

Book Excerpt

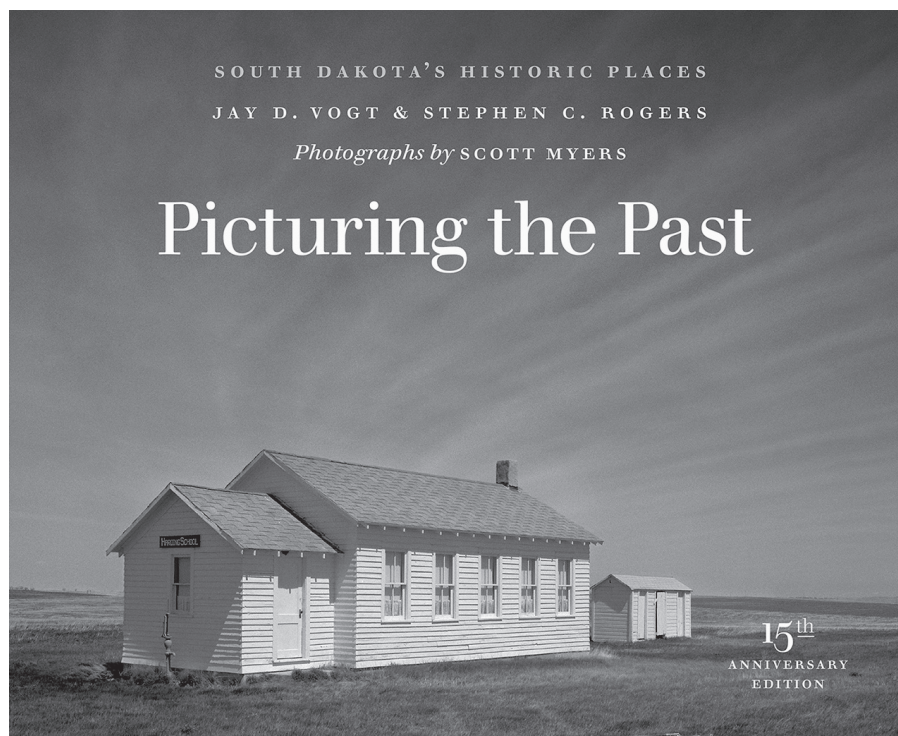
Picturing the Past: South Dakota's Historic Places

Jay D. Vogt and Stephen C. Rogers Photographs by Scott Myers

In nearly every South Dakota community, historic houses, government buildings, or commercial blocks stand as icons of our past. *Picturing the Past: South Dakota's Historic Places* explores these places as well as landscapes, parks, churches, cemeteries, and other spaces significant in the history of the state and in the personal memories of those who have a connection to it. Originally published by the South Dakota Historical Society Press in 2006, the book features seventy-eight black-and-white photographs by Scott Myers along with seven essays by Jay D. Vogt and Stephen C. Rogers that provide context for the places Myers depicts in his dramatic images.

This year, the Press published a fifteenth anniversary edition of *Picturing the Past* featuring a new afterword by Vogt, who explores what has happened in the realm of historic preservation in South Dakota since the book first appeared. In it, he highlights successes such as the preservation of the Meridian Bridge spanning the Missouri River at Yankton, among others. The third volume in the Historic Preservation Series from the South Dakota Historical Society Press, *Picturing the Past* is the winner of an Education Project Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation and an Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History.

Highlighted here is a sampling of images selected from various chapters in *Picturing the Past* along with the book's introduction and final essay.



INTRODUCTION

“Preserving the Stuff of History”

The great sweep of textbook history as told through wars, political leaders, and social change often falls short in drawing us into the human drama or in touching us at a visceral level. More often, it is our personal history, the account of where we come from and how we got to be who we are, that grounds us in the past. That personal account of things said and done can take many forms, such as a genealogist's family tree or a collection of stories—some funny, some sad, and some just important to remember. The account can be documented and written down, or it can be part of an ongoing oral tradition. Regardless of its form, this intimate, personal history motivates us with exemplary lives, cautions us with tales of human foolishness, and offers us the context and perspective to make thoughtful decisions about the future.

People are the focus of history, but because human life is marked by brevity, a large part of what we understand about the past comes to us in the form of its material record—personal papers, museum artifacts, and historic buildings. These physical remnants are the “stuff of history” that allow us to verify the past by seeing and touching the creations of people who lived long before our time.

