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The REMOVAL From MINNESOTA of the Sioux and Winnebago Indians

WILLIAM E. LASS

FEW MINNESOTANS in 1862 attempted to accurately assess the causes of the Sioux Uprising. Most accepted the "devilishness" of the Sioux as sufficient explanation of the savage bloodshed, and demanded, either in panic or in a spirit of righteous revenge, the deportation of all Indians from southern Minnesota. Accordingly, in the spring and summer of 1863 the government took steps to remove the red men from their homes and relocate them beyond the limits of settlement.

Most of the Sioux who played a role in the uprising had fled from the state ahead of the advancing military forces under Colonel Henry H. Sibley, and the majority of those seized by the army had taken no active part. Many surrendered voluntarily, believing they would be better off with the whites than with their hostile kin. By December, 1862, the captives had been divided into two general groups. Those convicted of war crimes, numbering about three hundred, were jailed at Mankato. The larger group of about sixteen hundred—mostly peaceful women and children—was confined at Fort Snelling.

The sentiment for their removal was fanned by southern Minnesota newspapers.

¹ *The Record* (Mankato), November 8, 1862.

John C. Wise, the fiery editor of the *Mankato Record*, launched an "extermination or removal" campaign directed not at the Sioux alone, but also at the peaceful Winnebago Indians residing on a reservation in Blue Earth County.¹ Rumors were afloat in Mankato that some of the Winnebago had participated in the siege of New Ulm. Although the military commission which passed judgment on the Sioux found no evidence to support these claims, the white settlers would not be pacified.

It is difficult to separate fear and prejudice from the economic motives behind the settlers' demands. The Winnebago had never been welcome in southern Minnesota. Forced out of their native Wisconsin, they were relocated several times in Iowa and Minnesota before being moved in 1855 from the Crow Wing area onto some of the choicest land in Blue Earth County. Since some white settlers were displaced in order to create the reservation, the presence of the Winnebago had been resented from the beginning. Only a few people stood to profit directly from their removal, but many business leaders in Mankato believed that the growth of the "Key City" depended on opening the reservation to white settlers. Capitalizing on both the economic and emotional pressures, therefore, some prominent men

in Mankato organized the semisecret "Knights of the Forest," a group whose one aim was to get rid of the Winnebago.²

The removal sentiment of frontier Minnesota was first voiced in Congress by Representative William Windom and Senator Morton S. Wilkinson. These men, both Republicans and known friends of the Lincoln administration, had been embarrassed by the president's commutation of the death sentence of all but thirty-eight of the over three hundred convicted Sioux. Wilkinson, especially, was under pressure to make an anti-Indian move since both his home-town newspapers, the *Mankato Record* and the *Mankato Independent*, had called for the hanging of all the convicted Sioux. Wise, a Democrat, contended that the administration's leniency was the result of an anti-Minnesota policy and that the Republicans listened to Eastern humanitarians rather than Western pioneers.³

On December 16, 1862, Windom introduced a Winnebago removal bill in the House of Representatives, and on the same day Wilkinson introduced in the Senate two similar bills applying to both Sioux and Winnebago. By mid-February it was apparent that the measures would pass without great opposition. When the Winnebago bill passed the House, the *Mankato Independent* confidently announced, "Glorious News, the Winnebagoes to be Removed." The act became law on February 21, and the Sioux act was passed on March 3. Both were very generally worded in order to give the Indian office maximum leeway in selection of a new location. The acts simply specified that the Indians were to be removed to unoccupied land, "well adapted for agricultural purposes," beyond the limits of any state. The appropriations to effect the transfer were niggardly, only some fifty thousand dollars being allowed for the Sioux and an equal amount for the Winnebago. Thus, since there were over three thousand Indians involved, Congress did, for all practical purposes, place a limitation on the distance they might be moved. Apparently the Indian

office never seriously thought of any other area than the upper Missouri.⁴

During March, the commissioner of Indian affairs, William P. Dole, and the secretary of the interior, John P. Usher, decided to place both tribes near Fort Randall, on the Missouri in south central Dakota Territory. This site was undoubtedly chosen because the garrison at Fort Randall could help contain and protect the Indians; there were but few settlers in the area; and a river location would mean the Indians could be conveniently transported and supplied by steamboat.

Sibley was among those advising the Indian office during the planning stages. In a pointed communiqué to Usher, he urged an early removal, because the Indians "are a source of irritation to the entire population, and there is constant danger of collision between the citizens and the U.S. forces in consequence." He suggested that the red men be placed on steamboats immediately after the opening of navigation and transported down the Mississippi and then up the Missouri to their new home. Despite the river distance of more than two thousand miles Sibley believed it much more practical than an overland route. The disadvantages of the latter, he wrote, would be the enormous cost of subsistence, the perils of taking the Indians through hostile white areas, and the many opportunities for escape open to those familiar with the plains environment. Minnesota's governor, Alexander Ramsey, also urged the Indian office to move speedily, noting that most of the delay was caused by differences of opinion as to whether the Sioux and Winnebago should be located on the same reservation or on two widely separated ones. In addition to these pressures the bureau was faced with the practical con-

² *Standard Historical and Pictorial Atlas and Gazetteer of Blue Earth County, Minnesota*, 85-88 (Minneapolis, 1895).

