



# North Dakota Office of the State Fire Marshal (ND)

## INCIDENT REPORT

Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Fire / Undetermined

Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-040

BATS ID: 1554786

Investigation Title: WALHALLA VERVILLE FIRE



### Incident Date/Time/Location

#### Status

Investigation Closed

#### Jurisdiction

Primary

#### Start Date/Time

4/25/2025 21:00 Friday

#### City/State/Zip

Walhalla, ND 58282

#### County

Cavalier County

### Investigator Information

#### Name

Andrew J Browne

#### Phone

701-720-9264

#### Email

abrowne@nd.gov

#### Title

Deputy State Fire Marshal

### Property Use or Target Information

#### Type

Agriculture

#### Status

Uninhabited



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## Scene Details

## Miscellaneous Information

Latitude

48.969605

Longitude

-98.072650



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### Person/Organization Information

#### Name

VERVILLE, JAMES

#### DOB

1946

#### Sex

M

#### Juvenile

No

#### Relationship(s)

Interviewed Party, Owner, Victim

#### Race

White

#### Ethnicity

Non-Hispanic

#### Age at time of Incident

78

### Address Information

#### Street Address

14142 MEMORYWOOD LANE

#### City/State/Zip

BAXTER , MN 56425

#### County

CROW WING

### Contact Information

#### Primary Phone

218-820-8758



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Name

BJORNSTAD, MARK

DOB

1955

Sex

M

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Interviewed Party

Address Information

Street Address

City/State/Zip

WALHALLA, ND 58282

Contact Information

Primary Phone

Street Address

City/State/Zip

WALHALLA, ND 58282

Contact Information

Primary Phone



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### Name

AMOTH, JEFF

### Juvenile

No

### Relationship(s)

Interviewed Party

### Address Information

#### Street Address

[REDACTED]

#### City/State/Zip

WALHALLA, ND 58282

#### County

PEMBINA

### Contact Information

#### Primary Phone

[REDACTED]

#### Street Address

[REDACTED]

#### City/State/Zip

WALHALLA, ND 58282

#### County

PEMBINA

### Contact Information

#### Primary Phone

[REDACTED]



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Attachments

Filename	Description	Date
NDSFM25-040-1 WALHALLA VERVILLE FIRE.pdf		5/21/2025

No image specified



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## Narrative(s)

### Title

Opening Report

### Author

Andrew Browne

7017209264

abrowne@nd.gov

### Description

A fire occurred on a vacant farmstead property.

Distribution Via Email Only:

Sheriff Matt Wright, Cavalier County Sheriff's Office, matwright@nd.gov



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Investigator/Agent - Browne, Andrew

Date

Approving Official

Date





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### Identify the Need

#### **Call for Service (dispatch, request, date, time):**

On Wednesday, April 30, 2025, I, Deputy State Fire Marshal Andrew Browne received a telephone call from Sheriff Matthew Wright of the Cavalier County Sheriff's Office regarding a fire that occurred in rural Northeast Cavalier County. During the conversation it was agreed that I would respond on Monday, May 5, 2025, and the investigation would begin at 9:30 am.

North Dakota Century Code 18-01-07 states; "An investigation of each fire must be made by the officers required to report the occurrence of fires under section 18-01-06."

### Define the Problem

#### **Nature of Incident/Incident Overview:**

On Friday, April 25, 2025, at approximately 8:30 pm, Fire Chief Mitch Lee of the Walhalla Fire Department received a telephone call regarding a grass fire in rural Northeast Cavalier County. Fire Chief Lee responded to the scene and observed a slowly moving grass fire and two impacted buildings that were already consumed and collapsed. Walhalla Fire Department was dispatched to extinguish the fire. (See Figure 1)



*Figure 1 Photograph DSC\_0003.JPG Southwest Corner Of Farmyard Facing East*

#### **Authority to Enter/Search:**



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I arrived at the Cavalier County Sheriff's Office at approximately 9:30 am on May 5, 2025. Upon my arrival I met Sheriff Matthew Wright and Deputy John Metzger. Deputy Metzger briefed me on the fire and information that had been gathered to date.

