

Guardian of the Land

Arthur A. Link

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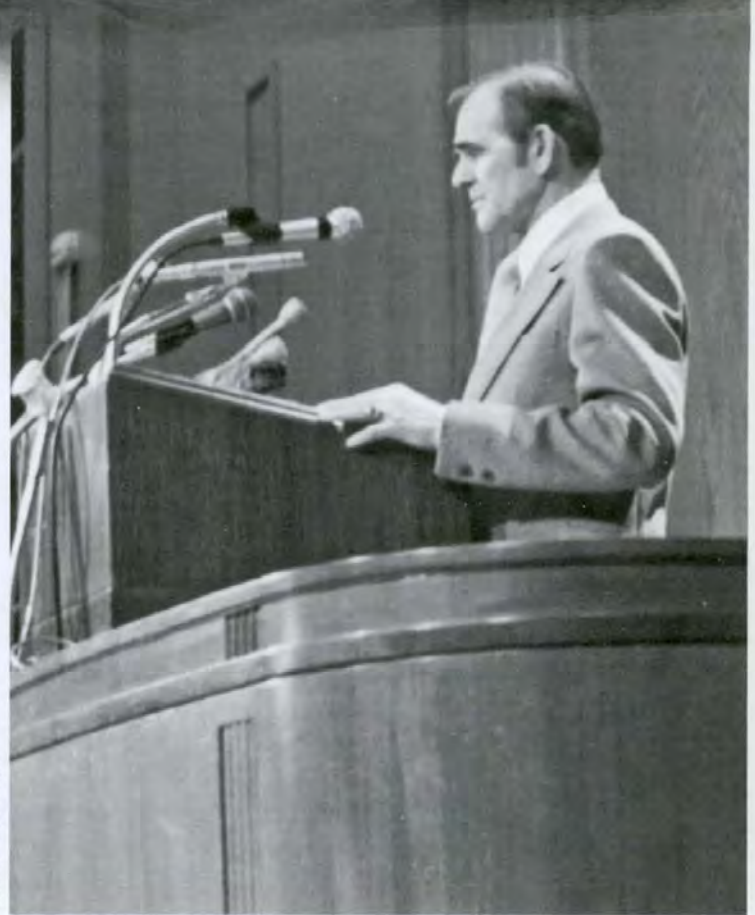
edited by Gerald G. Newborg

This article is based on a series of oral history interviews with Arthur A. Link and Grace M. Johnson Link. The Art Link interviews were conducted in 1993 and 2002; the Grace Link interviews occurred in 2002. All interviews were conducted by Gerald Newborg, state archivist with the State Historical Society of North Dakota. His questions have been omitted, and the presentation has been reorganized and edited. Brief editorial explanations, in italics, are scattered throughout the text. All punctuation is that of the editor. The portions of the article derived from Grace Link's interviews are slightly shaded.

The full interviews consist of approximately 11½ hours of tape. The space limitations inherent in an article for North Dakota History have required that some material be summarized or rephrased. Interested readers may view transcripts of the full interviews, which are on file at the State Archives and Historical Research Library of the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

This is not intended to be a balanced historical account, but rather a personal perspective based on the narrators' own words. Although space constraints permit publication of only a portion of the interviews, we hope that the "voice" and personality of the narrators will be apparent.

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Top: Rainy Butte, Hettinger County, North Dakota, about 1922. Photograph by Russell Reid. Above: Arthur Link giving his first inaugural address as governor, January 2, 1973.

PART ONE

Getting the Work Done

I was born May 24, 1914, on the farm that was the homestead of my parents, John and Anna Link. [Among my earliest memories are] following my dad around the yard, doing whatever work he was engaged in, staying close to my mother, who was a full-time homemaker, and then trying to keep up with four sisters. [I had] four older sisters—I am the fifth in the family—and there was a sixth [child]; that was a girl also. Because of the break in ages, my sister Mary, myself, and my kid sister Frances, who is youngest of the family, [are] the closest. The older ones were grown up and doing other things. I guess my earliest recollections are just a very busy farm life, very farm-oriented. All the emphasis was on getting the work done. It was always work, with time to play when the work was done. My sisters worked just as hard as I did.

[Some of my earliest chores were] feeding the chickens,

feeding the pigs, and feeding the calves. As we got old enough to sit on a milk stool and hold a milk bucket between our knees and milk a cow, all of us learned to milk. We learned how to handle the animals, what makes a cow behave and what makes her not behave. There was a little danger once in a while. You might get kicked if a cow was displeased over something. Of course, there was always a pretty good-size garden and a good-size potato patch. That's where child labor is very natural. In the early days the farm was in the stages of development from the natural outdoors. Part of it didn't have any fenced enclosure, being native grass. We would herd the cows on the native prairie. There was other land that adjoined the homestead that wasn't being used by anyone else; there was native grass growing on that. So one of the major and continuing chores was herding cows.



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John and Anna Link and children at their farm home near Alexander, North Dakota, 1925. Anna is third from left; the children (l to r) are Theresa, Annie, Frances, Mary, and Art. John Link was born in Bohemia, now the Czech Republic, in 1879. His family, who were cotton weavers, later moved to Germany, where they worked in the mills and John met Anna Mencl. John and Anna came to America in 1900; they married and were employed in the weaving industry in Massachusetts. In 1906 John and Anna, their two daughters, the Mencl family, and several friends migrated to McKenzie County, North Dakota. In 1907 John and Anna filed on their homestead south of Alexander. In the picture, the wooden dance platform directly behind the family was built by John Link for his daughter Elizabeth's (not pictured) wedding.



The John Link family, early 1920s. Seated (l to r) are Art, Mary, John, Frances, and Anna Link. Theresa, Elizabeth, and Annie (l to r) stand behind them. Art Link remembers the horses were named Dick (front) and King (back).

As a homesteader, you were required to plow up and cultivate a certain number of acres each year to prove up on the land and acquire ownership. You raised crops: wheat, barley, oats, flax, and corn. We couldn't let the cattle into that because they would eat it and destroy it. They could eat the native grass. So in the morning, after the cows were milked and we had our breakfast, our job was to herd those cows out of the gate. They became accustomed about where to go. Quite a bit of the time we had a dog along with us. Two or three of us—me and one or two of my sisters—would follow those cows out across the prairie trail as much as a half-mile away from the house. There we would just sit around on the prairie while these cattle were grazing. When they got thirsty they would go down to the creek. At noon they would sort of relax and lie down—rest and chew their cud. We would come home to have lunch; sometimes we would pack a lunch with us. We would be out there all day in the sun. Much of the time the cattle were grazing where you didn't have to bother them; it was only if they grazed close to fields that you would go and chase them away. We pretended that we were farmers and ranchers. I could take you to one spot where there was kind of a bare, flat piece of ground about as big as a city block. It was clay, gumbo soil; it didn't grow anything—just plain, bare, light-colored clay soil. We gathered up little stones not much larger than crab apples, and we built a farm, the pastures, and where the barn was. We had a whole farm out there just as a pastime.

We invariably found bird nests. The [meadowlark] builds a nest deep into the tuft of the grass, and it sort of

has a long entrance into it, so that it is covered over the top. The little prairie bird [horned lark] is just a gray bird, and they don't sing as much as a meadowlark. They build a round little nest that is straight up; it's open clear at the top. When we would find those nests, we would watch them from day to day. We knew where they were, and we would just sneak up and watch them. They wouldn't fly away unless you got too close to them. It was fun to watch the bird hatch its eggs. There would be a nest with four or five eggs in it. If you came close to it, even the rustling of a person, you would see four or five heads come [up] with their mouths wide open, just as wide as they could be, and you could see the yellow of their throats. They would kind of cry, you know—every one wants the mother to bring them a butterfly or bug or something. I don't think we had a great deal of what you would call planned recreation. Our time was pretty much occupied with doing chores.

We learned to ride a horse; we had a kind of plug horse, a plain, gentle thing that we could ride. Part of the time we'd take him out to the pasture because if there was something that had to go a long ways, one of the kids would ride on the horse to take the cattle out. So we learned at a fairly early age to bridle up a horse. We didn't have a saddle; we rode the horse bareback. By age eight or ten, I remember distinctly driving a horse. One learned to drive a team with your dad or your mom seated on the seat of a buggy or a wagon. That just kind of came natural. It wasn't anything unusual for a kid to hold the reins; if you're sitting right next to your parent while you are riding down the road, there was

really nothing to it.

We worked so close with our parents that it just sort of became natural. The first time that I began to do field work—I can remember the field that I was on—I was driving four horses and a three-section harrow. We walked behind the harrow to drive the team. The conservative farmer that wanted to get the most work out of his horses said, well, that horse can pull more harrow if I don't ride. I was considered old enough to harrow that field. I suppose [I was] about ten. I think my mother sent my sister Mary out there with a little pail and a sandwich and some coffee. I felt so big. I got a feeling of importance—somebody brought me lunch while I was out there in the field.

Until 1937, I think, all our work was done with horses. The most horses that we had at any one time was ten—a six-horse team and a four-horse team. Pretty soon, Dad let me drive the six-horse team—that was four horses behind and two lead horses operating a two-bottom gang plow. I became steadily occupied with my dad, farming the fields.

[Selling eggs and cream] was just as routine as getting up in the morning and going to bed at night. It was just one way of marketing farm produce. It was a win-win situation. We had all the eggs the family needed, and the surplus was taken to town. We had an egg crate that held twelve dozen. Once a week we would go to town and take the eggs, and sometimes the surplus cream, to the grocery store, and they bought the cream [and] the eggs. You got credit for that—you bought your groceries, and they took the bill for the groceries against what credit they gave you for the cream

The Death of a Creek

My parents homesteaded the quarter section in 1907 which is our farm home today. I was born in 1914 and have clear memories of the changes that have taken place since the early 1920s. . . . Antelope Creek was a lazy, placid trickle most of the summer, with long bodies of water ten to forty feet wide and from two to eight feet deep, connected like a string of sausages, steep, grass-covered banks lined with mud turtles on warm sunny days. The water, barely rippling, was home to a few wild ducks, muskrats, frogs, bullheads and sucker fish, and the dreaded snapping turtle. Oh, yes, and the ever-present yellow and black garter snake. . . .

Portions of the keynote address by Link at the 1987 annual meeting of the North Dakota chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society are presented here and on the following pages.

and the eggs.

[We had] half an acre [of potatoes], maybe. We would sell potatoes. Dad would always try to find out from the grocer—or if we were going to [the store in] Williston—if he could handle a sack or two of potatoes. It's amazing how something that we would get a dollar or two for meant something. We would take two or three sacks of potatoes to town and get five dollars or ten dollars. That was money. We'd harvest our potatoes—that was a lot of hand work. We took very good care of them, sorted them so that the good-sized potatoes were in one bin, little ones in another. Never wasted any potatoes, even if they were too small. They'd cook up the little potatoes like that, jackets and all, and feed them to the pigs.

I started school when I was six years old. One-room school. It was Randolph school district, and the name of the school was Rowe School. I think there were about fourteen or fifteen [children] at one time. When I graduated [from eighth grade], there was one other graduate besides myself. We were out of school for maybe two weeks or three weeks, then we had to go back to take state exams for two or three days. It was a warm spring day in May, and [we] took our state exams in order to pass the eighth grade.

[Our school year was] eight months. A few of the boys, occasionally, would stay out for fall work, but I don't think it was considered a problem there. As frugal as our parents were and as important as the fall work was, I don't recall very many of them that said that they had to stay home and work. I don't think that's true of all of the rural communities. I think in some of them the fall and spring work dictated the school year, but not in our case. I think our parents showed a tremendous commitment for us kids to go to school and to do our studies.

I liked arithmetic; I liked geography. I don't know if I liked history or not; I guess I tolerated it. Spelling was fun. We had to learn the multiplication tables. We learned all the capitals of the states. We had more memory work than they do today, I think. While there wasn't a piano in school, and no teacher that we had brought a guitar or played an instrument, we had singing every morning. Sometimes the teacher would ask one of the older students to raise the flag which flew from a staff on the front roof of the schoolhouse. Sometimes when weather was nice we would have the Pledge of Allegiance as we stood outside at flag raising. And we sang from the *Golden Book of Songs*.

There was never any mention of church in school, no criticism of it or affirmation. Some of the kids went to church, some of us didn't. The Ten Commandments were nicely framed and hung on the same wall as the large pictures of Washington and Lincoln. I didn't know hardly anybody that went to church regular. Some of them, I think, had Bible study at home. We didn't. Our parents

didn't have concern about church; they were busy raising a family, I guess. They kind of left their church when they left the old country. They told of incidences where they felt they were under undue pressure. And I guess they thought they had the freedom to do what they wanted here, and that's what happened. They weren't anti-Christian or anti-religion. They always had the minister out to the farm for dinner at least once a year. But to be active church members, they weren't until later in life.

My grandma and grandpa Mencl on my mother's side had four sons. One son—Frank, I think—had learned the violin back in Germany. They brought the violin with them. Well, Frank died, and

Grandma and Grandpa Mencl said, "If Arthur will learn the violin, he can have it." And I have it today; it's in the case out here, and I play it today. So at eight years old my parents sent me to a Lutheran minister in Alexander to take violin lessons. He taught me the rudiments of the instrument through the long book of instructions, where you learned nothing but exercises for years, it seemed like. I can't say that I relished practicing. I was stuck with it. I didn't revolt, but I found it an intrusion upon the things I'd rather be doing, like tinkering in the shop or out walking over the hills with a .22 shooting rabbits, or driving a tractor or something like that. I give [Reverend Svore] credit for instilling in me what little music I know, because after I quit taking lessons, why, I laid the violin aside. [Later] I got in connection with a little hometown band—a piano player, saxophone player, banjo player, and an accordion player—that played for dances. I played the fiddle, and got to playing for dances—all by ear. Pretty soon I was playing all these songs by ear.

I never had any plans [for further education] at all. It just seemed natural that being the only boy, I'd be a farmer. [It was] something that was just understood. That's part of this German ethnic culture. I think [it's even] more pronounced in the Germans from Russia. My parents were not Germans from Russia, but I think they had that culture. Julius Jacobson had the grocery store in Alexander and an implement company; he sold Chevrolet cars and International tractors and farm machinery. He confronted

my father one day when he and I came down from the minister's house. He wanted me to play some music, and I was too bashful. He was sitting on his chair in the store. What he said was gospel. He said, "When are you going to send that boy to high school?" Dad says, "Don't worry, Julius, I'll see that he gets his education." That's all my dad said. He never told me I should go to high school or had to or anything. I had become quite involved in farmwork and doing things on the farm.

The North Dakota Agricultural College had a special course, a farm husbandry course, for farm kids that wanted to go back to the farm, and it wouldn't interfere with their farming operations. I don't know if Dad made the contacts or he asked me if I would like to go to that. I said, sure, I would go. So [in 1929 he] enrolled me in the farm husbandry course at the North Dakota Agricultural College in Fargo. It was a very, very intense course. We got some training in English and math, but most of the rest was farm husbandry—care and management of livestock, feeding of livestock—and care and maintenance of gasoline engines. One topic was forge shop. I was fifteen when I went down there. That was a two-year program, but I didn't go back for the second year. That was a regret ever since. I've wondered why. It was just another year; it would have expanded my experience.

