Frontier

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another rise was on the way from above and that we must get out. They planned to go to Meckling to warn people there but when Mr. Ainsworth, one of the men, saw there were nine of us to be moved, he decided to go back with us with his skiff.

"He said the women could not ride but must walk along on the ice and hold to the boats so they could have a support when they broke through the ice

"So we started across the ice for the bluffs. Connett and Redrick had the big boat with their two children in it and their two women walking beside it. Mr. Ainsworth and myself had his skiff with my little girl in it and my wife holding to the stern. Every few minutes some one would break through the ice into the water and pull themselves out by holding onto the boat. The women sank deeper into the water as they were weaker in the arms and hands. About an hour after dark, we reached what had been open water in the afternoon but was now full of running ice. We had traveled about two miles and had a half mile more to make to reach land. We could see lanterns waiting for us on the bluff so we pushed in and jumped aboard. After a few rods, the water coated with ice so rapidly it was impossible to make headway. Thin ice would break and slip one on top another until finally it became strong enough to bear our weights on boards. We pulled the boats on top of the ice to prevent them from freezing in and floated down stream for about two miles where the moving ice halted and we went into camp for the night. The women and children packed themselves into the big boat like sardines with one quilt to a family. It was a cold, freezing night, we had nothing to eat and our clothing was wet and frozen.

"April 5 — Most of us found our feet and legs badly swollen. Just as we prepared to start for shore, all the ice in the channel started to break suddenly and moved down stream with us. The big rise had reached us. The ice gorged around the big boat with the women and children in it and crushed large holes in each side of the forward end. By lifting the damaged end upon the ice we kept it afloat until other ice gorged underneath it. From there we worked back all in one boat to the solid ice we had left the night before. Loose ice started and ran full from shore to shore. Had we succeeded in reaching clear water in the morning we should have been wrecked.

"From the spot where we were marooned, we could look about with a glass and saw the Metcalf crew coming from Meckling with about 75 people. They had two or three skiffs and some boards. They were near the Redrick house when the rise came. The house, barn, windmill and my house were floated off by the rise. The party from Meckling reached us just as the water began to clear. We had patched our broken boat and all together we made a start. The bluff shore was lined with people, teams and boats, powerless to render aid. Now, however, large skiffs met us half way across the channel, took our lead rope and pulled us rapidly to the shore."

P&D ARCHIVE PHOTO

Sod houses like these were common in Yankton's earliest days. "During a long rainy spell, it continued to rain in the house for several days after the skies had cleared outside and mother kept tin pans about the floor to catch the drips," recalled one pioneer.

A. L. WEST

Sixty-nine years of continuous residence in Yankton county, to which he came as a lad of three years, is the unusual record of A. L. West, of Mission Hill. Within the range of his memory is much of the history of this section.

A. L. West, known to his intimate friends as "Lou" West, tells of the early days in the following language:

"Like all other homes at that time, our first house was built of cotton-wood logs with roof made of slabs covered first with prairie grass and then dirt. During rainy weather, lambs quarters were plentiful on the roof and among my early recollections are times when my mother would send me up on the roof to cut greens for the family dinner. During a long rainy spell, it continued to rain in the house for several days after the skies had cleared outside and mother kept tin pans about the floor to catch the drips.

"Farm methods too have changed, for instance, corn planting. In the early days after the field had been laboriously plowed with an ox team and 12-inch walking plow — a 15-acre tract being an average size field at that time — a contrivance was used to mark rows both ways. This was done by placing four wooden runners across the field lengthwise and crosswise. The corn seed was then planted with a hoe at the intersections.

"To witness, with your mind's eye, a myriad of (grasshoppers) alight ... it is best to imagine a quite heavy snowfall in midsummer, the flakes as large as a 25 cent piece, completely filling the air, and covering the earth as rapidly and completely as a heavy snow will do in winter."

Indians, who were thickly settled along the river at that time and were willing to work for a little of the white man's food, often helped my father with the planting.

"One incident I recall occurred when I was about 7 years old. My uncle Abe (A. L. Van Osdel) ... had brought me a single barreled pistol from Sioux City and I was proud of my prowess with it. Indians were helping my father at that time and they found much amusement in having me shoot at the great flocks of black birds. The Indians were never without their guns. One day they gave me blank caps for my pistol and told me to take careful aim and to be sure to get down low. When they had taken aim behind me they would say, "Now Shoot." Of course I always got a bird, not realizing they had shot it.

