



8-1-2009

## North Dakota's Monuments: What They Reveal of the State's People and Their Character

Jennifer D. Heth

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NORTH DAKOTA'S MONUMENTS: WHAT THEY REVEAL OF THE STATE'S  
PEOPLE AND THEIR CHARACTER

by

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Bachelor of Science in Education, Minot State University, 1998

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the  
University of North Dakota  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota  
August  
2009



This thesis, submitted by Jennifer D. Heth in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Chairperson

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty at the University of North Dakota for their instruction and guidance, especially the members of my advisory committee, Dr. Porter, Dr. Iseminger, and Dr. Mochoruk. I would also like to thank my family and Ronny for encouraging me to pursue my goals and for supporting me through the joys and challenges of this process.

## ABSTRACT

Monuments and memorials are found in every society and civilization throughout history. These structures serve as commemorations of people, events, wars, victories, and disasters. The building of monuments allows the people of a society to express for posterity their jubilation, reverence, and grief. In turn, monuments and memorials reflect the values and beliefs of the society. As a result, historians study monuments and memorials to gain a better understanding of the people, culture, and values of a society or civilization. The study of monuments and memorials, as well as commemoration in general, is a growing field in both American and world history, but no study to date has addressed the structures located in North Dakota and what they reveal about the people who worked to see them built. This study seeks to fill that void.

The monuments selected for this study fall into two categories: those dedicated to North Dakota's historical pioneers and those devoted to the legendary pioneers. The historical pioneers are those identified individuals from whom character traits, values, and attitudes are drawn and celebrated as a reflection of the traits, values, and attitudes the monuments' commissioners admire and seek to emulate. By contrast, the legendary pioneers are unidentified; they represent those ordinary men and women who faced incredible challenges in order to establish the social, cultural, political, and economic foundations of the state. The monuments' commissioners chose to honor those unnamed pioneers as those who led the way for subsequent generations of the state's residents. In

so doing, the commissioners are able to project onto these legendary pioneers those character traits they believe have been passed down from the pioneering generation—those traits the commissioners wish to see perpetuated in future generations as well.

The examination of both the historical and legendary pioneers celebrated by North Dakotans reveals a distinct set of character traits and attitudes displayed and revered by the monuments' commissioners—the North Dakota character described by historian Elwyn B. Robinson in his *History of North Dakota* (1966).



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Monuments represent a physical link between a society's past, present, and future. These structures are built to honor citizens, soldiers, statesmen, and adventurers; to celebrate victories; to mourn tragedies; and to commemorate the people and events that shaped the past and laid the groundwork for the future. Monuments and memorials serve as mnemonic devices for the present society to remember and honor those who came before and those who led the way. But monuments also provide insight into the people who organized their construction, the values and character traits they admire, and their efforts to educate future generations. As a son of Holocaust survivors observed, one of the most important functions of monuments is the message they send to subsequent generations:

Because I was not there, and did not suffer, I cannot remember. Therefore, I very much need to be reminded. This memorial will be for my six-month-old daughter, who will need to be reminded even more. It will be for her children, who will need to be reminded still more. We must build such a memorial for all the generations who, by distance from the actual events and people, will depend on it to activate [memory].<sup>1</sup>

Monuments and memorials are found in every society and civilization throughout history, and North Dakota is no exception. These structures serve as commemorations of people, events, wars, victories, and disasters. The building of monuments allows the people of a society to express for posterity their jubilation, reverence, and grief. In turn,

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Krieger quoted in Ryan Coonerty, *Etched in Stone: Enduring Words From Our Nation's Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007), 92-93.



monuments and memorials reflect the values and beliefs of the society. As a result, historians study monuments and memorials to gain a better understanding of the people, culture, and values of a society or civilization. In particular, this study will investigate monuments erected in North Dakota to determine why, when, and where they were built and what they reveal of the character traits of the people who organized their construction.

In his *History of North Dakota* (1966), Elwyn B. Robinson outlined six themes of North Dakota's history: remoteness, dependence, agrarian radicalism, a position of economic disadvantage, the "Too-Much Mistake," and adjustment. Robinson concluded that these six themes influenced the state's people and produced the North Dakota character, which included such traits as pride, stubbornness, and radicalism. Although Robinson's scholarship did much to illuminate the complexities and interconnectedness of the state's history, geography, and society, he did not include a systematic study of North Dakota's monuments in his work. Moreover, Robinson's analysis of the North Dakota character must be evaluated in the context of the social, political, and economic changes that have occurred in the state since the publication of his seminal work in 1966.

The study of monuments and memorials is currently a rapidly growing field in historical research and numerous publications are dedicated to both specific examples and general categories at the national and local levels. In addition, some information is available on the monuments and memorials located on the North Dakota capitol grounds in Bismarck, but no study has been conducted with the express purpose of investigating the relationship between the monuments and memorials erected in North Dakota and the character of the people who created them. This study seeks to fill that void.

Due to the large quantity of monuments, memorials, and historic sites in the state, there is a need to limit the number and variety of subjects in order to have a workable pool of samples for further study. For example, this study eliminated any monuments or memorials located on cemetery grounds, because as James W. Loewen stated in his book *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (1999):

Often zamani monuments get put up downtown, where their presence on important public land at the courthouse or city hall implies that the community is united in the sentiments they express. People who do not share their sentiments and would not seek them out in cemeteries or parks will see them and presumably be influenced by them in these locations.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, this study examines those monuments and memorials that were built to represent the collective consent and approval of North Dakotans, even if the decisions concerning the purpose, design, construction, and dedication of these structures were made by individuals and small groups. And as this thesis seeks to understand the character traits of the people of North Dakota by examining the monuments and memorials in the state, the decision was made to research the monuments and memorials that one might call the most “public.”

Another decision was to include in this study only those structures specifically designed to commemorate or memorialize an event or person, rather than an object that had simply been restored or preserved. The distinction was that the express purpose of the structure was to serve as a monument or memorial and that it had no other function. Therefore, this study included no bridges, roads, schools, office buildings, athletic fields,

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<sup>2</sup> James Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 24. In this section Loewen describes the practice of the Kiswahili speakers of east and central Africa of dividing the dead into two categories: the sasha and the zamani. The sasha (the living-dead) are the recently deceased—there are people alive who knew them personally. The sasha become the zamani (the dead) when the last person to know them dies. Loewen uses this analogy to describe historical events and their monuments (the events of living memory and the distant past). This concept is discussed further on pages 13-14 of this chapter.

or courthouses.<sup>3</sup> Historical markers were also eliminated because the structures selected were intended to do more than mark the location of a historical event. Three of the four monuments in this study honor people who made significant contributions to the state's history, rather than marking the site of an event or place in the way that plaques mark the trail of Lewis and Clark through North Dakota. The exception in this study is the Iverson Well Monument, which marks the location of the first oil-producing well in the state, the Clarence Iverson No. 1. The monument has been included because of the shift in the commemorative focus from the event to the individuals who made it happen, as Chapter IV will show.<sup>4</sup> Finally, this study does not examine local and state museums as monuments or memorials. A number of communities across the state have either a local historical society museum or a "frontier village" of sorts dedicated to the pioneers and early settlers of North Dakota. Although these sites may provide as fascinating history lessons, they do not fall into the definition of a monument or memorial for the purpose of this study.<sup>5</sup>

The monuments selected for this study fall into two categories: those dedicated to historical figures or pioneers and those devoted to unidentified or legendary pioneers.<sup>6</sup>

The historical pioneers are those figures who are identified and celebrated for their

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<sup>3</sup> One example would be the Williams County Memorial Courthouse in Williston which is dedicated to those from Williams County who served in World War I and World War II.

<sup>4</sup> The Williston Basin Energy Festival Monument in Williston and anniversary celebrations that commemorate the event, along with the original monument at the well site, make the Iverson Well Monument an important component of this study as will be shown in Chapters IV and V.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley, Watford City, Rugby, and Alexander are just a few of the towns in the state that display replica buildings along with pioneer artifacts.

<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to use the term "legendary" pioneers rather than "allegorical" or "representative pioneers" as it draws attention to the fact that these pioneers are the unnamed progenitors who contributed to the establishment of the agricultural and energy industries in the state. The organizers, builders, and supporters of these monuments and other commemorative activities have glorified the deeds, values, motives, and character traits of these pioneers. And yet, these are the same values, attitudes, and character traits that the monuments' builders are encouraging the state's people to strive for. Further discussion of the use of the term "legendary" appears in the introductory paragraphs of Chapter IV.



individual contributions to the state's history. North Dakotans, for example, have erected monuments to widely recognizable persons, including Theodore Roosevelt and Alexander Griggs.<sup>7</sup> For this study, however, the statues of Sakakawea and John Burke were chosen.

One of the most prominent and recognizable monuments in the state, and one that is often used to represent the state to the rest of the nation, is the statue of Sakakawea, the young American Indian woman who accompanied Meriwether Lewis and William Clark from what is now North Dakota to the Pacific Ocean and back. This monument is prominent, not only because of its location on the North Dakota capitol grounds in Bismarck, but also because a replica of the statue represents the state in National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. Like Sakakawea, the statue of John Burke is displayed in a conspicuous location on the capitol grounds in Bismarck and also in Statuary Hall. These two monuments, therefore, present the image of North Dakota that their commissioners and supporters wish to display to the rest of the nation.

By contrast, the legendary pioneers are not identified by name; they theoretically represent the parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents who moved into this region to seek their fortunes or start a new life. During North Dakota's Centennial celebrations in 1989, the cities of Ellendale and Williston erected monuments to honor the early Euro-American settlers in the region, but the monuments selected for inclusion in this study, the Pioneer Family statue and the Iverson Well Monument, were built and dedicated outside of this centennial frenzy of commemorative activity.

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<sup>7</sup> The statue of Alexander Griggs is located on the Grand Forks County Courthouse grounds in Grand Forks; statues of Theodore Roosevelt can be found in Minot and Mandan. Other monuments dedicated to individuals include Sitting Bull (Fort Yates and Grand Forks), Four Bears (New Town and Twin Buttes), Carl Ben Eielson (near Hatton), Hazel Miner (Center), and Walter Chaloner (near the entrance of the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park).

The Pioneer Family statue, prominently located on the southern end of the North Dakota capitol “mall,” was commissioned in 1947 to honor John McLean—Bismarck’s first mayor and the man for whom McLean County was named—and all the pioneering generation. The intent to reflect or publicize create a sense of pride in the people of the state in their pioneering generation is evident in this large and noble statue that graces the capitol grounds. The pioneering spirit and rugged individualism, as well as the celebration of ordinary people overcoming the trials and tribulations of the lonely and challenging environment of the northern plains, is obvious in every detail of this work.

The Iverson Well Monument commemorates the discovery of oil in western North Dakota and the impact that the event has had on the state’s economy, politics, and culture. Built just two years after the Clarence Iverson No. 1 well in Williams County struck oil, the monument commemorates the event that “opened a new era for North Dakota and reaffirmed the confidence of her people in the opportunities and future of this great state.”<sup>8</sup> Although its location is isolated, the monument is included in this study because the event continues to be commemorated with frequent anniversary celebrations. Like the Pioneer Family statue, this monument and the subsequent commemorative activities celebrate the pioneering attitude of the state and pay homage to those who overcame adversity and the challenging environment of North Dakota.

Each of the two categories—historical and legendary pioneers—and each individual monument provides a different perspective from which to examine the people and events commemorated; and each presents an opportunity to illustrate the attitudes,

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<sup>8</sup> Iverson Well Monument inscription; the Iverson well struck oil on April 4, 1951, and the monument was dedicated October 25, 1953.

values, and characteristics that the monuments' commissioners admired and sought to pass along to the general population and the next generation.

Few scholars have chosen to write about North Dakota's monuments and memorials. As a result of the limited secondary analysis, this study relies on published accounts of the dedication ceremonies in newspapers and other sources. Because the statues of Sakakawea and John Burke represent the state in National Statuary Hall, booklets were published by the State Historical Society of North Dakota and the United States Government Printing Office respectively, and provide background information and copies of the speeches given at the unveilings in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. These speeches illuminate the selection processes as well as the images and impressions that the monuments' commissioners have of the subjects they have chosen to commemorate.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the information on the history of the North Dakota capitol and the Pioneer Family statue was obtained from *The North Dakota State Capitol: Architecture and History* (1989), edited by Larry Remele, which presented detailed information on the architectural plans and changes made to both the old and the new capitols. Additional information was gathered from the State Historical Society Library in Bismarck, as well as the State Historical Society of North Dakota's scholarly journal, *North Dakota History*, which published the most extensive coverage of the dedication ceremonies. Various newspaper reports on the monument helped to complete the narrative.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Each statue in National Statuary Hall is the subject of a comparable booklet. *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, [North Dakota's Presentation of the Statue of Sakakawea to the U.S. Capitol Statuary Hall] (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), 2005); *Statue of John Burke, Presented in the Rotunda, United States Capitol* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963).

<sup>10</sup> Larry Remele, ed., *The North Dakota State Capitol: Architecture and History* (Bismarck: SHSND, 1989); "Pioneer Family Statue," General Information File, SHSND Library and Archives, Bismarck, North Dakota; "Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1947): 273-285.



Writing the story of the Iverson Well Monument required compiling data from a variety of sources. Dominic Schaff's "The History of the North Dakota Oil Industry" (1962), Bill Shemorry's *Mud, Sweat, and Oil: The Early Years of the Williston Basin* (1991), and John Bluemle's *The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Discovery of Oil in North Dakota* (2001) provided a detailed history of the state's oil industry. In addition, resources related to the planning and execution of the commemorative events, such as newspaper accounts and promotional materials, reveal the motivations behind these activities, including the Iverson Well Monument dedication ceremonies in 1953, the Williston Basin Energy Festival in 1981, the Billionth Barrel Celebration in 1989, the Williston Basin Energy Festival II in 1991, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities (Williston Basin Energy Festival III) in 2001, as well as the current "Rockin' the Bakken" advertising campaign.<sup>11</sup>

The general history of the state provided a backdrop for the analysis of the character of the people of the state, as presented in such works as Elwyn Robinson's *History of North Dakota* (1966), D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff's *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People* (1976), Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins's *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (1977), and Neil D. Howe and Theodore B. Jelliff's *North Dakota Legendary* (2007). Robinson described a distinctive North Dakota character, and, as discussion in Chapter II will show, the foundations on which Robinson based his interpretation continue to hold true, albeit with modifications. The analysis of the character of the state's people was augmented with comparative studies of the character of people from other states, as well as an examination of North

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<sup>11</sup> Dominic Schaff, "The History of the North Dakota Oil Industry," (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1962); Bill Shemorry, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil: The Early Years of the Williston Basin* (Williston, ND: B. Shemorry, 1991); John P. Bluemle, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Discovery of Oil in North Dakota* (Bismarck: North Dakota Geological Survey, 2001); most of the coverage of the dedication and anniversary celebrations was found in the *Williston Herald*, 1953-2001.

Dakotans' perception of themselves through a brief discussion of North Dakota jokes, tales, and myths.<sup>12</sup> The central purpose of Chapter II is to show that the existence of an identifiable and distinctive North Dakota character can be interpreted from the unique combination of the state's history and shared experiences of its people. This character is the image that the monuments' commissioners wished to celebrate and perpetuate despite its lack of universal existence among the state's people.

This study of North Dakota's monuments has also benefited from an investigation of the broader studies of commemoration, which includes works related to individual specimens as well as collective categories such as war memorials. The overarching field of memory studies serves as the framework for scholarship related to commemoration. Beginning with the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the concept of collective memory and its relationship with historical studies has become an indispensable aspect of modern historical research and writing. According to Halbwachs and his disciples, the concept of collective memory is a "constructed" product of social groups. This interpretation has been expanded, strengthened, and promoted by American historian Michael Kammen, who in his book *Mystic Cords of Memory* (1991), argued that societies reconstruct their histories through elements such as commemorative activities so that the images and impressions of the past conform to those of the present.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (1966. Reprint, Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995); D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People* (Fargo: Knight Printing, 1976); Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977); Neil D. Howe and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota Legendary* (Fargo: North Dakota Center for Distance Education, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Kirk Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration," online essay commissioned by the Organization of American Historians and the National Park Service, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/ressedu/savage.htm> (accessed February 23, 2009); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, L.A. Coser, ed. and trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Cords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). For other works related to collective memory, see Frances A.



Although works related to collective memory, and its relationship to history, contribute to the foundations of commemorative studies, the field itself is so broad and diverse that an extensive examination of the topic goes beyond the boundaries of this study. Therefore, this section will review the pertinent component of memory studies related to this work, that of commemoration, along with the specific studies that have most influenced this thesis. This field—dedicated to a wide variety of commemorative activities, including the study of monuments and memorials and their place in society—owes much to the work of French historian Pierre Nora and his analysis of “les lieux de memoire” [sites of memory]. Nora argued that modern societies depend on these memory sites because the “real environments of memory”—living memory—known in pre-modern societies, no longer exist.<sup>14</sup> These sites of memory, especially monuments and memorials, represent one of the fastest growing fields in American historical scholarship today, and the variety of topics and interpretations continues to expand.

Some authors of commemorative studies choose to focus on specific monuments, especially national monuments and other structures most prominent in American society, such as Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall’s *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (1991), Christopher A. Thomas’s *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (2002), and Marcus Cunliffe’s *George Washington: Man and Monument*

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Yates, *The Art of Memory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993). Another important aspect of memory scholarship is Holocaust studies; see for example, Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); James E. Young, *The Art of Memory: The Holocaust Memorials in History* (New York: Prestel, 1994); Henry L. Feingold, *Lest Memory Cease: Finding Meaning in the American Jewish Past* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24; Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman, eds., Arthur Goldhammer, trans., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Savage, “History, Memory, and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration,” 2-3.

(1982).<sup>15</sup> Other authors have chosen to examine American monuments, memorials, and other public structures and their elevated status as “American icons” such as Marvin Trachtenberg’s *Statue of Liberty* (1976) and Rex Alan Smith’s *Carving of Mount Rushmore* (1985). Christopher Thomas’s study of the Lincoln Memorial also fits into this category as does Nicolaus Mills’s recent book *Their Last Battle: The Fight for the National World War II Memorial* (2004), which concentrates on the commemoration of World War II in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Other works are devoted to war monuments, memorials, and the battlefields on which those conflicts occurred, such as Alan Borg’s *War Memorials: From Antiquity to the Present* (1991), James Mayo’s *War Memorials as Political Landscape* (1988), and Edward Linenthal’s *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (1993).<sup>17</sup> Civil War commemoration in particular has been exceedingly popular, as evidenced by works such as Kirk Savage’s *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* (1997) and David Blight’s *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory & the American Civil War* (2002).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Christopher A. Thomas, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (New York: Mentor Books, 1982). Other examples include, David Dillon, *The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial* (Washington, D.C. (Spacemaker Press, 1998) and Jan C. Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg, *Statue of Liberty* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Rex Alan Smith, *Carving of Mount Rushmore* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985); Nicolaus Mills, *Their Last Battle: The Fight for the National World War II Memorial* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). See also, Albert Boime, *The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Alan Borg, *War Memorials: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991); James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1998); Edward Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); David Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory & the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). See also Thomas J. Brown, ed., *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004).



These studies represent a diverse collection of commemorative acts and structures, from parades and anniversary celebrations to major national monuments that have reached iconic status in American popular culture. Although these works cover unrelated topics, they provide the scholar with an approach or method from which to investigate other commemorative structures as well as a set of themes and generalizations to guide the analysis.<sup>19</sup>

In his book, *Lies Across America*, James Loewen attempted to draw attention to American historic sites and the ways in which the omissions, inaccuracies, and one-sided interpretations present a skewed or downright false version of American history. The main body of his work examined various historic sites, divided by region, and through short essays, Loewen explained the ways in which their deficiencies constitute “lies.” While Loewen’s book encouraged Americans to visit historic sites with an eye on historical facts, the most valuable portions of his work for this study were the essays that serve as the introduction to his historic site reviews.

In “Some Functions of Public History,” Loewen explained why societies, particularly American society, preserve historic sites and erect monuments. Loewen argued that there are “economic, political, social, cultural, as well as educational” reasons for doing so.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Loewen outlined the various roles monuments and historic sites play in American society, especially for future generations.<sup>21</sup> In “The Sociology of Historic Sites,” he sketched the process by which monuments, memorials, and historic

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<sup>19</sup> For general studies of commemoration, see John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Michael Geisler, ed., *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2005); Paul Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Loewen, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Loewen, 14.

markers are erected, as well as explaining by whom, and why. Particularly, Loewen noted that many (perhaps even most) of the historical markers and monuments displayed in this country came about as a result of the efforts of America's wealthy, privileged elite.<sup>22</sup> In "Historic Sites are Always a Tale of Two Eras," Loewen stated that "Every historic site tells two different stories about two different eras in the past. One is its manifest narrative—the event or person heralded in its text or artwork. The other is the story of its erection or preservation."<sup>23</sup> Loewen argued that a historian can learn as much about the society that erected the monument as the one that produced the subject.

During this discussion, Loewen explained the differences and significance of the monuments and memorials created for the events and people of the *sasha* (the living-dead) and the *zamani* (the dead). According to Loewen, *sasha* monuments are erected soon after the event or person has passed from the living into the *sasha*. The purpose of such monuments is to remember the event and honor its participants, who are often listed by name. The motivation for the *sasha* monuments is a sense of grief or loss. In contrast, *zamani* monuments are erected after the person or event has transitioned from the living-dead to the dead. The commemorators erect these monuments for their own purposes and "seek to influence how people behave by telling them what to think about the ancestors, event, or cause they commemorate."<sup>24</sup> The distance of time allows the commemorators "to avoid controversies about people and events still in the *sasha*," and to ensure that their vision of the event or person is recorded in the monument and memorials erected.

