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State Historical Society noting 150th anniversary of Dakota Territory

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota State Historical Society is noting that March 2 marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of Dakota Territory in 1861.

When established, Dakota Territory represented the northern-most section of the Louisiana Purchase, which included present-day North and South Dakota, along with most of Montana and Wyoming. In 1868, the territory was winnowed down to the present boundaries of North and South Dakota, with both gaining statehood on Nov. 2, 1889.

The official description of the Dakota Territory Seal is found in Chapter 56 of the *General Laws of the Territory of Dakota*, passed at the Second Session, 1862-1863 and titled, "An act to establish a seal for the Territory of Dakota." The act had two sections.

Section 1: That the following described seal is hereby declared to be and is hereby constituted the great seal of Dakota Territory, to wit: A tree in the open field, the trunk of which is surrounded by a bundle of rods, bound with three bands; on the right, plow, anvil, sledge, rake and fork; on the left, bow crossed with three arrows, Indian on horseback pursuing a buffalo towards the setting sun, foliage of the tree arched by half circle of thirteen stars, surrounded by the motto, "Liberty and Union, one and inseparable, now and forever;" the words "Great Seal" at the top, and at the bottom, "Dakota Territory;" on the left, "March 2;" on the right, "1861."

Section 2: This act to take effect from and after its passage and approval by the governor. Territorial Gov. William Jayne signed the act on January 3, 1863. North Dakota kept many of the attributes of the Dakota Territory seal when it created its own State Seal.

South Dakota held anniversary celebrations for both the 50th and 100th anniversary of the establishment of Dakota Territory.

A 50th anniversary celebration was held the week of June 11-17, 1911, in Yankton. Main events included music by the Fourth Regiment Band-South Dakota National Guard, speeches by Gov. R. S. Vessey and former governors of South Dakota and Dakota Territory, Old Settlers Day activities, and a Historic Pageant of the Exploration and Settlement of Dakota.

Other events included baseball games, automobile trips of historic sites in Yankton and Yankton County, parades, Native American dances, and a performance of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre holds three scrapbooks of news clippings concerning the Dakota Territorial Centennial celebration in 1961. Most of the work for the centennial was done at the county level, with counties forming their own organization and scheduling events and activities, with assistance from the South Dakota State Centennial Commission.

The centennial commission organized a search for the oldest South Dakota citizen to have lived the most number of consecutive years in both Dakota Territory and South Dakota.

Souvenir half-dollar centennial coins were issued for the 100th anniversary, along with the publication of a Centennial Cookbook.

The centennial commission also developed a 50-foot trailer exhibit, at a cost of \$13,000, which toured the state depicting various themes including territorial lore and history; Indian lore; South Dakota governors; present agriculture, industry and mining; and the future of the state in recreation, irrigation and other phases.

The 100th anniversary celebration also had its own “seal” which was used for publicity purposes. The commission also set a goal of having 1,000 speeches delivered throughout the state during the centennial on the history of South Dakota.

The Territorial Sesquicentennial is the theme of this year’s annual conference of the State Historical Society, taking place May 20-21 in Pierre. For more information, visit www.history.sd.gov or call (605) 773-6000.

The State Historical Society-Archives is open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Contact the archives by phone at (605) 773-3804 or by e-mail at archref@state.sd.us



The Great Seal of Dakota Territory is pictured above.

The South Dakota State Historical Society, an office of the Department of Tourism, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society’s world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.