



150th Anniversary of the U.S. – Dakota War of 1862

“A Commemoration”

“The August 14th 1862 Petition”

Introduction by Curtis Dahlin

In August of 2010 a group of community members representing various townships and cities in Brown County, met to discuss what events should take place to commemorate those that fought and died in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. After over a year of meetings; the group has developed a schedule of events (some still in the planning stage) for the week of August 20-26, 2012. One goal of the committee is to educate people about the events prior and after August 1862 event. This is the first article in a series that will be written until the commemoration in August 2012.

The U.S. – Dakota War of 1862 had its roots in a number of different areas. By 1862, the Dakota had relinquished all of their lands in Minnesota to the U.S. Government except for a reservation on the south side of the Minnesota River. In exchange for their lands, the Dakota were to receive annual annuities which they expected to live on. Unfortunately, the annuities did not contribute substantially towards their annual needs, and game and fur-bearing animals were rapidly disappearing, and these things were sources of frustration to the Dakota.

There were some points of contention between the Dakota, traders and the settlers. One was that the traders, who extended credit to the Dakota, had arranged that they were the first to be paid when the annual annuities arrived. Also, the Dakota saw large numbers of settlers coming in to settle their former lands, and sometimes relations between the two were strained as they came from different cultures who did not understand one another. Due to a series of events, by the summer of 1862, many Dakota were hungry, and the annuities were late in coming. So the situation was very tense. Then, on August 17, four young Dakota men killed five settlers at Acton in Meeker County, and the Dakota decided to go to war. Early on August 18, they attacked the Lower Sioux Agency, and then quickly moved to attack settlers living in neighboring Renville County and Brown County, particularly Milford Township. The surprise attacks that day killed at least 200 people, with very few Dakota being killed, and the War was on.

During the summer of 1862, the settlers had observed what was taking place with the Dakota, and as the situation deteriorated, they became very apprehensive. Some area newspapers voiced their concern, and on August 14, a large group of New Ulm residents sent a petition to Governor Alexander Ramsey, voicing their fears of a possible Indian outbreak. This petition, which is in the Minnesota Historical Society, reads as follows:

The Letter as Written

To his Excellency the Governor of the State of Minnesota.

Your memorialists, residents of Brown County Minnesota and residents of the Western Frontier Settlements adjoining the Dacotah and Sioux Indian Territory, respectfully represent:

That the payment for the Dacotah and Sioux nation of Indians has this year been delayed up to this time.

That said Indians considering said payment justly due to them and relying on the same for their subsistence, have become by such delay exceedingly exasperated, have committed several outrages and threaten to overwhelm these frontier settlements with Indian Warfare.

That your memorialists are in eminent danger to see their families massacred by said Indians, if the able bodied men of these settlements should be removed from here under the militia draft, before said Indians are appeased by receiving what is justly due them.

That the rumor has spread here far and wide that the United States Government has paid the money in gold for said Indians long ago, but that said money has been corruptly misapplied in speculations on the discount between gold and paper currency and otherwise by the Hon. Clark Thompson, Superintendent of the Indian Affairs in the State of Minnesota, and that this is the reason of the delay of the payment.

Your memorialists therefore pray:

- 1, That the drafted militia from this part of the country may not be removed before the Indians have received their payment and are thereby appeased.
- 2, That if Clark Thompson should not have received the money for the Indians, some of your memorialists may be authentically informed of that fact, so thereby the fair reputation of said Clark Thompson may be restored.
- 3, That if said money should have been paid by the Government, as the rumor goes, in that event a thorough investigation concerning the misapplication of the money may be instituted.

Dated August 14th, A. D. 1862

John G. Rudolph, John Manderfelt(d) A. Strecker, L. Brockmann, Johan Schneider, D. G. Shillock, Francis Erd, John W. Young, F. Beinhorn, Christian Prignitz, Carl Schmidt, Henry Behnke, Ernst Dietrich, H. C. Bergmann, ? Martin, S.C.?, Johan Bobleter, Johan ?, Aug. Friton, Stu Seiter, P. Scherer, C. Pfau, H. Loheyde, C. Schumacher, Fr. Rehfeld, H. Schalk, Fr. Wehrs, W. Galles, H. Kiesling, ?Kiseling, Pet. Jos. Schmitz, P. Hitz, Joseph Hitz, Louis Theobald, G. W. Otto Barth, Charles Roos, Jacob Muller, A. Cluassen, Charles Frieberg, John C. Toberer, August Kiesling, Fredrich Immel, Franz Nolle, Friedrich Ring, Christoff Brockmann, John Hauenstein, Benjamin Heinebach. *Some of the handwriting was difficult to transcribe, these are our best guesses.*

So these men were very concerned about the situation, and several of them, including Ernst Dietrich and G. W. Otto Barth, were to be killed by the Dakota several days later. The War was to be devastating to Brown County.

Check out our website commemorating this event. www.browncountydakotawarcommemoration.org
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