

# **Historiography of the Dakota War**

**Kellian Clink**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato**  
**Northern Great Plains History Conference**  
**October 2001**

## INTRODUCTION

I am honored to be allowed to address this group today. I am a librarian by trade and a historian by avocation. I have been studying history for something like 20 years as a student and a lay reader and am interested how history has changed during that period, but more generally, how it has changed and is changing throughout the history of our state. To this end, I decided to study a relatively finite event, the Dakota War, from the beginning of Minnesota's historical writings to the present. My hypothesis was that I would find both overt racism as well as an unspoken, underlying view of the Dakota as a problem to be eliminated in order that European settlers might farm and prosper in peace. An article that summed up what I expected to find was by William Robbins. He noted in his article "Conquest of the American West: History as Eulogy:

"The European invaders not only attempted to destroy American Indians and their culture; they also created in the process their own imperial histories to justify their dispossession of the American Indian. Whether as tenantless wanderers or as a menace to the invading European, Indian people are usually described as obstacles who had to be sacrificed in the name of Progress and the advancement of Civilization...So, the American Indian is doubly damned. Freely exploited by the invading European --- in many cases exterminated—then, to add insult to injury, Indians were made nonpersons in the conquerors written history." (Robbins 8)

Priscilla Russo, a Mankato native and PhD in history wrote in 1976 "the concept of civilization versus the *Collections of the Minnesota State Historical Society* and the *Minnesota History* journal as my sample to look at how history has changed during the last 130 years—only 37 articles all total. I found more balanced coverage of the events that I expected, and found the Dakota perspective represented more than I anticipated, both in their own words and in the understanding of their position from the lips of whites. I am grateful to the work of Micheal Clodfelter, in particular, for sparking my interest in the topic, Kenneth Carley's, Theodore Blegen's and William Folwell's historical writings on the events, and Dr. William Lass, for being the best teacher I've ever had.

## BACKGROUND

For those unfamiliar with the event, I will try to tale the tale briefly and put it into the immediate context. The names of those who ignited the fire were Killing Ghost, Breaking Up, Runs against Something When Crawling and Brown Wing. These young Wahpeton men killed Robinson Jones, his wife, and several other whites after one young man accused another of cowardice. The accused killed the whites in response to this taunt. When they sought counsel at home, a gathering was hurriedly organized. The Dakotas knew that it was possible that their annuity would be withheld because of these murders and decided that the time was right to retake possession of their land. They thought that since the Union side seemed to be losing and the state and the country was distracted with the war they might be able to regain their land. Many of the chiefs saw only disaster but didn't want to lose the

respect of the younger men. The young men wanted war and thought they could win it, seeing that many men were fighting in the Union Army or on their way to fight in that cause. Between that day in August (August 18) and the battle of Wood Lake (September 23), New Ulm was attacked twice, Fort Ridgely twice, and more than 20 counties saw murder and mayhem. Afterwards, much of southern Minnesota would be depopulated. In the end, many whites would leave voluntarily and the Dakota would be expelled.

Was it a war? The Dakota used force to attempt to achieve by those means that which they could not achieve by political means. They had signed treaties against their best judgement, knowing that the U.S. government couldn't be trusted to honor them. The Dakota killed, took prisoners, and looted. The U.S. soldiers available consisted of those stationed at Fort Ridgely, Fort Ripley, and Fort Snelling. It wasn't just army against army, though, but an army of Dakota warriors against both soldiers and settlers. Colonel Henry Sibley came with 1400 men from Fort Snelling which included the Sixth Minnesota under Colonel William Crooks, and some companies of the Seventh Minnesota. Eventually, "regiment after regiment was set in motion that spring and summer—from the Sixth Minnesota to the Eleventh...Enlistments from late May to September ran to nearly 4000." (Blegen 276) Many write that it is only because of superior artillery that the soldiers at Fort Ridgely prevailed, particularly through the good work of Ordnance Sergeant John Jones and his four howitzers (two twelve-pounders, one six-pounder, and one twenty-four-pounder). The battles, as is often the case, hinged on serendipity—hungry potato gatherers in the case of Wood Lake. The war ended in defeat for the Dakota, with the hangings of 38 Dakota in Mankato December 26, 1862. President Abraham Lincoln studied the records of the trials of the 307 condemned and would only agree to the hanging of 38 (one was pardoned at the last minute). The popular press was furious. They wanted vengeance. Lincoln wanted hanged only those were guilty of rapes or murder, not participation in battle. Many other Indians died, though, either at Fort Snelling, in transit to Crow Creek, and at Crow Creek, which is still spoken in hushed tones. The larger end, though, was the expulsion of the Dakota and the Winnebago from Minnesota.