³ *Record*, December 13, 1862.

⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 37 Congress, 3 session, p. 100, 104; *Mankato Independent*, February 20, 1863; United States, *Statutes at Large*, 12:658-660, 819, 784, 785.

sideration of settling the Indians in time to produce crops during their first year on the new reservation.⁵

USHER made the first move toward procuring transportation by contacting several St. Louis steamboat operators who were familiar with both the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Many steamboat lines were active on the Mississippi, but there were comparatively few that had worked on the upper Missouri. In response to his inquiries, Usher received replies from Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company and Robert Campbell and Company, both with long records of successful operation in the Indian trade on the upper Missouri. Campbell and Company advised Usher that he probably could obtain transportation for the Indians at a rate of ten to twelve dollars each, without subsistence, and about eighteen to twenty dollars with subsistence. The company made no actual bid. In fact, it accurately predicted a low-water year on the Missouri and suggested to Usher that overland transportation might be cheaper and more comfortable than travel by steamboat. The Chouteau company, apparently confident of its ability

to meet a contract, proposed to transport the Sioux and Winnebago from Fort Snelling to some point not more than a hundred miles above Fort Randall for twenty-five dollars per head, and to subsist them at ten cents each per day.⁶

The Chouteau bid was not received until April, and despite the pressure of time the month was well under way before Dole could take a positive step toward concluding an agreement. On April 8 the commissioner ordered Clark W. Thompson, the superintendent of Indian affairs for the Northern Superintendency, to proceed at once to St. Louis and negotiate a contract.⁷ Dole's orders were explicit: although Chouteau's offer seemed reliable, Thompson was to investigate further, because the bid came to considerably more than the government had planned to spend. Thompson must also make any would-be contractor understand that the Winnebago were reluctant to move and that the government would not be liable for any damage to boats or property caused by the Indians.⁸

Upon hearing that the Winnebago had to be moved peaceably, but that Thompson could not guarantee their co-operation, the Campbell company revised upward its earlier estimates of transportation costs.⁹ This removed all suspicion from Chouteau's bid. After having satisfied himself that the latter could not be bettered, Thompson signed a contract with the company on April 16, accepting the original offer. Chouteau further agreed to allow each Indian free transportation of baggage up to a hundred pounds, and to carry Indian agents without charge. The contractor was required to provide seaworthy boats in sufficient quantity "to give said Indians ample space for comfort, health, and safety." The contract also allowed Chouteau to use rail transportation for part of the distance if it were found necessary or desirable.¹⁰

After concluding the contract, Thompson stayed on in St. Louis for two more weeks, hiring men and purchasing equipment and supplies in preparation for the move up the

⁵ Sibley to Usher, March 14, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, St. Peter's Agency, in the National Archives; *Record*, April 11, 1863.

⁶ Robert Campbell and Company to Usher, April 3, 1863; Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to Usher, April 1, 1863, both in Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency.

⁷ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 303. Thompson, an energetic thirty-eight-year-old Canadian immigrant, had pioneered in the organization of Minnesota's Republican party and had served in the territorial legislature and as a member of the state's constitutional convention. Like other Indian office appointments of the time, his was purely political—probably secured through the influence of Senator Wilkinson. See Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 777 (Minnesota Historical Collections, vol. 14); Return I. Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 2:479 (St. Paul, 1908).

⁸ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 303.

⁹ Thompson to Dole, April 16, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency.

¹⁰ Contract between Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company and Clark W. Thompson, April 16, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, in the National Archives.

Missouri. Dole had instructed him to procure a steam sawmill, plows, harrows, saws, and seed, all of which were intended to make the Indians self-sufficient during the first year. He had considerable difficulty hiring workmen to assist in establishing the agency. Carpenters, blacksmiths, and teamsters were in great demand in St. Louis because of the military operations on the plains and along the lower Mississippi. The available labor force was further depleted by the rush to the Montana gold fields. Sixteen men were finally secured from Terre Haute, Indiana, to complete the necessary number.¹¹

While Thompson was in St. Louis, Dole was taking steps to consolidate the Sioux and Winnebago in order to expedite the removal. With many precautions and considerable secrecy the Sioux men who had been convicted of war crimes were transferred from their prison in Mankato to Camp McClellan at Davenport, Iowa. Indian hysteria was still at such a pitch in the Minnesota Valley that Dole feared physical harm to the Mankato prisoners if the time of the move were made public. An attempt was even made to obscure the real activities of the Indian office by releasing press rumors to the effect that the prisoners would be shipped to the Tortugas off the Gulf Coast.¹²

