

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Summer 2012

Volume 47, Number 2

*Like the Wind . . .
Oakland Cemetery
Holds Many
Caught Up in the
U.S.-Dakota War*

Patrick M. Hill

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*From Cigars for Founders to a Festive 2012 Centennial
The (Men's) Garden Club of Ramsey County at 100*

Barbara Parisien

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Jerry and Lee Shannon, right, take a rare moment to relax in their St. Paul garden—a park-like treasure in the heart of the city. The Shannons have been active members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County (GCRC) for over four decades and they often share their garden with the public. Like the Shannons, Zenas Thomas, top, one of the founders of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County (the predecessor of the today's GCRC), found a moment in 1930 to survey his Bald Eagle Lake garden with his wife, Edith. Photo of the Shannon garden by Glen Stubbe. Photo courtesy of STARTRIBUNE/MINNEAPOLIS-ST.PAUL, 2011. Photo of Zenas and Edith Thomas courtesy of John and Carla Henry.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 47, Number 2

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes, the historical context of now-familiar institutions might surprise us. In this issue, Barbara Parisien shares the history of the Garden Club of Ramsey County and reminds us that the Club started in 1912 with a group of dedicated cigar-smoking men! We are pleased that the Garden Club is celebrating its centennial with us at the Gibbs Museum. Dave Riehle presents the history of the *William Crooks*, the first railroad locomotive in Minnesota, now in Duluth, which many of us remember from its display at St. Paul's Union Depot. But of course, the engine itself came up the Mississippi in 1861 by steamboat, along with the iron rails to build tracks for its initial ten-mile trip from St. Paul to St. Anthony. And at nearly the same time, the devastating U.S.-Dakota War between European-born and Native Americans occurred in southern Minnesota. Patrick Hill notes the Oakland Cemetery graves of white settlers involved and other military graves, showing that even those quiet places can evoke memories of vivid conflict.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Like the Wind . . .

Oakland Cemetery Holds Many Caught Up in the U.S.-Dakota War

Patrick M. Hill

This year marks the sesquicentennial of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The event was essentially the equivalent of a nineteenth-century 9/11 for everyone living in Minnesota in those uncertain days. Yet today only a handful of Minnesotans are even aware of it. As Oakland Cemetery observes its 159th anniversary this year, thereby fortifying its claim as Minnesota's oldest continuously operating cemetery, no one should be surprised that so many participants of the fateful events of 1862 are buried there. The cemetery blocklot locations of their graves will be noted within asterisks (*XX-X*) following their names.¹ This article recounts key events in the U.S.-Dakota War from the settlers' perspective. It emphasizes the experiences of those who are buried at Oakland Cemetery and are linked to the violence of that summer in 1862.

The bluestem and prairie smoke waved in the gentle morning breeze. The men moved quietly but with purpose in random columns toward the little settlement of the Redwood Agency perched on a high bluff above the sluggish Minnesota

River.² Their plan had been quickly devised following an all-night gathering at the home of Chief Little Crow three miles above the agency. Little Crow had steadfastly opposed this move toward war throughout that fateful night. Yet fi-



Andrew Myrick, age 30, co-owner with his older brother, Nathan, of stores at both agencies. His intemperate remark between August 5-8, 1862, before a gathering at the Yellow Medicine Agency upset the Upper Sioux. He is inaccurately accused, however, of making the same remark on August 17 before the Lower Sioux, thereby triggering the violence of the next morning. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



At the time of the attack, the Kochendorfer family included Johan, 38; Catherine, 36; John, 11; Rose, 9; Kate, 7; Margaret, 5; and Sarah, 3. Johan, Catherine, and Sarah were among the very first victims slain on the morning of August 18, 1862. The other children made their way to Ft. Ridgley with the help of neighbors. Photo courtesy of Patrick M. Hill.

nally worn down by fatigue and incensed by an accusation of cowardice made by Red Middle Voice, the cunning headman of a group of malcontents known as the Rice Creek Band, he assented to lead these young hotheads in a war he knew they could not win.

The immediate targets of the converging men would be the four stores of the traders Andrew Myrick, Louis Robert, François La Bathe and William Forbes *102-67* located near the Agency. The men arriving this morning were not only convinced the traders had been dealing dishonestly with them for years, but these shopkeepers had also exhibited disdain toward their dependent customers. These

Veteran Burials at Oakland Cemetery, St. Paul

There is no accurate count of the number of veterans buried in Oakland Cemetery. Obvious reasons include the fact that not all veterans chose to be identified as such on their grave markers; those who did are widely scattered throughout the cemetery's more than 50,000 burial plots; and finally some veterans rest in unmarked graves. The best estimate of veteran burials would place the number at about 1,500–2,000 from all eras.

