

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

56 2693

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Assyrian Muslim Cemetery

Other names/site number: Muslim Cemetery; Muslim Mosque and Cemetery, Moslem Cemetery of Ross, Mohammadan Church

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: Quarter of a mile south of US Hwy 2 on 87th Ave. NW

City or town: Ross State: ND County: Mountrail

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this x nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national x statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A ___ B ___ C ___ D

	DIRECTOR	5-24-18
Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date
<u>NDSPHO</u>		
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

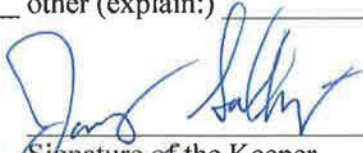
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain: _____)


Signature of the Keeper
For

7-17-2018
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____ <u>1</u> _____	buildings
_____ <u>1</u> _____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____ <u>1</u> _____	_____ <u>1</u> _____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Funerary: Cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Funerary: Cemetery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: marble and granite

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Assyrian Muslim Cemetery¹ sits on an undisturbed prairie hillside approximately one and half miles east of Ross, ND. The community of Ross, ND, has a current population of approximately 50² residents and is located in the northwestern part of the State, seven miles west of Stanley, ND, the county seat of Mountrail County. The private property, nearly treeless and with original prairie grasses, is approximately four acres in total, with its perimeter surrounded by metal fencing. The property includes the location of the first mosque in the United States. The front gate, dating back to circa 1965, is adorned with a traditional Crescent Moon archway.³ The road leading to the property is gravel and maintained by Mountrail County. The gravesite property has been well maintained by the descendants of the early settlers. Since 2005, the site also includes a south-facing replica of a typical Muslim house of prayer, 17 feet by 17 feet in

¹ "Muslim" is spelled "Moslem" on the tax records for the property. This was a common mistake in the early days, often from the immigrants themselves.

² Population reports vary on the size of Ross; these fluctuations are typically because of the number of workers employed at the State's oil fields as well as seasonal residents who often reside in the community during the summer months.

³ The gateway arches were purchased by Omar Hamdan, Stanley, ND. Omar is the son of immigrant Albert Omar; he is also the most recent member of the Assyrian community to be buried on the site at the time of this writing.

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total. The interior of this Mosque includes an east-facing ornate prayer rug and historical information about many of the early settlers resting on the property.⁴

Narrative Description

The property has been in the care of the Syrian immigrants and their descendants since the early 1900s, and was formally conveyed from Abel and Freida Hadey to the Assyrian Muslim Cemetery organization January 2, 1930, for the sum of \$60. As stated on the attached indenture,⁵ the Hadey's sold the four-acre property described as beginning 78.2 feet South and 33 feet West of quarter corner on East line of section twenty-eight in Township one hundred fifty-six North of Range ninety-two; thence West 581 feet, thence North 300 feet; thence East 581 feet, thence south 300 feet, parallel to said East line of Section Twenty-eight and 33 feet distant to point of beginning and containing four acres. The deed is signed by A. J. Ross and Charlie Juma, Sr. and notarized by A. J. Ross.

There are 41⁶ gravesites and eight memorial markers on the property thus far, the earliest dating back to 1928 and the most current (at this writing) dating 2017. The majority of these graves are marked with marble or granite headstones, are east-facing according to Muslim tradition, many with the star and crescent moon, and include the family name and dates of birth and death.⁷ The Quran dictates only that markers are not "ornate" (which is considered lacking humility) so each family makes the choice for marker design. The graves are clustered into family plots; a number of them include three generations. Most of the plots also display a larger monument bearing only the family name, and ground markers with the individual graves. Regarding the graves themselves, many are covered with a concrete wolf stone, protecting the burial sites from the harshness of prairie animals and weather. All but one gravestone is the original marker placed on site after the burial.⁸

⁴ The interior of the structure has great historical relevance to the Muslim community, featuring an ornate rug, recognized by Muslims world-wide as a space for prayer and reflection. This Mosque has the entrance on the south, likely due to typical winds coming from the northwest, but the only requirement for the building is that the prayer rugs inside must face east.

⁵ The property was purchased January 2, 1930. Readers will note the growth of the Syrian population was robust during the early years, and the plan at the time is that the space, through the years, would serve a much larger population. That growth did not continue after World War II, consequently, the space is much greater than the need. A copy of the formal indenture is included as Attachment 1.

⁶ The number of graves represents current burials only. Several descendants of the original immigrants indicate their intent to follow the footsteps of their parents and have named the cemetery as their burial home.

⁷ Attachment 2 lists all gravesites and markers, to include name, as well as birth and death dates. The graves of Nettie Juma and Solomon Hodge are oriented on the north-south axis because they were both from a different community in Syria, and "tradition" most often came from a local perspective. The Quran states an eastward burial, but some Muslim communities reach that through burying the body on its side so the head faces east, or even raising the head when it is facing east. The parents of one of the author's cousins were close to both Nettie Juma and Solomon Hodge and recalls them being buried on their side.

⁸ The original gravestone of Albert Abdallah was incorrect and a corrected stone replaced it several years ago.

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Aside from being the site of the first Mosque in the United States,⁹ this site is also the oldest¹⁰ Muslim Cemetery in the State (by 90+ years). Furthermore, and unlike many prairie cemeteries, the site continues to be used as the resting place for descendants of the original settlers' families and is well maintained.

⁹ "First mosque" is defined as a 'new structure' fully intended for use as a space for Muslim prayer (vs a remodel or repurposing of an existing structure). The Muslim Mosque in Ross, ND, was originally filed at the Mountrail County Courthouse as a "church", thus the misconception for many years by many that the mother mosque was located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The location of the original mosque can be seen in the 1957/1962 aerial in the Additional Documentation.

¹⁰ A relatively new cemetery exists in Fargo, ND, as part of the Islamic Community Center. Additional information was not available at the time of this writing, but the oldest known headstones on the property are from 2008.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion

Exploration; Settlement

Social History

Period of Significance

1902 – 1968

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Syrian

Architect/Builder

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Assyrian Muslim Cemetery is significant at the statewide level under Criterion A in the areas of Religion, Exploration/Settlement, and Social History. The property is deeply embedded into the history of North Dakota settlers; those immigrants arriving in the early days between 1900 and 1924, most often in search for opportunity in the New World and freedom from the oppression of Commonwealth Rule, that of the Ottoman Turkish government. The space, sacred to these early Islamic settlers, is the only remaining physical place that clearly represents them from this important time in North Dakota's history. The period of significance begins in 1902 when at least 12 Syrian settlers filed land claims in Ross Township and ends at the 50-year mark. The cemetery has also drawn interest from modern-day Islamic visitors from across the country who seek out the space for private reflection and prayer and from other travelers who have "discovered" the space through media writings.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The space is of great historical relevance to the State and represents an important period in its history – that of the immigration of foreign settlers from across the world.¹¹ Furthermore, as the recognized location for the first Muslim Mosque in the entire United States,¹² the space brings honor and prestige to its home: North Dakota. The cemetery remains a symbol of diversity and a historical reminder of the contributions of early residents who chose North Dakota as their home.

Why Settlers Arrived

Beginning as early as the turn of the century and continuing for more than the following 20 years, as many as 2,000 Syrian immigrants arrived in North Dakota, the majority of them young unattached males.



Edward Curtis IV noted

Early Islamic settlers harvesting hay in Mountrail County.

¹¹ According to *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History* by William Sherman et al, 26.6% of North Dakota residents in 1910 were foreign born and by 1920, that percentage was still 20.2%, p427-428.

¹² "First" is defined as a new structure, not a remodel or repurposing of any existing structure.

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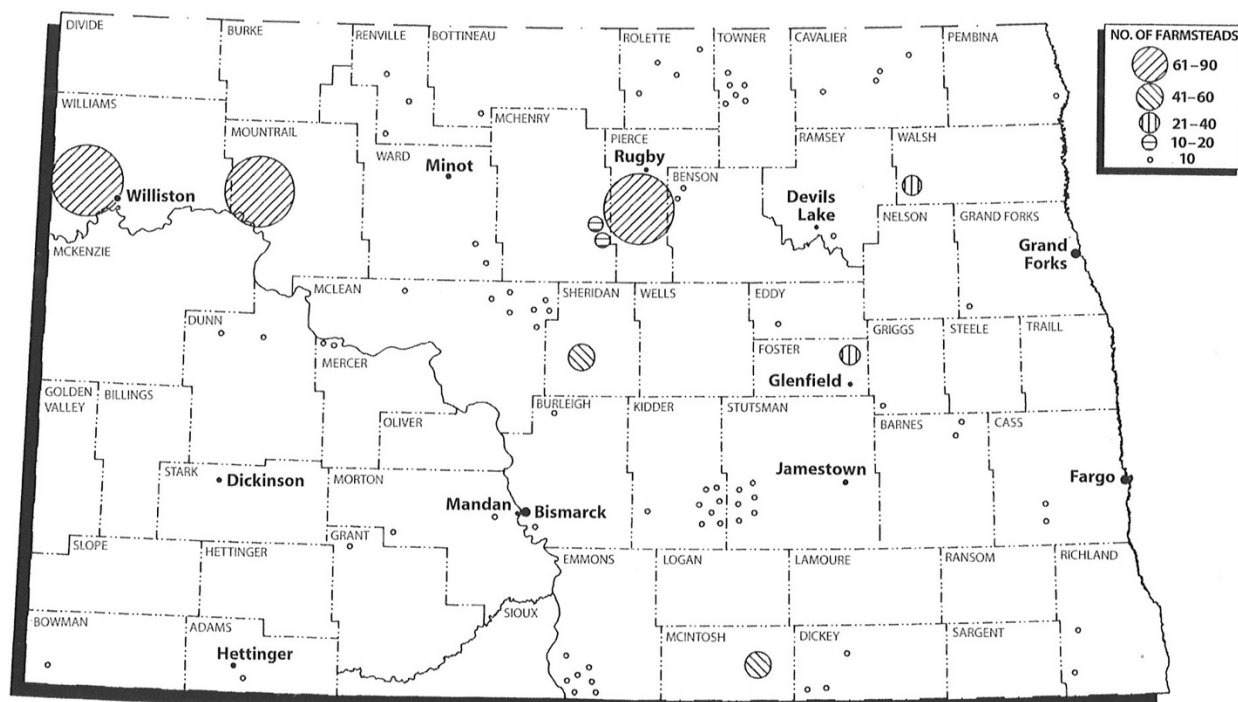
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in Volume 2 of the Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History that on a percentage basis, North Dakota likely had the largest Muslim-American migration into the United States in the early 20th century. This is noteworthy in the sense that Muslims constituted only about ten percent of the total wave of Arab-American immigration nationally.¹³ The stories, as later told by many family members, were that the plan was for these young Arab men to make the journey, accumulate great wealth in the New World and later return to their homeland to provide for their families. Of this total number of Arab immigrants, it has been estimated that 70% (+/-) of the North Dakota immigrants applying for citizenship between 1819 and 1917 were of Christian descent (Orthodox Christian, Melkite and Maronite Catholics) and about 30% (+/-), or nearly 600 immigrants were Muslim.¹⁴

Syrian-Lebanese Farmsteads in North Dakota 1895–1915



Map from *Prairie Peddlers*, page 127

From the 1939 WPA (Works Projects Administration)¹⁵ writings, settlers mentioned time and again that immigration began during a period when the territory of Syria, later in part to be

¹³ Encyclopedia of Muslim American history Volume 2, page 438

¹⁴ *Prairie Peddlers* – The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota, page 22; Attachment 3 is copy of Book Cover. The information is also included on page 438, Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History, Vol 2.

