

An account of the relief expedition
sent from St Peter~~s~~ to New Ulm, August 22,
1862 and the subsequent siege of New Ulm
by the Indians, written by William G. Hayden,
who took part in the expedition.

Written in Minneapolis in 1897 by William
G. Hayden, for many years a resident of
St. Peter, Minnesota.

Early in the morning of the 22nd of August thirty five years ago the citizens of St. Peter were aroused by messengers reporting that the Sioux Indians had started on the war path, sacking and burning the buildings at the upper and lower agency's and were killing the settlers in that vicinity. The procession of teams loaded with household goods accompanied by the women and children driving the live stock, coming over the bluff into the village, betokened a wide spread alarm.

Later messengers came in confirming the first reports, and by nine o'clock a company of volunteers numbering about one hundred men, citizens of St. Peter and Traverse, had been organized, and Judge Maudsue chosen to command ^{of} them; the intention being to go by teams to Fort Ridgely that day if possible, going by the south road passing New Ulm on the opposite side of the Minnesota river.

The writer, while hunting for buckshot to use in a double barreled shot gun, the only ^{weapon} arms obtainable, met Hon H. A. Swift, at that time acting Lieut. Governor, who proposed taking his own team and driving ^{with me} to New Ulm, and invited me to accompany him. As each of us had volunteered

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been enrolled as volunteers, a consultation with Judge Maudsue was held, which ~~resulted was had~~, resulted in our being detailed to proceed at once to New Ulm, and upon arriving there the Gov. was to notify ^{the Judge} him by messenger of the situation. Starting at about eleven o'clock we met a great many settlers hurrying towards St. Peter having with their families and such household goods as they could carry. One man, a German Minister, living near the river a few miles below New Ulm, who had sent his team conveying his family ahead, was lingering to help and direct others, learning ~~that we were going~~ ^{of} our destination said, if we could go there he could, and immediately turned and accompanied us. He was mounted on a fine pony and did good service in New Ulm, but the poor fellow was killed some three weeks later while attempting a visit to his farm. ~~He found~~ The ferry ^{was} deserted but ^{we} succeeded in ferrying ourselves across the river, ^{and} arriving at New Ulm at about three o'clock P.M., found the town full of settlers who had fled at the first warning of danger; although no Indians had been seen near the town, word had just been received that several persons had been killed at home, the ^{advancing} first town west, and the

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excitement was intense, but as all conversation was in German, this later acquired English being almost forgotten, ^{in their terror} it was some time before we could get any definite information. However, we soon found a number of the leading citizens who were comparatively cool and trying to enforce order and effect some kind of organization, but the prospect of making any successful defense against a possible attack by the Indians, looked dismal enough; A few of the men had hunting guns, but the majority were without fire arms and had supplied themselves with pitchforks. It took but a few minutes for Gov. Swift to decide to send a ^{message} messenger to Judge Flandreau informing him of the condition of affairs and urging him to come with his company to New Ulm, for that night at least, believing that such a move would tend to allay the excitement and give those who were trying to organize a defense of the town a little more confidence under such discouraging conditions. Evans Bowen, who lived at that time near the river between New Ulm and Mankato, volunteered to carry the message, and started at once

on horseback, barely missing the Indians, in their first attack on the town. Leaving our guns at the Dakota House, we walked to the top of the hill or bluff just back of the hotel. The Minnesota river at this point runs near the high bluffs on the Nicollet County side, leaving a strip of bottom land nearly half a mile wide between the river and the town, then came a bench or plateau perhaps three hundred yards wide upon which the town was then located. Back of this bench was a ridge extending from near the Cottonwood River ^{on the} south east of the village to a point near the west end of the village where it gradually sloped to the prairie west, and merged in a level piece of prairie extending west some two miles where ^{it would} it was intercepted by a body of timber extending from the river back to the second bench; Nearly a mile south and west of the town this second bench was covered with timber, and beyond that the prairie stretches as far as one can see.

While standing on this ridge or hill we could see ^{the whole scene} from the river to the second bluff, and we soon noticed a number of persons coming over the ^{barrier} bluff and also a small

body of horsemen riding down the prairie toward the west end of the town, but supposing them to be settlers coming in, or scouts who had been looking for Indians, we paid but little ^{heed} attention to them; Soon, however, ~~over~~ a discharge of guns attracted our ~~notice~~ attention to the west end of the village when we discovered that several haystacks and buildings were on fire; Convinced that trouble was brewing we started for the Hotel for our guns; and, as we were crossing an open space at the foot of the hill ~~and~~ about a block from the Hotel, we were startled by a ~~discharge~~ firing of guns behind us, and, looking back, we saw several Indians standing where we had been perhaps two minutes before, and firing, not at us fortunately, ^{but} into the crowded street and over our heads. ^{Killing a woman and child, who were standing near the corner of a house on the main street.} That discharge killed the first ~~person~~ that the first victim of the massacre in New Ulm. Securing our guns, we hastened to the street and learned that the Indians had possession of a house at the west end of the village; A dozen or more men armed with guns and revolvers decided to attempt driving them out, and by keeping behind buildings as much as possible until near

