

THE ROAD AHEAD

Plains Talk
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ANNUAL REPORT 2025



STATE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
OF NORTH DAKOTA



History's
Foundation
State Historical Society
of North Dakota Foundation

ND250 Road Trip: Our American Story

Opening July 1 at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum, this exhibit will take audiences on a spin through people, places, and events that have defined North Dakota over the United States' past 250 years. Check out a few of our favorites going on display to celebrate our nation's historic birthday.



From left, Row 1: Fire hose nozzle, 1920-29; Immigration inspection card, 1914; Lewis and Clark Bicentennial teddy bears, 2005; Gas pump, 1954

Row 2: State Dairy Show sign, 1957; *Dog-Sledges of the Mandan Indians* by Karl Bodmer, 1830-1850; "Wheat is King" button, mid-1900s

Row 3: University of North Dakota-built spacesuit, 2014; *Rocket Ship* by Jessica Wachter, 2019; Dakota Beer, 1961-1965; Norwegian spinning wheel, late 1700s

The Road Ahead



Hello Friends,

The study of history has always been about impacting the future. 2025 was a year of preparing the agency for exciting growth, including new capital improvements and building projects.

The road ahead for the State Historical Society of North Dakota is a clear path to an inspiring, event-filled horizon. As we participate in celebrating the United States' 250th year in 2026, we will explore that time in North Dakota through programs and *ND250 Road Trip:*

Our American Story, a new exhibit opening in July. We'll invite visitors to learn about where their own ancestors were 250 years ago and take them on a road trip experience showcasing thoughtful and enjoyable ways to connect with North Dakota's history.

The road ahead is also filled with the exciting progress of the Military Gallery expansion to the North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum. Many decades in the making, this new addition will examine the history of North Dakotans in the U.S. military. I am enjoying my journey down North Dakota's military history road. Of course, it is a place of great inspiration, and I have learned about many North Dakotans who leveraged their hometown roots to achieve remarkable objectives in our armed forces. Bravery, courage, leadership, and valor will be instantly recognizable in this gallery opening in late 2027. So, too, will stoicism, humility, and toughness. This place we call home has made us a hardy bunch, and it continues to shape us in remarkable ways as we move forward.

I am fortunate to work at the State Historical Society. Being surrounded by our collective stories and tangible objects in the State Archives and our museums, as well as through the agency's archaeology and historic preservation work, is a humbling reminder of where we have come from and lessons learned along the way. With history as our guide, North Dakota's road ahead is very bright indeed. We look forward to traveling it with all of you.

Kind regards,

Bill Peterson
Director, State Historical Society of North Dakota

VISION Inspire discovery and open minds to help shape the future of vibrant communities.

MISSION Empower through history.

CORE PURPOSE Respect the past, serve the present, inspire the future.

2025 North Dakota State Historical Board

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Cover: *A flag carried by the 1st North Dakota Infantry Volunteers during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars undergoes preservation work to stabilize its fragmented silk. The circa 1898 flag, donated by the North Dakota adjutant general's office in 1938, will be on exhibit in the ND Military Gallery opening in late 2027.*

2025 at a Glance



524,575
VISITORS

TO STATE MUSEUMS
AND HISTORIC SITES



206
VOLUNTEERS
8,553 HOURS



10
FRIENDS GROUPS
SUPPORTING 10 HISTORIC SITES



3 NEW NATIONAL
REGISTER LISTINGS



80,000
SQ. FT. OF
EXHIBITS

STATE MUSEUMS
& HISTORIC SITES

EMPLOYEES
85.5 FULL TIME
125 TEMPORARY



60 STATE MUSEUMS
& HISTORIC SITES

49 HISTORIC BUILDINGS

8 INTERPRETIVE CENTERS

24 SERVICE BUILDINGS

19 CCC MARKERS/KIOSKS

1 GOVERNING
BOARD



2,972,776

PAGEVIEWS ON
AGENCY WEBSITES

72,789

AGENCY SOCIAL
MEDIA FOLLOWERS



ANNUAL
CULTURAL
RESOURCE
REVIEWS

3,050

OF FEDERAL AND
STATE UNDERTAKINGS

LOOK WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE IN STATE COLLECTIONS!

