

Chapter Two

2.0 HISTORY

The history of Pennington County is long and varied. Prior to the arrival of white explorers and later settlers, the indigenous Native Americans held the land which now constitutes Pennington County as sacred. Mountain men, trappers and explorers began to visit the area in the mid-1800s. Pennington County was later created in 1875 by an act of the Dakota Territorial Legislature. From 1875 to 1897 the County boundaries changed. In 1897, the County boundaries were set, as we know them today.

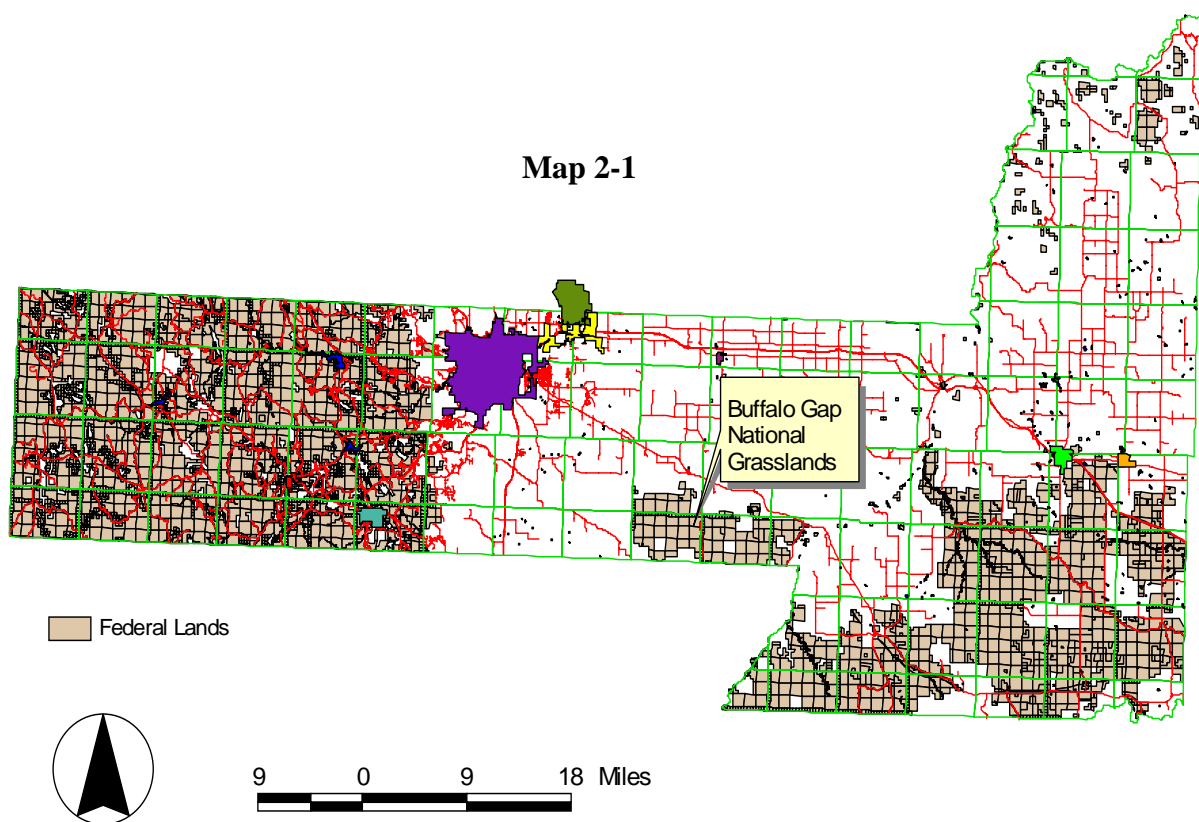
The County was named in honor of John L. Pennington, the fifth governor of Dakota Territory. Sheridan was selected as the first County seat. In 1878, the first Federal Court west of the Missouri River was held in Sheridan in a log building. Shortly thereafter, Sheridan lost the County seat to Rapid City, which was booming on the edge of the Black Hills. As the placer mines around Sheridan dwindled, it became a ghost town. In 1939, an artificial lake was constructed. Today Sheridan Lake covers the site of the ghost town of Sheridan. In 1882, the first courthouse was erected in Rapid City at a cost of \$12,000, where the County administration offices remain today.

Many of the towns and cities in Pennington County were established as a result of mining activities in the Black Hills. Some of the towns, such as Rapid City, Wall, Keystone, and Hill City continued to grow while others declined and ultimately disappeared. In 1886, the first railroad reached Rapid City from Nebraska. Prior to this, means of transportation was overland. Additional rail service was added in 1907 when the Northwestern and Milwaukee Railroads extended their lines across the Missouri River into Rapid City. Originally, the Black Hill National Forest started as a forest reserve in 1897 by order of President Grover Cleveland. Later in 1905, the forest reserve was transferred to the Department of Agriculture, and in 1907, was renamed as the Black Hills National Forest. The Black Hills National Forest encompasses 1,246,966 acres of which 394,820 acres are located within Pennington County. The Department of Agriculture also manages the Buffalo Gap National Grassland in eastern Pennington County, which contain 199,410 acres. A map indicating the location of both the Black Hills National Forest and Buffalo Gap National Grassland is shown as Map 2-1 on the following page.

During World War II, a large airbase was constructed near Box Elder. This base was selected as a permanent airbase after the war. Today Ellsworth Air Force Base is the only large military installation in South Dakota. A map of the area occupied by the Ellsworth Air Force Base is attached.

The history of Pennington County is important as it has and continues to have a direct impact on land use issues. The eastern part of Pennington County has primarily been developed as a result of homesteads. The western part of Pennington County, located in the Black Hills, has existing land use patterns reflecting the hundreds of mining surveys and patents that were issued from 1876 to 1900. Pennington County continues to deal with private lands that were once established mines or had the potential to be mined. The

location and size of these mining surveys have posed a particular set of elements to consider when reviewing planning and development projects. Many of the mining claims have legal access and floodplain issues.



Early in the 20th century, the Black Hills began to emerge as a tourist destination. In 1942 (?), the carving of Mt. Rushmore was completed. Later, Mt. Rushmore was declared a National Monument. In addition, the Badlands National Park, Wall Drug and other nearby attractions, such as Custer State Park, Jewel and Wind Caves, and Crazy Horse Monument have all brought ever-increasing numbers of tourists to Pennington County. Today Rapid City, Hill City, Keystone and Wall all rely on tourism as a major element of their economy. Elements of the local economy focusing on tourism also impacts land use. Pennington County has a significant number of land uses that cater to tourism, such as bed and breakfast establishments, temporary campgrounds, commercial campgrounds, hotels, and restaurants. Seasonal tourism means peaks demand for services in the summer.