near the house they made a rush for the front door. The Indians, after firing ~~on us~~, fled through the back door as the foremost ^{of our} men went in ^{at the front} door. One man, a citizen of the town, was killed in this charge, the others ~~reaching~~ ^{gaining} the house safely. About this time rain commenced falling and the fighting was confined to ~~one~~ exchanging shots with the Indians, who were lying just over the crest of the hill and keeping out of sight except when they raised up to fire, but most of their shot went over our heads. The cross streets leading to the ridge or bluff were hastily barricaded, and just before dark we were reinforced by eight or ten men on horseback, the advance of the St. Peter Company who had hurried forward to inform us that the company would come to New Ulm that night. Several citizens of Nicollet living on the opposite side of the river, having sent their families to St. Peter, joined us during the afternoon, so that we mustered a little company of sixteen men who were acquaintances, and consulting together we decided to stand guard during the night: so distributing our force that two of us should be at the

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same point; This arrangement being satisfactory to the citizens who were ^{to} be on guard, we were soon posted at all of the exposed points. At about ten o'clock the main part of the St. Peter Company arrived and were at once posted along the top of the hill, where they spent the night. In the morning the Indians had disappeared, but had left sad evidence of their presence in the bodies of eleven settlers who had been murdered while on their way to town, their mutilated remains being found within a few rods of the top of the bluff. The number of Indians engaged in this first attack was estimated at from thirty to forty.

Wednesday morning a mass meeting was held in the street and Judge Manderson chosen to the command of ^{the} town and all volunteers from outside; A provost-marshal and other assistants were appointed and during the day guard lines were established, and guards stationed, the women and children ~~located~~ assigned to quarters, and all possible arrangements made to feed the refugees. In the mean time reinforcements had arrived from Mankato, Le Sueur and other towns making a force of nearly three

hundred men armed with hunting guns mostly double barreled, shot-guns, perhaps three or four rifles, and one Sharps rifle.

The day passed without ^{any} sign of the presence of Indians, and none were seen for two succeeding days, although small parties made excursions into the country two or three miles, and refugees were coming in every day reporting that roving bands of Sioux were scouring the country and killing all of the white people they could find; One man came in Thursday night and reported ^{that} thirteen women and children were hid in a slough some ten miles off, and early ^{Friday} ~~on~~ the morning of about one hundred men ^{were} ~~to~~ go to their rescue, starting with teams, and provisions for a two days trip, they proceeded slowly examining every house and cabin on the route, finding at many of them the bodies of the owners who had been killed by the Indians; these were buried as carefully as possible. The women and children were found ^{in the slough} as reported, where they had been concealed in the high grass ~~where~~ having subsisted on flour and water for three days; one of the wagons was taken for their use and the march continued, ~~but~~ The varied experiences of the day had a depressing effect upon the company, and as

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night drew near this feeling was increased by hearing the regular boom of the cannon at Fort Ridgely, indicating that a battle of fight was in progress there. As near as could be ascertained the party was then about ^{miles} six miles south of the Fort, and ^{miles} sixteen from New Ulm. A number of the more timid or cautious were in favor of returning to town, but the majority voted to stay all night and camp on the prairie; Every discharge of the cannon at the Fort however, increased the number of those wishing to return, and just before sunset it was decided that we should make the attempt, a decision that the occurrence of the next day proved a fortunate one for the party, and probably as fortunate for the people in town. Soon after dark, to add to our anxiety the guide lost his way; The reader must remember that, in those days there were no regular highways, only trails across the prairie and many of those not traveled enough to be ^{followed} distinguished in the night, except by a person familiar with prairie trails. A halt was called and only one man found who felt confident that he could guide the party by the nearest way.

Signals made by flashing powder or turning bunches of dry grass

which could be seen on either side and behind, gave evidence that we were being watched if not surrounded by Indians. It was a dismal march that night, in a section of the country strange to us, surrounded by savages, and expecting an attack at every ravine or coulee we crossed. It was a joyous sound when the order was passed along the line "Get out of the wagons, and march"; one felt ~~sure~~ that on foot, the chances were more equal, and the danger from a stampede of the horses less. Finally the guide announced that we were at the head of the ravine, down the side of which the road wound through the timber to the prairie adjoining the town, passing this the last dangerous place we drove rapidly to town arriving at about eleven o'clock, tired but thankful that we still had our scalps safe.

The next morning, soon after turning out, a thick smoke was seen rising over the bluff, in the direction of the town of Lafayette, ^{across the river} in Nicollet County, and distant about six miles, indicating that the Indians had set fire to ^{the} town. The inhabitants had all left the town some days before, but a number of settlers who lived there, but were then in New Ulm were anxious to go and try to save their property,

and about twenty men of those having the best guns offered to go, and after considerable urging Col. Flandreau reluctantly consented. Up to this time we had heard nothing from Fort Ridgely, and but little news from outside, no Indians having been seen near New Ulm since the preceding Tuesday. This belief was quite general, that the uprising was confined to a few small bands who were roving about killing such unprotected settlers ^{as} they might encounter and robbing and burning deserted buildings, and that they would run from any organized body of ^{armed} men.

