

Ellendale attorney was hair's breadth from the U.S. Senate in 1926

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"The story of my father reveals what it was like to be in the family of a controversial politician. I was about fourteen years old, it was election day and my dad was running for office. He gave me a list of elderly people who had requested transportation to the polls. Happy to be driving the family car, I stopped for the first lady on the list. As I helped this old woman to the car, she asked, 'Aren't you Fred Graham's daughter?' I said that I was. 'Good,' she said, 'I'm going down to vote so I can vote against your dad, the dirty crook!'"

I was so appalled that I didn't know what to do but thought it was mighty dumb to be giving her a ride. When I assisted my next tottering passenger into the car, she said, 'I'm making a trip to the polls just so I can vote for your father. He's the greatest man since Abraham Lincoln!'"

--Helen Graham Rezatto, Ellendale 125th Anniversary History

As discussed in The October 15 edition's article about the 1920 US Senate contest between Ellendale attorney Hector H. Perry and Professor Edwin F. Ladd, President of the Agricultural College in Fargo (NDSU) there are times when political categories become blurred. Perry, the Democrat, represented the conservative side in the election. Ladd, who ran with the endorsement of the Non Partisan League, was a lifelong progressive and was categorized by the *Dickey County Leader* editor as "an avowed socialist and economist" (October 14, 1920). Notwithstanding such rhetoric, Ladd rode his solid reputation to a resounding victory, even surpassing Perry on his home turf by carrying Dickey County.

Once in the Senate, Ladd extended his reputation nationally. He was the first nonpartisan to win a US Senate seat, and the first laboratory scientist. He had, in the words of Senator Thomas Walsh of Montana, "a deep sympathy with the struggles of the people who sent him here." Having "the unerring skill of the trained scientist . . . he dissected the most intricate questions affecting their life and exposed to pitiless publicity the inner workings of the system through which they were exploited." Ladd became, said Walsh, "revered as much for his erudition as he was admired for his independence. Even those who were disappointed at his occasional lapses from party regularity never failed to give him credit for fidelity to the right as he saw it, nor was he ever suspected of being actuated by any petty or unworthy motive."

Given his ongoing popularity in North Dakota and among his Senate colleagues, it came as a most unpleasant shock when Ladd died after a short illness on June 22, 1925. Established practice was for the governor to appoint a successor. And that is where Fred J. Graham came into the picture.

In early 1926 North Dakota Governor Arthur G. Sorlie called together 25 of his most trusted associates. He presented to them two names. The first was a 33-year old Cooperstown newspaper editor named



This photo from the Coleman Museum shows Fred J. Graham of Ellendale (left) with several very powerful men at a 1928 political event in Fargo. Next to Graham are fellow progressives, U.S. Senators Gerald P. Nye (R-North Dakota) William E. Borah (R-Idaho) and Lynne Frazier (R-North Dakota). Had Governor Arthur Sorlie accepted the secret vote of his 25 closest NPL advisors, Graham and not Nye would have been sent to Washington to represent the state in the U.S. Senate. Nye, an NPL firebrand, went on to serve in the Senate from 1925 to 1945. (photo from the Ina Graham Collection, Coleman Memorial Museum)

Gerald P. Nye. The second was Fred J. Graham of Ellendale. Both men were well known and respected within NPL circles. Both had intimate knowledge of the severe challenges and controversies that had beset state politics since the NPL rose to power a decade earlier. With his trim figure, youthful face and cereal-bowl haircut, Gerald Nye presented an energetic image. His work in newspapering had given him a chance to express lots of opinions, many of them quite radical. Nye, who had often been called "the boy editor" had little college education but considered himself closely in touch with his readers, toward whom he dedicated constant streams of spirited newspaper editorials.

Fred Graham was deeply attached to Dickey County. He was a baby when his family, migrants from Michigan, settled near Merricourt. He attended a country school there, then went to Ellendale High School and the Manual Training School (the original name of the college in Ellendale, M.T.S for short). Then he headed to Grand Forks, where he earned a law degree from the University of North Dakota in 1906. His education at Ellendale brought him under the influence of the populist and progressive ideas of Warren G. Hicks. Hicks was teacher and superintendent of the Ellendale schools from 1892 to 1899 and served until 1905 as the first president of the M.T.S. The influence Graham received there was reinforced by his university professors, several of whom would (like Ladd from the Agricultural College) later align with the NPL.

Upon graduation from UND, Graham returned to Ellendale and opened a law practice, and in 1912 he married his sweetheart, Ina Randall. The couple would leave a lasting mark on Ellendale, and their four children would all claim notable accomplishments. The Graham's only daughter, Helen, was born in 1919, several years after Fred began his forays into state politics.