The Oakland Cemetery Association was organized in 1853. In 1890 the Acker Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War Union Veterans organization, requested an area be set aside by Oakland to provide for the burial of indigent Civil War soldiers. Forty grave sites were provided in an area to be named Soldiers Rest. That number was soon doubled and increased again following the Spanish-American War and World War II. There are currently 335 grave sites in Soldiers Rest, but men who served in the Civil War predominate.

Starting in 1879, the United States government began providing gravestones for veteran burials in private cemeteries, but an application proving the veteran's service had to be submitted to obtain one. This was not always done; so over the years a number of graves went unmarked.

In 1999, Bob Schoenrock, Director of the Cemetery, approached me with a proposal to make applications for gravestones for the known, unmarked, graves and for replacement gravestones for those with damaged gravestones. The agreement we reached was that if I would do the research, he would see that the government-provided gravestones were appropriately installed. Since that time, we have provided or replaced over 120 markers with something over 30 more applications remaining for sites in Soldiers Rest.

Although the Oakland Cemetery could provide basic information such as a veteran's name and date of death,

in most cases their records contained little or nothing on the deceased's military service. Consequently, the records at the Minnesota Historical Society along with the online databases for Civil War Soldiers and Sailors and for the Historical Data Systems were invaluable in reconstructing the military records of these men. Because there are many mistakes or contradictions in these men's records, we have imposed a three-source confirmation requirement to insure accuracy before submitting an application for a marker.

The burials at Oakland include many items of interest. There are five Medal of Honor recipients buried here, the most of any cemetery in the state except for Fort Snelling. They include Minnesota's first recipient, Marshal Sherman, recognized for his service at Gettysburg, and Joseph Burger, grandfather of Warren Burger, a former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Joseph Berger's award was granted for action performed at age fifteen. Two of Minnesota's three territorial governors are buried here, as well as five state governors. Two other state governors were temporarily deposited here while awaiting final burial disposition.

The stories of the veterans at Soldiers Rest read like a concise history of the Civil War. During the late nineteenth century, St. Paul was a center for western railroad development and the headquarters for the Army's Department of the Northwest. Thus people came to this area from across the country. Many of them settled in St. Paul and later died and were buried at Oakland. Thus the burials reflect the records of service of military units that were not exclusive to Minnesota.

The first burial of a veteran in Soldiers Rest took place in 1891 when Jasper McCollum, who had served in Hatch's Mounted Battalion on the Minnesota frontier in 1863, was interred. There are also two Civil War sailors at Soldiers Rest. One is Michael

Smith who served aboard the USS *Brooklyn*, which was part of Admiral David Farragut's squadron. The other is John Benson, a black seaman who had served aboard the USS *Vanderbilt*. Soldiers Rest and Oakland generally, has always maintained a policy of integration regarding its burials. There are a number of other black soldiers buried at the cemetery, including some like Henry Majors, a slave liberated by the advance of the Union Army in Mississippi during the war who showed his devotion by joining the service as part of the Sixth Heavy Artillery, U.S. Colored Troops. Members of the postwar U.S. Tenth Cavalry, Buffalo Soldiers, a unit that was predominantly made up of African Americans, are also here.

The Rose brothers, Gideon, Henry, and a memorial marker for Ben, are here. Their family gave its name to the city of Roseville. Others of interest include Edmund Brissette, First Minnesota Infantry Regiment, who was responsible for giving St. Paul its earlier designation of Pig's Eye; Edgar Atkins, First D.C. Calvary, a wartime military provost unit; Samuel Badger, a drummer boy for the Fourth Minnesota Infantry at the age of fourteen; Curtis Kelsey, Mississippi Marine Brigade, a hybrid army/navy unit described as one of the strangest Civil War units of all; Return Holcombe, Tenth Missouri Regiment, who was a significant nineteenth-century Minnesota historian; and William Cobb from Alabama, killed at the Battle of Birch Coulee in 1862. Cobb was first buried elsewhere in the cemetery, but he was reinterred in Soldiers Rest eighty-one years later when an insensitive descendant wanted his spot in the family plot.

