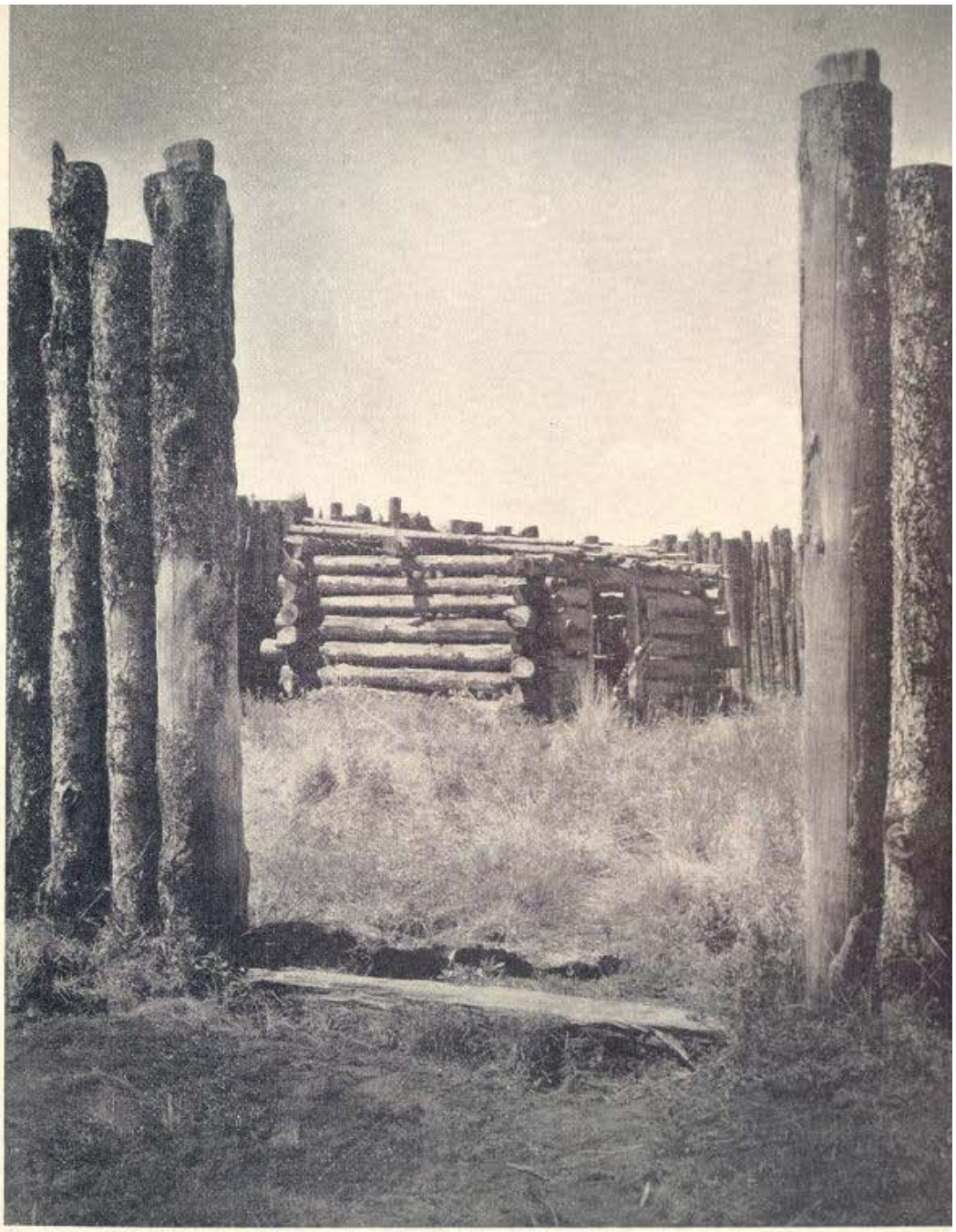
South Dakota History – Yankton Territorial Capital – Dakota becomes Twins

