



## Prosperity Rides on Rubber Tires: The Impact of the Automobile on Minot during the 1920s

By Charles Ellis Dickson

During the 1920s urban areas all over America discovered that a revolution in transportation was partly responsible for their prosperity. Even in Minot, a railroad center in agriculturally depressed North Dakota, the **automobile** was a symbol of economic well-being, a harbinger of dramatic change, and a useful adjunct to legal and illegal businesses. Almost literally, prosperity rode into Minot on rubber tires during the 1920s.

In 1924 a national scholarly publication, devoting its entire issue to the automobile, announced: “The gas-driven machine has brought an era as distinct and creative as that brought by steam.”<sup>1</sup> Later, another scholar contended, “The flood of automobiles owned by all classes of people changed almost every aspect of American life more in ten years than the railroad had changed it in almost a century.”<sup>2</sup> As the number of registered motor vehicles tripled in the United States during the decade and as the luxury, seasonal, open touring car gave way to the low-priced, year-round, multi-purpose family sedan, the increase in highway travel generated new economic activity and had a “definite relationship to the increase in the Gross National Product. . . .”<sup>3</sup> The increasing production of motor vehicles, which peaked in 1929 with 5,294,087 units, had an important effect on the American economy; and, while feeding business to the railroad, highway transportation outstripped the railroad as a carrier of interurban freight and passengers. During the 1920s truck freight and bus passenger traffic increased much more than rail traffic. In fact, rail passenger service went into permanent decline after 1920 (excepting a temporary recovery during World War II); and so 1920 can be said to mark the end of the rail era and the beginning of the **automotive age**.<sup>4</sup>

Spreading across the entire United States, the **automotive revolution** reached into North Dakota, where the number of registered passenger cars and

trucks rose from 92,000 in 1920 to 183,000 in 1930.<sup>5</sup> Doubling the number of motor vehicles in North Dakota required the rapid development of the state’s road system. Before the creation of the **State Highway Department** in 1917, “the state’s roads were, with rare exceptions, nothing more than ruts in the prairie.”<sup>6</sup> Of course, this was not out of the ordinary because all of the United States was “still about as devoid of good roads as the most remote and backward of the Balkan nations. . . .”<sup>7</sup> With major help from the federal government— notably as a result of the Federal Highway Act of 1921—the North Dakota State Highway Department supervised the improvement and construction of 2,366 miles of roads in an initial spurt of activity from 1917 until the end of 1924. The 1920s ranked “as one of the most active construction decades in the Highway Department’s history, surpassed only by the immediate post-World War II period in the late 1940s.”<sup>8</sup> North Dakota’s road system was tied to the rest of the country’s; with an annual expenditure of more than a billion dollars on construction and maintenance of roads, “by 1928, the country had one of the best systems of well-surfaced roads in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

Because most North Dakota farmers lived within fifteen miles of the railroad, they generally considered rail transportation to be their economic lifeline. At the beginning of the decade, they did not really appreciate the commercial and economic value of good roads even though a study by the



**Figure 1. Automobiles jam Central Avenue in Minot in this scene from the early 1920s. (SHSND A2834)**

Joint Committee on Federal Aid in the Construction of Post Roads had found, as early as 1914, that in North Dakota the cost of hauling to the railroad was thirty-three cents a ton-mile as contrasted with eight cents a ton-mile in France—where the roads were better.<sup>10</sup>

In 1924, the State Highway Department began distributing state **highway maps**, handing out seven thousand in the first year, in order to promote the use of the roads. As late as 1928 the State Highway Department still felt it necessary to use its North Dakota Highway Bulletin to persuade North Dakotans of the economic benefits to be derived from motorized transportation on good roads: “Farmers were advised that good roads would make it easier for them to travel to elevators in various towns, seeking the best price for their grain. Businessmen were told that good roads in the rural areas would make business boom on rainy days. Farm families, it was assumed, would come into town to shop during wet weather if they had an all-weather road to travel on.”<sup>11</sup>

