

## The Top 5: Hard Times, Wars And The River

Yankton's second 50 years saw tremendous change in the community, filled with dramatic highs and lows. Ultimately, one wonders if the residents of 1912 Yankton would have recognized the Yankton of 1961, the latter being a far, far different place from the former in so many ways.

### 1. THE DIRTY THIRTIES

In hindsight, it could be argued — or at least we'll argue it here — that no event impacted Yankton more during these middle 50 years than the nightmare the region faced in the 1930s.

It's often too easy to look at the harrowing years of the 1930s as one traumatic event. Instead, it was the result of the devastating one-two punch of an economic upheaval — the Great Depression unleashed by the 1929 crash — and the crippling Dust Bowl — seen now as one of the greatest manmade ecological disasters ever — that coincidentally followed shortly thereafter. This wrought a nightmarish world in which life for many people reverted back to what life was probably like for the souls who comprised Yankton in 1861: a relentless struggle for survival.

This was an age filled with countless stories that were attached to practically every family tree that was planted in the dust here. The economic times were brutal; the land and the sky had seemingly given up on the people. There were tales of business failure, banking uncertainties, social and civil unrest and burned-up crops. Some of those with jobs took steep pay cuts just to stay employed. Mount Marty College officials at one point voted to accept livestock and produce as a means of paying tuition in lieu of money. Entire families scavenged for food. Some families simply uprooted and moved away, never to return.

And there are many such stories in practically every family. They are worth seeking



An aerial photo of Gavins Point Dam, circa 1961. The spanning of the river, first by the Meridian Bridge, then by the dam, were among the top stories for Yankton from 1912-1961.

out while you still can.

The Dirty Thirties dramatically altered life in this community. As it happened, this decade also steeled the children of the Great Depression for the momentous events that loomed on the horizon.

### 2. THE BUILDING OF MERIDIAN BRIDGE

Before the Dirty Thirties changed Yankton, the building of a permanent Missouri River bridge in 1924 changed life here — in this instance, in a very good way.

While the Missouri River was always a blessing for Yankton, it was also a maddening hurdle, not to mention a terrifying beast (see the Flood of 1881 for an example of the latter). Simply crossing the river proved to be a formidable task. For decades, those looking to get across the Missouri were forced to rely on pontoon bridges or ferryboats, or travel across the ice of the frozen river during the winter. It nurtured a dream of a permanent structure to cross the river. And as Yankton moved deeper into the 20th century, the

dream became a genuine need if the town hoped to continue being a regional center.

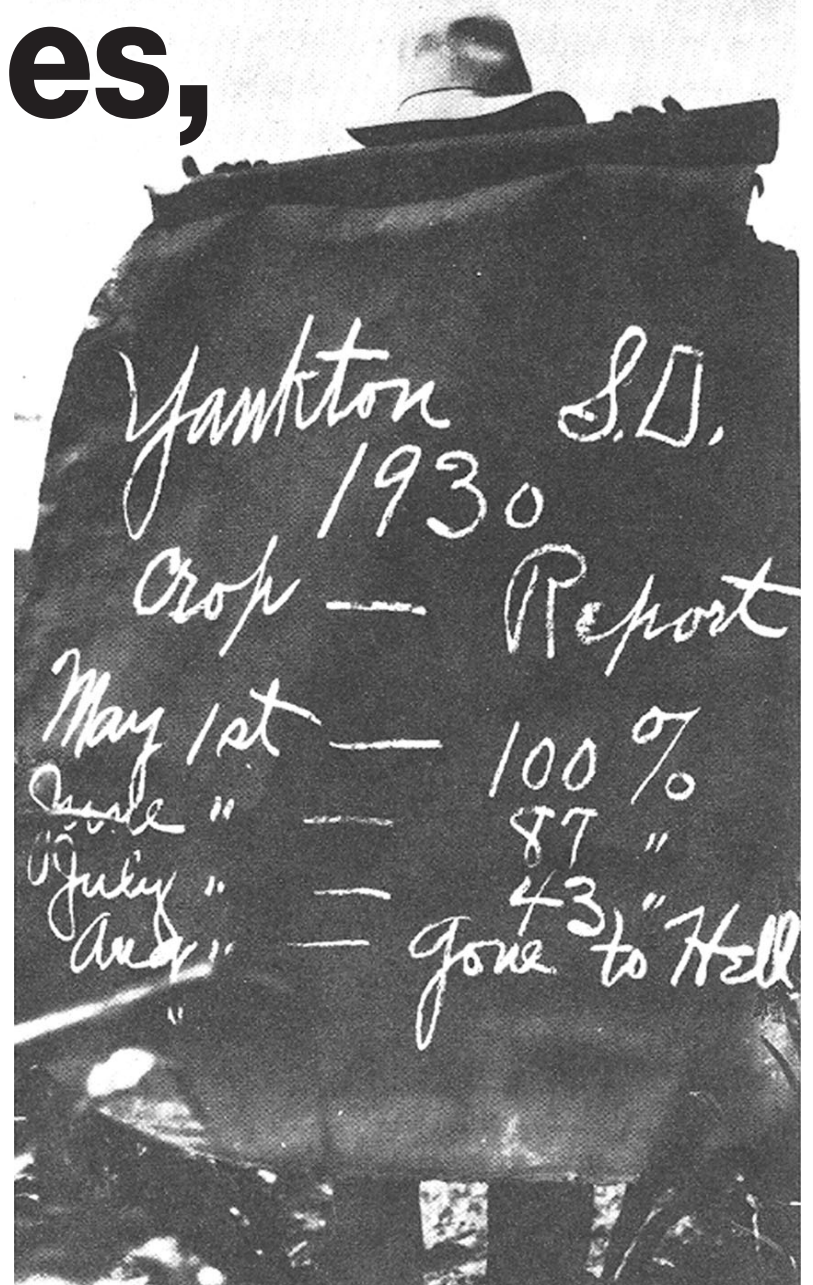
The dream was finally realized in 1924 with the opening of a double-decker draw bridge, which prompted a great community celebration. What followed was many years of toll-taking to retire the debt, which was finally achieved in 1953, again creating a celebration.

The bridge served motorists for more than 80 years before the opening of the Discovery Bridge in 2008. The Meridian is about to be converted into a pedestrian bridge, promising to continue serving Yankton for many more years to come.

### 3. THE BUILDING OF GAVINS POINT DAM

Crossing the river was one thing; taming it was quite another matter — and perhaps beyond the reach of even the wildest dreamers at one point.

But when Congress passed the Pick-Sloan



The hopeless universe of what would become the broken, bone-dry 1930s was embodied in this sign hoisted by a Yankton farmer in 1930 after a drought destroyed his crops. It was the first of many hard years to come for area residents and the nation in general. (From the book "Yankton: The Way It Was!" by Bob Karolevitz)

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Front row: Jim L., Stuart, Laurie, Shane, Tim.  
Back row: Rod, Jim K., Derek, Tyler, Bryan



On-Farm  
Tire Service



Faithful Employees  
Rod (left) employed with us since 1978. Bryan (right) has been with us since 1984

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Groundbreaking for the new store took place in July 2004 & Graham Tire opened for business at the current location in the winter of 2004.



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