

Education for an American Way of Life

It has been estimated that 321.3 million Americans purportedly follow a style of living called the “American way of life.” At the core of this belief system is a desire to follow the principles of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Among American values are a belief that anyone with merit can rise from poverty to prosperity, that any problem can be solved if one is willing to work hard, that democracy requires citizens’ participation in government, and that citizens should be loyal to their country. Teaching the American way of life to successive generations has fallen largely to the schools. In the following article, Professor Kurt Hackemer explores the decision to build the first permanent schoolhouse in the Dakota Territory, an investment that reflected the aspirations of a frontier community. The rhetoric related to schooling reveals much about how Americans in 1860s were grappling with concepts like democracy and national unity while also struggling to survive Indian attacks.

—Ed.

**“The Educational Interest of the State”:
Vermillion, Dakota Territory’s First Schoolhouse**

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On a pleasant autumn afternoon in September 2014, a crowd gathered on the grounds of the Austin-Whittemore House, an impressive Italian-style villa in Vermillion, South Dakota, that houses the Clay County Historical Society. The celebrants came to dedicate a new structure on the edge of the property, a replica of what is supposed to be the first permanent school building in Dakota Territory. The schoolhouse (Figure 1), a rough one-room structure built of cottonwood logs measuring only sixteen by twenty feet, looked especially unassuming when compared to the stately home next to which it stood.¹ However, a closer look at the context in which the

schoolhouse was built reveals that this simple log building, and especially the educational activities it was intended to house, reflected the hopes and dreams of a frontier community in a very uncertain time. The construction of Vermillion's first permanent school reveals much about the ways that Americans in the 1860s thought about concepts like democracy, citizenship, and union at a time when all three ideals were threatened by conflicts with Native Americans and a bloody Civil War among the states. This otherwise innocuous building became the basis for political, ideological, and social stability in an otherwise precarious environment.



Figure 1: A replica of the first permanent schoolhouse in South Dakota. Photograph courtesy of Kurt Hackemer, enhancements by Ashley Evans.

Schooling in Early Vermillion

Dakota Territory was formally opened to white settlement in the summer of 1859. Settlers and speculators alike moved up the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers, establishing town sites at Sioux Falls, Elk Point, Vermillion, Yankton, and Bon Homme. Yankton and Vermillion quickly emerged as the most important of these new communities based on fertile farmland, easy access to the Missouri River and its all-important steamboat traffic, and the political maneuvering of

rival groups of traders and speculators.² During the political sparring associated with the first territorial legislature, Yankton's delegates manipulated the process and used their political connections to get the territorial capital located in their town. As part of the negotiations, Vermillion received rights to the territorial university. That university would not be built for another twenty years, but Vermillion's delegates thought that acquiring the rights to become Dakota Territory's educational center was a good compromise.³

Even before the territorial legislature designated Vermillion as the home of a future university, its citizens had already decided that education was an important priority. In the winter of 1860, barely six months after the first white settlers staked their claims, Dr. Franklin Caulkins opened a subscription school in the upper room of a local store. A social spat allegedly triggered by a cartoonish Valentine's Day card caused a number of Caulkins' students to move to another private school taught by Miss Annie Hoyt in the Presbyterian church.⁴ Caulkins left Vermillion in 1861 when the Civil War broke out to join the Union Navy as an assistant surgeon. Local lawyer John Boyle taught classes until he left for the territorial legislature in March 1862, and Hoyt continued teaching through the spring of 1862.⁵ However, classes were still sporadic. For example, when Frank Trumbo arrived in town that June, he could find no evidence of any educational activity in a town that now numbered around 150 residents.⁶ Even so, education and the need for proper schools was very much on the mind of at least one influential local citizen. The editor of the *Dakota Republican* lamented the lack of territorial legislation that defined or supported education and recommended "the citizens call a mass meeting, and devise ways and means to organize a school district." His motivations were clear as he suggested that "this is the only legitimate way to develope [sic] a new country and build up towns and society."⁷ Newly elected county commissioners agreed and decided to appoint John B. Glaze as the superintendent of schools even though such a position had not yet been authorized at the territorial level. The community also agreed to begin collecting taxes to support a local school, and an audit of county finances one year later revealed that taxes indeed were collected and designated to support education.⁸ Even as Vermillion began creating the administration and funding for local schools, a subsequent issue of the *Dakota Republican* noted that Miss Hoyt, with "the reputation of being the best female teacher in Dakota," was once again taking on pupils.⁹