131,815 BOOKS & OTHER PUBLICATIONS

2.2 MILLION PHOTOGRAPHS

1,599 NEWSPAPER TITLES

4,580 ORAL HISTORIES

3,712 MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

1,934 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORD SERIES

2,405 STATE GOVERNMENT RECORD SERIES

3,050 FEET OF SHELF SPACE OF MOVING IMAGE
COLLECTIONS

85,000+ MUSEUM ARTIFACTS

12 MILLION+ ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS

9% OF N.D. ACRES SURVEYED FOR CULTURAL
RESOURCES

21,000 CULTURAL RESOURCE REPORTS &
77,000 SITE FORMS USED BY **582** SPECIALISTS

Creating Inspiring Education Opportunities

FROM TEXTILE ARTS AND MUSIC JAMS TO HANDS-ON INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS and learning labs, our education team makes the past come alive for people of all ages.

In 2025, educational programs, including field trips, special events, offsite outreach, and virtual programs, reached 41,579 people, a 34.7% increase over the previous year. Meanwhile, the National History Day in North Dakota program, which invites students in grades 6-12 to explore the past through research and creative history projects, saw a 50% increase in participation, with three new schools taking part: Fargo's South High School, Roosevelt Elementary School in Carson, and Scranton High School. Additionally, 61 teachers attended our continuing education workshops geared toward helping them meet state standards.



North Dakota students competing in the 2025 National History Day contest in the Washington, D.C., area visit the Sakakawea statue at the U.S. Capitol in June. The original statue stands at an entrance to the ND Heritage Center & State Museum.



A boy learns to use a drop spindle at the ND Heritage Center's Fiber Arts Education Day in March.



Children show off their pumpkin-carving prowess in October at the Pembina State Museum.



2025 Teen Takeover grand champion Isabella Packineau-Williams of Parshall reflected on what North Dakota means to her in her winning entry "My Home."

We invite North Dakotans ages 13-18 to submit entries for the next Teen Takeover contest responding to the question: "What is North Dakota's most important contribution to the nation?" Visit statemuseum.nd.gov/teen-takeover.

NEW EXHIBITS AT THE STATE MUSEUM offered opportunities to engage with the past from fresh perspectives.

Medora: Artist. Heiress. Bear Hunter. Namesake of a Wild West Town showcased the life and art of Medora, wife

of the Marquis de Morès and mistress of their Badlands home now known as the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site. Featuring more than two dozen of Medora's watercolors, the exhibit, which closed in March, reopens at the Chateau Interpretive Center in Medora in fall 2026.



Medora's painting of her Badlands property is pictured next to a drone image of that same landscape today. SHSND 1972.91



A selection of new items in the museum collections went on view in *Recent Donations*. Dolls, weapons from the world wars, and a walking cast worn by former Gov. Doug Burgum during a Republican primary debate after he injured his Achilles tendon in a basketball game are just a few of the eclectic items on exhibit.

Alumna Mary Ellen (Traynor) Iverson's 1980s-era New Town Eagles Cabbage Patch Kid cheerleader doll is part of Recent Donations at the State Museum. SHSND 2024.59.1

IN NOVEMBER, NORTH DAKOTA KICKED OFF ITS COMMEMORATION of the United States' upcoming 250th birthday at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum.

Sponsored by the ND250 Commission, the event featured musical and historical performances, face painting, and booths hosted by community organizations and military representatives. The commission, created within the State Historical Society to help commemorate the nation's historic milestone July 4, 2026, also distributed nearly \$50,000 in Community Initiatives Grants in 2025 for local groups and organizations to mark the occasion. Throughout 2026, check out ND250-related programs at our state historic sites and museums. For a complete listing, visit history.nd.gov/events.