In August of 1862, Minnesota was a new state, having been admitted in the union in 1858. A Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Orlando Brown, told Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey that the Indians should be moved to make way for "an enterprising and thriving white population." (Anderson) Ramsey and Sibley, both key players in the events of 1862, had both profited by the treaties that restricted the Dakota to a narrow band of land, Sibley took a \$35,000 handling fee and Ramsey allegedly took \$40,000 after the treaty signed at Traverse de Sioux was made. (Anderson) A Civil War was raging. Native Americans had already been forced west as European settlers edged ever westward themselves. The Dakota had been edged south and west by the Ojibwa, who had developed relations with the French that allowed them access to firearms in exchange for pelts, thus allowing them to shift their traditional enemies ever southward and westward. Ruth Landes reported between 1650 and 1850, the Santee had been pushed from the present northern Wisconsin and northern Minnesota to southern and western Minnesota. (Landes 43) Micheal Clodfelter notes in his book about the

Dakota War that eastern natives held out against the power of technologically more advanced invaders than did the western natives. "Compared to this 220 year resistance, the western tribes were conquered in less than four decades from the first serious clashes in the early 1850 to Wounded Knee in 1890. (Clodfelter 16) The government tried to protect the settlers by establishing forts near settler farmers. The soldier's lot was a hard one, described by Clodfelter as bad enough that suicide was a path not infrequently taken. Bored, with bad food and medical care, soldiers often turned to drink when they weren't killed by disease. As Clodfelter put it, "But the soldiers who served on the boundary line between red and white cultures knew that their chances of dying from dysentery or consumption were greater than those of succumbing to the thrust of a warrior's lance." (Clodfelter 10)

The Dakota had ceded land to the U.S. government in pieces, the most recent in 1858 limiting them to a 10 mile strip 150 miles long along the Minnesota River. The Dakota were having to absorb fundamental changes in their social structure and lifestyles, changes that meant huge adaptations both within and outside of their relationships with each other and their world. Their sense of stability was significantly reduced as the treaties took away a very way of life they had been practicing for generations. William Folwell wrote that "Indian treaties were necessarily farcical." (Folwell 214) The Dakota only later realized that their treaties didn't give them the right to the land in perpetuity, that in fact they could be moved at the will of the government. Grouping the Indians together in close proximity made for a change in their relationships with one another. Annuity payments made to the heads of household made for another social change, as the powers of the chiefs were reduced, Folwell argues. While the Dakota were to receive annuities, these were often eaten up with the debts they allegedly owed to traders. Folwell reports that "profit on sales to Indians ranged from one hundred to four hundred per cent it was comfortable for the agent to have a share in the business...substantially all the money paid out for annuities went immediately into the pockets of the traders in payment." (Folwell 214) They did not receive a fifth of the monies the government would receive for the sale of the land on paper, and in the end, after the events of 1862, they would receive nothing, only destitution on reservations first in what is now South Dakota and then the state of Nebraska.

In 1857, events started to unfurl as "outlawed and vile Sioux chief of the Wahpekute band" (Blegen 265) Inkpaduta, went on a killing rampage when he spotted settlers on a sacred place, Spirit Lake. He is reviled in every account of the Spirit Lake Massacre and usually referred to as an outlaw by his own people or any others writing about his criminal behavior. Soldiers, headed by Charles Flandrau, savior of New Ulm, were sent to bring Inkpaduta to justice, but as they were on foot and Inkpaduta's people on horses, and it was winter, it was an impossible situation and they were unable to bring the culprits to justice. Later that year, the Dakota were ordered to bring him in or lose their annuity payments. Little Crow and a band of soldiers were unable to bring him in, either, although they did kill four of Inkpaduta's band of outlaws later that year. In the end, the annuities were still distributed. The lack of resolve on the part of the U.S. is mentioned in almost every account as being a

factor in the events of 1862. Blegen writes that “certainly the Sioux were unimpressed by the power of the government in the face of insolence and murder.” (Blegen 265)

In August of 1862, the Governor was Alexander Ramsey, who was being pressed to provide soldiers for union armies. The war was going badly for the Union side and many testify that the Dakota listened most attentively as the war was being discussed by the settlers. The annuities that should have been paid in June still had not been paid, due to a late congressional appropriation, a debate about whether to pay the money part (there were both food and money components of the annuities) in gold or greenbacks, given the financial straits the divided nation found itself. The food stores by that August of 1862 were at the two Agencies, upper and lower, but the agent wouldn't distribute them. It was past practice to distribute money and foodstuffs together, so while the Indians went hungry, pork, flour, and other nourishment were behind locked doors. One trader, Andrew Myrick jeered the Indians-- let them eat grass. Little Crow warned them: “When men are hungry, they help themselves.” It had been a hard winter and some of the crops were ruined with cutworm, even for those Dakota who were trying hard to be farmers. Most Dakota didn't want to be farmers and give up their age-old lifestyle of hunting.

The parties involved in the events of 1862 are many and complex. Besides the Dakota who made war on the settlers and the U.S. government, there were “cut-hairs,” Dakota resigned to their futures as farmers. There were the traders, who were unscrupulous in their dealings with the Dakota. There were English-speaking settlers, and German-speaking settlers. There were religious leaders such as Bishop Whipple who argued for a more humane (although paternalistic) treatment of the natives. There were mixed blood people with loyalties on both sides. There were captives and there were those Indians who risked their lives and well-being to try and protect those captives against the excesses of the angry mobs of Dakota warriors. There were the Dakota and Ojibwa warriors hired by the U.S. army. It was a complexly related group of conflicting interests of all kinds.

