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# CURATOR'S CORNER

## The Deadwood Opium Pipe

The South Dakota State Historical Society (SDSHS) prides itself on its collections. From the State Archives to the Historic Preservation Commission, the Society's holdings include many rare items and manuscripts that span centuries and speak to South Dakota experiences. The State Museum's collection of over 33,000 artifacts is too extensive for every artifact to be always displayed to the public. To spotlight some of those items, *South Dakota History* is introducing a new feature, "Curator's Corner." For this first "Curator's Corner," the SDSHS Museum staff are digging into the history surrounding an opium pipe that was recovered in a 1901 raid in Deadwood's Chinatown.

The State Museum's collection includes many drug-related artifacts, such as drug kits from the State Penitentiary, items related to medical drug use, and even artifacts gathered from the "Pot Plane" that landed in Akaska, South Dakota, in the 1980s. Many of these artifacts belong to larger collections. Apart from being fascinating in and of themselves, these drug-related artifacts reflect the emphasis and effect that drugs have on society as a whole and are important to the human story of South Dakota.

Opium is a botanical drug that is cultivated from the seeds of the poppy plant, which is often grown in warm, dry climates.[1] It is the basis for numerous drugs used for their pain-relieving qualities; opiates are equally known for their addictive and potentially deadly properties, which are often overlooked in the hopes of pain relief. Though opium

1. "Exhibition – Opium," U.S. National Library of Medicine, accessed 15 Feb. 2024, https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/pickyourpoison/exhibition-opium.html; "Opium Poppy," DEA Museum, accessed 15 Feb. 2024, https://museum.dea.gov/exhibits/online-exhibits/cannabis-coca-and-poppy-natures-addictive-plants/opium-poppy.

Opium and its derivatives are cultivated from the seeds of the poppy plant, which is usually grown in warm, dry climates, such as in Egypt, as seen in this 1900 photograph.

has been used by humans since ancient times, it was "prevalent in India before it was in any other major society."[2] The use of opium is implied in the *Vedas*, the Hindu religious texts dating from circa 1200–900 BCE.[3] India was one of the first countries with a steady trade route for opium.

In 1757, control of the opium trade in India passed to the British East India Company, allowing Great Britain to establish "controls over cultivation and production . . . to increase revenue," while also restricting the use of opium as a luxury that should be paid for in high quantities.[4] By 1858, the Crown had monopolized the cultivation of opium, which included sending it to China, Britain, and America—though this does not mean that it was not being sent to these countries earlier.

Indeed, in 1729 the Yongzheng Emperor prohibited the smoking of madak, a blend of opium and tobacco, as it was considered "neither traditional, ritualistic nor medicinal." Because the use of opium among the Chinese was mostly "personal or social," it was unregulated and caused many issues. Ironically, after the emperor's edict the use of opium only increased, resulting in more edicts being issued in 1796 and later, the forbidding of the import of opium as well as the export of silver that was being used for exchange. The British, of course, resisted these efforts to undercut their enormous opium market in China, resulting in the Opium Wars (the first lasted from 1839–1842, and was fought between the British and Chinese; the second lasted from 1856–1860, and was fought between the Chinese and an Anglo-French alliance). In both conflicts, the Europeans prevailed easily over the Chinese and coerced them into accepting and even expanding the opium trade, among other concessions.[5]

In the nineteenth century, the British also imported opium to the United States, at first to be used medicinally. The recreational use of opium soon followed. The proliferation of the drug's recreational use coincided with growing anti-Chinese sentiment, especially among

2. Richard Harvey Brown, "The Opium Trade and Opium Policies in India, China, Britain, and the United States: Historical Comparisons and Theoretical Interpretation," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 30, no. 3 (2002): 623–56.

3. Ibid., p. 625.

4. Ibid., p. 626.

5. Ibid., p. 632.

working-class whites in the American West, as tens of thousands of Chinese immigrated to the United States in search of work in the 1850s and 1860s.[6] Correlation does not equal causation; nevertheless, the assumed connection between the two phenomena contributed to racial tensions between white and Chinese people across the United States.

