DAKOTA DATEBOOK

Gopher Day in Starkweather, 1916

BY MICHELLE HOLIEN & DR. STEVE HOFFBECK

June 22 -- The flickertail ground squirrel has always been a common sight across North Dakota's prairies, with its twitching whiskers and sharp movements, darting across pastures and road ditches. It is famous for flicking, or jerking, its tail while running -- or before zipping down a gopher hole. Although small in stature, these rodents flourished in such massive numbers that they lent the "Flickertail State" its nickname for decades. However, farmers detested flickertails because the little varmints feasted on wheat kernels, causing big income losses.

Most people called flickertails "gophers," but their real name was Richardson's ground squirrels. Flickertails were lumped together with their smaller cousins, 13-lined ground squirrels, otherwise called striped gophers, and known as detestable pests because each gopher could eat a bushel of wheat per year!

In order to fight gophers, farm communities across Dakota offered rewards for killing them. Indeed, on this date in 1916 the *Grand Forks Herald* reported on the big "Gopher Day" event in Starkweather. An estimated 1,000 people came for the town's annual Gopher Day event. The Starkweather Concert Band played throughout the day and at an evening dance. Another highlight was a speech given by Mr. U. S. Ebener, the gopher-killing expert. But the biggest attraction of Gopher Day was the counting of the gopher tails -- each tail providing evidence of a dead gopher. J. H. Weaver carried off first prize of $12 for bringing in 1,418 gopher tails. May Revis won second prize with 1,140 tails.

The traditional way for youngsters to catch gophers was to place the loop of a four-foot-long string around the edges of a gopher's hole and yank it when the gopher poked its head out. Others used gopher traps or hunted them with small-caliber .22 rifles. The most efficient way, however, involved strychnine poison. Newspaper ads boasted of its effectiveness in killing the pestiferous pests.

Starkweather was not the only town to have Gopher Days from 1895 through the 1920s. One Gopher Day, held in Fessenden, reported 100,000 gophers killed, with a bounty paid of three cents per tail. Because of the poisons, the flickertail/gopher population rapidly diminished. By 1917 some predicted that the Flickertail State might lose its namesake, with gophers joining bison as animals near extinction. But flickertails endured, going underground along marginal lands so that gophers survive on today's prairie lands, twitching their whiskers and dodging humans, to live another day.

High Price for Bread

BY CAROLE BUTCHER

June 23 -- Food prices spiraled upward in 1972. There were many reasons, including the devaluation of the dollar, a decline in world grain production and an increase in the demand for meat in developing countries. But those reasons were no comfort to American consumers.

An article in the *Bismarck Tribune* on this date in 1972 noted that the price for a one-pound loaf of bread averaged 24.5 cents. That was close to the all-time high of 25 cents, reached the previous year. Of that cost, farmers received only 3.5 cents. That was the same amount they received in 1947.

A newspaper column suggested that consumers should shop for lower-priced bread and take advantage of specials. They were urged to buy day-old bread on sale. It was also noted that whole grain breads were more nutritious than white bread, and consumers should consider making the switch.

Prices were on the minds of government officials as well. The Federal Price Commission planned to hold an unusual Sunday meeting. President Nixon considered lifting meat import quotas to slow the rise of food prices. He ordered a study of the impact. Nixon acknowledged that the move would not bring immediate relief. It would take some time before it had any effect. The news was of particular interest to North Dakotans. Representative Arthur A. Link said the Federal Price Commission should not even consider price controls at the farm level. He said it was totally unfair to blame the farmer for inflation when the farmers were actually the victims of that inflation. He said farmers received grossly inadequate prices. Link noted that farm prices for food had risen by six percent while overall consumer prices had risen by 43 percent. He also said that farm output was increasing twice as fast as manufacturing output. There was no evidence, he said, that price controls should be placed on raw agricultural products.

President Nixon had created the Cost of Living Council to oversee wage and price controls. The council was considering a recommendation by the price commission that the exemption of raw agricultural products from controls be ended. The price commission said that "firm and immediate action" had to be taken to bring food prices under control.

A Special Day

BY SARAH WALKER

June 24 -- "What is there to do in North Dakota?" An honest question heard across the state, echoed by young and old alike. On this day in 1912, there was plenty to do for some and plenty to look forward to for others. Because the next day was, as the *Wilton News* said, "a Big Day" -- in fact, "one of the biggest days of the summer in Bismarck . . . prior to the Industrial Exposition."

"On that day," the *Wilton News* reported, "the 'Better Farming Special' with its demonstration cars, lecturers and experts from the agricultural college, will visit the capital." Furthermore, "Invitations have been extended to all candidates for state and congressional office, regardless of party, to be present and address the farmers." Even Congressman Helgeson was expected to attend.

