

Dakota Resources

Finding Dakota Territory's Civil War: A Call for Further Research

Even as the Civil War's storm clouds gathered and broke, Dakota Territory was being opened for non-Indian settlement, with the first permanent communities established in the summer of 1859 along the Missouri River. The war itself ranks as one of the most traumatic and formative events in American history, affecting millions of Americans, altering the relationship between the national government and its citizens, and dramatically affecting race relations in the United States for generations to come. A review of the historiography of Dakota Territory during the Civil War reveals, however, that scholars have minimized the conflict's influence and impact. Instead, they suggest that the settlers' interaction with war-related issues was limited to the slavery question as the territory was being established, the creation of homegrown militia units as the conflict began in earnest, the 1862 United States-Dakota War, and the United States Army's subsequent campaigns against the indigenous inhabitants in 1863 and 1864. From the earliest chronicle by Moses K. Armstrong in 1866 through the work of historians in the twentieth century, the larger war is sometimes mentioned, but always as something distantly removed from the territory and its newly arrived population. In fact, the historiography suggests that the subject of the Civil War in Dakota Territory is in need of further examination in order to place the territory firmly in the national context and explore the social and cultural impacts of the war on the territory's residents.

The first histories of Dakota Territory, which informed all that followed, were written by early settlers intent not only on recording what happened but also on preserving their good names. The most important of these chroniclers was George W. Kingsbury, whose two-volume *History of Dakota Territory* (part of a larger five-volume set) told the

territory's story and preserved valuable documents.¹ Although those volumes would not be published until 1915, Kingsbury exerted an oversized influence in defining the territory's history almost from the moment he arrived in Yankton in the spring of 1862. He purchased a defunct local newspaper, renamed it the *Weekly Dakotian*, and became an immediate public and political force.² Kingsbury was elected to the territorial legislature in 1863, the first of several elected and appointed offices he held in his lifetime. From the very beginning, he was intent on preserving the territory's history and doing it in a way that reflected well on himself, his causes, and his associates. To that end, he amassed an unparalleled collection of contemporary documents, kept meticulous personal records describing early territorial politics, and tried to influence the early telling of the territory's history when he could.³ Oscar W. Coursey, who saw a manuscript of Kingsbury's *History of Dakota Territory* just before it was published in 1915, noted that Kingsbury "has been working on it for ten years; that is, steadily; while as a matter of fact, he began it fifty years ago."⁴

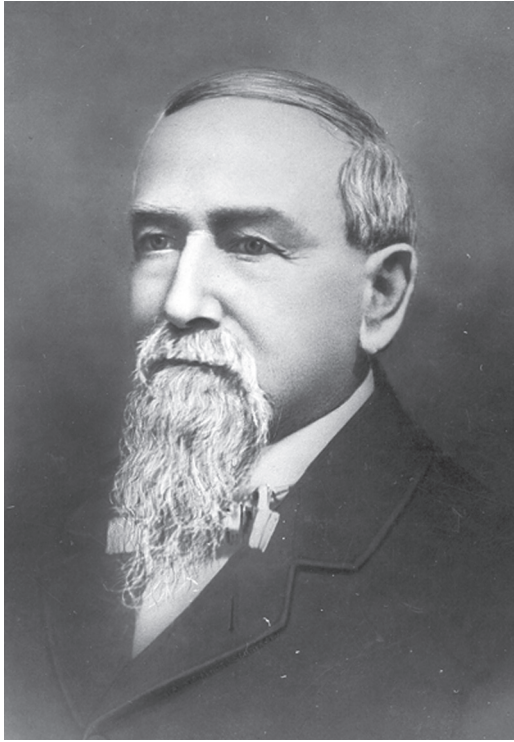
Although Kingsbury's history would become the most influential over time, especially as a repository of territorial documents, it was not the first written. Moses Armstrong, who arrived in Dakota Territory in October of 1859 and spent much of his career as one of Kingsbury's political rivals, was also interested in documenting the territory's history, with his first effort appearing in 1866. His *History and Resources of Dakota, Montana, and Idaho* focused on the territory's political evolution. When it came to the Civil War, Armstrong devoted two sentences

1. George W. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, and George Martin Smith, *South Dakota: Its History and Its People*, 5 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915).

