
MANFRED HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

P.O. Box 321 Harvey, North Dakota 58341

Greetings from Manfred!

This biography was prepared by Manfred History and Preservation.
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Adolph Shirley

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Full Name: Clarence Adolph Shirley

Place of Birth: Manfred, ND

Father's Name: Emil Shirley

Mother's Name: Anna Thompson Shirley

Siblings' Names: Gilman, Evelyn Fuhrman, Pauline

Adolph Shirley

A Farmer and a Poet at 100 (from the Herald Press April 2005) by Mark Phillips

He could recite the Gettysburg address from memory with flawless diction and the First Psalm in perfect King James English. He is a poet, with two songs published before he was 30. And, less than 10 miles from where he was born, Adolph Shirley will celebrate his 100th birthday Sunday, April 3.

Born in a farmhouse a mile west and two miles north of Manfred, Shirley grew up with one brother and two sisters. He has lived there all of his life, except for three months when he attended Concordia Academy in Moorhead, Minnesota. Adolph and his brother got scarlet fever, so had to quit school and come home. He later graduated from Fessenden High School.

Never married, he spent his life farming. "After I was old enough I took over our farm. Dad was old and couldn't do it anymore," said Shirley. "It was pretty tough sometimes. It was during the '30s when it was dry from the drought and there were no crops to speak of. I remember one time that five cents a bushel was the market price for wheat."

With a fondness for music he especially enjoys hymns and church music. He was a lifelong member of Vang Lutheran Church in Manfred. It was with his encouragement that the Vang Lutheran Church was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

He began music lessons upon entering Concordia Academy. After returning home he "took a notion" to have music set to a poem he wrote in seventh grade. In 1925 his copyrighted song "North Dakota" was published.

Bill Ongstad sent an original copy of the song to Shirley. Donna Corneliussen sang that song at Adolph's 100th birthday party. He was surprised to find there was still a copy in existence as all of his writing was destroyed in their house fire in 1933.

He wrote his other published song, "Together Through Life" about a "person I didn't even know." Shirley continued, "I found a picture in "The Farmer" magazine of someone I thought was nice and used her for the subject of the song." I never met her," said Shirley. "I never had enough money to travel that far, as she lived in southern Minnesota."

Commenting on turning 100 he said, "I feel as good as I did when I was 25."

Adolph passed away on December 17, 2005. Funeral services were conducted at Vang Lutheran Church and he was laid to rest at the Vang Cemetery, north of Manfred.