**TRIO OF BISMARCK ADVENTURERS**

**GEORGE F. WILL, SR., CLELL GANNON, AND RUSSELL REID.**

by Ann Vadnie, Bismarck Historical Society Board of Directors

This time of year, when the river is flowing high and hard, is a perfect time to remember three remarkable Bismarck men, (from left) George F. Will, Sr., Clell Gannon, and Russell Reid.

In June 1925, these friends and historians were companions on an interesting adventure. They journeyed by rowboat down the Little Missouri and Missouri Rivers all the way from Medora to Bismarck. Their main purpose on this trip was to camp and have a little “rest and relaxation.” However, a very important part of it became photographing the many interesting and beautiful locations along the way.

Thankfully for historians, the “journal” of their adventure, “A Short Account of a Rowboat Journey from Medora to Bismarck,” was published in the first issue of The North Dakota Historical Quarterly in 1926.

These men were amazing...so here is a bit about each of them.

**Russell Reid (1900-1967)** began working at the State Historical Society while still a student in high school. During his lifetime, he became a specialist in North Dakota birds, a skilled photographer, writer, adventurer, leader, and master historian.

He was named superintendent of the State Historical Society in 1929 and served until 1967. His accomplishments include: the development of many North Dakota historic sites and the gathering of historic artifacts that eventually provided a foundation for the basis of the state’s collections.

**Clell Gannon (1900-1962)** artist, poet, historian and printer, survived several serious illnesses: including diphtheria, influenza, and tuberculosis. But he never let anything keep him from exploring, writing, and painting.

Gannon is the author and illustrator of two poetry collections, Songs of the Bunch-Grass Acres (1924) and How Christmas Came to North Dakota (1929). After his death, his family published a third collection of poems, Ever and Always I Shall Love the Land (1965), which offers present-day readers a quick look into the basically undisturbed landscape of the western part of North Dakota.

**George F. Will Sr. (1884-1955)**, the son of pioneer seedsman Oscar Will, was a “mover and shaker” in the preservation of North Dakota history. While still a student at Harvard College, Will was one of the first archaeologists to see the probable importance of the Double Ditch Indian Village site north of Bismarck.

So, in 1905, Will and three of his Harvard classmates began to conduct an archaeological survey of the area. The excavations that they made at that site were the first careful studies of Double Ditch Village. One of the mounds at the earth-lodge village was excavated in a “cross-section” allowing these young archaeologists to see the basically undisturbed landscape of the western part of North Dakota.

But, Gannon is best remembered for his artwork. His murals decorate the Burleigh County Courthouse and the Bismarck High School library. Also, many of the designs for the covers of Pioneer Seed Co. catalogs and seed packets of the Will Seed Company, were taken from his paintings.

Clell married Ruth (Johnson) and they had two sons. The couple gathered field stones and built a house designed by Clell on a rise at the northwest edge of town (912 N. Mandan Street).
It’s been over a month since our June 12 primary election. The process piqued my curiosity. I discovered in the course of my research that our state had its first statewide primary election on June 24, 1908. The primary election law had been revised as a result of legislation passed by the 1907 Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to delve into the particulars of how and why the law was changed.

Primary elections during this period were held “the last Wednesday in June of every year in which occurs a general election.” When browsing through the archived election results on the Secretary of State’s website, I noticed that the date changed to the second Tuesday of June with the 1982 primary election. I also noticed that the primary elections from 1966-1980 were held on the first Tuesday in September.

I was not able to locate an actual ballot for the 1908 June primary election but did find a listing of candidates published in the Bismarck Tribune. Some of the recognizable names were C. B. Little, L. B. Hanna, Erastus A. Williams, John Burke, Francis H. Register, William O’Hara, William F. Fortune, and Walter H. Winchester. If you are curious as to the winners who moved on to the 1908 general election ballot, click on this link (https://tinyurl.com/1908PrimElectn) to find out.

Addendum: Women in North Dakota were not allowed to vote during this time. A woman’s suffrage bill was brought before the legislature at every session between 1901 and 1911. No suffrage bills were approved. However, the legislature amended previous voting laws to affirm that only “male persons” would be legal voters.

Sources:
“Certificate of candidates for nomination” (Bismarck Tribune, June 12, 1908, p.7)
North Dakota Secretary of State website: http://sos.nd.gov/
North Dakota Studies https://tinyurl.com/NDsuffrage
“Primary Election Law enacted by Legislative Assembly 1907” by Alfred Blaisdell
“Synopsis of the new primary election law” complied under direction of Alfred Blaisdell

Both buildings which have housed the Burleigh County Courts have been located in the same 2.1 acre downtown block, north of Thayer Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets.

The original Burleigh County, Dakota Territory Courthouse was built by P. J. Pauley & Brothers in 1881.

