

# THE NORTH DAKOTA PRESERVATIONIST

News from the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office

Summer 2022



Restored roof at Gingras Trading Post State Historic Site. Photo by Blake Kobiela, Kobiela Brothers Construction



# Remembering *Fern Swenson*

*Archaeology & Historic Preservation Director*



This has been a difficult time for the agency as we have had to say goodbye to our colleague, mentor, and friend, Fern Swenson. Fern's dedication to North Dakota and Northern Great Plains Archaeology was felt by all who knew her. Fern came to the State Historical Society of North Dakota in 1988 and spent her career learning about North Dakota and its people and this agency and how it worked. She then selflessly shared that vast accumulated knowledge with others. Her passion for our sites, our history, her team and our agency was inspirational. I was honored to have her on my leadership team and to have been her student for these last two years. Her legacy and achievements are many — Double Ditch, the Traces book, her research, writing, and teaching will stand the test of time. Fern indelibly shaped the agency for decades by hiring and mentoring the very best team of professionals for our work in the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Department. Fern's professional accomplishments in North Dakota archaeology will be as revered as those of Stan Ahler, W. Raymond Wood, George F. Will, and Alfred Bower. The people she mentored are nearly too numerous to count. Most of all we will miss the relationships she built and fostered with Native communities and others across the state.

***Bill Peterson***





St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church. Photo by SHSND

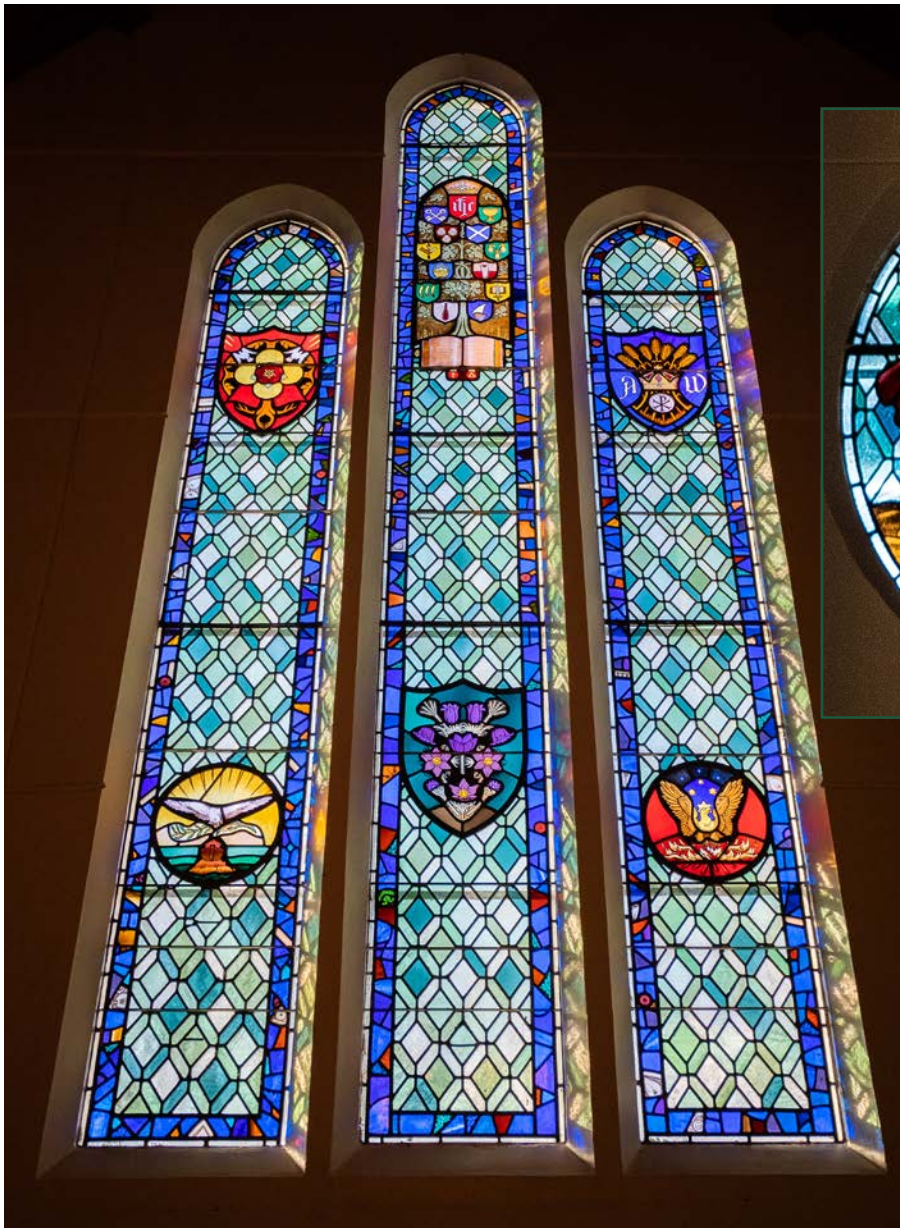
## New National Register of Historic Places Listing: St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church

