

“Both Sides of the Mountain”

Growth and Volatility at Sioux Falls College, 1953–1978

Stephen Jackson

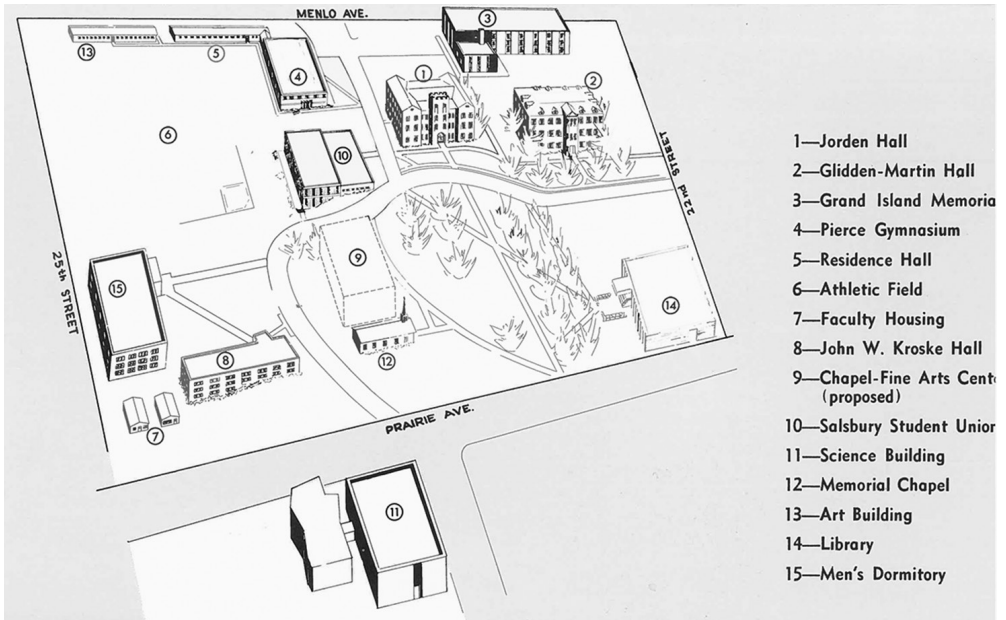
Founded in 1883, the University of Sioux Falls, formerly Sioux Falls College (SFC), is the oldest private college in the state of South Dakota, yet its history is not very well known.¹ Reuben P. Jeschke wrote two histories of the college during his tenure as president, one in 1958 and one in 1968, but these served more as fundraising tools than works of history and were not widely distributed. Later, a planned centennial history of the college was never completed.² While this lack of attention may reflect the school's small enrollment, which stands at less than 1,500 undergraduate students, it belies the institution's foundational role in the city of Sioux Falls.

In SFC's rich history, the quarter century span between 1953 and 1978 stands out as a pivotal period. Institutional publications and the records of the board of trustees reveal that the college entered the 1950s with a damaged reputation, a precarious financial situation, and seriously inadequate campus facilities. By the end of the 1970s, however, SFC emerged with its recognizably modern physical form and institutional culture. The institution owes this success to a favorable national environment for higher education, the resilience of its leadership, and, above all, the commitment of the American Baptist Convention (ABC) to support SFC and maintain a collegiate presence on the Great Plains.

The college overcame several critical challenges during these transformative years. Since its founding, SFC has faced brutal competition in

1. The University of Sioux Falls has had multiple names over the years. It was founded as the Dakota Collegiate Institute in 1883. Two years later, its name changed to Sioux Falls University. It then became Sioux Falls College in 1931 before finally gaining its current name in 1995. This article will refer to it as Sioux Falls College, since that was the name of the institution during the time period under discussion.

2. Reuben Jeschke, *Dream of the Pioneers: A Brief and Informal History of Sioux Falls College in Commemoration of Its Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (Sioux Falls: Sioux Falls College, 1958); Reuben Jeschke, *A Decade of Growth* (Sioux Falls: Sioux Falls College, 1968); Carol Mashek, *To Raise a Candle for the College: A Centennial History of Sioux Falls College*, unpublished manuscript, 1980–1982, University of Sioux Falls (USF) Archives.



This 1966 map of Sioux Falls College (SFC) reflects the significant expansion of the university that had occurred since the early 1950s.

South Dakota, a state with a high number of colleges and universities compared to a low population.³ The college was well-placed in the major population center of the state, but Augustana College—a Lutheran institution founded in 1860—was only a few blocks away.

Despite successfully negotiating the hardships of the Great Depression, SFC appeared to be on the brink of collapse following the Second World War. The institution elected to transition to junior college status a mere six months before the United States entered the war with disastrous results. While college leaders reversed this decision after just two years, it continued to damage the institution's credibility a decade later. Worse still, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools declined SFC's request for regional accreditation as a four-year institution in 1949, a crushing blow that led to the resignation of college president

3. Jason Lane and Francis J. Kerins, "Middle Border States: Higher Education in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming," in *Higher Education in the American West: Regional History and State Contexts*, ed. Lester Goodchild, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 104.

sponsoring Christian denomination. Although there were few Baptists in South Dakota—the church counted a mere 7,100 congregants across the entire state in 1950—SFC was strategically important because it was the only Baptist college in the five-state region of North and South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska.⁶ At several critical junctures, the American Baptist Board of Education (ABBE)—the national body that supported Baptist educational institutions across the country—provided essential financial support and strategic guidance to the college. Secondly, SFC grew during the 1950s thanks to an advantageous set of conditions for higher education. SFC leadership developed a strong donor base, took advantage of public funding opportunities, and managed to rapidly expand student enrollment, ensuring an explosive period of growth in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

Though he only began working at SFC a year earlier, Jeschke became president after the unexpected resignation of Evan Reiff in 1953. Jeschke's overwhelming priority in his first few years was to regain the college's accreditation. Lacking accreditation marked the college as a second-class institution in the eyes of the community and especially of prospective students.⁷ It also prevented the college from seeking grants and hampered its fundraising efforts, feeding what Jeschke called "a vicious circle: more people (including many Baptists) would support us if we were accredited; but we can't be accredited until more people support us!"⁸

To obtain accreditation, the faculty initiated a self-study of the curriculum in the 1954–1955 academic year, and the college conducted a campus-wide self-study the following year in accordance with the standard practices of the regional accrediting body, the North Central

6. Sioux Falls College was affiliated with the Northern Baptist Convention, which formed in 1909 to unify a conglomeration of Baptist institutions. It was renamed the American Baptist Convention in 1950 and American Baptist Churches, USA in 1972. For more on the history of the Northern Baptist Convention, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987); Ralph Tingley and Kay Tingley, *Building on the Rock: The South Dakota Baptist Convention 1950–1981* (Sioux Falls: South Dakota Baptist Convention, 1981), p. 1. See also Jackson, "In War as in Peace, Culture for Service," p. 37.

