



# West of the Red

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORTATION  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH DAKOTA

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*West of the Red — The Role of Transportation  
in the Development of North Dakota*

by

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## Preface

In reading this book you will undoubtedly discover that a history of North Dakota transportation is really a history of the state itself. Whereas states along the eastern seaboard had been settled for 200 years before the whistle of a steamboat or locomotive was heard, rails stretched across Dakota Territory before there was any significant white pioneer settlement. Transportation facilities were built long before there were any towns to serve. The development of agriculture was an immediate necessity if railroads were to survive. The iron horse and the traction engine were partners in the cultivation of the prairies, and although agriculture and transportation were, and are often adversaries, this close and highly interdependent relationship has continued to the present day.

The complicated love-hate relationship of the farmer and the railroad man, the settler and the steamboater, the rancher and the drover has made the history of North Dakota a complex pattern. Since the main characters of the drama are Ceres (the Roman goddess of agriculture) and Mercury (a Roman god who serves as herald and messenger and presides over commerce), it is appropriate that the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, located on the North Dakota State University campus, should publish their story. Agriculture and transportation have been the mainstay of the Institute's research effort since its inception.

The story told by this narrative is not merely one of ox carts, packet boats, steam and diesel engines and jet planes. Rather it is a human story, one of the reaction of extraordinary people placed in an extraordinary land of extreme climate, long distances, arid soil, but boundless opportunity. It tells of rails and trails across the prairie, but also of the people of North Dakota, their prides and problems, and marvels at the accomplishments they have wrought in scarcely one century of settlement in the Northern Prairie State.

The author, Richard Schneider, is a native son of North Dakota. He completed grade and high school at the Crippled Children's School in Jamestown and holds two degrees from North Dakota State University, including a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling. He has maintained

a lifelong interest in the history and personalities of the Peace Garden State. Mr. Schneider and his family immersed themselves in railroad and steamboat lore, old photographs and newspapers, local archives and the collection of the Institute for Regional Studies at NDSU. The original research was accomplished in the 1970s, before the general acceptance of the Internet and computerized information retrieval. The manuscript was laboriously composed by Mr. Schneider, a long-time patient with cerebral palsy, in a time before word processors. His interest was aided and abetted by Robert Tosterud and Gene Griffin of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, who encouraged him in this effort and made the facilities of the Institute available to him.

There have been dramatic changes in transportation and its laws in the last 30 years. With Mr. Schneider's approval, we have added a chapter to bring this intriguing monograph up to date.

Mr. Schneider was North Dakota's 1972 Handicapped Citizen of the Year. He lives in Fargo within earshot of the diesel horns of the Burlington Northern main line. He hopes that students in North Dakota schools might read this book and feel the same pride in their heritage that he experiences. We are proud and glad that he chose to share this story with us.

William E. Thoms  
Professor Emeritus of Law  
University of North Dakota  
Little Falls, Minnesota

Robert J. Tosterud  
Professor of Economics  
University of South Dakota  
Vermillion, South Dakota



# Chapter One

## The Beginning

Ahead lay the Red River. Behind was over 200 miles of construction. And at the station in Moorhead, Minnesota, stood the first regular train to enter Dakota Territory, waiting for its passengers to take their seats. Northern Pacific work engine No. 45 had been used to carry supplies for the construction of the bridge across the Red River; now it was fittingly polished and decorated for the occasion. The vibration and noise of its idling cylinders was like a drum roll. This event had been in preparation for months. Moorhead had been the “end of the track” since December 31, 1871, when the train arrived there in 28 degree below zero weather. Now the bridge was completed and June 6, 1872, was to mark the coming of THE TRAIN to Fargo and points beyond.

*“Heavy wreaths of flowers and ribbons hung from every available projection, and the one canvas store had been despoiled of all its ribbons for the streamers that floated gaily on the breeze.”*

*Mrs. Hubert Smith (wife of the director  
of the commissary for the Northern Pacific)*

The bridge was an unsupported span reaching from cement abutments on each bank. The approaches and supports were made of native wood. It was well built, and the workers were deservably proud of it. Many were aboard with the railroad officials and their wives who had ferried across the river to be on the first train.

As the puffing engine crossed the bridge and entered the recently named settlement of Fargo one could look left up the river and see the barges and docks of the James Hill Steamboat Company. On the Dakota bank, in the trees, were what was left of the many tents of all sizes and descriptions that were once the homes, stores, and saloons of the workers. Now that the railroad was to move on west, there would be no further need for this hell-on-wheels of a town. It was full of memories, for those who had withstood the weather and enjoyed the companionship of fellow workers through the long dark nights.

*Among the many dwellers were desperate and reckless characters, whose desires and lawless deeds kept them on the frontier, as far as possible from the restraints of civilization. . . . It was a “roaring camp” full of rough shod men and easy women. . . . Because there was no other place in which to live many professional and businessmen who would be making Fargo their home spent their first winter there.*

*Fargo Forum Diamond Jubilee Issue  
July 4, 1950*

In February the Puget Sound Land Company, a Northern Pacific (NP) subsidiary, wishing to lay claim to that piece of property, had reported to the authorities in Washington that liquor was being sold there on land that was still claimed by the Indians of the Sisseton and Wahpeton Sioux Tribes. Since the sale of liquors on Indian lands was forbidden by law, soldiers from Fort Abercrombie, acting as ordered, arrived, closed the “evil” places, and arrested the owners. The confiscation of the liquor and an early spring flood had left little to show that once there were six hundred people living in “Fargo in the Timber.”

Straight down the track on the left side were the equipment warehouses, corrals, and underground stables belonging to the railroad. Beyond were the temporary homes of engineers and surveyors. General Thomas L. Rosser, NP’s division engineer, true to his military training, had carefully planned every installation and law and order prevailed in “Fargo on the Prairie.”

*Thomas L. Rosser entered West Point in 1856 from his home in Texas. When the war broke out in 1861 he hurried to Montgomery, Alabama, to join the Confederate forces. His rank went from Lieutenant to General during his distinguished service. He studied law and then went to work as construction engineer for a southern railroad. He was hired by the Northern Pacific in 1871 as district engineer. . . . Rosser was of giant stature, over six feet tall, with a frame of massive proportions. He had jet black hair and piercing black eyes, with a face upon which every lineament was stamped “soldier.”*

*The Brave Mrs. Custer  
Mrs. W.H. Smith*

Situated on the right side and dominating the scene was a large three story white frame building, built by the railroad, and named Headquarters Hotel. Though still unfinished it was being used as a depot, offices, and

visitors' quarters by the railroad. It was properly named, for it was from this hotel and its successor that many important occupants made decisions that would affect the whole territory. Six years later Mrs. Custer would be leaving the train to stay here until she felt strong enough to continue her trip after the death of her husband, General George A. Custer.

Between the hotel and the bridge, on the right side, were the small buildings of hopeful businessmen. All of this was only a beginning, but it would mushroom into a city before the turn of the century.

*A sign over the entrance of one tent indicated Gordon Kenney ran the post office; another sign announced his land office. . . and a third sign announced Mr. Kenney's law office. Other establishments included Charles Mulherin's Grocery, Terrance Martin Grocery, A. Pinkham's boarding tent, Maddock and Mann's general store and four blacksmith and wagon shops owned by Newton, Whitman, Ross and McChesney.*

*A Century Together*

Beyond the new town as far as the eyes could see was an endless expanse of fertile, flat prairie, covered with rich native grass and studded with innumerable wild flowers. A mile north of the settlement was a small plot of wheat. Planted there by James B. Holes as an experiment, it was to be remembered for its foretelling of things to come. James was one of five brothers who arrived in the area before the railroad to seek their fortune.

*In 1874 James Holes planted 15 acres of wheat and in 1877 he increased it to 180 acres. The price of \$1.50 a bushel brought him over \$7,000 that year. By 1893 he had 1,600 acres in wheat.*

*The Valley Comes of Age  
Stanley Norman Murray*

The only disconcerting note on this day of accomplishment was the knowledge, at least by the officials, that the Northern Pacific was out of funds. In 1864 Congress had chartered the Northern Pacific and gave it a 50 million acre land grant to build from Duluth to Puget Sound. In North Dakota this land grant was for 40 alternate sections (640 acres each) for each mile of railroad, plus 200 feet on each side of the track. This meant that ahead of the train was a huge checkerboard strip of land 80 miles wide. The even-numbered sections belonged to the government and the odd to the railroad upon the completion of the track.

On January 1, 1870, Jay Cooke, the famous Philadelphia banker who had been so successful with financing the Northern cause in the Civil War, signed a contract to sell \$100,000 worth of Northern Pacific bonds bearing 7.3 percent interest. At that time, the NP was the largest business enterprise to be started in the United States. The 2,000-mile railroad through an uninhabited wilderness was estimated to cost \$85 million. The only security for creditors was the land grant. Before title to the land could be established, the railroad had to fulfill the requirements of the charter.

*While Cooke was considering the investment General W.T. Sherman advised him to be very cautious, since that part of the country is almost inaccessible during seven or eight months of the year, and is barren and worthless, . . . From Fort Abercrombie on the Red River to Fort Stevenson on the Missouri, about 500 miles, the country is as bad as God ever made or anybody can scare up this side of Africa.*

*History of North Dakota  
Crawford*

The surveying of the land was specifically stated as being the responsibility of the federal government. The initial survey in 1858 laid out parallels every 24 miles with corrections to adjust for the earth's curvature. The second survey, completed in 1870, laid out the townships. In the third survey, which came just ahead of settlements, the sections were identified. A typical survey team, usually eight or nine men and three covered wagons, required one week to lay out a township. They used a hundred-foot chain, a transit, a rod and a compass. The corners were identified by an oak stake about four feet long and three inches square which was marked with the section, township, and range numbers. To assure that the loss of a stake would not mean loss of a survey, a shallow trench forming a right angle was dug along the corner lines, and a mound four feet square of earth was left. Some of these old survey mound markings are still present.

*Grading had already proceeded westward to the Jamestown vicinity. This work was done by horse- or mule-drawn scrapers as well as men with spades. Grading crews lived in tents and worked miles ahead of the track-laying men who needed soldier protection.*

*The track-layers progressed across North Dakota at about three miles a day. (These men slept in railroad bunk cars.) With the ties already laid, the track-laying car hurried to the end of the track by*

*horsepower. Before it stopped, men dropped a rail to rollers on each side of the car. Six men on each side of the rail carried it ahead, and lowered it into place — while twelve men did exactly the same thing parallel to them. The car moved forward again on the unfastened rails, and in about a minute a second pair of rails lay in place. Men behind the cars firmed the rails.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

The pressing need for funds did not stop the building of the line westward. The first 93 miles to Jamestown was completed by September 13, 1872. While the winter slowed down operations, Bismarck, some 200 miles from Fargo, was reached by June 5, 1873.

In addition to the main track, every six miles a siding was added as required by the contract. As it was not always specified on which side the extra track was to be placed, this was left up to the building party in charge. This simple decision was often the basis for the laying of town sites.

It was no longer possible for the Northern Pacific to keep out of bankruptcy.

*The sale of bonds were adversely effected by the disastrous Chicago Fire (October 8-9, 1871) and the Franco Prussian War. The fire bankrupted many insurance companies and the urgent demand for funds to rebuild increased interest rates. The war kept foreign investors out of our bond market.*

*History of North Dakota  
Crawford*

Jay Cooke, unable to sell bonds, had secured the company with funds of his own. Some believed the amount of his own involvement was in the neighborhood of \$25 million. In September 1873, the inevitable occurred and bankruptcy was declared. The company then owned 150 miles of railroad from Tacoma to the Columbia River and 450 miles from Duluth to Bismarck, as well as the land grant that accompanied those miles. The only land sold at the time of the bankruptcy was 40,000 acres, all in Minnesota. Jay Cooke's financial shenanigans triggered the Panic of 1873 and the subsequent depression slowed down progress and settlement. Very few trains made use of the new tracks.

It is interesting to note that when names were selected to be used for all the new localities, Jay Cooke's does not appear. Moorhead was the name of a

partner of Mr. Cooke who was not in favor of the financial arrangement with the Northern Pacific. William G. Fargo, for whom Fargo was named, was the original partner of the Wells-Fargo Express and also a director of the Northern Pacific. There is an avenue in Bismarck that is called Rosser for General Rosser.

At the time of the coming of the steam car, Fargo was in the northern half of what was then the Dakota Territory, organized by Congress in 1861. The 1870 census gave this total area a population of 2,405.

*Of these, 1,213 were in Pembina County. Included in the figures were 808 Indians and Metis. Metis were offspring of French, Scottish or English fathers and either Chippewa, Cree or Assiniboin mothers.*

*Challenge of the Prairies  
Hiram Drache*

Besides these settlements, there were military forts designed to control the Indians. These included Fort Berthold near the present-day Minot, Fort Abercrombie south of Fargo, Fort Rice on the Missouri River south of the present-day Bismarck, Fort Stevenson on the Missouri about 17 miles east of the Montana border, Fort Totten on the shore of Devils Lake, Fort Ransom on the Sheyenne River about 15 miles north of the present-day Lisbon, Fort Pembina, Fort Seward at the present-day Jamestown, and Fort McKeen on the west bank of the Missouri near the present-day Mandan.

President Grant ran for his second term against Horace Greeley in 1872.

*Horace Greeley, who was a prominent editor for the New York Times, received endorsement from both the Liberal Republicans and Democrats. He lost 2.8 million votes to 3.5 million. Ironically within a month of his defeat he lost his wife, his position, his mind and his life.*

*The American Pageant  
Bailey*

Congress passed an amnesty act for all citizens of the South except for 500 to 700 Confederate leaders. Texas steers were driven north in huge herds to feed on native prairie grass and be marketed at railroad terminals. Montgomery Ward, a Chicago firm, sent out its first catalogue. Mark Twain published Roughing It. The first national park, Yellowstone, was established. The New York Sun accused many high officials (including Vice President Colfax) of

accepting bids for political influence in the building of the Union Pacific Railroad.

At this time much of the Great Plains was still in territorial status. However, its cities were starting to grow rapidly. Immigrants were continuing to come, particularly from the British Isles, Germany, and Scandinavia. Economically, the country was in sad shape. Some historians feel that this was due to the failure of Jay Cooke and Company to finance the Northern Pacific. Over 100 banks failed, six times as many state chartered as nationally chartered, and the country was plunged into financial panic which with its resulting unemployment would persist until 1878.

Events were occurring in Europe that would greatly increase immigration to the United States. By 1871, after a long series of bitterly fought wars, nationalism was emerging in Germany. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck engineered the Franco-Prussian War, resulting in the defeat of France and the proclamation of the German Empire under the Prussian King, now Kaiser Wilhelm I. In defeat, France, which lost 156,000 men, was also financially exhausted. Military conscription faced every man in Central Europe. Meanwhile, Russia, under Tsar Alexander III, was trying to “Russify” all of the people within its frontiers. The borders of the Little Fathers’ satrapies included many minorities, such as the Volga Germans, Mennonites, Poles, Finns, and Jews, who had their own religion and customs and did not want to follow those of the Tsar. The main force in the Scandinavian countries that caused emigration was the continuous domination of the big landlords and great industrialists. Though the great wave of Irish immigration was before the Civil War, every year of poverty, hunger and British misrule brought thousands more.

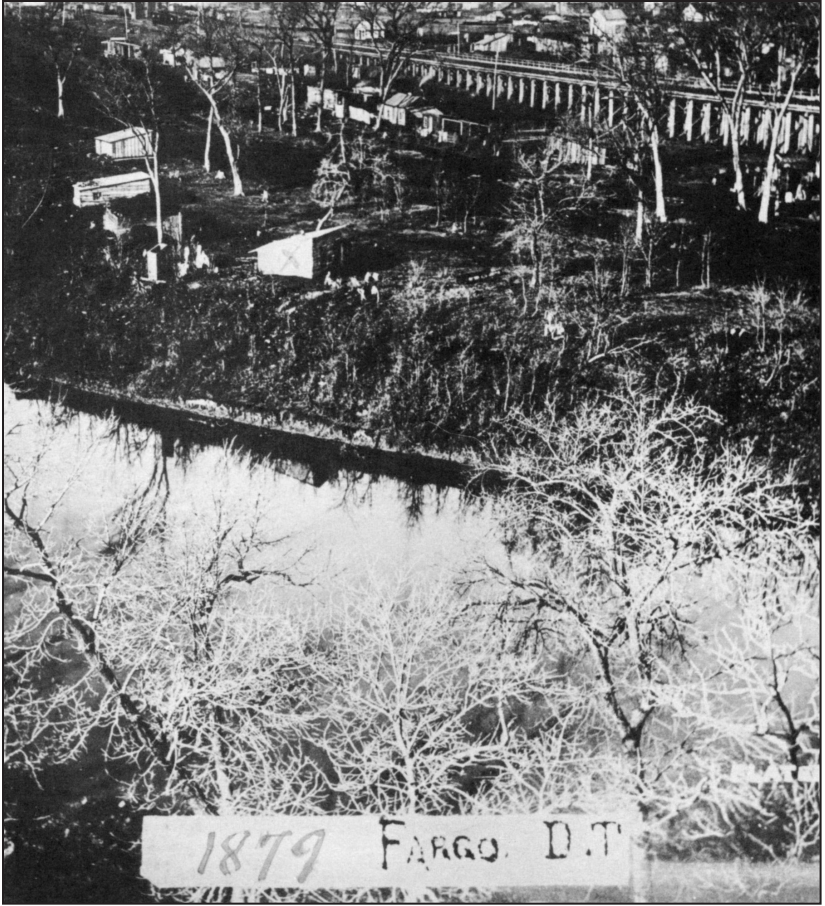
Still 17 years away from statehood, North Dakota was now going to see many changes in rapid succession. The millions of bison roaming its prairies were doomed. The Indians would be regimented into isolated areas. Immigrants would arrive through all the new railroad branches. The sod would be plowed in large plots by the bonanza farmers and in small acreages by the homesteaders. Eventually the rolling prairies that had remained unchanged for thousands of centuries would produce food for people all over the world.



Viewing down the interior of the Northern Pacific bridge from Moorhead

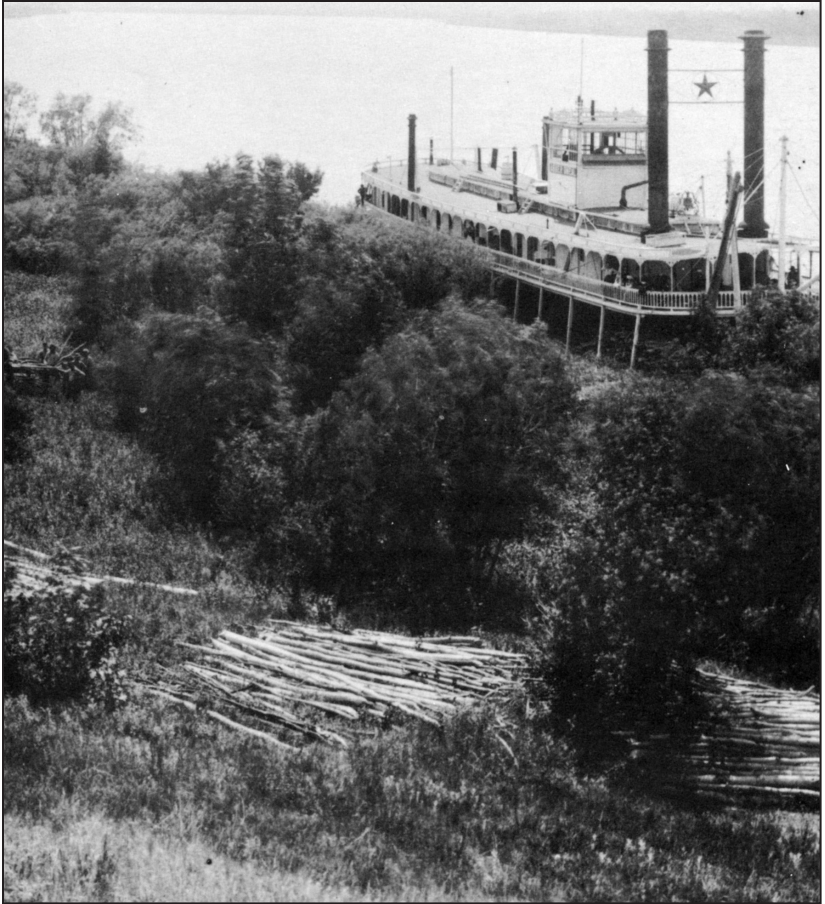
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Fargo, Dakota Territory, 1879

NDIRS



Rivers were important transportation arteries in Dakota Territory

NDIRS



Indians receiving rations, Fort Yates, 1886

NDIRS



## Chapter Two

### Steaming on the Red

Ten years had passed since President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act giving free land to anyone wanting to live on it: The Northern Pacific had built its main line, and North Dakota was now ready for settlement. Americans in the eastern states and the middle west, as well as people in Europe, were pouring into the territories. Though the '49ers in California, the Sooners in Oklahoma, and the Mormons' trek to Utah are more vividly remembered, it was a steady stream of adventurous families that gradually populated the Mississippi and Missouri Valleys.

However, it was soon evident that northern Dakota was being bypassed or just plain ignored. Southern Dakota had seven times as many people in 1870. There was an obvious need to publicize the region. The Minnesota immigration officials commissioned a Norwegian-American, Paul Hjelm Hansen, to visit the Red River Valley and subsequently published his report in the Norwegian-American Press.

*. . . The rivers by their curves and bends cut the land into areas of larger or smaller size. The pieces of land within these curves are surrounded by woods while the fourth side lies open to the prairie, and are places of exceptional beauty in the lee of the woods! The whole prairie which does not have the slightest bulge or rise, is the most fertile land one could wish . . .*

*History of Prairie Settlement*  
*Arthur S. Morton*

Half a dozen families of Norwegian extraction who had responded to the articles, went across the Red River to settle at the mouth of the Wild Rice River (the present site of Hickson). They came from southern Minnesota and brought with them farm tools, animals, and household goods. They found an area with some trees, flat, arable prairies, and an abundance of fish in the river. Their letters to friends and relatives encouraged others. The mouth of the goose River (present Hillsboro) became another Norwegian settlement.

*If by thieves and doctors bled  
Half your blood and cash has fled,  
Gather up your stove and bed  
and settle on the Goose.*

*Though Adam took his wife's advice  
And got expelled from Paradise,  
You'll find another just as nice  
by squatting on the Goose.*

*Anonymous settler  
The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

These first settlers sent their produce by steamboat to Winnipeg to trade for supplies.

The steamboats were the result of a promotion sponsored by St. Paul merchants who felt that the slow Red River Carts were a deterrent to a promising trade. The two-wheel carts carried 800 pounds of furs at the uncertain speed of an oxen's gait. Return trade goods were necessarily limited to small items. In 1859 Anson Northrup qualified for the \$2,000 prize by going from the mouth of the Sheyenne to Fort Garry in a small steamboat (18 passenger capacity) that he dismantled and brought overland from Crow Wing, Minnesota. A larger boat, the International, 137 feet long and carrying 133 tons was soon doing a profitable business. For 100 pounds of freight they charged \$4.80 which was more than the cart charged but was faster and more reliable.

*When flour ground from Minnesota wheat became an important commodity, St. Paul did not hesitate to vote money for exploring the feasibility of establishing steamboat service between the Minnesota River and the Red River of the North in order to capture a Canadian market.*

*Red River, flowing north, formed the boundary between Dakota Territory and Minnesota. Crossing into Manitoba, it reached Fort Garry (today's Winnipeg) and Lake Winnipeg. Two small steamboats owned by the Hudson Bay Company found the Red navigable the greater part of the year. It could be reached from St. Paul by following the round-about Minnesota to Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse, the so-called Boundary Lakes, just widenings of the river; and then going down the Bois de Sioux, a shallow*

*tributary of the Red which flowed north out of Lake Traverse. The trip could be made only in high water; at other times there was the danger that a sudden drop would leave a boat stranded. But for the greater part of the year freight had to be transported over the connecting portage.*

*The little Fanny Harris, of Galena, drawing only nineteen inches, made the crossing successfully, but other steamboats that tried it ran into costly and embarrassing difficulties. Young Captain John B. Davis, in command of the Freighter, a sternwheeler of thirty-eight tons, lost the channel as he crossed Big Stone Lake in high water. Determined not to be stopped, he headed his boat in the direction of Red River and took off across the flooded prairie. Ten miles from Big Stone Lake he ran the Freighter so hard aground that he wrecked her. Another famous trip across the prairies occurred in the early spring of 1861, when the old Fanny Harris, under government charter, went up the Minnesota from Fort Snelling to Fort Ridgely, about 150 miles by air but twice that distance by the twisting, looping river, to bring out the Buena Vista battery of light artillery, earmarked for combat duty on the eastern front.*

*Although the river was over its banks in many places, because of melting snows, the Fanny Harris reached Fort Ridgely. Her troubles began when she turned around to make her way downriver in the raging current. Brevet Major John C. Pemberton (later general) was in command of the battery. In forceful language he impressed on the captain of the Fanny Harris that time was of the essence. But after having been slammed right and left against the trees that lined the channel, with extensive damage to the boat's superstructure, the captain of the Fanny Harris refused to run by night. Repairs were made as she lay tied up that evening. The following day, as she neared Belle Plain, miles of flooded fields could be seen beyond the intervening fringe of trees. The sight of all that placid water was too much for the master of the Fanny Harris. Calling for more steam, he pointed her bow at the trees and tried to ram his way through. One of her stacks was knocked down and the other broken off a few feet above deck; trees were pushed over and limbs snapped; one ripped through the pilothouse. After a few moments of uncertainty the Fanny Harris wrenched her*

*way through the barrier. Two days later she ran out her landing stages and discharged the battery on the green at Fort Snelling.*

*The Steamboaters  
Drago*

It was James J. Hill, the one-eyed Empire Builder of St. Paul, who really expanded steamboating on the Red. In 1871 he and his partners launched the Selkirk, and it began to compete with the International. However, this competition did not last long, for in 1872 Hill and his old friend, Norman Kittson who was the captain of the International, decided to put the two boats under Kittson's management, calling it Kittson's Red River Transportation Line. By 1875 there were five boats keeping regular schedules. It took 60 hours to go downstream from Moorhead to Winnipeg and four days to return. The fare for one person from St. Paul to Winnipeg was \$24, Freight \$2.00 per hundredweight.

*A month after the first train arrived in Fargo the International dropped anchor at Moorhead and unloaded 10,000 buffalo robes and 19 bales of wool. As settlement increased greater tonnages of lumber, farm machinery and supplies, livestock and general freight went by steamer and barges. Passengers who could not afford cabins slept on stacks of freight.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

Pembina, in the far northeast corner of the territory, was an important port on the Red River. It was a fur-trading post managed by Joe Rollette. He filed the first homestead entry in northern Dakota in 1868. However, the first farmer in the northern part of the territory was well established on land that he preempted west of Pembina in the Walhalla community. Charles Bottineau had a hundred acres under cultivation. He ran a fur-trading post, raised cattle for military installations, and ran a line of carts. The success of his operation was due to his many mixed-blood servants. His wheat sometimes yielded 40 bushels to the acre. His men cut the grain with cradles and threshed it with flails. He sold his products in Canada.

United States Army installations, a dozen of which were located in the territory, were established to quash Confederate activities, police the hostile Indians, and give help to the earthlodge tribes. They protected the Red and Missouri Rivers, survey and construction crews, wagon trains of Montana goldseekers, and supplies. Around each fort were a few settlers who were



indirectly supported by federal money. Military trails between forts were dangerous, and the men were isolated for many months of the year. The letters sent to their homes were full of loneliness and stories of tribulation and hardship. The hostility of the weather was more often mentioned than the skirmishes with the Indians. Then came the news of a Sioux uprising in Minnesota and reports of Indian trouble all through the territory. Settlers rushed to the forts and preparations were made to meet further attacks.

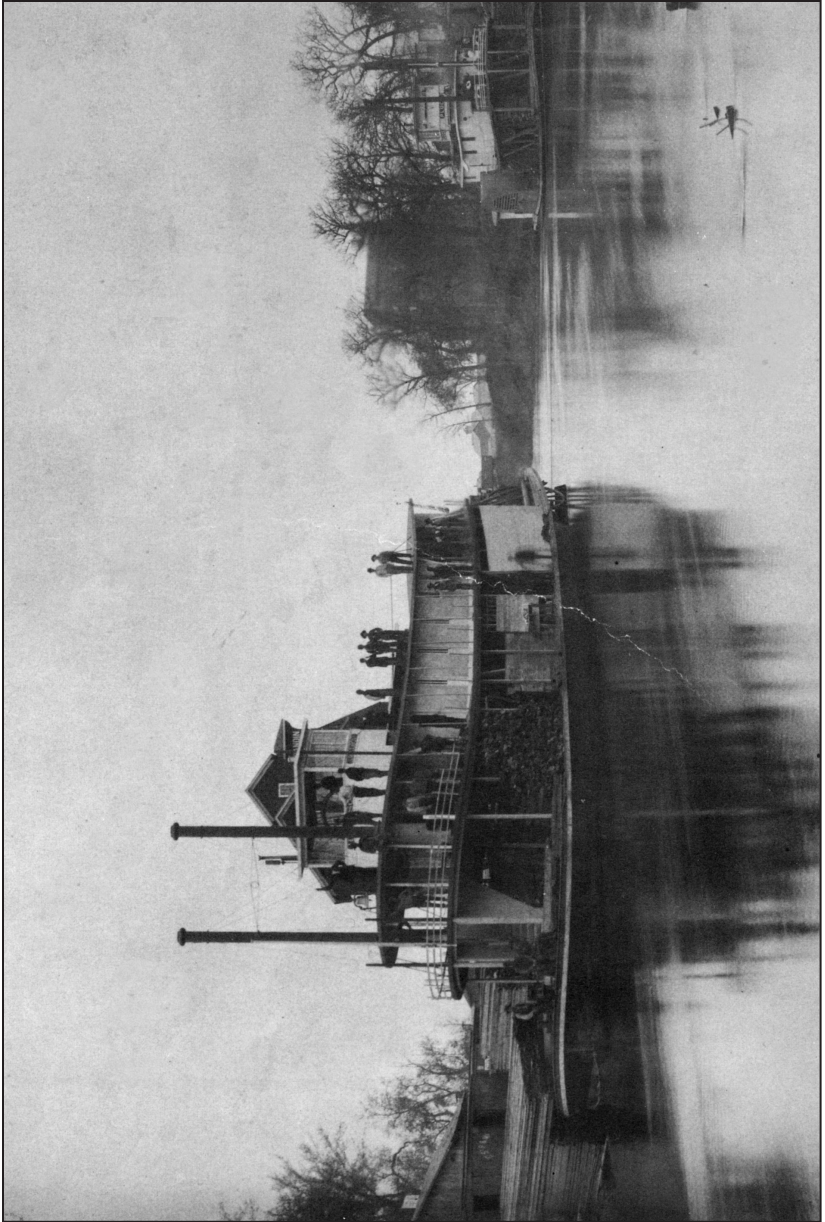
The massacre of settlers in Minnesota in August 1862, was read with horror by the already deeply troubled nation. President Lincoln set the figure of victims at 800.

*Each year in return for 28 million acres of land, the Sioux were entitled to a cash annuity of \$71,000 as well as provisions. They bought on credit from white merchants that they suspected cheated them. In the summer of 1862 the money was not sent and the traders refused to give out supplies on credit until it arrived. The explanation that the country was at war meant very little to a hungry Indian. The natural outcome was the attempt by the Indians to take goods in warehouses and from individual settlers. The massacre and uprisings were the culmination of bitter feelings.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

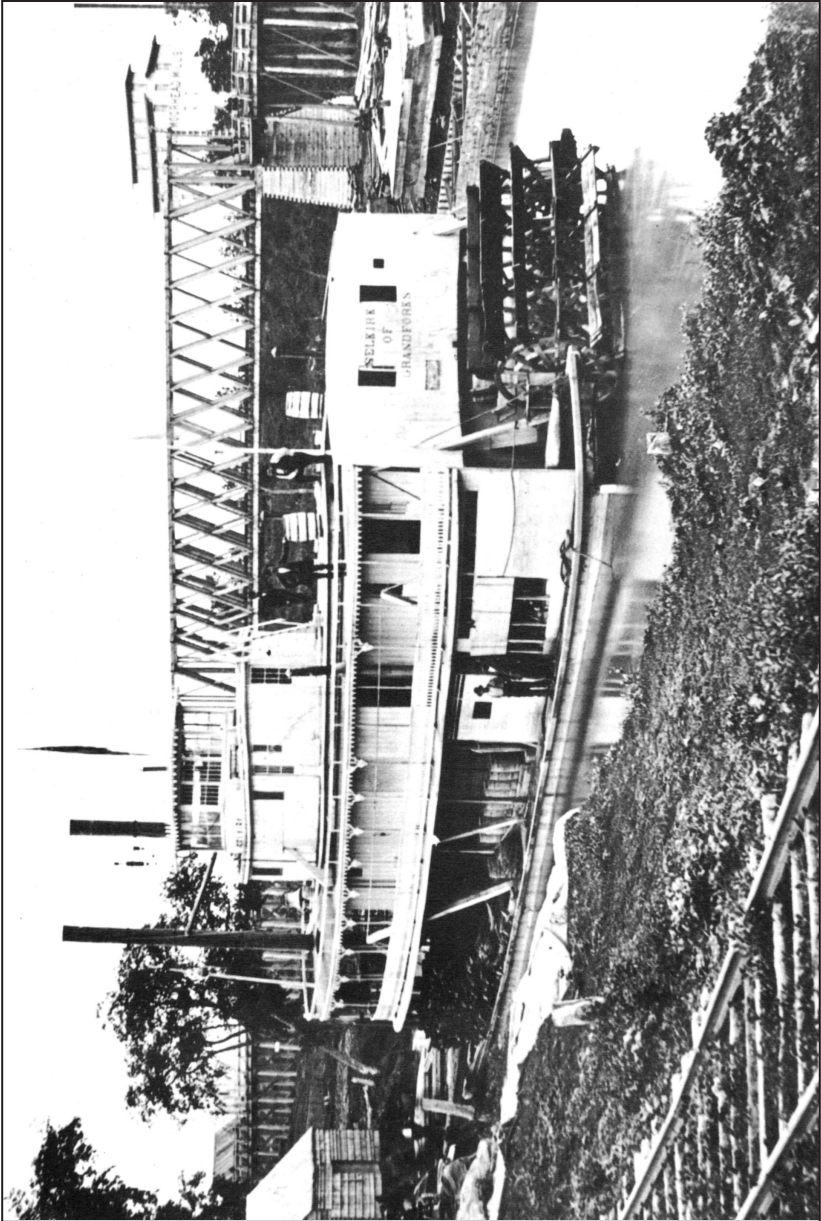
As word spread of the slaughter, of the torturings and mutilations of the bodies, many thousands of settlers fled eastward deserting villages, farms, animals and unharvested crops. The consequences of this event were to be a part of the history of the Dakota prairies and beyond, for the next three decades.

The free Dakota land carried a high price in apprehension: the perceived threat of the Indian, the harshness of the weather, and the remoteness of the territory. To meet this challenge the Northern Pacific directors were ready to take positive steps to present a favorable picture of life on the prairie and thus bring buyers to their newly acquired land.



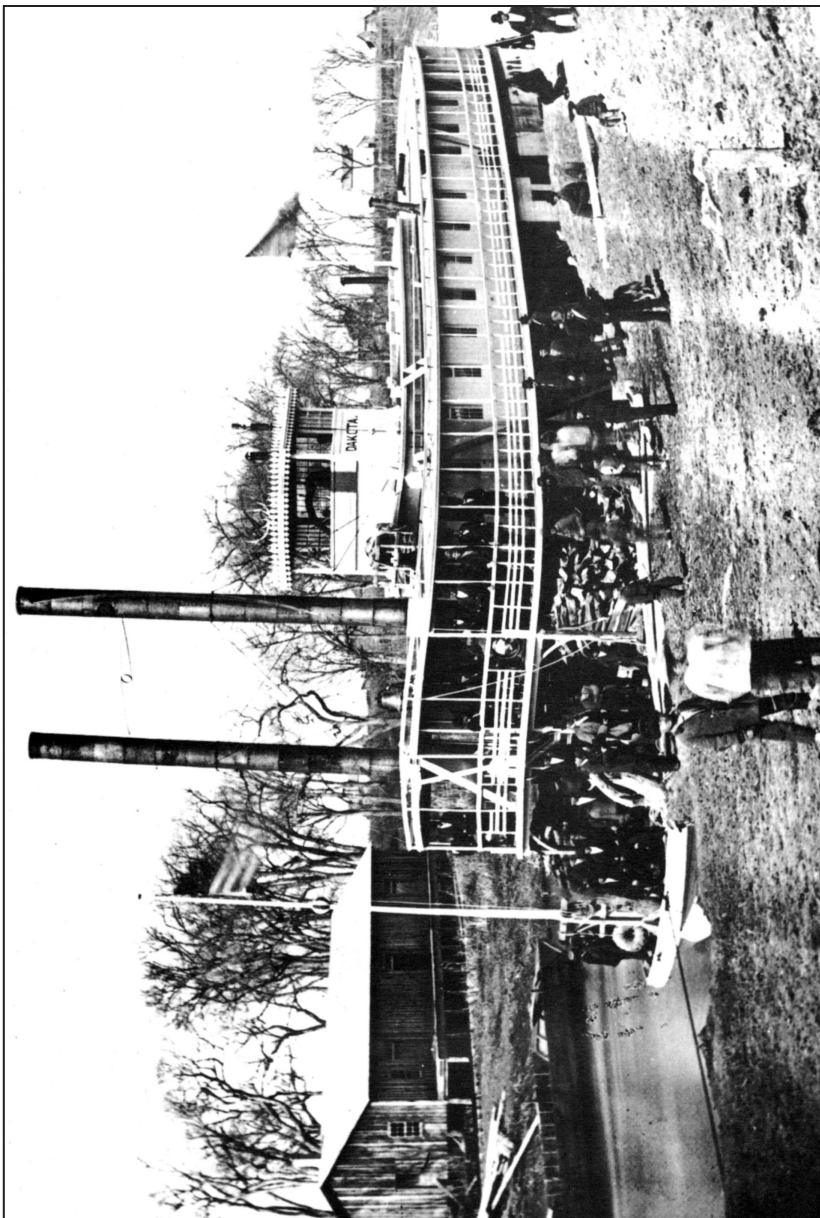
Steamboats on the Red River near Fargo

NDIRS



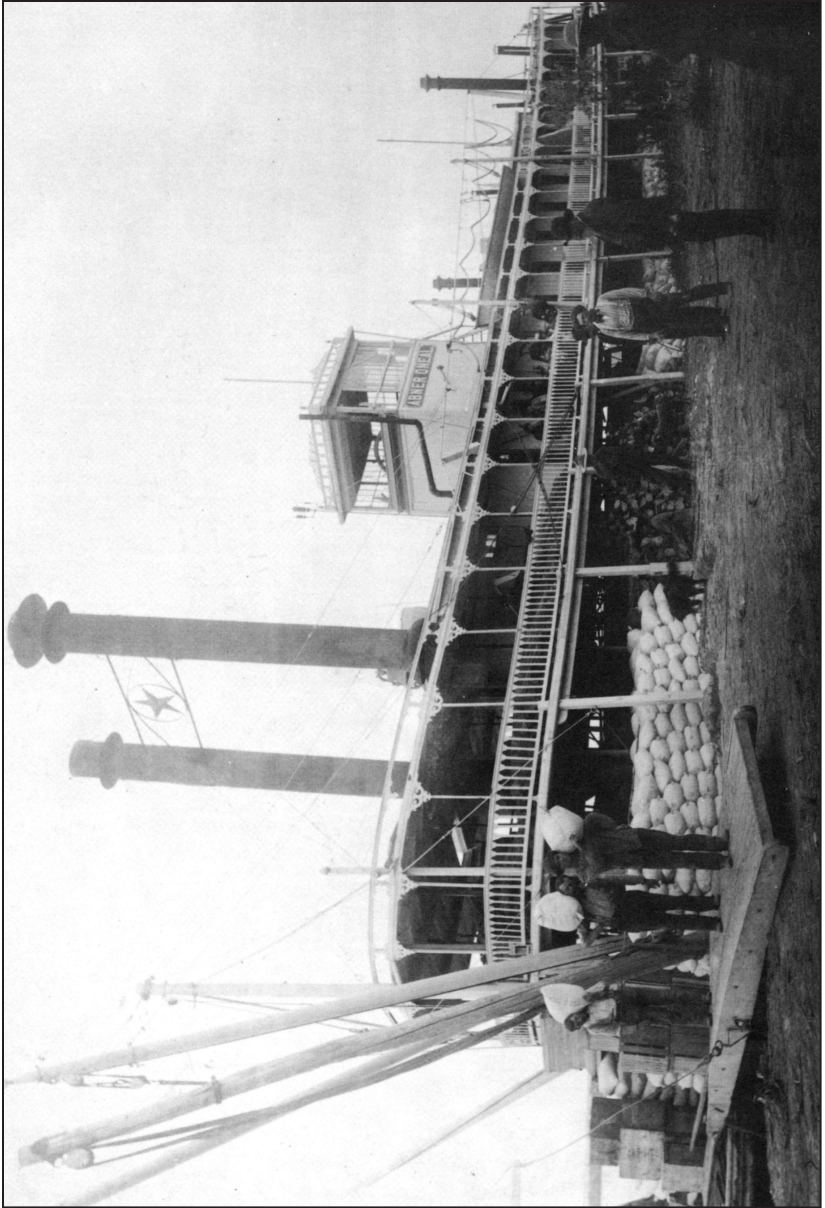
The "Selkirk"

NDIRS



The "Dakota"

NDIRS



The "Abner Oneal" carrying a load of Dakota Territory wheat

NDIRS



## Chapter Three

### The Sell

**O**n September 18, 1873, Jay Cooke and company and the Northern Pacific went down together in the financial panic of 1873, the most serious panic since 1837. Warning signals flying since 1872 had been ignored, and the swiftness of the financial disaster caught thousands of investors by surprise. The banking system of the country was paralyzed, and hundreds of thousands thrown out of work. Construction of the railroad halted on the east bank of the Missouri at Bismarck, North Dakota, 450 miles west of Duluth. In the far Northwest, the line from Kalama to Tacoma had been completed, but a single “mixed” per day was sufficient to accommodate the business generated. The line had no direct connection with Portland, except by ferry, and the Pacific Division as it was known, was nearly 1,500 miles away from the other end of the road on the Missouri River.

