



# NORWEGIAN AMERICAN WOMEN

*Migration, Communities, and Identities*

*Edited by*

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS

# Land Taking at Spirit Lake: The Competing and Converging Logics of Norwegian and Dakota Women, 1900–1930

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My Norwegian grandmother, Helene Haugen Kanten, told stories about growing up on an Indian reservation: “[My mother] took land; she took homestead on the Indian Reservation. And that’s where they chased the Indians off, you see, and took the land away from them.” The idea seemed incongruous: what circumstances would allow a young girl, recently emigrated from Norway with her widowed mother, to live on land belonging by treaty to Native Americans?<sup>1</sup>

When I first had occasion to visit the Spirit Lake Dakota Reservation in North Dakota, I discovered that my great-grandmother was not the only Norwegian to homestead there. Nor was she the only woman. And while Helene Haugen Kanten got it right that the Dakotas were dispossessed of large amounts of land, in fact, most tribal members remained on the reservation. In the early twentieth century, the Dakotas and the Norwegians vied for resources, made competitive bids for land, haggled over the price of rent, shared the burdens of rural life, and lost children to epidemics. With the grave injustice of Indian dispossession as a backdrop, these unlikely neighbors endured fierce winters, cultivated gardens, and rooted their kinship in the land.

When the reservation was established in 1867, a territory covering approximately two hundred forty thousand acres was recognized as Dakota tribal land. The treaty founding the reservation used Devils Lake as its northern border and the Sheyenne River as its southern one. The lake’s name had been changed to reflect the white Christian interpretation of its meaning, and the reservation was named accordingly. It included a military reserve, with Fort Totten at its geographic and administrative center.<sup>2</sup>

Starting in 1890, reservation land was allotted to individual Dakota men, women, and children, and the remainder opened to white homesteaders in 1904. Land quickly passed out of the Dakotas’ hands. By 1910, only half of privately owned reservation land belonged to individual tribal members. In the decades that followed, white settlers continued to move onto the reservation, Norwegians in even greater numbers. By 1929, the Dakotas’ share had diminished to one-quarter. By then, nearly half of the reservation land was owned by first-, second-,



*Helene Haugen Kanten, confirmation portrait, ca. 1907*

and third-generation Scandinavians, predominantly Norwegians. And, like my great-grandmother, almost a quarter (24 percent) of those Scandinavian landowners was female.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter details the processes by which the Dakotas were allotted land at Spirit Lake and Norwegians, including women, came to homestead the unallotted land. Despite the fact that property holding for one group was predicated on the dispossession of another, both groups were poor. The two dislocated peoples came to the region by profoundly different routes and entered land ownership with sometimes converging and other times clashing cultural logics of land. I argue that land ownership provided both Dakota and Norwegian women a means for their livelihood, a center for their kinship networks and community, long-term insurance to support themselves in widowhood and old age, and a place to live and practice their culture. Remarkably, land offered both Dakota and Norwegian women a base for survival and the prospect of a multigenerational legacy.

### The Competing Logics: Territorial Use versus Land Ownership

On the reservation, divergent histories meant that Dakotas and Norwegians both revered land but imagined using it in different ways. Historically the Dakotas had approached land as a gift that yielded the means for living and as a territory that had to be negotiated with competing tribes. Norwegians had the advantage of wanting to own land for themselves and embracing the logic of land accumulation, consonant with U.S. property laws and the dominant American ethos. Even though they came as poor people, they devoted their collective energies to cultivating land and retaining it over generations.

The convergence of immigration, economic opportunity, and federal policy

positioned Norwegians to gain from the opening of homestead land at the Spirit Lake Dakota Reservation. The costs to land seekers of the government's offer of land—relocation, back-breaking labor, and participation in usurping Indians' resources—were balanced by the benefits: satisfaction of the unrelenting peasant hunger for land and the promise of a viable economic future for the family. The costs to Dakotas included further erosion of their land base and the social and economic intrusion of white settlers. The tribe was to benefit financially from the payments for the land and, from the perspective of non-Native reformers, an Americanizing influence on the reservation. Ironically, although the U.S. government cast homesteading first- and second-generation immigrants as representatives of American culture who would help assimilate the native people as they lived side by side on the reservation, many spoke little English and most arrived with few resources other than kin and labor power. However, many homesteaders, coming as they did from farms in Norway or other midwestern states, had some knowledge of subsistence agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

The reservation was designated by treaty as the tribal base for the Sissetons, Wahpetons, and Cut-Head (Pabaksa) bands of Dakota. Like the Norwegians, many of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota had traveled far to make a life there. Although the region south of Devils Lake had been a hunting territory for the Yanktonai, or Ihanktonwanna (of which the Cut-Heads were a part), it had not been a place of permanent settlement for the Sisseton and Wahpeton, whose primary territory for generations had been southern and central Minnesota. The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 sparked violent repression, prompting these Dakotas to venture north and west in search of refuge.<sup>5</sup>

As American Indians, the Dakotas had a unique relationship with the federal government, which regulated land ownership and the prospects of moving on (or not) and influenced how they could use land. Living on a reservation created a sometimes tense, always dependent relationship with the U.S. government that was mediated by the Indian agent and federal employees, which included soldiers until 1890 when Fort Totten was decommissioned and demilitarized.<sup>6</sup>

In 1887, Congress passed the General Land Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, with the stated intent to assimilate American Indians into the agricultural economy by granting privately owned property—allotments—to individuals. The law allotted tribal members parcels of land on reservations that had formerly belonged to a tribe as a whole. Informed by an idealization of the yeoman farmer and a desire to take Indian land, the Dawes Act was based on the presumption that enabling individual Indians to own a plot of 160 acres (instead of sharing vast acreages owned collectively by their nation) would encourage them to develop farms, learn the logic of private property, and assimilate into the agricultural economy and U.S. culture. In addition to attempting to transform the communal character of Native society, the Dawes Act was designed to

transfer millions of acres from American Indians to European immigrants and Yankees, who would utilize the land "efficiently" and serve as an example of individual enterprise to the Natives among whom they lived. According to Indian agent F. O. Getchell, by 1902, 1,132 Spirit Lake Dakota had received allotments totaling 131,506 acres.<sup>7</sup>

The Dawes Act mandated that each man and woman who was head of household be allotted 160 acres. Unlike the Homestead Act, married Dakota women were allotted land, but only half the amount allotted to men. Children were each allotted eighty acres. The Dakotas' land allotments were concentrated in three areas on the reservation: St. Michael's Mission, Crow Hill, and Wood Lake, in the northern and western areas, which tended to be hillier and more wooded, more similar to terrain enabling mixed use of the land.<sup>8</sup>

The imposition of the logic of private land ownership and the push to engage exclusively in sedentary agriculture clashed with the Dakotas' historical approach to land. In Minnesota, the Dakotas had treated land as territory they collectively controlled in order to hunt, gather foodstuffs, and cultivate seasonal crops. From their perspective, their band was entitled to use the land and reap its resources. Tribal member Phillip John Young said, "The Indians, they felt that traditionally they shouldn't own land. You *couldn't* own land because it's not yours." Mari Sandoz writes that land "was held for tribal use and for posterity." For the Sioux, "sale of land . . . meant sale of the use." Selling or negotiating that right implied use of the land but not proprietary control. In contrast, white settlers viewed ownership as entitling them to monitor access and make absolute and authoritative decisions. Their beliefs embraced the principle of private property as the foundation of the legal system and the agricultural economy. This clash in logics led to profound misunderstandings and sometimes had disastrous consequences.<sup>9</sup>

In recognition of Indians' unfamiliarity with and opposition to private property ownership, the Dawes Act stipulated that the allotted land be held in trust by the U.S. government for twenty-five years. Thereafter the allottee was to obtain the patent—the legal title—to the land. The trust status of the land was to prevent scheming, land-hungry whites from defrauding Indians and to allow Indians to adjust to a landowning logic and family farming. Indians whose land was held in trust did not enjoy the same privileges and responsibilities as non-Indian landowners. For example, allottees could not take out a mortgage on the property. Nor could they sell the land; first they had to petition for the patent to the land and prove their fitness, or "competence," to act independently. By design, full-blooded tribal members were assumed to be "incompetent," that is, unable to manage their legal affairs. However, they could make a case to the Indian agent that they were "competent" to handle the responsibilities of land ownership and petition to receive the patent. Importantly, because an allottee

did not own land outright (it was held in trust) and was not formally a citizen of the United States (but rather a member of a domestic dependent nation), he or she did not pay property taxes on the land. Being declared "competent" enabled a person not just to take the title but to obtain a mortgage. Ironically, competency, and hence outright ownership, could encumber the owner with debt and taxation and consequently was often a fast path to dispossession.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with the Dawes Act, after a period following allotment, the Spirit Lake Dakota signed an agreement in 1901 conceding one hundred thousand acres to white homesteaders with the promise of receiving fees for the acreage. The U.S. Congress delayed but finally approved the agreement and passed legislation in 1904. To organize the process of land taking, the federal government designed a lottery to select potential homesteaders. The first six hundred names chosen won the right to claim a quarter section of land (160 acres) on the reservation for \$4.50 an acre and a pledge to improve the land. The appearance of equal opportunity in the lottery was undermined by the entrance rules that favored adult men, who could enter whether single, married, or widowed, as long as they were twenty-one or older. In keeping with the stipulations of the Homestead Act, married women could *not* enter the lottery; women had to be twenty-one or over and single, widowed, divorced, or head of household.<sup>11</sup>

