

# Celebrating 150 Years

**2011 marks a milestone in Yankton's history – come join the fun!**



Yankton's past will be celebrated anew next year when the city commemorates its 150th birthday. Planning is under way for what should be an intriguing year of historical perspective and reflection on the future.

Fittingly, the year will also honor the 150th anniversary of the forming of Dakota Territory in 1861. It's a coupling that indicates just how integral Yankton has been to this region of the Midwest.

However, Yankton can actually trace its history back long before its first white settlement.

It was at a site near what is now Yankton that explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark first encountered the indigenous people of the plains during the Corps of Discovery expedition up the Missouri River in 1804. While the explorers' stay here was brief, its impact on the region still reverberates strongly today, from a manmade lake bearing their name to a statue honoring the explorers outside a medical facility in Yankton.

The 150th anniversary celebration was a subject of debate in Yankton because it was difficult to agree on a year when

Yankton was, for lack of a better word, born. After the Treaty of 1858 opened up this region to white settlement, a village formed at the site of a former camp of the Indian chief Strike-The-Ree (or Struck-By-The-Ree), and it became what is now Yankton.

But 1861 was a pivotal year. It saw the organization of the Dakota Territory, which stretched from what is now the eastern border of the Dakotas to the Rocky Mountains. The small settlement of Yankton was designated the vast new territory's capital city.

Yankton began growing. Surviving a scare caused by an 1862 Indian uprising, the village matured into a bustling community. Its location along the Missouri River made it a prime port on the prairie, as well as a jumping-off point to western expansion. (The community played host to Gen.

George Custer and his troops briefly in 1874 while he was on his fateful way west.) During the Black Hills gold rush of 1875, the town became so swelled with prospectors and adventurers that the local weekly newspaper became a daily publication. The Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, which was founded in 1861 in conjunction with the arrival of the territorial government, has been a daily newspaper ever since.

Yankton also owns a place in western lore as the site where Jack McCall was convicted of murdering Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood in 1876. McCall was hanged in 1877 at a location near the current Human Services Center on the north edge of the community.

The early 1880s were a tumultuous time for Yankton. First, a devastating flood inflicted tremendous damage in 1881, destroying most of the steamboat industry that prowled the river and wiping out the small nearby settlement of Green Island. Then in 1883, the capitol was snatched away from Yankton in a covert legislative move, handled in a pre-dawn "session" inside a railroad car. It was a wound the locals would long and bitterly remember.

Nevertheless, Yankton grew as it moved into the 20th century, and as the years passed, it was evident that crossing the river was becoming an even more pressing priority. The seasonal pontoon bridges could no longer handle the demands of modern traffic in the heartland of a maturing nation.