Overall, Loewen's work established a basic foundation from which to further explore the

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<sup>22</sup> Loewen, 20; this is also the main focus of John Bodnar's interpretation of official and vernacular memory, see below.

<sup>23</sup> Loewen, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Loewen, 24.

field of commemoration studies. The introductory essays in *Lies Across America* examine the complexities of studying monuments and memorials and the societies that worked to build them.

Just as Loewen addressed the broad themes of commemoration, John Bodnar, in *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (1992), examined one of the most important aspect of commemoration studies: the question of who decides what to commemorate. In this study, Bodnar examined local, regional, national, and international aspects of commemoration and how each topic is both separate and combined in the discussion of public memory. According to Bodnar, control over American public memory has oscillated from the “official” to the “vernacular” throughout the country’s history. By official, Bodnar referred to those in positions of power—business leaders, elected politicians, and civil servants. The vernacular elements, in Bodnar’s definition, are the ordinary Americans who do not have the power (or do not wish to have the power) to make official decisions. In his estimation, “Public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.”<sup>25</sup>

Bodnar’s analysis began with an examination of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., as an example of the strong presence and influence of vernacular forces in America’s public memory. In discussing the mementos left at the memorial by visitors, Bodnar reported: “A park service technician who helped catalog the items left behind told a reporter that the mementos left him ‘a little misty.’ He claimed that these objects were ‘not like history’ but had an ‘immediacy’ about them. What he might have

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<sup>25</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.



added was that they were not really like the history that was usually commemorated in public.”<sup>26</sup> Bodnar’s contribution to the “memory debate” centered on his argument that “Public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”<sup>27</sup> By focusing on one or more aspects of the discussion—from local and regional commemorative activities to national celebrations—Bodnar examined the interaction between the official and the vernacular in the decision making processes as well as the execution of those ceremonies.

In the context of a discussion of North Dakota monuments and memorials and the commemorative practices observed in this state, Bodnar provided valuable information on the role and symbolism of the pioneer in the commemorative works of the Midwest:

the pioneer was a popular historical symbol in Midwestern commemorations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its appeal to ordinary people resided in its vernacular meaning of sturdy ancestors who founded ethnic communities and families, preserved traditions in the face of social change, and overcame hardship. These defenders of vernacular culture were especially important to Midwesterners who were anxious about the pace of economic centralization and the impact of urban and industrial growth upon their local places.<sup>28</sup>

Other major themes of commemorative studies are found in Kirk Savage’s book *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, which has become a standard by which other books devoted to commemoration are judged. Savage’s comprehensive analysis of race, politics, society, and commemoration come together in this powerful and groundbreaking study. In this work, Savage analyzed the monuments and memorials erected during and after the Civil War and the ways in which African-Americans are portrayed (or more realistically, left out) of those commemorations. Moreover, Savage argued that this

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<sup>26</sup> Bodnar, 8; some of these artifacts are now displayed in the American History Museum in Washington, D.C.

<sup>27</sup> Bodnar, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Bodnar, 17.

limited portrayal is significant in that it reveals and reflects the country's racial attitude during this period. According to Savage, 19<sup>th</sup> century concepts of slavery and race prevented both the commemoration of African-Americans as well as the realistic portrayal of this group in sculpture and other art forms. "The deeper reason is that the age-old status of the slave combined with the newer concept of race created an extremely powerful cultural formation that rendered the African-American virtually the embodiment of what was *not* classically sculptural."<sup>29</sup>

Savage also described the process through which the country worked in order to produce monuments to the emancipation of the slaves. Savage detailed the struggle of African-Americans to control the process as well as the ultimate failure of these efforts. In addition, Savage expertly analyzed how these early efforts at monument building reflected and reinforced the subservient position of African-Americans in this country. Crucial to this discussion was his analysis of Thomas Ball's Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln (Emancipation Monument), erected in 1876 in Washington, D.C. In this monument, Abraham Lincoln is portrayed standing above a newly emancipated slave who is crouched on the ground looking up into the distance.

Savage also addressed the flurry of monument building in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in both the North and the South and examined how the Southern states attempted to commemorate their "Lost Cause" without specifically addressing the issue of slavery. As a result of their efforts, the figure of Robert E. Lee became the symbol of the southern struggle without the blight of the political affiliation that Jefferson Davis embodied. Savage explored how the culture of the military and the desire of local communities to honor those who fought in the war are expressed in monuments dedicated

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<sup>29</sup> Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 15, emphasis in the original.

to the common soldier. One of the most interesting points Savage made in this section is how the posture of the soldier—upright at parade rest—separates the subservience of slavery from the obedience of military life.

Savage's work is a staple in the historiography of commemorative studies, a position that is well-earned. He masterfully combined the politics, art, and cultural elements that meld into a commemorative work. The book's plentiful pictures and Savage's lucid prose combine to produce one of the most relevant and powerful works in this genre.

While Savage examined a broader spectrum of commemorative structures, Christopher Thomas focused on just one whose presence and purpose has changed over the course of its history. Thomas's book, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life*, is a detailed study of the Lincoln Memorial, from the planning, design, and building of the structure to the symbolism and changes in meaning and significance in American society and culture from its construction to the present day. This work is divided into five chapters which neatly separates each aspect of the discussion into distinct topics and analyses. Thomas described his main focus of the book as a study of how the "illusion" of the Lincoln Memorial is indeed an illusion. "It may seem a shocking act of sacrilege to root the planning and use of the Lincoln Memorial in material historical circumstances, but this treatment will make it apparent that, like any other site or object, the Lincoln Memorial is utterly of this world, with all its ambiguities."<sup>30</sup>

Thomas began his book with an investigation of the history and memory of Lincoln as well as the discussions surrounding how best to memorialize the president who saw the country ripped apart by Civil War, but who did not live long enough to see it

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas, xix.



through the healing process. According to Thomas, it was necessary that time elapse before the country could agree on how to memorialize this man and what his presidency meant to the nation. Thomas then focused on the debates and arguments surrounding the design and construction of the monument.

Thomas's book is particularly valuable in the larger discussions of history and memory and what a nation chooses to commemorate—what the monument says about the person or event that is memorialized as well as what it says about those who build the memorials. Moreover, Thomas addressed the issue of how the meaning and significance of the memorials changed as the culture and society of the nation changed. For the Lincoln Memorial, Thomas noted, “Like Abraham Lincoln himself, represented in the gigantic seated marble statue inside, the memorial is a metaphorical stand-in for values deemed American.”<sup>31</sup> According to Thomas, the polymorphic nature of the Lincoln Memorial contributed to its dominating presence on the landscape. The Memorial serves as “a war memorial, a monument to a national hero, a temple to American ideals, and a national stage or theater on which events in American history and pageantry are performed,” including Marian Anderson's Easter Sunday concert in 1939 which came about after the Daughters of the American Revolution prevented her from singing in Constitution Hall on account of her race.<sup>32</sup>

The Lincoln Memorial is a part of “official memory” in that the traditional style of the monument, with its homage to Greek and Roman architecture, represents the type of structure built by the establishment. “Often produced in times of crisis when the nation is believed to be at risk of disintegration, official memory usually promotes

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas, xvii.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, xvii, 159-160.

consensus among divergent, conflicting groups, which typically nurture their own ‘vernacular’ versions of the past.”<sup>33</sup> But the Lincoln Memorial, as Thomas also noted, promotes consensus among different groups: both Republicans and Democrats in the early 1900s claimed Lincoln as a symbol of their parties; both urban dwellers and rural villagers could relate to the myth, history, and memory of Lincoln as a man and leader; northerners celebrated his successful preservation of the Union while southerners increasingly viewed his presidency with considerably reduced hostility.

In a format similar to Thomas’s, Nicolaus Mills outlined the steps and obstacles on the path to the creation of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., in his book, *Their Last Battle*. Mills meticulously illustrated each stage in the process from the introduction of the first bill in Congress to create the memorial in the late 1980s through the opening of the memorial to the public in 2004. According to Mills, the purpose of this book, like the memorial, is to study “how Americans see themselves today” as well as “how they remember World War II.”<sup>34</sup>

One of the first topics Mills addressed in his work is why it took so long to build a World War II memorial in the nation’s capital. Part of the answer lies with the members of the World War II generation. According to Mills, after the war, many Americans were more interested in resuming their lives than in memorializing the horrors of the conflict. As a result, the “useful memorial or the living memorial,” became a popular alternative. Rather than building a monument or statue to commemorate the war and its participants, Americans in the 1940s and 1950s preferred to see buildings, playgrounds, and parks

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas, xxiii.

<sup>34</sup> Mills, xi.

built instead. In addition, the living memorials honored those lost without addressing the horrors of the conflict.<sup>35</sup>

But as the 1980s approached, America began losing its World War II veterans at a rate of over 1,000 per day; many believed it was time to honor those who fought in the war, as well as those who supported the war on the home front, for their service and sacrifice. As the Vietnam War and Korean War memorials already occupied prominent places on the National Mall, it was only fitting that the World War II memorial be constructed on the same site.

Not only did Mills provide a detailed account of the creation of the National World War II Memorial, he also examined the controversies surrounding its design and placement between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. Mills also analyzed what the memorial means to Americans and what it reveals about the builders and honorees. For example, Mills stated that, “honoring the World War II generation has seemed the right thing to do as far as most Americans are concerned, but what has been much harder for us to determine is whether honoring the World War II generation with a memorial is more than grateful remembering, more than a tribute to beliefs we are no longer confident that we share.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, “the National World War II Memorial was not to be thought of like the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial, as a healing memorial designed to bind up the nation’s wounds,” but rather to commemorate a significant period in world history, which explains, according to Mills, why the memorial to Vietnam was built before the World War II memorial.<sup>37</sup> Mills’s straightforward analysis provided not only the basic facts of the process and the timeline of the memorial, but also a deeper

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<sup>35</sup> Mills, xxv, xxvi.

<sup>36</sup> Mills, xii.

<sup>37</sup> Mills, xxii, 142.



understanding of how, when, and why Americans commemorate significant people and events from their history.

With the exception of those monuments related to wars, soldiers, and veterans, the North Dakota monuments in this study have not received the scholarly attention other commemorative structures have received, but the issue is larger than that.

Few scholars have attempted to theorize the relationship between commemoration and tradition, what we might call the exterior and interior faces of historical consciousness. On the one hand are public sites and rituals of memory, and on the other hand are ingrained habits of thought and action that persist in individuals, families, and communities across long spans of time.<sup>38</sup>

As Savage noted, there is still much to be done in the field of commemoration; and this study seeks to fill one small portion of the gap.

The conclusions at which this study will arrive are based on two interrelated arguments. The first concerns the existence of a distinct North Dakota character. Elwyn Robinson outlined six themes of North Dakota history which, along with settlement patterns and the shared experiences of the state's people, created, in his estimation, a North Dakota character. As Robinson's interpretations were based on data collected only into the early 1960s, Chapter II of this work begins by evaluating the six themes and bringing them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This analysis suggests that one of the significant foundations of Robinson's interpretation of the North Dakota character (the six themes) continues to exist, with modifications. Therefore, it is arguable that the character itself exists. Utilizing subsequent histories of the state and its people, a comparative examination of the people of neighboring states, and a brief analysis of North Dakotans' perception of themselves in jokes, tales, and legends will also support this conclusion. Regardless of whether or not this character is demonstrated in all or most of the state's

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<sup>38</sup> Savage, "History, Memory, and Monuments," 11.

people, it remains the image that the commissioners of these North Dakota monuments wished to celebrate and use as didactic tools to educate the state's population and future generations of its traits, attitudes, and values.

Second, this study will show that the commissioners of the monuments to the state's historical and legendary pioneers actively worked to educate the state's people on the values and character traits embodied by the North Dakota character and sought to inculcate that character in subsequent generations of North Dakotans. Chapter III will examine the biographies of the historical pioneers Sakakawea and John Burke, the selection of these individuals as representatives in National Statuary Hall, and the didactic lessons the monuments' commissioners wished to present to the state and the nation by honoring these individuals. Chapter IV will focus on the development and presentation of the Pioneer Family statue along with the symbolism of the work and its relationship to the desire of the statue's commissioner to honor the agricultural pioneers and the spirit and values they represent. The second portion of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the construction of a monument to celebrate the discovery of oil in the state, the decision to erect a second monument on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, and the continued observance of the anniversary of the discovery date. This series of commemorative activities will show that the organizers of the celebrations actively worked to memorialize an event that changed the history of the state as well as to honor the unnamed energy pioneers who made it happen. By reviewing the commemoration of the legendary pioneers in both the agricultural and energy industries, this study will show the commissioners' desire to honor the people and events that shaped the state's history and how they encouraged the adoption of the values and character traits through these

commemorative activities and monuments. Finally, Chapter V defends the point of this thesis by concluding that the commissioners chose the subjects of their commemorative activities because they wanted to honor, remember, and perpetuate the values, attitudes, and character traits that they believe constitute the North Dakota character.

## CHAPTER II

### NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY AND CHARACTER

What is the relationship between North Dakota—its climate, geography, and history—and the character of its people? According to North Dakota historian Elwyn Robinson, “the conditions of existence, reflected in the history of the state, shaped the character of its people.”<sup>1</sup> In his groundbreaking study of the state’s history and its people, *History of North Dakota* (1966), Robinson described how the state’s semi-arid climate created identifiable themes within its history, which along with “the winnowing process of pioneer settlement itself have placed a stamp upon the people, producing the North Dakota character”—a character that was distinct, in Robinson’s estimation, from that of other Americans.<sup>2</sup> Robinson’s scholarship did much to illuminate the complexities and interconnectedness of the state’s history, geography, and society, and his *History of North Dakota* remains a cornerstone of North Dakota historical discourse. But how did Robinson conclude that the six themes of the state’s history blended with the shared experiences of its people to create a distinct North Dakota character? Moreover, do Robinson’s themes remain valid when discussing the state’s recent history? How have subsequent historians incorporated Robinson’s ideas into their historical works?

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<sup>1</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (1966. Reprint, Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995), 547.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 9; Elwyn B. Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” *North Dakota History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1959): 22.



What other sources suggest or support the existence of a distinctive North Dakota character?

The purpose of this chapter is to answer these questions by examining the state's history and the character of its people through a variety of sources. First, by revisiting Robinson's themes and determining how he concluded that a distinctive North Dakota character existed, it will be shown that it is still possible to use his framework to show that North Dakota's recent history continues to support the existence of the themes, and, by extension, the existence of the North Dakota character. Second, a comparative study of the character of people from neighboring states, along with a brief discussion of North Dakotans' perceptions of themselves as revealed in jokes and tales, will also show the existence of a North Dakota character. This chapter will identify and describe the character traits, values, and attitudes that the commissioners of North Dakota monuments, discussed in Chapters III and IV of this work, admire and seek to popularize and perpetuate in future generations of North Dakotans.

#### North Dakota History

Robinson moved to the state from Ohio in 1935, taught courses in American and North Dakota history at the University of North Dakota, and in 1966 published his best known work, *History of North Dakota*. In his comprehensive investigation of the state's history, Robinson identified six recurring patterns or themes within North Dakota's history: remoteness, dependence, economic disadvantage, agrarian radicalism, the "Too-Much Mistake," and adaptation. According to Robinson, "All the themes are tied to the most fundamental facts about the state: its location at the center of the continent, its cool, subhumid climate, and the climatic differences between the eastern and western parts of



the state. The influence of these facts is seen in every aspect of North Dakota history.”<sup>3</sup> Robinson’s book set the standard for later works on the history of the state, and no North Dakota historian writes about the state’s history without at least a passing reference to Robinson and his themes.<sup>4</sup> A closer look at each of the themes, evidence of their presence throughout North Dakota history, and their relation to each other and North Dakota’s climate and geography, will provide an understanding of how Robinson concluded that the history of the state created a community of North Dakotans and a distinctive North Dakota character.

The first theme, remoteness, is directly related to the state’s geographical location in the center of the nation. With the term remoteness, Robinson referred specifically to “the influence of the great distance between North Dakota and the chief centers of population, industry, finance, culture, and political decision in the nation and the Western World.”<sup>5</sup> Robinson illustrated numerous ways in which North Dakota’s remoteness affected the state’s history and people. For example, because of the great distance between North Dakota and major centers of population, the state experienced a later period of Euro-American settlement than other Great Plains states, such as Kansas and Nebraska. Furthermore, the remoteness of North Dakota has limited its economic opportunities, particularly in the manufacturing sectors, as transportation costs were, and continue to be, prohibitive.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” 6.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent student textbook on the state’s history, Neil D. Howe and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota: Legendary* (Fargo: North Dakota Center for Distance Education, 2007), includes a textbox dedicated to Robinson and his themes, 232.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” 6.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” 7.

As the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches, the sense of remoteness has been reduced in many ways through technological innovations. Today, people in the state take advantage of the latticework of interstate and major highways that connect rural areas and urban centers, both inside and outside the state. But the greatest development in transportation in recent years has been the expansion of commercial air travel to and from the state. Fargo, Bismarck, Grand Forks, and Minot all have sizable commercial airports that provide daily service for travelers with final destinations throughout the world. And the state's eight largest facilities accommodate over 660,000 passengers per year.<sup>7</sup>

The expansion of computer and telecommunications technology has also decreased the sense of remoteness in the state. Through satellite television, cellular telephones, and Internet access, North Dakotans are instantly connected to news, weather, sports, fashion, movies, and other sources of information and entertainment without leaving the comfort of their own homes. Online shopping replaced mail order catalogs and expanded options for North Dakotans from small towns and rural areas and provides them with an infinite variety of products from everywhere in the world. No longer are North Dakotans limited by the dearth of retail options in their small communities. In addition, small shops in North Dakota communities have the opportunity to reach millions of potential buyers through the World Wide Web; and some companies allow their employees to "tele-commute," or to work exclusively from home.<sup>8</sup> In addition, many students are also taking advantage of distance education and online courses offered

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<sup>7</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 661.

<sup>8</sup> Big Sky Buffalo Ranch in Granville sells buffalo (bison) meat and other products online, see [www.bigskybuffalo.com](http://www.bigskybuffalo.com); the ING Service Center in Minot provides the option for some of its employees to work from home.

by most of the state's colleges and universities, allowing them to remain in their small towns and rural areas while earning their degrees.

Advances in computer technologies and Internet access are arguably the most significant forces in breaking down the isolation and remoteness of North Dakota and other rural areas. And yet, a strong sense of remoteness lingers in the minds and hearts of many North Dakotans. Some aspects of this feeling are real—the state remains unable to attract large-scale manufacturing enterprises because of the expense of transportation due to the distance from major population centers.<sup>9</sup> In addition, tourism generates nearly \$3.8 billion annually, but the state faces serious challenges in attracting visitors to the state including its image and location.<sup>10</sup> And although individual communities have worked to increase their attractiveness to tourists through the construction and expansion of facilities and events, “North Dakota lacks the natural wonders that might make it a major tourist mecca.”<sup>11</sup>

More powerful than the real or physical remoteness of the state is the continued sense of separation from the rest of the nation. “North Dakota has always had a sense of being apart from the rest of the country and isolated from it, of being a sort of outsider or country cousin in the family of states.”<sup>12</sup> Robinson attributed this, at least in part, to the geographical distance from major population centers, as well as the high percentage of

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<sup>9</sup> David B. Danbom, postscript to *History of North Dakota*, (1966. Reprint, Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995), 586; Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 112; D. Jerome Tweton, “The Future of North Dakota—An Overview,” *North Dakota History* 56, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 7-13, specifically, 9.

<sup>10</sup> North Dakota Tourism Alliance Partnership, Destination Marketing Association of North Dakota, and the North Dakota Department of Commerce Tourism Division, “2008 Tourism Congress Report,” <https://www.ndtourism.com/uploads/resources/622/tourism-Congress-report-web-file.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2009), 9; see also Denis F. Zaun, “An Analysis of Vacation Activities of the Public and Its Image of North Dakota as a Vacation and Travel Area,” (M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Danbom, postscript to *North Dakota History*, 586.

<sup>12</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 118.



foreign-born immigrants and their children who settled the state in its early years.<sup>13</sup> Not only did these newly settled immigrants come from outside the country, they were comprised of groups considered to be outsiders in Europe—Norwegians and Germans from Russia—“so it is not surprising that they carried a sense of apartness to North Dakota.”<sup>14</sup> Today, that “apartness” continues in the state. David B. Danbom in his article, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” argued that this attitude has been perpetuated by the homogeneous and isolated nature of the state, as “nearly 73 percent of the state’s people were born there, ranking it eleventh among the states in percentage of natives.”<sup>15</sup> Whether real or imagined, the specter of remoteness continues to affect the politics, economy, and social attitudes of its people, as well as the perceptions outsiders have about the state, which, as Danbom noted, is “compounded [by] ignorance, wonderment, and bemusement.”<sup>16</sup> The theme of remoteness is also significant in that it has led the state to depend on outside resources.

Robinson’s second theme of dependence can be seen throughout North Dakota’s history. Robinson accepted the theory that soon after fur traders moved into the area, North Dakota’s Native American tribes became dependent on them for supplies, as well as for markets in which to sell their furs. Like the Native Americans before them, Robinson believed that white settlers in North Dakota had to rely on outside markets when selling their wheat and buying necessities. “But access to the markets was controlled by outsiders—the owners and managers of the railroads, the flour mills, the

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 549.

<sup>14</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 119.

<sup>15</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 121.