I think at that time I was beginning to feel the responsibility that had fallen on my shoulders because by that time we were

farming more land. Dad and Mom bought some land from the county [that had been] relinquished by the owners. There was quite a lot more work to do. The cattle herd had expanded because of the extra pasture we had to where we were running fifty cows and calves. So I don't think I put on a campaign that I wanted to go back. I often wished that I had gone back.

Half of the kids in our township didn't go to high school—the boys. The girls did. [My sisters went to school] in Alexander, five miles away. The girls rented a room in a little house in Alexander. I would take them in Monday morning. I'd drive that Model T Ford car in, take the girls in with the produce and stuff for the week, and go get them Friday night. I would see the kids go to school and see them



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Art Link at age twelve.

Grace Marion Johnson Link

Grace Johnson was born September 13, 1918, at the farm home of her parents, Roy N. Johnson and Margaret Alice Wood Johnson. My mother was born in North Dakota, by Portal. Her parents were from England. My father was born in Iowa, but he came out here to homestead from Illinois [in 1907]. His father was from Sweden; came over when he was twelve. [My father's] parents, his brother and wife, and his sister's husband came out and homesteaded north of Cartwright. My dad was the youngest of the family, and the other three had come earlier and settled on quarter sections that were [next] to each other. They all settled in the same area, but the other quarter [next to their land] was [part of] a school section, so my dad homesteaded about two miles northwest of where his mother was—he was batching over there. They said when he was done with his chores in the evening, he would put his lamp in the window, and his mother could see it two miles away. Then she knew that he was okay. So talk about the traditional light in the window, well, he used that.

I have two brothers and one sister. I was the youngest. My sister was named Nelle Margaret; one brother [was] Forest Roy, and my other brother was Vernon Ralph. Vernon was just two years older than me, and we did a lot of things together on the farm. As kids we entertained ourselves out there on the farm doing, I guess, what all the kids did in those days—we just played outside. Wherever the folks went, we went with them. My dad and mom liked to dance, and we kids went along. When we got tired, they fixed us up

a bed—right behind the piano, the noisiest place they could find—and you lay down and went to sleep. But we learned to dance early.

As kids we had our chores to do. Dad would plant about twelve or fifteen acres of corn that he'd check in so he could cultivate it both ways. Then Vernon and I used to go out and hoe the rest of the weeds out of the cornfield. That was during the early thirties. I never did a lot of work as far as farmwork is concerned. I didn't learn to milk the cows until I was married, but I had to do other things around the house.

I went to a one-room rural school [with eight to ten students], Sioux Crossing School, that was a mile and a quarter north [of home]. I had two classmates. In fact, one them also went to high school with me in Williston. We were in school all twelve years. My folks paid for my board and room [in Williston]. It was kind of understood that I would go home most weekends, and I did. Dad would come in and get me every weekend unless it was too stormy. And there were about three times during the years when I was going to high school when he'd bring me home on Friday night, and Saturday morning we'd be in a blizzard [so we couldn't drive back to Williston]. [He'd take] me to Cartwright, so I'd get on the train and go as far as Fairview, Montana. There you were expected to get off and sit in the depot while the train went to Sidney and on to Richey, Montana, and back, and then they'd pick you up again, and you'd go as far as Snowden, Montana [north and west of Buford, North Dakota]. Then you just waited there until a train came in from the west that pushed your cars on into Williston. It took about eleven hours [when it

was] thirty miles if we'd gone by car. Then you'd get into Williston at eleven o'clock at night, and of course I never thought of ordering a taxi or anything. I'd walk up to my place where I stayed, which I suppose was eight to ten blocks.



The Johnson family in 1930. Nelle, Forest, Vernon, and Grace (l to r) stand beside their parents, Margaret (second from right) and Roy.

what they believed in. And when [Franklin] Roosevelt came along with programs that helped poor people and the farm program and all of these things, why, he became the choice of the majority of the Farmers Union. And the same thing happened at the state level, and to some extent at the local level.

Art Link was involved in a peace movement in 1937. It was a movement that preached countries should settle their differences short of war. Some of it [was precipitated by the] rise of Hitler and the uprising in Spain. The American Friends Service Committee was one of the organizations that was very strong against [war]. Basically, they saw the war clouds forming, and they were trying to promote and preach peace rather than war, and that didn't stop Hitler.

[I went to] Brookwood Labor College [for training]. It was sponsored by the labor unions in the East, and I went there for one winter. This was in upper New York, this Brookwood Labor College. There they had seminars that had to do with the organization of laboring people and their part in forming organizations that were a benefit to them. It was [almost] as much a labor promotion organization as it was a peace movement. The [Farmers Union]

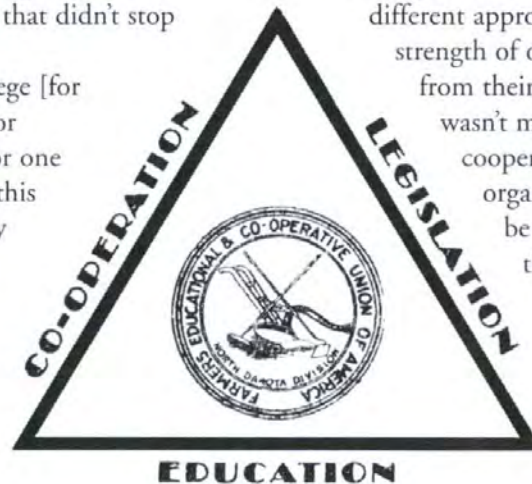
was invited to send representatives because [Brookwood] saw in the Farmers Union an organization of working people that they felt would have the same interests as they did. I suppose the leadership saw that I'd been active in Farmers Union work here and recommended that I go and offered me the chance to go, so I went. When spring came along and I had to come back and run the farm, I just came home. That was the end of my active participation there.

I don't know how strong the [isolationist] following really was. Walter Reuther was the president of the United Automobile Workers. I did meet Walter Reuther and his brother Victor. They came to the college and spoke.

Frankly, I felt a little out of place because they had a little different approach. It was primarily concentrating on strength of organization to secure their demands from their employers, you know. Well, that wasn't my background. Mine was through the cooperative movement, but I guess the two organizations at the head thought it would be good to get some interconnection. I think I learned a lot from it. I saw the other side of some of the issues.

I [met Grace at] the Farmers Union monthly dance [in 1934]. The local was pretty active back then. They would have monthly meetings, and they would meet in the Charbonneau community hall. Every community in those days had their own hall. [There would be] a local meeting to promote the sale of grain or livestock—stuff like that—through the Farmers Union, and there would be a report from the secretary, and after that they'd have a free dance. People would bring a lunch, and close to midnight they'd serve [it] there; I guess I was playing there with a little group.

Her brothers brought [Grace] to this little dance in Cartwright—that's a town about eight or ten miles from Charbonneau—and I saw her dancing, and I thought she was pretty



Top, symbol of the Farmers Union from the *North Dakota Union Farmer*, August 20, 1945. Above, Farmers Union President Glenn J. Talbott (left) presents Arthur Link with the quota membership award at the fourteenth annual Farmers Union convention in Jamestown, North Dakota, October 1940.

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nice. I remember she was standing there with Marion Cray, her classmate in school. She was fifteen. Then every time there was something going on in Cartwright, I made a point to be there, and she'd be there, and she got her brothers to bring her up to Charbonneau whenever she could.

[When I was] twenty-four, I rented a piece of land. There was no formal legal contract between [my father and me] other than to let me use the machinery. I plowed the land and cultivated the soil, and I suppose I bought the seed and planted it, but I used all the equipment we had on the farm, and then the profit was mine. [My] folks were pretty good and lenient.

Art and Grace Link were married in 1939. We bought an old house that was abandoned, but it was a pretty good physical structure—a two-room house—and moved it onto the yard. Dug a basement, put in a foundation, and moved the house onto that and built on to it. I guess for the first six months we lived in my folks' home, and my sister Mary was with us then. Then we ended up buying two quarters of land that other people had lost and let go. They couldn't pay for it, and it was up for sale, and we bought it. Borrowed four or five hundred dollars to pay for it. And in 1940 we bought [a] brand-new John Deere general purpose tractor. Art and Grace Link's oldest child, Walter, was born in 1941, and over the next ten years the family grew to include six children: Walter, Marvin, Donald, Rodney, Harvey, and Joann. The Links continued to farm until political office kept them away on a full-time basis. At that point the children took over primary operation of the farm.

I guess I started my first elective office on the local school board. They had a small school there—a one-room rural school. Actually it was the same school that I [had] attended when I was in grade school, so when I became a young adult and started farming, I was elected to the school board and then also to the township board. Of course you don't campaign for those offices; you just are nominated by somebody, and the people come in and they cast their vote. In addition to that exposure, I was then appointed to serve on the McKenzie County Welfare Board. That's what Social Services was called then, and then it evolved to Human Services as we know it today. I served in that capacity for around twenty years. I also was active in the North Dakota Farmers Union. I had served as secretary of our local Farmers Union, and then at the time I was nominated for the legislature I was serving as chairman of the McKenzie County Farmers Union organization. I was also appointed to serve on the state Farm Security Administration (FSA) committee [and] served under Walter Maddock, who was a former governor.

But the actual step into running for the legislature happened at a meeting that I didn't even attend. It was in the spring of the year [1946], and the Nonpartisan League

of McKenzie County was holding its annual caucus. The creek that ran right by our farm home was almost out of its banks, and when the creek was high we didn't leave the place because you couldn't cross the creek. So later that afternoon—and it was a fairly decent day—we saw this car come as far as it could on the road. It was a prairie trail that led to the farm home, and this man walked down the long hill because he knew he wouldn't get back up that hill if he came down with his car. I'd seen him from our place, so I went down to the edge of the creek, and he came as close as he could on the other side. I suppose there was a distance of about five rods [eighty feet] across the creek from one bank to the other. [The man's name was Art McCall.] He was



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Art Link and Grace Johnson were married on May 20, 1939, in the home of Grace's parents.



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Grace Johnson as a junior in high school, 1935.

I was fifteen [when I met Art]. We met at a dance when he was playing. We had dances in Charbonneau as well as Cartwright, and I had two older brothers that were very good to their sister. They took me with them when they went, and that's where I met him. He was playing for the dance. And then about three weeks later—at that point, my two brothers and my mom and dad were also playing for dances—the folks were playing, so Art could dance [with me] that night.

I went to business college in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and took business after I finished high school. My sister was living there. I could go down and stay with her and her husband. I was already dating Art pretty steady, and I just wanted to take some business courses. I enjoy bookkeeping, and that's what I was really looking for. [After business college,] I worked for about a year and a half for a farm real estate agent in Williston before we were married.

We were married in 1939 in my folk's home. When I talked to Mom about when we were planning to get married, she said, "Oh, won't I get to make one of my daughter's wedding dinners?" And I said, "Well, Mom, if that's what you want, that's what we'll do." We had about thirty guests, and Mom had a neighbor lady come in and help her. We were married at twelve o'clock

noon, and she made a nice dinner for the thirty guests. It was strictly family.

After their marriage, Grace and Art moved to the Link farm. Art's parents were very good to me and accepted me into the family. However, all of the rest of their in-laws were of the same nationality as they were. I was the one that was the English and Swede, and they were the Germans and Czechs. The folks were good to me, but there [were adjustments] to make. Art's parents used to speak German to each other, but after I came into the household they never spoke it in front of me. After a few years we had a bachelor neighbor whose sister came to live with him, and of course they had been friends in Germany. They knew each other. She used to come over and visit with Mother Link, and she'd speak to her in German, and Mother would return her in English. She just was that careful that she never spoke German in front of me, which I really appreciated.

During the years when our family was young, in summertime when Art was working in the field, I always made a hot dinner and took it out to the field to him and took the family along, and we would eat like a picnic dinner out there, but it was always a hot meal. I did that until we got to where we had some of the boys at home—each one would be working on a different field—and you couldn't take hot dinners out; then I had to pack dinners. But those first years while the children were younger, I took out hot dinners all summer long.

We used to go fishing; we lived along a creek, and there wasn't much in fishing there, but I used to pack up a Sunday evening picnic, and we'd go down along the creek. They didn't catch much—they'd catch some bullheads—but it was getting out with the family, and the kids loved it. We enjoyed doing that.

a neighbor of Grace's from the Cartwright community, and he had stopped in on his way back to his home. He had attended this county convention up at Watford City, and he said, "I just stopped, Art, to tell you that we nominated you for our candidate for the legislature up at the caucus today." So that's where it really started.

I didn't know whether to thank him or not. I didn't know what it really meant, although I'd been involved with issues of concern for agriculture. I'd been involved in issues of concern to the community—roads and things like that—and I had learned to know a few people, and I suppose a few people learned to know me. So I thanked him for stopping and letting me know, and the next day I got the county paper and saw on the front page of the paper that I had been nominated as their candidate for the legislature, and that's

really where it started. I didn't know whether I was happy or worried about it, but I accepted the nomination and went into the campaign, which was nothing like campaigns are today. Maybe we bought one or two little ads in the paper. We didn't go door-to-door. We attended some local meetings. In subsequent campaigns we'd put together a letter, and I know one time I sent a pretty good long letter out, a full legal sheet of paper extolling what I thought the legislature ought to do, what was good for the county and the people, and so forth.

There was, I think, at that time more support from the political party, the nucleus of the party, and when they selected a person as a candidate they took it quite seriously, and they did a lot to help. We would print up some posters. Posters were popular; I guess if we put anything in the paper it was a picture maybe, but I think that posters were the main thing. Rather than going house to house and asking for a person's support on an individual basis, you went around and made sure that your poster was in every store window that permitted you to put a poster in it, and on telephone poles and corner posts out in the country. You'd go armed with a supply of posters and a staple gun or a bunch of thumbtacks to nail your poster up. I can remember stopping out in the very rural part—probably out in the ranching area—and many places where they had auto-passes, you know, instead of a gate that you have to open. That was considered a good place, so you'd nail a poster on the post next to that auto-pass because people naturally had to slow up there to cross, and hopefully they'd see your poster and vote for you.

Why was I receptive to it? I've only limited formal education in terms of what is considered degree education today. I think I came by it somewhat naturally because my father was a political activist in his young years before he even came to the United States, and he and a bachelor

My dad had been a very public-spirited person. He did many things for his community. So when Art was willing to do those things, I was willing to accept that. I had no problem with him doing what he thought was good for the community. I think that was a big thing, because if I had come from a home where everything was concentrated in doing what was needed to be done right there on the farm, it would have been hard. I used to help him with the campaigns; he'd always put out a letter, and I'd get the mailings and get the list of names that we were going to send them to, and then we'd get the letters written up, and then I'd help. I did a lot of it. We had some that would help, but we did a lot of that.

Why did my creek die?

When I started farming with my father we used only horses. The light, small-blade horse disk chopped up the surface about two or three inches deep and left most of the stubble on or close to the surface. . . .

Tractors got bigger, plows and toolbars (overgrown duckfoots) and one-ways (overgrown disk harrows) took over, and we were on a frenzied binge to rip, dig, and grind our soil. . . . Now we have come full circle, and minimum till, no-till, and the blades are back in style.

neighbor who had also homesteaded in 1907 would talk about issues. They were part of the new movement in Germany when they were youths—when the working people were beginning to assert their rights and their liberties. They didn't even have the right to vote in his young days out there, and I would hear them talk about these issues.

