



Life on the Prairie: Building Community in a New Frontier

BY STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ND, ND250 COMMISSION

Throughout 2026, the ND250 Commission, administered by the State Historical Society of North Dakota, is leading the state's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. Through meaningful, inclusive and inspiring projects and events, the commission celebrates North Dakota's rich history, diverse people and bright future while honoring the state's heritage, individual values and spirit of community.

When people think about the settlement of North Dakota, they often picture homesteads, breaking sod and building farms across an open prairie. Yet successful communities required much more than land and crops. They required communities and institutions that connected people to one another and gave them a shared sense of purpose and place.

Long before North Dakota became a state in 1889, civic life was already taking shape.

Indigenous people were thriving within their own sophisticated governing and community cultures dating back more than 10,000 years. Europeans interacted with Indigenous tribes as early as 1738 when La Verendrye navigated the Missouri River.

The first permanent non-Indigenous settlement in what is now North Dakota was established at present-day Pembina in 1797 by a North West Company fur trader named Charles Baptiste Chaboillez. He built the outpost named Fort Panbian, near the confluence of the Pembina and Red rivers in northeastern North Dakota. This was constructed near already-established Native communities that had already established trade systems for goods and crops spanning hundreds of miles across the future United States.

Situated along important trade routes near the Red River, Fort Panbian became more than a trading post -- it became a gathering place where commerce, communication and community developed hand in hand. By 1801, Alexander Henry the Younger established a permanent North West Company post at modern-day Pembina, laying the groundwork for North Dakota's first organized church, school and post office.

This was just the beginning. Additional settlements followed up and down the river and moving east and west as newcomers quickly recognized that industries required thriving communities that supported the economic engine. They needed places to learn, worship, exchange ideas and govern themselves.

As towns emerged across Dakota Territory, some of the first community institutions included schools, churches, newspapers and local governments. The 1883 Stutsman County Courthouse in Jamestown, now a state historic site open to the public, was the primary location for key gatherings and civic conversations about transitioning from Dakota Territory to becoming the state of North Dakota.

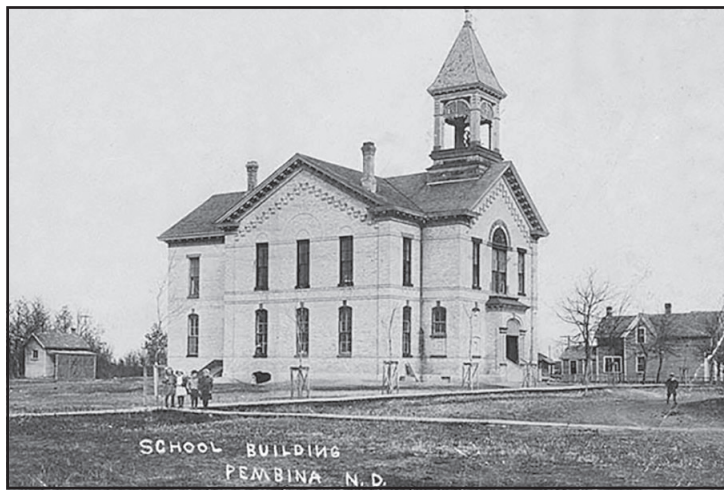
Over time, economic industry shifted from fur trading to a more agrarian society. During the Great Dakota Boom of the late 19th century, thousands of newcomers arrived to establish farms and businesses. Railroads connected communities and



ND's first post office, Pembina, ca. 1863. Source: SHSND, 00362-00001



ND's first schoolhouse, Pembina, ca. 1876. Source: SHSND, C1321-00001



Pembina School, ca. 1900. Source: SHSND, 10737-00108

new towns appeared across the prairie. Nearly every settlement aspired to have its own church, school, newspaper, post office and town government that were initiated by local citizens. These institutions became the foundation of civic life and connected communities.

North Dakota's civic story also reflects the diversity of the people who called the prairie home. Over time, communities established institutions representing many faiths, languages and cultures. These organizations helped newcomers maintain traditions while contributing to the larger American story.

The importance of civic institutions extended beyond community life. They helped residents practice principles of self-government. Through local newspapers, school boards, church committees, township meetings and city councils, citizens participated in public life and worked together to solve shared challenges.

Today, North Dakota looks very different than it did during the immigrant settlement era. Population centers have shifted, transportation has evolved and many small communities have changed. Yet the institutions that helped build the state remain important. Newspapers continue informing citizens. Radio, TV and social media now play a role. Schools prepare

future leaders. Places of worship create connection. Local governments provide services and all require public participation.

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary, these institutions remind us that democracy is not sustained only through national events and elections. It is strengthened every day in communities where people gather, share ideas, volunteer, serve and invest in their neighbors.

North Dakota's civic life was built one community at a time. Those communities continue to shape the state today.

