

Andrew Ericson Lee
3rd Governor of SD

March 18, 1847- March 19, 1934
(87 years) Lot 870

- Andrew and his twin sister, Betsey, joined three other siblings born to Eric and Augusta (Johnson) in Hordaland, Norway, near Bergen.
- The family immigrated to New York in 1851 and by 1860 they were farming near Dane, WI
- As a youth, he worked in a mercantile store in McGregor, IA, and then continued this profession in Madison, WI.
- In 1867, he moved to the Dakota Territory and partnered (1889) in a dry goods mercantile business with CE Prentis which eventually had the largest volume of any SD business.
- He married (Martha Anna) Annie Chappell in 1872. Annie was a state regent for the Daughter of the American Revolution (DAR). They had two daughters, Jennie (infant death) and Jessamine.
- In 1881, Lee was elected Vermillion City Alderman and 1892-96 Mayor of Vermillion. "Honest Andy" sided with the Vermillion people against his own substantial business interest in a municipal water company dispute.
- He was known to seek an end which led to the most good for the people which often involved overcoming significant legislative odds and opposition of business interests.
- Narrowly elected (319 votes) as the 3rd SD governor on the Populist ticket, the principal battle was against the railroads seeking state concessions.
- In 1898, Lee was reelected on the newly formed Fusion Party ticket, an alliance of independents. This term included the Spanish War (1898) and by the conclusion of this term, SD was debt free. He chose not to run for reelection.
- In 1890, he lost a congressional bid (242 votes) during a state-wide Republican landslide which ended Populist influence in the state.
- In 1908, Lee, as the Democratic nominee, was defeated in the gubernatorial race.
- Annie passed away May 17, 1918, at 67.
- Lee and Myrtle S. Sheppard were married on June 1, 1920. Her first marriage at 46, she was also active in the DAR.
- The Lee & Prentis partnership was liquidated in 1921. As Lee took a less active interest in his business affairs, Myrtle took a more active role in managing the Lee investments and ultimately amassed a fortune.
- 1924 brought an end to Lee's political career when he was defeated in his bid for the SD presidential elector position.
- After a long illness, Lee passed and at that time, his daughter's whereabouts were unknown.



The Russell Brothers
Clay County Sheriffs-Prohibition

George Frederick - 7/1/1899-4/23/1987
(87 years) Lot 926
William Ruston, Jr - 12/11/1900-
6/11/1991 (90 years) Lot 852

- Brothers born to William Sr. and Ida (Partridge) were raised in Vermillion with three siblings. About 1920, the family relocated to Lake Andes, SD, where William Sr. was the postmaster.
- After moving back to Vermillion, William married Alma Nelson in 1931 and they had eight sons; Robert, Roger, James, Jack, Byron, WR III, Mark and Dennis.
- George married Eve Ryan in 1936 and they had one son, Thomas.
- Both gentlemen played semi-professional baseball for the Sioux City Stockyards team.
- William was sheriff from 1933-36 and George from 1937-40.
- By 1934, both men were serving Clay County, William was the elected sheriff and the deputy sheriff was George.
- Prohibition was in effect in South Dakota and the brothers were aware of a large still in operation near Dalesburg, Garfield Township in Clay County.
- The tip that this still was to be raided by federal agents occurred when an unsent telegram was discovered in Sioux City intended for 'Al' (presumed to be noted gangster, Al Capone).
- The still was well hidden, the largest, and most intricately built still in operation including a hidden smokestack piped thru the silo so it couldn't be seen. One day, the brothers visited the farm to see if they could find the still and all they discovered was a girl playing with a doll in the barn – she was actually playing on the door which led to the underground operation of the still!
- In late September of 1934, federal agents raided the still on the Thure A. Swanson farm. The still was destroyed and several arrests, including the hired man and Mrs. Swanson were made.
- While the brothers believed they were assisting the federal agents in the sting, both were arrested. William was arrested at in his courthouse office and George by a downtown restaurant. Bail was set at \$7500.
- Ultimately, the brothers stood trial and were found not guilty. Evidently, the voters of Clay County felt no animosity for this alleged involvement as William was re-elected to a second term and following him, George was elected to two terms as sheriff serving until 1940.
- Eventually, George left Vermillion and worked as head of security for an aircraft manufacturing plant in Omaha and eventually moved to Anaheim, CA.
- After serving as Clay County Sheriff, William worked construction in Omaha and operated a hardware store in Pocahontas, IA.
- Both came home for their burials.

