

STUDIES IN MIDWESTERN HISTORY

VOL. I, No. 8

October, 2015

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS HISTORY CONFERENCE, 1966-2015

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The Northern Great Plains History Conference, which recently held its 50th conference, was conceived by D. Jerome Tweton of the University of North Dakota's Department of History. After attending the Missouri River Valley History Conference in Omaha, Tweton thought the concept of a regional history conference should be duplicated on the Northern Great Plains. But, his attendance at the American Historical Association's 1965 meeting in New York City caused him to act. The conference was crowded, costly, and only attended by two North Dakota historians. While flying back to Grand Forks, Tweton decided to give historians of the North Central region an opportunity to participate in a relatively inexpensive conference closer to their homes. With the enthusiastic support of his university's history faculty and administration, Tweton organized the first conference on the University of North Dakota campus in the fall of 1966.² From its first meeting in 1966 the conference has been devoted to history in its broadest sense. Its programs

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² "D. Jerome Tweton on the Founding of the Northern Great Plains History Conference," unpub. ms. in Northern Great Plains History Conference Records, 1966-, in Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

have regularly featured a diversity of regional, national and international history topics. It is regional only because its meeting sites have always been in the northern plains area. It was at the NGPHC in Hudson, Wisconsin in 2013 where the Midwestern History Working Group was first organized and at the NGPHC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 2014 that the Midwestern History Association was launched.

In its first decade the NGPHC was planned and perpetuated mainly by the history departments of the University of North Dakota, which hosted four conferences, and the University of Manitoba, which was the host twice. But as it became better known the NGPHC attracted more interest. Historically, its meeting sites have ranged from Winnipeg and Brandon, Manitoba, on the north, Eau Claire and La Crosse, Wisconsin, on the east, Mankato and Sioux Falls on the south and Pierre and Bismarck on the west. All of the annual conferences have been held in the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin and the Province of Manitoba. Through 1979 most of the conferences were held on college and university campuses, but several also met at off-campus hotels. But, growing dissatisfaction with inadequate campus facilities prompted Tweton, in consultation with some conference veterans, to permanently shift the annual meetings to host city hotels.

Prior to the formation of the conference council in 1986, the NGPHC was managed and perpetuated by D. Jerome Tweton. Institutions who wanted to host the conference would contact Tweton with their proposals. If he agreed, they would become conference hosts.

As the conference became well-established, it continued, in common with other professional associations and conferences, to experience the aggravating problem of overly long papers. In response to numerous complaints over the years, Tweton and some longtime conference participants decided to explore ways of addressing the long papers issue. The matter came to a head when they discussed it at a luncheon meeting at the 1986 conference in Eau Claire. The participants in the Eau Claire meeting were Calvin Gruver (St. Cloud State University), Harl A. Dalstrom (University of Nebraska at Omaha), David B. Danbom (North Dakota State University), Roy Hoover (University of Minnesota-Duluth), Lawrence H. Larsen (University of Missouri-Kansas City), William E. Lass (Mankato State University), Jack M. Lauber (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire), R. Alton Lee (University of South Dakota), Michael J. Lyons (North Dakota State University), Dana Miller (Research Center Director, Iron Range Interpretative Center, Chisholm,

MN), Larry Rowen Remele (State Historical Society of North Dakota), D. Jerome Tweton (University of North Dakota) and Stephen R. Ward (University of South Dakota). They decided that the best way of addressing the long paper issue and creating a conference management structure was to form a conference council. They also prevailed on Larry Rowen Remele, editor of *North Dakota History*, to serve as council chair for an unspecified time. As the first council chair, Remele worked with several volunteers to draft a conference operating policy. The council adopted this policy at its Sioux Falls meeting in 1987.

The formation of the council was the most significant turning point in NGPHC history. Henceforth, it considered all proposals to host conferences and encouraged long-range planning. Typically, the host institution and city are named three to four years in advance. The council also formalized the conference tradition of requiring host institutions to be responsible for fiscal management of the annual conferences. Consequently, the conference, in contrast to historical associations, does not have any funds and does not charge dues. Since its formation the council has been responsible for determining meeting sites and developing policies about all aspects of conference management.