By Zachary J. Lechner, Historic Preservation Specialist

On Oct. 5, 2021, St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church, located at 601 N. Fourth St. in Bismarck, became the most recent North Dakota property added to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service (NPS) administers the National Register program, which recognizes historically significant properties. It "is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources." St. George's was added to the National Register as significant under criterion C, with the NPS recognizing it for its architecture.

St. George's is connected to the broader history of the Episcopal faith in Bismarck. The first Episcopal

service in the city was held in 1873. Five years later, the Northern Pacific Railway donated several plots of land for the construction of an Episcopal church. Originally designated the Church of the Bread of Life, the building sat at the intersection of Mandan Street and Avenue A. The congregation renamed the church St. George's Episcopal Church in 1887 and held services there until a new building on Fourth Street opened in 1949 to accommodate a rapidly expanding congregation. From the early to mid-1940s, the size of St. George's congregation increased from 150 to 260 people. Funds for the construction of the new church came from donations and memorial gifts pledged by both congregants and members of the Bismarck community. Costs came to an estimated \$150,000 (more than \$1.7 million in 2021 dollars).



Stained glass windows at St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church. Photo by SHSND

St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church was designed by Bismarck architect Herman M. Leonhard and built by local contractor John W. Larson. The building was originally patterned after Cass Gilbert's St. John the Divine Episcopal Church in Moorhead, Minnesota, but the design evolved through the 1940s. After World War II delayed its construction, the church was completed in 1949. Leonhard's final design blended Gothic Revival architecture with contemporary design. It boasted unique features such as reinforced pumice concrete and stained-glass windows commissioned by Barton, Kinder, and Alderson of Brighton, England, that used recycled glass from churches bombed during World War II. In fact, St. George's was the first building in the northern United States to employ pumice concrete, and its unusual stained-glass windows are the only known examples of their kind in the country.



View from the nave toward the sanctuary. Photo by SHSND

# The Project Review Process

By Lisa Steckler, Historic Preservation Specialist, and Lorna Meidinger, Historic Preservation Specialist

One of the key functions of the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is the review of federally funded, permitted, or assisted projects for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. The NHPA requires federal agencies to consider the effects on historic

properties of projects they carry out, assist, fund, permit, license, or approve throughout the country. If a federal or federally assisted project has the potential to affect historic properties, a Section 106 review must take place.

There are several steps included in the Section 106 review process:

## Step 1

### Initiation of Review.

The federal agency identifies who should participate in the review. This includes either the SHPO or Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), as well as local governments, the project applicant, and any interested federally recognized Indian tribes or Native Hawaiian organizations. It may also involve other historic preservation organizations or interested parties, and the agency must also have a plan for gathering public input.

## Step 2

### Identification of Historic Properties.

The federal agency gathers information to decide if any properties in the area that may be affected by the project are listed, or are eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places. This process occurs in consultation with the SHPO.

