

# The Mandan Historical Society Legacy Program Alfred Burton Welch

1874-1945

Alfred Burton Welch was born on Sept. 26, 1874, in Afton, Iowa. Typically referred to as A.B. Welch, the majority of his childhood years were spent in South



Gilbert photo of John Grass.



John Charging Bear Grass

Dakota where he had daily contact with Native Americans. While he had an extensive military career, he was also well known for his extensive artifact collection and his continued lifelong close association with Native Americans.

After early childhood, Welch resurfaces in history when he joins the Washington State National

Guard/Volunteer Infantry on May 6, 1898, where he served in Company D, First Infantry, including a tour of duty in the Philippine Insurrection. He was released from service on Nov. 1, 1899. He was listed as a merchant prior to his enlistment.

After service in the Spanish American War and the Philippine-American War, Welch moved to Mandan for unknown reasons about 1905. In 1906, he was instrumental in organization of Company F-North Dakota National Guard to replace the local militia.

A.B. Welch was credited as being the first white man adopted into the Yanktonai Sioux Nation by its great chief John Grass and was given the name "Mato Watakpé," or Charging Bear. Welch, in addition to English, spoke the Sioux dialect.

On June 12, 1913, A.B. Welch was adopted by Chief John Grass as his son. The event was reported extensively by the Minneapolis Sunday Journal, complete with photos and artwork. The Journal said, "(Welch) studied their lives and haunts, became familiar with their bows and arrows... (learned) their history... with the result that a purpose was born within him to do whatever it might be given to him to do, to show his faith and his friendship for these once mighty children of nature, now shorn of their ancient rights."

Chief Grass had learned that Welch fought with distinction in the Philippine-American War. Over time, the two men became close friends. Grass lost a son in 1910, and three years later, he decided to adopt Welch in memory of his late son. It was a great honor; the chief said it was the first time in history that any white man had been adopted into the Sioux nation using the full tribal ceremony.

The ceremony took

place near Fort Yates. He was twice "taken prisoner" by ceremonial war parties and then released when Charging Bear would say, "This man is my friend." The warriors voted on whether Welch was worthy of this honor. One negative vote would have stopped the adoption, but Welch was accepted and was given his adoptive father's name, Mato Watakpé. With 500 in attendance, the ceremonies included speeches, con- verging of elders, drum- ming, dancing and singing.

North Dakota historian LaDonna Brave Bull Allard writes, "Adoption is one of our sacred seven rites of the Lakota/Dakotas Nation. We adopt all kinds of people young and old. If you lost a sister, you adopted another who reminds of that sister or brother, grandmother etc... We believe that you should never be alone in this world... it is our way," she said.

Charging Bear presented to Welch a specially made pipe, and Welch gave Charging Bear a gold watch. Welch also gave the tribe a barbecue, including two steers, 100 pounds of coffee, a wagonload of hard tack and 100 pounds of tobacco.

The Smithsonian Institute acknowledged Welch as being one of the "best posted men in the United States on the ancient customs, sports and ceremonies of the Sioux."

Welch was a commissioned captain and assigned to Company A, First Infantry, North Dakota National Guard, at Bismarck, on June 9, 1913; called into federal service on June 19, 1916, for

Mexican border duty and served there until discharged from federal service at Fort Snelling, Minnesota on Feb. 14, 1917, and resumed National Guard status. He was assigned for a short period of time, and assisted with guarding the Northern Pacific Railway's Missouri Bridge under the command of Major Dan Wright.

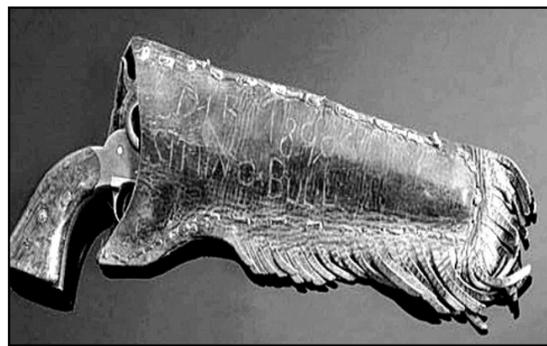
However, his reserve status was short-lived, as he was recalled into federal service on March 26, 1917; placed on supernumerary list, April 13, 1917; and recalled into active duty, April 15, 1917 in response to USA's declaration of war against Germany in World War I. He gained an assignment as a line captain in June 1917 when a second regiment from North Dakota was formed. He was assigned to Company I, Second Infantry, North Dakota National Guard (116th Ammunition Train) to Oct. 28, 1918; Third Ammunition Train, to discharge; and was overseas from Dec. 13, 1917, to Aug. 26, 1919. He was advanced to the rank of major.

A large number of Native American soldiers volunteered for his command. He was loud in his praise and stated, "I found them always loyal to their officers, always volunteered for the most dangerous of missions to the point of recklessness, and a splendid new element for the army now organized."

Joe Young Hawk, an Arikara was once captured by five Germans but subsequently escaped, killing of the enemy. Young Hawk was shot through



Welch



Allen Revolver with Sitting Bull's name etched into holder.



both legs, but was still able to capture his other two captors and take them back to U.S. lines. Major Welch said this of Young Hawk: "I am terribly proud of him. He ought to have a medal, for really it took all kinds of nerve." Young Hawk was eventually awarded his medal. His division was also involved in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

He was discharged at Camp Dodge, Iowa, on Oct. 7, 1919, as a captain. Before his military career was complete, he served in the Spanish American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the Mexican-American War and World War I.