Guarding the peace of the area at the time was a series of forts: Fort Ripley established in 1849, Fort Ridgely in 1853, and Fort Snelling in St. Paul. These forts were designed for the settlers as well as for the “blanket Indians,” and for the separation of warring native bands, in order that settlement could continue and prosper and the state could attract yet more immigrants. Blegen talks about how little anyone expected the events that would depopulate more than 20 counties. His survey of the newspapers immediately preceding the events clearly showed that no one expected this conflagration. Fort Ridgely was staffed by the time of the first attack but lightly, as Indian Agent Galbraith had a group of volunteers (the Renville Rangers) on the road to Fort Snelling to enroll for the union army and Lieutenant Timothy Sheehan was marching toward Fort Ripley. When refugees started pouring in, Captain Marsh at Fort Ridgely gathered up 46 men and an interpreter, Peter Quinn, but was ambushed, losing about half of his men, by the Redwood Ferry. Thomas P Gere, who had the mumps, was left in charge, with only 22 men available for service. Fortunately, Marsh had sent word out to Sheehan to “Return immediately the Indians are raising hell at the agency.” (Kunz 84)

During the next month, much of New Ulm would be burned in an effort to defend the refugees gathered there more easily, Fort Ridgely would be attacked twice (August 20th and 22nd), a battle would be fought at Birch Coulee (September 2nd), and would end with the Battle of Wood Lake (September 23rd), where the soldiers of the Third Minnesota, the Third Minnesota, the Renville Rangers and companies of the Seventh Minnesota ended the Dakota War. Between that September day and December 26th, 1862, Dakotas were tried swiftly and some given a reprieve, others condemned to death. The condemned were hanged in Mankato, the rest moved to Fort Snelling for a long cold winter followed by exodus. Many, including Little Crow, headed north for Canada, stirring up concern there.

### **THE HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Let us now turn to the articles that appear in the Minnesota Historical Society Collections, which appeared between 1870 and 1920, and the journal *Minnesota History*, which ran from 1925 through the present. The articles I studied are listed in chronological order at the end of this paper.

First, let's look at the writers that have brought to us Minnesota's history. In the preface of the Third Volume of the Minnesota Historical Society Collections, written in 1880, the Committee on Publications gives us the purpose of these volumes that initially came out sporadically: "is to gather up all the historical facts regarding Minnesota, or its people, that we are able, from such writers as will contribute them, and by publishing the same." The writers, then, are not historians, but just those willing to write. The representative of the committee on publications, in fact, goes on to note that "Nor should it be supposed than any arbitrary rule governed the committee in the inclusion of the memoirs printed, or the exclusion of others not given. We have published *all* (emphasis in the original) that we have been able to secure. It is interesting to look at the earliest contributions to our understanding of the 1862 events.

Of those published between 1862 and around the turn of the century, we have personal narratives of or by Indians Mazakootemane (1869), Big Eagle(1894), Snana (1899), Renville (narrative written sometime before 1892), captives Sweet (1892) , Schwandt (1894) , McClure (1894) , White (1898) , two soldiers (Buell 1903) and Sibley in praise of John Other-Day (1870), one missionary Adams( 1899) and only one politician George Sweet, who was a member of the legislature(1887)). Both soldiering sides are represented, and women are represented both from the white and the Indian sides as well. The Historical Society, it seems, was anxious to tell of the events from many perspectives. The accounts from the Indians make for interesting reading. Remembering that they are the conquered party, both militarily and culturally, readers can not, perhaps, take their words at face value. Paul Mazakootemane of the Dakota People, writes that "I was born an Indian, and consequently I didn't not know to distinguish between the good and the bad."(Mazakootemane 82). Another Dakota, Chief Big Eagle, one of the leaders during the war, is described by the introduction writer Robert Holcombe of St. Paul , as speaking "with the air and manner of one striving to tell "the

whole truth and nothing but the truth." It is difficult to believe that Big Eagle sincerely believes, though, "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." (Big Eagle, 384). He does go on, though, to enumerate the many reasons the Dakota had to be angry with the white men, in particular the opportunistic and unscrupulous traders and the whites' seduction of Indian women. Another Dakota account, Denville's is a straightforward account of the events without much editorializing, and he clearly condemns the "hostile" Indians, especially for taking women and children prisoner. He tried to make the hostile Indians give up their white women and children prisoners and was later appointed the chief of Sibley's scouts. There are many tributes to him at the end of the article from politicians and military men. Snana was a Dakota woman responsible for saving 14 year old Mary Schwandt. Snana had three years of white schooling but eventually went home to her Indian village, but "although dressed in Indian costume, I thought of myself as a white lady in my mind and in my thoughts (Snana 428) She later states, speaking of her white education, "it led me from the darkness of superstition to the light of Christianity in those dark days among my people. It is interesting to speculate how "true" or "real" the deprecation of the Dakota is, but the reader cannot know what was true for the narrators. It does allow historians to know that the people who published the Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society were willing to try to shed light on the events by publishing the Dakota narratives, the willingness to publish the tale from the other perspective.