<sup>16</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 118.

elevators, the grain exchanges, the wholesale houses, and the banks of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.”<sup>17</sup>

As a result of this reliance, especially on railroads to transport supplies and grain, North Dakota, according to Robinson, became a hinterland of the Twin Cities.<sup>18</sup> As Robinson noted, “for many years Minnesota law regulated the grain markets in which North Dakota’s wheat was sold; North Dakota was long a supplicant, begging for fair treatment in those markets.”<sup>19</sup> Early efforts to break away from their colonial status led many in the state to support the Nonpartisan League. Through this political group, North Dakotans attempted to control of the state’s political machinery, enterprises, and their own futures by establishing a State Mill and Elevator and creating the Bank of North Dakota. Hopes were dashed, however, when the League’s popularity waned in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

Dependence continues to be a problem for the state. As Jerome Tweton noted, “whether one is on the farm, strip mines, or oil fields the price is determined somewhere ‘out there.’”<sup>21</sup> Even attempts to diversify the state’s economy have not reduced dependence, as the state remains an exporter of raw materials and an importer of capital and finished products.<sup>22</sup> North Dakota is one of the nation’s top producers of small grains, especially wheat, yet only a small percentage of those crops are processed in the

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<sup>17</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, “The Meaning of North Dakota History,” Elwyn B. Robinson Papers, OGL #198, Box 26 Folder 3, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 122-123; the concept of agriculture as a colonizing force is addressed in detail in Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” 10.

<sup>20</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 113. For more information on the Nonpartisan League and its role in North Dakota politics at the turn of the century, see Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 327-370; Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

<sup>21</sup> Tweton, “The Future of North Dakota,” 9.

<sup>22</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 109.

state by local businesses such as the Dakota Growers Pasta Company in Carrington.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the state's petroleum resources are processed elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> Attempts to revise North Dakota's colonial status have been mildly successful, but overall, the state remains tied to the production of raw materials in the form of farm products and energy sources such as oil and coal.

The expansion and diversification of the North Dakota economy changed the nature of the metropolis-hinterland relationship between the state and the Twin Cities that dominated the state's early history. But the colonial status persists—North Dakota's remoteness and isolation, its lack of manufacturing, and limited transportation options allowed the real and imagined feelings of dependence to linger into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, North Dakota's status as the colonial hinterland of the Twin Cities continues to aggravate the state's economic disadvantage.

As North Dakota's economy was, and is, based primarily on agriculture, it is at a disadvantage to more diverse economies. The state's semi-arid climate has made the traditionally low-profit farming business even less profitable during years of severe drought.<sup>25</sup> And as Robinson noted, "the relatively low income of farmers, the dominant group in the state, made wages and salaries paid in nonagricultural occupations, except mining, lower in North Dakota than in the nation."<sup>26</sup> This trend continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the economy of North Dakota remains agriculturally-based, and efforts to bring manufacturing into the state have not always met with success.

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<sup>23</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 294, 342-343.

<sup>24</sup> The capacity of the refinery in Mandan is roughly 60,000 barrels per day: Kathleen Davison, Bonnie T. Johnson, Neil D. Howe, eds., *North Dakota: Readings about the Northern Plains State* (Fargo: North Dakota Center for Distance Education, 2008), 413.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 374.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 452.



In 2008, the state's per capita income was \$39,612, ranking it twenty-sixth among the fifty states, and placing it below the national average of \$44,254.<sup>27</sup> Another indicator of North Dakota's economic disadvantage is the number of people in the state who work more than one job—8.7% of the workers in the state as opposed to 5.2% of workers in the United States as a whole (in 2007).<sup>28</sup> This data suggests that the wages in the state are too low to adequately support the worker and a family on one income. In addition, as Danbom noted, “married women are the fastest growing segment of the workforce, in both rural and urban North Dakota.”<sup>29</sup> And although this statement reflects a national trend of women in the workforce, it also suggests that both farm and nonfarm families in the state are finding it necessary to earn additional income. Finally, some of the economic diversity created by the development of coal and oil resources have not produced the economic stability such diversity is expected to, but rather the boom and bust cycles of the energy industry resemble the unpredictability of agriculture in the state.<sup>30</sup>

In the early years of the state's history, the theme of economic disadvantage, paired with dependence, caused many North Dakotans to push back in the form of agrarian radicalism. Robinson explained the theme of North Dakota radicalism as “an attack upon the middlemen or, as they were commonly called, the ‘interests’ who stood between the farmer and his market. It was a revolt against exploitation, a struggle to change the status quo, or more simply, a determined effort to get a fair price for wheat.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Robyn, ed., “2009 Facts & Figures Handbook: How Does Your State Compare,” Tax Foundation [https://www.taxfoundation.org/files/f&f\\_booklet\\_20090224.pdf](https://www.taxfoundation.org/files/f&f_booklet_20090224.pdf) (accessed March 7, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> North Dakota State Data Center, “Multiple Jobholders in North Dakota: 1994-2007,” *Economic Brief* 18, no. 1 (January 2009), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Danbom, postscript to *History of North Dakota*, 591.

<sup>30</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 116.

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, “The Themes of North Dakota History,” 11; see also Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 275.

North Dakotans created a series of organizations throughout the years to protect their livelihoods and increase control over agricultural prices in the state. In the 1880s, North Dakota farmers organized the Dakota Farmers Alliance to combat “the extortions of the railroads and the grain trade.” In the “Revolution of 1906,” Democratic and Republican progressives, tired of the corruption and machine politics of Alexander McKenzie and his corporate cronies, united to elect Democrat “Honest John” Burke as governor.<sup>32</sup>

In 1915, Arthur C. Townley, Albert E. Bowen, and Howard Wood organized the Nonpartisan League in order to make the state government more responsive to the needs of its people, particularly farmers.<sup>33</sup> The League gained enormous popularity with farmers throughout the state who wished to wrestle control of their enterprises from outside forces. After winning the governorship and securing control of the state legislature, the Nonpartisan League adopted changes designed to place power back in the hands of the people and to ensure that the government was working for their interests.<sup>34</sup>

In 1919, the North Dakota legislature, under the direction of the Nonpartisan League, passed a series of laws, including one establishing a state mill and elevator “to engage in the manufacturing and marketing of farm products.”<sup>35</sup> This was an unconcealed attempt to sever the bond of dependence with the Twin Cities. The League also supported the creation of a state-owned bank, another blatant attempt by the people of North Dakota to lessen their dependence on outside financial services. The League’s

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<sup>32</sup> Charles N. Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912” (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1952), 65-67, 72; see also, Charles N. Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” in *The North Dakota Political Tradition*, Thomas W. Howard, ed., (Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1981), 46-49.

<sup>33</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 180.

<sup>34</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 185-189; Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 137-152.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 342.



popularity declined rapidly in the 1920s, but other farmers' organizations created in later decades, including the North Dakota Wheat Growers Association and the North Dakota Farmers' Union, continued the tradition of agrarian radicalism in the state.

D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff, in a bicentennial look at North Dakota, generally supported Robinson's conclusions, and remarked on the continued agrarian radicalism among the state's farmers. "Although its membership has declined from its all-time high, the Farmers' Union was named by the state's political leaders in a poll taken in 1973 as the single most powerful organization within the state."<sup>36</sup> By 1989, Tweton adjusted his views of North Dakota's continued agrarian radicalism: "The fact that in 1989 North Dakota has the highest per capita cooperative membership of all the states is," according to Tweton, "testimony not to radicalism but to business sense."<sup>37</sup> But Tweton is willing to entertain the idea that radicalism could re-appear more forcefully if the people believe it is necessary. This latent power of the people lies dormant until provoked by a threat to their interests. As Danbom remarked, "they react with fear and anger when Congress discusses ending the honey subsidy or closing an air base."<sup>38</sup> Although efforts were made to reduce the impact of dependence and economic disadvantage, these two themes were closely tied with the theme of remoteness and North Dakota's geography and semi-arid climate to produce what Robinson coined as the "Too-Much Mistake."

During the two great booms of North Dakota's history (1879-1886; 1898-1915), pioneers moved into the state and began rapidly building in the hope that their new

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<sup>36</sup> D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People* (Fargo: Knight Printing, 1976), 171.

<sup>37</sup> Tweton, "The Future of North Dakota," 10.

<sup>38</sup> Danbom, "Postscript," *History of North Dakota*, 584.

homeland would soon be as heavily populated as agricultural areas just to the east. Unfortunately, the optimism of the pioneers collided head-on with North Dakota's climate and geography. These pioneers "quite naturally expected the state to develop as such lands had in the past, to have as dense a population and to be able to support as many institutions. In other words, they brought ideas and expectations from humid regions which were unsuited to the semiarid country."<sup>39</sup> Robinson used the "Too-Much Mistake" as his term "for too many farms, too many miles of railroads and roads, too many towns, banks, schools, colleges, churches and governmental institutions, and more people than opportunities."<sup>40</sup>

Schools provide a telling example of the "Too-Much Mistake." As Robinson stated, "there are, and long have been, too many schools with low enrollments and high costs per pupil. One result has been the disappearance of many of them."<sup>41</sup> The effects of the mistake continue to be felt in the state through the continued high cost of education and low teacher salaries.

By 2007, the number of school districts in the state had dropped to 198, with the eight largest districts accommodating roughly 47% of the state's public school students.<sup>42</sup> But as the school remains a source of community pride, many towns only give up the school after years of slow, painful decline. And most communities realize that the loss of the school signals that the death of the town is not too far off.<sup>43</sup> In addition to school consolidation, many districts in the state are creating Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) in

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<sup>39</sup> Robinson, "The Meaning of North Dakota History," 4-5; D. Jerome Tweton, "Preface to the North Dakota edition: Elwyn B. Robinson and the Themes of North Dakota," in Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (1966. Reprint, Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995), xiii.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, "Themes of North Dakota History," 6.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, "Themes of North Dakota History," 18.

<sup>42</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 358-363.

<sup>43</sup> Danbom, "North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State," 123.

response to declining enrollments and financial constraints. JPAs allow districts to better serve their students by sharing resources in areas such as “transportation, curriculum, faculty, administration, and others.”<sup>44</sup> Another innovation, videoconferencing, allows schools to offer more course choices without adding faculty by utilizing faculty from other districts that administer the course.<sup>45</sup>

Higher education in the state is another example of the “Too-Much Mistake.” That the state of North Dakota supports eleven colleges and universities presents funding challenges for all of the institutions. As Danbom noted in 1988, “expenditures for higher education are spread among so many institutions that none can really be a place of quality by national standards.”<sup>46</sup> Although the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks and North Dakota State University in Fargo maintain strong student body populations of around 13,000 each, smaller institutions such as Mayville State University and Valley City State University struggle to enroll one thousand students. But efforts to change the constitution in order to reduce the number of institutions are met with fierce opposition.<sup>47</sup> The sixth and final theme is connected to the “Too-Much Mistake,” as North Dakotans adapt to their environment and the challenges it presents.

According to Robinson, the theme of adaptation has two main parts: adjustment to life on the semi-arid plains and correcting the “Too-Much Mistake” of North Dakota’s history. North Dakotans have adapted to life on the plains in a number of ways, particularly through the adoption of new technology and farming techniques. The

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<sup>44</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 362.

<sup>45</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 365.

<sup>46</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 124.

<sup>47</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 368. In 2007, only 1,037 students were enrolled at Valley City State University, while Mayville State University enrolled only 832 students. One factor affecting these two institutions is the proximity of larger universities. Mayville is less than 50 miles from Grand Forks; Valley City is approximately 60 miles from Fargo; Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 118.



proliferation of the automobile, communications technology, and computers with Internet access have made life on the northern plains easier and more enjoyable. Moreover, farming “has become more technologically oriented, more dependent on such off-farm inputs as chemicals and machinery, and more capital intensive.” As a result of these changes, the productivity of North Dakota farmers has increased dramatically.<sup>48</sup>

Robinson described the second aspect of adaptation: “retrenchment—the cutting back of the excess in farms, schools, banks, towns, newspapers, and churches—has been a necessary but painful and negative sort of adjustment.”<sup>49</sup> The abandoned homes, deserted towns, and empty schools are proof that North Dakotans have accepted, perhaps grudgingly, the need for consolidation. In addition, adjustment has occurred in farming as well. The number of farms has steadily declined since the peak of the 1930s; “it is estimated that there are approximately 30,000 farms” in the state today. At the same time, the average size of each farm has increased from about 400 acres in 1900 to nearly 1,300 acres a century later.<sup>50</sup>

Robinson used the six themes as the lens through which he viewed North Dakota’s history, and he believed that the state’s history revolved around these themes. Later North Dakota historians, including D. Jerome Tweton, Theodore Jelliff, Neil Howe, David Danbom, and Robert Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, supplied evidence that supports all or most of Robinson’s conclusions.

This is not to say that scholars agree wholeheartedly with Robinson’s interpretations. For example, Alan Fricker, as part of his Masters of Science degree in History at North Dakota State University, submitted a thesis titled, “A New Analysis of

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<sup>48</sup> Danbom, “North Dakota: The Most Midwestern State,” 116.

<sup>49</sup> Robinson, “Themes of North Dakota History,” 18.

<sup>50</sup> Howe and Jelliff, 378.



Elwyn Robinson's Too Much Mistake in North Dakota's History." In his study, Fricker argued that Robinson did not adequately address the reason why the "Too-Much Mistake" was made. Fricker explained that by "examining the relationship between settlement and the development of railroads and grain elevators, we can begin to understand Robinson's development of the too-much mistake."<sup>51</sup> In addition, Fricker sought to test the "applicability of Robinson's too-much mistake to other areas of the Great Plains," such as South Dakota.<sup>52</sup> Essentially, Fricker concluded that railroad competition in North Dakota led to the development of numerous towns; and because farmers initially hauled their crops to the grain elevator with either horses or oxen, it was necessary that the towns be located within five to eight miles of the farms. If the towns were located farther away, the farmers would be forced to spend the night somewhere along the way, which may serve as a large enough deterrent to growing crops beyond subsistence levels, according to Fricker.<sup>53</sup>

In his comparison of North and South Dakota, Fricker stated that there was less competition among railroads companies in South Dakota, and that railroads in the state were built to connect existing towns, rather than building the towns as they came through the way they did in North Dakota.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the discovery of gold in the Black Hills and the existence of a transcontinental railroad in Nebraska altered settlement patterns as well by allowing the railroads to build north from the lines in Nebraska to the goldmines.<sup>55</sup> Fricker concluded that because of these factors, "What Robinson (and

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<sup>51</sup> Alan Fricker, "A New Analysis of Elwyn Robinson's Too-Much Mistake in North Dakota's History," (M.S. thesis, North Dakota State University, Fargo, 1995), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Fricker, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Fricker, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Fricker, 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> Fricker, 17-19.

apparently other Western historians) never considered or realized was that these towns, farmers, grain elevators, and railroads he called ‘too-much’ in the context of today were an absolute necessity of the settlement period.”<sup>56</sup>

Professor Thomas Isern, a Kansas native who teaches at North Dakota State University, also questioned Robinson’s analysis of the state’s history. In his article, “Thorfinnson Rides Again: A Sense of Place on the Northern Plains,” Isern examined the relationship between the land and its people and our perceptions of that relationship. As for Robinson’s analysis of the state’s history and its people, Isern commented that “Robinson was right. In 1960.”<sup>57</sup> Essentially, Isern suggested that Robinson’s themes are not inaccurate, but rather, merely outdated. According to Isern, the state’s too-many towns, farms, and schools have been reduced to a sustainable level as a result of the painful adjustment and retrenchment of which Robinson wrote,<sup>58</sup> and that the state is now moving on to its “third era of Euro-American history on the Great Plains...Renewal.”<sup>59</sup> One gets the sense from this article that Isern does not reject Robinson’s overall assessment, but rather that his greatest disagreement with Robinson is that his interpretation was overly negative—and perhaps he has a valid point. The optimism of the early settlers led them to ambitiously plan for the state’s inevitable growth parallel to that of its eastern neighbors, a misguided assessment that subsequent generations were able to see with hindsight. As newspaper columnist Lloyd Omdahl noted, “having only the facts available in the 1880s, Professor Robinson may have joined others in encouraging newcomers to develop farms and towns in this great spanse [sic] of rich

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<sup>56</sup> Fricker, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas D. Isern, “Thorfinnson Rides Again: A Sense of place on the Northern Plains,” *North Dakota History* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 2-9, specifically, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Isern, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Isern, 6.

land. Given the means of transportation and communication...extensive development may have looked reasonable at the time.”<sup>60</sup>

Given this discussion, do Robinson’s themes remain an appropriate interpretation of North Dakota’s recent history? Some of Robinson’s themes lend themselves to modernization better than others as they are brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Remoteness, for example, both physical and mental, continues to be a challenge in North Dakota. Many Americans, including many in North Dakota, believe that the state’s location make it an unattractive place to visit or to conduct business. Tourism has increased in recent years, but the number of visitors continues to lag behind that of the state’s closest neighbors. Efforts to encourage businesses to expand or relocate to the state have met heavy resistance as businesses are reluctant to establish themselves in a place far from major population centers. Advances in transportation and telecommunications technology have moderated the isolation of the state’s residents, but the sense of remoteness, both real and imagined, has a profound impact on the state and its people.

Dependence also remains a problem for the state as the processing of the state’s natural resources and agricultural products continues to be conducted, for the most part, outside the state’s borders. Moreover, the lack of economic diversity and the state’s inability to attract large-scale manufacturing, coupled with an agricultural economic base, have placed the state at an economic disadvantage to more diverse economies in the nation.

The “Too-Much Mistake” presents an interesting challenge to modernization, because as Fricker, Isern, and Omdahl have noted, what Robinson referred to as “too-much” may have been necessary given the circumstances of the time, as well as the desire

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<sup>60</sup> Lloyd Omdahl, “North Dakota Moves from ‘Too Much’ to ‘Too Big,’ *Williston Herald*, April 2, 2001.



of the settlers to see their state's population and economic influence expand. At the same time, the state continues to support eleven institutions of higher learning which forces the state to dilute available funds, a situation that could be defined as "too much."

Agrarian radicalism is the least visible of Robinson's themes in North Dakota today. Although the farm groups Robinson wrote about no longer have the political influence they once enjoyed, farm lobbyists continue to work for agrarian interests at the state and national levels. But this is perhaps, as Tweton noted, more a testament to good business sense than to continued radicalism.

Finally, the state's people continue to adapt to life on the plains. North Dakotans have embraced new farming technologies and techniques that make the most of the productive agricultural lands. In addition, the state's people have adopted advances in telecommunications technologies which enable them to attend school as well as participate in the new global economy while remaining in their small towns and rural settings. These technologies have reduced many of the disadvantages of the state's remoteness.

Robinson's six themes and his conclusions have been supported by subsequent North Dakota historians as well as recent developments and data, albeit in slightly modified form. These themes—and the shared experiences of the people of the northern plains—created a sense of community and influenced the character of the people. As North Dakotans continue to live with the themes of North Dakota's history, it is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that Robinson's belief in the existence of a North Dakota character remains valid as well, as the following section of this chapter will show.



## North Dakota Character

According to Robinson, the characteristics of the typical North Dakotan, “spring from the North Dakota experience and environment.”<sup>61</sup> Robinson’s analysis has two parts. The first concerns the traits necessary for life as a pioneer and life on the plains in general, including “courage, optimism, warmhearted neighborliness, energy, individualism and self-reliance.” These traits, according to Robinson, have been strengthened by the North Dakota experience. In addition, North Dakotans value hard work because it is imperative to overcoming the challenges of an unforgiving environment.<sup>62</sup>

The second component of Robinson’s analysis of the North Dakota character is derived specifically from the six themes of North Dakota history. The remoteness of North Dakota has led to the development of a friendliness not always found in other parts of the country. As Robinson argued, the sparse population and the resultant neighborliness of the people developed because “where there were so few, each person counted, each was needed,” as opposed to “the loneliness of the great cities, where many people were, or seemed to be, faceless, valueless, unwanted, and unneeded.”<sup>63</sup> North Dakota’s tradition of dependence and economic disadvantage has led to a variety of character traits including stubbornness and independence, as well as a fear of dependence and feelings of inferiority. These aspects were “solidly based upon North Dakota’s status as a rural sparsely settled, semiarid plains and prairie state, a colonial hinterland exploited by and dependent upon outside centers of trade, manufacturing, and culture.”<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 550.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 552-553.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 553.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 551-552.

theme of agrarian radicalism, a backlash against North Dakota's colonial status, also manifests itself as distrust of outside interests, a fear of being exploited, and often in political isolationism, particularly in the realm of American foreign policy.<sup>65</sup> As North Dakotans adapted and continue to adjust to life on the northern plains, "They will seek to raise and stabilize their income, to diversify their economy, to conquer distance, to counteract in some way the social cost of space, and to adjust school, college, and church to meet their economic, cultural, and spiritual needs."<sup>66</sup>

A comparison of the people of North Dakota with the residents of neighboring states shows that the character of North Dakotans is not unique, but because of the geography, history, and settlement patterns in the state, it is distinct. Across the Red River of the North is Minnesota—North Dakota's neighbor to the east and a comrade of sorts as a result of commonality of settlers who hailed from the Scandinavian countries and Germany.<sup>67</sup> Minnesotans have been described as "hard-working people—descendants of hardy Scandinavian settlers"<sup>68</sup> who "still display the rugged individualism, the high productivity, and the stability of their forebearers [sic]."<sup>69</sup> In Minnesota, "some of the nation's more agreeable qualities are evident...courtesy and fairness, honesty, a capacity for innovation, hard work, intellectual adventure and responsibility."<sup>70</sup> But among the similarities, there remain stark differences. First, the geography of the two states creates several contrasts: because of Minnesota's location farther east (and its proximity to already settled areas of Wisconsin and Iowa), the state

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 550-552, 353.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 565.

<sup>67</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 203, 206-207; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., ed., *Minnesota in a Century of Change: The State and Its People Since 1900* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Clark, 1, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Clark, 15-16.

was settled earlier than North Dakota. And although western and southern Minnesota contains rolling prairies, the remaining lands were or are covered with an abundance of forests and lakes.<sup>71</sup> As Minnesota historian Theodore Blegen observed, “geographic factors are so interwoven, one with another and with the human story of Minnesota, that it is difficult to single out a few that dwarf the others in significance.”<sup>72</sup>

Second, as in North Dakota, Minnesota’s early pioneer farmers battled the northern climate and isolated conditions and were often exploited by the metropolitan centers farther east.<sup>73</sup> Because of the differences in the available building materials as well as abundant rainfall, however, those areas in Minnesota blossomed much like those of its eastern neighbors.<sup>74</sup> As the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul grew and attracted more settlers, businesses, and eventually, manufacturing, the colonial status of the state disappeared as the Twin Cities developed into a metropolis.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the similarities of settlement and location, combined with differences in economics, politics, and history, create a separation of identity as distinct as the boundary between the two states.

