Unprecedented yet Unheralded

Schooling in Beadle County During the Great Dakota Boom

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In a memoir written when he was an old man, early Beadle County resident Frank Bloodgood recalled the school he first attended. Born in Iowa, Bloodgood was part of a large family that moved west during the Great Dakota Boom, a land rush that began in 1878 when the railroads first arrived and ended in 1886 amid a great drought. During that brief period, the population of the county grew from 1,200 to 10,000 people, and the number of schools established grew from none to roughly 120. In 1880, Bloodgood's father, Lewis, staked a claim in Custer Township, just southeast of a new town called Huron. A year later, Bloodgood arrived with his mother and four siblings. In Bloodgood's memoir, he claimed to have started school at age three in 1882. His fellow students included three of his siblings, two McCoys—the family that had been their neighbors in Iowa—and six others, all sets of brothers and sisters. Their teacher, known to the pupils as Miss Morrison, also had parents who homesteaded nearby. Frank recalled little of her, except that he once fell asleep in her lap during the Sunday school that was also held in the Custer schoolhouse.[1]

Though American history abounds with stories of pioneers and homesteaders, the rapidity with which settlers arrived in the James River valley during the early 1880s has received comparatively little attention. This wave of settlement constituted an "unprecedented movement of people," according to historian Herbert Schell.[2] The speed with which the newcomers established schools may have been unprecedented as well. In 1885, Dakota Territory's superintendent of public instruction characterized the "array of facts" about the local schools to

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1. Steven J. Bucklin, ed., "'Pioneer Days of South Dakota': The Memoir of Frank Bloodgood," *South Dakota History* 29 (Summer 1999): 113–54. Bloodgood's memoir was written in 1941.

2. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 158.

be "almost incredible." The school data that the territory compiled for the previous year "presented such evidence . . . that it was everywhere conceded to be without parallel."[3] Today, however, these facts seem little known and largely unheralded. Indeed, that the county's schools, or those of the entire territory, tell a distinctive story—one that suggests their development was both unprecedented and well organized—is missing from the literature about late nineteenth-century education in the region.[4]

3. Dakota Territory, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Territory of Dakota*, p. 7. This report, and those of the previous and succeeding years, provide a wealth of detailed information about education in the territory. These are bound together in a volume available via Google Books. In subsequent references, these will be referred to as ordinal numbers and the year published.

4. Two histories of rural education in the Midwest provide context for this discussion. Wayne E. Fuller's *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Midwest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) describes these institutions' ability to eliminate illiteracy, educate generations of leaders, and give parents practice in participatory democracy. Fuller focuses on the development of rural education; once his study gets to the 1880s, he moves on to consider the development of an educational bureaucracy. Paul Theobald's *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) analyzes the religious and ethnic conflicts that took place during the settle-
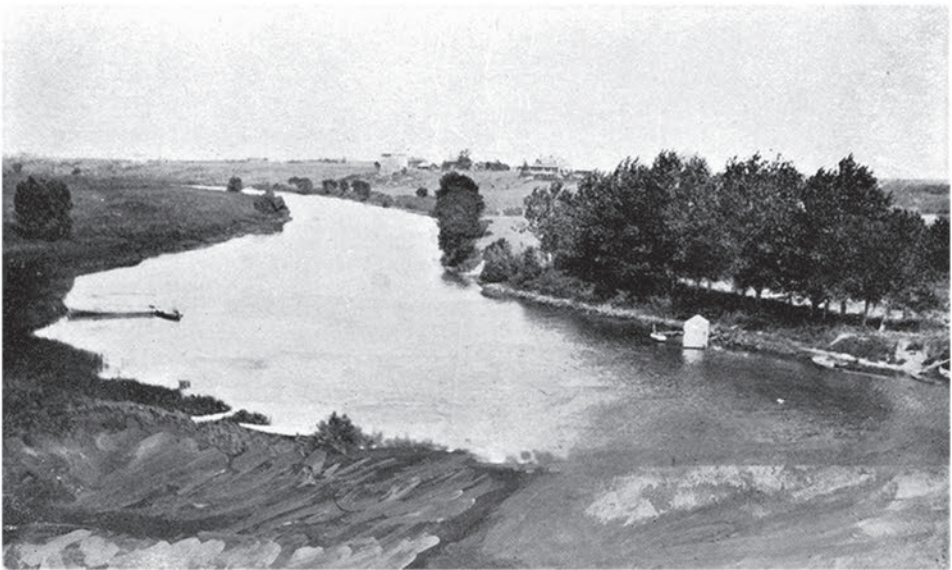
This undated postcard—likely from the early twentieth century—featured a view of the James River near Huron.

Beadle County, home of the extensive Bloodgood clan, was not only right in the center of this great movement of people onto the fertile soil extending several miles both east and west of the "River Jim," but it had been named after the man who led the development of the territorial school system: William Henry Harrison Beadle. As territorial superintendent of public instruction from 1879 until 1885, Beadle had overseen the emergence of the "incredible array" of facts described by his successor. But it was the settlers themselves, arriving via the county seat of Huron on as many as eighteen trains a day, who built the schools, with the aid of funds supplied by the territorial government and administered by Beadle's office. It is noteworthy that a process existed for collecting and distributing these funds with such alacrity.[5] These settlers, the vast majority of whom hailed from established states east of the territory, brought with them not only the respect for education they shared with Beadle, but lessons distilled from decades of organizing and managing rural schools.

Residents established the first school in Beadle County at Huron in 1880. It accommodated "15 scholars of all ages, sizes and grades," according to an 1886 "History of Huron's Schools" that a leading student named Nellie Botsford wrote and published in one of the county's several newspapers.[6] This first school was held in a building on Wisconsin Street that later became a real estate office. The furniture that first year

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ment phases of midwestern states. Settlers in the Dakotas brought a synthesis of these conflicts with them, so the schools there were less hampered by disputes that had slowed the progress of schooling elsewhere. Theobald does mention William Beadle and a school district near Brookings, but only in passing while considering squabbles over district versus township organization. His discussion suggests that he was unaware of either the rapidity or the scale with which the territory's schools developed (Theobald, *Call School*, pp. 43–44, 50, 57, 200–203).

5. See Dwight Miller, "General Wm. Beadle-The Man," and Douglas Chittick and James C. Schooler, "The Story of School Lands," in Harry Dykstra, ed., *Permanent School Fund in South Dakota and the Beadle Club* (Aberdeen: North Plains Press, 1976).

6. Nellie Botsford, "History of Huron's Schools." This appeared in Federal Writers Project, *Life in Early Huron, 1880–1889*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Works Progress Administration, 1942). An unpaginated, mimeographed compilation of stories that appeared in Huron's early newspapers, this consists of two volumes: "Churches and Religion" and "Education and the Schools." Its selections are arranged by date and by topic; the brief Botsford piece is in the 1886 section. Further references to this are given as FWP, volume name, and year the article appeared.

consisted of several long benches; for textbooks, students used the materials that their parents had brought with them. The following year, school leaders replaced the benches with desks constructed from available wood. The "rapid settlement of our city," Botsford recorded, necessitated the opening of two more schools over the next two years, one of which was in a building that had earlier been a saloon.

