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Reconciling Memory: Landscapes, Commemorations, and Enduring Conflicts of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862

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RECONCILING MEMORY: LANDSCAPES, COMMEMORATIONS, AND ENDURING
CONFLICTS OF THE U.S.-DAKOTA WAR OF 1862

by

JULIE HUMANN ANDERSON

Under the Direction of Clifford M. Kuhn

ABSTRACT

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 resulted in the deaths of more than 500 Minnesota settlers, the expulsion of the Dakota people from their homeland, and the largest mass execution in U.S. history. For more than a century, white Minnesotans declared themselves innocent victims of Indian brutality and actively remembered this war by erecting monuments, preserving historic landscapes, publishing first-person narratives, and hosting anniversary celebrations. However, as the centennial anniversary approached, new awareness for the sufferings of the Dakota both before and after the war prompted retellings of the traditional story that gave the status of victimhood to the Dakota as well as the white settlers. Despite these changes, the descendents of

white settlers persisted in their version of events and resented the implication that the Dakota were justified in starting the war. In 1987, the governor of Minnesota declared “A Year of Reconciliation” to bring cultural awareness of the Dakota, acknowledge their sufferings, and reconcile the continued tense relationship between the state and the Dakota people. These efforts, while successful in now telling the Dakota side of the war at official historic institutions, did not achieve a reconciliation between native and non-native residents of the state. Now nearly 150 years after the war began, the war is nearly forgotten by most Minnesotans even though evidence of the war dominates the permanent historic landscape of the state. Despite this invisibility, memories of the war still manage to provoke intense hostility between white and Dakota residents of the state. This study of the commemorative history of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 illustrates the impact this single event exhibited for the state of Minnesota and examines the continued tense relations between its native and non-native inhabitants.

INDEX WORDS: U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, Minnesota, Dakota, Sioux, Lower Sioux Agency, Little Crow, Public history, Memory, U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862, Mankato, New Ulm, Fort Ridgely, Plains Indian wars, Henry Sibley, Mankato, Commemorations, Monuments, Historic sites, hanging

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JULIE HUMANN ANDERSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Gary and Cathie Humann, who fostered a love of history in me from a young age and believed I could do something with it.

And to my husband, Chad, who has earned this degree right alongside me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has surprised me in many ways, not the least that I thought it was a good idea to tackle such an obviously large story. I would not have made it to the finish line without the support of a number of individuals, but the first supporter of my history career was my grade school teacher, Ted Lau, who not only taught me the subject but also introduced me to the joys of working at a historic site. I spent many Saturdays and summers during my teenage years as a tour guide at Gibbs Farm Museum in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Gibbs Farm also gave me a first glimpse into the culture and history of the Dakota. Although I was born and raised in Minnesota, I, like many current residents, was not familiar with this 1862 war and my knowledge of the Dakota barely extended beyond the fact that I lived in Dakota County, was familiar with the numerous place-names that have Dakota origins, and some Dakota communities operated casinos. However, while working on my master's at Northeastern University, a researcher from GFM called and asked if I was interested in doing research for them that could translate to my master's project. My task was to research Dakota culture to be implemented as a new employee guide. Gibbs Farm was in the process of shifting its interpretation to include both the story of an 1850s farming family and a site to learn about Dakota history and culture (GFM was originally interpreted as a 1900 urban fringe farm). As part of this project, I took an internship at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul that also had me researching a potential audio/walking tour at the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site. Finally, I learned the details of this war as well as the appalling manner in which the Dakota people were treated by my home state. Again like many present-day Minnesotans, I found this story interesting but I didn't know what to do with it, so I pushed this knowledge to the back of my mind for the next four years.

As a doctoral student, the story of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 stayed with me, despite the fact that I now lived in Georgia and researching a project based in Minnesota could be difficult. But rather than simply tell another story about the war, I was most interested in why few people I encountered seemed to know about this war. This morphed into a story of the way the war has been remembered, yet still manages to be invisible in the present-day. This led to a huge array of sources available at some amazing historical agencies throughout the state. If I had known the sheer quantity of materials available, I would probably have scaled back my project rather than attempt to absorb 150 years of memory activities into this single dissertation. As it is, I feel that I have only skimmed the surface of materials available and this project could be expanded in multiple directions. Specifically, I need to thank librarian Debbie Miller at the Minnesota Historical Society. Her enthusiasm for my project, quick response to emails, and introductions to other researchers at MHS made my many trips to the Research Library significantly easier. Research librarian Darla Gebhard at the Brown County Historical Society spent an entire day pulling sources, answering my questions, and providing insight into the anniversary celebrations at New Ulm. I also want to thank the Nicolette County Historical Society for their convenient organization of all newspaper articles relating to the War. The visit to this facility significantly shortened the amount of time I would have spent pouring through microfilm reels of all the Minnesota newspapers published since 1862.

At Georgia State, I first need to thank my advisor, Dr. Cliff Kuhn, who enthusiastically embraced this project after my original advisor took a new position out of state. His patience, availability, and belief that this project was important kept me going on more than one occasion. My other readers, Dr. H. Robert Baker from Georgia State University and Dr. Michael Elliott from Emory University, were equally excited about my research and the finished project. I also

wish to acknowledge my fellow graduate students in the GSU “cube farm,” who all offered support of some kind throughout these years. Specifically I wish to thank Laurel Koontz, Heather Lucas, Carries Whitney, Aubrey Underwood, and Andy Reisinger. I also wish to thank, my cousin, J.J. Carlson, who graciously created six original maps for this project despite getting married and moving to Germany. He worked diligently with my many requests and made each chapter visually appealing with his illustrations. I also had the pleasure of conducting a phone interview with Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, PhD. As a historian and activist in the Dakota community, her insight on my project was both welcome and enlightening. I sincerely thank her for taking the time to explain a part of the Dakota perspective on the commemorative history for this War, and I look forward to the dialogue this finished work may foster. While these research institutions and individuals greatly informed my work, any errors which this work may contain are my own.

On a personal level, this project would not have been completed without the help of my family. My mother, my siblings and their spouses, and my husband’s wonderful family all believed I could complete this project. They offered a place to stay, babysitting, and unwavering support while I researched and wrote this dissertation. I thank my boys, Jack and Reed, for enduring the many, many times I could not give them my full attention. And finally, I thank my husband, Chad, who survived nearly eight years of a wife whose mind kept wandering as I struggled to complete this paper. Your perseverance on my behalf, the many hours of single parenting you undertook when I needed to write, and your obvious pride in me with this achievement, make me forever grateful to have you by my side.

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CHAPTER 1

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862: Prelude to War

The Dakota people, also known as the Santee Dakota, lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle in present-day Minnesota for several centuries before encountering European traders late in the 17th century. Accustomed to roaming the land, living on the many nearby rivers and lakes in the summer months, and migrating to the woodlands and prairies in the fall, winter, and spring, the Dakota tolerated early white settlements with relatively little disruption to their traditional lives.¹ However, in 1819 the Dakota signed a treaty with the United States that provided land for the army to construct Fort Snelling near present-day St. Paul. Several more treaties followed with the Dakota conceding land and hunting rights to the American government in exchange for money, food, and the ability to remain in their homelands. The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1858, which opened vast tracks of land to white settlers eager to possess the rich farmland of Minnesota, confined the Dakota to a ten-mile wide stretch of reservation land in the southwestern portion of the state. Despite removal to a reservation, the Dakota were still able to hunt game and other food sources outside the reservation boundary. However, the Dakota people's lives were now structured according to the will of the United States and its representatives in Minnesota.

Located on the rolling prairies of southwestern Minnesota, the Lower Sioux Agency (one of two agencies where government workers, fur traders, and missionaries served the Dakota

¹ A good general history of the Santee Dakota can be found in Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997).

villages located within the reservation boundaries)² exhibited all appearances of a quiet community prior to the summer of 1862. The Lower Agency served two of the four bands of the Santee Dakota, the Mdewakanton and the Wahpekute. An additional agency, known as the Upper Agency, existed further up the Minnesota River and served the Wahpeton and Sisseton bands. These agencies hoped the Dakota would settle nearby, adopt Euro-American style dress and culture, and live as farmers. Some Dakota did make the effort to learn farming, converted to Christianity, and attempted to subsist in a world vastly different from their traditional one. Many others resisted the acculturation efforts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the resident missionaries, refusing to settle permanently on the reservation and only arriving in the summer for the annual distribution of food and money, which the Dakota were promised in the 1858 treaty in exchange for their lands in Minnesota. The atmosphere on the reservation was deceptively serene in the early summer months of 1862; in reality, severe unrest was brewing that would impact the future history of Minnesota.³

The summer of 1862 did not begin well for the Dakota. Short on food supplies due to a crop failure the previous year, the Dakota depended heavily upon receiving their annual payment and food allocations, which typically arrived in June. All the Dakota gathered at the reservation in June to await their payment, but the payment did not arrive, delayed by the Civil

² The “Lower Sioux Agency,” also known as the Redwood Agency, was one of two government agencies located along the Minnesota River within the reservation established by the 1858 treaty. The Lower Agency, named because it was located lower on the river, served the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands of Dakota. The Upper Agency, named because it was located further up the river and also known as Yellow Medicine Agency, served the Wahpeton and Sisseton bands of Dakota. Several villages would be located in the vicinity of one of the two agencies and a chief would govern each village or some recognized leader. The Upper and Lower Agencies housed government workers, including the assigned Indian agent, missionaries, and a collection of fur traders. All the Dakota, regardless if they were currently living in a nearby village, would report to the agencies each summer to receive their annual payments of money and food allocations. Those Dakota who agreed to learn to farm were known as “farmer Indians” and could be identified by their shorter hair and American-style clothes. These Dakota were often favored by the Indian agent and therefore resented by those Dakota who steadfastly held to the traditional lifestyle and were known as “blanket Indians.”

³ *The Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site: Development* (Minneapolis, MN: Nason, Wehrman, Chapman Associates, Inc., 1974).

War and by the indecisiveness of the U.S. Congress trying to determine in what currency the payment should be issued. By August the Dakota community faced starvation. They asked the fur traders for extended credit, but were refused until they could pay off debts with the annuity payments. Food allotments had arrived at the agency, but the Indian agent, Thomas Galbraith, not wanting to distribute the food and money separately, refused to disperse these goods until the annuity money arrived. Facing starvation, the Dakota did not understand why Galbraith refused to issue the food. Many Dakota were also angry with the fur traders and correctly believed that their debts were exaggerated. Some even stormed the warehouse at the Upper Sioux Agency and demanded that Galbraith distribute the food. Galbraith called for reinforcements of soldiers from nearby Fort Ridgely. The soldiers, under the command of Lt. Sheehan, were able to prevent total chaos by threatening to use the cannon. However, the soldiers agreed with the Dakota and ordered Galbraith to begin distributing the food rations even though the money had yet to arrive.

These tense conditions extended throughout southwestern Minnesota. On August 17, four Dakota men were hunting for food off the reservation. Finding little game to hunt, the men happened upon the farm of Robinson Jones near Acton, Minnesota. One of the men discovered some fresh eggs, and when his companions dared him to steal the eggs, the man replied that he was brave enough to not just steal eggs but to kill the farmer as well. They approached the Jones homestead, finding Mr. Jones and his two adopted children, a 15-year-old girl and an 18-month-old boy. Jones left the children and hurried to the nearby farm of his stepson, Howard Baker, where Mrs. Jones had been visiting. The Dakota men followed him there and found the Jones and Baker families as well as another visiting family, the Websters. Challenging the men to a shooting contest, the Dakota took aim at some targets but, while waiting for the homesteaders to reload their weapons, suddenly turned and shot Mr. Webster, Mr. Baker, and Mr. & Mrs. Jones.

The Dakota then left the Baker farm and returned to the Jones farm where they shot and killed Clara Wilson, the Jones' 15-year-old adopted daughter. Mrs. Baker, her young child, Mrs. Webster, and the Jones' 18-month-old adopted son all survived and fled to another homestead.⁴

Realizing the seriousness of these killings, the four men arrived at Rice Creek Village, which was located near the Lower Sioux Agency and was under the guidance of Chief Shakopee, a man who inherited his position from his father, a long-time respected chief among the Dakota people. The Rice Creek Village was also home to a newly formed soldiers' lodge, which was a council of about 100 members and dominated by hunters, who advocated maintaining traditional lifestyle, and actively refused admittance to any Dakota who had chosen the farming lifestyle. After listening to the men explain the Acton incident, the lodge quickly voted to go to war against the whites. However, Rice Creek and its soldiers' lodge only represented a fraction of the Dakota people and the lodge realized they would need additional support in order to make this war a reality. They turned to the other nearby villages and primarily sought the support of Little Crow, a village chief whom many considered the leader for the Dakota, although he was not currently the recognized spokesman for the nation. Little Crow had made recent attempts to become a farmer on Agency land and now lived in a frame house, had cut his hair, and dressed in the Euro-American style. Debate about how to handle this situation lasted throughout the night with opinions being given by multiple village chiefs and elders. Some believed the four men should turn themselves into the authorities and others argued that the time was ripe for war. Little Crow proved to be the voice the others turned to for the ultimate decision. Finally, while declaring that this would probably destroy the Dakota nation rather than restore it, he agreed to lead the war by declaring, "Braves, you are little children - you are fools. You will die like the

⁴ Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001): 7-10.

*rabbits when the hungry wolves hunt them in the Hard Moon (January). Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta is not a coward: he will die with you.*⁵ Little Crow, and those Dakota who supported going to war, prepared to attack the Lower Sioux Agency the next morning. War in Minnesota had begun.



Figure 1.1. This map depicts the reservation boundaries in 1862, the location of the two agencies, the first attack at Acton, and other points of interest associated with the War. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

⁵ Little Crow's quote can be found in Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988): p. 42. "Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta" was Little Crow's Dakota name and when translated means "His Red Nation," a meaning which many felt marked Little Crow as a natural-born leader of the Dakota.

Introduction: The Power of Memory

In 1878, just sixteen years after the events near Acton, a group of Minnesotans gathered at Ness Church in Litchfield to dedicate a monument to those first victims of war. The five settlers had been buried in the church cemetery located just a few miles from the homesteads where the murders took place. Sponsored by the Old Settlers' association of Meeker County and bolstered by \$500 appropriated from the state for the monument, several hundred citizens assembled "all in holiday attire, happy and gay" to memorialize and remember not only a brutal war, but also their own ultimate victory over the Dakota, which paved the way to full settlement of the Minnesota River Valley. The atmosphere was one of celebration and jubilation and included a one-mile procession to the church led by the Litchfield band as well as several speeches from prominent figures connected to the recent war. While General C.C. Andrews admonished that the federal government, with its corrupt Indian department and record of broken treaties, "was largely responsible for this dreadful massacre," former governor Alexander Ramsey maintained that there was no provocation for war and the settlers had always "treated [the Dakota] kindly."⁶ The four-sided granite obelisk, inscribed with the names of the five settlers killed on August 17, 1862, served not only as a cemetery marker but also as a symbol for the collective community memory of this event. This monument and its accompanying ceremony provided a public declaration that the white settlers were innocent victims in an unprovoked war. For the remainder of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, other monuments and ceremonies would likewise mark the landscape of this war, each one reinforcing this public memory that the white settlers were innocent victims and the Dakota people were solely to blame.

⁶ *Ceremonies at the Unveiling of the Acton Monument in Memory of the Victims of the Massacre (Aug. 17, 1862) Held at Ness Church, Sept. 13, 1878.* Minnesota Historical Society Collections.

In 2008, nearly 150 years after that fateful summer, Minnesota prepared to mark its sesquicentennial anniversary of statehood with a number of special events. One of the highlights of this yearlong commemoration was a featured exhibit at the Minnesota History Center titled “MN150.” This exhibit was based on the results of a public poll asking the residents of Minnesota to nominate people, places, events, and things that represented the essence of the state. Among the 150 topics selected for the exhibit was the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 because it was “the most tragic and deadly event in Minnesota history.”⁷ More than 500 people lost their lives over the course of this six-week war, thirty-eight Dakota men were executed as war criminals, and the remaining Dakota were expelled from the state. Interestingly, while visiting the MN150 exhibit featured at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 feature was difficult to find within the exhibit room. Located in the very back of an expansive space, visitors must first walk past a portion of a Greyhound bus, tributes to Minnesota governors, stage productions by actors impersonating characters from Minnesota’s past, and even the costume worn by pop-culture icon Prince in the movie “Purple Rain.” If you are a determined visitor wanting to ingest all 150 chosen topics, you will eventually find the panel and related artifacts representing the U.S.-Dakota War. However, you then must walk around the panel to actually find the text detailing why this event was nominated and how it fit into Minnesota’s 150-year history. Clearly, time had eroded the memory of this war in the minds of most Minnesotans, effectively pushing the knowledge of this war to the back of not only the exhibit room, but also the collective memory of the public.

The inclusion of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 in this exhibit certainly implies its importance as one of 150 specifically chosen historical events representing the development of

⁷ Quote from Kristin Berg’s nomination of the U.S.-Dakota War for the MN150 project. This quote can be found in the MN150 exhibit and Minnesota Historical Society, *U.S.-Dakota War*, http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=U.S.-Dakota_War (accessed 2008).

the state of Minnesota. However, the placement of the exhibit in the back of a large room, barely inviting visitors to look closer at the details of this particular event, suggests this story might not be on par with other stories told in the room. Unfortunately, the exhibit itself and its forgettable location in the room metaphorically represent how the majority of Minnesotans think about this specific event. A recent publication summarized, “For something characterized as a ‘cataclysmic event,’ the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 is not widely known today even in Minnesota, let alone outside it.”⁸ While the state abounds in place-names with Dakota origins and the majority of state monuments⁹ are dedicated to the memory of this war, most Minnesotans, and Americans in general, have no idea that this war took place, much less that it was one of the bloodiest Indian wars in United States history and resulted in the largest mass execution in this country.

A closer look at the MN150 exhibit does very little to expand upon a reader’s knowledge. In addition to the text from the nomination, a short paragraph very simply explains that the Dakota people in 1862 were living on a small reservation in southwestern Minnesota when, disillusioned by late annuity payments and little sympathy from the Indian Agent or fur traders in the face of starvation, the Dakota people “attacked the Lower Sioux Agency and war broke out.”¹⁰ Two accompanying artifacts on the panel feature the telegraph from Henry Sibley, the man who led the military campaign against the Dakota, to President Abraham Lincoln informing him that the execution order had been carried out and a photo of Dakota tipis in the internment camp outside Fort Snelling. But these images and their captions do little to treat the six weeks of warfare that would follow the initial attack, the surrender and military trials of nearly four

⁸ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 16.

⁹ Of the thirty state monuments listed with the Minnesota Office of Revisor Statutes, seventeen are dedicated to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Source: Office of Revisor Statutes, State of Minnesota, *138.585 2010 State Monuments*, 2010, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=138.585> (accessed 2010).

¹⁰ Minnesota Historical Society, "MN150" Exhibit (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota History Center, Installed October 2007).

hundred Dakota, the hanging of thirty-eight Dakota men, the military campaigns of 1863 and 1864 designed to capture all Dakota who fled the state for Dakota Territory or Canada, or the resulting commemorations that would prevail in Minnesota for the next century or more.

Two additional objects associated with this panel are modern pieces of art, one a bandana with the names of the thirty-eight men executed and the other a drawing simply titled “38 Ropes.” These art pieces, while moving and certainly commemorative of the hangings that took place in December 1862, again provide little facts to expand visitors’ knowledge of the war. Those seeking more information were directed to the “MN150 Wiki” website set up by the Minnesota Historical Society. Here, the detailed text labels this event “Minnesota’s Darkest Hour,” and while the details of the war are again brief, it does include statistics regarding the military trials and execution of the thirty-eight men as well as an attempt to highlight the Dakota perspective of this war. The website also discusses the long-running powwows held in Mankato, Minnesota, since the 1970s, with the express purpose of building reconciliation between the Dakota and whites in the area.¹¹ However, the website does not fully explain to readers why this would be a dark period in Minnesota history or how it has been remembered (or forgotten) by Minnesotans since.

The nearly overlooked nature of this particular panel in the MN150 exhibit reflects a pattern for discussing this war in recent decades officially within the state of Minnesota. This is dramatically different from the monument dedication ceremonies or community anniversary celebrations that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1902, journalist R.T. Holmcombe declared,

The violent outbreak and rebellion of the Sioux Indians of Minnesota, in the fall of 1862, constituted in many respects the most formidable and important Indian war in American

¹¹ Minnesota Historical Society, *U.S.-Dakota War*, http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=U.S.-Dakota_War (accessed 2008).

history. More Indians were engaged, more whites were killed, and more property was destroyed than in any other conflict or series of conflicts with the savages since the first settlement of this country.¹²

He went on to compare this war with King Philip's War, the pan-Indian movement led by Tecumseh, and the Creek and Seminole Wars in the southeast and firmly believes the Minnesota war surpassed them all. But, as journalist Tim Krohn states, "The events remain mostly a footnote in history, with many people living here [Minnesota] fully unaware of events."¹³ Why does this war remain so invisible, not just on a national level, but also at the state and regional level as well?

Historian David Lowenthal writes, "Like memories retrieved by analysis... public history is a record of present beliefs and wishes, not a replica of the past."¹⁴ Unlike the many works that have thoroughly examined the causes and outcomes of this War, this dissertation is concerned with the commemorative history of this War. This is also not a history of the Dakota people, or a history of the impact of American western expansion. This is a chronicle of the memory of a war that has persisted for 150 years, but has changed to accommodate cultural or political changes. The central question for this dissertation surrounds the collective memory of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 up through the present day, why it has now pushed to the background of public Minnesota thought, and what this means for continued relations between the state of Minnesota and its indigenous inhabitants. Furthermore, even if the majority of Minnesotans has largely forgotten this war, its causes and outcome remain hotly contested by those (both native and non-native) who do actively remember it. How can something so invisible remain so volatile?

¹² R. T. Holcombe, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive of the Monuments and Tablets erected by the Minnesota Valley Historical Society in Renville and Redwood Counties, Minnesota.* (Morton, MN: Minnesota Valley Historical Society, 1902): 5.

¹³ Tim Krohn, "Pardon push for Dakota named Chaska revives 1862 conflict," *The Free Press*, December 18, 2010.

¹⁴ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996): 149.

Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage writes, “Within collective memories a dialectic exists between the willfully recalled and deliberately forgotten.”¹⁵ As we shall see in the upcoming chapters, for the first several decades after the War, white Minnesotans were strongly encouraged to remember the war and to share those memories with each other by publishing captivity narratives, participating in anniversary celebrations, visiting the numerous monuments and markers erected on the landscapes of this war, and even learning about the war in school history books. However, as the 150th anniversary of the war approaches, few residents of the state can claim any knowledge of these events. Has this war been deliberately forgotten? If so, why? A recent scholar reiterated that the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 remains “the most important event in the history of the state of Minnesota and one of the signal moments in the history of the Dakota people.”¹⁶ While scholars and historians may still deem this war exceedingly important, most Minnesotans have allowed the events of 1862 to drift into the background of collective public memory. I argue that this shift in the importance of the war can be tied to tepid attempts at reconciliation between the state and the Dakota in recent decades.

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Equally important for this dissertation is how the memory of this war can be “owned” by particular groups and how this ownership lends power to the formation of the public memories associated with the event. This leads to a necessary look at the historiography surrounding this concept of “public memory.” David Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* is a study about how Americans remembered the Civil War in the first fifty years of its aftermath. He explores memory in commemoration, landscape, and other means as the United

¹⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005): 5.

¹⁶ June Numias, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997): 4.

States and its citizens sought to explain this period. The initial task for Americans was to find meaning in the war and often private, individual memories clashed with politics promoting collective memory. Before landscapes were appropriated for patriotic use, they were locations for memorials and a rising impression that the war really had nothing to do with slavery. This type of use gained support in newspapers and other written works and soldiers' memories were celebrated at numerous reunions and through the erection of monuments across the multiple battlefields. Blight states that many Americans purposefully chose to remember or forget certain aspects of the Civil War. African Americans and the ways slavery contributed to the story of the war were ultimately written out of the public memory. The power of memory rested securely in the hands of whites who favored reunification of the nation and glorification of fallen, invented heroes rather than addressing the problems that led to war in the first place. Blight's overall work illustrates how landscapes can be constructed as memories refashioned along cultural and political agendas.¹⁷ In Minnesota, the public memories of the U.S.-Dakota War also rested in the hands of whites while the Dakota kept their own memories to themselves and were certainly not encouraged to make them public. Therefore, for the first century following the war, public monuments and anniversary celebrations significantly favored the white settlers, those iconic homesteaders who were merely following the American vision of progress and expansion, as innocent victims of Indian aggression.

Edward Linenthal's *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* specifically links military landscape to commemoration. He studies five battlefields from five different wars in the United States: the Lexington Green and Concord's North Bridge, the Alamo, Gettysburg, the Little Big Horn, and Pearl Harbor. He uses terminology that calls the battlefield a part of the

¹⁷ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

“patriotic landscape” and “sacred,” invoking the idea that the public memory for landscapes of war has religious and political connotations. In addition to exploring the interpretive history of these five battlefields, Linenthal identifies three themes of veneration, defilement, and redefinition. Veneration involves the actual construction of a patriotic landscape including its preservation, erection of monuments that enforce the sacredness of the site, and the rhetoric used to achieve a particular interpretation at the battlefield. Defilement is the need to protect not only the battlefield but also the memory of those who died there from contamination. These battlefields are preserving the memory of men as much as the space and the events that occurred there. The preservation of memory at these battlefields has as much to do with present-day community needs as they do with the past. Finally, redefinition is the process for understanding the symbols located at the various sites and therefore the sensitivity necessary when interpreting the site for visitors and using the battlefields as locations for celebration as well as preservation. Linenthal adroitly illustrates how each site is in a continuous battle over ownership of its memory. This conflict involves historians, local populations, the national government, and numerous other stakeholders who make a claim for a particular sacred environment.¹⁸

The idea that the landscape is sacred and contested at the same time helps to understand resistance to reinterpretation by all sides involved in the historical memory of an event. In the case of the U.S.-Dakota War, even when sympathy shifted towards the Dakota people as victims of United States expansion, the monuments and markers that continued to dot Minnesota’s landscape still advanced the story of the settlers as primarily innocent victims. Furthermore, the continued use of words like “massacre,” “uprising,” or even “conflict,” fail to acknowledge the full-scale war declared by Little Crow and his followers and their ultimate goal of regaining their

¹⁸ Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 216.

land and autonomous lifestyle. In addition, Linenthal's explanation of the religious connotations for battlefield landscapes reminds historians to approach those areas associated with the U.S.-Dakota War with caution. If the landscape is sacred, then the memorials, celebrations, and preservation of these sites become almost religious rituals and are not openly amenable to new interpretations. The sacred nature associated with the battlefields and monuments hinders those attempting to broaden the historical facts surrounding the events of war as well as the current relations between indigenous and white residents of Minnesota.

James Loewen also examines the historical landscape of the United States, but expands beyond the traditional battlefield. Loewen describes a variety of landscapes including monuments in town squares; national, state, and local historic sites; and simple markers found along interstate and local highways. Like Linenthal, Loewen feels that the historical landscape is perceived as sacred, and that therefore altering that landscape has significant consequences. He identifies sites that continue to promote cultural imperialism, eurocentrism, and historical myth. He further finds that women are typically left out of the landscape and minority groups are marginalized or villainized when they are found. His discussion of the use for monuments is particularly interesting. He declares, "Monuments convey both less and more than historical markers. They tell less history because they usually have fewer words. In addition, their words are usually chosen to inspire rather than inform."¹⁹ In contrast, a historical marker, even with a one-sided interpretation, generally gives basic facts and leaves the rest for the viewer to decide. Loewen would like to see a broader dialogue between historians and the public that could promote better historical accuracy and memory of events. He believes this would change the landscape from one of white supremacy to one that embraces reconciliation and dispels myths. A tone of "reconciliation" has dominated efforts in the last two decades in Minnesota to remember

¹⁹ James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: Touchstone, 1999): 43.

this war treating both white settlers and the Dakota people as mutual victims in an unfortunate situation. However, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, “reconciliation” does not truly address the problems that caused the war and continued conflict regarding how the U.S.-Dakota War should be remembered on the local, state, and national levels.

In his 1998 work, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of Memory*, David Lowenthal makes distinctions between heritage and history. Lowenthal writes, “[H]eritage is not history, even when it mimics history. It uses historical traces and tells historical tales, but these tales and traces are stitched into fables that are open neither to critical analysis nor to comparative scrutiny.” Heritage is a faith in past events, something that cannot be altered because it validates a historical ideal in the present. Heritage is the present’s memory of the past; it does not need to be rooted in fact, but it is the means by which a group can make the past understandable. History, on the other hand, requires proof and demands that we (both the public and the professionals) question past events. History not only uncovers the facts surrounding an event, but it also explores the consequences of that event. These differences between heritage and history can be evidenced in the memory activities found in the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War and the cultural power achieved by the dominant group charged with preserving the heritage and memory of the war. Lowenthal writes, “Conflict is thus endemic to heritage. Victors and victims proclaim disparate and divisive versions of common pasts.”²⁰ Conflicts, especially violent ones of the nature of the U.S.-Dakota War, breed distinct and separate versions. This subsequently causes each side to cling more heavily to its heritage, both imagined and based in historic facts, and efforts to alter the master narrative can be met with fierce opposition.

²⁰ Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*, pp. 121, 234.

Michael Kammen, in *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in America*, studies the evolution of memory as it is invoked through nostalgia, commemoration, heritage, patriotism, nationalism, and other similar terms. Kammen outlines the history of memory in the United States as it changed over the course of four distinct eras. Prior to 1870, collective memory and tradition had few uses. Instead leaders could be divided among those who wanted to glorify America's revolutionary origins and those who wanted to look ahead to the future and the possibilities that would entail. The period from 1870-1915 is really when the nation became obsessed with tradition and memory, largely as a result of the Civil War and the deep emotional impact both war and reconstruction had on the nation. Many wished to forget the war and the circumstances that led up to conflict and instead remembered a more nostalgic image of the U.S. In Minnesota, this period also dedicated the bulk of monuments commemorating the victims and battlefields of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. During the period 1915-1945, as a result of two World Wars the federal government became more actively involved in promoting a collective memory of the history of the United States, however this nationalized history also marginalized immigrant and other minority groups. American memories took on themes that celebrated the nation as a whole rather than ethnically based communities. For example, the entire nation "remembered" a shared heritage of landing at Plymouth Rock or fighting the Revolutionary War regardless of an individual's proximity to these events in history. Minnesota communities responded during this period by remembering the U.S.-Dakota War at significant anniversaries, such as 40-year, 50-year, or 75-year milestones; however, there were also several celebrations that coincided with important national patriotic moments as well, such as the ends of World War I and World War II. The War anniversaries at this time also celebrated the

persistence of pioneers, another theme that resonated throughout the country, replacing the previous focus on white victims of the War.

The final part of Kammen's monumental work depicts the period following World War II. In response to social change occurring at a rapid pace across the nation, Americans collectively recalled a more nostalgic past that was seemingly without conflict, change, or upheaval. Again, although an individual may recall events differently, a group can dominate the historical discourse and shape the manner in which history is preserved and presented. In the case of the United States, preserving a national memory filled with historical myth rather than fact became the means to explain, or forget, troubling events of the present. Using language similar to David Lowenthal, Kammen argues that Americans sought to escape present problems by vacationing in the past.²¹ This is the period when the memory of the U.S.-Dakota War began to fade in the public minds of most Minnesotans. While the centennial year was marked in conjunction with national commemorative ceremonies for the anniversary of the Civil War, local community memorial celebrations for the U.S.-Dakota War appeared with less frequency and few monuments or markers were erected in the decades following World War II.

John Bodnar explains public memory as a confluence of official and vernacular interpretations of a particular subject. This combination of cultural leaders, authority figures, and individual local groups helps to define the memory of an event and the manner in which that memory is promoted. However, public memory is also symptomatic of political power and social structure and this certainly can be found in the examples of memory dealing with the U.S.-Dakota War. He states, "Public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire

²¹ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformations of Tradition in America* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991).

existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present.”²² In the case of this war and the peoples affected in Minnesota, the government, media, and white citizenry appropriated the right to remember themselves as victims of a brutal, unprovoked attack by the Dakota. The Dakota, many of whom did not choose to join Little Crow’s army, were collectively blamed, put on trial, and exiled from the state. White Minnesotans, following the tradition of American westward settlement, could not think of their own conquest of the land as unjust. To solidify this belief, and to celebrate those patriotic settlers who gave their lives, they began erecting monuments to the fallen and marking the anniversary of their ultimate victory over the Dakota nation. The political power and societal customs of the 19th and early 20th centuries reinforced the ability for white settlers to remember the war in this fashion. The Dakota people were powerless to erect their own monuments to fallen heroes; they were even powerless to recover the bodies of the thirty-eight men hanged as criminals in December 1862, which were instead used for medical study. The power which dictated the means for remembering the war and who could publicly contribute to the collective memory has shaped the nature of relations between the state of Minnesota and the Dakota people ever since.

David Glassberg’s *Sense of History* connects the meaning of public memory with a group’s preservation of a specific place. He writes, “When we recall places, we recall emotions and activities and not merely the physical setting. The memory of a place becomes a language through which we recall our past social networks and emotions.” Public groups mark an important place with monuments or by hosting regular community activities. These acts not only preserve the memory of an event but also invisibly reinforce community values and its overall sense of history. However, these places and the physical marks of historical memory that are

²² John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992): 14.

placed there are also subject to change. As time passes and direct connections to the past event are weakened, “public historical representations...are often kept deliberately ambiguous so as to satisfy competing factors.”²³ From the 1860s to the 1960s, white Minnesotans exhibited a direct memory connection to the War by having regular memorial activities, dotting the landscape with monuments, and promoting tourism to sites associated with the War. However, after that first century, when all direct connections to individual memories of the War were gone and white Minnesotans faced sharing their memories of severe loss with the Dakota, there is not only a significant drop in the number of commemorations but also a decided lack of interest in learning about the War.

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Today, some of the primary means for remembering the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 are the numerous historical and popular works that have been published, particularly those published in recent decades. Historians have contributed to the memory of the U.S.-Dakota War by researching and publishing about this war in three distinct categories. The first category broadly identifies the 1862 Dakota War within the greater context of the Plains Indian Wars, before, during, and after the Civil War. However, these examples rarely tie all the Indian Wars of the time period together; instead the works offer a compilation of several individual battles, insurrections, or wars that took place between a particular Native American nation and the United States Government. Thom Hatch’s book, *The Blue, the Gray, & the Red*, is an example of this type of work with individual chapters depicting the Bear River Massacre, the Dakota War, and the Sand Creek Massacre, among others. Hatch places all these conflicts into the arena of the Civil War, but he does not elaborate beyond what has already been written in other secondary

²³ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001): 115, 13.

historical works. Hatch also reasons that because the United States was occupied in a war between north and south, the federal government had little patience, sympathy, or resources to handle complaints from Native American groups. He therefore concludes, “Had the Civil War not occurred, perhaps relations between whites and Indians might not have been quite as violent.”²⁴ Hatch’s connection of the Dakota War to the Civil War is important as other sources have also indicated that the Dakota felt the timing to attack the white settlements was opportune as most men of fighting age in Minnesota were occupied as soldiers out of state.²⁵ What is also interesting about Hatch’s description of the Dakota War is that he includes the aftermath of the war as the Dakota were chased into Dakota Territory and Canada and pursued relentlessly for almost a year.

In addition to commonly using the terminology of “uprising” and “massacre” when referring to this war, many published works also share the desire to position this piece of Minnesota history as one of the largest conflicts between Euro-Americans and native Americans in U.S. history, both during its colonial and national period. In January 1903, the *Buffalo Lake News* declared, “In the loss of life and sacrifice of property no Indian conflict in the country has equaled this massacre. The burning, pillaging, murdering and torturing that went on are awful to contemplate.”²⁶ In a 1934 radio address, host Maud Colgrove Schilpin stated, “In all American history even from the date of the first arrival of whites upon the western hemisphere, there is no

²⁴ Thom Hatch, *The Blue, the Gray, & the Red: Indian Campaigns of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003): 228.

²⁵ John G. P. Hicks, *An Account of the Sioux Indian Massacre in Minnesota, 1862 and 1863: as related by John G. P. Hicks, one of the survivors, St. Johnsbury, Vermont*, (St. Johnsbury, VT:1924). Minnesota Historical Society Collections. Also refer to Little Crow’s speech as recorded in Anderson and Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eye*, p. 41.

²⁶ “Forty Years Ago: From the Buffalo Lake News,” in *Captured by the Indians* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977). Part of *The Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities* Vol. 106.

parallel to this fiendish and bloody massacre of pioneer settlers in Minnesota.”²⁷ In 1976, Civil War historian Gerald S. Henig explained, “In terms of lives lost, property destroyed, and tragic consequences for both Indians and whites, the Sioux (or Dakota) Uprising in Minnesota in the summer of 1862 has few, if any, parallels in American history.”²⁸

Historians Robert Utley and Wilcomb Washburn agree with these sentiments and call this “one of the most savage and bloody Indian uprisings in history.” This statement holds some weight as it is placed in an entire book dedicated to the subject of “Indian wars,” and they go on to describe “a nightmare of fire and death” which would claim close to four hundred lives on the first day of war.²⁹ While the loss of life associated with this war is high, Utley interestingly does not use the same descriptive language when describing other Indian wars in North America. In 1644, the Powhatan people killed nearly four hundred settlers in Virginia, but Utley merely states, “The attack, though costly, was not devastating.”³⁰ Other wars of the colonial period were clearly more “savage and bloody” than the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Metacom’s War in 1670s Massachusetts resulted in the deaths of six hundred English and possibly three thousand Native Americans.³¹ Utley and Washburn estimate that Pontiac’s Rebellion in 1763 “claimed as many as two thousand English.”³²

Despite giving other conflicts with Native Americans the label of “war” (such as Black Hawk’s War and the Yakima War, both which resulted in fewer white settlers killed than the War in Minnesota), Utley and Washburn persistently refer to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 as

²⁷ Maud Colgrove Schilpin, *A Series of Radio Talks*, Transcript (St. Cloud, MN: Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution, 1934).

²⁸ Gerald S. Henig, “A Neglected Cause of the Sioux Uprising,” *Minnesota History: Sioux Uprising Issue* (Fall 1976): 107.

²⁹ Robert M. Utley and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *Indian Wars*, First Mariner Books edition (Boston, MA: A Mariner Book, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002): 203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

³² *Ibid.*, 99.

“the Santee Outbreak.” Furthermore, this “outbreak” was only “the beginning of a Sioux war that kept the plains in turmoil for eight years.”³³ Dakota War historian Kenneth Carley also refers to the U.S.-Dakota War as one component of the larger wars between the United States and the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota inhabitants of the Great Plains. Carley writes

In a broader sense, however, the Sioux War went on for many years. As civilization moved westward, other Sioux tribes rose against the white man. Little Crow and the Minnesota Uprising of 1862 were still fresh in the nation’s memory when it became aware of such Indian leaders as Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse. Bloody battles at Fort Phil Kearny, the Little Bighorn, and, in 1890, Wounded Knee, brought to an end at last the generation of Indian warfare which had begun in Acton in August, 1862.³⁴

His book, now in its third publication, generally refers to the events in Minnesota as the “Sioux Uprising,” although his 2001 edition is renamed “The Dakota War of 1862” from the original “The Sioux Uprising of 1862.” For Carley (and Utley and Washburn), despite the numbers of individuals killed and the intent by Little Crow to go to war against the United States, the war in Minnesota was just one piece of the larger wars upon the Great Plains, and perhaps this is why the term “uprising” persists.

The second category of historiography covering the U.S.-Dakota War are the larger works detailing the cultural, political, and social history of the Dakota. Two of the most seminal works include Gary Clayton Anderson’s *Kinsmen of Another Kind* and Roy Meyer’s *History of the Santee Sioux*. Both of these works are highly sympathetic to the deteriorating situation the Dakota faced beginning with their early contact with white civilization in the 17th Century. Although initially very little changed for the Dakota, the introduction of trade goods such as cloth, metal goods, and guns, altered Dakota culture and made the Dakota increasingly dependent upon the fur traders. By the time the United States controlled Minnesota in the early nineteenth century, the Dakota were relying heavily on the fur traders for basic food resources as

³³ Ibid., 204.

³⁴ Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, p. 75.

well. Anderson summarizes, “We should also remember that, though early whites willingly assimilated aspects of the Dakota world view, the tendency to do so decreased as the potential for economic exploitation and the need to manipulate Sioux institutions declined.” Roy Meyer further points out that white men had irrevocably altered the history of the Dakota as even most records concerning the culture and history of the Dakota have been written by white men. The Dakota had not recorded their own history for white civilization to understand; rather white civilization recorded Dakota history for future generations to learn from.

One of the most prominent works of this type for many years was Samuel Pond’s *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as they were in 1834*.³⁵ As a missionary among the Dakota people for many years, Pond closely observed Dakota culture and even helped to create a written alphabet for the Dakota language. While this work is incredibly valuable for understanding Dakota culture, it is also an example of Native American ethno-history written from the perspective of a white observer. Another example is Guy Gibbon’s *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations*. An anthropologist with the University of Minnesota, his work provides an overview of Dakota and Lakota history from the colonial period through the twentieth century. He discusses the numerous treaties, the political organization of Dakota and Lakota villages, population estimates, the differences between Dakota and Lakota, and the impact of reorganization for these groups following the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. He describes the “Sioux Wars” as lasting from 1850-1889 and consisting of an “ongoing pattern of raids and counter-raids on the northern Plains.”³⁶ While the information in Gibbon’s book is useful and presents Dakota and Lakota history from a clear chronological perspective, it is, like Pond, a history of Native Americans written by a white scholar. According to Dakota activist and

³⁵ Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, p. 280; and Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

³⁶ Guy Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 105.

historian, Waziyatawin, “Gibbon’s assertions are extremely problematic because they run contrary to every shred of Indigenous evidence and some of his assertions are simply fabrications.”³⁷ In order to counteract this, histories and oral traditions about the Dakota by Dakota authors need to be made more available to the public.

For many years, Dakota authors had few publications to add to this general historiography of Dakota culture. Prominent Dakota figures, such as physician Charles Eastman, published small literary works. Eastman’s *Indian Boyhood*, detailing his early years growing up on a reservation in Canada, experienced moderate popularity but was referenced more for its cultural insights into Dakota life and less for its few details related to the war.³⁸ Eastman’s *The Soul of an Indian* described the spiritual and religious traditions of the Dakota both in the past, but also for his current audience in the early Twentieth Century. While frequently referring to himself and other Dakota as “Christians,” Eastman made it clear that the spiritual traditions of the Dakota, typically passed down orally, remained an integral part of Dakota culture and identity.³⁹ Eastman wrote many books describing Dakota culture and history for his mostly white audience. Although he appeared on the surface to be an excellent example of assimilation, Eastman spent his professional life working as a doctor on impoverished reservations and, rather than reject his heritage, he used his connections with white Americans to educate others about the Dakota.

The third category for this historiography includes those works devoted solely to the six-week war. Included in this grouping are a number of first-person narrative accounts published in

³⁷ Waziyatawin, Ph.D., *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008): 21.

³⁸ Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Boyhood* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971). Eastman was only 4 years old at the time of the war and fled to safety in Canada with his grandmother. Although he was later reunited with his father, his grandmother primarily raised him.

³⁹ Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911).

the years following the war. Sarah Wakefield, the wife of the physician for the Lower Sioux Agency, was taken captive along with her children and not released until the end of the war. Because a prominent Dakota leader protected her, Wakefield's captivity narrative was highly sympathetic to the cause of the Dakota and rationalized that if her community were facing starvation unjustly, she would approve a similar recourse.⁴⁰ In 1863, Mankato attorney Isaac V. D. Heard published his own account of the war including the trials that took place in its aftermath. Heard served as a soldier to help quell the Dakota attacks and also served as the recorder during the military trials of the accused Dakota men. Based on these experiences, he "endeavored to form a connected and reliable history." His detailed account outlined the individuals familiar to readers based on newspaper accounts, provided reasons that would cause the Dakota to go to war including their "predisposition to hostility," and the general sequence for the six-weeks of battles.

Heard's account also spent a great deal of time on the trials which took place primarily in October and November 1862 and resulted in the conviction of 303 Dakota men for their participation in the war. The final few chapters discuss the escape of Little Crow and his eventual death in August 1863, the military campaigns as far west as the Missouri River in Dakota Territory to locate those Dakota who fled rather than surrender, and the overall costs of the war in money, property, and psychological well-being. Although firmly on the side of the white settlers and the U.S. government in regards to who the "victims" of this war were, Heard also faulted the ways the Dakota were treated in the first place and provided solutions so that such tragedy could be avoided in the future. Heard pondered the future of relations with Native Americans in Minnesota and warned that conflict with the "Chippewa" may be next, unless

⁴⁰ Sarah F. Wakefield, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity*, 2nd Edition (Shakopee, MN: Argus Book and job printing office, 1864).

proper precautions were made. He advised that “adequate force of security” must be placed on every reservation, but also that the government should deal fairly with the Indians in all further agreements. He stated, “Justice and humanity require that, as we have deprived the Indian of his occupation of hunting and the indulgence of the wild habits of centuries, we should make a *genuine attempt* to have him adapt himself to altered condition.” He felt the state government should exert greater influence when dealing with Indians, as the federal government was incapable of properly overseeing that the treaties were maintained.⁴¹

Among academic historians, Gary Clayton Anderson has contributed two books devoted to retelling the war. Published in the mid-1980s, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* and, with co-editor Alan R. Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, both offer insight primarily from Dakota perspectives, including that the Dakota felt great injustices had been committed against them and it was time to retaliate. The Dakota viewpoints were typically recorded in the first 30-40 years following the war when a period of “strong prejudice against people of color openly existed in America.” It should be surmised that these first-person accounts, while certainly representative of the Dakota perspective, were recorded for a white audience and fed into the general public’s sympathy for the white settlers. Even those accounts by Dakota who fought in the battles stress the attempts by other Dakota to end the war or to better understand the desperate situation of the Dakota that would cause them to declare war.⁴²

Duane Schultz’ *Over The Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862*, is a very detailed and even graphic depiction of the circumstances involved in this war. Basically a narrative account of the war that includes the reasons for starting war and the aftermath of the

⁴¹ Isaac V.D. Heard, *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1863): v, 340-341.

⁴² Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 4-8, 43.

hangings, prison, and exile, Schultz draws heavily from Anderson and Woolworth's *Through Dakota Eyes* as well as from documented first-person accounts offered by white settlers.

However, Schultz also poignantly places the U.S.-Dakota War in a larger, more national context.

He writes,

The uprising had ramifications that went far beyond the killing ground. It marked the outbreak of a series of wars between whites and Indians over the Great Plains that did not end until 1890, almost thirty years later, at a place called Wounded Knee in South Dakota. These conflicts, taken together, coalesced into the longest war United States troops would ever fight.⁴³

Several other books have been written in the last decade detailing the story of the Dakota War; however, most of these books also rely heavily on Gary Clayton Anderson, Alan R. Woolworth, and Roy W. Meyer, and dwell more on the sensationalism of a “massacre” and less upon the reasons surrounding the war. In addition, all of these books illustrated the difficulty in ascribing a level of severity. Kenneth Carley, Jerry Keenan and Duane Schultz call the war an “uprising,” while Michael Clodfelter, Gary Clayton Anderson, and Alan R. Woolworth identify the events as a full-scale war.⁴⁴

While the details of the war have been well documented in numerous historical accounts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, few authors have considered what happened to the Dakota after the war. Corinne L. Monjeau-Marz's 2006 publication, *The Dakota Indian Internment at Fort Snelling, 1862-1864*, brings the story of 1700 Dakota women, children, and elderly safeguarded in an internment camp at Fort Snelling to light. Describing an area enclosed by a high wooden wall and armed guards, these Dakota were in such close conditions that when

⁴³ Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992): 5.

⁴⁴ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986); Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*; Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*; Michael Clodfelter, *The Dakota War: The United States Army Versus the Sioux, 1862-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988); Carley, *The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862*; and Jerry Keenan, *The Great Sioux Uprising: Rebellion on the Plains August-September 1862* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003).

an epidemic of measles hit the fort, several hundred died. Monjeau-Marz states, “It was here that for the first time in their history, Dakota were completely monitored, regulated, and controlled. This was the beginning of an exile, not just from the beautiful lands of Minnesota, but from a way of life, the seemingly free life of the hunt and the chase.”⁴⁵ The author states that the government placed these Dakota in confinement in order to protect them from the anger of white Minnesotans, yet severe abuses occurred within this protection. Soldiers at the fort raped women and those who resisted were often killed. As a result of disease, abuse, and exposure to harsh winter conditions, by May 1863 when it was time to be depart for a new reservation in Dakota Territory, roughly 1,300 Dakota remained.

More recently, Dakota authors have found a forum for telling their story of the war through the medium of commemoration. In particular, commemorative marches to remember the Dakota prisoners marched out of state following the trials have garnered significant interest in local newspapers. Historian Waziyatawin Angela Wilson published a collection of essays titled *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors*, all written by participants from the marches in 2002 and 2004. Feeling that Minnesotans preferred to ignore the ways the Dakota suffered in the aftermath of the war, the first march was organized in 2002 as a way to protest against the master narrative that traditionally downplayed the mistreatment of the Dakota by the government. Wilson explains, “This essay, and indeed this collection, is about beginning the process of creating a shared memory[.]”⁴⁶ The contribution of works written by and from the perspective of Dakota authors brings diverse measures for studying the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, and provides additional tools for understanding the impact of its memory.

⁴⁵ Corinne L. Monjeau-Marz, *The Dakota Indian Internment at Fort Snelling, 1862-1864*, Revised (St. Paul, MN: Prairie Smoke Press, 2006): 16.

⁴⁶ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, ed., *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2006).

This story of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 is integral to the larger history of the American frontier, but it is important to ground this frontier history into the latter half of the nineteenth century and not make too many comparisons to early contact periods between white settlers and indigenous peoples. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, a historian and Sioux tribal member, explains,

The native occupants who had lived on the continent for thousands of years were curiosities to the newcomers and very soon were considered enemies. However, it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the indigenous populations and their tribal ways were considered real impediments to the progress of the ideals of the newcomers, which were based on an unrelenting individualistic paradigm.⁴⁷

Richard White's seventeenth century vision of a middle ground of mutually accepted conditions to further the economic betterment of both whites and indigenous peoples living in the American west differs dramatically from the frontier relationships between the United States and native Americans during and after the Civil War.⁴⁸

In 1860s Minnesota, the frontier, while not exactly tame, was certainly perceived by white settlers as peacefully secure. The four bands of Dakota had agreed by treaty to live on or near the established reservation, not because they were blindsided by American determination to eradicate their culture, but because they believed this was the most prudent means to preserve what culture and heritage they still retained. Still, from the perspective of the United States, efforts at full-scale acculturation appeared attainable in the case of the Dakota peoples. White settlers poured into the area and routinely commented at the friendly nature of their Indian neighbors. The circumstances which caused the Dakota to declare war on the United States could not be foreseen, even though many involved on both sides certainly recognized the tense atmosphere that enveloped the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies, whose people were facing not

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007): 2.

