

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 18, 2011

CONTACT: Jeff Mammenga, Media Coordinator, (605) 773-6000,
Jeff.Mammenga@state.sd.us

State Historical Society notes President Taft's 1911 visit to South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota State Historical Society is noting the 100th anniversary of President William Howard Taft's visit to the state.

In October of 1911, President Taft made a three-day visit through South Dakota. It was the homeward leg of a swing through the western United States.

President Taft's railroad tour of the state included stops and speeches through larger South Dakota towns, as well as brief stops in smaller communities. The trip provided many people, and several towns, their first opportunity to host and hear a sitting U.S. president.

President Taft arrived in Edgemont at 6:50 am on Saturday, Oct. 21. The *Lead Daily Call* noted that as the president arrived in Edgemont, "he was greeted by cheers, hand clapping, and waiving of handkerchiefs."

At Minnekata, the president made a short speech while holding the 3-year-old daughter of the train conductor. He continued on to Custer and made an unscheduled stop in Hill City. The president's train arrived in Deadwood at 12:25 p.m.

The president made a number of speeches in Deadwood. Over 600 Deadwood schoolchildren, waving American flags, greeted the president. One of the students presented the president with flowers.

Also in Deadwood, the president received a 15-ounce, gold-brick paperweight made with gold donated from the Golden Reward, Mogul, Wasp No. 2, Trojan, and Lundberg, Dorr and Wilson mining companies. The president's party proceeded to a luncheon at the Franklin Hotel.

President Taft traveled to Lead for a tour of the city and down to the 1,200-foot level of the Homestake Mine. The president rode the Ellison hoist down into the bowels of the mine where they walked for about a mile by the light of acetylene miner's lamps.

While in the mine the president stated, "I can see big buildings, battleships and armies whenever I want, but it is only once in a lifetime that a person has an opportunity to see such things as these." Newspapers estimated that 15,000 people were in Lead to see the president.

The president next traveled to Sturgis and gave a talk to about 6,000 residents, including schoolchildren. Because of his delayed schedule, the president was unable to make a planned stop at Fort Meade.

Arriving later that evening in Rapid City, the president's parade toured the town and its streets adorned with "electric lights." When he arrived at his speaking engagement, eight Sioux Indian chiefs, including Chief Austin Red Hawk, greeted Taft. The delegation of chiefs presented the president with a peace pipe.

The president later dined at the well-decorated Hotel Harney with a number of distinguished Rapid City businessmen and other dignitaries. The *Rapid City Daily Journal* noted, "Old Glory floating from every minaret and adorning every window in the business part of the city added its silent welcome to the nation's chief executive." A number of businesses hung various banners with sayings such as "Pennington County is for Taft," "TAFT," and "Hello Bill."

The president's train left Rapid City, traveled through the night and early morning, and arrived in Pierre on Sunday, Oct. 22 at about 4 o'clock. In its Saturday edition, the Pierre *Daily Capital Journal* stated, "When the sun rises tomorrow morning the President of the United States will be in Pierre, the greatest man in the world, will be our guest for more than a day."

While in Pierre, Gov. Robert Vessey and the president attended services at the Methodist Church, ate lunch at the St. Charles Hotel and the president then spoke at the city auditorium. The president spent the night at the home of Congressman Charles Burke of Pierre. The next morning, Monday Oct. 23, President Taft talked with Pierre schoolchildren at 8:30 a.m., gave a speech at the depot, and headed east out of Pierre.

The president's next main stops were in Huron and Aberdeen. A number of special trains were run to both Huron and Aberdeen for "Taft Day." Taft also made brief stops at a number of South Dakota towns, including Miller and Redfield.

The Huron Commercial Club urged all businesses to close from noon to 2 p.m. Taft visited various points of interest in Huron, including the State Fair Grounds and Huron College, and ending at the Grand Opera House, where the president made his main speech.

The president's special train arrived in Aberdeen shortly after 5:30 p.m. A parade of automobiles followed the president, along with the South Dakota State band, the Grand Army of the Republic, Spanish-American War Veterans and Company L of the National Guard.

Taft gave a speech at the Northern Normal and Industrial School. The motorcade continued to the headquarters of the Aberdeen Commercial Club for a banquet. The president's special train left Aberdeen near midnight.

Select photographs and news clippings on President Taft's visit to South Dakota are found on the State Historical Society-Archives Facebook page via <http://history.sd.gov/Archives>.

The State Archives is located in the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The State Archives is open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CDT. Contact the archives by phone at (605) 773-3804 or by email at archref@state.sd.us

Cutline information: President William Howard Taft speaks during a stop in Miller on Oct. 23, 1911. (Photo courtesy South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives)

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society 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.