



*A portrait of
Chief Big Eagle,
taken before
the Sioux Uprising*

AS RED MEN VIEWED IT

Three Indian Accounts of the Uprising

Edited by KENNETH CARLEY

IN THE abundant source material on the Sioux Uprising of 1862 there is depressingly little testimony from the Indian side. While white participants and their mixed-blood friends told their versions of the conflict in numerous contemporary narratives, long-after reminiscences, soldiers' reports, diaries, letters, official documents, and the like, the Indians were silent except for brief and sometimes ludicrous statements attributed to them at the time of capture or during trials in the field.

It was not until 1894 that an important Indian story of the war came out in the form of an extensive interview with Chief Big

Eagle by Return I. Holcombe, then a representative of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Holcombe's interest in the Sioux Uprising apparently had been stimulated by his examination of the Henry H. Sibley Papers in 1893 for the Minnesota Historical Society. (See above, p. 100.)

In the late spring of 1894 Holcombe visited scenes of the outbreak in the Minnesota River Valley and searched out Sioux Indians still living there. Then he went on to Flandreau, South Dakota, to talk with Mrs. Nancy Huggan.¹ While there he met Chief Big Eagle, who had left his home near Granite Falls for a visit to Flandreau. The

reporter seized this opportunity to get, first-hand, the story of the uprising from a prominent Indian who had taken part in it. Big Eagle could not speak English, so Holcombe talked with him for several hours through interpreters — Mrs. Huggan and her son-in-law, the Reverend John Eastman.

Big Eagle's narrative, as recorded by Holcombe, was first published in the *Pioneer Press* of July 1, 1894. Later that year it was reprinted in volume 6 of the *Minnesota Historical Collections*.²

In his introduction to the story, Holcombe told how he got the chief to consent to an interview: "Mr. Big Eagle was first informed that his statements were wanted solely in order that a correct knowledge of the military movements of the Indians during the war might be learned. It was suggested to him that no harm therefrom could come to him or any of his people; that neither the war banner nor the 'bloody shirt' waved any longer in Minnesota; that it was well known that he was a prominent character in the war, but that he was now and had been for many years a quiet, industrious Christian citizen, respected by all who knew him, and he was assured that he would be correctly reported. He readily consented to tell his story, and gave full permission to use his name. Other Indians interviewed on the

same subject gave certain information, but requested that their names be not printed. Big Eagle's story is here given substantially as related to the reporter by the two intelligent interpreters."

In addition to being a "first" and an "exclusive," the interview had significance because of the fact that Big Eagle was a Sioux leader who took part in councils where decisions were made. "He was a sub-chief," Holcombe said, "and may be termed one of the Sioux generals, since he had a band or division of his own." Big Eagle also took part in all the major battles except Redwood Ferry, though at the outset he had been opposed to the war.³ Thus he was in a position to talk about Indian plans and moves from actual experience.

Holcombe was satisfied that Big Eagle was being honest. "The old man was very frank and unreserved," the reporter pointed out. "He did not seem to wish to avoid or evade an answer to a single question. He is of more than ordinary intelligence and spoke candidly, deliberately and impassively, and with the air and manner of one striving to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Reminiscences tend to be fallible, however, especially when events recalled have happened long before. It should be pointed out, therefore, that Big Eagle's story may well have inaccuracies, since he was remembering events in detail that occurred nearly thirty-two years earlier.

Big Eagle's memory also may have been influenced by his having become a Christian and a civilized neighbor of white men, but this is another factor that cannot be measured. The chief had not been found guilty of murder, but he was sentenced to ten years in prison for fighting in battles against the whites. He was released from the Davenport, Iowa, prison after serving three years and returned to Minnesota, where he was converted to Christianity and given the baptismal name of Elijah. He was better known as Jerome Big Eagle, however, and made his home in the woods below

¹ Mrs. Huggan, whose maiden name was Nancy McClure, married David Faribault in 1851. Both were of mixed blood and were held as captives by the Indians during the outbreak. After Faribault's death, she married Charles G. Huggan, and lived with him in 1894 on a farm near Flandreau. Her reminiscences were published in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:439-460 (1887).

² Return I. Holcombe, ed., "A Sioux Story of the War: Chief Big Eagle's Story of the Sioux Outbreak of 1862," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:382-400. This volume has long been out of print and difficult to obtain. As reprinted in this issue of *Minnesota History*, Big Eagle's account is unchanged except for minor alterations in spelling and punctuation and the addition of new annotation. Material appearing in parentheses was probably supplied by Holcombe. All additions made by the present editor are enclosed in brackets. The original manuscript of the narrative has not been located.

³ See Thomas Hughes, *Indian Chiefs of Southern Minnesota*, 36 (Mankato, 1927).

Granite Falls until his death on January 5, 1906, at the age of seventy-eight.⁴

At least one person who had been a captive of the Indians in 1862 took a dim view of Big Eagle's story. He was Samuel J. Brown, son of Joseph R. Brown. In a letter of February 6, 1896, from Browns Valley, Sam Brown wrote Holcombe, "I see you are considerably taken up with one Big Eagle. The old rascal has an interesting history — so had Cut Nose, Little Six, and Medicine Bottle. When you 'pump' him again try to find out why he should not be called Big Liar instead of Big Eagle."⁵

Regardless of Brown's estimate, or of any imperfections the narrative may have, it has been widely used — and of necessity will continue to be used — by writers interested in telling the Indian as well as the white side of the outbreak. There simply is no other major Indian account to compare with it. Holcombe shared none of his friend Brown's doubts about Big Eagle's statements. When a *Pioneer Press* reporter interviewed him shortly after the old chief's death in 1906, Holcombe said he was proud that the chief had chosen to tell him his story. Holcombe added: "To have been the first newspaper man to get the old hostiles to talk for publication is the feather in my cap of which I am vainest."⁶

His pride was justified, and Holcombe himself added to the value of the account by doing his job well. An Ohio-born Civil War veteran, he had picked up interviewing experience as an editor and reporter for newspapers in Missouri and Iowa and as the author of several histories of Missouri counties. He went to St. Paul in 1888 to help write a history of the city. Thenceforth he made his home there and wrote for the *Pioneer Press* and the *St. Paul Dispatch* from 1890 to 1905. He eventually became a historian of the Northwest, writing all or part of several books on various phases of Minnesota history. After Holcombe's death in 1916 at the age of seventy-one, Warren Upham, former secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society, said of him: "Among all

whom I have known in historical work, he was the most careful, anxious, and persistent to attain accuracy and truth."⁷ Of his ability as a reporter, the *Dispatch* observed: "He was gifted with the rare faculty of correct perspective, so that his chronicling of contemporaneous events was with the accuracy and fairness which commonly can be left with safety only to the unbiased judgment of succeeding generations."⁸

This "perspective" contributed to our knowledge of the Sioux Uprising. One cannot help observing that, as a relative newcomer to the area in 1894, he was able to see what most persons who had lived there longer apparently overlooked — that, before it was too late, the stories of uprising participants on both sides should be recorded in a calmer atmosphere than that which prevailed in the early 1860s, when the first accounts appeared. The result was the reminiscences of Big Eagle and a number of others.

Several Sioux accounts exist that are neither as important nor as comprehensive as Big Eagle's, but in the absence of other evidence from the Indian side, they are of considerable interest. Two of these, both by ordinary warriors, are also here reproduced. One story, published for the first time, is that of a half-breed named George Quinn, or Spirit That Rattles as It Walks, who was interviewed by Holcombe in 1898.⁹ The other account is that of Lightning Blanket, whose narrative of the Fort Ridgely battles appeared in the *New Uln Review* for August 22, 1917, some three years after the warrior's death. Both differ in numerous details from Big Eagle's story.

⁴ *Granite Falls Journal*, January 11, 1906.

⁵ Cut Nose, Little Six, and Medicine Bottle were all Sioux desperadoes found guilty of murdering whites. Brown's letter is in the Holcombe Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁶ *Pioneer Press*, January 21, 1906, sec. 3, p. 10.

⁷ Warren Upham, "Return Ira Holcombe," in *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 2:11 (February, 1917).

⁸ *Dispatch*, November 23, 1916, p. 8.

⁹ The original manuscript, in Holcombe's penciled handwriting, is in the Holcombe Papers.

Chief Big Eagle's Story

I WAS born in the Indian village of my father near Mendota, in 1827, and am now sixty-seven years old. My father was Grey Iron, a subchief of the Mdewakanton Sioux.¹⁰ When he died I succeeded him as chief of the band and adopted the name of his father, Wambde Tonka, which, as is commonly called, means the Big Eagle. When I was a young man I often went with war parties against the Chippewa and other enemies of my nation, and the six feathers shown in the headdress of my picture in the historical society at St. Paul stand for six Chippewa scalps that I took when on the warpath. By the terms of the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in 1851, the Sioux sold all of their lands in Minnesota, except a strip ten miles wide on each side of the Minnesota River from near Fort Ridgely to the Big Stone Lake. The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute had their reservation up to the Yellow Medicine.¹¹ In 1858 the ten miles of this strip belonging to the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands, and lying north of the river were sold, mainly through the influence of Little Crow. That year, with some other chiefs, I went to Washington on business connected with the treaty. The selling of that strip north of

the Minnesota caused great dissatisfaction among the Sioux, and Little Crow was always blamed for the part he took in the sale.¹² It caused us all to move to the south side of the river, where there was but very little game, and many of our people, under the treaty, were induced to give up the old life and go to work like white men, which was very distasteful to many.

