

# Mary O. Movius, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

The Movius family, father, mother and nine children emigrated from Germany to America in the spring of 1867. The youngest child was three year old Mary Otilie Movius, who had been born on August 21, 1863. They originally settled in Minnesota and then moved to what is now South Dakota. In 1884, she became the postmistress of Big Stone City, a community in the northeast corner of the future state, and continued in that position for ten years.

Two of her brothers, Emil and John, were early settlers in Lidgerwood, ND arriving in 1887. Lidgerwood, named for George I. Lidgerwood, a railroad engineer, is in the southeastern corner of the state, about one hundred miles north of Big Stone City. In 1894, Mary joined them in Lidgerwood. One of their several business ventures was a bank, the Movius State Bank, which was founded in 1896. By 1900 the new community had a population of almost 600.

On April 15, 1901, the bank became The First National Bank of

Lidgerwood (Charter #5772). The local newspaper noted, "The Movius brothers, and Miss Movius are to be heartily congratulated on this event, not only for what it will do for themselves but what it will do for the town." Brother Emil was the president, brother John the cashier, and Mary the assistant cashier. In 1910/11 she became the cashier and, with Emil's unexpected death on July 6, 1916, after a stroke, she was elected the president on July 11.

The bank had originally been in a wooden building that burned in 1902. Then they constructed a brick building, but that was damaged in a 1912 fire. A

## NEW FIRST NATIONAL BANK

### Opened for Business July 1st.

**STOCKHOLDERS.**

A. F. Bonzer, Jr.,  
C. A. Bonzer,  
B. Fischer,  
Peter Fischer,  
John Franta,  
James Goolsbey,  
J. B. Heiber,  
Hubert Honl,  
Frank Jahoda,  
H. F. Jahoda,  
Anton Kocourek,  
Geo. W. Mallinger,  
R. Norton,  
Ole Oss,  
Joseph Pasak,  
O. F. Pierson,  
G. H. Prokop,  
S. O. Quammen,  
Wm. Radke,  
Otto F. Strege,  
Geo. Wirtenberger.



**OFFICERS.**  
S. O. Quammen, President.  
James Goolsbey, Vice President.  
C. A. Bonzer, Vice President and Cashier.

**DIRECTORS.**  
Otto F. Strege, S. O. Quammen,  
H. F. Jahoda, C. A. Bonzer,  
James Goolsbey.

**NOTE.**  
When the new bank takes over the old bank, Mr. A. W. Johnson will assume the Cashiership and become a stockholder and director and active manager of this institution.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that the officers, directors and stockholders announce that the New First National Bank in Lidgerwood opened for business Wednesday morning, July 1st.

You are cordially invited to come in and see us that we may become better acquainted.