Even the captive narratives are relatively even-handed in their treatment of the Indians and their causes for going to war. Mrs. Sweet's narratives speaks of the suffering she underwent but speaks of the Indians as "with few exceptions [ ] kind and peaceable." There were two Indians, Lorenzo and Simon, who helped her and her children escape, by water and on foot. Nancy McClure, another captive, had high-ranking Dakota on her mother's side, going back for several generations. She was "more white than Indian in my tastes and sympathies," (McClure 445) and had, in fact, been instructed by her dying mother to stay with the missionaries and away from the Indians. She experienced, in some ways, more antipathy from the war-making Indians than whites, as the 'half-breeds' were regarded as traitors to their own people.

After Little Crow is attacked in part by mixed-ancestry Indian/Whites at Fort Ridgely, he came back and yelled at her and other mixed-ancestry people: "We will fix you, you devils; you will eat your children before winter." (McClure 452) She relates many occasions when the "half-breeds" were threatened with death. She was released, with the others, after the battle of Wood Lake. One of the captivity narratives, Mrs. White's is more what I expected when I started this project. She clearly hated the Dakota responsible for her suffering. She writes, "Fifteen thousand square miles of territory were overrun by the savages, and their trails in Minnesota were marked by blood and fire, while men,

women, and innocent children were indiscriminately butchered or made prisoners.” (White, 395) Her son was killed on the first day. She saved her baby and her 14-year-old daughter. Among the terrors she suffered was watching her baby get more and more malnourished throughout the 39 days of captivity she endured. Even she, who uses words like heartless and treacherous to describe the By the turn of the century, memoirs of the time are still being published, but many years have elapsed, and the writings are somewhat less passionate in some cases, as memories have dimmed the horrors of those times. Moses Adams (1899) was the chaplain for the Sixth Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers and refers to the “oft repeated wrongs” that the Dakota have suffered. He also wrote, however, that there was no “justifiable cause for that uprising and indiscriminate massacred of the innocent white settlers, men, women and children, without mercy. (Adams 432) Major Salmon Buell was a military man and recounts Charles Flandrau’s role in the defense of the New Ulm and the refugees gathered there in a very matter-of-fact way, making no judgements about the ultimate rights or wrongs about the Dakota’s actions, but generally giving praise to Flandrau.

One of the memoirs is not at all even-handed. John Ames Humphrey (writing in 1910) lost his parents and two siblings to the Dakota and wrote, “As a race, I maintain that the Sioux Indians are cruel, crafty, and treacherous...I knew the notorious Little Crow. They had the face of a fanatic, the voice of a hypocrite, and the bearing of a leader.” (Humphrey 341) He was 12 when he saw his parents were killed (he was getting water, as directed, for his family), and then was in the middle of it when Marsh’s soldiers were mowed down by the Dakota soldiers. The reader doesn’t expect him to feel anything but hatred for the Dakota and it gives the historian a sense of the long-lived bitterness experienced by the people who survived the attack.

Marion Satterlee, Minnesota Historical Society member, gives the first fully outlined history of the events, starting with the murders in Acton Township. He wrote for the monthly meeting of the Executive Council of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1911:

Those who care to investigate will find many reasons for the outbreak of 1862, but the essential facts are, that the Indians were obnoxious to and in the way of the whites, were preyed upon by conscienceless traders and boot-legging liquor-sellers, and were neglected by the government and its agents till at last long smothered anger and acute hunger produced a storm that broke in fury, the opening event of which were the murders at Acton...?” (Satterlee 350)

It was, in its own way, a balanced picture of the causes. The language used by the writers of Minnesota’s history generally gets less colorful after Satterlee, for the most part. For example, he wrote that a digression is necessary, that for the benefit of the present generation, they should be apprised of the fact that the Sioux “were as treacherous as snakes in grass.” (Satterlee 359) One cannot imagine today’s historian using those kinds of metaphors. Another 1911 contribution, by Lorin Cray, Mankato entrepreneur (first President of Mankato Citizen’s Telephone Company), judge, and Civil War veteran, is pretty even-handed, makes light-hearted fun of Company D of the Ninth Minnesota, which he served, as a bunch of young country bumpkins, and doesn’t malign the Indians. He glorifies the pioneers,



though, without seemingly recognizing, that in taming the land for agriculture, they were taking it from someone else who had lived there for some time:

These heroes and heroines of pioneer days went forth from our own borders, because they shed a martyr's blood without a martyr's prayer or a martyr's whine, because, when they won the game of life's battle, they were dust grimed, ragged victors, because they were heroes and heroines of the commonplace, their history is largely unwritten.... Of no class is this truer than of the early settlers of southwestern Minnesota, men and women with muscles of iron and nerves of steel." (Cray 454)

