

# SIMS

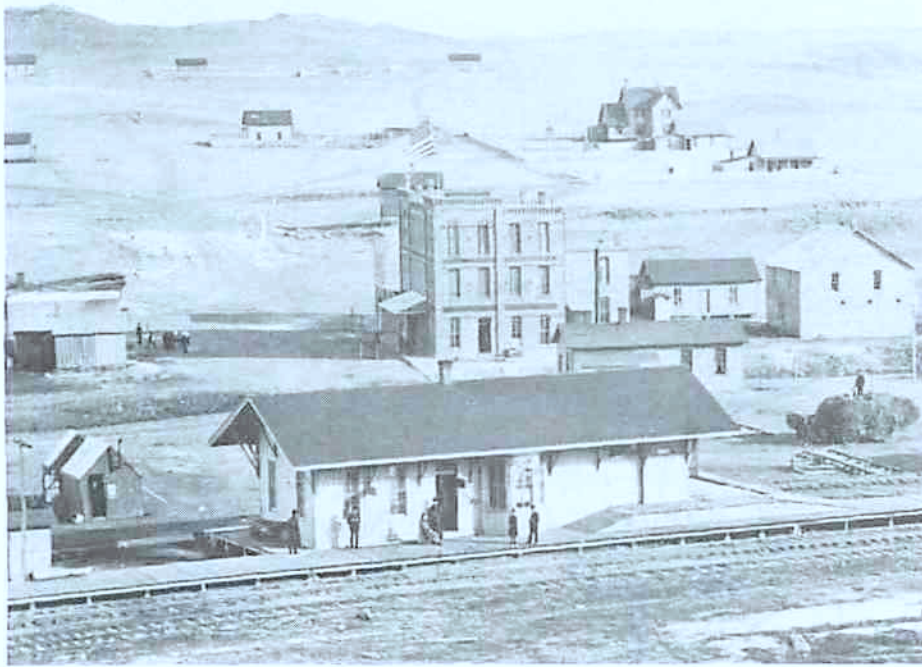
by Sig Peterson

According to "The Record," a Fargo publication, Dennis Hannafin and John S. Warn (likely NPRR surveyors) opened a coal mine about 35 miles west of Mandan in the fall of 1873. They had several brushes with the Indians, so General Custer issued them government rifles. It was then listed as Fort Hannafin. They abandoned the mine later that winter.

The Northern Pacific Railroad tracks reached Fort Hannafin in September 1879. The abundance of spring water and outcroppings of coal made it a promising site for a town. A side-track was made and boxcars were set off for shelter and temporary business places. An 1880 map shows it named "Baby Mine." In 1882 the NP station was named "Bly's Mine." Col. E.H. Bly had purchased all of section 11-138-86 from the railroad company. He opened a coal mine and sold coal to the railroad company for \$2.25 a ton. Charles W. Thompson had opened a mine in 1879 and managed it for the railroad company. At this time locomotives were fired with wood because they could not accommodate coal; however, the conversion to coal was soon to take place.

A list of railroad stations from Mandan west, as of July 15, 1882, shows the following: Mandan, Marmot, Sweetbriar, Sedalia, Blue Grass, Cold Spring, Bly's Mine, Curlew, Kurtz, Eagles Nest, Knife River, Taylor, etc. Cold Spring was a side track 1 1/4 miles north of Bly's Mine; there the locomotives took water before the pumping facilities at Bly's Mine were made.

1883 was a booming year for this area. The town was surveyed and named Sims in honor of George V. Sims, chief clerk in the New York railroad office. Streets were named Bly, Clough, Taylor, Haupt, etc., indicating it was predominately English. Other local names were McKee, Oaks, Sanborn, Dows, Luke, Hansel, etc.