While it is not clear when opium first came to the continent, between 1840 and the 1890s the opium trade in North America grew from "twenty-four thousand pounds a year to half a million."[7] The half-million pounds of opium per year would be distributed through both above- and below-board routes and made its way to the Black Hills of Dakota Territory rather quickly. Opium, as mentioned, was used both medicinally and recreationally. As a medicine, it became readily accessible to everyone, not just those who were directly associated with the trafficking or selling of the drug. Indeed, "the use of opiates became much more widespread in the imbibing of unregulated patent medicines rather than opium smoking."[8] Opium was one of many potentially dangerous ingredients that ordinary people kept on hand to make their own medicines; it was also one of the main ingredients of many medicines used by doctors at the time.[9] Laudanum, for instance, was a tincture prepared by dissolving opium in ethanol and prescribed as a pain reliever and a cough suppressant. "Almost all social groups used medicines made with opium and alcohol; they were especially popular with middle-aged, white, middle-class women who took them for 'female troubles.'"[10]

Morphine, another derivative of opium, was almost equally overused and underregulated. In fact, morphine was used for pain relief during the Civil War and came to be overused in treating all sorts of maladies and injuries.[11] Of course, just because it was a medicine did not make opium safe. The effects of opium are dreamlike: a "eu-

6. Ibid., p. 638.

7. James Marten, "A Medical Entrepreneur Goes West: Father William Kroeger in South Dakota, 1893–1904," *South Dakota History* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1991): p. 346.

8. Brown, "The Opium Trade and Opium Policies," p. 639.

9. Paula M. Nelson, "'In the Midst of Life We Are Death': Medical Care and Mortality in Early Canton," *South Dakota History* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2003): p. 198.

10. Brown, "The Opium Trade and Opium Policies," p. 639.

11. Ibid., p. 645.

phoric rush, relaxation and relief of physical pain."[12] Much like in the current opioid crisis, patients would sometimes become addicted to opium-based medicines after being prescribed them by doctors for many illnesses, and it was—and still is—easy to overdose.

The other way to use opium was to smoke it. To do that, specific paraphernalia were needed, namely an opium pipe. Usually, the opium would be placed into a bowl attached to the pipe and held over an opium lamp or open flame, allowing the drug to vaporize in the bowl and be inhaled. Opium dens, where people smoked the drug, usually included quilts or pillows to rest on while enjoying the drug's effects. Indeed, many of the raids that occurred in the nineteenth century reflect that quilts or other textiles were found in the drug houses.

