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HAVE A NEWS RELEASE or other information that needs to reach all ND newspapers? ND Newspaper Association can help! One call does it all. 701-223-6397.

## Bismarck becomes capitol

Submitted by Kathy Holte, McHenry Co. Historical Society

Source: The NDSHS newsletter, *Trails and Smoke Signals* dated 1968, part of a collection belonging to Eslie M. Kramer of Towner. Most of the material on early politics is from the book *Dakota Territory 1861-1889* by Howard Roberts Lamar.

Nehemiah Ordway, Governor of Dakota Territory 1880-1884, determined to move the capitol from Yankton. During the assembly of 1883, the Ordway factions, backed by the northern Dakota numbers, pushed through a bill creating a Capitol Removal Commission which was to meet in Yankton within thirty days of their appointment, organize, and visit various Dakota towns thought to be suitable for a capitol. Yankton citizens were up-in-arms, but the bill was pushed through the assembly.

Then their hopes lay in preventing the commission from meeting within the city limits. The three members of the commission from Yankton were carefully watched, any suspicious gathering was reported, and the local members openly threatened with violence. The days passed and no meeting occurred.

Then at 6:00 a.m. one morning an inconspicuous train rolled very slowly into the railroad yards at Yankton and continued through the town westward at a leisurely speed. No one thought it was important, but inside one of the coaches the capitol commission, with the wily Alexander McKenzie of Bismarck as its head, quickly and legally organized. The oligarchy had been outsmarted.

After a perfunctory set of visits to a dozen Dakota towns, in 1883 the capitol commission chose Bismarck as the new capitol of the Territory. This decision began a six-year political struggle which soon included so many other issues and groups that the final outcome amounted to a political and social revolution in Dakota.

Several of the territorial officers refused to move their offices to Bismarck. The territorial supreme court refused to budge, and most important of all, the territorial secretary, James Teller, brother of the incumbent Secretary of the Interior, W.M. Teller, declined to change his seat of office. Teller claimed that Ordway could not order him to move. Since Teller received his appointment from Washington, an order must come through the federal government. This meant that Ordway would be forced to appeal to Teller's own brother to remove the secretary.

With Dakota's government located in two cities over four hundred miles from one another, Ordway's star was soon in decline.

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It had been reported that Bismarck residents in 1883 contributed \$250,000 to the capitol building to be located there. In June 1883 after the decision to locate the capitol in Bismarck, many people, especially in the East, rushed into town by the thousands, thinking the town would become a metropolis in short order. The boom lasted about ten days but was a humdinger while it lasted. \$20,000 per fifty-foot lot was offered for downtown property. A man owning a section of land northeast of the capitol was offered \$200 per acre. He refused to sell, kept the land for 35 years and then sold it for \$35 per

In September, a session met to draw up a proposed constitution for the proposed state of northern Dakota. The most notable part of the constitution was Beadle's school of lands clause, in which the future state agreed not to sell its school lands for less than ten dollars an acre. The proceeds of the sale were to go into a perpetual fund, the interest on which would in turn be used to support the school system.

The excellent "Dakota system" for school lands eventually was adopted, not only by South Dakota, but by every western state coming into the Union under the Omnibus Bill of 1889.

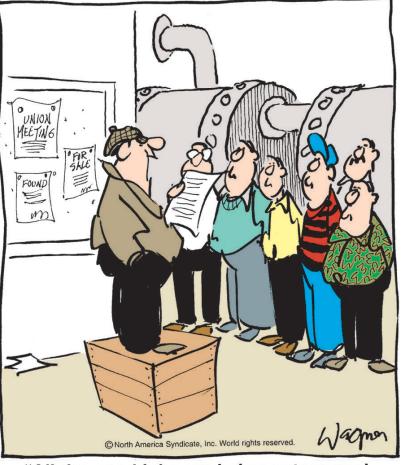
In February 1889, the Democrats and Republicans in Congress joined to pass the bill which created four new states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington. President Cleveland signed this act a few days before he left office.

#### Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps







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# Providing trusted reporting to strengthen local knowledge

The North Dakota News Cooperative provides original, nonpartisan reporting to newspapers across the state at no cost, helping local editors serve their communities with credible information. NDNC stories cover a wide range of topics important to North Dakotans, including agriculture, energy, health care, education, and rural issues.

"Our goal is to make sure every newsroom in North Dakota has access to strong, nonpartisan reporting," said Sabrina Halvorson, CEO of the North Dakota News Cooperative. "When local editors have credible information at their fingertips, communities are better informed and better served."

This reporting supports small and mid-sized newsrooms that may not have the resources to cover statewide policy or in-depth topics on their own. By supplying reliable, deeply reported stories, NDNC helps ensure readers in every region of the state have access to clear, factual journalism that strengthens public understanding of complex issues.

Community support makes this service possible. Contributions to the North Dakota News Cooperative help sustain independent reporting that benefits dozens of local newspapers and the readers they serve.

"These gifts ensure that home

"These gifts ensure that hometown news outlets can continue to publish trustworthy coverage without increasing costs for rural communities," Halvorson said.

If you'd like to support this mission, please consider a year-end gift to the North Dakota News Cooperative by visiting https://newscoopnd.org/donate. Or, contact NDNC at 501 E Main Ave, Suite 75, Bismarck, ND, 58501. Through December 31, donations are matched through NewsMatch, which makes your gift go twice as far.

The North Dakota News Cooperative is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

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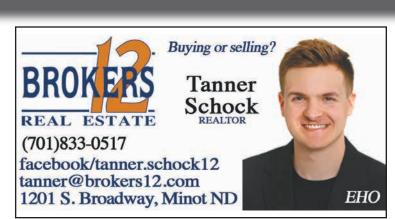
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