⁴⁸ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 50-59.

only starvation but also felt the indifference of the U.S. government when the treaty-promised annuity payments were significantly delayed. While many Dakota, Little Crow included, did not believe the war could end favorably, the mere act of going to war served as an amazingly strong statement against the treatment of indigenous peoples caught up in the acculturation program adhered to by the United States.⁴⁹

At the heart of this memory-story lies the details of the war and its aftermath, and for this I draw on the numerous academic works that provide insight to the sequence of events as well as the background circumstances that informed those events. While retelling the story of the war is important, the focus of this work is the memory of the war, rather than the details of the war itself. Therefore, I will slowly weave the story of the war throughout the dissertation by incorporating the next phase of the story into the beginning of each chapter. In this way, the war and its telling remains central to the story without overshadowing the more important study of the ways this war has been remembered in Minnesota. These story anecdotes will rely most heavily on the works of Gary Clayton Anderson, Alan Woolworth, and Kenneth Carley, not only because these are some of the better known monographs retelling the war, but also because they include the causes of the war and provide accounts from both sides of the battle.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 will focus on the way the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 has been labeled over the years and what those labels imply for race relations in Minnesota. Terms such as “massacre,” “uprising,” “conflict,” and “war,” all denote different perceptions about who was to blame and who were the victims. Even today, there is confusion about what to “officially” call the events in 1862. This chapter will also discuss the first efforts at publicly remembering the war through the erection of monuments to the memory of white

⁴⁹ Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, pp. 5-6.

victims. These early activities were exclusively for a white audience and there are no written or public records describing acts of remembrance by Dakota during this time.

Chapter 3 will focus on the publication of personal narratives by survivors of the war and also those who were taken captive by the Dakota such as the ones mentioned above by Sarah Wakefield and Isaac Heard. This chapter will also discuss a large artistic contribution to the memory of the war by Rochester, Minnesota, artist John Stevens, who painted four separate panoramas that described the scenes inspired by the story of two survivors of the attacks, Mrs. Lavina Eastlick and her son Merton. Mrs. Eastlick vividly recounted to Stevens the attacks in Murray County and how young Merton carried his infant brother to safety, walking over 60 miles. Anton Gág, an artist living in New Ulm, also contributed a popular panorama describing the War with the battles at New Ulm at the center of the story. The panorama, a popular form of entertainment in the 19th century that allowed audiences to “experience” a dramatic event, was shown throughout Minnesota in the late 1860s and 1870s.⁵⁰ This chapter will then discuss the use of anniversary celebrations throughout the regions affected by the War and how these memorial activities (for the period 1860s-1930s) not only brought communities together but also created a shared memory based on the white settlers’ experience during the War.

Chapter 4 will discuss the preservation of historic sites as well as the continued practice of dedicating commemorative monuments associated with this war. Following the national example for commemorating Civil War sites, Minnesotans actively memorialized this war in the same way by designating battlefields and establishing sites for tourism. A number of historical pageants performed in the early 20th century as well as the sale of souvenirs provided the public an additional forum for remembrance and celebration. The preservation of historic sites

⁵⁰ Bertha L. Heilbron, “Documentary Panorama: John Stevens and his Sioux war pictures,” *Minnesota History*, March 1949: 14-23.

specifically related to the conflict show evolving interpretations over time. Some of the first sites chosen in the late 19th century – Fort Ridgely and Birch Coulee – served as locations where whites had fought bravely to defend white settlers’ interests in Minnesota. After the centennial celebrations of 1962, historic sites, such as the Lower Sioux Agency, and other memorial activities or publications more frequently chose to interpret both sides of the conflict describing the culture of the Dakota, the business of fur traders, and the circumstances leading up to the August 18th attack on the agency.

Chapter 5 will center on the ways the Dakota have remembered the war through the years, both privately and more publicly in recent years. Rather than focusing on the reasons for going to war in the first place, most Dakota chose to remember the atrocities their people suffered at the close of war. In a 3-week period, almost 1,200 Dakota were put on trial through the justice system in Minnesota. Over 300 were condemned to death for crimes committed during the war, causing President Lincoln to intervene and review the trial reports in order to approve such a large number of executions. He ultimately agreed to the execution of thirty-eight Dakota men. Following this mass execution, the remainder of Dakota in the custody of the government, mostly women, children, and the elderly, were marched out of state and sent to new reservations in Dakota Territory. An annual powwow in Mankato began in the early 1970s to promote peace between whites and Dakota. Beginning in 2002, members of the Dakota organized a commemorative march and this has since become an annual event. Artistic pieces and songs have also been produced in attempts to heal the wounds of the Dakota people. In addition, some Dakota have published their own memory narratives allowing their voices to join those of white Minnesotans who had long disseminated the memory of these events. Heritage

preservation and increasing public awareness are among the tools used by the Dakota to remember their roles in the war.

Chapter 6 will focus on the more recent tone of reconciliation that has dominated the way official institutions, such as the Minnesota Historical Society and civic governments, choose to discuss this war. More importantly, this chapter will explore the concept of reconciliation for United States and indigenous peoples as well as discuss the idea of restorative justice, a concept that is actively promoted amongst many indigenous Native American scholars, including those within the Dakota community. In 1987, a “Year of Reconciliation” was sponsored by the state to further these aims, albeit with less success than the Mankato powwows. Some Dakota called the efforts at remembrance a “farce” while others felt that little had really been accomplished at repairing Dakota and white relations in the state.⁵¹ Conclusions drawn from this chapter will address the reasons behind reconciliation and the ability for white and Dakota people currently living in Minnesota to achieve that aim when faced with their memories of the war.

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 has produced significant public history sites and subsequent collective memory in Minnesota since its end, and while the majority of the public, both in Minnesota and at a national level, have little cause to remember this war, its memory is something that remains incredibly powerful for the regions and people it touched most deeply. The power of this memory is manifested in a variety ways, from debates about the interpretation at historic sites to demands for Minnesotans to acknowledge its role in the colonization of indigenous peoples of North America. Nearly 150 years since the war’s end, Minnesotans continue to deal with its aftermath with many Dakota remaining in exile while others struggle to build strong communities on a small percentage of their original lands. Despite tendencies to

⁵¹ Associated Press, "Indian Incident in 1862 Still Stirs deep Emotion," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1987.

push the facts of this war to the back of the public's memory, as in the case of the MN150 exhibit, this is a history of the past that very much informs the present.

CHAPTER 2

“A Destructive Storm:” August 18, 1862¹

After the all-night debate about the repercussions of war, a sizable number of Dakota voted to strike back against the United States government by attacking Lower Sioux Agency. While Little Crow became known as the primary leader, other village chiefs such as Traveling Hail, Big Eagle, and Little Shakopee also led the Dakota soldiers. Under this leadership, approximately 200-300 Dakota warriors advanced on the agency in the early morning hours of August 18, 1862. One of two government agencies on the reservation, the Lower Sioux Agency served the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands of Dakota. Little Crow’s soldiers largely came from these two bands. Living at the agency were the United States Indian agent Thomas Galbraith, several government workers, missionaries, and fur traders, for a total of more than 100 people. Little Crow’s attack would take the agency residents, including those residents who were Dakota, by surprise. Esther Wakeman, a Dakota woman living at the Agency where her husband worked as a clerk for the fur trader William Forbes, recalled, “Like a destructive storm, the war struck suddenly and spread rapidly. Everything was confusion. It was difficult to know who was friend and who was foe.” While some Dakota soldiers decidedly attacked the agency buildings, others joined Little Crow with more hesitation. Explaining his and his men’s reluctance to fully engage in war during this first attack, Chief Big Eagle declared, “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.” Despite the mixed feelings, the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency was a victory for the Dakota. Nearly two-dozen people were killed, including several traders and government

¹ The details of this section draw primarily from Jerry Keenan’s *The Great Sioux Uprising*, Gary Clayton Anderson’s *Through Dakota Eyes*, and Kenneth Carley’s *The Dakota War of 1862*.

workers. The remaining residents fled into the countryside. Among the traders killed was Andrew Myrick, who had refused to extend credit to the Dakota who were starving during the summer of 1862 while waiting for their annuity payments, and who then infamously declared, "Let them eat grass!" Myrick was left in the grass outside his store, mutilated and his mouth stuffed with grass.

Thirteen miles from Lower Sioux Agency, most of the survivors of this first attack found refuge at Fort Ridgely, the only military presence in southwestern Minnesota and consisting of little more than a cluster of buildings exposed to the open prairie. Upon hearing of the attack, a contingent of 46 soldiers under the command of Captain John S. Marsh set out for the Agency leaving less than thirty men to guard the fort and prepare for more refugees. Upon reaching the ferry landing at Redwood across from the Agency, Marsh and his men were ambushed and quickly overwhelmed by the larger force of Dakota soldiers. Twenty-four white soldiers were killed and Captain Marsh drowned trying to swim across the Minnesota River. The remaining soldiers retreated to Fort Ridgely, faced with the knowledge that the violence at the Lower Sioux Agency was not random, but a serious and coordinated effort. Word would soon spread to the Upper Sioux Agency and across the state that the Dakota nation had gone to war against the United States.



Figure 2.1. This map depicts the first two acts of war by the Dakota when they attacked the Lower Sioux Agency and later ambushed soldiers at Redwood Ferry. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

The Reflection of Memory in Words and Monuments

The declaration of “war” by Little Crow on the morning of August 18, 1862, explains the degree of seriousness the Dakota participants approached their attack on the Lower Sioux Agency. This was not a random raid or simple retaliation; the men and women who followed Little Crow understood this first battle would be one of many in their quest to retake their homelands and remove white settlers from the Minnesota River valley. As word spread about the

deaths in Acton and the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency, white Minnesotans reacted in stunned disbelief – unsure about what was happening and to what extent the bloodshed would continue. The white citizens of Minnesota looked at these first killings as unprovoked and used the precursory event at Acton as well as the surprise attack on the Agency to define and label the subsequent acts conducted in the name of war.

What to call this period of bloodshed has been seriously debated since the first reports of gunfire reached neighboring towns in the Minnesota River Valley. The variety of labels for the six-week war that followed the killings at Acton alternately use the words “outbreak,” “uprising,” “conflict,” and “war,” with the occasional use of “massacre” or “disturbance” to round out the descriptive language. These labels were certainly not limited to Minnesota, but had been employed by Americans since the beginning of the colonial period. These terms enabled Euro-Americans to justify the conquest of North America from its original inhabitants. Philip J. Deloria explains,

Almost from the beginning, white-Indian contact had been imagined and understood using two contradictory and gendered story lines. In one set of narratives, Indian women, linked to the land itself, gave themselves metaphorically to colonizing white men....Another set of narratives – and sometimes the two could be woven together – relied on masculinist imagery of violent conflict. Murder, massacre, torture, captivity, revenge, squabble, raid, campaign, and, most particularly, ‘surround’ and ‘last stand’ – such images and events underpinned white expressions of Indian difference, even in relation to the very real blendings together found in cross-cultural trade, diplomacy, alliance, conversion, and sex.²

This history of conflict between whites and natives in the United States, justified the severe punishment of the Dakota after the War because in the minds of white Minnesotans, “war” was not something that occurred between whites and natives. Furthermore, “war” would not typically result in the execution of members of the surrendering party. Finally, although some organized battles took place between the Dakota and either white settlers or soldiers, a significant number

² Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004): 20.

of white settler deaths occurred as individual settlements were attacked by Dakota who were not acting on Little Crow's orders. Although variations did exist, the traditional mindset that conflict with Native Americans was not a "war" prevailed. Over time, this series of events became predominantly labeled as "The Great Sioux Uprising" and resulted in titles for books, pamphlets, and numerous other popular media dedicated to preserving the memory of white Minnesotans who, while considering themselves to be the innocent victims and therefore placing full blame on the Dakota people, subsequently controlled the manner in which the war would be remembered.

Historian Elizabeth Cook-Lynn explains that many of the commonly accepted labels for this six-week period lessen the importance of such a war between indigenous peoples and the United States and ultimately remove the federal government from blame or aggression against the Dakota. She writes, "Indian wars can be called 'uprisings' or 'breakouts' or 'conflicts,' colonial historians tell us, utilizing not the language of warfare but the language of propaganda; thus, 'marauding, savage' Indians, unlike real opposing military armies, take captives who can be described in ways useful to the colonizer's story."³ Furthermore, using the term "war" brings this sequence of events beyond the initial six weeks of fighting between the Dakota and the United States in the Minnesota River Valley. The U.S. army would actively pursue the Dakota as military campaigns in 1863 and 1864 followed the retreating Little Crow and his people into Dakota Territory. In the midst of this pursuit, those Dakota who surrendered to authorities in Minnesota were either put on trial as war criminals or placed in inadequately supplied internment camps⁴ outside the walls of Fort Snelling in St. Paul. All Dakota who remained in Minnesota

³ Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars*, p. 100.

⁴ Other sources have also referred to the internment camp at Fort Snelling as a prison camp. However, as Dakota activist Waziyatawin points out, the Dakota held in these camps were not prisoners and were not being held for any convicted crime. She would prefer the use "concentration camp" because internment camp "completely denies and renders benign the violent and brutal processes of invasion, conquest, and ethnic cleansing that accompanied White 'settlement.'" (See Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like?*, p. 45.) Because significant debate remains about the intent of these camps, for the purposes of this paper, I will use "internment camp," implying that the Dakota

were eventually removed from the state to new reservations in Dakota Territory and the government issued a reward for any Dakota caught dead or alive within the boundaries of the state after the banishment. Using any term other than “war” diminishes the actions undertaken by Little Crow and his soldiers and the subsequent consequences imposed upon the losing side, in this case, the Dakota nation. However, as we shall see below, the term “war” has been little used in the historical discourse and considerable debate has surrounded this topic since the war ended.

Ascribing a “name” to this series of events may seem like a minor detail, and documenting the pattern of this naming in the context of understanding collective memory may seem even less important, but this issue continues to cause serious debate among historians of all levels even in the present day. In the course of my research on the topic of memory, I encountered numerous librarians, archivists, and historians who first wanted to make it clear to me that this should solely be named “The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862” and the use of “conflict” or “uprising” was not only outdated but also failed to accurately weight the seriousness of this time period in Minnesota. On the other hand, I also encountered professionals who adamantly refused to consider the word “war” in association with these six weeks. Even recent publications on the subject fail to use a common name. Curtis Dahlin, a local Minnesota historian who has published a number of pieces on this subject, most recently published *Dakota Uprising Victims: Gravestones & Stories* in 2007.⁵ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, in her 2009 publication *The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature*, vacillated between “war” and “conflict” quite frequently throughout her introductory chapter before settling on “Conflict” with a capital “C” for the remainder of the book.⁶ The simple task of

were both “interned” and “concentrated” at this camp, although they were not prisoners. None of the available terms justify the treatment of these particular Dakota, who had not actively participated in the War.

⁵ Curtis A. Dahlin, *Dakota Uprising Victims: Gravestones & Stories* (Edina, MN: Beaver’s Pond Press, Inc., 2007).

⁶ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*.

naming remains a serious issue of contention amongst historians and other keepers of this memory. For the most part, from this point on I will refer to this series of events as “War.” This shortens the more official denotation of “U.S.-Dakota War of 1862,” but it also, for the purpose of this dissertation distinguishes the War that took place in Minnesota from the national Civil War that was occurring at the same time.

Officially, the state and its historical agencies refrained from labeling the War until preparing for the 1987 Year of Reconciliation (which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6). At this time, the Minnesota Historical Society, the state’s primary historical agency, agreed to use the name “The U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862” as the best representative phrase. While this remains the label used officially at the Minnesota Historical Society, others feel “conflict” is not a strong enough term and the use of “The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862” can be found almost as readily. “Conflict” and “war” are not synonyms and should not be used interchangeably. In an interview with historian and Dakota activist Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, I asked what she would label this series of events. She replied that while change in attitudes of the 1980s led to the Year of Reconciliation and the official adoption of “The U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862,” she and others of her generation prefer the use of “war” because this is what Little Crow and his followers declared prior to attacking the Lower Sioux Agency. She further explained that some Dakota members have even started pushing for the use of “The Dakota-U.S. War of 1862,” in order to position the Dakota people first rather than the United States, since it was the Dakota who declared open war and first attacked the government at the Lower Sioux Agency.⁷ Michael Elliott, in his examination of the public history methods surrounding the mythology of General Custer, provides these options for understanding war between the United States and an indigenous group:

⁷ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, phone interview by Julie Humann Anderson, (May 5, 2009).

The Indian Wars of the nineteenth century have been understood as both racial conflicts between white and nonwhite peoples and cultural conflicts between groups who preferred radically different and incompatible manners of living. To think of these conflicts as political, on the other hand, emphasizes the decisions that were made on all sides regarding the negotiation of agreements and the strategic use of violence as both the United States and the tribes of the North American Plains sought to produce a secure future for their nations.⁸

The War in Minnesota was certainly one of racial and cultural conflict. However, few were willing to consider the decisions made on both sides that led to the declaration of war by Little Crow and that the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency was an act of war in retaliation for decades of wrongdoing incurred by the United States and its representatives.

The rhetoric for labeling the events of 1862 reflects the manner in which the War is remembered and who owns (or controls) the memory as victors. Since the white settlers rarely considered the often broken treaties or coercion tactics employed to get treaties signed, they felt justified in their settlement of the Minnesota River Valley and considered the attacks on the settlements unprovoked. Ultimately, these settlers were successful in retaining their land and securing it for future generations when the Dakota surrendered and were then banished from the state's borders. These shared feelings about rights to settle on the land and a sense of victory in the face of the six weeks of warfare led white Minnesotans to shape the story of the War as it reflected their shared memories. This resulted in continued misunderstanding about why the Dakota attacked in the first place and a collective justification that "civilization" had overcome a savage people. Since this War was destructive in terms of loss of life and property, local communities chose to celebrate their survival story on the frontier and their conquest of the land in the face of such violence. Therefore, shortly after the War ended, white Minnesotans referred to this War primarily as an uprising and identified themselves as victims of a massacre. These

⁸ Michael A. Elliott, *Custerology: The Enduring Legacy of the Indian Wars and George Armstrong Custer* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007): 8.

references would be repeated in publications, newspaper accounts of anniversary celebrations, and markings on the monuments that would begin to dot the historic landscape.

From the Dakota perspective, the story of this and other wars against Native peoples is not a story of American progress and conquering of the west but “are stories about the Sioux peoples’ struggle for survival against a colonial power that invaded their homelands and embarked on a policy of genocide to eliminate them from the face of the earth.”⁹ This debate becomes, really, a matter of perspective in which both sides feel justified in their version of events. Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick explains white Americans’ position regarding the acquisition of western lands as a “cultural imperative.”¹⁰ Basically, Native Americans were not using the land to its fullest potential, therefore it was only right that Euro-Americans “rescue” the land and utilize it to its fullest potential. Using this logic, whites felt justified in occupying the land and also felt they were the innocent victims when attacked. Limerick writes,

Land and natural resources, to the Anglo-American mind, were meant for development; when the Indians held control, the excluded whites took up the familiar role of injured innocents. The West, in the most common figure of speech, had to be “opened” – a metaphor based on the assumption that the virgin West was “closed,” locked up, held captive by Indians.¹¹

From the first attack on August 18, Little Crow and his followers believed they were engaged in the final battles to retake their land; the white settlers believed they were making the best use of the land and were therefore the rightful inhabitants who were unjustly attacked. The two sides approached each other with very different perspectives and emerged both feeling victimized. However, since white Minnesotans ultimately retained their rights to the land, they began to control the memory of events and subsequently used available terminology to highlight their

⁹ Mario Gonzalez, “Preface,” in *The Politics of Hallowed Ground: Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty*, ed. Mario Gonzalez and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999): xi.

¹⁰ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1987): 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

identification as “innocent victims” and hence the use of “uprising” over “war” persisted as the popular label.

Even before the War, Minnesotans did not understand the people whom they had called neighbors for several decades, and this is perhaps a good place to detail the parties involved in the War in order to better understand the powerful nature its memory would hold for the ensuing century. The Dakota people had lived in Minnesota for centuries and were in fact part of a larger population, which included the Nakota and Lakota nations who lived further west on the Great Plains but shared a common language and cultural practices with the Dakota of Minnesota. To differentiate among the tribes, the Minnesota Dakota were often referred to as the Santee, or Eastern Dakota, accounting for their geographic position that placed the Lakota furthest west and the Nakota in the middle of the three related nations.¹² When Europeans, in the form of French fur traders who entered the Minnesota region through Canada, first encountered the Dakota in the 17th century they mistakenly began calling them “Sioux,” a term meaning “enemy” or “snake.” The French learned this from the Ojibwe¹³ peoples of northern Minnesota, who were the long-standing enemies of the Dakota people in southern Minnesota. For whatever reason, this name stuck and the Dakota became commonly known as Sioux, and this label soon included the Nakota and Lakota people as well. Despite desires by the American government in Minnesota to

¹² The Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota are also called the Oceti Sakowin (the Seven Council Fires of the Dakota Oyate or Nation). The Dakota form four groups: Sisitunwan (or Sisseton, Dwellers at the Fish Ground), Wahpetunwan (or Wahpeton, Dwellers among the Leaves), Bdewakantunwan (or Mdewankanton, Dwellers by Mystic Lake), and Wahpekute (Shooters among the Leaves). Next are the Nakota with two groups: Ihanktunwan (or Yankton, Dwellers at the End) and Ihanktunwanna (or Yanktonai, Little Dwellers at the End). Furthest west were the Titunwan (or Lakota, Tetons, Dwellers of the Plains). The Titunwan were the most numerous of the three and divided into their own “seven council fires.” For more information refer to Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, *Remember This!: Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) or Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*.

¹³ In 1862, there were three indigenous tribes in Minnesota: the Dakota (divided into four bands), the Ho Chunk (People of the Big Voice, also called the Winnebago), and the Ojibwe (also called Ojibwa, Ojibway, Anishinabe, or Chippewa).

peacefully exist with the Dakota, they rarely bothered to amend their habit of calling the Dakota by the name of “Sioux,” essentially referring to them as “enemy” in almost all public discourses.

Beyond this general misnomer, during the course of the six-week War the Dakota were saddled with other labels. While not all Dakota joined in the War (those villages located near the Upper Sioux Agency primarily stayed out of the War), the entire nation was blamed and subjected to exile from their homelands. Newspaper and first person accounts recognized two primary groups, the “hostiles” and the “friendlies,” and these terms have yielded serious implications into the present day as modern Dakota fight against prejudice by reminding Minnesotans of their “friendly” status during the War. When early reports of the War began circulating in local newspapers, most Minnesotans had a hard time believing and understanding the full gravity of the situation. Duane Schultz writes in his book *Over the Earth I Come*, “The Sioux were neighbors, in some cases friends. And even after the uprising started and smoke from burning farmhouses stained the sky, many white families refused to believe the wild tales borne by their neighbors, who arrived on panting horses.”¹⁴

In fact, officials in Minnesota during the summer of 1862 had been applauding the agricultural efforts of the Dakota on the reservation under the supervision of Indian Agent Thomas Galbraith. The *St. Cloud Democrat* reported on August 14, 1862, just days before the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency, that the fields of corn were impressive and “for miles along the river there is every indication of civilization and (if you did not see the people) no one would suppose he was among a nation of savages” (parentheses in original).¹⁵ Even knowledge of unease over the late annuity payments did not warn white settlers and Minnesota officials that tension could lead to full-scale war. The *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat* reported on August 15 that

¹⁴ Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, pg. 6.

¹⁵ *St. Cloud Democrat*, “Progress of the Indians in Minnesota,” August 14, 1862.

Major Galbraith had successfully appeased the Dakota by distributing food rations and to wait peacefully for their monetary payment to arrive. “We are happy to inform our readers,” the newspaper calmly states, “that *everything is quiet at the Yellow Medicine*” (emphasis on original).¹⁶

This general disbelief that the Dakota would openly attack white settlements led to the early labels of “outbreak” or “disturbance” rather than understanding the declaration of war from Little Crow and his supporters. On August 20, 1862, the *Mankato Semi-Weekly Record*, in an article titled “The Indian Excitement,” detailed the reports of “a massacre of settlers on our frontier by the Sioux”¹⁷ but cautioned that all information was conflicting and unreliable at this point. On this same day, the *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat* reported a “Serious Outbreak of the Sioux Indians” and explained that the city was “considerably excited...by reports of murders committed by the Indians in Meeker County and at the Agency on the Minnesota River.”¹⁸ On August 21, the *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat* blandly issued the label “The Indian Disturbance,” but on August 22, under the headline “Terrible Indian Raid,” its account acknowledged the severe conditions on the prairie, declaring, “We can no longer shut our eyes to the fact that the Sioux Indians have commenced a war upon the settlements on our own frontier, and have massacred hundreds of men, women, and children.”¹⁹ Over the next several weeks, newspapers throughout Minnesota steadfastly used the label of “war” when describing the fighting in the southwestern corner of the state. As the War continued, most Minnesotans looked on even those Dakota who were labeled “friendly” with suspicion and this would ultimately lead to their post-war treatment. Utilizing the term “war” in this early period enabled Minnesotans to group all

¹⁶ *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat*, “The Late Indian Disturbances at the Upper Sioux Agency,” August 15, 1862.

¹⁷ *Mankato Semi-Weekly Record*, “The Indian Excitement,” August 20, 1862.

¹⁸ *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat*, “Serious Outbreak of the Sioux Indians,” August 20, 1862.

¹⁹ *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat*, “The Indian Disturbance,” August 21, 1862; and *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat*, “Terrible Indian Raid,” August 22, 1862.

Dakota as a singular enemy rather than separate Little Crow and his supporters from those Dakota who remained peaceful. It also permitted General Sibley and the U.S. army to swiftly place those Dakota who surrendered on trial in military court. Despite the use of the label “war” during the first few weeks and months, once the War was ended, the Dakota banished from the state, and white settlers resettled in the Minnesota River Valley, the white collective memory of these events focused almost exclusively on the innocence of the settlers and placed near total blame on the Dakota nation. As a result, by early 1863, the use of “outbreak” or “uprising” increasingly overtook “war” as the accepted label when describing the loss of life during the summer of 1862.

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Newspaper accounts were certainly the first means for labeling the War, and ultimately contributed to a collective memory that empowered white Minnesotans to claim the title of “victim” in these events. Textbooks also published an “official” version of the War primarily used for the purpose of educating elementary-aged children on the history of Minnesota. These publications exhibited a wide array of titles for the War as well, indicating that even official works such as these failed to agree on a label. Chapter titles for discussing the War include “Sioux Massacre” (1915 and 1929), “The Sioux War of 1862” (1918), “What Happened to the Indians” (1936), “The Sioux Uprising” (1948), “Minnesota’s Part in Our Nation’s Wars” (1950), “The Sioux War” (1951 and 1955), “Red Man Against White Man” (1964), “Trials of Statehood” (1977), “War at Home” (1989), and “Minnesota’s Civil War” (2003). Beyond the titles of chapters, the descriptive tone within the narrative reflects derogatory attitudes against the Dakota that would paint this War as unjustified, and therefore fostering a collective memory uniting white Minnesota. Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry, the editor and principle writer for

the publication *Textbooks and the American Indian*, explain that textbooks which use “such terms as ‘primitive, degraded, filthy, warlike, savage’ ...are derogatory statements which demean the Native.”²⁰ Minnesota textbooks make use of these terms when describing the Dakota at war as well as at peace. A 1918 textbook writes, “The success of the Indians put them in an elated and bloodthirsty mood.”²¹ The 1936 publication of *Minnesota Grows Up* describes the difference between Dakota war and American war, “They were angry at the way they had been treated, so they attacked and killed whole families – men, women, and children. This was the Indian way of fighting.”²² *Our Minnesota*, published in 1964, repeatedly refers to the Dakota as “the Red Man.”²³

Antoinette E. Ford, who worked as a sixth-grade teacher in St. Paul schools and later as Geography teacher at the Mechanics Arts High School in St. Paul, authored numerous textbooks used within the state. Each of these texts was quite obviously written for a white audience and includes chapter headings such as “First White Child Born in Minnesota” (1915) and “The Coming of the White Man” (1955). While she discussed the indigenous inhabitants of Minnesota, they are pushed more to the margins of the overall narrative story, doing what Patricia Nelson Limerick called “[flattening] out Indians.” Furthermore, the four textbooks written by Ford discussed here really only talk about the Dakota in Minnesota and almost completely ignore the Ojibwe who certainly also contributed to the history of the state. Limerick

²⁰ Rupert Costo, ed., and Jeannette Henry, writer, *Textbooks and the American Indian*, (American Indian Historian Press, Inc., 1970): 17.

²¹ Mary Vance Carney, *Minnesota: Star of the North* (Boston, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., Publishers, 1918): 167.

²² Clara Searle Painter and Anne Brezler, *Minnesota Grows Up* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1936): 97.

²³ Percie V. Hillbrand and James W. Clark, *Our Minnesota: The Geography and History of our State Against a Backdrop of National and International Events* (Syracuse, NY: The L. W. Singer Company, 1964): 164-165.

explains, “Significant only as they proved a ‘barrier’ to white expansion, Indians figured in history for the brief, ‘colorful’ phases of war and then vanished.”²⁴

At most, history textbooks like those authored by Ford sentimentalized Native Americans rather than critically including them in the overall story. Ford’s *A Study of Minnesota For Use in the Fourth Grade*, published in 1915, discussed the War under the heading “Sioux Massacre,” and over-simplified the causes for the War, stating, “In the summer of 1862, there was a delay in paying the Indians the money due them and the Indians, who at heart hated the whites, decided secretly to kill all the white people in the Minnesota valley and to drive the others across the Mississippi.”²⁵ In her view, the Dakota were no match for the superior artillery available to the soldiers at Fort Ridgely and in other battles and they were forced to surrender or retreat from the territory. Her 1929 publication, *My Minnesota*, continues to refer to the War as “The Sioux Massacre.” Here she provides more in-depth analysis of the causes that brought the Dakota to war, including the starvation faced by the nation and the lateness of their annual government payments. However, this text also includes language calling the Dakota “savages,” “always lazy,” and “wild,” so any sympathy with the Dakota cause is quickly tempered by the language employed in retelling the story. She even infers that Little Crow was really a heathen, despite making attempts to follow the farming program at the Agency, and that he supported war in 1862 because he wanted “the chance of getting into the good graces of his people once more.” Ultimately, the chapter proves confusing and asks students to both consider the Dakota “savages” and therefore deserving to have their land removed and their people exiled, and also that the United States repeatedly broke treaties and committed other wrongs against the Dakota.

²⁴ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, pp. 214-215.

²⁵ Antoinette E. Ford, *A Study of Minnesota For Use in the Fourth Grade and An Amplified Outline for the Study of Minnesota in the Sixth Grade* (St. Paul, MN: St. Paul Grade Teachers' Foundation, 1915).

She writes, “Horrible as the Sioux War was, it was the natural result of the treatment which the Indians had received from the white man.”²⁶

Ford’s 1932 publication, *Gopher Tales*, omits discussing the War, but does include more early indigenous history particularly as first contact with Europeans was made in the late 17th century. However, Ford continues to use the derogatory language described by Costo and Henry above as the text repeatedly uses “red men” when describing the Dakota.²⁷ Finally, her 1955 textbook titled *Minnesota: Past and Present*²⁸ hints at some changes in the popular rhetoric, now nearly a century after the War took place. While still written for a predominantly white audience, her chapter on the War is now titled “The Sioux War,” however the text of the chapter is nearly identical to 1929’s *My Minnesota* and students are again asked to reconcile the use of “savages” and “lazy” when describing the Dakota with the fact that the U.S. government, and white society in general, committed repeated wrongs against this and other Native American nations. These four examples by Ford would assume that students, and in many cases, even teachers, accept the information as fact and that the entire story has been retold. However, as James Loewen explains, “Textbooks also keep students in the dark about the nature of history. History is furious debate informed by evidence and reason. Textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned.”²⁹ The danger in retelling a story strictly from one perspective is that there is never simply one side to the story. Furthermore, continuing to employ derogatory language promotes a “racial ideology in the schools,”³⁰ and diminishes any chance at real reconciliation between the Dakota and the state of Minnesota or the United States.

²⁶ Antoinette E. Ford, *My Minnesota* (Chicago, IL: Lyons & Carnahan, 1929): 148-162.

²⁷ Antoinette E. Ford, *Gopher Tales: Stories from the History of Minnesota* (Chicago, IL: Lyons & Carnahan, 1932): 1, 14-17, 108-115.

²⁸ Antoinette E. Ford, *Minnesota: Past and Present* (Chicago, IL: Lyons & Carnahan, 1955): 157-172

²⁹ James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 8.

³⁰ Costo and Henry, *Textbooks and the American Indian*, p. 235.

The changes in language if not in overall content found in the 1955 textbook by Ford are not unusual, but it is also interesting to examine the way this story is told in national textbooks. Kyle Ward outlines the change in attitudes towards Native Americans, as reflected in their portrayal within U.S. history textbooks. In the 1800s, the dominant descriptive language referred to Native Americans as “savages” whose mere presence contradicted white Americans’ desire to expand into new territory. In the early 1900s, textbooks promoted the idea of the “noble savage,” which reconciled brutal warfare with an ideological view that Native Americans were uncivilized, but also uncorrupted by the downsides of modernity. Finally, by the 1960s and 1970s, textbooks offered students a more anthropological view of Native Americans which made better efforts at balancing the history and diversity of both Native and Euro-Americans.³¹ Ward includes a chapter on the treatment of “The Dakota Conflict of 1862” within textbooks at the national level and notes that knowledge of this Native war had largely disappeared by the early 1900s. An 1874 example, written while the United States was actively engaged in warfare with many Plains Indian nations, provides a fairly neutral retelling of the story, but ends with the warning, “Yet the Indians remained restive and troublesome, and ready for another outbreak.”³² An 1899 version mistakenly tells students that the “red men invaded Minnesota and Iowa, and massacred nearly a thousand men, women, and children, with circumstances of the most horrible barbarity.”³³ Ward’s final example is from a U.S. history textbook published in 1994 and is indicative of the near absence of this historical event at the national level. Embedded in a discussion of the Civil War is the following brief paragraph:

During the Civil War the Sioux of Minnesota, facing starvation and taking advantage of the sectional quarrel, went on the warpath and murdered several hundred settlers. The

³¹ Kyle Ward, *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling over the Last 200 Years* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2006): 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 186.

³³ *Ibid.*, 187.

uprising was finally crushed by federal troops, and nearly forty of the Sioux Indians, after a summary trial, were hanged at a well-attended mass execution.³⁴

The debate over what to call the War continues to invite arguments, yet the actual story of the War has receded into the background and is now practically invisible from the national perspective. While the Civil War remains an integral component of the teaching curriculum, the wars against Native Americans, many of which took place during these years or shortly after, are pushed aside and generalized.

More recent textbooks send a relatively mixed message regarding the War. William E. Lass' *Minnesota: A Bicentennial History*, published in 1977, describes the events leading to war and includes details regarding the territorial treaties which brought the Dakota to the reservation and opened the frontier to white settlement. Lass also explains the divisions that existed among the four Dakota tribes regarding assimilation or resistance as well as allegations that the fur traders cheated the Dakota and claimed the majority of the annuity payments to satisfy poorly documented debts. Lass continues the story of the Dakota beyond the War and discusses their treatment in the internment camps as well as the repercussions of dispersal for the nation as a whole, concluding, "The effects of the war on the Sioux were calamitous."³⁵

Northern Lights: The Story of Minnesota's Past, published in 1989, details these events in a chapter titled "War at Home" and repeats earlier themes that describe Native-white relations in the sense that the Dakota were impeding white Minnesotans' progress. The chapter opens, "The Civil War was not the only barrier between Minnesotans and their dreams of a great future. An even more terrible struggle held back the rush toward growth and progress."³⁶ The chapter

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ William E. Lass, *Minnesota: A Bicentennial History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997): 109.

³⁶ Rhoda R. Gilman, *Northern Lights: The Story of Minnesota's Past* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989): 115.

continues with a basic description of events and includes a number of first-person accounts of the War and shows considerable sympathy to the Dakota in regards to the punishment and harsh treatment they received in the internment camps. The 2003 edition of *Northern Lights* changes the chapter title to “Minnesota’s Civil War” and describes the chapter saying, “In the summer of 1862, a complex mix of factors led to the Dakota War, a deadly conflict with devastating consequences.”³⁷ Both the 1989 and the 2003 textbooks continually refer to the Dakota as “Dakota” rather than “Sioux” – an important change in the rhetoric and a step towards improving relations between the Dakota and the state. The 2003 edition also calls the Dakota leaders by their Dakota names, rather than their anglicized names. For example, Little Crow is repeatedly referenced as “Taoyateduta.” This textbook, in addition to using the label “war,” also refers to the Dakota as “soldiers” rather than “warriors.” While still giving the impression that white settlement was inevitable and Native inhabitants acted as barriers towards progress, these later textbooks clearly take great pains to tell a more balanced version of events and even ask students to question the circumstances which led to war as well as the treatment of the Dakota in its aftermath.

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Beyond newspapers and textbooks, other examples for the language debate can be found in numerous works by both amateur and professional historians who took up the task of remembering the facts associated with this War in its aftermath. These works invariably contributed to the collective memory of white Minnesota by almost universally avoiding the label “war” in published titles. *The Great Sioux Uprising*, published in 1959 by C.M. Oehler, is one example which describes the long-reaching memory of this War as well as its impact on

³⁷ Dave Kenney, *Northern Lights: The Stories of Minnesota's Past*, 2nd (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003): vii.

western white settlement. While reading more like a novel than historical account and largely built on the first-person narrative accounts published in the early years following the War, Oehler's sympathies are clearly evident as he utilizes words like "palefaces," "savages," "painted warriors," and "squaws" in the retelling of the story. He does detail the importance of this War in fostering a collective memory for both whites and Dakota in the years to come:

From the 1862 outbreak sprang tales which are now part of the lore of thousands of families. From it came stories told and retold at hundreds of Indian campfires and councils, sometimes to encourage the guardians of the plains to think that the invaders could be repulsed with ease. The uprising delayed by three decades the time when the West would be safe for whites, and set a dreadful example for the ultimate conquest.³⁸

According to Oehler, this was an *uprising*, a mere component of eventual decades of Plains Indian warfare. He repeatedly insists that Little Crow did not intend to start a war, but his actions influenced other nations of the Great Plains to continue the fight against the United States, inspiring conflicts such as the battle at Little Big Horn. The United States was so engrossed in its own Civil War that it had little energy to ponder the full-scale meaning of the events in Minnesota. He explains, "Not until two years later, when the War on the White Race erupted in the Cheyenne and Teton Sioux territory, was there time to notice what was happening on the western frontier."³⁹ Oehler diminishes the intent of Little Crow and the meaning this War had for Minnesota's Dakota – this was a "little war" amidst three centuries of warfare between native North Americans and invading Europeans. Rather than an opportunity seized by Little Crow and his followers to retake traditional homelands in Minnesota, this uprising was another attempt in a long line of efforts to slow the "inevitability that North America some day would be occupied in the main by Europeans and their descendants."⁴⁰

³⁸ C. M. Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York and Oxford University Press, 1959): viii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Other popular historical accounts of the War, like Duane Schultz' *Over the Earth I Come*, published in 1992, used language that historian Elizabeth Cook-Lynn would consider perpetuating colonization. Schultz explains the execution of the thirty-eight men at the end of the War by saying, "It was the largest mass execution ever to take place in the United States, and it was carried out in retribution for the most savage Indian uprising in the nation's history."⁴¹ He repeatedly refers to the War as an "uprising" and diminishes the credibility of the Dakota war effort by using descriptions such as "the Sioux ravaged the countryside" despite the fact that "[s]ome American settlers were willing to befriend the Indians, to share their food when the Sioux were hungry and to allow them into their homes to examine their wondrous possessions[.]"⁴² Jerry Keenan's *The Great Sioux Uprising*, published in 2003, gives the six-weeks of conflict more weight than Oehler or Schultz, but Keenan still avoids use of the label "war" when referring to the "seventeen actions" between August 17 and September 23 which included attacks on Fort Ridgely and engagements with "military columns sent in pursuit of them." While not declaring this a war, and using the title "The Great Sioux Uprising" despite a state decision in 1987 to use "The U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862," Keenan explains that this was "one of the bloodiest Indian uprisings in U.S. history"⁴³ and affected large portions of the state. Keenan's publication may be more recent than Oehler's, but it brings relatively little new insight or interpretation to the established story.

While Oehler, Schultz, and Keenan persist with the use of "uprising" and other colonial terminology in their published works, other popular publications reflect the change in attitudes about the War in the latter half of the twentieth century. Kenneth Carley published *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* in 1961 under the Minnesota Historical Society Press as a means to provide a

⁴¹ Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come*, p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴³ Keenan, *The Great Sioux Uprising*, p. 17.

clear narrative about the events leading up to and including the War. This book would go through several publications, each faithful to the original but also reflective of the move towards reconciliation in the 1980s. His introduction for the 1961 edition reads, “Here is the first pictorial history of Minnesota’s dramatic Sioux Uprising ever published. Its pages offer the reader a lively, concise text and over ninety illustrations of the bloody events in this major war.” The 1976 edition, published with the same title, left out the use of “dramatic” and downplayed the sensational promise of the earlier version. Other changes can be seen between the two editions that reflect the alteration of language and growing sympathy towards the Dakota cause for war. In the 1962 publication, Carley opened the first chapter with this colorful description:

From their reservations along the upper Minnesota River, the proud, combative Sioux Indians, led by Chief Little Crow, rose in an orgy of murder and pillage, taking the settlers in the Minnesota Valley by surprise.

By 1976, Carley tempered his wording and the same passage instead reads:

From their reservations along the upper Minnesota River, the proud Native Americans known as the Dakota or Sioux Indians, under the leadership of Chief Little Crow, rose to take the settlers in the Minnesota Valley by surprise.

In 2001, the Minnesota Historical Society Press reprinted the 1976 version, but now changed the title to *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota’s Other Civil War*. While the name on the cover changed, the interior contents remained the same as the 1976 edition and continued to extensively refer to the War as “the Sioux Uprising.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the continued use of descriptive sentences, such as “While the morning of August 18 was a nightmare of butchery, looting, and fire at the Lower Agency, all was quiet for a time at Yellow Medicine,”⁴⁵ do little to

⁴⁴ Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1961): jacket cover and page 11; Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976): v, 1; and Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*.

⁴⁵ Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, p. 17.

encourage new readers of this 2001 edition to think of the War in different terms than those first employed by newspaper reports in 1862.

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The nature of this memory and the need to emphasize whites as victims and the Dakota as ruthless killers by utilizing words such as “uprising” in printed records corresponds to the ways white Minnesotans chose to commemorate the War in the first few decades following 1862. Commemorating the deaths of settlers cut down in their attempts to conquer the American frontier strengthened white Minnesotans’ need to use terms such as “massacre” or “uprising” rather than “war” and it absolved them from taking any responsibility for the grievances of the Dakota people. Official memory objects began dotting the landscape of southwestern Minnesota in the form of monuments and markers to settlers killed in particularly brutal ways. Even after the thirty-eight Dakota men were hanged in Mankato and the remaining Dakota banished from the state, the white residents of the Minnesota River Valley remained in a state of mourning. In order to heal, white Minnesotans needed physical reminders of their losses, and entire communities coordinated fundraising efforts for memorials to the white victims of the War. Kenneth Foote, author of *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscape of Violence and Tragedy*, writes, “The creation of memorials and monuments is a natural outgrowth of these communal activities and a focus for many mourners.”⁴⁶ The monuments and markers that soon appeared throughout the areas touched by this War served a “dual purpose.” According to Minnesota historian Willoughby Babcock, they not only “[marked] the spot where some significant event took place,” but they also contributed to the War’s commemoration by the public.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscape of Violence and Tragedy*, Revised and Updated (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997): 166.

⁴⁷ Willoughby M. Babcock, “The Problem of Historic Markers and Monuments in Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* (Minnesota Historical Society) 11, no. 1 (March 1930): 25-35.

As each new monument marked the sites of heroic action (like the Defenders' State Monument in New Ulm) or tragic killing (such as the Lake Shetek State Monument in Murray County), local communities also staged full-scale celebrations to commemorate their own survival on the frontier and victory over the Dakota during that summer in 1862. In 1910, Minnesota citizens gathered at the site of the final battle for the War at Wood Lake to dedicate a monument to the volunteer soldiers who fought there. The ceremonial proceedings included remarks from the commissioners charged with overseeing the monument's completion, a religious invocation, and a speech by historian Dr. William Folwell titled, "The Passing of the Sioux," which emphasized the need for victory over the "savages." Folwell's speech concluded,

To the civilized white man, that was a week of massacre and pillage, the terror of which spread far beyond the scenes of actual killing and burning. To the savage it was a week of glorious warfare against a hated foe, crowned with loads of plunder, scalps of men and captive women and children. The ferocity of the savages was inversely paralleled by the helplessness of the unsuspecting victims.⁴⁸

Community ceremonies centered on the erection of a monument not only left a permanent mark on the landscape but also reaffirmed the collective memory that white settlers were innocent victims of Dakota savagery and disregard for civilization. Furthermore, simple word choices on the monument would ensure that this memory lasted for future generations as well. James Loewen explains, "[T]he term 'massacre' ... guarantees that most tourists will infer that Native Americans did the grisly work. Across the United States historic markers and monuments use 'massacre' when Native Americans kill European Americans, even when as few as one white died!"⁴⁹ By simply avoided the term "war" on the many monuments commemorating victims and battles associated with the events of 1862, white Minnesotans committed to the notion that white

⁴⁸ *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Monument Erected in Honor of the Volunteer Soldiers at the Battle of Wood Lake, Minnesota, Held on the Battle Ground on Tuesday, Oct. 18, 1919, at 9:30 A. M.* (Minneapolis, MN: Syndicate Printing Company, 1911): 13. Minnesota Historical Society Collections.

⁴⁹ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 94.

settlers were victims of Dakota aggression, and this left little room for argument as these sentiments were intended to last as *permanent* monuments on the landscape.

The city of New Ulm, twice attacked by Dakota during the War, enthusiastically dedicated monuments in the aftermath of the War. The summer of 1866 saw the erection of a four-sided pyramid placed in the town cemetery to honor “the innocent victims of August and to love, admiration, and gratitude for the survivors of that year.”⁵⁰ According to the newspaper articles covering the monument and the accompanying celebration, the War left behind an “indelible force on the memories of those who lived through those terrible days” and it was natural that the memories would be refreshed each passing year. This first monument in New Ulm was intended to remind its residents of “the courage and endurance of the citizens” who overcame the 1862 attacks and preserved the town for future generations.⁵¹ In 1890, the state commissioned a monument to the defenders of New Ulm, which was placed in “a commanding position” just outside the business district so that it would be “plainly visible from all parts of the city.” Again, dedication ceremonies became a town celebration and including numerous speeches by prominent figures, including the governor. The newspaper accounts of the activities reprinted all the speeches and also included fairly detailed illustrations of hatchet-wielding Dakota advancing on the town only to be repulsed by the gun power of the defenders of New Ulm.⁵²

The use of monuments not only reflected the memory of a community, but they became fixtures that forever embedded an idea that innocent white settlers were brutally attacked in the summer of 1862. Kirk Savage explains, “The public monument, after all, was not just a rhetorical space where people debated image and symbol, but was also a real physical space

⁵⁰ *New Ulm Post*, “Indian Massacre Monument,” July 27, 1866 and August 24, 1866.

⁵¹ *New Ulm Post*, “Indian Massacre Monument,” August 24, 1866.

⁵² *St. Paul Daily Globe*, “New Ulm, dedication of a monument to its defenders, Aug. 22, 1891,” August 23, 1891.

where publics could gather and define themselves at ceremonies and rallies.”⁵³ The act of dedicating monuments solidified a version of war that detailed the victims as strictly white settlers and furthered the conquest of western expansion as inevitable. In the same way that words like “uprising” overshadowed the declaration of war proclaimed by Little Crow and his followers, the monuments that marked the landscape in Minnesota, all dedicated to white victims’ memory, repeatedly claimed the official memory of war as belonging to and interpreted by white Minnesotans.



Figure 2.2: Monument in New Ulm, Commissioned in 1890. Photo by Julie Humann Anderson.

Shortly after the end of the War with the assurance that the Minnesota River Valley was securely in the hands of white settlers, additional monuments were established to meet the

⁵³ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997): 7.

demand of local residents who desired a physical way to remember their fallen. While many of these received state support or funding, they were typically erected as a result of local community efforts to remember specific individuals or acts of heroism, or in memory of particularly tragic scenes from the War. In 1873, a monument was placed in the Fort Ridgely Cemetery to remember Captain John Marsh and the twenty-five men who were killed at the ambush at Redwood Ferry. In 1877, the Eliza Miller monument was also placed at Fort Ridgely Cemetery to remember her bravery during the siege. As the fiftieth anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War approached, a large number of monuments joined the many already on the landscape. These were placed in honor of brave pioneers or for extreme examples of loss during the War. The Guri Endreson Rosseland Monument, in Kandiyohi County, was established in 1907. The Acton State Monument to mark the site of the Howard Baker cabin was dedicated in 1909. Also that year, the Jackson State Monument was built in Jackson County to remember 19 pioneer settlers killed in an 1857 battle as well as the 1862 War.⁵⁴ Of the 30 monuments established by the state beginning in 1873, seventeen monuments were erected specifically in memory of victims or participants in the “Sioux Uprising of 1862.”⁵⁵

Marking a landscape with a monument very often sanctified not only the land surrounding the monument but also the memories of those participating in the act of monument building. These monuments helped local communities come to terms with the more than 500 deaths that occurred in those six weeks and the general fear that another attack could occur at

⁵⁴ Office of Revisor Statutes, State of Minnesota, *138.585 2010 State Monuments*, 2010, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=138.585> (accessed 2010).

⁵⁵ Office of Revisor Statutes, State of Minnesota, *2009 Minnesota Statutes: 138.585 State Monuments*, 2009, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=138.585> (accessed 2009). These monuments are: Captain John S. Marsh State Monument (1873), Eliza Miller State Monument (1877), Ness Lutheran Cemetery State Monument (1878), Lundborg-Broberg State Monument (1891), Defenders’ State Monument (1891), Camp Release Monument (1894), Birch Coulee State Monument (1894), Fort Ridgely State Monument (1896), Guri Endreson Rosseland State Monument (1907), Acton State Monument (1909), Jackson State Monument (1909), Wood Lake State Monument (1910), Chief Mouzoomaunee State Monument (1914), Schwandt State Monument (1915), Lake Shetek State Monument (1925), Milford State Monument (1929), and the Sioux Indians State Monument (1971).

any moment. By claiming the identity of “innocent victim” and solidifying this by claiming the landscape as well, white Minnesotans controlled the way this War would be remembered and perceived for the next 150 years. The ground where bloodshed occurred became sacred in the minds of Minnesota and this sense of sanctification carried over to the memories that accompanied the monuments. Kenneth Foote explains,

Sanctification can occur when a community is struck by disaster....The afflicted community commonly seeks to memorialize these victims and pay tribute to their sacrifice at the site of the disaster, at the plot where the victims are buried, or in a public space. The process of planning and erecting such memorials is also a way for communities to come to terms with a disaster. They serve as a focus for public outpouring of grief that can help a community overcome its sense of loss.⁵⁶

Because the monuments, both those commissioned by the state and erected at the local level, told only one side of the story and perpetuated the belief that the white settlers’ were innocent victims in the face of a savage attack by their Dakota neighbors, the rhetorical story would also remain one-sided.

While monuments to white victims and heroes dominated the landscape, some did call for the recognition of those Dakota who fought for the settlers rather than against them. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth’s *Through Dakota Eyes* records the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency through the eyes of Cecilia Campbell Stay who recalled that several “friendly” Indians saved her father from being killed outside Andrew Myrick’s store. She remarks, “Passing Hail had the bravest warriors that ever lived and they took sides with the white people. Does history mention this fact? Are their names on the Camp Release monument?”⁵⁷ Of the seventeen state monuments, only two were established to recognize indigenous participation in the War, and then only to those Native Americans who served on the same side as the U.S. The Chief Mouzoomaunee State Monument, dedicated in 1914, celebrates the loyalty to the state

⁵⁶ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 49.

of this chief and his Ojibwe people. The Sioux Indians State Monument, established in 1971, “honors the Indians who were friendly to white settlers.”⁵⁸ Despite these few monuments dedicated to the memory of Native Americans, the official landscape mirrors the rhetoric which continues to minimize Little Crow’s declaration of war and instead joins the collective memory of the white settlers which has dominated the discourse since the end of the War.

