

“We Have Always Been Patriotic”

THE BROWER BOYS’ CIVIL WAR

STEPHEN E. OSMAN

AMONG THOUSANDS OF TREASURES awaiting discovery in the Minnesota Historical Society’s archives are letters received by Minnesota’s governors. Not all dealt with impersonal matters of state. Minnesotans overwhelmed by circumstance often considered a heartfelt letter to the governor as their last recourse. Such was the case for a Todd County patriarch, farmer Abraham D. Brower Sr., whose letter appears, with annotation, below.

Nearly 25,000 of Minnesota’s young men, and a few women, served as Civil War soldiers. Every family felt the impact of war, but few more than the Browsers. Five sons—and their parents—experienced the breadth of Minnesota’s involvement in two wars of the 1860s. Four of the boys fought on southern battlefields, languished in prison camp, garrisoned Minnesota forts, both lived as refugees and guarded stockades during the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War, and even cruised southern rivers on a gunboat. Two sons died in service, the fate of one remaining unknown to his family for nearly a year. A month before the war ended, Governor Stephen Miller pondered the following plea from Abraham Brower.¹

Stephen Osman, recently retired senior historian with the Minnesota Historical Society, for many years managed Historic Fort Snelling. A graduate of St. Olaf College, Northfield, in history and education, he also served with the U.S. Army Reserve at Fort Snelling. He researches the nineteenth-century military and has finished a book manuscript on Fort Snelling’s role in the Civil War.



Abraham Brower Sr., about 1863,
wearing a military coat and cavalry overcoat

Long Prairie
March 16, 1865

Stephen Miller,
Governor State of Minnesota

My Dear Sir

I take the liberty of laying my case before you the following facts.

By the advice of Mr. W. P. Van Cleve whose brother married my sister, and who was an old family acquaintance I was induced to move with my family and take up my residence at Long Prairie arriving there in the early part of May 1864. My family numbered seven the wife five boys and myself four of these boys were now grown the youngest was a child of seven years.

On the first breaking out of the Rebellion my second son James W. Brown, declared his intention of enlisting as a volunteer, and was one of those that were to have belonged to a

and hereafter
With Greatest Respect

A. D. Brown
Sank Centre
Stearns Co } P. O.
Minn }

Round Prairie
March 15, 1865

Stephen Miller
Governor State of Minnesota

My Dear Sir,

I take the liberty of laying before you the following facts.

By the advice of Mr. H. P. Van Cleve, whose brother married my sister, and who was an old family acquaintance, I was induced to move with my family and take up my residence at Long Prairie arriving there in the early part of May 1860. My family numbered seven, the wife, five boys and myself. Four of these boys were men grown, the youngest was a child of seven years.

On the first breaking out of the Rebellion my second son, James S. Brower, declared his intention of enlisting as a volunteer, and was one of those that were to have belonged to a company that Mr. C. C. Andrews of St. Cloud was raising. Mr. Andrews not being able to obtain the full number in time I advised him to go to St. Paul. He did so and became a member of Co. E., Capt. Morgan 1st Minnesota. This son after serving faithfully and honorably returned home on his discharge and is now with me, his constitution partly broken. James is the only man of his company that was in every action that the 1st Minnesota was engaged in.

When the Seventh Regiment was called for my third son, Abraham D. Brower Jr., joined the company of which Asa Libby was elected capt. This son was a fine noble boy six feet 3 inches high and weighing two hundred and twenty pounds.



Abraham Brower Jr., about 1862,
possibly at the time of his enlistment

Republican Stephen Miller was elected to office in 1863 after 17 months of field service with the First Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry and command of the new Seventh Regiment.

