

Top 5

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3. THE TRIAL OF JACK MCCALL

As the territorial capital, Yankton was a hub of judicial as well as governmental proceedings in Dakota Territory. As such, it hosted the trial of a man accused of one of the most famous murders in Old West lore.

On Aug. 2, 1876, Wild Bill Hickok, the former gun fighter turned lawman, was gunned down in a saloon in Deadwood. Initially, Jack McCall was a suspect in the killing, but he was ultimately found innocent of the charge in a hasty trial. McCall went to Wyoming, where he bragged of the murder. Since Wyoming authorities didn't recognize the Deadwood verdict because the town was an illegal settlement in Indian country, McCall was arrested and extradited to Yankton for trial.

McCall was convicted of the crime and, on March 1, 1877, was hanged near what is now the intersection of 31st and Broadway on the north edge of Yankton. McCall, 24, was the first person to be executed by the U.S. government in the territory. He was buried in a Yankton cemetery. The body was later exhumed and moved to a new location; allegedly, when the coffin was opened, the noose used to execute McCall was still wrapped around his neck.

McCall is now buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in the Yankton cemetery. Officially, no one

knows where the body is buried, a mystery that has brought investigators occasionally to town in search of the remains and of a piece of ghostly western folklore.

4. THE FLOOD OF 1881

The Missouri River has always been integral to Yankton's history, and flooding has always been a part of that story. (As the events of 2011 point out, the aspect still haunts life along the river.)

That was no more evident than in the spring of 1881, when floodwaters reached into Yankton and changed the area forever.

As the river quickly thawed that March, an ice gorge formed downriver in the Vermillion area and formed a makeshift dam. Soon, water began backing up and creating problems.

The Missouri River rolled out of its banks and moved into downtown Yankton. The community of Green Island, located just below Yankton, was drowned by the rising waters and was wiped from existence. Several steamboats were crushed by the jamming ice. The rising waters also created damage at several other locations in the area, including Vermillion, where three-quarters of the town was washed away; the community rebuilt itself on a bluff.

The flood is still remembered as perhaps the worst in Yankton's history, surpassed in terms of water volume only by the flooding of 1952. In the wake of the flooding of 2011, the memory of 1881 still serves as a fresh reminder of what being a river town is really all about.

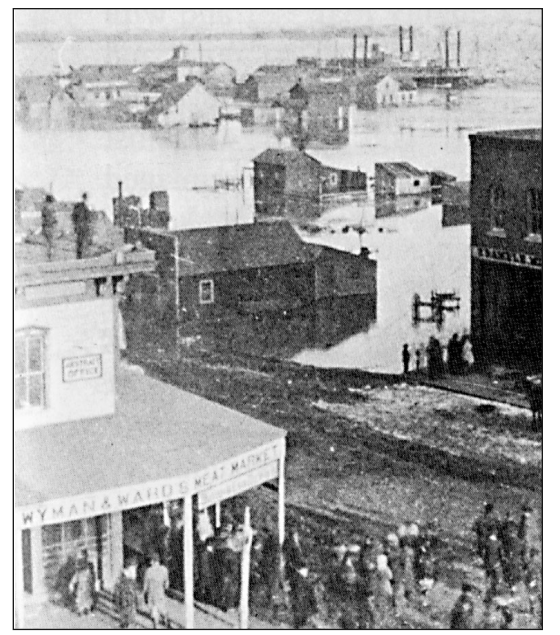
5. THE BLACK HILLS GOLD RUSH

Like the events that led to the trial of Jack McCall in Yankton, the gold rush represents another twist in history that directly impacted Yankton despite happening hundreds of miles away.

Gold was found in the Black Hills in 1874. Prospectors worked their way north from the present-day community of Custer and found vast amounts of gold in what is now the Lead-Deadwood area. Even though the Black Hills was considered Indian territory and such mining and settlement schemes were technically illegal, the rush soon commenced.

Yankton during the 1870s was not only a territorial capital but also a vibrant river outpost for travelers heading across the frontier. It was an ample source of fresh water and supplies, and offered by a thriving steamboat industry. When word of gold spread, Yankton was swelled by a massive influx of easterners heading west to find their fortunes. Local businesses popped up to meet the demands of these new arrivals. A printed daily publication called *The Black Hiller* sprung up to meet the needs of these transient hopefuls, and the paper proved so successful that the *Weekly Dakotan* became a daily newspaper, the *Yankton Daily Press & Dakotian*, on April 26, 1875.

The rush eventually subsided, but it left a significant impact on the history of Yankton.



P&D ARCHIVE PHOTO

This image of lower Yankton illustrates the misery that was unleashed by the Flood of 1881. While the toll it took on the local riverboat industry is often overstated, the historic flood did destroy part of Vermillion and wiped out the nearby settlement of Green Island.

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