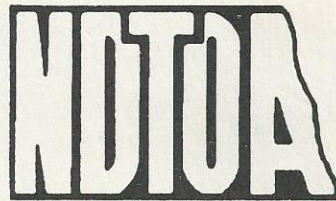


**TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF NDTOA**

**1966-1991**

**A HISTORY OF  
NORTH DAKOTA TOWNSHIP OFFICERS ASSOCIATION**

**Local Government**



**Means Better Government**

**November 1991**

## DEDICATION

We want to dedicate this 25th anniversary booklet to the many township officers who spent many volunteer hours to organize our state association. A special acknowledgment to Francis E. (Hank) Weber and Ralph Cameron, both from Cass County, who initiated the original push to get things started.

Further, we would like special acknowledgment to our past presidents who have passed away. These are: our first president, Ralph Cameron, from Ayr, ND. Ralph died in 1983. Our fourth president, Richard Bultema, from Wimbledon, ND. Dick died in 1985. Our fifth president, Leo Gray, from Hankinson, ND. Leo died in 1989. We are indeed indebted to these men for their contribution to the North Dakota Township Officers Association.

HISTORY COMMITTEE of NDTOA

## Twenty Five Years of NDTOA, 1966-1991<sup>1</sup>

The North Dakota Township Officers Association (NDTOA) was organized in 1966, twenty five years ago. The Association has become very effective in its roles in providing a voice for township in the Legislature and helping to improve the effectiveness of township governments. Organized township governments have been active as local governments since early in this state's history.

North Dakota is one of 16 states, primarily in the Midwest, that have organized townships. The six mile square township with 36 sections was initiated by Congress in 1885 as a method of measuring and identifying land in the developing western areas.

Approximately 1,360 township governments have been organized in North Dakota. Their primary responsibilities are road construction and maintenance, with some townships providing various other local services. Townships in sparsely settled areas of western North Dakota were never organized.

These local governments have been administered entirely by elected volunteer officers with no staff assistance. County organizations of townships have provided for coordination with county governments. Until the NDTOA was organized, townships had no official voice in the Legislature nor opportunity for communication and coordination with townships in other counties across the state.

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<sup>1</sup>This publication was prepared by the History Committee of NDTOA headed by Chester Larson of Enderlin and Nolan Verwest of Finley.



## Organization of NDTOA

In 1965, Francis E. (Hank) Weber was a township officer from Cass County and a freshman House member in the 39th Legislative Assembly. Based on his experience, he saw the need for a state township officers association. During the session, there were questions, remarks and comments relating to issues affecting township, but no one from townships was there to defend the township position in these issues. Other units of government, the counties, cities and departments of the state government, had their lobbyists and influential people representing their causes.

Following the legislative session, Hank Weber contacted Ralph Cameron who was at that time president of the Cass County Township Officers Association. Weber was vice-president of the Cass County Association. Together, they began to work for the formation of a state organization.

On May 17, 1966, township officers from Traill, Barnes and Ransom counties were guests of the Cass County Association. Talks began about starting a state association.

On July 11, 1966, a Cass County Township Officers meeting was held at the Vets Club in Casselton. Cass County officers attending were Ralph Cameron, Melvin Gangness, Francis Weber and Joseph Woell. By invitation, representatives attending from nearby counties included Ed Monson and Herb Peterson from Barnes County; Ernest Fadness and county agent Earl Sulerud from Ransom County and county agent Vern Kasson from Richland County. A motion was made by Hank Weber and seconded by Ernest Fadness to set up a temporary North Dakota Township Officers Association. Ralph Cameron was named temporary chairman and Joseph Woell as temporary secretary.

The official organization meeting was held later in 1966. Counties represented at the meeting in Casselton were Cass, Barnes, LaMoure, Nelson, Ransom, Richland and Traill. Ralph Cameron from Cass County was elected president; Ernest Fadness from Lisbon, Ransom County, was elected vice president, and Joseph Woell from Casselton, Cass County, was elected secretary-treasurer. The Fargo Forum reported, "Ralph Cameron of Ayr, in Cass County, has been elected president of the newly formed North Dakota Township Officers Association."