The Better Farming Special visited other places as well -- it was a series of train cars traveling around the state. Fifteen hundred people visited the train at Turtle Lake, and nearly the same number of people showed up to see the train at Goodrich. But that didn't beat the 3,000-plus crowd that showed up in Bismarck.

The train, coming into Bismarck off the Mott branch at about 3 a.m., parked in what was then the center of the city, across from the Northern Pacific depot. Although the train was only supposed to stay until noon before departing for Mandan, it was held in Bismarck for about half an hour longer so that everyone could be accommodated.

R. D. Hoskins Floral Company visited the dining car early that morning, bringing and distributing great bouquets of carnations, presented to the visitors with his compliments. The Bismarck Commercial Club treated the dignitaries to an auto ride through the city and to various points of interest and through the farming districts next to the city. And the Bismarck band "furnished a concert during the early morning hours, leading the crowds from one car to another until the institute work . . . and the lectures commenced."

Farming conditions in North Dakota were confirmed again and again to be "undergoing a revolution," and North Dakotans privately puffed their chests out just a little more.

And, "after having sown seeds of better farming knowledge that will bear fruit during seasons to come, and will add materially to the permanent prosperity of this entire region," the train chugged away on this big half-day.

Chief Red Fox

BY LISE ERDRICH

June 25 -- On this date in 1876, six-year-old Red Fox was camped near the Little Bighorn when the 7th Cavalry arrived. Red Fox outlived Custer by nearly 100 years.

He attended the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, gaining skills in writing and public speaking. In 1893 he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and toured the US and Europe for years. During a 1905 performance in London, he famously "scalped" King Edward VII. After the tours ended in 1910, Red Fox moved to Hollywood, appearing in 107 Western films, mostly silent. Red Fox also served in the US Navy during the Spanish-American War and the Boxer Rebellion. He later worked as an interpreter for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In 1932 he moved to Corpus Christi, Texas. Over the next 40 years, he visited schools wearing full regalia to teach children about Plains Indian culture. His stories captivated students. Red Fox hoped to counter stereotypes of Native people seen in movies and on TV.

In 1968 the superintendent of the Wahpeton Indian School saw Red Fox on Fargo television and invited him to speak. Students and staff were moved by his insight and respected his ability to speak of their families and traditions, even without knowing them personally. His goal was to guide Native children toward a strong and positive path in life.

Red Fox had worked with Will Rogers in the Wild West Show and in films. Once, the two joined a circus that toured South America but went broke and were stranded. But they worked their way home. Rogers came home on a cattle boat; Red Fox shoveled coal on a freighter.

He knew Teddy Roosevelt from his ranching days and once stayed at the White House for three days during a blizzard.

In 1971, McGraw-Hill published *The Memoirs of Chief Red Fox*, written on 14 school tablets. The book became a *New York Times* bestseller. Red Fox appeared on "The Tonight Show," "Today," David Frost and Dick Cavett.Though some questioned his authenticity, many, including University of North Dakota Indian Studies Professor Greg Gagnon, saw Red Fox as a powerful and admirable figure. Gagnon wrote, "Red Fox was a fascinating Oglala Lakota whose memoirs reveal the kind of man we all admire and should emulate."

Red Fox died in Corpus Christi on March 1, 1976, just shy of his 106th birthday.

Sponge Iron

BY DR. STEVE HOFFBECK

June 26 -- Sometimes the best ideas never come to fruition, and sometimes really dumb ideas gain wide popularity. This story tells only of a great idea.

In 1943, when World War II was raging and the US used massive quantities of steel to help win the war, a wonderful and logical idea percolated in North Dakota and Minnesota.

The highest-quality iron ore from the Minnesota Iron Range was running out. Meanwhile, steel supplies were running low as the nation required ever more iron to make ships, tanks, artillery and jeeps. So, a solution was suggested in the form of sponge iron.

Sponge iron was a type of iron produced directly from iron ore in a furnace fired by low-cost peat or lignite rather than first smelting ore in a blast furnace using expensive coking coal and then re-melting it.

On this date in 1943, the *Bismarck Tribune* mentioned the possibility of establishing sponge iron facilities in North Dakota. The idea had been articulated earlier in June by North Dakota Senator Gerald P. Nye, who called for public support of federal programs to develop new sources of iron, especially for investigating sponge iron initiatives.

Senator Nye noted that Minnesota's best iron ore was "being rapidly depleted" and that Minnesota's plentiful low-grade ore should be made into sponge iron. He pointed out that the process could be fueled by North Dakota's vast resources of lignite coal.

Nye's logic was impeccable. The simple sponge iron process involved mixing iron ore with lignite; heating it to the point of "incipient fusion" and removing "moisture, silica and oxygen" to make sponge-surfaced iron.

Senator Nye's idea was brilliant. Sponge iron plants could be built near lignite coal mines at Beulah and Hazen and near the Iron Range at Hibbing and Eveleth.