By the end of the summer, topics of conversation in Vermillion had shifted from education and the development of Dakota Territory to simple survival and preservation of life. The

problem started in Minnesota, where simmering tensions between the Dakota people who had long called the area home and the white traders and federal government agents who manipulated the annuity system exploded on August 18, 1862. A disagreement about eggs escalated into the mass killing of hundreds of white settlers in a matter of days with the violence quickly spreading west into Dakota Territory. A father and son were killed outside of Sioux Falls, which prompted the residents there to flee for safety. Rumors of marauding bands of Dakota warriors quickly made their way to Vermillion and Yankton, and at least four white settlers were killed in the vicinity. Yankton built fortifications while residents of Vermillion, Elk Point, and Brule Creek decamped and fled south for safety. Some residents would return, with those from the latter three communities building stockades for protection, but approximately half of the territory's residents had their fill of pioneer excitement and opted not to come back.¹⁰

This was, needless to say, a setback for education in Vermillion, and talk about organizing a school district all but ceased. The presence of Company A of the 41st Iowa Volunteers as well as Company A of the First Dakota Cavalry was a constant reminder that external threats were real and could be fatal. As they contemplated the renewal of hostilities in the spring of 1863, residents worried that “the Territory will be depopulated, homes must be abandoned, long years of labor and privations must go for naught, and peaceful and industrious citizens must be compelled to leave all behind and go forth with empty pockets, and without the means of sustenance.”¹¹ Despite the pessimism, efforts to educate Vermillion's children continued. A “Professor M. Buckley” offered classes in his home in the winter of 1862, and Mrs. Albert Gore taught students in 1863 in a downtown building for \$2.50 per term with board and lodging available for “students from the surrounding country.” Unfortunately, these sessions were sporadic and dependent upon finding suitable space every time a teacher assembled a group of students.¹²

Local attempts to organize schools in Vermillion mirrored similar exertions at the territorial level and with even less success. The territorial legislature passed an ambitious “Act for the Regulation and Support of Common Schools” in May 1862. In nineteen pages of detailed instructions, legislators mandated the creation of boards of county commissioners who would devise school districts overseen by county superintendents of public instruction. The duties of the boards, superintendents, district directors, district clerks, district treasurers, and teachers were all detailed, and sample forms for basic district functions were provided. The act was slightly

revised in January 1864 and again in January 1865, but its provisions remained substantially the same. On paper, at least, education in Dakota Territory was organized and well regulated.¹³

Despite the best of intentions, that clearly was not the case, as territorial Superintendent of Instruction James Foster acknowledged in his December 1864 report to the legislature's Board of Education. He bluntly noted that "since my appointment ... nothing has been attempted to be done in the way of organizing the public schools of the territory." He blamed the delay on a lack of administrative support and the fact that most counties had not elected superintendents, which resulted in his presumption "that there are no organized school districts in the Territory." Foster linked the existence of schools to the larger civic good, telling legislators that "without schools we shall make but very slow progress in all that pertains to the improvement of society." Still, there were bright spots, for he could cite examples, including Vermillion, where private schools existed. For example, the 1864 act had spurred citizens in Bon Homme to organize a school district, *The Dakotian* newspaper noting that "Vermillion, too, is moving, and an excellent school is already established, with Prof. M. Buckley as its principal."¹⁴ Despite the newspaper's optimism, school in Vermillion still occurred sporadically, a problem exacerbated by the lack of a permanent school building. Faced with a similar problem, the citizens of Yankton called for a public meeting at the end of August to discuss the need for a permanent schoolhouse.¹⁵

Vermillion followed suit with a meeting of interested citizens in October that raised funds to build a dedicated schoolhouse. Labor provided by Company A of the First Dakota Cavalry, stationed in Vermillion to provide protection from Indian attack, accelerated the construction process, as did a pail of whiskey donated by a local businessman, and the new school was ready by the following month. The first teacher in the new building was Amos Shaw, a noncommissioned officer from Company A released from his military duties several weeks ahead of his official discharge. His company commander, one of Vermillion's original settlers, thought education was so important that he paid Shaw's salary out of his own pocket. Teachers would come and go, but classes would regularly be offered from this point forward, and the rough log structure would be used as a school until 1872, when it was replaced by a larger brick building better able to serve the growing community's needs. The building of this and other schools, as Governor Newton Edmunds noted at the end of 1864, demonstrated "that the subject of Education is receiving that attention from our citizens that is deemed necessary." However, public school districts would not be organized sufficiently to replace private schools until the end

of 1866. Until then, communities like Vermillion operated schools on their own. Progress was piecemeal, dependent on local interest and support. . . .¹⁶