Thanks to
... The Bluff View Cemetery Board
... Storytellers - David Burrow, Steve Gapp, Kurt Hackemer, Kelly Herbster, Chad Passick & Wess Pravecek
... Brian Adams for audio

The mission of the Clay County (SD) Historical Society is to bring together those people interested in the history and prehistory of Clay County and adjacent areas.

CCHS Yearly Membership

- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family
- \$75 Institutional
- \$250 Lifetime

The Austin-Whittemore House
(home of the Clay County Historical Society)
15 Austin Street, is currently open by
appointment only. 605-624-8266



CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
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The Clay County
Historical Society
presents

**Spoken History
Cemetery Tour**

“It's all about Politics”

Monday, October 12, 2020
5:30 pm

Bluff View Cemetery
Vermillion, SD



Rachel Ross Austin

Suffragette, W.C.T.U. & Clay County School Board

June 1, 1838 - March 6, 1904
(65 years) Lot 302

- Rachel was born to Benjamin and Mary (Palm).
- She was raised in Trumbull (Warren County, OH) and graduated from Warren High School.
- In 1867, the family moved to Dakota Territory.
- Shortly after, she was hired to teach at the first permanent school house (1868 -1869).
- Rachel was one of five people who informally organized the Regular Baptist Church on February 16, 1868. She stayed actively involved in the First Baptist Church for the rest of her life.
- According to her husband Horace Austin's diary, they met on February 22, 1868.
- The couple was married on March 21, 1870, when he was 32 and she was 31 years old.
- Rachel was one of the founding members of the Dakota Territory Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) dated March 14, 1879.
- According to 1880 census, Rachel's occupation was listed as "keeping house".
- The couple adopted Helen (Pansy) Austin in 1882 and also 'reared' Anna Ross and Leroy Stevens.
- Rachel's husband, Horace, died in 1891 during the SD legislative session. He was 53.
- She served on the Bluff View Cemetery Board from 1891-1901.
- In 1892, Rachel ran in the school board election and was defeated. (The loss was attributed to her participation in the W.C.T.U.) A few years later, she was elected and retained that position for many years.
- In 1893, Rachel donated land to the City of Vermillion in Horace's memory to be used as a park (current site of Austin School), which wasn't developed until 1905.
- The Order of the Eastern Star was organized in Clay County in 1898 and Rachel was a member for years.
- Also serving as the county president of the Woman's Suffrage Association, Rachel managed the 1900 campaign to gain votes for women.
- According to the 1900 census, Rachel's occupation was listed as "capitalist".
- Rachel died of pneumonia at 65.

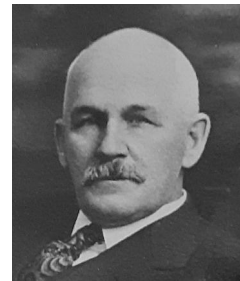


Elvira Englund Bliss

Clay County Superintendent of Schools

October 15, 1896 - November 14, 1975
(79 years) Lot 228

- (Emma) Elvira Englund was born on a farm in Union County to Carl and Emma (Roman), the sixth child of eight; Carl, Bertha, Ada, Henry, Alfred, Elvira, Alma and Theodor.
- The first eight years of her education were at the Walnut Grove School in Union County.
- She graduated from Vermillion High School in only three years - Class of 1916.
- In 1921, she graduated from the University of South Dakota with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Arts and Sciences.
- When she was 29, she and William O. Bliss were married in Sioux City, IA (1925)
- They resided at 714 Lewis Street.
- They had one child, James William Bliss, who was born in 1930.
- Elvira taught in rural schools for many years, including Spink Rural School in Union County.
- She studied at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and then returned to USD to obtain a Master of Arts Degree in 1932.
- The Blisses separated in the early 30s.
- In 1937, Bill died while living in California with his second wife and newborn son, Charles.
- In 1938, Elvira was elected Clay County Superintendent of Schools by defeating three other candidates. One was the incumbent, her ex-husband's sister, Ellen Bliss.
- For over 30 years - every two years - she was reelected to that position until the position was abolished in 1971. At that point, she retired.
- She served on the Clay County Board of Education and was a lifetime member of the Clay County Historical Society
- At 79, after a long illness, Elvira died of cancer.

