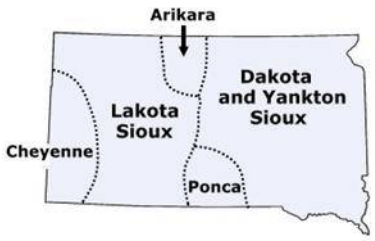
South Dakota Genealogy Research

Indigenous Peoples and European Settlement

The Arikara peoples dominated the land now known as South Dakota when the Sioux arrived in the 1700's. The Arikara raised corn (maize), beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco; they used these products and traded them with other tribes for meat and processed hides.

The three main tribes of the Sioux were the Lakota, the Eastern Dakota, and the Western Dakota. The Sioux were a nomadic people who lived in teepees and followed the bison herds.



At the time that Europeans began to explore and set up trading posts in what is now South Dakota, the people who lived there included the Sioux, the Arikara, the Cheyenne and the Ponca.

By 1700, the Sioux had driven the Ponca to the west side of the Missouri River. There the Ponca lived in the area of what is now Sioux Falls. Smallpox decimated their numbers, and they eventually moved to what is now known as Ponca, Nebraska.

The Cheyenne people originally lived in Minnesota. In the early 1700's, they migrated west into what is now North and South Dakota. After settling the Black Hills of South Dakota, they introduced the horse culture to Lakota bands about 1730. Allied with the Arapaho, the Cheyenne pushed the Kiowa to the Southern Plains. In turn, the Cheyenne were pushed west by the more numerous Lakota tribe.

In 1743, the French explorers Francois and Louis-Joseph de La Verendrye came to what is now South Dakota and claimed it for France.

In about 1750, the Teton Sioux, having driven the Omaha from the Big Sioux and James River valleys, reached the Missouri River and engaged the Ree tribe in a forty years' war.

In 1760, other Sioux Indians who had been pushed out of Minnesota by the Chippewa reached the Missouri River. They fought with the Arikara for control of the Missouri Valley in central South Dakota for many years.

In 1775, the Oglala Teton settled the Black Hills.

In 1780, the Yankton and Yanktonais Sioux, having been driven from western Iowa by the Oto, settled in the James River Valley.

In 1785, Pierre Dorian, later a guide to Lewis and Clark, married a Yankton woman and settled in trade at the mouth of James River.

In 1792, trader Joseph Garreau settled with the Ree Indians at Little Bend of the Missouri. He became an interpreter among the Arikara and Mandan people.

In 1803, South Dakota was sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

In 1804, Lewis and Clark passed through the area on the Missouri River. They explored the countryside, hunted and held councils with the Yankton Sioux and with the Teton Sioux.

In 1817, Joseph La Framboise set up the first American trading post near present-day Fort Pierre on the Missouri River. Later Fort Tecumseh was built at this site.

In 1818, Hazen Mooers set up a fur trading post at the Great Bend of Big Sioux (Flandreau.)

In 1837, a smallpox epidemic on Missouri River severely reduced the population of all tribes.

Land east of the Missouri River was successively part of the Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa territories before finally becoming Minnesota Territory in 1849.

Land west of the Missouri River became part of the vast northern Nebraska Territory in 1854.

In 1856/57 the Dakota Land Company from Minnesota established a settlement in Medary, near the town of Brookings. At about the same time, Western Town Company from Iowa established settlements in the area along the Sioux River, including what is now Sioux Falls.
In 1858, the U.S. government forced the Yankton Sioux onto a reservation in the southern part of what became Douglas County.
By 1860 white settlements were located in the southeastern part of the state and along the Missouri, Big Sioux, Vermillion, James, and Red Rivers. Settlers petitioned for territorial status.
Quartzite was found and quarried as early as the 1860s in what became Minnehaha County, along the Big Sioux River.
On 2 March 1861, the U.S. Congress created Dakota Territory, which included the present states of South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and most of Wyoming.
By fall of 1861, 11 post offices served the territory, including Yankton, Vermillion, and Sioux Falls.
In 1862, territorial counties were established by the legislature: Lincoln, Minnehaha, Brookings, and Deuel. Ft. Dakota was established in the Sioux Falls area to protect settlers.

The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged settlers to stake claims. Although economic depression, drought, and grasshoppers plagued the settlers, the development of land offices, railroad expansion, and changing crop conditions contributed to population growth.
In 1869, many Dakota families left the Santee Sioux Reservation in Nebraska to take homesteads on the Wakpaipaksan (bend in the river) of the Big Sioux near the abandoned town site of Flandrau. During the summer of 1870, the future Moody County was surveyed. The Dakota traveled to Vermillion to obtain their land titles. White settlers arrived in 1872, and soon the county was populated with Dakota and white settlers.
In 1863 the Winnebago and Santee Sioux were moved from Minnesota to a small reservation near Fort Thompson. This later became the Crow Creek Reservation.
In 1872, the Dakota Southern Railroad began operations in South Dakota, running from Vermillion to Sioux City, Iowa. The road to Yankton was completed in 1873.
In 1874, Lt. Col. George A. Custer led an expedition that discovered gold in the Black Hills, precipitating a gold rush. The expedition violated the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which had guaranteed the Sioux rights to their sacred territory. This triggered the Black Hills War of 1876, including the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana. However, South Dakota opened the gold mining region and its adjacent grazing land to white settlement.
In 1878, thousands of farmers rushed for land. Settlement peaked in 1885. The rapidly growing eastern river region settlements and prosperity in the mines created pressure for statehood.

