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A Re-Emerging History: History of the Four Bears Bridge and the Lost Communities of North Dakota

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**A Re-emerging History:
History of the Four Bears Bridge and the Lost Communities of North Dakota**

by

Tessa M. Sandstrom

A Thesis

Submitted to the

University of North Dakota

Honors Program Committee

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A RE-EMERGING HISTORY

HISTORY OF THE FOUR BEARS BRIDGE & THE LOST
COMMUNITIES OF NORTH DAKOTA



BY TESSA SANDSTROM

Acknowledgments

For a while, I felt somewhat alone in my project and the necessity I felt to record this history before it proved too late. As my research progressed, however, I found others who have begun on their own individual projects. Many of these people seemed just as excited about this topic as I, and many were eager to share their information to promote this historical period. It is to many of these fellow researchers that I owe great thanks.

Marilyn Snyder of the State Historical Society of North Dakota did the tedious work of searching through each and every *Sanish Sentinel* and *Halliday Promoter* for articles on the bridge to put together in a teaching kit. Marilyn generously gave me copies of her newspaper clippings, thereby saving me endless hours of scouring microfilm for the same articles. Mike Kopp is another who gave information I was otherwise struggling to find. Mike was a valuable source of information, since he is currently producing a documentary on the bridge for the North Dakota Department of Transportation. Mike, too, was kind enough to share some of his own work with me and point me toward others sources. He also gave me photographs of the project that I had either missed the opportunity to take myself or simply lacked the talent.

Bernice Houser, New Town's local historian so to speak, and one of my interviewees showed me her collection of articles on the new bridge. Bernice has also been in charge of working to preserve much of Sanish's history and invited me to the Senior Citizens Center in New Town where a mini exhibit on Sanish was displayed. This display will later be moved to the State Historical Society in Bismarck. Marilyn Hudson was also generous in opening the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum during the closed season and provided me with several sources, including her invaluable interview. Special thanks go to Bernice and Marilyn and my other interviewees: Thomas Brubaker, Dena Folden, Bob Gorder, Alvin Houser, Mr. Lawrence Robinson, and Rita Satermo. Without their contributions, this thesis would not have been possible. It is an understatement to say they breathed life into my documentation.

I must also thank Jeanette LaRock, a former English and journalism teacher in New Town, who has collected photos, both old and new. Throughout the past few years, Jeannette has played a major role in preserving history by assembling these photos in calendars and postcard collections. Jeanette also generously lent me information on Elbowoods that I doubt I could have found anywhere else. I must also give Jeannette special thanks. As my senior English and journalism teacher at New Town High School, Jeannette has not only been a teacher, but a counselor, a guide, and a mentor. She is one of many who have pushed me to where I am today. Similar thanks must be given to another mentor, Dr. Jeanne Anderegg of the Honors Program who "inherited" me from Jeanette. Jeanne has put up with every insecurity, every display of panic, and every minor question since I left Jeannette in New Town and came to UND! I must also thank Dr. Libby Rankin and our Honors Thesis Workshop class for their support and suggestions throughout the production of the thesis.

Last but not least, thank you, thank you, thank you to Dr. Jacquelyn Lowman. Dr. J. has been through this entire project with me, experiencing every setback, every failure, and every success since its beginning. She has been responsible for getting this project off the ground and steering me in the right direction. From the beginning, Dr. J. has made time for me, guided me, reassured me, and challenged me at every step of the way. My success is hers. I doubt I would have gotten through this project without her. Along with Jeannette and Jeanne, Jacqui remains one of my most influential instructors and has become a mentor both in and out of school.

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specifics in the project. I must also thank them ahead of time for the extra support I'm sure they will give me as I take this project to the next level! Much thanks and love!

Again, thanks to all!

Preface

A small, paved road, just a half-mile east of the Four Bears Bridge, turns south off Highway 23. It eventually leads to the point appropriately named Reunion Bay, where Lewis and Clark reunited during their expedition. Then, a little further, a gravel road turns west to my house, while the paved road continues down toward Pouch Point and Independence, and curves back toward New Town. Friends and summer visitors have commented that the first mile of that road could be a scenic landmark—if it weren't for the ramshackle buildings of Sanish that sit upon the hill. For the most part I agreed, though I did not think of it much when I lived there. The scene they spoke of was that of the buttes that dropped suddenly off "Big Bend" (as we called the long curve in the road that rounded Sanish) and framed the span of the Four Bears Bridge. It was a beautiful view for many, but for me it was an everyday sight. I had seen those buttes, the lake, and that relic of a bridge every day, both ahead of me as I went to town for school in the mornings, and behind me in my rearview mirror as I returned home after track practice or work. The bridge was a permanent part of the landscape, a path across Lake Sakakawea, blending in with the gray water stirred by the constant wind and only standing out on a still day when there was not one bridge, but two, the lake mirroring its every detail in the bridge's smooth reflection. And Sanish? It was a broken-down has-been of a town and a collection of deteriorated buildings that needed to be demolished.

I had heard of the lost village of old Sanish, read of its short-lived existence and seen the map of the town on Mount Crow Flies High that pointed out its approximate location. But when I looked down from Crow Flies High, I saw only a large body of water, and off to the south, an old, rusty bridge of no significant value. Surely, I thought, if the history of this area was interesting and worth knowing, we would have learned about it in school, or at least heard it discussed at length like the Lewis and Clark expedition—one of the few national historical events that took place in North Dakota. If the town and its history had been important, they would have been preserved in the first

place. I did not care about its connection to New Town, the bridge, or its neighbor and rival, Van Hook. All I cared about was the present. As a matter of fact, what was left of Sanish was boring and incomparable to Van Hook as it presently was—the only way I knew it to exist: a thriving summer park that invited a change to the routine life of New Town and a chance at a summer love and night life, where such things were otherwise limited.

Yet, despite my disregard for the bridge, I still let my eyes linger on it longer than usual and even looked back to catch a last glimpse of it as I rounded the curve one more time when I left for college. Whether it was because it was one of those days when the bridge reflected off Lake Sakakawea, or if it was because I was leaving home for the first time for an extended period, I'm not sure; but what was evident was that the bridge actually did hold some sort of meaning for me that I had not noticed before. Each time I came home and each time I left it was the same, though the impact it held was a degree stronger. It began to stand out as an individual figure, no longer painted in as a part of the landscape. By this time, it was not until I saw this bridge that I felt I was truly home.

Shortly after I left for college, preparations began for the construction of a new bridge. Rumors had been in the air for quite a while, though at that time I paid no heed. Like many who lived in or near New Town or drove across the bridge to get to the casino, I thought it was simply about time. The bridge was too narrow for more than one vehicle, unless maybe they were two compact cars. The need for a new bridge grew as traffic steadily increased to and from the casino. Losing a mirror or sideswiping another vehicle were commonplace accidents, and dents in the railings showed where motorists had swerved, possibly from panicking as a hay truck or semi approached. Once, it was rumored, even a motorcyclist's leg was ripped off by a passing car. The new bridge, in other words, couldn't come too soon.

When I returned home the summer after my freshman year, equipment was being moved in and preparatory work for the new bridge had begun. I found myself searching

the water for signs of construction, though at that time only a few barges might be seen floating on the lake. While searching the lake for activity, however, I also became aware that old foundations of Sanish were emerging on the receding shoreline. The emergence of the structures brought stories of Sanish and Van Hook to the surface in small talk and newspapers, and I found myself eavesdropping when someone began telling such tales. My dad began retelling bits of stories his grandfather, Grandpa Jahnke, had once told him, and soon, I found myself wanting to hear more. Sanish, apparently, was much more interesting than I had ever thought; it was a town from the Wild West settled in the Midwest and home to renegades, rustlers, and criminals who were brought there because they had literally reached the end of the tracks. But that was from Grandpa Jahnke, said Dad, and Grandpa was one of the old-timers who had a gift for embellished storytelling. Nonetheless, a history was beginning to unfold, and as far as I could tell, it was a history that was, for the most part, undocumented. As I did minor searching for more details, the lack of a detailed history slowly became frustrating, though at the same time it did provoke curiosity and provide a challenge. All of a sudden, I realized that this history was too interesting, too valuable to disappear with the foundations when the water rose to engulf this ghost town of Sanish.

As Lake Sakakawea receded ever more, stories and bits of information continued to trickle forth and I took note of names and events that were mentioned, including the Sanish Rodeo, the Van Hook dances, the FBI shootout, and the exodus to New Town. My interest and desire to learn more began to gain momentum as I became acquainted with the new bridge workers, though my frustration did begin to grow when it became clear that even they seemed to know more about the history than I did. Some of the workers had done their own research before coming to North Dakota and informed me that the steel workers who had built the old Four Bears Bridge came from the same place as a majority of these workers: Lake Charles, Louisiana. As a new bridge was built parallel to the old, a parallel of their histories also seemed to be constructed. The town was rife with

other construction, much like the time of its birth. Crews on the new bridge experienced similar setbacks due to weather, the ever-changing river, and horrible accidents. History was repeating itself, but the earlier history had nearly disappeared. As I became aware of this on-going history, I also became aware of the urgency to document it. Though I had been foolish enough to disregard the history of my home, I had suddenly begun to realize that I was living history at the moment. It was important to absorb the details now before they faded once more, perhaps never to reveal themselves again.

I watched the slow progression of the bridge construction from my scenic view on Big Bend as I became more and more absorbed with the daily events of my extended summer. I was fortunate that that summer was a longer one for me, though in September, I would be removed far from the construction site as I began my year abroad in Germany. Unfortunately, I would miss a greater part of the pivotal events as the bridge finally began to materialize. By keeping in touch with a few of the bridge workers and checking the live Web cam regularly to watch the progress of the bridge construction, I did, however, remain connected to the project. As for the history I longed to discover, I scoured the Internet for relevant information, though, as I predicted, there was little available documentation apart from what lay in the North Dakota State Library or the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

I returned in July 2005, just in time to see the final segment of the bridge being put in place.¹ Though the bridge was far from complete, it was, nonetheless, the end of the major construction. As we approached the denouement of this historic event, I was somewhat disheartened. With the job nearly complete, a majority of the workers, and our newest residents, would either be laid off or would voluntarily leave for other jobs. As saddening as this was, it did prompt me to act; now was the time for me to work

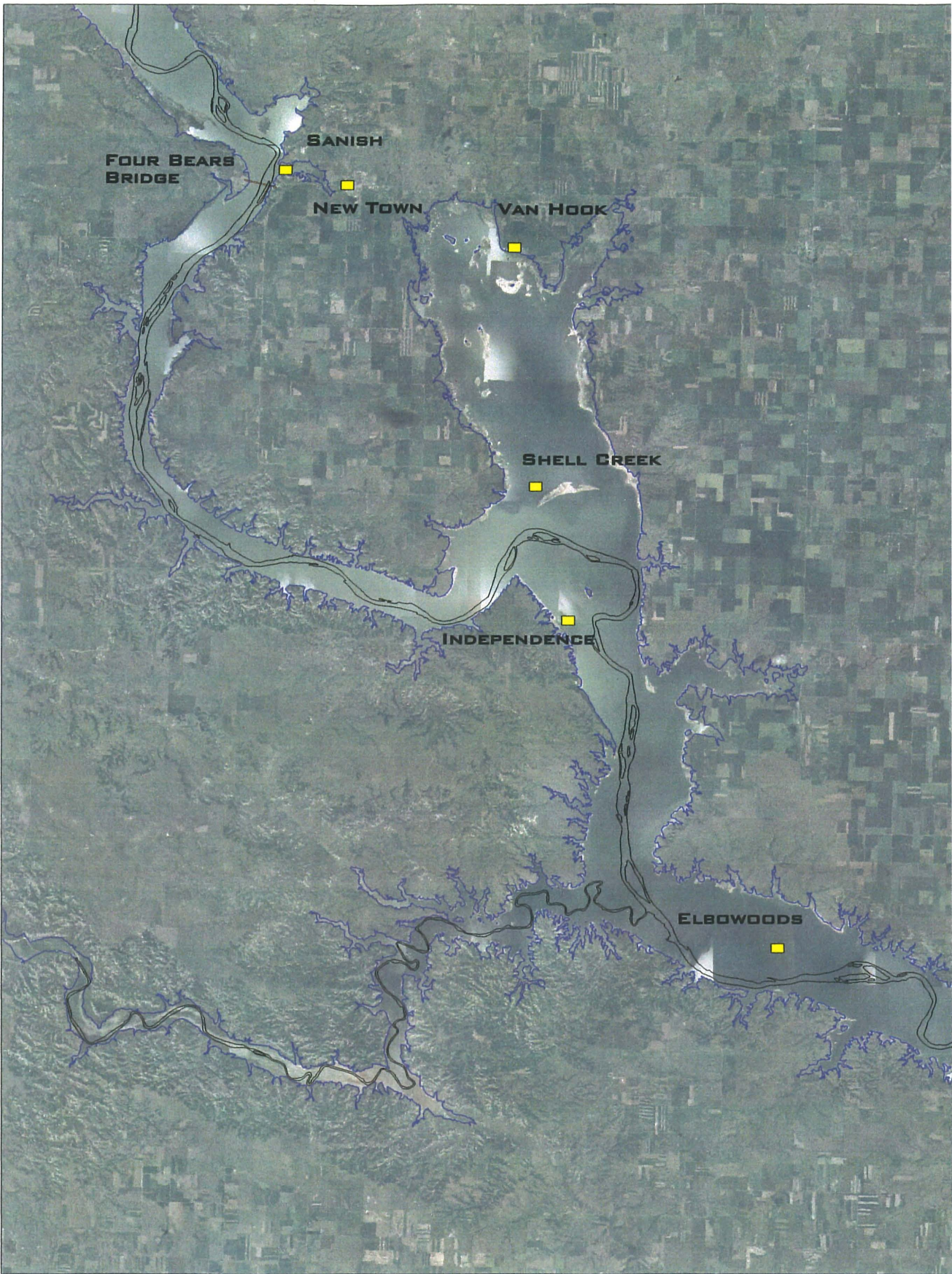
¹ The new bridge is a segmental bridge, meaning large cement segments were cast from a permanent mold. Each segment was then hung, one by one, from each of the piers. Epoxy was used to hold the segments together and once they were finished, cables were strung through each one, pulling and holding them together. In other words, as the bridge workers explained to us, our new bridge was put together with "cables and glue" (Robinson 2005).

toward the historical preservation before the memory of the events left with the last worker or was swallowed by the lake waters when—or if—the drought ended and Lake Sakakawea was brought back to a healthy state.

Sanish's Anniversary Celebration Committee compiled the town's 25-year-old history in hopes that "...those of the present Sanish may know a few of the pleasures enjoyed by the older generation and that future generations may know of the history as it was made. That we may realize the courage of those early citizens, through periods of plenty and of scarcity, both of produce and of the necessary rains" (2, 1940). This oral history seeks to do the same. It is a privilege owed to these past generations, who sacrificed in the hope of a better future for other generations. It tells of the struggles and sacrifices of a group of people who lived more than fifty years ago. Though this part of our past had nearly disappeared, this research has taken one step further to preserving their memories not only for the sake of their past, but to bring that history into today and apply it to our future.

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Introduction

The steady ringing could be heard three miles away in New Town. The noise drew crowds out west to the Four Bears Bridge to see what this racket was all about. There they watched as a 93,000 pound hammer connected to a crane pounded 1,700 feet of pipe piling into the floor of Lake Sakakawea (Ogden 2003). The past few months had been mounting up to this, but all the activity seemed to come as a surprise to a town that had remained dormant to the outside world for the last forty years. The rumors and minor preparations had finally materialized: major construction of the new Four Bears Bridge had finally begun.

The pounding did not only attract an audience to the site, but also brought workers from all over the nation as this \$55.4 million project got underway (Donovan n.d.). From that moment, New Town, already a busy summer haven for outdoorsmen, seemed almost frantic as the town was flooded with bridge workers, street crews, and carpenters. Houses went up on the north end of town, a juvenile detention center was under construction east of town, and the streets were being torn up as a construction crew worked on replacing waterlines throughout the city. The town was so full of activity, in fact, that the times were almost reminiscent of the years between 1950 and 1953. It was between these years that a muddy pasture was developed into this small town, where people with very little in common except their exodus from their homes came together.¹ Few people, however, would recognize this.

At only fifty-five, New Town is still young and its history fresh, but its origins go far back. The historical roots of this town seemed to extend only as far as 1950, when a muddy field was dedicated as the site for a new town. The roots, however, extended much further, first to 1944, when the Flood Control Act was passed by Congress, further

¹ Bernice Houser commented that New Town was composed of "a mixture of people thrown together that really had not much in common and ... their roots aren't really here." Bernice Houser, interview by Tessa Sandstrom, New Town, ND, November 20, 2005, tape recording, transcript, in author's possession.

yet to 1914 and 1915, when Van Hook and Sanish were established, and even further to times immemorial when the lands belonged to the indigenous tribes of North America. Unlike most towns of North Dakota, New Town did not come into being by chance, but instead came out of need. Its creation, then, was unique.

The town's birth, however, was widely ignored as it fell under the shadow of a larger and more nationally important project: the Garrison Dam. In its time, the Garrison Dam was a colossal accomplishment for a nation, one that was supposed to control a wily river, turn semi-arid North Dakota into a paradise, and bring safety to Americans further down the river who faced the rebelliousness of the mighty Missouri River each spring. For this project to materialize, however, hundreds of thousands upstream in the Missouri River Valley would have to sacrifice their lands and their lives as they had known them. This contribution, however, would not only be one of land, but of hard work, community, heartache, and their very roots, as people were forced to move from their homes. At the same time that this event would tear communities and homesteads apart, it was also bringing three very different towns and groups of people together.² On a field just three miles east of the new bridgehead, the communities of Elbowoods, Sanish, and Van Hook came together in a town later known as New Town. There the people of the communities strove to rebuild their homes. There, they worked to bring normalcy back to their lives. The waters of the Garrison Reservoir slowly rose, covering the foundations of the three towns, and the memories of the three communities seemed to join them. This, however, changed as the bridge, which had stood as a witness to all of this, seemed to have the final say.

As engineers and construction workers began to appear in the summer of 2003 to begin work on the new bridge, so did the lost village of Sanish. A drought that had been plaguing farmers for the last few years was beginning to have its effect on the lake, and

² Initially, it brought an entire nation as well as Sanish and Van Hook together. The Fort Berthold Reservation as a whole was affected, including eight Indian villages. Elbowoods, however, was the largest, and as the headquarters for government affairs, the most prominent. The scope of this project therefore, has concentrated on Elbowoods (Hudson 2005, 1998, & n.d.; Vandevelder 2004).

slowly the foundations of what were once houses, businesses, and elevators seemed to inch their way out of Lake Sakakawea. Though the foundations were barely visible anymore, people again began scouring the now partly exposed bottomlands for signs of Sanish; the receding lake, it seemed, had uncovered not only remnants of a village, but remnants of a disappearing history. Although it was common for Sanish to resurface in the minds of its old inhabitants when low water and drought revealed the town, the interest seemed to grow stronger with the prospect that the old bridge, the last remaining structure of this era, would soon join Sanish beneath Sakakawea's waters.