Women homesteaded for a range of reasons, but all sought the economic foothold that landowning provided. For single immigrant women, whose primary occupation in the United States was domestic service, land taking offered a unique opportunity. Were they to marry, they would no longer be eligible to homestead in their own names. Katherine Harris writes that for young women in northeastern Colorado, "one of the essential attractions of homesteading was the independence that proving up a claim offered. Self-determination was not an option generally available to their sex." Widowed women, regardless of age, shared many of the same obstacles to self-sufficiency, as did married women who had few employment options, particularly while raising children. Homesteading offered a potential investment with prospects for long-term productive labor. Barbara Handy-Marchello reframes our thinking about the legislation, the constraints on women's marital status notwithstanding, by pointing to the opportunities previously unthinkable to women.<sup>12</sup>

On August 9, 1904, it was a single woman, Carrie Fisher of Grafton, North Dakota, who stood first in line at the Grand Forks Land Office when it opened to register people for the land lottery. She was followed by a "long line of women" who wanted a chance to homestead cheap land. These women, and the many who joined them later, understood and valued privately owned land. Their pursuit of private land ownership promised them a major advantage in planning their futures. Over the course of two weeks, 15,076 people entered the lottery, and six hundred names were chosen, many of them female, some Norwegian. Six

years later, women constituted 13 percent of the Scandinavian landowners on the reservation. By then, Scandinavians owned virtually half of the new homesteading land. Homesteading resulted in the migration of many white landowners and their families to the reservation and created a local and immediate clash of cultural logics. The new inhabitants brought different languages, religious beliefs, food, and approaches to land.<sup>13</sup>

The settlers and the Indians found a common ground in leasing land. To provide income, Indian land could be leased by non-Indian farmers, an arrangement often encouraged by Indian agents. It had a rationality of its own: renting or leasing land was consistent with Dakotas' sense of territorial use, and it allowed Dakotas to live on a portion of the land but not have to cultivate it themselves. Renters would pay with half the crop in lieu of liquid cash or make an annual payment after harvest. For the most part, the Dakota farmers at Spirit Lake were not producing for a national market; most plots were too small and their farms undercapitalized. Importantly, funds from leasing could be easily divided among multiple owners, which the land could not if it were to support a household.

At the same time, leasing benefited Norwegians who needed to expand their acreage under cultivation in order to succeed under an industrializing system of agriculture. Renting land required less capital than outright purchase, so it created a way for Norwegian farmers to expand their production without investing money (that they might otherwise have to borrow). The Dakotas' willingness to lease land to them on a case-by-case basis enabled them to become commercially viable in an environment that required economies of scale. The process of leasing—sometimes negotiated directly and other times through the Bureau of Indian Affairs—engaged Norwegians and Dakotas directly with each other and allowed them to pursue their sense of the best use of land while they lived as neighbors. In this way, the shared logic of the use of land for a fee enabled Dakotas and Norwegians to find common ground.<sup>14</sup>

### Norwegian Demographic Dominance

In 1904, when the Spirit Lake Dakota Reservation was opened to white settlement, Norwegians were the largest ethnic group in the state. Importantly, they were concentrated in the counties surrounding and overlapping with the reservation: Benson, Eddy, and Nelson. They were well positioned to claim land when it became available.

Norwegians had been coming to the United States since the 1820s but began arriving in large numbers after the Civil War. The peak period of Norwegian immigration was from 1876 to 1890, just when Dakota Territory was surveyed and vast tracts of homestead land made available on the Upper Great Plains.



*Map showing Devils Lake region*

Norwegians were actively recruited by the territorial government through propaganda published in Norwegian and agents sent to Norway.<sup>15</sup>

Many Norwegians came to North America in pursuit of land. Under the strain of Norway's population growth and limited arable land base, Norwegians immigrated to the Midwest in general and North Dakota in particular; many sought land they could own, land that would support them and their children in a way denied them if they remained in Norway as farm laborers or cotters. Some had recently lived in Minnesota, Wisconsin, or Iowa and relocated as communities. Farming allowed them to be their own bosses. John C. Hudson argues that in seeking economic opportunities in North Dakota, people were escaping farm tenancy, which resulted from the lack of available land to buy or homestead in other states. They came to North Dakota to expand their generational prospects, for cheaper and more abundant land that would accommodate their children and extended kin. They sought to stay together in extended family groups and often took land in the vicinity of their kin and former neighbors from Norway in an effort to gain land and economic autonomy while maintaining social ties and culture.<sup>16</sup>

Sigrid Lillehaugen articulated the power of autonomy as a motivation for owning a farm. She lived in southern Walsh County, North Dakota, among her relatives and others from her district in Norway. Her husband, Tosten, claimed a

homestead and bought land. In a 1903 letter to her father back in Norway, Sigrid commented on the leverage that land provided: "It is good to have more in the hand or it will be as it has always been to work for others." Many preferred the modicum of autonomy in farming to working in a factory or being a hired farm worker or domestic servant. Owning a farm meant self-employment, although farmers could not control either the weather or the price of grain. Many land-owners had to work for wages as well, but they had taken a key step toward self-sufficiency.<sup>17</sup>

North Dakota was a state of newcomers. In 1910, the vast majority of the state's population (70.6 percent) was of foreign birth or parentage. As Table 7-1 demonstrates, foreign-born whites (27.1 percent) combined with whites of foreign or mixed (foreign and native-born) parentage (43.5 percent) significantly outnumbered native-born whites, or what I call Yankees (28.2 percent). Native American Indians constituted only 1.1 percent of the whole population and lived primarily on reservations. As mentioned above, many of the Dakotas at Spirit Lake had migrated from southern and central Minnesota.

Of those foreign-born whites, 29.4 percent were born in Norway (see Table 7-2). Another 7.8 percent were born in Sweden and 3.4 percent in Denmark, making 40.6 percent of those born outside the United States Scandinavian. Their presence shaped North Dakota's economy, politics, and culture.<sup>18</sup>

Norwegians predominated in the region surrounding the reservation. To put things in perspective, in 1902, 1,043 Dakotas lived on the reservation. While whites on the reservation were not enumerated, it is possible to generate an estimate of Norwegian concentration using the two counties (Benson and Eddy) in which the reservation falls, in addition to the adjacent county to the east (Nelson). Table 7-3 reveals that for each of the three counties, foreign-born whites and whites with at least one foreign-born parent made up over half of the population in 1910. Of those who were foreign born, Scandinavians constituted the vast majority. In turn, of those Scandinavians, Norwegians accounted for

TABLE 7-1  
Racial-Ethnic Composition in North Dakota, 1910

RACIAL-ETHNIC GROUP	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Whites: born of "native" parents	162,461	28.2
Whites: born of foreign or mixed parents	251,236	43.5
Foreign-born whites	156,158	27.1
Indians	6,486	1.1
Negroes	617	.1
Total	576,958	100

Compiled from U.S. Census, 1910

77.5 percent in Benson County, 64.1 percent in Eddy County, and 88.1 percent in Nelson County. Clearly, Norwegians were the dominant Scandinavian group in a region heavily populated by immigrants. Given the demographic distribution of the area, it is reasonable to assume that Norwegians were the majority of the Scandinavian population living on the reservation as well.<sup>19</sup>

### Landowning on the Reservation

The unallotted lands available for homesteading were concentrated on the southern, flatter part of the reservation, which perhaps made it even more attractive to Norwegians interested in farming. The nearby Sheyenne River provided drinking water for people and animals, and the valley offered wood for building and fuel, better hunting, and easier fishing. The Norwegians tended to take land in areas already populated by Norwegians, initially along rivers and creeks. Scandinavian women's land was concentrated on the southern part of the reservation along the Sheyenne River.<sup>20</sup>

Those who moved onto the reservation were not "pioneers" as those a generation before had been. In 1904, the living conditions mixed isolation and a lack

TABLE 7-2  
Countries of Origin of Foreign-born Whites, North Dakota, 1910

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	PERCENT
Norway	29.4
Russia	20.4
Canada	13.5
Germany	10.6
Sweden	7.8
Denmark	3.4
Austria	3.3
England	2
Hungary	1.8
Ireland	1.6
All other countries	6.4
Total	100

Compiled from U.S. Census, 1910

TABLE 7-3  
Foreign-born Whites and Scandinavians in Benson, Eddy, and Nelson Counties, North Dakota, 1910

	BENSON COUNTY	EDDY COUNTY	NELSON COUNTY
Total county population	12,681	4,800	10,140
Foreign-born whites	3,042	1,133	2,955
Norway	1,650	430	1,886
Sweden	388	215	190
Denmark	90	26	64
Total Scandinavian			
as percentage of foreign born	2,128 (70%)	671 (59.2%)	2,140 (72.4%)
Whites born to foreign or mixed parents	3,466	1,456	3,469
Foreign born + those with at least one foreign-born parent	6,508 (51.3%)	2,589 (53.9%)	6,424 (63.4%)

Compiled from U.S. Census, 1910

of electricity, indoor plumbing, and inadequate roads with advanced transportation and unprecedented connections to the world economy. As railroads penetrated the area—to Warwick on the reservation, to New Rockford in the south, and to Devils Lake in the north—small villages had greater access to urban centers and regional grain markets. Unlike farmers of the previous generation, who broke sod with a walking plow pulled by oxen, many of the homesteaders hired out the land breaking to a Yankee who owned a big steam engine rig and lived on the reservation.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the settlers did not stay for long. The hardships were too great and farming too unpredictable. Prompted by the diminishing supply of affordable land (North Dakota land values more than tripled between 1900 and 1910) and searching for a way to make a living in the wheat economy, some continued west while others ventured north. Sigrid Lillehaugen, who lived in Walsh County off the reservation, observed in a letter home in 1903, "All the land around here is taken. Those who want Homestead land have to go to Minot or to Canada." Land available for purchase had risen in value: "Here the land is up to two, yes, even \$3,000 a quarter. That is a lot of money. The poor can never pay that price when they buy." Amid these rising prices, we can imagine the clamor for these vast acres of reservation land, seemingly "unused" to the Norwegian and the Yankee eye, suitable for farming and available at below-market rates.<sup>22</sup>