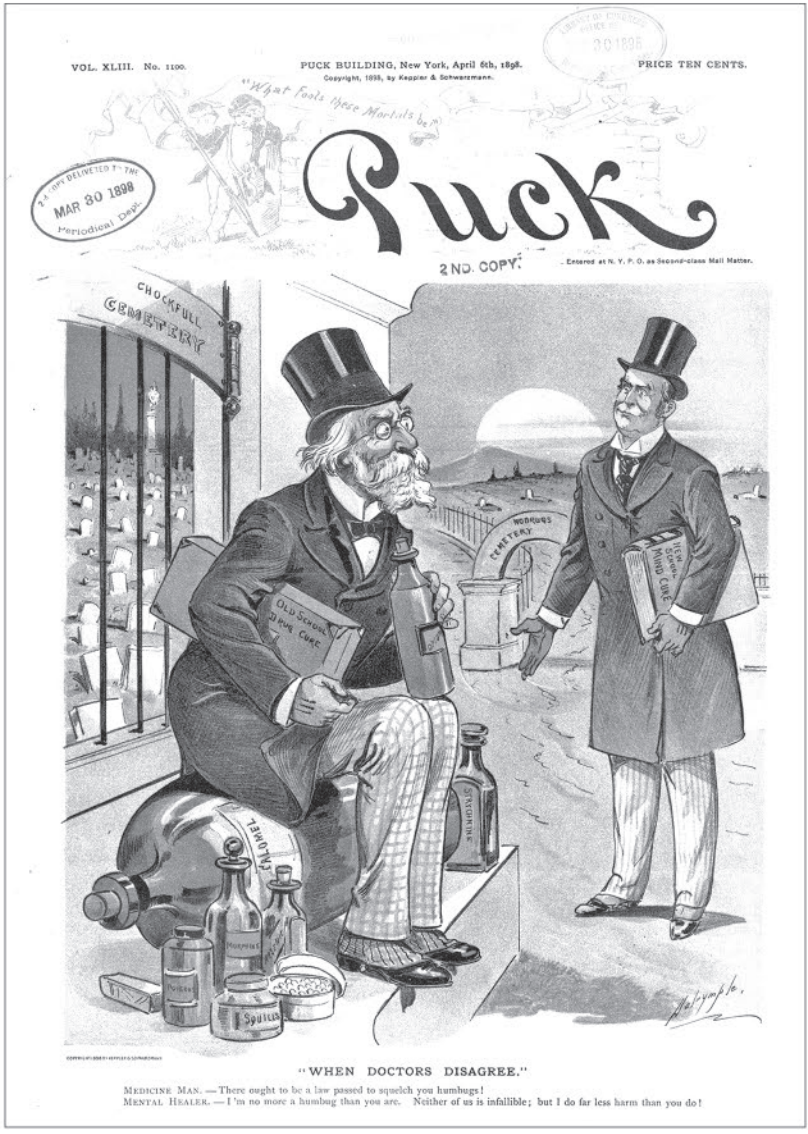
Unsurprisingly, addiction to opium and other drugs was highly stigmatized in the nineteenth century. A Civil War veteran who had become addicted to opium after being prescribed it to relieve the pain of his wounds, for instance, would have generally downplayed his addiction lest the government find out—he was expected to conform to certain standards of behavior in order to retain his pension. To admit addiction was to risk committal to a mental asylum, as it was believed that addiction could cause insanity.[13] Medical journals warned doctors about the dangers of morphine addiction, but "many doctors were slow to heed them, because of inadequate medical education and a shortage of other treatments."[14] It was only in the 1890s that doctors slowed the prescription of opioids and major state and federal laws were passed to help curb opioid addictions—though they never truly disappeared.

Opium smoking became popular in Deadwood soon after the town's founding in 1876. A gold rush boomtown, by 1880 Deadwood's

12. "Opium," Opium | Just Think Twice, accessed 15 Feb. 2024, https://www.justthinktwice.gov/drugs/opium.

13. Jennifer Micale, "Civil War on drugs: Doctoral candidate explores the nation's first opioid epidemic," BingUNews, 15 Nov. 2021, https://www.binghamton.edu/news/story/2405/civil-war-on-drugs-doctoral-candidate-explores-the-nations-first-opioid-epidemic.

14. Erick Trickey, "Inside the Story of America's 19th-Century Opiate Addiction," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 4 Jan. 2018, smithsonianmag.com/history/inside-story-americas-19th-century-opiate-addiction-180967673.




Louis Dalrymple's 1898 cartoon, "When doctors disagree," satirizes the growing divide between "old school" drug cures and "new school" mental cures. One, Dalrymple suggests, is far more dangerous.

population had swelled to nearly 5,000.[15] The population included the "largest Chinatown of any city east of San Francisco," as Deadwood's Chinatown "was a cultural, social, and economic nucleus for many Chinese living and working in the surrounding smaller mining camps and towns."[16] In fact, "Chinatown" was a misnomer; it was also home to African Americans and other ethnic groups, likely because it was more welcoming.[17]

Opium dens were among the many shops, restaurants, and other businesses that Chinese people established in Deadwood, and certainly they shared Chinese social practices with non-Chinese individuals, including opium smoking.[18] This does not, however, mean that the Chinese first brought opium to Deadwood, nor that they were responsible for Deadwood's opium-related issues. In fact, there are many stories of opium use that lack any Chinese involvement. In any case, "opium dens and tong houses [meeting halls that also provided rooming accommodations, laundries, and cooking facilities] were openly operated along Chinatown's Main Street." To mitigate opium use, the drug houses were licensed at the same rate as saloons: $300 per year in the 1870s. This licensing made opium smoking more difficult for some, but much easier for others. Those who were able to afford to license a building were given the freedom to use opium as they liked, and presumably could charge for the use of the opium dens.[19]

