

West Fargo a Brief History

The story of West Fargo began with a “Whistle Stop” called Haggart. The stop was at the intersection of the Northern Pacific Railway and the Sheyenne River on land owned by John E. Haggart. John E. Haggart came to North Dakota from New York state and laid claim along the Sheyenne River in 1871. He would become the first Cass County Sheriff in 1874 and serve on the first North Dakota state senate from 1889 to 1898. More settlers began arriving in the area and a community grew at this intersection. In 1876 the first school was built and opened in School District No. 6. As the Railroad expanded they added a section house for railroad workers (1889), feed lots for livestock (1905) and a watering station for steam engines (1913).

In 1916 a group of enterprising famers founded Equity Cooperative Packing Company. In 1919 the company finished building twenty-four houses for its workers and began operating Equity Meat Packing Plant. Equity operated for just four years before declaring bankruptcy in 1922. During Equity’s years of operation, the area got its first hotel which also housed a general store, cafeteria and post office. Three years after Equity shut its doors Armour and Company (a leader in the meat packing industry) purchased the Equity plant and resumed operation. The also bought up the equity houses and hotel. The residents on the north side of what is now Main Avenue requested an election to incorporate as the Village of West Fargo. With a 60 to 1 margin, the Village of West Fargo was officially incorporated in November 1930 and held elections for a board of trustees on February 17, 1931. The first board of trustees was headed by Joseph Jameson with Charles Hanson and Peter Zwack also serving as trustees. However, the area to the south of Highway 10 was not included in the incorporation of the village of West Fargo. By 1937 the residents to the south wanted to be recognized and after a 128 to 58 vote on February 15, 1937 the Village of Southwest Fargo was incorporated. Ole Anderson served as the first mayor of Southwest Fargo from 1937-1941.

As West Fargo and Southwest Fargo grew so did the need for infrastructure and services. A brick school building was built on Main Avenue in 1922 and added onto in 1934. The school began offering high school years in 1935 and West Fargo graduated its first class of ten in 1939. Construction began on a High School building in 1939 and was dedicated in 1942. The

first park was built along the Sheyenne River in 1931 on land donated by the Haggart family. Today this park is known as Armour Park. In 1935 West Fargo appointed Clifford Berlin as the first police officer (to deal with speeding on Hwy 10). In 1940 a volunteer fire department was organized and headed by Eddie Boise. In 1948 Southwest Fargo was incorporated as a city rather than a village. Because Southwest Fargo was a city the post office was moved there from West Fargo. Early in the 1940s there was an attempt to build a sewer and water system but this was delayed by World War I. A polio outbreak in 1946 showcased the need for a cleaner city and in 1949 sewer and water installation began in Southwest Fargo.

In 1959 Armour and Company closed the plant forcing many residents of West Fargo to seek new employment or relocate. However, a year later Siouxland Dressed Beef Company opened a plant which operated under multiple names until the 1970s. The West Fargo Union Stockyards had been operated since 1935 and by the 1970s was the 10th largest livestock market in the United States. As the decades passed meatpacking fell to the wayside of industry in West Fargo and in 1999 the packing plant closed its doors.

Southwest Fargo continued to grow rapidly and on June 7, 1967 they took on the name City of West Fargo and the village of West Fargo became West Fargo Industrial Park. This name did not sit well with the residents of West Fargo Industrial Park and in September of 1974 they became residents of the City of Riverside. By the 1970s even more changes were happening. The West Fargo Public Library opened its doors on Sheyenne Street for the first time on June 10, 1971. In 1972 the Cass County Fairgrounds were moved to West Fargo and Bonanzaville was constructed. A new City Hall was built in 1975 and next to it was a brand new Public Library.

The Sheyenne River may have been key to the success of this area, but it also proved to be a hazard with many floods over the years. The worst of the floods came in the summer of 1975 when after days of torrential rains, the Sheyenne began rising. West Fargo was flooded, businesses were forced to close and the Red River Valley Fair was canceled. The citizens of West Fargo came together to sandbag and build dikes to keep back the waters. The river crested on July 8th at a record 22.23 feet. This flood served as a catalyst for the Sheyenne River Flood Control Project which was authorized in 1986 and operational by 1993.

West Fargo as you know it today came into being in 1989 when the cities of Riverside and West Fargo merged. Nearly 100 years of separate entities and shared identities became one unified West Fargo. The merging of the cities was celebrated with a consolidation ceremony at the West Fargo Public Library on July 1, 1989.

The building of the Sheyenne River Diversion gave way to a population and building boom. Since 1993 West Fargo Public School District has grown by at least 3,770 students and with this growth came a need for new schools. A new larger High School was built in 1986 and by 2007 Sheyenne High School was built to accommodate the growing number of students. The West Fargo Public Library also needed more space to serve the growing population and moved to its current location at the Lodoen Center in 2005.

In recent years many changes have been made in the City of West Fargo with new amenities added every year. Here are just a few of the many...

- On October 1, 2009 the i-94 and 9th street interchange opened to traffic.
- In 2011 The new Southside Fire and Police Substation became operational.
- In July of 2013 Veterans Memorial Pool (built in 1959) began remodeling. The grand opening of the pool, complete with waterslides, was held on June 11, 2015.
- In April of 2015 the City of West Fargo contracted with Waste Management and became the first in the tri-city area to offer no-sort recycling.
- Also in 2015 West Fargo signed an agreement with the City of Fargo to buy water from them.
- In 2016 Rustad Recreation Center opened. The final phases of a large roadway reconstruction project began on Main Avenue. A new City Hall opened housing both city offices and the police department.

Today West Fargo is one of the fastest growing cities in the state of North Dakota. From a population of 707 in 1940 to over 30,000 in 2016 West Fargo has long been a “City on the Grow”.

To learn more about the history of West Fargo go to:

<http://www.westfargolibrary.org/656/Historical-Center>

or visit the West Fargo Historical Center located in the West Fargo Public Library