

Minnesota Indians

A PHOTOGRAPHIC ALBUM

Alan R. Woolworth



A YOUNG DAKOTA woman in captivity at Fort Snelling, pictured by Upton in 1863

BETWEEN THE ELABORATE, deeply embossed covers of an unusual album acquired in March of this year by the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society is a collection of 76 remarkable photographs. The brass-clasped volume was purchased from Janet Lehr, a New York City photograph dealer, with funds from the Bush Foundation; beyond that its provenance is uncertain.

What is certain is that the album provides the society with a rare, photographic collection of Minnesota's Indian people — nearly one-fourth of the views are new in the MHS holdings. The small, matted *carte de visite* photographs, measuring 2¼ inches by 3½ inches, depict the state's first citizens just before and during the Civil War; all are in excellent condition. The earliest date from about 1855, but the majority were taken in the 1860s, especially 1863. It seems obvious that the collection was systematically assembled by someone, possibly a visitor to Minnesota, who had a particular interest in the Indian people. The purchases may have been made as a gift to an eastern friend, a relative, or a government official. It is tempting to speculate that the album was put together by someone such as John G. Nicolay, William P. Dole, or Adrian J. Ebell — all of whom were on the Minnesota scene during portions of the Dakota war in 1862.¹

¹William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2:186n (Reprint ed., St. Paul, 1969); [A. J. Ebell], "The Indian Massacres and the War of 1862," in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June, 1863, pp. 1-24.

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THE CHIEF of the Gull Lake Ojibway band, Qui-Wi-Sain-Shish, photographed by Whitney in 1855 or 1863; an unidentified Indian boy, probably an Ojibway; Sha-



Bosh-Sgun, or Passed Through Everything, head chief of the Mille Lacs Ojibway, photographed at Martin's Gallery in 1855 or 1863



Among the photographs are 36 views of the Santee or Eastern Dakota. They include many poignant scenes of captive Dakota Indians who were confined in a prison camp at Fort Snelling from the fall of 1862 to the spring of the following year. (It was from this camp that these Indians were moved to remote Crow Creek in Dakota Territory.) One picture, new to the society's collections, is of captive Wacouta, a well-known Mdewakanton Dakota chief; other views show the crowded tepee camp where some 1,600 imprisoned Dakota women, children, and a few men waited for their fate to be decided.

Pictures of Dakota women are relatively rare, but the album contains about a dozen from the Fort Snelling camp. Some are posed with their small children in front of their tepees; others, taken in photographers' studios, display their finest costumes. Called "Sioux Belles" after the fashion of the period, many of them wear worried expressions, reminding us of their uncertain future. The portraits of the belles include at least one "Winona," Beautiful Day, Black Day Woman, Good Road Woman, and the ubiquitous Old Bets in two poses. Pictures of the male prisoners include the son (Wowinapa) and brother (White Spider) of Little Crow and Red Legs, a friendly Wahpekute chief.

The album provides more than 20 views of Minnesota's other principal Indian tribe, the Ojibway. Most of these are pictures of tribal leaders — Hole-in-the-Day, Heavy Sitter, Buffalo, Standing Forward, and Crossing Sky, for example — pictured in the St. Paul studio of Joel E. Whitney when they either traveled to or re-



TWO TEPEES in the camp of captive Dakota Indians at Fort Snelling; photograph by Whitney, Spring, 1863

turned from treaty negotiations in Washington, D.C., between 1855 and 1863. There is also one scene of an Ojibway camp with a birch-bark canoe and a seldom seen view of an Ojibway wedding party.

A smaller group of seven pictures of Winnebago Indians, a tribe that lived in southern Minnesota only from 1848 to 1863, were made by Benjamin F. Upton. Their chief, Winneshiek, is portrayed alone in an elaborate costume and with groups of his warriors. There is also a Winnebago bark and mat summer lodge.

