

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Multiple Property Documentation Form**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete the forms.

New Submission       Amended Submission

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

NONPARTISAN LEAGUE'S HOME BUILDING ASSOCIATION RESOURCES IN NORTH DAKOTA

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

The North Dakota Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association, 1919-1923

**C. Form Prepared by**

name/title Michelle L. Dennis  
 organization \_\_\_\_\_ date February 2006  
 street & number 2690 Jackson St. telephone 541.343.6652  
 city or town Eugene state OR zip code 97405

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature and title of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this multiple property document form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Date of action \_\_\_\_\_

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## Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

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## STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXTS

### **THE NORTH DAKOTA NONPARTISAN LEAGUE'S HOME BUILDING ASSOCIATION, 1919-1923**

The Statement of Historic Contexts section of this Multiple Property Documentation Form provides a historic overview of the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota's Home Building Association and the resources related to it. It provides a context for understanding and evaluating the physical resources that were constructed or purchased by the Home Building Association, a state program established by the 1919 North Dakota legislature as part of the Nonpartisan League's program.

This document is not intended to be a comprehensive history of North Dakota nor about the Nonpartisan League. Detailed accounts of various historical events are recorded in several books and journal articles, some of which are listed in the bibliography of this document. Two books that may be of interest to the reader seeking more information about North Dakota's history are History of North Dakota by Elwyn B. Robinson (1966) and North Dakota: A Bicentennial History by Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins (1977). In addition, a *North Dakota History: Overview and Summary*, written by Larry Remele in 1988 and published in the North Dakota Blue Book in 1989, is available on-line at the State Historical Society of North Dakota's website, and while not as detailed as either book, provides a concise overview of the major elements of the state's history. Those wanting more information about the Nonpartisan League should also consult the bibliography where several resources are listed. Readers may find Political Prairie Fire by Robert L. Morlan a good source for a comprehensive summary of the League and its activities.

### **NORTH DAKOTA: THE SETTING AND EARLY HISTORY**

#### *THE SETTING*

North Dakota comprises an area of 70, 665 square miles and is rectangular in shape, stretching about 335 miles east and west and 210 miles north and south. Immediately south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, North Dakota is bordered by Canada to the north, Montana to the west, Minnesota to the east, and South Dakota to the south. The U.S. census in 2000 showed a population of 642,200 people; the estimated population in 2005 was 634,366.<sup>1</sup>

Located almost in the center of the North American continent, North Dakota is considered part of the northern Great Plains region. The state is divided into three basic geographic regions from east to west: the Red River Valley, the Drift Prairie, and the Missouri Plateau. A fourth region, the Badlands, is located in the southwest

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau statistics (accessed via internet, January 2006).

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corner of the Missouri Plateau. Topographically, the state is flatter and lower in the east (the lowest point is 792 feet above sea level at Pembina); the land rises in elevation and becomes more rolling as one moves west (the highest point is 3506 feet above sea level at White Butte). The Red River, which flows north to the Hudson Bay, drains the fertile farm lands of the Red River Valley, considered one of the best agricultural regions of the world. The Missouri River drains the Drift Prairie and the Missouri Plateau. Precipitation patterns coincide with the topography; the lower the elevation, the greater the precipitation, averaging from about 21 inches a year in the east to about 15 inches a year in the west.<sup>2</sup> Winters are cold and summers warm and sunny.

Agriculture has long been and will continue to be a major part of North Dakota's economy. The rich soils and climate of the Red River Valley have supported the production of various crops, while wheat farming has dominated the Drift Prairie and portions of the Missouri Plateau. Cattle ranching is also well suited to portions of the Missouri Plateau. Historically, crops in the state included potatoes, sugar beets, corn, soybeans, sweet clover, alfalfa, in addition to wheat, oats, barley and flax.<sup>3</sup> The state is currently number one in the production of barley, sunflower seeds, and flaxseed and number two in production of wheat in the country.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to agriculture, the state boasts a variety of mineral resources, many of which have contributed to the state's economy historically. These resources include clay and fuller's earth (a type of clay); sandstone and limestone; sodium sulfate (used in the manufacture of paper, glass, soap, and stock feeds); and bentonite (used in the manufacture of soaps and cosmetics). Substantial lignite coal reserves are located in the western portion of the state; coal mining operations have existed since the 1880s. The discovery of oil in 1951 resulted in extensive exploration and drilling.<sup>5</sup> Today, North Dakota has 80 percent of the country's lignite coal reserves as well as oil production in fourteen western counties.<sup>6</sup>

### *EARLY NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY*

Archaeological evidence indicates that nomadic Paleo-Indians traveled through the western portions of what is now known as North Dakota, hunting prehistoric mammoths, mastodons, camels, saber-toothed cats, and musk

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<sup>2</sup> Melvin E. Kazeck, North Dakota: A Human and Economic Geography (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1956): 39, 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-70.

<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress. American Memory website.

<sup>5</sup> Kazeck, 156-173.

<sup>6</sup> Library of Congress, American Memory website (accessed January 2006).

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oxen during the years late in the Ice Age. As the climate changed, so did the vegetation and eventually the Ice Age animals disappeared, driving the human population from the area as well.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually native Indian tribes moved into the area where vast herds of bison provided a constant food supply. The first to arrive were the Mandan, who in about A.D. 1300 moved west into the Missouri River bottoms. A sedentary people, they were the first tribe to make permanent settlements in the area.<sup>8</sup> After the Mandan came other tribes. By the time the first white explorers arrived, there were several distinct Indian groups in the area, including the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara (sedentary groups who lived in relatively permanent settlements), and the Dakota or Lakota (also called "Sioux"), Assiniboine, and Cheyenne (nomadic groups who followed the bison herds). Groups of Chippewa (or Ojibway) moved into the northern parts of the Red River Valley around 1800, and groups of Crow, Blackfeet, and Cree hunted in the western ranges.<sup>9</sup>

The first recorded white visitor to the area was Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de La Verendrye, a French explorer who reached the Missouri River from Canada in 1738. Others followed, including La Verendrye's sons in 1742. Fur traders arrived soon thereafter, led by the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company.<sup>10</sup> In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition reached Fort Mandan, where they spent the winter before continuing their "Voyage of Discovery." The increasing number of Euro-Americans who came to the area in the early to mid-nineteenth century brought much change. The Indians were decimated by European diseases to which they were particularly susceptible, including tuberculosis, measles and smallpox. A smallpox epidemic in 1837 killed an estimated fifteen thousand on the Upper Missouri. By 1854, it was estimated that between disease and warfare, the Cree population had been cut by an eighth, the Arikara by a fifth, the Blackfeet and Sioux by a third, the Assiniboine and Crow by half, and the Mandan by three-fourths.<sup>11</sup> In the 1860s, major military expeditions resulted in a number of battles between the U.S. government and the Indians and by 1870 many tribes had submitted to reservation life to avoid starvation.<sup>12</sup>

Agricultural settlement in the Red River Valley had its start with the early settlements of the Selkirk colony and Pembina. It was not until the arrival of steamboats on the river in the late 1850s and the organization of Dakota

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<sup>7</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins. North Dakota: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Remele. *North Dakota History: Overview and Summary* (North Dakota Blue Book 1989; State Historic Society of North Dakota website, accessed January 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, 30-32, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkins, 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Remele.

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Territory by Congress in 1861, however, that settlement of the area began in earnest.<sup>13</sup> The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged farm settlement; the first claim west of the Red River was filed in 1868. The arrival of the railroad in the 1870s spurred a settlement “boom” between 1879 and 1886 when more than 100,000 people settled in Dakota Territory. New towns sprang up along the railroads, including Fargo and Bismarck, to serve the growing number of settlers.<sup>14</sup>

By the time North Dakota became a state on November 2, 1889 (the same day South Dakota gained statehood) the “Great Dakota Boom” had ended. Following the national Panic of 1893, however, better conditions and renewed promotion of settlement ushered in a second boom that began before the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup> The population increased 67 percent between 1890 and 1900, growing from 191,000 to 319,000. Only seventeen percent of the state was developed as farmland in 1890; by 1900 more than 35 percent of the state was in farms, an increase of 103 percent of farm acreage. By 1910, there were 74,000 farms containing 28,400,000 acres; North Dakota had become the leading wheat state, ahead of Kansas, its closet rival.<sup>16</sup> This second boom continued through World War I. By 1920, the population had grown to 646,900.<sup>17</sup>

### EARLY POLITICS IN NORTH DAKOTA

Politics in North Dakota at times has been turbulent and filled with insurgency, usually the reflection of the conflict between interests of the local farmers and those of outside corporate exploitation. The long period between organization as Dakota Territory in 1861 and admittance as a state in 1889 brought several political battles, including the struggle for statehood. Because the territory was largely a one-party region, the drive for statehood, which began in the late 1870s, was a Republican campaign with little interest from the Democrats. While the politicians were pushing for independence through statehood, the farmers in Dakota Territory also revolted against a dependent, colonial status.

By the 1870s, Minneapolis had become the largest milling center in the United States. The settlement “boom” in North Dakota, spurred by the development of railroads, shifted much of Minneapolis’s market for wheat from Chicago and Milwaukee to the Red River Valley and the newly developed wheat farms in North Dakota.<sup>18</sup> By

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson, 113; Remele.

<sup>14</sup> Remele (website).

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, 218.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 227, 247.

<sup>17</sup> Remele (website).

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, 135-136.

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the early 1880s, the Minneapolis mills controlled the line elevators and the terminal markets. They had formed alliances with the railroads, which “aided them by giving line elevators rebates on freight charges, making rules against track loading by farmers and track buyers, and dictating the size and location of elevators along their rights of way.”<sup>19</sup> Independent buyers, who could not compete, were driven out of business giving the line elevators a monopoly. North Dakota farmers, at the mercy of the Minneapolis market, were subject to low grading and low prices, with false weights and excessive dockage.<sup>20</sup>

The Dakota Farmers’ Alliance formed in the mid-1880s with the purpose of uniting the farmers with the goal of promoting a free market. By the end of 1886 there were 256 local alliances throughout Dakota Territory; two years later there were 744, with a membership of 28,000. The Alliance originally sought to bring reform through government action. Although active in both the 1887 and 1889 legislative assemblies, the Alliance lacked political power to implement their programs. The farmers’ struggle against corporations was also reflected in the constitutional convention in 1889, where Alliance leaders such as Martin N. Johnson and Fred B. Fancher played active roles.<sup>21</sup> In 1890, some members of the Farmers’ Alliance joined the Prohibitionists to form the Independent Party of North Dakota in an effort to stop the “McKenzie Gang” that dominated the Republican party. The Republicans prevailed and during the 1891 legislative assembly only limited reforms were made.<sup>22</sup>

Discontent among the farmers continued to grow. In 1892, leaders of the Farmers’ Alliance and the Independent Party adopted the Populist platform and nominated a full slate of candidates, including Eli C.D. Shortridge, a recent president of the Alliance, as the candidate for governor. The Independents swept the election with the exception of the Secretary of State. The following legislative assembly, however, fell on the eve of the Panic of 1893 and Shortridge’s administration was considered a failure when “no important reform legislation was enacted; the large appropriations and the depression bankrupted the treasury; and the state-owned elevator was not built.” The decline of Populism in North Dakota was marked by the defeat of the Independents in 1894 and the easy defeat of William Jennings Bryan in 1896.<sup>23</sup>

The American Society of Equity, an organization which had acquired considerable strength in North Dakota, was formed in 1902 with the goal of organizing farmers and fostering cooperatives. By 1907, organizers recruited thousands of North Dakota farmers as members, creating the North Dakota Union of the organization. In 1908, members formed the Equity Cooperative Exchange as a terminal marketing agency, and in 1911, the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 204-210.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 221-222.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 223-225.