Statehood

In 1889, the U.S. Congress approved the division of the Dakota Territory into the states of North Dakota and South Dakota.
Relations between the Sioux and the white settlers continued to deteriorate. In 1890, troops with the 7th U.S. Cavalry killed more than 250 Lakota in the Wounded Knee Massacre.
The result of the wars was European ownership of land and native peoples being confined to reservations. The Cheyenne people who remained in South Dakota (northern Cheyenne) were forced onto reservations in Montana.

Federally recognized tribes now living in South Dakota include the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council - Crow Creek Sioux Tribe - Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe – Lower Brule Sioux Tribe - Oglala Sioux Tribe - Rosebud Sioux Tribe - Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe - Yankton Sioux - Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.
Many settlers in the late 1800's came from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Through their perseverance and determination, they carved homes and farms out of the prairie.
In 1927, sculptor Gutzon Borglum began work on the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. In 1941, World War II caused Congress to cut off funding for completing the sculptures from head to waist.

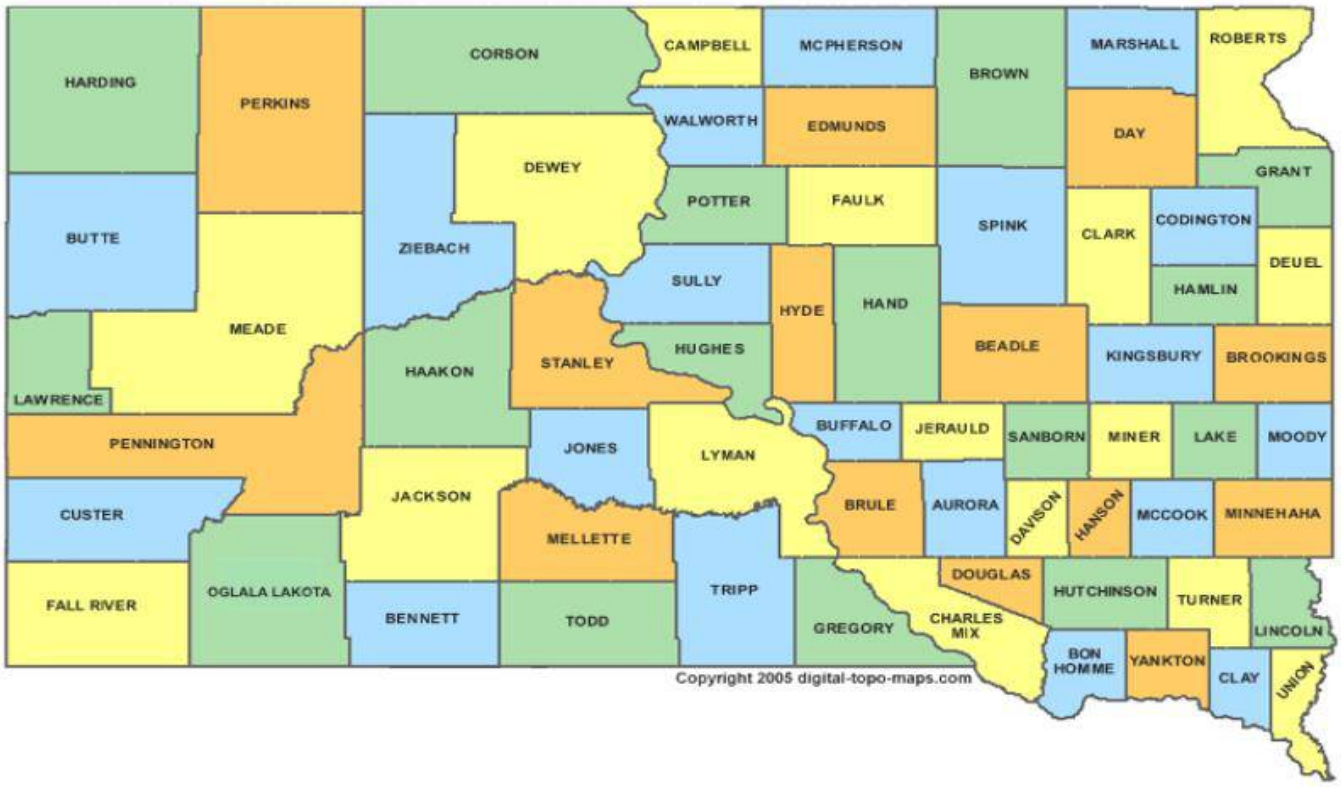
A memorial to Lakota leader Chief Crazy Horse in the Black Hills was dedicated by sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski and by Lakota Chief Henry Standing Bear on June 3, 1948. The 87-foot head was completed in June 1998. The rest is not finished.

