

## Dakota Datebook

### Legendary Concerts in North Dakota

By Jack Dura

April 6, 2026 – Today we stroll down memory lane, recalling past concerts in North Dakota. Perhaps you'll remember some!

Louis Armstrong performed in 1957 at the Grand Forks Central High School Auditorium for 1,200 people. But his appearance is better remembered for his comments to the Grand Forks Herald about the treatment of Black students in Arkansas known as the Little Rock Nine.

Armstrong had canceled his government-sponsored tour of the Soviet Union because "the way they are treating my people in the south, the government can go to hell." He said President Eisenhower had "no guts," and he denounced Arkansas's governor with such strong language, that the reporter asked him for words he could actually print! They went with "uneducated plow boy." Days later, Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock to protect the students.

Ray Charles also performed in Grand Forks, appearing with the Raelettes in 1968. 3,600 people filled the University of North Dakota Fieldhouse to hear him perform such hits as "Georgia on My Mind," "You Made Me Love You," "Crying Time" and "I Can't Stop Loving You."

While pausing for reflection halfway through his concert, he put down a heckler. Charles said: "You know, they say we're descended from apes, and that man got a two-way ticket." Charles also played UND's Chester Fritz Auditorium in 1975 and '79.

Anne Murray sold out the Chester Fritz in 1974. A six-piece band accompanied her. Her repertoire included "Snowbird." She praised the auditorium as "a treat" after doing a series of concerts in gymnasiums.

On this date in 1974, John Denver performed at the Bismarck Civic Center for 7,100 people. His nearly two-hour concert featured 22 songs including his latest hit, "Sunshine on My Shoulders." Denver said he wrote the song "on a really cruddy day in Minnesota." His stage set featured a wall-hanging that read "War Is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things." Denver also tested songs from his next album "Back Home Again," and earlier in the day he even recorded a song for the album at a Bismarck studio.

Johnny Cash performed in 1980 at the State Fair in Minot for 8,000 people. His set included "Folsom Prison Blues," "Ring of Fire" and "I Walk the Line." He introduced his wife, June Carter Cash, and they sang several numbers. Cash had performed in the Magic City years earlier, and told the crowd, "It's nice to be back in Minot."

### Farm Relief

By Carole Butcher

April 7, 2026 – Following World War I, North Dakota farmers faced financial hardship. The war had created a high demand for farm products – prices rose as exports surged. Farmers enjoyed a prosperity they had never known. But when the war ended, demand rapidly decreased. Overproduction resulted in sagging prices. Farmers who had taken out mortgages and loans to buy new equipment and expand

their operations found themselves unable to meet their financial obligations.

Congress took steps to relieve the farmers. Four attempts were made during the 1920s to pass the McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Act. It was supported by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Vice President, but it was vetoed by President Calvin Coolidge. It never became law.

In 1929, another attempt to help farmers was the establishment of the Federal Farm Board, with half a billion dollars of funding. The Farm Board helped farm organizations buy, sell, and store agricultural surpluses. President Hoover hoped this would halt the falling crop prices, but the funding was soon exhausted with no effect.

Next came the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930. It was supposed to help farmers, but the high tariff rate actually made the situation worse.

By the 1930s, North Dakota farmers were in dire straits, and things only got worse with the advent of the Great Depression. North Dakota farmers, like farmers in the rest of the country, found themselves in the midst of a financial disaster.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt inherited one of the worst agricultural situations the Great Plains had ever seen. Roosevelt believed that prosperity would not be achieved until farmers were again on even financial footing. He recognized that the farmers faced problems that went beyond the disastrous drought and dust storms.

Many of his New Deal programs were aimed at helping farmers. On this date in 1934, Roosevelt signed the Jones-Connally Farm Relief Act. Benefit payments, crop adjustments, funds for controlling livestock diseases, and moderation of planting restrictions were designed to tide the farmers over until the financial situation improved. The bill also provided for the purchase of starving cattle.

ND farmers still faced hardships, but the measures taken in Washington had put them on the long road to recovery.

### Horse Manure Problems in Grand Forks

By Dr. Steve Hoffbeck

April 8, 2026 – Modern people think of spring as the season of fresh air and flowers blooming and lovely breezes wafting through budding trees after the snows of winter have fully melted away. But those who lived in cities prior to 1910 had to consider other aromas of spring.

Although numerous citizens walked or used bicycles or electric streetcars, horses still provided the bulk of the transportation, pulling wagons, carriages and carrying people around town.

Grand Forks County had a population of 18,357 in 1890 with a total of 14,833 horses, and the city of Grand Forks had 4,979 people, so plenty of families in town had horses, which required a carriage house with storage space for hay, straw and carriage, along with box stalls for the horses.