*Charles B. Wright became president in 1874, when the fortunes of the Northern Pacific were near zero. The company had no credit and the bonds had long since ceased to sell. Trains ran only as far as Fargo during the winter months because, with so little settlement west of Fargo to Bismarck, it was more economical to terminate the operations on the Red River.*

*Northern Pacific  
Charles R. Wood*

When the directors of the bankrupt Northern Pacific met in 1873 there was one pressing problem facing them: how to turn the railroad’s many acres of Dakota land into money. There was a very real danger that the land would be taken by the lines’ creditors, who would just sit idly by until land values rose and thus profit by the misfortune of the railroad. If no one came to the territory for even a short span of years, the lack of business would be the finishing blow.

Among the employees was a chief clerk of the Minnesota Division, James B. Power.

*J.B. Power (1833-1912) was born in New York, educated in the common schools of Massachusetts, and later took up the study of civil engineering. He served as surveyor and civil engineer for several railroads, he was deputy state treasurer for Minnesota for four years before becoming land commissioner for the Northern Pacific Railroad.*

*Beacons Across the Prairie  
William C. Hunter*

In 1873 Power was made general agent of the land department and ultimately land commissioner. He was acquainted with the territory and knew the magnitude of this new challenge. The directors were anxious to get enough capital to continue the railroad, and were unwilling to sell for less than \$4.25 an acre (the government's price of land at the time). Creditors who could exchange bonds and stocks for land, thought they should receive preferential treatment and receive face value, or \$100 worth of land for a bond that was only worth \$40 or less on the market. People who had already settled on the land were sure that they had squatter's rights.

The first thing that J.B. Power did was to travel through the area in the summer of 1873. He was discouraged and depressed by what he saw on a trip to Valley City:

*It had been a dry summer, the whole country had been burned over, a blackened surface covered with bleached bones on every side as far as the eye could see. There was no water, the ground was dry and hard, its every appearance that of a barren desert.*

*It did not look good to us as a field to which investors or settlers could be attracted but whatever our impressions we could not voice them. It was our business 'to keep still and saw wood,' to find buyers and settlers if we could, but this seemed a hopeless task.*

*Reminiscences of Early History of North Dakota  
Colonel James B. Power  
Fargo Forum, February 14, 1912*

However, he was not ready to quit. He wrote articles for eastern publications telling of the opportunities in Dakota. Much of this was done to offset adverse publicity that was being printed.



*George Catlin came to the upper Missouri on early steamboats and studied the Indian and painted many pictures depicting their life. He became a much sought after lecturer where he displayed his paintings and promoted his plan to preserve the middle northwest for the Indian. "The Dakota prairie land is and ever must be useless for civilized men to cultivate." He wanted the government to make the Great Plains a vast part where the "Indian could live in his classic attire, on his wild horse chasing the herds of elk and buffalo."*

*History of North Dakota  
Crawford*

Power bought advertising space in European as well as American newspapers. Offers of land at 40 percent and then 60 percent less than list price with added inducements of only 10 percent down and credit off the price of the land cultivated, interested very few. There were some bond-holders who exchanged their bonds for land, more in desperation than in hope.

It was Power's idea to interest Northern Pacific stockholders and directors in the development of large farms. Advertising for the land sale campaign could then be based upon facts. He met opposition everywhere he promoted his ideas, until he made a trip to New York to meet with George W. Cass, president of the Northern Pacific, and Benjamin J. Cheney, a director. They agreed to cash in their bonds and authorized Power to select land for them. This he did by choosing 11,520 acres in the present Casselton area.

*The seven sections for Cass came to \$20,620.22. Five sections for Cheney were \$14,489.15. These figures represent an apparent cash outlay of \$4.60 and \$4.52 per acre respectively, but considering the depreciated condition of the Northern Pacific bonds at the time, the cash cost was about 50 cents or 60 cents per acre.*

*The Day of the Bonanza  
Hiram M. Drache*

In a 1912 article published in The Fargo Forum, J.B. Power modestly disclaimed this first success. He said that it was reports of a wheat crop that a homesteader raised in the Sheyenne Valley (1874) that convinced Cass and Cheney to invest in Dakota Land.

*It was in 1874 that a farmer on the Sheyenne River six miles west of Fargo raised 1,600 bushels of wheat on 40 acres, an event that*

*brought favorable publicity to the region. It was No. 1 Scotch Fife and brought \$1.25 a bushel. Quick calculations showed that this one crop had brought \$50 per acre on land that could be had for less than on tenth that amount.*

*The Farmer's Frontier*  
*Gilbert C. Fite*

Power's original plan was to convince the directors to invest money in the newly acquired property, break the land, map out acreages, build small houses and barns, then sell to settlers. Cass and Cheney directed that 1,280 acres be broken in the spring of 1875, but because there were no interested purchasers, they did not invest further money in buildings.

Power then suggested that a skilled farmer take over the management of the Cass-Cheney lands. He had become acquainted with Oliver Dalrymple, a Minnesota wheat farmer, who had just recently sold his 2,000 acres to pay off debts incurred in grain market speculations. Mr. Dalrymple went to New York and concluded an arrangement with the owners that guaranteed him capital to operate, and land ownership as his reward if his venture was a success.

*The contract drawn up between the owners and Oliver Dalrymple stipulated that the expenses incurred would be paid by the owners. These men had the means, Oliver Dalrymple had the experience and the imagination. When the capital investment was returned from the profits the land was to be divided on a 50-50 basis.*

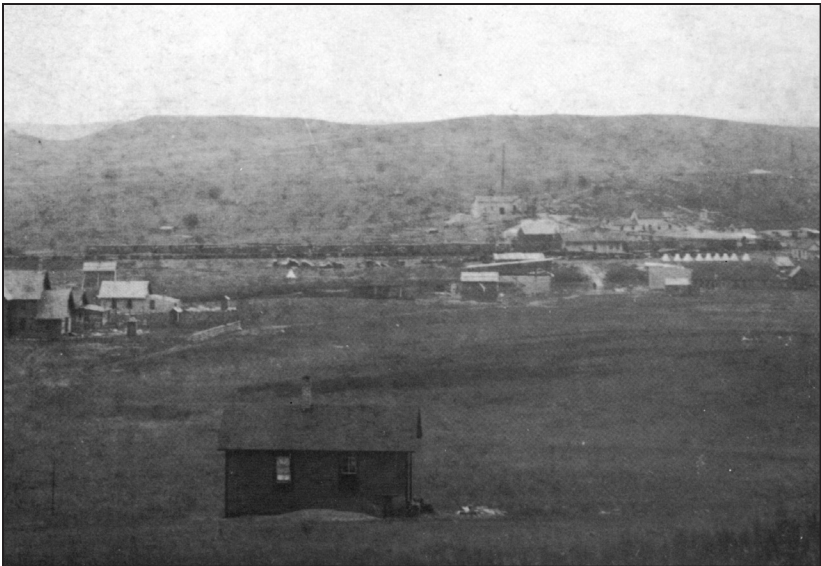
*Oliver Dalrymple, Bonanza Farmer*  
*John Stewart Dalrymple*

His first trip to Dakota Territory was made that fall. Passenger trains were not yet running so he took a handcar and "pumped" himself to the site of his new position. He was pleased with the land samplings he made and the level broken fields. Full of enthusiasm, he started the preparations that would bring bonanza farming to the new land.



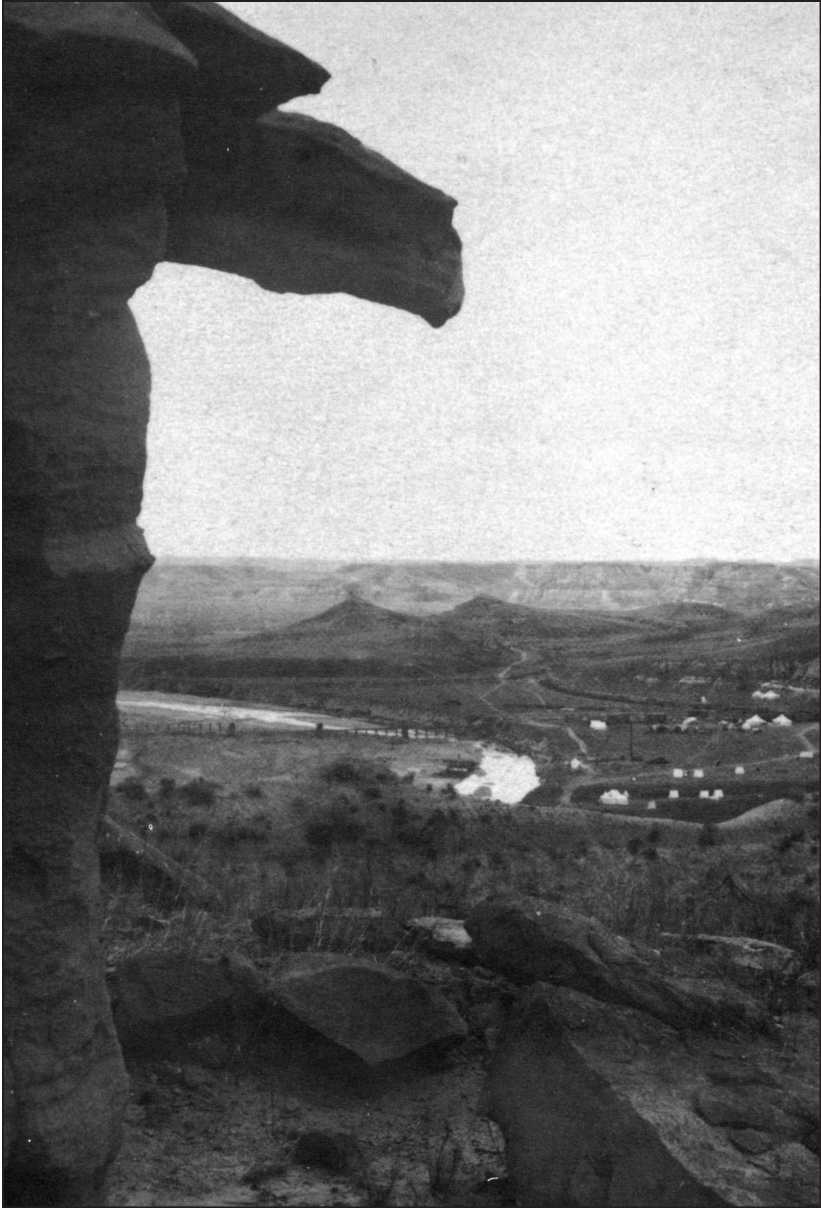
Cooking and littering near Mandan

NDIRS



Medora from the north (?)

NDIRS



Along the line of the NPRR lies the Valley of the Little Missouri billed by the railroad as the “Finest Scenery in the Northwest”

NDIRS



N.P. train, 1870's vintage

NDIRS



## Chapter Four

# Bonanza Farms

**B**onanza — Spanish for wealth — in English is an exciting word used to describe a gold strike, an oil well, or even a favorable market. The dictionary more conservatively says, “any profitable operation.” In northern Dakota bonanza farming meant an era of farming on a large scale. To the eastern investor it was an opportunity to recover something from his Northern Pacific Railroad stocks and bonds. To Oliver Dalrymple, the first bonanza farmer, it was the step to becoming a large landowner.

*Oliver Dalrymple (1831-1908) was born in western Pennsylvania, the seventh in a family of eight boys and one girl. He graduated from Yale Law School in 1855. He went to St. Peter, Minnesota, to work in a land office. In 1860 he became a member of the law firm Flandrau, Bigelow and Dalrymple. The firm became involved with the claims of the survivors of the Sioux outbreak in New Ulm. Oliver Dalrymple went to Washington to argue and lobby for these victims. After three months an act of Congress rewarded them \$1,000,000. With the \$40,000 he received as his fee he bought land 20 miles southeast of St. Paul. At the age of 40 he married Mary Stewart of Pennsylvania. From their St. Paul home he ran operations at the wheat farm. After a couple successful years the grasshoppers ruined the harvest. Mortgaging the farm to meet expenses just before the panic of 1873 and an attempt to recover some money in grain speculation left Oliver Dalrymple facing bankruptcy. This is when James B. Power came to see him.*

*Oliver Dalrymple, Bonanza Farmer  
John Stewart Dalrymple*

A bonanza farm required an owner with money and an excellent farm manager. If there was a lack in either category, there was no hope for success. James B. Power had brought together what he considered the best of owners and managers. His position as land commissioner for the Northern Pacific would depend upon the outcome of this combination.

Preparation having been made, Dalrymple and his work force arrived at Casselton in April 1876. The first order of business was the sowing of the broken land to wheat and the construction of buildings on both the Cass and Cheney tracts. During the summer another 3,200 acres were broken and back-set.

*Breaking the sod was a slow and expensive process. In addition to the first breaking, which took place in June and July, the land had to be back-set in September and October. Back-setting was cross-plowing the previously plowed sod so that it was less lumpy for seeding in the spring.*

*The Day of the Bonanza  
Hiram M. Drache*

When his first wheat crop was ready to be harvested, Dalrymple sent several wire binders into the field. His men shocked the bundles to protect them in the event of rain; but rather than stacking the wheat to await the arrival of a thresher, he instituted the practice of hauling the bundles directly to stationary steam-driven threshers that were brought out to the field. Since he had no elevator in which to store his first crop, Dalrymple sacked the wheat in three-bushel bags and took it to railroad cars that were waiting on his own siding. With the exception of what he saved for seed, the 32,000 bushel crop went to the Duluth market.

James B. Power, acting as agent for the owners, worked with Dalrymple to select three more sections for the next year's operation. Power reported that it was difficult to get accurate reports of the expenditures made by Dalrymple. However, Power did draw up a balance sheet which showed that on the Cheney farm the cost of operation was \$2,305.91 over the total income and the Cass operation had a similar loss of \$1,371.19. But as the expenses included the cost of breaking additional land (estimated to be \$3.50 an acre) and the income was only from the sale of the first wheat crop, this was to be expected. In 1877 there would be more land put into crops, and things should be better.



*Bonanza Accounting for 1876*

	<i>Cheney</i>	<i>Cass</i>
<i>Total operating</i>	\$ 8,218.97	\$ 8,754.74
<i>Expenses</i>	<u>\$ 5,913.78</u>	<u>\$ 7,374.55</u>
<i>Total income</i>	\$ -2,305.19	\$ -1,371.19
<i>Operating loss</i>	\$ -2,305.19	\$ -1,371.19
<i>Acres seeded</i>	633.97	604.93
<i>Gross cost per acre</i>	\$12.96	\$14.46
<i>Yield per acre</i>	9.58	12.54

Dalrymple had his own figures as to cost per acre, and his conviction that there was money to be made prompted him to borrow money from his brothers and purchase land for himself. These six sections were in the same area as the original farms.

*Cost of Production — Dalrymple*

<i>Land, valued at \$12 an acre with interest at 6 percent</i>	\$ 0.72
<i>Taxes and rates</i>	\$ 0.10
<i>Buildings, machinery and teams, valued at \$10 at 6 percent</i>	\$ 0.10
<i>Plowing</i>	\$ 3.00
<i>Seed</i>	\$ 1.50
<i>Harvesting and threshing</i>	<u>\$ 3.00</u>
<i>Total cost of growing an acre of wheat</i>	\$ 8.42

*At 20 bushels an acre this makes the cost per bushel \$.43. Sold at the railway station at Casselton at 75 to 80 cents, a very handsome profit is obtainable.*

*Oliver Dalrymple, Bonanza Farmer  
John Stewart Dalrymple*

In 1876 Power and Dalrymple were involved with the selection of land for the Grandin brothers of Tidioute, Pennsylvania. These bankers had lent money to Jay Cooke and chose land 30 miles north of Fargo in payment. They were from the same area of the east as Dalrymple and apparently made the same kind of agreement with him as had Cass and Cheney. This added 61,000 acres to Dalrymple's operation.

Dalrymple subdivided the land first into 1,280 acres and then into 5,000 acres. Each of these divisions had its own dwelling house, barns, blacksmith and repair shops, and grain storage facilities. While the first two farms and his own acreage were in the same area, the Grandin farm was close to 40 miles northeast. A telephone system between the many divisions kept Dalrymple in close contact with each day's operation. He also traveled on horseback back and forth as he was needed to make decisions.

In 1877 there were 7,000 acres planted (4,400 acres at Casselton and 2,600 at Grandin). Dalrymple hired 50 men at seed time and increased his work force to nearly 100 at harvest. He used 80 horses, 26 breaking plows, 40 cross-plows, 21 seeders, 60 harrows, 30 Woods self-binding harvesters, 5 steam-driven threshers, and 30 wagons. In 1878 Dalrymple purchased 38 plows, 35 harness sets, 17 seeders, 27 binders, 50 wagons, and 5 threshers for the Grandin farm alone.

*The entire line of machinery was purchased directly from the manufacturer which represented a savings of 33 1/3 percent of retail price. The cash savings on the five threshing machines alone was \$2,000.*

*File 309  
North Dakota State Institute  
of Regional Studies*

At one time James B. Power reported to Cass and Cheney that he thought Oliver Dalrymple had taken on more than he could handle. The owners were not always kept informed as to all of his operations and would be surprised when they would read the latest interview Dalrymple gave to some reporter.

*Dalrymple threshed enough wheat each day so that three trainloads totaling 30,000 bushels were shipped out daily.*

*Fargo Argus  
September 1, 1881*

*In 1884 near the peak of his operations, Dalrymple had an army of 1,000 men in the harvest fields operating 200 self-binding reapers pulled by 800 horses. When the harvest was finished, threshing started on the 30,000 acres of wheat with 30 steam-operated separators which produced a total yield of 600,000 bushels.*

*Cultivator and Country Gentleman  
October 9, 1884*

*Dalrymple oversees it all and superintendents have charge of their part and report to him. Rivalry amongst them to produce the biggest crop. For plowing men go out in gangs, 640 acres each. A foreman goes along on horseback. All in military style. All drawn up before starting and inspected. At the close of day all is again inspected.*

*Fargo Argus  
September 1, 1881*

Simultaneous with the development of the Cass-Cheney holdings, several other bondholder-purchasers broke land between Fargo and Casselton and raised crops in 1876. Most of these tracts were subdivided immediately for tenants. North of Casselton a professional sodbuster was preparing land for an eastern corporation called the Amenia and Sharon Land Company.

This land company was formed by a group of northeastern middle-class investors who could not afford to lose on their Northern Pacific holdings. The original 27 stockholders lived in the adjacent communities of Amenia, New York, and Sharon, Connecticut. They each received shares in the new company in proportion to their railroad holdings. The purpose of this organization was to take whatever steps were necessary to realize on their investments. Eben W. Chaffee, a principal stockholder and director, was sent to Dakota to select land.

*From a small farm background in Connecticut, Chaffee became a first class manager. He was active in local affairs and was a member of the North Dakota Constitutional Convention in Bismarck.*

*He was a strong Congregationalist and allowed no work on the Sabbath. He purchased land as his shares in the company paid dividends. His intent was to sell the property and he ran advertisements in the Fargo Weekly Argus.*

*The Day of the Bonanza  
Hiram M. Drache*

On July 30, 1875, the company secured 27,831.66 acres of land, all in present Cass County. Because all operations were reported to stockholders, the records were detailed and are now in the Regional Institute files at North Dakota State University. A mortgage against the land was allowed to meet operating expenses. An assessment against each stockholder for one fourth

the value of his stock was levied in 1878. This was not sufficient, so increased borrowing was necessary.

A hail storm ruined part of the 1877 crop, but the yield was good on the remainder. The year 1878 was favorable, at \$14,934.62 was realized. This was used to extend the farming operations, and in 1879 the return was \$18,866.90, and in 1880 it was \$33,785.78. A dividend of six percent on the paid-in-capital was made in 1880 and 1881. This was increased to 16 percent, and then in 1886 the stockholders each received nearly 50 percent of their original investment and another ten percent in 1887. After 1888, operations were adversely affected by lack of rain.

The profit came principally from the sale of wheat, but subsidiary enterprises brought in additional revenue. The blacksmith shop, built originally for their own use, was soon doing work for others. In 1880 an agreement was made with Northern Pacific for a spur track to the present town of Amenia which became the center of the farming operations. A store and a general supply post and office for farm operations were built for the use of the company but also served the public. An elevator was the beginning of a chain that is today the largest independently owned elevator in North Dakota. In 1884 the total income was \$82,839.92 of which three-fourths was from the production of wheat. In 1893 a second town, Chaffee, was built around an elevator to handle company business for its lands in the southwestern part of Cass County.

Both Oliver Dalrymple and E.W. Chaffee became wealthy men because of their experience as managers of these large bonanza farms. They were in a favorable position to buy land on their own and develop it on the same scale as the land they managed. Both of them later had trouble with the owners of the land and were taken into court over their bookkeeping practices. It may have been because the owners were misled by the good years and failed to accept the fact that there would be unprofitable years. It might have been because the managers used company machinery and manpower to farm their own land. It didn't really matter; James B. Power got the story he needed to promote the sale of land and the Amenia-Sharon stockholders made good on their investments.

The newspapers all over the country ran the stories of the bonanza farms and all the leading magazines sent reporters to write on-the-spot reports.

*In Dakota the farmer may mount his sulky plough, ride till noon, if  
his acres extend so far, and reach home at night with a returning  
furrow. He need not hold the plough. His 10-year-old son or  
daughter might drive the team afield just as well.*

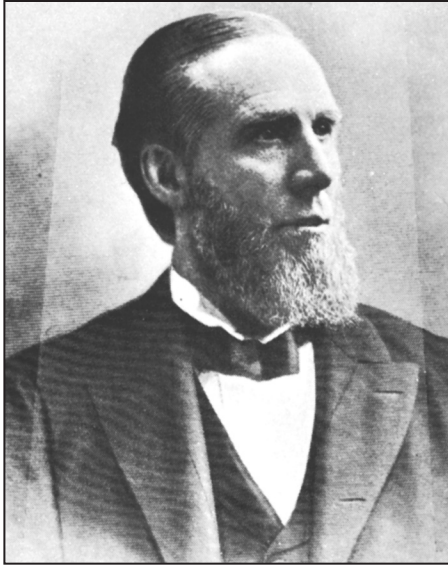
*C.C. Coffin  
Harper's Monthly  
March, 1880*

Kate Eldridge Glaspell in her book, Incidents in the Life of a Pioneer, said it so well: "Pioneers are the offspring of discontent, disappointment, ill health or a spirit of unrest. The magazine pictures the Dalrymple farm with its long line of machines tearing up the virgin soil to produce a wheat crop that would feed the world, more keenly interested the get-rich-quick element rather than the "covered wagon" class."

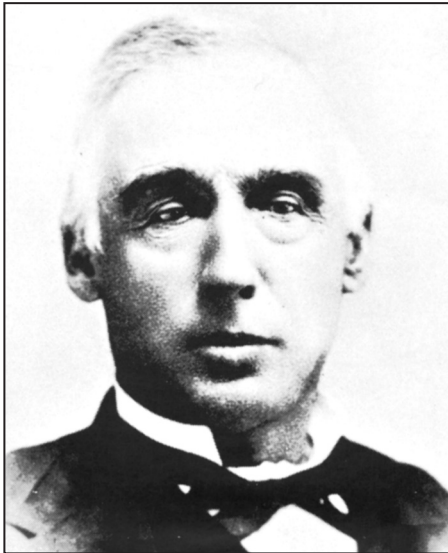


Bonanza farming with steam traction engine

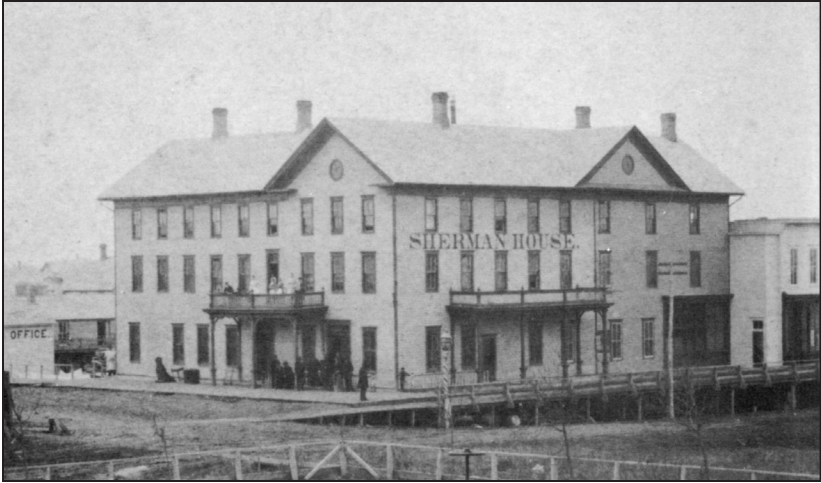
Orin G. Libby



Oliver Dalrymple, 1831-1908



Eben Whitney Chaffee



The Sherman House

NDIRS



Hickson, N.D. in early 1900's

NDIRS



## Chapter Five

### James J. Hill

Watching the changes occurring in northern Dakota with much interest was James Jerome Hill of St. Paul. “A Canadian by birth, and American by choice, and an Empire Builder by design” is only one of many ways biographers describe this energetic promoter.

*James Jerome Hill was born September 16, 1838, in what is now Ontario, Canada. His father was Irish and his mother Scotch. He received above average education and desired to become a doctor. An accident caused the loss of an eye and it was thought he should pursue some other profession.*

*A Great Life in Brief, James Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*

His widespread business ventures were varied but all related to transportation. His impact upon North Dakota through its formative years was greater than that of any other individual. The assessment of that impact varies among historians and may be rewritten as events unfold at the end of another 100 years.

*In scanning the activities of Mr. Hill one is no less lost in admiration over the genius for the little things than over the genius for the great. He showed in both “infinite capacity for taking pains.”*

*Life of James J. Hill  
Joseph Gilpin Pyle, 1916*

*First of all came the blizzards. Then came the droughts, then the grasshoppers, and hard on the leaping legs of the parasites came the greatest curse of all — James Jerome Hill . . . the man who made the Pacific Northwest, the empire Builder; the man who wrecked Minnesota, wrecked the Dakotas, Montana . . . the prophet of Northern Wheat, the Evil One of Homesteaders - aye, Jim Hill,*

*the barbed-wired, shaggy-headed, one-eyed old sonofabitch of  
Western railroading.*

*The Story of American Railroads  
Stewart H. Holbrook, 1947*

*It is ironic truth that the man who believed himself to be the  
Northwest's savior and prophet, and altogether its best friend and  
well-wisher, should actually have been the land's worst enemy.*

*Land of the Dakotas  
Bruce Nelson, 1946*

It was not his intention to stay in Minnesota's fast growing outpost. He had heard that trappers made a yearly brigade beyond the Rocky Mountains to Pacific ports, and as he decided that his future was to be in the Orient, he had hoped to accompany them. When he discovered that the group had been gone a week, he had no choice but to find work at once and then decide whether to wait until the next year or return to Canada.

St. Paul was a booming trade center. The steamboats on the Mississippi River were loading and unloading day and night. The deeply rutted streets were crowded with Red River carts, overland wagons, and stagecoaches. Within a few hours he had a job checking freight for a Dubuque and St. Paul steamship company. He moved into the cabin of a riverboat with his armful of books of scientific treatises and a set of Gibbons. By spring he was virtually running the business and had developed a keen sense of business appraisal.

By the end of the Civil War Hill was in business for himself as a forwarding agent, warehouse owner, and transportation systems developer with an ever increasing amount of sidelines.

*The Civil War caused little change in his life. He tried to enlist but  
his bad eye was considered too great a disability which goes to  
show the lack of imagination of the recruiting officers.*

*A Great Life in Brief, James Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*

His interests took him all over the territory. He often struck off across country on snowshoes just to become familiar with every grove, creek, or hill that made up the terrain.

He became a general agent for a 10-mile long railroad called the St. Paul and Pacific in 1866. This led him to the coal business, and he soon had a monopoly in the region. In a decade Hill had established himself in every

phase of trade and transportation in the St. Paul area and was looking north and west.

*Hill was elated in 1857 to ship the first export of Minnesota-grown wheat. It had been grown on the Le Sueur prairie, and it went to St. Louis. A little later, Hill was even more pleased to trans ship by river boat the first Minnesota flour to be exported.*

*A Great Life in Brief, James Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*

The St. Paul and Pacific railroad was extended to St. Cloud, and from there a stage and freighting line carried passengers and goods to Fort Abercrombie. At that point they were transferred to a Hudson's Bay Company steamer for the downriver run to Fort Garry. The whole land operation was Hill's; any profits on the Red River belonged to British capital. But this was to be changed. He sent a crew of men and materials to build a steamer and barges. In March of 1870 he started for Fort Garry to establish a terminal for his line. West of St. Cloud the stage ran into severe weather, and Hill and the driver missed relay stations and spent some nights sleeping in the snow. At Breckenridge, Hill bought a dog team and sledge and continued north alone. Nearing Fort Garry he met a party on their way to Ottawa to report the suppression of the first Riel uprising.

*Louis Riel, leader of the Metis, had established a provisional government in Fort Garry. Some Minnesotans and Dakotans thought this would be an opportune time to annex this part of Canada and those of Irish blood even hope to affect the freedom of Ireland from English rule.*

*History of North Dakota  
Elwyn B. Robinson*

It was here that Hill became acquainted with the Northwest Territories' Commissioner, Donald A. Smith. This meeting on the windblown prairie was the start of a life-long friendship and business association.

It was typical of Hill that his first steamboat would have the name of Selkirk instead of J.J. Hill.

*Lord Selkirk, a wealthy Scotch nobleman, bought huge tracts of land on which to settle his unfortunate countrymen. These 116,000 square miles were in central Canada.*

*Valley Comes of Age  
Stanley Norman Murray*

When the river was opened in the spring of 1871, the people of the newly named city, Winnipeg, (formerly Fort Garry) were astonished to see a brand new and strange boat at its levee. It was heavily loaded with freight and passengers. Equally surprised were the owners and operators of the Hudsons Bay Line. After a brief rate and speed war, Hill made a show of selling his interests to Norman Kittson (Anson Northrup's captain) and formerly Hudsons Bay agent at St. Paul. Actually, Hill remained as a silent partner and moving factor in the new Red River Transportation Company. This venture was to provide the foundation of Hill's fortune. It is interesting to note that when the Panic of 1873 brought the Northern Pacific and St. Paul and Pacific to bankruptcy, Hill was netting immense profits on the Red River.

*Hill found the business as profitable as it was interesting. He was ready to take any pains to please a customer, and he liked to recall filling an order for a Selkirk clergyman who wanted "two cases gin, one case sugar, two tuning forks, and one copy each of the works of Tennyson and Longfellow." Another Red River customer wrote to ask Hill about getting a load from a bank; said he had some mink skins as security. Hill replied, telling the man to send on his mink skins and to draw on Hill for \$1,000 cash. This was the sort of "accommodation" that made friends and money, too.*

*The Life of James J. Hill  
Joseph Gilpin Pyle*

However, the problems of transportation were really never met by the steamship line. The meandering Red River was always difficult to navigate, and in times of drought and through the winter months everything came to a halt. The first railroads greatly increased their business but would eventually do away with their need.

One fact stands out in reading accounts of J.J. Hill's activities. He never waited for things to happen. Somehow he was able to anticipate events and use this knowledge to his advantage. As early as 1872 when the Red River Transportation Company was making him a wealthy man, and before the financial condition of the railroads was common knowledge, Hill was planning a railroad to the Canadian border and was actively interested in the

Canadian Pacific, which was pushing west from Winnipeg and south to Pembina.

*In the fall of 1877 the Hill and Kittson Red River Transportation Company loaded a big-stacked locomotive on a barge at Breckenridge, Minnesota, and lashed it fast to the Selkirk. It was greeted at Winnipeg with whistles, bells and a special edition of Manitoba Free Press. As the first locomotive in that area it is on display since 1912 in front of the depot.*

*James J. Hill  
Steward H. Holbrook*

Donald A. Smith, resident Governor of Hudson's Bay Company, now of Selkirk, and his cousin, George Stevens of the Bank of Montreal, assisted Hill financially in the purchase of the bankrupt and incomplete St. Paul and Pacific from its Dutch owners.

*Just where Stevens got the money is still something of a mystery. It was even charged that he "borrowed" it from the Bank of Montreal.*

*James J. Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*

*The Dutch bondholders received from 13¼ to 75 percent of the par value of bonds, depending upon what class they were. There is much speculation about the total amount paid.*

*The Life of James J. Hill  
Joseph Gilpin Pyle*

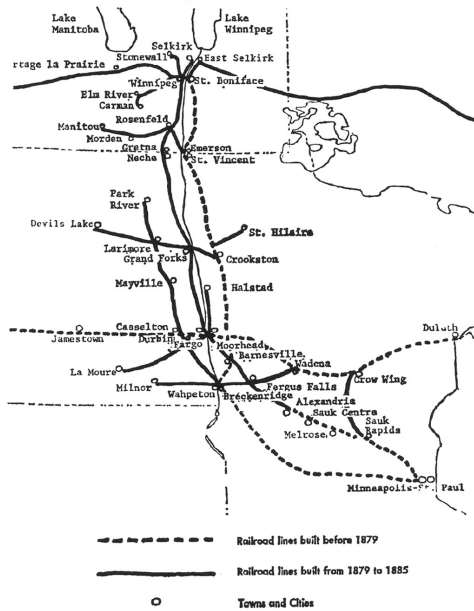
Before negotiations were completed on that complicated transaction, Hill had the railroad extended to meet the Canadian Pacific at St. Vincent, Minnesota. He later referred to these years of great achievement in a magnificent understatement as a "period of trials."

In May of 1879, a newly organized corporation named St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba took over the tracks and rolling stock of the St. Paul and Pacific. Shares in the new company were given to stockholders of the Red River Transportation Company. Hill, Kittsen, Smith and Stevens were the principal stockholders. The assets included 565 miles of completed road and 102 miles under construction. There were also over two million acres of land granted to the old St. Paul and Pacific. This was sold for over

\$15 million, thus putting the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba on a firm financial footing.

Some of this new construction was advancing a line that went from St. Paul to Fergus Falls. It reached Fargo in 1880 and Grand Forks in 1881 and the Canadian border in 1882. During this time the company was extending from Breckenridge to Durbin south of Casselton. After agreements were made with the Northern Pacific this line continued to Mayville and in 1884 to Park River. By 1885 nearly all parts of the Red River Valley were within 15 miles of a railroad loading station.

### Railroad Building in the Red River Valley, 1879 to 1885



The Canadian Pacific Railway was not yet complete from east to west. Thus, all freight for Winnipeg had to go through St. Paul via the new St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad. Right from the start the Manitoba, as it was known, made money. In its first year, 1879, the profit was a million dollars. Good crops through the 1880's paid for the expansions. Hill was ready now to announce his plan for a railroad to the Pacific. It was to go west from Grand Forks across Dakota through Minnesota and wheat from Dakota would be traded for silks and spices in the Orient.

*Hill sent agents to the Orient and as far east as Maine to find trade goods. He was an encyclopedia of facts regarding China, Japan and India. "If the people of a single province of China should consume an ounce a day of our flour they would need 50 million bushels of wheat per annum."*

*James J. Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*

There would be no land subsidy such as the company had received in Minnesota, and the Northern Pacific was already building a road parallel to the proposed Manitoba. These irrefutable facts did not deter Hill in his plan.

While others were laughingly talking about "Hill's folly," he was in Dakota selecting the route and securing right-of-way. He was not going to lay down trackage without much planning as the Northern Pacific had done. The roadbed must be perfect, the bridges were to be built for projected future traffic, curves and grades had to pass his personal inspection.

