

**The Sioux City to
Fort Randall Military Road
1856-1892**

Revisited

Maxine Schuurmans Kinsley

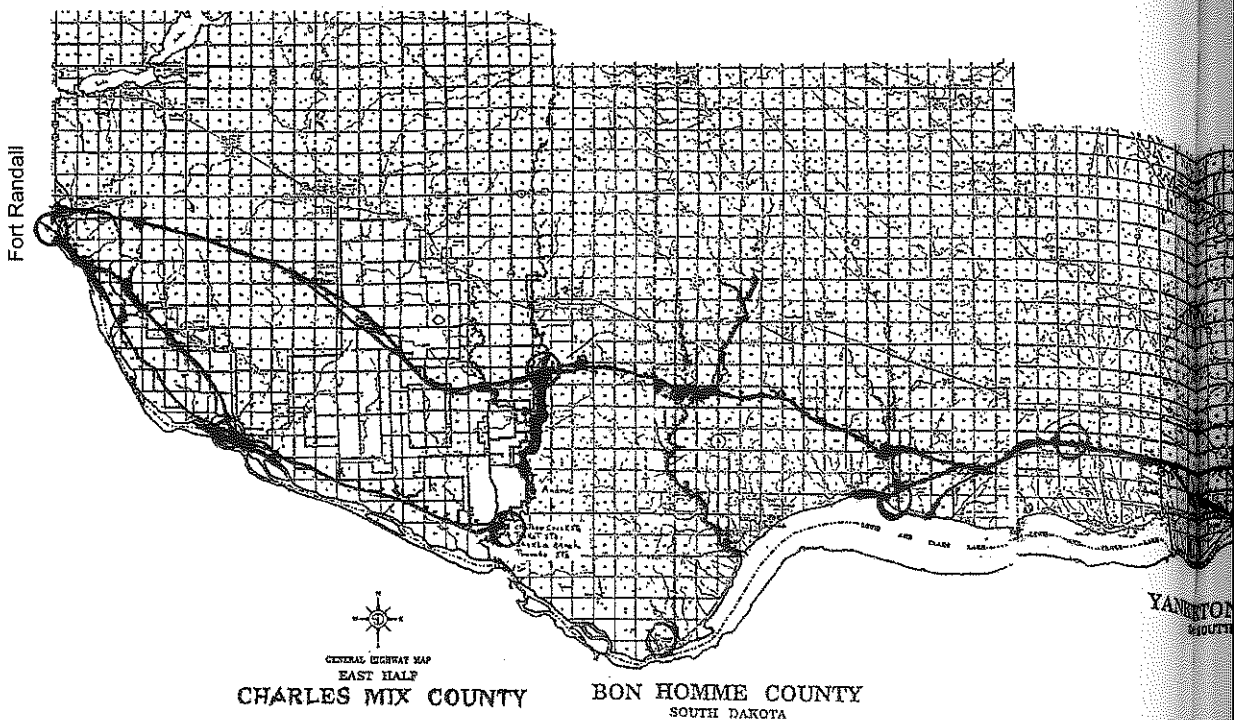
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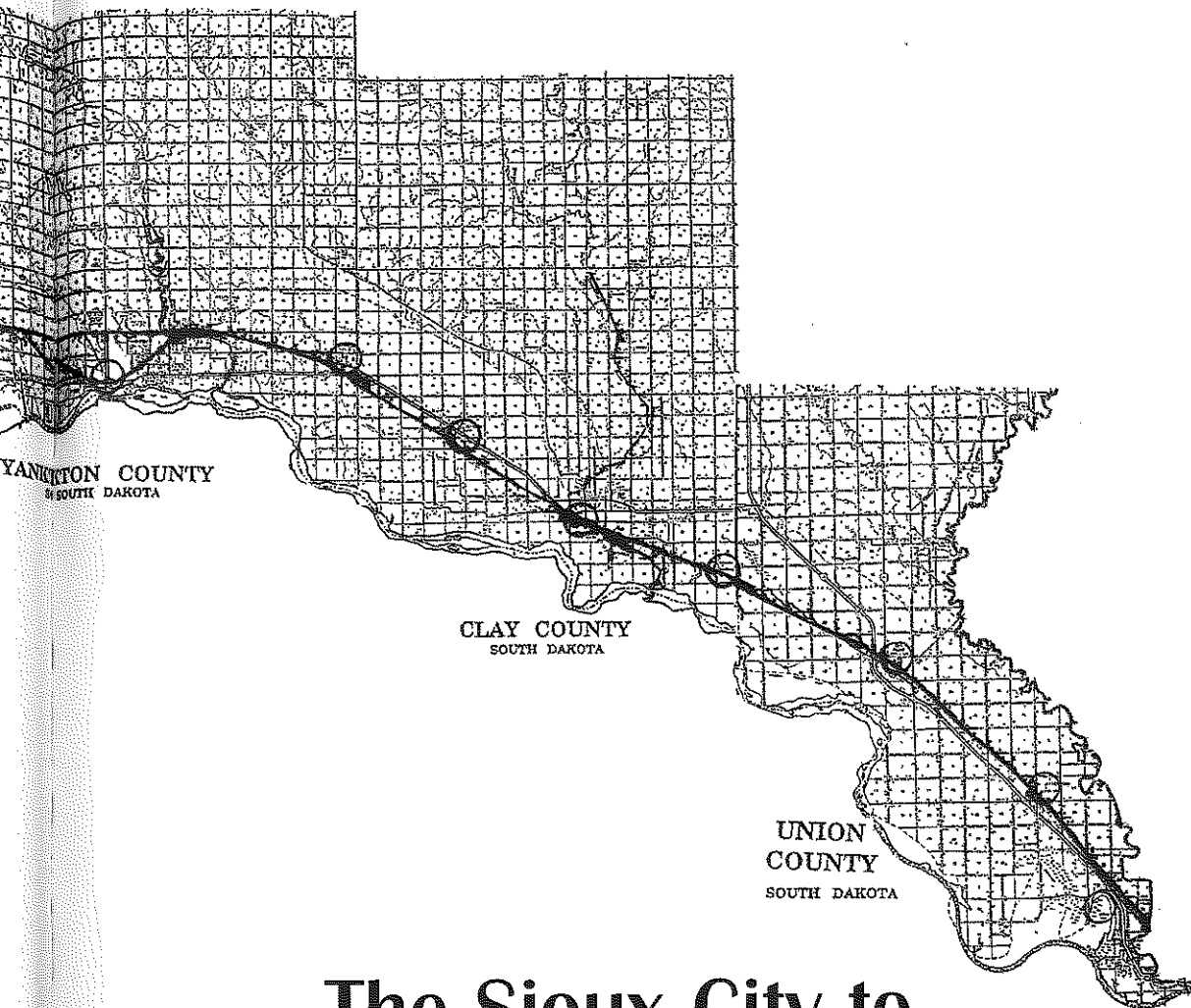
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ISBN: 978-1-57579-420-4
Library of Congress Control Number: 2009944191