¹⁵ WPA (Works Projects Administration), created by Franklin D. Roosevelt and implemented in 1935, is known to be the largest and most ambitious American New Deal agency. The WPA was successful in employing millions during the Great Depression. These workers (mostly unskilled men) were responsible for many projects, including public

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Lebanon, was ruled by the Ottoman Turks, and citizens had few opportunities to earn their livelihood. The recordings are filled with stories of overpopulation and land shortages, as well as an expectation for young men to serve in the Turkish military. Allay Omar, an immigrant who filed a homestead claim in 1911, stated in his interview in 1939, "I left my country of birth because I thoroughly disliked and disapproved the government of Turkey and the control they had over us. They forced the young men to join their army, and they taxed us until we bled, and we never could understand what they used our money for as no improvements were ever seen anywhere."¹⁶ Ahmed (Mike) Abdallah, an immigrant who filed a homestead claim in 1915 also spoke of opportunities in the United States during his WPA interview. "In this country we get improvements for our tax money and we can think and say what we want, while in the Old Country we could think what we wanted but we didn't dare say it."¹⁷

The Muslim settlement in Ross is an excellent example of the chain migration process. Word of mouth has always been a powerful influencer, but never more than in the early days of our country. The Homestead Act was a driver for two growth periods in North Dakota (1871-late 1880s and 1898-1915).¹⁸ Word spread quickly when territories offered these land claims, and though the Syrian immigrants were primarily peddlers by trade, the promise of land advanced their migration into the frontier.

The Muslim men arriving in western North Dakota were the truest of early pioneers – "sodbusters".¹⁹ They claimed the free acreage and put down roots in the Ross area. The earliest on record was Hassen Jaha, who filed his naturalization papers in 1901. At least twelve pioneers filed land claims in Ross Township in 1902, and according to the Federal Land Office, by 1909 at least 66 men filed land claims in the Ross area.

This enclave of settlers was Muslim, or from the 'Mohammadan Church' as was often referred by the locals in early North Dakota. The teachings of Islam were new to these early Christian settlers, but the understanding of Christianity was not foreign to the Muslims.

From the Mediterranean to Mountrail County

Leaving their beautiful Mediterranean homeland behind had to have been traumatic on these early immigrants. Most of the settlers in the Mountrail County community of Ross came from a high mountain valley area in South East Lebanon, about 60 miles from Beirut.

buildings and roads. Project workers also documented stories of recent immigrants from across the world. The information gleaned from this work continues as significant historical documentation even today.

¹⁶ Prairie Peddlers – The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota, page 66; WPA Interview with Everal J. McKinnon, Attachment 5

¹⁷ Quoted from Mr. Abdallah's interview in 1939 as part of the Work Projects Administration, Attachment 6

¹⁸ The Homestead Act, passed into law in 1862, was of great importance in creating growth in the western territories and assisted states in attracting new settlers. North Dakota benefited from the Act prior to statehood. The information on this topic was provided by ndstudies.org.

¹⁹ According to Merriam Webster Dictionary – a person or a thing (such as a farmer or a plow) that breaks the sod.

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This valley is almost due west of Damascus Syria. The mountains in the background are on the Lebanese/Syrian border. To the left of the valley is the village of Al Bireh and to the right would be the village of Al Rafid. Most of the Ross settlers came from these two villages; the two separated by a narrow gully wash. A current photo of the Al Bireh village is shown here, together with its location within Lebanon. Around the Mosque are residences that still house relations to the Omar, Juma, Abdallah and Jaha families that settled in the Ross area.

Modern view of city.



Western North Dakota immigrants most often traveled from this area in Syria.

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The Assimilation of These New Americans

It was during the second land boom that the Syrian immigrants found their way to various parts of the state. Enclaves of Muslim Syrians landed predominately in Ross Township, Williston, and smaller communities in other parts of north central North Dakota.²⁰

One would wonder how difficult acclimation was for these settlers, and how accepted the early settlers felt. In today's world, one could likely assume assimilating may be difficult, but according to a number of WPA interviews, religious persecution was not an issue. The Muslims recall being accepted and having the same choices and challenges as their Christian neighbors. [As an example, Allay Omar took an interest in and provided work for a young Scandinavian man, Edward Evanson, when he first moved to North Dakota.] And no doubt some of the Muslim traditions could have set the early settlers apart, but all of the residents in the area were settlers with different backgrounds, so the many traditions blended in. For instance, North Dakota was a dry state in the early 20th century. Consuming alcohol was illegal during the Prohibition Era,²¹ so the fact that the Muslim religion forbids the consumption of alcohol was no different than their Christian neighbors at that time who were following the law. Muslims fasted and used prayer beads²² – also a familiar practice with local Roman Catholics, and since the early settlers were primarily farmers, the practice of Halal,²³ slaughtering their livestock according to Islamic dietary rules was not unusual. As stated in the WPA writings of 1938 and 1939, the group reported a unanimous response to acceptance. Allay Omar of Ross wrote that “all the people in my neighborhood were very friendly, and they helped me whenever they could”. Joe Albert,²⁴ Williston, ND, reported a similar experience. “When I first came, everyone help me all they could – more friendly here than in the old country.”²⁵



Sample of Islamic prayer beads

²⁰ Immigrant migration throughout the country was largely defined by religion and ancestry. As most immigrants used “word of mouth” to inform friends and relatives of opportunities, it is no surprise that communities were developed around faith and family.

²¹ The nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages continued from 1920 to 1933.

²² Traditional prayer beads, Misbaha in Arabic, consist of 99 beads. Typical to Islam, the prayer involves repeated praise and glorification of Allah, as follows: 33 times “Subhan Allah” (Glory be to God); 33 times “Al-hamdu lilah” (Praise be the God); 33 times “Allahu Akbar” (God is the greatest).

²³ Halal is the ritual slaughter of livestock and poultry according to Islamic law. The butcher must speak “In the name of God”, Bismillah in Arabic, before the slaughter of each animal; the slaughter is an immediate cut through the carotid artery, with blood properly drained from the carcass according to instructions in the Quran.

²⁴ No photo of Mr. Albert could be located.

²⁵ Mr. Omar's quote was taken from page 439 of the Encyclopedia of Muslim American History, Volume 2.

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The Religion of Islam

In order to fully understand the unlikely migration of Muslims to Mountrail County it is important to step back and learn about the history of the Muslim religion.

Islam follows the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. What these early settlers believed and what the majority of modern Muslims believe is significantly different from the Islam seen on television today.

The Child Muhammad

It is instructive to understand the childhood of the Prophet Muhammad in order to understand the original Islamic faith. Muhammad ibn Abdullah, born in 570 (died in 632), was orphaned as a young child and was initially cared for by his grandfather. When his grandfather passed away, Muhammad's uncle, who worked on a camel train, took him in. Some years later the owner of that same camel train passed away, leaving the business to his wife, Khadija. Although she was fifteen years older than Muhammad, the two eventually grew closer together, and customarily for that time in history, eventually married. Muhammad was drawn to a deep spiritual yearning that consumed his adult life. He would spend long periods of time alone in a cave in Mount Hira, just outside of Mecca, isolating himself from the world he lived in and all the problematic things that were going on. It was during this period he received inspirations from God, ideals that eventually led to the Islamic faith.

The Foundation of Islam

Islam recognizes and celebrates a value system known as "The Five Pillars", the same guidelines established by the Prophet Muhammed. The pillars include:

1. The belief in the one Abrahamic God, Allah in Arabic
2. Daily prayer consisting of five sessions beginning at dawn, at noon, afternoon, evening and again at night (at a Mosque if available, but for nomadic people, prayers can be held anywhere, and include only a prayer rug and the facing of Mecca. Many Muslims also prefer prayer beads much like the Holy Rosary)
3. Concern for the needy resulting in the requirement of charitable giving based on one's means
4. Self-purification through fasting during the month of Ramadan
5. Pilgrimage to the Hajj in Mecca for those able to do so.

Muhammad, familiar with Jewish customs, was well acquainted with writings from the Old Testament. Because Christianity was also well established across the Middle East at this time, Islam also reflects both Jewish and Christian antecedents. For instance, many today do not understand that Muhammad accepted the concept of Judgment Day, Jesus the man, and the virgin birth by Mary.

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The Constitution of Medina

Because of Muhammad's great love for his first wife Khadija, women were highly esteemed in the early versions of the Quran, making the nature of Islam in its earliest years significantly different than forms of Islam in parts of the world today (mainly the Wahhabi cultures of Saudi Arabia and other extremist parts of the world). This position on women was not well received by the Arabic tribes in and around Mecca who practiced Sharia Law, and eventually Muhammad and his followers were driven out of Mecca. They took up residence in the town of Medina²⁶ – a population of predominantly Jewish citizens. To ensure harmony within the city, Muhammad set out to draft and implement the *Constitution of Medina*²⁷ whereby each of the faith communities could live in accordance with their own beliefs without interference from each other. The consequence of the movement to Medina and the resulting constitutional arrangement was a breath of fresh air during a time of darkness, not only in the Middle East, but also across much of Europe (which had been entrenched in the Medieval Dark Ages for centuries). The result was a rapid expansion of the Islamic world, ranging from central India to the East and Moorish Spain to the West. This period of time is referred to as the Golden Age of Islam. Moorish Spain flourished under a government based on the *Compact of Medina* and that era remains today as an example of interfaith harmony.

Translations bring Transformation

Regrettably, just as the Holy Bible had experienced major transformations in the 12th and 16th centuries (resulting in the current King James version), the Quran experienced many of its own translations. For Islam, some translations included insertion of Sharia Law in parts of the Arab world (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Mauritania are the only countries that fully practice Sharia Law) while other Islamic sects around the world, for example the Arab Emirates, India and northern and eastern African countries, are influenced by Sharia Law – not as directed by government, but within some families. In spite of that, according to Pew Research studies, the Islamic faith remains the fastest growing religion in the world.²⁸

Assimilation into America

The Syrian immigrants established farms and businesses and assimilated into American culture. They also maintained their inner strength through worship and customs. The settlers practiced

²⁶ Medina is the burial place of Muhammad, and the second most holy city in Islam (after Mecca). Medina served as the power base of Islam in its first century.

²⁷ The entire Compact is included as Attachment 7 of this writing.

²⁸ Pew Research is a nonpartisan fact tank informing the public about issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

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centuries-old traditions (e.g., abstinence from consuming pork or alcohol, specific rules of inheritance, marriage and divorce, etc.) all while becoming active in their community.

The Muslim population in western North Dakota grew quickly, reaching more than 100 men, women and children in the first decade. Hassan and Mary Juma's son, Charlie Juma Sr. was the first Syrian child born in the area (1903). His birth was followed by many more births across the county.

A Place to Worship



Star and Crescent Moon grace the archway to the cemetery.

The Muslim Cemetery is significant under Criterion A in the category of Religion. This sacred space is the oldest designated Muslim cemetery in the state of North Dakota and is of great historical and religious prominence. It is currently home to 41 gravesites, many of which were the settlers arriving in the early 1900s and continuing for the next (approximately) 20 years. These same settlers built the first mosque in the United States and established the Assyrian Cemetery Association that continues today.