Though that first school was not graded, by 1886 Huron's three schools included twelve grades and instruction in "all the principal branches taught in any public school of the Eastern States," according to Botsford. Enrollment had grown from fifteen pupils in 1880 to four hundred or more six years later. Though there were no high school graduates that year, a class of ten or twelve was expected the following June. The one-room school in Custer Township attended by the Bloodgoods was one of the 102 schoolhouses in the county; a dozen other schools held classes in private residences as they waited for their own

Huron photographer William E. Snell captured this image of a group of schoolchildren in town during the territorial period.

building. Fourteen county schoolhouses had been constructed since the previous year and fourteen more were under construction, according to Botsford's report.[7] The superintendent's annual reports provide additional context: in March 1883, Beadle County had ten schoolhouses and 304 pupils enrolled; by June 1884, there were fifty-one schoolhouses, forty-three of which had been built in the preceding fifteen months. Enrollment for 1884 was 866, more than half of the county's total 1,494 persons between the ages of seven and twenty.[8]

While these figures are remarkable in their own right, it was a great credit to the territory and its superintendents of public instruction that they could be compiled at all, given both the rate of growth and challenges of travel and communication at the time. The annual reports from 1884 to 1886 all carry a table titled "Exhibit of Growth" that reflects the massive changes to the territory. Collectively, they tell a story that may well be without parallel: whereas in 1879 there were 18,535 "youth of school age" in Dakota Territory, this number had increased to 77,499 by 1884; 10,000 more were added the following year; in 1886, there were 103,382, a quintupling in just seven years.[9]

While a comparison of Beadle County with other counties along the James River reveals similar growth, Beadle is of particular interest not only because of its namesake but because of the rich documentation of its educational history.[10] During the 1930s, for instance, the Federal Writers Project sponsored a compilation of newspaper articles about Huron's schools and churches. These articles, along with county histories, are a rich source of information. Further, Huron, briefly considered as both territorial and state capital, is of interest because of the prominence it assumed in the half-decade after its founding.[11]

7. Botsford, "History of Huron's Schools."

8. *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884. For 1883 figures, see table 1, p. 19; for 1884, see tables I and II, pp. 8, 9 (these tables appear to be out of chronological order, but they are correctly numbered).

9. *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884, table 12; *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 1885, [p. 11]; *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 1886, [p. 29].

10. Brown County Territorial Pioneer Committee, *Early History of Brown County, South Dakota* (Aberdeen: Western Printing Company, 1965); Lou-Ella Miles, "Settlement of Spink County," master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1917; R. M. Black, ed., *A History of Dickey County, North Dakota* (Ellendale: Dickey County Historical Society, 1930).

11. In addition to the Federal Writers Project compilation noted earlier, this includes Mildred McEwen Jones, *Early Beadle County* (Huron: Privately published, 1961).

Despite its location squarely in the middle of the continent, Dakota Territory attracted non-Native settlement far later than most of its neighbors. Though few Indigenous people remained on the land around the James at the time of the Great Dakota Boom, the settlers' arrival in other parts of the territory had contributed to the displacement of the American Indians who had inhabited these prairie lands for centuries.[12] In what became Dakota Territory, federal officials promised the Oceti Sakowin—whom they referred to as the Sioux—and other Indigenous peoples land on either bank of the Missouri River. A series of broken treaties, however, left them confined to reservations. Natives found their freedom of movement restricted and the bison they relied upon decimated so that the prairies could be subjugated by the iron horse and the settlers' plow.[13]

The first white settlers in present-day South Dakota were concentrated in its southeast corner and the Black Hills.[14] Beginning in 1878, however, a combination of factors brought settlers to the James River valley, including Beadle County. Doane Robinson, in his early history of South Dakota, described the migration as "unique and dramatic."[15] States such as Illinois and Iowa, from which many Beadle County res-

12. Indigenous people were not included in the 1880 census; later revisions to the census of 1890 did estimate their number. See *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present*, vol. 1, part A: *Population* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 317, 341. Though the Indigenous population was not counted in 1880; by 1890, it was estimated to be 19,792 in South Dakota and 6,264 in North Dakota. See table notes, ibid.

13. Adam Dahl, in *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundation of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), offers a compelling argument about the meaning of European expansion onto lands long inhabited by Indigenous peoples. Without going into the details of his reconceptualization, it is important to note that some of these Dakota settlers were not willfully ignorant of the impact of their actions.

14. For a detailed summary of the various waves of the state's settlement between 1860s and into the 1900s, see Robert C. Ostergren, in "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 13 (Spring/Summer 1983): 49–82.

15. Doane Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, vol. I (Aberdeen: B. F. Bowen, 1904), p.563; Miles, in "Settlement of Spink County," made this claim, too, perhaps relying on Robinson as a source. In "The Settlement and Economic Development of the Territory of Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Review* I (Apr. 1936), Harold E. Briggs claimed that the growth was greatest in Beadle, Spink, and Brown counties.

The Chicago and North Western Railroad bridge outside of Huron is seen in this undated photograph from William E. Snell.

idents came, had developed over a period of twenty or thirty years. In contrast, this process took less than five years in the counties along the James.[16] The railroads, which began entering the territory during the 1870s, made this possible. Most lines moved in from Minnesota, headed west.[17] In 1877, an officer of the Chicago & North Western determined that a bend in the placid James River would be the best location for a bridge that would bring a line being built from Minneapolis out to Fort Pierre on the Missouri. The railroad itself arrived in 1880, and the bridge was completed that June. Huron, with a population of 150 or so, gathered on 5 July that year to celebrate Independence Day a day late. The first recorded community event, a baseball game, had to be called during the seventh inning because the only bat in town had been broken.[18]

Among the county's early residents were the Baum brothers, immigrants from Germany. They successfully harvested a crop of wheat that first summer, which was fortunate because the following winter would be a harsh one. By January 1881, the snow that began falling the previous October prohibited trains from running until April. The Baum brothers' wheat enabled Huron's residents to survive. The family of Laura Ingalls Wilder, who spent those months in De Smet, thirty miles east of Huron, almost did not, a story she told in her 1940 novel *The Long Winter*.[19]

During the boom decade, Beadle County grew at an astonishing rate: it attracted nearly ten thousand people where few had lived before. Most of them came in family groups; they came to stay and "to farm upon a

16. Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 10. See also John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986); and Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, IL, 1825–1970* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1983). Both describe a rate of settlement decades longer than that of the James River counties.