Forty of the photographs in this outstanding album were taken by Joel Whitney, a native of Maine who had moved to Minnesota Territory in 1850 and established a studio at Third and Cedar streets in St. Paul. His contemporary, B. F. Upton, arrived in St. Anthony (now part of Minneapolis) about 1856; from headquarters there he traveled about the state in a wagon especially built to carry his photographic equipment and camping gear, shooting priceless views of Minnesota people and scenes, 18 of which appear in the album. Nine other photographs can be ascribed to James E. Martin, founder of the Excelsior Photographic Gallery on Third Street not far from Whitney's. Martin settled in Minnesota in 1858, living there for about a decade; his work has been favorably compared with that of Whitney.²

Among the special gems in the album are three prints taken by Adrian Ebell, a photographer visiting in 1862 from the East. His camera captured some Dakota women winnowing wheat at the Upper Sioux Agency near present Granite Falls; another group of women and children guarding crops; and numbers of white refugees from the Dakota war fleeing to safety. The album also contains a rare view, entitled "Government Wagon Train Crossing the Prairie," which may show the Sibley Expedition of 1863 that pursued the fugitive Dakota west to Dakota Territory.

The addition of this album enriches the photographic collections of the MHS, but its value goes beyond the graphic representations. As an entity, it makes a social comment about a kind of collecting interest that was prevalent in the post-Civil War days. The pictures reveal something of the differences between the Dakota and Ojibway people — their physical appearance, their living quarters, their costumes and hair styles. They also offer opportunities for further study of photographic work by pioneer Minnesota cameramen. Finally, the album presents a splendid pictorial record for Indian people of the area who are interested as perhaps never before in their roots and in all the artifacts that can illuminate those roots.

²On these early Minnesota photographers, see Beaumont Newhall, "Minnesota Daguerreotypes," in *Minnesota History*, 34:30-33 (Spring, 1954); G. Hubert Smith, "First Photographers of Minnesota," 5, 7, typewritten manuscript, G. Hubert Smith Papers, in the possession of Alan R. Woolworth.



A WEDDING PARTY of Ojibway Indians, pictured by Upton at the Chippewa Agency near Crow Wing

AW-KE-WEN-ZEE (Old Man), a Lac Court Oreille (Wisconsin) Ojibway chief, photographed at Martin's Gallery

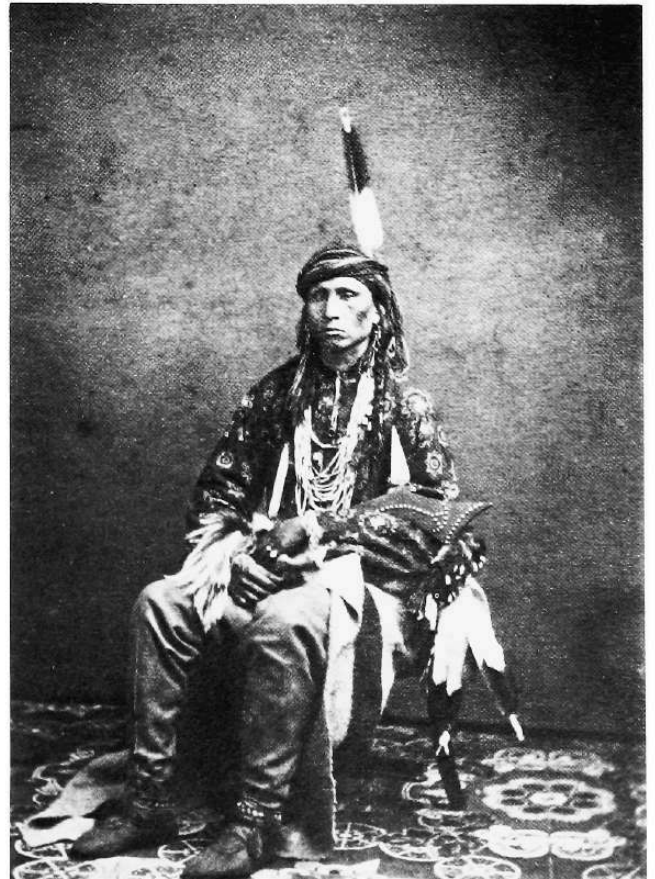


*EASTERN DAKOTA women
and children guarding a corn-
field against blackbirds;
photograph by Ebell,
August, 1863*



*A DAKOTA INDIAN woman and her children in the
captives' camp; photograph by Upton, Spring, 1863*

*TE-NA-ZE-PA, a Dakota warrior who was hanged at
Mankato in December, 1862, for participating in the
uprising; photographed at Martin's Gallery*





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