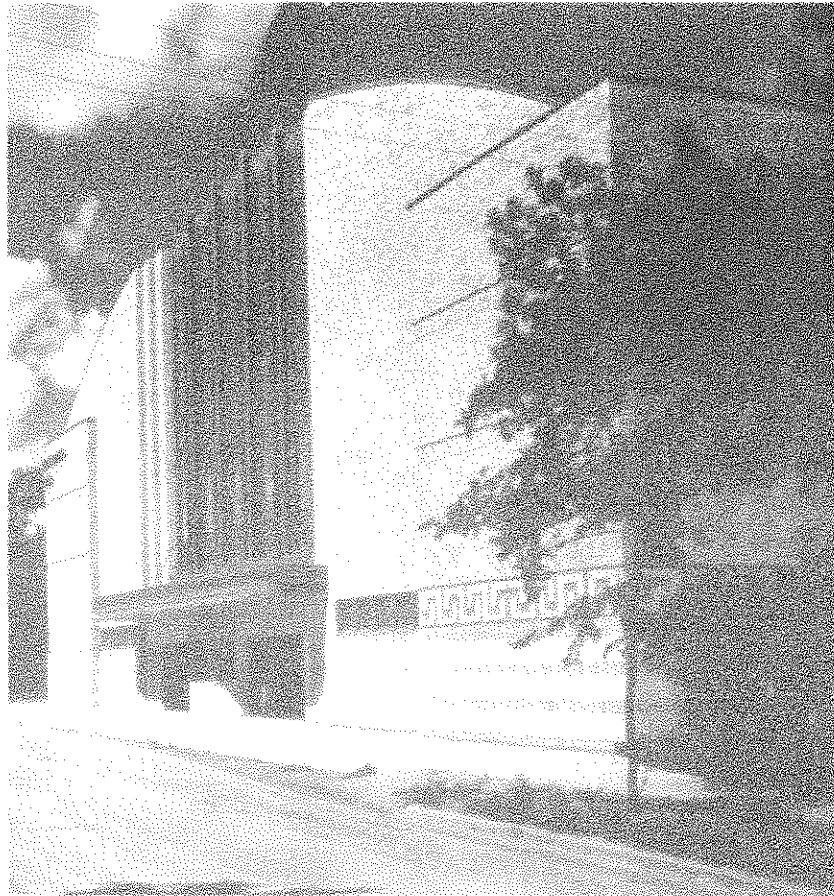


# **Relief and Recovery: The New Deal in Brown County**

## **THE HUMAN, ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTIC LEGACY**



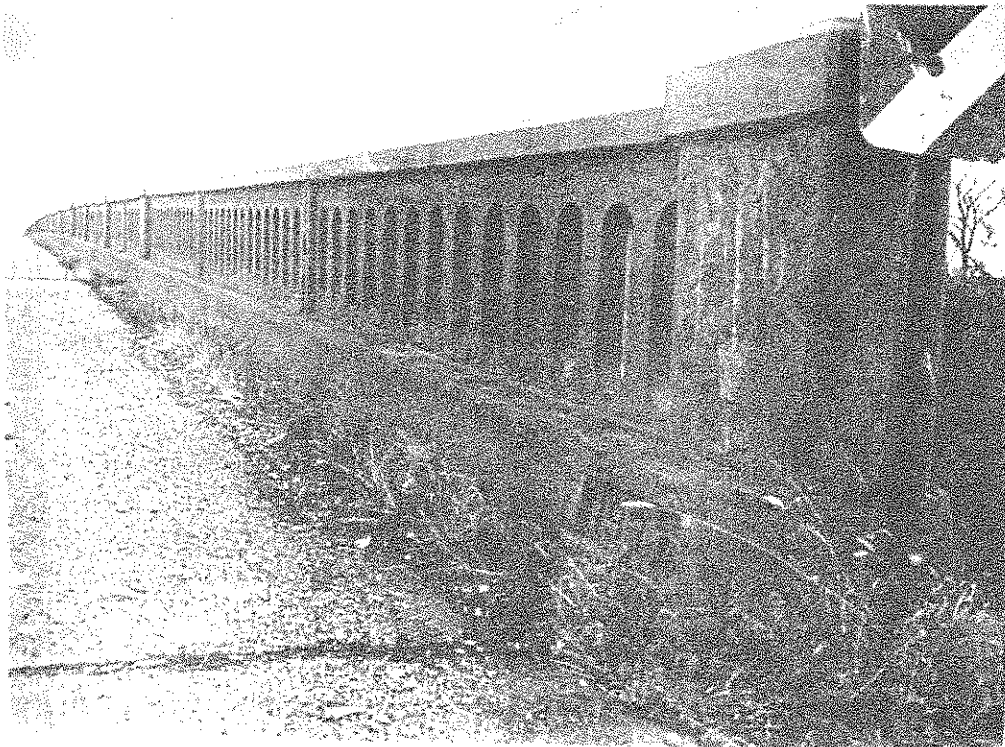
Civic Arena - PWA

**Brad Tennant & Dr. Art Buntin**  
**Published by the Aberdeen Brown County**  
**Landmarks Commission**  
**2005**

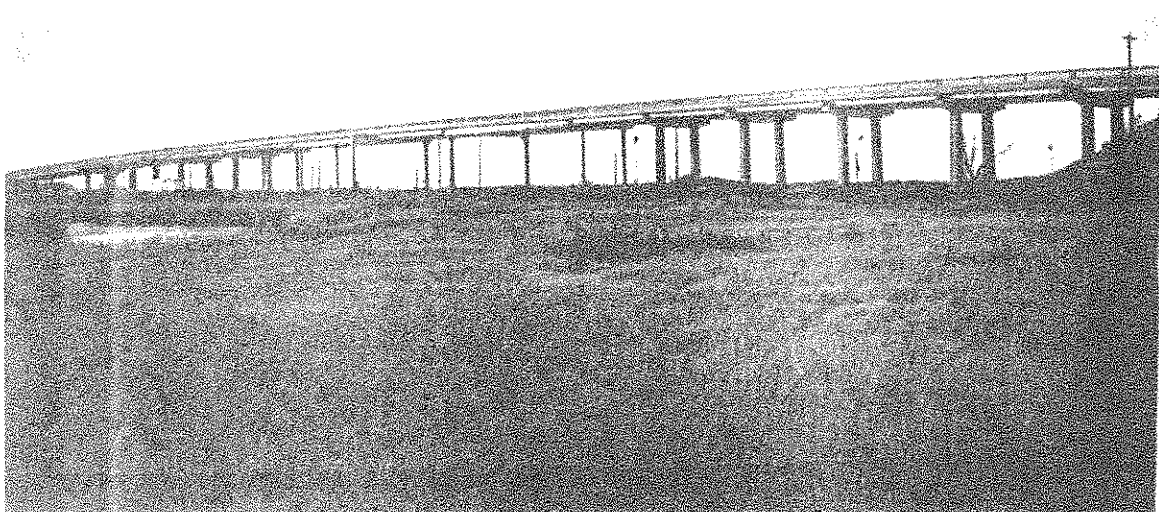
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**RELIEF AND RECOVERY: THE NEW DEAL IN BROWN COUNTY  
THE HUMAN, ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTIC LEGACY**

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## INTRODUCTION

Today during relatively prosperous times Aberdeen, South Dakota witnesses a 21st Century building boom and annual efforts to improve underground superstructure of piping and above ground surfaces of roads and walkways. In the past there have been similar building booms both public and private often with federal assistance. In war periods such as 1941-45 workers and materials were diverted to other causes. In post-war years the boom resumed. One might conclude that the Great Depression of the 1930s with its economic troubles lessened construction booms. However, that era saw a boom in urban and rural structures as a means of lessening unemployment, promoting consumer consumption and renewing a functional infrastructure useful for future generations.

Living in the New Deal years 1933-1943 required patience and persistence when dealing with bureaucratic state and national capitol to secure relief funds. Delays occurred awaiting congressional appropriations and re-applications to fulfill requirements missed in the first application. Workers experienced distribution delays for the weekly paycheck and sometimes materials with which to work. Quotas for the number to be employed and limits on length of consecutive employment months created an element of uncertainty. When current projects were completed, scarcity of projects created at times unemployment intervals between jobs. Those job crisis worried planners and officials who scheduled work projects to coordinate with available labor. Looming over all facets of relief were concerns of financially strapped Brown County and Aberdeen city commissioners to keep local relief budgets within limits by securing federal projects which could lessen the burden on county and city.

This account omits New Deal agricultural relief measures and focuses mostly on urban relief which did help some farmers who needed winter employment. All citizens—the employed and unemployed, urban and rural—benefited from New Deal recovery measures. Creation of artificial lakes was such an example. The Aberdeen Evening News of April 5, 1940 commended the writers of a WPA booklet Builders of Prairie Lakes for preserving the record of an era in water conservation and directed attention to how Brown County's artificial lakes improved the human condition and left a legacy for the average person—the *"thousands who haven't the financial means to travel far to lake resorts. The persons who can't afford to go hundreds of miles for their fishing and swimming fun may still know the joys of a Sunday at the lake as a result of Mina, Richmond and Elm."*

The author of the WPA booklet Aberdeen: A Middle Border City (1940), in a chapter entitled "Aberdeen Works," indicated there were many employed as well as needy unemployed and recognized the role of federal funds in bolstering the economy:

*"Federal funds have played an important role in keeping Aberdeen at work since 1934. WPA funds not only form the support of a large number of families but, combined with the money brought into the region by Federal agricultural programs, are the backbone of consumer purchasing power in the community."*

This narrative and its visuals document the building of a legacy. There is the human legacy of restored self-respect created by employment through work relief and consequent increase in consumer consumption and quality of life. More easily discerned is a structural, architectural and artistic legacy created when federal, state and local funds interacted to empower people to meet the challenges of the New Deal years 1933-1943. *Nation's First Third, Ter m. President . . . .*

OUR GREATEST PRIMARY TASK IS TO PUT PEOPLE TO WORK. THIS IS NO UNSOLVABLE PROBLEM IF WE FACE IT WISELY AND COURAGEOUSLY. IT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN PART BY DIRECT RECRUITING BY THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF, TREATING THE TASK AS WE WOULD TREAT THE EMERGENCY OF A WAR, BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, THROUGH THIS EMPLOYMENT, ACCOMPLISHING GREATLY NEEDED PROJECTS TO STIMULATE AND REORGANIZE THE USE OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Taken from Inaugural Address March 4, 1933



FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

## PART I: BROWN COUNTY AND THE DEPRESSION YEARS

According to most economic histories, the Great Depression began with the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and continued throughout the 1930s. Although the stock market crash marked the beginning of the depression years and the end of America's post-World War I prosperity of the 1920s, it is important to realize that, for much of rural America, the depression years began much earlier than 1929. This was certainly true for many people residing in Brown County, South Dakota.

The agriculturally-based economy of Brown County, and the state of South Dakota as a whole, was among the first to be affected by the economic problems that would culminate in the Great Depression. In fact, it was in the latter months of 1920 that postwar deflation began having an adverse affect on the region's economy during a decade that was elsewhere going to be heralded as a time of prosperity.

America's farmers enjoyed a high demand for their produce and good prices during the time of World War I. This, in turn, led many farmers to take out loans in order to buy more land and obtain new equipment. Unfortunately, a post-war recession, a dramatic increase in agricultural production, and deflated agricultural prices soon hit rural America quite severely

Subsequent drops in agricultural prices and farm incomes, along with declining property values, made it extremely difficult for farmers to repay loans. Not only were farmers faced with substantial economic concerns, but also the declining rural incomes soon affected neighboring towns and communities. Since people simply could not buy as they once did, town businesses were also being pulled into an early depression. The unfortunate results of this economic dilemma became evident as bank failures in the state went from one in 1921 to no fewer than thirty-six in 1923. By 1925, the state of South Dakota witnessed 175 bank closings. Such was the situation when the Stock Market Crash of 1929 marked the "beginning" of the Great Depression.

While much of America began to feel the immediate effects of the depression, the economic situation became even more severe for those who lived in Brown County and other parts of the rural Midwest. The decade of the Thirties saw current economic concerns compounded by a series of natural disasters, which included grasshoppers, drought, and crop failures. Hard times were definitely becoming harder.

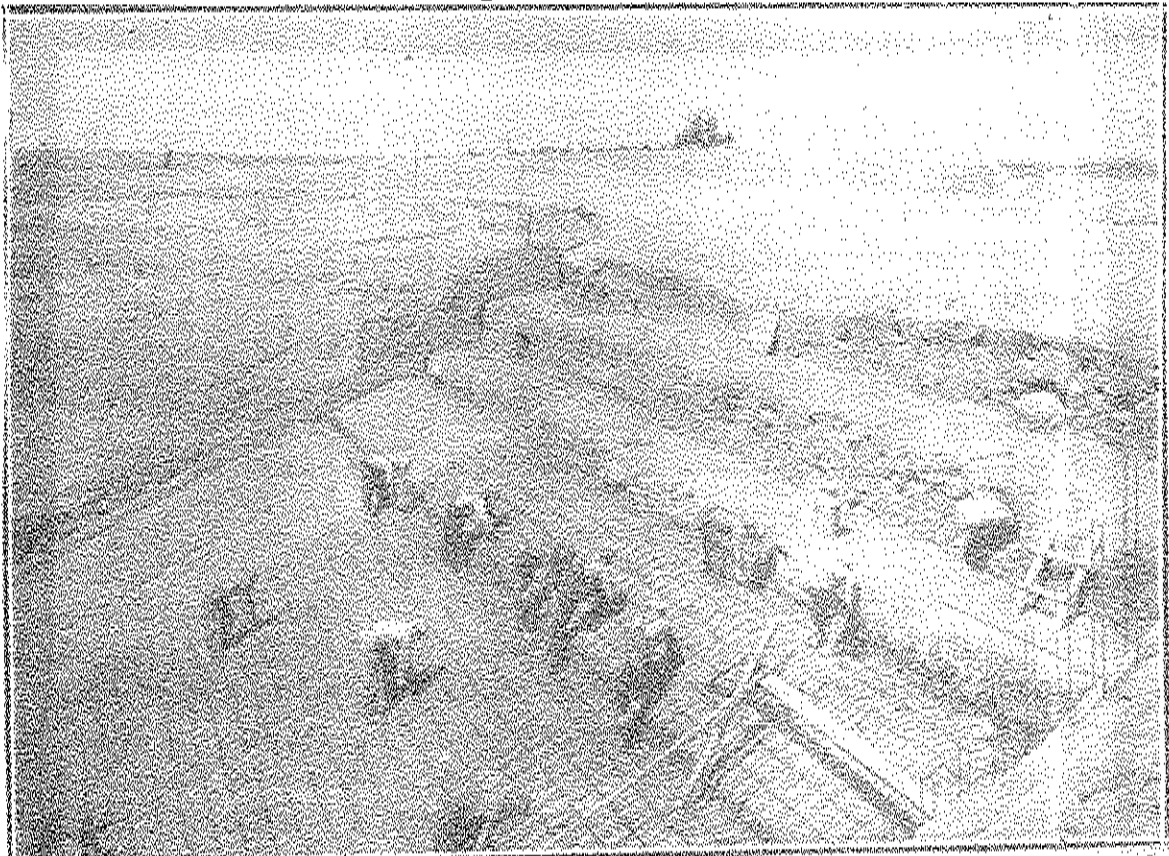
Farm foreclosures in South Dakota became increasingly common. Between 1920 and 1930, nearly 23,000 South Dakota farms faced foreclosure. This statistic increased when the years of 1931 and 1932 saw an additional 11,500 foreclosures take place in the state. Farm foreclosures and declining businesses contributed to increased bank failures. By 1934, slightly more than 70 percent of all banks in South Dakota had failed.

The election of 1932 saw Republican leadership abandoned both in Washington, D.C. and in South Dakota as citizens looked to the Democratic Party for positive changes. Riding on the shittails of the Democratic presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 1932 election marked the first time in South Dakota's history that Republicans were defeated in every state office.

While the president and Congress set out to deal with the country's economic woes, South Dakota's newly-elected Democratic governor, Tom Berry, was also busy attempting to improve the state's economic situation. Despite Governor Berry's attempts, 39 percent of South Dakota's total population joined the relief rolls by the end of 1934. This was the highest percentage of the forty-eight states.

#### Men at Work

#### Constructing Amsden Dam Spillway



Workers from Day and Brown counties were employed by the WPA to construct the Amsden Dam located across the county line in Day County.

Once Roosevelt took office on 4 March 1933, he immediately set out to create legislation and programs, which he offered as a new deal for the “forgotten man.” From 9 March through 16 June 1933, the Roosevelt administration conducted a flurry of activity that exemplified the determination of the administration to bring about change within Roosevelt’s first one hundred days in office. This legislation resulted in the creation of a variety of programs designed to provide both relief to those in need and recovery to the overall economy. Among the “alphabet soup” of federal agencies soon created were the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Although these federal agencies provided employment opportunities to many needy individuals across the country, these same agencies worked with the State of South Dakota, Brown County, and municipal governments throughout the county to provide a variety of construction projects and services, which epitomized the work of Roosevelt’s New Deal administration. While some of the structures have since disappeared from Brown County’s landscape, the legacy of many of these New Deal programs is still evident today. These are the programs that represented relief, recovery, and the New Deal’s role in Brown County during the Great Depression.

#### **WPA Bridge Engraving 1939**



Many New Deal structures are still evident throughout the county as indicated by this “WPA 1939” engraving found on a Brown County bridge.



## **PART II: FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION (FERA)**

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was among the first relief measures created by Congress and signed into existence by President Roosevelt. FERA was established in May 1933 as part of the Hundred Days legislation. Although FERA was federally-funded for only two years, it played a significant role in the implementation of many other federal relief programs that were soon created as part of the New Deal.

The FERA provided both direct and work relief through state relief administrations that channeled federal funds to local communities. In addition, the state administrations were responsible for providing state funds as a match to federal funding. Both direct financial assistance and work relief assistance was need-based on a month by month basis. From 1933 to 1935, Brown County was one of three South Dakota counties to receive in excess of \$1,250,000 in funding.

Both the CWA in 1934 and the FERA in 1935 vanished from the New Deal recovery alphabet. The life span of experimental agencies was often short lived. South Dakota led neighboring states in converting to a new work relief system as the termination of CWA approached in April 1934. In South Dakota all civil works activities stopped March 15; on March 16, 1934 the state initiated the new program. Nationally, four million men had received CWA assistance. Under the new system cases must be investigated to determine need. Work hours and earnings were limited by individual budgetary requirements. Nationwide by the end of 1934 former direct federal relief had been liquidated.

Then on December 2, 1935 FERA officially ended. Since May 1933 it had spent slightly over three billion dollars nationally and in S.Dakota, \$54,912,197. In the first eight months of 1933 FERA spent \$324,358,488. That figure jumped to \$1,367,876,319 for 1934. The federal government provided "final" allotments nationally of over a billion and a half dollars for state relief during the 1935 transition period. The State Emergency Relief Administration received its last FERA allotment in November 1935. FERA South Dakota records became a cause of controversy in 1936-39. In December 1936 its records were mysteriously removed from Pierre to Sioux City. Finally, in September 1939 they were returned.

As mentioned earlier, many of the construction projects that began as FERA work relief were later completed through other New Deal programs. For example, dams and subsequent lakes in Brown County that began under FERA included Highland, Moccasin Creek, Richmond, later completed under WPA. The dams at Mud Creek and Rondell Park were both completed under the FERA.



### PART III: PUBLIC WORKS ADMINISTRATION (PWA) 1933-1940

The 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act created the Public Works Administration (PWA) as yet another means of creating meaningful jobs and to stimulate the economy. Harold Ickes, Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, served as the director for this program, which was originally appropriated over three billion dollars for projects across the country. Reacting to criticism of past experiments, the New Deal introduced new guidelines for its relief program. A new day dawned for PWA with its appropriations for 1935. The past wage scale continued --50 cents per hour for unskilled labor and \$1.20 for skilled workmen. The grants changed from 30 per cent to 45 per cent of cost. Sponsor must pay 55% of loan with interest reduced to 3%. Work should be useful--a permanent improvement in living conditions or in creating future national wealth. Compensation should not encourage rejection of private employment. Projects should be located where employment needs are greatest and emergency funds should be used to enrich human lives.

Like the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the PWA played a significant role in construction projects, especially during the early years of the First New Deal. Brown County communities took advantage of PWA funding to complete waterworks projects in Aberdeen and Frederick, a sewage project in Aberdeen, a school in Groton, and an auditorium and theater for the Aberdeen Public School District. Total costs for these PWA projects exceeded one million dollars. Individual costs included:

Waterworks (Aberdeen)	=	\$655,000
Waterworks (Frederick)	=	16,000
Sewage (Aberdeen)	=	150,000
School (Groton)	=	66,000
Auditorium/Theater (Aberdeen)	=	<u>300,000</u>
Total	=	\$1,187,000

Four major projects with long lasting impact and survival ability represent in Brown County the work of the PWA. In contrast to the later Works Progress Administration and its successor of 1939-- the Work Projects Administration. In sequence the first to be completed was the Groton school of 1934 which will be treated later under Brown County Towns and Rural Sites. The second was the Aberdeen waterworks improvement by means of Willow Creek Dam, a filtration plant and the Aberdeen water tower of 1934. Voters rejected an effort to fund such a project earlier in 1931 during desperate economic times. PWA contracts were issued to any contractor as in the Willow Creek project according to county

commissioner Lindboe in a letter of August 3, 1936 whereas WPA labor would be under the direction of state and county engineers. Aberdeen's Civic Arena of 1938 and Northern State Teachers College's Seymour Hall 1939-1940 were the other two major projects.

### WILLOW LAKE, CREEK DAMS, TREATMENT PLANT, MAINS & WATER TOWER

The Aberdeen American News of January 1, 1935 evaluated headlines of 1934 and concluded that public improvements dominated and were Aberdeen's "big story" The PWA funded waterworks project was at the top of the list. However, the News felt completion of the PWA funded sewage disposal system was an improvement nearly as equally important. The paper's analysis emphasized the human aspect of federally funded projects under the "New Deal now in its second year".

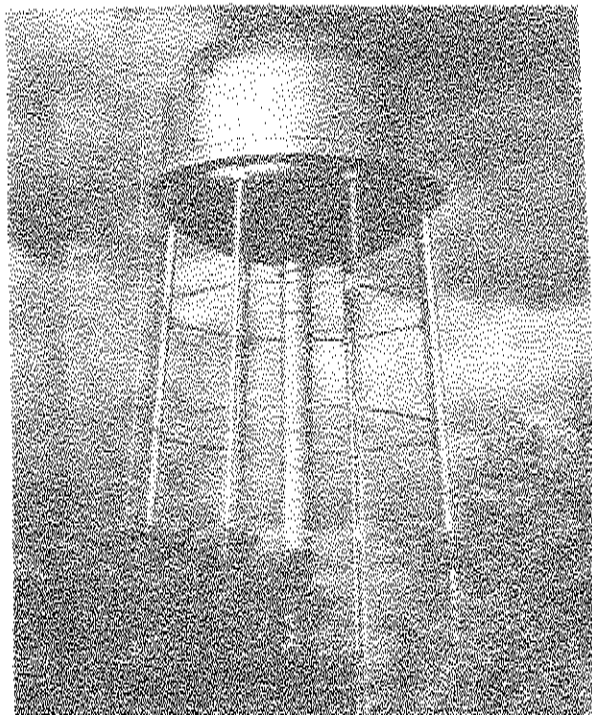
Of the three phases of Aberdeen's PWA waterworks project the first to be completed were the eight miles of force mains linking the treatment plant and Aberdeen. Periodically, the Aberdeen Evening News reported progress on the entire project with emphasis on what features were near completion and on the fluctuating number of laborers employed at varied stages of construction as well as indicating periodic payment of contractors by special requisitions to PWA for work completed. The WPA loaned money based on city bonds which served as security. Frequently, PWA payments were tardy and payment of contractors could be delayed as long as a month. This water project was characterized as "more advanced than any other project in South Dakota".

### ABERDEEN'S WATER TOWER

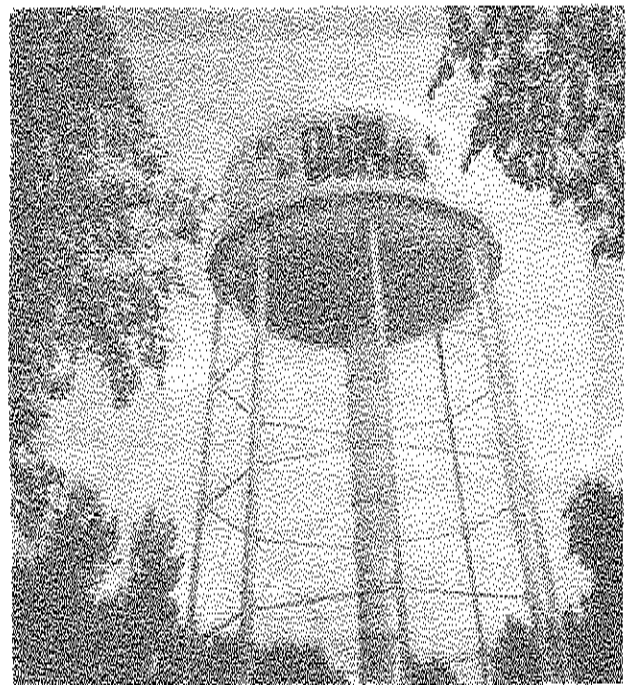
In 2005 a 150-foot elevated water tower looms across from NSU on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE between Washington and Jay streets. Eight 100-foot support pillars raise the tank skyward. As a result of city and university cooperation workers recently decorated the tower with a wolf figure--the school mascot--and painted the entire tower white. That icon of 1934 can be observed from miles around. The pumping plant of 1913 which occupied the corner of Washington Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue was demolished in March 1992 and in its place stands a bronze cornerstone plate commemorating that plant which continued to serve the city until 1934 when the water tower was positioned. The surface reservoir behind the pumping plant was dismantled once the elevated tank was operative.

The tower tank was the concluding link in the foundation of the city's new soft water system which included the Willow Creek Dam, other Elm River dams, the Ordway water treatment plant and the eight-mile force mains channeling water to Aberdeen. Between April 14 and 29, 1934 the Jonason Company completed the concrete foundation for the tank. A dozen men filled huge moulds for the foundations prior to pouring of concrete. Once foundations were done, the crew shrank from 12 to 4 men. On May 10 the city authorized payment of \$2,919.28 for the foundation work, leaving a balance of \$1,058.52 to be paid on the \$3,860 contract. This was part of a larger periodic, waterworks reimbursement requisition for PWA funds.

The McClintic-Marshall Corporation provided the eight support pillars and the 500,000 gallon tank. This proved to be what observers called "the most spectacular phase of construction." Between May 16 and May 24, 1934 steel erectors positioned eight steel "stilts" to support the tank. In mid-July twelve riveters hauled sections of the tank upward some 100 feet to rivet them into a whole. Water, treated with powdered purifier, was pumped into the tank between 9:30 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. July 27, 1934 at the rate of 1800-to-2200 gallons a minute. On Saturday an additional 100,000 gallons was added to the 400,000 pumped in the previous evening.



Water tank 1940



Water tank 2005

The water-filled tank with its 15,000 rivets was tested for leaks. When emptied, contractors G.B. Brown and Son's crew painted the interior with two coats at 48 hour intervals. Thus, workers completed the tower in July 1934. Eventually, 500,000 gallons of water filled its interior. Its silvery exterior pierced the skyline 150 feet. An orange-painted arrow directed air traffic to the municipal airport to the east. An automatic obstacle light warned night fliers to stay above the tower. In its third PWA allotment request to pay construction the city authorized anticipated expenditures after May 12 for the tank foundation \$1,000.

By August 1934 the tank was in operation as evidenced by residents who experienced spurts of water rather than dribblets from their sink taps. This was the first section of the new water system to be operative. A dry river bed temporarily prevented the Elm River storage dam and eight-mile force mains from functioning. City officials alerted parents and cautioned boys who had been climbing the tank to the platform which circled the tower at the 100-foot level: "*Any we catch are going to jail, and I don't mean maybe*" warned water commissioner Frank Guhin. Resourceful boys had ignored trespassing signs and by-passed the locked cage ladder which led upward to dangerous heights. As of September 5, 1934 tank water stood at 38 feet, just two feet short of being full. Operated from the nearby pump station, a gauge system tracked water depth. Gauges alerted engineers whether or not pumps must be activated. In November 1934 the city authorized final payment to McClintic-Marshall Corp for its work on the elevated tank. This imposing tank has served two purposes-- a reserve water supply for the city and an equalizer of water pressure.

#### WILLOW CREEK PROJECT AND DAM

In 1931 voters rejected a \$750,000 bond issue with 4.5% interest to build a Willow Creek Dam. In August 1933 Aberdeen voters approved a \$515,009 bond issue at 4% interest over 30 years, including \$225,000 of principal. They voted with the knowledge that the project would also be funded by a federal PWA grant of \$140,000. The new proposal added two auxiliary dams on the Elm River and a giant overhead storage tank in Aberdeen. The American News pointed out that the rejection of 1931 had been fortunate as locals would have had to carry the entire load with their own bond issue without federal public works assistance. In January 1934 the city bought 160 acres of Rural Credit land at \$15 an acre in the Willow Creek basin. Total cost was \$2400. The city commission asked the federal government for \$120,000 to fund work already completed --land easement and construction materials for future use. In February they authorized purchase of the 20 acre filter plant site for \$3,800.00 or \$47.50 an acre.

A tributary of the Elm River, Willow Creek is located about half way between Elm Lake in the north and Aberdeen in the south. It joined the Elm River nine miles west of Westport. Since 1931 Aberdeen had envisioned building a Willow Creek dam as the main reservoir for city water. Runoff from a 102,400 acre area could impound water. Its 175-foot spillway served the reservoir until December 24, 1943, when a fifty-foot break in the spillway emptied a two-year water supply for Aberdeen and caused the Elm to raise eight feet. The dam, 100 feet south of the breach, remained intact. Speculating on the cause of collapse, commissioner Guhin felt the shale base of the spillway did not have sheet piling except on one end. Seepage due to broken drain tile under the spillway caused the cave in. Not until 1958 was this breach repaired, but in that year no federal money was involved. How did this Willow Creek waterworks project of 1934 contribute toward employment and build a sense of partnership and pride in work?

#### BUILDING OF THE FORCE MAINS: April--May 15, 1934

During April 1934, 322 Aberdeen men were employed in all phases of the project. A progress report indicated 14 laborers were working on force mains over an eight-mile stretch from the treatment plant site to Aberdeen. This included much ditch digging and placement of pipe. On April 7 thirty additional men joined the pipe laying crew to increase the total to 147.

The Aberdeen Evening News of April 13, 1934 commented on those working on the force mains: "*Braving the swirling clouds of dust, men of all professions were becoming skilled manual laborers as they pursued with vigor their task of linking the Elm river with the city by a slender tube that is to carry in the future Aberdeen's life blood—soft water.*" By April 13 the pipe layers, motivated by a "bonus system," had caught up with the ditch excavators along the Northwest railway right of way. By April 29 ditch diggers had reached the city to link pipeline to city mains along First Avenue Northeast. There remained less than two miles between the outer end of the line and its ultimate destination. A June finish date with its pressure tests was anticipated. During the third week of April employment on the pipeline dropped from 147 to 128. A month behind in payments, the city on May 10 authorized payment to Barnett Record Co. of Minneapolis for laying the force main as part of a larger request to PWA. The total contract had been \$49,228. Having previously paid \$8,252.62, the city asked PWA for \$25,714 which brought the total at that date to \$38,967.02. A balance of \$15,269 was yet to be paid.

On Tuesday May 15, 1934 both excavators and pipe layers finished their task at 8:45 a.m. Pipeline tests followed for about a month. One hundred men were

released that morning to work on another city project—a line to the Milwaukee stockyards. An Evening News final employment assessment of May 15 stated: *"During the past two months an average of 110 men have been employed in excavating, laying the 24-inch pipe and back filling. Employment on this phase reached a peak of 147 but in the final stages dropped to about 88."*

#### BUILDING OF THE FILTER/TREATMENT PLANT

Aberdeen's S. W. Jonason Company contracted to build the treatment plant for \$195,915. As of April 4, 1934 contractor Jonason temporarily suspended operations at the Elm River facility because rain had filled excavations to a depth of about two inches. Twenty-two men were listed on the employment rolls for the filter plant. By April 7 water-filled ditches still curtailed operations as the contractor secured steel workers at the re-employment office. By April 29 progress reports indicated construction at the filter plant had speeded up; both the concrete foundations had been laid and the river bed intake pipe. Digging a channel for pipes to the plant proceeded. The crew now claimed 28 workers, an increase at a time when other activity of the waterworks project decreased in manpower. Between May and November 1934 the city authorized three payments from PWA to Jonason Company on its \$105,915 treatment plant contract. In its third PWA allotment request the city authorized anticipated expenditures of \$12,000 after May 12 for McClintic-Marshall's work on the plant floor's wash water tank.

