



## Norwegian-Indian Friendship

Reprinted article by Ole Synstebj  
*From the Hanska Herald, date unknown*

This is the second in a series of articles on the 1862 Dakota War which is being published by the Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm in its newsletter and by the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Steering Committee of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 in area newspapers for the 150th Anniversary in 2012.

Ole Synstebj was born in 1856 in Lesja, Gulbrandsdalen, Norway. He immigrated to America with his parents in 1873. They settled in Lake Hanska Township, Brown County. Ole spent most of his life farming, and also served as the first mayor of the village of Hanska, and as a Brown County Commissioner. He died in 1942. He wrote many articles on the history of the Lake Hanska area which were published in a booklet titled "Interesting Tales of Pioneer Days in Lake Hanska and Vicinity."

### *Original Article:*

During the Dakota troubles in 1862 the settlers of the Lake Hanska area loaded their wagons with provisions and started eastward, hoping to avoid the attacking Dakota Indians. When some of them reached Lake Linden (undoubtedly the Sorbel cabin), Torgrim Torgrimson figured he did not have enough provisions and yoking his oxen, he started home again even though he knew it was risky. He did not see any Dakota on the way home. He got home, tied his oxen to an oak tree by the door and loaded the wagon as full as possible. When he was finished, he walked south of the house to see if his cows were anywhere near. Looking toward the hill, now called Fort Hill, he saw a group of Dakota coming mounted Indian file. Torgrim knew the Dakota had seen him before he saw them. He also knew that running was useless, so he just stood still waiting for what he thought would be death in a few minutes. When the Dakota came within a few rods they stopped, the leader dismounted, gave his horse and gun to the man next to him and came towards Torgrim. When he reached him, he took hold of Torgrim's coat, pointed him east and said some words ending with "...go east." He motioned that it was dangerous to stay here any longer. Then turning, he re-mounted and the Dakota rode away. Torgrim started east again to join his family and other relatives at Lake Linden.

Why did the Dakota not kill Torgrim? There was a reason. Usually some Dakota lingered over winter by the lakes trapping and hunting. One Dakota stayed at Lake Omsrud and vicinity. One day when he was crossing the lake covered with ice and broke through. For every yard the Dakota swam he had to break his way through the ice with his bare hands. Being a good swimmer was no help. Finally, he reached the shore exhausted and stiff with cold. Torgrim found him and carried him to the house where Mrs. Torgrimson gave him a warm drink and dry clothes. Then they laid him near the stove, covered him well and there he remained until morning.

This was the Dakota leader of the group Torgrim encountered on his farm. Maybe even the Dakota had come by Torgrim's house to warn him of danger, but, in either case, he saved Torgrim's life. A good deed was repaid.

It had not been unusual for Dakota to call at Torgrim's cabin just like other good neighbors. What food there was had been divided with them. It happened now and then that Torgrim found just the animal pelt in his trap. The Dakota had been there and found a muskrat which they skinned, took the carcass, left the pelt and set the trap again. Thus Torgrim had his pelt and the Dakota satisfied with their fresh meat.

Submitted by Joel Botten, Mankato, Minnesota

Check out the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary website at [www.browncountydakotawarcommemoration.com](http://www.browncountydakotawarcommemoration.com) for information on upcoming 2012 events and additional articles.