Of the causes that led to the outbreak of August, 1862, much has been said. Of course it was wrong, as we all know now, but there were not many Christians among the Indians then, and they did not understand things as they should. There was great dissatisfaction among the Indians over many things the whites did. The whites would not let them go to war against their enemies. This was right, but the Indians did not then know it. Then the whites were always trying to make the Indians give up their life and live like white men—go to farming, work hard and do as they did—and the Indians did not know how to do that, and did not want to anyway. It seemed too sudden to make such a change. If the Indians had tried to make the whites live like them, the whites would have resisted, and it was the same way with many Indians. The Indians wanted to live as they did before the treaty of Traverse des Sioux—go where they pleased and when they pleased; hunt game wherever they could find it, sell their furs to the traders, and live as they could.

Then the Indians did not think the traders had done right. The Indians bought goods of them on credit, and when the government payments came the traders were on hand with their books, which showed that the Indians owed so much and so much, and as the Indians kept no books they could not deny their accounts, but had to pay them, and sometimes the traders got all their money. I do not say that the traders always cheated and lied about these accounts. I know many of them were honest

¹⁰ Grey Iron was leader of the band earlier headed by Black Dog, whose village was located on the south bank of the Minnesota River some four miles upstream from Mendota. See Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 35.

¹¹ For information on the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota and their aftermath, see William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:266–304 (St. Paul, 1956); Lucile M. Kane, "The Sioux Treaties and the Traders," in *Minnesota History*, 32:65–80 (June, 1951).

¹² This land, estimated at the time to be worth five dollars an acre, was sold in 1858 for what eventually amounted to thirty cents an acre. Comprising nearly one million acres, the tract included that owned by Wahpeton and Sisseton bands (Upper Sioux) as well as the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute (Lower Sioux). After the traders' claims were paid, the latter received practically nothing and the former about half the original amount voted by Congress. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:218, 393–400.



SHAKOPEE and *Medicine Bottle*

men and kind and accommodating, but since I have been a citizen I know that many white men, when they go to pay their accounts, often think them too large and refuse to pay them, and they go to law about them and there is much bad feeling. The Indians could not go to law, but there was always trouble over their credits. Under the treaty of Traverse des Sioux the Indians had to pay a very large sum of money to the traders for old debts, some of which ran back fifteen years, and many of those who had got the goods were dead and others were not present, and the traders' books had to be received as to the amounts, and the money was taken from the tribe to pay them. Of course the traders often were of great service to the Indians in letting them have goods on credit, but the Indians seemed to think the traders ought not to be too hard on them about the payments, but do as the Indians did among one another, and put off the payment until they were better able to make it.

Then many of the white men often abused the Indians and treated them unkindly. Perhaps they had excuse, but the Indians

did not think so. Many of the whites always seemed to say by their manner when they saw an Indian, "I am much better than you," and the Indians did not like this. There was excuse for this, but the Dakota did not believe there were better men in the world than they. Then some of the white men abused the Indian women in a certain way and disgraced them, and surely there was no excuse for that.

ALL THESE THINGS made many Indians dislike the whites. Then a little while before the outbreak there was trouble among the Indians themselves. Some of the Indians took a sensible course and began to live like white men. The government built them houses, furnished them tools, seed, etc., and taught them to farm. At the two agencies, Yellow Medicine and Redwood, there were several hundred acres of land in cultivation that summer. Others stayed in their tepees.

There was a white man's party and an Indian party. We had politics among us and there was much feeling. A new chief speaker for the tribe was to be elected. There were three candidates—Little Crow, myself, and Wasuihiyedan (Traveling Hail). After an exciting contest Traveling Hail was elected. Little Crow felt sore over his defeat. Many of our tribe believed him responsible for the sale of the north ten-mile strip, and I think this was why he was defeated. I did not care much about it.

Many whites think that Little Crow was the principal chief of the Dakota at this time, but he was not. Wabasha was the principal chief, and he was of the white man's party; so was I; so was old Shakopee, whose band was very large. Many think if old Shakopee had lived there would have been no war, for he was for the white men and had great influence. But he died that summer, and was succeeded by his son, whose real name was Eatoka (Another Language), but when he became chief he took his father's name, and was afterwards called "Little Shakopee," or "Little Six," for in the Sioux language "shakopee" means six. This

Shakopee was against the white men. He took part in the outbreak, murdering women and children, but I never saw him in a battle, and he was caught in Manitoba and hanged in 1864. My brother, Medicine Bottle, was hanged with him.¹³

As the summer advanced, there was great trouble among the Sioux — trouble among themselves, trouble with the whites, and one thing and another. The war with the South was going on then, and a great many men had left the state and gone down there to fight. A few weeks before the outbreak the president called for many more men, and a great many of the white men of Minnesota and some half-breeds enlisted and went to Fort Snelling to be sent south. We understood that the South was getting the best of the fight, and it was said that the North would be whipped.

The year before the new president had turned out Major [Joseph R.] Brown and Major [William S.] Cullen, the Indian agents, and put in their places Major [Thomas J.] Galbraith and Mr. Clark Thompson, and they had turned out the men



TAOPI

under them and put in others of their own party. There were a great many changes. An Indian named Shonkasha (White Dog), who had been hired to teach the Indians to farm, was removed and another Indian named Taopi (The Wounded Man), a son of old Betsy, of St. Paul, put in his place.¹⁴ Nearly all of the men who were turned out were dissatisfied, and the most of the Indians did not like the new men. At last Major Galbraith went to work about the agencies and recruited a company of soldiers to go south. His men were nearly all half-breeds. This was the company called the Renville Rangers, for they were mostly from Renville County.¹⁵ The Indians now thought the whites must be pretty hard up for men to fight the South, or they would not come so far out on the frontier and take half-breeds or anything to help them.

It began to be whispered about that now would be a good time to go to war with the whites and get back the lands. It was believed that the men who had enlisted last had all left the state, and that before help could be sent the Indians could clean out the country, and that the Winnebago, and even the Chippewa, would assist the

¹³ The Wabasha referred to here was the third of a Mdewakanton Sioux dynasty known to white men by the same name. He had been opposed to the treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851 and the treaty of 1858, but was induced to sign both. Shakopee and Medicine Bottle were hanged, not in 1864, but on November 11, 1865. For information on the Wabashas and Shakopees, see Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 9-11, 15-17.

¹⁴ Taopi was a friendly Mdewakanton leader who later joined Wabasha in arranging for the release of prisoners held by the Indians. Old Betsy, better known as "Old Bets," was kind to the prisoners during the outbreak. For many years she was a familiar sight in St. Paul, and tourists often bought her picture. She died at Mendota in 1873 at the age of eighty-five. See J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of St. Paul*, 252-254 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4); Thomas M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, 197-200 (St. Paul, 1886).

¹⁵ The Renville Rangers, about fifty strong, learned of the Sioux Outbreak while in St. Peter, en route to Fort Snelling, on August 18 and made a return march to Fort Ridgely on August 19. They helped repel the attacks on Fort Ridgely on August 20 and 22 and later took part in the decisive battle of Wood Lake on September 23. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:128, 180. For their roster see *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:780 (St. Paul, 1890).

Sioux.¹⁶ It was also thought that a war with the whites would cause the Sioux to forget the troubles among themselves and enable many of them to pay off some old scores. Though I took part in the war, I was against it. I knew there was no good cause for it, and I had been to Washington and knew the power of the whites and that they would finally conquer us. We might succeed for a time, but we would be overpowered and defeated at last. I said all this and many more things to my people, but many of my own bands were against me, and some of the

SIoux tepees near Mendota, 1862



other chiefs put words in their mouths to say to me. When the outbreak came Little Crow told some of my band that if I refused to lead them to shoot me as a traitor who would not stand up for his nation, and then select another leader in my place.

But after the first talk of war the counsels of the peace Indians prevailed, and many of us thought the danger had all blown over. The time of the government payment was near at hand, and this may have had something to do with it.¹⁷ There was another thing that helped to stop the war talk. The crops that had been put in by the "farmer" Indians were looking well, and there seemed to be a good prospect for a plentiful supply of provisions for them the coming winter without having to depend on the game of the country or without going far out to the west on the plains for buffalo. It seemed as if the white men's way was certainly the best. Many of the Indians had been short of provisions that summer and had exhausted their credits and were in bad condition. "Now," said the farmer Indians, "if you had worked last season you would not be starving now and begging for food."