17. Briggs, "Settlement and Economic Development of the Territory of Dakota," pp. 153–54.

18. FWP, "Education and Schools," 1880.

19. For a nonfiction account of that winter and other carefully researched reconstructions of the Ingalls and Wilder families, see Caroline Fraser, *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (New York: Henry Holt, 2017). In Fraser's account, De Smet seems to have lacked many of Huron's attributes.

larger scale."[20] They staked claims, published newspapers, turned the ocean of grassland into fields of wheat, and opened stores and slaughterhouses. They organized churches, literary societies, musical groups, fraternal organizations, and, perhaps most importantly, schools. In sum, they recreated the cultural institutions that had evolved over the preceding century in the states from which they came.[21]

Whether Beadle County's early development occurred due to happenstance or by design is unclear. Other James River counties experienced similar growth, but in those instances the process began several months or a year later. In each case, the growth can be directly attributed to the arrival of the railroad.[22] William Henry Harrison Beadle, the county's namesake, showed no favoritism to its residents.[23] Born in 1838, Beadle grew up on a farm in central Indiana and received his bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Michigan. He served with distinction in the Union Army during the Civil War and earned the rank of general. Accordingly, many referred to him as General Beadle. Prior to being named surveyor general of the Dakotas in 1869, Beadle had practiced law in Indiana and Wisconsin. During that time, he saw how the "school lands"—section sixteen and later also section thirty-six of each township, according to the new republic's early land laws of the 1780s—could be recklessly squandered if sold before they reached their full value, and he was determined that would not happen in the Dakotas.[24] The territory under Beadle's leadership followed a pattern initiated, if not always heeded, in eastern states: a permanent

20. Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, vol. I, p. 294. See also Ostergren, "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," pp. 49, 82.

21. The books by Fuller and Theobald noted earlier put these accomplishments into perspective, as does Hamlin Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border* (numerous editions; originally published in 1917). Garland's book offers details on his schooling in rural Iowa during the 1870s. In the 1880s, his family moved to Brown County, ninety-odd miles north of Huron.

22. Briggs, "Settlement and Economic Development of the Territory of Dakota," pp. 153–54; Ostergren, "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," p. 55; James F. Hamburg, "Railroads and the Settlement of South Dakota During the Great Dakota Boom, 1878–1887," *South Dakota History* 5 (Spring 1975): 165–78.

23. On Beadle's substantial influence, see Mark Elliott and Melissa Dirr, eds., *Schools in South Dakota: An Educational Development* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 1998).

24. Biographical information on Beadle is from O. W. Coursey, *A Complete Biographical*

William Henry Harrison Beadle sat for this photograph in 1881, early in his tenure as territorial secretary of public instruction.

school fund was established to contain proceeds from the sale of school lands; in turn, these lands were distributed to counties in the territory and administered by county superintendents.[25]

During the five years that Beadle served as superintendent of public instruction for the territory, he not only fostered the development of a strong school system but became known as the "savior of our school lands" because of his insistence that they be sold at full value.[26] Later, as a leader in the movement for statehood, Beadle insisted that South Dakota's constitution include a provision disallowing sale of school lands until they were worth at least ten dollars an acre.[27] True to his reputa-

Sketch of William Henry Harrison Beadle (Mitchell, S.Dak.: Educator Supply Co., 1913); Miller, "Beadle—The Man," in Dykstra, ed., _Permanent School Fund in South Dakota and the Beadle Club_, pp. 1–21.

25. For a detailed analysis of how the accumulation and distribution of the school's fund worked, see Douglas Chittick and James C. Schooler, "The Story of School Lands" in Dykstra, ed., _Permanent School Fund in South Dakota and the Beadle Club_, pp. 49–77.

26. See Coursey, _Complete Biographical Sketch of William Henry Harrison Beadle_, pp. 29–31; and Miller, "Beadle—The Man," pp. 15–17; both also note that his insistence on not squandering these lands also saved them in the states of North Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Washington, states that were admitted to the union the same time South Dakota was.

27. Coursey, _Complete Biographical Sketch of William Henry Harrison Beadle_, p. 29.

tion, in a lengthy "Retrospective" published as part of his 1884 annual report, Beadle credited others: his predecessors, he claimed, had laid a firm foundation and the current county superintendents' "character, intelligence, and faithfulness" had aided the system's extraordinary growth during the previous five years. "Public schools and their finances are public affairs, to be treated responsibly," he wrote. Townships are "the nurse of our civil liberty and free citizenship"; the "first essential" for preserving self-government is "free and enlightened citizens." The people, Beadle wrote, "could have poor roads without doing serious harm to the state, but that was not true of the schools."[28]

Given the growth the territory's schools would undergo during the Great Dakota Boom, it is fortunate that they had both a firm foundation and competent administrators. Beadle, another admirer wrote, was "happily talented" for the work. He must have attracted others with similar qualities, as they quickly faced an unprecedented challenge. The blizzards of 1880–1881 had left sufficient moisture in the prairie soil to enable eager settlers to turn the dry grasslands into fertile fields of wheat over the next few years. In 1880, Dakota Territory had a population of 135,177, most of it concentrated along its eastern border. By 1890, after it had been divided into two states, the same area held 539,583 people, increasingly spread from east to west and north to south. During the boom, however, most of the growth was in the north central part of the state; between 1880 and 1885, Beadle County's population grew from 1,290 to 10,318.[29] The James River was a major draw.[30]

Nine decades after the boom began, amateur historian Mildred McEwen Jones described her father's journey to Beadle County. Twenty-one years old and recently married, C. C. McEwen (his daughter gave no indication what the initials stood for), was living in western Minnesota when he boarded the first train headed for Huron when the snows began to melt. His family had been pushing west since the 1850s; from New York, they went first to Wisconsin, and then to Minnesota. Despite

28. William H. H. Beadle, "Retrospective," in *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884, pp. 35, 40, 46, 47, 48.

29. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 165.

30. Among others who made this claim was Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (repr., Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), p. 143, and Garland, *Son of the Middle Border* (1917; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 196–97.
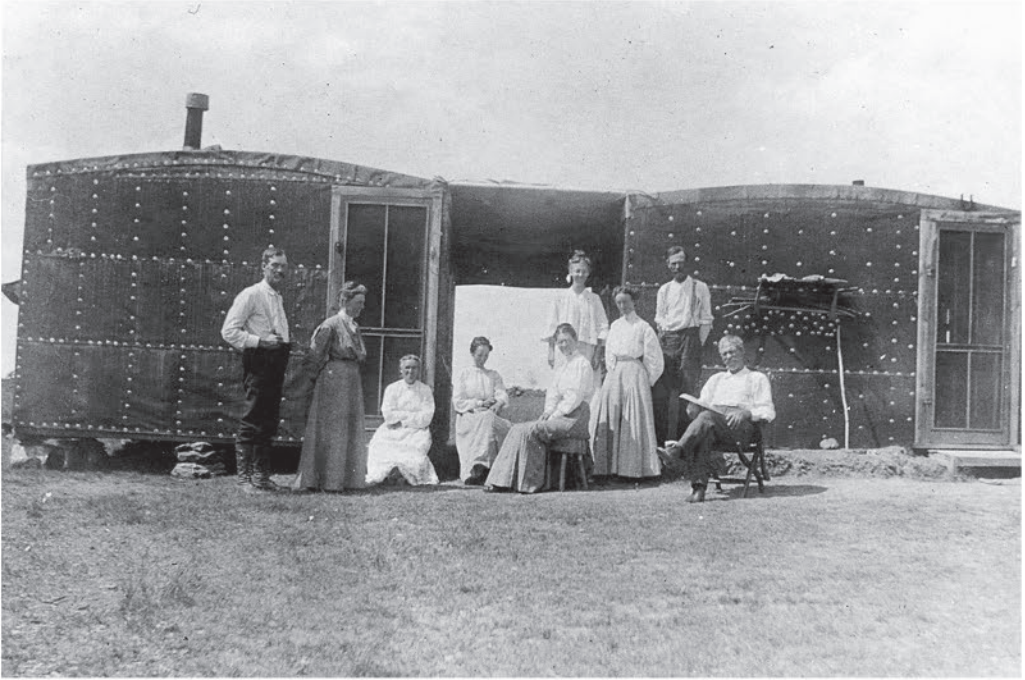
Members of the Cobb family, homesteaders in the vicinity of Mitchell, due south of Beadle County, posed for a photograph beside their sod house in 1907. Most settlers in the James River valley set up crude homes of this sort as they attempted to prove up on their claims.

