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English 12

March 13, 2026

Print History In South Dakota

There is little documentation on the development of printmaking culture in South Dakota, despite that the heart of printmaking is the fact that it's a physical and often highly copyable medium. With many records destroyed, uncovering the story of its prevalence on the prairie is not as simple as it may seem. And as it often goes, most of the key materials one must reference were likely never intended to be used as historical research materials. Newspapers, agricultural records, and course catalogs seem unlikely candidates for future historical analysis, though it seems they are, and serve, as vital records for events. Though the lack of documentation may indicate a lack of importance of printmaking in South Dakota, this simply isn't so. The state's rich use of the print medium over time proved essential to the growth of the region. From the newspapers to college courses, print is (quite literally) printed all over South Dakotan life.

1. The State's Lack of Literature

In the early nineteenth century, there was a notable lack of books in South Dakota. "For many early South Dakota settlers, reading was certainly not a prime activity or even a real option. Those who did actively involve themselves in the culture of print were variously motivated" (Lindell 215). It's hard to say whether or not reading was an unpopular hobby because of the lack of materials, or because of a general lack of interest. However, it's logical to assume that because there was little media to consume, it became less and less likely to find

someone interested. Reading was not accessible, as there was no primary location to buy books at that time.

Bookstores were nonexistent. Businesses that sold printed materials at their stores would sell them alongside the main merchandise they distributed. Bookworms who had a mailing address and could afford it had access to catalogs where they could sometimes purchase books, having them mailed to their residence (Lindell 217). Reading was a hobby that a nineteenth-century South Dakotan could not commit to lightly. It simply took so much time, effort, and money to acquire the materials that many residents did not bother to own more than a few books at a time.

It is obvious that reading was not a popular pastime, due to the lack of books found in the average South Dakotan household, as shown in the following excerpt:

Information on the number of books, along with other articles of personal property, owned by early settlers of Hand County, South Dakota, is available from probated estate inventories, conducted from 1891 to 1906. These can be found in the South Dakota State Archives in Pierre, South Dakota. Of the few inventories that mentioned books (22 out of 210 households), around two-thirds (68 percent) had a Bible; nearly as many (64 percent) had one or more schoolbooks; and 50 percent owned other books, none exceeding a combined value of \$10. Individual book titles were not listed, with the exception of a single mention of Webster's Dictionary, appraised at thirty cents (Lindell 233).

Many settlers generally appeared to be satisfied by their lack of literature, not feeling the need to own more than a few pieces of literature. Of course, this is not to say that there were not avid bookworms on the prairie, but such people were few and far between that booksellers found no major motivation to expand at this time. In fact, this could be why South Dakotans began to

see more libraries.

One of the very first reading rooms in South Dakota was created in 1875 in the town of Sioux Falls. Established by Louisa Churchill Gale, it was located above the Williams Brothers' store (Lindell 219). "The room was filled with newspapers, periodicals, and books for public use" (Voudry). The city was originally built to be the largest city in South Dakota, with the founders hoping to establish it as the future state capital (Lindell 219). Despite its popularity however, the Sioux Falls reading room would eventually close just after a year of being open due to an infestation of grasshoppers. Despite the closing in 1876, a man named Joseph Mead Bailey Jr. took the library's collection of books to his private estate, where it was opened to the public in 1890, for reference and enjoyment. After J. M. Bailey Jr.'s death in 1891, the materials were returned to the original Sioux Falls reading room (Voudry). Without the care of Joseph Bailey Jr., the Sioux Falls library may not exist today. His willingness to open his private property for the public's use shows the passion for literature and public knowledge South Dakotans had at the time.

Though the establishment of the South Dakota literature scene was slow, many state residents exhibited a genuine interest for print and media. Its unpopularity was more likely attributed to its lack of accessibility rather than a lack of value. The existence and use of author mail orders and public reading rooms shows that when given the resources, the people of South Dakota had the desire to indulge in print. One of the biggest hurdles for the nineteenth century bookworm was the fact that sourcing print outside of the state was expensive.