In nearly every South Dakota community, residents can point to a particular house, government building, or commercial block in recognition that those physical manifestations of history are more than mortar and brick—that they stand as icons of our past. Inexplicably, the critical importance of this material legacy to both textbook history and personal history is easily forgotten. As if we could successfully investigate the past without seeing physical evidence, the study of history and the work of preserving its material record have been disconnected. Too many of us have come to think that we can deepen our understanding of history without the critical contribution of historic preservation.

This book is about reconnecting the preservation of this stuff of history to both the grand sweep of the past and our personal experience. Through a remarkable series of South Dakota photographs interwoven with seven essays, the book addresses the kinds of topics modern preservationists confront on a daily basis. Why do we preserve? What makes a preservationist’s vision different? Is a historic place worth saving just because it is old? Has craftsmanship disappeared or has it simply evolved? Is historic preservation the first and greatest recycle-and-reuse program?

The theme of the last essay, “Retaining a Sense of Place,” weaves itself throughout the entire book. You will find it in all the other essays and most dramatically in the photographs. Some images will be familiar, while others will be gems that have been hidden from almost everyone’s view. In presenting the familiar in a new way and connecting the new with what is already known, we hope that your sense of place is reaffirmed and deepened and that you will recognize the stuff of history as the historic landscape that makes it possible for us to call South Dakota home.

“Retaining a Sense of Place”

Each of us identifies with place—the place where we live, where we belong, where our people come from, where our stories unfold. Our sense of place connects us to our physical surroundings, the material world in which we live. And when those physical surroundings are preserved, retaining their uniqueness and remaining recognizable over time, they also connect us to our history.

We experience a sense of place when it has emotional content for us. We do not identify with a parking lot, for example, or feel a deep personal connection to the median strip on the interstate. Places that conjure feelings—a city’s architecturally distinctive building, our grandparents’ farmstead, a window framing a familiar view—formulate our sense of place. And the sense that imbues our surroundings with meaning turns a house into a home, a town into a community.

We derive a sense of place by associating a location with people and with events that occurred there. For example, the terrain of the Wounded Knee site looks like many other areas, but this particular place is important to us because it stimulates memories of historic conflict and lives lost. Connecting us emotionally and intellectually with the past, historic sites and structures remind us that we are part of a continuum that encompasses the past and projects into the future. This connection creates a sense of wholeness and gives us our identity.

Many communities rely on historical structures—civic buildings, bridges, mansions—to symbolize their identities and evoke a sense of place. Yankton is known for its Meridian Bridge, Mitchell for its Corn Palace, Deadwood for its main street. These physical structures have become community icons, historic markers. Sometimes local landscapes or natural formations serve this same purpose of calling to mind an image or sparking a memory of an important event.

To be able to stir our memories and arouse our emotions, a place must retain its unique, recognizable character. But visit any community in the United States, and it becomes apparent that much about it is familiar, that every place looks a lot like everywhere else. Whether in New York, Mississippi, or South Dakota, the McDonald’s, Holiday Inn, and Wal-Mart look and feel the same. While some people appreciate the

familiarity this cultural homogenization provides, for most it robs us of our sense of place and dilutes our sense of identity.

Historic preservation is the antidote to this homogeneity. Preservation is especially important when cultural and regional differences are disappearing. Whether the experience of a sense of place is the result of a direct, personal tie or of identification with a broader historical community, the place must be recognizably unique to stimulate the association.

Sometimes over generations the story of a place is lost. Its relevance to a changing populace declines, or its evolution into legend loosens its ties to a specific locale. For some sites, only an archaeological record remains of events and of the people who lived there. Other sites fall into ruin and decay, and memories associated with them diminish. Protecting and preserving these sites gives us time to rediscover their stories and strengthen our links to the past.

Historic preservation seeks to protect the uniqueness, and therefore the identity, of places. With place preserved, we can recognize where we belong and understand more fully who we are.