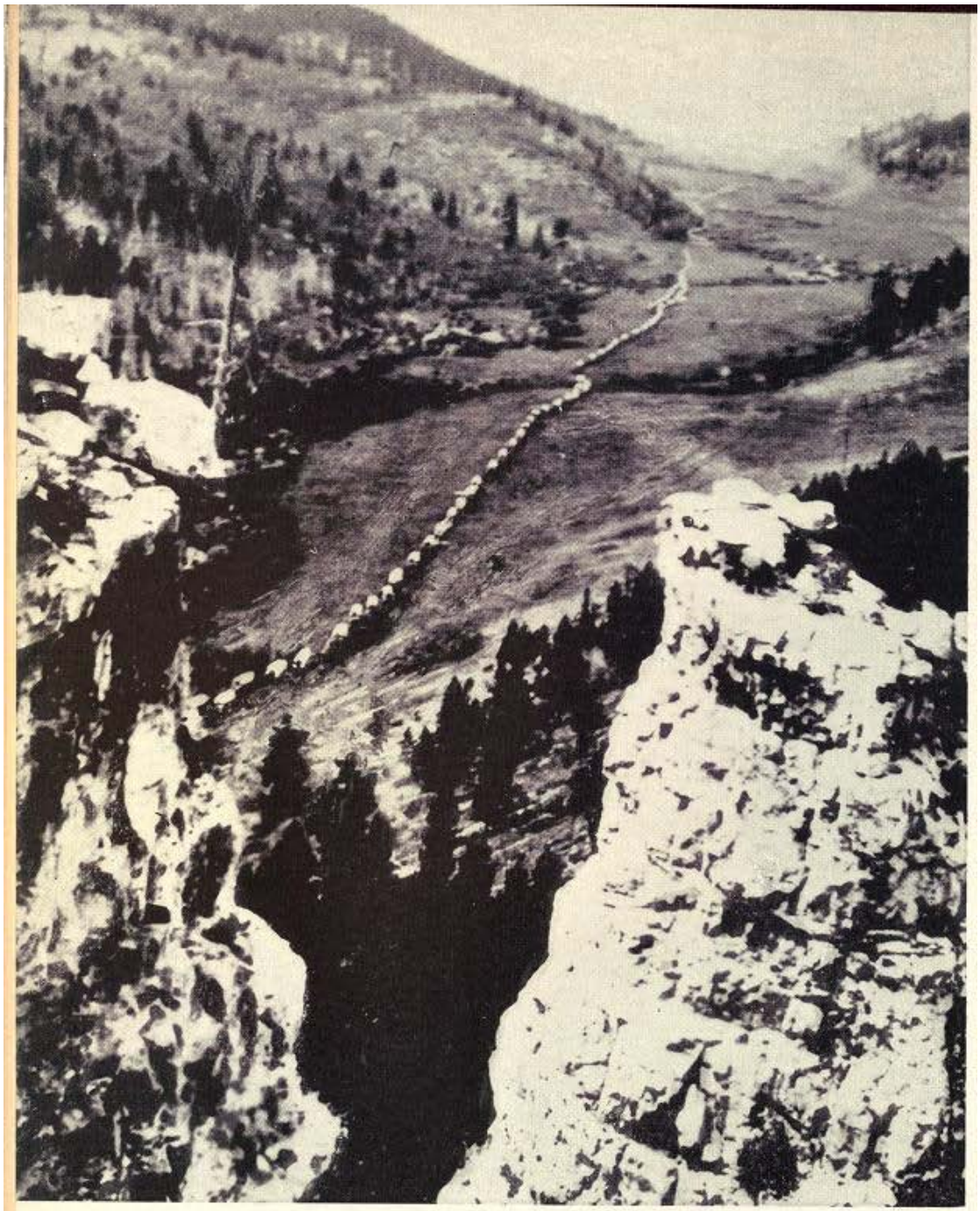
THE history of South Dakota is comparatively recent. Even some of the Indians who watched the covered wagons move ponderously over prairie trails are still living. In the pictures that follow, there is a photostat of the oft-folded treaty with the Sioux which was signed in 1815 by William Clark, of Lewis and Clark fame, and thumb-printed by Sioux chieftains. There is also a picture of the celebrated Sioux Sun Dance, revived in the Standing Rock Reservation in 1936. Another picture shows a group of Sioux maidens of today, dressed in native costumes.

