



## Frances Densmore Papers

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A Sioux Woman's Account of the  
Uprising in Minnesota

by  
Frances Denismore

There are few Indian survivors of the outbreak in Minnesota who can recall the details of the tragedy. One woman, however, remembers it clearly, though she was only eight years old at the time. Her Sioux name is Wicaŋpewaŋtewiŋ, meaning Good Star Woman, and she lives with her children near Red Wing, Minnesota. Although she is almost blind, she sews industriously all day, making patchwork of woolen pieces that her daughter cuts for her, laying the light and dark pieces in separate piles where her groping hands can find them, and keeping her supplied with threaded needles. She has an interesting face, her gray hair is in long braids, and her vigor belies her eightyfour years. Sitting beside the door of the wigwam, on the ground, she had her tobacco bag beside her, with its mixture of Spearhead and kinnickinick. When she had finished her narrative she lit her long pipe as deftly as the woman of today lights a cigarette. Holding the red-stone bowl in her hand she puffed the long stem of the pipe, sometimes taking it from her mouth to speak to her daughter who had interpreted the story and was discussing it with me.

The English name of Good Star Woman is Dorine Blacksmith, and her father is said to have been the first Sioux blacksmith among the Sioux, learning the trade at Crow Creek, South Dakota, and working there three years. His father was ~~Her grandfather~~.

His father was  
Her grandfather was  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX father was part Indian whose name was~~

a Frenchman, his mother a Sioux, and he had seven or eight  
~~familyxx~~  
 brothers. Thus Dorine's father was a "half-breed."  
 xxxxxxxx.

This story is presented exactly as translated by  
another daughter, Mrs. Peter Logan, being in consultation  
Mrs. John Bearskin, daughter of Good Star Woman. No attempt

has been made to harmonize it with history. It stands as the ~~personal~~ narrative of one who remembers the Sioux "massacre" and shared in its sufferings. *It was made back to the daughter and some parts changed made.*

According to Good Star Woman there were three outbreaks at once, the first being at Granite Falls, the second at Birch Coulee, and the third at Big Stone Lake. The family of Good Star Woman lived near Birch Coulee. Her father belonged to the Hemnica band, some of whom lived near St. Paul and others near Red Wing. They were not in the trouble, which was started by the Sisseton Sioux. Some of the Mdewakanton <sup>band</sup> were involved and were blamed, while the Sissetons who really started the trouble fled to Canada and Montana, many leaving their families behind them. The Mdewakanton chiefs told their people to keep away from the trouble, but in the end they ~~were blamed and~~ suffered severely.

One of the events that led up to the trouble at Birch Coulee occurred a year and a half before. Two Indians were passing the house of a white man and asked for food, as they were hungry. The man was angry and one Indian said "Let us go on." The other said, "I'll ask the woman for a piece of bread." The first Indian went on, expecting his friend to overtake him. Later he returned and found the body of his friend <sup>hidden</sup> in a swamp, with a tree laid over it. The Indian's head had been split



open and a bloody axe lay near by. The white man and his family had gone away, taking all their belongings. The Indian took the body of his friend, <sup>it</sup> ~~which was~~ wrapped <sup>it</sup> and placed <sup>it</sup> on a scaffold, according to ~~the custom of~~ the Sioux custom. The Indians did not turn against the white, because of this incident.

Hunting and trapping were the principal industries of the Sioux and they took the hides to the trader. Sometimes he went to the Indians in their hunting camps, taking pork, coffee and other commodities which he gave to the Indians in exchange for hides. He packed the furs on his sled and went on to the next camp. So far as the Indians knew, there was no account kept when the trader collected the hides nor when they took the hides to his store. They only knew that they "owed a lot to the trader."

After a while two traders called the Indians to a council. Good Star Woman's father did not go, and when the men came back he said "What did they want to tell you?" They replied, "The trader said he wanted everybody who owed him anything to sign a paper and then he would collect the money from the Government. He didn't show us any papers, he just wanted us to sign. He said the Government would allow each Indian twenty dollars a year, and what he owed the trader would be taken out of that. Then we won't have to go hunting any more."

The trader also told the Indians that if they didn't sign the paper they could get nothing at his store, saying, "If you have to eat ~~xxx~~ <sup>grass</sup>, go ahead and eat ~~xxx~~ <sup>grass</sup> but don't come around here asking for food."

From that time the Indians and the trader were unfriendly but the trouble did not begin right away.

The trouble at Birch Coulee ~~actually~~ started with four young Sioux, two from near Birch Coulee and two belonging to the ~~xxxxxx Sioux xxxxxxxx belonged to another band xxxxxx The xxxxxx~~ Pezutazizi (yellow mediaine) group living near Granite Falls. They went hunting to get some meat, perhaps staying two or three nights.

On the way home they came to the farm of a white man and one said "Let's ask this man for water, so we can cook some supper. I'm hungry." A hen flew up and left some eggs, hidden in the grass. One Indian said he was going to take the eggs. Another said, "Let them alone, they belong to this farmer." The first Indian said, "That is nothing. You are just afraid of this white man." So he stepped on the eggs and broke them. The farmer did not see this as it happened some distance from the house.

The Indians <sup>Two of them</sup> ~~As they~~ were still hungry, so ~~they~~ took a pail and went toward the house to get water, to cook some of the meat they had brought. The farmer saw them and motioned them to go away, then he went into the house, got his gun and threatened them but did not shoot. The Indian who had advised leaving the eggs alone ~~whazhazztanztedzhiz~~ turned to the other and said, "You called me a coward. Shoot this man. If you don't I'll kill you right here." So the Indian shot the farmer and his wife. Some white men chased them toward Birch Coulee.