Horatio Van Cleve was a West Point graduate selected to command the Second Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. In May 1862 he was promoted to brigadier general and was later brevetted major general. Van Cleve was farming near Long Prairie when the war began.² Abraham and Mary R. Brower of New York moved to Michigan, where their sons were born. Their Minnesota farm was just north of the present town of Little Sauk. When the Dakota War began in August 1862, the family fled to Sauk Centre and then to Watab, near present-day Sartell. Mary Brower lived to age 95 and published reminiscences of pioneer Minnesota life in the *Long Prairie Leader*.³

James Brower was 22 when he mustered into Company E. He was wounded at Gettysburg and mustered out as a corporal. Christopher Columbus Andrews enlisted as a private but was mustered in as captain of Company I, Third Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, in November 1861. On July 16, 1863, he assumed command of the regiment and was later brevetted major general. That same July day, George N. Morgan, Company E, assumed command of the First Minnesota. He returned to the state disabled the following May and commanded Fort Snelling at the end of the war.⁴

Abraham Brower Jr. was 21 when he mustered into Company I on August 14, 1862, just days before the Dakota War began. Among 52 members of the Seventh Minnesota wounded on July 13–14, 1864, at Tupelo, Mississippi, he was taken prisoner and moved to Mobile, Alabama, where he died on August 2. Seven months later, his family was still unaware of his fate. Captain Asa Libby, born in New Brunswick, was 35 when he mustered in. He resigned January 27, 1864.⁵

When Gen. A. J. Smith made his raid from Memphis to the Mobile & Ohio R.R. he was met by the Rebels at or near Tupelo. On the first charge my son was terribly wounded in the right leg near the hip joint. He was left on the battle-field in the hands of the rebels. On the return of the paroled Surgeon & nurses to St. Louis last October I learned that he was living a prisoner in Mobile, his right leg drawn up so that his toe just touches the ground. This son as I have understood from the best authority was a good and faithful soldier always ready and willing to do his duty and respected by his officers and fellow soldiers.

On the breaking out of the Sioux War I was living on my farm at Round Prarie eight miles from Long Prarie and while the whole population of Sauk Valley were fleeing in terror I used every endeavor to stay the panic and was one of seven men that were determined to fortify and fight rather than run. We fortified at Sauk Centre and collected around us a *company of militia*. My oldest son Richard D. Brower and my fourth son, Jacob V. Brower, and myself were members of this Co. I also turned in my span of Horses and for three weeks I would walk from Round Prarie twice a week, stand guard and return home. The walk was twelve miles through heavy timber.

In the month of October [1862] my fourth son, Jacob V. Brower, joined *Capt. Oscar Taylor's Co. of Mounted Rangers*.

On the 1st of May following my oldest son joined the same Co. then stationed at Sauk Centre.

These two sons were a part of the expedition of Genl. Sibley to the upper Missouri and on its return my oldest son Richard D. Brower was left at Fort Abercrombie one of the sick and died there the 6th of Sept. This son although advised by his Capt. to stay at Fort Atchison was so determined to do his duty that he unfortunately persisted to go through with what he had undertaken.

On the same day that I heard of the loss of my son I also heard that my son Jacob had gone into Hospital at Fort Ripley. I immediately went there with my wife. We watched over him for two weeks. Without our nursing he would have died. Two poor boys died while we were there.⁸

My great anxiety to hear definitely from my son A.D.B. the prisoner in Mobile caused me to make preparations last fall [1864] to go or send one of my sons who were at home to New York and through the influence of John M. Nixon my cousin, one of the oldest and first merchants of the city, or through the influence of Hon. Trumble Casey of Batavia N.Y., the uncle of my wife



“Mr. J. V. Brower, Co. D., enjoying an afternoon siesta while the Artist peruses Harper’s Weekly of a much earlier date.” This diminutive pencil sketch is from Wilfred Whitefield’s diary of the Sibley Expedition in the summer of 1863.