I followed Deputy Metzger to the scene and arrived at the scene at approximately 10:30 am.

Upon arrival at the scene, I contacted property owner James Verville over the telephone. I identified myself and the reason for the call. I presented James Verville with a Consent to Search Form over the telephone and James Verville gave me verbal consent to be on the property and had no questions. The form will remain with the file.

I departed the scene at approximately 1:30 pm.

### Assisting Person/Agencies:

Name	Agency	Case Reference if Available
Deputy John Metzger	Cavalier County Sheriff's Office	CC-25-00575

### Fatalities/Injuries:

Name	Fatality/Injury:	Notes/Other Information
		No injuries or fatalities were reported to the State Fire Marshal's Office.

## Data Collection

### Photographs:

Prior to physically altering the fire scene, the fire scene was photographed in the condition it was found. During the investigation a series of 108 photographs were taken. The photographs and photograph log will remain with the file.

### Drawings/Sketches:

The sketch drawing was drawn by Deputy State Fire Marshal Andrew Browne. A clip from Google Maps was clipped from the area of where the fire occurred. The sketch drawing was drawn in Bluebeam. A copy of the sketch will remain with the file.



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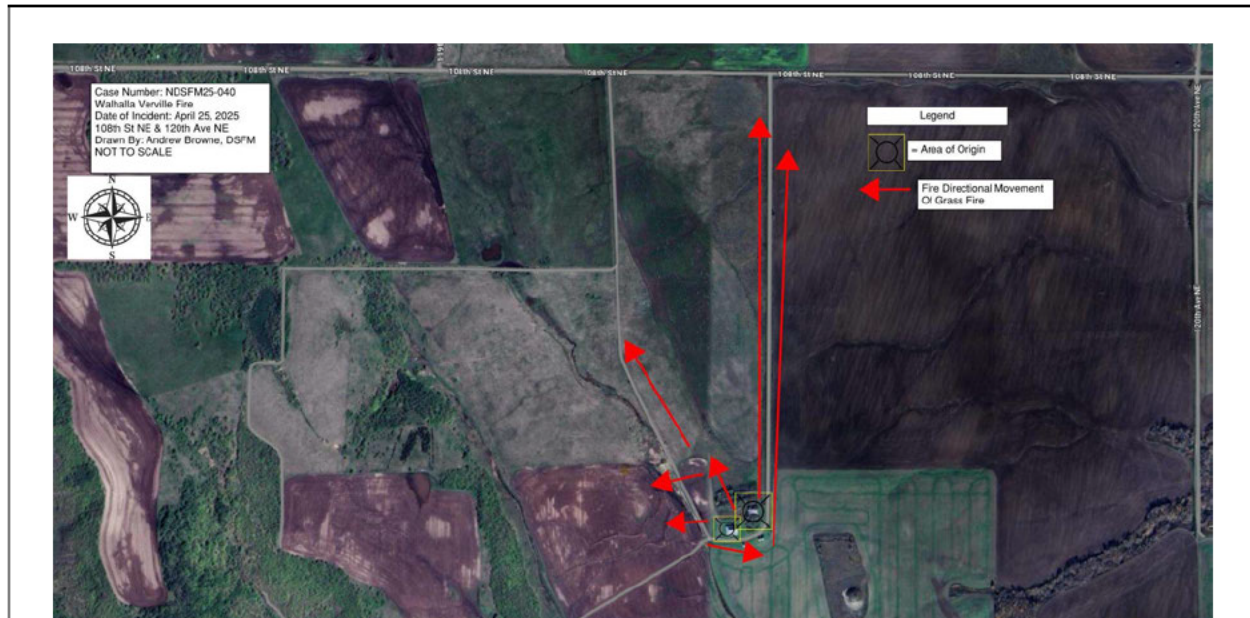


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### Exterior Scene Examination:

I began my exterior examination on the south side of property and continued in a clockwise direction. During my initial walkthrough A Scene Safety Assessment Form was completed and will remain with the file.