Members of the Minishoshe-Mandan Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution channel the Spirit of 1776 at the launch of the ND250 activities.

Honor. Educate. Inspire.



Gov. Kelly Armstrong (far right) and other dignitaries break ground on the Military Gallery addition. From left are Brig. Gen. Mitchell Johnson, ND National Guard adjutant general; Dr. Monica Mayer, MHA Nation tribal councilwoman; Brad Hawk, executive director of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission; Brian Berg, principal architect with Fargo-based Zerr Berg architects; and Bill Peterson, director of the State Historical Society.

A GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY IN JULY marked the beginning of construction on the new North Dakota Military Gallery addition at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum. The 70,000-square-foot expansion, a joint project of the North Dakota National Guard, the State Historical Society, and their foundations, is expected to be completed in late 2027.

In addition to a military history gallery honoring the service and sacrifice of North Dakotans, the project includes an event space, an expanded restaurant and patio, and a new outdoor courtyard and amphitheater. The nearly \$80 million expansion, designed by Zerr Berg Architects of Fargo, is being funded through a mix of public and private monies. To donate, visit statehistoricalfoundation.org/military-gallery-donation.

In fall 2025, the French Gratitude Train boxcar moved to its new Capitol grounds location next to the All Veterans Centennial Memorial to make way for Military Gallery construction.



Retired Master Sgt. Joy (Gregor) Kinney grew up in Ransom County yearning for a life of adventure and travel. Her 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force took her to more than 50 countries, including service as an airborne mission technician working from embassies around the world. We're thrilled this servicewoman's leather flight jacket will be on exhibit in the new ND Military Gallery. To donate your own piece of history, visit bit.ly/SHSND-CollectionDonate.

SHSND 2025.45.1



Allan Burke, founder of the Braddock News Letterpress Museum, demonstrates a 19th-century tabletop printing press to eighth graders as part of Living History Field Day in September. Burke helped facilitate the site's new printing press exhibit. At right, historical equipment on view in the print shop, where students once produced *The Fort Totten Review* and later *Keyapi*.

FOR MUCH OF FORT TOTTEN STATE HISTORIC SITE'S PAST as an Indian boarding and community school, students learned technical skills and produced school publications at a print shop in the former principal's office. A new printing press exhibit brings that

era to life via printing presses, typecase cabinets, tools, and equipment. Items were donated by the South Central Threshing Association, home of the Braddock News Letterpress Museum, and some were originally used by the *Devils Lake World*.



Attendees paint fossil casts at the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center in October. Launched in 2025 and held the last Saturday of each month, the Confluence Learning Lab offers hands-on programs connecting history, nature, and science.

WITH MORE THAN 10 MILES OF PAPER DOCUMENTS, the North Dakota State Archives is a veritable wonderland of historical treasures. Additionally, it holds 76.8 terabytes of digital records. Explore government records, photographs, manuscript collections, and more both online and in-person. In 2025, the team welcomed 1,326 visitors to the Orin G. Libby Memorial Reading Room and connected virtually with 1,632 patrons and 660 potential donors.

Have a nose for news? Explore State Archives digital holdings of more than 3 million pages of historical newspapers. In 2025, staff added 209,841 digitized pages to our collections (an 86% increase over the previous year), including papers from Burke, Cass, and Traill counties.



Establishing Deeper Connections With Core Constituencies

MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE TURNED OUT IN JUNE to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Welk Homestead becoming a state historic site. The birthplace of band leader Lawrence Welk, the homestead outside Strasburg was purchased by the agency in 2015.

Featuring historical demonstrations, a tractor trek, speeches, German Russian foods, and a “Lawrence Welk Show” reenactment by the Joyful Voices choir, the day-long event culminated in the unveiling of a bronze statue of Lawrence Welk on the shores of Baumgartner Lake.



Above: Tractor trek entries kicked off a day of “Life on the Homestead” events.

Left: Children enjoyed an array of activities, including a “money in the haystack” game.