Opium contributed to racial tensions in Deadwood, but not in the way that might be expected. As one reporter explained, "neither judicial nor public opinion was very strong about such things. If a Chinamen [*sic*] wanted to smoke opium, who cared?" The issue arose when non-Chinese people used the drug. "So long as only Chinese frequented such establishments they were tolerated. When white residents began to be listed among joss house [Chinese temples or shrines] customers, racial relations became strained." By the mid-

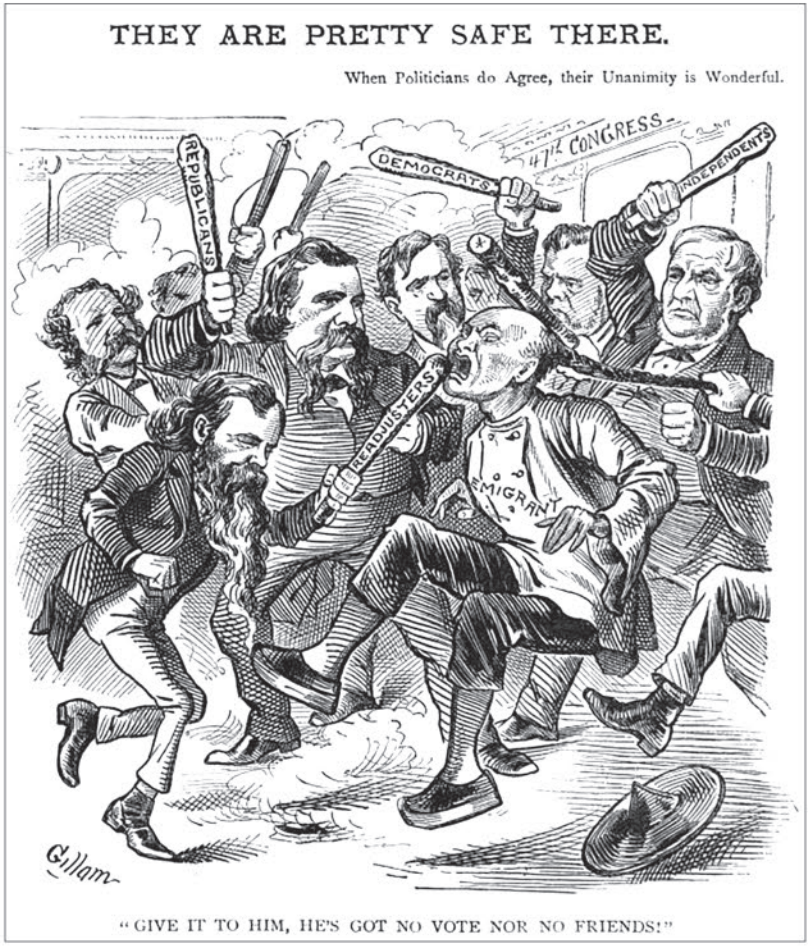
15. Rose Estep Fosha and Christopher Leatherman, "The Chinese Experience in Deadwood, South Dakota," *Historical Archaeology* 42, no. 3 (2008): 97–110.

16. Grant K. Anderson, "Deadwood's Chinatown," *South Dakota History* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1975): p. 266; Fosha and Leatherman, "The Chinese Experience in Deadwood," p. 97.

17. Fosha and Leatherman, "The Chinese Experience in Deadwood," p. 98.

18. Ibid., p. 99.

19. Anderson, "Deadwood's Chinatown," p. 284.




This 1882 cartoon by Bernhard Gilliam criticizes American politicians for passing the Chinese Exclusion Act, sarcastically remarking, "When Politicians do Agree, their Unanimity is Wonderful."

1880s, the opium trade seemed to threaten "the right way of life" in Deadwood, specifically in the opinion of middle-class white women who were afraid that "their men would become addicted."[20] The irony is palpable, considering this demographic's widespread use of medicinal opiates. Their prejudice against the Chinese probably stemmed less from fear for their husbands than from the prevailing anti-Chinese sentiment. The main worry was that the men would rank the use of opium over their jobs and their families, potentially losing their income in the haze of getting a high. The second, and more racist, theory is that the women whose husbands went to opium dens were worried about how their own standing in society would change if their husbands were spending time in Chinese-owned opium dens.