2. O. W. Coursey, *Who's Who in South Dakota*, vol. 2, *Thirty-three Biographies* (Mitchell, S.Dak.: Educator Supply Co., 1916), pp. 36–37. The *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, the lineal descendent of Kingsbury's newspaper, remains the oldest continuously published newspaper in South Dakota.

3. *Memorial and Biographical Record: An Illustrated Compendium of Biography* (Chicago, Ill.: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1897), p. 230; Howard R. Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861–1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 289. For an example of Kingsbury trying to define the territory's early history, see "History of Yankton County," *Dakota Union*, 9 Aug. 1864.

4. Coursey, *Who's Who in South Dakota*, 2:41.



Moses K. Armstrong was an eyewitness to many of the events of early Dakota Territory. He is pictured here in his later years, around the time he published his *Early Empire Builders of the Great West*.

to the war's outbreak and an additional sentence later in his narrative to the local raising and mustering in of two companies of cavalry for territorial defense, whose role in the 1862 United States-Dakota War quickly overshadowed their original reason for existence. Beyond that, his account is absolutely silent about the Civil War and what the territory's residents thought about it.⁵ His *The Early Empire Builders of the Great West*, which includes many of the anonymous but thinly dis-

5. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, 1:146; Armstrong, *History and Resources of Dakota, Montana, and Idaho* (1866; reprint ed., Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1967), pp. 30, 32. Armstrong's choice not to discuss what Dakota Territory residents thought

guised newspaper columns Armstrong wrote about the territory during and after the war, was published thirty-five years later in 1901. It, too, is similarly silent about the war in the pages that chronicle Armstrong's territorial experiences from 1859 to 1865.⁶

Both Armstrong and Kingsbury were important influences on *History of Southeastern Dakota: Its Settlement and Growth*, which was published by an anonymous author or authors in 1881. The writer acknowledged his debt to Armstrong's "admirable productions" in the preface and regularly inserted some of Armstrong's language verbatim from the *History and Resources of Dakota, Montana, and Idaho*.⁷ Although Kingsbury was still decades away from publishing his magisterial history of Dakota Territory, one historian has speculated that he was one of three authors behind the book.⁸ The narrative follows the pattern used by both Armstrong and Kingsbury at different points in time, mentioning the Civil War only in the context of local events, and even then hardly at all. It acknowledges the outbreak of war in the spring of 1861 and the enlistment and mustering in of the Dakota Cavalry, but nothing else having to do with the war. The territory's political situation dominates the narrative, and there is no sense of how the war was perceived by or what its impact might have been on the territory's residents.⁹

The turn of the century saw the first histories written by those who had not experienced the Civil War in Dakota Territory personally. Chief among this second wave of chroniclers was Doane Robinson, who moved to the territory in 1883 to practice law. Within a year,

about the war almost immediately affected a similar publication. When George A. Batchelder, secretary of Dakota Territory, decided to publish his own account of the territory's early history, he drew heavily on Armstrong's book. See Batchelder, *A Sketch of the History and Resources of Dakota Territory* (Yankton, D.T.: Press Steam Power Printing Co., 1870; reprint ed., Pierre, S.Dak.: Hipple Printing Co., 1928), p. 3.

6. Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, p. 81; Armstrong, *The Early Empire Builders of the Great West* (St. Paul, Minn.: E. W. Porter, 1901), pp. 29–160.

7. *History of Southeastern Dakota: Its Settlement and Growth* (Sioux City, Iowa: Western Publishing Co., 1881), p. 7.

8. Gary D. Olson, "A Question of Authorship: *History of Southeastern Dakota: Its Settlement and Growth* (1881)," *South Dakota History* 34 (Winter 2004): 340–54. Olson believes that the other two authors were Payton H. Acton and Wilmot W. Brookings.

9. *History of Southeastern Dakota*, pp. 21, 49.



As the state historian for South Dakota, Doane Robinson authored many articles and volumes on the region's past. Like other historians of his era, he tended to focus on local events.

