



Tiny town keeps tradition alive

BY BRITTNEE WILSON

In 1911, excitement ran high in north central North Dakota, as the Soo Line Railroad was building a branchline between the towns of Drake and Fordville. Towns sprang up all along the right of way, including Baker.

Baker, in western Benson County, was a boom town, with a population of about 150. It boasted more than 25 businesses, including three elevators, two lumberyards, two hotels, two banks, a pool hall, a weekly newspaper, a butcher shop and a blacksmith. A school was built, and a band was organized, which was instrumental in the celebration of Baker Day, celebrated on July 11 from 1913-1920.

This boom time did not last. There were not enough people in the surrounding area to support all the business establishments. One by one, they began to close or move out. By the time the Depression rolled in, Baker was only a skeleton of its former self and the population dwindled to about 50.

Between the drought and the Great Depression, there

was little money for entertainment. The Baker pool hall housed residents, especially the men, gathering for some friendly card playing. This is where the idea of reviving Baker Day came, and they worked hard to make it a success.

This group of young men had common interests in radio, electricity and mechanics. One year, they conceived

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Welcome back, students!
- Headquarters gets updates



The restored school bus was a 2021 Baker Day parade entry.



This school bus was used for transporting children from the country to Baker School from 1940-1950.

some unusual parade entries, including a car hinged in the middle and fixed, so the front end reared into the air when the driver stepped on the gas. They called it Leaping Lena. They also constructed a radio-controlled car that was ahead of its time.

Anytime these men gathered, they formed many ideas for improvements to the city of Baker. Perhaps the idea considered the wildest and most impractical was Palmer Stadum's desire to bring central station electrical service to the Baker community, including farmers and those living in the village.

Turning a wild dream into reality, the group decided to appear business-like, they needed a name, so they called themselves the Baker Technical Club. They even had stationary printed with Baker Technical Club on the letterhead. In the fall of 1935, they wrote a letter to the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) requesting

information on starting a cooperative to bring rural electrification to the Baker area.

The letterhead worked, and the REA answered in a letter back, providing information on how to move forward. It offered a loan up to 100% of the cost of the construction of new line extensions to a responsible local body which would undertake to construct the lines. The next step was to get all the prospective consumers on board.

After many meetings and research, on April 12, 1937, Baker Electric Cooperative Inc., the first rural cooperative in North Dakota, became a legal entity.

Fast-forward to September 1941, and Baker Electric moved its headquarters from Baker to Cando after the cooperative bought a plant owned by Central Electric and Telephone Company in the city of Cando. The decision was unanimous, as the board of directors realized Baker just did not have the facilities to care for the growing needs of the cooperative, once again, leaving Baker's population in a decrease.

Today, Baker Electric Cooperative is no longer, as Tri-County Electric Cooperative joined forces in 1997 to form what is now Northern Plains Electric Cooperative. As for the town of Baker, the population is down to four. However, the town booms every July 11 as past residents, family members of residents or anyone who has a tie to Baker comes together to celebrate Baker Day. It does not matter the day of the week it falls on; attendees know that every July 11 is a day to revive the town.

This year, I had the pleasure of attending Baker Day.



Past and present Baker residents and families stood in front of a 12x8 American flag that once proudly hung from the Baker Hall before being passed down to generations. The flag was constructed in the late 1920s/early 1930s by the ladies of Baker, and it only has 48 stars.

When entering Baker, you can't miss the official town sign, "Baker, Pop 3-4 sometimes 5, ½ dog and cats?". That set the tone and I knew I was in for a good time.

That Sunday afternoon around 50 people were greeted by a three pound Yorkie, the town's "1/2 dog", when they arrived to the Kirkeide residence with a potluck dish in tow. Before a shared meal attendees enjoyed reminiscing about the good old days of Baker while looking through old town photographs and memorabilia.

For many, the highlight of the day was the parade. It didn't matter the length of the parade, with five entries to count, it was about the tradition running since 1913. ■

Source: "Acorn to Oak"
by Doris Stadig.