Monuments that represent only one side of a battle or war hide the full truth from the public in an almost permanent fashion. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn, discussing the massacre of an Apache village at Camp Grant in late 19th century Arizona, illustrates the impact one-sided monument building can have on a community and its subsequent memory:

A collective memory, the recollection of past events shared by a community, is no different. Tucson’s myth of origin does not comprise the totality of incidents and experiences but offers a selective remembrance of things past. The names of city founders etched into local monuments are meant to honor that part of their lives that contributed to the beginning of our home. We gain much from this – a sense of self, kinship, and belonging. Yet, we lose something when they are ennobled only as names that grace buildings, street signs, and hilltops, when we forget who these namesakes were and what they did.⁵⁹

Colwell-Chanthaphohn explains that lauding city founders via city monuments overlooks the manner in which they secured the future of Tucson – the surprise massacre of over 100 men, women, and children, peacefully invited to Camp Grant. This story of the founding of Tucson is nearly absent from the historical landscape, yet it is a story which could also be shared by the community.

In Minnesota, monuments dedicated to the Dakota side of this War have been nearly absent from the landscape for the last century and a half. In their place were the monuments to white victims, but also monuments announcing white victory over the Dakota people, such as the

⁵⁸ Office of Revisor Statutes, State of Minnesota, *2009 Minnesota Statutes: 138.585 State Monuments*, 2009, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=138.585> (accessed 2009).

⁵⁹ Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn, *Massacre at Camp Grant: Forgetting and Remembering Apache History* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2007): 116.

hanging of the 38 Dakota in Mankato in December, 1862. In 1912, a simple monument was placed at the site of the hangings bearing the words “Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians Dec. 26th, 1862.” This monument remained at the site until it was removed in 1971 when the public began to see it as offensive and its location was eyed for downtown development. After residing in storage until the 1990s, the marker essentially disappeared and recently became the subject of an investigative search by a history class at Minnesota State University in Mankato. Some reports believe the marker was given to the Dakota, but no one is able to confirm its actual location or even if it was destroyed. This particular marker sparks such debate because it focused on the harshest of memories for the Dakota people as well as the ultimate victory experienced by white settlers in the aftermath of the War – the hanging of 38 Dakota men as war criminals. The students interviewed Dakota member Vernell Wabasha, who says the location of the marker is known, but “the marker represents history that no one ought to be proud of” and the memory of such a marker should be forgotten. Sheldon Wolfchild, the Lower Sioux tribal chairman, while claiming no knowledge of the marker’s location, explains the marker itself epitomized the one-sided memory of the War which labeled the Dakota as savages. The history students agreed that this story does not make Minnesota proud, but they also decried the attempts made to bury the past rather than face it.⁶⁰

While the Dakota side of the War remains absent from the official landscape, efforts have been made to permanently mark the landscape with their memories as well. After the removal of the “Hangings” marker, the city of Mankato opted not to mark the location of the hangings at all. However, while white Minnesotans focus their memories on their identification as victims, the Dakota people also choose to focus on the wrongs suffered by their ancestors during and after the War’s conclusion. In particular, the Dakota recall the hangings of the 38 men as well as the

⁶⁰ Dan Linehan, “Students Search for Missing Monument,” *Mankato Free Press*, May 14, 2006.

internment of the Dakota people in internment camps and the subsequent march through Minnesota to new reservations in Dakota Territory. In 1997, several hundred Dakota dedicated their own memorial in Mankato, choosing to honor the memory of the thirty-eight condemned men. The present monument is a white buffalo carved out of limestone and is meant to commemorate not only the thirty-eight men who were hanged, but also the reconciliation efforts between Dakota and whites since the late 1980s.



Figure 2.3. White Buffalo Monument, Reconciliation Park, Mankato, MN. Photo by Julie Humann Anderson.

Originally the location of the largest mass execution in United States history, today this site is known as “Reconciliation Park.” The new use of memory on this particular landscape marks a shift in statewide perception about the War as a whole. Interestingly, there is little explanation of the War or the hangings on the marker adjacent to the buffalo. The plaque is dedicated to twentieth-century Dakota leaders “for their lasting efforts towards reconciliation among all people” and contains a poem offering prayers for the 38 men who were hanged in December 1862. Across the street at the public library is a more detailed plaque providing some

facts of the War and explaining the significance of the location. This marker summarizes, “The Minnesota uprising was one of the nation’s most costly Indian wars, both in lives lost and property destroyed.”⁶¹

Despite the presence of a monument dedicated to the memory of the Dakota who fought and died in the War, the dominant memories remain imbedded in the minds of white Minnesotans because the story continues to be written and learned from this perspective, and, as shown above, the vast majority of permanent memory markers only serve to reinforce this memory. Even the white buffalo monument in Mankato, a seemingly strong presence on the landscape, stands nearly silent with few residents, both local and statewide, understanding the purpose for which it was established in the first place.

⁶¹ General information about the dedication of the buffalo monument comes from: Nick Coleman, "Letting Eagles Soar," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 19, 1997 and Nick Coleman, "Grandfather's song recalls sad hangings," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 22, 1997. The passages quoted come from the monuments at Reconciliation Park in Mankato, MN, and were observed by the author.

CHAPTER 3

The War Expands: Attacks at the Upper Agency, the Countryside, and New Ulm

While the Lower Sioux Agency was under attack, the Upper Agency (also known as Yellow Medicine Agency) was quiet during the morning hours of August 18. By noon, rumors of Indian attacks began to filter in, but few Upper Agency residents believed what they were hearing. Still, some, like physician John Wakefield, chose to exercise caution and made arrangements for families to leave the Agency. Dr. Wakefield quickly sent his wife, Sarah, and their two small children with George Gleason, a government employee, to the safety of Fort Ridgely where they could wait out any potential hostilities on the reservation. As Sarah Wakefield and George Gleason neared the Lower Sioux Agency, she noted smoke from burning buildings but Gleason insisted that it was probably just a prairie fire. However, they soon encountered two Dakota men, identified as Hapa and Chaska, traveling on horseback. Hapa shot Mr. Gleason, but Chaska recognized Sarah as the doctor's wife and urged her to keep quiet. She described, "In a moment after poor Gleason breathed his last, Hapa stepped up to the wagon and taking aim at my head, would have killed me but for Chaska, who leaped toward him and struck the gun out of his hands." Sarah and her children would spend the next six weeks living as captives in Dakota camps under the protection of Chaska, but also at his mercy.¹

While Sarah Wakefield experienced first-hand the effects of war, the Upper Sioux Agency Dakota leaders, mostly from the Wahpeton and Sisseton villages, met to decide about joining Little Crow and his followers in this war. No clear decision was reached, with most adopting a "wait and see" attitude rather than fully committing their soldiers. Many of the Dakota who had

¹ Sarah F. Wakefield, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997): 69.

converted to Christianity, adopted a farming lifestyle, and were more decidedly “prowhite,” did not favor war and instead spent the day warning their white and mixed-heritage friends at the Upper Agency of the very real danger of war. Among these were the Wahpeton leaders John Otherday, Chief Akepa, Simon Anawangmani, and Paul Mazakutemani. Other Upper Agency Dakota members felt all the Dakota would be blamed anyway, rather than just those who participated in the Lower Sioux Agency attack; therefore, they opted to join in the war and began looting agency buildings and stores.

By late Monday, the Upper Agency’s white residents, including the local missions of Dr. Thomas Williamson and Rev. Stephen Riggs, prepared to flee the area upon hearing firm reports of the devastation at the Lower Sioux Agency. Williamson and Riggs organized several dozen white and mixed-blood residents and fled early Tuesday morning. This group included Martha Riggs Morris and photographer Adrian Ebell, who would both later publish their accounts of the group’s five-day journey to Henderson. Another group of over sixty residents would flee to St. Paul, under the guidance of the full-blooded Dakota John Otherday, a converted Christian living as a farmer at the Upper Agency. Otherday would share his story with the St. Paul Press on August 28. Little Crow and his soldiers now controlled the Upper Agency, essentially abandoned, and the buildings and stores were soon looted or destroyed.

In the meantime, those Dakotas committed to full-scale war met near Little Crow’s house outside the Lower Sioux Agency to determine their next moves. Smaller groups of Dakota soldiers had already been attacking isolated homesteads on the frontier in the vicinity of the reservation. These soldiers’ actions were unpredictable – some killed entire families outright, while others favored taking captives. The first few days of warfare significantly favored the Dakota soldiers as white farmers either did not believe the rumors of war or were completely

caught by surprise on their farms. Renville and Brown counties experienced the worst attacks as well as the greatest loss of life in this first week of the war. More than fifty residents of Milford Township were killed late on August 18. Also on that first day, Mary Schwandt, a fourteen-year-old German, was taken captive with two other young girls. Twenty-five German settlers from the settlement of Sacred Heart were killed on August 19 while they attempted to flee the region. The family of Joseph Brown, the former Indian agent on the reservation who was married to a Dakota woman with whom he had thirteen children, were taken captive on August 19 as they fled the Upper Agency for Fort Ridgely. The family survived captivity under the protection of Little Crow, who recognized their familial connection as Dakota. As the war progressed, the Dakota traveled further from the reservation and attacked more settlements. On August 20, they arrived at Lake Shetek, about forty miles south of the Upper Agency in Murray County. Eleven families sought refuge in a swamp only to be severely outgunned by the Dakota. Fifteen people were killed, several were wounded, and eight (two women and six children) were taken captive. These eight would travel with their captors into Dakota Territory and would not be freed until November, several weeks after the war ended. As the war spread more deeply into the countryside, fear permeated the entire state and the survivors of these first attacks would share their stories with an audience increasingly seeking to permanently remove the Dakota from Minnesota.

While several isolated settlements were attacked randomly, Little Crow and his Dakota supporters considered attacking the German settlement at New Ulm as it was the largest town in the vicinity of the reservation. Furthermore, the town was nearly undefended having just sent a recruiting party west to enlist more volunteers to fight in the Civil War. If New Ulm fell to the

Dakota it would be counted as an important victory, but it also promised large amounts of goods and property that could be claimed by the Dakota people.

As word spread of the attacks on the reservation and the nearby settlements, the citizens of New Ulm prepared to defend themselves by erecting barricades around several blocks of primarily brick buildings. Women and children were sequestered in the some of the larger buildings, while able-bodied men armed themselves with any weapon available under the guidance of the town's sheriff, Charles Roos, and probably the only citizen remaining with any military experience, a German immigrant named Jacob Nix. As a last means of defense, the town sent messengers to St. Peter to request aid, particularly from leading Minnesota Valley citizen Judge Charles Flandrau. While all this preparation occurred, refugees from the numerous attacked settlements began pouring into New Ulm.

Around 3:00pm on Tuesday, August 19, the Dakota attacked New Ulm, but met with surprise at the quick organization of the defenders. The Dakota were not fully united in this assault, and significantly lacked a leader as Little Crow and several other chiefs chose to focus their own attack on the soldiers at Fort Ridgely and therefore did not wholly support the attack on New Ulm. The first battle ended later that evening with six citizens of New Ulm killed and another handful wounded. Flandrau and his relief unit of volunteers from the St. Peter area arrived that night and brought much-needed fortifications for the town. The Dakota, however, would return on August 23 with more than 600 men and a more focused attack. Fighting that day continued until dark and many of the town's buildings were burned and destroyed. However, the inexperienced soldiers under Flandrau's command were able to rout the Dakota who were forced to withdraw. In all, 34 citizens and defenders of New Ulm were killed; Dakota casualties of this battle remain unknown. Despite the victory, Flandrau ordered the evacuation of the town

and nearly 2,000 people abandoned the bulk of their possessions and headed to Mankato for safety. Meanwhile, the severely understaffed soldiers at Fort Ridgely were fighting a fierce battle of their own.²



Figure 3.1. This map shows some of the early attacks on nearby settlements as well as the takeover of the Upper Sioux Agency and the battles at New Ulm. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

² The above paragraphs referenced Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, pp. 17-39.

Sharing Memory to Build Community Identity

Within just a few months of the War's end, Minnesotans who had experienced the War began sharing their story with the larger public. Among Americans, the practice of sharing and remembering a traumatic event was very common. As historian Jill Lepore explains, "How wars are remembered can be just as important as how they were fought and first described."³

Hundreds of written documents survive in New England archives describing the feelings of colonists following Metacom's War, the late 17th Century war which left thousands of settlers dead and irreparably destroyed Native society and landholdings in the region. The feelings of these colonial settlers were translated into words which "proved to be pivotal to their victory, a victory that drew new, firmer boundaries between English and Indian people, between English and Indian land, and between what it meant to be 'English' and what it meant to be 'Indian.'"⁴ In Minnesota, white settlers also felt the need to share their experiences and did so by giving interviews and publishing personal narratives, all the while solidifying the new political, cultural, and geographic boundaries that drove the Dakota from their lands and firmly declared white settlers the inheritors of the territory. Furthermore, as white Minnesotans openly remembered this particular war and shared their experiences with each other, a solid community identity developed reinforcing the belief that the true inhabitants of the land were Minnesotans of European descent – not the Dakota people – and therefore the victory by Minnesota over the Dakota in this war and the punishment of the Dakota after the War was justified.

While few Minnesotans today are aware of the details of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, for the first few decades following its conclusion, white and some Dakota participants, particularly those who were considered "friendly" to whites, were encouraged by journalists,

³ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998): x.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

writers and historians, and the general public to not only remember their experiences, but to actively share those memories with a wider audience. Many shared their memories by giving interviews to local newspapers, while others opted to publish their narratives in book form. Publicly remembering these shared experiences not only helped to emotionally heal those affected by war, but it also tied the entire region together. In addition to individual memories, “much memory is attached to membership of social groups of one kind or another.”⁵ By encouraging individuals to talk about their memories, these became social memories, memories that essentially belonged to the entire group regardless of the group’s participation in the event. In the case of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, this group included the regions directly affected by the War and at times even the entire state which would hear and read about it.

These individual memories gradually contributed to the larger collective memory and created an official version of the War’s events told from a predominantly white perspective. This version reinforced the larger, national message of American western progress and overall patriotism. This message could be extremely powerful, both at the local and national levels, and certainly served to bolster the desire to take control of the land previously inhabited by Native Americans throughout the United States. Edward Linenthal explains, “Patriotic rhetoric... is the language of conservation; it asks people to preserve, protect, perpetuate, reawaken, revitalize, and rededicate themselves to the ideals for which sacrificial warriors died.”⁶ In Minnesota, remembering the War helped survivors to venerate their loved ones who were killed and to create a legacy which encouraged rebuilding and prospering in the very same locations which had experienced some of the worst moments of the War. In February 1864, *The Saint Paul Daily Press* reported that the reconstruction of New Ulm was “going on bravely.” Attacked twice

⁵ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992): viv-x.

⁶ Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, p. 4.

during the first week of the War, much of the town was destroyed, but the townspeople were ultimately able to repel the Dakota. Now, less than two years after the attacks, the media could report, "The town will soon be rebuilt, and re-peopled, and the country around it re-peopled with a brave and hardy race, like that massacred and driven away in 1862."⁷ Clearly, New Ulm and other surrounding settlements were using their memories to create a new future built by the same "brave and hardy race" of those settlers who had died.

Sharing memories of traumatic events was not isolated within the state of Minnesota. The nation as a whole shared its memories as a means to understand the devastation of the Civil War and "to find meaning in the war's grisly scale of death."⁸ White Minnesotans sought meaning for the loss of nearly 500 settlers killed during the course of the War. Because white settlers saw themselves as the only victims in the War, rather than contributors to its causes,⁹ individual memories of violence and death could be co-opted by the entire community to celebrate the hardworking pioneer who successfully drove away the "savage" Indian. On August 22, 1862, just days after the War began, Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey declared, "The Sioux Indians upon our western frontier have risen in large bodies, attacked the settlements, and are murdering men, women, and children. . . . This outbreak must be suppressed, and in such manner as will forever prevent its repetition"¹⁰ From the highest office, the message sent to the white citizens of Minnesota was clear from the very beginning: the Dakota had started the War, were guilty of murder, and should be stopped in such a manner to ensure that this would never happen again in Minnesota. As a result, even those voices that would speak in favor and sympathy for

⁷ *The Saint Paul Daily Press*, "From New Ulm," February 23, 1864.

⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 19.

⁹ It should be noted that numerous sources do place significant blame on the government (both state and federal) and the fur traders for contributing to the outbreak of war with the Dakota people. White settlers, however, tended to view themselves as innocent victims who were living on land approved for settlement.

¹⁰ *St. Paul Pioneer & Democrat*, "Proclamation of the Governor," August 22, 1862.

the Dakota were ultimately used to further the steadfast, pioneer image that had tamed the land and triumphed over the Indian. This image reinforced the governor's decree that the War was unprovoked and white settlers were the true victims. Even today it is difficult to displace this memory for one focused on the Dakota plight. It was in the interest of the nation and the state to perpetuate the steady pioneer image in Minnesota, who overcame the Dakota, and took possession of the land in order to make it profitable in a way that Native Americans could never accomplish.

Within days of the attacks on the Lower and Upper agencies, newspapers began printing stories from survivors. John Otherday, the full-blooded Christian Dakota who led several residents of the Upper Sioux Agency to safety, related his experience to the *St. Paul Press* on August 28, 1862. His story had even more impact because of his heritage. Here was a man who was a full-blooded Dakota of a Wahpeton band, but he illustrated to his white audience that civilization programs such as those at the Upper and Lower Agencies could work. He had converted to Christianity, he lived as a farmer near the Hazelwood mission, and he sided with the white settlers, even personally leading them to the safety of St. Paul, when his own people declared war. His narrative begins with word of the attacks at the Lower Sioux Agency slowly reaching the Dakota tribes in the vicinity of the Upper Agency. While the leaders of the Wahpetons and Sissetons debated joining Little Crow in the War, Otherday recounted warning the assembled man that "the consequence would be that their whole country would be filled with soldiers of the United States, and all of them killed or driven away." Otherday took pains to list those Dakota who he felt urged the killings of white settlers as well as those whom he felt remained peaceful throughout the War. He explains, "The only reason given by the Sissetons for killing the whites, was that already stated – that the outrages at the Lower Agency would make

them implacable enemies, that all the Indians would suffer for it, and that it would be no worse if they killed the whites.” Ultimately, Otherday’s story, printed just ten days after the Lower Sioux Agency was attacked, sought to safeguard those Dakota who chose not to fight in the War because he proved, by escorting the missionaries to safety, that not all Dakota wanted to be at war with white Minnesotans. He also very clearly explained which Dakota were seeking war and why, and which Dakota steadfastly opted for peace. Unfortunately for John Otherday and the other “friendly” Dakota, they would face punishment just as surely as the Dakota who sided with Little Crow, a fact which Otherday expressed even before he fled the Upper Agency.¹¹

Local newspapers recorded a large number of survivor stories in the immediate aftermath of the War and for many decades to come, often as part of a community or statewide anniversary celebration. In April 1863, *The St. Paul Pioneer* printed a story titled “The Sioux Massacre – Thrilling Adventures and Escape of Geo. H. Spencer, Jr.” In 1887, both the *Saint Paul Daily Globe* and *The Renville* of Redwood Falls recounted stories of the battle of Birch Coulee for their readers. In 1891, the seventieth birthday celebration for Colonel John S. Prince (a messenger for General Sibley) prompted the *Saint Paul Globe* to publish his reminiscences and promised readers that the “memorable days of ‘Sixty-Two [would be] graphically recalled.” In 1892, now the thirtieth anniversary of the War, the *Winona Daily Republican* provided its readers with a “graphic narrative” of the “Siege of Fort Ripley by Infuriated Savages” by one of the fort’s defenders. In 1893, the *Minneapolis Star Journal* advertised a reunion of survivors from the

¹¹ John Otherday’s account first appeared as John Otherday, “Highly Interesting Narrative of the Outbreak of Indian Hostilities,” *St. Paul Press*, August 28, 1862. I have also utilized the account as it has been recorded in Anderson and Woolworth, “John Otherday’s Interview,” *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 119-125.

battle of Birch Coulee when they would be able to “meet again and talk over the vents of that fight so famous in the annals of the state.”¹²

Not all of these memories published in local media were from white survivors, however. In 1897, the *Minneapolis Times* retold the story of the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency and included accounts “told by warriors who participated.” While some Dakota stories did make their way into print, and will be discussed further below, these examples are buried amongst the stories of the white settlers and soldiers who survived. As the twentieth century dawned, the anniversary celebrations lessened, most likely because first-hand accounts were harder to locate. In 1912, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* discussed the commemoration of the battle of Birch Coulee to take place on September 2, with Thomas E. Byrne, “probably the last survivor,” scheduled to attend in order to recall the “horrors of Indian War.”¹³

The survivors of the U.S.-Dakota War were encouraged to share their memories with a larger audience, at times even a national audience, and these “private memories began to collide, inexorably, with the politics of collective memory.”¹⁴ In Minnesota, the private memories of the citizens who experienced the War created a very powerful image that merged with the national patriotic image of hardworking pioneers helping to build and strengthen the state and nation as a whole. John Bodnar explains,

[T]he pioneer symbol served the needs of several groups and because it did, it became widely used and powerful. The meaning of pioneers was diverse enough that as a symbol it was able to simultaneously soothe the personal needs of ordinary people and the political needs of professionals and officials.¹⁵

¹² *The Saint Paul Pioneer*, “The Sioux Massacre - Thrilling Adventures and Escape of Geo. H. Spencer, Jr.,” April 15, 1863; *The Saint Paul Daily Globe*, “Recount of Birch Coulee battle ‘Blood Birch Coulee,’” August 27, 1887; *Redwood Falls The Renville*, “Battle of Birch Coulee,” September 17, 1887; *St. Paul Globe*, “A Remarkable Ride,” May 10, 1891; *The Winona Daily Republican*, “Minnesota History,” March 5, 1892; and *Minneapolis Star Journal*, “Twas a Bloody Fight,” August 26, 1893.

¹³ *Minneapolis Times*, “Outbreak: Told by Warriors Who Participated,” August 15, 1897; and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, “Will Commemorate Birch Coulee Battle Tomorrow,” September 1, 1912.

¹⁴ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, p. 135.

For Minnesotans, this symbol of the pioneer would dictate the memory stories that surfaced after the War. The image of a brave pioneer surviving not only the unknown frontier but also attacks from Native Americans was the theme of family histories long after the War ended. Author George Allanson, grandson of Major Joseph Brown who was the former Indian agent to the Dakota, focused his family pioneer memories on the large 19-room, “luxuriously furnished,” stone house where the family lived before the War. He states, “Too few realize the history bound up in the house and its location, the history which was made by brave pioneers of this section of Minnesota during the outbreak of 1862.” The ruins of the home, located eight miles from the Upper Sioux Agency, served as a tangible reminder of the perseverance of pioneers and their ability to overcome the harsh frontier.¹⁶

With a similar pioneer theme, Karl and Helen Thurn wrote the story of Guri Endreson, an immigrant from Norway who survived an attack that killed her husband and her son and placed her two daughters in captivity. She managed to care for her remaining two children as well as several wounded men and bring them all to safety. The Thurns not only dedicated their book “to all pioneers,” but sought to “further commemorate the memory of this pioneer heroine,” beyond the monument which had been erected in her honor by the state. Written in 1956, the entire book was intended to celebrate the pioneer spirit which aided in “the establishment of this part of our glorious Minnesota.”¹⁷ The need to celebrate the pioneer and promote the memory of those settlers who died defending their land as well as those who survived overshadowed any narrative which was sympathetic to the Dakota and their reasons for going to war.

¹⁶G. G. Allanson, *Stirring Adventures of the Joseph R. Brown Family*, (Sacred Heart, MN: Sacred Heart News, N.D.). Minnesota Historical Society Collections.

¹⁷Karl and Helen Thurn, *Guri Endreson: A true story of pioneer courage* (Thicket Press, 1956).

In December 1862, *Harper's Weekly* published an image titled "Indian Murderer" which depicted a young boy identifying a Dakota man who had participated in the War. The accompanying article listed the number of settlers killed as at least one thousand and speculated that many more "are still lying in the woods." This article also noted the growing belief that the War in Minnesota was the largest ever to occur between indigenous people and Euro-Americans: "There is no record of a massacre so thorough in detail in the history of our country, fruitful as it is of Indian outbreak." The article's author also assured his readers that the Dakota were prisoners, who actually now needed protection from "the vengeance of the outraged settlers." In January 1863, *Harper's* carried a sketch and accompanying article (reprinted from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*) describing in vivid detail the hangings of the thirty-eight Dakota men in Mankato the previous month. The sketch was titled "The Execution of Thirty-Eight Indian Murderers" and the written column described the event as "brief, and the whole number of savages were sent at the same moment before the Great Spirit to answer for their inhuman barbarities." Clearly, the rhetoric used in these examples and the choice of subject matter for the illustrations supported a "white-settlers-as-innocent-victims" memory that not only pervaded the state of Minnesota, but now had the sympathy of a national audience as well.¹⁸

Probably the largest national coverage occurred in June 1863 in *Harper's New Monthly* with a twenty-four-page article, including detailed illustrations, by an eyewitness: photographer Adrian Ebell. Intending to photograph Indian life on the reservation, particularly the distribution of annuity payments, Ebell had travelled from Chicago to Minnesota and arrived at the Upper Agency in mid-August 1862. During the morning of August 18, while the Lower Sioux Agency was under attack, Ebell was busy taking photos of a Dakota farming family at the Upper Agency

¹⁸ *Harper's Weekly*, "The Indian Murders in Minnesota," December 20, 1862; and *Harper's Weekly*, "The Execution of the Minnesota Indians," January 17, 1863.

near the Williamson mission. When word reached the mission that the Dakota had gone to war against white settlements, Ebell fled with the Williamson and Riggs groups in the early morning hours of August 19. While on this journey, Ebell would photograph the refugee group as they stopped for lunch on the prairie. This photo would be reproduced on numerous occasions and became a symbol for the dual notions of “innocent victims” and “resilient pioneers” in the months and years following the War. After the group reached Henderson, Ebell and his associate, Edwin Lawton, continued on to St. Paul where Ebell had his photographs developed and began contributing eyewitness accounts for the *St. Paul Daily Press*. He was eventually commissioned into the army at Fort Ridgely, where he continued to record his own observations as well as those of other survivors for the *Daily Press*. After a brief illness, Ebell left Minnesota and returned to Chicago where, by December 1862, he had contracted with *Harper’s New Monthly* to retell his full story for a national audience.¹⁹



Figure 3.2. “People escaping from Indian outbreak of 1862” by Adrian J. Ebell. Carte-de-visite, August 21, 1862. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁹ Adrian Ebell, “The Indian Massacres and War of 1862,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, (June 1863); and Alan R. Woolworth, “Adrian J. Ebel: Photographer and Journalist of the Dakota War of 1862,” *Minnesota History* (Minnesota Historical Society) 54, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 87-92.

In addition to his story of the six-week war, Ebell's article included a series of line drawings illustrating the region, various battle scenes, the jail where the Dakota were held awaiting trial, Camp Release (where the captives were released and the Dakota surrendered), Camp Lincoln (where Dakota prisoners spent the winter of 1863 outside Fort Snelling in St. Paul), and the mass hanging of the thirty-eight men. Although Ebell was not a resident of Minnesota and would not remain in the state for long, his eyewitness account and experience as a journalist made his story fascinating for a national audience. He used several pages to describe his journey to the Upper Agency and made frequent note of the tense conditions both agencies were experiencing as a result of the late annuity payment. Ebell also employed pejorative language and sentiment for Native Americans when describing the Dakota people at the Agency:

The "Bucks" are covered nearly from head to foot with their blankets... Their faces are painted, one half perhaps in zigzag stripes, while the other is speckled as if from a recent attack of measles; or in broach belts around their eyes. They have bows and arrows and double-barreled shot-guns, some with two-thirds of their barrels cut off for convenience in carrying under their blankets. They saunter around the stores and boarding-houses in groups, smoking their pipes of kinickinick, while the squaws – not unfrequently[sic] – perform all the work except fighting and eating.

Government has expended large sums of money to encourage and assist them in the pursuits of civilization... Yet, for all this, it has been with the greatest difficulty that a few have been persuaded to adopt the dress and the habits of the white man. The Indians look upon one of their number who cuts his hair, lays aside his blanket, changes his dress, and goes to work as having sold his tribal birth-right.

Ebell took pains to explain the peacefulness of the prairie settlements and posited that the Dakota were not wronged by the settlers laying claim to the surrounding land, but by the traders who took advantage of the Dakota on the reservation. Ebell then vividly described the attack of the Lower Sioux Agency using typical language that would provoke a memory of massacre rather than an act of war. He calls the Dakota soldiers "savages" and dramatically summarizes this early morning attack:

But who can tell the story of that hour? of [sic] the massacre of helpless women and children, imploring mercy from those whom their own hands had fed, but whose blood-dripping hatchets the next moment crashed pitilessly through their flesh and bones – of the abominations too hellish to rehearse – of the cruelties, the tortures, the shrieks of agony, the death-groans, of that *single hour!* (Emphasis in original)

This paragraph calls upon a nation's sympathies when women and children become victims of war, however, it does not convey that the targets of this first attack were the fur traders, not the women and children of the Agency. Furthermore, Ebell was not an eyewitness to this attack on the Lower Sioux Agency. On the morning of August 18, Ebell was photographing farming families at the Upper Agency, where he says they were "fearing no danger" and even when the tales of war finally reached them, "Not one of us, even the most timid, had the least conception of its extent and magnitude." Therefore, his graphic descriptions of this scene have been gleaned from other eyewitness accounts, and, more than likely, embellished by Ebell for dramatic effect. Still, he insisted, "I have given nothing but what I saw myself, or received from those who saw it."²⁰

Ebell's account continued with the attacks on area settlements and individual farms as well as the attacks at Fort Ridgely, the pursuit of Little Crow, and the surrender of the Dakota at Camp Release that led to the trials, imprisonment, and execution of the thirty-eight in December. Throughout the twenty-four pages, Ebell "rehearsed" tales of blood-shed to the point where it is easy to see why many believed a thousand or more white settlers had been massacred. He explained, "I have given but the briefest outline of the late massacre in Minnesota, in which not less than a thousand men, women, and children were indiscriminately murdered and tortured to death, and barbarities of the most hellish magnitude committed." Throughout this article, Ebell had little sympathy for the Dakota and provided few reasons that would lead them to war. When the thirty-eight Dakota men received the death sentence he described their reactions as

²⁰ Adrian Ebell, "The Indian Massacre and War of 1862," pp. 1-24.

indifferent. He ended his article warning the government to punish the Dakota in order to prevent such an outbreak from occurring again. The government should “Teach them habits of civilization, not by pampering them in idleness and smoothing them over with promises of annuities, but by placing them in circumstances requiring them to work.” As a whole, Ebell’s account reinforced the memories of the white settlers, memories of innocents massacred by a savage people who ultimately deserved their punishment and lessons should be taken from this example to prevent future bloodshed on the frontier.²¹

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While all survivors were encouraged to remember and share wartime experiences, the type of narrative in highest demand was from those individuals held captive during the War. These captivity narratives would be published routinely throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, making this particular war “unusual in the sheer number of accounts that found their way into print, probably because the War was, and continues to be, bitterly contested.”²² Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola collected a large number of these captivity narratives in her recent publication, *The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature*, as a way to examine “the complex interplay between narrative and memory.”²³ Derounian-Stodola incorporated equally both native and non-native contributions to the captivity genre. This work also loosely includes examples from authors who did not participate in the War but served as compilers of a series of survivor stories as well as a few examples of fiction using the Dakota War as its subject matter. In sum, her overall work expands readers’ understanding of what constitutes “captivity” for each of the featured authors. Ultimately, “the surviving traces of multiple captivity narratives... reveals the Dakota War’s

²¹ Ibid., 1-24.

²² Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pg. 2.

²³ Ibid, 21.

persistence in historical memory and joins a larger conversation within the United States about ethnicity, identity, war, memory, and narrative.”²⁴ Derounian-Stodola focuses exclusively on captivity narratives to explore the impact this War had on the collective memory. Her work does not include general narratives about the War or other communities’ efforts to share memories, such as anniversary celebrations or the dedication of monuments.

The majority of captivity and survivor narratives for the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 were published during distinct periods: immediately after the War in the 1860s and 1870s, from 1890-1910, and in the 1930s. However, individual publications occurred outside these periods, particularly during anniversary celebrations or times promoting state or national patriotism. Jacob Nix, for example, published his account of the attacks on New Ulm in 1887 to coincide with the twenty-fifth commemoration and anniversary celebrations planned for the surrounding region. One of the few residents of New Ulm with military experience at the time of the attack, Nix was instrumental in preparing the town’s defense. However, his *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota* found limited success as it was published in German. His stories were well known in the vicinity of New Ulm, but outside a German-speaking enclave, Nix’s memories had little audience.²⁵

Not all captivity narratives were told from a Euro-American perspective, even if the author was white and the story told closely followed the actual war. Sarah Wakefield spent six weeks as a captive and, in 1863, became one of the first captives to publish a narrative. The first edition did so well that a second edition in 1864 quickly followed. Derounian-Stodola refers to Wakefield’s account as “the most famous of all the captivity narratives arising from the Dakota War” and its popularity is surprising considering it blatantly critiques the U.S. government’s

²⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁵ Ibid., xxxi.

treatment of the Dakota before, during, and after the War.²⁶ While most captivity narratives revealed the prejudices of their Euro-American writers and the intended audience, Sarah Wakefield took great pains to show her sympathy towards the Dakota people and their reasons for warfare. Her narrative not only described the morality of her Dakota savior, Chaska, but also repeatedly detailed the kindness of several Dakota women who protected her and her children. Beyond publishing her story, Sarah was the “only one of approximately one hundred women and men to come forward and to testify for Dakota people.”²⁷ Despite her testimony at the military trials, Chaska, the man Sarah said saved her from certain death on multiple occasions, was convicted of murdering George Gleason, her driver when she and her children left the Upper Agency on August 18. Sarah testified that it was Hapa, not Chaska, who shot and killed Gleason, but the tribunal opted to ignore her testimony. Wakefield recalled,

When Chaska was to be tried, I was called upon to testify. I told them all I could say would be in his favor. They thought it very strange I could speak in favor of an Indian. I went into court, and was put under oath. Chaska was present, and I shook hands with him. I am particular in relating every interview I had with him, as many false and slanderous stories are in circulation about me. He was convicted of being an accomplice in the murder of Geo. Gleason, without any evidence against him. I was angry, for it seemed to me as if they considered my testimony of no account; for if they had believed what I said, he would have been acquitted.²⁸

As a result of this conviction, Chaska was hanged in Mankato on December 26, 1862. While Wakefield explained her desire to publish this narrative as a means to help her children remember the weeks in captivity, it’s possible she felt guilty for not being able to save Chaska in the same manner that he had saved her. June Numias, editor of the 1997 reprint of Wakefield’s narrative, observes, “Perhaps those guilts forced her to become a writer in defense of the Dakota

²⁶ Ibid., xxviii.

²⁷ Numias, “Editor’s Introduction,” p. 39.

²⁸ Wakefield, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees* (1997 publication), pp. 115-116.

nation.”²⁹ Furthermore, while Wakefield’s message in support of restoring the Dakota nation’s ancestral land was not a popular one in the wake of the 1862 War, her narrative is one of the few from this war to be republished multiple times and remains in demand with its most recent publication occurring in 1997.

Harriet Bishop McConkey, a St. Paul schoolteacher who wanted to make a name for herself as a historian, compiled a lengthy version of the War and included a number of stories from survivors. Published in late 1863 and then revised by 1864 for a second edition, *Dakota War Whoop: or, Indian Massacres and War in Minnesota, of 1862-3* provided little of the sympathy for the Dakota nation that was found in Wakefield’s narrative. McConkey’s book opens with a picture of Henry Sibley and a dedication to him – very clearly setting the story as siding with the white settlers and ultimately the white soldiers who set out to stop the War. Although McConkey did not experience the War first-hand as a captive or a survivor, she considered herself “a living, actual witness” because she was privy to all the reports and survivor accounts that flourished (in the state’s newspapers) throughout the weeks of warfare. She recounted the circumstances that led the Dakota to declare war, but she fully placed the blame on the Dakota saying, “they had broken truce with the whites” when the four Dakota hunting party killed the settlers at Acton. She used terminology such as “evil” and “terrible” to describe Dakota actions and referred to Little Crow as “the bloody Chief.” She openly declared the civilization programs to be pointless and believed, “How would the souls of poor white men expand with ambition, was the same kindly governmental care extended to them!” Furthermore, she considered the actual war to have been inevitable – that any wrongs committed by the government, the traders, or the settlers against the Dakota to be a simple catalyst for conflict:

²⁹ Numias, “Editor’s Introduction,” p. 35.

In every normal savage heart exists a principle of reckless hate towards the whites, which, stimulated by real or imaginary wrongs, needs no avalanche of argument to start the missiles of death. Like a spark of fire in a magazine of powder, the ignition is as sudden, the results as terrible. That the great Sioux raid of '62 was somewhere premeditated, plans intelligently matured and admirably arranged for secrecy, is beyond a doubt. Strategy is the art of savage warfare, secrecy the guaranty of success.

Like the majority of histories and captivity narratives that would emerge in the several decades following the War, McConkey's firmly falls on the side of the white settlers as innocent, unsuspecting victims.³⁰

While McConkey included the personal experiences of several survivors (such as Mrs. Eastlick and her sons and Mrs. Jeanette DeCamp who are mentioned elsewhere in this chapter), the story of George Spencer definitely dominated as a narrative throughout her book. A storeowner in the vicinity of the reservation, Spencer had learned the Dakota language and considered a number of Dakota to be his friends. Still, he learned over time that "as a race, the Sioux were worthy of little confidence." Shot three times in the attack at the Lower Agency, reports circulated that he was dead. He appealed to a Dakota friend to spare his life, was taken as a captive to Little Crow's village, and was nursed back to health. Spencer remained a captive until the end of the War and was rescued at Camp Release by Sibley's troops following the battle of Wood Lake. In a later chapter, titled "Cause of the War – What is an Indian?," McConkey used Spencer's observations to explain the grievances the Dakota had against the government which would lead to war. However, Spencer also provided extremely derogatory remarks about the Dakota, a nation among whom he had lived for many years and considered to be his friends. He stated, "In the great chain of nature, the Indian is a connecting link between the wild beast and the human species." Spencer did not feel the Dakota had an instinct other than to go to war and he credited them with very little intelligence and certainly not equal to the civilization of

³⁰ Harriet E. Bishop McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop: or, Indian Massacres and War in Minnesota, of 1862-3*, Revised Edition (St. Paul, MN: Wm. J. Moses' Press, Auburn, N. Y., 1864): 19, 30, 38-39, 287-288.

white society. “When they feel that they have been wronged, they proceed (actually solely by a desire for revenge) to wreak their vengeance upon defenseless, helpless women and children.” It is interesting to point out that both George Spencer and Sarah Wakefield were treated kindly during their captivity period and they both repeatedly ascribe their captors as “friends.” However, Spencer’s narrative differs greatly from Wakefield and his published statements offer little sympathy for the Dakota people. His outspoken beliefs mirrored the feelings of most white settlers before and after the War occurred and it bolstered the belief that the Dakota should not coexist with white Americans.³¹

In 1864, Charles S. Bryant and Abel B. Murch published *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians, in Minnesota*. As indicated in the title with the use of the word “massacre,” Bryant and Murch’s publication does not grant significant sympathy to the Dakota side of this War. Also, like previous published histories of the War,³² this was a compilation of stories from survivors and captives published “for the benefit of the present and future generations, the astounding truths connected with this bloody drama in our history.” Opening with an overview of the history of Minnesota, beginning with the arrival of the French in the 17th century, this work included background information about the tensions and “complaints” of the Dakota prior to 1862. Chapters four through twelve retold the events of the War in much the same fashion as other compiled histories, but chapters thirteen through twenty provided the written narratives of a number of survivors, including Mary Schwandt and Lavina Eastlick (whose stories will be discussed in more detail below). Bryant and Murch make their feelings on the War abundantly clear in the opening paragraph of the first chapter calling it a “horrible

³¹ McConkey, *Dakota War Whoop*, pp. 52, 125, 127, 241. For the purposes of this chapter, the story of George Spencer can be found in McConkey’s Chapters 7, 20, 34, 40, and 41.

³² I am referring to the 1863 publications of Harriet Bishop McConkey’s *Dakota War Whoop; or, Indian Massacres of War in Minnesota* and Isaac V. D. Heard’s *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863*.

massacre of the defenseless inhabitants.” The authors almost entirely placed blame for the War on the Dakota, only mildly suggesting that the United States may have wronged Native Americans at any point. In fact, the final pages used increasingly derogatory language, frequently calling the Dakota “murderers” and declaring that the civilization programs would continually fail. The authors ultimately upheld the ideals of western progress and manifest destiny declaring, “This is written in God’s law of eternal progress.” Finally, they supported and promoted the idea of banishing the Dakota from the state completely and warned, “The final result of the war of progress is the extermination of the resisting element: that element may lie in some false and pernicious theory, or in a particular race or branch of the races of men, who stubbornly stand in the pathway of humanity, and attempt to stay its onward movement.”³³

By the 1890s, the Minnesota Historical Society, with the aid of historian and journalist Return I. Holcombe, sought to record as many accounts from survivors as possible. This desire was not limited to white survivors, and Holcombe, among others, made several visits to Dakota reservations to record the stories of Dakota participants, both those who were held captive by their relatives and those who participated in the War. These narratives signified the state’s desire to preserve firsthand accounts while participants still lived, but they also sought accounts that were previously overlooked, such as the stories from previously marginalized groups, like German-Americans or the Dakotas. Derounian-Stodola explains, “[B]y the 1890s newspapers and historical publications were competing for hitherto unheard stories about the War to boost readership and reach the huge number of newcomers to Minnesota since 1862.”³⁴ Because so many immigrants were arriving in Minnesota during this time, the state, through the pages of

³³ Charles S. Bryant, A. M., and Abel B. Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians, In Minnesota, Including the Personal Narratives of Many Who Escaped*, Republished by Kraus Reprint Co., Millwood, N.Y., 1973 (Cincinnati, OH: Rickey & Carroll Publishers, 1864): iii, 18, 463-464.

³⁴ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, p. 104.

local media, felt it necessary to redefine its history for these new residents, and this included recording and publishing accounts of the state's most significant event. A number of issues of *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* during the 1890s included captivity narratives and survivor stories from women, ethnic minorities, and Dakota participants from the War, which continued to hold the interest of the state even thirty years later. Most of the memories recorded came from captives who had never previously told their stories, such as Jannette DeCamp Sweet, who declared, "It is a part of my life which I would much rather forget than remember, and which, after so many years' time, I can now dwell upon but with feelings of utmost horror."³⁵ Derounian-Stodola explains that most participants in these newly published collections contributed "as a public duty,"³⁶ and rarely discussed their memories publicly again. However, their memories, once published, did contribute to the growing collective memory that remained strong in the state at this time.

Even accounts with somewhat balanced sympathies continued to attack the Dakota people rather than understand the reasons behind the War. Mary Schwandt Schmidt's story became very popular in the decades following her captivity, partly because Bryant and Murch first published it as one of the several narratives in the 1864 book. In this first account, Mary gave a relatively straightforward, almost emotionless account of her family's deaths and her own subsequent captivity and possible rape. Like Sarah Wakefield, she also experienced the protection of a Dakota individual, in her case a Dakota woman who essentially adopted Mary during her weeks in captivity. In her 1864 account, Mary, having lost her parents during the War, described her experience with mild anger. She wrote, "The Indian who took me prisoner gave me to his niece, *Wenona*. The whites called her Maggie. Her husband's name was *Wakinyan Waste*,

³⁵ "Mrs. J. E. De Camp Sweet's Narrative of Her Captivity in the Sioux Outbreak of 1862," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (The Pioneer Press Company, State Printers) 6 (1894): 354.

³⁶ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, p. 127.

or Good Thunder. I was forced to call them father and mother.”³⁷ By 1894, her feelings towards Good Thunder and Maggie (also known as Snana) had apparently softened. She called Maggie “one of the handsomest Indian women I ever saw” and stated “Maggie could not have treated me more tenderly if I had been her daughter.” Maggie Brass in Santee, Nebraska, where she was living at the Indian Agency School, read these kind words and she quickly sent a letter to Mary. Their renewed correspondence led to several reunions between the two, public recognition of the role Maggie Brass played in Mary’s survival (Maggie’s name would be engraved on the monument to “Friendly Indians” in Morton, Minnesota, in 1908), and Mary providing some financial support to Maggie for the rest of her life.³⁸

Still, Mary’s story, which she repeatedly shared either as a public speaker or in future published narratives, remained the story of American western progress. Her 1929 manuscript, “Recollections of My Captivity among the Sioux,” explains why she broke nearly 30 years of silence in 1894 to retell her story. The *Pioneer Press* had sent an interviewer to record her story and she explained, “[T]he man said it would be a sin for me not to tell my story and let this generation know what the early settlers had to go through all the hardships and at last loose thear [sic] lives besides and said he it belonged to the History of Minnesota.”³⁹ This placement of Mary’s story within the generic story of American pioneers’ efforts at settlement hindered by desperate Indians continued in the 1975 republication, *The Captivity of Mary Schwandt*. Glen Adams proclaimed in the preface,

As white settlement of the American West progressed, inch by inch and mile by mile the Indian was pushed back, always to the poorest land. When millions of bison were slaughtered on the prairies starvation stalked the red man. The Sioux were proud and stubborn and in 1862 they rose against their oppressors. In this conflict hundreds of lives

³⁷ Bryant and Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre*, p. 341.

³⁸ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pp. 112-116.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

were lost, both red and white, and prisoners were taken on both sides. A number of white girls were captured, including Mary Schwandt. This is her story.⁴⁰

While each of Mary Schwandt Schmidt's published narratives included some favorable descriptions of Dakota people, the majority of her work was about surviving despite having lost much; in her case she lost both parents and three siblings as well as several friends and acquaintances. Despite her renewed friendship with Maggie Brass, her memories were extremely painful – to the point she did not want to recall them until her friends “assured me that my experience is a part of a leading incident in the history of Minnesota that ought to be given to the world...to inform the present and future generations what some of the pioneers of Minnesota underwent in their efforts to settle and civilize our great state.”⁴¹ Mary specifically shared her memories, not to sympathize with her captors or to support the state's punishment of the Dakota, but to remind Minnesotans of the sacrifices endured by the early settlers, such as those made by her family, to achieve the pioneer dream.

Minnie Bruce Carrigan's story was one sought first by her local community and only later published to reach a larger audience. In 1903, her captivity tale was told in serial form by the *Buffalo Lake News*, which declared her experience to be similar to other pioneers who “shrank not from the dangers and hardships of pioneer life, but resolutely set to work to build homes for themselves and their children in what is now the beautiful county of Renville.” Her story was so well received that she was encouraged to publish her memories as a book and she hoped the book would “instill in the minds of its readers a true appreciation of the pioneers of the Minnesota Valley and a like appreciation for the manifold comforts and advantages which are ours to enjoy at present, but which were not thought of by our ancestors forty years ago, then I

⁴⁰ Glen Adams, "Preface," in *The Captivity of Mary Schwandt* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1975).

⁴¹ Mary Schwandt Schmidt, *The Captivity of Mary Schwandt*, ed. Glen Adams (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1975): 26. Originally published as “The Story of Mary Schwandt” *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (The Pioneer Press Company, State Printers) 6 (1894): 461-474.

shall feel that this story has not been written in vain.” Published in 1907 and then revised in 1912 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the War, Carrigan not only retells her own story, but includes stories that she would have heard from other sources, such as the killings at Acton on August 17, which propelled the Dakota to seek war. Just five when her family settled in the area of Sacred Heart Creek in 1860, Minnie Bruce was part of a growing German settlement, which would include the family of Mary Schwandt. Carrigan writes, “Our life on the frontier was peaceful and uneventful. All, or nearly all, of the families in our settlement were Germans: honest, industrious, and God-fearing people.”⁴²

In amazing detail, Carrigan described the deaths of her parents and young siblings on the first day of the War, August 18. Nearly forty years later, Carrigan explained her ability to recall her memories, “How painfully distinct are all the memories of this dreadful afternoon.” Minnie, along with her brother, August, and sister, Amelia, were spared, but were taken captive. Before going to the Dakota camp, the children witnessed the dead bodies of several neighbors and later learned the fates of several others. Her next pages described the days spent in camp and her encounters with several Dakota as well as other captives. Minnie spent the entire six weeks of War in captivity and was released following the battle of Wood Lake along with the other more than two hundred captives being held at what became known as Camp Release. Eventually the captives were brought to St. Peter where relatives and friends were waiting to claim loved ones. Although Minnie survived the War, her memories included hoping that other members of her family might have survived as well. “I could not help watching the door and thinking of the story the teamster [that her father might have survived] had told me,” she wrote, “but it was in vain – my father and mother never came.” Minnie and her two siblings were eventually placed in the

⁴² Minnie Bruce Carrigan, *Captured by the Indians: Reminiscences of Pioneer Life in Minnesota* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977): 1-6.

care of a farmer near Hutchinson, who received money from her father's estate because he said he would care for the surviving children. She left this new home at the age of fifteen, became a schoolteacher, and eventually married. While Minnie Bruce Carrigan's personal story ended here, the published book included several more stories of captivity survivors.⁴³

While narratives of Euro-American survivors dominated publication, some native texts also made contributions in the late nineteenth and early twenties centuries. The 1890s saw a renewed interest in the War and a number of professional and amateur historians sought to record as many stories as possible while participants were still alive. As explained above, at this time, Minnesota's historians also sought the recollections of marginalized groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, which allowed a fair number of Dakota memories to be gathered. Derounian-Stodola explains that minority stories no longer seemed "as so threatening to mainstream American society. They also naively believed that residual hostility and self-serving subjectivity had completely evaporated by then."⁴⁴ The majority of native Dakota publications were the stories of mixed-blood families who had not joined Little Crow and were held as captives during the War. Those Dakota who did participate in battles, such as Big Eagle, made clear in their published accounts that their participation was reluctant and they did so only out of fear for their own lives. Derounian-Stodola provides some of the reasons native stories became published,

[T]he date of composition and the circumstances under which the information was told, published, revised, and/or republished were often connected with the subject's political and personal allegiances regarding the Conflict. The closer the texts were to 1862, the more likely that the Indian writers or tellers whose work appeared in print either were, or said they were, accommodationists. Only later, with the passage of time, might Dakotas be more willing to speak frankly and the majority press be more willing to publish responses dissenting from the prevailing mainstream ideology.⁴⁵

⁴³ Carrigan, *Captured by the Indians*, pp. 9, 23.