A May 16 progress report indicated construction was booming. City water had become available with completion of the pipe line to Aberdeen. Previously, workers had been somewhat hindered by lack of water for concrete work. Most of the foundation and filter works had been completed. The plants' intake pipe had been laid in the creek but the pipe was not yet linked to the plant. A quarter mile of work remained to install the drain pipe from the plant to the river below the lower dam. On May 2 the city approved payment from PWA funds of \$25,000 for the filter plant and clarifier equipment worth \$4,870, pumps valued at \$5,400 and valves costing \$400.

The plant hosted an open house November 18, 1934 for visitors who eyed the tan brick exterior which in one section loomed four stories high. The long dirt-covered settling basins protected water from freezing and the concrete from temperature changes. Graders had protected the fillers with dirt cover. In the spring these earthen areas would be landscaped with grass and trees. Most of the machinery was in place, the power lines were in place as were gasoline standby generators for use in case of power failure. Twenty-four electric motors from one fourth to 200 horse power had been installed.





## WILLOW CREEK DAM

A progress report of April 1934 described dam site activity which covered work on a concrete dam and an earthen dam as well as bridge work and construction of a lower and upper dam on the Elm. Having secured a contract for \$136,622.50, the C.A. Wagner Construction Co of Sioux Falls secured seventy-two workers for varied tasks. These included stone rip-rapping along the base of the 1400-foot concrete dam, placement of a concrete retaining wall where the dam and spillway channel intersected, and framing and pouring of a concrete apron along the upstream side of the dam. Much dirt work occurred with dirt moved to a bridge area two miles westward to raise grades to match the height of a new bridge abutment. This raised the bridge ten feet above pool level. Upon completion of dirt-moving, trucks resumed work on the dam to increase its final height ten more feet. Plans included impoundment of Willow Creek reservoir to a depth of 30 feet, storing 250 million gallons. From there water went to the filter plant and subsequently pumped through the force mains to Aberdeen.

Reports recorded the work activity at Willow Creek. *"Moving dirt at the rate of 4000 yards daily, 72 men, using 15 trucks, two muckers and a gasoline shovel were giving the 1100 foot earthen dam at Willow Creek visible form. Busy as swarms of bees, 57 men employed on the lower dam on the Elm river were speedily completing the pouring of concrete"*--a most eye-catching activity. On the upper dam a dozen more men were driving piling, after completing excavations

The Evening News of April 13, 1934 also praised the work ethic displayed at the site *"Whizzing trucks operating on a traffic system not easily discernible to the casual eye were threading their way through the maze of runways at Willow creek, wheeling at top speed their heavy burdens of earth and clay. There was no fear of working themselves out of a job. No one waited his turn if skillful driving and a tiny opening presented the opportunity of skipping in ahead. Fifteen trucks were keeping two 'checkers' dancing to evade actual interment in that great earthen embankment that is to back water up several miles between the bluffs of that Willow creek basin"*.

*"Less spectacular, but none the less impressive was the work of the builders of the lower concrete dam on the Elm. There a small squad was feeding the maws of two big concrete mixers, keeping the whirling cylinders filled to capacity from early morning until late at night."*

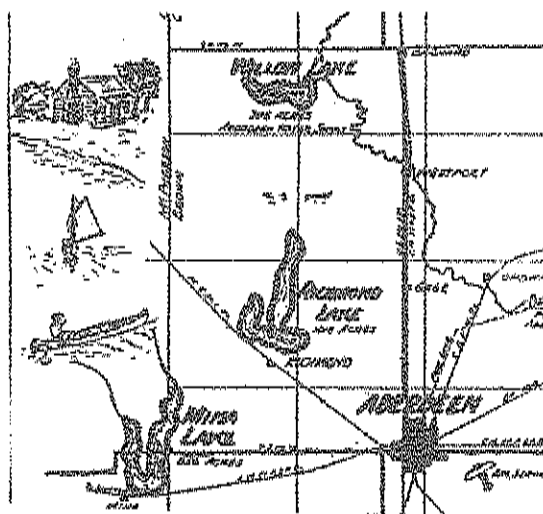
Men's attitudes of partnership in a great enterprise were praised: *"The employment office, rendezvous for weeks of growing grumbling men, is deserted. There is no time to grumble--there is work to be done. There is no reason to*

*grumble—jobs are to be had. Genuine enthusiasm for their work has replaced the half despairing, half defiant attitude so evident but a few short weeks back.*" At April's end the lower dam was practically completed. When full, it would back water 11 miles to the base of the upper dam.

The Aberdeen city commission authorized on May 10, 1934 payments through the PWA on dam projects. Having previously paid through PWA \$17,644.40 to contractors Campbell, Lowrie and Lautermilch of Chicago, the city commission approved a sum of \$12,929 for the two Elm river dams. There remained a balance of \$9,476 on a contract of \$39,950. Also they compensated C.A. Wagner Corporation Co. of Sioux Falls for its work on the Willow Creek dam and spillway in the amount of \$24,974 in addition to previous payments of \$16,403.732. They had yet to request payments of \$95,754 plus \$510 for extras.

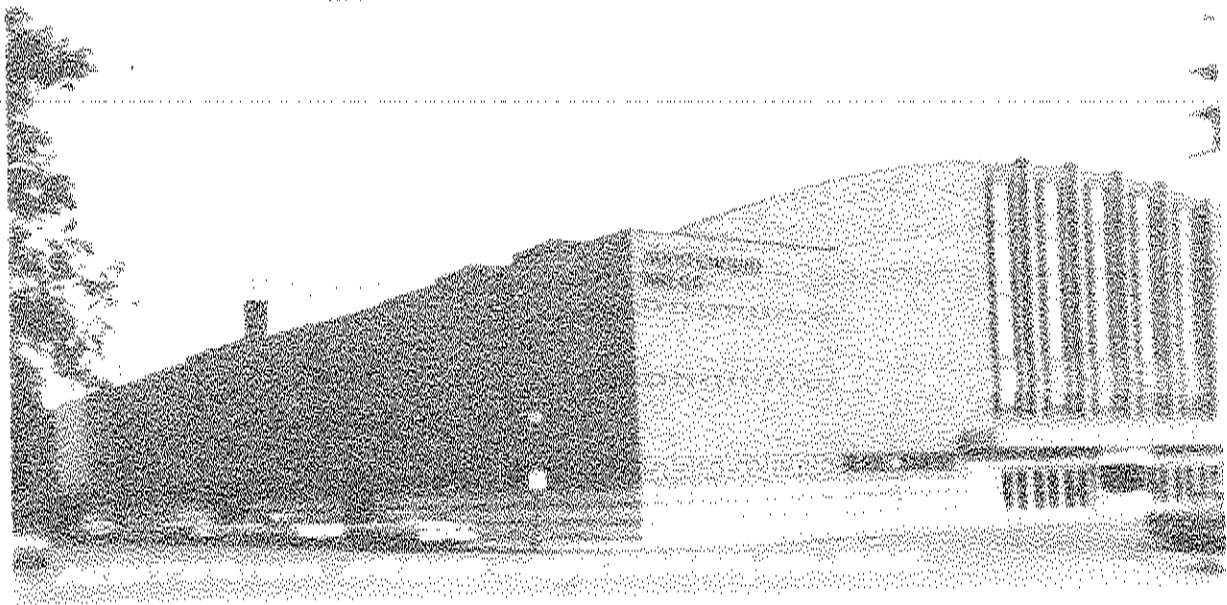
In July 1934 the books were cleared of all expenses related to the waterworks project. On July 11 Mayor Douglas learned that a fund transfer against Aberdeen's bonds had been completed at the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis. PWA headquarters in Washington D.C. had approved Aberdeen's request for money remaining in their total requisition of \$165,500.

Aberdeen looked forward to 1935 when soft water would replace bad, brackish artesian well flow of the past. As a consequence the city envisioned industrial and economic opportunity. However, timing of that flow depended on lessening of the drought of 1933-34 by gradually filling Willow Creek Dam through rainfall and snow melt.



Map Willow Lake in relation to Aberdeen

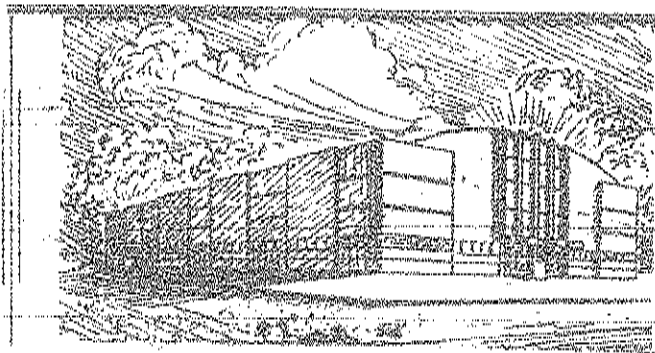
An Aberdeen Evening News editorial headline of March 28, 1935 declared "Let the Whistles Blow and all the Bells Ring". The elation was over the fact that Willow creek soft water will be surging through Aberdeen water mains. *"For fifty years Aberdonians have cussed their water supply—cussed it the first forty because it was too hard for commercial use—cussed it the last ten because there wasn't enough to go around. The injection of an abundant supply of soft water into city mains will mark one of the greatest steps forward ever taken by Aberdeen.... We suggest that all Main street business men crank down their awnings and supply the water commissioner with a hose with which to wash off all traces of Nebraska and Kansas dust which has spread its sickly pallor over local establishments during the past few days."*



The Auditorium Arena became commonly known as the Civic Arena. The auditorium and a theater served the Aberdeen school district until new school facilities were opened in the fall of 2004. The Civic Arena was the sight of numerous high school and collegiate athletic contests, concerts, commencements, proms, circuses, and other community events over the years. The theater's entrance is located on the north (left) side behind the arena. Both facilities are now used by the City of Aberdeen's Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department.

### ABERDEEN'S CIVIC AUDITORIUM: PHOENIX OF THE PRAIRIE 1934-1938

Auditorium Week in November 1938 culminated a four-year effort to realize a twenty-year old dream. This auditorium combination of theater (assembly room) and arena claimed to be the first example where a city of 17,000 built an auditorium which served both school and the city. Federal aid along with strong local leadership and public support overcame delays and controversies which marked the four-year struggle.

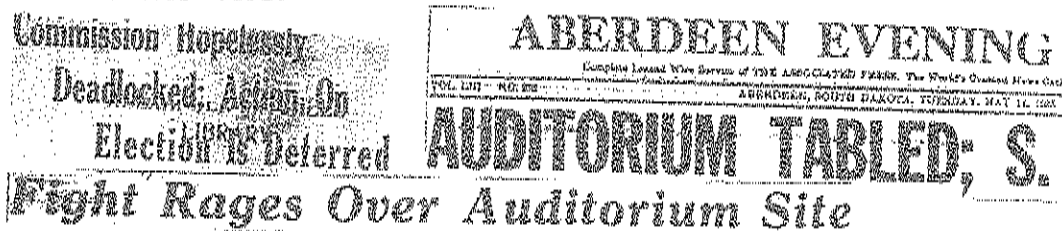


Auditorium sketch

In December 1934 the American Legion, service clubs and business leaders endorsed building an auditorium capable of handling large state meetings. Failure to secure the 1935 South Dakota Education Association convention, due to lack of convention hall space, helped trigger these sentiments of late 1934. The Aberdeen Evening News editorialized on the need and suggested a way to finance the project by turning to the federal government which was on the verge of more drastic measures to relieve unemployment because private industry could not resolve that problem. Aberdeen had seen the public works method in operation in funding the city's new water and sewage systems. The News claimed that the city's next greatest need was an auditorium where athletic events, trade exhibits, state conventions and other crowd-drawing events attract town and regional people. Initially the focus was not on enhancing school educational facilities. For this reason city government and the business community assumed leadership in 1935 and 1936 whereas later the school district assumed that role.

#### CONTROVERSY; FINANCES AND LOCATION 1935-1936

The year 1935 was one of ups and downs for the auditorium project. Illustrative headlines were:



Having had experience in slow response time by federal aid officials, the city council in February 1935 revealed concerns about dealing with the PWA for building an auditorium: *"if the projects begun as a PWA job precious months would be wasted on red tape and should PWA approval be withheld an entirely new start would be necessary to place the project back on the city's own responsibility."* However, under pressure from 3500 petitioners to build an auditorium, the council focused on how to avoid further bonded indebtedness accumulated from funding the Aberdeen water project.

In order to have a November 1935 completion date for such an auditorium, speedy action seemed essential in processing a relief fund application so construction could start by July 1. While the mayor favored a bond election for April 16, water commissioner Frank Guhin believed there should be no auditorium indebtedness until the water system proved itself and became self-liquidating. The council authorized architect J. Henry, along with Sioux Falls associate Robert Perken, to draw up tentative plans and sketches. In March before the April election, differences arose over location of the proposed building—whether to use a city owned parking lot north of city hall and a block from the high school or a site between Jay and Washington streets on second Avenue adjacent to the school. Since business and school interests favored retention of the city parking lot for parking purposes, the council deferred the bond election. The Monday May 13, council meeting, labeled by the News as “the city’s last chance to secure federal aid,” tabled the PWA building proposal supported by finance commissioner Gannon’s motion, seconded by water commissioner Frank Guhin. Then, pressed by business interests, the council on May 16 agreed to apply for PWA funds pending a city audit. On June 4 PWA administrator in Pierre assured them that the auditorium project was still on the PWA priority list and the Civic Association renewed efforts on behalf of an auditorium. On August 17, 1935 state PWA director Cochrane forwarded the auditorium proposal to Washington for consideration under a new setup for PWA loans and grants. In September 1935 PWA officials in Washington disapproved of the proposal because it did not meet regulations on percent of labor costs. In late 1935 and during 1936 high school needs for more student space and the idea that the school district build its own auditorium for educational purposes began to receive equal attention to previous economic arguments of a crowd-drawing entertainment and convention center

#### NOW IS THE TIME! 1937

After two years of controversy and delay over auditorium issues, 1937 proved to be a year of progress. An Evening News editorial of March 16, 1937 posed the question: “Is Aberdeen Ready to Build an Auditorium?” Recognizing that all parties agreed on the need for such a building, the editor suggested that the project needed a new sponsor—the Board of Education rather than the city. However, action was needed soon as PWA programs might be terminated as of July 1, 1937. At a Ward Hotel meeting April 1, 1937 the idea of cooperation with the school board accelerated. School officials wished to expand school space due to an overcrowded assembly room. Their argument: “900 pupils are often packed into central High School’s auditorium in space which is capable of seating only 525.” With a new auditorium, the current assembly room could be converted into class rooms.



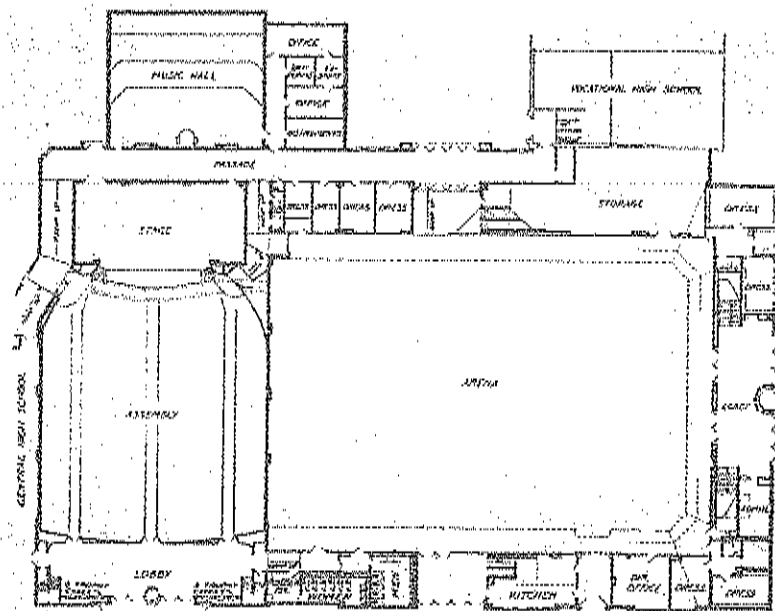
Editorial support for a revived auditorium effort appeared on April 29. The school board announced it would call a bond issue election which took into account federal government relief assistance in labor and materials, grants and loans. Lower costs were associated with this project in part because the school owned the land on which the auditorium would be built. Students needed more space at regular assemblies and graduation exercises. This "Golden Opportunity" would enhance the city's image in competition with progressive neighbor cities such as Mobridge which had completed an auditorium and Huron and Watertown which had begun or were contemplating such action. In April the Evening News observed: *"it can be built more cheaply than ever again because of the 45 per cent federal grant available until July 1."* By May 9, 1937, 581 property owners had signed petitions with only 119 more signatures needed to meet requirements to call a bond election. At their May 10 meeting city commissioners moved to transfer to the school district the PWA priority held by the city during the past two years. PWA regulations had changed since the application of July 1936. Grants were now based on amount of wages paid laborers employed from certified relief rolls. The new grant included wages computations plus an additional 15 %.

Washington approved the application for a WPA grant. The school district authorized appraisal of buildings presently occupying the proposed site—seven residences, a grocery store and a garage. From May 25 to June 10 daily features of the Evening News provided concise answers to the question "Why an auditorium?" A \$150,000 bond issue followed. In the special election 85 percent of voters approved, 2208 for and 337 against. By late August 1937 PWA approved both cash grant and loan. The award consisted of a \$135,000 PWA grant and \$165,000 loan. Estimated construction time was from four to six months. Given the excellent financial condition of the school district, repayment of the bond issue was scheduled over 20 years at \$6,875.00 per year beginning in 1941.

Employment of workers had not been as crucial part of pre election campaigning but this was a major purpose of PWA relief aid. The project employed 143 men from Aberdeen and 28 supervisors and specialized workers. The daily average was 43 workers with a peak crew of 82 men. On January 11, 1938 workers began preparations for excavation and clearing the site. In late October, 1938 workers completed installation of arena tile and installation of theater stage equipment. By November 6 the PWA engineer said the building was 97 per cent completed, and claimed it was the largest WPA project begun and completed in 1938 in both Dakotas. A new PWA grant for \$4,500 helped pay for new plant heating equipment which cost \$10,000. A progress report estimated that \$60,000 had been spent for labor and \$200,000 for materials and equipment.

## CIVIC DREAM A REALITY: AUDITORIUM WEEK NOVEMBER 6-13, 1938

This modernistic brick structure had three components: One was an arched ceiling arena 37 foot high with a tile floor 106 feet by 150 feet supplemented by a mobile maple floor for basketball tournaments and a portable stage. On three sides of the arena were balconies capable of seating 4,200-4,500 people. There was a south balcony lunch room off the second floor corridor. Initial publicity claimed that with chairs the main floor had a seating capacity of about 6000. Dressing rooms with lockers marked both north and south sides of the arena.



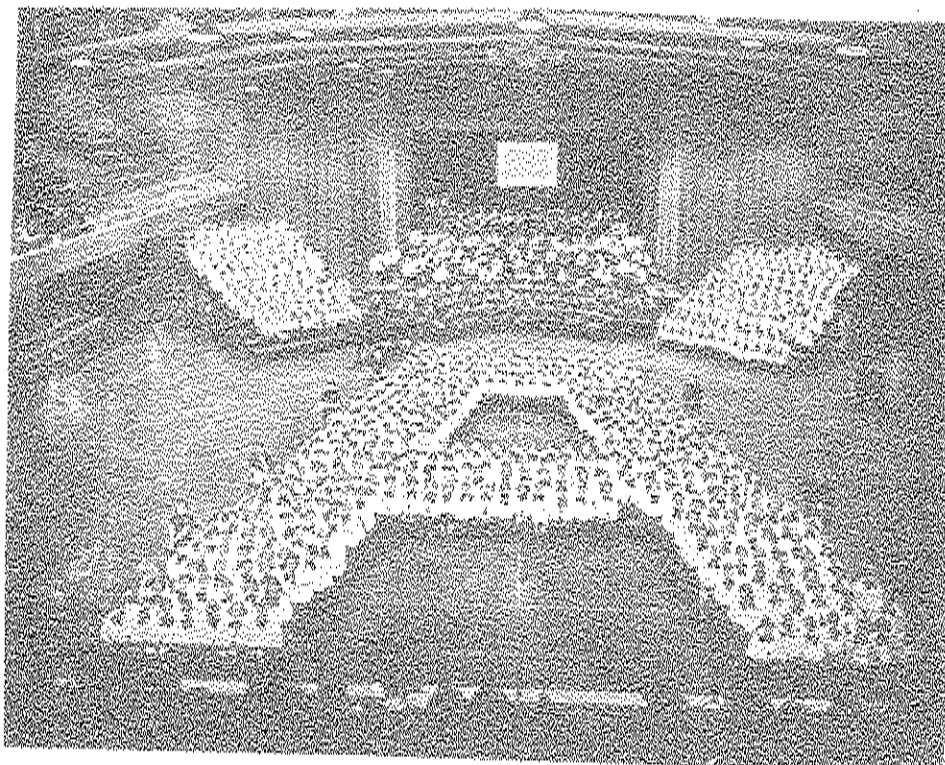
A MAMMOTH arena seating 5200 people, a beautiful acoustically perfect modernistic theatre seating 1600 people, a commodious music hall all under one roof make the Aberdeen auditorium facilities unapproachable for convention conveniences.

### Architect's Sketch of Interior

A music hall, 57 feet by 45 feet, emerged as the second component of the new building. Terraced seating levels provided room for 150 musicians at rehearsal time. A theater or assembly room, 78 feet by 146 feet with inclined floor levels, was the third component. A 57-foot by 35-foot stage provided space for speakers, actors and entertainers. A balcony at the far north end added to seating capacity of about 1600. The PWA rejected the original 3,600 chairs because the low bidder did not meet specifications; later that bidder, Hub City School Supply, secured the contract for 3,213 chairs by its bid of \$15,564. These chairs would be available after January 1 so temporary seating was used for the open house in November.

Towns within 50 mile radius of Aberdeen were notified of open house November 6-13, 1938. Those who entered the west entrance on Washington Street could marvel at the structural glass front with its marquee below and when entering the spacious lobby were impressed by the five-window ticket office and the two stairways leading to the balcony. Those entering the theater entrance on the northwest also encountered a glass front and marquee and a lobby with gold terra flooring.

Demonstrating the use of arena space, the public on November 8 viewed a single concert consisting of combined talent of all the school system's musicians. About 1000 students paraded into the arena for a grand opening and under floodlights varied color-coded groups presented selections from their main floor positions. The photo below records that event.

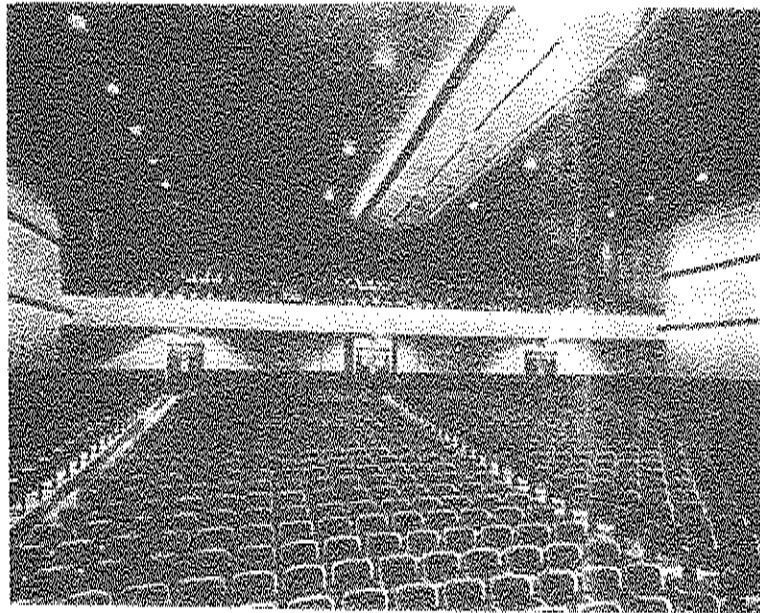


**T**HE ARENA with a floor area of 28,386 square feet and a balcony seating almost 2000 people in comfortable panel back seats has a complete public address system. It lends itself admirably to athletic events, stage shows, floor shows, pageants, dances, exhibits, or indoor circuses. It stands in a class by itself in the Dakotas.

**Balcony view of Arena floor: music concert November 8, 1938.**

The school board established three classes of rental rates with preference to public organizations as well as for school functions. The varied uses of this auditorium for the next sixty-five years testify to the significance of the building as a true civic and cultural center. An Aberdeen Evening News editorial of June 30, 1939, based on a board of education report, and entitled "Auditorium Serves," foreshadows that usage. These services (described below) employed 656 boys as ushers for 945 sessions each from three to five hours long. Thus, the auditorium contributed to employment long after its construction.

*"From January 4 to June 5, the auditorium, completed last year, has been used 85 times for events to which the public was admitted, either free or by charge. This did not include use of the auditorium for school and assemblies about three times weekly, nor any practice periods for basketball, music etc, nor daily use of the music studio or other parts of the building for regular school functions. It did include the Civic Music association concerts, the Shrine circus, the American News cooking school, the Golden Gloves boxing tournament, dances, all basketball games, musical programs, commencement and baccalaureate exercises, etc."*



**T**HE THEATRE is finished in ultramarine blue with brown and gray trimmings. It has a stage 69x29 feet with complete lighting and stage appurtenances including a Hammond Electric Organ, a Steinway Concert Grand Piano, and a projection machine. The beautiful indirect, neon and colored lights used in this room make it a place where the best stage productions may be enjoyed to the utmost.

**Aberdeen arena theater: site of stage productions and school assemblies**

## PWA CAMPUS ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY: SEYMOUR HALL 1939-40—2005

In contrast to the brick armory building which had a life span of about 28 years, the brick Seymour Hall, on the campus of Northern State Teachers College, now Northern State University., survived for 66 years. It may be demolished in the near future when a new addition to Mewaldt-Jensen classroom building is constructed on the campus green. Regent's permission to build the new structure was conditioned on disuse of other campus space. Lacking elevator service, sturdy Seymour Hall has been designated as the tradeoff for acquiring the new space.

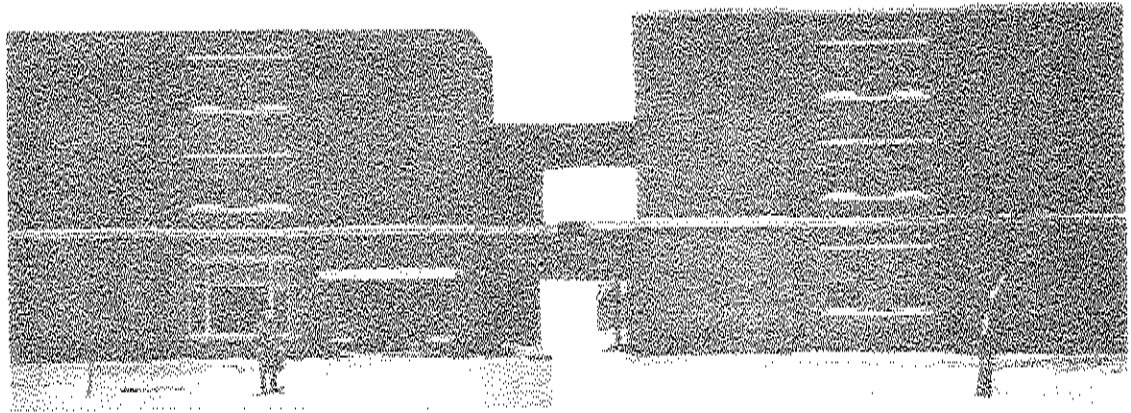
Three years passed between initial application for a Public Works Administration grant and actual construction in 1939. Campus president Lawrence applied in 1936 and the state regents approved in spring of that year. Northern secured government approval in summer 1938. Architects Perkins & McWayne's plans dated May 1, 1939 are filed in the university's Physical Plant Office.

Previous to 1939 the site to be occupied by Seymour Hall had been used for sports activity such as softball and field hockey. That site was south of Old Central, the key classroom building and the nearby Industrial Arts Building.

Federal funding of the men's dormitory was 45% or \$60,750.00. The sponsor's funding came through loans. A Minneapolis bonding company sold self-liquidating bonds for a commission which was not covered by the loans. Legally the S.D. regents could not pay the commission of \$2746. To expedite the dorm project President Lawrence, expecting reimbursement, drew from his savings account. With furnishings the total cost of Seymour Hall amounted to \$197,462. Student rentals helped repay these loans.

This 23,047 square foot building gradually took shape under the supervision of general building contractor S. W. Jonason and Co. which had built Aberdeen's Municipal Building in 1913. Reports in the campus newspaper, The Exponent, testify to building progress. A report of October 30, 1939 announced "*Work is being completed on the roof, and the finishing touches are beginning to take form on the interior.*" On December 8, 1939 the headline read "Men's Union Building Nears Completion" That week workmen installed electric fixtures and plumbing equipment. Decorating and terrazzo work was well underway. Plastering had been finished; the laying of tiled floors was scheduled in two weeks. Students learned that recreational facilities included a book store and soda fountain in the

north end of the building's first floor. A large basement room for lounging and table games awaited them.



Seymour Hall (1940 Pasque)

Two wings marked the eastern façade. To the north stood Marshall Hall and to the south Douglas Hall. Grant Hall stood to the west separated from the other wings by a courtyard. Students originated these hall names based on state counties. At first some thought the dorm should bear Dr. Lawrence's name for his role in initiating the project. However, the image of Dr. Seymour who had served until his death in 1936, had been so strong that the hall was named after him. An Exponent headline of January 26, 1940 announced "Boys Dormitory Nameless No More." At the formal dedication on May 28, 1940 a plaque in the Douglas Wing read: "*Seymour Hall, Dedicated to the memory of Arthur Hallock Seymour, a distinguished educator and Christian; gentleman, Vice President and Professor of History of Northern State Teachers College, who builded his monument in the minds and hearts of men.*"

In the western-most Grant Hall a men's infirmary with six or seven beds occupied the first floor. This area also contained a supervisor's apartment adjacent to the dorm offices. Later, from 1944-45 until the late 1960s this area became the school President's apartment with a sun porch reception room added to its west end in 1959. The six-man suites in the second and third floor wings totaled 36 bedrooms, each containing a single and double bunk. Under each bed were two large drawers for linen and blankets. Each floor housed study rooms with six built-in desks capable of being locked. Three wash bowls, two shower rooms, an accessible lavatory accommodated occupants of three separate suites. A telephone cubby hole rested in the hall near each suite.



An estimated 2500 people attended Seymour Hall's open house on March 15, 1940. One observer described that hall, as "a palatial edifice" which conveyed an image of "regal splendor." Male students not living off campus were required to live in Seymour Hall. Initially, some were reluctant to experience dorm life which seemed confined and crowded with so many in a suite and living in an environment which promoted friction and poor study habits. However, as Edward Hagen, President of the hall, asserted on May 10, 1940 after several months occupancy: "*at this date if you were to try to get the boys out of Seymour you would have to call out the militia.*" He asserted that many boys had become dorm residents instead of residing at home. They became dorm boosters instead of dorm knockers. He attributed dorm acceptance to "*learning to give and take*" as in the real world. In 1942 and 1943 training programs brought to the campus enlisted men and army cadets who were housed in Seymour. As more youth volunteered or were drafted for war service, the number of males on campus declined so that women occupied all three wings of Seymour by fall 1944. After the war men resided in Seymour. However, by fall 1963 Seymour suites experienced reduced occupancy. Four students roomed together instead of six in a suite.

Over the decades changes came to this structural legacy of the WPA era. About 1968 workers remodeled Seymour's Grant wing into faculty offices and opened a faculty lounge in the former president's apartment. Students of that wing departed for the new Jerde Hall. Students also left Seymour when the Marshall and Douglas wings were converted into offices and classrooms. In Fall 1967 students voted to finance a radio station. Decision makers chose the north end of Seymour Hall's third floor Marshall Wing for its location. Between 1970 and 1979 that station operated with a limited broadcast area but could not overcome the challenges of inadequate funding, equipment and staffing problems. That operation provided announcing and technical experiences for numerous students before it closed down.