"When I was about five, mother and I were preparing to go to the Morey place, now owned by Wm. J. Magorien. As we were about to start we saw a number of squaws coming across the field. Mother bolted the door and instructed me not to make a sound. After lowering the blinds we stood in the middle of the room waiting for them to go away but they circled the house several times and then camped on the door-steps. After waiting for some time mother decided to open the door. They always wanted to bargain for bread and this time they offered to trade a sack of feathers for bread. My mother knew the only way to get rid of them was to make a deal. Some time later, however, she discovered the feathers were of her own which she had brought from Iowa and stored at the Van Osdel place. ..."

GEORGE H. MINER

My first recollections as a little fellow are that the business section of the town was located on the Levee or river bank. I remember the Press, later the Press and Dakotan newspaper, Mills and Purdy Drug store, French Joe's Dance Hall, also other dance halls, the old city hall, Bramble and Miner. ...

The flood was in the year of '81. It washed out the town of Green Island, Nebraska and I helped Jim Marsh after the flood. ... During this flood 42 people were seen on one brick house. This was the only house that remained after the flood. Rev. Seccombe, Congregational minister, lost his church, which went down the river like a steamboat. Two boys on the roof of the brick house saw their home float by. They saw two men with a skiff and offered $500 if they would save their parents who were in a the house floating by. They were reluctant but finally decided to try and on arriving at the house they saw the couple hanging on with their heads just above the rafters. They thought it was impossible to get them. The couple pleaded and promised to pay them five hundred dollars which was in a trunk in the lower part of the home. They were saved. The house finally landed near a bluff four miles down the river. The trunk was found and also the money that was promised to them. My dad's warehouse contained flour and this was covered with nine feet of water. He had a skiff stationed to a platform in front of the mill. The men laughed at this when they saw it but before nightfall they were glad to take a ride in it when he went. On this they floated to the front door of the Portland Hotel. Boats were left high and dry after the flood. One double deck steamboat floated over the land past the Milwaukee Depot and landed near Stone's farm now called the Gurney Nursery farm. The boats were taken back to water much the same way that houses are moved.

... When I attended the fourth grade school Yankton had an earthquake. When the building shook, we all thought it was Mr. Bristol shaking the furnace in the basement. The quake was strong enough to shake a jar of butter off the scales in Capt. Lavender's grocery store.

... At the time of the last big Indian parade in Yankton there were about 700 of them. They camped on the prairie northeast of the Milwaukee depot near the old race track. Among them were two old squaws who did house work for my mother when I was a tiny tot. They immediately recognized me saying "Georgie," and emphasized their speech by drawing a finger across their nose where I have a blue vein.

In later years I was bailiff under District Attorney Campbell at the time Brave Bear was hanged in the court yard. I have a picture in my possession that was drawn by him in colored pencil. It is a picture of an Indian on horseback. His photograph is pasted on the side of the picture. Just before he went to the gallows he gave this to me and said "Me Go Good Bye" and he pointed upwards.

CHAS. EDMUNDS

Coming to Yankton as a boy of 12 in the year 1964, Charles P. Edmunds has always been one of the best "mines" of information on early Dakota days, because of an observing and retentive mind, and because of the active part he played in the affairs of the Territory.

The Edmunds family arrived on September 4, 1864. The settlers were still nervous about the Indians, although the Minnesota outbreak was two years behind and the army was engaged in chasing the hostile tribes westward. The Wiseman massacre in Nebraska had occurred just one year before.

The Yankton Stockade had disappeared, but some of the earthworks were still in evidence when he arrived, Mr. Edmunds says. Within a very few years these had been leveled off as the town grew, streets were graded and buildings erected.

... He was appointed deputy United States marshal in the fall of 1873 for Dakota Territory, by J. H. Burdick, the then United States marshal, and served through his administration, and also under John B. Raymond, until 1882, when he went into the banking business with his father and brother Will.

... In his position as deputy United States marshal Mr. Edmunds was required to travel much over the Territory, and it brought him into close touch with conditions and people on the frontier. He became acquainted with all the well known pioneers of Dakota, and has a vast fund of information on them and on innumerable incidents in Dakota history.