Oakland Cemetery is open to the public during regular visiting hours. Anyone who wants to visit Soldiers Rest or any of the other veteran graves at the cemetery should stop at the main office on Jackson Street and pick up a map of the cemetery or check their website, www.oaklandcemeterymn.com.

men of the Soldiers Lodge were determined that justice would finally be done.³

Throughout the summer all the traders had exchanged insults with those Dakota who had threatened to change the payment arrangement this year. The terms of the payment would not be controlled by the merchants, as in all previous years. This time the process would be open with a chance to object to the accounts. "Fine then" asserted the traders, including Andrew Myrick *3-51*—a co-proprietor of one of the stores with his brother, Nathan *3-51*—"if we are not to be paid we will stop extending credit and you can eat grass." And the Sioux had countered "Stop cutting our timber and allowing your animals to graze on our land."⁴ The whole matter was exacerbated by the fact that the annual annuity payment, normally made by June 10, was delayed due to the federal government's attention being focused on the Civil War.

Violence Erupts

This morning violence would settle the matter. By 7:00 a.m. the killing had begun at the stores. Andrew Myrick had only minutes left to live. The traders were targeted not just for revenge but within their stores could be found the food, weapons and ammunition to allow the warriors to expand their rampage. After some initial delay to plunder, the carnage spread through the Agency buildings among those who had been too slow to have heeded the warnings.

Soon afterwards hundreds of warriors spread out on horseback in all directions seeking new targets. Directly across the Minnesota River from Red Middle Voice's Rice Creek band's village, lay the Kochendorfer and Schwandt farms. These German families had recently moved onto the strip of former reservation land that the Dakota had ceded in the 1858 Treaty hoping to see an increase in their annuity payments. Instead they found that virtually all of the proceeds would pass directly to the merchants and the only increase realized was in Indian resentment. The Kochendorfer children were outside when they witnessed their father, Johan, fall from a shot fired from a group of approaching Dakotas. Their mother and baby sister were soon killed in their kitchen.



Mary Schwandt Schmidt (in an 1860 tintype), age 14, was away from home when she was taken captive. Five members of her family were killed at the Schwandt home. Taken to Little Crow's village, she was saved by the intercession of Snana. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The four children escaped to a woods nearby; later they made their way to Fort Ridgely. Johan, Catherine, and Sarah are now buried at *57-4* and their surviving son, John, who witnessed the murders, is buried at *54-13*.⁵

Their neighbors, the Schwandts, fared worse. Five Schwandt family members and two house guests were killed. A son, August, was left for dead but survived, though disfigured for life. Fortunately their daughter, Mary *13-45*, was away from home, but she fell captive. Through the heroic effort of Snana, a young Dakota mother, Mary's life would be saved. Her accounts of her experiences is one of the most familiar personal accounts of those days.

Meanwhile to the south, the flood of refugees streamed toward Fort Ridgely, where, acting as a police station for the entire valley, protection might be found. Stationed there currently was Company B, 5th Minnesota commanded by Captain John Marsh. Marsh had already seen service in combat at Bull Run as a member of the 2nd Wisconsin infantry, which distinguished him from the other inexperienced men of his unit. He was not easily frightened.

As the tide of hysterical citizens seeking refuge increased, so did the degree of horror contained within their tales. Marsh determined he would have to venture out to collect his own reliable information and detached 47 men from his available 76 for the task. He departed at 11:00 a.m. on the fifteen-mile journey to the Redwood Ferry, but before leaving he dispatched a courier on horseback to recall Lieutenant Timothy Sheehan, with fifty men of Company C, 5th Minnesota who had left the fort the previous day on an overland march to Fort Ripley, their normal duty station. The courier would find Sheehan later in the day, 42 miles from the fort.

Failing to heed the warnings of people he met along the way not to go further, Marsh's unit would be ambushed at the ferry crossing to the Lower Agency. Half of his men were killed outright, and Marsh would drown while attempting to lead the survivors back to the fort. Barely thirteen men of his original fifty-man expedition returned.

At Fort Ridgely

Lieutenant Thomas Gere, had been left in command at Fort Ridgely. He set about



Snana, age 23, the wife of Good Thunder. Her own seven-year-old daughter had recently died. Taking pity on the captives, she traded a horse to receive possession of Mary Schwandt whom she then hid and protected until delivering her to safety at Camp Release on September 29. The two women resumed a warm friendship late in life. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

securing the fort and organizing the refugees, identifying men among them who could aid in the defense including Martin Clum *44-157* a veteran of the 2nd Minnesota Infantry. The valley had been stripped of men of military age volunteering for service in the Civil War. In fact, so few men remained that even a company of mixed bloods, or métis, recruited in the valley and self-named the Renville Rangers, had just departed the fort that morning headed down river for St. Peter on the way to recruitment at Fort Snelling.

