



DAKOTA DATEBOOK

Sprint Launch Site

BY SARAH WALKER

April 28 -- In Cavalier County, about 17 miles east of Langdon, 43 acres of land are enclosed within four perimeter fences. Hardened remote launch operations exist below the earth, with two concrete ventilation towers above ground, along with sentry stations. The Sprint missile launch area contained 17 launch stations.

This is Remote Sprint Launch Site-3, also called RSL-3. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2018, it is the third of four such sites constructed as part of the Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex. Another site was also established in Cavalier County and two others were in Ramsey and Walsh counties.

The site was established during the Cold War to defend North Dakota's Minutemen Missile sites. It was located at Nekoma, and a pyramid tower still stands there today.

The Remote Sprint Launch sites were meant to be smaller than the Minutemen sites. They needed less attention and could be operated remotely. Construction contracts were awarded for all four RSL sites in 1971. They were designed very similarly; the only differences were how many launch stations each had and the length of the tunnels to the reinforced buildings that housed launch operations.

Interestingly, efforts to build the Mickelsen complex were not exactly secret. In 1972 the mayor of Nekoma wrote a letter to the newspaper that since construction had begun in April 1970, "virtually every citizen in the area" had been directly affected. He continued: "Most of us have felt it in the higher prices and wages now paid for goods and services; others feel it in the overcrowded or overloaded educational facilities, utilities and roads; property owners find it in the high assessments placed to them for street or utility installations and repairs."

And in December 1973, the *Hillsboro Banner* published a notice that Major Wayne Wiken of El Paso, Texas and a group of men from Fort Bliss were touring the complex site. Wiken's mother, from Minnesota, and two other guests traveled out to meet them at the base in Nekoma and stayed as his guests at dinner that evening.

Today, visitors interested in the history of the Cold War can visit multiple sites across North Dakota, including the RSL-3 site.

WDAY Signs on in 1922

BY JIM DAVIS

April 29 -- Radio was an exciting medium in the first quarter of the 20th century. On this date in 1922, three young men from Fargo, Lawrence Hamm, Earl Reinecke and Kenneth Hance, anxiously awaited a very important piece of paper.

Only a few weeks before, Mr. Hance had gone to Chicago and successfully completed his federal examination for a commercial license. They were already active in the radio business, having established a transmitter and receiver in the Cass County Courthouse. The set was situated in the dome under the bell tower in the courthouse and their antenna was a wire cage affair connected to the flagpole, but under Department of Commerce procedures, they were not authorized to begin the first commercial broadcasting in North Dakota until that paper arrived.

By 1922 there were more than 500 radio receivers in North Dakota, but not many local signals -- especially from transmitters powerful enough to have statewide range. The trio of Fargo men hoped to broadcast music, vaudeville acts, weather forecasts, news, crop reports and criminal information. They were already operating on a commission received from Sheriff Fred Kraemer of Cass County

to broadcast information on criminal activity and monitor any responses from amateur stations via telephone or wireless telegraph. When the license arrived, they began operating as WDAY out of Fargo on May 22, 1922.

Earl Reinecke, like many young men of his generation, had been fascinated with electricity and radio transmitting and had built his own transmitter as early as 1907. During the war he acted as a radio code instructor at the Agricultural College for the US Army. He had formed a radio equipment company in Fargo and this acted as the motivation to begin his own broadcasting station. He remained with WDAY until his death in 1965. During his lifetime he witnessed the development of radio and television in North Dakota.

Lawrence Hamm acted as president of WDAY for approximately 10 years, but his love was in the printing business and he was chairman of the board of the Pierce Company printers in Fargo until his death in 1958.

Kenneth Hance, like Reinecke, had a love of radio, and he obtained the license for the station. He left WDAY in 1928 and joined KSTP radio in St. Paul, eventually becoming vice president. This pioneer of radio and television died in 1969, the last survivor of the trio that first rode the commercial airwaves in North Dakota.

