



Celebrate America's 250th Anniversary With a Road Trip to Remember

Themes of travel, migration, innovation, and community animate ND250 Road Trip: Our American Story on view through October 2028.

Few things are more American than the open road.

A new exhibit marking the nation's semiquincentennial at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck invites visitors on the ultimate journey through our past, present, and future.

Developed by the State Historical Society as part of the America250 commemorations this year, *ND250 Road Trip: Our American Story* highlights how North Dakota shapes and has been shaped by the nation, from early Native trade networks and population migrations to military readiness, energy development, and agriculture. Visitors are also invited to explore their own roots through genealogical resources and games and learn about the state's Centennial Farms.

Along the way, the exhibit showcases forms of travel that have taken us through and to this place we call home. Encounter a Native American bullboat and a sled-style travois, learn how railroads brought settlement and towns, and get behind the wheel of a 1969 farm truck interactive to experience destinations such as the Enchanted Highway and Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park. Historical campaigns advertising North Dakota to potential residents and tourists and quirky promotional items further feed the road trip theme. There's even a capsule containing a "Breath of Pure North Dakota Air"!

(cont.)

Celebrate (cont.)



A section highlighting “Who Was Here in 1776?” includes historical artifacts and interviews with contemporary tribal leaders.

A truck interactive allows visitors to choose their own adventure.

As for North Dakota’s road ahead in the next 250 years, the sky’s the limit. The exhibit concludes by spotlighting high-tech innovations spearheaded by North Dakotans that reflect our state’s “out of this world” future. Don’t miss the University of North Dakota-built spacesuit for use on Mars.

“We are encouraging people to discover new stories and explore places they haven’t visited yet,” says Exhibitions Manager David Newell. Strap in for the ride.



Let Freedom Ring

Gov. Kelly Armstrong gets an assist with ringing North Dakota’s replica Liberty Bell at the ND Heritage Center at the start of the nation’s 250th birthday week. The bell, gifted to the state as part of a 1950 U.S. savings bond campaign, was rung for the first time since 1976, the nation’s Bicentennial year.



Outreach Coordinator Brian Hardy and a group of young “Minutemen” practice 1776-style military drills and maneuvers at the July 4 “Call Out the Militia” event at the Pembina State Museum. Participants constructed their own Revolutionary War-era tricorne hats.



Representing North Dakota

Three State Historical Society team members—Museum Store Manager Rhonda Smith, Security Officer Wyatt Mosbrucker, and Museum Store Assistant Manager Rachel McCann—joined other state employees and Congressional interns to staff the North Dakota pavilion at the Great American State Fair on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Showcasing North Dakota’s appeal, the pavilion featured a sunflower selfie station and a model of the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in Medora, among other attractions. The fair, which ran from June 25 to July 10, was part of the Freedom 250 semiquincentennial celebrations.

Photo by Mark Bonnette



Photographer Shane Balkowitsch demonstrates the wet plate collodion process to visitors at the 160th anniversary celebration in June of Fort Buford’s 1866 founding. The fort, which became a state historic site in 1931, was established to protect routes used by immigrants. More than 300 people turned out to enjoy a full day of hands-on activities, including adobe brickmaking, frontier washing, Indigenous and frontier games, and even a barracks boot camp.



Members of the Sitting Bull Healing Ride arrive at Fort Buford State Historic Site after retracing the Hunkpapa Lakota leader’s historic journey from Poplar, Montana. The memorial ride, which included tribal members and elders from Fort Peck Indian Reservation, marked the 145th anniversary of Sitting Bull relinquishing his rifle to the U.S. military at Fort Buford in 1881.

New Whitestone Hill Monument Underway

Construction of a new monument at Whitestone Hill State Historic Site near Kulm honoring Native Americans killed during the Sept. 3-6, 1863, massacre there by U.S. troops has begun. The monument will offer a place for reflection, remembrance, and education.

Planned in conjunction with descendants of Indigenous survivors and designed by architectural firm Quintus 3D, the monument will be built in four phases. Phase 1, which included installing the foundation and supporting infrastructure, is complete. Vertical artwork panels, stone benches, and tree plantings will be added in future phases.

In 2023, the North Dakota Legislature authorized \$250,000 for the construction of the monument. Donations are being accepted for Phases 2-4 of the project. For information on how to contribute, contact Historic Sites Manager Rob Hanna, 701.328.3508 or rjhanna@nd.gov.



