

Finding Aid to the William Martin Cordes Photograph Collection

Cordes, William Martin, 1894-1977

William Cordes photograph collection, 1908-1920s.

56 dry plate glass negatives: gelatin silver; 3 ¼ x 4 ½ and 5 x 7 in.

32 copy photographic prints: gelatin silver; 5 x 7 in.

7 photographic prints: gelatin silver; 14 x 17 cm. and smaller

Collection number: Photo 2053

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OVERVIEW

Links: View collection in [Digital Horizons](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Ruby R. Cordes, Garden Grove, Calif., 1998, and Muriel Abraham, 1999 (Acc. 2506).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection is held by the Institute for Regional Studies.

Citation: Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

BIOGRAPHY

Frank William Martin Cordes was born January 16, 1894 at Fairmont, Minnesota, the son of Henry and Johannah (Neitzel) Cordes. He usually went by the name Bill. The parents were originally from Iowa before moving to Blue Earth County, Minnesota. After the death of his father, Henry Claus Cordes, at Blue Earth, Johannah and the family moved to Brocket, North Dakota for a short time before settling on a farm called "The Mahoney Place," four miles west of Douglas, North Dakota. The other children of Henry and Johannah were John, Annie, Henry, Minnie, August, Martha, and Marie Augusta. All were born in Minnesota. William was the mechanic on the family farm, keeping the John Deere tractors and Model T Fords in repair. He liked to take photographs and took early photos with his glass plate camera, also doing the developing and photo tinting.

On February 16, 1919, William Cordes married Dorothy Trueblood and together they had two children, Howard and Muriel. Dorothy Trueblood Cordes died February 21, 1922 at the age of twenty-one. After her death, the children and Bill lived with Johannah Cordes on her nearby farm. Bill died September 19, 1977 at Anaheim, California near where his son Howard lived. He was buried at Douglas, N.D. with his wife. Daughter, Muriel Abraham lived in Park Rapids, Minnesota. Son, Howard Cordes died in January 1998 in Garden Grove, California where he and his wife, Ruby O'Barr Cordes resided. Together they raised three daughters and have four granddaughters.

*Abraham, Mrs. Kenneth. "Cordes Family." *People, Places, and Events, Minot, Ward County: Bridging the Century*. Inter-Collegiate Press: Winnipeg, Man. 1985. P. 296.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The William Cordes Photograph Collection consists of fifty-six glass negatives that were taken by Mr. Cordes. For thirty of them copy prints were made by the Institute. There are forty-two 5x7 in. negatives and fourteen that are 3 ¼ x 4 ½ in. The negatives that have not been printed are either similar images to those that were printed, or those thought to be of poorer quality. Four particular negatives were not printed due to the fact that they were adhered together by paper. Some of the negatives when donated had been placed inside the pages of a pamphlet. Over time, however, the emulsion side of the negatives adhered to the pamphlet paper. Nothing was done at this time to take the negatives apart.

The prints have been arranged into nine series: Automobiles, Buildings, Cattle and Horses, Douglas, N.D., Farming, Interior Shots, and Outdoor Shots, William Cordes, and Cordes Family. All of these prints, including the remaining negatives were taken in or around the town of Douglas, N.D., or possibly Iowa. The finding aid folder contains photocopies of the copy prints with notes of additional identifying information gathered from daughter Muriel. She felt some of the images likely were taken at the home of Neitzel relatives in Iowa. These have been so labeled.

The Cordes Collection is a good representation of rural life in North Dakota in the late 1910s and early 1920s. There are several farm pictures including such things as plowing and threshing. Women are also represented in this collection. One particularly good print is that of a woman milking a cow. Many of the negatives also include group pictures, both interior and outdoors. The researcher should consult the itemized finding aid for specific image identifications.