## Step 3

### Determination.

If the federal agency determines that there are no potentially affected historic properties in the area, then it documents its finding, seeks the concurrence of the SHPO/THPO during a 30-day review period, and makes information available to consulting parties and the public. If, on the other hand, the federal agency determines that there are historic properties in the area that may be impacted, it must proceed to assessing the project's effects.

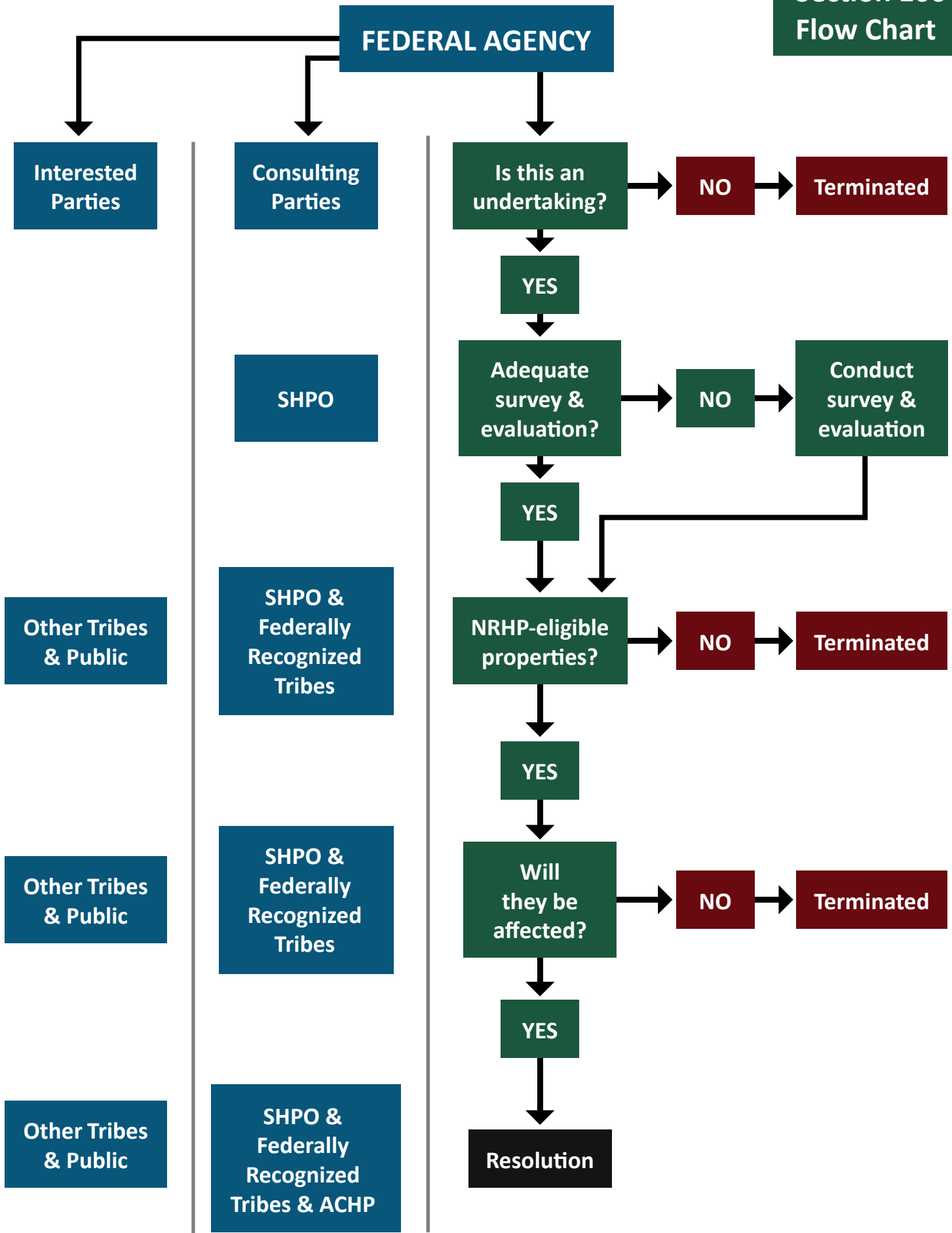
## Step 4

### Assessment of Effects.

If historic properties have been identified, the agency must determine (in consultation with the SHPO/THPO and other interested parties) whether that effect will be adverse. If it is not, then the federal agency documents its finding, seeks the concurrence of the SHPO/THPO during a 30-day review period, and makes information available to consulting parties and the public. If one or more adverse effects are determined further consultation is required to ascertain ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect(s) to historic properties and to reach agreement with the state or tribal historic preservation officer on measures to resolve them. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), a federal agency, may also be involved in this step.