7. Jeschke, *My Life and My Family* (Salem, Ore.: By the Author, 1985), p. 78 and chap. 37.

8. Jeschke, "Report of the President," 27 Sept. 1955, p. 18, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.



President Reuben P. Jeschke, seen here speaking to a group of students, was an influential figure in the growth of Sioux Falls College.

Association.⁹ Gaining accreditation required significant improvements to the campus, particularly adding dormitory space and an enhanced library, hiring and retaining qualified faculty, and demonstrating a record of balanced budgets.¹⁰ The price tag for all of these changes was high, especially considering that the college was still operating under a budget deficit.¹¹

The key to SFC's financial stability was its relationship with the ABBE. In June 1955, Jeschke and the board of trustees agreed with the ABBE on "A Plan for Stabilizing and Expanding Sioux Falls College into an Accredited Christian College Under the Sponsorship of the American Baptist Convention," thereafter rather dramatically referred to as

9. Jeschke, "How Near is Accreditation?" *Sioux Falls College Alumni Bulletin* 46, no. 3 (Feb.-Apr. 1956): 1, USF Archives.

10. Ibid.

11. Jeschke, "Report of the President," 27 Sept. 1955.

“The Plan.” The document envisioned a reorganized board of trustees for SFC that contained additional members from the ABC, a steadily growing endowment, and a major campaign to both liquidate debt and address campus renovations and improvements.¹² The Plan went so far as to rewrite SFC’s articles of incorporation under a new name, the Midwest Baptist Education Society, to more closely reflect its relationship with the ABC.¹³ The high level of support that the ABC provided proved critical in stabilizing SFC and priming the institution for rapid growth over the next decade and a half.

After the board ratified the Plan, the ABBE began issuing SFC an annual grant of \$40,000 that continued until 1974.¹⁴ This grant was the largest that the ABBE provided to any college at that time. It was earmarked to aid SFC’s development team, particularly by hiring an executive vice president who could assist the college’s fundraising efforts. That position went to Everett Sugarbaker, who made an immediate impact on the SFC development plan and was instrumental in raising funds for the college over the next several years.¹⁵ The amount of money that the ABBE donated seemed paltry compared to the college’s budgets even a decade later, but in the mid-1950s it provided an enormous boost to SFC and significantly stabilized its finances.

The Plan also involved reorganizing the college itself. Shortly after its adoption, SFC set up an advisory board to fundraise in the Sioux Falls community, reorganized its board of trustees, and adopted a ten-year

12. “A Plan for Stabilizing and Expanding Sioux Falls College into an Accredited Christian College Under the Sponsorship of the American Baptist Convention,” Board of Trustees Special Meeting, 18 June 1955, pp. 100–3, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

13. While the institution adopted this new corporate name, it was still colloquially referred to as Sioux Falls College. Many in the community found the name change confusing, and it also created headaches when the college filed taxes. Jeschke opined that “the ruling of the Treasury Department is that gifts are only tax deductible when made out in the name of The Midwest Baptist Society,” even though many gifts were made out to Sioux Falls College. The corporate name reverted to the familiar Sioux Falls College soon thereafter. Jeschke, “Annual Report of the President,” 26 Sept. 1961, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

14. Jeschke, “Spring Report of the President,” 27 Mar. 1962, p. 91, *ibid*. The amount decreased over time, and was gradually phased out beginning in 1972. Ronald Wells, “President’s Report to the Board of Trustees,” 16 Oct. 1972, p. 46, *ibid*.

15. Everett Sugarbaker, “Report to the Board by Everett Sugarbaker,” 1 Oct. 1957, p. 19, *ibid*.

development strategy designed to radically improve the campus and secure regional accreditation.¹⁶ By 1956, SFC balanced its budget for the first time in several years, a feat it managed for much of the remainder of Jeschke’s long tenure as president.¹⁷

This groundwork paid off in 1958, a momentous year in the college’s history. On its seventy-fifth anniversary, SFC finally regained provision-

16. Jeschke, “Annual Report to the Board,” [n.d.] 1956, p. 4, *ibid.*

17. “Executive Committee Minutes,” 27 Sept. 1956, p. 1, *ibid.*



In his tenure as president, Jeschke—seen here at center with his wife, Sabina Jeschke, and Minnesota businessman Norman B. Mears—worked with trustees, alumni, and the community to ensure the college had a stable future.

al accreditation from the North Central Association. SFC also successfully fundraised for a new men's dormitory, partially by securing a large federal loan. By this point, a new dorm was an absolute necessity due to a 22 percent increase in enrollments that year. Each of these successes built upon the last, but achieving accreditation, even provisionally, was the real victory.¹⁸ SFC was now better able to advertise to prospective students, apply for grants from large foundations and the federal government, and make strong appeals to wealthy individual donors.¹⁹

The stunning successes of 1958 allowed SFC to capitalize on a conducive atmosphere for higher education. Across the country, universities and colleges experienced unparalleled public support and massive enrollment increases. Total national enrollment went from 1.5 million students in 1940 to 7.9 million by 1970, a stunning increase prompted both by the postwar "baby boom" and growing popular support for mass higher education.²⁰