Theodore Blegen is a name well recognized in Minnesota history circles. He wrote a body of work that allows historians now to understand our past. The first article I find referenced in *Minnesota History* by him and about the Dakota War is an introduction to a modest letter home that Guri Endreson wrote after the Dakota war. This article was published in 1929. She was truly a hero, having helped two severely wounded men to safety, while having lost her husband and one son (a year after the fact, since his wound from gunshot never healed). The introduction provided by Blegen seems like a juncture in the literature about the Dakota war, as the accounts from Blegen's article forward in time seem more factual and analytical than the personal narratives up to that point seemed. In 1931, we see Robert Boyd's narrative. He survived the Birch Coulee battle but isn't writing to recount those events, but to note how the Sioux Indian's skirmishes had changed the way the military was trained to fight, as was evidenced, in his opinion, by World War One battles. The article I next found along my chronological path was in 1948. F. Paul Prucha wrote an article that seems more like the kind of history I have become accustomed to as a student of history. It is in the third person, not the first. He cited government documents extensively, as well as newspaper accounts. It is clear that he is seeking the truth by wading through public opinion, analysis by "experts" in the field, and wrote in a way that is significantly less colorful and personal than many of the previous articles.

Prucha's words, though, reflect the overall sense of the events as they were understood at this point when he wrote about negative public opinion of the frontier army: "Only in a situation of comparative security did people speak out about the irksome details of the army's presence which seemed to impede the fulfillment of manifest destiny...the war department considered these concentrations of troops the best means for overawing the redmen and prevented isolated families in the river valleys." (Prucha 232-233) Not until about 100 years after the event, until the 1962 edition of *Minnesota History* would any writer question the underlying assumption that the whites were entitled to this land that had been lived on by so many generations by Indians. It was implicit in every account that it was, in fact, manifest destiny for the white to have this land and prosper as farmers and no real awareness seems given to the possibility that perhaps the Dakota were reasonable in seeking to regain their land and return to their ancestral ways of living. Prucha's article narrates the army's role in that manifest destiny—keeping the settlers safe until the natives were removed or pacified, then moving west to do it again, until they reached the Pacific Ocean.

Next on my path through the *Minnesota History Journal*, I happened upon Laurence Gould's "Minnesota Today and Tomorrow," published in 1949. While it doesn't deal with the Dakota Conflict specifically, it's interesting in the cavalier way he dismisses the Indian past in Minnesota: "Though we have pretty systematically eliminated the native peoples, yet their names are left to give romance and color to the state," (Gould, 331) and goes on to give the Indian names that grace our geographical names. That's it—the Native American role in our state dismissed with the word "eliminated." Gould is the first author self-identifying as an historian in this perusal of *Minnesota History* articles pertaining to the Dakota War. Starting in 1955, we see the identification of authors in the way that has become the norm now. An article by Alvin Gluek, Jr, discusses the Canadian problem created by the events of 1862. This is the first time when the author is identified by degree and expertise. Since then, of course, their area of expertise and education almost always identifies the authors, and for the most part, are males, with degrees in history earned somewhere in Minnesota. Of the 19 articles in my sample from 1948-1998, only two are from women authors. Gluek is the last to use the term savages to describe the Dakota soldiers, the norm up to this time, 1955. He describes in this article how Canadian and Americans conspired to get Chiefs Little Six, Little Leaf and Medicine Bottle chloroformed and taken into American custody, where they were executed. He acknowledges the iniquity of the plot, writing that the press at the time called it "unjustifiable and uncalled for" but also writes that public opinion of the time was, both in the U.S. and Canada strongly in favor of getting rid of those understandably seen as a threat to their well-being.

In 1962, the entire September issue of *Minnesota History* is devoted to understanding the events. It represents a sea change from the writing that has proceeded it. In terms of authorship, it is mostly historians on staff at the Minnesota Historical Society. In terms of content, it's clearly different than everything that has come before. The introduction to the issue, written by Willoughby Babcock, described the Dakota War as "an episode that remains the state's greatest tragedy and has moral implications for all Americans and all generations." There are articles contained within about the events that are very sympathetic to the Indians. Babcock starts by outlining the events, emphasizing the Dakota's traditional lifestyle and how it was impossible to sustain on a ten-mile swath of land. The article lionizing Charles Flandrau, "Attorney at War." notes his understanding of how difficult the situation was for the Indians and emphasizes his role, when he was, in 1856-1857, the United States Indian Agent for the Upper and Lower Minnesota Sioux., as advocate trying to get the Dakota more funds, more help with farming, and prompt receipt of the annuities. The article praises him for his sympathy with and respect of the Dakota, as well as his role in saving the settlers gathered in New Ulm against the attacks.

The 1962 issue includes the accounts of three Dakota, including Big Eagle, Lightning Blanket, and George Quinn, who was part of the party that decimated captain John S. Marsh's company at the Redwood Ferry. Walter Trenerry, President of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1962, wrote "The Shooting of Little Crow, Heroism or Murder?" He writes scathingly about the bounties

placed on Sioux scalps and the payment for the killings of Indians. He concludes about Little Crow's death in particular: "To shoot an unknown Indian who was quietly eating raspberries simply does not qualify as justifiable [homicide] under any of the statutory classes." (Trenerly 152) Clearly, by 1962, the viewpoint has changed significantly. No more the casual use of 'savage' as the referent for Dakota. No more easy condemnation of the Dakota.