Title Page Photo: Reenactment soldiers in period dress fire an authentic cannon
on unspoiled prairie in Charles Mix County near the Fort Randall Road.

Printed in the United States of America

PINE HILL PRESS
4000 West 57th Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57106



**The Sioux City to
Fort Randall Military Road
1856-1892**

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Local residents ponder the history and future of the unchanged Missouri River above Running Water.

Foreword

History is fascinating and illuminating! It reveals that we Midwesterners today are no more multi-faceted than our forebears were, our appetites no keener, whether it be for possessions or titles or simply for finding security in this uncertain world. Like our ancestors, our nether sides are not all bad, nor are our finer qualities all good.

Throughout the pages that follow we encounter real people, some of whom bettered themselves at the expense of others, many whose motives were genuinely altruistic, and those somewhere in between. Pioneers of a century and a half ago braved an unknown, unpredictable land with courage, optimism and often little else—learning lessons along the way that remain applicable today.

My tale begins in 1856 when military action became necessary to protect prospective settlers eyeing lands along the Missouri River soon to be acquired from the Yankton Sioux Tribe. That military action required a land road between government warehouses along the Missouri River in Sioux City and the newly established Fort Randall 150 miles upriver. Before the account concludes, we will have observed how dramatically the Fort Randall Road affected the five adjacent counties through which it passed.

An entire chapter deals objectively with the Yankton Sioux and the Indian Agency at Greenwood; however, descriptions of interaction between the Natives and those who benefited by their removal to a reservation continue throughout, particularly in "Part I: A New Epoch Dawns in the Upper Missouri River Valley." To be historically relevant, I have chosen to use the word "Indian" to describe the area's first inhabitants.