Gere, age nineteen, who was suffering from the mumps and without military experience himself, had the good fortune to have at hand the services of a remarkable soldier still at the fort though not under his direct command. Sergeant John Jones *44-178*⁶ was a Regular Army soldier who had been left to manage the federal property including six artillery pieces that had remained behind when the Regular Army units had been quickly called away to Washington in April 1861, after the Rebel attack on Fort Sumter. Jones was a veteran of the Mexican War and had been stationed at Fort Ridgely since 1856 as an expert artillery instructor. Later, by a remarkable coincidence, within the small group of perhaps forty men of fighting age he found enough with previous artillery experience to form three gun crews to protect the fort.⁷ Their combined skills and courage, under Jones's guidance, would prove decisive in the coming confrontations with the Sioux warriors.

Meanwhile up river things were rapidly deteriorating. The number of isolated settlers falling victim to Sioux attacks was escalating swiftly, but there were islands of safety forming as well. Naturally, Fort Ridgely was primary among them and people attempted to make their way to its safety from all directions. But the Yellow Medicine Agency also became a place of organized sanctuary thanks to the Dakota who lived nearby. These Sisseton and Wahpeton bands had generally not participated in the planning of the outbreak and were as shocked as the settlers at the degree of violence they were witnessing.

Many of these Upper Sioux took immediate measures to offer protection to the Agency employees and missionaries in the own neighborhood. Little Paul



John Other Day (in about 1862) or Ampatutokacha, age 43, a Wahpeton and a leader among the Peace Seekers. He had been a formidable trouble maker in his youth but later embraced life as a farmer. He helped to protect Upper Agency employees and on the night of August 18, led a group of 62 to safety in a five-day journey across the prairie to St. Paul. Both he and Snana are among the six names memorialized on the Faithful Indian Monument in Morton, Minn. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Mazakutemani, Gabriel Renville, Akipa, Simon Anawangmani, John Other Day, and Lorenzo Lawrence were the nucleus around whom the "Peace Seekers" would coalesce.⁸ Their bravery and leadership in the coming weeks would directly contribute to saving hundreds of innocent lives. In the meantime they collected and housed Agency employees within the stone warehouse and stood guard throughout the night to keep them safe.

On August 19 John Other Day led an expedition of sixty-two Agency employees from the Upper Agency. The group included his wife, Roxana*2-22H*, and Noah Sinks *15-2*, the Agency farm manager. Following a perilous three-day walk across the prairie, the group arrived safely at Cedar City and later St. Paul. The malcontents burned Other Day's home and farm for the betrayal. In 1870, Roxana would be found destitute and

ill near Redwood (Falls) and brought to St. Paul through the efforts led by then Governor Horace Austin, but all attempts to save her life failed.⁹

The missionaries in the area, Dr. Thomas Williamson and Steven R. Riggs¹⁰ were at first unconvinced that they personally had anything to fear. Although warned on August 18 of the outbreak by their friends among the Dakota, neither would leave until the following day as evidence of widespread violence accumulated. Travelling carefully, their party of about thirty people arrived near Birch Coulee on August 22 and then went on to safety at Henderson.¹¹

By the evening of August 18 at Fort Ridgely, Lieutenant Gere was counting nearly 250 refugees within its walls. Ironically, an unexpected group had arrived that afternoon, guards carrying the long-delayed annuity payment of \$71,000 in gold. Had this gold arrived even a day earlier, the news might have diffused the whole disaster. Now it could only be stored within the fort while the guards, including Cyrus Wyckoff *19-14*, E.A.C. Hatch *EP6-8*, and Justus Ramsey *15-1*, joined the defenders. Some of the survivors of Captain Marsh's detachment had also stumbled back with the news of their disaster and Marsh's death.

While a small battalion was slowly taking shape, no one present believed they were strong enough to hold off what, for all they knew, was a vastly greater number of Dakota. Gere and Jones decided that news of their emergency should be sent to Governor Alexander Ramsey*15-1*. Part of their dispatch to the governor read: ". . . Capt. Marsh is killed and only thirteen of his company remaining. The Indians are killing the settlers and plundering the country. Send reinforcements without delay."

They selected a volunteer, Private Bill Sturgis, to mount the best horse they could offer and at 8:00 p.m., he slipped out of the fort on his perilous but vital mission.

That night of August 18 was one of pandemonium and joyous celebration in the impromptu camp that had sprung up in the area surrounding Little Crow's house. It had developed into the unofficial

headquarters for the Dakota. Supplies from plunder were in abundance as were captives who were brought here to determine their eventual disposition. The Soldier Lodge gathered in a great feast to celebrate their success and recount their tales of mayhem. But Little Crow was not so elated. The artillery contained within Fort Ridgely constituted a major threat to their continuing success. Those guns must be taken, and soon.