Of course the issues of my young growing days were related to agriculture and farm prices. The people felt a lot of oppression—that we weren't getting fair treatment from the grain trade—and I participated in meetings having to do with freight rates, the cost of shipping grain, and a variety of producer-farmer concerns. As early as I could remember, when I could go with [my father,] he'd take me along. I wouldn't participate; I'd just sit there and listen, and so I guess I ingested a lot of this by osmosis. You'd just assimilate it.

North Dakota House of Representatives

Link served in the state legislature from 1947 to 1970. By comparison with what is provided today, you'd almost say the support process [for members of the legislature] was practically nil. I must pay a great deal of respect and appreciation for the other member of the House [from my district]. Bernt Anderson [McKenzie County, 1937-1947] was a member of the legislature and had some experience already, and he quite generously took me under his wing, so to speak, and told me a lot of things that I would have taken a long time to catch on to. The committee setups were provided for us, but there was no pre-session orientation process such as we have today. There was no Legislative Council. There was no real format for bill drafting established. There were certain legal requirements that had to be stated in the bill introduction, but nothing as uniform as we have today, and the service for getting bills drafted was just whoever had the time or

the ability to do it. So those of us who had little or no experience had to prey upon the goodwill of some other member that was qualified or knew how to draft a bill. I remember Ralph Beede, a veteran legislator from Elgin, a Nonpartisan Leaguer, and he did a lot of bill drafting. He'd do it gratis in his spare time—peck away at his typewriter up in the Patterson Hotel way into the night, drafting bills for fellow legislators.

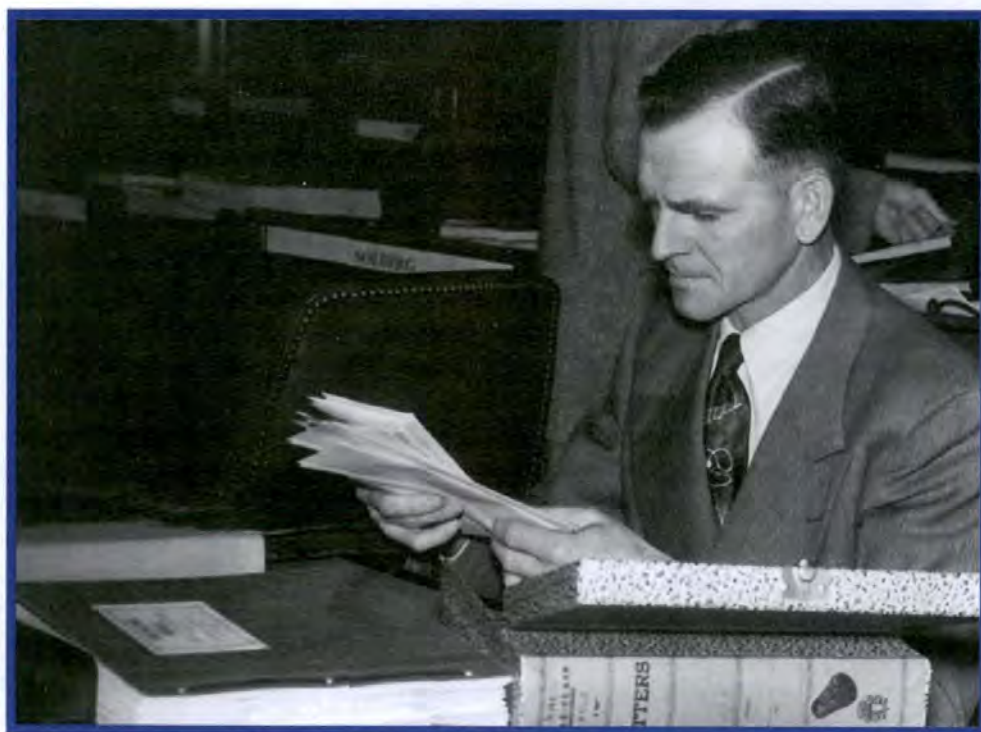
I give the caucus [system] a lot of credit for giving me the opportunity to learn the process. You learned a great deal. *Link was a member of the Nonpartisan League caucus and the Democratic caucus after the two groups merged in 1956.* The caucus would be, of course, led by people who already had experience, and there was a great deal more party discipline at that time. We met almost every night for a couple of hours and discussed the bills and took caucus positions on them. It wasn't mandatory that everyone vote just the way the caucus [decided], but we analyzed [the bills] in pretty close detail as to how they affected the position of our party. I don't know if the first year I was there that we had an attorney, but [later] we had a caucus attorney that was not necessarily a member of the legislature. [He] would analyze bills from a legal standpoint and interpret the bills, what they meant. We had real good discussions, and if there was a divergence of opinion you'd have some pretty heated discussions about whether or not we should support this bill or oppose it, and the ramifications of it.

The session was sixty days, every day, not just weekdays. There was no pre-session; you came down here completely green, with no committee assignments, and each party had their caucus. And then we lost a good ten days just getting the legislature organized, getting the committee assignments and the committee schedules fixed up so that you could start committee hearings. But then we held meetings and hearings six days out of the week. Very few Saturdays did we take off. And [we] did our work in sixty days.

I came in under the old rules and procedures and was part of the legislature that approved electronic roll call [in 1947], and finally in later years I was on the subcommittee of maintenance and operations of the legislative

chambers. It was a real adventurous step when the committee recommended carpeting for the legislative chambers. They were all just tile floor; anybody walking by down the hall [would go] "clop, clop, clop," and all the walking in the back of the rail was "clip, clip, clip." The chairs all originally were bolted down in place. You couldn't move them; you could [just] swing them, turn them around. Well, they were [replaced by] the chairs with wheels and all the new things, new desks. Surprisingly we didn't get any feedback; cost money, you know. That house chamber has gone through two or three remodelings. I saw a lot of changes in that legislature. [We] even had brass spittoons!

[In 1949] we needed a new bridge across the Yellowstone River on Highway 200 between Cartwright and Fairview, Montana, in my home county, so I and Halvor Rolfsrud—the other [McKenzie County House] legislator—and [Senator Hjalmar Nelson] from the eastern part of the county joined in introducing that bill for a new bridge. The highway commissioner was against it, and he wasn't of our party, either. It stirred up some controversy in our home county because people from another part of the county said, "You don't need that bridge over there; we got a bridge over the river to Sidney, Montana." It was contentious; we had a hearing, and some of our neighbors came down from the southern part of the county and testified against the bridge. We stood our ground, and then they had a



Representative Link at his desk in the state House of Representatives, about 1955. Link described his years in the legislature as "my education in the whole process of government, public relations, speaking, and the whole bit."



The Link family, Christmas 1954. Art (third from left) stands beside his parents, Anna and John; Grace (far right) stands next to her mother, Margaret Johnson. The children around the tree are (l to r) Marvin, Walter, Joann, Rodney, Harvey, and Donald.

After Link was elected to the legislature the family accompanied him to Bismarck in 1947. There was no way that he would leave me at home with three little boys and [me being] six months pregnant. He said, "You're coming with me somehow." People didn't rent out their homes at that time like they do today, and we were having real trouble finding a place to stay. We answered one ad of a motel that said they had cooking accommodations, and when we wrote and said we had these three little boys, they contacted us back that they were filled up. But they kept on advertising, so who knows? But Kobis Tjaden from Tyler's cabins [rented us a place].

We lived in a fifteen-by-twenty one-room cabin for sixty days with those 1½, 3½, and 5½-year-old boys. It was a home—I mean, you could cook there. They had a three-burner hot plate. No refrigerator. I think they had a few cupboards above and then just a counter. In those days you could still get orange crates. We fixed orange crates under the counter so that I had a little place to store things, and we brought down an oven from a kerosene

stove so that I could fix a roast or bake some apples. I couldn't bake cake or anything like that, but I could do a little. There was no place for getting our laundry done, so Art would take our laundry to the laundromat in the morning as he left for work, and they would take care of it. When he came back, it had been through the dryer and was back in our box for me to take care of. We took along a big box of frozen meat and put it out under a snowbank, and I think we took a twelve-dozen crate of eggs with us. We got along. I ate one meal away from that cabin in the sixty days we were here, and I think I was up to the capitol about three times.

Tyler's cabins were where the old Holiday Inn, Palace Arms, or whatever they call it now [is]. The cabins were in a circle, and there was lots of nice room. It was a good place for us to be with our three boys that were not used to town living. There was room for them to play outside—they weren't close to any traffic.

Rodney Tjaden was the same age as our son Walter. They become very good friends there, and that was quite a help because every year when we brought the boys down and put them in school, Rodney was there to go [with them] to school. Walter went to the same school he did, and kind of helped the other boys get along. They went to the old Will School the first year, and then to the Will-Moore School.

It was only sixty calendar days when they went [to school in Bismarck], and our boys, [who went] to a one-room rural school, had no problem. They were ahead of the kids here when they came in, but when they went back they didn't have to catch up with anybody because there wasn't anybody else in their class. We had one other friend who brought their kids down, and they went to a bigger school at home; they said they'd never do it again because they had the same problem: their kids were ahead of them here, but when they went back they were so far behind their classmates, it was hard for them to catch up.

[Kobis Tjaden] kept accommodating us with whatever he had that was a little bigger and a little

better, until the last session he had one unit that was two of these sixteen-by-twenty rooms that were in one building. Most of them were single, but he had this one that he cut a door between and rented us both of them. And that worked out very well because by that time we had the six children, and we were able to have three beds in the one room and then our bed and living quarters in the other. Two bathrooms—that worked out very well. They said when we left he just closed up that doorway again. So he was really good to us.

[We did that until] I think it was the 1955 session. By that time Walter was starting to go to high school, and then we knew that you couldn't switch them. And then, too, the boys were getting old enough to help more on the farm, and Art's dad was getting older. We always had a hired man at home, and the folks had to kind of supervise the hired man, and it was getting harder for them to do that. There were two or three sessions after we stayed home, where if Art wanted to get a message—there were no telephones—he'd call the school and talk to Walter, because he could be called during school hours. He could get ahold of us that way. We didn't get a telephone [at home] until 1959.

And I will say that, if they had asked me in the early forties if I'd ever get in that car and drive to Bismarck in the middle of the winter all by myself, I would have said you're crazy, but I did it. When you had sixty days, they worked until noon on Saturday always. Well, for him to drive home Saturday afternoon to come back Sunday, it just didn't pay. He, I think, usually came home one weekend out of the session, and then I brought the children down for a weekend. And then I—well, the kids were getting old enough, with Art's folks there—could leave and be gone for a couple days. I wouldn't be gone very long.

big hearing in Watford City—a public hearing—and the highway commissioner came out. Of course, the majority of [our neighbors] were standing firm with us, the legislators. The highway commissioner sort of thought that we—the legislators and the people who wanted that bridge—were not supporting him. He said that they had only so much money, they had their plans for what had to be spent, they had to spend it where the need was the greatest, and so forth. It got down to who could you believe. And one lady got up and said, "Well, we are here, and we don't challenge the veracity of our legislators, either." I remember that. So we got the bill passed. The fact of the matter was, the commissioner had the authority to do it on his own; he didn't need any bill, but because he had refused to for two years, that's why we put in a bill. I

lived with that bill that whole session. I had to carry the ball; it was in my end of the county. I went to Norman Brunsdale, the governor. [He was] a Republican, and I was a NPLer. I felt a little bit uneasy, and I said we thought we had the votes to pass the bill, but I was afraid of a veto. He said, "I'll tell you, Art, I won't say anything for the bridge, but if you get your bill passed, don't worry about me; I'll sign it." That was a big relief to me, but I was afraid, you know, all my work would go down the drain. But he didn't fight it. We got it passed and signed.

I was on the education committee, [which was] quite important, and there was a dispute about the foundation aid program of supporting schools. The earliest sales tax measure was for the support of schools, and it was dedicated: seven-twelfths [of the tax would go for] schools, and five-twelfths for welfare. [In 1963] Ken Fitch from Fargo, a strong leader in the ROC [Republican Organizing Committee], initiated and introduced the "jackpot" law. The big [argument] was that it wasn't fair to have a special tax dedicated to a special purpose, and that all [sales] taxes should go into one fund [the jackpot], and the different needs of state government should be met out of that fund. Fitch was the man that waxed loud and long; eventually they were successful in passing the jackpot law. Well, you see, the school fund had a surplus in it, and the welfare fund—they charged that it was such a big fund that it invited welfare. Big school districts that had a big tax base were willing to see it go jackpot; they had enough money, [and] they could get along without it. But [the dedicated sales tax] did a great thing for little schools, so [school districts'] support and opposition divided on whether they were little or big.

In the 1950s and 1960s the oil production tax and the coal [severance] tax both became hotly debated taxes. I and Halvor Rolfsrud from McKenzie County [and] Iver Solberg, [Williams County,] decided that with the extensive oil drilling tearing up the roads in the western part of the state, the counties were entitled, and so we got a specified division of the oil severance tax. Part went to the schools of the county, part for roads, part to the cities in the counties, and part to the state. That created a lot of fire [with] counties that didn't have any oil development, so we were in the minority in terms of votes, but we fought for our position.

And it has proved its value, because if it hadn't been for that, we wouldn't have had [money for] the roads, the schools, or the oil impact and the coal impact offices. [If] a community was impacted adversely [by oil or coal development, a share of the tax] went into the coal and oil impact funds. The schools, the local communities, the townships, and the counties can make applications [for these funds] based on the costs of furnishing services in an area that has served the oil and coal development. The

eastern people, they didn't have any of that [fund available] because it was confined to counties wherein there was this development; they wanted more of the money to go to the general fund, to the state. Most of it is still going to the general fund, but we were able to hold our troops and get a specified amount. And to this day it helps the counties out there that have a small population, lots of mileage, and big trucks running all over the county and township roads, maybe tearing them up. What are you going to do if you don't get something back from it? That's what we did. That was a real fight. Those kind of things run through the whole session.

School consolidation is a very sensitive issue, and understandably so. The local residents of the community that has a school, especially if it is twelve grades, look at that as their foundation of community life, and to a great extent that's true. [But] it comes a time when a population doesn't justify the school, and they can't keep the quality of education up where it should be. I know a great deal of attention is being directed on telecommunications, and students in a small population area can get the same instruction as a child in a large school. [But] I think it's something that will have to be worked out. I just think that the population shifts will probably dictate some things taking place that we'd rather not see but will happen anyway.

There was a fundamental realignment of political parties

in North Dakota when the Nonpartisan League joined with the Democratic party in 1956. This move was resisted by "old guard" Leaguers who joined with the Republican Organizing Committee (ROC). The full merger of the Democratic-NPL party was not completed until at least 1960. Link made the transition in 1956 and was minority leader in the North Dakota House of Representatives beginning in 1957.

I wasn't one of the most active people in [the move of the NPL to the Democratic party]. I kind of stayed fast—stayed with the Nonpartisan League—and I didn't ever waver. I never intended to join the Republican Organizing Committee. Only one person back home said he was disappointed in me. He said, "I thought you were a Republican. I always supported you because you were a Republican." "Well," I said, "I was a Republican and a Nonpartisan Leaguer." He failed to see. That was over in the Yellowstone valley. I felt bad about that because he [had] campaigned for me. Well, I made whatever explanation I thought I should make; I don't know if it changed him. It didn't destroy our friendship—it isn't that we couldn't visit any longer—but I kind of lost him as a supporter. But it was no clear-cut [division between the] Democrats and Republicans. It was a hodgepodge. . . . Because here were people on the other side that we had worked with, Nonpartisan Leaguers, and on some of the so-called liberal issues or the more farm-oriented issues, you could still see

The oil industry took off in North Dakota on April 4, 1951, with the discovery of oil at Clarence Iverson #1 well near Tioga. Oil production increased through the 1950s, peaked in 1965, and then declined as existing fields were exhausted. However, OPEC's actions in 1973 more than doubled the price of oil in the next year, and oil exploration began to increase. New discoveries in 1977 and 1978 set off an oil boom in western North Dakota, with exploration and production increasing throughout the decade. The collapse of oil prices in the 1980s, however, brought exploration in North Dakota almost to a halt and left many communities with expensive projects designed to serve an increased population that had now moved on.