It was Gen. George A. Custer's expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 that discovered gold on French Creek, near the present town of Custer, and a rare picture shows the 110-wagon caravan passing through the Hills. Soon after Custer had spread the news of gold, a party of 26 men and one woman entered the Hills, and near the gold discovery site they built the Gordon Stockade, a reproduction of which is pictured here. And at this same site, there is a picture of men successfully panning gold in 1937.

Also included among the pictures are early modes of transportation—the stage, and the river boat.



GORDON STOCKADE



CUSTER WAGON TRAIN, 1874

PANNING GOLD

Commerce west of the Missouri River was carried on by stage-coach and ox train. There were main trails leading into the Hills from Pierre, Chamberlain, Sidney, Neb., Cheyenne, Wyo., and Bismarck, N. Dak. But the coming of the railroads to the Missouri meant the end of the steamboats. Thereafter they survived on the upper Missouri only as ferries at the principal crossings, until the building of the State bridges many years later.

The winter of 1880 was a memorable one for this region. The snow fell heavily in a blizzard in October, and did not disappear until the following spring. Train service was interrupted and the roads were practically impassable. In the resultant thaw in the spring, a great amount of damage was done, especially on the lower Missouri in the southeastern corner of the State.

The Fight for Statehood: When Dakota Territory was created in 1861, it included what is now North and South Dakota, much of what is now Montana and most of present Wyoming. But with the creation of Montana Territory in 1864 and Wyoming Territory in 1868, Dakota Territory was reduced to the present size of the "Sister States."

As early as 1872 there was some agitation for the division of Dakota Territory into two equal parts as at present; but nothing came of it. In 1879, however, an attempt was made to buy the school lands of the State at a low figure; and through the influence of the superintendent of public instruction, Gen. William H. H. Beadle, it was determined to combine the fight for the division of the Territory with a demand that no school lands should be sold for less than $10 an acre. A convention of citizens was held at Canton in June 1882, and a committee was appointed to further both these ends. The committee carried the matter to the Legislature the following winter and the latter passed a bill calling for a constitutional convention. This bill, however, was vetoed by Gov. Nehemiah G. Ordway. The executive committee thereupon called a delegate convention to meet at Huron in June 1883. Every county in South Dakota was represented by its strongest men. An ordinance was passed providing for a constitutional convention to be held in Sioux Falls on September 4. In the meantime delegates to the convention were elected. At the appointed time they met in Sioux Falls and drew up a constitution, in which was inserted the $10 school-land provision. This constitution was submitted to the people at the November election, and was adopted almost unanimously. A committee

was appointed to present it to Congress, together with a petition for Statehood; but Congress did not see fit to act.

The next Legislature provided by law for a new constitutional convention to be held in Sioux Falls in September 1885. The constitution framed by this convention again with a $10 minimum clause was ratified once more by the people at the November election; and a complete set of State officers together with a Legislature and Congressman were elected at the same time. The Legislature elected two United States Senators and these men and the Governor carried a petition to Congress. But the National Administration was at this time Democratic and the leaders did not favor a plan that would be sure to introduce four new Republican Senators to cut down the Democratic majority. They favored the admission of the whole Territory as one State and the National Administration brought pressure to bear to the same end. But every time the question came to a test vote the people of the Territory voted overwhelmingly for division.

In 1888 the Republican National Convention made the admission of the two States a campaign issue. The Republicans prevailed in the fall elections and the Congress then in session yielded to the inevitable and passed the enabling act on Valentine's Day 1889. It was approved on Washington's Birthday. A new constitutional convention met in Sioux Falls on July 4 with power only to amend and resubmit the constitution of 1885. At a special election on October 1 this document was approved; and on November 2, 1889, the long fight was ended and proclamations were issued by President Cleveland admitting North and South Dakota to the Union. At the time of its admission, the State of South Dakota had a population of more than 300,000.