The farmers were favored by the government in every way. They had houses built for them, some of them even had brick houses, and they were not allowed to suffer. The other Indians did not like this. They were envious of them and jealous, and disliked them because they had gone back on the customs of the tribe and because they were favored. They called them "farmers," as if it was disgraceful to be a farmer. They called them "cut-hairs," because they had

¹⁶ The Winnebago Indians lived on a reservation ten miles south of Mankato and the Chippewa roamed northern Minnesota. There was some minor trouble among the Chippewa in 1862 and great apprehension among the white population, but nothing came of it. See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:374-382.

¹⁷ The treaties by which the Sioux gave up their lands stipulated that they were to be paid cash at the time of the signing and also money and goods in the form of annuities over a fifty-year period. The annuities normally were paid to the Lower Sioux near the end of June and to the Upper Sioux about the middle of July.

CHASKA, one of
the farmer Indians,
with his family



given up the Indian fashion of wearing the hair, and "breeches men," because they wore pantaloons, and "Dutchmen," because so many of the settlers on the north side of the river and elsewhere in the country were Germans. I have heard that there was a secret organization of the Indians called the "Soldiers' Lodge," whose object was to declare war against the whites, but I knew nothing of it.¹⁸

At last the time for the payment came

¹⁸ A soldiers' lodge was a powerful organization of warriors who met in secret. In June, 1862, such a group was formed among the Lower Sioux and decided on a forcible protest against white troops being present to help traders collect their credits at the forthcoming annuity payment. According to Folwell (*Minnesota*, 2:235), there is no evidence that its purpose or plans went beyond this immediate issue.

¹⁹ Delay in sending the annuity money, probably the chief immediate cause of the uprising, was brought about by Congress' tardy action in appropriating the funds and a month-long deliberation in the treasury department over whether the Indians should be paid in scarce gold, as was customary, or in paper currency. The money finally arrived in St. Paul on August 16 and at Fort Ridgely on August 18, the day before the first attack there. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:237.

and the Indians came in to the agencies to get their money. But the paymaster did not come, and week after week went by and still he did not come. The payment was to be in gold. Somebody told the Indians that the payment would never be made. The government was in a great war, and gold was scarce, and paper money had taken its place, and it was said the gold could not be had to pay us.¹⁹ Then the trouble began again and the war talk started up. Many of the Indians who had gathered about the agencies were out of provisions and were easily made angry. Still, most of us thought the trouble would pass, and we said nothing about it. I thought there might be trouble, but I had no idea there would be such a war. Little Crow and other chiefs did not think so. But it seems some of the tribe were getting ready for it.

YOU KNOW how the war started — by the killing of some white people near Acton, in Meeker County. I will tell you how this was done, as it was told me by all of the four young men who did the killing. These young

fellows all belonged to Shakopee's band. Their names were Sungigidan (Brown Wing), Kaomdeiyyedan (Breaking Up), Nagiwicakte (Killing Ghost), and Pazoiyopa (Runs against Something when Crawling). I do not think their names have ever before been printed. One of them is yet living.

They told me they did not go out to kill white people. They said they went over into the Big Woods to hunt; that on Sunday, August 17, they came to a settler's fence, and here they found a hen's nest with some eggs in it. One of them took the eggs, when another said: "Don't take them, for they belong to a white man and we may get into trouble." The other was angry, for he was very hungry and wanted to eat the eggs, and he dashed them to the ground and replied: "You are a coward. You are afraid of the white man. You are afraid to take even an egg from him, though you are half-starved. Yes, you are a coward, and I will tell everybody so." The other replied: "I am not a coward. I am not afraid of the white man, and to show you that I am not I will go to the house and shoot him. Are you brave enough to go with me?" The one who had called him a coward said: "Yes, I will go with you, and we will see who is the braver of us two." Their two companions then said: "We will go with you, and we will be brave, too."

They all went to the house of the white man (Mr. Robinson Jones), but he got alarmed and went to another house (that of his son-in-law, Howard Baker), where were some other white men and women. The four Indians followed them and killed three men and two women (Jones, Baker, a Mr. Webster, Mrs. Jones and a girl of fourteen).²⁰ Then they hitched up a team belonging to another settler and drove to Shakopee's camp (six miles above Redwood Agency), which they reached late that night and told what they had done, as I have related.

The tale told by the young men created the greatest excitement. Everybody was waked up and heard it. Shakopee took the young men to Little Crow's house (two miles above the agency), and he sat up in bed

and listened to their story. He said war was now declared. Blood had been shed, the payment would be stopped, and the whites would take a dreadful vengeance because women had been killed.²¹ Wabasha, Wacouta, myself, and others still talked for peace, but nobody would listen to us, and soon the cry was "Kill the whites and kill all these cut-hairs who will not join us."²²

A council was held and war was declared. Parties formed and dashed away in the darkness to kill settlers. The women began to run bullets and the men to clean their guns. Little Crow gave orders to attack the agency early next morning and to kill all the traders. When the Indians first came to him for counsel and advice he said to them, tauntingly: "Why do you come to me for advice? Go to the man you elected speaker (Traveling Hail) and let him tell you what to do"; but he soon came around all right and somehow took the lead in everything, though he was not head chief, as I have said.

AT THIS TIME my village was up on Crow Creek, near Little Crow's. I did not have a very large band — not more than thirty or forty fighting men. Most of them were not for the war at first, but nearly all got into it

²⁰ The victims, besides Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Howard Baker, were Viranus Webster (who was temporarily lodging with his young wife in a covered wagon at the Baker place), and Clara D. Wilson, who had been adopted by the Joneses. Her age usually is given as 15. See Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:303–311, where somewhat different translations of the names of the four Indians are given.

²¹ Big Eagle here implies that Little Crow led the way in deciding to resist the whites. Other Indians dispute this, contending that Little Crow agreed to lead the uprising with great reluctance and only after much pressure from the braves. If his speech upon this occasion (see p. 115) has been correctly reported, the latter interpretation seems the more accurate. See also *New Ulm Daily Journal*, August 8, 1947.

²² In view of the distance of Little Crow's home from the villages of Wabasha and Wacouta, there seems some doubt as to whether they could have attended the council. (See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:241.) Both chiefs were, however, opposed to the war. Some accounts claim that Wacouta was dead. The date of his death is uncertain.

at last. A great many members of the other bands were like my men; they took no part in the first movements, but afterward did.

The next morning, when the force started down to attack the agency, I went along. I did not lead my band, and I took no part in the killing. I went to save the lives of two particular friends if I could. I think others went for the same reason, for nearly every Indian had a friend that he did not want killed; of course he did not care about the others' friends. The killing was nearly all done when I got there. Little Crow was on the ground directing operations. The day before, he had attended church there and listened closely to the sermon and had shaken hands with everybody.

So many Indians have lied about their saving the lives of white people that I dislike to speak of what I did. But I did save the life

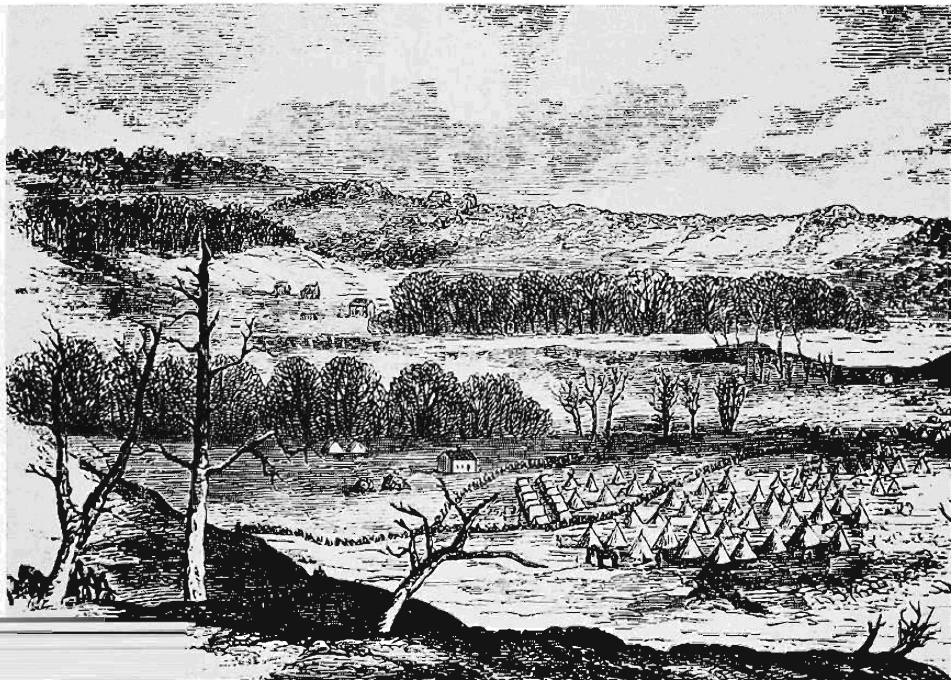
²³ Spencer, a clerk at the William H. Forbes store at the Lower Agency, was wounded about 7 A.M., August 18, at the start of the outbreak. Saved by an Indian friend variously identified as Chaska, Big Eagle and His Thunder, Spencer was one of the few white men (possibly the only one) who survived captivity. For his story, see Charles S. Bryant and Abel B. Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota*, 92 (Cincinnati, 1864); Harriet E. Bishop McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop*, 50-60 (St. Paul, 1864).