Muslim historical circles report that the first Islamic prayer service was held outside of Ross sometime in 1900. The Muslim community held prayer in private homes, with services of about an hour and a half and led

by respected community members. Hassan Juma, Ahmed Abdallah and Allay Omar were among the earliest known leaders. As the population grew – the group no longer fit in the farmstead homes. They needed more space to worship, and they needed a sacred place to bury their loved ones.

It was circa 1928 when community members gathered and determined they would build a new structure. Unbeknown to these homesteaders, they were erecting the first mosque in the entire nation.²⁹ The project was of national religious interest, and the Arabic newspaper, *Al-Bayan*, published at that time in New York, included an announcement referencing the project, “The Moslem colony of Ross, N.D., is planning the erection of a mosque in their town on which building operations will start this coming spring. A committee has been formed to prosecute the work and an appeal issued for the collection of funds from all the Arab settlements in the United States. *Al-Bayan* strongly supports the project and calls on its readers to contribute generously...”

Called a “Jima”³⁰ by the locals, and the Mohammadan Church by the Christian locals, the modest post and beam space was a west facing half-basement level concrete building with a wood frame entrance and roof. According to Hassin Abdallah, Stanley, ND, “it included four windows on each of the longer sides and two on each of the others. The inside had no furnishings

²⁹ “First” is defined as a new structure, not a remodel or repurposing of any existing structure.

³⁰ Jima: Arabic for “gathering”

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beyond a large, ornate rug in the center of the room and benches along the wall. A coal stove on the north wall provided warmth in the harsh winter months".³¹

The site was used for more than just prayer services. It was also the location for Muslim funerals and the final resting place for the local Muslim people.

No record can be found of the Ross area having a permanent Iman³² on site, but there are numerous records and remembrances of a Sheikh traveling to the area from Canada (the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan still have active Muslim communities). Though no Sheikh was permanent to the community, their visits most often involved living with local families for several months at a time to teach the Quran, lead prayer services and preside at funerals.



Original Mosque constructed 1928-29

Changes in the Making

The original building plans included erecting an additional level to accommodate both the growing families and the continued Syrian immigration that was occurring in the area. But with the October 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression and central Great Plains drought commencing in 1930, the settlers faced one of the most devastating periods in all of United States' history.

All of North Dakota suffered population decline during the years of drought, but already dry, the northwestern region was particularly hard hit. Over the next decade many of the families left the area in search of work, many having lost all their holdings in foreclosures, while some simply sold all of what they owned and moved to places like Detroit, MI, Gary, IN, or Toledo, OH, in pursuit of employment. By the time the rains returned and the grain prices increased, World War II had started. The majority of the remaining younger males left the community for active military service and many of the females went to work in war industries. Few ever returned, and the cemetery remains the only historical indication of these settlers' migration into the State.³³

³¹ Mr. Abdallah's quote is from "North Dakota is Home to First U.S. Mosque", a video on America's First Mosque by NDSU student, Susan Logue. Web link included in Bibliography section.

³² Iman: Arabic for religious leader

³³ A very small number of buildings from the settlers survive in the area but they are buildings typical of any settler to the area and do not suggest that their original owners were Syrian Muslims.

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The active Muslims remaining in the area have since died, but some of their descendants still reside in the area.

Declining Population: Forgotten Mosque

The mosque itself was used less and less as the Syrian population declined. The oldest living settlers who remained in the area continued their prayers at home. Their children, many of whom were first-generation Americans, typically married local Christians and most often became members of the nearby Lutheran Churches in Ross or Stanley. As time passed the mosque became an unnoticed backdrop to an already desolate landscape. It would sit on the barren hillside for more than 20 years – certainly not recognized and respected as the national *first of its kind* historical treasure it is.

By the late 60s the structure was in such disarray the members of the Assyrian Cemetery Association feared the safety of anyone who went inside and made the decision to dismantle it [circa 1969].³⁴

What did remain in use was the cemetery property itself. The site is now the resting place for the immigrants and many of their families. The property has been maintained by the local Arab descendants, in particular the Omar, Abdallah, Juma and George (Jaha) families who continue to operate as the Assyrian Cemetery Association. All of the gravesites have been maintained, regardless of whether or not a family member remains able to care for it. Important to also consider, as best as possible, the stories of these immigrants have been passed from generation to generation.

Muslim-Americans in the Military

An important chapter of the American story has included generations of males (and in more recent time, females) who have served in active military service. The same applies to the immigrants from the Middle East. As mentioned earlier in the writing, many settlers left North Dakota during the Dust Bowl and later to enlist into military service. But a few did return, and to date



The corners of the property are graced with pine trees (northwest shown here). Also visible is Alex Asmel's military marker at the left.

³⁴ The door and doorknob from the original structure is housed in Dearborn, MI, at the Arab American National Museum, as part of their permanent exhibit. A photo is included in Section 11.

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there are eight United States Military veterans buried in the Cemetery. They include: Alex Asmel and Salem Juma, WWI veterans; Omar Hamdan, Hamed George Jaha and Ahmed Jaha, WWII veterans; Abraham Omar and J.D. Benson, Korean War era veterans; and Kobby Nai Sowah, a veteran from the Iraq war.

Kobby Nai Sowah is not a descendent of a local settler but when the Bakken oil boom took the state by storm in 2006, North Dakota welcomed workers from across the nation – people came to the state from all backgrounds, cultures and religions. Sowah, an immigrant and an Iraqi veteran who had traveled from Florida and was employed as a tanker driver in the oil field. After Sowah died in an automobile accident in 2015, his family sought permission from an Assyrian Muslim Cemetery associate to have him buried in the Muslim cemetery and permission was granted.

A Memorial is Erected

A few years following the dismantling of the original Mosque, Sarah Allie Shupe, widow of Alley Omar and daughter of Mrs. Ahmed Abdallah (Lila), began advocating for the development of a small temple on the cemetery site that could accommodate a site for prayers. The design took place over a number of years, and the new Mosque was completed in 2005. Sarah participated in the design but did not live long enough to see the finished product. Her funeral was the first to take place in the new Mosque.

The new Mosque was formally dedicated in 2005³⁵ and included a noteworthy presentation by Paul Whitney, one of the coauthors of "Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota", with participation by his coauthors D.J. Guerrero and the Rev. William Sherman. It is noteworthy that funding for the construction came from contributors from across the country, particularly from the Midwest and Pacific regions, and across the Abrahamic faiths; Jewish, Christian and Muslim contributors.

Just as the contributions for the Mosque came from various parts of the country, so did components of the new structure. Wheeler Contracting, a Minot, ND, based firm, constructed the basic building, with elements coming from across the country. The brick materials, for instance, were transported from the Southern United States to a Bismarck, ND,



Exterior and interior views of the new structure

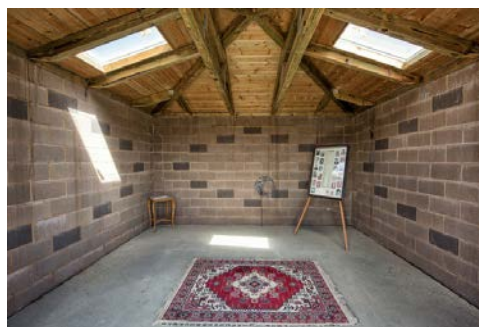


Image from Attachment 8b

³⁵ Descendants of the immigrants, some traveling across the United States and Canada, [as well as many local residents and a number of media] gathered for a dedication program of the new space. Speakers included author Paul Whitney and other contributors to the project.

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firm from which the bricks were purchased. The dome and minarets were designed by Emmett Omar, son of Sarah Omar Shupe, and fabricated in Seattle, WA. The ornamental spires forming the tops of the minarets and topping the dome came from an Indiana firm. A plaque recognizing Sarah Allie Shupe as the inspiration behind the construction project, affixed to the left of the doors, and the plaque commemorating the original Mosque, located to the right of the doors, was developed in California.

The construction and dedication attracted much attention, partially the result of a series of articles in the *Minot Daily News*, by Staff Writer Jill Schramm and partially through word of mouth and social media. "Prairie Peddlers" co-author John Guerrero reported that the story about the construction of this new Mosque had spread to sizeable Arab communities in Canada and Michigan and even back to Lebanon.

Renewed Interest

Since the publishing of "Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota" in 2002, the site has received local, regional, and national attention. There are currently writings in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and a number of other prominent national newspapers and magazines.³⁶ Television cameras have frequented the space on numerous occasion as well, and the site has been the subject of several documentaries, as well as being featured on NPR's Weekend Edition (Sept. 2010).

Conclusion

The Ross settlement by Syrian Muslims is an important and significant part of North Dakota's history as it shows the diversity of immigrants who settled in the State beyond the various groups of European descent. Though some of the surrounding farming and pasture land is still owned by the descendants of these immigrants, few relatives remain in the area at this time.³⁷ The cemetery is the most significant place remaining that testifies to this part of North Dakota's homesteader legacy while also demonstrating some of the social and religious customs important to the group.

As stated in local, regional and national writings over the past decade – the site is one of the most interesting places in North Dakota you've likely not heard of! *The Forum* article dated May 11, 2003,³⁸ quoted D. J. Guerrero, co-author of *Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota*, "When the word gets out this is the first mosque, it will be a shrine. It will be a holy spot for future generations."

³⁶ Several samples of writings on the Muslim Cemetery are included as Attachments 8a-d

³⁷ Hassin Abdallah was the last practicing Muslim in the Ross-Stanley area, he died in 2009.

³⁸ Quoted from *The Forum*, Fargo, ND

Assyrian Muslim Cemetery
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Assyrian Muslim Cemetery
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: 13N Easting: 684942 Northing: 5353277

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Beginning 78.2 feet South and 33 feet West of quarter corner on East line of section twenty-eight in Township one hundred fifty-six North of Range ninety-two; thence West 581 feet, thence North 300 feet; thence East 581 feet, thence south 300 feet, parallel to said East line of Section Twenty-eight and 33 feet distant to point of beginning and containing four acres.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