An interesting method was employed in preparing the proclamation for the Chief Executive's signature. The President desired to give neither State priority, but to admit both as "Sister States." Before the Presidential signatures were attached, therefore, the two proclamations were placed on the President's desk with the texts covered and only the lines for the signature showing. As a further precaution, after the signatures had been attached, the documents were thoroughly shuffled by another person. This made it impossible to tell which State was admitted first. It can only be said that the two Dakotas are the thirty-ninth and fortieth States. As a matter of courtesy, when it is necessary to rank the States,

South Dakota yields to North Dakota, which has a prior position in alphabetical order.

Immediately after entering upon Statehood, South Dakota experienced its last Indian trouble—the Messiah War. A Nevada Piute Indian named Wovoka claimed to have had a vision following an eclipse of the sun in 1889. From this he evolved a religion which was a curious mixture of Christianity and Indian religious thought. The gist of it was that he, as the Messiah, had come to drive out the whites, restore the land to the Indians, and bring back the buffalo. This was to be accomplished by means of a religious dance called the "Ghost Dance," during which the dancers wore a "ghost" shirt, which was supposed to render them immune to the white men's bullets. The dancing craze spread till it was inflaming the Indians to a dangerous degree. Sitting Bull was killed resisting arrest on the eve of setting out for the Ghost Dance with his band; and orders were given for the arrest of Big Foot's band, which was also on its way to join the dancers. The band was overtaken and apparently submitted to arrest; but during the night they escaped into the Badlands. A young captain named John J. Pershing was among the troops maneuvering to isolate Big Foot, although he was not present at the ensuing battle. The morning following its escape, Big Foot's band was overtaken on Wounded Knee Creek. Again they surrendered and the soldiers began to disarm them. This angered the Indians and they were further inflamed by a medicine man named Yellow Bird who, speaking in the Sioux tongue, exhorted them to resist and reminded them that they were wearing the bullet-proof ghost shirts. Finally, as a soldier pulled aside an Indian's blanket to see whether he was armed, another Indian fired at the soldiers and was joined at once by all the rest of the Indians. The soldiers immediately fired in return and at point-blank range the carnage was frightful. Then the Hotchkiss guns of the artillery raked the Indian village, setting fire to the tipis and killing women and children indiscriminately. The superior arms of the soldiers and their artillery could have but one result. Only a few of the Indians escaped to the hills and the draws, and the soldiers cut down those whom they could overtake, women as well as men, leaving their bodies scattered for a distance of two miles. The Wounded Knee massacre—for it was that, rather than a battle—resulted in the death of nearly 200 Indians, men, women, and children, and some 60 soldiers. It was caused by the use of green troops, led by inexperienced officers. Shortly after

this, Gen. Nelson A. Miles arrived, restored order, and composed the last of the serious differences between the whites and Indians.

The first Legislature of Dakota Territory made provision for a Territorial university; but it was not until twenty years later that the university became an accomplished fact. The story goes that after Pierre had won the capital, Sioux Falls had the next choice of State institutions, and chose the penitentiary; then Vermillion had to take what was left, and got the university. The University of South Dakota was established at Vermillion in 1882 through the enterprise of the citizens and the people of the county. In 1883 the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts was founded at Brookings.

The Capital Fight: The question of the location of the Territorial and later of the State capital was one that agitated the people for years. Although Yankton had won the honor in 1861, the fact that it was in one corner of the vast Territory led to agitation for removal of the capital to some more central location. Finally, in 1882, the Legislature appointed a capital commission to select a permanent site. They chose Bismarck, largely because of the inability of South Dakotans to agree upon a site themselves. Although many subsequent attempts were made to remove the Territorial capital from Bismarck, they were unsuccessful for the same reason.

The constitutional convention of 1885 submitted the selection of a capital to popular vote, and Huron won. The enabling act of 1889 again required that the people should designate a temporary capital. This brought on a hard-fought struggle in the summer of 1889, with Pierre, Huron, Watertown, Sioux Falls, Mitchell, and Chamberlain as contestants. Pierre won by a large margin. Under the constitution, the permanent capital was to be selected at the election of 1890. This time Pierre and Huron were the only contestants. Pierre again won by a large majority.