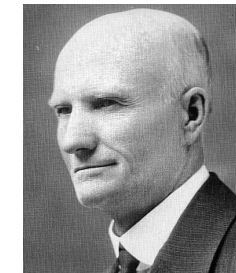


Morris Jay Chaney

Speaker of the SD House of Representatives

Oct. 1, 1858 - Feb. 8, 1940
(81 years) Lot 787

- Morris was born in Ogle County, IL, to Osborn and Amanda (Rice). He was the 7th of 8 children including four sisters (Louise, Alice, Mary, Harriet) and three brothers (Edward, George, Harry).
- He and his siblings were raised near Winnebago, outside of Rockford, IL. His father was a lumberman.
- As a young adult, he joined his brother, George, in Buena Vista County, IA, where he farmed prior to teaching in the Newell School.
- There he met and married Helen McFarline in 1886. She was born and raised in Portage, NY.
- In 1893, the family (Florence, Dorothy and Morris A.) moved to Wakonda. In addition to a mercantile business and farming, he was a banker at the Bank of Wakonda.
- By 1903, he was elected (Republican) as a representative in the SD House and continued through the 1909 session.
- He was Speaker of the House for both the 1907 and 1909 congressional sessions.
- The family moved to Vermillion in 1912 and Morris organized the Citizen's Bank & Trust Co.(1914) which he operated until his retirement in 1936.
- Helen passed away of a 'fatal illness' in September of 1922 and their daughter, Florence, passed away just over four months later in January of 1923 of a coronary thrombosis. She was only 31.
- In 1933, during a bank robbery, Morris and two other employees were taken hostage but were released at the edge of town.
- Morris was a trustee for both Congregational Churches in Wakonda and Vermillion,. He served on the 1929 building committee for the current UCC.
- Morris was active with the Vermillion Public Library Board, served on the first Dakota Hospital Foundation Board and was a Freemason.
- He was an sportsman, hunter and fisherman
- While on a Florida fishing trip visiting a Wakonda friend, Morris passed away quietly in his sleep.



Carl Gunderson

11th Governor of SD

June 6, 1864 - Feb. 26, 1933
(68 Years) Lot 968

- Born in a log cabin to Hans and Isabel (Governor Lee's sister) on the family homestead near Burbank, Carl had eleven siblings.
- In addition to family farming, Carl's father served three terms in the Dakota Territorial legislature.
- Carl graduated from USD (1890) with a degree in civil engineering and surveying. He also attended Cornell University in Ithaca, NY
- He married Gertrude Bertleson on June 16, 1892, and they had four children, Helen, Florence, Carol, and Norris.
- Carl served five terms in the SD Senate, being elected in 1892, 1896, 1898 and 1900. He returned to the Senate again in 1916.
- From 1904-11, he was a federal Indian allotting agent locating Timber Lake, Eagle Butte and Dupree while assigning 10K Indian allotments.
- Carl operated a large 900-acre wheat farm in Aurora County (moved to Mitchell in 1918) and operated a mercantile business in Vermillion.
- Three months prior to the 1924 election, his Democratic gubernatorial opponent died in a farm accident. The replacement nominee, William Bulow, was defeated by Gunderson 70.2% to 29.8%. At 60, he was the oldest newly elected Governor in state history.
- By 1926, he was thoroughly unpopular (reverted state agency budgets, ended rural tax credit program, closed state-owned, normal schools) and was defeated by Bulow.
- Carl was a member of the I.O.O.P., Masonic Lodge, Kiwanis Club and the Wheat Growers Association.
- After his defeat, Carl returned to his home in Mitchell. He attempted to obtain the Republican nomination for governor in 1930 and 1932.
- Carl remained there until his death of heart disease. Previously he selected his own final resting place on the tract of land he had homesteaded as a young adult, Bluff View Cemetery.