Complete secrecy was impossible, however, and by mid-April Mankatoans were well aware that the departure of the Sioux was imminent. Preparations at the prison near the landing indicated this several days before the steamboat "Favorite" stopped on its return from a trip to Fort Ridgely. Even the boat's officers did not know of their mission until they were halted and advised by Colonel Stephen Miller that he had cargo for them. When the boat was brought before the prison on the evening of April 21, it was evident that the long-awaited move was at hand. A "large crowd of ladies and gentlemen assembled at the steamboat landing" early on Wednesday morning. They were greeted by three companies of the Seventh Minnesota Regiment, formed in two lines between the crude log prison and the boat,

so that the Indians could pass without molestation.¹³

Joseph R. Brown, veteran Indian agent and politician, and Captain Davis R. Redfield had charge of the operation. Some fifteen or twenty women who had been serving as cooks and housekeepers for the prisoners were loaded first. They were followed by forty-eight acquitted men. Like most of the women, these were to be left at Fort Snelling to join the group destined for Dakota Territory. The convicts, chained in pairs, were checked out of the prison as Brown called their names. Three of them were so sick that they had to be carried on blankets. The *Record* claimed that despite the close confinement which had resulted in thirteen deaths in the previous four months, the general appearance of the prisoners was good. Most were quite "full and aldermanic," claimed the *Independent*, and "looked as if they had been living on the flesh pots of the land." Before the little side-wheeler steamed off on the morning of April 22, it took on board a military escort of eighty-five men from Company C of the Seventh Minnesota accompanied by Brown and Redfield.¹⁴

The three-day trip to Davenport was interrupted only by a brief halt at Fort Snelling and several wooding stops made far from settlements. At Camp McClellan the Indians were incarcerated in barracks within a wooden stockade and were guarded by units of the Second Iowa Regiment.¹⁵ About a quarter of them died in this prison, but within a few years the survivors were freed and sent to join their people.

John Wise of the Mankato *Record* probably spoke for the majority of Minnesotans when he avowed that "All believe they richly deserved hanging, but as the President would not consent to this, the next best thing was to take them away. This has been

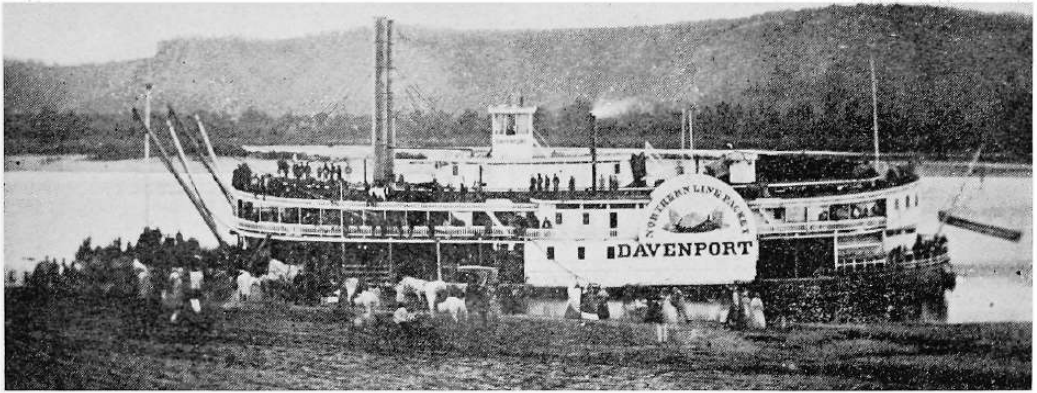
¹¹ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 304, 308, 310.

¹² *Record*, April 11, 1863.

¹³ *Mankato Independent*, April 24, 1863.

¹⁴ *Record*, April 25, 1863; *Mankato Independent*, April 24, 1863; *St. Paul Pioneer*, April 24, 1863.

¹⁵ *St. Paul Weekly Press*, April 30, 1863; *Pioneer*, April 29, 1863.



THE steamer "Davenport," photographed at Winona about 1870

done, and the people of our state and of this community especially are pleased with the riddance."¹⁶ On April 23, 1863, the editor of the *St. Paul Weekly Press* probed more deeply into the whole problem of the uprising and commented somewhat sententiously: "The massacre of the 18th of August was the protest of a dethroned dynasty, venerable as that of the Bourbon kings, against a usurpation—of prescription against change—of blind inertia against resistless progress. Little Crow was the Canute who would have set the limit of his royal prerogative to the advancing tide. . . . While we take vengeance on this wild freebooter of the plains, let us do him justice. We have cursed the assassin, let us pity the exile. It is not his fault that he belongs to an age and an order which no longer exists, and which has no place in the grand economy of the modern world."