Rendering by Quintus 3D

A TR Library Opening, a Presidential Visit, and an Improved Visitor Experience at the Chateau



Reenactors portraying Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders await President Trump’s motorcade at the Chateau Interpretive Center in Medora.

From staffing activity stations in Chimney Park to taking care of last-minute requests from the White House to move a fence in advance of President Donald J. Trump’s July 1 visit to Medora, dozens of agency staff worked to ensure the festivities surrounding the opening of the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library proceeded smoothly.

During the library’s opening week, the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site’s Chimney Park on the western edge of town served as ground zero for the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation’s America250 celebration featuring live entertainment, food trucks, a kids zone, and a beer garden. Staff were on hand to provide information and facilitate activities highlighting the 26th president’s conservation focus. At night, the park’s 85-foot-tall smokestack was also illuminated. Meanwhile, the Chateau Interpretive Center’s parking lot morphed into a staging ground for the press covering Trump and hosted a ticket booth for the library.

Visitors to the site, which in addition to the Chateau, Interpretive Center, and Chimney Park includes De Morès Memorial Park in downtown Medora, will notice an enhanced visitor experience.

The Chateau now has air-conditioning and heating, flush toilets on the grounds, and new interpretive signage in the house. Chimney Park has been fully electrified, and a new footbridge links the park to the adjacent Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Agency staff worked with the presidential library on wayfinding

signs and with the Department of Transportation on streetlights, sidewalks, a roundabout, and the realignment of Chateau Road. Finally, De Morès Park features fresh plantings and flowers, including roses, daylilies, and petunias.

Site activities also expanded, with new offerings throughout the summer in De Morès park, including family story times. The Chateau, which celebrated its 85th anniversary as a state historic site in August, hosted lawn games and bottomlands walks, with weekly Friday Fun afternoons at the Interpretive Center.



Children make and identify animal tracks at an agency activity station in Chimney Park.

Tent Encampment Brings Early Days of Fort Mandan to Life

The interpretation of Fort Mandan State Historic Site near Washburn got a boost with the recent addition of a Lewis and Clark Expedition-style tent encampment on its grounds.

Representing where the Corps of Discovery would have stayed while building the original fort in 1804, the nine soldiers’ tents and two interpreters’ tipis offer visitors a different glimpse into the expedition’s time in the area.

With access to part of the reconstructed fort now limited due to its age, the new tent encampment invites visitors to step inside the corps’ initial canvas dwellings and experience life as it was then, from the infantry kits and uniforms of the soldiers to the bison robes and parfleche bags used by the expedition’s interpreters.



Experience tents like those the Corps of Discovery lived in during the construction of Fort Mandan in 1804.

“We want people to come inside, explore, and interact with the items,” says Site Supervisor Ashli Laducer. Moving forward, plans are in the works to replace the aging fort with a new interpretive structure using sustainable materials.

ND Heritage Center Creates Smudging Space

An exhibit fabrication area in the ND Heritage Center & State Museum is now being used as a smudging space for tribal nation members caring for Native cultural aspects in the collections.

Smudging is a purification practice involving burning sacred plants such as sage, tobacco, cedar, and sweetgrass.

“It’s to purify our minds, our thoughts, the environment, our bodies,” says Lakota tribal member Jon Eagle Sr., the agency’s Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

(NAGPRA) program specialist. “When we are going to pray, and we’re going to handle sacred items, we are supposed to be like a hollow reed so that our Creator, our ancestors can work through us.”

Having a designated smudging area is part of the State Historical Society’s ongoing efforts to enhance relationships and help the agency meet federal NAGPRA requirements. The room features separate air handling, exhaust, and fire suppression systems, allowing for smoke to safely dispel.



Historic Sites Manager Rob Hanna, right, receives the 2026 National Association for Interpretation’s Heartland Region Distinguished Interpretive Manager Award. Hanna was recognized at the NAI Heartland Region Workshop in Fargo for his work drafting new interpretive panels for the Whitestone Hill State Historic Site and helping raise awareness of trauma-informed interpretive techniques, among other accomplishments.