Remodeling of 1983 created a skywalk connecting the Grant and Marshall Wings on both the second and third floors. After president Baumgart moved off campus in November 1968, the NE Council of Government moved into the first floor Grant wing occupying until 1998 space originally reserved for the men's infirmary. Due to renovation of the Student Union, the student affairs office in June 1998 moved from that building's upper level to the Seymour Hall spaces vacated by NECOG. In December, 1999 student affairs returned to the renovated Student Union.

# **Onward South Dakota...**

Yesterday's Dreams A Reality.....

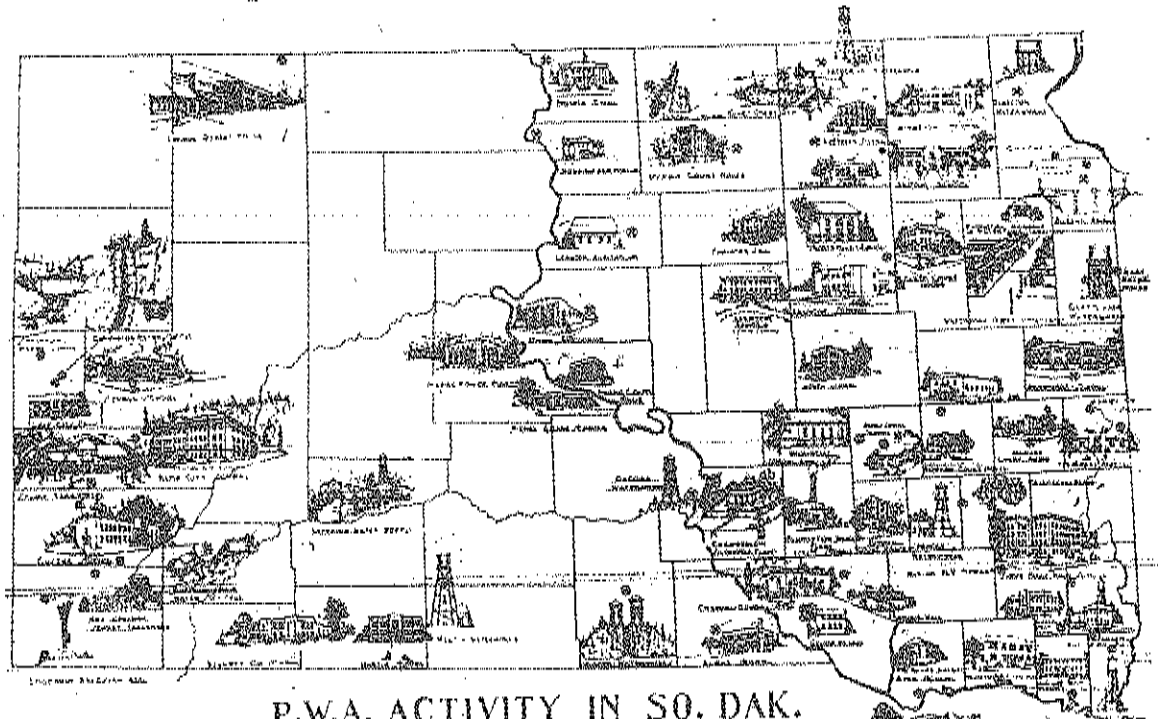
Today's Dreams High Possibilities!

**THANKS TO PWA**  
**ABERDEEN EVENING NEWS**

Wednesday, June 16, 1937.

ABERDEEN, SOUTH DAKOTA

## **PWA Celebrates Four Years Of Public S** **Dakota Maps Revamped By PWA's Broad Activity**



**P.W.A. ACTIVITY IN SO. DAK.**

*An Expression of Gratitude to the Federal Government and  
Confidence in Our Future is Shared by the Following  
Aberdeen Firms:*

1937 Aberdeen Appreciation Statement for the PWA

### **PART IV WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION (WPA) 1935-1943**

On 6 May 1935, President Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by executive order and named Harry Hopkins as the administrator. The Works Progress Administration later became the Work Projects Administration in 1939, although its fundamental role remained the same — to provide jobs and to construct meaningful projects in order to provide individual relief and economic recovery.

On 23 May 1935, Harry Hopkins ordered the creation of five Works Progress Administration districts throughout South Dakota. One of the district offices was based out of Aberdeen. M.A. Kennedy, who previously served as state relief administrator, was appointed to the position of State Administrator of the WPA. The speed in which South Dakota was able to organize was indicative of the state's planning and need to put people to work as soon as possible.

Projects considered by the WPA could be sponsored by any governmental unit, such as counties, cities, townships, and school boards. Regardless of the sponsor, it was stressed that the initiation of any project should come from the bottom up, not the top down. The only other major concern of sponsors was that they submit proposals as far in advance as possible so that the employment of local workers was not interrupted by a lag in project proposals.

The number of people employed by the WPA in South Dakota is in itself an indication of the extended hardships that had fallen upon the people. In 1936, the national monthly average of WPA employment per 10,000 population was about 199. In South Dakota, the average monthly number of WPA employees per 10,000 people was 395 -- almost twice the national average and the highest in the country.

In Brown County alone, there was an estimated 2,800 families on relief as the result of the depression and the accompanying drought. Needless to say, it did not take long for project proposals to become actual projects that provided needed employment for many of the country's men and women.

### **WPA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE & GRANT APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS 1935-1940**

One of the five WPA administrative districts in South Dakota was Aberdeen District #1. Its jurisdiction covered Perkins, Corson, Ziebach, Dewey, Campbell, Walworth, McPherson, Edmunds, Brown, Marshall and Day counties. District status was discontinued August 1, 1937 Aberdeen became a field office administering to the above counties and adding seven new ones after November 1, 1939. These were Roberts, Grant, Deuel, Hamlin, Codington, Clark and Spink counties. Michael Kennedy served as South Dakota WPA administrator and Joe Foran as director of District 1. Each district office had a field staff including a resident engineer inspector.

All districts including Brown County District #1 implemented activities through varied divisions—Finance; Employment which handled certification, assignments and classification of workers; Women's and Professional Project division; Recreation Bureau; Operations; and Administration division. As of June 25, 1937 Aberdeen's Finance and Employment office, as well as those in Watertown, Pierre and Rapid City, were transferred to Mitchell, SD as an economy move. However, effective November 1, 1939 the employment division was decentralized. District employment offices were established in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Pierre, Aberdeen and one remained in Mitchell.

State and local WPA allotment of funds depended on congressional budget approval which was usually available at the beginning of the government's fiscal year July 1. These budgets were operative for two year periods. In 1937 and again in 1939 two year extensions were authorized by Congress. The Aberdeen American News headline in June 1936 asserted "*WPA Ready to Start New Year*" The News quoted Harry Hopkins, national WPA administrator, who reported that 90,000 projects nationwide were underway as of April 15 while 82,000 projects awaiting new funding. Over a billion dollars would be available for projects presently underway. As of April 15, 1936 South Dakota's local and state contribution was \$6,617,431. Although speed to relieve unemployment was the WPA objective, one can discern some waiting time involved in distribution of funds and approval of projects. Complaints over long delays surfaced occasionally.

Applicants were informed of work-relief regulations to which sponsors must agree in order to secure funding. The project must have a local sponsor who was to furnish supervision and some cash or equipment as its percentage of costs. The WPA provided labor costs and some materials. Workers' wages and hours were based on the city's size. A maximum hours-per-month was set and a specific wage which sometimes raised the specter of competition with wages in the private sector. On a national level criticism arose on employment practices for Federal Theater projects: "*play acting individuals get more federal money than unemployed tradesmen who worked with shovel and pick*" Complaints also arose that some actors worked continuously for three years or more. By many, actors were not considered as needy as plain laborers. Washington established a regular quota maxim for numbers to be employed. At times, especially as winter approached, an emergency or drought quota provided relief for additional workers beyond the regular quota. Workers were taken from a re-employment office list. Need had to be shown. If satisfied, officials certified the worker enabling him to report to a project.

Uncertainty became a fact of life in the 1930s. Workers who had been employed continuously for 18 months, according to a ruling of 1939, would have to take 30 days off so others could have their share of work time. Reapplying after that interval was a possibility but not a guarantee. Officials were pressured to help farmers secure harvesters during that season. The argument arose that relief workers preferred relief status and would not accept other employment in the private sector. In meetings such as that in the initial stages of the Amsden Dam project Webster cost criteria were presented. If the project involved less than \$25,000 the Works Progress Administration would be involved; if more than \$25,000 the supervision would be handled as a Public Works Project and eligible for a 45% federal grant. Many were not aware of the distinction as the initials WPA were so similar.

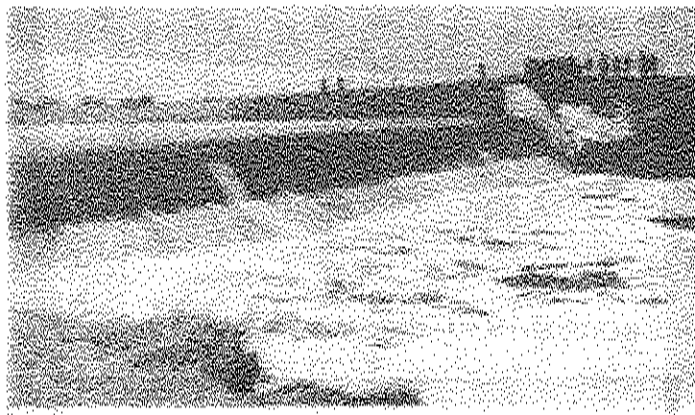
This narrative focuses on construction of public buildings and conservation projects aimed at saving water through storage and distribution facilities—all which helped more immediately to provide work relief for the unemployed in difficult economic times. However, we recognize briefly that portion of the WPA's legacy embodied in Professional and Service projects between 1935 and 1940. Community Service projects involved adult education, recreation and library and art. Welfare projects included housekeeping aids, hot lunches, furniture repairs and sewing; Research and Records projects encompassed historical records survey, graves registration and archaeological research. These too helped the unemployed retain and develop skills as well as provide money for survival. As survivals and legacies they may not remain as visible today as dams, schools, auditoriums, farm to market roads, street and sidewalk improvements, storm sewers and other structures.

From 1935 through 1939 the WPA spending in Brown County was \$1,745,787 with sponsors providing \$370,514. In early March 1939 WPA administrator P. C. Harrington, reacting to political criticisms, asserted: *"WPA is not a federal bureaucracy, paying exorbitant wages to workers who do little or nothing and spending most of the millions for administration. Of every federal WPA dollar spent, 86 cents goes directly into the hands of workers in terms of wages. About 3 cents goes for administration expenses and the balance, approximately 11 cents goes for materials and equipment."* The WPA Professional and Services program summarized its achievements in South Dakota listing, for example, 452,000 books renovated by library service workers, completion of over five million garments to the needy, and serving over two million school lunches. Lunch surveys testify to the human legacy of the WPA as well as to its architectural legacy of construction.

## BORDER DAMS AND LAKES MINA DAM LAKE & PARK

In "Water Comes Back to South Dakota" Arthur Gilfillan, editor of MSS -- a Federal Writers Project-- observed in March 1937 *"For three years relief workers have been scraping, hauling, and piling dirt across dry creek beds, rocks from the prairie were monotonously loaded on stone boats and drafted by skinny teams to riprap barren slopes, dust swirled into concrete mixers, into men's eyes, into the prospective lake beds. Dams these were--scores of them."*

This description fits very well the construction of Mina Dam, completed in February 1934, on the border between Edmunds and Brown counties. Workers from both counties helped build that dam. The lake that formed back of the spillway, which dammed Foote creek served the residents of those counties for decades thereafter. It became an important recreational center to rival the natural lakes in the northeastern Day and Marshal counties. When completed, the dam was 900 feet long and 44 feet high. Its 34- foot spillway rose from the creek bed eventually holding back over 30 feet of lake water. In 1943 that lake had filled so that for the first time water poured over the spillway—an exciting event for all those who came to watch...



*Water going over spillway first time 1943*

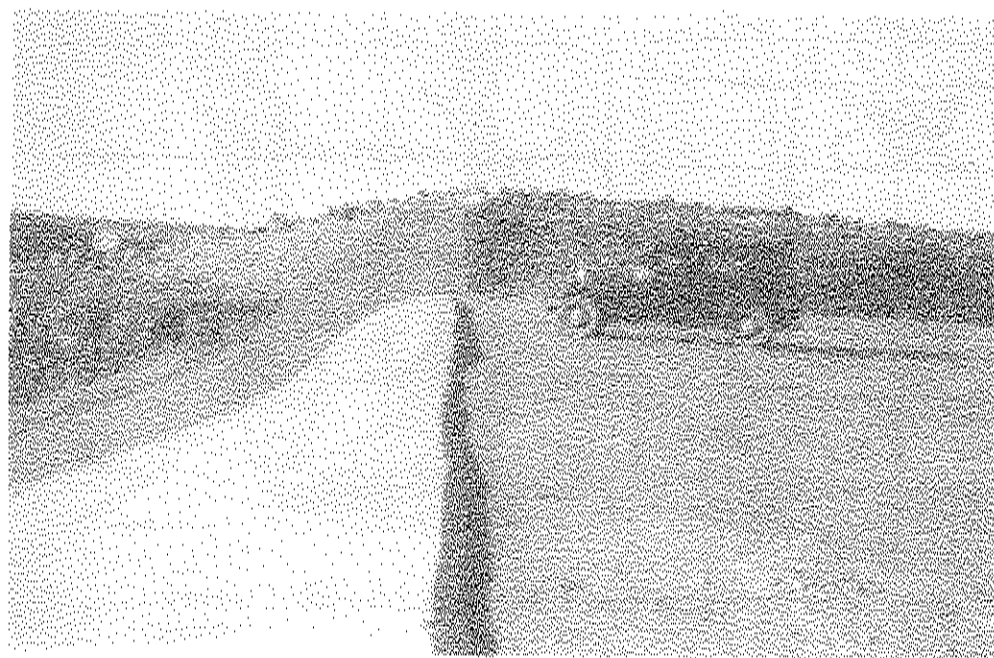
### Water Going Over Mina Spillway First Time 1943

## MINA DAM, LAKE AND PARK

One of the first major projects involved the construction of a lake by Mina, South Dakota. Although the dam for this lake was constructed just across the county line in neighboring Edmunds County, the resulting 900 acre artificial lake, which is approximately ten miles west of Aberdeen, provided valuable employment and a very noteworthy legacy of the WPA.



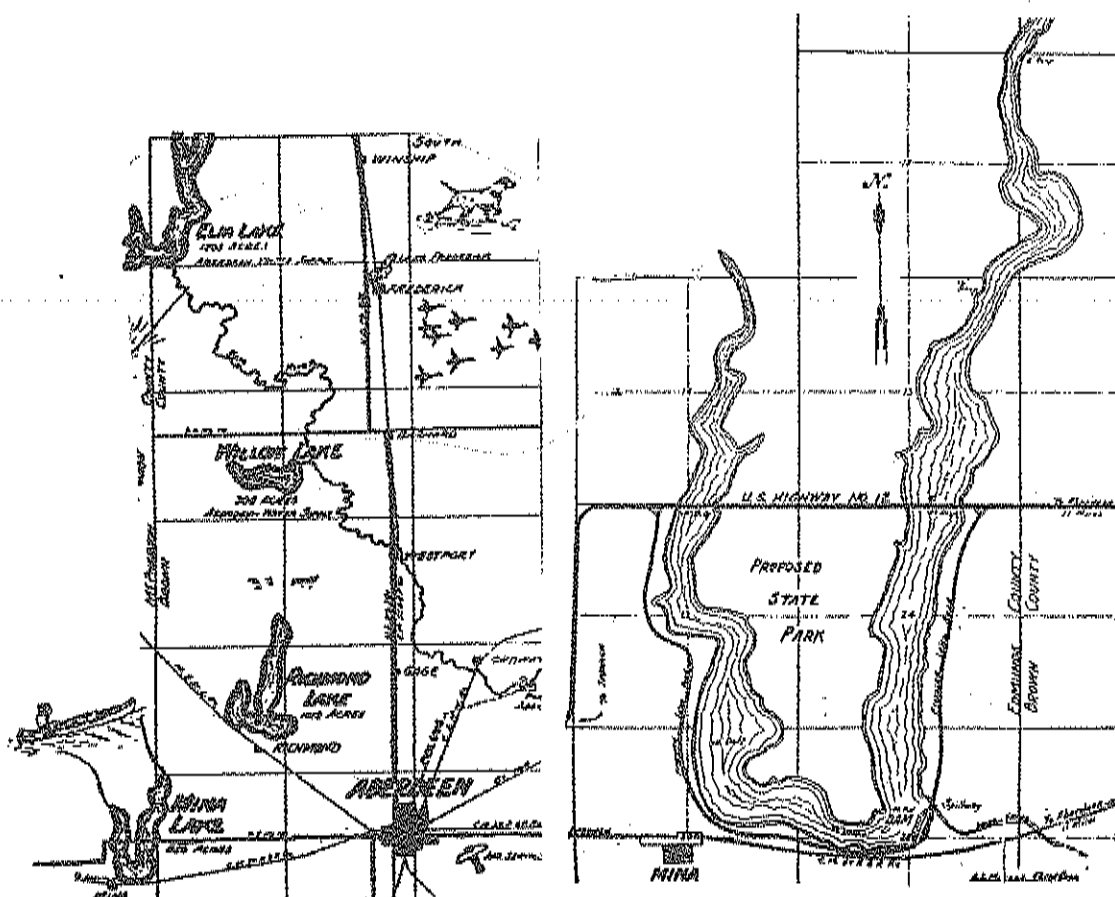
The initial planning and work for the Mina dam and the creation of Lake Parmley began with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. When the idea of building a lake near Aberdeen was first mentioned, Aberdeen businessman Ka P. Squire took on a leading role to see the idea become a reality. Under Squire's leadership, a group of about thirty civic-minded individuals formed a committee to take care of the planning and the sponsor's share of funding the project. Because this committee also oversaw other lake projects in the region, it became essential that regular meetings were conducted every Monday evening in Squire's office. Many prominent community members considered it a privilege to serve on this committee, and they did so without any compensation. Because of Squire's expertise in real estate, he took on the responsibility of acquiring the necessary easements. The committee raised about \$12,000 for the sponsor's share of the funding and also bought eighty acres of land, which were to be maintained by the State Fish and Game Commission.



This photo shows Mina Dam shortly after its completion. Mina Dam created Lake Parmley, which became one of the area's most popular recreation areas.

One hundred teams of horses were used to move earth for the Mina dam. In addition, the WPA employed two hundred new workers every seven days to insure that a larger number of people would benefit. WPA laborers were hired from both Edmunds and Brown counties. After the dam was completed, WPA workers also planted trees, graded roads, and improved an entrance road to the park.

Plans not only included a lake between the dam but also a state park between the two areas of the future lake and bridges for Highway 12. On October 19, 1933 the Ipswich Tribune called the project “impressive”: “The two branches of Snake Creek uniting and circling their way in a deep gorge leaving two bluffs which are being connected by a man-made dam that will impound over five million gallons of water.” A sketch map in the Ipswich Tribune of December 24, 1933 shows the horseshoe shaped lake, the dam and spillway and the proposed park site.



**MAP: Mina Dam to Make New Lake in Edmunds County**

In 1987 in his book Memories Leo Hansen, recalled his experiences as a bridge worker at Mina Dam in 1933-1934. He recalled that on that dam men worked with their hands and relied on horse power rather than on power machinery. “A core was dug at the dam site, from one side to the other, to the rock. Then men with 4-horse scrapers hauled dirt and yellow clay, packing as they hauled it. Later on, the rocks were dug by hand along Stoney Run, a creek that was nearby. Sometimes there were so many men with bars, prying up the rock, you could not see the rock. After digging the rocks out, they were hauled by wagon and horses to the dam site for rip rap”.

He referred to this and other road work in which he served as timekeeper, as 'WPA work.' Workers received a monthly income for labor on dam, road and park projects. Leo exclaimed: *"I believe that was a better way of doing it than the way they do now, just giving people money without having to work for it."*

The Ipswich Tribune reported intermittent progress. An issue of October 19, 1933 described the main crew working on the spillway *"3 seven-yard steel dump wagons and 15 ordinary horse drawn dumps" were involved in loading.* The reporter estimated 2500 or more yards of dirt a day were transferred to the huge dam. As it is built upward, rocks rip rap the huge dam on the upper lake side. Many men and farm teams assembled stones which came from a spot less than a mile from the dam. These surface stones, a legacy of the glacier era, varied in weight from 10 pounds to a ton.



Work Teams of the Mina Dam Crew

### Work Teams of the Mina Dam Crew

By early November, 1933 the Tribune estimated *"Dam Construction Half Completed"* Spillway forms had yet to be started; the highway grade must be raised about 14 feet above the present level. This involved about as much earth moving with the graders as on Mina Dam itself and cost an estimated \$86,000 when finished possibly by May.1934. The reporter observed: *"more than 120 men, most of them from Brown County, have been rushing the work. A rock crusher prepares material for concrete work."* On November 23 the Tribune reported that less than 30,000 yards were to be placed on the dam. Workers were busy every day. Three tractor dumps and large numbers of teams moved an average of over 3000 yards of earth per day for several weeks. The base of the dam had been completed and succeeding layers of clay placed on the top bringing work to one layer of completion at the north end. Eight carloads of sand had been unloaded for spillway work. Soon hand work of the past few weeks would end followed by concrete-pouring.

Officials designated December 15 as Mina Lake Day as a means to raise additional funds. This was celebrated in Aberdeen and Ipswich. The Tribune reported on the visitors who came to see the dam: *"Everyday and especially Sunday many cars have driven to the site loaded with sight-seers interested in the development of the largest artificial lake in the northern part of the state."* The crew had finished the last earth lift across top of the dam bringing the dam above the anticipated high water level. Brown County had two crews working a total of ten hours. Due to less daylight in December that crew had to return to a six hour shift. Two crews worked each day for several weeks.

Ninety acres of land between the lake's two arms became a park (purchased in 1938 for \$3100 and originally managed by Edmunds County to 1950 and since 1969 by the State Game, Fish & Parks department.) The environmental improvements of 1938-39 made over 6000 linear feet of terracing covering the shoreline. WPA assistance also helped in grading a shoreline drive. Trees donated by the Game and Fish Commission and by U.S. Biological Survey were planted as a WPA project. An irrigation system was installed so as to nourish the trees and plants. In 1974 this park expanded by purchases of 204 additional acres.

Even as early as July 22, 1937 the American News indicated the significance of Mina Dam, the lake and park formed as a result of its completion. The editor wrote these words of appreciation under the headline: *"Mina Lake is Meeting Hopes of its Builders"*

*"Drive by the lake any day between sunup and dark. Along its banks for miles can be seen parties of fishermen, families picnicking and children bathing in the waters which cover a gorgeous series of barren alkali beaches and knobs sparsely covered with straggly grass."*

*"In short it is a mecca for people who otherwise would not have access to the pleasures of the outdoors—boating, fishing and bathing. It is proving a haven for bird and animal life which has been nearly obliterated in these parts because of years of drought. Only praise and honor should go to the foresighted men who saw this project through to completion. It is a wise long-pull investment."*

Forty-six years later, Governor William J. Janklow issued an executive proclamation proclaiming June 17-18 1983 *"Mina Centennial Days"*. He focused on this legacy of the 1930s: one of northern South Dakota's first man-made lakes: *"The pride of this one hundred year old town is the uniquely shaped Mina Lake, officially Shaka Haza the Sioux word for horseshoe. As one of the state's largest man-made-lakes, Mina Lake has brought renewed interest, vitality, and recreation to the thriving centennial community that is its namesake."*



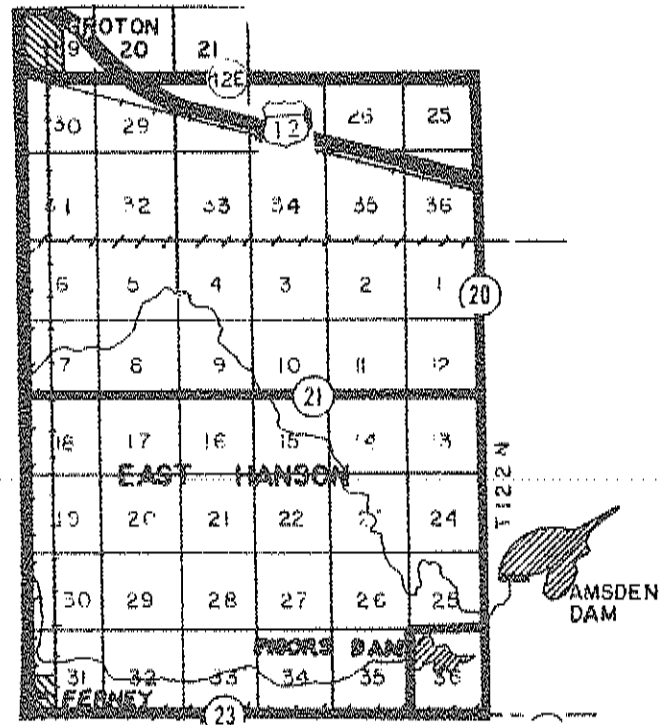
This photo shows Mina Dam in the spring of 2005. Some years have seen high water levels in Lake Parmley and a great deal of water running over the spillway. This photo was taken when water levels were quite low.

### DAY COUNTY'S AMSDEN DAM & LAKE

Located in southwestern Day County six miles southwest of Andover and six miles east and five miles south of the Brown County town of Groton., this dam was first referred to as Andover-Groton Dam. However, planners decided on its final name--"Amsden Dam"-- on Friday January 3, 1936 at a joint meeting of Groton and Andover directors. Although several others gave land, Arthur T. Amsden, former owner of the dam site who charged only \$5 per acre for his 40.8 acres, received the honor. The Rural Credit Board contributed 63 acres. The Day County site was about 14 miles east of the Brown County border. Work had begun earlier in late November 1935.

As is often the case, dam builders select a creek site as an initial water source to feed a newly completed dam. Amsden Dam is situated on Mud Creek which drains 27 square miles above the dam and in normal years flowed continually. In November 1935 water flowed under the creek ice requiring sheet iron to be driven into the ground to cut off the flow. However, in June 1936 Mud Creek dried up. In a dry condition the creek proved helpful to the construction workers. When completed the dam was about 800 feet long at the top and shorter

at the base. The primary, concrete spillway was 75 feet wide with a secondary earthen spillway 100 feet wide. The impounded waters eventually covered 342 acres of land in a normal pooling year.



Day County's Amsden Dam in relation to Groton & Ferney

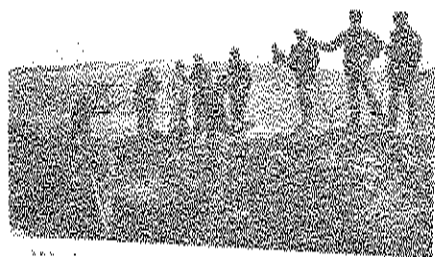
Both the Webster Reporter and Farmer and the Groton Independent reported occasionally on construction progress. In assessing preliminary possibilities the Independent on August 9, 1935 mentioned securing easements and noting efforts underway to secure WPA authorization which paid for labor and part of the construction material. Many stones available on adjacent lands proved advantageous for rip-rapping at the site. At a joint meeting of Andover and Groton councils Nov. 18, 1935, representatives appointed Webster's Frank Elliot, who had previously worked on Day county's Pierpont Dam, as the locally financed superintendent and Groton's John Schornack as federally reimbursed time-keeper. On November 21, 1935 that paper reported the dam had received official approval having fulfilled all requirements including an application for WPA assistance. Federal funds paid for labor while sponsors Andover and Groton shared expenses of securing land. Initially the estimated project cost was \$21,000 with the federal share over \$16,000. The basic agreement provided that Brown and Day counties pay \$5,000 and furnish machinery, gasoline and oil. Townships and municipalities would help pay for easements. It was anticipated that over 100 men would be employed over seven to eight months. Those who furnished teams of horses would receive 25 cents an hour. Groton and Andover laborers were promised free



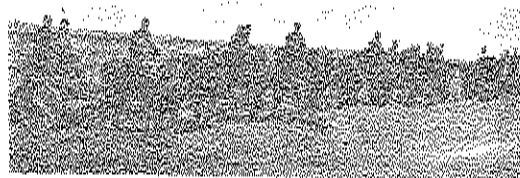
transportation to the work site whereas workers elsewhere provided their own vehicles going to and from work. Engineers at the November 21 meeting suggested the hardest task would be at the beginning when a core 600 feet long had to be laid to a depth of about 15 feet and then filled with clay to prevent seepage under the dam and destruction of the foundation. Superintendent Elliott indicated about 25 men will be used in digging the core.

The Reporter and Farmer noted on November 28, 1935 "*Work Starts on Building of Dam in Andover Lake*": Thirty men were on the job, fifteen from Brown County and fifteen from Day. Twenty two more had been called up. In the months to come initial operations included digging of rock, excavation for the dam's core, digging down about 30 feet to strike shale on which the dam would rest. The Groton Independent on December 5, 1935 indicated that ten or fifteen men in Groton were delayed as their classification was not in order. Farmers who had moved to town had neglected to change registration and the "*WPA officials have been reluctant to place farmers on city projects.*" Dam workers received 16 days work a month at the prevailing wage scale of 27 ½ cents an hour.

In early January 1936, according to the Reporter and Farmer, about 75 men had steady employment. Progress had been slowed by bad weather. Due to a 25% increase in wages recently workers and directors hoped for an increase in appropriations for labor. As of April 16, 1936 the Groton Independent noted that numerous visitors had come to the dam site to satisfy their curiosity as to progress. "*Workmen were now busy completing the last few yards of the core.—the most difficult of all stages*" Workers probably had to dig down 20 feet or more before shale is struck and the filling in process started." Work on the spillway was already underway. Cement had been ordered for use when sufficient dirt had been removed. Groton Mayor Theo Funk observed "*The men are apparently working with great deal of enthusiasm, knowing that when the dam is completed it is something they can look at and say it was built with their own hands.*" Pride in the project revealed itself in this statement: "*A visit to the dam site reveals it is one of the most desirable and natural lake sites yet being developed as an artificial lake. Flooding as it does considerable lowlands and surrounded by sloping hills, it forms a natural reservoir for water.*"



Work crew on the Amsden Dam.



Horses used in the building of the dam.

In the July 23, 1936 issue of the Webster paper Superintendent Elliott describes progress: *"the main fill of the earthen dam is about 50 per cent complete. Work has been started on rip-rapping of the upper face of the dam. WPA labor is being furnished. Work is expected to start shortly on pouring of concrete for the primary spillway."* In the November 26, 1936 Reporter and Farmer a writer for the local South Andover column observed progress "The most important work-- cement work-- has been finished for some time." On December 3, 1936 the Webster paper headlines announced *"Amsden Dam is Now Nearing Completion"*. *Foreman Frank Elliott estimated that, barring bad weather, work would be completed by December 15. Rural teamsters may finish shortly. Seventy to eighty men have been employed. The lake has already started to fill, the water now being about 9 feet deep at the dam and about a foot deep where the road formerly cut across the meadow to the dam."*



Thirty-three laborers from Brown and Day counties worked on the Amsden Dam in neighboring Day County.

### Amsden Dam Spillway

In the Groton Independent for December 3, 1936 the local news columnist proudly referred to one of the dam's finishing touches-- stones spelling Amsden Dam stretched across the works. Letters 18 feet high and 14 feet wide made the name visible for several miles in clear weather. Two creeks fed by springs began

the gradual rise in water level of this crab-shaped lake. The winter snow of 1936-37 and the spring rains worked wonders on the dam's impoundment which reached at spots a depth of 35 feet before overflowing down the spillway. The South Andover local reporter indicated in the Webster paper for April 22, 1937:

*"Again last Sunday, cars by the score were viewing the beautiful Amsden Dam. Water is still going over the spillway and the lake is a wonderful sight. It is such a drawing card that often you see cars from miles distance there."*

A Groton Independent headline of April 15, 1937 announced "Water Goes Over Amsden Spillway".

*"Since last fall the water has been gradually climbing up the embankments of the lake, and this spring when the enormous amount of snow melted on the watershed of the lake and found its way into the place that had been prepared for it, its rise to the point where it would flow over the spillway was watched with considerable interest by the major portion of two counties. Now that it has happened folk in this area will settle down and watch the development of the lake into a recreational center and wild game refuge."*

The Aberdeen American News editor on April 15, 1937 advised its readers to visit Amsden Dam to see the flowing water as they had not yet experienced the thrill of seeing water flowing over spillways at Mina or Richmond dams.