²⁴ Nathan and Andrew Myrick were the most hated of the traders. The latter escaped from the store through a second-story window but was shot down before he could run for cover. The former was not at the agency on August 18.

of George H. Spencer at the time of the massacre.²³ I know that his friend, Chaska, has always had the credit of that, but Spencer would have been a dead man in spite of Chaska if it had not been for me. I asked Spencer about this once, but he said he was wounded at the time and so excited that he could not remember what I did. Once after that I kept a half-breed family from being murdered; these are all the people whose lives I claim to have saved. I was never present when the white people were willfully murdered. I saw all the dead bodies at the agency. Mr. Andrew Myrick, a trader, with an Indian wife, had refused some hungry Indians credit a short time before when they asked him for some provisions.²⁴ He said to them: "Go and eat grass." Now he was lying on the ground dead, with his mouth stuffed full of grass, and the Indians were saying tauntingly: "Myrick is eating grass himself."

When I returned to my village that day I found that many of my band had changed their minds about the war and wanted to go into it. All the other villages were the same way. I was still of the belief that it was not best, but I thought I must go with my band and my nation, and I said to my men that I would lead them into the war, and we would all act like brave Dakota and do the best we could. All my men were with me; none had gone off on raids, but we did not have guns for all at first.

A Sioux village
near the
Redwood Agency



That afternoon word came to my village that soldiers were coming to the agency from Fort Snelling. (These were Captain [John S.] Marsh and his men.)²⁵ At once I mounted the best horse I had, and, with some of my men, rode as fast as I could to meet them at the ferry. But when I got there the fight was over, and I well remember that a cloud of powder smoke was rising slowly from the low, wet ground where the firing had been. I heard a few scattering shots down the river, where the Indians were still pursuing the soldiers, but I took no part. I crossed the river and saw the bodies of the soldiers that had been killed. I think Mr. [Peter] Quinn, the interpreter, was shot several times after he had been killed. The Indians told me that the most of them who fired on Captain Marsh and his men were on the same side of the river; that only a few shots came from the opposite or south side. They said that White Dog did not tell Mr. Quinn to come over, but told him to go back.²⁶ Of course I do not know what the truth is about this. White Dog was the Indian head farmer who had been replaced by Taopi and who was hanged at Mankato.

I WAS NOT in the first fight at New Ulm nor the first attack on Fort Ridgely.²⁷ Here let me say that the Indian names of these and other places in Minnesota are different from the English names. St. Paul is the "White Rock;" Minneapolis is "the Place Where the Water Falls;" New Ulm is "the Place Where There Is a Cottonwood Grove on the River;" Fort Ridgely was "the Soldiers' House;" Birch Coulee was called "Birch Creek," etc. I was in the second fight at New Ulm and in the second attack on Fort Ridgely. At New Ulm I had but a few of my band with me. We lost none of them. We had but few, if any, of the Indians killed; at least I did not hear of but a few. A half-breed named George Le Blanc, who was with us, was killed. There was no one in chief command of the Indians at New Ulm. A few subchiefs, like myself, and the head soldiers led them, and the leaders agreed

among themselves what was to be done. I do not think there was a chief present at the first fight. I think that attack was made by marauding Indians from several bands, every man for himself, but when we heard they were fighting we went down to help them. I think it probable that the first attack on Fort Ridgely was made in the same way; at any rate, I do not remember that there was a chief there.²⁸

The second fight at Fort Ridgely was made a grand affair. Little Crow was with us. Mr. Good Thunder, now at Birch Coulee agency, was with us.²⁹ He counted the Indians as they filed past him on the march to the attack, and reported that there were eight hundred of us. He acted very bravely in the fight, and distinguished himself by running close up to the fort and bringing away a horse. He is now married to the former widow of White Dog, and both he and his wife are good Christian citizens. We went down determined to take the fort, for we knew it was of the greatest importance to us to have it. If we could take it we would soon have the whole Minnesota Valley. But

²⁵ See above, p. 96. The troops were, of course, coming from Fort Ridgely, not Fort Snelling. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:248-250.

²⁶ White Dog was standing on the opposite bank as a "sentinel" when Marsh's force approached the ferry. Through Quinn, he told the soldiers to come over, apparently so they would be an easy target in midstream, but at his trial White Dog claimed he told the soldiers to stay back after he discovered the ambush. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:113.

²⁷ Both Lightning Blanket and the half-breed George Quinn, whose stories follow in this issue, say Big Eagle was present at the first attack on Fort Ridgely. For information on the battles of Fort Ridgely, see *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:250-255; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:126-133.

²⁸ Quinn contradicts this. See below, p. 148.

²⁹ Good Thunder was the first Indian baptized by the Episcopal Bishop, Henry B. Whipple, at the mission he founded at the Lower Agency in 1860. In view of the fact that Good Thunder was one of the "friendlies" who helped white captives, and after the war became a pillar of the Indian church near Morton, it is of interest that both Big Eagle and George Quinn mention his presence at the second battle of Fort Ridgely. For Good Thunder's story, see Henry B. Whipple, *Lights and Shadows of a Long Episcopate*, 61-64, 111-114, 175, 181-183 (New York, 1900).

we failed, and of course it was best that we did fail.³⁰

Though Little Crow was present, he did not take a very active part in the fight. As I remember, the chief leaders in the fight were The Thief, who was the head soldier of Mankato's band, and Mankato (Blue Earth) himself. This Mankato was not the old chief for whom the town was named, but a subchief, the son of old Good Road. He was a very brave man and a good leader. He was killed at the battle of Wood Lake by a cannon ball. We went down to the attack on both sides of the river. I went down on the south side with my men, and we crossed the river in front of the fort and went up through the timber and fought on that side next the river. The fight commenced about noon on Friday after the outbreak. We had a few Sisseton and Wahpeton with us, and some Winnebago, under the Little Priest were in this fight and at New Ulm. I saw them myself.³¹ But for the cannon I think we would have taken the fort. The soldiers fought us so bravely we thought there were more of them than there were. The cannon disturbed us greatly, but did not hurt many. We did not



GOOD Thunder as a young man

³⁰ The most famous quotation attributed to Big Eagle is the following summary of the importance of the battles of Fort Ridgely: "We thought the fort was the door to the valley as far as to St. Paul, and that if we got through the door nothing could stop us this side of the Mississippi. But the defenders of the Fort were very brave and kept the door shut." Instead of including this passage in the Big Eagle interview printed in the *Collections*, Holcombe used it in his history of Minnesota. The Dakota equivalent of "They kept the door shut" was stamped on medals issued to defenders of the fort. Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:338.

³¹ One of the many unsettled questions about the Sioux Uprising is the extent of Winnebago participation, if any. Little Priest and some of his warriors evidently were at the Lower Agency when the outbreak started, having come from their reservation near Mankato to be present for the annuity payment. Although Big Eagle and others said the Winnebago took part in various battles, none of the latter were convicted. For a discussion of the subject, see Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 99-106.

³² This expedition won a skirmish against soldiers under Captain Richard Strout near Acton on September 3, and unsuccessfully attacked Forest City and Hutchinson the next day. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:157-160, 162. Carley, *Sioux Uprising*, 52-54.

have many Indians killed. I think the whites put the number too large, and I think they overestimated the number killed in every battle. We seldom carried off our dead. We usually buried them in a secluded place on the battlefield when we could. We always tried to carry away the wounded. When we retreated from Ridgely I recrossed the river opposite the fort and went up on the south side. All our army but the scouts fell back up the river to our villages near Redwood Agency, and then on up to the Yellow Medicine and the mouth of the Chippewa.

OUR SCOUTS brought word that our old friend Wapetonhonska (The Long Trader), as we called General Sibley, was coming up against us, and in a few days we learned that he had come to Fort Ridgely with a large number of soldiers. Little Crow, with a strong party, went over into the Big Woods, towards Forest City and Hutchinson.³² After

he had gone, I and the other subchiefs concluded to go down and attack New Ulm again and take the town and cross the river to the east, or in the rear of Fort Ridgely, where Sibley was, and then our movements were to be governed by circumstances. We had left our village near the Redwood in some haste and alarm, expecting to be followed after the defeat at Ridgely, and had not taken all our property away. So we took many of our women with us to gather up the property and some other things, and we brought along some wagons to haul them off.

We came down the main road on the south side of the river, and were several hundred strong. We left our camps in the morning and got to our old villages in the afternoon. When the men in advance reached Little Crow's village—which was on the high bluff on the south side of the Minnesota, below the mouth of the Redwood—they looked to the north across the valley, and up on the high bluff on the north side, and out on the prairie some miles away, they saw a column of mounted men and some wagons coming out of the Beaver Creek timber on the prairie and going eastward. We also saw signs in Little Crow's village that white men had been there only a few hours before, and judging from the trail they had made when they left, these were the men we now saw to the northward.