As the dramatic increase in motor vehicle ownership and the substantial improvement of streets and highways revolutionized life in North Dakota, the City of Minot became a prosperous center of a network of highways and rural roads. The railroad had created the “**Magic City**” on the North Dakota frontier in 1886, and, in the early days, when the surrounding roads were still bad, the railroad had

made Minot “nearer Chicago than it was to nearby rural hamlets, which had been stranded by the railroads’ passing a few miles away.”<sup>12</sup> As was true of many similar American cities, the new road network now brought Minot for the first time into intimate contact with its hinterland. Rejecting their economically unsatisfactory farm life, large numbers of North Dakotans moved into Minot (and other cities) to participate in an apparent urban prosperity by obtaining employment in a diversity of new occupations. During the 1920s Minot’s population grew by 66 percent. With the state’s population increasing by only 5 percent during this decade the city’s growth was mainly the result of migration from nearby farms and villages.<sup>13</sup>

As rail lines had been responsible for Minot’s economic well-being—they continue to play an important part in the city’s economy today—it took a long time to realize that roads and motor cars also made a significant contribution to Minot’s continuing prosperity. The Minot city directory finally recognized in its 1927–28 edition that, in addition to being a railroad center, Minot was now also a “meeting place of three national highways.”<sup>14</sup>

These roads were usually called the **Theodore Roosevelt International Trail** (now U.S. 2), the **North Star** or **Great Green Trail** (now U.S. 52), and the **International Trail** (now U.S. 83). Private associations had marked these roads, putting iden-



tifying colors on utility poles to indicate where the roads were. The Theodore Roosevelt was indicated usually by white, red, and white bands or by a rectangular sign saying “TR.” The Glacier Trail, which was another name used for the present U.S. 52 southeast of Minot and the present U.S. 2 west of Minot, was indicated by bands of white, orange, and green and by a round marker displaying a mountain goat and the words “**Glacier Trail.**” The associations called these roads “trails” to give them a western flavor and because that is what they were—not one of them was paved. By 1922 the Theodore Roosevelt for a few miles east and west of Minot was earth-graded (the state had improved only 898 miles to this condition), but by 1927 all the major roads immediately around Minot had been graveled (the state had graveled 1,338 miles by then). When the Joint Board on Interstate Highways met in Washington in 1925 to designate and number transcontinental roads, the Theodore Roosevelt (also known as Route 8) became U.S. 2, and in the spring of 1927 the shield signs designating it as a national highway appeared alongside the road. To Minoters the all-gravel U.S. 2 remained the “T and R” or the “**Tough and Rough Road**” due to its many chuckholes.<sup>15</sup>

Although there were only ten miles of paved federal and state highways in North Dakota by 1927, there were five-and-a-half miles of paved

streets within Minot by the early 1920s and at least twenty-four miles of concrete paving by the early 1930s.<sup>16</sup> According to the North Dakota guidebook produced by the Federal Writers’ Project in the 1930s, “Rough, well-worn [wooden] block pavement in the business section evolves into smooth, tree-bowered asphalt avenues lined with fine homes in the residential districts.” Of course, when the Souris River overflowed its banks—as during the 1923 and 1927 floods—these streets and avenues were often inaccessible to automobile traffic.<sup>17</sup>

In the years immediately after World War I, the increased number of private cars and trucks cleared Minot’s streets of their clutter of horsedrawn wagons. Of a dozen old-fashioned livery barns, only the Scofield barn remained. The city now bustled with automobile traffic. Even in 1920 an observer was astonished by “the noise of passing cars” in what she termed “**The Wonder City.**”<sup>18</sup> In June 1921, the Minot Auto Club, which had just organized to promote road-building and maintenance, to better traffic regulation, and to prevent auto thefts, held its “first annual picnic” at Rice Lake with 4,000 people attending and with 512 cars counted by 1:00 p.m.<sup>19</sup>

As the number of automobiles increased and as city traffic quickened its pace, accidents mounted

**Figure 2. A bird's eye view of Minot, 1925. (SHSND B0756-73)**



alarmingly. The number of traffic deaths in North Dakota increased from eleven in 1919 to seventy-seven in 1926.<sup>20</sup> The consequence was more government regulations. In the early 1920s Minot experimented briefly with an automatic traffic signal in the middle of the Main and Central intersection, but few motorists paid any attention to it. In 1930, after Judge William Murray had experienced his sixth automobile “upset,” he considered issuing himself a restraining order to prohibit his driving a car anymore. North Dakota drivers were not licensed until 1935, the same year that the **State Highway Patrol** came into existence, and no examination of drivers was required until 1947.<sup>21</sup> It was not until 1939 that Minot experimented again with traffic signals, putting one for a trial period at Northwest Second Street (now N. Broadway) and Fourth Avenue and then installing similar lights at several downtown intersections. An editorial in the *Minot Daily News* urged motorists to “exercise due patience and . . . cooperate willingly to give the system [of traffic lights] a chance to function.”<sup>22</sup>

