

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF
THE
INDIAN OUTBREAK OF 1862
BY

SARAH PURNELL MONTGOMERY

743 Simpson Ave.
St. Paul, Minn.

Our home at South Bend, Minnesota was between the Winnebago and Sioux reservations. The Indians, who were frequent callers, were friendly and reasonable until August, 1862.

On Monday morning, the eighteenth, while I and the other children were awaiting the ringing of the bell to call us inside the school-house, a courier rode furiously by, shouting, "The Indians are murdering the settlers on the frontier." The bell did not ring. Hurriedly, we ran to the nearby store where the messenger was announcing the terrifying news that the Sioux had burned the buildings at the government agency, and murdered all but a few who had escaped to the woods and swamps; that the night before they had attacked New Ulm.

Immediately, my father and others organized a company to go to the relief of New Ulm, and after a hard day's march, entered New Ulm from the South, as the Indians were still attacking it on the North.

On stepping into the building assigned as their quarters, my father beheld the bodies of nine men ~~scaped~~ and horribly mutilated. In another room, lying

side by side on the floor were three little children, who had been found hanging to trees by their feet.

Appalled by these gruesome sights, father thought of his own dear ones, and the dangers to which they might be exposed. He decided his first duty was to them, and with others who felt likewise, started back to aid in their protection, and under cover of the darkness, reached home safely.

Terror had spread over the whole frontier, and settlers, seeking safety, were pouring into the towns. The two stone buildings in our village were filled with refugees. The one in which we were quartered was fortified by a stockade made of farm wagons standing closely together, on the outside of which a high wall of cordwood was erected, while on the inside the horses and oxen were coralled. All through the night, the neighing of the horses added weirdness to our terror.

The men not on picket duty, occupied the lower floor, while the floor above was filled with women and children, the latter sleeping on the floor in

a small room. For the rest of us, there was no sleep. We filled every available vessel with water from a nearby well, and laboriously carried up an outside stair way. Fires were kept burning to keep the water boiling, and had the Indians attacked us that night, as was their intention, they would have received showers of boiling water upon their heads. Axes, pitchforks, and other tools had also been collected for use in our defense.

On the outskirts of the village, a picket-guard was placed, and each picket instructed to fire a shot if an Indian was seen or heard. At midnight came the report of a gun. The silence which followed was terrible -- every sound exaggerated a hundred-fold. Father, who was one of the pickets, went to every man on the picket-line, but not one had discharged his gun. It is believed that this shot was fired by a Winnebago chieftain as a signal to the Sioux whom they were waiting to join. New Ulm had been attacked again that night, and had the Sioux succeeded in taking the town, nothing could have prevented them from joining the Winnebagoes at

South Bend, and carrying out their threat of again planting corn on their old camping-ground at Traverse des Sioux.

With what joy we hailed the dawn! For greater safety, father took us at once, to Mankato, which was being filled with refugees. A cavalcade of over one hundred and fifty wagons entered the town at one time. Every available building was used as a hospital for the wounded, of whom many had been pierced in the back by poisoned arrows, and others horribly mutilated.

A military expedition, with General Sibley in command, was organized and sent in pursuit of the hostile Sioux, who were still on the war-path. It was not long before they were over-taken, and nearly a thousand with their squaws and papooses captured.

It was on a beautiful Indian summer afternoon a few weeks after we had returned to South Bend, that General Sibley and his staff, in full uniform, and mounted, headed a strange procession that passed through our village. Behind them marched a regiment of infantry. Then came forty wagons

drawn by horses containing four hundred of the murderers. They were chained together, and seated on the floor, five on a side, facing one another. Many wore bright shawls that they had taken from the homes of the settlers. Nearly all covered their heads.

Another regiment of infantry was followed by ambulances carrying the wounded settlers, who had been found nearly dead from hunger and exhaustion. The squaws retained to cook and care for the prisoners, rode in army wagons drawn by mules. The camp equipment and supplies was followed by the artillery which comprised the rear guard.

They came to a halt at the Blue Earth river, midway between South Bend and Mankato. Here a stockade had been built in which they were to be confined. A military camp was established to guard the prisoners.

So bitter was the feeling against them, that several attempts were made to storm the camp and kill

the murderers. To prevent this, the cavalry were ordered to guard the roads leading to the camp, and the infantry to be ready with loaded guns. The memories of the horrible atrocities they had so recently witnessed were so fresh in the minds of these soldiers, that they had resolved to use not leaden bullets, but paper wads, in their guns, in case duty compelled them to fire upon the mobs.

Visiting the prison, we found the Indians seated on the ground in groups, smoking their pipes, and conversing with one another, with their blankets wrapped closely around them.

The execution of the thirty-eight condemned Indians -- all at one time -- was an awful spectacle for a girl of fifteen to witness, and the scene is as vivid to me now, as it was more than seventy years ago.

* * * * *