The council decided not to publish conference papers. Council members believed that those presenters interested in publication should submit their works to appropriate historical journals. Subsequently, many articles in state and regional historical society journals have had their genesis as Northern Great Plains History Conference papers. It should be noted, however, that in the pre-council era, two conference hosts published selected conference papers. The University of Manitoba published *Proceedings of the Second Annual Northern Great Plains History Conference* (1967), edited by J. E. Rea and R. A. Swanson. Four years later Moorhead State University published *Historical Papers: Selected Proceedings of the Sixth Northern Great Plains History Conference*, Lysle E. Meyer, ed.

The council has improved the long papers issue by developing, implementing, and disseminating length and time guidelines for session presenters, chairs, and commentators. But the long papers problem is something akin to the farm problem. There is no permanent final solution, but rather a recurrent need to cope with the issue.

From its inception the council has evolved to include representatives from organizations and institutions not included in the original group. These additions include Bismarck State College, Brandon University, the Minnesota Historical Society, the South Dakota State Historical Society,

Women Historians of the Midwest (WHOM) and the Society for Military History (SMH). Furthermore, the council and the annual coordinators have encouraged the participation of independent scholars and public historians.

Both WHOM and SMH established a strong affiliation with the NGPHC. WHOM was dissolved in 2000, but Barbara Handy-Marchello (North Dakota State University) spearheaded the organization of its successor—the Women’s History Interest Group, (WHIG), which she first represented on the council in 2002. Handy-Marchello was succeeded by Claire Strom (North Dakota State University), who served as WHIG coordinator, 2003–2007. Since 2008 Lori Ann Lahlum (Minnesota State University, Mankato) has been the WHIG coordinator. WHIG regularly sponsors several sessions at each NGPHC conference as well as hosting a conference luncheon.

The Society for Military History, whose conference participation predated the council’s formation, was initially coordinated by Malcom Muir, Jr. (Austin Peay State University, Tennessee). Muir was succeeded by Joseph C. Fitzharris (University of St. Thomas) in 2001. Margaret Sankey (Minnesota State University Moorhead) replaced Fitzharris after he retired between the 2011 and 2012 conferences. In July 2015, Sankey was succeeded by Carole Butcher (North Dakota State University). Traditionally, the Society for Military History has sponsored a session for every conference time slot and hosted a luncheon during the conference. Additionally, it funds awards for both a best undergraduate paper and best graduate paper presented at the conference. Due in large part to the Society for Military History, the NGPHC attracts participants from many places far beyond the Northern Great Plains.

Larry Rowen Remele’s service as the first council chair was abruptly ended by his sudden death at age 43 on June 3, 1988.³ His passing shocked and saddened his council colleagues and many others. When the council met at the 1988 conference in Eveleth, Minnesota, Tweton suggested that the council recognize Remele’s contributions to the NGPHC. The council promptly created the Larry Rowen Remele Award that was to be granted annually to an individual who exemplified Remele’s outstanding dedication to the conference. The council named a committee to select the first recipient of the award and to decide on wording for the award plaque. At the 1989 St. Cloud conference, D. Jerome Tweton was announced as the first recipient of the award and presented a

³ Remele obituary in *Bismarck Tribune*, June 4, 1988.

plaque at the conference banquet. Since then a committee named by the council chair has selected each recipient.

Since Dana Miller was the coordinator of the 1988 conference in Eveleth, he agreed to succeed Remele. Subsequently, Miller served as council chair for thirteen years. In advance of the 2000 conference, he notified the council that he thought he had done his duty and advised the council to plan on his succession in 2001. At the 2000 council meeting, William E. Lass was named to chair a committee to draft a council chair policy. The committee, which included Janet Daley (State Historical Society of North Dakota), Harl A. Dalstrom, and Robert Hilderbrand (University of South Dakota) recommended the council chair position be made elective with term limitations. The policy, approved by the council in 2001, specified the chair would be elected for a three-year term with a limitation of two consecutive terms. The council elected Lass, who served until 2007, when he was succeeded by Kimberly K. Porter (University of North Dakota). In 2010 Porter chose not to be a candidate for a second term. The council then elected Mary E. (Betsy) Glade of St. Cloud University, who was re-elected in 2013.