Despite this decisive outcome, agitation still continued for the removal of the capital to some other city. In the Legislature of 1901, the other candidates agreed to abide by the result of a caucus, and Mitchell won. An attempt was made to submit a constitutional amendment, but a filibuster blocked this. At the session of 1903, the caucus plan was again adopted and again Mitchell won. The Legislature passed the submitting resolution by a large majority in both houses. During the next two years a strenuous campaign was waged. It became a contest between the State's two principal rail-

way systems. The Milwaukee backed Mitchell and the North Western, Pierre. At first the railroads gave influential citizens throughout the State passes to visit their respective candidates for capital. Finally the situation developed to a point where the railroads felt obliged to transport free anyone who wished to visit either of these cities; and in the summer of 1904 they carried upwards of one hundred thousand people to the rival cities, a mass movement unprecedented in the history of the State. The election resulted in a victory for Pierre by about 18,000 majority. The Legislature of 1905 made provision for a permanent capitol building, which was dedicated in 1910.

During the Spanish-American War, South Dakota raised and equipped a regiment for service. It went to the Philippines, participated in the hardest fighting in many battles, and won great distinction, several of its members receiving the highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor; and on its return it was reviewed by President McKinley at Aberdeen.

In the year 1907, the Milwaukee and the North Western railroads continued their lines from Chamberlain and Pierre, respectively, through to the Black Hills at Rapid City. Earlier, about 1890, the North Western and the Burlington had built their lines to Deadwood from their Nebraska terminals—the Burlington through the heart of the Hills and the North Western up their eastern edge. At the same time, the Milwaukee extended its main line west from Aberdeen to Lemmon.

State Enterprises: During the period from 1915 to 1925, the State engaged in a number of experimental ventures into business and finance. Some of these the State administered directly and some it controlled. The first of these ventures was the State Bank Guaranty Law of 1915. Under the provisions of this act, the State undertook to administer a fund, contributed pro rata by the banks, to liquidate closed banks and thus protect the depositors. This plan worked satisfactorily during prosperous times, and the first few banks which failed were liquidated promptly. But with the coming of the depression the financial strain proved too great, the fund was soon exhausted, and the law fell into abeyance.

In 1917 the Rural Credits constitutional amendment became effective. This provided a means whereby landowners could borrow money directly from the State, from funds secured by the sale of interest-bearing bonds. As in the case of the Bank Guaranty law, the plan proved effective during normal times. But the depression

caused many farmers to default on their payments, a large amount of land reverted to the State, and in 1936 more than 1½ million acres, representing about 5,700 separate tracts, were in the hands of the State; while more than 60 million dollars in bonded indebtedness and interest remain. The debt is gradually being liquidated by a diversion of a portion of the gasoline and other taxes.

Another State venture was the purchase in 1919 of a coal mine at Haynes, N. Dak., for $200,000. The vein of coal pinched out, and the mine was sold in April 1936 for $5,500, which was insufficient to pay outstanding obligations against the property. In the winter of 1933-4, the State opened a strip coal mine at Firesteel, S. Dak. (*see Tour 2A*), but this work was halted when it was discovered that coal could be purchased elsewhere for less than it could be mined at the State project.

A method whereby farmers could receive the benefits of hail insurance was the objective of another State-promoted venture. The act provided that every farm should be automatically covered; and if the beneficiary did not wish protection, he was obliged to file an application for exemption. Although farmers in the areas subject to hail storms reaped benefits, the fact that the average farmer did not wish to carry this insurance led to the repeal of the law.

Another State-owned enterprise is the cement plant, located at Rapid City (*see Tour 4*). Since 1925 the plant has virtually monopolized the cement business of the State, because of the high quality of its product and the low cost of production, the latter being due to the presence of all the necessary ingredients within a small area. More than a million dollars in profits have been turned into the State treasury by the plant since 1925. The original indebtedness amounted to about $1,200,000. The business has been under the direction of a five-man commission.

Gov. William H. McMaster rose to Nation-wide prominence in 1924 when, announcing that the oil companies were charging too much for gasoline, he ordered the State to engage in the gasoline business. The result was that motor fuel prices dropped sharply. The public praised the step, and a little later McMaster rode into the United States Senate on a wave of popularity. The act was later declared unconstitutional.