And yet, many ethnic Norwegians remained over generations. North Dakota was a rural state with an agriculturally based economy. The majority of Americans dwelled in cities as of 1920, but in 1930, 83 percent of North Dakota's population was still rural. Norwegians, more than any other Euro-American group, including other Scandinavians, tended to stay clustered in rural communities for generations. With the Norwegians' proclivity for farming and rural living, Norwegian communities consolidated and endured on the reservation as they did elsewhere in North Dakota.<sup>23</sup>

By 1929, the staying power of Norwegians became clear as they continued to accumulate land on the reservation. Scandinavian landowners held an average of 212.6 acres each (see Table 7-4), reflecting growth and consolidation of farms since the initial land taking in 1904 (average acreage was 149.5 in 1910). Still, their acreage was less than half the average farm size in the state as a whole: 500 acres in 1930. On the reservation, the land had been made available to homesteaders only in 160-acre parcels, and a person could acquire more land only through purchase, marriage, or inheritance.<sup>24</sup>

While the Norwegians gained, the Dakotas lost. By 1929, more than a generation after allotment, Dakotas' average landholdings had shrunk to 83.8 acres each, smaller than the average size in 1910 and even less adequate to sustain a family through cultivation. While Dakota landowners were more numerous than Scandinavians, the total acreage owned by Dakotas had declined significantly as

TABLE 7-4

## Acreage Owned at Spirit Lake Reservation by Gender and Race-Ethnicity, 1929

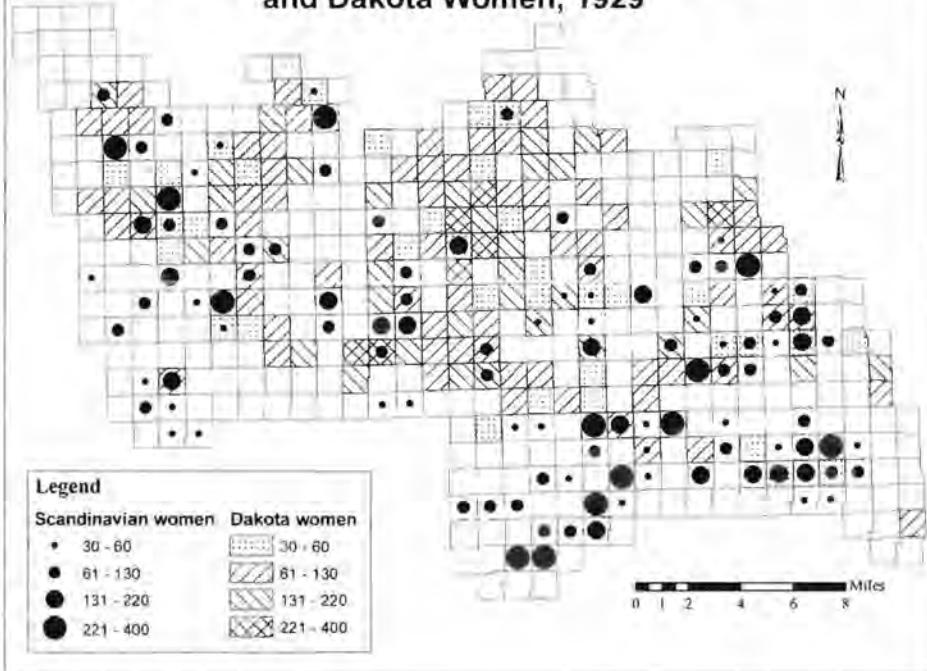
	TOTAL ACREAGE OWNED	MEAN ACREAGE (AC)	FEMALE (%)	MALE (%)	UNKNOWN (%)
Indian	49,209	83.8 (587)	83.0 (205)	84.4 (380)	60.0 (2)
Scandinavian	73,331	212.6 (345)	152.7 (83)	237.2 (242)	163.2 (20)
Yankee	30,238	200.3 (151)	127.7 (33)	229.3 (109)	113.9 (9)
German	70,024	241.3 (83)	182.6 (16)	262.2 (64)	106.7 (3)
Canadian and other foreign born	13,119	305.1 (43)	242.0 (5)	313.4 (38)	—
Unidentified Ethnicity	16,746	119.6 (140)	145.6 (48)	111.6 (55)	97.6 (37)
Total	202,667	115.5 (1,349)	150.2 (390)	168.1 (888)	117.5 (71)

well, from 99,038 acres in 1910 to 49,209 acres in 1929. Most Dakotas did not own their land outright at this point; their land continued to be held in trust. When an allottee died, the land was divided among the heirs. If no heirs could be identified, a patent was assigned to the land, and it was put on the market for closed bidding. In this way, many original allotments were sold to whites. While some Indians did attempt to purchase land, they were greatly outnumbered by local farmers, speculators, and land investors with more resources.<sup>25</sup>

Dakota women represented the largest group of female landowners on the reservation. The growing scholarship on the indigenous ownership of land tends to neglect gender, making this analysis of landowning at Spirit Lake all the more striking. As evident in Table 7-4, Dakota women were significant landowners, comprising 35 percent of Dakota landowners in 1929. These rates are astonishingly high in comparison to those of non-Indian women. In her studies of homesteading, which was just one path to land ownership, Elaine Lindgren found that women claimed an average of 10 to 12 percent of homesteads in North Dakota. A 1920 study examined the ownership of farms rented to tenants in the north-central states and found that only 8 percent of the owners of North Dakota farms were women, even though the average was about 16 percent in the region overall. By all of these standards, the proportion of Dakota women owning land was high, as was that of Scandinavian women: 24 percent of Scandinavian landowners were women in 1929.<sup>26</sup>

The comparative amount of land women controlled is equally important in assessing the gendered dimensions of landowning on the reservation. Consistently across the region and across ethnic groups, men owned more land than women. However, Dakota women came close to parity with men; they owned on average 98 percent of the amount of land that men owned (83 acres versus 84.4 acres). This parity may reflect the consequences of receiving allotments and

### Amount of Land Owned by Scandinavian and Dakota Women, 1929



inheriting land in equal numbers. When allottees died, their land was divided equally among their heirs, male and female alike. By 1903, one-third of the original allottees had already died. Over time, the disparity between men and women narrowed, and Dakota women continued to be major landholders in the tribe. As evident in the GIS-generated map of female land ownership in 1929, Dakota women's holdings were largely in the northern, central, and western areas of the reservation.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Scandinavian women became a larger proportion of landowners, yet the inequality of acreage owned increased between men and women. Of the various ethnic groups, Scandinavian women owned approximately 64 percent of the average acreage of Scandinavian men. Still, Scandinavian women owned an average of 152.7 acres, almost double that of Dakota women and men. Canadian and other European and German women owned a considerably higher ratio compared to men (77 percent and 70 percent, respectively). Interestingly, the largest disparity in acreage owned was between the holdings of Yankee women—those identified by Lindgren as the most active homesteaders elsewhere in North Dakota—and those of Yankee men. In 1929, on

average, these native-born women owned just 56 percent of the acreage owned by Yankee men.

### The Meanings of Land

Land taking was shaped by culture, history, and individual inclination, as well as by law. While Norwegian and Dakota women differed in how they acquired land and in how much land they owned, they shared some perspectives on the meanings and use of land. Both groups faced economic and cultural challenges in the U.S. economy that land ownership helped them meet. Land provided the means to feed the family. It enabled both groups of women to grow vegetable gardens, raise chickens and cows, and engage in other subsistence-oriented work.

For most of the Dakota women, the reservation was not ancestral territory, but two generations after the reservation was established, it had become a tribal base. With that designation came some shelter and food, however limited. Over time it became home, a place where kin lived and visitors gathered. Eunice Davidson relayed her Dakota grandmother's perspective about her land: "She always made that remark that the land was one of the greatest gifts. That's what it was to her, a gift, she said . . . when you give something to an Indian, back then and now, that's really a gift you get, and you really cherish it." Dakota women were determined to maintain a base to practice their culture and raise their children. The land provided a vital foundation on which to build a physical and metaphorical home. Individual holdings were too small to farm profitably, although women were able to plant huge gardens. Nor was most Indian land a fungible asset because of its trust status.<sup>28</sup>

On the reservation, both Dakota and Scandinavian women commonly leased out their land. Some Dakota women also made efforts to accumulate land to generate income for their families. Mary Blackshield was one of the few Dakota women who made a bid to purchase available Indian land in 1913. Approximately ten years later, she rented land to the Knudson family, who lived on the reservation. Bjorne Knudson recollects a time during the 1920s when, as a boy of twelve, he drove a team of horses north of Fort Totten with a rig to plow a field belonging to Blackshield. Because the land was so distant from his home, he stayed at the Blackshield home and took meals there for a week while he plowed.<sup>29</sup>

Norwegian women recognized that land could generate annual income as well, through renting it for cultivation or harvesting the wild hay that grew abundantly on the reservation. For example, my great-grandmother, Berthe Haugen, testified in her final proof of homestead claim that she cultivated oats and flax on sixty-five acres, harvested wild hay, and rented her twenty-one-acre pasture to a neighbor for his cattle. Renting out the land could provide the owner a

dividend, paid in either crops or cash. Gust and Annie Berg struggled to remember the name of the woman from whom they rented land after they were married in 1922: "We just had eighty acres. That belonged to somebody, some lady that homesteaded. Her name was . . . what was her first name?" Annie replied, "Albert Olson's . . ." Gust interrupted, "Sister, yeah."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to generating income, owning land gave women the power to say no. When Norwegian immigrant Bertine Sem proved up her claim in Bottineau County in 1904, three neighbors attested to the fact that she had lived on the land and cultivated eighty acres. "Satisfied that she was in fact a *bona fide* farmer, the government granted her a deed to the land." She married Erick Sannes almost immediately thereafter and started a family.<sup>31</sup>