some hardships, C. C. "always had great faith in the land," his daughter wrote.[31] The 250-mile journey to Huron took three weeks; passengers had to shovel snow from the tracks and repair the roadbed for the train to pass through.

Crowds stampeded the train upon its arrival in Huron, as they had done without supplies for months. C. C. quickly made arrangements at the livery stable for the fifty-mile ride to Mitchell the following morning so he could file a claim. First in line when the land office opened, he found what he wanted west of Huron; the next day, a land locator took him there. He built a sod shanty, acquired an ox, and prepared for the arrival of his wife, a schoolteacher, in the fall.[32]

31. Jones, "Foreword" to *Early Beadle County*, pp. 1–7.
32. Jones, "The Settlers Arrive," ibid., pp. 9–16.

Lewis Bloodgood and his father Abram were also on one of the early trains. They may have chosen Beadle County after relatives who had settled earlier in Canton on the Big Sioux River south of Sioux Falls re-layed stories about the fertile soil along the James River. In the summer of 1880, Lewis and his father drove a wagon pulled by two mules 450 miles from eastern Iowa. They filed claims on land southwest of Huron and then returned to Iowa. In the spring, Lewis and his family head-ed west; his wife and their children stayed with her parents in Canton while he got settled in Custer.[33]

Though one memoirist wrote that her grandfather, an immigrant from England, had walked to Huron from Minnesota, neither foot nor covered wagon carried most early settlers to Beadle County. Rather, they came by railroad via "emigrant cars," as they were called, which carried not only household goods but also livestock. During 1881, the trains arrived all summer long, unloading hundreds of people daily in the town. The newcomers were "put up" in one of the many "hotels" where families were separated from each other by only a blanket; space was so tight that children had to play on the beds. New arrivals would be taken out to their claims just in time for another new batch of set-tlers to arrive.[34] In the spring of 1883, 250 cars of people and goods were unloaded in Huron in a single month. In one week, one thousand pas-sengers were carried to the city.[35]

Some accounts of western settlement suggest that speculators, not in-dividual settlers, acquired most of the vast acreage wrested from Indig-enous people after the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862. While that may have been the case elsewhere, it does not seem to be true of Beadle and other nearby counties.[36] The accounts by Mildred McEwen Jones, Frank Bloodgood, and others suggest that these Dakota homesteaders actually received their land as the original legislation intended—they made a claim on a quarter section, built a structure in which they could

33. Bucklin, ed., "'Pioneer Days of South Dakota,'" pp. 114, 117.

34. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 9–20.

35. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 165.

36. Schell argues that much of the land in the Dakotas passed into private hands not through homesteading but through purchase, and that speculators had acquired a great deal of it and then sold it to settlers. But other evidence he presents suggests that home-steaders actually did acquire much of the land in Beadle County. See Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 170–74.

live, and began farming. The territory's first land offices were in Vermillion and other southeastern cities, but by 1880 there were offices in Watertown and Mitchell. In the fall of 1882, a land office opened in Huron. According to Schell's history of the state, on 9 October of that year, its opening day, the Huron land office experienced the "greatest activity" of any in the territory, receiving 690 claims made, contests on 163 other claims, and about 1,200 applications for final proof.[37]

The memoirs of Jones and Bloodgood reveal another distinction of Beadle County's early residents, one that also had an impact on the importance they attached to education: their ethnic homogeneity. Their surnames indicate either British or German origin and most arrived there from other states directly rather than from abroad. As of 1890, out of a total county population of 9,586, 17.2 percent or 1,741 residents of a total countywide population of 9,586 were foreign born. But several references indicate that many of these people had settled elsewhere first and then migrated to the Dakotas. Of that foreign-born population, over five hundred hailed from Germany, nearly three hundred from Canada, and another 180 from England. Together, Ireland, Sweden, and Norway contributed another four hundred residents.[38] Given their national origins and previous residence in states further east, neither foreign language instruction nor cultural assimilation would have been major issues for the county's schools.

The native-born population hailed from nearby states: mainly Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. Schell claimed that in the 1880s, "Wisconsin and Illinois seem to have supplied the greater number of Americans who settled in the James River Valley." Further, the majority had come from other agricultural communities and were familiar with frontier life.[39] Other accounts make the same claim.[40] A study of Spink County, just north of Beadle, found a similar proportion of native-born residents; emigrants there mostly arrived from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in that order.[41] Most respondents to the study

37. Ibid, p. 170.

38. Census Bulletin, No. 208, 30 Sept. 1892, "Population by Color, Sex, ad General Nativity, 1890," table 34, p. 51.

39. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 168.

40. See Ostergren, "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," pp. 51–60; and Turner, *Frontier in American History*, p. 146.

41. Miles, "Settlement of Spink County," pp. 17–18.

claimed they had been drawn to the Dakotas by a friend.[42]

The homogeneity of these early settlers, both in terms of ethnicity and region of origin, as well as the community solidarity they brought with them, suggest other reasons why schools were established so quickly in Beadle County. So, too, does William Beadle's experience in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. When planning South Dakota's education system, he relied on his knowledge of the states near the nation's northern border, long the most literate and well-educated. Beadle may have emphasized the importance of schools, but it was a classic case of preaching to the choir.[43] Studies of schooling in the United States frequently focus on the significance of New Englanders as "people of the book." From the Massachusetts Bay Colony's decree in the 1640s that each community assure that its children acquire basic literacy to Horace Mann's promotion of common schools for students of all social classes two centuries later, ideas and institutions established in New England have had substantial influence on the development of schooling in the United States.[44] Further, studies of regional differences in attitudes toward schooling have noted that those of New England moved across the nation's northern territories from Ohio to Oregon in the nineteenth century. In the South and Southwest, this devotion to schooling was less a part of the culture.[45] As predominantly second and

42. See also Ostergren, "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," p. 61.

43. Beadle's 1884 "Retrospective" briefly recounts a history of U.S. education. See pp. 28–32.

44. A host of books augment these points both directly and indirectly, as do most textbooks on American education history. See Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); and Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983). Fuller, in *The Old Country School*, also makes this point. Further, he claimed that the one-room schools of the Midwest produced a more literate population than did schools in any other part of the country during the middle to end of the nineteenth century.

