

Minot History

1920–1940

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MINOT BETWEEN THE WARS (Part I)

The City of Minot owes its origin to the railroad, and the railroads still play an important part in the city's economy. In 1929 Minot's rail connections improved greatly when the Great Northern started its regular Seattle-Chicago run of the "Empire Builder" and the Soo Line started its first Vancouver-Chicago run of the "Mountaineer."

The 1927-28 Minot City Directory finally recognized that Minot was also a "meeting place of three national highways." They were usually called the Theodore Roosevelt or Glacier Park (now U. S. Route 2), the North Star Trail (now U. S. 52), and the International Trail (now U. S. 83). (The all-gravel Theodore Roosevelt was called the "T and R" or the "Tough and Rough Road" due to its many chuck holes.) Also unpaved, State Highways 8 and 9 entered Minot from the east and State Highway 6 from the north. By the early 1930's the city had 24 miles of concrete paving. Even though downtown streets still featured rough pavement of creosoted wooden blocks, this evolved, according to the North Dakota guidebook produced by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930's, into "smooth, tree-bowered asphalt avenues lined with fine homes in the residential districts." Of course, when the Souris overflowed its banks, such as during the 1923 flood, these streets and avenues were often inaccessible to automobile traffic and the wooden block sometimes floated away, to be later gathered for firewood.

It became easier for farmers to trade in Minot after the development of federal and state highways in rural areas and as the state improved the shorter rural roads (or "feeders"). Over ninety percent of the land in Ward County was still devoted to some sort of agricultural activity, but by 1928 Minot was also ranked as one of the most prosperous cities in the nation based on business volume because it was the major trade and transportation center

for more than 15,000 square miles of northern North Dakota. The 1927-28 City Director boasted: "No city of its size in the United States has as large a trade territory, undisputed by other cities of comparable size within the territory." During the boom in the immediate post-war period people clearly recognized the mutual dependence of Minoters and regional farmers as this verbose statement illustrates: "Tributary to the city for hundreds of miles the thrifty husbandmen seed and harvest their remunerative crops, and in these prosperous farmers, Minot finds assurance of her future prosperity." The city was a major grain-shipping point with several grain elevators and two flour mills (such as the Russell-Miller Milling Company, a grain elevator and maker of Occident flour), a poultry plant, several creameries, as well as a distribution center for machinery and other items needed by farmers. Among North Dakota counties Ward County was fourth in the manufacturing of butter, second in ice cream, and second in flour.

The Valker-Christensen Company, a wholesale-retail seed and feed business, operated one of the largest seed houses in the state, eventually making a specialty of processing and distributing grass seeds throughout the United States and many foreign countries. It was founded in 1920 by George Valker and A. M. Christensen. Christensen, who became sole owner in 1928, came to this state in 1910 as a teenager. He walked from Chicago to his uncle's farm west of New England, North Dakota and then got a summer job at the Dickinson experiment station. The boy became so interested in his work there that he devoted much of his life to the seed business. Later in his career, he also served as president of the Dakota Transfer and Storage Company and the Minot Building and Loan Association (now Midwest Federal), as well as the Minot Association of Commerce.

While Minot's streets and highways improved in the years immediately after World War I, the increased number of private cars and trucks cleared Minot's streets of their clutter of horse-drawn wagons and sped the movement of traffic. Even in 1920 an observer was astonished by "the noise of passing cars." Clearly, as one scholarly publication announced in 1924: "The gas-driven machine has brought an era as distinct and creative as that brought by steam." In June of 1921 the Minot Auto Club, which has just organized to promote road-building and maintenance, to better traffic regulation, and to prevent auto thefts, held its "first annual picnic" at Rice Lake with 4,000 people attending and with 512 cars counted at 1:00p.m.

As mortised vehicles multiplied, accidents mounted alarmingly. In 1930, after he had experienced his sixth automobile upset, Judge William Murray considered issuing himself a restraining order prohibiting his driving an automobile anymore. In the early 1920's the city experimented with an automatic traffic signal in the middle of the Main and Central intersection, but it fell into disuse because few motorists paid any attention to it. It was not until 1939 that the city experimented again with traffic signals, putting one for a trial period at NW 2nd Street (now N. Broadway) and 4th Avenue and then installing similar lights at several downtown intersections.

Drivers licenses were not required in North Dakota until 1935, the same year that the State Patrol came into existence. The first task of the new superintendent and his four officers was to go to county seats like Minot with bundles of licenses, which were then issued to reluctant drivers upon payment of a small fee.