Right: The Welk statue, donated by the entertainer’s grandson Jonathan Fredricks.



TO HELP EXPAND FAMILY-FRIENDLY PROGRAMMING, the carriage house at the Former Governors’ Mansion State Historic Site in Bismarck has undergone a makeover. The new classroom space, which previously housed an exhibit on transportation, will host educational activities and be available to rent.

Built in 1903 for the governor’s horse and buggy, the carriage house later served as a garage for gubernatorial vehicles. In 1927, its second-floor hayloft was converted into a residence for the mansion caretaker. The last governor moved out of the house in 1960.

A group of women dip candles in the renovated carriage house classroom at the Former Governors’ Mansion State Historic Site.



Preserving Community Heritage

When James Rindy was looking for assistance getting his Sheyenne Bar listed in the National Register of Historic Places, he turned to Lead Historic Preservationist Lorna Meidinger.

Preservation staff typically select one nomination from the public per year to research and write, going beyond the agency's standard role as coordinator of North Dakota nominations, and Rindy's bar fit the bill.

"Those are my favorite projects each year," said Meidinger. "I love digging into the research and helping communities achieve recognition for their local gems."

The National Register is the federal government's list of properties it considers worthy of preservation.

As part of the research, Meidinger poured over local history books, old newspapers, and fire insurance maps in the State Archives, traveling to Sheyenne in 2025 to photograph and document the site.

While the 124-year-old continuously operating bar received an exterior facelift to give it a Western look in the 1970s, the interior has remained relatively unchanged. It boasts the original wood bar, pressed tin ceiling, and layout.

Established by barber Henry "Ikie" Miller in 1902, the bar initially served as a gathering place for food, pool, and cards, with the back room eventually becoming his barbershop. Alcohol wasn't served until North Dakota legalized the sale of beer in 1933.

The nomination, forwarded to the federal Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places by the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Review Board for official designation in December, is historic in other ways as well. To date, the Sheyenne Bar is the only bar in North Dakota individually nominated and listed in the National Register.



Agency staff helped Sheyenne Bar owner James Rindy navigate the National Register listing process for his historic watering hole.

DID YOU KNOW? Nominations accepted in the National Register of Historic Places occasionally get an update. That was the case with Fort Totten State Historic Site, which added documentation in 2025 shedding light on its post-military history as an Indian boarding and community school (1891-1959) as well as its brief interlude as a tuberculosis preventorium (1935-1939).



Fort Totten State Historic Site

In 1971, when Fort Totten became the first North Dakota property to go through the formal nomination process for listing in the National Register, the original paperwork focused mainly on the site's time as a frontier military fort (1867-1890).

Thanks to an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the National Park Service, the agency was able to expand on the site's history, significantly enhancing its interpretation. Lead Historic Preservationist Lorna Meidinger also interviewed former students of the boarding school. Those interviews are available at the State Archives.

Optimizing Our Assets

MERIWETHER LEWIS' DOG SEAMAN WAS THE ONLY ANIMAL to accompany the Corps of Discovery on their famous 1804-6 expedition from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean and back.

Now Washburn's Fort Mandan State Historic Site, near where the Lewis and Clark Expedition wintered, is leading the way to create more pet-friendly state historic sites. Since spring 2025, dogs and other pets on leashes can accompany their owners inside the visitor center. Site Supervisor Ashli Laducer said they were already allowed on the grounds and in the reconstructed fort, "so the next step was just figuring out how we could make it more inclusive" by bringing them into the building.



A curious canine checks out the exhibits at the Fort Mandan Visitor Center. The site began welcoming pets in 2025.



Thanks to the addition of an HVAC system, the Chateau's circa-1880 box grand piano is now in a climate-controlled environment and ready for its first tuning since being donated by the Hagburg family of Gladstone in 1976! Here, Ashton Solecki, who plays Medora on the INSP network's "Elkhorn" series, poses with the Kurtzmann piano during a visit by cast and crew to the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site in September.