Motivations for Building the Vermillion Schoolhouse

When viewed as an isolated event, there is nothing particularly unique about a young frontier community deciding to build a one-room schoolhouse. It might be explained as a task that a smart company commander used to occupy his soldiers' time or as a necessary trapping of northeastern and midwestern civilization that a new community took on to make itself more attractive to future settlers. While there is some truth in both explanations, a closer examination of the larger context in which Vermillion's schoolhouse came into being suggests that this one-room schoolhouse allowed the settlers in Vermillion to look past a chaotic and sometimes frightening present to an optimistic future.

Vermillion's early inhabitants came primarily from New York, New England, and upper-midwestern states like Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The midwestern states had strong cultural and social ties to the northeastern ones, so it was no surprise that these settlers possessed some of the reform zeal that swept across the Northeast in the decades before the Civil War. Reformers there had established a clear link between education, democracy, and the preservation of the republic. Democracy and the republic in which it thrived depended on an educated and informed male citizenry who could form their own opinions, act independently, and vote accordingly. The linkage between these concepts emerged in the earliest days of the republic and evolved with the region's changing political and social sensibilities. In the colonial period, free, white males often learned how to become citizens through mandatory militia service. That changed after independence with the rise of the common school, and education became inextricably linked to the propagation of American political and social ideals.¹⁷

The importance of education was accentuated by the significant social disruption that characterized American society before and during the Civil War. An emerging market economy that began in the Northeast and moved steadily west with American expansion made it possible for individual farmers and small shopkeepers to engage in economic pursuits far beyond their immediate locale. In doing so, these conditions helped create the ideology of the middle class, a world where, in the words of Henry Clay's campaign biographer, "men start from an humble origin, and from small beginnings rise gradually in the world, as the reward of merit and

industry.” These self-made men, or at least those who aspired to be self-made men, were much more mobile than their predecessors. They migrated from the countryside into the cities, and from the East to the West. This fluidity challenged existing social constructs, or, in the case of newly created frontier communities like Vermillion, required them to be built from scratch. This could result in a fair amount of social disruption as new norms were established, leading one early settler to observe that the national “government appears to have looked with more surprise than compassion on these early political freaks of Dakotans.”¹⁸

Education helped mitigate that social chaos. The national response in similar situations was to find one or more institutions that could preserve and transmit traditional political and social values. The most important of those institutions was the common school, itself the product of the larger reform impulse that swept across much of the country, except the South, in the three decades before the Civil War. The common school movement advocated for universal public schooling, often by subscription but preferably free and supported by the state. Common schools attempted to rein in some of the social and cultural confusion inherent in a fluid and rapidly changing place like Dakota Territory, defining what it meant to be an American and unifying the nation in the process. This was especially important in the context of the Civil War.¹⁹

The new residents of Dakota Territory understood the potential impact of public education. An 1861 editorial titled “The Importance of Sustaining Schools” opined that “the education of the young and rising generation of our Territory is a matter of vast import.” At stake was nothing less than the future of the Territory, which needed an educated population that would not only make important civic decisions on behalf of all residents but would also “be elevated to the high position of moral and religious instructors to our children.” One week later, the same editorialist more explicitly linked the need for education to the preservation of the republican ideals then under attack by the nascent Civil War. Discussing the threat to American democracy posed by the war, he argued that those settling the West possessed character traits “best calculated ... to uphold and perpetuate our present form of Government.” As he considered how best to preserve the Union and what role the West would play in the current struggle, the editorialist concluded that “the destiny of our country will be controlled by the giant minds that are being reared amidst surroundings well calculated to fit them for the arduous duties of Government, and for the perpetuation of our free institutions.” These same concerns were very much on the minds on Vermillion residents as they gathered for a Fourth of July celebration in that first year of the war.