During the 1920's the city continued to support five blacksmiths, but the automobile revolution encouraged the rapid development of at least fifteen automobile dealerships. On New Year's Day in 1921 Henry H. Westlie, who had begun a Ford agency in Parshall in 1917, and his partner, Ernest D. Root, took possession of the Moore Motor Company (renamed the Westlie-Root Motor Company) at 123 West Central. Handling Ford cars and parts, Fordson tractors, and Goodyear tires, the original staff of six expanded to fifteen within four years. In 1927 H. H. Westlie became sole

owner of the Westlie Motor Company, buying out J. A. Charbonneau, who had replaced E. D. Root as his partner. In 1927 and 1928, after Ford ceased making the popular Model T truck, Westlie manufactured them in Minot, assembling (from parts) 38 trucks in 1927 and 50 more in 1928. Later the editor of the Minot Daily News would praise Westlie's contributions to Minot: "Virtually no worthwhile development in this district has been carried to a successful conclusion without the footprints of this man showing along the way."

Also in 1921, Ole Frosaker and his brother Knute purchased the Holt Motor Company, which sold Dodges at the corner of 1st Avenue NW and what is now Broadway. The Frosaker brothers also handled Maxwells, Packards, Chryslers, Studebakers, Reos, and Cadillacs before they concentrated on Chevrolets alone. Louie Smith and Clarence Parker, the hotel owner, started the present Don Moe Motors as the Parker Motor Company in 1922. In 1924 b. D. Renz and his two sons, Ernest and Bruno, opened the Renz Nash Motors Company in the Weinrebe Block; and in the same year the DuBord Sweet Motor Company, a sales agency for Flint motor cars, opened at the New Motor Inn on SW 3rd Avenue. United Motors, a Chrysler dealership, built its showroom at 4th Avenue and S. Main in 1927. Herman Harvey Fisher went into partnership with J. R. Sandlie in 1926 and purchased Pence Motor Company, a Buick dealership where he was a mechanic and salesman. Within a few years "Smiling Jimmie" Fisher (as he was then called) became sole owner of Fisher Motors and, according to his son, "one of the founding fathers of the city who carried the town forward."

Business directly related to the automobile also grew. By 1920 two of the largest American tire concerns established distribution centers in Minot. Harry Eck founded Motor Service Company in 1922 to sell automobile parts, and four filling stations were constructed in 1923. By 1925 \$8,000 worth of gasoline was being sold daily in Minot -- at 23 cents a gallon. Beginning in 1923 motorized taxis of the Three-O-Three Taxi Line could take a person to any point in the city in a new, heated Durant car for 35 cents. In the previous year the Rapid Transit Company, a bus system organized by Harry Eck and Leo Finnegan, began making a 5 and a half mile loop of the city (excluding South Hill) every 45 minutes for a dime. It also made two daily trips to Max. The state's first interurban bus line, now the Interstate Transportation Company, began operating between Minot and Bismarck in this same year. Tourist cabins were also constructed for the growing number of motorists. In September of 1925 the well-known athlete, Irving ("Speed") Wallace, started the Speedway Camp six miles west of Minot at the junction of highways 2 and 9. His "one tiny building with one gas pump along with a barrel of oil" grew into a tourist camp of international reputation. In 1929 the manager of the Grand Hotel, Carl E. Danielson, using a Milwaukee architect, built about forty deluxe cabins, known as Grand Manor, on 31 acres in the Elbow Park addition between Roosevelt Park and the Fairgrounds. This tourist camp featured a playground, tennis courts, and a community laundry. The Minot Daily News called Danielson "a prophet who foresees thousand of tourist-laden auto visiting North Dakota in the future."

The automobile revolution also brought a fresh spurt of energy to Minot's illegal businesses. The city had long had a reputation as a rowdy frontier town and had never paid much attention to the state's prohibition of the sale of alcohol. Now, with nationwide Prohibition, it became famous as "Little Chicago," the most wide open city between Chicago and Butte, Montana, even though periodic crackdowns and reform crusades prevented Minot from being completely open. Often the police department raided the speakeasies of those who had supported the losing side in an election for city commissioners. In 1921, soon after W. M. Smart was elected president of the city commission by defeating six-year incumbent W. S. Shaw in a spirited election, he was the subject of a recall petition alleging that he allowed gambling as well as blind pigs (as illegal drinking establishments were

called). Grain alcohol was customarily sold in rectangular gallon tin cans for \$7 and then eventually for \$11. Although the illegal whiskey often originated in Minnesota, the popular Creighton's Moon came from Williston.