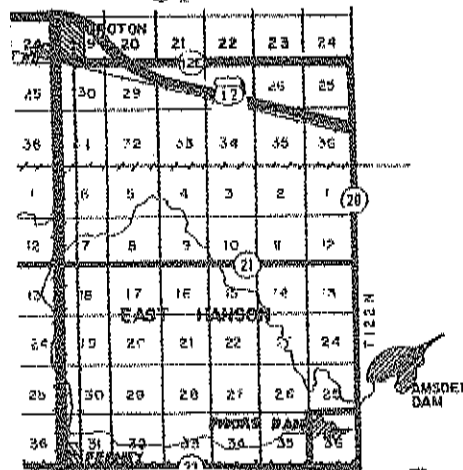
In late March 1937 the Aberdeen Evening News had cautioned about dangers at "our new lake resorts" during the coming spring and summer. Although at the time Mina and Richmond lakes had not reached the high water mark, Mina Lake provided good summer facilities to hundreds from neighboring towns of Brown, Edmunds and Spink counties. With higher water levels and improved shores more swimmers could be expected. Water safety by boaters and swimmers needed public attention. In July 1937 game warden George Woods warned that Mina Lake had a trap area near the spillway, Because of its depth rescue would be difficult if a swimmer became disabled.

This danger was amplified in August of that year when news from Amsden Lake secured the headlines. Day County had experienced its worst drowning tragedy in its history. A picnic party of 14 persons had ignored or forgotten warnings that a gravel pit with a precipitous drop off of 15-to-25 feet was located 10 feet from shore. Six drowned and eight others were saved. Thus, added to the legacy of work relief, recreational water and beach pleasures is a legacy of dangerous waters which in all the man-made lakes, as well as natural lakes, claim victims over the years.

## PIGORS DAM AND LAKE 1936-1937

In July 1936 two federal officials and Groton's mayor Theo Funk toured the area south of Groton and east of Ferney to locate a possible dam site adjacent to Pigors' property. Pigors property proved to be the larger of two dam sites. Engineers found the footing to be satisfactory. Footings here averaged a depth of 10 to 16 feet and its northern edge had hard clay. They envisioned a completed dam with a lake winding through a draw, about a mile long, and from a few to seven rods wide, the eastern edge of which touched the Day-Brown County line. In addition to storing huge amounts of water, an additional benefit would be the nesting of waterfowl in this eastern end. The Brown County commissioner informed the Groton Independent on July 30, 1936 that "*the dam site is an extremely acceptable one.*" It will store a vast amount of water that is badly needed in that part of the county, and besides give work to a large number of men"

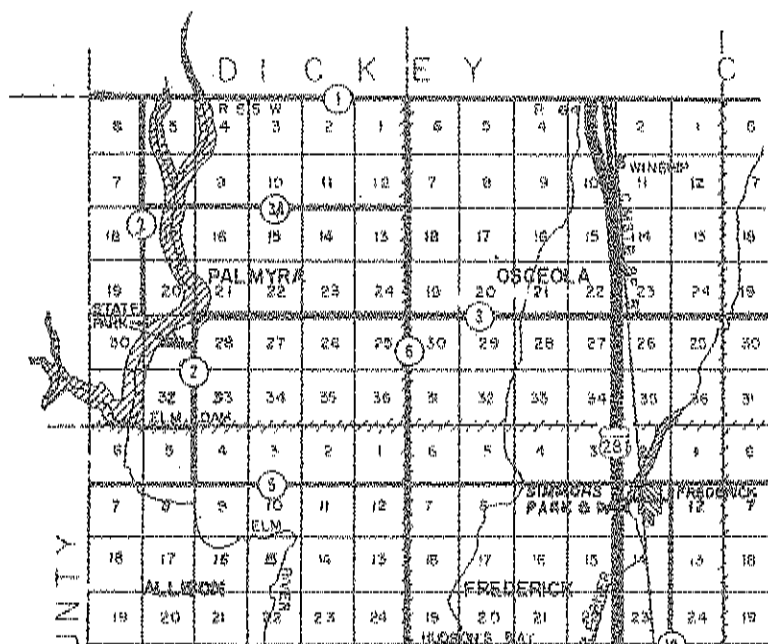
With WPA providing wages for laborers, work on the site began in late December 1936. Many workers had been released from work on the completed Amsden Dam. In the winter of 1936-37 snow impeded travel on the road to Pigors Dam endangering the workers ability to draw paychecks as they could not get to their work place. Fifty-six WPA men were employed on this project with a total payroll of about \$2,000.00 during open road periods. The county had to employ a snow plow to keep that travel route open and thus save the county from dipping more into its poor fund to take care of 56 needy families. By end of 1938 the vision of planners had materialized with the dam's completion and impoundment of water. On April 13, 1939 the Groton Independent observed that area lakes were overflowing their spillways due to melting snow. This would help fishing in some lakes although Pigors was not a noted fishing lake. However, the 15 to 20 acres on the east end provided a natural nesting place for all varieties of ducks.



Map of Pigors Dam in relation to Amsden Dam, Ferney & Groton, SD

## ELM (FREDERICK) DAM AND LAKE 1936-1938

Man-made Elm Lake over a time span of seven decades has emerged from the status of "Brown County's best kept secret" to form an important part of the natural environment. It has taken its place as a landmark for farmers and sportsmen and serves as an emergency source of Aberdeen's water supply. Thirty-eight miles from Aberdeen, the lake is larger than Mina and Richmond Lakes although the dam itself is smaller than that of Richmond dam. It may be categorized as a border lake as it extends about 1 ½ miles north of the South Dakota/North Dakota line into Dickey county. Its western arm extends into McPherson County. The dam is located about nine miles northwest of Frederick, South Dakota. WPA funding and labor helped in its construction. From planning and approval in 1936 it took longer than most Brown County dams before completion in 1938 and impoundment of waters in 1939.



Map Elm Dam and Lake

At a joint meeting of the city and county commissions in late August 1936 ideas about an upper Elm River dam surfaced. Such a project would employ 500 heads of families for eight months and, when completed, would conserve run-off water for future use. For a local contribution of less than 10%, the county would secure federal allocations of \$176,000 for labor and \$74,000 for materials. This materials grant was \$22,000 in excess of the regular WPA ratio to man months of labor; therefore, the county proposed to furnish equipment and transportation of labor and guarantee easements estimated at \$12,000.

As in all dams, a planning stage and land easement preceded the actual construction. Ka P. Squire, who had been involved in easement acquisitions for Mina and Richmond Lakes, handled easements for this project. As of early December 1936 he secured easements which eventually cost about \$23,000 but because of bad weather he filed the last easement at the Brown County Register of Deeds in March 1937. The easements fund was supplemented by \$500 from Game and Fish Commission in addition to a previous \$2500 and \$500 from McPherson County. Once easements were secured, they must be approved by WPA officials.

Searching for ways to lessen the county's cost for direct relief, Brown County commissioner Lindboe became a driving force in planning. On July 20, 1936 he envisioned an 800 acre artificial lake with a greater drainage area than that of Willow Creek Dam. He proposed to dam the west branch of the Elm River at a point about ten miles straight west of Frederick. Lindboe estimated that as an employment measure it would involve 400-500 workers. WPA funding would account for labor costs with the county as sponsor paying for machinery and a camp at the dam site.

Beating winter freeze-up was ever in the minds of planners and eventually workers. Certain grunt work could be done in winter but preparatory work such as dam core and spillway excavation needed to be done before water & ground froze. Employment of a work force in winter was a prime objective of the county. The Brown County News of September 23, 1936 reported further details about the proposed dam: the main spillway would be 334 feet high and 150 feet wide with a secondary spillway 300 foot across. The earth and rock dam itself would measure 1000 foot long, 44 foot high and 25 foot across the top. When waters were impounded two islands emerged—one 14 acres and the other 147 acres.

Securing Aberdeen cooperation with the county's project required lengthy negotiations. It was Aberdeen's aim to secure a series of small dams below this large Elm River dam to store water for the city. The WPA rejected the initial proposal of seven such dams. The county planned to accept \$15,000 from the city which would secure water rights to the Elm River Dam waters. The county wanted this money to pay for land options which expired on February 1, 1937. Compromise followed with the city accepting three dams for their \$15,000. Aberdeen demanded the right to select sites of the three dams along with the county temporarily funding the easements until the city raised \$15,000 to secure lake water rights of the top 12 feet. WPA engineer W. R. Edgerton of Mitchell, SD informed the county commission in late January 1937 that this compromise was approved, clearing the way for preliminary work on the project.



Realtor Squire predicted that the 20-mile long lake with its rugged terrain, banks 60 feet high, 40 miles of shoreline and rich Indian lore could harbor a park which could develop into one of the county's most picturesque spots. The county had secured land extending one fourth of a mile in each direction from the dam site--120 acres around the site and 320 acres a half mile upstream from the projected abutment. The county resold 160 acres to the Fish and Game Commission for a refuge. This was in contrast to the Mina and Richmond Dam sites where neighboring private land prevented park development close to the dam.

In February 1937 the way seemed clear for placement of camp buildings to service and feed construction workers and inspection by the state WPA engineer W. R. Edington. As part of the county's sponsorship the WPA required the county to transport laborers to and from the site. However, that was too expensive so the county arranged to build barracks to house workers. Many of the 150- workers were expected to come from completed projects elsewhere such as Mina and Richmond lakes and Aberdeen's street and graveling crews. WPA officials approved Frank Elliot of Webster as foreman at a salary of \$100 per month—one of two candidates recommended by the county commission.

The WPA priority was the main dam rather than the three smaller, concrete, overflow dams which the city so desired. These could wait until spring runoff receded. A sixteen foot section of the existing Westport dam had broken at its spillway due to improper construction for which Mayor Krueger received criticism. This dam would have to wait to store next year's spring runoff.

Plans to begin on Monday February 8, 1937 were blocked by bad weather. Snow-blocked roads prevented a crew of 50 works progress laborers to reach the site. They had planned to construct a garage, tool house and mess hall. Later, snow plows cleared the road and 75 workers were on site. Building materials for the garage, mess hall and tool house came from the county fair grounds and Sand Lake Game Refuge. Workers used materials from five Sand Lake buildings for housing. A Richmond dam building became a mess hall. Project work began February 30, 1937. That September county officials agreed to start the middle one of three proposed new dams below the Frederick dam on the Elm. One was to be situated three miles northwest of Westport at what was called the Caliaghan site (section 3, township 125, range 64).

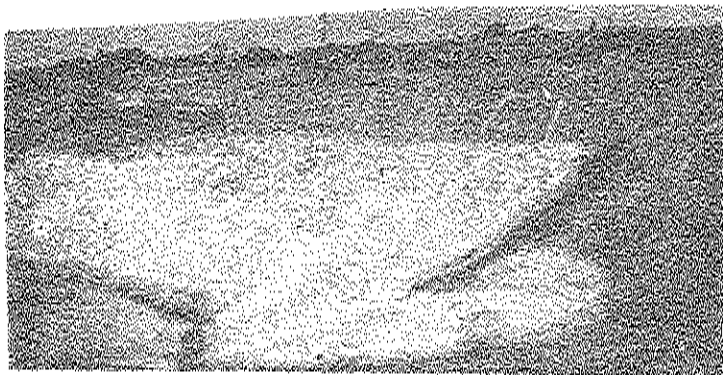
That winter at the primary dam site a two-month struggle between workers and boulders followed. Workers discovered below the dam an underground river which necessitated sinking a core shaft 26 feet deeper than originally planned and

removal of huge rocks, some so large they had to be dynamited before workers could remove them. Eventually they reached shale bedrock 46 feet below the surface. Learning from the lack of sheet piling in Richmond Dam which resulted in seepage and repairs of \$10,000, WPA engineers decided to sink such piling to the strata about 20 feet below ground.

Between February 30, 1937 and June 1938 about 80% of the project was completed. The primary concrete spillway at the east end of the dam was nearing completion. Plans called for a ten-span bridge 124 feet long and 24 feet wide across that spillway. Two bridges, incidental work around the dam, and trimming up the spillway remained undone. About 200 men were employed in June, 1938.

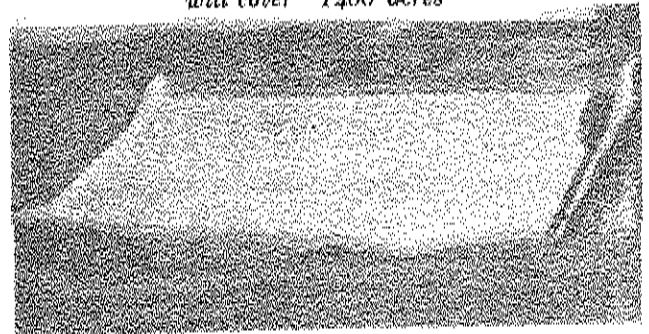
The Brown County News of September 30, 1938 reported the dam "*nearing completion.*" Fill had reached the 30-foot level, a few feet below spillway level. Rip-rapping had reached a few feet below the earth work. The concrete 150 foot apron for the spillway had been completed. Supporting concrete pillars for the highway bridge across the spillway were in place. Four miles north of the dam a long, high grade had been rip-rapped to prevent wave erosion. The 120-foot bridge had yet to be placed there. Outlet pipes were in place at the dam's base. On December 15, 1938 the paper continued to report on "finishing touches." The News indicated 75 workers were still employed in clean up and policing work.

After a subnormal runoff in the winter and spring of 1938-39, the winter and spring of 1939-1940 brought snow and rain to the area enhancing the prospects of fuller reservoirs for the three middle dams as well as the larger Elm and Willow Creek reservoirs. These events assured Aberdeen of 500,000 gallons of soft water. In the immediate future emergency pumping from eyestone pits seemed no longer needed to meet Aberdeen's needs.



*The Elm River Spillway under construction in mid-winter*

*When water flows over this spillway, Elm Lake  
will cover 1400 acres*



**WPA Built Elm River concrete spillway**

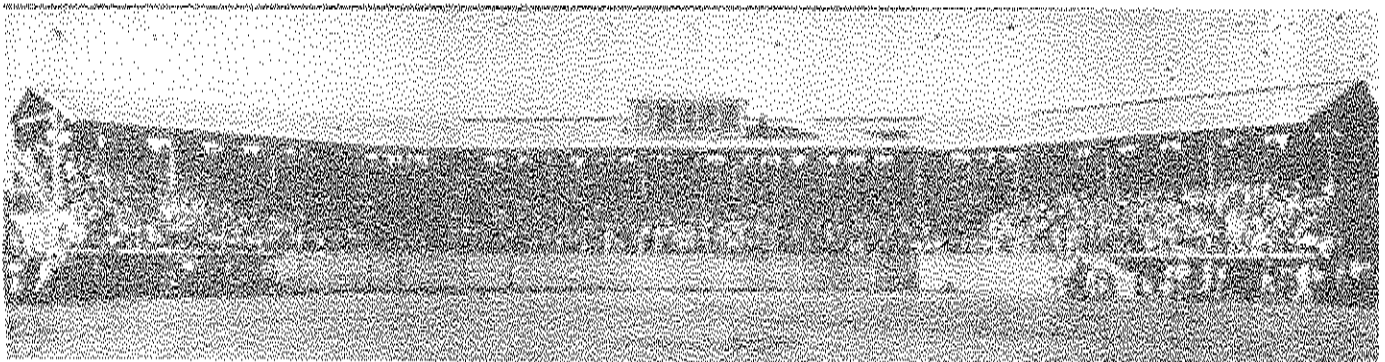
## WPA LEGACIES ABERDEEN'S MUNICIPAL BASEBALL PARK 1936-1968

Aberdeen has been baseball minded since the 1880s. Baseball grandstands and diamonds have come and gone over the decades. The Aberdeen Daily News of May 15, 1889 asserted that "*Nothing creates enthusiasm like baseball and nothing will draw a crowd as continuously as the national game closely contested and honorably played. ....It makes lively times, it advertises the town, it brings people to the city and in many ways stimulates and fosters business.*" It also stimulated rivalry between towns each boosting for its team.

The era of privately owned baseball parks in Aberdeen ended by 1933. The Kreuger brothers' privately owned baseball park opened in mid June 1912. Fence and bleachers were removed from an east side location to the Wylie Park site providing seats for over 1000. Located across the road south of Wylie's Lake Minneho, this baseball center served Aberdeen and the area for many years. The grandstand of 1922 enlarged over that of 1912 housed 2000 people.

By 1933 Aberdeen was without a ball park. In 1935 an Aberdeen group successfully bid for the state amateur baseball tournament which earlier had been hosted by Watertown. Aberdeen activists built a small grandstand on the future Northern State football practice field. That successful tournament generated enthusiasm which resulted in city approval of a new ball park completed as a WPA project in time for the 1936 state amateur baseball tourney.

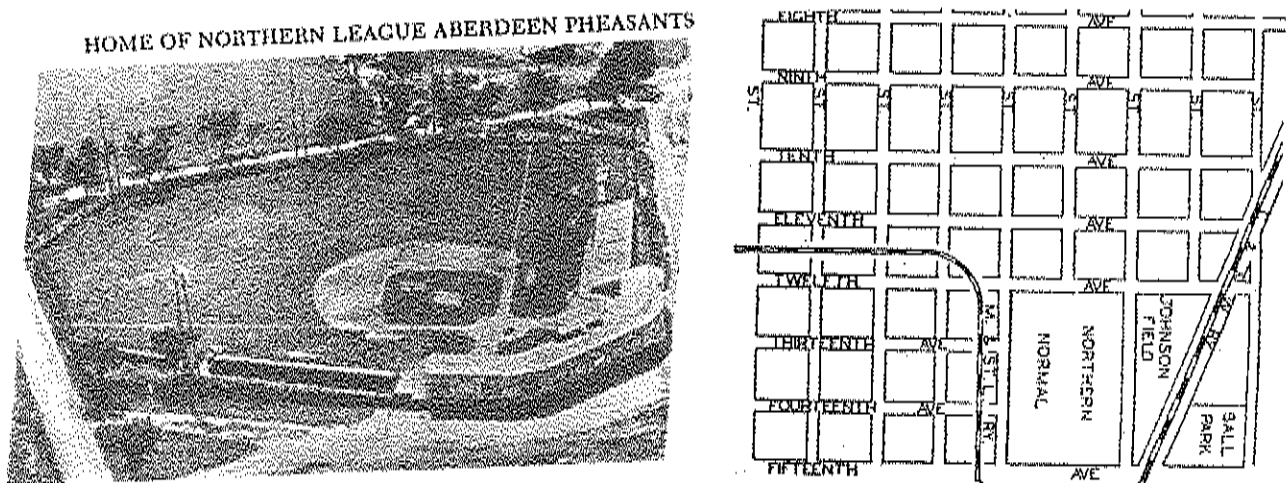
### Crowds Jam Aberdeen New Baseball Park



The \$28,000 Baseball Park and playing field included a large grandstand area, portable bleachers, locker rooms and showers, and broadcasting facilities As

a local sponsor, the city of Aberdeen contributed almost \$8,000 of the total cost. Because Aberdeen had been selected to host the state amateur baseball tournament in September of 1936, construction of the baseball park was rushed. Throughout much of the summer, two crews totaling forty men worked in relay shifts to speed construction. Record crowds attended the seven-day state tournament. With a similar seating capacity along the foul lines, portable bleachers complemented the 2500 seat grandstand. Many considered the ballpark to be one of the best in the nation.

The municipal baseball park was located at the corner of 15th Avenue and State Street. That site was east of the Chicago Northwestern Railroad tracks which ran through the northeastern edge of the Normal school campus. To the southwest was Johnson field--operative since 1915 through early 1970--a site of many football games a baseball diamond and grandstand seating 2000 at the north end. There were two entrances to the new grandstands with a ticket office concession space between the two. A radio broadcast booth stands alone above the grandstand. A board fence topped by barbed wire enclosed the park.



1946 Aerial View with NSTC- --Campus location grid in relation to near-by Johnson Field

The building of the baseball park was linked to building of the National Guard Armory located on Third Ave. SW between First and Second streets. Trucks carted dirt excavated from the Armory basement site to grade the park's diamond. Street Superintendent John Buck and a small crew graded the grounds. On Saturday May 16, 1936 a small crew of WPA laborers began laying a water service to the grandstand site and a drainage line from the baseball diamond to the storm sewer.

A shortage of labor and materials sometimes delayed action. A three-week requisition time for material used in the part of the building above the foundation was a factor impeding progress. A headline of August 8, 1936 announced "New Baseball Park to be ready for Tourney" WPA officials predicted on August 7 that the park should be ready by September 1 to 8 if all lumber arrived by August 15. City Foreman Clocksin declared that "only shingles of the grandstand roof would be uncompleted by September 1 and confirmed WPA statements that this was conditional on arrival of planking for seats by mid August.

The grandstand foundations were laid with materials on hand and with current laborers to speed up the process and meet the tournament deadline of September 1936. On August 8 24 men worked on the project and five more were rushed to complete the playing field. District WPA Director Joe D. Foran announced on Friday August 7 that the fence is "virtually completed, all the framework, all concrete work but the floor to the grandstand and a portion of the roof are in place." Counteracting rumors, he declared that they had four carloads of lumber on the grounds and had not laid off one single laborer. They're working on the roof now and unless something unforeseen develops, the park will be completed in time." He was willing to put on double shifts of men to work until dark if necessary but probably he would not have to resort to this drastic measure.

The significance of this baseball park may be seen in the events that took place in the years after construction. Varied advertisements reflect ballpark activities. The American Legion Convention booklet of July 10-13, 1938 contains a photo of the new Municipal Baseball Park where a world championship wrestling match along with drum and bugle corps competitions were held that summer. An advertisement of June 2, 1939 announced an Elks-sponsored event :the bearded House of David vs. New Orleans Stars a Negro team and the personal appearance of an 1936 Olympic woman champion—all for 55 cents. The city base ball park of 1936 boosted American Legion baseball activities. The Sidney L. Smith post fielded great teams and hosted several state and regional tournaments. In 1964 Aberdeen hosted the American Legion World Series. Aberdeen proved to be a hub for state baseball .The amateur tournament thrived until World War II dampened such activities. Tournaments ran for as long as ten days drawing overflow crowds. The Aberdeen Pheasants worked out as a Class C minor league team, an arrangement which lasted for 26 years. Games were started at 5:30 p.m. because there were no lights in the ball park at that time. Later, the Pheasants raised funds for lights. Team victories made 1947 a noteworthy year in the ball park's history. The Pheasants won 17 of their first 19 home games. The Aberdeen Preds, became the dominant team in amateur competition.

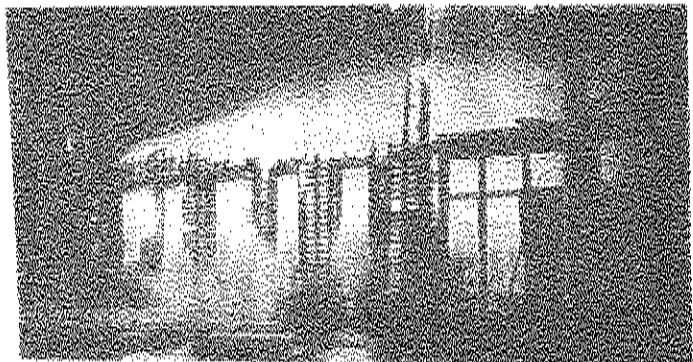


After World War II, professional baseball returned to Aberdeen when the city received a Northern League franchise. The most exciting phase of postwar baseball was the 26-year period (1946-1971) when the Aberdeen Pheasants operated in the Municipal Ball Park where future major league stars performed before area fans who flocked to see them. After each Pheasant game the American News contained a cartoon sketch of Philbert, the pheasant, in varied stages of gloom and joy depending on the score of each Aberdeen game.

Average attendance at Pheasant games in 1946-through 1948 was 70,000 a year with a peak audience of over 96,000 in 1949. Minor league baseball suffered attendance declines during the 1950s due in part to television and, travel opportunities to other recreation centers. Between 1950 and 1958 the team had one profitable season in 1956. On August 3, 1951 fire destroyed the Municipal Ball Park grandstand. The park had been jammed by an unusually large crowd prior to the fire. Temporary facilities enabled fans and team to finish the season. In fall 1951 voters approved a \$65,000 bond issue for a new grandstand, which was constructed in spring 1952. Thus the life of the WPA financed grandstand had been about 16 years.



**Philbert shows his temper**



**Grandstand Fire of August 3, 1951**

In 1968 the state purchased the 9.4 acre site of the city ball park east of the campus for \$175,000. This money helped pay for a city and university multi purpose stadium, football and baseball field in northeastern Aberdeen. In the early 1980s the Barnett physical center and football practice field occupied the Municipal Ball Park site. Aerial views were taken of the campus and the fenced municipal ball park in 1939, 1962 and 1968. The social and economic impact of that site made it a landmark which in 2005 only lingers in the memory of area residents. In the S.D Writer's Project booklet "Aberdeen: A Middle Border City" published in 1940 the writer noted the city baseball park: "Sports, especially baseball, draw highly partisan crowds. An excellent baseball field and grandstand erected in 1937 with federal aid, attracts large crowds during the season."

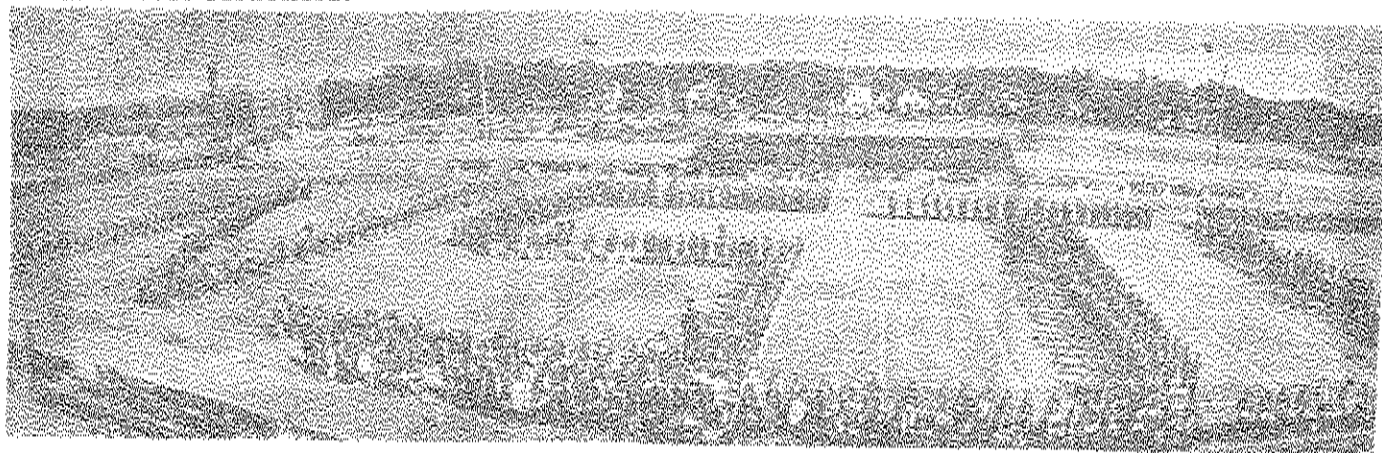


## WPA LEGACY SIMMONS JR. HIGH ATHLETIC FIELD BLEACHERS 1937-1976

Another sports field on Aberdeen's south side owed expanded seating capacity in the mid 1930s to WPA funding. In December 1936 the Aberdeen school board resolved to build a combination bleachers and dressing room at 4<sup>th</sup> St. SE adjacent to the 1926 Simmons Junior High School. Overcrowded locker usage at Simmons by 150 students was one justification for this action. Equally as urgent was the need to ease unemployment as many common and semi-skilled laborers were idle because of delay in the Moccasin Creek project. The school board estimated the project's cost at \$7000 for materials plus \$300 for skilled labor. The project required purchase of cement and construction of a frame building which housed two dressing rooms, a training room, coaches office and a furnace room. About 350 lockers were ordered for the dressing rooms. The Board envisioned bleacher capacity at 2500. Of course, this was possible only with WPA funding.

A crew of 14 men began work in mid March 1937 on this \$21,000 WPA project which was completed in 1938. Located on the west side of Simmons field, the structure was 184 feet long, 38 feet wide and 26 feet high. The former west-field bleachers were moved to the east side of the field increasing seating to 2600. The school district spent \$10,965 and the WPA \$9,984.00 on this project.

For 29 years this legacy of the WPA provided sports fan a gathering place to socialize and cheer their teams and to view other staged events. This became a site for Northern State Teachers College evening football games as well as a site used in various ways by the public schools. In the fall of each year during Gypsy Day marching bands from various area schools displayed their formations on this field. At the 1952 event some two dozen marching bands performed at half time on Simmons Field during the football game. The photo below shows over 900 musicians practicing the NSTC formation about 1953 on the field between the east and west bleachers.



**NSTC Band Formation on Simmons Field**

In time this field's facilities became outdated. Safety issues arose due to the large attendance that marked Northern games. Its seating capacity of less than 4000 could not meet demand. Thus, college and city cooperation in the move by 1977 to Swisher Field—a move made possible by funds received by the city's earlier sale of the municipal ball park to the state.

**WPA LEGACY  
ABERDEEN'S NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY  
116 3<sup>RD</sup> Ave. SW  
1936-37-1964**

Nationally armories were amongst the numerous structures built with the help of WPA funds and matched with a sponsor's contribution on the local level. In Aberdeen momentum for an auditorium contributed to a drive to secure an armory as the next best way to meet space needs not provided by existing school gyms and the municipal building's third floor auditorium. Previously, federal officials had removed a city auditorium from the priority list of the WPA. A primary motivation also was pride in the state's National Guard service and the need for training and recruitment facilities for the soldiers. Capt. C.R. Wilson of Aberdeen's National Guard recognized the existence of auditorium yearnings and that the armory could not fully meet that need. He asserted in early 1936 *"We are not trying to take advantage of sentiment favorable to any auditorium to secure the armory. The armory could not supply the auditorium need."*

Prior to building, several challenges related to land title, funding and tax claims arose. First, the congress had to approve new funding for the Works Progress Administration beyond June 30, 1936. President Roosevelt had requested \$1,500,000,000 for the next fiscal year. Aberdonians and District WPA officials assumed this funding would be approved. Although local level efforts to raise matching funds must proceed, WPA director J. D. Foran frequently pointed out that the armory project was contingent upon upcoming congressional appropriations.

In February 1936 district WPA engineer Glenn Matteson informed Aberdeen that the state office had conditionally approved a double allocation for a two-unit armory in the city. Therefore, the city commission authorized Mayor I.N. Douglas to instruct architect J. W. Henry to draw plans for an armory-auditorium costing \$125,000. PWA authorization would be final once the city passed a bond issue for their share of the costs. A bond issue for \$62,500 was scheduled as match

for federal funds. WPA wage scales had been increased by about 25% since the original proposal. So a larger figure seemed justified. The mayor had favored a \$75,000 bond issue to offset "lost efficiency" in using WPA labor rather than contracting more skilled workers.

In April 1936 an armory vote passed by a margin of six votes. Electoral votes revealed that 2,379 favored a special levy for \$11,500 to supplement a \$25,000 federal grant while 2,179 voted no. There were 188 spoiled or blank ballots which reduced the majority vote. The vote called for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mill special levy in 1937 to raise the \$11,500 to be paid to the state military board for armory construction.

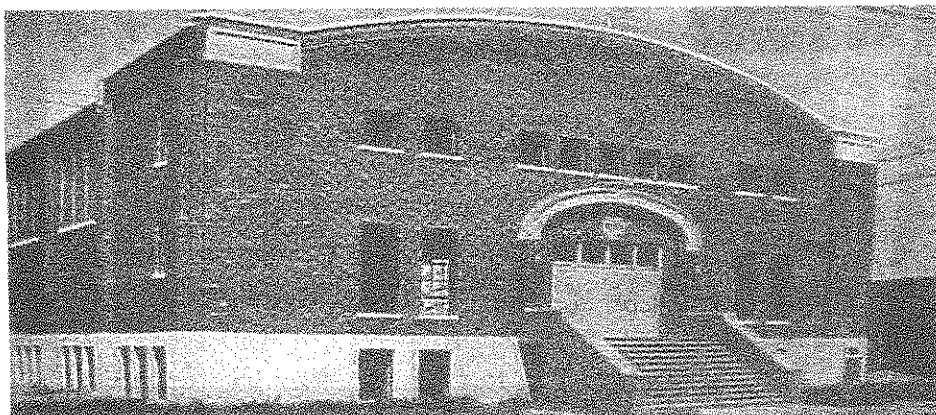
On Tuesday June 2, 1936 the city council approved a resolution to borrow \$11,000 at 4.50% interest for the sponsor's contribution. The legality of this move was questioned but the State Attorney General Walter Conway reassured them. Cash for repayment could be arranged at the time of drafting the next annual budget. They should not rely on the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mill levy voted in April. Therefore, the city commission declared it would secure money from a local bank removing the last obstacle to immediate construction of the armory.