Section 106 Flow Chart on next page »

**Section 106  
Flow Chart**



In an average year, the SHPO receives approximately 3,000 requests to review projects occurring within North Dakota, the majority of which are federally funded or assisted. Of these projects, 90% occur in areas where no historic properties will be affected, or where there will be no adverse effects on historic properties. The remaining 10% require additional consultation to find a resolution to potential adverse effects.

When a project request is received by the SHPO, the review and compliance staff evaluate the documentation provided by the federal agency or its designee to determine whether efforts to identify historic properties have been completed in a sufficient manner. Staff also review the project to decide what types of properties could be affected. Once it has reviewed the documentation, the SHPO will respond to the federal agency, either concurring with their determination or asking for additional information or for an architectural or archaeological survey to be completed. Surveys are done when there is not sufficient documentation to determine whether historic properties are present. Currently only about 8% of North Dakota has been fully surveyed. Surveys are conducted by permitted archaeological or architectural companies. Once a survey is completed, it is submitted to the SHPO for review and placed in a permanent repository for future researchers.

The types of projects that trigger review vary widely. Examples of recent projects range from ones as simple as a request to install foundation panels or to insulate a home built in the 1970s to extremely complicated ones, such as the proposed Fargo-Moorhead Red River Diversion, a multiyear, multi-agency project involving two states, several archaeological and architectural surveys, and various mitigation requirements.

Some projects without a federal connection still need to be reviewed under North Dakota law. For instance, North Dakota Century Code § 55-02-07 mandates preservation consideration for publicly owned historic properties, while other statutes require cooperation between state agencies to consider effects on historic properties. Possibly the most common review under state law is for projects under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission (PSC). For these projects, the State Historical Society follows the same overall process as for Section 106, except that the ACHP is not involved, and the PSC holds the project applicant responsible for the consultation. As a result, it is common for a project applicant to hire a cultural resources consultant to assist in the identification of historic properties.



1969 ABC publicity photo for "The Lawrence Welk Show." Wikimedia Commons

## Spotlight on a North Dakota State Historic Site: Welk Homestead

By Zachary J. Lechner, Historic Preservation Specialist

For many Americans, the name Lawrence Welk brings to mind the famed entertainer's eponymous television show, which, after airing locally in Los Angeles for four years, ran nationally on ABC from 1955 to 1971, and continues to be rebroadcast on PBS to this day. Welk's self-described "champagne music" provided a family-friendly mix of pop standards, show tunes, polkas, novelty songs, and occasionally, even the hipper music of Elvis Presley and the Beatles, played in an easy-listening style by Welk's orchestra.

The show's conservatism made it a target for naysayers, with one critic writing that the show offered "the squarest music this side of Euclid." It also became a cultural marker of Middle America, a place imagined by President Richard Nixon in the late 1960s as the home of the "silent majority," those (largely white) Americans who resisted the era's social and cultural changes. Country music artist Tom T. Hall captured this association when he

told *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1973, "I don't think [segregationist Alabama Governor] George Wallace speaks for the silent majority. Lawrence Welk does."

For most people, their knowledge of Welk is limited to his massively popular TV show. The [Welk Homestead State Historic Site](#) just outside of Strasburg draws on the early years of Welk and his family to tell a larger story about the experiences of their fellow German Russian immigrants who settled on the plains of North Dakota in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Welks arrived in the United States in the middle of a decades-long wave of immigration by German Russians. In the mid-eighteenth century, the German-born Catherine II (better known as Catherine the Great), empress of Russia, issued an edict inviting foreigners to settle along the lower Volga River. Her goal in colonizing this thinly populated area was to establish a defense against the Asiatic peoples



who threatened Russian sovereignty in the region. Many Germans answered Catherine's call, and in the succeeding years, they settled not only in the Volga River area but also in other newly opened lands in Ukraine and on the Crimean Peninsula. The German colonists remained largely unassimilated, retaining their language, religion, and culture.



