



Doane Robinson

Dakota Images

Known as an idea man with a practical bent, Doane Robinson spent much of his life promoting South Dakota and preserving its history.

Robinson was born 19 October 1856 near Sparta, Wisconsin, to George McCook Robinson and Rhozina Grow Robinson. He was christened Jonah Leroy, a name his younger sister rendered as "Donah," which later evolved into his pen name, "Doane." At age twenty-one, he took a homestead in Minnesota, where he also taught school and studied law. He moved to Dakota Territory in 1883 to practice law and within a few years turned to newspaper publishing in Watertown, Gary, Yankton, and Aberdeen. From 1898 to 1904 he published the *Monthly South Dakotan*, a magazine of South Dakota history and literature. He married Jennie Austin on 4 December 1884, and the couple had two sons, Harry and Will.

Robinson began a quarter century as head of the South Dakota Department of History with its formation in 1901. As state historian, he published twelve volumes of *South Dakota Historical Collections* contributing scores of articles to the series as well. Several of his books have become cornerstones of South Dakota history, including his 1904 *History of South Dakota* and his 1925 *Encyclopedia of South Dakota*. Among the hundreds of items he collected for the state museum in Pierre was the Verendrye Plate, which documented the presence of French explorers in the region in 1743.

By nature a promoter, Robinson has been called the "Father of the Rushmore Memorial" for originating the idea of a historical monument in the Black Hills. He also advocated the development of tourism, good roads, and the Missouri River. He served as secretary of the state railroad commission from 1889 to 1891 and was instrumental in locating the State School for the Blind in Gary. Writing poetry and giving public lectures provided other avenues for Robinson to express his zeal for South Dakota and its history.

Robinson again served briefly as state historian before his death on 27 November 1946. He is buried in Riverside Cemetery in Pierre.

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