It was his duty to go to the Black Hills and bring witnesses to Yankton for the trial of Jack McCall, hanged here for the killing of Wild Bill Hickok at Deadwood, and McCall was in his custody in Yankton up to the time of the hanging.

"(Jack) McCall was a mild appearing fellow and not at all of the desperado type. He pleaded not guilty at his trial, and always claimed he had shot Wild Bill because of some deal in which he said the latter had beat him out of some money. But I never believed that. I think he did it for the notoriety."

"McCall was a mild appearing fellow and not at all of the desperado type," Mr. Edmunds says. "He pleaded not guilty at his trial, and always claimed he had shot Wild Bill because of some deal in which he said the latter had beat him out of some money. But I never believed that. I think he did it for the notoriety. He liked the spotlight. Hickok had a wide reputation as a dead shot, and quick on the draw. Maybe McCall thought he could gain popularity and notoriety by putting him out of the way and get away with it; and he nearly did. The miners' court let him go. But the federal government then went after him and brought him back to Yankton."

Wild Bill was shot while sitting at a card table in a Deadwood saloon with Doc Massey, and early day river man, and three others. Hickok had an invariable rule never to sit with his back to a door, for obvious reasons, but on this occasion Massey took the wall chair, and for some reason Hickok did not insist on his rule, according to Mr. Edmunds Possibly he figured he could take a chance safely once.

McCall strolled in and immediately opened fire, shooting Hickok from behind. The latter was killed instantly, but even as he died he threw both his guns from his holsters and they were found clenched in his hands on the table. "McCall would never have got him except from behind," Mr. Edmunds says.

"He was a good prisoner," the Yankton man continued. "We kept him in the small federal jail on Linn street, about where the Henry Tammen, Sr., home now stands, and planned to build a scaffold there to hang him, but residents in that neighborhood objected, so it was decided to take it out of town. The scaffold was built just southeast of the State Hospital, near the knoll, and it seemed like nearly everybody in Yankton came out for the hanging."

The deputy marshal and a priest rode with McCall out to the spot in an open rig. The officer and prisoner were shackled together. On the way they passed the open grave, waiting for the body of the doomed man. McCall showed no signs of concern or fear, but talked very little. He said "goodbye" to the officer as he mounted the platform, to last one to whom he spoke, and the latter did not go up on the platform.

Although the approximate location of McCall's grave can be determined, Mr. Edmunds says he has been unable to fix the exact spot because in subsequent years the highway boundaries have been changed. It is quite possible the grave has been dug up in grading.

GEORGE W. KINGSBURY (WRITINGS)

"There was considerable uneasiness during the summer of 1864 in the farming settlements regarding Indians; but what was fifty-fold more harmful to the general welfare and prosperity of the territory was the first grasshopper raid experienced by the white settlers."

Thus Kingsbury opens his chapter on the grasshopper plague of 1864 in Volume I of his history of Dakota Territory. ...

Writing further Kingsbury says:

"It occurred in July (1864) just after the New York colony had got fairly settled in comfortable quarters; and while it was the first, it was the worst and most complete scourge of the kind that ever visited the territory.

"It was a most unfortunate disaster coming at the time it did. The insects came down at midday while the bright sun was shining; the fields gave promise of a moderate harvest and the gardens were in fair condition, producing a variety of summer vegetables — but all were covered literally by the myriads of these ferocious insects who devoured and destroyed every green thing, even the leaves on the trees, the grass on the prairie, the family washing hanging in the open air, and injured many of the tents in which new arrivals had their temporary homes. The insects remained all night and departed next morning as abruptly as they came.

"Several of the newcomers and some of the members of the New York colony became so affected and discouraged at the frightful damage inflicted that they yoked up their cattle and left the territory intending to settle in Iowa. ...

Kingsbury says that no history of the Dakotas would be complete without the story of the grasshopper plague and its effect upon the settlements and immigration, and states that the scourge of 1864 was the "beginning of the grasshopper affliction which continued to impoverish and harass our settlers more or less for the succeeding ten years.

"To such an extent did the infliction grow that the United States government sent out an expert commission from Washington to investigate the insect and discover, if possible, its origin and its habits, and from the report of that commission we have considerable information and much more from actual contact. ...