In 1915 Fred was elected state's attorney for Dickey County, and four years later he was appointed District Judge. He would later be chair of the North Dakota Republican Central Committee, serve as his party's National Committeeman (three terms) and

would be president of the North Dakota Bar Association, in addition to serving in the state legislature. Graham's abilities and credentials were rock solid. But in 1926, Governor Sorlie was posed with a choice to fill Ladd's vacant seat: he could pick the much younger Nye, a wordsmith with a flair for controversy. Or he could pick the better educated Graham, whose reliability and consistency were more reminiscent of the deceased Senator Ladd.

A close-up of Governor Sorlie's selection process was given, many years later, by Harrison French, an editor and NPL activist who was well acquainted with both Nye and Graham. In a 1961 letter to Helen Graham Rezatto, French explained at length what had happened. First, French assured Helen, her father Fred (who had died in 1953) was "an exceptionally fine man with definite progressive views" and "was considered to be the League wheel horse in Dickey County." Then, he added, "here is something that you may not know:"

"In 1926 I was called to Bismarck to become the editor of the *North Dakota Nonpartisan*, the state organ of the League. I was called by long distance and informed that a meeting was being held in Bismarck at the time of representatives from various parts of the state to prod Governor Sorlie into appointing a U.S. Senator to take the place of Senator Ladd who had died a few months before. John N. Gagan, former Commissioner of Agriculture, and then president of the newspaper board of directors, called me and asked me to come to Bismarck at once and take over the paper. There had been no regular editor for some time and Gerald Nye had been attending to this task as a part-time job. Mr. Hagan explained to me . . . that the Governor had just appointed Gerald Nye to be U.S. Senator. I left for Bismarck at once.

"After arriving there I was informed as to how the Governor had made his choice for the appointment. The group met in two rooms in the McKenzie (Inter Patterson) Hotel with the Governor. He said he would make the appointment, but he wanted this group to indicate his preference. Both Mr. Nye and Mr. Graham were present in this

group of about 25 men, making up an unofficial group of self-appointed advisors to the Governor. Governor Sorlie asked each man there to take a slip and write on it the name of the man they preferred as first choice and the man they preferred as second choice. When the slips were filled out the Governor went into an adjoining room for awhile. After a few minutes he came back into the room where the men were and asked Judge Graham and Gerald Nye to come to his office in the Capitol the next morning.

"They both went there the next morning and spent quite a time waiting for the Governor to get around to disclose what he had asked them to come for. Finally he came in an hemmed and hawed for quite awhile, telling each of the men how highly he regarded them. Then suddenly he said, 'The reason I am appointing you, Gerald, is . . . ' I never did hear what the reason was. Some years later Senator Nye told me about this meeting and how surprised he was at his appointment. He said he felt certain that the Governor had in mind the appointment of Judge Graham and he had nearly fallen from his chair when the Governor had picked him . . . But I am quite sure that Mr. Nye knew all the time that he would be appointed.

"After governor Sorlie died a couple of years later, Walter Maddock, Lieutenant Governor, became Governor. I was then running the McLean County Independent at Garrison. Maddock said he was helping Walter clean out his desk and they came up on an envelope containing the ballots of the 25 men who had voted their first and second choice at the McKenzie Hotel. The slips showed that a majority of votes had been cast for Fred Graham rather than for Gerald Nye for first choice. It was a smooth scheme on Sorlie's part. He let the men think they had made the choice and that he had appointed the man they had chosen, when in fact he had done just the opposite. I thought you might be glad to know that the majority had voted for your dad over Nye, and if their will had guided the Governor, Fred Graham would have been appointed Senator."



The State Normal & Industrial School used this photograph on its dedication program when it launched its new library in December, 1930. In 1960 the building was formally renamed in honor of Fred J. Graham. Much credit was given to Graham, who was a generous giver and staunch defender of the school. Graham lobbied frequently on the school's behalf as an attorney and judge and during his terms as a state legislator. This photo , from the Ina Graham Collection at the Coleman Museum, was taken shortly after the building was completed 95 years ago. Its appearance remains nearly unchanged, though the cupola ventilators on the roof have been removed.