The exterior of the property would be best described as a vacant farm site with no habitable buildings and no power on the property. From the west/east roadway on the north border of the property there was a gravel driveway that ran north/south. The driveway led to a yard site. Along the east side of the yard was a driveway that extended to a crop field. Along the south side of the yard were three grain bins and a crop field to the south of the yard. Along the west side of the yard was a barn in the southwest corner of the property. The whole west side of the yard bordered crop fields. To the north was a tree grove that extended to a grass area with bee boxes in the grass. To the north of the grass area was CRP grass crop field.

The southern portion of the property bordered a harvested sunflower field. Along the southernmost portion of the property were three grain bins. The grain bins were intact. The grass along the south portion of the property was charred up to the field where the field was unburned. (See Figure 2)





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*Figure 2 Photograph DSC\_0007.JPG Southernmost Portion Of The Farmyard Facing Grain Bins Along The Field And Farm Yard Facing East*

In the southwest corner of the property were the remains of a barn. The barn roof trusses were mostly consumed, and the metal roofing was oxidized and warped. All four of the walls were mostly consumed throughout. The block foundation remained intact with soot deposits throughout. There were remains of asphalt shingles throughout. The grass was charred around the whole barn. The grass lay away from the barn and the charring decreased the further you went away from the barn all four directions. There were no trees near the barn. (See Figure 3)



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*Figure 3 Photograph DSC\_0015.JPG Northwest Corner Of Barn Facing Southeast*

Continuing to the north was a garage, located to the northeast of the barn. The garage walls, truss members, and walls studs were consumed. There were remains of asphalt shingles throughout. The cement floor and brick footings remained intact. The trees along the exterior of the garage were charred along the side that faced the garage, where the sides not facing the garage remained unburned. (See Figure 4)



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*Figure 4 Photograph DSC\_0031.JPG Southwest Corner Of Garage Facing Northeast*

To the north of the farm site was a grass field. The grass field with trees and bushes. The trees and bushes were not damaged. To the north was a small, mowed grass patch that had bee boxes on the grass. The mowed grass was not damaged. (See Figure 5)





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*Figure 5 Photograph DSC\_0057.JPG Northernmost Portion Of Farmyard Facing West By Bee Boxes*

To the north of the yard was a CRP grass field. The only portion of the CRP grass that was burned was the westernmost portion of the field, close to the creek that ran northwest/southwest through the property. To the east of the CRP grass was the driveway that ran north/south. The grass on both sides of the driveway was burned approximately most of the way up the driveway, with a small portion of grass remaining intact from the roadway back to the charred grass. The grass was more burned on the south end of grass clumps compared to the north ends. The grass mostly laid facing north along the ditch of the driveway. (See Figure 6)



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*Figure 6 Photograph DSC\_0063.JPG CRP Field Along West Side Of North/South Driveway Facing North*

To the west of the farmyard was a creek that ran northwest to southeast. The creek grass was consumed along approximately the southern half of the creek and was unburned along the northernmost portion closest to the roadway.

To the west of the creek was a field that led to a wood line that ran north/south on the property. The wood line was on the side of a hillside slope. The grass was portion from the west extending from the northwest corner of the farmyard was burned into the trees and stopped as a crop field, directly to the west of the wood line. The grass laid mostly towards the west. (See Figure 7)





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*Figure 7 Photograph DSC\_0096.JPG Hillside Along West Side Of The Property Facing East*

#### **Interior Scene Examination:**

I began my interior scene examination at the southwestern most building and then continued to the northeastern most building on the property.

