

Top 5

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Act in 1944, the groundwork was laid for a series of manmade dams along the upper stem of the Missouri River. The southernmost would be located near Yankton — thus, the wild dream turned into the promise of reality.

Ground was broken for the dam in 1953 and the structure was complete in 1957. With that, the wild river was apparently tamed (but not completely, as the events of 2011 indicate) and a new body of water, called Lewis and Clark Lake, was formed behind it. The dam reinvented life here, both in terms of how Yanktonians viewed flooding and how people used the river. The area reaps immense benefits from the dam to this day.

4. WORLD WAR II

The aforementioned children of the Great Depression grew up and went off to war — a second global war that redefined America and touched lives everywhere.

Like countless other communities across the country, Yankton did its share in aiding this fight, sending many soldiers to war. Several did not come back. But all of them contributed to the great change wrought by the conflict.

Yankton's Tom Brokaw called these soldiers "the Greatest Generation," not simply because of the war they fought but also because of the world they created after the war. And their impact on Yankton was no less important or decisive.

5. WORLD WAR I

Yankton had sent soldiers off to war before — including the brief Spanish-American War of 1898 — but the first world war brought about a full-scale mobilization. It also shattered any sense of prairie isolation that may have still existed during the second decade of the 20th century.

Not only did the soldiers go to war, but in one terrifying respect, the war came home to Yankton. The Spanish flu crawled out of the deadly trenches of Europe and soon galloped across the world as a pandemic, delivering death to practically every reach of humanity. The Yankton area was not immune. The great plague eventually subsided, but its fatal memory lives on even now.



ABOVE: This plaque, which is on display at Fante Memorial Park, commemorates those Yankton County soldiers who gave their lives during World War II. "Yankton: The Way It Was!" by Bob Karolevitz) BELOW: Thousands turned out for the dedication ceremony officially opening the Meridian Bridge at Yankton in October 1924.



P&D ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Dust Bowl

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come. You would go to swat them away, and they'd come flying back at you and hit you in the face.

"When you think about, it that was a very bad year."

Holec also remembered the grasshoppers. "First they started with the leaves, and then they started on the stalks. And when they finished, the stalks were about 12 inches from the ground. That's all they left. I remember the government was giving people poison to put around the edges of the fields. Well, the grasshoppers had wings, and they flew over (the poison) and would eat the corn anyway. And if anyone's cattle got out and ate that poison. ... I know my dad lost at least one cow that way. It was tough farming."

Amidst all the dust and pain, however, there were a few lights of hope. A *Press and Dakotan* article from Oct. 2, 1933, described how federal support was given in the form of road work for farmers in South Dakota counties stricken by drought and grasshopper plague.

At the same time, the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC) was formed by the Roosevelt administration after millions of pigs were slaughtered to stabilize hog prices. As part of the implementation of the FSRC, the federal government began paying farmers to reduce their number of hogs raised and number of acres utilized for growing corn. Yankton County farmers participating in the program earned a total of \$313,718.65 in 1934, according to a story in the July 14 edition of the *Press and Dakotan* published that same year. With the FSRC, farmers were guaranteed good prices for what they could raise.

The House of Gurney (as Gurney Seed and Nursery Co. was also known) in Yankton was an oasis of sorts during the '30s. In his book, "Yankton: The Way it Was!" author Bob Karolevitz recounted how "the stores and services in the Gurney building provided employment for many people when jobs were scarce."



Workers line up to serve the hungry masses during Gurney's annual Pancake Days.

PHOTO: DAKOTA TERRITORIAL MUSEUM

In addition to providing jobs, the House of Gurney also put on a week-long pancake feed during their annual fall festival starting in 1928. Thousands of people in the Yankton area suffering from the financial backlash of the drought and the Great Depression would flock to Pancake Days for the free all-you-could-eat feast of pancakes and sausages.

Karolevitz also relates how in 1931, D.B. Gurney, the owner and co-founder of Gurney Seed and Nursery Co., used his social influence to gather together 70 carloads of donated food, clothing, grain and other items for the drought victims in Arkansas.

"Of special interest," wrote Karolevitz, "five carloads contained well over a million hatching eggs to help the Arkansans rebuild their decimated chicken flocks." Even during the tough

economic times, Yankton area citizens managed to raise \$37,602.54 in cash for other relief items.