How this industry would be taxed and how the taxes would be distributed have been issues in almost every legislative session since 1951. Oil produced in North Dakota is subject to two state taxes. Revenue from the gross production tax, first enacted in 1953, is distributed, according to a remarkably complex formula, between the state general fund, the impact grant fund, the producing county, school districts within the county, and incorporated cities with the county. The second tax is the oil extraction tax, created by a 1980 initiated measure—Measure Six—that imposed an additional 6½-percent tax to be distributed to the state general fund, the school trust fund, the Southwest Pipeline fund, and a resources trust fund.

The first state taxes on coal were imposed in 1975, with the enactment of the coal severance tax—a tax imposed on the act of removing coal from the ground for sale or industrial purposes—and the coal conversion tax on the state's electrical generating and coal gasification plants. Revenues from these taxes are also distributed to the state general fund, the school trust fund, the lignite research fund, and among the counties where the coal is mined or the conversion plant is located.

There have been ongoing legislative debates over the correct balance between the tax revenues to be returned to the producing communities in western North Dakota and the amount to be deposited in the state general fund for all the citizens of the state. The coal severance tax, for example, was amended during every legislative session between 1975 and 2001; two constitutional amendments during that period also modified its provisions.

Kathleen Davison

that we were together in thought. So it did sort of flavor the votes in some cases. You weren't just voting Democratic and Republican; you were still voting on some of the basic issues that you would normally support each other on. But officially they were listed as Republicans.

I say, when you're in a minority now, you don't know what a minority is! That first legislature after [1956] we only had nineteen Democrats in the [House]. [The Republicans] didn't want to give us credit for any of the good legislation. I would make a strong plea for a bill—one of the times the Speaker [of the House] was Ben Wolf, a former Nonpartisan Leaguer from way back from down in that Wishek country. And he said, "You made a good speech, Art. But if you ain't got the votes, it won't matter."

The North Dakota Legislative Assembly had failed to reapportion its legislative districts since 1930. In 1959 the legislature approved Senate Concurrent Resolution "M," which amended the sections of the state constitution relating to the setting of House and Senate districts. The amendment was



Clarence Iverson #1 well, which launched the oil industry in North Dakota in 1951.

But what about my creek?

Can Antelope Creek be brought back to life? While it might be possible to some limited extent and at considerable expense, it is perhaps much more realistic to concentrate on eliminating the continuing loss of topsoil that still remains.

approved by voters in June 1960, and following the 1960 census new legislative districts were drawn.

I and Leslie Bergum were on the committee [to draw up a plan for reapportionment after the 1960 census]. I maintained, and I still do, that we can apply the same philosophy to state government that we have at the national level, which gives every state two senators regardless of size and population. Bergum was a [state] supreme court justice, and he believed in the same thing. We were going to give that same recognition to counties; every county should have at least one senator. That would have meant that we would have had fifty-four legislative districts; they'd have House members on a population basis, but they'd have a senator regardless. But the [United States] Supreme Court ruled that a county is not the same as a state. A county is a division of the state, and therefore you couldn't apply the same rules to a county that at the federal level you apply to a state. So we lost that one.

[Reapportionment] changed all our local districts. Our districts when I started running for the legislature were the counties—McKenzie County [was] District 41. And [with] the changes, District 41 is the largest geographic district in the state. It runs from the Missouri River on the north to the South Dakota line on the south. And it is sixty miles wide in some places.

I think people [now] are more conscious of the [differences in] lifestyle—different social patterns and communication—between the West River people and the Red River Valley, but I think that [these differences have] always been there. Now, communication and transportation are so complete that people are more knowledgeable of the lifestyle and the environment of the whole state.

In 1965 there was a Democratic majority in the House, and Art Link was elected Speaker of the House. While Democrats lost majority status after that session, Link continued to serve as minority leader until he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. I had good sessions, pretty good sessions. I had been in long enough, and some of the people—like Bryce Streibel, [who] I think was Republican floor leader—we kind of understood each other. We had our spats and our disagreements, but I didn't have too much trouble.

I think the interim study program [that is directed by the Legislative Council] has given the legislature some semblance of projected planning, some semblance of realizing that their responsibility goes beyond just serving in the next session of the legislature, getting a job done for two years, and then going home and forgetting about it, which is virtually what we did then. You forgot about it. You didn't come to life until your next caucus in the spring of the following year, [when you ran] for reelection. There was very little [to do], unless your district had a bridge that you had to get an appropriation for or some specific item or some major road improvement. And that wasn't so much a matter of legislative process; that was a matter of appealing to the proper authorities or agencies at the state level to get things done for your district. There was virtually no activity. The legislature wasn't even in town! There wasn't an office. There was no place to carry forth the work of the legislature.

Congress

In 1970 Art Link ran for Congress. I'd been in the legislature twenty-four years; I had served as Speaker and floor leader, and I just got a feeling that it was time to move on. Tom Kleppe was the incumbent congressman, and [he] decided to run against Quentin Burdick for the U.S. Senate from North Dakota.

[My opponent was] Bob McCarney. He never did concede to me, not to this day. It took about two weeks

for us to find out that I'd won the election. I think [the margin] was something like five hundred votes. I ran in the West District, [which went] as far east as the west boundary of Stutsman County. So geographically, the West District was almost two-thirds of the state. Mark Andrews was from the East District, which had as many votes as my whole two-thirds. So I had a big area to campaign in. I had the probably naive feeling that after twenty-four years in the legislature—[having] been involved in all of these good things for the schools and everything else that was important to North Dakota, [and having been] Speaker of the House—I just thought, well, I'm pretty well known, particularly in the West. I was surprised that the minute I got east of Bismarck at all, I got the feeling that nobody knew me, that serving in the legislature doesn't make any very large, long-lasting waves as far as the general population is concerned. It was kind of a shock to realize that. So I had to work like the dickens to campaign the whole West District. It came out that close.

McCarney beat the Republican [convention] nominee, Dick Elkin, in the primary. McCarney had built his own problems by being rather cantankerous, and he was an obstructionist. He had referred a lot of issues, so he was a controversial character to begin with, and after [defeating Elkin, many Republicans] wouldn't support him, and they knew me. A lot of them say, "I voted for you. You were the first Democrat I voted for, but I knew who you were." But

The use of interim studies was made possible by the creation of the Legislative Research Committee in 1945. Such a committee had been suggested in a 1942 report by the North Dakota Government Survey Commission, which had been charged with studying ways to improve the efficiency of state government. The report noted that the legislative assembly needed technical assistance based on well-directed research, assistance in bill drafting, and a permanent repository for its records.

The research committee created in 1945 consisted of fifteen members of the legislature who were empowered to study and assemble information and make recommendations on potential legislation. A balance of committee members was selected from both the House and the Senate, and from the minority as well as the majority party. During his twenty-four years in the legislature, Art Link saw the responsibilities of the Legislative Research Committee steadily expand. The committee was not particularly active in the 1940s or early 1950s and had minimal staff and resources. Only one interim study was conducted in 1947-1948; four studies were authorized in 1949-1950. In the late 1950s the number of studies greatly expanded, and more legislators were assigned to the interim committees conducting these studies. In 1965 the position of budget analyst and auditor was created and added to the committee staff, and in 1969 the name of the committee was changed to the Legislative Council.

The legislators who make up the council now meet after each legislative session to determine upcoming interim studies and committee memberships. Every legislator serves on one or more of the interim committees that hold hearings, take testimony, and review information on potential legislative issues between sessions. The council has a permanent staff of attorneys, accountants, and other personnel that provide a wide range of services to legislators. Like the creation of the Department of Accounts and Purchases to centralize purchasing and administration functions, the Legislative Council was part of the effort to make state government more professional. By providing an institutional source of information and research on potential legislation, bill-writing services, budget analysis, and other services, the Legislative Council also decreased the need for individual legislators to rely on services provided by lobbyists or the political parties.

Kathleen Davison

the Democratic party has done itself the same thing since then; anytime a candidate challenges the party nominee and beats him, you lose some people.

I got a chance to serve on the U.S. House Agriculture Committee to represent North Dakota's constituents and to serve on the District of Columbia Committee to support good government for the nation's city. [This was] an opportunity to emphasize urban and rural interdependence, by serving on [the D.C. Committee]. I [had] never sat on a city council, but I likened [the D.C. Committee] to a city council. [For example,] there was a dispute about truck license fees. Here we sit, a committee of congressmen from all over the United States, hammering out the dispute between the truck drivers and the truck owners [over] their license fees on their trucks. Well, that's city administrative business—had to do with providing the city services—like any other place in the country.

I served on the Agriculture Committee and on the subcommittee of livestock and feed grains. Now, it was the subcommittee that had more intense meetings, but in the full committee I was a full-fledged member on the major issues—when we made foreign sugar import quotas, and all the other things the Agriculture Committee worked on. Sugar import quotas were kind of hotly debated because the United States has a system of granting quotas [to] sugar-producing countries all over the world. The foreign countries that basically have cane sugar and cheap working conditions lobbied hard for getting more quotas because the sugar prices were high in the United States. The American growers were protecting their markets, so we were always balancing trade with foreign countries for political and economic reasons. But you were affecting your own people, so it was hotly contested; it was quite important.

[The greatest frustration with serving in Congress was the] slowness of the system, compared to the state legislature. For one thing, the lack of electronic voting in the House with 435 members [slowed things down]. This was in 1971-1972. By comparison, North Dakota had installed electric voting in 1947. Calling the roll by the Speaker's assistant here in Washington, D.C., would take an hour or two. You'd go back to your office, and you knew about the time your name would be coming up, and you'd go over there. It looked so antiquated and so slow. And I soon became aware that if you could get a bill written and introduced to committee, it wasn't going anywhere unless you had plenty of influence. I think influence is what drives Washington, D.C. I was used to things being more in hand—you [could] keep track of what was happening and have some influence on it. So I think that's the reason I chose to go for governor.

We liked Washington. There was so much history; [it's] close to the historic places. I liked to work in the Congress, but not to live there permanently. George Washington's



home at Mount Vernon was a place that Grace took visitors to. She enjoyed driving our 1970 Impala Chevy that sits out here in the garage yet, taking family members and friends on sightseeing tours around Washington. One weekend Grace and I went to Williamsburg, Virginia—the two of us for a weekend. But as for my sightseeing in Washington, I never got in the Smithsonian in the two years we were there. But Grace got quite proficient. She drove all over Washington.

I had good working relationships with [Representative Mark] Andrews [and Senators Quentin] Burdick and [Milt] Young. During twenty-four years in the North Dakota legislature I had become personally acquainted with each of them. Also, with all of us having an agriculture background, there was little political conflict. On one issue I arranged a meeting of all four of us. They all came, and we had a good discussion. I was told later that this was the first time that this had taken place. Unlike today, there was a lack of congressional interaction [between] North Dakota members.

I served for two years, and then I would have had to run [again], but while North Dakota didn't lose any population, other states gained. As a result we were reduced to one congressman at large. Mark Andrews had already served two terms, or at least one before I was elected, in the East District. If I wanted to run for Congress again I would have had to run for that one seat and oppose him. Some of my friends in the Democratic party said I should go for governor because Bill Guy had just completed twelve years and was not seeking reelection. There was no incumbent for governor, and Richard Larson, a University of North Dakota professor, was the Republican nominee. He was lieutenant governor at the time.

[My working relationship with Mark Andrews was] very

good. [One time there] was a big Boy Scout jamboree in Valley City. We were waiting for the parade to start, and here Mark Andrews came along walking up the street and saw us standing there; [he] shook hands and stood around there. First thing you know, there was a cameraman following, and he took a picture of us standing there; and son of a gun, he used that picture in his campaign to show he was my friend. But then he was running; I wasn't running against him then.

1972 Campaign for Governor

The Democratic nomination for governor in 1972 was contested by Link, George Sinner, Lloyd Omdahl, and Walter Hjelle. The district caucuses in 1972 [were] where I gained the support that gave me the nomination. This gave me the personal, one-on-one contact with party district supporters. We had developed committee support. Many of them were legislators and former colleagues. We encouraged the district delegates to participate in the [state] convention. They'll give you their word; you don't bind them—we had no way of officially binding them. We asked for a pretty strong commitment.

[During the convention there was] intense lobbying of the district delegates between votes. It was a well-managed campaign with a core of committed delegates. That was our strength. None of our original delegates wavered. But into the second or third ballot some of them would start to shop around. Bob [Valeu, Link's campaign manager,] had a

The year that Art went into Congress, our youngest was starting college. I really don't think we would have done it if we had [had] anybody at home. But he started college in the fall, and then we left in January. That was a big change, and I think when we did it we weren't sure. We kind of felt like we'd be coming back to the farm. But I learned to drive in D.C. Got lost a few times, yes. But we would have family members come down, and I would take them out to Mount Vernon and get around. We lived in a fifteen-story high-rise with—I think they called it—a bedroom-and-a-half apartment. I learned to adjust to it. I'm glad it was only two years. I don't think I would have liked it as a permanent lifestyle.

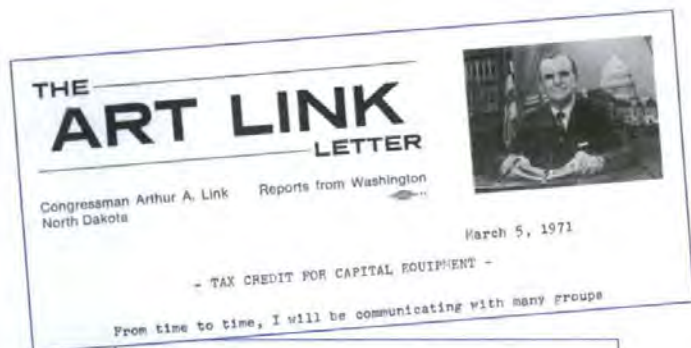
I became a very good friend of a congressman's wife from the state of Washington and one from South Dakota. We had what they called the Democratic Wives Club, and we got to know each other. There was also a congressional wives [group], and we went on a lot of tours and did different things, so we got acquainted with each other.

We didn't get acquainted with hardly anyone else living in this big high-rise. We had one family friend that lived in Arlington, and her first comment when we were living in this high-rise was, "Well, when you wash clothes, be sure that Art goes with you." I came back after talking with her, and I said to Art, "If it is so dangerous to live down here that I can't go down to the laundry room in this place, I don't think I belong here." I had my friends—Art had two of his staff that were about my age—so we would do things together. Then [I did things] with these other congressmen's wives, and that was pretty much my lifestyle there. And then the first summer I came home because Joann and Harvey were home. They were the two that were in college, and they were home. I felt like I needed to be home. The second summer [Art] was running for governor, so I was home trying to campaign for him when he was gone. So I never spent a summer down there. I just don't think I'd like to live down there. Only the ones that are involved with the Congress can really enjoy being down there, I think. But everybody to themselves!



