



Wallace L. Dow

Dakota Images

Wallace Leroy Dow, Dakota Territory's premier architect, was an influential imagemaker whose buildings reflected the region's struggle toward statehood and prosperity in the late 1800s.

Dow was born 21 September 1844 in Croydon, New Hampshire. Continuing a family tradition, he engaged in the cooperage, carpentry, and joinery businesses in Newport, New Hampshire. He left his native state for Dakota Territory in 1880, tempted by the possibility of receiving architectural commissions from his friend and fellow New Hampshire native, territorial governor Nehemiah Ordway. Dow lived briefly in Pierre and Yankton before moving to Sioux Falls in 1883.

The architect received his first territorial commission—the hospital for the insane in Yankton—from Governor Ordway in March of 1881. Ordway's successors continued to patronize Dow throughout his career, selecting him to design more than two dozen buildings for other governmental institutions. His commissions included structures for the South Dakota School for the Deaf, the State Reform School, the University of South Dakota at both Vermillion and Springfield, South Dakota State University, Dakota State University, and Northern State University. He also designed the South Dakota and North Dakota penitentiaries and the South Dakota Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Many communities also called upon Dow to build their public structures, including the courthouses for Douglas, Kingsbury, Lincoln, McCook, and Minnehaha counties; city halls for Mitchell and Sioux Falls; and libraries for Mitchell, Pierre, and Yankton. He designed numerous religious, residential, and commercial structures for towns throughout eastern South Dakota and southwestern Minnesota as well.

Dow worked in a variety of the elaborate styles popular during the Victorian period. Some consider the Minnehaha County Courthouse in Sioux Falls, a Richardsonian Romanesque building constructed of the architect's trademark Sioux quartzite, to be his masterpiece. Dow continued to live and work in Sioux Falls until his death on 5 July 1911.

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