The southwestern most building would be best described as a barn with shiplap siding and a steel roof. The barn had a cement floor along the southernmost portion and a dirt floor along the northernmost portion. Along the south wall there were the remains of a four-wheeler and a garden tiller. Throughout the structure there were remains of charred fire debris throughout. The combustible materials inside the structure were oxidized and warped throughout. (See Figure 8)



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*Figure 8 Photograph DSC\_0021.JPG Interior Southern Half Of Barn Facing West*

The northeast most building would be best described as a wood garage with asphalt shingles. Inside the structure there were no remains of any items other than an oxidized unidentified object in the southeast corner. The floor had ash remains throughout. (See Figure 9)





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Figure 9 Photograph DSC\_0042.JPG West Interior Wall Of Garage Facing West

### Interview #1:

**Name:** James Verville

**Interview Date:** May 5, 2025

**Notes:** James Verville was the property owner. The following are notes from an informational interview with James Verville. The interview took place over the telephone and was done voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and not recorded.

James Verville has owned the land for several years. James Verville stated the land is where James Verville grew up and inherited from James Verville's father. James Verville stated that James Verville lives in Baxter, MN and rents the land to Mark and Travis Bjornstad. James Verville stated that they have been renting the land for approximately 5 years and have a good relationship. James Verville stated there is no power on the property and has not had power in almost 10 years or longer. James Verville stated the only buildings on the land were the two impacted by the fire.

James Verville stated in the northeast most building on the property the building was wood siding with an asphalt shingled roof. James Verville stated the building had partially collapsed. James Verville stated the building had no personal belongings inside. James Verville stated that prior to James Verville's fathers' death James Verville's father had sold the building to an Amoth who has passed away too. James Verville stated there was a son Jeffrey Amoth who farms in the area. James Verville stated that James Verville does not know Jeff Amoth, but James Verville stated that James Verville overheard through law enforcement that Jeffrey Amoth took interest in the fire since Jeff Amoth believes that Rick and Larry Crockett might have started the fire due to



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an ongoing dispute with Jeff Amoth. James Verville stated that Jeff Amoth believes that the Crockett's might have started the fire since Jeff Amoth believed the fire was related to the building being sold to Jeff Amoth's late father. James Verville stated the building was sold by James Verville's father over 20 years ago and was done on a handshake and there was no purchase agreement. James Verville stated that James Verville has no reason to believe either Rick or Larry Crockett would be involved with the fire as James Verville has a good distant relationship with both.

James Verville stated the southwest most building was an old barn. James Verville stated the barn was made of shiplap siding and a steel roof. James Verville stated inside the barn there was an old 4-wheeler, garden tiller, and other miscellaneous items. James Verville stated there was nothing of value kept inside the barn other than the 4-wheeler and garden tiller

James Verville stated that James Verville does not come to the property often, around 3-4 times a year. James Verville stated the last time that James Verville was at the property was in the fall of 2024. James Verville stated that James Verville does not have any enemies. James Verville stated James Verville does not know anyone upset with James Verville. James Verville stated that no one other than the renters should be on the property but was not sure the last time they would have been on the property. James Verville stated the land is posted with a no trespassing sign by the roadway, near the driveway.

James Verville stated that James Verville had no insurance on the property, buildings, or personal property located where the fire had occurred.

James Verville stated James Verville believes the fire was intentionally set.

This concluded my interview with James Verville.

### Interview #2:

**Name:** John Metzger

**Interview Date:** May 5, 2025

**Notes:** John Metzger was the deputy assigned to the call for service from Cavalier County Sheriff's Office. The following are notes from an informational interview with John Metzger. The interview took place at the Cavalier County Sheriff's Office, Langdon, ND and was done voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and not recorded.

John Metzger stated the fire was called into the Cavalier County Sheriff's office on Friday, April 25, 2025. John Metzger provided me with a list of individuals that were associated with the fire. John Metzger stated that the Cavalier County Sheriff's Office requested assistance from the State Fire Marshal's Office. John Metzger stated the fire appeared suspicious due to the location and how the fire burned.

John Metzger stated the sheriff's office would be assisting with the investigation.