Payment of delinquent school taxes on the armory site needed resolution. The county had agreed to donate the site—lots 7 to 10, 142' by 200' at Third Avenue SW and Second Street-- since the city legally could not appropriate to secure that site. On June 12, 1936 the Evening News reported that \$2000 more was needed to assure an armory. This included \$825 to pay a delinquent tax bill against the site. A rather involved process followed.

On June 24 the Evening News reported that school attorney George Fletcher suggested "*the school board could lease the armory building for a period from two to five years for the amount of \$825, the structure to be used to house school functions when the school auditorium or gymnasium were not available. The sum would be paid to the military board, which in turn would turn the amount to the county treasurer. The treasurer's office then would pay off the delinquent tax bill.*" By July 6, 1936 the city had cleared title to the land. However, a paving tax of \$500.95 remained. Nevertheless, this did not impede construction. The city also paid J. W. Henry \$500 for drawing plans and specifications. A possible delay in construction lurked in availability of laborers to work on the site when needed as they might be employed in other construction activity, such as Richmond Dam. However, WPA officials thought laborers would be free by the time armory construction started several weeks or a month later.

On Tuesday June 23 excavation of the site began. On the morning of Wednesday June 24, 1936 a work crew and trucks removed dirt from the basement of this future 78' 120 foot building. This preliminary work began before formal and final WPA approval which was promised soon after the state's WPA fiscal year funding was determined. That dirt was used to assist grading the new municipal ball park at State Street and 15th Ave. According to the Evening News July 20, 1936 district WPA officials requisitioned cement for the foundation of the armory through its Watertown procurement office.. The Evening News of December 2, 1936 described the armory application which categorized the building as a one-story, semi fireproof brick, 75' by 121 structure to be completed by January 1, 1937. Photos indicate that this "one story" armory building has the appearances of a two-story building. However it has a full basement and the main floor has high ceilings with windows lighting the interior making it seem more like two stories.

WPA, state and city officials gathered at the Armory for dedication on October 18, 1937. Forty-seven year old Harry Hopkins, national WPA administrator on a western tour, checked on conditions which might impact the WPA relief program. He came to Aberdeen on the Great Northern train arriving at 9:55a.m.. That day he toured the airport, the city baseball park, Simmons athletic stadium, Riverside Park and cemetery, Richmond Dam and the armory. Escorted by color guard and the municipal band the auto caravan proceeded from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue east to Main Street and then to the Armory. On the previous Saturday seats were installed in the armory for 2000 persons with an amplifying system so persons outside the armory might hear. That afternoon an estimated 2600 people crowded into the armory to hear Hopkins; the overflow audience heard him through the sound system.



Two National Guard units and local organizations used the Armory, which had a 1,800 seating capacity. After over 61,000 man-hours, WPA director Harry Hopkins visited Aberdeen on 13 September 1937 to help dedicate the building.

**Aberdeen's new National Guard Armory 1937-1964**

Aside from housing National Guard equipment and serving as a year-round training place, the building was used by various Aberdeen groups. A boxed advertisement of March 9, 1937 featured an auction sale of furniture at the Armory Building on Saturday March 13. Advertised as three blocks west of the Sherman Hotel, the armory serviced five annual Kiwanis pancake days 1953-1957----March, 1953; January 15 and 16, 1954 , March 1955 ; April 5 and 6, 1957

## HEADLIGHT

### Adjusting School

Under Direction of S. D. Motor Vehicle Dept.

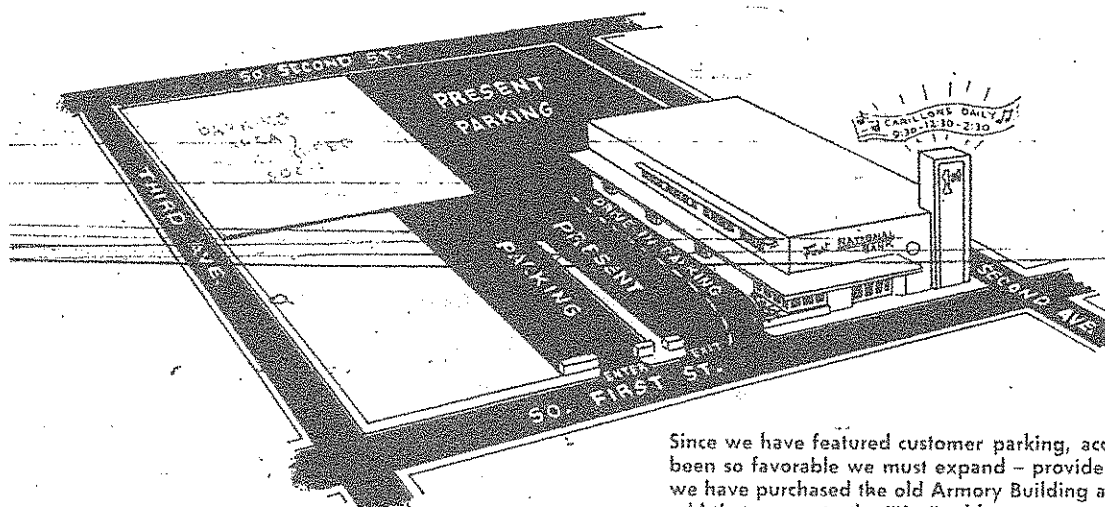
### ABERDEEN ARMORY

**Saturday, July 23rd - 10 A. M.**

Everyone planning on doing headlight adjusting work next season **MUST** attend this session to qualify for their license.

Armory Usage Evening News ad July 21, 1938

The National Guard used the Armory extensively during the war years of the 1940s and 1950s. guardsmen spent the first ten days of active duty at this spot. Men underwent physical examinations, up-dated their records and boxed equipment. On December 5, 1940 men in the Aberdeen units joined other units of the 147<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment to board troop trains bound for Camp Ord, California. On September 1, 1950 members of Headquarters Company and Company E reported to the Armory. They remained there ten days for processing and receiving equipment. . On September 1, 1953 Aberdeen became the home station of Regimental Headquarters Co. and Company E.



Since we have featured customer parking, acceptance has been so favorable we must expand - provide more of it. we have purchased the old Armory Building and will soon add that corner to the "Yes" address.

1964 brings expanded parking, a continuation of our Drive-In Window Service and 4% interest\* at the Full-Service First.

**Old Armory Site purchased by First National Bank 1964**

In 1964 this Armory site became a part of the First National Bank's parking and drive in area in the southwest corner intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave SE and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. That bank had moved from the corner of South Main St and 2d Ave SE to the corner site on 2d Ave and First Street SW previously occupied by Lust Chevrolet Auto Sales and Services in the late 1950s. A First National sketch of January 26, 1964 dramatically illustrated the newly purchased armory site which was slated for additional parking. An Aberdeen Wrecking Co. ad of April 1, 1964 announced the beginning of the armory's demolition and listed salvage materials which the public could buy cheaply. This list provides insight into the interior contents of an armory. Since 1964 a new armory occupies land at 115 South Roosevelt Street

**We Have Started To Dismantle The  
ARMORY BUILDING**  
The Following Salvage—Lumber and Materials  
Will Be Sold At Bldg. Site At Bargain Prices  
Come Now. Buy For Delivery In A Few Days

<b>OAK FLOORING</b> 2x10-14 Ft. 2 In. Will Be Sold Cheap	<b>2 Steel Vents</b> Overhead Doors 12 Ft. W.-11 Ft. H. Some with Hardware Some Without	<b>LOOK</b> 5 Laminated Stringers By 2 1/2" Long 10 In. x 12 In. They Supported A Roof So x 125 Ft. Without Uprates	<b>20—Ordinary Doors</b>	<b>HEATING PLANT</b> HOT WATER EXPRESS — 40 HORSE WATER TUBE — STEEL BOILER Installed New About 7 Years Ago Gas Burner With Oil Stand By Large Circulating Pump — All In Good Working Condition. Installation cost \$12,000 If You Need This Type Of Equipment, Investigate Now — It Must Be Sold.	Limited Amount 2x10—14 Ft. to 16 Ft. 2x12—14 Ft. to 18 Ft. 2x14—14 Ft. to 18 Ft.
<b>STAIR CASES</b> 2—15" Stairs 2—7" Stairs 1—9" Stairs 1—4' Stairs	<b>6—Door Stops</b> Heavy Duty	<b>364 Pieces</b> 2x8—18 Ft. Long Excellent	<b>210—Pieces</b> 2x8—Length 21 Ft. Like New	<b>10—Hot Water Wall Radiators</b> Medium Size	<b>Fluorescent Lights</b> 8 Ft.—Slim Line Single & Double
<b>210</b> 4x8 Nuwood Sheets	<b>150</b> Ceiling Tile—3 Ft.x1 Ft.	<b>364 Pieces</b> 2x6—18 Ft. Long Like New	<b>300 Ft.—4 Inch</b> Eave Troughs and Down Spouts	<b>5—Space Heaters</b> Hot Water	<b>Steel Frame</b> Windows 15—3x4 1/2 Ft. 10—3x6 Ft. 11—3x3 Ft. 30—21x3 Ft. 19—4 1/2x3 Ft.
<b>ABERDEEN WRECKING CO.</b>	<b>14 In. I Beams</b> 150 Ft. Good Lengths Like New	<b>300 Ft.—4 Inch</b> Eave Troughs and Down Spouts	<b>5 Toilet Seats</b> 2 Lavatories 4 Urinals 6 Shower Heads	<b>100 Ft. 1 1/4" Pipe</b> 400 Ft. 1" Pipe 300 Ft. 4" Pipe	<b>The Ideal Window</b> For Masonry Bldgs.

Ph. 225-5750 Demolition Site 3rd Ave. S. W. At 2nd St.

### Armory Salvage Sale Prior to Demolition April 1964

### RICHMOND DAM, LAKE AND PARK 1934-1938 FROM DREAM TO REALITY

Motivated by successful efforts to create Mina Dam in neighboring Edmunds County, Brown County planners set their sights on building a large dam within the county. Impounding the natural flow of Foote Creek and run-off from seasonal snow and rain storms would meet popular conservation goals as well as provide the setting for a shaded park and recreational activity. A further refinement appeared later in the form of a youth camp and lodge to more fully utilize the lake setting.



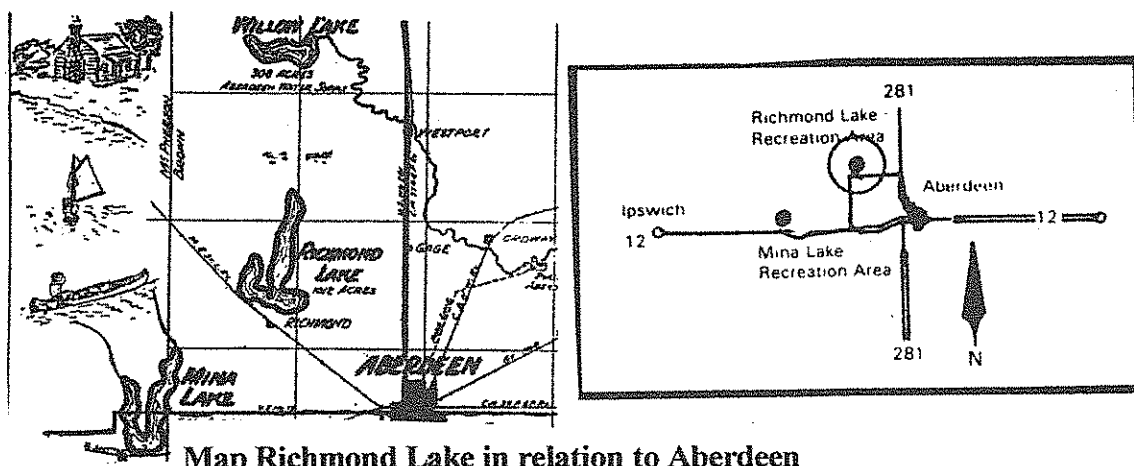
The newly organized Civic Association in April 1934 focused on the Richmond Dam project. A Brown County delegation, spearheaded by county commissioner Alfred Lindboe, traveled to Pierre in mid April 1934 to once again submit for state approval the Richmond Dam project. Governor Berry approved the project as a federal relief job. However, land easements must be obtained at an estimated cost of \$6000.00. Planners envisioned a project extending over two or three years so it could provide jobs for the unemployed when other relief projects were completed. Originally, planners envisioned reliance on hand and team labor rather than on trucks and tractors so that it would give more opportunity for common laborers to secure relief work especially in the winter.

Having focused on a worthwhile project, easements to secure ownership of the land were the next step before excavations could begin. City and county agreed to share equally in purchase of 320 acres at the juncture of the two arms of the basin behind the proposed dam. Their agreement with the state required leaving the Foote Creek channel open until arrangements had been made for the concrete spillway. Resolving the spillway issue appeared to be costly. Planners hoped to either secure a designation of their project as work relief or foist cost of materials on the CCC by proposing a CCC camp for Richmond dam. They believed that the CCC provided materials when their workers were involved. In the meantime certain work proceeded after most easements were secured.

Engineer Mannes estimated that about 200 men could be employed on about 80 percent earthwork activity which had previously been approved. He calculated to build the 1400 foot embankment berm along Foote Creek bottom 105,630 man-hours and 103,000 team hours of labor were needed. This forty-four foot high dam --with a 228 feet base in thickness tapering to 28 feet at the top-- would rise to build up Richmond reservoir. Across this dam workers would build a 28-foot wide road. To handle emergency floodwaters the plan provided for an auxiliary spillway at the south end containing ten lines of 30 inch pipe embedded in concrete. Draining 150 square miles, the dam's impounded water would reach an estimated depth averaging at 15 feet and a maximum depth of 32 feet. The lake would cover about 1011 acres and hold about four billion gallons of water. Excluding the concrete spillway, the dam would cost \$67,174.50

A week later on May 17 the American News editorial labeled this project as a means to free the county from the entire relief burden. With the Mina dam completed and the city waterworks half done, there would be 800 men in Aberdeen unemployed during the winter. He alerted his readers about labor trends: "*Contrary to the general belief work relief is becoming scarce, especially for Aberdeen where*

*all work relief road projects have been completed.*" Commissioner Lindboe was confronted with the option of increased county/city costs for direct relief or of finding a new project eligible for federal work relief—Richmond Dam which has the double benefit of helping the unemployed and providing lasting benefits. The editorial endorsed the drive for \$6000 to purchase easements. Calling refusal to donate money for easements an *"economic blunder"*, the editor characterized giving up \$100,000 in federal funds and the opportunity to create the state's largest artificial lake is *"penny wise and pound foolish."* Land easements were secured except for two crucial tracts which eventually went to the courts for condemnation proceedings. However, city and county arrived at a negotiated settlement enabling landowner Anton Mittelberger to avoid the stigma of condemnation which had awarded him \$3200. He received \$2000 for acreage flooded and gave up a twelve-foot margin around the lake. In return the city/county abandoned the park idea using stretches of his land; they purchased land elsewhere for park purposes.



Map Richmond Lake in relation to Aberdeen

Intermittently, the press issued progress reports on Richmond dam. Construction continued on undisputed land. A July 7, 1934 report indicated crews varying from 35 to 75 were at the site daily on preliminary work. Summer tasks were limited so that the county could employ more workers during the winter. A late July and early August release on dam construction indicated that it was a work relief project and an average crew of 50 was at the site daily. During the pre-winter months supervisors found it necessary to deviate from the original hand-and-team labor strategy to reliance on trucks in order to finish preliminary work so other workers could be employed in the winter. A shortage of feed also made team labor impractical. In order to secure motorized equipment special fundraising occurred such as a movie at the Orpheum Theater. A November 8 news release explained the situation: *"Because of the shortage of feed and the poor conditions of horse flesh, the committee has found it necessary to purchase about \$2,000 in equipment, mostly trucks, in order to get the Richmond dam far enough along so that relief*

*labor may be employed there all winter. More work must be provided for relief workers on FERA payrolls to keep them from becoming dependent upon county taxes for relief."* The average 75 daily workers should increase to 200-300 when two factors interacted: use of motorized equipment and release of other laborers from other relief projects in the county.

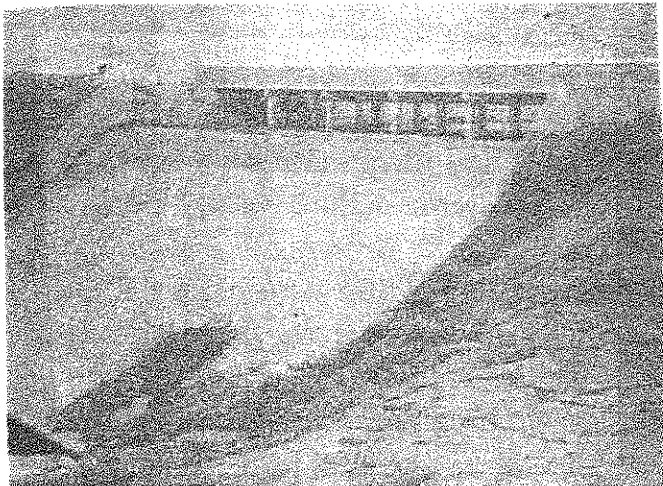
The Richmond dam committee paid \$3375 for four trucks and a tractor. Both city and county promised three trucks. An expected ten trucks eventually were used. A garage was built to house trucks and old furnaces donated to keep the garage warm. The county furnished coal to keep the garage warm. A press item of November 26, 1934 summarized progress thus far: *"Already the core of the dam has been cleaned out and workers have started filling it in with clay. All sod has been removed from the base so that work can continue during cold weather unhindered. Workers also have been at work gathering stones which will be used later for rip-rapping and which will be hauled to the dam site during cold winter"*.

With the end of FERA relief labor, the project eventually became a WPA project. The winter of 1935-36 was a period of intense and protracted cold followed by a February storm delaying work. The Northwest Journal of February 28, 1936 noted resumption of work as a WPA project: *"Workers have been kept at work for forming spillway concrete, rip-rapping the dam and driving piling for the proposed bridge over the spillway. Approximately 160 men were employed."* A WPA deadline loomed for July 1, 1936 and engineer Matteson predicted work to be completed by that time. The project required removal of 157,000 yards of dirt and 5000 yards of rock in rip-rapping the face of the dam.

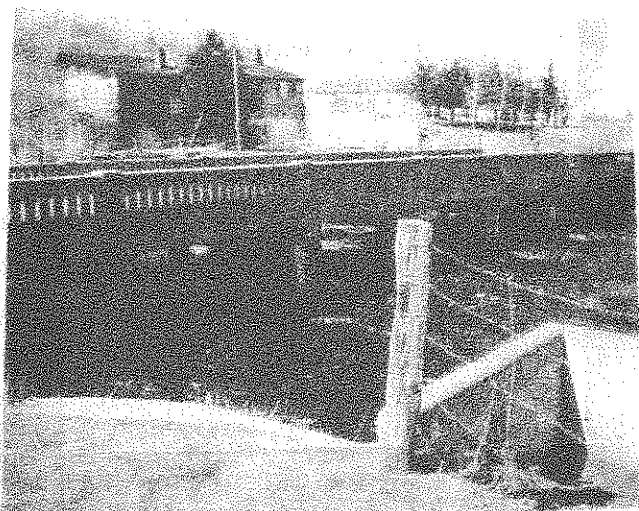
Impoundment of waters behind the completed dam was the next stage in the Richmond Project. All eyes were on the gradually rising waters in spring 1937. Viewers longed to see an overflow of spillways at Mina and Richmond dams. Press editorials encouraged public anticipation of that time when lake waters rose and spillways overflowed. The Evening News of March 11, 1937 urged its readers to *"turn out by the thousands at the lakes and feast the eyes on the unusual scene" when spillways overflow. Water had been flowing into the lakes for a whole week and if spring rains came hopefully the lakes would overflow."*

By April 13, 1937 the Evening News editor suggested a new title for Aberdeen: *"The Lake Resort City"* and commented on the lake-minded citizens: *By the thousands they flocked Sunday to Richmond, Mina and Willow to see with their own eyes the widely publicized expanses which have been created behind all the dams by the melting snow. ..all thirsting for a sight of running water; a sight*

*has been more or less denied them for several years. Their eyes were greeted by more water than the county has seen for a decade."* Richmond waters lapped about eight feet below the spillway compared to Mina's five feet under the overflow point.



*An excellent highway passes over the Richmond Dam spillway*



**1938-1940**

**1970's**

#### **Highway Bridge over the Richmond Dam Spillway**

#### **TRANSFORMATION OF BARREN SHORES INTO PARKLAND**

The Brown County commission acquired about 160 acres along the lake shore for park purposes. The city and county jointly contributed about \$1200. The Game & Fish Commission gave about \$1,000 and the Civic Association committee raised the remaining \$5500 to purchase land. The county commission had hired John Rosette to be Richmond Dam foreman at a monthly salary of \$125. He supervised National Youth Administration youth to work in planting 2300 trees and 1000 seedlings while a WPA project was being drafted. Commissioner John Lindboe's vision of the park included a graveled bathing beach, a bathhouse with shower baths, driveways, and fencing which would employ at least 25 men. In July 1937 he submitted WPA proposals which included the water tank dismantling, transportation 33 miles and reconstruction at the park. The total estimated cost for landscaping the 120 acres and removal of the Tacoma Park tank was \$20,000. The county's share was \$2,733.88 and agreement to pay the project foreman.

As in all such proposals an estimate of laborers to be employed was included---an average of 58 men with 378 man-months of labor. One proposal featured moving a Tacoma Park redwood water tank capable of holding 80,000 gallons, along with a small pump house and a seven horsepower gasoline engine to Richmond Park area to provide water for the trees already planted and for servicing

the future bathhouse. Months passed. Finally, on Monday January 24, 1938 twenty-two workers began dismantling of the Tacoma Park water tank and transported it to the park at a cost of \$2500. Reconstruction of the tank began at the end of February 1938. In the spring park development continued. A crew of about fifty men built a wood bath house with concrete flooring and with two wings-- one for men's and one for women's showers and dressing rooms. This, along with gravelling 200-foot lake front beach cost \$4500. They terraced several small hills, built and graveled roadways, set out additional trees and built a wire fence around the park. They built a boat landing which cost \$12,000.

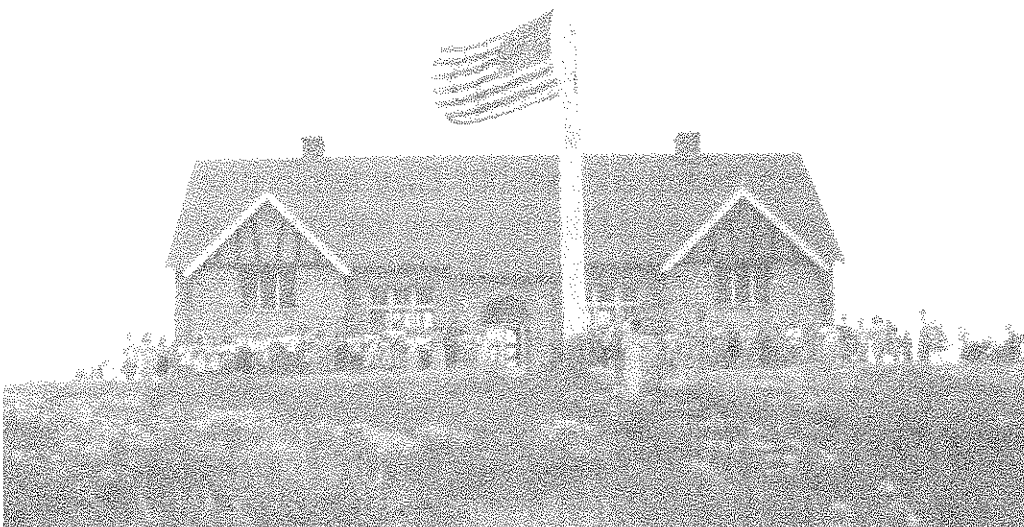


**Richmond Park Tree Planting 1938**

#### **RICHMOND COMMUNITY YOUTH BUILDING & CAMP 1938-1940**

A third development that enriched the park setting was a WPA project with an estimated cost of \$27,718 for a community youth building and development of a recreational camp on the north side of the lake. Brown County assumed sponsorship of the project. The camp idea originated with the boy scouts and was supported by Mrs. H. C. Behrens desire to memorialize her deceased husband. A crew of 45 began preliminary work on the site which was situated directly across from the south shore's main park. By April 1939 the walls had reached the six-foot level and work had started on the water system. Located on a newly treed fifteen acre plot on a high bluff at the point where the northern lake branch joins the main lake body, this 40' by 80' structure featured two levels on each end with sleeping quarters on this second floor. The main hall--56' x 41'--occupied the first floor with a stone fireplace at each end and the neighboring assembly room housed a third fireplace. A kitchen, office and storeroom occupied the other end of the first floor. Below ground lay a 12' x 12' basement. Lake water formed a natural inlet. There workers built a boat landing.





The Richmond Youth Camp Community House was built by the Federal Works Projects Administration and dedicated on 29 September 1940. Richmond Lake became one of the state's largest man-made lakes until construction of dams along the Missouri River. Below is the Community House as it appeared in 2005. The facility continues to be used by numerous groups for special camps and retreats.



Brown County's share of the Richmond Dam project cost came in the form of materials and land, which were donated by area manufacturers and distributors, donations by Brown County residents, and proceeds from benefit movies.

**Community House Building 1940**

**Community House Building 2005**



On Sunday September 29, 1940 over 300 people gathered to dedicate the building. Fish and Game Department director J. W. Cluett asserted that this building and camp was a positive contribution to a more wholesome environment and attractive out-of-doors. Mrs. Behrens spoke of those who had shown vision which benefited the present and future: generations: Vision, faith and work represent the "dynamic power that has changed our mode of life in the last four decades" Those who created artificial lakes had a vision born in the hardships of drought years. "She then quoted verse: suggesting creation of a legacy:" *Say not their work is done, No deed of love or goodness ever dies/But in the lives of others multiplies./Say it is just begun.*"

## Invitation

WORKS PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

BROWN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

CITY OF ABERDEEN COMMISSIONERS

RICHMOND LAKE CAMP COMMITTEE

*invite you and your friends to the dedication*

*of their camp at Richmond Lake on*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1940

*at Two O'clock P. M.*

*The building and grounds will be open for*

*your inspection from Ten A. M. until*

*after the dedication.*

RICHMOND LAKE YOUTH CAMP COMMITTEE

S. L. KIRKPATRICK	President
W. L. BUTLER	Vice-President
CLAYTON WALKER	Secretary-Treasurer
J. G. BARGER	KA SQUIRE
DR. H. R. DARLING	C. R. MOREY
	MRS. H. C. BEHRENS

## PROGRAM

### DEDICATION

#### RICHMOND LAKE PARK AND YOUTH CAMP

March "The Thunderer"	John Phillip Sousa
March "King Cotton"	John Phillip Sousa
Aberdeen High School Band	
Flag Raising	Boy Scouts
Opening	S. L. Kirkpatrick
President Behrens Youth Camp Committee	
Invocation	Reverend Morris Bone
Pastor Presbyterian Church	
"God Bless America"	Irving Berlin
Aberdeen High School Band	
History of Richmond Lake	Ka Squire
President, Richmond Lake Committee	
History of Richmond Lake Park	John B. Forsting
Chairman, Brown County Board	
History Behrens Richmond Lake Youth Camp	W. L. Butler
Vice-President, Behrens Youth Camp Committee	
Presentation of the Park and Camp to Brown County and City of Aberdeen	M. A. Kennedy
State Director of WPA, Mitchell, South Dakota	
Acceptance of Park and Camp	John B. Forsting
Chairman of County Board, for Brown County	
Ira Krueger, Mayor, for City of Aberdeen	
March "Black Jack"	Fred K. Huffer
Aberdeen High School Band	
Conservation in South Dakota	J. W. Cluett
State Director of Game and Fish, Pierre, S. D.	
H. C. Behrens Memorial	Mrs. H. C. Behrens
Benediction	Reverend Father H. Hoerner
Pastor, St. Mary's Church	
"Star Spangled Banner"	Francis Scott Key
Aberdeen High School Band	

### Youth Camp Dedication Program September 29 1940

## PRESERVATION OF URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH PWA & WPA

### MINOR NEW DEAL & WPA CAMPUS PROGRAMS

The WPA continued to aid Northern State Teachers College by remodeling and improving the campus environment in the years 1939-1941. Final approval came in January 1941 to assist repair of the Industrial Arts Building. This project also included remodeling and moving the greenhouse, building two tennis courts,

seeding grass, planting hedges and installing curb on the athletic field. This work expected to employ 50 men for six months. The WPA supplemented the college's \$7,010 contribution with a grant of \$17,972 making the total package \$24,982. The college received credit for materials on hand which reduced their cash share and the regents' appropriation of \$1405 helped toward the sponsor's share. In the months following workers placed a new roof on the Industrial Arts building and made electrical improvements and interior repairs. In order to improve passage of fire trucks along college sidewalks the WPA funded another \$5,359 to widen those walks and to install fire hydrants. Legislative appropriation enabled Northern to match WPA funds with \$4000.

There were instances when campus efforts to secure federal assistance were unsuccessful. In September 1938 President Lawrence submitted to the WPA a request to rebuild portions of Old Central but the regents rejected that project and would not provide the required sponsorship money. However, later the college came up with the sponsor's share for repairing, remodeling and decorating old Central. This project also included landscaping Seymour Hall, painting Johnson field grandstand and hauling dirt to improve the football field—an eight month job for 15-40 men. It was completed before the Industrial Arts project began.

Evidence that the WPA was on student minds appeared in the Exponent of January 26, 1939. The Newman club advised couples to wear old clothes for a Friday W.P.A costume Dance in Spafford Gym. The American News and the Broadcast Journal impressed on the minds of their readers that in the state at week's end--June 14, 1939,--11,669 men and 2,216 women had been employed through WPA. The press cautioned that the state was nearing an expected decline in WPA employment as there was a trend to rely more on private employment. Effective August 1, 1939 some could be dropped for 30 days from WPA rolls after an uninterrupted 18-month period of federal employment. Workers were requested to seek private employment before reapplying for any WPA opportunities. In early march 1939 WPA administrators declared that for every federal dollar spent 86 cents went directly into the hands of workers in the form of wages and about 3 cents went to administrative expenses while the balance of about 11 cents paid for materials and equipment for work projects.

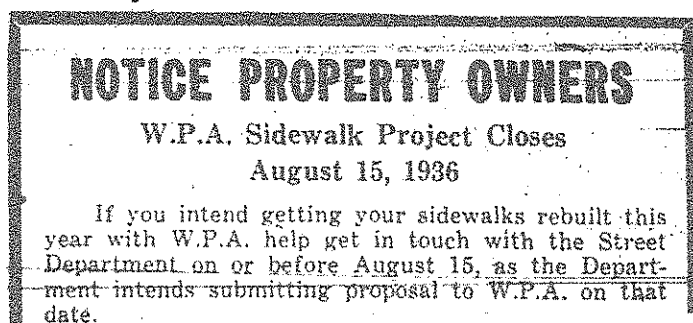
#### **PEDESTRIAN AND MOTORIST'S FRIEND: WPA TRANSFORMATION OF SIDEWALK AND PAVEMENT 1936-1937**

In April 1935 the city commission considered sidewalk repair as a way to meet unemployment needs at the urging of relief officials who wanted to place laborers, completing their winter's work, on other projects. If only individuals

within the city would shoulder responsibility for costs of material, government programs could furnish the labor free of charge. On April 3, 1936 the editor of the Aberdeen Evening News suggested "*better days possible for sidewalk stumblers*" and observed that "*many sidewalks which replaced wooden ones 50 years ago had never been patched; pedestrians have stumbled over them in darkness and have splashed through them in wet weather.*" A year's time passed before dreams became reality. In early August 1936 a campaign began to secure neighborhood support for improved sidewalks in two sections of Aberdeen—the Aldrich Park square on North Main and the newer Morning Heights residential area.