Minot was a center for the so-called "rum-running" traffic linking the liquor supply in Canada with the demand in America. Many bootlegging tales focused on the roads around Minot. The highway between Minot and Canada was an especially poor road in the 1920's. Once, booze runners making a trip from farms near Elmore, Saskatchewan got stuck west of Glenburn in the Little Deep Creek. Mac Birnel, a farmer to the north, pulled them out with a team of horses and was paid a case of whiskey for his help.

In 1924, when a father and two sons opened an automobile dealership in downtown Minot, it was alleged that they drove big cars in order to haul whiskey from Canada. It appears that on one trip the brothers' car stalled when revenue officers pursued them near Bottineau. The young men bolted from the car and took off on foot across a field, losing their car and load to the officers.

Minot was often the scene of dramatic high-speed automobile chases, such as the one resulting in the arrest of the proprietor of the Last Chance Barbershop located on W. Central, and dramatic shootouts, such as when whiskey-runner Avery Erickson fatally shot police officer F. S. Fahler and later died from shots received in the same encounter.

A long-time resident of Minot recalls that her family could not take Sunday afternoon drives to the north and west of Minot in their elegant black Buick sedan. They had found that trips there could be interrupted either by federal liquor agents, who suspected such a car had to be involved in illegal activities, or by hijackers, who also thought such a car might be carrying liquor.

It was common knowledge that the owner of a lignite mine located less than half a mile southwest of Burlington would give a car to anyone who could deliver three loads of booze from Canada to his liquor storage rooms under his garage, but it seems that often the car would be hijacked on the third trip, reportedly by men hired by the mine operator.

Local, state, and federal law enforcement agents conducted many well publicized raids in the area. Sometimes the raid seemed to be merely an enterprising method for transferring ownership of the illegal goods rather than enforcing Prohibition. In the spring of 1921 a U. S. commissioner arrested Minot's former police chief and a current police captain for impersonating officers in a raid in Bottineau County where they had walked off with a cache of whiskey as well as a Cadillac. In 1924 these two former police officials were tried twice, but not convicted, for illegally transporting liquor. When state prohibition forces opened their northwest regional headquarters in Minot in April of 1921, they announced that their cars would be equipped with Browning machine guns. After this, federal agents were recalled from the area, claiming that rum-running was on the wane and the Canadian border was secure. In 1929 a Congregational pastor, the Reverend E. E. Keedy, called a meeting where most of the fifty-two people present supported Prohibition, but where one minister declared that "conditions were worse now than seven years ago."

Besides the highly profitable liquor traffic, Minot was known for other questionable activities. In the summer of 1921 the city attorney began drawing up an ordinance prohibiting certain kinds of dances in local dance halls. In 1926 the Waverly Tea Room gave public notice to its patrons: "Promiscuous dancing is not allowed in the present day cabarets, so therefore we must adhere to the law."

An illicit drug trade also flourished, although on a relatively mild scale compared with liquor. In December of 1922 a series of opium raids cracked down on certain hotels, cafes, and other opium dens on SW 3rd Street. These raids, which lasted until the end of 1924, put an end to most of the opium and cocaine traffic at that time. In one raid on two residences on SW 3rd Street police confiscated \$1,000 worth of opium in the form of “decks” and “books.” “Books” contained three times more opium than “decks,” but still only a small amount. The street value of a “deck” was one dollar.

Such drugs were apparently handled on the local level primarily by Chinese, some of whom were also illegal immigrants. An innocent victim of the drug raids in Minot was Louis Lolling, a Chinese-American who had opened the popular American Café in September of 1922 in the Scofield Block on Main Street. The menu featured Special Chow Mein at 25 cents a plate and Lobster Egg Foo Yung at 55 cents a serving. Unfortunately, Mr. Lolling was arrested in an opium raid at the Dakotah Hotel at 60 South Main Street. He was merely looking for an employee there, and so charges were soon dismissed, but Lolling became so discouraged with Minot that he sold his new café and left town in 1924.

