

In its heyday Mapleton Commanded an area of Four Square Miles'

(Editor's Note: The following history was written by a former Pioneer staff writer.)

The history of the city of Mapleton is the history of the state of North Dakota condensed. It is one of the oldest cities in the state, and certainly no city has a richer story to tell than Mapleton, for it stands among the front runners of those cities which have experienced just about everything the Midwest has to offer - Indians, blizzards, tornadoes, bonanza farming, droughts, bumper crops, and failures. It was one state to be settled, and the people, proud of this fact, hold their own.



Originally settled in 1870, it was called Maple River because it bordered the Maple River. When the Northern Pacific railroad surveyed the land between the Red and Missouri Rivers in 1871; Mary Bishop's log cabin was the only human habitation found in the area. Being the case, the railroad built a station there called Maple River. The name was changed to Mapleton when the post office was established July 21, 1875, with Mrs. Bishop as postmaster. She owned the township and sold it the following year. The plat was filed Sept. 2, 1876, having been platted in June that year by Mrs. Bishop and John Dunlap. The village incorporated in 1884.



In 1884, the year that Mapleton was officially incorporated into a city, the area was not even a state yet; it was still Dakota Territory.

But though it may have been early in one sense, it was one of the most exciting and perhaps romantic times to be living here. For this was the very heart of bonanza farming country in the days when it was common for the temperature to reach 45 degrees below zero one day and 30 above the next.

There are a good many reference books on the Mapleton area from which you can learn a great deal about the times. But none of them gives as much insight into the life and times of the era as a book called "The Checkered Years" by Mary Dodge Woodward.

In it Mrs. Woodward has compiled not just a set of hard statistics, but a story of her day-to-day life on a small farm in the heart of the bonanza farms. Mrs. Woodward came from New York originally. The move from the cultured east to the wild, unsettled Midwest brought great changes for her. Some of these she recorded in a diary which, covers the years 1884-1889.

For Mrs. Woodward, Dakota Territory was one of extremes: cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Sections describing fatalities of the cold winters, frozen hands, ears, fingers and noses are scattered throughout the book.

The original house in which Mrs. Woodward and her husband lived in still stands a few miles south of I-94 on the Kindred road as a monument to those who endured the early years in the Mapleton area.

But all was not simply a hardship story. There was land and wealth to be had almost for the taking in Dakota Territory, Mapleton country now. And people knew it.



Simply known as "Lame George" to Mapleton residents, it was this man's job to light the lamps.

In 1883 35,000 farmers were located on government lands, not counting thousands of acres sold from railroad land grants. In the spring of 1883, it is said that immigration reached 5,000 in one day; and by the end of the year, 2,161 homesteads had been entered in the Territory. The press of the times reported crowded passenger trains, and hotels filled with cots in halls and parlors, and firmly averred that no country appeared as frequently in story and print as Dakota.

Proud, indeed, were these early settlers of their vast holdings; their buildings, many of which were fine for those times; their extensive machinery; their livestock; and their great wheat fields, presenting as they did such a striking contrast to the wild country which had been inhabited only by the warlike Sioux up to the time of the admission of the Territory, a mere 20 years before. Owners and managers came from far and near to assume operation of the farms. Names like Dalrymple, Grandin, Dunlap, Chaffee, and Kindred were famous not only throughout the Territory, but over a large portion of the United States as well.

The chief product of these big farms was, of course, hard wheat, called No. 1 hard. In 1884, the Northern Pacific Elevator Company handled an average of 75,000 bushels of wheat each day during harvest. One bonanza farmer' alone had, at one time, 600,000 bushels of No. 1 hard in the elevators which he was holding for better prices.

Bonanza farming has disappeared from the Red River Valley, with the sole exception of the Dalrymple farms.

In 1865, Oliver P. Dalrymple opened up a farm in Washington County, Minnesota, which was to be the largest wheat farm in the world at that time (26,000 acres). This led to his selection of an experimental farm in Cass County. A Northern Pacific station was established here in 1875 and named for Dalrymple, owner and operator of this first bonanza farm in North Dakota. A land grant from the NJP. first established the farm and additional land was purchased at 40 to 60 cents an acre until Dalrymple either directly owned or leased over 75,000 acres from Kindred to Mayville. At present John S. Dalrymple, grandson of Oliver Dalrymple, owns 30,000 acres with 34 separate farms scattered over it all.

Dalrymple recalled that many times he heard of his grandfather plowing one furrow from the farm all the way to Mapleton six miles away.

Bonanza farming wasn't the only thing that was in its height in the 1880s.

In 1880 Fargo and Mapleton were approximately the same size in population and area. According to residents of both cities, however, Mapleton was by far a nicer town. Fargo was a budding industrial area with hundreds upon thousands of people coming in everyday. Essentially it was a tent city with all the connotations that that holds.

Mapleton was a much more settled community with a more serene atmosphere permeating the scene. There was activity and immigration in Mapleton too, but of a more permanent and peaceful nature. Houses went up instead of tents. *

In its heyday Mapleton commanded an area of four square miles. As far back as anyone can remember there were at least four elevators, two grocery stores, three hotels, one hardware store and a fine old country doctor by the name of Dr. Mitchell whom everyone seems to remember very well.

The years from 1870 to 1900 and from 1930 to the present are freshly preserved in a good many places including minds, books, and scenery. But 1900 to 1930 seems to have been misplaced somewhere. A few Mapletonians remember the days of World War I. It hurt the town a great deal with the loss of many of its finest young men. As if this wasn't enough, the community hall burned in 1917, a time when things were hard for people since the war was on. In 1924 a new high school was built which still stands today. The depression was hard on all the farmers of the area, but from 1910 to 1930 the town grew rapidly.

Today the story of Mapleton is the story of success. Although the city is certainly not as big in size or importance as it once was, it could be one of the most sought after towns in the southeastern part of the state to live in.