

# All-Time Minnesota Moments

By John DuBois

You're 5 Minnesota Moments.

Which makes me wonder: What are Minnesota's top five Moments? Uh-oh. This is going to be controversial. Boiling Minnesota's storied past into five moments is totally subjective. So how about if we look at this way? These are my moments. You can visit [www.minnesotamoments.com](http://www.minnesotamoments.com) and weigh in on yours. Maybe we can even put a little democracy into the equation.

## Vote for your top five Minnesota Moments and we'll crown the winners.

Anyway, without further ado, here are my top five picks:

- The Dakota Conflict, aka the Minnesota Sioux Uprising. I've read quite a bit about this and I think we should actually come up with another name for this moment. How about: The Settler's Invasion? That's really what happened. European settlers poured into Minnesota.

Their fur trade not only destroyed the animals the Dakota depended on, but they went on to take away their lands. It all came to a head in 1862 when the Dakota were starving. The annuity payments that the government promised in exchange for the land were late.

And the Indian agent, who was sitting on a warehouse full of food, foolishly and cruelly told the Dakota they could eat grass for all he cared. The agent was the one who was found with a mouthful of grass. Nobody knows for sure how many people were killed. Some say as much as 800 settlers.

Accounts from survivors are pretty horrendous. But the one "horror" that stands out for me came from the settlers. When a farmer ambushed and killed Little Crow, the Dakota's reluctant leader of the conflict, the settlers did something incredibly barbaric. They took Little Crow's scalp, skull and hands and paraded them from town to town, even, I read, church to church.

Until 1971, those bones were held by the Minnesota State Historical Society.

There's one more awful note about the event: After the Dakota were defeated, settlers hanged 34 of them in Mankato. Actually, 303 were slated for execution, but Abraham Lincoln, who pored over records from the hasty trials, spared all but 38. It was the largest execution in American history.

- OK. That's a pretty grim Minnesota Moment. So here's a happy one — the 1987 Twins.

Minnesota has always had an inferiority complex. We measure ourselves against the New Yorks, the LAs, even the Chicagos and always come up short.

So to have a team break through and win the World Series is big. Real big. Especially a team that was built on heart, not big salaries.

Even the star player, Kirby Puckett, wasn't a free agent that we bought with a fat contract. He was a happy go lucky kid who, like most of the team, came through our farm system.

In fact, Kirby's the only one on the team who achieved baseball immortality — that is, induction into the Hall of Fame.

The rest of the guys, including stars like Kent Hrbek and Frank Viola, are only remembered by us Minnesotans.

But what a memory: Homer Hankies, the deafening crowds in the Metrodome, and that wonderful photo on the Wheaties box.

- That brings us to Moment Three and probably my most controversial pick — the Kensington Runestone.

Just to refresh everybody's memory: It's a stone tablet — kind of like the Ten Commandments — that a Kensington area farmer unearthed in 1898.

The inscription on the stone, carved using the Runic Alphabet, a precursor to Latin, is attributed to Viking explorers.

You know those guys — big swords, long flowing yellow hair, wooden ships that looked like a dragon.

The tablet, which bears the date 1364, talked about a battle with local Indians in which the Vikings lost 10 men red with blood and, according one on translation, tortured.

If you believe in the Runestone, the Vikings were here more than 100 years before Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

They found a country that was a lot wetter than it is now — allowing them to float all the way from Hudson's Bay through Lake Winnipeg to Central Minnesota.

I know that most scholars have dismissed the tablet as a hoax. But there are believers. And they make some interesting points.

One is the strange holes found in boulders scattered about Central Minnesota. They're similar to the mooring holes Vikings drilled to anchor their ships. Another is how the Mandan Indians, who lived in present North Dakota, could have people with blond hair and blue eyes.

There have been various Viking implements discovered as well.

I really don't if the story is true or not. But you've got to admit, it's a good story, which is enough for me.

- Moment number four is a no-brainer. The birth of Bob Dylan, aka Robert Zimmerman, in Hibbing Minnesota.

In choosing Bob, I'm saying he had a bigger influence than Charles Lindbergh our Little Falls native. He was the first to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. I'm

even overlooking one of my hometown's famous citizens — Sinclair Lewis. And he was the first American author to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

But I think Bob has had a bigger impact. There were a few pilots nipping at Lindbergh's wings. They were just days behind the lone eagle. And we — meaning Sauk Centre natives, certainly could have done without Lewis's Main Street skewered small town life.

But Bob was critical. His gutsy songs of peace became the anthems that helped end the Vietnam War. His poetic self-searching lyrics helped the most influential band of all time — the Beatles — find their voice. And even now, in his 60s, Dylan, the poet, continues to write songs that challenge us to keep looking inside. And keep ch-ch-changing.

- And finally my fifth and last Minnesota Moment — the Mall of America. Just kidding.

I've got three moments vying for this pick. One is the Hinckley Fire that roared through East Central Minnesota in the fall of 1898 and killed as many as 800 people. Smoke was so thick people could see it in New York City.

The Cloquet Fire is a second option. It ravaged northern Minnesota less than two decades after the Hinckley Fire and killed just as many or more people.

Which reminds me of another natural disaster — the July 4, 1999 Blow down in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It leveled more than 600 square miles of forest and scared the heck out of campers there. (I left the area a day before it hit).

The third moment vying for my pick is the one I'm going with. It's not exactly a moment. More like a period. It's when the French Voyageurs paddled and portaged in the Far North.

Yeah, I know. They carried furs — and that means they had a hand in destroying the animals that had fed the hunters and gatherers here in Minnesota for hundreds of years.

I'm also aware that these guys lived a hard life — expected to work 14 hour days, paddle 55 strokes per minute, portage almost 100 pounds of furs and fighting insects and weather and probably some Native Americans along the way.

I read somewhere that these guys' life spans weren't much over 30. I also read that few knew how to swim — how could that be?

But still I've travelled over the same trails, pitched tents at the same campsites, sat around the same fire rings and wondered at the same stars.

Nice moments.

## What are your top Minnesota Moments?

Here are some ideas to get you thinking.

- The 1991 Twins (they, too, won the World Series).
- Native son Charles Lindbergh's record setting flight across the Atlantic. (He's from Minnesota, you know).
- Sinclair Lewis' Nobel Prize for Literature. (He's from Gopher Prairie, I mean Sauk Centre).
- The Minnesota Vikings four Super Bowl appearances — and losses.
- Betty Crocker and Betty Crocker Kitchens. (Do you know that people actually used to ask whether Betty Crocker was married to General Mills?).
- Pillsbury Doughboy. Woo-hoo.
- The Interstate 35 W bridge collapse.
- The Super Bowl held in the Metrodome. (No. XXVI – 1992).
- Jesse Ventura's political smack down — remember how he came out of left field and won the governorship and a pretty regular seat on TV talk shows.
- SPAM — our nation's favorite luncheon meat, invented and made in Austin, MN.
- Post-it Notes. 3M (Minnesota, Mining & Manufacturing).
- Paul Bunyan. (Not sure where he ran off to, but I saw him when he was a fixture in Brainerd.)
- St. Paul native Charles Shultz and his cast of characters, Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, etc.
- Medtronic's pacemaker, a lifesaving device that has saved so many.
- Mary Tyler Moore — what a cool statue of her in front of Dayton's, I mean Marshall Field's, that is, Macy's in downtown Minneapolis.
- The wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald — amazing song by Gordon Lightfoot.
- The Mall of America — biggest in the whole wide world.
- The first and only woman legally hung in Minnesota — Ann Bilarsky who was convicted of poisoning her husband and hanged in 1860.