The aims of the Association, as set forth in the Constitution adopted at the Casselton meeting, are to provide representation by townships before various groups, boards and agencies, provide for joint action between townships, and to promote the best interests of township governments and citizens. At the Casselton meeting, the group authorized President Cameron to attend the 1967 session of the North Dakota Legislature to work in the interests of township needs.

## History of NDTOA

The following history of the Association is based on available Association minutes and on the memories of those involved. The Association had some hard times during its formative years. A Fargo Forum editorial on December 23, 1967, stated the "the township actually is too small a unit to function effectively" and went on to say this unit of government should "form a consolidation of townships equivalent to the school district serving the area." The editor evidently did not know much about the border lines of school districts to make such a statement. His comments stirred some township officers into putting more energy into the organization. Another episode that riled some township officers was a statement made by state Senator Esky Solberg, who was representing the Motor Carriers Association. Senator Solberg stated that the North Dakota Township Officers Association was weak and ineffective; therefore should not be recognized in their lobbying efforts to gain a share of the Highway Users Funds.

## Accomplishments

In spite of the opposition from the North Dakota League of Cities and some state agencies, the NDTOA has had some major accomplishments.

In 1969, the Association lobbied for the repeal of the personal property tax. The state legislature repealed the tax, but added a business privilege tax.

In 1971, the Association lobbied for repeal of the business privilege tax. Again the legislature concurred. Also in 1971, the Association made its first attempt to achieve legislative action to gain a share of the Highway Users Funds. The efforts failed but the seeds were sown. Modifications of the original bill were proposed in the next four legislative sessions. In each succeeding session, the bill came closer to passage but never quite made it.

The 1972 minutes of the Association annual meeting indicate that eleven county associations of townships were members of the State Association. President Richard Bultema represented the Association at the State Constitutional Convention in Bismarck. All of the recommendations of the NDTOA were adopted by the Constitutional Convention. Also beginning in 1972, Federal Revenue Sharing became an important source of revenue for townships; however, Federal Revenue Sharing was terminated by Congress in the mid-1980's.

At the 1973 annual meeting, a resolution was passed to have three representatives of the Association sit in on the state equalization hearings on assessments for property taxes. The minutes reflect that the State Association had 14 county associations as members. Present at that meeting were representatives from Traill, Ransom, Steele, Cass, Richland, Nelson, LaMoure, Renville, Bottineau and Stutsman counties. Absent were representatives from Benson, Grand Forks and Ward counties. A membership committee of Chester Larson from Ransom County and Alan Braaten from Richland County was formed to work toward getting more counties in the State Association.

At the annual meeting on December 10, 1975, Jay Kirkeride of Benson County moved that our association join the National Association of Towns and Townships. The motion was seconded and adopted. Now the Association was involved in county decisions and state and federal legislation. Also at this meeting a controversial resolution opposing construction of the proposed Kindred Dam was adopted. This resolution made the directors realize there are people living on both sides of a dam, each with a different perspective of the project. Another resolution concerning the Garrison Diversion project a couple of years later did not receive support. Also the Kindred Dam proposal came back to the 1976 annual meeting. This time the resolution did not get the support of the convention.

Annual membership dues were increased from \$5 to \$10 per township at the 1976 annual meeting to help finance the increased activity of the association. A newspaper "Grassroots Forum" was planned and negotiations with Prairie West Publications of Wahpeton were being conducted. Seven issues were printed and mailed out. The cost of the publication far exceeded revenues so "Grassroots Forum" was discontinued. The last issue was dated August 1979. The 1979 financial report indicated dues were received from townships in 33 different counties.

The present NDTOA newsletter was initiated in 1981. In 1990, the newsletter was named "Grassroots Report." It is sent to all township officers.