THE SECOND phase of the removal was the transfer of the Sioux at Fort Snelling to their new reservation. The number of prisoners at the fort was roughly calculated at sixteen hundred during the winter of 1862–63. The figure varied from week to week because some stragglers were added, and

a "considerable number" died in the prison.¹⁷ A head count taken after those transferred from Mankato had joined the group showed a total of 1,455. Many of the prisoners were Christians and had been attended over the winter by three ministers sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Thomas S. Williamson, John P. Williamson, and Stephen R. Riggs. Two Episcopalian churchmen also worked among the captive Sioux: Bishop Henry B. Whipple and Samuel R. Hinman. Both church groups intended to continue their missionary activity on the new reservation.

The Indians were readied for transfer by Benjamin Thompson, brother of Superintendent Clark Thompson, who had been hired as a special agent to assist with the removal. One hundred thirty-seven Sioux and half-breeds, including the Campbell and Renville families, were to be retained at the fort. These included the scouts who were to accompany the proposed Sibley expedition of 1863, and their families, as well as other individuals who had remained friendly to the whites during the uprising. The 1,318 deportees included 176 men, 536 women, and 606 children. Colonel William Crooks, the commander at Fort Snelling, estimated that only 125 of the men were capable of bearing arms. The prisoners had but negligible agricultural equipment, and their clothing and tents were suitable only for summer use.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Record*, April 25, 1863.

¹⁷ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 313.

¹⁸ Charles E. Mix to C. L. Otis, May 18, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency.



JOHN P. Williamson (left) and Samuel D. Hinman, missionaries who accompanied the Sioux into exile. The picture of Williamson was taken a number of years later.

The Chouteau company decided to move the Sioux by steamboat from Fort Snelling to Hannibal, Missouri, where they would be transferred by rail across the state to St. Joseph. There they would again board steamers for the trip up the Missouri. Since the contractors did not have enough steamers available, they chartered two boats, the "Davenport" and the "Northerner," from the Northern Line Packet Company, one of the leading concerns in the St. Paul-St. Louis trade. The subsistence portion of the contract was sublet to Charles K. Winnly of Chicago.¹⁹

On May 4 the "Davenport" was moored at Fort Snelling and the loading process began. It was not a large boat, being only 205 feet long and 35 feet wide. Yet on it were crowded 771 Sioux, accompanied by the missionary, Hinman, and a forty-man military escort from Company G of the Tenth Minnesota.²⁰ These were the Indians being

moved with "ample space for comfort, health, and safety" as the contract specified!

At St. Paul the boat halted briefly to take on cargo. An ugly crowd gathered and, apparently goaded to violence by a soldier who had been wounded at the battle of Birch Coulee, commenced throwing rocks at the Indians. Those crowded on the boiler deck could not escape the barrage, and several women were injured. The mob was stilled only after the captain commanding the military escort threatened a bayonet charge. A reporter for the *Press* labeled the mob action a "gross outrage" because the prisoners on the "Davenport" were peaceful Indians, not war criminals. Moreover, he pointed out, at the time of the attack they

¹⁹ *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 7, 1863; Mix to Otis, May 18, 1863.

²⁰ Mix to Otis, May 18, 1863; *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 7, 1863; *St. Paul Pioneer*, April 22, May 6, 1863.

were engaged in singing hymns and praying.²¹

Before the "Davenport" reached Hannibal, word was received that the boat which was to rendezvous with the Indians at St. Joseph had been delayed. This being the case, little time was to be saved by rail transfer, and the contractor took the cheaper course of sending the Indians all the way by boat. After arriving in St. Louis on May 8, they were immediately transferred to the steamer "Florence," which started for the upper Missouri the next day.²² This was the only group to travel entirely via the rivers.

The balance of the exiled Sioux were put aboard the "Northerner" on May 5. This group of 547 was accompanied by Benjamin Thompson and John Williamson. They were not as crowded as those on the "Davenport" had been because the "Northerner" was pulling three barges which carried some of the prisoners. The four-day trip, interrupted by many freight stops, was slow and uneventful. Williamson complained that the Indians had no doctor or interpreter, and he was apprehensive — as no doubt the Sioux were also — because their destination was still unknown.²³

After arriving in Hannibal on Saturday, May 9, the prisoners were held over until Monday. This weekend stop, Williamson observed, was "not because the managers had any respect for the Sabbath, but because a

Railroad bridge had been broken."²⁴ The delay gave the young missionary a chance to conduct Sunday services in the warehouse where the Sioux were quartered. On Monday afternoon the Indians were crowded into freight cars, about sixty to a car, and taken on an overnight ride across Missouri to St. Joseph.²⁵ There they camped in tents on the river bank to await the arrival of the "Florence," which was moving up the Missouri from St. Louis with the first group of prisoners. Williamson and the Indians anticipated a delay of one or two days at the most, but they did not reckon with the contrary river. They were to wait in St. Joseph for six days while the "Florence" labored over the sand bars of the unusually low "Big Muddy."