Freedom Train

BY SARAH WALKER

April 30 -- In the late 1940s, an unusual public service campaign was initiated in the form of a train. The Freedom Train was red, white and blue, and it carried an exhibit of more than 100 historic documents and items, including the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence. The US attorney general said the project had the goal of "combat(ing) alien ideologies and reawaken(ing) in the American people the reverence we know them to have for the American way of life."

President Truman went along with the idea, and the attorney general secured the use of some marines to guard the train and its precious cargo throughout the journey. The train set out from Philadelphia on Sept. 17, 1947. Christened the "Spirit of 1776," the train was on tour for 413 days, visiting all 48 contiguous states and traveling more than 37,000 miles.

At the end of April 1948, the freedom train rolled through North Dakota. Newspapers across the state reported on the long lines, often forming several hours before the train officially opened. Bismarck was the train's first stop in North Dakota, followed by Minot, Jamestown, Fargo, then finally, on this date, Grand Forks became the train's 174th stop.

People traveled from everywhere to see the famous train. Schools let out for the day and some students were carted in from nearby towns. A Canadian businessman even chartered a plane to Bismarck to view the documents.

Minot garnered the largest crowds, picking up people who

missed the train in Bismarck as well as others from nearby areas. Due to a late opening, just over half of the estimated 20,000 who came to the city to see the train were successful. Nevertheless, Minot set a new one-day attendance record for the 82 cities west of the Mississippi river where the train had so far appeared. Some people fainted while waiting in line. And Boy Scouts handed out pamphlets about the documents. Jamestown had 10 bands play throughout the day. When the train reached Fargo, Minot's attendance record fell as 10,925 people visited. During the final stop in Grand Forks, the university band played all morning for the thousands who lined up.

North Dakotans had turned out strong to see documents of American history that most had only read about.

Gifts Given to Soldiers

BY DR. STEVE HOFFBECK

May 1 -- An outpouring of patriotism and goodwill accompanied North Dakota's soldiers as they left on trains to fight in World War I. In communities across the state, townspeople gave banquets, speeches, band concerts and farewell receptions for their departing soldiers. Flags, flowers, songs and oratory showed each draftee that he had the support and encouragement of the people.

It was on this date in 1918 that the *Grand Forks Herald* revealed how the people of Rolla showed their loyalty to their local soldier boys. The newspaper reported that about 500 people gathered at the Great Northern Railway station "to give the nine drafted men a rousing send-off." Before the train arrived, the teachers and students at the Rolla school formed lines and marched to the depot, waving flags and bearing goodwill in a "lively and patriotic procession." At the depot, a local judge gave an eloquent speech, and each of the nine draftees received a wristwatch as a token of gratitude.

Similar ceremonies were common across the state during World War I, and some towns had given greater farewell gifts than wristwatches. In July 1917, during a patriotic gathering in Cavalier, the townsfolk gave 26 young draftees \$10 gold pieces as symbols of appreciation.

In the town of Fingal in September, the people paid tribute at an assembly, with rousing tunes from the marching band, several songs by a ladies quartet, and stirring speeches. Fingal, like Cavalier, presented a \$10 gold coin to each of the 17 men called by the draft, in homage to their service and sacrifice.

In Inkster on September 22, all of the local draftees were "highly honored" at a "patriotic meeting" held in their honor at the Inkster Opera House. Each departing soldier got a gold coin to take with him or to leave at home with his family.

As more and more men were conscripted and sent away to war, citizens in Forman, Willow City, Pembina and elsewhere continued send-off ceremonies, but townspeople, wearied by the sheer numbers of draftees, no longer gave gold coin gifts. Instead the men got cakes and cookies, and marching bands still played amid inspirational words, but there were no more wristwatches or coins.

Oxford House at UND

BY JIM DAVIS

May 2 -- In 1966, the National

Historic Preservation Act was created to help preserve the diverse archaeological and architectural treasures of America. Often it takes the efforts of dedicated preservationists to wrest a structure from the wrecking ball. Such was the case with the Oxford House on the UND campus.

