

MOSHER GENEALOGY

Biographical Material especially relating to Asa Mosher and his experiences in the Sioux Wars in Minnesota, between 1860 and 1865 with some references to his brothers, Hiram, Jim and Rob who fought mostly in the South during the Civil War. Hiram fought against the Indians in Minnesota from 1860 to 1862, and from 1862 to 1865 in the South, until wounded in the battle of Nashville. These soldiers were all sons of Obadiah and Nancy Allen Mosher, who left Ohio in 1846 and pioneered in Minnesota.

The first contribution of a biographical nature is a letter from Miss Nell Young, of Waseca, Minnesota, written June 15, 1936. She was the niece of these soldier uncles and was well acquainted with all of them. She lived for many years at 901 Lake Avenue, Waseca. She was a teacher, an author, a grammarian, a teacher in the Minneapolis, Minnesota public schools for many years, until her retirement. Following is her letter.

Waseca, Minnesota,
June 15, 1936

Dear Orville,

I wish you could see "Child's History of Waseca County." It is a record of events here from 1854 to 1904. In it the Mosher who lived in the vicinity are mentioned many, many times.

Uncle Jim enlisted in the First Minnesota from here. On July 2nd of each year I always spend much time in thinking of the terrible day when the First Minnesota at Gettysburg, was thrown into a gap to hold the line until reinforcements could be brought up. A large percentage of the boys of the regiment lay dead or terribly wounded when the reinforcements arrived. Uncle Jim having received four bullets, three in his thigh and hip. Forty years later a piece of a shell was removed from his hip. He lay there on the battlefield two days with little water before help arrived.

Uncle Asa was in Fort Snelling (near St. Paul, Minnesota) on the bank of the Mississippi River, at the time of the Sioux Massacre at New Ulm. He hoped to be sent South soon-but instead was sent after Little Crow and his braves --with General Sibley about 1862.

It was after just after the massacre that Uncle Asa asked for a furlough. Of course they couldn't grant his request. Uncle Asa "borrowed" a government team without permission and drove down here, got his family and took them back to the Fort. The incident was ignored.

Uncle Asa said they soon caught up with the Sioux. In a skirmish, a fifteen-year old Sioux was shot in the leg and captured. He had been through the same trip with his father several years before. An Indian always remembers the details of such a trip. He was promised his freedom, if he would point out from time to time the route his father had taken. If he directed them wrong they told him they would kill him. The soldiers would carry him to the top of some hill and he would look across the country and point out the route. They followed his directions and reached the head waters of the Yellowstone --as the little Indian had promised. The soldiers became very fond of the Indian boy. This trip took many months. Uncle Asa told of one night when it was snowing heavily. They were ordered to give the animals extra food. When morning came their tents were nearly buried in the snow. It was night before they were able to shovel out and get more feed to the horses.

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MOSHER GENEALOGICAL RECORDS CONTINUED.

When my father and mother first came to Minnesota, father didn't go out of sight of the house without mother with him. One morning he lighted the fire and went to the barn. When the room was a bit warm mother arose and was dressing when an Indian entered the house. Mother was so frightened that she jumped behind a built-in cupboard. The Indian went out at once and said to father, "I scared your squaw." Father went into the house and found mother so tightly wedged in behind the cupboard that he had to tear the cupboard nearly to pieces to get her out.

Uncle Rob said that once as he and a number of other soldiers were sitting in front of their tent when General Grant passed. He was smoking one of those extra long cigars. After saluting Uncle Rob said, "You haven't any extra one of those cigars, have you General?"

General Grant smiled and gave Uncle Rob and the other boys with him all the cigars he had with him.

Just like Rob!

Some day I may be able to tell you other incidents --I realize that I know many unknown to anyone else --When I die there'll be no one left to tell them. I have already written a number for the Waseca Historical Society I'm too tired these days to tell anything well.

Sincerely yours,

Nell J. Young

CONTINUATION OF MOSHER GENEALOGY AND BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL Sept. 14, 1951
Prepared by Orville Watson Mosher (Jr.) Emporia, Kansas

AN ACCOUNT OF ASA AND HIRAM MOSHER IN THE SIOUX WARS IN MINNESOTA
DURING THE PERIOD 1860-1865 with comments on the "Nell Young" letter.