NORTH DAKOTA'S STATE HISTORIC SITES

provide first-hand encounters with places where history happened. In 2025, the agency completed 61 capital improvement projects across 17 properties. Highlights include adding an HVAC system to the home at the Chateau de Morès State Historic Site in Medora, installing public restrooms at the Welk Homestead, Fort Buford, and Whitestone Hill state historic sites, and completing Phase 1 of Fort Totten State Historic Site's gym renovation to stabilize the building structure.

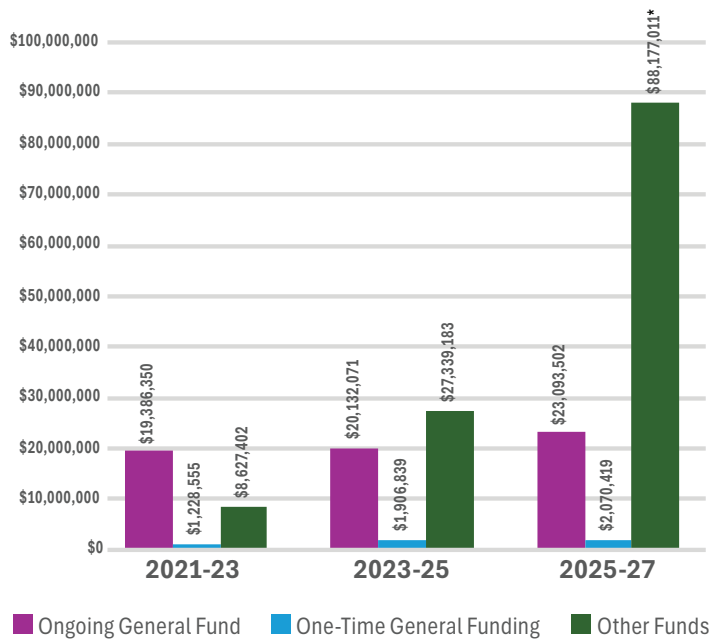
THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE and Archaeology & Historic Preservation Department completed their first major rewrite in more than 40 years of the guidelines governing how archaeologists, historians, and architectural historians document North Dakota’s cultural resources. These standardized guidelines promote good stewardship of North Dakota’s significant sites and can help minimize the impact of public and private development on cultural resources. View them at bit.ly/NDSHPOGuidelines.

Lead Historic Preservationist Lorna Meidinger photographs an early 20th-century farmstead in LaMoure County.



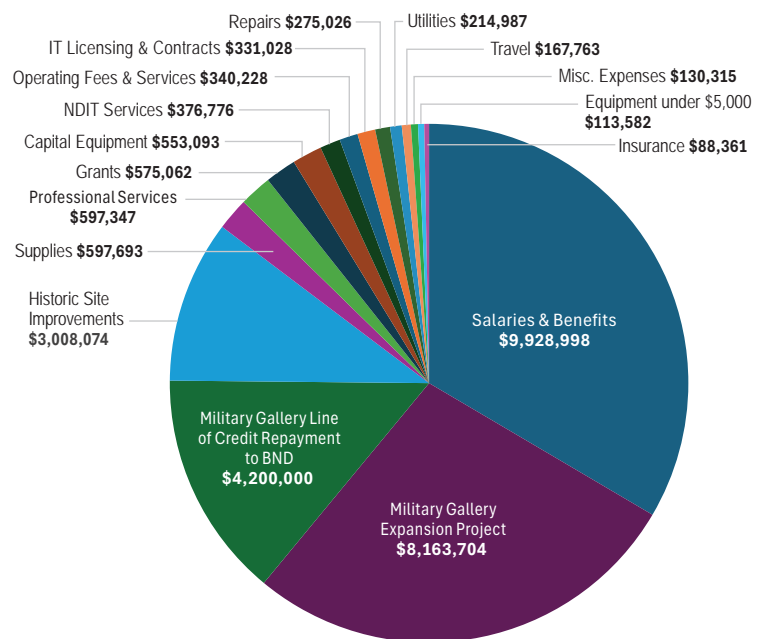
OUR MUSEUM STORES EXPANDED THEIR LINE of custom products featuring state historic sites and museums. In 2025, more than 300 of these tongue-in-cheek T-shirts, commemorating a “chilly” visit to the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site’s underground launch control center, flew off the shelves. We also added to our family of Museum Stores, opening the latest at Jamestown’s Stutsman County Courthouse State Historic Site. Shop in-person or online at statemuseum.nd.gov/store.