New to the Collections



Swing Your Partner

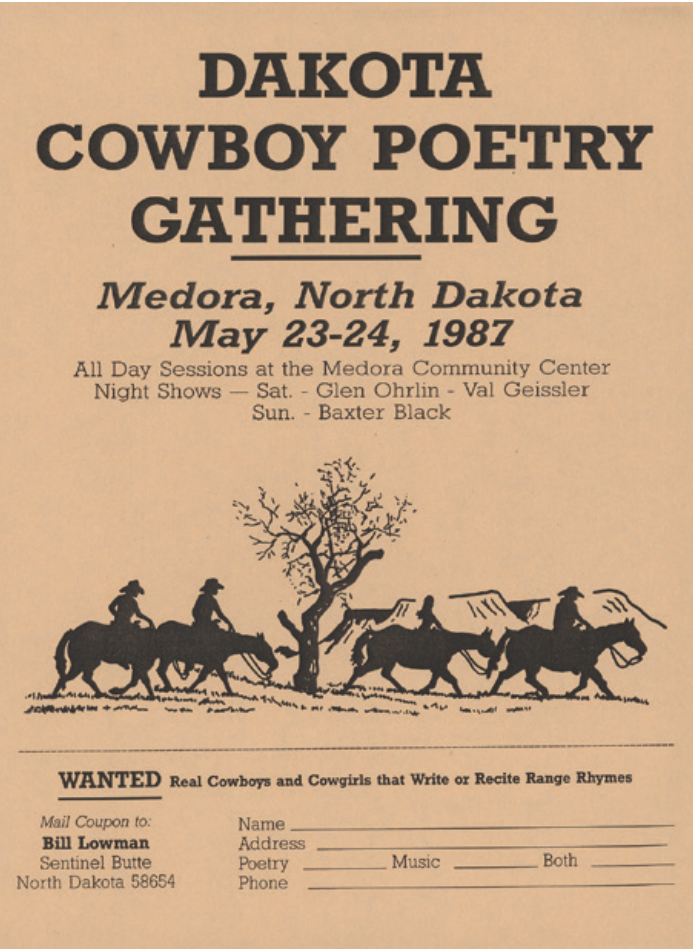
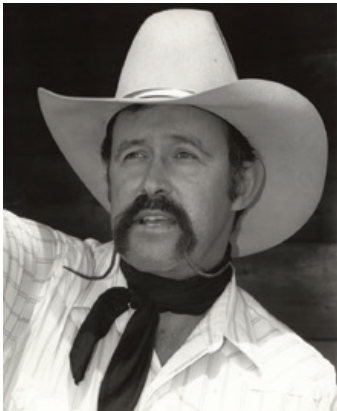
These classic red, white, and blue square dance outfits, made in 2015 and 2018, have seen plenty of action. Donors Mark and Bina Krebsbach of Bismarck boast the distinction of having danced in all 50 states—three times—and even abroad!

The Krebsbachs, who have held leadership roles in local, state, national, and international square dance organizations, have been do-si-doing since 1990 and currently serve as treasurers of Belles & Beaux Square and Round Dance Club in Bismarck. View photo albums and papers related to the history of the club, founded in the 1950s, in the State Archives. Some of these were donated by the couple.

Where the Deer and the Antelope Play

Each May for the past four decades, prairie bards have converged on Medora for the annual Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering.

Founded by Sentinel Butte rancher Bill Lowman in 1987, the two-day event celebrates an oral tradition animated by the joys and struggles of cowboy life. Jeri Dobrowski, a freelance writer and photographer at the time, went to the first gathering to cover it as journalist and never looked back. She quickly became a regular volunteer, helping promote the event. Dobrowski also collected a trove of memorabilia, which she recently donated to the State Archives. In addition to programs, news clippings, and promotional materials, her records included correspondence, stories, poetry, and photos as well as audio and VHS tapes.



Donor Jeri Dobrowski captured this image, top right, in 1996 of Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering founder Bill Lowman, who recently stepped down from his leadership of the annual event after 40 years. Above, a poster from the first gathering in Medora. SHSND SA MSS 11744

Designing Dad

The prominent 20th-century Bismarck architect Robert A. Ritterbush, along with his brother Clarence and later his son, Robert H., designed many of the capital city’s landmark buildings.

But in the 1920s and 30s, Robert A. was also a young dad who used his talents to create toys for his two children, Robert H. and Elizabeth. Among these was this painted wooden schoolhouse with green trim built for his daughter. It is part of a larger collection of nearly 200 vintage toys from the first half of the 20th century donated to the State Historical Society by Robert A.’s granddaughter Lauren Ritterbush.