The Sauk Centre Volunteer State Militia served from August 25 to October 25, 1862, under Captain Silvester Ramsdell.⁶

First Lieutenant Oscar Taylor’s Northern Rangers from St. Cloud, commanded by Captain Ambrose Freeman, served in the area from August 24 to October 14, 1862. Two weeks after discharge, Taylor mustered in as captain of Company D, First Regiment Minnesota Mounted Rangers, with Freeman assuming the first lieutenant position. The regiment was raised for 12-months service to defend the state from the Dakota, by whom Freeman was killed the next summer.

While Jacob V. Brower’s name is not on the Northern Rangers’ published roster, a Jacob V. Bower [sic], age 19, mustered into Company D of the Mounted Rangers on October 16, 1862. Twenty-five-year-old Richard Brower mustered into Company D of the Mounted Rangers on May 2, 1863.⁷

and an influential friend of Wm. H. Seward, with the hopes that something might be done and after my son J. V. B. had stood his draft in Sept. I told him that he might go. He left on this merciful errand on the 27 of Oct. A supplementary draft took place on the 2nd of Nov. and *this son was drafted*. After performing the duty upon which he was sent on his return home he accepted a situation as carpenter and went in the service of the U.S. in a private capacity and is now at Duvalls Bluff Arkansas. He engaged himself while he was in Buffalo. *The letter informing him that he was drafted he never received* although it was sent. He is however in hopes to be discharged and return home. He engaged for seven months.

The above statement of facts I have taken the liberty of laying before your Excellency for the purpose of having myself accepted as a substitute for my son if I can be detailed to some special duty in the State and I most earnestly entreat your influence. I am a hale hearty man of fifty four brought up in the wholesale dry goods business in N.Y. City. I have considerable capacity. I am willing to accept of any situation however humble. This son is the only one left of my four [adult] boys whose health and strength is left to him and to whom I can look to for aid in my business as farmer. We are the last scions of one of the oldest families in the U.S., our forefathers emigrating from Amsterdam to N.Y. in 1631. We have always been patriotic. Fourteen of the family fought at the Battle of Long Island in the Revolution. My grandfather served through the whole Revolutionary War. My father although furnishing a substitute served a campaign on the Niagara frontier as a volunteer aid. My wife's father was an aid in the same frontier to Genl. Brown and I myself would shoulder the musket if I thought I was able. Although active and capable of doing a great quantity of business I do not think I could stand camp life. An aged Grandfather of Eighty-five mourns the loss of his grand children the last of his race. A mother weeps and is not comforted. Brothers look with sorrow upon the vacant places and the father broken hearted most earnestly entreats your influence. Grant us this great favor and the prayers of this whole family will ever ascend to the throne of Almighty God for your happiness both here and hereafter.

With Greatest Respect,
A. D. Brower
Sauk Centre
Stearns Co., Minn

Although Jacob Brower served a one-year enlistment in the Minnesota Mounted Rangers, he was still eligible for the draft.

Congressional districts and towns had quotas of men to provide under the several calls for volunteers. Minnesota Adjutant General Orders No. 12, April 7, 1864, proclaimed, "Any person failing to report for duty after notice left at his last place of residence, or served on him personally, without furnishing a substitute or paying \$3000, is pronounced by law to be a deserter; he may be arrested and held for trial by a court-martial and sentenced to death" (emphasis in the original).⁹



Jacob V. Brower, Todd County's first auditor, pictured in the 1874 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*

ABRAHAM AND MARY BROWER had good reason to wish to protect their promising 22-year-old son, whom they had personally educated. By the age of 17 Jacob was teaching school and had developed strong interests in land surveying, geology, and archaeology. In 1865 he was spared the draft because, unbeknownst to his family, he was already back in uniform. While helping to build government warehouses in Union-occupied Arkansas, Brower had signed on as an ordinary seaman aboard the ironclad steamer *USS Exchange*. This stern-wheeler was part of the Mississippi Squadron and in 1864 had been struck by Confederate artillery 35 times while fighting near Columbia, Arkansas.¹⁰ During the war, mail delivery, especially from the South, could be erratic. We do not know if Jacob hesitated to inform his parents of his enlistment or if his letter was delayed. So, while father Abraham was earnestly writing Governor Miller, son Jacob was sailing up the lower Mississippi and the White River escorting ordnance supplies.