Against this rollicking, highly irregular background the continued development of Minot’s more reputable community was very much evident. Religious institutions reacted to the modern ways of the automobile age. In 1924, for example, after a formal debate the Ladies Aid of the Presbyterian Church decided by a close vote that it was proper for their members to bob their hair. According to the Independent, “Minot girls who have bobbed their tresses will undoubtedly welcome this vote of approval of their methods of thus abbreviating their hirsute appendages.”

Several churches began constructing during the twenties. All Saints’ Episcopal Church replaced its small wooden building with a large brick structure, which cost over \$50,000. The wardens, John E. Greene and George W. Kemper, made the financing possible and watched each stone and brick go into place, but it was the women of All Saints’ Guild whose exhausting fund-raising activities paid off the mortgage in less than ten years. The rector, the Reverend George H. Swift, later recalled that they “did not dare to slow down lest the juggernaut of ruthless debt catch up with them, run over them, and close the church.” At about the same time that the new All Saints’ was built, the cornerstone of the present Congregational Church was laid, and in mid-March of 1922 this new \$41,500 building was dedicated. In 1930 Beth Israel dedicated a new Jewish synagogue near the old temple, which later became a Greek Orthodox Church. Minot’s Hebrew congregation had increased considerably in Eastwood Park, within easy walking distance of the synagogue.

The Lutherans of Minot and the surrounding area felt the need for a hospital of their own after Ward County turned over to the Sisters of St. Francis the county hospital which the sisters then renamed St. Joseph’s. In the spring of 1922, under the leadership of Minot’s Lutheran pastors, representatives from many Lutheran churches formed the Trinity Hospital Association and elected First Lutheran’s pastor, the Reverend Dr. T. F. Gullixson, as president of the proposed hospital’s 21 member board of trustees. Throughout the decade, he was the leading figure in planning, organizing, and building Trinity Hospital. The Association quickly raised \$60,000 and began building the first of four units, which was to contain thirty beds. In the meantime, Trinity used the C. A. Johnson home, on the site of the present hospital, receiving there the first patient (Rose Gyer) in early September. In 1924 the School of Nursing graduated its first trainees, a class of six. Meanwhile, building continued. The Second Unit brought the hospital’s capacity to a hundred beds. When it was dedicated in 1924, the Minot Daily News called it “an important milestone in the splendid growth and development of Northwest North Dakota.” In 1926 Trinity added three stories to the north wing. This Third Unit meant the hospital now had a

150-bed capacity. In 1929 three additional stories were added to the west wing, giving the hospital a 220-bed capacity. This Fourth Unit, completing the original building plans of 1922, provided a children's department and another operating room.

Many other organizations were beginning to make an impact on the life of the city. In 1921 the Kiwanis received its charter. The Lions held their charter banquet at the Leland-Parker Hotel in January of 1927. In 1928 Moose Lodge No. 869 was instituted and began holding meetings in the Sons of Norway Hall. The Town and Country Club, under the presidency of J. N. Ellison, discussed purchasing a golf course in 1921. Finally, in 1928, the Association of Commerce helped organize the Minot Country Club, which purchased the farm of A. B. Hills – 160 acres at \$60 an acre – in the river valley west of Minot. The new \$17,000 club house was dedicated at the site of the old barn in 1930 and almost \$9,000 was spent on constructing the golf course.

With an acre of park for every 100 inhabitants, Minot's parks were also making an important contribution to life in the city. The largest was the attractive tree-filled Riverside Park whose 52 acres were located on the Mouse River adjacent to the Theodore Roosevelt Highway. This "pleasure ground of the city," as a travel book of the times put it, contained a zoo, a swimming pool, and an excellent automobile drive following the river. In September of 1922, after hearing the news of Theodore Roosevelt's death, Minot's Park Board adopted a resolution to change the park's name to Roosevelt Park and to erect a statue there in honor of the former president. The statue was to be a replica of one given to Portland, Oregon by Dr. Henry Waldo Coe, a former North Dakotan and a friend of Roosevelt. In 1924 the Great Northern Railway transported the equestrian statue, made by a Los Angeles sculptor, J. Phimister Proctor, from New York to Minot in two crates weighing 4,200 and 2,300 pounds, prepaid by Dr. Coe. It was originally mounted on a base representing the geological formations of the Bad Lands where Roosevelt had ranched.

