

THE REVIEW.

Mankato, Minn., April 27, 1886.

(Written for the REVIEW.)

The Knights of the Forest.

A CHAPTER OF SECRET HISTORY.

No event in the history of Minnesota caused more universal anxiety and alarm in the minds of its citizens, than the Sioux massacre of 1862. Mankato was then a frontier town. The whole country west of us had been devastated by the blood-thirsty Indians, about a thousand of our people murdered by these savages; their houses and crops destroyed; our town converted into a camp of fugitives, and a hospital for wounded men, women and children. It is no wonder that a bitter and revengeful feeling prevailed among the white settlers.

Added to all this, there was a general feeling of insecurity, arising from the fact that only three miles from Mankato lay the Winnebago Indian reservation, on which this tribe had a few years before been placed by the United States government, occupying nine townships of the most fertile and best watered portion of Blue Earth and Waseca counties. The white settlers on this track had been driven from their homes to make room for the Indians. Some of them who tried to hold their claims were subjected to constant threats, annoyances and depredations by the savages until they, too, unable to exist longer in such continual fear, abandoned their homes, and the land which they had hoped soon to behold occupied by a prosperous community, was forced by process of law to remain a wilderness.

These Winnebagoes were known to be friendly with the Sioux, and only the most watchful care and vigilance had prevented them from joining in the murderous raid. Our people felt that the future prosperity of Mankato, and indeed of all this region, depended on obtaining the speedy removal of the Winnebagoes from our vicinity, and then from our State. It was, however, a difficult project owing to the great influence with the government of those whose interest it was to have them remain, and the case seemed almost hopeless.

While affairs were in this condition, the date being the last of December, 1862, or the first of January 1863, three persons, two of them citizens of Mankato, and one of Garden City, conversing about the situation, conceived the idea of forming a secret order, whose object should be the removal of all Indians from the State. Having confided the project to others, chosen men, believed to be favorable, and found to be so, they organized a lodge that very night, in a building in block 14, opposite the levee, and adopted the name, "Knights of the Forest." They believed that by uniting men of both political parties to work for a common object, throwing over their proceedings the mysterious veil of secrecy, they would be able to wield more power than by working openly by petitions or otherwise.

This lodge afterwards met in a carpenters' shop which stood on the corner of Front and Jackson streets, where the *Free Press* office now stands. Then in an office in block 14 again, near Walnut street. Than a few times in the Masonic Hall, in Marks' stone building, and probably in other places. They considered it expedient to move from place to place, lest they might attract attention by meeting many times in one building.

The lodge grew to a considerable size. It included in its membership many of the most prominent and influential men of Mankato and Blue Earth county, some of whom still live among us, and have not forgotten the ancient grip and sign, which have frequently, even in these latter years, afforded a means of recognition between men who would otherwise have regarded each other as strangers. A ritual was adopted. The presiding officer was called Worthy Chancellor, other officers were Past Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Conductor, Assistant Conductor, Recording and Financial Secretaries and Sentinel. At the opening of the lodge the Chancellor addressed the members as follows:

"OFFICERS AND MEMBERS:—The objects for which we are assembled are worthy of our cause. It is no less than the preservation of our lives, our families and our homes. Let us be ever watchful and keep constantly in mind the sacred obligation which binds us together as brothers in one common interest. I

sincerely hope that this meeting may be profitable to each one of us, and that we may go forth from this lodge stronger and braver in the determination to banish forever from our beautiful State every Indian who now desecrates its soil."

The Vice Chancellor then proclaimed the lodge open in the following words:

"I declare this lodge open for the transaction of business, and for extending universal opposition to all tribes of Indians in the State of Minnesota."

At the initiation, the candidate was asked the following questions before he was admitted to the lodge room:

Do you promise, upon your honor, that you will keep all secrets and informa-

tion which we may here reveal to you? Are you in favor of the removal of all tribes of Indians from the State of Minnesota? Will you sacrifice all political and other preferences to accomplish that object? Will you do all in your power to elect to office such men only as will favor such removal? Do you desire to become a member of an order having for its object the removal of all Indians from this State, called the Knights of the Forest?"

These questions having been satisfactorily answered, he was led by the conductor within the lodge room, and introduced to the Vice Chancellor, who addressed him, explaining the objects of the order. After this the candidate took the obligation, which was as follows:

"I, _____, of my own free will and accord, in the full belief that every Indian should be removed from the State, by the memory of the inhuman cruelties perpetrated upon defenceless citizens, and in the presence of the members of the order here assembled, do most solemnly promise, without any mental reservation whatever, to use every exertion and influence in my power, to cause the removal of all tribes of Indians from the State of Minnesota. I will sacrifice every political and other preference to accomplish that object. I will not aid or assist in any manner to elect to office in this State or the United States any person outside of this order who will not publicly or privately pledge himself for the permanent removal of all tribes of Indians from the State of Minnesota. I will protect and defend at every hazard, all members in carrying out the objects of this order. I will faithfully observe the constitution, rules and by-laws of this lodge or any grand or working lodge of Knights of the Forest to which I may be attached. I will never in any manner reveal the name, existence or secrets of this order to any person not entitled to know the same. And in case I should be expelled or vol-

intarily withdraw from the order, I will consider this obligation still binding. To all of which I pledge my sacred honor."