"To witness, with your mind's eye, a myriad of these pests alight, presuming you have never looked upon such an invasion with your physical eye, it is best to imagine a quite heavy snowfall in midsummer, the flakes as large as a 25 cent piece, completely filling the air, and covering the earth as rapidly and completely as a heavy snow will do in winter," says Kingsbury.

"Just imagine these flakes falling for an hour and then the earth a mass of life, crowding upon everything out of doors and indoors if permitted to enter, cover the bushes and trees and the grass, the fences and the walls of buildings so completely as to effectually conceal them from view and in as brief a time as it takes to tell it, stripping the tree of its foliage and devouring the grass and the gardens."

Hertz

From Page 3A

• Yankton has some of the best medical care anywhere, with a large regional hospital, a thriving medical clinic, a specialty hospital and the Human Services Center, just to name a few offerings.

• There is a strong local manufacturing base: One report in recent years stated that Yankton County had more manufacturing jobs per capita than any other county in South Dakota.

• Yankton's agricultural base has remained strong.

• The tourism industry has flourished thanks in great part to Lewis and Clark Lake and the recreational opportunities that have sprung up with it.

• Yankton's educational base has also done well — and this is true despite the fact that grand, old Yankton College closed its doors in 1984. The town still has a college, a strong public school system, a growing private school and a burgeoning technical education program. (Also, Yankton College still remains a player in fostering educational opportunities here.)

• The arts have flourished in Yankton, with the town nurturing several art galleries and hosting the summer arts festival each August in conjunction with one of the community's biggest drawing cards: the annual Riverboat Days celebration.

The list could go on.

I'm not a Yankton native, but I am from the Yankton area, and I've watched this community grow and change all my life.

I remember when you came in from the west of town on Highway 314 and Ninth Street curved into Summit St.

I remember when Riverside Park was a barron place, virtually Yankton's backside.

I remember (and was, in fact, born in) the old Sacred Heart Hospital.

I remember when heading out to Lewis and Clark Lake meant you had to turn south and drive below Chalkstone Hill.

I remember seeing movies in the Dakota Theatre.

I remember when there was virtually nothing on the west side of Broadway north of McDonalds.

I remember when there was no McDonalds.

I remember when there was no mall, and I remember when the addition was built onto the mall.

And there are probably dozens of other little things that would seem odd now if I devoted far more time to searching my memories.

And these memories are actually quite modest when compared to other recollections that longtime Yankton natives could share with you. I encourage you to ask them, talk to them and find out where we were, once upon a time.

The key now, of course, is where 150-year-old Yankton goes next.

If the past is any indication, it has some big things awaiting it. Yankton is the type of community that is always poised for better things: This place offers good quality of life with a lot to do; it is far enough away from places like Sioux Falls, Sioux City and Omaha that it doesn't get sucked into an urban rush; and it is close enough to places like Sioux Falls, Sioux City and Omaha to provide convenient access to those urban offerings without having to take on the burden of that urban rush.

Yankton's future can also be guided by its rich past, which is really part of the spirit behind this 150th anniversary section you are reading now. It's an effort to remind you that Yankton has a lot of practice at this whole survival business, and it has always found ways to do a lot more than just survive. In that sense, perhaps the past can serve as a template for the future.

That would be the finest testament to Yankton's 19th century settlers that the 21st century could ever offer.

ABILITY BUILDING SERVICES

Providing Opportunities for Enriched Lives.

January 6, 1975, a sheltered workshop opened on West 9th Street with 9 "client workers". The program was originally a part of the mental health center. Later the two separated and the name of the program was changed to Community Projects Unlimited. In 1978, the program moved and became a new corporation known as the Yankton Area Adjustment Training Center Inc.

Today our name is Ability Building Services. We provide services to approximately 137 people. ABS owns eight residential facilities, and the people we support rent or own at numerous locations around Yankton.

Ability Building Services is a private not-for-profit community agency that emphasizes becoming person centered in practice as well as in planning. The organization's mission is "Providing Opportunities for Enriched Lives." People are at the center of person centered planning and this includes having the opportunity to lead their own plan. Ultimately Ability Building Services wants to support people to have full lives.

Ability Building Services in proud to be part of the growth, development and history of the Yankton community. We are proud of the opportunities and support we have been able to achieve through the commitment and dedication of our leaders in valuing all people who live in our community.

909 W. 23rd Street, Yankton, SD • 605.665.2518 • www.abilitybuildingservices.org