

History^[edit]

The Dakota Territory consisted of the northernmost part of the land acquired in the [Louisiana Purchase](#) in 1803, as well as the southernmost part of [Rupert's Land](#), which was [acquired](#) in 1818 when the boundary was changed to the 49th parallel. The name refers to the Dakota branch of the [Sioux](#) tribes which occupied the area at the time. Most of Dakota Territory was formerly part of the [Minnesota](#) and [Nebraska](#) territories.^[2]

When [Minnesota](#) became a state in 1858, the leftover area between the [Missouri River](#) and Minnesota's western boundary fell unorganized. When the [Yankton Treaty](#) was signed later that year, ceding much of what had been [Sioux Indian](#) land to the U.S. Government, early settlers formed a [provisional government](#) and unsuccessfully lobbied for United States territory status.^[3][Wilmot Wood Brookings](#) was the provisional governor. The cities of Wilmot and Brookings as well as the county of Brookings, South Dakota are named for him.^[4] Three years later [President-elect Abraham Lincoln](#)'s cousin-in-law [J.B.S. Todd](#) personally lobbied for territory status and the [U.S. Congress](#) formally created Dakota Territory. It became an organized territory on March 2, 1861. Upon creation, Dakota Territory included much of present-day [Montana](#) and [Wyoming](#) as well as all of present-day [North Dakota](#) and [South Dakota](#) and a small portion of present-day [Nebraska](#).^[5] President Lincoln appointed Dakota Territory's first governor, William Jayne, who was Lincoln's old friend and neighbor from Springfield, Illinois.^[6]

A small patch of land known as "[Lost Dakota](#)" existed as a remote [exclave](#) of Dakota Territory until it became part of [Gallatin County, Montana Territory](#), in 1873.^[7]

All land north of the [Keya Paha River](#) (which includes most of [Boyd County, Nebraska](#), and a smaller portion of neighboring [Keya Paha County](#)) was originally part of Dakota Territory, but was transferred to Nebraska in 1882.

American Civil War^[edit]

Dakota Territory was not directly involved in the [American Civil War](#) but did raise some troops to defend the settlements following the [Dakota War of 1862](#) which triggered hostilities with the [Sioux](#) tribes of Dakota Territory. The [Department of the Northwest](#) sent expeditions into Dakota Territory in 1863, 1864 and 1865. It also established forts in Dakota Territory to protect the frontier settlements of the Territory, [Iowa](#) and [Minnesota](#) and the traffic along the [Missouri River](#).

Prior to statehood^[edit]



[Historical coat of arms](#) of the Dakota Territory (illustrated in 1876)

Following the Civil War, hostilities continued with the Sioux until the [1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie](#). By 1868, creation of new territories reduced Dakota Territory to the present boundaries of [the Dakotas](#). Territorial counties were defined in 1872, including [Bottineau County](#), [Cass County](#) and others.

During the existence of the organized territory, the population first increased very slowly and then very rapidly with the "Dakota Boom" from 1870 to 1880.^[8] Because the Sioux were considered very hostile and a threat to early settlers, the white population grew slowly. Gradually, the settlers' population grew and the Sioux were not considered as severe a threat.^[9]

The population increase can largely be attributed to the growth of the [Northern Pacific Railroad](#). Settlers who came to the Dakota Territory were from other western territories as well as many from northern and western Europe. These included large numbers of Norwegians, Germans, Swedes, and Canadians.^[10]

Commerce was originally organized around the [fur trade](#). Furs were carried by steamboat along the rivers to the settlements. Gold was discovered in the [Black Hills](#) in 1874 and attracted more settlers, setting off the last [Sioux War](#). The population surge increased the demand for meat spurring expanded cattle ranching on the territory's vast open ranges. With the advent of the railroad agriculture intensified: wheat became the territory's main cash crop. Economic hardship hit the territory in the 1880s due to lower wheat prices and a drought.^[11]



Map of the Dakota Territory, c. 1886

The territorial capital was [Yankton](#) from 1861 until 1883, when it was moved to [Bismarck](#). Admission of new western states was a party political battleground with each party looking at how the proposed new states were likely to vote. At the beginning of 1888, the Democrats under president [Grover Cleveland](#) proposed that the four territories of [Montana](#), [New Mexico](#), Dakota and [Washington](#) should be admitted together. The first two were expected to vote Democratic and the latter two were expected to vote Republican so this was seen as a compromise acceptable to both parties. However, the Republicans won majorities in both the House and the Senate later that year. To head off the possibility that Congress might only admit Republican territories to statehood, the Democrats agreed to a less favorable deal in which Dakota was divided in two and New Mexico was left out altogether. Cleveland signed it into law on February 22, 1889, and the territories could become states in nine months time after that.

There had been previous attempts to open up the territory, but these had foundered because the [Treaty of Fort Laramie \(1868\)](#) required that 75% of Sioux adult males on the reservation had to agree to any treaty change. Most recently, a commission headed by [Richard Henry Pratt](#) in 1888 had completely failed to get the necessary signatures in the face of opposition from Sioux leaders and even government worker [Elaine Goodale](#), later Superintendent of Indian Education for the Dakotas. The government believed that the [Dawes Act](#) (1887), which attempted to move the Indians from hunting to farming, in theory, meant that they needed less land (but in reality was an economic disaster for them) and that at least half was available for sale. Congress approved an offer of \$1.25 per acre for reservation land (a figure they had previously rejected as outrageously high) and \$25,000 to induce the Indians to sign.

A new commission was appointed in April 1889 that included veteran Indian fighter general [George Crook](#). Crook pulled out all the stops to get the Indians to sign, using a number of underhand tactics. He threatened them that if they did not sign, the land would be taken anyway and they would get nothing. This would not have been seen as an idle threat; the treaty had been ignored in the past when the [Black Hills](#) were taken from the Sioux. Crook ignored leaders like [Sitting Bull](#) and [Red Cloud](#) who opposed the sale and kept them out of the negotiations, preferring instead to deal with moderate leaders like [American Horse](#). American Horse, however, claimed immediately afterwards that he had been tricked into signing. Crook made many personal promises (such as on reservation rations) which he had no authority to make, or ability to keep. He claimed afterwards that he had only agreed to report the concerns back to Washington. Crook lied about how many signatures he already had, giving the impression that the signature he was currently asking for would make no difference. He said that those who did not sign would not get a share of the money for the land. Crook even allowed white men who had married Sioux to sign, a dubious action given that the [blood quantum laws](#) only counted full-blood Indians as members of the tribe. By

August 6, 1889, Crook had the requisite number of signatures, half the reservation land was sold, and the remainder divided among six smaller reservations.

On February 22, 1889, outgoing President Cleveland signed an omnibus bill that divided the Territory of Dakota in half. North Dakota and South Dakota became states simultaneously on November 2, 1889. President Harrison had the papers shuffled to obscure which one was signed first and the order went unrecorded.^[12] The bill also enabled the people in the new Territories of North Dakota and South Dakota, as well as the older territories of Montana and Washington, to write state constitutions and elect state governments. The four new states would be admitted into the Union in nine months. This plan cut Democratic New Mexico out of statehood and split Republican Dakota Territory into two new Republican states. Rather than two new Republican states and two new Democratic states that Congress had considered the previous year, the omnibus bill created three new Republican states and one new Democratic state that Republicans thought they would capture. In their eagerness to admit both Dakotas, Republican congressmen also ignored the uncomfortable fact that much of the land in the anticipated state of South Dakota belonged to the Sioux. The Dakota Territory was divided into the states of [North Dakota](#) and [South Dakota](#) on November 2, 1889.^[13]