Although Minot continued to support five blacksmiths, the automobile revolution encouraged the rapid development of at least fifteen automobile dealerships.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the decade, there were many different makes of cars sold in North Dakota, the major ones being (in the order of their popularity) **Ford, Overland, Dodge, Buick, Chevrolet, Maxwell, Studebaker**, and **Oakland**. The Ford was by far the most popular; 49,694 were licensed in 1921. The next most popular make, the Overland, had only 8,886 licensed.<sup>24</sup>

On New Year’s Day 1921 **Henry H. Westlie**, who had pioneered a Ford agency in Parshall in 1917, and his partner Ernest D. Root took possession of the Moore Motor Company (renamed the Westlie-Root Motor Company) at 123 West Central. Handling Ford cars and parts, Fordson tractors, and Goodyear tires, the original staff of six expanded to fifteen within four years. In 1927 H.H. Westlie became sole owner of the **Westlie Motor Company**, buying out J.A. Charbonneau, who had replaced E.D. Root. In 1927 and

1928, after Ford ceased making the popular Model T truck, Westlie began manufacturing them in Minot. From parts, he assembled thirty-eight trucks in 1927 and fifty more in 1928. Later, the editor of the *Minot Daily News* would praise Westlie’s contributions to Minot: “Virtually no worthwhile development in this district has been carried to a successful conclusion without the footprints of this man showing along the way.”<sup>25</sup>

Also in 1921, Ole and Knute Forsaker (who had run a Cadillac agency for three years and owned the Minot Implement Company, a John Deere franchise) purchased the **Holt Motor Company**. This company, which was “one of the very finest in the state,” sold Dodges. The Forsaker brothers also handled Maxwells, Chryslers, Studebakers, Reos, Packards, and Cadillacs before they eventually concentrated on Chevrolets alone. J.L. (Louie) Smith and **Clarence Parker**, a prominent hotel owner, started the **Parker Motor Company** in 1922. In 1924 B.D. Renz and his sons Ernest and Bruno opened the Renz Nash Motors Company, and in the same year the DuBord-Sweet Motor Company, a sales agency for Flint motor cars (“The Car that Never Refuses to Climb Hills”), opened on Third Avenue Southwest. In 1927 United Motors, a Chrysler dealership, built its showroom at Fourth Avenue and South Main. H.H. (Herman Harvey) Fisher went into partnership with J.R. Sandlie in 1926 and purchased **Pence Motor Company**, a Buick dealership where he was a mechanic and salesman. The company had grown from a work force of two in 1903 to a force of 250 in 1925. Within a few years “Smiling Jimmie” Fisher became sole owner of **Fisher Motors**, “one of the founding fathers of the city who carried the town forward.”<sup>26</sup>

Businesses directly related to the motor car also grew. By 1920 two of the largest American tire companies had established distribution centers in Minot. In 1922 Harry Eck founded **Motor Service Company** to sell automobile parts. Four filling stations were constructed in 1923 alone, and by 1925 \$8,000 worth of gasoline was being sold daily in Minot—at twenty-three cents a gallon.



# THE MINOT DAILY NEWS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA, TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 1929

ESTABLISHED 1884



**1929  
AUTOMOTIVE  
EDITION**

**THE STAGE IS SET**

**T**HE Minot Auto Show will introduce to Northwest North Dakota the latest presentation of improvements in the automobile industry. In the following pages you will find all the newest, most attractive examples of modern motoring comfort.

The hand of change has written swiftly—Motors—Body Designs—Safety Features—Driving Comforts—these creations of America's finest engineers and largest industry are so new that a scant year almost represents a century's progress.