The town residents with their northeastern roots were joined by large numbers of Norwegian farmers from the countryside. The war, and what it meant for the future of the Union, dominated the proceedings. A. Puit, who presided over the festivities, opened with an oration that drew clear connections between the Revolutionary generation and these hearty Dakotans with attendees encouraged to “renew your vows, and practice their virtues.” A spirited reading of the Declaration of Independence reinforced his point almost immediately. Nelson Miner, a prominent local lawyer and the main speaker that day, then explicitly connected the Revolution to the Civil War, urging attendees to “remember and revere the undying deeds of our fathers, and to consecrate their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to the defence [sic] and perpetuation of the best government on earth.” An observer noted that Miner’s “oration throughout abounded in burning eloquence, touching pathos, and exalted patriotism.”²⁰

Governor William Jayne expounded further on these sentiments in his first message to the territorial legislature in the spring of 1862. “There is no subject,” he declared, “more vital to the prosperity and general welfare of the territory, than the subject of education.” Using language that would have been familiar to his contemporaries, Jayne explained that “the virtue, intelligence and public happiness of a people, and all that conduces to the advancement of the prosperity, wealth and power of a country, is intimately associated with, and dependent upon, the development of the educational interest of the state.” Jayne also highlighted the civic benefits of public schools, noting “that we are not unmindful of the great interests of education and the proper moral and intellectual training of the youth of our land.” This was particularly important as the nation entered the second year of a bloody civil war whose ideological undertones demanded preservation of the Union, and he reminded legislators that “it is well you should bear in mind the age in which you live, and the nation of which you are a part” as they considered potential legislation. Supporting public education would create communities where “truth, virtue, intelligence and knowledge prevail.”²¹

Challenges in Dakota Territory

One might be tempted to think that these concepts of citizenship and civic duty were abstractions, but they were very real ideas for the white settlers who were directly involved in expanding the boundaries of the republic. The importance of these ideals to the settlers would be tested in the early 1860s, a particularly turbulent time when the future of both Dakota Territory

and the Union itself was very much in doubt.

The 1862 Sioux War, which spilled over into Dakota Territory from Minnesota, came at a moment when almost every vital institution in the territory was in a fragile state. The immediate effects were nearly fatal for a territory that had existed for barely three years. The obvious impact, of course, was the fear of future raids and subsequent depopulation of much of the territory by white settlers who had only recently arrived, but the Sioux War was profoundly disruptive in other ways. For all intents and purposes, local governments, with the exception of Yankton, temporarily ceased to exist. The territorial government continued to function in Yankton as well, but its activities were focused almost entirely on military affairs, and civil matters were set aside until the immediate threat had passed.

For those who remained, evidence of the breakdown of civil government was all around them. In Yankton, a great quantity of lumber had been collected in early August for the construction of a capitol building. Somewhat symbolically, it never served that purpose, being “confiscated by the local militia under the unwritten law of ‘military necessity’” for constructing fortifications.²² Newspapers, which devoted multiple pages of each issue to printing federal and territorial documents and served as civic boosters, stopped publishing. In some cases, like the *Dakota Democrat* from Sioux Falls, the newspaper never published again. The Yankton *Dakotian* was the first paper back in print, explaining in mid-September that “owing to the confusion we were thrown into by the recent Indian excitement—women and children taking entire possession of our office—we have found it impossible to issue our paper for the past two weeks.” The Vermillion *Democratic Republican* all but disappeared, prompting *The Dakotian* to wonder “what has become of the Vermillion *Republican*? Has it dried up?”²³ It had indeed and would not put out another issue for months. Even though it resumed publication relatively quickly, *The Dakotian* had changed. The Indian threat dominated its pages and local government news appeared only infrequently. It was also now the only newspaper (and thus organ of local and territorial government) functioning in the territory.

