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, Zver 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 1911.

Besides the above mentioned men, other early settlers in the township were Bernt Hagen who came in 1876 and was the first settler in the township. Later that same year William Jackson arrived. The next few years brought Mrs. O. O. Hoff, Ole Midtmoen, A. L. Steele, Ole Erickson, C. J. Tallakson, Leon Surprent, Robert Kerr, John, 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 Helgeland 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 open 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
Air Force, they began farming in partnership with their father. He retired from active farming in 1970. Then Lester and his family moved to the farm, and his parents built a retirement home for themselves on the farm. James and his family live in East Grand Forks, but they expect to move to their farm soon. Another son, Arnold, lives with his family in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania. He is a machine designer.

LESTER AMUNDSON

Lester Amundson, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Amundson, was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota on February 24, 1935. He was graduated from the East Grand Forks high school in 1952, and from the North Dakota State University in Fargo in 1956. After that time he spent two years in the army, most of the time at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey in the Signal Corps research and development laboratory. When he had completed his army service, he returned to the North Dakota State University in 1959 for graduate work. It is there he met Anna Marie Paulson who became his wife on July 2, 1961. She was born on December 12, 1933 at Fort Ransom, North Dakota, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Paulson. After graduating from high school and the Valley City Teacher's College, she taught grade school for a number of years. She then returned to the North Dakota State University where she majored in Home Economics. Later she taught at Larimore and in East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

They live on a farm five and a half miles north of East Grand Forks and are growers of certified seed potatoes and grain. Lester is active in church and farm organizations, and has served on the board of the Red River Valley Potato Growers Association, and on the Red River Winter Shows Board of Managers. He is also a licensed ham radio operator. Mrs. Amundson is active in church and 4-H activities.


GORDON L. BRIDGEFORD

I, Gordon L. Bridgeford, am the oldest son born to John K. and Annie Bridgeford. I was born in Grand Forks Township on June 27, 1902 on the Alex Lammy Farm which my father rented at that time. We moved to the Point in Bygdal Township in February 1908 when I was six years old. I attended rural school in Huntsville Township and worked on the family farm. My family was among the first to grow potatoes. I can remember our first potato planter, an assist-feed Eureka. Our neighbor, John Guerard, walked beside the planter and drove the team while my father hand fed the machine. I remained with my father on the farm. In 1918 we moved to a larger farm. When I was seventeen years old, I received a small aereage of potatoes as my reward for working. For extra income, I cut and delivered cord wood to Grand Forks for our neighbor. On July 11, 1921 I married Lillian Bushee. To our union were born eight children; three sons and five daughters: Dorothy, Jeanne, Douglas, Colleen, Robert, Joyce, Monica and Patrick. After my marriage, I continued to farm with my father and younger brothers. We rented land close to the home-farm at $15 per acre, cash rent. I sold my first crop of wheat for $1.26 per bushel, but potatoes sold from 18¢ to 27¢ per bushel. Conditions improved somewhat the next few years; but in late July, 1927 our local bank failed. This wiped out my entire savings. My good bachelor friends came to my rescue with a small loan for which I was thankful. In 1932, I went into partnership with O. J. Barnes, a pioneer potato grower and dealer. This partnership lasted for seven years. We grew Certified Seed Potatoes mostly Irish Cobbler and Bliss Triumphs. I bought my present farm in 1931 and moved to this farm on November 9, 1937. We continued to grow Certified Potatoes, wheat and barley. I discontinued potatoes in 1972 due to wet weather and poor prices. My wife, Lillian, passed away March 25, 1956. On January 22, 1965, I married Clara Wincheстер who had one son Robert. I now grain-farm at 73 years of age.

The Gordon L. Bridgeford Family: Standing, L to R: Dorothy; Robert; Joyce; Jeanne; Douglas and Colleen. Seated, L to R: Monica; Gordon, Lillian, Patrick.