This concluded my interview with John Metzger.

### Interview #3:

**Name:** Jeff Amoth



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**Interview Date:** May 7, 2025

**Notes:** Jeff Amoth was a landowner that owns a nearby farm where the fire occurred. The following are notes from an informational interview with Jeff Amoth. The interview took place over the telephone and was voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and not recorded.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth owns farmland nearby where the fire occurred. Jeff Amoth stated Jeff Amoth had information about who Jeff Amoth believed started the fire. Jeff Amoth stated Jeff Amoth learned about the fire through neighbors over the weekend and into the following week after the fire occurred on April 25, 2025.

Jeff Amoth stated that on April 25, 2025, Jeff Amoth stated Jeff Amoth observed smoke in the area from approximately 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Jeff Amoth stated that the smoke was nothing that was out of ordinary as people in the spring do control burns.

Jeff Amoth stated that during the fall of 2024, Jeff Amoth had been dealing with a property trespassing issue with a neighbor with Rick Crockett and Larry Crockett. Jeff Amoth stated Rick Crockett and Larry Crockett were observed on a camera driving on a field road on Jeff Amoth's property. Jeff Amoth stated that when the issue was brought up to law enforcement, Jeff Amoth stated the Cavalier County States Attorney did not pursue charges at the time. Jeff Amoth stated subsequently on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, the Cavalier County States Attorney brought charges forward for the trespassing on Jeff Amoth's land.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth's father purchased a building on the property where the fire occurred over 20 years ago. Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth had inherited Jeff Amoth's father's personal property and real estate property. Jeff Amoth stated that being Jeff Amoth owned the building on James Verville's property through his father that Jeff Amoth thinks Jeff Amoth was being targeted by the Crockett's.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth overheard on the day of the fire that Rick Crockett was at the Walhalla Country Club Golf Course for a smoker dinner at approximately 6:00 pm. Jeff Amoth stated the golf course was only approximately 4-5 miles away from where the fire occurred.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth believes the fire was intentionally started. Jeff Amoth stated that no one should have been on the property. Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth believes that Jeff Amoth was targeted by the Crockett's with the recent issues of the trespassing issues on Jeff Amoth's land and lighting the fire of the building that was owned by Jeff Amoth was a way of getting back at Jeff Amoth.

Jeff Amoth had no insurance on the building. Jeff Amoth stated the building had partly collapsed and there was nothing being stored inside the building.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth stated the fire was suspicious as it had burned on both sides of the driveway.

Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth overheard Francis Langton was in the area and observed the fire. Jeff Amoth stated that Jeff Amoth did not have any further information regarding the fire.

This concluded my interview with Jeff Amoth.

**Interview #4:**





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<b>Name:</b>	Mitch Lee
<b>Interview Date:</b>	May 7 ,2025
<p><b>Notes:</b> Mitch Lee was the Fire Chief of the Walhalla Fire Department. The following are notes from an informational interview with Mitch Lee. The interview took place over the telephone and was voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and not recorded.</p> <p>Mitch Lee stated that Mitch Lee on Friday, April 25, 2025, went out to the Walhalla Country Club Golf Course for a smoker event where they were having supper at approximately 6:15-6:20 pm. Mitch Lee stated while traveling out to the golf course Mitch Lee observed smoke coming from the north/northwest in the area where the fire had occurred. Mitch Lee stated the smoke was white and Mitch Lee didn't think too much about the smoke as people burn during the spring. Mitch Lee stated that Mitch Lee had stayed at the golf course until approximately 8:00 pm. Mitch Lee stated that Rick Crockett was present at the smoker when Mitch Lee arrived.</p> <p>Mitch Lee stated at approximately 8:30 pm Mitch Lee received a phone call from Paul Soeby regarding the fire. Mitch Lee stated Paul Soeby was concerned the fire was unattended and close the Pembina Gorge. Mitch Lee stated that Mitch Lee took Mich Lee's UTV out and arrived approximately 10 minutes after 8:30 pm.</p> <p>Mitch Lee stated that Mitch Lee observed a slow creeping grass fire along the driveway burning to the north towards the roadway. Mitch Lee stated in addition the westernmost woods along a hill to the west of the farm site were on fire, burning slowly to the west and south. Mitch Lee stated there was little to no wind at the time arriving on scene. Mitch Lee stated that Mitch Lee called the fire in to have fire personnel respond.</p> <p>Mitch Lee stated the farm site yard portion was not on fire and the two buildings were not smoking and appeared to have been self-extinguished. Mitch Lee stated the fire appeared to have originated from the yard, near the buildings.</p> <p>This concluded my interview with Mitch Lee.</p>	