These foundations and a sudden need to know more about the history of this bridge sparked a certain curiosity, not only in those who had lived in the area, but also those across the state as the Department of Transportation began a project to preserve the history of this North Dakota landmark. Human interest pieces and feature articles appeared in newspapers, bringing forth brief facts about this area.³ Though these gave people more than they had known before, there were still holes in the history, information and facts were missing, and a larger story remained untold. For the most part, in other words, this history was largely undocumented—or at least unpublished. The most available and recent sources all contained the same general facts or addressed only the present effects of the Garrison Dam. *The Forum* published a short series of articles on the dam, titled the “Unfinished Dream,” that focused on the aftermath of the Garrison Dam.

³ Such sources included in this oral history include a special series in *The Forum* by Patrick Springer and Janell Cole:

Janell Cole, “Garrison Dam, Day 1: History and traffic converge on bridge,” *The Forum*, June 8, 2003, <http://www.in-forum.com/specials/garrison/index.cfm?page=article&id=34770>.

The Forum, “Drought uncovers some of Sanish,” September 22, 1988.

Patrick Springer, “Garrison Dam, Day 3: River tug of war,” *The Forum*, June 10, 2003a, <http://www.in-forum.com/specials/garrison/index.cfm?page=article&id=34870>.

Patrick Springer, “Garrison Dam, Day 3: Tortured past, troubled present,” *The Forum*, June 10, 2003b, <http://www.in-forum.com/specials/garrison/index.cfm?page=article&id=34871>.

Patrick Springer, “Garrison Dam, Day 2: ‘A bitter chapter’, State awaits proper due for generations of sacrifice,” *The Forum*, June 9, 2003, <http://www.in-forum.com/specials/garrison/index.cfm?page=article&id=34814>.

Patrick Springer, “A flood of tears: Five decades later, tribes still recovering from dam losses,” *The Forum*, June 8d, 2003, <http://www.in-forum.com/specials/garrison/index.cfm?page=article&id=34778>.

Articles reflecting the Three Affiliated Tribes' past efforts to thwart the construction of the Garrison Dam in the 1940s and 1950s were numerous, while little was made available of the reservation villages' histories and personal stories. Even less was available on Sanish and Van Hook, apart from the cities' anniversary programs. Microfilms of newspapers provided the necessary dates and excerpts on major events, but they gave little away on the people and occurrences that shaped the towns and the citizens' everyday life prior to the dam. What was said of their exodus was an optimistic view of new and better times to come and not, as I would later come to find, of the difficulties and strain of each day as residents relocated and rebuilt their homes and lives. It soon became evident that this history was so hidden and so unknown, in fact, that not even Elwyn B. Robinson's *History of North Dakota* recognized the plight of these people and the disappearance of some of North Dakota's richest farming land. The next sources to consult were those who had once called the villages of Elbowoods, Sanish, and Van Hook home, among them Marilyn Hudson, Bernice Houser, Rita Satermo, and Bob Gorder.

The interviews proved to be invaluable, and some eventually led to other forms of information. Marilyn Hudson, former resident of Elbowoods and the current administrator of the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum in New Town, introduced me to *Coyote Warrior*, a book by Paul VanDevelder that tells the story and history of the creation of the Garrison Dam, the fight of an indigenous people, and the end of a prosperous era for the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations. VanDevelder progresses through the life of Martin Cross, the tribal chairman during these pivotal years, and later, his youngest son, Raymond, as they fought for the rights of the tribes. Bernice Houser, a former resident of Sanish, has worked for several years to collect and preserve parts of Sanish's history (Lund 1973). In her interview, she referred me to *Valley of the Dammed* by Bigelow Neal. *Valley of the Dammed* appeared first as a series of articles in the *McLean County Independent* and other newspapers, and was later printed as a book. Neal

was a Garrison resident⁴ who opposed the Army Corps of Engineers' relocation policy and would later fight for more government aid for the people of Sanish. Both told stories of the unsung heroes of an untold history.

These sources and interviews revealed that not only was there a rich history that was fading fast, but that North Dakota, an often overlooked state, had handed over its best resources and wealth for the amelioration of the nation. The cost was that hundreds of individuals would suffer; but their sacrifices, for the most part, had gone unnoticed and unappreciated. The importance of their trials had been so overlooked, that even those who had grown up right on the shores of Lake Sakakawea were unfamiliar with their sacrifice. One woman expressed the shock she felt in reading about these events in *Coyote Warrior* in a letter to Marilyn. The woman, said Marilyn, had grown up and spent her whole life in Killdeer, not far from where Elbowoods would be today. "I knew nothing about Elbowoods," the woman told Marilyn.⁵ "I was taught nothing about the Garrison Dam, and I grew up in the sixties and seventies after the Garrison Dam was built. I knew nothing about Indian people or Fort Berthold," said the woman. "In other words, I didn't know any of this had happened, and there, I lived right on the banks of Lake Sakakawea" (Hudson 2005). The woman continued to tell Marilyn that more local history, especially of such significance, needed to be taught to the people of North Dakota. "She was—appalled, you know," said Marilyn. "She said, 'Here's all this history that was right there and we were not taught any of it.'"

What is told of those years is how the U.S. Government and the Army Corps of Engineers tamed and harnessed the energy of a mighty river through the construction of the Garrison Dam. What remains untold, however, are the stories of those who made the sacrifice for a nation, and the histories of the "Atlantises" of Lake Sakakawea.⁶ What we lost when the Missouri fattened and spread across her bottomlands were not only three

⁴ Though originally from the Garrison area, Neal eventually came to reside in Sanish (Lund 1973).

⁵ All direct quotes from the interviews and sources in this text are written as they were spoken.

⁶ Lauren Donovan of the *Bismarck Tribune* compared Sanish with the city of Atlantis, a mythological city that disappeared beneath the sea "stirred by angry gods over 11,000 years ago" (2004).

small villages of North Dakota, but a history of a people. These were the people of the Valley of the Dammed.⁷

⁷ *Valley of the Dammed* is the title of a pamphlet written by former Garrison and Sanish resident Bigelow Neal. Neal was a critic of the proposed project. Even after losing that battle, Neal continued to fight for the rights of the citizens of Sanish. Neal was successful in getting the citizens nearly 60 percent more financial aid than originally offered by the U.S. Government and Corps of Engineers.

CHAPTER I

“The Big Dam Project”

“The story of how this came about is sordid. In no place among all its chapters is there a rift where the sun shines through. It is the story of this greed. It is the story of stupidity. It is the story of man’s cruelty to man.”

BIGELOW NEAL, GARRISON, 1949⁸

Begun in 1947, the construction of the Garrison Dam would demarcate a historical period for the state, as well as the nation. The Missouri River, long known for spontaneity, had proven herself a giver of life by providing many with lush lands for agriculture, trapping, mining, and timber.⁹ She had, however, also proven herself deadly, flooding farms and taking back crops she had previously provided. The river was so fickle, in fact, that the editor of the *Sioux City Register* wrote: “Of all the variable things in creation, the most uncertain are those of juries, the state of a woman’s mind, and the condition of the Missouri River” (as cited by VanDevelder 2004, 82). Talk of trying to tame “The Big Muddy” began as early as the 1920s. But her behavior in the spring of 1943 would be the last straw for the United States government. In April 1943, the Missouri flooded Omaha, an occurrence that was disastrous—though at the same, not out of the ordinary. Each year, as the frozen surface of the river would break up, a small dam of ice would form somewhere on the upper segment of the river, holding back water until the ice and river would finally “come down,” causing minor flash floods along the way. The spring of 1943, however, would be much different. The breakup of this natural dam due to unusually warm temperatures on the northern plains already proved threatening. This threat, at the same time as this damming, turned into a nightmare when a low pressure system was moving in from the Gulf of Mexico, bringing with it additional

⁸ Bigelow Neal, *Valley of the Dammed* (Garrison: McLean County Independent, 1949), p. 1.

⁹ The Missouri River, because of its character, had been given several nicknames including “the Big Muddy” and the “Mighty Missouri.” In its gentler states, it was known as “Grandmother-river” by the Sioux tribes (North Dakota Water 2002, 4).

moisture. The combination of the two was deadly. Rain, along with the runoff from the Rocky Mountains, pushed the Missouri River over her banks, inundating land east of both Omaha and Kansas City (Vandevelder 2004).

At the time, the public's attention was focused abroad on the wars in Europe and Asia, and the disaster wasn't recognized by the nation until May, when a second flood carried away entire towns in Iowa and Nebraska. Finally, in June, the Missouri would get the attention for which she had seemed to be pushing. On June 13, a third flood would cover millions of acres of farmland, leaving much of the Midwest under North America's largest temporary lake (VanDevelder 2004). America's heartland lay in devastation as homes, livestock, and whole farms were carried off by the Big Muddy. That June, the Missouri River had claimed her spot on the front page of the *New York Times*, and the U.S. Government declared war on yet another front: the Missouri River.

Two men, Army Corps of Engineers' Colonel Lewis Pick and Bureau of Reclamation Engineer Glenn Sloan committed themselves to the task of planning the Missouri River diversion. Both plans were submitted to Congress,¹⁰ and after much debate, it combined the two plans in 1944 in what Farmers Union president James Patton called a "shameless, loveless shotgun wedding" (as cited by VanDevelder 2004, 104) and construction of the dam began in 1947. Yet while the series of dams along the Missouri River would be a chance to finally gain victory over the Missouri's relentless and erratic force, this marriage and promise of a new era of prosperity would prove to be a funeral

¹⁰ Following the Flood Control Act of 1936 and the Reclamation Project Act of 1939, the Bureau of Reclamation began studies for projects on the Missouri River (VanDevelder 2004). Sloan was one of the civil engineers who began work on plans for multi-use diversion plans. Sloan had already spent three years on his plans when they were finally submitted to Congress. His plans included several small dams on the Missouri's tributaries that would both prevent flooding and provide irrigation to the area. The Garrison Dam was not included in his plans. In fact, previous studies of the Bureau showed that the site chosen for this dam was impractical because "the foundation materials lacked 'sufficient crushing strength' to support a high dam" and because the Missouri was subject to rapid silting (Meyer 1977, 211). Pick's plan, on the other hand, prepared in only ninety days, was dedicated mainly to flood control, but also sought to aid in downstream navigation. The most important feature of this plan was the Garrison Dam. This dam was reported by the water agencies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Reclamation as an "unnecessary extravagance" that would devastate people in the valley for thousands of years (VanDevelder 2004, 119).

for and end of another era for thousands of people in North Dakota. Though many questioned and even protested the proposed plan, primarily the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes,¹¹ Congress went ahead with its plans, promising not only the control of the Missouri, but also irrigation for the area farmers, cheap electricity, and tourism and recreation opportunities in what would become the nation's third largest man-made lake. For the U.S. government, the subsequent losses of the project were expendable, and Lieutenant Colonel R. J. B. Page of the Army Corps of Engineers assured those hesitant and critical of the project that "for every dollar spent in building the Garrison dam, \$1.40¹² may be expected to be returned in the form of benefits" (as cited by Cory 1953b).

Robert Cory of the *Minot Daily News*, however, questioned whether what North Dakota might be sacrificing balanced what might be gained. In his article, Cory listed a number of losses North Dakota would suffer, which included 465,000 acres of land (150,000 of which were reservation lands) and the loss of the three towns of Sanish, Van Hook, and Elbowoods, in addition to other small community centers scattered up and down the Missouri. Some of the state's richest farmland, range land, mineral resources, and 370,000 acres of "river-bottom ecology" would be given over to the Garrison Reservoir. These, however, were tangible losses and a majority their material worth could be compensated with money; yet the value of these losses was pale beside the intangible losses North Dakota would endure. What the residents of the valley would be asked to give up were not only lands and homes, but their entire livelihood and the places where they had grown up and built their lives—the places where their fondest memories were made. "There is, of course," wrote Cory, "no way to measure the heart-aches of many of

¹¹ The tribes challenged the diversion plan repeatedly in court, offering new plans and a new site for a dam. The tribes were joined by several senators and engineers who opposed the plan, stating that the Garrison Dam was an unnecessary extravagance, based on earlier studies' findings that the foundation there was insufficient for such a project. The results of the trials, however, only seemed to set the tribes' efforts back, a history told in Paul VanDevelder's *Coyote Warrior*. It wouldn't be until the late 1990s that the tribes would finally receive reparations for their forced sacrifice.

¹² According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), this amount would be equal to \$10.40 in 2006. This amount was found using the CPI Inflation Calculator provided on the U.S. Department of Labor's website at <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>. All other monetary values below \$10,000 (the calculator only allows this maximum) will be calculated using this source in further annotations.

the several thousands of people who are required to move from chosen homes, even tho [sic] humble, and from a way of life that was satisfactory to them” (1953b). Despite his concerns, Cory, much like those who had made their lives in the Missouri River Basin, accepted that they were to become heroes by contributing to the cause of the nation: “But that is part of the sacrifice,” said Cory, “and part of the contribution North Dakota is making to allow the Garrison Dam project to come into existence” (1953b).

This contribution would not be a choice, but a reluctant acceptance of “eminent domain,” the ability of government to appropriate property without the owner’s consent. For those of European background who were accustomed to this tradition, the idea of eminent domain was inarguable. For the Native Americans who had lived in the valley since time immemorial, however, the idea of handing over even more land to the government was yet another violation of the many treaties signed. “It is hard to explain the law of eminent domain to people like that,” said Cory, “with whom the government has made a ‘treaty.’ This broken pledge—however justifiable it may be in the light of changes unforeseen—also must be weighed and added to the loss side of the balance sheet.” The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations would no doubt suffer greatly as a result of the Garrison Dam. They would be just one of many groups of people who were forced to give up their lives as they had known them for what was promulgated as the greater good of a nation.

CHAPTER II

Elbowoods

"There was a time when I believed in Santa Claus. I also believed in fairies. And along about that time my mother taught me about the flag of our country and how, under its starry folds, rippling up there against the sky, there could be nothing but things that were nice like freedom and justice and generosity and mercy. And above all I came to believe that such a thing as deceit in the name of that flag was not only unthinkable but an impossibility. I clung to that belief a good many years."

BIGELOW NEAL, GARRISON, 1949¹³

"I told Wayne we should go plant some potatoes on Shell Creek," said Cheryl, the main bartender at the Scenic 23. "I bet that's really good soil for potatoes." She paused, pondering, and I watched as the wind whipped up dust where there should have been whitecaps on the surface of the lake. "But the Corps of Engineers would never let us out there," added Cheryl as an afterthought (Feiring 2004).

The irony of her comment lies not only in the fact that a year before, she and other fishermen were catching some of the biggest walleye Lake Sakakawea had to offer, but also in the fact that just 50 years ago, Shell Creek was fertile ground for crops, gardens, and grazing land. Shell Creek was just one of the eight small communities of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, including Nishu, Beaver Creek, Red Butte, Lucky Mound, Independence, Charging Eagle, and Elbowoods, that lay on some of the most fertile ground of North Dakota. Today, those areas that are not above water as a result of the drought remain some of North Dakota's most fertile beds for walleye and the sites of popular summer resorts; those that are above water are scraggly grasslands where there were once giant cottonwoods. At least one can say the communities' names remain alive in some respect; nonetheless, their memories are painful for those who remember the villages before the flood.

¹³ Taken from Neal's book, *Valley of the Dammed* (1949, 7).

Located in the sheltered valley between the Mandan Bluffs, the eight small villages were connected by the sometimes wily, sometimes tranquil Missouri River, which snaked through the forest of large cottonwoods that lined the bottom of the basin. The tribes had been in that particular area for about 100 years before the taming of the Missouri, and by living off the resources the river helped supply, had remained a self-sufficient nation secluded from the world beyond the borders of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Fort Berthold, home of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes, had been referred to as North Dakota's most prosperous reservation by many.¹⁴ Though the tribes had lived on this land since time immemorial, they had come to call this particular area home following the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1866, when the three tribes were recognized as the Three Affiliated Tribes.¹⁵

Marilyn Hudson (née Cross) had spent her whole childhood in Elbowoods, the "central hub" of the reservation.¹⁶ The village, named Elbowoods because it was situated in a heavily wooded bend of the river, was surrounded on three sides by the Missouri. Though Elbowoods was not an incorporated town like Sanish or Van Hook, said Marilyn, the town was still a center for much of the reservation and government activities. "It was

¹⁴ Robert Cory of the *Minot Daily News* spoke of the reservation as the most prosperous when he sought to create a "balance sheet" to weigh the losses and gains of the Garrison Dam project (1953b). In her *History of North Dakota*, Ruth Kinnersley spoke about the sale of 23,040 acres of land north and east of the river to white settlers. "This money," said Kinnersley, "made the Fort Berthold Indians one of the most prosperous Indian Tribes" (n.d., 2).

The Sanish Silver Anniversary Jubilee Program also dedicated a section to the successful agriculturists who not only grew enough to support themselves, but enough to supply seed for the entire northwest of the Missouri River Basin (Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration Committee 1940, 59).

¹⁵ Their most noted settlements dated back to the 1700s, when the Mandan and Hidatsa resided along the Heart River. One hundred years later, the tribes moved further north to the location along the Knife River (near what is the town of Stanton today) where they would house the legendary Lewis and Clark in the winter of 1804, sheltering them from the harsh North Dakota winter. Lewis and Clark subsequently founded Fort Mandan, a center for trading furs, corn, flint and other items, near those villages. A small pox epidemic in 1837 wiped out a large majority of the two tribes and forced the survivors to move north to the site known as Like-a-Fishhook village in 1845. They were later joined by the Arikara in 1862, forming what is today known as the Three Affiliated Tribes (Hudson n.d.).

¹⁶ Much of the information in this section, unless otherwise cited, is from the interview with Marilyn Hudson. Marilyn was chosen for this interview, not only because she had lived in the area before it was flooded and because her father and brother played a large part in the events surrounding the dam, but because of her knowledge of the topic. As the administrator of the Three Tribes Museum in New Town, ND, Marilyn has also aided several other writers of a similar topic, as well as written her own reports on the Four Bears Bridge and the history of the three tribes (Hudson 1998, n.d.)

the hub of all the Indian affairs activities, as well as the school.... Elbowoods was quite a thriving community in the years that I grew up there It was quite an interesting place” (Hudson 2005). Founded in what Marilyn approximated as the late 1800s, the village’s main purpose was to serve as a government headquarters for Indian affairs.

The government offices were by far the biggest contributors to the livelihood of Elbowoods. The Indian agency located in Elbowoods conducted daily government business, including land issues, education, health, maintenance, law enforcement, social work, and other city or county government affairs. Those offices included a staff of close to one hundred people, said Marilyn. While government affairs contributed to making Elbowoods the hub of the reservation, adjacent to the Indian agency was the school, another major center of the town. Elbowoods served as the center for upper level education on the reservation. Though the other communities of the Fort Berthold Reservation also had schools, they only offered up to an eighth grade education, after which students who wished to continue their education would move into the dormitories in Elbowoods. The Elbowoods campus, then, was made up of these dormitories, as well as a clubhouse for the teachers who usually also resided right at the school. Near both the school and the government headquarters was the Catholic mission, made up of a rectory, a church, and several other buildings where different activities were held.

