

CAPITAL PAST TIMES

NEWSLETTER FOR THE BISMARCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AUGUST 2019

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THE NEW RAILROAD BRIDGE, CIRCA 1948

TOM ATKINSON

As planning is underway by Burlington Northern Santa Fe to build a new railroad bridge over the Missouri River in Bismarck, it should be remembered that this is the second serious attempt by the railroad company to replace the landmark bridge. The first effort was attempted in 1948 and would have succeeded had it not been for the lack of state funding.

As originally designed in 1883, the railroad tracks on the Bismarck side of the bridge were built with a tight curve as the tracks exited the bridge. The tracks then headed southeast and ran on the east side of the Bismarck Indian School, now Fraine Barracks. The tracks then curved east and merged with the current track location at approximately where Schafer St. crosses the tracks.

With the development of larger and longer diesel locomotives in the 1930s, the curve of the track resulted in the trains having to slow down. At the same time, soil on the hill on the east side of the bridge was starting to slide again. The stability of the east bank had been a problem since the bridge was built and had caused the east pier to shift to the west. Numerous repairs had been made over the years to no avail.

The Northern Pacific Railroad Company started to investigate sites for a new bridge in 1945 [1]. The proposed new bridge was to be built south of the original Liberty Memorial Bridge. In Bismarck, the tracks would have been relocated for about a mile onto Memorial Highway from Washington Street to just south of the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

Under the plan, the state would have relocated Memorial Highway. The new highway would have been located on railroad right-of-way starting at Washington Street until it connected with Rosser Avenue. It then would have cut straight west and joined with the road at the highway bridge. The plan called for a new underpass at Washington Street. The railroad liked the plan because it eliminated the tight curve at the bridge and a steep track grade from the city of Mandan to the railroad bridge. The highway department liked the plan because it eliminated a dangerous hairpin curve at the existing underpass and a curve at the east approach of the highway bridge [2].

The railroad's plan was to disassemble and move the old bridge to St. Regis, Montana, where it would replace an existing bridge over the Clark River. The cost of the new bridge was estimated at \$4.282 million [3]. The railroad asked the State of North Dakota for \$977,500 in funding to support the project. The State of North Dakota received \$500,000 a year from the US Government Public Roads Administration to support grade separation projects. The railroad position was that grade separation money could be used per the discretion of the state and it did not require any matching state funds. The State was hesitant to apply all of their grade separation money for 2 years to just one project. In 1949, the State decided that they could not support the project.

The railroad then turned their attention to the east bank of the



Proposed bridge location. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

railroad bridge [4]. To try and stop the sliding of the slope, the railroad spent \$125,100 in 1951 to excavate a large portion of the east bank. At the same time, the tracks were realigned to allow for a smoother curve.

The result was that the slide continued to move, but at a much reduced rate. At the same time, the trains were able to handle the curve at a faster speed. The solution has proven successful for the last 68 years, but deterioration from weather and age has finally caught up with the bridge.

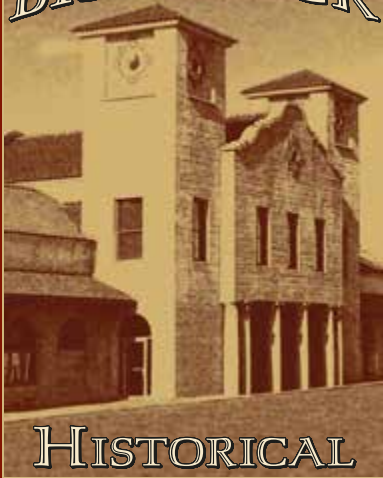
[1] Northern Pacific Railway Company, Engineering Department records, Minnesota Historical Society, catalog ID number 001719906, location 134.k.4.12f, general correspondence.

[2] The Bismarck Tribune, April 30, 1949, pg 1.

[3] NPRR Engineering Department records. Board of Directors meeting, Dec 16, 1948.

[4] North Dakota Public Service files, Northern Pacific Railroad 1951 Annual Report, State Historical Society of North Dakota.

BISMARCK



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PRESIDENT'S MUSINGS

KATE WALDERA, BISMARCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT

We live in a world of firsts...first on the moon, first to break the sound barrier, first President to throw out a ceremonial pitch, etc. North Dakota also has its share of firsts – including Helen Hamilton, the first female lawyer in the nation to be admitted to the American Bar Association and the first woman to receive a law degree from the University of North Dakota.