Additions to the collection were received from daughter Muriel Abraham. Two images of Bill Cordes were copied from originals in her possession. One is a formal portrait and the other a snapshot of him seated on a car with a mandolin in his hands. The Cordes family images include a number of casual outdoor images likely taken by Bill Cordes. There is a photographic postcard of a distant view of a crowd by a lake. Many people are gathered under a pole structure covered with branches and American flags are visible in various areas. The title on the front of the postcard is "View near Douglas, North Dakota." On the back is written a message in 1908 to Gusta from Oscar Gilbertson. In the message he makes reference to a July 3rd celebration shown on the front of the postcard. Another view is of the Cordes family homestead in 1908, located east of Douglas. It shows a tarpaper shack, other outbuildings, horses and family members.

The remaining unprinted negatives have been included at the end of the contents listing in a separate series. The negative number is given along with a short description.

FOLDER.ITEM	CONTENTS
1	Finding aid and biographical material
	Automobile Series (2 prints)
2.1	People sitting in an automobile, male driver.
2.2	People sitting in an automobile, female driver.
	Buildings Series (3 prints)
3.1	Church (possibly Iowa)
3.2	House with fenced yard.
3.3	House surrounded by trees with lumber in yard.
	Cattle and Horses Series (2 prints)
4.1	Woman milking a cow.
4.2	Woman sitting side-saddled on a horse.
	Douglas, N.D. Series (3 prints)
5.1	Douglas State Bank
5.2	Street shot of Douglas, N.D.
5.3	Street shot of Douglas, N.D.
	Farming Series (8 prints)
6.1	Butchering
6.2	Binding
6.3	Cultivating Corn
6.4	Women in cabbage field.
6.5	Hauling wheat
6.6	Threshing
6.7	Plowing
6.8	Threshing
	Interior Shots Series (3 prints)
7.1	Young girl holding a candle
7.2	Portrait of two young women
7.3	Family Portrait
	Outdoor Shots Series (8 prints)
8.1	Young men and women sitting in open field
8.2	Young men and women standing by bushes
8.3	Men and women in a boat
8.4	Women and one man in grass with backdrop of a house
8.5	Young women, man, and young girls standing in bushes
8.6	Women, man, and infant sitting in trees
8.7	Two men sitting playing banjo and mandolin
8.8	Group in open field with two tents.
	William Cordes Series (2 copy prints)
9.1	Cordes seating on automobile running board playing a banjo
9.2	Cordes in formal portrait

Cordes Family Series (7 prints)

- 10.1 Marie Cordes Fowler in corn field
- 10.2 Woman in garden bean patch
- 10.3 Marie Cordes Fowler and Martha Cordes Hoel seated outside by bush
- 10.4 Marie Cordes Fowler outside
- 10.5 Johannah Cordes in cabbage patch, Douglas, N.D.
- 10.6 Crowd gathered at lake near Douglas, N.D., July 3, 1908
- 10.7 Cordes homestead buildings east of Douglas, N.D., 1908

(Neg. No.)

Dry Plate Glass Negatives (Not Printed) Series

- 3 People sitting in an automobile, male driver
- 6 Men with horses pulling large load of hay
- 7 Man and two horses standing in front of pile of hay or straw
- 10 Man, four horses and binder
- 11 Steam engine pulling grain wagons
- 11 Portrait of infant
- 15 Car driving by hill (badlands?)
- 23 Group of women, one man, and child by trees
- 24 Woman standing in shrubbery
- 25 Three men and a woman standing in tall grass
- 26 & 27 Man in uniform standing by tree, & four men by tractor
- 28 & 29 Men surrounding tractor, & men standing in field
- 30 Threshing scene and farmstead in background
- 31 Stream with woods on banks and hills in background
- 38 Girl holding a tall candle, wearing a veil with flowers and holding small book
- 40 Portrait of man
- 49 People standing on snow bank on farm yard
- 50 Infant on blanket
- 51 Landscape with river and small house
- 52 Hillside with tree
- 53 Woman sitting with infant
- 54 Portrait of man
- 55 Man on tractor pulling plow, with automobile following
- 56 Man on tractor pulling plow, other wagon with barrels and automobile nearby