The building was enlarged in 1908 using local architect was Arthur Van Horn and contractor was W. W. Bowe.

The present Burleigh County Courthouse in Bismarck, North Dakota was built in 1931. The three-story gray Indian limestone building faces south. The base of the building is pink granite.

This wonderful building was constructed by Redlinger & Hansen and designed in the Art Deco style by architect Ira Rush.

Ira Rush was a North Dakota architect who won several design competitions for courthouses. All four of his courthouses in North Dakota were listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

On the north side is the Courthouse Annex which was built in 1960 and the second and third stories were completed in 1984. That building is currently undergoing another major renovation.

This trivia ties nicely into the main article in this issue because one of the men featured, Clell Gannon, painted the amazing murals in the Burleigh County Courthouse.

The Burleigh County Commission has made an effort over the years to keep the murals cleaned and restored.
and pottery. Also discovered were bits of charred food items, indicating that the people ate corn, beans, and other vegetables as well as bison meat.

Even after taking over his father’s business, “Oscar H. Will & Company,” in 1917, George Will maintained an active interest in archaeology, anthropology, horticulture and agriculture, publishing dozens of books and articles. His Corn Among the Indians of the Upper Missouri (1917) is still considered an important source on Native American agriculture. Will continued to improve on many varieties of seeds first offered by his father.

George Will was also president of the State Historical Society of North Dakota between 1942 and 1955. He maintained a lifelong interest in archeology and history. By the end of his life, he had written and published dozens of books and articles about the prehistory and the history of North Dakota, in addition to dozens more books about horticulture and agriculture.

Bismarck should consider itself very fortunate to have had these three wonderful men as part of its history. And North Dakota can also thank them all for their contributions in so many areas to the development of our historical legacy.

THANKS FOR THESE GREAT PROGRAMS:

FounDERS DAY--MAY 9, 2018

This was a wonderful Founders Day event to celebrate the birthday of Bismarck. After a few opening remarks, 4th Graders from Robert Miller Elementary led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and students from Lincoln Elementary sang the National Anthem.

One former mayor, Bob Heskin, is a brother to Bismarck Historical Society Board Member, Carolyn Twingley. Heskin traveled the farthest distance to join us and it is greatly appreciated.

After the mayors were introduced, the evening featured a “round table” style discussion with four of the five living mayors in attendance from left to right in the photo: Mike Seminary (mayor 2014-present), John Warford (mayor 2002-2014), Bill Sorensen (mayor 1990-2002), and Bob Heskin (mayor 1974-1978). The mayors greeted audience members, shared stories with each other and later cut the birthday cake. A variety of displays were available to view while cupcakes and cake were enjoyed.

The final presentation of the evening was done by Ann Vadnie and Kate Waldera who gave quite a bit of information in a PowerPoint entitled: “Bismarck Mayors Through the Years.”

MEMBERSHIP DUES CHANGE

NOTICE

The board of the Bismarck Historical Society Board, as recommended by its Executive Committee, has approved the following increases for membership dues.

• Family and individual dues are increasing $5.00...family dues will now be $45 and individual dues will be $30.
• Corporate dues will increase $10 to the new price of $110.

• Tier membership levels (three-year memberships) for families and individuals are disappearing. Those who’ve already paid ahead will be grandfathered in. New society members will not have the tiered option.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

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COMING EVENTS:

**BISMARCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS PICNIC**

*August 29, 2018 (note change of date)*

Be watching your mail for the “postcard” invitation to our annual member picnic and information about how to RSVP. A change to note will be a little larger venue.

This year the picnic will be held in the Community Room at the Hillside Aquatic Complex located at 1719 E. Boulevard Avenue.

Please, enter the door that says Community Room, and not the main pool entrance door, and then take the stairs or the elevator to the second floor.

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2018**

St. Mary’s Catholic Church
On-site tour and talk, including information about the beautiful stained glass window in this historic Bismarck Church.

**OCTOBER 10, 2018**

“HIGHLAND ACRES AREA NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION PROJECT”

**NOVEMBER 14, 2018**

Annual Meeting

**DEC. 12, 2018**

Marilyn Snyder “EARLY MEDICINE IN BISMARCK”

**JANUARY 9, 2019**

Terry Bohn “MODERN BASEBALL IN BISMARCK”

**FEBRUARY 13, 2019**

Mike LaLonde (and friends) “THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF LEO LALONDE”

**MARCH 13, 2019**

Ted Quanrud “VINTAGE BISMARCK POSTCARDS”

**APRIL 10, 2019**

Susan Lundberg “THE HISTORY OF SLEEPY HOLLOW”

**MAY 8, 2019**

“FOUNDERS DAY” celebration of “Bismarck’s Birthday”

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

All programs, unless noted otherwise, will begin at 6:30 and be held in Room A at the Bismarck Public Library.

More information on coming events in the next newsletter.