JOHN K. BRIDGEFORD

As the oldest of the Polk County Bridgefords, I will relate something about my father and mother and their early experiences in America and in Bygdal Township. My father, John K. Bridgeford, came here from Aberdeen, Scotland when he was twenty-one years old. He worked for his passage on a cattle boat. He went to Canada first, where he worked for a time; then moved on to the west coast and later to Larimore, North Dakota. He told some interesting tales about the early harvesting days and eating in cook cars. Later on, he settled north of East Grand Forks, Minnesota and started farming on his own. He met his wife, Annie Fraser, while she was working for her uncle, Robert Anderson. Annie, born in Canada came from Dundalk, Ontario, and because she had lost her parents had come to live with her uncle. The Bridgefords were married in 1900 and raised a family of ten children: Lovina Boehme, now living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Gordon, a farmer in Esther Township; Zona Shannah, Grand Forks, North Dakota; Arthur, Percy, John, Ansel, all retired farmers living in Bygdal; Jessie, of Milwaukee; Esther of Washington, D.C. and Leslie, who farms in Bygdal.

About 1908 John, Annie and four children moved to a farm south of East Grand Forks, now the property of Mrs. Arthur Fillion. Then in 1918, they moved to another farm in Bygdal, which he bought from Frank Fillion. There John and Annie lived out their days: he to almost 97 years; and she to 93. They were grain and potato farmers but also raised cows and chickens. Annie found time in her busy life to milk cows, make butter to deliver to customers in Grand and East Grand Forks. She made butter, baked bread and cooked and cared for her husband and ten children. John retained his Scottish brogue all his days and it was a source of pleasure to listen to him talk. He always referred to his children as lads and lassies.

Farm Home of John Bridgeford Family: Standing, L to R: John Jr.; Arthur; Esther; Lovina; Zonu; Jessie and Percy. Sitting, L to R: Gordon, Leslie, Annie; John and Ansel.
As for my own history: I, Gordon, married the former Lil- 
lian Bushee and we lived and farmed in Byland until 1937, 
when we moved to my present home. We have eight children: 
Dorothy, Jean, Douglas, Joyce, Colleen, Robert, Monica and 
Patrick. My wife, Lilian died in 1956. Later I married Clara 
Winchester. She had a son, Robert, who now lives in Minneap-
olis, Minnesota. I still continue my farming operation, at the 
age of 73.

BERNT J. HAGEN

In the spring of 1876 Bernt J. Hagen, an unmarried Norwe-
gian immigrant, homesteaded the Southwest Quarter of Sec-
tion 24 of Grand Forks Township. It was reported as the first 
prairie homestead north and east of East Grand Forks. In 1882 
the Reverend T. Thorvalson of Grand Forks performed a mar-
riage ceremony for Bernt and Dorthiea Midtmoen, a seventeen 
year old native of Norway. 

Bernt and Dorthiea became parents of ten children, three 
who have lived to celebrate the Centennial of the Lone Ever-
green Farm. They are Mrs. Peter, Emma, Haugen and Mrs. 
Alex. Ida, McLaughlin of Grand Forks, North Dakota, and 

Adolph died when a boy; and Arthur died as a young man; 
Olag, Thorvald, Ode and Bennett all married, had families 
and wives who survive them.

Thorvald Hagen remained on the farm until his death in 
1956. Two of his sons, Clifford and Vernon, are the only des-
cendants who continue to farm in Polk County. The Clifford 
Hagens live on the site of the original homestead. They have 
four children: Roger, the oldest son has purchased land to 
become the fourth generation of Hagen landholders. Vernon 
Hagen is an East Grand Forks resident and has farming and 
business operations in several areas of Polk County.

OLE O. HOFF

This gentleman Ole O. Hoff was formerly known as Mr. 
Olson, and whose fine farm lies two miles and a half north of 
East Grand Forks, Minnesota and adjoins that of Bernt J. 
Hagen, was born in Solor, Norway, February 4, 1854. He came 
to the United States in 1888, with no capital but his strag 
clear head and courageous spirit. His passage across the 
ocean not having been paid, he was bound under a strong obli-
gation to work even that out; before he could lay up anything 
for himself or start any project of his own.

On his arrival in this country Mr. Hoff came direct to Polk 
county, where his brother, Bernt Olson, was already estab-
lished on a homestead which he had taken up in 1877. Ole's 
first year in this country was passed in the employ of Samuel 
O. Ormsen as a farm hand, doing much the same he had 
always done in Norway. When his brother Bernt took-up his 
homestead he also took-up a tree claim. This is the land which 
Ole now owns. Bernt was killed by accident on the railroad on 
his way home from Crookston, and at his death left a widow 
and a son named Bernhardt. A daughter named Teolina was 
born after her father's death. Both of these children died early of diphtheria.