Another attraction in Minot was the Northwest Fair, the regional fair which preceded the present State Fair. In 1919 Henry L. Finke, a Berthold farmer and livestock raiser, who was president of the Mouse River Loop Purebred Association, began suggesting to his organization and to Farm Bureau members that the Ward County commissioners underwrite a fair. He helped circulate petitions and in November of 1920 Ward County residents voted in favor of a large fair. In July of 1921, the county commissioners levied \$20,000 – the first of five levies totaling \$100,00 – to build the fair and in 1922 they selected as first president of the Fair Board Carl W. Mason, former editor of the Minot Daily News. Hank Finke, a member of the original board of directors, served from 1923 through 1949 as secretary-manager of the fair. Architect Ira Rush designed \$35,000 worth of structures, including a grandstand, exhibition buildings, and barns. With its main attraction being the radiophone, the first fair of the "Northwest Agriculture, Livestock and Fair Association" was held in September of 1922. Despite cold and disagreeable weather, it took in \$7,397.83. The next fair, held in early July of 1923, featured auto races and horse races. The crowd of 15,000 attending the Fourth was the biggest assembled in Minot to date; but, as the Independent reported, "There was a total absence of intoxication so far as could be seen anywhere in the city." By 1924 fair receipts totaled over \$30,000, including \$2,500 in state aid, and the fair cleared almost \$7,000 in profits.

Finke, who was responsible for the original ground plans and buildings, got three major building improvements for the fair without any real expense. He acquired Barn No. 1 by persuading the county commissioners to deed to the fair a building on 4th Avenue SE which they had acquired for delinquent taxes, and he then put on a rodeo to defray the \$1,000 cost of moving and repairs. He improved the Exhibition Building by agreeing to pay a local lumber dealer all money received from tickets for the new bleachers and the dance hall and by getting the sheriff to furnish prisoners to do the

work.

The Northwest Fair had been preceded by the Ward County Fair. Its location south of 16th Avenue, between SE 2nd and 6th Streets was the scene of Minot's first flying exhibitions in 1911 and was soon used as Minot's first unofficial airport. By 1919 a World War I flier registered commercial airport just west of the city on Country Club Road. His airport, about half a mile long with one single-plane hanger, continued in operation – eventually under the aviation committee of the Association of Commerce – until Minot's Park Board opened the present municipal field in 1928. Attorney F. B. Lambert, sometimes called the “Father of the Minot Airport,” battled for years on the Park Board for the development of a municipal landing field. In 1928, under the leadership of Sidney Baldwin, the Park District finally purchased 148 acres on North Hill for \$17,000 and established the “Port of Minot.” With Captain T. M. Strickler as its first operating manager, International Airways built the new airport's first hanger, a Butler steel structure which could house five planes, on the west side of the airport. Cecil Shupe, as International Airways' chief pilot, began regular scheduled flights to Bismarck in September of 1929; but, due to lack of patrons, this service lasted less than a year. Shupe eventually became the first official manager of the airport in 1930. At the airport's dedication during the Northwest Air Show in July of 1928, Park Board president Sidney Baldwin said to the huge crowd of 35,000 (the largest in Minot to date): “Minot has in the past served a large territory and with the coming of the automobile and of good highways that territory has been greatly increased.” He then stated: “We believe that the coming of the airplane to Minot following the dedication of this port will increase the territory served by Minot a great deal more.” Members of the Park Board and their families were then taken up into the air in a Ford Tri-Motor plane, which dropped bouquets of flowers upon the Port of Minot as it passed over the field.

MINOT BETWEEN THE WARS (Part II)

Music has always played a big part in Minot's cultural life. The presentation of a portion of Handel's Messiah (first performed in Minot in 1909) soon became a regular December activity. By 1919 a music curriculum had appeared in the Normal School's catalogue. In 1921 the Schumann Club was started and also a forty-member community band was organized with J. H. Colton as its president. City band director Jhon Howard formed a quintet to tour the Midwest for the Chataugua Company in 1923, the same year that the Clef Studio opened on South Main in the Fair Block to offer instruction in piano, voice, and the dramatic arts. In 1925 students from the Teachers College performed Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado in the high school auditorium. In the summer of 1926 a concert by a 150-voice chorus inspired a committee of the Association of Commerce to conduct a successful drive to establish a permanent city chorus under the direction of Mr. Jean Gilbert Jones, the head of the College's music department. The sixty voices of the Minot Community Chorus first performed in January of 1927 at St. Leo's Church. Arturo Petrucci led a college orchestra of 52 members in its initial performance in 1929. In the same year a new city band also gave its first concert. Several years before (in 1926) Minot citizens had packed the high school auditorium to hear the music of John Philip Sousa.