The 1862 Sioux War also disrupted territorial elections, which were scheduled for September 1, 1862, right at the height of public panic. Some locales like Brule Creek and Charles Mix County held hurried elections and allowed white male minors and nonresidents to vote. The same happened in Red River Valley, along with a hundred or more “extra” ballots cast in the general confusion. Still other elections, especially in Pembina, were delayed long enough that

ballots for the territory's congressional delegate election were not counted. This ensured a factionalized legislature when that body assembled in Yankton for its second session in December 1862. The legislators sparred for seventeen days before determining how seats would be filled and then got around to conducting the territory's business.²⁴

Like the newspapers, the legislature's focus had also changed. Governor Jayne's message, delivered on that seventeenth day, clearly defined the difference between the first territorial assembly, which met before the outbreak of hostilities, and the second assembly. The first legislature, he noted, "enacted a civil and criminal code, established a revenue, militia and educational system, formed all the counties which our settlements seemed to require, and passed many other acts of necessary legislation." As he considered what should occupy the current assembly, there was a noticeable change in emphasis from civic and educational affairs. Jayne now declared that "the questions which are most intimately connected with the welfare and settlement of Dakota, and which require your attention and consideration, are Indian affairs and military protection of the frontier." He did, however, sound an optimistic note near the end of his address. Foreseeing an end to both the Sioux War and the Civil War, he prophesized that "we shall witness the checked immigration of the past few years again spring up, and soon the rich valleys of the Missouri, the Big Sioux, Dakota, Red River and Niobrara will be crowded with dense settlements, thriving towns and commercial cities." The challenge was whether Dakota Territory would be ready to handle the influx. Everything about the territory, including government, was slowly taking form, with the end goal of statehood still years away. Getting there would require an educated and discerning white male citizenry who understood the values that characterized this latest addition to the republic.²⁵

Dakota Territory's prospects would, in fact, stabilize throughout 1863 and into 1864. Residents still feared that violence might flare up, but the campaign against the Sioux had moved well to the north, and life was returning to some semblance of normalcy in the southern half of the territory. Local spirits were bolstered in May 1864 with the arrival of some fifty new families in the Vermillion area from New York, part of a larger migration of ninety-four families moving together to Dakota Territory. Among the newly arrived migrants was Lucian W. Case, who would play a prominent role in the decision to build a permanent schoolhouse in Vermillion.²⁶

As Case and other Vermillion residents began talking about building the school, the need for its civilizing and normalizing influence became increasingly acute. Although the end of the Civil

War was less than a year away, that was not obvious in the summer of 1864. Instead, it appeared to many observers that the Lincoln administration would fail in its efforts to preserve the Union. If the Union did not survive, then what would this part of North America look like? One very real possibility was that the United States of America might cease to exist in its familiar form, replaced by two or more independent republics. No matter what the outcome, civic education and the transmission of shared values were recognized as increasingly important. Politicians, educators, and civic leaders across the country were certainly reaching that conclusion. As a California superintendent noted just four years later, “the highest purpose of the public schools is to ... cultivate good tendencies & inculcate love of country, love of liberty & patriotism, and above all to become good citizens to the country, state, and nation.”

In the dark summer of 1864, Vermillion residents considered the same concerns and reached the same conclusion. At the Republican and Union Convention of Dakota Territory, in Vermillion at the end of July, attendees resolved that “through the education of the masses of the people our free institutions are to be preserved, and therefore we pledge ourselves to do all in our power to establish such a system of free schools and colleges as shall insure the free and liberal education of the rising generation of this territory.” Several of the delegates who drafted that language, including Mahlon Gore, Hugh Compton, and T. Elwood Clark, had been or would be involved in promoting education in Vermillion, and these sentiments would reflect the perspectives of their constituents.²⁷

That summer was indeed dark, for the war was not going well for the Union. In the Eastern Theater, Ulysses S. Grant’s campaign against Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had turned into a protracted bloodbath. Grant suffered over sixty-four thousand casualties in eight weeks and seemed no closer to forcing Lee’s surrender than when he had started. Criticism mounted in the press with Grant being labeled a butcher even by erstwhile allies. The concern even reached President Lincoln’s cabinet, where Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles recorded in his diary that “there is a craving and intense anxiety in relation to the army of the Potomac. Great confidence is felt in Grant but the immense slaughter of our brave men chills and sickens us all.” Union progress was also disappointing in the West, where William T. Sherman’s Army of the Tennessee initially made solid progress against Joseph E. Johnston and John Bell Hood but then stalled on the outskirts of Atlanta after taking heavy casualties in multiple battles.²⁸

