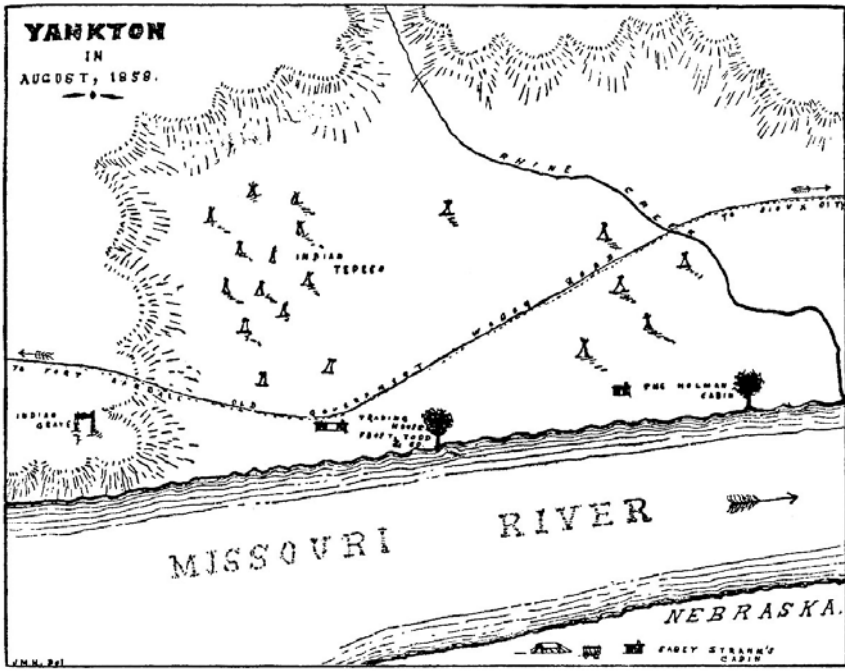


SECTION

A

BEGINNINGS

Life In Yankton: 1861-1911



ABOVE LEFT: A rough map showing the condition of Yankton in 1858, shortly after the signing of a land treaty with local Native Americans. Thus, three years before 1861, there was something at this spot called Yankton. ABOVE: By 1875, Yankton was taking off, thriving as a river port and as a territorial capital, and feeding off the frenzy of the Black Hills gold rush. BELOW LEFT: In 1877, Jack McCall was hanged in Yankton for the murder of Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood, thus tying this community to one of the most vivid episodes in Old West lore. (P&D archive photos; from the book "Yankton: The Way It Was!" by Bob Karolevitz) BELOW RIGHT: Huge chunks of ice created by what is now called the Flood of 1881 left destruction in their wake throughout this region. (South Dakota State Historical Society photo)

The Top 5: Where It All Began ...

Discussing the 150-year history of Yankton in the span of just 40 newspaper pages is a tough proposition. For every item we bring up, we're likely missing 10 or a hundred, or even more.

So, we'll hit the highlights. We've divided the history into three 50-year sections, and each section will commence with an overview of the "Top 5" events of that time period. These lists should not be viewed as definitive judgments; rather, they are subjective talking points that, we feel, give readers a fairly quick overview of the time period in question.

The story of Yankton is certainly more than 150 years old. It begins, arguably, in 1804 when Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery came through the area and held a council with the local Sioux at Calumet Bluff. In the years thereafter, white travelers came through the region, which was still Indian land. The place was known, and settlement eventually arrived. For our purposes, that's where the story really starts ...

1. THE FOUNDING OF YANKTON

While 1861 has been designated by modern organizers as the year of Yankton's "birth," the entity known as Yankton was actually in place three years before the pivotal year of 1861.

After the Treaty of 1858 was signed with 15 local Yankton Sioux chiefs, the

small white settlement that would be known as Yankton took root in what was known as "Old Strike's Camp," so named for the chief Old Strike, also known as Struck-By-The-Ree. The early outpost was barely a community in the traditional sense, consisting mostly of trappers and traders living in minimal conditions.

But a sense of community took root, perhaps in part by default. Yankton was one of the first settlements of what was about to become Dakota Territory. Stationed as a western outpost along the Missouri River, an essential highway across the prairie to the Rockies, it became an integral jumping-off point into the embryonic territory.

But 1861 is the year that the small settlement blossomed into a bona fide community. In March of that year, the vast Dakota Territory — which stretched from what is now the Big Sioux River to the Rockies — was established, and Yankton was soon designated as the territorial capital. That June, a newspaper, the *Weekly Dakotan*, was founded. Also that year, two churches — Christ Episcopal Church and United Methodist Church — were born. By the end of 1861, the foundation of Yankton was clearly established, with its future waiting to be written.



2. THE CAPITOL SAGA

The arrival of the territorial capitol no doubt did a lot for Yankton's prospects as a community in the earliest days of the Dakota Territory. It's sudden departure more than 20 years later wounded the town deeply, but not fatally.

Yankton was chosen as the territorial capital shortly after Dakota Territory was formed in March 1861. William Jayne, who was the personal physician to President Abraham Lincoln, was named the first territorial governor. Yankton's role as the territorial seat had begun.

A capitol building was constructed in

1862, and for two decades, the territory was governed from Yankton.

But in time, other political forces, seeing the value of the territorial capital designation, began devising plans to wrest the capitol away from Yankton. And it was finally accomplished under the cloak of deception. With the law demanding that such official business be performed within the capital city, lawmakers in 1883 convened inside a railroad car that stopped in Yankton and stripped the community of the capitol, moving the governing seat to Bismarck. For the first time in the history of Dakota, Yankton was no longer its capital city.

"If the capital commission had studied (and it doubtless has kept its intellect

pretty busy during the past week) to commit a larger blunder than the one perpetrated this morning, they could not have made a greater success of it," the *Press & Dakotan* declared on the front page of its April 3, 1883, edition.

Yankton residents railed mightily at the move. The former capitol building fell into neglect and disgrace, and was eventually hauled away.

But time heals the wounds, at least somewhat. In the late 1980s, Yankton erected a replica of the territorial capitol in Riverside Park, and it still serves as a popular meeting place today.

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