To the west, Montana’s eastern prairie is nearly indistinguishable from western North Dakota—dry and windswept, it is inhabited with more ranchers and oilmen than farmers and townspeople.<sup>76</sup> Montana’s landscape and climate are rugged and beautiful, as well as harsh and unforgiving, much like North Dakota’s.<sup>77</sup> Also, as in North Dakota, Montana’s early settlers came from humid regions with established notions of what life and settlement should be like, but “here [in Montana] was no humid, gently rolling

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<sup>71</sup> Blegen, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Blegen, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Blegen, 203.

<sup>74</sup> Clark, 2; Blegen, 183-210.

<sup>75</sup> Clark, 2; for a detailed account of the relationship between the metropolis and its hinterland, see also William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

<sup>76</sup> K. Ross Toole, *Montana: An Uncommon Land* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 250.

<sup>77</sup> Toole, 5.



forested area but a place of vastness, semiaridity, and implacably unpredictable weather.”<sup>78</sup> In addition, “nature, not the evil designs of men, decreed that Montana be a place with a colonial economy. The object of men had to be to trap it, mine it, shoot it, and get out.”<sup>79</sup> The distance from major metropolitan areas sentenced Montana to a colonial role in much the same way it did for North Dakota: “and so it was with beaver, beef, sheep, silver, copper, oil, and, to a lesser extent, even with lumber and wheat;”<sup>80</sup> Montana served as a supplier of raw materials, but failed to take control of the lucrative processing of those goods.

The similarities between the two states end, however, with an examination of Montana’s western geography and history. As Montana historians Michael Malone, Richard Roeder, and William Lang remarked, “We must remember that urban centers, in the peculiar form of mining camps, were established in Montana long before most of the wide-open areas began to attract a rural population.”<sup>81</sup> In fact, these mining camps, in addition to creating a separate cultural element, focus the attention, both inside and outside the state, on the western portion. Furthermore, the mining camps, through their rowdiness and colorful characters, created a sense of the Wild West, which categorizes Montana more with other mining states like Alaska, Colorado, and even South Dakota. This focus effectively separates Montana from the farming communities that dominated the landscape of its eastern neighbor. Montana often celebrates this heritage through historical societies, monuments, and other commemorative activities. As Montana historian K. Ross Toole observed, “Yet strangely enough such commemoration is almost

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<sup>78</sup> Toole, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Toole, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Toole, 249.

<sup>81</sup> Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Rev. ed., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 347.

always a commemoration of myth and not fact...[the Montanan] makes the cowboy into a noble knight of the prairies, and he makes a Titian out of Charles M. Russell.”<sup>82</sup>

Because of its history, the dichotomy of its geography, its unforgiving landscape, and its colonial economy, Montana has produced a people who have survived the booms and busts, and for whom “optimism has alternated almost monotonously with despair.”<sup>83</sup>

And because of these elements, North Dakotans can relate and sympathize with their neighbors, but yet are worlds away from them.

None of the other states in the Union can relate more closely to the geography, history, and people of North Dakota as its twin—South Dakota. What would become the two states of North and South Dakota began their conjoined existence as a single unit, Dakota Territory, in 1861. But just as two siblings will squabble, tensions soon developed and eventually led to the split. Railroad development occurred differently in the northern and southern portions of the territory, resulting in vastly dissimilar settlement patterns. In addition, railroad officials became a dominant force in northern Dakota politics.<sup>84</sup> Another major factor was the development of bonanza farming, which brought a large influx of settlers into the northern portion of the territory in the 1870s.<sup>85</sup> This rapid population build-up, combined with the political influence of the railroad companies, created a divergent set of political attitudes among northern and southern Dakotans.<sup>86</sup> The breach between the two widened farther in 1883 when Territorial Governor Nehemiah Ordway, in collaboration with Alexander McKenzie and members

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<sup>82</sup> Toole, 243.

<sup>83</sup> Toole, 9.

<sup>84</sup> Howard R. Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 192.

<sup>85</sup> Lamar, 191.

<sup>86</sup> Lamar, 205.

of his political machine, successfully removed the capital from Yankton to Bismarck.<sup>87</sup> The “stealing” of the capital eventually led to the splitting of the territory in two, not geographically along a north-south axis as might be perceived as natural given the landscape, but rather into northern and southern portions. Part of this separation can be explained by the changing attitudes of those in southern Dakota where “the colonial mentality was passing;” northern Dakota on the other hand, still relied heavily on outside interests. The land of the Dakotas, like the rest of the plains, appealed to a particular segment of the population, including Germans from Russia, who were already familiar with plains life and grain farming. Others were molded to fit into the landscape, as South Dakota historian John Milton noted, “one senses that the conditions of the land, austere at best, have helped develop strong hardy grain and strong hardy men—no other could survive.”<sup>88</sup>

And from the outside, “in the minds, or imaginations, of the people living on or near the nation’s coasts, the Dakotas are very much alike—if they exist at all.”<sup>89</sup> But upon closer inspection, South Dakotans, along with Minnesotans, Montanans, and the rest of the people of the plains states share strikingly similar character traits with the people of North Dakota; and yet the geography, history, politics, economics, settlement patterns, and perceptions—the events and experiences that make North Dakota different from its neighbors—make the people of North Dakota distinctly North Dakotan.

A final component of the analysis of the character of North Dakotans is perception, an element that is often expressed by jokes and other humorous anecdotes enjoyed by the people of the state. In his weekly column, *Plains Folks*, Professor

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<sup>87</sup> Lamar, 205-207.

<sup>88</sup> John R. Milton, *South Dakota: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 11.

<sup>89</sup> Milton, 3.



Thomas Isern produced a collection of “You-Must-Be-From-North-Dakota” sayings that he gathered from his readers and other sources. For example, you must be from North Dakota...

...if the idea of snow in June doesn't surprise you.  
...if someone asks if you've ever fenced and you think about barbed wire and posts.  
...if you realize that lefse and tortillas look alike, but all similarity stops there.  
...if you don't think it's cold unless your eyelashes stick together when you blink.<sup>90</sup>

According to Isern, there are three themes that can be distilled from these jokes and others like them:

First, we live in a hard country and take pride in our own hardiness. Second, those willing to suffer win the rewards of the country, which are aesthetic and spiritual, not material. Third, we have some strange ways and thus are little understood in the other parts of the country.<sup>91</sup>

North Dakotans, according to Isern, believe themselves to be different as a result of their attitudes for and their experiences with the northern climate and geography. They express these differences through humorous anecdotes and jokes that are also, in many instances, self-deprecating.

In his collection of oral traditions of the Germans from Russia population in the state, particularly in the form of short stories and jokes, Ronald Vossler stated that his

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<sup>90</sup> The jokes are based on the format of comedian Jeff Foxworthy's “You might be a Redneck if...” routine. Thomas D. Isern, *Plains Folks*, “You Must Be from North Dakota,” <http://www.plainsfolk.com/youmust/> (accessed March 29, 2009).

<sup>91</sup> Isern, “Thorfinnson Rides Again,” 5. Other examples of state and regional joke books are Ronald J. Vossler, *Not Until the Combine is Paid and Other Jokes: from the oral traditions of Germans from Russia in the Dakotas* (Fargo, ND: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries, 2001); Ronald J. Vossler, *Lost Shawls and Pig Spleens: Folklore, Anecdotes, and Humor from the oral traditions of Germans from Russia in the Dakotas* (Fargo, ND: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries, 2002); Charlene Power, *The Best of Queen Lena: A Compilation of the Best Norwegian Jokes from Five Best-Selling Books* (Crosby, ND: C. Power, 1991); other perceptions can be obtained from non-fiction literary accounts of current and former residents of the area, see for example, Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and A Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (New York: Viking, 1962); Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993); Debra Marquart, *The Horizontal World: Growing Up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere* (New York: Counterpoint, 2006).

purpose was “to celebrate the rich, distinct traditions of this ethnic group’s humor,” which is “just what one might expect from a traditional, pragmatic farming people, whose prairie lives [both in the old country and new] were intimately involved with all the gritty realities of life on the edges of...one of America’s last frontiers.”<sup>92</sup> The Germans from Russia, as a component of the North Dakota population, express their perceptions of themselves as being different from the mainstream population, an attitude adopted by others in the state as well.

The perceptions of both North Dakotans and outsiders are their realities. North Dakotans have become a community of individuals because of their common experiences, history, and beliefs about themselves and their state. It is important to repeat that in no way did Robinson believe or argue that any one of these character traits was unique to North Dakotans, but rather, the combination of the history, climate, and shared experiences of the people created a distinctive North Dakota character.<sup>93</sup> As the following chapters will show, the commissioners of North Dakota monuments deliberately selected their subjects in order to showcase the character traits, values, and attitudes of the North Dakota character they admired. Their hope was to educate the general population as well as future generations on the state’s history and its distinctive character.

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<sup>92</sup> Vossler, *Not Until the Combine is Paid and Other Jokes*, x.

<sup>93</sup> Another caveat in this argument is that it is understood that not every resident of the state displays these character traits, nor does each person who identifies with the North Dakota character exhibit all of the traits. Just as historians generalize about the character and history of “women,” “Vietnam veterans,” or “African Americans” as a group, so too is it necessary to generalize the character of “North Dakotans” in this instance.

## CHAPTER III

### MONUMENTS TO HISTORICAL PIONEERS

Many Americans have been inspired by the lives of the nation's notable historical figures. The subjects of these commemorations range from the pensive and studious to the bold and adventurous. The monuments' commissioners deliberately selected the honorees in order to display their adoration of their lives, to honor their deeds, and to celebrate their characters. General Ulysses S. Grant, American Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and suffragettes Elizabeth Cady-Stanton and Susan B. Anthony have all been immortalized in bronze and stone. In North Dakota, monuments commemorate both well-known and obscure individuals, including Alexander Griggs, Hazel Miner, and Chief Four Bears.

By examining how North Dakotans have commemorated their historical figures—their historical pioneers—we are able to establish an understanding of the character traits that the monuments' commissioners believe their honorees possessed, as well as those traits that have been inferred from them. Moreover, by studying how the commemorators memorialize their subjects, we are able to determine the character traits they see in themselves, the traits they hope to develop in themselves and the rest of the state's population, as well as the values and attitudes they want to encourage in future generations.



A number of individuals have been honored with statues, plaques, historical markers, and other commemorative devices in the state. As a result, it was necessary to narrow the discussion to two people who figure prominently in the state's history. The first, a young Shoshone woman, Sakakawea, has gained national attention in the two hundred years since her death for her participation in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Not only is Sakakawea easily recognizable throughout the state, she is an icon of American history as well. All of this is remarkable, considering her relatively minor role in the expedition.<sup>1</sup> As this study will show, despite an extremely limited amount of primary source materials on Sakakawea, many North Dakotans have attributed a number of positive characteristics and values to a woman who is virtually an unknown entity, historically speaking. The gaps have been filled in by a collective effort of commemorators to celebrate the person they hope she was, as will be shown in this chapter.

The second individual, John Burke, left a longer trail of historical information from which to draw conclusions about his life, his career, and his character. John Burke is best remembered as an honest politician who rescued North Dakota's government from the corruption of machine politics in the state's early years. These identifiable characteristics become the focal point of the commemoration of this "remarkable man."

Sakakawea and John Burke were selected for this study because of the prominent places their statues occupy. Not only are these statues located on the state capitol grounds in Bismarck, but both represent the state in National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. By examining their biographies and the

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<sup>1</sup> See Clay S. Jenkinson, "The Challenge of Sakakawea," in *A Vast and Open Plain: The Writings of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in North Dakota, 1804-1806*, Clay S. Jenkinson, ed. (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), 2003), 553-558.

commemorative events celebrating their lives, this study will show the character traits and attitudes that the monuments' commissioners cherish, emulate, and seek to pass on to the future generations.

### Sakakawea Statue

Perhaps the most recognizable North Dakota icon is Sakakawea, the teenage Shoshone wife of Toussaint Charbonneau, who accompanied Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on the Corps of Discovery from Fort Mandan to the Pacific Ocean and back.<sup>2</sup> Despite the familiarity of her name and her image, both in the state and the rest of the nation, very little is known about her life, with the exception of the brief glimpses obtained from the journals of the Corps of Discovery members. Even the spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of her name are hotly debated. As author Clay Jenkinson noted, "It is not even certain that Sakakawea is the name by which she would have chosen to call herself."<sup>3</sup>

Historians speculate that Sakakawea was born around 1787 in southwestern Montana. At some point in her childhood, probably near the age of eleven, Sakakawea was kidnapped from her home near Three Forks by Hidatsa raiders from the Knife River villages in what is now North Dakota. By the time Sakakawea met Lewis and Clark on November 11, 1804, she was one of the wives of the French-Canadian fur trader

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Lewis and Clark Expedition (Corps of Discovery) see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Clay S. Jenkinson, ed., *A Vast and Open Plain: The Writings of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in North Dakota, 1804-1806* (Bismarck: SHSND, 2003); Elin Woodger and Brandon Toropov, *Encyclopedia of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (New York: Facts on File, 2004); Thomas P. Slaughter, *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Jenkinson, 556-558; Ella E. Clark and Margot Edmonds, *Sacagawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 147; Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (1966. Reprint, Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995), 44n; Neil D. Howe and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota Legendary* (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Center for Distance Education, 2007), 75; D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People* (Fargo: Knight Printing, 1976), 175.

Charbonneau and six-months pregnant with her first child.<sup>4</sup> Almost immediately, Lewis and Clark decided to hire Charbonneau as an interpreter who would continue with the Corps in the spring. No doubt Sakakawea's Shoshone ancestry played a significant role in this decision, as the opinions of Charbonneau's ability and character were already quite low.<sup>5</sup>

The Corps of Discovery had set out from St. Louis in early May 1804 and reached the Mandan-Hidatsa villages along the Missouri River in October where the captains decided to remain for the winter. In preparation for their stay, Lewis and Clark and the other members of the expedition built Fort Mandan along the river.<sup>6</sup> The Mandan, Hidatsa, and the men of the expedition spent the winter hunting, fishing, and exploring the area. For Sakakawea, her pregnancy probably progressed smoothly over the winter, although no mention of it was made in the expedition's journals. On February 11, 1805, Sakakawea went into labor; and, as is often the case with a first child, the delivery was long and difficult. At the suggestion of Toussaint Jessaume, another French-Canadian living in the village, Meriwether Lewis administered a potion of pulverized rattlesnake rattles to Sakakawea. Whether the concoction was effective, or if the baby's time had finally come, historians will never know, but within a short time, Sakakawea's healthy baby boy, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, nicknamed "Pomp," was born.<sup>7</sup>

On April 7, 1805, the Corps of Discovery, along with Charbonneau, Sakakawea, and two-month-old Baptiste continued their journey into the northwest. Members of the

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<sup>4</sup> Jenkinson, 553; Ambrose, 187; Clark and Edmonds, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Jenkinson, 553; Ambrose, 187, 203, 277; Clark and Edmonds, 15. Even though Sakakawea spoke Shoshone, in addition to Hidatsa, the communications with the various tribes, including the Shoshone, would be difficult, as the messages needed to be translated through several languages in order for members of the party to communicate.

<sup>6</sup> This site is approximately fourteen miles from present-day Washburn, Ambrose, 186; see also, Robinson, 43; Clark and Edmonds, 12-13; Howe and Jelliff, 74-75.

<sup>7</sup> Ambrose, 197; Clark and Edmonds, 14-15.



expedition mentioned Sakakawea infrequently in their journals; she “got noticed when she fed the expedition, when she nearly drowned, when her beads were needed for an economic transaction, when she showed extraordinary resourcefulness in a boat accident, and when she interpreted among her people, the Shoshone.”<sup>8</sup> The lack of information about her day-to-day activities, however, does not suggest that the members of the Corps did not value Sakakawea’s presence. Within a month after leaving Fort Mandan, the Corps experienced what could have been a disastrous accident when one of the pirogues (with Charbonneau at the helm) nearly capsized, sending the “journals, maps, instruments, and other invaluable items” into the water.<sup>9</sup> But thanks to Sakakawea’s presence of mind, disaster was spared. Lewis remarked, “The Indian woman whom I ascribe equal fortitude and resolution, with any person on board at the time of the accident caught and preserved most of the light articles.”<sup>10</sup>

It was the meeting between the Shoshone and the expedition in which Sakakawea’s role was most critical. In August 1805, as the Corps approached the Continental Divide, Lewis had a chance encounter with a small group of Shoshone and was led by an elderly woman to their camp where he met the chief, Cameahwait. When the rest of the expedition joined him, Sakakawea threw her blanket over Cameahwait and “cried profusely” when she recognized Cameahwait as her brother.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the successful negotiations with the Shoshone, made possible by Sakakawea, the expedition secured horses for the next phase of their trip. Perhaps Sakakawea’s most valuable

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<sup>8</sup> Jenkinson, 556-557.

<sup>9</sup> Ambrose, 225.

<sup>10</sup> Ambrose, 225; Clark and Edmonds, 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Ambrose, 268-277; Jenkinson, 554, notes: “Although it is possible that ‘brother’ carried a metaphoric rather than literal meaning for Sakakawea, Lewis and Clark were convinced that Cameahwait and Sakakawea were related by consanguinity rather than close cultural and family ties.”

contribution to the success of the expedition was her presence on the journey, which along with that of her infant son, signaled to all tribes along the route that the Corps of Discovery was a peaceful expedition. As Clark noted in his journal on October 19, 1805, “the sight of this Indian woman, wife of one of our interpreters, confirmed those people of our friendly intentions, as no woman ever accompanies a war party of Indians in this quarter.”<sup>12</sup>

In November 1805, the Corps of Discovery finally reached the Pacific Ocean after a long and hazardous journey. The expedition remained near the coast for the winter and began its trek eastward the following spring. When the expedition returned to the Mandan-Hidatsa villages on August 17, 1806, the Charbonneau family was discharged from the service of the Corps and remained at the village, while Lewis and Clark led the rest of the expedition back to St. Louis. William Clark, who had grown fond of little Pomp, offered to supervise his education, which Charbonneau and Sakakawea declined, as the child was not yet two years old. In 1809, however, the family did travel to St. Louis, and Clark was able to oversee the boy’s education.<sup>13</sup>

As with most of Sakakawea’s life, the years following the expedition are not well-documented. Sources suggest that after Charbonneau and Sakakawea met Clark in St. Louis, they traveled north once again. Tragically, the young Shoshone woman’s adventurous life was cut short by “putrid fever” at Fort Manuel just below the border of North and South Dakota in 1812, an event that Clark also recorded in his account book of

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<sup>12</sup> Jenkinson, 557; Clark and Edmonds, 44-45, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Jenkinson, 555.

1825-1828.<sup>14</sup> In the two hundred years since her death, Sakakawea has gained the fame and recognition bestowed on only a handful of American women.

The first efforts to memorialize Sakakawea in North Dakota began in 1903 after the centennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the appearance of a commemorative statue in Oregon. That year, the Fargo Fortnightly Women's Club (part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs) determined that a statue of Sakakawea should be placed on the North Dakota capitol grounds to honor the only female member of the Corps of Discovery, a woman who also had ties to one of the state's American Indian tribes. In 1905, the General Federation of Women's Clubs North Dakota (GFWCND) formally adopted the project.<sup>15</sup> Dr. Orin G. Libby, Superintendent of the State Historical Society of North Dakota and a member of the history faculty at the University of North Dakota, worked closely with the GFWCND on the project and helped to secure the services of sculptor Leonard Crunelle of Chicago.<sup>16</sup> Accuracy was of great importance to both Libby and Crunelle, and as a result, the pair spent several days on the Fort Berthold Reservation for the purpose of locating a suitable model—Mink Woman, also known as Hannah Levings Grant, Sakakawea's granddaughter, was

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<sup>14</sup> Jenkinson, 556; not everyone is convinced that Sakakawea died in 1812; some have argued that she lived to be nearly 100 years old and that she passed away quietly on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, see for example, Clark and Edmonds, *Sacagawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

<sup>15</sup> General Federation of Women's Clubs North Dakota brochure, located in "Sakakawea Statues and Other Memorials," General Information File, SHSND Library and Archives, Bismarck, North Dakota; Gordon L. Iseminger, "Dr. Orin G. Libby: A Centennial Commemoration of the Father of North Dakota History," *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains* [hereafter, *North Dakota History*] 68, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 2-25, specifically, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Crunelle was born in Pas de Calais, France in 1872 and immigrated to the United States in 1882. Crunelle began working under sculptor Lozando Taft in 1893. The statue of Sakakawea was his first large-scale work; see *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, [*North Dakota's Presentation of the Statue of Sakakawea to the U.S. Capitol Statuary Hall*] (Bismarck: SHSND, 2005), 25-26.



chosen.<sup>17</sup> In addition, “Libby and Crunelle also familiarized themselves with how Indian women a century earlier had looked, dressed, and carried their babies.”<sup>18</sup>

After Crunelle had completed a clay model of the statue in 1909, Libby, together with James Holding Eagle and Spotted Weasel from the Fort Berthold Reservation, traveled to Crunelle’s Chicago studio to view the piece and to make suggestions.<sup>19</sup> The final version of the statue (figure 1) shows Sakakawea with her baby, Jean Baptiste, asleep on her back “in the manner of Hidatsa women,” scanning the horizon for familiar landmarks and stepping forward purposefully on her right foot. Not only is the bronze statue a remarkable representation of Sakakawea, it is also a stunning piece of art. The beautiful representation of the young Shoshone woman earned Crunelle the respect of the Chicago Society of Artists, who honored him with their annual medal.<sup>20</sup>

To raise money to fund the project, the women of the GFWCND called on their members for support as well as on the schoolchildren of the state, who were asked to donate their pennies to the cause. The effort raised a total of \$3,500 to pay for the statue, and the state legislature granted \$1,500 to cover the cost of the base and the cost of erecting the statue.<sup>21</sup> The unveiling and formal dedication ceremonies took place on Friday, October 13, 1910, on the capitol grounds. The large crowd, estimated to be five thousand strong, included representatives of the Shoshone, Hidatsa, Arikara, and Sioux nations. The regimental band of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry played “The Star Spangled Banner,” as

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<sup>17</sup> GFWCND brochure; *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 25; Iseminger, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Iseminger, 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 25; Iseminger, 25; GFWCND brochure; “Short History of Life and Works of Sakakawea Indian Guide with Lewis and Clark,” *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, October 11, 1910.