The other seven villages were smaller replicas of Elbowoods, each a thriving, self-sustaining community of the Fort Berthold Reservation.¹⁷ People hunted and foraged for what could not be obtained from the rich soil of the Missouri River bottomlands. The

¹⁷ This stated fact by many of the people who lived in the communities must also be viewed from another perspective, given the fact that other reports contradict these claims. Though several former citizens of the bottomlands have commented about the prosperity and health of the tribes in the years before the floods, a study conducted in 1948 found that the tribes actually received lower incomes and “based on superficial observations ... there is undernutrition [sic] among the people.” In addition, sicknesses including trachoma, tuberculosis, and venereal diseases were “extremely high, compared to other races in North Dakota. Sickness, undernutrition arising from low income and poor housing conditions, and home habits contribute to lack of energy and feelings of insecurity among the population” (Macgregor 1948b, 7). Macgregor also states that the tribes were left dependent upon the government following the two waves of small pox that dramatically effected the tribes. This dependency, however, was only worsened by the suppression of the native institutions, cultures, religions, etc., which created a “cultural vacuum” (8).

thickly wooded bottomlands supplied the people of the basin, not only with shelter from the extreme temperatures and wind of the harsh North Dakota winter, but also wild game to supplement other supplies. The woods were prime hunting grounds, with both wild game and fruits and berries that grew along the riverbanks. This land, then, was dear to the tribes because of its productivity, an aspect that prompted one of the field engineers of the Garrison Dam, Byron Sneva to travel into the area each year for hunting. "Those river bottomlands were a different world. There was so much game in the fields and woodlands of the bottom that we never bought meat at the grocery store," said Sneva (VanDevellder 2004, 144).

Born in 1936, Marilyn was just one of the ten children of Martin and Dorothy Cross. Martin, a chief's son and descendant of Sakakawea's stepfather, was a rodeo cowboy in his earlier years. Dorothy Bartel, the daughter of Norwegian immigrants who had settled in Van Hook, was introduced to Martin through his sister, Maggie Grinnell. Maggie and Dorothy became good friends, and Dorothy spent most of her free time in Elbowoods. According to Marilyn, "She was a pretty Norwegian girl, the only daughter of first-generation homesteaders, and he was the dashing rodeo cowboy, the son of a tribal chief. With our dad, life for this high-spirited girl from dreary Van Hook was suddenly very exciting."¹⁸ Even though her parents disapproved, Dorothy married Martin in September 1928. The newlyweds spent their first summer traveling from rodeo to rodeo, until they finally settled down in the farmhouse built by Martin's father, Old Dog. Martin began his ranching and Dorothy took care of the garden. Both would eventually begin caring for their growing family—a family that would come to play a leading role in the Garrison Dam and the tribes' rights for almost fifty years.¹⁹

¹⁸ This quote was not taken from my interview, but from Paul VanDevellder's book *Coyote Warrior* (2004 90). The history of the Cross family covered in this paragraph was the work of Paul VanDevellder.

¹⁹ Martin stepped up as the Tribal Council Chair in the years that the Three Affiliated Tribes challenged Congress over the placement of the Garrison Dam. He spent the next few years traveling to and from Washington, D.C., but to no avail. As the tribes' efforts to divert the plan fell apart, so did his marriage, and Dorothy and Martin were divorced after the flood. He continued to fight for the tribes' rights after, as with many of the past treaties, the promises made by the government vanished with Elbowoods. Fifty years later,

The Crosses were a typical Elbowoods family. They sustained themselves on what they raised; Martin took care of the horses, cattle, and other livestock, while Dorothy raised a large garden, as well as a field of corn and potatoes. When the children came and grew old enough, they, too, took on the responsibilities of the farming and ranching life. Like other families on the Fort Berthold Reservation, the Crosses led a relatively simple life, drawing from the resources of the land in summer and harvesting and drying what was raised in the gardens to sustain them through the winter. Much like the Crosses, most families Marilyn knew lived out in the country and either farmed or ranched. "Almost everyone that I knew there lived on their own land and raised their own food, you know, whether it be cattle or vegetables. We went to the store for things like sugar, probably maybe oil, but it was a pretty self-sufficient community" (Hudson 2005).²⁰

The people of the Fort Berthold Reservation had nearly everything they needed at hand, from social aspects to necessities. The connections the tribes had always held with the land seemed to provide all that was needed, and the people remained secluded from the outside world, apart from casual links with the surrounding white communities. "We often went from Elbowoods to Halliday. The towns that we did business with was Halliday to the southwest, Garrison to the east, and Parshall to the north.... People wanted to go shopping, or if you needed something repaired or if you were going to buy something. There was a lot of times when people needed things, especially with the farm work. A farmer might need a plow, or something fixed on the plow." If what they needed were simple things like machinery or supplies that could not be harvested from the land, the smaller outside communities proved enough. If special occasions arose, people often traveled to Minot or Bismarck, though these trips were usually rare. "I do recall going to things like some of the big circuses in Minot, or some of the events in Bismarck, but we

however, the youngest Cross, Raymond, succeeded in finally securing the payment promised to the tribes half a century ago, a subject that will be discussed later in this paper (VanDevellder 2004).

²⁰ Unless otherwise cited, all other direct quotes from Marilyn come from her interview on November 25, 2005 with the author in New Town, ND.

didn't travel a whole lot, you know, in those years. So when we did go to Minot, then it would be a real thrill. You know, we thought that was really big time." Marilyn laughed. Going to Minot today was an everyday occasion for some. "Big times," she said.

The reliance on land, however, also meant much hard work, not only for the parents, but also for the children. "I think a lot of young people's time, then, was spent working. You know, we had a lot of chores at home. Somebody had to take care of the cows, the livestock, the chickens. There was always gardening to be done, harvesting.... There was always work to be done." On an average day as a teenager, Marilyn said she probably attended school about six hours, followed by at least two hours of work each day, leaving little time for leisure activities. But if time was limited, so were financial resources. "We didn't have much spendable cash. Everybody lived on a pretty limited budget. The income [our parents] derived was in the fall when they might have sold cattle, or sold a crop. Even then it was quite limited." Otherwise, if a family needed something they could not provide for themselves, they would often barter with others. "Sometimes there was trading back and forth. Somebody, for example my father, might need some ... potatoes, and our neighbors to the north had a big potato crop. Well, he might be willing to trade oats or—or a bag of some other type of grain—wheat or something," said Marilyn.

By reaping the natural resources available to them or utilizing the resources for agriculture, the land of the reservation provided the people with enough to get by and still flourish culturally and personally, if not financially. "[Elbowoods] was a pretty self-sufficient community ... everyone could depend upon, you know, themselves, or their neighbors," said Marilyn. Indeed, a lot of the livelihood of the area derived from neighbors, family, and the school. "We had a lot of social activities connected with the school—basketball, I think we even had, like movies on Wednesday nights, church groups, Girl Scouts, lot of—lot of programs like that." Many of the people, especially teenagers, would often look forward to those activities. "Most of us lived out in the

country, and in those years, didn't have a lot of means of transportation. So when we did get together with other students our age, it was—it was real—a pleasure and a lot of fun.” Games often revolved around outdoor activities or sports: basketball and snowball fights in the winter, and softball, rodeos, and riding horseback in summer. “Recreation in those years was a very simple type of recreation. You had to learn how to entertain yourself. There were no ready-made games like kids are experiencing today,” said Marilyn. “So, entertainment was in the form of reading, jigsaw puzzles, or you could make up your games. We did a lot of—fortunately I came from a big family, so we were never at a loss for having somebody to get together with as far as making up a game or playing. And in the summertime it was outdoor—a lot of outdoor games. Riding horseback was another big sport. Everybody owned their own horse and we had the freedom to ride where we wanted. But it was always combined with a lot of hard work, so I would characterize my whole childhood probably as one of a lot of freedom in terms of my own time, but also a lot of responsibility and a lot of hard work.”

Throughout Marilyn's childhood, much remained unchanged for Elbowoods and the other communities of the Fort Berthold Reservation. The tribes kept close ties with family, the land, and their traditions in their ability to draw what they needed from their land. The bluffs and trees that provided shelter from the weather also sheltered them from the outside world. In the years following the War, the news of the Garrison Dam would tear this shelter open.

CHAPTER III

Van Hook

"I sat looking the country over and all of a sudden saw the possibilities of a nice big lake to the south so I dreamed in a dam across the river at the slides—I built a dock approximately where the high water line will be in a couple of years. I filled the lake with water of course and right away I found myself on board my dream boat."

JOHN OLSON, VAN HOOK, 1912²¹

The small, idyllic, Norwegian town of Van Hook, named after a teamster who served the railroad surveyors, was situated on the prairies of North Dakota, eight miles north of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation (Kinnersley n.d.). Opened for charter registration, the right to settle a land lot in the area, in 1911, farmers slowly began to filter into and homestead the area by 1912. Those years proved challenging as prairie fires, spring floods, hot, dry summers, and sickness were among the hardships faced by homesteaders. Settlers quickly learned to be self-sufficient since the nearest town was Plaza, nearly thirty miles away. In the first years, loneliness was a defining characteristic of life on the prairies and seemed to affect women the most. Homesteaders went days, weeks, and even months without seeing other people. Mary Metzger, one of the first to file for land in the Van Hook area, lived alone for thirty-five years. "Except for the cars that went by or the train night and morning, she could see no signs of life but her neighbor's smoke" (Kinnersley n.d., 8). Mr. and Mrs. Fred Aisenbrey, other homesteaders in the area, spent their first winter there completely alone. When spring came, it also brought neighbors and the Aisenbreds reported going outside just to look at the light off to the distance.

²¹ Taken from Ruth Kinnersley's "History of Van Hook." John Olson was one of the first settlers in the Van Hook area and this is a thought—now almost a prophesy—he had as he camped near the river in 1912 (n.d., 5). All additional background information in this chapter is also taken from Kinnersley unless otherwise cited.

Settling the area was no doubt a challenge, but according to Ruth Kinnersley, homesteaders looked back at the time as both a difficult challenge and an exciting time. "In looking back it is easy for us to think it was either all fun and excitement to homestead or that it was all hardship. In truth it was both. Most of these people enjoy telling about their early experiences but would not be anxious to live through many of them again" (n.d., 8).

In 1914, lots were finally put up for auction in what would soon become Van Hook. O.H. Ulrich was Van Hook's first resident and business owner when bidding for lots ended on November 5, 1914. According to Stephanie Schulte, granddaughter of one of the founders of Van Hook, the building of the town boomed through the spring of 1915, making the town known as "The City of Speed" (1979). Signs were erected boasting of the town's quick growth and the town even developed its own slogan: "Speed Limit, 75 miles per Hour, Beat it if You Can."²² Van Hook was officially incorporated as a town on July 23, 1915 and continued to prosper, until it was home of two theaters, five grain elevators, four banks, six churches, two hotels, three restaurants, two newspapers, a tailor, and a millinery. The "City of Speed," however, would contract as quickly as it developed (Kinnersley n.d.).

The "Dirty Thirties" hit the northern Plains hard as residents watched their crops shrivel in the heat and be devoured by grasshoppers and army worms. Farms dried up and cattle starved. Though there was hay available for purchase, many farmers simply could not afford it. Farms were abandoned as farmers were either forced to leave for failing to pay taxes, or willfully left in search of more opportunities and better lives in the West. The government finally did step in to buy the sick and starving cattle for \$20²³ a head. The cattle fit for eating were butchered and canned. The rest were shot and buried. With

²² The information about Van Hook's signs and slogan were taken from Ruth Kinnersley's "A History of Van Hook." All capitalization and punctuation are hers as they appear in the text.

²³ The amount today would be \$237.49 a head. According to the Northern Livestock, a healthy heifer would be about \$950 (Sandstrom, pers. comm. 2006). Though \$237.49 is far below this amount, farmers were receiving more than they could have trying to sell these cows on the market.

nothing else to do, the men of Van Hook built a golf course, though the game was tough as wind whipped dry soil in this area that had come to resemble a desert. More government aid was eventually given to the residents of the area, including food and clothing.

Rita Satermo (née Wollschlager) was a young girl at that time and grew up on a farm southwest of Parshall.²⁴ Much like the Three Affiliated Tribes at the time, many of the farming families were self-sufficient. “We had a farm so we had milk, butter, eggs, cream. We ground our own grain for bread flour. *God*, I got tired of whole wheat bread!” She leaned forward, her eyes widening. “Now you pay two seventy-five for a loaf of whole wheat bread!” She laughed at the change. Change, however, would become a familiarity to Rita within a few years. Reflecting again on her past and the hard times faced while she grew up, Rita continued, “My mother raised turkeys and my dad paid the taxes with her turkey money so we went without this furniture that she was going to buy.” The Wollschlagers, then, worked hard to support themselves through the first few years of the Depression.

The strain that the dry years brought, however, would weigh heavily on the Wollschlagers, as it did on many other families in the area, no matter the effort and work put forth. When government aid finally became available, Rita remembers her neighbors applying for and accepting a large portion of it. She especially remembers when the neighbors’ children came on the school bus one day with grapefruit, her eyes growing big at the memory. “They got grapefruit—I swear that was as big as a kid’s head because they’d bring these on the bus and then they’d splash them on their heads!” She paused as she tried to recall exactly how big they were. “But maybe they were scrawny kids, too,”

²⁴ Rita is the grandmother of a childhood friend of mine. I remember going on drives with her and her granddaughter and we often went to Van Hook. Rita would point out where houses and stores used to be as she drove up and down the gravel streets of Van Hook. That was over ten years ago, but during my interview, I’ve found that Rita’s memory is still as keen as it was then. All direct quotes from Rita’s interview. Rita Satermo, interview by Tessa Sandstrom, New Town, ND, November 19, 2005, tape recording, transcript, in author’s possession.

she said, laughing, though her laughter quickly turned to scorn at the thought of these “worthless neighbors.”

“And they got everything! They got mattresses, they got clothes, they got food, they just got everything, and,” she paused, “we got nothing.... And then finally it got so bad we didn’t have shoes or clothes. We didn’t have money. We just—but we had enough food.” When Rita’s father finally decided to apply for relief aid, he was turned down. “My dad came home. He didn’t talk. He walked the floor. He was turned down flat because ‘My God, man! If you can pay your taxes, you can buy—!’ Which wasn’t true. That was the only time I ever saw my dad that upset.” Rita paused as she gazed at the floor, as if the memory were being projected there. “He was a calm, good—I’ll never forget it.” The stress the Depression caused her father resulted in his death in 1941 due to bleeding ulcers.

If the hot, dry summers of the Depression proved torturous, the winters only added to the distress. “We had so much snow! I don’t know how, in the thirties we had snowbanks so high,” she said, holding her hand four feet from the floor. “And why, then it wouldn’t rain. So you’d get started with a garden.” Rita motioned with her hand as if to say, and then the rest is history. It wasn’t until 1939 that the Wollschlagers were finally able to harvest a crop. Finally, eight years after the onset of the drought, times began to look up and people filtered back into the area. At that time, according to Rita, Van Hook did not have much to do, but the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided the town with a community hall. “WPA resurrected us in the thirties,” said Rita.

The following year, Rita was off to college and after the death of her father, she began teaching at a country school south of Parshall for sixty dollars a month. “And it was special!” said Rita. The school was equipped with a basement, a coal furnace, a cot, camp stove, a piano, and indoor toilets. Rita lived at the schoolhouse, but her new job did not mean that she was free from the obligations of the family farm. After her father died, she and her sister and brother were left the farm. Due to a series of strokes, her mother

was incapable of taking care of the farm herself, and many of the responsibilities were delegated to the kids. Rita often came home in the fall to help on the farm. The work involved in running the farm was difficult for Rita and her siblings. "So we survived it, worked like fools." Little did she know that her experiences on the family farm would be precursors for future trials that awaited her in less than fifteen years.

Following the war, and shortly before Van Hook's demise, men who were away at the war and other residents returned and the town began to prosper once again. Rita, too, had been away, first helping her sister, then teaching and completing her degree. When she returned to Van Hook, Rita married Ralph "Whitey" Satermo in 1946. While Ralph helped at his family's hardware store, Rita took care of their children and worked at various jobs, including the post office and substitute teaching. Though she enjoyed the work at the post office, she always wished she had stayed teaching. After work and on weekends, Rita took part in the many events offered in Van Hook, including ball games, rodeos, and dances. "We made our own fun," said Rita. As a lover of music, Rita especially enjoyed the dances that were held weekly. "We had dances, which was a good thing. We had—we had good dances," she said. In her love for these dances, Rita often encouraged and taught many of the local boys to dance, which helped make the dances more lively.

Not everyone shared Rita's appreciation for the dances, however. "We had the Church of God. They fought the dances. The Lutherans did, too. All the belly-rubbers, which we didn't like. But we just turned around and said, 'We're better off in the dance hall!'" Rita laughed at the thought. "The minute it loosened up they—the people came back—they wanted to go to the dances, too," she said leaning toward me, her eyes twinkling and a knowing smile growing on her face. "I call 'em the Holy-rollers," said Rita. These religious families not only opposed the dances, but the theaters as well. "They couldn't even see a Shirley Temple show we had in town!" said Rita. The children of those families did start going to the dances once they "got let loose," but they often got

carried away in their freedom, said Rita. Apart from the “Holy-rollers,” Van Hook also had some problems with the neighbor and rival town, Sanish. “We always said Sanish come over to fight.”

Established around the same time, Sanish and Van Hook had been rivals since the first stages of their existence. Though the rivalry developed originally from high school sports, it also spread to all aspects of competition, including business. The rivalry between Sanish and Van Hook—or the River Rats and the Prairie Dogs²⁵—was also of some entertainment for the two towns. “Oh God, that Sanish was—” began Rita as she laughed. “I think as far as we were concerned, they had such a rowdy bunch and they did—we had the rodeos first!” she blurted, as the rivalry between the two towns sunk in. “And finally then they got a rodeo and *God* they bragged...” she jabbed. Then softly she admitted: “And they did have a beautiful place. They had trees, and, uh, we had it up on a plateau out on the bare prairie. Which worked good, too.”

The Lions Club started what would become an annual rodeo in the spring of 1937, and the Van Hook Rodeo Association was born (Kinnersley n.d.). They developed rodeo grounds west of Van Hook, and the first rodeo was held July 23-25, 1937. In following years, the date would be pushed forward to Independence Day and the rodeos continued to grow, attracting crowds of up to 10,000 people from around the area. This new, popular event bore Van Hook’s new identity of “Rodeo City.” Though the competition at the time was largely fun and innocent, this rivalry would be tested when the survival of each town would depend on its ability to get along in every aspect of the town’s livelihood, especially business.

About the time that Rita was living and teaching at the school near Parshall, the Corps of Engineers had begun purchasing land and relocating buildings in the areas that would be inundated. News came that one-third of Van Hook was to be inundated, leaving the other two-thirds to become a lakeside village. Though Van Hook would retain most

²⁵ Bernice Houser brought up the names each town gave each other (B. Houser, interview).

of its businesses, a small number of houses, grain elevators, the Soo Line depot, and tracks—not to mention 85 percent of its business trade area—would be sacrificed to the waters of Lake Sakakawea (Case 1949a). “Van Hook was a small town and they were only gonna take part of it,” said Rita. “Well our *whole* customers, or the *whole* livelihood was south of town with the farming.”