Arkansas responded in kind in 1933 by sending truckloads of grain north when grasshoppers and drought ravaged the crops and farmland of South Dakota.

In spite of the hardships, each woman interviewed independently commented on how, as children during the '30s, life wasn't devoid of good times. Neighbors would still get together and visit, while children would entertain themselves by playing games or sharing a nickel's worth of candy or popcorn.

Schnider concluded with, "Times were hard, but I don't know... I think we were just as happy if not happier than we are now. Now we expect the big things. We appreciated things more back then."

Bridge

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"In 2006, they decided to walk on the top deck of the Meridian Bridge as part of the Meridian Trails event," he said. "Only the top deck was closed down for the walk, and permission for this had to come from the South Dakota Department of Transportation."

The Bridge Walk took place in 2006, 2007 and 2008, Larson said. After 2008, the bridge repairs and eventual closure ended the event, he said.

Larson didn't have official figures on the number of pedestrians those years, but he did have one measure.

"In applying to close the

bridge in 2006, the Meridian Trails walk in 2005 had an estimated 500 people involved, so they were applying to have the upper deck closed for a one- to two-hour period," he said.

The bridge walk provided both a unique opportunity and an awe-inspiring view both up and down the Missouri River. The walkers, some who came from long distances, ranged from parents with children in tow to teenagers roaming the bridge to nuns in tennis shoes.

No firm date has been given for re-opening Meridian Bridge for pedestrian use, Larson said. However, it appears it could be September 2011, according to the last reports from the South Dakota Department of Transportation.

"When it is property of the city, it will be a pedestrian

bridge," he said. "People will be allowed to walk, run or bike across it on both levels."

When opened, Meridian Bridge will provide a link to a trail system on both sides of the river, he said.

"Before the 2011 flood, the city had trails on the property it owns on the Nebraska side. They are unimproved trails that were created through the years by deer or by (all-terrain vehicles)," he said.

"These trails would be accessible from the Nebraska side of the Meridian Bridge. The National Park Service also owns land on the Nebraska side."

In addition, the Nebraska side does have a trail planned from the Army Corps of Engineers property by Gavins Point Dam to Murdo's Aten resort, Larson said.

Some members of the public

have raised concerns about whether Meridian Bridge can withstand the current historic Missouri River flooding.

The Corps of Engineers has increased releases for about two months, with Gavins Point Dam currently releasing 160,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), or more than double the old record of 70,000 cfs.

However, South Dakota Transportation Secretary Darin Bergquist reassures the public that Meridian Bridge can withstand the current flooding.

"The Department (of Transportation) does believe the bridge is structurally sound enough to handle existing flooding," the secretary said. "The bridge was constructed prior to the existing reservoir system and thus has withstood much larger

magnitude flow events in the past."

While taking on a new role, Meridian Bridge remains an integral part of Yankton's history, Grow said. For many, the double-decker bridge symbolizes Yankton, she said.

"When writing and researching our book, now more than a decade ago, we encountered many, many people who remembered Yankton first and foremost as the place with 'that bridge!'" she said.

Meridian Bridge serves as more than a mode of transportation, Grow said.

"It's a monument to an ambitious, risk-taking, hardworking Yankton... a Yankton determined to have what it needed, no matter the cost... a Yankton made up of folks of all back-

grounds and levels of economic resources, who worked together during hard times to build the future of their city," she said.

"We need that monument as a reminder of that kind of community spirit," she added.

Grow looks forward to the day when Meridian Bridge will again provide a chance for travelers to cross the Missouri River.

"Personally, I wish the bridge were still carrying vehicular traffic, but I will be glad to see it crossed again—soon, I hope—by people on foot and bicycles," she said. "This is a bridge that has always worked hard for its living, and it's time for it to get back to work."

"Besides, I have missed that incomparable view from the upper deck!" she added.

Did you know - Yankton had the 1st Walmart in SD?



Walmart built their first store in South Dakota in 1990 and Yankton was it. Employing 125 people from Yankton & Surrounding areas.

Yankton's Walmart built a Super Center in 2005, and today employees more than 320 people.

Congratulations Press & Dakotan, we look forward to celebrating many years in the Yankton Community with you!



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