<sup>20</sup> Iseminger, 25; Bertha R. Palmer, “Sakakawea Statue Recalls Early History,” *Fargo Forum*, December 15, 1923.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer, *Fargo Forum*, December 15, 1923; GFWCND brochure; Iseminger, 25.

the American flag covering the statue was removed.<sup>22</sup> Judge B. F. Spalding, representing Governor John Burke, expressed his wish that the statue stand “for countless generations as it now stands with face toward the great west which furnished her vast field for service, and which gives to us and to all its inhabitants great [incentives] to embrace and improve the opportunities found here for human and patriotic endeavor.”<sup>23</sup>

Future generations of North Dakotans continued to admire the statue and the young woman it honors. In 1959, Congressman Quentin Burdick, a supporter of the movement to name Sakakawea as North Dakota’s first representative in National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., sent a letter to North Dakota governor John E. Davis expressing his opinion that Sakakawea was “the person most deserving of this niche in the hall of fame.”<sup>24</sup> In a news release, Burdick also stated that Sakakawea was “a symbol of the courage, endurance and resourcefulness of both the American Indian and the pioneers who settled the Great Plains.”<sup>25</sup> But Burdick’s request remained unfulfilled as the commission appointed by Governor Davis to select the state’s first representative ultimately chose former governor John Burke instead.

In 1998, North Dakota Congressman Earl Pomeroy led a campaign to make Sakakawea the state’s second representative in National Statuary Hall.<sup>26</sup> According to Pomeroy, the upcoming bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition afforded the

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<sup>22</sup> Palmer, *Fargo Forum*, December 15, 1923; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1910; Iseminger, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, *Fargo Forum*, December 15, 1923; after the capitol burned in 1930, the Sakakawea statue was the only sculptural element reinstated on the new capitol grounds, see Larry Remele, ed., *The North Dakota State Capitol: Architecture and History* (Bismarck: SHSND, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Quentin N. Burdick to John E. Davis, January 27, 1959, OGL #46, Box 8, Folder 33, John E. Davis Papers, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

<sup>25</sup> News Release from the Office of Congressman Quentin N. Burdick, January 27, 1959, OGL #46, Box 8, Folder 33, John E. Davis Papers.

<sup>26</sup> North Dakota’s first representative, John Burke, was placed in Statuary Hall in 1963, and is discussed in greater detail below.

appropriate opportunity to honor Sakakawea in this way. Congressman Pomeroy also considered it appropriate that a replica of Crunelle’s 1910 statue to be placed in the U.S. Capitol, rather than having a new piece commissioned. Pomeroy believed that Sakakawea should be honored because she had “made a lasting contribution through her courage and resourcefulness.” Secondly, Pomeroy stated that it was “fitting to recognize the important contributions to our society by women and Native Americans.” Finally, the congressman noted that the dedication would provide North Dakota with “a dramatic opportunity to highlight our region’s role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition as bicentennial events approached.”<sup>27</sup> Many in the state agreed. A *Minot Daily News* editorial concurred that the selection of Sakakawea would be a “fitting tribute,” and that a replica of Crunelle’s “eloquent representation” of her would be “the most appropriate image North Dakota could choose to join the statue of former North Dakota governor and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury [sic] John Burke in representing the state in Statuary Hall.”<sup>28</sup>

Statues intended for Statuary Hall must be a gift from the state, rather than from a private individual or organization. It was, therefore, necessary to gain the permission of the state legislature—which it gave in 1999 during the Fifty-Sixth Legislative Assembly.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Congressman Pomeroy requested special permission from the Architect of the Capitol Alan M. Hantman, AIA, to donate a replica of Crunelle’s statue as it depicts two individuals rather than one. Permission was granted with the understanding that little Jean Baptiste Charbonneau’s name would not appear on the

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<sup>27</sup> “Place Statue of Sakakawea in U.S. Capitol,” *Fargo Forum*, July 26, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> “Sakakawea: Legendary Native American Belongs in Capitol,” *Minot Daily News*, July 27, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 424, included in *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 7; GFWCND brochure.



plaque on the statue's base.<sup>30</sup> Having the consent of the legislature and the Architect of the Capitol, the next hurdle to overcome was raising the estimated \$200,000 necessary to replicate the statue and place it in Statuary Hall. The General Federation of Women's Clubs North Dakota (GFWCND), which oversaw the funding of the original statue in 1910, would again work with the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) to raise the needed funds. The group set a fundraising goal of \$50,000.<sup>31</sup>

The GFWCND enlisted the help of a new generation of North Dakota's schoolchildren, who again donated their pennies. In October 1999, fundraising efforts got off to a good start when former North Dakota governor Arthur Link and his wife Grace donated \$50,000 to the project.<sup>32</sup> On August 21, 2000, the efforts received another tremendous boost of support and funding from the Business Council of the Three Affiliated Tribes from the Fort Berthold Reservation whose members announced they would donate \$50,000 to the project. In addition, the Council expressed its desire to see the statue presented as a gift from the State of North Dakota and the Three Affiliated Tribes.<sup>33</sup> Joe and Florence Hauer, owners of United Printing and Mailing in Bismarck, made a final \$50,000 donation.<sup>34</sup>

As of September 2001, the GFWCND had raised \$17,000, but the national tragedy of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, halted the efforts as groups across the state rushed to raise money to support the victims and their families. University of

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from the Architect of the Capitol Alan M. Hantman, AIA, to The Honorable Earl Pomeroy, April 14, 1999, included in *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 13, 69-72; "Sakakawea Statue to be on Display at Nation's Capitol," *Minot Daily News*, January 26, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> "Sakakawea Statue to be on Display at Nation's Capitol," *Minot Daily News*, January 26, 2000; GFWCND brochure.

<sup>32</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 9-10; The Three Affiliated Tribes are the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. For more information on the merger, see their website at [www.mhanation.com](http://www.mhanation.com).

<sup>34</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 78.

North Dakota alumnus Ralph Englestad and his wife Betty donated the final \$33,000 enabling the project to move forward.<sup>35</sup> In 2002, Arizona Bronze Atelier of Tempe, Arizona, a company with a North Dakota connection, was selected to produce the replica of Crunelle's statue. Owner Tom Bollinger, a native of Bismarck, recalled visiting the North Dakota Capitol grounds as a child with his family and viewing the Sakakawea and Pioneer Family statues.<sup>36</sup>

The formal dedication ceremonies were held in the Capitol Rotunda on October 16, 2003, nearly 93 years to the day after the original unveiling in Bismarck. The ceremonies for the unveiling actually began earlier in the day farther down the National Mall near the Washington Monument. Tex Hall, Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes, Governor John Hoeven, and Congressman Earl Pomeroy on horseback led a parade to the reflecting pool of the U.S. Capitol where members of the Three Affiliated Tribes had erected tipis to represent the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, as well as Sakakawea.<sup>37</sup>

The presence of the tribes was also felt in the formal ceremonies inside the capitol as the flag of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nation was presented and the flag song was sung following the presentation of the U.S. flag and anthem.<sup>38</sup> In his address, Chairman Hall declared that, "now not only our people—the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people—and our state of North Dakota know of her contributions, but all of America now can come and visit Statuary Hall and know of her contribution for time

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<sup>35</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 79; GFWCND brochure.

<sup>36</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 79-80; GFWCND brochure.

<sup>37</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 86-87.

<sup>38</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 33-36.

immemorial.”<sup>39</sup> Congressman Pomeroy noted that Sakakawea served as a “beacon of peace” during the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and that she continues in that service today between the state and the tribal governments.<sup>40</sup>

Governor John Hoeven asserted that Sakakawea “represents our proud past, strength, and resourcefulness, but she also looks to the future.” According to Hoeven, Sakakawea’s child represents the future of the state and the nation, a sentiment that was echoed by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA): “It is not just the gift of a statue, which we all know; it is a gift of our country that Sakakawea helped discover, and it is a gift of hope for the future.”<sup>41</sup> It is remarkable that despite the dearth of information on Sakakawea’s life and character, speaker after speaker highlighted the determination, spirit, courage, strength, and composure displayed by this young woman during the arduous journey from the center of the continent to the Pacific Coast with “an eleven-month-old infant on her back [and] a forty-year-old unremarkable husband underfoot.”<sup>42</sup> Senator Kent Conrad noted that these were the qualities that Lewis and Clark saw in Sakakawea and that “these are the same qualities that define our state and bind us as North Dakotans even now.”<sup>43</sup> According to Senator Byron Dorgan, the statue was important to the state and the nation by “reminding us and our country everyday of this great gift given to us by this young Indian woman; reminding us of the grace, beauty, dignity, and inspiration which is the legacy of a woman the Hidatsa called Bird Woman, Sakakawea.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tex Hall, *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Earl Pomeroy, *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy Pelosi, *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 45, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Earl Pomeroy, *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 50, 52, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Byron Dorgan, *Sakakawea’s Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 51.



## John Burke Statue

On June 27, 1963, in the Capitol Rotunda, the state of North Dakota presented its first representative in National Statuary Hall to the United States—"Honest John" Burke—state legislator, governor, state supreme court justice, and treasurer of the United States. In 1864, legislation designated the Old Hall of the House of Representatives in the U.S. Capitol as National Statuary Hall and authorized each of the states to donate gifts of statues of two prominent citizens for placement in the new gallery. But by 1933, the Hall had become crowded and the floor was in danger of failing as a result of the weight of the statues standing three deep in some places. Therefore, Congress allowed the Architect of the Capitol to relocate the existing statues and to place newly donated ones throughout the building.

By the late 1950s, various movements to name particular individuals to fill the first of North Dakota's allotted spaces began in earnest. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, along with Congressman Quentin Burdick, supported the nomination of Sakakawea. Marion Piper, along with the Medora branch of the Penwomen, campaigned for the selection of James W. Foley, "one time poet-laureate of the state." Finally, Representative Murray Baldwin of Fargo called for the nomination of Mandan Chief Four Bears as the state's first representative.<sup>45</sup> But each nominee lacked the broad support necessary to gain the approval of both houses of the state legislature.

In January 1959, the president of the North Dakota Society of Washington, D.C., Leslie Polk, wrote to Governor Davis to express the opinion that efforts to encourage the state legislature to vote on a particular individual represented "a backward approach to

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Franta, "North Dakota Should Complete Formal Adoption of 'Teddy,'" *Cavalier County Republican*, Langdon, North Dakota, January 14, 1960, included in OGL#46, Box 8, Folder 33, John E. Davis Papers.

the question, [one that] automatically eliminates any other person from consideration, and is a rather undemocratic method to use for filling our position in Statuary Hall.”<sup>46</sup> In initiating an effort to see North Dakota represented, the group suggested that the legislature empower the governor to appoint a commission for that purpose. According to Polk, this would ensure that the movement would be “non-partisan, non-political and not connect[ed] with attempts to have any one person memorialized.”<sup>47</sup>

That year, the state legislature called for the establishment of a North Dakota Statuary Hall Commission to select “a deserving person of the State of North Dakota whose statue shall be placed, along with other great Americans, as a representative of the State of North Dakota in the National Statuary Hall.”<sup>48</sup> Governor Davis appointed ten members to the commission in order to include as many constituency groups as possible. The commission consisted of Representative Murray Baldwin of Fargo; Marion Piper of Bismarck; Edward Franta of the *Cavalier County Republican*; Vesper Smith Lewis, teacher and state president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs; Mrs. James E. Beck of Bismarck; Roberta Kennedy of Sentinel Butte; Natalie Adamson, Superintendent of Golden Valley County Schools; Dr. Charles Scott, retired president of Dickinson State Teachers College and a member of the State Board of Higher Education; businessman Herman Stern of Valley City, a past-president of the Greater North Dakota Association; and Minot businessman Ralph Christensen.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Leslie D. Polk to John E. Davis, January 19, 1959, OGL# 46, Box 8, Folder 33, John E. Davis Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Polk to Davis, January 19, 1959.

<sup>48</sup> News Release from the North Dakota Statuary Hall Commission, December 9, 1959, OGL# 46, Box 8, Folder 33, John E. Davis Papers.

<sup>49</sup> Franta, *Cavalier County Republican*, January 14, 1960; News Release from the North Dakota Statuary Hall Commission, December 9, 1959.

On January 3, 1961, the commission presented its report to the North Dakota legislature announcing the selection of John Burke to represent the state. In order to understand why the commissioners chose John Burke over other notable figures from the state's history, it is necessary to retell the story of the man who was known, both in his lifetime and after, as North Dakota's Lincoln.<sup>50</sup>

John Burke was born February 25, 1859, to John and Mary (Ryan) Burke, recent Irish immigrants who settled in rural Keokuk County, Iowa. The youngest of three boys, John was only seven when his mother died on November 25, 1866.<sup>51</sup> His father remarried and John and his brothers helped farm while attending the local rural school. After Burke completed the eighth grade, he began farming full time. In the fall of 1884, Burke enrolled in law school at State University of Iowa in Iowa City, and despite never having attended high school, he completed his studies on time with the rest of his class. Upon graduating, Burke relocated to Des Moines and entered into a partnership with his brother Thomas who had graduated from law school six months earlier. Believing that there was not enough work for both brothers in the firm, John left Des Moines to practice law in Henning, Minnesota, but did not remain there long. In the summer of 1888, Burke arrived in Dakota Territory, nearly penniless, and worked his way north to St. John in Rolette County where he resumed his law practice.<sup>52</sup> It did not take long for Burke to

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<sup>50</sup> Chapter 366 of the Laws Passed at the Thirty-Sixth Session of the Legislative Assembly, House Bill No. 660, quoted in *Report of the North Dakota National Statuary Hall Commission*, submitted to the Thirty-Seventh Legislative Assembly, January 3, 1961 (Bismarck: Bismarck Tribune, 1961); Robert A. Hunt, "Senate Gives Okay To Statue of Burke," *Bismarck Tribune*, April 17, 1963; Charles N. Glaab, "John Burke and the Progressive Revolt," in *The North Dakota Political Tradition*, Thomas W. Howard, ed., (Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1981), 40; "The Origin of the National Statuary Hall Collection," Architect of the Capitol, [www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/nsh\\_coll\\_origin.cfm](http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/nsh_coll_origin.cfm) (accessed January 21, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Charles N. Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912" (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1952), 1-4.

<sup>52</sup> Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912," 4-8; Roy P. Johnson, "John Burke, 1859-1937," *Statue of John Burke, Presented in the Rotunda, United States Capitol*



become well known and well-liked in the small community and his entrance into politics seemed to be a natural next step in the evolution of his career.

John Burke was first elected as a Democrat in 1889 to complete the term of a county judge and the following year was elected to the state House of Representatives.<sup>53</sup> On August 22, 1891, Burke married Mary Elizabeth Kane of Wauheska, Wisconsin, whom he had met in St. John two years earlier when she traveled to the state to visit a friend. The couple moved to Rolla, the new county seat, where Burke devoted his time to his law practice. By the turn of the century, Burke had gained a reputation as a successful lawyer and was offered a partnership in Devils Lake with one of the state's most prominent lawyers, Henry G. Middaugh.<sup>54</sup> Not only was Burke widely recognized as a competent attorney, he had also earned the nickname "Honest John" as a result of his honesty and integrity in business and political ventures. Even his political opponents admired his character, as expressed by the Republican *Cando Herald*: "He is a born statesman, and the only fault we find with 'Honest John' is his political views, but they are a mere triviality beside his qualifications as a man."<sup>55</sup>

During his years in the state legislature, Burke learned first-hand the power and influence wielded by Alexander McKenzie, North Dakota's Republican "boss," who represented corporate interests in the state. As historian Charles Glaab observed, "McKenzie may have been in part a legend created by politics, but the control he exerted

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(Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 6; "John Burke," Architect of the Capitol, [www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/burke.cfm](http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/burke.cfm) (accessed January 21, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912," 8; Roy P. Johnson, *Statue of John Burke*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912," 34.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in the Grand Forks *Plainsdealer*, August 25, 1896, in Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912," 33; Tweton and Jelliff, 132.

was in large measure real.”<sup>56</sup> In an attempt to loosen the hold McKenzie and the outside corporate interests had on the state’s politics, Democrats, along with some “insurgent” Republicans, convinced a reluctant Burke to accept the party’s nomination for governor in 1906.<sup>57</sup>

Despite his reluctance to enter the race, Burke dedicated himself to the campaign wholeheartedly, often making several appearances in a single day.<sup>58</sup> The people of the state connected with his straightforward message and his common man appearance.

Glaab described Burke’s campaigning style and the image he presented to voters:

Dressed in a threadbare suit, with a poorly tied necktie that often worked around toward his ear, and in cold weather wearing a well-worn sheepskin coat, he delivered unembellished, forcefully plain speeches which convinced voters...that here was a man of honesty and integrity who spoke the truth.<sup>59</sup>

His appearance was a stark contrast to the sharp-dressed, fast-talking politicians of the urban areas.

Although most of the Democrats running for statewide office in 1906 lost, the margin was smaller than in previous years. But the big story in the election was John Burke’s victory over the Republican machine. Burke, speaking before a crowd in Devils Lake on a cold November 17, declared that his “victory was not a personal or a party victory, but a victory in which the people of the state had fought a battle for political independence and won.” It truly was the Revolution of 1906.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” 46-49; Robinson, 263-266; Tweton and Jelliff, 131-133; Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 109-113.

<sup>57</sup> Roy P. Johnson, *Statue of John Burke*, 6; Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” 41; Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 65-67, 72.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson, 266; Tweton & Jelliff, 132-133.

<sup>59</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” 44.

<sup>60</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 79-83; Robinson, 266.

In 1908, Burke won reelection, which was, as Glaab noted, “largely an endorsement of his first administration and a personal tribute to his popularity in the state.”<sup>61</sup> Burke secured a third term as governor in 1910, despite heavy campaigning on the part of the McKenzie machine and its large out-of-state campaign contributions. The continued success of Burke’s Democratic administration was proof that North Dakotans had had enough of machine politics and corrupt government; and that they respected and admired Burke’s honesty.<sup>62</sup>

Burke was so beloved in the state that as the end of his third term neared, North Dakota’s delegates made a fleeting and symbolic attempt to make him the Democratic Party presidential nominee at the convention in Baltimore in 1912. But it was not to be. Burke lacked the national recognition and attention necessary to offer serious competition. As it was, North Dakota Democrats supported Woodrow Wilson’s nomination; and he carried the state in the November general election. After the inauguration, Burke met President Wilson in Washington, D.C., and was offered the position of United States Treasurer—a position he held throughout Wilson’s two terms.<sup>63</sup>

Because of the financial experience Burke gained during his years in the Treasury, he was offered a number of positions in the business sector. Burke accepted a position at the brokerage firm of Louis M. Kardos in New York. Unfortunately, the firm used Burke’s exceptional character and honest reputation as a smokescreen to disguise its illegal activities. When the firm went bankrupt, a grand jury investigated its actions. As Glaab noted, “Burke had taken no part in the active conduct of the business...[and] was

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<sup>61</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 120.

<sup>62</sup> Tweton & Jelliff, 133; Robinson, 267; Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 146.

<sup>63</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 164-165, 169, 179-180; Robinson, 269.



completely absolved of any responsibility for the debts of the business,” although he did choose to surrender his entire personal fortune to cover the firm’s debts. And for the second time in his life, Burke arrived in North Dakota nearly penniless.<sup>64</sup>

Burke’s final civic incarnation occurred in 1924 when he was elected to the North Dakota Supreme Court, a position he held until his death on May 14, 1937. According to Judge A.M. Christianson, Burke left “an enviable record of honorable service honestly performed, and a multitude of real friends scattered far and wide over the nation. No man could leave a greater heritage.”<sup>65</sup>

In its report submitted to the Thirty-Seventh Legislative Assembly on January 3, 1961, the North Dakota Statuary Hall Commission reported upon its decision making process and final selection of John Burke as North Dakota’s first representative in Statuary Hall. According to Glaab, “the Commission agreed that it should request the assistance of all interested citizens in the state in the submission of names of deserving and outstanding citizens who should be considered for selection by the Commission.” After preparing biographical sketches on thirty individuals, the commissioners narrowed the field using the following criteria:

(1) permanent and widespread benefit to the people of the state; (2) integrity, courage, and other traits of character admired by North Dakotans; (3) long residence in the state; (4) popular acclaim as a hero of his generation.<sup>66</sup>

The nominees included educators like Dr. George McFarland who had been the president of the Minot State Teachers College (now Minot State University) and Beatrice Johnstone, a long-time teacher and educational professional in the Grand Forks area. Other nominees represented the fields of agriculture and agricultural science. Dr. Henry

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<sup>64</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 180.

<sup>65</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912,” 181.

<sup>66</sup> *Report of the North Dakota National Statuary Hall Commission*, January 3, 1961.

