

ELECTRIC CONSTRUCTION BUILDING  
16 South Fourth Street  
Grand Forks  
Grand Forks County  
North Dakota

HABS ND-33  
*HABS ND-33*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## ELECTRIC CONSTRUCTION BUILDING

HABS ND-33

**Location:** 16 South Fourth Street, Grand Forks, North Dakota  
Latitude: 47.924312, Longitude: -97.031302. The coordinate was obtained on 24 January 2014 using Google Earth. The datum is WGS84. There is no restriction on its release to the public.

### Significance:

The building was built on Grand Forks' original town site. It was constructed during Grand Forks' peak period as a commercial center in the upper Midwest. The building was once part of a commercial historic district which is significant as for its association with the earliest growth of the community's public, commercial, social and transportation-related infrastructure. This growth is directly related to federal Homestead legislation, the construction of the transcontinental railroads, and the rapid settlement of the West that followed.<sup>1</sup>

The building was damaged by the flood of 1997 and was subsequently razed in order to build a new corporate center and its associated parking facility in downtown Grand Forks.

### Project Information:

Pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement for the Grand Forks Corporate Center, Leah Byzewski and Kent Anderson prepared the documentation for the City of Grand Forks in 1999. The building was demolished to allow construction of Grand Forks' new Corporate Center at DeMars Avenue and South Fourth Street following the flood of 1997.

In 2013, the documentation was submitted to HABS and in 2014 it was edited by HABS Collections Manager Anne Mason in order to comply with the *Secretary of Interior Standards for Architectural and Engineering Documentation* so that it could be accessioned into the HABS collection at the Library of Congress. Photographic documentation consisting of 8x10 prints without accompanying negatives, maps, and drawings were placed in the field notes for this survey.

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<sup>1</sup> National Register of Historic Places nomination for Downtown Grand Forks Historic District, U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service. Listed in the National Register on 28 December 2005.  
<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/05001475.pdf>

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## **Part I. HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Physical History:**

*Date of Erection:* 1910

*Architect:* Unknown

*Original and Subsequent Owners:*

1910, Leslie and Ada Stinson.

1938, First National Bank, L. E. O'Connor, Receiver.

1940, Henry Haugen ¼ interest, Walter Schlosser ¼ interest, Ann Haugen ½ interest.

1943, ¼ interest transferred to Helen B. Schlosser by Walter Schlosser.

1968, ¼ interest transferred to Phyllis Haugen by Helen B. Schlosser.

1986, ¼ interest transferred to Phyllis (Haugen) Loeder by Ann and Henry Haugen.

1996, ½ interest transferred to Phyllis (Haugen) Loeder by Henry Haugen Estate

1997, Woods, Woods, Riske, and Riske.

1998, City of Grand Forks

*Building Applications and Lessors:*

1910-1914, Agricultural Implements, Leslie Stinson, proprietor.

1914-c1924, Stone, Ordean and Wells, Wholesale Grocers.

1925-1930, no listing for 16 South Fourth Street in city directory; used as warehouse for electrical supplies.<sup>1</sup>

1930-1940, The Stinson Company, Inc., Distributors of Oakland Pontiac Automobiles, Automobile Accessories and Supplies, Coal, Coke and Wood Wholesale and Retail (Leslie Stinson, President; Edward Dahl, Secretary and Manager; Edward Stinson, Vice President and Treasurer).

1940-1997, Electric Construction Company (Henry Haugen, President; W.H. Schlosser, Vice President). Electrical supplies, repair and contracting, Frigidaire refrigerators, Crosley and RCA radios. Business subsequently transferred to Phyllis (Haugen) Loeder in 1980s.

### **B. Historical Context:**

16 South Fourth Street, commonly known as Electric Construction, was built on Grand Forks' original town site. It was constructed during Grand Forks' peak period as a

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Norene A. and Joe D. *Historical Research Report, Summer 1981*  
*Historical and Architectural Survey of Downtown Grand Forks, Vol. 2.*

commercial center in the upper Midwest, but the building contractor is unknown. From c1900 to c1918, downtown Grand Forks replaced its original wood frame buildings with professionally designed brick buildings that were more durable and reflected the region's economic vigor. The building's original purpose as an agricultural implement dealership is significant because agriculture was, and is, the primary industry of the Red River Valley. Following World War I, however, the demand for food products declined. Americans, who had reduced their food consumption in order to help the war effort, continued their dietary habits from the war years, resulting in agricultural surpluses that forced farm prices down.<sup>2</sup> Farmers began to suffer economically; they could no longer afford to expand their production acreage and purchase new equipment. Loans that had been incurred during the war years often went into default. In the towns, this economic downturn was felt throughout the business community. Many implement dealerships went out of business, triggering a trend of unemployment among other businesses in midwestern communities. In Grand Forks, one result was a virtual halt to new building construction. New and existing businesses that did expand often moved into vacated farm equipment buildings rather than construct new structures, as can be seen in the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for Grand Forks from 1906, 1912, 1916 and 1951.

