

1968

## Dakota Territory

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### Recommended Citation

Johnson, David. "Dakota Territory." *New Mexico Quarterly* 38, 4 (1968). <http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol38/iss4/63>

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DAVID JOHNSON

## DAKOTA TERRITORY

Years before I saw it  
elevators jutted erect out of the grasslands  
amazed and awkward banners announcing  
a stand of poplars, a few frame houses  
a dry goods store threaded by iron rails  
a steam driven artery moving to the horizon  
beyond the tip of your finger  
safe in bushels and a new spur

Fargo grows like a wild weed  
barbecues and patios past  
the city limits / Sears sends credit cards  
with the catalogue suits and overalls  
walk side by side / the college has an idea  
or two and West Fargo's the home of the 16th  
largest stockyard in the world  
and yet downtown—at the center  
a few of the old pillared homes  
are for sale and an unsavory crowd  
frequents the bars near the tracks  
last December another run of the Great Northern  
Railway / Fargo to St. Paul  
was discontinued

some cities like giant cedars  
develop heart rot at maturity  
Ottertail, Minnesota once had blood  
in its veins 1600 people 3 grocery stores  
stables for horses and a creamery  
an important stop for the Fargo-St. Paul train