To meet the needs of the family, it eventually became necessary to expand the size of the farm. Most farmers used their land as collateral to buy more land, but Bertine, who had worked so hard to retain the title to her land in her own name, refused to risk mortgaging her farm. She insisted they find another way. Her independent ownership of land entitled her to veto a maneuver that would risk her financial security. Because her name was on the patent, she could say no.<sup>32</sup>

For Norwegians, land was an anchor in the new world, a place to make a living and raise a family. Norwegian women sought economic independence, long-term security, and the ability to make strategic contributions to their current kin and future households. As Lori Ann Lahlum found in her study of farming practices on the Great Plains, Norwegian women took an "agricultural rather than aesthetic" perspective on the land. Lois Olson Jones, of Swedish and Irish ancestry, framed the issues grandly: "We're the people that feed the world. And if you have land, you can have cattle and you can have gardens and whatever."<sup>33</sup>

Elizabeth Hampsten has found that while white women in North Dakota were unlikely to identify emotionally with the land in their diary and memoir writing, they focused on the continuity and livelihood it provided. As one Norwegian woman living near Devils Lake wrote in 1889 to her cousin in Norway, "You say aunt wonders whether I still own land. Well I have it mainly because as long as I keep it we have a home. Mother lives there mostly alone. I am at home in the winter time and gone in the summer." (Her summer job cooking for a "tight American" helped to pay for food and wood to support her mother and herself through the winter.) The letter writer continued, "You know I cannot take care of the land like a man. All I can do is to live there as much as I can and to plow what I can so that no one can take it away from me because I hope in time to sell and maybe get a couple of thousand dollars for it if we get railway over here."<sup>34</sup>

Hopeful speculation aside, the letter writer's land, at the very least, was a home for herself and her mother. She realized that her crops might not yield

much, depending on the weather. Land was a place to live, it potentially yielded annual income, and if a person got lucky, he or she could turn a handsome profit from selling it. Though it seldom generated riches, land was a prudent investment that owners assumed would increase in value, regardless of its annual crop yield or improvements.

In addition to providing income, land could enhance women's and men's prospects on the marriage market. Single women with land were surely more attractive to male farmers than women without. Presumably the reverse held true as well. Julius Fjeld, who grew up in Nelson County and later homesteaded in Ward County, married a homesteading woman, Mary Rue. Using his neighbors as an example, Julius explained that "you couldn't take a homestead if you was married, a lady couldn't. But, she had a homestead and he had a homestead. And one of them proved up so that they could marry." Sem left Norway expressly to homestead land in North Dakota. She settled in Bottineau County in 1902 and worked the land to improve it. In two and a half years, she took title to her homestead. A month after filing for her patent, she married.<sup>35</sup>

Land and kinship were deeply intertwined in Norwegian law and culture. According to Mark R. G. Goodale and Per Kåre Sky, "traditionally, farms were thought not to belong to individuals only, but to all related kindred if the farm had been in the possession of a family for a certain period of time." Informed by their history of working the land, Norwegians were aware of the intense labor and commitment required to operate a successful farm. Handy-Marchello articulated the long-term multigenerational approach to land and posterity: "In North Dakota, many women identified their personal or their family's security with ownership of a productive farm. Farm families expected to prosper through generations linked to each other by their work and presence on the land." While she found the land-keeping ethic across groups, it perhaps held true more for immigrant groups that came from agricultural societies. Particularly on homesteads and previously uncultivated land, it was essential to take the long-term view, as it took years to create a farm. Success could only be measured over time as land stayed in family hands and continued to produce. In interviews with contemporary women landowners of all different ethnicities, researchers found that women "kept their land primarily for family reasons. They either lived on the farms or maintained ownership from a distance because of a desire to keep the land in the family."<sup>36</sup>

The endurance of Norwegian communities was linked to the kin-based, labor-intensive (rather than capital- and machinery-intensive) form of agriculture they practiced. Farmers had to muster many hands to help with periods of harvest. Drawing on extended kin was as important as having many children. Having a network of relatives meant that farmers could share not only equipment and labor but also information and support.<sup>37</sup>

Like the Dakotas, the Norwegians sought to live as close to one another as possible. Brothers and sisters homesteaded on adjacent sections of land. Adult children staked out land for their parents, who followed them to the new country. Parents purchased more land when possible to sell to their children later at below-market prices. Clusters of neighbors moved from villages in Norway to townships in the United States. Newcomers sought out people who spoke their language, made their favorite foods, and told jokes they understood. Handy-Marchello argues that Norwegian women fought to keep their land because it anchored them in a familiar culture in a foreign country: "These Norwegian immigrant women understood that losing the farm might mean moving out of the community. If they had to move, they might end up in a Yankee community where they would be outsiders."<sup>38</sup>

This pattern is visible in the clustering of family names on the plat maps. Oral histories attest to the importance of choosing land near relatives. Geographic clusters of kin-owned land facilitated sharing labor and farm equipment, which was too cumbersome to transport on bad roads. Because of the isolation of dispersed households founded through homesteading and allotment, companionship was also a motivating factor. Barbara Levorsen told of the joy people found in speaking with others from the same village or valley in Norway, people who spoke the same dialect and might have news of the folks back home. As Lahlum puts it, the shared language and culture helped to mitigate the extreme "strangeness" of the new land and its economy.<sup>39</sup>

The link between place and kinship shows up in numerous stories of illness and grief. Gravestones rooted losses in a particular place. The Lillehaugens of Walsh County lost five of their eleven children to disease and accidents in the early twentieth century. Yet they remained among their kin and fellow Norwegians. Handy-Marchello astutely articulates the paradox: "The bond between family and farm was both beneficial and tyrannical: land was a powerful benefactor that supported large families over generations, and land was an enemy that drained families of money, health, hope, and sometimes even life." For some families, surviving meant staying where people knew them and could help them. As Norman Forde put it, "I don't think they had any choice . . . they had to live some way."<sup>40</sup>

For the Dakota as a people, the loss of ancestral land frames stories of the past. Grace Lambert, a Dakota elder, reveals the impact of a family tragedy a generation after military defeat.

My father was farming . . . my parents were on a homestead. So, naturally we were there. And that was really good I thought, because I can always remember seeing scenes like my dad used to plow, plow the field, to put in his grain . . . Then when I became about eight years old I think,

my grandmother got killed by lightning. [She was] my dad's mother . . . And my dad . . . just couldn't stand it, . . . so we left the homestead, and then some white man got it.

"Some white man got it." With this simple statement, Lambert expresses her feeling that her family had been robbed of something rightfully theirs. The passage of Dakota land to whites was repeated over decades. The Dakotas held less land on the reservation as their Euro-American neighbors acquired more. Her statement about the consequences of this incident rings with inevitability, a despairing acceptance that the invisible arm of the market had joined with the heavy hand of the federal government to take Indian land from a Dakota family and transfer it to a white owner. Her reflections on how it *felt* as an eight-year-old obscured the particulars of the land sale. Yet her statement exposes traces of the bitterness that she, an elder of the tribe who was sixty-eight years old at the time of the interview, felt after witnessing the cumulative impact of sixty years of land transfer from Indian to white owners.<sup>41</sup>

The paradox of the land—that it both gave and extracted life—existed in tension with a deep-seated land-keeping ethic. Land gave sustenance, fed people, and provided a safe harbor. It simultaneously demanded bone-wearying work and provoked worry and fear of loss. Land was everything. Lois Olson Jones, of Swedish and Irish ancestry, reflected, "It's instilled on *me* that land, you don't sell land, once you get it. You hang onto land." In a similar vein, Eunice Davidson, of Dakota ancestry, recalls clearly the message of her grandmother:

She said, "Don't ever sell the land." Both my grandmas did. On my mom and my dad's side. They both felt strongly about the land. My grandma, Alvina Alberts, she always said, "Don't sell the land. Whatever you do, don't sell the land." So they both felt very strong about that. And I think it was because they were nomads for, you know, from back to their parents to their grandparents. They always



Two Dakota women on a wagon trail

moved around, but they always had land. They didn't have to fight for it. Then all of a sudden they were fighting the whites for their land.

The grandmothers' advice rang true for the granddaughters of the reservation, be they Scandinavian or Dakota. Both groups of women embraced this ethic, a belief that coalesces the competing logics of land in the next generation. Divergent histories led these peoples to the same place. The Scandinavians were more or less able to act on the grandmothers' wisdom. The Dakotas as a whole were not. In the face of dispossession, this shared insight takes on tragic dimensions.<sup>42</sup>

### Farming and the Gendered Division of Labor

Scholars have posed theoretical questions about the relationship between the gendered division of labor, women's economic contribution to households, and their status in society. The question remains: do women's economic resources—in the form of labor, wages, and wealth—translate into more power? While debating definitions, dynamics, and consequences, historical studies of women's work consistently document the extent to which women's labor and wage-earning were essential to the farm economy. To this perplexing conundrum I want to add the matter of land ownership. The value of a woman's labor is critical, but so is the value of her property. Did owning land, working the land as a partner farmer, or building community networks translate into decision-making leverage, bargaining power, old age security, or greater respect for women? What were the consequences, in both the long and short run, of women's economic contributions to their families as landowners, farm workers, and community builders?<sup>43</sup>

*Women as Partner Farmers.* While decidedly male dominated, the farm economy was also deeply gender integrated. On the Great Plains, women's labor was essential to family success and well-being, whether as gatherers or as farmers. Handy-Marchello frames these gender relations as a "partnership"; "marriage and family stability depended on the economic contributions of both husband and wife." Linking the centrality of women to the type of crop cultivated, Handy-Marchello argues that "the instability of wheat farming made women's productive activities on the farm central to the family's survival and success, not peripheral." Handy-Marchello's conception of women as partner farmers renders their work visible and important in ways that conventional portraits of women as helpmates or housekeepers ignore.<sup>44</sup>

