

USD Letters on the Bluff  
For 2-4-14  
**CCHS Heritage Notes**

The Concrete USD Letters on the Bluff

The erection of the concrete symbols –**USD**—on the hillside above the railroad tracks and Burbank Road a mile or so East of Vermillion was designed to advertise the University of South Dakota. The letters—made of concrete, each about 50 feet long, by students in the USD College of Engineering—were formally presented in a ceremony on June 9, 1922 by the Vermillion Civic Council. The event was held in the University Chapel, with the Civic Council making the presentation on behalf of the people of Vermillion and Clay County (and the USD Class of 1921) as a reminder of the University’s location and the determination to keep it in Vermillion.

The funds for the construction of the letters had been raised through the efforts of various organizations in the Vermillion community. It was assumed that the upkeep of the letters would become the responsibility of the USD first-year classes.

A tradition lasting a number of years came into being the following autumn on the afternoon of October 23, 1922 when the University’s upperclassmen—with full approval by the Student Senate—rounded up about a hundred fifty freshmen to march them in columns of four to the site. The neophytes proceeded to give the letters a good cleaning and a fresh coat of white paint under the careful supervision of the upperclassmen.

Meanwhile, the USD Alumni Association was trying to raise funds to build an Alumni Hall to be located east of the University Library on Clark Street. The structure would have been the first Union Building on the campus but the effort was not successful at the time. The first Student Union at USD opened on February 2, 1931, using space in an existing campus building.