<b>Interview #5:</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Mark Bjornstad
<b>Interview Date:</b>	May 7, 2025
<p><b>Notes:</b> Mark Bjornstad was the land renter that farmed the property where the fire occurred. The following are notes from an informational interview with Marj Bjornstad. The interview took place over the telephone and was voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and not recorded.</p> <p>Mark Bjornstad stated that Mark Bjornstad had been renting the farmland for approximately 5 years from James Verville. Mark Bjornstad stated there were no issues with the lease agreement and everyone had gotten along. Mark Bjornstad stated there were no issues with Crockett's with either Mark Bjornstad or James Verville. Mark Bjornstad stated the building that was sold to Jeff Amoth's father no one would have had knowledge of that.</p> <p>Mark Bjornstad stated that the last time someone authorized to be on the property would have been in the fall 2024 during harvest of crops. Mark Bjornstad the property is posted with no trespassing signs and has not seen anything suspicious in the past. Mark Bjornstad stated Mark Bjornstad went on the property on Tuesday April 29, 2025, to check the fields and noticed the fire had burned the buildings and the grass around. Mark Bjornstad</p>	



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stated that Mark Bjornstad had gotten back from wintering in Arizona late on Friday, April 25, 2025. Mark Bjornstad stated no one would have authorization to burn the property for control burning. Mark Bjornstad that Mark Bjornstad talked to employees that work for the farm, and no one has been to the property since fall of 2024.

Mark Bjornstad was not aware of any enemies. Mark Bjornstad stated Mark Bjornstad believed the fire was intentionally set.

This concluded my interview with Mark Bjornstad.

### Video:

No video was obtained by the State Fire Marshal's Office.

### Weather Reviewed:

The weather information was obtained from [www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com). The data was reviewed for April 25, 2025. The closest reporting station was the Devils Lake Regional Airport Station, which is approximately 65 miles away from Walhalla, ND. The following information was learned.

Temperature: 49 degrees to 59 degrees Fahrenheit

Humidity: 27% to 50%

Wind Direction: E to ENE

Wind Speed: 0 mph to 13 mph, with 16 mph wind gusts

Conditions: Fair to Haze

<https://www.wunderground.com/history/daily/us/nd/devils-lake/KDVL/date/2025-4-25>

The weather conditions were not a direct cause of the fire but may have assisted in the spread.

Weather data was reviewed the two prior days of the fire being reported. There were no thunderstorms or lightning within the vicinity of where the fire occurred.

### Times:

Hard Time Description	Time	Soft Time Description
	Fall 2024	The last known time anyone authorized was on the property.
Times from April 25,2025		
	5-6pm	Jeff Amoth observing smoke in area.
	6:15-6:20 pm	Fire Chief Mitch Lee observing smoke in area.



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		8:30 pm	Fire Chief Mitch Lee receives a call from Paul Soeby regarding the fire.
		8:40 pm	Fire Chief Mitch Lee arrives on scene to assess the fire.
	Dispatch Time from Call for Service	9:10 pm	

### **Evidence identified/collected/preserved:**

No evidence was collected by the State Fire Marshal's Office. No areas were marked with warning this may be evidence during the on-scene examination.

