

RADIOGRAMS OF MINNESOTA HISTORY

SIOUX VERSUS CHIPPEWA¹

When history begins to record the doings of the Minnesota Indians, the Dakota or Sioux were in full occupation of the whole north central part of the state from the Red River to Lake Superior, with strong villages in the vicinity of Mille Lacs. They were a forest people, depending upon their canoes for transportation, living on the abundant game of the region, and holding their lands by their great strength in war. Their weapons were of stone, bone, and copper. To the great village of Kathio on the shores of Mille Lacs came the intrepid explorer and trader Du Luth, and the captive missionary Father Hennepin. A well-known canoe route from the Mississippi to Lake Superior passed through the heart of the Sioux country and gave a ready outlet for the war parties of the Sioux against the Chippewa.

Moving gradually westward along the southern shores of Lake Superior came the Chippewa, indirectly reflecting the pressure of white settlement along the Atlantic coast and unable to maintain themselves against the firearms of the eastern tribes. The Chippewa, almost marooned for a time on Madeline Island in Lake Superior, eventually secured firearms also and turned them against their powerful neighbors, the Sioux, to the west.

Shortly before 1750 the storm broke. The murder of some friendly Chippewa visitors to the Sioux village of Kathio during one of the periodic truces gave the signal for the attack. After rallying to avenge the murder, the warriors from the Lake Superior region swept down in overwhelming force upon the settlements, struck the upper end of the un-

¹ A radio talk originally given on March 17, 1924, from the Twin City broadcasting station WLAG.

suspecting Kathio near the base of Cormorant Point, a short distance above the present village of Vineland, and then moved south and east through the Indian village. Terrific was the slaughter as the conquering Chippewa blew up lodge after lodge with gunpowder, and so destroyed the luckless Sioux who had taken refuge there. The end of the second day of fighting saw the invaders completely victorious and the poor remnant of the Sioux fleeing panic-stricken down the Rum River. The battle of Kathio marked the end of Sioux domination in northern Minnesota and the beginning of the occupation of a new region by the Chippewa, parts of which they still retain.

Although they retired to the southern part of the state and became essentially prairie Indians, the Sioux never forgot this crushing defeat and constant efforts were made to recover a part of the lost territory. Some of the conflicting claims of the two tribes came to light in 1835 when the government attempted to survey and mark a boundary line between them, an enterprise which was finally abandoned. There was a constant raiding back and forth as the years passed. Truces were frequently made and members of the two tribes smoked and hunted together for short periods, but invariably some reckless brave, infuriated by real or fancied wrongs, would strike the blow which renewed the slaughter.

With the coming of the fur-traders to the Minnesota wilderness a peculiar situation developed. These white men used their influence for peace, — since peace meant more Indians engaged in hunting, more peltries in the spring, and greater profits, — yet they put into the hands of the Indians the very weapons which would enable them to carry on their warfare. Guns, powder, and lead for hunting fur-bearing animals might just as well be used for human game, and skinning knives were very effective for taking scalps. Indeed the coming of the traders into the region near the mouth of the Minnesota River supplied the Sioux with firearms and enabled them to stop the Chippewa advance.

Upon the establishment of Fort Snelling in 1819 the United States government began to take a hand in Indian affairs in the Minnesota region and to assert itself to counteract the British influence over the tribes of the Northwest. An Indian agency was also established under the jurisdiction of Major Lawrence Taliaferro of the United States army, as a means of checking intertribal warfare. The joint control over Sioux and Chippewa by one man, however, while it had its advantages, involved the enforcement of regulations which would insure safety to the Chippewa while on peaceful visits to the fort and the agency and would prevent these people from using their safe-conducts as a cover for hostilities.

On one such occasion during the year 1827 the Chippewa on a visit to the fort met the Sioux chiefs in council at the agency, smoked the pipe of peace in the afternoon, and agreed to a permanent peace. That very evening the Sioux fired into the tepees of the Chippewa and killed seven persons. An immediate demand upon the Sioux for the guilty Indians by Colonel Snelling and the Indian agent brought about the surrender of five warriors to the Chippewa for punishment by running the gauntlet. A line of Indian warriors with loaded rifles was drawn up on the plain outside the fort, and at a given signal each captive was released for a wild dash towards safety. None reached the goal and a salutary lesson had been given to the Indians with reference to the intention of the government to maintain peace.