Bernt Olson's widow, whose maiden name was Olena John-
son, took over the homestead after her husband's death, and 
for one year Ole worked on it. He then moved to the place he 
now owns and occupies, and he has since bought an additional 
160 acres in Roseau county. The widow had only a log house 
on the land when he took hold of it, and he has since built the 
present buildings. He raises principally wheat, oats, and bar-
ley. For thirty-three years he has been devoting much of his 
time and energies to the improvement and cultivation of this 
farm, for only thirty acres were broken when he located on it 
and began to develop it. Three years after settling here, he 
marrid his brother Bernt's widow. They have three children, 
Olof, Emma and John, all living at home.

Mr. Hoff has been a member of the Township Board for the 
last six years, and has also been a trustee of Grand Marais 
Lutheran church. He was for many years a Republican in 
political faith and allegiance, but of late years he has been 
independent of party control and uses his judgment of men in 
dispersing his vote. He is enterprising and progressive, and is 
universally esteemed as an upright man and a very useful citi-
ze.

Ole O. Hoff died in 1924 of injuries sustained when a motor 
vehicle collided with his horse and buggy as he was returning 
to his farm home from East Grand Forks. Olena Hoff passed 
away in 1927. Bernt Olson and his wife came from Goodhue 
County in Minnesota to East Grand Forks by covered wagon. 
Also, the land in Roseau County was sold and the proceeds 
of the sale, $2,000 deposited in a bank in Roseau. He then lost 
the entire amount when the bank went bankrupt, a not uncom-
mon occurrence in the early days.

The children of Ole and Olena Hoff all married and stayed 
in Polk County. The original homestead was divided and their 
sons Olaf and John lived on the same farms through their 
entire lives.

Olaf Hoff married Anna Thompson, the daughter of 
another pioneer couple who settled in Grand Forks Township. 
They had four children, Howard, Lyle, Ruth and Shirley, who 
between them have fourteen children. Howard is now living on 
and farming his father's part of the original homestead. Olaf 
died at the age of 82. Anna Hoff is now living in East Grand 
Forks.

John Hoff married Grace Aasland of Thief River Falls, also 
the daughter of Norwegian immigrants and they had seven 
children: Orlis, Stanley, Glenn, Elizabeth, Jacqueline, Paul 
and Patricia. They are all married and have twenty-two chil-
dren between them and also provided John and Grace with 
seven great-grandchildren. John passed away at the age of 
eighty, and his wife, Grace, is still living on the farm which is 
now being farmed by sons, Stanley and Glenn.

Emma Hoff married Henry Lindgren, the son of Scandina-
avian immigrants and they lived and farmed in Esther town-
ship. They had three children: Leonora, Clarence, and Evelyn, 
who died during her childhood. Leonora and Clarence married 
and between them had five children. Henry died at the age of 
92 after having spent his entire life in Polk County. Emma still 
lives in East Grand Forks, and Clarence is now farming their 
home farm.
Hammond Township

HERBERT AND HANNAH AVERY

Herbert Ernest Avery was born April 18, 1867 at Cooperstown, New York, youngest of three children of Delos Lucian Avery and Juliette Richardson (had a brother Alva and sister Ida). At eighteen he started working for the gentry in New York City. These people were noted English men and women, among whom were Stanford White, Devreux Emmett and George Hyde Clark. Several of these people went down with the Titanic when it was making its maiden voyage. They were related to the Stewarts of England, through marriage.

While employed as “Head Coachman” at these homes, Herbert met Hannah Elizabeth Lindberg who was employed by Mrs. Emmett, sister of Stanford White, designer of “Madison Square Gardens”.

Hannah was born January 10, 1865 in Sweden and came across the ocean when twenty years old. She could not speak English but learned quickly. She was the youngest of nine children, four other girls and four boys.

Herbert and Hannah were married April 5, 1893 in New York City and soon after moved to Stockton, Illinois.