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Exchange incorporated in North Dakota. Both the American Society of Equity and the Equity Cooperative Exchange were able to exert some political influence in the state legislature and they supported the efforts to gain a state-owned terminal elevator.<sup>24</sup>

There was a strong loyalty to the Republican party in North Dakota. Although it was the party of the railroads, the grain elevators, and the moneylenders, it was also the party of Abraham Lincoln, the Union, and the Homestead Act, without which many of the settlers in North Dakota would not own their land. The “McKenzie Gang,” under the influence of Alexander McKenzie, continued to control the Republican politics in the state into the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

Progressive sentiment gradually brought the decline of McKenzie’s influence. The Good Government League, organized in 1905 with George B. Winship, the editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*, as president, launched the “Revolution of 1906” by bringing together Republican insurgents and Democrats to elect John Burke as governor. Although the progressive Republicans and Democrats held the house, McKenzie’s men still controlled the senate. In 1908, the first primary in North Dakota was held, and in the fall, Burke was re-elected. The 1909 legislative session, with conservatives still controlling the senate and ignoring progressive platforms, was called a failure by the Democrats and progressives. Triumph finally came in 1910, when Burke was elected for a third term and progressives and Democrats succeeded in winning control of the legislature. The 1911 legislature passed several progressive reforms without opposition, putting North Dakota at the front of progressive states in the country.<sup>26</sup>

In March 1912, the first-ever presidential preference primary in the country was held in North Dakota. The voters of the state showed progressive support for Robert M. LaFollette over Theodore Roosevelt and President Taft. At the national conventions in June, the Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson while the Republicans nominated Taft over Roosevelt. Angered by this, Roosevelt formed the Progressive Party and began a third-party movement. Reluctantly, progressive supporters in North Dakota formed a state Progressive Party, but Roosevelt had little support for his campaign; Wilson easily carried the state in November. In 1912 and 1914, voters of the state elected a Republican, Louis B. Hanna, as governor. Hanna, however, had the support of some progressives, including William Lemke, who would become a major force in the Nonpartisan League.<sup>27</sup>

During the progressive years, farmers demanded reforms in the grain trade with little success. Most grain continued to be shipped to the Minnesota markets and the farmers repeatedly asked the Minnesota legislature to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 276-277.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 230-231.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 264-267.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 268-270.



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reform their grading practices to no avail. They asked for federal inspections and grading, also without success. For a number of years, farmers found some success by developing cooperative elevators along the line, but success at terminal markets was more difficult. In 1907, the state legislature was asked again to investigate the feasibility of a state-owned terminal elevator. In 1909, the board of inquiry recommended such an elevator and

the legislature proposed a constitutional amendment authorizing one in Minnesota or Wisconsin. In 1911 the legislature approved the amendment a second time, as the constitution-amending process then required. The voters accepted it in 1912. Another amendment for a state-owned elevator within North Dakota went through the legislature in 1911 and 1913 and was accepted by the voters in 1914.<sup>28</sup>

### THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE: ITS INCEPTION AND RISE TO POWER

The constitutional amendment authorizing a state-owned terminal elevator was approved by the legislature and the voters of North Dakota twice. Yet at the 1915 legislative session, the State Board of Control issued a 600-page report “consisting in large part of an exhaustive argument against the entire project.”<sup>29</sup> The report recommended instead that an elevator be leased rather than a new one built. Governor Hanna, who originally supported the constitutional amendment, now opposed it.<sup>30</sup>

The North Dakota Union of the American Society of Equity was holding its annual convention in Bismarck at the same time that the state legislature was meeting and a number of state farmers were in attendance. The convention supported the bill for the state-owned elevator. The night before the vote was to be taken, George S. Loftus, the sales manager of the Equity Cooperative Exchange, angrily denounced the State Board of Control’s report. The next day the bill was decisively defeated. The Equity convention turned into a protest meeting where farmers and legislators argued long and hard. Lore has it that Treadwell Twichell, a house member, “told the farmers that the running of the state was none of their business” and he advised them to “go home and slop the hogs” (a statement he denied having ever made).<sup>31</sup>

A number of historic accounts tie the beginnings of the Nonpartisan League to this Equity convention. In Bismarck to attend the convention, A.C. Townley observed the defeat of the elevator proposal and the resulting anger of the farmers. Several sources suggest that he decided to take this opportunity to start a new farmers’ organization, which he called the Nonpartisan League. More recent scholarship, however, credits the idea of the Nonpartisan League to A. E. Bowen, who apparently conceived of the idea as early as January 1914.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 274-275.

<sup>29</sup> Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, 270.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 330-331.

<sup>32</sup> Larry Remele, “The Immaculate Conception at Deering.” *North Dakota History*, Vol. 47, No. 1: 30.

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Arthur Charles Townley was born December 30, 1880 near Browns Valley, Minnesota. He graduated from high school in Alexandria, Minnesota and taught school for two years before beginning farming with his brother near Beach, North Dakota. He married Margaret Rose Teenan and they had one foster daughter. In 1907 he started an extensive flax enterprise that was highly successful and by 1912, he was known as the “flax king of the Northwest.” Disaster brought by an early frost and a depressed market that year wiped out his crop and forced Townley into bankruptcy.<sup>33</sup>

Townley then became an organizer for the Socialist party and in 1914 was employed as a “special organizer” for the new “organizational department” of the party. A.E. Bowen and Leon Durocher, both experienced organizers, were also part of this department and worked with Townley. On November 3, 1914, the North Dakota Socialist Party Executive Committee decided to cut off the Organizational Department’s direct organizing tactics and on December 15, 1914 Townley, Bowen and Durocher were officially released for continuing to organize without authorization. At the party’s state meeting on January 26-27, 1915, Townley and Bowen tried unsuccessfully to re-establish the department.<sup>34</sup>

Albert (Bert) Eugene Bowen, Jr. was born in Dickey County, North Dakota on May 4, 1885. He apparently spent his youth working on his father’s farm, as the 1900 census shows him living there as a “farm laborer.” In 1908 he married Katherine Kennedy in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. They had two children, but the marriage ended in divorce and Bowen returned to North Dakota. It is not known when he began working for the Socialist party, but apparently he was engaged in this endeavor by the beginning of 1914.

While attending the Socialist State Convention in Minot in January 1914, Bowen advocated for the “creation of a state department of agriculture in which farmers alone shall have a vote” and that this agency should establish milling and processing facilities and engage in marketing farm produce. He developed an outline for the program he envisioned and in September, at the home of M.P. Johnson, president of the Equity society in North Dakota, he shared his ideas. To support the notion that the Nonpartisan League was the brainchild of Bowen, a letter written by Durocher in 1920 claims that Bowen first outlined his idea for the League program in September 1914 while they were working in Golden Valley County and that Townley was not “in on this until sometime in December.”<sup>35</sup> Perhaps further support for this theory came from Bowen himself, who having been endorsed as a Congressional candidate while living in Minnesota (though he chose not to run), was quoted in an article in the *Bismarck Tribune*, dated April 29, 1920, as claiming to have started the League even though Townley had gotten the credit.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert L. Morlan, “Townley, Arthur Charles,” *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement 6, 1956-1960*: 644-645.

<sup>34</sup> Remele, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Bismarck Tribune*, 29 April 1920: 4.

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On January 29, 1915 Bowen began to publicly promote his idea for a nonpartisan political organization of farmers when he spoke at an Equity district convention in Minot. The idea was so positively received, he was asked to repeat his speech at the Equity's state convention in Bismarck on February 2. He was so encouraged, he resigned from the Socialist party. The Farmers Nonpartisan Political League gathered its first members following Bowen's speech in Bismarck. Although it is not known who the first three members were, Anthony Walton of Minot had a receipt of his membership, bearing the number "4" and dated February 3, 1915.<sup>37</sup>

Just exactly when Townley joined Bowen in organizing the League is unclear. What is clear is that Townley became the chief organizer and the ultimately, the League's leader. Townley was a natural platform speaker who understood the farmers and their issues. He knew how to organize them and gain their support.

In February 1915, a five-point platform, aimed at addressing the complaints of the farmers, was adopted. The platform included:

1. State ownership of terminal elevators, flour mills, packing houses, and cold-storage plants
2. State inspection of grain and grain dockage
3. Exemption of farm improvements from taxation
4. State hail insurance on the acreage tax basis
5. Rural credit banks operated at cost<sup>38</sup>

As a "nonpartisan" coalition of farmers, the League aimed to capture state government through the existing party system. The direct primary system would be used to endorse candidates sympathetic to the League's program regardless of party affiliation. League organizers and officials originally could not run for office; this rule didn't last beyond the 1916 election. Townley, however, never ran for office while the League was in power.<sup>39</sup> Initially the League was run by a self-appointed executive committee that included Townley, Fred B. Wood, and William Lemke, and in fact, most of the League candidates on the slate in 1916 were friends of Lemke's.<sup>40</sup>

Membership in the League grew rapidly. Townley's organizational tactics included recruiting enthusiastic farmers as organizers, training them on how to talk with prospective members, and sending them out in a fleet of Fords to canvass the state. Dues were originally set at \$2.50 a year (to be collected at the time of enrollment), but the expense of organizing resulted in raising the dues first to \$6.00 and within a year to \$9.00. After the election in 1916, dues were set at \$16.00 for each two-year period corresponding with the term of state

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<sup>37</sup> Remele, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Morlan, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Charles R. Lamb, "The Nonpartisan League and Its Expansion into Minnesota" in *North Dakota Quarterly* (Summer 1981): 114.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, 333-335.