To see blueprints for some of the Ritterbushes’ real-life creations and learn more about the prominent family of North Dakota architects, check out the State Archives’ extensive collection of their architectural drawings as well as family papers and photos.



Class Act

When Head of Technical Services Virginia Bjorness (pictured at left) first heard the number of yearbooks the State Archives was being offered, she thought it was “a typo.” The 679 annuals received from an anonymous donor in March span 1907 to 2004 and are the largest single yearbook donation in the agency’s history. Ranging from homemade-style volumes with actual photographs pasted to the pages to the more standardized and professionally printed designs predominant since the 1960s, the yearbooks hail from 153 schools across North Dakota. Explore them at the State Archives. You never know who you might discover.



Clowning Around

As an Elks clown in the 1950s, Mandan native Ed Makelke entertained crowds at the town’s annual July 4 parade while riding this Schwinn unicycle with red and yellow accents. The late Makelke, who worked at a local Chevy dealership, would often bring a push puppet clown along, which made the kids “pretty excited,” says his daughter Billie Jane Leingang, who donated the unicycle.

Field School Pilot Study Investigates Welk Homestead

Students and academics from Southern Methodist University and United Tribes Technical College partnered with State Historical Society archaeologists on a pilot study of the Welk Homestead State Historic Site in July.

Led by Southern Methodist University Associate Professor Kacy Hollenback and agency staff, the two-week-long field school introduced students to the basics of archaeological research, from collections to archives. The research team then spent several days at the Welk Homestead State Historic Site outside Strasburg investigating the evolution of this late 19th-century German Russian farmstead via geophysical surveys and targeted excavations.



Ariella Fogel, a student at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, and Addison Loftis, a sophomore at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, excavate part of the homestead’s pathway.



Plans are in the works for the field school to return to the Welk Homestead State Historic Site next summer to search for the foundations of the original blacksmith shop and barn, among other farm features.

North Dakota Properties Listed in National Register of Historic Places

A school in Harvey, a bar in Sheyenne, and a ranch in Billings County have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the federal government’s list of properties it considers worthy of preservation and recognition. North Dakota nominations are coordinated by the State Historical Society.

The former **Harvey High School**, now the B.M. Hanson Elementary School, was constructed in three stages, including a 1939 Public Works Administration-funded addition with Art Moderne styling.

The **Sheyenne Bar** in Sheyenne has been a community hub and watering hole for more than 120 years. While the front was redecorated with a Western look as part of the urban renewal movement of the 1970s, the interior still has the original tin ceiling, bar, and layout.

The **Short Ranch Historic District** in Billings County is significant to the 20th-century history of ranching in western North Dakota. Initially started to raise horses in the early 1900s, the ranch switched to raising cattle when technology replaced horses in agriculture. Don L. Short, who took over the ranch from his father in 1931, would go on to serve in the North Dakota Legislature and U.S. Congress.



The late U.S. Rep. Don L. Short once lived in this house on the Short Ranch near Medora.

Playrooms Engage Young Visitors at State Historic Sites

In an ongoing effort to make state historic sites more family-friendly, the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center near Williston and Pembina State Museum have added playrooms for our young visitors.

At the Interpretive Center, a tiny theater has transformed into Buford’s Prairie Playroom, a nature, history, and STEM space, complete with microscopes for examining fossils, child-safe sewing kits with plastic needles, and even a frontier doctor’s medical bag. Kids can also practice calligraphy, try on historical-style garments, and touch furs and horns.

Meanwhile, Pembina State Museum now has Little Grove, a calming play space for toddlers featuring hand puppets, books, bug counting activities, a tent, and toy campfire.

Both playrooms are free and located outside the paid admission area, making them ideal for traveling families in need of a break.



Children enjoy hands-on learning in the new playrooms at the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center (left) and Pembina State Museum (above).

Inaugural ‘AgFest’ Draws Thousands

More than 3,000 people turned out to celebrate North Dakota’s agricultural heritage at “AgFest” in August. The day-long event at the North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum featured farm animals, hands-on activities, agricultural exhibits, and even an appearance by Miss Rodeo North Dakota.

Attendees also enjoyed a tractor parade and show hosted by Dakota Aged Iron Tractor Club on the Capitol grounds and the toe-tapping bluegrass rhythms of the Waddington Brothers.