There was, of course, a little excitement, and the column halted. Four or five of our best scouts were sent across the valley to follow the movements of the soldiers, creeping across the prairie like so many ants. It was near sundown, and we knew they would soon go into camp, and we thought the camping ground would be somewhere on the Birch Coulee, where there was wood and water. The women went to work to load the wagons. The scouts followed the soldiers carefully, and a little after sundown returned with the information that they had gone into camp near the head of Birch Coulee. At this time we did not know there were two companies there. We thought the company of mounted men (Captain [Joseph] Ander-

son's) was all, and that there were not more than seventy-five men.³³

It was concluded to surround the camp that night and attack it at daylight. We felt sure we could capture it, and that two hundred men would be enough for the undertaking. So about that number was selected. There were four bands—my own, Hushasha's (Red Legs'), Gray Bird's and Mankato's. I had about thirty men. Nearly all the Indians had double-barreled shotguns, and we loaded them with buckshot and large bullets called "traders' balls." After dark we started, crossed the river and valley, went up the bluffs and on the prairie, and soon we saw the white tents and the wagons of the camp. We had no difficulty in surrounding the camp. The pickets were only a little way from it.

I led my men up from the west through the grass and took up a position two hundred yards from the camp, behind a small knoll or elevation. Red Legs took his men into the coulee east of the camp. Mankato (Blue Earth) had some of his men in the coulee and some on the prairie. Gray Bird and his men were mostly on the prairie.

Just at dawn the fight began. It continued all day and the following night until late the next morning. Both sides fought well. Owing to the white men's way of fighting they lost many men. Owing to the Indians' way of fighting they lost but few. The white men stood up and exposed themselves at first, but at last they learned to keep quiet. The Indians always took care of themselves.

We had an easy time of it. We could crawl through the grass and into the coulee and get water when we wanted it, and after a few hours our women crossed the river and came up near the bluff and cooked for us, and we could go back and eat and then re-

³³ The white force sighted by the Sioux was part of a burial detachment sent out by Sibley. Not seen by the Indians was a group of infantry under Captain Hiram P. Grant, which had gone up the north side of the river. Grant selected the unfortunate camp site near Birch Coulee, and about sunset the cavalry force joined him. See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:151.

turn to the fight. We did not lose many men. Indeed, I only saw two dead Indians, and I never heard that any more were killed. The two I saw were in the coulee and belonged to Red Legs' band. One was a Wahpeton named Hotonna (Animal's Voice) and the other was a Sisseton. Their bodies were taken down the coulee and buried during the fight. I did not see a man killed on the prairie. We had several men wounded, but none very badly.

I did not see the incident which is related of an Indian, a brother of Little Crow, who, it is said, rode up on a white horse near the camp with a white flag and held a parley and had his horse killed as he rode away. That must have happened while I was absent from the field eating my dinner. Little Crow had no brother there. The White Spider was not there. I think Little Crow's brothers were with him in the Big Woods at this time.³⁴ The only Indian horse I saw killed that I remember was a bay. Buffalo Ghost succeeded in capturing a horse from the camp.

Late in the day some of the men who had been left in the villages came over on their horses to see what the trouble was that the camp had not been taken, and they rode about the prairie for a time, but I do not think

many of them got into the fight. I do not remember that we got many reinforcements that day. If we got any, they must have come up the coulee and I did not see them. Perhaps some horsemen came up on the east side of the coulee, but I knew nothing about it. I am sure no reinforcements came to me. I did not need any. Our circle about the camp was rather small and we could only use a certain number of men.

About the middle of the afternoon our men became much dissatisfied at the slowness of the fight and the stubbornness of the whites, and the word was passed around the lines to get ready to charge the camp. The brave Mankato wanted to charge after the first hour. There were some half-breeds with the whites who could speak Sioux well, and they heard us arranging to assault them. Jack Frazer told me afterward that he heard us talking about it very plainly. Alex Faribault was there and heard the talk and called out to us: "You do very wrong to fire on us. We did not come out to fight; we only came out to bury the bodies of the white people you killed."³⁵ I have heard that Faribault, Frazer and another half-breed dug a rifle pit for themselves with bayonets, and that Faribault worked so hard with his bayonet in digging that he wore the flesh from the inside of his hand. One half-breed named Louis Bourrier attempted to desert to us, but as he was running towards us some of our men shot and killed him.

We could have taken the camp, I think. During the fight the whites had thrown up breastworks, but they were not very high and we could easily have jumped over them. We did not know that Major Joe Brown was there; if we had, I think some of our men would have charged anyhow, for they wanted him out of the way. Some years ago I saw Captain Grant in St. Paul and he told me he was in command of the camp at Birch Coulee.³⁶

Just as we were about to charge word came that a large number of mounted soldiers were coming up from the east toward Fort Ridgely.³⁷ This stopped the charge and

³⁴ The White Spider is said to have temporarily replaced his half-brother, Little Crow, at the head of part of the Indian force that fought the skirmish at Acton. Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:361.

³⁵ Jack Frazer (see footnote, p. 101) and Alexander Faribault, both mixed-bloods, were among Brown's scouts while the burial party moved up the south side of the Minnesota. Faribault, who founded the city of that name, was a son of the famed fur trader, Jean Baptiste Faribault. Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 216 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14). The "Louis Bourrier" mentioned below was probably Peter Boyer (or Pierre Bourrier), a Renville Ranger serving with Captain Anderson's company. Holcombe says that the report the half-breed was trying to escape to his kinsmen "was never proven and is doubtless untrue." Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:351.

³⁶ See footnote, p. 103, for a discussion of the controversy over who was in command at Birch Coulee.

³⁷ This was a rescue force of 240 men under Colonel Samuel MacPhail from Fort Ridgely. See footnote p. 103.



AN ARTIST'S
conception of the
battle of
Birch Coulee

created some excitement. Mankato at once took some men from the coulee and went out to meet them. He told me he did not take more than fifty, but he scattered them out and they all yelled and made such a noise that the whites must have thought there were a great many more, and they stopped on the prairie and began fighting. They had a cannon and used it, but it did no harm. If the Indians had any men killed in the fight I never heard of it. Mankato flourished his men around so, and all the Indians in the coulee kept up a noise, and at last the whites began to fall back, and they retreated about two miles and began to dig breastworks. Mankato followed them and left about thirty men to watch them, and returned to the fight at the coulee with the rest.

The Indians were laughing when they came back at the way they had deceived the white men, and we were all glad that the whites had not pushed forward and driven us away. If any more Indians went against this force than the fifty or possibly seventy-five that I have told you of I never heard of it. I was not with them and cannot say positively, but I do not think there were. I went out to near the fortified camp during the night, and there was no large force of Indians over there, and I know there were not more than thirty of our men watching the camp. When the men of this force began to fall back, the whites in the camp hallooed and made a great commotion, as if they were

begging them to return and relieve them, and seemed much distressed that they did not.

THE NEXT MORNING General Sibley came with a very large force and drove us away from the field. We took our time about getting away.³⁸ Some of our men said they remained till Sibley got up and that they fired at some of his men as they were shaking hands with some of the men of the camp. Those of us who were on the prairie went back to the westward and on down the valley. Those in the coulee went down back southward to where their horses were, and then mounted and rode westward across the prairie about a mile south of the battlefield. There was no pursuit. The whites fired their cannon at us as we were leaving the field, but they might as well have beaten a big drum for all the harm they did. They only made a noise. We went back across the river to our camps in the old villages, and then on up the river to the Yellow Medicine and the mouth of the Chippewa, where Little Crow joined us.

For some time after the fight at Birch

³⁸ "One would not think so from their attitude upon returning to camp," wrote Mrs. Jannette E. DeCamp Sweet after reading Big Eagle's narrative in 1894. Mrs. Sweet, who was a captive among the Indians at the time of the Birch Coulee engagement, took issue with this and several other statements made by the chief. See Mrs. Sweet to William R. Marshall, July 28, 1894, Holcombe Papers.

Coulee the greater part of the Indians remained in the camps about the Yellow Medicine and the mouth of the Chippewa. At last the word came that Sibley with his army was again on the move against us. Our scouts were very active and vigilant, and we heard from them nearly every hour. He had left a letter for Little Crow in a split stick on the battlefield of Birch Coulee, and some of our men found it and brought it in, and correspondence had been going on between us ever since. Tom Robinson and Joe Campbell, half-breed prisoners, wrote the letters for Little Crow. It seems that some letters were written to General Sibley by the half-breeds which Little Crow never saw.³⁹

I and others understood from the half-breeds that General Sibley would treat with

³⁹ When Thomas A. Robertson, a half-breed prisoner, delivered Little Crow's last note to Colonel Sibley on September 12, he also brought a secret communication from Chiefs Wabasha and Taopi in which they indicated they wanted to be taken under Sibley's protection and asked how it could be arranged. Robertson may have been accompanied by a similarly named half-breed, Thomas Robinson. See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:172; Whipple, *Lights and Shadows*, 111-114.