Financials



Appropriations

*Special fund authority includes \$78,644,524 for the ND Military Gallery expansion.



Expenditures

Embracing Technology

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE THEODORE ROOSEVELT MEDORA FOUNDATION, the agency helped lead high-tech archaeological investigations at the site of a former 19th-century military post in the Badlands. Built near the Little Missouri River to house soldiers guarding the construction of the Northern Pacific Railway, the Badlands Cantonment was remodeled into a hunting lodge after the line's completion in 1883. It was abandoned in 1887 when a fire destroyed many of the buildings.

Using drones, thermal imaging, ground-penetrating radar, and magnetometry, the team identified areas where artifacts might be found. Subsequent digs revealed items ranging from cartridge cases to a tin toy soldier to fragments of a porcelain doll. A floor or part of a wall was also excavated. Stay tuned as the team has plans to expand their exploration in 2026!

Archaeology & Historic Preservation Department Director Andy Clark, far left, and volunteers excavate a potential part of the Badlands Cantonment in October.



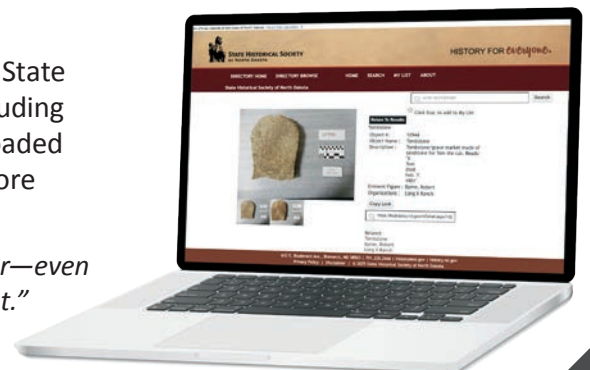
Research Archaeologist Brittany Brooks collects remote sensing data using a magnetometer and GPS in May 2025. This data allows the research team to target areas where artifacts may be located.



FILM FOOTAGE HOUSED IN THE STATE ARCHIVES often finds a second life on news broadcasts and media platforms across North Dakota. In 2025, Audiovisual Archivist Greta Beck fielded 172 requests for historical footage, including an InForum ask for this nostalgic segment from Fargo's WDAY-TV on Dayton's Santa Bear frenzy in 1986.

WITH THE LAUNCH OF THE fiNDhistory WEB PORTAL, more of the State Historical Society's collections are now available to the public online including artifacts, photographs, manuscripts, and publications. In 2025, staff uploaded about 1.25 million records to the site and continue to add items. To explore these offerings, visit findhistory.nd.gov.

fiNDhistory has what you're looking for—even if it's a tiny tombstone for "Tom the cat."



AGENCY ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND ADDITIONAL STAFF CONTINUE TO MONITOR SLUMPING and erosion at Double Ditch Indian Village State Historic Site north of Bismarck.

One of the region's most important archaeological sites, Double Ditch was home to the Mandan people for nearly 300 years (late 1400s-1785) and was a regional trading center. Growing cracks pose a threat to areas stabilized after the 2011 Missouri River flood and to village features including graves. The data we collect will help determine the best path forward to ensure the site's long-term preservation and integrity.

Geotechnical instruments and drones are helping our team document the extent and rate of slumping along the village's river terrace. In this aerial image, yellow posts indicate the location of monitoring technology. Large cracks can be seen along Double Ditch's pedestrian path.