Meanwhile, Sturgis had taken the established 150-mile route to St. Paul leading through St. Peter. Arriving at 4:00 a.m. on August 19, he exchanged his lathered horse for a fresh one and delivered the latest news. By a remarkable coincidence, the group assembled there included Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Charles E. Flandrau *50-18* who began to organize the volunteers and three future governors, Henry Swift, Horace Austin *41-17*, and Andrew McGill *35-100*. The Renville Rangers had stopped here for the night at the end of their day-long march from the fort. They immediately drew arms from stores in the town and started back up the river.

The Governor Acts

On the afternoon of August 19, Governor Alexander Ramsey received the message carried by the daring Sturgis including the news he had collected along the way. Ramsey had been Minnesota's first territorial governor and was serving as the state's second governor. He sprang to immediate action on receipt of the shocking news contained in Gere's message. He knew immediately that if there was trouble with the Dakota, one man above all would be indispensable in restoring order. He sent at once for Henry Hastings Sibley *16-2*, then residing at Mendota near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.

It was an inspired decision by Ramsey, and in this emergency Sibley's knowledge and reputation among the Dakota would prove indispensable. Sibley had served as the first state governor but more importantly he had been the primary fur trader among the Sioux for the past twenty-eight years. No one in the state was better known among the natives than Sibley. He was a contemporary of all the current Dakota chiefs, particularly Little



Little Crow (1860) or Taoyateduta, age 52, a Mdewakanton chief. Looked to for leadership, his was the decisive voice in taking the Dakota to war. Escaping capture, he was killed while collecting berries outside Hutchinson in July 1863. His partial remains were held by the Minnesota Historical Society until 1971, when they were returned to his family and buried in South Dakota. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Crow, had lived among them, hunted with them, developed kinship bonds through marriage, and largely held their respect. Yet he remains an enigma for he was the primary architect of the 1851 treaties that so benefited the traders at the expense of the Dakota. Though devoid of any formal military training, Sibley would accept Ramsey's appointment as a colonel and commander of the Minnesota State Militia for the emergency.

Ramsey soon arrived at Fort Snelling where fragments of four regiments—6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Minnesota—were in various stages of mustering for service in the Civil War. They would now form the core of the force needed to restore order. Present was Lieutenant Colonel William Marshall *5-EH* of the 7th Minnesota, later elected governor. Other volunteers were beginning to report to help in the crisis including a unit of mounted men led by William Cullen *28-9*, former Northern Superintendent of Indian Affairs under President James Buchanan.

The Cullen Guards would see fateful service in the next two weeks.

On the morning of August 20, this battalion of roughly 500 men, who were primarily recruits of the 6th Minnesota Infantry, started up the Minnesota River aboard steamships disembarking near present-day Shakopee, tentatively entering the eerie landscape of the prairie that was now nearly empty of settlers. They marched to St. Peter but did not arrive there until August 22 only to witness chaotic scenes in the little village overwhelmed with a few thousand panicked, fleeing refugees. They also learned that Charles Flandrau had already organized a squad of men on August 19, which advanced up the valley to the relief of the new German settlement of New Ulm.

Sibley determined to halt here to stabilize the situation, integrate further volunteers into his growing battalions, and gather current information. Collectively, these men represented the only authority remaining in the state capable of preventing the warring Dakota from descending the Minnesota River Valley to the very gates of St. Paul. Cognizant of this, Sibley determined to advance with caution, a decision for which he was criticized from a number of quarters. By August 25, multiple reinforcements had increased the size of his brigade to some 1,400 men, but many of them were poorly armed for the duty they faced. These included William Crooks *66-57*, newly commissioned colonel of the 6th Minnesota Infantry and Robert MacLaren *51-23* later to command the 2nd Minnesota Mounted Rangers.

On the morning of August 19, Little Crow would lead those willing to follow him to attack Fort Ridgely, although more preferred to continue collecting easy spoils by their assaults on isolated settlers. Big Eagle, one of the minor leaders who accompanied him to the fort would state the case succinctly in an account that was recorded in a 1898 interview with Return Ira Holcombe *41-104*. At that later time, Holcombe was working as a stringer for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* when the two men met unexpectedly on a reservation in South Dakota. The Dakota leaders deemed the fort "the door to the valley as far as to St. Paul"



John Jones (in 1865). He was a Mexican War veteran and artillery instructor in the U.S. Army who had been stationed at Fort Ridgely since 1856. Jones's judgment and expertise were decisive in saving the fort during the attacks on August 20 and 21, where artillery is universally credited with turning the tide of battle. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

said Big Eagle. "And if we got through that door nothing could stop us this side of the Mississippi River."¹²

As the Dakota war party of about 400 considered its options before the fort, these warriors were surprised to hear a great cheer rise from inside it announcing the return of Company C, 5th Minnesota. The message from Captain Marsh to Lieutenant Sheehan had gotten through. With their arrival the numbers of defenders had nearly doubled to almost 125 armed men. This caused the Dakotas to reconsider their planned attack. Against the objections of Little Crow, the group broke up with a portion setting off to raid New Ulm where they would not have to face soldiers, and more importantly, artillery. Little Crow sullenly led his remaining followers back to their camp. Later in the day the Renville Rangers would also return to the fort, again enhancing the little group of defenders within.