*He watched and waited (with some disapproval) as the Northern Pacific was being completed further to the south. He thought it poorly located, and failing in many areas, to take advantage of the terrain, resulting in excessive construction costs. The Northern Pacific was deeply in debt and would soon face a receivership due to its rapid expansion, and costly mainline construction without sufficient branches to serve as profitable feeders to the mainline.*

*While the NP rushed pell mell from Duluth to Tacoma, the Manitoba was making haste slowly. During this period from 1880 to 1883, Hill gained access to the Great Lakes at Duluth, was active through his agents in colonizing Northern Minnesota and Manitoba, organized the Minnesota Transfer Company where all roads coming into Minneapolis/St. Paul could interchange freight equipment, and in 1886 gained permanent access to Chicago through the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. In retrospect, if Hill had had the sumptuous land grant from the Dakotas to the Pacific that the Northern Pacific had during its building, perhaps the Manitoba too would have made a headlong rush for the Pacific Northwest. Without such a grant, the Manitoba busied itself under Hill, in making itself so strong in Minnesota and North Dakota, that when the time did come to push first into Montana and then across the Rockies and Cascades, it was able to do so without bleeding itself white.*

*In 1886 the tip off to the push west came when the Manitoba, after constructing only a relatively few miles of track per year in North Dakota, suddenly punched almost 122 miles west to Minot, and constructed another 100 miles of track elsewhere in North Dakota. This type of fast construction was typical of Hill only when a distant goal was in sight. That goal was Great Falls, Montana, nearly 600 miles to the west, and again characteristic of Hill, the goal was not strange country without friends or connections. These friends had organized in 1886, the Montana Central Railroad which was to connect the territorial capital at Helena with the new city planned at the Great Falls of the Missouri where Lewis and Clark in their explorations of 1804-06 had had so much difficulty.*

*Lines West  
Chas. Wood*

Even more important for the success of the railroad was Hill's procedure to "protect his rear." He would build along the route and then extend a branch line north to the Canadian border. These feeders, of which there were ten between Grand Forks and Williston, were to deliver settlers, coal, lumber, machinery, and so forth and bring back grain and livestock. Sufficient grain elevators and stockyards were also in Hill's plans. Either the Manitoba built them or Hill offered inducements to have them built by others. This traffic was the means by which a railroad could pay its way through a sparsely inhabited region.

On July 4, 1883, the track reached Devils Lake, and by 1886 it was finished to the tent town of Minot. The government then served notice that the Indian territory of Fort Berthold Reservation could not be crossed. Hill immediately went to Washington and stayed until a bill was passed to give the Manitoba the authorization to purchase a right-of-way from the Indians.

During this delay Hill's organization stockpiled construction materials at Minot. Stocks of ties, timber, piling, sawed timber, kegs of spikes and bolts covered acres of land. The cars that unloaded this material did not return empty to eastern markets but transported there bleached buffalo bones. Hill's abhorrence of an empty boxcar was one of the reasons the railroad always paid dividends to the stockholders.

*Construction of the Manitoba west from Minot began in April of 1887 with nearly 10,000 men employed as locating engineers, bridge and building gangs, grading crews and track layers. The prime contractor Shepard-Winston and Company had worked previously for Hill when he had sent them north with Van Horne of*



*the Canadian Pacific. A tremendous camp sprang up at the railhead, just outside of Minot, and through the spring of 1887 the facilities of the railroad were fully engaged in hauling rail, timbers, ties, grading equipment and all the supplies necessary to build a railroad. Out on the prairie to the west of Minot, the railroad progressed at the rate of better than 3¼ miles per day during May, June, July and August, and by the middle of October the rails were being spiked down at Sun River, Montana, nearly 550 miles from Minot. Here the Manitoba connected with the rails of the Montana Central, which during the same period had completed its parts of the line between Sun River, Great Falls and Helena — a distance of 95.8 miles. In just 7½ months 643 miles of continuous railroad had been constructed, and the Montana Central continued construction during 1888 to reach Butte where the Manitoba could interchange freight and passengers with the Union Pacific for points in Oregon and California.*

*Meanwhile, back in Minnesota, Hill had organized the Eastern Minnesota Railway for a direct connection with Duluth and Superior, Wisconsin, and now had connections between the major cities of Minnesota, the Great Lakes and the new railroad in the west. In addition, Hill organized the northern Steamship Company to carry wheat on the Great Lakes and put six new modern steamships in service.*

*Lines West  
Chas. Wood*

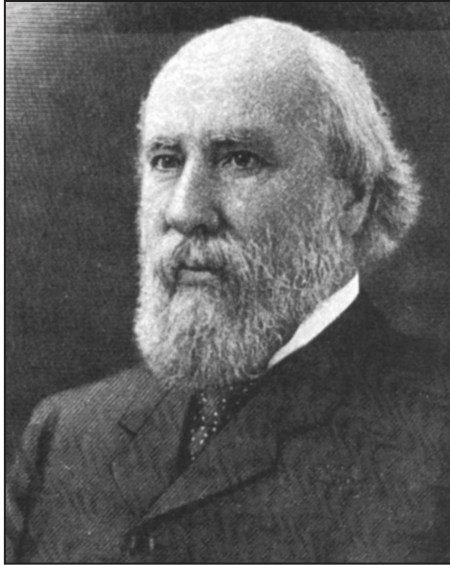
Except for the one work locomotive which followed up the tracklaying, men and horses did all the work. On November 18, 1887, a season's record of 643 miles of track was laid to Helena, Montana.

Nobody thought to record what the Indians' reaction was to this track building activity. Nor does a biographer of J.J. Hill mention his awareness of what changes his plans would mean to the first inhabitants. There is no mention of the Minnesota Sioux uprising in 1862 or of the Custer Massacre in 1876. To excuse this omission by thinking he had a one-track mind would not be fair to Hill. Even as his railroad went west through the Rockies and on to Puget Sound, he was planning for the populating of the vast open prairies.

*It was significant of James J. Hill's complex character that of two of the best remembered stories about him, one paints him as a hero, the other was villain. Once in a Dakota blizzard, when a*

*section crew was trying to clear the track for a stalled passenger train, President Hill came out to snatch the shovel from one after the other of the men and sent them back to his car for warmth. That was Jim Hill for you. Again, because the mayor of a small Minnesota town complained about the all-night switching in his village, Hill swore by God that its people could walk, then had the depot torn down and set up two miles away. That, too, was Jim Hill.*

*A Great Life in Brief, James Hill  
Stewart H. Holbrook*



James J. Hill



James J. Hill and son Louis



Construction forces pushing westward from Minot, 1867. A record of 8 ½ miles of track was laid on August 11, 1887.

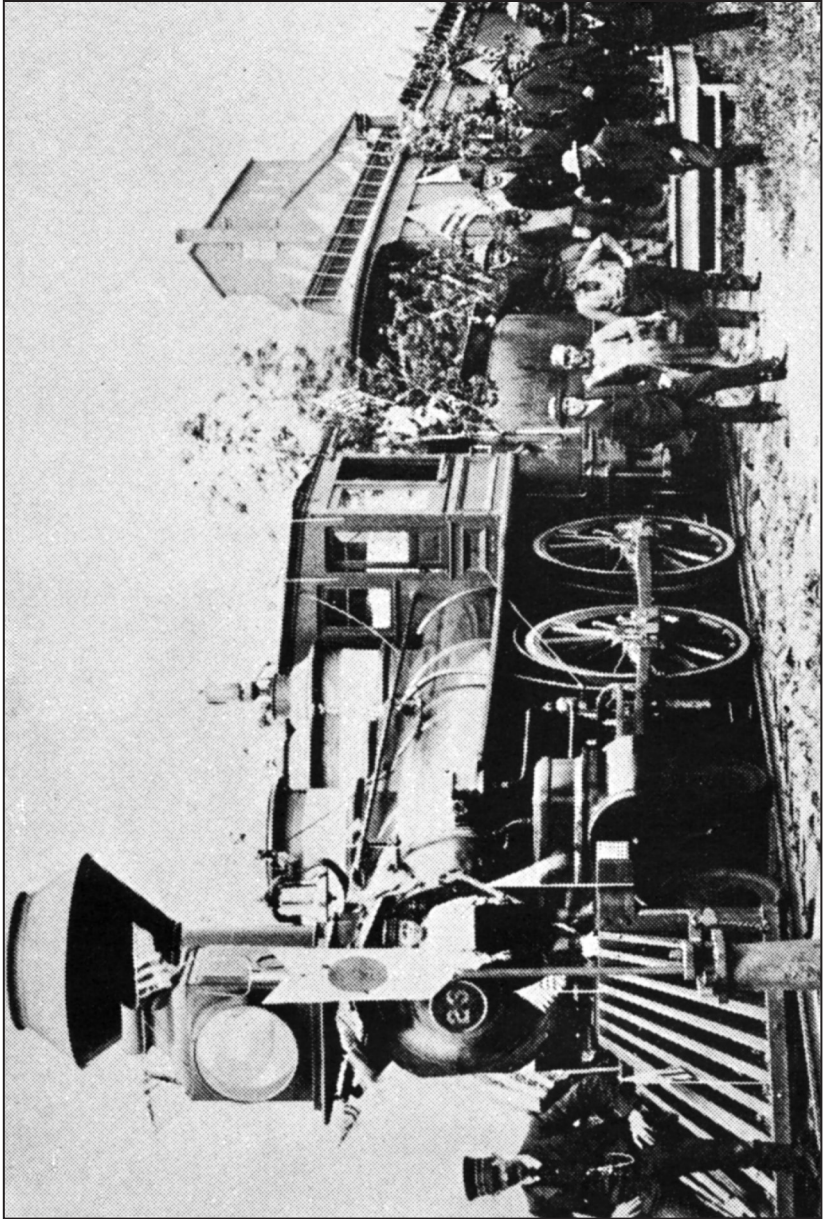


Great Northern railroad passenger station, Mayville, 1908

NDIRS



Building barges on the Red



First train into Devils Lake, July 4, 1883. Note elevator was built before train arrived.

## Chapter Six

### Prairie Pioneers

Between 1878 and 1887 the majority of towns and villages in North Dakota will be celebrating their 100th birthday. For in that decade of the 19th century thousands of people came every month to live on the prairie. Lured here by stories of the bonanza wheat farms and the advertised promises of the railroad promoters they came from northern Europe, Canada, and almost every state in the union. Many nationalities were represented, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate. Speaking many languages and representing different cultural backgrounds they shared a common desire to start a new life.

For most of these immigrants coming to Dakota meant a chance to farm their own land. They expected to work hard and to do without the simplest of comforts. They hoped for security and better times as their reward. There were those who arrived with money to invest in large farms. Others came with carpenters' tools, law books, printing presses, doctors' equipment, and a desire to be an important part of a new community. Also there were speculators who hoped to make a quick dollar as land values increased, and mushrooming towns were plotted on property they had acquired. Adventurers came with the titles out of the Almanach de Gothe as well as a New York socialite who was destined to become a future president. A significant part of the heritage of North Dakota can be found in the individual stories of these early pioneers.

*“I sank to the ground in exhaustion and immediately fell into a heavy sleep,” wrote Mrs. Frank Carpenter, Mrs. Quentin Burdick’s grandmother, in her diary, telling about how she felt when she and her husband finally reached their homestead near Edgeley on July 2, 1882. Their 12 by 16 foot shanty was not finished and they slept in one corner for two weeks. For five years they lived in dire poverty. The loneliness made it imperative that she make trips to New York to visit her family. Death of a child, poor crops and tragic blizzards, fill page after page. January 4, 1883, she emphasized the weather by writing “This is an awful country. For a whole week it has been between 20 to 50 below.” Her husband*

*finally went to work for Dalrymple and from there he went to Fargo where he was a successful businessman.*

*Fargo Forum  
Centennial Issue, June 15, 1975*

The way the on-rush of settlers affected northern Dakota was phenomenal. The population went from an estimated 16,000 in 1878 to 191,000 when the 1890 census was taken, an increase of over 1,000 percent. Wheat shipped to Duluth and Minneapolis averaged 42,100,000 bushels in the years of 1881 to 1885. This was a 40 million bushel increase over the year of 1876. The railroads increased their trackage from 200 miles (Fargo to Bismarck) to 2,093 miles. From the time the first land office opened in 1873, to 1890, 39,000 persons filed for homesteads on over 6 million acres. An additional 29,000 filed for 4,500,000 acres by tree claim entry. During the same time the Northern Pacific sold three-fourths of its 10,700,000 acres of land grant. Also by 1890 there were 50 incorporated towns and villages, 1,362 public schools, 454 post offices, 335 churches, 245 elevators, 35 flour mills, 125 banks and 125 newspapers.

*Mary Dodge Woodward came to Dakota Territory with her son, Walter. Walter had been employed by an uncle to manage his small bonanza farm (1,500 acres). They arrived in 1882 and stayed until the spring of 1889. Her diary is a sensitive account of her daily life. Here are a few as they are published in her book, The Checkered Years.*

*“We are eight miles as the crow flies from Fargo. I have been viewing the country from the chamber window with the spyglass. I can see from there three larger schoolhouses than I ever saw in Wisconsin; one in Fargo, one in Mapleton and one in Casselton; besides four country schoolhouses, all painted white. The Dakotan of the next generation should be an educated person.”*

*March 22, 1883*

*“The mercury ran down into the ball at midnight and did not come up until 9 a.m. It was 50 degrees below at 9 a.m. and there are three suns sailing the Dakota sky but they fail to warm up this desolate region.”*

*February 9, 1884*



*“We have ten men and Katie (her daughter) and I have to work harder than we are able in this 100 degree heat.”*

*July 5, 1884*

*“Yesterday there was a hard white frost and our garden is black. The wheat is being harvested and is the best we have had because there is so little weed seed in it.”*

*August 19, 1887*

*“The day is a lovely one, but the air is so smoky with prairie fires that we seem shut it. Hay will be both scarce and dear.”*

*October 8, 1887*

The greatest factor in this civilizing of Dakota, next to the vast expanse of public land, was the railroad. While the Manitoba was building north and west across the state, the Northern Pacific was also expanding. In 1879 the company had recovered sufficiently under new management to continue west from Bismarck. A branch line went north from Casselton that same year to connect bonanza farms with eastern markets. In the 1880's branches from the main line went to Cooperstown, north and south from Jamestown, and south from Leeds to Oakes.

The Fargo and Southwestern, which was to become a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific, built southwest of Fargo to LaMoure, a distance of 88 miles. The Soo (Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie) laid 99 miles of track in the southeastern corner from Fairmount west to Baynton. The Chicago and Northwestern were built south from Oakes through Ludden to Aberdeen in southern Dakota. The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul had 118 miles, including its Fargo and southern subsidiary to Fargo from Ortonville, Minnesota, and a branch to Edgeley. In 1887 an additional 386 miles were added to the state's existing trackage. This gave the state 110 miles of railroad for every 10,000 people, as compared to 26 miles of track for 10,000 people in the United States. The investment in outside capital for the total of 2,093 miles of railroad represented was estimated to be near \$30 million.

The Northern Pacific in 1879, under the direction of James B. Power, set up local agencies throughout the eastern United States and northern Europe. They stepped up their newspaper advertising and distributed literature from the local offices. Their intention was to recruit and assist interested individuals and groups who wanted to migrate to Dakota.

The group colonization plan worked very well. People in one area wishing to emigrate would each pay a fee (usually \$20) which would take care of the expenses of an individual to select the land and make traveling

arrangements. The railroads charged nominal fees to individuals and low rates to families.

The colonization societies, as they were called, were organized not only in the United States but also in Europe. By April 1885, a Russian colony of 50 families had settled in Morton County. Another colony, consisting of 75 Dutch families, came to Emmons County. The Dakota Settler, published in Bismarck, reported that a colony from Iowa had settled in Logan County in March 1887. That April there was notice of three colonies in Towner County, one from Missouri and two from Canada. Also on April 25, the Mandan Weekly Pioneer told about a Polish colony of 100 families that had settled at Crystal Springs.

Settlement west of the Missouri River was greatly influenced by the work of the Northern Pacific Colonization Bureau. This bureau was under a general manager whose job was to organize local boards to assist three or four people who wanted to migrate to Dakota. Each local board had its own officers, and anyone could belong to it provided that he signed the articles of association and paid a membership fee of \$20. The central bureau did everything to help establish colonies, recommending location, getting transportation, aiding in the search of sites, and providing information to the local boards.

Once the Northern Pacific had established the colony and helped to get it settled, the local board took it under its control. The various colonies detached themselves from the central bureau after the settlement had been made.

*When he was 19, John Christiansen left Schleswig-Holstein aboard a freighter transporting hogs and cattle. He worked himself across the country to Wisconsin. In 1883 he learned a colony of German immigrants was being organized by a German Evangelical Church in Chicago to settle in western Dakota. He paid the \$20 fee and boarded the crowded immigrant car where he slept on a double bunk made of planks. Livestock and personal belongings of the group were in cars on the same train. When they arrived at "New Salem," a town planned and platted by men in Chicago and existing only in the dreams and hopes of its future citizens, it was just prairie grass only beginning to turn green under an overcast April sky. They lived in the cars until they built a single building 30 by 40 feet where everybody moved. John hired out to plow the land for himself and his neighbors for which they paid him \$5 an acre. He had the only breaking plow. That first year they built the church and then scattered to their homesteads where they put up frame*

*shanties. They did not have trouble with the Indians but the rainfall did not come enough years to make it profitable to continue to expand their farming. Those that stayed decided that they had plowed under grass that would support dairy cattle and they became one of the leading dairy centers of North Dakota.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

This colonization scheme was very successful. Through it came the towns of New Salem, Glen Ullin, Taylor, Gladstone, Dickinson and Belfield. The railroad hoped to have these towns become centers around which other settlements would develop. The later immigration into these areas led to the fulfillment of this hope.

Not every newcomer came on the train.

*Many a pioneer came trudging along over the prairie with his oxen, his wagon laden with tent, plow, a few handy tools, some simple furniture, the whole mounted with wife and children, while a cow or two and perhaps some pigs brought up the rear.*

*History of North Dakota  
Elwyn B. Robinson*

These single units were sometimes greeted by friends or had been instructed by the agent from the railroad as what to do when they arrived. But often they fell victim to the unscrupulous land agent or merchant.

*Other misfortunes were met by the new arrival. Usher Burdick (father of Sen. Quentin Burdick) who migrated to Jamestown from Owatonna, Minnesota, in 1882, remembered how shocked the family was when the veterinarian told them their horses had glanders, an ulcer condition in the respiratory tract, and would have to be shot. They were a "beautiful team of grey mares, perfectly matched, fat and sleek. I remember I liked them very much." Horses were selling for \$500 a team and in order to save money Burdick's father purchased a team of 1,800-pound oxen. They were on their way to homestead northwest of Carrington.*

*Recollections and Reminiscences  
of Graham Island  
Usher L. Burdick*

The Northern Pacific offered its land on easy terms. The \$2.50 per acre price was lowered by 25 percent if the land was cultivated within two years. So a quarter section of land would come to \$300, and that did not become payable for five or ten years. The interest rate was seven percent. The United States government sold its land under the Preemption Law. A settler could buy 160 acres for \$2.50 per acre within the Northern Pacific land grant and \$1.25 elsewhere. Before he was allowed to make the purchase and get a deed, he had to live on the property for six months and make certain improvements.

*The typical quarter section homesteader did not get much more than 10 to 20 acres plowed in his first year. If he was using a team of oxen he was pretty much at their mercy because they just simply refused to budge if it was hot or if the flies were bad. One homesteader fed his oxen ground corn about 3 a.m., worked them until 6 a.m., and let them graze while he tended his chores and had breakfast. They would work then until 11 a.m. They worked again in late afternoon until dark. One team of oxen set a record of breaking 130 acres in a single season.*

*Challenge of the Prairie*  
*Hiram M. Drache*

The federal government also gave away land for settlement or for the planting of trees. Under the Homestead Act the settler was given 160 acres for living on the land and cultivating a portion of it for five years. He paid a fee of \$14 when he made the original entry (\$18 within the railroad land grant) and \$4 when he made final proof of title. He could, after six months, buy the land at the same rate as the preemption land. This would give him clear title. The Timber Culture Act of 1873 awarded the settler 160 acres for planting ten acres of it in trees. At the end of eight years he had to have 675 living trees on each of the ten acres. He paid an entry fee of \$14. This gave a settler a potential of 480 acres if he satisfied the requirements.

*We reached the territory early in April, 1880, rented a quarter section of land near Wheatland, and a little cottage in town. I took Mr. Glaspell and his helpers their lunches and attended to business in Casselton. As soon as our crop was in, my father, J.M. Eldridge, and a friend of his came up from Iowa to go in with us on the purchase of land. They decided on two sections close to the track seven miles west of Jamestown, then called 'tenth siding' and they*

*filed claims also on three quarters adjacent. A man named Charles Towne, general superintendent of the Northern Pacific, platted the townsite and named it Burton for his son, but later discovered there was another post office in the state by that name so told my father he would name it for him. To this day, over 60 years, the plat is still Burton, and the post office, Eldridge.*

*Incident in the Life of a Pioneer*  
*Kate Eldridge Glaspell*

Towns and villages sprung up as if by magic. The townspeople were very essential to the farmers and vice versa. This need did not necessarily make them friends. The first buildings were small and boxlike, cheaply built and unattractive. There would be a general store, hardware and drug store, a lawyer or two, a doctor, a dentist, a veterinarian and a photographer, several hotels and banks, harness shops, blacksmith shops, lumber yards, implement dealers, poolrooms, a school, a newspaper, several churches, livery stables, and many grain elevators and saloons. They were not erected in that order. Often a bank and a saloon were the first to open their doors. Elevators were among the first to be started although that type of building was much more difficult to construct. A little town in Bottineau County called Omemee, and no longer on the map, started out with seven elevators, and seven blind pigs (a name given to illegal saloons).

*They were able to make out what appeared to be white and yellow objects on the flat prairie. Could these be tents and board shanties? In the center, rising high in the air, were four tall iron shafts like upright pipes. A block and tackle moved up and down them. Near the pipes were several tall piles of yellow lumber, stacked slatwise to let the rain run off. He could see tents now, many tents. Also a few one-story buildings of wood hastily put up.*

*Now they could not only see but hear also. Nothing much of a place yet, it made as much noise as a city of thousands. Loudest of all, he heard an engine chugging away beside the iron pipes. This engine was grinding its heavy drill deep down into lower geological strata. For an artesian well. No water, no town.*

*Now he could make out other sounds, hammers and saws, mingled with the voices of men. Many men, some pulling down lumber from the stacks. The hammers were driving in nails, ten-penny nails and*

*thicker spikes. The builders of a new city were laying the foundation of the future.*

*Dakota in the Morning*  
*William Harlowe Briggs*

The towns that were supply points for the railroads were rough, lawless places with drifters, prostitutes' sporting houses, and gambling establishments. Minot, growing to a population of 1,000 in five weeks, had many of such businesses in tents. Munich at one time had 13 "blind pigs," and gambling went on around the clock. Many towns had to take positive steps to make their streets safe. This was often accomplished by a vigilante group composed of the men who were interested in permanent settlement.

After the rush to build business establishments was accomplished and homes, schools and churches were a fact, the townsmen sought to bring entertainment and diversion with theaters, fairs, baseball games, track events, horse racing, celebrations, rodeos and socials.

The 1890 census was very comprehensive and gives much information about the new North Dakotans. The foreign born and their children made up 69 percent of the population. Of the 81,461 of the territory's foreign born, 25,773 came from Norway; 23,045 from Canada; 8,943 from Germany; 8,174 from England and Ireland; 5,583 from Sweden and 4,098 from Russia. Over half of the Russian immigrants (German Russians) lived in McIntosh County.

Of the native born, the largest number came from Minnesota (13,052), Wisconsin (9,869), New York (6,785), Iowa (4,559), Michigan (3,973), Illinois (3,684) and Ohio (3,192).

The 1890 census also showed a great discrepancy between the amount of land acquired and the amount of land in farms. The difference, about 4 million acres, were in the hands of speculators. During the boom the value of land increased very rapidly and made speculation profitable. By 1883 farm land in Cass County within five miles of the railroad was sold at \$15 to \$25 an acre, while unimproved land farther away brought from \$8 to \$15.

The speculation in townsites was a very lucrative business unless the tip about a new townsite had been false or only the lure used by a real estate agent to obtain a good price for land that was later found to be nowhere near a railroad.

*Ten miles south of Lakota at the townsite of Wamduska a large 33-room three story brick hotel opened to the public with a gala ball on July 23, 1882. It boasted a grand spiral staircase. Its*

*leatherbound register still bears the signatures of guests from Boston, Chicago, Scotland, as well as from "End of the Tracks." The railroad never came and the building was razed in 1954.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

*A grain field in Washburn Township, Griggs County, marks the location of the metropolis of Mardell. Surveyed and platted in 1882, it was advertised as having "good chances for becoming a great metropolis of the west and a rival of Chicago or Omaha." Envisioned railroad lines on its boom map made it a crossroads of transportation. Mardell Townsite Company men claimed James J. Hill himself had promised the railroad would come right there in the valley of the Sheyenne.*

*History of North Dakota  
Elwyn B. Robinson*

However, there were exciting stories about successful plungers. It was said that a dozen men in Jamestown had each made from \$75,000 to \$150,000 in town lot speculation. In one day, the Northern Pacific sold \$70,000 worth of lots in the town of LaMoure even though it would be another six months before a building would be erected there.

The boom which started in 1879 reached its peak in 1883 and then gently subsided. The crops for the years of the boom were good with the exception of 1881 and 1886 which were dry years. The 1882 crop was excellent, and the price was 80 cents a bushel for wheat. The largest crop for the decade was in 1887, but by then the price of wheat had gone down each year and reached 52 cents per bushel in both 1886 and 1887. Though wheat prices did regain strength in the following years, the crops were less plentiful.

It has been speculated that the boom was probably not as directly related to the bountifulness of the crops and the prices as to a "psychological enthusiasm of pioneering." This enthusiasm was directly related to the advertising campaigns of the railroads and the assistance given to newcomers by their agents. Whether real or psychological, the results were obvious. Maybe too many people came and built too many towns with too many stores, newspapers, banks, churches. If the census prepared by the committee asking for statehood is not exaggerated the population count of 1885 was greater in many areas than the official census of 1890. Fargo, for example, was credited with 7,384 in 1885 and only 5,664 in 1890. Grand Forks "declined" from 6,516 in 1885 to 4,979 in 1890; Bismarck from 3,176 to 2,186; Jamestown

from 2,382 to 2,296; Lisbon from 1,700 to 935; Wahpeton from 1,540 to 1,510 and LaMoure from 358 to 309.

The individual stories of people who were here for only five or ten years are harder to find than of those who stayed. Many of the departed may have never intended to stay but came to gain title to property and make money on the increased land values. Others probably did not have enough resources built up to weather the poor years that came in the 1890's, and returned to their former homes in the East. The European immigrant had no choice. He had made the decision that had no point of return. For him and his family the climate, the prices, the merchants, the railroads, and the purpose of the government were to be tolerated or changed as best they could.

*A Norwegian immigrant who settled in Griggs County in 1881 wrote to a friend back home: "On the whole it seems to be a good deal easier to make a living (in Dakota); but there are many hardships connected with the life of a pioneer, especially at first. I should like to see you and others come over, yet consider the matter twice before you leave the Fatherland and the place where your cradle stood. It is not a small matter."*

*First Norwegian Settlement  
Herigstad*

Both immigrants and native Americans, who were the first generation North Dakotans, brought to this new state courage, optimism, energy, ambition, aggressiveness and compassion. These traits were necessary to combat the hardships and dangers that were a part of being a prairie pioneer.

*Valentine Vetter and his wife Franciska were Germans who came from Russia to Dakota Territory in 1888. They settled permanently on a farm northeast of Linton. Among their children was a 15-year-old boy, John, who stayed on the farm, enlarging his holdings as he prospered. John's six children presented him with 79 grandchildren. His son Joseph lives today on the same farm which now includes 18 sections. Joseph prides himself on being able to remember the names and birthdays of his 93 grandchildren*



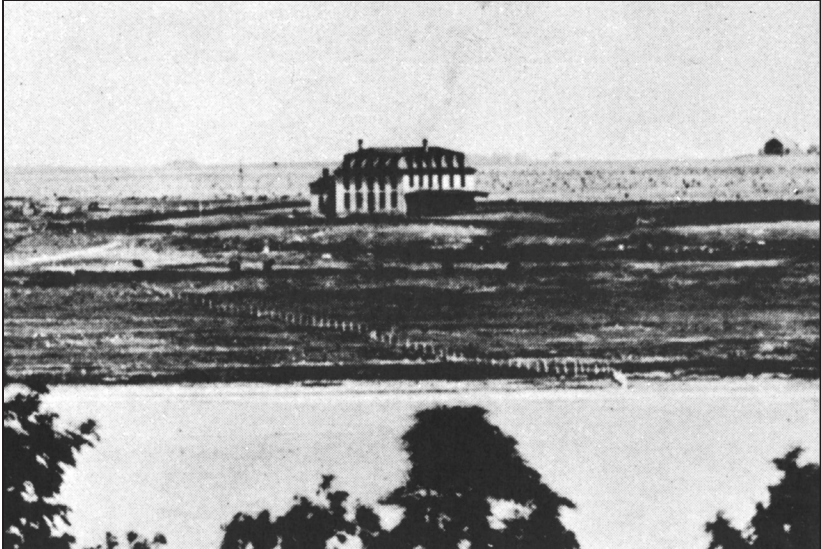
*as well as his own 13 children. He is also “Uncle” to his brother and sisters’ 66 children. The remarkable thing about this family is that almost all of them chose to stay in the state and have prospered in many professions.*

*Interview with Tony Vetter  
Twelfth Child of Joseph  
Firestone Store Manager  
Bismarck, North Dakota*

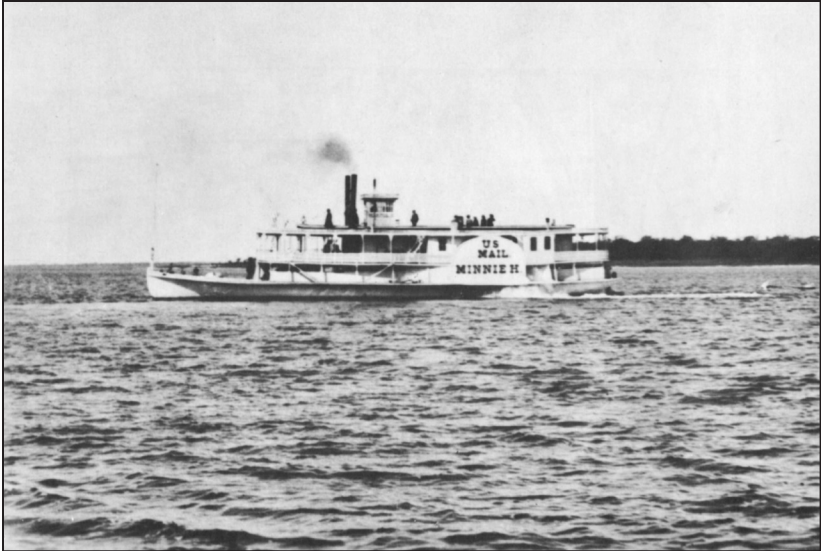


Deadwood-Medora stageline, 1890

Orin G. Libby



The deserted Hotel Wamduska



Steaming on Devils Lake, 1893

Orin G. Libby



Advertisement used by the Northern Pacific

## Chapter Seven

# Grain Marketing

When the Hudson's Bay steamship arrived at the confluence of the Goose River and the Red, the farmers were waiting. Beside them were the bundles of furs, sacks of grain, and baskets of produce; in their pockets were the lists of items that were to be purchased from the Hudson Bay post in exchange. It was not always possible for a farmer to accompany his crop to market. He trusted the company's representative to handle his trade fairly. Under the direction of the boat's captain the farmers would put their wares on the decks and cover them with the canvas provided.

*Some of the early settlers complained that they were unable to deal with the Hudson's Bay Company at Georgetown (Minnesota). If settlers objected to pay \$14 a barrel for flour their alternative was a two-week trip to Alexandria where the price was \$7 to \$10 a barrel.*

*The Challenge of the Prairie  
Hiram M. Drache*

It was in this fashion that the first grain grown on North Dakota soil left the state. As early as 1825 there was a wind-powered mill at Point Douglas, and it is recorded that this replaced a horse-powered mill.

*By 1856 there were 16 windmills, nine water mills, and one steamdrive mill in the lower Red River Valley. Since the windmills worked only when a strong steady breeze blew, after a calm spell farmers scurried to the mill with their carts of grain.*

*A History of Manitoba  
William L. Morton*

The coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad brought a direct route to Buffalo, New York, by the way of Duluth and the Great Lakes. Large terminals were built in Buffalo. James J. Hill built the first steel elevator at that location.

The grain from the first harvest was sacked and put on the train at a nearby siding. It is difficult to imagine sacking tens of thousands of bushels into one-bushel and two-bushel bags. The name of the shipper was stenciled

on the bag and returned to the owners. Because warehouses for the grain were not built until after that first year, the wheat must have been put into bags as it left the thresher and lifted into wagons and then into the boxcars. The sacks were piled seven deep on the floor of the car. The boxcar of those days held 400 bushels as compared to the 3,600-bushel capacity today. The grain was then sold to buyers at the tracks.

These buyers were representatives of milling companies in Minneapolis or were independently buying for markets in the east. A large mill on the Mississippi River at Saint Anthony Falls produced flour of such a superior quality that there was much demand for it. The wheat from the Red River Valley was excellent for this purpose so there was a ready market. St. Louis had been the leading processor of grain, but Minneapolis surpassed it in the 1880's and soon grew to be the largest milling center in the world.

*Shipping flour from Minneapolis mills to other parts of the country began after the economic crash of 1857 when a Minnesota farmer sent a few barrels of locally milled flour to a New Hampshire firm in payment of a debt. Immediately hundreds of barrels were ordered and by 1854 Minneapolis was well on the way to being called "the Mill City."*

*Day of the Bonanza  
Hiram Drache*

Before there were warehouses or elevators in which to store the grain, the railroad company would place boxcars at sidings when requested. The Railroad commissioners recorded these boxcars as warehouses. The individual buyers would fill the cars as they bought grain from the farmers. Some did not buy the grain outright but acted as agents for the growers. A present member of the Public Service Commission, E. Bruce Hagen, wrote in his master's thesis on the State Mill and Elevator Association about the track side buyers. "Usually the track buyers were only in business when it was good. They operated with little capital, paid few taxes, and were known as 'scoopers'." When the grain dealers associations organized, they persuaded the railroads to refuse cars to any buyer who did not have grain in storage before ordering. This put the "scoopers" out of business. It also eliminated a lot of competition for the purchase of the farmers' grain.

Henry Bruns of Moorhead, the Hudson Bay Company, and several Winnipeg firms were purchasing grain and distributing seed before 1875. When the business grew large enough to seek foreign markets, the Canadian grain came by steamboat to Fisher's Landing and then by rail to Duluth and

finally to Liverpool, England. Luman H. Tenney and George S. Barnes, both of Glyndon, Minnesota, were the first commercial grain buyers of importance. They started out as wheat farmers and supplied seed to other farmers. In 1876 they added grain buying on a large scale and concentrated their efforts along the Northern Pacific for the Duluth market. Later they added Walter J.S. Trail to their partnership, and by 1878 the Barnes-Tenney-Trail firm became the major commission house in the entire Red River Valley. Daily price quotations from the principal world markets came to them by telegraph, and they began to ship substantial quantities of wheat into national and international channels.

The buyers for the milling interests in Minneapolis soon faced a serious storage problem, and warehouses and elevators were built in large numbers within a few years. To supply the mills with grain year-round, large terminal elevators were constructed near the mills.

Mr. Frank H. Peavey was the original owner of the Peavey Company.

*“Do well what you are given to do, and, if possible, do it better than anyone else ever did it before.”*

*Frank H. Peavey*

In a speech given at the National Grain and Feed Association in 1901 in Des Moines, Peavey told about his start in the grain business. In 1867 as a young man he came to Sioux City, Iowa, to work in a grocery firm. He could see a real need for farm machinery in the area and obtained backers to start an implement house. A tragic fire wiped him out, and he vowed he would never be uninsured again.

*His sincere belief in insurance saved the company from serious loss many times. Shortly before his untimely death at the age of 51 he insured his life for one million dollars with the corporation as the beneficiary. His foresightedness assured the continued growth of the Peavey Company.*

*Peavey  
Spring of 1974*

When he found financing, he rebuilt an enlarged operation that allowed farmers to buy machinery with grain instead of cash. This is how he got into the grain business. By the time he was 21, he was well established. Peavey said that he was aware that the developing milling and processing plants would soon be needing a steady supply of grain. But in the meantime farmers were unable to find buyers for their crops and were even burning their corn for fuel. The railroads were opening the whole area so transportation was

available. What was needed was a grain marketing and storage system large enough to do mass buying and mass selling.

*“The railroads are the great civilizers and equalizers of the age, and famine cannot exist at one end of this country with plenty at the other.”*

Frank H. Peavey

The first elevator Peavey built was a 6,000-bushel balloon type powered by a blind horse. This was in Sioux City in 1874.

*“The blinded horse walked in a circle to furnish the power to elevate the grain or to run a fanning mill in the basement. Up to this time all grain was delivered in sacks, and the grain merchant used his back to convey the wheat to one corner of the warehouse; later it was resacked and carted to a Missouri River steamboat and shipped to Omaha, the then nearest railroad point.”*

*“With the advent of the railroad came partitioned warehouses, and the seeking of allocation on a knoll or hill high enough to spout to cars without reshoveling.”*

Frank H. Peavey

The elevator, powered first by horses, then steam, and later by gasoline engines, was a necessity as more grain came to market. The line elevators, with funds to build ahead of the railroad, met this need.

*“Materials were carted miles in advance of the railroad, and at heavy expense elevators were completed by the time the track reached there. Business was commenced with no banking facilities and in many cases with no other building in sight; wheat receipts were heavy; steam power was used; currency was shipped from Minneapolis to the nearest express point and then sent by special messenger to the side track elevator man, whose life was lonely and whose pistol was ready to protect the money and property in his charge.”*

*“By 1900 the grain buyer was on the site of a proposed town ahead of the tracks, and his elevator was generally completed before the station house was built. Though warehouses were still constructed, the crib style elevator was used by every independent as well as the grain companies. It was about this time that the*



*gasoline engine was introduced. This made for a much more efficient operation.”*

*Frank H. Peavey*

After 17 years of growth and prosperity, Peavey moved his headquarters to Minneapolis and added to his chain of line elevators the large terminals that held the grain until it was resold. The first elevators owned in North Dakota by the Peavey Corporation were acquired when the firm bought the Monarch Elevator Company.

*“It takes a high order of man to succeed today. Fifty years ago physical courage was the chief requisite, but today, with the world as our competitor, where profits are figured by fractions, it requires brains combined with hard common sense and good moral character to successfully complete.”*

*Frank H. Peavey*

In Fargo, between Northern Pacific Avenue and Front Street (now Main) on the Red River was situated a Grandin Line elevator. It was used exclusively by the Grandin farms and transferred wheat from their river barges to railroad cars. The Railroad Commission Report of 1891 lists this elevator as having a 30,000-bushel capacity.

The Union Elevator built by G.S. Barnes and Luman Tenney in 1879-1880 was situated at the southeast corner of First Avenue North and Second Street. This was a tall steam operated elevator and generally recognized as Fargo's first elevator of importance.

This elevator has a strange history. The Railroad Commission report of 1891 lists it as belonging to the Northern Pacific Elevator Company. The 1895 report calls it the Consolidated Elevator Company. By 1898 it was referred to as a Linseed Oil Mill with the notation that it was exclusively used for flax. In the 1903 listings there is no mention of this operation. This elevator was twice as large as any other in the state. Across the river in Moorhead there was one equally as large which belonged to Henry Bruns and H.G. Finkle. It was called the “A” Elevator and had a large “A” painted on its side.