Portrait of Catherine II of Russia painted by Aleksey Antropov in the second half of the eighteenth century. Wikimedia Commons

In 1871, Tsar Alexander II revoked the welcoming policies established by Catherine and her grandson, Tsar Alexander I, for immigrants to Russia. Colonists were forced into peasant status and faced conscription into the Russian military. In response, 175 German Russians immigrated to the United States the following year, eventually settling in Yankton, Dakota Territory. Tsar Alexander III's continuance of his father's Russification policy toward German Russians further stripped these communities of their autonomy, including the right of self-governance. They were now required to send their children to schools that taught only in the Russian language.

The Russian regime's increasingly regressive policies combined with the enticements of U.S. railroad agents in Russia encouraging immigration to the United States, where settlers could take advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act's land grants, brought some 120,000 German Russians to the country between

1870 and 1920. The German Russian immigrants to what is now North Dakota settled mostly in Emmons, Logan, and McIntosh counties. By 1920 German Russians comprised nearly 73% of Emmons County and 96% of McIntosh County.

Two of the immigrants to Emmons County were Ludwig and Christina (Schwahn) Welk, Lawrence's parents. Ludwig was a farmer and a blacksmith. The Welks' ancestors hailed from the Alsace region, now in France, and relocated to Odessa, Russia, in 1803 during the reign of Alexander I. By the time the Welks arrived in the United States, Ludwig's sister Rosina and her husband, Michael Klein, were already making a new life in South Dakota.

Entering the United States via New York City in 1893, Christina and Ludwig, both Catholics, took the train as far as Eureka, South Dakota, where Rosina and Michael lived. Christina and Ludwig then traveled north behind a team of oxen, settling on a piece of land near Tirsbol, North Dakota. It was a bucolic setting close to Baumgartner Lake.

The initial months there were busy. Christina gave birth to the couple's second child (their first had died while she and Ludwig were still in Russia), and they built a house while rushing to plant a crop before winter. That first home was replaced by a second on the same site in 1899. The Welks' frontier homes would see the births of eight children between 1893 and 1909. Lawrence, the sixth child born at the homestead, arrived in March 1903. Young Lawrence assisted with the various chores around the house and farm. He attended a nearby Catholic



German Russians outside of their church in western North Dakota, circa 1910. SHSND SA 2005-P-021-00004

school where he was taught in German by nuns. Lawrence didn't want to be a farmer. Having learned to play the accordion from Ludwig, Lawrence left the farm in 1924 at the age of 21 to begin his entertainment career.



The Welk family at their homestead, circa 1904. SHSND SA 01065-00001

The Welk homestead consisted of 160 acres, a tract of land they acquired due to the Homestead Act. The family purchased another 80 acres to the north in 1902. Like their neighbors, the Welks were primarily wheat farmers, though they grew other crops, too. They supplemented their income by raising chickens to sell eggs and by processing and selling cream from cows. Then as now, the area surrounding the homestead consisted of rolling farmland. The Welks' neighbors attempted to replicate the tight-knit German communal dynamic that they had enjoyed in Russia. Whereas in Russia, farmers lived in a village and went outside of the village to work their farms, in North Dakota, as elsewhere in the United States, farmers lived on their land. Ludwig and his German neighbors assisted each other with tasks such as gathering hay and bringing in harvests. Together, they also celebrated births and marriages and assuaged each other's grief when family members died.

