



"I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs, and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music."
-George Eliot

Thanks to today's technology, music is thankfully at our fingertips – on our radios, our television, streaming through our computers, stored digitally on our electronic devices.

There's a good reason music is so readily available. No one can survive without it.

That seems to be particularly true in Vermillion and Clay County. Music is so loved here that:

- A renowned museum was created on the University of South Dakota campus to showcase the dizzying array of instruments men and women have developed and mastered to produce it.

- Special efforts have been taken to provide places where good music can be heard, from Gayville Hall and the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center, to USD's Aalfs Auditorium and downtown Vermillion's Ratingen Platz.

- A young girl who lived here long enough to be exposed to Vermillion's culture and the music program at the UCC Church went on to be a Grammy winner.

This special publication tells the stories of people in Vermillion and Clay County who, in one way or another, touch our lives with music.

They are the stories – both past and present – of musicians, of songwriters, of people who are dedicated to collecting instruments or researching their origins so that we may learn, and be exposed to wondrous melodies every day.

Special thanks to everyone who helped us – particularly Cleveland Johnson, director of the National Music Museum in Vermillion, who shared many of the timeless photos of the museum's history that you'll find in this special Heritage Edition. We are also grateful to the musicians who, while in the process of creating or rehearsing great music, took the time to talk with us.

We urge everyone who reads this special edition dedicated to Vermillion's musical heritage to also take a moment to thank our colleagues who purchased advertising to make this publication a reality.

The support we've received from our community is greatly appreciated.

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The Vermillion Plain Talk

Larson's legacy is the National Music Museum

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The collection of instruments at the National Music Museum (NMM) is now more than 15,000 strong, with pieces gathered and donated from across the globe.

When the museum was founded on July 1, 1973, it consisted of more than 2,500 pieces, all of which were collected by one man – Arne B. Larson.

Born on a farm near Hanska, MN, in 1904, musical instruments were always a source of fascination to Larson.

According to his son André, some of Arne Larson's first acquisitions came in the form of band instruments from the Civil War era.

The collection grew further in World War I.

"My father got to know some connections (in Europe), and they were concerned about what might happen, and they were anxious to send a lot of their old instruments and things they had around there to this country," André said in a 2011 interview with the Plain Talk.

Arne Larson eventually earned degrees from the Minneapolis College of Music and Northwestern University in Evanston, IL.

In January 1943, he, his wife Jeanne and their family moved to Brookings where he served as head of the public schools' music department.

By that time, World War II had started, enabling Larson to get more instruments from overseas.

André Larson said his father would send tea and spam to the United Kingdom to help stock the food supply, in exchange for items for his collection.

"Literally, these crates of band and other musical instruments would periodically show up at my parents' house," André said.

In addition to these, Larson also went out each Sunday to give piano lessons, and purchased even more instruments with the money he earned.

"They eventually took over the whole house," André said.

Along with the by now thousands of instruments, Larson and his wife also had four children.

"We each had our own bedroom with a bed and a chair and a little desk, and the rest of the rooms (were filled with instruments)," André remembered. "It was a large house."

Larson would never admit to having a favorite



One of the loves of Arne B. Larson's life was conducting. Here he leads the Dalesburg Community Band for the 113th annual Midsummer Festival at the Dalesburg Lutheran Church in 1982.

(Photo courtesy of the National Music Museum)

piece, his son said.

"My father would always say, 'I have four children, and I wouldn't take \$1 million for any one of them. But I wouldn't give five cents for another dozen instruments,'" André said.

As he grew older, the question arose of what should be done with those instruments.

In the early 1970s, André found the answer.

"I had been a student here at the university, so I talked to the people here and they decided that he should bring his collection here," he said. "They didn't realize the extent of it, so when it got here, there were truckloads of stuff."

The items – about 2,500 at that point – were initially stored in the attic of Dakota Hall, the old student center and other locations across campus.

The collection was

allowed one room in the Carnegie Library building.

"He sat in a desk ... and he used to get things out and play them for people," André said.

When the I.D. Weeks Library was built, it was expanded to two rooms.

It has long since taken over the entire building.

"Once we got established in there, people started bringing in stuff to donate," André said.

The NMM now has more than 15,000 pieces to its name. The original 2,500-piece collection was donated to the state by Arne and Jeanne Larson in 1979.

Arne Larson died in 1987, but his legacy lives on at the museum, the collection of which is so large that it can't all be put on display at one time.