During the Great Depression years of the 1930s, the local economy suffered further economic difficulties that affected the ownership history of 16 South Fourth Street. The financial crisis expanded to every sector of the economy; banks failed, including the First National Bank in Grand Forks, which was put under the receivership of L. E. O'Connor, an appointee of J. F. T. O'Connor, Comptroller of the Currency during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. These "Receivers" served to "conserve the assets of a national bank for the benefit of its depositors and creditors." The First National Bank in Grand Forks did not reopen after Roosevelt's "Bank Holiday" of 6 March 1933 due to poor management. Eventually, it did reopen with a \$1 million loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Stinson Period:*

Leslie Stinson (1861-1944) purchased Lot 7 of Block 27 (16 South Fourth St.) on Grand Forks' Original Townsite on 15 December 1902. On 22 December 1902, he signed a mortgage with the Aultman & Taylor Machinery Company for \$3,000.00. This mortgage may have been obtained to improve a wood frame building on the lot, or to obtain farm implements for sale. The 1901 and 1906 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps indicate a wood frame building labeled "farm machinery and wagons" on the site.

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<sup>2</sup> Tweton, D. Jerome and Jelliff, Theodore. *North Dakota the Heritage of a People*, Fargo, ND, Knight Printing Company, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Rylance, Dan. "North Dakota Characters, J. F. T. O'Connor" *The Grand Forks Herald*. Grand Forks, ND, Date unknown.

On 10 January 1910, Stinson signed a "Party Wall" agreement with Joseph Mahowald, owner of the northerly half of Lot 9, Block 27, Original Townsite of Grand Forks.<sup>4</sup> This agreement indicates Stinson's intention to construct a brick building on Lot 7, Block 27, and assigned Mahowald the right to use the southerly wall of said building in any future building construction that he might undertake in the future. Also in 1910, Stinson and his wife, Ada, signed a mortgage for \$8,000.00 with the Northwestern Trust Company, presumably to finance the cost of the new building.

The Stinsons retained the property until 18 July 1938, falling victim to the Great Depression, when the First National Bank, under the receivership of L. E. O'Connor, foreclosed on a \$14,000.00 mortgage signed by the Stinsons on 1 February 1933. The building was subsequently sold for \$13,139.30 at public auction to L. E. O'Connor, receiver for the First National Bank, at the Grand Forks County Courthouse on 14 December 1938. Under the Stinsons' ownership, the building's use encompassed farm equipment, groceries, fossil fuels and automobiles.

*Electric Construction:*

On 15 May 1940, The Electric Construction Company, a corporation established in 1919, purchased 16 South Fourth St. from L. E. O'Connor, Receiver for the First National Bank, at a cost of \$15,000.00. The property was divided among the officers of the corporation on 31 March 1943: one quarter to Henry Haugen, President; one quarter to Walter Schlosser, Vice President; and half to Ann R. Haugen, Secretary. Eventually, ownership passed to Phyllis J. Loeder, the Haugens' daughter, who carried on the business.

Electric Construction's business interests ranged across electrical appliance sales and repair, radio broadcasting, and potato sales.<sup>5</sup> The first radio station in North Dakota was created by the Electric Construction Company in the early 1920s. In 1923 the transmitter was sold to the University of North Dakota to create KILO.<sup>6</sup>

As retailers moved to the malls constructed on the city's south end, downtown Grand Forks gradually declined as a retail center. Electric Construction remained as a repair shop for antique electrical appliances. Henry Haugen was the subject of several

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<sup>4</sup> The Grand Forks Abstract Company. *Abstract of Record Title*, Grand Forks, ND, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Meers, Melinda. "Forever is 57 Years," *The Grand Forks Herald*, Grand Forks, ND, November 7, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson., Elwyn B. *History of North Dakota*, Lincoln, NE, The University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

newspaper articles that described his ability to repair a wide variety of electrical items and locate rare components.

#### *The Flood of 1997*

The flood of 1997 spurred the demise of Electric Construction. The building suffered major damage as floodwaters filled the basement and covered approximately four feet on the main floor. Part of the City's plan to rebuild the downtown area following the great flood included construction of a "corporate center" in the heart of the city's original business district. In order for this venture to succeed, adequate parking was needed to support the facility. Block 27 was selected as the site for a new parking ramp to connect to and serve the adjacent corporate center. The buildings on Block 27 were purchased and razed to accommodate this parking facility.

## **Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

#### *Architectural Character:*

This 1910 building is what is sometimes called Chicago Mercantile Style. The structure had two stories with a full basement under the entire building. The roof was flat with a moderate amount of slope to the rear.

#### *Condition of Fabric:*

The fabric of the building was in generally good condition. As a result of the 1997 flood, the power was been disconnected and the basement became dank and moldy. The lower portion of the first floor was flood damaged. Ductwork and partitions that once existed in the basement were removed as a result of post-flood cleaning and sanitizing efforts. Mechanical and electrical systems were all replaced following the flood.