Building a home on the northern Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took ingenuity; finding lumber was especially difficult. It was a problem that German Russians had encountered on the similarly timber-scarce Russian steppe. The cost of paying to transport wood long distance would have been prohibitive for the Welks and their fellow immigrants, so another building material was used—typically, mud combined with

hay or grass (and even manure sometimes) placed in a wooden box and then baked in the sun. The resulting 12-inch bricks (aka batsa) formed the home's interior and exterior walls. Creating superior thermal lag, they kept the home cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It was common for the area's settlers to establish "starter homes" on their newly acquired land. These residences, as the name indicates, were not meant to be permanent. The Welks' first home in North Dakota fell into this category.

Their second home, built by Ludwig and his brother, Johannes, is the one that visitors to the Welk Homestead State Historic Site can tour today. It features three rooms laid out in a linear arrangement that measure about 29 feet by 38 feet when measured from the outside. An 11 feet by 11 feet entrance vestibule, also known as a *Vorhausl*, was added shortly after the house was constructed. The home's rooms consist of a kitchen, a living/dining room, and a small bedroom. On the wall between the kitchen and the living/dining area is a chimney. On-site, the Welks' property also featured a summer kitchen, outhouse, blacksmith shop, granary, and windmill, all of which are still visible today, in addition to a barn moved onto the property around 1949.

In 1928, Ludwig and Christina Welk moved into the nearby town of Strasburg, turning over the operation of their farm to their youngest son, Michael, and his wife, Catherine. Their family would continue to operate the farm until 1965. Later the property stayed within the Welk family while being managed as a historical attraction by the local nonprofit



Welk Homestead State Historic Site. Photo by SHSND



Family gather around the dining table during a birthday celebration at the Welk homestead, circa 1965. SHSND SA 2017-P-013- 00008

Pioneer Heritage, Inc. In 1993, two years after the site underwent considerable restoration, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its historical and architectural significance. After years of declining visitation to the site, the state of North Dakota purchased the homestead in 2015.

When the State Historical Society staff began curating the property as Welk Homestead State Historic

Site, it shifted the focus of the site's interpretation. We continue to include Lawrence Welk's success story but have also broadened the focus on pioneer settlement in North Dakota, German Russian architecture, and farming practices. The site preserves 6.11 acres of the family's holdings. The homestead is open Thursday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through Sunday of Labor Day weekend.



Councilman Cory Spotted Bear of the Three Affiliated Tribes (left) visits the Molander village site during 2018 test excavations conducted by researchers from PaleoCultural Research Group and the State Historical Society. Photo by SHSND

## Archaeological and Geophysical Investigations at Molander Indian Village

By Zachary J. Lechner, Historic Preservation Specialist

In 2020, PaleoCultural Research Group (PCRG), a nonprofit focused on researching and educating the public on the archaeology of the Great Plains and the Southern Rocky Mountains, published a report on its 2018 archaeological and geophysical field investigations of the Molander site in northeastern Oliver County. For this project, PCRG was joined by archaeologists from the State Historical Society and Oklahoma State University. The Molander site comprises two Plains villages as well as a homestead that dates to a later period of American settlement. The larger 5.2-acre village is a fortified earthlodge

community; the homestead was built on the eastern portion of this settlement's location. Both of these sites were purchased by the state of North Dakota in 1935 and are currently administered by the State Historical Society as Molander Indian Village State Historic Site. The smaller Native settlement is located on a nearby terrace and is owned privately. The 2018 investigations focused on the fortified village and the homestead.

The fortified settlement at Molander was a summer village located downriver from the Knife River Indian

Villages National Historic Site, twenty miles north of modern-day Mandan. Like Big Hidatsa village, Molander is a Hidatsa site and was established in the 1700s by the Awaxawi division of the tribe. It served as their home until the early 1780s, when a smallpox epidemic swept the northern Plains. Approximately half of the Molander villagers died during the epidemic. Survivors abandoned the village, journeying north to reside at Amahami Village at the confluence of the Knife and Missouri rivers. Faint impressions suggest that almost 40 earthlodges stood at Molander. The village featured a dry moat and a wooden palisade that ringed the site. Along the ditch were six bastions that allowed inhabitants to see beyond the confines of the village and offered further defense against attacks from enemy warriors. Like the Mandans and the Arikaras elsewhere on the upper Missouri, the Awaxawi Hidatsas grew a variety of crops, including corn, in the rich soil of the river's floodplain.