Dr. William Lass in 1963 recounted the horrors of the removal of the Winnebago and the Dakota first. He included the numbers who died both in transit and on the barren and drought-stricken wilds on the reservation chosen for them. He concluded:

The demands of the state government and people of Minnesota had thus been met; the Indians had been effectively removed from the boundaries of civilization. In the process they had also been removed—inadvertently perhaps—from the boundaries of concern for human life. The bureaucratic callousness which allowed this is in some ways less forgivable than the passionate ferocity of the Indians themselves."

Barbara Newcombe (1976), the first woman not a first hand witness/participant in the events of 1862, as author about the Dakota War published in *Minnesota History* was a librarian for the Chicago Tribune. She outlined the problems the Indians had with their forced reservation life. She wrote that there were too many ways the whites undermined the Dakota's ability to survive on the appointed reservations—lack of protection from the other Indians, lack of annuity monies, all taken up by unscrupulous traders, lack of promised agricultural equipment and help, etc., etc. She's very sympathetic to their plight and details the "idiocy of Indian policy." (Newcombe 96) Another woman historian is published in 1976, a Priscilla Ann Russo, who writes about the role of the chief speaker and how Little Crow lost that title but, in the end, was the leader of the Dakota when they decided to make war on the settlers in the Minnesota Valley. Russo, in her article published in 1976, states:

"The most disruptive agents of change for the Santee were the historically familiar rapacious traders, ethnocentric missionaries, white men's decimating diseases, inept Indian Bureau officials, equivocating United States government representatives, and deplorably conflicting military policies. Perhaps the ultimate disruptive force for the Santee, as for all Native Americans, was land-hungry settlers. As been seen elsewhere in this issue, the Santee by 1862 had a long list of grievances: the conspiratorial nature of the negotiations of 1851 and 1858 and the failure of the U.S. government officials' efforts to fulfill its treaty obligations; the traders' procurement of treaty proceeds and the disadvantageous methods of trade for the Indians; the U.S. government officials' efforts to deter Inkpaduta's raids...and the increasing pressures of settlers." (Russo 99)

Clearly, the way the events are looked on in 1976 is hugely different than previously.

In 1983, we have Gary Clayton Anderson's analysis of trader Andrew Myrick's comment about the Indians eating grass because they weren't getting their annuity food until the Indian Agent said so. This insult is mentioned in almost all of the preceding articles described as the immediate precipitating cause of the Dakota War. Anderson, who is a prolific writer on the Dakota, offers a meticulous look at one small piece of the story, adding immeasurably to our understanding of the events. Anderson's

Careful research revealed that it is impossible for the council where these remarks were allegedly made, to have taken place when and where they are supposed to have been. He concluded that in light of the sequence of events brought into question by his findings, historians should look more closely at the “governmental acculturation program, the increased occupation of neighboring hunting grounds by white pioneers, and an annuity distribution system.” (Anderson 206) He notes that “the story of Myrick’s insult was too sensational to be ignored. It made good reading and represented what some historians perceived as the ‘match’ necessary to ignite the conflagration that followed.”(Anderson 202) His is the first article about the conflict that is about how the history of the conflict came about, the first analysis of not the events, but the history of the events.

### **CONCLUSIONS DRAWN**

It is interesting to look at these articles as a set representing how history has changed in the last 130 years. The most significant aspect of looking at the articles for me is that there were, in fact, so many accounts of the events from the perspectives of the Dakota, including those that fought on the “wrong” side of the dispute. While their narratives usually include some statement of what happened was wrong, it also allowed the readers of the MHS Collections to read the reasons for the events from the perspectives of the natives. Second, for me, was that I didn’t find the military history that I expected to. I expected to find more descriptions of the soldiers and their heroism and the kind of praise to a militaristic solution to the Dakota, especially in earlier times. Another aspect I didn’t find that I expected to was some sort of analysis of military might versus strategic/tactical guerilla warfare practices of the Dakota. Clodfelter’s book *The Dakota War* explores this, as well as the difficulties faced by far too few troops too malnourished and undersupplied for too much territory and against Indians well supplied with horses. This didn’t really show up in either the MHS Collections or Minnesota History articles to any large degree.

In terms of what I did find, I was not surprised at the language used, the almost constant use of savages to refer to the Dakota from the very first articles through about 1955. What surprised me is that while referring to the Indians as savages, a surprising number of articles acknowledged that the Dakota had good reasons to be angry with the treaties, the traders, and their situation. The first articles are eye-witness accounts and as such, are recounting events with a certain lack of detachment or analysis. The writers are people whose lives were disrupted, and some destroyed, by the events. The reader doesn’t expect the writers to acknowledge that the land the Dakotas were fighting for was land where they had lived for generations or to be respectful in the terminology for the people who killed their loved ones, often within their sight. The early narratives are passionate and personal and sometimes either self-promoting (either in justification for deeds done or grievances suffered) or promoting a certain point of view (whites, mostly, even when the witness is Indian). There isn’t, even from the Dakota viewpoint, an analysis of land ownership—that the notion was a different concept from the two perspectives. On the other hand, never is there an overt claim that whites have a superior claim to the

land, more an unspoken kind of understanding that they do, or at least that since the Dakota had treated away their rights to the land that it was legitimate for the immigrant farmers to settle there.