Designed by Joseph Bell DeRemer and built in 1902, the Oxford House originally served as the home for the university's fourth president and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Webster Merrifield. DeRemer was noted for many other buildings on campus, including the administration building and Merrifield Hall. Thirty years after the Oxford House was built, he took on his biggest challenge, the art deco design of the ND State Capitol building.

When the 40x50-foot, two-story Oxford House was built, it was considered one of the most fashionable, modern homes in the northwest. Although of colonial design, it featured most of the modern conveniences of the time and cost approximately \$25,000. Built with granite and granite pressed brick, its exterior woodwork was painted gloss white to give the impression of marble. Two large columns extending above the second floor suspended the portico containing a balcony surrounded by a wrought iron fence. An unusual feature in its design, the attic was also used for entertainment and contained a large ballroom.

A full basement held the servants' quarters, and the main floor housed a large parlor for entertaining, a living room, dining room, study, kitchen and pantry. The upper floor was divided into five bedrooms. Bathrooms were located on each floor, and it was one of the first houses in Grand Forks to boast of electricity. There were three fireplaces, a dumbwaiter and a telephone.

Oxford House served as a home for four university presidents until 1954, when a new house was constructed on the banks of the English Coulee. For the next 10 years it served as a men's dorm, and then housed the art department until 1971.

At 70 years of age, many believed its usefulness was over and it was destined for the wrecking ball. At this point the Oxford House Restoration Committee was formed and approximately \$447,000 was raised for restoration. After a stint as the alumni center, it is currently used as a social center for campus receptions, called the Gershman Graduate Center.

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Bill requiring phone-free public schools signed into law



A new law requiring K-12 public schools in North Dakota to adopt phone-free school policies may be the most impactful legislation of this session, Gov. Kelly Armstrong said as he signed the bill April 25 surrounded by students, school officials, legislators and First Lady Kjersti Armstrong at Centennial Elementary School in Bismarck.

House Bill 1160 requires all personal electronic communication devices to be securely stowed and inaccessible to students during instructional time from the start of the school day until dismissal at the end of the day -- commonly referred to as a "bell-to-bell" phone-free policy. The law becomes effective August 1.

"This is a game changer for our public schools, giving students the freedom to focus on learning and to interact with teachers and friends without the constant tug of their cell phones and addictive social media," Armstrong said. "We appreciate the legislators, education leaders, teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders who worked incredibly hard to pass this bill in just four weeks, because this can't wait two more years. We need to act now for the academic success, mental health and overall well-being of our students."

Armstrong and Lt. Gov. Michelle Strinden championed the phone-free schools legislation with State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, HB 1160 lead sponsor Rep. Jim Jonas, Sen. Michelle Axtman and others through bill amendments introduced in late March. The amended version of HB 1160 passed the Senate 42-4 and the House 82-8 last week.

Baesler noted at least 25 states have laws or policies that ban or restrict students' use of electronics in school or encour-

age local districts to enact their own policies. She said that during her more than 12 years as state superintendent, she has heard from teachers with increasing urgency that student mental health challenges have become overwhelming, making it challenging to teach even the most basic material.

"We had to ask ourselves -- are we willing to take steps to prevent the student mental health crisis from getting worse? House Bill 1160 takes those steps. It limits student use of personal electronic devices during school hours, with appropriate exceptions for instructional or medical reasons," Baesler said. "This law gives students the gift of attention, connection and presence. We are removing the constant pull of comparison and distraction and replacing it with space to learn and grow."

The proposal still allows for the use of tablets and other school-issued electronic devices for learning, while also including exceptions for students who need personal electronic devices for medical reasons or as part of an individual education plan (IEP). Schools will have flexibility in deciding how to stow personal electronic devices.

Jonas, the West Fargo lawmaker who sponsored HB 1160 and introduced the phone-free amendments with Axtman, said the bill is "the culmination of a decade and a half of North Dakota schools trying to negotiate cell phone policies, trying to solve the problem of how much it distracts students from being engaged in learning."

"Educators have been advocating for tougher and more uniform approaches that allow them to spend more time teaching in their classrooms and less time policing cell phone use," Jonas said. "Teachers don't want to be the phone police. They want to teach."

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