

Finding Aid to the Grafton, North Dakota Community Surveys

Grafton, North Dakota Community Surveys

Grafton, N.D., community surveys, 1924-1936

.5 linear ft.

MSS 266

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OVERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY

Grafton is located in Walsh County, which is in the northeast portion of North Dakota. Walsh County is named in honor of George H. Walsh, a well-known Grand Forks newspaperman and politician. The county was created in 1881. The northern two tiers of townships in Grand Forks County and the southern two tiers in Pembina County were split off to form Walsh.

In 1878, O.T. Gorder and M. Christianson settled on the north bank of the Park River. In the fall of that year, Nils Monson and four companions walked from Winnipeg to claim homesteads. Gust Colsen arrived on New Year's Eve, 1878. These early settlers formed the original town of Grafton. Thomas

Cooper arrived the following year with his family. Although he wasn't the first settler, Cooper is credited with being the father of the town. He built the first permanent structure. The nearest post office was quite a distance, and it was difficult to get mail in the winter. Cooper went to every settler within twenty-five miles and got their signatures on a petition. With the petition, he was able to secure a post office for Grafton. With the establishment of a post office, it was necessary to have a proper name. Cooper did not want the town named after himself. He and his family considered several names. These included "Grand Crossing," Mrs. Cooper's maiden name of "Lockport," and "Glenwood" because Cooper liked the sound of it. His wife suggested "Grafton" in honor of Grafton County, New Hampshire where her parents lived. Everyone agreed that Grafton was a fine name. Cooper also built a temporary bridge over the river to accommodate the flood of settlers passing through. Many of those settlers stopped and put down roots in Grafton. The first business district was on the south bank of the river near where the Great Northern Railroad would build a bridge. These first businesses included a hotel, a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a grocery store. A doctor moved to Grafton and besides his practice he ran a drugstore. A livery stable opened. Two banks were quickly added.

As with many North Dakota towns, the railroad was an important factor in the growth of the town. The railroad arrived in 1881 when the first train of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad (later the Great Northern) pulled into Grafton. It was the cause of much excitement in the town. At the time the railroad arrived, Grafton's population was 400. Within six months it rose to 1,000. In another six months, it was 1,500.

Company C of the National Guard was organized in 1885. The company retained its designation when North Dakota became a state. Company C erected an armory in 1892 at a cost of \$3,000. In 1898, every member of the company volunteered for the First North Dakota Volunteer Infantry. They served with distinction in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection.

As with other towns throughout North Dakota, Grafton suffered during the Depression. Many empty buildings looked shabby from lack of upkeep. Some businesses did manage to hang on, as did one bank, the library, and the newspaper. But by 1930, Grafton had lost two banks, 3 pool halls, 3 garages, a produce dealer, a tailor, a milliner, a lumber yard, and a general store. The town was without bus service. Even some of the churches had shut their doors. The 1930 survey noted that the automobile, dance halls, liquor, and movies were blamed for the bad behavior of the young people. It was said that they had a "flagrant disrespect" for the rights of others and the established customs of the community. The 1936 survey reported that 1930 was the low point, but the town was growing again.

U.S. Highway 81 came to be known as the "liquor route." Bootleggers ran liquor down from Canada. It was also reported that there was a great deal of home production of liquor.

In 1924, the population was estimated to be 60% Scandinavian with Bohemians, Polish, French, and German making up the rest. As of the 2010 census, the population of Grafton was 4,284, making it the thirteenth largest city in North Dakota.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

Questionnaire reports (1924) compiled on Grafton, N.D., community in Walsh County, in connection with the Institute of Social and Religious Research's series entitled American village studies; together with follow-up studies (1930, 1936) by Lynn Smith and J.A. McCrae, of University of North Dakota. Includes detailed statistical and descriptive information relating to the population, social groups, agriculture, banking, health, library, civic and social life, churches, and schools.

FOLDER LIST

Box-Folder	Content
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1/3	Schools, 1930
1/4	Churches, 1924
1/5	Community Survey, 1930
1/6	Community Survey, 1936