

Crossing the Sheyenne

David Lunde | Contributing Writer

We all, perhaps, are familiar with the simple old joke, “Why did the chicken cross the road?” To get to the other side! Why and for what reason did farmers and others build walking access to the other side of the river? More than the chicken joke, I’ll try to explain the various reasons starting from my grandfather’s farm three miles south of Highway 200 then downstream several miles.

My story is of locals building “hanging” - “swinging” bridges over the Sheyenne River or a simple version not swinging, just a plank “foot bridge”, as was the case of my grandfather. For some families having access to the other side, it was a necessity for them, for another it was the fun of visiting neighbors. Then others it was an actual means to daily navigate to work or shopping. Two were built of a similar design.

The foot bridge I recall was put together by my grandfather, only for visits across the stream to relatives, the Vasfarets. Using discarded bridge planks, two posts were dug in both banks, then a cross piece was nailed to lay the planks on and the same in the middle of the river.

Often as a kid, and with cousins, we hiked over to Kari Vasfaret for cookies or peppermint candy, graciously given. One time, cousin Tom Melgard stopped over

the middle of the river to let Powl, our large German Shepherd type dog, pass him and I can still see the scene. No room for two on the same spot and the dog won! Splash, backwards into the water he went! He made it to shore, sun-dried and joined the adventure. The social going between these two farms, especially Grandpa, was often. Luther League and youth groups from Ness Church sometimes met at Kari’s farm. Those coming from the westside - Solas, Hagens, and Ericksons among them, took this shortcut (to save gas-the thirties were here) rather than driving on a round-about road three miles both ways, or was it the thrill of navigating the crossing, even returning to their cars after dark. How daring it was!

Downstream two miles a “swinging” bridge was constructed on the Hans Broston farm. Cables were anchored in sturdy trees, most likely oak, sheep fence netting lined the bottom and sides, and boards were the flooring platform. The farm site was on the east side of the river, a fine location it was in early horse and buggy days to trot up the valley hill and to town or church they went. Not so as cars entered the scene. The solution? Build a “hanging” bridge, leaving them an option, with a car left on the west bank. They could quickly scoot across the bridge, and weather permitting, it was a shorter drive to town for



selling their cream or eggs - yes, shopping for the basic necessities of life.

One mile further downstream in the 1960s Kenny Froiland and Bert Hoffman, Boy Scout leaders, with the help of the scouts, no doubt, constructed a replica in honor of Otto Njaa the landowner and uncle to Froiland, naming it Otto’s Blue Bridge. Built it was for the novelty and experience, and access to their camp across the waterway.

A mile further downstream at the Cooperstown Bible Camp a well-constructed replica was built, anchored in cement, engineered by Tom Johnson.

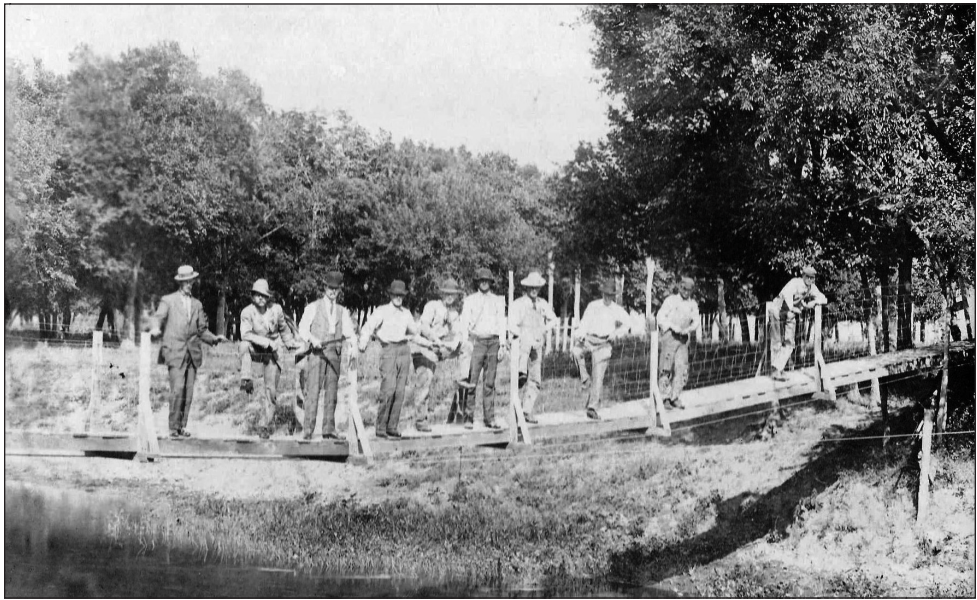
It is the walking trek to the other side of the Sheyenne River where a climbing wall exists. The youths can “swing” their way

over and then practice climbing the wall.

