

## The Towns of Medary

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There were two periods of settlement at Medary. You might even say there were two Medarys. The first is linked the opening of Dakota territory. By the fall of 1856, it was certain that the populous Minnesota territory would be eligible for statehood. This left its western extension, reaching all the way to Missouri River to become the future Dakota Territory. A group of politicians and legislators connected to then Governor, Samuel A. Medary saw big opportunities for speculative enterprises. They incorporated themselves as the Dakota Land Company, by special legislative act of Minnesota Territory. To quote Charles E. Flandrau, who wrote some twenty years later, we would occupy the territory west of the new state, send a delegate to congress, secure the capital, the university, penitentiary, and other public buildings at our towns and make good speculation out of the enterprise.

Shortly after its formation the Dakota Land Company was instrumental in getting Congress to appropriate \$15,000 to build an emigrant road from Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota River connecting with the Oregon Trail at South Pass. This wagon road would be known as the Nobles Trail after its chief advocate William Noble, who dreamed of a road connecting Minnesota and the Pacific Ocean.

Colonel William Nobles, named superintendent and his party which included son of the Governor, Samuel A. Medary Jr, as engineer embarked for the Dakotas in the spring of 1857. They marked the course of the road with mounds of dirt as they proceeded westward to the Missouri. At the Big Sioux crossing, the Nobles crew improved the ford with rocks and gravel.

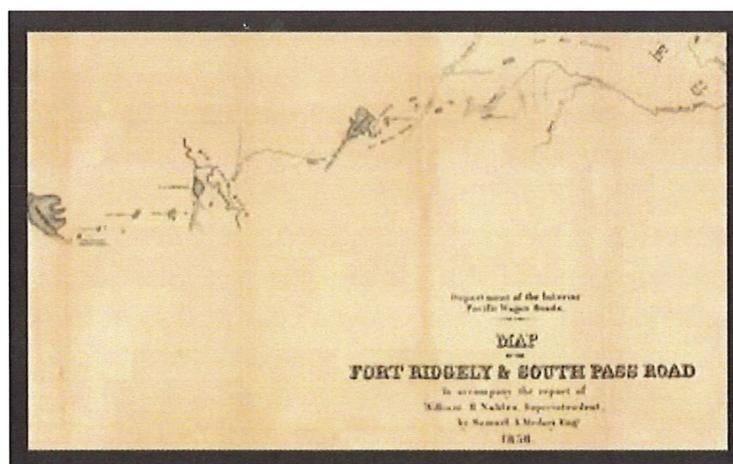


Fig. 1 Nobles Trail

The crossing became the logical place to locate a townsite. The Dakota Land Company located the town of Medary near it when they arrived at the river later in June. The Medary settlement was located on the east side of the Big Sioux River in southeast corner of section 26 of the future Medary Township (township 109, range 50). Medary was named for Governor Samuel A. Medary. The Dakota Land Company party was led by Alpheus G. Fuller and Major Franklin J. Dewitt along with a group of settlers, who likely left St. Paul in May, took a steamer as far as New Ulm, and went overland to Dakota. Franklin Dewitt and 14 to 16 men stayed behind at Medary and built quarters for themselves to prepare to stay for winter. Fuller and the others went on down the river to found the site of Flandreau (named for Charles E. Frandrau) and eventually to establish a site near the falls of the Big Sioux. The question of whether Medary was the first townsite in Dakota Territory as stated on the base of the Medary Monument remains open.

It was certainly the first town established by the Dakota Land Company and was favored to become capital of the new territory by that company. However, to the surprise of the Dakota Land Company, a group had been sent out by the Western Land Company of Dubuque, Iowa in spring of 1857 to the falls of the Big Sioux. They had occupied the site since May 1857, a full month before the arrival of representatives of the Dakota Land Company and laid a land claim of 320 acres, which they named Sioux Falls. The St. Paul party staked a claim on an adjoining plot of land, which they named Sioux Falls City.