We watched the company crossing the river which was accomplished without interference, but no sooner had they disappeared through the fringe of timber on the other side than the Indians seized the ferry and cutting the rope, let the boat drift down stream, thus preventing their return except by swimming. A few minutes later

~~within half an hour~~ the alarm was given that the Indians were coming and a large force, estimated at from three to five hundred, emerged from the timber north west of the town; moving across the prairie they approached the upper end of the village, but before coming

within range of the guns they divided their force, part going south and west along the bluff and part passing to the north and east side along the river bottom, ~~so~~ in a short time completely surrounding the town. They quickly gained possession of the houses at the upper and lower end of the main street, several brave but ineffectual attempts were made to dislodge them, and as these ^{efforts} ended in the loss of several men, without apparent gain, Col. Flandreau wisely decided to form his men behind the barricades which had been erected across the streets enclosing the center of the town. All of the women and children had been ^{placed} ~~placed~~ in the cellars of the stores and houses inside of the barricades and there began the struggle which many even of the bravest thought must end in defeat, and defeat meant death, for the Indians gave no quarter. Each side fought under cover as much as possible, but the Indians unable to resist the passion for burning buildings, had set on fire many of the houses and it soon became evident that our chances of making a successful defense would be increased by having a clear field outside of

the barricades, and the order was given to burn everything that could afford a hiding place outside of the lines. Then began one of the wildest scenes of frontier warfare; burning buildings, with hideously painted ^{masked} savages ~~dancing~~ running in and out of the fire light, often recklessly exposing themselves in their mad dance, yelling like fiends, with that peculiar warwhoop that makes the cold shills run over one, especially when you know that it is in earnest, and you are the prospective victim. The almost continuous discharge of guns, the shrill hiss of bullets, ~~added with~~ added to the apparent hopelessness of the situation made the bravest pale, when they thought of the hundreds of women and children, and hundreds more of ^{mostly} equally defenseless men armed only with forks or clubs, depending upon their keeping the yelling savages at bay. This mad scene continued through the afternoon, but as night came on the firing slackened and at dark ceased except an occasional shot. The still smoldering fires, however kept the open space outside, light enough to prevent the Indians from approaching unseen. About midnight the

windmill standing on the hill was set on fire, and kept the town well lighted until near morning.

None if any slept that night, ~~but~~ ^{all kept} close watch, expecting an attack, but the the absence of any cover whereby the Indians could approach, and a vigilant guard ^{at} every exposed point prevented any determined attempt, though one dead Indian was found inside the lines in the morning. Early Sunday morning the firing was renewed, but with less spirit, on the part of the Indians, continuing until about nine o'clock, when they ^{were} seen moving in squads from the river bottom, and disappearing over the bluff. Uncertain as to its meaning this movement was watched with some anxiety. We were not kept long in suspense, as the watch on one of the buildings reported a body of men approaching from the lower ferry, and by the aid of field glasses ^{we} ~~it was~~ ascertained that they were ^{whole men and} armed with muskets.

This was a volunteer company partly from Gen. Sibley's force which had been in camp at St. Peter for three ^{or four} days, and were gladly welcomed by the weary and hungry watchers, few of whom had had a meal for two days,

there being neither time ^{nor} opportunity for cooking anything. Through them we learned of the attack on Fort Ridgely on the previous Friday, and with them came a part of the company which had started for Lafayette on Saturday morning. These last had encountered a small war party, ^{of warriors} after crossing the river, and being unable to return, had worked their way east until they met this company. Two or three of the party were slightly wounded in the skirmish, but none severely.

No Indians were seen during the afternoon or the succeeding night, ^{as the supply of provisions and ammunition was nearly exhausted} and on Monday morning it was determined to abandon the town and march to St. Peter by way of Mandakota. The women, children and wounded were placed in wagons and the march began about noon. Camping out one night they arrived at St. Peter the following day. After the party had moved out of town, we drove through the streets and about the buildings left standing. The sight was a sad one; graves had been dug on vacant lots where those killed in the fight had been buried; the streets were strewn with goods of all description which the inhabitants had attempted

to destroy or render useless, determined that nothing should be left of value to the Indians: Thus ^{what} had been, a few days before a pretty village containing houses for about fifteen hundred people, was left only a mass of torn shambles and fire-blackened ruins, nothing of the village being left standing except the stores and hotels on the main street and a few other buildings that stood inside of the barricades. At the request of Col. Flanagan, Gov. Swift and the writer drove to St. Peter that night and ^{brought} the first news of the result of the siege. After reporting to Gov. Libbey, we went to our homes from which we had not heard since for several days.

I have purposely omitted the names of participants in the scenes here feebly described for the reason that I cannot remember them all, and where all perform their duty it would be very unfair to single out those personally known to the writer; many deeds of daring and bravery were performed which the writer did not see, and no one can complain if I leave out all personal mention of them.

Written in Minneapolis in 1897 by
William G. Hayden, for many years
a resident of St. Peter, Minnesota.
Deposited with the Minnesota His-
torical Society by his son, John
F. Hayden, Minneapolis, Minn.

John F. Hayden
Minneapolis, Minn.

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May 1919.