Research has taken me through many volumes of *South Dakota Historical Collections*, (referred to in content as SDHC), and *Volume I* of George Kingsbury's 1915 *History of Dakota Territory*. Other sources listed in the bibliography include books written by venerable and amateur authors, magazines, journals, papers, and oral histories contributed by friends, colorful if not unconditionally reliable. A number of South Dakota historical signs placed at local sites in the 1950s and 60s furnished useful information. Unfortunately many are faded by time and difficult to read and more than a few are missing. An older model 35mm camera provided numerous photographs beginning in 1996 when my interest in the Military Trail first developed.

The text is not intended to be scholarly and almost surely contains errors or questionable statements. (History is not a precise science!) Because references to the Sioux City to Fort Randall Military Road occur throughout the text, few entries appear in the index; however, for students of genealogy, names of people and places may prove useful.

Lastly, I am grateful to friends old and new for their encouragement to compile and add to material gathered more than a decade ago.

M.S.K.

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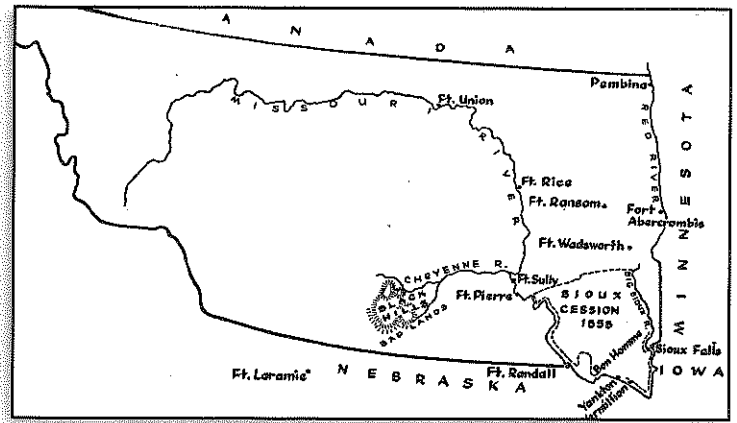
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An immigrant family appears ready to challenge an empty and bleak prairie.



A New Epoch Dawns in the Upper Missouri River Valley

Introduction

It is in the nature of man to be intrigued by what lies beyond the horizon, to where roads may lead. The settling of Dakota Territory in mid-19th century provided many white adventurers the opportunity to explore, to acquire, to settle. Military action became necessary to provide safe access to and through lands made available by forced removal of Native Americans from the homelands they had roamed freely for centuries.

In 1855, General Wm. Harney directed his topographical engineer Lieutenant G.W. Warren to survey roads over which his armies could travel most effectively. Warren complied by platting both the Fort Pierre to Deadwood Trail and the Sioux City to Fort Randall Military Road, the former to provide a route for travelers hastening to gold fields in the Black Hills and the latter to protect not only wagon trains hauling military supplies from government warehouses in Sioux City to Fort Randall but also adventurers and settlers impatiently waiting to enter newly-opened lands.

In the summer of 2008, three hundred mostly West River riders from South Dakota and other places as well celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Fort Pierre to Deadwood Trail, utilizing over fifty wagons pulled by horses, mules, and oxen to retrace old tracks. Local historians had used GPS technology to map the route exactly as surveyed by Lieutenant Warren. One of many challenges on the seventeen-day trip of almost 220 miles was fording the Cheyenne River.

In 1964, the late Retired General Lloyd Moses of Vermillion, accompanied by Will Robinson, then director of South Dakota Historical Society, were the first to attempt to retrace the original Sioux City to Fort Randall Military Road. The following year, again with limited success, Moses and his wife repeated the search after which he recorded their findings in a paper he forwarded

Dakota Territory encompassed Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota, parts of Wyoming and Idaho at the time of its organization in 1861. A census that year recorded 2,376 whites and mixed bloods but no Indians.

to Mr. Robinson. In a personal interview conducted by the author on January 24, 1996, Moses shared his memories of the second attempt. Edited portions follow.

