

written 1895

Narrative of Charles D. Hatch's experience in the Indian War in Minnesota in 1862.

The year that I was 24 years old I left Wisconsin for the frontier of Minnesota to take a claim and make me a home. Having a sister at Lake Shetek, Murray County, Minnesota, and in company with my brother-in-law commenced to build a mill, having the irons on the ground and everything nicely under way. The morning of the 20th of August in '62 I left my home at the lower end of the lake and went to see Messrs. Cook and Vogue some six miles up the lake. I arrived at Mr. Cooks about sunrise, hitched my horse at his house and went a short road across the slough to Mr. Vogue's. As I came near the house I saw the watch dog was chained and lying dead near the house, approaching the door, I saw that the house had been pillaged. Turning from the door I saw Mr. Vogue dead under some trees. I examined him and concluded he had been dead only a few minutes. Imagine my feelings if you can standing by my dead neighbor knowing that it must be the Indian's work but not knowing which way they had gone or what to do. Should I go into the woods and hide or rush down the lake and alarm the rest of the neighbors, of which there were some eight families in our settlement. From our settlement to the nearest house it was 18 miles, 75 miles to New Ulm, and about the same to Fort Ridgely. I started back to Mr. Cook's where my horse was tied, as fast as I could run, but when I got near the house I saw the Indians ahead of me. There was a large war party and as soon as I saw them at their terrible work I knew they meant death to every settler on the lake. I sprang back out of sight of the Indians, knelt down and asked God, the great ruler, and disposer of all human events, to protect me in this my hour of danger. If I succeeded in warning the neighbors below, I must run for some distance in full view of the Indians before reaching another clump of timber. I succeeded in running the gauntlet in safety and in a few minutes stood at Mr. Ireland's door and told him to fly for his life down the lake. They began to pick up some valuables. I told them to leave everything and make all possible speed as I knew the Indians were close behind. They gathered a few things together and came on, but the Indians stopped long enough at Cook's to kill him while he was going to the spring to get them a drink, and to catch my horse which had broken loose when they fired at Cook. He was a wild colt and they had some trouble in catching him. This is probably what enabled me to get in ahead of them alive. When Mr. Ireland's people saw the Indians close at hand they dropped their budgets and while the Indians were over hauling them they got so far ahead that they reached the house where we were all to meet and fight the Indians. I exerted myself to the utmost to reach Mr. Eastlick's as they lived off the main road and had to run through tall grass waist high, but I felt well repaid when I reached their house for there were eight members of their family surely enough worth making a desperate effort for. Here I borrowed a horse and was soon flying down the lake as fast as the horse could go, turning in at every house and alarming the inmates. Messrs. Ireland, Eastlick, Duly, Smith, Wright, Everett, Roads and Bently can all testify to my flying visits that morning. And in those families were eight men, five women, and seventeen children; 29 in all. I reached Mr. Wright's house in safety, these with myself and Mrs. Cook had gotten away from the Indians after they killed her husband, joined us, concluded to make a fort of this house and try and defend ourselves. But as we looked over our implements of war we found only three squirrel rifles, some shot guns and a keg of powder and a few sacks of shot. There was a camp

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of Indians near this house who had camped near the settlement at different times for years with whom the old settlers were well acquainted and on friendly terms. They claimed to be still friendly and offered to do all they could for us, even help fight the strangers. Pawn the leader went out to the war party and told us there were 300 of the Indians and if we stayed there they would burn the house over our heads, but if we would leave everything and go away, they would not harm us. After a long council we concluded to do so. We accordingly hitched up one team, put the women and children into the wagon and started for New Ulm some 75 miles away. We had gone but a few miles, perhaps three or four, when we saw the Indians coming after us our friendly Indians with the others. They commenced firing on us with fearful effect, the women and children were getting wounded in the wagon so fast that we abandoned it at once and started for the slough and tall grass, firing as we went. We succeeded in killing their chief called Grizzly Bear, and should judge by their motions wounded others while they were cutting the harness from the horses. This done they circled out and surrounded us. One man was wounded and dropped his gun which I picked up and we all hid in the tall grass, our only refuge. While they were surrounding us, two of our men deserted us leaving only seven to protect the women and children. We were under fire for five or six hours, expecting every minute they would charge in upon us, they watching every motion of the grass and aiming wherever they saw a movement. Here Mr. Eastlick was killed while he was in the act of firing his gun and soon all of the men were wounded. I received four wounds. My sister heard me groan and wished to come to me (Mrs. Eastlick speaks of this in her history) but I persuaded her to stay where she was as there was no safety in moving the grass. I had two double barreled shot-guns loaded and lying across my wounded arm, that being strong enough to raise the guns should they charge in on us, but the hand was powerless.

The day passed, the wind began to blow, a heavy thunder storm arose, and the Indians called to the women and children to come out to them, promising to treat them well as prisoners. Soon after they went out an old squaw commenced to cut one of the children with a knife, and then other Indians began to kill others of the prisoners. Soon nearly half of the prisoners were massacred, my sister and two little nephews among the number, thirteen in all. My niece was carried away with six others as prisoners. When the women first went out they asked them if the men were all dead and they told them they were. Then they sent Mrs. Wright back to gather up the arms. I let her have one of mine. The storm began to rage with greater fury, and the Indians thinking we were all dead took their prisoners and left. As soon as I discovered that the Indians were all gone, I hunted up my brother-in-law, Wm. Everett, who was badly wounded in the arm and leg and nearly helpless, and we started for New Ulm. We traveled nearly all night in the rain, reaching a house 18 miles distant Dutch Charles. Mr. Everett was so weak from loss of blood that I could hardly coax him to try and get away. At this house we found Mr. Myers with an ox team and his family fleeing from the Indians.