The State has much progressive legislation on its books. In 1899 South Dakota became the first State to provide by statute for the initiative and referendum; but these laws have not proved as effective as was expected, since it has proved difficult to overcome public apathy with regard to any particular issue.

The Last Twenty Years: South Dakota's contribution to the World War was not made as a State. Her population was too sparse to make up even a single division, so her recruits were scattered among various commands. The State ranked high, however, in the per capita purchase of Liberty Bonds, and it did its part in Red Cross and other war-time activities.

An interesting feature of South Dakota's participation in the war was that in the first selective draft recruits from this State ranked highest in point of health in the United States. The rejection of recruits for physical defects was less than 20 per cent in South Dakota, as against an average of more than 29 per cent for the country at large, and a rejection of four out of ten candidates in certain States.

In 1919 the citizens of Yankton decided that they must have a bridge across the Missouri at that point. The money was partly raised by a bond issue. An excellent bridge was built, at a cost of 1¼ million dollars. To raise money for payments on the bonds, a toll is charged.

At about the same time the State decided to erect a number of bridges across the Missouri River, to unite the two halves of the State more closely. All vehicular communication between them up to that time had been by ferry. Five bridges were erected, at a total cost of more than two million dollars. The bridges were located, from north to south, at Mobridge, Forest City, Pierre, Chamberlain, and Wheeler. The money was secured by means of a legislative appropriation and a small tax levy.

In the summer of 1927, the State for the first time had the honor of providing the summer home of a President of the United States. President Coolidge occupied the State Game Lodge in Custer Park (*see Tour 5*) for the season, and maintained business offices in the high school at Rapid City.

The Federal order in 1933, increasing the price of gold at United States mints from $20.67 to $35 an ounce, by changing the dollar's gold content brought a revival of mining activity in the Black Hills, the renewed operation of many mines that had been closed as unprofitable, and, for the first time in many years, a revival of placer mining. While no outstanding "strikes" occurred, it developed that placer mining could be made to yield a fair day's wage and that was important at a time when jobs were scarce. This renewed mining activity in the Black Hills region still persists (1937).

In July 1934 occurred the first stratosphere flight from the Stratosphere Bowl, 12 miles west of Rapid City (*see Tour 5*). This and the succeeding flight were sponsored by the National Geographic Society and the U. S. Army Air Corps. The 1934 flight did not succeed in breaking the record, although the balloon, Explorer I, attained a height of over 60,000 feet. At this point the fabric began to rip and the descent was begun. The flight ended near Holdredge, Neb., when the balloonists were forced to resort to their parachutes to save their lives.

In the early summer of 1935 a second attempt to penetrate the stratosphere was made; but an hour before the time scheduled for the take-off, the already inflated balloon burst at the top and the charge of helium escaped. Nothing daunted, the sponsors of the flight repaired the balloon, Explorer II, and on Armistice Day, 1935, their efforts were crowned with complete success; for on that day the greatest balloon ever made by man reached the greatest heights ever attained by man. The giant bag arose to a height of 72,395 feet, remaining in the air eight hours. The descent was as felicitous as the rise and the balloon made a perfect "egg-shell" landing near White Lake, S. Dak., 240 miles southeast of the rock-walled starting point. Capt. Albert W. Stevens commanded the flight and Capt. Orvil A. Anderson was the pilot.

INDUSTRY AND LABOR

South Dakota, with few large cities and a thinly-scattered population, is preeminently an agricultural State, but mining, manufacturing, and lumbering are also important in various sections. Although 14th in size among the States of the Union, it ranks only 36th in population (692,849 in 1930). The entire State contains but 5,000 more people than the city of Pittsburgh, Pa. In 1935 the State contained 18,000 fewer people than it had five years previously.