Both Asa and Hiram Mosher took part in the Sioux Wars in Minnesota. Asa under General Sibley in 1860-1862 and then reenlisted under General Sully and pursued the Indians into the "bad-lands." Both Asa and Hiram were present and took part in the hanging of the 38 Sioux Murderers, Dec. 26, 1862, Asa in the cavalry and Hiram in the infantry.

Asa enlisted in the 2nd Regiment of Minnesota Cavalry, Minnesota Volunteers Co. C. Hiram in the 10th Regiment CO. F. This regiment was sent South in 1862 and he served until he was badly wounded, losing an arm at the battle of Nashville. A third brother Jim Mosher enlisted in the first Minnesota and served until permanently disabled at the battle of Gettysburg. Rob Mosher also served under Grant, but I have been unable to locate the Regiment and Company to which he was attached.

These soldiers of our family, Asa, Hiram, Rob and Jim were my great-uncles. As a boy I knew Asa well during the period after he had left Waseca, Minnesota and settled at Waupun, Wisconsin. As a history-minded boy, "wild about Indians," I listened to his stories with the greatest interest and, although many of his accounts have faded out with time, others still remain vivid, and these I record in order to give further light on frontier experiences. I also have added comments on the "Nell Young letter."

At the time I knew him, Asa was in his 70's, partly crippled, and as something had happened to his vocal cords, he was only able to speak in a loud whisper. As a fifteen year old boy, I was interested in bows and arrows which Waupoose, a prisoner in the state penitentiary at Waupun, used to make me. In an atmosphere of beaded moccasins and bows and arrows, seated by the stove in the dining room with a plate of Aunt Deb's cookies for refreshments, I listened to Asa as he told me of his life in the army. As nearly as I can recall from fifty years ago, here is what I learned.

He was stationed at Fort Snelling when the New Ulm massacre occurred. Shortly after, he was sent there with cavalry to restore order and help the refugees. Aunt Deb would "hush" Asa up when he started to tell me all he saw at New Ulm, for a diet of horrors for a boy was not considered a good thing. But I gathered that he had seen a child that had been nailed to a table and a number of people scalped, of which one was still alive. One woman saved herself and baby by hiding in a swamp behind rushes, their heads just above water. On the way to New Ulm a scout reported a movement in the long grass of the prairie. Thinking it might be an Indian, the troops concealed themselves, when along came a little boy scarcely twelve years of age carrying his little brother on his back. He and his little brother alone of the family had escaped the massacre. They had been hiding out for two days and now he was carrying his little brother to safety towards Mankato.

As conditions in Minnesota became progressively dangerous, many soldiers having relatives in the region of the Indian raids were in great fear for the lives of their loved ones. At any time it is a serious offense in the army to be "Absent Without Leave" but especially so during the Indian troubles. As so many soldiers had been called away to fight Lee and Jackson in the South, the frontier was inadequately guarded, and Little Crow and his Band were on a rampage. But the soldiers in the fort could not remain idle to see their loved ones on the farms around New Ulm,

Continuation of the O.W. Mosher (Jr) account of the Sioux War in Minnesota.

Mankato and Waseca left to be murdered. What to do? Among them, Asa took a chance. Leaving behind instructions that their absence from the fort was only temporary and telling one of their comrades to answer for them when their names were called at muster, the anxious soldiers went off with army wagon hitched to horses and mules they rode away from Fort Sumpter, gathered up their families with what valuables they could carry and transported them back to Fort Sumpter. As the Nell Young letter and my own talks with Asa affirmed the officers and authorities ignored the absences.