After 1958, SFC experienced a similarly dramatic increase in enrollment. Enrollment was volatile in the 1940s and early 1950s but had stabilized by the mid-1950s.²¹ In 1957, Jeschke reported a stagnant enrollment of 233 full-time students, but by the fall semester of 1958 that number had jumped to 285 and the president confidently predicted that sharp enrollment growth would continue into the 1960s.²² Though his predictions may have sounded overly optimistic at the time, they actually underestimated the growth of SFC's student population over the next decade. The college's baby-boom enrollment peaked in the fall of 1968 with a full-time student population of 725 and an impressive total of 1,023 when including nontraditional and part-time students.²³

Rapid enrollment growth is the dream of any college administrator, but managing that growth presents a significant set of challenges. The

18. "Board of Trustees Annual Meeting," 30 Sept. 1958, p. 5, *ibid.* The North Central Association reevaluated Sioux Falls College in 1961 and granted the college full regional accreditation. Jeschke, *Decade of Growth*, p. 40.

19. "Students and Gifts Move More Readily to Accredited School," *Sioux Falls College Bulletin*, Special Report (Summer 1957), USF Archives.

20. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, p. 361.

21. Jeschke, "Annual Report of the President," 27 Sept. 1955, p. 16, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

22. Jeschke, "Annual Report of the President," 30 Sept. 1958, p. 13, *ibid.*

23. Jeschke, "President's Report to the Board of Trustees," 1 Oct. 1968, p. 132, *ibid.*

most pressing issue for SFC was its physical campus, which was in no way prepared for this influx of students. The existing structures were insufficient to house and instruct so many students, and many of the buildings desperately needed renovation. A 1960 independent survey of higher education in South Dakota strongly recommended significant improvements to the SFC campus. The report suggested that Meredith Hall—the college's original building—be demolished as a "serious hazard," that all of the World War II-era structures then in use on campus be replaced as soon as possible, and that a new fine-arts center be constructed in addition to new dormitories.²⁴ It also strongly criticized the inadequacies of the college's library, which again became a point of particular concern after a survey by the American Library Association offered a similar assessment in 1962.²⁵ Although SFC's achievement of accreditation certainly helped with fundraising, these construction and renovation needs carried a shockingly high price tag.

For the next decade, Jeschke and the board of trustees turned their attention to an enormous renovation and expansion of the college's physical campus. Again, they found national and regional conditions decidedly favorable. Beginning with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, American higher education institutions received unparalleled levels of financial support from federal and state governments as well as private grant-issuing foundations.²⁶ Public institutions received most of this support, but private liberal arts colleges like SFC also benefited, proving to be, as historian John R. Thelin describes, "remarkably resourceful and effective in adjusting to the market of student choice in the 1950s and 1960s."²⁷ Smaller colleges emphasized their individualized approach in contrast to increasingly large and impersonal public institutions.²⁸

Though accreditation paved the way for SFC to take advantage of

24. S. V. Martorana and Ernest V. Hollis, *Higher Education in South Dakota: A Report of a Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1960), p. 197. Following World War II, Sioux Falls College received three decommissioned military buildings for use on campus. Jackson, "In War as in Peace, Culture for Service," p. 55.

25. Jeschke, "Spring Report of the President," 27 Mar. 1962, pp. 83–84, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

26. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, chap. 7.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 296.



In the 1960s, outside organizations strongly urged the college to update its library, which needed extensive repairs.

government funding for new construction, the board of trustees seriously questioned whether this was appropriate for a small Christian college. The issue was first raised in 1960, with the board proclaiming that the college's "long-range spiritual, moral, economic and social values" depended upon policies "of self-help and independence from government assistance."²⁹ In other words, a majority of board members expressed moral scruples about accepting government aid. Though this thinking was in line with Baptist principles about the separation of church and state, it would not have been a common stance for Baptist colleges nationally.³⁰ In fact, it was not even in line with SFC's history, since the college accepted a great deal of government assistance in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when it benefited from repurposing several decommissioned wartime structures as dorms and

29. "Board of Trustees Adjourned Session," 5 Apr. 1960, p. 86, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

30. For a more panoramic view of Baptist institutions of higher education, see William H. Brackney, *Congregations & Campus: North American Baptists in Higher Education* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2008).

as a chapel.³¹ The 1960 resolution instructed the SFC administration to seek out private funding sources and to only accept government loans or grants "as a last resort."³²

Concerns regarding accepting federal funds remained a source of contention among the board for the next four years. The issue came to a head in March 1964, when the costs of what would become the Norman B. Mears Library continued to rise and the college struggled to find matching private funds. President Jeschke asked the board for a firm policy to guide SFC in the years to come. Aside from the philosophical implications of accepting government funds, there was also significant concern that accepting such aid would diminish private donations to the college. Though Jeschke was willing to accept the board's decision either way, he shared his own considered opinion: "We can hardly afford to refuse this help if most others accept it. That is, unless we have in immediate prospect the equivalent in private support. Otherwise we may have facilities and programs inferior to those of others who do have more resources."³³ In other words, the skyrocketing costs of construction and operation necessitated accepting any and all sources of funding, especially since nearby competitors were already capitalizing on these programs. Ultimately, the board resolved to authorize funding from both private and public sources.³⁴ Over the next half decade, SFC took advantage of several federal grant and loan opportunities that proved essential in the major construction projects of those years.

With this philosophical issue resolved, Sioux Falls College constructed three new dormitories, a new student union, a house for the president, a library, and a science building between 1960 and 1967. The new buildings facilitated major enrollment increases and fundamentally reshaped the physical campus. Philanthropic contributions from wealthy donors were particularly critical for the various construction projects.³⁵ In May of that year *Time Magazine* published an advertisement in the Chicago metropolitan area, entitled "7 Buildings in 7 Years,"

31. See Jackson, "In War as in Peace, Culture for Service."

32. "Board of Trustees Adjourned Session," 5 Apr. 1960, p. 87, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

33. Jeschke, "Mid-Year Report of the President," 31 Mar. 1964, p. 104, *ibid*.

34. "Board of Trustees Midyear Meeting Minutes," 31 Mar. 1964, p. 70, *ibid*.