Don't aim at electrical equipment!

As various North Dakota hunting seasons approach, please remember that electrical insulators, conductors and electrical equipment are NOT on the hunting list.

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative encourages hunters to be aware of electrical equipment while enjoying the great outdoors this season.

Hunters and other gun owners should not shoot near or toward power lines, power poles and substations. A stray bullet can cause damage to equipment, could be deadly to the shooter, and potentially interrupt electric service to large areas.

Be aware of what's behind that big buck or it might cost big bucks. Repairs can be costly and damages cause outages to our members. As a nonprofit cooperative, owned by the members, we all share in this expense.

We encourage experienced hunters who are familiar with the area to identify the locations of utility properties and equipment to young or new hunters in their group and remind them to avoid shooting toward these facilities. Enjoy the great outdoors. Just be sure to hunt only what's in season.

Hunting safety tips:

- Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of power lines and equipment on land where you shoot.
- Take notice of warning signs and keep clear of electrical equipment.
- Do not place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles. Energized lines and equipment on the poles can conduct electricity to anyone who comes in contact with them, causing shock or electrocution.
- Do not shoot at, or near, birds perching on utility lines. That goes for any type of firearm, including pistols, rifles or shotguns.
- Do not place decoys on utility equipment. Anything attached to a pole besides utility equipment can pose an obstruction – and a serious hazard – to electric cooperative employees as they perform utility operations. ■



Welcome back, students!

As the new school year kicks off, Northern Plains Electric Cooperative shares the many educational opportunities provided to students. You can find more information on each program by visiting our website, www.nplains.com, or be sure to read future issues of *North Dakota Living* magazine for announcements. Any questions can be directed toward Brittnee at 800-882-2500.

Power plant tour program

A full-day tour provides students with great insight into one of the North Dakota's brightest and most important industries. Students will come away with an understanding of the complexity of electrical generations and will learn about the many job opportunities available in North Dakota's energy industry. To help defray costs, the co-op offers financial assistance to schools located within Northern Plains Electric Cooperative's service area that book a tour.

Scholarships

The Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship program recognizes and encourages the academic achievements of students in the region. It also serves as an investment in the economic future of rural areas. Yearly, together with Basin Power Electric, a \$1,000 scholarship is given to one lucky winner of a Northern Plains member dependent.

Additional scholarship opportunities have been given at our annual meeting in a luck-of-the-draw format.

North Dakota electric cooperative Youth Tour

This essay-writing contest is an opportunity for one lucky winner to enjoy a week filled of educational learning and site seeing in an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., compliments of Northern Plains Electric Cooperative.

Kids safety poster contest

By hosting a safety poster contest, our intent is to initiate conversations between children and parents/teachers about the dangers of electricity and ways one should practice safety. The yearly contest is open to elementary-aged students and the cooperative offers cash prizes to the winners.

Legislative field trips

Rural electric cooperatives were born in government. Understanding of, and involvement in, government is critical to our success and the successes of the communities we serve. That's why Northern Plains Electric Cooperative encourages students to visit the state capital to view North Dakota's legislative process in action. Recognizing that school budgets are often tight, Northern Plains Electric will help defray trip expenses to any high school in the cooperative's service area that takes a student group. ■

Use caution when burning



A controlled burn can quickly become an uncontrolled one. That's why Northern Plains Electric Cooperative is asking farmers and homeowners to take extra precautions when burning on their land or ditches.

We understand that fires are an essential tool in land management, however if burns are not managed safely, they can cause property damage, power outages, injury and even death.

If the area you choose to burn is near a utility pole or underground facilities, including cabinets/transformers, or your fire spreads more quickly or farther than you thought it might, your controlled burn could get costly.

Fire damage to a power pole is usually evident by blackening and scorch marks, but even slight discoloration can cause serious problems. In some cases, the pole can look like it has little damage on the outside, all the while burning from the inside out.