The labor provided by partner farmers placed a premium on marriage. As Carrie Young insightfully observes in her biography of her Norwegian mother, "Homesteading men were desperate for wives." The sex ratio favored women; the surplus of men in the state gave women some leverage in their marital and

economic choices. With the labor-intensive demands of rural life, male farmer needed women to make their farms viable.<sup>45</sup>

Without electrification or indoor plumbing, in remote areas where road were impassable a good part of the year, women in cash-poor households mad do through ingenuity and hard work. They hauled water, washed clothes in bi- tin tubs, warmed the house, and cooked with wood and cow chips. Each task required strenuous physical labor. For example, when Dakota elder Lamber described her life in the 1920s, she spoke of her responsibility for chopping mountains of wood to keep warm in winter. She boasted that chopping wood made her "strong and mighty." Grace Pearson, a second-generation Norwegian who lived just off the reservation, told a similar tale about hauling logs from the Sheyenne River: "When [my husband] was out working in the field, threshing and that, then I'd go down to my sister's, and she'd help me load it. And I'd haul wood home, in that old Model T." Women cooked five meals a day, took care of children, milked cows, churned butter, baked, cleaned, laundered, sewed, and knit. Men's list of chores was equally long. For example, Barbara Levorsen's father dug wells, turned the soil, tilled the fields, tended horses, hauled hay and straw for the animals, cleaned the barn, hauled manure, and made trips to town.<sup>46</sup>

The division of labor on the farm had to be flexible, although adaptations differed between racial-ethnic groups. Every group had a gendered division of labor, and which chores were appropriate for whom varied by culture. As Handy-Marchello says, "To make a northern plains farm produce, families developed an integrated system of productive and reproductive labor that extracted a huge physical and emotional toll from women, men and children. In this system, the assignment of tasks according to gender operated under rules that were both flexible and subtle." Historians of the West have found many more similarities than differences among groups of farming women, regardless of ethnicity, in part because of the work they do. Hampsten finds a common workaday reality for women in North Dakota: "Depending on where he lives, a man can be a cattle raiser, a whaler, or a miner; what women do all day long is much the same from one place to another." Glenda Riley argues that differing resources and economies of the prairies and the plains did not significantly affect women's daily lives. Rural women performed hours of back-breaking labor in the barnyard and in the house, regardless of ethnicity. Even those with sufficient resources to hire help pitched in alongside.<sup>47</sup>

Like the Norwegians, the Dakotas practiced a deeply gendered division of labor. Historically, Dakota women were responsible for cultivating crops. In addition, they dried meat, tanned hides, and foraged for edible food on the prairies. Importantly, they owned household items as well as tipis. On the reservation, Dakota women planted gardens, produced ceremonial objects such as beadwork and quilts, and occasionally snared small game. They had the power to divorce

men without stigma, and in the process they retained possession of the household and its goods. Relations between men and women “were complementary and consistent with a wider Dakota ethos which idealized both individual integrity and collective responsibility.” According to anthropologist Patricia Albers, “Men did not exert any control over the products of female subsistence and manufacturing activity. Women had the right to determine how the products of their labor would be used.” This autonomy contrasts dramatically with the practices of Norwegian households, where women’s work contributed fundamentally to the household economy but decisions were made largely by men.<sup>48</sup>

On the reservation, forms of economic subsistence shifted from growing squash and corn and seasonal hunting and fishing to a life based primarily on sedentary farming supplemented by wild game. In this transformation, the responsibility for growing crops was shifted uneasily and incompletely from women to men. The federal government set policies of tool distribution and ran educational programs that privileged men in agriculture and the cash economy and excluded women. Women continued to garden, forage, and manufacture goods for trade or sale at home.

Despite the similarities across groups, Norwegian women did more work in the fields than women of other ethnic groups. Norwegians seemed amenable to interpreting these gendered boundaries flexibly or simply disregarding them. In Norway, through the mid-nineteenth century, women were responsible for the house and barn, often running farms while men worked elsewhere in fishing and forestry. Although some chores shifted in the United States (e.g., men began milking cows), Norwegian women continued to work in the fields, at least seasonally.<sup>49</sup>

The seasonal rhythms of farm labor demanded numerous workers. Barbara Levorsen told many stories about haying and harvest time, which required all available hands, including women and girls: “Papa would guide the horses along, one on either side of the windrows, and the rake would dump constantly, leaving the hay in piles. Mama shaped these piles into haystacks and I trotted along with a big wooden rake, supposedly gathering up all the stray tufts of grass.” Levorsen’s skepticism about whether her work was actually helpful is countered by other accounts that reveal that children provided substantial help. She recalls her neighbor, Ann, not yet eleven, driving a plow: “I distinctly remember her plowing the big field next to the road, with five horses on the gang plow.”<sup>50</sup>

Levorsen’s childhood chores included hoeing weeds around newly planted trees and shoveling manure among them. Clearly remembering the weight of the expectations placed on her, she recalls exclaiming, “It was no fun being a Norwegian!” She protested not only the amount of work she had to do on the farm as a child but also her mother’s proprietary sense of how things should be done: “The way they did things in Norway was the only way for Mama.” Her

mother believed that her Norwegian cultural practices were the superior and correct approach and so expressed a kind of self-righteousness.<sup>51</sup>

The cycles of farm life, particularly those required in forging a farm on new land, made pressing demands on women. Carrie Young writes about her mother:

No matter how busy the pioneer women were with their own tasks, when their husbands came to them and said they were needed, they dropped everything and went. From the time she was married my mother always helped my father outside. The first year she helped him clear the rocks from his homestead quarter and both of her own—a bone-crushing job. My father dug out the largest rocks from the soil with a pickax, and my mother helped him carry or roll them onto a flat stone boat pulled by a team of horses.

Even though the land was much richer and less rocky than in Norway, breaking new fields required picking rocks, as reported in many accounts of homesteading. For Bertine Sem Sannes, "although household tasks increased with the birth of each child, Bertine never completely removed herself from work in the fields. One of her babies was born in a field, far from the house, where she was picking rocks with [her husband] Erick."<sup>52</sup>

In recognizing the value of their labor, women could assert limits. Lester Skjerven's mother exercised her right to draw boundaries on the basis of the sacrifices she had made in the past. Amanda Skjerven reported on the bargain her mother-in-law made in agreeing to move from Minnesota: "His mother had told him that if she moved to North Dakota, she didn't want to leave Rochester 'cause that's where her people were; that's where they came. And she said, 'If I move out to North Dakota, I'm not going into the fields to work or anything. I'm through with that.' And she stayed by that. She never did go. Although she sure did her share of work. Plenty of it, but not in the fields like she had done there." Amanda admired the many talents of her mother-in-law and also implied that she found her negotiation fair and reasonable.<sup>53</sup>

That Norwegian women worked in the fields did not mean Norwegians abandoned a gendered division of labor. Most jobs had a gender label and a preferred hierarchy. In field work, men were preferred, then big boys second, hired men third, women next, and smaller children last. However, the necessity of flexibility was understood. Young reports, "Even in later years if my brother wasn't home and my father couldn't get a hired man my mother would often go out into the fields and help my father rake hay or operate the binder that tied the wheat into sheaves."<sup>54</sup>

The account of an interview with Johanna Tvedt, which compared her life

in Norway with that in the United States, revealed that she was able to adapt to field work despite her distaste for it:

Life in Norway had been constant work, but she found that it had been nothing compared to what was expected of her in America. Obligated to her sister and brother-in-law for the price of the passage, they put her to work. The hired man was released so that Johanna would not suffer from idleness and beside her house work she cultivated corn and did other farm work generally required of a hired man. In only a matter of days Johanna found that America was not going to be such a paradise.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps Norwegian women were exploitable because they were new to the country. They often worked as domestic and farm servants. Lester Skjerven of Nelson County explained how Norwegian women contributed to the family economy: "They had to be along stacking hay, and work out in the field. Mother was telling about women [that] had little babies. They'd have the baby in the cradle at the end of the field and they'd make a round and come back and look after the baby. And go again." His wife, Amanda, elaborated that the workday was not yet over after working the fields: "And then come in and do your . . . housework and the cooking. And the men could rest." The lack of equitable leisure time was not lost on her. She carefully chronicled the skills and cumulative labor of her mother-in-law.<sup>56</sup>

While farm-making called on women of all ethnic groups to adapt, it seemed that Norwegian women were disproportionately likely to continue to work outdoors, which triggered scorn by the dominant culture. Handy-Marchello finds an "anti-rural sentiment" voiced in a larger cultural context that celebrated bourgeois womanhood and exercised suspicion toward those who were foreign born, did not speak English, and worked at physical labor. Levorsen recalls the tensions between farm women and town women, which corresponded to an ethnic divide: "It seemed that the 'Yankees' could take the settlers good butter, fresh eggs and hard-earned cash, but to take their hand in friendship was another matter." Handy-Marchello explains that "women's labor helped stigmatize their groups as un-American or hard on women." According to Levorsen, women worked with animals back in Norway and felt no disgrace in it. But in the United States, doing animal chores connoted poverty and foreignness. Ingrid Semmingsen writes that Yankees "took it for granted that immigrants would do the hardest work and get the least pay."<sup>57</sup>

In this, Norwegian and Dakota women shared a stigma. In the nineteenth century and through the early twentieth, dominant bourgeois Euro-American society constructed dichotomies as a way of defining and preserving middle-class white womanhood, distinguishing the ideal woman, who was dependent

and decorative, from useful, hard-working immigrant, Indian, and black women. Indian women historically had been viewed by white society as unequal drudges because Indian women worked hard and, from the dominant perspective, Indian men did not work hard enough. Ironically, the strenuous and skilled labor that made Indian women integral to the economic endeavors of their families and communities prompted the dominant culture to cast aspersions on them. The values of respect and honor within Dakota and Norwegian cultures are different matters and ripe for future investigation.<sup>58</sup>