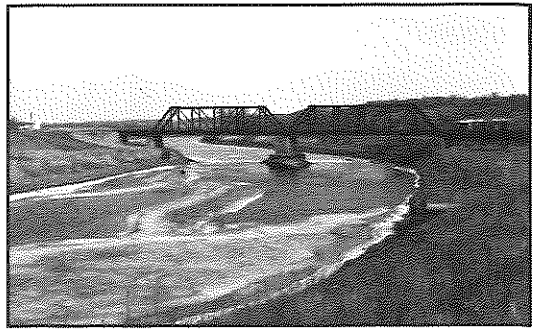
The Moseses began at the original ferry crossing of the Big Sioux River in North Sioux City near the location of today's railroad bridge. In 1965, the banks of the river still showed traces of alteration which had allowed fording by wagons when the river was low. Exactly eight miles west (he had checked his odometer twice), but east of Elk Point, the couple found a log house, already sided over, which had once been a roadhouse. A local historian remembered there had once been a spring near the east boundary of Elk Point where stock could be watered close to a "turn-around," a circle where travelers camped.

Moses found no first-hand information at either the Jefferson or Burbank areas, but learned that from Burbank the Military Trail entered Vermillion by two different routes. During dry periods the trail passed through Old Vermillion below the bluffs, crossing the Vermillion River just before it entered the Missouri. When wet conditions made that route impractical, the trail reached the shelf above by climbing today's South University Street to Lewis Street where it proceeded one-half mile west to the river crossing at the end of Forest Avenue.

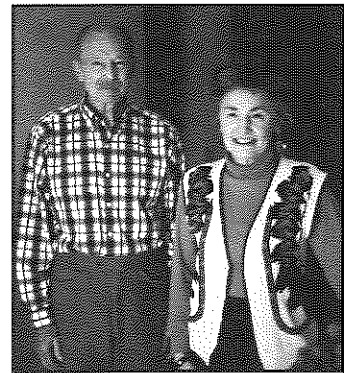
The land along the Missouri River, then located several miles north of its present position, was relatively flat, requiring two routes to serve travelers en route southwest to Lincoln Station and today's Meckling. The preferred route loosely followed Old Timber Road. An artesian well still flowing in 1965 lay near a farm house located in the very southwest corner of Clay County. The well provided water for livestock, an elderly resident related, adding that her father had settled on that claim after the Civil War, that water had flowed freely as in those days tanks were not an option.

The location of the alternate "high" road can be visualized one-half mile south of Meckling by looking west at a private fenced-in cemetery through which or alongside of Moses believed the Military Road had passed. Near the cemetery stood a house that had served as a stay-over for the military. When the railroad approached the vicinity where Meckling would be established, Moses learned that the roadhouse was moved north to become its first building.

The General and his wife bypassed Yankton to check out the once-functioning Lakeport village area located several miles northwest. He came to believe that the two lakes now bisected by Highways 50-52 were once a single lake and that the military camped along its south side. Residents of the farm adjoining the present south lake informed Moses that they definitely believed that travelers and the military had carved still recognizable ruts into the moderately steep bank.



The Railroad Bridge over the altered and controlled Big Sioux River marks the site of Pacquette's Ferry and the first government bridge completed in July 1867.



General Lloyd Moses, Retired, shares information with the author at his home in Vermillion, South Dakota, in January 1996.



Members of First United States Infantry of Fort Randall, Dakota Territory reenact a drill in full period uniforms at Fort Sisseton in 1996.

So ended the general's recollections as he and his wife discontinued their search after finding no traces in the Avon area. However, his military interest in the Old Military Road spurred this author and a retired surveyor friend, Richard Hermanek of Running Water, re-enactor member of the First United States Infantry of Fort Randall, Dakota Territory, to study maps, make personal visits to knowledgeable people along the entire route and gather the results into printable form. Thirteen years later, supplemented by further research including maps and photographs, that material is herewith presented.

The Historical Background

At mid-19th century Dakota Sioux Indians claimed all the country between the Big Sioux River and the Missouri River as far north as Lake Kampeska. The Santee Sioux populated the northeastern reaches near Minnesota, the Teton Sioux the northwest, and the Yankton Sioux the plains along the Missouri River. The three tribes had successfully forced other Sioux to adjacent areas south, west, and north. In 1854, the newly created Territory of Iowa had already pushed the Indians out of Iowa, and by 1857 the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas restricted Indian access to lands south of the Missouri.