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office holders.<sup>41</sup> In addition to membership, the dues provided the farmers with a subscription to the *Nonpartisan Leader*, a weekly newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Townley believed (apparently rightfully so) that if a farmer had put his money into a project, he would stick with it even if only to get a return on his investments. He was reported to have said, in his characteristic profanity, “Make the rubes pay their God-damn money to join and they’ll stick – stick till hell freezes over.”<sup>43</sup>

By the fall of 1915, it was estimated that membership in the League had reached approximately 18,000; by the end of winter in early 1916, there were about 26,000 members. The League’s first success came in the primary election in June. Not unlike the McKenzie machine, the Nonpartisan League wanted to benefit from the state’s loyalty to the Republican party and chose to endorse a number of candidates on the Republican ticket. Candidates included Lynn J. Frazier for governor, William Langer for attorney general, Thomas Hall for secretary of state, and Carl R. Kositzky for state auditor. All League-endorsed candidates for state office won the primary election in June. The November election proved an easy victory as well. Frazier carried every county and received 79 percent of the vote. Langer, Hall, and Kositzky also won. The League also elected 81 of the 113 seats of the house, but only 18 of the 49 seats in the senate (only 25 seats were up for election that year).<sup>44</sup> By the close of the 1916 campaign, the Nonpartisan League claimed a membership of approximately 40,000.<sup>45</sup>

Progress was limited, however, during the 1917 legislative session. The lack of control in the senate prevented the passage of the League’s most important measure, House Bill 44, which called for a new state constitution framed to implement the League’s program. Some reforms were passed, however, including those that created a grain-grading system, guaranteed bank deposits, established a nine-hour work day for women, established a state highway commission, and forbade discrimination by railroads. Also passed was a bill to build a state-owned terminal elevator and the appropriation of \$300,000 for it. Governor Frazier, after consulting with League leaders, vetoed the bill claiming that a single small elevator would have little effect.<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after the end of the 1917 legislative session, the United States entered World War I. Prior to this time, the League had opposed the war with a firm conviction that it was a “rich man’s war” and felt that its source was “a grasping imperialism that lusted for greater profits and desired only to solidify the power and wealth of

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<sup>41</sup> Morlan, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Lamb, 113.

<sup>43</sup> Morlan, 27.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, 332-337.

<sup>45</sup> Morlan, 87.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, 338-339.

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the privileged few.” After the actual entry of the United States, the League formally backed the war effort, though not enthusiastically.<sup>47</sup>

The elections of 1918 proved to be successful for the League. They again supported Frazier for governor, as well as most of the men that were elected in 1916. An addition to the slate was Howard Wood, Fred Wood’s son and an early organizer for the League, who became the candidate for the lieutenant governor. Of greater importance, however, was the constitutional amendments that would legalize the League’s program. The June primary proved a sweeping victory when League candidates won every Republican nomination for state and congressional office. The League’s opposition tried to turn the war hysteria against them, claiming that their platform was a disloyal, Socialist ploy, and before the Fall election had established the Independent Voters Association (I.V.A.) to defeat the League in the election. The League prevailed, however, when all their candidates were elected and the constitutional amendments passed. A “New Day” had arrived in North Dakota.<sup>48</sup>

### **THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE PROGRAM**

The 1919 legislature passed five laws that created the framework of the Nonpartisan League’s program. Robinson summarizes the laws as follows:

One set up the Industrial Commission, composed of the governor, attorney general, and commissioner of agriculture and labor. The Industrial Commission was empowered to manage all the business enterprises of the state.

The second law created the Bank of North Dakota, with a capital of two million dollars. The law required that all state and local government funds be deposited in the bank. It was to provide low-cost rural credits, to finance state departments and enterprises, and to serve as a clearinghouse and rediscount agency for banks throughout the state. It might redeposit funds in any bank and make loans on real estate and warehouse receipts.

A third law formed the North Dakota Mill and Elevator Association, which was to engage in the manufacture and marketing of farm products and to establish a system of warehouses, elevators, flour mills, factories.

A fourth law set up the Home Building Association, through which the state would build houses for a down payment of 20 per cent and installments running from ten to twenty years.

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<sup>47</sup> Remele, Larry. “The Tragedy of Idealism: The National Nonpartisan League and American Foreign Policy, 1917-1919,” in *North Dakota Quarterly*, Autumn 1974: 82-84.

<sup>48</sup> Robinson, 340-342.

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A fifth law amended the state hail-insurance system already in operation; a flat tax of three cents an acre was to pay part of the cost.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to these laws, the legislature passed a number of reforms. Included were the strengthening of the 1917 grain-grading law, the establishment of a graduated income tax and an inheritance tax, the enactment of a workmen's compensation law and an eight-hour-day law and a minimum-wage law for women, and a limit of the use of injunctions in labor disputes. It also authorized a state printing commission, comprised of League-elected officials, to select one newspaper from each county to serve as the "official" newspaper.<sup>50</sup>

As the League struggled to launch its program, it suffered a disastrous blow when three of its League-elected state officials defected. Langer (attorney general), Kositzky (state auditor), and Hall (secretary of state) joined together to call into question the League's mismanagement, likening the League to the Bolsheviks and accusing the leaders of corruption. They eventually gathering enough signatures on petitions to force a special referendum in May, but the League prevailed when the voters approved the laws passed by the legislature. The opponents pressed on, taking the League's program into the courts, but the courts upheld the constitutionality of the laws.<sup>51</sup> Langer became a leader in the I.V.A. and continued his battle to bring down the League over the next couple years.

The League continued the struggle to implement its program. Progress was slow, however, and plagued with problems and scandals. Townley was convicted in Minnesota of conspiracy to teach disloyalty in July.<sup>52</sup> The Bank of North Dakota opened its door on July 28, 1919 with insufficient capital, not having found purchasers for the \$2,000,000 worth of bonds. In August, the North Dakota Mill and Elevator Association purchased a small flour mill at Drake; the manager began a practice of buying wheat above market price and selling flour under market price, a practice that immediately caused a loss in revenue.<sup>53</sup> In October, the Scandinavian-American Bank in Fargo, the bank owned and managed by the League, was implicated in a scandal of misused funds. On the heels of this accusation, Langer ordered examinations of all state enterprises.<sup>54</sup> In November, Townley announced that they would build a mill at Grand Forks.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 345-346.

<sup>52</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 14 July 1919: 1.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, 343-344.

<sup>54</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 6 October 1919: 1.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, 344.

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At the regular session of the legislature earlier that year, it was agreed that a special session would be called that fall to review the newly established programs and make adjustments to them as necessary. Governor Frazier called for that session to begin on November 25. As that session began, scandal broke out about the State Library having purchased books on socialism, anarchism, and free love, a situation that put the League further on the defensive.<sup>56</sup>

Regardless of the uproar, the legislature granted most of Frazier's requests, including the authorization of a bond issue, secured by first mortgages, to provide funds for initial operation of the Home Building Association; the creation of a state sheriff; and the creation of a special joint committee of the House and Senate to investigate attempts to destroy the credit of the state by misrepresentation, election fraud, and the illegal acts of public officials and illegal expenditures of public funds (the committee was popularly known as the "smelling committee"). Both houses also adopted resolutions calling Langer's resignation and reducing the funding and staffing for his office. In addition, the appropriation for the state auditor's office was slashed and Kositzky was removed from the State Auditing Board, the State Board of Equalization, and the Emergency Fund Commission. Hall's office also suffered funding cuts and he was removed from the State Auditing Board.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the struggle to implement the League's program in 1919, there were some successes during its first year. The hail-insurance system functioned efficiently and elevators were made to pay for dockage.<sup>58</sup>

### THE HOME BUILDING ASSOCIATION

The Home Building Association, off to a slow start, built only one home by the end of the first year.<sup>59</sup>

The law that authorized the Home Building Association of North Dakota started as Senate Bill 19 and came from the Committee on State Affairs. It was passed as:

An act declaring the purpose of the State of North Dakota to engage in the enterprise of providing homes for residents of this state and to that end to establish a business system operated by the state under the name of the Home Building Association of North Dakota, and defining the scope and manner of its operation and the powers and duties of the persons charged with its management; and making an appropriation thereof.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 2 December 1919: 1.

<sup>57</sup> Morlan, 270-273.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson, 345.

<sup>59</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 1 December 1919: 3.

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The law placed the Association under the direct oversight of the Industrial Commission and empowered the Commission to buy, lease or acquire land through the right of eminent domain and to construct, repair and remodel buildings. It also called for the Commission to appoint a manager and other necessary staff and to “employ contractors, architects, builders, attorneys, clerks, accountants and other experts, agents and servants” as the Commission saw fit. The law required that the manager furnish a bond for not less than \$50,000.<sup>61</sup>

A “home” was defined as a “dwelling house” that was located within or adjacent to a town, village or city and its purchase or construction cost was limited to \$5,000. A “farm home” was defined to mean a tract of agricultural land with a dwelling house, a barn, and other such farm buildings and its purchase or construction cost was not to exceed \$10,000. The Commission was to fix interest rates on all deposits and loans, but no interest rates were to exceed six percent per annum. In the building of homes and farms, the Association was to use standardized plans. Land that was purchased by the Association could be subdivided into lots and developments such as streets, parks, sidewalks, and utilities could be provided.<sup>62</sup>

An interesting twist to the program was that a person interested in participating was required to become a member of a Home Buyers’ League. A Home Buyers’ League consisted of ten or more members who, with the written consent of one another, were to come together locally to form a league. Each league had to be authorized, registered and numbered by the Home Building Association and was required to elect a secretary-treasurer to conduct the business of that local league. Once a would-be buyer became a member of a Home Buyers’ League, he was required to make application to the Association, which upon accepting his application would purchase or build a home or farm home and

convey it to him upon a cash payment of twenty per cent, the balance to be secured by a purchase money mortgage on the property, and to be paid on an amortization plan by means of a fixed number of monthly installments sufficient to cover, first, a charge on the loan, at a rate to be determined by the Industrial Commission, second, a charge for administration and surplus at a rate not exceeding one per cent per annum on the unpaid principal, said two rates combined constituting the interest rate on the deferred payments; and third, such amounts to be applied on the principal as will extinguish the debt within an agreed period, not less than ten or more than twenty years.<sup>63</sup>

Each member of every Home Buyers’ League was jointly “liable for all contracts, debts and obligations due the Association from his league, to the extent of fifteen per cent of the price at which his home was sold to him.” In

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<sup>60</sup> Laws Passed at the Sixteenth Session of Legislative Assembly of the State of North Dakota (Bismarck: Bismarck Tribune, State Printers, 1919): 210.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 212-213.



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addition, the law required that all monies associated with the Home Building Association be deposited in the Bank of North Dakota.<sup>64</sup> A direct appropriation of \$100,000 had been made to finance the early stages of the Association's work.