⁴⁴ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, p. 104-105.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

Some examples of Dakota narratives published during this period include: Samuel Brown, held captive (narrative published in 1897); Nancy McClure Faribault Huggan, held captive (narrative published in 1894); Lorenzo Lawrence, a Christian Dakota who advocated for peace and helped secure the release of the captives (narrative recorded in 1895 and published in 1912); Snana, or Maggie Brass, the Dakota woman who adopted Mary Schwandt during her captivity (narrative published in 1901); and Big Eagle, a participant in the War (narrative published in 1894).⁴⁶

In 1988, Dakota War historians Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth published thirty-six narratives gleaned from Dakota participants in the decades following the War. The completed work, *Through Dakota Eyes*, is one of the few texts on the War which is completely from a Dakota perspective; however, even the authors admit that the narratives “vary considerably in content and in scope.”⁴⁷ The majority of the published narrators were not willing war participants, but were either held captive by the Dakota or felt coerced into joining the Dakota side. Furthermore, the intended audience for the majority of the publications was a white audience. Anderson and Woolworth explain, “[E]ven forty or fifty years after 1862 anti-Indian feeling was still so intense in Minnesota, and racism was so pervasive in American society, that Dakota narrators undoubtedly felt constrained in what they could say. Surely the narrators knew that the largest part of their audience held no sympathy for the Dakota Indians.”⁴⁸ Derounian-Stodola agrees, saying, “the Native texts themselves not only showed what their usually white mediators wanted them to show but could and did reveal the Native subjects manipulating or controlling material.” Still, Anderson and Woolworth compiled a unique collection of memories that together offer a different perspective on the War than the memories of white settlers. Seven

⁴⁶ Ibid., xvii-xxix.

⁴⁷ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

narrators participated in the War, five were on the fence and only opposed the War when it was clear the Dakota would not be successful, four narrators actively organized a “peace party” to counter the War efforts, others showed some sympathy to the leaders of the War without actively participating, and the rest simply tried to stay out of the way of all sides in the War.⁴⁹ This collection of voices reveals “the complexity of Dakota society in 1862,”⁵⁰ and seeks to “make deeper and broader perspectives available to readers.”⁵¹

The ways the Dakota remembered this War, including the publication of first-person memories and captivity narratives, will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5. However, the account of Big Eagle, a chief who reluctantly fought with Little Crow because he would not abandon his soldiers, can be discussed here. Big Eagle’s narrative, or “A Sioux Story of the War,” appeared in the series compiled by Return I. Holcombe for the Minnesota Historical Society. Holcombe, a journalist and aspiring historian, tracked survivors throughout the state and even travelled to Dakota reservations in South Dakota to obtain these memories. Through the interpretation of Nancy McClure Huggan and the missionary on the reservation, Holcombe was able to interview Big Eagle in “order that a correct knowledge of the military movements of the Indians during the war might be learned.” Holcombe further explained, “[W]e can never fully understand the Sioux war of 1862 until the Indians tell their story.” He made it clear that Big Eagle was happy to share his story, that he was now living as a Christian under his “true” name, Elijah, and that he was “respected by all who knew him.” Because so few Dakota, especially

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

those who participated in the War, shared their stories with a white audience, Holcombe was obviously thrilled to have such a “frank and unreserved” interview subject.⁵²

Born in 1827, at the time of the interview Big Eagle was sixty-seven years old and living a relatively quiet life in Flandreau, South Dakota. Before and during the War, Big Eagle was considered a sub-chief, responsible for his village, but not speaking for the entire Dakota nation. He was one of several Dakota chiefs, which included Little Crow, to visit Washington, D. C., in 1858. This visit led to the sale of the northern half of their reservation land along the Minnesota River. What Big Eagle chose to share in his narrative, as well as the tone of his language, suggests that even though this is a narrative by a Dakota participant in the War, it is a modified picture of what was happening from the Dakota perspective. Big Eagle was aware that the majority of his audience would be white and he carefully used language that would reflect favorably on him.

Immediately in his narrative, Big Eagle emphasized his current beliefs, saying, “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 explained the many reasons the Dakota people were upset with the reservation system including the resistance to learning to farm and the continual cheating of the Dakota by the fur traders. He also spoke of the general prejudice against the Dakota, “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.” In the end, “All these things made many Indians dislike the whites.”⁵³ Throughout his account, Big Eagle displayed great understanding of the actions of the Dakota as well as what he knew about white society:

⁵² *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, “A Sioux Story of the War,” July 1, 1894. Republished in *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (The Pioneer Press Company, State Printers) 6 (1894): 382-384.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 384-385.

“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.” He then recounted the killings at the Baker farm in Acton, which prompted the Dakota to go to war. He insisted he “was never present when the white people were willfully murdered,” but he felt compelled to accompany his people throughout their engagements in the war. He participated in the second attacks on New Ulm and Fort Ridgely saying “if we could take [the fort] we would soon have the whole Minnesota valley.”⁵⁴

In all, Big Eagle’s account is quite passive; it discusses wrongdoings by whites and Dakota during the various battles, but it’s done in such a quiet manner that it does not feel as if he places blame or harbors resentment. If anything, Big Eagle was most upset after he chose to surrender with the rest of the Dakota after the battle of Wood Lake. He had been assured that his prison term would be short, but in reality he served three years in prison in Davenport, Iowa. He wrote, “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.”⁵⁵

The acquisition of Big Eagle’s account by Holcombe for publication was important and received significant popular interest. His version, though given via a translator and then rewritten by Holcombe, was one of the few published accounts to feature the War from the viewpoint of a Dakota chief. Whereas most other published accounts by Dakota came from those Dakota who remained on the side of peace and negotiated surrender at Camp Release or were taken captive

⁵⁴ Ibid., 387-392.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 399.

and held in Little Crow's camps for six weeks, Big Eagle survived to give his story from behind the battle lines of the Dakota army. This side of the story and its contribution to the overall memory of the War had certainly been overlooked up until this point. However, it's also important to distinguish the nature of Big Eagle's participation in the War. Derounian-Stodola placed Big Eagle's account within the genre of captivity narratives because he described feeling coerced into fighting with Little Crow and only reluctantly joined the War effort to protect his own men. His story, told more than thirty years after the War with remorseful undertones, was still only a glimpse into the thoughts and actions that occurred among Little Crow and his supporters. Still, Big Eagle's narrative provides an alternative story to the numerous first-person accounts that fell firmly on the side of the white settlers. He conceded that the Dakota "did not understand things as they should" (meaning they were not Christians at the time), but he also did not apologize for the desire of a nation to reclaim what had wrongfully been taken from them.⁵⁶

The third period of publishing first-hand written accounts of the War, even those that were passed down to latter generations, occurred during the 1930s as part of a Tourism Bureau Contest to commemorate Minnesota's Diamond Jubilee in 1933. This contest, with a grand prize being a trip to Itasca State Park, collected "about a hundred essays dealing with Sioux War experiences."⁵⁷ According to historian John Bodnar, this period in American history integrated "vernacular cultures into official ones."⁵⁸ With the nation facing the crisis of the Great Depression and possible war in Europe, local, small-group stories were being incorporated into the larger state (or official) collective history. This created a stronger bond between local groups and statewide or national interests if citizens collectively felt they shared each other's memories. In Minnesota, the state's 75th anniversary observations gathered personal stories from across the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 384; and Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pp. 217-219.

⁵⁷ "General Minnesota Items," *Minnesota History* (Minnesota Historical Society) 14, no. 4 (1933): 449-450.

⁵⁸ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, p. 41.

state. The sheer number of citizens who recalled the War indicated that this event was still fresh in the collective memory. As of 1933, especially since some survivors of the War were still alive, this event remained a pivotal turning point in state history and white citizens eagerly shared their personal or family stories, incorporating these individual memories into the larger collective memory.

Some of the reminiscences collected sought to remind white Minnesotans that many Dakota did not participate in the War. George Allanson, a descendant of the Joseph Brown family (the mixed-heritage family of former Indian Agent Joseph Brown and his Dakota wife who were held as captives during the War), explained that while his mother's family story was well known, he wanted to use this contest to tell about "the shabby treatment of Standing Buffalo," a Sisseton Dakota who was pursued by Little Crow into Dakota territory even though he was known to be "in every respect a good Indian." He further explained, "As some of the facts do not conform with the ideas of some of our historians, I want to state that they are drawn largely from Indian sources." Allanson also submitted a published pamphlet titled "Stirring Adventures of the Jos. R. Brown Family," which appeared in a series on "Pioneers" in the *Sacred Heart News*. This pamphlet described the events from the perspective of his grandmother, Mrs. Joseph Brown, and his mother, Ellen. Although the Brown family had close cultural and ethnic connections to the Dakota people, Allanson's pamphlet provided numerous examples which separated the wealthy Brown family from the war aims of Little Crow and his followers. Allanson used harsh language when describing the Dakota who attacked, "These Indians, even without their threatening attitude were a terrifying spectacle – naked except for breech clouts, their faces and bodies daubed with paint and smeared with blood, their hands and weapons bloody." Both through his desire to change historians' perception of Standing Buffalo and his

descriptive anti-Dakota tone throughout the pamphlet, Allanson very clearly illustrated that many Dakota did not side with Little Crow but were in fact allies to the white settlers.⁵⁹

Most of the collected memories for this 1933 contest were reminiscences of settlers fleeing regions under threat of attack. Some were first-person accounts, such as Christiana Hudson Brack who remembered fleeing to New Ulm only to return to her home after seeing the town on fire, or the account of August Gluth, who was captured at age twelve and told of his experiences living in Little Crow's camp as a captive. Others were stories passed down to younger generations. Jesse Vawler Branham's daughter described the family's flight, but also detailed her father's military service at Acton and Hutchinson during the course of the War. In the case of William and Margaret Jones, their granddaughter recounted their escape to the safety of Mankato. Mr. A. A. Davidson, a man who lived between the lower and upper agencies, witnessing the passing of time, and interviewing "defenders, captives, survivors, and Indians who participated in the Indian Massacre of 1862," chose to submit a narrative about Justina Krieger, whose story he called the "most harried and cruel."⁶⁰ Whether a handwritten account, a newspaper clipping, or a typed letter, it was clear from the response garnered by the Tourism Bureau, that survivors and their immediate surviving family members still harbored deep memories of the War and wished to share those memories with a wider audience.

⁵⁹ The sources provided by George Gray Allanson for the 1933 Tourism Bureau Contest can be found on Reel 1, Frame 0107, part of the Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Microfilm edition, Minnesota Historical Society. Specifically, these include a letter from George Gray Allanson to Mr. George H. Bradley, July 31, 1933; an undated pamphlet by Allanson titled "Stirring Adventures of the Jos. R. Brown Family;" and a typewritten document by Allanson titled "Standing Buffalo."

⁶⁰ The following sources were all submitted for the 1933 Tourism Bureau Contest and are part of the Dakota Conflict of 1862 Manuscripts Collections, Microfilm edition, Minnesota Historical Society: Christiana Hudson Brack, "Reminiscence," September 4, 1933, Reel 1, Frame 0101; August Gluth (submitted by Harry B. West), "A Lad's Version of Chief Little Crow," July 29, 1933, Reel 1, Frame 0488; William and Margaret Jones (submitted by Mrs. Wallace Merritt), "Sioux Massacre of 1862," 1933, Reel 2, frame 0173; and Justina Kreigher (submitted by A. A. Davidson), "Narrative from the Indian Outbreak of 1862," 1933, Reel 2, frame 0323.

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Another method for sharing the story of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 took the form of the documentary panorama and two Minnesota artists provided contributions to this art form. Like the collective, community identity formed from the sharing of personal narratives described above, the documentary panorama “re-presented and promoted expansion and settlement across the continent, and thus the extension and consolidation of the United States.”⁶¹ These panoramas allowed vast numbers of Minnesotans, most who had never participated in the War personally or were new to the state, to experience the War and to become part of the master narrative by actively taking part in its memory. John Stevens, a native of Utica, New York, who arrived in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1853, made his living as a house and sign painter when news of the War reached him. Rochester, while located in southern Minnesota, was far enough east that it became a haven for refugees fleeing settlements located in the wake of violence. Stevens painted four panoramas between 1863-1878 that described the scenes inspired by the story of two survivors of the attacks, Mrs. Lavina Eastlick and her son Merton. Mrs. Eastlick vividly recounted to Stevens the attacks in Murray County and how young Merton carried his infant brother to safety, walking over 60 miles.⁶²

Stevens’ panorama allowed audiences to “experience” a dramatic event, and it was shown throughout Minnesota in the late 1860s and 1870s. Stevens’ panorama shows sold tickets for as much as fifty cents in St. Paul and it gave the larger Minnesota public the chance to experience the War in person. The hero of his story was the young Merton Eastlick, because he single-handedly carried his infant brother to safety. An 1873 advertisement for a showing of the panorama (together with a second part depicting the recent Chicago Fire) included commentary

⁶¹ John Bell, “The Sioux War Panorama and American Mythic History,” *Theatre Journal* (The Johns Hopkins University Press) 48 (1996): 284.

⁶² Heilbron, “Documentary Panorama,” pp. 14-23.

from Eastlick himself who traveled with the show for a time, giving the show a greater sense of authenticity. This playbill also listed Eastlick as the show's manager and promised that half of the proceeds from the exhibition would go to him to help support his mother and younger brother. Stevens would create four different panoramas on this topic before his death in 1879, eventually bringing his show to Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois, and due to his skill as a showman it appears he made a profit from this business.⁶³

More than entertaining his audience, Stevens' panorama show "redefined the 1862 Sioux uprising for the settler audience as an epic narrative of white innocence, Indian savagery, vulnerable nature, and death." Through the visual medium of a painted canvas, he used the same language employed by the authors of written survivor narratives and he reinforced the belief that the settlers ultimately triumphed over the Dakota, a task rooted in the concept of manifest destiny. On the national scale, this concept justified the United States' acquisition and settlement of the western territories. In Minnesota, the settlers who claimed homesteads in the Minnesota River Valley believed they were destined to control the land. As proof, they conquered the Dakota even at the cost of going to war, and they successfully resettled those regions that had been attacked. This documentary panorama, a form of entertainment but also a way to disseminate a shared memory to a wider audience, created a mythic history for the settlers. This history reaffirmed "the correctness of existing frontier settlements in the eyes of their householders and [justified] ongoing and future expansions westward to the Pacific." White Minnesotans not only defeated and removed the Dakota from the land, they also contributed to the national goal of westward expansion during the nineteenth century.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.; and Bell, "The Sioux War Panorama and American Mythic History," pp. 279-282.

Like Stevens, artist Anton Gág also produced a series of paintings designed to document the War. Gág, born in 1859 in Bohemia, arrived in the United States in 1873, eventually settling in New Ulm in 1880, almost twenty years after the War ended. Soon after arriving, Gág found a benefactor in brewer August Schell, who sent Gág to Chicago for a time to study art. During his year in Chicago, Gág also spent a few weeks in Milwaukee, where he was probably first exposed to the popularity of the panorama. He returned to New Ulm and established himself as an artist and proprietor of a photography studio. In 1891, he photographed the unveiling of the New Ulm “Defenders” monument. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, New Ulm survived two organized attacks during the 1862 War. As the town rebuilt, its citizens worked hard to preserve their memories of the War by dedicating monuments and hosting regular anniversary celebrations. This provided Gág with ample material from which to learn about the War and to visually represent it through paintings. By 1902, in collaboration with his business partners Alexander Schwendinger and Christian Heller, Gág worked on his panorama project depicting the 2nd battle of New Ulm through the end of the War and the climaxing with the execution of the thirty-eight. While more polished than Stevens, Gág did not experience the same level of popularity and was not as skilled at marketing his work as Stevens. Stevens also had the advantage of an eyewitness account to provide authenticity to his presentation, whereas Gág relied on his own imagination when painting his scenes of war. Still, the panorama received considerable attention in the New Ulm area and his paintings of the War remain well known.



Figure 3.3. “Attack on New Ulm during the Sioux Outbreak August 19th – 23rd 1862” by Anton Gág (1859-1908). Oil painting, 1904. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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While survivors of the War still lived and could be compelled to tell their story, white Minnesotans were not content with simply sharing these memories in published narratives or experiencing memory as it was presented in visual form. Many white communities affected by the War were committed to publicly and collectively remembering through the act of anniversary or reunion celebrations. Just as with the desire to share individual memories through published narratives, communities banded together and formed a group identity while remembering their shared experience of surviving this War. In 1893, the *Minneapolis Star Journal* reported that survivors of the Battle of Birch Coulee would “meet again to talk over the events of that fight so famous in the annals of the state.” While this reunion did not occur on the actual battlefield, but rather several hundred miles away in the city of Minneapolis, the media explained the

importance of such a meeting as “there are not many of the boys left to tell of the fatal surprise and awful slaughter that occurred that beautiful September day so many years ago.”⁶⁵

In 1894, the citizens of Montevideo, Minnesota, marked the dedication of the “Camp Release Monument” by planning a reception, speeches, and entertainment for the nearly 2,500 visitors who arrived to mark the occasion. This celebration, which took place on July 4th and included a parade headed by “twenty young ladies and misses, tastefully dressed and carrying flags,” provided an opportunity for reminiscences of “one of the most memorable days” in Montevideo’s history.⁶⁶ In 1908, the *Redwood Gazette* reported that the annual Minnesota State Fair would include a reproduction of Fort Ridgely’s buildings that would then be the object of a mock attack. With more than 1,000 people involved in the production, “300 of which are to be Sioux Indians,” this was sure “to be the big spectacular feature of this year’s fair.”⁶⁷

In 1912, the city of Hutchinson, Minnesota, hosted a 50th Anniversary Sioux Indian Massacre Commemoration and invited all “defenders, pioneers, and former residents of Hutchinson” to the festivities. This event coincided with the “corner-stone laying of the new school building 50 years after the burning of Hutchinson’s first school house by the Indians.”⁶⁸ Also in 1912, the town of Fairfax hosted a celebration for the 50th Anniversary of the battle at Fort Ridgely. Coinciding with the grand opening of Fort Ridgely State Park, the town anticipated a “Monster Crowd” and festivities included a demonstration of military maneuvers by the 9th Infantry, recently returned from the Philippines and stationed at Fort Snelling in St. Paul. The Fairfax celebration included a special souvenir edition of the local newspaper, which provided

⁶⁵ *Minneapolis Star Journal*, "Twas a Bloody Fight," August 26, 1893.

⁶⁶ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "Where Whites Were Freed," July 4, 1894.

⁶⁷ *Redwood Gazette*, "Rebuilding Fort Ridgely," July 15, 1908.

⁶⁸ *50th Anniversary Sioux Indian Massacre Commemoration of Hutching, Minn., Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, 1912, to All Defenders, Pioneers, and Former Residents of Hutchinson, Minnesota*. Pamphlets relating to the 1862 Dakota Conflict (1865-...), Minnesota Historical Society Pamphlet Collection.

numerous articles retelling the War, with special emphasis on the Ft. Ridgely battle, and a special column “Pioneer Tells of Battle” where a Mr. George Rieke described his experience for readers.⁶⁹ In 1926, a memorial service was held at the Birch Coulee Battlefield which included a parade, talk of the battle from a survivor, the placement of 100 wreaths on crosses by local school children, and a variety of patriotic songs. This ceremony connected the story of survival of the Birch Coulee battle to the persistence of pioneers who successfully settled the countryside and therefore included two presentations on this specific topic: “Pioneer Days in Birch Cooley” by Jim Landy and “Reminiscences of Days Gone By” by Col. C. H. Hopkins.⁷⁰

In 1927, the community of Monson Lake, where thirteen pioneers were killed on August 20, 1862, dedicated “Monson Lake Memorial Park” as a “perpetual memorial” and location for continued anniversary ceremonies. For several years, the Monson Lake Memorial Association hosted an annual observance, often in the form of a community picnic. The activities included a number of guest speakers, a religious element, and an assortment of musical numbers or patriotic gestures. At the first program in 1927, the governor of Minnesota even presided over the dedication ceremony. These early ceremonies also provided an opportunity for survivors to share their experience with the gathered audience. In 1928, the special guest of honor was Mrs. Anna Stina Peterson, billed as “the only living survivor of the Broberg Families who were in the massacre by the Sioux Indians at West Lake, August 20, 1862.” The Anders Broberg family had actually lived on the grounds where the Memorial Park was located. In 1929, another survivor, Mr. Andrew P. Oman, received the honor as the memorial’s special guest, and he continued to attend the annual meetings, often speaking to the crowd about the deaths of the Monson Lake

⁶⁹ *Fairfax Standard Souvenir Edition, Commemorating Fiftieth Anniversary of the Battle of Fort Ridgely*, August 15, 1912.

⁷⁰ *Memorial Exercises held on the Birch Cooley Battlefield 2 Miles North of Morton, Sunday, May 30, 1926*. Pamphlets relating to the 1862 Dakota Conflict (1865-...), Minnesota Historical Society Pamphlet Collection.

families in 1862 and his own family's survival by hiding in their home's cellar, until his death in 1934. The Monson Lake Memorial observations also included a fair amount of patriotic rhetoric and homage to pioneer days. The 1933 program included a pageant production titled "An American Epic," which included scenes detailing an immigrant's journey to the new world and the voyage west to the prairie. The 1862 War was titled simply "The Massacre" and the subheadings were "Flaming Arrows," "Man's Inhumanity," and "Afterglow." The final two chapters, titled "The Inland Empire" and "America the Beautiful," attest to the pioneers' ultimate success at taming the prairie and following the mandates of progress dictated to all true patriots of the American dream.⁷¹

Of all the local community celebrations, the town of New Ulm probably observed the largest organized memorial events. In 1862, this was a substantial town with a firm foundation of German immigrants both in the town and the surrounding countryside. As a result of the two attacks on New Ulm on August 19 and 23, and the town's successful defense against the Dakota soldiers, its citizens immediately used their memories to create an image of stalwart defenders and patriotic pioneers who could defend their right to be on this harsh frontier and as well as their role in banishing the Dakota from the state. As discussed in Chapter 2, the town began erecting monuments very soon after the War's end, but individual survivors also began to immediately share their memories both in print and through anniversary celebrations. In 1866, the anniversary ceremony included the erection for the town's first monuments and also declared, "The very tragic events at the time of the Indian uprising have impressed themselves with indelible force on the memories of those who lived through those terrible days of 18-23

⁷¹ *Monson Lake Memorial Park, Dedication Exercises, Sunday, August 21, 1927* (1927); *Souvenir Program, Second Annual Memorial Picnic, Monson Lake Memorial Park, August 19, 1928* (Sunburg, MN, 1928); *Souvenir Program, Third Annual Memorial Picnic, Monson Lake Memorial Park, August 18, 1929* (Sunburg, MN); and *Souvenir Program, Seventh Annual Memorial Picnic, Monson Lake Memorial Park, August 20, 1933* (Sunburg, MN).

August 1862 in Brown county and especially in New Ulm as it was besieged from all sides, and the memory will persist to the furthest generation.”⁷² The town of New Ulm upheld this desire to preserve the memories of its survivors with periodic celebrations. While these continue well into the twenty-first century, the anniversary observations of the first sixty or seventy years provided a specific venue for survivors to retell their stories to a live audience.

New Ulm upheld the innocent pioneer sentiment already discussed with numerous other first-person narratives in this chapter. In 1885, for the 23rd Anniversary Celebration, “New Ulm’s Defenders” reunited to celebrate and remember the battle “when the savage Sioux Indians made merciless war upon the then all but defenseless people of New Ulm, only to be finally repulsed and driven back by a brave and determined people[.]” This event included a speech by Judge Flandrau, who organized the defense of the town in 1862, and a unanimous decision to create an association dedicated to gathering and preserving history about New Ulm’s role in the War. Named “The defenders of New Ulm against the Sioux Indians in 1862,” the group opened membership to those who defended New Ulm, Fort Ridgely, and “all citizen volunteers who fought against the Indians.” This reunion ended with a viewing of a “tableau” created by Julius Berndt where “during the few moments the audience was permitted to gaze upon the pictures the bloody scenes of 1862 were vividly recalled to memory.” Despite the passage of time, clearly the citizens of New Ulm intended to vividly retain their memories of this War.⁷³

In 1887, for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, the town of New Ulm erected a “magnificent arch” across its downtown streets to mark the location of the festival which was enhanced by artistic decorations at businesses and many residences. Mayor Weschcke welcomed the crowd, “Again have we assembled under the golden rays of an August sun, to commemorate

⁷² *New Ulm Post*. “New Ulm – Monument erection.” August 24, 1866. (Translated from German). Folder, “Indian Massacre Monument” Erected in City Cemetery in 1866. Brown County Historical Society Collections.

⁷³ 23rd Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1885, Manuscript folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections.

the anniversary of the successful repulsion of the Indians, and again do I welcome you in the name of that city, to whose defense you hastened twenty-five years ago.” For New Ulm, while survival of the War was an important part of their story, the larger story was the successful defense of the town. It was not enough to merely survive, the citizens of New Ulm actively participated in the town’s defense and prevented their victimization by the Dakota. John Lind remarked, “But the dauntless pioneers were conscious of their precious charge, mindful of their duty as men, as husbands and fathers, they fought with a desperation unknown to civilized warfare.” Others declared the importance of anniversary celebrations because they provided an avenue for survivors to share their memories with each other and to remember those who “fell in the defense of property and lives of their fellow citizens.” Anniversary celebrations in New Ulm also served as annual meetings for “The Defenders” association, formed in 1885. The 1887 meeting decided to ask the state of Minnesota for appropriations to erect a monument to the defenders, approved the expenditure of medals for each defender, and desired to have a photograph taken of all the defenders still living.⁷⁴

In 1902, for the fortieth anniversary of the War, nearly 20,000 people descended on New Ulm to partake of the celebration. This celebration incorporated the participation of a number of local Dakota in a “sham battle” and a parade that included two floats by artists Christian Heller and Anton Gág. The two floats would “furnish the younger generation a vivid conception of the trials and tribulations of early pioneer life and the horrors of the Indian massacre.” Although the newspapers do not explicitly say, the recreation of the battle of New Ulm would certainly provide a similar visual exercise. In addition to upholding the traditional pioneer image, one of the speakers at the festivities clearly placed the citizens of New Ulm as innocent victims, saying,

⁷⁴ *New Ulm Review*, August 24, 1887, 25th Anniversary – Sioux Uprising – newspaper clippings and program commemoration, Manuscript folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections.

“[The Indians] did not have the slightest reason to cool their thirst for revenge upon the poor pioneers who for years had shown them nothing but kindness, and the red man, so often described as noble, showed himself in his true character as the brute in the guise of man.”

Amidst the speeches, food, parades, and mock battles, this anniversary celebration, like earlier ones, found its greatest strength in the ability for survivors to recall and share their memories with the larger community. The *New Ulm Review* writes, “About the most interesting and gratifying feature of the whole celebration was the interest taken in by the men who went through the Massacre, gathered in groups in pairs and in parties, they entered vigorously into the details of those days so long hid in the memory of each other.”⁷⁵ The city also sold souvenir post cards so anniversary participants could physically take home not only an artistic representation of the history of New Ulm, but share in the memory of the survivors who presented during the occasion.

⁷⁵ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "Indians Coming," August 2, 1902; *New Ulm News*, "Historic Scenes - For the Indian Celebration," August 2, 1902; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "Sioux Massacre Anniversary at New Ulm," August 24, 1902; and *New Ulm Review*, "Massacre is Well Remembered, New Ulm Pays Fitting Tribute to Memory of Pioneer Days," August 27, 1902.



Figure 3.4. “Governor Van Sant and staff at New Ulm celebration of Sioux Uprising of 1862. Photograph Collection 1902. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The fiftieth anniversary celebrations in New Ulm would again take on a fair-like atmosphere, and also again included participation of local Dakota. The celebration’s “Sioux Indian Massacre Committee” arranged for transportation and lodging, as well as a daily wage, for any Dakota man, woman, or child who participated in the anniversary events. In addition to the “Indian Village,” these events were also to include an automobile parade and organizers were hoping for 2,000-3,000 autos to participate. In 1919, New Ulm hosted a 57th Anniversary celebration “On the occasion of a Home-Coming of Soldiers of the World War...and of the Repulse of the Sioux Indians.” This event, clearly designed to inspire patriotism in the wake of the United State’s victory during World War I, included an address by the Minnesota Secretary of State that warned of “the rapid and extensive growth and spread of the insidious doctrine of socialism.”⁷⁶ While the patriotic celebration included the memory of “repulsing” the 1862 attack

⁷⁶ Mr. Paul Lawrence, Morton, MN, August 17, 1912, Letter, 50th Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1912 – postcards, photos, misc, Manuscript folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections; Rev. H. W. St. Clair,

by the Dakota, clearly the threat to New Ulm was no longer Native Americans but the spread of socialist ideals.

By 1922, the year for the sixtieth anniversary celebrations in New Ulm, first-person memories from survivors was not highlighted for any planned events, although some survivors surely lived in the area since they were present at other community celebrations well into the 1930s. For New Ulm, the memory of that time, while still important, had passed on to the subsequent generations who tasked themselves with cherishing the actions of the defenders of New Ulm rather than listening to these memories first-hand. A feeling of nostalgia appears to have hit the town at this point, and while the Dakota were still considered primarily at fault for the War and the deaths of the settlers, “the feeling of hatred and revenge against the Indians, which was strong in the early days, had subsided to a certain extent because it has become generally known now that the red man had been cheated by the government agents and there was some reason for his going on the war path.”⁷⁷ Still, the speeches upheld the image of steadfast pioneer and the “onward march of civilization,”⁷⁸ essentially declaring that even if the Dakota were wronged by the government, their demise was inevitable. While monuments to venerate the fallen should remain an important goal, Captain Albert Steinhauser, president of the Junior Pioneers of New Ulm, an organization charged with preserving the memory of the defenders, declared “the sons and daughters of the pioneers can best honor the memory of the dead by leading honest and upright lives.” Steinhauser points to the aftermath of the recent World War

Morton, MN, August 1, 1912, Letter, 50th Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1912 – postcards, photos, misc, Manuscript folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections; and *Address by Julius A. Schmahl (Secretary of State of Minnesota) at New Ulm, Minnesota, August 20, 1919, and Kimball, Minnesota, Sept. 27, 1919*, Sioux Uprising – 57th Anniversary – 1919, Manuscript folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections.

⁷⁷ *New Ulm Review*, “Capt. Albert Steinhauser, president of the Junior Pioneers,” August 23, 1922.

⁷⁸ *New Ulm Review*, “Speech by Mayor L. A. Fritsche,” August 23, 1922.

saying that white men “[have] fallen prey to the mob spirit and [have] done things which savor strongly of the savage instincts displayed here in the border days.”⁷⁹



Figure 3.5. “Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Sioux Uprising, New Ulm,” Photograph Collection 1937. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

At this point, without the first-person experiences bolstering the idea of hardworking pioneer families as innocent victims of savage warfare, New Ulm and its citizens found understanding and sympathy for the Dakota and their cause for war, while still wishing to uphold the memory of the defenders. Anniversary celebrations for the War would continue in New Ulm and other communities throughout the state of Minnesota, marking significant milestones or patriotic time periods. However, the lack of first-person narrative accounts of war would require other tangible reminders of the War in order to make the same impact upon the larger community.

⁷⁹ *New Ulm Review*, “Capt. Albert Steinhauser, president of the Junior Pioneers,” August 23, 1922.

CHAPTER 4

Organized Attacks: The Battles at Fort Ridgely and Birch Coulee

After early success at the Upper and Lower agencies and the surrounding countryside, the Dakota took time to celebrate and strategize. The War's Dakota leaders had difficulty deciding on their next coordinated assault. Many of the chiefs, including Little Crow, Big Eagle and Shakopee, favored attacks on New Ulm and Fort Ridgely, believing victories at these locations would secure the Dakota position in southwestern Minnesota. Other Lower Sioux chiefs, primarily Wabasha and Wapecuta, refused to agree to Little Crow's plan. The leaders subsequently delayed following up on the successes at the two agencies and spent the entire night arguing their next moves. Further complicating matters, the majority of chiefs based at the Upper Agency refused to join the war effort and few Upper Agency Dakota would join Little Crow. By the morning of August 19, Little Crow, Big Eagle, and the other chiefs left Wabasha and Wapecuta behind and began preparing their men for attacks on New Ulm (which would occur on August 19 and 23) and Fort Ridgely (which would occur on August 20 and 22). However, the initial delay and general lack of cohesiveness would cost them key victories.

In the wake of the attacks on August 18, many settlers fled to the safety of Fort Ridgely, located thirteen miles south of the Lower Sioux Agency on the northern side of the Minnesota River. The soldiers at the fort recognized the challenges facing them at this remote prairie outpost. Little more than a collection of stone and wooden buildings loosely bordering a parade ground, the fort was not surrounded by a stockade, and its only water supply came from the nearby Minnesota River. Essentially, this fort was built to keep the peace on the frontier and was not designed for defense. The commander in charge of the fort was Captain John Marsh, who

had left on August 18 to validate the reports of violence at Lower Sioux Agency, only to be ambushed at the Redwood Ferry and killed along with most of his men. Marsh's second in command, Lieutenant Timothy Sheehan, was also away from the fort leading a contingent of fifty men towards Fort Ripley. The next ranking officer remaining at the fort was the inexperienced nineteen-year-old Lieutenant Thomas Gere, who, along with most of the soldiers at the fort, was ill. The defense of the fort now lay in the hands of just twenty-two able-bodied men. As refugees streamed into the post and word of Captain Marsh's death reached him, Gere anticipated an imminent attack from the Dakota and frantically sent word asking for help to Fort Snelling in St. Paul. He also sent word to Lieutenant Sheehan to return immediately. Gere and his small group of defenders, including the post surgeon and ordnance sergeant, spent an anxious night on August 18 waiting for an attack. Little Crow and the other chiefs preferred a quick assault on the fort but were overruled by many of the younger Dakota who favored attacking New Ulm, which had greater potential for looting. This change in strategy gave Gere the time he needed to plan and wait for reinforcements.

Lieutenant Sheehan arrived at Fort Ridgely late on August 19 to take command. The soldiers were soon joined by a volunteer regiment out of St. Peter called the Renville Rangers, originally organized to join Minnesota's troops fighting in the Civil War. Fort Ridgely now had approximately 180 defenders. Ordnance Sergeant John Jones strategically placed a six-pound cannon and two twelve-pound howitzers around the fort's perimeter and the men were left to wait for the expected attack. After failing to overcome New Ulm on August 19, nearly 400 Dakota prepared to attack Fort Ridgely by the afternoon of August 20. Although the Dakota were coordinated for this assault, the cannon and howitzers surprised them. In addition, Sheehan instructed his men to take cover and fire at will, foregoing traditional military formation in favor

of a method which would better provide cover to the soldiers. By nightfall, the Dakota retreated to the Lower Agency and reevaluated their next course of action.

Smaller groups of Dakota soldiers used this period to attack the countryside. A small Scandinavian settlement in Swift County was attacked on August 20. At least fourteen people were killed, including almost the entire families of Anders and Daniel Broberg who were attending church services at the home of Andreas Lundborg. (This attack would be memorialized as Monson Lake State Park and marked with a monument.) On August 21, the Lars Endreson homestead was targeted. Lars' wife, Guri, and a young daughter survived by hiding in a cellar, but Lars and a son were killed, another son was injured, and two older daughters were taken captive. Guri set out with her two remaining children for Forest City, a thirty-mile walk. Along the way, she encountered two severely wounded men, managed to load them into a wagon and then drove the remaining distance to safety.¹

By August 22, the Dakota felt ready to attack Fort Ridgely again. Chief Big Eagle explained the importance of this attack: "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."² Now with nearly 800 soldiers, including some from the Sisseton and Wahpeton tribes at the Upper Agency, Little Crow's strategy was to set fire to the fort's buildings and lay siege with constant shooting. Unfortunately, recent rains made it difficult to set the roofs ablaze and any buildings the Dakota managed to occupy were quickly destroyed by cannon fire, effectively removing safe coverage from the Dakota and preventing them from getting too close to other fort buildings. Big Eagle writes, "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

¹ The above paragraphs draw on information found in Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, pp. 15-31.

² Big Eagle's account as found in Anderson and Woolworth's *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 148.

there were.”³ After this second failure to take Fort Ridgely, the Dakota regrouped and made a second assault on the town of New Ulm, which occurred on August 23. Again, the defenders of New Ulm successfully repelled the Dakota assault. The Dakota hopes for regaining their homelands began to fade after the multiple defeats at Fort Ridgely and New Ulm, but the war was far from over in the region and white settlers continued to flee the Minnesota River Valley.

By the end of August, General Sibley, based on the advice of advisors and scouts, believed the Dakota had left the area, therefore thinking it was safe to venture onto the prairie to assess damage, locate possible survivors, and bury any dead left in the open. Major Joseph Brown, a former Indian agent on the Dakota reservation, led the party of about 170 men. Brown was now a successful businessman who had built a large, opulent house a few miles from the Upper Sioux Agency. His Dakota wife and their mixed-blood children were being held captive in Little Crow’s camp. Against Brown’s better judgment, he accepted the location of Birch Coulee as a camping site based on the recommendation of Captain Grant and the detachment established camp for the night of September 1. Overnight, more than 200 Dakota soldiers, under the leadership of Big Eagle, Mankato, and Gray Bird, easily surrounded this poorly defensible position. By the end of the day-long siege, when General Sibley arrived with reinforcements, thirteen of Brown’s soldiers lay dead and another forty-seven were severely wounded. This battle constituted the heaviest casualties of the military for the entire war.⁴ Big Eagle recalled, “Both sides fought well. Owing to the white men’s way of fighting they lost many men. Owing to the Indians’ way of fight they lost but few.”⁵ After Birch Coulee, fighting would move further north

³ Big Eagle’s account as found in Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 149.

⁴ Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, pp. 40-44; June Drenning Holmquist and Jean A. Brookins, *Major Historic Sites in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1963): 105

⁵ Big Eagle’s account as found in Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 150.

and west; the Dakota abandoned the southern half of their reservation around the Lower Sioux Agency.

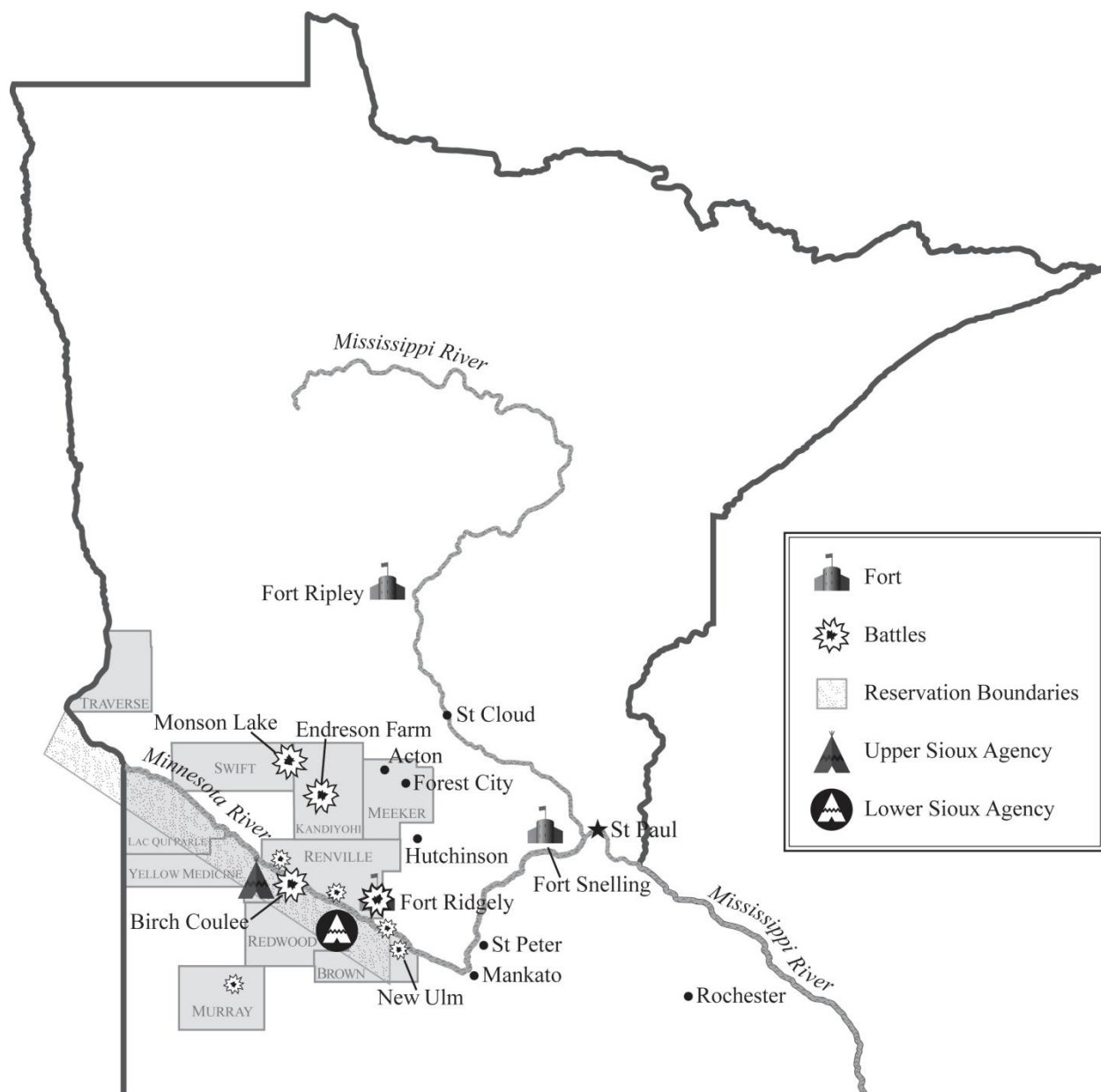


Figure 4.1. This map shows the next wave of attacks on the settlements as well as the battles at Fort Ridgely and Birch Coulee. Also note the previous attacks or battles as illustrated by the smaller “battle” icons. Clearly, in just a few days (August 18-23), the War was intense and widespread. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

Memory on the Landscape

For white Minnesotans, the conclusion of the War, the conviction and execution of thirty-eight Dakota men, and the expulsion of the remaining Dakota nation from the state, was not

enough to assuage the feelings of loss. Minnesotans connected this brief war with the Dakota to the larger aftermath of the Civil War. According to historian David Blight, Americans in the post-Civil War years “were now a people with so much tragic, bloody history that their modern society would forever be burdened by its historical memory. America’s ‘historic landscapes’ became more *interesting* because of the Civil War.”⁶ Minnesotans were active participants in the memory of the Civil War, erecting monuments to their regiments who met distinction on the battlefields of Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Andersonville. The landscapes associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 also necessitated memorial activities. In fact, monuments to Minnesota’s soldiers at Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Gettysburg were dedicated in the 1890s, the same decade in which monuments were erected at Camp Release, Birch Coulee, and Fort Ridgely.⁷ As the centennial for both the Civil War and the U.S.-Dakota War approached, Minnesotans would again find connections between the two wars.

Especially as the landscapes marked by battle in the U.S.-Dakota War occurred within the state’s boundaries, they *were* interesting to the white Minnesotan collective memory that dominated for more than a century. Once monuments and markers appeared on the landscape, official organizations such as local and state historical societies encouraged all Minnesotans to visit these designated locations by planning anniversary celebrations, distributing souvenirs, and publishing tourist guides. As historian James Loewen notes, “Many monuments represent only one side of a conflict and misrepresent what really happened,”⁸ and the visitors at these memorial activities fully embraced this one-sided story. The messages etched permanently in stone on these monuments were not meant to challenge or expand history.

⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 33.

⁷ *St. Paul Daily News*, “The Chickamauga Monument,” September 28, 1893; and *Find a Grave*, “1st Minnesota Infantry Monument,” <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=6935558> (accessed February 11, 2011).

⁸ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 443.

By preserving memory permanently on a landscape – through markers, monuments, or historic sites – the public is able to both bring closure for a painful past and ensure that one version of events, or the memory of those events, is preserved for future generations. Geographer Kenneth Foote writes, “The sites have been inscribed with messages that speak to the way individuals, groups, and entire societies wish to interpret their past. When ‘read’ carefully, these places also yield insight into how societies come to terms with violence and tragedy.”⁹ And finally, David Glassberg explains, “The meanings established for a place, and the land use decisions that stem from those meanings, are shaped not only by the social, economic, and political relationships among the various residents of a town or neighborhood but also by local residents’ relationships with the outside world.”¹⁰ Historic landscapes can “speak” long after individuals have died. Permanent landscapes, such as stone monuments or brass markers, are not easily changed or removed; therefore, they can also preserve a particular version of an historic event despite potential interpretive changes. In Minnesota, the majority of monuments and markers were placed to reflect white settler memories and did not sympathize with any sufferings the Dakota nation might have incurred both before and after the War.

The continued presence of the monuments located within state parks and historic sites remains a powerful image and sends a particular message. Furthermore, the emergence of the state in the dedication of these monuments, more than earlier and on-going efforts committed at the local levels, is significant. Kirk Savage writes that monuments were “meant to last, unchanged, forever.”¹¹ The intent of communities, organizations, or individuals, and now, most importantly the state, which placed permanent markers in commemoration of this War, also remains. David Lowenthal writes, “When other relics have perished, commemorative creations

⁹ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Glassberg, *Sense of History*, p. 20.

¹¹ Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, p. 4.

survive as our only physical reminders of the past. They are deliberately made durable to recall treasured lineaments for as long as possible.”¹² The vast majority of monuments for the 1862 War reinforced the image of white innocent victims attempting to achieve a pioneer dream. The other side of this image is the Dakota, who became branded as brutal and savage, unworthy to live on the land of their heritage and banished from Minnesota at the conclusion of the War. The preservation of larger landscapes surrounding the monuments made these views even more steadfast, despite increasing sympathies to the ways the Dakota were wronged or that the hangings of the thirty-eight men on December 26, 1862 occurred too hastily. The turn of the twentieth century was a monumental era – when Americans utilized stone monuments as the appropriate way to commemorate an event. This commemorative practice has endured even as the War has been forgotten. Savage states, “Monuments remain powerful because they are built to last long after the particular voices of their makers have ceased, long after the events of their creation have been forgotten.”¹³ The brief attempts at reconciling with the Dakota nation in recent years have been ineffective largely because the message on the landscape has remained unchanged, even though the events themselves have receded in memory.

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By the end of the 19th century, the state began taking a more official and expanded role in preserving sites associated with the U.S.-Dakota War. For the first few decades, the state and local communities had been content erecting monuments and markers and did not make plans to purchase and preserve the landscapes as larger historic sites. The first larger-scale landscape preserved by the state was actually the last site associated with the six-week war – Camp

¹² David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 324.

¹³ Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, p. 211; and “When Minnesota State Parks were Established,” in *Minnesota State Park Centennial Conference December 4, 1990*, Minnesota, Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

Release. The purchase of twelve acres of land in 1889 on the site of the surrender of the Dakota and their nearly 300 captives led to the establishment of Camp Release State Park and also marked the initiation of the Minnesota State Park System. The state also made plans to place a monument in the new state park. Dedicated in 1894, the state appropriated \$2500 for this “Camp Release Monument” and one of the speeches at the ceremony called this location “holy ground,”¹⁴ a significant phrase because once a space or series of landscapes was deemed sacred, it would be difficult to introduce a differing perspective of the underlying event. Like the monument erected at Acton in 1878 (discussed in chapter 1), the Camp Release dedication provided an opportunity for the white public to gather to celebrate and commemorate a shared memory of the War.



Figure 4.2. “Camp Release monument.” Undated. Photographed by Susan Granger. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁴ *Dedication of Camp Release Monument at Camp Release, Lac qui Parle County, near Montevideo, Minnesota: Fourth of July 1894*, (Montevideo, MN: Hoard & Henry, 1894): 26.

The second area added to the state park system was the battlefield of Birch Coulee. It was originally established in 1893 as a veteran's cemetery for Minnesota soldiers and sailors from all wars. In 1894, a monument commemorating the battle was dedicated, but it was placed about a mile and half away from the battlefield in the nearby town of Morton. Sparking controversy that the monument was not placed at the site of battle, Major Joseph Brown and his son, Samuel Brown, also objected that the monument's planned text listed Captain Hiram P. Grant as the commander of the battle. The Browns felt General Sibley had appointed Major Brown as lead commander of this burial detachment. However, Brown was injured early in the battle and Grant was left to organize defenses and perhaps this is what led Grant's name to be highlighted on the monument.¹⁵

Another monument, slightly smaller than the first but of the same granite-shaft design, was also placed at this off-battlefield site and dedicated to six Dakota who saved the lives of whites during the War. Erected by the Minnesota Valley Historical Association in 1900, this is one of the few monuments to mark the participation of Dakota permanently on the landscape of this War. The *Minneapolis Journal* explained that this "Monument to Good Indians" was for those Indians who "instead of attacking the whites with the hundreds of painted braves who slaughtered so ruthlessly in the summer of 1862, defended the whites or enabled them to escape the fury of the hostiles."¹⁶ It is somewhat interesting that the remote, small town of Morton was chosen as the location for this monument to "friendly" Dakota, and that it was so near the Birch Coulee Battlefield, a historic site that could be claimed by the Dakota as a victory. Some Dakota had resettled in Morton soon after the War and established a tribal community there. Perhaps the monument was a good will gesture from the white leaders of the Minnesota Valley in the midst

¹⁵ *The Penny Press*, "Birch Coulee: Differences over the Location of the Monument," August 16, 1894.

¹⁶ *Minneapolis Journal*, "A Monument to Good Indians," July 14, 1900.

of continued tension between the two groups even decades after the War had ended. By the 1940s, the state shifted the purpose of the battlefield from memorial cemetery to historic landscape. This new designation implied that details of the War would now be shared (by placing interpretive signs or providing guided tours) with a visiting public in addition to commemorating heroes or victims with a monument. By this time, eighty-two acres had been either purchased or donated as Birch Coulee Memorial State Park. In order to use the park as a tool to tell the history of this battle and the War in general, several small granite markers were placed on the battlefield at strategic points to outline the course of the battle.¹⁷

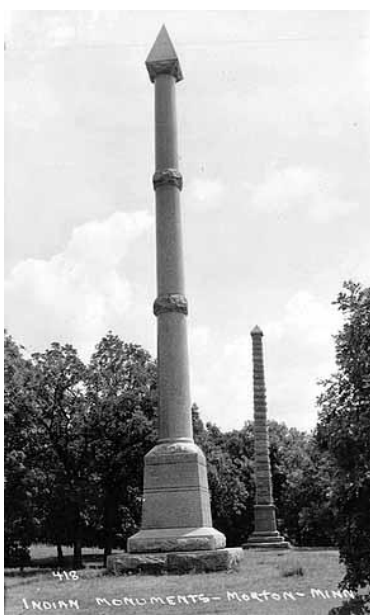


Photo 4.3. Birch Coulee Monument and monument honoring six Dakota who saved white men, Renville County. Postcard ca. 1930. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Edward Linenthal writes, “Conspicuous by their presence on the martial landscape are battlefields, prime examples of sacred patriotic space where memories of the transformative power of war and the sacrificial heroism of the warrior are preserved.”¹⁸ The designation of specific space for commemoration of a particular battle by a community not only builds

¹⁷ *Profile: Birch Coulee Memorial State Park (1963), Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission [MORRC], 1959-1967, 1974, Minnesota. Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.*

¹⁸ Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, p. 3.

community memory and identity, but also claims that particular space as sacred. In addition to the numerous monuments, specific battlefield landscapes associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 became locations for members of the wider community, with the emotionally and financial support of the state, to gather and reaffirm the sacrifices of the early pioneers as well as provide opportunities to celebrate victory over the Dakota. Furthermore, beyond the irregular anniversary celebrations, battlefields preserved as state parks or historic sites were intended for year-round, or at least seasonal, usage.