In any case, the women asked the federal government to help them push those who perpetrated the drug use out of the Black Hills, but by then the government had passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and much of Deadwood's Chinese population had already left.[21] By the 1890s, most of the Asian population had departed the Black Hills altogether. Those who remained continued to use the drug, however, and faced no backlash; the threat to the livelihoods of "upstanding citizens" of Deadwood was truly no threat at all. In fact, the Asian population that stayed "rose in status and gained the respect of white residents."[22]

During the crackdown on the opium dens, "[s]uch opinions [i.e., that only the Chinese should use opium] prompted concerned miners to blow up opium dens in Lead City and Deadwood."[23] As part of the wider crackdown, police raiding the dens seized paraphernalia, arrested those inside, and closed the dens, albeit sometimes only temporarily.

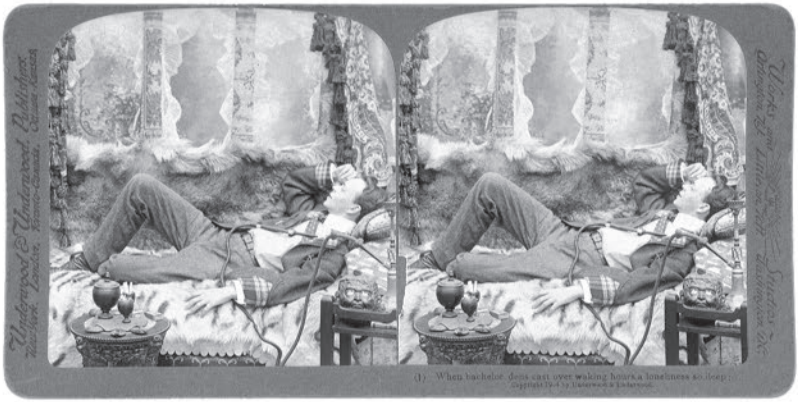
The opium pipe and bowl in the SDSHS Museum's collection was seized in one such raid, made on a "hop joint" in Deadwood on 11 March 1901. It was not the only item seized in the raid: "The police got a pipe, a lamp and a quantity of opium, and a quilt that was used to spread on the floor for the 'dreamers' and they have been confis-

20. Ibid., pp. 282–84.

21. Fosha and Leatherman, "The Chinese Experience in Deadwood," p. 97.

22. Anderson, "Deadwood's Chinatown," p. 284.

23. Ibid., p. 283.




Female residents of Deadwood cared little if Chinese patronized the town's opium dens, but feared the consequences of their husbands becoming addicted to the drug, like the young man in this (probably staged) 1904 stereocard by Underwood & Underwood.


Samuel C. Polley (left) donated the Deadwood opium pipe to the SDSHS collection. Here he is pictured in 1924 with fellow South Dakota Supreme Court justices John Gates (center) and Carl G. Sherwood (right).

cated." Three men were arrested and fined. One, a working miner, paid the ten-dollar fine and extra costs and went back to work, while the other two declined to pay and spent some time in jail. All three men, judging from the newspaper report of the raid, were likely of non-Asian descent.[24]

The police had been watching the three men for some time and suspected them of distributing opium. The officers involved in the raid allowed the men to approach the building and settle themselves inside before entering the premises. "When the room was finally reached there was nothing to be seen. There were no chairs or beds in the place, only the quilt, a lamp, and a pile of old newspapers on one part of the floor." All evidence was gathered, and the men were taken to see Judge Coleman, who imposed the fine.[25]

One member of the raid was Samuel C. Polley, a prosecuting attorney at the time. He went on to serve as the state's attorney for Lawrence County for one term, as South Dakota secretary of state from 1909 to 1913, and as justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court until his death on 7 May 1949.[26] It is not clear why Polley was involved in the raid, but there are some possible explanations: he may have been needed as a witness, in order to determine what charges should be brought against the suspects; the police may have needed the additional manpower; or he may have just wanted to be a part of something exciting. Polley most likely would have been the one to present the men to Justice Coleman and document what they were charged with. Whatever the reason for his involvement, Polley wound up with the opium pipe. He donated it, along with the pipe bowl, to the SDSHS sometime between 1901 and 1914.[27] The original documentation gives Polley a lot of credit: "Chinese opium pipe. Secured by Judge Samuel C. Polley. When prosecuting attorney at Deadwood in 1901 he raided a 'hop-joint.'"[28] Museum staff wonder how important he actually was