### **Data Analysis, hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, select final hypothesis**

### **Other Forms/Documents/Reports Reviewed:**

#### **MultiRae Lite Photoionization Detector (PID)**

I used my PID around the perimeters of both buildings and throughout the buildings using the "cupping method". The cupping method is taking a plastic or Styrofoam cup and placing it at the end of the monitor where the monitor takes in the ambient air to read levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC). During this part of the on-scene examination my PID did not indicate any levels of VOC or elevated readings within the two structures or around the exterior of both structures. The VOC read zero during the examination using the detector.

### **Area of Origin:**

Based upon the examination of the fire scene, data collected, and witness statements, the area of origin was determined to be at or near the farmyard in the southeast corner of the property.

- Fire Effects
  - The barn and garage on the property collapsed and were mostly consumed.
  - The noncombustible materials inside the barn were oxidized and warped.
  - Most of the combustible materials inside the barn were consumed.
  - The trees were charred on the side facing the northeast garage.
    - Consistent with duration and time.
  - The natural vegetation within the farmyard sustained more damage compared to the westernmost woods along the hillside on the westernmost portion of the property.
    - Consistent with duration and time.
- Fire Dynamics
  - From the farmyard where the two buildings were the grass was charred in an outward direction from the buildings.
  - The grass was charred extending from the farmyard up both sides of the driveway to the north. The grass from the roadway to approximately a quarter down the driveway on both sides remained unburned.





# North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)

## INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE

Official Law Enforcement Report – Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited



**Incident Type: FIRE/ARSON**

**Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-040-1**

**BATS ID: i-1554786**

**Investigation Title: WALHALLA VERVILLE FIRE**

- As the fire moved away from the farmyard portion of the property, the natural vegetation damage was less compared to the natural vegetation within the farmyard.
- **Witness Statements**
  - Fire Chief reported seeing a creeping fire along both sides of the driveway traveling north when arriving on scene
  - Fire Chief reported seeing a creeping fire along the westernmost portion of the property in the woods near the hillside moving north and south when arriving on scene.
  - Fire Chief reported the buildings were collapsed and consumed and there was no visible smoke or embers when arriving on scene.

### Cause Hypothesis Development and Testing:

Based on the examination of the fire scene, witness statements, and other data reviewed, the following identified as the most creditable potential causes within the area of origin:

1. A person or persons unknown ignited the garage in the northeast corner of the property and the barn in the southwest corner of the property using open flame to ignite grass, wood, paper, or flammable liquids.
  - Property was posted with a no trespassing sign located near the driveway entryway to the property.
  - Last time any authorized party was on the property was during the fall of 2024.
    - This included the property owner James Verville and land renter Mark Bjornstad and employees that work for Mark Bjornstad.
  - Nearby landowner Jeff Amoth observed seeing smoke in the area between 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm on Friday, April 25, 2025.
  - Fire Chief Mitch Lee reported seeing smoke in the area on the way to the golf course which was approximately 5 miles southeast of where the fire occurred at approximately 6:15 6:20 pm on Friday, March 25, 2025.
  - Land renter Mark Bjornstad returned home from wintering in Arizona during the late evening hours of April 25, 2025.
    - Mark Bjornstad reported not knowing about the fire until going out to the property on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, to check the fields to see if they were ready to be plowed/planted.
  - Landowner James Verville was in Baxter, MN at the time of the fire.
    - James Verville learned about the fire from a telephone call from Mark Bjornstad on Tuesday, April 29, 2025.
  - James Verville had no insurance on the buildings, property or personal contents inside the structures.
  - Fire Chief Mitch Lee receives a telephone call from Paul Soeby driving by that observed a grass fire at approximately 8:30 pm on Friday, April 25, 2025.
  - Fire Chief Mitch Lee arrived on scene at approximately 8:30 pm.
    - Fire Chief Mitch Lee observed a slow creeping fire along both ditch sides along the driveway spreading to the north.
    - Fire Chief Mitch Lee observed the westernmost woods on fire with a slow creeping fire going to the north and south.
    - Fire Chief Mitch Lee reported the farmyard area was not on fire at the time of arrival.