One of the battlefield examples in Linenthal's book, *Sacred Ground*, is Little Bighorn National Monument, site of the 1876 battle between George Custer and his 7th Cavalry and an overwhelming number of Lakota and Cheyenne soldiers in Montana. The commemorative history of Little Bighorn helps to understand why Minnesotans preserved particular battlefields, how they manipulated historic interpretation to meet a particular agenda, and why a battlefield's history can remain controversial. Immediately following the battle at Little Bighorn, Custer and his fallen men were enshrined in a myth of American patriotic progress struck down by the savage nature of the American Indian of the West. At the centennial observation in 1976, Native Americans openly challenged this myth and demanded recognition for their ill-treatment by the U.S. government and army during their shared history. Consequently, "far from being a placid tourist attraction amid the rolling prairies of Montana, the Little Bighorn remains the site of an ongoing clash of cultures that is less violent but just as spirited as the military clash that took place there in 1876."¹⁹ Because non-Indian Americans dominated the collective memory and interpretation of this battle, what was a major victory for Native Americans in 1876 was turned into a massacre of U.S. soldiers and Custer became a national symbol.

¹⁹ Ibid., 130.

Even though Little Bighorn battlefield was a surprising victory for Native Americans, it was initially preserved and interpreted as a memorial to the white soldiers who died there. In Minnesota, Birch Coulee battlefield was preserved for many of the same reasons, and the fact that the U.S. soldiers were nearly overwhelmed at this site was typically minimized. The attack on the Lower Sioux Agency and both battles at Fort Ridgely occurred before the battle at Birch Coulee, but this battlefield was actually preserved as a historic landscape before the other sites. A tourist guide published in 1963 called this battle “demoralizing as well as crippling, since it probably could have been avoided by the selection of a less vulnerable camp site and more effective posting of lookouts.”²⁰ Similarly, Dakota War historian Kenneth Carley ends his chapter on this particular battle writing,

In the battle of Birch Coulee, the troops suffered the heaviest military casualties of the war. Big Eagle later reported that he had seen only two dead Indians. Some historians have surmised that the action at Birch Coulee may have diverted the Sioux from the down-river settlements towards which they were headed. On the other hand, events there taught the whites the folly of moving in hostile Indian territory without a large, well-trained army.²¹



Figure 4.4. View of Birch Coulee Battlefield from the Dakota perspective of the battle. Photo by Julie Humann Anderson, Summer 2008.

²⁰ Holmquist and Brookins, *Major Historic Sites in Minnesota*, p. 105.

²¹ Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, p. 44.

Continuing the desire to preserve battlefields' association with this War, in 1907 the state purchased an acre of land to commemorate the Battle at Wood Lake and for the purpose of erecting a memorial "to the memory of the men who here lost their lives in an engagement between Minnesota volunteer soldiers and the Sioux Indians, Sept. 23, 1862." These words are inscribed on the north side of a monument placed there in 1910. Dedicated in honor of those soldiers killed during the last official battle of the six-week war, the Wood Lake Monument also serves as an example that monuments generally did little to explain the full breadth of this War. The monument also surprisingly does not mention that this battle led to the surrender of the Dakota to General Sibley only a few days later. A speech during the dedication ceremony reminded those gathered "the Sioux War had then been going on for something over a month." It then explained the importance of the Wood Lake battle saying, "This little expedition was organized to drive them back, and to secure possession of about two hundred and fifty prisoners they held[.]" Although the last site of conflict during the 1862 War, it was a decades-long effort by the local community to secure state funding to preserve the site and erect a monument. Still, in spite of the reasons to mark this ground significant because it led to the end of the War in Minnesota, the actual monument is dedicated only to the six men who died in this battle and no mention is made of the battle's outcome or that it led to surrender of the Dakota.²²

²² *Proceedings of the Dedication of the Monument Erected in Honor of the Volunteer Soldiers at the Battle of Wood Lake, Minnesota, Held on the Battle Ground on Tuesday, Oct. 18, 1919, at 9:30 A. M.*, (Minneapolis, MN: Syndicate Printing Company, 1911).



Figure 4.5. “Battle of Wood Lake monument, Yellow Medicine County.” Photographed by Louis Enstrom (1873-1947). Photograph collection ca. 1915. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The preservation of the ruins of Fort Ridgely occurred as both a means to commemorate those who died and celebrate those who assisted in its defense. Once efforts to preserve the location started, Fort Ridgely became recognized as a more significant place of history than Camp Release, Birch Coulee, or Wood Lake, and it would receive considerable funding and attention from the state and historical agencies. Established as a military fort in 1853 to secure Minnesota’s western frontier for settlement now that the Dakota reservations were in place, Fort Ridgely included twenty-two buildings located on a high prairie bluff. The commissary and barracks were constructed of stone, but the remaining buildings were wooden. The fort was not surrounded by a stockade and did not even include a well. In addition to protecting settlers and policing the Dakota on the nearby reservation, the fort was also used for artillery training. Considering its poor defensive design, the ability of its soldiers and volunteers to repel the two separate assaults by Little Crow and his men is quite remarkable. These victories, occurring within the first ten days of War, gave white Minnesotans hope and confidence that the Dakota would be defeated and removed as a threat to future settlement. On August 30, 1862, the *Winona*

Daily Republican reported that with Fort Ridgely secured, “the excitement along the border is already on the wane.”²³ After the 1862 War and the expulsion of the Dakota from the territory, there was little immediate need for a military fort to protect white settlement and the fort permanently closed in 1872.²⁴

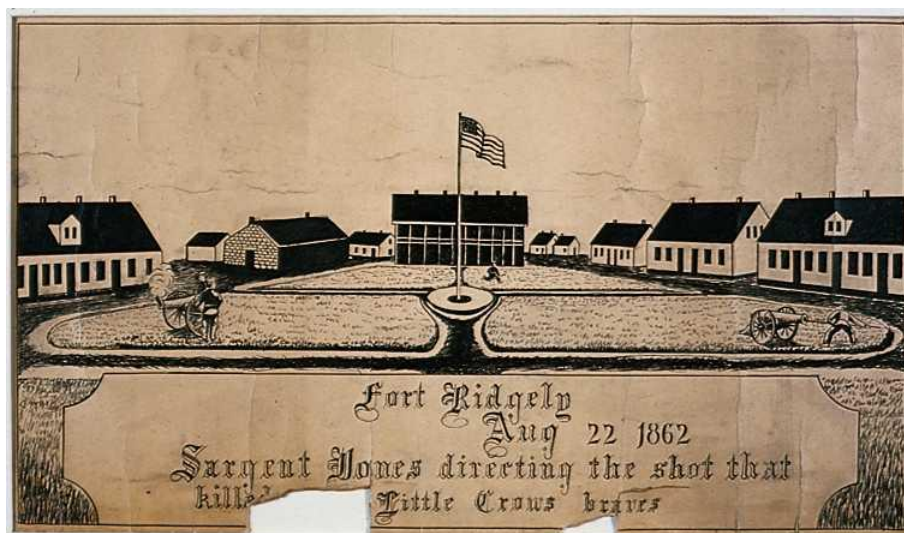


Figure 4.6. “Fort Ridgely” by anonymous. Art collection, Ink wash 1862. From the Visual Resource Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

In 1894, local groups successfully erected a monument on the grounds of Fort Ridgely. The familiar shape of an obelisk was placed where the fort’s flagpole had been, in the center of the ruins of the former stone buildings. The memorial service, which took place on “Decoration Day,” paid homage to the many similar memorials, which were taking place throughout the nation to commemorate the Civil War.²⁵ Decoration Day began after the Civil War as the nation and local communities needed a meaning for such large-scale death. Even before the Civil War ended, soldiers gathered to mourn their fallen comrades and women “began rituals of burial and remembrance” by placing flowers on graves or makeshift monuments to the dead. Decoration

²³ *Winona Daily Republican*, “The Indian War,” August 30, 1862.

²⁴ Richard B. Dunsworth, *Tour of Minnesota forts, battlefields and Sioux Indian historic sites, 1962*, (1962); Dian Olson Belanger, “The True Story behind the Fort Ridgely Medal,” *Minnesota History* (Minnesota Historical Society) 47, no. 6 (Summer 1981): 235; Nancy Eubank, *A Living Past: 15 Historic Places in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1973): 16.

²⁵ *Memorial Service at Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, May 30, 1894, History of the Day and History of Fort Ridgely and Its Siege, August 1862* (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press, Co., 1894).

Day gradually became Memorial Day in most parts of the country, and the rituals associated with the day (flowers, parades, speeches, monument dedications) gave communities an opportunity to reconnect with their losses and reaffirm their memories. However, some feared that over time “[t]he holiday had become one only of calculated forgetting”²⁶ as the event became more about the needs of the present community than the past it was publicly commemorating.

In 1894 Minnesota, Decoration Day activities remembered the 1862 War, but they also focused on the perseverance of pioneers and their right to claim the Minnesota River Valley at the expense of the Dakota. The Rev. Peter Boren spoke at the monument dedication at Fort Ridgely,

In dutiful memory of those who shed their blood during the four years of the most eventful war in the history of the human race, we have gathered on this great historic spot to pay our respect, not only to the ashes of those who sleep under yonder soil, but also to the surviving heroes, not only of the great Civil War, but to those, too, who have fought on this very spot to defend life and liberty of our pioneer settlers around here.²⁷

In 1896, the state expressed its own interest in preserving the site and purchased five acres of the original fort property with the intent to host future commemorative ceremonies on the grounds.

In 1899, a Fort Ridgely State Park and Historical Association was formed in order to protect the site and preserve its history. In 1911, the state purchased an additional 148 acres and officially named the site Fort Ridgely State Park. As a state park, rather than an historical one, the purpose for use of the grounds was focused more on recreation and less on interpretation of historic events. A golf course was added to the property in 1927 and the grounds were used as camps for both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Veterans Conservation Corps during the New Deal era. At this time, a number of parks, including Fort Ridgely, received improvements such as picnic grounds and outbuildings with the available federal funds and workers. In 1937, the site

²⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 65, 97.

²⁷ Rev. Peter Boren, "Lecture," in *Memorial Service at Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, May 30, 1894, History of the Day and History of Fort Ridgely and Its Siege, August 1862* (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press, Co., 1894).

was renamed Fort Ridgely Memorial State Park, but the use of “Memorial” was dropped again in 1967.²⁸



Figure 4.7. Fort Ridgely Monument in front of restored stone building at Fort Ridgely State Park. Photo by Julie Humann Anderson. Summer 2008.

Additional state monuments and parks commemorating this War continued to be established in later decades. The Schwandt State Monument in Renville County was built in 1915. Sibley State Park was established in 1919 on the site of Henry Sibley’s favorite hunting grounds. The Lake Shetek State Monument was built in 1925 and placed inside what would become Lake Shetek State Park in 1937. The Milford State Monument in Brown County was dedicated in 1929 to remember nearly 50 settlers killed. Also in 1929 a monument was built to remember Samuel Brown, the mixed-blood son of former Indian agent Joseph Brown. Samuel survived captivity in Little Crow’s camp and was released with his family at Camp Release at the end of the six-week war. After his release, he joined Sibley’s campaigns against those Dakota who had not surrendered. In April 1866 he valiantly rode from his base at Fort Wadsworth to

²⁸ Kenneth Lee Walsh, "A biography of a frontier outpost," Thesis, Graduate School, University of Minnesota, Duluth (June 1957); "When Minnesota State Parks were Established," in *Minnesota State Park Centennial Conference December 4, 1990*; and "Fort Ridgely," Minnesota, Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

another camp comprising Dakota scouts in order to warn them of an impending attack. He soon learned it was a false alarm and immediately returned to the fort to explain this news to his commanding officer. This ride proved too physically demanding and he suffered permanent injuries that made it impossible to continue in the military. However, because of this ride, he became known in Minnesota as the “Paul Revere of the Northwestern Frontier,” and later wrote a narrative of his experiences during this War. Even though he was of Dakota heritage and related to Little Crow on his mother’s side, Samuel Brown made it clear in his biography that he was the son of Joseph Brown and he considered himself to be “white.” The monument erected in his honor by the state certainly supported this assertion. The bronze table is located in a highway wayside in the Sam Brown Memorial Park in Traverse County, where he resided following the War.²⁹

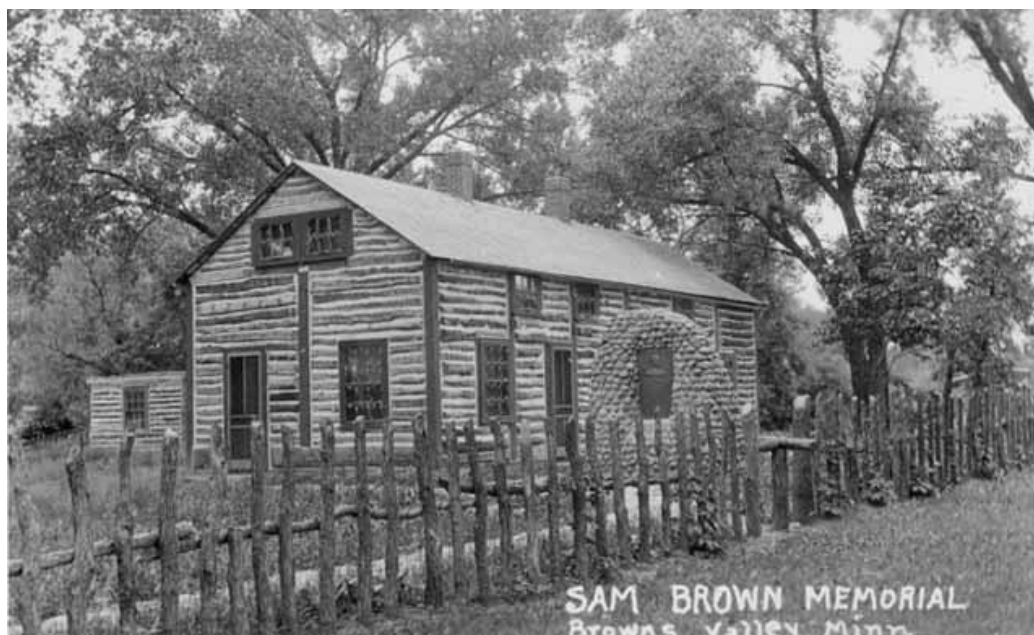


Figure 4.8. “Sam Brown Memorial, Browns Valley.” Photograph Collection, Postcard ca. 1930. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁹“Minnesota State Park Centennial Conference December 4, 1990,” Minnesota, Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives; Office of Revisor Statues, State of Minnesota, *138.585 2010 State Monuments*, 2010, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=138.585> (accessed 2010); and Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pp. 172-175.

In some cases, local communities used the financial support of the state and the existence of a state monument to preserve larger properties as historic sites within the state park system. These sites would be community-gathering places year-round, but could also be used for specific anniversary ceremonies to recall the War. In 1923, residents of Swift County near Sunburg, Minnesota, celebrated the creation of Monson Lake Memorial State Park, a 187-acre sacred space. Set aside to memorialize thirteen settlers of the West Lake Settlement who died during an attack on August 20, 1862, local citizens would eventually use the park for an annual memorial picnic (started in 1927 and discussed in Chapter 3). The impetus for creating this park probably arose because the only two survivors of the attack, cousins Anna Stina Broberg and Peter Broberg, were aging and the community desired a way to keep the memory of those killed pertinent even after the survivors were gone. Stone markers had been placed on the site of the cabins in 1917, but the community wished to preserve not only the memory, which would fade once the survivors and their generation had passed, but also the actual landscape that could ultimately prolong the story. Designating this space as a public memorial park ensured that the community would remain connected to the memory of the attack at Monson Lake and that the victims would be remembered by anyone who utilized the park's facilities in the future.³⁰

³⁰ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, *Monson Lake*, http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/monson_lake/index.html (accessed January 6, 2011).



Figure 4.9. “Broberg marker erected in 1917, Monson Lake State Park.” Photographed by Eugene Debs Becker (1919-1978). Photograph Collection, 1960. From the Visual Resources Database of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Monson Lake Memorial Association existed “as a perpetual memorial to the pioneers of the community” and used the park grounds to annually remember their pioneer heritage and the high cost that some pioneers paid. In 1937, the Memorial Park was reduced to a 31-acre historic district and rechristened Monson Lake State Park. The CCC and the WPA constructed two buildings, a parking lot, and an entrance road and these improvements have remained to the present day. While the use of “memorial” was removed from the name of the park, perhaps in response to less interest at the state level for commemorating the War, its purpose for the local community remained the same. The Monson Lake Memorial Association continued to use the park for regular memorial picnics or observances as late as 1992. By this point, while remembering the thirteen pioneer settlers continued to be the purpose of the association and its meetings, the scope of the Association had grown to also “recognize the strife thrust upon the native peoples of that era as the White man gradually pushed them from their homelands.”³¹

³¹ Minnesota Historical Society, *Monson Lake State Park: National Register Listing: October 1989*, <http://mnhs.org/places/nationalregister/stateparks/Monson.html> (accessed January 6, 2011); Minnesota Department

Another state park memorializing a large group of settlers killed in the War is Lake Shetek State Park located in Murray County. Fifteen of the thirty-four settlers in this remote settlement were killed as they fled their homes on August 20, 1862. Upon seeing Dakota soldiers, the settlers sought shelter in a slough and exchanged some gunfire. Every movement in the grass would cause the Dakota to rain gunfire into the slough, killing a number of individuals. In addition, women and children were killed when they left the slough after the Dakota promised them safety. These attacks became known as “Slaughter Slough” because so many people were killed in one location. Mrs. Lavina Eastlick, whose story was discussed in Chapter 3, was injured in this assault while her two sons managed to escape. Eleven women were taken captive by the camp of White Lodge and removed to Dakota Territory. Two managed to escape, one infant died, but the remaining eight (two women and six children) were held captive for three months, well past the surrender of the Dakota on September 26. These captives were actually rescued by Lakota men, who became known as the “Fool Soldiers,” and who did not agree with the decision of the Dakota to go to war.³²

The victims of the Lake Shetek attack were buried in a mass grave, and the area became a sacred space, even though it was not formally set aside as a park for many decades. The community used the memory of this War and their connection to the Lake Shetek victims as a means to establish community identity as well. Beginning in 1884, the Murray County Fair was held during the third week in August, which corresponded to the August 20 attacks at Lake Shetek. In 1925, a monument to the fifteen settlers killed was dedicated. In 1937, available New

of Natural Resources, *Monson Lake*, http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/monson_lake/index.html (accessed January 6, 2011); *Souvenir Program, Third Annual Memorial Picnic at Monson Lake Memorial Park, August 18, 1929*; and *Monson Lake Memorial Association, Memorial Observance, Monson Lake Memorial State Park, Sunday, August 23, 1992*, (The Monson Lake Memorial Association, Monson Lake Memorial State Park: 1992).

³² U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service of Murray County, "Slaughter Slough," *Murray County*, www.murray-countymn.com (accessed January 6, 2011). This is a copy of a brochure.

Deal programs and dollars prompted the creation of Lake Shetek State Park (which eventually expanded to include a large waterfowl protection area). The Murray County Historical Society, established in the 1950s, still maintains the sites of pioneer cabins, including the Eastlick cabin site. In 1964, the Koch cabin was moved onto the park grounds as well and is the only cabin to remain standing.³³

As the centennial for the War approached, the majority of sites associated with this historical series of events had been established and preservation and interpretation efforts existed. Joining the sites listed above were Fort Snelling State Park (1961) and the Upper Sioux Agency State Park (1963). Although both of these sites have ties to the War, their primary interpretation had a different focus. Fort Snelling became interesting to the public during the 1950s when a highway project threatened its complex, some of the oldest buildings still standing in the state. The Department of the Interior declared the fort a National Historic Landmark in 1960 and it then became part of the state park system operating in partnership with the Minnesota Historical Society. The fort's interpretation focused more on the story of developing the Northwest United States, the fur trade of the state's territorial era, and that Dred Scott briefly lived at the fort, and minimally discussed its history as an internment camp for the Dakota at the close of the War. The Upper Sioux Agency focused more on the history and purpose for an Indian agency on a reservation. The only site significantly associated with the War that was not preserved at the time of the centennial was the Lower Sioux Agency, although a 1963 "Historic Sites Program for Minnesota" overview recommended that this 35-acre site "should be acquired by the state and restored." In 1967, the Minnesota Historical Society would officially acquire

³³ *Lake Shetek State Park*, www.murray-countymn.com (accessed January 6, 2011).

123-acres of land and establish the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site, which included a stone warehouse that was the only building still standing from the War.³⁴

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Occurring in conjunction with the creation of historic battlefield and massacre sites, commemorative souvenirs provided ways to mark popular events sponsored by local or state groups. The ability to take a physical piece of memory from such events home is significantly important and served as a means for white Minnesotans to participate in the War, even if they had no personal memory of the period. Often produced to coincide with anniversary celebrations, these souvenirs reinforced the message of the War (that white settlers were victims) and typically employed a visual component that strengthened the theme. In 1891, the Brown County Agricultural Society produced a booklet titled “Souvenir to the Defenders of New Ulm” which included brief historical summaries and several artistic renderings of the battles at New Ulm. The text highlighted the defense of New Ulm and provided no explanation for why the Dakota “broke into open rebellion on August 18th, 1862.” It also stressed the large force of Dakota (nearly 650 strong, according to the text) who managed to destroy 180 buildings, but were repelled from taking the town by the strength and perseverance of the defenders. The accompanying reprinted artistic works depicted chaos in the surrounding countryside and the destruction of the town.³⁵

In 1896, the state issued special medals to honor the defenders of Fort Ridgely. These medals were distributed at the dedication ceremony for the Fort Ridgely Monument. While the inscription on the medals indicated that they were presented to defenders by the state, the funds

³⁴ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, *Upper Sioux Agency State Park*, http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/upper_sioux_agency/index.html (accessed February 23, 2011); Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, *Historic Fort Snelling: A Brief History of Fort Snelling*, http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/fort_snelling/index.html (accessed February 23, 2011); *The Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site: Development*; and *An Historic Sites Program for Minnesota (1963)*, *Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commissions [MORRC], 1959-1967, 1974*, Minnesota, Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

³⁵ Charles W. H. Heideman, "Souvenir, To the defenders of New Ulm," *New Ulm Review*, 1891.

for these were actually donated by Werner Boesch, a defender who lived in Mankato and wished his donation to be anonymous. On August 20, 1896, various leaders of the Fort Ridgely battles recounted their experiences to the gathered audience celebrating the erection of the monument. Boesch joined these leaders on the platform, but did not formally address the crowd. After the monument was dedicated, the more than one hundred medals were distributed to widows or children of defenders as well as any defenders still living. These medals were regarded as souvenirs from the state honoring the defenders of the fort and therefore contributed to the official memory of white settlers' ability to defend their interests on the frontier.³⁶

While most souvenirs, regardless of whether the state or a local agency appropriated funding, were attached to local events or ceremonies on the preserved historic landscapes, at times the state invited a larger audience to take part in the memory of the War from a location that had no connection to the actual battlefields. In 1908, the Minnesota State Fair, located in the capitol city of St. Paul, produced a "souvenir libretto" for the "Great Spectacular Production 'Fort Ridgely in 1862.'" The performance was clearly intended as the highlight of the annual State Fair and was to take place in the fair's Grandstand. Other performances that year included comedic acts, vaudeville performances, and acrobatic achievements. The souvenir libretto recounted the story of Fort Ridgely and the 1862 battle, and it also included the winning essay from a "state fair story on the defense of Fort Ridgely contest" aimed at Minnesota high school students.³⁷

Postcards provided another means to engage citizens of Minnesotans in the history of this War through souvenirs. By purchasing postcards, white Minnesotans could participate in the memory of the War without traveling to the specific sites. They could visually see the sites of

³⁶ Belanger, "The True Story behind the Fort Ridgely Medal," pp. 233-239.

³⁷ *Minnesota State Fair, August 31-September 5th, 1908, Souvenir Libretto, The Great Spectacular Production: Fort Ridgely in 1862, 1000 People including 300 Indians*, (1908).

battle and preserve its memory by collecting and sharing photographic postcards. These postcards could illustrate buildings either still standing or still remembered in local towns, such as the Winslow House in St. Peter, which served as a hospital during the War, the Dacotah House in New Ulm, which served as one of the refugee buildings during the two attacks on the town, or a picture of a log house which survived the attack on New Ulm.³⁸ Most postcards highlighted the many monuments erected in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to the white victims of war. In 1910, a postcard depicted the monument in Jackson County to “pioneer settlers...who died in Dakota Uprising.” That same year produced postcards showing monuments in Meeker County “to the memory of the first victims of the Sioux Uprising of 1862,” Grove City, Birch Coulee, and New Ulm.³⁹ Some highlighted local artists, such as a 1910 postcard of a New Ulm monument designed by Anton Gag.⁴⁰ Other postcards were significantly more macabre. One depicted the “grave of those killed by Indians” at the Lake Shetek site. Another postcard showed the marker commemorating the location of the hangings of the thirty-eight Dakota men. This marker, removed in the 1970s, was located in Mankato and simply stated, “Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians, Dec. 26th, 1862.”⁴¹ This is certainly an example of a monument that does not expand on the simple message etched permanently into its stone. These

³⁸ Minnesota Digital Library, “Winslow House, St. Peter, MN,” *Minnesota Reflections*, 1908, <http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?nico,2157> (accessed 2011); “Copy of a drawing of the Dacotah House; housed refugees during the Sioux Uprising, New Ulm,” ca. 1900, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; and “Log cabin at New Ulm which survived the Sioux Uprising of 1862,” ca. 1900, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database.

³⁹ “Monument to pioneer settlers of Jackson County who died in Dakota Uprising,” ca. 1910, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; “Monument to the memory of the first victims of the Sioux Uprising of 1862. Meeker County,” circa 1910, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; “Sioux Uprising monument three miles south of Grove City,” circa 1910, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; “Birch Coulee monuments,” circa 1910, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; and “Monument erected by the state of Minnesota to commemorate the Sioux Uprising, New Ulm,” circa 1910, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database.

⁴⁰ “Monument commemorating Sioux Uprising designed by Anton Gag, New Ulm,” ca. 1910, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database.

⁴¹ “Grave of those killed by Indians, Lake Shetek.” 9/4/1914, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database; and “Indian monument where thirty-eight Sioux Indians were hanged following the Sioux Uprising of 1862, Mankato,” ca. 1920, Postcard, Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resource Database.

postcards were not necessarily produced to encourage tourism or to promote a greater historical understanding of the events of the 1862 War. More than likely, they were intended to bolster a sense of triumphalism that had persisted at the local level since the War's conclusion. Because of this, postcard producers assumed buyers had some knowledge of the War that was based on the long established memories of the white settlers.

A four-page local newspaper insert honoring the "60th Anniversary of the Indian Wars," particularly the multiple battles at New Ulm and Fort Ridgely, also served as a souvenir keepsake. The front of the insert was a sketch illustrating a man in frontier dress holding a long-barreled rifle on one side stretching his hand in greeting to a Native American wearing a feather in his long hair, leggings, and holding an peace pipe. At the top of the sketch, the artist depicted a covered wagon moving across fertile farmlands. The text at the bottom of the sketch simply states, "Greetings, Friend." However, a text box in the middle of the sketch brought the readers' attention to the War and very clearly explained that this was not a friendly altercation. The text first quotes Charles Flandrau, one of the leaders of the New Ulm battles, calling the War, "The most important Indian War that ever occurred[sic] since the first settlement of the continent[.]" The rest of the text is a reprint of the words inscribed on the Fort Ridgely State Monument: "The Sioux Indians of the upper Minnesota River in violation of their Treaties, broke into open Rebellion and within a few days thereafter Massacred about One Thousand Citizens in the Southwestern part of the State and destroyed Property of the value of Millions of Dollars." Clearly, this type of souvenir was intended for white Minnesotans and maintained the traditional story that the Dakota were entirely to blame for the War. The souvenir insert also reprinted text and photos of several markers found throughout the area in memory of the white settlers and soldiers who had died during the war. For instance the text for a marker at Fort Ridgely reads,

“In memory of the fallen; in recognition of the living and for the emulation of future generations.” In response to continued questions regarding the cause for the War, the insert simply stated, “Much dissatisfaction was engendered among the Indians by occurrences which took place. Where there was any good ground for it or not, is of very little consequence now; the fact that a hostile feeling existed is all that is material here.”⁴²

In 1937, for the 75th anniversary of the War, the insert appeared again in local newspapers, although this edition also included a reprint of Charles Flandreau’s published account of the battle of New Ulm. The 1937 celebration in New Ulm included another souvenir for visiting patrons – a coin with a likeness of Little Crow on one side and the text “75th Anniversary Indian Massacre and Fair Celebration, New Ulm, Minnesota” on the other. The *New Ulm Review* printed a special “Pioneer Edition” in order “to emphasize the significance of the anniversary of the Indian massacre.” The accompanying headline hinted at the contents to be found within the paper and illustrates the attitude that many Minnesotans continued to have about the War, even 75 years later. It stated, “The Bravery of the Defenders Drove Back the Ambitious Savages and the Whole State Was Saved.”⁴³

One of the most interesting souvenirs produced as a result of the War has become known as the “Mankato Spoon” and was the subject of a 2008 episode for the PBS program, *History Detectives*. Produced in the early 1900s, possibly for the 40th Anniversary celebrations in 1902, this souvenir spoon depicts the scene of the hangings in Mankato, etched into the bowl of the spoon. The owner of this particular spoon inherited the object from her grandmother, a resident

⁴² August Hummel, *1922 souvenir, 60th anniversary of the Indian wars, New Ulm, August 18-25, 1862, Fort Ridgely, August 18-27, 1862*, (New Ulm, 1922).

⁴³ *1937 Souvenir, 75th anniversary of the Indian wars: New Ulm, August 18-25, 1862, Fort Ridgely, August 18-27, 1862*, (Minnesota, 1937). This is a reprint of the 1922 newspaper insert created by August Hummel. This version includes Charles E. Flandreau’s account of the Battle of New Ulm; details on the “Little Crow coin” can be found at the Brown County Historical Society archives under the folder “Sioux Uprising 75th Anniversary, 1937;” and *New Ulm Review Pioneer Edition*, Thursday, August 19, 1937.

of St. Paul, Minnesota, and was always curious why such a scene would be produced as a souvenir. Wes Cowan, of *History Detectives*, set out to uncover the mystery behind the spoon with such a “disquieting image.” Because the particular style of souvenir spoon was not produced before 1900, the detective knew it was produced in the 20th Century. A meeting with a Minnesota souvenir collector uncovered a beer tray also bearing the image of the hanging. This tray was produced in 1902, so the detective and the souvenir collector reasonably assumed the spoon was from that date as well.



Figure 4.10. “Mankato Spoon.” Photo located at http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigations/608_mankatospoon.html. Accessed on February 23, 2011.

The episode of *History Detectives* is interesting beyond the mere mystery of the origins of this souvenir spoon. Wes Cowan also inquired as to why a community would wish to remember such an event. During the investigation he met with Dr. Elden Lawrence, a Dakota historian and elder, who provided viewers with some of the background for the Dakota and their cause for war. Asked how the Dakota people would feel about this souvenir spoon, Dr. Lawrence stated, “It would hurt them deeply to see something like this, because this is etched in a lot of the minds and hearts of people.” Although all the Dakota people were punished for the War regardless of their participation, white Minnesotans continued to need reminders of their victory, exemplified most strongly by the hangings at Mankato. When Cowan returned to tell Nancy Johnson, the owner of the spoon, the full story, she remarked, “That is quite a story. The

background is horrible.” Wes Cowan responded, “It’s a story that I think probably 99.9 percent of Americans don’t know about.”⁴⁴

Regardless of the lack of knowledge about the War, the permanent reminders of the War still remain, in this case an etching of a gruesome image into a stainless steel souvenir spoon. These reminders were meant to last even if individuals or communities no longer remembered. The souvenirs produced in the first century after the War performed a similar function as the monuments and they were similarly one-sided. They simplified the history and reinforced the white settlers’ memory of the War. They did not encourage a deeper understanding of the participants in the War and, since they were limited textually, they used their visual impact and subject matter to prolong that memory for the next generation.

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In addition to designating historic sites and producing souvenirs for white Minnesotans to revel in their shared memories, local and state organizations also encouraged its residents to visit the landscapes of this War. In 1902, R. T. Holcombe published a book of “sketches” detailing the monuments and markers placed on the landscape by the Minnesota Valley Historical Society. Keeping his focus to just Renville and Redwood Counties (two counties which saw the bulk of battles), Holcombe notes, “It is believed that portions of these sketches constitute original and interesting contributions to the general history of that most important period of the tragic history of Minnesota.”⁴⁵ His work not only retells the story of the War, something he believed had not been fully accomplished at this time, but he chose his topics based on the markers found on the landscape as a means to guide not only readers of his pamphlet, but also those who might wish to seek these locations in person. According to Holcombe, the Minnesota Valley Historical Society

⁴⁴ “Transcript: Mankato Spoon (Season 6, Episode 8),” *PBS’ History Detectives*, August 2008, http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigations/608_mankatospoon.html (accessed February 23, 2011).

⁴⁵Holcombe, *Sketches*, p. 5.

interviewed participants and witnesses of the War in order to determine the locations for specific events. In 1898, the Society then placed granite markers of varying proportions on the landscape, “thus fixing the identity of the historic points for all time.”⁴⁶

These markers would identify the location of the traders’ stores at the Lower Sioux Agency (the target of the first attacks on August 18), the location of Little Crow’s home, the site of the Redwood Ferry attack on Fort Ridgely soldiers, the outline of the battle at Birch Coulee, the location of Camp Pope (where General Sibley held his base of operations while planning his campaigns of 1863), and the “Faithful Indians Monument...believed [to be] the only structure of the kind ever erected in the United States.”⁴⁷ This last monument, placed near the Birch Coulee monument, was commissioned by the Society which then carefully chose which Dakota should be memorialized based on three requirements: (1) must be a full-blooded Indian, (2) must have been “truly loyal to the whites throughout the entire period of the outbreak,” and (3) be someone who actually saved the life of a white settler. The five Dakota chosen were John Otherday, Little Paul, Lorenzo Lawrence, Simon, and Mary Crooks. Snana, or Maggie Brass, was added to the monument later.⁴⁸ Holcombe’s pamphlet concludes by saying, “The Minnesota Valley is and must always remain the most historic region of the State.”⁴⁹

In 1922, Arthur T. Adams, an instructor in the Minneapolis Public Schools, produced a tourist pamphlet titled “Landmarks of Minnesota History.” Using photos, details for locating the specific sites, and brief descriptions for each site, Adams encouraged his patrons to visit these sites and felt they had lasting importance. In some cases, such as the monument marking the location of the Redwood Ferry where Captain Marsh and his men were ambushed, Adams

⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48-49.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 79.

lamented that the spot for the marker was near the river, difficult to access, and therefore a historic site should be “stabled here” to preserve its history and boost visitors. He also recommended moving two monuments located in a field, which were positioned correctly but proved inconvenient for interested visitors to access. Adams’ “Landmarks” provided a mix of monuments, markers, building ruins, state parks, and recommendations for additional ways to mark the sites associated with the War.⁵⁰

A number of historic pageants produced in the 1920s and 1930s also encouraged tourism at the historic sites of the U.S.-Dakota War. These pageants retold the story of the War as well as the history of Minnesota and provided a celebration of pioneers. David Glassberg explains, “Community historical pageants typically depicted past generations as religious, temperate, hard-working, and patriotic...scenes depicted early settlers bravely persevering to overcome hostile elements and disease, sometimes representing the trials of the pioneers allegorically.”⁵¹ The pageants about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 not only retold the history of the War, from the white perspective, but also reinforced community images of pioneers, a trend which could be found throughout the nation, not just in Minnesota. These events affirmed Minnesotans’ place in the larger national history.

In 1926, the Renville County Birch Coulee [sic] Memorial Association celebrated the 64th anniversary of the Battle at Birch Coulee by performing a pageant on the battlegrounds. This pageant included scenes that provided a history of the county, a description of early Dakota customs, a history of Joseph Renville (the fur trader for whom the county was named) trading with the Indians, and a history of Le Croix (the first settler at Birch Coulee). The purpose of this

⁵⁰ Arthur T. Adams, *Landmarks of Minnesota history* (Minneapolis, MN, 1922). These are newspaper clippings from the *Minneapolis Journal* mounted on 41 pages for publication.

⁵¹ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990): 124.

pageant (while certainly telling the story of the battle that would make this area historic) was to “commemorate the bravery of the early defenders.” Ultimately, this exhibition upheld the belief that while the early settlers suffered during the War, this was merely a setback. The program states, “Men like RENVILLE and LE CROIX are always accompanied by the SPIRIT of PROGRESS. PROGRESS knowing she must press on, summons her messenger, OPPORTUNITY. OPPORTUNITY comes. OPPORTUNITY leads the PIONEERS to Birch Cooley.”⁵² Of particular interest in this program was that the parts of “Indians” in the pageant were played by members of the Lower Sioux Band, which was located in Morton, about two miles from the battlefield. Few pageants were able to cast actual Native Americans as participants. David Glassberg explains

Though nearly every historical pageant included at least one [Indian scene], pageant-masters realized that few towns, especially in the East, had full-blooded Indians of the proper nation living nearby or local residents willing to identify with their Indian descent. . . . Pageant-masters suggested that local organizations with an interest in Indian lore, such as the Boy Scouts or the Improved Order of Red Men, be assigned these roles.⁵³

Although it was certainly a coup for this pageant to have native actors, it is not clear how the Dakota participants felt about playing the assigned roles or how they were compensated for their service.

A 1930 historical pageant presented at Fort Ridgely State Park for the 68th anniversary of the War was designed to show the life of the Dakota and the settlers in the Minnesota Valley in 1862. This program included scenes about the beginning of the War and specifically the battle at Fort Ridgely. The planned cast of characters included braves, Indian riders, Indian women, children, early settlers, square dancers, boy scouts, and girls in drill. Scenes included: a Sioux

⁵² *Program: 64th Anniversary Celebration of the 'Battle of Birch Cooley' on the Battlegrounds, 1-1/2 miles N. E. of Morton, Thursday, Sept. 2, 1926, Under the auspices of the Renville County Birch Cooley Memorial Association* (Renville County Birch Cooley Memorial Association, 1926).

⁵³ Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, p. 114.

village and the Grand Medicine Ceremonial, the trading post of Joseph LaFrambois, and an early settlement near Fort Ridgely; an 1860 4th of July picnic; the agency during the summer of the uprising; the incident in Acton which led to the uprising; the killing of the first settlers in Acton; Little Crow joining the War as principal Dakota leader; the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency; and the two attacks on Fort Ridgely on August 19 and 22.⁵⁴

In 1934, citizens of Redwood County performed a pageant depicting the pioneer days of their county. This pageant actually provided a neutral interpretation of the War and largely dealt with the events surrounding the War. The pageant was performed in honor of the centennial of the arrival of Henry Sibley in Minnesota. However, it also celebrated the pioneers of Minnesota and declared, “It was the surge and urge of adventuresome pioneers, craving the fertile acres of Minnesota for a home, which caused the United States government to purchase from the Sioux Indian Tribe in Minnesota thousands of acres of land at a price of about ten cents per acre to be paid in annual payments.” This account also placed more blame for the causes of the War on the settlers. Most accounts tended to focus blame on the federal government or the Dakota. Although repeatedly using the word “massacre” to describe Dakota aggression towards white settlers, this pageant is surprisingly sympathetic to the cause of the Dakota and included details of their imprisonment, trials, and the mass execution of the thirty-eight men.⁵⁵

In 1939 the Minnesota Valley Pageant Association was formed and performed at Fort Ridgely State Park for the 77th anniversary of the War. The booklet produced in conjunction with the performance included a history of Fort Ridgely and details of the attacks on the fort. The park was being rebuilt at this time, using the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the purpose of the

⁵⁴ B. L. Thurston, *Sioux Indian Outbreak and Battle of Fort Ridgely: Historical pageant presented at the 68th anniversary at the Fort Ridgely State Park, August 22 and 23, 1930*, (Fairfax, MN,:1930).

⁵⁵ H. B. West, *Pioneer Days in Redwood County, a historical pageant presented at Morton, MN on August 9-10, 1934*, (Morton, MN: 1934). The speech by Andrew Myrick greatly angered the Dakota. He would become one of the first fur traders killed at Lower Sioux Agency. His body was mutilated and his mouth was stuffed with grass.

pageant was to promote tourism at Fort Ridgely and in the Minnesota River Valley. This tourism outreach extended beyond the boundaries of Minnesota, as guest speakers included the governor of South Dakota, a Wisconsin congressman, and a state executive from Iowa. The pageant was in several parts. The prologue used a pioneer storyteller and scenes depicting Indian culture. The next section retold the stories of familiar Dakota people, such as Snana and her husband Good Thunder, the fur trade industry and early missionary efforts, and early white settlement in the region. The third part dealt with scenes of the War including the Baker cabin, Little Crow's speech, the attack at the Lower Sioux Agency, and the attacks on Fort Ridgely where the "Indians [were] finally repulsed" and there was "great rejoicing." The finale was a "memorial to departed pioneers and friendly Indians" performed by the entire cast. The printed program provided a complete history of Fort Ridgely and more details of the battles.⁵⁶

As plans commenced to mark the centennial of both the Civil War and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, a number of additional tourism opportunities emerged to encourage Minnesotans to connect with their own Civil War past. In May 1958, a Minnesota River Valley Tour specifically visited sites of "the Sioux Outbreak Country." After a brief overview of the War, the pamphlet highlighted the points of interest that tourists would encounter including Birch Coulee, Fort Ridgely, and the Lower Sioux Agency. The tour also visited the monument to the Forest City Stockade, where an outlying town successfully defended itself against an attack on Sept. 3, 1862, as well as the towns of Acton, New Ulm, Mankato, and St. Peter. For each stop, the guide outlined the battles that took place, highlighted any monuments that would be found, and listed the number of white casualties.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Historical Pageant: depicting pioneer life in the Minnesota River Valley and the Sioux Indian outbreak of 1862*, performed by Minnesota Valley Pageant Association, Fort Ridgely State Park, Sept. 3-4, 1939.

⁵⁷ *Minnesota River Valley Tour, May 24-25, 1958. Re: Visiting the Sioux Oubreak Country*, (1958), Pamphlets relating to the 1862 Dakota Conflict (1865-...), Minnesota Historical Society Pamphlet Collection.

In September 1962, Eugene Becker, curator of the Minnesota Historical Society's picture collection, produced a series of photographs titled "Scenes of the Sioux War: A Century Afterward" in *Minnesota History*, a monthly magazine published by the Minnesota Historical Society. The accompanying text explains, "In the hundred years that have passed since the fearful autumn of 1862, the Minnesota Valley has remained mindful of its history." Directing readers to not only view the photographs of monuments and landscapes, Becker suggests interested persons could view these places and personally experience a piece of history. "Although the stone shafts, picnic tables, and green expanses of lawn hardly suggest the scenes of one of the nation's bloodiest Indian uprisings, the contours of the land remain little changed." His photographs showed not only monuments built to commemorate the white victims of the War, but it also provided beautiful views of the present-day landscape at Birch Coulee and at the site of the Redwood Ferry, seemingly appearing just as it did one hundred years earlier.⁵⁸

Becker's photographic contribution in *Minnesota History* was just one of several pieces for a "Special Sioux War Issue" published in September 1962. Intended to provide an overview of the War for Minnesota readers, it also introduced some alternative ways of thinking about the War that had affected the state so significantly. Of particular note, is the use of the word "war" rather than "massacre" in the title of the issue. This marks a very clear shift in official thinking towards the events of 1862. This publication is a product of the Minnesota Historical Society, a state-funded and operated historical agency, and use of the word "war," while still not widespread among professionals or at the local level, marked an important change.

The choice of articles also contributed to the change. In the introductory article for the issue, Willoughby Babcock, a former staff member with the Minnesota Historical Society,

⁵⁸ Eugene Becker, "Scenes of the Sioux War: A Century Afterward," (*Minnesota Historical Society*) 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1962): 154-156.

summarized the impact of this War, “For Minnesotans the outbreak meant only a temporary setback in the tide of settlement, but for the Sioux nation it marked the beginning of nearly a generation of fruitless warfare in defense of their homeland.”⁵⁹ While Minnesota’s pioneers could certainly be applauded for securing their claims on the Minnesota River Valley, the volume clearly illustrates the high cost of this War for the Dakota. Two of the seven articles focused on Henry Sibley and Charles Flandrau, the most well known “heroes” for the white side of the War, but three of the remaining articles specifically addressed the Dakota perspective. Little Crow’s speech on the eve of the War is reprinted under the title, “Taoyateduta Is Not a Coward,” and the words provided clearly show a man who calculated the risks of going to war, and did not feel the Dakota would win, but valiantly chose to fight with his people rather than be labeled a coward. This portrayal is significantly different than the descriptors of “bloodthirsty,” “savage,” or “murderer” formerly applied to Little Crow or other Dakota who participated in the War. Historian Kenneth Carley provided the article “As Red Men View It: Three Indian Accounts of the Uprising.” While using the phrase “Red Men” remains derogatory, the intent of the article reflected a change in attitude towards the Dakota and their roles in the War. Carley wanted to highlight the few accounts of the War provided by Dakota participants, in this case, Big Eagle, George Quinn, and Lightning Blanket, who all gave their accounts at different times but had never been published together.⁶⁰

The second-to-last article in this issue is particularly interesting as it questions whether the shooting of Little Crow (which occurred in July 1863 when he ventured back into his home territory with his son and was shot by a farmer) was an act of heroism or an example of murder. Written by Walter Trennery, president of the Minnesota Historical Society, it questioned the

⁵⁹ Willoughby M. Babcock, "Minnesota's Indian War," (Minnesota Historical Society) 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1962): 98.

⁶⁰ For more details on these articles, please review *Minnesota History Special Sioux War Issue* (Minnesota Historical Society) 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1962).

legality of the shooting, despite the popularity of the act at the time. Trennery illustrated that even though the state was no longer in a state of warfare by summer 1863, “the whites generally felt that there was open season on red men,” and bounties were offered to those who killed Indians during this time of crisis. A century after the fact, Trennery concluded that Little Crow’s shooters “were provocateurs and murderers,” but he also added, “Are they nevertheless entitled to some glory in their deed? The answer will depend on history.” Trennery was not prepared to overtly declare Little Crow’s shooting to be a murder, but the fact that he repeated the arguments several times implies he was asking readers to seriously ponder this question for themselves.⁶¹ The overall balanced tone of this magazine issue, giving equal attention to the reasons the Dakota went to war as well as the justification used by the state to oust the native population from the region, was indicative of a change in state attitude towards the war at the time of the centennial anniversary.

Minnesotans were still encouraged to visit the historic sites and monuments associated with the War, but they were now bidden to do so with a more temperate attitude than previous generations. However, this attitude was not widespread and local communities preferred celebrations of pioneer perseverance rather than lamenting the high cost of the War for the Dakota. Wayne Webb also provided a centennial anniversary tourist guide “to the area swept by the Uprising of the Sioux Indians of Minnesota in 1862.” This booklet was titled “The Great Sioux Uprising” and included several pages of stories, photographs, and maps for the reader to either visually experience the sites named within, or to embark on a physical journey to explore the area in person. This book followed the chronological story of the War and encouraged tourists to follow this same path. Each site included a brief story, but the photographs displayed

⁶¹ Walter N. Trennery, "The Shooting of Little Crow: Heroism or Murder?," *Minnesota History Special Sioux War Issue* (Minnesota Historical Society) 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1962): 152-153.

illustrated the numerous monuments, stone markers, and cherished landmarks that still remained in 1962. Webb went to great lengths in his guide to detail both the simplicity of monuments found on the landscape but also the numerous historic sites, which were now being interpreted and promoted in 1962. Photos for the Lower Sioux Agency depicted nine markers that had been placed on the agency grounds to designate the location of deaths or to draw attention to notable places, such as Wabasha's Village, about one and a half miles from the Agency. These photos also drew visitors to the stone warehouse, built in 1861 and the only building to remain standing after the attack on August 18.⁶²

Both the wording used and the sites portrayed clearly make Webb's tour one for visitors interested in learning the white side of the War, and this reflects the persistent general mood for commemorating the War during the centennial year, despite the change in attitude exhibited in *Minnesota History*. The title for the pages depicting the battle of Fort Ridgely is "An Epic of Heroism," invoking the memory of outnumbered soldiers and refugees' against-all-odds ability to defend the poorly designed outpost. For the battle at Birch Coulee, he uses the phrase "The Battle Nobody Won," even though most present-day historians have marked this as an important victory for the Dakota side. A picture of a plaque at the Upper Agency explains, "During the Sioux Outbreak in August 1862 many whites from this agency and nearby missions were escorted to safety by friendly Indians," an example where the few markers depicting Dakota contributions to the War focused on those Dakota who sided with whites.⁶³

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In 1962, in honor of the centennial of the War, the Kandiyohi County Historical Society published the booklet "A Panorama of the Great Sioux Uprising," a collection compiling the

⁶² Wayne E. Webb, *The great Sioux uprising: a tourist guide to the area swept by the uprising of the Sioux Indians of Minnesota in 1862: stories, photographs, map* (Redwood Falls, MN: W.E. Webb and J. I. Swedberg, 1962).

⁶³ Ibid.

work of twenty-two artists each depicting a different scene of the War with a final piece depicting the “Lower Agency of Morton Today.” While acknowledging that both non-natives and natives lost much during the course of the War, the book continued to promote a memory that favored the white perspective. The book’s dedication illustrated this perspective by simply stating, “Dedicated...to the pioneers who won...and to the Sioux – who lost.”⁶⁴ While sympathy for the Dakota and their reasons for going to war could be found in the text accompanying each art piece, this booklet clearly wished to recall memories of war for its primarily white audience. The Foreword explained, “Today’s Minnesotans must know of this portion of their heritage, and the love of freedom in both settlers and Indians which inspired it, if we are to retain this freedom for ourselves and the generations which will succeed us.”⁶⁵ (This publication took place one hundred years after the War, however, its message remained the same.) The “Minnesotans” referenced as needing to understand this history were clearly white Minnesotans who had forgotten their heritage and needed to be reminded of the struggles employed by their pioneering ancestors who had successfully defeated the Dakota in order to make the state safe for continued white settlement.