"There's no way to access all of our

collections without coming to see it, and even then you can't see it all," André said. "There's satisfaction in things like that, but there's also satisfaction in watching a group of school kids jabbering away about all the stuff that they saw on their way out the front door. That's the future generation."

"So there's a lot of satisfaction, not just working with the instruments, but working with the dynamics that you see in how it touches people, which is what musical instruments are supposed to do," he said.

It's the purpose to which Arne Larson devoted his life.

– Some of the information for this article was taken from "The Shrine to Music Museum: A Pictorial Souvenir."

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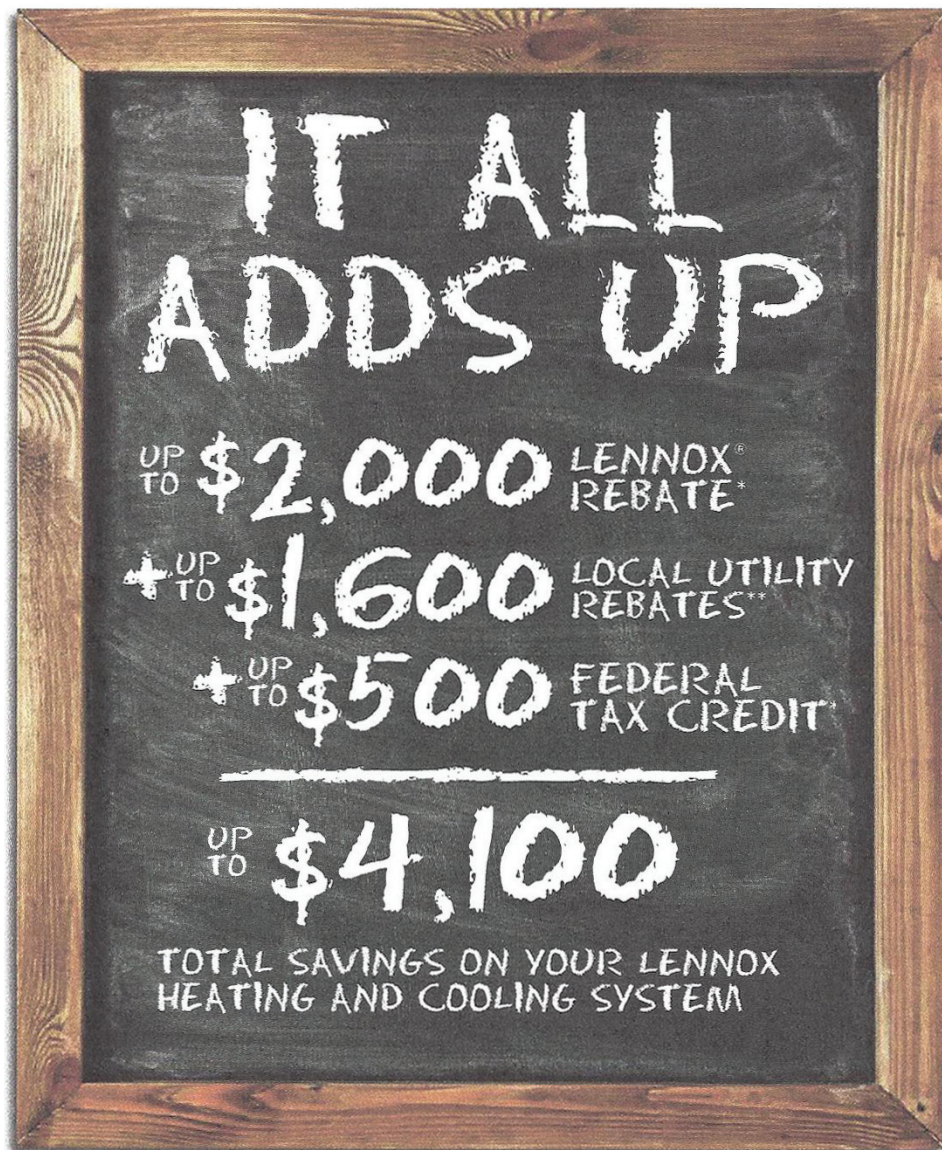
Through Time...

Arne B. Larson is born on a farm near Hanska, MN, in 1904.



The Carnegie Library is constructed in 1910.

Arne Larson begins collecting instruments in the 1920s, eventually acquiring more than 2,500.



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