The settlement of Medary was short lived as it was abandoned on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1858. The area of South Dakota, east of the Big Sioux had been ceded by the Santee Sioux in 1851. Although Medary was legally sited according to the treaty, Smutty Bear, a Yanktonian chief and other chiefs disagreed. In the spring of 1858 Chief Lean Dog, leading a group of about 1500 Yankton and Yanktonnais Indians began moving east in the general direction of the pipestone quarry in Minnesota, when they stopped at Medary to warn settlers away. According to letter from H. L. Back, a bystander, Lean Dog, through interpreters, told Franklin Dewitt and his men, who numbered 16, that he and his men had never signed the treaty and gave them to sundown to get out. Meanwhile the Indian women began turning back the sod where potatoes had been planted and began eating them. The men threw a plow and other tools into the well, collected enough grub to sustain them for four days, and departed. There were no hostilities at Medary. The Indians, while numerous, were only armed with bows and arrows. A year later Dewitt received a \$6,000 payment for his loss.

The first phase of Medary ended in 1858. Although gone, Medary was not forgotten. The place name Medary continued to be shown on maps printed throughout the 1860's and the memory of the settlement lived on in regional lore.

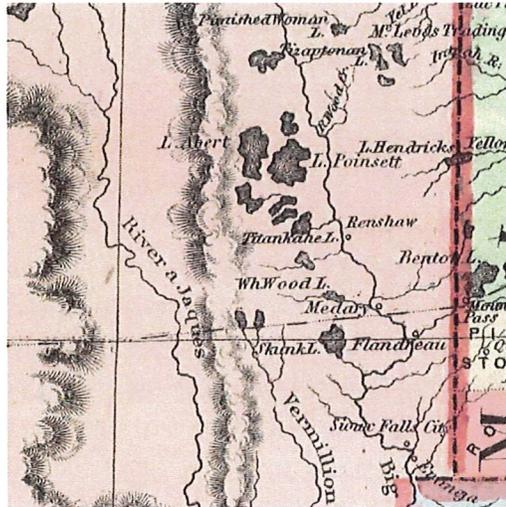


Fig. 2 Colton's Map of Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota and Indian Territory, 1865.

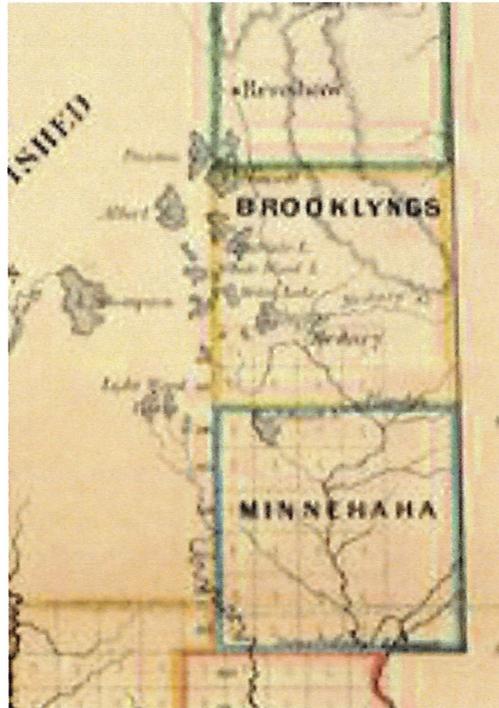


Fig. 3 Extracted from a Map of Dakota Territory, 1866.

It was eleven years before another group of people of European origin attempted to settle in the county. During this time, in 1862 Brookings County was created, although it

essentially had no settlers. This Brookings County was larger than today's county. It is shown on the map of Dakota Territory published in 1866 along with a no longer inhabited village of Medary.

