The following two pages were written to provide a little background information leading up to the beginning of this organization.

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The professional organization of elementary school principals in North Dakota has come into being in recent years and is therefore considered a relatively young organization. The position of the elementary school principalship in North Dakota (as we know it today) is likewise a recent origin, but precedes the “organization” by a few years. The elementary school principal of today plays a far different role than did the so-called elementary principal of 30 or 40 years ago.

The North Dakota Elementary School Principals’ organization came into formal existence in the fall of 1954. At the N.D.E.A. Convention, in Fargo that fall, a meeting of school principals as held at the Benjamin Franklin Junior High School. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of the North Dakota Department of Elementary School Principals. Vincent Dodge, then principal of Roosevelt School in Fargo, was elected the first president. At about the same time that the elementary school principals of North Dakota emerged as an organized professional group, the Department of Elementary School Principals of NEA also reached a milestone in it’s history. In March 1955 the first separate national convention of this group was held in Chicago. A number of North Dakota elementary school principals attended this convention.
Why hadn’t such a professional organization of principals in the state appeared on the scene much earlier? A brief glance at the State’s history will provide the answer.

1. First of all, North Dakota is a relatively young state. As late as the second decade of this century there was still some land available for homesteading, and “pioneering days” are still a memory for many Dakotans.

2. Secondly, North Dakota is a primarily an agricultural state and has never known any heavily populated industrial areas. Because of this the population figures have remained relatively low as well as stable. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in population from the farm to the city and this has had an effect on the school organization plans in the state.

During the first forty or fifty years of our State’s history the population was still largely rural. The coming of the railroads did bring into existence numerous towns and villages. These small towns and villages flourished for a few years but did not experience any further growth. In later years with the development of modern highway systems these same towns and villages began to decline and many of them have all but vanished from the scene. However, some of the more strategically located towns became thriving cities.
Going back to the earlier year of our State’s history, it is obvious that there were few, if any, of the larger school systems. Most of the school systems had both elementary and secondary grades housed in one building with just one administrator in charge. The “principal” - whether in charge of elementary or secondary levels-would be a full time classroom teacher as well.

As some of the cities in the State began to flourish and experience substantial population growth, the school systems likewise expanded. Instead of just one building for the entire school system, the secondary and elementary levels began to separate into their own buildings. The elementary schools not only experienced larger buildings, but more and more buildings were constructed within a system as the population continued to grow. At this stage of growth, these elementary school buildings began to require separate-and often full time administrators. Many cities in North Dakota today have 3, 5, 8, 10, or more elementary school buildings. In the rural areas, a more recent development is to statewide district reorganization plan. This too has resulted in larger schools, which in turn requires more full time administrators. The period of greatest growth in elementary came about after World War II. By the 1950’s the number of elementary school principals in North Dakota had reached a sizable number, and it was obvious that the time had arrived for this group to form a separate professional organization. This, therefore, became a reality in the fall of 1954 when formal action resulted in the creation of this professional organization.
Charter Members

In writing up the history of any organization there is always the problem of getting at the historical data which may be necessary or desirable. After a period of fifteen years there may be information which is difficult to obtain because certain records have become mislaid or lost.

The list of charter members of this organization should include those who were members (or became members) within some given period following the initial organization. The following is a list of “charter members” from the previous historical review.

Bismarck
Reverend Father Spain

Garrison
Carl Carlson

Grand Forks
Walter Loomer
David Shearer

Bottineau
Clifford Herman

Devils Lake
Delma Bratvold

Minot
Henry McLaughlin
Gertrude Linnertz
Marlowe Johnson
Lowell Latimer
Charles Simonson
John Youngbeck

Dickinson
Donald Mueller
R.E. Gibbon

Elgin
David Raymond

Rugby
James Kappel

Valley City
Selma Land
Chester Campbell

Fargo
Earl Torgerson
Glenn Melvey
Vincent Dodge

Zeeland
Elmer Bauer

Williston
Marion Johnson
Robert Kelly
Charles Solheim

It is noted that one of the offices elected at the very first organization meeting in 1954 was not included in the above list. It seems apparent, therefore, that there are many more who would be eligible to be on this “charter member” list. However, it would be difficult at this time to determine who these would be. If a more complete list is possible, and if the organization deems it necessary, perhaps some survey can be made to make this list more complete.