Herbert was employed at various occupations which included caretaker of “Oakdale Camp” grounds near South Freeport, Illinois. Many people came there from all over the United States. Several moves were made during their stay in Illinois. All seven children were born in that area, three girls and four boys: Grace, Clyde, Paul, Florence, Carl, Arthur and Ann (twins).

In 1913 they decided they wanted a farm of their own so they purchased one in Hammond Township, Polk county. They moved by train from Illinois in March. They were greeted at Beltrami by new neighbors, taken to their home in a jumper (home built on runners) they were pulled by two Montana mustangs and they followed no roads, just cut across country.

Crops were mostly wheat, flax, and corn. Herbert had brought seed corn from Illinois, first of its kind. They turned out a very good crop as it was a long growing season.

A “Booster Farmer’s Club” was organized, with meetings once a month, programs, dinners, arts and crafts and produce displayed, then judged with prizes awarded.

In 1915 Herbert was school director of district 220. Five of the Avery’s were attending at that time.

The 1918 flu epidemic came, people nursed and helped care for many, near and far; many died, although others lived because of care and concern of neighbors and friends. Neighborliness and good deeds were a part of rural living.

There was Sunday school and church every week with dedicated parents seeing that all had religious contacts and training.

The Averys lived in the Crookston vicinity until Hannah’s death, July 24, 1947; there Herbert made his home with his daughters, Grace of here, and Ann of Minot, North Dakota. He died May, 1949.

Herbert and Hannah’s children are Grace Avery Newhouse, homemaker and housewife, born February 1, 1894; Clyde Herbert Avery, salesman, born January 19, 1896; Paul Richard Avery, farmer, born January 18, 1898; Florence Avery Davis, teacher, born August 20, 1899; Carl Frederic Avery, tool maker, born June 17, 1901; Arthur William Avery, mechanic, born May 12, 1903; Ann Avery Schmunk, teacher, born May 12, 1903.

JAMES DEWAR

James Dewar, born in Perth, Scotland January 16, 1846 sailed to Canada with his family on the “Glenmanna” at the age of eight. Hours of dread and pain were endured during the roar of wind storms, causing fear of shipwreck, during the 58-day trip. This trip was made during the Crimean War, in which an uncle, Robert Dewar was killed. A cholera epidemic on board killed all infants, except his infant sister, Kittie, who died upon arrival in Canada. After a brief stay in Montreal, the family traveled to Trempealeau, Wisconsin.

At nineteen Mr. Dewar enlisted for duty in the Civil War but was rejected because his weight was under one hundred pounds. He subsequently joined bridge builders going to Vicksburg, and later was bookkeeper on a cotton plantation at Covington, Tennessee.

Mr. Dewar returned to Wisconsin in 1868 and married Wilhelmina Dopp and to them one son, John Dopp Dewar, former longtime resident of Beltrami, Minnesota was born. Following his wife’s death, he came to Crookston in 1882. In 1883 he married Agnes Valance Samson, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Samson (Annie Dewar), her brother and his sister, in Hammond Township. The Dewars also settled in Hammond, taking part of their farm as a tree claim.

District 220 school house, commonly called the Dewar School, was built in 1895 on land donated by the pioneer farmer, James Dewar. His nephew, Wallace J. Samson, was the first teacher. Dewar was one of the first school officers, along with his cousin, William Rattray, and H. A. Tofely. Dewar served as school officer many years and as chairman of supervisors for Hammond Township over forty-five years. For several decades, Sunday school was conducted in the Dewar School to serve the area. “Grandpa” Dewar, as he was affectionately called by many, served as superintendent and his wife as a teacher. Traditionally, the Fourth of July community picnics were held at the Dewar homestead.

On the windswept prairie, the Dewars endured three three-day blizzards one winter alone, 1896-7. On the third day of an extremely severe blizzard, Mr. Dewar made his way to the barn with the use of a long rope kept handy for that purpose. With a bobsled a trip to Crookston for supplies took three to four hours each way. Ten 100-pound sacks of flour were purchased each fall and shared with neighbors when necessary.

Children of James and Agnes Dewar were William Samson (1884-1911), Walter James (1886-1967), Mrs. C. R. Emerson (Ruby), Virginia, Minnesota. Mrs. E. E. Luhman (Annie Laurie), Fosston, and Esther Dewar of Minneapolis.

Herbert and Hannah Avery.