



PHAIDRA YUNKER | THE LEADER-NEWS

Tarps stretch across the deteriorating roof of the Fort Mandan Replica, a stop-gap solution to prevent water damage to the furnished Lewis and Clark-era rooms on the interior of the structure.

Worn by time

Deterioration pushes state toward a new replica

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER
REPORTER

Nearly a year after the McLean County Historical Society transferred the Fort Mandan Replica to the State Historical Society of North Dakota, state officials say the structure has deteriorated to a point where repairs are no longer practical — and a full rebuild is now the most likely path forward.

The county approved the transfer in early 2025, requiring that the site continue to serve an educational purpose and that the state include an exhibit explaining how the 1972 replica was constructed. McLean County Historical Society President Cody Meadows said the agreement ensured the site's long term preservation.

"Our main goal was to keep the historical aspect of the property intact," he said.

Now responsible for the property, the State Historical Society has completed its own assessment of the aging structure. Ashli Laducer, historic site supervisor for the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and Fort Mandan, said the replica's condition reflects both its age and the limitations of the materials used to build it.

"The current shape of Fort Mandan is reflected in the age of the structure," she said. "Some elements of the building are still in operable condition, but others are not. I don't think repairs are appropriate at this point, as too much of the structure needs replacement."

A structural engineer who inspected the fort in 2024 reached the same conclusion. Laducer said the roof stands out as one of the

most pressing concerns.

"The first thing that comes to mind that needs attention is the roof," she said. "I do not think that repairing it is an option."

While some portions of the replica remain intact, Laducer said the scale of deterioration makes piecemeal fixes unrealistic.

"For the scale of any future projects for Fort Mandan, I think an across the board overhaul would be most appropriate," she said.

The State Historical Society has spent the past two years gathering input from staff, area legislators and community members about the future of the site. Those conversations, Laducer said, have consistently pointed toward starting fresh.

"Based on those comments, we have decided a rebuild would be most appropriate," she said.

The current replica, built of untreated cottonwood in 1972, has lasted far longer than many similar bicentennial era structures. Laducer credited the Washburn community for the fort's longevity. "The community of Washburn did a fantastic job building a structure that has seen hundreds of thousands of visitors," she said.

If the state moves forward with a rebuild, the new fort may not be an exact copy of the existing structure. Staff have been researching military forts and cabin construction techniques from the early 1800s, and updated scholarship may influence the design.

"We are looking at building a historically accurate structure that lasts much longer with new construction materials," Laducer said. "There may be changes to the way the new Fort Mandan will look based on

the most recent research available."

Laducer said she hopes a new fort can serve visitors in all seasons — something the current replica cannot do. Heating, cooling, insulation and ADA accessibility are among the improvements she would like to see incorporated.

"I would love to see a structure that can serve the public in all seasons," she said. "Heat, cooling, and insulation as well as ADA accessibility would be great additions to enhance visitor enjoyment and comfort."

No timeline has been set for the project. Laducer said the State Historical Society has begun early conversations with legislators representing the area, but any major construction effort would require approval — and likely funding — from the North Dakota Legislative Assembly.

"This is going to be a large project with big needs and plenty of participation with local and state partners," she said.

The agency also plans to involve the Washburn community in future decisions and hire an architectural firm with experience in historically accurate reconstruction. Ideally, Laducer said, she would like to see a new fort ready within five years, though she emphasized that the project's complexity makes that goal ambitious.

"The community of Washburn did such an amazing job on our current fort that, fortunately, we have a lot of the groundwork completed for a design," she said. "However, we want to make sure that we create the next fort that both honors the original 1972 structure and stands strong for North Dakota's generations to come."

McLean County to hold hearing on Falkirk road closure request

Commissioners to consider temporary section line closures for mining operations

COMPILED BY KELLI AMELING
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

The McLean County Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing May 5 on a petition from The Falkirk Mining Company to temporarily close several section line roads for surface coal mining and reclamation operations.

The hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. at the McLean County Courthouse in Washburn.

Falkirk Mining Company, based in Underwood, has requested approval to temporarily close three section line roads located in Township 144 North, Range 84 West. The affected roads include the section line road between the southwest quarter of Section 1 and the northwest quarter of Section 12, a road located on the quarter line between the northwest and southwest quarters of Section 12, and a road located between the east and west halves of Section 12.

According to the petition, the road closures are necessary to allow surface coal mining and reclamation activities to proceed. Following completion of those operations, Falkirk will restore the closed section line roads to conditions equal to or better than those that existed prior to the closures, to the extent required by the board.

The May 5 hearing will provide an opportunity for the public to offer testimony and submit evidence related to the request. Statements may be made either orally or in writing at the time of the hearing.

The petition and a map showing the affected section line roads are on file with the McLean County Auditor's Office and may be reviewed during regular office hours.

The public notice was issued by order of the McLean County Board of Commissioners and signed by County Auditor Beth Knutson and can be found with a full map in the April 23 and April 30 editions of The Leader-News.

OBITS

Kathleen "Kathy" Hirschert

June 28, 1948 - April 8, 2026

Kathleen "Kathy" Hirschert, 77, passed away on April 8, 2026, in Bismarck, ND.

A memorial service will be held at 11:30 am, Friday, May 9, at Mission Evangelical Free Church, 701 7th St N, Wilton, ND.

Burial will be held at 3:00 pm, Friday, May 9, at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, Mandan.

Kathy was born on June 28, 1948, to Oscar and Emma (Wegerle) Wiedrich in Hazen, ND. She attended junior high in Minot and graduated from high school in Moncks Corner, SC.

Kathy met and fell in love with her cowboy, Richard "Tex" Hirschert. They married on April 18, 1987, in Bismarck. They shared many years together until his passing in 2004.

Her faith was an important part of her life. She attended Mission Evangelical Free Church in Wilton. She enjoyed music and singing in church as well as attending "jam sessions" in Hazen with her sisters. She was proud to entertain and make people laugh with her "bag lady" skits at various events.

Kathy took great pride in caring for her home. She had a special place in her heart for her cats, who brought her comfort and joy through-



out the years. Kathy had a love for sketching and drawing. She loved spending time with family and friends and will be remembered for her cheerful nature and kind heart. Kathy's constant smile brightened the lives of those around her.

Kathy is survived by her sister, Luella "Lou" Grosz; sister-in-law, Barb Wiedrich; and numerous nieces and nephews. She leaves behind many loved ones, special friends, Sue and Russ Whitaker; and her favorite niece, Lynn Fullmer.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Richard Hirschert; her parents; her siblings, Loretta (Duane) Link, James (Hope) Wiedrich, and Albert Wiedrich; and her nephew, Stacey Grosz.

To sign the online guest book and share memories of Kathy, go to www.eastgatefuneral.com.