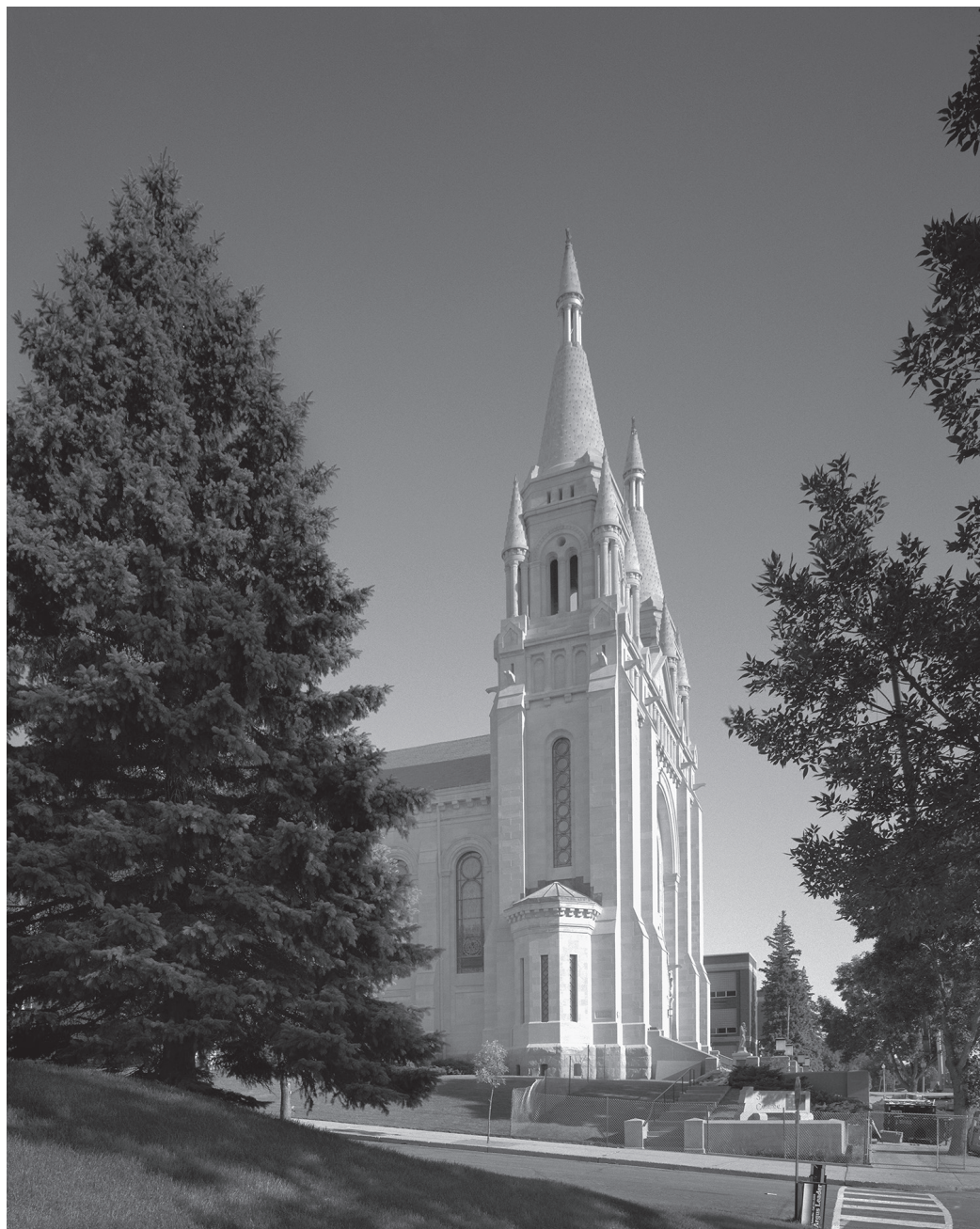
Bear Butte, Meade County

Bear Butte rises twelve hundred feet above the South Dakota plains. Significant for its geology, this location is associated with American Indian spiritual tradition; several tribes continue its use as a religious site. A prayer ribbon waves in the foreground of the photograph. Bear Butte also served as a landmark for settlers making their journey across the plains.



Ashton Grain Elevator, Spink County

Farmers brought grain by wagon or truck to their local elevator from which it was then shipped by rail to a terminal elevator and ultimately to a processing facility. Construction of elevators was thus often related to construction of the railroad. With changes in transportation and agricultural processes, elevators like this one, constructed around the turn of the twentieth century, have become obsolete and are disappearing from our landscape.