The record of this Sioux-Chippewa feud as kept by the missionary Samuel W. Pond for many years is a dreary story of murders from ambush, surprise attacks, and treachery. A Chippewa raid into Sioux country would net a scalp or two one season and result in a counter raid the next year, probably with like result. Naturally many of the casualties were among women, but no difference was made between men and women in the taking of scalps.

The murder of nearly all the members of a Sioux hunting party in April, 1838, near Lac qui Parle, by Hole-in-the-Day

and his warriors, after the Chippewa had been hospitably entertained by their victims, resulted in an attempt by the relatives of the latter to assassinate that chief when he visited Fort Snelling the same summer. One Chippewa of Hole-in-the-Day's band was killed, but the chief himself escaped. This last-mentioned murder, however, was indirectly responsible for the greatest defeat that the Chippewa ever suffered at the hands of the Sioux.

Late in June, 1839, Hole-in-the-Day and nearly a thousand Chippewa from the bands on the upper Mississippi made their way down to Fort Snelling in an attempt to force payment of their annuities there instead of at La Pointe, Wisconsin, the regular place. Taliaferro refused to make the payment and started them back as soon as possible for fear of trouble, after exacting a promise from the Sioux to refrain from war if the Chippewa committed no hostile acts. On July 1 the Chippewa started home in three bands via the Mississippi, the overland route to Rum River, and the St. Croix River. Two members of Hole-in-the-Day's band, however, sons of the man killed at Fort Snelling in the previous year, lingered behind, killed and scalped a hunter of the Lake Calhoun band on the south shore of Lake Harriet the next morning, and made their escape. By noon of that day the Sioux warriors were massing at the Falls of St. Anthony and making their plans for revenge. The war party divided, one taking the trail of the Rum River Chippewa, and the other that of the St. Croix band, since both of these groups of Chippewa would be unaware of danger.

At dawn on July 4, 1839, both war parties struck their victims, the first about the mouth of Rum River and the second near the site of the old prison at Stillwater. As the result of the slaughter the Chippewa lost nearly a hundred killed in the two battles while the Sioux lost less than one-fourth of that number. Yet despite this victory Cloudman deemed it wise to abandon the village at Lake Calhoun and

move to the Minnesota River country, since retaliatory attacks were bound to follow.

Counter raids followed in quick succession during the next few years, and in the summer of 1842 the Chippewa of the St. Croix planned a deadly blow at the Sioux village of Kaposia on the west bank of the Mississippi within the present limits of South St. Paul. The attackers hid in the deep ravine near the mouth of what is now called Battle Creek, east of the Mississippi, to await a proper moment for the attack, but they could not resist the temptation to kill a Sioux woman or two just in front of their position at Pig's Eye Lake. Despite the drunken revel in which the Sioux warriors of Kaposia were engaged, the sound of the guns brought them to their senses and they rallied to the fight. After a running fight lasting several hours the Chippewa drew off defeated, although the Sioux loss was heavier than that of the invaders. Troops from the fort arrived after the fight was over.

Even after Minnesota had become a territory and boasted of its capital, St. Paul, painted warriors roamed the streets with scalps at their belts, and in 1853 a skirmish took place at the corner of Third and Jackson streets. A party of Chippewa ambushed a group of Sioux coming up from the river to trade in the stores of St. Paul. In the firing several Sioux were wounded, one mortally, and the lives of whites were endangered. A cavalry patrol from Fort Snelling pursued the Chippewa and killed one man.

With the opening up of the lands west of the Mississippi to settlement the opportunities for intertribal fighting became fewer and a closer check was kept upon the movements of the Indians, who were assigned reservations and virtually compelled to live on them. Much bitterness was aroused against the whites who were taking the good lands away, and events shaped themselves for the Sioux Massacre of 1862.

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