

As a writer and scholar, John R. Milton helped win recognition for the literature and culture of the American West. As an editor and professor at the University of South Dakota, he inspired more than a generation of writers in their own creative pursuits.

Milton was born in Anoka, Minnesota, on 24 May 1924 and grew up in Saint Paul. He served in the Army Signal Corps in World War II, receiving a battle star for the Okinawa campaign. Returning to Minnesota in 1946, he married Lynn Hinderlie and entered the University of Minnesota, where he earned bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees. He continued his education at Oregon State College and Stanford University, receiving his Ph.D. in American literature and creative writing from the University of Denver in 1961. Milton taught at Augsburg College in Minneapolis and Jamestown College in North Dakota before joining the University of South Dakota faculty in Vermillion in 1963.

As professor of English and director of the university's creative writing program, he specialized in the literature of the American West. His 1980 book, *The Novel of the American West*, carefully distinguishes serious "Western" literature from its mass-produced and popular counterpart, the "western." In examining the myths and truths of life in the West, Milton also helped define the characteristics of the region and its inhabitants. He explored these characteristics himself in his own poetry and fiction, including *Tree of Bones and Other Poems*, *Notes to a Bald Buffalo*, and "The Inheritance of Emmy One Horse," selected for *Best American Short Stories of 1969*.

Shortly after arriving at the University of South Dakota, Milton founded *South Dakota Review* and served as editor of the nationally recognized literary magazine for more than thirty years. Although the journal had a western emphasis, the editor sought out works that exposed readers to the "outside" world as well. Milton also served on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals and belonged to numerous professional organizations, including the Western Literature Association, serving a term as its president.

Milton did not allow his own scholarly efforts, which included fifteen books and more than two hundred essays, reviews, and scholarly papers, to overshadow his dedication to his students. Although a tough critic, he enjoyed teaching and nurturing talented writers.

John Milton died 28 January 1995 in Vermillion.

by Joshua Garrett-Davis

Dakota Images



John R. Milton

Copyright of South Dakota History is the property of South Dakota State Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

All illustrations in this issue are property of the South Dakota State Historical Society, State Archives Collection, except for those on the following pages: covers and pp. 114, 116–17, 120–23, 124–45, from Maxwell Van Nuys, Denver, Colo.; pp. 92, 99, from Yankton County Historical Society, Yankton, S.Dak.; p. 157, from L. Frank Baum Collection, Alexander Mitchell Library, Aberdeen, S.Dak.