



**Drought and Depression**  
By Carole Butcher

March 9, 2026 – The entire economic system of the United States began to break down following the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Unemployment swept across the nation, and North Dakota suffered even more than most of the country because of a devastating drought. Production was down and so were prices. In 1933, the per capita personal income in the United States was \$375. But in North Dakota, it was only \$145. Thousands lost their farms. There was a mass migration out of the state. Over one third of the remaining population lived on relief.

North Dakotans were not united in how the government should respond to the crisis. They tended to be extremely independent. Farmers did not want the government to tell them to change their farming methods, and the residents in general were reluctant to live on charity handed out by Washington, considering it a loss of independence and freedom. In spite of efforts by a Democratic Administration to get the country back on its feet, North Dakotans remained staunchly Republican.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932 and inaugurated on March 4, 1933. More than 13 million Americans were out of work. There was no time to lose. He had to act, and he had to act fast. On this date in 1933, the Emergency Banking Act was introduced in a special joint session of Congress. The sense of crisis was so great that there was only one written copy of the Act available, and it was read aloud before Congress. It passed that evening. Roosevelt immediately signed it into law. The Act expanded the powers of the President to respond to a banking crisis, allowing him to regulate virtually all banking functions.

Roosevelt told Americans that “It is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than under the mattress.” His immediate action had the desired effect. Within two weeks, Americans deposited more than half the funds they had withdrawn from banks. The Stock Market began a slow recovery.

The Great Depression was by no means over. North Dakotans continued to suffer. People drifted off the farms into towns, where they were no better off. Governor Langer believed it was crucial to increase farm prices to save the state. He declared a moratorium on farm foreclosures. With measures instituted by both Washington and Bismarck, North Dakota slowly emerged from the Great Depression.

**Churchs Ferry**  
By Michelle Holien, edited by Dr. Steve Hoffbeck

March 10, 2026 – Located along U.S. Highway 2 west of Devils Lake, the town of Churchs Ferry has struggled to remain intact. To passersby, at first glance, Churchs Ferry appears to be abandoned.

Those who live nearby have witnessed the rising waters

of Devils Lake creeping into Churchs Ferry, threatening, and eventually engulfing many of the town’s houses and buildings.

On this date in 1888, the <evils Lake Inter-Ocean reported on the town’s namesake, Irvine Church. He lay deathly ill in his home, but would thankfully go on to make a miraculous recovery.

Arriving in 1883, Irvine Church was among the first settlers in the area near the Mauvais Coulee, a streambed where furious waters flowed. French fur-trappers found this deep ravine difficult to cross. The word “mauvais” means “bad,” and “coulee” means “flow” or “ravine.”

Irvine Church established a ferry, allowing settlers to cross the barrier to make their way to Devils Lake, the nearest town. A little community arose near the coulee and it took the name of Church’s business.

But the ferryboat enterprise did not last long, for the Mauvais Coulee dried up altogether in the late 1890s. History lost track of Mr. Church, but it is known that he left his little town and pursued life in California, where he died in 1925.

Today, little of Churchs Ferry still stands. Only twelve residents live there, a major decline from 110 in 1999. Almost all the people accepted federal funds to move their houses into nearby towns. As the water kept rising, several buildings were destroyed, including Zion Lutheran Church. Eventually the water receded, and now only the building on higher ground remains.

As drivers pass by Churchs Ferry and glance over a sea of cattails, it is unnerving to realize that the water Irvine Church’s ferryboat once navigated had risen to decimate his little town.

**Spring Has Sprung – Almost**  
By Carole Butcher

March 11, 2026 – On this date in 1935, the high temperature for Fargo was predicted to be 26 degrees with 25 mile an hour winds. But even though it was over a month until Easter, spring was on the minds of North Dakotans. Across the state in Williston, the high was 30 with a warming trend. The weather report anticipated only a trace of snow with increasingly mild temperatures. Streets and roads in many places in the state were icy after a period of thawing and freezing, but no serious traffic problems were anticipated. Spring was in the air.

Shops were also in the mood for spring. The ads reflected the improving weather. Fargo’s Sears Roebuck and Company advertised “smart spring dresses.” The ad boasted that “Every little lady can have gobs of fresh, cleverly styled washable frocks.” The dresses were 49 cents each for size 7 to 14 years. Other styles were 69 cents each. Mothers were urged to buy lots of the dresses for school and dress-up. Winter coats were on clearance for \$1.99.