Robinson had become the editor of the *Watertown Daily Courier* and a contributor to the *Minneapolis Tribune*.¹⁰ He later abandoned his practice and went into publishing, where he “edited the *Monthly South Dakotan*, a magazine devoted to a spicy review of the early history of the Dakotas.”¹¹ In 1901, he became the state historian and collector of vital statistics, which gave him the time and resources to delve more deeply into the Dakotas’ past. Three years later, he published his two-volume *History of South Dakota*, which firmly established his reputation as a regional historian. Robinson followed the lead of his predecessors, focusing on the local and political at the expense of the national and socio-cultural. To be fair, his approach reflected the kind of history academic historians were writing all across the country at that time.¹²

Robinson introduced questions of national significance into his narrative only when they informed the local story he was telling, and then as economically as possible. For example, he linked the coming of the Civil War to the slavery question in one quick sentence, mentioning slavery only because its existence in Dakota Territory was the subject of a heated wartime political debate that was more about political factions jockeying for local control than issues of national import. Likewise, he noted the “great wave of patriotism which swept over the American people” after southern states seceded, but only to explain the resulting call for troops in Dakota Territory who would be so critical for territorial defense during the 1862 United States-Dakota War.¹³ He took the same approach one year later in his *A Brief History of South Dakota*, noting that “South Dakota had little part in the Civil War” before discussing the Dakota cavalry in the 1862 war, and again

10. Thomas W. Herringshaw, *Local and National Poets of America* (Chicago: American Publishers’ Association, 1890), p. 377.

11. O. W. Coursey, *Who’s Who in South Dakota: Volume 1* (Mitchell, S.Dak.: Educator Supply Co., 1913) 1:91–92.

12. Larry J. Zimmerman and Mary Keepers Helgevoel, “Keepers of the Past: Doane Robinson, William Henry Over, and Herbert S. Schell,” in *South Dakota Leaders: From Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to Oscar Howe*, ed. Herbert T. Hoover and Larry J. Zimmerman (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Press, 1989), pp. 434–39; Mark H. Leff, “Revising U.S. Political History,” *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 830–34.

13. Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, 2 vols. (N.p.: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1904), 1:194, 202.

in 1930 in his three-volume *South Dakota Sui Generis*, when he observed that “in the Civil war [*sic*] South Dakota as such, had no direct part.”¹⁴ Robinson broke from this pattern only once, during his 1904 account of the 1864 territorial election. He noted the “great Lincoln-McClellan campaign” that raged across the Union but described Dakotans as “unmoved by national politics.”¹⁵ In doing so, he separated the territory and its residents from the national context even more explicitly than earlier accounts had done.

When George Kingsbury finally published his *History of Dakota Territory* in 1915, he codified the historical narrative that had taken shape over the previous five decades. His epic narrative devoted less than three pages to the Civil War, with no real assessment of its impact on Dakota Territory. After noting the outbreak of the war and setting up a monolithic “Europe” as supporting the Confederacy in the hope that the American experiment with republicanism would fail, he quickly shifted to the raising of the Dakota Cavalry.¹⁶ From that point forward, the Civil War receded far into the background, emerging only periodically. Kingsbury’s one exception was the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, an event so traumatic that it overshadowed all that was happening in Dakota Territory even fifty years after the fact.¹⁷

The early twentieth-century historians who identified more closely with the history of North Dakota adopted the same perspective when discussing the territory’s Civil War years. Like Robinson, William B. Hennessy broached the subject of slavery, but only to explain why the region’s bid for territorial status was denied by Congress in 1859 but ultimately succeeded in 1861. The 1859 bill forbade slavery in Dakota

14. Robinson, *A Brief History of South Dakota*, 3d ed. (New York: American Book Co., 1916), p. 124. The first edition was published in 1905. *See also* Robinson, *South Dakota, Sui Generis: Stressing the Unique and Dramatic in South Dakota History*, 3 vols. (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1930), 1:488.

15. Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, 1:220.

16. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, 1:190–92. As a point of comparison, Kingsbury devoted six pages to an 1864 grasshopper plague. *See ibid.*, 1:342–47.

17. This reaction was typical of public reactions throughout the North. *See, for example*, David B. Chesebrough, “‘Never Such a National Sorrow’: The Reaction of the Northern Clergy to the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln,” *Lincoln Herald* 93 (Dec. 1991): 125–28.