45. A book that carries this argument across the country is David Hackett Fischer's somewhat controversial *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Though some education historians assert that American schools have focused more on social control than on intellectual development for students of all social classes, Beadle, Fuller, and the early settlers of Beadle County would put more credence in the latter argument.

Settlers to Huron often arrived with enough money to open small businesses such as Gahman's Grocery, the interior of which can be seen in this 1912 image.

third generation Americans hailing originally from northern states, Beadle and settlers of the county named after him seemingly agreed that schools were essential to the society they wanted to establish.

The devotion to education that characterized Beadle County's early settlers reflected their largely middle-class backgrounds. As an 1898 textbook history of the state claimed, the three main groups of people attracted to the Dakotas were homesteading soldiers who had served in the Civil War, others who had been unfortunate in business and wanted to make a new start—the McEwen family's cheese factory in Minnesota, for example, had burned down—and young men impatient with the "conservatism of well-settled lines of business elsewhere."[46] In addi-

46. George M. Smith and Clark M. Young, *History and Civil Government of South Dakota* (Chicago: Werner Schoolbook Co., 1898), p. 63.

tion, many young men who found that the farms they had grown up on could not support them and their siblings moved on to where more land was available.[47]

That these new Dakotans had to have money to purchase their train tickets and supplies once they arrived also suggests they were not impoverished. They needed a certain amount of ready currency once they disembarked in Huron. Jones gave the costs of various necessary expenses: in 1880, it took $14 to file a claim with the government land office; an overcoat purchased at a local store cost $2.25; it took $40 to buy a cow, a team of horses along with a plow and wagon could be had for $300 to $400. Wages were $1 a day, and one might be paid $4 to plow an acre. It did not take long for many of these newcomers to get established. By 1882, Jones wrote, the town was already home to seventy businesses. A few years later, it had a thriving slaughterhouse, a brickyard, a cigar factory, and a flour mill.[48] Townspeople held a variety of occupations: storekeepers, lawyers, and railroad employees predominated. Others marketed produce, sold equipment, ran hotels and restaurants, and held jobs with various government agencies.

If Beadle County was an offspring of the railroads, the local newspapers were its midwives. The first papers were established around the same time that the first trains arrived and the first school opened. In addition to notices of claims, final proofs, local advertisements, and news, the newspapers carried the same national news and advertisements that were printed in Minneapolis and elsewhere. As Mildred McEwen Jones described them:

> Newspapers meant much to the early settlers. Through them the pioneers felt a part of the new land, an important factor in the movement for statehood, for good government, and for anything that would help to better conditions. Papers kept the settlers in touch with the world they had left behind for the new venture. They set the pattern for politics, reporting speeches, votes, party conflicts, new ideas, and the challenge of life in a new country–barren, yet full of possibilities; dry, yet with hopes of irrigation.[49]

47. Ostergren, "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," p. 58.

48. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, pp. 35–40.

49. Ibid., p. 61.
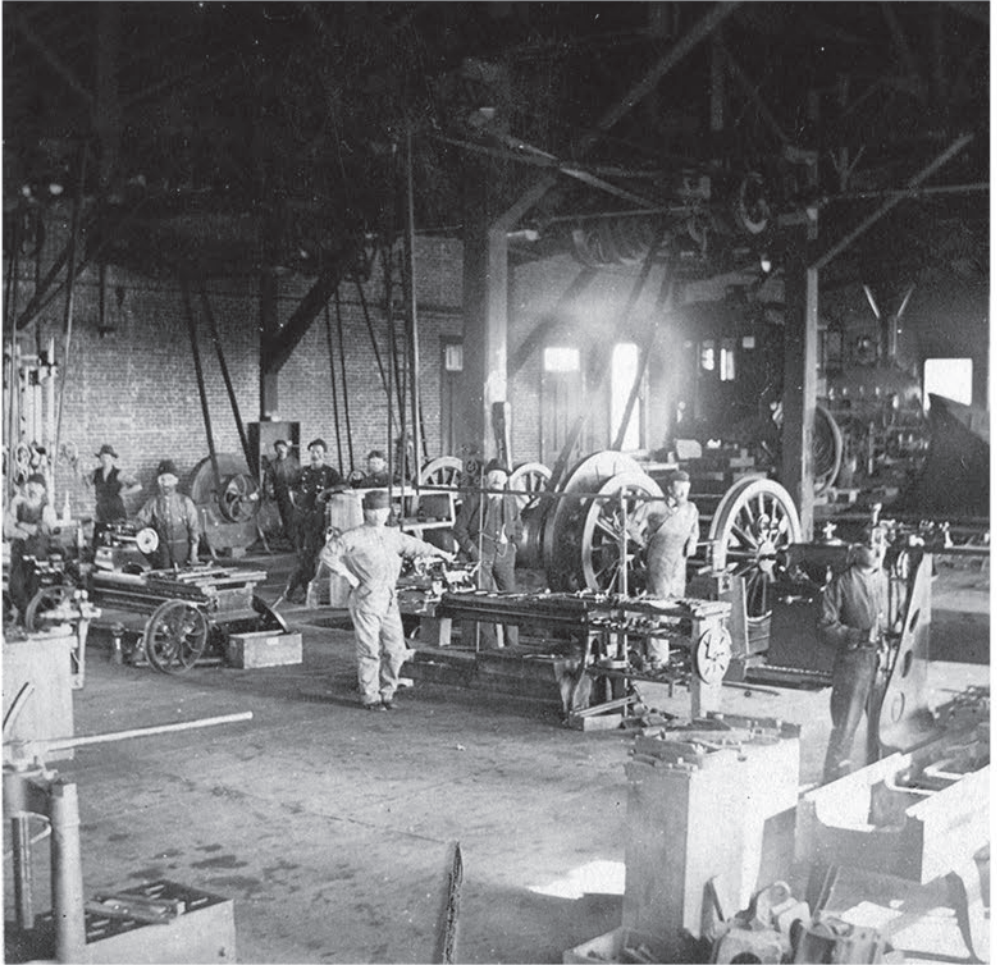
Many newcomers to the Huron area found jobs working for the Chicago and North Western Railroad, including these workers in the company shop seen in this William E. Snell photograph.