Across the state of North Dakota as fast as the railroads were built, elevators went into operation.

*List of owners and the number of elevators operated:*

<i>Saint Anthony and Dakota</i>	69
<i>Monarch Elevator Co.</i>	57
<i>Consolidated Elevator Co.</i>	53
<i>Minneapolis &amp; Northern</i>	45
<i>Osborn and McMillain</i>	36
<i>Cargill Elevator Co.</i>	35
<i>National Elevator Co.</i>	32
<i>Atlantic Elevator Co.</i>	26
<i>Northwestern Elevator Co.</i>	25
<i>Great Western Elevator Co.</i>	22

*Railroad Commission  
Report for 1895*

By 1895, when the state was only 16 years old, there were 644 elevators with a total capacity of 20,570,900 bushels. Of this number only 119 were independently owned and 11 were farmers' elevators. The 514 line elevators were owned principally by 11 Minneapolis-based firms. Though some of the names are familiar, today most of the companies are no longer in existence.

The Cargill Corporation had 35 elevators in North Dakota by 1895. No doubt some of their outlets of today were once the property of independents or line elevators no longer functioning. Cargill started at LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and built their elevators west through Minnesota. The first Cargill elevator in North Dakota was built at Wahpeton in 1879. In 11 years they added 32 more along the Great Northern in the eastern part of the state.

The elevators were as necessary as the railroads to the grain producers. Without the market at the mills in Minneapolis the line elevator would not have come into existence. The necessary expenditure to erect and man an elevator before a cent of profit could be made could only be handled by individuals or corporations with substantial funds or credit. There must have been very good returns for the business to have expanded so rapidly while at the same time being so dependent upon so many uncontrollable factors for success. Drought, the world market, business depressions, the high cost of insurance and, of course, competition were all a part of the grain business. The farmer's discontent over his returns focused on the line elevators and brought about farmer-owned outlets and legislation to control the business practices of out-of-state owners.



Trademark of an early Minneapolis mill that used North Dakota durum wheat



"Depot Elevators," Hope, N.D.

NDIRS



Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railway station, Hickson, N.D., 1908

NDIRS



Pumping barge for irrigation, Williston

NDIRS

## Chapter Eight

# Weather: The Great Equalizer

*“Gosh, I wish it would rain. Not so much for my sake but for my young son; after all, I’ve seen rain.”*

**D**espite all the hoopla and puffery used to induce immigrants to settle in North Dakota, one factor is inevitably linked with the state — its continental climate: cold winters and hot summers, warm days and cool nights, light rainfall, low humidity and much sunshine.

Hired by the Northwestern Fur Company and accompanied by nine men, three horses and 30 dogs, David Thompson in November and December of 1797, proceeded to scout and map an area generally encompassing southwestern Manitoba and northwestern North Dakota. Thompson’s journal revealed that he was particularly “impressed” by the weather in this region.

*December 1st. “A WSW gale. Thermometer 37 below zero. We could not proceed but had the good fortune to kill a good Bison cow which kept us in good humor. The severe cold and high wind made the tent very smoky, so that notwithstanding the bad weather, we walked about in the woods the greatest part of the day, and when in the tent we had to lie down.”*

*December 10th. “7 a.m., thermometer 20 below zero. Strong winds from the south were blowing snow and then as we walked into the storm looking for shelter, the weather became milder and the snow changed to sleet and rain. At 7 ½ p.m., thermometer 36 being four degrees above the freezing point. The south wind in 12 hours brought a change of 56 degrees. This was the most distressing day I had seen yet.”*

*December 19th. “At 7 a.m., thermometer 17 below zero. 9 p.m., 24 below zero. All day a dreadful storm from the westward, with high drift. The sky was as obscure as night, the roaring of the winds was like the waves of the stormy sea on the rocks. It was a terrible day, in the evening the storm abated. My men attributed these heavy gales of wind and their frequency to the lateness of the*

*season; but this cannot be the cause for no such stormy winds are known to the westward; here are no hills worth notice; all is open to the free passage of the winds from every quarter; for my part I am utterly at a loss, to account for the few Bison we have seen.”*

*David Thompson's Narrative  
Toronto Champlain Society*

If one looks at a map of North America, he can easily see why the area gets such a wide variety of weather. North Dakota lies exactly in the center of the continent, about 1,500 miles from the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and 1,500 miles from the northern border of Canada and the Gulf of Mexico. The wind blows freely across the central plains, influencing both temperature and rainfall.

As the settler crossed the state from the east to the west, he found the climate becoming progressively drier. Some years may bring plenty of rain to make the country very beautiful and the crops bountiful, while others may leave the land barren. The exception is the Red River Valley which normally receives enough rain to produce a good wheat crop year after year.

The Red River Valley, in the eastern part of the area, gets an average of 19.4 inches of rainfall annually, the Drift Prairie, in the middle part, 16.6 inches, and the Missouri Plateau, in the western part, 15.4. Being the driest, the western part gets the highest temperatures.

Sometimes winds bring rapid changes in temperature. Unlike the western states, North Dakota does not have any mountain ranges to protect it from the air masses that penetrate the area. Thus, there is nothing to combat the cold coming down from the subarctic McKenzie Valley. Warm air from the Gulf of Mexico brings rain and moderating temperatures, but because of the distance from the Gulf, the precipitation is less than in any of the states between. Warm, dry winds from the Rockies, known as “Chinooks,” can affect the western part to such an extent that the temperature has been known to rise 75 degrees within a day. On the average, in January, Dickinson is almost nine degrees warmer than Devils Lake. In the summer though there is very little temperature difference between the west and the east.

If statistics such as these had been available to James B. Power and Major John Wesley Powell in the 1880's, their arguments about the conditions in North Dakota could have been put to rest. Power was hired by the two major railroads in the state to promote settlement so that the lines could become profitable. Powell was hired by the government to report on

conditions as he saw them. While they both looked at the same things, they had diametrically opposed views and conclusions. There is no doubt that Power believed what he proclaimed, because he bought a large acreage in the northeastern corner of Ramsey County where he practiced diversified farming and made his home. He was President of the North Dakota Agricultural College (now North Dakota State University) from 1893 until 1895. Powell, with no axe to grind, wrote extensively and lectured on the semi-desert of the Dakotas. In 1877 he wrote a widely read essay, entitled “On the Public Domain,” in which he bluntly stated that everything west of central Minnesota was so arid that it could not support a large population. Naturally this disturbed Power, and in a letter to a friend in Washington, D.C., he expressed exactly how he felt about Powell.

*“Major Powell may be a first class “rock sharp” but it is clear that as a judge of agriculture value of western lands he can be written “an ass.” Practical men looking for lands, prefer talking to and take the judgment of one who digs in the soil, even if he can neither read or write, rather than the opinion of a school of such specialists as Major Powell. The game is hardly (worth) the powder, yet as the press has published his absurdities, he may if time permits, (make) his answers through the press.”*

It is interesting to note that Powell spoke at the dedication of the Territorial Capitol in Bismarck in 1884. His speech was one of foreboding:

*“In the western part of the state the dependence on rain will ultimately bring disaster to the state. . . In the eastern part years will come of abundance and years will come of disaster. The thing to do is to look the question squarely in the face and preserve the water in the hands of the people for future use.”*

The newspapers of the day dismissed his remarks as the views of a “chronic pessimist.”

Bruce Nelson, in his book Land of the Dakotahs, speaks highly of him. To him Powell was “a prophet of astonishing accuracy” whose recommendations were not taken too seriously. He points out that after Powell and his assistants had studied rain cycles, soil samples, and the native grasses of the region, they concluded that no farming should be established in the Upper Missouri Valley. Powell even doubted that the land would stand up to grazing, especially if the livestock were confined to one area. Nelson blamed the empire builders, exploiters, and boosters of the west for the fact that Powell’s warnings were not heeded.

*In the United States the belief that if western farmers could be induced to plant trees, rainfall would be increased sufficiently to eliminate the climatic hazards led to the passing of the Timber Culture Act by Congress in 1873. It was also thought that the soil, after it was broken, acted like a huge sponge, absorbing and storing moisture, so that as cultivation was extended, more and more of the precipitation would be conserved and increased rainfall would result from the increased evaporation. During the period of 1875-86 abundant rainfall did occur to prove seemingly the assumption was correct. This hypothesis was widely publicized by commercial interests wishing to exploit dry land farming.*

*The myth that a human agency was responsible for the increased rainfall in the Plains was brusquely shattered by subsequent periods of drought.*

*Climate and Man  
"The Hydrologic Cycle"  
Benjamin Holtzman*

It is true that North Dakota has been and is handicapped by the weather. By definition, a drought exists when an area receives less than 14 inches of precipitation annually. This has been the condition in the western third of the state 29.5 percent of the years from 1882 to 1975, the middle third, 16 percent of the same period, and the eastern third 8 percent. However, North Dakota has also experienced many years with plenty of rain. From 1889 to 1975, the western third of the state had 24 years of over 17 inches, the middle third, 38 such years, and the eastern third, 71.

In terms of agriculture, the amount of rain North Dakota receives divides the state into four definite regions: a range-livestock region along the Little Missouri Valley; a wheat and range-livestock region west of the Missouri; a wheat region from the Missouri to the Red River Valley and the southeastern corner of the state. On the whole though, North Dakota is small grain country where wheat is king. On the average, the state has a 130-day growing season, 30 days longer than is normally required to grow wheat. In addition to wheat, which accounts for 45 percent of North Dakota's gross annual farm income, more barley, flax, and rye are raised in North Dakota than any other state. Recognizing that up to 65 percent of North Dakota gross farm income comes from the sale of small grains, the state needs rain for its very economic survival. Due to this dependency North Dakota's income has fluctuated throughout the years with the western third suffering the most.



Despite its extremes, the climate of North Dakota has been considered to be healthy as well as stimulating. In 1887 a publication designed to encourage immigration described the air as “dry, pure, and full of invigoration.” Perhaps this is why the state has a low death rate. Between the years 1924 and 1940, except for 1935, the state had the lowest death rate in the nation, and at the present time it is still below the national average.

Many people have commented on the energy-giving of North Dakota’s weather. In 1884 while in the Badlands, Theodore Roosevelt wrote his sister saying, “I have never been in better health than on this trip.” Mary Woodward Dodge, keeping a diary on her bonanza farm in the 1880’s, said that the North Dakota farmers were “more energetic” than those in her native state of Wisconsin.

It is the extremes in the weather in North Dakota that makes the newspapers all over the nation: “Crowbars were used in Bismarck, North Dakota, today to open the frozen doors on the Northern Pacific passenger train.” (January 23, 1959). People of the state also add their share of publicity. “We are again trying to maintain a temperature in our home that is 100 degrees above the outdoors. The furnace never shuts off.” (January 31, 1972).

On February 6, 1936, the temperature dropped to 60 degrees below zero in Parshall, and only five months later rose to 121 degrees in Steele.

For the best assessment of climate the averages rather than the extremes should be considered. However, the charts and statistics do not tell the whole story, because besides temperature and precipitation there are other factors which also have a bearing such as topography, day length and solar angle, evaporation and humidity. A year of limited rainfall may also consist of cool nights, heavy dew, and no hot dry winds. Good returns in small grain have been known to occur under these conditions. Precipitation that comes in heavy snowfall or hard rain may be lost as runoff or cause crop damage as a result of standing water.

Frank J. Bavendick, in his book Climate and Weather in North Dakota, considers the following as drought years: 1885, 1886, 1889, 1894, 1900, 1910, 1917, 1920, 1921, 1926, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1949 and 1952. A close look at the accompanying tables shows that there is a great variance between the years that he classifies as drought. Nothing before or since has touched the low rainfalls of 1934 (6.6 inches in the western part of the state). All the years from 1929 to 1937 were below average and unbelievable to anyone who did not live through them.

Total precipitation in Dickinson for 1929 was 17.21 inches, but in June there was less than average rainfall, and this was followed by almost no rain in July and August. Complete crop failure was the result. The moisture

content of the soil by planting time in 1930 was below normal. Hot winds quickly dried what precipitation there was. The winter of 1930-31 was unusually mild and little snowfall. This was followed by high summer temperatures to make the mean temperature for the year of 44.4 degrees, the highest on record.

The drought continued through 1932 and 1933, and brought groundwater levels down to where lakes and rivers all over the state were dry. In 1934 dust storms of unprecedented severity occurred during April and May. There was neither food nor water for livestock and as a result many died. The whole year brought less than eight inches of moisture and half of that in one month. After a slightly better year in 1935, the year of extremes, 1936 broke all records for temperature highs and lows and drought. Cattle were shipped out of the state, and thousands of farmers and their families left. In August, President Roosevelt paid a special visit to discuss the situation.

Gradually snow and rain returned to bring better times to the state, but the scars of the “dirty thirties” remained: thousands of abandoned farms, monstrous dirt drifts, and struggling small towns. North Dakota, of course, was not alone in its suffering, for the drought covered a large area and a nationwide depression that occurred made recovery even more difficult.

Despite periodic efforts by North Dakotans to remove the word from its official vocabulary, the National Weather Service’s definition for a blizzard requires a wind speed greater than 32 miles an hour, temperature less than 20 degrees, and visibility not greater than 500 feet. A severe blizzard is a storm that has winds exceeding 45 miles an hour, temperatures not greater than 10 degrees and visibility less than 100 feet.

*On January 11th, a strong snowstorm started from the southeast very bad, many pioneers did not water their stock all day and the storm roared until the next morning, then at 7 a.m., the storm ceased and there was not a breath of wind but the snow was falling heavy, the fresh snow was about eight inches deep on the level. All of a sudden a loud roaring was heard in the north and was coming closer. And about 9 a.m., the dreadful storm hit our yard but we all were in our shanty with plenty of water and wood for two days, all our stock was fed and watered. This sure was the most severe snowstorm ever seen by all the old pioneers. There was no let up all day until midnight. Whoever stepped outside away from his door never returned alive. As the small population in the state lost 196 people were found frozen to death. Some that did find shelter*

*had frozen ears, fingers, and toes. That snowstorm was written into the history of our state.*

*From a diary written by  
Frank Wisnewski, homesteader  
in Sargent County near  
Geneseo, 1888*

Rotary plows on North Dakota railroad lines keep busy throughout the long winters; the Dakota's lead the other states in the number of blizzards. Blizzards are the result of low pressure systems that form at the base of the Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta or southern Colorado. As the low moves eastward, it picks up snow and intensifies winds as the cold air rushes into the lowered pressure area. In a normal year there may be as many as 39 Colorado and 42 Alberta lows that move across the plains, but only two or three will develop the conditions to form a blizzard. Such a storm frequently lasts only a few hours, but many can go on for days.

The sudden fury of a blizzard and the accompanying drop in temperature struck terror to the pioneers. Death by freezing was often the result for those who were away from shelter when it arrived. On January 11, 1888, a cloud arrived without warning from the northwest carrying with it snow which was driven by a 65-mile-per-hour wind. Though it lasted only 14 hours, 112 people lost their lives. The unusually severe blizzard of 1941 (March 15, 1941) with 70-mile-per-hour winds crossed the state from northwest to southeast in only seven hours, leaving 39 dead.

Because the National Weather Service uses all avenues of communication to warn of impending blizzards, and the people now know what they must do, there is no longer the extent of fear and apprehension that was felt by the pioneers. Each storm is carefully watched, and records are kept of each blizzard that has come to the state since 1873.

Herman Stommel, Weather Bureau State Climatologist, prepared a narrative report on the March 2, 1966, blizzard that was published in [Symposium of the Great Plains of North America](#). He classified this storm as "an all time record-breaking blizzard for North Dakota for sustained severity, low visibility, and amount of snowfall." An odd combination of three low pressure systems moved on a collision course to meet in the far western part of the state. "The winds rose over 70 miles an hour and continued unabated for four days in some areas. Snowfall, reported as much as 38 inches in the northeastern part of the state, was piled into mountainous drifts 30 to 40 feet in many places. Schools were closed, business was suspended, newspapers failed to publish, and all forms of traffic came to a halt." Timely warnings, at least a day in advance of the storm, and the lack of severe low temperatures

kept the loss of life to three elderly men and two young girls. The loss of livestock was serious with an estimated 18,500 cattle, 7,500 sheep, 600 hogs and 2,000 turkeys.

Blizzards and heavy snowfall still cause problems for transportation companies operating in this state. Air and bus schedules have been annulled each year due to snowstorms and as recently as January 1975, Amtrak's Empire Builder was snowed in for 24 hours in Grand Forks.

And then there are floods. The floods that occur in North Dakota usually happen at the time the rivers break up in the spring or by unusually high rainfall in the early summer months. Because North Dakota's major cities are built near rivers, the property damage has often been very extensive. Roadways and bridges have been rebuilt at considerable expense. A peculiar problem affects the Red River since it flows north, ice melts in North Dakota when the river is still frozen in Canada. The water has nowhere to go but the surrounding countryside.

The funnel cloud that forecasts the approach of a tornado is not uncommon to North Dakota, although the state is not considered to be in the principal tornado district. Ray E. Jensen, in Climate of North Dakota, calls the tornado the most violent of all winds that sweep this planet. Though the state's average number of tornadoes a year is 12.9, the range is from only two in 1961 to 41 in 1965. July is the peak month, and the southeastern part of the state is the most susceptible. Since 1916, 19 people have lost their lives in tornadoes. The most notable tornado in the state's history slammed into Fargo on June 20, 1956, causing more than \$5 million of damage and 10 fatalities.

Though there are no statistics on windstorms, it is estimated that in nearly all years there is several times more property damage done by windstorms than by tornadoes.

*The fastest wind speed clocked over a one-minute period at the weather stations in the state was 115 miles an hour recorded in Fargo, June 9, 1959. The next strongest was 88 miles per hour and was also in Fargo on September 1, 1960.*

*Climate of North Dakota  
Ray E. Jensen*

Hail is feared by every farmer in the state. The average hailstorm covers an area only five miles wide and 20 miles long. But the intensity and the devastation caused are not only frightening but can completely wipe out a farmer's crops, killing fowl and damaging buildings.

*The largest hailstones officially reported in North Dakota fell on June 24, 1901, at Jamestown, on June 17, 1925, in western Morton County, and on August 14, 1949, at Moffit. Some of these hailstones were three inches in diameter. The largest reported in the nation were five inches in diameter and weighed 1½ pounds and fell at Potter, Nebraska, on July 6, 1928.*

*Climate and Weather in North Dakota*  
*Frank J. Bavendick*

North Dakota had a hail insurance program early in its existence which is still available at a minimal cost. The most damaging hailstorm in the history of the state occurred in Bismarck on July 26, 1949. It covered a strip one mile wide and five miles long with golf ball hailstones. The million dollar damage was due to the high northwinds that drove the hail with such force that it came right through screens and windows, ruined roofs, and left cars with deep indentations.

The possible number of hours of sunshine in North Dakota from May 1 to September 29 (2,238 hours) is 200 more than in Texas. This is because the days in June are as much as 16.2 hours long and is why successful agriculture can be carried on despite the relatively short growing season. On a yearly basis, six out of ten days will be sunny.

The northern lights, or aurora borealis, are seen in many northern states, but in some parts of North Dakota the display can be seen during about half the nights of winter. On April 14, 1926, and January 21-22, 1938, there occurred the most brilliant and complete displays yet recorded. The whole sky was lighted with the complete aurora borealis, with the bright glow lasting throughout most of the night.

North Dakota's four seasons are distinctly different. The snow melts swiftly to dismiss winter, and the grass is green even before all the snow is gone. Crops are planted in May, and June's rains cause such rapid growth that by July the cultivated areas are lush with promising rewards. Large combines harvest the grain in a few weeks in late summer. Falls are generally beautiful with warm days, cool nights, and little rain. Winters are brisk and invigorating with many sports and activities. Modern transportation and communications, the snowmobile and citizen band radios, have dispelled a great deal of the dangers of severe weather.

Warren Thornthwaite of the Soil Conservation Service, wrote an article called "Climate and Settlement in the Great Plains." His closing summary states so well the climate and man's adjustment.

*In a desert you know what to expect of the climate and plan accordingly. The same is true of the humid regions. Men have been badly fooled by the semiarid regions, because they are sometimes humid, sometimes desert, and sometimes a cross between the two. Yet it is possible to make allowances for this too, once the climate is understood. The semiarid regions are now understood well enough for man to do a good job with them and avoid the failures and tragedies of the past.*

And Teddy Roosevelt wrote of his home in the Badlands:

*It was still the Wild West in those days, the farm West, the West of Owen Wister's stories and Frederic Remington's drawings, the West of the Indian and the buffalo-hunter, the soldier and the cow-puncher. . . We worked under the scorching midsummer sun, when the wide plains shimmered and wavered in the heat; and we knew the freezing misery of riding night guard around the cattle in the late fall roundup. In the soft springtime the stars were glorious in our eyes each night before we fell asleep; and in the winter we rode through blinding blizzards, when the driven snow dust burned our faces. . . We knew toil and hardship and hunger and thirst; and we saw men die violent deaths as they worked among the horses and cattle, or fought in evil feuds with one another; but we felt the beat of hardy life in our veins, and ours was the glory of work and the joy of living.*

And Dorothy Stickney, star of Broadway, reminisces:

*North Dakota means to me all the lovely things that the word childhood implies. Summer was riding an Indian pony across the fenceless prairie, smelling the fragrant wind, hearing the meadowlarks. Winter was clean snow that squeaked and crunched beneath my overshoes, and twinkling Christmas tree lights — and most of all my beloved family.*

*It means the joy of coming back after a long time away to the warmth of the wonderful North Dakota people.*

And then a year ago (November 16, 1975) a story was carried in The Fargo Forum proclaiming “Expert Says Major Drought Overdue in Great Plains:”

*Washington (AP) - A major drought appears to be overdue in the U.S. Great Plains, raising the threat of a situation perhaps more serious than that in subsaharan Africa, a specialist writes in Smithsonian magazine.*

*The climate trends that some scientists are predicting could bring us to a point of catastrophic convergence between the increasing population and inadequate food supplies much sooner than many people expect, says Henry Lansford of the National Center for Atmospheric Research.*

*The semiarid plains west of the 100th meridian have suffered from drought every 20 to 22 years throughout the recorded history of the region. Although the causes of these periodic droughts are not understood, the next one is overdue if in fact they do recur on a 20- to 22-year cycle.*

*The 100th meridian is in the area of Dodge City, Kansas, and Abilene, Texas.*

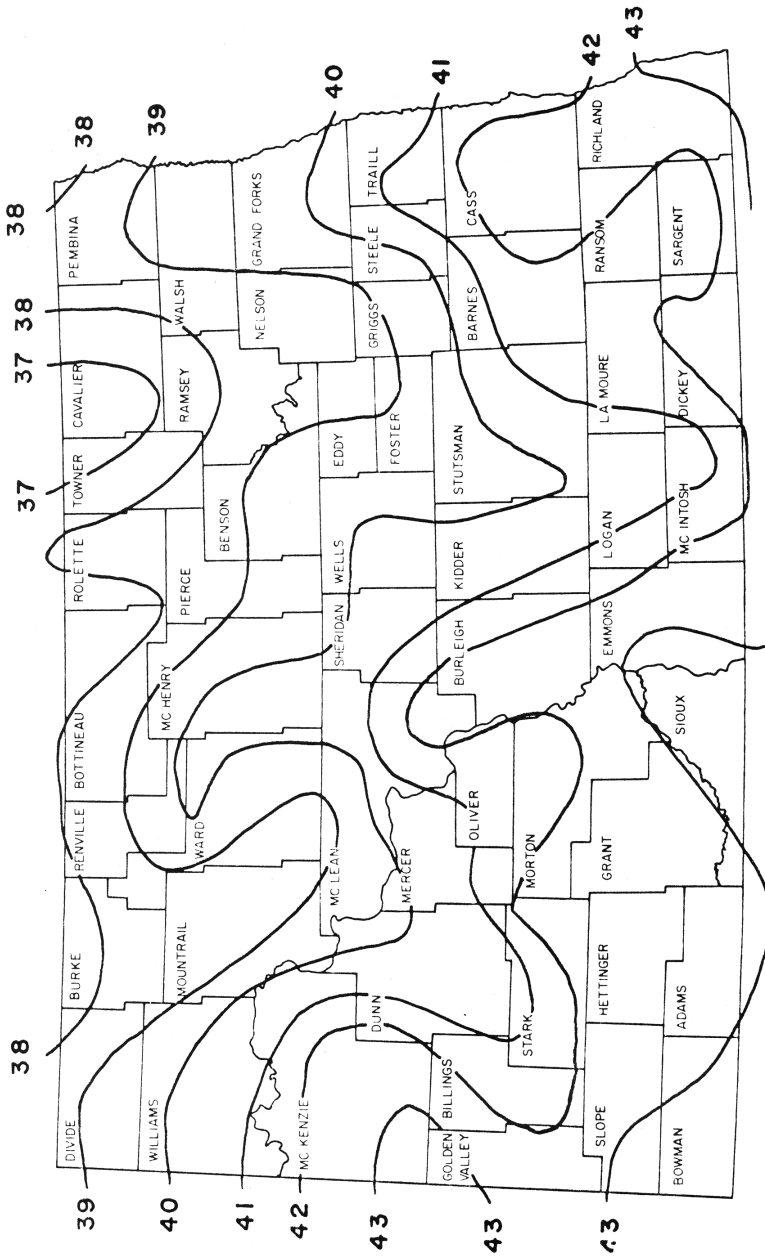
*Lansford cites an estimate from Helmut Landsburg, a University of Maryland climatologist, that a drop of one or two degrees in the average temperature above the 40th parallel could completely eliminate wheat and corn production in some major growing districts.*

Through droughts, floods, blizzards, heat waves, hail, tornadoes, from grass fires to grasshoppers, North Dakota has, is, and will continue to not only survive but flourish.



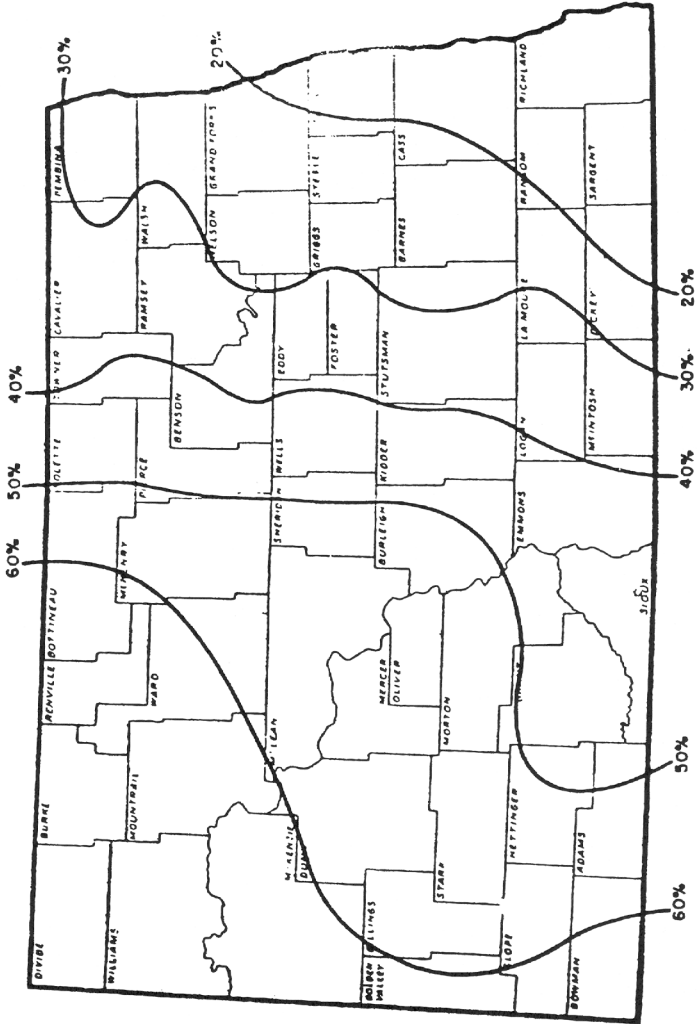
Dorothy Stickney, Broadway Star





Annual Mean Temperature

NORTH DAKOTA  
 Percent of Years with  
 Less Than 16 Inches of Precipitation







## Chapter Nine

# Bonanza Beef

*Of all the things that live and grow upon the earth, grass is the most important.*

*Back Trailing in the Heart  
of the Short Grass Country  
Donald Culross Peattie*

*When all the land without no fence or fuss belonged in partnership  
to God, the Government and us.*

*Sun and Saddle Leather  
"The Old Cowman"  
Badger Clark*

*The bones of the buffalo that lie bleaching on the prairie, their  
countless trails and wallows to be found on every hand, afford  
abundant proof that here they lived and multiplied. If these plains  
sustained vast herds of buffalo, also elk, deer, antelope, who can  
say that they are not adapted to stock culture?*

*Below I Show You a Delightful Land  
O.H. Holt*

**I**t was only a matter of months after Custer's defeat in 1876 that the militia of an angered nation annihilated and scattered the Indians. The survivors were put on restrictive reservations. There was no longer a question about honoring the promises made by the government respecting Indian rights to the vast prairies and the gold in the Black Hills. For the next ten years herds of cattle would arrive to range on the native grass. The cattlemen, with money to invest, and the cowboys, with assurance of employment, were now willing to stake their futures on cattle raising in Dakota.

*As early as 1878 the Deffenbach Brothers brought cattle to range  
north of the Black Hills into present North Dakota. The cows that  
cost then \$15 to \$25 brought them \$100 to \$150 at the mining  
camps after a short fattening period on the prairie grasses.*

*Our State North Dakota  
C.W. Leifur*

There were in the territory a few ranches that raised cattle for the army posts. Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud in his Story of North Dakota tells that the first cattleman was George Grinnel who came to Fort Union in the vicinity of present-day Williston with a military supply wagon train. He was originally from Maryland and came west soon after his honorable discharge as a spy with the Union Army.

*Grinnell came to a bizarre end. His mixed blood wife strangled him to death when he tried to whip her. The frontier coroner's jury ruled that he 'came to his death through an Act of Almighty God, by the hand of His agent, Josephine Grinnel.'*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

By 1879 Fort Buford traders set up the North Star Ranch north of the Missouri. There were other small ranches that existed for a short time, many of which were in Emmons and Burleigh counties, in the area north of Bismarck, and in the Mouse River Loop.

West of the Missouri, ranches were started by men who came there to hunt, to serve in the army, to work for the Northern Pacific, or to work at the stage stations. At the start the rancher seldom owned more than one-fourth of the land on which he placed his buildings. Legally he had no right to the land on which his cattle grazed. Because nobody built fences, the cattle usually got mixed with those of his neighbors. As a result roundups for counting and branding were necessary.

By the fall of 1879, over 2,000 head of cattle were trailed from Montana to Bismarck to be shipped by the Northern Pacific to Chicago. Like the bonanza farms in the Red River Valley, the early cattle industry was financed by easterners and Europeans. Men who had no previous ranching experience read such books as General James S. Brisbin's Beef Bonanza or How to Get Rich on the Plains and The Cattlefields of the Far West which lured them to the Great Plains.

About three-fourths of the ranches in North Dakota were started by Texans. They discovered that though Texas was a good place for cattle raising, Dakota was in a better position to get the cattle ready for market. So between 1866 and 1885 nearly six million cattle were driven from Texas to the northern ranges.

The first ranch of bonanza size was started in 1879 by the Continental and Cattle Company. By 1880 it had a herd of 6,500 head.

*The Continental and Cattle Company was better known as “hash knife” because of its brand. They had 100,000 cattle. They shipped a carload of black angus cattle from Belle Fouché. The home ranch is on Box Elder Creek at Ekalaka.*

*Black Trailing in the West  
of the Short Grass Country  
John O. Bye*

At the same time W.L. Hawley and Hiram B. Wadsworth took 200 cattle from Minnesota and began the Maltese Cross Ranch seven miles south of Medora. After establishing the Long X headquarters in the Dickinson vicinity the Reynolds brothers drove stock north to the present McKenzie County. Among the other ranches that were created in the northwestern part of the state included Thomas and Arnette’s Circle X, the Bird Head managed by Wilse Richards and Frank Banks, the Sloping Bottom managed by Mrs. Lloyd Roberts, the Badger Cattle Company’s V-Eye, the Diamond C south of the Killdeer Mountains, the White Earth Creek managed by Eustis and Jameson.

In 1884 Howard Easton, after coming to the Badlands to hunt, joined guides Frank Moore, and Gerry Paddock in establishing the Custer Trail Ranch five miles south of the Northern Pacific crossing. This ranch was financed by one of Easton’s friends, A.C. Huidekoper, a wealthy Pennsylvanian and a Harvard graduate, who set up the Little Missouri Horse Company with his HT Ranch near Black Butte. He also bought several townships of Northern Pacific land, making him the first rancher who owned range land. Once he owned the largest purebred Percheron herd in the United States.

Once the Northern Pacific Railroad had crossed the Missouri River bridge in 1883, many more came to the Badlands, the most famous of whom as M. Antoine de Vallombrosa, Marquis de Mores. Born in France and a graduate of the military academy of St. Cyr he came to the Dakota Territory at the age of twenty-five arriving in the Badlands in a private railroad car with his young bride, Medora, daughter of the wealthy L.A. Von Hoffman of Wall Street and Paris. His cousin, Count Fitz-James, had hunted in the Badlands earlier and had told de Mores of the rail facilities, the vast amount of coal, and much rangeland and shelter for livestock. So he came, not just to go into ranching but with a vision to set up a meat-packing plant. His logic was that shipping dressed beef instead of livestock would bring lower shipping costs and do away with weight shrinkage. Marquis de Mores figured he could put beef in the markets of the east at a lower price than the local butcher.

Money was no problem for the rich Marquis, and his father-in-law’s desire to provide his daughter with anything she wanted brought him

additional funds. By fall he built a \$250,000 plant and began slaughtering in October. He also organized the Northern Pacific Refrigerator Car Company to ship his products. When running at full capacity the slaughtering plant handled 150 head a day. To aid these facilities de Mores built cold storage plants in the towns that the Refrigerator Car Company served. As the news of his business spread eastward, men came to the area to seek employment. In addition to a hotel for his employees de Mores built a clubhouse which had lavish entertainment, a 15-room chalet for his home, and a large brick house for his wife's parents. Nearby he built a beautiful chapel for his wife. In Medora, the town he named after his wife, he built a church, a school, a theater, and lounging and club room that had a bowling alley and other means of recreation for his employees and their families.

Meat packing was just one of de Mores' enterprises. His refrigerator cars shipped salmon from Portland to New York. In Medora he was the first to use irrigation for a vegetable garden, and he had thoughts of starting a pottery industry. He was a stockholder in the Mandan Pioneer and bought a farm near Bismarck.

Through de Mores' efforts a freighting service and a stagecoach line between Medora and Deadwood, South Dakota, was established. For this route he bought 150 horses and four coaches, built 15 way stations, and set out crews to construct a road.

*Marquis de Mores' stageline from Medora to Deadwood, South Dakota, was started in 1885 and ran about a year. Every morning a coach left Medora and Deadwood to start the 215-mile trip. The fare was \$21.50 and took 36 hours. Four coaches that cost \$1,500 each were used. Two of the coaches were later worn out by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. One went to a museum in Miles City and the other to Jamestown.*

*Back Trailing in the Heart  
of the Short Grass Country  
John O. Bye*

Several months after de Mores had come to the Badlands Theodore Roosevelt arrived to hunt buffalo. Also a young man of twenty-five, he was attracted to this "strangely different but beautiful country" and bought a ranch seven miles south of Medora, the Maltese Cross. Before returning to New York he formed a partnership with Sylvane Ferris and A.W. Merrifield who ran the ranch for half the profits. While he was in New York, both his wife and mother died on the same day. Following a political setback, Roosevelt, with a heavy heart, returned to the Badlands in the summer of 1884. Once he was



back, his cattle business prospered so he bought a second ranch, the Elkhorn. He put this ranch under the management of two Maine woodsmen friends, William Sewall and Wilmot Dow.

Roosevelt was hardly a typical Dakota cowboy. His speech was evidence that he was a product of an eastern school such as Harvard. The other cowboys got a chuckle when he called to the cattle “hasten forward quickly there!” He never intended this to be his lifelong work. He came to Dakota to strengthen his body and overcome his sorrows. This is what he did as well as make friends and learned about their ways, which eventually helped him politically.

But Roosevelt did leave behind a definite mark on the history of ranching in North Dakota. His main contribution was the starting of the Little Missouri Stockmen’s Association, a protective group. He was well respected by the Billings County residents for his moral and intellectual qualities. Roosevelt and De Mores occasionally socialized but never became close friends, and on occasions they clashed.

The cattle drives out of Texas started shortly after the Civil War as the ranges there were severely overstocked with large roaming herds. These were cattle of Mexican origin mixed with breeds brought into the state. Many were rounded up and brought north overland to shipping points and to northern ranges. Kansas cattlemen upgraded the herds with Hereford bulls imported from England. Prices were good and the industry spread until it was discovered that southern cattle were carrying tick fever forcing the northern states to pass laws banning the cattle drives.

*The longhorn is called the first American breed. And like most Americans they can trace their ancestors to Europe; Spain to be exact, and before that to Asia. They could live without man, and if conditions were right, they doubled in number every two years. The long horns that sometimes measure five feet from tip to tip made them difficult to ship, and gradually they were replaced with other breeds. Their horns are to be found mounted on the walls of homes, hotels, clubs, and museums throughout cattle country.*

*The Cattlemen from the Rio Grande Across the Far Marias*  
Mari Sandoz

In cattle country the highlight of the year was naturally the great roundup. The first little Missouri roundup was in the spring of 1884 in which forty men took part. It was dangerous work, involving rough riding and long hours. Roosevelt gave a description of his work in a letter to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge:

*I have been three weeks on the roundup and have worked as hard as any of the cowboys . . . Yesterday I was eighteen hours in the saddle — from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. — having half an hour each for dinner and tea. I can now do cowboy work pretty well.*

Although Roosevelt enjoyed the free life of a cowboy, he admitted that it was full of hardships. George F. Shafer, who later became governor, said that while he was on his father's ranch, the cowboys on the roundup

*were often wet to the skin for days at a time; and, sleeping on a wet bed in the rain, the sleet, and the snow, there is a little wonder that nearly every cowboy is a victim of rheumatism and a physical wreck at the age of thirty-five years.*

The ranchmen were never free of problems. The cattle roaming the range were easy prey to rustlers and wolves. Indians anxious to pay the white man back were not shy about taking what they wanted.

Because this region was still very much unsettled, keeping law and order was a real problem. In fact, it was receiving a bad reputation. In 1884 the Dickinson Press said:

*If there is any place along the line that needs a criminal court and a jail it is Medora.*

This lawlessness in part was caused by the conflict between the small and large ranchers over free grass, the wealth of the region. In the fall of 1884, aided by big Montana ranchers, twenty vigilantes invaded McKenzie County to force the small ranchers to leave. The vigilantes, consisting of former convicts and horse thieves, frightened the local rancher with a hanging, killing a hunter, setting the prairie on fire, and burning a barn and five hundred tons of hay on a ranch. However, they failed to discourage the small ranchers.