These military setbacks had political repercussions that put the future of the Union in doubt. Internal discontent led a group of disaffected Radical Republicans to hold a political convention at the end of May that nominated John C. Fremont for president rather than Abraham Lincoln. Although the mainstream Republican Party overwhelmingly nominated Lincoln for a second term just a week later, the political fractures were clear and very public. The Democrats, meeting in early August, nominated General George McClellan on a platform that called for a negotiated end to the war and announced that prominent anti-war Democrat Clement Vallandigham would be McClellan's Secretary of War. Facing challenges both from inside and outside his party, subject to a constant stream of bad news from his generals, and recognizing that growing numbers of Americans thought the war could not be won, President Lincoln concluded in late August that he was going to lose the fall election. In a remarkable act of self-awareness, Lincoln wrote a statement on a sheet of paper on August 23, sealed it in an envelope, had members of his cabinet sign across the seal, and then placed the unknown memorandum in his desk. The memorandum, which was not revealed to the cabinet until after the election, read as follows:

This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.

The post-election conversation with the cabinet made it clear that Lincoln anticipated a negotiated peace and thus the dissolution of the Union as the likely outcome.²⁹

Dakotans were not privy to Lincoln's inner thoughts, but they closely followed the war, worried about its possible outcomes, and wondered what impact it would have on their own lives. At the local and territorial levels, these concerns manifested themselves in a bitter political fight that filled the pages of the territory's newspapers with invective and slander. This was an internal fight between Republicans over who best represented the interests of the Union, much like the national contest between moderates and radicals within the party. Both factions struggled to define what the war was about and how it affected those living in Dakota Territory. These were not abstract questions for the territory's residents, and they eagerly debated what it meant to be a loyal American, how the war should be prosecuted, and what the post-war world should look like.

The dispute went public at the end of June 1864, when Grant's army had bogged down and Lincoln's political opponents had nominated their alternative Republican candidate for president. A new newspaper, the *Dakota Union*, emerged to challenge the dominant *Weekly Dakotian* and the rapidly declining *Dakota Republican*.³⁰ In its inaugural issue, the *Dakota Union* declared, "it is too often the case that a free interchange of conflicting views cannot find their way before the public through the columns of one sheet—and—hence, another is demanded." Those "conflicting views" did not sit well with the *Weekly Dakotian* faction, which questioned "the record of all these men who call themselves Republicans, but always work with the Democrats and anti-Administration party." The editor reminded his readers that "this new party will prove a failure; for it is nothing more or less than the old enemy that we have always had to fight."³¹

And fight they did, for the rest of the summer of 1864. The national battle for the future of the Union took place in smaller and more concentrated form in Dakota Territory. The stakes seemed clear, and although intimately entwined with local political disputes, they were expressed in the form of high-minded ideals. The *Dakotian* decried the effects of faction, telling its readers that "it occasions us, at this time, surprise, mingled with disgust, that there are those, who ... are so desirous of change that they are willing even to divide, and weaken the loyal strength of the nation, to gratify their desires." Of course, it went without saying that the faction its editor supported was obviously in the right, and that loyal citizens in Dakota Territory should consider the issues and then support "the firm, enduring principles of the [Republican] Platform pushed vigorously forward to final triumph." Using language that was equally ideological and traditional, the *Dakota Union* told its readers that

it is a great question of the age, whether or not the moral and religious culture of the people, and the enlightened understanding of our statesmen, are yet fully prepared to weigh and realize the fact that, to us, is confided the experimental duty of testing and proving the purity and stability of a Republican form of government.³²

Like his counterpart at the *Dakotian*, the editor of the *Dakota Union* knew where he stood on those principles and that his opinion was also the right one.

As it turned out, these stances were not all that far apart, and any differences were really the result of local political disputes. By early September, the editors had reconciled, ultimately merging their newspapers into a new entity titled the *Union and Dakotian*. Democracy still hung

in the balance, and it was not yet clear that the Union would survive unscathed, but these local Republicans, like their national counterparts, would close ranks, with “the initiatory steps already taken towards reuniting the loyal people of the Territory heretofore so unhappily divided.” Months later, they would explain that “Dakota is a united Territory, and her people desire a united Press.... Perhaps we have been wrong—perhaps others were. We have been governed by our convictions of Right—others may have done the same. We censure no one but forgive all.”³³