Some other Dakotas attempted a timid assault on New Ulm later that day, but it was met with enough resistance from the townspeople, supported by a small

mounted squad from St. Peter now known as the Boardman Calvary whom Flandrau had dispatched to their aid earlier in the day.¹³ This small group arrived at the settlement just as the attack had been repelled, but it charged through the town shouting and firing to hurry the retiring Dakota on their way. Later that evening Flandrau arrived with the primary relief column adding 125 men to the defense. The town breathed a sigh of relief believing their siege had been lifted. The coming days would prove that hope was premature.

The Dakota would try to assail Fort Ridgely again on August 20 and 22 without success. These were ferocious attacks. They were well planned, but the warriors had no solution to the problem of Jones and his artillery. Big Eagle would conclude his analogy of the fort as the door to the valley with a simple assessment. "The defenders of the fort were very brave and kept the door shut." Once again the Dakota turned instead to attack New Ulm.

By August 23 Flandrau's men had constructed a stronghold amid five blocks in the center of New Ulm. The area housed a frightened population of 2,000 but only 225 men of fighting trim. A failure here would certainly lead to slaughter perhaps exceeding that already amassed. Part of the strategy for securing the stronghold included the burning of buildings outside the perimeter (including a windmill) to deny their use as cover by the approaching Indians. Flandrau issued the orders. The German owners stood in silent ascent while 190 of their businesses and homes were burned to the ground. Lives, not property, were all that mattered now.

Still smarting from their repulses at Fort Ridgely, the Dakota arrived with a full complement of nearly 650 men on a plateau above the town. There would be no cannon to oppose them here. They were determined and confident. Flandrau had heard the thundering volleys of the artillery fire up the valley at Fort Ridgely during the previous three days. It troubled him he had not heard them recently. He concluded that the fort had fallen during the last fight. He was aware that the odds did not favor his garrison of volunteers and the power of the Dakota attack on the morning of August 23 would leave a chilling impression upon him even years



Charles E. Flandrau (in 1862), age 32, was a justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court who resided near St. Peter at the outbreak of violence. Due to his position and long service as an attorney in the area, Flandrau helped lead the defense of the garrison at New Ulm beginning on August 20. New Ulm withstood a major assault on August 23, when it was crowded with 2,000 anxious refugees. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

later when he recorded the events. "The savages uttered a terrific yell and came down upon us like the wind," he recalled.

But the embattled protectors, fearful of the certain massacre that would result from their defeat, were staunch and fought gallantly throughout the hot summer day. Though the defenders had suffered casualties of more than one third of their numbers, by evening the Dakota had drawn off without penetrating the fortress. Knowing they could not survive another such attack, the next day Flandrau determined to evacuate the 2,000 survivors to Mankato which was successfully accomplished on August 25. At St. Peter, Sibley had received news late on August 23 from



Henry H. Sibley (in 1862), age 52, former Minnesota governor. Sibley had worked and lived with the Dakota as a fur trader since 1834. Though without military experience, he was Governor Ramsey's choice to lead the state's defensive forces in 1862. He knew all the significant Dakota leaders and had developed kinship bonds among them. Sibley influenced the drafting of the Treaties of 1851, which many historians identify as the source of the problems that later precipitated the conflict. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

New Ulm pleading for help. He dispatched a squadron which arrived in time to help guide the evacuation.

In his authoritative *History of Minnesota*, William Watts Folwell wrote of New Ulm "This was no sham battle, no trivial affair but an heroic defense of a beleaguered town against a much superior force. The outcome had been very close."

At Birch Coulee

By August 26 Sibley was ready to advance and started his little army for Fort Ridgely where his vanguard arrived and lifted the siege the next day. On August 31 he made one of the most controversial decisions of the conflict when he detached a patrol of 150 men, mostly from St. Paul (Company A, 6th Minnesota and the Cullen Guards representing most of his mounted troops), and sent them forward into the unknown to gather information. The Dakota discovered this group and on September 2 surrounded and ambushed them at the Battle of Birch Coulee.