The cattlemen did receive some protection through the Little Missouri Stock Growers' Association. It required each rancher to have a registered brand. Every spring it organized a roundup in which each calf was branded. Then in the fall a second roundup was set up in which the cattle for market were selected and the calves that were missed in the spring were branded.

Because better treatment to the Indians would lessen the chance for thievery, the association appealed to the Federal government to give them supplies. The cattlemen also asked the territorial government to put bounties on predatory animals.

There was always the added danger of drought such as in the summer of 1886. Because of the dryness prairie fires were numerous. By September the

land was suitable for only a small part of the cattle. Beef prices were dropping, and the cattle were in poor shape to be marketed.

By November 5, the temperature had dropped below zero. Then came the first of many blizzards. Soon the ground was covered with five feet of snow. Though a thaw came in January, it was followed by extreme cold putting a hard crust on the snow.

In previous winters the livestock had been able to live on the dry prairie grass and seek shelter in the shallow coulees when the wind turned cold and brought snow. But the winter of 1886-87 was so severe and the snow so deep that the animals were at the mercy of the elements.

Early in March 1887, a warm chinook wind caused the Little Missouri to flood and carry downstream the frozen carcasses of the victims. Every coulee was filled with bunched frozen animals, and the few survivors were in such sad shape that they had to be killed. An eerie stillness and stench of rotting carcasses covered the prairie. Cattle would be brought to western North Dakota again, but the operation of ranches would be changed. In April of 1887, T.J. Bryan, president of the Stockmen's Association, summarized:

*A drouth without parallel; a market without a bottom, and a winter, the severest ever known.*

*Back Trailing in the Heart  
of the Short Grass Country  
John O. Bye*

By the summer of 1886 Roosevelt was worried about overstocking. Despite the unfavorable conditions cattle were still being shipped into the area. The following April he left the Badlands heartsick. In a letter he told Senator Lodge:

*The losses are crippling. For the first time I have been utterly unable to enjoy a visit to my ranch. I shall be glad to get home. Roosevelt's books showed a net loss of \$20,292.63 at the close of his operations. This did not include interest on the investment.*

*Roosevelt in the Bad Lands  
Hermann Havedorn*

Though the big Texan companies, such as the OX, the Three Seven, the Hashknife, and the Long X kept sending cattle to the area, they scaled down their operations. Roosevelt restocked his ranches, but his happy visits came to an end. After the disastrous winter of 1886-87 the cattlemen stocked the open-prairie, leaving the grass in the Badlands for winter grazing.

Medora was already showing signs of declining. By the summer of 1886 it became apparent that de Mores' meat-packing plant was doomed. Later that year the Cow Boy, the town's newspaper, said some seventy people had left and their whereabouts were unknown. On November 20, the Bismarck Tribune declared:

*Medora has pretty nearly gone into winter quarters. To be sure, the slaughter house establishment of Marquis de Mores will not be formally shut down until the end of the month, but there are many days on which there is no killing done and the workmen have to be laid off. The past season has not been of the busiest, and the near approach of winter finds this about the quietest place in western Dakota. The hotel is closed and its former landlord now runs a little boarding house, but early next month will make a permanent removal to the states. There is only one general store and its proprietor declared that the middle of December will find him, stock and all, hundreds of miles from here. The proprietor of the drug store will remove either to Wyoming or Winona, Dakota, early in December, as he cannot make his board in the place. There are very few families here, nearly all of the workmen being unmarried, and as soon as the slaughter houses close they will have to seek employment elsewhere, as scarcely any of them have a cent for time in advance of the present day.*

In the three years that the Marquis de Mores lived at Medora he saw his dream of a cattle and meat-packing company fade into the stark reality of failure. Though the winter of 1886-87 no doubt was a factor, there had been many other serious problems.

The people of the area misunderstood the Marquis. His very mannerisms were strange. His display of wealth, staff of personal servants, and titled guests set him apart in a land where every man considered himself an equal. The men he hired were not loyal to him as other cowhands were to their ranch foremen and owners. He was often taken advantage of by the unscrupulous.

The meat-packing business ran into all manner of obstacles. There is the often-told story of the plotting of meat companies in Chicago with the railroads to charge the de Mores' higher freight rates and to see that the refrigerator cars belonging to him were sidetracked, lost, or not noticed. Range cattle reached prime condition only at the end of the summer so the plant would stand idle half of the year. The meat was not as tender as grain fed beef and had to be sold at a lower price. A rumor was started and published

as a fact by eastern journals that de Mores' contained poisonous preservatives. The attempt to process mutton failed, because the sheep that the Marquis bought were too old to be palatable.

The bringing of sheep into cow country was unforgiveable, but the putting up of fences brought de Mores gun fights and killings. He was charged with murder and tried before a jury. Though he was acquitted, the trial brought out the hard feelings many of his neighbors felt.

His final act before he left the Dakota venture forever was to order a sign put on his closed packing plant: "Rent free to any responsible party who will make use of it." He left only after every worker was paid and every bill settled. For many years taxes were paid on the property by his estate. It is estimated that his financial losses were well over two million dollars.

*Marquis de Mores was killed in Africa where he was mapping and exploring the territory. A band of about forty natives killed and robbed the entire party. (June, 1896).*

*The Marquis de Mores; the former Medora Von Hoffman, married the Marquis in France in 1882. She bore him two sons and daughter. She lived in the chateau at Medora during the summers her husband was in the west. At the time of his death she was in Paris and tried to bring the "real" killers to justice as she was certain there were those who wished to keep de Mores out of politics. She returned to Medora in 1903 and gave a large party for everyone. She died in 1921 and is buried beside her husband at Cannes.*

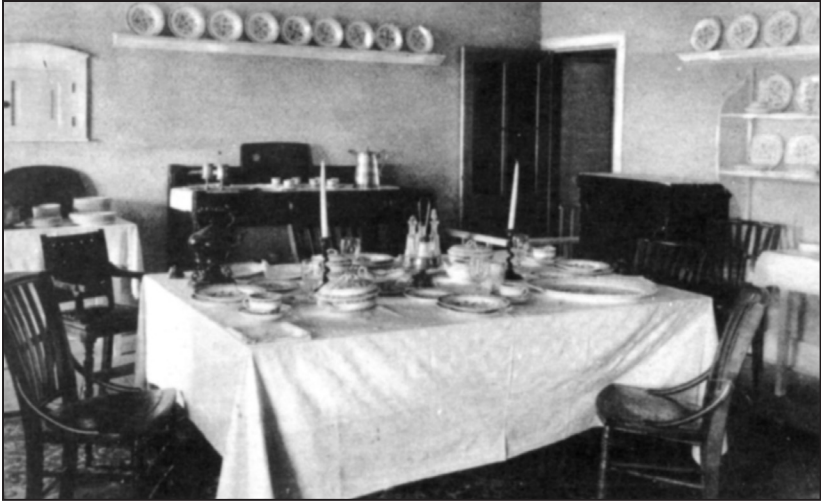
*The Marquis de Mores  
Donald Dresden*

*A fire in the fall of 1903 destroyed the packing-house. A brick smokestack is all that remains. This site and the chateau were given to the State Historical Society in 1936 by Louis Vallombrosa, eldest son of the Marquis.*

*The de Mores children commissioned a life size statue of their father that is in the park at Medora. Eventually his large holdings were disposed of, but as long as there is a Medora, the Marquis de Mores will be remembered.*

*The Marquis de Mores  
Donald Dresden*

It would take some time for the cattle industry to recover. The era of invested money was over. But the prairie was still there with all its potentials and promises, and those who continued to raise cattle in spite of the setbacks would find their rewards when they adjusted their operations to meet the challenges.



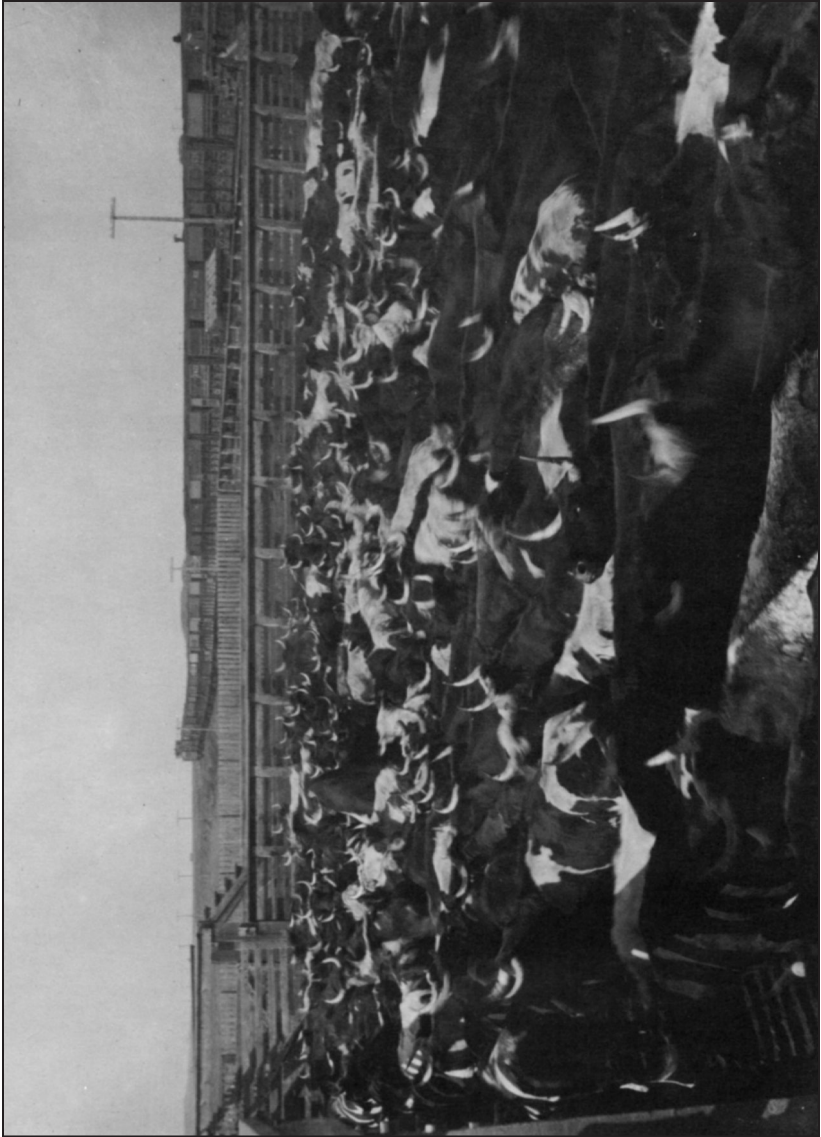
Chateau dining room, de Mores state historic site, Medora, North Dakota

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Chateau de Mores, de Mores state historic site, Medora, North Dakota

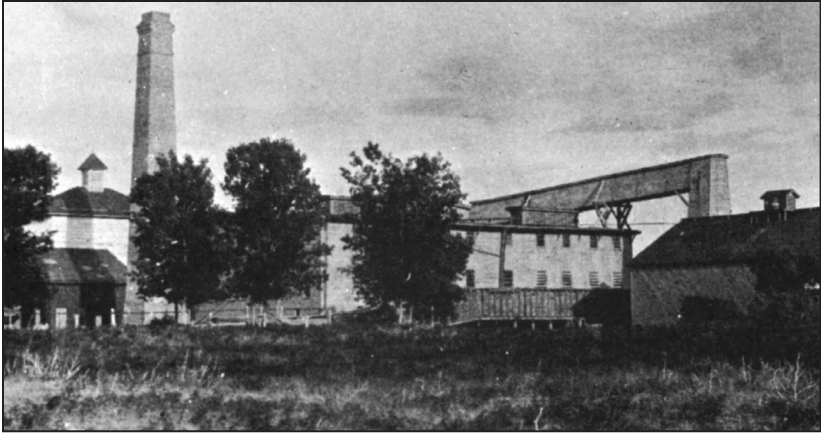
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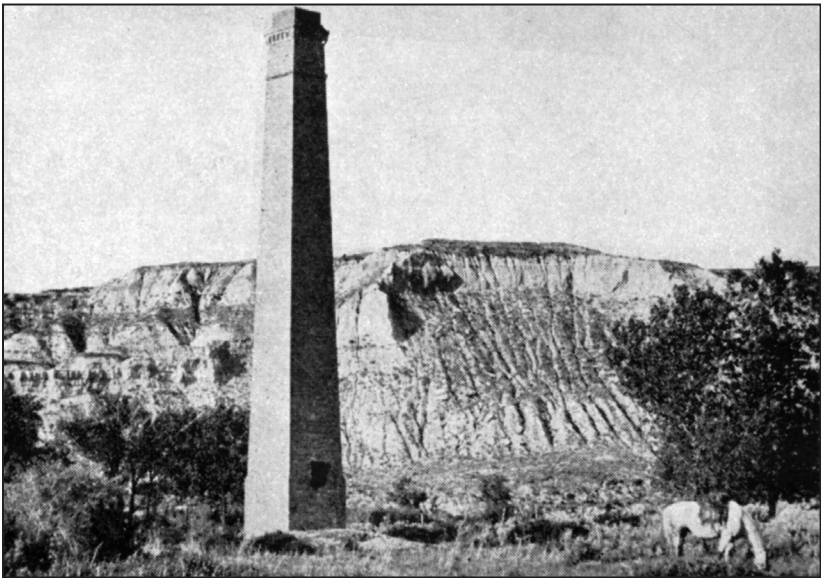
Marketing Dakota beef

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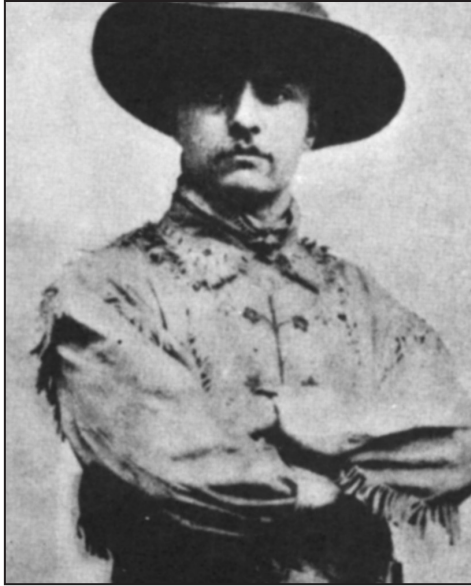




Marquis de Mores' packing house



A fire in the fall of 1903 destroyed the packing house. A brick smokestack is all that remains.



Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President, dressed as a cowboy when he lived in the Badlands 1883-1887.



The Marquis de Mores



The Marquise de Mores

## Chapter Ten

# The Second Boom

The period between the Spanish-American War and the First World War (1898-1917) was a time of incredible growth and development in North Dakota. Elwyn B. Robinson in his book History of North Dakota terms these years “The Second Boom.”

A quarter of a million latter-day pioneers rushed to claim the last of the homestead lands. The population increased from an estimated 270,000 to 670,000. The railroad mileage almost doubled, increasing from 2,662 miles to 5,226. The number of farms that North Dakotans operated rose from 45,000 in 1900 to 74,000 in 1910, and in acreage the increase went from 15,500,000 to 28,400,000. Within the boom period the acreage planted to wheat more than doubled from 4,300,000 acres to 9,400,000 while the production rose from 69 million bushels to 159 million, making it a record period. Between 1900 and 1910 the average price of land went from \$11.00 to \$26.00 an acre, and by 1920 it was \$35.00.

The Missouri Plateau had the biggest increase, though many counties of the Drift Prairie and many towns had large growths. While the Missouri Plateau had 47,000 people in 1900, it had 187,000 by 1910, an increase of 296 percent. The population of the Drift Prairie rose from 151,000 in 1900 to 262,000 in 1910, an increase of 74 percent. That of the Red River Valley went from 122,000 in 1900 to 128,000 in 1910.

The larger towns grew rapidly. During the first decade of the 1900's the population of Fargo grew from 9,589 to 14,331; Grand Forks from 7,652 to 12,478; Jamestown from 2,853 to 4,358; and Bismarck from 3,319 to 5,443. The newer towns grew even faster. The population of Devils Lake rose from 1,729 to 5,157; Minot from 1,277 to 6,188; and Williston from 763 to 3,124.

During the “Second Boom” railroad construction was extended across the Drift Prairie to the Missouri Plateau. Between 1898 and 1904 some 550 miles were built. The Northern Pacific added 234 miles of branch lines to reach the towns of Denhoff, McHenry, Marion, Oakes, Esmond and Linton. The Great Northern also extended its lines, about 125 miles, to reach Walhalla, Hannah, Souris, Munich and Mohall. The Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railroads (Soo Line) built a line from Kulm to Wishek and then north to Bismarck and south to the state line. Also a branch was built by the

Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul from Roscoe, South Dakota, to Strasburg and Linton.

At the turn of the century two new railroad companies were formed within the state. William D. Washburn, a wealthy Minneapolis miller and promoter of the Soo, started the Bismarck, Washburn and Buford Railway Company in 1899. By 1901 he had laid a track to the town of Washburn through his lignite beds near Wilton. In 1904 he sold it to the Soo. Meanwhile, farmers in Ramsey County formed the Farmers' Grain and Shipping Company to build a line from Devils Lake to Starkweather and then in 1905 to Hansboro.

*Farmers' Grain and Shipping Company was incorporated in 1902. It used 8,000 shares of stock worth \$25 a share. The principal stockholders were twenty-five farmers in the area. The Great Northern acquired the company after a succession of unprofitable years.*

*Great Northern File  
Minnesota State Historical Society*

This period saw definite improvements in railroading. Roadbeds were constructed with straightened curves and lowered grades. In 1900 the Great Northern built larger shops in Minot and the Northern Pacific built a large Spanish-style depot in Bismarck. The Soo bought a ten-wheeler engine thought to be the second largest in the nation, while reducing its passenger fares from four to three cents a mile. The Northern Pacific added the North Coast Limited which carried passengers in style and comfort.

No construction was done in 1904, but in 1905, 528 miles were built; 1906, 144 miles and 1907, 273 miles. Much of this building was due to the Soo's desire to take business away from the Great Northern. But it only put too much railroading in a sparsely populated region, spreading available traffic thin and causing costs to rise.

In 1905 the Soo began the "Wheat Line" from Oslo, Minnesota, to Kenmare which paralleled the Great Northern's main line for 250 miles. In 1906 it built a branch from Drake to Plaza and another westward from Flaxton.

Both the Great Northern and the Soo put more lines on the Missouri Plateau. In 1905 the Northern Pacific extended its lines to Streeter and Devils Lake. Improvements continued to be made: heavier rails, water reservoirs and more locomotives and freight cars.

The last phase of railroad construction in North Dakota came in 1910-1914, amounting to 1,025 miles of track. In 1912 the Soo built a line from Fordville to Drake that roughly paralleled the Great Northern for 130 miles, and during the next two years it extended its lines from Plaza and Ambrose.

The Midland Continental Railroad had an ambitious plan of building a track from Winnipeg to Galveston, Texas, but its venture folded after laying track between Edgeley and Wimbledon.

*The Midland Continental Railroad ran into many problems. It took three years to build from Edgeley to Jamestown. The track was completed to Wimbledon, a total distance of sixty miles, in October, 1913. The start of World War I changed the money market and financing stopped. From then on the railroad struggled to exist. Schedules were irregular. Rolling stock included a Model T Ford with flanged wheels. Eventually the Soo and the Burlington Northern bought the floundering line. They put \$70,000 in needed repairs and hauled the bumper crops of 1967 and 1968. The flood of 1969 put the south sector permanently out of use. The track in the yard of Jamestown and the Wimbledon to Clementsville track is still in use.*

*Trains*

*“About a railroad you may not have heard of— and that is no more.”*

*Steward Mitchell*

Another enterprising North Dakota railroad venture was the Fargo and Southern Company. The Fargo and Southern Railroad was started by 23 Fargo businessmen who put down \$100,000 each. The purpose of the railroad was to provide another route to ship freight to the Twin Cities and Chicago. The Great Northern and the Northern Pacific were charging higher rates for this haul than they charged for much longer distances elsewhere. The railroad went south through Wahpeton connecting with the Milwaukee at Ortonville.

*It is estimated that 60 percent of the freight traveled this route the first year. There were two passenger trains daily. So pleased were the people of Fargo with the cheaper rates that they hoped the line would extend farther south.*

*Then the owners sold the railroad to the Milwaukee for an undisclosed amount. The freight rates went up and the passenger service was discontinued. To many observers this was a disastrous*

*economic blow that would hold Fargo back from being a metropolitan center.*

*A Multimillionaire Lived in Fargo: A History of Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. and the Fargo and Southern Railroad*  
Richard E. Blair

Charles T. Yerkes masterminded the Fargo and Southern Railroad and no doubt left town much richer than when he came. His next venture was the control of street railways in Chicago.

The Fargo and Southern Railroad was sold for a profit by its stockholders to the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. This company, commonly known as the Milwaukee, had laid its first tracks within the state (1907) across the southwestern corner, connecting Marmarth, Bowman, Scranton, Reeder, and others with Chicago. In 1911 they built a line from McLaughlin, South Dakota, to New England. The Northern Pacific built lines going north and south from Mandan. The northern line went up the Knife River Valley, reaching Killdeer in 1914, while the southern one went west to Mott. About the same time the Northern Pacific built another line south from Beach and a Great Northern line was extended to Watford City. A little later the Great Northern built to Grenora. Under James J. Hill's personal supervision the Great Northern built a line diagonally across the state from Fargo to Surrey (near Minot). The Surrey cut-off nearly paralleled the Soo Line from Valley City to Minot and touched only one town of over 500 people, New Rockford. It is interesting to note that despite the profusion of main and branch lines, North Dakota has but one railroad bridge across the Missouri River.

By 1915 North Dakota was served by four major railroads: the Northern Pacific with 1,496 miles of track; the Great Northern, 1,872; the Soo, 1,269 and the Milwaukee, 378. When the shorter lines trackage was added, the state had 5,226 miles of railroad track. This averaged out to 74 miles per 10,000 people at a time when the United States' average was 25 miles per 10,000 people. This extensive rail net contrasts with South Dakota, which has but one main line and few branches within the state's borders.

The estimated cost per mile was \$20,000, making the total invested capital \$100,000,000. However, stocks and bonds sold by the various companies represented three or four times that amount. The dividends for the stockholder who held \$3,000 worth of stock had to be earned by \$1,000 worth of railroad. The surprising thing is that sometimes it did — but not in sparsely settled North Dakota.

The feverish rush of people to the state reflected the “last time” psychology of the promoters. The railroads advertised for settlers; the state legislature appropriated \$20,000 for this purpose. The officials of the United States Department of Agriculture were forecasting the end of unoccupied tillable land, food shortages and high prices. James J. Hill, speaking at a 1906 Minnesota Fair, predicted that the farmers would be the most prosperous class of our society, and on the free land of North Dakota was the place to start.

*Marie Downing, a maid-in-waiting for Queen Victoria, left the luxurious palace to marry a homesteader, Harry Williams of Rolette County. Harry had also been in the royal family's service but had left his fiancée to come to Canada and then to North Dakota. The Queen did not want Marie to leave for what she called “savage America” and delayed her departure for five years. When Marie did make the trip, she was accompanied by many trunks of beautiful gifts from the Queen. There were many diamond rings and other jewelry, beautiful clothing, dishes, sterling silver, porcelain figurines and even a gold encrusted saddle. Marie and Harry were married in Devils Lake in 40 degree below weather and traveled by sleigh to their home where they piled her many possessions in one of the two small rooms.*

*She lived the life of a homesteader's wife. Gradually she gave away or sold her possessions when times became difficult.*

*She was often asked if she had regrets and she assured everyone that she loved her new country and her prairie home.*

*Pierce County Tribune  
October 18, 1951*

The conditions were ideal for speculators to make money. The desire for land is a basic inherent trait of man and the advertising of the railroads and the government had encouraged the people everywhere to believe North Dakota was the place. All the speculator had to do was to purchase the land and resell at a profit.

The Northern Pacific sold its land to individuals, but the greatest acreages went to land companies, many of which had offices in the Twin Cities. The D.S.B. Johnson Land Company of St. Paul bought all the land that the Northern Pacific owned in Foster, Wells and three other counties; H.A. Hunter of Minneapolis purchased over 167,000 acres, and the Western Land

Securities Company and the Golden Valley Land and Cattle Company, both St. Paul firms, bought and controlled other large areas in the western part of the state. W.D. Washburn also bought a large tract of land in northern Burleigh and southwestern McLean counties. James C. Young, who was originally a townsite builder had, in 1909, a million acres in North Dakota, including several sections near Dickinson. In Stark County the Western Land Securities Company was the principal owner, while in Dunn County the Fertile Valley Land Company, formed by men connected with the Soo Railroad, bought large tracts of ranch properties for resale. One of the largest operators in the region was the W.H. Brown Company of Chicago which owned 2 million acres and had a land office at Richardton.

*In 1903 Mr. Brown of the William H. Brown Company founded and platted townsites and established land offices at Mott and Haynes before county of Hettinger was organized. Some thought he selected the site in Mott on account of drainage; some thought it was because of the peculiar quality of the gumbo mud to be found after each rain; and still others thought it was because the land was unfit for anything else.*

*Mott was the scene of marked activity as a result of Mr. Brown's enthusiasm and direction with carpenters, masons, painters and sign painters bustling about their work. The entire community was built in 1905 and 1906. Mr. Brown was a great promoter, using catch phrases to attract attention and boast the town. "Mott's the spot. That's what" was known far and wide. Another was, "Don't get 'hot,' because you're not 'in it.' Come to Mott and buy a lot this minute."*

*Our Hettinger County Heritage  
Enid Bern*

A major settlement in western North Dakota was launched by C.L. Timmerman who bought and sold large tracts of Northern Pacific land. He was treasurer of both Mercer County and the Mercer County Land Company. The southwestern part of the state was developed under the leadership of James E. Phelan of Bowman. Originally in the livestock business he turned his attention to land selling. Alexander McKenzie, political leader of North Dakota from 1883 to 1906, bought some 300,000 acres in 1906. He was estimated to have made a million dollars when he sold the land in 1909 because of rising prices.



Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves in her book Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains gives explicate examples of the rising values of land.

*Land values quadrupled in the year 1900-1910. The railroad and its subsidiary, Northwestern Improvement Company, sold the bulk of their holdings west of the Missouri at an average of \$1.93 an acre. The land company in turn sold at an average price of \$5.66. The next purchaser, often an individual speculator, averaged \$8.25 an acre on the resale.*

The speculative fever spread to Europe. Capitalists in Holland invested a million dollars in land for a Dutch settlement in Stark County at Belfield (1910). Belgian money went into a 100,000-acre tract along the Montana border a year later. Russian capitalists authorized a Fargo land company in 1913 to purchase 300,000 acres in a solid block, but they were too late, for by then there were only scattered sections left.

There is no way to be certain how many homesteaders were actually speculators. The homestead requirements were changed in 1909 and again in 1912 so that a resident could acquire 320 acres by living on the land seven months a year for three years. Additional land could be bought at \$1.25 an acre. Federal land laws were designed to prevent the relinquishment of claims but there is much evidence to show that it was a common practice.

Over one million acres were filed upon each year from 1900 through 1908. The peak year was 1906 with 2,700,000 acres taken. Everyone of legal age, male or female, working or unemployed, was fulfilling the requirements of homesteading by sleeping on his (or her) land when convenient and either farming or hiring others to plow and seed the required acreage.

During the years 1900-1910 about half the homestead land was committed. An investigating committee reported that in some areas it was as much as 90 percent. In 1904 relinquishments of quarter sections were bringing between \$1,500 and \$2,000 in the Minot and Bottineau area. Near Beach the price varied from \$800 to \$2,000, depending, no doubt, on the condition of the terrain. Four years later the same transaction in Williams, McKenzie and Dunn counties were bringing only \$400 or \$500 and sometimes less.

There were many reasons other than land speculation for the homesteader to leave the land. Much of it was unfit for farming. Many newcomers did not have the experience needed in a semi-arid region. Others did not have the necessary funds to continue farming until they had something to sell. Some borrowed on the land to continue to live, and when they were unable to make the payment, the banks became the owners.

For the most part North Dakota families of today are the descendants of the thousands that arrived in the twenty years before World War I. They came by passenger train with their worldly goods following on a freight train. Sometimes this included livestock and machinery, but many preferred to buy their farm supplies at the town where they detrained. About half of the new arrivals brought goods for a store, money for a bank, lumber for an elevator, doctor's equipment, law books, pharmaceuticals, blacksmith anvils, newspaper presses, carpenter's tools, photographic paraphernalia, or the vocational skills of teaching, ministry, clerking, bookkeeping and many others.

Harriet H. Carr in her book Against the Wind gives a vivid description of a homesteader waiting his turn at a land office.

*Dan shivered as he stood in line in front of the Land Office in Minot. All day he'd been standing, except when Mom came to relieve him so he could go to the hotel to thaw out and get a bite to eat. It was dusk now and she'd be coming again soon. He'd try to get a little sleep this time, for he'd have to stay in line all night or lose his place. It would be late tomorrow before he got inside the building at the rate the line was moving . . . .*

*Dan looked toward the hotel. Frame buildings with false second-story fronts lined the street on either side. There was a bank, two or three general stores, a lumber yard, livery stable, blacksmith shop and barber shop, all plainly marked with signs. Some were painted and neat appearing. Toward the edge of town, where rutted, grey hills rolled up above the valley, there were other buildings covered with tar paper and strips of lathe. Already Dan knew some of them were 'blind pig' and gambling halls, although a few were called restaurants.*

The 1910 census sets the population at 577,000; 41 percent of this number were from other states, 21 percent were Norwegians, 20 percent were of German ancestry (about half from Russia), 12 percent were English, Scottish and Welsh (some from Canada) and 5 percent from Sweden. Many of the foreign born spent some time in other states before coming to North Dakota.

*Pierre I. DeLange came from Iowa to Marmarth in 1907 with his wife and six of his children. He built a bank, a home for himself and one for his oldest son. Marmarth was the division point for the Milwaukee Railroad and was a booming town. It was a beautiful spot on the banks of the Little Missouri with many trees and flowered boulevards. One of his daughters married the local doctor, one a rancher and another taught school. The other boys worked for the railroad. This man, the writer's great grandfather, called his beloved town, the "oasis on the prairie."*

*By Author*

\* \* \*

*Marmarth is the only place in the world with that name. The president of the Milwaukee had a little granddaughter named Margaret Martha. When asked her name she said, "Marmarth." For her he named the town.*

*Origin of North Dakota Place Names  
Mary Ann Barns Williams*

It was easy to distinguish the different nationalities and often those of different occupational intentions, but they had some very important things in common: they shared hope and courage, they were the daring and energetic individuals who broke from the old patterns of their lives to find something better. Together they would face loneliness, and the trials of new environment and share the results of their labors.

Everything happened so rapidly in every village, town and city, at every railroad siding, and in every township in every county that it defies description. County histories make very interesting reading, because they tell of these beginnings. Invariably there was a struggle over the placing of the county seats, towns were literally moved across the prairie when railroad routes were changed, there were compromises about school locations and all-out efforts to establish churches and much more.

Each community had its own distinctive characteristics and interesting personalities. The Divide County History tells of "the politics, the bitter fight and the enthusiasm which went into the battle for the county seat. . . Ambrose, Crosby and Noonan were all contenders. . . On February 20, 1918, the courthouse was dedicated. A band from Noonan played and they danced in the courtroom." That courthouse is still the pride of Crosby.

*Hope was designated the county seat when Griggs County was formed. A group of people petitioned for a general election to secure the county seat for Cooperstown, which was only in the planning stage, but more centrally located. There were many election irregularities, some proven, some only rumors. Cooperstown was declared the winner. The Steele family, large landowners, hired a Fargo attorney to serve an injunction to stop the removal. Before the papers were served, a group of men from the Cooperstown area stole the records and took them to a granary at the townsite. In retaliation, eleven men from Hope took the records from two guards at gun point. For several months they were not available. At a later election money was voted for a courthouse at Cooperstown.*

*Myrtle Benis Porterville  
File 296  
North Dakota Institute for  
Regional Studies*

The sudden birth and growth of a town is expertly described by Laura Thompson in the book History of Rolette County.

*A great deal of excitement prevailed in the southern part of Rolette County in 1905, for in that year two railroads came into the territory, the Soo and the Great Northern, the roads crossing at a point in Leonard Township. The owner, John Christenon, sold his land when it was a golden wheat field to the Minnesota and Trust Company for \$35 an acre. On August 10, 1905, at 3 p.m. the sale of lots began. . . . Within a very short time men were flocking into the new townsite and buildings of all sorts were erected. They in fact, were just thrown together to start business. Old timers recall that two lumber yards, a blacksmith shop and a hotel were the first places open.*

*On September 8, 1905, the first edition of the Rolette County Examiner, a weekly newspaper, was published. It contained advertisements from two banks, two meat markets, four hardware stores, five grocery stores, one laundry, three dray and transfer companies, three contractors, three doctors, one photographer, one barber and one auctioneer.*

The new town was named Rolette, and a small settlement, McCumber, a half-mile north, was invited to move down. Soon there were six elevators, three on each railroad, and a mill was grinding wheat into flour to be sold under the label “Rolette’s Pride.” Two attorneys, a garage, restaurants, pool halls and ‘blind pigs’ added to the business section. The 1910 census lists Rolette County with 9,558; 408 in the town of Rolette. In November of that year they challenged, at an election, the town of Rolla (587 inhabitants) for the county seat and lost. The 1920 census credits Rolla with 576, Rolette, 409 and the county 10,061. The era of rapid growth was over.

*The county seat fight in McKenzie County caused bitter feelings that lasted for many years. When the county was organized in 1905, Alexander was designated as the county seat. The first courthouse was a log building that had been used at a ranch. Immediately, Schafer started legal and illegal proceedings to have it moved to their village. In a highly suspicious election, they won the removal. Within a few years the tables were turned on them as Watford City wanted the county seat. They lost again in 1928 and in 1934. Finally, in November, 1940, they defeated Schafer by an overwhelming majority.*

*Dreams of Reality  
Hodvig Clausen Svore*

Education was not neglected by the early isolated pioneers. Before public education was available, the children were often taught in small groups in private homes. Statehood brought public funds for schools and by 1916 there were 4,722 rural schools. A little over half of the children attending grade schools in the state were in these schools. By today’s standards they would seem inadequate with poorly trained teachers, short terms and very little reference materials, but each year public education improved. The town schools fared better because the cost per pupil was so much less and rising land values secured more school money through taxation. An eighth grade education was made mandatory for every child up to the age of seventeen. High schools were soon operating in every town of adequate size to support one.

The university and colleges were dealt to the cities at the time Bismarck was chosen as the state capitol. The University at Grand Forks, Agricultural College at Fargo and normal schools at Mayville and Valley City were started by 1890. During the “Second Boom” the others were opened: Industrial and Normal School at Ellendale in 1891, the School of Science at Wahpeton in 1904, the School of Forestry at Bottineau in 1907.

*The counties of Ward, Rolette, McHenry and Bottineau voted to determine the site for the School of Forestry. First, returns showed Minot had 828 votes, Bottineau, 782 and Willow City, 736. It was found out that 151 women voted in Ward County, and since women had no right to vote at that time, those ballots were thrown out and Bottineau declared the winner.*

*Diamond Jubilee  
Brief History of the  
County of Bottineau*

Added later were normal schools in Minot (1913) and in Dickinson (1918). The total enrollment in 1918 was 3,409, and the value of their campuses, buildings and equipment was over \$3 million.

The dedicated devotion of early missionaries brought the Christian religion to the Indians before settlement. Later, eastern congregations helped many communities to build churches and engage ministers. The histories of these early churches tell the rapid growth of religious influence. Thirty-seven denominations had 2,520 local churches with 225,877 members by the year 1916. Though there were more Catholics (95,859) than any other, the Lutherans (72,026) had three times as many churches (1,007). Many congregations totaled less than 50 members and had to share the expenses of a clergyman with nearby towns.

The church did much for developing moral standards, providing spiritual and social development and establishing schools and hospitals. The schools were elementary and secondary as well as colleges. The hospitals were principally built and staffed by the Sisters of Catholic Orders. There were also Lutheran hospitals and a large Evangelical Association hospital at Bismarck.

The story of newspapers in the early years of statehood and before, starts with Colonel Clement Lounsberry's printing press that went to Bismarck on the first Northern Pacific train to make the trip. His newspaper, *The Bismarck Tribune*, made its appearance in July, 1893. He received national attention with his newspaper reports of Custer's defeat in 1876.

The second paper was the Fargo Express. The Grand Forks Plaindealer followed. George H. Walsh, who was to become an associate of Alexander McKenzie and play a political role in the state, was the owner.

The first daily, The Fargo Argus, was financed by James J. Hill at about the same time that he formed the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad Company.

It was easy to start a paper. With an old Washington handpress and a case of type, a printer could be in business. He would be editor, advertising salesman, news and court reporter and the editorial staff. He no doubt was janitor too.

From 143 newspapers in 1899 the number went to 333 in 1909. This number included 12 dailies, of which the Fargo Forum had the largest circulation with 12,694, followed by the Grand Forks Herald with 10,427 and the Minot Optic with 4,150.

The newspapers played a very important part in the political, business and social life of the community. Most of them were Republican with a few exceptions: the Bowman County News, the Bathgate Pink Sheet and the Minot Democrat. When the Nonpartisan League brought political changes, the papers were definitely for or against — mostly the latter. On the whole they were free speaking and fiercely loyal to their localities.

The basic wealth of the state was the land during this period. Agriculture was by far its leading industry. In more than half of the years from 1890 to 1919, North Dakota led the nation in wheat production and wheat accounted for 80 percent of the state's cash income. In 1909 the amount was \$109 million. Oats, which was primarily fed to horses, was valued at \$24 million; livestock products were \$16 million and the flax crop was \$15 million.

The purchasing, marketing and shipping of agricultural products were very large related businesses. The number of elevators went from 644 in 1895 to 2,061 in 1915. The farmers' dissatisfaction with the grain companies and the railroads was an important part of the history of this period.

Many small industries were started. Most of these were related directly with agriculture such as mills, harness manufacturers, cheese plants, creameries and meat processing. The Hebron Brick Company of Hebron in western Morton County had the distinction of being the oldest North Dakota business still in operation.