Since its opening in temporary quarters in the fall of 1913, the Normal School had made great progress and had become an important influence in the cultural life of the community. Arthur G. Crane, the first president, resigned in 1920 and eventually became president of Wyoming University and then governor of Wyoming. After the presidency of Dr. Levi H. Beeler, Dr. George A. McFarland to Minot in 1922 at the age of 64 and ran the college with an iron hand until his death in 1938 at the age of 80. Crane described McFarland as a “Gentleman, scholar, executive, true friend, and manly fighter.” During McFarland's first year in Minot, the rhetoric class started the forerunner of the Red and Green – with much misgivings that the

newspaper did not have the full formal consent of the faculty for its publication. By McFarland's second year the Normal School had become Minot State Teachers College, a four-year institution entitled to grant a B. A. in Education. The new college dedicated a west wing to match the east wing of Old Main, during a power failure which left the participants in the dark for an hour. It had been built with a \$100,00 appropriation signed by Governor Frazier in 1921. By 1925 Old Main had added a north wing, to house a fine auditorium and a gymnasium, with a \$65,000 appropriation. This year also saw Mrs. Emma Cotton, the mother of Professor Florence Perrett, begin a campaign for a pipe organ for the new college auditorium. After an extensive fund drive involving the whole community, the \$12,500 Kimball pipe organ was dedicated in 1932 as a monument to Dr. McFarland in the auditorium which would soon bear his name. The auditorium was responsible for establishing the college as the major cultural center of the community; for example, the Isadora Duncan Dancers from Moscow appeared there in 1930.

During the financially lean 1930's Minot State Teachers College managed to continue developing. In 1931 the \$115,000 Teacher Training Building (now called the Campus Laboratory School) was constructed to house intermediate and high school students while primary students continued to use the nearby Harrison School (until it was razed in 1964). The National Youth Administration began building the old Student Union (near the present Administration Building), but the College in 1934 found it necessary to cut faculty salaries by as much as forty percent and to require faculty without children to reside in Pioneer Hall.

Minot's commitment to providing education for its growing number of children can be seen in construction at the downtown site of what is now called the Central Campus of Minot High School. In late 1918 students from grades 9 through 12 began attending classes at their new high school building next to the first brick grade school building (built in 1893). The nearby Old Central High School (built in 1905) now became the junior high school for seventh and eighth grade students. The new high school contained an auditorium with 2,000 seats, which was much used for community entertainment. In 1926 Will Rogers appeared there and in 1927 the city heard the Tunney-Demsey fight, not over the radio but by listening to a local announcer read Associated Press reports supplied by the Minot Daily News. The new high school, which also featured a small pool, an assembly hall, and a free dental clinic, soon became overcrowded; so a new junior high school wing was added in 1928 and 1929 for grades 7 through 9, thus relieving the senior high of its ninth graders. This junior high wing also housed some fifth and sixth graders. In 1929 Minot's first brick school building was torn down, so that the expanding secondary school could use its location to add a full sized gymnasium with two electric score boards and with sliding, folding doors to make two smaller gyms.

Long before this new gymnasium opened in 1930, school sporting events were a major source of entertainment for the people for Minot. The teams of Coach E. C. ("Jack") Flug won several district basketball and football championships in the 1920's, and the teams of Coach "Red" Jarrett and Harley Robertson won state basketball championships in 1934, 1936, and 1937 and the state football championship in 1936. The high school played its football games at Roosevelt Park. During the early 1920's Minot High School students participated in "yells" (what we now call "cheers") such as the uncomplicated and unconcerned "ach Louie, Chop Suey/Watch Minot Hop thruely" and the now completely unacceptable "Nigger, Nigger, Hoe patater/Half past Alligator. /Ram, Ram, Bulligator, / Chick-a-wah-wah! /Minot High School, / Yah! Yah! Yah!"

In 1931 the Independent judged Casper Oimoen "without even a close second as North Dakota's greatest athlete." Born in Norway, where as a youngster he had learned to ski using barrel staves, he arrived in Minot in 1923 to live with his uncle, O. P. Nustad, and to learn the bricklaying trade.