Saint Joseph's Cathedral, Minnehaha County

Two large towers topped with conical roofs accentuate the façade of Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Sioux Falls. Built in 1916, the Italian Gothic structure incorporates Bedford limestone material with arches above the windows and doors.



Vangen Church, Yankton County

This vernacular Gothic/Queen Anne-style church building features an open bell tower with a projecting two-stage steeple and an uppermost spire. The building is thought to be the oldest standing Lutheran church in South Dakota.



Wounded Knee Cemetery, Shannon County

Located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the cemetery is the site of a mass grave of over one hundred forty individuals who died as a result of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre. Visible between the wire gates is a monument or grave marker erected in 1903.



Old Catholic Church, Yankton County
This cross grave marker is located in the church cemetery. The church, erected in 1872, is one of the oldest in South Dakota.



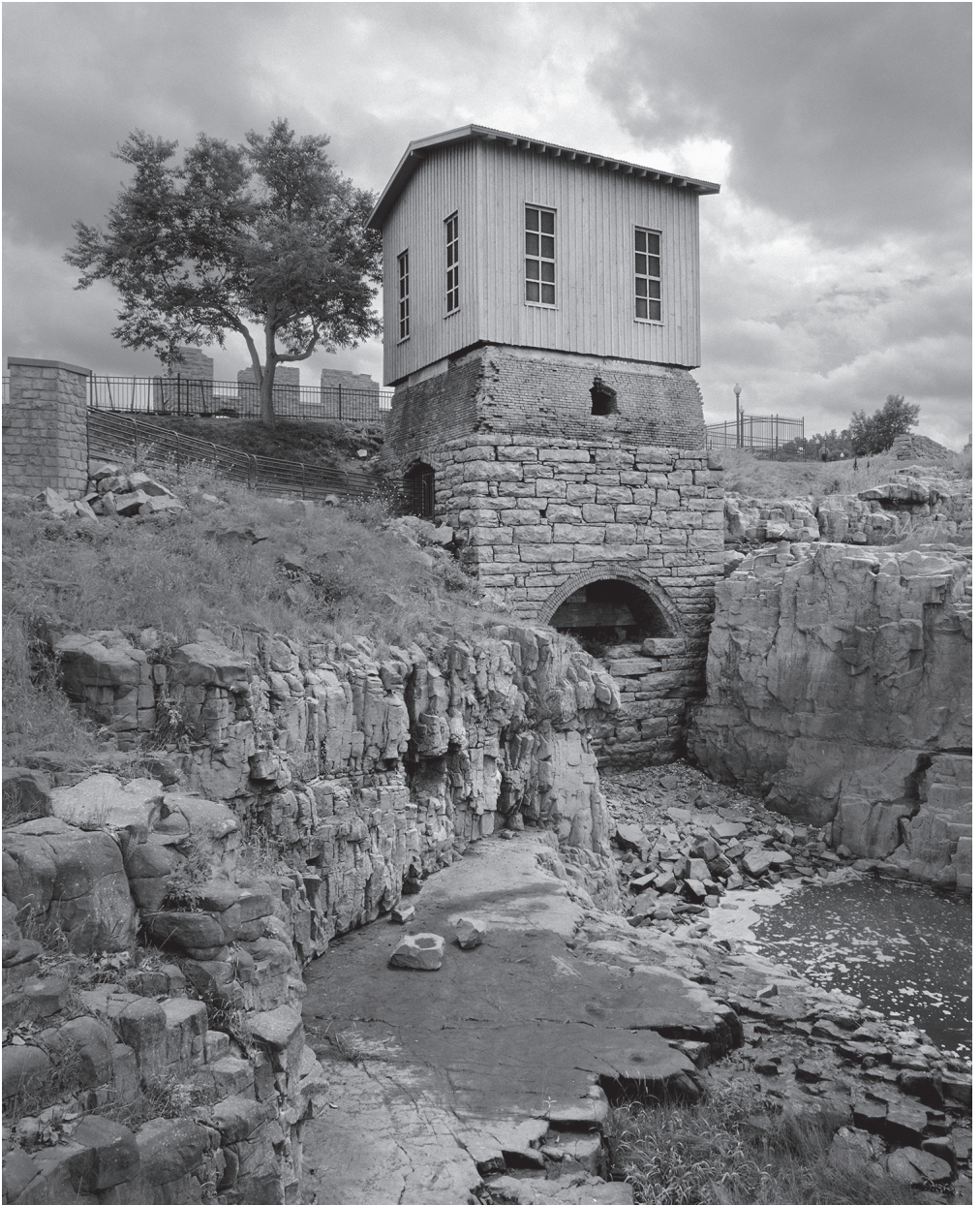
Stock Growers Bank Building, Stanley County