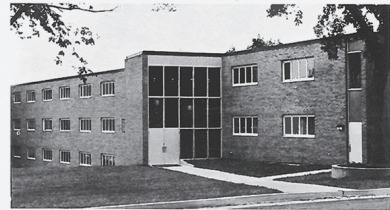
35. The buildings include John W. Kroske Hall, Grand Island Memorial Hall, Burgess

The Campus Today

During the past few years Sioux Falls College has been able to secure seven new buildings through the generosity of its friends, representing a total investment of over \$3,000,000.



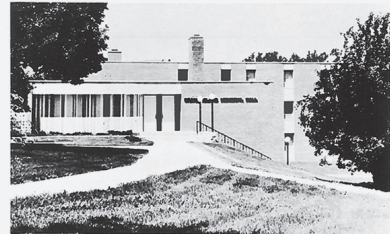
Salsbury Student Union



John W. Kroske Hall



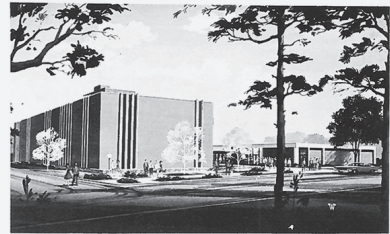
Norman B. Mears Library



Grand Island Memorial Hall



President's Home



Joseph B. Salsbury Science Center



Burgess Residence Hall

that touted this impressive accomplishment.³⁶ With the exception of the president's house, each of these structures is still currently in use at the University of Sioux Falls half a century later.

Hall, Salsbury Student Union, Salsbury Science Center, and the Norman B. Mears Library. Jeschke, *Decade of Growth*, chap. 4, 8.

36. The editors of *Time* revised the title proposed by SFC. Jeschke's original title was "What! You have never heard of Sioux Falls College?" Jeschke, "President's Report: Path of an Idea," *Sioux Falls College Bulletin* 57, no. 5 (July 1967): 1, USF Archives.

7 Buildings in 7 Years

But our stature comes from people

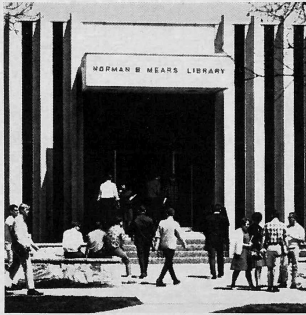
The new library shown below is one of seven additions to Sioux Falls College since 1960. But we are less concerned with our bricks and mortar than the people who wear our mortar board.

We find it far more inspiring that today students from 30 states and teachers from 33 colleges and universities have chosen to come to this small campus in America's heartland.

What we seek are more people, without regard for race, creed or color, who find the learning and the teaching process as challenging and rewarding as we do. And perhaps, among Time's vast audience, a few friends of good education who will help us meet the price of progress.

When you build a college with the right people, the buildings take care of themselves.

Sioux Falls College, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Founded 1883 • Liberal Arts Curriculum
Enrollment 1000 (co-educational)



A campus flyer (*facing page*) and an advertisement in *Time* (*left*) celebrate the success of Sioux Falls College's ambitious building plan, which saw it add seven new buildings to campus in as many years.

Though Jeschke was understandably jubilant about the rapid growth of the campus, the era of expansion also brought problems for SFC. Both faculty and students frequently complained that the administration and board ignored their needs while single-mindedly focusing on building campaigns.³⁷ Jeschke recognized this as early as 1964, when he wrote to the board that “we must henceforth carry our physical expan-

37. Mashek, *To Raise A Candle for the College*.

sion mostly from special gifts, and begin to direct more funds toward endowment, faculty salaries, student program services, and instructional strengthening.”³⁸ Despite this recognition, the college’s records

38. Jeschke, “President’s Report to the Board of Trustees,” 30 Mar. 1965, p. 82, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.



Report on Assembly on Progress at Sioux Falls College

Over 200 alumni, Baptists, and Sioux Falls businessmen heard on November 19, 1962, a report of what happens to a campus when vision and courage meet.

President Jeschke, in reporting SFC progress, commended the local community, as well as the wider one, for the response that made progress possible.

At the evening session, Robert L. Gale, Vice President of Carleton College, focused the attention of the group on the further contribution that liberal arts colleges might make if friends and alumni increasingly share.

Below are the goals completed in the last six years, and the plans for the future, as outlined at the Assembly.

Completed Goals

- North Central accreditation obtained
- Full time enrolment to 492
- Full time faculty to 30
- Faculty salary average up \$2,000
- Men's dormitory completed
- Women's dormitory constructed
- Student Union constructed
- All laboratories renovated
- Each year's budget balanced
- Development Council of over 80 organized
- Endowment raised to \$200,000

Plans for a Better SFC

- Strengthen and expand faculty
- Further increase faculty salaries
- Enlarge student aid program
- Construct new 100,000 volume library
- Construct fine arts building
- Construct chapel-auditorium
- Renovate gymnasium
- Add wing to Kroske Hall
- Reach enrolment of 800-1,000
- Increase endowment to \$1,000,000
- Complete landscaping
- Encourage increasingly a Christian environment

This 1962 campus report detailed the priorities of the college moving forward, which included hiring a greater number of faculty members at higher salaries.

for the next several years indicate that attention remained squarely on physical expansion with these other needs only occasionally addressed.

For faculty, the most pressing issue was compensation. The academic job market was the most robust in the history of American higher education during the 1950s and 1960s, and national faculty salaries rose rapidly as a result.³⁹ The salary scale at SFC rose during the 1960s, but not nearly as swiftly as at other colleges and universities in the area. Aware of this, Jeschke resisted publishing SFC's salary data with the American Association of University Professors because it would simply proclaim "our low totem-pole rating to the world."⁴⁰ In 1965 and again in 1967, faculty expressed discontent with this situation, and retaining qualified faculty became a perennial problem for the college throughout the decade.

