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# Yankton Celebrates A Rich History

## It's The People Who Have Made Yankton A Special Community

BY DAVID KNOFF  
Mayor of Yankton

The Mother City of the Dakotas is filled with a richness in history unmatched in South Dakota. It is impossible to point to any historical event in our community as our defining moment. Whether people came through on their way somewhere else, were born and raised here or moved here to plant their roots, it is the people who made Yankton so special for the last 150 years.

We weren't a dot on the map when Lewis and Clark rediscovered the beauty of the land by way of the untamed natural waterway we call our Missouri River. Their expedition paved the way for an explosive growth in population and commerce. The history was preserved by the need for people to be informed, thus the birth of the *Press & Dakotan* and 150 years of keeping us up on our community.

The American West was made up of unique characters who had the spirit necessary to tame the untamed. Many of them made their way through on their journey. Yankton became a stopping point as riverboats fed the gold rush.

People needed supplies for the long haul in front of them. Hotels and saloons fed and watered them. The second floors of the buildings downtown also were centers of commerce, selling companionship for cowboys and politicians. Custer camped here on his way West before he met his fate. Others met their fate here. A shooting in Deadwood ended up with Jack McCall sentenced to death by hanging — a result western justice. The proceedings didn't have the benefit of modern constitutional interpretation because the Constitution



Knoff

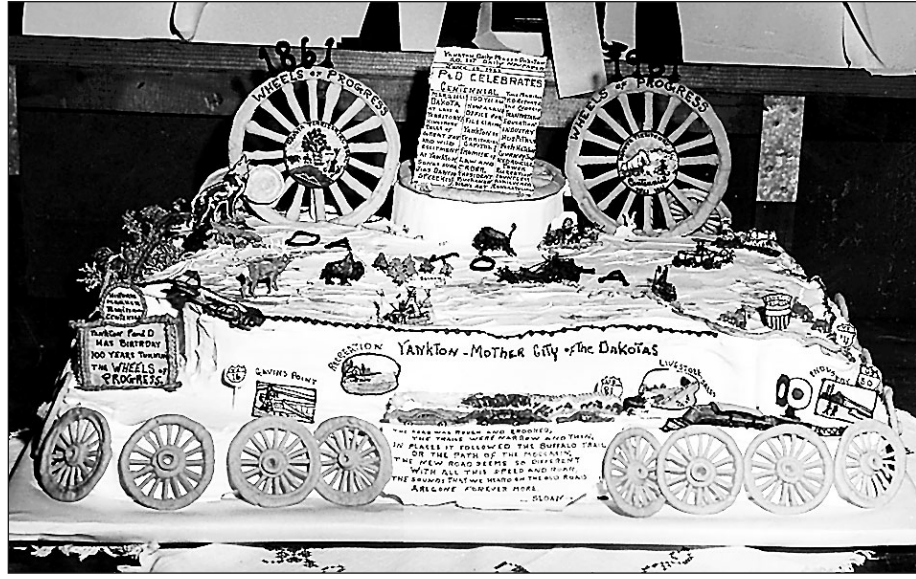
wasn't that old. Whether he would have been convicted today is anyone's guess, as is the place he is buried in Yankton.

Industry and business built Yankton into its present, thriving position in our state. As rural South Dakota declines in population, we have kept the No. 7 on our license plates. The contributions of the Gurney family — seeds, gasoline, hotels and any other money-making venture were prevalent in our town. And there is the funny-sounding musician from "Nordakota" who made his mark on WNAX. The station it still the No. 1 preset on farmer's radios all over the Midwest. Legends on the radio kept farm wives learning recipes and farmers knowing the prices.

When business demanded easier access across the river, the Meridian Bridge was built. On this momentous birthday year, it will be reborn as a pedestrian bridge, evidencing our transition to a recreational mecca. Who would have known that the riverboat would have been replaced by hundreds of boats tucked into a marina just a few miles west of town? The impact of the dam transformed the area into a summer destination for thousands of visitors every week.

South Dakota politics started in Yankton. The capitol replica at Riverside Park is a reminder of that history. Pierre has a central location, but what legislator wouldn't rather experience our (normally) mild Februaries here in the "Banana Belt?" Maybe we can win the capitol designation back over the next 150 years!

Mental health care has been a stalwart in Yankton for 132 years. From the early beginnings in the beautiful Meade building to our modern hospital, we know here that persons with mental illness are valuable members of our city, and our acceptance of our role in caring for them is commendable. The abundance of every type of health care we enjoy here today had its



When it's party time in Yankton: This cake, baked by Mrs. Mel Livingston of Pickstown, honored the 100th birthdays of Dakota Territory, Yankton and the Press & Dakotan when the territorial centennial celebration was held in Yankton in June 1961. It was on display at the Press & Dakotan offices during the newspaper's open house.

humble beginnings with nuns in the convent and doctors who made house calls with horse and buggy. Many of our doctors not only practiced medicine, but developed procedures and practices that benefit people across the globe.

Those same sisters that provided health care knew the value of an education. Their dedication to learning gave rise to our very own Mount Marty College. Having an institution at that level is invaluable to Yankton. Economic development is directly affected by the level of education available to a community's residents. Our citizens have both the college and the Regional Technical Education Center to advance their positions and make a better life for themselves and their families. The rich history of Yankton College is kept alive by its alumni. Great musicians and scholars, together with football legend Lyle Alzado walked

those grounds. The present inhabitants aren't there under the best of circumstances (as it is a federal prison camp), but they have given new life to a tired old campus. We have always had excellent schools, both public and private. Not only have we graduated our own Tom Brokaw and many others who have contributed greatly to society, we have enjoyed success in the activities our kids take part in.