In response to demands of the western states, the United States Congress had passed a Pre-emption Law in 1841, which allowed any citizen of the United States or single woman of lawful age or person of foreign birth who declared his/her intention to become a citizen to settle on and claim 160 acres of public land. After six months of settlement and payment of \$1.25 per acre, he/she would become owner. If the land was not yet surveyed, a prospective settler could "squat" and hold a desirable piece until so done and then file.

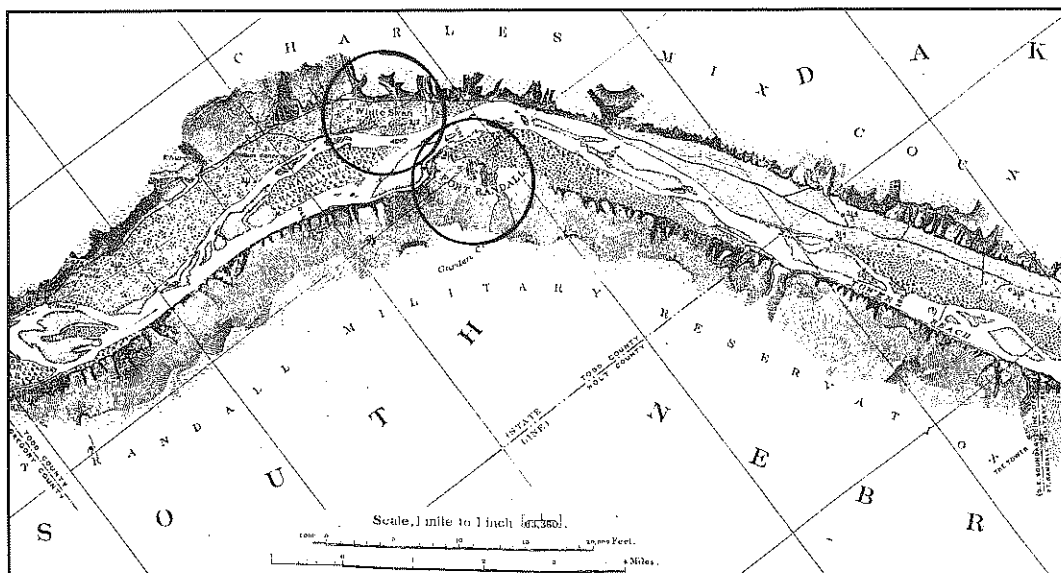
However, the public was legally restrained from settling on Yankton Sioux Indian lands in the Upper Missouri River Valley until July 10, 1859, by which date the Yanktons were to have vacated their homelands and moved to the newly created Yankton Sioux Reservation.

It was not surprising that white men would crave the emptied lands: impatient adventurers, speculators, entrepreneurs, immigrants searching for free land, or that Indians would resent their encroachment. Their way of life was threatened, their food supplies diminished, their religion negated by white man's missionaries.

But progress would not be denied, and to support that progress, roads must be built. Among the first to be surveyed in the land that would become Dakota Territory was a primitive trail laid out in 1856 and 1857 that would connect a federal government warehouse located in the growing village of Sioux City, Iowa, to the new Fort Randall located approximately 150 miles above on the Missouri River. The road was known by various names including "Military Trail," "Sioux City to Fort Randall Road," or later, "Government Road."

South Dakota Historical Collections (SDHC, vol. 25, p218) describes the road in an article titled "South Dakota Stage and Wagon Roads." A portion follows exactly as printed.