It seems that the general public assumed the Home Building Association was essentially a state-controlled building and loan association, differing only in that the state was to undertake the building of houses, thereby saving on costs associated with contractors and retail building material dealers. They understood the program's objective to be the promotion of economic security by assisting persons in the low- and middle-income groups to become owners of their own homes.<sup>65</sup> The Association's failure to start building houses immediately after it was created resulted not only in disappointment of supporters of the program and hopeful homebuyers, but led to questions about its management and growing discontent about the program. By mid-May of 1919, 34,000 signatures on petitions had been gathered by I.V.A. against the Home Building Association.<sup>66</sup>

In July 1919, Robert B. Blakemore was named as manager of the Home Building Association. A member of the state legislature in 1913, a former Fargo city commissioner, and a recently retired chief of the waterworks in Fargo, he had been in the real estate and loan business since 1888 and was presumed to have a wide knowledge of home construction and valuation of real estate.<sup>67</sup> Blakemore was a Nonpartisan League supporter and was to be paid \$5,000 as the manager. The Industrial Commission instructed him to secure a bond for \$25,000 (even though the law required a bond of \$50,000) and to "make a survey of the state with a view to determining where the association may best begin its acquisition of land for farmers and townsites."<sup>68</sup> Within days, Blakemore had provided a \$50,000 bond and had made arrangements to open the offices for the Home Building Association in Bismarck. The Bismarck Tribune, with anti-League leanings, questioned the possibility that the Association was about to embark on the building of utopian cities, since the Association could take whatever land they deemed necessary and build entire towns.<sup>69</sup>

The newspapers reported that "hundreds" wished to acquire homes through the Association, but by mid-August, no loans had yet been made and no construction had occurred. According to a statement issued by Blakemore, the Association was not yet in the position of making loans because, although there were many who wished to borrow, there were not yet sufficient investors. He pointed out that the Association was not a building and loan

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>65</sup> Morlan, 231-232.

<sup>66</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 15 May 1919: 1.

<sup>67</sup> Morlan, 250.

<sup>68</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 9 July 1919: 5.

<sup>69</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 14 July 1919: 2.

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association, but a cooperative association in which the only capital would be that paid by its members. It was his intent that the Association would send out agents or organizers to help local Home Buyers' Leagues get established.<sup>70</sup>

In early September, the newspaper reported that John B. Adams, an accountant for the public utilities commission, would be the first citizen to benefit from the Home Building Association's program. Adams had purchased a lot on the east edge of Custer Park in Bismarck and had prepared plans for a modern bungalow. He had arranged to deposit twenty percent of the total cost of the house (not to exceed \$5,000) and guaranteed payments of the balance within the next twenty years.<sup>71</sup> Also in September, Blakemore announced that W.J. Prater had been hired as his assistant. Prater, who was to be paid \$3,000 per year, was to have responsibility for purchases, loans, and appraisals. Blakemore reported that the Association had received many applications, but that because of the cooperative nature of the enterprise, he thought there would be little funds for the program through the fall.<sup>72</sup>

In response to the Association's struggle to get started, a bill was introduced during the special session of the legislature in November. Senator McCarten proposed that the state issue \$2,000,000 worth of bonds to enable the Home Building Association to "get into the business of building homes and buying farms for its members."<sup>73</sup> The bill passed 71 to 35 after considerable debate.<sup>74</sup> It is not clear if any of these bonds were ever sold.

In January 1920, the Bismarck Tribune reported that the first home built by the Home Building Association was now occupied by John B. Adams. The house was designed by Adams and was to be a model for future homes of this type. The newspaper description said

The Adams bungalow consists of a large living room with an antique fireplace, dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, two bedrooms, bath, and full basement. The floors are oak with interior trim of red birch, finished in mahogany in the living room and in white enamel in the bedrooms, bath and kitchen. The heating system is modern and efficient, and the money invested by the state has been made to cover an attractive retaining wall. There is a handsome pergola over the entrance, and large porch in front, and French windows between the dining room and living room and dining room and breakfast room.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 16 August 1919: 1.

<sup>71</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 4 September 1919: 1.

<sup>72</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 6 September 1919: 1.

<sup>73</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 1 December 1919: 3.

<sup>74</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 11 December 1919: 1.

<sup>75</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 15 January 1920: 3.

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Adams served as his own contractor and apparently was able to buy quality materials directly from local dealers, which coupled with the fact that Adams owned the lot, made it possible to keep the cost of the construction below the \$5,000 limit. The newspaper article goes on to state,

An interesting feature of this model bungalow is the fact that every bit of material down to the last nail was purchased at home, through regular channels, and it is in no sense a mail order house. Its owner regards it the equal of any \$7,500 home in Bismarck and declares it would rent at prevailing rates for \$60 per month while it is costing him to pay for his home while he occupies it for only \$28.75 per month, aside from insurance, taxes, and upkeep, which probably would bring the total to \$45 per month.<sup>76</sup>

Two days later, an editorial appeared in the same newspaper berating the Home Building Association for taking six months to build one bungalow.<sup>77</sup>

No more was heard of the Association until May 3 when Blakemore went to speak in Fargo about how citizens could secure homes with state aid. On May 5, the newspaper reported that Blakemore announced plans to build twenty homes in Fargo and that work on them would begin within a month. It was also announced that he was on his way to Michigan where he would “study” home building plans and purchase materials for the houses the Association plans to build.<sup>78</sup>

In July, it was announced that the Home Building Association was finally undertaking projects in Bismarck. The Association had purchased several lots and had plans to construct houses during the summer. Eight lots in Block 90 of the McKenzie and Coffin Addition were purchased from Eliza Harris. Construction had begun on a house that was located in the 400-block of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and the Association had purchased two houses (the Osterhaus house at 302 W. Thayer and the Limbach house at 209 W. Thayer) for resale. In addition, it was reported that three cars of lumber from a mill in Washington state had arrived, two of which were being unloaded in Bismarck and the third to be sent to Fargo.<sup>79</sup> In August, the lots that were purchased from Harris were replatted as lots 1 through 5 and the new subdivision was named “State’s Subdivision of McKenzie and Coffin’s Addition.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 17 January 1920: 4.

<sup>78</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 5 May 1920: 1.

<sup>79</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 14 July 1920: 2.

<sup>80</sup> City plat maps for State’s Subdivision, August 1920.

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Just as the public was gaining faith in the program, news broke that the Home Building Association was building a house for William Lemke in Fargo. Lemke was the Vice-President of the North Dakota Nonpartisan League and a member of the Nonpartisan League's national committee, and at the time the news broke, was a candidate for North Dakota's attorney general (he was elected). The cost of the house, being built in "one of the finest residential districts" in Fargo, reportedly would cost \$12,000. Not only was this a breach of the public faith, but it was in direct violation of the law. To make matters worse, it was also discovered that the Association had purchased a house in Fargo for \$10,000 and was spending an additional \$2000 to remodel it and make it a duplex for George A. Totten and his son, George Totten, Jr., who was an employee of the Nonpartisan League in Fargo. Two additional projects, a house costing \$10,000 for J.W. Boeing and a house costing \$8,000-9,000 for a Mr. Johnson, were also called out as violations of the state law.<sup>81</sup> In the end, it was determined that Lemke's house cost approximately \$22,000.

In late November, F.R. Pollard, the buying agent for the Home Building Association resigned. He had been one of the leading figures in the Association and had been responsible for purchasing substantial amounts of building materials for the construction of the houses. It was rumored that this action had been questioned by critics of the Association, but officials insisted his resignation was voluntary. There were also rumors that Blakemore would be discharged, but they were unconfirmed. H.A. Paddock of Bismarck was hired to replace Pollard.<sup>82</sup>

In early December, the North Dakota Association of Architects held their annual conference. In attendance at the meeting were W.B. Hancock (Fargo), F.R. Boyd (Jamestown), Arthur VanHorn (Bismarck), G.B. Horton (Jamestown), Bert Keck (Grand Forks), O.A. Braseth (Fargo), W.J. Edwards (Grand Forks), J.A. Shannon (Jamestown), and Joseph Bell DeRemer (Grand Forks). After some discussion, the organization issued the following resolution against the Home Building Association:

Whereas it is very evident, judging from the expensive character of the homes being built by the Home Building Association that the owners thereof are not fit subjects for public relief, and as the architecture profession has established a bureau where people of small means can get architectural service at a nominal costs for less than the state can produce it:

Be it resolved, that this association consider the work done by the Home Building Association in acting as architect and builder, is superfluous and an unnecessary burden on taxpayers and recommends the discontinuance of such service;

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<sup>81</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 22 October 1920: 6.

<sup>82</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 27 November 1920: 1.

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Be is resolved that this association emphatically condemns the methods by which the state buildings are handled, as it is evident that there is little, if any, competent supervision over the equality [sic] of workmanship and materials used.<sup>83</sup>

Faced with harsh criticism of the houses being built for the Nonpartisan League favorites in Fargo, coupled with continued financial problems, the Industrial Commission, in mid-December, took action to avert a complete suspension of all Home Building Association activity. They asked that the workers building the houses for the Association work under a deferred payment plan in order to continue work on several unfinished houses. There were approximately forty employees in Bismarck with a payroll of about \$3,500 per week. There was an equal number of workers in Fargo. According to a statement by Blakemore, the proposal was being met favorably by the workers.<sup>84</sup>

On their continued crusade to inform the public of the ills and deceits of the Nonpartisan League, the old state auditing board of Langer, Hall and Kositzky had engaged Bishop, Brissman & Co., an accounting firm from Minneapolis and St. Paul, to audit the state's enterprises. The Industrial Commission was either unable or unwilling to pay the cost of the audit, so I.V.A. supporters raised \$12,000 for the purpose. Although the full audit was not complete by the legislative session that began in January 1921, partial reports were submitted to them on January 25.<sup>85</sup>

The Bishop, Brissman & Co. Report on the Home Building Association, which covered the period from July 1, 1919 to December 3, 1920, was thirty pages in length and began with a letter of submittal explaining that "owing to the incomplete and deficient condition of the records, and the limited time at our disposal, a complete and comprehensive audit was not possible." The letter of submittal also summarized their findings, which included, in part, that:

- receipts for cash payments made prior to December 1919 had not been issued at the time of payment but were written in duplicate in December 1919 to cover prior payments
- cash receipts in the sum of \$2,022.00 had never been deposited in the Bank, but were instead used as a cash fund
- no supporting invoices were found in the files, or produced for examination, to explain disbursements totaling \$57,985.72
- the cost of the individual buildings could not be determined due to the fact that no cost system had been maintained, but that the total disbursements for construction purposes had been \$311,119.62
- an inventory had been taken of materials being stored, amounting to \$80,132.59

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<sup>83</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 9 December 1920: 3.

<sup>84</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 21 December 1920: 1.

<sup>85</sup> Morlan, 304-205.