Minot Auto Show



March 28 29-30

Figure 3. The annual Minot Auto Show attracted thousands to the "Magic City." By 1929, the event was the largest civic promotion, one deserving a special section in the *Minot Daily News*. (SHSND Collections: *Minot Daily News*, March 26, 1929)



This figure did not include “much more which is taken out of the city in tanks for use on the farms and surrounding towns.”<sup>27</sup>

Public transportation also modernized. Beginning in 1923 motorized taxis of the **Three-0-Three Taxi Line** (named for its telephone number) could take a person to any point in the city in a new, heated Durant car for thirty-five cents. In the previous year the **Rapid Transit Company**, a bus system organized by Harry Eck and Lee Finnegan, began making a five-and-a-half-mile loop of the city (excluding South Hill) every forty-five minutes for a dime fare; it also made two daily trips to Max. North Dakota’s first interurban bus line, later the **Interstate Transportation Company**, began operating between Minot and Bismarck in the same year.<sup>28</sup>

When Americans first began touring in their motor cars, they avoided the hotels, which were not yet designed for the motoring public, and camped gypsy-like along the road. By the early 1920s **autocampers**, estimated to number in the millions, were more likely to stop at a municipal park in one of the three thousand to six thousand special camps which town boosters provided for them. The average daily expenditure by such tourists in the mid-1920s was variously quoted

from four dollars a person to twenty dollars a car. As early as 1917 the **Minot Town Criers’ Club** had secured fifteen acres opposite Riverside Park (renamed **Roosevelt Park** in 1922) to establish a “Night Camp,” furnishing motorists touring north-west North Dakota with drinking water, guides, free fuel for cooking, and electric lights.<sup>29</sup> It was still the only autocamp in the area (its nearest rival being in Towner) as late as 1923, when it was listed in a national camp site guide as having the following qualifications: “Wooded. Water. Bath. Light. Shelters. Oil stoves. Fuel. 3 acres.”<sup>30</sup> The guide also noted that Minot had two service stations of the Standard Oil Company (Indiana) “where tourists may obtain data of the United States Touring Information Bureau, Inc., on road conditions, garages where protection against overcharging is given, good hotels, etc.”<sup>31</sup>

Because economically marginal people were also buying cars and camping year round, pay camps, usually charging a fee of fifty cents a day, soon replaced the free municipal autocamps. In September 1925, well-known athlete (and later author) Irving (“Speed”) Wallace started the **Speedway Camp** six miles west of Minot at the junction of trails (i.e., highways) 2 and 9. As his “one tiny building with one gas pump along with a barrel of oil” grew into a tourist camp of international



**Figure 4.** The Grand Manor Tourist Park at Minot had its own gas pump (at right) when this photo was taken, circa 1929. With the automobile came many businesses, including the “tourist camp” catering to the increasing number of cross-country motorists. (SHSND 0165-03)



reputation, Wallace particularly “appreciated the wonderful trade from the residents of the Northwest.”<sup>32</sup> When autocampers, who by now were often no longer enamored with tenting, began to expect more conveniences and facilities free from health problems, more sumptuous tourist cabins, the ancestors of the present-day motels, were constructed. In 1929 the manager of the Grand Hotel, Carl E. Danielson, using a Milwaukee architect, built about forty deluxe cabins, known as **Grand Manor**, on thirty-one acres between Roosevelt Park and the fairgrounds. This tourist camp featured a playground, tennis courts, and a community laundry. The *Minot Daily News* called Danielson “a prophet who foresees thousands of tourist-laden autos visiting North Dakota in the future.”<sup>33</sup>

For all these developments, however, Minot’s primary source of prosperity remained as a major trade and transportation center for farmers. The automotive revolution had ended the farmers’ isolation and permanently changed their buying habits. Even during the agricultural depression of the 1920s, farmers bought innumerable motor vehicles. In 1920 57 percent of North Dakota farmers had automobiles, and by 1930 87 percent had them. At the beginning of the decade, only one in a hundred farmers owned a truck; by the end of

the decade one in five owned such a vehicle. The number of horses on North Dakota farms fell by a fourth during this period, and in Ward County the number of horses declined from 25,439 in 1920 to 17,716 in 1930.<sup>34</sup>

No longer did farm families have to patronize the nearest general store or shop from the mail-order catalog. They were now able to drive an average of six to eight miles for hardware, fourteen miles for furniture, and twenty miles for women’s fashions. Despite the farm depression, from 1923 to 1928 North Dakota farmers increased their purchasing of family-living goods and services by 30 percent. One Ward County scholar concluded that, in particular, there was “a great tendency for farmers to leave the stores in town near their homes and go to Minot when they want to make a valuable purchase.”<sup>35</sup>

This **change in purchasing patterns** affected rural Ward County severely. Small villages declined in business volume as people began traveling longer distances to do their shopping. A researcher contended that many who lived more than twenty-five miles from Minot now bought goods in Minot, especially at chain stores; one Minot merchant claimed that he frequently sold groceries to those living more than seventy-five miles from Minot. In Ward County, “The general use of automobiles and good roads has almost or entirely destroyed the small merchant in the little village or the open country,” and the small-town merchants who remained in business patronized Minot’s wholesale houses and hauled supplies by truck.<sup>36</sup>