A.L. Moody’s was also in a spring mood. Their ad noted that “March may be a lion or a lamb.” The store offered lady’s knit dresses which could be worn under a coat “when March winds roar” or worn on their own “when spring is in the air.” Pastels and two-color combinations were offered for \$7.95 each.

Herbst Department store focused on spring cleaning.

Spring was the time for new sheets at 84 cents each, ordinarily offered at \$1.39. It was noted that the taped edge was 25% stronger than ordinary sheets. Ruffled curtains were sure to brighten the home for spring. Half-length curtains had to be “seen to be appreciated.” Daintily ruffled and in a large selection of colors, the curtains, a \$1.00 value, were 15 cents each. The store also advertised their spring fashion show, coming up the following week and featuring suits, dresses and sweaters for spring, displayed by live models.

North Dakotans seem to take pride in an ability to withstand harsh winter. There is a tendency to laugh off below zero temperatures and gale-force winds. But spring is just around the corner, and that is not a bad thing.

**Town Criers**  
By Sarah Walker

March 12, 2026 – It’s a “flock” of geese and a “murder” of crows, but what do you call a large group of town criers? On this date in 1929, the Park Hotel in Killdeer was full of them!

They had gathered in Killdeer for their regular Town Criers meeting. The Killdeer Herald reported that it “was a capacity affair. Thirty-five persons were recorded in attendance.”

The town criers enjoyed a meal, after which the chairman called the meeting to order. Part of the order of business was to discuss what they had accomplished. The newspaper reported, “As the last word,

Haakon Weydahl, in his usual vivid way, portrayed their activities in military parlance, which took in every maneuver from the breakfast bugle of the morning after to the zero hour of the night before. As a climax, he decorated them with a specially prepared ribbon from each of which was suspended a five dollar gold piece.”

After the business of the meeting was over, the town criers went to the Odd Fellow Hall in the Killdeer Hotel building, where they played whist, sang, and enjoyed themselves. Their number increased as people around town, including “many who were weather-bound in town overnight”—at least that was their excuse.

The newspaper stated, “Somewhere, long ago, a sad-faced poet who never ‘convived’ with his friends and acquaintances uttered the following: ‘Backward, turn backward, O time in thy flight, and make me a child again just for tonight.’ That gem of thought confessing the accumulated stagnation of years gone by and expressing a yearning for things that were forever gone, would have never graced the crown of literature if the discouraged old poet had ever attended a party with the Killdeer town Criers.”

There are official town crier positions in some cities today, though none in North Dakota. Still, one can imagine the echo of the group of men, cheering each other, and perhaps even exclaiming out loud, “Hear ye, Hear ye!”

**The Fargo Theatre Turns 100**  
By Jayme L. Job

March 13, 2026 – The finishing touches were being put onto the brand-new Fargo Theatre on this date in 1926, before its much anticipated opening on March 15. Isaac Ruben, co-owner of Finkelstein and Ruben Theatres Company, arrived in town to direct last-minute installations.

No theatre of this scale or finery had ever been seen in the state. The Bijou, Fargo’s first theater to feature moving pictures, opened in 1906, but it didn’t rival the grand theaters of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Enter Moses Finkelstein and Isaac Ruben, two men who had been building theaters in the Upper Midwest since the turn of the century. By 1925, they were operating over a hundred theaters in four states, including the famous Capitol Theater in St. Paul and the State Theater in Minneapolis. The men decided to expand their business into North Dakota, and hired the local firm T. F. Powers and Company to construct the new theater. Built on the former site of Idlekope’s Fruit Store, the theater was constructed at a cost of \$350,000, a small fortune in 1926.

Ruben and Finkelstein broke ground for their new enterprise on September 15, 1925, and after six months of construction, the state-of-the-art theater was ready for its grand opening. With its landmark 36-foot-tall Fargo marquee, fine Italian leather seating for 1300, and 5,000 light bulbs, the theater was indeed monumental.

The theater’s first patrons entered for a 2 p.m. showing of Syd Chaplin’s film, “The Man on the Box,” which chronicled the comedic antics of a wealthy bachelor turned taxi driver. They were also treated to music performed on the theater’s \$25,000 organ, the Mighty Wurlitzer.

Despite the popularity of the theater, it eventually fell into disrepair. In the 1980s, local residents raised funds to restore the theater to its original glory, and in 2001, the first Fargo Film Festival was held in the restored venue.

Today, as the Theatre celebrates 100 years, patrons can attend a variety of shows in the art-deco building, and can still hear the music of the Mighty Wurlitzer.

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