

Lake Region Pioneer Daughters

The Pioneer Daughters organization is a champion for history preservation in the region. Established in 1931, it works:

- To Honor the memory and spirit of those parents who pioneered in North Dakota,
- To preserve and perpetuate the history of North Dakota,
- To promote public interest in the resources and activities of the State.

Pioneer Daughters membership was open to any woman who was a descendant of a parent who settled in ND before statehood (1889). Today membership has been expanded to be all inclusive, inviting both men and women, descendant or not, who support the goals of the Lake Region Pioneer Daughters organization.

Pioneer Daughters began with a mission to gather artifacts from the time when the pioneers (often new immigrants) struggled to survive on the wide-open prairie. The hardiest persisted, often due to grit and the promise of economic opportunity and free land accessed through the homestead land claims.

The first public viewing space for the Pioneer Daughters growing collection were two log buildings that served as jail and jailkeepers quarters when Ft. Totten was first established (1867). Pioneer Daughters operated a museum in the drafty log cabins from about 1934 until 1960. When Ft. Totten was transferred to the ND State Historical Society to be preserved as a historical site, the Society invited Pioneer Daughters to move its collection into renovated space, formally used as the hospital during the time the soldiers occupied the fort and a dining room when it became a boarding school. Today a visit to the Fort Totten Historic Site provides a fascinating glimpse into the lives of pioneers and soldiers as



well as the Native American children who attended school at the Fort from 1891 until a new school was built in 1959.

Through the years, Pioneer Daughter members have donated countless hours collecting, cataloging and exhibiting artifacts that echo the region's pioneer ancestors. They have worked closely with other history preservation groups, most notably the Lake Region Heritage Center, Fort Totten State Historic Site Foundation, and the State Historical Society. In recent years, Pioneer Daughters donated some collections to the Lake Region Heritage Center and negotiated an agreement with the state of North Dakota that allows the state to be a caretaker of the collection at the Fort Totten

Historic Site. Pioneer Daughters also participates to host a Living History Day at the Fort Totten Historic Site held annually. The day provides an immersive experience for students that helps them imagine what life was like in pioneer days while also igniting their interest in history.

Pioneer Daughters is proud of its history preservation tradition, as well as the expansive collection it has amassed. Without the work of its enthusiastic and committed members, much local history would have been lost. Today the organization carries out its mission by encouraging preservation work and by promoting public interest in local history. The Lake Region Pioneer Daughters Scholarship Endowment established in 2022 represents another form of dedication to the work of this remarkable organization. The Pioneer Daughter scholarship will be awarded annually to a student at Lake Region State College who is interested in preserving the history and heritage of North Dakota.