Please be aware that even scorching a pole will compromise the integrity of the structure. Power poles are treated with a protective coating that prevents moisture from entering the core of the pole and causing deterioration. If a pole is scorched, the protective coating is damaged. Though it may appear as just a discoloration or slight burn, this damage to the pole could significantly shorten the life of a power pole.

The same scenario goes for underground cabinets and transformers if a fire nears. Although a fire may not enter the cabinet, the equipment inside is still at jeopardy, as the heat of the fire could cause the inside equipment such as elbows and fiberglass to melt.

In all cases, the result is the same: If the utility equipment is compromised, it will most likely need to be replaced. The cost of the replacement will be the responsibility of the person who started the burn.

Last year, 41 of the 72 reports of public accidents Northern Plains received were reports of damaged or broken poles and underground cabinet damage. ■

HOW TO PREVENT BURN-RELATED DAMAGE TO POWER EQUIPMENT

- Plan your burn before you begin.
 - Check the forecast for weather conditions, such as wind direction and speed, as well as humidity (as a general rule, relative humidity should be 40 percent or higher, the temperature should be less than 60 degrees and the wind should be 5-15 mph at 6 feet off the ground.)
 - If there are power poles or utility cabinets in the planned burning area, clear all vegetation and weeds at least 4 feet around the base of the pole/equipment.
 - Wet the base of the pole with water before beginning your burn. Do not spray up toward the top of the pole.
- If your fire gets out of control, gets too close to utility equipment or if the equipment catches on fire, call 911 and also contact our office to report it. Once a fire breaks out, NEVER spray water near the pole, power lines, or any other utility equipment. Electricity and water do not mix and you could cause a short circuit that could cause serious injury or death.



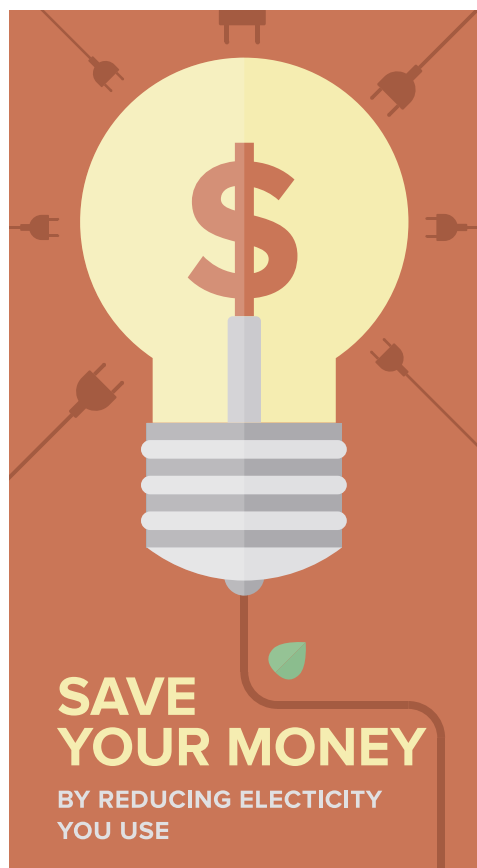
Northern Plains Carrington office.



Northern Plains Cando shop.