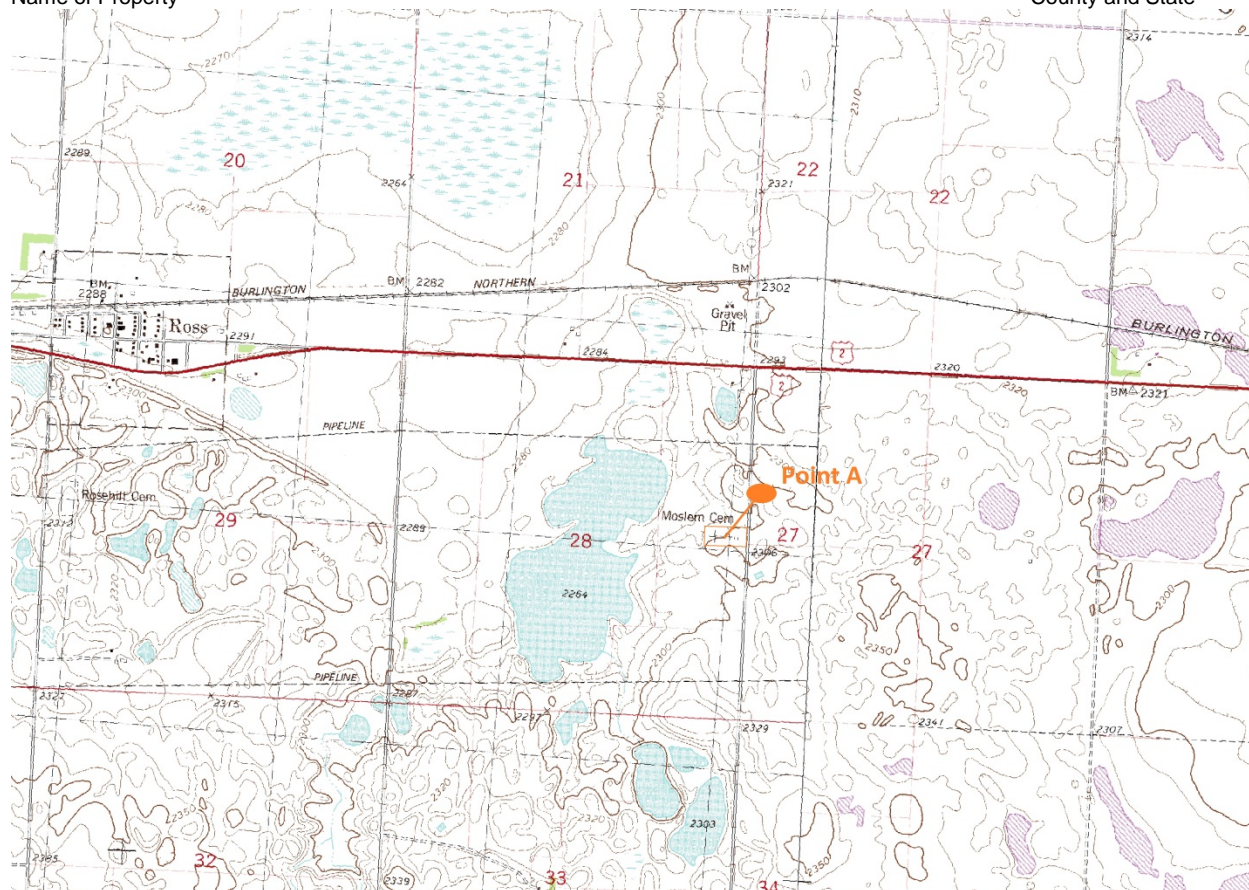
The boundaries were determined by the purchase of the property. See Attachment 1, Abel Hadey Conveyance, Original Lease of Property.

Assyrian Muslim Cemetery

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UTM NAD 83: 13N 684942 5353277



11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Blanche Abdallah
organization: Family/descendant of immigrants
street & number: 1115 Elway St.
city or town: St. Paul state: MN zip code: 55116
e-mail bea.abd56@gmail.com
telephone: 218.791.3916 date: April 2017

name/title: Emmett Omar
organization: Family/descendant of immigrants
street & number: 24025 58th St NE
city or town: Redmond state: WA zip code: 98053
e-mail memmetto@hotmail.com
telephone: 425.836.0504 date: April 2017

Assyrian Muslim Cemetery
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Additional Documentation

Property Owner

name/title: Richard Omar, Representative
 organization: Assyrian Muslim Cemetery of Ross
 street & number: 8051 65th LN NW
 city or town: Stanley state: ND zip code: 58784

Photo Log

Name of Property: Assyrian Muslim Cemetery
 City or Vicinity: Ross
 County: Mountrail State: North Dakota

Photo Number	Photo Name	Photographed By	Date	View
1	Abdallah Family Headstone	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	W
2	Mike Abdallah	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	
3	Lila Abdallah	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	
4	Nathan Abdallah	Roberta Abdallah	July 2016	
5	Hassin Abdallah	Roberta Abdallah	July 2016	
6	Hayden Almer	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	
7	Crescent Close Up	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	W
8	Northwest Corner	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	NW
9	Irene George	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
10	Eli Family	Emmett Omar	July 2016	W
11	Elley Gader	Roberta Abdallah	July 2016	
12	Sam Gader	Roberta Abdallah	July 2016	
13	Solomon Hodge	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	
14	Albert Hamdan	Jackie (Hamdan) Schumacher	June 2016	
15	Omar Hamdan	Jackie (Hamdan) Schumacher	December 2017	
16	Ahmed Jaha	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
17	Kalled Jaha	Bea Abdallah	July 2016	
18	Sam Jaha Family Site	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
19	Nettie Juma	Emmett Omar	July 2016	W
20	Salem and Johanna Juma	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
21	Allay Omar Family Graves	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
22	Allay Sarah Omar Family	Emmett Omar	July 2016	W
23	Omar Ayash Family	Emmett Omar	July 2016	W
24	Omar Families	Emmett Omar	July 2016	

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25	Frank and Belinda Osman	Emmett Omar	July 2016	NW
26	Allie Sma'aine	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
27	New Mosque	Emmett Omar	Unknown	NE
28	Plaque on Mosque	Emmett Omar	July 2016	
29	Overview of Cemetery	Lorna Meidinger	May 11, 2018	W

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

THIS INDENTURE, Made this 2nd day of January, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Thirty (1930) between Abel Hadey and Freida Hadey, husband and wife, part ies of the first part, and The Assyrian Moslem of Ross, Ross, No. Dak. part y of the second part

Document No.

120470

WITNESSETH, That the said parties of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Sixty and no/100 DOLLARS, to them in hand paid by the said part y of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do herely GRANT, BARGAIN, SELL AND CONVEY, unto the said part y of the second part its successors and assigns, FOREVER, all that tract or parcel of land and real estate lying and being in the County of Mountrail and State of North Dakota, described as follows, to-wit:

Beginning 78.3 feet south and 33 ft west of Quarter corner on East line of Section Twenty-eight (28) in Township One Hundred Fifty-six (156) North, of Range Ninety-two (92); Thence West 581 ft; thence north 300 ft ; thence east 581 ft; thence south 300 ft. parallel to said east line of Section Twenty-eight (28) and 33 ft distant to point of beginning and containing 4 acres

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD THE SAME, Together with all the hereditaments and appurtenances thereunto belonging or in anywise appertaining unto the said part y of the second part, its succe^{ors} and assigns, FOREVER. And the said Abel Hadey and Freida Hadey husband and wife, part ies of the first part, for themselves their executors and administrators, do covenant with the said part y of the second part, its successors and assigns, that they are well seized in fee of the land and premises aforesaid, and ha ve good right to sell and convey the same in the manner and form aforesaid; that the same are free from all incumbrances whatsoever

and the above bargained and granted lands and premises in the quiet and peaceable possession of the said part y of the second part, its successors and assigns, against all persons lawfully claiming or to claim the whole or any part thereof, the said part ies of the first part will Warrant and Defend.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, The said part ies of the first part do hereunto set their hand s and seal the day and year first above written.

Signed, Seal and Delivered in Presence of
A. J. Ross Abel Hadey (SEAL)
Charlie Juma Freida Hadey (SEAL)
 (SEAL) (SEAL)

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA, }
 County of Mountrail } ss.
 On this 2nd day of January in the year A.D. 19 30 before me personally appeared Abel Hadey and Freida Hadey, husband and wife,

known to me to be the person wh described in and who executed the within instrument, and acknowledged to me that the y executed the same.
 (A. J. Ross, Notary Public) A. J. Ross
 State of North Dakota Notary Public, Mountrail Co. N. Dak.
 My commission expires May 21st 1931.

Delinquent taxes and special assessments or installments of special assessments paid and transfer entered Jan 3 19 30
P. J. Haines
 Auditor of Mountrail Co., N. D.
 By L. S.

I hereby certify that the within instrument was filed in this office for record on the 3rd day of Jan. A. D. 19 30, at 9 o'clock A. M., and was duly recorded in Book 249 of Deeds on page 523.
H. W. Dennis
 Register of Deeds.
 By P. A. Deputy.

Attachment 2

List of Graves and Memorial Markers*

Assyrian Muslim Cemetery, Ross, ND

<u>Name</u>	<u>Gravestone</u>	<u>Marker</u>
1. Nathan Hizan Hassen	3-6-33 – 4-12-33	
2. Solomon Hodge	1870 – 1940	
3. Kobby Nai Sowah	1975 – 2015	
4. Elsie Eli		1921 – 2010
5. Joe Eli	1917 – 1988	
6. Alex Asmel	Unknown – 41	
7. Sarah Omar Shupe	1914 – 2004	
8. Allay Omar	1884 – 1978	
9. Mary Omar Looney		1933 – 1998
10. David Omar	1946 – 1996	
11. Sam Omar	1884 – 1956	
12. Fred Omar		1948 – 2007
13. Beverly Horst		1937 – 1999
14. Abraham Omar		1933 – 2004
15. Fatima Miller		1931 – 2004
16. Reda Omar	1925 – 2002	
17. Raymond Omar	2-24-46 – 4-6-47	
18. Albert Omar	1889 – 1970	
19. Nazira Omar	1908 – 1998	
20. Jephtha D. Benson	1931 – 2011	
21. Omar Hamdan	1928 – 2017	
22. Albert Hamdan	1896 – 1966	
23. Johanna Juma	1902 – 1980	
24. Salem C Juma	1889 – 1973	
25. Sam Gader	1890 – 1949	
26. Mostafa Osman	1883 – 1951	
27. Elley Gader	1881 – 1948	
28. Belinda Osman Hudson	1915 – 1980	
29. Isha Gader	1886 – 1948	
30. Mary Juma	1864 – 1947	
31. Allie Sma'aine	Unknown – 1941	
32. Nettie Juma	1904 – 1943	
33. Ahmed (Mike) Abdallah	1887 – 1974	
34. Hassin Abdallah	1925 – 2009	
35. Hayden Wayne Almer	1996 – 2011	
36. Lila Abdallah	1887 – 1968	
37. Toby Abdallah	1931 – 1953	
38. Nathan Hassin Abdallah	8-14-79 – 1-12-80	
39. Albert "Charles Amid" Abdallah	1921 – 1930	
40. Nazema [Nezema] George Jaha	1909 – 1976	

41. Irene George	1951 – 2013
42. Dorothy George Dugdale	1948 – 2016
43. Joseph Jaha	1928 – 1928
44. Hussine Jaha	Unknown – 1933
45. Hamed George Jaha	1910 – 1985
46. Machaede Jaha	1890 – 1942
47. Ahmed Jaha	1929 – 1996
48. Sam Hassen Jaha	1892 – 1965
49. Kalled Jaha	1927 – 1967

*There are also nine family markers and a bench in the cemetery.



Prairie Peddlers

The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota

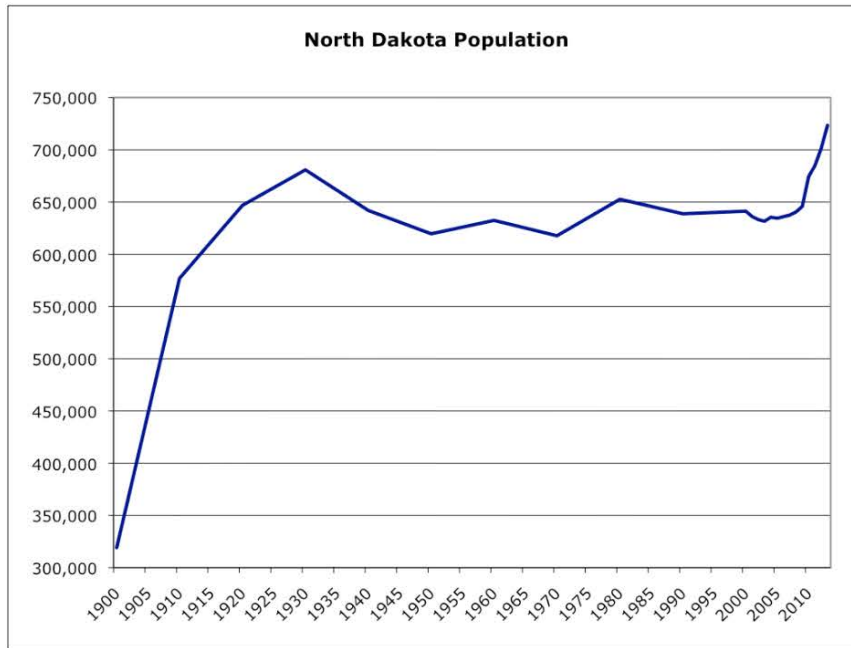
William C. Sherman
Paul L. Whitney
John Guerrero



North Dakota Historical Population

Based on Data from the U.S. Census Bureau at:

North Dakota QuickFacts <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/380001k.html> and [U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates page](http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html).
 2000 - 2013 data are estimates from <http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html>.