After thirty-three hours under attack,

the detachment was rescued by Sibley, who arrived from Fort Ridgely leading his entire brigade. But the losses were staggering with 23 dead and 60 more wounded. Sibley also suffered the loss of the bulk of the horses available to his command. Captain Hiram P. Grant *13-31* (a St. Paul fireman), Company A, 6th Minnesota, had been in command during the siege and it was regarded as a miracle that anyone had survived at all. The dead included St. Paul residents Robert Gibbens *9-31*, the first man to die, William Cobb *41-305*, William Russell *9-32*, Robert Baxter *9-19*, William Colledge *10-17*, and Ben Terry *10-43* whose missionary brother, Elijah, had been killed by the Sioux ten years earlier.

Over the next three weeks, Sibley gradually increased pressure on the warring Dakota. He was compelled to move cautiously aware that the militants were holding nearly 300 hostages, primarily women and children. Fortunately in his attempt to preserve the lives of the hostages while bringing an end to the carnage, he received valuable assistance from the Peace Seekers who, at very significant danger to themselves, had been working for weeks to achieve the captives' safe release. In fact, it is unlikely that without their efforts many hostages would have survived regardless of Sibley's efforts.

The Aftermath

Following their defeat at the Battle of Wood Lake on September 23, the hostile Dakota knew for certain their war had failed. During the battle the Peace Seekers had gone to the hostile camp and seized most of the hostages taking them to their own camp. On their return, the hostiles were enraged nearly leading to fratricidal violence. But Little Crow intervened, and instead prepared to lead those willing to join him into Dakota Territory to avoid capture. On September 26, Sibley moved his army near the camp of the Peace Seekers and received control of the captives from them, eventually 269 in all, at the location now known as Camp Release.

All the Dakota who had remained in the vicinity were taken into custody. On September 29, Sibley received a promotion to brigadier general in the Federal



Big Eagle (about 1863) or Wamditanka, age 45, a lesser Mdewakanton leader. He was present at the battles of Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, Birch Coulee, and Wood Lake. Big Eagle later surrendered, was tried, and sentenced to death, but President Abraham Lincoln commuted his sentence to prison. In 1894 he provided the first comprehensive Dakota account of events in 1862 in an interview published in the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Big Eagle died near Granite Falls in 1906. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Army. From that point forward, all decisions regarding the final disposition of Dakota prisoners would be controlled by the U.S. Government not by Minnesota authorities. A military tribunal was convened to hear evidence against the prisoners. A total of 303 of the prisoners were found guilty of capital crimes or rape, for which they were sentenced to death. Officers serving on the tribunal included Colonel Crooks, Lieutenant Colonel Marshall (later replaced by Major George Bradley), Captains Grant and Hiram Bailey, and Lieutenant Rollin Olin. I.V.D. Heard *31-6* served as court reporter, preserving a record of the evidence.

Using Heard's evidence records, President Abraham Lincoln would reduce the number of condemned from 303 to 39. Later one of those sentences

was commuted to prison. The evidence suggests that between 600 and 800 people died as a result of the conflict.¹⁴ The execution of the condemned, the largest mass execution in U.S. history, was carried out in Mankato on December 26, 1862. Soldiers present for that duty included Lieutenant Colonel Marshall and Private Andrew McGill, 9th Minnesota.

Today Oakland Cemetery is the resting place for at least thirty-two people who were directly connected to the violence of the U.S.-Dakota War in 1862. They all experienced the pain and suffering of that summer. As far as we know, all of them were white. Existing records at Oakland and elsewhere indicate that no Dakota were buried there. The Dakota who experienced pain and suffering as a consequence of the war came to their final resting places

somewhere else. Although many of those Dakota graves are known, sadly there are also many others that are not known, much less marked for posterity.

The great tragedy of the U.S.-Dakota War was that it could have been prevented. It was not a spontaneous outbreak, but the result of the accumulation of real and perceived offenses that generated a pool of resentment that was exploited by a group of malcontents at a moment of crisis. Reasoned voices were raised in opposition, but they were ignored.

Yet this crisis would never have arrived if there had not been a comprehensive failure of leadership across the entire spectrum of nineteenth-century Minnesota society. There was the failure of the federal government's Indian policy that refused to acknowledge the natural resentment of a people pressured

to change their traditional way of life and values too quickly. Minnesota territorial and state government officials failed to moderate that policy. Responsible corporate interests in the persons of the fur traders manifested greed above honor. Dakota leaders failed to effectively counter or moderate the behavior of extremists in their midst. Even some religious leaders failed. Collectively, all these participants produced a bitter harvest.

A St. Paul resident, Patrick Hill has previously published articles about the Civil War in Ramsey County History, Minnesota History, and Gettysburg Magazine. This article grew out of research that he did for the tours he does at Oakland Cemetery that focus on Civil War topics.