During its nearly thirty-year existence, the council has devised and implemented some significant policies. To encourage more participation by younger scholars, the NGPHC Council developed policies to provide monetary awards for the best undergraduate and graduate student papers presented at the annual conferences.

During its nearly half-century long history, the NGPHC, like virtually everything else, has been characterized by continuity and change. From its beginning the conference attracted participants who were very conscientious about attending sessions. Reflecting changes in the nature of history, conference programs of the last two decades, in particular, have featured more emphasis on women's history, racial and ethnic minorities, and various themes of the new social history. Conversely, interest in political history has waned considerably. The first generation's concern for such topics as the Dewey-Truman presidential election campaign of 1948 seems to have virtually disappeared.

Over the years, as the conference became increasingly popular, its annual programs were greatly expanded. During its first five years the conferences typically had only about a dozen sessions and were usually scheduled on a Friday afternoon and Saturday. But for the last three decades conferences have usually had forty to forty-five sessions scheduled from Wednesday evening to Saturday

noon. Conference attendance ordinarily ranges from 175 to 225. But on several occasions has surpassed 300.

Conference arranging and administering have been revolutionized by the advent of the internet and email. Until about 1995 conference coordinators developed their programs by regular postal service and numerous telephone calls. By about the turn of the century, use of email and the traditional contact methods were on a par. Recent conferences have been arranged almost exclusively by email and coordinators have posted the conference program and other information on the internet.

The NGPHC is old enough to have some tradition, but in the long historical perspective is still relatively young. Coincidentally, it began at about the same time as Super Bowl I and Subway Restaurants. To those who were adults in 1966 the last half-century must sometimes seem like a fleeting experience. But to some who were born later and cannot decipher Roman numerals, it may seem that the Super Bowl and the NGPHC (which is evidently not as well established in the public's consciousness) have been around for eons.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES: The most comprehensive collection of Northern Great Plains History Conference records is in the Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota. It includes programs, council minutes, correspondence, copies of the two published proceedings and some photographs. Other records of specific conferences are in the respective institutional archives or history department offices.

Appendix ILIST OF NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS HISTORY CONFERENCE
ANNUAL CONFERENCES

Sponsors indicated parenthetically.

1. 1966 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
2. 1967 Winnipeg (Univ. of Manitoba)
3. 1968 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
4. 1969 St. Cloud (St. Cloud State College, St. John's Univ., Collegeville, MN and College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN)
5. 1970 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
6. 1971 Moorhead (Moorhead State College)
7. 1972 Winnipeg (Univ. of Manitoba)
8. 1973 Sioux Falls (Univ. of South Dakota, Sioux Falls College and Augustana College)
9. 1974 Mankato (Mankato State College and Gustavus Adolphus College)
10. 1975 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
11. 1976 La Crosse (Univ. of Wisconsin-La Crosse)
12. 1977 Bismarck (Bismarck Junior College and State Historical Society of North Dakota)
13. 1978 Fargo (North Dakota State Univ.)
14. 1979 Winnipeg (Univ. of Winnipeg)
15. 1980 Duluth (Univ. of Minnesota, Duluth and St. Louis County Historical Society)
16. 1981 Sioux Falls (Univ. of South Dakota, Sioux Falls College and Augustana College)
17. 1982 Bemidji (Bemidji State University)
18. 1983 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
19. 1984 Bismarck (Bismarck Community College and State Historical Society of North Dakota)
20. 1985 Moorhead (Moorhead State Univ., Concordia College and North Dakota State Univ.)
21. 1986 Eau Claire (Univ. of Wisconsin-Eau Claire). Northern Great Plains History Conference Council formed.
22. 1987 Sioux Falls (Univ. of South Dakota, Sioux Falls College and Augustana College)