For our purposes, however, on the reservation, both Dakota and Norwegian women seemed relatively oblivious to the outside valuations as they went about their lives and raised their children as best they could. Occasionally, they had to confront prejudice, on and off the reservation. My grandmother, Helene Haugen Kanten, recalled being a student in a local day school just south of the reservation in Eddy Township. Because she did not come to North Dakota until the age of eleven, what little English she spoke was laced with a strong Norwegian accent. Tired of being ridiculed by a teacher for her inadequate English and by students who called her a "squaw" because she lived on the reservation, one day she exploded with frustration. She wrestled the teacher down on a bench, sat on her, and with a shaking finger scolded, "You be good. You be good." Like Dakotas, Norwegians were forbidden to speak their language in schools and were disparaged as foreigners in Yankee communities. In contrast, when they went to a store or attended a Lutheran church on the reservation, they could be greeted in their mother tongue.<sup>59</sup>

*Operating Farms and Cultivating Community.* If women worked on farms and if they owned land, did that make them farmers? Some women who worked in the field considered themselves farmers, not just partner farmers or farm wives. Some were even given the occupational designation of "farmer" in the census, which defined the job category as "a person in charge of a farm." A report based on the 1900 census found that foreign-born women in North Dakota were more likely to be farmers than any other occupation except domestic servant. Among the foreign-born women, Norwegians were more likely than any other group to be farmers. The few adequate options for making a living as a single woman made agricultural labor appealing, particularly if a woman had children to support. Trina Dahl was widowed when her children were small. Trina "ran the farm alone. She lived a most laborious life and still she lived to be one of the very oldest members of the community. The *Wells County Free Press* had an article about her when she was 95 years old and was out in the field attempting to shock grain." In another example, Sigrid Tufte Myhre Ostrom, whose husband died after failing to prove up his preemption and before he proved up his homestead, took over the homestead in 1896, at the age of twenty-six. She had four little children,

the youngest of whom was eight months old. In 1900, she took title to the land; the census listed her as the head of the household and a farmer. She stayed on her homestead until 1907, when she remarried and moved to her new husband's farm with her children.<sup>60</sup>

Bjorne Knudson described the importance of his mother's labor in the fields while his father earned income for the family through carpentry: "Mother would try and farm and I can remember when she would have three horses on a walking plow. We called it a walking plow, because you had to walk behind it and hold it as you plowed the ground. So we farmed, as the kids got a little older, us kids, we helped her all we could." In the 1920 U.S. manuscript census, Charlotte Knudson's occupation was listed as "none;" her husband was listed as a farmer.<sup>61</sup>

Most of the few women I have found identified in the manuscript census as farmers on the Spirit Lake Dakota Reservation were widowed heads of households. Working in the fields and selling farm products did not earn a woman the title of *farmer*, clearly a valued and contested term. Lois Olson Jones declared that her aunt, Ida Olson, was not a "real farmer." Ida owned the land, but her father and her brother farmed her land. Owning land could mean working the land, leasing it, or managing a farm. For Jones, the hallowed title of *farmer* required that the person work the land.<sup>62</sup>

Women sought a voice in major decisions about the farming enterprise. Marriage led some women to assert their status as co-owners of their husbands' farms, even if their names were not on the deed. North Dakota law entitled married women "to hold as her separate property all real or personal estate owned by her at the time of her marriage and all that she may acquire afterwards." Laws insured that a widow received at least one-third of her husband's property after he died and that a homestead estate went to the surviving spouse. Sigri, who immigrated from Norway as an adult, found a good marital prospect in Hans, an affable man with two quarters of land. Sigri "was a smart woman and probably a much better manager than Hans," according to Levorsen. When Hans traveled to Norway, she stayed behind to run the farm and supervise the tenant: "It was her land now wasn't it?"<sup>63</sup>

The authority women assumed in ownership is evidenced in their use of the word "we," a perspective that assumes a common purpose, if not commonly owned land. In her letters home to Norway, Sigrid Lillehaugen speaks in the "we" voice. For example, she wrote, "We have put up well over 100 tons of hay and we have rented out just as much from the other quarter that we have taken as Homestead Land." While Lillehaugen more subtly suggested her ownership of the land than did Sigri, her phrasing nonetheless indicates that she believed homesteading to be a communal enterprise, not just her husband's responsibility.<sup>64</sup>

A dispute about farm management arose between a couple who owned land and were each used to running their own farms. Levorsen tells the story of Tostein and Tella:

I no longer remember whether Tostein came to Tella's homestead as a hired man or whether she came to his as a hired girl. However as the years passed everyone, Tostein and Tella most of all, chose to ignore that the two were not married. It was said that when Tella first came into the community she chewed and spit tobacco just like a man. She smoked as well. Gradually she gave up the chewing and tried to smoke only in private.

The two lived peacefully together most of the time, but occasionally they got into furious disputes about farm management. At such times Tella might snatch the pipe out of Tostein's mouth and puff furiously until the smoke billowed around her. Thus refreshed, she was ready to enter into the argument again.

The example illustrates Norwegian homesteaders' continued cultural isolation from hegemonic norms of femininity. At the same time, this dispute suggests that land ownership, independence, and a sense of entitlement prompted women to voice their opinions and exercise their decision-making power.<sup>65</sup>

Women also brought valuable resources to their household economies by cultivating community networks. Their social relationships affected resources available in the community as a whole as well. When an unnamed Indian visitor came to Ella Halvorson Dolbak's house off of the reservation one day when she had no fresh bread to offer, her mother gave the gift of wool socks she had knit. Her mother expressed concern that on this brisk day in late autumn the visitor was "cold on his feet." The socks were received with a smile and mutual appreciation. E. R. Manning, whose mother was Norwegian and whose Yankee father was the publisher of the *Sheyenne Star*, had multiple pairs of moccasins. He recalled that Annie Grey Wind, a Dakota woman who lived nearby, would occasionally bring her children and join the Mannings for a midday meal. His mother would give her their castoff clothing. In return, "she'd always give us moccasins. So I had moccasins; I'd wear moccasins all the time."<sup>66</sup>

Those relationships potentially translated into good will and a basis for doing business. In a land-scarce environment, having land to lease or rent meant a land-owner could use discretion about with whom to make an agreement. Consistent with Sonya Salamon's research, landowners made decisions based on their ongoing relationships with other farmers, whether kin or neighbors. Ingemund Peterson appreciated not having to go all the way to Fort Totten to pay his rent, so when his Dakota landlord showed up annually to collect, Ingemund was relieved.<sup>67</sup>

Negotiating business relationships could be complicated, as Patrick Langstaff discovered, when a piece of land had multiple owners and a farmer assumed the person with whom he or she was dealing was the sole owner. Solomon Fox was a central Dakota landowner on the reservation, and many white farmers went directly to him to make an agreement, confident of his honor and ownership status.<sup>68</sup>

Presumably because it was a landowner's market, those who wanted to rent had to cultivate relationships with landlords. The Knudsons rented land from Mike Gord (as well as Mary Blackshield, as mentioned previously), on whose land they lived. One particularly desperate year, the Gord family began showing up for the midday meal unannounced but hungry. Thereafter Mrs. Knudson would, in anticipation, set places for them at the table. Hospitality not only strengthened the community safety net; it also ensured her family's good relationships with their landlords.<sup>69</sup>

### Converging Logics in the Meanings of Land

In the early twentieth century, a confluence of global forces and local conditions brought two peoples together. Dakotas, through territorial dispossession and war, migrated to Spirit Lake and negotiated a treaty with the U.S. government to establish a reservation. Through a coincidence of timing, Norwegians migrated internationally and across North America in search of land, arrived in North Dakota, and found themselves poised to take advantage of the Indian land newly available at Spirit Lake. As a result, the Norwegians were major beneficiaries of government policies that further diminished Dakota lands. Thus the two groups lived together on the reservation, both adapting to a culture not their own but attached to the land, rooted in kin networks, and committed to a rural way of life.

In this context, Dakota and Norwegian women owned land, largely with different legal statuses. Most Dakota women owned their allotments with the land in trust, although some owned their land as citizen Indians. Norwegian women homesteaded, improved the land, made claims, and filed for patents to take title. Both occasionally bid on land for purchase. Dakota and Norwegian women frequently leased their land and sometimes cultivated part of it themselves. They farmed; they managed; they negotiated. In addition, most women grew their own gardens, providing produce for their families.

By 1929 Norwegians owned more land on the Spirit Lake Reservation than did Dakotas. Even when women did not own land themselves, they worked the fields and were actively involved in the land-taking process. They acted as partner farmers in the context of their kin networks. Like Dakota women, Norwegian women valued their land, sought to hold onto it, and were centrally involved in providing resources for their families through their labors. More detailed

comparative studies of women's landowning in subsequent generations will uncover what was distinctive to some racial-ethnic groups and what was universal, what endured and what was characteristic only of a temporary moment of converging historical forces.

On average, Spirit Lake Reservation landowners' holdings were half the size of landholdings in North Dakota as a whole, and women's average acreage was smaller than men's. The Dakotas' average landholdings were less than half the size of those owned by Scandinavians. Because most Dakotas owned land in trust and multiple heirs subdivided entitlement, subsequent generations faced restrictions on land use. If owning land was a potential indicator of well-being, then the Dakotas continued to struggle. Landlessness in the wake of dispossession was a tribal issue as well as a personal and familial one.

Demographic concentration on the reservation gave both groups a visible cultural presence. A majority of tribal members continued to live on the reservation, even with the dearth of economic opportunity outside of farming or leasing land. They considered Spirit Lake their reservation, which even in destitute times was of symbolic importance (both positive and negative). Dakotas continued to live in family groups when possible, as the plat maps attest. It is evident that Norwegians also understood the power of demographic density; they exercised similar efforts to live near people with a shared ancestry. The critical mass enabled them to continue to speak their language and establish their own places of worship.