While the reservoir would devour families’ entire farms, the Wollschlagers were among the lucky few where the majority of their land lay just above the 1850 foot flood elevation level set by the Corps. The extent of the flooding was still unbelievable for many, especially those around the Van Hook area where the river lay about 10 miles away, even as relocation was taking place. “We just couldn’t believe that water was going to—we just didn’t believe that water *could* come up! And it did, right below our hill.... But it was a biggy. That much water came.” While the level set by the Corps did leave some people just high and dry, safe from losing everything to the reservoir, it put the small town of Van Hook, whose population was just under 400, in a predicament.

CHAPTER IV

Sanish

"Twenty-five years, looking back, is not a long time, nor was the future hard to envision when we came to the first Sanish. Situated on the bank of the mighty Missouri, nestled between the high hills on the north and south, with mighty trees to furnish us shade, with water and lignite in abundance, the future indeed looked bright."

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION COMMITTEE,
1940

Sixty-six years before Lewis and Clark camped in the Mandan villages of the Knife River, the French-Canadian explorer Pierre Verendrye gazed out upon the land below him from what would later be named Crow Flies High Butte.²⁶ Verendrye, the first known white man in the area, looked at the Missouri River and thought he had found the river that would take him to the west. He stayed at the Hidatsa village beneath Crow Flies High for two months before crossing the Missouri and journeying further westward.

About 176 years later, W.F. Thompson came to this same area and erected the first store at what would become the first Sanish town site. One of the men who helped him haul the first load of lumber from Stanley quickly turned back stating, "It's such a God-forsaken spot" (Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration Committee 1940, 3). Nonetheless, people continued to move in and soon, this "God-forsaken spot" became a major commerce center of the Missouri River. People continued moving into the area, and the village quickly grew as the railroad lines leading from Van Hook to the river were completed in the late spring of 1915. In the years following the expansion of the railroad lines to Sanish, the town quickly grew and the government laid out the plan for an official town site. Lots were open for bidding in 1916, and the people of Sanish moved their buildings to the new officially allocated site. The town was named "Sanish" by a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes, Charles Hoffman. The word in his native

²⁶ All details of Sanish's early history in this chapter comes from the anniversary program put together by Sanish's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration Committee in 1940 unless otherwise cited.

language means "A Good People." Like Van Hook, Sanish grew quickly, boasting 54 businesses in its first year. This quick growth earned Sanish the title of "The City of Ambition."

Officially incorporated on March 20, 1917, Sanish was a major trading port of western North Dakota from the onset of its existence, and soon developed into a town "Where Rails and Water Meet" (Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration Committee 1940, 8). Where western farmers and ranchers once had to take their products all the way to Van Hook for shipping, Sanish's strategic location now made it possible for farmers to ferry or ship their grain to Sanish where the train could take their produce east to the markets. The railroad was regarded as one of the "arteries that feeds life blood into a new country" and credited for helping in keeping many of the people of Sanish in the area (8). The accessibility of markets to farmers was further increased when a sidetrack along the river was added with a loading "outfit" that unloaded grain from the decks of barges into the train cars. The importance of Sanish as a center of commerce and Sanish's trading territory increased again when the Verendrye Bridge was erected in 1927, connecting Mountrail and McKenzie Counties and making it easier for farmers and ranchers to get their products across the often treacherous Missouri River.

Yet while the railroad helped set Sanish up strategically, it would also force Sanish to be the "end of the tracks" for drifters who jumped the trains. The river barges brought extra traffic through the town, as well. Jay Sandstrom spoke of stories he heard from his grandfather, Herman Jahnke, about the types of characters who found themselves in Sanish when their train ride was over. As quickly as Sanish had become a city of commerce, it had also become a rowdy town reminiscent of the Wild West. The town had become known for its poker games, rodeos, occasional murders, and most legendary, its one FBI shootout. "It was kinda wild, I guess," said Bernice Houser casually of the events. "There were a few murders."

Bernice Houser (née Narum)²⁷ was born in Sanish in 1930 and lived there until she and her husband, Alvin, moved to their farm about two miles north of the town. Today, Bernice remains one of the few remaining citizens of Sanish, and even scarcer, one who has carefully documented the history of Sanish and tried to keep it alive. “It wasn’t quite as—well, it was probably just as wild when I was a teenager, but we were the wild ones then I s’pose.” While Bernice remained somewhat reserved about the reputation of the town, her husband, Alvin, provided a little more insight. “Got pretty wild at times. Wasn’t much Wasn’t much police force in it. I did a lot of chasing around them days, running up and down the streets. Cops never bothered us. We got on the good side of them,” he said, smiling (A. Houser 2005).²⁸

While Alvin spoke of the shootings that took place in Sanish with a little more enthusiasm, Bernice remained somewhat nonchalant. “But, yeah, there was several murders,” she said: “One of them was a—a jealous girlfriend, I guess, and she walked into a bar and pulled a gun on the guy who was steppin’ out on her.” The woman, however, was never charged for this shooting. The stories of these murders and rowdy times travel, and Rita remembered some of the stories she heard about the Sanish poker games. “They used to have poker parties out on the ice, and when the poker party got out of hand, they’d cut a hole in the ice and dump ‘em in there!” she said (Satermo 2005). Another story she recalled involved a salesman who took refuge in a barn one winter, and froze to death. “He stayed there and he was frozen stiff, so [the gamblers] put him up in the rafters. And then another bunch that went there to play—but they had so much heat in the thing that he thawed out and fell on their table.” Rita began laughing at the thought. “It’s funny. And they all left their money and everything and tore out of there.”

²⁷ As one who has worked to preserve Sanish’s history, Bernice is an authority on the topic. She has collected items over the years, most of which are now on display in the New Town Senior Citizens Center. Bernice said this exhibit will later be transferred to the State Historical Society of North Dakota in Bismarck. All direct quotes from Bernice are taken from the interview with the author on November 20 2005.

²⁸ All of Alvin’s direct quotes are taken from his discussion with the author (A. Houser, discussion, November 20, 2005).

The big story for Sanish, however, was when bank robber and FBI Most Wanted man, Johnny Benson, was shot by the FBI in the spring of 1947.²⁹ “[The FBI] hung around there for a while,” said Bernice. “We didn’t know where they were, but we knew they were around there someplace. We informed [authorities] that his mother was the telephone operator and they figured he’d show up there sometime, and he did. And they got him.” Bernice was just a little girl when this happened and remembered walking through the alley where he was shot on her way to school. Though they had scraped up the gravel where the blood was, Bernice remembers shell casings lying all over. “For many, many years I had one of the—” Bernice began to giggle at the thought, “shell casings from shooting Johnny Benson!” She continued smiling. “That was probably one of the bigger things that ever happened in Sanish, I suppose. We had other things, too. We had—there were a few horse rustlers and things like that,” she said. “It was pretty Wild West, yet, I guess!”

Another aspect that added to the Wild West characteristic of Sanish was the overall view of the town. Until 1935, the streets of Sanish were of dirt, and Bob Gorder,³⁰ who had come to Sanish for his final year of high school laughed, remembering the sight of the town. “I really got a rude awakening, because when I first got down here, I drove over to Sanish, and I was new. I was going to go to school. That’s the first time I’ve been over there that I can remember. And I saw a horse rack—a place to tie up horses in front of the post office. I remember that right away, because I haven’t seen one of those outside of the western shows! I said, ‘What the heck—? A horse rack in town here?!’”

Yet, at the same time that Sanish seemed to be taken straight from a Western movie, it remained a pleasant little town as well. “It was a pretty little town, in the middle of a valley,” said Bernice, fondly, recollecting the trees, river, the little creek that

²⁹ The story of Johnny Benson was compiled with information from the interviews of both Bernice and Rita.

³⁰ I was referred to Bob Gorder by Mike Kopp of the North Dakota Department of Transportation. Kopp has been working on a similar project to preserve the history of the bridge. Bob worked on the Four Bears Bridge when he was a teenager. Bob also had much to say about the first years of New Town. All direct quotes from Bob are taken from the interview on January 8, 2006 in New Town, ND.

ran through the town, and the “hills galore.” Though pretty, the town was still much like most small towns. “It had, I s’pose, all the businesses and stuff that any small town had: grain elevators and gas stations and grocery stores and bank, post office. All the usual things,” said Bernice. Highway 23 went through Sanish’s Main Street and continued west to the Verendrye Bridge and on through McKenzie County. The town was also small, composed of about 500 people who knew everyone else—and their business. “When I was growing up it was more quiet, but it was a town where everything you did, pretty soon everybody knew, you know. I mean, the neighbor lady could tell my mother exactly what time I came home at night.” Though today this might be considered a nuisance for teenagers, for Bernice, it was a sign of closeness. “That kind of thing doesn’t go on anymore because hardly anyone knows their neighbors anymore.”

This neighborly intimacy was one of Sanish’s strengths, according to the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration Committee in the Sanish Jubilee Program (1940) and Bernice (2005). While Van Hook may have started having their rodeos first, according to Rita, the City of Ambition worked to make theirs a huge, state-wide event. “That was fun. That was especially fun, because I was young and so were the cowboys, you know!” said Bernice laughing. The event, however, also took much work from the town to hold each year. “That took everybody in town’s efforts to carry that off. A lot of volunteer labor for that. But, yeah, that was always fun.” One year, the traffic headed to the rodeo was backed all the way up to Van Hook, which was eight miles away, said Bernice. The rodeo, however, only lasted about seven years before Sanish received the news that the town would be relocated. The last rodeo was held while the Four Bears Bridge was under construction, but construction was halted in observance of the rodeo. “That was a big thing for the town,” said Bernice, still smiling at the memories of the event.

When the “pretty little town” of Sanish reached its twenty-fifth year, the town was still continuing to grow steadily. Residents looked forward to the “bright future” of the town as it entered its twenty-sixth year. Growing up, Alvin’s home, the only home in

Sanish with plumbing, was situated less than a block from the river. “[In] fact, when the ice went out in spring, a lot of times the ice came up right next to the house. I lived on a ledge and I seen it come that far from the house,” said Alvin Houser, measuring about two feet with his hands. Watching the ice go out was often a big thing for the people who lived along the river. “Big, huge!” exclaimed Rita (Satermo 2005). “The ice would build up and get caught someplace and there would be this big dam of ice and then all of a sudden that would let loose. That’s the way our crick came down.” Rita, however, never got to see the Missouri come down. “People would skip school and I woulda skipped too,” she said. “I was a good student, but I would’ve skipped if I would’ve had a chance.” What was a wonder and spectacle for them, however, was often disaster and nightmare for others downstream. One must wonder as they watched the river go out if they ever thought of the consequences this spectacle would later cost them. Little did they know, the bright future the Sanish Anniversary Celebration Committee looked forward to in 1940 would begin to darken when the ice went out in the spring of 1943.

CHAPTER V

The Exodus

"I ask you [the Congress of the United States] in the name of all these people that you wipe out all that has been done, appoint a just and fair commission to fully compensate, relocate and rehabilitate every man among us who must sacrifice his home that prosperity may come to others and then to see to it that, in all the years to come, no public work shall be undertaken without first providing for the real rehabilitation of the man who must give the land."

BIGELOW NEAL, GARRISON, 1949³¹

*AS LONG AS THE SUN RISES AND SETS*³²

When rumors of the proposed dam began to reach the communities in the valley, many sat idly, waiting for further news on the project. The Three Affiliated Tribes, however, acted quickly on each rumor, declaring opposition to the project as early as 1943. Their second cry of opposition came in June 1944 when a delegation called the Fort Berthold Americans, Inc. stepped before a Senate committee to express its opposition to the plan which, at the time, was being discussed in Congress (Macgregor 1948a). Its efforts, however, proved futile when the Pick-Sloan Plan was passed December 22, 1944 without first consulting those who would be most affected: the Three Affiliated Tribes (VanDevelder 2004). The tribes persisted. In April 1945, the tribes again went on record opposing the Garrison Dam and a study on the proposed dam and its effects was conducted by a committee, according to social economist Gordon Macgregor, which found that "the reservation would be affected unfavorably" (1948a, 1).

Nonetheless, the Army Corps of Engineers wasted no time in beginning construction. In late summer, 1945, the Corps had already begun preliminary work at the Garrison site before the plan had even received final approval from Congress. Congress had passed a deficiency appropriations bill on December 28, 1945 to halt further

³¹ Bigelow Neal *Valley of the Dammed* (Garrison: McLean County Independent, 1949), p. 17.

³² Taken from *Valley of the Dammed*, where Neal discusses the treatment of the tribes. The tribes were told in the Fort Laramie Treaty that they would have their land "as long as the sun rises and sets" (Neal 1949, 22).

spending on the project until an agreement with the Three Affiliated Tribes was made, but according to VanDevelder, this was merely delaying actual excavation of dirt (2004). The Corps, meanwhile, took this to mean they could proceed on the construction of the infrastructure for the Dam site. Railroad spurs for transporting materials to the site were laid, appraisal of white-owned land had begun, new railways and highways were being planned, a new bridge for the dam site was being designed, and access roads to the site and new towns to house construction workers were all under construction (Meyer 1977). In fact, by October 1946, an estimated \$6 million had already been spent on a project that was neither fully approved by Congress, nor discussed with the tribes.

Yet, while the Corps was continuing its work at the Garrison site, the tribes, now led by Marilyn's father, Martin Cross, were also busy obtaining outside aid for their cause. Civil engineer Daniel C. Walser was hired to investigate alternate sites for a dam and found, as engineers of the water agencies of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs had earlier stated, that the Garrison Dam would be an "unnecessary extravagance."³³ In his report issued March 15, 1946, Walser recommended the dam be moved upstream on the Fort Berthold Reservation near the town of Sanish (Macgregor 1948a). The tribes supported the alternate site and offered to donate the reservation lands that would be flooded, at no cost to the government; this offer was passed by tribal resolution on May 27, 1946. The plan, however, was dismissed by General Pick as "a project that we could [not] justify or that I would recommend" (as cited by Meyer 1977, 214). In addition, with the amount of money spent on the current site, and with the project already ahead of schedule, Congress was forced to agree.³⁴

³³ President Roosevelt's secretary of interior was a major supporter of the tribes and found that the dam was indeed an unnecessary extravagance. He found that "widespread use" of smaller reservoirs and containment ponds would be sufficient for taming the river and preventing downstream flooding. In fact, the floods of 1943 could have been prevented by a mere 2 million acre reservoir. The Garrison Reservoir as proposed by the Corps, however, would cover 60 million acre-feet (volume of water that will cover an acre to a depth of one foot), "ten times what was needed for effective flood control in a hundred-year flood" (VanDevelder 2004, 101).

³⁴ The amount spent on the Dam had reached \$60 million by 1949. At this time, Congress still lacked any kind of tribal approval for some sort of compensation plan for the people of the reservation. The legality of

In 1946, Congress turned to offering the tribes land equal in area and quality to the reservation lands.³⁵ This, however, was not accepted by many of those on the reservation. More and more, the government's negotiations resembled the promises and lies the tribes had heard in the past. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 had stated the lands given the tribes would remain theirs "as long as the sun rises and sets" (Neal 1949, 22). Members of these tribes—tribes that had always been quick to cooperate—were finally giving in to their suspicions of the U.S. government. In a meeting held in Elbowoods on May 27, 1946, members of the tribes voiced their opinions to Pick. "I have seen a good many white people with bald heads," said James Driver, Sr., of Shell Creek, "and when a person is in that shape, he is the most gifted liar in the country. His promises are taken with a smile. On the other hand, his promises are not worth the paper that's written on" (General Meeting 1946).

Others, knowing full well the value of their land, stated in defiance that they would not leave and that the lands offered would not be sufficient. "We are told that they would give us land in exchange for the land that are to be inundated. That the land they give us would be comparable in size and little bit better then what we have, but there is no land that would compare with the land that we have at the present time. ... Now I heard the remarks of General Pick here saying that he would do his best to give us the best land in exchange for our lands, but I doubt his word because they have fooled us. They have never live [sic] up to their promises. There will be no land in comparison in what we got here [sic]," said Daniel Wolf of Elbowoods. Other speakers echoed these

the dam's construction was also still in question. Treaties stated that the land would be the tribes' "as long as the sun rises and sets," but the tribes had not been consulted on the use of their land before the Pick-Sloan Plan was passed (Meyer 1977).

³⁵ On May 2, 1946, the 1947 Civil Functions Act was approved by the President. This act appropriated funds for the construction of the Garrison Dam, but only after the secretary of war had met with the tribes and arranged for lieu lands to replace those that would be lost. The lands, which would be located in Oliver and Mercer Counties, were surveyed and appraised to see that they were comparable in quality and were equal in area to those being taken from the tribes (*Hazen Star* 1946). This plan, however, was met by opposition not only from the tribes who did not wish to be moved, but from the white farmers who would be forced to move from this land. Because of this, the tribes gained more support in their fight against the dam, though when a cash offer was substituted and the farmers there were safe, support "quickly evaporated" (Macgregor 1948a, 2-3).

sentiments, stating that they neither trusted the government, nor agreed that any lands could compare to these lands that were dear to them.

The battled raged on, but for Marilyn Cross, it was a concern only for the adults, even though Marilyn's father was at the center of the controversy. "In 1944, I was eight years old," said Marilyn (Hudson 2005).³⁶ "You don't really care when you're eight years old." Moreover, Marilyn had grown up with the topic of the Garrison Dam as part of regular conversation, especially as the daughter of the Tribal Council Chairman. "They started talking about the Garrison Dam probably in the early forties, you know?" she said. "So there was always discussion that they—a dam would be built somewhere on the Missouri River. So I guess you just sort of gradually grew into the knowledge that somewhere there's going to be a dam built.... So, then, even when you get into your teenage years, it's an adult problem. You know, you don't really care about it, because it's an adult problem," said Marilyn. In retrospect, according to Marilyn, her situation was no different from those of today's teens. "You know, if you went out and talked to a typical teenager, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old, and asked them, 'Well, what do you think about the war in Iraq?' they would think it's somebody else's problem to decide—that's an adult problem." For Marilyn, her situation was the same. "So as kids and teenagers when we were growing up, even though we knew that there was this—*all* this stuff going on about the Garrison Dam, it was completely someone else's problem."

Indeed, it was a problem for many, but like Marilyn, many had accepted that they would have to move. While the evacuation of the bottom lands was remembered as an emotional time by many elders,³⁷ Marilyn does not recall the evacuation as being particularly emotional, but rather a time when minds were set on the future. "I think a lot

³⁶ All direct quotes from Marilyn are taken from the interview (Hudson, interview).

³⁷ This is a focus for selected parts in VanDevellder's book and a few news features that appeared in the *Forum*, and in, as portrayed in perhaps the most famous photograph of the time, the signing of Public Law 437, or the "takings" act of 1949, in which the tribes signed their land over to the government (VanDevellder 2004). In this photo, Chairman George Gillette (who followed Cross as Tribal Chairman) cries as the bill is signed. In this emotional outburst, Gillette said, "The members of the tribal council sign this contract with heavy hearts. Right now, the future does not look good to us" (as quoted in Springer 2003d).

of people have the idea that everybody was, you know, very emotionally upset and crying. There might have been a lot of that, but I didn't see any of it at all. I remember most of the effort was on planning and then securing payment for the lands," said Marilyn. By that time, the tribes had lost the battle to stop the construction of the dam and were looking now toward obtaining just compensation for their forced sacrifice. There were 289³⁸ households located on the bottomlands that would now have to move their homes and lives elsewhere.