Accounts of student activism in the 1960s often focus on sit-ins and demonstrations. In reality, that form of activism was limited to a small handful of campuses.⁴¹ The records do not indicate any significant political activism among students at SFC, but they were increasingly vocal about some of the social restrictions placed upon them. In particular, students wanted to smoke and dance on campus. The college's administration had held the line against smoking for some time because of its negative health effects and the potential fire hazard. Formal dances had never been allowed at SFC, and Jeschke adamantly argued that the policy ensured that the college played "fair with its Baptist church constituency." Jeschke's attitude on this issue was clearly out of step with popular opinion; by the 1960s, more than three-quarters of students had been allowed by their parents to go to dances and all but two ABC colleges allowed dances on campus.⁴² Moreover, SFC students had held dances off campus for a number of years. By 1967, student pressure finally succeeded, and the college created designated smoking areas and allowed formal dances on campus.⁴³

39. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, p. 310.

40. Jeschke, "Memo to Faculty Relative to Comparative Salary Levels," 13 Oct. 1967, p. 40, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

41. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, p. 309.

42. Jeschke, "Midyear Report of the President to the Board of Trustees," 28 Mar. 1967, p. 97, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

43. "Special Meeting of the Executive Committee," 2 Oct. 1967, p. 4, *ibid.*



ARCHITECT'S SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED **CHAPEL-AUDITORIUM** and **FINE ARTS CENTER**

This artist's conception of the proposed Chapel-Auditorium and Fine Arts Center symbolizes in appearance and function our dedication both to the enhancing of human expression as found in man's spiritual outreach, and in the forms of language, music, art and drama. Located on the "hilltop", the highest point on campus, this complex of buildings will be the focal point of the college. The size of the structure (57,225 sq. ft.) and its space allocations will enable all of its departments to provide the best in equipment and educational methods to both students and faculty.

SIOUX FALLS COLLEGE



COMMEMORATING PLAQUE
Meredith Hall, for more than 80 years a haven of learning and of friendship, will have its tradition perpetuated in a wall of stone symbolizing that today's progress is built upon the sacrifice of the past.

MEMORIAL CHIMES TOWER
The Memorial Chimes Tower—itsself an expression of man's upward reach to God.



This architect's sketch shows the design for the Jeschke Fine Arts Center, a project that eventually caused the college serious financial trouble.

While the SFC administration only gradually addressed the pressing concerns of students and faculty, they continued full speed ahead with the building program in the late 1960s. The most difficult building project in this era of the college's history, and of Reuben Jeschke's long tenure as president, was the building that today bears his name: the Jeschke Fine Arts Center. Plans for a fine arts center and a joint chapel and auditorium began as early as 1956 with the ten-year development program.⁴⁴ Yet, ballooning cost estimates and more pressing needs across campus consistently delayed the project. The earliest projections estimated the cost at under \$600,000 for the building, but the ultimate cost for the entire project exceeded that estimate by more than 350 percent.⁴⁵ Construction began in 1968 with completion expected in 1970, but the structure ended up taking an additional year to build.

44. "Campaign for \$100,000 Underway in Sioux Falls," *Sioux Falls College Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (Feb. 1958): 2, USF Archives.

45. Jeschke, *A Decade of Growth*; Jeschke, "Memorandum on Overall Completion and Fur-

In 1968, Jeschke wrote *A Decade of Growth*, a work that triumphantly showcased the college's success. Just two years later, SFC once again faced spiraling debt, a budgetary deficit, declining enrollments, and a profound financial crisis. Following two tragic deaths in the family and a physical breakdown resulting from what he called "nervous exhaustion," Reuben Jeschke resigned as president in the spring of 1970.⁴⁶ This was an ignominious ending to his long tenure as president of the college. Jeschke should rightly be remembered for presiding over SFC's greatest growth period during the 1960s, but his last two years, which brought with them a desperate financial situation, should also not be forgotten.

Construction costs for the fine arts center rose much faster than anticipated, and by August 1970, with the building still under construction, fundraising efforts had left a \$460,000 shortfall for the project.⁴⁷ SFC faced its biggest fundraising task of the decade without vice president Everett Sugarbaker, who died due to complications from surgery in 1967.⁴⁸ Sugarbaker had led the college's highly successful development efforts since the late 1950s, and his death was a major blow to the administration. The gargantuan debt caused by the fine arts center precipitated the return of turbulent times to SFC in the 1970s.

What a difference a decade makes. The national environment for higher education was dramatically worse by the 1970s. The economic shocks caused by the 1973 oil embargo marked the beginning of a period of anemic economic performance. The postwar baby boom peaked in 1968, and by the 1975-1976 academic year enrollments dropped nationally for the first time since 1951. These adverse economic conditions were particularly challenging for small liberal arts colleges unable to count on public funding. Colleges across the country entered an era of belt tightening and readjustment. SFC administrators had long understood that this crisis was coming. While the budget deficit and ballooning debt from the completion of the fine arts center were bad enough, the college also faced a steep reduction in private sources of giving.⁴⁹

nishing of the Chapel-Auditorium and Fine Arts Center," 12 June 1969, p. 118, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

46. Reuben Jeschke, "Report of the President," 24 Mar. 1970, p. 87, *ibid*.

47. "Executive Committee Regular Meeting," 27 Aug. 1970, p. 9, *ibid*.

48. "SFC Mourns Sugarbaker," *Stylus* 72, No. 11 (12 Jan. 1967): 1.

49. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, p. 320-22.

As it had during the early 1950s, SFC relied on the ABCE in its time of need. Indeed, the ABCE proved instrumental in resolving SFC's two most pressing needs following Jeschke's resignation: finding a new president and paying the construction costs for the fine arts center. Ronald V. Wells, former executive director of the ABCE, agreed to become the new president.⁵⁰ That same year, Roger Fredrikson, an SFC alumnus and trustee, became president of the ABC.⁵¹ These connections made the bond between the college and denomination tighter than ever before. Critically, the ABCE also helped finance the remaining costs of the fine arts center by agreeing to guarantee a loan of \$335,000 from Northwestern National Bank.⁵² Without this assurance, SFC would not have been able to secure the loan, and their financial difficulties would have escalated.