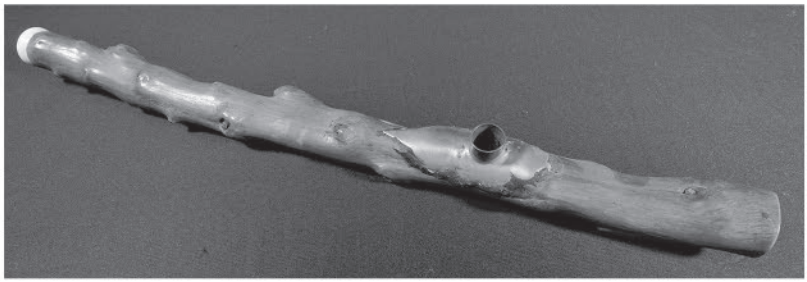
24. "Hop Joint Is Raided," *Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, 12 Mar. 1901.

25. "Hop Joint Is Raided."

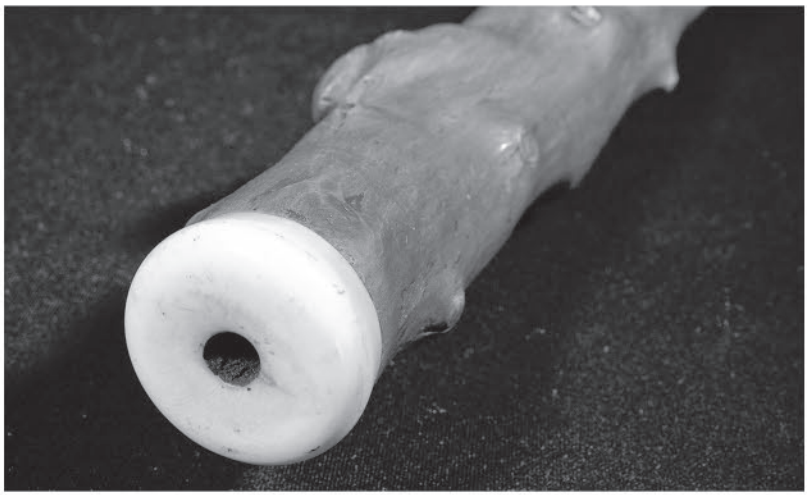
26. "Judge Polley Dies In Rapid City Saturday," *Lead Daily Call*, 8 May 1949; "Memorial Services By State Barristers Eulogizes The Late Samuel C. Polley," *Lead Daily Call*, 22 Mar. 1950.

27. The pipe's donation is documented in the 1914 Robinson Museum Catalogue.

28. 1914 Robinson Museum Catalogue.



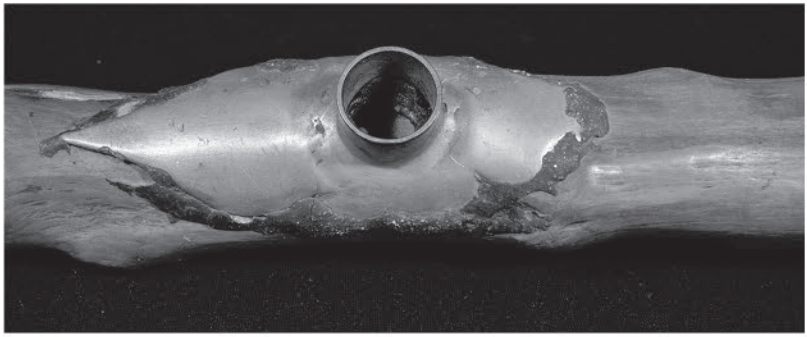
The Deadwood opium pipe, seen here, is probably made from cherry wood.



The ivory mouthpiece on the opium pipe supports the theory that it was brought to Deadwood by an immigrant.

to the raid, or if he exaggerated when he donated the artifact—he was, at the point he donated the artifact, a supreme court justice.