While history is created from these eye-witness narratives, it is by the analysis of all of them that meaning starts to take shape. Meaning is derived from the very notion of looking more broadly—from the viewpoints of both sides of the survivors of Birch Coulee, Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, and Wood Lake and from their historical contexts. It is, in fact, looking at it from the viewpoint of history itself. Where was Minnesota at that point, where was the nation, where were the Dakota from the perspective of centuries of time? That consciousness starts being revealed only 100 years later, in the articles, especially, published in 1962. By that time, it is possible to look less passionately and with a broader perspective, with a consciousness changed by history itself. By that time, the authors are people who have studied history—who have a sense of the context of these events in light of the Civil War, the expansion of the U.S. to the Pacific Ocean, in light of the near-extirmination of Indians throughout the country. In the articles in 1962, and interestingly, from the two women historians published in 1976, on the bicentennial, that we see a viewpoint opposite from those earliest accounts, where it is clear that the writers feel that while the events of 1862 were reprehensible, that the whites, in fact, were duplicitous in their dealings with the Indians and more importantly, perhaps, using the words of the Dakota at the time. Barbara Newcombe in her 1976 article quotes Little Crow extensively from the 1858 negotiations in Washington. It represents a significant departure, not only to be openly critical of the U.S, but to acknowledge that the Dakota at the time were able to argue logically and convincingly how they were being cheated by the U.S. government and treated unjustly by the Indian Agents and traders in Minnesota. The earlier accounts from Native Americans are those that echo the sentiments of whites, from a position of being the conquered race, saying that they understand now that what they were doing was wrong. Mazakootemane speaks of “the good God brought us wild men the way of life; and now the gospel has taken root and will grow among the Indians.” Chief Big Eagle “Of course it was wrong, as we all know now...” Snana who thought of herself in her heart as a white woman. There was a lot of internalized racism in these accounts. But in the treaty negotiations that Newcombe brings to light, we see honest discussion from the Dakota of the iniquities visited upon them by the U.S. government. It's significant that this is published when it is and that Newcombe is both adding her interpretation but using the very words of the Dakota. It is a way of honoring them, as well as a different look at the historical picture.

The picture the study of these articles gives the reader is a kaleidoscope. The clearest lesson I've learned from studying them is perhaps, that the eye-witness narrator might very well understand the situation the least, that it really requires a telescoping back to understand meaning, although one can understand events well enough from one's own personal experience of them. I'm writing this against the backdrop of the horrors of the tragedies on September 11 and against the backdrop of cries of going to war and hitting back and questions about what constitutes war and am finding lots of parallel kinds of questions with the ones raised by the Dakota War. I'm hoping that our nation pauses to

telescope back to the big questions and the big pictures before reacting in haste, as was almost done in Mankato when they was an outcry to hang unto death all of the Indians, when editors around the state cried for extermination of the all of the Indians. I hope that we can look for peace and a just solution as Abraham Lincoln did in those dark days of 1862.

## Works Cited

- Anderson, Gary Clayton. "State's Founders Hatched Land Grab." *St. Paul Pioneer Press* August 17, 1987, section G, page 4, column 1.
- Blegen, Theodore C. *Minnesota: A History of the State* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975.
- Clodfelter, Micheal. *The Dakota War: The United States Army versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998.
- Folwell, William. *A History of Minnesota* Volume 2 St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society 1924
- Kunz, Virginia Brainard. *Muskets to Missiles: A Military History of Minnesota* St. Paul: Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission, 1958.
- Landes, Ruth. "Dakota Warfare." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* v. 15 (1959): 43-52.
- Robbins, William. "The Conquest of the American West." *Indian Historian* v. 10, no. 1 (1977) pp.7-13.
- Russo, Priscilla. "The Time to Speak is Over: The Onset of the Sioux Uprising." *Minnesota History* 45.3 (Fall, 1976): 97-106.

**ARTICLES ABOUT THE DAKOTA WAR ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY**  
**First year represents year read or written, publishing year may differ.**

