



Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy

Dakota Images

Valentine T. McGillicuddy was born in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1849. As a young man he studied and practiced medicine in Detroit, Michigan. Then in order to improve his health, he joined the United States Lake Surveying Service and helped survey the forty-ninth parallel from the Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains. Thriving on his life in the outdoors, he became chief topographer for the Jenney Expedition, organized to verify the existence of gold in the Black Hills. While there he became the first white man to climb Harney Peak.

In 1867 on the recommendation of General George Crook, McGillicuddy was appointed surgeon of the Second United States Cavalry, and he accompanied the troops into the Dakotas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. President Hayes appointed him Indian agent at the Pine Ridge Agency in 1879. While there he organized the first Indian police force, developed a boarding school, and was under continual investigation by Congress, Red Cloud, and the press. His wide range of acquaintances included Generals Sherman, Sheridan, Terry, and Crook, Marcus Reno, Bishop Hare, Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickok, California Joe, Calamity Jane, as well as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Red Cloud.

Before leaving South Dakota in 1897, he served as a member of the constitutional convention in 1889, president of the South Dakota School of Mines, and mayor of Rapid City. McGillicuddy lived to be ninety and on 7 June 1939, the flag at Pine Ridge flew at half-mast from a staff erected by him sixty years before. His ashes were placed on the top of Harney Peak in a crypt prepared for them by the Department of Forestry.

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