Balley taught botany at the North Dakota Agricultural College (now North Dakota State University) and was made the state seed commissioner in 1909. Dr. Edwin Ladd arrived in North Dakota in 1890 to teach chemistry at the North Dakota Agricultural College and later became the college's president. He is credited with supporting the change in the wheat grading method and the passage of the Pure Food Laws. Ladd also served for a short period in the United States Senate. In addition to Ladd, four other political figures were on the short list of nominees: Minnie J. Nielson, James W. Foley, John Burke, and Alexander McKenzie. "After a great deal of consideration," the Commission "unanimously" selected John Burke.<sup>67</sup>

According to the biographical sketch compiled by Roy P. Johnson, historical feature writer for the *Fargo Forum*, written at the request of the Commission, John Burke

restored honor, justice and self-respect to the state. To every North Dakotan he gave freedom from corruption and reinstated dignity, self-respect and courage to fight for the right. He made it possible for the people to grow and prosper and for the state to take its place in the nation as a home of free and upright people.<sup>68</sup>

The sculptor selected for the project was Dr. Avarad T. Fairbanks of Utah who had created the Pioneer Family statue for the state capitol grounds in 1947. Burke's statue, along with its replica on the capitol grounds in Bismarck, is cast in bronze atop a mahogany granite base. John Burke is shown in his suit and vest standing confidently with his eyes fixed on some point in the distance. He is holding his hat and topcoat in one hand and a rolled paper or scroll in the other (figure 2). During the unveiling ceremonies on June 27, 1963, Dr. Fairbanks stated that, "Our ideals live on, this we know...so when we think of persons of great deeds whose memories are worthy of being

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<sup>67</sup> *Report of the North Dakota National Statuary Hall Commission*, January 3, 1961.

<sup>68</sup> Roy P. Johnson, *Statue of John Burke*, 6.

perpetuated down through the ages, we want their services rendered to fellow men to be in monumental form[,] to be the inspirations of others from generation to generation.”<sup>69</sup>

Speakers throughout the ceremony repeated the events and characteristics that they believe made John Burke a great man and a great North Dakotan. Senator Milton R. Young described Burke as “one of those who, through ability and perseverance, is caught by a surge of history, and who moves among the great.”<sup>70</sup> Senator Quentin Burdick called Burke, “resourceful, inventive, fearless, and perhaps most important, he had a sophisticated concept of the dignity of man.”<sup>71</sup> Finally, Representative Don L. Short summed up why he believed John Burke deserved the honor and praise bestowed upon him. “[John Burke] typified what our people admire. ‘Honest John’ was a common expression used in referring to this unselfish and dedicated man.”<sup>72</sup>

But what the various speakers of the event hinted at, Governor William Guy expressed aloud—that John Burke was “North Dakota’s Lincoln.” From his simple and rustic beginnings, Burke earned his reputation as a prairie lawyer and an honest politician.<sup>73</sup> But, Burke was also North Dakota’s Emancipator—“he changed North Dakota from a ‘colonial possession’ of wealthy plutocratic interests who ruled through a corrupt political machine into a free democratic community where honest and responsible government prevailed.”<sup>74</sup> Glaab noted that there were “resemblances in Burke to the real Lincoln as well as to the myth, for, like Lincoln, Burke, despite his public appearance of

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<sup>69</sup> Avard Fairbanks, *Statue of John Burke*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Milton R. Young, *Statue of John Burke*, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Quentin Burdick, *Statue of John Burke*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Don L. Short, *Statue of John Burke*, 37.

<sup>73</sup> William Guy, *Statue of John Burke*, 40.

<sup>74</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” 40; see also, *Statue of Burke*, 5.



rustic simplicity, was a cultivated man with a deep and continuing interest in the life of the mind.”<sup>75</sup>

“Honest John” Burke was a politician known for his straight talk and integrity during a time of political corruption and exploitation. Burke embodies the quality of spirit, attitude, and vision that the statue’s commissioners, through the prominent placement of his likeness, project to the nation and to future generations of North Dakotans. At the memorial service held after Burke’s death, Judge George M. McKenna declared that:

We need build Governor John Burke no great mausoleum. Physical monuments perish but a true and noble character perpetuates itself and endures through all future ages. His greatest monument has been erected in the hearts of his people, who have reared for him there a shrine which is the glory of the State, and which will endure so long as the name North Dakota shall continue in the annals of men.<sup>76</sup>

This is precisely why the commissioners believed that a monument should be erected in his honor. Dr. Fairbanks, in his unveiling of the Burke statue explained that “the attributes of personal character, combined with positions of responsibility, culminate in determining the character of a state and when they come to be symbolized in statuary form they will ever live in the memory of its people.”<sup>77</sup> The statue’s commissioners and supporters believed then, and many continue to support today, the character traits embodied by “Honest John” Burke.

The monuments’ commissioners selected Sakakawea and John Burke for commemorative statues in order to pay homage to their lives, their accomplishments, and their character traits. These statues were placed not only on the most publicly prominent

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<sup>75</sup> Glaab, “John Burke and the Progressive Revolt,” 44.

<sup>76</sup> Roy P. Johnson, *Statue of John Burke*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Avarad Fairbanks, *Statue of John Burke*, 26.

location in the state, the North Dakota capitol grounds, but are also included among the notable figures in National Statuary Hall alongside George Washington, Samuel Adams, Stephen Austin, Sarah Winnemucca, and Dwight Eisenhower. The statues' commissioners deliberately chose their subjects in order to showcase the values, attitudes, and character traits they admire and seek to advertise to the rest of the state's population, as well as to future generations.

In the case of Sakakawea, the impetus for the original statue on the state capitol grounds came from the women of the GFWCND who believed that "some suitable recognition be given to the woman who accompanied the Lewis and Clark Expedition."<sup>78</sup> Following the popularity of the Expedition's centennial celebrations and the unveiling of a Sakakawea statue in Oregon as part of the events, the members of the GFWCND expressed their desire to honor a woman, a mother, and a "North Dakotan," in a prominent and meaningful way. Because of the lack of extensive historical records and the number of years that had passed since her death—her transition from the sasha to the zamani, in James Loewen's framework—allowed the promoters to highlight the characteristics from the few sources available: courage, determination, composure, and strength.

The Sakakawea statue's features and placement on the state capitol grounds are also significant. In addition to its beauty and accuracy, the statue's facial features depict a young woman with an intense gaze, scanning the western horizon for the familiar landmarks of her childhood homeland. Her face expresses the courage and determination that the statue's commissioners attributed to her. Sakakawea is portrayed stepping purposefully in the direction of her journey without doubt or hesitation. And by

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<sup>78</sup> *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 63.

including Jean Baptiste on her back, the commemorators ensured that any adventure or quest would include future generations of North Dakotans, who, like Pomp, would be carefully nurtured and held securely.

The women of the GFWCND chose to honor Sakakawea because she embodies the spirit and character they wished to perpetuate in future generations. In 1910, when the group set out to raise money for their commemorative statue, it enlisted the help of North Dakota schoolchildren. The large-scale effort ensured that “every school child in North Dakota knew the name ‘Sakakawea.’”<sup>79</sup> When a second round of fundraising was needed to place her statue in the U.S. Capitol, schoolchildren were again rallied to the cause.

The two commemorative representations of Sakakawea also illustrate the dichotomy of the “vernacular” and the “official” expressions of commemorations, as explained by John Bodnar. Although the GFWCND was a group with a fair amount of political influence, their efforts to organize the grassroots support of the state’s schoolchildren ensured that the 1910 commemoration of Sakakawea on the state capitol grounds maintained a distinctly vernacular atmosphere. In contrast, the 2003 presentation to National Statuary Hall, which also benefited from penny donations, was the result of a movement begun by North Dakota’s congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. And yet, the didactic purposes of the statue remained. The second round of dedication ceremonies also emphasized the character traits that Sakakawea possessed, including determination, spirit, courage, strength, and composure. North Dakota Governor John Hoeven and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi remarked on the

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<sup>79</sup> Palmer, “Sakakawea Statue Recalls Early History,” *Fargo Forum*, December 15, 1923



importance of Sakakawea's child as a symbol of subsequent generations and the "gift of hope for the future."<sup>80</sup>

Another educational aspect of the 2003 dedication ceremonies was the modern interpretation of Sakakawea's life and deeds and how society incorporates its current beliefs and values in that narrative. For example, when campaigning for the selection of Sakakawea as North Dakota's second representative in Statuary Hall, Congressman Pomeroy stated that it was "fitting to recognize the important contributions to our society by women and Native Americans," projecting modern American society's views toward gender, tolerance, and multiculturalism.<sup>81</sup> Native American tribes were present at the 1910 dedication, but none of their members were asked to speak at the ceremonies. In 2003, the Three Affiliated Tribes were an integral part of the events.

With John Burke a similar scenario appears: the North Dakota Statuary Hall Commission selected Burke to represent the state because of his deeds and character traits. The selection and dedication of John Burke's statue represents a more official rather than vernacular approach to commemoration. The state legislature empowered the governor to appoint the selection commission. And although the commission solicited nominations from the state's residents, the final decision was left to the commission's ten members. The commissioners chose Burke because he displayed honor, dignity, perseverance, and courage—"traits of character admired by North Dakotans."<sup>82</sup>

Burke earned his moniker "Honest John" during his lifetime, and it was this character trait that was emphasized above all others in the commemorative ceremonies. Unlike Sakakawea, Burke had not transitioned into the zamani, nevertheless, nearly thirty

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<sup>80</sup> Nancy Pelosi, *Sakakawea's Journey to Washington, D.C.*, 45-47.

<sup>81</sup> "Sakakawea: Legendary Native American Belongs in Capitol," *Minot Daily News*, July 27, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> *Report of the North Dakota National Statuary Hall Commission*, January 3, 1961.

years had passed between his death and the placement of his statue in Statuary Hall. The complexity of the man was compressed into a simple, straightforward, and marketable concept—John Burke was an honest man and we wish to honor him for that. Little attention was given to the actual executive decisions he made as governor, the policies he promoted as U.S. Treasurer, or the legal arguments he made as a North Dakota Supreme Court Justice.

Dr. Fairbanks sculpted the features of the Burke statue to represent not only his physical likeness, but his spirit and character as well. His facial features and stance express the determination and courage of a man who was not afraid to confront the corrupt political machine that had taken hold of the state's government. The scroll in his hand symbolizes the laws that John Burke enforced as governor and interpreted as a state Supreme Court justice. Even his wardrobe is accurately represented. Burke's slightly disheveled suit, along with a tie that is not quite straight, gave this prairie politician an air of approachability to the farmers and workingmen who supported him.

Finally, the most important feature of Burke's statue is the didactic lesson it conveys to the state's people and future generations. In his remarks, Fairbanks observed that individuals are honored in "monumental form" to serve as examples and as "inspirations of others from generation to generation." The statue's commissioners selected John Burke because they wished to celebrate his accomplishments and character traits, as well as to offer up an example to the next generation of North Dakotans. But as Chapter IV will demonstrate, those traits do not have to be exhibited by specific, named individuals—sometimes, the subjects we honor are the unidentified group who came before, those who led the way—the legendary pioneers.

## CHAPTER IV

### MONUMENTS TO LEGENDARY PIONEERS

The *Concise Oxford American Dictionary* (2006) defines a legend as “a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated.”<sup>1</sup> Legends are stories passed along from generation to generation and may involve either fictional or historical individuals. In the case of many historical figures, fact and fiction blend, often seamlessly, to produce the popular account. The legend of Frank and Jesse James’ bank robberies and escapades are constructed from bits of historically verifiable evidence augmented by years of storytelling and myth-building. Even the legend of Lady Godiva’s infamous ride is based on a kernel of fact, although few are willing to support the story’s authenticity without reservation. Legends are also used to tell a representational or generalized account of a group who faced similar experiences during a particular period. But legends, myths, tales, and fables also have important functions—to create a sense of community through storytelling and collective memory, and to teach a lesson to the general public and future generations.

The term “pioneers” conjures up images of sturdy frontier farmers breaking through the tough prairie sod to plant the first of many crops in order to eke out a living on the plains. We imagine that they toiled day-in and day-out without complaint to establish a home for their families and a future for their children. Spirit, determination, and courage are exuded by their persistence in the face of nearly insurmountable

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<sup>1</sup> *Concise Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 507.



challenges. When hardships and setbacks occurred, we imagine the sigh and the straightening of shoulders just before they resumed the task at hand.

At the dawning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of men and women moved into North Dakota in search of new opportunities and a better life. The newcomers who tilled the land with the hopes of making a profit from the northern prairie laid the foundations of the agricultural enterprises that make North Dakota one of the leading producers of farm products in the nation. But the agricultural pioneers were not the only adventurous souls looking to make a profit from the land—the energy pioneers began exploring for oil in the early 1900s, but the first producing well in the state, the Clarence Iverson No. 1 did not strike oil until April 4, 1951. Since that time, the communities of western North Dakota have benefited from the increased economic activity that oil production stimulates.

In both cases, monuments have been erected to celebrate those who came before and those who led the way. But these unidentified pioneers are different from the historical figures discussed in the previous chapter who were identified and honored for their individual contributions. The unidentified or legendary pioneers, are unnamed, but still provide insight into the character traits, values, and attitudes that the monuments' commissioners admire and hope to see perpetuated in future generations.<sup>2</sup> By referring to the agricultural pioneers as “legendary,” this study addresses the collectivization of a diverse group of early Euro-American settlers who came to North Dakota to start a new life on the northern plains. The energy pioneers, those men and women who moved into

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<sup>2</sup> Soldiers and veterans are the groups most widely honored with monuments and memorials in both the state and the nation. In some cases, their names are listed on the memorial, but in others they are not. As a result, soldiers and veterans could be included in the category of “unidentified,” but the ubiquitous nature of veterans' memorials makes an analysis or interpretation of these structures less specific to North Dakota and its people.

the state in search of oil, are also referred to as “legendary.” Although oil companies made huge profits and gained much recognition for the development and continuation of the petroleum industry in the state, later commemorations recalled the efforts of the unknown and unnamed roughnecks and roustabouts who toiled in the state’s oil patch during its early years. In both cases, the use of the term “legendary” draws attention to the blending of fact and fiction, of history and storytelling. Moreover, by referring to the pioneers as “legendary,” this study is able to focus on the image of the previous generation and the reverence and homage paid to it by the current generation.

The monuments in this study were chosen for their prominence in the landscape and importance to the history of the state. The first monument, the Pioneer Family statue, is located on the capitol grounds in Bismarck and serves as the southern anchor point of the capitol mall. Dedicated in 1947, this impressive and beautiful statue is a representation of the hardy frontier family and was intended to portray the characteristics and spirit of the pioneers that its commissioner admired.

The second monument is off the beaten path, but the significance of the event it celebrates makes it an essential part of this discussion. The Clarence Iverson Well Monument was dedicated in 1953, just two years after the well struck oil. In addition, the event was also celebrated on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the dedication of a second monument in Williston’s Harmon Park along one of that city’s main thoroughfares. The original monument and the subsequent celebrations show how the monuments’ commissioners and the event coordinators actively worked to commemorate the event and to inform the general public of its importance, as well as to honor those whose labor made it possible.

Both the Pioneer Family statue and the Iverson Well Monument represent unnamed persons who established the cornerstones of the North Dakota economy—agriculture and energy. In addition, both monuments reflect the desire of their commissioners to honor those legendary pioneers and their contributions to the establishment of the state. By examining these monuments, and the legendary pioneers they honor, this chapter will also show the desire of the monuments' commissioners to express their admiration of the generation of legendary pioneers that was beginning to pass on, and their wish to promote the traits and values they believed these pioneers represent to the rest of the population and future generations.

### Pioneer Family Statue

Situated as a focal point of the North Dakota capitol grounds, the Pioneer Family statue pays homage to the state's earliest Euro-American settlers and reminds the state's residents and visitors of the extraordinary accomplishments of ordinary people. The monument to pioneers harkens back to the early days of the northern plains and draws attention to the characteristics necessary to persevere in such a rugged and untamed place—characteristics that the statue's commissioner believed that the pioneers possessed as well as those he wished to promote to future generations of North Dakotans. The connection between the pioneers and North Dakotans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century displayed in the Pioneer Family statue begins with the establishment of Bismarck as the territorial capital.

In 1861, the land that would later become the states of North and South Dakota was organized as Dakota Territory, with the territorial capital at Yankton, in the southeastern corner.<sup>3</sup> In 1882, a collaboration between Alexander McKenzie—the man

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<sup>3</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (1966. Fargo: North Dakota State University Institute for Regional Studies, 1995), 198; L. Martin Perry, "According to Plan: A History of the North Dakota Capitol



who “was to become the boss of North Dakota”—and the territorial governor, Nehemiah G. Ordway, resulted in a series of agreements and concessions to ensure that the capital removal commission, in charge of deciding the new capital location, selected Bismarck, a settlement located on the fringes of Euro-American civilization, and right on the Northern Pacific’s main line.<sup>4</sup>

Once Bismarck became the new capital, plans were drawn up for the establishment of the “Capital Park Addition,” “modeled after the Wisconsin capitol grounds at Madison,” and reminiscent of the layout of Washington, D.C., designed by Pierre L’Enfant. An architectural competition was held, and in the prevailing style of the day, the building was constructed with both Greek and Roman design elements.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, a lack of funding forced the scaling back of the project leaving the final building with a “truncated appearance” and lackluster landscaping. When statehood was achieved in November 1889, the building was promoted to a state capitol,<sup>6</sup> but “the attempt to urbanize Capital Park Addition through subdivision into streets and lots proved unsuccessful; the absence of landscaping left the grounds a raw collection of structures; and features added to the grounds appeared suspended, spatially independent of each other.”<sup>7</sup>

As the state’s population expanded rapidly in its early years and the state government grew accordingly, the space provided in the capitol building soon proved to be inadequate. Although additions were made to increase square footage, the

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Grounds,” in *The North Dakota State Capitol: Architecture and History*, Larry Remele, ed. (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), 1989), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Villard, Northern Pacific’s president, laid the cornerstone of the new capitol. Robinson, 200-201; Perry, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Perry, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Perry, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Perry, 41.

discontinuity in architectural styles produced an unattractive result.<sup>8</sup> On the night of December 28, 1930, the old North Dakota capitol burned and the state was required to rebuild its legislative and executive spaces from scratch.<sup>9</sup> The fire gave the state the opportunity to build a new and modern capitol with enough office and public space to meet its needs. Moreover, the rebuilding of the North Dakota capitol also supplied the chance to organize the capitol grounds in a logical and aesthetically pleasing manner.

The new prairie skyscraper, modeled after the Nebraska and Louisiana capitols, “is a building that fully exploits its magnificent site, that uses rich materials, and that contains dramatic public spaces, but there is throughout a reserve and dignity and a kind of tough-minded integrity.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, the landscaping plans originally drawn by the landscape architects Morell and Nichols from Minneapolis in 1920 were revived and implemented, although budget restrictions forced alterations in scope and scale. The highlight of the plans was a monument or sculpture anchoring the southern point of the capitol grounds directly opposite the capitol itself. It was not until 1947, however, that an “inspiring” monument to the state’s pioneers filled the prominent space.<sup>11</sup>

The massive bronze statue, Pioneer Family, was commissioned by Harry F. McLean to honor his father, John A. McLean, Bismarck’s first mayor and the man for whom McLean County just to the north of the capital city is named. Harry McLean was born in Bismarck, made millions in the Canadian railroad business, and was famous for his generosity and random acts of kindness, particularly his habit of handing out one

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<sup>8</sup> Perry, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Bruegmann, “Moscow, Berlin, Washington, Bismarck: Some Thoughts About Architecture and Politics in the 1930s,” in *The North Dakota State Capitol: Architecture and History*, Larry Remele, ed. (Bismarck: SHSND, 1989), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Bruegmann, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, 42, 44, 50-51.

hundred dollar bills.<sup>12</sup> William B. Falconer, cousin and representative of Harry McLean for the dedication ceremonies, stated that McLean wanted the statue “to be dedicated to the Pioneer of the West and that it be an ever-lasting monument to [that] memory.”<sup>13</sup>

McLean was first introduced to the sculptor, Dr. Avarð Fairbanks through his friend Gerald McGeer who had seen photographs of Fairbanks’s most recent statue, *Lincoln the Frontiersman*, and decided to commission a bust of himself from the artist. McLean, on the other hand, chose to pay homage to the pioneer families of North Dakota. The price of the statue was not negotiated as McLean paid Fairbanks’s requested fee, approximately \$50,000, in full without hesitation.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Fairbanks, a Utah native who at the time was working as the Dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Utah, was no stranger to the theme of pioneers.<sup>15</sup> Fairbanks’s father was a farm boy who relocated his family to Salt Lake City where Avarð began studying art at an early age. In 1913 Fairbanks studied in Paris at the *Ecole Nationale des Beaux Artes*, received training in New York and Italy, in addition to earning several degrees from American universities. Although a large portion of his career was dedicated to teaching, Fairbanks was also a prolific sculptor whose portfolio included the *Pioneer Mother Memorial* for Vancouver, Washington. Fairbanks would

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<sup>12</sup> “Pioneer Family: Information on Statue on Capitol Grounds,” located in “Pioneer Family Statue,” General Information File, SHSND Library and Archives, Bismarck, North Dakota.

<sup>13</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” *North Dakota History* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1947): 273-285, specifically 275; “McLean Statue Arrives In Bismarck,” *Bismarck Tribune*, August 20, 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Teresa Charland, *Building an Empire: “Big Pants” Harry F. McLean and His Sons of Martha* (Merrickville, Ontario: Riparian House, 2007), 244-246; “McLean to Give Monument to Co.,” *Washburn Leader*, September 5, 1946.