A resolution passed at the December 1980 annual meeting of NDTOA asked for a one cent state tax per gallon on motor fuels. Funds generated from this tax would be dedicated for the construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of township roads. The 1981 Legislature turned down the one cent tax increase, but did allocate a one time 8 million dollar allocation for the biennium (4 million per year). The State Association of Township Officers finally had a big break.



In the 1983 legislative session the one cent fuel tax was again proposed by NDTOA. This time the legislature saw fit to enact permanent legislation dedicating one cent of the motor fuel tax to township roads. NDTOA felt this action rectified 1963 legislation which allowed cities in the state a share of motor fuels taxes and registration fees. Motor fuels taxes now received by townships account, on average, for over 30 percent of their total revenue.

### **Workshops and Handbooks**

Officers of the State Association had felt a need for more information to township officers on carrying out their responsibilities. In 1984, four educational workshops were held across the state. In 1986, the first issue of "North Dakota Township Officers Handbook" was printed as a looseleaf notebook. The handbook was written and edited by Lloyd B. Omdahl and Lyle Olson at the Bureau of Government Affairs, University of North Dakota. The NDTOA Handbook Committee and Norbert Dorow, NDSU Extension Service, facilitated and coordinated its publication. In 1988 an update of the Handbook was researched and written by Phil Harmeson, Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota. The 1990 Handbook was revised by the Handbook Committee of NDTOA with John B. Oxton from Hope, N.D., doing the major research and writing. Thomas Moe from Mayville, legal counsel for NDTOA, was the legal advisor.

The first workshops for township officers held in 1984 were very well received as indicated by a survey. Subsequent workshops were held over the state in even numbered years, 1986, 1988 and 1990. Over 500 township officers attended the series of workshops each of the four years they were conducted. The Handbooks and the biennial revision were distributed and reviewed at all the workshops. This gave the township officers a chance to discuss the latest legislative changes affecting townships.

The workshops included reviews of responsibilities and duties of township officers which were particularly helpful to new township officers. The workshops were conducted largely by state officers of NDTOA and attorneys. Thomas Moe was the attorney at the last two series of workshops. Norbert Dorow, NDSU Extension Service, served as the coordinator for each of the series of workshops.

### **Host for NATAT**

In the summer of 1986, NDTOA hosted the June meeting of the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATAT) in Medora. The new convention center in Medora offered a relaxed atmosphere and a quiet background for the productive board meeting. Several compliments were received from the other states' delegates that attended. A couple of the NATAT board members found out they had to tighten their cinch straps in order to stay on board a horse.

### **Leadership Awards**

In 1987, Hank Weber of Casselton, Cass County, received the "Mr. Township" State Leadership Award.

The "Grassroots" Leadership Award was initiated in 1987. Jimmy Braaten from Crary, Ramsey County, was the recipient of this first state award. He received a plaque and a trip to the National Education Conference of NATAT, where his name was entered into the competition for the national award. The 1988 "Grassroots" Leadership Award went to Leo Gray of Hankinson, Richland County. Leo's untimely death in May of 1989 prevented his name from being entered in the national competition.

Our 1989 "Grassroots" Leadership Award went to John Oxton of Hope, Steele County. John also was entered into the national competition and came out 2nd runner-up

to the national "Grassroots" Leadership Award winner, Jean Lushin, from the state of Indiana. Nolan Verwest of Finley, Steele County, was the winner of the 1990 "Grassroots" Leadership Award. His name will be entered into the national competition in September, 1991.

### **Board Members Added**

From 1975 to 1984 the State Association membership grew quite rapidly; therefore, the directors saw a need to make some change in the makeup of the board. The executive committee expanded membership beyond the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and past president to include two elected executive committee members. Don DeFoe from Pembina County and John Erickson from Burleigh County gave the committee a better cross section of the state. With this addition, it was easier to have state representation at the county conventions. At the 1985 directors meeting the "at large" executive committee members was further expanded to four. At this meeting, Ben Byron from Pembina County replaced Don DeFoe and Ken Yantes from Ramsey County and Jerome Knudson from Divide County were elected to the new positions. This gave the executive committee representation from three corners of the state and a much broader view of what was happening statewide. On December 11, 1987, we retained Tom Moe, attorney, from Traill County to be the NDTOA legal counsel. With the addition of Moe to the executive committee, the committee now has ten members.