*Hebron, named for the biblical vale of Hebron in Palestine, was started in the spring of 1885 by a church-related group from Chicago, originally from Germany. The Hebron Brick Company was started in 1904 by Charles Weigel. It was a natural combination of good clay and coal deposits. The bricks are used throughout the United States as well as foreign countries.*

*Morton Prairie Roots  
Marian Plath Peterson*

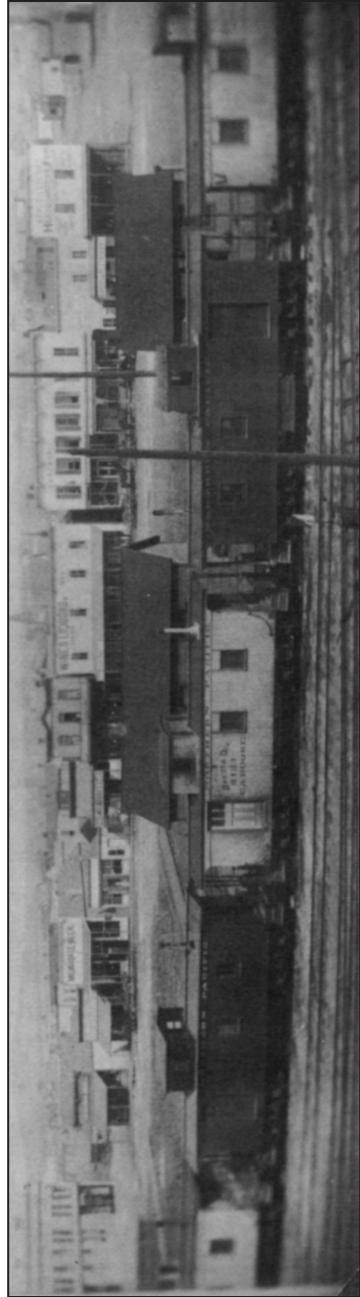
The magnitude of the things accomplished by the old and new arrivals in the state in the early 1900's staggers the imagination. Every city, town, village, campus and most of the farms are evidence of their industriousness. Unless a person is in a new suburb, shopping center, or on a new farm, he is surrounded by the buildings of this period.

The concentrated effort of the railroads, the government and each hopeful community had been to bring people to the state. By 1915, there was concern that in some areas it had been overdone. The population peaked at 647,000. The problems now were to be the adjustments needed to live in the semi-arid climate, to diversify farming and to bring in industries to employ those who could not make a living on the land. The quality of life in North Dakota would depend upon these important factors.

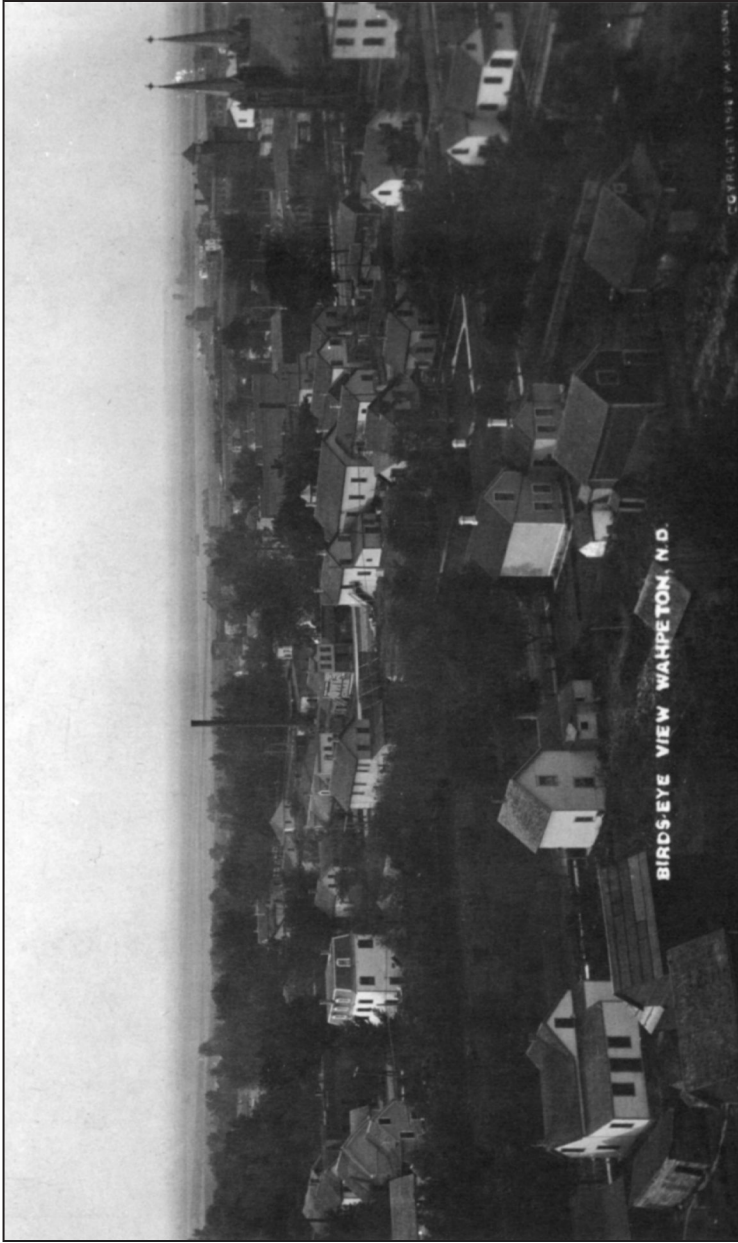




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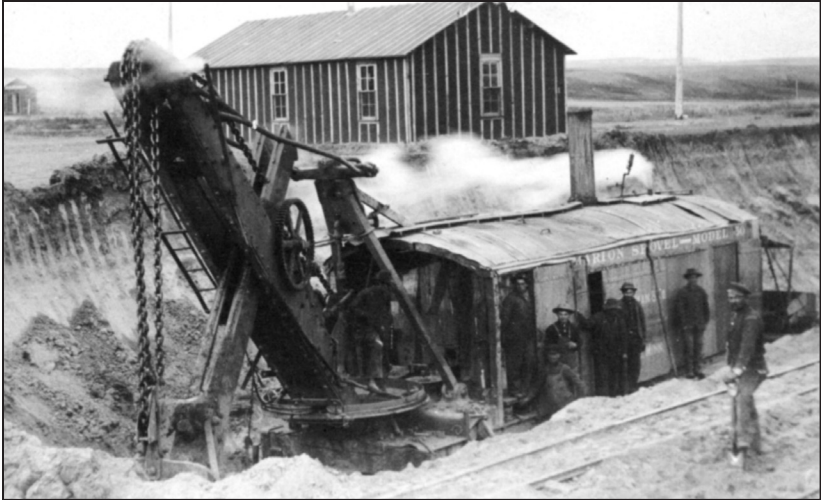


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Wahpeton, N.D., 1908

NDIRS



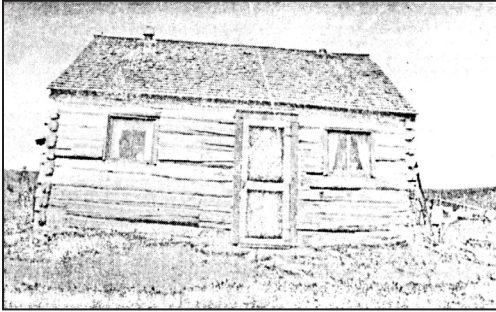
Marion Shovel – Model 50

NDIRS



Railroad graders at work in Badlands

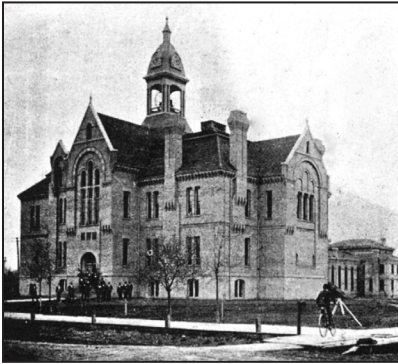
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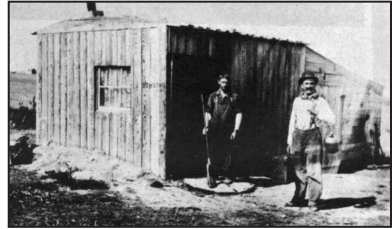
First county courthouse of McKenzie County at Alexander



Catholic Cathedral, Minot



Cass County Courthouse, Fargo, North Dakota.  
Built at the turn of the century and still in use.



Homesteader's first home



Bismarck High School, built in 1913

## Chapter Eleven

### Langer, Lemke, the League and the Law

In his book, Story of the Nonpartisan League, Charles Edward Russel, historian, simplified the farmers' problems as he tells of a North Dakota farmer named Evans.

*Evans arrived on his homestead with his bride, a few belongings, many years of farming experience, and \$400. He bought four horses and two plows. Then he sought to mortgage his farm to tide him over until harvest.*

*Though the legal rate of interest in the state is 12 percent, he discovered that to borrow \$702, he had to sign a mortgage for \$800 on which \$48 interest was due every six months.*

*Before he was ready to sell his wheat, he had used all of the \$702 and had to borrow from a loan shark, at 16 percent interest, enough money to pay the interest on the original loan.*

*But his troubles had only begun. His wheat was a little short on yield but not on quality. So imagine his dismay to have the elevator man say, "Pretty shriveled, ain't it. No. 4 is the best I can do." He drove down the road six miles to hear exactly the same words. Then he remembered he had seen the first man making a telephone call.*

*"I'll give you 68¢ less the freight and the commission, leaving 63¢." Then when it was weighed, it was seven bushels short of what Evans knew he had. Also he was docked three pounds a bushel for 'dirt.'*

*After some figuring Evans knew he was going to have \$1,134 for his crop (140 acres at 13 bushels an acre). Balancing this against his expenses for the next twelve months he realized he was going to be short. But maybe next year would be that bumper crop every farmer dreams about. The next year his crop was nine bushels to an acre and the market was even lower. He made his interest payment in September but defaulted the next March and the bank*

*began foreclosure. Then he lost his team, harness, and machines to the loan shark, and the following winter he was working for wages on a ranch in Montana and the wife had gone back to her folks.*

It was no surprise that the farmer's revolt rose as a national movement during the 1870's. "The National Grange of the patrons of Husbandry," more commonly known as the Grange, was organized in Washington, D.C. in 1867. By February, 1874, there were ten thousand local Granges.

There were active branches in the Dakotas where the meetings were a social occasion for the entire family as well as a movement to change the status of farmers. The farmer, the only producer who buys at retail prices and sells at wholesale prices, hoped to reduce his costs, eliminate the middleman, and sell for increased returns. However, the Grange lacked an effective method of gaining their goals and though united in purpose the membership lost hope when results were not forthcoming. Many of these members became a part of the North Dakota State Alliance headed by Walter Muir of Hunter and M.D. Williams of Jamestown. The aims of this organization included regulation of railroads, lowering the legal rate of interest, farming a Federal Land Bank system, and a publicly owned terminal elevator.

The leaders of the National Alliance, to which the North Dakota group belonged, sought changes by supporting at the ballot box individual candidates for public office. By 1890 North Dakota membership was 40,000. The National Alliance numbered one and one-fourth million and became a strong political force.

The combination of the National Alliance and the fast-growing labor unions resulted in a third political party, the Populists, in 1892. The party platform advocated a complete reform of the government and control of big business practices. Free coinage of silver was their primary aim, which would result in a cheaper dollar than the gold standard. This would serve as a boom to small businessmen, laborers, and farmers who were laden with debt.

In North Dakota the Populist party attracted the Prohibitionists and some Democrats and elected Eli C. Shortridge, a farmer living near Larimore, as governor. Many needed reform laws were passed during his two-year term. These laws provided for a state-owned terminal elevator on Lake Superior, public scales for the farmers to use, fixed freight rates on North Dakota coal, liability of railroads for prairie fires, regular schedules of trains, extension of time for paying personal property taxes, and interest rate regulations.

These giant steps forward were stopped in mid-air by two factors. The first one was the Panic of 1893 which brought all projects needing funds to a halt. The Populist Party was blamed for this turn of events, and they were defeated in the next election. Later, the term "panic" was replaced by the

euphemism “depression,” which has itself yielded to “recession” in our national lexicon. But in 1893, as in 1872, it meant widespread bank failure, a wave of unemployment, no financing for business, and political upheaval. The other restraining factor was Alexander McKenzie who represented the railroad interests and controlled the Republican Party.

*By all odds the most conspicuous citizen of Dakota, from territorial times well into the present century, was a gentleman of variegated and peculiar talents named Alexander McKenzie — otherwise known as the Bismarck Boomer, Alexander the Great, and in later years as the Boss of North Dakota.*

*He was the very antithesis of the fat political boss made famous in countless cartoons. Tall, handsome, and possessed of unabounded physical courage, yet quiet and soft-spoken, he was a natural leader of men and an adroit practical psychologist; he knew how and where to dispense gifts and favors to the best advantage. . . . He was ruthless, when necessary, in the exactions of favors in return. One frontier editor whom he was able neither to buy nor coerce, found his plant smashed and his printing press dumped into the Missouri River by “unknown” vandals. Men who opposed McKenzie’s wishes sometimes awakened one day to find a coffin resting on their front porches — a delicate hint that their conduct was displeasing to the Boss.*

*Land of the Dacotahs  
Bruce Nelson*

The election of 1892 was the first time McKenzie’s control of state affairs was challenged. His association with the state started in 1867 when he arrived with an army supply train. He worked as a construction foreman for the Northern Pacific Railroad and was sheriff for six consecutive terms in Burleigh County. As a member of the Territorial Capital Removal Commission he engineered the transfer of the capital from Yankton to Bismarck. His speculation in North Dakota land had made him a wealthy man. His position with the railroad was to protect its many interests which included insurance companies, banks, and chain elevators. Because of these connections he pretty much controlled the Republican Party. But in 1892 a reform party had invaded his territory, and his usefulness to the railroads was in question.

Not one to take a temporary setback sitting down he set about to sabotage the success of the Populist governor. Anti-railroad legislation passed at the outset of the session was effectively blocked or delayed. There were still

many McKenzie men in the legislature, and he had many statewide connections. Party members became disenchanted with the lack of results and broke away to oppose the renomination of Governor Shortridge. Two years of Populist rule were over, and the state returned to the Republican Party and McKenzie.

For twelve years the regular Republicans held sway. The McKenzie men saw to it that no man with progressive leanings was put into any position of power. When bills did manage to pass the legislature, such as the one eliminating the railroads' veto power over independent elevators being constructed on their right-of-way, and requiring all grain buyers to be bonded, there were no means for enforcement.

The farmers persisted in their attack on unfair marketing practices which included incorrect grading at both local and terminal elevators, setting of prices for all line companies by two men — Hoskin and Durant — of the Minneapolis Board of Trade, and freight service charges in addition to the high rates.

The next united effort by farmers was the North Dakota Union of the American Society of Equity. The Equity built cooperative elevators throughout the state and a large terminal elevator at St. Paul. The line elevators met this new competition very effectively by raising their buying price in areas where the Equity had an elevator and lowering it where there were none. In Minneapolis the Equity was refused a seat on the Grain Exchange and could not offer their grain on the exchange floor to the big millers. The trials of this latest venture made the clamor for state-owned elevators and mills even louder.

*In 1907, the Equity made a concerted effort to control the wheat crop. Some ten thousand North Dakota farmers pledged to hold their wheat from the market until they could be assured of a dollar a bushel.*

*A dollar a bushel the farmer said,  
A dollar a bushel for wheat.  
Twill only pay taxes and buy us bread,  
And shoes for our children's feet,  
And a tiny profit to put away  
In case there should be doctor's bills to pay.  
A dollar a bushel, expenses to meet,  
Tis little enough to get for wheat.*



*But the plan failed because there were no funds to help the farmer until the price was right.*

*George S. Loftus became sales manager for the Equity in 1912. He was very effective and much respected. Under his guidance the movement expanded to encompass many side lines such as wholesale purchase of supplies.*

*The Economics and Political Background  
of the Nonpartisan League  
Robert H. Bahmer*

*Farmer-owned elevators grew in number from four in 1900 to 264 in 1915. They faced the price wars conducted by the line companies by pledging themselves to pay a half-cent penalty on each bushel of grain they sold to the competitor.*

*History of North Dakota  
Edwyn B. Robinson*

Finally, McKenzie pressured the Republican Party a little too far, and his roughshod tactics were more than some members could accept. In 1906 these objectors, who were called Insurgents by the regular Republicans, joined the former Populists to elect John Burke, the Democrat nominee, as governor. He was greeted with thunderous applause by the legislature when he gave his inaugural address.

*Alexander McKenzie died in St. Paul on June 22, 1922. His funeral was held in the House of Representatives at the Capitol. His grave in St. Mary's cemetery was not marked for many years. It was not until after his death that it was disclosed that he had married twice. The children of the first marriage lived in Quebec, and the others lived in Yonkers, New York.*

*History of the City of Bismarck  
George F. Bird and  
Edwin J. Taylor, Jr.*

John Burke was governor for three terms during which many reforms were enacted. Measures were passed to build or buy a terminal elevator within or outside the state. These proposals were ratified by the people and became constitutional.

*John Burke, a son of Irish immigrants, came to Rollette County to be an attorney in 1888. He later moved to Devils Lake where he built up a successful law practice. A tall angular man with rough hewn features and large ears he disliked the nickname “Honest John” though he had much in common with “Honest Abe.” He was fond of reading, especially poetry of Robert Burns; and he felt a deep sympathy for the people.*

*On election day more than ten thousand Republicans crossed over to the Democratic side of the ballot to vote for John Burke for governor and Charles J. Fiske for supreme court justice. In all the remaining offices Republicans were elected.*

*History of North Dakota  
Edwyn Robinson*

*North Dakotans in 1963 honored John Burke by placing his statue in the National Statuary Hall at Washington. He not only served as governor of North Dakota but also as U.S. Treasurer and as a judge of the North Dakota Supreme Court.*

*The Story of North Dakota  
Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud*

Not until 1913 did the legislature appoint a committee to study building plans and possible locations for the terminal and report to the 1915 session. When this report was read, the reaction was explosive for the committee recommended the venture be abandoned. It was a flagrant misinterpretation of the committee’s purpose. Farmers who felt assured that legislation would bring results again faced defeat.

The Equity sent a delegation to the legislature to protest the report. They were treated with scorn, and supposedly it was said, “Why don’t you go home and slop the hogs?” This demeaning statement became the war cry of the next farmers’ organized effort in their own behalf, the Non Partisan League.

*The remark, “Go home and slop the hogs” was attributed to Tradewell Twichell, owner of a big farm in Cass County, a man of wealth and active in partisan politics. Twichell himself denies using this particular language, but the phrase was quickly reported back by the farmers’ committee and became a slogan in the fight of the farmers against the ruling political group.*

*Whether they were the exact words or not the farmers did learn that the legislators resented the attempt of a cooperative organization of farmers to lobby in their own behalf.*

*The Nonpartisan League  
Herbert E. Gaston*

Arthur C. Townley attended the 1915 legislative sessions with interest, since an early frost and a manipulation of the market had led him into debt and bankruptcy. He looked to socialism as a cure for the farmers' problems and was an active organizer for the party. In North Dakota the Socialists' plan did not include collective ownership of land but rather state-owned elevators and mills, rural credit banks, and state financed hail insurance. They endorsed candidates for state and local offices with some success.

*Arthur C. Townley, thirty-five years old in 1915, was born and raised on a farm in Minnesota. He graduated from High school in Alexandria. After teaching school for two years, he went in 1905 to western North Dakota near the town of Beach where he began farming with his brother. In 1907 the brothers began raising flax with considerable success, expanding their holdings each year until they became known as the largest flax growers in North Dakota. By 1912 Townley, now operating alone, put in 8,000 acres of flax and bought on credit the large machine necessary for such an operation. Flax was selling for \$3 a bushel, and he stood to make \$100,000 on the crop. After the frost he had only a fraction of the expected crop, and the market had dropped to \$1 a bushel.*

*Political Prairie Fire  
Robert L. Morlan*

When Townley found great enthusiasm for the platform but not the party, he soon neglected to say he was a Socialist organizer. The party terminated his employment in December of 1914.

In February of 1915 the Equity called a statewide meeting in Bismarck to protest the legislature's refusal to create a state-owned elevator. In attendance was Fred B. Wood, a farmer from Deering in McHenry County. He was acquainted with Townley, and together they had discussed the formation of a new movement to benefit the farmers. The circumstances of this second meeting made them determined to act on their convictions.

It was at the kitchen table in the Woods' farm home that the Nonpartisan League was born. Townley, Wood and his two grown sons, Howard and Edwin, worked out a platform and planned an organizational program. The

platform was basically the same as that of all the movements that came before: state ownership of elevators, mills, packing houses and cold storage plants; state inspection of grain and grain dockage; exemption of farm improvements from taxation; state hail insurance and rural credit banks.

Townley stressed the nonpartisan idea. Though the organization would work its program through political control, he said it must be from within an existing political party. To set the farmers apart as Populists or Socialists would defeat their purpose and incur the complications these parties had met.

It was the organizational plan that gave the Nonpartisan League its overwhelming success. Early the next morning they put their plan to the test. Howard Wood and Townley started out on a bobsled to talk to the neighbors. Wood did the introducing and Townley did the talking. Later it would be a Ford and trained organizers, but the introducer was always a respected farmer of the community who had been previously recruited. During the busy farming seasons a member of the group would continue the farmer's work so that he would be free to talk to the organizers.

In six days Townley signed up seventy-nine eager farmers. Each paid a year's due with a \$2.50 check dated for October of that year. Continuing on borrowed money they bought cars and trained more organizers, held community meetings, and solicited funds.

*The League's first organizers were recruited from the ranks of farmers who showed unusual ability in speaking and organizing, and from Townley's old friends of the Socialist party. Those latter were especially able advocates of the League's cause for they had at their fingertips the economic and social abuses of the day.*

*Townley was the featured speaker at many statewide meetings. He was a gifted orator with a message that appealed to his audience.*

*"Avoid the politician who seeks office, for he usually, though he may not admit it, seeks it for himself and not for the good that he may do for all people. Avoid also the men who may be too friendly with bankers, middlemen, and big business, for they may betray you."*

*The average farmer was delighted at the attacks upon bankers, businessmen, and lawyers, for he was usually indebted to all three of them. They often quoted Townley:*

*“If you put a lawyer, a banker, and an industrialist  
in a barrel and roll it downhill, there’ll always be a  
son-of-a-bitch on top!”*

*Land of the Dakotas  
Bruce Nelson*

With the addition of a subscription to the weekly newspaper to be published by the League, the dues were raised to six dollars. By July there were 10,000 members, and when the first issue of the Nonpartisan Leader came out in September, there were 22,000 subscribers.

*The Nonpartisan Leader was tabloid size containing 16 pages. The first page carried a cartoon, usually by John M. Baer, a postmaster from Beach, who later became the League’s successful candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. Baer depicted “Big Biz” in a confrontation with the “N.D. Farmer.” “Big Biz” was pictured short, fat, bald, and gaudily attired, while the farmer was Uncle Sam in overalls or a business suit. To make certain the cartoon was understood, it was accompanied by an explanation.*

*Also on the front page was a schedule of meetings around the state and a “pep-talk” by A.C. Townley. The paper carried regular features: “North Dakota at the National Capitol,” “Impartial Weekly Review of World War I,” “News for the North Dakota Farmer,” letters to the editor, recipes for the ladies, and an up-to-date market report. The editorials did not carry Townley’s name but are typical of his writings.*

*Nonpartisan League File  
North Dakota Institute for  
Regional Studies*

The appearance of the Leader brought the “establishment” up with a start, and from then on the League was under attack. Conservative papers resorted to smear tactics and called the farmers that joined “six dollar suckers,” “socialists,” “wobblies,” “atheists,” “bolshhevists,” and so forth.

The first step as an organization was the selection of candidates for the 1916 election. The Leader carried instructions to every township or election precinct. At local caucuses they were to select candidates for the state legislature and delegates to a state convention for the selection of state officers and for the preparation of a platform. If the candidates that they selected were Republicans, they were to be entered in the Republican column

of the ballot against others who were seeking endorsement of the party. Townley advised that the office should seek the man and that any individual who vigorously sought the nomination should be viewed with suspicion.

On March 29, 1911, 3,000 delegates representing the 40,000 members met in Fargo. Usher Burdick, who was the man defeated by the League candidate for Republican nomination, writes in his book History of the Farmer's Political Action in North Dakota:

*They proceeded in the old town council way. There were no secret councils of a self-appointed few, no fixing of a slate for selfish interests, but proposals from the floor and general discussion. "The best man, regardless of the party," was the guiding principle. The farmers were simply interested in "pulling and polling" together.*

\* \* \*

Newspaper reports on the State Convention held in Fargo, March 29 and 30, 1911:

*The work of the delegates of the members of the Nonpartisan League was conducted in the following manner: Every delegate present was free to suggest as many men for the various state offices as he thought worthy of consideration by the convention. As the names were suggested they were written on a blackboard so everyone could see them. When all were through suggesting men for the office under consideration discussion was opened. Every delegate spoke his mind; he said what he pleased for or against the men whose names were written on the blackboard. The qualifications, record, experience, ability and above all, loyalty to the farmers' cause and the League's program were discussed.*

*When every delegate present had had his say — and most of them expressed their minds freely on each name suggested — the delegates proceeded to ballot. The balloting was secret, each delegate voting for his choice and none but himself knowing for whom he voted. Then the ballots were collected and counted. The delegates found a surprising agreement when the votes were counted for each office.*

FROM THE WILLISTON HERALD:

NEARING THE END

*Another step toward the final dissolution was taken by the misnamed nonpartisan league at its State Convention at Fargo last week. The "convention" proved to be a "school of instruction," at which the delegates were informed of the nominations which had been made by the inner, select committee of the organization and then given the opportunity to subscribe about \$100 each for "campaign expenses." P.T. Barnum was undoubtedly right when he said the people like to be humbugged, but we haven't yet exhausted our faith in the assertion of Lincoln that "you can fool part of the people all the time and all of the people part of the time." The \$20,000 said to have been subscribed at Fargo may encourage the grafters in charge to continue their work a few months longer but there are indications the sucker business in North Dakota is nearing its close.*

Lynn J. Frazer was selected to head the ticket as the League's choice for governor. Frazer, a successful Pembina County farmer, was not even at the convention. The majority of the officers endorsed were farmers, and all but one were Republicans. P.M. Casey, who ran for state treasurer on the Democratic ticket was the only Leaguer defeated in the November election. The League dominated the House with 80 out of the 109 members. Because of the four-year staggered terms of the Senate, the League received only 17 of 50 seats.

The Senate blocked much of the League's important legislation such as a new state constitution and funds for a state mill and elevator. It did enact a cooperative marketing law, a state grain inspection law, a law compelling railroads to furnish cars to all shippers and to allow independent elevators to build on the railroad's right-of-way. Some social reform bills were passed that dealt with tax reform, rural school laws, and the establishment of a public welfare commission and a highway commission. After 1917, women could vote for candidates running for national office.

The League went into merchandising, banking, and newspaper publishing. Among their promoters were men of questionable honesty, and many people who invested in the League's operations lost money.

Organizers spread into other states. Townley changed the name from Farmers' Nonpartisan League of North Dakota to the National Nonpartisan League and moved his headquarters from Fargo to St. Paul. When the 1918

elections were held, the League had 356,188 paid-up members and a staff of more than 500 speakers and organizers.

The November 1918, election gave the League all the state offices except the Superintendent of Public Instruction, all three congressmen, a large majority in both houses of the State Legislature, and four of the five members of the State Supreme Court. All the amendments sponsored by the League for state-owned businesses were declared passed.

The bitter campaign waged during this election left a determined opposition in the form of the I.V.A. (Independent Voters' Association). They used the strong stand Townley took against war profiteering to call the League "Pro-German." When Townley embraced the labor unions while speaking at the American Federation of Labor National Convention, he was called a "I won't work" proponent. ("I won't work" was a pun on the initials of the Industrial Workers of the World of "wobblies" which received much adverse publicity in capitalist-controlled papers). "Socialist" and "Bolshevik" were terms to describe the amendments.

As a result of this publicity the Legislature of 1919 was attended by reporters of leading national newspapers and magazines. However, instead of a Bolshevik takeover they reported that the state legislature was made up of responsible men seeking a workable solution to the farmer's problems.

The most important of the League legislation included a graduated income tax, a Dairy Industry Commission, the Bank of North Dakota, the Home Building Association, a grain-grading act, an Industrial Commission to manage state businesses, an eight-hour day for women, state hail insurance, and a proposed constitution to have the recall, initiative, and referendum for all state offices. A bond issue of \$5 million was provided to start the state-owned industries.

*The graduated income tax was from one-fourth of one percent on the first \$1,000 to ten percent on everything over \$30,000. This made all taxes for state and local governments to average \$6.20 a year as compared to \$11.40 in Minnesota.*

*The Bank of North Dakota was the victim of exaggerated figures for both sides. When loans to farmers and state industries which had run in arrears were paid, the bank was in good condition.*

*The Home Building Association was very poorly managed. The cost of operation was way out of line with the amount of loans made, and it was discontinued.*



*The Grain Grading Act was considered by many to be the most important legislation to come out of this session. Dr. Ladd, state grain inspector, estimated that in its two years of operation it saved \$15,000,000 for the farmer. It was declared unconstitutional in 1922 and had to be discontinued.*

*The Industrial Commission received financing through a bond issue and completed the state mill and elevator.*

*The labor laws included workmen's compensation for disability of workers and benefits for widows and children of those who are killed at work.*

*The state hail program was attacked by the IVA which said the commission paid the farmers who were League members larger benefits than the non-members. In fact, the first season saved the farmers \$3,150,000 in premiums over what the insurance companies charged.*

*Political Prairie Fire  
Robert L. Morlan*

Oddly enough the first serious dissension came from three League-elected officials: William Langer, Attorney General; Thomas Hall, Secretary of State; and Carl Kositzky, State Auditor. Attorney General Langer led an audit and subsequent closure of the Scandanavian National Bank of Fargo, owned by the League. He wrote a pamphlet which was widely circulated proclaiming that the League leaders were socialists. In an open public letter to Townley he used strong abusive language to call him a traitor to the farmer.

However, at a special session of the legislature in November, 1919, the League members were 99 percent loyal to the League programs. The Secretary of State was the only one of the three re-elected in 1920. Langer sought and was given the I.V.A. endorsement for governor.

The intensive campaign against the League at this election included a widely circulated publication called The Red Flame, backed by Langer and Kositzky, stating that the League government's next step was to take the land from the farmers, close all parochial schools, and stop all religious teachings. The intelligence of any voter who would vote for the League amendments was questioned in full page ads of the newspapers.

*In parallel reading of The Red Flame and The Nonpartisan Leader one feels himself caught up in a vast tug-of-war for the hearts of the people of North Dakota, a struggle in which few holds were barred. The vitriolic and heavy-handed style of The Red Flame might be laughed at in a more sophisticated age, but it was almost a prototype of a kind of campaign literature later characterized as “political dynamiting.” ...The League was surely in no sense promoting “free love” or “Bolshevism” as alleged, but its relatively radical (for the time) political-economic program made it an easy target, and the newly invigorated opposition fired in scattershot fashion.*

*The Red Flame, which is supposed to be an expos of the Bolshevism takeover in the name of the Nonpartisan League with its “Townleyism, Free Love, and the Communization of Women.” The cartoons on every page show A.C. Townley as a hook-nosed villain. The hobos with I.W.W. and “Bolsheviks” with black beards are ever present.*

*The reference to “free love” and “communization of women” is the result of a member of the House of Representatives (an anti-Leaguer) finding in the state library a stack of newly arrived books. He took them home to do some reading, and the next day he appeared on the floor of the House to deliver a tirade on the attempted corruption of the school children of the state by forcing them to read books that advocated “free love” and “communization of women” among other things.*

*Though an investigation proved that none of the books had been sent to schools and were only being considered for reference material that could be used by teachers, there was no stopping the “scandal.” Love and Ethics by Ellen Keys and Profits of Religion by Upton Sinclair were the ones most often quoted.*

*Political Prairie Fire  
Robert N. Morlan*

Though some NPL representatives were not re-elected the League did elect all but four of the state officers and passed all the amendments. E.F. Ladd became the first Leaguer in the United States Senate.

The legislature that met in 1921 was one of chaos, bitter fights, and confusion. The Independent Voters’ Association publicity, while it had not

gained its purpose, had planted the seeds of doubt and suspicion, and the unity of the League was a thing of the past. Requests were made from the floor for audits and committee investigations of all League enterprises. The difficulty encountered when they tried to sell bonds to finance the Bank of North Dakota and the State Mill and Elevator put the Industrial Commission in a precarious position. However, a senate investigation commended the Industrial Commission. An audit, authorized by an initiated measure, found plenty of mismanagement but no dishonesty. A House Committee reported that there had been “political considerations” in the running of the state industries. The session became bogged down with these audit and committee reports and the subsequent angry denials of those affected. The fights were carried over into the Capitol halls and onto the streets of Bismarck. There were some black eyes and a few arrests. Everyone was glad to bring the seventeenth assembly to a close.

A few months later at a convention held in Minot the I.V.A. selected candidates to run against Governor Frazier and Attorney General William Lemke and outlined an initiated amendment to stop the League’s program. They set the date for the recall election as October 28. By September 15 they had a candidate to oppose John N. Haugen, Secretary of Agriculture and Labor, and had filed the necessary petition with 74,000 signatures.

In the weeks left the I.V.A. conducted a campaign that attacked the league leadership and the three incumbent officials. To all the old scandals and name calling were added new exposés of misconduct. The Home Building Association, which was specifically limited to lending \$5,000 for the building of a town home and \$10,000 for farm buildings, had lent \$4,000 to Lemke for a home. The house he built in south Fargo was obviously much more expensive than the \$5,000 limitation. The I.V.A. was quick to point out that the Attorney General, who was elected to uphold the laws of the state, had made flagrant misuse of state funds. It became a major hue and cry of the I.V.A.

*William Lemke, as a boy of five, watched the arrival of the first train at Devils Lake from his parents’ ox-driven wagon. The German family, that would number twelve, then turned north where they selected land in Towner County and prospered. William graduated from the University of North Dakota and Yale Law School. He became an attorney with a Fargo law firm in 1906.*

*Lemke became interested in a Mexican land development. He invested heavily and convinced his friends (William Langer, Lynn Frazier, and others) that there was profit to be made in the*

*increasing value of Mexican land. The failure of this venture eventually cost him \$400,000 and the deep-seated distrust of his political-minded friends.*

*He became the attorney for the Nonpartisan League and some say the “master-mind” of the organization. He broke with A. C. Townley when he sought the office of Attorney General which he subsequently lost in a recall election.*

*His biographer says that his home in Fargo was his attempt to give his wife something substantial after his financial reverses. The publicity given this obvious misuse of Home Builder’s funds brought a steady stream of sight-seers and a burning in effigy of Lemke.*

*Prairie Rebel  
The Public Life of William Lemke  
Edward C. Blackorby*

The League leadership asked Townley to stay out of the state as they felt that his recent troubles in Minnesota, related to his anti-war stand and cry of profiteering, would make him more of a liability than a help. As a campaigner there was no one better than Townley, and his failure to appear worked to the party’s disadvantage. The League campaign was mostly cries of fraud launched against the I.V.A. petitions and a repeating of the aims and purposes of the League’s state-owned enterprises.

It was the first recall of state officials in the United States. Ragnvold A. Nestos defeated Governor Frazier 111,434 to 107,332. Sveinbjorn Johnson and Joseph A. Kitchen won by similar margins. At the same time the people voted against the I.V.A.’s initiated measures to do away with the League program. The result was that the new officials were put in control of the state-operated enterprises.

The League was more than defeated in this election; they lost the drive to rally against their opposition. In November 1921, Townley began serving his sentence on a trumped-up charge that he had conspired to discourage military enlistments in Minnesota. In March 1922, he resigned as president of the National Nonpartisan League. There had been a session of bad years for the farmers, and members stopped paying dues. Offices of the League were closed, and the publication of the Leader was discontinued.

Unlike most protest groups whose goals have been achieved, the Nonpartisan League did not fade away. The very next year the ousted Governor Frazier received the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate

and took office January 1923. The next two governors were N.P.L. candidates. After William Langer lost the Republican nomination for governor in 1921, he became a successful lawyer in Bismarck. He again entered politics as the League's winning candidate for governor (1933-1934 and 1935-1937) and eventually the United States Senate.

*William Langer was only 28 when he won the office of States Attorney on the Republican ticket in Morton County. He threw himself into the position with the same fervor he had used in athletics at Casselton High, in his law studies at the University of North Dakota, and his pursuit of the valedictorianship of the senior class at Columbia University, New York.*

*He successfully added to the tax roles the buildings erected on railroad property owned by grain companies, lumber yards, oil companies, stockyards, and so forth. He enforced the prohibition laws that had been ignored. He made it a duty of his office to see that each school age child was in the classroom.*

*Langer was seeking the nomination of Attorney General even before he got an invitation from the Nonpartisan League to be their choice. Upon his election he descended upon the cities of Minot and Grand Forks to enforce the prohibition laws. He was just as alert for irregularities in education and public health programs.*

*After he took office for the second time, he discovered some irregularities in the operation of a bank in Valley City and the Scandinavian Bank of Fargo. The result was that Townley called Langer a traitor to the League, and Langer had Townley and Lemke indicted on charges of embezzlement. They were acquitted, but the fire was started that led to Langer's leaving the League to seek the I.V.A.'s nomination for governor. The campaign included the publication of The Red Flame. There is evidence that Kositzky, Langer, and some members of the I.V.A. collaborated in the magazine. Publication stopped the month that the I.V.A. lost the election.*

*The Dakota Maverick  
Agnes Geelan*

There was a brief period in the late 1940's when the Farmer's Union joined with the League to form the Committee for Progressive Unity. They gained control of the Lower House and sent Usher Burdick back to the House of Representatives. Then in 1955 a movement from within the leadership of the League brought about a coalition with the North Dakota Democratic Party. This is the present Democratic-NPL Party that has had its candidate in the governor's chair since 1960 through the present time and has consistently sent Senator Quentin N. Burdick to Washington.

There is always difficulty in assessing the results of a revolutionary movement even sixty years after the takeover. The League was in complete control only two of the five years their candidates were in office. In one legislative session (1919) they set in motion the reformation they thought was needed to change the plight of the farmers. Besides all the written material of the day there are many studies and articles available to scholars describing this period. They all agreed that the Nonpartisan League was unique in its farmer-centered organization; explosive in its growth, (over 50,000 members in less than a year); and generally successful in its goal of complete control of the government machinery of North Dakota.