2. The First Publications

By printing closer to the population of high literature demand, the sourcing cost of materials decreased, therefore making the item more affordable for the average person. It's speculated that the very first book printed within the state is the 1898 - 1899 South Dakota State Brand Book, though this is not explicitly stated. "Information includes last and first name (or company name) of brand owner, town address, and page number for their brand. The index includes over 1,500 names ("South Dakota State Historical Society"). Brand logos depicted in the book appear to be relief printed. There is no formal analysis of the process of its illustration, though it seems to be aligned with the text on the page very uniformly. For this reason, this may be printed by woodcut relief methods. The woodcut Wikipedia gives insight on context of this process:

Because woodcuts and movable type are both relief-printed, they can easily be printed together. Consequently, woodcut was the main medium for book illustrations until the late sixteenth century. The first woodcut book illustration dates to about 1461, only a few years after the beginning of printing with movable type, printed by Albrecht Pfister in Bamberg. Woodcut was used less often for individual ("single-leaf") fine-art prints from about 1550 until the late nineteenth century, when interest revived. It remained important for popular prints until the nineteenth century in most of Europe, and later in some places (Wikipedia Contributors).

This means that the first book in South Dakota printing history may be made by an artistic application of printing. Regardless, one of the more popular print formats of the era was newspapers. "A newspaper was a symbol of civilization and permanence, so printer-editors (however good or bad) were welcomed by town founders and office-seekers" (Karolevitz 6). Towns went great lengths to start their own publications.

Drawn by oxen, a wagon carrying a hand printing press brought the same printing press from Saint Paul, Minnesota that would be used to print the very first newspaper in South Dakota: The Democrat. The first edition of this paper was published around July 1858. Historians remain unsure of the exact printing date, but assume it to be July 2nd. It's debated whether or not The Democrat qualifies for the title of newspaper, as it largely served as a way for politicians to spread what could be considered propaganda. "In the beginning, the underlying reasons for carting a heavy press to an embryonic settlement with very few readers on the scene were politics and land promotion" (Karolevitz 6). The Democrat served as a way for politician Samuel J. Albright to promote the city of Sioux Falls City as the best candidate for South Dakota's capital (Karolevitz 4). However, as the culture of paper print became more popular, the purpose of the publications stood true to their original goal: expansion.

From 1878 to 1887, the state began to experience what came known as "The Great Dakota Boom," where a massive influx of settlers migrated to South Dakota. Affectionately known as "The Great Dakota Newspaper Boom," an increase in newspaper publications followed suit, allowing the newly established residents to access media (Karolevitz 17). During this time, the popularity of newspapers was astonishing. It's possible that South Dakota's popularity was caused by the rise in print. Communities realized this, begging writers to work for them and for their cities.

In 1884, the Yankton Press and Dakotian released a publication stating, "Roswell, Miner County, will give \$35 to anyone who will start a paper there" (Karolevitz 17). Unfortunately, there exists no records of the town ever printing a newspaper, indicating that their search for a new producer was unsuccessful. In 2012, Roswell would surrender its title of "town," following the 2010 census that recorded 15 residents in the area ("Roswell"). In retrospect, it is highly

likely that the former town's lack of success was attributed to the lack of publication. In fact, it could be argued that even the geography of South Dakota is caused by print.

The move of the state's capital was a choice based upon the immigration climate around the 1880s. Governors and state officials debated on the potential for each city, explaining that the capital needed to be choice of "real estate":

The governor also bribed legislators, threatened vetoes of legislators' bills if they resisted his plans, compelled settlers seeking county seats to give him land, installed his son as territorial auditor in order to control finances, and moved the territorial capital from Yankton to Bismarck in order to benefit from real estate speculation (qtd. in Kimberly Breeden 430).

If the popularity of South Dakota is attributed to news publications advertising real estate, then perhaps the move of the state's capital is attributed to such publications by extension.

Print's purpose has changed over time, working for the printmaker who was using it. Early in South Dakota's story, it was used as a means of advertisement for the early American, showcasing the potential of cities and townships, in an effort to grow the community. Ironically, the first book printed in the state was more news-filled than newspapers themselves, as the purpose of the Brand Book was to inform readers of each different ranch's brands. The art of teaching print, though, became majorly moved by college institutions, subsequently circling back to the region's agricultural roots

3. Print in Educational Institutions

After the popularity of residents utilizing print for their agriculture endeavors, there began to be a heightened interest in teaching printing for future generations to use this tool. In

1919, South Dakota State University (formerly known as “South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts”) began offering courses on print, for the purpose of teaching agricultural journalism (South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts 67). The course focused on teaching the methods and attitudes that future journalists should have. The 1919-2020 course catalog gives a brief breakdown of what the journalism course offers: “The work in advertising will be preceded by several weeks study of writing farm and other news for publication because advertising, to be effective, must have news value” (South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts 68). This is the first instance of a South Dakota State University catalog mentioning the schools offering for a linotype studio. This publication not only states the installation of the department, but also the school's massive interest in the installation itself. Over time, print became more than just a means of literature publication; people began to use it as an art style. Schools began to offer more courses after noticing this.