**MORNING HEIGHTS SIDEWALKS:** The WPA had awarded Aberdeen \$6,766.02 to establish a near mile of sidewalks along Sixth Avenue from Dakota Street to Roosevelt Street. A ditch paralleling the highway had not been convenient for pedestrians. This ditch was to be filled in on the south side of Sixth Avenue. Workers would be employed to grade a sidewalk line on that route. This project involved an estimated five-to-six weeks of work. The city's share was limited to \$379.82 to employ a foreman who would be approved by both city and the WPA. The WPA promised to provide \$6,386.20 for labor and materials. The city issued a contract for \$1,484.00 to the Thompson Yards Co. for 2,130 bags of cement to be used in laying a five-foot concrete walk.

This opportunity, just as the street paving project, required several elements besides funding: public willingness to sign petitions agreeing to pay for the work, available construction materials and unemployed workers at a time when their appeared to be a labor scarcity due to their work elsewhere. A boxed ad of August 6, 1936 testifies to the city's solicitation effort:



**ALDRICH PARK SIDEWALKS** After a year passed since receiving Aberdeen's request for sidewalks, the WPA in early August, 1936 approved an Aldrich Park sidewalk project for \$4,012.40. Plans called for laying 6600 square feet of concrete walk, 14,300 square feet of new gutter, new curbing, resurfacing and paving replacement. Benefited city taxpayers were expected to pay a sponsor's share of \$2,046.28 for a portion of materials and skilled labor. The WPA agreed to

pay \$1,966.32 for labor and materials. The project had several phases: demolition of 4600 square feet of concrete and replacement with new concrete, constructing 14,200 feet of new six-inch concrete gutters; replacement of 1420 square feet of paving; 400 lineal feet of curb; resurfacing of 26,200 square feet of street and resurfacing of ground with 522 cubic yards of black dirt. Implementation depended on workers who were presently employed on other projects. By early October 1936 15 PWA workers were available to replace the dilapidated sidewalks around Aldrich Park. This park was the city's most central park since 1912 with a band shell since 1914. Band concerts played alternately there and at the newer Melgaard Park band shell of 1930

Pleased with the work of 1936, the city council approved \$12,000 to continue reconstructing sidewalks. The Aberdeen Evening News observed on August 11, 1937: "*As a result of this project Aberdeen will be able soon to outgrow its reputation for having "stumbling blocks" instead of sidewalks in many of its residential and some of its business districts.*" In August 1938 the school board contributed to new side walks after the construction of the Civic Auditorium at Washington Street and Second Avenue southeast. They secured a WPA project for labor to place a 29-foot walk (5,163 square feet of walk) in front of the auditorium and a 19-foot walk along the north edge on Second Avenue. Also, workers positioned 448 feet of curbing. The school board financed the materials. Begun and completed in 1940, a WPA sidewalk curb project built 8000 feet of sidewalks and 3000 feet of curb costing sponsors \$5,708.00.

PAVEMENT TRANSFORMATION 1934-1940s; One of the several changes of the mid and late 1930s impacting Aberdeen was the initial stages of wood-block street pavement removal in portions of the city and replacement with new pavement of concrete slabs followed by some asphaltting of other streets. Street excavation preceded pavement replacement.

In July 1934 the Wagner Construction Company in connection with the State Highway Department agreed to replace some wood blocks taken from the new concrete area and, after cleaning them, reposition the blocks on the edge of the new twenty foot slab-concrete laid by the highway department. The city advised people not to pick up discarded paving blocks on North Main where Highway 281 was being paved as many were to be reused by the Wagner Company in the 12 foot strip on each side of the new concrete paving. The city agreed to store excess blocks on city lots and other storage lots close to South and North Main. At this stage the strategy of maintaining and repairing wood blocks triumphed over

complete removal from all streets although some had been removed in center sections.

The north side of Sixth Ave. between Weber and Roosevelt streets was not in the city limits in April 1934 nor was the north side of Eighth Avenue Northwest between Second and Third streets. The city aimed to gain control of traffic on both lanes of Sixth Ave and bring both lanes into the city limits. Highway aid came to only those parts of the highway within the city limits. Therefore, with county cooperation the city made its move to claim whole jurisdiction on both Sixth and Eighth Avenues.

The first six blocks of the 20-foot wide highway with its edge replacement of blocks was nearly completed by July, 21, 1934. This project gave Aberdeen a paved right of way through the city in two directions. Paving on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue depended on release of Wagner Company workers and equipment on the Willow Creek dam but that dam was nearly completed by mid July 1934. Main Street from Eighth Avenue to Third Avenue had wood block paving and its concrete base removed in preparation for new concrete surface. This necessitated rerouting of north bound traffic on Main.

Several years later the city applied to the PWA for a grant which provided for the city to have city and property owners assume 45% of costs and the PWA shoulder 55 percent of costs. On August 13, 1938 officials asked for \$232,649.87 to pave 272 blocks of streets and six blocks of alleys. The city agreed to pave only those streets whose property owners petitioned for new paving. Not only did the city face occasional shortage of laborers to work on such projects but also there developed a shortage of petitioners to take advantage of government money. As of August 29, 1938 only three petitions for seven blocks had been filed.

The Evening News on September 12, 1938 and again on August 16, 1939 editorialized to encourage property owners to sign petitions. After a rain the 1938 remarks focused on the business district including Lincoln Street. The editor referred to the wooden block stretch as a war-time "no man's land":

*"We steered a zig zag path as we attempted to dodge the wooden block mounds and at the same time dodge oncoming traffic. Expanded by moisture the blocks swell and the pavement bulges. But it's an old story to Aberdonians. Similar rains have caused similar bulges for 30 years. Property owners may petition the city to pave the streets taking advantage at the same time of a 45 percent Public Administration grant."*

The August 1939 editorial on street improvement by means of temporary oil surfacing focused on residential districts. The editor urged action before the PWA paving opportunity was lost. Residents had been slow in signing petitions. As of October 10 six petitions had been turned in for a total of 13 blocks of oil paving. The PWA required a minimum of twenty blocks, preferably contiguous, for a paving district

Further difficulties with PWA arose over their refusal to accept property owners' special assessment certificates at the conclusion of a project. If they were verified by a bank that the city had sufficient funds other than relying on money trickling in from property owners certificates were acceptable. To meet the new PWA requirement that paving contracts be let and work start before January 1, 1939 proved difficult. The city needed more time to gather petitions. The Civic Association and city delayed their petition campaign until after January 1. Therefore, in 1939 the WPA program proved more functional.

**WPA TO THE RESCUE:** By July 1939 the Civic Association Paving Committee and the WPA joined to secure petitions in the wholesale and downtown district. A paving project would cost property owners an estimated \$1.10 per square yard. The remaining \$3.30 would be federal responsibility. If enough petitions (60% of property owners) were presented to the city commission, the city would become the sponsor. The actual pavement laying would begin in spring 1940. Pavement of reinforced concrete six inches thick would replace wooden blocks in a 20 block area. In early October 1939 the Brown County commission helped on the downtown paving by laying concrete on three sides of the courthouse for an estimated cost of \$12,408.93. They resurfaced the county's 250 feet of frontage on Railroad and First Avenues and 300 feet frontage on Market Street.

**RAILROAD AVENUE PAVING PROJECT 1939-1940:** On November 27, 1939 the city commission approved a Railroad Avenue project for WPA acceptance. The project started in September 1940. The sponsor's share was to be paid by owners of abutting property along the avenue from First Street to Kline Street. Costs were estimated at \$9,803.44. A companion project for a storm sewer along that street also surfaced; its cost was \$16,231. Sixty-three percent of abutting property owners supported a March 1940 petition drive to pave nine blocks of streets and three blocks of alleys in the business district. Six inches of concrete replaced wooden blocks at a cost of \$17,442.80. In October 1940 workers with the help of a caterpillar tractor pulling a plow guided by three men displaced wooden block pavement on Railroad Avenue SE as they initiated a WPA paving project. Workers also set forms for pouring concrete.



The paving transformations of the late 1930s and early 1940s continued after the end of the Second World War. A precedent had been set. This legacy of government assisted improvement provided a springboard for the post war generations to maintain and improve city infrastructure.

#### **CITY SEWAGE LINES/ TREATMENT PLANT EXPANSION 1933-1935 PWA TO WPA**

American Evening News headlines documented one of the top stories of 1934: improvement of the city sewage system funded with PWA allotments. The city sewage treatment plant built in 1914 was located two miles south of the city and connected with the city pumping plant at 11<sup>th</sup> Ave and South State Street. Overloaded as a result of industrial growth, the plant needed improvements which voters authorized in August 1933. The overloaded system experienced odor problems from offensive industrial plant waste. The voters were assured that the old plant would continue to be used: "No feature will be abandoned." A PWA project would only enlarge and modernize the present facility. This bond issue of \$107,000 served as the security basis for a federal Public Works Administration allotment. The project received a \$43,000. PWA grant in addition to loans based on bond issuance.

Despite the PWA goal of speedy employment for the unemployed administrative processing of local requests seemed slow. By April 1, 1934 the city had not yet received the PWA loan agreement contract or a bond contract from banks. A construction contract was possible thirty days after arrival of the above two contracts. Four contractors were involved; one for cast iron pipe, another for laying force mains, a third for construction of a plant addition and a fourth for equipment: screen clarifiers, sludge pumps and digester unit. By June 1934 contractor Fred Peterson, winner of the bid for the treatment plant, asked on July 1 the city for a water supply in order to proceed on construction at the sewage treatment plant. The council authorized digging a 1200-foot artesian well as a "\$671 extra" increasing contract price to \$100,813. In the original bid he had included a two-inch hard water artesian well but it had been omitted, along with other items, in order to stay within PWA allotment figures. Peterson sub-contracted the artesian well work to the Aberdeen Well Drilling Co. The city still awaited PWA approval of their requisition for funds based on the bond issue. However, by late July and early August 1934 a crew had grown from 14 to 44 for preliminary work including excavation and well digging for an addition to the sewage treatment plant. Roberts Filter Company installed filter equipment on a contract for \$50,960. A progress report of December 18, 1934 indicated completion in about ten days and announced that new units in the plant were already functioning.

Burgard Brothers and Brown laid the force mains to the new sewage treatment plant for \$6,086.37. and American Cast Iron Pipe Co. contracted for furnishing pipes for \$23,126.90. By August 6, 1934 arrival of heavy shipment of pipe increased the need for laborers. These eight carloads represented about half the needed pipe for force mains from the city pumping station to the treatment plant. By February 15, 1935 \$20,000 of the PWA grant arrived to pay on the now completed project. Requisitions had been sent in December 1934 when \$122,015.67 worth of work had been completed on the \$150,000 job. Final city acceptance of the project would trigger a final requisition for remainder of the \$43,000 grant. Landscaping awaited warmer weather when grading around the sludge-digester tank and seeding earth embankments around the digester filter beds and plant building would help beautify the site.

#### **ABERDEEN WATER MAIN EXPANSION & SERVICING THE MILWAUKEE STOCKYARDS**

Water and sewer mains continued to be laid in 1936 and 1937 with the help of the WPA. Summer 1936 was an emergency summer when Elm dam went dry and a mile and half of water mains were needed to supply Aberdeen with water. Twenty two blocks of eight-inch water main and four blocks of sewer were laid in the spring and summer of 1936. On another project the city was financially unable to buy pipe for the stockyard line because of a fixed budget which had not provided for such emergencies. The Milwaukee Railroad helped out the city by sponsoring a WPA program purchasing the piping materials with the understanding that the city would credit the railroad for expenses in its future water bills. Over six weeks some fifty relief workers supervised by water department employees helped dig the 4500 foot ditch from Twelfth Street along Sixth Avenue to the stockyards and lay water mains to that point. In 1937 the city repaid the Public Service Company for water borrowed from its wells during the emergency period. Rejecting Aberdeen's request for 1000 feet of water mains at the Elm River, the WPA allowed two additional blocks of water main and three additional blocs of sewer in Aberdeen. By early August 1936 27 blocks had actually been installed and five other blocks awaited action and more if funds held out. By January 1937 the city audit reported that as sponsor the city share of WPA projects had put the water department in the "red."

#### **MOCCASIN CREEK: PARKWAY, STORM SEWER AND BRIDGE: 1935-1939**

In 2005 we view the creek banks, Anderson Recreation center park area and the greenery stretching from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Melgaard Road as impressive, eye-catching landscape. This legacy of development began in the 1930s. Moccasin Creek flowing on the east edge of Aberdeen became a headline item intermittently

in the 1930s. Campaigns to clean up and improve that stream and its adjacent banks were triggered by criticisms directed at the creek's appearances and smell. Earlier cleanups of a limited nature blossomed into more extensive projects in order to beautify that landmark and at the same time employ persons when relief agencies were seeking employment for their clients. FERA and CWA relief marked earlier stages of work. As early as mid-January 1933 Brown County employed 400 workers for the Moccasin Creek Project. Funded from an R.F.C allotment, work time was split in two, three-day weekly shifts of about 200 men each. Workers received 25 cents an hour for an eight hour day three days a week.

Pierre RFC headquarters sent checks to the county once time slips were received. The county deducted costs for food, rent, fuel and clothing of the workmen and their families before distribution of a wage check. Teams, city trucks and men at Moccasin creek deepened the channel three and one half feet and leveled embankments from the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue bridge southward to the city storm sewer east of Melgaard park. They also filled in and leveled the east bank of the creek north of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The city water and sewer department furnished picks, wheelbarrows, tools etc. Lunch and tool shacks along the banks serviced the workers. Broken-up concrete was used in dam construction above the mouth of the storm sewer in order to back up water in the deepened channel. This project had started in October 1932 and continued until RFC funding ceased. In time WPA became involved although some later improvements were part of a federal highway program in which the state Bureau of Public Roads was involved. For varied reasons inaction characterized most of the year 1934.

Supervised by the city water department the cleanup of the creek reopened on January 4, 1935 with a crew of up to 75 men reporting to clear the creek bed of debris and vegetation at the south end. In time they worked their way southward to the sewer outlet. They would also begin working north of 6<sup>th</sup> avenue once suitable noon-hour eating facilities were prepared. During the previous year unfavorable weather had delayed the project. With completion of a clean up along the Morning Heights section of the creek approaching in early April 1935, Joe D. Foran, county relief director, informed the city council on April 1 of the need for more projects to employ workers. He expected the end of the creek project and an end to rural work relief would throw 302 workers on county aid rolls if they could not be directed to new projects eligible for federal relief. However, such projects required the city to guarantee materials while accepting federally funded labor.

After two years consideration, the state Bureau of Public Roads approved a federally financed roadside improvement project on city-owned property adjacent

to Moccasin Creek along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This was part of a federal highway program which, however, allowed employment of relief labor. A strip of land on the south side of Sixth Avenue (highway 12) 1150 feet long and 233 feet wide was to be landscaped with trees, shrubbery, grass, driveways and walkways on both side of the creek and only as far as 150 feet east of the creek. This project was compatible with park superintendent S.H. Anderson's improvement plans for the creek area further south already implemented under past FERA and CWA projects. One condition of the new project was the city's agreement to maintain improvements once completed.. On February 11, 1935 the city commission signed an agreement with the state highway commission.

The New Year 1936 opened with a re-opening of cleanup efforts. A letter of December 1935 responded to the question: "What was most important thing for the city to achieve in 1936?" The responder chose Moccasin Creek and suggested placing a concrete dam there so Aberdeen would have use of nearby impounded water. The present dam would not withstand:"the rush of high water". After several years these suggestions became reality. An agreement of November, 1936 implemented a "long delayed WPA project"--dredging of Moccasin Creek, beautifying its banks, replacing the temporary earthen dam with a concrete one. This helped ease the WPA "labor crisis" as four highway projects near Aberdeen had been completed ten days previously idling 180 men in Aberdeen. In discussions a new idea appeared: extension of the storm sewer outlet beyond Melgaard Park. However, this was rejected as it challenged an approved plan over a year previously to keep the present site of the temporary earthen dam some 750 feet north of the bridge. Rejection was based on the grounds that the new idea was more expensive because the sewer would have to be extended if the outlet was extended. Also, a revised plan would cause weeks of delay while an approval application was resubmitted to the WPA Two years elapsed before much more was achieved.

In August 1939 the city and county assumed a new sponsorship with the city's contribution at \$1500. A crew of forty-six started work on a \$50,000 Moccasin project. In addition to cash, Aberdeen provided easements and promised to checkup on engineering of the storm sewer phase of the project. WPA engineer Julian Staven promised 90 men for assignment to the project within two days. Total costs were set at \$52,652 with an estimated total sponsor's share at \$15,572. Plans called for a permanent concrete dam on the creek at a point where the road running along the south edge of Melgaard Park crosses the stream. A new bridge would replace the present structure. The main storm sewer line from the city which emptied into the stream at a point due east of the park and just below the present low earthen dam would be extended farther south.

Crews worked at excavating extension of storm sewer which emptied into the creek near the earthen dam north of the bridge. Workers placed 96" pipe of reinforced concrete in the excavations which ran 630 feet south of the road running past Melgaard Park. By December the county commission accepted bids on materials for the WPA creek storm sewer development and decided to buy grease for trucks used on the project, 528 sacks of cement, 40,000 pounds of reinforced steel, kegs of nails and lumber. They had the assistance of WPA purchasing agent, Earl Coyne. A 70-foot concrete bridge replaced the present bridge. Seventy five men worked in two shifts to do this. Controls were installed to regulate water depth of the stream above. Workers removed the small earthen dam and cleaned the area between bridge and dam. In 2005 those who cross the creek and walk its banks should appreciate this legacy of the late depression years and the work relief labor which laid foundations for the green belted parkway of the present.

#### **BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE: THE QUEST FOR FEDERAL AID—PWA & WPA REJECTED AND AUTHORIZED CHANGES**

The Aberdeen Evening News editorialized December 4, 1935 about a "Knotty Problem" facing the county. Direct or 'dole' federal relief was approaching its end. How should the county care for its needy? Is there enough work to employ about 2000 people on relief? Since county relief funds were inadequate, the only choice was to accept the New Deal's offer to match funds for local construction. Thus, a proposed jail and courthouse project and a bond issue to raise matching funds seemed essential. While greater share of construction for a new jail and courthouse flooring, vaults and elevator was in materials for which the county as sponsor was responsible, the employment of workers was crucial. Therefore, voters should approve the upcoming bond issue for \$74,000 in order to secure a government grant of \$60,000 and a loan to cover most of the total project cost \$134,545. Counties were forbidden by the courts to use budget funds directly for such purposes. The bond election was the only course to raise matching money for needed construction. PWA would provide 45 percent of costs. The unemployment crisis of 1935 provided additional arguments for a new jail not emphasized previously in the early 1930s—construction would provide work for the unemployed.

On December 9 voters rejected the PWA \$74,000 bond issue. Rural voters doomed the project. The state PWA engineer suggested that the unemployment situation justified pushing for construction of an auditorium and that concern for future expenses to fund an auditorium might have effected some city votes. Not until the 1960s was a new jail built; however by 1938 an auditorium was built. The Evening News editorial of Dec. 11, 1935 felt that thrifty Aberdonians felt spending

had gone too far in depressed times. However, this was dangerous thinking; *“There is a vast difference between spending for things we need and useless, needless projects. There are some things government must provide for the people. It must continue to put out money to finance them even after the period of retrenchment sets in if it proposes to function for the general welfare.”*

However, in 1937 and 1938 some courthouse repairs were funded with WPA help. In February 1937 President Roosevelt approved an outlay of \$59,400 federal money matched by a \$7,907 county contribution for three Elm River dams and decoration of the county courthouse. The actual money would be advanced later. Of that sum the courthouse project received \$1,248 with a match of county funds of \$225 to clean ceilings, walls and floors, kalsomine ceilings and walls, repaint walls and floors, re-varnish woodwork and construct two doors to the judge’s chambers. At a total cost of \$1473 the project took about a month and employed 22 men, supervised by the courthouse custodian.

In late September 1938 a WPA courthouse and jail rehabilitation project continued into October. Supervised by foreman Chris Swenson, 19 men worked on replacement of a coal bin in the boiler room, laid a new concrete floor in the courthouse basement, repaired brick and stone work on both buildings, renewed jail plumbing, and installed new steel bunks in the jail. As sponsor the county contributed \$1,099.60 while the WPA contributed \$2916.40. An Evening News report on October 4, 1938 commented on that crew’s activities with a headline inferring that some relievers on other “made work” projects had not worked to capacity but that this courthouse crew was really working. A county circuit court was in session: The story continued: *“The 19 men employed on the WPA project to rehabilitate the courthouse really were busy—so busy in fact the noise of their hammering made it virtually impossible for the court to hear what was going on. A baliff was sent down to warn them, and again to bring back the foreman. Finally, a deputy sheriff was dispatched to hail the foreman before Judge Howard Babcock. The foreman, Chris Swenson, apologized for his men but explained he didn’t know about the court’s order for quiet because he was absent from the job at the time. His explanation was accepted.”* This was the court reporters story warranting the headline: **“Found WPA Workers Who Really Work!”**

#### **ABERDEEN PUBLIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS 1938 1940 WITH THE WPA**

In the fall of 1938 the Aberdeen school board authorized major repair work totaling \$13,242 on city schools using PWA funds. A variety of tasks were implemented: painting of exteriors, puttying all window glass, repairing roofs on Simmons, Garfield , Adams , McKinley and Monroe. In Central High, Lincoln and



Simmons elementary buildings gymnasium floor repair was scheduled. Contracts were let subject to approval by the WPA. The board accepted Fred Peterson Company' base bid of \$5,471 for installing a maple floor in the high school gymnasium and mould tile in the other schools. That company also had a painting base bid of \$3,195.00 for exterior wood including finishing gymnasium floors at Central High, Simmons and Lincoln buildings. Aberdeen's Sheet Metal Works offered the low base bid of \$4,576 for roofing. The newer portions of Adams, Monroe, McKinley and the main portions of 'Simmons School were re-roofed. Two years later in November 1940 the school board decided to apply for WPA assistance on construction of an addition to Monroe school in order to utilize that building for junior high purposes. They also authorized plumbing, heating and ventilation in two new elementary schools on the north side. By means of \$100,000 bond issue to provide the sponsor's share of a WPA project, Aberdeen had two new elementary schools--Howard Hedger and O.M.Tiffany in 1941. By 2005 all these schools but Simmons, Tiffany and Central have been demolished. However, repairs of the 1938-40 and the new schools enabled the school district to serve the community well.

#### RIVERSIDE CEMETERY BEAUTIFICATION

Fencing the 1886 cemetery has been a concern surfacing over the decades. In August 1910 the Witte Hardware Co furnished an iron fence costing about \$2800 as a protective measure. It replaced a barbed wire fence which had sagged in places and which was torn down in other spots. In October 1936 nine men--WPA laborers-- under the supervision of foreman Ben Jaeger, a city employee, worked on a WPA project building a wall to replace the iron fence of 1910. Twenty-one men were landscaping the new cemetery addition northward across the road from the older cemetery acreage. This landscaping had been on hold for about two months. This was one aspect of Aberdeen's beautification efforts which also included Moccasin Creek. In 2004 Cemetery sexton Kathie Allstot, commenting on distinguishing features of the cemetery, referred to the historic rock walls and dangers--ponding of water and road widening-- that threatened them in the past and possibly in the future

Even Aberdeen's Riverside Cemetery provided needed jobs for many individuals. In the official project proposal dated 4 September 1935, a description of work to be done included construction and graveling of a road, preparing and sowing thirty-eight acres of grass, planting 3,000 shrubs, 1,000 small trees, 200 large trees, and 500 evergreens, as well as construction of a stone retaining wall and fence, entrance, walk, and pillars. The justification for the project proposal stated, "*Riverside cemetery is a public property and needs to be more fully*

*developed. This project would develop this addition, making it more beautiful and making care of the grounds more easy [sic]. The work to be done also makes the project desirable from a labor stand point."* Funding requested WPA totaled \$18,470, and the city of Aberdeen's contributions as the sponsor totaled \$7,331.15.



The beautiful field stone pillars and walls marking the entrance to Aberdeen's Riverside Memorial Park serve as a legacy of the many different types of structures created by the WPA and other New Deal agencies during the Great Depression.

#### **Entry Pillars & Stone Wall Facing Highway: 2005**

#### **BROWN COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT SHOP AND HEADQUARTERS 1939-40**

In 2005 the Boys and Girls Club of Aberdeen located at 1111 First Ave. SE has served our youth for many decades. However, in 1939-40 the building was constructed to house the district Highway Bureau. In the 1970s the highway department moved to its present headquarters on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE. This sixty-five year-old structure has served two different purposes –one assisting road development and maintenance throughout the county and the other assisting youth in productive ways of using their time, especially after school. The Evening News contained a photo of the building as it neared completion in its September 20, 1939 issue. Beneath the photo was this caption: "*A \$11,000 maintenance shop and office building for the district highway bureau here will be completed in about a month, it was estimated by S.W. Jonason whose contracting firm holds the general contract. One story, with part basement, the structure is located at the intersection of the Milwaukee and Northwestern railroads on Jackson and Railroad Ave. E.*"



The Aberdeen Boys and Girls Club was built by the WPA to originally serve as a Brown County Highway Building.

### **Former Highway Building; Boys & Girls Club 2005**

#### **ABERDEEN AIRPORT IMPROVEMENTS**

The airport moved from its Fairgrounds location to its present location off Highway 12 in 1930. By July 1934 a WPA project had been approved and work was scheduled to begin on Friday July 20. The project was expected to take 6300 man-hours of labor to complete. Relief officials were to send a crew of 12 to begin leveling off bad spots and graveling portions of the field. Reporting station was the city scales where transportation would take them to the airport. However, only two relief workers appeared and were told that at least ten workers were needed to make it cost effective to hire a foreman to supervise them. This explained the Evening News headline "*Jobs Available but No Workers.*" Workers eventually arrived and the project implemented. The airport's first WPA project was completed in July 1936.

By 1937 the opportunity for better commercial airline service arose. This necessitated more improvements. The city council in February authorized WPA engineer Glen Matteson to finish plans for a one-story 38'x25' administration building, with a passenger waiting room, an office and a radio room., Materials cost an estimated \$2,000 for which the city was responsible as sponsor. The federal government contributed an additional \$2,000 for materials and furnished labor. By July conferences with Hanford airline representatives resulted in suggested improvements for the landing field and runway boundaries in order for the city to prepare for ten passenger plane service by August 1. They also listed many improvements for the future to stabilize the runways. Erection of a passenger

station was essential and could be funded by a WPA project. A meeting followed in August with WPA operating director, city officials, businessmen and Bureau of Air Commerce supervisor. WPA Edgerton suggested combining field improvements with passenger or administration building as a means to secure more man-hours and more funding for materials which went with the landing field items than if the depot became a separate item. Thus, the passenger station was built.

In 1940-41 the WPA was called on to help fund improvements. The project cost an estimated \$64,307 which included \$1261 from federal defense funds. The sponsor's share was \$17,227. As the world situation became more serious defense funds became available if the government listed Aberdeen's airport as a defense port. This project envisioned grading and lengthening runways, preparation and installation of full drainage system, and preparation of a stabilized gravel base for runways. After a fourth application the sponsor's share was increased by \$1,242 in November 1940 due to omission of 14 lights and about five miles of electric wires from the third application. Another WPA project aimed to install airport lighting with WPA labor resulted in some confrontation when Mayor Kruger insisted on Mid-Continent airline's paying \$2500 as advance rental fee which he wanted to use as the sponsor share of the project.

There were those that exercised caution in delaying tactics. In the future the possibility existed that WPA funds would no longer be available with that agency's eventual liquidation. On January 5, 1943 state WPA administrator Michael Kennedy told commissioners and business men at a dinner meeting he was sorry the WPA could not finish the job. *"Unless the port is completed now much of the WPA expenditure on the project will have been wasted effort."* City officials hoped that the field might be declared an emergency airport since a civilian pilot training program was underway. When the WPA terminated as of February 1, 1943, the city's two years negotiating with the Civil Aeronautic Administration for CWA funds became more important. A landing and lighting improvement contract loomed with that agency in July 1943. However, between 1934 and 1941 Aberdeen had made considerable progress toward a modern airport with help of the WPA.

#### **PWA & WPA AT WORK IN BROWN COUNTY TOWNS & RURAL SITES FREDERICK, SOUTH DAKOTA:**

Frederick's experience with the PWA occurred first in May and June, 1935 when the town secured a waterworks through the aid of that relief agency. In that year the town's population was 459. Later, the WPA helped that community to build an auditorium.

### FREDERICK WATERTOWER: TOWN LANDMARK & SYMBOL OF PROGRESS

As in the case of Aberdeen's waterworks project which included building of a huge elevated water tank, the Public Works Administration assisted Frederick with a smaller 50,000 gallon tank more comparable in size to the 50,000 gallon tank at the Aberdeen Treatment Plant. Contractor Chicago Bridge & Iron Company placed the water tower at a cost of \$15,000 on a site where a large surface well provided "*fairly soft water*" rather than artesian water from a deeper well. In addition, five blocks of new six-and eight-inch pipe were laid to improve the water main system. Frederick benefited not only by enhanced drinking water distribution through increased water pressure but also that pressure and the mains increased fire fighting capacity and efficiency as well as an anticipated reduction in fire insurance rates. Impact of these rates as well as employment for workers contributed to the economic as well as quality of life aspect of this PWA project.

### COMMUNITY CENTER: MARCHING FORWARD WITH WPA 1938-1940

In the 1930s Frederick's citizens envisioned an auditorium as well as Aberdonians. That dream was realized by 1940. Funding of sponsor's fee involved sale of \$3,700 in bonds. The Frederick bond issue of 1938 and a \$1500 contribution by the Odd Fellows helped match the federal contribution for a total cost of \$21,000. This ended a quest which reached back into the 1930s when after apparently losing federal aid, the PWA engineer informed Frederick officials in March 1936 that their auditorium project was still pending although no definite information from Washington on funding had been received. By 1938 residents visiting their post office viewed an architect's sketch showing a building of approximately 50'x100'. They were assured the federal government would pay for labor and furnish about \$1900 for materials leaving Frederick \$5200 as its share.



Although no longer in use, the Frederick Auditorium was the venue of many local athletic contests and community events.