As the North Dakota State Highway Department developed the highway system and improved the shorter rural roads (or “feeders”), large numbers of farmers in a huge area around Minot took their trucks and cars to the now more accessible city. Although the presence of Minot gave Ward County a much lower rate of rural to urban population than typical in North Dakota, over 90 percent of Ward County land was still devoted to agricultural activity. Moreover, Minot served a 15,000-square-mile region on the glacial plain of



**Figure 5.** Interstate Transportation Company began regular bus service between Minot and Bismarck in 1922. When this photo was taken about 1929, its operations included routes into South Dakota. The company was another example of the growth of dependence on motorized transportation during the 1920s. (SHSND 0032-OL-19-08)

northern North Dakota whose fertile soil overlaying sand and gravel made it well-suited for grain and livestock farming. The 1927–28 city directory proudly asserted: “No city of its size in the United States has as large a trade territory, undisputed by other cities of comparable size within the territory.”<sup>37</sup>

The city became a distribution center for farm machinery, hardware, and other items needed by farmers: “[A]ll the principal manufacturers of agricultural implements have wholesale or distributing agencies in the city that do an aggregate business of over \$10,000 a year.”<sup>38</sup> In 1922 the Minot branch of **International Harvester**, with its seven-story warehouse, had greater sales than any other branch in the country. The city was a major grain-shipping point with many grain elevators, two flour mills, a poultry plant, several creameries, and an ice cream plant. Consequently, among North Dakota counties Ward County was fourth in the manufacturing of butter, second in ice cream, and second in flour. The vigorous flour mill industry was judged in 1920 to be “the most important industry in the city, the product of Minot flour mills being sold in all parts of the United States, as well as enjoying an export demand.” Of course, some flour was processed locally and sold throughout the region. Trucks of the **Sweetheart Bakery** and others covered an area within a ninety-mile radius of Minot.<sup>39</sup>

The **mutual dependence** of Minot and regional farmers encouraged a boom in the immediate post-war period. In 1928 the Standard Bureau of Statistics of New York rated Minot as one of the three most prosperous cities in the nation based on business volume.<sup>40</sup> These statistics do not reveal, however, that Minot prospered in the 1920s not only because it was an agricultural distributing and collecting point, but also because it became a center for the so-called “**rum-running**” traffic linking the liquor supply in Canada with the illegal demand in America. The city had long had a reputation as a **rowdy frontier town**. In fact, its economic condition seemed dependent on activities associated with the reputation. It

had never paid much attention to the state’s constitutional prohibition of the sale of alcohol; with nationwide **Prohibition**, it became famous as “**Little Chicago**,” the most wide-open city between Chicago and Butte, Montana, even though periodic crackdowns and reform crusades kept the vice at least partially hidden.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1920s “**wets**” and “**drys**” argued about the effect of Prohibition on America’s prosperity. Wets pointed out that cities, which were generally against Prohibition, were more prosperous than rural areas which were usually for it. Drys claimed that urban areas were more prosperous due to the sober habits promoted by Prohibition and the wages diverted from drink to the purchase of homes, radios, and motor cars. One scholar has argued, “If prohibition put more money in the hands of a workingman so that he could afford to buy a car, that car gave him the means to go where liquor was to be found and to bring that liquor back to his own home.” Technological innovations like motor cars “helped to bring about the boom, which was claimed as a dry triumph; but they also took bootleg liquor or its tidings wherever they moved.” A social worker of the day lamented, “Fords have taken the place of the saloon. Another complained, “Second-hand Fords are the bootlegger’s chief deputies.” A popular historian of the 1920s summed the situation clearly: “If prohibition is repealed, Ford is going to quit making cars. If it isn’t, Mack is going to make bigger trucks.”<sup>42</sup>

While Prohibition existed, it and the automobile were responsible for the energy exhibited by Minot’s illegal businesses. Many **bootlegging** tales focus on the roads leading into the city. Once, booze “runners” making a trip from farms near Elmore, Saskatchewan, got stuck in the mud west of Glenburn in the Little Deep Creek. A farmer pulled them out with a team of horses and received a case of whiskey for his help.