1870	2,405
1880	36,909
1890	190,983
1900	319,146
1910	577,056
1920	646,872
1930	680,845
1940	641,935
1950	619,636
1960	632,446
1970	617,761
1980	652,717
1990	638,800
2000	641,298
2001	636,225
2002	633,210
2003	631,680
2004	635,480
2005	634,528
2006	636,019
2007	637,534
2008	640,525
2009	645,903
2010	674,344
2011	684,867
2012	701,345
2013	723,393

Attachment 5

WPA Interview with Mike Abdullah, 19th Century Syrian Immigrant in North Dakota

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

A Syrian who settled in North Dakota in 1907 had many stories to tell three decades later. In 1939, Syrian native Mike Abdullah sat for interviews with employees of a New Deal program called the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The interviews were part of an effort to employ writers and historians to capture oral histories in a rapidly changing nation at midcentury. The “Syrians” of North Dakota had found their way to the upper Midwest when their eastern Mediterranean homeland was still under Ottoman rule. Many of these immigrants were Maronite, Orthodox, and Melkite Christians, but some were Muslims, especially those who settled in North Dakota. Even though Mike Abdullah and his compatriots had become “sodbusters” in the Great Plains tradition, they continued to practice Islam, and had founded a mosque and cemetery by around 1930. The image accompanying this excerpt shows the Ross, North Dakota, mosque, the first mosque in the United States, as it was rebuilt in 2005. The two people in the picture are descendants of the Syrian immigrants who came to North Dakota a century earlier. The interviews with Mike Abdullah and other Syrian settlers are excerpted in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, edited by Edward E. Curtis. The book is included in the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf.

TEXT

Note: A WPA field worker, Everal J. McKinnon, interviewed Mike Abdullah in his home in Ross, North Dakota. I was born in Rufage, Rushia, Syria. I don't remember the date, nor the month[,] but I believe that it was in 1886. (People in the Old Country did not keep track of their age or birth date because of the Turkish rule[,] and they forced our boys into military service when they were of a certain age.) The village that I was born in had a population of about 400 people.... My home was a one-story six-room stone building, about thirty by forty. The floor was made like all the other homes in the Old Country, poles about six inches in diameter were laid side by side on the ground.... I went to school one year. It wasn't a school like in this country. Father paid a man living in our town to write and read our bible [the Qur'an]. That was my education.

Father was a farmer and until I was a full-grown man, I worked at home for father. When I was old enough to work out for others, I received about 25 cents a day.

Taxes in the Old Country [were] much different from here. Taxes there were figured according to what your crop produced. For instance, for every ten bushels that the farmer got from the crop, the government took one bushel.

For seven years, I farmed for myself in the Old Country. I farmed about forty acres, with a team of oxen, wooden plow equipped with an iron lay, the rest of the farm work such as seeding, reaping, and threshing, I had to do by hand. I had one cow and about a dozen chickens, but no goats or sheep as most people had.

We had church services every Friday. I belonged to the Moslem church in the Old Country the same as I do in this country....

In the Old Country... it was very hard to make a living.... Quite a few people from our town had already come to America and their letters told of lots of work for which they got big pay, free land to farm and live on, and much freedom. We didn't have any freedom in the Old Country as we were under the Turkish rule and we even had to be very careful what we said[,] and the taxes we paid were taken by Turkey and we never got anything back for the taxes we paid. Our roads were terrible. Then the Turkish government made our men and boys serve in their army for sometimes many years

When I left for America, I gave my land and things to my mother and sister, my father was dead. I borrowed \$75 besides the money I had saved, to make the trip. I brought only some clothes and enough food to last until I got to France. There were fifteen of us that left from our town at that time. H. A. Juma and Alley Farhart were in the group. I don't remember the names of the rest. We left from Beirut the spring of 1907 and sailed to Naples, Italy, on a cattle boat, from there we traveled through France by train and took a boat to Liverpool, England. I can't remember sailing from England to Montreal, Canada. It seems to me that I was only on a boat two times on the whole trip. *[Field worker's note: Mrs. Abdullah tried to convince the informant that he must have crossed the ocean on a boat, but he could not recall it.]*

I stayed in Montreal for one month and then came to Fargo, North Dakota, by train. I tried to peddle for about three months but I couldn't make a living at that, so I took the train to Ashley, North Dakota. There were other Syrians already there and I went to work on a farm; worked on farms there for three years, making from \$25 to \$30 a month. In 1911, I came to Ross. I worked out for four years and during threshing I got \$1.25 a day. When working by the month I got \$30. In 1915, I filed on a homestead. I lived on my homestead for two years and then lived with Frank Osman for a year. I got my naturalization papers October 2, 1916. In 1918, I moved to New Rockford, North Dakota. I stayed in New Rockford for five months and worked in the section crew. In 1919, I moved to Detroit, Michigan, and worked in the factories for two and a half years. In 1921, I moved back to Ross, North Dakota, as I got married in 1920 and had to settle down and make a home. I have lived around Ross ever since. I rented three farms and in 1927, I bought the farm we are now living on.

When I first came to America, I thought America was pretty funny. The way people [did] things seemed funny. The people were always in a hurry[,] and when they got done there didn't seem to be any reason for the hurry.... Everything in the Old Country was much slower.... I didn't like it for the first two years I was in America, and many times I felt like I wanted to go back to the Old Country.

I couldn't talk or understand the American language when I came here, and when I was peddling I had to talk to people by motions and when I wanted to tell anyone the price of a thing, I would take money from my pocket and show them the amount of the price. When I wanted to ask for a place to sleep, I had to lay down on the floor and play that I was asleep[,] and then they knew what I wanted. Nearly everyone felt sorry for me because I couldn't talk their language. I remember one time when a bunch of people wanted to know what nationality I was[,] so a man asked me if I was Jewish, and I nodded my head no. So he asked me if I was a sheeny [an archaic epithet for Jews]. It sounded enough like "Syrian" so I nodded my head meaning yes. Everyone laughed very hard. It took me about two years to learn enough English to get along good.

I was attracted to my first American residence by other Syrians living in that community and an opportunity to make a living. That was at Ashley, North Dakota.... When I first started farming in this country I had a plow, harrow, and binder. I farmed 100 acres when I started and in 1924 I farmed 240 acres. Now I farm 160 acres.... My steadiest income has been from cattle and sheep. Until 1934 we depended mostly on the cattle, [but] since it [has been] so dry [since then] we have depended more on the sheep. I have 106 head of sheep, nine cows, and seven horses. I have no more machinery now and do all my farming with horses. In 1934 I was forced to sell thirty-nine head of cattle to the government because [I] didn't have feed for them.

I have not been able to make anything farming since 1929. I belong to the Agricultural Conservation Association [a locally administered federal program of financial support and other aid to farmers]. If it weren't for this there wouldn't be any money in trying to raise a crop. I don't think we live any different now than we did before there was a depression. If we [couldn't] eat good[,] there wouldn't be any use living. It was hard to have to sell my cattle to the government for so little money, but they would have starved if had tried to keep them....

My wife was born in Rufage, Rushia, Syria. We don't know the date of her birth, but it was in the year 1886. *[Field worker's note: Mrs. Abdallah told as a joke: There are several of the Syrians here that don't know their age, and they never get to be over 55 or 60 years old. I guess I am like the rest of them. Because of military reasons nobody in the Old Country kept track of their age, and they still don't know. I am sure that some of them can't tell within 15 or 20 years of their correct age.]* Mrs. Abdallah was married and had two children in the Old Country before coming to America....

We (meaning Syrians) have a religious belief concerning the butchering of meat. We believe that an animal should not be shot or hit in the head to kill it. It should be bled to death. We think that when an animal is shot or hit in the head, the evil and sins remain in the meat and it is a sin to eat this meat. We also know that when an animal is butchered our way the blood drains from the meat better, and in this way the meat is a lighter color and it will keep much longer. There is another Old Country belief that to pass a comment when looking at a newly born baby, such as saying that the baby is good looking, etc., will make the baby become sick. We also have a Syrian way of blessing and saying thanks for our food on the table before eating even one bite. We believe that it is a sin to eat without saying this (cannot give it in English).

[We don't have much recreation] besides going to town, listening to the radio, the children try to play the mouth organ and the guitar. Sometimes we go to the neighbors' to visit but most times we have work enough to keep us busy....

[Field worker's note: There was nothing about the farm or the home to set it aside as a Syrian American home. One frame barn, and one straw barn, a few small frame sheds and a frame house....]

If I had my life to live over again, I'd likely do about the same things only I'd come to America when I was younger and I [would] settle down and stay there. I'd maybe settle in the state of Michigan or in North Dakota. I would get married younger and try to save for my old age. I wouldn't try to raise much crop if I was on a farm; I'd go into cattle and sheep. I can't really say that I am sorry that I lived the way I have because I have always enjoyed life.

SOURCE

Edward E. Curtis, ed. *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. (pp.33-39)

HOW TO CITE THIS PAGE

"Muslim Journeys | Item #86: WPA Interview with Mike Abdullah, 19th Century Syrian Immigrant in North Dakota", March 27, 2017
<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/86>.

County--Mountrail
Field worker--Everal J. McKinnon
Address--Ross, North Dakota
Informant--Allay Omar
Address--Ross, North Dakota
Farm description--SE¹ Section 33-156-92

I was born on December 15, 1890 in Bierie, Rachieah Sham, Syria, and my real name is not Allay Omar but Allie Sadden. Upon entrance into the United States, I was unable to spell my name, so someone took the liberty of writing it for me and misspelled my surname, and my father's surname was given as my given name.

We lived in a lovely village in Syria. It had a population of about one-thousand people, and everyone's home was built of stone. Our home consisted of four rooms, and the entire building measured 30 x 40 feet. All the homes were surrounded by trees and many had orchards, and the whole effect was pleasing to the eye.

My father was a farmer, and I helped him on the farm all the time that I was in Syria. Father owned about one-hundred acres and quite a number of grains were sowed. Forty acres was used for wheat, thirty-five acres for oats, twenty acres for lentils, and the remaining five acres for cattle feed. We used a team of oxen on a wooden walking plow equipped with an iron lay for plowing, and seeded and harvested by hand.

In the villages, the inhabitants hired an individual to teach their children to write and to read the Koran. I attended such a school from 1895 to 1896. The larger cities had government schools.

I did not belong to any organizations in the Old Country.

We attended the Moslem Church, and services were held every day. Friday's services were the most important, however. We did not sing any hymns at the services.