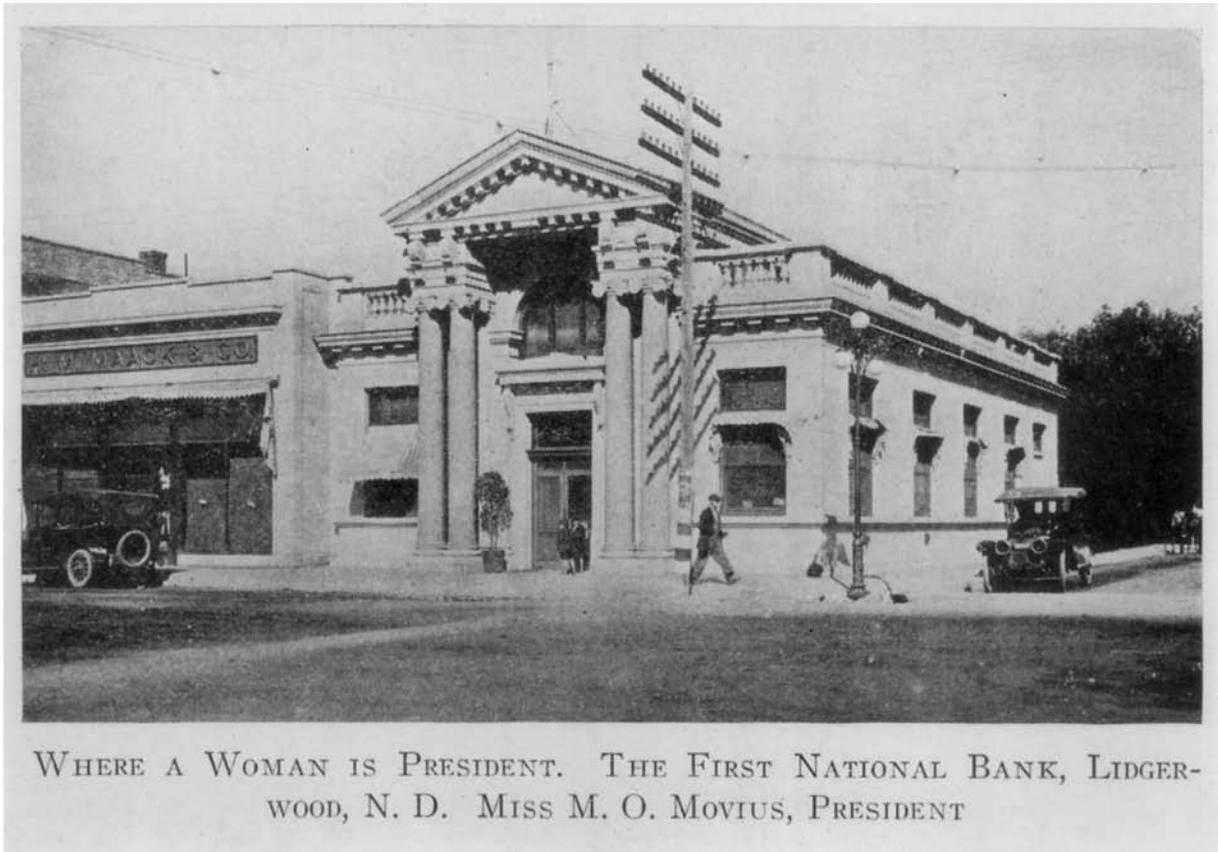
**"HOW CAN WE SERVE YOU"**

The new bank is prepared to give you a complete banking service and invites you to make use of its various facilities.

Advertisement for new bank (charter #12776) which was housed in the same building as the former bank from *The Lidgerwood Monitor*, July 2, 1925. Today this building is the home of the Lidgerwood City Library.

beautiful new building, said to have cost \$50,000, with the banking rooms "arranged with all the modern conveniences found in city banks" was then built and opened in 1913.

As bank president she was active in the Association of Bank Women, a national professional organization, after its founding in 1921. For example, in 1923 she gave a talk at their first mid-western meeting in Kansas City, MO on banking matters. The bank's two women assistant cashiers, Margaret E. Voyek



Picture of the bank and caption from Anne Seward, *The Women's Department*, 1924, a book about women and banking careers.

and Ella C. Parizek, were also early members of this organization.

But the early 1920s were not good times for an agricultural state like North Dakota. Land values and commodity prices both dropped. And the state was “over-banked” with more banks in proportion to its population than any other state in the union. These factors took their toll, one of which was the closing of The First National Bank of Lidgerwood on June 16, 1924.

The Comptroller of the Currency listed the failure as category C: “Local financial depression from unforeseen agricultural or industrial disaster.” Early hopes that it would reopen were not to be. A new bank, The First National Bank in Lidgerwood, housed in their beautiful building, did open a year later.

Miss Movius then made her living as a bookkeeper. She died on August 25, 1949, just after her 86th birthday, from complications in a fall. It was noted that until the day before she fell she had been at work. Her obituary called her Lidgerwood's “Grand Old Lady,” having been an active and important member of the community for 55 years. Among her community roles was service on the city council, a founder of the public library, treasurer of the local women's club, and an active member in the Methodist Church. It also noted that she was “always ready and willing to lend a hand to the good cause or the downtrodden” and “for many years she cheerfully ignored her age, and now she is gone.”

The First National Bank in Lidgerwood built and moved to a new building in 1980 and today continues as a branch of the Bank of the West banking conglomerate. Given her interest in the public library, it is fitting that the former bank building became the home of the Lidgerwood City Library in 1982. It continues to serve that role in the community today.

#### Sources and acknowledgements

The useful history of the community is *Lidgerwood, Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow*, Lidgerwood Centennial Committee, 1985, especially pages 16-19



(Movius family), 53-55 (Library), and 155-156 (Banks). The death and funeral of Emil A. Movius are in *The Lidgerwood Monitor* for July 6 and 13, 1916, and the election of Mary O. Movius as president of the bank is in the latter issue. The closing of the bank is recorded in the same newspaper for June 19, 1924, with some follow-up articles on July 31, August 7 and 21, 1924. The opening of the new bank is in the paper for July 2, 1925. Miss Movius was the very first woman national bank president to become a member of the Association of Bank Women. As such, she was mentioned in various publications. Key Cammack, "Madam Bank President," *The Woman Citizen*, October 4, 1924, p. 12, 28 has a long detailed paragraph about her, and *The Bankers Magazine*, June 1923, p. 1106 discusses the groups' first mid-western meeting at which she spoke. Anne Seward, *The Women's Department*, The Bankers Publishing Company, 1924, and Genieve N. Gildersleeve, *Women in Banking; A History of the National Association of Bank Women*, Public Affairs Press, 1959, both mention her career. Miss Movius' 85th birthday was featured in an article in the Lidgerwood paper for August 26, 1948, and her death and funeral in the issues for August 25, 1949, and September 1, 1949. I am grateful for the assistance of John D. Movius, her grandnephew; the late Forrest Daniel; and the Lidgerwood Community Museum for help with this article. ❖

Series 1902 note with stamped signature of M. O. Movius as president and signed signature of M. [Margaret] E. Voyek as assistant cashier. The other woman assistant cashier in the bank, E. [Ella] C. Parizek, is also known to have signed national bank notes with Miss Movius. (Courtesy Heritage Currency Auctions)

## Update to article on Louisa B. Stephens

Fred:

Mrs. Stephens, apparently the second woman president of a National Bank, became president of the First National Bank of Marion, Iowa in 1883 following the death of her husband, who had been president. My article on her appeared in *Paper Money*, May/June 2008, p. 235.

The bank is now a part of Wells Fargo, and Marianne Babal of the Wells Fargo Historical Services has recently found her resignation letter of March 23, 1885 (shown). She also found that Mrs. Stephens had been elected a director of the bank on November 19, 1877. The Photo is courtesy of Wells Fargo Archives, Wells Fargo Bank N. A.

-- Karl Sanford Kabelac