In the long run, women aspired to attain greater security for themselves and their families. In a country where land equals wealth, land ownership, even of relatively small parcels, confers some power. Larger landholdings translated into more resources, a greater political voice, and increased economic well-being. Conversely, owning less land or none at all led to impoverishment and further displacement. In an era during which the safety net was local, social, and non-institutional, people without land were more vulnerable to hunger and dire poverty. Still, bountiful harvests or profitable commodity prices could never be guaranteed, and owning land did not ensure adequate nutrition, access to cash resources, or freedom from poverty.

My own great-grandmother stayed on the reservation into her old age, leaving the cultivation of land to her grandsons. The homestead was sold out of the family after she died in 1936. My grandmother married and moved to Saskatchewan in 1910 with her husband's family, only to homestead again. My family history aside, people of Norwegian descent can still be found on the reservation today, as landowners and as tenant farmers, alongside Dakotas. The tensions of the competing cultural logics have shifted over the past one hundred years of shared history and intertwined kinship networks, though they continue to shape the relationship between the two groups.

## Notes

1. I extend my appreciation to those who patiently and astutely read earlier drafts of this essay: Andrew Bundy, Mignon Duffy, Anita Ilta Garey, Clare Hammonds, and Debra Osnowitz. Grey Osterud lent her expert eye and generous insights multiple times, and my argument is stronger for it. My understanding of Indians' perspectives on the past has been immeasurably aided by Louis Garcia, honorary tribal historian of the Spirit Lake Dakota, who has been conducting interviews and keeping research journals for forty-five years. David Deis designed the regional map, and Robert Rose provided invaluable skill in generating the GIS map. I also thank Betty Bergland and Lori Lahlum for having the foresight to undertake this project and for their generosity in sharing sources.

Helene Haugen Kanten, interview by author, 1977. The data for this article comes primarily from two sources: oral history interviews and plat maps (see note 3). The 106 oral histories that constitute the heart of the project convey the distinctive perspectives of the people who lived this history and of their immediate descendants who remain at Spirit Lake today. The limitations of the written records have made oral histories especially valuable in interpreting the dynamic between the Norwegians and the Dakotas during the process of reservation land taking. Few letters and diaries from the immigrant homesteaders remain. The Dakotas' perspective has been especially elusive. A people with an oral rather than written tradition who were reeling from dislocation and population decline, the Dakotas left few documents about themselves. I have analyzed seventy-two of the 1,214 oral histories collected by the State Historical Society of North Dakota in 1975–76, including all the interviews done with Scandinavian residents of the three counties on and adjacent to the reservation. Since only two SHSND interviews were with Native Americans who lived at Fort Totten, I purposely sought out Dakota narrators. Between 1999 and 2008, I personally conducted twenty-seven interviews with people who grew up on and near the reservation, six of those with Dakota narrators. Over the past three decades, I have conducted an additional seven interviews with members of my extended family.

2. At its founding, it was called the Devils Lake Sioux Indian Reservation. Throughout the essay I refer to the reservation as Spirit Lake, as it was originally called by the Dakota people. However, the lake itself is still called Devils Lake. To make matters more confusing, the town north of the lake is called Devils Lake as well.

3. If the landowner was born in Norway, Sweden, or Denmark, or at least one of his or her parents was born there, I consider that person Scandinavian. With common ancestral background came language, culture, and often, in those first several generations, values about land. For the purposes of this essay and to streamline language, I refer to the first and second generation as simply *Scandinavian* or *Norwegian*, acknowledging their ethnic and cultural identification but not their immigration status. The same guidelines apply to those I classify as *German*, although most of those living on the reservation are second-generation Germans who emigrated from Germany (not Russia, like so many in the state). *Yankee* is a catch-all term to describe those born in the United States whose parents were also born in the United States, so they are at least second-generation U.S. born.

Finally, *Canadian and Other Foreign-born* combines those of differing nationalities who were born outside of the United States. These categories encompass many fewer people, so for analytic purposes I have grouped them together.

The Native Americans who lived on the reservation also had diverse origins. Although Dakotas of several different bands constituted the vast majority, some of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa were allotted land at Spirit Lake and lived on the reservation. Despite historic rivalries, intermarriage over the years has blurred boundaries between tribes, nations, and ethnicities. I use the term *Indian* to refer to all of the Native American landowners on the reservation. Originally, it was land designated for the Dakota people, and because they were the majority of the Native American population, I often use *Dakota* interchangeably with *Indian*. My terminology notes specific (albeit socially constructed) ethnic identities at particular moments in time.

My analysis of land ownership begins with plat maps in 1910 and 1929 where individual landowners were recorded on the one-mile-square sections within a surveyed grid of thirty-six square-mile townships. I used the maps to build a database of property owners in the eighteen townships on which the reservation falls. Over the course of a decade, I searched the U.S. manuscript census and town histories and queried locals about the gender and ethnicity of the landowners. Through this labor-intensive process, I have been able to identify the ethnicity of all but 10 percent of the 1,349 landowners on the reservation in 1929 and the sex for all but 5 percent. Next I used SPSS to generate descriptive statistics of landowners and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to array the information spatially. For a more in-depth discussion of my strategies for gathering information about the landowners, see Karen V. Hansen and Mignon Duffy, "Mapping the Dispossession: Scandinavian Homesteading at Fort Totten, 1900–1930," *Great Plains Research* 18.1 (2008): 67–80.

4. To what degree this convergence of issues—costs and gains—for other immigrant groups operated on reservations elsewhere is unclear. This is an important area for future research. For a discussion of what some of those payments to the tribe looked like, see Louis Garcia, "Where Is Aspen Island?" in *A Message from Garcia: The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota* (Tokio, ND: The author, 2000).

5. Louis Garcia, "Who Are the Cut-Heads?" in *A Message from Garcia*. According to Garcia, the Cut-Heads subdivision of the Yanktonai, or Ihanktonwana, a northern branch of the Nakota, did not sell any of their land to the U.S. government and never received a reservation of their own. They had claimed as their territory all the land from the Red River to the Missouri River in North Dakota. That said, they participated in the treaty that created the Spirit Lake Reservation in 1867. See also Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650–1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997); Garcia, "Where Is Aspen Island?"; Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988).

6. The fort buildings were transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in January 1891 and became part of the Fort Totten Indian Boarding School. Merlan E. Paaverud Jr., "Swimming with the Current: Education at the Fort Totten Indian School," in *Fort*

Totten: *Military Post and Indian School, 1867–1959*, ed. Larry Remele (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota [hereafter, SHSND], 1986), 46–56.

7. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by "Friends of the Indian" 1880–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973). F. O. Getchell, Annual Report, RG 75/A003/B038/C002//E035, Kansas City Regional Archives, National Archives and Records Administration, Fort Totten, ND, 1902.

8. The Dawes Act specified eighty acres and forty acres for women and children respectively, but new legislation amended the law in 1891.

9. Mari Sandoz, *These Were the Sioux* (New York: Hastings House, 1961), 105. Phillip John Young, interview by author, 2005. On the tension between nomadic and sedentary economies and use of land, see Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

10. Prucha, *The Great Father*. Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887–1934* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

11. *Land Allotment Act*, 179, 58th Cong., 2d sess. (27 Apr. 1904).

12. Katherine Harris, "Homesteading in Northeastern Colorado, 1873–1910: Sex Roles and Women's Experience," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 174. Barbara Handy-Marchello, "Women and the Homestead Law: Standing Equal before the Law of the Land," paper, The Lincoln Legacy: The Homestead Act, Bismarck, ND, 2008.

13. Cherry Wood Monson, Betty Loe Westby, Cherrie Lane Anderson, and Stella Rasmusson Payacheck, *Warwick Memories* (Warwick, ND: privately published, 2002), 256. "Winners in Ft. Totten Land Lottery," *Sheyenne Star*, 1 Sept. 1904. Eunice Davidson and David C. Davidson, interview by author, 2008.

14. Leasing was not a panacea for the Dakotas or for others who rented their land. However, I do not have space to develop a critical discussion of the practice in this essay. See, for example, McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian*.

15. Odd S. Lovell, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

16. John C. Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66.2 (1976): 242–65. Jon Gjerde documents extensively how this worked in a community in Wisconsin: Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway to the Upper Middle West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

17. Theresse Nelson Lundby, Kristie Nelson-Neuhaus, and Ann Nordland Wallace, eds., *Live Well: The Letters of Sigrid Gjeldaker Lillehaugen* (Minneapolis, MN: Western Home Books, 2004), 74. Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier."

18. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*; William C. Sherman and Playford V. Thorson, eds., *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies [hereafter, NDIRS], 1988).