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- with one exception, no contracts were found in the files for the individuals for whom houses had been or were being built or had been purchased (the one contract of record was with John B. Adams, dated September 13, 1919)
- no records of any contract amounts, terms thereof, payments made and due, and whether fully paid or delinquent were found
- no mortgages were produced or found in the files
- construction on two houses listed in one of the Fargo projects had not yet begun
- the Manager of the Home Building Association of North Dakota was authorized by the State Industrial Commission, at its meeting on April 7, 1920, to employ such assistants and install such office system from time to time as might be necessary, and to employ, to that end, experts conversant with the installation of such systems as might be required; that on December 3, 1920, the installation of an adequate system of accounting had not yet been completed, and the records and accounts were yet in an incomplete and unsatisfactory condition<sup>86</sup>

The report includes a list of staff of the Association. Included were:

Robert B. Blakemore, Manager (appointed 7-18-19)  
 James Baker, Supervisor of Construction (appointed 5-1-20)  
 F.R. Pollard, Purchasing Agent (appointed 5-1-20)  
 Benj. C. Okert, Clerk and Bookkeeper (appointed 6-6-20)  
 Jos. F. Saldin, Dis. Supervisor of Construction (appointed 6-7-20)  
 M. H. Chernick, Dis. Supervisor of Construction (appointed 7-24-20)  
 D.E. Stewart, Sec. & Ch. Accountant (appointed 8-25-20)  
 O.B. Lewis, Assistant Manager (appointed 9-1-20)  
 Wm. H. King, Sec. & Ch. Accountant (appointed 11-22-20)<sup>87</sup>

The report made no mention that Pollard had resigned in late November. It also did not list either W. J. Prater or J.B. Adams in the section listing the staff and their dates of appointment, but did list Prater (spelled Praden in the report) as the Assistant Manager in the account statement of salaries and mentioned Adams in two places – first in the submittal letter as the head bookkeeper and again in the account statement of salaries as the contractor on Fargo Project #1. It is not known when Adams began working for the Association.

The report shows that real estate had been purchased from thirteen different individuals although it makes no mention of the location of those properties or whether the property included existing homes or were vacant lots. It also lists the home buyer accounts with 187 names of persons who had made deposits, ranging from \$1.00 to

<sup>86</sup> Bishop, Brissman & Co., Report of Special Examination of the Home Building Association of North Dakota (Bismarck: December 8, 1920): 3-8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 30.

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\$4,725.00 (most being \$1.00 or \$5.00), into the accounts for a total of \$51,281.06. The same list shows which buyers had made contract payments in addition to deposits; only seven had done so for a total payment of \$1,146.00.<sup>88</sup>

There were twelve Home Buyers' Leagues listed in the report with a total of 164 members. There were two leagues in Bismarck, one with 27 members, the other with twenty. Two leagues were listed in Fargo, one with sixteen members, the other with eight. There were leagues listed in Driscoll (fifteen members), Hazen (fifteen members), McGregor (ten members), Merricourt (ten members), Minot (ten members), Mandan (seven members), New Rockford (fifteen members), and Underwood (eleven members). The report noted that there were no applications on file for several of the individual members, with no applications at all for those listed in the Fargo leagues or the Mandan league. One of the Bismarck leagues also had several members with no applications.<sup>89</sup>

The report also included a list of houses under construction or completed. It listed nineteen houses in Bismarck Project No. 1 (nine of which were already occupied), nine in Bismarck Project No. 2 (one of which was occupied), seventeen in Fargo Project No. 1 (of which four were occupied), eight in Fargo Project No. 2 (one of which was occupied), seven in Mandan Project No. 1 (of which three were occupied), and two houses and a barn (at Coleharbor) in Underwood Project No. 1 (both houses were occupied). This list included the address of the houses in Bismarck and Fargo, but made no mention of the actual locations of the houses in Mandan or Underwood. It also references a barn constructed at Coleharbor.<sup>90</sup> This reflects a total of 62 houses, far short of the number of houses required to match the number of members in local Home Buyers' Leagues and for which deposits had been made.

A copy of this report is included as an appendix to this document.

A second audit investigation had been conducted at the same time as the Bishop, Brissman & Co. audit, this one conducted by the Equitable Audit Company. No copies of this report have been found, but newspaper accounts indicate that there was "very little about the Home Builders [sic] Association" and that the report "compares generally with the report of Bishop, Brissman & Co."<sup>91</sup>

The same day that the Bishop, Brissman & Co. report was distributed to the legislature, so was a report written by Kositzky at the request of the state Board of Auditors. Kositzky, with the assistance of Mr. Chernick who

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 12-17.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 25-29.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>91</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 2 February 1921: 1.

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was one of Blakemore's assistants, conducted a visual investigation and audit of the Home Building Association's construction materials stored in Fargo, Bismarck, and Mandan, as well as apparently some materials stored in Hazen and Underwood. Dated December 28, 1920 and addressed to the Board of Auditors, the report criticized the amount and kinds of materials on hand and the methods by which they were being stored, calling it "evidence of carelessness, inefficiency, and waste." Kositzky also reported finding that the Home Building Association had been paying considerably more for lumber they were buying than the then-current mill prices would dictate. By his estimation, the Association was paying as much as \$4.00 to \$5.00 more per thousand feet, which amounted to about \$1,100.00 more per carload than was necessary.<sup>92</sup>

Immediately following the release of the Bishop, Brissman & Co. reports, rumors flew about forthcoming resignations from Blakemore and J.H. McGovern, the manager of the mill at Drake. The rumors were denied, but the Industrial Commission was forced into conducting reviews of both enterprises. Blakemore refused to resign under fire and publicly stated that portions of the audit report were untrue. He also announced that Equitable Audit Company had been engaged over the summer to install an accounting system, some of which was complete, the rest of which was still being worked out. The legislature requested time to put together a committee to review the reports carefully before any actions were taken.<sup>93</sup>

Two days later, Blakemore was stricken with serious kidney trouble and was taken to the hospital. Dr. G.R. Lipp, who happened to one of the persons for whom a home had been built by the Home Building Association, was the attending physician. Although Dr. Lipp felt that Blakemore was not in danger, it was thought that an operation may need to be performed.<sup>94</sup> Apparently Blakemore's illness was quite serious and he went home to Fargo to recuperate. J.B. Adams was put in charge of the Association and Blakemore did not return to Bismarck until June.<sup>95</sup>

In the meantime, the Association continued to be plagued by scandal. Late in February, the assistant attorney general launched an investigation into charges that F.R. Pollard, former purchasing agent for the Home Building Association, had been taking "kick-backs" from the suppliers from which he ordered materials.<sup>96</sup> The legislative investigation committee, put together in late January or early February, had hired Herbert Temple of Temple-Webb and Company, certified public accountants from Minneapolis, to make an analysis of the Bishop, Brissman & Co. and the Equitable Audit reports. At the legislative hearings at the end of February, Temple concluded that the North Dakota Industrial programs (specifically the bank, the mill, and the Home Building

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<sup>92</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 26 January 1921: 2.

<sup>93</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 27 January 1921: 1, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 31 January 1921: 1.

<sup>95</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 28 March 1921: 6; 4 June 1921: 1.

<sup>96</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 28 February 1921: 1.



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Association) showed a substantial loss, “the amount of which in not possible to determine for its operations during the last year.” Adams also testified at the hearings in an effort to refute some of the charges made against the Association. The hearings were suspended and the committee met to discuss the findings.<sup>97</sup>

The conclusion of the reports indicated continued mismanagement of the Home Building Association and the legislature had had enough. At the beginning of March 1921, the appropriations committee slashed the Association’s budget from \$100,000 to \$19,000 – “just enough to let them wind up the work now on hand.”<sup>98</sup>

This action, however, seemed to have little effect on the Association’s program. In late March, it was announced that the Home Building Association wished to operate on a large scale throughout the state and to facilitate this, an “entire change in policy” would be adopted soon. At the heart of the new policy was a change in buying practices where building materials would be purchased directly from local dealers in communities where houses were to be built rather than buying large supplies from mills outside the state and storing them in only a few locations. Not only would this allow for better public relations with local dealers, it would eliminate the costs associated with storing materials in bulk and transporting them to different towns for use. Apparently the Industrial Commission felt that the Association still had potential and the Bank of North Dakota advance the Association sufficient funds to pay all its indebtedness with the exception of one payroll.<sup>99</sup>

A lawsuit seeking to stop construction on the Lemke House was filed in July of that year. In August, Judge W.L. Nuessle ruled that the law had been violated by building houses costing more than \$5000 and recommended that the Industrial Commission should be restrained from violating the law in the future, but he refused to issue a restraining order to stop work on Lemke’s house, stating that if houses cost more than \$5000 the owner must be responsible for the full amount.<sup>100</sup> In the end, Lemke paid the Home Building Association for the full cost, with money put up by family and friends.<sup>101</sup>

Further investigation into the costs associated with building these houses revealed that not only was Lemke’s house costing more than the law allowed, but that the average cost of all of the houses was thought to be over by about twenty percent, some were over by as much as forty percent. According to Adams, the cost overruns were due to home buyers opting to alter the standardized plans to suit their needs, such as the construction of additional rooms or the use of higher quality finishing materials. The Association intended for owners to pay for the additional costs. Apparently, however, the owners either had not been informed that the “extras” they

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<sup>97</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 1 March 1921: 1.

<sup>98</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 2 March 1921: 1.

<sup>99</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 28 March 1921: 6.

<sup>100</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 1 August 1921: 1.

<sup>101</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 25 November 1921: 1.

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had requested would cost more or had been led to believe the “extras” would cost only a few hundred dollars over the original cost of the house.<sup>102</sup>

In September, the I.V.A. filed petitions containing 74,000 signatures to recall the three members of the Industrial Commission: Governor Frazier, Attorney General Lemke, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor, John N. Hagan. In their places, the I.V.A. was supporting Ragnvold A. Nestos for governor, Sveinbjorn Johnson for attorney general, and Joseph A. Kitchen for commission of agriculture and labor. Also initiated by petition was a constitutional amendment and six laws to limit or end the state industries. The recall election was set for October 28.<sup>103</sup>

On October 13, just prior to the recall election, the Equitable Audit Company conducted its last audit of the Home Building Association. The company was paid \$23,277.09 for their services. It was found that the Association owed the Bank of North Dakota \$441,122.06.<sup>104</sup> On October 21, the *Bismarck Tribune* reported that the State of North Dakota was contemplating the issuance of a “home building series” bonds for \$1,000,000 to a company from Toledo, Ohio.<sup>105</sup>

On October 28, 1921 North Dakotans held the first recall of state officials in the United States. Voters, it seems, had lost trust in Townley’s men and the mismanagement of the state industries, particularly the building of a house for Lemke by the Home Building Association, served to hasten the end of the Nonpartisan’s hold on state politics. All three I.V.A. candidates defeated the Nonpartisan league office holders.<sup>106</sup> The initiated measures, however, were defeated and the League prevailed, leaving the I.V.A. in office with a mandate to implement the League’s program.<sup>107</sup>

In November, John Hagan, the recalled Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor, moved out of the house built for him by the Home Building Association. In a statement made to the newspapers, Hagan said “They were to build me a house for \$5000 with \$600 of extras. I have received notice that the cost of the house if \$8,889.98. I

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<sup>102</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 2 August 1921: 1.

<sup>103</sup> Robinson, 349.