During their stay the Indians were visited by hundreds of curious people. The *Morning Herald* of St. Joseph, obviously conditioned by Missouri experiences in the Civil War, persisted in identifying the Indians as "the Sioux tribe of the Copperheads." Thompson was reported to be "gentlemanly and obliging," and Williamson was identified as "the Interpreter."²⁶

On Sunday morning, May 17, the "Florence" hove in sight, "literally swarming with Sioux Indians."²⁷ On Monday morning the boat, already covered from "deck to deck," received the other 547 who had been camped on the river banks. Williamson wrote: "we all crowded in — I can't tell where — some around behind the wheel-house — some between the pumps[,] some under the boilers, some on the fore deck, but the most up on the hurricane roof."²⁸

The thirteen hundred desperately crowded Sioux embarked on the eight-hundred-mile trip upstream still uncertain of where they were going, knowing only that the river would get lower with each passing mile. Thirteen of them died en route. They were, according to Williamson, fed ample quantities of pork and bread, but since they had no fresh water, they drank the filth-laden river water, which contributed immeasurably to the rate of sickness.²⁹ The entire trip was a

²¹ *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 7, 1863.

²² John P. Williamson to Thomas S. Williamson, May 25, 1863, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society; *Daily Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), May 9, 1863.

²³ *St. Paul Pioneer*, May 6, 1863; Mix to Otis, May 18, 1863; John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, May 9, 1863, Williamson Papers.

²⁴ John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, May 25, 1863.

²⁵ John P. to Mrs. Thomas S. Williamson, May 13, 1863, Williamson Papers.

²⁶ *Morning Herald* (St. Joseph, Missouri), May 13, 14, 1863.

²⁷ *Morning Herald*, May 19, 1863.

²⁸ John P. Williamson to Stephen R. Riggs, May 25, 1863, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁹ Williamson to Riggs, May 25, 1863.

boatman's nightmare. The meandering and shallow channel prevented nighttime navigation; working over sand bars caused long delays; high winds forced stops. The boat's officers spent two days working the craft over a single bar above St. Joseph. In order to lessen the draft, the prisoners were unloaded, sometimes with baggage, and made to walk across the bars and wait for the steamer. On one such occasion the Sioux waited most of a day without food, part of the time in a drenching rain.³⁰ The physical condition of the prisoners steadily deteriorated on the trip, and they eagerly looked forward to their arrival at the reservation, wherever it might be. They all knew that Superintendent Thompson had gone ahead of them to select the site.

Thompson's equipment and supplies had left St. Louis April 28 on the "Isabella." A week later he and his workmen met the boat in St. Joseph. On the way upstream a day was lost when the craft hit a snag which tore a hole through the engine area. Then some of the workmen had second thoughts about living in Indian country and departed without notice.³¹

Thompson expected to complete his list of provisions by purchasing beef and oxen in Sioux City, but there he found that many of the available cattle had been bought up by the military in preparation for an expedition against the hostile Sioux. He purchased some animals on an overland trip from Sioux City to Yankton and then continued across country to select the reservation site. The much-delayed "Isabella" overtook him above Fort Randall on May 25. Realizing that the Sioux had left St. Joseph some days earlier, Thompson hastily reconnoitered and on May 26 decided to locate the reservation near the mouth of Crow Creek, about 150 miles above Fort Randall. The site had a fairly good stand of timber, but the grass in the surrounding area was already parched by a severe drouth. Thompson's men unloaded the "Isabella" on May 28, only two days before the arrival of the sick and exhausted Sioux.³²

A FEW DAYS after the Sioux had left Fort Snelling, Dole instructed Saint Andre Durand Balcombe, the Winnebago agent, to assemble his charges, advise them of their forthcoming removal, and above all to disarm them.³³ The commissioner feared possible "collision and bloodshed," because white settlers were eager to begin spring planting on the patches of ground cleared and cultivated by the Winnebago. Conversely, although the settlers wanted the Indians' land, they were anxious to have the red men strictly confined to the reservation until they were permanently removed. Although Dole's orders were sent out on April 10, Balcombe maintained that he had not received them until April 24. He held a council with the Winnebago the next day and officially informed them that the government intended to remove them soon to a reservation on the Missouri.³⁴

The much-traveled tribe, victimized by the Sioux Uprising, was reluctant to move. Baptiste Lassallieur, the half-breed head chief, was at first strongly opposed to the move and was quoted as saying that the upper Missouri was "a d—n cold country — no wood; been there — knows all about it; d—n bad country for Indian."³⁵ Baptiste and Little Priest, another prominent chief, changed their minds within a week as the traders' houses were closed and the agency supplies were packed and freighted into Mankato. They were undoubtedly influenced by the presence of troops at Mankato and on the reservation. Only old Chief Win-

³⁰ Williamson to Riggs, May 25, 1863.