In the early spring of 1869, a small group of Norwegians from Salem Township near Rochester Minnesota, decided to move west. The group consisted of Nils O. Trygstad, his wife Christiana and seven sons (Carl, Ole, Martin, Cornelius, Erick, John, and Michael); as well as Ole Jermstad, his wife; and Rinda and Christopher Balterud. On May 27, 1869 Trygstad sons Martin (26) and Erick (21) set out on foot with a small supply of provisions. Getting advice on the way of where they might find suitable land they keep moving westward. They headed for Lake Benton, the last white settlement, but missed the settlement and found themselves at nightfall at a little lake, now called Shaokatan in central western Lincoln County near the then Brookings County line. The brothers then traveled southwest until they reached a point (three miles west of Elkton) where they met the Nobles Trail. They followed the road until they reached the site of the old village of Medary. They followed the river upstream for several miles, where they camped for night.

The spot they spent the night of June 6-7 was on the east side of the Big Sioux about four miles northwest of Medary in section 9 of township 109, range 50. This became the loci of the Norwegian settlement in the township. On their return the two brothers planned to follow the Nobles Trail to Lake Benton. The brothers had very little to eat and barely made it to Lake Benton, where they received sustenance. By the time they met up with their relatives at a point between New Ulm and Redwood Falls, they had walked an estimated 415 miles with the exception of 20 miles between Lake Benton and Lynd where they were given a ride. The Trygstad clan and notably Martin Trygstad would continue to play a pivotal role in the history of Brookings County, Medary Township, and the town of Medary.

The census of 1870 showed for Brookings County a population 163 persons of whom 151 were native-born, mainly Indians, 12 foreign born, including 10 Norwegians living in the Medary township area. There were likely a handful of other non-Indians living in the county that the census failed to count. People began to trickle into the county mostly locating along lakes and streams. Settlers had to go to Sioux Falls for their mail from 1869 to 1871. The Flandreau post office then served them for six months before the first post office in Brookings County was opened in 1871 with Martin Trygstad as the postmaster. The first post office operated out of Martin Trygstad's cabin in section 4 of Medary Township. Brookings County was organized by Act of Territorial Legislature in January 13, 1871 with Martin Trygstad, L. M. Hewlett and Elias Thompson as county commissioners. Medary was named county seat of Brookings County on January 21, 1871, which means for a time the location of Medary was likely



The large footprint of the plat suggests that entrepreneurs James Bippus and Henry Urmy had great expectations for the future of Medary. In fact Medary did prosper for a time. On July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1872, a few days after Medary was platted, Charles H. Stearn arrived at Medary with his wife and his son Henry I. to become the second household there. They constructed a log house and in next year acquired the Bippus and Urmy's stock of goods. J. Bippus and H. Urmy left for Sioux Falls but continued their interest in the new town. C.H. Stearn sold groceries and general merchandise from a lean-to-build on the side of his house. His was the first family to settle permanently at Medary. The Stearn family began its long association with Medary and the township. C.H. Stearn like later residents of the town fully expected the Chicago and Northwestern railroad to cross the river at Medary. He and other early settlers bought some land and waited for business to come and land values to rise. Stearn traded furs and skins for goods from 1873 to 1874 with the Christian Indians who lived along the Big Sioux from Medary to Flandreau and handled the mail. After 1874, C.H. Stearn went into full time farming.

James Natesta arrived in the Medary area in May 1873. Eric Trygstad gave Natesta the use of a log cabin two miles up the Big Sioux from Medary which he used for one year while he ran a store in which he stocked with traps for hunting. Meanwhile J. Bippus and H. Urmy induced him to move to Medary by offering him a lot if he would build a store. He put up an inexpensive frame building measuring 16 by 24 feet. J. Natesta bought out C. H. Stearn's inventory for \$80 and assumed the postmaster's position. This was in August 1874. Natesta operated a successful grocery and dry goods store in Medary until 1879-1880.