"People just realized that, 'Hey,' you know, 'we've got to find another place to live.' And my own family moved our house into Parshall, and that's how we came to be in Parshall." Marilyn's, attention, however, was already turned to the future. As a recent graduate of Elbowoods's largest and last senior high school class, Marilyn was concentrating on the new stage of her life that she was about to enter. She moved with her family to Parshall, and began college in Minot. Marilyn continued her education in Kansas and eventually moved to California, where she and her family (her mother now divorced from Martin) lived for a number of years.

Other families moved around the area, forming the new towns of White Shield, Twin Buttes, and Mandaree. Still others would eventually move into the new town being constructed three miles east of Sanish (Hudson 2005). Their new lives would prove to be dramatically different from what they had previously known. "The land was not as productive, so it couldn't sustain people, and that was a big social life change for people then, because, you know, they could no longer provide a living for their families, with cattle-ranching and farming," said Marilyn.

This, however, should not have been a surprise considering the studies that were conducted on the relocation lands. In one study, conducted on January 15, 1948, around

³⁸ There were 357 households total on the reservation at the time, meaning that 81 percent of the households would have to relocate (Macgregor 1948a). Marilyn estimated between 2,500-3,000 tribal members resided on the reservation at the time of the Garrison Dam's construction (2005).

the time that the tribes were negotiating for more compensation money,³⁹ the Missouri River Basin Investigations Staff stated that the Native Americans were losing their best farming, ranching, and grazing lands, not to mention the area that offered the most “desirable homesites” (1948, 2). “Here the homes are protected from the full fury of the winds that sweep the plains,” stated the report. “Gardens, which furnish a large part of the food supply, thrive exceptionally well in the bottom lands. Domestic water of good quality is usually found here at depth of about 40 feet, as opposed to twice that depth or more on the uplands.” The tribes’ claims, in other words, were now backed by more than a sentimental attachment; they were backed by the government’s own research. This report also supported what George Gillette foresaw as a bad future for the tribes: “The withdrawal of the taking area will remove the best grazing area and shelter of the Indian cattle. It will disrupt the organization of the cattle operations, destroy hay fields and remove the cover of the wildlife on which so many Indians depend for part of their subsistence” (Missouri River Basin Investigations Staff 1948, 3). As for the promised irrigation that would bring life to the otherwise dry hilltops: “All of the potentially irrigable lands on the reservation will be flooded. It will probably not be feasible to irrigate any part of the residual reservation after the creation of the reservoir.” This would not only affect the Native Americans, but also the people of Sanish and Van Hook, who would later come to reside on the reservation when the boundaries were extended as a result of the Garrison Dam agreement.

*HALF SLAVE AND HALF FREE*⁴⁰

While the entire village of Elbowoods would be inundated and most of the residents of the reservation knew their one and only option was to move, Van Hook’s future was not so clear. The Pick-Sloan Plan proposed that the Garrison Reservoir’s shore

³⁹ A contract was drawn up between the tribes and the Department of War for \$5,105,625 for their loss of land and costs of relocation and improvements (Macgregor 1948a).

⁴⁰ This subhead is taken from a quote by Abraham Lincoln: “No nation can exist half slave and half free.” (quoted in Case 1949a).

would come to rest at the 1850 foot elevation level, placing the reservoir's waters right at Van Hook's doorsteps—and past some of them. This proposed level would put one-third of Van Hook under water, putting the railroad tracks, elevators, a few businesses and homes, and 85 percent of Van Hook's trade territory under water (Case 1949a). The level would also mean that Van Hook would be located on a peninsula surrounded by water in times of wet weather, and a "three-way dustbowl" in times of drought. The residents and businessmen of Van Hook were faced with a dilemma: either sell what land the Corps needed and try to fare without its trade territory, or try to sell out completely and work to combine with its rival, Sanish.⁴¹

The City of Speed worked quickly to plan its future. In an emergency vote, 95 percent of Van Hook residents decided they would rather sell out and combine with Sanish than watch their town die with their economy. Van Hook, like Sanish, still lacked a plumbing and sewer system. Moving to a new site would ensure that the new town would be up-to-date and modern, much like the new town of Riverdale that was being built for construction workers near the Garrison Dam. In addition, the two towns would combine to form a much larger one where it "won't ever be too crowded" (O.H. Ulrich as cited by Case 1949a). Moreover, the towns would complement each other, Van Hook supplying the theater Sanish otherwise lacked, for example, and Sanish providing a newspaper, which Van Hook did not have. The move, overall, seemed to make sense, though the final decision was dependent upon two things.

⁴¹ Historical facts of Van Hook in this section were found in several sources, unless otherwise explicitly cited, including:

Bismarck Tribune, "Van Hook too worried to sing much, though," May 4, 1949.

Jack Case, "Half of Van Hook due for ducking," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), May 4, 1949a.

Robert Cory, "State made many sacrifices to big dam project," *Minot Daily News* (Minot, ND), June 10, 1953b.

Ruth Kinnersley, "A History of Van Hook" [n.p., n.p., ca 1960]. A copy can be obtained from the author.

James McMaster, "New Town 1951-1976," [n.d., n.p. Copy in North Dakota State Library, Bismarck, ND].

Minot Daily News, "New Town grows to replace flooded," June 10, 1953.

Satermo, interview.

Stephanie Schulte, "History of Van Hook and the Frank Traynor Park," *Mountrail County Promoter* (Stanley, ND), August 8, 1979.

First, the Corps had previously only offered to compensate Van Hook for the sections that would be flooded and initially had no intentions of buying out the whole town. Second, the merger would bring the rivalry that was normally reserved to sports and games right down to business—literally. While a majority of Van Hook supported the move, businessmen were more hesitant and undecided. Only 13 of the 23 Van Hook businessmen wanted to remain with the town and move in with Sanish. Four opted for retirement, and the remainder were undecided. Their decision would essentially come down to how the two towns would negotiate the sale of business lots, a feat that was far from simple. The long-term rivalry stood in the way of that, and according to one Van Hook resident, “If Van Hook and Sanish can get together, there is no need to worry about the U.S. and Russia reaching an agreement” (as cited by Case 1949a). People of Sanish speculated that there would not be enough trade to support the businesses of both towns. Van Hook, on the other hand, suspected that Sanish was merely afraid of aggressive business competition from Van Hook businesses.

Even so, the two towns discussed finding solutions to their twin problems as a delegation from Van Hook went to Washington to request that the Corps purchase the entire town. “I remember Ester Ranum helping,” said Rita (Satermo 2005). “She just got up on the stump box and she said, ‘You *will* buy it all!’ She helped a lot. And they asked if the Corps will take the whole town so we could just move away and they did that.” Congress passed a bill stating that the Corps of Engineers was to purchase the entire city because Van Hook’s economy would be terminated by the reservoir’s waters. Thus, in November 1949, the fate of Van Hook was decided: the City of Speed would be no more. Residents began to search for new homes.

Seeing this predicament as an opportunity to get together and create something better for the two towns, ten men from Van Hook and ten from Sanish joined together as the Sanish-Van Hook Relocation Company (SVHRC) and began to push the plans for the new town along. “It looked to us like there was more to be gained by working together,

and getting the army engineers to give us what help they could, than to buck and pout,” said one of the Van Hook members, Frank Traynor (*Minot Daily News* 1953d, 8). For the time being, the rivalry between Sanish and Van Hook was resolved as the SVHRC began searching for a new site. Land three miles west of the Four Bears Bridge construction site was chosen and later purchased from Anna Wuttke of Minot for \$75 an acre.⁴² The site for a new town, a new identity, and a new future for the two towns was found. The people of Van Hook and Sanish could now begin their move toward a new life.

Many of the residents of Van Hook looked at their situation as an opportunity to build a new life in a modern town. Others, however, could foresee the hardship and money it would take to relocate. According to Rita, families were still short of money in the fifties as a result of the Depression and struggling to make a comeback. Rita remembers a tragic story during the time that the people of Van Hook began to move (Satermo 2005).⁴³ “A man committed suicide. We found out later he had cancer and he didn’t want to deplete all of their money he had for his family. He didn’t even tell them he had the cancer and he committed suicide in the granary.” Rita paused. “Just to save them the money it would have cost them to help him. And there were others who went through the same thing. Just the thought of *picking up* and *moving* and didn’t know *where* to move.” The incident shook the small town, “But when we saw the turmoil—he could see ahead what it was going to be, and he wasn’t going to have them use up that money. Money was precious.”

Indeed it was. When the Corps had accepted Van Hook’s proposal to pay compensation for the entire town, the residents were happy enough with their deal. Later, according to Rita, they would come to regret their quick acceptance. By that time,

⁴² CPI \$617.12. Jay Sandstrom, a New Town area farmer who has recently had his land appraised, said land today is worth anywhere from \$300-400 per acre for pasture land and \$500-800 per acre for good farming land. Sandstrom owns land just south of New Town that was appraised at \$413.25 per acre (Sandstrom, pers. comm. 2006). This land, he said, is better than that on which New Town is built. Sandstrom also noted, however, that the land purchased was not used for farming. Land bought for industrial uses, he said, can be worth up to \$1200 per acre. For this reason, he believes the SVHRC got a “hell of a deal” for Wuttke’s land.

⁴³ All direct quotes from Rita are taken from the interview (Satermo, interview).

Bigelow Neal, a writer and farmer from Garrison, was making his trips up and down the Missouri, fighting for the rights of landowners who were being defrauded by the Army Corps of Engineers' Real Estate Division. In his crusade against the policy of the Real Estate Division, Neal had succeeded in helping landowners, among them the people of Sanish, get 25 to 75 percent more compensation than the division had initially offered (Neal 23). "Bigelow Neal came and he did a lot of good," said Rita. "He got them mineral rights and better money, and they just rebelled against the eminent domain, or the government, and won a lot more. We thought it was not right to fight eminent domain, but after [Sanish] got so much more, we wished we had."

As the tribes were experiencing, however, the force of eminent domain was a difficult challenge. While other residents accepted the move as a new opportunity, other citizens, especially the elderly, appealed against the relocation. Their lives were established, and they had already experienced their share of difficult times in homesteading the area and surviving the Depression. Moving, in other words, was an unwanted challenge so late in their lives. In a letter addressed to North Dakota Senator William Langer, Van Hook resident John Bever wrote:

Dear Senator Langer:

I own a house on an Indian lot in Van Hook. It would cost about a thousand dollars to replace it. Also I have a chicken house and some sheds. I have a big outside cave for storing vegetables and where I keep my coal. There is also a toilet.

The Government men say all they will buy is the house and they say that they will either buy the house or move it to New Town whichever is the cheapest for the Government and that's all that I can get for all my buildings and property.

They said that they would have to take the chimney off my house and it would be up to me to put it back on after they moved the house. I don't want to move the house to New Town or any other place because I am seventy-six years old and don't want to start again here.

*Yours truly,
John Bever⁴⁴*

⁴⁴ John Bever, letter, 27 June 1952, Box 448, Folder 8, William Langer Papers, Special Collections, University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library, Grand Forks, ND.

While Bever was just one of the many forced to move, many other citizens of Van Hook moved merely because the town did. Leonard Holst, a rural post carrier, reluctantly accepted the relocation. "I've spent twenty-five years getting the kind of home I wanted here in Van Hook and I hate to leave it. However, when you work for the post office department, you move where the post office moves, so I have little choice" (Kinnersley n.d., 37). These appeals and concerns, however, held little sway with the government, and relocation went ahead as planned.

For Rita, moving was particularly difficult. She and her husband, Whitey, were not only responsible for moving their home and family, but also responsible for helping her husband's parents move their home and the family hardware store. "We were going to move two houses and then the store. Well, the store [from Van Hook] was so old.... Jake the Jew—he went by that and didn't mind a bit! He was a good business man. He was a good friend to the Satermos, and he loaned them money to build the store. Well, when we got over here we didn't get anything more done." Rita and Whitey had also been building a new house on a lot in the new town to later rent out, but ended up living in it, even though it wasn't really finished at the time.⁴⁵ When it came time to move their own home over, Rita and Whitey were offered an opportunity at easing some of the work. "The house mover said, 'I would love to buy this house!' and Whitey said, 'Sold!'" said Rita, laughing. Rita and Whitey then concentrated on finishing the construction of their new home, moving her in-laws' home, getting the family hardware store in place, and helping to build an entire town. "It was a strain," said Rita. "And it was tough." Moving the individual buildings, however, was only the first step in their new lives. The people of Sanish and Van Hook were now faced with the challenge of reconciling differences and banding together with Sanish to form one community.

⁴⁵ Rita still lives in this house today, though she has made changes. A deck was added on and the garage was turned into a music room.

A DIVIDED CITY

Charles Pickering, editor of the *Sanish Sentinel* drove to the dam site to see the work in progress himself. Whereas others may have seen the rising dirt on the horizon of the construction site as a dawn of hope for farmers who suffered greatly during the Depression, as he stood watching the excavators moving dirt, Pickering saw the cloud as an omen of doom for his small town. "White people in the valley are about to get a taste of what the Indian has been experiencing for the past hundred years," wrote Pickering (as cited by VanDevelder 2004 140). The white landowners of the Missouri River Valley would soon develop their own distrust for the government. Though the dam was met with little opposition by these landowners who still recollected the hard times during the Depression, the policies, propaganda, mistreatment, lies, and threats used by the Army Corps of Engineers' Real Estate Division made their sacrifice seem more than it was worth. "Granting that the dam must be built, granting that these neighbors of mine must sacrifice their homes, how did it come about that this thing came to pass five, six, maybe ten years before it was necessary? Why was it done in cruelty when it could have been done in the spirit of rehabilitation? Why was it done at all when it was wholly unnecessary and until the waters could have come in to cover up the scars?" said Bigelow Neal (Neal 1949, 5).

Neal was speaking of the unjust treatment of landowners and the inaccuracies of property value appraisals. When the Flood Control Act was passed in 1944, the Army Corps of Engineers wasted no time in acquiring lands that the Garrison Reservoir would swallow. Landowners who would be affected by the resulting flood were promised that they would receive "just and fair compensation" for their sacrifice to the project that was promised to not only make North Dakota rich, but control a river that had been terrorizing states downstream (Neal 1949, 17). Farmers and landowners welcome trained appraisers onto their land, where the deal they were expected to make seemed to live up to this

promise of just and fair compensation. Landowners' expectations, however, did not materialize.

"As to their fair mindedness ... there could be no question," wrote Neal. "In one instance I suspected them of leaning over backward in my favor.... When they had tasted and sniffed and looked cross-eyed and photographed to their heart's content, they came to the time when they couldn't think of more to do, except to add up a lot of figures. When they said they were all through... I asked them if they'd leave me a copy of their appraisal. They said, 'We're not allowed to tell'" (Neal 1949, 8). It was at this moment that Neal lost faith in his government. Not only had he welcomed these appraisers into his home, he had allowed them to analyze his land and home without any say in its value. But now he was not allowed to see the value. For him, this was a betrayal of the trust and faith he invested in his government. "Since then I haven't believed in fairies.... I sat down and felt pretty bad, not so much because I was to lose my home as because they had taken my faith in something beautiful. Never again could the stars and stripes stand for quite so much as before" (Neal 1949, 8). His faith in the government would diminish more when the "Negotiator" came with the government's offer of \$6,000.⁴⁶ Negotiators came a second time with an offer of \$6,500,⁴⁷ then a last time for \$7,000.⁴⁸ Each time Neal refused, leaving the Corps' Real Estate Division with no choice but to condemn his land. The condemnation meant Neal had to go to the United States District Court, but the case was beneficial to him rather than the Corps. In his trial, the jury awarded him \$10,500.00.⁴⁹ After the trial, Neal learned that the Corps had originally appraised his property at \$7,000, evidence that the Corps was offering an amount far below its original appraised value. For this reason, the Corps, according to Neal, was far from "just and

⁴⁶ This amount would be equal to \$49,991.60 in 2006. This amount was calculated at prices according to 1949, the time of the publication of Neal's book. The amount is substantially more if the prices are calculated at an earlier year than 1949, but the exact date of Neal's appraisal was not made clear. Neal did not state how many acres he owned.

⁴⁷ CPI \$54,157.56

⁴⁸ CPI \$58,323.53. This was also the original value that the appraisers had placed on the land (Neal 1949).

⁴⁹ CPI \$84,522.61

fair” (Neal 1949). Neal’s victory marked one of the first in this battle against the Corps to get the fair and just treatment landowners were promised and deserved.

Among those he helped were the people of Sanish. “All the way up from Garrison he was active in trying to get more money for the people out of their land,” said Bernice.⁵⁰ A common problem people faced was not only getting the correct value for their land, but being able to reap the resources of it. Many people had a large amount of timber, coal, lignite, and even oil on their land, much of which they were unable to mine before the Real Estate Division required them to leave. Bernice’s father, owner of the Sanish Oil Company in Sanish, was one of the many people Neal helped. “I think he helped my dad reserve the oil rights. My dad owned six lots in town and forty acres outside of town and I don’t think he ever would have got the oil rights reserved on them if it hadn’t been for Bigelow,” but she laughed at this “victory.” “But the oil rights are all under water, so that doesn’t help much!” Neal also helped many other people and through a series of court cases, eleven Sanish residents eventually got over 37 percent more than what they were initially offered.⁵¹ At this time, Bernice was recently married, and she and her husband, Alvin, were moving to their own farm. “He didn’t have a house [in Sanish], so we weren’t involved at all. We didn’t have any property there.” Bernice knew that for other people, however, moving was much more difficult.

“It wasn’t a very pleasant time for a lot of people,” said Bernice. Even though Neal had helped get many people better values for their property, the money was still a major concern. “They got paid for their place and the appraisal rate in those towns, it was old buildings, [so] it wasn’t very great. So they didn’t get too much in the first place. With the money they could buy the house back for a lot less than what they were paid for it,” said Bernice, “but then they had to go and find a place for it, buy a lot to put it on, the

⁵⁰ All information and direct quotes from Bernice in this section are taken from the interview unless otherwise cited. Bernice Houser, interview.

⁵¹ The jury awarded the eleven landowners \$86,700 (CPI \$603,432.46). This was \$23,500 (CPI \$163,560.12) more than what the government offered them and \$57,500 (CPI \$400,200.31) lower than what owners had hoped to get from the court case (*Minot Daily News* 1953e).

government didn't give them any land to put their building on. Buy a lot, dig their own basement, dig their own well, move the house, pay all that expense themselves." As soon as the house was sold and bought back again, said Bernice, the government's part was over. The only thing entirely paid for by the government was the movement of the cemeteries. "They didn't pay for moving any live people," said Bernice, "just dead ones."