By 1972, SFC—while still operating in a deficit—had developed a plan to fully finance the fine arts center. The plan involved the loans guaranteed by ABCE, a loan from the National Bank of South Dakota, and additional philanthropic donations.⁵³ This plan significantly increased the college's overall debt but enabled it to successfully pay for the initial costs of the building and distribute the additional payments over time.

As they negotiated the fiscal crises of the early 1970s, SFC administrators began to pay more attention to campus culture. A key part of this was reevaluating the Christian atmosphere on campus. John Butler, SFC's academic vice president and dean, argued that religious life on campus needed serious attention, as it had become "one of the most ignored portions of college life" at SFC.⁵⁴ In December 1970, the board of trustees voted to form a committee to study "our stance as a Christian college" and "ways of increasing the Christian witness and commitment of this college community."⁵⁵

Aiming to bolster SFC's Christian identity, the board made the criti-

50. "Dr. Ronald V. Wells New President of Sioux Falls College," *Sioux Falls College Bulletin and Alumni News* 61, no. 1 (Oct. 1970): 1, USF Archives.

51. "Sioux Falls College Alumnus-Trustee-Teacher and Local College Pastor Chosen President of American Baptist Convention," *ibid.*

52. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 29 Oct. 1970, p. 51, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

53. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 22 Aug. 1972, p. 3, *ibid.*

54. Butler, "Report of the Acting Administrative Head," 29 Sept. 1970, p. 31, *ibid.*

55. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 31 Dec. 1970, p. 57, *ibid.*

cal decision to hire the college's first-ever campus pastor. Traditionally, faculty and administrators had led campus chapel services, but by 1971 the board of trustees recognized that having a campus pastor was “of paramount importance in order to emphasize our position and mission as a Christian college.”⁵⁶ Larry Bowden became the college's inaugural chaplain and director of religious activities in the fall of 1971.⁵⁷ He adopted a student-centered approach that sought to meet “students ‘where they are.’”⁵⁸

Trustees, students, faculty, and administration also gave careful thought and attention to the everyday practices of religion on campus when they formed the Committee on Religious Life in 1971. The committee recommended that chapel service be significantly revised, and, critically, that the attendance requirement be waived. The committee lobbied for a new program with “an active rather than passive emphasis” and a voluntary hour of chapel offered every day. These reforms

56. “Minutes of the Executive Committee,” 25 Feb. 1971, p. 69, *ibid.*

57. Butler, “Report of the Academic Vice President and Dean,” 28 Sept. 1971, p. 31, *ibid.*

58. Larry Bowden, “Memorandum from the Chaplain Re: Religious Activities Since September 1971,” p. 48, *ibid.*



Even though chapel attendance was not mandatory, many students, like those pictured here in the late 1970s, regularly gathered for worship and fellowship.

to chapel carefully balanced the college's traditional Christian identity with the changing demands of the student body. By revitalizing Christian life on campus with contemporary educational practices, it supported SFC's traditional Christian identity. The decision to make chapel voluntary also empowered students with a much higher degree of choice. The campus holds voluntary chapel only once per week in the twenty-first century, but in many respects the plan developed in the early 1970s is recognizably similar to present-day Christian life at the University of Sioux Falls.

One positive note for SFC was that, despite the major financial challenges it experienced in the 1970s, the North Central Association renewed the college's accreditation in the spring of 1972.⁵⁹ The association's report argued that the college was "quite strong," praising its "well-defined educational task," adaptable administration, and experienced faculty.⁶⁰ The physical campus was in excellent shape, and the "long-term debt on the physical plant is entirely manageable."⁶¹ The report confirmed, however, that the institution's short-term debt was a significant problem that needed to be addressed quickly.⁶²

As yearly deficits continued to build, and enrollment numbers declined, President Ronald V. Wells considered a radical alternative: merging SFC with two other institutions of higher education based in Sioux Falls. The original initiative for a merger came from Augustana College. The two institutions had recently begun cooperative programs in areas such as criminal justice and social work, and their close geographical proximity also made a merger viable.⁶³ In early 1970, Augustana passed a resolution to form a "Joint Study Commission on Institutional Co-operation," better known as the CIC, to explore the possibilities of more effective cooperation, "including the formation of a confederation of, or an organic merger of the two institutions."⁶⁴

59. Norman Burns to Ronald V. Wells, 3 Aug. 1972, p. 21, *ibid.*

60. Butler, "Report to the Academic Affairs Committee by John Butler," 16 Oct. 1972, p. 57, *ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. Wells, "Status Report Concerning Proposals and Recommendations for Inter-Institutional Cooperation," 22 Feb. 1973, p. 1, Administrative Heads: Ronald V. Wells, Series 1, RG 2, USF Archives.

64. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 26 Feb. 1970, p. 62, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

In 1971, SFC president Ronald V. Wells (left) met with Augustana College president Charles L. Balcer (right) to discuss a potential merger between the two schools.



There were several potential advantages to this merger. By consolidating Augustana College, Sioux Falls College, and the North American Baptist Seminary, which had moved to Sioux Falls in 1949, the unified institution would not have to compete with so many nearby neighbors and would benefit from a higher level of efficiency. Additionally, the Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation, a charitable organization started by the son of railroad magnate James J. Hill, expressed serious interest in providing grant funding to combine these private organizations.⁶⁵ The prospective merger seemed like an incredible opportunity to create a financially stable and efficient organization that would experience less regional competition while bringing in major grant funding. With Wells's enthusiastic support, the board of trustees authorized the formation of a joint committee to study increased cooperation with Augustana in December 1970.⁶⁶

Tom Kilian, then Augustana's vice president for development, chaired the CIC. The group explored multiple levels of cooperation, even going

65. Lane and Kerins, "Middle Border States," p. 121; Charles Balcer, Ronald Wells, and David Draewell to Robert Bonine, undated, Administrative Heads: Ronald V. Wells, Series 1, RG 2, USF Archives. Bonine was the assistant executive director of the Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation.

66. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 1 Dec. 1970, p. 54, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.



Tom Killian, seen here giving a speech at the South Dakota State Historical Society's annual meeting in 1986, served as Augustana College's vice president for development in the early 1970s and later became the president and namesake of Kilian Community College in Sioux Falls.

so far as to draft articles of incorporation for the new institution, which they tentatively called Dakota University.⁶⁷ The proposal envisioned a "federal union" that allowed each college to "reserve for itself those functions, services, properties, rights and powers as it may feel are desirable to retain."⁶⁸ Initially, Dakota University would be governed by a board of regents that included members from each institution and would maintain an executive committee containing their presidents. The university would then gradually transition to having a full-time president or chancellor.⁶⁹

In addition to drafting proposed articles of incorporation, the CIC recommended four potential options for Augustana, Sioux Falls College, and the North American Baptist Seminary to consider moving forward. The first option was for each organization to abandon increased cooperation and "go their separate ways."⁷⁰ The second option would

67. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 3 Aug. 1972, p. 3, *ibid.*; "Draft Proposal: Articles of Incorporation of Dakota University," Sept. 1971, p. 49, *ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. "Trustees Agree on '2,'" *Sioux Falls College Bulletin* 73, no. 3 (Apr. 1973): 1, USF Archives.

continue current practices and perhaps find measures to increase cooperation while maintaining completely separate programs and identities. The third option went a step further, proposing that the colleges cooperate heavily and only maintain "some degree" of institutional identity. Option four was a complete merger. By a small margin, the CIC members voted for option three.⁷¹

In the spring of 1972, Wells presented the board of trustees with a resolution concerning institutional cooperation. The resolution stated that all of the evidence gathered by the CIC and conversations over the previous year indicated "that the best interests of the three institutions would be served through increased cooperation in the future," especially in helping each institution receive grant funding to stay afloat.⁷² The resolution clearly suggested a "need to preserve the identity and sovereignty of each of the cooperating institutions," but it empowered Wells to join with the presidents of Augustana and the North American Baptist Seminary "to administer and operate those departments and functions which each of the institutions may from time to time agree to delegate to it."⁷³

Planning efforts went even further than what the CIC envisioned. In an application for \$3.3 million in grant funding from the Louis W. and Marie Hill Family Foundation, the trio of college presidents proposed a multistep process to complete the merger. The first step was to create a corporate federation of the three institutions as envisioned by the CIC. The second step involved paving the way towards enhanced efficiency by synchronizing college schedules, equalizing student costs, and identifying areas that could be combined. The third phase would be to develop a private Sioux Falls area community college and create enhanced professional schools at the new corporation. By following all of these steps, the presidents assured the foundation, "a major new ordering of the higher educational establishment of South Dakota would be an assured ultimate result."⁷⁴

While the idea of a merger greatly appealed to the three college pres-

71. Ibid.

72. "Resolution on Institutional Cooperation," May 1972, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

73. Ibid.

74. Balcer, Wells, and Draewell to Bonine.

idents, other community stakeholders strongly opposed the idea, and the measure divided the SFC community.⁷⁵ Faculty at both Augustana and SFC were united in opposition. For the former, the potential loss of jobs, alumni support, Lutheran affiliation, and the “unique smallness of the liberal arts college” far outweighed any promised gains.⁷⁶ Many SFC faculty, meanwhile, felt that their Augustana counterparts viewed themselves as superior, and that in a potential merger they would “always be the ‘second class citizen.’”⁷⁷ Both faculty groups pointed to the lack of specifics in the various proposals. In general, employees were very concerned that personnel decisions would lead to layoffs.

John Butler, SFC’s academic vice president, was a prominent voice within the administration who opposed the CIC proposal, largely because it would undermine the college’s relationship with the ABC. He rejected arguments that a merger was the only way out of SFC’s financial troubles for several reasons. For one, he contended, “the Christian emphasis of the institution would drop to the least common denominator of the more closely related schools.”⁷⁸ Autonomy and independence had always been cardinal virtues of Baptist identity, and losing SFC would be a tremendous blow for the denomination. Above all, Butler argued, “it is immoral for us, or any other private college, to offer a program essentially like that of the surrounding state universities, and to ask twice the price for it.”⁷⁹ He concluded that “there is something worse than failure to survive. It is a continuation of an institution with all of the regular classes and activities but without a mission—without its reason to exist.”⁸⁰

A board of trustees meeting in the spring of 1973 decided the fate of the potential merger. By then, the North American Baptist Seminary had rejected the CIC-recommended option three and instead chose the second option, which called for only slightly increased cooperation.

75. “Trustees Agree on ‘2.’”

76. “Augustana Faculty Reply to Cooperative Ventures with Sioux Falls College,” [n.d.], pp. 1–2, Administrative Heads: Ronald V. Wells, Series 1, RG 2, USF Archives.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

78. Butler, “Some of the Concerns and Opinions I Hold About Cooperation Between Sioux Falls College and Augustana,” undated, Administrative Heads: Ronald V. Wells, Series 1, RG 2, USF Archives.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Augustana's board of regents would not vote until the following month, so the decision of SFC's board of trustees was critical for the venture.⁸¹ While Wells supported the CIC's recommended option, only six out of thirty board of trustees members followed his lead. Ultimately, the board opted for option two, which involved increased cooperation but preserved strong institutional identities. The board also voted to move forward with the creation of a corporate entity called the North Central University Center that would allow enhanced cooperation without a potential merger.⁸²

The board's decision had significant ramifications. For SFC, part of the fallout was Wells's resignation as president. His resignation letter stated that while he respected the decision, he became "convinced that you will need new leadership" to manage the college in the coming years. Wells agreed, however, to continue on as president for an additional year to enable an effective search for his successor.⁸³ SFC then immediately implemented cost-cutting measures, including slashing course offerings and reducing the overall number of faculty. The following year, cutbacks reduced the total number of full-time faculty to their absolute nadir in the post-World War II era: a mere twenty-five.⁸⁴