Assessing the advantages of the project, the Brown County News of February 17, 1939 asserted: that an auditorium encouraged repeated visits to Frederick by trade territory customers:

*"Frederick will be equipped to set up and bid on small conventions, basket ball tournaments and many other meetings that will be beneficial to the welfare of this city. But the largest advantage will be that no longer will the business men of Frederick have to hang their heads in shame or make excuses when a meeting or celebration is held and those in attendances go into the business houses and "crab" because there is no place large enough to take care of the crowd."*

The Aberdeen Evening News of September 26, 1940 alerted readers that Frederick's concrete auditorium would soon be ready, that its gym's hardwood floors were being laid, that the basement served as a social meeting place where lodge rooms, a dining room, restrooms, showers and dressing rooms were located. The main auditorium boasted a large 20-foot stage and a 40'x 60' basket ball court. With seating for 500 and a balcony which could hold 2000. its use as a sports center drew special attention: *"for the first time this winter Frederick High will be represented in basket ball, a sport impossible heretofore because floor space was lacking."*

Later, for the open house on November 15, 1940 the Brown County News corrected the basketball court dimensions by indicating to the public the dance that evening would have ample space using their 61"x 36" basketball court floor. WPA workers finished work one day before the open house. Financing provided by a supplementary appropriation had expired. The 104'x48' building served both school and town until 1977. In April of that year Frederick accepted a bid of \$299,354 from North Plains Builders of Aberdeen to build a gymnasium-lunchroom at the school site and that winter Frederick's team played basketball in the new gym. The old auditorium remains today on Main Street, its roof in need of repair, and no longer serving its role as a magnet for area people. Thoughts of preservation of the sixty-five year old building linger in the minds of some townsfolk but funding has proven an obstacle—no PWA-WPA grants or loans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

#### **CLAREMONT: WPA WATER PROJECT**

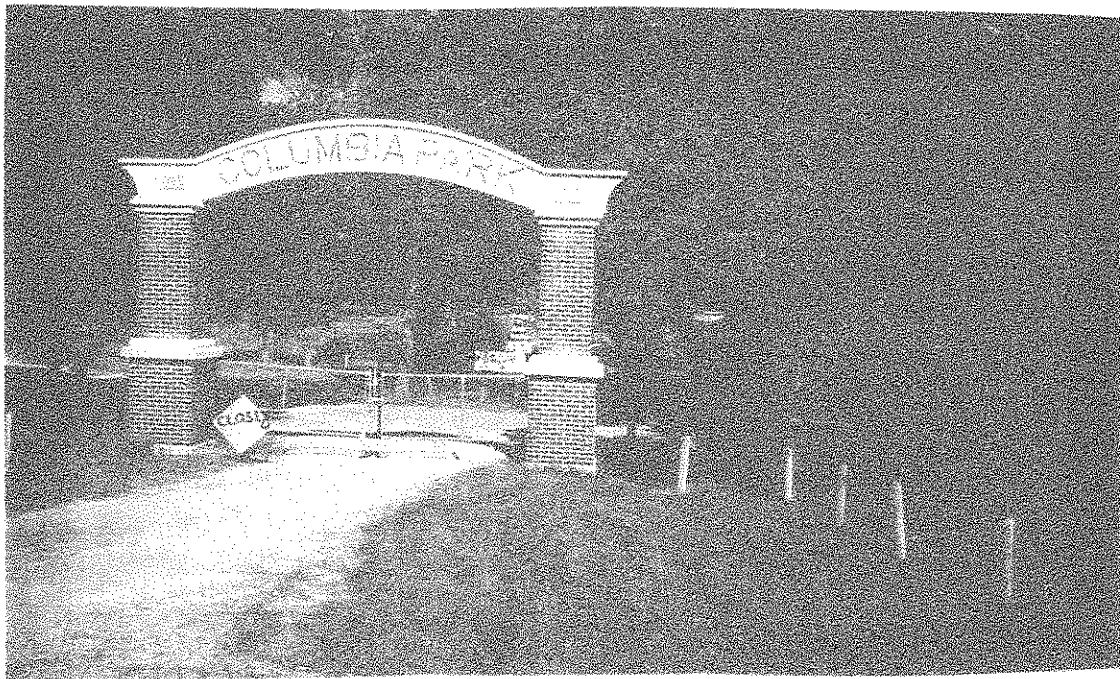
East of Frederick the town of Claremont with its 283 residents secured WPA assistance to better their quality of life. In October, 1936 eight men began work on a \$21,000 municipal water project under WPA auspices. Over a three-month period they were joined by others. Claremont's contribution was \$18,000 and the federal share was \$3,200. Plans included an underground reservoir 12 feet



deep to impound water from the town well. Workers built a 12'x29' tank and pump house containing a 10,000 gallon pressure tank and pumps so as to better distribute water to second story buildings in town.

#### **COLUMBIA, SOUTH DAKOTA: Park Signage**

Established in 1936, Columbia Park occupies 20 acres about one half mile south of Columbia on the north side of a bend in the James River. An arched gateway, built with brick pillars by Bill Wandry as a W.P.A. project in 1936, looms adjacent to county highway 16. Labeled COLUMBIA PARK, it beckons visitors. A circular road ringed with post guards provides access to scattered park facilities as the visitor enters under the arched gateway. Although true today, it was especially so in the late 1930s that a visit to the park generated a sense of remoteness from urban life. The arched gateway and circular park drive attract the eye and create the impression of mysterious vistas waiting as one passed through the gate and followed the winding roadway. People of depression days would have to wait 22 years for a renovated ball complex servicing picnickers and others. In the 1930s they would play day-time ball on what ground could be cleared. There would be a 20-year wait before the installation of night lights, modern concession stands, rest rooms, and extensive roadside fencing. At least the park had an identity designated by that large, arched roadside entry sign, and foundations for further development thanks to WPA labor and local leadership.



**Columbia Park Gateway of 1936**

## GROTON'S QUEST FOR A NEW SCHOOL 1933-1935

When school opened September 3, 1934 Groton's first and second graders and high school students attended classes in the Methodist church. Third to eight graders occupied frame buildings on the school campus while the superintendent's office was housed in the fire hall. Groton's old, brick school of 1889 had been demolished in early June 1934 in order to build a new school on that site. After a school year and three months in that structure Groton students in mid March 1935 moved from the Methodist church into the new building. The community experienced its first basketball game in the gym of the new school earlier in mid-February 1935. Groton's new building culminated in a lengthy process of applying for federal aid through the WPA and approvals from varied authorities. Frustrations had mounted over delays as the months passed

After three months of consulting with architects and contractors and awaiting clarification of government unskilled and skilled labor wage scales in competition with private enterprise, the school board called for a bond issue to build a new school. Crucial in this decision was the desire to benefit from a federal grant of 30% for public projects.

The school board had \$40,000 in their building fund. Their first step was petitioning city freeholders to secure bond issue approval which carried with a four- to-one majority. Out of 427 votes cast, only 81 were against. On November 23 and December 4, 1933 the Groton Independent's editorial justification for building a new school stressed the idea that repayment of \$45,000 bond issue would be feasible as future years would be a mix of good and poor economic years and not as difficult as the early 1930s. Emphasizing the "time is now" argument the editor urged immediate action to secure 30 % of building costs from the government. Also, present low costs would not be available in the future: "*Groton will have to build a new school within the next ten years, government or no government grant.*" Continuing the argument of necessity and low cost to the taxpayer and "*pay more later*" reasoning, the editor rejected the argument that the project should be implemented to give more jobs to the unemployed. Reflecting Republican philosophy, he asserted: "*Too many people are living off the government now.*" However, in reality this project provided many jobs. CWA local labor tore down the old school, salvaging its wood and brick for use elsewhere on school property. WPA labor and materials helped to build the new school.

Upon learning that Pierre had confirmed a government "set aside" of \$66,000 for the new school with \$40,000 in the form of a loan and \$26,000 as a grant governed by PWA work requirements. Steps loomed ahead: approval of

plans by state engineer, advertisement of bids, and labor agreements with the local CWA relief office. The Independent on January 11, 1934 anticipated that the new school would attract *"a large crowd ... for basketball tournaments and other sports"* and increase student enrollments; *"We have elevated the biggest business in Groton to an educational service station for the surrounding countryside."*

In late April 1934 the school board received the Final Bond Contract Agreement from the government triggering the move of high school equipment to the Methodist Church where classes were held for the remainder of the school year. This document bound the school board to comply with requirements of the PWA in erecting the new school.

The Sioux Falls architect firm of Perkins and McWayne, who later would devise plans for NSTC's Seymour Hall, provided plans and supervised much of the work along with General Contractor Wold Construction of Brookings. Plans called for two stories with a gymnasium taking up floor space of 42'x68' and with seating capacity for 650 or 800 people. A stage which could be converted into bleachers occupied one side of the gym when the space was used as an auditorium. Beneath the stage was a bleacher storage area. Six grade rooms occupied the first floor along with the Superintendent's office. Seventh and eighth graders, the principal's office, the library, four academic department class rooms and a science lab were housed on the second floor.

A June 4<sup>th</sup> headline read: "Work on School will Start Soon"; *"contractors will employ two forces of workmen—under terms of PWA contract—skilled and common laborers are permitted to work only 30 hours each week, so two forces will be employed to expedite building operations."* Frustrated by delays, the Independent editorialized several times during the ensuing months about PWA. Reacting to PWA threats to rescind federal allocations to those communities who failed to speed up project, the Independent asserted Groton was not in that category; it was government red tape that delayed the project. Characterizing the PWA as *"desperately slow"*, the editor declared: *"six months from January. 11, when the allocation was granted, until June 25, when the work was actually started, has been virtually wasted because the PWA had been so slow in attending to the administration of its affairs...school board officials, contractors and architects are watching the weather and bemoaning the fact that many working days are slipping by with nothing being accomplished."*

In July 1934 a double crew expedited concrete work on the foundation. Arrival of PWA resident engineer architect Carl Bohlen in mid July earned praise

as evidence of concern when a supervisor checked on PWA labor and use of building materials. The Independent noted in early August that brick work had begun and the building was “shooting skyward”. The contractor had added double shifts to complete brickwork and plastering before arrival of cold weather. A white, Bedford stone strip, two or three feet above the foundation extended around the building. Walls above that were 13 inches thick. The Independent of September 6, 1934 contained a sketch by the son of Architect Perkins. On January 24, 1935 the Independent reported school construction in its final stages. Some delay had been due to late arrival of flooring. During the wait for flooring, work was sublet to Minneapolis workmen. Local carpenters hung doors and installed windows while local painters completed their work. Workers installed 96 lockers. Each locker served two high school students. By March 1935 students moved into the new school.



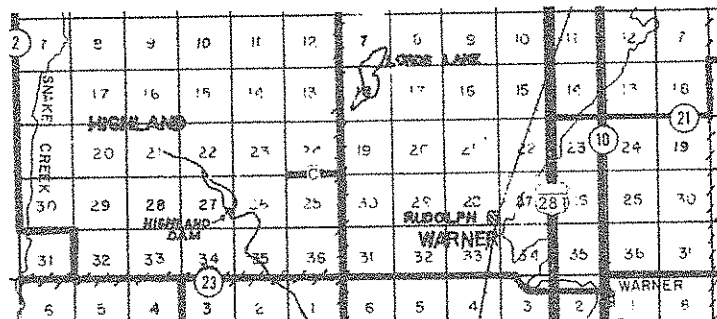
The PWA constructed the Groton school as one of several major projects sponsored in Brown County. Although the windows have been changed, the building still serves the Groton school district.

### HIGHLAND DAM AND LAKE 1935

The Highland Township dam site, southwest of Aberdeen and seven miles west and one mile north of Warner, SD, was not too far from Edmunds County. On June 20, 1935 the Brown County Commission endorsed Highland township dam as a work relief project at the request of farmers led by August Dahme. The project was too big to be handled by the township which requested help from the new

work relief program that became effective July 1, 1935. Farmers and local relief dependents had been working on that dam which was about 40% completed.

In mid June 1935 A.S. Mannes, Brown County project engineer, had drawn up plans for damming a dry run: *"the embankment is 320 feet long, 95 feet thick at the base and 15 feet high. It will impound a 50-acre lake two miles long with a maximum depth of 11 feet. Workers will rip rap a natural spillway."* Thus another dam, although smaller than most described so far, contributed to the legacy of water conservation and worker relief in rural portions of Brown County



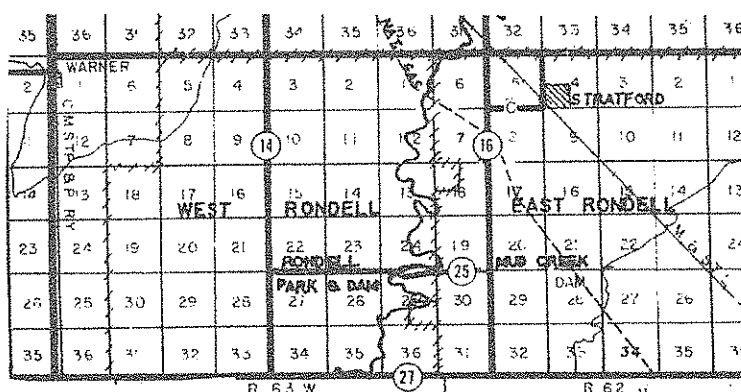
Map of Highland Dam Site

#### RONDELL DAM AND PARK & WPA CAMP BUILDING 1938

Located in southern brown County 18 miles south of Aberdeen, Rondell had a long history as a picnicking and recreational center for those who loved the outdoors. Its shaded vegetation and fishing image depended on the impoundment of river water and the rise and fall of the James River which flowed though its park-like grounds. Aberdonian John Firey who bought the area in 1917 donated a few of his 1200 acres in the late 1930s to the Girl Scouts for a camp and earlier some land to be utilized as a public park. The dam was in disrepair. Repair problems at the dam attracted press coverage in 1928-29. The Evening News declared: *"the roar of the dam is the one thing needed to give the final touch of romance to this beautiful and historic spot."* The McPherson Chapter of DAR decided proper recognition was due for the Rondell Park site. In September 1933 that group dedicated a monument at the site, historic for the first trading post in present Brown County. A giant rock had been secured from Mina and a bronze plaque placed thereon. Aberdeen's Central High School band provided music. Firey opened the park for people to enjoy a day in the great out of doors

On September 17, 1936 the Northwest Journal editorialized with the headline "Restore Rondell" and urged more government involvement to make it a more congenial setting for community gatherings. In October 1938 the Rondell Park WPA project received approval. It authorized a main lodge shelter, fencing

and landscaping at a cost of \$12,688. On November 22, 1938 work began on establishment of a permanent Girl Scout camp in Rondell. The federal project had about a three-month completion time so that the girl scouts could enjoy overnight trips to the camp in spring 1939. That camp remained until 1948 when flooding waters forced removal elsewhere. The Mina stone on private, fenced land remains to commemorate the Oakwood Trading Post site. The depression years often saw use of boulders, rather than expensive monuments, to designate historic sites.



Map :Rondell Dam and Park

#### WARNER: PWA SCHOOL ADDITION 1935

South of Aberdeen the town of Warner utilized PWA aid when that agency assumed 45% of costs for a school addition; The Warner school district paid for the remainder of the \$22,000 project. Workers built a new gymnasium, shower rooms and stage. They remodeled the old building for additional classrooms.

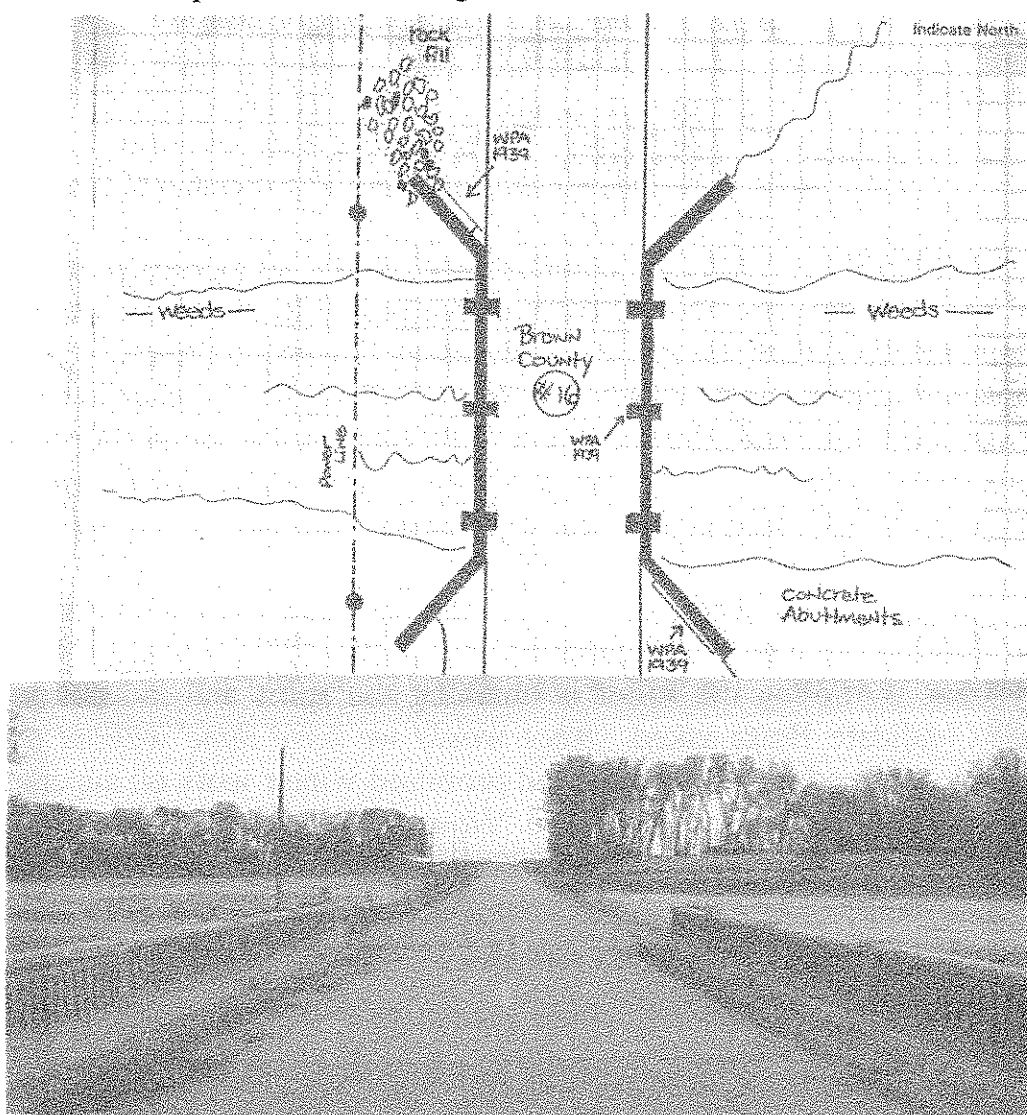
#### BRIDGES OF THE NEW DEAL ERA

Wherever rivers and creeks flow, bridge crossings at crucial spots are essential to the county and state highway system and movement of people from one place to another. This was true in the horse and buggy days as well as in the automobile era. By the 1930s many of our earlier bridges had deteriorated and needed repair or replacement. State highway funds and federal funds assisted in this effort. Road and bridge building were components of the work relief programs of the 1930s. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century bridges of the 1920s and 1930s also deteriorated and needed replacement. This narrative focuses on several bridges built in the late 1930s which have served well over the decades but for safety reasons have been replaced. Not all bridges of that era were constructed directly with federal money and WPA labor. One example in Brown County is the steel stringer overpass viaduct crossing Foote Creek west of Aberdeen. Built in 1938 by the State Highway Department and placed on the National Register of Historic Places, this 913-foot structure was demolished recently.



A concrete bridge located on county road 16 3/4 of a mile south of Columbia was built as a WPA project in 1937. In 1999 this bridge #239 was replaced based on engineering inspections report of 1991 which showed deterioration. Eight years later it was on the overdue list for replacement. This steel girder structure with three spans and 121 feet long had replaced a bridge of 1908. In May 1999 a new 120 foot concrete viaduct opened as its replacement. This bridge legacy of the New Deal served the county well for sixty-two years. Bridge #239 had been the chief connecting point of Columbia and Sand Lake Refuge to the service center of Aberdeen and it served as an important route to visit the wonders of the Sand Lake Refuge.

On County Road #16 about six miles south of Bath corner and Highway 12 a seventy-foot concrete viaduct with four 16' spans crosses the Moccasin. Both the WPA and Brown County sponsored this bridge which still services traffic to and from Stratford. It has an identifying plate which dates its construction in 1939. Below is a sketch and photo of that bridge.



This 1939 bridge across the Moccasin was one of many WPA projects resulting in roads and bridges in Brown County.

## RELIEF ISSUES IN LOCAL POLITICAL ELECTIONS 1934-1936

While the Evening News reflected a republican attitude displaying concern about federal spending on frivolous items and standing as protector of the taxpayers, Republicans recognized the need for handling the unemployment problem as did the Democrats. In Congress Republicans often challenged excessive spending bills and created uncertainty in the states as to whether or not funding would be reduced for relief.

On the local level in Aberdeen there is some evidence that relief issues were used for political purposes although other issues were raised to cast doubts about political opponents. This narrative will include illustrations for 1934-1936. On November 5, 1934 a boxed ad entitled "Notice to Relief Workers" presented thoughts from the county Democratic Committee. They blamed Republicans for misinforming the public as to the wages and work hours for relief workers in South Dakota compared to Minnesota. Also, Minnesota drew funds from county, state and federal sources while in South Dakota federal funds were the only source of relief labor wages.

### Notice to Relief Workers

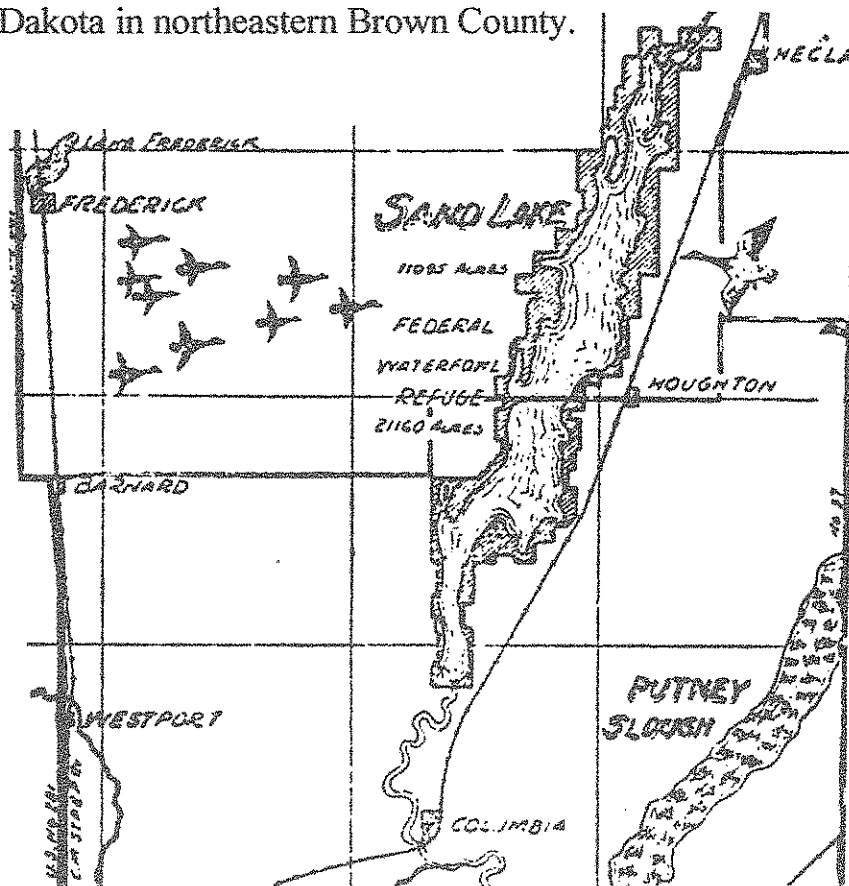
Eye catching Headline to Evening News ad November 5, 1934

On April 21, 1935 City commissioner Kelly' supporters portrayed him as a friend of the taxpayers. One of the positive points in an advertisement was: *"He has been fair to Labor. He has voted for every city project to provide work for the unemployed and to keep all city employees at work. His team work with other commissioners enabled Aberdeen to get PWA money for water works and sewage improvements. Aberdeen was the first city in the whole northwest to get PWA funds. Many South Dakota cities less aggressive and efficient lost out entirely."*

In April 1936 candidate W. L. Buttz criticized incumbent mayor Douglas' record quoting the mayor's remarks of August 19, 1935 opposing National Relief policy, that is "doling out relief is breaking the spirit and independence of our cities." Candidate Buttz asked *"What would we have done without that Federal relief?"* He claimed that the mayor had promised winter work on superstructures of the dam for 500 laborers. Buttz asked *"How many laborers worked that winter or later on this project?"* *Were there 500 men there, 400, 300 or even 200 at any time? As a matter of fact you men who did work, I ask you: Was there ever any where near the number employed that was promised? I believe a promise to labor is as scared as a bond."*

## PART V- CCC & NYA 1935-1941 NEW DEAL'S SAND LAKE LEGACY

In 1933, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act, which authorized the creation of the Civilian Corps Reforestation Youth Rehabilitation Movement. Soon after its creation, this program simply became known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). An Advisory Council consisting of representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Labor, and War provided the organization and direction for projects conducted by the CCC. The primary purpose of the CCC was to carry out conservation measures that included forestry, soil erosion, flood control, fish hatcheries, and wildlife refuges. In fact, the development of a wildlife refuge was the main purpose for a CCC camp near Columbia, South Dakota in northeastern Brown County.



Map Sand Lake Refuge

The CCC differed from other New Deal programs that offered jobs to the unemployed in that the CCC followed more of a military organization. Requirements to join the CCC included: American citizenship, age limits of 18 to 25 years, unmarried, out of school, unemployed, capable of strenuous physical labor and willingness to obey camp rules. Individuals enrolled in the CCC

generally worked a forty hour week and received \$30 per month in pay, \$25 of which was sent to the family of the respective workers.

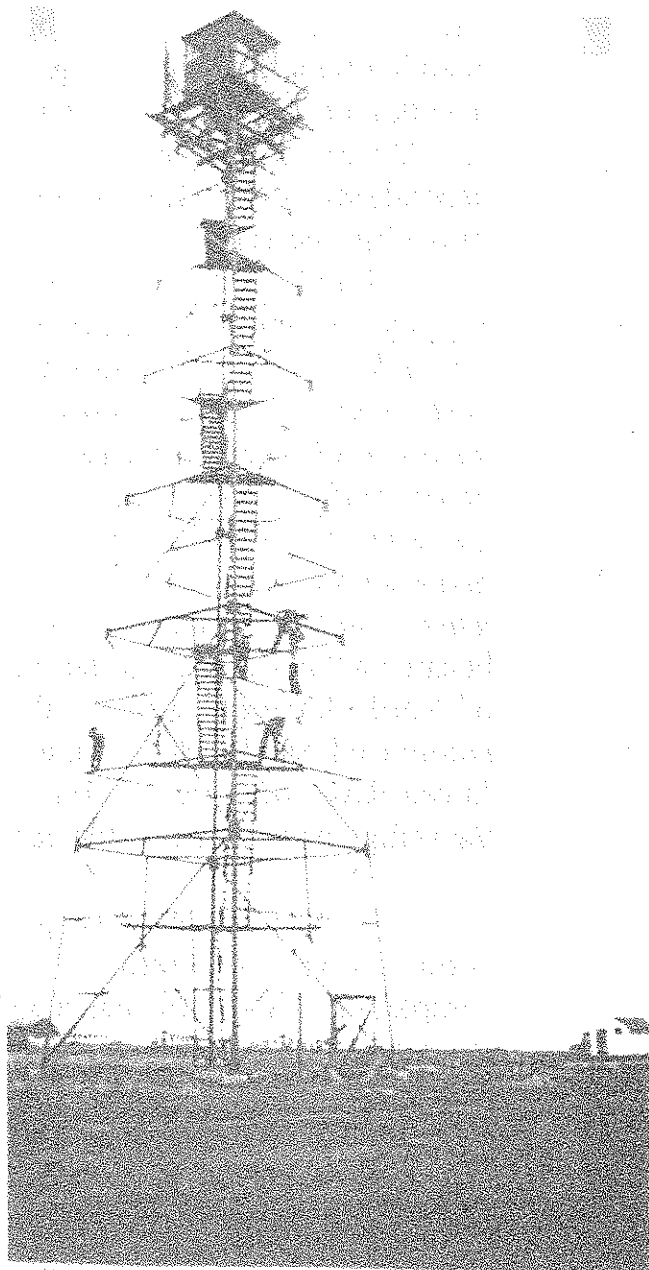
Recognizing that farming and grazing practices contributed to depletion of wildlife habitats and that employment opportunities for youth were needed in the unemployment crisis of the mid 1930s, President Roosevelt by executive order established Sand Lake Refuge in northern Brown County. When the project was originally proposed in 1934 and the county commission was asked in December to sell  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a section of land at about \$8600, area farmers complained that such a low price might set precedents for low prices for their land. In 1934 original surveys were made and land acquisition followed in 1934-1935. Houghton farmer opposition in January 1935 surfaced. They rejected accusations that they were greedy and wanted higher prices for land needed in the refuge. Their argument was that they needed the land for hay to feed their livestock. They rejected the designation of their land as "sub-marginal" when it averaged two tons of hay to the acre. In summer 1936 the new Refuge leased some 900 acres of hay land to farmers for livestock feed since they were hard pressed for subsistence having sold their hay land to the government for refuge purposes.

The U.S. Biological Survey sponsored a 'Sand Lake project. In March 1935 a permanent station for an overseer was built on the northwest edge of Sand Lake north of Columbia in connection with the game refuge. By June 1935 prior to the arrival of CCC youth, work had begun on about a dozen permanent structures at the civilian Conservation Corps camp established to service the area. Fred R. Comb Co. of Minneapolis with a low bid of \$33,362 contracted to perform a variety of tasks: construct a residence and a service building, a barn, sanitary building, boathouse, pump houses and equipment, entrance gate, septic tank and disposal field and concrete footings for a steel lookout tower. For an additional \$34,519 that company also contracted to lay sewer conduits, cement walks and to grade the grounds. Workers, also, built a mess hall with combined dining room and kitchen. Contractors erected a 107 foot observation tower, a feature found in all waterfowl refuges. That tower remains today as a part of this camp's legacy and an icon in the memories of those who viewed it or climbed it. In July 2000 teacher Jackie Wells-Fauth, a product of Columbia area farm country, described her memories: *"The tower at the refuge base is a source of fascination. It was always a challenge for climbing. As a child, you wanted to get to the top and then weren't sure about coming back down. As an adult the view from the top is ever more breathtaking than the climb for those who are interested. Viewing the entire area from that vantage point is one of the joys of the trip."*

Sand Lake Tower in treeless setting

Restriction of movement in the Refuge Area impacted the freedom and movement of sportsmen and trappers in a region renowned for its fishing and wild life. The Aberdeen Evening News of October 8, 1936, alerted its readers to the restricted area: *"Located along the James River, the refuge extends from a mile north of Hecla, southwest sixteen and a half miles past Houghton to within four miles of Columbia. Four highways cross the area, all of which are closed to hunting or shooting at all times."*

In January of 1935 speculation arose about a possible location for two CCC camps near Aberdeen. One seemed destined for the Richmond Dam spillway project and another along the Elm possibly diverting overflow waters from the Elm River by means of a three-mile ditch to Moccasin Creek. This CCC employment did not materialize & a north Brown County location became the CCC site. In June 167 former South Dakota youth finished with Arkansas camp work. They arrived by Northwest train at Columbia. Under Captain John Morgan they erected a tent city until permanent buildings were finished. Military administrators supervised CCC youth. Officers thought laying out the camp site would be a six-week project. In Sept. 1935, CCC workers



View from the Air of Sand Lake Refuge



started their four-year task of shaping the land, “*the hay basket of Brown County*,” into a suitable refuge for birds as well as building structures to serve as a headquarters and work base. They built an eight-stall storage garage, a duck hospital, dry seed storage, irrigation pump house and other structures. A year later in 1936 the Sand Lake beds were dry for the first time in local history forcing dependence on 15 artesian wells. This dry spell enabled much island building for future bird nesting.

Ralph Herseth, camp superintendent, relates in the Houghton Centennial History, the work which employed some 200 youth: “*tear down buildings on farms which had been taken into the refuge area, build pheasant shelters, build duck nests, had a nursery to start seedling trees, transplant trees, an irrigation system for the trees, harvest bulrush seed, bale straw for use in the bird shelters and nests, build bridges and roads and dams, move barns and buildings off the now government owned farms to farms outside the refuge area, build gates to the headquarter entrance, create a public picnic area, tear out fences, put in boundary fences, built the lookout tower at the headquarters.*” The Refuge which emerged became a “*true jewel*” of the Prairie Pothole region—a place to see migratory birds of North America. In 2001 the American Bird Conservancy in Washington DC recognized Sand Lake’s significance as a globally important bird area along the James River because millions of birds rely on the refuge every year and because the refuge had made notable achievement in conserving birds and habitats.

In August, 1938 refuge director Phil Dumont invited service clubs and the public to visit the refuge. He reviewed the accomplishments which included completion of two, low-earth dams. The Columbia dam located at the south end of the project was 3200 feet long and had a 400-foot concrete spillway. The Mud Lake dam, one foot higher than the Columbia dam and one mile north of state highway #10, was 6600 feet long and had a 100 foot concrete spillway at the east end. Five-strand barbed wire, strung on creosoted posts, surrounded the posted 21,000 acre refuge. Hunting was banned on four highways crossing the refuge.

The changes of 1935-39 impacted both negatively and positively the farms, towns, travel routes and hunting practices in the vicinity. Brown County commissioners responded in July 1935 to petitions from the Bureau of Biological Surveys requesting closure of 24 segments of road in the Sand Lake area’s future federal game refuge. They decided to keep open some stretches including a three-mile east-to-west segment across the James river bottom four miles north of Houghton and a north-south road running north from Houghton in order to connect the town with the Branch grade stretch. However, at least eight other stretches were closed.



