



The story of Yankton is really the story of Dakota...

That's not an overstatement, as the historical significance of Yankton actually predates the formation of Dakota Territory in 1861, which led eventually to the creation of both North and South Dakota in 1889.

Yankton's story actually starts before there was a Yankton. In 1804, the Corps of Discovery expedition of Lewis and Clark, which was sent out by President Thomas Jefferson to sail up the Missouri River and explore the newly-acquired territory known to history as the Louisiana Purchase, first encountered Native Americans at Calumet Bluff, located just to the west of present-day Yankton. Legend has it that the explorers wrapped a newborn baby in an American flag; that baby grew up into the Sioux chief Struck-by-the-Ree, who was one of the signees of the Treaty of 1858 that opened up this region to white settlement. In fact, the site of modern-day Yankton was part of a place known as "Old Strike's camp."

White settlers began moving into the area in the late 1850s, and by 1861, there was a growing settlement at the Yankton site.

It's now generally held that Yankton's official "founding" was in 1861. In March of that year, Dakota Territory - a vast region that stretch from the present eastern Dakota border all the way to the Rocky Mountains - was organized, and Yankton was named the capital. (To that end, what is now the Yankton Press & Dakotan newspaper was started just three months later.) A territorial legislature was formed, with a permanent building eventually constructed at what is now the corner of Fourth and Capitol. The original building is long gone, but a replica of it now stands in Riverside Park along the Missouri River.

In 1862, a Santee Sioux uprising in the region forced the construction of a stockade in what is now downtown Yankton. The structure was never needed, but a monument to this fortification now stands near Third and Broadway.

Yankton became a bustling town, serving as a river gateway to the western frontier.

In 1873, Gen. George Custer and his westward-bound Seventh Cavalry spent three weeks in Yankton, where the soldiers were provided shelter from a spring blizzard. Custer's brief stay nevertheless has remained a prominent impact on the community's history.

In 1875, Yankton's fortunes boomed. Gold was discovered in the Black Hills in what is now western South Dakota, and the community swelled in size as fortune hunters seeking their treasure flowed into

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