The Romanesque Revival polygonal corner tower accentuates the intersection of Main and Deadwood Streets in Fort Pierre. Built in 1903, the bank symbolizes the commercial growth of both Fort Pierre and the surrounding community. Some of the more prominent individuals in western South Dakota history were associated with the bank. The beautifully restored building provides office space for the community.



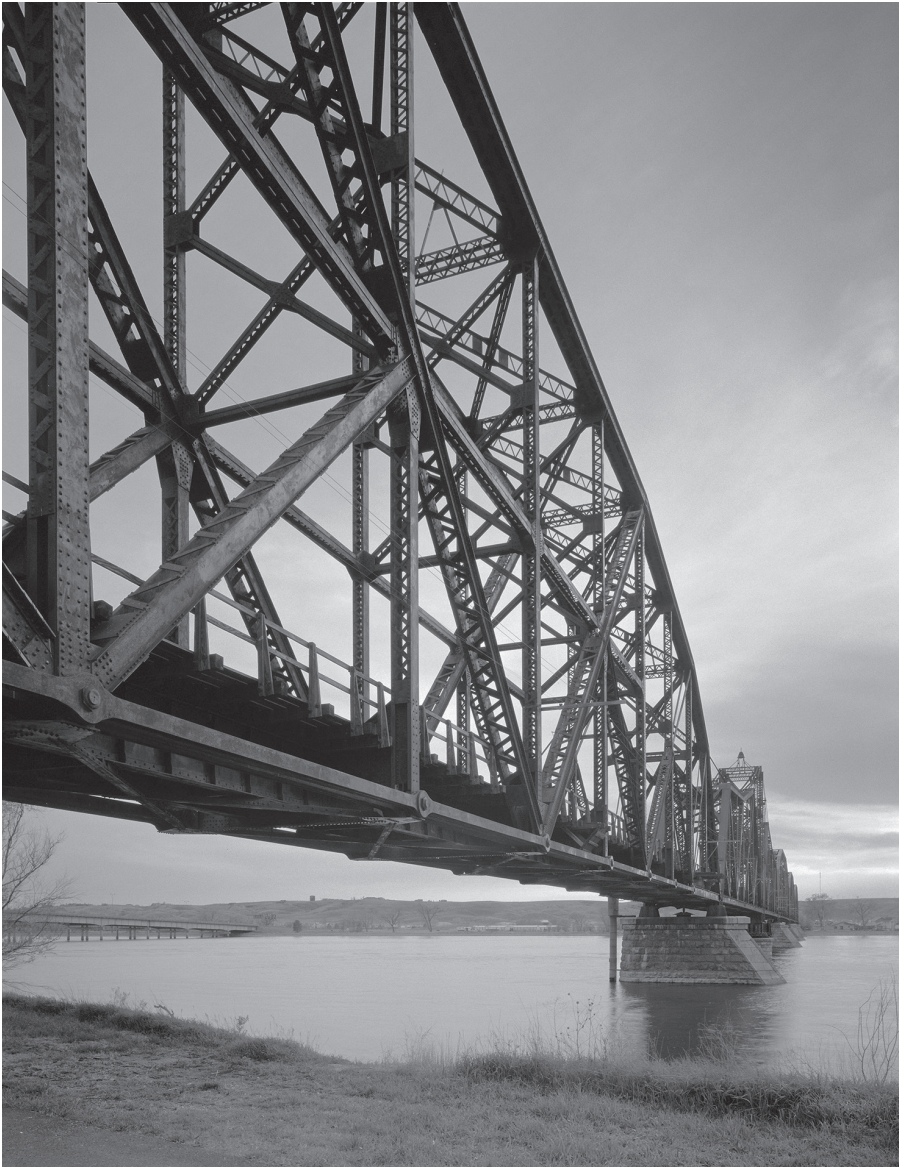
Nick's Hamburger Shop, Brookings County

Constructed in 1932, Nick's Hamburger Shop continues to serve hamburgers on the Main Street of Brookings. The design of the building was influenced by the Spanish Colonial Revival style the architect had noted on a trip to California. Nick's is noteworthy as a business that started just prior to the Great Depression and thrived while others failed.