Territory, which doomed it to failure in a Democrat-controlled Congress. The ascendancy of the Republicans in 1860 turned the tables, paving the way for creation of the territory the following year.¹⁸ Hennessy's second mention of the war was noting local requests for army transports, "despite the fact that the Civil War was raging," once gold and silver were discovered in the western part of the territory in 1863.¹⁹ Even so, he never linked the citizens of Dakota Territory to the war itself. His account, however, was brimming with detail compared to those written by Clement A. Lounsberry and Zena I. Trinka, whose narratives briefly mentioned the territorial cavalry that became so useful during the 1862 United States-Dakota War and the fact that many of the "vigorous young men" who might have met the initial attack by the Sioux in August 1862 were away fighting in the war, but little else.²⁰

Of all the accounts of Dakota Territory published by the early years of the twentieth century, George Kingsbury's remains the most detailed, interesting, and informative to modern historians. Kingsbury was an active participant in the events he described, which gave him a unique perspective but also introduced a consistent bias to his narrative. The southern, more populated section of the territory where he lived dominates his story, as do his political and factional associations, but it was Kingsbury's lifelong obsession with collecting and preserving the documents associated with Dakota Territory's history that opens the door to a broader interpretation of perceptions of the Civil War on the nation's periphery.

18. Hennessy, *History of North Dakota* (Bismarck, N.Dak.: Bismarck Tribune Co., 1910), pp. 84–85.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

20. Lounsberry, *Early History of North Dakota* (Washington, D.C.: Liberty Press, 1919), pp. 286–87; Trinka, *Out Where the West Begins: Being the Early and Romantic History of North Dakota* (St. Paul, Minn.: Pioneer Co., 1920), p. 62 (quotation). Lounsberry's life exemplifies the disconnect between those who more directly experienced the war further east and those who indirectly experienced it in the territories. He was a decorated veteran, mustering in as a private in 1861 and ending the war as a regimental commander. Even though the war defined his life, he never considered its impact on those further removed from the conflict. C. W. G. Hyde and William Stoddard, eds., *History of the Great Northwest and Its Men of Progress: A Select List of Biographical Sketches and Portraits of the Leaders in Business, Professional and Official Life* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Minneapolis Journal, 1901), pp. 372–75.

While Kingsbury's narrative gave short shrift to the Civil War and the extent to which settlers interacted and engaged with it, many of the documents he published suggest that the territory's residents not only kept abreast of events happening further east but also identified strongly with the Union and its shifting causes. This connection was almost immediate. For example, attendees at the territory's first political convention in June 1861 in the town of Vermillion organized themselves as a national union party and adopted a party platform. While five of the platform's seven resolutions addressed local concerns, two were clearly aimed at national issues. The platform's first resolution declared that "we, as citizens of Dakota Territory, are unanimously in favor of maintaining inviolate the Constitution of the United States and the enforcement of all the laws of Congress and the perpetuity of the Union." The convention also made it clear that "we fully and frankly endorse the policy of the present administration in relation to our national difficulties, believing that it is both patriotic and just."²¹ A similar convention ten weeks later in Yankton declared that its members "do most cordially endorse the war policy of the present administration, in all endeavors to put down rebellion, and preserve the Constitution and union of states."²² Kingsbury acknowledged the pro-Union sentiment in both resolutions but quickly shifted his narrative to the political machinations that ensued over purely local issues.

Governor William Jayne's first message as territorial governor in March 1862, which Kingsbury reprinted in its entirety, reinforced that connection to national events when Jayne directly linked a War Department request for volunteers to garrison Fort Randall on the Missouri River to the overall effort of "crushing this most accursed rebellion."²³ His message continued with a detailed description of the current military situation in the war's eastern and western theaters. He also came down firmly in support of the prevailing Northern opinion on slavery, recommending that the institution not be allowed to take root in Dakota Territory. In making his case, he linked slavery directly to the war, expressing his "repugnance of an institution which today

21. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, 1:184.

22. *Ibid.*, 1:185.

23. *Ibid.*, 1:202.



HISTORY OF DAKOTA TERRITORY

BY
GEORGE W. KINGSBURY

SOUTH DAKOTA ITS HISTORY AND ITS PEOPLE

EDITED BY
GEORGE MARTIN SMITH, B.A., A.M.

ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME I

CHICAGO
THE S. J. CLARKE PUBLISHING COMPANY
1915

George W. Kingsbury, a former newspaperman who held territorial office, worked on his *History of Dakota Territory* for decades before its 1915 publication. Pictured here are the frontispiece and title page of the two-volume work, which includes important documents from the territorial period.

convulses the continent, arrays a million of men in arms, interrupts our commerce, suspends business, prostrates trade, and paralyzes all the industrial interests of the country.”²⁴ He argued, in words that reflected the sentiments of his constituents, to “let freedom rule—let this be the home of the white man,” with the ultimate decision about slavery to be left to individual states.²⁵ All together, the governor devoted approximately a quarter of his annual message to the war and its impact on Dakota Territory.

Other documents reproduced within Kingsbury’s narrative reflect a similar interest in the war. During the summer of 1862 a series of political conventions were held in anticipation of territorial elections that fall. The Republican and Union Congressional Convention in Vermillion, the Yankton County Republican Convention, the Minnehaha County Republican and Union Convention, the Republican and Union Territorial Convention, and the People’s Union Territorial Convention in Vermillion each included specific platforms supporting the war against the “unreasonable and unholy rebellion.”²⁶ Other conventions, notably the Yankton County People’s Union Convention, the Bon Homme County Republican and Union Convention, the Charles Mix County Republican and Union Convention, the Bon Homme County People’s Union Convention, and the Clay County People’s Union Convention, announced their formal support for those earlier platforms. Only a handful of conventions chose not to address the issue, recording only their preferred candidates for local and territorial office. In noting the use of the word “Union” by many of the region’s emerging political parties, Kingsbury explained that maintenance of the Union “at that time was the dominating issue in national and territorial political affairs.”²⁷ He, however, chose not to emphasize it in his narrative.

Despite the prompts sprinkled throughout Kingsbury’s collected documents, the general histories of Dakota Territory, North Dakota, and South Dakota written from the end of World War II to the pres-

24. *Ibid.*, 1:200.

25. *Ibid.*, 1:201.

26. *Ibid.*, 1:217–23. Quotation from page 220 from the platform of the Republican and Union Territorial Convention.

27. *Ibid.*, 1:221.

ent have not tackled the question of the extent to which residents of Dakota Territory from 1859 to 1865 interacted with the Civil War and its antecedents or were affected by it in any significant way. There are two reasons for this gap. First, some of these histories are so topically focused that this discussion would not be appropriate. For example, Howard R. Lamar's history of territorial politics acknowledges that "the Dakotans followed the progress of the Civil War with a tremendous interest,"²⁸ but makes it clear that because the key to his monograph was "the settler's use of government on the spot . . . this study concentrates on Dakota politics."²⁹

Second, all of the postwar histories were influenced by what preceded them and were written in the context of a traditional political and economic interpretation of American history. Whether or not they did so consciously, most of their authors drew upon content and organized themselves around events and themes that one finds in Armstrong, Kingsbury, Robinson, and other early chroniclers. The analysis may have grown more sophisticated and the overall tone more professional, but the core events defining Dakota Territory's interaction with the Civil War had not changed. To the extent that they dealt with the war at all, they all (with some variation) structured their narratives around the importance of the slavery question in the creation of the territory, the raising of the Dakota Cavalry for home defense, and the campaigns of the United States military against the Sioux in 1863 and 1864.³⁰ The one conscious attempt to recast South Dakota's history in light of the social and cultural history movement, *A New South Dakota History* (2009), did so admirably for most of the state's history but defaulted to a more traditional interpretation for the chapters and parts of chapters that covered the Civil War years.³¹

28. Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, p. 87.

29. Ibid., p. ix. See also the topical essays in J. Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman, eds., *Dakota Panorama* (N.p.: Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1961).

30. See Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004); Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966); Hoover and Zimmerman, eds., *South Dakota Leaders*.

31. Harry F. Thompson, ed., *A New South Dakota History* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 2009).

Authors who have deliberately written about Dakota Territory and the Civil War have also missed the social and cultural impact of the war. Like the territorial and state histories cited above, their accounts tend towards the traditional, but in terms of military history rather than political history. On the eve of the war's centennial, Robert Huhn Jones was the first to study the Civil War experience of five northwestern territories and states, including Dakota Territory. His account was, by design, an operational and administrative history of the United States Army's Department of the Northwest that discussed "the day-to-day workings of a military department on the frontier in time of war."³² As such, it did not delve into the social and political implications of the war, although Jones did acknowledge that "there was probably no living American whom it did not touch in some way, either through news, taxes, the prosperity it brought, the effort to escape it, service in the army, politics, or death."³³ Unfortunately, his narrative did not address these additional facets of the war in any meaningful way.