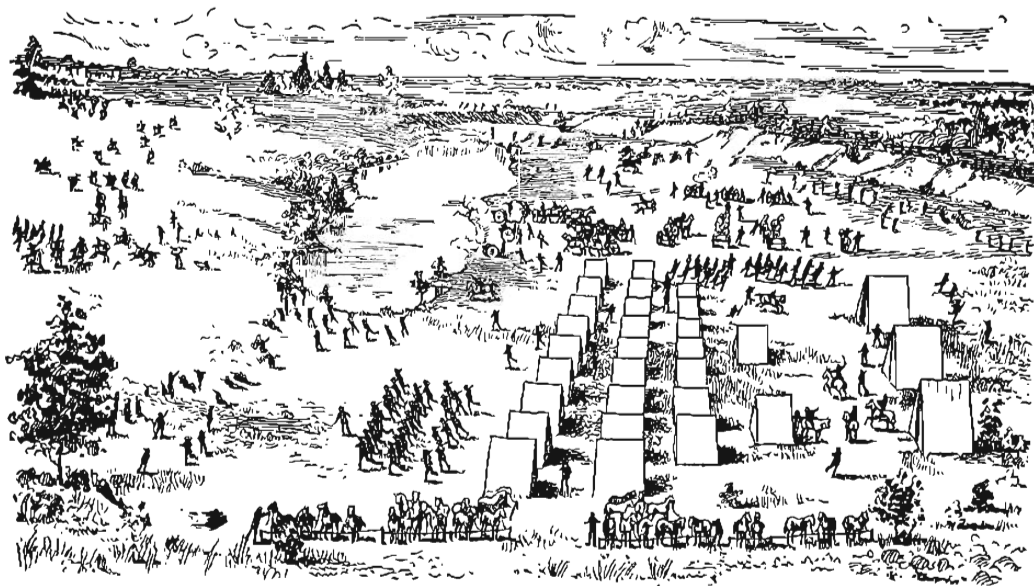
⁴⁰ Sibley's force encamped on the east shore of Lone Tree or Battle Lake, now dried up.

all of us who had only been soldiers and would surrender as prisoners of war, and that only those who had murdered people in cold blood, the settlers and others, would be punished in any way. There was great dissatisfaction among us at our condition. Many wanted to surrender; others left us for the West. But Sibley came on and on, and at last came the battle of Wood Lake.

WHEN we learned that Sibley had gone into camp at the Wood Lake, a council of the subchiefs and others was held and it was determined to give him a battle near there. I think the lake now called Battle Lake was the old-time Wood Lake.⁴⁰ As I understand it, there once were some cottonwoods about it, and the Indians called it "M'dachan" — Wood Lake. The larger lake, two miles west, now called Wood Lake, was always known to me by the Indian name of "Hinta hauk-payan woju," meaning literally, "the Planting Place of the Man who ties his Moccasins with Basswood Bark."

We soon learned that Sibley had thrown up breastworks and it was not deemed safe to attack him at the lake. We concluded that the fight should be about a mile or more to

THE battle of Wood Lake, sketched by an unknown artist





PRISON camp of the uncondemned Sioux at Fort Snelling, winter, 1862-63

the northwest of the lake, on the road along which the troops would march. This was the road leading to the upper country, and of course Sibley would travel it. At the point determined on we planned to hide a large number of men on the side of the road. Near the lake, in a ravine formed by the outlet, we were to place another strong body. Behind a hill to the west were to be some more men.

We thought that when Sibley marched out along the road and when the head of his column had reached the farther end of the line of our first division, our men would open fire. The men in the ravine would then be in the rear of the whites and would begin firing on that end of the column. The men from behind the hill would rush out and attack the flank, and then we had horsemen far out on the right and left who would come up. We expected to throw the whole white force into confusion by the sudden and unexpected attack and defeat them before they could rally.

I think this was a good plan of battle. Our concealed men would not have been discovered. The grass was tall and the place by the road and the ravine were good hiding places. We had learned that Sibley was not particular about sending out scouts and examining the country before he passed it. He had a number of mounted men, but they always rode together, at the head of the column,

when on a march, and did not examine the ground at the sides of the road. The night he lay at Wood Lake his pickets were only a short distance from camp—less than half a mile. When we were putting our men into position that night we often saw them plainly.

I worked hard that night fixing the men. Little Crow was on the field, too. Mankato was there. Indeed, all our fighting chiefs were present and all our best fighting Indians. We felt that this would be the deciding fight of the war. The whites were unconscious. We could hear them laughing and singing. When all our preparations were made Little Crow and I and some other chiefs went to the mound or hill to the west so as to watch the fight better when it should commence. There were numbers of other Indians there.

The morning came and an accident spoiled all our plans. For some reason Sibley did not move early as we expected he would. Our men were lying hidden waiting patiently. Some were very near the camp lines in the ravine, but the whites did not see a man of all our men. I do not think they would have discovered our ambuscade. It seemed a considerable time after sunup when some four or five wagons with a number of soldiers started out from the camp in the direction of

the old Yellow Medicine agency. We learned afterwards that they were going without orders to dig potatoes over at the agency, five miles away. They came on over the prairie, right where part of our line was. Some of the wagons were not in the road, and if they had kept straight on would have driven right over our men as they lay in the grass. At last they came so close that our men had to rise up and fire. This brought on the fight, of course, but not according to the way we had planned it. Little Crow saw it and felt very badly.

Of course you know how the battle was fought. The Indians that were in the fight did well, but hundreds of our men did not get into it and did not fire a shot. They were out too far. The men in the ravine and the line connecting them with those on the road did the most of the fighting. Those of us on the hill did our best, but we were soon driven off. Mankato was killed here, and we lost a very good and brave war chief. He was killed by a cannon ball that was so nearly spent that he was not afraid of it, and it struck him in the back, as he lay on the ground, and killed him.

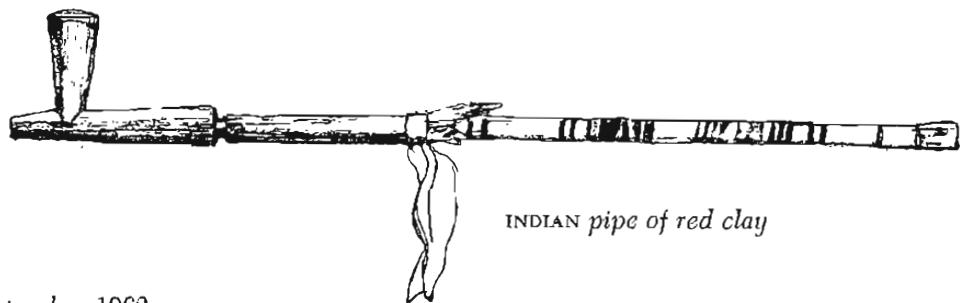
The whites drove our men out of the ravine by a charge and that ended the battle. We retreated in some disorder, though the whites did not offer to pursue us. We crossed a wide prairie, but their horsemen did not follow us. We lost fourteen or fifteen men killed and quite a number wounded. Some of the wounded died afterwards, but I do

"At least some of the dead Indians were scalped. 'Such brutality is deserving of the severest condemnation and its repetition will be severely punished,'" warned Sibley. Sibley Order Book, 1862, p. 35, Sibley Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. See also Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:182.

not know how many. We carried off no dead bodies, but took away all our wounded. The whites scalped all our dead men — so I have heard.⁴¹

SOON AFTER the battle I, with many others who had taken part in the war, surrendered to General Sibley. Robinson and the other half-breeds assured us that if we would do this we would only be held as prisoners of war a short time, but as soon as I surrendered I was thrown into prison. Afterward I was tried and served three years in the prison at Davenport and the penitentiary at Rock Island for taking part in the war. On my trial a great number of the white prisoners, women and others, were called up, but not one of them could testify that I had murdered any one or had done anything to deserve death, or else I would have been hanged.

If I had known that I would be sent to the penitentiary I would not have surrendered, but when I had been in the penitentiary three years and they were about to turn me out, I told them they might keep me another year if they wished, and I meant what I said. I did not like the way I had been treated. I surrendered in good faith, knowing that many of the whites were acquainted with me and that I had not been a murderer, or present when a murder had been committed, and if I had killed or wounded a man it had been in fair, open fight. But all feeling on my part about this has long since passed away. For years I have been a Christian and I hope to die one. My white neighbors and friends know my character as a citizen and a man. I am at peace with every one, whites and Indians.



INDIAN pipe of red clay

Lightning Blanket's Story

THE EVENING of the second day of the Sioux war, August 19, 1862, the Indians came into Kagaw Chestin's (Little Crow's) village and reported that all whites who had not been killed had gone to Esa Tonka (Fort Ridgely) and Wakzupata (village on the Cottonwood—New Ulm).⁴² Little Crow, with several of the chiefs, Medicine Bottle, Little Six, and Big Eagle, favored the attack on these two places, but the other two chiefs, Wabasha and Leaf Shooter [Wacouta], would not agree, because Wabasha was jealous of Little Crow.