Between 1880 and 1885, Huron had at least four newspapers. They brought good tidings, soft-pedalled disasters, indulged in boosterism, and took an active role in promoting schools and other cultural institutions. On occasion, they chided the citizenry for paying insufficient attention to schools. In 1881, one of the newspapers–after commenting on how crowded the original school building had become—printed an editorial that argued:

This is not a matter it will do to put over too long. There is always a class of immigration that seems willing to drop in where there are no schools. There is another class of immigration that won't. Which are we bidding for? Before too many other irons are in the fire this matter should have earnest, practical attention. There must be some way of having a suitable school house, without breaking up anyone in business. Will some man, more familiar with the situation, point it out? The town will be broken up in business if something is not done.[50]

Soon, the town committed funds for a new building.

When Huron's first school opened in the spring of 1880, it served barely more than a dozen students. By the spring of 1881, when trains started running again after the hard winter, the school had sixty students, though the teacher claimed the building had room only for fifty-four. By the fall term, the town had a new school building. The school had two teachers: Watson Reed taught the advanced grade, which contained forty-six students, and Delia Rogers the primary grade, which had fifty-four students. Average daily attendance ran between thirty-five and forty students. Another new building opened in the fall of 1882, but it also quickly become too crowded. By that year, Huron's schools served 410 pupils out of a total population that neared the three thousand mark sometime in 1884.[51]

As Mildred McEwen Jones described the curriculum, the schools had "no course of study and most textbooks were those brought from other states." Students learned what their parents had: reading and writing, U.S. history, physiology and hygiene, and the ill effects of alcohol and tobacco, which were taught "with the same thoroughness as arithmetic and geography."[52] Students also learned music. By 1882, there was a piano in town, and by 1884 a "social orchestra" that performed at teachers' meetings and other events had formed. School reports in the newspaper published during the 1885–1886 school year concentrate on "rhetoricals" and "entertainments" given by the students. One such event in December drew between seven hundred and eight hundred of the

50. The articles in the FWP compilation were gathered by date; names of individual newspapers were not given. Thus, details about the exact date on which an article ran, or the paper that published it, is not available.

51. Botsford, "History of Huron's Schools."

52. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 59.

town's "best" people. A rhetorical, given by older students in February, included seven declamations, a recitation, nine essays, three duets, and one selection from Shakespeare. The year-end report on the school commented that "the people are glad and the taxpayers gratified."[53]

Huron High School, which opened in 1884 and graduated its first class of twelve seniors in 1887, was the only high school in the county for twenty years or more. Jones wrote that its graduating class averaged a dozen or so until 1908. The superintendent's annual report for 1886 referred to the lack of high schools as the "missing link" in the territory's education system—already, more than a half-dozen colleges had been established.

The Huron schools opened sometime in September and the first term ran until Christmas. The second term began in January and ended at the beginning of June. This eight- to nine-month school year seems to have been standard for Huron schools right from the beginning. Terms for the county's rural schools varied. In 1885, the territory mandated that all public schools hold sessions of no less than six months each school year, though some leeway was given for newly organized districts. Superintendent's reports claim that the number of school days averaged between 95 and 101 from 1883 to 1886. By 1889, Jones wrote, the territory mandated twelve weeks of schooling each year, six of which were to be consecutive; this was compulsory for all children between the ages of ten and fourteen.[54] The superintendent's reports claim that in 1883 Beadle County had 725 residents of school age, which at the time meant ages five to twenty-one; by 1886, this had increased to 2,702. The number of students enrolled grew from 866 in 1884 to 2,300 in 1886, and somewhere between 60 and 75 percent of those enrolled in the schools attended.[55]

Various sources suggest that teachers were recruited locally. Some parents encouraged friends and relatives from Iowa and elsewhere to come and teach in county schools. Jones wrote that of the town's early families, the McCarthys and the Issenhuths furnished the most

53. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1885.

54. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 59.

55. Statistics for Brown and Spink, two other James River counties, were equally astounding and perhaps even more so, as they had higher numbers of residents of school age according to the superintendents' annual reports.

This undated postcard shows a teacher guiding students in one of the early schoolhouses in the Dakotas.

teachers—seven and six respectively. The superintendent's reports indicate that recruitment was not haphazard, though it was a tremendous challenge: the number of teachers needed in county schools grew from fifteen in 1883 to 155 in 1886. Two-thirds of those hired were women. All had to be certified by the county superintendent. Pay averaged thirty dollars per month (which included board), with male teachers being paid around five dollars more than female teachers.

The figures given in Jones's book are less precise, but they do not conflict with those of the superintendent's reports. She wrote that by the 1883–1884 school year, Beadle County had a total of forty-six schoolhouses that had been constructed at an average cost of $725, employed fifty-five teachers, and served 1,500 pupils, two-thirds of whom attended school in Huron. The year 1885 was the high point of school building in the county: by that spring, it had eighty-six schoolhouses, thirty-four of which had been constructed during the previous year according to

the superintendent's reports. By 1889, the total number of schoolhouses in the county had grown to 121, according to Jones.[56] Each of the county's thirty-five townships had three or four schools apiece, meaning a school could be found within walking distance of every potential pupil in the county.

A newspaper report on the Custer school dated 18 February 1887 and written by its teacher Charles Issenhuth reported that sixteen students were enrolled. Attendance over the previous three weeks had ranged from three to twenty and averaged fifteen pupils. During the same period, there were only four instances of tardiness. Frank Bloodworth and his siblings may have accounted for them all, as none were listed among the three McCoys, four Stephensons, and two others whom Issenhuth reported as neither absent nor tardy.

General Beadle, in his report for 1884, wrote about the importance of teachers' institutes—as training sessions for educators were known at the time—and the county superintendents who conducted them. The latter were elected by the people and served two-year terms. Though it was preferable that they be experienced teachers, competent businessman would also do, he wrote. County superintendents "should be devoted to the work . . . and a sincere and earnest friend of public education." Of utmost importance was that they be free of "considerations of political favor" and "personal interest."[57]

One of the chief reasons for the institutes was to provide an opportunity for the superintendent to examine potential teachers for the county. The territorial government provided the meager funding for the institutes. While the sessions, Beadle wrote, should be on the "branches" and "methods," they should avoid "purely theoretical discussion" and be "immediately useful" to the schools.[58] One of the newspapers reported on an institute held in January 1886. More than fifty teachers, a third of the county's teaching force at the time, attended the three-day meeting and received lessons in arithmetic, language, geography, and pedagogy.

56. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, pp. 57–60, provided a wealth of information on the rural schoolhouses, including the cost of their construction, which varied from $400 to $700. Many were built with donated materials and volunteer labor.