³¹ Thompson to Dole, May 13, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency.

³² Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 310.

³³ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 305. Like Thompson, Balcombe had been a prominent Minnesota Republican and a strong supporter of Wilkinson. He had served in the territorial legislature and as presiding officer of the Republican section of the state constitutional convention in 1857. See J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, 1:543n (Lincoln, 1905).

³⁴ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 305; Balcombe to Dole, May 12, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Winnebago Agency.

³⁵ *Record*, May 2, 1863.

neshiek and his 750 followers continued to hold out against removal.

The Indians began arriving in Mankato on Tuesday, May 5, and by the end of the week about half of the tribe's nearly two thousand members were assembled at Camp Porter on the bank of the Minnesota River. This temporary camp was named in honor of John J. Porter, a Mankato tanner and politician who had actively fomented local demands for the Winnebago deportation. The gathering was supervised by Justus C. Ramsey, a brother of Governor Alexander Ramsey, who went to Mankato as a special agent.³⁶

The bands of Baptiste and Little Priest made their Mankato farewell a lively occasion. A few days before moving to town some of Little Priest's warriors had killed two Sioux who were seeking refuge on the Winnebago reservation. The two Sioux men, one of whom was married to a Winnebago woman, were evidently slain because some of the Winnebago blamed their expulsion from Minnesota on the Sioux Uprising, and reasoned that they could win favor with the great white father by killing his enemies. The nature of the deed and the ceremonies that followed it merely confirmed what settlers had long contended: that the Winnebago were barbarians. The bodies were scalped and dismembered, and when the Winnebago arrived in Mankato, they bore the fresh scalps stretched in hoops attached to poles adorned with paint and ribbons, and triumphantly paraded them before the whites.³⁷

Mankatoans became increasingly anxious to be rid of their guests as the number increased to about a thousand by May 9. The Indians, not content with the confines of Camp Porter, swarmed over the town, visiting stores, examining the scaffold on which the thirty-eight condemned Sioux had been

hanged, and parading up and down Front Street. Some of the warriors, besmeared with mud and paint, held scalp dances. These were accompanied by drums and guttural chants, and were probably designed to intimidate the whites, rather than entertain them.³⁸

The "occupation" of Mankato ended on May 9 and 10 when three Minnesota River packets took nearly twelve hundred Winnebago down to Fort Snelling. Final ceremonies included an all-night scalp dance which began on the eve of embarkation and continued during the actual departure. A war party with the two Sioux scalps took a position on the hurricane deck of one of the boats, and as it steamed off, the braves waved the scalps aloft to the accompaniment of chants and drums.³⁹

The Minnesota was unusually low, exposing more than the ordinary number of snags and sand bars. The boats made the trip to the mouth of the river in three days, but with much difficulty. One of them, the "Eolian," struck a snag between Henderson and Belle Plaine, ripping a thirty-foot hole in the hull and sinking the craft in three feet of water. It was bailed out and the hole repaired, but continuous use of pumps was necessary during the remainder of the trip. The "Favorite," loaded with 350 Indians as well as wheat, ran aground just out of Mankato and broke a shaft, rendering one of the wheels inoperative. The crippled boat was run to St. Peter, where it lay over most of a day for repairs. Farther down the river, at Little Rapids just above Chaska, the "Favorite" hit an exposed reef. In order to pass through the rapids, it was necessary to unload the Winnebago and three hundred sacks of wheat.⁴⁰

Arrival at Fort Snelling was marked by a near clash between the tribes. Some of the Sioux scouts at the fort, on hand to watch the disembarking, were enraged when the Winnebago came off the boat waving the two bloody scalps and shouting insults at the Sioux. Fortunately, none of the Indians were armed. During their brief stay at the fort,

³⁶ *Record*, May 2, 9, 1863.

³⁷ *Record*, May 16, 1863.

³⁸ *Mankato Independent*, May 15, 1863.

³⁹ *Mankato Independent*, May 15, 1863; *Record*, May 16, 1863.

⁴⁰ *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 14, 1863.

the Winnebago held two scalp dances and sold trinkets to sight-seers.⁴¹

Major Edwin A. C. Hatch, special Indian agent in charge of the group at Fort Snelling, made arrangements for their removal on the Chouteau-chartered steamer "Canada." Winnly, Chouteau's subsistence contractor, was also on hand, as was John Cleveland, a former employee at the Winnebago agency, who was to accompany the Indians to their new reservation. The "Canada," loaded with more than seven hundred Winnebago and a military escort, steamed off for Hannibal on May 13. It was followed two days later by the "Davenport," which carried some four hundred Indians, escorted by Lieutenant Michael R. Merrill and forty-two men of the Tenth Minnesota. Both groups of Indians crossed Missouri by rail and reached St. Joseph about a week after they had left Minnesota.⁴²