### **B. Description of Exteriors**

#### *Street Front / North Fourth Street:*

This elevation contained the primary architectural character of the building. The street level/first floor consisted of two store fronts containing Electric Construction Co. and a smaller unoccupied store front on the right hand (northwest) side of this elevation. At the far right of this elevation is a street level door to stairs to the second floor. All store fronts are framed in wood as well as wood doors into each store front and stairs. Above

the store front framing was a continuous band of wood-framed transom glass to allow natural light into the first floor area.

All of the store front framing was surrounded by stacked face brick that was alternately recessed and projected at each side jamb. Brick headers at the head of the store fronts continued this modulating theme. Most of the surface area of the building front was a dark brown standard brick. There was no belt course to differentiate the first floor from the second floor.

Five double hung wood windows, symmetrical on the elevation, provided light and ventilation to the second floor. The window jambs were plain brick with a normal reveal depth to the windows. A flush cut stone lintel, approximately 12 inches high, trimmed out the window head. Projected cut stone was used for the window sills. Above the windows a continuous projecting band of cut stone separated the upper part of the wall from the parapet.

The parapet was finished with a cut stone coping. The coping and parapet were raised in the center of the elevation to provide a location for what was once the building identification and name.

A single projecting sign, constructed of metal, proclaimed "Electric Construction Co." This was a vintage sign that emphasized with lightning bolts the nature of the business.

*Right (Northwest) Alley Side:*

When facing the front of the building, this was to the right side of the building. It was also the northwest elevation and fronted onto a private drive shared with the former Red River National Bank. The private drive frontage was unremarkable, with the wall consisting of painted common brick. The first floor portion of the wall contained no openings.

The second floor had a number of single pane and mullioned double hung windows serving the apartments on the second floor of the building. These windows were without trim at their heads and jambs. Sills were plain rowlock brick.

The top of the wall had plain brick rowlock copings, on brick parapet walls, stepped to the rear following the roof slope.

*Rear Alley Side:*

The elevation of this portion of the building is unremarkable. Once again, painted common brick predominates. Openings on the first floor level were used for service deliveries. Patches show evidence of previous openings.

wood floor framing permitted large floor loads when the building was an implement and automobile dealership.

A ramp at the rear of the building led to the basement. In earlier days a ramp, still in evidence, lead to the second floor.

A single stair at the north corner of the building lead to the second floor apartments.

#### *Second Floor:*

The size of the second floor is the same as that of the first floor and basement. Windows on all four sides permitted natural light and ventilation into the apartments on this level. When the building was originally constructed, however, the second floor was used for storage and display of implements and automobiles.

At all times in the life of the building, access to the second floor was by one stair only. Egress in case of emergency at the rear of the building was by an exterior fire escape.

#### **D. Site:**

##### *General Setting and Orientation:*

The Electric Construction Building was located at 16 South Fourth Street, County of Grand Forks, Grand Forks, North Dakota. The building fronted on South Fourth Street, a major street in downtown Grand Forks. The building had a zero setback from property lines on all sides.

##### *Historic Landscape Design:*

There is no evidence that there was any landscaping on the site at any time.

### **Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

**A. Original Architectural Drawings:** none found

**B. Early Views:**

Figure 1: Electric Construction, c. 1907

Figure 2: Electric Construction, c. 1914, with members of Elks Club

Figure 3: Henry Haugen, Electric Construction owner, c. 1963

Figure 4: Clifford Block, c. 1907, showing streetscape and Electric Construction to the rear.

Figure 5: Bird's eye view of downtown Grand Forks, c. 1920

Figure 6: Bird's eye view of downtown Grand Forks, date unknown.

**C. Interviews:** Phyllis Loeder, 9 April 1999

**D. Bibliography:**

**Primary Sources**

Abstract of Record Title, The Grand Forks Abstract Company, 1995

Meers, Melinda. "Forever is 57 Years," *The Grand Forks Herald*, November 7, 1976.

Pettibone City Directories, Grand Forks, ND, 1909-1925

Polk City Directories, Grand Forks, ND, 1925-1997

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1906, 1912, 1916, 1951

**Secondary Sources,**

Tweton, D. Jerome and Theodore Jelliff. *North Dakota, the Heritage of a People*, Fargo, ND, Knight Printing Company, 1976.

Roberts, Noreve A. and Joe D. *Historical Research Report, Summer 1981 Historical and Architectural Survey of Downtown Grand Forks, Vol. 2.*

Robinson, Elwyn B. *History of North Dakota*, Lincoln, NE, The University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Rylance, Dan, "North Dakota Characters, J. F. T. O'Connor," *The Grand Forks Herald*, date unknown.

**Likely sources not yet investigated:**

North West Architectural Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

**E. Photographic Appendix**

An extensive photographic inventory of the Electric Construction building was taken by City of Grand Forks staff in 35 mm format. These photographs were taken in February 1998, and both photos and negatives are on file with the University of North Dakota's Special Collections Department at the Chester Fritz Library.