As to the proceedings attendant upon the hanging of the Indians at Mankato, that too, was sketched up as unfit for the ears of a boy, except when I asked "Who ordered them hanged?" Asa replied "Able Lincoln told us to do it." Also there was a lot of good came out of those evil Sioux by their deaths, for their bodies were promptly dug up by medical men, especially by Dr. Mayo and his brilliant sons. They had 38 superb corpses on which to learn anatomy --all of which knowledge was to stand them in good stead when the Mayo boys grew up and astounded the world with their superb knowledge of how to save lives by operative techniques. After the New Ulm massacres such was the hate of the population for Indians, even those that had had nothing to do with the massacre, that the lives of innocent red-men were in danger. My uncle, Waldo Mosher, was in a hardware store down that way when an Indian known by his friends to be entirely all right passed by. A man whose wife and child had been killed at New Ulm seized a rifle and was about to shoot the friendly Indian when Waldo and another by-stander intervened and took the rifle away from the infuriated would-be avenger. The old slogan used to be "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." To marry and Indian, to become a squaw-man was about as bad as to marry a negro at that time. It is remarkable how that hostility has vanished in the last fifty years.

In the passage of Cousin Nell Young's letter which tells of the chasing of the Indians into the Bad Lands by General Sibley and the story of how the Indian boy pointed the way to the camp of the hostiles, I am sure she has confused Asa's experience under General Sully with that of General Sibley. After the execution of the Sioux in 1862 General Sibley was replaced in active service against the Indians by General Sully. Sibley appears to have interested himself after 1862 in Minnesota state politics and the Civil War, leaving it to General Sully to straighten out the Indian situation.

The occasion for General Sully's expedition into the Bad Lands was to punish the Indians that had left their reservation and had taken part in the outbreak, but especially the idea was to force the Indians to go back onto their reservation on which they resented being kept. The only way to get them back was to destroy their supplies --then they would have to go back on the Reservation and receive the supplies from the United States government, consisting of cattle, flour etc.

For this part of Asa's experience, I believe that I am better informed than my cousin Nell Young was, although we both heard from Asa the incident of the Indian boy directing the army to the camp of the hostiles.

Here is what happened. Sully's expedition occurred in 1864. His army was composed of Britchett's Battalion of cavalry, six companies of the Second Minnesota Volunteer cavalry of which Asa was a member. They also took along artillery that could shell the Indians with grape and canister that the Indians called "rotten eggs." The expedition travelled light and fast. It left Fort Ridgley, near New Ulm, crossed to the Missouri River west along the Big Cheyenne, Cannon Ball and Heart Rivers to the head waters of the Yellowstone. They finally caught up with the Sioux at the junction of the Big Knife and Little Missouri where they fought the Battle

Continuation of the O.W. Mosher (Jr.) account of the Sioux War in Minnesota

of Killdeer Mountain.

According to General Sully's account there were 1600 lodges with some 5000-6000 warriors and accompanying wives and children. On the approach of the army the women and children fled to the mountains, leaving behind their lodges with tons of pemican (pounded dried buffalo meat mixed with berries) great quantities of dried berries, buffalo robes, tanned hides of buffalo, elk and antelope, brass and copper kettles and mess pans. They even left their dogs and ponies tied to pickets.

The Indians came out to fight the army, charging out of neighboring gullies and ravines. They feared the artillery. The loss was small on both sides, the white loss 5 killed and 10 wounded, the Indians 150 killed. The day was spent in destroying the property left by the Indians. Sully described the Bad Lands as "Hell with the fires put out."

Now turning to Asa's description as I remember the way in which he described this battle of Killdeer Mountain--it varies very little from General Sully's report. After the army had been guided by the wounded Indian boy as described in the Nell Young letter, it was found that they had taken the Indians completely by surprise. It was a very large camp that had been laying in supplies of meat for the winter. Asa describe the shelling of the Indian camp and shooting at clustered groups high on the mountain sides as they tried to escape. He told me of seeing the mountain sides full of squaws with their children and papooses desperately climbing upward to get out of the way of the "rotten eggs" the grape and canister shot by the field pieces. (Later General Sully was to be attacked by those who had sympathy for the Indians, claiming that he uselessly killed a lot of their women and children)

"The Indians were plenty brave," said Asa, "Their charging our troops from the ravines with only shotguns and bows and arrows was futile, as they were easily repelled by our better-armed cavalry."