When the *USS Exchange* was decommissioned in August 1865, Jacob was discharged and headed back to Minnesota. His father failed to get the farmhand he hoped for, however. Jacob soon became Todd County auditor, married, and in 1872 was elected to the Minnesota legislature at age 28.¹¹

IN 1889 THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY commissioned Brower to examine and survey the source of the Mississippi River. His report, *The Mississippi River and Its Source* (1893), including detailed hydrographic and topographic charts of his own making, is available today as volume seven in the Society's Collections series. After completing this project, Brower immediately set out to preserve the Itasca headwaters area in its natural condition. In 1891 he drafted a bill, brought to the legislature by Ramsey County Senator John B. Sanborn, that began the difficult struggle to establish Itasca State Park. Brower was named its first commissioner. When lumber interests in the legislature prevented both park funding and a salary, he spent thousands of dollars from his own pocket to support the work.¹²

Through his later life, Brower continued to study and publish on the state's prehistory. He died in 1905 at age 62 while on yet another field expedition and was later eulogized as "Minnesota's premier explorer, archaeologist and historian." His collection of American Indian artifacts, surveys of prehistoric earthworks, and extensive writings have long served scholars. But Jacob V. Brower's enduring legacy is Itasca State Park, an accomplishment far greater than his parents could have envisioned in March 1865. ☐



Jacob Brower's opus, *The Mississippi River and Its Source*, is available online at the Library of Congress' American Memory website, most easily accessed via the alphabetical listing for the Minnesota Historical Society, *Collections*, volume 7, at www.mnhs.org/library/ebook.

Notes

1. Brower to Miller, Mar. 15, 1865, Records of Governor Stephen Miller, 1864–65, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society. Brower's punctuation has been updated for ease of reading but his spellings have been preserved.

2. Board of Commissioners, ed., *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861–1865* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1890), 713–14, hereinafter cited as *Civil and Indian Wars*.

3. Mary Brower, "Writes Story of Early Pioneer," *Long Prairie Leader*, Mar. 19, 1907, p. 1.

4. On James Brower, see www.1stminnesota.net; on C. C. Andrews, *Civil and Indian Wars*, 701–02; on George Morgan, www.1stminnesota.net and Ste-

phen Osman, "Fort Snelling and the Civil War" (unpublished manuscript).

5. *Civil and Indian Wars*, 356–57 (Brower is erroneously recorded as Brown), 383.

6. The published roster includes an R. D. Brower and a Q. N. Brower; *Civil and Indian Wars*, 794. Incomplete muster rolls of Dakota War militia units were transcribed and published—with clerical errors—in this volume as "Roster of Citizen Soldiers Engaged in the Sioux Indian War of 1862."

7. *Civil and Indian Wars*, 762, 530, 519–24.

8. For Mary Brower's detailed account, see "Early Experiences in Minnesota," *Long Prairie Leader*, Sept. 20, 1907, p. 2–3.

9. *Executive Documents of the State of Minnesota, 1864*, p. 341.

10. Gunboats like the *USS Exchange* in the so-called Mosquito Squadron were armor-covered, shallow-draft former commercial vessels. Most were sold after the war.

11. For an overview of Brower's career, see Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, comps., *Minnesota Biographies* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1912), 80–81.

12. Here and below, C. L. Llewellyn, "The Fight for Itasca Park: J. V. Brower's Long Struggle and Devotion to Save for Minnesota This Treasure of Nature," *Western Magazine* 17 (May 1921): 146–51 (quote in frontispiece portrait caption).

All images are in MHS collections, including the diary sketch from the Edwin and Wilfred J. Whitefield Papers, photographed by Eric Mortenson/MHS.