With iron-making plants in both states, Nye said trains would be fully loaded going back and forth, "bringing the ore to one state and the lignite to the other."

Senator Nye believed that his state's 600 billion tons of lignite was "better than ordinary coal in the sponge iron process because of the high percentage of hydrogen gas" it produced.

Experimentation followed, but ultimately, Minnesota instead developed a way to make low-grade taconite into iron pellets for steel production. Consequently, sponge iron plans faded away into unfulfilled, lignite-fueled dreams.

"Dakota Datebook" is a radio series from Prairie Public in partnership with the State Historical Society of ND and with funding from The Study ND. See all the Dakota Datebooks at prairiepublic.org, subscribe to the "Dakota Datebook" podcast, or buy the Dakota Datebook book at shopprairiepublic.org.

Weather report

MICHIGAN

Reports from the NDSU ND Agricultural Weather Network station at Michigan for the 24-hour period each day.

Date	High	Low	Rain
June 15	74	48	
June 16	73	44	.02
June 17	69	53	
June 18	69	52	
June 19	68	49	.13
June 20	69	45	
June 21	70	45	

Weather report

PEKIN

Reports from the NDSU ND Agricultural Weather Network station at Pekin for the 24-hour period each day.

Date	High	Low	Rain
June 15	74	45	.05
June 16	72	44	.01
June 17	68	50	.02
June 18	69	51	
June 19	69	49	.15
June 20	69	46	
June 21	69	46	

UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING LAKOTA CITY COUNCIL June 17, 2026

The Lakota City Council held a special meeting on June 17, 2026 at the city hall. Mayor Bill Solberg called the meeting to order at 7:33 a.m. All council members were present, except Nelson and Haugland who were absent.

Member Vasichek made a motion to approve the airport lighting replacement contract and the required 2.5% local share match for the project, seconded by Member Fahey. On a roll call vote, all members voting in favor. Motion carried.

Member Fahey made a motion to approve a library sign from Xtreme Signs and Graphix for $715, seconded by Member Matejcek. On a roll call vote, all members voting in favor. Motion carried.

Member Vasichek made a motion to approve the USDA year-end management report for 2025 for the water fund, seconded by Member Fahey. On a roll call vote, all members voting in favor. Motion carried.

Member Vasichek made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Member Fahey. Meeting adjourned at 7:57 a.m.

Amie Vasichek
Auditor

Bill Solberg
Mayor

*Full meeting minutes are available upon request at the Lakota City Hall.

Two locals on NDSCS honor roll

ND State College of Science has recognized 595 students on its president's honor roll for the spring 2026 semester. This distinction is awarded to students who have earned a 3.5 grade point average or higher while completing 12 or more credits with traditional letter grades.

Locals on the honor roll, with their home towns and area of study, are Savanna Lebrun of Crary, welding technology; and Trevor Stein of McVille, fire science.

37990

ABSTRACT OF STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2025 of the

American Empire Insurance Company
In the state of Ohio

Total Assets	21,864,880
Total Liabilities	4,839
Aggregate write-ins for special surplus funds	0
Common Capital Stock	3,100,000
Preferred Capital Stock	0
Aggregate Write-ins for Other Than Special Surplus Funds	0
Surplus Notes	0
Gross Paid in & Contributed Surplus	16,100,000
Unassigned funds (surplus)	2,660,040
Total Capital & Surplus	21,860,040
Total Liabilities, Capital & Surplus	21,864,879

NORTH DAKOTA BUSINESS ONLY FOR THE YEAR 2025

Total Direct Premiums Earned	0
Total Direct Losses Incurred	0
Total Accident & Health Direct Premiums Earned	0
Total Accident & Health Direct Losses Incurred	0

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE

I, Jon Godfread, Commissioner of Insurance of the State of North Dakota, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true Abstract of Statement, as officially filed by the Company in this office.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of this office at Bismarck, the first day of March, A.D. 2026 (SEAL).

JON GODFREAD
Commissioner of Insurance

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE COMPANY'S CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORITY

WHEREAS, the above corporation duly organized under the laws of its state or country of domicile, has filed in this office a sworn statement exhibiting its condition and business for the year ending December 31, 2025 conformable to the requirements of the laws of this State regarding the business of insurance and

WHEREAS, the said company has filed in this office a duly certified copy of its charter with certificate of organization in compliance with the requirements of insurance law aforesaid,

NOW THEREFORE, I, JON GODFREAD, Commissioner of Insurance of the State of North Dakota, pursuant to the provisions of said laws, do hereby certify that the above named company is fully empowered through its authorized agents and representatives, to transact its appropriated business of authorized insurance in the state according to the laws thereof, until the 30th day of April, A.D. 2027.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at Bismarck this first day of March, A.D., 2026
(SEAL)
JON GODFREAD
Commissioner of Insurance

(Publish June 18 & 25 & July 2, 2026)

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