*To the rank and file the Nonpartisan movement is a class obsession. To its active leaders it is an opportunity for notoriety and for political power. To the large landed proprietor it is an opportunity for the cure of all abuses and possibly for the creation of a farmers' monopoly. To the far-thinking socialists it is an opportunity to move toward a socialist state.*

*Nonpartisan League (1921)  
Andrew A. Bruce  
formerly Chief Justice of the  
Supreme Court of North Dakota*

*The North Dakota farmers as a class belong to the kings of the earth, with all the modern improvements and luxuries, yet he is so dissatisfied and mad that he wishes to grab it all and is determined all other people shall be made to suffer and perish.... Did you ever notice that Socialist-materialists nearly all have the same facial cast? Compare the facial lines of Gene Debs (leader of the Socialist Party) and A.C. Townley. Both these gentlemen have high cheek bones and a narrow chin, a kind of coffin-shaped face al a*

*Russian. Nearly all the socialists have the same facial expressions. I can recognize them when I see them without any introduction or previous information.*

*The Despoilers, Stories of the  
North Dakota Grain Fields (1920)  
J. Edmund Butree*

Elwyn B. Robinson in his History of North Dakota calls his chapter on the League “The Great Socialist Experiment” and concluded by saying:

*They (the League) did not greatly alter the dependent exploited status of North Dakota. In a broad view, the great socialist experiment was a failure.*

Robert L. Morlan, the author of Political Prairie Fire writes:

*In evaluating the League program in general one must conclude that it possessed a measure of real merit. Though poorly administered in some instances and operating in its early stages under the terrific handicap of a depression, war hatreds, and unremitting bitter opposition, it nevertheless brought significant benefits to the farmers of North Dakota. Cheaper credit and more adequate credit facilities were provided, vastly more economical hail insurance was made available, a more equitable system of taxation was established, railroad rates were lowered and improved services secured, fair weights and payment for dockage were achieved, and an important contribution was made toward gradual abolition of other evils in the marketing system. In addition to its own direct achievements, the League gave considerable impetus to cooperative marketing and to much national and state legislation directed toward the improvement of agricultural conditions.*

In describing the responses of the people to the League, Lewis Crawford in History of North Dakota says:

*It is doubtful whether any society has experienced a more bitter partisan strife since days of slavery than North Dakota passed through in the period of about ten years following the legislative session of 1917. Almost our whole and business life was influenced by the continuous turmoil into which all were drawn. The League*

*and its doings formed the chief topic of conversation wherever men gathered: on the street corner, in the crossroads, in the barber shop, or business offices.*

Along this same line Bruce Nelson writes in The Land of the Dakotahs:

*Children barely able to talk — but quite able to hear — knew which side of the fence they were on in North Dakota's political revolution. In 1920 when Townley traveled over the state by airplane, he attracted great crowds, not only because of the intense interest in League affairs but because of the then novel means of transportation he employed.*

*Even children of six or seven, despite the awe and admiration they felt for these daring aviators spat fiercely on the wings of the plane when they learned that it carried A.C. Townley, of whom they had heard so much. I can verify this, for I was one of those children.*

*The Nonpartisan League was A.C. Townley's one great work; never again did he find a niche where his talents could be utilized and in which he could feel content. It is a striking commentary on the fortunes of politics that the word was law to tens of thousands of faithful followers, whose speaking swayed multitudes could spend his last days a virtually penniless traveling salesman, lonely, unknown, wandering aimlessly through the state in which he once knew fame and honor.*

*Political Prairie Fire*  
Robert L. Morlan

\* \* \*

*On November 7, 1959, Townley drove his car over a hill near Makoti, Ward County, and into a truck parked crosswise of the road. He was 78.*

*Three years prior to his death Townley talked to the son of the publisher of the Minot News. He asked that what he said would not be published until after his death.*

*"It hasn't been the Nonpartisan League I built since Langer took over, and before. It has been a political machine, used to serve the interests of the bosses that control it, like any other political machine."*



*“My advice to students today, if anyone is interested, is give more service than you get for that service. Play square with your fellow beings and know that in the long run there is no winning outside the truth.”*

*Fargo Forum, November 8, 12, 1959*

Senator Langer died three hours after Townley was killed.

Usher L. Burdick wrote in Political History of the Farmer’s Political Action in North Dakota, published in 1944:

*Here is a lesson in practical politics. If the members of the 1915 legislature had been faithful to their trust and provided for the erection of a terminal elevator as the voters had directed, no one would have heard of the Nonpartisan League. . . . The farmers’ old fight for a square deal still continues in North Dakota.*

It is to be remembered that the farmers did organize and put into office men who would carry out the wishes of the League. The method that they used should be noted too. They did not form a political party but took over the nominations of the strongest political party in the state at the time. This affiliation was later changed when the members of the first party organized and were successful against the League. If socialism figured at all in the formation of the League, it was only that some of its organizers had at one time been members of the Socialist party.

Present federal laws including grain grading practices and the formation of the Interstate Commerce Commission, were enacted in whole or in part for the farmers benefit. These foundations of the regulated system of privately-owned transportation can be generally credited to the earlier Granger movement. However, there is no doubt that the success and publicity given to the League played a positive role in the passing of Federal as well as State legislation in the farmers interest.

Success against unfair practices in part of North Dakota’s heritage. Recently when grain was sold in large quantities to Russia, the farmers of North Dakota became concerned over irregularities at shipping points and took steps to deal directly with foreign nations so they could ensure that the grain arriving at its destination is of the same quality as that which left North Dakota farms. In the fall of 1976 this North Dakota farmers “Wheat Pool” made its first grain sale to a West German firm. The sale was made through the state-owned mill and elevator.

North Dakota's Public Service Commission, State Mill and Elevator, and the State Bank still stand as monuments to the League and its fight for the farmer against unfair transportation and corporate practices.



Senator Wm. Langer

Orin G. Libby



Trolley and hacks at Great Northern depot, Grand Forks (now Amtrak) prior to 1919  
Orin G. Libby



Grand Forks State Mills in the days of steam

Orin G. Libby



Alexander McKenzie



Arthur C. Townley



John Burke



## Chapter Twelve

# Dust, Depression, and Despair

There was no way that the people of North Dakota could have foreseen the trials that were still ahead. The accomplishments of the Nonpartisan League would be of little consequence in the face of the depression and drought of the 1920's and 1930's. At a time when the industrial centers of the country were experiencing growth and prosperity, the agricultural states were in deep financial trouble.

*I would remember times when I would see a gaunt, unshaven Norwegian farmer sitting before my father's desk, staring down at his blackened nails, speaking to my father with painful difficulty about the locusts or the reaper which broke its axle on a rock, and sometimes, with more difficulty, about his wife who had gone sick again. Those were in the bad times. Those were the days when my father could not eat much at supper. Those were the days when a buggy would drive up to our house after supper, and my father and a wheat farmer would sit on the porch talking in low tones, with long periods of silence, until after we children fell asleep upstairs. . . My father simply met the challenge without emotion, as a man should, and grappled with it as well as a man knew how. In the end he lost. It ruined him.*

*Not So Wild A Dream*  
*Eric Sevareid*

The World War I years had created a demand for American agricultural products both at home and abroad. The post-war years saw the soldiers return to their farms both in Europe and at home. The result was a surplus of farm produce and a drop in prices. Wheat that brought \$2.96 a bushel at Minneapolis in July 1920, was down to 92 cents by December 1921.

However, the demand for peace time industrial goods such as farm machinery, building materials, automobiles, household furnishings, radios, movies, telephones, and other consumer goods was met by a rapidly expanded industrial growth and rising prices.

North Dakota's people, directly and indirectly dependent upon agriculture, were caught between lowering prices for their product and rising prices for the things they had to buy.

Land values were the next thing to start the downward spiral set by lower prices for agricultural products until the loss in valuation amounted to half a billion dollars. Lack of rainfall for six of the twelve years between 1919 and 1931 compounded the problem. The family yearly income, after expenses, ranged from a high of \$289 to a minus \$65.

Effects of Drought and Depression: North Dakota	
	North Dakota
Cropland harvested (acres)	
1929	21,254,660
1934	9,348,482
1939	15,536,632
Crop failure (acres)	
1929	854,365
1934	9,888,796
1939	1,131,303
Value of farms (land and buildings)	
1930	\$951,225,446
1935	707,138,992
1940	490,197,358
Average value per acre (land and buildings — farms over 30 acres)	
1930	\$24.61
1935	18.08
1940	12.92

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940.*

Banks lent money on farm mortgages to owners so that they could continue their farming operations. As the value of land continued to plummet, the amount of the mortgage became larger than the land’s market value. Thus, the bank was left with insufficient assets to cover their indebtedness. Banks all over the state began closing their doors until only 325 of the 898 in existence in 1920 were left by 1933. North Dakota bank depositors lost a total of \$50 million. If a farmer could hold onto his land it would someday return to its original value, while the depositors’ \$50 million was lost forever.

Gradually the dream of prosperity faded as stark reality faced the disillusioned pioneers. The brick bank with its marble counters was the first of many empty buildings on the street. The new schoolhouse curtailed its



proud industrial arts program for lack of tax revenues voted a few years back. The market reports continued lower. Maybe those who were forced to leave when the first foreclosures occurred were the lucky ones.

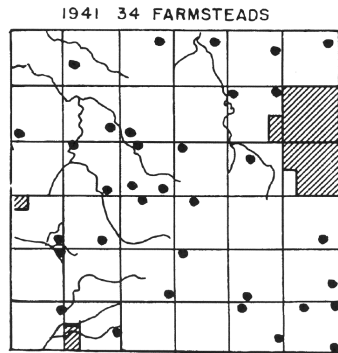
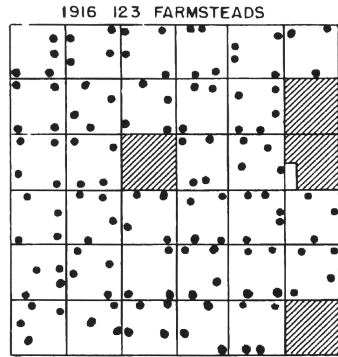
Those who stayed realized that there had to be adjustments. There had been too many farms in many areas of the state, and the loss of population was inevitable. Now it was for those remaining to do something constructive to reverse the sliding economy.

The newly created Bank of North Dakota loaned \$41 million to 16,486 farmers in the period of 1919-1933. The amount loaned per acre the first year was \$14.07 and gradually dropped to \$5.95. The money was on loan to the State Bank from eastern bonding agencies. When the farmers defaulted, the State Bank was forced to pay interest in the amount of \$8 million which was taken from other state funds such as the motor vehicle tax, beer tax, and the general fund.

Construction of the State Mill and Elevator was finished in February 1923, at a cost of \$3,044,391. It could store 1,700,000 bushels and manufacture 3,750 barrels of flour a day. Though it paid a few cents a bushel more for wheat, it purchased only one to three percent of North Dakota's crop. It wasn't used to capacity and lost money the first ten years of its existence. More importantly it was not the hoped-for solution for the problems of marketing wheat.

*The State Mill and Elevator consistently lost money in the 1920's. It paid line elevators a commission for wheat. It was a poor location to serve the southern half of the state. There was political interference, high freight rates, and poor sales. But the principal reason was that the mill operated at much less than its full capacity, generally at a third in the spring and a half in the fall.*

*The Dakota State Mill and Elevator  
Gilbert W. Cooke*

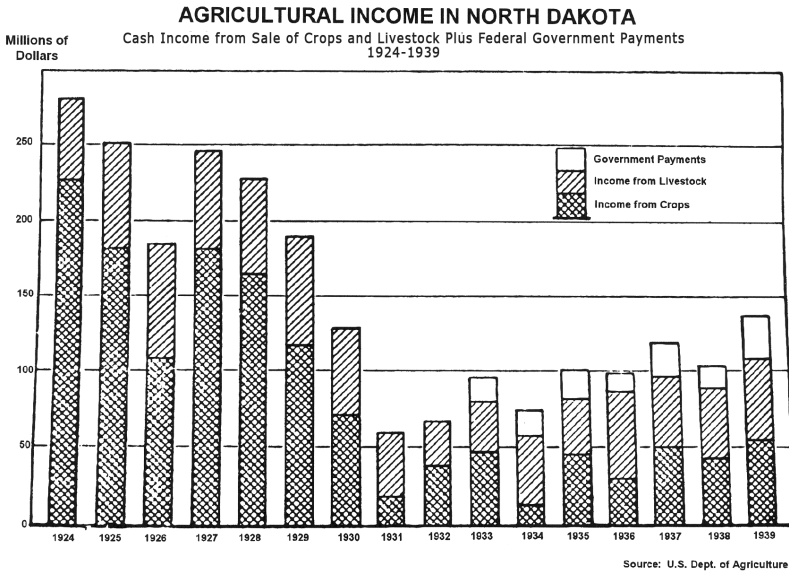


Changes in settlement density  
Fertile Township, Mountrail County,  
Homesteaded in 1916.

The North Dakota Legislature passed the Standard Marketing Act in 1921. Long overdue, it gave farm organizations some of the advantages of monopoly control. The growth of farmer-owned elevators, under the auspices of the Equity Cooperative Exchange, was a direct result, and soon every farmer in the state had a cooperative elevator close enough to be practical.

The continued falling prices offered for grain spurred agricultural organizations whose primary purpose was to control the flow of grain out of the state.

The following graph taken from Years of Despair: North Dakota in the Depression by D. Jerome Tweton and Daniel F. Rylance shows the drastic drop of income from the 1920's which were below average to the desperate years of the 1930's. It also gives one an idea of the percentage of income that was from government assistance.



The North Dakota Growers Association's plan was to borrow money from a government agency and loan to the farmer 70 percent of the value of his wheat. They would hold it until the market was more favorable. This scheme failed because the Association never had enough grain to create a monopoly, and storage costs plus a falling market wiped them out.

The Northwest Producer's Alliance, started by Arthur C. Townley in 1924, failed to raise the price of grain and with the Equity Cooperative

Exchange merged into the National Farmers Union. This gave the Farmers Union the Equity's terminal elevator in St. Paul. The North Dakota branch of the Farmers Union, under the able leadership of Charles C. Talbott, established headquarters at Jamestown and recruited membership across the state. Besides the handling of grain and livestock, it went into the oil, coal, feed, fertilizer, twine, fencing, tires, seed, and grocery businesses. The Union paid dividends to member-customers. This cooperative has the unique distinction of lasting through the depression to the present time.

Out of the depression years came many jokes to attest to the fact that the people still had a sense of humor.

*"A North Dakota farmer went to his minister for solace and comfort. He told of poor crops, bank failure, low prices for his produce, etc., etc. The minister comfortingly replied, "cheer up, Ole, it could be worse." Ole cheered up and sure enough, it did get worse.*

Elwyn B. Robinson in his History of North Dakota says it aptly:

*Compared to the trials of the 1930's, the (farm) depression years of the 1920's were to seem like a time of serene prosperity.*

The stock market crash of 1929 brought depression, already experienced in the agricultural Midwest, to the rest of the nation. The economic breakdown was followed by mass unemployment. Like a line of toppling dominoes, each succeeding crisis triggered another until every individual's future was threatened. The federal government, with the advent of the New Deal, assumed the responsibility and placed its strength and resources behind the programs necessary to return economic stability to the nation.

Without these programs many North Dakotans could not have survived. The people would have left the area in far larger numbers than they did had the national farm programs and relief agencies not pumped millions of dollars into the state's economy. The drought of the 1930's was unbelievable even to those who had witnessed dry years before. Only one year (1932) had normal precipitation. All the rest tried to outdo the one previous until an all-time record (8.18 inches) was set in 1936.

Just when the people of North Dakota were sure things were at the very worst, they awoke the morning of November 11, 1933, to find that the darkened sky was not an impending storm, but swirling dust. North Dakota farmers have always prepared their fields in the fall so they will absorb more moisture. Now the bare fields, dry as powder, were being carried aloft by the

wind. It happened again and again until the ditches were full and the fences stood in drifts of dirt. Cattle died in many areas from dust-clogged lungs and stomachs.

The dry fields provided the grasshoppers with excellent breeding grounds. Normally, most of the eggs that are laid just below the surface do not survive the spring rains. The counties provided poison in an all-out effort but money from Congress was necessary to finally check the plague of locusts.

*In Hettinger County at Mott, at one time during August, 1933, swarms of hoppers forced the city to turn on the street lights during the day. "The air became so degenerate," a reporter wrote, "that it was necessary to turn the lights off and build high fires on the street corners into which the hoppers plunged to their Waterloo." At Killdeer "the swarms made it impossible to see even a ray of light; hoppers lay on the town streets in piles four inches thick."*

*The Years of Despair:  
North Dakota in the Depression  
D. Jerome Tweton and Daniel F. Rylance*

The cattle on the western ranges were starving. The pastures never turned green in the spring of 1934. The government began buying livestock, paying four dollars a head for calves and twenty dollars for cows. Many were shipped out of the state. The rest were returned to the owner for slaughtering, or to a federally funded canning project in the area.

A hundred million bushels of wheat was considered the minimum yield for a satisfactory year. From 1929 to 1941 there were only two years when that amount was reached. In 1936 the number dipped to 19 million, most of which came from the counties bordering the Red River.

Despite the low yield, prices continued to dive. In 1932, one of the better yield years (110 million bushels of wheat), North Dakota farmers sold wheat for 36 cents a bushel, oats for 9 cents, barley for 14 cents, potatoes for 23 cents, flaxseed for 87 cents, and beef cattle for \$3.30 per hundredweight.

In the most desperate year, 1933, the per capita personal income in the United States was \$375, but in North Dakota it was only \$145. As things improved on the national scene, the figure rose to \$527 and \$278 in North Dakota. In 1939, L.A. Baker of the North Dakota Public Welfare Board prepared a special report on Relief and Economic Situation in North Dakota. In this report, he stated that the farmers were deprived of \$1,340,000,000 anticipated income from 1929 to 1938.

Forty-three thousand farm foreclosures had taken place by 1933. Taxes went unpaid, and people were leaving the state by the thousands.

This was the state of affairs when William Langer became governor in January 1933. Langer's return to the Nonpartisan League occurred in 1928 when he was their unsuccessful candidate for attorney general. He mended his political fences and was rewarded with the League's endorsement for governor in 1932. He won by promising the desperate farmers that he would bring them assistance.

Drastic events needed drastic solutions, and Langer met the challenge head-on. The treasury was empty and had a \$10 million bond indebtedness, so he convinced the legislature to cut appropriations in half, and he transferred money from other funds to the bond-retirement fund to improve the state's credit rating.

*The only item on the budget that was not cut was the aid for elementary and rural schools. The University of North Dakota's President took a drop in salary from \$8,000 to \$3,000.*

*There were many special funds, such as the \$6,000,000 for highways, that were beyond the authority of the legislature or the governor. The highway fund was the money brought in by the tax on gasoline and oil.*

*The Dakota Maverick  
Agnes Geelan*

Langer's next step was to place an embargo on all out-of-state shipments of wheat. Before the federal court issued an injunction against the embargo, the price had risen 28 cents a bushel.

On March 4, 1933, President Roosevelt proclaimed a national bank holiday. The same day, Governor Langer decreed a moratorium on foreclosure of all debts. The banks reopened on March 14th, but the debt moratorium, with some revisions, necessitated by constitutional requirements – stayed in effect until 1943.

*The Farm Holiday Association, headed by Usher Burdick, and the National Guard were used to enforce the moratorium. The organization was created to control the sale of farm products so as to raise prices. They would attend a farm auction and control the bidding so that the farmer and his friends could buy the sale items at ridiculously low prices. If someone dared bid they would let him know that it was not the thing to do. The National Guard was only*

*used a few times but Langer often used them as a threat. "As long as I am governor the moratorium will remain in effect, even though I have to call out the Guard three times a day."*

*The Dakota Maverick  
Agnes Geelan*

Amendments to the moratorium law made foreclosure possible for federal agencies, the state land department and, in 1939, for unpaid taxes. Many banks convinced their clients to refinance their loans through the federal agencies. By 1942 the Bank of North Dakota held 1,600,000 acres. The United States Department of Agriculture and the Federal Land Bank each held one million acres.

By January 1933, the county and state relief agencies were completely without funds. Governor Langer appointed a state emergency relief commission, headed by Supreme Court Judge A.M. Christianson. The committee was able to borrow \$492,000 from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA).

By midsummer these funds were available for groceries, medical aid, and a statewide garden program and set relief clients to mining their own coal on school lands. Some of the funds went to buy stock feed. In return for this assistance, the farmers worked in the building of roads and other construction.

The committee also supervised the Civil Works Administration (CWA) which at one time employed 37,000 persons in the state to perform all manner of public service. The minimum wage was 30 cents an hour, and the weekly payroll amounted to \$250,000.

*The CWA was a federal program of employment while the FERA was a federal program of work relief. The basic difference was only that the client who had formerly earned a wage was now allowed to work only enough hours to take care of the budgetary needs of himself and his family.*

*Relief in Review of North Dakota  
Federal Emergency Relief Administration*

The FERA projects also included funds for public schools and assistance for needy college students. They sponsored art and historical research, ran camps for transients, trained social workers, paid workers to mix grasshopper bait, and others.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), also under the FERA, paid a total of 40,000 North Dakota young men to work in landscaping and

construction work in public grounds and parks. They each received \$5 a month and their parents \$25.

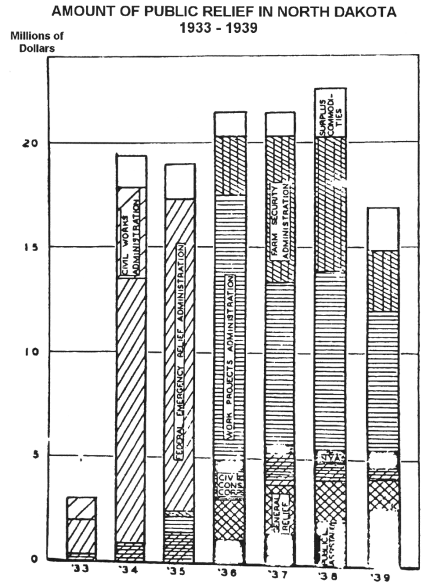
In 1935 the federal government created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which would handle all work relief programs at federal level and leave the burden of direct relief to state and local governments. The State Legislature passed an income tax law to help finance the \$6 million dollars which they had appropriated for relief, old-age pensions, and child welfare.

The year of 1936 broke all records for both cold and hot weather. In the winter of 1936-37 workers on WPA earned \$40 a month for 100 working hours. Most of the families of these 53,000 workers were completely dependent upon the programs.

A large percent of those employed were farmers and most of the jobs were unskilled construction work. By 1940 the WPA had finished 13,743 miles of highway, 465 bridges, 426 new public buildings, and 116 miles of sidewalks. There were also WPA projects for women which included sewing garments for distribution by public welfare boards. In the year 1939 866,440 articles of clothing were given to needy families. Gardens and canning projects, mattress making, hot lunch programs, recreation programs, courses in reading and writing, vocational courses, repairing of library books, and more, provided employment and contributed to the general improvement of the state.

In 1937 the Federal Security Administration (FSA) was placed within the Department of Agriculture. In the years of 1937, 1938 and 1939, \$17 million was loaned directly to farmers, and about the same amount was given in direct relief.

North Dakota politics during the depression years reflected the unrest of the people. The factions that were pulling for drastic measures, such as the debt moratorium and wheat embargo, were



Taken from *Years of Despair: North Dakota in the Depression* by D. Jerome Tweton and Daniel F. Rylandce.

strongly opposed by the old line Republicans and many Democrats. They felt that such measures would destroy what little economic security remained. The liberals outweighed the conservatives, and the Nonpartisan League was again in control.

Governor Langer reactivated the party newspaper, The Leader, in 1933 and solicited his appointees to buy and resell subscriptions in an amount equal to five percent of their salaries. When federal employees in the government relief offices were asked by a zealous worker to take Leader subscriptions, they reported it to their superiors in Washington. Langer was subsequently convicted of soliciting political funds from federal employees. As a result, he was removed by the courts from office, since as a convicted felon, he was disqualified. He was replaced by Lieutenant Governor Ole H. Olson. The voters returned Langer to the governorship in 1936. In 1938 he ran unsuccessfully against Senator Nye. Then in 1940 he challenged Senator Frazier and won. He held this office until his death in 1959.

*Governor Langer appointed a board of administration to control the state schools. In 1937 the board fired President Shepperd and seven others (three deans, one assistant dean, county agent leader, the registrar and the president's secretary) of North Dakota Agriculture College. The school lost its accreditation as a result and was not reinstated until Governor Moses rehired the staff members in 1939.*

*Governor Langer's explanation for the board's action was that the college was in "the throttle-grip of a small clique" who did not make agricultural training of farm boys and girls their primary purpose . . . The city of Fargo has come to regard the school as their property and want to make it another state university.*

*Beacon Across the Prairie*  
William C. Hunter

Senator Gerald P. Nye, appointed by Governor Sorlie after Dr. Ladd's death in 1925, became an outspoken isolationist as war was gaining momentum in Europe. He headed the senate committee to investigate World War I profiteering. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he said, "We have been maneuvered into this by the President." However, he and the other North Dakotans in Congress voted to declare war on the following day.

Congressman William Lemke also received national attention with the Lemke-Frazier Bankruptcy Act which gave the debt-ridden farmers more time to meet their obligations. It was the only successful act of four that



Lemke wanted passed to refinance farmers. He was an avid Roosevelt supporter in 1932 but became disenchanted when he discovered that Roosevelt was opposed to his legislation. He ran for president on the Union Party ticket in 1936.

*North Dakota had four governors in seven months (July, 1934-February, 1935): William Langer, Ole H. Olson, Thomas H. Moody and Walter Welford. Moody was found to be unqualified as he had lived outside the state for some of the five years required for residency.*

*History of North Dakota  
Elwyn B. Robinson*

John Moses, a lawyer from Hazen, was elected governor on the Democratic ticket in the fall of 1938. His first term was spent investigating William Langer's term of office. His investigators reported many irregularities in the Motor Vehicle Registration Department and at the State Hospital in Jamestown. Moss was able to cut government expenditures, and under his appointed manager, the State Mill and Elevator started making a profit. After his second term as governor he defeated Senator Nye in 1944 but only lived a few months after taking office. Senator Milton Young, the present incumbent, was appointed to fill the vacancy.

With half the people of the state on relief at some time during the 1930's there was a cloud of despair over business. Few business innovations or remodelings took place. Often businesses stayed open way beyond the point of profitable return. Venturesome individuals would try to supplement their meager income with home businesses and sideline projects.

*Many North Dakotans went hungry rather than give up their radio and car, which was required before a person was eligible for relief.*

*Grass Roots  
The Story of the North Dakota Farmers Union  
Harold V. Knight*

The desire for an automobile and a radio created a few new related businesses. Improvements in refrigeration brought ice cream stores to even the smallest of communities. A big double dip of two flavors was only a nickel. Sound movies were an exciting diversion in an otherwise lack-luster existence. School athletic games and town-sponsored baseball events were attended by everyone.

The changes that came to the towns were gradual and inevitable. The picture show was reduced to one or two nights a week. Vaudeville and traveling shows died a lingering death. The jewelry stores and barbershops found that they were not needed. Though the doctors were as busy as always, they were seen in the same suit, with the same worn-out satchel year after year. Carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, and electricians often left home looking for work in other localities. The general stores had large ledgers full of unpaid accounts, yet they still had a nickel's worth of candy for a child with a penny. The Yankee motto, "use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without" was followed until there was nothing left. Every morning would see the opening of offices and businesses at the usual hour. There would be a trip to the post office for the mail and a cup of nickel coffee at the cafe with friends of long standing, and then back to the office. Many days there were no clients or very few customers. The highlight of the day was seeing the children after school, laughing and playing as if nothing could dim their private world.

Everyone was aware of the transition from the horse to the horseless carriage. It did not happen suddenly as neither the farmer nor the townsmen had the money for the machinery, trucks and cars that he wanted. One or more livery barns which housed the horses and wagons for a draying firm were an integral part of every town. The drays delivered the freight from the train to the stores and from retailer to customer. As trucks replaced the horses the livery barn was either transformed into a garage or torn down.

Over-the-road trucking started in the 1930's. Individuals with one or more trucks would apply for a permit to haul between designated points. The Public Service Commission would then decide if there was a public need for this service and grant a certificate if it so found.

*Midwest Motor Express started in Bismarck in 1933 with three trucks. They now have terminals in Minot, Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks, St. Paul and Duluth, and have over 500 pieces of equipment. It is the oldest trucking firm in the state to still be in business. Nels Roswick, son of the original owner, describes those early years: Our first permit allowed us to truck in interstate commerce. There were no regulations and we could drive 24 hours a day and sometimes did. We did our own loading, repairing of the trucks, unloaded and collected. When we merged with Greenstein Transfer and Snyder's Dray and Transfer we had their permits, too. Eventually we purchased other firms around the state and in Minnesota.*

*In an interview with Nels Roswick  
August 11, 1976*

Trucking became essential to the livestock industry. During the 1930's the railroads lost money on the freighting of animals to meat processing centers. The price of stock went so low that the farmers were unable to pay the necessary increased freight rates and stay in business. The trucks filled the void. In 1940, 63 percent of the cattle, 96 percent of the hogs and 65 percent of the sheep were trucked to the Armour Plant at West Fargo. Trucks now handle almost all of the movement of livestock.

The railroads still maintained passenger and freight schedules, cutting back only when allowed to by the Public Service Commission. A statute required railroads to operate passenger service on all lines, which requirements were satisfied by the operation of mixed trains. Under the "partial abandonment" doctrine, the state Public Service Commission had authority over the discontinuance of all local service until 1958. North Dakota's Commission jealously guarded this authority. Railroads lost money on all but their main lines, and there was talk of the government taking over the branches. Some of the problem was the competition from the bus lines and truckers, but principally it was that there simply wasn't sufficient traffic.

Airplanes were still pretty much of a novelty, but there were 50 airports in the state in 1938. Many of these were only markings laid down in a pasture, but they forecast the events to come.

*As of April 1, 1936, there were 7,341 miles of state highway, most of which was graveled and many graded county roads.*

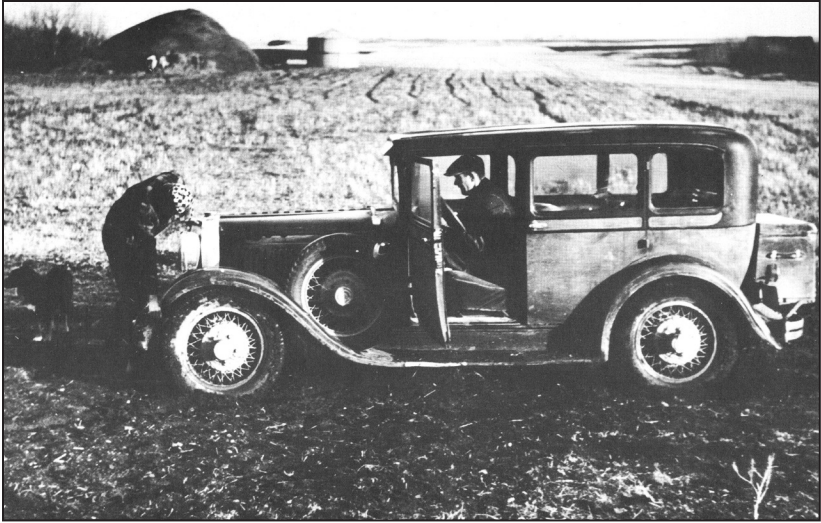
*The state has 5,288 miles of railroad and a considerable network of commercial auto transportation lines, including passenger motor coaches and motor trucks has been established in North Dakota in recent years.*

*In the country, 39.5 percent and in the city 46.6 percent of the people had radios according to the 1930 census.*

*Transportation and Community Facilities*  
*Donald G. Hay*

The year 1949 started a series of excellent growing seasons, and the war years that followed brought an increase in the price of agricultural products. The depression was over. The total amount the federal government spent in North Dakota from 1933 to 1940 was \$266,000 which seems like a staggering sum until compared with the \$1,340,000,000 estimated loss in farm income alone.

Out of the bitter experience of the prolonged drought and dust storms came some positive programs to protect the land and conserve the water. Even with modern cloud-seeding techniques, it appears that droughts are inevitable and North Dakota forever vulnerable.



Cavalier County, 1940

Orin G. Libby



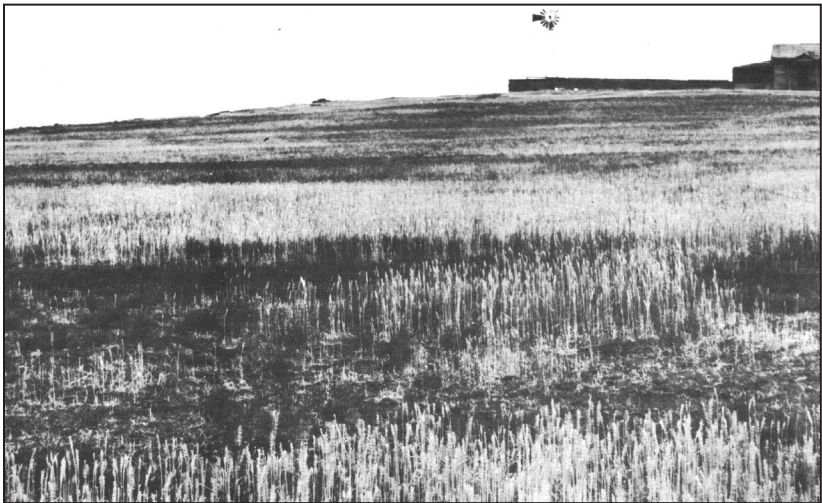
GN Station, Fargo, 1939

Orin G. Libby



Used tires at Minot, 1937

Orin G. Libby



Field eaten by grasshoppers, Beach, N.D., 1936

Orin G. Libby

## Chapter Thirteen

# Toward Our Second Century

As the people of North Dakota struggled to emerge from a major depression and years of drought, they were certain that the furnishing of war materials to the Allies was as far as the nation would go to bring peace to Europe. When their young men were conscripted into a year's duty with the armed forces, they did not want to go, and it was reported that camp morale everywhere was low.

*How could they, these civilians in khaki, know when they read the Hearst and McCormick press, when they listened to the contentions of congressmen that the nation had no need for soldiers. What could there be of morale when in August, 1941, the House of Representatives, dividing on party lines, decided not to disband the army — by a margin of just one vote?*

*Not So Wild A Dream*  
*Eric Severeid*

The year 1941 was the wettest on record and brought the first big crop since 1928. The pastures of the western ranges were green with range grass that was thought to have been permanently destroyed. Land values were low, and the market started a steady upward trend. Many farmers were excitedly planning for their sons' return so they could expand their operations. But the events of December 7th and 8th were to change everyone's life.

It is estimated that 120,000 people left the state as they went to work in defense industries or to serve in the armed forces. If the drought years had continued, there is no doubt that there would have been a much larger exodus. There were 58,509 North Dakota men and 1,570 women who served their country in all major theaters of the war. Of this number 1,939 died, which was 3.51 percent, a higher rate than the 2.9 percent national death rate.

The decreased population made it difficult to find hired help when the bountiful crops of the war years needed harvesting. Everybody worked harder and longer, and women and students worked in the fields. By 1945 a third of the state's farms were 1,000 acres or more. The Bank of North Dakota and other lending agencies sold property they had gained through foreclosures. The Anti-Corporate Farming Law, backed by the Farmers Union, required all corporations to sell their holdings by 1942. The average price per acre was

\$9.57 in 1942 and \$11.14 by 1945. Except for the purchase of land the average farmer carefully saved money, though he desperately needed many things. He bought war bonds, saving 11 percent of his income this way — more than any other state had subscribed. By December 1945, the total amount came to \$397 million. The lean years in a semi-arid state had shown the necessity of a financial reserve.

The good crop years continued until 1949. The gross cash yearly income was over \$700 million. After 1947, the inflated price of everything the farmer bought, and the falling market price of his products, caught him in between again. Fortunately, by 1949 very few farmers were in debt.

The federal programs of the Agricultural Adjustment Act gave the farmer an opportunity to put some of his land in a “soil bank” and be paid for not farming it. Also he could seal his grain in storage and receive a parity price from the government which was usually 25 cents above market price. If he would sell it when the market improved, he could keep anything above the amount given him by the government. This was an expensive program and was used for all manner of crops — cotton, tobacco, peanuts, and others.

There was a lot of debate about the ultimate results of the soil bank and possible alternatives. Part of the discussion had to do with export controls — a topic which is still very much in the news. Withholding grain from worldwide markets for diplomatic reasons also affects the economy of agriculture. The Greater North Dakota Association took a strong stand against both nonproducing land and export control.

*The Greater North Dakota Association (GNDA) united the businessmen of the state... It sought new industries and wider use of the state's resources. It tried to attract tourists; worked for highway improvement; it promoted irrigation and encouraged diversified farm production... The organization sends out monthly newsletters to members and publishes a beautiful magazine about North Dakota called Horizons. Their headquarters are in Fargo.*

*History of North Dakota  
Elwyn B. Robinson*

The reporting service of the Greater North Dakota Association lists farm income for 1951 as \$501,070,400 of which \$6,700,000 were soil conservation and other government payments. The next year the figures were \$396,472,000 and \$37,462,800 respectively. Percentage-wise this 1.3 to 9.5 percent is an indication of the condition of the agricultural market. In 1967, government payments constituted 29 percent of total farm income.



The soil bank program was discontinued in 1969. The government payment for stored grain is still in force, but the price differential is lower. The marketing of grain is affected by many variables that are out of control of the producer. A farmer must gamble his labor and cost of operation against the odds of the weather, favorable legislation, a profitable market, exporting of surpluses, fair-priced transportation facilities, and a checked inflation. A breakdown in any one of these or many other factors could adversely affect his operation.

On occasion conditions are such that a profitable market and a bumper crop coincide. Then the demands made upon transportation to move the grain have caused storage problems, boxcar storages, and ultimately, the dumping of grain on the ground. The loss of income, as a result, has been as serious a problem as unfair handling fees and unreasonably high freight rates.

As an indication of the state's concern, the 1967 North Dakota Legislature established the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at NDSU in Fargo to specifically study transportation problems. The duties of the Institute are to conduct and supervise research in the field of transportation and make public its findings, conclusions, and suggested solutions.

GNDA figures for 1975 list North Dakota agricultural returns as \$2,319,501,000 (78 percent of total new wealth). This reflects the favorable weather (except for isolated flooding and drought), favorable legislation, profitable markets (durum wheat went as high as \$8.30 per bushel) and high foreign market demand and sales. The continued upward spiral of inflationary prices for the things the farmer must buy was an adverse condition that would have to be considered in his planning of next year's purchases.

The railroads, so much a vital necessity for economic growth, tried to keep pace with the changes. The heavy traffic of war materials and troop movements called for increased railroad activity. North Dakota's two main lines were essential transportation arteries across the nation. The moving of the bumper crops to the mills and shipping points put further strain on the railroads. At the same time there was a curtailment of replacement equipment and roadbed repairs.

The 1950's and 1960's were years of adjustment as the state's railroads necessarily abandoned some trackage and cut back on passenger service. The Public Service Commission granted these requests after holding public hearings.

*In a report to the Interstate Commerce Commission and Railroad Service Planning Office, George H. Morin, Director of Traffic for the Public Service Commission, states that the miles of railroad in the state dropped from 5,262.5 in 1930 to 5,079 by 1974. This was a 3.3 percent decrease which is considerably less than the nation's loss.*

The deterioration of passenger train service was a serious concern. Some lines had service reduced to two or three times a week. Often the passenger trains were replaced by mixed trains where passengers were less important than freight. When the United States Postal Service started using airplanes and trucks for deliveries, the withdrawal of all but freight trains was inevitable except on the main lines. There was widespread public opposition as the people felt the changes would deprive them of something they had a right to expect though they no longer rode on the trains. North Dakota law required maintenance of passenger service or at least mixed trains on every line throughout the state. This provision remained in force until 1958, when the Interstate Commerce Commission assumed jurisdiction and allowed the discontinuance of the local trains.

*The Northern Pacific had for many years a running battle with the railroad commissioners of North Dakota. The regulators were great believers in the virtues of branch line passenger trains, and the railroad was forced to run them, regardless of whether or not anyone wanted to ride on them. Out of Jamestown, North Dakota, for example, branch line trains ran to Wilton, Oakes and Leeds, and continued to do so until very late in the game indeed.*

*In order to cut expenses, the company relied on its aging fleet of gas-electric cars and the roundhouse at Jamestown was full of them. The chief advantage, besides their economical consumption of fuel, was that they could be operated with a three-man crew: engineer, conductor and baggageman.*

*The Track Going Back (1969)  
Everett DeGolyer*

North Dakota's two principal railroads, the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern, joined the Burlington and the Spokane, Portland and Seattle to form the present Burlington Northern. After 15 years of negotiations, the final regulatory obstacles were cleared and the merger papers were signed on March 2, 1970. The new company laid claim to 24,000 miles of railroad,

2,000 units of motive power, 122,000 freight cars, and more than 1,200 units of passenger equipment.