Will G. Robinson, whose father, Doane, was so important in defining the history of Dakota Territory and South Dakota, wrote about the territory's experience with the conflict on the centennial of both the war and the territory's creation. In a chapter in *Dakota Panorama* titled "Dakota's Own Civil War," he tried to put the Dakota experience into the broader context and opened some new topics of discussion, but his effort fell short in two key ways. First, the core of his narrative remained essentially local in its political and military focus, but with some attempts to define how Dakotans viewed national events. Robinson correctly noted the importance of newspapers in bringing national news to Dakota, citing local mention of secession, the attempted Crittenden Compromise, and occasional battles in both the eastern and western theaters of the war.³⁴ Unfortunately, his attempts were sporadic and, like the entire chapter, lack any supporting documentation

32. Jones, *The Civil War in the Northwest: Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and the Dakotas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. xiii.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

34. Robinson, "Dakota's Own Civil War," in Jennewein and Boorman, eds., *Dakota Panorama*, pp. 279–84.

to support his contentions about local impact. So, for instance, Robinson could devote several paragraphs to the capture of Confederate commissioners Mason and Slidell by Captain John Wilkes of the USS *San Jacinto* and their ultimate release by the State Department, arguing that Dakotans viewed the release with “distaste,” but that distaste is neither documented nor linked to any discussion of overall perceptions of the Civil War in the Dakotas.³⁵

One might be tempted to give Robinson the benefit of the doubt in this case, but similar assertions about the reactions of Dakotans to the larger war are not supported by the documentary record. For example, in discussing the political campaign leading up to territorial elections held in September 1862, Robinson claimed that “until the election was over, Dakota was not interested in what was going on further east.”³⁶ A cursory examination of any single newspaper issue during the summer of 1862 when local political passions were running high challenges Robinson’s contention. The 22 July 1862 issue of the *Yankton Dakotian*, for example, is full of news about multiple political meetings and the platforms they adopted in support of candidates running for territorial office. That same issue, however, contains “A Story of the War,” a reprinted piece of fiction from *Harper’s Weekly*; a piece of historical analysis from the ancient world through the Napoleonic Era labeled “Terrible Havoc of War”; a story titled “Sensation in a Shower of Shells” describing combat from the perspective of a private in a New York regiment; and several columns of war news from Richmond, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Nashville, and Saint Louis reprinted from the *Nebraska Republican*.³⁷ Newspaper publishers (George Kingsbury, in this case) had to make money in order to survive, which meant that the pages of their papers had to be filled with information that subscribers thought was worth paying for. The fact that this territorial newspaper devoted significant space to war-related items in almost every issue suggests that Dakotans, despite Robinson’s claims to the contrary, re-

35. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

37. *Yankton Weekly Dakotian*, 22 July 1862.

tained their interest in the larger war even as they were occupied with the political excitement of the upcoming territorial election.³⁸

Second, Robinson's *Dakota Panorama* essay assigned far too much importance to the presence and impact of Southern sympathizers during and after the secession crisis of 1860–1861. He opened his argument with the resignation of several officers stationed at Fort Randall, the most explicit expression of Southern support to be found in Dakota Territory. From the start, he assumed that these resignations reflected a significant problem, noting that “there were a good many Confederate sympathizers among both officers and enlisted men.”³⁹ Robinson's analysis falls apart, however, when he discusses details. The only solid number he provides is that six out of the twenty-two officers at Fort Randall who were at the post on 1 January 1861 resigned their commissions to fight for the Confederacy.⁴⁰ The proportion of officers at Fort Randall who resigned (27.3 percent) is in line with what was happening throughout the United States Army at the time. A total of 269 officers, representing 24.7 percent of the entire officer corps, left to fight for the Confederacy. What happened in Dakota Territory was no different than what happened at frontier forts across the country. In general, as historian William B. Skelton notes, “southern officers performed their duties faithfully until they relinquished their commissions and left for the war,” and there was “surprisingly little animosity” as the departing officers headed home.⁴¹ Robinson offers no evidence that anything different happened at Fort Randall. He also acknowledges the futility of extending his argument beyond the officer corps, conceding that “there is nothing in the rosters or post returns to indicate that any such proportion of the enlisted men were Southern sympathizers.”⁴²

