

Dick Bernard
6905 Romeo Road
Woodbury MN 55125-2421
651-334-5744
dick.bernard@icloud.com
<https://thoughtstowardsabetterworld.org>
<https://chez-nous.net>
<https://amillioncopies.info>

See July 11, 2022

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TRAVEL NOTES JULY 5-8, 2022

I'm lifelong North Dakota. Even though I have not lived in the state since 1965, North Dakota will always be home. We moved frequently when I was growing up – by my count I lived in eight different towns (11 homes), my younger siblings in at least two others. We don't even have a "home town" with attendant roots. "Home" for us was the entire state.

My first ancestor to visit North Dakota was Samuel Collette, with Sibley's 1st Regiment Minnesota Mounted Rangers (Co G) in 1862-63 in the then campaign to move the native Americans across the Missouri River. . In August, 1863 they reached what would later become Bismarck ND. Samuel was a private, an immigrant from Quebec in 1857.

Later, beginning 1878, many of Samuel's Quebec family moved to northeast North Dakota (Oakwood), and in 1881, 8 years before ND became a state, my Grandma Josephine was born at then-St. Andrews where the Park and Red Rivers meet east of Grafton.

In 1905, my mother's parents, Ferdinand and Rosa Busch, married in Wisconsin and moved west to never-plowed ground in LaMoure County, roughly equidistant within the triangle of LaMoure, Berlin and Grand Rapids.

The pre-oil boom in North Dakota crested in perhaps 1910. Rural ND population declined consistently in the 20th century. Small towns became smaller and smaller, and many disappeared.

23andMe sums me up, thusly: 100% Northwestern European (French and German). My first provable European ancestor came to Quebec in 1634, though the earliest ancestor is said to have been there in 1618 (Quebec City was founded in 1608).

THE TRIP

July 5-8 was not at dramatic trip. It was short in time and for a single purpose, to attend to my family history website at the North Dakota Historical Society in Bismarck (archive 11082). This has been a major project of mine for the last seven years, and I'm nearing completion on it. This trip was working on the Bernard-Collette portion, and the bulk of my time in Bismarck was in the reading room of the archives working on the contents of Boxes 29 and 30. I accomplished what I set out to do. There is clean-up work to do.

Going and coming, I like to touch base with friends in the state. This is a rich part of my journeys. I couldn't see everyone I hoped to, but many thanks to those who I could.

Bismarck is about 440 miles from where I live; Fargo is about half way. (Chicago is about 400 miles from here). Today it is all Interstate, but as I age it is not an easy drive: endurable but recovery time required.

Each time I travel the road I remember the first time I was on I-94. It was in the summer of 1958 when I began college. The first segment was opened between Jamestown and Valley City. When I drove it, the shoulders were not yet completed. It was said to cost “a million dollars a mile” and we were impressed. In 1959, the long famous Buffalo was introduced to I-94 travelers at Jamestown. We saw it early on after its dedication. Description at tinyurl.com/2p8fskz9.

The North Dakota I saw this year was plush and green compared to near drought conditions in 2021. 2020 there was no trip: Covid-19.

There is a tendency to stereotype North Dakota. My favorite is from the Coen Brothers iconic film “Fargo”, which is not really based on North Dakota or Fargo, but nonetheless the Fargo Visitors Bureau showcases the famous Woodchipper used in the film.

Near the end of the film, in my recollection, one of the villains is attempting to recover a stash of loot buried along a road in the flattest part of North Dakota. The land is snow-covered, and there is absolutely no landmark of any kind to actually locate the stash. It characterizes North Dakota, pure and simple. Nothingness. Not true at all.

The real North Dakota, including the 200 or so miles I traversed, is certainly not mountainous; neither is it flat as a floor once one clears the Red River Valley, the floor of ancient glacial lake Agassiz.

This summer the gently rolling hills, largely devoid of trees, mostly crop or grazing land, interspersed with ponds called “sloughs” or “potholes” is a very inviting environment to this traveling tourist.

The landscape is rarely interfered with by towns of any size. A large part of this is due to the fact that the Interstate bypasses all towns, whereas the previous U.S. Highway 10 went through all of them.

The exceptions – the places with more than one exit – are Fargo-Moorhead, Valley City, Jamestown, and Bismarck. It is about 60 miles from Fargo to Valley City; 40 Valley City to Jamestown; 100 Jamestown to Bismarck, and several available and well-kept rest areas in between. (Only Dickinson, west of Bismarck would count as a city.)

There is plenty to see in North Dakota, depending on your interest. The Heritage Center by the State Capitol in Bismarck, my destination, is a very impressive and interesting place, with major exhibits on paleontology, archaeology and antiquity.

As the ad for Nebraska tourism states, North Dakota is not for everyone. Those looking for shopping malls and theme parks probably are best advised to look elsewhere. North Dakota Tourism guide is very helpful: <https://www.ndtourism.com>.

As I have noted to others, I most enthusiastically recommend the new Clay Jenkinson book about North Dakota, “The Language of Cottonwoods” which fleshes out the totality of North Dakota.