A wedding in the Old Country was a strange affair compared to one other than a Moslem. All arrangements were made by the parents of the two parties involved, and at the ceremony, the bride has the one privilege of naming two witnesses to act in her behalf. The bridegroom and father of the bride are the main characters in the performance, because the bride is not present at the time of the ceremony. She retires to another room while the father and bridegroom clasp hands, over which a handkerchief is draped. The vows are given, the bride meets her husband, and there is much rejoicing. Everyone feasts and celebrates for many days.

A party in the Old Country was really enjoyed by all, as all forgot to be formal and acted as they pleased. No seriousness was ever introduced. Food was served, music played for dancing, and everyone loved it. A party was held in the evening, and it often lasted for days.

Our meal was a typical meal of the East. We used mutton or beef for meat, cheese, olives, ground wheat used in various concoctions, grape syrup, green vegetable salads, and breads. The whole family ate together.

I left my country of birth because I thoroughly disliked and disapproved the government of Turkey and the control they had over us. They forced the young men to join their army, and they taxed us until we bled, and we never could understand what they used our money for as no improvements were ever seen anywhere. I was also captivated by the stories told of the land of opportunity, America.

I really didn't know what to expect to find in America. When we started from Syria, we bought enough food to last us until we reached France. We took all of our clothes with us. A farewell party was given in our honor, which was sad indeed, as our relatives didn't want us to go such a distance. Gifts were presented to us, after which there was much shaking of hands.

There were seven others that came across at the time I did. There was Mohammed Ismale, Mohammed Allie, Hamid Samadale, Allie Samadale, Side Allie and his wife, and Shade Allie. My destination was Ross, North Dakota, as my brother, Sam Omar, came to homestead in 1902.

Byron We left from Bayriet, Syria in August of 1907. Our boat was a fine one. Our quarters were good, and the food was, too, but I couldn't eat because I was seasick the least bit. We didn't encounter any storms, and throughout the whole five-week trip, had but a few days of fog. We came directly to New York, and my first impression of this world was favorable. When the boat docked at the harbor, I immediately took a train to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I visited for a couple of weeks. I then went by rail to Stanley, North Dakota, where my brother met me and took me to his homestead.

I didn't work out at all, but found a man that wished to sell his homestead rights, so I took advantage of the sale and homesteaded for fourteen months. In 1909, I moved in with my brother because we were both bachelors, and since we just lived across from each other, it would be just as well to batch together.

In 1923, I bought another quarter of land, which is about two and one-half miles from my homestead towards the northeast, and now reside on this land. I farm both places, however.

My homestead description is SW $\frac{1}{4}$ on Section 8-155-92. My first home was a 12 x 14 one-room frame shack. The first school built around here was the Ross Public School.

Raising my first crop was simple as my brother and I farmed together and he had all the machinery, horses, and five years of experience, so all the necessities were on hand.

I cannot read English at all, and subscribe to magazines and

newspapers from the Old Country, and one newspaper from New York.

I am a member of the Farmers' Union, but cannot give you the date ~~the~~ joined the organization. I have never become affiliated with any political party.

I had very little trouble because of lack of knowledge of the English language as my brother always accompanied me wherever I went. All the people in our neighborhood were very friendly and they helped me whenever they could. My brother and I never went anywhere seeking recreation.

I favored America entering the World War because I think that whatever my government decides in such a case is not for me to find fault with, but instead, help in whatever way I can.

I did lose some money in the ^{of} past-war bank failures, and did not regain it.

My period of greatest prosperity is from 1922 to 1928. My greatest losses came from 1930 to 1939. I had to sell twelve head of cattle to the government in 1934, and have been able to get along during the depression except for one winter when I had to ask for grants. I also made a loan from the Federal Land Bank in 1937 which has to be repaid, and I owe for taxes for the past few years.

I belong to the County Agricultural Conservation Association.

Foods and religion are still retained in my home as well as in the homes of the other Syrian's in the community. One custom, that of shaking hands every time you meet regardless how often, is still prevalent.

I have no hobby, but my wife likes to sew and do fancy work. The children all find their recreation at the school. We all attend church services on Friday's.

The future of North Dakota, and especially for next year, looks bad. Irrigation might help in some places but the land is, ^{as two} so rough for irrigating in this country.

The relief situation is fine in some cases but partiality is shown is to be found in places.

I like this government. After living under Turkish rule, this government is a wonder and anyone saying otherwise should be exiled to a European country until he is cured of his ideas.

I know that conditions in the Old Country can't be too good with war raging right next door. I would like to go back and visit my land of birth, but would not care to stay. America is far superior to Syria or any other country, except in one respect, and that is that our climate was ideal.

We use the Syrian language in our home, but our farm is thoroughly American. Our buildings are nice and well-kept.

My wife is a Syrian, but a natural-born citizen of the United States. She was born in Medina, North Dakota, in February of 1914.

We have had five children, and they are Aminia, born on January 7, 1931 in Ross, North Dakota; Mary, born on June 2, 1932 in Ross, North Dakota; Zinie, born on July 23, 1933 in Ross, North Dakota; Lila, born on September 2, 1935 in Ross, North Dakota; and Selma, born on August 5, 1938 in Ross, North Dakota.

Attachment 7

The Compact of Medina: A Constitutional Theory of the Islamic State

Posted On *May 30 2001*
By : *Dr. Muqtedar Khan*

Published in the Mirror international on May 30th, 2001

The Qur'an was sent as a divine guidance to those who believe and contains principles and guidelines essential for social, political and spiritual guidance of humanity. The Qur'an should however not be mistaken as a manual. It is an essence of divine values, a collection of revealed principles the understanding and following of which will lead us along the straight path. The derivation of a manual from the divine principles is one of the most important responsibilities that come from being a Muslim. This responsibility is like a fard-e-kifaya (communal obligation). It is enough that someone take up this task in a given place and time.

As Muslims always in search of political autonomy and ethical authenticity we repeatedly return to Islamic sources in order to derive a manual for our times from the divine principles in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. One of the projects that contemporary Muslims are dealing with is the construction of a theory of an Islamic state. Several theories of the Islamic state have already been advanced. Some are more focused on the principle of shura and hence are more democratic in character while other theories are more focused on the divine authority of the Khalifa and are therefore more authoritarian models.

In this brief essay I wish to point out to one particular precedent set by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that not only supports the democratic theories of Islamic state but also provides a very important occasion for the development of political theory itself. The occasion I am referring to is the compact of Medina; some scholars also refer to it as the Dastur al-Medina (The Constitution of Medina). We must remember that everything the Prophet (PBUH) said and did is essentially an exegesis of the Qur'an. The Prophet's actions should be understood as an interpretation, a prophetic and divine interpretation, of the Holy Qur'an.

After Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) migrated from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 CE, he established the first Islamic state. For ten years Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not only the leader of the emerging Muslim Ummah in Arabia but also the political head of Medina. As the leader of Median, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exercised jurisdiction over Muslims as well as non-Muslims within the city. The legitimacy of his rule over Medina was based on his status as the Prophet (PBUH) of Islam as well as on the basis of the compact of Medina.

As Prophet of Allah (SWT) he had sovereignty over all Muslims by divine decree so profoundly manifest in the statement of Shahadah, Lailaha Illallah Muhammadur Rasoolullah (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger). When Muslims declare their faith, they not only assert the sole divinity of Allah (SWT) but also the sovereignty of Muhammad (PBUH) as his messenger and agent on Earth. But Muhammad (PBUH) did not rule over the non-Muslims of Medina because he was the messenger of Allah. They did not recognize this particular credential of his. He ruled over them by virtue of the tri-partite compact that was signed by the Muhajirun (Muslim immigrants from Mecca), the Ansar (indigenous Muslims of Medina and the Yahud (Jews). It is interesting to note that Jews were constitutional partners in the making of the first Islamic state.

The compact of Medina provides an excellent historical example of two theoretical constructs that have shaped contemporary political theory and should therefore be of great value to those

scholars who are involved in the theorizing of the Islamic state. Political theory relies heavily on the ideas of a social contract and a constitution. A social contract, made famous by the French philosopher Rousseau is an imaginary agreement between people in the state of nature that leads to the establishment of a community or a state. In the state of nature people are free and are not obliged to follow any rules or laws. They are essentially sovereign individuals. But through the social contract they surrender their individual sovereignty to the collective and create the community or the state. This state then acts as an agent of the sovereign people, exercising the sovereignty that has been delegated to it by the people through the social contract in order to realize the wishes of the people enshrined in the objectives of the social contract.

While western political thinkers like Rousseau and Locke have used this idea of an imaginary social contract as a fundamental premise for theorizing the modern state, there are really very few real examples of such an event in human history. In the American history, the Mayflower compact is one example. The writing and signing of the constitution after six months of deliberation in Philadelphia may be considered as another example of a social contract. But Muslims are fortunate to have the compact of Medina as a tradition upon which the foundations of a modern state can be built.

The second idea that underpins contemporary political theory is the concept of the constitution. In many ways the constitution is the document that enshrines the conditions of the social contract upon which any society is founded. The writing of a constitution is a very old idea. Aristotle himself had collected over 300 written constitutions in his lifetime. The compact of Medina clearly served a constitutional function since it was the constitutive document for the first Islamic state.

Thus we can argue that the compact of Medina serves the dual function of a social contract and a constitution. Clearly the compact of Medina by itself cannot serve as a modern constitution. It would be quite inadequate since it is a historically specific document and quite limited in its scope. However it can serve as a guiding principle to be emulated rather than a manual to be duplicated.

The compact of Medina also illustrates what should be the relationship between the revelation and a constitution. Muhammad (PBUH) if he so wished could have merely indicated the truth revealed by Allah (PBUH) shall serve as the constitution of Medina or the basis for the new community and force this revelation upon non-Muslims. But if he did that then he would have ruled Medina with the authority of Allah behind him but without the complete consent of those under his rule. Muhammad (PBUH) in his great wisdom demonstrated a democratic spirit quite unlike the authoritarian tendencies of many of those who claim to imitate him today. He chose to draw up a historically specific constitution based on the eternal and transcendent principles revealed to him and sought the consent of all who would be affected by its implementation.

In simple terms, the first Islamic state established in Medina was based on a social contract, was constitutional in character and the ruler ruled with the explicit written consent of all the citizens of the state. Today we need to emulate Muhammad (PBUH) and draw up our own constitutions, historically and temporally specific to our conditions and based on the eternal and transcendent principles revealed by Allah (SWT). We can use the compact of Medina as an example of how to develop manuals from principles.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize the principles manifest in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) constitution of Medina. I recommend that all Muslims read this wonderful document themselves. I regret that there is no place in this brief column to reproduce it in its entirety. but readers are welcome to read its entire text at <http://msanews.mynet.net/books/lessons/constitution.html>.

The Constitution of Medina establishes the importance of consent and cooperation for governance. According to this compact Muslims and non-Muslims are equal citizens of the Islamic state, with identical rights and duties. Communities with different religious orientations enjoy religious autonomy. Which essentially is wider in scope than the modern idea of religious freedom. The constitution of Medina established a pluralistic state — a community of communities. It promised equal security to all and all were equal in the eyes of the law. The principles of equality, consensual governance and pluralism are beautifully enmeshed in the compact of Medina.

It is amazing to see how Muhammad's (PBUH) interpretation of the Qur'an and the Maqasid al-Shariah was so democratic, so tolerant and compassionate, while contemporary Muslims (like the Taliban for example) interpretation of the same is so harsh, so authoritarian and so intolerant. I hope this discussion will invite us to look at the Sunnah of our dear Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), more closely. We must learn from him not only the principles of faith but also human virtues of mercy, compassion, equality, justice and tolerance. The constitution of Medina is an excellent manifestation of the Prophet's (PBUH) virtuous personality.