Queen Bee Mill, Minnehaha County

Constructed in August of 1879, the Queen Bee Mill survived floods and economic depression before succumbing to fire in 1956. The ruins include the quartzite foundation of the main seven-story structure (visible beyond the fence and in close-up) that was one of the first sizeable stone buildings constructed in South Dakota. The small building on top of the ruins of the mill wheel is a modern reconstruction of the original frame structure.



Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Bridge, Hughes County

Distinctively engineered, this railroad bridge across the Missouri River between Pierre and Fort Pierre features a stately half-mile-long, multispan, pin-connected Pennsylvania through truss. A 445-foot rotating section accommodates river traffic. Constructed in 1906–1907, the structure is the only swing-designed bridge in South Dakota.



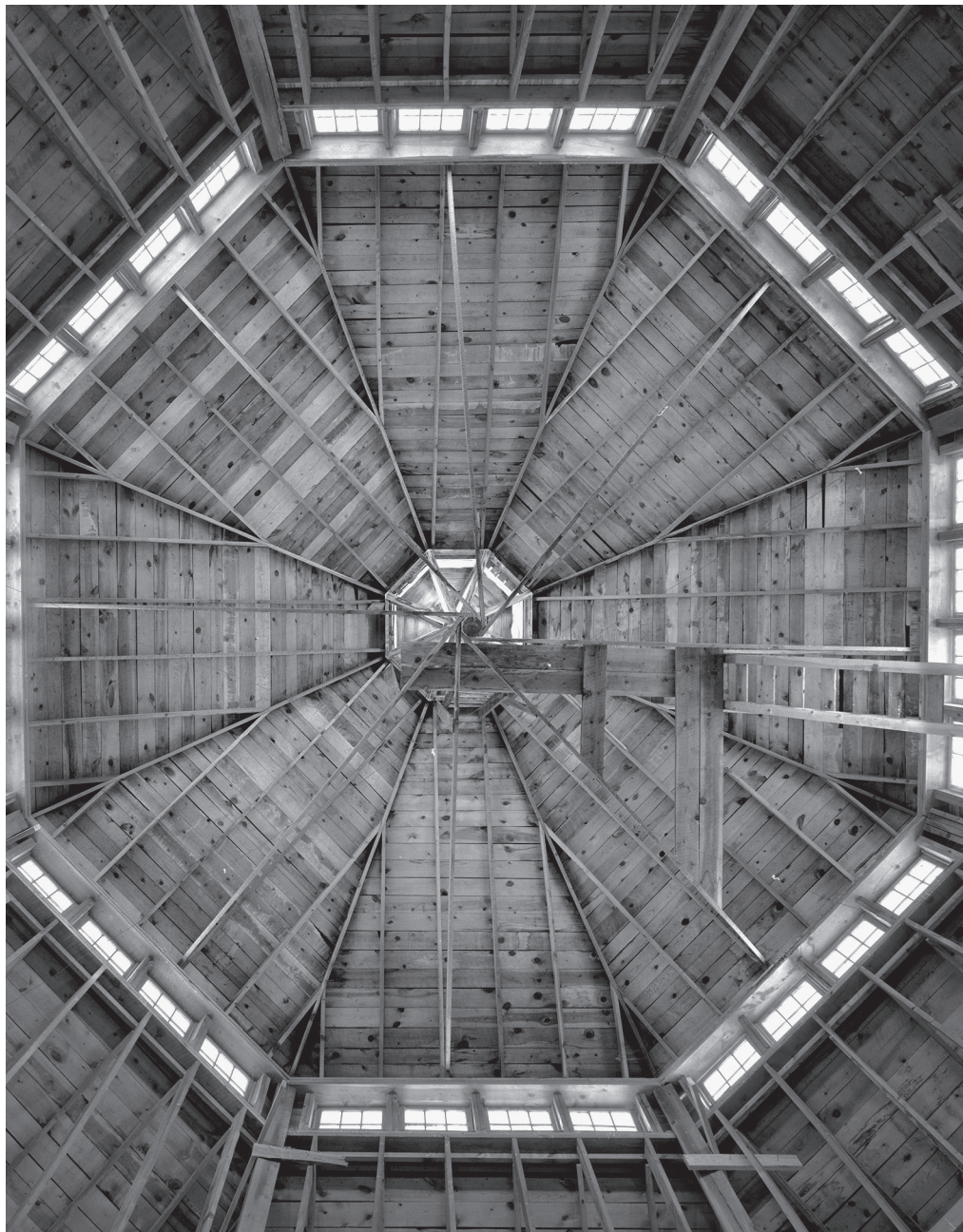
Mackay House, Lake County

Constructed in 1893, the Mackay house in Madison is one of the best examples of Neoclassical Revival architecture in South Dakota. Two-story Corinthian columns, a second-story porch with decorative balusters, decorative brackets, and a fan-light window accentuate this beautiful home.



Fishback House, Brookings County

The stately Neo-Colonial design features an elaborate portico with two Ionic columns and a second-floor balcony. Constructed in 1895, the building also includes symmetrical dormers with a truncated hip roof. A one-story porch featuring decorative brackets, dentils, a transom, and sidelights and a balustrade draw attention to the front entrance.



Butte-Lawrence County Fairground, Butte County

One of the most significant buildings at the fairground is the pavilion, a two-and-one-half-story wood-frame octagonal structure with entry doors on each wall. The internal roof structure of the pavilion reflects the craftsmanship that went into its construction in 1921.



Sitting Bull Crystal Cavern Dance Pavilion, Pennington County

The Sitting Bull Crystal Cavern Dance Pavilion stands nine miles south of Rapid City. Godfrey Broken Rope, an artist from Pine Ridge, decorated the building with five distinctive paintings. Pictured here is one of those murals, a herd of buffalo in a prairie setting.



Carnegie Free Library, Codington County

The Neoclassical design of the Watertown library features Ionic columns, decorative brickwork, and a cut-stone belt course. Construction of the library commenced in 1905 and contributed to the educational development of Watertown residents until 1967. Today, the building continues to serve the community as the site of the Kampeska Heritage Museum.