The University of South Dakota offered its first printmaking-centric program for the 1979-1980 school year. The Undergraduate catalog offered a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, with a concentration in printmaking practices (Peterson). Until this point, print was respected for its social potential, but rarely for its artistic capabilities. Brandbooks included print depictions, but as an accompaniment to the information listed, rather than to be the sole media of the book. Offering printmaking courses as an extension of the fine arts program allowed for students to explore broader applications of the medium. About 30 years later, South Dakota State University followed suit. In the 2011-2012 school year, SDSU started offering students a program where they could earn a certification in printmaking (“Majors & Minors - South Dakota State University”).

Then, in 2015-2016, South Dakota State University students were able to receive a Bachelors of Fine Arts Studio Art degree with a focus on printmaking, just as the University of South Dakota did before them (“Academic Programs - Majors, Minors, Certificates - South Dakota State University”). From this point forward, print as a fine arts medium began to be widely accepted. Schools teaching printmaking is no strange concept, though it being broadly treated as an art rather than a tool is a much newer outlook for South Dakota. It may be common sense that a better instructor often means a better education. In this case, having teachers passionate in their art was important for the resurgence in the craft itself.

4. The Modern Print Climate

Enter Lloyd Menard: Having taught at SDSU for 33 years, Lloyd Menard is renowned not only for his teaching abilities but also for his print works. Information provided by South Dakota State University implies that Menard founded the printmaking department at SDSU himself, though this is not explicitly confirmed (“Celebration of Excellence”). Despite it not confirmed the origin of the SDSU’s print department’s construction, Lloyd Menard had clearly been around at the school long enough to be credited. “...they were building a new fine arts [department]. This was in 71. There was no print shop there” (*PORTFOLIOS: LLOYD MENARD* 00:08:21-00:08:30). Menard would build the SDSU print program from the ground up.

Menard’s approach to teaching may be considered untraditional to some. He emphasised the practice of bringing printmakers from around the country to teach his students. “I wanted them to know they weren’t second class,” Lloyd said (*PORTFOLIOS: LLOYD MENARD* 00:14:34-00:14:37). As a result, he became a very popular mentor for artists to seek out. Students came from Nebraska, Iowa, and all over South Dakota to learn from him, at SDSU. Menard

claims that the guest teachers he brought in were the people that truly made the program. “He really built a network of a printmaking community that has blossomed into Frogman’s paper print workshop” (*PORTFOLIOS: LLOYD MENARD* 00:15:02-00:15:11).

Frogman’s print workshop was established in 1979, by Menard himself (“Frogman’s Print Workshops”). One of the first Frogman’s workshops was hosted during the summer and took place in the Black Hills. Menard recalls this experience, speculating that just about five or ten of his students participated. Several summers following, Frogman’s continued to run the same workshop in South Dakota. It was said that people came from all over to participate and that most of the time, the workshops were hosted in old buildings such as cabins or one-roomed schoolhouses (*PORTFOLIOS: LLOYD MENARD* 00:15:13-00:15:54). In the year 1996, Frogman’s Workshops moved location, and now operate in a different part of the state, in Beresford, South Dakota. Finally, two years later, the studio found its home for the next twenty years in Vermillion, South Dakota - the home of South Dakota State University.

Some of Lloyd Menard’s work can be observed through the Dahl Fine Arts Center, a gallery located in Rapid City, South Dakota (“Lloyd Menard”). For many years, the Dahl has been a space for young and old artists alike to display their pieces to the world. Established in October 1974, the gallery has housed many exhibitions that include print work (“About”). Many of these exhibitions were sponsored and organized for and by local schools, displaying how printmaking education is still prevalent in modern day (“Past Exhibitions”).

Print in South Dakota is much more vast and prevalent than one may realize. Some may say that print was not widely used in a visual art application until its integration in schools’ fine arts programs. Though with livestock brand designs being displayed in Brand Books, its visual

art potential may have been identified far earlier. It's clear that print, regardless, has its place in society, whether that exists as newspapers, textbooks, or in colleges.

Print moved people, and it moved cities, quite literally and people understood that. It is as Lloyd Menard once said himself: "There's things you cannot get in any other profession. I'll tell you. It's a rewarding profession. I wouldn't trade it" (*PORTFOLIOS: LLOYD MENARD* 00:22:31-00:22:40).

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