

EARLY DAKOTA NEWSPAPERS

The student of northwest history must inevitably consult the newspapers of the period and of the region he studies. Files of such newspapers for the seventies and eighties are rare, however, and their existence is little advertised. The purpose of this note, therefore, is to open an approach to the study of Dakota history through the newspapers in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The advancing tide of settlement crept up the Missouri Valley during the late fifties and the sixties. In the early seventies it followed the line of the slowly advancing Northern Pacific Railroad into the Red River Valley and, finally to the Missouri River. In the middle seventies, the discovery of gold in the famous Black Hills region of what is now South Dakota drew into that district a tremendous horde of miners and settlers. The earliest newspaper sources of information about the new settlements that were being made on the Dakota frontiers are found in what may be called "Dakota Letters"—letters sent by settlers and explorers who penetrated the raw wilderness to their friends in the settled regions of Iowa and Minnesota. Such letters frequently were published in the newspapers of these two states.

As settlements in Dakota grew, they developed all the institutions of older communities. Hence, early in the period of settlement there appeared newspapers, a considerable number of which found their way into the newspaper collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Among the settlements that grew up in the lower Missouri Valley during the fifties and sixties were Sioux Falls on the Big Sioux River and Yankton on the Missouri River. At Sioux Falls, on July 2, 1859, the first number of the *Democrat* was issued. The Minnesota Historical Society owns photostatic copies of the issues from July 2 to No-

vember 8, 1859, with scattered numbers thereafter until February 18, 1860. In 1861, at Yankton, the *Weekly Dakotian* was established. Only one number of this paper has found its way into the collections of this society—that for July 27, 1861. Late in 1870, the *Yankton Press* was begun, and in 1873, that paper and the *Weekly Dakotian* combined to form the *Press and Dakotian*. In the collections of the society are files of the *Yankton Press* from March 1, 1871, to November 13, 1873, and of the *Press and Dakotian* from November 23, 1873, to October 7, 1880. These files are invaluable for the study of navigation on the Missouri, the development of the lower Missouri Valley, and the great gold rush to the Black Hills.

The Northern Pacific Railroad moved westward from Lake Superior toward the Pacific. In 1872 it terminated at Moorhead, on the threshold of the Red River Valley. There, in the summer of 1872, the *Red River Star* was established. Through the whole of the decade of the seventies, when settlers were thronging into the great valley, this paper, after 1877 known as the *Advocate* and after 1881 as the *Argonaut*, told the story of settlement. The only known complete file is preserved by the society.

In anticipation of the coming of the railroad, the little frontier town of Bismarck was laid out on the banks of the Missouri River. A short time later, on July 11, 1873, the first number of the *Bismarck Tribune* was issued. The Minnesota Historical Society possesses a file of this paper from the first issue to February 27, 1885. It is a valuable source for the study of the development of the great wheat-growing country of Dakota, and it affords a clear view of the Black Hills gold rush, for Bismarck was one terminus of a great Black Hills trail.

By the spring of 1876, the Black Hills region was alive with booming, roaring mining camps. A town had been laid out at Deadwood, and on June 8, 1876, the *Black Hills*

Pioneer, the first newspaper published in the new mining center, was established. A file of this interesting paper covering the period from July 8, 1876, to July 16, 1879, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. In the spring of 1877, another paper, the *Black Hills Times*, appeared at Deadwood. In addition to publishing a weekly newspaper, this paper soon launched a daily edition. Among the most prized newspaper files in the society's collection are those of the *Weekly Times* for May 27 to November 25, 1877, and of the *Daily Times* for June 8, 1877, to June 18, 1880. These files of early Dakota newspapers take on particular interest when their rarity is considered. So far as is now known, there are no existing files, other than those in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society, of the *Bismarck Tribune* or of the Deadwood papers mentioned.

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