Conclusion

The challenge for territorial residents throughout the summer and fall of 1864 was to discern exactly what republican principles of government were at stake and decide how to act upon them. It was a confusing time, with both local and national battles raging in the press and a very real fear that the republic would not survive the ordeal intact. Based on their understanding of the way republican values were transmitted as well as the sobering rhetoric swirling about them, the territory’s inhabitants believed the future of the country depended on an informed and astute public whose education prepared them to consider these difficult questions and take principled action. Because both democracy and the preservation of the republic hung in the balance, the need for common schools had never been greater. From the public sentiments expressed from the 1861 Fourth of July celebration through the resolutions adopted in Vermillion as part of the Republican and Union Convention of Dakota Territory in the summer of 1864, it is clear that Vermillion residents had connected public education with the future of the republic, as they contemplated building and staffing that simple log schoolhouse in the fall of 1864. At a time when no one was quite sure what either “the United States” or “Dakota Territory” might turn out to be, here was something they could do to tip the odds in their favor. Posterity would bear out the wisdom of their decision. As Representative William Loughridge of Iowa noted just a few years later, “This nation has but recently emerged from a terrible contest . . . for our success in that struggle and our safe deliverance from the perils that surrounded us, we are indebted . . . to the common schools of the land more than any other agency.”³⁴ Although the stakes would never again be quite so high, Vermillion not only survived the “terrible contest” but also emerged better able to prepare its citizens to meet the civic challenges of territorial life and, ultimately, statehood.



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Notes

¹ Megan Street, "Replica of Historic Schoolhouse Returned to Vermillion," *Volante*, September 8, 2014, <http://volanteonline.com/2014/09/replica-historic-schoolhouse-returned-vermillion/> (accessed May 13, 2015); Herbert S. Schell, *History of Clay County, South Dakota* (Vermillion, South Dakota: Clay County Historical Society, 1976), 123. While most sources agree that the first dedicated school building in Dakota Territory was constructed in 1864 in Vermillion, William H. H. Beadle, who came to Dakota Territory in 1869 and later served as superintendent of public instruction, suggested that the first school building was built in 1860 in Bon Homme, Dakota Territory. See William H. H. Beadle, "Personal Memoirs of William H. H. Beadle, LL. D." in *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Aberdeen, South Dakota: News Printing Company, 1906), 153.

² Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed. (Pierre, South Dakota: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2004), 71-79; William E. Lass, *Navigating the Missouri: Steamboating on Nature's Highway, 1819-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 181-183.

³ Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 94-95; Cedric Cummins, *The University of South Dakota, 1862-1966* (Vermillion, South Dakota: University of South Dakota Press, 1975), 3-5.

⁴ Beadle, "Personal Memoirs of William H. H. Beadle," 153.

⁵ Harold Edward Briggs, "The Early History of Clay County" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1924), 41-42; Herbert S. Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past* (Vermillion, South Dakota: Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, 1985), 150.

⁶ Frank Trumbo, "Recollections of Early Opportunities for an Education in the Territory of Dakota," in *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Pierre, South Dakota: State Publishing Company, 1916), 11.

⁷ "Local Affairs," *Dakota Republican*, April 5, 1862.

⁸ F. Belle Conrow, "History of Clay County, South Dakota," in E. Frank Peterson, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Clay County South Dakota* (n.p.: R. M. Tackabury, 1901), 56-57.

⁹ "Town and Neighborhood," *Dakota Republican*, May 24, 1862.

¹⁰ Alvin M. Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 100-121; Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), 35-45; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 84-85.

¹¹ "Removal," *Dakota Republican*, January 10, 1863; "Our Future Prospects," *Dakota Republican*, February 14, 1863.

¹² Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past*, 150; Frank Trumbo, "Recollections of Early Opportunities for an Education in the Territory of Dakota," 11; "Town and Neighborhood," *Dakota Republican*, January 10, 1863.

¹³ "An Act for the Regulation and Support of Common Schools," in *General Laws, and Memorials and Resolutions of the Territory of Dakota, Passed at the First Session of the Legislative Assembly, Commenced at the Town of Yankton, March 17, and Concluded May 15, 1862* (Yankton, Dakota Territory: Josiah C. Trask, 1862), 452-470; "An Act for the Regulation and Support of Common Schools," in *General and Private Laws, Memorials and Resolutions, of the Territory of Dakota, Passed at the Third Session of the Legislative Assembly, Commenced at the Town of Yankton, December 7, 1863, and Concluded January 15, 1864* (Yankton, Dakota Territory: G. W. Kingsbury, 1864), 84-101; "An Act to Amend an Act, Entitled An Act for the Regulation and Support of Common Schools," in *General and Private Laws, and Memorials and Resolutions, of the Territory of Dakota, of the Fourth Session of the Legislative Assembly, Commenced at the Town of Yankton, December 5, 1864, and Concluded January 13, 1865* (Yankton, Dakota Territory: G. W. Kingsbury, 1865), 2-3.