Despite the gloom of the moment, there were hopeful signs that SFC was slowly emerging from the crisis of the early 1970s. Debt from the fine arts center's construction had been considerably reduced by selling stocks given to SFC by Norman B. Mears. The major remaining problem was the debt accumulated from years of budget deficits. By 1976, SFC trustee Louis L. Lillibridge proposed a fundraising campaign to eliminate the outstanding debt by the following June. Though Lillibridge's effort did not meet the deadline, pledges significantly eased the college's debt burden for the foreseeable future.⁸⁵

81. "Inter-Institutional Cooperation," Spring Board of Trustees Meeting, 26, 27 Mar. 1973, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

82. Ibid.

83. "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 31 May 1973, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

84. "Report on Recommendations for Implementation of Curriculum and Organizational Changes in Sioux Falls College," 25–26 Mar. 1974, p. 82, *ibid.*; Wells, "President's Report," 23 May 1974, p. 106, *ibid.*

85. "Minutes of the Board of Trustees Fall Meeting," 5 Oct. 1976, p. 24 and "Minutes of the Board of Trustees Spring Meeting," 5 Apr. 1977, p. 132, *ibid.*

On the national level, SFC greatly benefited from new opportunities for student aid. The Basic Educational Opportunities Grants, renamed Pell Grants, offered federal financial aid to students at the institution of their choice.⁸⁶ SFC took advantage of this new funding by hiring Glen Poppinga as director of financial aid and ensuring that students knew about federal aid programs. Though it took time, these efforts helped grow enrollment in the second half of the 1970s.⁸⁷

By 1978, the new SFC president, Owen Halleen, noted that the emphasis on efficiency and cost-cutting measures had significantly improved the college's position, and the college was once again operating in the black.⁸⁸ Halleen was confident enough in the college's financial situation to begin preparations for a new dorm for married students, which would be the first structure built on campus since the major expansion of the Jeschke years. SFC also began exploring new majors to attract students, including the possibility of offering master's programs for the first time.⁸⁹ These new initiatives indicated that SFC had worked its way through the crises of debt and enrollment declines that typified the 1970s.

While the merger of the three Sioux Falls private colleges did not move forward, those discussions had long-lasting ramifications for the city. In April 1976, the North Central University Center, in a motion approved by SFC's board of trustees, created a community college.⁹⁰ The new community college—named after Tom Kilian, who became its first president—was a unique endeavor in the history of South Dakota higher education. The private nonprofit community college remained in operation until 2016. When it closed, the University of Sioux Falls, as SFC became known in 1995, agreed to take on Kilian students, continue their outreach “Bridges Program,” and create the Dr. Thomas Kilian Academic Success Center.⁹¹

86. Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, p. 324.

87. Glen Poppinga, “Report to the Student Life and Living Committee,” p. 123, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

88. Halleen, “President's Report,” 3, 4 Apr. 1978, p. 204, *ibid.*

89. Halleen, “President's Report,” 11 Oct. 1977, pp. 31, 38, *ibid.*

90. “Community College Resolution,” Board of Trustees Spring Meeting, 6 Apr. 1976, p. 96, *ibid.*

91. Megan Raposa, “USF to Fill the Void Left by Kilian Closure,” *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 29 Sept. 2016.

Another transformative moment for SFC occurred in 1978 with the decision to adopt a new mascot: the cougar. For fifty years, the college's mascot was the brave, and the school was strongly associated with American Indian symbolism. For instance, the college celebrated homecoming with an annual "Tepee Days" celebration that became a central part of campus culture. American Indian students at SFC began publicly questioning these practices in the early 1970s, rejecting these stereotypical images. Though most SFC alumni and students stressed that they did not believe this symbolism had racist overtones, by 1976, according to the *Sioux Falls College Bulletin*, "it became painfully apparent that many practices and caricatures were no longer acceptable to depict Indian culture."⁹² Students, alumni, faculty, and the administration debated and then voted to make a change, choosing the cougar as the college's new mascot.

The adoption of a new mascot was but one of a number of the college's impressive accomplishments as it emerged from a period of explosive growth and difficult challenges from the 1950s through the 1970s. Writing at the low point of the 1970s crisis, John Butler reflected on the volatility of these years: "While the more recent years have been a difficult struggle, my earlier years at Sioux Falls College were times of expansion, movement and achievement. I've had a chance to be in on both sides of the mountain, climbing and then descending. I'm confident that the College will reach the valley's bottom and will begin to climb again. It has happened before in the history of Sioux Falls College and surely the potential remains for it to happen again."⁹³ The college's modern form emerged after it earned accreditation in 1958, undertook an unprecedented building program in the 1960s, and pursued curricular innovations and institutional culture-building in the 1970s. These changes stemmed from the ABBE's determination to support the college in challenging times and the ability of SFC leadership to take advantage of a favorable national environment for higher education.

92. "New Mascot Chosen," *Sioux Falls College Bulletin and Alumni News* 78, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 1-2, USF Archives.

93. Butler, "Report of the Academic Vice President and Dean," 25 Mar. 1974, Board of Trustees Minutes, Series 5, RG 1, USF Archives.

Picture credits: All illustrations in this issue are property of the South Dakota State Historical Society except for those on the following pages: pp. 202, 203, 205, 207, 210, 212, 213, 214, 216, 219, 221, University of Sioux Falls Archives; pp. 230, 232, 237, 239, 240, 242, 243, 248, 249, 251, 254, Neil Lyon King & Joan Sunderland King Collection, Leland D. Case Library for Western Historical Studies, Black Hills State University; pp. 271, 274, 276, 277, 279, 281, 284, 294, 299, 302, Library of Congress; pp. 290, 291, 293, Rose Lane Wilder Collection, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library; p. 305, *San Francisco Bulletin*; p. 319, Robert L. Slagle Collections, University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, University of South Dakota.

On the cover: Based out of Black Hills Teachers College (now Black Hills State University) in Spearfish, the cadets of the Ninety-Third U.S. Army Air Forces College Training Detachment learned to fly using the single-engine aircrafts seen in this photograph taken at Black Hills Airport during the 1943–1944 school year.

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.