<sup>104</sup> Diehl, F.E. Report of the Home Building Association (December 31, 1922): 10.

<sup>105</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 21 October 1921: 1.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson, 350.

<sup>107</sup> Baum, Dale. “The New Day in North Dakota: The Nonpartisan League and the Politics of Negative Revolution,” in *North Dakota History*, Vol. 40, No. 2: 15.

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will not pay it.” The agreed-to \$600 of extras was to include the installation of a hot water heating plant.<sup>108</sup> His action brought light to what was to become the greatest obstacle yet for the continuance of the Association.

A report on the Home Building Association appeared in the *Bismarck Tribune* at the end of November. Based on information from Adams’ records, the report showed that the final costs of the houses built by that time was 61 percent higher than the estimated costs and the Association was facing a possible loss of \$250,000. No contracts had been signed for any of the houses that were built; contracts were signed for the five houses that had been purchased and resold to new owners under the program. The report also indicated that there was an ongoing dispute over who should pay the taxes (the state or the owner) and that some houses were already being advertised for sale due to delinquent taxes. In addition, the report listed the final Association costs on the Lemke house as \$21,379.51 (the figure did not include some materials purchased independently by Lemke).<sup>109</sup>

This report also provided an accounting of estimated and final costs of the houses (according to James T. Baker, the superintendent of construction for the Home Building Association). The breakdown by property is listed in an appendix to this document.

In response to this report, home owners in Fargo refused to sign contracts with the Home Building Association, maintaining that they should have to pay only the original estimated costs of the homes. Home owners in Mandan hired attorney John F. Sullivan and were considering bringing a lawsuit against the Association for the same reason.<sup>110</sup> Anticipating further conflicts and possible lawsuits, the State decided to withdraw \$600,000 worth of the home building series bonds that they had previously offered, claiming that \$400,000 worth of bonds would be sufficient funding “to clean up the debts of the association.”<sup>111</sup>

On December 12, 1921, F.E. Diehl, a lawyer and a building contractor from Bowman, was appointed as the manager of the Home Building Association.<sup>112</sup> One of his first tasks, as instructed by the Industrial Commission, was to secure contracts with the home buyers, all of which he had contacted by mid-January 1922. None of the home buyers agreed to sign the contracts that would have required them to pay more than the original estimated costs of the houses; several informed him that they had retained lawyers and intended to contest the state’s efforts to collect the additional money.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 15 November 1921: 1.

<sup>109</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 28 November 1921: 1.

<sup>110</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 29 November 1921: 1.

<sup>111</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 1 December 1921: 1.

<sup>112</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 14 December 1921: 3.

<sup>113</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 12 January 1922: 1.

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At the beginning of March 1922, Diehl announced that there was no way to revive the Home Building Association without legislative appropriate and a change in the law. The enabling legislation and the subsequent law with amendments did not, in his legal opinion, allow for the sale of bonds for at least ten years, making it impossible to continue operations. Legislative appropriate would be necessary not only to continue operations, but to make up the deficits that had been identified.<sup>114</sup>

On March 8, the Home Building Association filed actions in suits against George E. Wallace and John N. Hagan. The two suits were intended to be test cases that would help define responsibility around construction costs and taxes. Specifically, the suits aimed to:

1. compel Wallace to pay the full cost for a house built at the request of Wallace;
2. compel Hagan to performance of alleged contract and to determine whether he, as a member of the Industrial Commission and one of the directors of the Home Building Association, had the right to deal with the association, and to determine if he must pay the full cost of the house he abandoned or if the Association must refund the money already paid (less rent);
3. determine if persons who purchased homes after the Association had nearly completed them must pay full costs (seven houses in Bismarck, seven houses in Fargo); and
4. determine who must pay the taxes.<sup>115</sup>

The suit against Wallace asked for a judgment of \$8,820.45, while the suit against Hagan sought a judgment of \$7,139.73. A third suit was filed the following week; this one against C.O. Fossum, seeking a judgment of \$7,293.83.<sup>116</sup> The following month, David Hull sued the Home Building Association. He sought judgment against the Association to give him the house constructed for him at the agreed upon original estimate.<sup>117</sup>

The case against Wallace was heard by District Court Judge Thomas Pugh of Dickinson in July. Several persons testified on behalf of the Association, including Blakemore and Adams. Blakemore testified that construction on several houses was started before buyers were secured at the direction of the Industrial Commission in an effort “to get the program underway” and consequently, some decisions about “extras” on houses were made by the Association rather than the home buyer. He indicated that all the houses were built using two basic plans, either of which could be modified. Houses constructed using the first plan cost \$4,500.00; houses built using the second plan cost \$4,700.00. Evidence, however, showed glaring irregularities in costs of materials and who was charged for extras and who was not. The lack of detailed records and signed

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<sup>114</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 6 March 1922: 1.

<sup>115</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 8 March 1922: 1.

<sup>116</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 16 March 1922: 1.

<sup>117</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 7 April 1922: 3.

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contracts worked against the Association and the case was decided in favor of Wallace. Judge Pugh, deciding that the original estimates were legally binding, ordered the house be delivered to Wallace for the sum of \$5,820.00.<sup>118</sup>

The State immediately appealed the Wallace case to the State Supreme Court. If Judge Pugh's decision was sustained, the state stood to lose approximately \$250,000. The appeal was filed in August with the hopes of being on the September calendar of the court; the appeal wasn't heard until November 9 and the decision announced in December.

On September 15, Diehl made a report to the Industrial Commission. This report provided a comparison of accounts using the amounts based on the district court decision in the Wallace case with those prepared by Equitable Audit Company. The report shows records for fifty houses constructed by the Association. Based on accounting in accordance with the Wallace case, the total value of the houses was \$272,002.46, a total of \$100,574.98 had been paid by the buyers and the remaining \$171,427.48 was due. Based on the Equitable audit, the total value of the houses was \$430,960.69 with a total of \$330,385.71 due.<sup>119</sup>

That fall, a suit was brought by the Burkholder Lumber Company of Minneapolis against the Home Building Association claiming damages amounting to \$80,000. The damages, they claimed, arose because of cancelled contracts originally made by F. R. Pollard. The jury trial, held in Bismarck in December, last a week. The Burkholder Lumber Company was represented by William Langer. The jury found in favor of the Home Building Association.<sup>120</sup>

On December 20, the Supreme Court sent the Wallace case back to the district court and directed that additional testimony be taken. The following information was to be gathered:

1. the reasonable value of the home at the time of owner possession;
2. the reasonable rental value;
3. the value of improvements by the defendant since taking possession and the dates of such improvements; and
4. whether or not the defendant was a member of a Home Buyers' League, and if so, the extent of the obligations due the Association from the league of which he was a member.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 18 – 27 July 1922: 1.

<sup>119</sup> Diehl, F.E., Report to the Industrial Commission (September 15, 1922).

<sup>120</sup> Diehl (December report): 6-7.

<sup>121</sup> Diehl (December report): 5.

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On December 31, Diehl made another report to the Industrial Commission outlining the Home Building Association's activities since its inception. He was critical of the way the Association had been managed and charged that the previous officials of the Association "seemed to think that there would be little credit derived from helping poor people in obtaining modest homes, since all the houses built by the Association cost from six to twenty-two thousand dollars each, notwithstanding the fact that the Home Building law limited the cost to five thousand dollars each." He went on to say that "they expected to use it [the Home Building law] in monopolizing and socializing both city and farm property." Diehl's analysis also suggested that it was the Industrial Commission's "dream to use the Home Building Association in conjunction with the Immigration Department to dominate the sale of all farm and city property of the State of North Dakota, and the only thing that seemed to be in their way was the lack of ready finance."<sup>122</sup>

It seems to have been this lack of ready finance that saved the state from further financial disaster. The Association after all, with only an initial appropriation of \$100,000, managed to incur losses totaling almost a third of a million dollars. As Diehl pointed out in his December report, the Home Building Association should not be held solely responsible for the fiasco. Had it not been for loans made by the Bank of North Dakota to an Association that had no legal authority to borrow money, perhaps the losses might have been less. He also called into question the logic – and ethics – of having both the borrowing institution and the loaning institution under the control and management of the Industrial Commission.<sup>123</sup>

The Home Building Association was dissolved in 1923. Beginning in November 1923, hearings were held by the Industrial Commission at which settlements were reached with home buyers as to the amounts due and the monthly payments expected. Diehl had become the secretary of the Industrial Commission after wrapping up the Home Building Association's business and was instrumental in recommending settlement terms. The last record of these hearings was in December 1925. It is unclear how much the state ultimately lost through building these houses, but the settlement records indicate that the state was able to negotiate with most owners to receive payments covering much of the state's cost for constructing the houses.<sup>124</sup>

There are discrepancies about the total number of houses constructed by the Home Building Association. In Diehl's December report, he claimed that a total of 53 homes and one barn had been constructed (his report does not indicate which, if any, of these were houses that were purchased and resold). This number is considerably less than the Bishop, Brissman & Co. report issued two years earlier, which showed a total of 62 under construction or completed.

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<sup>122</sup> Diehl, (December report): 8-9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the Industrial Commission special settlement meetings (September 1923 through December 1925).

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There are other anomalies in the records that also leave unanswered questions. J.B. Adams is shown to have owned two houses, one in Bismarck, another in Fargo. To date, no information to explain why he had two houses constructed by the Association has been found. There is no mention in the reports of garages being constructed with the houses, with the exception of the Lemke house in Fargo, yet many of the houses have garages that are contemporaneous with the houses. It is possible that some of the “extra” costs charged to home buyers included the construction of garages; to date, no information about the garages has been found. There are no references in the reports to refunds, yet the Bishop, Brissman & Co. audit showed that at least 187 persons had made deposits as would-be home buyers. Clearly houses were built for only a fraction of that number. What became of the deposits of the approximately 130 people who never got houses?

### **THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE: THE END OF AN ERA**

Long before the recall election, there was a decline in confidence in the Nonpartisan League’s leadership. Erosion of the League’s hold began shortly after Langer, Kositzky and Hall defected from the party in 1919. In the 1920 elections, the League candidates won, but by narrowing margins. The I.V.A. continued its mission of ousting the corrupt leaders and through the investigations into the state industries in 1921, was able to convince enough voters that it was time to rid the state house of League leadership. The national attention on the “Red Scare” which was sweeping the country and the comparisons of the Nonpartisan League to the Bolsheviks may have contributed to the shift in voter sentiment.

Following the recall election, the Nonpartisan League’s hold on North Dakota shifted. Governor Nestos had promised to give the League program a fair opportunity to prove itself. He pushed the rural-credit program and lowered the interest rates of the Bank of North Dakota, finally ensuring that loans were made for farm land. In the spring of 1922, Nestos sold three million dollars worth of State Mill and Elevator bonds and construction resumed on the project at Grand Forks. On October 30, the machinery was started and operations at the mill began.<sup>125</sup>

In November 1921, Townley finally began to serve his 90-day jail sentence in Minnesota. In 1922, he resigned as president of the National Nonpartisan League. The League, which had expanded into a total of thirteen states, saw a decline in membership and support in all states. At the height of the League’s power, there were approximately 208,800 paid members and another 40,000 that counted themselves as Leaguers.<sup>126</sup> After Townley’s resignation, the League continued to endorse candidates in these states, but with limited success.