About the Author

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Associated Press

◀ The former mosque near Ross, N.D., in this 1960s era photo, that shows the 30-by-40-foot basement building as it looked in its final years. The mosque, built about 1929 to serve Lebanese Muslims near Ross, didn't survive the toll of weather and neglect as the faithful moved or were assimilated into the Christian culture.

Arab roots in North Dakota

■ First mosque built in North America near Ross, N.D., no longer stands, but memories still abound

By Jill Schramm
Minot Daily News

ROSS, N.D. — The first mosque constructed in North America was a half-basement structure on the North Dakota prairie, researchers say.

The mosque, built about 1929 to serve Lebanese Muslims near Ross, did not survive the toll of weather and neglect as the faithful moved on or were assimilated into the Christian culture. Rodent and water damage led the cemetery committee to dismantle the building in the late 1970s.

All that remains are ground indentations that indicate where the walls once were.

Some would like to see the state put up a historical marker at the site.

"When the word gets out this was the first mosque, it will be shrine. It will be a holy spot for future generations," said D.J. Guerrero, co-author of a new book on Syrian-Lebanese immigrants.

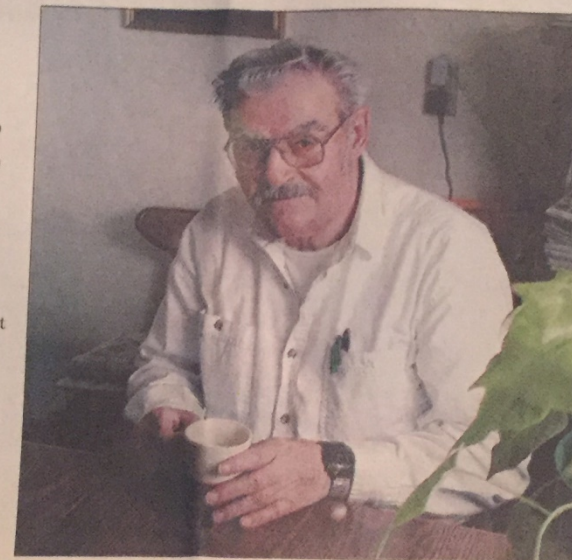
Richard Omar of Stanley, whose parents were Muslims, said he believes the building eventually came to be beyond saving, but he supports the idea of a plaque at the site. Muslims have asked to see the site, he said. Various Muslim organizations recognize the mosque as the first of its kind.

Earlier mosques in America existed, but in converted buildings.

Early years

"North Dakota's claim to fame is that they have the first Muslim mosque in North America built from the ground up," Guerrero said.

The Ross settlers had planned to build an upper level to the half-basement building until the Depres-



Associated Press

▲ Hassin Abdallah of Stanley, N.D., who grew up near Ross, N.D., in one of the state's largest enclaves of Lebanese immigrants, recalls a large gathering in the mosque in the late 1930s to pray for rain.

sion years intervened. Muslims called the mosque the "Jima," a word for gathering. The non-Muslim neighbors called it the Mohammedan Church.

The building was about 30 feet by 40 feet. A single room was supplied with benches. There was an elegant floor rug in the middle of the room. A coal stove was on the north wall.

The northeastern corner of the room was set aside as the prayer room, but no walls separated that area. Congregation members faced east as they prayed. Services were on Fridays, in Arabic.

Hassin Abdallah of Stanley remembers a large gathering in the mosque in the late 1930s to pray for rain.

"I don't think anybody missed that," he said. "All the men stood and prayed, and the women stood on the side."

To a lad, the praying seemed to go on a long time. But when they left, clouds were forming in the west.

"It rained so hard, we had an accident going home. We hit another car. It was a regular storm," Abdallah said.

In the earliest days, spiritual leaders called sheiks would come from Canada or Minneapolis for a couple of months, living with families, to teach and hold services. However, there was little religious instruction for the second generation.

Omar remembers his parents keeping the Muslim prayer customs themselves at home, although they occasionally sent him to the Lutheran Church. His father, Albert (Abdallah) Omar, had come to America after the turn of the century, later going back to Lebanon for a time before returning in 1946 with a wife, Reda.

Abdallah, born in 1925, said he grew up hearing the Quran read and explained at home and saying the Arabic table prayer. He taught the table prayer to his children. Now,

his grandchildren are learning it. Abdallah said he still tries to observe the Ramadan fast when his health permits because fasting is not only good for the body, but for him. It brings back fond memories.

Book on immigrants

Guerrero, the Rev. William Sherman of Grand Forks and Paul Whitney have penned "Prairie Peddlers: Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota," a history of the estimated 2,000 Arab immigrants who had a presence in most of North Dakota's 53 counties.

The book is expected to be released in mid-June by the University of Mary. It tells about the mosque and provides a county-by-county record of the early settlers and their pioneer lives.

"These people need to be identified and given their due," Guerrero said. "They have done well here. They were just remarkable people."

The book followed research by Sherman and Guerrero on ethnic life in North Dakota.

Guerrero, a retired Marine who served in Lebanon in 1968, met the Catholic priest after coming to Fargo to attend North Dakota State University in 1970. Their partnership produced "Plain Folks Ethnic Atlas," which only scratched the surface of Syrian-Lebanese influence in the state.

Whitney, a history instructor in Breckenridge, Minn., who has Lebanese ancestry, joined the partnership after coming to the other authors about 12 years ago for help with research.

The authors say they will receive no profit from "Prairie Peddlers." The University of Mary holds the copyright.

"We just do this because it benefits the state. It preserves the history," Guerrero said.

People of Syrian-Lebanese descent have held offices in North Dakota city, county and state government. One was on the Turtle Mountain Tribal Council. Records also show 63 North Dakotans of Syrian ancestry served in the military during World War I, including 56 who were born overseas. Figures for subsequent years are harder to determine because of mixed parentage by then.

"They are so patriotic, it's unreal. You go into any of their homes, they all have American flags in them.

MOSQUE: See Page 6D

North Dakota Mosque a Symbol of Muslims' Long Ties in America

On Religion

By SAMUEL G. FREEDMAN MAY 27, 2016



Richard Omar at the gate of the oldest mosque in the United States, near Ross, N.D.
Credit Jerry Anderson for The New York Times

ROSS, N.D. — Richard Omar drove his pickup truck through the cemetery gate and pulled to a stop in sight of the scattered headstones. As he walked toward a low granite monument, his running shoes crunched the dry prairie grass and he tilted forward into an unrelenting west wind. “These are my parents,” he said beside a carved granite marker. Then he fixed bouquets of fabric flowers into place with metal stakes, hoping they would last until next spring.

Mr. Omar, a retired electrician, was engaged in an act of filial obligation and something larger, as well: the consecration of a piece of American religious history. This cemetery, with the star-crescent symbol on its gate

and on many of its gravestones, held the remains of a Muslim community that dated back nearly 120 years. Up a slight hill stood the oldest mosque in the United States.

The original mosque, erected by pioneers from what are now Syria and Lebanon, had been built in 1929. After it fell into disuse and ruin, the descendants of its founders and the Christian friends they had made over the generations raised money to put up a replacement in 2005.

It is a modest square of cinder blocks, perhaps 15 feet on each side, topped with an aluminum dome and minarets. Several hundred yards off the main highway, on the outskirts of a town with barely 200 residents about 60 miles west of Minot, the mosque and cemetery exist much as they always have, surrounded by fields of wheat and corn and grazing lands. In this spot, all the industrial clamor of North Dakota's fracking boom feels immeasurably distant.

Though the mosque is rarely used for religious ritual, even during the holy month of [Ramadan](#), which begins June 5, it remains a powerful emblem of Muslim heritage and pride. And in this particular election year, when Muslim immigrants have been made a polarizing part of the political discussion, this obscure mosque in an isolated stretch of a rural state serves as a reminder that Muslims have been part of the American mix for a long time, and not only in populous hubs like Brooklyn; Dearborn, Mich.; and Chicago's western suburbs.

Some, like Mr. Omar's father, arrived in the almost mythically American form of homesteaders and farmers. By 1920, perhaps 200 had made their way to Ross and surrounding Mountrail County, which then had 8,500 people spread over its 1,900 square miles.

"I think it was just over there," Mr. Omar, 66, said as he indicated some furrowed acres on the far side of 87th Avenue Northwest, which was nothing but a dusty gravel track. "He had a team of horses. He'd take the rocks out of the soil for the other farmers."

The elder Omar had come to America from the village of Bire in the Bekaa Valley, in what is now Lebanon, under his birth name, Abdallah Ayash. After making some money in one of Henry Ford's auto factories, he moved to Ross, acquiring 120 acres on June 19, 1911. By then, he had changed his

surname to Omar, which seemed to him more American. Before long, he dropped Abdallah in favor of Albert.

“Years ago, when all these people came over, they came over for a new life,” Richard Omar said as he walked through the cemetery, pointing out adjacent farmsteads. “Right up there used to be Allay Omar. And over there, Sam Omar. No relation to me.”

The graves that he passed spoke of patriotism and assimilation. Amid the many Juma and Omar headstones, marriage had brought to this Muslim cemetery people with the last names of Miller and Horst.



The original mosque fell into disuse and ruin and was rebuilt in 2005. This mosque, about 15 feet on each side, is topped with an aluminum dome and minarets and is now rarely used.

Credit Jerry Anderson for The New York Times

The marker for J. D. Benson, the husband of a woman raised in a Muslim family, featured a photograph of the two on horseback. The stone for Alex Asmel gave his military service from World War I: private in the 108th Infantry. Abraham Omar (1933-2004) was represented with a photograph of him with long sideburns, a ducktail haircut and a black leather jacket. It could fit into a scene from “Grease.”

Inside the mosque, a prayer rug lay on the floor, pointing east toward Mecca. Photographs of the community's early residents, including Mr. Omar's father, rested on an easel. Mr. Omar took a broom to sweep cobwebs from the corners.

Maybe simply by being there, simply by existing in their undeniably concrete way, the mosque and the cemetery, though little used, serve a purpose. Amid a presidential campaign in which one party's presumptive candidate calls for a ban on Muslim immigration, a campaign that has coincided with a [rising number of bias crimes against Muslim people](#) and institutions, this little plot is a reminder that Muslims were here as far back as the Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, Finns, Poles and Jews among whom they settled.

It was not always easy. "Prairie Peddlers," a book about the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to North Dakota, notes that they were sometimes called "black," unwillingly conscripted into America's binary form of racism. Several local Muslims who tried to serve in World War I, the book notes, were discharged for supposed disloyalty because their ancestral homeland was then part of the Ottoman Empire, an enemy in that global conflict. But over time, those who seemed strange became familiar. "These are community people," said Kenneth Halvorson, a high school classmate of Mr. Omar's and the sheriff of Mountrail County. "They are part of our community. They sometimes find themselves in a situation where their nationality or whatever causes them problems. But not here. We know that they're good, hardworking people."

For the occasional American Muslim who learns of this bit of history, the mosque here is touchstone and affirmation. Aman Ali, 31, is a professional storyteller who grew up in an Indian immigrant family in Ohio. During Ramadan in 2010, he decided with his friend Bassam Tariq, a filmmaker, to try to visit a different mosque in a different state for each of the 30 holy days.