Endnotes

1. The author is indebted to the dedicated staff of Oakland Cemetery for their tireless support in preserving the history found therein. Special thanks are offered to Bob Schoenrock, director, and particularly Allison Gustafson for her patient and generous research assistance for this article.

2. The Treaties of 1851 provided for the creation of two on-site agencies to provide for administration of the terms of the treaties. Serving the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands was the Yellow Medicine or Upper agency, and serving the Mdewaukanton and Wahpekuta was the Redwood or Lower Agency.

3. A Solders Lodge was formed by men at times of crisis to make decisions regarding actions to be taken by the band. Proceedings were held in secret. Chiefs and headmen of the bands could not attend. The decisions of the Solders Lodge could not be opposed.

4. Andrew Myrick had a mixed blood wife Wiyan (Nancy) who had just given birth to a daughter. Myrick is widely reported to have incited the Uprising by use of the insensitive remark "Let them eat grass" during a meeting at the Lower Agency on the evening of August 17. No such meeting occurred at the Lower Agency. According to Gary Clayton Anderson, Myrick's remark had been made by many of the merchants throughout the summer. Thus the tradition that Myrick provoked the Dakota to war on August 17 is false. See Gary Clayton Anderson, "Myrick's Insult: A Fresh Look at Myth and Reality," *Minnesota History*, 48, no. 5 (Spring 1983): 198-206. A more recent account of this episode is Gregory Michno, *Dakota Dawn: The Decisive First Week of the Sioux Uprising, August 1862* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2011), 35-39.

5. The surviving children were John, 11, Rose, 9, Kate, 7, and Margaret, 5. Their mother, Catherine, had experienced a presentment of her death the previous week. See *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 26, 1915.

6. Jones' wife Maria *44-17* who was pregnant, lived at the fort with him as did their 3 children including 2 year old daughter Nellie *44-17*. Stressed by the attack, Maria would go into labor and deliver a stillborn child.

7. Two of these men led gun crews that would prove critical in saving the fort during the attacks. Yet both might easily have already been dead earlier on August 18. J.C. Whipple had been at the Lower Agency when the outbreak started there. James McGrew was with Capt. Marsh when they were ambushed at the Redwood Ferry. The 6 guns at the fort represented the largest concentration of artillery in the state at the time.

8. Peace Seekers is the name given to these Upper Dakota by Dr. Elden Lawrence in his book *The Peace Seekers; Indian Christians and the Dakota Conflict* (Pine Hill Press, 2005). Dr. Lawrence is the great-grandson of Lorenzo Lawrence one of the six people named on the Faithful Indian Monument erected in Morton, MN, in 1894.

9. Other Day met her in Washington, D.C. in 1858 when he travelled there with the Dakota delegation for treaty negotiations. Roxana is identified as Caucasian in the news account and her death certificate. Her death at age 36 was the result of ascites, more commonly called abdominal dropsy. Other Day also had Dakota wives during his life. *St. Paul*

Pioneer Press, November 3, 1870; death certificate, January 26, 1871.

10. These men had each served the Dakota for more than 20 years. Riggs had formed a group of Christian farmer Dakotas named the Hazelwood Republic from which, Lorenzo Lawrence, became the first Dakota to be granted US citizenship.

11. While at Birch Coulee, it was decided to send an advance messenger the last 15 miles to the fort. There the scout was informed that the fort had just been attacked that day and their chances might be better by heading east to Henderson from their current location. The advice was accepted. Indeed, it may have been the attacks on the fort over the previous three days that had served to distract Dakota raiders from locating them.

12. Jerome Big Eagle, "A Sioux Story of War," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, 6 (1894): 382-400.

13. According to Horace Austin, before Austin arrived at the scene of the fighting Sherriff Boardman, feeling himself too inexperienced to lead the group, had deferred his leadership position in favor of Austin.

14. These numbers are speculative and an exact count will never be known. Estimates from various authorities and scholars put the number as high as 2,000 and as low as 400. Complicating the problem of estimating the number who died was the uncertainty about how many people were actually living in this frontier area at the boundary of western settlement. Typically census counts, such as the one done in 1860, lagged behind the actual count of those who were living in frontier areas.

R.C.H.S.

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Sherry and Rick Sanders, members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County, have taken on a massive lakeshore restoration project at their home on McCarrons Lake outside St. Paul. They believe, "It is paramount for us to help restore ecosystems. By sharing the beauty and wonder of our environment, we encourage others to join this mission." For more on the Garden Club of Ramsey County, see page 3. Photo courtesy of Sherry and Rick Sanders.