- 1869** Mazakootemane, Paul. "Narrative of Paul Mazakootemane." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 1869.vol 3 1870-1880
- 1870** Sibley, Henry. "Sketch of John Other Day." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* Volume III, 1870-1880.
- 1887** Sweet, George W. "Incidents of the Threatened Outbreak of Hole-in-the-day and other Ojibways at time of Sioux Massacre of 1862." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 1887
- 1893** Sweet, Jannette E. "Mrs. J.E. DeCamp Sweet's Narrative of Her Captivity in the Sioux Outbreak of 1862." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 6 (1894) :354-380
- 1894** Schwandt, Mary. "The Story of Mary Schwandt. Her Captivity during the Sioux 'Outbreak.'" *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 6 (1864): 461-474.
- 1894** Big Eagle, Jerome. "A Sioux Story of the War." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 6 1894
- 1894** McClure, Nancy. "The Story of Nancy McClure, Captivity among the Sioux." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 6 (1894) 439-460.
- 189?** Snana. "Narration of a Friendly Sioux." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 9 (1898-1900).
- 1898** White, Urania S. [Mrs. Nathan D.] "Captivity among the Sioux, August 18 to September 26, 1862." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 9 (1901): 395-426.
- 1899** Adams, Moses N. "The Sioux Outbreak in the Year 1862, with Notes of Missionary Work among the Sioux." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, 9 (1901) : 431-452.
- ???? Buell, Salmon A. "Judge Flandrau in the Defense of New Ulm during the Sioux Outbreak of 1862." in *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 10, part 2 (1905): 783-818.
- 189?** Renville, Gabriel. "A Sioux Narrative of the Outbreak in 1862, and of Sibley's Expedition in 1863...with a Biographic Sketch of the Author by Samuel J. Brown" *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 10.2 (1905) : 595-618.
- ."Narratives of the Sioux War," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 15 (May 1915): 349-370.
- 1910** Humphrey, John A. "Boyhood Remembrances of Life among the Dakotas and the Massacre in 1862." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 15 (May 1915) : 337-348
- 1911** Cray, Lorin. "Experiences in Southwestern Minnesota, 1859 to 1867." *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 15 (May 1915): 434-454.
- 1911** Satterlee, Marion P. "Narratives of the Sioux War." *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 15 (May 1915): 348-370
- 1929** Blegen, Theodore C. introduction. "Guri Endreson, Frontier Heroine." *Minnesota History* 10 (December 1929) : 425-430.
- 1931** Boyd, Robert K. "How the Indians Fought: A New Era in Skirmish Fighting, by a Survivor of the Battle of Birch Cooley." *Minnesota History* 11 (September, 1930) : 299-304.



- 1937 Howard, J. R. "Sioux War Stockades." *Minnesota History* 12 (1937) :301-303.
- 1948 Prucha, F. Paul. "The Settler and the Army in Frontier Minnesota." *Minnesota History* 29(3) (September 1948) : 231-246.
- 1949 Gould, Laurence M. "Minnesota Today and Tomorrow." *Minnesota History* 30(1949((4): 331-342.
- 1952 -----. "Lincoln's Sioux War Order." *Minnesota History* 33 (Summer 1952) : 77-79.
- 1955 Gluek, Alvin D., Jr. "The Sioux Uprising: A Problem in International Relations." *Minnesota History* 34 (Winter 1955) : 317-324.
- 1955 Connors, Joseph. "The Elusive hero of Redwood Ferry." *Minnesota History* 54 (Summer, 1955): 233-238.
- 1962 Babcock, Willoughby. "Minnesota's Indian War." *Minnesota History* 38 (September, 1962) : 93-98.
- 1962 Fridley, Russell W. "Charles E. Flandrau: Attorney at War." *Minnesota History* 38.3 (September 1962) : 116-125.
- 1962 Carley, Kenneth A. "As Red Men Viewed It: Three Indian Accounts of the [Sioux] Uprising ." *Minnesota* 38.3 (September, 1962) : 126 -149.
- 1962 Carley, Kenneth A. "The Sioux Campaign of 1862." Sibley's Letters to His Wife." *Minnesota History* 38.3 (September, 1962) : 99-114.
- 1962 Trenerry, Walter N. "The Shooting of Little Crow: Heroism or Murder?" *Minnesota History* 38 (September, 1962): 150-153.
- 1963 Babcock, Willoughby M. "Minnesota's Frontier, A Neglected Sector of the Civil War." *Minnesota History* 38.6 (June 1963) 274-286
- 1963 Lass, William E. "The Removal from Minnesota of the Sioux and Winnebago Indians." *Minnesota History* 38.8 (1963) :353-364.
- 1968 Davis, Jane S. "Two Sioux War Orders: A Mystery Unraveled." *Minnesota History* 41 (Fall 1968) : 117-125
- 1970 Ellis, Richard D. "Political Pressures and Army Policies on the Northern Plains, 1862-1865." *Minnesota History* 42 (Summer, 1970): 42-53.
- 1976 Dietz, Charlton. "Henry Behnke: New Ulm's Paul Revere." *Minnesota History* 45.3 (Fall,1976) : 111-115.
- 1976 Newcombe, Barbara T. "A Portion of the American People: The Sioux Sign a Treaty in Washington in 1858." *Minnesota History* 45.3 (Fall 1976): 83-97.
- 1976 Henig, Gerald T. "A Neglected Cause of the Sioux Uprising." *Minnesota History* 45.3 (Fall, 1976) 107-110.
- 1976 Russo, Priscilla Ann. "The Time to Speak is Over: The Onset of the Sioux Uprising." *Minnesota History* (Fall, 1976): 97-106,
- 1983 Anderson, Gary Clayton. "Myrick's Insult: A Fresh Look at myth and Reality." *Minnesota History* 48.5 ( Spring 1983) : 198-206.
- 1994 Woolworth, Alan R. "Adrian J. Ebell, Photographer and Journalist of the Dakota War of 1862." *Minnesota History* 54.2 (Summer 1994) 87-92.