Clarence Smith in the Houghton Centennial history 1885-1985, published in 1985, recalled the impact on local farmers and Houghton. He labeled the refuge project *"an even greater misfortune"* than the dust storms and drought of the early 1930s. The Refuge *"stretched for miles north and south just west of the little town, cutting off half of its trade area. Farmers sold their land and moved out. Roads were closed and rerouted. Dams were constructed on the James River. The whole area was fenced by CCC workers. They built a high observation tower and extensive headquarter buildings and pens. Farmers were being exchanged for geese, and the geese came by the hundreds of thousands."*



**Fencing the refuge**

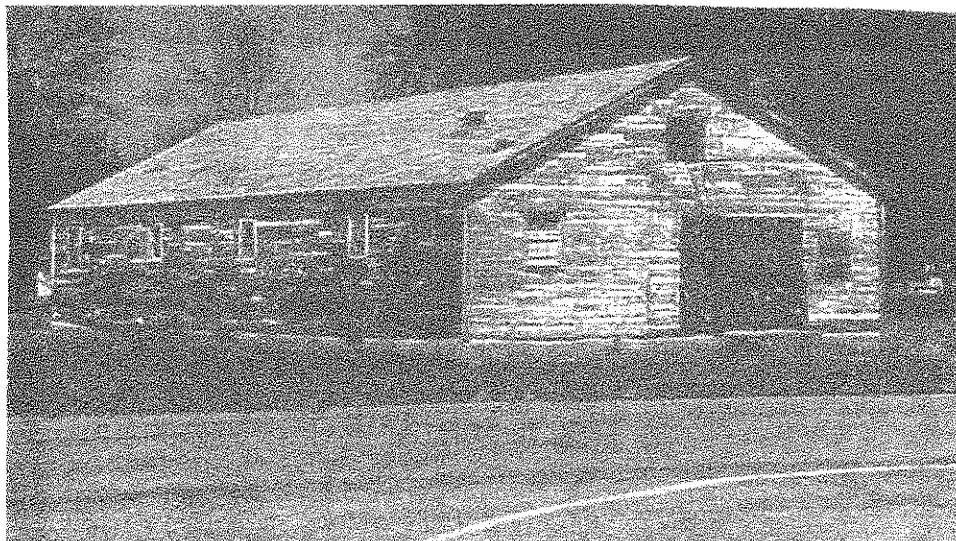
Smith's lament continued: *"Geese, likewise, needed no roads or civic improvements, and they also paid no taxes. With the hunting season hordes of hunters came cruising along the township roads seeking straggling geese straying outside the refuge. During the wet fall days these hundreds of cars cut the farm roads to pieces. The rookie hunters from away could not tell a dairy cow from a deer, and they cut the farmers fences and trampled down his corn. The farmers who remained around Houghton have suffered a lot during the last fifty years."*

By April 1936 workers had constructed eight islands into what the press termed *"a private island empire"* for migratory wildfowl. Workers moved over 120,000 cubic yards of dirt in the process. Burrows surrounding the islands were connected by ditches with the James River to insure a continuous water supply. Camp Superintendent Teckemeyer in April 1936 asserted that in order to provide *"a bird paradise,"* some sixteen miles of marsh, have been planted with dense vegetation and was to be flooded.

In 1936 and 1937 marginal trails were built to provide year-around patrol roads inside the refuge and to serve as wide fire breaks; only a few miles of those trails were graveled. Starting in 1936 the Shelter Belt Division of the Forestry Service transferred surplus trees which were grown in a 22-acre nursery on the east bank of Sand Lake. In 1937 about 45,000 of these had been planted in shelter strips. In February 1939 the Aberdeen Evening News reported on staffing. In August 1937 the first WPA men were brought in from nearby towns of Columbia, Claremont, Bath and Westport mainly for carpentry work. In 1938 about 75 WPA workers helped in tree planting but only 15 remained during August to November. In November 1938 a large crew of WPA workers assisted in winter work on water system controls, fire brakes and game shelters. By February 1939 110 WPA men were assigned to the Sand Lake project. In 1938-1939 A.O. Talmadge, experienced in refuge projects elsewhere, supervised WPA workers as well as performed other functions as Assistant Refuge Manager.

In July 2000 teacher Jackie Fauth looked at Sand Lake with a different perspective than that of farmer Clarence Smith in 1985. She recalled childhood days lying on pasture grass looking skyward to see the sky turn white and gray with those noisy beautiful birds: who, as they landed, turned the refuge into a “*moving snow bank*”...Sand Lake can be white and foamy when the wind skips across the surface or it can take on deep mysterious browns, blues and greens as the season and water flow determine.” Describing a walk through the nature trails as entertaining and educational, and one which increased awareness of wildlife, she asserted that for the nature lover Sand Lake seemed like a “*Magic Kingdom*” In July 1939 the Aberdeen Evening News confirmed this assessment of 2000 with the headline “*CCC Creates Paradise for Waterfowl at Sand Lake.*”

### A Camp Building Survivor



This building was once used as the library for the CCC camp located at Sand Lake. It was later moved to Hecla where it served as the American Legion Post before falling into disuse.

The News announced termination of the camp as of August 1, 1939 and praised the CCC camp's four years work as educational and professional training for the several hundred enrollees. Many of the more skilled youth received training to operate diesel tractors, draglines and other earth moving equipment—experiences which served them in later life. The Refuge manager announced that its officers and personnel would be transferred elsewhere and its buildings transferred to the Works Progress Administration for use by the NYA program.

#### NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION

Established in the First District in December 1935 the NYA did not operate in a military mode as the CCC. The First District's allotted quota of youth for its ten counties was 600. In October 1936 ninety of these were employed in Brown County and 65 of these were in Aberdeen. In addition high school and college students financed their education by wage work paid for by this federal program. To qualify, youth must be between 18 and 25 and in most cases from certified needy families. In Brown County they received \$11.72 a month in 1936 and were expected to help their families with that salary which increased over time. Youths worked 48 hours for 32 cents an hour. Programs were aimed at developing a trade. Westport had ten boys making bookcases, piano stools and school benches in a manual training course.

By late 1939 a new scene of activity emerged when Sand Lake CCC camp was disbanded in August and buildings turned over to NYA. Some of the 27 buildings were to be used elsewhere; others were demolished. Two served to house NYA workers. The former CCC Sand Lake site became a center for vocational education in December 1939 and into 1940-41. Forty boys remodeled buildings for the new operation. Boys from varied counties received instruction in garage work, machine and wood shop, body and fender repair. Between 120-150 boys arrived after July 1, 1935 for a four-to-nine month stay, depending on their course curriculum. The NYA camp occasionally loaned some of its youth to the WPA for various projects. By 1939 enrollees received \$30 a month but about 2/3 of that paid for subsistence at the camp. In January 1941 members enrolled in a new project on soil conservation. This involved machinery repair, grass seed sorting, landscaping, dead-tree cutting and sawing of wood for firewood and fence posts amongst other things. Both the CCC and NYA received general praise compared to some New Deal programs. The Aberdeen Evening News put it this way in an editorial which characterized that program as *"an investment in an improved younger generation...When the depression is over several hundred thousand young men and the nation's natural resources will be better because it existed."*

## PART VI FEDERAL PROJECT NUMBER ONE

### FEDERAL WRITERS PROJECT IN BROWN COUNTY 1935-41; PUTTING INTELLECTUALS & WHITE COLLARS TO WORK

The Federal Project Number One, or simply the Federal One Project, was created in 1935 with the whole-hearted endorsement of President Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor. The Federal One Project actually consisted of several different project categories. They were the Federal Arts Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Federal Writers' Project. Nationally between the program's inception and its demise in 1943 the Federal Writers' Project employed 10,000 persons. Critics were quick to challenge whether these projects could really be called work. In Brown County, the Federal Writers Project employed local writers and researchers. As a result several publications were written.

#### "DISCOVER SOUTH DAKOTA FOR SOUTH DAKOTANS"

On December 10, 1935 the Aberdeen Evening News alerted readers to the establishment of District One headquarters of the WPA Writers Project in Aberdeen with Luther E. Falk as District supervisor. Even earlier in late November of that year the Evening News announced a search for writers for the WPA's State History Project. That organization sought professional and technical persons who had been on relief. This call was not for common laborers but for newspaper men, poets, novelists, students, ministers, teachers, magazine contributors and technicians such as draftsmen, printers and photographers. The Writers Project was preparing to write a local and a state Guide, one of a series for an all-national American Guide. If such persons were already working on a manual labor job or if they were currently unemployed volunteers were asked to visit the relief offices for an interview. They were needed in preparing a study of Aberdeen which would be useful for strangers and tourists as well as locals.

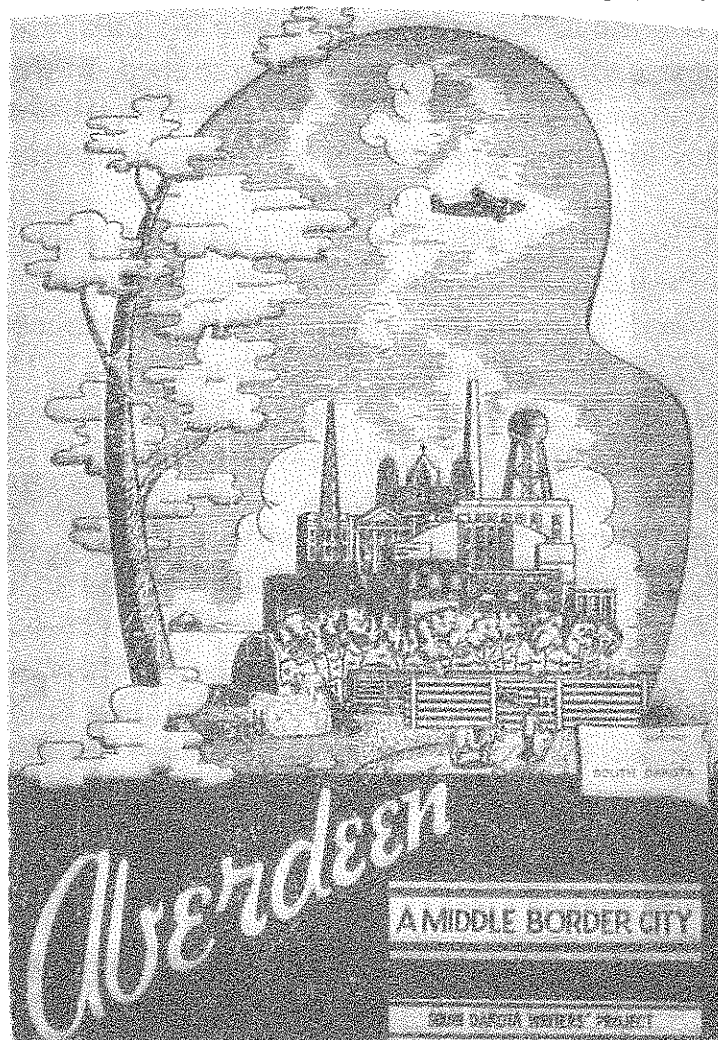
In October and November 1936 the Aberdeen Evening News highlighted a feature "*Know Your Aberdeen*" prepared by the WPA Writers Project for the American Guide series. Illustrative subjects treated are "environs" which commented on Richmond, Mina and Willow Lakes and other topics depicting the city's development.

By December 1936 much material had been assembled and organized for a state guide. A staff of thirty, headquartered in Pierre, coordinated narratives from many towns including Aberdeen. That guide contained a series of tours crossing the state revealing points of interest, origins of town names, recreational centers,

scenic spots along with pictures and maps. The American Guide--the ultimate outcome of local and state guides-- received much publicity. Its purpose was to gather facts about all sections of the country to be published in 5 volumes of 600 pages each. Contents included maps and topographical lists of plants and animal life, historical settings, educational and recreational facilities.

The Aberdeen guide aimed to explore the founding of Aberdeen, its history and development and included an analysis of the entire multi-county district. The district supervisor edited and forwarded the material to Pierre and the state director Lisle Reese for further editing and inclusion in the state guide. In 1940 the WPA published Aberdeen: A Middle Border City with 13 chapters and 11 photos. It has an illustrated cover representing major structures many of which were built by supervised relief labor.

Cover sketch: Aberdeen: Middle Border City (1940)



In the foreground of the etching below are the Milwaukee stockyards which were serviced by WPA water main construction in 1936. Further back on the left is the KABR radio tower established in 1935 and to the right is the water tower of the city's new soft water system of 1934-35. Behind the 4th Ave. American News building stands the Civic Auditorium of 1938 constructed with PWA funds. To the right is the Brown County courthouse which experienced some WPA renovations in 1938. To the right in front of the Civic Auditorium stands a building resembling the treatment plant at Ordway. Behind that stands a structure resembling the new federal building of 1937. In the background the spires of Sacred Heart Catholic church loom skyward as does the smokestack, probably of Tiffany laundry. In the clouds above an airplane symbolizes the recent servicing of Aberdeen by a national carrier and airport improvements assisted by WPA.

The Historical Records Survey, a branch of the WPA, completed most of its work by the end of 1936. Its South Dakota staff of twenty-five had finished researching courthouse records of 66 counties. Their objective was to prepare a bibliography of all courthouse records and to make a similar list of city records. Other private and semi public records were also examined. In the vaults of public institutions dwelt unfamiliar and forgotten data and stories. This was but one more WPA historical legacy for future amateur and professional historians.

#### S. D. MANUSCRIPTS: COMMUNICATING WITH WPA WRITERS

The Writers Project staff communicated with its workers and incorporated samples of creative work through nine issues of a short publication called MSS (Manuscripts) during the period August 1936 to August 1937. These essays were precursors of the 1938 South Dakota Guide, South Dakota Place Names (1940) and Legends of the Mighty Sioux (1941). This experiment and a shop environment gave unemployed printers as well as writers a job. Articles by 20 women and 29 men with varied educational backgrounds were involved. Aberdeen District director Luther Falk included an essay on Hamlin Garland in the Dakotas. An October 13, 1936 editorial supported the endeavor. Under the banner "*State Writers Reveal Talent in Extra Effort*" the Evening News editor announced he had been receiving a literary magazine entitled MSS containing contemporary South Dakota history, local color, and original stories and poems. He felt that publication and its distribution was an important contribution of the WPA and should be found in schools and libraries of the state.

#### HAMLIN GARLAND MEMORIAL

On Sunday July 12, 1936 Luther Falk, district supervisor of the WPA Writers' Project who had suggested a memorial, welcomed a large gathering at the



site of the Richard H. Garland home where Hamlin Garland had lived between 1881 and 1884. The center of attention was a 15 ton boulder, donated by Brown county commissioner John Forsting. A bronze plate bore the inscription

**HAMLIN GARLAND  
WHO ROSE TO DISTINCTION IN  
AMERICAN LETTERS  
RESIDED ON THIS SPOT 1881-1884  
HERE STOOD THE  
GARLAND HOMESTEAD  
WHERE HE BEGAN HIS FIRST BOOK  
"MAIN-TRAVELLED ROADS"**

This event triggered publication of a mimeographed 33 page booklet The Hamlin Garland Memorial. Lisle Reese, state director of the Federal Writers' Project pushed for republishing in 1939 the dedication edition as a second edition which included a Forward by Hamlin Garland. Mr. Reese in September 2000 recalled "*the writers' League (me) Workshop bought 24 lb paper and used a straight edge to make each page look deckle-edged. All type was hand set and each page printed on a hand-fed job press. The imitation leather cover was a special order.*"

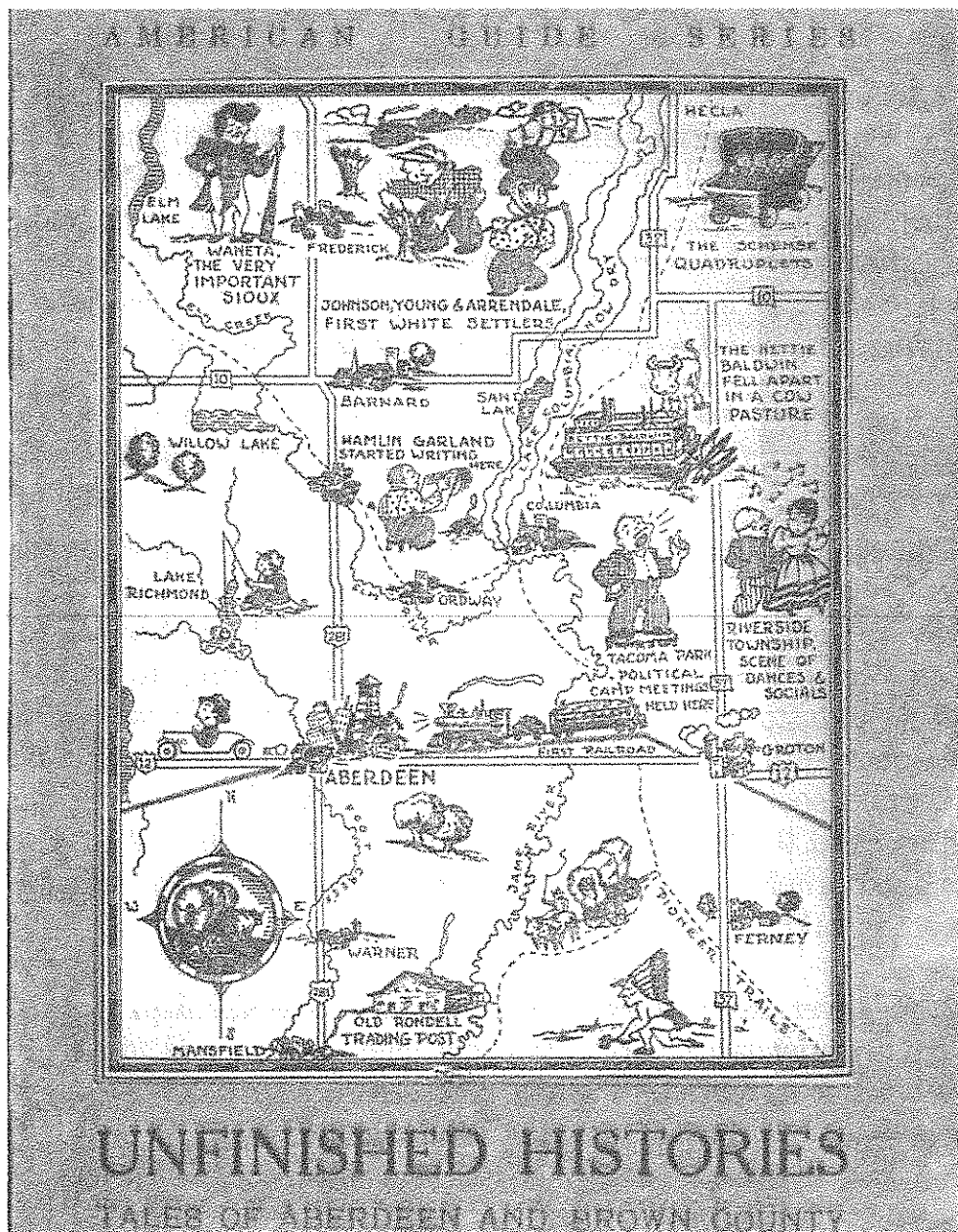
#### **UNFINISHED HISTORIES; TALES OF ABERDEEN AND BROWN COUNTY (1938)**

The Northern South Dakota Historical Association based at Northern State Teachers College was the cooperating sponsor of this title in the American Guide Series. State Director of FWP and L.E. Falk, Aberdeen Director of FWP, in a forward indicated this publication of 1938 was an attempt to give "*warmth and color*" to local history, to recall and preserve in brief form "*intimate glimpses*" of city and county from pioneer times to the present. Aberdeen's first Christmas, its Main Street, its social events and the Blizzard of 1888 illustrate this theme. Preface remarks asserted the 60-page book with its four chapters and seven illustrations was designed primarily to give useful employment to needy unemployed writers and research workers.

The cover featured artist Sada Jones' pictorial map of Brown County. Within county boundaries varied drawings catch the eye and stimulate curiosity to discover what is represented thereon. Three recent artificial lakes—Willow, Elm, and Richmond-- are included along with historic sites such as Tacoma Park, Columbia and its Nettie Baldwin river boat. The northern towns of Frederick,

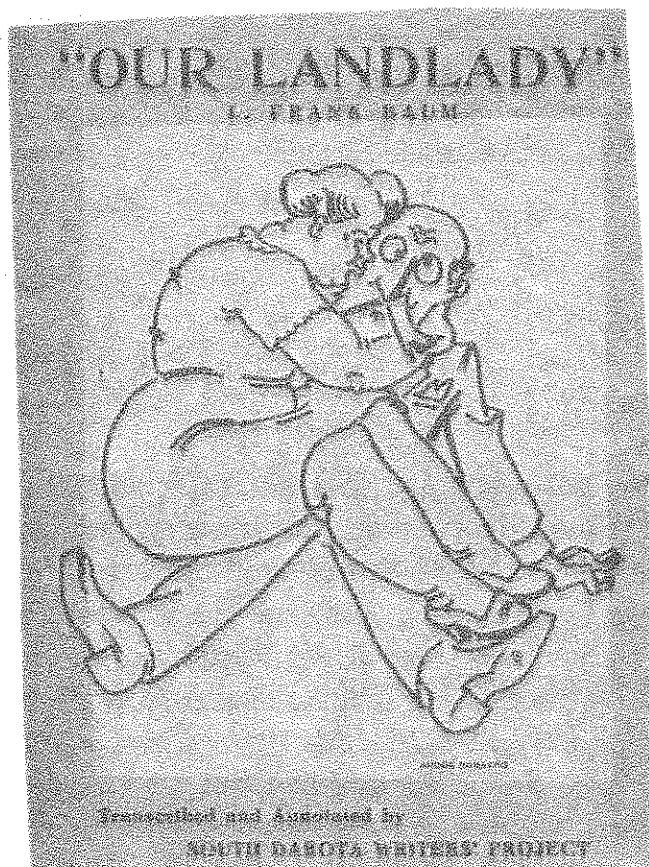
Barnard and Ordway and the southern towns of, Groton, Ferney, Mansfield and Warner are represented. Hecla and its Schense quintuplets testify to an event of the 1930s. Added to this feast for the eyes is a covered wagon and an Indian representing early times as do the original Sand Lake and the former Columbia Lake of the 1880s. Train and auto as transportation symbols focus on Aberdeen with its tall buildings and water tower, Cabins and persons representing the first white settlers are present along with early Indian inhabitants symbolized by an Indian wearing a feathered head dress approaching Rondell trading post. In the center above the town of Ordway young Hamlin Garland sits at work writing

Cover chart: Unfinished Histories: 1938



## L FRANK BAUM'S OUR LANDLADY

Translated and annotated by the South Dakota Writer's Project in 1941, this illustrated forty-six page compilation of 13 columns from Baum's newspaper, the Saturday Pioneer presents a satiric look at Aberdeen in 1890. Around the dinner table in landlady Mrs. Bilkins' boarding house various boarders and guests talk about issues and personalities of that time. Director of the SD Art Project Andre Borak selected the scene below from Baum's column of March 29, 1890 for the cover of that publication.

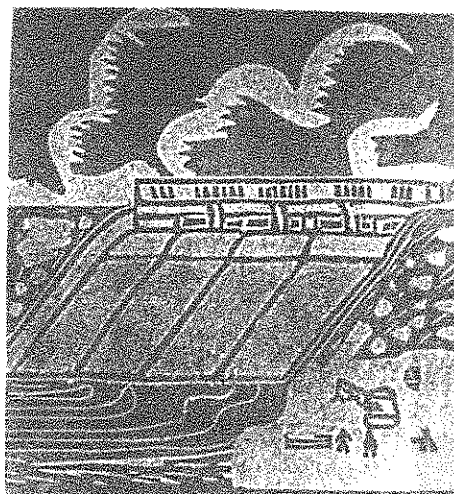


## SCULPTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEDERAL ARTS PROJECT:

The United States Post Office and Courthouse building in Aberdeen received funding for federal arts projects. In 1940 artist Laci de Gerenday was commissioned under the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Art to do a wood sculpture for the Post Office building built in 1937. The finished work was a 72"x62" walnut wood carving entitled: "*The Building of Grand Crossing.*" This wood sculpture was moved to the first floor of the Federal Building where it can be seen by the public and bears the following inscription. "*This relief depicts the building of a post office in the settlement of Grand Crossing. While the men hammer and saw, the women and children bring water and paint a sign to be hung over the doorway.*"

The cover of the Federal Writers Project Builders of Prairie Lakes booklet (1940) is symbolic of the lake building theme. It focuses on three of the largest lakes built by the WPA in South Dakota--all in Brown County. Paul Kean, artist in the South Dakota Art Project, created the linoleum block cover design which symbolizes dam building by workers shown to the right of the spillway--the most dramatic evidence of construction.

Linoleum Block design for  
Builders of Prairie Lakes-1940



### CONCLUSION

Scholars recognize that defense preparation after 1940 were decisive in ending economic depression. Each experiment in alphabet agencies marked the early New Deal 1933-34 and elicited criticisms of excessive spending and “*make work*” dole projects that did not demonstrate a visible improvement in the economy. A favorite song at the Republican convention of June 1936 conveyed this critical attitude. Joe Dunne’s anti-New Deal song inspired the delegates. Repetitive phrases in both verses stressed the refrain “*Three long years, Full of grief and tears*”. Focusing on FDR, the verses continued to the tune of Three Blind Mice: “*Frankie gave us to understand,/He’d lead us to the promised land/For three long years/For when he got to the promised land/We found nothing but shifting sand/and he left us stripped like Sally Rand.*”

Grotonites might dispute this song’s interpretation as they secured a new school thanks to the PWA and Aberdonians boasted a new waterworks system prior to 1936. In November 1936 Brown County voters returned Democrats to the national and congressional offices even though republicans had local successes. In their 1940 national convention Republicans might have to revise the words of 1936 based on events of 1937-1940. During the later New Deal 1937-1940 Brown County and Aberdeen benefited from federal programs which met human needs for employment and self-respect as well as improved the public infrastructure creating an architectural and artistic heritage for future generations.

In 1943 when President Roosevelt terminated WPA, the republican-oriented Aberdeen American News summarized WPA’s contribution under the

banner "WPA LEAVES MANY MONUMENTS" and labeled those New Deal years as *"the end of an epoch which may never be repeated."* Characterizing the WPA as *"maligned at times"* the editor termed the WPA as *"effective in enabling hundreds of depression struck families in Brown County alone during the seven years of its existence."* As an emergency measure *"it gave more than it took"* An approximate comparison of WPA expenditures and the local sponsors' contributions testified to the truth of this interpretation.

The News compared the sponsors--Aberdeen, Brown County and the school district--with WPA participation since 1935 excluding projects in other county towns. Using the most recent but incomplete records, it seemed correct to say that over \$2,000,000 in public buildings and major improvements were built 1935-1943 and the sponsors expended "slightly more than \$650,000". The county appeared to be the largest contributor--\$482,320--in that seven year period. Richmond Dam and Park, (finished in 1940), was the biggest single outlay at a cost of \$60,000 whereas the county share of the Elm Dam (1937-1940) was \$57,925. WPA bridge building cost the county \$34,800 and road construction \$48,865. The county was involved, either as sole or co-sponsor, in major projects: Dams--Amsden, Pigors, Highland; and Rondell Girl Scout Camp & Park, Tacoma Park improvements; Moccasin Creek sewer and bridge, Frederic Auditorium and county highway shop and office as well as fairgrounds improvements.

The city's involvement with WPA was evident in airport improvement, armory construction, a city baseball park and the Railroad Avenue paving project completed in 1940--with sponsor's share of \$12,918 out of total expense of \$39,291. The Railroad Sewer project cost the city \$2977.25.

Past and present narratives focus on the legacy of the New Deal in the nation and in Brown County. What did those years produce in long-term effects as well as immediate relief and recovery? The creation of artificial lakes received attention in a chapter called the *"Long Pull"* contained in the WPA Aberdeen Middle Border City publication of 1940. The long-term impact was emphasized: *"Aside from their practical uses, these lakes have intangible value that would be difficult to overestimate. In a country where the abundance or scarcity of water is of primary importance, a lake is a welcome and refreshing sight. Lakes could not be wished into existence, so Aberdeen, with the help of the federal government, created them."*

A generation now aging makes way for a new generation whose memories of the New Deal era are not so strongly embedded in thought. Hopefully, this narrative is not only a reminder to those who lived in that era but also a guide for the present as to government's role to serve citizens whether it be in prosperous times or times of economic difficulty.

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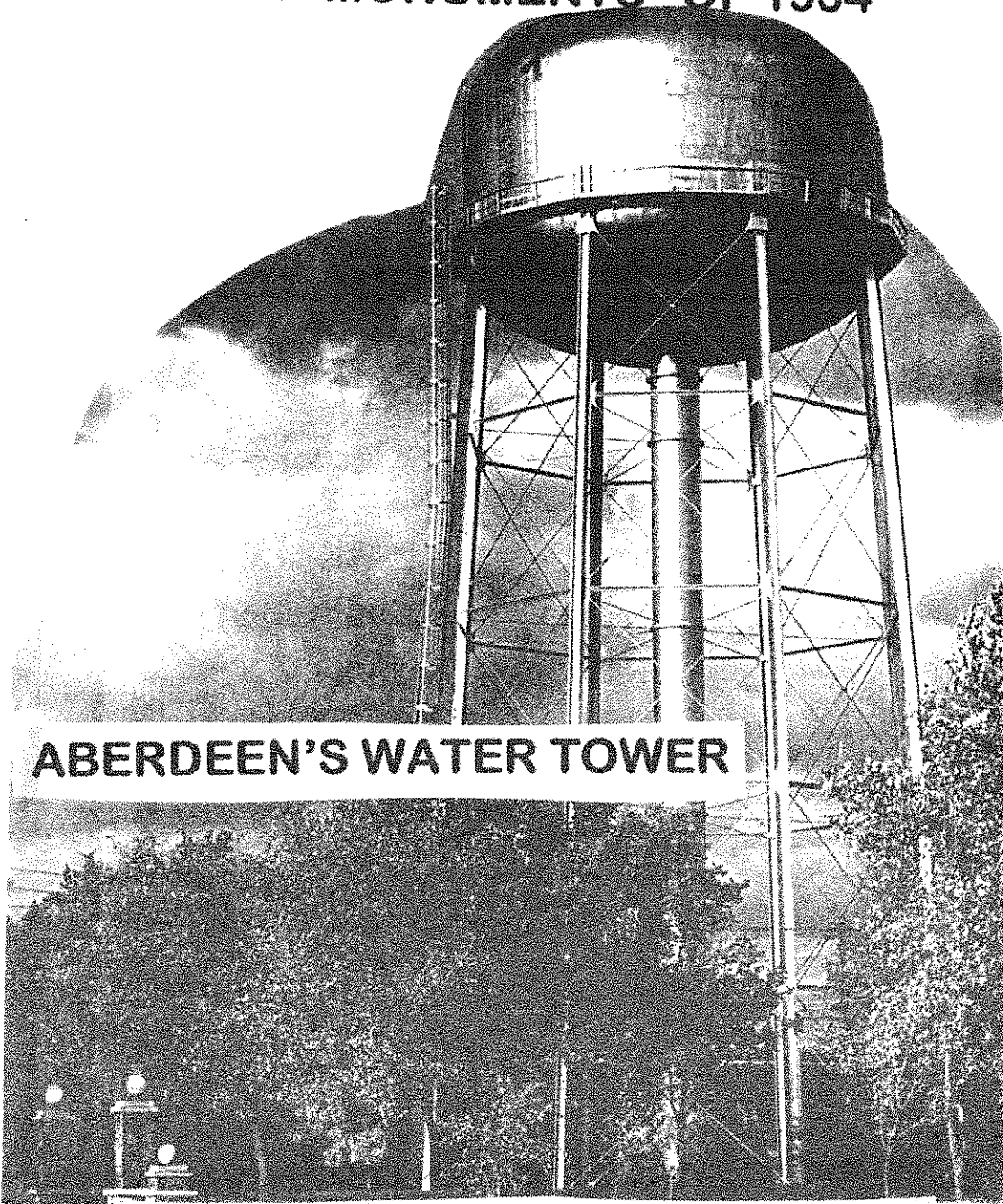
The publication of this booklet has been partially financed with federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior through the South Dakota State Historical Preservation Program, Pierre, South Dakota. Funding and in-kind support from the city of Aberdeen and Brown County contributed significantly to the research, photo reproduction, and publication of this booklet.

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Readers who may wish to contact the landmarks Commission about this booklet may correspond to the Commission at the Municipal Building, 123 South Lincoln Street, Aberdeen, South Dakota 57401. The mission of the Aberdeen/Brown County Landmarks Commission is public education of historic preservation and the importance of protecting and preserving our historic heritage.

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Troy McQuillen photo file-----	Back cover (enlarged water tower)

# **NEW DEAL "MONUMENTS" OF 1934**



**ABERDEEN'S WATER TOWER**



**TREATMENT PLANT AT ORDWAY**