Meanwhile, in Mankato, the reluctant Winneshiek and his followers were brought to heel. On May 11 Captain Alonzo J. Edgerton with four men of the Tenth Minnesota visited the chief at Lake Elysian, about

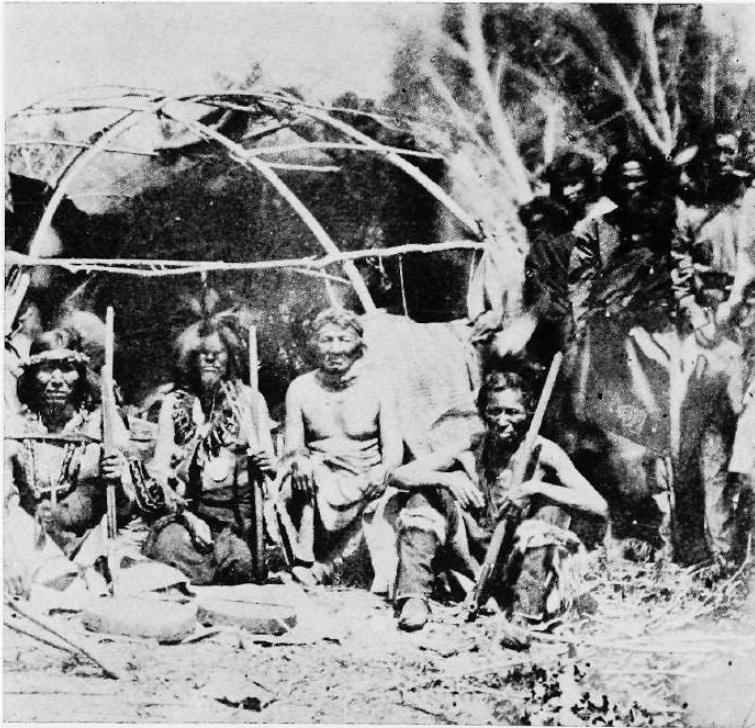
twenty-five miles east of Mankato, and told him that he had half an hour to decide whether or not to come in peacefully. Winneshiek's invitation to council was refused by Edgerton, and the aged rebel reluctantly consented to move. All his people were at Camp Porter by the end of the following day. The journey to Fort Snelling was again accompanied by difficulties due to low water. Some of the Indians had to be transported part way by wagon, because boats were having difficulty reaching Mankato.⁴³

Charles E. Mix, chief clerk of the commissioner of Indian affairs, went to Minnesota to assist Agent Balcombe and Major Hatch in the removal of the last of the Winnebago. When all were assembled at Fort Snelling, 748 Indians were put aboard the "Davenport," which was taking its third load of

⁴¹ *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 14, 21, 1863.

⁴² *St. Paul Weekly Press*, May 21, 1863; *St. Paul Pioneer*, May 14, 1863; *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), May 22, 1863; *Morning Herald*, May 19, 24, 1863.

⁴³ *Record*, May 16, 23, 1863; *St. Paul Pioneer*, May 19, 20, 1863; *St. Peter Tribune*, May 23, 1863.



WINNESHIEK (second from left) and a group of his followers

Indians downriver. It is unlikely that the escort of thirty-nine men of the Tenth Minnesota under Lieutenant Ebenezer H. Kennedy were any more comfortable than the prisoners. Under the leadership of Hatch, the Indians arrived at St. Joseph on June 3.⁴⁴ Their kinsmen had departed a week earlier for Crow Creek.

While the Winnebago waited in St. Joseph for a boat to take them up the Missouri, they provided a lively spectacle for the townspeople. The earlier arrivals, the bands led by Baptiste and Little Priest, amused themselves by wandering through the town, visiting stores, and engaging in bear and scalp dances. The bear dance was occasioned by the visit of some forty braves to a captive grizzly bear, an animal which evidently held a high place in Winnebago lore. After dancing around his "bearship"—a sobriquet coined by the *Morning Herald*—the warriors continued their dancing and imitative bear grunting around a bear's head which they used for ceremonial purposes.⁴⁵

This dance was brief and quiet compared to the scalp dance which followed it. The latter observance, centered on the two Sioux scalps, lasted with only minor breaks from a Saturday to the next Wednesday night. The Indians "danced, sang, yelled, whooped, made talks, howled, grimaced, drummed, whistled, stamped and grunted." The ceremony was finally halted by the order to embark on the "West Wind," a regular packet which was stripped of its cabin furniture to make room for the Indians. The boat departed on May 27 and arrived at Crow Creek on June 8.⁴⁶

Winneshiek's Indians were visited by hundreds of spectators during their eleven-day

⁴⁴ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 311; *St. Paul Pioneer*, May 28, 1863; *Morning Herald*, June 4, 1863.

⁴⁵ *Morning Herald*, May 23, 24, 28, 1863.