South Dakota Vital Records
Online Indexes
Ancestry.com – births, marriages and deaths various years
FamilySearch.org – births and marriages various years
South Dakota Birth Record Search Site – index of birth records over 100 years old filed at state
Records
Counties began recording some births, marriages and deaths in the 1800's.
In 1905, state law required counties to record all births, marriages, divorces/annulments and deaths and the state began storing birth, marriage and death records.
Obtain Records
Order copies of vital records from the **County Register of Deeds** or from the **South Dakota Department of Health Vital Records Office.**
Only birth records over 100 years old are copied for the public; but there is no time restriction on copies of marriage and death records. Specify if the copies are informational or certified. Request "photostatic" copies; they have the most information.

South Dakota Genealogical/Historical Repositories
Center for Western Studies, Augustana University - Native Americans and Scandinavian pioneers
I.D. Weeks Library, University of South Dakota – oral history center, historical collections
National Archives, Denver
South Dakota Genealogical Society
South Dakota State Archives - manuscript collections, state, county, and town government records, photographs, maps
South Dakota State Historical Society
South Dakota State Library
City, township, and county genealogical or historical societies

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000.
- http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

South Dakota Counties



South Dakota Migration Routes

Missouri River - Red River of the North - Great Northern Railway (U.S.) - Wadsworth Trail

South Dakota Land Records

Public Domain Land

When the United States acquired South Dakota, most land became part of the public domain. The federal government surveyed the land into plats and sold it to settlers in local land offices; the first South Dakota land office was set up at Vermillion in 1861.

Land could be obtained through cash payment (cash entries), or by homesteading (after 1862). After a settler completed the requirements for land entry, his case file was sent to the General Land Office (GLO) in Washington, DC, where a patent (first-title deed) was issued.

The local land offices recorded transactions for each section of land in tract books. They also created township plats, which are maps of land entries for each township.

Original **Federal Land Patents**, copies of the **Tract Books** and **Township Plats** are at **The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office** in **Billings, Montana.**

BLM **Patent Records since the 1960's** are stored at **National Archives** offices in **Denver, CO**.

Original **Homestead Papers** are stored in the **National Archives** in **Washington, D.C.**

Private Land Ownership

After a citizen bought a parcel of land from the U.S. government, the land became the private property of that person. Private land records may state the given name of the wife, a previous residence, names of children, or death information. They may give maiden names when fathers deeded property to their daughters. Witnesses may be relatives or neighbors.

Private land records are filed in the **County Clerks'** or **County Recorders' Offices**. As new counties were formed and boundaries changed, transactions were then recorded in the new county, while the parent county retained the records previously created.

South Dakota Genealogy Websites

Note: Check online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota – www.usgwarchives.net/sd/andreas
Dakota Land Patent Records - http://www.time-passages.com/land-patent-research.html
Digital Library of South Dakota – search or browse the digitized records of university libraries - http://dlsd.sdln.net/
Moody County Genealogy - issues of the historical society newsletter, homesteading of the county by Native Americans and Europeans, cemetery burials, and veterans - http://www.moodycountymuseum.com/
South Dakota State Historical Society Collection Indexes – indexes of military records, naturalizations, biographies, newspaper database, guide to American Indian research - https://history.sd.gov/archives/collectionindexes.aspx

South Dakota African American Research

AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

South Dakota Cemetery Research

Moody County Cemeteries - Alphabetical listing of all recorded burials in cemeteries within Moody County as of August 2018 - http://www.moodycountymuseum.com/research-center.html
Riverside Memorial Cemetery – Aberdeen, SD - alphabetical index of burials includes birth date, death date, burial date, and cemetery location - https://aberdeen.brown.sd.govern.com/
South Dakota Cemeteries – list of cemeteries, burials for some years - http://www.idreamof.com/cemetery/sd.html
Woodlawn Cemetery – Sioux Falls, SD – search list of burials - results include name, burial date and burial section - http://woodlawncemeterysf.com/burial-search/

South Dakota Military Research

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/
Moody County Veterans - list (incomplete) of Moody County residents who served in the Civil War through the present - http://www.moodycountymuseum.com/research-center.html

South Dakota Native American Research

Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center – student records, cemetery information, much related to one of the Sioux tribes - http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/
Dakota Archives – history of homesteading of Moody County by Dakota families and white settlers - http://www.moodycountymuseum.com/dakota-archives.html
First People - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html
For Eagles to be Crows – oral histories collected by KDSU radio in the 1970's for a series about Native Americans in the Dakotas region - http://digitalhorizonsonline.org/digital/collection/ndsu-eagles
Native American Tribes of South Dakota - http://www.native-languages.org/sdakota.htm

Information above courtesy of:
Ancestry.com – Wiki - South Dakota State Research Guide
Familysearch.org – Wiki - South Dakota genealogy
History.com - https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/south-dakota
"International Vital Records Handbook, 7th Edition"; compiler Thomas Jay Kemp
Moody County Museum - http://www.moodycountymuseum.com/
Referencedesk.com – History Timeline of South Dakota - http://www.ereferencedesk.com/resources/state-history-timeline/south-dakota.html
Family Tree Magazine