Helen Hamilton

Helen was born in Lexington, KY on January 3, 1874 to Major John G. and Melissa Lavayea Hamilton. The family came to Grand Forks in 1878 and became important fixtures in the city. Family influences gave her a love of law and public service. Helen's father was one of Grand Forks' pioneer attorneys and active in city affairs. Her mother's family was equally impressive. A maternal uncle, Henry Lavayea, represented the Fifth District in the North Dakota Legislature from 1901-1904. Helen's brother, Harry, served with the North Dakota National Guard regiment during the Spanish-American War and World War I.

She entered into law practice on June 14, 1905 with the Bangs, Netcher & Hamilton law firm and, later, with Bangs, Hamilton & Bangs. Hamilton remained in the practice of law until about 1½ years before her passing. Miss Hamilton was also appointed deputy clerk of the federal district court, a position she held for over 50 years. Helen was active in veteran and patriotic groups as a member and/or office holder in the American Legion Auxiliary, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, and United Spanish War Veterans. (The Grand Forks post for this last organization was named in honor of her brother.) In addition, she was a charter member of the Business and Professional Women's Club. Helen Hamilton has been honored annually since 1982 during the UND School of Law "Helen Hamilton Day". She died on September 30, 1949 at the age of 75.

Sources:

Grand Forks Herald (2/24/1918, p.10; 9/13/1923, p.1; 3/11/1933, p.10; 10/1/1949, p.12)
UND School of Law, Dean's Office 6/7/2019

FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

NEWS & NOTES

In the last newsletter it was mentioned that the Board was looking into acquiring a physical space in which to house our growing archival storage needs as well as for our Board and Committee meetings. Since then, a space has indeed been acquired. Located at 533 Airport Road, the Society has begun renting office space to headquarter its operations. The space includes two large rooms – one for storing collections and one to act as a meeting room. At this point it seems to be serving our needs very well.



THANKS FOR THESE GREAT PROGRAMS:

FOUNDERS DAY – MAY 9, 2019

Founders Day: Remembering Dr. B.F. and Linda Slaughter – In a packed evening, Ann Vadnie presented on the history of the Slaughter family, Marilyn Snyder joined with a presentation on genealogy of the family, and finally a group of the descendants engaged in a panel discussion featuring family stories and memories. Included was the performance of several of songs written by Mrs. Slaughter by Evan Laib. Mr. Laib's Lincoln Elementary National Anthem Singers opened the event by leading the audience in the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance. This program and others can be watched on-demand from Dakota Media Access - dakotamediaccess.org



TRIVIA

HILLSIDE PARK

The site for this year's Bismarck Historical Society's Annual Member Picnic is Hillside Park. Development of the park started largely in 1928. In that year, according to reports in the Bismarck Tribune, Father John Slag of the city park board presented to the East End Community Association plans to beautify their area of town through the addition of a park. The park board already owned some land there and Father Slag expected the St. Mary's Cemetery Association to donate a considerable amount of adjacent land to the project. (It appears that St. Mary's leased this land to the park board at the rate of \$1 for 99 years. Presumably this lease began in 1928 but is unknown to the author at this time.)

1928 was a busy year for parks in the Bismarck/Mandan area. In addition to the development of Hillside Park, the city acquired the Municipal Ballpark from a group of local civic organizations. At the ballpark the Kiwanis Club arranged for the purchase of playground equipment. In Mandan, the construction of a municipal 9-hole golf course took place under the guidance of Bismarck's Tom O'Leary.



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COMING EVENTS:

ANNUAL ALL-MEMBER PICNIC

AUGUST 29, 2019 AT 5:30PM

Hillside Aquatic Complex Community Room
1719 E Boulevard Ave

Watch your mailbox for more information!

IN MEMORIAM: TED QUANRUD

The Society is saddened by the passing of former Board member and current Honorary Board Member Ted Quanrud. Ted possessed a knowledge of Bismarck's history that could not be rivaled. Rest in peace, friend.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

Do you have an idea for a great historical article or story that would be a perfect fit on the front page of this newsletter? If you've got an original piece you'd like to have considered for print you can by submit it to Evan Laib at ejlaib1@gmail.com. Pieces may also be considered for sharing on our website or Facebook page.