Downstream a few miles in prior Bald Hill Dam high water days, Olaf Ueland, son of pioneer Martin Ueland, and his wife Dagny (Edland) lived and farmed. The house was on the west side of the river and the barn on the east side. Daily to do chores, multiple trips on their well-constructed, sturdy hanging bridge took place. A nice picturesque farm, it was where they raised a large family from Mervil to Duane. The Baldhill Dam was the demise of this farm and its swinging bridge to swing no more.

Perhaps this story is of interest. Is there someone around who can say, “I remember those old ones?” Memories ...

PICTURES FROM THE PAST



This photo was likely donated to the Griggs County Museum by Borghild Bue and was shared on the Griggs County Museum Facebook page. It was also published in the 1976 Griggs County History book, page 384.

Bike Safety Day

On Tuesday, June 3, from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., the Griggs County Sheriff’s Office will be hosting Bike Safety Day!, an event that welcomes participants of all ages.

There will be four informative stations covering crucial aspects of cycling safety: helmet fitting, rules of the road, bicycle maintenance, and general bike safety tips. To encourage full participation, individuals who visit all four stations will have their names entered into a drawing for a chance to win a new bicycle or helmet.

A free lunch will be of-



fered throughout the event because of a donation made by Miller’s Fresh Foods. Those attending the Titan Sports Camp are en-

couraged to stop by after the camp is done for the day.

BND releases 2024 annual report

The state-owned Bank of North Dakota (BND) released its 2024 annual report to the Industrial Commission, titled “Breaking the Barrier.” The report highlights two large multi-state agency initiatives launched in 2024 under BND’s leadership: SmartWithMyMoney.nd.gov and Sustain, Transform, Authenticate North Dakota (STAND).

Smart with My Money is the statewide financial literacy effort backed by 12 state agencies, aiming to make North Dakota the most financially literate state in the country by 2027. Currently, the state has a grade of C in financial literacy. As of Dec. 31, 2024, 3,248 accounts were started with over 111,000 site visits on its website.

In response to growing scrutiny of agricultural and fossil fuel practices, the 2023 Legislative Assembly directed BND to evaluate the complex policies and trends impacting North Dakota’s businesses and industries. The result was STAND, a cross-sector initiative aimed at educating consumers nationwide and globally about North Dakota’s progressive practices. A group of 27 North Dakotans, including elected officials, private industry leaders and representatives from state agencies and associations, developed STAND’s first report released in July. The report,

along with other written and video stories, can be found at stand.nd.gov.

BND closed 2024 with total assets of \$10.8 billion, a 6.8% increase from the previous year with net income of \$200.4 million, up from \$192.7 million in 2023. The Bank had an excellent return on investment of 15.8%, and the total return to the state was \$335 million. Standard & Poors maintained BND’s rating as A+/Stable in its 2024 annual review.

“Bank of North Dakota’s foremost responsibility is managing risk on behalf of the state’s residents,” said members of the Commission in a joint statement. The Commission, consisting of Gov. Kelly Armstrong as chairman, Attorney General Drew Wrigley and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring, oversees BND. “Their strong team effectively balances liquidity, interest rate shifts and credit exposure to safeguard public funds.”

North Dakotans see the impact of BND’s work directly through its loan portfolio. This year, the Bank originated and renewed 8,726 loans to the state’s residents for more than \$2.1 billion, bringing the amount of the total lending portfolio to \$6.1 billion, a new record for BND. BND delivered both agriculture and commercial loans through 70

different financial institutions and their 201 branch offices. Student loans are provided directly to North Dakota residents and out-of-state residents attending a North Dakota school.

In addition to these portfolios, BND administers more than \$1.1 billion in legislature-directed loan programs, including school construction, state infrastructure, water projects and disaster recovery. These programs help lower local taxes for residents by providing lower interest loans than they would typically negotiate.

“BND is committed to protecting the state’s deposits while providing a healthy return,” stated Don Morgan, BND president. “Every day, our team strives to achieve more to benefit the residents of our state.”

Complete copies of the 2024 Annual Report are available at www.bnd.nd.gov.

The Bank’s mission “to support agriculture, commerce and industry” has not changed since its earliest days in 1919. The Bank of North Dakota is the only state-owned bank in the nation.

For more information, contact Janel Schmitz Communications and Marketing Manager at 701-328-5880.