The subsequent sections retold the classic stories including the first killings at Acton, the appeal to Little Crow to start a full-scale war, and the attacks on the Lower Sioux Agency, Fort Ridgely, New Ulm, and the general countryside. The scenes depicted several attacks at individual farms as well as the stories of survivors and even the story of the Dakota man, John Otherday, who led a group of whites from the Upper Agency to safety in St. Paul. The scenes concluded with the Dakota surrender at Camp Release, their trials, the mass hangings, and imprisonment during the winter of 1863. The inevitability of white settlement, not only in

⁶⁴ *A Panorama of the Great Sioux Uprising* (Kandiyohi County Historical Society, 1962): 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

Minnesota but also throughout the American West, was made clear. The book stated, “This was the beginning of the end of the mighty, proud Sioux nation. . . . When the Uprising ended they had only a few more years of the independence they loved, for finally the growth of America forced them to give up all the lands they had once owned and live on assigned reservations.”⁶⁶

A map of Minnesota can be found at the end of this publication showing the region affected by the 1862 War. Titled “The Battleground,” it highlights almost half of the state and certainly puts into perspective the impact this War had, not only on the people, but also on the land and gives an idea of what the Dakota were fighting for in the first place. Calling this the “opening battle in the 29 year war for the West” the text then lists the various counties affected while also putting the 1862 War into the larger national context of the “Sioux Wars,” which typically marks their end in 1890 with the massacre at Wounded Knee (the text also strengthens the reasons Minnesotans should remember this War, even 100 years later, because it was, as the foreword states, “One of the most important, and least known, events in Minnesota’s history”).⁶⁷

In preparation for the centennial of the Civil War and the U.S.-Dakota War, the Minnesota State Legislature appointed a committee to oversee anniversary observations occurring throughout the state. Formed in 1959 and tasked with emphasizing “commemoration and observance, and not a celebration,” the Centennial Commission sought to underscore state and national history for the citizens of Minnesota and to elicit pride in the state’s heritage and system of government.⁶⁸ Declaring that the “Civil War was the most profound experience in American history,” the committee highlighted the important roles the state played in this time period. To provide a more personal connection of the role Minnesota played, a summary

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27-28.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸ “Minnesota Civil War and Sioux Uprising Centennial Commission’s Progress Report, September 15, 1960,” *Minnesota Civil War and Sioux Uprising Centennial Commission, Report, 1960*, Minnesota, Legislature, Reports of Interim and Special Committees and Commissions, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society. State Archives.

brochure stated, “Minnesota has the most interesting associations with the War of any of the northwestern states, and these unique associations have kept alive the interest in Minnesotans in this momentous conflict.” The brochure explained that Minnesota was the first state to volunteer troops to Lincoln, Minnesota was home to the last Union veteran, who died in 1956, the 1st Minnesota Regiment played a key role in the battle at Gettysburg, and, of course, Minnesota was the site of the “beginning of the fateful twenty-eight year ‘War for the West’” when the “Sioux Uprising” occurred on the state’s frontier in 1862. The brochure then explained that local communities could partake in the commemorative exercises by organizing their own committees, sponsor programs or promote research, mark sites and graves not already identified, preserve documents, and arrange appropriate observances or educational activities so the wider public could learn from “the memories of tragic events” and “sharpen our sense of national purpose at a time when we are seeking to redefine it.”⁶⁹

In addition to the activities designed to commemorate Minnesota’s role in the Civil War, a number of programs occurred specifically to remember the events of 1862. Designation of a “Sioux Uprising Trail” was approved by the state legislature, the University of Minnesota produced plays with the War as a primary topic, numerous books were published, the historical society conducted a tour of “Uprising Sites,” Fort Ridgely received a new interpretive program and updated markers, newspapers printed several series of articles on the theme, and a separate “Sioux Uprising Committee” successfully erected additional historical markers. Interestingly, the commission reported that a group of Dakota from Prairie Island marked the centennial of the War with the theme “100 Years of Peace with the White Man.” Robert Wheeler, who provided a summarized report of the activities carried out for the centennial, felt the Prairie Island efforts

⁶⁹ “Minnesota Civil War and Sioux Uprising Centennials,” Brochure, *Minnesota Civil War and Sioux Uprising Centennial Commission*, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

were constructive. He later stated, “To me, the most important single result stemming from the two anniversaries has been the increased understanding on the part of many people of the factors which brought about the two great conflicts. I am sure that the Commission’s insistence on a dignified, meaningful observance had much to do with the significant results from a human relations standpoint – north and south, of the Indian and white.”⁷⁰

The centennial anniversary observations marked an important shift in interpretation and sentiment regarding the War. Previous commemorative efforts focused almost exclusively on the white settler perspective. With nearly 500 settlers (and soldiers) killed during the six-weeks of primary warfare, white Minnesotans needed and wanted an outlet to not only remember the fallen, but to celebrate those who survived. However, by the 1960s amidst more national awareness of civil rights and racial equality, the long-known reasons for which the Dakota justified war began to be examined more closely and the commemorative tools adjusted to reflect these new attitudes. While the white settlers were still looked at as victims, the concept emerged that the Dakota could also be victims of government corruption and racial hatred.

An example of these attempts to balance the story of the War was the Fall 1962 issue of the *Gopher Historian*, a history magazine for Minnesota published by the Educational Press Association of America. The edition is almost entirely dedicated to retelling the War, including a multi-page article by Minnesota historian Willoughby Babcock. While the article itself does not present a new version of the War’s main events, its tone does make attempts to see the War from the perspective of the Dakota as well as the soldiers and settlers. Babcock describes the Dakota as starving, impatient for their long overdue annuity payment, and harboring general resentment that the Upper and Lower Sioux had been cheated out of their lands through the treaties of 1851 and 1858. Babcock described the fur traders as “heartless,” mentioning twice the dismissive

⁷⁰ Robert C. Wheeler, Assistant Director, to Honorable Leslie E. Westin, State Senator, August 28, 1962.

words of Andrew Myrick suggesting that the Dakota “eat grass” if they were hungry. However, the article and the periodical as a whole continue to remain faithful to the long-held beliefs about the War. The War is labeled repeatedly as an “uprising” or “outbreak,” Little Crow is listed as the sole leader, the successful defenses of New Ulm and Fort Ridgely are highlighted over the near defeat at Birch Coulee, the Dakota are typically divided into “friendly” and “unfriendly” categories, and description of the hangings of the 38 men is presented without controversy.⁷¹

In June 1962, the *New Ulm Journal* also dedicated a good portion of an issue to the “Centennial Celebration” for the “Sioux Indian Uprising.” The publication retold the well-known stories such as the battles of New Ulm, the first-person survivor narratives, and the hangings of the thirty-eight at the conclusion of the War. The paper also reminded local citizens of area monuments while retelling the many individual sites touched by war. The work of the Brown County Historical Society was commended for dedicating “the first in what is hoped to be a series of historical markers in this area.” This first plaque was placed outside the building housing the historical society and summarized the two battles of New Ulm. Interspersed throughout the numerous articles are occasional attempts at understanding the causes for the War and there are hints at sympathies towards the Dakota of 1862 as well as the Dakota a century later. However, some articles maintained serious prejudice, such as one by Wayne Webb regarding the present, quiet condition of the Upper Sioux Agency.⁷² Webb provided two primary reasons for the War, “other than the natural disinclination of the Indians for civilization.” He

⁷¹ Articles referenced are found in the *Gopher Historian: Junior Historical Magazine of Minnesota* (Educational Press Association of America) Vol. 17, No. 1 (Fall 1962).

⁷² This is the same Wayne Webb who wrote *The Great Sioux Uprising* discussed above. He was the editor of the *Redwood Falls Gazette*.

gave one case as “trader whiskey” and placed some blame here on corrupt traders. The other cause was the late annuity payments.⁷³

As the period for centennial celebration ended, the desire to encourage tourism to these sites continued as well as the increasing sympathetic tone towards the Dakota’s role in the War. June Drenning Holmquist and various collaborators produced three different tourist guides between 1963 and 1972, each designed to highlight historic sites in Minnesota and particular historical events, such as the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. With co-author Jean A. Brooking and photographer Eugene Becker, her 1963 *Major Historic Sites in Minnesota* was published by the Minnesota Historical Society “in response to numerous requests for brief, accurate information on Minnesota’s historic places.”⁷⁴ Although not specifically a project for the centennial, Holmquist and her collaborators began their research for this project in 1958, the centennial of Minnesota’s admission as a state, and ended in 1962, the centennial year for the U.S.-Dakota War, so it certainly fits within the genre of interest surrounding the many centennial observations for statehood, the Civil War, and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The authors reserved nearly twenty pages of this tourist guide to “Sioux Uprising Sites.” They summarized, “Within thirty-eight days the red men killed more than five hundred settlers, destroyed a great deal of property in southern Minnesota, and launched a series of Indian wars that lasted until 1890. In terms of the number of lives lost, the Sioux Uprising was one of the worst in American history.” The guide then lists ten sites of the War in chronological, rather than geographical order, beginning with the murders at Acton and ending with “the Hanging of the Sioux” in Mankato. Each site provides a description of the action that took place and then describes the use of the site in present-day 1962. Accompanying illustrations vary from photographs of current monuments,

⁷³ Wayne Webb, “Upper Sioux Agency Quiet Place Today,” *New Ulm Journal*, June 26, 1962. Reprinted from 1959.

⁷⁴ Holmquist and Brooking, *Major Historic Sites in Minnesota*, p. v.

buildings, or ruins found on the various sites and historic artists' renderings or maps of particular events. This guide ends with information for each of the official monuments erected by the state until 1962.⁷⁵

In 1967, the Minnesota Historical Society published "History Along the Highways: An official guide to Minnesota State Monuments and Markers" and June Holmquist again served as one of the primary contributors. The guide reprinted the text found on state-approved historical markers, monuments, and geological markers as of 1966 and lists these in the order in which they were erected, rather than based on a regional grouping or historical event. Obviously, the markers for the U.S.-Dakota War figure prominently, but this particular guide does not provide historical background on the events and does not expound on the interpretation of this history as the present day historic sites. It is again interesting to note that markers for Birch Coulee, the Battle of Wood Lake, the site of Camp Pope, and the site of Camp Release were erected before sites such as Fort Ridgely or Lower Sioux Agency. However, this guidebook does not include the dates that the markers were placed on these locations, unless the text on the marker provided its own date, so it is difficult to ascertain when the state deemed it necessary to mark the spots or how close in date these markers were placed in relation to each other or the monuments also discussed. Also, not all of the markers specifically explain their relation to the War, and it is left to the reader to make the connections.⁷⁶

The list of monuments does include the dates they were approved in legislation, and again it is interesting to note which individuals or events made their permanent mark on the landscape before others. The first official state monument was the John S. Marsh monument, dedicated in 1873 to the captain who was ambushed at Redwood Ferry. The next monument was

⁷⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁷⁶ Russell W. Fridley and June Drenning Holmquist, *History Along the Highways: An Official Guide to Minnesota State Markers and Monuments* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1967).

dedicated to Guri Endresen for her bravery during the War. The third and fourth monuments remembered groups of victims (at Acton and Monson Lake). Finally, by the fifth monument, specific battles (New Ulm) begin to be marked for remembrance. The monuments, more so than the markers, clearly demonstrate the dominance of the U.S.-Dakota War upon Minnesota's memory landscape. Of the 110 markers, only 20 specifically mention the War, generally referred to as "the Sioux Outbreak of 1862." Of the 23 monuments, seventeen referenced the 1862 War. However, Holmquist and her collaborators do not draw attention to this obvious fact nor discuss the War in detail at all. While the aim of the book is to encourage Minnesotans to discover their history during a casual drive along its highways, the guidebook leaves it to the visitor to make the connections between the many markers and monuments provided. The War, by the late 1960s, is just one piece of history in Minnesota's past; it no longer demands as significant attention or place in the collective memory.⁷⁷

In 1972 June Holmquist and Jean Brooking reteamed for an update to their 1963 guide. Now published with more photos and using larger page size, the guidebook is divided into four regional zones to detail forty-five major historic sites, of which the "Southern" zone focuses most on the sites associated with the War. However, there had been obvious changes in attitude about the War and the manner in which it had been interpreted since the original publication of 1963. The authors explained, "The section devoted to Southern Minnesota is perhaps the most greatly changed. Here the chapter formerly entitled 'Sioux Uprising Sites' has been rewritten to focus on the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies and Fort Ridgely, and the story of the Dakota Indians in Minnesota has been expanded and broadened to give what we think is a more accurate view of their past in this portion of the state." They also explained that sites such as the Lower Sioux Agency expanded their interpretive programs. While the story of the Agency from 1854-

⁷⁷ Ibid.

1862 remained important, the site itself now included the cultural and social history of the Dakota from first contact up to the present day.⁷⁸

In 1973 Ron Hunt and Nancy Eubank produced “A Living Past: 15 Historic Places in Minnesota,” which of course included sites associated with the War. Again, the three sites singled out to represent this history were the Upper and Lower Agencies and Fort Ridgely. They specifically referred to the War as “war” rather than “outbreak” or “uprising,” a continued important change in wording from previous decades. They called it “Dakota (Sioux) War of 1862”. For causes of the War, the authors stated, “The war was a culmination of years of friction between Dakota and European as white settlement pushed upon Indian hunting grounds.” Any mention of government negligence or the duplicity of the fur traders had been pushed to the background, and few details of the War were provided. Tourism to sites associated with the War continued to be promoted, although downplaying the significance of the War continued and the details pushed to the back of Minnesotans’ minds even as they were encouraged to embark on journeys to explore their state’s past.

While fewer Minnesotans actively remembered the War in the 1960s and 1970s, others worked to connect this history to a larger national story. Artist Jerry Fearing created a graphic novel describing the War for publication in the color comic section of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, which was then published as a separate booklet for the anniversary observances of 1962. Titled simply “It Happened in Minnesota: The Picture Story of The Minnesota Sioux Uprising,” Fearing called this “the story of Minnesota’s frontier settlers, and the men who led them, in their most desperate hour.” For the Dakota, Fearing called this their “tragic story of a proud race of red men,” and he ultimately hoped this publication would serve as a vehicle to make thousands

⁷⁸ June Drenning Holmquist and Jean A. Brookins, *Minnesota's Major Historic Sites* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1972).

“acquainted with this historic stepstone of Minnesota history.” Because the centennial anniversary of the U.S.-Dakota War coincided with the nationwide centennial observations of the Civil War, Fearing’s booklet begins with the founding of Fort Snelling, which marked the permanence of the United States in the territory, and continues with the opening battles of the Civil War.⁷⁹

After the brief reminder of Minnesota’s role in the Civil War, the text continued with the question “What caused the Sioux uprising of 1862?” and the accompanying graphics aided the reader in the story of what sparked the War and the panic that flooded much of the state. Fearing detailed the attacks on the Lower Sioux Agency, the battles at New Ulm and Fort Ridgely, the many survivor stories, the formation of Sibley’s army unit, the final battle at Wood Lake, and the numerous events that occurred after the Dakota surrendered. His scenes showed burning cabins, warriors painted in bright colors and brandishing rifles, and fierce battles on the prairie between Little Crow’s men and Sibley’s troops. Fearing’s text did not tell a new story by any means, but rather reinforced the standard tale as it has been told in Minnesota since the end of the War. He persistently referred to the Dakota as “braves” and “warriors.” Furthermore, he described the heroics of “friendly” Indians and made a point of illustrating these Dakota, such as John Otherday, wearing the clothing of a hard-working farmer, which contrasted sharply with the breechcloth wearing “warriors” fighting with Little Crow.

Fearing’s account was generic and neutral – neither blaming the Dakota for going to war or severely admonishing the government for the causes which started the War. Fearing implied that the military trials were unfair, prompting President Lincoln to review the proceedings; he also described the horrors the captured Dakota faced when they were marched between camps.

⁷⁹ Jerry Fearing, *It Happened in Minnesota: The Picture Story of the Minnesota Sioux Uprising*, Reprinted from the *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN: N.W. Publications, Inc., Publishers of *St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press*, 1962).

He concluded his story questioning the reasons Sibley pursued the Dakota in the campaigns of 1863 and 1864 saying “hundreds of innocent Sioux suffered” and these campaigns “embittered the Indians and laid the foundation for the Indian wars which were to continue for years.”

Fearing encouraged his readers to learn more about the War by visiting their local library.

However, Russell Fridley, the director of the Minnesota Historical Society at the time of

Fearing’s publication, declared that this booklet

...accurately and graphically portrays the story of Minnesota’s role in the Civil War and the Sioux Uprising of 1862. The Civil war influenced the general course of our nation’s development, and shaped our character as a people. The Sioux Uprising – Minnesota’s own Civil War – swept through the picturesque Minnesota valley and ignited the decisive and tragic 28-year war for the western plains.

Clearly the contents of this graphic novel could provide all the information a reader would require to learn about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The goal of this booklet, as explained by Fridley and certainly hoped for by Fearing, was for Minnesotans to realize their own place in national history and feel their connection to the Civil War through their own state’s internal struggle.⁸⁰

In 1977, Jerry Fearing teamed with the Minnesota Historical Society to produce “The Story of Minnesota: The State’s History in Picture Form.” Although previously published in various forms (as a series in the Pioneer Press during 1963-64 and as published booklets in 1964 and 1969), Fearing and the Historical Society felt a new edition was warranted at this time, perhaps in conjunction with the recent patriotic celebrations for the nation’s bicentennial year. The introduction states, “The Story of Minnesota’ is a portrayal in pictures and text of historic events in the development of the North Star State. Based on painstaking research, it begins with the Ice Age and courses through thousands of years to the present. Educators and historians have acclaimed the story for its accuracy, attention to detail, and originality in conception.” It is

⁸⁰ Ibid.

extremely interesting to note that Fearing now uses the term “Native Americans” rather than “Indians” and calls the Native Americans of Minnesota the Dakota and the Ojibwe, with their commonly known, but incorrect, names of Sioux and Chippewa in parentheses. The ensuing early pages of this book detail the arrival of first French, then British, and finally American explorers and fur traders and the subsequent accommodations made by the Native Americans in Minnesota to each new arrival. The second part of this story follows “Minnesota as it changes from a land of Native American villages and trading posts to a territory and then a state with settlers from many countries.”

The account of the Dakota War takes up only one page in Fearing’s nearly eighty pages of state history, a surprising change as previous histories of the state and the above-mentioned tourist publications allotted significant coverage of the event. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the cultural and social changes of the 1970s permitted the Dakota side of the story to be told more publicly than ever before. However, this seemed to coincide with more white Minnesotans losing interest in the War and perhaps Fearing’s shortened version in this publication reflects this trend. Fearing did not mention specific battles (such as New Ulm or Fort Ridgely), although the illustrations show townspeople firing upon Native Americans amid burning buildings and blue-uniformed soldiers encamped in an open space while Dakota soldiers prepared an ambush. He provided basic reasons for the War (government and fur trader corruption, the starvation of the Dakota), the number of people killed as more than 450, the leadership of Little Crow, the campaigns led by Henry Sibley, and the hanging of the thirty eight. The two paragraphs conclude saying, “All Dakota people were then driven from the state whether they had taken part in the fighting or not.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Jerry Fearing, *The Story of Minnesota: the State's history in picture form* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1977): 1, 36, 63.

The dilution of the story by Fearing in 1977 is indicative of the movement of this story to the background in the larger history for the state. Now more than a century removed from the six-weeks of warfare, white Minnesotans as a whole no longer felt the need to actively remember the War or celebrate the pioneer conquest of the frontier. However, while white Minnesotans were no longer actively participating in memorial events for the 1862, the Dakota community was finding ways to share their memories and acknowledge the sufferings of their ancestors through increasingly public actions.

CHAPTER 5

September - December 1862: Retreat, Surrender, and Consequences

While Brown's burial party was under siege at Birch Coulee, Little Crow opted to move his men north towards Hutchinson and Forest City. During this move, his group split amid disagreements regarding Little Crow's plans; about 35-40 men stayed with Little Crow while another 75 men followed Walker Among Sacred Stones. On September 4, these two groups attacked Hutchinson and Forest City, only to find the towns had been hastily surrounded by stockades and well defended by local settlers. After a day of fighting and plundering any unprotected property, the two Dakota groups headed back towards the Upper Agency. These were just two of many stockade forts built by settlers after they learned of the attacks on the Dakota reservation. The fort at Hutchinson was capable of sheltering nearly four hundred people. The community of St. Cloud built three fortifications, one that included a tower for sharpshooters. Some of these forts would become more permanent fixtures and occupied by the army. While many settlers continued to flee the region, others opted to stay and fight for their property and these stockades enabled their protection.

On the western border of Minnesota and Dakota Territory, Fort Abercrombie was also under attack. Commanded by Captain John Vander Horck, this fort was similar to Fort Ridgely in its poorly designed defenses and was located along the Red River, about fifteen miles north of Breckenridge. Having inadvertently heard about the Dakota attacks on the Agency when a supply train from St. Cloud brought a newspaper clipping on August 23, Vander Horck immediately began preparing for defense and brought nearly eighty settlers into the fort for protection. On September 3, nearly one hundred Dakota attacked the fort but were repelled after

about two hours of fighting. However, this attack left the fort with very little munitions and even less hope of being resupplied. On September 6, as many as 150 Dakota soldiers attacked the fort again. While the Dakota were still unable to take the fort, they did hold it under siege until relief forces arrived at the fort on September 23.

By early September 1862, Governor Alexander Ramsey's pleas to President Lincoln to commit federal troops to this war were finally heard. To emphasize the seriousness of the situation and the responsibilities of the federal government, Ramsey stated in a telegram, "This is not our war; it is a national war." By September 6, Major General John Pope was named commander of a new military department for the Northwest to be based in St. Paul. However, Pope did not contact Sibley until September 17, and Sibley already faced criticism across the state for his continued delays in pursuing Little Crow after he set up headquarters at Fort Ridgely on August 28. His loss of men and horses at Birch Coulee as well as lack of experienced soldiers made Sibley cautious about engaging the Dakota in an open attack, but he was most concerned that attacking the Dakota would lead them to kill the nearly 300 prisoners being held in their camps. Using his knowledge of the Dakota and personal connections made while a fur trader, Sibley began corresponding with Little Crow to secure the captives' release and end further assaults. Other chiefs, such as Wabasha and Taopi, also began communicating with Sibley who suggested, "Indians who desired protection should gather with their captives on the prairie 'in full sight of my troops' with a white flag 'conspicuously displayed.'" It was clear to Sibley that there were divisions among the Dakota, some who wished to continue the war and others who sought a peaceful end. Finally, on September 19, resupplied with ammunition, weapons, and men, Sibley marched out of Fort Ridgely and prepared to engage the Dakota either in battle or in treaty negotiations.

On September 22, Sibley and his men camped at Lone Tree Lake.¹ His guide mistakenly identified their position as Wood Lake, which was located about three and a half miles from their actual location. Unknown to Sibley, because he failed to station pickets far outside the confines of his camp, roughly 700-1200 Dakota soldiers prepared for an attack on Sibley's camp. Opting to ambush the soldiers at dawn rather than attack at night, Little Crow placed his soldiers in key positions, hidden by the tall prairie grass. This surprise attack was thwarted, however, when a group of men from the Third Minnesota left camp without permission around 7:00 am, hoping to supplement their army food rations with potatoes that could be found nearby in the Upper Agency gardens. The Dakota attacked these men, but since this was not Sibley's entire party, the assault caused minimal damage. Sibley was able to regroup and formalize an attack on the Dakota, aided by cannon fire. One of the Dakota casualties for the day was Chief Mankato, who was killed by a cannon ball. He was the only major Dakota leader killed in the course of the war. The Dakota lost an additional fourteen men in this battle. The battle at Wood Lake became the victory Sibley needed and the Dakota would not openly engage the army in Minnesota again.

While Little Crow fought at Wood Lake, those Dakota opposed to the war took the opportunity to fully separate from his camps and to secure the white and mixed-blood prisoners, many held for the full six weeks of war. This separate "friendly" Dakota camp, also known as the "peace party," was composed of nearly 150 lodges made up of both Lower and Upper Sioux. The leaders sent word to Sibley that he could come to this new camp to claim the captives. On September 26, the friendly Dakota "released 91 whites and about 150 mixed-bloods. Additional captives, freed in the next few days, brought the total to 107 whites and 162 mixed-bloods – 269 in all." The captives were taken to Sibley's camp, now called Camp Release. At the same time,

¹ Also known as Battle Lake.

about 1200 Dakota were taken into government custody. As more Dakota surrendered in the following days, the total number of Dakota in Sibley's camp reached nearly two thousand.²

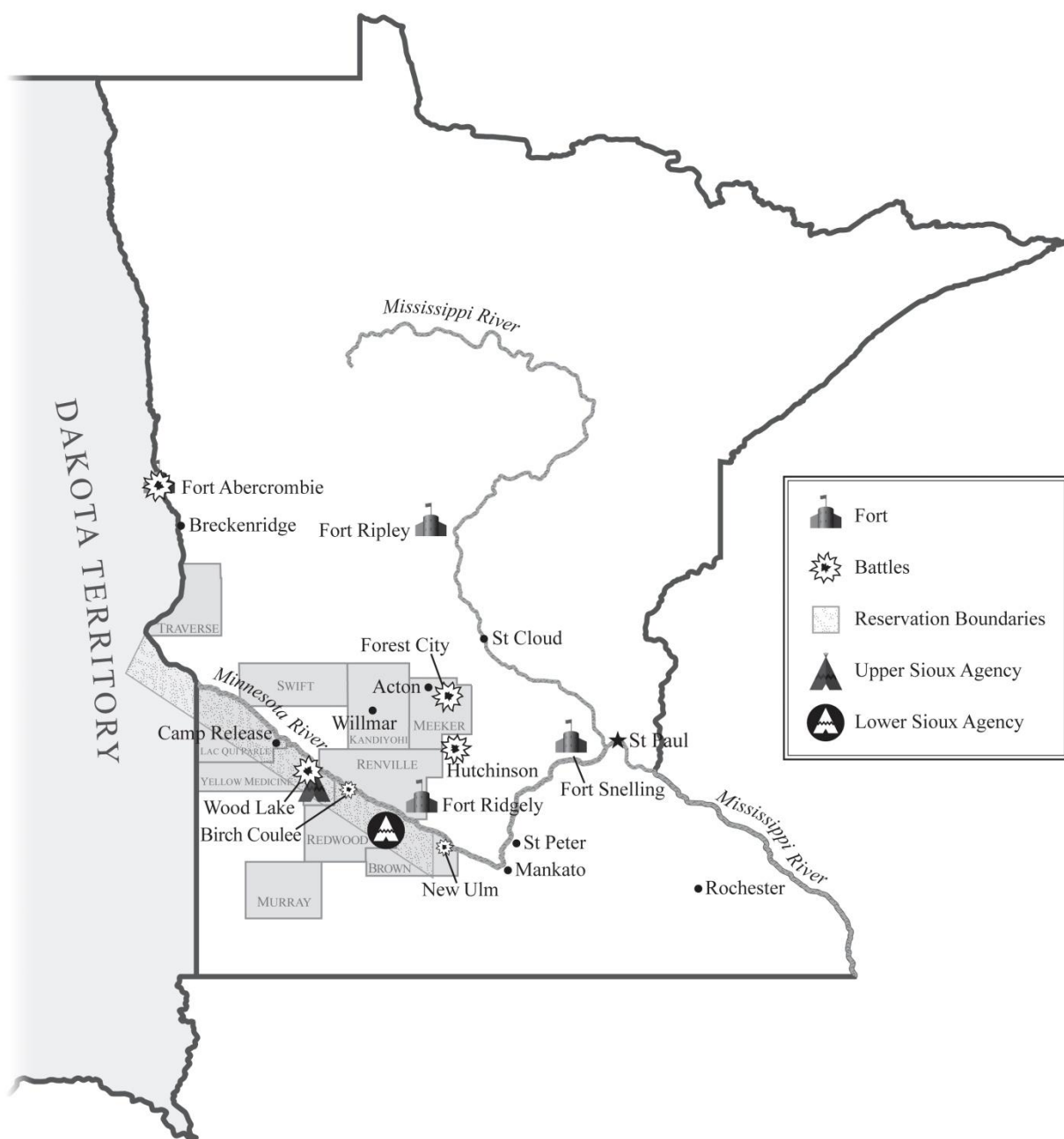


Figure 5.1. This map shows the final battles of the War as well as the surrender at Camp Release. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

² The information in this opening section was drawn from Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, pp. 45-67.

Dakota Memory Activities

The previous three chapters have largely focused on the ways white settlers remembered and memorialized the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Often overlooked and disregarded have been the ways the Dakota people also remembered this War, both in the immediate aftermath when their memories were largely invisible to the white general public, but also in the recent past as their perspective of the War has been more accepted throughout the state of Minnesota. Of significance is that the Dakota remembered the War using many of the same media as white Minnesotans. They wrote letters to loved ones describing their experiences in prison as well as their roles in the War. They passed their stories down through generations using both oral and written histories. They marked specific anniversaries to memorialize their fallen. And, they erected monuments and markers and preserved historic sites in order to tangibly and permanently remember the War on the landscape. However, the bulk of Dakota memory stories have focused on the aftermath of the six-weeks of warfare – the rushed military trials of nearly 1,200 Dakota, the internment camp experience and forced removal of the remainder of the Dakota nation, and the subsequent hangings of the thirty-eight Dakota men on December 26, 1862. While white Minnesotans remembered specific battles and community losses, the Dakota focused on the actions committed by the government on their nation that continued after the War.

Native historian Elizabeth Cook-Lynn argues that Native Americans should not be treated as minorities because they

are not what others are, ‘ethnic Americans’ whose intentions are to be absorbed and assimilated... We have been thought of as a despised people in many parts of the world, in the global universe of émigrés, and, yes, in the immigrant nation of America, among movers and settlers, a despised population that most of America has hoped and believed would go away, disappear, or vanish[.]³

³ Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars*, p. 180.

The challenge for the Dakota people's memories to be accepted as part of the larger collective memory associated with this War faced difficulties even as the battles occurred. One example is a letter printed in local newspapers that provides a sense of the deep emotions present in the mindset of white Minnesotans that supports Cook-Lyn's description of the Dakota as a "despised population." This letter appeared on September 2, 1862, in the *Stillwater Messenger*. The author described the desperate feelings among the soldiers and settlers waiting at Fort Ridgely for the expected Dakota attack and a pledge made by some of the defenders:

...upon the altar of the Eternal God, that if either or all of us escaped from our then perilous situation, we would prosecute a war of utter extermination of the entire Sioux race.... We believe this to be the spirit which should actuate every white man. The race must be annihilated – every vestige of it blotted from the face of God's green earth. Otherwise our State will be ruined and white men slaughtered or driven from our noble young State.⁴

Words such as these created a "heritage of bitterness,"⁵ which continues in some areas even today, successfully marginalizing the Dakota perspective of the War and the ways they could openly share their memories. After the War, white Minnesotans focused almost exclusively on their status as innocent victims and were intent on punishing the Dakota nation, regardless of their roles in the War.

Historian David Blight discusses the effect of marginalizing one group's memory in his book on the memory of the Civil War, *Race and Reunion*. While the story of African-Americans and slavery contributed to the causes of the Civil War, their own experiences and need to participate in anniversaries were ignored in favor of memorial celebrations that reunited North and South, with little discussion for slavery as a cause for the devastating war. He explains, "Black responses to such reunions as that at Gettysburg in 1913, and a host of similar events, demonstrated how fundamentally at odds black memories were with the national reunion. In that

⁴ A. J. Van Vorhes, "Let the Sioux Race be Annihilated," *Stillwater Messenger*, September 2, 1862.

⁵ Gibbon, *The Sioux*, p. 113.

disconnection lay an American tragedy not yet fully told by 1913, and one utterly out of place at Blue-Gray reunions.”⁶ For the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, now that the Dakota perspective has been acknowledged, there is an ever-present challenge to honor both the white and Dakota perspectives about the War without marginalizing either group. The first step is to identify the contributions of the Dakota to the larger commemorative history.

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The impact of the forced invisibility for Dakota memories is long reaching and has contributed to the continued tense atmosphere surrounding discussion of this War today in Minnesota, even as the history of the War is not generally well-known amongst white Minnesotans. However, while these memories may be less visible to a wider public, that does not mean they are non-existent. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan Woolworth identified sixty-three distinct Dakota personal narratives, then published thirty-six of these in their book *Through Dakota Eyes* in order to make “deeper and broader perspectives available to readers.”⁷ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola similarly included twelve Dakota narratives in her recent work on Dakota captivity literature. From the earliest histories of the War, such as Isaac Heard’s 1863 *History of the Sioux War*, Dakota voices have been included in the overall story. However, their perspective has rarely allowed for a portrayal of the Dakota as victims in the War and therefore white Minnesotans controlled the long-term memory story.

Dakota participants in the War shared their memories through oral tradition and through written records. Some of the personal narratives took the form of captivity narratives and came from mixed-heritage members who tended to downplay their Dakota connections. Nearly fifteen percent of the Dakota population in 1862 fell into this mixed heritage group and their narratives

⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 10.

⁷ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 7.

provided significant insight for the atmosphere on the reservation before the War and what happened in Dakota camps during the six weeks of fighting, and ultimately revealed the complex relationships that existed throughout the Dakota nation. Dakota communities comprised full-blood families as well as families blended as French-Dakota (from the history of French voyageurs in the fur trade during the early period of European contact in Minnesota), Anglo-Dakota (as fur traders of English or Scottish descent operated in the region), or even a combination of “black/white/Native ancestry, further complicating their identity and loyalty.”⁸ When War began, these complexities made it difficult to declare loyalties as many Dakota straddled a fence between cultures and the published narratives reflect this continued struggle.

Samuel Brown, the son of former Indian agent Joseph Brown and his mixed-blood Dakota wife, was on school vacation and visiting his family at their home near the Upper Agency when the War commenced. The family, minus Joseph who was away on business, was taken captive and survived largely due to his mother’s Dakota relatives. Isaac V. D. Heard first published Brown’s story as an eyewitness account in 1864, as part of the general captivity story involving the entire Joseph Brown family. Brown personally re-told his story in the 1897 publication, *In Captivity*. The story, as part of a general history of the Joseph Brown family, was published a third time by his nephew, George Allanson, in 1933. After his captivity, Samuel Brown served as an army scout in Sibley’s expedition to track down those Dakota who had not surrendered at Camp Release. Although his narrative acknowledged his Dakota ancestry, Brown clearly aligned himself with his white audience. Derounian-Stodola explains, “Denying or at least downplaying his Dakota heritage consolidated his identity as a white man and reflected the influence of his father.”⁹ Samuel Brown is one example of a Dakota voice being heard, but his

⁸ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pp. 167-168.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

account is from not only the anti-war faction of the Dakota but also someone held captive and who personally identified as “white” more so than Dakota. Paul Mazakutemani, whose statement is reprinted in Anderson and Woolworth’s book, also made this identification as he recalled coordinating with General Sibley for the surrender at Camp Release: “Since then I and my children have lived well. And from that time more than ever I have regarded myself as a white man, and I have counselled[sic] my boys accordingly.”¹⁰

Even the narratives from active war participants, such as Big Eagle’s account given in the 1890s, were tempered knowing that mostly white Minnesotans would read the accounts. Anderson and Alan describe, “[E]ven forty or fifty years after 1862 anti-Indian feeling was still so intense in Minnesota, and racism was so pervasive in American society, that Dakota narrators undoubtedly felt constrained in what they could say. Surely the narrators knew that the largest part of their audience held no sympathy for the Dakota Indians.”¹¹ Still, Minnesotans in the 1890s exhibited an interest in both sides of the War, even if white citizens continued to hold fast to their status as the only innocent victims of the War. The introduction to Big Eagle’s published 1894 story explains,

The stories of the great Sioux war in Minnesota in 1862 never grow old. They are always new to many and never dull to anybody. . . . There are two sides to this as to every other story. The version of the white people ought to be well enough known. But the Indian side, strangely enough, has not been recorded. The soldiers of the Union read no stories of the great Rebellion with more interest than the narratives of the ex-Confederates, and we never got the full and true story of the war until they began to write. So we can never fully understand the Sioux war of 1862 until the Indians tell their story.¹²

Big Eagle provided not only general details of the War and his own participation in specific battles, but he also placed a fair amount of blame on the Dakota and sought understanding from

¹⁰ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 256.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² From the opening words by Return I. Holcombe in the publication *Wamditanka* (Big Eagle), "A Sioux Story of the War: Chief Big Eagle's story of the Sioux outbreak of 1862," ed. Return I. Holcombe, *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (The Pioneer Press Company, State Printers) 6 (1894): 382.

his white audience, “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.”¹³ He also explained that he and others like him may have fought in the War, but they did so out of loyalty to their people rather than a belief that it was the right thing to do. His narrative ended with a statement that he had reconciled the outcome of the War, even if the bulk of those associated with it had not, “I am at peace with every one, whites and Indians.”¹⁴

Big Eagle’s account may be the most well known of the Dakota pro-war participants, but it was certainly not the only one. In 1908, Hachinwakanda (or Lightning Blanket)¹⁵ provided his own account as “an eye-witness who fought on the Indian side” and “to retain the correct account for future generations.”¹⁶ Apparently, white Minnesotans did believe a “correct account” could include Dakota versions of battles and not strictly be told from the white perspective. His story provided the military maneuvers from the Dakota perspective of the two battles at Fort Ridgely. While he hinted at divisions in the Dakota war camp, particularly as Little Crow struggled to get the entire war faction to agree with his plans for battle, Hachinwakanda did not provide personal feelings about why he fought in the War or his opinions on its outcome. In 1962, *Minnesota History* recounted the story of George Quinn, a mixed-heritage Dakota, from his never before published 1898 interview. Quinn’s account detailed the ambush of soldiers at Redwood Ferry, the second battle of Fort Ridgely, and the final battle at Wood Lake. He also did not apologize for his actions merely explaining that while he was “half white and half Indian...I was raised

¹³ Wamditanka, “A Sioux Story of the War,” p. 384.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

¹⁵ Hachinwakanda was also known as Red Star, Wichunkpeduta, and David Wells.

¹⁶ Hachinwakanda (Lightning Blanket), *Battles of Fort Ridgely: Story of the Battle of Fort Ridgely, Minn., August 20 and 22, 1862. As told by hachin-wakanda (Lightning Blanket). Who was a Participant in this Conflict on the Indian side.* (Morton, MN: O. W. Smith, 1908).

among the Indians as one of them. So when the outbreak came I went with my people against the whites.” However, he also stated, “I took no part in killing the settlers and was opposed to such work.”¹⁷ Despite this, Quinn spent four years as a prisoner in Iowa before moving to the Santee Reservation in Nebraska.

Recent publications such as *Through Dakota Eyes* or *The War in Words* combine the multiple Dakota narrative accounts, both pro-war and anti-war, into single edited monographs. Anderson and Woolworth showcased thirty-six sources while Derounian-Stodola discussed twelve. Of the latter author’s twelve, only one source differed from those found in Anderson and Woolworth because she included a section on 20th century author Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, whose work will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Derounian-Stodola selected her twelve sources around the theme “captivity literature,” while Anderson and Woolworth utilized any source which expanded the story of the War.

Of the thirty-six accounts, only five give a female perspective of the War and three of these women were held captive. Roughly fifteen of the accounts came from narrators of mixed heritage. Anderson and Woolworth identify seven narrators as active participants and another five where evidence suggested they also took part in the War and “opposed the fighting only after it had failed.” Others may not have participated but still exhibited significant sympathy towards the leaders of the War and their decision to fight. Only four narrators were members of the “peace party” and the final remaining narrators fell somewhere in the middle and “tried simply to avoid the destructiveness of the conflict.”¹⁸ The earliest narrative (published on August 28, 1862) was the one given by John Otherday to a St. Paul newspaper after he led survivors from the Upper Agency to safety. Other early narratives include Taopi and Joseph Godfrey’s

¹⁷ Kenneth Carley, "As Red Men View It: Three Indian Accounts of the Uprising," *Minnesota History Special Sioux War Issue* (Minnesota Historical Society) 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1962): 147-149.

¹⁸ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 4.

testimonies to a military commission during the trials of 1862 (Godfrey's testimony would be edited and published in Isaac Heard's 1864 published history of the War), testimony given by Wowinape (Little Crow's son) to the army after his arrest in 1863, and two letters written to Sibley during the extended campaigns of 1864. It is clear from the two collections of narratives that the Dakota side of the War was recorded, even if these were often disregarded in favor of the dominant white narrative.¹⁹

Outside of Big Eagle, any preserved narrative, oral or written, describing the Dakotas' reasons for going to war and the experience while at war is generally overlooked in most well known published accounts and histories of the War. Kenneth Carley explains,

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.²⁰

Many Dakota people today prefer to look on themselves as victims because the most well-known stories that were accepted by Western society were records of Dakota people who were innocent of going to war, like the narrative of Samuel Brown. Most recorded memories were from members of the peace party or from those Dakota who worked with the U.S. army as scouts or soldiers in the aftermath of the War. Memory efforts today focus primarily on the thirty-eight men who were hanged. It would be interesting to hear more from Dakota people who committed

¹⁹ The narrators featured in Anderson and Woolworth are: Big Eagle, Wabasha, Robert Hakewaste, Good Star Woman, Little Crow, Cecilia Campbell Stay, Esther Wakeman, Joseph Coursolle, White Spider, Taopi, Samuel J. Brown, Nancy McClure Faribault Huggan, Joseph Godfrey, George Quinn, Gabriel Renville, Victor Renville, Joseph La Framboise, Jr., Charles R. Crawford, John Otherday, Snana, Lightning Blanket, Thomas A. Robertson, Paul Mazakutemani, Ecetukiya, Star, Light Face, Lorenzo Lawrence, Solomon Two Stars, George Crooks, Frank Jetty, Wowinape, Iron Hoop, Little Fish, Antoine J. Campbell, Little Wheat, and Standing Buffalo. The captivity narratives featured in Derounian-Stodola are: Samuel J. Brown, Joseph Godfrey, Paul Mazakutemani, Cecilia Campbell Stay, Nancy McClure Faribault Huggan, Big Eagle, Lorenzo Lawrence, Maggie Brass (Snana), Good Star Woman, Esther Wakeman, Joseph Coursolle, and Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve.

²⁰ Carley, "As Red Men View It," p. 126.

to Little Crow and actively sought to regain their homelands. In addition, the historic landscape keeps the active participant side of the story silent. Those Dakota who are remembered on markers and monuments are typically the “friendly” Dakota – those who sided with the white settlers or who fought with General Sibley and his assembled military regiments.

In recent years, another form of personal narrative has been translated and shared. Dakota elder Clifford Canku, a professor at North Dakota State University, spent years reading and translating letters from Dakota men imprisoned at the War’s end. The letters, written in the Dakota language to missionary Stephen Riggs who then shared their contents with the prisoners’ family members, reveal the horrors of prison life (including knowledge of soldiers who raped Dakota women who worked at the prison), the pressure to convert to Christianity, and their knowledge of Lincoln’s assassination and what that could mean for the future of the Dakota people. The letters have the power to be extremely controversial. While they give a voice to those Dakota who participated in the War and have largely been kept silent, the letters also make white Minnesotans question the actions of their state and federal government. Canku encourages these questions as a means to promote “truth telling.” He states, “Did they have concentration camps in Minnesota? Even today, people don’t believe that. People died. They were in prison. They experienced genocide. And when you talk about these things you are going to get opposition saying, no, these things didn’t happen. But they did happen.” Even for the Dakota, the letters can spark some controversy. While many are excited to see the names of their ancestors, the content of the letters also reveal those men who collaborated with the army, a fact which some wish to conceal. But as Bruce Maylath says, “This has been a one-sided story to this point. And for the first time this tells the other side – directly from the Dakota side.” These letters are directly from the viewpoint of Dakota participants for a Dakota audience. They were not filtered

through interpreters and published for white Minnesotans. While controversial, the translation and publication of these letters brings a necessary dimension to the ever-present debates regarding the War and the manner in which it should be remembered.²¹

While providing court testimony or leaving written records was one way to share memory, the Dakota also remember the War and its aftermath in a more traditional way by passing their memories down orally through generations. Dakota elder Eli Taylor, explained, “He [God] didn’t give us pen and paper; we remember with our minds.”²² This oral tradition not only allowed the Dakota to share their memories with each other and heal emotional trauma, today it can be used to bring another much-needed side to the overall story of the War and its impact. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn, in his work on the Apache and the massacre at Camp Grant in Arizona, explained that Apache narratives, while “marginalized and silenced in the mainstream,” were remembered among Apache and passed down or recorded for future generations, enabling the story of Camp Grant to be less one-sided and “more realistic.”²³ Guy Gibbon adds, “Sioux stories must not be marginalized in the face of Western discourse or dismissed as merely amusing. As an ongoing social activity, oral tradition has sustained Sioux social life throughout the difficult twentieth century.”²⁴

Dakota historian and activist Waziyatawin explains that traditionally Dakota children were trained to hear, remember, and repeat the stories of their elders. These stories were both mythological and historical and together they constituted an oral tradition that could be passed down through generations. The many publications of Charles Eastman (described in Chapter 1)

²¹ Dan Gunderson, "150-year-old letters give voice to Dakota prisoners," *Minnesota Public Radio*, January 19, 2011, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/01/19/dakota-tribe-letters> (accessed March 2, 2011). These letters were stored at the Minnesota Historical Society. The translators plan to publish 50 of the 150 letters in a book using the original Dakota language, a literal translation, and a contemporary English explanation.

²² Waziyatawin, *Remember This!*, p. 3.

²³ Colwell-Chanthaphohn, *Massacre at Camp Grant*, pp. 45, 42.

²⁴ Gibbon, *The Sioux*, p. 153.

illustrated this blend of myth and fact as he orally learned his people's history. Waziyatawin writes, "Consequently, the Dakota definition of oral tradition is at least partially based on the assumption that the ability to remember is an acquired skill - one that is acutely developed or neglected."²⁵ While a written language did exist for the Dakota in 1862, the use of oral tradition remained an integral component of the now-dispersed Dakota community and stories about the War contributed to their collective identity.

Although not a narrative passed down through generations, the testimony of Wowinape,²⁶ Little Crow's son, is an example of a Dakota child who remembered and shared the story of his elders. Wowinape was present when Little Crow made his speech agreeing to lead his people to war. He later recounted this to an attorney and it was eventually translated and published. He accompanied his father into Minnesota in the summer of 1863 and witnessed his father's death after being shot by local farmers. Eventually Wowinape was captured by the army, and his testimony was printed in local newspapers and provided additional insight into Little Crow, his feelings about the War, and the reality of exile for many Dakota. He described Little Crow's desperation for his family: "Father [Little Crow] went to St. Joseph last spring [1863]. When we were coming back he said he could not fight the white men, but would go below and steal horses from them, and give them to his children, so that they could be comfortable, and then he would go away off."²⁷ Wowinape's training as a Dakota child taught to remember the words of his elders provided insight into the perspective of Little Crow, who was killed before he could share his own story.

The realities for the Dakota community after the War were harsh. The nation as a whole was punished for the War, regardless of their roles. The majority of Dakota either fled the state

²⁵ Waziyatawin, *Remember This!*, p. 28.

²⁶ Wowinape was also known as Thomas Wakeman.

²⁷ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 279-282.

of Minnesota voluntarily or was forced onto new reservations amid harsh conditions in Dakota Territory and Nebraska. The community also dispersed into Canada and often mixed with other tribes. Oral tradition provided a means for connecting to a shared, albeit scattered, heritage.

Waziyatawin explains, “The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 remains the major point of demarcation in Dakota history. The loss associated with that seminal event has affected every Dakota life since 1862, and it will continue to affect every Dakota person in the future.”²⁸ The inclusion of the oral traditions of the Dakota people and the stories that have been passed down about the War can adjust the long-standing white narrative and eliminate the one-sided story that has dominated for more than a century. In addition, *what* the Dakota have publicly remembered – the aftermath rather than the causes for war or the details of battles – explains *why* the memorial efforts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have also focused on these aspects of the War. It also explains why the Dakota feel victimized and why reconciliation has remained out of reach.

In the collected narratives found in the Anderson/Woolworth and Derounian-Stodola books, two of the stories reflect this oral tradition: Esther Wakeman, married to Little Crow’s half-brother and whose story “is thus particularly valuable because she viewed events as a close relative of Little Crow,” and Joseph Coursolle, a mixed-heritage Dakota who served as interpreter at the Lower Sioux Agency and whose two young daughters were held as captives during the course of the War. Wakeman shared her story with her daughter, Mrs. Harry Lawrence, who then published the account in 1960. Her version of events spoke of confusion and chaos among the Dakota and she painted Little Crow as a reluctant participant. She described seeing him return from hunting while others attacked the Lower Sioux Agency. According to Wakeman,

²⁸ Waziyatawin, *Remember This!*, p. 5.

Little Crow divided some white women and children who found it difficult to escape among his friends to protect them from the renegades. The Indians raided farms to get food for the refugees. One day a large group of soldiers attacked them and they were forced to fight. Little Crow wanted to make peace, but the majority of the people wanted him to lead them in a war.

Her account ended with their flight to Canada, eventual surrender, and the imprisonment of her husband for siding with Little Crow. “Our treatment was terrible,” she recalled, “All the food was mixed in one big pot and it wasn’t fit to eat. Three of my brothers died of smallpox while in prison.”²⁹

Esther Wakeman and her husband sided with Little Crow out of family obligation, and her history focused on Little Crow’s reservations about the War and their mistreatment following surrender. Her testimony was favorable towards the pro-war Dakota. Joseph Coursolle’s oral account was told from the perspective of a Dakota who fought against his own people. Coursolle was of mixed Franco-Dakota heritage, but his upbringing and education was greatly influenced by Henry Sibley, who raised and educated him after both his parents died. He married a white woman and they lived in the mixed heritage community that existed at the Lower Sioux Agency, where he worked as a blacksmith. When the Lower Sioux Agency was attacked, Coursolle and his family fled to Fort Ridgely, where he enlisted in the militia and would go on to fight at Birch Coulee. His story was passed down to his son and grandson, who later shared it with F. J. Patten for publication. Patten retold this story for a white audience and the account was most likely embellished. For example, Coursolle’s wife was now described as Franco-Dakota. From the account, however, it is clear Coursolle sided with the white side of the war. His narrative provides detailed accounts of his military experiences and he provides no evidence of apprehension about fighting against his Dakota relatives and former neighbors.³⁰

²⁹ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, pp. 54-55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-60, 158-165, 239-241.

While these oral accounts included details during the War, others focused on its aftermath, particularly the impact of the hanging of thirty-eight Dakota men on December 26, 1862. Rose Bluestone shared her families' memories, passed down through her grandmother. These stories began with the execution rather than ending with it, and were shared with her by an aging grandmother. Published in 1995, her story begins, "My Grandmother witnessed the hanging of her father in Mankato when she was thirteen years old. The families were there to watch. It was a tragedy." Still, Rose Bluestone's story mixed sorrow with hope: "From my grandmother I learned about sadness. It made me feel so bad, what they went through. But you have to go on living as best you can." After beginning her story with the executions, she then went back and explained the history of her people and how they came to live in southwestern Minnesota, how they ceded the bulk of their land in exchange for annuities, and how they struggled with assimilation programs. Her memories and identity included a modern-day return to Dakota traditional beliefs, what she refers to as the "Way of the Pipe," and she describes the resurgence of the Sun Dance and powwows, such as the memorial powwow in Mankato. Her final statements were thoughtful: "Are our lives improving? If you're thinking of assimilation, no – that's not what we want. We're Indian. We live our lives in our own way. We know how to laugh at ourselves. That's what keeps us going." Bluestone's oral tradition interweaves history and personal experience, all centered on the impact of the hangings and pointing towards a future that reaffirms Dakota cultural identity.³¹

In 1997, Korean War veteran Trulo His Day (also called Trulo Columbus) sang a song at the dedication of a memorial in Mankato for the thirty-eight Dakota men hanged after the War. Learning the song from his grandfather, he described it as "full of pain and pride of a people

³¹ Rose Bluestone, "From My Grandmother I Learned About Sadness," in *Messengers of the Wind: Native American Women Tell Their Life Stories*, ed. Jane Katz (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1995): 69-77.

defeated in war.” His Day recalled hearing his grandfather’s stories and finding them terrifying. The stories with the most impact were of the hangings. His Day shared, “My grandfather felt sorry for the 38. I think he felt the Indians were all mistreated. And so he always cried when he sang it and that’s why I learned the words.” The words of the song provide little insight as to why the 38 were hanged, but they do suggest a connection between the Dakota of 1862 and those in the present:

From the clouds, they’re looking down.
The Indians that were hanged, they’re looking down, the Indians that have gone on.
We are all related.
When we get to Heaven, we will stand in front.

According to His Day, being able to openly sing the song is a new experience. He states, “I used to think this song was made for Indian and not the white man and that we should keep it quiet.” However, by the time of the dedication of the monument in 1997, His Day felt it was time to not only share the words of the song, but also his feelings so that “maybe people will look back and think maybe the Indians weren’t all wrong. Maybe it will wake people up. It’s about time.”³²

Anthropologist Guy Gibbon writes that present-day Dakota use oral tradition as a means to define their culture. By telling their histories through story telling and dancing, they are “socially reproducing their culture...and countering narrative erasure by the dominant society.”³³ When Floyd Red Crow Westerman published his cultural story, he not only identified himself as Dakota, he also pinpointed that identity to the aftermath of the War. He wrote, “I am a descendant of those who were hung in the greatest mass execution in American history at Mankato, Minnesota.” His story, like Rose Bluestone’s, explained the origins of the Dakota and the gradual impact of European settlement. He called the War “a very reluctant uprising” that was forced because the Dakota were starving. Westerman did not provide details of battles, but

³² Nick Coleman, “Grandfather’s song recalls sad hangings,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 22, 1997.