They sat up all night with their blankets around them until the sun was coming up in the morning, when they announced to us young men that Wabasha and Leaf Shooter would not go, but that we were to get ready immediately to fight the white men at Fort Ridgely and New Ulm. The young men were all anxious to go, and we dressed as warriors in war paint, breech clout and leggings, with a large sash around us to keep our food and ammunition in.

We started at sunrise and crossed the river at the agency on the ferry, following the road to the top of the hill below Faribault's creek, where we stopped for a short rest. There the plans for attacking the fort were given out by Little Crow. It was agreed to follow the road and ridge along the bluff to the creek west of the fort. These men were under Big Eagle and Medicine Bottle. The men on horseback with Little Crow and Little Six were to go down the creek to the river bottom, then follow the old crossing road up to the bluff, south and west of the fort.

After reaching the fort, the signal, three volleys, was to be given by Medicine Bottle's men to draw the attention and fire of the soldiers, so the men on the east (Big Eagle's) and those on the west and south (Little Crow's and Little Six's), could rush in and take the fort.

We reached the Three Mile creek before noon and cooked something to eat. After eating we separated, I going with the footmen to the north, and after leaving Little Crow we paid no attention to the chiefs; everyone did as he pleased. Both parties reached the fort about the same time, as we could see them passing to the west, Little Crow on a black pony. The signal, three big shots, was given by our side, Medicine Bottle's men. After the signal the men on the east, south, and west were slow in coming up. While shooting we ran up to the building near the big stone one. As we were running in we saw the man with the big guns, whom we all knew, and as we were the only ones in sight he shot into us, as he had gotten ready after hearing the shooting in our direction.⁴³ Had Little Crow's men fired after we fired the signal the soldiers who shot at us would have been killed. Two of our men were killed and three hurt, two dying afterward. We ran back into the creek and did not know whether the other men would come up close

⁴² In publishing this narrative, the *New Ulm Review* of August 22, 1917, noted that it had been preserved by Robert H. Hinman, who was "connected with the Indian Agency school near Morton," and had "spent his whole life among the Sioux Indians." Hinman was the son of the Reverend Samuel D. Hinman, Episcopal missionary at the Lower Agency at the time of the outbreak. Little Crow's Indian name usually is given as Taoyateduta ("His People Are Red" or "His Scarlet People"), by which he signed the treaty of Mendota.

⁴³ Lightning Blanket apparently took part in the main Sioux attack on the northeast corner of the fort, where J. C. Whipple, a refugee from the Lower Agency, manned a howitzer. Other ordnance men at the fort quite possibly known to the Indians were Sergeant John Jones, who was in charge of the "big guns," Dennis O'Shea, who had worked on a farm near the Lower Agency, and Sergeant James C. McGrew, who was stationed at the northwest corner and helped Whipple drive the Indians back from the northeast corner. Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:334-338; Carley, *Sioux Uprising*, 34-36; Notebook no. 5, p. 109, 114-118, vol. 60. Folwell Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society.



THE second battle of Fort Ridgely as later pictured by one of its defenders

or not, but they did and the big guns drove them back from that direction. If we had known that they would come up close we could have shot at the same time and killed all, as the soldiers were out in the big opening between the buildings. We did not fight like white men with one officer; we all shot as we pleased. The plan of rushing into the buildings was given up, and we shot at the windows, mostly at the big stone building, as we thought many of the whites were in there.⁴⁴

We could not see them, so were not sure we were killing any. During the shooting we tried to set fire to the buildings with fire arrows, but the buildings would not burn, so we had to get more powder and bullets. The sun was about two hours high when we went around to the west of the fort, and decided to go back to Little Crow's village and come and keep up the fighting next day.

After leaving the fort we buried the two who were killed, in a little creek or draw, west of the fort, from behind which the men had been fighting. We buried them on the creek, one above and one below the road,

about forty rods apart, taking dirt from the road to cover them. I do not know how many were killed on the east, west, and south sides, but do not think there were any. We always thought no whites were killed, or not many, as it was hard to see them. There were about four hundred Indians in this attack; no women were along. They all stayed at Little Crow's village. The cooking was done by boys ten to fifteen years of age, too young to fight.

WE LEFT the camp early in the morning, arriving at Little Crow's village about the middle of the day; from that time until night we made bullets and everyone who had powder brought it in, getting the most of it from the agency buildings. That night about four hundred Sisseton and Wahpeton warriors from Big Stone Lake, who had started on hearing of the war, joined us, and early on August 22 we started with about eight hundred warriors, but the grass was very wet with dew, more than on the day of the first attack, so the sun was quite high before we traveled very far and it was just before the middle of the day when we reached the fort.⁴⁵ We followed the same road, crossing at the agency as we did before, and divided forces at the Three Mile creek, footmen going north and horsemen south, with the same chiefs as in the first attack. I was again

⁴⁴ This building was the two-story barracks into which the women and children had been crowded.

⁴⁵ The statement concerning the Sisseton and Wahpeton is of interest in view of later denials, in the Sisseton and Wahpeton claim case of 1901, that the Upper Sioux had taken part in the battles of 1862. See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:418-437.

with the men on the northeast and north side. There were no women along, but the boys were taken for the same purpose as before, to drive cattle and make camp-fires.⁴⁶ We did not stop to eat this time, but each carried something to eat in his legging sash and ate it in the middle of the day, while fighting. The plan of attack was the same as in the first battle, three big shots from the north, followed by a rush of men on the east, west, and south sides, all at the same time. Little Crow had given strict orders on account of the first failure.

Just before all was in readiness three young men belonging to Medicine Bottle's party on the northeast side of the creek saw a mail carrier coming into the fort on the Wakzupata (New Ulm) road, and shot at him, but did not kill him; then shot twice more and killed him. This, the men on the south and west heard, and . . . [taking] it for the signal, ran up to the top of the hill and began shooting. By the time the others had commenced, the big guns were fired at them, the one on the south and west, and they ran back under the hill. We were then all shooting, most of us being hid. We saw many more soldiers than were there on the day of the first attack, but we kept up the shooting until dark.⁴⁷

During the day many small buildings were burned, and we tried to burn the large ones with fire arrows. Some were burning when a rain put out the fire. The sun was now setting low and after we saw the men on the south and west driven back by the big guns, and could see Little Crow and his men going to the northwest, we decided to go around the creek to the northwest and join them and see what to do, as our fire arrows had failed to burn the buildings and drive the whites out into the open. After joining them we supposed we were going back to Little Crow's village for more warriors. When we got to Three Mile creek it was dark and we cooked beef, and Little Crow told us there were no more warriors, and a discussion followed. Some wanted to renew the attack on the fort the next morning and then go to New Ulm;

others wanted to attack New Ulm early the next morning and then come back and take the fort. We were afraid the soldiers would get to New Ulm first. Little Crow wanted to go to New Ulm to reach there first, before sunrise. He said he would take the ones who wanted to go and capture New Ulm. He left the camp that night and started for New Ulm with part of the men, I should think, about half of them, four hundred.⁴⁸ The others stayed in camp that night and went back to Little Crow's village the next morning.

In this day's fight we had seven killed and eight wounded. Six of these were killed on the east side, Big Eagle's men, near the top of the creek bluff, where we tried so hard to kill the men with the big guns. These we had to leave without burying, as the soldiers would shoot us if we stood up to carry them away or to cover them.

Only one big rush was made from the south and west—where one of Little Six's men was killed in the first shooting. We buried him after the fight, when we went around to the northwest, on the bank of a little creek back of the old crossing road. The white man, the mail carrier from New Ulm, who was killed, had on a buckskin vest, with gold pieces sewed inside. The Indians put the money in a kettle and carried it all day, and when we camped on Three Mile creek that night, buried it on the bank of the creek, as we had no use for the money. I do not think it has ever been dug up by any of our people. I was with the party that went back to Little Crow's village after the battle and was not in the battles at New Ulm.

This is the truth of these battles, as I was in both of them.

⁴⁶ This differs from most white accounts, which indicate that Indian women were present. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:254.

⁴⁷ The number of defenders was actually unchanged.

⁴⁸ Holcombe says Little Crow was wounded late in the second battle of Fort Ridgely and thus was not present at the second battle of New Ulm the next day (August 23). Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:337; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:132.

Account of George Quinn

I WAS BORN on Minnehaha Creek, north of Fort Snelling, in 1843.⁴⁹ I was a member of the Mdewakanton Sioux band, of which Wabasha was head chief. I belonged to the sub-band called the Lake Calhoun band, or White Swan's band; afterwards it was known as Kahkoka's or the Drifter's band.⁵⁰ In the summer of 1862 I was living near Walter McLeod's near Bloomington, Hennepin County.⁵¹ A rumor came to our settlement that the paymaster had gone up to the Lower Agency to pay the Indians their annuities, and some of us young men went up to be present at the payment and get our share of the money.