Co-op headquarters get updates

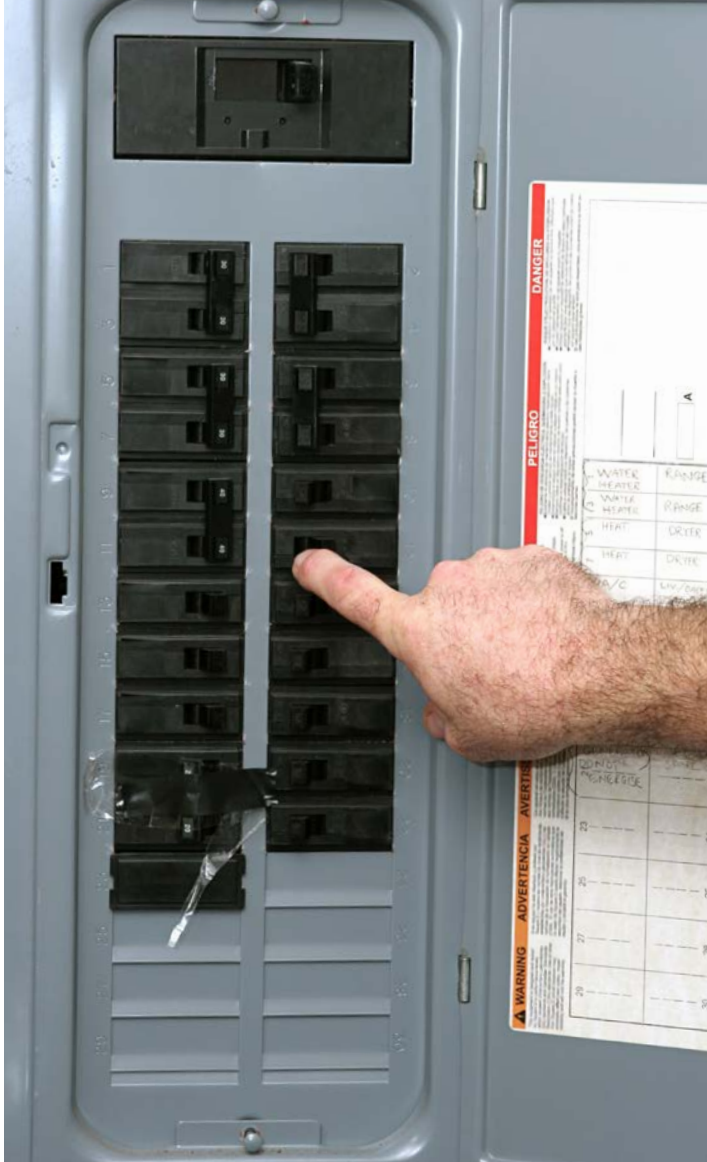
This summer, construction took place on the Carrington headquarters office as the building got resurfaced in stucco. In Cando, the shop received new windows and tin siding, reviving the building with a cohesive look.



YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE!

A home energy assessment can help stop wasted energy, too. Little bits of energy waste add up, so make sure all the systems in your home are working at peak efficiency:

- Set your water heater temperature at 120 degrees, which is hot enough for comfortable showers without wasting energy.
- Energy-efficient LED lighting uses less energy and lasts longer than conventional incandescent bulbs.
- Use a programmable thermostat to set home temperatures forward or back while you're asleep or away to save up to 10% on your heating and cooling costs.
- Electronics continue to use energy even when they're fully charged or turned off. Use advanced power strips to stop these vampire loads from feasting on your electricity.
- Seal cracks and gaps around your home with caulk or expanding foam. This acts as a windbreaker for your home, helping the insulation work up to its full potential.
- Ductwork exposed in unconditioned spaces, like attics, should also be air-sealed and insulated. This will keep you from heating and cooling the great outdoors. ■



Do you have electric heat? *Check that breaker!*

Often, members turn off their breaker to their heat meter through the summer months and forget to turn it back on heading into fall. If the breaker is off to the meter, the meter will not register, therefore the member will not be credited for the lower rate of electric heat.

If you already have an off-peak meter and your breaker is switched to the "ON" position, you do not need to do anything.

Don't have an electric heat meter?

One thing that can help members save during cold winter month is having a heat meter installed. An electric heat meter records your heat usage only. When electric demand and market prices are high, an off-peak device in the home automatically switches from an electric source to a backup source, such as propane or fuel oil. In exchange, participating members receive discounted off-peak rates, which are competitive with fuel oil and propane. Our off-peak program is designed to reduce electric demand during peak times and save money.

If you are heating with electric heat and do not have a heat meter, please contact the NPEC office at 800-882-2500 to learn more. ■

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