Robinson tried to salvage his claim by charging that a critical mass

38. Barbara Cloud, *The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992), pp. 35–38.

39. Robinson, “Dakota's Own Civil War,” p. 278.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

41. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784–1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), p. 357. For Skelton's entire argument, see pp. 355–57.

42. Robinson, “Dakota's Own Civil War,” p. 279.



In this photograph taken by C. L. Hamilton in 1866, a soldier with the Fourth United States Volunteer Infantry sits near the quartermaster office at Fort Randall, where a small number of Confederate sympathizers resigned their posts in 1861.

of Southern sympathizers existed among the territory's settlers. While he admitted that "there is no way that the Southern sympathizers could be determined," he was sure that "there were many." Lacking any concrete proof, he constructed an explanation for the lack of measurable secessionist activity around the political philosophy of Frank M. Ziebach, editor of the *Sioux City Register*. Although it was an Iowa newspaper, the *Register's* proximity to Dakota Territory made it an important source of news, especially before the establishment of local newspapers. Robinson describes Ziebach as a "Southern sympathizer" during the fall of 1860 and the spring of 1861. With the outbreak of hostilities in April 1861, Ziebach announced that he would be supporting the Union. "This declaration of loyalty," Robinson suggested, "no doubt swayed many others who had subscribed to his philosophy as expressed previously, but who could not, on the actual threat to break up the Union, follow their prior predilection."⁴³

43. Ibid.

Robinson's determination to find secessionists in Dakota Territory founders when one puts people like Frank Ziebach into proper context. Ziebach was a Democrat, a member of a political party that believed that the best way to preserve American liberty was to limit the power of the federal government and support states' rights. Democrats feared the federalism of the young Republican Party, were convinced that the Republicans' limited regional appeal was bad for the Union, and portrayed them as agents of unwanted racial change. Those fears were magnified by the 1860 presidential campaign, leading to widespread admonitions within Democratic circles that the election of Abraham Lincoln would lead to secession, not only in the Deep South but also in several border states. With Lincoln's election, however, much of the rhetoric and even more of the sentiment dissipated in the North. It became difficult to find outright Southern sympathizers in the North as northern Democrats closed ranks with Republicans to advocate for preservation of the Union. To the extent that the parties disagreed with each other, they did so over the means of preserving the Union, with many Democrats preferring negotiation to armed force. Ziebach's actions during and after the election, then, reflect what was



With the Civil War gradually fading from memory, South Dakotans dedicated a monument to Dakota Territory's Civil War soldiers in 1920 that still stands near the state capitol.

happening nationally. He and his compatriots in and around Dakota Territory may have been partisan, but they were not ardent Southern sympathizers. Robinson's effort to expand the narrative of Dakota Territory's interaction with the Civil War was well intentioned but ultimately flawed.⁴⁴

In 1977, a collection of essays titled *The Western Territories in the Civil War* appeared that seemed more promising when it came to explaining the war's broader impact. Editor LeRoy Fischer made it clear that "every effort is made herein to treat the total history and culture of each of the territories for the Civil War period in their varied aspects."⁴⁵ The chapter devoted to Dakota Territory, however, failed to meet these expectations. There were some notable attempts to look at history and culture, but author Kenny L. Brown returned to topics that had been taken up by earlier historians, so little new ground was broken. For example, Brown broached the question of Southern sympathizers, noting that "if there were any, [they] either left the territory or kept their opinions to themselves."⁴⁶ The territorial legislature's discussion of slavery received brief mention, as did the unfounded charges of "copperheadism" that were bandied about during the 1864 election, but without much detail.⁴⁷ In the latter case, Brown missed

44. Joel Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 25–27; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 228–30; Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 20–22. Ziebach moved to Yankton in 1861, where he founded the *Weekly Dakotian* as a Democratic newspaper. In 1862, he sold a share of the business to George Kingsbury, who changed the paper's affiliation to Republican. Ziebach remained as a silent partner until May 1863, when he sold his interest to Kingsbury. This career path was hardly one of an ardent secessionist. In fact, in the summer of 1861 Ziebach penned an editorial blasting the "addle-pated asses" calling themselves Democrats who supported secession. See *History of Southeastern Dakota*, pp. 232, 382; Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, 1:175; "Are They Democrats?," *Weekly Dakotian*, 20 July 1861.