Like those in Van Hook, moving for the older residents of Sanish was especially hard and unwanted. "They just figured on staying there till they died in their own house, with no thought of moving anyplace," said Bernice. "And financially it was terrible because they didn't, I mean, they had no help whatsoever once they decided where they were going to go. That was it." Most had to choose between moving away from the area to another where they knew no one, or facing the hard times that were ahead in the new town. "If they moved ... to [the] new town, they also had to bear the expense of putting in water and sewer, which they didn't have in the old towns, you know, and rewiring their houses, because they wouldn't meet specification for REA.⁵² So it was a tough time for those people." Bob Gorder remembers the work his parents did to help build the town.⁵³ His parents, however, were still young and could endure it. As for the older residents, he recognized the strain it put on them. "They were old fellas when they moved over and—starting a lawn and everything? It just—it just took 'em. They hadn't been used to that—that tough of work." He paused, frowning. "At that age, you know?" he said quietly.

For those, however, who chose to move away, times were not much easier. Both Rita and Bernice remember those who chose to move away. They were in a new place, with no friends, and at an old age, this seemed to increase the loneliness. "Royal Logan [of Sanish] was telling about going to California and visiting some of the people that had lived in Sanish and they moved out there to be where their kids were," said Bernice.

⁵² Rural Electrification Administration. The administration was set up by Franklin Roosevelt and promoted electrification in rural areas.

⁵³ All direct quotes from Bob are taken from the interview (Gorder, interview).

"And he said the one old fella, all he had to do was sit on the bench outside the house and twiddle his thumbs. He didn't know a soul, had nothing to do, and there he sat. They just sat there until they died out there." Rita remembers others who had left, but fared no better than those in Logan's reports. "There was a lot of people that moved away that didn't want to move away and just didn't seem like they were happy again."

* * *

This time of change was no doubt difficult for everyone, but one of the greatest challenges was trying to build a town out of two rival towns.⁵⁴ Though both had agreed that one big town would be better than two smaller ones, both towns still remained biased. "There were two sides to that story and they didn't get along. It caused a lot of enemies, because there were quite a few people, my dad included, and Herman [Jahnke], too, that didn't want to combine with Van Hook," said Bernice. Many people in Sanish felt they should have first priorities on lots, since the entire town had to move, whereas only a small part of Van Hook had to. "They wanted the streets laid out so that the corner where the bank was in Sanish would be a corner for the bank in New Town, so the businesses could be in the same locations that they were in town and then anything left over was what Van Hook would have." The rivalry was not only between the people of Van Hook and Sanish, but also among citizens of each town. "There was a competition," said Rita, talking about the rivalry of the two towns, "but Sanish fought amongst

⁵⁴ All historical facts in this section were mentioned in several sources. Unless specifically cited, this information came from:

Bismarck Tribune. "Van Hook too worried to sing much, though," May 4, 1949.

Jack Case, "Muddy's water to bury Sanish," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), May 3, 1949b.

Gorder, interview.

B. Houser, interview.

Leonard Lund, "Residents of old Sanish don't want it forgotten," *Minot Daily News* (Minot, ND), December 29, 1973.

James McMaster, "New Town 1951-1976," [n.d. n.p. Copy in North Dakota State Library, Bismarck, ND].

Minot Daily News, "Deadline on moving buildings extended," June 13, 1953b.

Minot Daily News, "New Town grows to replace flooded," June 10, 1953d.

Satermo, interview.

Stephanie Schulte, "History of Van Hook and the Frank Traynor Park," *Mountrail County Promoter* (Stanley, ND), August 8, 1979.

William Langer Papers. 1900-1959, Box 448, folder 8. Special Collections. University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library.

themselves, too." This matter was even brought before Senator Langer. In a letter dated October 9, 1950, Arthur Green addressed many of the issues of the combination, including the town's name, location, and stipulations expected when combining the towns:

We do not hesitate to charge that Van Hook did not appreciate the help Sanish gave them to enable the portion of their town to be bought

Sanish would have been better off if they had refused the help Van Hook asked for. Sanish gave the help with three reservations, first, that the town retain the name of Sanish, second, that the citizens would retain as near as possible the same sites in the new town as they now have.

There were lots in among the present business places for those Van Hook people who wish to come in with us.

Third that the lots in the new townsite would be available at cost. We did not wish to bid for some. ...

At this time no mention was made of a definite site.

Unknown to the Sanish residents a group from Van Hook, plus four individuals of Sanish backed by the Army Engineers bought a townsite two and one-half miles east of present Sanish and told us that was our townsite.

We contend that the bona fide citizens or property owners should have had the right to express their preference of one of two sites. ...

Now that was the petition on which Van Hook proceeded like the proverbial camel who stuck his head in the door to get warm and ended up by entering the tent and pushing his master out.

So we feel as though we have been dealt with unfairly.⁵⁵

On September 8, 1950, some of the residents of Sanish formed the Sanish Protective Association. The association passed a resolution, speaking out against the Real Estate Division and their program which "has come among us to take our lands and properties and by so doing to destroy our homes and places of business, to render valueless the good will we have built up over a period of thirty-five years, to force the sale of our stocks and merchandise and personal possessions at prices tending to bankruptcy and to destroy the homes and livelihood of many among us who are too old to

⁵⁵ Sanish Protective Association, resolution, 8 September 1950, Box 448, Folder 8, William Langer Papers 1900-1959, Special Collections University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library, Grand Forks, ND.

re-establish ourselves elsewhere—all of this for the construction of a dam and reservoir.” The association also appealed to the president, Congress, the North Dakota governor, the Commanding Officer of the Army Corps of Engineers, and the court of public opinion “for relief from the cruel and unnatural and wholly unfair treatment under which we suffer” (William Langer Papers 1900-1959).

Part of this appeal dealt with the town site chosen by the Corps and members of the SVHRC. The Sanish Protection Association (SPA) stated that “In Van Hook it was easy, because Van Hook had everything to gain and nothing to lose but in Sanish ... the village had everything to lose and nothing to gain” (William Langer Papers 1900-1959). They opposed this move because Sanish would be forced to move farther away from the river and bridgehead, and thus, farther from their trade source. People, however, varied on where they wanted to see their town reestablished. The site chosen by the SPA, or “militant group,” as it was called by the *Minot Daily News* (1953d), was on a bluff south of Sanish that overlooked the town and bridgehead. Even though this site was ruled out because of its lack of railway and highway access, several Sanish residents moved to the area, including Royal Logan, Bernice’s father Henry Narum, Charles Pickering, Herman Jahnke, and even Bigelow Neal. Not only had Neal helped in getting Sanish more money, but he had also helped keep the name of Sanish alive by being the first to build a house on the new site of Sanish.

While these Sanish residents, many of whom had originally homesteaded in this area, built their town atop this bluff, the Corps and SVHRC continued with their plans at the chosen site. The residents of this new town continued to work hard to turn a muddy field into North Dakota’s newest town and on April 30, 1953, both Sanish and Van Hook dissolved their city governments. As they worked on their new town, several people began to suggest names. One name was “Vanish,” alluding to Van Hook and Sanish’s circumstances. Another was Sanhook. Others simply referred to it as the new town, a name that seemed to stick. A vote was supposed to be held to choose an official name for

the town, but people seemed to object. "When they voted to name it," said Rita, "they said, 'No! It's already named! It's the '*New Town!*'"

CHAPTER VI

New Town

“Originally faced with the necessity of solving the twin problem of Sanish and Van Hook, they conceived the idea of digging a grave between the two towns and burying both in the same hole.”

SANISH PROTECTIVE AGENCY, SANISH, 1950⁵⁶

Two days after the Sanish Protection Association wrote its resolution, the groundbreaking of what would later be called New Town was held on October 27, 1950 and lots were officially available for purchase.⁵⁷ For the next four years, New Town would be a busy place. While the residents of Van Hook and Sanish were moving businesses and homes, the Four Bears Bridge was being relocated from Elbowoods to the old Sanish town site, and Elbowoods was in the process of relocating the Indian Affairs agency to New Town. The town was busy with construction crews for the bridge, the water system in New Town, the streets, and the construction of new homes and businesses.

The first years in New Town were very difficult for many people. Bob Gorder, who at that time had just graduated from high school at Sanish, most remembers the streets of New Town before they were paved. “The street was either mud or dust. It was either so dusty you couldn’t hardly see across Main Street, or else so muddy you had to wade across Main Street.” The muddy streets often caused a lot of problems for

⁵⁶ Cited in the William Langer Papers. 1900-1959, Box 448, Folder 8. Special Collections. University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library.

⁵⁷ All quotes from Bob, Bernice, and Rita were taken from the interviews. All historical facts were taken from the following sources unless otherwise cited:

Gorder, interview.

B. Houser, interview.

James McMaster, “New Town 1951-1976,” [n.d. n.p. Copy in North Dakota State Library, Bismarck, ND].

Minot Daily News, “Deadline on moving buildings extended,” June 13, 1953b.

Minot Daily News, “New Town grows to replace flooded,” June 10, 1953d.

Satermo, interview.

construction. "I remember the lumber yard had a big, old diesel truck they'd haul lumber around with," said Bob. "That was when they were making water and sewer ditches for pipe and everything. Big truck was coming down the street, right in front of the bank and Super Valu. All at once this truck sunk out of sight. It fell in the sewer ditch!" The sewer ditches, which were about six feet deep, posed a dangerous problem for many other people, too. "If a waitress didn't get to a café, they went looking for her because you could've slid [into those trenches]," said Rita.

The jobs that the residents of New Town had to endure were often overwhelming. The town still needed a school, a clinic, streets, and sewers; families had to dig basements, move their homes, and move businesses. Rita often wondered what they were thinking when Van Hook decided to move. "We wondered, 'what the hell are we doing over here!' when we could've stayed.... But you couldn't, just couldn't do everything at once—and that muddy—! The mud was something we'll *never* forget." When it came time to help get Whitey's parents' house moved in, the mud and rain of that spring interfered, making the relocation increasingly difficult. "Blocks," said Rita sardonically. "Cinder blocks. Oh, what a new invention! You didn't have to run cement! Well, the big rain came and it caved in and all the blocks were—," she said, waving her arm. "So we got that cleaned up and it happened a second time. So finally then they, I don't know, protected it enough. Put trenches around so the water went someplace else so finally then they got their house brought over here and set."

Yet while the streets were a mess, the residents of New Town tried to keep their shops and homes clean. This, however, was to no avail, said Bob. "I remember the first summer. Our dad was operating the bank here [and he] started sweeping up every night. You know, waxing the floor and everything. After doing it for a couple days, they just went out and [got] sawdust and put it on the floor in the morning. Then, at night, when we'd shovel the sawdust out of there, we'd get all the mud that fell off shoes. Then we'd put a fresh layer of sawdust on the floor." Bob paused, recalling the muddy streets of

New Town and the extra work it caused. "Boy, that was rough. I would never go through that again!"

Though it would seem very few people would have fond memories of wading and digging through mud, Rita did find some entertainment in it. She remembers when Gary Gorder came home with the groceries. "He couldn't get up the ditch. Well, they were four, five feet tall! And he'd get so far," she said, imitating him slipping down the ditch. She began to chuckle. "Finally he'd get up far enough and set the groceries down and then he'd—" Rita suddenly gasped, turning serious again. "It was *miserable!*" While the ditches provided some comedic value in this case, they were still a threat for some. "You could drown in a ditch they were so—you had to worry about the kids and oh! You know how kids will stamp on ice and go through. I taught mine in a hurry," said Rita. Relief of the ditches finally came when it was time to lay sod. "*That* was a thing!" exclaimed Rita. The sod was taken from a nearby ranch that grew Kentucky bluegrass. A sod cutter came and cut long strips of it and brought it in rolls to New Town. Like the water system, everyone looked forward to it, but it was paid for in hard work. "We had to get the base," said Rita. "I shoveled more dirt—I had to have rocks in my head!"

The times were definitely hard, but Rita said everyone somehow found ways to laugh and have fun. The dances Rita loved so much helped get her through some of the hard times. When the people of Van Hook moved, they brought their community center over to New Town with them. The hall, however, was downtown and meant Rita had to trudge through about four blocks of mud to get to it. "We went to the dance and Whitey [was driving and] slipped into the ditch, so we had to walk home from down at that motel. They said, 'Well, stay overnight with us!' and we said no, we'll walk home. Well, I would [have] kicked [Whitey] all the way home, if I—" Rita began laughing. "I had so much mud on my foot I couldn't lift it." It was moments like these that helped alleviate the hard work that the new residents of New Town went through. "Somehow you laughed more with the troubles and then it would get better," said Rita. At another dance, Rita led

a small procession down the street. "I went down Main Street and I was cheerleading," she said, leaning forward and laughing. "I was kind of snookered. They said I had a six-pack under my arm and leading the band!" Rita pretended to cradle a beer in one arm and raised her arm up and down imitating the leader of a marching band. "We were singing. We had a good time.... But it was—it was a lot of work, but somehow we had fun."

New Town eventually got its water system installed, but this was, by no means, the end of the residents' water troubles. "The water was bad," said Rita. "It took a long time to get the new water plant. All of our tubs got rusty and we used to use that Zud to clean them.... It just got orange and brown. We all bought new tubs after we got that new water plant. It used to take the enamel off with that Zud." Cleaning the tubs was one thing, but the work involved in cleaning the untreated water was another, more difficult task. When Bob's family built their new house, they put in a new basement with three bedrooms and a shower room in case company came to visit. When work crews began showing up for all the construction going on in New Town, however, his parents began renting out the rooms. Trying to be a good host, his mother was determined to keep the workers' beds and sheets cleaned, but because of the mud, this meant washing the bedding every day. "She'd never been in a rough town," said Bob. "So she tried to clean—keep that place clean. Ah!" he exclaimed, "You know?! Guys muddy knee-up. Clear to their knees, you know? All that stuff coming in there! All played out, they just fell in bed. Next morning they hurry up and took a shower. Out they went. At that time she washed the sheets every day.... We didn't have any water plant. You could put about two or three inches in the bathtub. You couldn't see the bottom of the tub, it was so rusty. And so Mom, we used to heat the water in the boiler, down in the basement. Then she put lye in the water when it was hot. That made the rust raise to the top. Then she'd scoop that off, and then heat up the water again, and then wash with an old-fashioned washing machine." Bob leaned forward, smiling, "And you know who had to haul the water! You know? I did!"

Though Bob had his fair share of work, he doesn't remember the strain being so bad for him. "But, you know, I didn't have anything to do! I was living with the folks at the time. I just graduated from high school. I wasn't doing anything. But, just think of those other people that had to work—" he said, his voice trailing off as he stared at the table. For young people, the time was full of adventure, and with all the construction going on, new things happened every day. "It was kind of fun, you know, for a young person." At that time, Bob was one of the many men in the area who were also building the bridge. He spent most of his days on the bridge, helping his parents from time to time, and just waiting for Friday, their payday, to come. "Young guy like me, I was only eighteen, nineteen years old, you know. And we weren't interested in—just interested in six o'clock. When six o'clock came, we'd go and drink a beer. Carouse around, you know, like all the young people do!"

While Bob was building a bridge, the others were still working on their new town, and it was slowly coming together. Shelter from the wind on a barren field was one of the other challenges the New Town residents had to address. "Stubble field!" exclaimed Rita. "This was just a wheat field. We all planted Chinese elm.... This was a new thing. It grew so nice and it grew so fast," said Rita.⁵⁸ The ladies also worked on gardens, planting flowers and shrubs to fix up their lawns. The residents worked for three years to get this stubble field in shape, and when it was close to being finished, New Town, said the *Minot Daily News*, had become "a flourishing example of what private citizens can do for themselves when circumstances compel them to make a fresh start" (1953d, 8). Funded, organized, and built by its residents, New Town did become a fresh start, not only for Van Hook and Sanish, but also for part of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. The agency headquarters had relocated to New Town, bringing the three doomed

⁵⁸ Little did they know, Chinese elm dies almost as fast as it grows. Today, residents pay hundreds of dollars to cut down dead limbs from these trees (Satermo, interview).

communities of Elbowoods, Van Hook, and Sanish together, creating what Bernice called "a melting pot ... out here on the prairie."

But even while the residents of New Town were shaping their town, the town had indeed begun to shape them. Those who remember putting New Town together, piece by piece, will always remember the effort and dedication they put into their town. "It was just too much but oh! we were busy bees," said Rita. Even though the work sometimes made Rita think they should have just stayed in Van Hook, she still appreciated coming to New Town and was glad they had. Nonetheless, according to Rita, the town was only for those able to endure the hardships of the time. "It was fun and it was tough," said Rita frankly. "Just the toughest ones stayed. The rest left."

CHAPTER VII

The Four Bears Bridge

"Our people were brave and proud of their great leaders. Foremost among our leaders, and the bravest and wisest of them all was Four Bears."

CROWS HEART, 1932⁵⁹

Ever since the passing of the Flood Control Act of 1944, it seemed as if the whole Missouri River Valley was on the move. Bulldozers and excavators moved earth at the Garrison Dam construction site. Relocation companies moved houses, barns, elevators, businesses, and any other building that families chose to take with them. Towns were on the move, people were on the move, and down in Elbowoods, even a bridge was on the move.

First built near Elbowoods in 1934, the Four Bears Bridge was a monument in its time.⁶⁰ This "mammoth bridge" was an extraordinary feat considering the state was suffering as a result of the Great Depression. This feat was celebrated by both white and Native American North Dakotans at its dedication in June of 1934. The bridge was named Four Bears in honor of both the Hidatsa chief who had signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851 and for the brave leader of the Mandan tribe in the 1800s. The bridge was one of only four bridges that spanned the Missouri River and joined the territories east and west of the river. It was expected that the bridge would serve over 200,000 people and would join an isolated western North Dakota with the rest of the state. The appropriateness of its name lay in the fact that it was opening up links of communication

⁵⁹ Quoted in Marilyn Hudson's *A Bridge Called Four Bears* (1998, 1).

⁶⁰ The historical facts of the Elbowoods Bridge were mentioned in a number of sources. Unless otherwise cited, all facts came from the following sources:

Halliday Promoter, "Is open for traffic. June 1, 1934a.

Halliday Promoter, "Dedication of bridge June 15-18." April 20, 1934b.

Halliday Promoter, "Facts about the new Elbowoods Bridge." March 23, 1934c.

Halliday Promoter, "Work on Elbowoods bridge starts after cold weather layoff." February 17, 1933.

Marilyn Hudson, *A Bridge Called Four Bears* (New Town: Three Tribes Museum, 1998).

Minot Daily News. "Two bridge Missouri ceremonies arranged." June 12, 1934.

Minot Daily News, "New Missouri River bridge at Elbowoods to be named for Indian chief" May 7, 1934.

among the entire region, just as Chief Four Bears had opened up communication between two nations. When it was moved, "Four Bears" would again come to symbolize the bridging of a gap between two different cultures.