Sims - 1885 - Dakota Territory

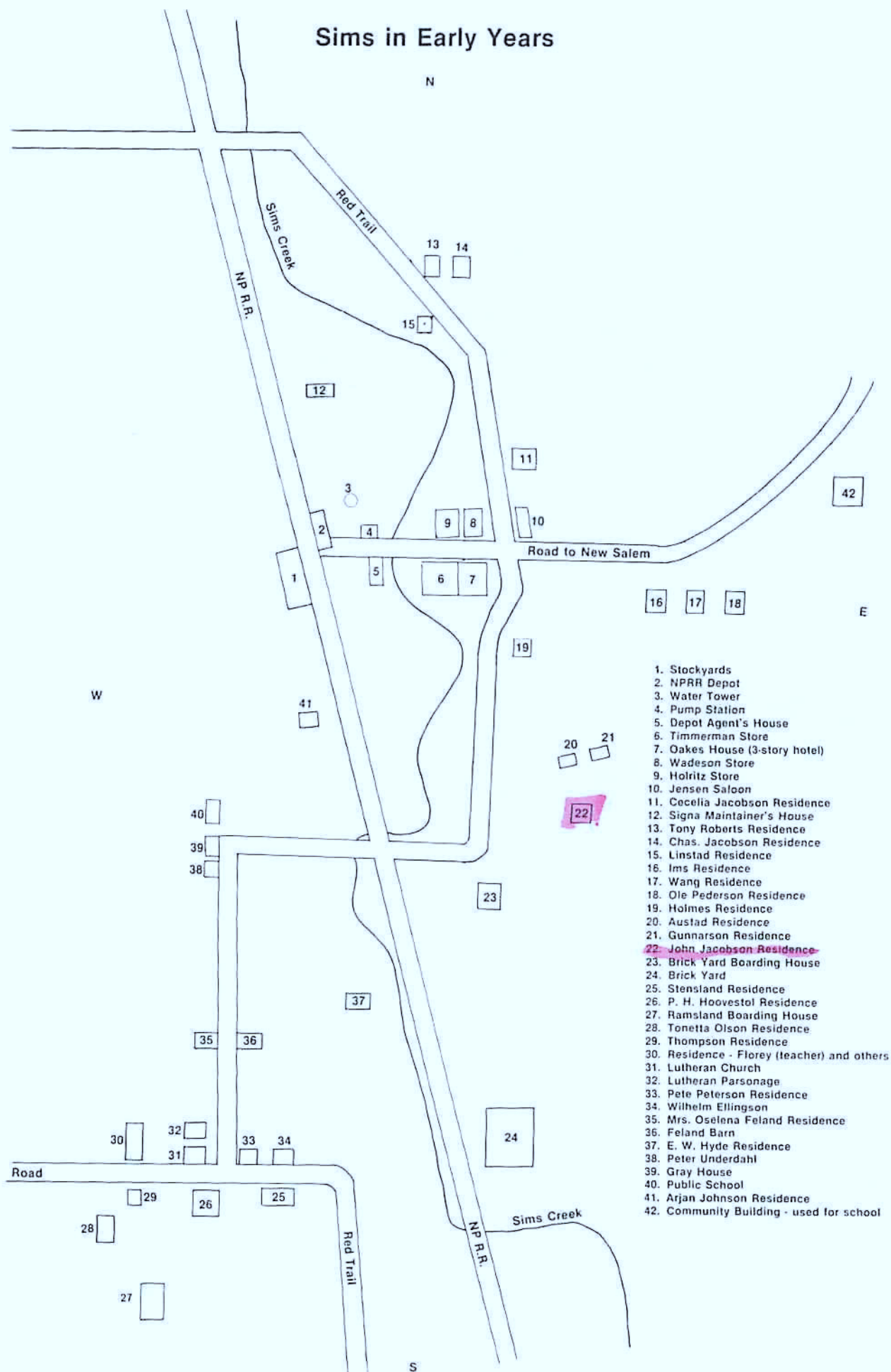


Sims, ND - about 1900



Sims, ND - about 1900

# Sims in Early Years



1. Stockyards
2. N.P.R.R. Depot
3. Water Tower
4. Pump Station
5. Depot Agent's House
6. Timmerman Store
7. Oakes House (3-story hotel)
8. Wadson Store
9. Holritz Store
10. Jensen Saloon
11. Cecelia Jacobson Residence
12. Signa Maintainer's House
13. Tony Roberts Residence
14. Chas. Jacobson Residence
15. Linstad Residence
16. Ims Residence
17. Wang Residence
18. Ole Pederson Residence
19. Holmes Residence
20. Austad Residence
21. Gunnarson Residence
22. John Jacobson Residence
23. Brick Yard Boarding House
24. Brick Yard
25. Stensland Residence
26. P. H. Hoovestol Residence
27. Ramsland Boarding House
28. Tonetta Olson Residence
29. Thompson Residence
30. Residence - Florey (teacher) and others
31. Lutheran Church
32. Lutheran Parsonage
33. Pete Peterson Residence
34. Wilhelm Ellingson
35. Mrs. Oselena Feland Residence
36. Feland Barn
37. E. W. Hyde Residence
38. Peter Underdahl
39. Gray House
40. Public School
41. Arjan Johnson Residence
42. Community Building - used for school



Also in 1883 Charles Thompson started a store and the Carbon Pressed Brick and Lime Company was organized with Charles Thompson as manager. This brick factory had investments of \$30,000, and bricks from this company were shipped to Bismarck, Mandan and used locally. The Oakes House, a three story hotel was also built in 83 at a cost of about \$15,000. In the hotel were the offices of the N.P. company coal mine and Carbon Pressed Brick and Lime Company. A tornado later in 1883 took the roof off the Oakes house and wrecked the N.P. water tower; the home of Arjan Johnson was also wrecked.

The first N.P. depot agent was George H. Luke; in 1880 the postmaster was Robert McKee; the nearest postoffice to the east was Mandan.

The population of Sims increased rapidly; there was work in the many underground coal mines and in the brick factory. Among the first Scandinavians to arrive was the Jonas Ims family who came from Iowa in a covered wagon drawn by oxen. They came on July 4, 1881. Also in 1881 the Ben Ramsland and Arjan Johnson families arrived.

The first church congregation was Presbyterian; the first cemetery was west and north of town and was referred to as the English cemetery. The Lutheran congregation was organized September 30, 1884.