By 1925 the 19-year-old Minoter was called “The Boy Wonder” at the national ski jumping tournament. During the 1929-30 winter a crowd of several thousand saw him make a 140 foot jump at the Tri-State Ski Meet held near the Great Northern high bridge just west of Minot. At that time he was called the most spectacular ski “rider” in the country. In 1930 the young man won the Eastern, Central, and National Championships, plus taking first in eight other events, a feat which has never been equaled. He helped plan the construction of the largest ski slide in North Dakota, which was built in Minot – at a cost of \$3,000 – immediately northwest of the college. It was 225 feet long and 106 feet above North Hill. Oimoen proclaimed it “among the best” in the country and proceeded to win the C. E. Danielson trophy there in February of 1933 with a 140 foot jump and several of 130 feet or more. “Iron Man Oimoen” won more than four hundred trophies and medals in his fifteen-year-long sports career. In 1932, having placed first in 16 of the 20 events he had entered in the previous two years, he was made captain of the 6-man U. S. Olympic Ski Team at Lake Placid, New York, where he established a new American amateur ski jumping record and over all was judged in fifth position, the highest position ever placed to date by any U. S. entry for that event. In 1935 Oimoen, known for his daredevil jumps, took the longest official jump of his life, setting a new American record of 225 feet. In 1936 he captained one of the few teams which did not return Hitler’s Nazi salute at the IVth Olympic Winter Games held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany. In that year the Independent said that Oimoen had “been proclaimed by judges and public alike to be the most spectacular, graceful and skilled skier on the American Continent, with a record that has never been equaled and probably will never be excelled.”

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During the developments of the 1920’s Minot’s population grew by an exceedingly healthy 6,000 people, the census figures increasing from 10,476 in 1920 to 16,099 in 1930. The economy also appeared to be doing well on the eve of the Great Depression. In July of 1929 R. E. Barron, the president of the First National Bank, stated, “In my 28 years’ experience in the banking business in Minot, conditions were never so sound and the outlook never so bright as at the present time.”

Contrasting with this statement and symbolizing economic hard times was the office building which George Valker, Sr. began in the late 1920’s. Soon called the Sparrow Hotel, it sat vacant and unfinished for twenty years, except for the birds roosting in the incomplete upper stories. Finally after World War II Clarence Parker turned it into what is now called the Parker-Johnson Hotel.

As the Great Depression was beginning, the seat of Ward County did see the completion of an ambitious construction project. For many years Minot’s original red brick courthouse had proved inadequate for the needs of Ward County. Built in a wheat field in 1890, with a major addition in 1904, the old structure was razed in 1928. While the county offices were placed temporarily in the First Avenue Building, a new, modern courthouse, the largest in the state, rose on the site of the old one. It cost \$450,000, but payments were made, without a bond issue, from funds accumulated in the past. In 1930 Governor George F. Shafer dedicated the new building to the men and women who served in World War I.

The City of Minot was also making progress in governmental affairs. Just as it had been the first North Dakota city to appoint the commission form of government, so (in an election in November of 1932) it became the first North Dakota city to move to the major-council-city manager form of government. Although the voters had supported the idea 4,309 to 1,637, the new governmental structure did not tone down the city’s political

battles. When the city council decided to bring the 46-year-old Jay W. Bliss from Valley City to be the first city manager, the state was set for a series of noisy clashes that shook the city during the entire 1930's, clashes generally won by Mr. Bliss. Many politicians tried to undermine the new system because they lost control of political patronage. The colorful Jack A. Patterson (who had been elected the first mayor under the new plan and remained mayor until 1938) must have realized that the office of city manager would greatly diminish a mayor's powers. He and two aldermen began the fight by voting against hiring Bliss as the city's first manager, on the grounds that the city could not afford his \$250-a-month salary. Other leaders claimed to be dissatisfied with Bliss's lack of experience and with the fact that Bliss, a former North Dakota state engineer, had not been recommended by the National City Managers Association. They immediately obtained a temporary injunction against the city's hiring Bliss, which was lifted when Bliss agreed to work without being paid until Minot's financial problems were resolved, and in November the Mayor unsuccessfully attempted to cut Bliss's salary. Then, in early 1935, while Minot was still the only North Dakota city with a manager, a bill was introduced into the Legislature to repeal the state law authorizing city managers. Action on this bill, which had mysterious backing, was postponed indefinitely when opposition to it quickly developed in Minot, where Bliss's supporters loudly claimed that the new office was "working admirably in spite of trivial opposition." Bliss's proponents also pointed out how dramatically the city's expenditures had gone down since Bliss had become manager. In 1938 the Minot Daily News praised Bliss's "enviable record" and added that "if he had the sincere cooperation of a united council, instead of harassment, the record could be even better." It argued that until the city manager agreed "to 'an open town' for Minot, as far as gambling is concerned, there will continue to be this campaign of harassment..."