Public Notice: City of Ellendale

CITY OF ELLENDALE
Regular Meeting
City Council
November 10, 2025
6:00 pm – City Hall and Zoom Virtual
This meeting was held at City Hall and virtual Zoom Meeting option was also available.
Mayor Flaherty called the special assessment hearing to order at 6:02 PM with Council members in attendance: Belgarde, Lee, Meidinger, Crabtree, and Denison via zoom. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
Absent: Langeliers
City Employees present: Auditor Gunn, Deputy Auditor Schmidt, Attorney Kelly; Police Chief Knutson and PW Monroe.
Others attending: Separate sign-in sheet available
Public Comment: None
Bid Opening Bell's Addition: City received one bid for the sale of Lots 10-12, Block 12, of Bell's Addition, City of Ellendale, Dickey County North Dakota. Bid from Gary Dathe for \$2,400 for all three lots, for the intended purpose of housing development with a time frame of summer 2026 or 2027. Lee moves, Meidinger seconds to accept this bid. Roll call vote: Meidinger, Lee, Denison, Belgarde, and Crabtree- yes. Langeliers- absent. Motion carries.
Agenda Additions: None
Wade: EMS Building update: Going vertical, hope to be completely enclosed by end of November. Pay estimate #6 in the amount of \$267,570.00 for Quest Construction. Meidinger moves, Crabtree seconds to approve Pay Estimate #6. Lee, Denison, Belgarde, Crabtree, and Meidinger- yes. Langeliers- absent. Motion carries.
Building Inspection Service Quotes: Two quotes have been received for building inspection services for buildings # 3 and 4 for Applied Digital buildings received from Interstate Engineering

and Midwest Inspection Services. Cost would be borne to the owner of the facility needing these services. Scope of work varies with each quote. Fee for City of Ellendale TBD. Meidinger moves, Belgarde seconds to hire Midwest Inspection Services. Roll call vote: Lee, Denison, Belgarde, Crabtree, and Meidinger- yes. Langeliers- Absent. Motion carries.
Bauer Landfill Dispute: Chris and Dawn Bauer brought their landfill invoice to contest stating that it came from their residential property not their commercial property. Being so that invoices will be void as landfill charges only apply to material coming from commercial property or is a particular type of debris that should be charged. Bauer's are also asking for an extension on cleaning up their commercial property in Northport Addn. that is in the right way. Bauer inquired as to possibly vacating that street as it is not used as a street and other streets in that area have already been vacated. Bauer to work on paperwork and possibly bring to city council as a request to vacate that street.
Staley Container Update: Todd Staley asked the council for another extension on getting the shipping container on his residential property completely enclosed. This would be his third extension. Meidinger moved, Lee seconds to extend deadline to December 8, 2025, to finish this project, if not completed other alternatives will be discussed.
Landfill Signs Update: Doug Kendall is still interested in donating signs to City Landfill and City Cemetery with his logo on the sign. He is willing to split donating the signs, one from him and one from Jeff Ulmer, with Doug signing a lease as it would need one considering he wants his logo on the sign. Auditor Gunn to reach out to Ulmer to discuss further.
Resolution Issuance of Improvement Bonds: Infrastructure loan from BND does not cover all costs for Ellendale

Acres project, Colliers found direct placement from Security First Bank of North Dakota came in with the best rates for the City, with fixed rate at 4.65% on a 20 year maturity with interest payment to be made in May 2026 and principal payments to begin 2027. These payments will be made from the TIF District funding for the Ellendale Acres Infrastructure project. Denison moves, Lee seconds to accept Resolution Authorizing the Issuance of Improvement Warrants and Exchanging them for \$700,000 Refunding Improvement Bonds Series 2025B. Roll call vote: Belgarde, Crabtree, Meidinger, Lee, Denison- yes. Langeliers- Absent. Motion carries.
Public Works report: Not much to report on. Full time employee resigned last week. Part-time employee that was hired for summer work would like to stay on full-time. Ad was put into paper for full time position. Meidinger moves, Lee seconds to hire part time person Friday November 14, 2025, with full benefits, with same rate of pay retroactive to November 1st and keep ad in paper to possibly hire a third public works person. Roll call vote: Crabtree, Meidinger, Lee, Denison, Belgarde- yes. Langeliers- absent. Motion carries. There is a big hole on personal property in Bell's Addition. Meidinger moves, Lee seconds to send certified letter to property owner to put a fence up as a safety precaution or City will put up a fence at the property owners' expense to be completed by end of November. All in favor, aye. Motion carries.
Building permits: Meidinger moves, Crabtree seconds to approve following building permits: Jason Elliott for shop on lots 32 and 33 of Block 34 First Addition; Jason Elliott, new house build at 6th St N; Linnea Dahlberg for a temporary fence at 516 1st Ave N; and Brad Knutson for remodel of bathroom at 416 4th St S. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries. Aaron Tschosik