In 1929 South Dakota had a per capita wealth of roughly $5,000, the third highest in the United States. Although this wealth lies largely in livestock and agricultural products, in 1933 there were 348 manufacturing establishments in the State employing 4,731 persons with products valued at $46,265,812. The total mineral production in 1934 was valued at $19,173,000 and the value of the gold alone in 1935 was $19,853,057. South Dakota is also one of the leading States in the production of mica, tin, feldspar, and lithium products, and stone, gravel, sand, and cement are other

leading products. Large deposits of lignite coal have been found in the northwestern part of the State but as yet they remain inaccessible to transportation. The forested areas include 1,067,745 acres of National forests and 77,482 acres of State forests, while the 478,000 acres of water surface make South Dakota 18th in that respect. Among other developments, there were, by 1936, nine hydroelectric plants producing 19,853 horsepower and about 75,000 acres of land under irrigation.

On the other hand the value of the crops, livestock, and livestock products marketed in 1935 reached $100,838,000, while in 1929 it was $242,797,000. Dairy products alone in 1933 were valued at 16 million dollars. The State in 1935 had more than 1½ million cattle, more than 1½ million sheep (of which over 100,000 were in one county) and more than half a million hogs. The wool clip in 1935 was just short of 10 million pounds. In the same year the farm population numbered 358,204 and the 83,303 farms with their buildings had a total value in excess of 1¼ billion dollars.

Serious labor troubles are rare in South Dakota, with only 16 strikes recorded between 1920 and 1935, of which but two or three were important. There were two strikes in 1934 and three in 1935. The problem of migratory labor has lessened in recent years. Where formerly hundreds, if not thousands, of transients "bummed" their way on freight trains to the harvest fields, now the combines and the small threshing machines have done away with the necessity for large crews, and farmers "change work" with one another.

Misfortune, in the form of drought, grasshoppers and dust storms, has plagued South Dakota for the past several years, during which time Federal aid was a tremendous boon to both business and agriculture. Government-supplied employment on permanent improvements, such as water conservation, soil erosion projects, roads, and public buildings, was the biggest factor in South Dakota's battle against the lean years.

STATE GOVERNMENT

According to the State constitution, a candidate for nomination as Governor must receive at least 35 percent of the votes cast by his party in the primary; otherwise the nominee is decided on by a caucus, which quite often has nominated some candidate other than the one receiving the highest number of votes. The salary of the Governor, $3,000 a year, is the lowest paid to any State Executive in the Union.

The State has a bicameral Legislature, reduced in 1937 to 75 representatives and 35 senators, elected every two years. They convene at Pierre on the first Monday after the first Tuesday in January of odd-numbered years, for a limited session of 60 days. Special sessions have been rare.

Legislators draw a salary of $5 per day for not more than 60 days, and travel allowance of 10 cents a mile from their homes to Pierre and return. They also draw an expense allowance of not more than $200.

South Dakota has five judges in its supreme court. Originally there were three, but the number was increased in 1909 by an act of the Legislature. The judges are elected every six years by a vote of the entire State, and vacancies are filled by appointment by the Governor. The court has both original and appellate jurisdiction, although most of its cases are appellate. The only appeal from its decisions is to the United States Supreme Court. Salary of the judges is $3,000 a year, with an $1,800 annual allowance for expenses.

Twelve circuit judges, elected by districts every four years, preside over the tribunals that hear most of the civil and criminal cases arising in the State. They have original jurisdiction over all cases except those of probate, city ordinance, and Federal character. The salary of circuit judges is $2,500 a year.

The trend of South Dakota's finances is toward a decrease in bonded indebtedness. In 1927 the percapita net bonded indebtedness was approximately $88.66 and by 1936 it had been reduced to $63.56. This included Rural Credit bonds which in 1936 constituted 91.8% of the total net bonded indebtedness while contributing only 16.1% of the total amount in the interest and sinking funds. Outside of the Rural Credits, the bonded indebtedness of South Dakota is almost negligible.

The total revenue available for the State in 1936 was $21,646,494.06, of which practically 23% was Federal aid. The total expenditures were $12,923,444.55, 59.9% for expenses in departments under appointive officers (three-fourths of which was for highway construction), 14.6% for educational institutions, 11.4% for State enterprises, 8.6% for penal and charitable institutions, and the rest for miscellaneous operations.