

Radange, Mrs. Peter
A Midnight Ride
and

A Battle with Sioux Indians in Meeker County

Seventy-one years ago on a Sunday morning in August Jesse Vawter Branham was tying his cravat before the mirror, and humming an old Kentucky love-song, when Mollie Stark his wife, called- "Why not call on our new neighbors, the Bakers, to-day?"- Jesse was more than delighted to go as friends were few and far between in those early days on the Prairies and the new Pioneers, as they arrived in their covered wagons were enthusiastically received, for they not only brought fresh news from the out-side world, but their companionship warmed the lonely hearts of those who had come before. So, taking their three small children this gay young couple drove to what is now called Acton, and spent the day charmingly, with the newly arrived neighbors.

Little did this couple dream as they drove homeward at evening what a whirlwind of tragedy the succeeding weeks would bring, for on the next Sunday Aug. 17- 1862 the Sioux Indians Murdered the Baker and Jones families. (Mrs. Webster, who was sitting in one of the covered wagons was not molested)

Thus began the Sioux massacre of Meeker Co. the Branhams being caught in the very maelstrom of that part in that County.

As news spread of the dreadful atrocities by the Sioux, this couple gathered a few belongings and escaped to Forest City- here eighteen men signed a contract to stay and protect the frontier, a stockade was hastily built- which formed temporary shelter.

It was at this time (about Sept. 2nd) that Capt. Whitcomb who was in command of the brave group at Forest City, heard that soldiers who had been sent from Minneapolis to enforce the Pioneers and were encamped at Acton, were being surrounded by Little Crow and his warriors- He knew the company did not know of their peril and called his men together and asked for Volunteers to ride to Acton that night to tell them of their danger.

Jesse V. Branham was the first to respond- Mr. Holmes and Mr. Sperry then stepped forward- Capt. Whitcomb asked them if they realized the danger, and they responded they did, and were willing to undertake the mission- As they rode out into the darkness the Capt. feared he would never see them alive again, as the Country

was filled with a merciless and murderous foe.

As these three men proceeded on this perilous ride they had to dismount from their horses and feel the ground with their hands to keep the wagon tracks, the darkness was so dense.

At one time they rode through two lines of Indians (unknowingly) who fell back and let them pass through for fear the shooting might awaken Strout's Company, whom they wished to surround at day-break.

When the brave trio reached the Camp, the Company was asleep little dreaming they were surrounded by a deadly foe. The three scouts were given a place to rest and the soldiers were aroused to prepare for battle. They found, at this time that wrong ammunition had been given them, and the balance of the night was given to casting bullets.

At day-break the Scouts were called and Mr. Branham was given the responsibility of leading the Company out. As he rode out he saw what he believed to be a reflection of a sunbeam on an Indian's rifle in a nearby wheatfield in the direction they were going, and he rode back, and reported to the Commander and it was decided to change the route and proceed to the Stockade at Hutchinson, and thus escape, if possible, the Red-skins.

And here, let me say that no movie plot ever contained a more startling scene, and Minnesota has in her history no more thrilling event. As this small Company of sixty men, newly recruited from Minneapolis business firms, moved out of their camp at daybreak on Sept. 3rd, there swooped down upon them three-hundred Sioux Indians in all their war-paint, giving their most blood-curdling yells,

Little Crow, the Chief, mounted a fence and waved his blanket in a signal to his warriors-Immediately every white man fired at him but in their terror each missed his aim, whereupon the Chief remounted

the fence and made the soldiers a deep bow- (My father said it was the coolest act he ever saw.)

At once the utmost confusion prevailed, the soldiers were surrounded, and men and horses were killed. It was at this point Mr. Branham was wounded, shot through one lung, and was thrown into one of the wagons. Capt. Strout soon rallied what was left of his little band, and began a running fight toward Hutchinson.

Those who escaped on this day tell of the fast and furious fighting-In order to lighten loads supplies were thrown out, men fatally wounded were also left behind and fearfully butchered by the foe-Mr. Branham, suffering agony as the wagon bore him across rough fields and prairies, with the Indians whooping on every side heard his own fate discussed, but was saved by the pleadings of a faithful friend. On and on plunged the horses crazed by the screaming warriors, but finally they began to outstrip their for who stopped when fresh supplies were dropped out of the wagons.

These things were quarrelled over and thus some of our early Pioneers reached Hutchinson and were cared for in the stockade there, which the Indians attacked again the following day.

Mr. Branham lay without medical attention for a long time, was later cared for and recovered and later was one of the founders of Litchfield, Minnesota.

Surely Minnesota's history is written in the blood of those brave men and women who "stood by" against a cruel foe in those perilous times-

Mollie Stark and Jesse Branham lived through the early struggles of their State-never regretting that they gave their "all" to the State they never ceased to love-Minnesota!

Note- The above account is written and forwarded by a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J.V. Branham living at Litchfield, Minnesota- Mrs. Peter Rodange, who has in her possession the clothes Mr. Branham had on the day he was shot showing the bullet hole made by the rifle from the hand of the Indian. She also

has the very books and a number of possessions that were picked
up hastily by her mother and taken by ox-team to the Stockade
and thence on through the Big Woods to Minneapolis-

*Mrs. Peter Rodange
Litchfield
Minnesota*