57. Beadle, *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884, pp. 37–43.

58. Ibid, p. 44.

In the spring of 1886, James S. Bishop was superintendent of Beadle County. In his contribution to the annual report in June of that year, he noted that schools were "gaining on the debts" accumulated in earlier years and that he anticipated better schools in following years "because our best teachers are becoming known and the poor ones are not encouraged to remain in the business." He planned to examine potential teachers in August and to hold an institute later in the fall when "the teacher comes fresh from the schoolroom with all the vexing questions . . . and helpful suggestions were ready for dissemination."[59]

In his memoir, Frank Bloodgood described how the rural schools functioned as the social center for its community. The McCoy school, as the one he attended became known, not only educated the township's students but welcomed a great variety of other activities, from Sunday schools to mock trials and Thanksgiving dinners. The "literaries" held there, he wrote, were crowded because "nearly everyone took part." There were "heated debates" on topics such as women's rights and whether Washington or Franklin did the most for his country. One representative debate topic was: "Resolved that the Indian received more injustices than the Negro."[60]

Another memoirist wrote of her grandfather's experience attending a rural school near Yale, northeast of Huron, that had been established in 1883. She recalled him discussing "speaking his piece," for which he won a framed picture. He also recalled spending a night at the school during the blizzard of 1888; he and his siblings kept the fire stoked with coal so that they would be comfortable. One of the children who had left the schoolhouse to go home did not survive the night.[61]

These "little white schoolhouses," wrote another memoirist, hosted not only debates and lyceums, but religious services, elections, and spelling bees. She also wrote about the rural schoolteachers, claiming that they were unqualified and that locals usually filled the positions. Overall, however, the instructors were a "faithful group" who "made a real effort to impart knowledge to their pupils."[62]

59. Foster, "*Seventeenth Annual Report*, 1886, pp. 41. A man of the same name had earlier been superintendent of instruction for the territory. In 1884, Beadle had appointed him to a committee to revise the Dakota school laws.

60. Bucklin, ed., "'Pioneer Days of South Dakota,'" pp. 132–33.

61. Betsey DeLoache, ed., *Country Schools: Past and Present* (Pierre: Red Bird Studio), p. 350.

62. Ruth Cook Frajola, "They Went West," *South Dakota History* 6 (Fall 1976): 291. Frajola

In 1884, Huron was host city for the organizational meeting of the South Dakota Teachers Association. General Beadle, in his last year as superintendent of public instruction, gave the major speech for the session. A newspaper report claimed that his "irrepressible and contagious educational spirit" was evident. He made a strong appeal for the township rather than the district method of organizing school systems—then a contentious issue—on the grounds that the former required fewer officers and less money spent on organization.[63] The state constitution eventually allowed both to exist simultaneously.

That first meeting of the teachers' association went on for two days. Of the forty-one original members, only fifteen were women, which is of interest as women outnumbered men among teachers: for the terri-

grew up in Jerauld County, just south of Beadle, but her description would fit township schools in both counties.

63. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1884. Beadle wrote of the territory's township plan that its adoption had been used to "advertise us favorably to the world," in the *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884, pp. 66–69.

Students and their teacher stand outside of one of the many "little white schoolhouses" that dotted the Dakota prairies by the end of the nineteenth century.

tory as a whole, of 2,911 teachers, 863 were male and 2,048 female; for Beadle County, there were thirty-three female teachers to twenty-two males.[64] The program included an overture by Huron's Social Orchestra, other musical selections, committee reports, and sessions on grammar and penmanship. The gathering endorsed the township system of organization and established the *Western Educator* as its official organ. The group met in Huron again the next year, also in July. That year 125 teachers attended; a newspaper reported that this was "less than wanted." They represented eighteen counties, about half of which were in the southern part of the territory.[65]

That "South Dakota" appeared in the name of teachers' association when it was only a geographical rather than a political entity indicates something else about Huron's role as a leader. Spearheaded in part by General Beadle, an effort was already underway to divide the Dakota Territory into two states. Moving from territorial to state status was determined by Congress, however, not by Dakotans. The territory's first effort at admission to the union was in 1884, but the House of Representatives, which at the time had a Democratic majority, had turned it down, fearing four more Republican senators. Though the population both above and below the forty-sixth parallel—the later division between the two states—had exceeded the population requirement of sixty thousand, five more years would elapse before admission.

In 1888, a Huron newspaper opined that the Southern states from which the Democratic opposition came spent nowhere near as much on education as did the Dakotas: not a one of them possessed "as many school houses or as many teachers . . . or is in any respect as fitted for statehood as Dakota," it argued."[66] Reports from the superintendent's office support that claim: in numbers of teachers, expenditures, and

64. *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 1884, table III, "Summary of Pupils, Teachers, and Cost," p. 9.

65. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1885. Beadle, in his arguments for statehood, noted the difficulty one superintendent had in supervising all schools in the full territory. Statistics gathered by his office indicated that the southern counties had made more progress in developing school systems than had those in the northern half.

66. "Southern States against Dakota Statehood," *Huron Daily Plainsman*, 17 May 1888. In his *Sixteenth Annual Report*, Beadle's successor as superintendent A. Sheridan Jones offered numerous statistics to support his claim that Dakota was far more advanced in developing its school system than many other states. See *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 1885, pp. 7–13.

numbers of schools, the Dakotas were far ahead of many other states. The Dakotas had more schoolhouses when compared to size of population (151) than all but three other states; its closest competitors were Minnesota (167), Kansas, and Nebraska (156 each).[67] In the spring of 1889, after the election of Republican Benjamin Harrison as U.S. president, the process toward statehood was finally underway. It officially took place on 2 November 1889.[68] Though Huron was briefly in the running for state capital, that honor went to Pierre.

Beadle County's new settlers had indeed accomplished a great deal in the nine years since the torrent of trains began arriving, and these accomplishments went beyond the establishment of an extensive school system. In 1881, efforts were already underway to establish a Free Reading Room in Huron; nearly $350 had already been pledged toward the effort. In January 1882 some "thoughtful citizens" were "moving to form a literary society." The group later changed its name to the Alpha Club, and in 1886, some members put on a masked ball that raised $160 for the library.[69]

In addition to schools and libraries, several churches were established during Beadle County's first decade; seven congregations were organized in Huron and thirty-two in the county. Newspaper reports concentrated on the "munificence" of the edifices and ignored doctrinal differences, though the dominant denominations included Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, all noted for their encouragement of schooling.[70] The Methodists began as and continued to be the most popular denomination in both the town and the county. Considering the county's prominent German-origin population, as the 1890

67. Superintendent Jones's report noted an even greater disparity when separating the southern from the northern part of the territory: the ratio was 132 for the former and 202 for the latter. See *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 1885, pp. 8–10.

68. Though neither Coursey nor Beadle explained why he was named after President William Henry Harrison, Beadle and Benjamin Harrison knew each other as young attorneys in Indiana. See Coursey, *Complete Biographical Sketch of William Henry Harrison Beadle*, p. 39. Coursey's parents were also homesteaders in Beadle County, and he had begun his career as a teacher in county schools.

69. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1882 and 1886.

70. Information on Beadle County's churches compiled from Donald Dean Parker, *Early Churches and Towns of South Dakota* (Brookings: South Dakota State University Press, 1964); FWP, "Churches and Religion"; and Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 544–96.

census revealed, it is no surprise that at least three different Lutheran groups were organized during that first decade.