In 1932 Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President in one of Minot's most decisive presidential elections, and the next year William Langer was elected governor of North Dakota. Both men were committed to decisive action against the Great Depression and a major result of their new administrations in Washington and Bismarck was that public welfare would be conducted on an organization basis and federal influence would grow in municipal affairs. Judge A. M. Christensen became the head of the State Relief Committee and the mediator to federal programs. In 1935 the city applied for a \$123,000 grant from the Public Works Administration to finance construction of a new city hall and auditorium. Although this plan fell through – and thus the municipal auditorium would not be built for many more years – Bliss was usually successful in obtaining large amounts of federal funds for projects to improve Minot and find work for the city's unemployed.

Before federal funding began, the city had hired unemployed men, each at a dollar a day, to clean out the river channel. Now in 1936, when the biggest private construction was the Farmers Union Cooperative Association's erection of a \$45,000 poultry plant, the Works Progress Administration provided \$222,570 toward city construction costs. Employing fifteen to twenty men, the "pride project" of the district WPA that year was the 120 foot long NW 8th Street bridge dedicated in October of 1936. Technically this was a Ward County sponsored project, but the city cooperated, and the College particularly enjoyed the improved access to the campus. Minot had done no street paving since 1930, but in 1936 the WPA built or improved 50 blocks of city streets and bridges, 20,075 feet of sidewalk, and 2,900 feet of curb. It also added a 50,000 gallon underground reservoir and pump house at the College; made repairs at the Fairgrounds, including building Pioneer Bowl; improved park facilities, playgrounds, athletic fields, and schools, especially McKinley (by now the city's oldest school building).

Again, in 1937, the largest share of construction costs in the city was the \$146,000 provided by the WPA. The WPA's biggest project of that year, a project employing more than 200 men, was a pipeline of over 7,000 feet to send treated effluent from the sewage disposal plant to an open channel

downstream from the city. Minot's health office, Dr. J. L. Devine, called it the "greatest sanitation improvement which the city of Minot could have made" and district WPA director Arvid Backlund called it "one of most worthy projects undertaken in the city of Minot by the WPA." The biggest private construction of that year was the NE 3rd Street viaduct, built with railroad money.

The New Deal contributed to another fundamental change to Minot by the end of 1933: the repeal of the 18th Amendment. Repeal obviously affected the bootlegging activities in and around Minot. Legal beer outlets soon flourished, including beer sales in grocery stores. V. T. Lee, who was then city auditor, said that in 1934 Minot's beer licenses brought in nearly \$6,000, enough to meet one month's payroll. In June of 1935 there were 26 beer outlets in the city, easy paying a beer fee of \$200 a year. City laws governing beer parlors were confused and took several years to work out. The city council spent some time figuring out how to prohibit the drinking of beer at public dance halls. Most of the first legal beer parlors were in basements downtown and were soon also the subject of a first-class row in council. A group of citizens wanted windows in these places, facing the sidewalk. Then they wanted curtains removed from the windows after the owners put them up for privacy. Finally the council passed a law forbidding basement liquor establishments altogether. Grocery stores were next to feel the hand of authority. A clue to public social interaction during the 1930's is an advertisement which appeared in the June 25, 1935 issue of the Minot Daily News. In it the Red Rooster Night Club (located on U. S. 52 several miles west of Minot) stated that no beer would be sold there after 2 a.m., but that soft drinks, dancing, and lunch were available after 2 a.m.

It was not until late in 1936 that selling hard liquor became legal in North Dakota, with Minot tavern selling the first legal drink across the bar in the state's entire history. A police spokesman noted the "lack of real celebration" as patrons calmly and orderly observed this historic occasion. During the first year Minot and Ward County received \$60,000 from liquor fees, and 330 people were arrested for drunkenness in Minot, only 27 more than the previous year.

Strong counteracting forces were present in Minot from its haphazard beginnings on America's frontier until World War II. In the 1880's and 1890's the heart of downtown Minot had teemed with gambling houses and saloons, but the people had also laid the foundations of most of the enduring churches. In the bootlegging era of the 1920's Minot built new churches, added another hospital, and encouraged educational and cultural activities. By 1940 the followers of vice and virtue were organizing for a final battle under different community conditions, a battle to be resolved after World War II.