

YANKTON'S History

Home to the Yankton Sioux, or Ihanktonwan in the Dakota language, Yankton means “Those Who Camp at the End.” In 1859, Yankton was a virtually treeless campsite occupied by people of the Ihanktonwan Nation on the banks of the Missouri River. Two years later, it became the first capital of the newly created Dakota Territory and transformed into a rollicking river port. Settlers were drawn to the river access and progressive way of life. Yankton is home to South Dakota’s first ever bank, newspaper, high school, college, medical clinic, and bridge across the Missouri River. Yankton has always been a place of opportunity, vision, and entrepreneurialism!

1804 LEWIS AND CLARK

Lewis & Clark passed the Ihanktonwan (Yankton) Nation encamped near what became the City of Yankton on their expedition in 1804. They met with the Ihanktonwan Nation leaders on the Calumet Bluffs, now near Gavins Point Dam. Lewis & Clark provided gifts to the Ihanktonwan people and spent several days learning their way of life before continuing their journey up the Missouri River.

1860s-1870s ECONOMIC TRADE HUB

Located on the Missouri River, Yankton was a large river port, political powerhouse, and economic center for the upper Midwest. The city grew as a stop for steamboats to take on supplies and fresh water, especially after steamboat traffic boomed during the Black Hills gold rush.



1861-1883 DAKOTA TERRITORIAL CAPITOL BUILDING

< In 1861, Yankton was designated as the Dakota territorial capital. Dakota Territory originally included present day South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. The name refers to the Dakota branch of the Sioux tribes which occupied the area at the time. Construction of the capitol building began in November 1862. In 1989, a replica of the building was built at Riverside Park thanks to the Yankton Sertoma Club.

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1876 THE WILD WEST

Wild Bill Hickok, a sheriff and former gunslinger, was gunned down in a saloon in Deadwood. His accused killer, Jack McCall, was brought to Yankton, the location of the U.S. Marshal Office for Dakota Territory, for his trial. McCall was convicted of murder and publicly hanged at age 24. His body is buried in a newly marked grave in Yankton at the border of the Yankton City Cemetery and Sacred Heart Cemetery.

1879 DAKOTA HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE

Due to the overcrowded conditions in facilities that catered to the mentally ill in neighboring areas, the Territorial Legislature approved a dedicated mental hospital in Yankton. This institution, originally named the Dakota Hospital for the Insane, commenced its operations within two wooden structures, both personally funded by Governor Howard. Subsequently in 1974, a more encompassing title, the South Dakota Human Services Center, was adopted to better align with the comprehensive range of services provided by the institution.



1909-1980'S THE MEAD MUSEUM

The Mead Building initially served as residential quarters for female patients at Yankton State Hospital from 1909 to the 1980s. Honoring the legacy of Superintendent Dr. Leonard C. Mead, the building underwent a transformative rehabilitation and reopened in 2018 as a distinguished museum and cultural center. Presently, the Mead Museum boasts an impressive collection of over 45,000 historic artifacts and hosts traveling exhibits throughout the year.

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