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- Fire Chief Mitch Lee reported the buildings were not smoking or smoldering and had collapsed.
  - Landowner James Verville and land renter Mark Bjornstad reported the west/east roadway to the north of the property is not a high traffic roadway and nearby neighbors are approximately one mile or greater away from the property.
    - The nearest high traffic county road is approximately five miles south of the property.
  - The fire damage in the farmyard near the buildings on the natural vegetation sustained the greatest damage compared to rest of the property.
    - The trees around the northeast garage were more charred on the side facing the building compared to the other side of the trees.
    - The grass laid outward from both buildings in all four directions.
    - The farther you went away from the buildings the damage to the natural vegetation decreased.
  - The two buildings on the property sustained collapse and most of the combustible materials were consumed.
    - The southwest barns contents were mostly consumed with the noncombustible materials were oxidized and warped.
    - The northeast garage was consumed with only remains of charred combustible materials and ash throughout.
  - There were no known enemies to the property owner James Verville or land renter Mark Bjornstad.
  - There was no thunderstorm activity within the area the day or days leading to the fire being reported.
  - There was no power on the property.
    - There were no power lines on the property.
    - There were no utilities on the property.
  - No one reported smoking on the property.
    - There were no remains of cigarette butts found on the property.
  - No suspicious activity on the property was reported by the property owner or land renter.
  - There were no public roadways that ran through the property.
  - This hypothesis cannot be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
2. A thunderstorm passing through the area created lightning that sustained a direct hit to the buildings on the property, grass, natural vegetation that sustained enough heating to cause a fire.
- There were no thunderstorms on the weather data days leading up to the report of the fire.
  - There were no thunderstorms on the day of the fire being reported from the weather data obtained.
  - The lightning data map showed no strikes near the area on the day of the fire being reported and days leading up to the fire.
  - This hypothesis has been eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
3. An ember from a control burn carried in the wind that came in contact with grass, natural vegetation, or structure members that sustained heating to ignite a fire.
- There were no reported control burns within the area of the fire on the day of the fire or days leading up to the fire.



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- This information was verified by the Fire Chief Mitch Lee and Cavalier County Sheriff's Office.
  - The winds on the day of the fire were at the maximum speed of 13 mph with gusts of 16 mph.
    - The wind was out of the east and north/northeast.
  - The land renter reported that no control burning has been done on the property.
    - Last time renter or property owner was on the property was in the fall of 2024.
  - This hypothesis has been eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
4. A vehicle dragging a chain along the driveway near the yard created a spark to ignite a fire in the grass.
- Property was posted as no trespassing along the driveway near the entryway of the property.
  - Last known person on the property authorized was in the fall of 2024.
  - No witnesses witnessed the fire occurring.
  - Farm vehicles and trailers are known to travel in the area.
  - Fire was reported late in the evening hours and the buildings were already consumed.
  - This hypothesis cannot be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
5. A vehicle or off-road highway vehicle created a backfire or spark that created heating to ignite grass.
- Vehicles are known to travel along the west/east roadway.
  - The area is known to have high traffic of off-highway vehicles in the area.
  - The area had adjacent off-road vehicle trails nearby where the fire occurred.
  - No witnesses reported the fire, and the fire was reported late in the evening hours and the buildings were already consumed.
  - This hypothesis cannot be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.

### Final Hypothesis/Conclusion:

Based on the data collected at the time of the investigation, the area of origin was determined to be at or near the farmyard in the southeast corner of the property.

This fire has been classified as undetermined.

The opinions expressed in this conclusion are based on data and evidence collected to this point. The opinions are subject to change based upon relevant, significant and credible information discovered or provided in the future.

### References:

Technical Committee on Fire Investigations. 2023. NFPA 921: Guide For Fire & Explosion Investigations. 2024 Edition. NFPA. Quincy, MA