In 1924, when a father and two sons opened an automobile dealership in downtown Minot, people said that they drove big cars in order to haul



whiskey from Canada. On one trip the brothers' car stalled (perhaps out of gasoline) when revenue officers pursued them near Bottineau; the young men took off on foot across a field, losing their vehicle and its load to the officers. Likewise, it was common knowledge that the owner of a lignite mine located southwest of Burlington would give a car to anyone who could deliver three loads of liquor from Canada to storage rooms under his garage, but it seems that often the car would be hijacked on the third trip, reportedly by men hired by the mine operator.<sup>43</sup>

A long-time resident of Minot recalled that her family could not take Sunday afternoon drives to the north and west of Minot in their elegant black Buick sedan. They learned from experience that outings in those directions could be interrupted either by hijackers who thought a car of this type might be carrying liquor, or by federal liquor agents, who suspected such a car had to be involved in illegal activities.<sup>44</sup>

The area around Minot was never as dangerous as parts of Michigan where so many innocent people were shot by agents watching for bootleggers that some local drivers began to put stickers on their windshields displaying an American flag and the legend "Don't Shoot, I'm Not a Bootlegger."<sup>45</sup> Minot, nevertheless, was often the scene of dramatic high-speed car chases, such as one in a blinding snowstorm which resulted in the arrest of the proprietor of the Last Chance Barbershop located on W. Central. His big Cadillac contained "32 cases of High and Dry gin and Baxter's Scotch whiskey, said to be very choice brands." There were also dramatic shoot-outs, such as when **whiskey-runner** Avery Erickson fatally shot night policeman F.S. Fahler and later died from wounds received in the same encounter. Erickson had been returning to Minnesota from Canada in a stolen car filled with eight sacks of Green River Whiskey.<sup>46</sup>

Local, state, and federal law enforcement agents conducted many well-publicized raids in the Minot area. When state prohibition forces

opened their northwest regional headquarters in the city in April 1921, they realized that the area presented a difficult enforcement task; they responded by equipping their cars with Browning machine guns. Sometimes the raid seemed to be merely a method for transferring ownership of the illegal goods rather than enforcing prohibition laws. In 1921 Minot's former police chief, Charles Lano, and a current police captain, John Reed, were arrested for impersonating officers during a raid in Bottineau County, where they had walked off with a cache of whiskey as well as a Cadillac. In 1924 the two former police officials were tried twice, but not convicted, for illegally transporting liquor.<sup>47</sup>

Use of cars in the illegal liquor trade continued throughout the decade. In 1929, after an exciting chase through the city in a borrowed car, the police arrested a youth for possession of a large quantity of **bootlegged liquor**. They had been watching him for some time as he visited most of the country dances near Minot to peddle his wares. After he abandoned his "Booze Laden Car" and ran, the police found him hiding under another car in a garage.<sup>48</sup> Many other such stories color both the public press and the collective memory of the 1920s.

In 1929 Congregational pastor Reverend E.E. Keedy called a meeting at which most of the fifty-two people present supported Prohibition; however, one minister declared that "conditions were worse now than seven years ago." Also in 1929, the president of Minot's First National Bank stated, "In my 28 years' experience in the banking business in Minot, conditions were never so sound and the outlook never so bright as at the present time." These two statements summarized the 1920s for Minot. The minister was referring to criminality related to Prohibition; this type of crime was about to end as the sale of alcohol became legal in the 1930s. The banker was referring to an economic prosperity related in part to the revolution in motorized transportation; this prosperity was about to lessen as the nation entered the **Great Depression**.<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 6.** During the 1920s, Minot's Main Street was a bustling place for people, businesses—and the automobile. (Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo, 2000.350.50)

As a result of the end of Prohibition and the beginning of the Depression, Minot's economy declined during the 1930s; but its economic condition was still better than it would have been without the automobile-related developments of the 1920s. In 1931, the Right Reverend Philip Cook, the Episcopal Bishop of Delaware who was visiting the Minot church that he had served from 1902 to 1904, put it this way: "I am pleased at the young progressive city that has taken the place of the Minot I used to know." Referring to the nation's double calamity of financial depression and drought, he added, "You do not feel it as badly here as we do in the industrial east."<sup>50</sup> The automotive revolution had encouraged a healthy diversity in Minot, brought it into closer contact with the surrounding area, and made it less dependent upon rail transportation for its economic well-being. Minot's boom

in the 1920s thus provided it with a better base for surviving the economic travails of the Depression years and did much to build the modern city that in 1986 celebrated its centennial year.