submitted a building permit for property he owns outside of city limits but within the ½ mile extra-territorial jurisdiction of the city to build a greenhouse where they will also be growing produce from the ground itself. They are also asking to hook into City of Ellendale water and sewer lines. There was a letter submitted to the auditor in protest to letting them hook into city water and sewer, wanting the council to deny this request unless they annex into city limits. Discussion on requiring the property owners to annex into city, but council cannot require that to hook into water/sewer. Belgarde moves, Lee seconds to give a conditional use permit, for a greenhouse with the ability to connect to city water and sewer, conditioned upon using it only as a greenhouse for retail sales. Roll call vote: Meidinger, Lee, Denison, Belgarde, Crabtree- yes. Langeliers- absent. Motion carries.
Police report: Things going well. Due to government shutdown, we still have not been able to get the go ahead from USDA to move forward on purchasing new squad car. Motion at previous meeting to pay for squad car as the dealership cannot hold it for much longer. Police Chief Knutson and Auditor Gunn to work with dealership to get a check cut for the vehicle.
Cotter Plat Review: Need to send out notice, to have the hearing when the city has plat hearing for Applied Digital later in November.
Possible purchase of city lots: Executive Session: Due to the content of this discussion Attorney Kelly disclosed the proper Executive Session procedure per AG of the State of ND. Executive Session was called under NDCC section 44-04-19.1 for attorney consultation and discussion for contract negotiations for possible purchase of city lots, at 8:40 PM on November 10, 2025; and recording continued. Roll call: Mayor Flaherty, Lee, Meidinger, Belgarde, Denison via

zoom, Crabtree, Auditor Gunn, Deputy Schmidt, Chief Knutson, Attorney Fallon. Langeliers absent. No members of the public were present. Motion by Lee, second by Belgarde to adjourn Executive Session at 8:58 PM. All members, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries. No action by the city was taken during or after executive session.
First Readings: Lee moves, Meidinger seconds to do First Reading on the following ordinances: Late Filing Fee, Mobile Food, Hawkers/Peddlers, Mobile Home/RV Court, and Industrial Zoning Ordinances. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries. Motion by Belgarde, second by Denison that City Council will be Zoning and Planning committee. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries.
Minutes: Meidinger moves, Crabtree seconds to approve minutes from: October 1, 2025 Special; October 13, 2025 Regular; October 15, 2025 Special; October 23, 2025 Special; and October 29, 2025 Special meetings. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries.
Operating Statement/Fund Activity: Lee moves, Denison seconds to approve October operating statement/fund activity. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries.
Bills: Belgarde moves, Lee seconds to approve October bills. All in favor, aye. Langeliers absent. Motion carries.
Correspondence: We received a legal description for possible annexation of property. The properties included are: parts of the walking trail that are not yet in city limits, that the city owns, the city cemetery, and Ringstad's property right before the cemetery on the East end of town.
Next meeting: Special meeting/hearing November 24, 2025, at 6 PM.
Meeting adjourned at 9:02 PM

Starion Bank	\$1,220.62
CK Lawn Care	\$5,250.00
Dennis Durheim	\$2,003.60
Dickey Co. Leader	\$42.00
James Monroe	\$13.71
ND One Call	\$48.20
10-8 Video LLC	\$3,149.00
Amazon	\$221.94
Bismarck Hotel and Conf.	\$660.00
Computer Express	\$6,330.00
Voided	
voided	
Ellendale PB	\$50.00
Ferguson Waterworks	\$847.25
Ecolab Pest Elim.	\$181.61
Napa Auto Parts	\$139.42
Dakota Pump and Control	\$1,840.00
Bound Tree Medical	\$584.32
BCBS of ND	\$13,068.30
Farmers Union Oil	\$1,453.84
Interstate Engineering	\$42,413.00
MDU	\$2,587.57
Matheson Tri-gas	\$400.79
Sansio	\$348.00
Ellendale True Value	\$893.05
Visa	\$1,105.89
True North Steel	\$5,394.90
Council	\$692.64
Mayor	\$294.61
Ambulance	\$16,562.02
City	\$30,394.19
IRS Payroll	\$12,923.72
Anne Vande Hei	\$25.00
NDPERS	\$5,383.79
NDPERS	\$427.84
Postmaster	\$272.38
Dickey Co. Recorder	\$20.00
voided	
voided	
Starion Bank	\$25.75
Ellendale PB	\$12,530.52
TOTAL	\$159,631.67
Donald Flaherty, Mayor	
Nicole Gunn, Auditor	
(Minutes subject to corrections and approval at next regular meeting.)	
(November 20, 2025)	