This summer, celebrate ND250 with a trip to the newly opened Pembina Gorge State Park in Walhalla. Learn more about the fur trade era at Pembina State Museum in Pembina or at the ND Heritage Museum in Bismarck, including the ND250 exhibit. And visit the 1883 Stutsman County Courthouse in Jamestown and experience their engaging civics exhibit covering how we became a state.

To learn more about North Dakota's role in the 250th anniversary and events happening across the state, visit ND250.com.

What local establishments can do to capitalize on the World Cup

The FIFA World Cup 2026™ is likely to be among the most anticipated sporting events across the globe. The FIFA Annual Report 2025 estimated that the World Cup could reach a global audience of six billion people across various viewing platforms in 2026 -- which means there's lots of ways for restaurants and local bars to capitalize on the quadrennial craze.

The action began in Mexico on June 11 and culminates with the World Cup Final in New Jersey on July 19. That offers five weeks of opportunities for local businesses to draw record crowds, and a few simple steps can help bar and restaurant owners make their establishments the go-to place to watch all the action unfold.

- **Be sure you have the right broadcast package.** The World Cup will be broadcast on Fox Sports (English) and Telemundo (Spanish) in the United States. Establishment owners are urged to review their existing television/streaming packages to confirm they have the necessary channels.

- **Upgrade your customers' viewing experience.** Sports fans have grown accustomed to an ultra high definition viewing



experience, and they'll expect the same sharp images they have at home when venturing out to watch the action this summer. Establishment owners can set themselves apart from the competition by upgrading their televisions and sound systems to reflect the latest advancements.

- **Make an effort to entice walk-ins.** If an establishment is in a busy area where restaurants and bars will compete for customers, then a little effort to entice walk-in customers can go a long way toward generating revenue. Hang some outward-facing televisions so they're facing the sidewalk where foot traffic might be heavy.
- **Offer an outdoor view-**

ing experience. If possible, spruce up your outdoor seating areas and hang an extra television or two. The World Cup plays out over a five-week span between June and July, a period typically marked by beautiful weather. A comfortable, well-equipped outdoor viewing area can set a bar or restaurant apart from the competition.

- **Know your audience.** Establishment owners who operate in neighborhoods with significant ethnic populations can cater to those fans when the nations they support are competing on the pitch. Offer specialized game day menus featuring ethnic food. For example, if a bar is located in a neighborhood where many people trace their ancestry to Germany, then offer popular German foods and beverages when Germany is playing. This approach can be applied to any country and fan base.

- **Promote your offerings.** Advertise your offerings in the weeks leading up to the World Cup and throughout the five-week competition. Add an insert to menus listing what you'll be doing, and market those offerings on popular social media platforms as well.

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Tips to steer clear of traffic on your next summer road trip

When vacation season hits full swing, vacationers have long had a tendency to get behind the wheel and take to the open road, and that tradition seems to be especially appealing to modern travelers. The 2026 Trends Report from Hilton indicated that 71 percent of travelers surveyed indicated their intentions to drive on their next vacation. Road trips are favored for a variety of reasons, including a sense of spontaneity that is not available when vacationers are traveling on airline's schedules.

With so many vacationers expecting to hit the open road this summer, it can benefit all drivers to embrace strategies designed to help motorists steer clear of traffic.

- **Choose alternative routes when mapping trips on GPS.** Modern drivers rely on mapping applications to get them to and fro on long road trips, and some of those apps may allow drivers to choose alternative routes that are less busy. Many mapping apps default to the fastest route, but Apple Maps and Google Maps also offer options to avoid highways and tolls. Those alternative routes tend to be less heavily trafficked than the primary routes. Drivers also can look for specialized navigation apps like Calimoto. Calimoto is popular among motorcyclists who use it to find the most scenic and winding routes as opposed to the fastest. Such roads tend to be less crowded, which can be ideal for vacationers who aren't in a hurry but hoping to avoid traffic.

- **Wake up early.** While it might not be for everyone, those who can rise early can beat many of their fellow travelers to the road. Peak congestion periods vary by region, but it's generally best to avoid departing during times of day associated with morning and evening rush hour. That's between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. and between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Roads tend to be considerably less congested between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m., but it's important that drivers who intend to hit the road at this time get sufficient sleep the night before departing and avoid driving drowsy.

- **Depart a day early.** If possible, drivers can plan to leave for vacation a day early. For example, leaving on a Thursday



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For example, leaving on a Thursday

as opposed to a Friday can help drivers avoid weekend road trippers and others who are starting their own lengthier trips on Friday. It also can help to return home a day early or leave a little driving as possible for the final leg of the trip, particularly if it's on a Sunday. Roads tend to be packed with returning vacationers and weekenders on summer Sundays, making those days a particularly busy time to travel.

- **Dust off the map.** When confronting a traffic jam, many travelers will utilize the same mapping apps to find alternative routes. That means the traffic may just be shifting from one busy road to another road that may soon become just as crowded. Drivers are urged to bring along a traditional map to find local roads that mapping apps are unlikely to recommend.

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