<sup>15</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 274.



later go on to sculpt the statue of John Burke that North Dakota presented in National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C., one of three of his works on display there.<sup>16</sup>

Fairbanks and his family, together with McLean's cousin William Falconer and his wife, selected a site for the Pioneer Family statue near Washburn in September 1946.<sup>17</sup> The site was changed to Bismarck the following month at the request of Dr. Fairbanks and the late John McLean's friends and relatives. George Will of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, in his statement to the media, concluded that the statue was "so valuable and of such national interest that the capitol grounds will be a better place for it."<sup>18</sup>

The Pioneer Family statue stands on a granite base at the southern end of the capitol lawn and includes a family group roughly eight feet high—a father standing in the center of the piece grasping the hand of his son whose other hand rests on a wagon wheel. To the man's right stands his wife with an infant child in her arms (figure 3).<sup>19</sup> The inscription on the back of the statue reads:

No trails too rugged, no obstacles too large, no mountains too high to stop the sturdy frontiersman, with sureness of purpose, with daring adventure, and from generation to generation the pioneering spirit moves always forward and onward to greater goals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eugene F. Fairbanks, *A Sculptor's Testimony in Bronze and Stone: Sacred Sculpture of Avard T. Fairbanks* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1972), 1-8; Fairbanks's other statues are Esther Hobart Morris (Wyoming) and Marcus Whitman (Washington).

<sup>17</sup> "McLean to Give Monument to Co.," *Washburn Leader*, September 5, 1946.

<sup>18</sup> "Capitol to be Site for McLean Monument," *Bismarck Tribune*, October 28, 1946.

<sup>19</sup> Robert F. Biek, *A Visitor's Guide to the North Dakota Capitol Grounds: Buildings, Monuments, and Stones* (Bismarck: SHSND, 1995), 36; "McLean Statue Arrives In Bismarck," *Bismarck Tribune*, August 20, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> "Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota and Dedication of this Gift to The Pioneers of North Dakota," [dedication ceremonies program] located in "Pioneer Family Statue," General Information File, SHSND. The plaque in front of the statue identifying Harry F. McLean as the donor did not appear until 1950; it was donated by the Bismarck chapter of the Pioneer Daughters.

Fairbanks, as could be expected of any artist, was exceedingly proud of his work and believed that the statue encompassed the spirit, vision, and character traits of the pioneer. The clasped hands of the father and son represent the pride, faith, and confidence that each had in the other. And “the pioneer father’s hand around the mother gives the impression of a man capable of supporting his family and also lending a helping hand to her heavy duties.”<sup>21</sup>

The dedication ceremonies for the statue were held September 20, 1947. Following a musical selection by the Bismarck High School band, George Will, Chairman and President of the State Historical Society, introduced William Falconer to present the statue as a gift to the state. In his speech, Falconer described the importance of pioneers to the history of the state and the nation: “With courageous determination they set themselves to the task of bringing millions of new acres beneath the folds of Old Glory, so that generations of Americans still unborn, might live among us and enjoy the blessings of a government of the people.”<sup>22</sup> According to Falconer, “the Pioneers gave much and asked little...they blazed the trails where others followed...Manhood, womanhood, and youth, with their individual characteristics did the job.”<sup>23</sup>

Other speakers of the day, including North Dakota Attorney General Nels Johnson, representing Governor Fred Aandahl, addressed the significance of the pioneering generation and explained the reasons why the descendants of those people and the current inhabitants of the state should honor them. Johnson expressed McLean’s wishes to create “an everlasting reminder of the place and influence of the pioneers on

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<sup>21</sup> “McLean Statue Arrives In Bismarck,” *Bismarck Tribune*, August 20, 1947; Indeterminable newspaper source located in “Pioneer Family Statue,” General Information File, SHSND.

<sup>22</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 274.

<sup>23</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 274.

our lives”<sup>24</sup> and honor his father and “all the pioneers of the State” and therefore celebrate the values and character traits they embody. The statue, Johnson stated, “is simple in its construction, yet exhibits strength in depicting the qualities of our early settlers. It is rugged in outlook and appearance and fits well into its surroundings on the lawn of our straight-lined, rugged, beautiful capitol building.”<sup>25</sup> Johnson proclaimed that the statue “will be a source of inspiration to all who shall gaze and look upon it for years to come, and will go away having gathered in the story it sets forth.” He also expressed his hope that the statue “will inspire the generations who come to look at it, to study and emulate the qualities of the pioneers of this State, and take upon themselves the characteristics of those pioneers.”<sup>26</sup>

A.G. Burr, Associate Justice of the North Dakota Supreme Court, was asked to prepare remarks for the occasion pertaining specifically to the North Dakota pioneers and their role in the state’s past and present. In his speech, Burr identified the varied groups of individuals who moved into this territory, some “who came here in search of adventure—adventure in harmony with home life.”<sup>27</sup> Burr declared that the pioneers, including those who settled in what would become North Dakota, were “of necessity...individualistic. [The pioneer] depended and had to depend upon himself and he succeeded in this.” According to Burr, the early pioneers were “too much engrossed in the practical work of living to interfere with the rights of his fellowman and he was under the stern necessity of protecting his own, he had no one to do things for him.” Burr described the early settlers as “conscientious, diligent, enduring.” This last trait was

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<sup>24</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 276-277.

<sup>25</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 277.

<sup>26</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 278.

<sup>27</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 280.



necessary, as Burr noted, because “the weeding out process was severe; but it left a society that was sound at the core.”<sup>28</sup> Burr also described the pioneers as possessing “indomitable courage, steadfastness of purpose, [and] determination to succeed”—characteristics that Burr believed were expressed in the facial features of the statue’s family members. These personality traits, attitudes, and values, Burr remarked, “gave to our State an ethos all its own.”<sup>29</sup> But farmers were not the only pioneers to seek their fortunes in the state.

### Iverson Well Monument

Just off a narrow two-lane highway south of Tioga in the middle of the scenic North Dakota prairie stands a monument dedicated to one of the most significant events in the state’s economic history—the discovery of oil on April 4, 1951. Today, the granite monument proudly stands in a sea of pumping units and tank batteries amid the bustle of current oilfield activity sparked by the latest boom. As the oil workers scramble to tap into the recently developed Bakken Formation, the Iverson Well Monument stands as a tribute to the well that started it all. It also represents the first of many celebrations dedicated to the state’s oil industry and its energy pioneers.

In 1859, Edwin Drake drilled the first well in the United States at Titusville, Pennsylvania, “with the intent of finding and producing oil.”<sup>30</sup> The event triggered a rush; and since that time oil companies and their workers have drilled across the country in search of black gold. In North Dakota, serious efforts to find oil began at the turn of the century, but these early attempts were hampered by primitive technology which

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<sup>28</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 283.

<sup>29</sup> “Presentation of the Statue of a Pioneer Family to the State of North Dakota,” 281-285.

<sup>30</sup> John P. Bluemle, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Discovery of Oil in North Dakota* (Bismarck: North Dakota Geological Survey, 2001), i.

limited how deep a well could be drilled. The first serious near-miss in the state would not happen until 1938, when the modern rotary rigs came into use. This attempt, the California Kamp #1 well, was located just under a mile from where oil was eventually discovered.<sup>31</sup>

Oilmen were certain that oil was under the surface of the North Dakota prairie. As early as 1912, geologist W. Taylor Thom, Jr., together with E. Russell Lloyd and L. Murray Newman discovered fossil corals in beds of clay and sandstone near the South Dakota border “and so concluded that the area had at one time been at the bottom of a sea.”<sup>32</sup> In 1923, the geological feature that became the oil-producing region of North Dakota was given the name “Williston Basin,”—a name that became synonymous with oil activity from the first discovery to the present.<sup>33</sup>

The first attempts to locate oil in the Williston Basin were made in 1915 and 1916. In 1916, the Pioneer Oil & Gas Company of Bainville, Montana, drilled its No. 1 near Williston, but the well was abandoned four years later at a depth of 2,107 feet.<sup>34</sup> In 1946, the Amerada Petroleum Corporation decided to invest in the search for oil in the state. Amerada bought leases which had been allowed to expire by Standard Oil of California along the Nesson Anticline, a geological formation within the Williston Basin, and spent the next four years mapping the area using the latest geophysical surveying

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<sup>31</sup> Bluemle, i, 8; Robinson, 458-459.

<sup>32</sup> Bluemle, 1; Robinson, 2; D. Jerome Tweton and Theodore B. Jelliff, *North Dakota: The Heritage of a People* (Fargo: Knight Printing, 1976), 175; “Richness That Is Williston Basin Served By Great Northern Railroad As Most Important Transportation Link Of Area,” *Williston Herald*, October 24, 1953; “The Great Hunter,” *Time* (Monday, December 1, 1952), [www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,817494,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,817494,00.html) (accessed September 20, 2008). This subterranean formation was originally called the Cannonball Sea Basin for its location along the Cannonball River.

<sup>33</sup> Bluemle, 1; the Williston Basin also includes parts of Montana, South Dakota, and southern Canada.

<sup>34</sup> Bluemle, 3; Robinson, 458; for a detailed account of the earlier attempt to drill in North Dakota, see Dominic Schaff, “The History of the North Dakota Oil Industry,” (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1962), 1-28.

techniques.<sup>35</sup> After the mapping was completed, Amerada's President Alfred Jacobsen told *Time* magazine in December 1952 that choosing the location to drill was easy. "Any office boy at Amerada could have done that because you drill in the peak of the dome. As long as you stay in that area you could pick your spot by the Sam Weaver method."<sup>36</sup> On August 4, 1950, the State Geologist's office signed the permit for Amerada Petroleum Corporation's No. 1 Clarence Iverson well to be drilled in Williams County on farmland owned by Clarence Iverson of rural Tioga.<sup>37</sup> Drilling commenced on September 3, 1950.

By January 2, 1951, "a drill-stem test, from 10,448 to 10,803 feet, recovered one pint of free oil in the bottom of the test tool."<sup>38</sup> The oil was obtained from the Devonian Formation, although drilling continued to 11,400 feet without finding additional oil. But, the completion of the Iverson well was far from over as drilling problems and an unusually challenging winter slowed progress on the well to a crawl. Finally, on April 4, 1951, seven months after the hole was spudded, the first "economically producible oil was recovered in North Dakota" as the Clarence Iverson well "came on."<sup>39</sup>

The historic event was captured on film by legendary Williston Basin oil reporter and photographer William "Bill" Shemorry. In his book, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil: The Early Years of the Williston Basin* (1991), Shemorry recalls his adventures that evening

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<sup>35</sup> Specifically, the geologists were searching for dome structures in the rock formations as they are usually indications that oil is trapped between the rocks; "The Great Hunter," *Time*; "Richness That Is Williston Basin Served By Great Northern Railroad As Most Important Transportation Link Of Area," *Williston Herald*, October 24, 1953.

<sup>36</sup> "The Great Hunter," *Time*: "Sam Weaver was an old driller who provided one of the industry's classic anecdotes. Some 40 years ago, his crew was about to start drilling in Mexico in a cow pasture, when one of the crew asked Weaver where to drill. Replied Weaver: 'Watch the cows and drill where the first cow pie falls.'"

<sup>37</sup> Bluemle, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Bluemle, 23; the term "free oil" refers to oil that is free of water and drilling mud.

<sup>39</sup> "Spudding" refers to the initial stages of the drilling process; Bluemle, 23; for a detailed account of the drilling history of the Iverson well, see Schaff, 29-40.



as he worked to cover the story and capture the first pictures of the successful completion.

I passed through Ray and headed east. The light of the fire [from the well's flare] was getting brighter. There was no problem finding the well site in the dark. I came to the turnoff south of Tioga. A gravel road led to the well. It looked like the fire was just over the next hill, but I found it was four miles further. When I approached the well, cars were parked all over the shoulders...The drilling rig and surrounding area were lighted by a huge gas flare. It was almost as if it were daylight.<sup>40</sup>

From the light of the flare, Shemorry had no trouble capturing the iconic photograph that became the symbol for oil production in the Williston Basin. After a quick trip to Minot through flooded roads to obtain the printing plates of the photographs, Shemorry returned with his pictures to Williston in time to make the weekly publication of the *Williston Press-Graphic* the following morning and to announce to the people of the state and the rest of the world that oil was being produced in North Dakota. The *Williston Herald* headline that same day, "Oil Flowing From Tioga Well Today; Heavy Gas Pressure Also Reported," took precedence over the headline announcing that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg had been sentenced to death.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the year, Amerada had sixty-nine wells producing in the state with another twenty being drilled.<sup>42</sup> The Iverson well would go on to produce oil from the Silurian, Devonian, and Madison Formations until the location was shut in for good on August 2, 1979, "after its 28-year-old casing had collapsed and was deemed impossible to repair." During its life, the well produced a total of 584,529 barrels of oil and 818 million cubic feet of natural gas.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bluemle, 25; Bill Shemorry, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil: The Early Years of the Williston Basin* (Williston, ND: B. Shemorry, 1991), 53-57.

<sup>41</sup> Shemorry's photographs were later reprinted in numerous newspapers including the *Minot Daily News* and *Fargo Forum*, as well as *Life* and *U.S. News and World Reports* magazines, Bluemle, 25-27; "Oil Flowing From Tioga Well Today; Heavy Gas Pressure Also Reported," *Williston Herald*, April 5, 1951.

<sup>42</sup> "The Great Hunter," *Time*.

<sup>43</sup> Bluemle, 23, 30.

Two years after the Iverson well came on, a collaborative effort of businessmen, local community leaders, and farmers with oil wells on their land resulted in the placement of a monument on the site in order to commemorate the event that had drastically altered the economy of North Dakota. Numerous groups coordinated the planning and building of the monument and covered the costs of the monument and ceremonies by selling buttons as well as concessions at the ceremonies.<sup>44</sup> At the time of the dedication in October 1953, the Williston Basin was home to roughly 250 producing wells.<sup>45</sup>

The dedication ceremonies were set for October 25, 1953, at various locations in Williston and at the well site south of Tioga. Prominent political and oilfield business leaders were scheduled to attend, including North Dakota Governor C. Norman Brunsdale, United States Senators William Langer and Milton R. Young, and U.S. Congressmen Usher L. Burdick and Otto Krueger, along with the president of Amerada Petroleum Corporation, Alfred Jacobsen.<sup>46</sup> Events scheduled for the two-day celebration included a banquet at the Plainsmen Hotel in Williston on Saturday, October 24, as well as formal dedication ceremonies, barbeque, band concerts, and an air show at the Iverson well location on Sunday, October 25. Organizers of the events included the Greater North Dakota Association, the North Dakota Historical Society, Ray Lions Club, Tioga Association of Commerce, Watford City Association of Commerce, and the Williston Chamber of Commerce. Clifford Hansen and Olaf Giske, farmers with oil wells on their

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<sup>44</sup> "Oct. 25 Set For Dedicating Discovery Site," *Williston Herald*, August 27, 1953; "Basin Oil Land Owners To Serve Barbecue At Oil Discovery Monument Dedication," *Williston Herald*, October 9, 1953; "Oil Dedication Buttons On Sale," *Williston Herald*, October 15, 1953.

<sup>45</sup> "Richness That Is Williston Basin Served By Great Northern Railroad As Most Important Transportation Link Of Area," *Williston Herald*, October 24, 1953.

<sup>46</sup> "Key Leaders In Many Lines Will Attend Oil Dedication," *Williston Herald*, October 2, 1953; at the time, North Dakota had two representatives in the U.S. House.

land, organized the barbeque and coordinated the donations of beef for the event.<sup>47</sup> In all, the organizers expected nearly 8,000 people to attend the dedication ceremonies on October 25, but their estimate turned out to be overly optimistic.<sup>48</sup>

The anticipated crowd was not the only deviation from the planned agenda, as the cancelation of the air show had been announced earlier in the week. Also, Senator Langer and Representative Burdick were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts. Despite these changes, nearly three thousand people braved the cold and wind to witness the events at the Iverson location. Concert bands from Ray, Williston, Tioga, and Epping played a variety of musical arrangements followed by the unveiling of the monument by Governor Brunsdale.<sup>49</sup>

The monument itself is a slab of polished mahogany granite six feet high, three feet wide, and eight inches thick sitting on a base ten inches thick (figure 4). The front of the structure depicts an oil derrick on top of a small hill with the inscription engraved beneath which reads:

Oil was first discovered in North Dakota by Amerada Petroleum Corporation April 4, 1951. This Williston Basin Discovery Clarence Iverson No. 1 opened a new era for North Dakota and reaffirmed the confidence of her people in the opportunities and future of this great state. Dedicated October 25, 1953, Tioga, North Dakota.

Governor Brunsdale in his remarks stated that “we must dedicate ourselves to a greater and better North Dakota through the proper development of her resources.”<sup>50</sup> But the governor had little cause for concern, as the oil boom in the state that began in April

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<sup>47</sup> “Basin Oil Land Owners To Serve Barbeque At Oil Discovery Monument Dedication,” *Williston Herald*, October 9, 1953; “Tioga Readies Dedication, Barbeque Pits Prepared,” *Williston Herald*, October 22, 1953.

<sup>48</sup> “State Oil Officials Among 8,000 Expected For Oil Dedication at Tioga Sunday,” *Williston Herald*, October 20, 1953.

<sup>49</sup> “3,000 Brave Cold at Oil Dedication,” *Williston Herald*, October 26, 1953.

<sup>50</sup> “3,000 Brave Cold at Oil Dedication,” *Williston Herald*, October 26, 1953.



1951 continued for many years and helped to diversify the economy of a predominately agricultural state. The growth was swift and significant. As Amerada's president Alfred Jacobsen remarked at the banquet on the evening before the dedication at the Plainsmen Hotel in Williston, "North Dakota, as a new oil state, is in a position to move ahead faster and more constructively than some of the earlier oil states, by benefiting from the experience of others in up-to-date methods of discovery, drilling, and production, as well as through the increased number of workers available now, compared with only a few capable workmen available in the area a few years ago."<sup>51</sup>

The addition of the oil industry to the state's economy has been extraordinarily beneficial. Many people moved into the state to work in the region's oil fields and this influx increased revenues and property values as well as supported the growth of schools, businesses, and other economic endeavors. But the boom and bust cycle of the industry also makes predicting revenue and future earnings difficult.

The early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed a boom once again as the oil industry in North Dakota reaped the benefits of new technology and techniques that allowed for a more thorough evaluation of the Bakken Formation that covers the western portion of North Dakota, eastern Montana, and parts of southern Canada. The "play" began in Montana in 2001 and slowly spread to the North Dakota side of the Williston Basin.<sup>52</sup> Encouraging drilling results and oil price increases attracted considerable attention to the region as a result. Not only does the formation cover a large geographical

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<sup>51</sup> "3,000 Brave Cold at Oil Dedication," *Williston Herald*, October 26, 1953; for a complete account of Jacobsen's remarks, see "North Dakota's Oil Dedication," *North Dakota History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1953): 173-190.

<sup>52</sup> Julie LeFever and Lynn Helms, "Bakken Formation Reserve Estimates," North Dakota Geological Survey, [https://www.dmr.nd.gov/ndgs/bakken/newpostings/07272006\\_BakkenReserveEstimates.pdf](https://www.dmr.nd.gov/ndgs/bakken/newpostings/07272006_BakkenReserveEstimates.pdf) (accessed March 3, 2009), not paginated; the term "play" refers to an area of oil activity.

area, its potential production is huge. “All researchers agree that the Bakken Formation is a tremendous source rock.” It is estimated that these shale formations contain between 200 and 300 billion barrels of oil, although scientists disagree over how much is recoverable—up to 50% by some accounts.<sup>53</sup>

A steady increase in oil prices helped to boost annual oil production in North Dakota from 45 million barrels in 2007 to nearly 63 million barrels in 2008.<sup>54</sup> North Dakota now ranks ninth in crude oil production in the United States with an average (2007) of 123,447 barrels of oil per day.<sup>55</sup> The impact of the oil industry’s growth has had a profound effect on the state’s economy. According to a report published in January 2009, the economic impact of the petroleum industry doubled between 2005 and 2007. The industry created nearly 2,500 new jobs (a 47% increase) and generated \$1.46 billion in direct personal income in 2007, in addition to promoting a dramatic increase in secondary employment. State and local governments gained as well—the petroleum industry paid \$519.8 million in state and local taxes in 2007 alone, allowing North Dakota to be among the few states in the country without a budget crisis.<sup>56</sup> Ron Ness, President of the Petroleum Council, summed up the industry’s impact on the state: “Petroleum is a leading economic driver for North Dakota, second only to agriculture, in

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<sup>53</sup> LeFever and Helms, “Bakken Formation Reserve Estimates.”