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<sup>125</sup> Robinson, 380-382.

<sup>126</sup> Morlan, 277.

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In July 1923, the *Nonpartisan Leader* ceased publication and in October, the North Dakota League “formally severed connections with the virtually nonexistent national body” so as to continue on its own.<sup>127</sup> Despite its defeat in 1922, the North Dakota League elected governors in 1924, 1926, 1932, and 1936. They also sent Langer, who eventually came back to the Nonpartisan League, and Gerald Nye to the U.S. Senate.<sup>128</sup>

After leaving the League, Townley worked for a while as an organizer for the National Producers Alliance and later helped organize the Farm Holiday Association. He ran for various public offices in North Dakota and Minnesota, once on the Farmer-Labor ticket, later as a Republican and subsequently as an Independent. He failed to get elected each time. In his final years he sold insurance in North Dakota. He was killed in a car accident on November 7, 1959.<sup>129</sup>

Lemke, after a brief break from politics following his recall in 1921, went on to a mostly successful political career. He ran for the senate, on the short-lived Farmer-Labor party, in 1926, but was defeated. In 1932 he was elected to U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican and served four two-year terms. In 1936, he ran for President as the Union party candidate. In 1940, having already received endorsement for another term as Representative, he chose instead to run for the U.S. Senate as an independent candidate and was defeated. In 1942, he was elected again as a Representative and served until his death in May 1950.<sup>130</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The Nonpartisan League, despite its rapid rise and scandalous fall from the political forefront in North Dakota, has a lasting legacy. Although opinion has been divided through the years about the League’s politics, many people agree that the enterprises and reforms instituted by the League have served the state well.

Morlan sums up the merits of the League program as follows:

Cheaper credit and more adequate credit facilities were provided, vastly more economical hail insurance was made available, a more equitable system of taxation was established, railroad rates were lowered and improved services secured, fair weights and payment for dockage were achieved, and an important

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>129</sup> Morlan, Robert L. “Townley, Arthur Charles” (biographical sketch) in Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement 6:1956-1950: 644-645.

<sup>130</sup> Blackorby, Edward C. “Lemke, William Frederick” (biographical sketch) in Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement 4: 1946-1950 (1974): 479-481.



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contribution was made toward gradual abolition of other evils in the marketing system..... only the Home Building Association no longer exists.<sup>131</sup>

Although the Home Building Association itself no longer exists, it too left a lasting legacy in the houses that were constructed as part of the program.

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<sup>131</sup> Morlan, 358-361.

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### **ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES**

#### **PROPERTY DESCRIPTIONS**

Properties associated with this Multiple Property Listing include buildings constructed or purchased and resold by the Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association in 1920 and 1921. Building types include houses, barns, and garages.

Although records show a discrepancy about how many houses were built or bought and resold by the Association, a number of houses and their locations have been identified through prior survey work. To date, 26 houses in Bismarck have been identified (four of which have been demolished); two others listed in the Bishop, Brissman & Co. report have not been identified. Of the 22 previously identified, twenty were confirmed to be extant in 2005; the two without street addresses were not visited and no confirmation was made.

Twenty-five houses were listed in the Bishop, Brissman & Co. report in Fargo. Construction on two had not yet begun. Of the 23 known to have been built, twelve are listed as contributing resources in the Fargo South National Register Historic District. In addition to these houses, four were confirmed as extant in 2005 and six were unconfirmed. One house appears to have been demolished.

None of the seven houses listed on that report as having been built (or under construction) in Mandan have been identified. It is not known if all seven reached completion or which, if any, are extant. Neither of the houses constructed at Underwood, nor the barn constructed at Coleharbor, have been identified and it is not known if they are extant.

It is possible that further research may yield information about the location of the unidentified houses. As this occurs, the information pertaining to the Associated Property Types may need to be modified. A list of the identified resources and their potential eligibility for listing on the National Register is included at the end of this section.

The Home Building Law that enabled the creation of the Home Building Association indicated that standardized plans would be used for the construction of houses and barns. Blakemore, in his testimony during the Wallace case, indicated that there were two standard plans, either of which could be modified. Most of the houses constructed by the Association are modest, 1½ story bungalows with Craftsman detailing such as wide overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails and knee braces. This architectural style was popular throughout the country at that time. There is some variation on the theme, however, as dormers and porches vary, as do floor plans and square footage. Although none of the Association records or reports indicate the source of the plans that were used, an article in the Bismarck Tribune in January 1920 indicates that John B. Adams, the first participant in the Association's program designed his seven-room bungalow as a model to be used for future

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houses built by the Association. It is not clear if Adams, who worked as an accountant and served as his own contractor on the project, had any background in design or construction. It is possible that he chose the plans from the variety of pattern books that were available at the time. The Bishop, Brissman & Co. report shows that Adams served as the contractor in Fargo Project No. 1 so it is quite possible that his plans were adapted and modified for use by the Home Building Association.

Adams' house in Bismarck was described as a thoroughly modern, two bedroom bungalow which included a large living room, a dining room, a breakfast room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and full basement. Finishes included oak floors, birch moldings and trim, an "antique" fireplace, and "French windows" between the dining room and breakfast room and between the dining room and living room. The house had a large front porch and a pergola over the entrance. The article in which the house is described makes no mention of structural framing, exterior or interior wall coverings, or foundation or roofing materials. Some conclusions can be made, however, based on the audit reports and newspaper articles about the materials and supplies purchased by the Association, that most of the houses were constructed of wood, set on concrete foundations and basements, with wood siding and wood shingle roofing; interior walls and ceilings were plaster.

Although most of the houses constructed by the Association were Craftsman bungalows, there were examples of houses employing different architectural styles and building materials. Most notably was the Lemke House in Fargo, which was a two-story, clay tile house finished with brick and stucco. Stylistically, it has been called Tudor Revival. Houses that were purchased and resold by the Association may have been of any style and materials. The Osterhaus House in Bismarck, purchased during the summer of 1920, is an example of Dutch Colonial Revival.

No information was found about the barn that was constructed, other than its general location in Coleharbor. It is not known what style by which it might be classified, but it was likely constructed of wood, as most barns during that period were.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

### *CRITERION A*

All eligible resources associated with this context will be significant under Criterion A. They are important in their association with the Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association.

The Nonpartisan League is a significant part of North Dakota's history, putting the state in the national spotlight for several years. Born in North Dakota, the League grew to have alliances in thirteen states and claimed to have membership and support of nearly 250,000 farmers. North Dakota, however, is the only state in which the

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Nonpartisan League had complete control of the state government. Several of the League's leaders gained national recognition, including A.C. Townley, William Lemke, Lynn Frazier and William Langer. The League's reign in North Dakota was fraught with controversy and ultimately resulted in the first-ever recall election of state officials in American history.

Despite the negative politics, the Nonpartisan League brought positive change to the state. They implemented or improved the grain-grading system, farm credit, hail insurance, the taxation system, railroad rates, a fair dockage system, a workmen's compensation program, and women's suffrage. The issue that ignited the League to begin with, the farmers' desire to have a state-owned terminal elevator, also came to fruition under the League, albeit after the recall election that brought the League to its knees.

During its reign, the League sought to implement a number of state-owned enterprises. The Home Building Association was one of those enterprises. Although it was characterized by gross mismanagement, and was in large part responsible for the fall of the League in North Dakota, it did eventually build a number of houses in the state that still stand. To further the significance of the resources associated with the Home Building Association, it must be mentioned that the Association appears to have been a one-of-a-kind enterprise in the nation. There were other cooperative housing ventures, but all were developed and managed as private enterprises rather than public. The League seemed to be ahead of its time by providing what some saw as "public assistance" by making low-interest loans available for the purchases of homes. To date, only one other state has been found to have instituted a state loan program for home buyers and that was South Dakota, which passed a bill in January 1920, as a remedy for the state's housing shortage, designed to make loans available for persons wishing to build homes. This program, however, differed from the North Dakota Home Building Association in two primary ways: (1) it was not a cooperative venture and individuals could be approved for loans without belonging to a home buyers' league, and (2) the state did not engage in the building of homes, the borrower was responsible for having his or her home constructed privately. Interestingly, the South Dakota program was set up so that application for loans had to be approved by local municipalities, as they were liable for the loss on any loans made through the state's program.

### *CRITERION B*

Resources may also be eligible under Criterion B in this context. For a property to be considered eligible in association with a person or persons, the property must be associated with the person's productive life and it must be shown that the person gained importance within his or her profession or group. The resources must represent the most important property associated with the person, or be the last remaining property associated with that person, to be considered eligible.

It is not necessary that the person's significance be tied to the Nonpartisan League, only that the resource being nominated have been constructed or purchased by the Home Building Association as part of their program.

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### *CRITERION C*

Resources may also be eligible under Criterion C in this context. For a property to be considered eligible it must embody the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style and/or construction practice. Distinctive characteristics are the physical features or traits that commonly recur in specific types, periods, or methods of construction. Resources must retain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of the type, period or method of construction for which it is significant.

### **REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

To be considered eligible for listing on the National Register in association with this context, the following must apply:

1. A property must be demonstrated to have been constructed by the Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association or to have been purchased, remodeled, and sold by the Home Building Association.
2. Construction must have begun in 1920 or 1921, been completed by the end of 1922, and be located in the state of North Dakota.
3. A property should be considered significant on a statewide level under Criterion A. If the property is also eligible under Criterion C, it should be considered significant on a local level under this criterion. If a property is also eligible under Criterion B, the level of significance (local or state) will depend on the significance of the person and whether he or she was significant to the history of the state or significant to local history only.
4. A property must possess sufficient integrity to convey its significance. Generally, a resource will possess several, and usually most, of the following seven aspects of integrity:
  - a. Location: Because the relationship between a resource and its historic associations is usually destroyed if the resource is moved, it is most desirable that the resource remain in its original location. If the resource has been moved from its original location, it must meet Criterion Consideration B for moved properties as indicated in the National Register guidelines.
  - b. Design: A resource should retain a combination of elements that conveys its original design. These elements may include the form, plan, organization of space, structural systems, technology, materials, and style. Generally, a resource should retain its overall original form and massing. Subsequent additions to resources should be set back so as to not obstruct the original form, should be of a compatible scale, and should not be on the primary façade of a building. Window replacement in buildings may be acceptable if fenestration patterns remain intact; enlargement of window or door openings may render a building

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ineligible if the alterations significantly change the wall-to-opening ratio. The filling of openings, if the original openings are readable, may be considered on secondary facades only. Original plans and organization of space should be evident, even if the use of the space has changed over time. Original surface materials should remain intact. The type, amount and style of ornamentation must reflect the original design.

c. **Setting:** The physical environment in which the resource exists should reflect its historic features, including topography, vegetation, simple constructed features, and the relationship between the resource and its surroundings. Natural and created landscape features should be evaluated for significance in relation to the resource.

d. **Materials:** A resource must retain the key materials dating from the period of its historic significance. If a resource has been rehabilitated, historic materials and significant features must be preserved. A resource whose historic materials have been lost and then reconstructed may be eligible only if it meets Criteria Consideration E for reconstructed properties as indicated in the National Register guidelines.

e. **Workmanship:** A resource must retain the physical evidence of workmanship.

f. **Feeling:** A resource should retain sufficient original physical features that, when taken together, convey the resource's historic character. This will generally include the combination of original design, materials, workmanship, and setting. Because feeling depends on individual perceptions, its retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility for the National Register.

g. **Association:** To retain association, the direct link between the resource and its association with an important historic event or person must be sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Association, like feeling, requires the presence of original physical features that convey the resource's historic character. Because association depends on individual perceptions, its retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility for the National Register.