Expanding Access to History One Scan at a Time

Volunteer Todd Hanson's love for "old paper and North Dakota history" comes in handy at the State Archives.

To date, he's scanned some 100,000 pages of manuscript collections, allowing these resources to be made available to the public on the findhistory web portal and reducing the time it takes reference staff to fulfill remote requests.

A retired teacher who spent 20 years at Cannon Ball Elementary on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, Hanson relishes encountering primary sources from the past. "Today, I got to see letters from railroad magnate James J. Hill," he notes.

But his "full circle" moment? That came when he opened a file from Oscar G. Wall, a soldier with the 1863 Sibley

Expedition, and discovered his original journal. Hanson, 61, had used a copy of the 1863 diary to write a paper on the expedition during his senior year at the University of Mary in Bismarck.

He credits his interest in history to growing up in the small town of Robinson, where his family owned the bar for 78 years. That bar made national headlines when a subsequent owner succeeded in briefly trademarking the hotly contested title of "Geographical Center of North America" for Robinson. So where does he come down on the debate?

"It was the center of my world," Hanson laughs.

Volunteer Todd Hanson (second from left) pictured with State Historical Society Director Bill Peterson, Gov. Kelly Armstrong, and Manuscript Archivist Emily Kubischta, receives the agency's Special Project Award for scanning 1,760 small manuscript collections in 2025.



Foundation Year in Review

SHARING NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY IN ARIZONA.

Executive Director Dale Lennon represented the Foundation at the North Dakota Picnic in Arizona.

Visitors stopped by the Foundation table at the March 2 event in Mesa's Red Mountain Park to learn about our mission, membership opportunities, and upcoming projects. A raffle drawing for a one-year family membership helped connect attendees with the work of preserving the state's heritage.



Retired ND Air Guard State Command Chief Jeff Miller and Foundation Executive Director Dale Lennon get ready to greet fellow North Dakotans.

CHANGING SPACES. With the North Dakota Military Gallery expansion underway, the Foundation has made significant adjustments to its office space at the ND Heritage Center. Construction created a need for a new volunteer workstation, different storage space, and moving mail operations to the boardroom. The Foundation is continuing to operate during the construction period. We invite you to stop in.



Helping tell the story of the Cold War.

RESTORING A HUEY HELICOPTER. The Foundation contributed to restoring a recently acquired Bell HH-1H Iroquois "Huey" helicopter at the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site near Cooperstown. Our support made possible a full exterior repaint, including insignia, that returned the aircraft to its Cold War-era appearance. This Huey, on long-term loan from the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, has been on view at the site's helipad since June. It served at the Grand Forks missile field during the 1990s.

HONORING CHAMPIONS OF LOCAL HISTORY. The Foundation sponsored the 2025 Local History Awards banquet in November recognizing individuals and organizations dedicated to preserving and sharing North Dakota's history.

The late Arlene Saugstad, a writer and editor from Minot, received the North Dakota Person of History Award; Dutch researcher Toine Schreinemachers and the Fargo Air Museum each received the Excellence in Local History Award; and former North Dakota State Archivist Gerald Newborg was awarded the Heritage Profile Honor Award.



2025 Local History Awards recipients and their representatives with State Historical Society Director Bill Peterson (center) and Foundation Executive Director Dale Lennon (far right).



ENHANCING STATE ART COLLECTIONS. The Foundation received a generous gift from Mel Webster of Bismarck, who donated three watercolor paintings by acclaimed Western artist Michael Haynes: *His Sister's Son*, *Arikara Warrior*, and *Peacock Feather*.

Now part of the State Historical Society's museum collections, these works enhance the agency's ability to share stories of the northern Plains through history and art.

State Historical Society Director Bill Peterson, Mel Webster, and Foundation Executive Director Dale Lennon.



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612 E. Boulevard Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58505-0830

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Discover our impact within the American story.

Exhibit opens July 2026 at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck.



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HISTORY FOR
everyone.