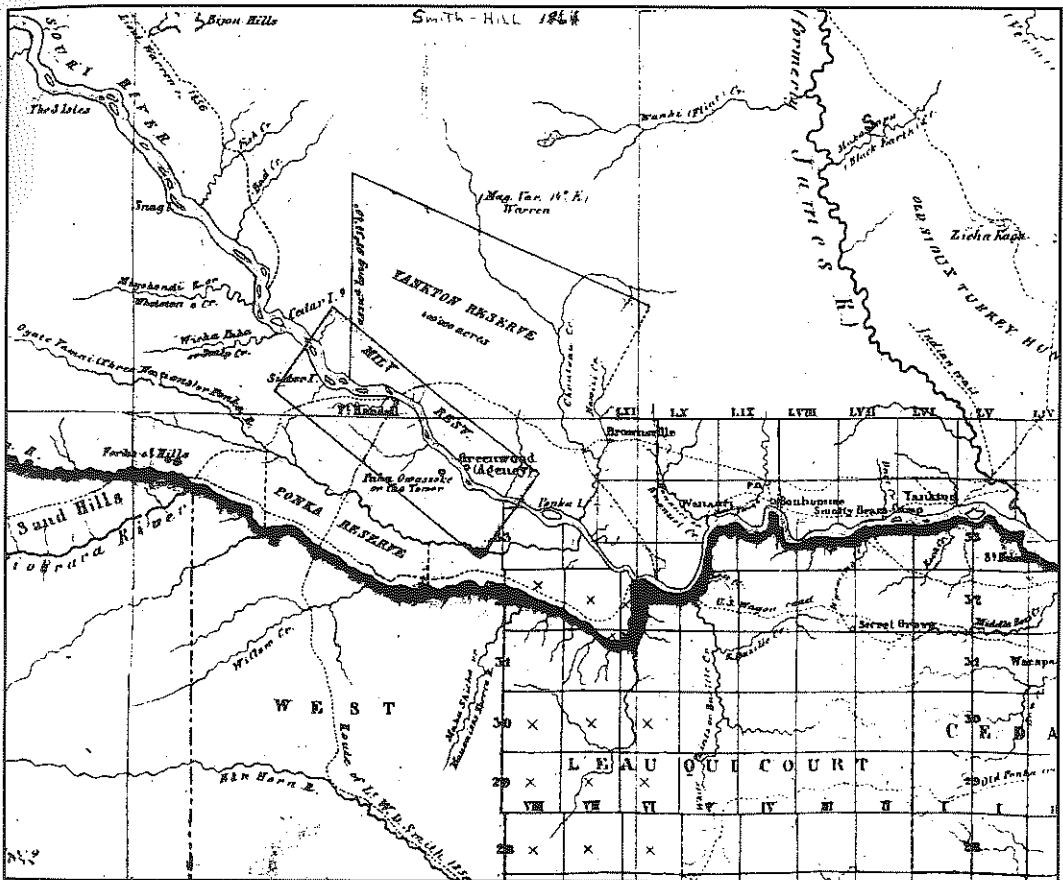
"...a roadway up and along the Missouri was deemed a military necessity. Pacquette's ferry was located in the NW ¼ of Section 14, Township 89, Range 48. That spring the wagon road up the river was commenced and eventually became to be known as the Military Road to Ft. Randall, established in 1856. This military road ran to and through Elk Point and Vermillion but was North of Yankton, with a by-pass into Yankton. Its route is well outlined by the surveyors, largely in 1861 when it was in constant use. The river along this route was the big freight carrier and also was the source of a fair part of the passenger traffic, but a road was a necessity, especially when the river was icebound and this Pacquette Ferry - Ft. Randall road was the initial highway. To Choteau Creek it was well outlined. Choteau Creek marked the East side of the Yankton Indian Reservation and surveys, while this road was the main highway, on that section, were not made. The road from Greenwood (Yankton



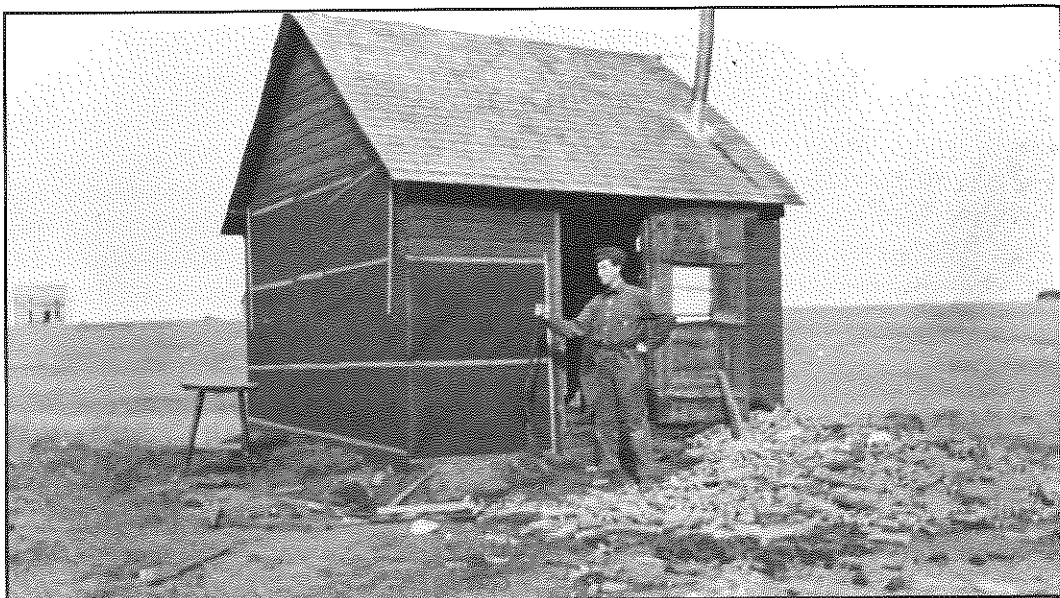
An 1891 Missouri River map shows the close relationship between White Swan (circled, left) and Fort Randall (circled, right). (Missouri River Commission, 1892)