Beginning in 1874 Medary showed definite signs of growth. Taylor Tidball and George Smith built a small building and started a drug store. Mogan Culbertson built a frame building 16 x24 feet in size and one and a half stories tall. It was both a home to the Culbertsons as well as the only hotel. James Hauxhurst built a small house which he sold: it was used a school for as long as Medary lasted. George W. Bolles than built a home and had an even larger store than James Natesta's. Will Roddle had a small hardware store and Stevens a meat market. The Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan noted in its June 28, 1876 issue; The place (Medary) has grown from a few unpainted buildings, apparently used for dwellings, to a genuine village. The extensive planting of ornamental and shade trees, together with the erection of hitching posts and horse blocks, lead an individual to mentally exclaim 'these people are hopeful for the future' and expect to live and die here or sell to a class who wish to enjoy the comforts of life in full."

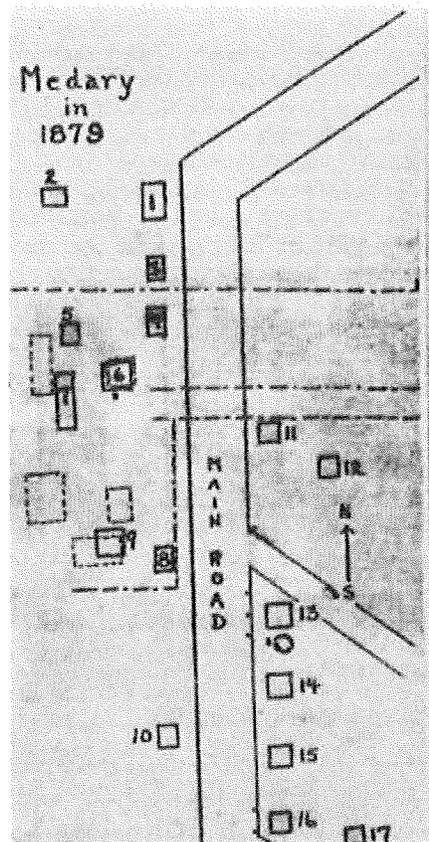


Fig. 4. Medary in 1879.

1. Morgan Culbertson's frame house; 2. Culbertson' barn; 3. Culbertson's blacksmith shop; 4. Tidball & Smith's drugstore; 5. Urmly & Bippus' log house; 6. Stearn's log house; 7. Stearn's cattle shed; 8. Hauxhurst frame house used as a school in 1879; 9. Stearn's barn; 10. Roddle's frame house; 11. George Smith's frame house; 12. Smith's barn; 13. Natesta store; 14. Natesta's frame house; 15. Stevens' meat market; 16. Bolles' frame house and Bolles' barn. Most of the houses were 16x24 feet or smaller. The Medary Monument lies about a city block southeast of Bolles' barn (17). "Brookings Register," Diamond Jubilee Edition, August 15, 1954.

At about the same time, in 1873, the Territorial Legislature, at the instigation of entrepreneur Richard Pettigrew and surveyor of town plat of Flandreau, took two tiers of townships of the south of Brookings County and two off the north of Minnehaha County to create Moody County. Flandreau was declared the county seat of the new county. This left Medary, then county seat only a mile from the Brookings County line. This change in boundaries ultimately sealed the fate of Medary.

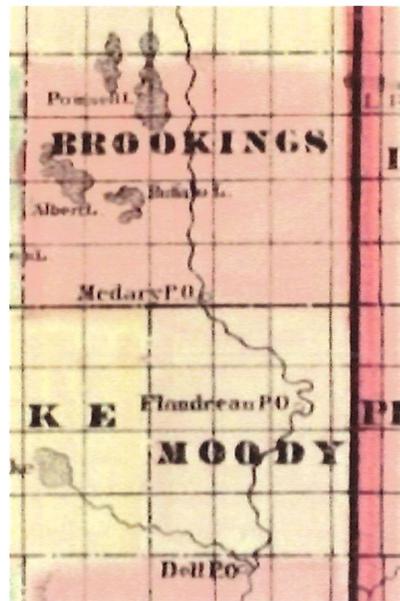


Fig. 5 Extracted from Cram's Railroad and Township Map Dakota Territory, 1875

As described by J. H. Biggar in 1880, "Medary was a beautiful spot for a town, being close to the winding Sioux river, with beautiful groves of ash, elm, and maple close by." Medary in its hay day supported a variety of cottage industries. Flax that was raised by Morgan Culbertson in 1873, was spun by local women, and made into linens. M. Culbertson also operated a broom factory and blacksmith shop. Mrs. J. L. McMaster's made straw hats according to individual specification and William Dale operated a cheese factory. Professions were represented as well, Medary had a doctor, dentist, lawyer and operator of a livery stable.