Dismantling of the Four Bears Bridge began just 19 years after its dedication.⁶¹ The steel structure of this bridge would be moved to a site near Sanish, three miles west of the developing New Town. Preliminary work had already begun at the new bridge site as crews worked through the fall of 1951 to clear the brush and timber from the bottomlands.⁶² This new bridge was to be the longest in North Dakota at 4,482 feet. Following the necessary preparations, construction of the piers finally began in May of 1952. The ringing sounds of driving pile⁶³ could be heard throughout most of the day, though one might wonder if many people of New Town took notice of it in the midst of

⁶¹ Information of the earlier stages of the Four Bears Bridge at New Town is taken from a series of sources, including:

Robert Cory, "River crossings remain at four after reservoir fills," *Minot Daily News*. June 10, 1953a.
Gorder, interview.

A. Houser, discussion.

Marilyn Hudson, *A Bridge Called Four Bears* (New Town: Three Tribes Museum, 1998).

Minot Daily News, "Bridge pier job almost completed." September 29, 1953a.

Minot Daily News, "Dismantling of Elbowoods Bridge to start," June 5, 1953c.

New Town News, "Elbowoods bridge again in place," October 14, 1954a.

New Town News, "First steel up on new bridge," June 3, 1954b.

New Town News, "New bridge substructure completed" October 8, 1953a.

Sanish Sentinel, "Massman-Kansas City Construction Companies bring in heavy equipment," April 10, 1952b.

Sanish Sentinel, "Bridge firm employs local men," February 14, 1952c.

Sanish Sentinel, "Sanish bridge job goes to Oklahomans," February 14, 1952d.

Sanish Sentinel, "Contracting firms to begin work soon," January 31, 1952e.

Sanish Sentinel, "Contractors for new bridge here to look over situation," November 8, 1951a.

Sanish Sentinel, "Bridge Construction representative here," October 11, 1951b.

Sanish Sentinel, "Plans being readied for 4,483 foot Sanish Bridge," April 1, 1951c.

⁶² The clearing of brush and timber was done by A.T. Nolan Company of Minneapolis. The John Beasley Construction Company and Manhattan Construction Company won the contract to dismantle the bridge in Elbowoods. The Kansas City Bridge Company and Massman Construction Company, both of Kansas City, Missouri were awarded the contract for the substructure. The superstructure was completed by the Manhattan Construction Company of Muskogee, Oklahoma. The total costs for the 1954 Four Bears Bridge was \$4,140,234 (approximately equal to \$29,450,003.77 today). This price included not only the construction of the sub- and super-structure of the bridge, but also the dismantling of the Elbowoods Bridge and the removal of the Verendrye Bridge near Sanish (all facts taken from a number of sources. See note 60).

⁶³ "Driving pile" refers to the process of driving pieces of steel, which would support the piers, into the ground.

their own construction. Construction continued quickly and by late June and early July, construction crews were already in the process of pouring cement for the piers.

Like New Town, the bridge was built primarily by local residents. Among the workers who toiled at this grueling task was the young, “carousing” teenager, Bob Gorder.⁶⁴ Bob began working with the Massman Construction Company in the summer of 1952 after his junior year of high school in Plaza. He and his family had just moved into the area that summer. “I got \$1.32⁶⁵ an hour! That was pretty good money in those days!” said Bob, laughing. That summer, Bob doesn’t remember doing much other than wielding a shovel and eventually pouring cement for twelve hours a day, six days a week. He quit when school started again in the fall, but returned to Massman in the summer of 1953, this time earning \$1.43⁶⁶ an hour. “I thought that was chips there! Course that was a long time ago, too...over fifty years ago.” The summer of 1953, however, Bob was working the night shift. “They had an island out in the main channel, and we took a boat out there at four-thirty in the afternoon, you know, and then climbed down in a cofferdam⁶⁷ and mucked it out.”

At the time, Bob didn’t think much about the work he was doing out on the bridge. He and most of the people working there only had their minds on that \$1.43 an hour. For those twelve hours, Bob would stand down in the cofferdam and shovel all the muck from under the beams, which was later picked up by cranes. “And that’s dangerous!” said Bob. “We never thought of it that day. We just saw the dollar forty-three an hour, that’s all we thought about. But you know, after I started sitting back and taking a look at it, that was dangerous, to climb down there.... We could watch the edges of it, water coming in between the ties, you know, up there. But they had pumps pumping

⁶⁴ I was referred to Bob by Mike Kopp of the NDDOT (see note 30 in Chapter IV). All quotes are taken from the interview with Bob on January 8, 2006.

⁶⁵ Today that amount would be \$9.88. Most of the people who started at the bridge in 2003 started at around \$20 an hour.

⁶⁶ \$10.62 per hour.

⁶⁷ A cofferdam was a temporary enclosure that was pumped dry so that construction of piers could be done on the ground.

at all times.” Even with the precautions taken, Bob still thought about things that could have gone wrong. “After a couple years, I started thinking about, what if one of those things would have fallen through? It could’ve fallen through and filled up with water within two seconds. You know? It scared me after I got older. But I didn’t think anything of it then.”

But accidents did happen. Several times materials were washed out by the wild Missouri River, delaying construction.⁶⁸ In addition, working at such heights, falls were not uncommon, an occurrence that injured several workers throughout the duration of the bridge’s construction. The first fatality occurred in September 1953 when carpenter Sylvester Mahr fell into a cofferdam as scaffolding of one of the piers gave way. Three other men fell, though they were only injured. One of these men, Edwin Zook fell into shallow water and had his head stuck in mud when C.R. Happe came to the rescue and pulled him free (*New Town News* 1953b). These men, however, were some of the workers brought in for the job, and death wouldn’t hit home until July 27, 1954, when a local painter, Donald Ryland was killed when he fell from the bridge. “I remember one night we got out there about five o’clock and a guy had fallen off...a pier. Couple piers west of where we were.”⁶⁹ Ryland survived his fall and tried to swim to a pier, but was pulled under by the Missouri’s current. “The river had a lot of current, a lot of water action,” said Bob. “And he fell off and it just stunned him, I guess. He tried to swim toward the pier, but he couldn’t. They picked him up about two, three miles south on the river here.” The *New Town News* later reported that Ryland had been reaching for a paint

⁶⁸ Information of the various accidents are taken from various newspaper articles: *Minot Daily News*, “Swollen river washes out wood construction bridge,” June 18, 1953f. *New Town News*, “Tom Williams, Corps Inspector at bridge, dies in sleep,” September 29, 1955b. *New Town News*, “Victim of bridge accident; body found four miles downstream,” August 4, 1955c. *New Town News*, “Fall from new bridge fatal to local man,” July 28, 1955d. *New Town News*, “Bridge worker hurt last week,” May 20, 1954c. *New Town News*, “One bridge worker killed; another injured here,” September 17, 1953b. *Sanish Sentinel*, “Bridge worker injured in fall from crane,” August 7, 1952a.

⁶⁹ Dates according to Bob’s recollections and the actual death of Donald Ryland do not match up. Ryland’s death occurred July 27, 1955. Bob was not working on the bridge at that time. His recollections as to the details of Ryland’s death do, however, match up with those reported in the *New Town News* (1955c & 1955d). For this reason, I chose to report this recollection because of the relevance it still had to the event.

mixing stick when he lost his balance and fell (1955d). Crews near the scene thought they would be able to rescue him as he clung to a steel beam, but Ryland lost his grip and fell into the muddy waters below. He fell 135 feet and landed feet first and was swimming to the shore when he disappeared beneath the water. His body was found on July 30 about four miles downstream. Ryland's would be the last death in the construction of the bridge. In the fall of 1953, shortly before the work on the bridge's substructure was complete, Bob quit his job with Massman to attend college in Minot.

While most of the preliminary preparations and substructure work were done by mainly local residents, many workers were brought in for the more difficult superstructure. The Manhattan Construction Company came to begin the construction of the steel structure, which would be made up of the main span of the Four Bears Bridge that had been located at Elbowoods. Many of these workers came from the south, particularly Lake Charles, Louisiana, which was a hotbed of steel workers due to the growth of unions.⁷⁰ In the midst of all their own construction, residents of New Town also set about trying to find housing for the influx of workers expected to come there. This, however, would prove difficult, since Sanish was on the move. "A lot of people were living in an old—right by that old dancehall down by the river—in tents and stuff. They didn't have any hotels to amount to anything then, and all the crews were here. They worked around the clock," said Bob. Bob, however, was in college by the time construction of the superstructure had begun, and was not around when these workers came flooding into New Town.

Alvin and Bernice, who were by now living on their farm north of the bridge site, however, were uninvolved in the construction of New Town and had more time to take note of the activity that was going on around them. "It was really, really busy," said

⁷⁰ This information came from Mike Kopp of the North Dakota Department of Transportation and Lawrence Robinson. According to Mr. Lawrence, the unions were big until they "killed themselves." Union leaders in Lake Charles were caught for embezzlement, which left very few union jobs in that area. Union members then had to travel elsewhere for work. Throughout the construction of the new bridge, Kopp researched both bridges and conducted his own interviews as to the livelihood of the time. The information was received through an e-mail on December 19, 2005.

Alvin. "They had a campsite up there on the west side of [Sanish]. It was just about a block, two blocks from where I lived. They had about fifty trailers in there." A lot of the help that was brought in stayed in that camp for the next few years.

Construction of the bridge continued around the clock to meet its deadline of January 1, 1955. Apart from the death of Ryland and the natural death of Army Corps of Engineers Inspector, Tom Williams, the bridge was completed without further incident (*New Town News* 1955b). The Fours Bears Bridge was officially opened to traffic October 1, 1955 at the ribbon-cutting ceremony (Lawson 1955). A two day celebration was held in New Town, with festivities including a parade, rodeo, and dance (*New Town News* 1955a). For the next 50 years, the Four Bears Bridge would stand as a landmark and the last standing relic of a world that had disappeared almost completely beneath the waters of the Garrison Reservoir.

* * *

With the construction of the bridge and New Town complete, people finally began to settle into their new lives. The town grew and steadily increased in population as it became both the center for the Fort Berthold Reservation and for recreation on Lake Sakakawea. In the 1970s, Frank Traynor and several others reincarnated Van Hook as a summer haven for fishermen and boaters (Lund n.d.). Sanish, as it was founded by the "militant group" of the 1950s, slowly dwindled as more and more people moved into New Town. Today, only a few buildings remain of Sanish, many of which are now merely broken-down shacks. People who remembered Van Hook and Sanish as towns slowly became fewer and fewer. This era had proven to be hard, and, for some, heartbreaking. Nonetheless, Bernice asserts that everyone was better off afterward. "As far as the flooding goes, there isn't a person that lived down there that's alive now that isn't better off than they would have been had they not built the dam, really. The only people that suffered, they're gone. There's nobody alive *now* that's worse off than they

were then, as far as I can see. Nobody.”⁷¹ For those who are still alive and remember the hardships faced for the next years, they learned early on that life kept going, and all they could do was move with it. “You move on,” said Bernice. “You move on.”

⁷¹ Bernice was referring to the living conditions of the time. None of the towns in the valley had electricity or indoor plumbing, nor was it possible at that time to get it because of the terrain of the bottomlands. There have been several sources (including VanDevelder, Cole, and Springer), however, that have noted the continuing economic, cultural, and even psychological damages that resulted from the dam. Though Bernice states above that everyone was better off after the dam, she was still a critic of the project herself. “I’m enough of a naturalist, or environmentalist, or whatever, to think they shouldn’t have built the dams in the first place, because, well I know a fellow, that—he says, ‘Mother Nature will—she’ll claim her land back again. It may take a while, but she’ll claim that whole river bottom back again’. And she will. The dams will fail eventually. And the trees will come back. We won’t see it, but it will happen. So, I wasn’t too crazy about the whole idea in the first place.... I’d like to see the whole thing go back to the river myself” (B. Houser 2005)”

CHAPTER VIII

Building a Bridge

"I came here to do two things: build a bridge and chew bubblegum. I'm out of bubble gum."

THOMAS "BOOBOO" BRUBAKER, IRONWORKER⁷²

Fifty years later, the bustle and construction of fifty years ago seemed to repeat itself in New Town. Once again, New Town became a bustling center of construction as Kemp Construction began digging up the streets to replace water lines and Fru-Con construction began work on the bridge.⁷³ Workers came from all over the country, but as with the old bridge, a large majority of them came from the Lake Charles, Louisiana area. Hotels were full, residents began renting homes out to workers, and the bars were no longer quiet with a few of the regulars, but full of people to whom they were not accustomed. When curious locals asked what these strangers were doing here, a common answer was simply, "Building a bridge."

After numerous studies and much deliberation, it was decided in 1996 that the old, and increasingly dangerous bridge, needed to be replaced. Plans continued for the new bridge and finally, in May 2003, laborers began arriving for preliminary work. By September the sounds of driving pile were once again the notes of a song the people of New Town heard daily as the town went through its transformation. Where one had seen the same North Dakota vehicles in front of the same businesses every day, diesel trucks with Louisiana and Texas license plates sat in their place. Barstools were occupied not only by regulars, but also by construction workers telling stories and talking in southern accents about the bridge. Parking lots of hotels once filled with fishermen's boats were

⁷² Brubaker, pers. comm, 2005.

⁷³ Talk of replacing the bridge began as early as 1993. Studies were conducted to decide if the bridge could be widened. It was decided in 1996 that the best alternative for the bridge was to remove it and build a new one. Tribal leaders and the state government submitted a request for \$40 million for the construction of a new bridge (Hudson 1998). The actual designing of the bridge was conducted in 2002 and 2003. The contract for the bridge was awarded to Fru-Con Construction Company based out of St. Louis, Missouri (North Dakota Department of Transportation 2004).

now filled with travel trailers where construction workers and their families lived. These parking lots often ended up being the place workers' get-togethers on weekends and evenings. There they cooked Cajun food and sometimes even catfish the workers caught at the construction site when delays on the job left them with little to do.

At first the crews mainly stayed together in their own enclaves within the town. As segments of the bridge slowly began to come together, however, so did these strangers and the residents of New Town. People were drawn to these new, colorful residents of New Town and their stories of living as nomads who traveled around the United States from job to job. Not one of these workers was alike. "If you take fifty people," said crane operator "Mr." Lawrence Robinson,⁷⁴ "you'll get fifty different stories. There's some of the most wonderful people in the world. There's some con artists," he said smiling. "There's thieves. There's everything, because when we're sitting, it's under the same tent."

As many New Town residents would come to find out, that was indeed the case. Mr. Lawrence, as he was known by his fellow crewmembers and eventually the locals of New Town, was a considerate, polite, elderly man in his sixties—a model of the Southern Gentleman. Billy Joe Buxton was a little brother to many, though not necessarily because innocence, but because he often needed to be looked after since he had a tendency to get into trouble. Thomas Brubaker, otherwise known as Booboo, was the quiet, friendly type who quickly befriended many and boasted that he was building this bridge, "All by myself." There was also Gene "the Thug" Metcalfe of Oklahoma. Thug was known for his strength on the job—and for showing it off in frequent bar fights. His co-workers also joked about guarding their possessions from him because of his record for stealing. As

⁷⁴ Mr. Lawrence was one of the workers who had been in New Town the longest. Because of his commitment to this job, he was also one of the last workers left in New Town in November when I began interviewing for the project. Many of the other workers referred me to Mr. Lawrence, not only because he has worked construction since 1967, and therefore knowledgeable about the project, but because of his careful attention to details and history.

Mr. Lawrence said, these workers were all together under one tent; they were all part of one large family.

The loyalty these workers often showed to each other was soon projected on the people in town. Dena Folden and her fiancé, Devin Dorval, were among the many who grew close to the workers.⁷⁵ When Devin, known by the workers as “Pineknot”⁷⁶ for his small size, began working on the bridge, both Devin and Dena were quickly accepted into the crew and found themselves drawn to the bridge workers. “They changed it up,” said Dena,⁷⁷ “and made us think about different things—embrace new things.” Dena and Devin often went to the workers’ gatherings, where they listened to the stories the bridge workers told. “They were just interesting, because we’d never known anything like this before in our little hole,” she joked, her comments resembling some of those of the Southerners’ “—our little cave that is the North!”

The workers seemed to do so much for the town, recalls Dena, but at the same time, it was difficult to pinpoint their exact influence. “There’s so many things they did, but at the same time, they didn’t do anything,” she said. The workers, after all, had merely come to do a job, but in their stay, the attitudes, experiences, and outlooks the workers shared with each person with whom they came in contact worked to change some of these “Nodakians.”⁷⁸ For Dena such a moment, one she will always remember, occurred over Easter. The boss’s wife, Miss Charlotte, put varying amounts of money in eggs and hid them for the workers. “It was so—family,” said Dena. “Like honest-to-God family. She treated them like they were her sons and spent God knows how much

⁷⁵ Dena is a close friend of mine. She was a waitress and I was a bartender at her father’s restaurant and bar, the Scenic 23 Club. This is how I became acquainted with most of the workers. With the workers now gone, she and I often talk about them and the influence they had on the town. Whenever she drives across the new bridge, Dena calls one worker, Kip, and asks “When are you coming home?” (Folden 2006)

⁷⁶ When the boss, Rocky, introduced Devin to the crew as Pineknot, no one really even knew what a pineknot was. “Pineknot!” said Rocky, “Like a little knot on a pine tree!” There are no notes on this conversation, but it was a story that was often retold when others asked about this strange nickname.

⁷⁷ Dena Folden, telephone conversation, notes in author’s possession, February 28, 2006. All direct quotes from Dena are taken from this conversation.

⁷⁸ A worker, Mark Lamon, always called people from North Dakota, or “NoDak,” Nodakians. This was often merely a joke about how different the food is, the way we lived, and the way we acted.

money.” Miss Charlotte, often playing the mother figure, did try to make it like family, since most of the workers were away from their homes most of the year. She even helped Tanner Sandstrom, the newest local addition to this family, find an egg, after feeling sorry for him when everyone else had found several eggs, and he was still empty-handed. Finally, he returned from the pickup bed with an egg, a grin on his face, and five more dollars in his pocket than when he went in. These were the simple pleasures that set this family apart, and was reflected in one of their sayings. “Life’s too short to be unhappy,” Booboo always said. “Got to be happy.”⁷⁹

Their stay in North Dakota was not always pleasant, however. Like the construction of the first bridge, workers faced many problems on the job site. During the day, the construction workers had to battle the natural elements which seemed much more extreme in North Dakota than most places they had been. Wind made operating the cranes difficult on several occasions and the rise and fall of the lake level also produced many problems.⁸⁰ The cold plagued the workers accustomed to warm weather, and one worker, Clint, even got frostbite from being outside for six minutes. “When it snowed before Halloween,” said Booboo, “that was it!” He had had enough of North Dakota’s weather and couldn’t wait to be laid off for the winter. Often, the workers would be laid off when the ice froze over, but in some cases they tried to continue through the weather to meet their deadline. When Booboo first arrived, he was sent home and called back shortly after. “I went home for about a month,” said Booboo, “and they called us back

⁷⁹ All quotes and information from this section are taken from the interview with Thomas Brubaker unless otherwise cited. Thomas Brubaker, discussion, notes in author’s possession, October 24, 2005.

⁸⁰ This is also discussed in several news articles about the bridge. Unless otherwise noted, facts about the bridge came from the following sources:

Thomas Brubaker, discussion, notes in author’s possession, October 24, 2005.

Thomas Brubaker, telephone conversation, notes in author’s possession, November 30, 2004.

Laruen Donovan, “New bridge spans art, architecture: Project tops a flurry of financial activity in New Town,” *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), [n.d.].