In 1884 there were three general merchandise stores in Sims, two real estate offices and several other business places. A community building was constructed about ¼ mile east of downtown Sims at a cost of \$5,000. This two-room building was used as a school until 1909. School was held three months in the fall and three in the spring. Attendance at this site was up to 80. In 1909 the new school was built south of town.

On November 18, 1890 the residents were



Willman funeral procession.  
Sims brickyard about 1885.



First auto in Sims - owned by Andrew Holritz.

warned of a Sioux Indian uprising and were advised to entrench themselves on the highest hill. This they did on the Anderson Hill northwest of the church. People came from far and near for protection. Mr. Steen (later of Carson) delivered government rifles. He said there were 450 able bodied men in Sims at that time. Some of the local residents did not go up on the hill, but they were advised to be ready at a moment's notice. John Peterson had guard duty. Fortunately the Indians did not come.

By 1886 Sims was already starting to go down hill. The bricks were not of durable quality and better coal had been discovered in Montana. At the peak it is estimated that the Sims population could have been about 1200. A Norwegian newspaper clipping of 1889 states that there was a hotel, a boarding house, two real estate offices, a school, a church, four coal mines and three stores. The stores were operated by Fred Holritz, a Norwegian; Jack Wadeson, an Englishman and C. L. Timmerman, a German. Timmerman had the largest establishment dealing in general merchandise, hardware, lumber, grain, banking, post office and hotel. When Timmerman moved to Almont the office was moved to the depot. Dave Pederson later bought the Wadeson store and when Almont started, he and Fred Holritz moved down there. Fred Holritz moved back to Sims in 1913 after selling his store in Almont to C. E. Kelsven.

Ranchers from as far as the South Dakota state line drove their cattle to Sims for shipping as it was the nearest facility. A locomotive and caboose would often times come up from Mandan



Timmerman's store-depot-water tower and water pumping and treating plant.





and load an entire train load. A 1902 brand book shows 75 brands recorded to stockmen with Sims addresses.

The population census of 1906 shows 300 for Sims; by 1910 it was down to 86. The two-room school house located about  $\frac{1}{8}$  mile north of the church had an enrollment of 40 to 50 with two teachers; by 1920 the enrollment had dropped to the extent that only one teacher was necessary. The school was later closed and moved to Amont for a teacherage.

Sims has been noted for the abundance of good spring water. Much coffee water was hauled to Almont before the new wells were dug. All locomotives took water there; a steam pumping and treating plant operated 24 hours per day. All east and west traffic went through Sims both by rail and road. In 1928 the new U.S. No. 10 highway was completed between New Salem and Glen Ullin; the automobile traffic was then very much reduced. On December 6, 1947 the N.P.R. abandoned the road through Sims and began service on the short cut from New Salem to Glen Ullin. A store and post office was maintained until the final day. It was operated by Simon Johnson until he passed away, at which time Ervin Olin took over his uncle's duties.

The only original buildings still standing are the Lutheran Church, where services are held every Sunday; the parsonage occupied by Willard Johnson; the living quarters of the Holritz store and the Anderson house (also referred to as the Gray house).



Gray house - 1890.



Gray house - 1980.



## ❧ Sims Houses ❧

*There were many houses in Sims at one time — but what happened to them? I've been asked that question many times. Most of them were moved into the surrounding areas, and some were moved quite a distance.*

Moving houses at that time was not easy. The house would be jacked up high enough to slip two wagons and timbers under it; then the house had to be snubbed down to prevent tipping. In most cases it took eight horses to pull the heavy load. In the moving process the chimney and plaster would crack or fall down, so would have to be replaced. Sometimes the chimney and plaster was removed before moving to reduce the weight.

Jonathan Pederson's house on Bluff Dale Stock Farm was moved from Sims. It was a heavy load, as it was insulated with coal slack. Otto Feland's house also came from Sims; taking it across the creek must have been a problem. Mrs. Olivia Lotspiech moved two houses to Almont from Sims. The one is now the Wesleyan parsonage and the other is the house adjacent to it. The later house at one time was located across the road from the Sims Church, and occupied by our family. All of us six kids were born in that house. The little

blue house on Hyde Street also came from Sims; it was occupied by the Ben Bird family.

Harry Wadeson took his house down in sections, loaded it on a freight car and moved it to Hebron. Our family farm house was also from Sims. Paul Rusch said that when he was very young (living in a sod house north of New Salem), he saw a house coming over the hill, drawn by horses; it had come from Sims. I'm sure there were many that were relocated in the New Salem area.

This accounts for but a few of the many houses that made up the village of Sims. I am sure that many were taken down and the lumber salvaged for other buildings. Much of the lumber was of full demension; a 2x4 measured a full 2x4 inches and the boards were a full 1 inch thick. There were 16 inch wide boards that we do not see any more on the market. All nails were square.



Gray house in Sims. Built by Andrew Anderson about 1890 and occupied by the Anderson family. The Tom Gray family moved into the house in about 1910 and resided there until about 1930. School teachers boarded there. Sims school in background.