5. A resource need not retain its original function if its historic physical integrity is intact.

6. Associated outbuildings should be included as contributing resources when appropriate.

In addition, if any of the National Register Criteria Considerations apply, the property must be demonstrated to meet the required degree of significance associated with the applicable criteria consideration.

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**HOUSES LISTED IN THE BISHOP, BRISSMAN & CO. REPORT AS HAVING BEEN  
CONSTRUCTED OR UNDER CONSTRUCTION BY DECEMBER 1920  
AND AN ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY**

The addresses that appeared in the Bishop, Brissman & Co. report for Bismarck indicate that at some time between the construction of the houses and the present time, the street numbers shifted and were renumbered. Resources are listed by current addresses where known; if current address is unconfirmed, the address shown in the report is listed below.

Historic Name	Address	NR Eligibility
<i>Bismarck Project No.1:</i>		
J.B. Adams	210 W. Park	altered, not eligible
J.J. Osterhous	602 W. Thayer	potentially eligible
E.E. Rimbach	517 W. Thayer	altered, not eligible
R. Mossbrucker	402 10 <sup>th</sup> St.	demolished
C.O. Fossum	1007 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	potentially eligible
A.A. Svensgaard	1013 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	potentially eligible
F.J. Grady	414 Ave. F East	potentially eligible
A.A. Jones	1002 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	potentially eligible
J.B. Hollenbeck	1006 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	altered, not eligible
J.N. Hogan (Hagan)	1010 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	altered, not eligible
F.H. Adams	listed in 1920 as 1006 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	unconfirmed
E.H. Light	417 W. Thayer	altered, not eligible
O.H. Lerum	421 W. Thayer	altered, not eligible
J.E. Payne	428 W. Broadway	altered, not eligible
A.L.Sandin	323 E. Park	altered, not eligible
J.A. Graham	510 W. Rosser	altered, not eligible
Paul Willman	N. part of Block 7 in Lincoln Addition	unconfirmed
F. Holmboe	615 N. 1 <sup>st</sup>	altered, not eligible
T. Taylor	1017 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	demolished

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*Bismarck Project No. 2:*

A.J. Arnot	826 N. 5 <sup>th</sup>	potentially eligible
O. Lundquist	622 W. Thayer	potentially eligible
C.B. Rosen	Ave. A	demolished
G. R. Lipp	502 W. Rosser	potentially eligible
W. Kershaw	Farm home north of city	unconfirmed
P.R. Fields	listed on Ave. A in 1920 (no #)	unconfirmed
Ora L. Martin	406 W. Rosser	potentially eligible
G. Wallace	601 N. 7 <sup>th</sup>	potentially eligible
O.S. Jacobson	800 N. 13 <sup>th</sup>	demolished

*Fargo Project No. 1:*

Geo. A. Totten, Sr. & Geo. A. Totten, Jr.	Lots 12/13 of Blk 3 Chapin's Add'n	unconfirmed
Alfred Knutson	listed as 1413 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	unconfirmed
John E. Wood	1417 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
Fred C. Brett	1415 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
David Hill (Hull)	1425 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
I.A. Johnson	1429 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
Mrs. M.E. Hallet	1433 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
A.A. Aardal	1437 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
Fannie H. Johnson	1021 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
Wm. Lemke	1222 9 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
J.W. Boeing	724 Broadway	demolished?
C.L. Sonquist	listed at Oak Grove	unconfirmed
W.O Folendorf	listed at Oak Grove	unconfirmed
Edgar Potter	618 13 <sup>th</sup> Ave. S.	potentially eligible
J.B. Adams	1317 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
Fred Wimmer	1321 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
J.T. Erickson	1441 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave. N.	altered, not eligible

*Fargo Project No. 2:*

Nels Anderson	1437 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave. N.	altered, not eligible
John Liljedal	(not started in 1920)	built?
G.E. Graham	1349 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district



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R.M. McClintock	listed on 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S. bwtn 13 <sup>th</sup> & 14 <sup>th</sup>	unconfirmed
T.J. Sullivan	(not started in 1920)	built?
C.O. Berg	1442 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave. N.	altered, not eligible
O.E. Anderson	1333 8 <sup>th</sup> St. S.	listed: contributing in district
A.C. Seeley	listed at Midway Subdivision	unconfirmed

*Mandan Project No. 1:*

B.L. Surface	no address listed	unconfirmed
A.J. Peterson	no address listed	unconfirmed
Frank Lee	no address listed	unconfirmed
Anton Finz	no address listed	unconfirmed
J.I. Rovig	no address listed	unconfirmed
W.H. Murray	no address listed	unconfirmed
Ted Rotnem	no address listed	unconfirmed

*Underwood Project No. 1:*

L. Johannes	no address listed	unconfirmed
John Franson	no address listed	unconfirmed

*Coleharbor:*

Barn	no address listed	unconfirmed
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### **GEOGRAPHIC DATA**

The State of North Dakota, specifically Bismarck, Fargo, Mandan, Cole Harbor, and Underwood, are included in this Multiple Property Listing.

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### SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

The Multiple Property Documentation Form entitled *Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association Resources in North Dakota* was developed in order to analyze the context of buildings constructed or remodeled under the auspices of the Nonpartisan League's Home Building Association in North Dakota.

The historic context was developed using primary and secondary sources including books, manuscripts, newspaper articles, city directories, census records, legislative records, and state commission meeting minutes. The National Register nomination for the Fargo South Historic District provided information about some of the houses constructed by the Home Building Association in Fargo. Previous cultural resource surveys in Fargo and Bismarck also provided information about some of the resources.

Although no comprehensive survey was completed as part of this project, a windshield survey of resources was conducted in September 2005. Of the resources identified through research as having been constructed or remodeled by the Home Building Association, twenty were confirmed to be extant in Bismarck and sixteen were confirmed in Fargo during this field research. Four additional houses constructed in Bismarck were confirmed as demolished. None of the seven houses listed on that report as having been built (or under construction) in Mandan were identified or confirmed. Neither of the houses constructed at Underwood, nor the barn constructed at Coleharbor, have been identified and it is not known if they are extant.

Registration requirements for listing resources associated with this context are based on significance related to this context and the integrity of the identified resources. The standards for integrity are based on the National Register standards for assessing integrity. As additional associated resources are identified and surveyed, additional specific qualifications may be added and the list of existing requirements refined.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Bishop, Brissman & Co. Report of Special Examination of the Home Building Association of North Dakota, December 1920

Appendix B: *Bismarck Tribune's* "Complete Report on Homebuilders," November 28, 1921

## APPENDIX A



## APPENDIX B

### *Bismarck Tribune's "Complete Report on Homebuilders"* November 28, 1921

According to the newspaper article, the information in this report was based on records kept by J.B. Adams. The accounting of estimated and final costs of the houses was based on records of James T. Baker, the superintendent of construction for the Home Building Association.

<i>Bismarck Project No. 1</i>	Estimated cost	Total cost
A. Mossbrucker	\$4,020.00	\$6,310.00
B. Fossum	4,530.00	7,293.88
C. Svensgaard	4,700.00	7,395.80
D. Grady	5,050.00	8,691.76
E. Jones	4,900.00	7,972.86
F. Hollenbeck	5,600.00	8,652.43
G. Hagan	5,433.00	8,889.98
[H. not listed in report]		
I. Light	5,320.00	9,162.05
J. Lerum	5,630.00	8,709.09
K. Payne	4,900.00	8,380.00
L. Sandin	5,000.00	8,236.00
M. Graham	5,750.00	12,632.70
N. Willman	[no amt. listed]	7,062.94
O. Holmboe	6,045.00	11,663.03
P. Taylor	4,950.00	8,746.76

### *Bismarck Project No. 2*

A. Arnot	5,220.00	10,257.27
B. Lundquist	5,710.00	9,995.32
C. Rosen	5,600.00	13,715.43
D. Lipp	5,850.00	12,017.92
E. Kershaw	6,395.00	11,031.57
[F. not listed in report]		
G. Martin	4,950.00	8,169.56
H. Wallace	5,250.00	11,720.45
I. Jacobson	remodeling	1,000.00

### *Underwood Project*

A. Johannes	8,200.00	9,454.00
B. Fransen barn	3,200.00	2,657.72

*Fargo Project No. 1*

A. Knutson	4,750.00	7,143.42
B. Wood	4,700.00	7,267.86
C. Brett	4,500.00	6,673.52
D. Hull	4,700.00	7,376.75
E. Johnson	4,500.00	6,614.22
F. Hallett	4,900.00	7,516.17
G. Aardahl	4,500.00	7,010.22
H. Johnson	8,323.00	14,322.31
I. Lemke	14,500.00	21,379.51
J. Boeing	8,325.00	14,091.64
K. Sonquist	5,150.00	7,471.42
L. Follendorft	5,030.00	6,879.40
M. Potter	4,700.00	8,045.33
N. Adams	4,700.00	7,612.13
O. Wimmer	5,350.00	7,934.71
P. Erickson	4,700.00	6,432.15

*Fargo Project No. 2*

A. Anderson	5,450.00	8,234.00
[B. not listed in report]		
C. Graham	5,425.00	9,508.18
D. McClintock	4,850.00	6,534.71
[E. not listed in report]		
F. Borg	4,500.00	8,108.27
G. Anderson	4,500.00	5,792.52
H. Seeley	remodeling	2,036.37

*Mandan Project No. 1*

A. Surface	5,100.00	7,834.19
B. Peterson	5,100.00	7,648.55
C. Lee	5,100.00	7,975.10
D. Fing	5,125.00	10,355.98
E. Rovig	4,750.00	7,574.26
F. Murry	4,700.00	6,927.56 <sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Bismarck Tribune, 28 November 1921: 1, 3.