23. 1988 Eveleth (Iron Range Research Center)
24. 1989 St. Cloud (St. Cloud State Univ., St. John's University and College of St. Benedict) First Remele Award presented to D. Jerome Tweton.
25. 1990 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
26. 1991 Mankato (Mankato State Univ.)
27. 1992 Fargo-Moorhead (North Dakota State Univ., Moorhead State Univ. and Concordia College)
28. 1993 Pierre (South Dakota State Historical Society)
29. 1994 St. Paul (Augsburg College and Minnesota Historical Society)
30. 1995 Brandon (Brandon University)
31. 1996 La Crosse (Univ. of Wisconsin-La Crosse)
32. 1997 Bismarck (State Historical Society of North Dakota and Bismarck State College)
33. 1998 Sioux Falls (Univ. of South Dakota, Univ. of Sioux Falls and Augustana College)
34. 1999 St. Cloud (St. Cloud State University, St. John's University and College of St. Benedict)
35. 2000 Mankato (Minnesota State University, Mankato)
36. 2001 Grand Forks (Univ. of North Dakota)
37. 2002 Minneapolis (Augsburg College)
38. 2003 Fargo (North Dakota State University, Concordia College, Minnesota State University Moorhead)
39. 2004 Bismarck (State Historical Society of North Dakota and Bismarck State College)
40. 2005 Eau Claire (Univ. of Wisconsin-Eau Claire)
41. 2006 Sioux Falls (University of South Dakota)
42. 2007 Duluth (University of Minnesota Duluth)
43. 2008 Brandon (Brandon University)
44. 2009 St. Cloud (St. Cloud State University)
45. 2010 Grand Forks (University of North Dakota)
46. 2011 Mankato (Minnesota State University, Mankato)
47. 2012 Fargo (North Dakota State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead, Concordia College). First Lifetime Achievement Award presented to William E. Lass.

48. 2013 Hudson (University of Wisconsin Colleges, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, University of Wisconsin-Stout)
49. 2014 Sioux Falls (University of South Dakota)
50. 2015 Bismarck (State Historical Society of North Dakota and Bismarck State College)

Appendix II**LARRY ROWEN REMELE AWARD RECIPIENTS**

- 1989: D. Jerome Tweton (University of North Dakota)
1990: Archer Jones (North Dakota State University)
1991: Lawrence H. Larsen (University of Missouri, Kansas City)
1992: James M. Skinner (Brandon University)
1993: William E. Lass (Minnesota State University, Mankato)
1994: William C. Pratt (University of Nebraska at Omaha)
1995: R. Alton Lee (University of South Dakota)
1996: David B. Danbom (North Dakota State University)
1997: Hans Burmeister (Brandon University)
1998: Dana Miller (Iron Range Research Center)
1999: Malcolm Muir Jr. (Austin Peay State University and Society for Military History)
2000: Nancy Tystad Koupal (South Dakota State Historical Society)
2001: Harl A. Dalstrom (University of Nebraska at Omaha)
2002: J. Michael McCormack (Bismarck State College)
2003: Charles M. Barber (Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago)
2004: Janet F. Daley (State Historical Society of North Dakota)
2005: Edward J. Pluth (St. Cloud State University)
2006: Gerald D. Anderson (North Dakota State University)
2007: Robert C. Hilderbrand (University of South Dakota)
2008: Frank E. Vyzralek (Bismarck)
2009: Joseph C. Fitzharris (University of St. Thomas and Society for Military History)
2010: James Naylor (Brandon University)
2011: Kathleen K. Davison (State Historical Society of North Dakota)
2012: Lori Ann Lahlum (Minnesota State University, Mankato)
2013: Anne Kaplan (Minnesota Historical Society)
2014: Kimberly K. Porter (University of North Dakota)
2015: Gordon L. Iseminger (University of North Dakota)