SHSND 10787

Joann Link, only daughter of the governor and first lady, was North Dakota's Cherry Blossom Princess in 1972, the final year of Art Link's term in the U.S. House of Representatives. Cherry Blossom Princesses are chosen (one per state) for their leadership, academic achievements, and civic involvement; they are rewarded with an educational week in Washington, D.C. Joann was a senior home economics education major at North Dakota State University at the time of her selection. Joann Link Hetzel died in 1991.



To Congressman Arthur A. Link

From *Art Linkletter*

April 13, 1971

Dear Mr. Link:

This is an Art Link Letter from the real Linkletter. Your newsy report was sent me by a mutual friend, Bob Dean of Bismarck, and I was very interested in its contents and your proximity to your constituents. I believe communications between our nation's leaders and the public is an imperative these days and I congratulate you on this effort.

I would have asked for a royalty on the name "Link Letter" but I notice it is not only free, but printed at your own expense! My middle initial is "G;" what can you do with that?

Cordially,

AL:J

cc: Bob Dean

SHSND 10787-b43-432

U.S. Representative Link periodically sent the Art Link Letter to his constituents to keep them abreast of his work in Congress. One good-natured reply came from the letter's namesake.

terrifically highly organized crew to watch how the delegates were voting and kept our strength together. And then each succeeding ballot, I gained a few more, and the others were losing them.

I believe that the candidate for lieutenant governor can have a bearing on the outcome. I knew Wayne Sanstead and Albert Wolf both. It just seems that Sanstead had been around a long time. Somehow he just stood out in people's minds, having been in the legislature and a debate coach and all that—good communicator.

I think my service in Congress for two years gave me the opportunity to become better known in the eastern part of the state, because I served on the Agriculture Committee, which dealt with import sugar quotas as well as considering another beet sugar refinery plant in western Minnesota. It gave me visibility in the Red River Valley, which grows lots of sugar beets. My service in Congress demonstrated my

ability to deal with broad policy issues. I think it did.

In the 1972 campaign I called for cautious, orderly development of our natural resources. I called for the reclamation of mined land. I called for improving education—such as health, kindergarten, educational TV—conservation of petroleum products, and improving and maintaining our road system. My opponent, Richard Larson, displayed an air of overconfidence and did not take time to visit with future constituents. His business with special groups consisted of a brief talk: hello, goodbye. I recall one in particular; I think it was in Grand Forks. We were the guests of the Nurses Association, and they had invited both of us to a noon luncheon. We sat at the head table, and I don't know how Mr. Larson got to be the first, but he did, much to my satisfaction; he said that he had another engagement that he had to get to quite soon. As soon as the lunch was pretty well over, he was introduced to speak, and he gave his little pitch to the audience. There were a whole bunch of delegates, nursing delegates, and they were polite, and they gave him a warm welcome. But he excused himself and left me there alone. I could take all the time I wanted. I visited with them, and I entertained some questions, which he had not done—didn't have time to. I think I walked away from there with a good feeling. It was pretty well recognized that he, well, he was lieutenant governor; he held the office. I think he overestimated his strength. I have nothing personal against the man; he's a friendly fellow. He made more money by not getting elected. He went to California and joined a big bank—became an officer in a bank or something.

Governor Guy's excellent record of good progressive government made it easy to assure voters of a continuation of these policies. I believe that twelve years of responsible Democratic administration had instilled a major degree of confidence in the voters, which was a plus for me. I think that Bill Guy, probably more than any one person in my political lifetime, ushered in the Democratic party—with a Democratic philosophy—and was very good and very professional about it. And I like to think that I, in a different style, at a different level—not the professionalism; I'm not educated as he was—demonstrated a knowledge and a commitment to those same principles. So I think I benefitted from the quality of administration that he gave the state; he had dispelled the fear that the Democrats had horns and stuff like that. They weren't, after all, a bunch of wild Communists running away with everything.

The transition was very good. I stepped into the governor's office the day Governor Guy vacated it, and when he handed me the keys it was all amiable. The staff was on board. I asked them to stay if they chose to. Most of them did at least for a few days; some had other

things they wanted to do, and some stayed on. I knew them personally, and they knew me personally. I had no reason to find fault with any of them. He and his staff were very helpful, which made the transition easy. I could not have asked for more cordial transition.

Kathryn Satrom was news and speech writer and researcher. Murray Sagsveen came as legal advisor. He was finishing his last semester of law school while he served in the governor's office. He got credit while serving here. I appointed [Bob Valeu, my campaign manager,] to the Office of Economic Opportunity, and he was my representative on the five-state Old West Region Committee. He was active, but not at as visible a position. I was, I guess, in some respects politically naive, even at that time. Everybody else since then, and maybe some before that, appoint their campaign manager as their number one person. I intentionally didn't do it because I thought, in my humble mind, that it would make it look too political. If I took him in here, the people would see him as the person that helped beat them. And it wouldn't be good policy, because I thought once you're the governor, you're everybody's governor. [Now] I think I'd do that differently; I'd have him right in there as top man. But we never had any discussion about it.

I appointed [Woody Gagnon] director of administration in the governor's office. [I knew] him when I was in the legislature and serving on the Legislative Research Committee. He'd just retired from the National Guard. I recall calling him in and telling him, "Woody, I have all these young people on my staff. You've got the background, you know the people, you know the military, you know a lot of things. I want you to meet with my staff if you feel like it. Analyze the jobs that are here, and then give me a report on how you think I can best staff the office and have the best working unit that we can put together." And he came back a couple weeks later, and he outlined what he thought were some changes I should make. I don't think he said it in those terms, but he said, "What you need on your staff is someone with a few grey hairs." He says that I told him right there, "OK, now you go do it." I don't think it was quite that abrupt. He thought it over, and he came back and said he appreciated the offer, and he was my director of administration. He was a good organizer; he kept charge of things. He knew so many people in the state and so many things the state depends on in times of an emergency, when you had to deal with the National Guard.

The agency heads and board appointments were filled by assigning a staff to do research on applicants and review the procedures that were mandated by law and that must be followed. I had one real contest. LaClaire Melhouse was retiring as adjutant general, and a committee from eastern North Dakota came over [to lobby me] for the appointment

The first thing we must do is determine that land is as sacred as air and water and no one has the right to abuse it or destroy it. Private ownership of land should not convey the right to do so. Since caring for the land is in the interest of the general public, the general public must share in the cost of maintaining adequate conservation practices.

of Alexander McDonald of the Air Guard, from Fargo. The other candidate was C. Emerson Murry, [who] had been the executive director of the Legislative Council for a goodly number of years. I appointed Emerson Murry. It was watched so closely by so many people, and I took so long that it almost became embarrassing. There were people who were as strong against Emerson Murry as they were strong for McDonald. There was a little bit—air force versus army, you see. I learned a little bit about internal politics in the military, too. If you're conscientious about the appointment of people in important and responsible positions, it's impossible to take it lightly. I recall that incident, that whole scenario; it hung on for two months, you know. "When is the governor going to appoint the A.G.?" That's where they got the saying, "He's too slow in making up his mind."

Some of my strongest supporters at the state convention were unhappy that I did not fire Walt Hjelle, who was highway commissioner and my most vocal opponent for the nomination at the state convention. Not only he, but some of his department people were down there campaigning. I think I did the right thing, as he was a popular state highway commissioner, and it quieted the emotions of the convention. I kept him for my eight years. He was one of my strong supporters while in office. But it was a difficult thing. It had gotten real hot and down-to-the-wire. He pulled a lot of votes, and they were mad at me because they could see that we were beating him. And they were saying mean things after the vote, and I overheard them right down the hallway. I even heard ranting. So it took a lot of guts to leave him on. My people said, "You don't want Walt Hjelle [because of] the things he said—his people said—about you." I didn't listen to them. I reappointed him. Well, that took all the steam out of it. And he never failed to include me in any public announcement or activity that had to do with improving the roads or that had to do with making the governor look good.

Walt Hjelle became a good, solid, real supporter, and he was a good highway commissioner. He had a following [among] both the county commissioners across the state and the contractors. He kept the department clean. I never had

any problem; he never embarrassed the governor's office. He was a good, liberal Democrat, and he supported the party. He got over it after all, but had I gone the other way, I think his people and staff that ran the department, they would have carried that within them.

In October 1973 the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cut oil production, announced a halt of sales to Western nations, and raised prices substantially. Even before these OPEC actions a heating fuel shortage was looming over the state. On inauguration day [January 2, 1973], after I'd given my inauguration [speech], [I was] signing the oath of office at the big reception [when] someone taps me on the shoulder and says, "Governor, you're wanted in the governor's office." Here's all my friends, my relatives—we were all shaking hands and having cookies and coffee, and the place was packed. They lugged me down to the office, and here was the emergency energy assistant head and [Adjutant General] Melhouse. They told me that the state was facing a shortage of heating oil—and there was a lot of snow [that] December—and if we didn't act pretty quick some people were in danger of running out of fuel oil and being in physical harm. They had a plan, though, for me: rationing. I had to sign an order, so I was initiated or baptized into the energy crisis with fire and brimstone.

[The worldwide energy crisis that had developed led] North Dakota to reassess its place as a important player in exporting energy. This required much attention to water resources, coal and oil exploration, [the careful placement of] power plants, land reclamation, and the overall environmental impacts to our state—especially in western

In the 1972 campaign] I gave a certain amount of talks. That's not my bag of tea, I'd say. It's hard for me to do, but I did some of that, and I attended a lot of coffee parties. There were other women candidates and wives of candidates that were in the area, and we would go together. I campaigned primarily in the western part of the state because Art was known there, and when he'd come home, he'd hit the things in the East where they didn't know him as well.

I wasn't as visible a First Lady, I don't think, as some have been. I did get the program started for the preservation of the old governors' mansion. I did a few of those things, and there were times when I was asked to come to some special meeting and speak, and I did do that some, but not very much. I went with Art on almost all occasions, whatever it was. If I could, I went with him, because we had decided at that point that our family's grown now. If he's going to do this, we're going to be together. I was this silent partner that sat there and listened to his speeches. We used to talk it over after he'd given his speeches, or he would visit with me about the issues before he'd make his decisions. If I thought there was something I didn't agree with, I might [tell him]. But I learned—some people have told me that they couldn't have lived with this—never [to give] my opinion [to others] on issues, because if I said I agreed with him on all the issues, they'll think, "Oh well, she doesn't have a mind of her own," and if I disagreed, that made a bigger story yet. So I just kept still.

Our life together has been very much a partnership. But I guess with him as governor, I always had the feeling he was the one that was elected, and it was up to me to support him in whatever. I could visit with him and maybe influence his decisions, but in the public it was him and his decisions. I guess that's kind of the way I grew up. I think my mother took the same stance.

[I would go to] city functions they'd expect Art to be at, and of course there would be the political things that we would have to go to. When Art's dad was living with us, there was one time that Art had to go to Valley City. He had to be there for a day, and there was a political function in the evening. There was a young Dem that picked me up and took me up there for the evening function. We got up the next morning, and Art's dad says, "Why didn't you wake me when you came home? I laid awake all night worrying about you because I didn't think you got home last night." So we said, here he was ninety-some years old and worrying about his son not making it home. It was kind of nasty weather; the roads were a little icy or something. He was worried about us.



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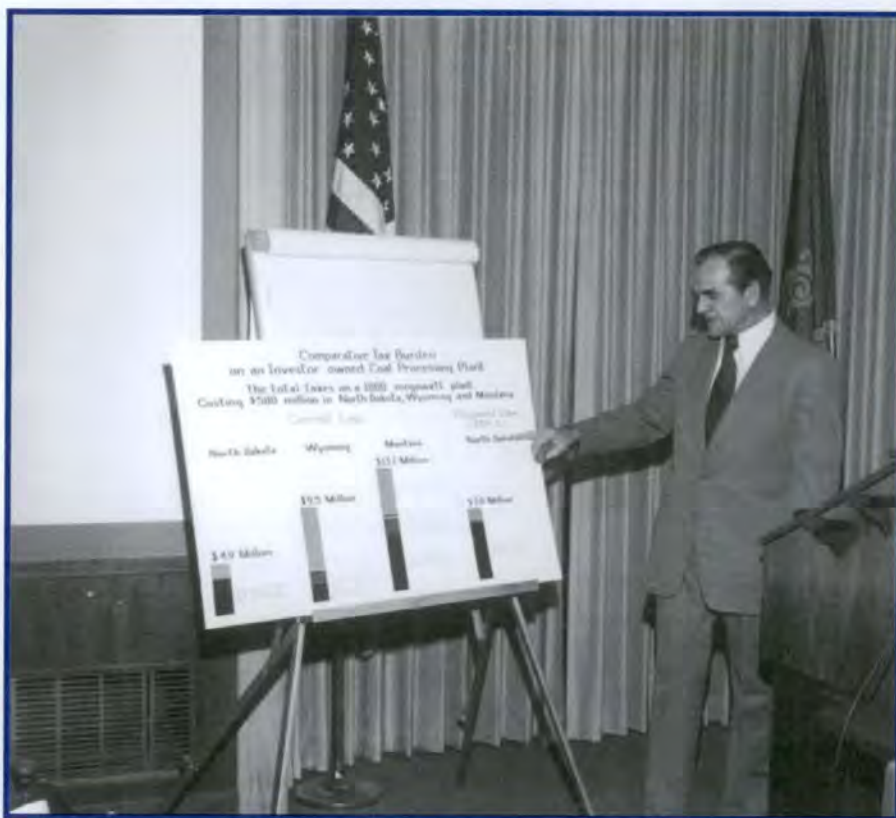
John Link with daughter-in-law Grace in the state House of Representatives chamber, January 7, 1975. Art Link's father lived with him and Grace at the governor's residence during the winter months until his death in 1977.

North Dakota. So it had a far-reaching effect.

[One of the earliest] key issues [was to] comply with the federal conservation mandates, such as the fifty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit. The federal government had decreed that by the fall [of 1974], [the speed limit for all] the states had to be fifty-five. So I [asked] Murray Sagsveen, "Can we implement the fifty-five-mile-an-hour speed limit earlier?" "Well," he said, "You can by [executive order]." We started it—the first state in the nation to enact the fifty-five-mile speed limit. [The order] was never challenged. You see, the big trucks could have taken us to court and said you haven't the right.

[We also] resisted the application by Michigan-Wisconsin Pipeline Company for water permits to build four coal gasification plants in North Dakota. As chairman of the State Water Commission, [which is responsible for issuing water permits,] I asked Murray Sagsveen to write a condition in the water permit that required all users of water for energy, both electric and gasification, to perform total reclamation of surface-mined land following removal of the coal. This was a long and hard-fought condition, but we prevailed. I was criticized for hindering progress and economic development. The water commission supported our demands, although some of the water commission members, even Vern Fahy, who was the state engineer, weren't sure that I had the authority to do that. We approved one gasification plant permit and held the others on the side, telling them, well, we'll hold them for you if you need them later. These same rules also applied for coal-fired electric plants. These rules were never challenged and were adopted by the succeeding legislature. Murray wrote legislation into the water commission rules that made these conditions a part of the water permit system and got the legislature to approve that. So what I did by executive order—establish rules for total reclamation—became law in the succeeding legislative session. I had campaigned on the slogan of cautious, orderly development. So when they would challenge me and say, you're slowing up economic development—[I was] not slowing it up, just being cautious, orderly. And it has stood the time.