³³ Gibbon, *The Sioux*, p. 151.

instead focused on the harsh conditions of internment at Fort Snelling and Lincoln's decision to execute the thirty-eight men. He also stated, "And of course, concentration camp life has continued for us,"³⁴ referring to the continued struggles on reservations in the United States and Canada.

Eli Taylor's account was not only a written recording of the stories he learned and passed on to future generations. As author Waziyatawin explains, Dakota oral tradition can be a "decolonizing agent" aimed at returning Indigenous knowledge and history to Indigenous peoples.³⁵ In order to gain the Dakota perspective of the War, the oral accounts need to be adequately understood and included alongside accepted historical fact. Waziyatawin's book based on Eli Taylor's stories explains the importance of teaching oral tradition to Dakota children. She also recalls that her own oral history education included visits to sites associated with the War, including Wood Lake and the Upper Sioux Agency. She writes, "Visiting these sites reinforces the connection to place taught in oral tradition, and many times I have walked with elders in search of a 'place' attached to a story from oral tradition."³⁶ While the Dakota people may not have had their own markers on the permanent landscape, oral tradition enabled them to mark important sites and maintain connection to those sites through visitation.

Of greater importance in Waziyatawin's book, and what emphasizes the value of the stories provided by Eli Taylor, is that oral tradition enables the Dakota to "reclaim our past for ourselves...differentiated from that body of knowledge written and understood by the dominant society."³⁷ Even though the Dakota were dispersed and disconnected from their homeland after the War, oral tradition could preserve community ties. Those stories tended to center on the War

³⁴ "Floyd Red Crow Westerman," in *Of Earth and Elders: Visions and Voices from Native America*, ed. Serle L. Chapman (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 2002): 126-129.

³⁵ Waziyatawin, *Remember This!*, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

and its aftermath because that event “marks the separation from homeland.”³⁸ The Dakota oral tradition of Eli Taylor often focused on the hanging of the thirty-eight. Waziyatawin writes that the way the Dakota remember the thirty-eight differs significantly from white society, which paints these Dakota men as murders and rapists. Instead, Dakota view these men as “heroes, patriots, and martyrs who died defending their people, their way of life, and their land. These are the stories essential to the decolonization project, as they subvert the colonialist interpretation of events that have come to be identified as unchallenged ‘truth.’”³⁹ Eli Taylor’s story of the hanging is one of sorrow at the loss of cultural leaders and provides no details that led up to the event:

They hanged some elder men, those who cherished the earth. Their future grandchildren’s children will cherish the earth even more. They hanged them. They have blessed the future now. They were not hanged for doing anything bad. They died for doing good, no one can compare to what they died for. For that righteousness they were hanged.⁴⁰

The perspective provided by Taylor is drastically different from the perspective of more than a century of texts authored by white Minnesotans for a predominantly white audience. These differences contribute to the continued struggle between the two groups in Minnesota even today.

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While the sharing of memories orally and in written form would help connect the dispersed Dakota people, it is also important to understand how the Dakota nation as a whole rebuilt their community following the War. After the surrender at Camp Release, 1700 Dakota were held in internment camps during the winter of 1862-63; as many as 3000, including Little Crow, successfully fled the state rather than surrender. The U.S. army, led by Generals Henry

³⁸ Ibid., 97.

³⁹ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Sibley and Alfred Sully, pursued these Dakota and engaged in the battles of Big Mound, Dead Buffalo Lake, Stony Lake, Whitestone Hill, and Kildeer Mountain during expanded campaigns in 1863 and 1864. These battles were against the Dakota as well as their allies with the Yankton, Yanktonai, and Lakota peoples. These battles are also at times placed into the larger “Sioux Wars” which would include the Battle at Little Big Horn in 1876 and the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Meanwhile, all previous treaties signed between the U.S. and the Dakota were declared invalid, their reservation lands taken away, and any remaining annuity payments were canceled. Their lands were opened to homesteading and new reservations were created in Dakota Territory and Nebraska. Nearly all Dakota who were part of the Lower Sioux Agency were banished from the state, while some members of the Upper Sioux Dakota were permitted to remain. Most Dakota opted to leave the state amid the severe anti-Indian atmosphere of the state in the wake of the War. Only about fifty Dakota remained in Minnesota as of 1867; in contrast, about 6,000 Dakota had lived in the state in 1850.⁴¹

Despite their obvious losses, both physical and cultural, the Dakota did rebuild communities in Minnesota as well as on their new reservations in Dakota Territory, Nebraska, and Canada. Their nation was dispersed, but a shared heritage remained. By 1883, the Dakota in Minnesota had established thirteen separate communities and used government appropriations to purchase land at Prairie Island, Birch Coulee, and Prior Lake. “These lands became core properties for twentieth-century Dakota communities.”⁴² By 1939, an Upper Sioux community had also been established. Within these new communities, the United States continued to encourage assimilation programs, conversion to Christianity, and the abandonment of traditional values and Dakota cultural practices. Ironically, while the American and Canadian farming

⁴¹ Gibbon, *The Sioux*, p. 111.

⁴² *Ibid.*

neighbors of these Dakota communities prospered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “the economic and living conditions of the Sioux deteriorated.”⁴³ By the 1930s, the Dakota were able to benefit from the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 to purchase additional land. Still, Dakota cultural traditions were discouraged and the factionalism within their communities exacerbated pitting full-blooded members against those of mixed heritage, progressive-minded versus conservatives, and those successful at farming or ranching against those unable to maintain access to their land. Although the Dakota in Minnesota no longer had official federal reservations, outside the state reservations existed at the Santee Reservation in Nebraska, the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota, and the Flandreau Santee Reservation in South Dakota. Still other Dakota settled on reservations of their Lakota, Yankton, or Yanktonai relatives, both in the United States and in Canada.⁴⁴

The re-establishment of Dakota communities was an important step in their ability to publicly remember the War from their own perspective and to highlight the moments of War that most greatly impacted their futures. The oral and written histories, as mentioned above, were the first means of commemorating the hardships endured by the Dakota at the end of the War, including the hanging of the 38 and the forced removing of the remaining population. By the 1960s, social historians found value in the perspective of non-white cultures and acknowledged the ways Europeans and euro-Americans had violently claimed much of the western world. Additionally, social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement led other marginalized groups to seek visibility on the predominantly white cultural landscape. Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, women, and Native Americans organized and staged events to make their voices heard. The American Indian Movement was founded in Minneapolis in 1968 and its

⁴³ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 142-164.

headquarters continue to be based there. In 1971, students at Mankato State College,⁴⁵ located in the same town as the 1862 hangings, successfully petitioned to change their school mascot from “Indians” to “Mavericks.”⁴⁶ Publications such as Vine Deloria, Jr.’s 1969 *Custer Died for Your Sins* and Dee Brown’s 1970 *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* also influenced the general public to reconsider the ways Euro-Americans had acquired their land at the severe expense of indigenous peoples. Dee Brown’s book, which showed the rapid decline of Native Americans’ freedom in the United States from 1860-1890, even included a chapter about the War in Minnesota, titled “Little Crow’s War.”⁴⁷

Novelist Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve used the medium of young adult literature and a new demand for ethnic stories in the 1970s to contribute to the growing Dakota-sided story of the War. Her 1974 book, *Betrayed*, retells the events of the Lake Shetek attack.⁴⁸ Derounian-Stodola explains that until recently children’s literature about the U.S.-Dakota War (and other wars with Native Americans) has been “written for a white readership and has often demonized the Dakotas.” Sneve states that she learned the bulk of the history of her ancestors from non-Indian sources and then balanced that “misinformation” with the oral tradition of the Dakota elders. Still frustrated by the imperfect manner in which Native Americans were portrayed, especially in the genre of children’s literature, she uses her own published stories to counteract the established stereotype. Derounian-Stodola describes, “The entire novel is essentially a captivity narrative about the Lake Shetek settlers that dramatizes their abduction by White Lodge and their rescue

⁴⁵ Now known as Minnesota State University – Mankato.

⁴⁶ *List of Banned Mascots*, Jay Rosenstein, <http://jayrosenstein.com/pages/honormascots.html> (accessed August 17, 2011).

⁴⁷ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 2nd edition (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); and Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, 3rd edition (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).

⁴⁸ This is the story of the attack of the Lake Shetek settlement, examined in more detail in Chapter 3. The majority were killed, but several women and children were taken captive and taken from the state as their captors fled into Dakota Territory. With the aid of several Lakota men, they were rescued in November 1862.

by the Fool Soldiers. But it is a captivity narrative with a twist, as its Native author provides her own perspective on the captivity of white hostages.” In contrast to many of the oral histories described above, Sneve’s novel ends, rather than begins, with the mass hanging. Derounian-Stodola observes, “Ending her novel this way allows her to portray the vengeful settlers as savage and thus destabilize, once again, the prevailing stereotype of violent Indians in so many white-authored captivity narratives.” Sneve’s novel challenges the accepted white narrative and the perception that white settlers were the primary victims in the War. The social context of the 1970s allowed Sneve to present these alternative viewpoints.⁴⁹

Hollywood actor-director Michael Landon incorporated the story of this War and the plight of Native Americans in general in several episodes of his family-friendly drama series, *Little House on the Prairie*. Set in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, in the 1870s, this series told a fictional story of a hardworking, pioneer family and their surrounding community loosely based on the real-life story of the Charles Ingalls family, made famous in the books authored by daughter Laura Ingalls Wilder. Walnut Grove, a town located in southwestern Minnesota, would have been within the region to experience the War in 1862 and therefore its residents would have had first-hand memories of those chaotic weeks. In January 1977, during the third season, an episode titled “Injun Kid” aired. This episode told the story of Spotted Eagle, the mixed-blood son of a Caucasian woman who had chosen to marry a Dakota man and live amongst his people. After the death of his father (a dramatic opening sequence which depicts a Native man running away from mounted soldiers only to be shot in the back and killed), Spotted Eagle and his mother move in with her father, Jeremy, who lived in Walnut Grove. Spotted Eagle is forced by his grandfather to be known as “Joseph” and to learn to live according to his white heritage,

⁴⁹ Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words*, pp. 265, 268-269, and 272.

effectively abandoning his Dakota heritage to avoid both his grandfather's and the town's racism.⁵⁰

The fictional nature of the show, although based on historical figures, could make its audience doubt the authenticity of this tale. However, the show routinely walked a fine but effective, line showing not only the racism prevalent in an 1870s southwestern Minnesota setting, but also the continued racism towards Native Americans in the 1970s. The show as a whole aired numerous episodes on the topics of racism, abuse, alcoholism, physical disabilities, and several other topics that could be socially relevant both in the 19th century and also in the 20th century. Furthermore, this episode aired in 1977, just a few years after the American Indian Movement's standoff at Wounded Knee. Other episodes that brought the Ingalls family into the spectrum of Native American history include the pilot (1974) where the family attempts to settle in Kansas only to lose their land because this was still considered Indian country and not open for settlement; the episode "Freedom Flight" (season 4, airing December 1977) where a Native American man seeks medical attention for his ailing father only to face the racism of the town which banned the man and his family; and the episode "The Halloween Dream" (season 6, airing October 1979) when son Albert, while planning a Native American Halloween costume, falls asleep and dreams of his capture and ensuing adventures among Native Americans. The series finale even touched on the 1862 War. Titled "The Last Farewell" (airing February 1984), the episode describes what happens when a businessman buys all the land around the town intending to build a railroad through the region. This businessman smugly reminds his colleagues that because the Indians were defeated in 1862, the land was now free for settlement and improvements. Clearly, while all of these are fictional stories intended to entertain a specific audience, Michael Landon and his crew had researched the Walnut Grove region sufficiently to

⁵⁰ *Little House on the Prairie: Injun Kid (Season 3, Episode 16)*, Television, directed by Michael Landon, 1977.

know what subjects would be real for his 19th Century characters as well as providing impact for his 20th Century audience.⁵¹

In keeping with these changing attitudes towards non-white cultures at the national level, and the increased acceptance of the Dakota perspective on the War, the historic sites in Minnesota that interpreted the War also altered their narrative to include the Dakota side. David Glassberg writes,

We think that once we make a place historic it will not change. But it will. Historic places, supposedly marked for eternity, disappear from view as markers crumble and surrounding neighborhoods change. The places that remain are reinterpreted by succeeding generations in ways that mirror changing political ideologies and popular tastes.⁵²

While the monuments and markers that were already present on the historic landscape in Minnesota were not crumbling, they did become less important as attitudes towards the Dakota changed. Instead, interpretation at historic sites met the demand for an expanded story of the War that included the Dakota perspective. By the 1970s, the interpretive plan for Fort Ridgely State Park described the “now-or-never choice” the Dakota faced “dealing with the injustices thrust upon them.” The bulk of interpretation at the fort focused more on the history of frontier forts, life for soldiers, and Indian culture as it existed before white settlement. The War and the two battles that took place at the fort in 1862 were minimally discussed. The interpretive plan continues, “The significance of Fort Ridgely today is primarily educational – to convey to the public an understanding of the early history of Minnesota, the events that shaped its development, and the people involved in those events.” Since the late 19th century, the interpretive goal of the fort had focused more on commemoration and memorial history, but now

⁵¹ Ibid.; *Little House on the Prairie: Pilot*, Television, directed by Michael Landon, 1974; *Little House on the Prairie: Freedom Flight (Season 4, Episode 13)*, Television, directed by Michael Landon, 1977; *Little House on the Prairie: The Halloween Dream (Season 6, Episode 7)*, Television, directed by Michael Landon, 1979; and *Little House on the Prairie: The Last Farewell*, Television, directed by Michael Landon, 1984.

⁵² Glassberg, *Sense of History*, p. 202.

removal of a monument was discussed. Erected in 1896 and standing in the parade grounds, the new interpretive plan suggested the monument should be removed to the nearby military cemetery as it prevented site visitors from envisioning the fort as it would have been in the 1850s and 1860s.⁵³ As sympathy towards the treatment of the Dakota before and after the War grew within the state, the need to memorialize the white victims of the War diminished as well. However, rather than discuss the War in a context that would include both white and Dakota perspectives, the solution was to push the story to the background of the interpretive history at sites like Fort Ridgely.

One of the last historic sites connected to the War to be established was the Lower Sioux Agency, which broke ground for a museum in 1969. Although this was the first location attacked by the Dakota as an act of war, there was little interest in its preservation for more than a century after the War's completion. While some stone markers had been placed near the original agency buildings, marking the location of some of the fur traders' stores and the site of the Redwood Ferry ambush that killed almost two dozen soldiers dispatched from Fort Ridgely, white Minnesotans had seemed disinterested in using these grounds for memorial or interpretive purposes. However, the new social atmosphere of the 1960s encouraged the Minnesota Historical Society to not only acquire the property of the Lower Sioux Agency and tell the story of the War, but to also to tell the story of the Dakota while they lived on the reservation from 1851-1862. The planned exhibit, to open for the 1970 summer season, was divided into three parts. The first described the history of the Dakota, particularly as it related to the United States in the 19th century. This part included the fur trade industry, the United States reservation system, the involvement of missionaries, and the various treaties that resulted in reservation existence from 1853-1862. This section ended with causes for the War. Part two focused on the War, the

⁵³ Brooks Cavin, F.A.I.A., *Fort Ridgely Development Plan*, (1976).

various battles, the trials, the hanging of the thirty-eight, the internment camp at Fort Snelling, and the death of Little Crow in the summer of 1863. The final section focused on the aftermath of the War and the realities of reservation life for the Dakota as they were banished from their homelands and resettled in Nebraska and Dakota Territory. This section connected the 1862 War to the remaining “Sioux Wars” that ended in 1890 at Wounded Knee. The exhibit ended with a look at the Dakota in the 20th Century.

This planned exhibit was intended to be entirely from the Dakota perspective, not the white settler perspective – an important change in the interpretive history of this War as other historic sites, such as Fort Ridgely or Birch Coulee, did focus more on the defense of white settlements than the culture of the Dakota or their reasons for going to war.⁵⁴ While the establishment of the Lower Sioux Agency and its sympathetic shift focusing on Dakota history and perspective of the War were important changes in the memory history of the 1862 War, the interpretive plan continued to be conducted by white Minnesotans with little to no input from the Dakota community. This omission is especially obvious at the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site as one of the Dakota settlements in Minnesota is located just a few miles away in Morton. Even the exhibit plan detailed its focus on retelling the War from the white perspective: “Texts and pictures for individual battle exhibits will be similar to and mostly taken from [Kenneth] Carley’s book. We will try to give some quotations taken from Indian accounts of the uprising.”⁵⁵ White Minnesotans and historians were certainly more sympathetic to the Dakota by the 1970s, but the tools used to retell the War continued in the long-standing tradition of histories told by white authors for a predominantly white audience.

⁵⁴ *Exhibit Plan for the Lower Sioux Interpretive Center, dated January 13, 1970*, Minnesota, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

In 1962, the Minnesota Historical Society, in partnership with KSTP-TV in St. Paul, produced a 25-minute documentary to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the War. This film used written accounts of major actors, both Dakota and white, involved in the conflict including Chief Big Eagle, John Bishop, Lt. Thomas Gere, and Charles Flandrau. A form of visual remembrance, this documentary also reflected the social changes of the 1960s and attempted to tell the story of the War from both the white and Dakota perspectives. In 1973, the Minnesota Historical Society produced another film, this time to serve as the introductory film for visitors to the newly opened Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site. The film was intended to explain the purpose of the agency prior to the conflict and its central role once the War began.⁵⁶

Several videos produced in the last two decades continue to detail the story of the Dakota War with more focus on the Dakota perspective for going to war. A documentary produced by Twin Cities Public Television in 1993, simply titled “The Dakota Conflict”, opens with a sketched drawing of the hanging of the thirty-eight condemned Dakota men. This graphic image is intended to show the “tragic end to the Great Sioux Uprising” as well as the beginning of Dakota exile from Minnesota. Interspersion of narrators of Dakota and white descent further depicted this War as a tragic event that affected the state of Minnesota as a whole. The documentary depicts a Dakota nation that learned to live in harmony with the fur traders only to be duped by the traders and the government into giving up their land. The influx of new immigrants onto former Dakota lands, particularly German immigrants, caused increased tension, as these new immigrants did not bother to learn Dakota language or participate in trade with the Dakota.⁵⁷ Ultimately, this video persuades the viewer to side with the Dakota by using quotations from Dakota leaders as well as white soldiers and settlers associated with the War all

⁵⁶ *Recollections of Minnesota's Indian War*, Film, directed by Jerome Wasley, 1962; and *Dakota in Minnesota*, VHS, Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site, 1973.

⁵⁷ *The Dakota Conflict (Minnesota Centuries Series)*, directed by Kristin Berg, 1993.

sympathetically giving reasons for the inevitability of a war between the Dakota and whites. The uses of remembrance displayed in this video documentary posit the Dakota as the ultimate victims of the very war they started.⁵⁸ A 1996 documentary sequel to “The Dakota Conflict” traces the paths of Dakota prisoners and refugees. Using the words of present-day Dakota elders and tribal historians, it tells the continued struggle to remain “Dakota” in the face of government efforts to destroy their language, culture, and even their memory of historic events such as the 1862 War.⁵⁹

David Lowenthal writes, “Most of my generation learned history... ‘never dreaming there might be more than one view of past events.’ Today contrary views may be posed, but alternatives are often only good or bad, right or wrong; honest differences of opinion are seldom an option.”⁶⁰ For many decades following the War, white Minnesotans could not conceive a second side to the story of the War, much less include that story or the memories of Dakota participants alongside their own. Today, while alternate versions are accepted, it is a natural impulse to polarize those views – one side is right, the other side is wrong. This polarization makes it difficult for differing sides of the story to be *both right and wrong*. It is nearly impossible for native and non-native Minnesotans to accept that both sides of the War committed wrongs against the other and that both groups were victimized.

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For the white citizens of Minnesota, the hangings on December 26, 1862, provided a fitting end to the brutality of the War. At least 500 settlers had been killed during the six weeks, many of them brutally killed. More than 200 citizens had been held captive and would carry

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Dakota Exile*, VHS, directed by Kristin Berg, 1996.

⁶⁰ David Lowenthal, "History and Memory," *The Public Historian* (National Council on Public History) 19, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 37.

those memories with them. The Minnesota River Valley had been nearly depopulated amidst fear of continued violence. After the battle of Wood Lake and the surrender at Camp Release, Sibley hastily completed military trials of nearly 1200 Dakota prisoners over the course of just three weeks. At the end, 303 Dakota men had been convicted and sentenced to death. The majority of white citizens agreed with this sentence, but there was a delay as President Lincoln took time to review the court proceedings and weigh the best course of action. During this waiting period, the poem, "Charge of the Hemp Brigade,"⁶¹ appeared in the Mankato Weekly Record "dedicated to the three hundred pet lambs" held in prison. The following words reflected the feelings of many white Minnesotans waiting for Lincoln's decision:

Hemp on the throat of them
 Hemp round the neck of them
 Hemp under ears of them
 Twisting and choking
 ...
 Theirs not to make reply
 Theirs not to reason why
 Theirs but to hang and die,
 Into the valley of Death
 Send the three hundred
 ...
 Stormed at with shout and yell,
 Where wives and children fell;
 They that had killed so well
 Come to the jaws of Death,
 Come to the mouth of Hell,
 All that is left of them,
 Left of three hundred
 When can their mem'ry fade?
 () ! the sad deaths they made!
 All the state mourned.
 Weep for the deaths they made:
 But give to the Hemp Brigade,
 The Devilish three hundred!⁶²

⁶¹ This poem is a parody of Alfred Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" which was published in 1854.

⁶² *Mankato Weekly Record*, "The Sioux War," December 13, 1862. According to the first line, "Charge of the Hemp Brigade" was originally printed in the *St. Paul Union*.

Although there were no photographs taken at the hanging, a detailed engraving soon surfaced and was in such high demand that the *Mankato Weekly Record* had to special order more paper from St. Paul to fill the rush of orders. The paper also reported “Mr. Foster, at Tivoli has sold a number of the engravings to Winnebago Indians, who view the scene with great astonishment. We hope the example to be beneficial.”⁶³ The white citizens of Minnesota used the mass hangings as a warning not only to the Dakota, but other native peoples within the state of the consequences of war. Additionally, the verbal and visual depictions expressed the triumphalism that most white Minnesotans felt with the hangings. These feelings further marginalized the Dakota as they were not only removed physically from the state, but they were barred from emotionally participating in memorializing their own fallen heroes.

While white Minnesotans controlled memorial celebrations for most of the period since the War ended, the Dakota were not entirely absent from these scenes. An 1880 Independence Day celebration in New Ulm, Minnesota, aimed at achieving “perfect harmony” between the white and Dakota people in attendance. Local newspapers declared, “The whites and Indians, with patriotic hearts and with one accord, mingled together under one flag, the bright stars and stripes, to celebrate the occasion.” Crowd estimates numbered almost 1,200 Dakota in the audience and “equality was the watch-word of the whites, and well was it carried out with their dusky brethren.” More than 200 Dakota participated in a mock battle, mounting horses, and attacking the town. Gabriel Renville remarked that his Dakota relatives “were glad to meet with their white brethren on such an occasion” and that “learn their ways and living like them and following their examples was what his people wanted.” Furthermore, “it was with pride and

⁶³ *Mankato Weekly Record*, “The Indian Engraving,” February 28, 1863. The Winnebago (or Ho Chunk) also lived on reservations in southern Minnesota. They were accused of siding with Little Crow and providing aid to the Dakota war effort and were also banished from the state following the War.

gladness that he could say that the Sissetons remained loyal to the government.”⁶⁴ In 1887, during the annual St. Paul Winter Carnival celebration, an “Indian Village” served as “one of the most interesting features” for the carnival. The majority of the Native Americans who participated in the village were Dakota, and included some who had participated in the War.⁶⁵

The town of New Ulm repeatedly included Dakota community members in their numerous anniversary celebrations. In 1902, for the fortieth anniversary celebrations, Dakota again participated in a sham battle.⁶⁶ The fiftieth anniversary plans included the establishment of an “Indian Village” and the recruitment of Dakota men and women from Morton to participate in dances and demonstrate lace-making.⁶⁷ In 1922, thirty Dakota from Morton were engaged for New Ulm’s “60th Anniversary Indian Massacre Celebration and Home Coming.” The program explained that these Dakota, wearing war paint, would “stage war dances and give real zest to the celebration.”⁶⁸ And finally, in 1962, for the 100th anniversary celebration in New Ulm, Little Crow’s great-grandson, Edgar Dow, was featured in the town’s parade. A speech by Victor P. Reim, spoke of the need to end the bitterness, which continued to exist between the residents of New Ulm and the Dakota in Minnesota, despite the history of including Dakota in these celebrations:

I propose, today, to speak briefly in memoriam of those who were victims of the holocaust of 1862, which spread through our beautiful Minnesota Valley, both white and red. Because our forefathers occupied this area struck by that tragedy; because the homes and farmsites of our forefathers were burned and destroyed; because our forefathers lost their lives or in seeking refuge wandered in the Valley of the Shadows of Death, we have

⁶⁴ *Browns Valley Reporter*, "The Grand Jubilee," July 8, 1880.

⁶⁵ *St. Paul Dispatch Carnival Edition*, "Indian Village in Carnival Park," January 26, 1887.

⁶⁶ *New Ulm Review*, "Massacre is Well Remembered," August 27, 1902.

⁶⁷ Mr. Paul Lawrence, Morton, MN, August 17, 1912, Letter, 50th Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1912 – postcards, photos, misc, Manuscript Folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections; and Rev. H. W. St. Clair, Morton, MN, August 1, 1912, Letter, 50th Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1912 – postcards, photos, misc, Manuscript Folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections.

⁶⁸ *60th Anniversary Indian Massacre Celebration and Home Coming, New Ulm, Minn., August 16 to 20, 1922, Official Program*, (New Ulm, MN: 1922), 60th Anniversary of Sioux Uprising – 1922, Manuscript Folder, Brown County Historical Society Collections.

been bitter over the years....The complete story of the Uprising and its background shows clearly that the Sioux had been deceived, cheated and mistreated and harassed beyond human endurance and our own course of action would have driven anyone to violence.⁶⁹

One hundred years had passed, but those who participated in these anniversary celebrations knew the Dakota still faced an image that painted them as the instigators of war rather than victims of injustices as well.

As a result of the nature of the mass hanging and the severe punishment of the nation after the War, the Dakota communities' more public memorial efforts in recent decades focused on events which occurred after the War ended, rather than justifying the reasons Little Crow and other Dakota decided to engage in the War. The majority of Dakota who surrendered to Sibley at Camp Release had not participated in the War. Many were from the Upper Agency villages and had refused to join Little Crow despite his repeated efforts to convince them. Their leaders had secured the safety of the captives and removed them from Little Crow's camps while he was engaged in the Battle of Wood Lake. They sent word to Sibley that the captives were safe and ready to be released. Sibley, in turn, encouraged the remaining Dakota (Little Crow and many of his followers escaped into Dakota Territory and Canada after Wood Lake), to place themselves into his custody. However, those who surrendered were then placed in a prison camp and suffered through three weeks of military trials. The elderly, women, and children were sent to another camp at Fort Snelling. After the hangings, the remaining convicted prisoners were sent to prison in Davenport, Iowa. Scholar and Dakota leader, Elden Lawrence writes, "For the white captives the worst was over; for the innocent Indians it was just beginning."⁷⁰

In an effort to heal the wounds of this War, a powwow was organized in Mankato in 1965. While it may seem ironic to hold a Dakota memorial event in the very city where the

⁶⁹ *New Ulm Journal*, "White Settlers Were Invaders Says Reim in Memorial Talk," July 2, 1962.

⁷⁰ Dr. Elden Lawrence (Ehanna Wicohan Oyake), *The Peace Seekers: Indian Christians and the Dakota Conflict* (Sioux Falls, SD: Pine Hill Press, 2005): 130.

hanging took place, the idea for the Mahkato Wacipi (Wa-CHEE-pee, which means “dance”) grew out of a friendship between Dakota elder Amos Owen, of the Prairie Island Mdewakanton Community, and Bud Lawrence, a businessman in Mankato. First held at the Mankato YMCA, by 1972 it became an annual 3-day long event, and in 1975 its purpose expanded to consider the concept of reconciliation. As the event grew, the Wacipi was also held in a baseball park and Sibley State Park before the city of Mankato designated space in 1980, known as “Land of Memories Park,” specifically for the Wacipi. The purpose of the Wacipi was to “honor the 38 Dakota warriors who died in that execution, the largest mass execution in U.S. history.” The 3-day celebration became a time to educate the wider Mankato-area public about the War and Dakota history and culture, and organizers encouraged non-natives to not only attend the Wacipi, but to participate in some of the dances as well. Eventually, the annual 3-day Wacipi also included an “Education Day,” where the Dakota community invited elementary students to learn about Dakota history and culture. This annual celebration occurred as a need to publicly remember the thirty-eight, but it “gradually developed into a unifying social institution.” Anthropologist Guy Gibbon explains, “Powwows became gathering-places where problems could be discussed. They also provided an opportunity for Sioux who no longer spoke Dakota, lived and worked off-reservation, and had received a non-Indian education to become acquainted with their Indian heritage.” The Wacipi has also become a chance for Dakota elders and cultural leaders to educate the next generation about history, native foods, and the need to preserve Dakota language.⁷¹

In 2007, seventy-four fifth grade students joined Dakota leaders at Reconciliation Park to not only learn about the Dakota (history and culture), but to “meet face-to-face the people who

⁷¹Gibbon, *The Sioux*. 174; *Mahkato Wacipi History*, <http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/History.htm> (accessed March 2, 2011); and Jean Lundquist, “Pow-wow this weekend: Event encourages education, celebrates reconciliation,” *The Free Press, Mankato, MN*, September 19, 2007.

have helped bridge the chasm between present-day Mankato and the tragic events that took place...when 38 Dakota were hanged[.]” The students learned about the realities of boarding-school life for Dakota children, who were forced to change their names and abandon their native language. Dakota member Dave Larsen also presented the clothing worn in ceremonies, usually decorated with eagle feathers, and discussed Native American values and the pain that accompanied the “systematic destruction of Native heritage.” Fifth-grade teacher Steve Miller organized the field trip. He felt that the general curriculum, which included in-depth coverage of the Civil War, failed to adequately discuss the Dakota War and he wanted “to make that history meaningful for students.”⁷² For the Dakota, public education efforts such as this and the 3-day annual Wacipi are necessary to keep alive the memory of the War from the Dakota perspective (which highlights the hanging of the thirty-eight) and to bring healing between the native and non-native descendants of that War.

The desire to heal the wounds inflicted when the thirty-eight Dakota were hanged in 1862 inspired additional memorial efforts by the Dakota community. A Memorial Relay Run began in 1986 and annually covers the 80-mile distance from Fort Snelling in St. Paul to Mankato. In 1862, the thirty-eight condemned Dakota men “were forced to march from a detainment camp at Fort Snelling in St. Paul to their executions in Mankato.” The route of the runners commemorates this final journey for the thirty-eight. Runners carry a feathered staff and pass it along as a relay, each runner traveling about one mile before handing it off to a new runner. Songs, chants, and the sounds of drums accompany them. “The runners’ purpose is remembering the past but also reconciliation – the healing of old wounds that still remain more than a century

⁷² Kent Tanner, “Monroe students connect with Native American history,” *The Free Press, Mankato, MN*, May 19, 2010.

after the bloody conflict between American Indians and white settlers.”⁷³ For other runners, the memorial run is more about community pride than a desire to recall past events, although the ultimate purpose is to remember the “Dakota 38.” Some Dakota who participate have “only basic knowledge about the broken treaties, withheld land payments and long marches to reservations that created the fuel of the regional war so many years ago.” Young runner Ian Cook explained, “The runners have been doing this for almost 30 years and we’re trying to make this one big circle. It’s about love, friendship, compassion and the memory of our relatives who were killed.”⁷⁴

In 2005, a memorial horseback ride to honor the thirty-eight was initiated “when Dakota descendant Jim Miller recounted a dream of a series of horseback rides that would raise awareness and help bring reconciliation.” These riders begin the 300 plus mile ride at the Missouri River in South Dakota and end at the Minnesota River in Mankato on December 26, in time to join the memorial runners from St. Paul. Together, the riders and runners meet at Reconciliation Park, near the library in Mankato, for a ceremony on the site of the hangings. Sheldon Wolfchild, a former chairman of the Lower Sioux Indian Community, explains, “In order to heal in the future, we have to go back and remember the past.” Wolfchild also details that 150 years is not necessarily enough time for healing, especially when the War and its aftermath “shattered their community.”⁷⁵ An upcoming documentary simply titled “Dakota 38” remembers those who were hanged and follows the riders on their journey. Filmmaker Silas Haggerty explains that the scars of 1862 are still evident on the Dakota people today, even as they are dispersed over several states and two countries. He says, “There’s a lot of historical

⁷³ Mathias Baden, "Remembering, Reconciling: Run from Fort Snelling to Jordan brings light to 1862 hangings," *Prior Lake American*, December 24, 2005.

⁷⁴ Dan Nienaber, "Reconciliation riders, runners reach Kato," *Mankato Free Press*, December 26, 2009.

⁷⁵ Dan Linehan, "Dakota ride finishes four-year cycle," *Mankato Free Press*, December 21, 2008.

trauma and it's talked about in the film, where a lot of the Dakota men on the ride speak of this genetic depression that's passed from one generation to the next." However, co-director and member of the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Sarah Weston, suggests that in order to finally heal from this trauma, "the Dakota and other Indians should take a simple but difficult step: forgive the misdeeds of the past."⁷⁶

Similar to the commemorative efforts on behalf of the 38 Dakota men, a movement began in November 2002 to remember the 1700 Dakota who marched, mostly on foot, to Fort Snelling to spend a harsh winter in confinement. This first march of about thirty walkers covered 150 miles, retracing the original walk from the Lower Sioux Agency to Fort Snelling in St. Paul. However, this was more than a memorial walk. Waziyatawin writes, "While the primary intent of our march was to remember and honor our ancestors how suffered on these journeys, it was also about giving testimony to the truth about a shameful past that had been largely hidden over the previous 140 years."⁷⁷ She further cites this 150-mile walk as the first stage in the forced removal of the Dakota from their Minnesota homelands. As they walked, the participants placed the names of heads of families on sticks and planted them as they passed each mile. Because the records from the period are incomplete, visibly marking known names on these stakes helps present-day Dakota make tangible connections to their past.⁷⁸ This first wave of removal resulted in the eventual scattering of all the Dakota people across a wide territory. She observes,

One of the consequences of the diaspora of our People and the silencing of our history has been that, while we have largely shared a common historical memory – that is, through our oral traditions, most of our People today have had at least a minimal

⁷⁶ Mark Steil, "New documentary remembers largest mass execution in US history," *Minnesota Public Radio*, December 23, 2010, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/12/22/dakota-conflict/> (accessed March 2, 2011). The directors of the documentary released the film in summer 2011.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors*, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

understanding of the forced removals that occurred as a consequence of the 1862 war – we have not had a shared memory of that experience.⁷⁹

Today, this Diaspora extends from Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Canada and has, according to Waziyatawin, contributed to silencing the Dakota.

The Dakota Commemorative Marches, as they would come to be known, take place every two years for a week in November and provide a means for sharing memories and connecting a scattered people. Amy Lonetree, a historian and Ho-Chunk member, participated in the 2004 march and described, “The march transformed my life in powerful and meaningful ways, and the words to express the depth of this transformation are at time elusive.” She further explained that the march is not intended to bring closure, but “through the Dakota March, the participants are demonstrating to the Dakota, as well as to other Indigenous people, the means to move forward.”⁸⁰ Diane Wilson described the shock at realizing how deep the suffering of 1862 continued to be felt and that the “march gave our collective grief a place to be shared.”⁸¹ While white Minnesotans could actively (through anniversary celebrations) and inactively (by the continued presence of monuments) share their memories of the War with each other, solidifying a collective identity, the Dakota were denied the ability to share memory because they were scattered when they were removed from their homelands. The Commemorative Marches, as well as the annual Mankato Powwow and other memorial events described above, give the Dakota a public voice and forum to share memories and encourage the continued visibility about the War.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁰ Amy Lonetree, "Transforming Lives by Reclaiming Memory: The Dakota Commemorative March of 2004," in *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century*, ed. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2006): 246, 249.

⁸¹ Diane Wilson, "Mending Tiyospaye," in *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century*, ed. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2006): 257.

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While hosting community events and staging public memorial activities garnered awareness and sympathy for the Dakota perspective of the War and the significant ways the nation as a whole suffered at its conclusion, the fact remained that for many years the permanent landscape continued to exclude the events of the War that the Dakota deemed most important. Some of this changed with the designation of Land of Memories Park for the annual powwow and more inclusive language on historical markers and in the interpretation at historic sites. Still by the 1990s, the Dakota community had not yet memorialized their fallen with monuments. In contrast, the white community had nearly two dozen such monuments to remember heroes and victims. As knowledge of the War faded throughout the state, the Dakota's absence on the landscape only seemed to highlight the way their memory had been marginalized since 1862. Marking the participation of the Dakota upon the historic landscape in Minnesota has long garnered significant debate. Throughout the nineteenth century, any markers associated with the War either focused on white memories or recognized white leaders or persons showing significant heroism. Markers from the Dakota perspective were nearly non-existent, and those that were present only recognized those Dakota who fought with the state and not against it.

The lack of monuments or markers remembering the struggles of Native Americans is not just found in the Dakota community. Mario Gonzalez and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn describe late twentieth-century struggle by the Minneconjou and Oglala people to memorialize their fallen at the site of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre. Mario Gonzalez explains the long efforts employed to preserve this landscape, “[T]here are no national monuments to Native American patriots who defended themselves and their homelands, and there was no reason for that except the oppressive political system which has denied that idea since its inception in 1776.” Together

with the Wounded Knee Survivors' Association, Gonzalez organized annual memorial runs to remember those Lakota killed at Wounded Knee and petitioned the state of South Dakota, and ultimately the federal government, to allow the Lakota to interpret and control access to the site of the massacre. More than marking the site of the massacre, the Lakota wanted the interpretation to include "meaningful discussion about history, law, and politics." Gonzalez and Lynn write,

They knew that Wounded Knee should tell of the largest massacre of innocents in the history of the United States, that it was the direct result of the theft of Lakota property, the Black Hills, in 1877, and of nine million acres in 1889, the loss of things on the land like the buffalo, the loss of a whole way of life. They knew the 'trauma' of the Ghost Dance to be symptomatic rather than casual, and they knew that the passive story of 'many Indians fell' dehumanized them all.

Rather than reassure citizens of their identity as part of the United States, the activists for Wounded Knee felt historic examples such as this should challenge accepted history that had been shaped by a dominating political force.⁸²

What is blatantly missing from the historical landscape provides significant insight into the power of the traditional white narrative. In Jamestown, Virginia, celebrated as the first permanent English settlement in North America, there is no monument or marker informing visitors that the first sale of African slaves in what would become the United States occurred there in 1619. While Civil War battlefields are not only well marked but also well visited, historic sites that discuss the realities of slavery in the United States are few. Part of the challenge, according to Shirley Wheatley, an employee at the Museum of African-American History and Culture in Natchez, is that a "large portion of the black community agrees with the white community that they'd rather leave slavery in the past."⁸³ Historic sites in Minnesota associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 are encountering a similar problem. White

⁸² Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn, *The Politics of Hallowed Ground*, pp. 25, 47, and 77.

⁸³ Adam Goodheart, "The Bonds of History," *Preservation*, September/October 2011, p. 39.

Minnesotans, rather than face the historic reality that the state was founded and prospered because its indigenous people suffered, have forgotten the circumstances of this War. Many Dakota people would also prefer to leave this painful reminder of their history safely in the past.⁸⁴ However, this combined complacency, coupled with empty declarations of reconciliation between the native and non-native residents of Minnesota, prevent the healing of wounds and the possibility of a better future.

One of the most controversial markers that remembered the Dakota, albeit for negative reasons, was a marker designating the location of the hangings in Mankato. Created in 1912, the large granite monument simply declared, “Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians Dec. 26th 1862.” Correspondence in 1957 between Russell Fridley of the Minnesota Historical Society and Clifford Rucker of the Governor’s Human Rights Commission revealed that this marker had sparked controversy. Fridley acknowledged that many had criticized “the propriety of marking a site where thirty-nine⁸⁵ Indians were hanged,” but since the marker rested on private property and was not an official state marker, the historical society had little jurisdiction to remove or replace it.⁸⁶ The marker was finally removed in 1971 “after it became unpopular with the public and stood in the way of a downtown development project.”⁸⁷ The site of the hangings would then remain unmarked for the next twenty-five years until the Dakota community renamed the site “Reconciliation Park” and erected a statue of a white buffalo, a sacred symbol, at the location. No mention of the hangings remains at the site.

⁸⁴ Gabrielle Tateyuskanskan, a participant in the 2008 Dakota Commemorative March, explained this feeling that both white and Dakota residents in Minnesota would prefer to not discuss painful history. Reference: Brian Ojanpa, "Dakota trace ancestors' steps," *The Free Press*, November 10, 2008.

⁸⁵ Fridley incorrectly states that thirty-nine Dakota were hanged. Lincoln did approve the execution of thirty-nine men, but one of the convicted received a last-minute reprieve so the correct number is thirty-eight.

⁸⁶ *Russell W. Fridley to Mr. Clifford E. Rucker, Executive Director, Governor’s Human Rights Commission, St. Paul, MN, January 7, 1957*, Historical Sites & Markers Commission, Minnesota, Division of Parks and Recreation, Subject Files, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archives.

⁸⁷ Dan Linehan, "Students search for missing monument," *Mankato Free Press*, May 14, 2006.

The continued lack of public monuments or markers that reflect the Dakota perspective of the War is very telling for the Minnesota landscape. Kenneth Foote writes, “Sanctification occurs when events are seen to hold some lasting positive meaning that people wish to remember...Obliteration results from particularly shameful events people would prefer to forget.”⁸⁸ James Loewen adds, “Many monuments represent only one side of a conflict and misrepresent what really happened.”⁸⁹ Consequently, in order for the Dakota side of the War to be truly felt on the historic landscape, and subsequently within the larger collective historical memory, there need to be monuments and markers that commemorate how the War affected them, both as aggressors and as victims. In 1992, a marker dedicated to the memory of Wowinape, a survivor of the War who did not fight with Little Crow, was erected at the cemetery in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Providing details of his life story and shedding light on the War, the marker served “as a gesture of reconciliation”⁹⁰ and also represented a slowly expanding historic landscape that includes more memorials dedicated to Dakota individuals. As the Dakota perspective becomes more visible, through commemorative activities and permanent features on the landscape, the history of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 has the potential to be shared from multiple perspectives.

⁸⁸ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 443.

⁹⁰ *Sota Iya Ye Yapi*, "Marker Dedicated to Dakotah War of 1862 Survivor," December 24, 1992.

CHAPTER 6

Aftermath of War: Imprisonment, Removal, and the Campaigns of 1863 and 1864

Following the surrender at Camp Release, General Sibley asked to be relieved of his command in favor of someone with more military training to continue the pursuit of those Dakota who had fled the state. Instead he was promoted to Brigadier General and charged with securing and feeding the captive Dakota at the camp. Sibley also initiated a mass trial of Dakota who were accused of participation in the war. These trials began at Camp Release on September 28, 1862; by October 25, Sibley had moved the entire party (soldiers and Dakota captives) to the Lower Sioux Agency and resumed the military trials. At the conclusion of the trials on November 5, 392 Dakota prisoners had been tried before a panel of military judges. Of these, 307 were sentenced to death while another sixteen received prison sentences. The trials were conducted very quickly, with some only lasting five minutes. Many Dakota had surrendered only because they were assured that they would be prisoners of war; instead they received death sentences even if their only proven crime was being present at a battle. The white population of Minnesota demanded swift justice and gladly overlooked the circumstantial evidence for many of the accused. Today, the nature of the trials have been questioned as “a travesty of justice”¹ and another example of the ways the Dakota were severely punished for their attempt to regain their homelands.

While many, including General Sibley and his commanding officer General Pope, favored immediate executions, they prudently asked President Lincoln to officially issue the order for execution. Lincoln received an adjusted list of 303 condemned Dakota on November 7. Rather than sign the order, however, Lincoln demanded a full record of the trials and appointed

¹ Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862*, p. 69.

two men to study them in detail, asking them to distinguish between those accused of rape and murder from those who simply participated in battle.

During this time, Sibley removed nearly 1,700 Dakota to Fort Snelling in St. Paul. These were mostly women, children, and elderly men who had not faced trial after their surrender. Making the six-day journey primarily on foot, these Dakota were placed into a fenced and guarded enclosure outside the fort and here they would spend the rest of the winter “awaiting the government’s decision regarding their future.”² Sibley also moved the 303 condemned men from the Lower Sioux Agency to Mankato, where they could be better protected after several mob attacks by white citizens. In contrast to the anti-Dakota sentiment gripping the state, Bishop Henry Whipple, Missionary Stephen Riggs, and Dr. Thomas Williamson, men who had spent many years living and working with the Dakota, all wrote letters to the press warning that the trials had not been fair and the state and federal governments had repeatedly treated the Dakota poorly. Amidst this atmosphere, President Lincoln and his clerks concluded that thirty-nine men should be executed for the crimes of rape or murder. The additional condemned men would be remanded to prison. One of the 39 received a last minute pardon, but the remaining 38 were prepared for execution on December 26, 1862. Observers of the execution recalled that the condemned chanted their traditional Dakota death song as they were led to the mass gallows. While photos of the execution were not permitted, artist drawings appeared soon after depicting the large gallows erected in front of Mankato businesses. Surrounding the gallows as witnesses to the execution were 1,400 soldiers charged with keeping the peace and various townspeople. The thirty-eight men were then buried in a “single shallow grave near the river front.”³ That

² Ibid., 70.

³ Ibid., 75.

night, a number of local doctors (including Dr. William Mayo, whose sons would later found the Mayo Clinic) dug up the bodies in order to study them.

Not content with the execution of thirty-eight men and the imprisonment of the remaining convicted Dakota, white Minnesotans demanded that the army track down those Dakota who escaped into Dakota Territory and that any Dakota remaining in the state be banished. Generals Sibley and Sully would lead expeditions in 1863 and 1864 deep into Dakota Territory and all the way to Canada in their attempt to punish those Dakota who had gone to war. Dakota who had not participated in the War received the same treatment as those who admitted to participation. Governor Alexander Ramsey also proposed using the Dakota annuity payments to reimburse white victims of the War. In addition, the treaties signed between the United States and the Dakota were revoked. The Dakota lost all their land in the state and any money still owed them according to the treaty. During the early winter months of 1863, missionaries worked with the prisoners in Mankato and the confined Dakota at Fort Snelling, teaching them to read and write in the Dakota language and converting many to Christianity. Some of these missionaries, such as John P. Williamson, would spend the rest of their lives working with the Dakota on their new reservations outside the state.

The remaining 265 men held as prisoners in Mankato were transferred to Camp McClellan (Davenport, IA) in April 1863. They would spend three difficult years in prison and nearly 120 died during this time. In April 1866, President Johnson pardoned the remaining prisoners and they were free to rejoin their families. The Dakota at Fort Snelling also experienced a difficult winter. Of the 1,700 originally confined at the fort in November 1862, only 1,300 survived to be deported in the spring of 1863. Removed in two groups, the first 770 Dakota took a steamer down the Mississippi River to St. Louis and then transferred to another

steamer to journey up the Missouri River to St. Joseph. The remaining 547 Dakota traveled on a steamer to Hannibal, Missouri, and then rode overcrowded freight train cars to St. Joseph where they joined the first group. The now overly crowded steamer continued up the river to Crow Creek near Fort Randall in southeastern Dakota Territory. These Dakota would be joined by almost 2,000 Ho Chunk (or Winnebago), who were wrongly accused of fighting in the War with the Dakota and similarly banished from the state. After three miserable years of failed crops and poor supplies from the government, the Dakota at Crow Creek were moved to a new reservation at Santee in Nebraska where “life gradually improved.”⁴

While the Dakota were officially banished from the state, a small number of “friendly” Dakota were permitted to remain. Some had served as scouts for the campaigns into Dakota Territory and resettled now at Big Stone Lake. Others settled privately near Faribault and Mendota. In 1867, some former members of the Upper Sioux Agency resettled on reservations at Devils Lake (present day North Dakota) and Sisseton (present day South Dakota). By the late 1860s, “small groups of Dakota began returning to Minnesota”⁵ and settled at Prior Lake, Prairie Island, and near their former homes at the Upper and Lower agencies. In 1869, about twelve families left the Nebraska reservation and established a farming colony at Flandreau, South Dakota. The communities that developed in Minnesota were not federal reservations; rather they were established as individually purchased lands that became Dakota tribal communities. In 1884, Good Thunder bought eighty acres near the Birch Coulee battlefield site. Others followed his lead and the Lower Sioux Community at Morton was gradually reestablished. Historian Kenneth Carley writes, “Thus small but significant numbers of Dakota returned to Minnesota in spite of their banishment ‘forever.’ Their long agony in prisons and on

⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵ Ibid., 82.

reservations did not destroy their pride in Dakota traditions nor did it totally obliterate the many cultural elements and crafts which remain a valued part of their heritage today.”⁶

An estimated 250 Mdewankanton Dakota did not surrender at Camp Release, but escaped with Little Crow into Dakota Territory. As their leader, Little Crow attempted to forge alliances with the Lakota, the Yankton, and the Yanktonai bands in the hopes of resuming the war against the whites. He found little interest in this plan and soon his fellow refugees began to splinter. Disgruntled with this failure to unite his remaining forces or to secure stronger alliances, Little Crow made plans to return to Minnesota with his son, Wowinape,⁷ who stated, “When we were coming back he said he could not fight the white men, but would go below and steal horses from them, and give them to his children, so that they could be comfortable, and then he would go away off.”⁸ On July 3, 1863, while picking berries in a field near Hutchinson, Little Crow was fatally shot by a farmer. The farmer was unaware whom he had killed although many believed it to be Little Crow by identifying his deformed wrists, which had been injured many years earlier. When Wowinape was later captured near Devil’s Lake, he made a statement confirming his father’s death as the man shot by the farmer. The Minnesota Historical Society held Little Crow’s remains until 1971, when they were finally returned to his relatives and buried at Flandreau. While the campaigns of 1863 and 1864 into Dakota Territory would result in several more battles between the army and the Dakota, Little Crow’s death marked the end of his dream to retake the Dakota homelands in the Minnesota River Valley.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wowinape would later be known as Thomas Wakeman.

⁸ Anderson and Woolworth, *Through Dakota Eyes*, p. 280.