¹⁴ "Bon Homme Awake," *The Dakotian*, July 2, 1864.

¹⁵ "Report of Board of Education and School Superintendent," in *House Journal of the Fourth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Dakota* (Yankton, Dakota Territory: G. W. Kingsbury, 1865), 103-104; "School Meeting," *The Dakotian*, August 27, 1864.

¹⁶ Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past*, 150-51; Everett W. Sterling, *Vermillion Story: The People and Events in Vermillion's Founding in 1859 and Growth Through the First 100 Years* (Vermillion, South Dakota: n.p., 1959), 23; Orlan J. Svingen, "The History of Vermillion to 1900" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1975), 29; A. M. English, "Dakota's First Soldiers: History of the First Dakota Cavalry, 1862-1865," in State Department of History, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, vol. 9 (Pierre, South Dakota: Hipple Printing Company, 1918, 302-303; "Governor's Message," *The Union Dakotian*, December 10, 1864; Herbert Schell, *History of Clay County, South Dakota* (Vermillion, South Dakota: Clay County Historical Society, 1976), 123.

¹⁷ Schell, *History of Clay County*, 15-17; Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past*, 6-7; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1986), 189-190, 199-207; Rita Koganzon, "'Producing a Reconciliation of Disinterestedness and Commerce': The Political Rhetoric of Education in the Early Republic," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (August 2012), 404-406; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 18-20.

¹⁸ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 237-238; Moses K. Armstrong, *The Early Empire Builders of the Great West* (St. Paul, Minnesota: N: E. W. Porter, 1901), 30.

¹⁹ Frederick M. Binder, *The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 162-163; John L. Rury, *Educational and Social Change: Contours in the History*

of *American Schooling*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 70-72; Robert Wiebe, "The Social Functions of Public Education," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1969), 148-50; Paul Theobald, *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 16-17.

²⁰ "The Importance of Sustaining Schools," *Weekly Dakotian*, July 6, 1861; "Western Characteristics," *Weekly Dakotian*, July 13, 1861; "Vermillion Correspondence," *Weekly Dakotian*, July 13, 1861.

²¹ "Governor Jayne's First Message," in George W. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915), vol. 1: 200, 204.

²² Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, vol. 1: 255.

²³ *The Dakotian*, September 15, 1862; "Town and Territory," *The Dakotian*, September 30, 1862.

²⁴ Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 104.

²⁵ Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, vol. 1: 264-266.

²⁶ Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past*, 6-8.

²⁷ Mark Groen, "These Public Schoolhouses - The Citadels of our Liberties," *American Educational History Journal* 32, no. 2 (2005), 157; Report of the Committee on Resolutions of the Republican and Union Convention of Dakota Territory, July 27, 1864, in Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, vol. 1: 371-72; English, "Dakota's First Soldiers: History of the First Dakota Cavalry, 1862-1865," 302-303.

²⁸ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 130-132; Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 135-143; Gideon Welles, *The Civil War Diary of Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy*, ed. William E. Gienapp and Erica L. Gienapp (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 421.

²⁹ Steven E. Woodworth, *This Great Struggle: America's Civil War* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 295-301; *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, vol. 7 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 514.

³⁰ By this point, the *Dakota Republican* had ceased publishing much more than federal legislation, territorial political party platforms, and advertisements. It contained no editorial content and no local news stories.

³¹ "To the People of Dakota," *Dakota Union*, June 21, 1864; "The Dakota Election," *Weekly Dakotian*, July 2, 1864.

³² "The Republican Platform," *Dakotian*, July 2, 1864; "The False Popularity of Public Men," *Dakota Union*, July 26, 1864.

³³ "United We Stand," *Dakotian*, September 3, 1864; "Dakota Redeemed and United," *Union and Dakotian*, November 19, 1864.

³⁴ Groen, "These Public Schoolhouses—The Citadels of our Liberties," 156.