19. Getchell, Annual Report, 1902. The Bureau of Indian Affairs enumerated American Indians, but not European Americans, within reservation boundaries. The U.S. Census Bureau collected data and distilled it by county, not by other administrative districts.
20. William C. Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* (Fargo: NDIRS, 1983); Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970).
21. John C. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Monson, et al., *Warwick Memories*.
22. Glen Allen Mumey, "The Parity Ratio and Agricultural Out-Migration," *Southern Economic Journal* 26.1 (1959): 63–65. The U.S. Department of Agriculture assessed the farm out-migration rates in the 1920s as between 1.4 and 2.9 percent. These are well below the figures for the 1940s and 1950s, which reach as high as 7.8 percent in 1952. Mumey clarifies that the measure of farm out-migration "excludes persons who continue to live on farms while working elsewhere" (64). As I have noted, farming does not preclude work for wages: Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Nordic Newcomers and Dakota Survival, 1900–1930* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2012). See also Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier." Karel Denis Bicha, "The Plains Farmer and the Prairie Province Frontier, 1897–1914," *Journal of Economic History* 25.2 (1965): 263–70. Lundby, Nelson-Neuhaus, and Wallace, eds., *Live Well, 74–75. Land Allotment Act*.
23. Barbara Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier, 1870–1930* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), 26. Sherman, *Prairie Mosaic*; Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters, "Ethnic Groups in the Flux: The Changing Ethnic Responses of American Whites," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487: Immigration and American Public Policy (1986): 79–91. John C. Hudson's study of the Historical Data Project found high rates of local residence by "pioneer offspring." He finds that 50.4 percent of Norwegians' adult children lived in the same county as their parents, and another 10.1 percent lived in another North Dakota County (58). Only Germans from Russia had a higher rate of intergenerational geographic stability. John C. Hudson, "The Study of Western Frontier Populations," in *The American West: New Perspectives, New Dimensions*, ed. Jerome O. Steffen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 35–60.
24. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 26.
25. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains*.
26. Two important studies occasionally refer to the land women own but do not analyze the gendered variation on land ownership among Native women. Emily Greenwald, *Reconfiguring the Reservation: The Nez Perces, Jicarilla Apaches, and the Dawes Act* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Melissa L. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).
- H. Elaine Lindgren, "Ethnic Women Homesteading on the Plains of North Dakota," *Great Plains Quarterly* 9.3 (1989): 157–73. In her study of nine counties, Elaine Lindgren found that women claimed an average of 12 percent of homesteads. H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota* (Fargo: NDIRS, 1991), 53. The percentages ranged between 6 and 20 percent. In five of the townships in those

counties she studied, women filed claims for 30 to 32 percent of the homesteads. Only two townships out of the three hundred she studied lacked women filing. Lindgren argues that homesteading varied little by ethnicity but rather by chronology. There were more women homesteading later, especially after 1900. None of the counties she studied included reservation land, so none included Native Americans. Although women of all ethnic groups homesteaded, Lindgren found that Anglo-Americans claimed the most homesteads in the settlement period following 1900; Norwegians did so only "moderately." Howard A. Turner, "The Ownership of Tenant Farms in the North Central States," ed. U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926), 26.

27. Turner, "The Ownership of Tenant Farms," 26. In comparing regions, the study surveyed ten counties in southeastern North Dakota and one adjacent county in South Dakota. The 1920 study of rented farms revealed that on average men owned more land than women: 374.6 acres compared to 232 acres. In their general study of land ownership in the United States, Anne B. W. Effland, Denise M. Rogers, and Valerie Grim found that in 1946 men owned about one-third more acreage than women; women's parcels were consistently smaller: "Women as Agricultural Landowners: What Do We Know About Them?" *Agricultural History* 67.2 (1993): 235–61. F. O. Getchell, Annual Report, RG 75/A003/B038/C002//E035, Kansas City Regional Archives, National Archives and Records Administration, Fort Totten, ND, 1903.

28. Davidson and Davidson, Interview.

29. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Land Sale Card, Records of the Fort Totten Indian Agency, RG 75/A003/B038/C002//E035, National Archives and Record Administration, Regional Archives, Kansas City, MO, 1913–25. Bjorne Knudson, interview by author, 1999.

30. Berthe Haugen, "Homestead Entry, Final Proof," Department of Interior, Devils Lake, ND, 1912. Gust Berg and Annie Berg, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1976), 55A. The 1929 plat map shows that Ida Olson, aunt to Lois Olson Jones, owned land near the Bergs. A 1946 national study documented that "the vast majority (85%) of female landowners lease out their land": Effland, Rogers, and Grim, "Women as Agricultural Landowners." Women were more likely than men to own the land but not operate the farm. Furthermore, women were "more dependent on income from agriculture, specifically land rentals, than men landowners" (250).

31. Erling N. Sannes, "'Free Land for All': A Young Norwegian Woman Homesteads in North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 60.2 (1993): 24–28.

32. Sannes, "'Free Land for All.'"

33. Lori Ann Lahlum, "'Everything Was Changed and Looked Strange': Norwegian Women in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 35.3 (2005): 189–216. Lois Olson Jones, interview by author, 2005.

34. Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880–1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 34.

35. Julius Fjeld, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1975), 1029A&B. Sannes, "'Free Land for All.'"

36. Mark R. G. Goodale and Per Kåre Sky, "A Comparative Study of Land Tenure,

Property Boundaries, and Dispute Resolution: Case Studies from Bolivia and Norway," *Journal of Rural Studies* 17 (2001): 183–200. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 28. Effland, Rogers, and Grim, "Women as Agricultural Landowners."

37. Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Hudson notes the importance of "well-used information networks specific to ethnic groups which formed a bond between the widely scattered enclaves, and the usefulness of these informal networks in spreading information about economic opportunities when and where they arose": "Migration to an American Frontier." Also see Sonya Salamon, "Sibling Solidarity as an Operating Strategy in Illinois Agriculture," *Rural Sociology* 47.2 (1982): 349–68.

38. Stanley R. Eliason, interview by author, 2005; Jon Gierde, "Chain Migrations from the West Coast of Norway," in *A Century of European Migrations, 1830–1930*, ed. Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 158–81. Barbara Handy-Marchello, "Land, Liquor and the Women of Hatton, North Dakota," in *The Centennial Anthology of North Dakota History*, ed. Janet Daley Lysengen and Ann M. Rathke (Bismarck, ND: SHSND, 1996), 228.

39. Barbara Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest: A History of the Lives and Times of the First Settlers of Central North Dakota* (Hawley, MN: Hawley Herald, 1974). Lahlum, "Everything Was Changed."

40. Lundby, Nelson-Neuhaus, and Wallace, eds., *Live Well*. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 28. Norman Forde, interview by author, 2006.

41. Grace Lambert, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1976), 110A&B.

42. Jones interview. Davidson and Davidson interview.

43. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*; Joan M. Jensen, ed., *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1981); Joan M. Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850–1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006); Paula M. Nelson, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900–1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986); Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*.

44. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 4, 5. Also see Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Joan M. Jensen, *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

45. Carrie Young, *Nothing to Do but Stay: My Pioneer Mother* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 50.

46. Thomas Pearson and Grace Pearson, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1976), 685B, 686A&B. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 45.

47. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 9, 53. Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*. Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988). Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*.

48. Patricia C. Albers and Beatrice Medicine, "The Role of Sioux Women in the Production of Ceremonial Objects: The Case of the Star Quilt," in *Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, ed. Patricia C. Albers and Beatrice Medicine (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 123–40. Patricia C. Albers, "Autonomy and Dependency in the Lives of Dakota Women: A Study in Historical Change," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17.3 (1985): 109–34. Hilde Bjorkhaug and Arild Blekesaune, "Masculinisation or Professionalisation of Norwegian Farm Work: A Gender Neutral Division of Work on Norwegian Family Farms?" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38.3 (2007): 423–34.
49. Bjorkhaug and Blekesaune, "Masculinisation or Professionalisation." Handy-Marchello, "Land, Liquor and the Women of Hatton, North Dakota"; L. DeAne Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows. Factors of Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the Americanization of Norwegian-American Women* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991).
50. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 52, 75.
51. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 54.
52. Young, *Nothing to Do but Stay*, 66. Sannes, "'Free Land for All.'
53. Lester Skjerven and Amanda Skjerven, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1976), 680A&B.
54. Young, *Nothing to Do but Stay*, 66.
55. Johanna Tvedt, interview by Mark Olson, typed summary, NDIRS, Fargo, 1971.
56. Skjerven and Skjerven interview.
57. Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 97, 158. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 105. Ingrid Semmingsen, *Norway to America: A History of the Migration*, trans. Einar Haugen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 133.
58. For a discussion of these issues, see Albers and Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half*; Bonnie Thornton Dill, *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of Work and Family among Black Female Domestic Servants* (New York: Garland, 1994); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). Katherine M. Weist, "Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves: Nineteenth Century Observations of Northern Plains Indian Women," in *The Hidden Half*, ed. Albers and Medicine, 29–52.
59. Esther Kanten Hansen, interview by author, 1995. According to Helene's daughter, Esther Kanten Hansen, the teacher ceased to pick on her after this incident.
60. 1910 Census, "Instructions to Enumerators." Stephen Ruggles, et al., "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-Readable Database]" (Minneapolis Population Center, 2008). Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains*, 49. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 89. Carol Russell, *Sigrid: Sigrid Tuft Myhre Ostrom and Her Ancestors and Descendants: The History of an American Pioneer Woman with Roots in Hallingdal and Aurland, Norway* (Annandale, VA: The author, [1995]).
61. Knudson interview.
62. Jones interview.
63. Carole Shammas, Marylynn Salmon, and Michel Dahlin find that in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1890, "couples rarely bought houses together; not even 1 percent did so. Almost all property was in the name of an individual; four out of five times it was a man."

This figure changed dramatically over the twentieth century; in 1980 it was 63.3 percent: *Inheritance in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 172. Lemuel H. Foster, *The Legal Rights of Women: Adapted for Use in Every State by Means of a Brief Synopsis of the Laws Relating to Property Rights, Dower, Divorce, the Rights of a Widow in the Estate of Her Husband, Etc. Containing Much Other Helpful Advice, Information, and Direction for Women in Every Walk of Life* (Detroit, MI: Women's Publishing Co., 1913), 62, 101. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 84.

64. Lundby, Nelson-Neuhaus, and Wallace, eds., *Live Well*, 14–15.

65. Levorsen, *The Quiet Conquest*, 98.

66. Ella M. Halvorson Dolbak, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1976), 50A&B. Erland Reed Manning, interview (Bismarck: SHSND, 1975), 317A&B.

67. Sonya Salamon and Ann Mackey Keim, "Land Ownership and Women's Power in a Midwestern Farming Community," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41.1 (1979): 109–19; Sonya Salamon and Vicki Lockhart, "Land Ownership and the Position of Elderly in Farm Families," *Human Organization* 39.4 (1980): 324–31. Ingemund Peterson, interview by author, 1999.

68. Patrick Langstaff, interview by author, 1999.

69. Knudson interview.