Old Main, University of South Dakota, Clay County

Old Main was the first building of public higher education constructed in the state. Made from pink quartzite, it incorporates a broad range of architectural designs, with a prominent Georgian cupola adorning the façade. Fire consumed the original building in October 1893. Reconstruction commenced quickly, with some materials and decorations procured from structures displayed at the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.



Aurora County Courthouse, Aurora County

Completed in 1940, the Aurora County Courthouse in Plankinton is a wonderful example of Art Deco architecture, a style popular in the United States especially during the 1930s. The Art Deco characteristics on this building include the streamlined concrete exterior and the vertical emphasis formed by the fluted pilasters that separate the windows. The geometric motif near the top of the building further exhibits the Art Deco style.



Charles Mix County Courthouse, Charles Mix County

Located in Lake Andes, the Charles Mix County Courthouse was constructed during a sixteen-month period in 1917 and 1918. William L. Steele, an architect based out of Sioux City, Iowa, who had previously worked with Louis Sullivan, designed the building in the Prairie School style. Prairie School-influenced stained-glass windows on the building's façade shed light on the staircase and stylistic interior.



Dinosaur Park, Pennington County

This brontosaurus stands twenty-eight feet high and is eighty feet long. Located just outside Rapid City, Dinosaur Park includes four additional dinosaurs and various other animals. The dinosaurs take their shape from an iron-and-steel framework covered with concrete. The park was constructed as a Works Progress Administration project in 1936.



Lemmon Petrified Wood Park, Perkins County

The park contains the world's largest collection of petrified wood. The structures are composed of 3,200 tons of petrified wood, 100 tons of petrified grass, and various amounts of cannonball boulders. Construction began in 1928, creating jobs for several individuals during the Great Depression.

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On the covers: The Butte-Lawrence County Fairground features a two-and-one-half-story wood-frame octagonal pavilion. Inside, visitors can see the craftsmanship that went into its construction. In this issue, a book excerpt from *Picturing the Past* by Jay D. Vogt and Stephen C. Rogers with photographs by Scott Myers highlights numerous structures and sites important to South Dakota's history.

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