



**History of  
North Dakota**

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## *Preface*

THERE ARE TWO KEYS to understanding the history of North Dakota. The first concerns the context of historical movements in Europe and North America during which North Dakota was explored, settled, and developed. The second deals with North Dakota's geographical location and the various ways in which that location influenced the course of events within the state. Studied together, they give form and meaning to the story of how a modern, civilized society was carved out of the wilderness of the Northern Great Plains.

Of the two keys, location is more important because from it spring six themes which dominate the North Dakota story: remoteness, dependence, economic disadvantage, agrarian radicalism, the "Too-Much Mistake" (trying to do too much too fast with too little), and adaptation to environment. Every event in the history of the state is related in some way to one or more of them.

In writing this volume, I have utilized these concepts as a means of interpreting the North Dakota experience, not only for North Dakotans, but for all who would understand the state and its people. I have therefore sought to view North Dakota's history in broad perspective, relating it to major events in the history of the Western world, and to demonstrate how the conditions of existence shaped the character of

the men and women who settled the state. For it is my conviction that an adequate knowledge of North Dakota's past provides the best foundation for making public decisions which will determine its future.

I have incurred numerous obligations in preparing this book. To the many students and other friends who have expressed interest in its progress, I extend heartfelt thanks. At the University of North Dakota, the late President John C. West and Dean R. B. Witmer made clear their warm approval. When Dr. George W. Starcher became president in 1954, he encouraged me by his keen interest. On two occasions the administration lightened my teaching load, and the Faculty Research Committee has given me research grants. Most of the work, however, has been done during long summer vacations.

I owe much to the graduate students whose theses and dissertations are listed in the Bibliographical Essay. I thank the Greater North Dakota Association, the State Soil Conservation Committee, the Great Northern Railway Company, North Dakota State University, the University of North Dakota, and others who supplied photographs. Miss Margaret Rose, librarian of the North Dakota State Historical Society, was especially helpful in selecting pictures from the excellent collection under her management. Professor Robert K. Snortland, chairman of the University of North Dakota's Department of Engineering Drawing, prepared the maps.

Special thanks go to Dr. Robert P. Wilkins, long my colleague in the Department of History at the University of North Dakota, for encouraging words, for interesting items from his own research, for reading the manuscript, and for much conversation about the meaning of the North Dakota experience. My thinking was clarified by the opportunity afforded me through Dr. William E. Koenker's invitation to lecture on "The Themes of North Dakota History" at the university's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration in the fall of 1958. To my wife, Eva, I owe most: for typing, for aid in stylistic revision and checking the manuscript, for listening to endless talk about North Dakota history, and for sacrificing for many years time which might otherwise have been used for family recreation. Only such sacrifice has made this book possible.

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