A young boy checks out Seamus, the Highland steer. North Dakota’s well-known bovine was one of many animals, including alpacas, miniature horses, and pygmy goats, to appear at the festival.

History Matters Launches



The State Historical Society’s new magazine featuring the stories, people, and places of North Dakota debuted in February. *History Matters* carries forward the tradition of bringing North Dakota’s past, present, and future to life with engaging content for adults and children. Subscriptions are a membership benefit of the State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation. Purchase copies at the Museum Store online or in person.

The agency is making \$150,000 in Historic Preservation Fund grants available to the public for historic and archaeological properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The deadline is Oct. 16.



For an application, contact Grants & Contracts Officer Amy Munson, 701.328.3573/amunson@nd.gov, or visit history.nd.gov/hp/grantshpfund.html.

North Dakota Students Make History at National History Day

For the first time in its more than 50-year history, the National History Day contest awarded a Special Topics prize to a North Dakota entry. Olivia Grote and Mariam Keita from Legacy High School in Bismarck received one of two “U.S. Women’s History” awards for their senior group documentary, “The Women Behind the Black Panther Party,” at the Washington, D.C.-area competition in June. The award recognizes outstanding projects in any division and category that highlight the contributions, achievements, and unique perspectives of women in the U.S. The event’s 2026 theme was “Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History.”

North Dakota’s 25 National History Day contestants visited the U.S. Capitol and met with U.S. Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer while on the East Coast.



Building International Relationships One Mastodon at a Time



Check out Gallery Guide Tom Chase’s bimonthly pop-up talks at the ND Heritage Center on the Highgate mastodon, once billed as “the world’s greatest wonder.”

Thanks to an ice age fossil and modern technology, Gallery Guide Tom Chase made his international debut earlier this year with a Zoom talk to a Canadian-based group interested in learning more about the agency’s Highgate mastodon, a prehistoric relative of the elephant.

Discovered near Highgate, Ontario, in 1890, the mastodon has been a source of intrigue for years, touring Canada and the United States and switching hands multiple times before eventually making its way to the state collections in 1947.

The Glencoe & District Historical Society, based not far from where the skeleton was first found, plans to build their own wooden recreation, says Chase, who carried out extensive research online and in the State Archives in preparation. “One of the leading mastodon people in Canada was on the call,” he adds. “It made me kind of nervous.”

Chase showed the Canadians letters and receipts related to the ownership and trajectory of the mysterious fossil as it episodically disappeared and reappeared. “Maybe it will inspire some of them to come down and see it,” he says.

Turning Heads on Highway 83

Exhibits Preparator Jordan Long gets ready to haul a nearly 10-foot-tall red horse from Minot to Bismarck in April. The traditional Swedish Dala horse was one of many objects, photographs, and other memorabilia donated to the State Historical Society’s collections from the former Norsk Høstfest Scandinavian festival, which held its final event in 2025. See the Dala horse in the ND250 Road Trip exhibit at the State Museum.



Caravan Brings Military Gallery Project to North Dakota Communities



Foundation Executive Director Dale Lennon discusses the Military Gallery at Heritage Village in Grafton.

The caravan received statewide media exposure that began in February and continued throughout the spring. *The Bismarck Tribune*, *The Forum*, *The Jamestown Sun*, and *The Minot Daily News* featured the project, with community newspapers highlighting local visits. Statewide radio programs, local stations, and television coverage by KFJR-TV and KX News expanded awareness. Community calendars and social media also helped promote each stop.

Earlier this year, the Foundation’s Military Gallery Caravan visited 48 communities across the state, meeting with veterans, families, service organizations, and community members. At each stop, attendees learned how the future Military Gallery at the ND Heritage Center in Bismarck will tell North Dakota’s military story through the experiences of the men and women who served.

One question came up repeatedly: How can I be part of this project? Presentations explained how individuals and families can contribute through oral histories, photographs, and military artifacts, while also outlining opportunities to support the gallery through financial gifts.



Veterans and community members gather at the Stark County Veterans Pavilion during the Dickinson stop.



The caravan concludes at Bismarck AMVETS with a community dinner and Military Gallery update.

This statewide tour, which concluded in April, generated an estimated 60 media placements across print, radio, television, and community platforms, giving residents throughout North Dakota an opportunity to learn more about the project and how to participate.

Community groups, veterans organizations, and service clubs interested in scheduling a Military Gallery presentation are encouraged to contact the Foundation office to arrange a visit.

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