The 2018 archaeological and geophysical investigations were the most recent attempt to uncover information about Molander. Previously, the State Historical Society mapped the site in the



View looking north/northeast across an open unit located in the fortification ditch during the 2018 Molander excavations. Photo by SHSND

1930s, followed by limited work there over the next several decades. In 1968, archaeologists W. Raymond Wood and Donald Lehmer dug a single 5 feet by 5 feet test unit and recorded some observations about the village's fortifications. A few dozen shovel probes near the fortification ditch by different investigators followed in 1978, but this effort did little to illuminate the history of the village or its inhabitants.

Archaeologically, much more attention has been directed to Molander in the twenty-first century. In 2004, Metcalf Archaeological Consultants remapped the fortified site, during which they identified a previously unknown earthlodge impression outside of the boundaries of the state historic site and conducted five shovel probes. In 2017, the Archeo-Imaging Lab at the University of Arkansas joined with the State Historical Society to conduct "a complete magnetic gradiometry survey of the fortified settlement, along with resistivity and ground-penetrating radar surveys of selected blocks."<sup>1</sup>

The 2018 investigations were largely a continuation of the previous year's efforts. According to archaeologists Mark D. Mitchell, Kenneth L. Kvamme, and Rory Becker, the 2017-2018 work was beneficial for establishing key information about Molander:

Data from the 2018 testing effort, in combination with topographic, geophysical, and hand coring data obtained in 2017 and 2018, provide insights into local geomorphic processes, the age and distribution of the site's pre-Plains Village occupation, the occupation history of the Plains Village component, earthlodge and fortification design and construction, and the processes and extent of post-occupation disturbance.<sup>2</sup>

More specifically, this new data expands our knowledge of the Awaxawis Hidatsas' relationship with their neighbors to the north and the south. For instance, the Awaxawis apparently cultivated a primarily economic relationship with the Mandans of the Heart River region, while to the north, the Awaxawis forged mostly cultural links with their Hidatsa neighbors at the Knife River settlements. PCRG further explained that "the 2018 project also provides important new data on earthlodge

construction practices and on extramural features. Analysis of the site's well-preserved defensive system provides a more comprehensive understanding of eighteenth-century community leadership and mobility."<sup>3</sup>

Molander remains rich with investigative potential. Mitchell has contended that future excavations should concentrate on a survey block labeled H11, the site of the remains of an earthlodge in the north-central portion of the village. "Additional limited excavation at Molander would add greatly to the interpretations presented in this report on the site's occupation history and on eighteenth-century earthlodge architecture," wrote Mitchell. "An investigation focused on H11, for which detailed ground-penetrating radar data are available and which appears to be especially well-preserved, likely would prove especially fruitful."<sup>4</sup>

For more information on the recent geophysical and archaeological work at Molander, see [PCRG's 2020 report](#).



Archaeologist Mark D. Mitchell stands inside a cache pit at the Molander site in 2018. Photo by SHSND

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mark D. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Archaeological and Geophysical Investigations During 2018 at Molander Indian Village State Historic Site, Oliver County, North Dakota*, ed. Mark D. Mitchell, Research Contribution 116 (Broomfield, Colorado: PaleoCultural Research Group, 2020), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Mark D. Mitchell, Kenneth L. Kvamme, and Rory Becker, "Field Investigation," in Mitchell, *Archaeological and Geophysical Investigations During 2018 at Molander Indian Village State Historic Site*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, *Archaeological and Geophysical Investigations During 2018 at Molander Indian Village State Historic Site*, unpaginated abstract.

<sup>4</sup> Mark D. Mitchell, "Summary," in Mitchell, *Archaeological and Geophysical Investigations During 2018 at Molander Indian Village State Historic Site*, 218.