The pipe features an ivory mouthpiece and a metal stem where the bowl is attached. The pipe itself is made from wood—probably cherry—and has knots in it shaped much like the branch of a tree. The ivory mouthpiece is stained brown, likely from opium residue, and has quite a small opening for smoking purposes. Where the pipe originated is unknown, other than that it was picked up in the raid. It could have been made or bought in Deadwood or brought over by an immigrant. The ivory mouthpiece supports the theory that the pipe was brought into Deadwood by an immigrant, as ivory was much eas-



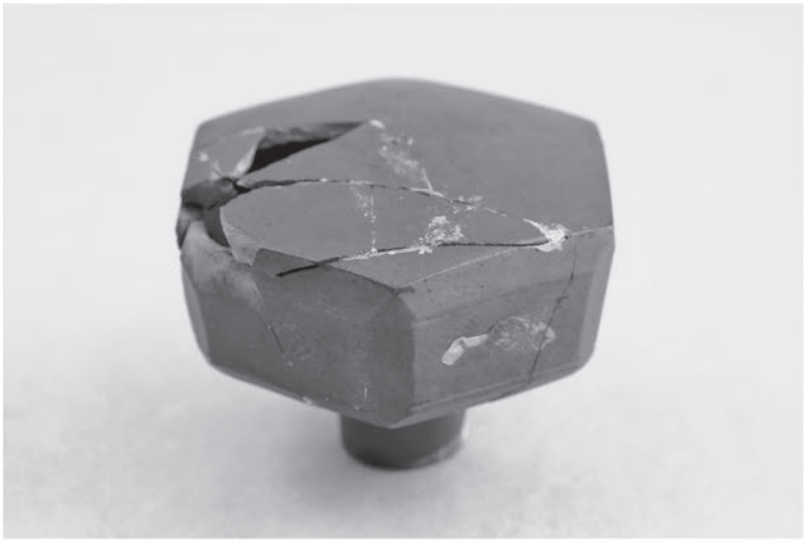
The mouth of the pipestem is the perfect size to fit the opium bowl, indicating that the two artifacts go together.

ier to obtain in places such as India and China than it would have been in the United States.

The metal stem base is shaped like a leaf, and the place where it attaches to the pipe has both opium residue and a tacky substance, much like a wood glue to hold it in place. The stem then connects to a pipe bowl, where the opium would be placed and heated up. The pipe bowl that goes along with this artifact is small and octagonal in shape, black in color, with the mouth of the bowl the perfect size to fit into the metal stem attached to the pipe. When in use, the dark material that the bowl is made of would have better and more accurately held and conducted heat.

Usually, opium pipes are displayed with the bowl attached to the stem, but this one has been unattached for some time. Museum records indicate that the pipe bowl was assumed to be an inkpot that had been brought over by an explorer from China. Early museum staff believed the residue in the bowl was ink, not opium. The bowl was therefore not associated with the pipe, and they were stored separately for many years. Detailed research done in 2024 led staff to believe that they were, in fact, not only related but came from the same 1901 raid. Due to the artifacts' fragility—the bowl had already been damaged once—museum curators decided not to attempt to reattach them.

There is some possibility that the pipe bowl and stem were separated during the raid and donated in that condition. The newspaper article mentions that the suspects tried to hide their crime: "As little noise as possible was made in gaining admission to the building, but



The dark color of this bowl would have helped to more efficiently heat and vaporize the opium for smoking.

the three men expected their approach, and the police men could hear a lively scramble as the paraphernalia was being placed away out of sight."[29] The bowl and pipe may have also been separated by the police in the aftermath, as discrete pieces of evidence.

The bowl, mouthpiece, and stem all have a thick, tar-like substance in and around their openings. Museum staff immediately assumed that this substance was opium residue based on the information that the pipe had been recovered in a raid on an opium den. Opium could be dangerous if it was ingested in any way, and staff took proper precautions in handling the artifact until it could be tested. In January 2024, local law enforcement determined that it was indeed an opiate. A sample of the residue inside the pipe was placed into a testing container, along with a vial holding a green testing chemical. When the vial was broken, the liquid immediately changed color from green to black, identifying the substance as morphine (or a substance closely related to it). With that positive test result, plus the knowledge of the artifacts' provenance, it is safely assumed that the tar-like substance is opium residue. The pipe and bowl are only handled with the ut-

29. "Hop Joint Is Raided."

most care: latex gloves are worn to prevent transference of opium residue to skin, and the box that the pipe is kept in is identified with information highlighting care of handling is needed.