We found on arriving that there was some excitement over an election for Chief Speaker of the Mdewakanton band. Traveling Hail, a subchief, had been elected over Little Crow and Big Eagle. A few Indians were dissatisfied and some of them shouted a war whoop, but the excitement died out, because in a few days it was succeeded by a greater. The reason Traveling Hail was

elected was that he had opposed the sale of the ten-mile strip north of the river, in 1858. This strip was sold by the influence of Major [Joseph] R. Brown, the Agent for the Sioux. He got a lot of the chiefs and head men to go to Washington and make a treaty for the sale of the land. Wabasha, Little Crow, Traveling Hail, Mankato and other chiefs went and made the treaty but Traveling Hail opposed the sale of the land, as did nearly all of our people.

While these chiefs were in Washington they called on President Buchanan, who advised them to live like he did — wear white men's clothes, etc. Wabasha and Traveling Hail said they would do so. But Little Crow said, "No; I was born an Indian and I will die one; I was given a breech-clout as my first garment, and I will always wear one." Yet he put on white men's clothes before he returned home on that trip and had his picture taken in them; and he often wore white men's clothing after that and lived in a house with stoves, bedsteads, etc. Traveling Hail was a "breeches Indian," too. He took no part against the whites during the outbreak of 1862. In the spring of 1863 he was sent with other Indians to Fort Thompson (or Crow Creek) on the Missouri, and he died at Niobrara, Nebraska, in 1866.

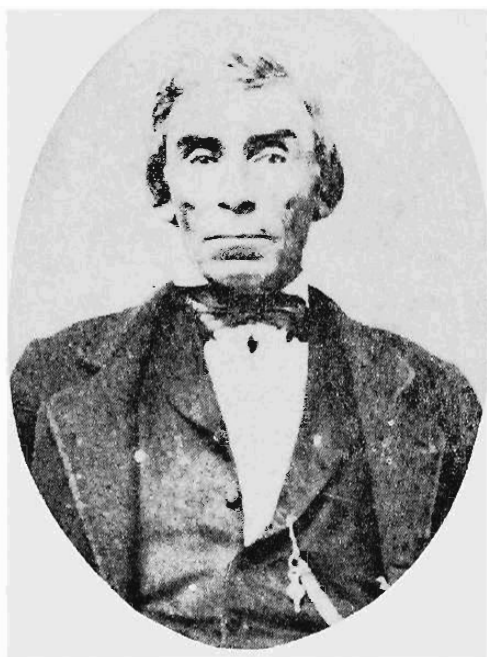
I ARRIVED at Redwood Agency August 13 and four days later the outbreak began in the Big Woods (or at Acton). The next morning the work began at the Lower or Redwood Agency. I am half white man and half Indian, and I learned to read and write the Sioux language at Lake Calhoun under the instruction of the Pond brothers.⁵² But I never learned to speak English and I was raised among the Indians as one of them. So when the outbreak came I went with my people against the whites. I was nineteen years old and anxious to distinguish myself in the war, but I had no wish to murder any-

⁴⁹ The original manuscript is prefaced by the following note in Holcombe's handwriting: "Statement of George Quinn, alias George Ortley, alias Wakonkdayamanne, alias Spirit That Rattles as It Walks, a half-breed Sioux Indian, made to R. I. Holcombe in 1898, in the Pioneer Press building. Wm. L. Quinn, interpreter."

⁵⁰ The Drifter and Cloudman were rival chiefs of factions of the Lake Calhoun band. The former was killed by Chippewa near Fort Snelling in 1841. Samuel W. Pond, Jr., *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas*, 150, 152 (Boston and Chicago, 1893).

⁵¹ Walter McLeod was a son of the fur trader Martin McLeod, who had settled at Bloomington in 1849 and died on his farm there on November 20, 1860. Walter McLeod eventually became Sioux agent, serving until 1888. See *Pioneer Press*, June 24, 1894, p. 13; Upham and Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 476.

⁵² Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond began mission work among the Sioux at Lake Calhoun in 1834 and thereafter labored among them at Lac qui Parle and elsewhere for many years. They wrote several works in the Sioux language. Their story is told in Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries*.



JACK Frazer

one in cold blood, nor did I; nobody ever accused me of such a thing. I fought the white soldiers, but not the unarmed white settlers.

I was in the attack on Captain [John S.] Marsh's company at Redwood Ferry, the first day of the outbreak at the agency, and helped to destroy that command. After the fight I and four other young men were sent down mounted to Fort Ridgely to watch the fort and see what the soldiers were doing, and to ride back and report anything important. Other parties of four or five were sent down for the same purpose. The squad I was with got to the fort very late at night. We hitched our horses and crawled up in the darkness as close as we dared to the west side of the fort and lay down and I fell asleep. When I awoke it was daybreak, and old Jack Frazer, a well-known half-breed who had made his escape from Wacouta's village the day before, leaving his family behind, was standing picket in plain view of us. He called out to us to get right away from there or he would shoot us, and he said that if he did not know our fathers and mothers

so well he would shoot us anyhow. We slipped down the bluff bank and did not let him see us any more. Later in the day we returned to the Redwood Agency. One party sent down to watch the fort rode some miles north of it and finally saw Lieutenant [Timothy] Sheehan's company returning to the fort in the night. A messenger was sent back to give the alarm. This messenger gave the news to another scout and he rode to Little Crow's village and reported that the soldiers were coming in great numbers. There was great excitement and orders were given to break up camp and retreat to Yellow Medicine. But in a little time another scout came and said there were only about fifty men coming to re-enforce the Fort, and so the orders to break up camp were countermanded.

I was in the second attack on Fort Ridgely. In this fight I came up on the south side to the stables and tried to get a horse. As I was leading it out a shell burst in the stable near me and the horse sprang over me and got away, knocking me down. When I got up I saw a mule running and I was so mad that I shot it. Good Thunder was in this fight and got a horse. I saw him and another Indian shooting at the windows of a house on the west side of the Fort. Some white men were firing from these windows at the Indians. Little Crow, Wabasha, Shakopee, Big Eagle, and Mankato were all at the first Ridgely fight. I saw Little Priest and three other Winnebago there. Big Eagle and The Thief tried to prevent the second attack on Fort Ridgely, by saying it was no use to attack it, for it could not be taken without too great a loss. The Thief was not at the first fight; I know he was not.

I was over in the Big Woods trying to steal horses when the fight at Birch Coulee began. I got to the battle ground just as Sibley came and ended the fight. Red Legs' brother, Wahkeeyah Hotonna, or Thunder Voice, was killed at Birch Coulee.⁵³ His body was

⁵³ Red Legs (Hushasha) was a Wahpekute chief whose village was the farthest downstream from the Lower Agency. See map in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2:226.

wrapped in a blanket and taken to the old site of Shakopee's village near the mouth of the Redwood and buried. Several Indians were wounded, and among them was William Columbus, now living at Morton; he had his powderhorn shot off too.

I was in the Wood Lake battle. I was one of a party of thirteen that was placed toward the rear of Sibley's force in a ravine which ran from the lake. We were nearly all of Wacouta's band and our leader was Chetanwekechetah, or the Killing Hawk. His wife was Jack Frazer's niece. He was killed and eight more of the thirteen were shot by the force that attacked us. Our line was across the

⁵⁴ This is not specified in Big Eagle's account, but Holcombe (probably using information from Big Eagle) says Mankato was buried "in the bluff bank of the Yellow Medicine." Hubbard and Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 3:406.

⁵⁵ Simon Anawangmani is one of the "faithful Indians" honored by a special monument at Morton.

THE PICTURES on pages 137 and 142 are from the Newberry Library, and that on 149 is from the Hill Library. The drawings on pages 140 and 141 are in A. P. Connolly, *The Minnesota Massacre*, (Chicago, 1896), and the one on page 135 appeared in *Harper's Monthly* for June, 1863. All others are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

route the soldiers were on to dig potatoes at the Yellow Medicine Agency, and a dog with the soldiers barked at our men as they lay in the grass and so they were discovered. Little Crow stayed on the field till the fight was all over. He had no arms but a large six-shooter. I do not think he fired it. Mankato's body was buried back in our camp, I think, and not in the bank of the Yellow Medicine, as Big Eagle says.⁵⁴ Old Simon came among the Indians during the fight, with a white rag on a stick and wanted the other Indians to stop fighting, and some of them obeyed him.⁵⁵ Old Mahzomanne (Walks on Iron) went out from the Indian side with a white flag, but a cannon ball took off his leg and he died. He had taken no part against the whites.

I surrendered at Camp Release and gave my gun to Samuel J. Brown. He put me under guard, but said I would not be a prisoner very long. I was a prisoner for four years, being sent to Rock Island. Nothing was proved against me except that I was in some of the battles against the whites. I took no part in killing the settlers and was opposed to such work.

SIoux Indians traveling, as pictured by Seth Eastman





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