Eloise Ogden, “Bridge Builders: Workers from everywhere come together to construct new Four Bears Bridge,” *Minot Daily News* (Minot, ND). September 26, 2004.

Eloise Ogden, “Contractors work on building Four Bears Bridge” *Minot Daily News* (Minot, ND). October 16, 2003.

Lawrence Robinson, interview by Tessa Sandstrom, New Town, ND, November 19, 2005, tape recording, transcript, in author’s possession.

when it was forty below. Actually it was sixty. Sixty below zero the day Rocky called me back to work. I got home that night, watched the weather channel, called Rocky back. 'Are you kidding me! Idiot! It's sixty below up there!'" Booboo came back, though, as work resumed on the bridge. Work, however, was slow. "[We] worked a little bit. Went back and got warm," said Booboo. Then, as an afterthought, he added, "Spent more time getting warm than anything."

For the most part, construction continued with minor incidents and injuries.⁸¹ Like the old bridge, falls during the construction were an everyday threat, even with their emphasis on safety.⁸² But the workers did experience a catastrophe that affected one, Billy Joe, for a while thereafter. The received the call on November 30, 2004 from Jay Sandstrom. Someone was just killed on the bridge when the reinforcement bar (rebar) for one of the piers collapsed. I thought of the crew. Booboo? Billy Joe? Thug? Eclipse?⁸³ The workers, however, were not with Fru-Con, but with JD Steel, a subcontractor working on the steel structures of the bridge. Jay described what he saw from the Sanish bluff and filled me in on the rumors. "I thought, 'Jesus Christ, what a disaster,'" he said. There were also three young men injured, two of whom were seriously hurt. The young man who was killed was Levi Grant of Mandaree. Booboo later called and told me what happened.⁸⁴ Billy Joe was closest to the accident when it happened and jumped on the rebar to help rescue the boys. "Billy Joe had to choose which worker to cut [free from the rebar] first," said Booboo. "Told one he had to cut the other or *he'd* die. The other was grabbing [Billy Joe's] leg saying he had to cut him or he'd die." Other workers looked on at the accident, waiting to see if their help was needed. When the boss, Rocky, told

⁸¹ Information about the accident came from the interviews and news articles. All direct quotes, unless otherwise cited, are taken from the interviews and discussions:

Thomas Brubaker, telephone conversation, notes in author's possession, November 30, 2004.

Jay Sandstrom, telephone conversation, notes in author's possession, November 30, 2004.

Curt Woodward, "Part of bridge falls." *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), December 1, 2004.

⁸² Even when off the job site, many of the workers jumped at even moderately loud noises, because they were cautious of falling objects during construction.

⁸³ Eclipse was the nickname of another local worker, Jeremy Young Wolf.

⁸⁴ Thomas Brubaker, telephone conversation, notes in author's possession, November 30, 2005.

Booboo, Thug, and Eclipse they didn't need help with the accident, Rocky said, "I've never seen more relieved faces in my life." The memory remained with Billy Joe for a long time, however. "There was nothing left of his head but his face," Billy Joe told Booboo, and confided that he often woke up screaming when he dreamt about the accident.⁸⁵

The other men survived and Grant's was the only death. After the accident was cleaned up, progress continued on the bridge and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) continued investigating the accident. In June, OSHA fined Fru-Con and JD Steel for failing to provide instructions for properly supporting the steel column, failing to provide appropriate plans for installing it, and failing to provide prompt medical attention to the men in the accident.⁸⁶ The last segment was hung in August of 2005. This landmark event ended the major construction of the bridge and preparations began for the demolition of the old bridge. Even with work far from complete on the new bridge, many of the original crew members began to leave the same way they had come: one by one.

Like the old Four Bears Bridge, this new, sleek structure was dedicated on October 1. Three days of celebration followed, including a parade, dances, and meals (Denning Gackle 2005). Work had already begun on the demolition of the old bridge. One by one, a small section spanning two piers was imploded. Cranes fished the steel of these smaller spans from the water, and Porter Bros. of Minot hauled this steel away by the truckload (Fundingsland 2005). One shipment of steel coincidentally went by during the parade. As people gathered, waiting for the parade to start, Jeanette LaRock, a former

⁸⁵ Grant was working on the pier when the 50,000 pounds of rebar collapsed, crushing him. His death was believed to be instantaneous (Woodward 2004). Details are not available from the article by Woodward and were not something Billy Joe wanted to go into very much. Quotes were taken from what Booboo relayed on to me and are not verbatim from Billy Joe, but from Booboo. There are no notes from what Billy Joe told me about his nightmares, but the conversation was not something easily forgettable. He had one of these nightmares when he and Booboo were visiting me in Germany in January 2005.

⁸⁶ JD Steel settled for \$14,175 in fines, a decrease from the \$25,000 proposed by the OSHA. Fru-Con was still contesting the \$49,500 in proposed fines (Associated Press 2005).

high school English and journalism teacher,⁸⁷ remembers seeing a few of these trucks go by like a funeral procession. "I thought, 'Why don't they have this in the parade!' Here this big truckload of the old Four Bears Bridge was going by and nobody even looked!" she said.⁸⁸ Rita Satermo, however, was one of the few others who did notice the symbolic significance of the moment. "Here we had this parade and it was for the bridge and here's big trucks coming with refuse from [the old one]. They should've had that in the parade, too." Meanwhile, for the next few weeks, the main section of the Four Bears Bridge continued to stand tall as sections on either side of it were demolished. Its own demolition was slated for October 14, 2005.

* * *

"There it is! There it is!" I yelled as the story of the Four Bears Bridge demolition came on the local news. All the people in the Scenic turned their attention to the two TVs as they watched the steel structure from the main section of the old Four Bears Bridge fold in on itself and fall into the lake. Everyone yelled and cheered as the news showed the demolition from six different angles. "Sweet!" yelled Clint and Booboo, just as they had earlier that afternoon when we had watched the demolition from one of the floating barges.

Watching the demolition on TV brought back the original sense of watching the explosion as it happened. My friend Bridget and I waited near the Four Bears Marina Bait Shop an hour before the scheduled demolition. Several others were already there waiting, cameras and camcorders in hand, when we arrived. When we finally saw the small, tin-looking boat pull up, we walked down to the shore. "Look at us!" I said when another girl, Cassie, Clint's girlfriend, showed up. "We've got connections! We're like the Bridge Groupies!" I joked as we drove out to one of the barges that sat half a mile from the bridge. These "connections," however, got us a front row view of the demolition. We

⁸⁷ Jeanette is also doing her part to preserve the history. Since the construction of the new bridge, she has been taking pictures and putting together a calendar and collection of postcards of the bridges.

⁸⁸ Jeannette LaRock, pers. comm., notes in author's possession, November 19, 2005.

looked at the hundreds of cars that had gathered on the shore near the marina and atop the bluffs near Sanish. After the crews had debriefed the safety measures, we all stood on the barge deck and waited for the countdown. After some complications with one of the explosives, the event had finally come. With a deep BOOM that knocked the wind out of us, even from a half-mile away, the bridge seemed to stay suspended in the air for a split second before folding in on itself. Smoke and water filled the air as chunks of steel splashed down into the waters of Lake Sakakawea. The wind slowly cleared the smoke away, and like curtains being pulled back, it revealed a clear, unobstructed view of the new, sleek, Four Bears Bridge.

CHAPTER IX

The Cycle of Survival

"The improvements in our cultivation, the improvements in control of the floods that are now so destructive, will then probably seem commonplace. They will accept them as a part of their lives. They will no longer question the usefulness of these great dams."

PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER,
GARRISON, ND, JUNE 11, 1953.

For most, the spectacle of seeing the archaic, old bridge crash down into the water was more about witnessing the accurate and flawless demolition through implosion than seeing the Four Bears Bridge in its entirety one last time. For others, however, it was seeing this 71-year-old structure, the last of an era, disappear once and for all had special significance. For them, especially the elders, this was not only a bridge across a river, but a bridge to the past. This old relic had stood as the last remnant of Elbowoods, a remnant that had moved with the people when the flood waters came. Though it may not have played a central role in the history of this particular region and era, the bridge, standing tall and strong, was a symbol and constant reminder of the past. The story of how it came to be near New Town is the same story of the people.

This, however, was not only a significant story for the locals who had experienced and lived in those hard times; it was also a story that a majority of the state indirectly embraced and identified with. "The interest in the bridge is of much greater depth than just the shallow water," said Mike Kopp, a journalist documenting the history of the Four Bears Bridge for the North Dakota Department of Transportation.⁸⁹ "There is a lot of 'ownership' of the Four Bears Bridge as it stood at New Town. I have yet to speak to a group⁹⁰...in which at least one if not more members of the audience [does not come] up

⁸⁹ Mike Kopp, e-mail message to author, notes in author's possession, December 19, 2005.

⁹⁰ Mike Kopp has given presentations around the state on his research so far of the Four Bears Bridge. Among the towns he mentioned were Devils Lake, Dunseith, Minot, Williston, Stanley, New Town, and Bismarck. He is working as the media developer for the North Dakota Department of Transportation

to tell me their story about the old bridge, their first crossing, their work on it, or their family member who worked on it.” The bridge, then, stood not only as a mere utilitarian object, but one that embodied a history and identity of a people and a state.

The bridge’s embodiment of identity is not an uncommon occurrence for this region. John Hudson, a scholar of Midwestern culture, said that the Midwest’s past “is so suffused into the present that deliberate attempts at historic preservation often seem out of place, literally” (as cited by Kent Ryden 1999, 521). This seemed to be the case as the histories people took from Sanish, Van Hook, and Elbowoods became entwined with the birth of New Town. The houses and businesses people moved were changed, transformed, and mixed in among the new buildings of New Town until they no longer resembled their original façade. Even the bridge, which had retained its original structure from 1934, was seen so much as a necessity for present-day use that its historical significance was often overlooked. A popular perception was that preservation of this history was not needed with this structure already standing as a memorial to those who were relocated as a result of the Garrison Dam.

Furthermore, the bridge had stood as a seemingly permanent figure of New Town since the town’s creation, inscribing the bridge as a part of the region’s natural landscape. Through winter and storms, the structure withstood the wind and ice. In summer, it stood serenely, its sharp body reflecting brightly off the smooth surface. The bridge’s almost natural inclusion into the landscape thereby gave the bridge meaning, and it stood as a record of the area’s history (Ryden 1999). In fact, the bridge had become so much a part of the landscape, and so much an embodiment of both the area’s past and present, that it would take its very destruction to reveal the deep and rich history that resided within it. Only then did the individual attachments that many held for the bridge come together.

(NDDOT). He is also working on projects about the Rainbow Bridge in Valley City and the Veterans Memorial Bridge in Bismarck NDDOT (Ogden 2005). The Four Bears Bridge is eligible to be on the National Registry of historic places, so “it is considered ‘historic property.’ Since it will be removed, many efforts have to be taken to minimize adverse effects, and that includes maintaining its memory” (Kopp 2002). Kopp was previously an editor of the *New Town News*, so he was familiar with the bridge before taking on this project.

“Sometimes when something is as close to our personal environment as the bridge was close to [our] personal environment,” said Kopp, “it is hard to see that others have as much or even greater interest in it. This is the case with the Four Bears Bridge. I’ve been surprised that so many people from so far away laid claim to the bridge in a personal way.” But as the bridge came apart piece by piece, so did the history, as each thread of this tale of struggle, sacrifice, and survival unwound itself, revealing the truths and stories that had been hidden behind a monstrous dam.

But if the bridge was to evoke a historical awareness, the duration of this historical revelation is uncertain. At the same time that the bridge stood as a record of and monument to the region’s history, the history was still “threatened to some degree by erasure, as elements of a historic document that is the landscape are lost to the effects of time, economic decline, and sporadic abandonment” (Ryden 1999, 521). Indeed, the old Four Bears Bridge would be removed and its history threatened when this historic structure would be replaced by a new, less historically significant bridge. Once the new bridge was built, the old bridge did show the effects of time in comparison to its replacement. No longer did it appear to stand tall and strong, but instead, broken-down and rickety. This was even more evident at night. While driving across the new bridge, the sight was awe-inspiring and “medieval” (LaRock 2005). The steel skeleton-like structure of the old bridge was a ghostly white, an apparition floating next to its replacement. Though the old bridge’s appearance was caused by a trick of the lights installed on the piers of the new bridge, this image seemed to be an element of foreshadowing. In just a few months, this apparition, even if it was only a manifestation of the mind, would be all that remained of the bridge. On October 14, 2005, this apparition became a reality as the old bridge fell away from the landscape and into the water below. Today, only those who had personal experiences with the bridge would know it had ever existed. Only those who looked upon it every day can still see its ghost there.

* * *

From the Scenic we can see dirt and sand being whipped about by the wind, obscuring the view of Van Hook. O.H. Ulrich was right when he said Van Hook would be in the middle of a three-way dustbowl in times of drought. As we watch the lake recede ever lower, summer after summer from the drought, bitterness about the Garrison Project grows stronger. What was supposed to bring prosperity seemed to only bear problems for North Dakota. Fishermen, who had made use of "what we got dumped with,"⁹¹ are angry as the Army Corps of Engineers continues to let water out from the dam so that barges of the few remaining shipping companies downstream can continue to operate. Area farmers are angry because they still have not seen a single drop of irrigation; so far, fewer than 9,000 acres of the promised 1 million acres have been irrigated. The tribes are angry, because even with this large body of water right at their feet, many families still do not have adequate drinking water. Until 1992, the tribes hadn't even been sufficiently compensated for their sacrifice.⁹² Meanwhile, environmentalists are angry because the dam has destroyed natural habitats, placing the pallid sturgeon, piping plover and interior least tern on the endangered species list. The Garrison Dam holds not only water, but a buildup of silt as shorelines downstream continue to erode. At a Corps of Engineers meeting, one man from Emmet County is angry because noxious weeds have grown along the shoreline and he must pay to get them removed so they don't overrun his crops.⁹³ Others are angry simply at the government's failure to keep its promises.

⁹¹ Taken from the interview with Rita Satermo, November 19, 2005. The sacrifices many gave for the Garrison Dam left the people of the Missouri River Valley with virtually nothing but a giant lake. Today, many look back with scorn. Though the lake provides opportunities for outdoor recreation, it is still something they were "dumped with," or forced to accept following the construction of the Garrison Dam.

⁹² Because of the efforts of Martin Cross's son, Raymond, the tribes were finally awarded \$149.2 million for the injustices they suffered in 1949. In order to fund this decision, a trust fund was created in which surplus funds from the power receipts from the Dam would go. Over six years, the target amount of \$149.2 million was met and paid to the tribes.

⁹³ This grievance was expressed at the Corps of Engineers meeting on November 17, 2005 (Army Corps of Engineers 2005). This meeting was held so that the Corps could announce revisions on the master manual

“I would think that all of North Dakota should be kind of angry,” said Marilyn, “not only at the Corps, but the politicians of the era.” As a state struggling for economic survival, the promise of irrigation made farmers eager to agree with the plan. “Farmers [were] having crop failures one after the other...and life was tough for the Dakotans. So, along comes these guys that say, ‘Okay, here’s what we’ll do. We’ll build the Garrison Dam, and we’ll irrigate the entire state of North Dakota ...and eventually North Dakota will be like a paradise.’ ... So everybody dreamt of prosperity and good times, and,” said Marilyn, pausing, “it didn’t happen.” Indeed, North Dakotans continued to hope for rain, year after year. Those who had to move from their homes as water backed up behind the dam worked to rebuild their lives elsewhere. The troubles and hardships they suffered were suppressed as they waited for this promised prosperity (Hudson 2005). While they waited, a bridge was built, New Town was completed, and life went on. Each day, after all, was just part of the “cycle of survival” (Hudson as cited by Springer 2003d).

Today, a new, sleek bridge stands in place of the hulking, steel Four Bears Bridge. This bridge bears its own significance, for it embraces the cultures of the Three Affiliated Tribes. Medallions adorn the piers and the walking path that was included in the bridge. Many of the townspeople admire this culturally sensitive bridge, which brings a sense of honor and accomplishment for the bridge builder Mr. Lawrence. “There’s a lot of satisfaction, because you get to see what I saw when I got here. We didn’t have the first pier when I got here. They was working on it. And you see it all come together and how proud the local people are of what they got now. That satisfies me.” Satisfaction, however, was not the only asset Mr. Lawrence got from the project. He also found the experience he had working in New Town to be valuable. “I make money, but I’ll spend that money. But I’ll have those memories, and those memories will always be with me” (Robinson 2005).

which would call for a spring pulse to try to imitate the river’s natural springtime movements in order to address some of the above problems.

Indeed, memories often outlive physical objects, as they have outlived the towns of Sanish and Van Hook. Memories, however, cannot continue to live if they are allowed to disappear with the people who hold them. The history of this area had faded so much and become so obscure, that had the old bridge not stood as a memorial, as the last artifact of this forgotten time, one might ask if this history would even be recalled and remembered today. Yet while the old bridge worked to hold together the fading fragments of history, the construction of the new bridge would further unite the separate pieces of history. Through local interest, statewide attention to the project, and others' efforts to help preserve the history, the connection between the bridge, the lost communities of North Dakota, and the Garrison Dam had once again come together.

The re-emergence of this history came at a time when farmers were again suffering crop failures. The question on the minds of farmers, especially those who had given up their rich lands in the Missouri River Valley, was: How could there be crop failures after the construction of this monstrous dam? The answers lie in the fact that the Garrison Dam was still an "Unfinished Dream."⁹⁴ As people reflected on the unfulfilled promises of the 1940s and 1950s, one question weighed on their minds: was it worth it after all? Was the construction of the Garrison Dam worth the millions of dollars it cost a nation just coming out of economic depression? Was it worth the environmental and economic effects the state now suffers? Would the promises of the Garrison Dam, so far unfulfilled, ever compensate for the toil, hardships, and heartache? Most important, would the selfless sacrifice of an entire group of people ever be recognized or commemorated?

For the most part, the people of the Valley of the Dammed have not been paid tribute for the personal sacrifices they gave for their nation. Now their history lies on the brink of erasure. This project has made a short step in the direction of preserving their

⁹⁴ The Garrison Dam was referred to as the Unfinished Dream in a series of articles by journalists Patrick Springer and Janelle Cole of *The Forum*.

memories, but these are only the memories of a few individuals. Many stories continue to reside in the memories of individuals who were also relocated as a result of the dam. The day of the bridge's demolition proved one thing: as much as people wanted to preserve that rusty, old, steel structure, such a desire was impractical. The structure stood for 71 years, a duration that is hard on any well-built structure, especially one that must battle the elements of a harsh North Dakota environment. The bridge's demolition showed that physical objects from history cannot be preserved forever, but the memories, the ghosts of the past, will not fade if we work to preserve them today.

The people who hold these stories, however, are beginning to disappear with the towns whose foundations erode or are covered by silt. It is not necessary, however, that the epic of this bridge, these towns and their people disappear with them. The stories that are provided here are only the tip of an iceberg of a rich and interesting history, a history that continues to reverberate through and influence the occurrences of today. It is a history that does not belong only in the past, but in our present, and our future.

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