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## About the Author

Charles Ellis Dickson became interested in the history of North Dakota during his three years as visiting professor of history at Minot State University (1982–1985). He has also taught history and other social sciences in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, Missouri, and Ohio. He retired in 1999 to Tucson, Arizona, where he continues to write, teach, and sing in two choirs. Dr. Dickson holds his Ph.D. in American and British History from Ohio State University.

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1. Clyde L. King, "Foreword," *The Annual of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. (November 1924), p. vii.
2. Frank Donovan, *Wheels of a Nation* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1965), pp. 158–159.
3. John B. Rae, *The Road and the Car in American Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 101 (using statistics from 1935
4. Rae, pp. 44–45, cites car production figures from the FTC's *Report on the Motor Vehicle Industry* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), pp. 7–10. Donovan, p. 158, argues that car production was the "nation's leading industry" in the 1920s, using

on). Rae, pp. 133–134, says that closed cars rose from 2 percent of passenger cars in 1916 to 72 percent in 1926. Christy Borth, *Mankind on the Move: The Story of Highways* (Washington: Automotive Safety Foundation, 1969), p. 208, says that motor vehicle registration rose from more than nine million in 1920 to almost twenty-seven million in 1930.



- 20 percent of the steel, 9 percent of the gasoline, and 80 percent of the processed rubber. Julius H. Parmelee and Earl R. Feldman, "The Relation of the Highway to Rail Transportation" in Jean Labatut and Wheaton J. Lane, eds., *Highways in our National Life: A Symposium* (N.Y.: Arno Press, 1972), pp. 228–232, say that between 1926 and 1941 truck freight traffic increased by 142.8 percent (rail increased by 6.7 percent) and bus passenger traffic increased by 211.9 percent (rail decreased by 17.6 percent). Rae, p. 89, says that rail passenger service peaked at forty-seven billion passenger-miles in 1920, which thus marks "the end of an era."
5. Registration figures from Carl F.W. Larson, "The Automobile in North Dakota, 1911–1930," an illustrated lecture delivered at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck on October 6, 1985; also see Larson, comp., *Dickinson and the Automobile: The Early Years, 1903–1929* (Dickinson: Dakota Western Auto Club, 1982).
  6. Robert L. Carlson and Larry J. Sprunk, *History of the North Dakota State Highway Department* (Bismarck: North Dakota State Highway Dept., 1979), introduction. Larson, *Dickinson and the Automobile*, pp. 102–103, extracts the *Dickinson Press*, September 20, 1922, giving the following mileage figures from *North Dakota Good Roads Magazine*: hard-surfaced road (outside municipalities), 0.5; gravel, 500; good graded highway, 4,000; primary highway, 3,000; and secondary highway, 4,000; a total of 106,202 miles of roads in North Dakota at that time.
  7. Borth, p. 209.
  8. Carlson and Sprunk, pp. 32, 38.
  9. Borth, p. 209.
  10. Carlson and Sprunk, pp. 7, 21.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
  12. Walter Firey, Charles P. Loomis, and J. Allan Beegle, "The Fusion of Urban and Rural." in Labatut and Lane, p. 155 (referring to Cheyenne). Minot was known as the Magic City because of the way the town sprang up as if "by magic" when the railroad construction was unexpectedly delayed.
  13. Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977). p. 90, contend that this migration of North Dakotans "would reduce the number of producers of new primary wealth while increasing the number of recyclers of such wealth."
  14. Polk's Minot City and Ward County Directory, 1927–1928 (St. Paul: R.L. Polk & Co., 1927), p. 21.
  15. Carlson and Sprunk, pp. 20, 30, 32, 48; "Official Auto Trails Map of the United States Featuring Tourist Camp Sites," with *The Complete Camp Site Guide and latest Highway Map of the United States. . .* (Waterloo, Iowa: United States Touring Information Bureau, Inc., 1923). North Dakota road maps for this period may be consulted at the North Dakota State Archives at Bismarck; cf. Adah Lee Straszer, "Minot, North Dakota: An Urban Community on the Northern Great Plains" (MS thesis, University of Chicago, 1926), pp. 13–14.