If you consider where we have been the last 150 years, it is natural to wonder what the next 150 will bring. Yankton will face challenges we can't predict and will just have to meet them head on. Don't let that scare you — we've been doing that for nearly two centuries. Every person who has lived here their entire life, decided to move here or is just making their way through will meet the challenges and enjoy the successes of the future.

## History Provides A Unique Bond

BY DOUG RUSSELL  
Yankton City Manager

With the arrival of 2011, the City of Yankton is experiencing 150 years of existence, allowing us the opportunity to reflect on what it means to grow and overcome challenges as we progress into the future. It is a unique circumstance to be able to celebrate this achievement which Yankton will only experience one time. While it is important to stay focused and concentrate on issues of growth and development, especially considering the current opportunities, it is equally important to recognize the community for its effort over the past 150 years.



Russell

Being a part of a community represents a social commitment to banding together through similarities and differences, striving always to find the best outcome. It is a mixture of independent values and attitudes that define this effort and lead us to the ultimate resolution. In the midst of successful achievements, a community will always be faced with a respective challenge, with other issues seemingly always ready to take their place. When focused on the current issues, it is easy to forget that the Yankton community has spent a 150-year lifetime addressing the respective "issue" of the time. Likewise, it is easy to forget that the community has also experienced a lifetime of victories and accomplishments. Through them all, the community has defined itself and moved forward to create the Yankton that we see today.

It is an honor to be part of the Yankton community while it celebrates this milestone. Moreover, it is an honor to be serving in a community where we are committed to defining a future that has been built on the foundation of spirit, values, and attitudes of those who have come before us. Even in the last year, Yankton has experienced achievements that will establish a platform for continued growth.

It is with excitement for the future, and a recognition of community attributes displayed in Yankton, that we celebrate the past 150 years, knowing that there is more history waiting to be written.

# Yankton's 150th: A Testament To Survival

BY KELLY HERTZ  
The Press & Dakotan

Yankton is officially celebrating its 150th birthday, and with the broadest of brush strokes, one of the finest compliments we might give ourselves is to declare, "We're still here."

Yes, such a statement would seem to set the bar for success rather low.

But if the knowledge of this 150th anniversary would have somehow been known to those earliest inhabitants of Yankton, they probably would have taken a great deal of pride in it.

Nothing about the future was guaranteed in the settlement of Yankton back in 1861 — or 1858, 1859 or 1860, if you want to get technical about when this community truly took root. For the white settlers, this was a wild place far removed from the safety of the east; a place surrounded by myriad dangers, whether it was from the harsh weather, the remoteness or the indigenous natives; a place whose only lifeline was a river that could drown you out as well as keep you alive.

There were a lot of dreams sown here. There was a lot of faith that went with it, too.

So to the Yankton of 1861, the Yankton

of 2011 was far from a sure thing.

Consider a couple of unfortunate alternatives.

Think about the small community of Green Island, located just below Yankton on the Nebraska side of the river. It was crushed by the Flood of 1881 and obliterated from existence.

Or contemplate the fate of the settlement of Bon Homme, located west of Yankton in southeastern Bon Homme County. It, too, was a river town with big dreams, and it nearly achieved them: In the late 1860s, the territorial capitol came within one vote in the Legislature of moving from Yankton to Bon Homme. A large settlement was platted for Bon Homme, and its future as a thriving river port seemed secure. However, the railroad, which was the other great frontier lifeline of the 19th century, went to Tyndall in the center of the county, causing some in Bon Homme to relocate. Then the river channel itself relocated south, leaving Bon Homme a mile from the shore. The dream literally died; fittingly, all that's really left of Bon Homme is a small, mostly empty cemetery.



Kelly HERTZ

(Granted, an empty cemetery generally has many plusses, but in this instance, it suggests an unrealized, stillborn history.)

Unfortunately, there are many other examples of frontier settlements that did not survive and are buried in the sod of history. They are either too numerous to rename or forgotten from all recollection.

I think about these ghosts a lot when I look at Yankton in the 21st century. The fact that it survived at all still looms as a large accomplishment.

But this community has done more than merely survive.

It has endured through bitter failure. When the territorial capitol was whisked away in 1883, the town might have just folded. When several attempts at various industries failed to make a go of it, it could have crippled this place. When the Flood of 1881 smothered the lower sections of this town and destroyed a portion of its steamboat fleet, it might have been a mortal economic blow. But Yankton withstood all these things.

A lot of hard work and determination

made this place work, and not merely in Yankton's earliest days. The greatest example is the Meridian Bridge. Yankton residents dreamed for years of having a permanent structure cross the river, and through hard work, finally reached that reality in 1924 with a bridge that was built largely with local funds. Then, Yankton collected tolls on the bridge for 29 long years, finally retiring the debt in 1953. That took a lot of perseverance, and Yankton had enough to go around.

And there was some luck along the way. Yankton was fortunate that the floods didn't do more damage to it, unlike Green Island or other places along the river. And Yankton was probably also fortunate to have a native son, Chan Gurney, in the U.S. Senate when the Pick-Sloan Act was passed in Washington in 1944, establishing a network of dams along the upper reaches of the Missouri River. The rewards reaped from that daring decision have been obvious.

Ultimately, Yankton has prospered, and there has been much more than mere chance tied to that — even if we take those things for granted.

HERTZ | PAGE 18A

## Proud to be part of Yankton's Past, Present & Future

*Congratulations to the Press & Dakotan on their 150th anniversary.*

*We appreciate all you have done for our community.*



Deb Specht  
Broker Associate



Tanya Hacecky  
Broker Associate



Norene Gibson  
Broker Associate



Dan Specht  
Broker



Randy Kussman  
Broker Associate



Lisa Williams  
Broker Associate



Verlin Ailts  
Broker Associate

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200 W. 4th Street  
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605-664-5555