The Michigan-Wisconsin Pipeline Company's [proposal] to construct a coal gasification plant using low-grade lignite coal was a major project that to be successful required the fullest cooperation and various



Governor Link's campaign for a higher coal extraction tax was based on the idea that North Dakota should get fair return for the "one-time harvest" of its natural resources.

permits from many state regulatory agencies, including the governor's support. I tried to get the legislature to approve a Department of Natural Resources, but they shied away from it. They didn't want to expand government. I created by executive directive the Natural Resources Council. I named every agency and department that was affected in any way by the development of energy plants of any kind and set a schedule of meetings about once a month, or as often as development of significant events required. Most meetings were attended 100 percent. The party that was creating the impact was invited to give a report to the entire council, and those [agencies] whose jurisdiction was to be affected were requested to respond as to the impact, if any, and how they would deal with it.

Officials of the coal gasification plant were very cooperative and kept the governor's office informed of developments and expected to be called to the meeting to report to the council. [We met] when Mr. Art Seder would come to town, representing the Michigan-Wisconsin Pipeline Company in their requests for all kinds of state permits in the building of the gasification plant. Meetings did not last too long—perhaps an hour or two. This proved to be an efficient, economical method for establishing trust and communication between affected agencies, thus eliminating the problem of the right hand not knowing what

the left hand is doing. This project required negotiating the first loan guarantee from the federal government for construction of the coal gasification plant. And we did that in President Carter's office.

[Other accomplishments included] the creation of the Office of Management and Budget. We succeeded in getting some funding for public kindergarten and expanded services for the developmentally disabled. During my eight years the [North Dakota] Heritage Center, state laboratory building, and supreme court chambers and office building complex were funded and constructed, and a new environmental control system was installed in the state capitol. The [Liberty] Memorial Building was refurbished, and the facilities at the state mill were expanded and modernized. We promoted the Cross Ranch State Park and Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site; created the North Dakota Bicentennial Commission to celebrate the two hundredth birthday of the United States; vetoed legislation allowing nineteen-year-olds to drink alcoholic beverages (that did create a storm); and appointed the state's tribal chairpersons to be members of the Indian Affairs Commission. They had an Indian Affairs Commission, but we didn't have any [tribal chairs on it], and by executive



SHSND 10943-42

President Jimmy Carter congratulates Governor Link after signing a \$240 million federal loan guarantee to fund construction of the American Natural Gas coal gasification plant near Beulah, North Dakota, on July 18, 1980. Link's loyalty to Carter in the 1980 presidential race may have contributed to his own loss of the governorship to Allen Olson that year.

In the 1960s the region's growing demand for electrical power led to the construction of a number of lignite-fired power plants in North Dakota. Experts were also predicting that the nation would soon run short of natural gas, and companies began seeking alternative natural gas sources. One source was coal gasification—the processing of coal to produce natural gas—a relatively untried technology in this country. By the 1970s large national energy companies, as well as regional electricity producers, had begun looking to western North Dakota. Between January 1973 and May 1975 ten applications for industrial water use permits for electrical generation and gasification were filed with the State Water Commission. These applications proposed the construction of at least ten electrical facilities and twelve gasification plants. One of the companies applying for a water permit was the Michigan-Wisconsin Pipeline Company, a subsidiary of American Natural Gas. In 1972 and 1973 the company had acquired rights to some 2.7 billion tons of coal in North Dakota; in 1973 the company filed an application for a water permit for four gasification plants, to be constructed at Beulah, Dodge-Halliday, Washburn, and Center, North Dakota.

Concerns about development were increased by the release in 1975 of a study by the state's Water Conservation Commission on diverting Lake Sakakawea water to the region west of the Missouri River. The study proposed that use of the diverted water for industrial as well as agricultural purposes was necessary to make the project economically feasible. At the highest level of potential development, the study projected dozens of electrical generation and gasification plants, the strip mining of 1.3 million acres of western North Dakota land (almost 3 percent of the state's total), and increasing the West River population from about 86,000 to almost half a million.

Opposition by environmental and other groups concerned about the effects of such large-scale development was not the only problem faced by the Michigan-Wisconsin gasification project; the plant's financing soon became problematic. Other proposed gasification projects had failed to move beyond the planning stage, and the cost of constructing a plant just half the size originally proposed had risen to over six hundred million dollars. Michigan-Wisconsin sought federal loan guarantees to assist in raising the capital for construction. Although natural gas prices were falling as new gas deposits were identified, project developers convinced President Carter that the proposed gasification plant deserved federal support as a demonstration of a technology that could advance the nation's energy independence. On July 18, 1980, President Carter delivered a conditional letter of commitment for the quarter-billion-dollar loan guarantee that made continuation of the project possible.

Kathleen Davison

We had a lot of tours [of the residence]. [With] Bill and Jean Guy it was very, very open. Of course they were the first ones to be really able to live in it. The Davises lived in it for nine months, but I don't think things were really finished up that much. And so Jean had had a very open policy, and I continued that. I would suppose we had tours through there on an average of two or three a week or more. I don't think it's been that open for tours since. We opened up our home for the Young Life kids to come in a couple, three times, and of course there were a few political things in the picnic area and so forth. Then Art had quite a few morning breakfast[s] with his staff, and we'd have them in for Christmas parties, and all of the elected officials. We had certain evenings when we would have the different ones come in for dinners. We could only seat twelve or fourteen at the table, [so] when we would invite in the state officials and their spouses, we'd put card tables up. There were times when we closed off the family area, especially when our parents were with us and it wasn't always convenient. But the state area—I guess we just felt that belongs to the state, and the people should get the chance.

One Sunday morning Art had walked up to the capitol to do something in the office before we went to church. [When] he came out of the office there was a car in the parking lot. As was his habit—he saw that it was out-of-state—he went over and greeted them. And these people said, “We're looking for a Lutheran church. Can you tell us where is a church?” Art started to tell him, and then he thought, why should I? And he said, “Well, if you just want to come home with me and have a cup of coffee, we're going to church. We'll take you along.” They didn't know he was the governor. When he drove to the residence, they couldn't quite believe their eyes. That was his way of doing. In fact, I think he still does it a lot. When we are up in the capitol grounds, and you see a car from out of state, I know where they're from and what they're doing, and so forth.

order I made it a policy [to] appoint the chairman of each tribe as a member of the commission. And now they are doing it regularly.

Most scholars of government consider North Dakota as having a weak governor's office. I think if that is true—and by comparing with other states, it may be—it stems from the almost fierce determination of North Dakotans to defend their right to select by vote the various officeholders of state government. I think there is an ingrained determination that we're not going to give up the right to some individual, even if it is the governor, and make



Governor and Mrs. Link attend a powwow at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck. Link is proud of the fact that he was adopted into the Three Affiliated Tribes and given the name Charging Eagle, after an honored Hidatsa leader.

a kingdom or dictator—they don't use the words generally—that has too much authority. We resent—I'm speaking now as one of the people of North Dakota—we resent and reject the notion that one person should be granted that authority. I wanted to create a Department of Natural Resources [that combined the duties of other departments, but] there were people who were very reluctant to change. I guess in many ways I find myself questioning change.

The greatest power that a governor has is the power of veto. A measure approved by a majority vote in each house, if vetoed by the governor, must be returned for the legislature either to support the governor's veto or override the veto. But that requires a two-thirds vote of the members, so in this case the governor holds a strong hand. The power of the budget, while quite strong, can be amended or rejected by a majority vote of the legislature. There seems to be constant disagreement between the governor's office and the legislative branch.

I'm surprised that the governors since my time seem not to be concerned with [threatening to veto a bill]. *Article V, Section 11 of the North Dakota Constitution prohibits the governor from threatening use of his veto power.* I religiously stayed away from any possible hint, because I thought it was next to treason to use the threat of a veto to influence the legislature. But I think it's been suggested by some

governors since then—they don't hesitate at all to show their support or opposition to what the legislature is doing.

The governor is required to give a veto message, and you have that one opportunity to defend your position when writing the veto message and make your case. If you anticipate some criticism, it's one avenue by which you can defend your position. I did that in the case of defeating the nineteen-year-old drinking bill. It sure wasn't popular. I was invited to throw the basketball out at the state Class A tournament about a week or ten days after I vetoed that bill, and when they called my name out there was a boo. But they gave me the ball, and I threw it out, and at halftime two sophomore girls came over and apologized. I had so many more people come around and say, you did the right thing. But you've got to take some of that [criticism].

I think having served in the legislature was a lifesaver for me. That experience—which probably indirectly was my education in the whole process of government, public relations, speaking, and the whole bit—served me extremely well. I think I was cognizant of the position of the legislature and probably was less inclined to interfere with the legislative process because I'd been there and recognized that the legislature is a body unto itself and should not be intruded upon by the executive. Therefore, even though

As we celebrate the Centennial of our State in 1989, we call upon all citizens to usher in the second century with a greater awareness and commitment to the conservation of our natural resources. . . . We must do this lest the death of Antelope Creek be in vain.

and I went before the state senate once by request and addressed an issue that I always felt very strongly about. I was very sensitive about it, [however,] and did not wish to use the office of governor unduly on the legislature in its deliberations. Today the president and governors of many states—even the governor of this state—don't hesitate at all to say whether they're for or against a measure. I don't quite understand that. Either I was too laid back or they're intruding on the other branch of government unnecessarily or without good cause, so I've not decided that at this point.

As a Democrat facing a Republican legislature, the partisanship can become very significant. However, if there is restraint and partisanship is set aside, there is much that can be accomplished. I believe in communication. On important major issues I would invite the leadership of both parties to a breakfast at the residence and lay my position on the table—open up the discussion and have an open forum so there was full understanding. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. In other words, we built a measure

my recommendations, my programs, may not have been accepted or were significantly altered at times, I think I was prepared to take that in stride. It isn't always easy. I don't know if at the time I broke any traditions, but I did go before a couple of legislative committees,



A reception and ball for the opening of the 44th Legislature was held in the Capitol Memorial Hall in Bismarck on January 7, 1975. Reflecting on his governorship, Link remarked that "Having served in the legislature was a lifesaver for me. . . . Because I'd been there [I] recognized that the legislature is a body unto itself and should not be intruded upon by the executive."

of trust and reduced the element of gamesmanship. [In 1979] I strongly supported the appropriation to buy the Cross Ranch for a state park, and I didn't know if I had the support of the majority or not. *Cross Ranch was a large, privately owned property south of Washburn, North Dakota, containing native woodlands and extending seven miles along the west bank of one of the few remaining free-flowing, undeveloped stretches of the Missouri River.*

Earl Strinden was the leader of the Republicans. So I called one of those breakfast meetings and laid out the proposal, and he came across. I was gratified to know that he was on my side. Here I had a majority Republican legislature to work with. Well, I don't say this to boast, but they knew my limits of what I could get done, and they knew I couldn't do anything without their support. But they knew, I think, that I represented a faction in the state that have ears and eyes, too. And they didn't push me around too badly because I think I had built a pretty good reputation of trust with the people of the state, and I was fortunate that I was able to dodge the bullet. I wasn't damaged too seriously.

[House Majority Leader Earl Strinden's reputation as being partisan] didn't faze me—I accepted it. He'd get up and make an impassioned plea; he'd get pretty angry and make you feel like you don't know what you're talking about. But if he knew you were right, and you stood your ground, he stayed in his place. But if he thought he could push you around, he would do that. There is one thing that everybody who ever dealt with him said: he was smart. He operated from a platform of strength and of self-confidence. When he quoted figures, when he quoted situations, he had done his homework. It wasn't just blasting off or political rhetoric. There are some that get carried away with their own feeling of aggrandizement [and] make charges and statements that they cannot defend, and then they are in trouble. You didn't catch Earl very often making a misstatement. You may not agree with him, but what he was saying, he was right in whatever he said.



Earl S. Strinden (1931-). A native of Litchville, North Dakota, Strinden entered business in Grand Forks in 1959. He was elected to the city council in 1962 and to the North Dakota House of Representatives from District 18 in 1966, following the legislative reapportionment mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court. Moving quickly into leadership, Strinden served as majority whip beginning in his second session, and became majority leader in 1975. He remained the leader of House Republicans until retiring from the legislature in 1988. Known for his hard work and long hours during the legislative sessions, Strinden believed strongly in legislative initiatives and generated numerous studies on key issues ranging from public employee retirement programs to the distribution of the oil extraction tax. He tenaciously worked to consolidate health and welfare functions into a Department of Human Services, an effort that took ten years of legislative committee work. Highly visible and a firm believer that the legislative branch needed to jealously guard its constitutional role, Strinden personified the Republican position on key issues such as the coal severance tax during the Link administration.

PART TWO

Working Together

In 1976 Link ran for reelection against the Republican nominee for governor, Richard Elkin. Back in 1972 I didn't have any idea [how long I wanted to serve as governor]. I didn't spend much time in making my own agenda for the future. I sort of dealt with the immediate future and took care of those things, and they just kind of happened. Some that go into politics, they say, I'll do this, and then I'll do that. If you do that, I think you spend more time on the process than on the content of the issue. I think you make your best point by the issues you work on—if they are constructive, if they are important, if they are beneficial for the people. But I think if you just make the moves that will advance your own political future, it will show through after a while. That's my personal belief, in this whole political process.

Compared to the 1972 campaign, the 1976 campaign was much better. [After] four years there was much to talk about with the people. They knew me better, I knew them better, and there wasn't the pressure of the 1972 campaign, when we were vying for delegate support. There was no dissatisfaction in the Democratic party that I was aware of. I think that I was nominated by acclamation. That gives you a good feeling, when you know you're not wasting your time. What party in their right mind, with a governor who has had four successful years and hasn't been tarred and feathered, hasn't done anything really bad, and has a pretty good standing, would think of changing? You just don't.

The second term

began to show signs of maturity. We could see many of our efforts coming to fruition. However, some of the most important projects were still coming into their own. The construction of the Heritage Center was not yet started. We were trying to save Cross Ranch park, which the legislature had approved, [but the legislation] was referred. The never-ending contest of the management of the Missouri River and the flood protection dikes of the Red River thinned a few hairs and grayed more of the few that were left.

In retrospect we should have taken a more proactive role in resolving the issues [regarding treatment of the developmentally disabled]. When I think of the institutionalizing of our mentally and physically retarded, the condition we found them in, I regret that I didn't just speak out in outrage about how we treated them. It seemed we were just institutionalizing them. That's the way it was always done, and it took a court order to make the state change it. *In 1980 a lawsuit was filed in federal court challenging North Dakota's practices regarding institutionalization of individuals with developmental*

disabilities. This lawsuit resulted in the wholesale restructuring, under court supervision, of the state's programs for the developmentally disabled. [The lawsuit] came after my term in office, so I can't claim a great deal of credit for it. I did support the effort to provide for their comfort and safety, but it wasn't really enough. There needed to be consideration for the developmentally retarded, like giving



Governor Link, accompanied by First Lady Grace Link and House Minority Leader Richard Backes, at the 1976 state Democratic convention in Bismarck.

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them these group homes and more of a home settlement, instead of having them in a warehouse in Grafton. So I'm frank to admit, in retrospect, we should have taken a more proactive role regarding this.

1980 Election

I was confident that I would win a third four-year term. I was completely engulfed with the duties of the office of the governor. Allen Olson spent all of his time campaigning in every town in the state. Governor Guy had served twelve years, and I had served eight years. Olson said, "Twenty is plenty." That was a catchy phrase meaning that twenty years of Democratic governors is plenty. Olson tied me to Carter, whom the Republicans blamed for the wheat embargo. Then there was the merciless Reagan landslide.