Even with GPS, they could not find the Ross mosque. A local pastor introduced them to Lila Thorlakson, a daughter of one of the Omar families and the volunteer caretaker for the mosque. Setting foot there, praying inside, Mr. Ali said, changed his life.

"Learning that Muslim communities have been in this country since the

1800s, it made me realize I am the latest chapter in a book that's being written about our beautiful community," he wrote in a recent email. "It was the first time I felt like I actually belonged here."



Missouri River

By The New York Times

In March 2015, an oil-rig hand named Kobby Nai Sowah died in a car crash across the state line in Montana. He was a Muslim born in Ghana and raised in Florida. The funeral home arranged to have him interred at the cemetery in Ross, in a plot near three pine trees to blunt the incessant wind. In Mr. Omar's folder of records for the Assyrian Moslem Cemetery, its official name, he keeps pages with neat charts of the available grave sites. Realistically, though, few will ever be filled. Sarah Omar Shupe, who was buried here in 2004, was the last community member to regularly speak Arabic and read the Quran.

Ever since the Dust Bowl days, a steady stream of local Muslims have been moving to cities for better economic prospects. Many of those who stayed here died or converted to Christianity in marriage. Mr. Omar's wife is from Scandinavian stock, and he can barely remember a time when he practiced Islam.

He is not even sure he will be buried in the cemetery that he so tenderly tends.

Reconstruction of mosque in Ross nearing completion

Associated Press Mar 13, 2005

ROSS - Work to reconstruct a Muslim mosque here is nearing completion.

Zinie Peterson of Bismarck said the mosque, which was dismantled in the 1970s, was the oldest Muslim mosque constructed in North America.

The building located on the Muslim cemetery near Ross will include a dome and minarets once completed this summer.

Peterson, whose family initiated the project, said the mosque is being built over the site of a previous mosque. Various Muslim organizations recognize the mosque as the first of its kind.

Earlier mosques that existed were in converted buildings. The Ross mosque was built around 1929 to serve Lebanese Muslims.

The building didn't survive the toll of weather and neglect as the faithful moved on or assimilated into the Christian culture. Rodent and water damage led the cemetery committee to dismantle the building some 30 years ago. All that remained were ground indentations that indicated where the walls once were.

It was her late mother's dream to see the mosque rebuilt, Peterson said.

"We thought it was such a terrific idea," Peterson said. "She would be so thrilled because this little thing is being built not only by her family, not only by her Muslim friends, but her Jewish friends and her Christian friends have all donated."

The new mosque is only 289 square feet, Peterson said.

"It's just tiny. It's like a little chapel," she said.

The original mosque was about 1,200 square feet.

Muslims called the mosque the "Jima," a word for gathering. The non-Muslim neighbors called it the Mohammadan Church.

The current building went up last summer and hosted a memorial service for Peterson's mother, Sarah Shupe, who had died in February 2004.

A dedication ceremony will be held July 3 for the finished mosque.

D.J. Guerrero, co-author of a new book on Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, said publicity about the mosque construction has spread to back to Lebanon.

Guerrero, of Fargo, said the mosque will likely be a draw for tourists.

LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE

by HPR Contributor | [Contact](#) | CULTURE | August 12th, 2016



By Tessa Torgeson

There is a piece of history smack dab amidst the seas of wheat and corn, cattle, and derricks in northwestern North Dakota. A crescent moon and star fence along with a tiny cinder block structure with an aluminum dome and minarets pierce the vast blue sky. This structure was the first mosque built in America, right on the outskirts of the 90-person town of Ross, North Dakota, in the oil patch.

Although it is not active, President Obama mentioned this beautiful hidden gem when he was reflecting upon the history of American Muslims in February during his first visit to a mosque.

Syrian-Lebanese immigrants built the original mosque in 1929, settling in North Dakota because of The Homestead Act. While North Dakota is known as a Christian state with predominantly German, Russian, and Scandinavian immigrants, Islam is actually the second-most practiced religion in North Dakota. This was a surprising statistic found in The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies census that was recently published in The Washington Post.

According to the Islamic Society of Fargo-Moorhead, there are about 6000 Muslims in the Red River Valley alone. Even though the number of Muslims on the oil patch is unknown and the mosque fell into disrepair, it was replaced in 2005 thanks to a collaboration between the founder's' descendants and neighboring Christians. The mosque and grounds are still maintained by retired electrician Richard Omar, the son of the founders.

Just like nearby rural Christian churches, there is also a cemetery surrounding the mosque. Traditional Islamic names like Omar are etched into tombstones along with Norwegian ones like Benson. While it is true that death is the great equalizer, this also illustrates that differing religions and cultures have been quietly coexisting for over a century even in prairies of the Midwest. This is tangible proof that unity is possible even in a divisive, turbulent political landscape where Muslims are victims of discrimination, hate crimes, and even an immigration ban proposed by presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Unfortunately, Trump and his followers use the terroristic actions of fringe Islamic extremists to define the entire Islamic religion, thus discriminating and stereotyping the Muslim community. Prejudice against Muslims also called Islamophobia is “the last sanctioned racism,” writes Edward Said, author of “Covering Islam.” Even though violence is a violation of the central tenets of Islam, the mainstream media do not portray it as a peaceful religion, though they are quick to dismiss Christian terrorism as the work of extremists.

As the golden light dances upon the dome of the mosque while the sun sinks into the horizon and cicadas hum in nearby fields, it is sad to believe that people vilify Islam as a violent religion.

This little mosque on the prairie is a lesson that the ties that bind us together are greater than the ones that threaten to break us apart.



ABDALLAH
FAMILY





☪ ☾ ★
ABDALL
FAMILY

MOTHER
LILA
ABDALLAH
1887 - 1968

Small white marker with illegible text



NATHAN HASSIN
ABDALLAH
AUG. 14, 1979
JAN. 12, 1980

BABY
I MISS YOU





HASSIN ABDALLAH

DEC. 25, 1925

APR. 23, 2009

HAYDEN ALMER
MARCH 3, 1996
AUGUST 18, 2011
MISSED BY ALL









Forever Loved Forever Missed
Irene George
April 19, 1951 - November 29, 2013
What Beautiful Memories You've Left Behind





WILLIAM W. WEAVER

1861 - 1948




SAM BRADDER

1850 - 1910



SOLOMON
HODGE
1870 — 1940



ALBERT
HAMDAN
1896 — 1966

OMAR HAMDAN

PVT US ARMY

APR 26 1928

FEB 21

MOTHER
MAGDALENA JAHA
1890 - 1974

LOVING FATHER
AHMED
JAHHA
1929 - 1996

SAM JAHHA
AND FAMILY

TRUDY JAHHA
SAMUELSEN JAHHA
APR 10 1901 - 1987

AHMED JAHHA
PFC US ARMY
KOREA
OCT 29 1929 APR 1 1996



KALLED JAHA
FEB 25, 1927 AUG 30, 1967





GRANDFATHER
JAHN
1910 - 1985

DAUGHTER
JAHN
1915 - 1985

SAM JAHN
1910 - 1985

JAHN
1910 - 1985

AHMED JAHN
1st Lt. US ARMY
KOREA
APR 4 1951

NETTIE
JUMA
1904 - 1943





JUMA

SALEM C JUMA
NORTH DAKOTA
1ST US ARMY
WORLD WAR
24 1887 1957

JOHANNA JUMA



*If tears could build a stairway
I'd walk right up to heaven
and bring you home again*

*In Loving Memory of
Mary Omar Looney
June 2, 1932
Apr. 11, 1999*

OMAR

OMAR





OMAR

ALLAY & SARAH

AMINIE. MARY. ZINIE. LILA. SELMA. EMMETT. DAVID



OMAR
"AYASH"

ALBERT
"ABDULLAH"
FEB 5 1889
OCT 9 1970

REDA
TEL-KADRI
JULY 2 1925
SEPT 5 2002

ALBERT OMAR
1889 - 1970



REDA OMAR
1925 - 2002





OSMAN

HUDSON
1915 - 1980

1961 - 1991





ALLIE SMA AINE

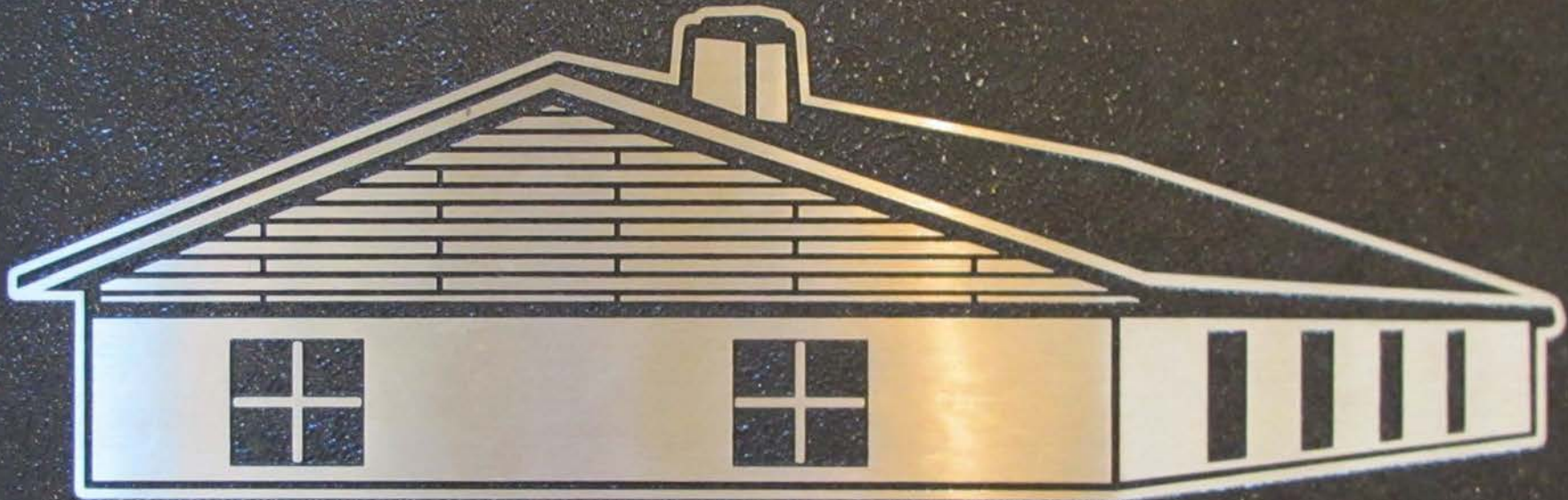
Loving and Caring,

Called to his Maker in 194





First Mosque Built in America



Constructed CIRCA 1928

New Mosque constructed in 2004



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 5/30/2018 Date of Pending List: 7/9/2018 Date of 16th Day: 7/24/2018 Date of 45th Day: 7/16/2018 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 7/17/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



To: Keeper, National Register of Historic Places
From: Claudia J. Berg/ Lorna Meidinger
Date: 24 May 2018
Subject: National Register Nomination

The following materials are re-submitted on this 24th day of May 2018, for the nomination of the Assyrian Muslim Cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places.

- _____ National Register of Historic Places nomination form on archival paper
- _____ Multiple Property Nomination form on archival paper
- _____ Photographs
- _____ USGS map(s)
- _____ Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)
- _____ Pieces of correspondence
- 2 CDs
- 1 Signature Page
- _____ Other: _____

COMMENTS:

- _____ Please insure that this nomination is reviewed
- _____ This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
- _____ The enclosed owner objections ____ do ____ do not constitute a majority of property owners.
- _____ Other: _____