

George A. Thorne Family in the Massacre of 1862.

About in the year 1854, George A. Thorne, an English ship carpenter, and Delia Stafford his Irish colleen bride of a month, landed at the Indian settlement of Owabopte, the present site of the city of Hastings. Soon George had made a log cabin for his bride, and the two settled down happily in their wilderness, with only Red Owl and his Sioux Indians as neighbors. Their happiness was complete, when a year later, their daughter Mary was born.

About this time Mr. Thorne was employed by Major Joseph R. Brown, and the little family moved to Henderson, Minnesota. Mr. Brown was a romantic figure, being Indian Agent for the Government, a man with a great fund of common sense, and hence a friend of both the whites and the Indians. It was he who first suggested the name of Minnesota; was the founder of Stillwater and Henderson; who became a territorial politician and editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press; and also invented the steam wagon.

At Henderson, because of Mr. Thorne's work with the Indians, Mrs. Thorne became a very close friend of the squaws, and was constantly being brought gifts from the Indian village; beads, moccasins, and wild fruits from the woods. Little Mary was a great favorite of the Indian squaws and children, and both mother and daughter often visited the Indian village across the river.

One day Delia Thorne's pioneer heart almost stood still. Calling Mary, she received no answer, and she searched the neighborhood to no avail. A posse was formed, and a thorough hunt was made of the entire community; still there was no trace of Mary. As a last resort the party crossed to the Indian village, and there, seated in a circle of admiring aborigines, and decorated with beads and Indian finery, sat Mary, eating heartily of a piece of dog meat, which had been prepared in her honor. Such was the friendly spirit which existed between the Thornes and the Indians. Darker clouds, however, were forming on the horizon.

At the close of an August day in the year 1862, a number of Indians were seen paddling down the Minnesota River, this was not an unusual sight at Henderson, but their attitude and dress was very unusual. They wore a liberal coat of war paint and headdress of eagle feathers. Their manner had changed from friendliness to a hostile manner and a sullen averting of faces. Even the squaws who passed that evening were no longer friendly, but turned away and went by in silence. A general alarm was felt in Henderson that night, and early in the morning word was received that an Indian uprising was starting. George Thorne mounted his horse and rode from home to home giving the alarm. Volunteers were called for, and Mr. Thorne entered the service, now as an Indian fighter.

A terrible state of excitement arose, the rush of enlistment, the galloping of mounted messengers, the shrill war whoop of the savages from the distance telling the story of new murders, the scurrying of women and children from their homes, the anxiety of parents for their children's safety, the worry of wives for their fighting husbands; through hurry and bustle, cries and tears, speed and confusion, the women and children were hurried to the Valley House for safety, and in their haste all forgot even the barest necessities, especially food. By the following day the refugees in the Valley House were without food, and by the second day, intense hunger had to be reckoned with. Delia Thorne remembered that she had just baked bread before leaving her Henderson home, and thought possibly she could get back to Henderson to obtain the bread and what food she could collect. It happened that Maj. Brown was driving the stage coach to St. Peter, and so Delia Thorne and her daughter were left off at the deserted Henderson.

For a woman and a child to venture into a deserted village, where savages might lurk at every corner, took the greatest amount of courage. With a trembling heart, but a stout upper lip, Mrs. Thorne clasped Mary's hand and walked straightway to her home. The slightest sound of the wind, the shadow of a swaying tree, the baying of a loose hound, or the approach of a stray dog, sent chills through Delia's heart. However, all fears proved groundless, and she arrived at her home to find everything just as she had left it. The entire afternoon Delia gathered food together, while Mary helped to keep watch. While milking her cows that evening, Mrs. Thorne had her greatest fright, a dark object sprung up from the tall grass and Delia all but felt her scalp being taken off; it turned out to be a neighbor's large pet dog which had been left behind. Mrs. Thorne returned in safety to the Valley House with the food and thus saved many lives from starvation.

The days that followed at the stockade, or Valley House, were days of misery and almost starvation. Often rations were so low that each person was allowed in substance about one cracker a day; heavy rains during the time also added to their misery; and the constant news arriving at the stronghold of new atrocities enacted by the savages, kept their hearts and minds filled with horror and worry as to the safety of the men who were out fighting the redskins.

After the outbreak, Mr. and Mrs. Thorne and Mary returned to Henderson to find their home, and all their possessions in ashes. Disheartened, and broken in spirit, they traded their little farm for a yoke of oxen and cart and returned to Hastings, where they spent the rest of their days; however prematurely old and scarred by memories of atrocities that could not be effaced. The effect was equally hard upon little Mary, for she broke the heads of all the dolls in her neighborhood, going through the scalping act of the savages.

Juliet Rachel Thorne.
(Only living child of
George and Delia)