45. Fischer, "Introduction," in *The Western Territories in the Civil War*, ed. LeRoy Fischer (Manhattan, Kans.: Journal of the West, 1977), p. 4.

46. Brown, "Dakota and Montana Territories," in Fischer, ed., *Western Territories in the Civil War*, p. 12.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–15.

the fact that the key players in what was a bitterly partisan fight between pro-Union political factions ultimately reconciled. They publicly renounced the charges they had leveled at each other, noting that “personal bitterness between the friends of the Administration in Dakota has at length given away to Common Sense.”⁴⁸ The majority of Brown’s chapter, though, was devoted to a traditional retelling of the war against the Sioux that occupied Dakota Territory from 1862 to 1865. In that retelling, the primary impact of the Civil War was the economic damage sustained by the territory as the result of benign neglect by a federal government more focused on waging large-scale war elsewhere. The population’s perceptions of the war and its impact on them as American citizens received no attention.⁴⁹

Two more recent efforts, Alvin M. Josephy Jr.’s *The Civil War in the American West* (1992) and Michael Clodfelter’s *The Dakota War: The United States Army versus the Sioux, 1862–1865* (1998) have addressed the war more directly with unabashed operational histories focused squarely on battles and campaigns.⁵⁰ Both Josephy and Clodfelter have clarified key military issues, but their studies are limited by design.

This lack of attention to public perceptions of the war as well as the war’s impact on the territory’s citizens in histories devoted both to Dakota Territory and its interaction with the Civil War should come as no surprise when one considers when most of them were written. With the exception of *A New History of South Dakota* and the works by Josephy and Clodfelter, much of what has been written was created before the parameters of the new social history and new military history were defined. As a result, they reflect traditional historical approaches that focus on local and regional elites, the functions of government, and battles and campaigns. In these cases, narratives almost automatically gravitated towards the territory’s creation, the emergence and evolution of political structures, and the 1862 United States-Dakota War and its subsequent campaigns. However, those underlying concepts of

48. “United We Stand,” *Weekly Dakotian*, 3 Sept. 1864.

49. Brown, “Dakota and Montana Territories,” pp. 21–24.

50. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862–1865* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1998).

political and military history began changing in the 1960s and 1970s as historians explored the social and cultural impacts of political and military events.⁵¹

Unfortunately, the published history of Dakota Territory during this era has not yet caught up with modern forms of historical analysis. Given that neither the “new social history” nor the “new military history” are particularly “new” any more, it is time to rethink Dakota Territory’s interaction with the Civil War, especially when it comes to understanding the associated social and cultural aspects. This task is of primary concern when one considers the sheer scale of the war and the corresponding loss of life, as well as the extent to which the outcome of the conflict altered the nation’s political, economic, and social landscape both during and after the war. Historians need to dig deeper into the interconnectedness of national politics, territorial politics, and the social hierarchy of territorial residents. They should also move beyond the traditional political framework that has defined the story thus far to delve deeper into perceptions of the war and the impact of those perceptions on daily life and relationships, both commercial and personal, in Dakota Territory. The distance that separated the territory’s residents from the war likely affected their understanding of the larger conflict, and techniques developed recently to explore historical memory might help to explain the relationship between distance and perception. Fortunately, the documentation needed for these kinds of analyses exists in territorial records, military records, contemporary publications, memoirs, and archival holdings. There is a much richer story waiting to be told, one in which the citizens of Dakota Territory were consistently engaged with the Civil War, affected by it in ways both large and small, and defined themselves politically and culturally in the context of the national questions over which the war was waged.

51. See Leff, “Revisioning U.S. Political History”; Edward M. Coffman, “The New American Military History,” *Military Affairs* 48 (Jan. 1984): 1–5; Peter Karsten, “The ‘New’ American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored,” *American Quarterly* 36 (1984): 389–418.