### **Comments**

This publication was prepared to highlight the activities and progress of NDTOA during its first 25 years. A measure of success is that membership has continued to grow. There are now about 1,000 townships in 41 counties that are members of the Association. Through the Association, townships and elected officers are represented in the Legislature, and have opportunity to improve their services through participation in workshops, use of the Handbook, review of the NDTOA newsletter, access to legal counsel and contacts with members of the state executive committee.

Appreciation is expressed to the several thousand elected township officers who have in the past and continue to give of their time and abilities to maintain effective township governments.



## State Officers of NDTOA, 1966-1991

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PRESIDENT</u>	<u>VICE PRES.</u>	<u>SECRETARY</u>	<u>TREASURER</u>	<u>NATAT DIRECTOR</u>
1966	Ralph Cameron Cass	Ernest Fadness Ransom	Joseph Woell Cass	Joseph Woell	
1967	Ralph Cameron	Ernest Fadness	Joseph Woell	Joseph Woell	
1968	Ernest Fadness Ransom	Lloyd Law Steele	Earl Sulerud Ransom	Alvin Evanson Ransom	
1969	Fadness (6 mos.) Law (6 mos.)	Law (6 mos.) Oeder (6 mos.)	Earl Sulerud	Alvin Evanson	
1970	Lloyd Law Steele	Oscar Oeder Ransom	LeRoy Odegaard Steele	Alvin Evanson Ransom	
1971	Lloyd Law	Oscar Oeder	LeRoy Odegaard Gerald LeClerc Steele	Alvin Evanson	
1972	Richard Bultema Barnes	Leo Gray Richland	Larry Iverson Barnes	Alvin Evanson	
1973	Richard Bultema	Leo Gray	Larry Iverson	Alvin Evanson	
1974	Richard Bultema	Leo Gray	Lester DeKrey Barnes	Chester Larson Ransom	
1975	Richard Bultema	Leo Gray	Lester DeKrey	Chester Larson	
1976	Leo Gray Richland	Chester Larson Ransom	J.D. Latham Richland	Alden Cavett Ransom	Leo Gray
1977	Leo Gray	Chester Larson	J.D. Latham	Alden Cavett	Leo Gray
1978	Leo Gray	Chester Larson	J.D. Latham	Alden Cavett	Leo Gray
1979	Leo Gray	Chester Larson	J.D. Latham	Alden Cavett	Leo Gray
1980	John Oxton Steele	Emil Burquist Burleigh	Gerald LeClerc Steele	Nolan Verwest Steele	John Oxton
1981	John Oxton	Emil Burquist	Gerald LeClerc	Nolan Verwest	John Oxton
1982	John Oxton	Chester Larson Ransom	Gerald LeClerc	Nolan Verwest	John Oxton
1983	John Oxton	Chester Larson	Gerald LeClerc	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1984	Chester Larson Ransom	Oscar Erie Leeds	Jack Armstrong Ransom	Nolan Verwest Steele	Chester Larson
1985	Chester Larson	Oscar Erie	Jack Armstrong	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1986	Chester Larson	Oscar Erie	Jack Armstrong	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1987	Chester Larson	Oscar Erie	Jack Armstrong	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1988	Ken Yantes Ramsey	Jerome Knudson Divide	Tom Moe Traill	Nolan Verwest Steele	Chester Larson
1989	Ken Yantes	Jerome Knudson	Tom Moe	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1990	Ken Yantes	Jerome Knudson	Bryan Hoime	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson
1991	Ken Yantes	Jerome Knudson	Bryan Hoime	Nolan Verwest	Chester Larson