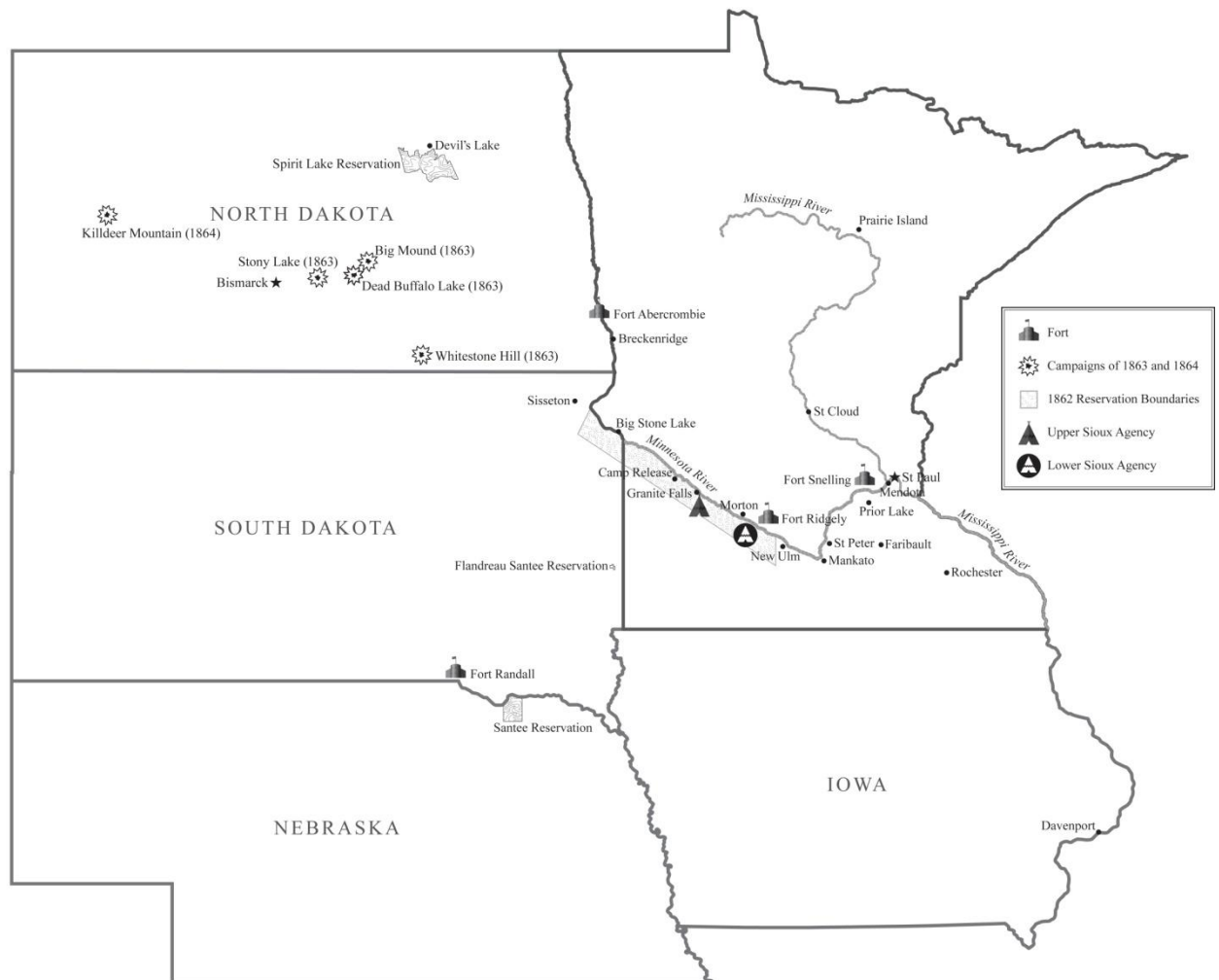


Figure 6.1. This map shows the battles for the 1863 and 1864 campaigns as well as the locations for the new reservations and settlements of the Dakota nation. The Dakota received no compensation for their previous reservation when their treaties were revoked following the War. Illustrated by J. J. Carlson.

An Era of Reconciliation

In July 2010, while driving in Bismarck, North Dakota, I caught the familiar color of a brown historical marker out of the corner of my eye. Looking more closely, it was a sign directing travelers to General Sibley Park a few more miles down the road. This immediately intrigued me. Could this be the same General Sibley associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862? During the army campaigns of 1863-1865, Sibley did engage some Dakota groups as far west as present-day Bismarck, but I never considered that there may be a historic site or marker detailing this fact so far from the primary sites in Minnesota. I followed my curiosity all the way

to the park to discover a pleasant campground in a grove of trees not far from the Missouri River. The entrance sign read “General Sibley Park,” so I eagerly searched the grounds for a plaque or some marker indicating why this piece of land had been preserved and so-named. Nothing could be found discussing Sibley or his excursions into Dakota Territory seeking revenge on the Dakota people who had followed Little Crow into battle. The website for the campground provided a little more information, describing the nearby battles and the parties involved. Still, for all the travelers who enjoyed the beauty of this campground nearly 150 years after Sibley’s campaign, the details of these battles, the six-week war in Minnesota in the fall of 1862, and the continued thirty year campaign against the Plains Indians, remain decidedly absent from the historical landscape.

The invisible nature of this War continues to be puzzling, especially given the more recent efforts at reconciliation made by the state and some members of the Dakota tribes. It is clear from the previous chapters that both white Minnesotans and the Dakota communities have a history of actively remembering this War and have publicly demonstrated that remembrance with memorials and commemorative ceremonies. So why does this War seem forgotten? Most current residents in the state of Minnesota have little knowledge of the event which was pivotal in its early years of statehood. Reminders of the War exist, but few of the state’s citizens seek this history or understand the continued consequences this War has had on the relationship between white Minnesota and the Dakota nation even in the twenty-first century. Walkowitz and Knauer, in their edited work on historical memory in South America, state, “[T]he power of memory – individual and collective – does not always depend on a physical marker.... Sometimes the creation of a marker lulls people into complacency; if the marker does

the memory work for us...we are less vigilant and can allow ourselves the luxury of forgetting.”⁹ Because the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 has been significantly documented on the physical landscape, does that allow modern-day Minnesotans, both white and Dakota, to forget?

Teresa Meade discussed the realities of having sites dedicated to the memory of an event yet still forgotten by the public who should most remember the underlying history. Her article on the atrocities of the Chilean Junta explains that while the new democratic government provided “memory sites” intended to inform its citizens and tourists about the Junta, these sites rarely provided adequate interpretation from a guide. Furthermore, she posits, “Many Chileans, one might argue, are content to remain oblivious to the excesses of the military era.”¹⁰ Is Minnesota’s War invisible because few Minnesotans, or Americans in general, want to physically acknowledge the high cost of American progress and expansion? While there are some historic markers depicting the history between Euro-Americans and indigenous peoples, they rarely challenge the established white American narrative of freedom and progress. For example, it was only recently that the state of Georgia marked sites associated with the Cherokee “Trail of Tears.” Although the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail marks locations of the Cherokee removal in other states, sites within Georgia were excluded, even though “it was one of the most aggressive states in removing its native people.”¹¹ Irina Carlota Silber, in her work “Commemorating the Past in Postwar El Salvador,” states, “[C]ommemoration involves a

⁹ Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, “Introduction,” in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004): 6. The authors are also drawing on the work of Pierre Norra in this statement.

¹⁰ Teresa Meade, “Holding the Junta Accountable: Chile’s ‘Sitios de Memoria’ and the History of Torture, Disappearance, and Death,” in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, 191-209 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004): 194-195.

¹¹ Meg Donahue, “The Foot of the Trail: Georgia history and the Trail of Tears converge,” *Atlanta*, 2010 March: 17-18.

tension between remembering and forgetting that takes place in the practices of everyday life.”¹² For nearly 150 years, white Minnesotans actively remembered and venerated the white victims of the 1862 War, yet they also actively forgot their own actions that caused Little Crow to go to war and their blinding need for revenge at the War’s end that severely punished all the Dakota peoples, both guilty and innocent.

In a recent article in *Time*, David Von Drehle discussed the ability for Americans to forget the underlying cause of its greatest conflict, the Civil War. He writes, “North and South shared the burden of slavery, and after the war, they shared in forgetting about it.” He continues,

It’s not simply a matter of denial. For most of the first century after the war, historians, novelists and filmmakers worked like hypnotists to soothe the posttraumatic memories of survivors and their descendants. Forgetting was the price of reconciliation, and Americans – those whose families were never bought or sold, anyway – were happy to pay it.

The commemorative ceremonies for the Civil War focused on reuniting the country and proclaiming that soldiers of both the North and the South shared the task of building a country rather than contributing to its near destruction. Declaring both sides “reconciled” meant ignoring the cause for Civil War – namely slavery. For the numerous “Indian Wars” that have occurred in what would become the United States, including the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, white Americans also wanted to forget that Europeans and later Americans colonized North and South America and brutally destroyed thousands of lives and obliterated countless cultures of indigenous people. “Reconciliation” assumes closure and provides another means to forget our own role in colonization. Continuing to encourage reconciliation allows white Minnesotans to ignore that the lands they now occupy were wrongly taken from the Dakota (and the other indigenous peoples of the state). Reconciliation begs forgetfulness. Many Native Americans are calling for

¹² Irina Carlota Silber, “Commemorating the Past in Postwar El Salvador,” in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004): 211.

restoration of justice over reconciliation and asking that real amends be offered. As Von Drehle states, “150 years later, it’s time to tell the truth.”¹³

Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh states, “The study of past violence is closely allied to notions of justice.”¹⁴ Herein lies the ever-present problem with the ability to “reconcile” the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. This history was violent for both the white settlers and the Dakota nation and both sides seek justice. Although it can be certainly argued that white settlers received their justice by severely punishing the Dakota, the sheer volume of commemorative activities that have occurred in the last 150 years as well as the reluctance to remove monuments suggests this community may still seek some form of justification. Part of pursuing “restorative justice” is the pursuit of truth. Colwell-Chanthaphonh explains,

[W]hen the truth about past violence remains hidden and obscured, the perpetrators remain in a very real sense triumphant...Reconciliation does not demand one truth to which everyone must subscribe, nor does it entail a relegation of the painful past to the far recesses of collective memory. Instead, the multivocality that emerges from truth commissions should be viewed as a process of engagement that entwines the past with the present through enduring memories. History in this form is a dialogue that critically approaches varying versions of the past while nevertheless aspiring to uncover the truth of events and experiences.¹⁵

Amy Lonetree, recalling a speech given at New Ulm during the 2004 March, explained the difficulty of telling stories from the Dakota perspective. She writes, “When we do tell these stories, they usually attempt to diminish our suffering by putting theirs on equal footing.” Her argument, and that of many activists for the Dakota, would be that the descendants of white settlers have had 150 years to share their stories; it is time for the Dakota stories to be heard. Many white Minnesotans, and white Americans in general when discussing U.S. history with

¹³ David Von Drehle, “The Way We Weren’t: The Civil War 1861-2011,” *Time*, April 18, 2011, p. 40.

¹⁴ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Massacre at Camp Grant*, p. 104.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

Native Americans, would “more toward a quick and speedy act of reconciliation”¹⁶ so they would not need to dwell on their own actions which caused the suffering of countless indigenous groups across North America. Restorative justice, according to Colwell-Chanthaphonh, “hopes to mend collective memory through dialogue that makes sense of the past and balances recall with erasure.”¹⁷ It is not about assigning blame but opening a dialogue, particularly in situations where two-way communication has long been closed.

Knowledge about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 has not been hidden from the people of Minnesota (or the nation as a whole for that matter). It is well marked upon the historic landscape and it is discussed at historic sites. Children are exposed to the facts of this War in their history books and adults can certainly satisfy their own curiosity by picking up one of the numerous books on this subject matter. The question remains, if evidence exists and discussion of the War continues to spark intense debate, what has caused it to recede into the recesses of collective memory for the residents of Minnesota? Gone are the anniversary celebrations that featured main street parades or community days centered on the theme of commemoration. While many counties in the region continue to hold annual fairs during the month of August, few fair-goers today make the connection to the War of August 1862. James Oliver Horton, examining the interpretation of slavery at historic sites, states, “History must be taught not only in the academy but in the variety of nonacademic settings where Americans go to learn. Here is where the role of the public historian, in charge of telling the complex and contradictory national story in public spaces, becomes crucial.”¹⁸ The challenge for historians, both native and non-

¹⁶ Amy Lonetree, "Transforming Lives by Reclaiming Memory," p. 250.

¹⁷ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Massacre at Camp Grant*, p. 111.

¹⁸ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, Kindle Edition (New York, NY: The New Press, 2011): Location 777.

native, to make the details of this War visible again to the wider public is a daunting one, and it was made more difficult by the lack of true reconciliation in 1987.

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In 1987, attempting to bring awareness to the War in its 125th anniversary year and also promote healing between both whites and Dakota, the historians and government officials of the state of Minnesota declared a “Year of Reconciliation.” That same year, the Monson Lake Memorial Observance conducted a program in honor of the “Year of Reconciliation” at Monson Lake Memorial State Park. This included a dramatization of the War as

...an attempt to portray the trying living conditions of the Indians leading up to the Dakota uprising; how the new settlers were caught off guard and massacred by a starving and often cheated Indian tribe, who were forced by land hungry whites to live in crowded conditions of a reservation. The Dakota uprising of 1862 was a short but bloody conflict.¹⁹

The characters portrayed included pioneer women, Mrs. Baker (a survivor from the Acton attack on August 17), Gabriel Renville (a “Mixed Blood Indian”), Wabasha (“Dakota Indian Chief”), and three survivors of the Monson Lake attack, which included Anna Stina Peterson. In 1992, the Monson Lake observance for the 130th anniversary of the War continued to use language that suggested hopes for reconciliation. The 1992 program stated,

The Monson Lake Memorial Association was created in 1927 to memorialize the 13 pioneer settlers massacred here during the brief but bloody Dakota Indian Uprising. In recent years the Association has also made an effort to recognize the strife thrust upon the native peoples of that era as the White man gradually pushed them from their homelands.²⁰

After 130 years, this particular memorial effort was finally interested in broadening the memories of its members to include the causes for war and understanding as to why the War

¹⁹ *Monson Lake Memorial Observance 'The Year of Reconciliation' at Monson Lake State Park on 23 August 1987* (The Monson Lake Memorial Association, 1987).

²⁰ *Monson Lake Memorial Association, Memorial Observance, Monson Lake Memorial State Park, Sunday, August 23, 1992.* (The Monson Lake Memorial Association, Monson Lake Memorial State Park: 1992).

happened in the first place. While the use of “massacre” and “uprising” continued in the program, it is clear that this local community was reconsidering the cost of pioneer progress upon indigenous peoples.

The Dakota Studies Committee and the Minnesota Historical Society used the “Year of Reconciliation” as an opportunity to “educate the public about Dakota history and culture and to further human understanding through a greater appreciation of cultural diversity.” In addition to officially adopting the title “U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862” to describe this war, the re-telling of the War now focused on the stresses faced by the Dakota community (starvation, cheating by fur traders, poorly negotiated treaties) that led to the War rather than its effect on the surrounding countryside. Where previous anniversary celebrations lauded the bravery of pioneers and commemorated those settlers and soldiers killed during the War, this series of “talks” addressed the impact of the War upon the Dakota communities. Of the six speakers, only two touched on the white perspective. One compared “Indian and White Perceptions of an Expanding Republic” and the other examined “Public Reaction to the Dakota Conflict.” Another presentation, by historian Gary Clayton Anderson, asked the audience what lessons could be learned from “the Great Dakota Conflict.” The remaining three talks identified the roles of Dakota women during the War, the realities of reservation life in the twentieth century, and gathered four Dakota elders to share their thoughts on the War and the present Dakota community. These programs as a whole aimed to show “Dakota and white people...working together in many different ways” to educate the public.²¹

A proclamation by Governor Rudy Perpich for this “Year of Reconciliation” revealed the purpose for such a declaration, but it also limited the abilities for reconciliation by not

²¹ *As Part of the Year of Reconciliation Commemorating the 125th Anniversary of the Dakota Conflict of 1862....The Dakota Studies Committee and the Minnesota Historical Society present Aspects of Dakota History and Culture*, Program, May 6, 1987 – July 10, 1987, “Year of Reconciliation” Project Files, Minnesota Historical Society.

acknowledging the causes for war. The purpose of the yearlong events focused on the need to understand Dakota community and culture, not the reasons that led members of the 1862 Dakota community to declare war, and certainly not the role of the state in exiling the Dakota from their homelands. His proclamation also failed to detail why this war was significant and did not mention whose lives were lost (white settler, soldier, or Dakota), that the war ended with the largest mass execution in U.S. history, or why “reconciliation” was a concept that needed exploration. The proclamation read:

Whereas: The year 1987 marks the 125th anniversary of the Dakota Conflict in Minnesota, an event which resulted in great suffering and loss of life, and
 Whereas: The anniversary of this tragic conflict offers an opportunity for Minnesotans to learn more about the life and culture of the Dakota people; and
 Whereas: A ceremony in Mankato on December 26, 1986, will mark the beginning of a year’s activities in which the Dakota people will join with others in appreciation of cultural diversity and human understanding;
 Now, therefore, I, Rudy Perpich, Governor of the State of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim the year 1987 to be YEAR OF RECONCILIATION in Minnesota.²²

This 125th anniversary of the War was minimally interested in teaching others about the War and white Minnesotans role in the “tragic conflict.” In addition, the yearlong anniversary began on December 26, 1986 – the 124th anniversary of the hangings of the thirty-eight. The governor’s proclamation could have begun on August 18, 1862, exactly 125 years after the Lower Sioux Agency was attacked, marking the beginning of the War. Instead, the state and the committees charged with planning and organizing the anniversary year began the tribute on the date marking the largest mass hanging in United States history when thirty-eight Dakota men were executed for their roles in the War. However, the significance of this date was absent in the proclamation and from the majority of events organized for the year. Amidst all the talk of “reconciliation” there was little discussion of what actually needed reconciling – white Minnesotans wanting

²² *Governor’s Proclamation*, Speakers, Descriptive Texts, Grant Proposal, “Year of Reconciliation Project 1986-1987” Project Files, Minnesota Historical Society.

recognition for their loss of life and the Dakota wanting acknowledgment for the unjust manner in which they were punished at the War's conclusion.

The events for the "Year of Reconciliation" varied throughout the state and not everyone fully embraced the notion of understanding Dakota culture over the long-standing tradition of venerating their own frontier heroes. In New Ulm, local historian Elroy Ubl arranged to reproduce a commemorative pin, originally produced for the 40th anniversary celebrations in 1902. Bearing the title, "40th Anniversary Indian Massacre Celebration," the pin depicted an Anton Gág painting of a Dakota man carrying a rifle and crouching behind some bushes preparing to attack.²³ The continued use of "massacre" and the depiction of a Dakota soldier on the attack, even in reproduction, would not correspond to the atmosphere of reconciliation declared by the governor with his proclamation.

Despite examples such as this, official anniversary activities sponsored by the Brown County Historical Society (based in New Ulm) did aim to educate the wider public about their Dakota neighbors. The BCHS logo for the reconciliation year marked 1987 as the "125th Anniversary of the Dakota War of 1862," a significant difference from the state historical society use of "conflict" rather than "war." BCHS organized both bus and walking tours of sites related to the War and the development of New Ulm. Children's programs included tours, storytelling sessions describing the memories of a girl who witnessed the battles in New Ulm, Indian games and craft-making, led by the local Girl Scouts. Adults could partake in a number of programs that explored Dakota culture as well as the German heritage of New Ulm. BCHS director Kathy Juni explained that the scheduled events, conducted by both white and Dakota members of the

²³ *New Ulm Journal*, "Pin marking Dakotah uprising reissued," December 23, 1986.

surrounding community, demonstrated “a shared responsibility to educate people about the Dakota Conflict.”²⁴

The Brown County Historical Society not only informed its citizens about Dakota culture, but it also educated its public about the ways the War had been remembered in New Ulm since 1862 with a new exhibit at its museum. The historical society wanted to illustrate that “Attitudes about ways to observe the anniversary of the 1862 Dakota War...have evolved through 125 years.” On display were postcards, anniversary programs, commemorative souvenirs, and photographs and newspaper clippings from the numerous anniversary observations held in the town. The exhibit sought to show the history of how “New Ulm celebrated the ‘Massacre’...[with] week-long extravaganzas.” These celebrations eventually became “gimmicks to bring people to town.” While “sensitivity emerged” to temper the celebrations at the time of the centennial observations, the town continued to have parades and pageants but they were no longer billed as “Sioux Uprising celebrations.” The exhibit was not intended to pass judgment on the town for the manner in which it celebrated its defense during the 1862 War, but rather “presents items from the past for museum visitors to view.”²⁵ This exhibit did not provide the details of the War or the reasons why New Ulm would have hosted such boisterous and frequent celebrations.

A newsletter published to help organize the Mazaadidi Family Reunion (scheduled for July 1988 in Santee, Nebraska) suggests that the Dakota people also sought education about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The November issue informed readers of a symposium sponsored by the University of Minnesota on the subject of the War. The newsletter encouraged Dakota

²⁴ Donna Weber, "Dakota Conflict activities will reach peak on August weekend," *New Ulm Journal*, June 28, 1987.

²⁵ Donna Weber, "Exhibit sheds light on Dakota conflict," *New Ulm Journal*, April 5, 1987.

descendants to attend the symposium, which featured discussions from Gary Clayton Anderson, Vine Deloria, Jr., and Dakota elders or tribal leaders.

This event affords our family an excellent and timely opportunity to learn about the events that led to the Dakota Uprising of 1862 and the subsequent removal of our ancestors from Minnesota to reservations in Nebraska and the Dakotas. What we learn at this symposium will help us appreciate the significance of our first family reunion in Santee, Nebraska...when the descendants of Dennis Mazadidi [sic] will Come Together To Touch The Earth Of Our Ancestors . . . and Remember. (underlining in original)

While previous newsletters were most concerned with the family history of Dennis Mazaadidi and his descendants, subsequent newsletters showed a desire to expand upon the renewed interest in the War of 1862 brought into the open as a result of the Year of Reconciliation. A March 1988 issue focused more specifically on the War, the mass hangings, the confinement at Fort Snelling, and the removal from the state. Now the reason for the reunion went beyond a basic desire to share in family heritage, but to also honor “all of the Dakota people who lived and died during this shameful period of American history and to honor as well, those who followed and made it possible for us to live today.”²⁶

Students at a Minneapolis high school marked the 125th anniversary in an unusual way by changing their school mascot from “Indians” to “Lakers.” The change occurred when a parent, who was Dakota, took offense during a basketball game when a fan dressed up like an “Indian.” Students recognized this was racially demeaning and felt the nickname “Indians” was “an emblem of division, not of community.”²⁷ Additional events throughout the state encouraged the sentiment of these high school students. The Science Museum of Minnesota, located in St. Paul, sponsored an exhibit about the Dakota before 1862. The annual powwows at Lower Sioux

²⁶ *Mazaadidi Reunion Newsletter*, Reunion Quarterly, November 1987, Issue No. 3; and March 1988, Issue No. 4. Editor: Reuben Kitto, Jr. Reunions occurred in 1988 and again in 1992. The “Reunion Newsletters” were later bound as “Memorial Collection of Mazaadidi Family Reunion Newsletters” and presented as a gift to reunion participants following the 1992 reunion.

²⁷ *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, “An Indian-led effort to heal cultural wounds,” June 5, 1987.

Community and Mankato reinforced the theme. Fort Snelling held a ceremony in October to unveil a new interpretive marker placed at the location where the Dakota were interred during the winter of 1862-63. The local media promoted the variety of events and a special series about the Dakota, the War, and its aftermath ran in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press Dispatch* throughout the year. The Year of Reconciliation culminated with a Memorial Relay Run and “Reconciliation Ceremony” at the site of the hangings in Mankato on December 26, 1987.²⁸

While organizers of the events for the Year of Reconciliation deemed it a successful endeavor, some members of the Dakota community in Minnesota were less optimistic. David Larsen, Dakota tribal chairman in 1987, said he continued to feel “anger and bitterness that white history still blames the Indians,” despite the events intended to bring greater awareness to reasons the Dakota went to war. Vernall Wabasha, a member of the Lower Sioux Community, called the Year of Reconciliation a “farce” and felt that little changed “except more white people coming in looking at us again.” Still, Larsen did acknowledge some positives for the year including positive portrayal of the Dakota in the media and the discontinuance of official organizations calling the War “The Great Sioux Uprising.” However, Larsen pointed out that most textbooks, as of 1987, continued to refer to the War as an “uprising” or “massacre” and this usage would negate any gains made during the Reconciliation year.

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The work necessary to bring more realistic reconciliation could take place on an interpretive landscape that can be more readily adjusted to reflect social and political changes – the historic site. Edward Linenthal demonstrated the possibilities for change at historic sites, such as the work of the National Park Service at Little Big Horn. Although still struggling with

²⁸ *Year of Reconciliation Summary*, Speakers, Descriptive Texts, Grant Proposal, “Year of Reconciliation Project 1986-1987” Project Files, Minnesota Historical Society.

dueling interests at this battlefield between Custer loyalists and Native Americans, the National Park Service is “engaged in the process of redefinition...struggling to transform a shrine into a historic site.”²⁹ While several historic areas have been preserved specifically because they are associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, there are three sites that are actively tasked with interpreting not only the battles that occurred there, but also now serve as the primary vehicles for interpreting the events before, during, and after the actual war. These sites are Birch Coulee Battlefield, Fort Ridgely State Park, and the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site. According to Kenneth Foote, “Creating a park, erecting a sign, or building a marker are ways of designating a site, but such a site gains little long-term attention and is rarely the focus of regular commemorative rituals.”³⁰ Both Birch Coulee Battlefield, which began as a memorial cemetery, and Fort Ridgely State Park, which initially had “Memorial” included in its official name, have shifted their interpretive goals from one of commemoration to instruction. These sites, which are more than locations for a monument, are now testaments to the changing attitudes about the War and therefore the changes in collective memory that have occurred in the most recent decades.

While Fort Ridgely State Park and Birch Coulee Battlefield provided general self-guided interpretive signage and walking trails, in the 1990s the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site expanded its offerings to include an interpretive center with exhibits, a restored warehouse that was present on the site in 1862, and several walking trails to enable the visitor to learn not just about the War but about life at the agency prior to the War. A survey in 1997 indicated that 66% of visitors to Lower Sioux Agency were interested in learning more about Dakota culture, while only 51% expressed interest in the War of 1862. The Lower Sioux Agency therefore included a great deal of the culture and history of the Dakota people in their interpretation. As a result, the

²⁹ Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, p. 130.

³⁰ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, p. 18.

bulk of the exhibit in the museum space at the Lower Sioux Agency focused on the history of the Dakota people, both before and after the events of 1862. Despite this emphasis on Dakota history and culture, a 1999 Interpretive Plan observed that Dakota patrons made up only a small percentage of visitations. The diversity in possible audiences as well as the breadth of expectations required interpretations that reached broad audiences.³¹

As of 2008, a detailed exhibit provided more than twenty panels of information to visitors on the subjects of Dakota tribal history, the purpose for a government agency, details of the fur trade in Minnesota, and what life was like for the Dakota after the War, including the boarding school system and efforts to rebuild Dakota communities within the state. Within this space, only three panels discussed the actual six-week war. These panels provided reasons the Dakota went to war (poor Indian agents, division among “farmer” and “traditional” Dakota, and the flood of white settlement into the region), and after giving a few facts about the battles and attacks on nearby settlements, ended with the hangings of the 38 at Mankato. Three outdoor walking trails furthered the blend of information about agency life and details of the War. Other cultural interest activities at the site have included maple syrup making, a children’s program about how to set up and camp in a teepee, and a driving tour designed to recreate popular riverboat tours of the 1860s.³² While recognized as the primary destination for learning more about the War, the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site significantly expanded past this short historic event and

³¹ “The Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site: Development,” 5; and *Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site Interpretive Plan Outline*, (January 26, 1999), Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site. The author received this copy as part of a 1999 internship with the Minnesota Historical Society.

³² Fritz Busch, “Syrup cooks at Lower Sioux: Slow process creates sugar, maple syrup,” *New Ulm Journal*, March 21, 2004; Mike Dougherty, “Day trip: Learn to set up, camp in a tepee,” *sctimes.com*, July 6, 2008, <http://www.sctimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2008107030069&template=printart> (accessed July 17, 2008); and Beth Gauper, “Grand Excursion into the past,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 28, 1999.

included a fuller history of the Dakota and the impact of American western expansion upon this particular region.³³

Despite attempts to bring diverse interpretive experiences to the public, the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site experienced a crisis in 2003. Facing budget cuts, the Minnesota Historical Society announced a plan to close seven historic sites in the state by July 1, 2003. The list was compiled based on low attendance figures and included the Lower Sioux Agency, as well as Fort Ridgely. Fund-raising efforts, including a \$90,000 donation from the Lower Sioux Community, helped to keep the sites open for the remainder of the season, but their future remained in jeopardy. One suggested solution from a Minnesota congressman would give the site over to the Lower Sioux Community, a proposal that was welcomed by the Community. Community treasurer, Brian Pendleton, believed the Dakota could “tell a better, broader story” of the 1862 War. However, many local historians and citizens opposed this move fearing that the Dakota community would only tell one side of the story and also declaring that the Lower Sioux community could afford to build its own interpretive center in nearby Morton. Implying the Lower Sioux Agency was not only part of Minnesota history but had larger national importance as well, site technician Dan Fjeld implored officials, “We have the Shenandoah Valley of Minnesota. Let us spread our wings and fly.”³⁴ The opinions of the local white community kept ownership of the Lower Sioux Agency with the Minnesota Historical Society. While the site stayed open for the 2003 season, it reduced its daily schedule down to just three days per week (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) and then only for the summer months (Memorial Day through Labor Day). Prior to these cuts, the site had been open seven days a week from May 1 through Labor Day.

³³ Information about the exhibit based on visit to the site by author in summer 2008.

³⁴ Fritz Busch, "Opinions differ on Lower Sioux site," *New Ulm Journal*, March 16, 2004.

In 2004, the Minnesota Historical Society again declared its inability to fund the Lower Sioux Agency and anticipated closing the site. To compensate for the loss of this site, the Society proposed installing a future exhibit about the War at Fort Snelling Historic Site. Located just outside St. Paul, Fort Snelling received considerably more visitors than the Lower Sioux Agency (a million annual visitors compared to about 5,000 at LSA) and therefore felt the War's history would reach a larger audience at a site closer to the majority of visitors. In addition, the Society again suggested transferring the Lower Sioux Agency historic site to the Lower Sioux Community at Morton. These proposals were presented at a public meeting and provoked strong opinions from both sides of the argument. The Lower Sioux Community eagerly welcomed the opportunity to take over the site, promising that

The Community intends to continue to operate the exhibits and programs that currently are in place and have been developed over the years. These exhibits and programs would be the foundation upon which the Community will build... We all have a stake in the accurate presentation of the history of the Dakota people.³⁵

Others expressed serious concern about turning the site over to a private group. John LaBatte, a resident of New Ulm and a Dakota descendent, argued against the transfer, saying the Lower Sioux Agency represented more than just Dakota history. He stated, "It was also a white site, a fur trade site, a missionary site, and a U.S. Government site. Fair interpretation must be made for all of these groups. I doubt this will happen if it is owned by a private group."³⁶ Despite the desire of the local community, the historical society was unable to raise the funds necessary to keep the site open and, despite state legislative approval, the county would not approve the transfer of the site to the Lower Sioux Community. Therefore the site closed on June 30, 2004.³⁷

³⁵ Joshua Dixon, "Future of Lower Sioux Agency debated," *The Redwood Gazette*, March 23, 2004.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "Lower Sioux Agency set to close June 30," June 23, 2004.

While the facts of the 1862 War may have been forgotten by much of the state, significant numbers of its citizens, both white and Dakota, were unwilling to see the War's primary interpretive historic site remain shuttered. After being closed for two seasons, the state legislature restored funds to the Minnesota Historical Society, enabling the organization to reopen the Lower Sioux Agency and six other sites closed due to budget cuts. Planning meetings with the surrounding community reflected a desire for "better marketing and integration with other historic places in the Minnesota River valley and a closer relationship with Dakota people."³⁸ The future of the Lower Sioux Agency was not secure and the local community wanted to ensure the success of this important historic site by making connections to other historic sites and inviting greater participation from the nearby Dakota community at Morton. However, shortly before the site was set to reopen in May 2006, the entire Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site staff, except for the manager who was new to his position at LSA, resigned their positions. Citing dissatisfaction with the interpretation at the reopened site that did not "reflect the best interests of the site or the staff," the society quietly accepted the six resignations without question.³⁹

Despite the upheaval of the staff, the site opened as planned for the summer season. By 2009, the Minnesota Historical Society and the Lower Sioux Indian Community "reached a management agreement under which the two entities [would] work together to present the Lower Sioux Agency historic site to the public."⁴⁰ While the state agency would remain ownership and provide funding and technical assistance, the Lower Sioux Indian Community would take over daily operations of the site. The new partnership would serve multiple purposes. It would keep the site open to preserve the history of the site as an Indian agency and scene of the first attack

³⁸ *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "Staff of Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site resigns," April 11, 2006.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Kay Johnson, "Lower Sioux Indian community to manage historic site," *Hutchinson Leader*, March 12, 2009.

for the 1862 War, but would also broaden the interpretation of the site with the full cooperation of the Dakota community.

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The ability to “reconcile” difficult history is not just found in the conflicts between indigenous and Euro-Americans. The African American and white American communities are also adjusting interpretive programs to begin the process of reconciling the long history of slavery in the United States. In recent years, the Historic Natchez Foundation began to gradually increase the diversity of its board from all-white wealthy female members to include males and nearly a third African American members as well. As a result of these changes, member Ron Miller believes “...the awareness of history here is gradually broadening.” Still, according to author Adam Goodheart, “[W]hen it comes to slavery itself, the American landscape seems largely silent, inscrutable.” While Americans, both white and African American, are aware that the nation’s history included slavery, there are few reminders of this history on the landscape. Although examples of historic sites dedicated to discussing slavery do exist, they remain few. Others that do focus on African American history prefer to focus on Reconstruction through World War II, leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. The history of slavery is often “left in the past.”⁴¹

James Oliver Horton explains the difficulty of discussing slavery at historic sites, “The vast majority of Americans react strongly to the topic, but few know much about it.”⁴² Furthermore, while discussion about slavery can now be more available in the classroom, most Americans admit to learning best at historic sites, but arrive at these sites ill-prepared to learn about a difficult subject. For example, visitors at Arlington House in Washington, D.C., are

⁴¹ Goodheart, “The Bonds of History,” p. 37-38.

⁴² Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History*, Kindle location 789.

resistant to interpretations that connect Robert E. Lee to slavery. Horton writes, “White visitors often bristle at the mention of Lee as the owner of slaves and have difficulty accepting the fact that he and his compatriots took up arms against the United States in order to preserve a society based on slave labor and white supremacy.”⁴³

Choosing to remove the discussion of slavery from the historic landscape parallels the lack of historic sites and monuments that discuss the “conquest of the American west” from the perspective of Native Americans. Ronald L. F. Davis, a professor at California State University at Northridge, explains, “Not talking about slavery isn’t a question of not having the information. It’s a question of what you decide to selectively remember.”⁴⁴ While working to secure a national monument at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre, Mario Gonzalez observed, “[T]here are no national monuments to Native American patriots who defended themselves and their homelands.” He cited “the oppressive political system” in the United States since 1776 that has prevented Native Americans from being defenders of their land as opposed to the white dominated perception that they were barriers to American western progress.⁴⁵ In Minnesota white communities preferred to focus on the loss of settlers’ lives in the 1862 War rather than their ancestors’ own actions that led to the War and the subsequent punishment the entire Dakota nation received at the War’s end. Little Crow and those Dakota who followed him to war fought to regain their land and defend themselves against a corrupt system that was erasing their culture. However, as the War was memorialized, the Dakota were not permitted to publicly acknowledge their own heroes.

For the first one hundred years following the War, local white communities actively remembered the War through ritual-like anniversary celebrations and the placement of

⁴³ Ibid, Kindle location 1000.

⁴⁴ Goodheart, “The Bonds of history,” p. 40.

⁴⁵ Gonzalez and Cook-Lynn, *The Politics of Hallowed Ground*, p. 25.

monuments to permanently mark the landscape with their memories. It was a remembered war, a watershed moment for the state. However, by the 1960s as the centennial anniversary approached, the official organizations of the state exhibited greater control of the memorial events. This coincided with the larger social understanding that the Dakota had been wronged before the War and many in the state now acknowledged that the act of going to war may have been justified, even if the brutal killing of 500 seemingly innocent settlers was not. These two changes in memory – the state controlling events and the awareness of the poor treatment of the Dakota – signaled the beginning of forgetfulness for the bulk of Minnesota’s white citizens. While the War was still discussed and certainly considered an important event from the state’s past, most citizens “forgot” the War happened almost as soon as they would have learned about it (in schoolbooks, through media, or via tourist visit).

Despite this amnesia, there continues to be debate about the importance of this War and the ways in which it should be remembered. Because the War was an important event in the state’s history, there is an unwillingness to reinterpret the commemorative landscape that was established in the first century after the War. James Loewen remarks, “In most places Americans have not shown the moral courage to tell what really happened...let alone offer a hint of apology or rectification.”⁴⁶ The Year of Reconciliation is evidence that officials in Minnesota felt the retelling of the War should be told from a broader perspective, one that considered the desperate circumstances facing the Dakota in 1862 and the harsh manner in which they were treated ever since. There is also evidence that some are still interested in preserving the sites associated with the War and making the historic landscape available to a wider audience. The battle over the Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site illustrated the significance of this site for both the white and Dakota communities. Association with the War also bolsters other tourist locations. Darla

⁴⁶ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 448.

Gebhard, research librarian at the Brown County Historical Society in New Ulm, stated that the number one thing visitors come to New Ulm to hear about is the War. Even visitors from Germany, choosing to vacation in a quintessential German-American town, come to New Ulm expecting to learn about the War and “see the Indians.” These foreign visitors are often disappointed to learn that the closest Dakota live nearly 50 miles away.⁴⁷

Amy Lonetree’s essay describing her experience from the 2002 Dakota Commemorative March helps to illustrate the long journey ahead for true reconciliation. Despite an intent to open dialogue between native and non-native Minnesotans, there were times when Lonetree felt significant tension from non-native communities, suggesting an “all-consuming...desire for closure” rather than engage in discussions about the War from the Dakota perspective. She describes a white woman in New Ulm who spoke from the audience after listening to the speeches from some of the marchers about the hardships endured by the Dakota during that forced march in 1862. According to Lonetree, the woman “expressed her wish that in the future the local White townspeople would be able to participate in the Commemorative March to tell their stories of their ancestors killed in 1862.” Though understanding the woman meant well, Lonetree “felt that she was suggesting that we stop emphasizing Dakota suffering, because, after all, White people suffered just as much, and that instead we should move toward a quick and speedy act of reconciliation.”⁴⁸ From the Dakota perspective, while it is true that both whites and Dakota suffered during the War, it is not possible to commemorate those sufferings in the same manner. A march to commemorate Dakota women, children, and elderly forcibly removed from their homelands would not be the place to memorialize settlers killed during war. The events were different and the memories cannot easily be shared.

⁴⁷ Darla Gebhard, interview by Julie Humann Anderson, New Ulm, MN (July 2008).

⁴⁸ Lonetree, "Transforming Lives by Reclaiming Memory: The Dakota Commemorative March of 2004," pp. 249-250.

It would be wrong to suggest that the 1987 Year of Reconciliation did not achieve some of its original goals. Of significance was the adoption by the state's official organizations that the War be officially called "The U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862." This put to rest the continued disputes about calling this War an "uprising" or a "massacre" throughout its memorial history. While I argued in Chapter 2 that "conflict" is not a strong enough term to fully appreciate the impact this War had upon the region, it is a preferable term to the ones that implied total blame be placed upon the Dakota. "Conflict" invites white Minnesotans to acknowledge their own roles in the War, namely the continued encroaching upon Dakota land and the poorly negotiated treaties which favored white society at the high expense to Dakota culture and survival. Also, the addition of "U.S." in the official title makes it clear whom the Dakota were battling during the War. The numerous treaties were negotiated with the United States government, not the state of Minnesota. The U.S., not the state, opened the land that formerly belonged to the Dakota for settlement. Agents appointed by the federal government, not the state, maintained order and distributed food and annuity payments on the reservation. When Little Crow and his followers went to war, they may have directly attacked residents of Minnesota, but their primary target, and the only entity able to return the land to the Dakota, was the United States.

While some residents may have assumed that a declaration of reconciliation implied closure for both white and Dakota victims of the War, others would argue that reconciliation is only part of a longer process towards restorative justice. Rather than closing the door on discussion, the concept of reconciliation should spur dialogue and push towards restoring justice. Scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn writes,

It is the hope now that these ideas and strategies and debates will move toward consensus, but no one can be sure. Consensus is not the same as reconciliation because justice – the most significant condition for reconciliation and justice for tribal nations and tribal peoples – so far at least, has been unachieved; thus, reconciliation amounts to

merely a futile, empty gesture. The recent faux movement toward reconciliation stirred in some parts of Indian Country to reestablish, resolve, acquiesce; to reconcile one's self to defeat; to make compatible; or to settle is an unapproachable place at this time.⁴⁹

Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn explains that reconciliation constitutes a process seeking multiple truths that connect the past with the present. This subsequent dialogue “critically approaches varying versions of the past while nevertheless aspiring to uncover the truth of events and experiences.”⁵⁰ This search for multiple truths is “giving a voice to the voiceless,”⁵¹ something the Dakota since 1987 are now encouraged to contribute.

Sheryl Dowlin explores the process necessary to bring estranged parties towards reconciliation and she stresses that it “takes much time to develop a critical mass of white people willing to work for the transformation of their own society.” Beginning with the friendship between Bud Lawrence of Mankato and Amos Owen, a Prairie Island Dakota, the now annual Mankato Powwow has created an atmosphere of “understanding and appreciation of each other’s culture and uniqueness.” This friendship spread to a larger community effort to develop shared memories and started a process towards healing the wounds between the Dakota and non-native residents in the Mankato area. The commemoration of the 38 Dakota men who were hanged in this city has become the focus of the annual September powwow. Because of the Year of Reconciliation, the general public was educated about the War. Dowlin writes, “The revelations shocked and angered many Minnesotans, who had not been aware of the extent of the greed and chicanery practiced by the earliest settlers and leaders of the state against the Dakota people.” Other reconciliation efforts that continued beyond 1987 include: collaboration with Minnesota State University at Mankato for a communication course that brought twelve Dakota speakers in to share with the class and the community; the dedication of the Treaty Site History Center (the

⁴⁹ Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn, *Massacre at Camp Grant*, p. 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

new main building for the Nicollet County Historical Society in St. Peter), which was designed with Dakota members input and appointed two Dakota people to its board of directors; and an acknowledgement in 1998 by the mayor of New Ulm “for the historic bad feelings between the two groups, and warmly encouraged the much-needed process of healing and reconciliation.” Dowlin states that reconciliation efforts must occur with the cooperation of the Dakota. Creating new “commonly shared social realities,” such as the annual powwows that invite both sides to participate, is essential for success. Still, “the wounds associated with the 1862 Conflict, never far from the minds of the Dakota people and only recently acknowledged by the general public, run deep and may never be completely healed.”⁵²

According to Dakota historian and activist Waziyatawin, achieving reconciliation and restorative justice requires more than an acknowledgement of wrongs committed against the Dakota nation. In her book, *What Does Justice Look Like?*, Waziyatawin calls for a restoration of land to the Dakota people as well as the establishment of a “truth commission” that would “end American colonization of Dakota people and homeland.” She writes,

Despite the fact that Minnesota’s ethnic cleansing of Dakota and Ho-Chunk Peoples is well-documented, most Minnesotans remain naively or purposefully ignorant of the reality that violent and morally reprehensible crimes were perpetrated so they could not only freely obtain Indigenous lands, but could also settle on them without fear of any violent retribution.

According to Waziyatawin, the questionable treaties that led to severe loss of land with minimal compensation for the Dakota and the expulsion of the Dakota people from their homeland following the War (in addition to severe loss of life as a result of imprisonment in Iowa for the convicted men and confinement in concentration camps at Fort Snelling for the women and children) equate to acts of genocide as defined by the United Nations. While Minnesotans have

⁵² Sheryl L. Dowlin and Bruce Dowlin, "Healing History's Wounds: Reconciliation Communication Efforts to Build Community Between Minnesota Dakota (Sioux) and Non-Dakota Peoples," *Peace & Change* 27, no. 3 (July 2002): 414-428.

been made aware of the details surrounding the War and their own actions that contributed to the reasons the Dakota initiated the War, few acknowledge that this was an act of American colonization and resulted in the near annihilation of a specific people. She states, “The Minnesota Historical Society continues to resist using appropriate and accurate terminology such as ‘genocide,’ ‘ethnic cleansing,’ and ‘concentration camp,’ preferring instead more benign terms that diminish the horror of Minnesota history.”⁵³

As activists struggle to achieve some sense of justice for the Dakota peoples of Minnesota, others are focused on justice specifically for those Dakota wronged during the War. A movement to pardon the thirty-eight men hanged was proposed during the Year of Reconciliation, but it did not gain enough support to move forward. Some argued that if the thirty-eight men were innocent, they should not need a pardon because that would imply they committed a crime. Recently, efforts have focused on the case of Chaska, one of the Dakota who was executed but a case many believe was one of mistaken identity. As discussed earlier, Sarah Wakefield, wife of Dr. Thomas Wakefield, testified that Chaska had rescued her and her children and that his companion had murdered her driver, but Chaska was innocent. Regardless of her testimony, Chaska was convicted of crimes, but not necessarily sentenced to death. Elden Lawrence writes,

How could they have mistaken Chaska for another? The most obvious answer is that no one among the whites cared that much about justice for Chaska....In all probability Chaska did not die by mistake. It was probably Sarah’s testimony in his behalf that prompted his execution. Government officials had been contemplating ways to make this conflict beneficial to them. As an added penalty, the Dakotas would sacrifice their land in the State of Minnesota. There would be no treaties or annuities. In order to do this, the Indians would have to appear as wicked, uncivilized, savages deserving of nothing and reduced to a state of servitude.⁵⁴

⁵³ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like?*, pp. 9-10, 37ff, and 74.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, *The Peace Seekers*, pp. 138-139.

Dakota leader Leonard Wabasha believes a federal pardon of Chaska would “shine a light” on the nature of the trials and the punishment of the Dakota at the end of the war. He says, “It would cause people to read and research into it a little deeper.”⁵⁵ The movement to pardon Chaska faces several challenges; no person executed by the government has ever received a federal pardon. Gwen Westerman, a professor in Mankato and Dakota member, would favor a pardon for Chaska, but she is more concerned with the larger movement to bring awareness about the War. She states, “To have an open, honest and sensitive discussion I think is really important, especially as we are coming up to 2012.”⁵⁶

While the pardon of Chaska may contribute to the healing of some wounds, much work remains in order for the native and non-native citizens of Minnesota to reach reconciliation. Interpretation at historic sites, particularly the Lower Sioux Agency, now favors a perspective of war from the Dakota side. Waziyatawin writes, “[T]his is not a Dakota versus White issue, but rather it is a twenty-first-century moral issue.”⁵⁷ Is it possible to retell the details of the War in the context of American western settlement and colonization of indigenous peoples? This would undoubtedly make most non-native Minnesotans and Americans uncomfortable as a discussion of their own roles in the subjugation of a people would not be received favorably.

Even if this dialogue were opened at historic sites and museums dedicated to the story of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, there remains an imbalance upon the permanent landscape. The sheer number of markers and monuments commemorating the fallen white settlers and soldiers vastly overshadows the few objects that commemorate the Dakota. In addition, those monuments that speak for the Dakota rarely explain the details of the War. The white buffalo monument at Reconciliation Park does little to explain why a need for reconciliation exists. This disparity can

⁵⁵ Robert K. Elder, "Execution 150 Years Ago Spurs Calls for Pardon," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2010.

⁵⁶ Krohn, "Pardon push for Dakota named Chaska revives 1862 conflict."

⁵⁷ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like?*, p. 77.

be reversed on the permanent landscape for this War. James Loewen argues, “We can take back the landscape. It does not belong to the dead, but to the living. Monuments and markers are messages to the future, and the future does not belong to the rich alone but to all of us.”⁵⁸ David Glassberg similarly states, “We think that once we make a place historic it will not change. But it will. Historic places, supposedly marked for eternity, disappear from view as the markers crumble and surrounding neighborhoods change.”⁵⁹ Reconciliation efforts have occurred, but how effective can they be if lasting changes are not also made upon the landscape?

As the year 2012 approaches, both state and local agencies will be challenged with renewed commemorative efforts for the 150th anniversary of this War. The Minnesota Historical Society is planning a “online presentations, educational tools, published works, artwork, events, and community outreach.” Continuing the desire to bring Dakota voices to the forefront, some of this will include oral history projects and new cultural lessons about present-day Dakota.⁶⁰ The Linnaeus Arboretum at Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, Minnesota) will host a series of lectures titled “Commemorating Controversy: The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Speaker Series.” Scheduled for January 2012, the six speakers will include historians and language scholars as well as members of the Dakota community.⁶¹ Brown County Historical Society and New Ulm also have a number of events planned for the 150th Anniversary year. The Society is planning a number of historical tours to sites associated with the War, an art presentation, book signings with well-known authors of the War, and a speaker presentation. Unlike the plans at the Minnesota Historical Society and the speaker series at Gustavus Adolphus College, New Ulm is

⁵⁸ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 453.

⁵⁹ Glassberg, *Sense of History*, p. 202.

⁶⁰ *U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Sesquicentennial*, 2011, <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/projects/us-dakota-war-1862-sesquicentennial> (accessed September 14, 2011).

⁶¹ *Commemorating Controversy: The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Speaker Series*, <https://gustavus.edu/calendar/commemorating-controversy-the-u-s-dakota-war-of-1862-speaker-series> (accessed September 14, 2011).

focusing its anniversary activities on tourists who wish to reconnect with white memories of the war. Darla Gebhard states, “I think when people come they will want to go and see the sites.... The people who descended from these families that were here in 1862 during the US Dakota War...they want to know where the site of the farms are and where their graves are...It’s very emotional.”⁶² The dual tones for these planned commemorations remains a challenge. Is it possible to discuss the continued sense of victimhood for the white settlers killed while also acknowledging the crimes committed against the entire Dakota nation? Whether the commemorations of 2012 can successfully open the dialogue between whites and Dakota remains to be seen.

Is it possible for the Dakota to achieve restorative justice in Minnesota? The Year of Reconciliation made some progress, but many Dakota leaders continued to assert that the wounds of 1862 went deep and mere reconciliation could not achieve true healing. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphohn explains that “restorative justice, whatever its method, needs a strong commitment to the ideal of truth – that the past, however messy and complex, really happened and really can be understood.”⁶³ The 150th Anniversary is an opportunity for both state and local historical agencies to not just revise the tone in which this historic event has been portrayed in the state and engage in the “truth telling” that Dakota activists demand, but to reconsider the manner in which this history has been remembered on the permanent landscape. Is it necessary to remove all monuments related to this War? No. But it is an opportunity to repurpose existing monuments and historic landscapes as tangible teaching tools that expose all perspectives. James Loewen suggests, “Changes in historical perspective could be charted by showing how a famous

⁶² Serra Muscatello, "Wide variety of events kick off US/Dakota War observance," *New Ulm Journal*, August 21, 2011.

⁶³ Colwell-Chanthaphohn, *Massacre at Camp Grant*, pp. 110-111.

person or event...has been commemorated in different eras.”⁶⁴ Existing monuments, markers, and historic sites associated with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 can tell not only the details of a devastating war, but also the history of the way this War has been remembered. Understanding the history about why these memories were one-sided for nearly 150 years can bring empathy to the present-day Dakota need to share their memories for the public, without revisiting white memories at the same time.

⁶⁴ Loewen, *Lies Across America*, p. 456.

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