By 1879, the Brookings County Press carried advertisements for the Medary Hotel, William Allison, Proprietor; James Natesta, dealer in groceries and dry goods, Clerk of the District Court, general land agent; William H. Skinner, notary public, and real estate and locating agent; W.H. Shortley, Blacksmith, James Hauxhorst, Register of Deeds and County Clerk, H.H. Keeney, locating agent; George H. Smith, harness maker, and N. Grinols, sheriff of Brookings County.

Medary remained the county seat until it was determined the Dakota Central Railroad Company, a branch of the Northwestern and Chicago, rail line would be located further north through the center of the county. In keeping with railroad policy to locate townsites eight to twelve miles apart, townsites had been selected at Elkton, Aurora, and Volga with no plans for others.

Sometime in the spring of 1879, a group of men from Medary approached D.B. Waterman, then right of way and town site agent for the Northwestern and Chicago Railroad, with a proposal, for a new location for the county seat. W.H. Skinner and R.M. Crawford took the lead, and after several conversations with D.B. Waterman and T. Brown, an attorney from Sioux Falls, it was thought feasible to locate a fourth town in the center of the county, if they obtained 160 acres for townsite, sidetracks, depot, and other facilities. Medaryites joined by supporters from Fountain achieved the needed land transactions to satisfaction of the railroad and Brookings joined the list of towns planned by the railroad. Brookings was platted on October 3-4 in 1879. On November 4, 1879, a vote was taken to relocate the county seat from Medary to the new town of Brookings. It was passed by more than a 2/3rds majority. Brookings won out over Volga and Aurora, though not without some suspect activity on the part of James Hauxhorst, then county clerk.

This began the "big bug out." People left by the drove and Medary buildings were moved to Brookings. Some of the buildings moved were William Shortley's blacksmith shop and W.H. Roddle's hardware store. As soon as Brookings was platted in 1879, people of Medary began to move. James Natesta was the first to set up a business, but on account of being clerk of courts and postmaster of Medary, then the county seat, didn't move to Brookings that year, but moved there when his term of office expired in 1881. J. Hauxhorst, W. Roddle, J. Tidball, G. Smith, J.H. Shortley, W.H. Harvey, and W. H. Skinner were some of first to move to the new town. William H. Skinner, who had connections to both Medary and Fountain, was clerk of the courts from 1879 to 1883 and chairman of the county board in 1879 to 1880. He was later postmaster of Brookings. Taylor Tidball moved to Brookings to continue the drug business he had had in Medary. Dr. A.B. Culbertson, who had been a teacher in Medary before going to medical school, was Brookings' first resident physician. Natesta was engaged in the mercantile business in Brookings until 1895. After that he became assistant cashier of the Bank of Brookings.

The post office continued to operate in Medary through 1883, but ultimately the town declined and disappeared. In 1880 the town had two stores, a post office, a hotel, blacksmith's shop, and school. Henry I. Stearn, son Charles Stearn, remained a successful farmer in Medary, farming some 1200 acres. In 1920 he retired moved to Brookings, living at 716 Fifth Street. In 1929 he donated land for the construction of the Medary Monument. Today the monument is only marker of the town or towns of Medary. The map on the next page shows Brookings County as it was settled in 1881.



Fig. 6. Extracted from Post route map of the territory of Dakota with adjacent parts of Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota, and portions of the Dominion of Canada. Published [Washington, D.C.] U.S. Post Office Dept., 1881.