One day Asa said, "You love to collect Indian relics, my boy, " How I wish I could have saved for you some of the things I had to throw onto the great fire that we lit when we were ordered to destroy the Indian camp. We were told to burn everything. We heaped up their teepees, mat supplies, everything and burned them in piles. I remember carrying beaded buffalo-robes, bows and arrows, deer-skin tanned as white as snow, all sorts of Indian gadgets the use for which I did not know, and throwing them on the fire. Since we had destroyed all the carefully collected supplies by which the Indians hoped to live during the coming winter, this compelled them to come back to their reservations or die of starvation."

Until relieved by home-coming Civil War veterans in 1865, the Second Regiment of Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry was retained on patrol duty of the northern and western borders, and from Asa I got something of a picture of life in the camps, such as Fort Ridgley, Fort Riley, Fort Snelling.

Asa had a "way" with horses; he loved them and his eye would brighten as he told how the animals felt the spring of music in their feet when the regimental bands would play "Garry Owen." At more or less permanent forts or camps the officers would have cows brought in so that they could enjoy milk and cream for themselves. It was considered one grand joke to the common soldier to milk those cows during the night so that there wouldn't be any milk or cream for the officers' breakfast, which, of course, had already gone down "the little red lane" of the common soldiers' thirsty throat.

In order to prevent having their pet cows milked, the officers hit on the scheme of placing them at the end of a long shed, surrounded by the most vicious cayuses (Indian ponies) horses and mules prepared to kick the daylights out of anyone who tried to get near. And yet Asa was able to do the trick. In the dead of night he would crawl under the bellies of those vicious horses and mules, gentling them, milk the cows--then crawl all the way back with the pails of milk and never get kicked or caught.

Continuation of the O.W. Mosher (Jr.) account of the Sioux War in Minnesota

Wrestling matches, instead of prize-fights or boxing matches were in vogue in the armies at the various posts. Asa successfully represented his company on several occasions.

Probably the most revealing account of an Indian buffalo hunt was given me by Asa --I have never heard it described in like manner.

Asa recounted that after the battle of Killdeer Mountain the Indians gradually drifted back to the Reservations and asked for their government beef allotments. It later was part of the notorious Bellknap Scandal that the beeves allotted the Indians were of the worst and frequently failed to arrive on time. Such was the situation--failure of the arrival of the beeves that gave Asa a chance to see Indians kill buffalo with bows and arrows. "We couldn't let the Indians die, of starvation," he said, nor could we let them have their guns, or they might have turned them on us. So as there were still large herds of buffalo in the vicinity, it was decided to let the Indians kill them with bow and arrow. I went along to prevent the Indians from leaving the reservation and, of course, to see how they killed buffalo.

Asa continues: "In order to guide the pony along side of the fleeing animal, the Indian had to have some way by which he could guide his horse. At the same time he had to have both arms free to hold the bow and arrow and shoot. It was managed in this way: The Indian would knot a buck-skin thong by one end to his horse's jaw and hold the other end in his own teeth. The Indians were some of the finest riders on earth. They would pursue the buffalo, and then, by jerking their own heads this way and that they would steer their horses close to the left sides of the fleeing buffalos. Then leaning clear down over the sides of their horses, so as to get good shots at the hearts of the fleeing animals, they would drive their arrows into the sides of the buffalos. I personally saw one case where an arrow that had missed a rib protruded on the other side of the animal --such had been the powerful force of the sinew-backed bow.

While on the march, in making camp pickets were placed all around. These would call to each other at regular intervals throughout the night, "Two o'clock and all's well" appropriate to the hour. If any one picket failed to call any investigation would be made immediately. There were tragic cases where Indians creeping through the grass in the early morning had silently killed a soldier, the poor man being found transfixed by arrows.

And so I have written up these memories of an old man who had taken an intimate part in the frontier life of early Minnesota as accurately as the passage of time has permitted me.

Orville Watson Mosher

Orville Watson Mosher (Jr.)

Curator Lyon County Branch of the Kansas State
Historical Society and President of the Organiza-
tion.

September 14, 1951.