Horses produced large amounts of manure. A horse weighing 1,000 pounds excreted about 50 pounds of manure daily, thus yielding more than eight tons of manure per year!

The straw used for bedding soaked up waste products at a

rate of about ten pounds per day, but when horses moved around the city, they deposited manure on street pavements, so that a pedestrian had to watch his step on city avenues. The city hired sanitation workers to sweep the streets of manure and other garbage.

During a long winter, manure piles from stables arose in backyards and alleys. When frozen, the piles were not terribly odiferous. When spring arrived, however, the stench of thawing stable waste colored the air.

On this date in 1893, the City Health Officer, a man by the name of J.R. Logan, issued a public notice for the annual spring cleanup. Logan informed all citizens that they had to "thoroughly clean their alleys and out-premises of all ashes, manure and other garbage," and remove all waste to the "city dumping ground," located on Skidmore Avenue on the north side. Those who failed to comply within five days would have to pay a fine to cover the cost of "a corps of scavengers" employed by the city to cart away "all offensive deposits."

### Banning Elmer Gantry

By Sarah Walker

April 9, 2026 – Sinclair Lewis published the book Elmer Gantry in 1927. The book is about a traveling evangelist who preferred whiskey, women, and wealth to saving souls. It was a controversial book, banned in some areas around the country, such as Boston, where sales of Elmer Gantry could be prosecuted under a law prohibiting "indecent and obscene books."

On this date in 1927, North

Dakotans joined in censoring Elmer Gantry when the North Dakota State Library decided not to stock it. The State Library was still fairly new, having been established as the Public Library Commission in 1907, taking up one room in the State Capitol.

Lillian Cook, then librarian, told the Bismarck Tribune she would not buy it for the library and she would not recommend it, stating, "In almost every library the purchase of one book means that another would be dispensed with, and in this case, Mr. Lewis' latest book would be considered 'another' in comparison with almost any 'one.'"

She continued, "It is lacking in accurate perception. It does not produce a convincing impersonation. It has not the rapier touch of the satirist but the bludgeoning of a propagandist. ... The impression is given that the glasses Mr. Lewis used when making his investigation prevented his seeing anything he did not want to see and which did not contribute to his preconceived idea. The result is not an interpretive piece of sculpture, but a work of base metal, cast in a predetermined and distorted mold. Lacking truth and beauty and art, it does not merit attention nor consideration."

Today, the book is not held at the State Library because the book does not fit with the State Library's collection policies, the library being "built and maintained...to meet the information needs of state government, the library community, and the citizens of North Dakota."

Other books that were banned

and burned over the years include "The Scarlet Letter," "Where the Wild Things Are," "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Moby Dick," "The Great Gatsby," and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn."

Books of all sorts are still banned for all sorts of reasons, and that's why, in 1982, Banned Books Week was established. The annual observance celebrates "the freedom to read."

### WW II Victory Speed Limit

By Dr. Steve Hoffbeck

April 10, 2026 – "V for Victory," was the famous motto of Winston Churchill as he rallied international support for winning World War II. North Dakotans answered the call and willingly rationed vital goods needed to win the war.

Key elements among the rationed goods included tires and gasoline. The best way to save both was to reduce the speed limit on roads and highways.

On this date in 1942, Governor John Moses requested that all police officers in the state enforce the 50 miles per hour speed limit then on the books. Moses had been asked by President Franklin Roosevelt to reduce the limit to 40 miles per hour, but he said he had no authority to do that.

However, that fall, President Roosevelt instituted a nationwide Victory Speed limit of 35 miles per hour, starting October 1. Governor Moses then asked all North Dakota motorists to observe the 35 miles per hour speed in order to conserve "rubber tires and gasoline," and to save lives, but acknowledged that he had no power to change the limit from 50 to 35.

Nonetheless, the state highway department began installing new road signs in highly visible locations with the words: "Victory 35 Limit," starting in December. Oddly, officers could not arrest or prosecute anyone for exceeding 35 miles per hour, because the official limit remained at 50, but the rationing authorities were known to take away gas-rationing coupons from speed violators.

The situation changed in June 1943, when Governor Moses decreed a new wartime speed limit of 35 through an executive order. This meant that speeders faced a fine as well as losing gasoline coupons.

Later that year, in Cass County, a speeder got arrested and fined on December 8 for exceeding the limit, and he appealed his case all the way to the state supreme court. The court eventually ruled that Governor Moses had exceeded his authority in changing the speed limit, and, thus, the court overturned the Victory Speed limit and the speeding ticket.

Oddly, the man whose stubborn insistence on driving faster than 35 was named Victor Johnson, from Moorhead, so "V," in this case, was more for "Victor" than for "Victory." And so the Dakota speed limit reverted to 50 in December of 1944. The governor, being slowed by the courts, said he would not try to impose the Victory Speed limit again.

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