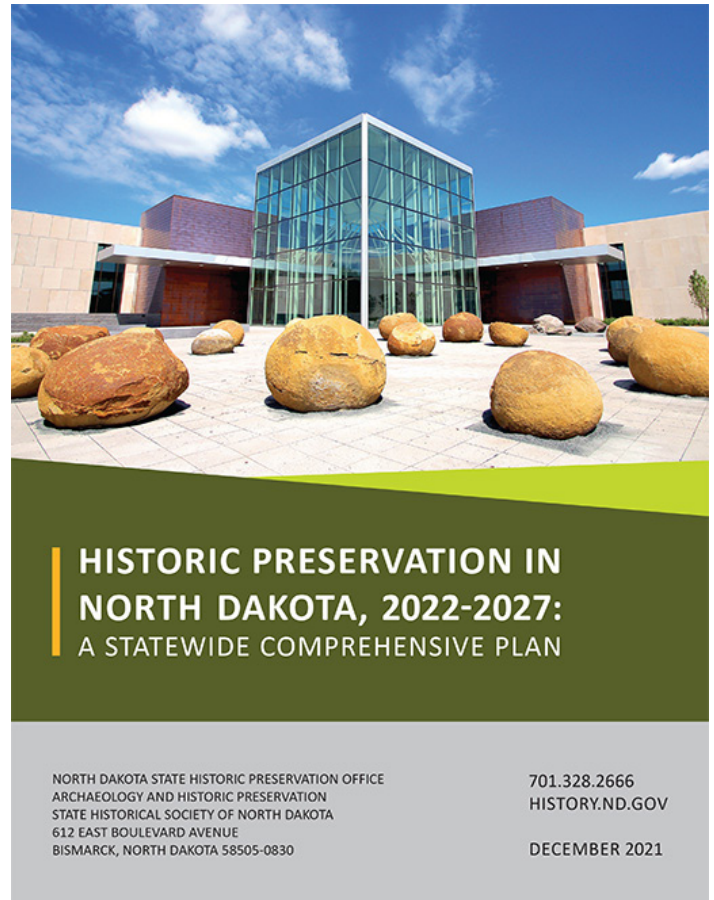
# Historic Preservation News Brief: Updated North Dakota Historic Preservation Plan

By Zachary J. Lechner, Historic Preservation Specialist

In fall 2021, the National Park Service (NPS) approved the historical component of the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) latest historic preservation plan, titled *Historic Preservation in North Dakota, 2022-2027: A Statewide Comprehensive Plan*. The document was released to the public in December 2021. The SHPO began reviewing the previous preservation plan in 2020, which entailed gathering data and public input designed to accurately gauge the needs and status of historic preservation in North Dakota. The SHPO attained outside input in the second half of 2020 through a survey that yielded 200 responses from both preservation professionals and members of the general public.

The NPS mandates that each SHPO periodically revise its historic preservation plan, which consists of historical and archaeological components (see our [Summer 2021](#) issue for a discussion of the archaeological component). This task fulfills one of the requirements for continued involvement in the National Historic Preservation Program. Annually, this program brings approximately \$750,000 into North Dakota to underwrite historic property surveys, National Register of Historic Places nominations, building restorations, site protection, certified local government activities, technical assistance to the public, and other initiatives.

*Historic Preservation in North Dakota, 2022-2027* summarizes how the North Dakota SHPO has carried out the goals of the previous (2016-2021) plan and set new goals and strategies related to historic preservation in the state. Over the next six years, this information will provide a focus for the state's historic preservation program. It is important to note that this document is not a work plan for the North Dakota SHPO. Rather, it provides guidance to government agencies, community organizations, businesses, professional practitioners, and various citizens—in short, any individual or group with an interest in identifying and meeting the challenges and opportunities of preserving North Dakota's rich



historic and cultural resources. The preservation plan is intended to assist such groups and individuals by illuminating the environment and challenges with which preservation efforts must contend while identifying widely held priorities for such efforts.



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612 East Boulevard Ave.  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0830

history.nd.gov | 701.328.2666



For more information, please contact Andrew Clark at [andrewclark@nd.gov](mailto:andrewclark@nd.gov) or 701.328.3574.



Interpretive panels at  
Fort Rice State Historic Site.  
Photo by SHNSD