The next morning we all started very early in the rain, traveled all day reaching a little village called Leavenworth on the Cottonwood River. It had rained all day which was good for our undressed wounds. The people of this place had left and the houses were pillaged. We went into one, and while we were concluding what to do with ourselves for the night we heard the cannons booming at Fort Ridgely, a great distance away. Then and not till then, did we know that it was a general war with the Indians. In a few minutes we heard a large party of them approaching they came up

the street and passed by the house we were in and camped some twenty rods above us. We could hear their shouts and whoops until about three o'clock in the morning. Some of their dogs were barking most of the time also. We felt greatly relieved when we heard them leaving, going in the direction of the fort. It had been a very anxious time for us so near the Indians and Mrs. Meyer's little babe had cried most of the night, but the Indians made so much noise themselves, they did not hear it. We concluded after this to keep away from the main traveled roads. We traveled all the next day in the direction of New Ulm. Toward night we could see a heavy smoke where the town should be and concluded the Indians were burning the town. The next morning Mr. Meyers said he would leave us there, camped in a hollow in the prairie, and go and see if he could get us into New Ulm, and if he did not return within twentyfour hours, we were to start for Mankato. We waited very anxiously for his return but he did not come. I was sure that something serious had happened for he would not desert his sick wife and little children. What could we wounded men do with the oxen, four small children and the sick woman. I determined to make a desperate effort for their lives. The rest were discouraged. I got the oxen hitched to the wagon and all safely loaded at last, and drove on all day toward Mankato. That night we camped on a lake near a farm house. The people were gone, the cows and sheep were undisturbed and seemed lonesome for their master, as I came near the house, they seemed glad to see me. I soon found a gentle cow and managed to milk with my well hand a bountiful supply for our hungry children. In fact, we were nearly all dead from hunger and fatigue for we had been out for seven days and had very little to eat during that time. Mr. Meyers had one small cheese and some flour in the wagon when we started from the house, and we wounded men nothing but what he generously gave us. The flour did us little good as we were afraid to build a fire to bake, as the Indian's keen eyes would then discover our hiding place. Our situation was indeed pitiful. Mr. Everett seemed nearly dead and Mrs. Meyers had daily grown worse until now she took no notice or care of her babe, her husband gone and probably killed by the Indians, our oxen tired out, feet and necks sore while my hand that had been so badly torn to pieces by an ounce ball was mortifying and my other wounds were painful. All the clothing I had on was a hat, shirt and overalls, my shirt was shot full of holes and stiff with blood. I was bound to have some bread that night. I went into the house, found a cookstove, built a fire and baked some bread before I tried to sleep. When the morning dawned again I was out early. Mr. Everett and I concluded that we must be within forty miles of Mankato perhaps another days journey would bring us to the friendly white man.

At this farm we found a fresh yoke of oxen among the other animals and we made up our minds to take them and leave ours in their place, as they were so tired and lame that it was hard work to get them along and we wanted to make all possible speed and we were sure the owner would not object if he could see our wretched condition. While I was getting our new cattle hitched one of the children wandered away and got lost. I hunted it up and found it badly scratched by briars and thorns. We were soon under way again with our little band of sufferers. Nothing worthy of note happened until four o'clock in the afternoon when we discovered a body of mounted men approaching us. As we had no way of defending ourselves and they were some distance away, we concluded to leave our team and each try and get to a slough nearby and hide. Mrs. Meyers roused up and tried to go but fainted away. Mr. Everett could hardly walk, the children were crying and I expected we would be killed in a few minutes. I took my shotgun and went into the grass. I had no ammunition but what was in the gun and that was rendered worthless by the heavy rains. But as they



came up to the wagon all was still for some time, then I heard someone call my name but I dared not to go at first still fearing they were the Indians, but afterward discovered they were soldiers. I went out and behold they were Captain Danes cavalry. We found friends and protection at last. They did all they could to relieve our sufferings and the next day sent us to Mankato twelve miles distant. Here we found a large hotel being used as a hospital, a great many wounded already there and doctors and nurses caring for them. All was done for us that could be but Mrs. Myers died in a few hours after we arrived. Mr. Myers was not killed but found his family just before his wife died. He was a brave man and would have returned to us but as the Indians had made a new attack a few minutes after he reached the place he could not get back. Mr. Everett lived, but it was six long weeks before he began to recover from his wounds. I did not have my hand taken off as the doctors first feared. They did their best to save it and after a time the pieces of bone all came out and it got well but is still weak and crippled and at times swollen and painful, and with another wound in the same arm causes me to suffer much with the rheumatism and is still a painful reminder of the suffering passed through thirty three years ago. On account of the still continued trouble with the Indians the Government did not consider it safe to grant the request of the surviving settlers to send back an escort of troops to bury our dead until about the middle of October when I was able to go with the troops as a guide. We found the bones of some fifteen bodies which we carefully buried. We will draw a veil over these scenes as they are too fearful to contemplate and impossible to describe.

My niece with the six other prisoners taken at Lake Shetek were taken away into Dakota beyond Fort ~~Pine~~. The commander of the Fort heard of their being there and sent out some friendly Indians and brought them and returned them to their friends the following December.

The ox team which we took at the farm house was claimed by its owners on reaching Mankato. I found Mr. Meyers's oxen also and sold them and sent him the money, he having gone East. I enlisted in a year from the following September in the Union Army and served until the close of the war. I then returned home and was married the next spring, and about five years after this I traded my farm for one in Martin County, where I have since resided.

Chas. D. Hatch  
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