That night some Indians who had been hunting came home and found what had happened. This was late at night, but they talked it over and the head men got together and said the trouble must not go any further. But ~~they~~ the Indians who had been told



to eat grass  
 / got angry and the attack on the trader followed in a short time.

The family of Good Star Woman lived near the trading post. Her father had a sister who had raised more corn than she needed, so she told them to come over and eat it. She lived a few miles toward the west and they moved over to her place. That was in August, 1862. Early the next morning the mother of Good Star Woman said "I'll go and get some wood, and in the afternoon we will pick our corn." The little girl went with her mother. It was the custom of the Sioux women to carry wood on their backs, the pack being carried by a strap across the chest or forehead. In preparing to carry wood, a woman laid the ends of the long carrying strap parallel on the ground, then laid the wood across the straps, leaving enough of the lengths to tie upward over the wood, while the loop, or middle portion, was ready to be placed across the woman's head or shoulders.

Good Star Woman's mother had laid only a few sticks on her carrying strap when she heard shots. "Hurry," she cried, "The Chippewa must be here," and they ran back to the camp. There they heard more shots and everyone thought it must be the Chippewa as they had had raids of the Chippewa and were always looking for them.

When they returned to the camp it was still very early and ~~it was still so early in the morning that~~ the little children were ~~in bed~~. <sup>still</sup> An Indian came riding into the camp, so frightened that he could not tell them what was the trouble. They kept saying "Tell us, what is the trouble." At last he said "The Sioux are killing the whites." This was taking place four or five miles away but they could hear the guns. The children wakened and began to cry.

Later they learned that one of the trader's was standing on the steps of his store when the trouble took place. He had been there many years and could speak Sioux fluently and he said to the Indians, "Why are you fellows coming here? Are you jealous of me?" One of the Indians said "I'm the one," and shot him.

The two Indians who killed the white farmer were shot <sup>in punishment</sup> by their own people. One of them was sitting at the end of his wigwam, opposite the door, when an Indian came in and said, "You were the cause of all this suffering, making the women and children suffer so much," and he shot him dead. The other went out of his tent and was walking along when someone shot him in the back. One of the leaders said, "This is what we ought to have done in the beginning and then this suffering would not have come, the women crying and the little children having to walk so far." Every morning they could hear the women crying, and as they went from place to place the little children had to walk and they cried from weariness and fright.

The Indians who fought the whites turned against the Indians who refused to join them. It was a custom of the Sioux, when in danger of attack from the Chippewa, to put the women and children in one or two wigwams, and dig a trench in the middle so they could crouch in that and be below the line of fire. The earth that was removed to make the trench was piled outside the wigwams, forming an embankment. Good Star Woman's family were "friendly Sioux" and she remembers being placed in such a shelter, with the other children and the women.



At length the friendly Sioux got someone to write a letter and take it to Fort Snelling. The man had to go a long way around, but he returned safely and said the soldiers were coming. He told the Indians what to do when they saw the soldiers and said they must make a white flag to wave, and must point their guns down toward the ground. They did as he told them, and the soldiers circled around and had them pack their goods. The soldiers brought wagons for the women and children, while the Indians who had horses took them, and put their belongings on travois. Good Star Woman's father had a horse and travois and she travelled that way, with her two younger sisters. Her father covered them with a buffalo hide with the hair on the outside, but she sometimes lifted the corner and peeked out. When they passed through towns the people brought poles, pitchforks and axes and hit some of the women and children in the wagons. Her father was struck once and almost knocked down. The soldiers rode on each side of the column of Indians and tried to protect them but could not always do so. A boy was driving an ox cart and the white people knocked him down. Some Indians died from the beatings they received.

At night they camped close together, and the soldiers camped in a circle around them. Once an Indian was struck and killed. They scraped the fire aside and buried him under it, so the whites would not find his body. Then they went on the next morning.

In the meantime the Sioux who had started the trouble had run away to safety.



At length the pitiful column of friendly Sioux reached Fort Snelling. A high fence was put around their camp, but the ~~s~~ettlers came and took their horses and oxen. They were provided with food. The soldiers drove a wagon among the tents and gave crackers to the children and bread to the older people. Measles broke out, and the Indians thought the disease was caused by the strange food. ~~This was the first time they ever had the disease.~~ ~~∠~~ All the children had measles and one of her sisters died. Sometimes 20 to 50 died in a day and were buried in a long trench, the old, large people underneath and the children on top. A Roman Catholic priest brought a box for each body and ~~put them~~ ~~in the~~ trench until spring, and then he "buried them right." He was good to the children and told them to come to church and he gave them candy and apples. The children liked the singing in the church. (Who was this ~~unhappy~~ priest? Doubtless his name is recorded in history but the ~~friendly~~ Sioux remember only his good deeds.)

Good Star Woman said that some Sioux were taken from Fort Snelling to St. Louis and put in chains. The remainder were kept there all winter, and in the spring were told they would have to move. They were put on a steamboat and taken down the river, but the boat was leaking and some had to be taken off. ~~and put in box cars~~ After a while they were put in box cars and taken over to the Missouri river where they were again put on a steamboat. Their destination was Fort Thompson where they were kept in a stockade for three years. Many starved to death there. The Indians were almost naked. They wound

burlap around their legs to keep warm. Many of the women had to wear burlap gotten from the soldiers, and nobody had any sleeves in their garments. If the men got drunk they had to carry bricks all day.

Such is the story of Good Star Woman, one of the Friendly Sioux who remembers the uprising of the hostile Indians.