<sup>54</sup> Department of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas Division, “North Dakota Annual Oil Production,” <https://www.dmr.nd.gov/oilgas/stats/annualprod.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> North Dakota State Data Center, *Economic Brief* vol. 17, no. 8 (August 2008) <http://www.ndsu.edu/sdc/publications.htm> (accessed March 3, 2009), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Dean A. Bangsund and F. Larry Leistritz, “Petroleum Industry’s Economic Contribution to North Dakota in 2007,” *Agribusiness and Applied Economics Report No. 639* (January 2009), <http://mabu-ndoil.taopowered.net/image/cache/PetroleumStudy.2008.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2009); see also the North Dakota Petroleum Council website, [www.ndoil.org](http://www.ndoil.org).

terms of benefiting our residents through jobs creation, tax relief and total business activity.”<sup>57</sup>

But throughout the highs and lows, many North Dakotans continued to celebrate the event that changed the economic, political, and social history of the state forever. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of oil in the state, two Williston businessmen, Doug O’Neil and Rich Rolfstad, organized the Williston Basin Energy Festival in order to educate the people of the community and the state about the industry and its impact. Originally organized “under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce,” the Energy Festival steering committee began its initial planning sessions in 1980. Organizers made the decision early on to make the event part of a larger energy festival rather than just a “celebration for the discovery of oil or a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.” In addition, the planners wished to see the festival as more than simply a propaganda tool of the petroleum industry; as a result, the committee chose to have “every division co-chaired by one person from the energy industry and one person from non-energy businesses.”<sup>58</sup>

The festival organizers stated that their main goal was education. O’Neil remarked that “too many people don’t know what the energy industry is and how it operates.” The co-chairs and planners of the events also expressed their hopes that the festival would have lasting educational effects on the people of the region and the state, and as Rolfstad stated, raise “the awareness level of the average person on the street or on

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<sup>57</sup> North Dakota Petroleum Council, “Economic Impact of Petroleum Industry Doubles in Size,” *Industry News*, [www.ndoil.org/?id=25&ncid=4&nid=63](http://www.ndoil.org/?id=25&ncid=4&nid=63) (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> “Festival Chairmen See Plans Come to Fruition,” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, May 27, 1981, 20.



the tractor who is being impacted by energy development to more fully understand what is happening.”<sup>59</sup>

North Dakota Governor Allen Olson declared the week from June 21 to 27, 1981, as “Energy Festival Week” in honor of the celebrations.<sup>60</sup> In his proclamation dated May 29, 1981, Governor Olson, declared that “it is important and proper for the State of North Dakota to recognize the past accomplishments, present contributions and future opportunities for the development of energy in our State.”<sup>61</sup> The events included speakers, luncheons, and forums—all devoted to the state’s oil industry. The festival even included a special shipment of beer commemorating the events. Brewed in New Ulm, Minnesota, the cans displayed the Energy Festival logo along with a description of the event and its purpose.<sup>62</sup> The celebration also included the dedication in Williston’s Harmon Park of a pumping unit and granite monument that bears the Williston Basin Energy Festival logo as well as the inscription,

Dedicated June 26, 27, 1981 to recognize past contributions of the Williston Basin energy pioneers who have contributed to the vitality of the entire Midwest region. We also challenge future energy pioneers to lay a solid sub-structure upon which tomorrow’s energy problems can be addressed and opportunities realized (figure 5).

According to Bill Shemorry, longtime oil reporter, the Energy Festival was “a comprehensive celebration, honoring the pioneers of early oil and pointing up the

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<sup>59</sup> “Festival Chairmen See Plans Come to Fruition,” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, May 27, 1981, 20.

<sup>60</sup> “Festival Chairmen See Plans Come to Fruition,” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, May 27, 1981, 20; “Governor Olson Signs Proclamation Designating ‘Energy Festival Week,’” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, June 10, 1981, 4.

<sup>61</sup> “Governor Olson Signs Proclamation Designating ‘Energy Festival Week,’” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, June 10, 1981, 4.

<sup>62</sup> “Cracking a Brew in a Toast to Energy Festival Taken Literally,” *Williston Herald*, June 18, 1981.

achievements of oil men through the years, and including the present.”<sup>63</sup> The focus of the celebrations, as noted by the festival’s organizers and the monument’s inscription, shifted noticeably from the discovery event to the energy pioneers and education.

Other celebrations commemorated the petroleum industry and the energy pioneers, although no monuments were erected on those occasions. On October 26, 1989, almost thirty-six years to the day since the dedication of the Iverson Well Monument, North Dakota celebrated the production of its the billionth barrel of oil. Also, in 1991, a second Williston Basin Energy Festival was held in Williston to observe the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the oil discovery in the state.

In order to coincide with the second installment of the Energy Festival, Bill Shemorry published *Mud, Sweat, and Oil*, an account of the early years of the oil industry in the Williston Basin. Shemorry dedicated his book to the men and women “whose technical skills, good judgment and ability to take chances and preserve brought a hardy new industry and a great number of good citizens to this high plains country.”<sup>64</sup> In addition to outlining the history of the oil industry in North Dakota, Shemorry included the stories and humorous anecdotes of the people who labored in the oil patch. One such individual was Andrew Delbert “Blackie” Davidson, an Amerada employee from Oklahoma who oversaw the drilling operations on the Iverson well. Shemorry, quoting a *Fargo Forum* article from 1954, described Davidson as “one of those colorful characters who became a legend in the oil fields...a big, bluff, fun-loving man who is a bear for

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<sup>63</sup> Bill Shemorry, “Many Celebrations Marked the Discovery of Oil,” *Williston Basin Oil Reporter*, a supplement of the *Williston Herald*, June 24, 1981, 101.

<sup>64</sup> Shemorry, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil*, 1.

work.”<sup>65</sup> Davidson died in 1961, but Shemorry ensured that his legendary spirit and character traits were known to future generations of North Dakota oil workers.

A second individual pulled from the multitude of nameless, faceless energy pioneers was another transplanted Oklahoman, Leon “Tude” Gordon. As an employee of Johnston Testers, Gordon evaluated the drill stem tests in early 1951 when the first pint of oil was retrieved from the Iverson well. Shemorry described Gordon as the “dean of oilmen in the Williston Basin,” and as a man possessing an inventive mind and loyalty to the industry.<sup>66</sup> In addition to Shemorry’s book, Gordon was honored as one of the energy pioneers and served as a parade marshal during the 1981 Energy Festival. The “old-timers” and energy pioneers were celebrated throughout the Festival for their character traits and their contributions to the foundation of the state’s oil industry.

Many in North Dakota celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as well in April 2001, along with a third installment of the Williston Basin Energy Festival in August of that year.<sup>67</sup> Tude Gordon was again honored as the representative of the state’s energy pioneers in 2001 and was introduced by North Dakota Governor John Hoeven during the celebrations.<sup>68</sup> During the Energy Festival in August 2001, the parade once again included an “old-timers” float as well as the introduction of “Old Timer” honorees at the Festival banquet.<sup>69</sup> As the number of remaining old-timers and pioneers dwindled, the emphasis on their contributions and characters increased.

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<sup>65</sup> Shemorry, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil*, 171.

<sup>66</sup> Shemorry, *Mud, Sweat, and Oil*, 196-198.

<sup>67</sup> “Discovery Celebrations Set,” *Williston Herald*, April 4, 2001; “Basin Celebrates 50 Years of Oil,” *Williston Herald*, August 8, 2001.

<sup>68</sup> “Discovery Celebrations Set,” *Williston Herald*, April 4, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> “Energy Festival III Offers Fun for All,” *Williston Herald*, August 5, 2001.



When the oil industry boomed once again in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the city of Williston organized a promotional campaign “aimed at attracting people who want to make a good living, invest in the region, and for businesses who want to participate in the action.”<sup>70</sup> Soon the “Rockin’ the Bakken” campaign became an inescapable part of life in North Dakota’s oil country as the slogan was found on baseball caps, shirts, bumper stickers, and numerous other items to show the region’s continued devotion to the oil industry, as well as the energy pioneers who laid its foundation in the state.<sup>71</sup> Tom Rolfstad, Director of Williston Economic Development, believed that the most profound result of the slogan and logo was the promotion of pride in the community, its heritage, and the industry on which it depends.<sup>72</sup>

The commissioners of these monuments chose to honor two sets of pioneers in order to celebrate the events, values, and attitudes that they admired. These monuments reflect their desire to inform the state’s current residents as well as future generations of North Dakotans of the significance of these people and events. The prominent location of the Pioneer Family statue ensures that all visitors to the state capitol grounds have the opportunity to gaze upon the massive bronze representation of a frontier family and the spirit and determination they symbolize. In the case of the Iverson Well Monument, the commemoration of the event and the meaning of its monument have been transformed into a commemoration of the energy pioneers and the state’s oil industry by subsequent celebrations.

Harry McLean wanted to honor his father and all of North Dakota’s agricultural pioneers with a large and beautiful statue created by a well-known and well-respected

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<sup>70</sup> “Williston to Unveil New Campaign,” *Williston Herald*, April 24, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> “Bakken Slogan is Rockin’ the Area,” *Williston Herald*, July 15, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> “Bakken Slogan is Rockin’ the Area,” *Williston Herald*, July 15, 2008.

artist. In choosing the pioneers as his subject matter, McLean celebrated his reverence for the characteristics displayed, or implied, by the frontier farmer—hard work, energy, individualism, and self-reliance. McLean respected and admired the pioneer for the courage and optimism necessary to move into a foreign environment in order to put down roots and establish a better life for himself and his family. Finally, McLean’s celebration of the pioneers represents his desire to search out the tradition, family, and values that were so important to him. The prominent placement of the statue ensures that many North Dakotans and other visitors to the state capitol will encounter his didactic lesson.

The statue’s features are designed to speak volumes to those who view it. The father and son, representing the generations, stand firmly and proudly as they look to the future. The clasped hands show unity and confidence, as well as the strength of the family’s bond. The man’s wife stands to his right with their infant child in her arms. His hand on her back suggests that he is willing and able to provide for his wife and his family. The pioneer woman looks to the future as well, but not in the distance as the other two figures do, but rather, at the future generation represented by the child in her arms.

The timing of McLean’s tribute to the pioneering generation is also significant. At the close of World War II, many members of that generation were disappearing, leaving the subsequent generations with a sense of nostalgia and the desire to honor those who established the first Euro-American settlements on the northern plains. As the agricultural pioneers began to transition from the sasha to the zamani, McLean, and others like him, felt the need to honor the “greater” generation that came before—the legendary agricultural pioneers.

In many ways, the Iverson Well Monument represents a very different approach to the commemoration of the pioneering generation. The Iverson Well Monument located near Tioga was dedicated in 1953, just two years after the well struck oil. The inscription on the monument reflects the desire of the monument's commissioners to celebrate the event and to recognize the extraordinary changes to the state's economy and society as a result. The large granite monument represents its commissioners' desire to see the event remembered and celebrated well into the future. But a comprehensive understanding of this commemorative structure and the celebration of the energy pioneers is made possible by examining the Iverson Well Monument in conjunction with the subsequent commemorative activities.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of oil in the state was met with relatively little fanfare. It was not until the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary that many in the state's oil producing counties began to recognize and commemorate the event that altered their economy and society. The purpose of the Williston Basin Energy Festival in 1981 was to commemorate the event, the state's oil industry, as well as the "old timers"—the drillers, company men, roughnecks, and pumpers—who witnessed its birth. The Energy Festival organizers also expressed their desire to educate the people of the community and the state on the oil industry and its impact on the region and the state. The second granite monument and pumping unit in Williston's Harmon Park exemplifies the shift of the commemorative focus from the oil companies and the event itself to the "Williston Basin energy pioneers" whose blood, sweat, and labor made it possible.

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the second installment of the Williston Basin Energy Festival picked up where the previous celebrations left off. Bill Shemorry's *Mud, Sweat,*



*and Oil* included an article on the lives and characters of Blackie Davidson and Tude Gordon, two of the men responsible for bringing the Iverson well into production. The most recent celebration, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in 2001, also emphasized the individual contributions of the energy pioneers.<sup>73</sup> Just as the Pioneer Family statue honored the agricultural pioneers as they were slipping away, the subsequent oil celebrations sought to pay homage to the men and women who labored in the state's petroleum industry in its early years and were now beginning to pass away.

The Pioneer Family statue and the collection of oil celebrations also represent different approaches to commemoration. The Pioneer Family statue was created to honor the state's agricultural pioneers in general and McLean's father in particular. The statue represents an example of official commemoration, according to Bodnar's definition, and has gained popular attention and appeal since its dedication in 1947. The original Iverson Well Monument also fits into Bodnar's definition of official commemoration as the commissioners consisted mostly of oil company executives and local civic groups. The subsequent celebrations, however, exhibited a much stronger vernacular influence, especially the first installment of the Williston Basin Energy Festival which was organized by two Williston men and funded largely by individual donations. Their conscious effort to continue to celebrate the discovery of oil and the legendary energy pioneers, suggest their continued commitment to their heritage and roots, their optimism for the future, and their desire to sustain the growth and development of local sources of energy.

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<sup>73</sup> "Oil Gives Williston Reason to Celebrate," *Williston Herald*, April 2, 2001; "Basin Celebrates 50 years of Oil," *Williston Herald*, August 8, 2001.

The selection and veneration of the pioneer is not unique to North Dakota, but it does reveal something about the people and the attitudes and characteristics that the commissioners sought to emulate and advertise. The pioneers represent the ordinary people who “overcame difficult problems of geography, climate, and politics” and succeeded where others had failed. Furthermore, the celebration of the pioneer is an extension of the celebration of the natural environment—the rugged badlands, gently rolling prairie, and challenging climate of the northern plains.<sup>74</sup>

Both the Pioneer Family statue and the Iverson Well Monument honor the *legendary*, as opposed to the *historical*, pioneers. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the historical pioneers, such as Sakakawea and John Burke, are identified and celebrated for their individual contributions. By contrast, the legendary pioneers are not identified by name. Because the Pioneer Family statue and the Iverson Well Monument do not identify specific individuals, the monuments’ commissioners are able to project onto these legendary pioneers, those character traits and attitudes they believe this group represents. These are the traits—courage, determination, persistence, spirit, optimism, and adventurousness—that the monuments’ commissioners admire and hope to obtain, as well as those traits they wish to see in their children and grandchildren. The monuments’ commissioners deliberately chose their subjects in order to pay homage to the legendary agricultural and energy pioneers, and promote the attitudes, values, and character traits they represent. The final chapter will demonstrate how these character traits—representing the North Dakota character—are reflected in the monuments and memorials that their commissioners chose to build.

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<sup>74</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Monuments connect a society's past, present, and future. As "reminders,"<sup>1</sup> monuments serve to honor those who came before and those who led the way, whether they were statesmen, adventurers, farmers, or oilmen. But monuments also provide insight into the beliefs and character traits of those who worked to see them erected. By examining the monuments, we are able to determine the people and events they believe are important to commemorate and remember—those elements from a society's past that "embody [their] deepest and most fundamental values."<sup>2</sup> And just as individuals in a society construct monuments, they construct the meanings and values assigned to the subjects and events commemorated. The identity of the society and its core values are "sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the values, attitudes, and character traits represented in a commemorative work are those valued by its commissioners.

Monuments also serve a didactic purpose. Not only do monuments and memorials allow for "a place to provide context, facts, and meaning" about people and

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Martin Reynolds, "Introduction," in *"Remove Not the Ancient Landmark": Public Monuments and Moral Values* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61, no. 2 (Dec., 1982): 374-402, specifically, 377; Reynolds, 7.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3; see also Char Roone Miller, "Neither Palace Nor Temple Nor Tomb": The Lincoln Memorial in the Age of Commercial Reappropriation, in *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative*, Michael Geisler, ed. (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).



events to subsequent generations, they also promote the values and character traits that their commissioners wish to advertize to the general population and promote in future generations.<sup>4</sup> For the commissioners of the monuments in this study, this means the promotion of aspects of the North Dakota character. A character that is distinct: many in North Dakota believe themselves to be stubborn, hardy, and hardworking; they identify themselves as courageous, optimistic, warmhearted, energetic, and self-reliant. Like elsewhere on the plains, many North Dakotans have experienced economic disadvantage, struggled against the unforgiving environment, and fought against a colonial status imposed on them by outside forces. But North Dakota is the most “plains” of the plains states, the most “Midwest” of the Midwestern states, and, therefore, the state’s climate, geography, and history have combined to create a distinct version of the Midwestern, or Great Plains, component of the American character.

The distinctive North Dakota character is reflected in the monuments and memorials their commissioners have chosen to construct. Most of the monuments in this study, including the statues of Sakakawea, John Burke, and the Pioneer Family, were selected because of their prominence on the North Dakota landscape. As “secular variants” of a sacred site, the North Dakota capitol grounds in Bismarck, as well as National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol, represent the places where the commemorators are able to announce what they cherish, what they honor, and what they hope to pass along to the next generation.<sup>5</sup> The Iverson Well Monument, while not conspicuous on the landscape, remains a prominent figure in the minds of those whose livelihoods depend on the state’s petroleum industry. By continuing to draw upon the

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<sup>4</sup> Ryan Coonerty, *Etched in Stone: Enduring Words from Our Nation's Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007), 93.

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz, 378, 390-391.

image of the monument and the energy pioneers it represents, the commemorators are making a conscious decision to honor and remember the event and the people who changed the state forever.

The monuments selected for this study were divided into two categories—monuments dedicated to historical pioneers and those devoted to legendary pioneers. By examining monuments to historical figures, this study is able to show how the statues' commissioners deliberately selected individuals who displayed the values, attitudes, and character traits they admire or represent. In the case of John Burke, the commissioners celebrated his life because he is North Dakota's Lincoln—a man of such character and integrity, they concluded, that he leaves no room for doubt. Had the commissioners selected another figure, such as Alexander McKenzie, the image revealed by the choice would be drastically different. Honoring such a figure as McKenzie might say to the nation that North Dakotans value people who are determined, ambitious, and unrelenting in the pursuit of their goals, no matter the means—legal or illegal.

Sakakawea, as a commemorative subject, reveals much about those who worked to commemorate her life. In 1910, the women of the GFWCND wanted to raise awareness of the connection between North Dakota and the centennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In addition, they wished to celebrate the life and accomplishments of the only female member of the Corps of Discovery. Through Crunelle's beautiful statue of Sakakawea, the women of the GFWCND also paid homage to the spirit and character traits she represented. By enlisting the support of North Dakota's schoolchildren, the organization ensured that their promotion of the aspects of the North Dakota character they attributed to her—including courage, determination, and resourcefulness—reached

young people across the state. Nearly ninety years later, the second commemoration of Sakakawea occurred with the placement of a replica in National Statuary Hall. In addition to the didactic lessons, the commemorators also projected modern American society's views toward gender, tolerance, and multiculturalism. The selection and veneration of the historical pioneers in general, and Sakakawea and John Burke in particular, allowed the commemorators to call upon and emphasize those traits they admired most.

The commemoration of the legendary pioneers also reveals much about the character that the monuments' commissioners admire. Those first Euro-American settlers in the state, the pioneers, represent the state's agricultural foundations and have taken on "mythic proportions in the eyes of succeeding generations."<sup>6</sup> Because these legendary pioneers are not identified, the commemorators are able to generalize and to project onto them those traits they cherish and seek to perpetuate. These monuments "can foster the myths that create a common history that allows for divergent groups to find a common bond."<sup>7</sup> Monuments to legendary pioneers, like memorials to soldiers and veterans, glorify a generalization of a group of unidentified individuals rather than selecting life-stories to celebrate.

McLean selected North Dakota's agricultural pioneers because he wished to celebrate and promote aspects of the North Dakota character that he admired. By commemorating the state's pioneers, McLean encouraged the state's residents and future

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<sup>6</sup> Gillis, 9; Here Gillis is referring to America's founding fathers, but the reference fits in this context as well.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 3.



generations to appreciate and develop similar traits, including courage, determination, self-reliance, and optimism.

The celebrations devoted to the energy pioneers and the discovery of oil in the state also reflect the commemorators' desire to honor and advertize the traits of the North Dakota character. As the commemorative focus shifted from the discovery date to the "old timers," the energy pioneers, the commemorators highlighted the character traits they believed were necessary for workers in the petroleum industry specifically, and for residents of the state in general, including optimism, strength, courage, determination, and self-reliance. In addition, the organizers of the series of Williston Basin Energy Festivals wished to educate the state's residents and future generations on the importance of the petroleum industry to the state's history and economy.

The timing of the dedications is also significant. Both historical pioneers Sakakawea and John Burke had died many years before the commemorative events took place, allowing the complexities of their personalities to be distilled into a few key character traits to be celebrated and promoted. With the legendary pioneers, the celebration of the "greater" generations that come before requires that the previous generation, following James Loewen's analogy, be placed on the precipice of the transition from the sasha to the zamani. The Pioneer Family statue was dedicated in 1947 when the pioneering generation was passing on, allowing the subsequent generation, including McLean, to recall its members fondly. With the Iverson Well Monument, it is not so much the 1953 dedication date that is significant, but rather 1981, 1991, and 2001, when the commemoration of the discovery event was taken up by another generation and modified to include a celebration of the energy pioneers. The passing of time, as seen

with the passing from the sasha into the zamani, from the living-dead to the dead, allows a distance of time for reflection and the development of perspective.

The monuments in this study also demonstrate the complex relationship between official and vernacular approaches to commemoration, according to John Bodnar's framework. The statue of Sakakawea on the state capitol grounds and its replica in National Statuary Hall benefited from official endorsement from the GFWCND and the North Dakota Congressional delegation. In addition, these official elements encouraged the grassroots support by enlisting the help of the state's young people. The oil discovery celebrations also blended official and vernacular approaches. The Iverson Well Monument was organized in 1953 almost exclusively by civic groups and oil executives, but the subsequent celebrations were proposed by those in western North Dakota whose livelihoods depended on the petroleum industry. The statue of John Burke, however, represents a nearly exclusively official approach to commemoration as a committee selected by the governor made the final decision to commemorate Burke. Finally, McLean, a wealthy former resident of the state, commissioned the Pioneer Family statue and arranged to position it in one of the most prominent locations on the state capitol grounds. This lack of public input represents an exclusively official approach to commemoration.

The commissioners of the monuments in this study are people of the Great Plains and through their commemorative efforts, actively worked to promote the North Dakota character. They believe they are hardy and hardworking; they identify themselves as courageous, stubborn, and friendly, traits they share with others from the Great Plains. But North Dakota's history and geography created a distinctive set of character traits,

attitudes, and viewpoints that are similar to, and yet separate from, those of even its closest neighbor, South Dakota. This character is revealed in the perceptions these commemorators have of themselves and their state, as well as in the monuments they constructed for themselves and for posterity.





Figure 1. Sakakawea Statue, State Capitol Grounds, Bismarck, North Dakota





Figure 2. John Burke, State Capitol Grounds, Bismarck, North Dakota





Figure 3. Pioneer Family Statue, State Capitol Grounds, Bismarck, North Dakota





Figure 4. Iverson Well Monument, near Tioga, North Dakota





Figure 5. Williston Basin Energy Festival Monument, Harmon Park, Williston, North Dakota

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