Welch served as the commander of the American Legion Post in Mandan in 1921-1922. Among his many contributions to Mandan, he served as its postmaster in at least from 1931 through 1933. His signature is found on cachets celebrating the opening of the Mandan Airport on May 2, 1933.

He died in a Bismarck hospital after a long illness on June 30, 1945, and is buried in Union Cemetery, Mandan. The funeral, held

at the Masonic Temple in Mandan, was attended by representatives of the American Legion, the color guard from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and an honor squad from the North Dakota National Guard. The American flag from his casket was presented to his brother Eldred Welch for his brother's military service, on behalf of a grateful nation.

In November 2005, one of A. B. Welch's collected artifacts fetched \$118,000 at a public auction. A well-documented Whitney revolver once owned by Sitting Bull had been presented to A.B. Welch in 1920 by a chief of the Hunkpapa Lakota and a cousin of Sitting Bull, No Two Horns. No Two Horns fought with Sitting Bull at the Little Big Horn. The revolver's handle and its fringed leather scabbard are both inscribed with the scratched notation "Sitting Bull Die 1890."

(This biography is based in part on the July 12, 2004 Dakota Datebook item compiled by the State Historical Society of North Dakota for Prairie Public Radio.)

The Legacy Program, a joint project of the Mandan Historical Society, the ND Newspaper Association and the State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation hopes to post 52 biographies this calendar year. While information on approximately 20 notable citizens has been compiled to date, any biography on current or for-

mer residents of the county are encouraged to be submitted. The Mandan Historical Society members have offered assistance to anyone who wish to participate. Keitu Engineers & Consultants of Mandan will scan photographs for these biographies free of charge during 2008. Contact their Mandan office at 667-1800 to schedule

this service. The Society would also welcome access to additional photographs or information on any of the individuals posted or under development. More information on the Legacy Program can be found at the Historical Society's website at [www.mandanhistory.org](http://www.mandanhistory.org) or via email at [legacy@mandanhistory.org](mailto:legacy@mandanhistory.org).

## Cold weather brings out art and artists to Kirkwood Mall the first weekend in February

It's winter, it's cold, and there is no better day than Saturday, Feb. 2, and no better place than Kirkwood Mall to spend some time, staying warm and enjoying a wide variety of wonderful, free entertainment.

There will be performances by Dakota West Arts Council member artists and arts organizations from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Groups will be on stage in the central courtyard for 20 minutes each. Booths will be located throughout

the mall with art demonstrations and membership information. For more information, call 222-6640.

### Schedule

10 a.m. - Suzuki School of Music  
10:30 a.m. - Northern Plains Dance

11 a.m. - Central Dakota Children's Choir  
11:30 a.m. - Blind Mice  
12 p.m. - Gregg Marsland, Scottish Highland Bagpiper  
12:30 p.m. - Dragon Jane Performance Art Company

1 p.m. - Kittyko-Children's Music  
1:30 p.m. - Let's Dance Studios  
2 p.m. - Capitol City Cloggers  
2:30 p.m. - Family Folk  
3 p.m. - A Leap of Faith Dance  
3:30 p.m. - Old Hat Music  
4 p.m. - U of Mary Woodwind Trio



Submitted photo

Mandan 10U team took second place in a tournament in Alexandria, Minn., last weekend. Team members are: (front, l-r) Madison, Addy Mattern, Shaylynn Mack, Madysen Zachmeier, Samantha Halstengard, Ashlyn Quintas, Erin Bussman, Rebecca Helbling, (back, l-r) Head Coach Brittini Zander, McKenna Quintas, Mariah Marsh, Maiah McCowan, Sara Zachmeier, Brenna Hammer, Samantha Bussman, Paige Lillis, Dei'Yonna Beck and Assistant Coach DeWitt Mack.



Submitted photo

The Dust-Tex Heat Mandan's fourth Grade Traveling Team won first place in the Gold Division of the 11th annual Dickinson Booster Basketball Tournament held on Jan. 19 and 20. (back, l-r) Coach Tracy Porter, Jake Carlson, Tyler Tibke, Tim Waldref, Taylor Jensen, Nick Miller, Coach Duane Friesz, (front, l-r) Erik Porter, Tate Russell and Jeremy Friesz.

## Fundraiser breakfast scheduled

The Mandan High Girls Basketball Summer Traveling Program is hosting a Pancake and Sausage Breakfast from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 10 at the First Lutheran Church, located on 408 Ninth St. NW. The price of admission is \$5 per person.

All proceeds will go towards the girls traveling program.

## The Strip

Coming soon to the Mandan News

**Call for Bids**  
The Board of the Nesson Public School District #2 is accepting written bids for the school gymnasium, which includes the kitchen, bathrooms, and locker room areas, and accompanying property in the City of Epping, Williams County, North Dakota. For further information on property description, bid process and terms please contact Daniel Anderson, Superintendent at 701-568-3301 or stop in at Ray Public School. Send bids by mail: Epping School Bid, Nesson School District #2, P.O. Box 564, Ray, ND 58849. Or deliver bids personally to Ray Public School by January 22, 2008 at 7:00 pm. The school board reserves the right to reject any and/or all bids. For photos and additional information see the following website: <http://www.ray-dev.k12.nd.us/>

**Leasing Minerals in Western North Dakota**  
We're looking for mineral right owners who are NOT LEASED YET in:  
**Mountrail, Ward, McKenzie, Dunn, McLean, & Burke** and other counties of Western North Dakota.  
**For information call: JB Mineral Services**  
Beth @ 406-690-1961  
Tim @ 406-598-5142  
**Or send legal info to:**  
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Billings, MT 59105

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