⁴⁶ *Morning Herald*, May 27, 28, 1863; Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 318.

⁴⁷ *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownsville), June 4, 1863.

⁴⁸ *Morning Herald*, June 14, 16, 1863.

⁴⁹ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 317.

⁵⁰ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 317.

stay in St. Joseph, and perhaps made wily by their many travels, they took up collections among the onlookers during their ceremonial dances.⁴⁷ The steamer "Florence," ordered by Major Hatch to transport the group upriver, arrived at St. Joseph on Sunday morning, June 14, after the Indians had spent Saturday afternoon and night performing their war dance. The order to load interfered with a scheduled afternoon powwow which was to have included a scalp dance and an address by Chief Little Thunder. The warriors, in a refractory mood over the move to Dakota, and particularly resenting the interruption of their ceremony, refused to board. Lieutenant Kennedy informed them that the boat must be loaded by one o'clock in the afternoon or they would be driven on at bayonet point. This threat first intimidated the women, who struck their tents, packed them up, and went on board. After further counseling by their agent, the warriors reluctantly followed.⁴⁸ The "Florence" reached Crow Creek on June 24, making fairly good time considering the low water in the Missouri. Its arrival completed the transfer of 1,306 Sioux and 1,945 Winnebago from Minnesota to Dakota Territory.⁴⁹

THUS, in the space of a few short weeks, a small, previously uninhabited area near the mouth of Crow Creek was transformed into one of the largest population centers in the territory. The Indians were attended to by Thompson, about fifty workmen, and a forty-man guard of the Dakota militia. During the month of June Thompson's workmen broke sod, assembled the sawmill and put it into operation, and constructed a wooden stockade four hundred feet square to enclose the agency buildings. The Sioux and the Winnebago were assigned to separate but adjacent reservations, and the stockade was located near the dividing line so that both could be serviced by one agent.⁵⁰ During this period of initial construction, Thompson named the place Usher's Landing in honor of the secretary of

the interior. Within a few weeks, however, others were calling it by the name it was to retain: Fort Thompson.

Adjustment to the new environment at Fort Thompson proved even more trying to the Indians than their forced exodus had been. Separated only by the staked boundary line, the Sioux and the Winnebago lived in constant fear of each other. The former, still alarmed by the scalping of their two tribesmen in Minnesota, feared renewed Winnebago hostilities; the latter had more warriors, but they feared raids from hostile Sioux who were roaming the Dakota prairies and who might be lured to Fort Thompson by their kinsfolk.

The Winnebago, who had always lived in wooded areas, loathed their new location. The open grassy country that stretched endlessly away from the Missouri was parched by drouth; it was compared to the appearance of Minnesota when the grass had dried after a killing frost. Clouds of dust, moved by high prairie winds, added to the desolation. Prairie fires were no threat, said one Minnesota observer, because the grass was so sparse that a fire could not spread from one clump to the next.⁵¹

Williamson, skeptical of the idea of subsistence through farming, talked to a French trader who had planted squaw corn in the area for a number of years. "Sometimes she grow, and sometimes she grow not," was the reply.⁵² The missionary pessimistically concluded that the "Indians can never remain here without a great expense to the Government, and such an expense as the Government will never go to."⁵³ His prophecy was borne out. Dole had counted heavily on crops, so he had made little provision for annuities. The supplies purchased in St. Louis were delayed by the condition of the Missouri, which continually worsened through fifty rainless midsummer days. Some provisions were finally hauled in by wagon from Sioux City, but they were inadequate.

By July 22, seventy of the thirteen hundred Sioux at Crow Creek had died.⁵⁴ As

conditions on the reservation worsened, many of the Winnebago left. Winter came, and there was not enough food; nor was there adequate clothing and shelter. Over the winter countless numbers of the remaining Indians died. Finally, in 1865, the Winnebago were relocated on a somewhat more hospitable reservation in northeastern Nebraska, and a year later those that remained of the Sioux were moved into northern Nebraska.

The demands of the state government and people of Minnesota had thus been met; the Indians had been effectively removed from the boundaries of civilization. In the process they had also been removed—inadvertently perhaps—from the boundaries of concern for human life. The bureaucratic callousness which allowed this is in some ways less forgivable than the passionate ferocity of the Indians themselves. It is easy to feel with Samuel Hinman, who, appalled by the plight of the Sioux, wrote to Whipple: "Bishop if I were an Ind[ian] I would never lay down the war-club while I lived."⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Mankato Independent*, July 11, 1863.

⁵² John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, June 9, 1863, Williamson Papers.

⁵³ Martha L. Riggs to J. S. Wheelock, June 25, 1863, Riggs Papers.

⁵⁴ John P. Williamson to Stephen R. Riggs, July 22, 1863, Riggs Papers.

⁵⁵ Hinman to Whipple, June 8, 1863, Henry B. Whipple Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society.

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