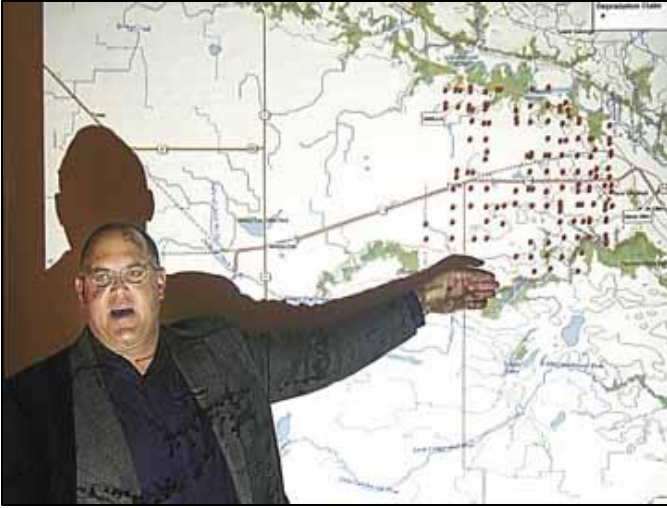


1862 Battlefields Detailed

Archeologist reviews report that will be submitted to American Battlefield Preservation Program

The Journal, November 2, 2010 - By Fritz Busch Staff Writer



NEW ULM - A Sauk Rapids-based archeologist who has traveled North America, Europe and the Middle East detailed his 1862 Brown County Battlefield Preliminary Archeology Report on Monday at the Brown County Historical Society Annex.

Richard M. Rothaus said Brown County's 1862 (U.S.-Dakota Conflict) battlefield history has unique national historical significance.

It's very unusual in the fact that the Dakota invaded a Midwestern town (New Ulm) very early in the Civil War," Rothaus said. "It was a very ethnic conflict. The federal

government was way off in getting things under control at the time."

He said the vast amounts of historical data at the Brown County Historical Society (BCHS) are just as unique.

"It's astonishing, puts us miles ahead of other places," Rothaus said.

Less is known about the Dakota side of the conflict partly because most Dakota don't want to talk about it, Rothaus said.

Rothaus' report centered on Milford, where 479 people lived in 1860, not far behind New Ulm's population of 635, according to statistics at the annex.

More than 50 settlers died on Aug. 18, 1862, in Milford, just west of New Ulm.

Milford had the highest fatality rate of any Minnesota township in 1862.

"History is what it is," Rothaus said.

"Things got hostile very quickly in Milford. White men, women and children died, some in horrible ways, in what was really a massacre, followed by a sham trial," Rothaus said. "Innocent people were hung and the guilty got away."

"If you were caught, you were killed at Milford," Rothaus said. "Nobody fought back. They were completely taken by surprise."

The Dakota attacked New Ulm but were slowed by barricades and terraced defense lines.

Women and children sought protection in available brick buildings.

"We don't really know who attacked New Ulm the first time, but we know who the defenders were," Rothaus said. "Dakota fought in kinship lines. Aided by St. Peter and Le Sueur defenders plus a rain storm, the New Ulmites prevailed in a close battle."

Rothaus said the second Dakota attack on New Ulm Aug. 23, 1862 was marked with building-to-building fighting.

"The Dakota came in on horses, took shots and moved on. Dakota got into some buildings and fired at barricades while settlers burned other buildings to keep them out," Rothaus added. "The Dakota had the upper hand but left after they ran out of cover."

Two days later, a caravan of 153 wagons carried 1,500 refugees and 80 wounded men in retreat to Mankato.

"The retreat drove New Ulm pioneer Jacob Nix crazy after the defenders just held off the Dakota twice," Rothaus said.

"Here was the population of one of the most flourishing towns in the state abandoning their homes and property, starting on a 30-odd mile journey, through hostile country, possibly being massacred along the way, with no hope or prospect but the hospitality of strangers and ultimate beggary," wrote New Ulm pioneer Charles Flandrau.

Only 68 of New Ulm's 258 buildings were not burned in the conflict.

Rothaus said some of his archeological finds in Milford included "burnouts" where houses were pushed into a hole and burned after the attack.

Ceramics and other 1860s era objects were discovered at sites west of New Ulm.

Such finds are rare - an archeologist's treasure trove, Rothaus said.

"What we really want are sites undisturbed by people," he added.

Rothaus' report will be sent to the American Battlefield Preservation Program.

Brown County could be put on the National Battlefield Register, which can open the door to more project funding.

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Staff photo by Fritz Busch

Archeologist Richard Rothaus of Sauk Rapids gives Brown County 1862 Battlefield Preliminary Archeology Report Monday at the Brown County Historical Society Annex.