The wheat embargo by President Carter was a very traumatic world event. At the National Governors Association meeting [that year] in Denver, as is customary, the Republican governors and the Democratic governors set one morning session aside—two or three hours—[for] a breakfast [and] caucus. At that caucus someone from Carter's office came to Denver to speak to the Democratic governors, imploring the governors to endorse a resolution of support for Carter's renomination for his second term, and I went along with it. And I didn't even get home before Al Olson had issued a statement that I had betrayed the trust of the farmers of North Dakota, because Carter had imposed the wheat embargo to Russia, which affected exports. It didn't matter that Carter was using it to influence some political decision on the part of the Russians or not. Olson said Link should have done at least what the governor of Colorado, Dick Lamb, [did]—he withheld his support. Well, being a good, loyal Democrat, I said to myself, I can't be down here and say I won't support Carter. We had worked with him on the coal gasification plant and stuff like that, and what kind of Democrat would I be if I played politics? So I went ahead. Well, the game lent Olson some ammunition to stoke his fire. That's why I say the wheat embargo by President Carter was a very traumatic event.

The severance tax for mining coal became a real contentious issue. It was considered [that] if you were for a higher severance tax you were against economic development. Those of us who were standing pat for a higher tax said [coal mining] is a one-time harvest. The thing that became obvious in the debate was that a large percentage of the electricity that we produce at the coal-fired electric plants in North Dakota is exported, and one of the receiving states is Minnesota, [which] charged their consumers more for the electricity produced from a ton of coal than North Dakota was getting for extracting that coal. And yet the people who were supporting the coal industry were hollering to high heaven that we'd drive them out of

Back in the 1959 session of the legislature, there was a bill in to raze [the Former Governors' Mansion] and sell the lot. Art caught it about two weeks before the session was over, and it was too late to put in a bill. So he put in a resolution that we save that building, which passed. Then it was being used for office space. When we came back here [from Washington] we talked it over, and we decided the state couldn't do anything with it. So I got a group together, and we got a bill passed [in 1975] to transfer ownership to the State Historical Society so we could do something with it. And I guess it was just our interest that we didn't want to see the building destroyed. We just wanted it as a museum or to save it.

I think every year [when Art was in the legislature] the First Lady would have a tea [in the old governors' mansion, until the new residence was built]. Because of the size of the home, she would break it down so maybe twenty-five or forty of us would be invited each time. I can remember sitting in that dining room and thinking, "Oh, my, what a big room this is." After living in those little cabins that we were in, it seemed like it was pretty big.



Grace Link (r) and Doris Hanson (l) in 2003 at the Former Governors' Mansion State Historic Site, where Mrs. Link has hosted a series of "high teas."

Olson Criticizes Link for Supporting President Carter

Center Republican, April 27, 1980

the state. We maintained that North Dakota should get at least as much as Minnesota was charging for the electricity that was made from it. We were not able to hold it to that figure, but we were able to get and put into law reclamation standards that became sort of a standard for other parts of the country. We required complete reclamation on mined land, which the mining companies were opposed to, but we held our ground, and they finally agreed that it was the only way to go. It's been recognized that North Dakota has the best reclamation laws in the country, and even people in the industry say, "It's the best thing you ever did"—putting everybody on an even playing field [by making] reclamation a part of the cost of mining coal and selling it.

[Another] issue was Measure Six. Measure Six provided for a higher oil tax, [which] would be allocated to schools and certain other designated services. There was strong opposition to it; oil companies were opposed to it. They said that we would drive the oil industry out of the state. That was a very contentious issue. *Measure Six was passed by*

a 60 percent majority of the voters.

Al Olson and I had a good personal relationship. He was attorney general all the years that I was governor. As such, he handled his office in a competent manner. He was the official law arm for the governor's office, so any legal question that required more than the staff attorney that I had would go to him. He was strictly nonpolitical and very accommodating, and we had a good rapport. The governor, the attorney general, and the commissioner of agriculture serve on the Industrial Commission. We'd meet once a month [to oversee the activities of] the Bank of North Dakota and the State Mill and Elevator. We'd go up to Grand Forks [where the state mill is located] for meetings maybe every three or four months. Although we were of different political parties and he became an opponent when he ran for governor—and we had a spirited campaign, and I guess a few potshots were leveled from both sides—it was nothing of a permanent, damaging nature. We [Grace and I] had Al down to the house for a noon luncheon [after the

Courtesy of Richard Hooqe

1972				1973			
9-1	Barly	802 @ 85	6814	12-19	Durum	1052 @ 850	8949.69 ✓
1-7	"	888 @ 98	880.7	12-20	Durum	776 @ 6.75	519.59 ✓
8-29	Dur.	534 @ 1.60	854.40 ✓	1-2	Barly	1195 @ 2.10	2509.50
9-12	"	618 @ 1.85	1142.37 ✓	1-2	Barly	3132 @ 4.00	12528.73 ✓
10-17	Dur.	1802 @ 1.00	1802.27 ✓	1-15	Barly	3842 @ 2.20	8452.40
12-2	Dur.	1136 @ 1.92	2180.16 ✓	2-11	Durum	1986 @ 7.45	14891.18 ✓
1-11	Barly	3197 @ 2.17	6937.49 ✓	3-12	Barly	1023 @ 5.00	5112.33 ✓
1-4	Dur.	1444 @ 1.60	2308.58 ✓	4-23	Barly	2495 @ 2.30	5739.15 ✓
2-3	"	1066 @ 2.11	2250.32 ✓	5-4	Barly	1733 @ 2.25	3901.41
2-13	Dur.	353 @ 1.15	383.55 ✓	3-26	Barly	2102 @ 2.80	5885.60
2-19	"	5484 @ 1.15	6306.60 ✓	6-26	Barly	1563 @ 2.65	4011.96
2-22	Dur.	464 @ 2.13	3119.38 ✓	6-10	Durum	1776 @ 8.50	1504.50
3-8	"	2486 @ 1.98	4922.90 ✓	7-3	Durum	667 @ 4.75	3166.81 ✓
3-5	"	3225 @ 2.13	686.88 ✓	7-13	Barly	2052 @ 2.75	5643.00
3-5	"	329 @ 2.13	657.57 ✓				

The 1970s agricultural boom is reflected in these entries recording grain sales made by Richard Hooqe, a farmer in Cavalier County, North Dakota. Mr. Hooqe records, on September 29, 1971, a sale of durum wheat for \$1.60 a bushel. A little over a year later, on December 14, 1972, his records show seed durum selling for \$8.50 a bushel.

A 1972 crop failure in the Soviet Union prompted President Nixon to approve massive grain sales to that country, resulting in an immediate rise in prices. For many North Dakota farmers the next few years would be the most prosperous they would ever know. By the late 1970s, however, the agricultural boom was beginning to falter, as export markets decreased and high interest rates and rising fuel and fertilizer prices cut into profits. In January 1980 President Carter, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, imposed an embargo on wheat and corn sales to the Soviet Union that his administration estimated would cost U.S. farmers over two billion dollars in income. Carter's actions became a focus for farmers frustrated by the worsening agricultural economy.

election]; just the three of us sat at the table there and talked about things. I offered all of the assistance I could. So that was the human element of it.

From township, school board, legislature, Congress, and governor, 1980 was the only election I lost. [The loss] was traumatic. It was traumatic for the staff because all the predictions were that I would win. We were probably the recipients of overconfidence. It wasn't entirely our fault, but we should have been more conscious of that fact. I think the fact that Olson was in state government as attorney general and involved in these kinds of issues left a sense of continuity. It was tough to lose, but there is life after politics. I have many friends and much satisfaction over successes [since that election].

I was [still] deeply interested in saving Cross Ranch for a state park. In 1979 we'd gotten the legislation passed to transfer that ranch into a state park. [But] then it was referred in 1980, and the referral passed. Then the owner of the Cross Ranch, Mr. Levis and his family, wanted it to go into a preserve, and that's when they connected up with the Nature Conservancy to buy the Cross Ranch. That saved it from being sold [to] any private [individual] and saved it as a ranch. Al Olson and I worked together on a committee to provide for the purchase—[for] the state to trade land with the [Nature Conservancy] so we could save the ranch. He was governor already by that time, and I was the ex-governor.

As you leave office you regret seeing some of the things you've worked for, were hopeful of accomplishing, go by the way, but there's little you can do about it; [you] just hope that there are enough people that are affected by the idea [that] it would catch fire and be carried on. The lack

Well, [our children were affected by Art's political career] to a certain extent. We particularly noticed it soon after he was governor, because our daughter graduated from college one year and our youngest son the next, and they were looking for jobs. We heard the comments come back. Joann was a home economist, and she applied in one county; we heard that somebody had said, "Well, would anybody want the governor's daughter as their home economist?" So the kids had to live against that. Harvey applied to a school because he was a vo-ag teacher, and he had the same comment. He was being interviewed by the school board, and before he was done they asked him, "Are you related to the governor?" It really upset him because he said, "They can hire me for what I am; makes no difference." The boys out on the farm, they would take the cattle sometimes to Sidney, Montana, to the sale rink, sometimes to Williston. If they took them to Sidney, they'd say, "Oh, so the governor's selling his cattle out of state." So you see, this was one thing that did make it hard. I think that overall, the governor's children are held to a little higher standard than the average, and I think the kids all felt it a certain amount. I think they [also] feel that they have had an advantage in knowing state government and federal government and being able to get around and see things. So it's both ways.

of getting the Department of Natural Resources through the legislature I shared with you before. So [instead], by a request from [my] office, all the agencies of government came together [in the] Council on Energy Resources, and we met periodically. And I was disappointed when I heard that after I left office there was no more of that.

At the time [I left the governorship,] I did not consider seeking elective office again. Four years later I did make a bid [to run for governor] and lost in the convention. That was about the end of my political ambition. A lot of people encouraged me to do it. They said, "We never realized what you brought to the office," and they—I don't want to say that they were comparing me with Al Olson, but they were just unhappy with the way things were going. Al made some tactical errors that had more impact than I think he thought that they would. One thing was that they didn't move into the governor's residence, and it's funny how those little things kind of permeate the people's impression. One error was—I thought—he brought his lifetime college friend in as chief of



The state Industrial Commission, consisting of Governor Link, Attorney General Allen Olson (right), and Commissioner of Agriculture Myron Just (left).

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staff, and I don't think that was to his benefit.

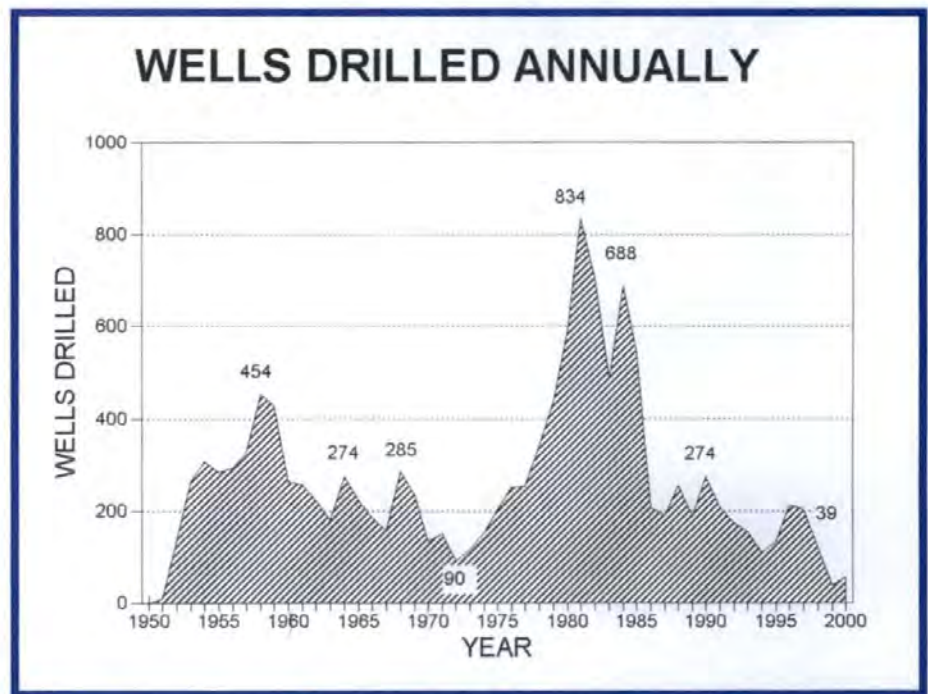
This much I must say—when I did decide to seek the nomination again, I waited too late. I guess I wasn't ready to, but I got so much encouragement that [I] finally made up my mind, "Well, I might as well try it." I tried it, and that resulted in a contest between myself and George Sinner for the nomination within the Democratic party. And I said it then and I'll say it again, if it hadn't been for that real hard-fought contest, George Sinner would never have gotten elected, because it gave him the visibility he needed, and he as much as admitted it. It wasn't intentional, but that's the way it adds up. There were a few tears and a few regrets, and I look back and see some of the things I made poor judgements on. It was because I didn't make some of my decisions strictly on politics; I made them on the principle of what I thought was right and wrong. And that doesn't always wash.

The end result was that when George Sinner got the nomination, we conceded right away at the convention; I took the podium and, they said, gave the best speech they ever heard me make. And I can't remember what I said. He sent me a copy of it on tape, and I haven't played it yet. We went away from there as friends and have been friends ever since—respecting one another, you know—without really planning it.

End of the Energy Boom

I really didn't [foresee the energy bubble bursting the way that it did]. I had no way of knowing, because of the optimistic nature of the original request [for a water permit for the gasification plant]. I had no reason to think that it wasn't going to be sustained, [although] certainly at a less aggressive volume than they [had] requested. But I thought in three or four years they would be coming back and asking for another permit.

We up here in North Dakota, particularly those of us who live in the area where oil is scattered all around us, had not experienced [an oil boom and bust] in all our lives. We'd heard about the boom and bust in other parts of the country, but we hadn't experienced it here. This was North Dakota's first experience, and we happened to be the generation that were part of it. It was all a pretty high expectation of a continuing industry that would be here for many, many years to come. I'm speaking about myself, our



This chart demonstrates the rapid increase in oil and gas wells drilled in the late 1970s and the equally precipitous drop in the 1980s. From *The 50th Anniversary of the Discovery of Oil in North Dakota*, by John P. Bluemle, North Dakota Geological Survey, 2001.

own family—my brother-in-law and I were following the oil development quite carefully. [We] bought a few scattered mineral [rights] around the county; we thought we might hit on something. And I believe one of the things that gave this feeling of confidence and assurance for future development was the fact that practically every acre of land was covered by an oil lease. It just seemed like everybody in the whole country—in our part of the state at least—had their land leased for oil development. Regardless of whether there was any oil discovered close or not, it just seemed like everyone was out there to get a piece of the action.