*The problem is that numbers don't really tell the BN story — except perhaps for one number, one which virtually every BN officer will cite as the real key to the merger success. The number: 47,865. It represents BN's workforce, from chairman and president to the lowest-seniority switchman or clerk.*

*Railway Age  
March 30, 1970*

Burlington Northern announced plans to cut 100 miles from their Twin Cities to Seattle route by combining the best of the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific. Better management and improved communications would also speed operations. They promised there would be nobody deprived of employment or demoted because of the merger. Improvements in trackage and equipment were scheduled over the next ten years.

In the North Dakota Public Service Commission report for 1970-1972 there are requests for increased freight rates by the Burlington Northern. They report that their employees (2,865) in the state received 41 percent more wages than in 1964 to average \$9,242 plus fringe benefits. They also outlined capital expenditures to repair and replace equipment as being increasingly higher. They were not granted the six percent requested but were given permission to increase freight rates by three percent.

Freight rates are always of primary concern to North Dakota producers and consumers. The fluctuating price of grain sometimes dips dangerously close to the cost of production plus the freight rate. Constant vigilance and necessary action is the concern of groups and individuals who wish to protect the shippers from what are considered to be inequitable freight rates.

*At a recent hearing in Minot before the Interstate Commerce Commission the Public Service Commission, the North Dakota Wheat Commission, and the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute secured for the western North Dakota shippers a fair freight rate for west coast delivery. Prior to this ruling it cost more to ship from Minot (\$1.75, summer rate and \$1.75, winter rate) to Portland, Oregon, than it did from Fargo to Portland (\$1.46 in summer and winter). The new rate will be the same for summer and winter (\$1.46) during the coming year.*

*The Forum  
September 17, 1976*

The Burlington Northern merger and the efforts of the Public Service Commission did not improve the passenger train service. The EMPIRE BUILDER, WESTERN STAR, MAINSTREETER, and NORTH COAST LIMITED went from Chicago to the west coast with a few stops within the state, but the locals that stopped at every station were a thing of the past.

*For the period of 1958-1970 the Interstate Commerce Commission, rather than state commissions, were given jurisdiction over discontinuation or change of any trains. ...The intent of the Congress in 1958 was evidently that railroads would be more easily able to discontinue money-losing passenger services by recourse to the I.C.C.*

*Reprieve for the Iron Horse  
The Amtrak Experiment — Its  
Predecessors and Prospects, 1973  
William E. Thoms*

The public dissatisfaction with passenger trains was a matter of national concern, and in 1970 Congress established the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak). The government financed a study of the country's railroads and then would subsidize the operation of passenger trains that were deemed feasible. Amtrak was to at first rent trackage and equipment from existing railroads. Proponents of Amtrak claimed that the system would be paying for itself within a few years.

It was soon evident that after three years and the expenditure of a half a billion dollars, Amtrak tickets were still paying only about half the cost of operation. In addition, they were not providing the hoped-for service.

*As Amtrak nears its fourth birthday, the question of survival is scarcely in doubt. What people are asking is whether Amtrak can, as its promotion jingle goes, "make the trains worth traveling again."*

*U.S. News and World Report  
December 30, 1974*

Many of Amtrak's problems are related to the fact that it does not directly operate the trains. Rather, it relies upon a cost-plus contract with the railroads. In the final analysis, the federal government is in the passenger transportation business but not in complete control.

In April, 1976, Michael Putzel of the Washington American Press states in a series of articles about Amtrak that "the total cost to the American

taxpayers for this passenger service is now over \$2 billion and proves what private railroads had been saying for years: you can't make money running passenger trains."

William E. Thoms is a little more optimistic as he concludes in his book Reprieve for the Iron Horse.

*Now that the nation has a new approach to the problem of moving people by rail, it remains to be seen if Amtrak can survive the tender mercies of the railroads, their employees, and the politicians. ...It remains to be seen if Amtrak can make the trains worth traveling again, but perhaps we can hope that the travel might be a little easier in the future.*

Amtrak in North Dakota has two passenger trains daily going east and two going west. From Fargo one can go to Grand Forks and Minot and on to Williston and points west, and also from Fargo to Bismarck and on to Dickinson and points west. These trains are well filled and usually on time. The complaints are mainly about the service on the train, its time schedule through North Dakota, and the smaller number of stops scheduled.

The immediate result of Amtrak was the discontinuance of all inter-city rail passenger services on the routes not operated by Amtrak. For much of North Dakota the needs of public transportation must now be met by an intricate system of bus lines or the private automobile. In 1975 there were 37 bus lines registered in the state. They are subject to the regulations outlined in the Motor Carriers' Act (1935) and by the Public Service Commission, the same as trucking lines.

*The Dakota Transportation Company started four years ago with regular trips to Fergus Falls. They now have expanded to reach as far as Sioux Falls, Minneapolis, Jamestown and Duluth... The huge graceful buses now in use, built for speed and comfort, are the descendants of a weather-beaten touring car.*

*Fargo Forum  
April, 1927*

*Today's Greyhound Bus Lines that cross every state in the nation had its roots in Hibbing, Minnesota. In 1914 Carl Erick Wickman of Hibbing drove a seven-passenger Hupmobile to Alice on a regular schedule. He charged his passengers 15 cents a trip (25 cents a round trip).*

*Profile of Greyhound  
Arthur S. Gene*

Wickman expanded and incorporated other lines to form what eventually was to be the Greyhound Corporation, the largest inter-city bus operator in the world.

Greyhound expanded into North Dakota as a connecting link between its Western and Canadian operations. Its main line between Chicago and Seattle operates between Fargo and Dickinson, and there is twice daily service between Fargo and Winnipeg via Grand Forks. The buses at least partially filled the gap in local transportation caused by the disappearance of the local trains. The interstate highway system was a great boom to bus traffic in as much as the buses could now match the speed, if not the comfort of passenger trains. But highway improvements often were the death-knell of small towns. The super highways bypass these villages and the bus operators do not find it worthwhile to detour from the interstate to serve these communities. In many ways the bus functions as the equivalent of the vanished mixed train, providing baggage and parcel express service as well as local passenger traffic. When the buses deserted the small towns, those without access to automobiles were left without mobility.

In addition to Greyhound, several other intercity carriers provide bus service within the state. Triangle Transportation Company is a firm almost as old as Greyhound. At one time the carrier provided frequent trips from Grand Forks to the Minnesota lake country, but now there is but one daily trip from Grand Forks to Duluth and return. The company is presently seeking to discontinue its run from Grand Forks to Langdon, and the service between Grand Forks and Warroad, Minnesota, on Lake of the Woods has long since been abandoned. Grand Forks-based Star Bus Company operated regular service between that city and Minot. Several other bus companies provide the lifeline for smaller communities in the western part of the state.

The trucking industry is now a vital part of transportation both within the state and interstate. In 1975, there were 161,850 trucks registered. Of this number, 27,734 were classified as farm trucks, and 105,626 were engaged in transporting agricultural products. Dr. Robert Tosterud, director of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, reported in an Institute study that on an average day in 1973 Duluth and Minneapolis received 283 boxcars, 76 covered hoppers, and 307 trucks loaded with 1,159,836 bushels of North Dakota grain.

*Minneapolis Grain Exchange transportation director, Dudley Russell, estimates that a train can carry seven times as much grain as a truck on the same amount of fuel. One or two men move 20 tons by truck while three or four men can handle 100 carloads.*

*North Dakota Wheat Commission Market Report  
January 17, 1974*

When a certificate is obtained from the Public Service Commission by a trucking company for a requested route, they are often assigned routes to service towns that are not on a railroad. In this manner no town is without freight service.

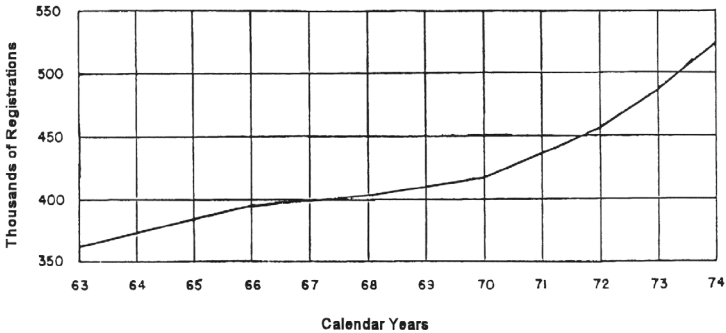
Mr. Nels Roswick, in an interview, told of some inland routes covered by the Midwest Motor Express. They have a regular schedule and deliver to the recipients directly. They also use their large van trucks to carry grain to Duluth or Minneapolis from these areas. Mr. Roswick said that though it may not be profitable, he thought that the Public Service Commission was necessarily providing service in the fairest way possible.

Established truck line owners generally prefer the regulated entry standards as outlined by the Interstate Commerce Commission and the states public service commissions. New truckers feel that the permit method is discriminatory, favoring older firms and discouraging competition. Many transportation economists, including policymakers in the Federal Department of Transportation, prefer a deregulation of entry, relying on the marketplace to ensure shipper satisfaction. They feel the competition of rival truckers would tend to lower freight rates. Proponents of regulation argue that today's rates include a certain amount of cross-subsidization, so as to ensure service for all. If free competition prevailed, so their argument goes, truckers would have to concentrate on the thickly populated areas of the state and ignore the small towns to stay in business.

According to the North Dakota Motor Carriers Association, about one out of every seven paychecks in the state comes from trucks. They also point out that the highways in the state are paid for in a large part by truck owners through registration fees, motor fuel taxes, excise tax on rubber goods and parts, excise tax on new trucks and trailers, and other taxes and fees.

Within the state there are 104,040 miles of roads. The interstate system of I-94 and I-29 accounts for 579 miles. There are 6,356 miles of state highways, and the remainder are county and township roads plus national park and service roads. In the fall of 1976, North Dakota was the first state in the nation to complete its interstate highway system.

### NORTH DAKOTA PASSENGER CAR, TRUCK, AND BUS REGISTRATIONS



Many exciting developments have changed the quality of life and outlook for the future of North Dakota. The Rural Electrification Administration (R.E.A.) Brought abrupt change across the prairie. As early as 1937 the first rural electric cooperative was started at Cando with money borrowed from the federal government. The war interrupted the expansion for a few years, but renewed activity brought 90 percent of all North Dakota farms electricity by 1954. By 1960 the amount of money borrowed by North Dakota cooperatives was \$119 million. There were 25 cooperatives providing electricity to 78,154 customers at the close of 1975. In the homes there were now pumps for water systems, freezers, washing machines, stoves, refrigerators, TV sets, as well as all the small appliances. In the bar there were electric milkers, coolers, feed grinders, feed augers, water pumps and everywhere there was illumination. The prairies at night became a light-studded expanse. Telephone systems were established as cooperatives throughout the state with money loaned from the R.E.A.

*The first TV station in North Dakota started transmitting on Easter Sunday 1953 from Minot. Fargo and Bismarck had stations in the same year. Now there are 11 stations in the state that send local broadcasts as well as three national networks and Public Education programs.*

*WDAY Fargo Information*

On April 4, 1951, at 9:30 p.m., the first oil-producing well in North Dakota brought forth a yellow-green crude oil from a depth of 11,630 feet near Tioga. Amerada Petroleum Company invested \$72,000 on this successful strike. Their check in the amount of \$172.27 to Clarence and Thea Iverson,



the owners of the land, was their share for that first month and the first money paid in North Dakota for crude oil.

*In 1921, the Pioneer Oil and Gas Company drilled North Dakota's first dry well. In 1938 the California Company went down 10,281 feet before abandoning operations. These attempts were near the Iverson well and within a half mile of producing wells today.*

*North Dakota: The Northern Prairie State  
Bernt Lloyd Wells*

The rush of oil companies to secure oil leases and the frenzied activity to drill more wells brought abrupt changes to all the northwestern and western countries. By 1955, the production of oil had become an important industry, bringing new wealth to the state and a release from almost complete dependence upon an agricultural economy for the oil-rich areas. Ten years after that first day there were 1,567 producing wells in 90 oil pools in 12 counties. Natural gas, an important by-product, added to the state's petroleum income which totaled \$128,924,000 for the year of 1975.

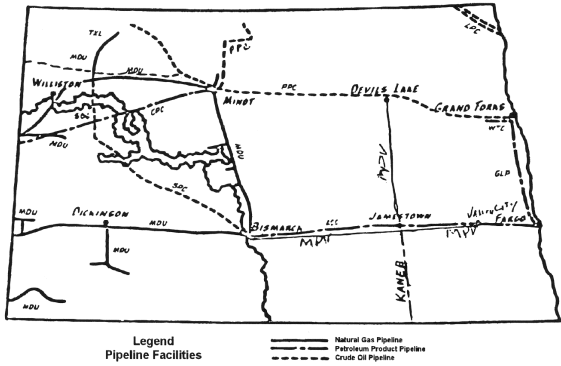
*At present rates of production in North Dakota, the proven reserves will last only 17.5 years. The natural gas, if produced at the current level, should last 41 years. Unless overseas and Canadian imports are curtailed, there will be a surplus in storage which would inhibit exploration. The North Dakota Industrial Commission will control production to the amount expected to be demanded in the local market. . . There is a five percent production state tax.*

*Petroleum Resources and Production  
Facilities in the Upper Midwest (1962)*

The first crude oil was shipped by railroad tank car to refineries outside the state. Small refineries were built at Tioga, Williston and Dickinson. The major refinery in the state was built by Standard Oil in Mandan during 1953. A pipeline, 164 miles in length, pipes the crude oil to this refinery, which has been enlarged several times until it now processes two-thirds of the state's oil. From Mandan to Moorhead, Minnesota, a pipeline carries the refined products.

The Portal Pipeline Company, a subsidiary of Hunt Oil Company of Dallas, and the Northwestern Refining Company of St. Paul laid a pipeline across the state to Clearbrook, Minnesota, where it connects with lines from Canada and is carried to either refineries in St. Paul, Toronto, or Buffalo. The

first crude to make the trip through the 373 miles of pipeline occurred in October, 1962.



- PIPELINE COMPANIES**
- American Oil Co.
  - AOC
  - Cenex Pipeline Co.
  - CPC
  - Great Lakes Pipeline Co.
  - GLP
  - Lakehead Pipeline Co.
  - LPC
  - Montana Dakota Utilities
  - MDU
  - Portal Pipeline Co.
  - PPC
  - Service Pipeline Co.
  - SPC
  - Signal Oil & Gas Co.
  - SOG
  - The TXL Oil Co.
  - TXL
  - Williston Terminal Co.
  - WTC

During the exciting years of the oil discoveries a huge \$249 million Missouri dam was being built by the federal government near Garrison. It was started in 1947 and completed in 1956. It is 12,000 feet long, 210 feet high, 2,600 feet wide at the base, and 60 feet wide at the top. The backed up water forms a lake called Sakakawea that reaches northwest to Williston. Its five generators produce 400,000 kilowatts of electricity for a large part of the state.

The controversial Garrison Diversion project is a mammoth canal system designed to irrigate farmlands and divert water from the Missouri to raise the level of Devils Lake and to reach the Red River. The project has a completion date beyond the year 2000 at an estimated cost of \$529 million.

Work has gone forward on the main canal which will be 74 miles long, 94 feet wide at its water surface, 25 feet wide at the bottom, and 17 feet deep. There has been opposition from environmentalists who contend that the land taken out of production was not properly evaluated. Some Canadians and Minnesotans are concerned about the effect of the diverted water upon the quality of their rivers. Congress questioned the consistency of appropriations being used to irrigate land and, therefore, increase production in a state where they were currently paying farmers not to put all the land into crops.

A series of dry years or a demand for food by starving countries would probably speed the completion of the project.

*When will it come true? Well, construction is scheduled to be underway on the entire length of the main canal this summer for the first time, with its completion planned for 1979.*

*Horizons  
Spring, 1975*

When 60 million tons of earth was brought from the surrounding area to make the fill for the huge Garrison Dam, the presence of tons of lignite (4-6 million) became a problem as it could not be used and was stockpiled in huge mounds near the site. At that time it was estimated that 350 billion tons of coal was just below the surface in western North Dakota. By 1960 only .003 percent had been used in the 76 years since mining operations first started. Later figures nearly doubled the estimated amount of lignite present.

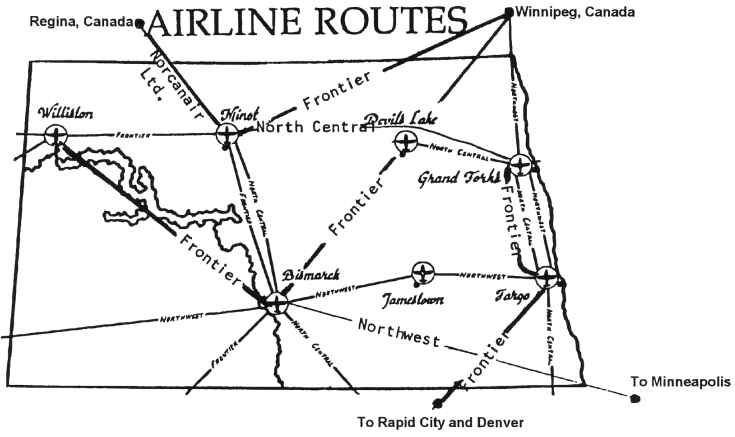
The production of electricity at Garrison only temporarily affected the production of lignite. The demand for power has since increased to the point where huge plants are in operation, or are being built, throughout the coal areas of the state. Large power plants in neighboring states are buying the lignite in trainload quantities. The frequency of coal trains has become a traffic hazard in many cities and towns where the tracks run through the business district.

The November, 1964, issue of the North Dakotan, published by the Greater North Dakota Association, carried an article called "Mid-Continent Area Power Planners to Spend Three Billion for New Facilities" that told of the plans of 22 member power suppliers in the midcontinent and one in Canada to form a large interconnecting system. The power would be carried by 3,600 miles of transmission lines. In North Dakota the lines fan out from the Garrison area northeast to southeast. Recently there have been complaints from people who live near these high tension wires. They fear for the health of their families and animals.

The problem will be faced by the Public Service Commission, which has jurisdiction over coal mining and utility plans. The commission has also been designated the agency responsible for the newly passed reclamation legislation. Under the law the coal mining company will post a bond of \$1,500 per acre that is to be used to restore the stripmined land back to useable agricultural land. In the June 1975 report, the commission expressed concern about the carrying out of this program until more specific legislation is passed.

The State Tax Commissioner's office reported that the first year of the severance tax (1975) brought in more than \$5,500,000 on production of more than 10,700,000 tons of coal. The largest amounts (\$1,900,000 each) were paid by Knife River Coal Company and Consolidated Coal Company.

Air transportation began with Northwest Airlines serving the state in the 1930's. There has been an increase in the route network with recent expansions by Frontier Airlines. There are seven major municipal airports in North Dakota: Fargo, Jamestown, Bismarck, Williston, Minot, Devils Lake and Grand Forks. According to the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission at Bismarck, there are 100 secondary municipal and commercial airports and 155 privately owned "Flying Farmer and Rancher" type landing strips for light aircraft.



In 1975 there were 390,508 enplanements made on commercial flights in North Dakota and 2,247 tons of air freight carried. The projected figures for 1995 indicate a 300 percent increase in passengers and a 320 percent increase in freight. The Aeronautics Commission has prepared a brochure in which they outline plans for the future which will meet this projected increase in air traffic. The greatest need is for enlarged airport facilities.

Airline service is provided by Northwest, Frontier and North Central, but the service is primarily oriented toward interstate traffic. There is no direct service between Grand Forks and Bismarck, or Fargo and Minot. Valley City, Dickinson and the whole section of the state west of the Missouri River are without scheduled airline service. Air taxi and charter operators have taken up the slack, and in 1976 a local operator began service with six-passenger planes between Bismarck and Grand Forks. Local operators may become more important as airlines phase out their smaller planes and require large airport landing facilities.

In 1975 the Greater North Dakota Association announced the new wealth figures within the state. Agricultural products accounted for approximately

78 percent of the total; manufacturing, 11 percent; mining, 6 percent; and tourism, 5 percent.

<b>Summary of New Wealth</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>1974</b>	<b>1975</b>
Agriculture	\$2,446,595,000	\$2,259,904,000	\$2,319,501,000
Mining	\$111,853,000	\$159,427,000	\$177,354,000
Manufacturing	\$243,000,000	\$304,800,000	\$306,600,000
Tourism	\$126,000,000	\$123,460,000	\$150,000,000
Totals	\$2,927,448,000	\$2,847,591,000	\$2,953,455,000

Much manufacturing is closely aligned to agriculture such as the State Mill and Elevator whose figures for the year ending June 1976 show a \$3.28 million profit on \$46 million worth of sales. Sugarbeet and potato processing plants along the Red River and the making of wheat straw insulation at Devils Lake are other examples.

The manufacturers of farm equipment include the Fargo Foundry which makes structural steel buildings, weed spraying equipment, and custom welding and metal finishing. The Melroe Manufacturing Company of Gwinner and Bismarck (now a division of Clark Equipment Corporation) turns out the Bobcat loader, windrow pickups, and harrows. The Steiger tractors built in Fargo are huge four-wheel drive machines that are sold all over the world. This company recently announced that their sales had increased 67 percent over a year ago and that stock in the company would be for sale.

Towner and Bottineau both have wood treating plants that turn out posts, railway ties, bridge supports, and so forth. Lignite is processed into briquets at Dickinson. Meat packing is done at West Fargo and Dickinson. There are cheese factories in several western towns.

In Pembina there is a very interesting assembly plant. All the materials are shipped there from out of the state, and about 100 people of the area assemble the luxurious intercity buses that are used throughout the continent. The chassis is built in Winnipeg, so it was to the company’s advantage to ship the other parts to the chassis. However, tariff regulations made it imperative that the finished product be made in the states.

When the people of Pembina learned of this opportunity, they organized and bought a parcel of land for \$17,000 and gave it to Motor Coach Industries, Inc. The plant was built, and a new industry came to North Dakota.

The North Dakota Economic Development Commission in Bismarck will assist in every possible way any community that feels it has the resources and the manpower to entice an industry to the area.

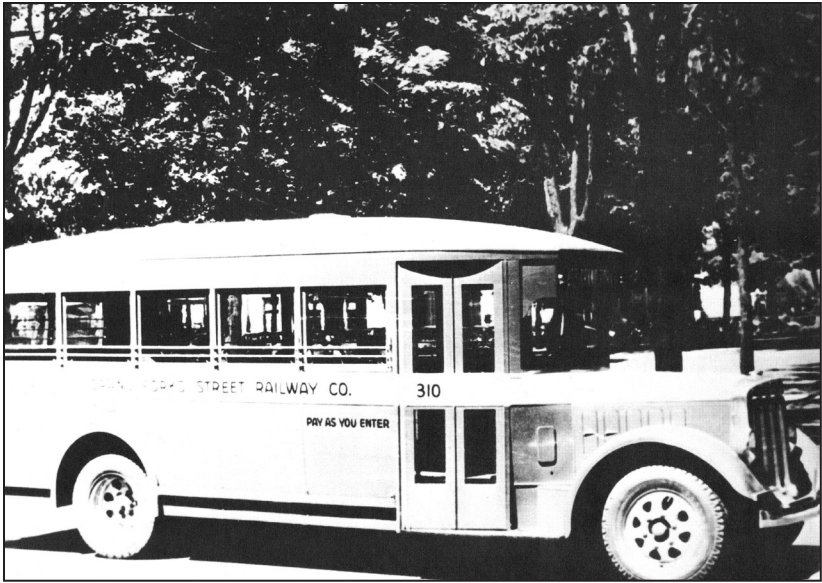
Near Williston is the deepest salt mine in the world. The salt is mined by flushing water through the mine and evaporating the brine. Potash, which is plentiful in Canada just above the North Dakota border, has been found in large quantities north of Minot. Sulphur, a byproduct of natural gas processing, is an industry in itself. Clay, sand and gravel are also included with the above as being new wealth in mining.

Tourism has brought money into the state in ever increasing amounts. The Greater North Dakota Association has been very successful in promoting the tourist attraction of the state. The GNDA also encourages the people of North Dakota to become acquainted with their state by means of mini-vacations to interesting spots within easy driving distance.

North Dakota has passed through her formative years and has learned much through the experience. The drought years brought lessons of thrift, soil conservation and irrigation. Overpopulation of semiarid areas has been corrected and should not happen again. Recognizing North Dakota's extreme dependency on the effective marketing of its products, transportation problems are under constant scrutiny by several North Dakota state agencies as well as by federal authorities. Marketing of agricultural products has been improved with storage facilities and foreign markets and the guidance of interest groups such as the North Dakota State Wheat Commission and the North Dakota Stockmen's Association. Legislation is in effect to attempt to control the production of oil and coal so that the people of the state will receive the benefits of these new extractive industries.

Our future prosperity has been helped because of the advancements made, but constant attention to new opportunities should be the aim of everyone. New shipping facilities on the west coast will provide loading platforms for much larger ships than can use the eastern ports. The West Coast is a promising new horizon for North Dakota grain products.

Below the surface in huge pipelines, on the land by rail and highway, and above by airplane and high tension wires, the products of the state are sent on their way to provide for North Dakota.



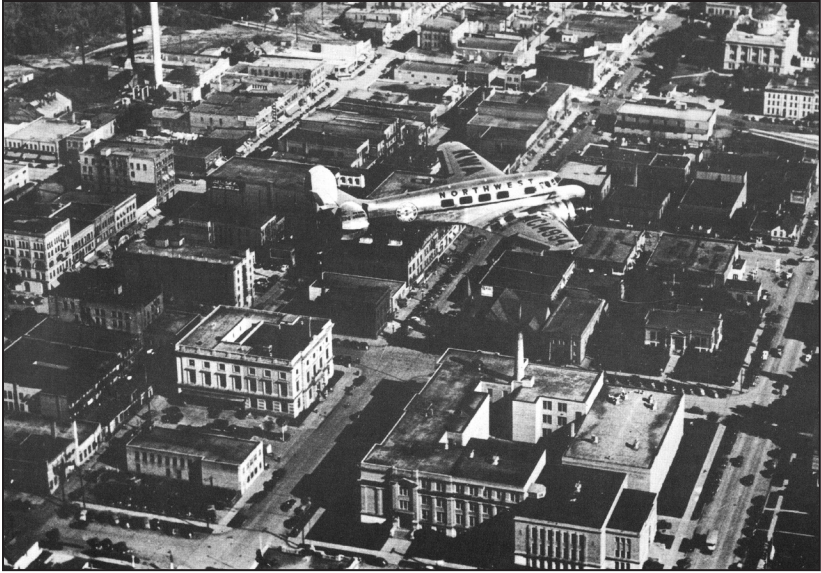
Early Grand Forks City Bus

Orin G. Libby



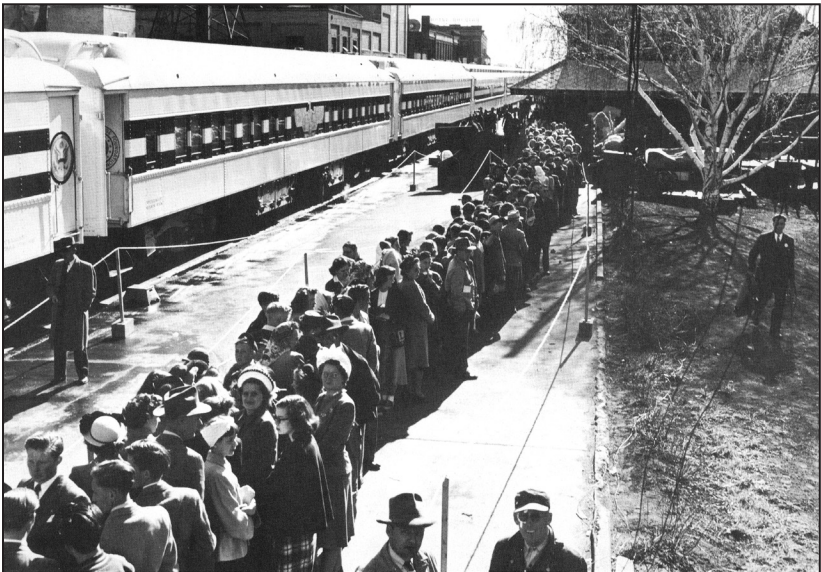
Bridge under armed guard, Williams County, 1942

Orin G. Libby



Early Northwest Airlines flight over Grand Forks

Orin G. Libby



The "Freedom Train," Fargo

Orin G. Libby



## Epilogue

# Into the New Millennium

*“Open space and open jobs, which is why Morgan and thousands of others have moved to North Dakota during the past year. The state, once known primarily for its remoteness, is enjoying a new reputation as a haven amid economic collapse nationwide. It has the country’s lowest unemployment rate at 4.2 percent, a budget surplus of \$1.2 billion and more than 9,000 unfilled jobs.”*

*Ell Saslow, Road to Recovery  
Washington Post, August 14, 2009*

In the three decades since this history was published, the perception of North Dakota in the public scene has changed dramatically. The Information Age has been ushered in by the Internet and North Dakota is now tied more tightly than ever to the global marketplace. That’s been made possible, not only by the information superhighway, but by the transportation arteries that cross our state.

Today, complex logistics systems facilitate “just in time” and “lean” manufacturing strategies that help the state’s industries remain competitive. Between 1993 and 2002, manufacturing tonnage in North Dakota increased by 37 percent.

North Dakota’s agricultural landscape has changed as well. Potatoes, corn, soybeans and other crops have expanded along with irrigation in the state. At the same time, yields of traditional crops have continued to increase. An emphasis on “value-added” agriculture by state leaders has resulted in the development of agricultural processors and the growth of alternative, high-value crops. Tonnage of agricultural production has more than tripled since 1950 to 57 billion pounds. These developments, along with the railroad’s ongoing emphasis on unit train loading, have altered transportation patterns in the state. Low-volume roads and bridges built in the first half of the 20th century are now accommodating semi trucks and massive farm equipment.

The challenges to the transportation system may be even more pronounced in the western portion of the state. A 2008 U.S. Geological Survey report estimated that the Bakken Oil Formation in western North Dakota and Eastern Montana contained more than 3 billion barrels of recoverable oil. Oil production in North Dakota jumped from 2.2 million

barrels in 2006 to 7.4 million barrels in 2007. Oil production in North Dakota has now expanded into 17 counties and the state now ranks fifth among oil producing states. Each new well requires 750-800 truckloads of inputs during the drilling process. In addition, biofuel production and wind energy are growth sectors in the state.

Personal and commercial travel is increasing in North Dakota and the region. Total vehicle miles traveled have nearly doubled since 1970 to more than 7 billion miles in 2005. Statewide, truck traffic is projected to grow at a rate of 3.7 percent per year.

According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, while the United States averages 675 licensed drivers per 1,000 residents, North Dakota has 725. The average American traveled 9,941 miles in personal vehicles in 2003; the average North Dakotan traveled 11,782 miles. In 2003, the United States averaged 1.12 registered cars, pick-ups, vans, and sport utility vehicles per licensed driver; North Dakota averaged 1.35. In summary, North Dakota has more vehicles and more drivers who drive more miles per capita than the national average. While this may indicate a more mobile population, it is also a reflection of the mobility environment in the region which is characterized by sparse population levels, few urban areas, and few mobility choices.

All of this traffic and increased commerce is creating serious challenges for the state's transportation infrastructure. But the challenges to mobility will be more personal in nature to many in the state. Today about 12 percent of the state's residents are senior citizens and about 11 percent have incomes below the poverty line. Some counties, particularly those co-located with Indian reservations have significantly higher levels of poverty with up to 38 percent of residents having incomes below the poverty line. The elderly, the handicapped and the poor often struggle to meet their mobility needs of health care, shopping and socializing at a time when those services and activities are increasingly centralized in a few regional trade centers.

Since the land-grants that drove the development of railroads across the region, transportation in North Dakota has been significantly influenced by policies and deals struck in the nation's capital. That continues to be true today. Transportation was largely deregulated by the Federal government in the 1970s and 1980s. The impacts of that deregulation, as much as manufacturing, demographic, and agricultural trends, continues to ripple through the state's transportation system.

Both the Civil Aeronautics Board and the Interstate Commerce Commission have shuffled off into the dustbin of history. Common carriers are free to set their own rates and withdraw from unprofitable routes.

Financially, this has proved disastrous for airlines, but the railroads are doing rather well, having rationalized and merged their systems.

Airline travel in North Dakota has been drastically modified, in the wake of the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978. Essential airline service is still provided to Jamestown and Devils Lake, but there has been a retrenchment of air service due to a series of mergers and contractions. The state was particularly dependent on Northwest Airlines and its Minneapolis hub, but in 2009 the carrier was swallowed by Atlanta-based Delta. Before succumbing to bankruptcy and merger, Northwest had swallowed Republic (formerly North Central Airlines). Now, Delta and United, and their commuter connections, are the principal airlines serving North Dakota, through airports in Grand Forks, Fargo, Minot and Bismarck. The carriers fly to the hub cities of Minneapolis, Chicago and Denver. Transcontinental service is available from Winnipeg, but difficulties in crossing the border have inhibited travel via Canada. There are eight commercial airports and 82 general aviation airports in North Dakota.

Amtrak continues to serve the state at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Its operations seem hopelessly uneconomic, but the National Railroad Passenger Corporation seems to have more lives than a cat. North Dakota enjoys daily service to Spokane, Portland and Seattle westbound and to Minneapolis, Milwaukee and Chicago eastbound via Nos. 7 and 8, the "Empire Builder." However, the "North Coast Hiawatha" via the ex-NP route through Bismarck did not survive the turn of the century.

Nationwide, Amtrak is basically a one-train-daily railroad, with the exception of corridor operations between Boston and Washington, and other intensive routes in California and in lines radiating from Chicago. Of the long-distance (transcontinental) trains, the route of the Empire Builder is the most successful, possibly because there is no competition west of Minot.

The railroad map of North Dakota has not changed that much, but the colors and names on the locomotives certainly has. The Burlington Northern merged with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, first calling their consolidation the Burlington Northern Santa Fe. Today it is the BNSF Railway. The route through North Dakota is now called the Northern Transcontinental route in the BNSF system. Through freights follow the Surrey Cutoff from Fargo to Minot and then rejoin the old Great Northern mainline (used by Amtrak) west to Spokane. The Soo Line, for decades owned and controlled by the Canadian Pacific, is now operating under the CP name. Both transcontinental railroads have cast off a number of their branch lines and new railroads have sprung up to handle local freight traffic. Most of them have a friendly connection with their former owner.

The first, and largest, of these spinoffs is the Red River Valley & Western Railroad, which took over former Burlington Northern lines from Wahpeton through Jamestown to Carrington and New Rockford. The railroad handles quite a bit of overhead as well as local traffic. In 2005 the RRV&W was named Regional Railroad of the year by the American Short Line Railroad Association. It also serves some trackage owned by the Rutland Line, Inc.

The Dakota, Missouri Valley and Western Railroad is a Bismarck-based operation. It operates freight service in North and South Dakota and Montana, all of which is leased or purchased former Soo Line routes.

The Dakota Northern Railroad is operated as part of the Minnesota Northern system, headquartered in Crookston. It operates two freight lines out of Grafton.

The Northern Plains Railroad returns the initials NP to North Dakota. It was founded in 1997 to operate the old “Wheat Line” most recently maintained by the Soo Line and Canadian Pacific. It leases 338 miles of Soo Line trackage in Minnesota and North Dakota and also operates the Mohall Railroad and Mohall Central Railroad, which were formerly part of the Burlington Northern.

The Yellowstone Valley Railroad operates ex-Great Northern routes in northeastern Montana, but crosses over into northwestern North Dakota. It has operated as an independent railroad since 2005.

Short line railroads are able to succeed where the Class I railroad could not because of local management, friendly connections, astute marketing, and service tailored to the needs of local industry. They have been successful in winning back freight from customers who had deserted the railroads in favor of trucks.

The trucking industry was changed greatly by the Motor Carrier Act of 1980, which eliminated ICC regulation of entry, exit and rates for trucking companies. No longer must carriers of general commodities stick to regular routes determined by review boards in Washington. Trucking safety, including hours of service for drivers and other factors, continues to be regulated, but the legislation opened the highways of North Dakota to more competition, including owner-operators and local trucking concerns. Many giant interstate trucking companies found it difficult to operate under the relaxed conditions and are no longer in business, while many intrastate truckers are now operating across state lines. The idea of protecting established truckers against new entrants has passed into regulatory history.

One group of motor carriers was not subject to the 1980 law—interstate buses were under ICC control in deciding entry, exit, routes and rates. Two years later the Bus Regulatory Reform Act removed these last vestiges of

classic transportation regulation. Subsequently, the national duopoly held by Greyhound and Trailways began to crumble. Greyhound deserted the small towns that were once its bread and butter and many local routes, once designed to replace branch-line passenger trains, were turned over to local bus operators. In 2004, Greyhound dropped one-quarter of its system. In 2009, Greyhound abandoned its last North Dakota operations—two or three hundred yards of city streets in Fargo, in favor of Minneapolis-based Jefferson Lines.

Today, Jefferson operates what intercity bus service still runs in North Dakota, with two exceptions. Rimrock Stages from Montana operates along I-94, connecting Fargo with Bismarck, Dickinson, and points in Montana. And one of the longest intercity van lines in the country meets Jefferson buses in Grand Forks and proceeds west to Minot and south to Bismarck and New Town. Bus travel is more comfortable than it was at the time of the first publication of this book as can be seen by the better, more luxurious buses produced by Motor Coach Industries at its Pembina factory.

In February 2007, a twice weekly bus service began between Bismarck and Rapid City, roughly following the stagecoach route established by the Marquis de Mores in the 19th century. The service is sponsored by the Departments of Transportation of North and South Dakota, Bis-Man Public Transit, Standing Rock Public Transit and River Cities Public Transit. Jefferson Lines provides the buses under charter. It replaces a circuitous route through Montana and South Dakota which, with layovers, took over thirty hours one way. In addition to these intercity routes, four North Dakota cities have city-wide fixed-route and dial-a-ride bus services and there are 33 rural public transit systems.

As befits a state heavily dependent on transportation, the subject is studied in detail at both research universities in North Dakota. Aviation is researched in great detail and is taught at the Center for Aerospace Sciences at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, while surface transportation is the subject of extensive research and publication at the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute located at North Dakota State University in Fargo. UGPTI was established to help the state manage grain transportation. Today the UGPTI educates people, conducts research, and provides outreach in the areas of small urban and rural transportation and logistics to enhance the mobility of people, goods, and agricultural commodities.

By now the reader has, thanks to Mr. Schneider, an expanded view of the Northern Plains and the trains, planes, trucks and buses that cross the Red and Missouri Rivers and link us to the rest of the nation. We hope that the reader's reaction, assimilating all this history, might be that of a college student

recently transferring from Colorado to North Dakota. As the train pulled in to Grand Forks at 5 in the morning, she looked at the prairie landscape, the lights of the University, the westbound travelers waiting to board, and gazing east at the sunrise over Minnesota, says, “It’s been a long trip and I’m tired... but I’m glad to be here!”



*“Yet there isn’t a train I wouldn’t take  
No matter where it’s going”*

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

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