In December 1914, Congress passed the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act "[t]o provide for the registration of, with collectors of internal revenue, and to impose a special tax on all persons who produce, import, manufacture, compound, deal in, dispense, sell, distribute, or give away opium or coca leaves, their salts, derivatives, or preparations, and for other purposes."[30] This was not the only type of drug that was regulated by the United States in the twentieth century; insisting that "the 'non-medical' use of opium and other traditional drugs (except alcohol and tobacco) was a moral and social evil," in the 1920s the United States "successfully sought to broaden the focus of international regulation from opium to heroin and other non-pharmaceutical 'narcotics' such as cannabis, coca leaves, and cocaine."[31] Today, all opiates, as well as the drugs mentioned above, are regulated, but law enforcement entities are continually fighting against drug use in the United States. The opioid epidemic includes both synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, and natural opioids like morphine and codeine.[32] Since the 1990s, medical prescriptions for opioids have increased, and from 1999 to 2021, 645,000 people have died of overdoses.[33]

These numbers are not always accurately categorized, either; many times it is difficult to identify what drug caused the death of an individual, and sometimes the drug can cause bodies to fail but not directly cause the death, as in an overdose. In any case, the opioid epidemic is a direct echo of the overuse of opium in the nineteenth century, in both medicines and as direct drug use. Opium itself is now less common; morphine, codeine, heroin, fentanyl, tramadol, and other synthetic opioids are now the threat.[34] Fentanyl is the largest threat right now; at present there is a huge influx of the drug into the United States, and it has taken thousands of lives.

30. https://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/history/e1910/harrisonact.htm.

31. Brown, "The Opium Trade and Opium Policies," p. 648.

32. "Opioid Data Analysis and Resources," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 8 Aug. 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/data/analysis-resources.html.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

South Dakota is not immune from issues with drugs. Ongoing political battles about the legalization of marijuana, and what goes along with that process, are a case in point. Indicative of other drug-related problems, the Sioux Falls Police Department seized over 970 grams of fentanyl in 2022, while the Rapid City Police Department reported 1,019 drug arrests in 2023.[35] In South Dakota, opioid-related deaths have increased from fifty-four cases in 2013 to ninety-six cases in 2022.[36] Although these numbers are not large, it must be reiterated that they may not be accurately reported. U.S. Route 83, a proven drug highway from Mexico to Canada, runs directly through South Dakota. South Dakota is also a neighbor of states that allow legalized use of marijuana, and this causes its own issues in the fight against drugs in South Dakota.

On a more positive note, today there is a massive archaeological and historical effort occurring in Deadwood to help uncover the history of the community—literally, in some cases. The South Dakota Archaeological Research Center and Deadwood History, Inc. strive to tell the history of Deadwood, with efforts in what was "Chinatown" during the 1800s. These efforts are reflected in Deadwood daily and are ongoing—there is much more to uncover about the history of Deadwood.

The pipe, bowl, and surrounding history of the 1901 raid on the "hop-joint" highlight the seedier history of the Black Hills. This opium pipe is not the only one residing in the collection of a South Dakota museum, nor is it the only item ever taken as evidence from an opium den raid. What this artifact, and this history, highlights is that Deadwood (and the Black Hills more generally) was more than a mining and gambling town. Racial issues, drug use, and harsh living in these towns is often glossed over in favor of the famous stories and famous people that were in the area. The duty of the South Dakota State Historical Society is not to look at history through rose-colored glasses, but to keep all stories alive.

35. "2022 Police Annual Report," Sioux Falls Police Department, https://www.siouxfalls.gov/files/assets/public/v/1/police/police/2022-police-annual-report.pdf, p. 25; "Workload Statistics," Rapid City Police Department, https://www.rcgov.org/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=30054-2023-workload-statistics&category_slug=police-department&Itemid=149.

36. "Key Data," Avoid Opioid SD, https://www.avoidopioidsd.com/key-data/.

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*On the cover*: On 13 September 1931, a fire swept through the Warren-Lamb lumber yard and destroyed $130,000 of lumber. Some suspected arson by disgruntled workers.