It became evident before too long that the biggest physical demonstration of the oil activity was the seismic [testing], with these trucks running back and forth clear across the country. Practically on every section line or between [them] they would run these seismic trucks and drill holes for testing the underlying possibilities of oil. I think a pretty substantial portion of our own county, McKenzie County, was seismographed. They were able to determine the so-called hot spots; the drilling that took place was done where these so-called hot spots showed up. There was no question that they had a system of reading their seismic maps and could roughly outline where the best possibility of striking oil was. Since they could do that, and they had a fairly good feeling of where the most productive chances were, they would drop leases in the less



North Dakota Centennial Commission chairman Link, commission executive director S.F. "Buckshot" Hoffner, and commission member Mary Louise Defender Wilson ride in a Dodge Dakota pickup at a Williston parade, July 23, 1988.

popular places. So we could tell it wasn't going to be a continuation. They wouldn't renew those leases in the less prospective areas. There were signs, but it must have been the international glut of oil that dropped the price of oil. Oil dropped down to a few dollars a barrel, and [it] was no longer financially possible to continue. That was your bust.

We were fed a bill of goods by the oil developers. Of course, they in turn tried to convince landowners and the state officials and everybody that unless we made the tax rate and all the rules and regulations favorable to the oil industry, it would discourage them, and we'd lose that development, and therefore it would be to the disadvantage of the state. But the whole thing of oil leasing is so varied. As far as the individual landowner or royalty owner, you find that you have very little bargaining power in terms of the kind of a lease that you can get from the oil company. When they started out, the standard lease was one-eighth royalty—one-eighth [12.5 percent] of the production belonged to the owner of the royalty. But after a while people got more sophisticated, and [it] became apparent that other parts of the country weren't leasing for that small portion. So then we'd get a lease for one-sixth, and up as far as three-sixteenths [18.75 percent].

The people who were in the business [and also owned mineral rights], many of them would get a 25-percent lease, and the oil companies would buy those, too—it's a matter of [those in the business] getting as good a deal as they could for themselves. The landowner, if they were unaccustomed to any greater lease shares, then they maybe leased for just an eighth. [They] didn't get as much of a return for their

royalties as they might have had. I don't think it was the taxation that hurt the oil industry in the state. It was the world price of oil.

Centennial Commission

George Sinner asked me to be chairman of the North Dakota Centennial Commission. That came within his first term of office, his first year [1985]. When I look back there isn't anything that could have happened that filled the void more perfectly than being chairman of the centennial commission. There were almost five years with complete immersion with the people. One of the things that came to the surface was that they didn't vote against you because they didn't like you. They had personal reasons. They thought that I'd been there long enough and things like that. I never felt anyone—I knew many people, I knew what their politics were—didn't treat us both with the greatest respect. I think they valued the opportunity to work together. Having that opportunity took away the bite of rejection. I think that can be the most stressful thing that an individual can experience, [when] you put yourself up to public examination and your whole life is on the line. They get a chance to judge your past experience, and they vote according to it. If you get turned out, why it's a feeling of, wow, that's a pretty hard sentence. But it kind of melted away.

I think George Sinner left some on [the commission] that had been appointed by Allen Olson, and changed some. I told him that I wanted Woody Gagnon to be secretary. But I didn't dictate the other committee members; all I



Art and Grace Link dressed in centennial costumes.

could do is recommend. [One of the people Governor Sinner] picked [was] Buckshot Hoffner. You can make all kinds of assessments about Buckshot Hoffner, but there isn't a better cheerleader in the state. He can give a speech and just visualize. He had a way of inspiring people with the idea. But we lacked inner cohesiveness—inner management. And when we found Dennis Neumann, he was that person. Of course, Woody Gagnon has got the driving ability of a retired colonel, which he was, and that comes through.

[If] the centennial was to fulfill its purpose and its obligations, it needed to make every community or every group that had an interest in the centennial feel that it was the biggest thing in their life, in their community. So when a small community north of Minot said, "We don't have much left of this town; we have a little park left, and we'd like to build a gate and build a flagpole there. Would that qualify as a centennial project?" we said yes. We had a system of evaluating projects, and it had to stipulate what it would do for the community and who would be involved. If it met the criteria, then it could be called a centennial community and use the logo. I think we put some purpose and some value to the use of the logo [that] made it important to the people. We didn't want to see it get out of hand, where everyone would say, well, this is my centennial project. They had to apply, and if they wanted to go into business and sell stuff [with the logo], we required a small commission—we had copyrighted that. The logo was already established by the former commission, but that's as far as they had gone. When we finished our activities, we [were] \$180,000 in the black. It was a big accomplishment, because

There's been one thing [since Art left the governor's office]. When he became congressman and then governor, I had to adjust to the role of not being his secretary and not having to do all of his things. Then when he got out of the governor's office, suddenly we didn't have that support staff, and it puts a lot of pressure on us again to try to keep up with things. Once again I am the secretary and the bookkeeper and scheduler.

We do [have a busy schedule]. I do think that we are trying to see that we give our family a little more attention. There were a number of years there when they had to kind of take a backseat to what the needs of the state were, and now we are able to spend more time with family. [Now] it's the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren that we get, and we try to spend some time with each one of our boys. We now have nineteen grandchildren and twenty-six great-grandchildren. We've got a big family to keep us busy.

so many of those things—those big public events and celebrations—it's all expenses and no income. Dennis was a good manager.

Continuing Public Involvement

I don't know [why I decided to take a high-profile role on the gambling issue]. I really honestly don't know. I don't know whether I ever got a lecture from my father or my mother. I think it's just the fact that I thought it was wrong. In order to win, someone must lose. It's as simple as that. Most people wouldn't think of taking something from a person across the table—say my dollar—[just] because [they were] strong enough to get it. But they'll go to a gambling joint and bet on winning a jackpot because it's invisible. You don't see the person that's losing.

Then you go deeper in the business of legalized gambling, and where the state operates a lottery, [that] is by far the most vicious, unacceptable aspect of gambling. I abhor it. Because it's the state. So much of my life has been involved with doing things through state government that are for the benefit of the people. All of the things that you're involved with when you're in public office, whether you're in an elective or appointive office



Art Link waits to testify before the House Judiciary Committee during the 2005 legislative session. Link spoke in opposition to House Bill 1509, which would have made North Dakota a home to internet poker. The bill was defeated. Seated behind Link are (l to r) Rep. Blair Thorson, Todd Kranda, a lobbyist for charitable gaming interests, and Rep. Ron Iverson.

or the legislature, you're dealing with problems that have to do with people. You're dealing with things that help people do things together that they cannot do or cannot do as well individually. It isn't the purpose of government to be in the business of encouraging people to gamble their money so that the state has money to operate with. It doesn't distribute the load of support equally. Only the people gambling are paying for government service, and that isn't fair. Everyone should pay fairly, in relationship to their benefits from society and the government, and the responsibility they have for good government. I think it's only fair that if you need the tax money, you impose the taxes.

See, the most vicious part of state government is when the state is addicted, and they are now. South Dakota is addicted. They get millions of dollars from gambling. I don't see how they'd get along without it now. Well, they've taken that money from people who've lost it at the gambling table. That's not fair.

[Charitable gambling started] back in 1979. It was to keep grandmas off the streets and came about because North Dakota had an anti-gambling law, and yet they were playing poker and they were playing bingo, and by a strict interpretation that would be against the law. Allen Olson, the attorney general, said the only way we can settle this is to vote on it and legalize bingo and two or three little games—have "smokers" legalized. Smokers were where once or twice a year men would get together and have a gambling game, and that's all it amounted to. "They were doing it anyway. Let's decriminalize it." And it sounded logical. Most of us went along with it. "Well, it won't do any harm. They're doing it anyway. Catholics were having their weekly-monthly bingo parlor game and stuff, so let's make

legal people out of all them that were conducting the event." But little by little it's crept up on us.

I joined [Bismarck State Bank] in March or April of 1981. But I had been approached to buy some stock and become a director while I was in office. We didn't have much money. We had a few dollars in savings from Washington, D.C., when we left Congress. We didn't get paid like they do today. Well, it's an opportunity, I thought. It sounded good. The prospectus called for them borrowing money from the Bank of North Dakota for operating capital, and the governor is one of the members of the Industrial Commission that runs the Bank of North Dakota. They were going to have to apply to the banking commissioner [for a charter], and the governor appoints the commissioner. Suddenly the thought occurred in my mind that if I joined that new organization—they were still in the organizing process—and they applied for a charter and got it, some people could say, "Oh, that's nice. The governor's bank got a charter." I got to worrying about that, and next day I went to Al Olson, the attorney general, and I said, "I've been invited to join this new banking company here. Is it legal or is it illegal?" And he said, "Well, I tell you, Governor, there is nothing illegal about it. There's nothing that says you couldn't or you shouldn't. It's just the public perception. What will they say?" I thought about it another day, I guess it was, and by the time I was supposed to meet with those guys I called them. I said, "I'm sorry, I can't go."

I think it's the best decision I ever made. It never opened up any questions. They went ahead and organized; I forgot about it, and it so happened that when I left office in 1981, Bennie Meier, who was a fairly heavy investor in that new bank, wanted to sell it. So Al Wolf came again and said, "Governor, we've got some stock to sell if you'd like to buy

it." And we did. That's the start of it.

I guess maybe in the long run it's another thing that gave me something to think about that had to do not particularly with government, but with the public. You're dealing with the public's money, with the public's trust, and trying to keep it. I'm not oblivious to the fact that private individuals like to have people join them who, in their opinion, have a good reputation [and] are well known to the public. I didn't go in because of that. I don't think they exploited it, but they weren't hurt by it. And maybe it helped a lot of people; I've had people come to me—"Oh, we saw you were on the board of directors, so we thought it should be a safe place to keep our money." If that's in jest or not, I don't know, but it may help. So that's how we got involved in it. And it's been interesting to watch it grow.

The other aspect of joining this bank [is that] it's a community [bank]. It kind of underscores my whole makeup. All the years I was in the legislature there were fights between the independent banks and the big banks. I always supported the independent banks, like the Stenehjem [family's] bank up in Watford City. They were local and owned by one family, but they were an independent community bank. When I was approached to join this Bank Center First—at one time it was Bismarck State Bank, and then it changed its name—I told the folks, I have never been through my growing up years a friend of banks. You know, the old fight between the haves and have-nots. The bankers were always shown as fat cats, and the poor man pays the interest. I tell the story that my dad told me. When he started farming he needed a hundred dollars. He went to the bank, and when he made out the note he got eighty-two dollars. And [the banker] said, "Well, John, that's if you don't have a crop, you'll have your interest paid already." That would have been 18 percent. My dad never swore very much. He said, "I told him to keep his goddamn money." You know, that story hung in my craw all the time. I thought bankers were all cheats. So I told them if this bank is to remain a community bank—so the ownership stays in the community, and the profits that are made are made by people who live in this community and will spend their money in this community—I'll join. But if it's to be part of a great big multimillion-dollar institution where people just suck the money out of the community, I don't have anything to do with it. Well, so far we've been able to do that. That's why we merged with Dickinson. They have the same kind of a bank as ours; they are all locally owned, and they are facing the same problems.

Significant Changes

In the political arena, I see a falling away of personal interest by the younger generation. Now maybe there

weren't any greater percentages of them involved when I was in [my] early twenties or thirties. But it surely seems like it to me—that there is a lack of joining up, a lack of accepting the responsibility [to be] part of the political action. Bill Guy has a famous quote on what a small percentage of the population actually controls the outcome of our organized society. I see a change in the social order of our younger generation. They are not joiners of the social organizations, like when Grace and I were young people growing up.

The standard of living is the greatest change that I can think of. This house we live in here, in the days that I was a kid growing up, would have looked like a mansion. We experience an affluence unknown to any people in recorded history. We have to be careful that we don't emphasize those aspects of life to the point where it will choke us off. In other words, if we demand so many of the amenities of life that we utilize more of the natural resources than we're entitled to or than we should take, eventually we will destroy the very thing that we want to maintain. That's the way I look at it. We've got to be careful.

Economic influence on government is getting so heavy that it's becoming a disincentive for the average person to seek public office. Our current governor spent a million-some dollars to get elected. [My] last election [campaign for governor cost] eighty thousand dollars. It wasn't a hundred thousand dollars. I'm afraid what's happening is, the affluent and the people that are privileged with the most resources and have the access to the most financial resources have the upper hand right from the start—right from the minute that the campaign gate is open.

Any wonder [when George W.] Bush got so many millions of dollars from the oil industry, that he's campaigning for them now to drill in the arctic refuge? He owes it to them. There is that unseen, unwritten commitment. It would be a rare person indeed who wouldn't remember a big contribution from a friend when it came down to the time of making a decision that was either friendly to that person or otherwise. And you can say all you want that, "I'm not influenced by how much money I get or who I get it from."

I think that a representative form of government is so precious, and anything that approaches it is denied to so many millions of people the world over. Far too few people in this country—I'm speaking of the country as a whole and including our state—are conscious of what it really means and what it has accomplished for us. Unless there's a change of attitude and action on the part of the public, that apathy and the almost unrestricted bashing of public officials will seriously undermine what we have and what is so important today. I've talked to a number of [politicians]. They say there's no more fun in serving in Congress, no more fun in

serving in the legislature or serving in elective office. The most important reward is the people appreciating what you do. Let's face it, it goes beyond money. Money won't buy that—if they don't appreciate what you're doing, if they think that every time you turn your hand you've got your finger in the pie someplace. When I was very, very active in opposing a state-operated lottery, somebody wrote a letter to the editor and said, "Art Link says he isn't getting anything out of it; I don't believe that. Why is he so active?" and implied that I was getting some. I put money of my own into postage, into running around at meetings and stuff. The few dollars that the council collected went for postage and for ads in the papers that we put all over the state.

When people lose confidence, we're heading for trouble. I wish I had the answer to it, but I guess I don't. I can only hope—and I'm an eternal optimist—that we'll come to our senses just as we're coming to our senses in the use of tobacco, smoking. We'll have to come to our senses on liquor and eventually on gambling, but I don't want to harp on that, because I don't want to appear as a fanatic on it. Like a lady told me, "I have eternal hope that we're going

When the Landscape Is Quiet Again

. . . And when we are through with that
and the landscape is quiet again
when the draglines, the blasting rigs,
the power shovels and the huge gondolas
cease to rip and roar!

And when the last bulldozer has pushed
the last spoil pile into place,
and the last patch of barren earth
has been seeded to grass or grain.

Let those who follow and repopulate the land
be able to say . . .

Our grandparents did their job well,
This land is as good and,
in some cases,
better than before.

Only if they can say this will we be worthy
of the rich heritage of our land and its resources.

From "When the Landscape is Quiet Again," handwritten by Governor Link on October 11, 1973, as he was waiting to speak about strip mining to the annual meeting of the North Dakota Rural Electric Association in Mandan, North Dakota. A sense of responsibility towards future generations is characteristic of Link's career in and out of office.



Former Governor Link at the ground breaking ceremony for the archives expansion of the North Dakota Heritage Center, September 7, 2005. It was during Link's administration that funding for the original construction of the Heritage Center was secured, and he was an active supporter of the recent effort to obtain funding for the building expansion. Speaking at the ground breaking ceremony, Link said that by recording the history of our state "we are demonstrating to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren a gift of timeless value."

to see a reverse of this trend." There's a strong element out there that believes in the basic values that will counteract the drug problem, the excessive alcohol problem, the promiscuity which feeds to a great extent the AIDS epidemic and those things. There has to be some kind—and I'm not a preacher—but some [thing] related to the Christian philosophy or something. There has to be some resurgence that takes hold of this country and establishes a degree of responsibility for what's going on. Very few people are doing that today. That's where our trouble lies.

Since 1981 **Gerald G. Newborg** has been North Dakota State Archivist and Director of the State Archives and Historical Research Library Division at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.