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# Dakota Images

by Mary M. Collins

Rancher, freighter, and town builder, Frederick Taft Evans was an entrepreneur with a talent for adapting to the rapidly changing frontier West.

Born in Parkman, Ohio, on 28 November 1835, Evans received his early education in Ohio, where he also attended Hiram College. Leaving his home state at age eighteen, he traveled throughout the West working as a wood chopper and freighter before establishing a stock ranch on the Platte River near Grand Island, Nebraska, in 1859. There he married Theresa Beall in 1863.

Evans sold his ranch in 1868, moving to the Missouri River Valley to found the town of Sloan, Iowa. Three years later, he took his family to Sioux City, where he engaged in the mercantile and banking businesses. With the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874, Evans joined several partners in a freighting venture, shipping supplies and mining equipment up the Missouri River to Fort Pierre for ox trains to haul west to Deadwood. He bought out his partners in 1878, and over the next several years the Evans Transportation Company carried millions of pounds of freight over the Fort Pierre-Deadwood Trail and the Chamberlain Road, an alternate route that Evans helped to develop. At one time, Evans employed more than one thousand men and owned four hundred wagons, two hundred and forty mules, and fifteen hundred oxen.

With the completion of a rail line to Rapid City in 1886 and the subsequent demise of overland freighting, Evans sold his warehouses and stock for a reported half-million dollars. His next enterprise was the development of the southern Black Hills town of Hot Springs as a health spa catering to adherents of a popular 1890s natural-health movement. Taking advantage of the area's warm-water springs, he built a number of bathhouses, including Evans Plunge, which was the world's largest enclosed natural warm-water swimming pool at the time. He also constructed the elegant Evans Hotel and several distinctive business buildings of native pink sandstone.

Evans also had a political career, serving as a county treasurer and territorial legislator in Nebraska, a commissioner for Lawrence County, South Dakota, and mayor of Hot Springs. Remembered as a tireless promoter with a voice as big as his person, Evans died on 11 October 1902. He is buried in Hot Springs.



**Frederick Taft Evans**

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