  16. Maps of Minot for this period (also at the State Archives) contain statistical information about the city.
  17. *North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State*, 2d. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 160.
  18. *Minot Ward County Independent*, January 6, 1921, p. 7; Z'dena Irma Trinkka, *North Dakota of Today*, 3d ed. (St. Paul: Loms F. Dow Co., 1920), p. 26.
  19. *Ward County Independent*, June 16, 1921, p. 5; June 9, 1921, p. 1.
  20. Carlson and Sprunk, p. 36.
  21. Straszer, p. 16; *Ward County Independent*, January 2, 1930, p. 1; Chet Gerbert, "1<sup>st</sup> Superintendent Recalls Early N.D. Highway Patrol," *Minot Daily News*, June 17, 1985, p. 3; Carlson and Sprunk, p. 58. Also see Larry Remele and Ginger L. Sprunk, "The North Dakota Highway Patrol: 1935–1985" (Manuscript prepared for North Dakota State Highway Patrol, 1985).
  22. *Minot Daily News*, November 2, 1939, p. 4.
  23. *City Directory*, 1923–1924, pp. 499, 493.
  24. Larson, "The Automobile in North Dakota."
  25. *Ward County Independent*, January 16, 1921, p. 4; *Minot Daily News*, July 2, 1927, p. 1; November 8, 1958, p. 4; June 30, 1964, p. B-1; September 11, 1969, p. 6.
  26. *Ward County Independent*, September 1, 1921, p. 1; November 20, 1924, p. 2; February 19, 1925, p. 3; March 24, 1927, p. 12; March 12, 1925, p. 1; Tanya Watterud, "Painting Honors 'Founding Father' of Fisher Motors," *Minot Daily News*, June 27, 1985, p. 13; June 30, 1964, p. B-7. *The Ward County Independent*, March 26, 1925, is entirely devoted to automobiles.
  27. Trinkka, p. 28; *Ward County Independent*, March 26, 1925, p. 1.
  28. *Ward County Independent*, October 18, 1923, p. 6; cf. *North Dakota: A Guide*, pp. 160, 163. At the end of 1923 a bus route also opened between Devils Lake and Jamestown via Carrington; see *A History of Foster County* (Foster County, N.D.: Foster County History Book Committee, 1983), p. 70.
  29. Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910–1945* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 71, 121; Trinkka, p. 30.
  30. *Complete Camp Side Guide*, p. 40.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
  32. Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, pp. 105, 106, 125; *Ward County Independent*, May 12, 1932, p. 3; September 2, 1932, p. 2.
  33. *Minot Daily News*, Dec. 4, 1929, p. 9; cf. *Ward County Independent*, June 27, 1929, p. 1.
  34. Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 372–373; L.O. Lantis, "Rural Socio-Economic Conditions in Ward County and the Relations between Farmers and Townspeople" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Dakota, 1935), p. 31.
  35. Lantis, p. 116. See also Robinson, p. 374, and Donovan, p. 160.
  36. Lantis, pp. 42, 52, 53, 108, 116.
  37. *City Directory, 1927–1928*, p. 21.
  38. Trinkka, p. 28.
  39. Straszer, p. 5–6, 50–60; Trinkka, pp. 27–28; Lantis, p. 54.
  40. *Ward County Independent*, October 11, 1928, p. 1. Minot's volume of business in August 1928 was 29.4 percent above the figure of August 1927 and 9 percent above the 1920–24 average.
  41. Galen Brown, address read posthumously at Minot State College, February 1984. Minot was not the only area in North Dakota with lax enforcement; the subject of Prohibition remained constantly in the news into the 1930s.
  42. Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), pp. 316, 318.
  43. Reminiscences of Louise Jevne, Lansford, North Dakota.
  44. Noted in the Galen Brown address.
  45. *Milwaukee Journal*, August 3, 1929.
  46. *Ward County Independent*, January 20, May 5, 1921, both p. 1.
  47. *Ibid.*, March 24, April 28, 1921, February 14, 1924, all p. 1.
  48. *Minot Daily News*, November 14, 1929, p. 1
  49. Rev. J.O. Silseth, quoted indirectly in *ibid.*, December 7, 1929, p. 2; R.E. Barron, quoted in the *Ward County Independent*, July 25, 1929, p. 1. The first lawful liquor sale across the bar in the entire state's history occurred in a Minot tavern on December 3, 1936, according to the *Minot Daily News*, December 3, 1937, p. 3; beer had been legal in 1933.
  50. *Ward County Independent*, May 21, 1931, p. 1.