Agency) originally was located up on the high ground away from the river bottom, but while the volunteer troops were at Ft. Randall in the 1860s during the Indian War, they were used to construct a "dugway" along the chalk stone cliffs that lie between (Greenwood and) Ft. Randall. (The point opposite Ft. Randall, just where the spillway is being constructed in 1950, has born many names. It has been called White Swan, for the Indian chief who was the head man in the western part of the reservation; Willows, by Chapter 34 S.L. Dakota Territory 1863, and Bosung's Station, by Chapman's Sectional Map of Dakota of 1869).

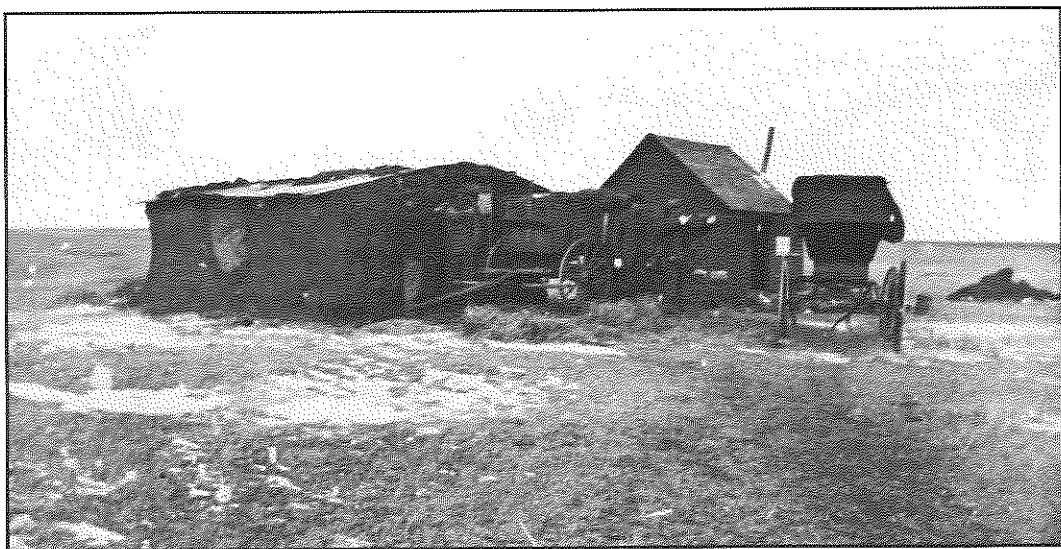
There is much more to tell: explorers who preceded the trail, some more than a century prior; the Yankton Sioux people whose lands the trail crossed; fur traders and their trading posts which provided employment and revenue; events that precipitated military action which resulted in the need for roads; communities that arose and, especially, the people who were instrumental in their creation. The story begins with the river. Always the river.



B.M. Smith and A.J. Hill 1864 Map shows the limited number of subdivisional surveys completed west from Sioux City, Iowa, through Bon Homme County, Dakota Territory. Note that from Yankton westward only Chief Smuttly Bear's Camp, Bon Homme (village) and Wanari are noted en route to the Brownsville Crossing at Choteau Creek and ultimately Fort Randall.



A settler with rifle in hand ponders the open prairie surrounding his claim shack.



Neighbors gather at what may be a settler's sole possessions: sod house, frame shanty, and wagon.