

Finding Aid to the Oscar Forness Photograph Collection

Forness, Oscar, 1896-1970

Oscar Forness photograph collection, 1960s-1970s.

1,233 photographic prints

Collection number: Photo 2054

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OVERVIEW

Links: View images in [Digital Horizons](#).

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

Provenance: Donated by Ronald Olin, 1997 (Acc. 2471 & 2473).

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

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection remain with creator.

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

BIOGRAPHY

Oscar Forness was born December 23, 1896 at Colfax, North Dakota where he grew up. He farmed in the Colfax area until 1954 when he moved to Fargo, N.D. He married Inga Wollan at Colfax on November 20, 1926. After moving to Fargo he worked as a maintenance person at a number of businesses, including a number of years at St. John Hospital. His wife Inga worked at St. Luke Hospitals as a registered nurse until 1970. Oscar died May 20, 1970 in Fargo. In 1980 Inga moved to Wahpeton, N.D. where she died on September 20, 1988. Oscar and Inga had five children, Jerald, Allan, and Ronald Forness, Carol Forness Browne, and Charlotte Forness Burns.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Oscar Forness Photograph Collection originally consisted of eight albums that contained detailed images of Fargo-Moorhead through the medium of photography. The albums were purchased by the donor at a Fargo antique store and then presented to the Institute. They had been sold to the store by a grandson of Mr. Forness. There is no indication of original ownership within the albums themselves, and the original ownership information was provided by the antique store owner. It is believed there may be one or more additional albums still in private hands.

The photographer attempted to capture as many storefronts and streets as appeared during the 1960s and early 1970s. Since some images are dated after Forness' death, it is not known if they are mis-dated or someone else continued the photography and mounted them in the albums. Due to the poor quality of the albums, the images were removed from all but three of the albums. These prints were sleeved in plastic and organized in the original order of the album pages. In the three remaining albums the photographs were glued making extraction impossible. The collection is arranged in nine series: three topical series, and the six albums.

Two small albums contained prints of a professional quality likely acquired by the compiler. They were removed from the albums and organized into three topical series: Fargo, N.D.; Moorhead, Minn.; and General images. The **Fargo Series** contains thirty-two photographic prints and includes street scenes of Broadway, First Ave. North, Front Street, and N.P. Ave.; the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad freight house; the Grand Recreation building & Grand Theater; Fargo fairgrounds; and Island Park. The **Moorhead Series** contains only three images: two of Center Avenue, and Roy's Food Market and Bridgeman's stores. The **General Series** contains four unidentified prints including winter street scene with building labeled "Oslo Cafe;" Hofman Market; close-up of shot-up mailbox; and man with hat on leaning over a counter, perhaps in a bar.

For three albums that contained snapshots mounted with photo corners, the snapshots were removed and individually sleeved and numbered. The three albums included the following series: Moorhead business district, Fargo business district, and Schools and municipal buildings. The original order has been maintained from the original album pages. The **Moorhead Business District Series** includes business fronts on Center Avenue, Second St., Fourth St., and other business streets (183 images). The **Fargo Business District Series** contains business fronts of NP Avenue, Broadway, Main Avenue, First Avenue, and other business streets (266 images). The **Schools and Municipal Buildings Series** includes images of Fargo public schools, some churches, bridge between Moorhead and Fargo, NDSU, and St. Luke's and St. Ansgar hospitals (150 images).

The **Album Series** includes three albums containing photographs that were glued to the pages and thus have been retained as they were originally compiled. The Advertising Signs Album includes many road and street signs, the Big Boy restaurant statue, building names, and other business signs. The photographer apparently liked to document the unusual and humorous signs (343 images). The Natural Disasters Album contains pictures of the Fargo blizzard of 1946, the Chelsey Fuel Company Fire, the Fargo Flood of 1947, the tornado of 1957, the Huntington Building (Straus) fire of 1963, and other natural disaster in Fargo-Moorhead (172 images). The album also has several pages of newspaper clippings dealing with blizzards in the 1940s. The final album, the Spiro Agnew Protest Album, contains photographs of the protest in Fargo during the Vice-President's visit to Fargo during the Vietnam War

(date unknown) (78 images). The album includes several articles from the *Forum* newspaper regarding the visit and a leaflet apparently handed out at the protest by the Vietnam Action Committee. The album also contains a series of 15 photographs documenting the Fargo Fire Department fighting a fire at the American Linen Supply Company.

BOX/FOLDER	CONTENTS (No. of items)
1/1	Finding aid and biographical material Fargo Series (32)
1/2	[not used]
1/3	Miscellaneous (7)
1/4	Broadway Avenue (6)
1/5	Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, & Pacific Freight House (2)
1/6	Fargo Fairgrounds (3)
1/7	First Avenue (2)
1/8	Front Street (3)
1/9	Grand Recreation and Theatre (3)
1/10	Island Park (4)
1/11	NP Avenue (2)
1/12	Moorhead Series (3) Center Avenue with Rudy's on corner Center Avenue with Comstock Hotel on corner Roy's Food Market & Bridgeman's
1/13	Miscellaneous Series (4) Oslo Café in winter Hoffman Market Mailbox shot up Man leaning over a bar
2/14	Moorhead Business Series (183)
2/15	Fargo Business District Series (266)
2/16	School and Municipal Buildings Series (150) Album Series
3/1	Advertising Signs and Logos (346)
3/2	Natural Disasters (171)

4/1

Spiro Agnew Protest (78)