A branch of the American Sunday School Union, a national organization founded in Philadelphia in the early nineteenth century, was established in Huron sometime during the first year or two of settlement.[71] This nondenominational group often met in rural schoolhouses. The group helped residents maintain connections with towns from which the emigrants had come. One in Theresa, New York, donated one hundred books to Huron's first reading room, likely because some of its residents had settled the county's Theresa Township.[72] Jones also tells of a spelling match among the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians that charged fifteen cents admission and cleared thirty-two dollars.[73]

Nationally prominent groups such as the Farmers Alliance and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) attracted members in Beadle County, but neither populism nor feminism, a cause the WCTU advocated, appear to have been prominent concerns. Temperance was, however, as the hazards of alcohol were an aspect of the curriculum. Since 1878, women had been able to vote in school board elections, but efforts to extend the franchise met with limited support. In May 1890, Susan B. Anthony visited Huron on one of her several trips to the Dakotas; her efforts for suffrage had garnered support from the Farmers Alliance, but female enfranchisement narrowly missed approval by the state legislature.[74]

By 1886, Beadle was the second wealthiest county in what became South Dakota. Though Jones cited no source, some evidence of this is provided by an illustration of Huron's Utah Street School. A substantial two-story edifice of brick with an imposing façade, several arched windows, and a bell tower capped by a weathervane, it appears to have had

71. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 57. Union Sunday Schools were a popular late nineteenth century institution, designed to promote religious observation on Sunday afternoons in rural communities. See Jack Seymour et al., *The Church in the Education of the Public* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984).

72. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1881.

73. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 83.

74. Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, vol. I, pp. 597–98. See also Lori Lahlum and Molly Rozum, eds., *Equality at the Ballot Box: Votes for Women on the Northern Great Plains* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2019), especially Ruth Page Jones, "'The Women Voted': School Suffrage in Dakota Territory and South Dakota," pp. 191–217.

at least eight classrooms, perhaps more. Huron schools had over five hundred students at the time. The building was, Jones noted, constructed at a cost of $10,000.[75] A newspaper report published in July 1886 stated that a J. C. Bloodgood was employed to construct a new school on Utah Street for $10,000; he was to have the work completed by the first of December or face a penalty of $50 a day.[76] As Frank Bloodgood had uncles named both John and Joe, the contract might have gone to one of them.

By the end of the decade, Huron's population was 3,056. Though it was the fifth largest city in the state, it had lost some of its earlier prominence. Jones wrote that in 1889 there were 809 children in Huron between the ages of seven and twenty and that the Huron schools had 680 pupils: 388 in the primary school, 220 in the grammar school, and 72 in the high school, an average of 52 pupils per class.[77] Enrollment in district schools ranged from a dozen or so to twenty students.

An investment such as the Utah Street school might not have been possible after 1886, as the drought that ended the Great Dakota Boom began that year. Hard times came with the drought, a contrast with the easy prosperity experienced earlier in the decade. Farms and homes were deserted, stores went out of business, and many people left. Jones wrote little about them, but it might be fair to assume that those who arrived without the family or hometown supports many early settlers had benefitted from had a more difficult time hanging on in hard times.[78] Another blizzard in January 1888 left some needed moisture in the soil, but periodic droughts continued; a severe national depression during the mid-1890s compounded these challenges. Yet before the 1880s had ended, historical societies were organized in the county and "old settlers associations" began holding annual picnics.

By 1890, Beadle County's population had gone down to 9,586, over seven hundred fewer than its mid-decade high. By 1900, it would fall to just over eight thousand. But the number of teachers in the public

75. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, pp. 40, 60.

76. FWP, "Education and the Schools," 1886.

77. Jones, *Early Beadle County*, p. 60.

78. Ostergren, in "European Settlement and Ethnicity Patterns on the Agricultural Frontiers of South Dakota," claimed that those settlers who had been Americans for several generations tended to be those who moved on (p.58).

Huronites attend to business on Main Street after a heavy snowfall, perhaps the famed blizzard of 1888.

schools did not drop after the boom ended: they numbered 155 in 1886 and 158 in 1890. In the county's thirty-five townships, there were still around 120 schools, despite the drop in population. They may have been ill-equipped, drafty, and without even a privy at first, but they had been established and built as soon as there were a dozen children in need of one. Their teachers may have had limited preparation for their work and changed as often as the seasons, but they were there to impart such knowledge as the parents of their pupils felt was essential.

While one of Beadle's biographers asserted that he deserved recognition similar to that accorded Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and Calvin Piece—three widely noted mid-nineteenth century proponents of public schooling—he remains unheralded.[79] He deserves considerable credit as "savior of the school lands" in a half dozen states. Further, he deserves to be heralded as head of a system that, while under pressure from unprecedented growth, distributed funds that supported 3,700 schools in 1886 while gathering statistics that remain valuable 150 years later. A man of exceptional intelligence and strong character—another

79. Miller, "Beadle–The Man," in Dykstra, *Permanent School Fund in South Dakota*, p. 21.

Beadle's reputation as "savior of the school lands" garnered him considerable renown within South Dakota. In this 1911 photograph credited to Miller Studio, he stands in the background as the sculptor Harry Daniel Webster crafts the likeness that now appears in the state capitol building in Pierre.

biographer claimed that he was "the most conspicuous citizen that South Dakota ha[d] as yet developed"—Beadle gave credit to others for what the territory and its schools were able to accomplish.[80]

80. Coursey, *Complete Biographical Sketch of William Henry Harrison Beadle*, p. 1.

Beadle's 1884 "Retrospective" outlined the qualities he attributed to county superintendents: "character, intelligence, and faithfulness." But understanding how and why the Dakotas managed to attract talented educators and administrators is a more challenging undertaking. One explanation is that the Dakota system had two decades to develop and stabilize before the Great Dakota Boom began; its earlier superintendents were New Englanders with a similar dedication to the ideals of the common school.

To emphasize these educators' socioeconomic and regional origins reeks of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. Indeed, other factors made Beadle County in the 1880s a place where the American common school ideal could be planted and then quickly thrive. Extrapolating from Paul Theobald's discussion of the religious and regional conflicts that hampered the establishment of common schools in the older states of the region that came to be known as the Midwest, it is possible to come to a less determinist conclusion: Beadle County's early settlers had distilled the lessons of the communities from which they came and brought them, along with their literary societies, whole to the Dakotas. The county's settlers busied themselves establishing farms and businesses while the soil was fertile, the moisture abundant, and prosperity appeared boundless. Squabbles could wait until resources were strained and competition bred suspicion and corruption.

The schools in the county named after William Beadle were little more distinctive than others in the James River valley. Beadle County attracted settlers more quickly than did Spink County to its north, but its population advantage began to diminish as soon as railroads arrived in the other counties. Beadle County did have Huron, which became one of the state's major cities, but before the decade's end Aberdeen in Brown County began to outpace it. Beadle County's distinctiveness was, perhaps, a product of being in the right place at the right time. But it ought to be more than a historical footnote. As Beadle's successor noted in 1885, "education has made a most triumphal march" in the territory.[81] Indeed, the county's rapid educational development was a triumph that ought not go unheralded.

81. *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 1886, p. 13.