History of Grand Forks Township

Polk County was organized by the state legislature on March 3, 1873; and a year later, March 17, 1874, the area near East Grand Forks, which included Huntsville, Rhinehart and Grand Forks townships, was organized and called Huntsville township. It was the first township organized in Polk County.

This was an area which was divided by the Red Lake River, which made communication and travel difficult; so in 1882 a group of residents north of East Grand Forks petitioned the County Commissioners to have their area separated from Huntsville Township. This was granted, and the territory was organized into a new township. The first meeting was held at the home of A. Walstrom on January 25, 1882. What should the township be called? Some wanted it to be called “Walstrom,” others wanted the name to be “Arthur” in honor of Chester Alan Arthur, who was president of the United States at that time. After some controversy, the name “Grand Forks Township” was chosen. Officers elected were: A. Walstrom, N. Jenning, Bernt Johnson, Iver Johnson, Theodore Thompson and Robert Anderson. Robert Anderson had been the clerk of the combined Huntsville Township, so now he was elected clerk of the new township, a position he held until 1917.

Besides the above mentioned men, other early settlers in the township were Bernt Hagen who came in 1878 and who was the first settler in the township. Later that same year William Jackson arrived. The next few years brought Mrs. O. O. Hoff, Ole Midmoen, A. L. Steele, Ole Erickson, C. J. Tallakson, Leon Surprenant, Robert Kerr, June, Thomas and Pete McCoy, Joe Jarvis, Pierre Emard, James Peterson, Bernt Olson, Peter Olson and James Kenn.

Some of the early settlers came from the Selkirk settlement in Canada, where they had been plagued by floods or other misfortunes, and hoped to find a better place here. Others came from the Scandinavian countries, and most had lived for several years in other places in the U.S. before moving here.

School District #2, which was located two miles north of East Grand Forks on the River Road, was organized in 1876, and was the second school to be organized in Polk County. Later that same year District #3 in East Grand Forks was organized. School was in session for three or four months in the summer. This was a large district, and as the pioneer families grew, some of the district was divided and another district (78) was formed in 1882.

The first jail for East Grand Forks was built in Grand Forks Township in 1883 at a cost of $200 appropriated by the County Commissioners, but they made it clear that they expected to be reimbursed for this when the city of East Grand Forks would be incorporated.

The area north of East Grand Forks was the first area in Polk County to raise wheat in large quantities. There is a reason for this. Congress had made grants of land to the railroad companies to aid them in the construction of the railroads. They were granted every odd-numbered section of land for six miles on each side of the railroad track. This they sold to the settlers for $5.00 an acre, but the farmer would receive a rebate of $2.50 for each acre he planted into crop. When the railroad was finished from Fisher to Grand Forks in 1880, much grain was shipped by rail. However, before this time the grain was loaded on barges which went to Moorhead, or north to Winnepeg (Fort Garry). Seventeen bushels per acre was considered a good yield.

In July 1882, the County Commissioners appropriated $150 to be used in building a bridge across the Grand Marais 6 miles north of East Grand Forks, and in 1884 they appropriated money for building a bridge along the north line of the township.

In the very early days there were no churches in the township. The Lutherans held worship services at the homes of Bernt Hagen or A. L. Steele because they had larger log houses. Those of other faiths usually went to Grand Forks on the ferry to attend worship services.

HAROLD AMUNDSON

Harold Amundson, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Christian Amundson, was born in Sullivan Township on March 24, 1905. After attending the local grade school, he was graduated from the Northwest School of Agriculture, Crookston, Minnesota in 1925, and from the advanced course in 1926. He was married to Olga Morud on June 10, 1933 at Crookston. She was born in Hegelanda Township, and was graduated from the Warren high school in 1926, and from the Teacher’s Training Department in 1927. After graduation she taught in rural schools for six years. Later she attended classes at the University of North Dakota, taking classes in music, art and ceramics. Since their marriage they have lived on a farm north of East Grand Forks, Minnesota. They have three sons, Lester, James and Arnold.

Harold served as treasurer of the local school district for many years, also was township assessor, church secretary, and was on the Board of Directors of the Farmers Elevator Company for thirty-nine years. Mrs. Amundson served as a 4-H leader, Sunday school teacher, organist, choir director, and is active in music and garden clubs. She is on the Board of Directors for the Valley Memorial Home.

Electricity, which came to this area in 1945, produced many changes in the farm home. Formerly heated with wood and coal, the home could now be heated with electricity. Baking in an electric oven was quite different from trying to regulate the oven heat while burning wood. Refrigeration was a great convenience, for now the meat could be frozen fresh, while formerly it had to be canned, salted or smoked. A water system, indoor plumbing, and many smaller electrical appliances made the farm home very comfortable. The farmer also realized many changes in his work, for now electric motors did much of the heavy work, such as elevating grain, piling potatoes and pumping water. However, the greatest change was in the farm shop where they could now use a welder, grinder, saw and other power tools for repairing machinery.

Harold always tried to think of ways to make the work easier. He made an electric "mini scoop" which was used for shoveling potatoes in crowded quarters, the potatoes were no longer shoveled by hand. He made a power hoist for lifting heavy objects such as truck boxes and machinery. He also designed and made a grain drier which has been in use for many years.

After Lester and James finished their schooling at the North Dakota State University in Fargo, and service in the Army and