After receiving this obligation the candidate was required to sign the constitution, and was then instructed in the grip, sign and password, after which the Past Worthy Chancellor addressed him with congratulatory remarks, and finally the hancellor proclaimed him a worthy knight, entitled to all the rights of the order.

When the lodge had increased to a considerable size, having in its membership not only many citizens of Mankato, but also several from the surrounding country, applications began to come for the forming of other lodges. A grand lodge was therefore organized, with headquarters at Mankato, which proceeded to grant charters to subordinate lodges, several of which were formed in the winter and spring of 1863; one at Garden City, which met in the garret of an unoccupied house; one at Meriden, Steele county, and others, the names and locations of which are now lost, the records of the grand lodge and of Mankato lodge having been destroyed by fire.

The nature of the business transacted in these lodges will be readily understood from a perusal of the obligation recited above. One noteworthy act of the Mankato lodge, however, merits particular attention. This was the employment of a certain number of men, members of the order, whose duty was to lie in ambush on the outskirts of the Winnebago Reservation, and shoot any Indian who might be observed outside the lines. It is not the province of this sketch to relate how many, if any, Indians were thus disposed of. It is sufficient to say that the designated parties went out on their scouting excursions, and in due time returned and reported. For obvious reasons their reports were not made matter of record.

The Winnebagos were removed in May 1863, and with their removal, and the opening of the reservation for settlement, the immediate reason for the organization of the Knights of the Forest ceased to exist. The order, however, had done its work. There is no doubt that its prestige was magnified in the minds of the people, and of the government, by the secrecy thrown around its proceedings.

This mystery had its effect on the government, and it is very probable that without it the removal of the Indians might have been delayed for years, as there was a strong and influential party whose interest it was to have them remain.

There is no betrayal of trust in publishing these matters now since the object for which the order was constituted having been accomplished, and the order itself having ceased forever, the people are now among those who, in the language of the ritual, are "entitled to know the same."

Those who carefully read the obligation may wonder how new members were obtained, since the obligation prohibited revealing the name or existence of the order. It was the practice to approach those who were believed to be in sympathy with the project of removing the Indians, and talk with them in a casual manner on this subject, and finally, unless they themselves suggested it, ask them what they thought of the propriety of forming such an order. If the result of the interview was favorable, a report was then made to the lodge; it was talked over, and if a ballot being had, the person was elected, he was then requested confidentially to come to a certain place at a certain time, where he would meet others who were ready to join him. On arriving at the designated place, and not before, he discovered that the lodge was already in existence.

Mankato's First School House.

VENTURA, Cal., Sept. 23rd, 1893.

EDITORS OF REVIEW:—I am asked for a short statement of the first seminary of learning in Mankato, "The Old Log School House."

Late in the summer of 1855, Rev. James Thomson, with others, consulted about the situation of the community as to a place for public worship, and for a school.

The first plan seemed to be to build by subscription a house for worship, which should be used for a school house. There was no school district organized, and perhaps no school law. I remember well that Mr. George M. Van Brunt said no to the proposition, but said he would build a school house, and it should be used for church service.

This plan was adopted, and the house was built of logs, hewn on one side, which were laid to face inwards, the outside showing the round side, or nature's architecture. The size was 24 by 30 feet. A door in the south end, and two windows in the east side, and two in the west, constituted the openings.

Any other material for the building was very hard to get. John S. Hinckley had a pile of pine lumber on lot 1, block 13, but it was held sacred for the dead it seemed, as it was never used except for coffins, and Mr. Hinckley was looked upon as a provident friend in such cases. No other good lumber was in reach. All the people joined in the expense of the building.

It was completed about Dec. 1st, 1855, and unadorned, it filled its purpose for ten years as a church and school house of Mankato, until the Union school building was erected in 1866, eleven years later, on the same lots and immediately in front of its predecessor.

John S. Hinckley donated one of the lots, and the Mankato Claim Company assumed payment for the other.

The first school was taught by L. G. M. Fletcher, and was the commencement of a course of education of which Mankato may well be congratulated. Of the scholars that look back to the "Old Log School House," as a once scholastic house, the learned professions may all be proud.

A. D. SEWARD.

THE AIM OF LIFE.

I love to feel when sinks the sun
That there is something I have done,
For which the world is better.
However small the act may be,
If something good has gone from me,
The world remains my debtor.

I hold the aim of him is less
Who seeks for his own happiness
Than his who lives for others.
For, stripped of vanity and pride,
The brightest truth the whole world wide
Is this—"That men are Brothers."

So may we be content to find
The satisfaction of the mind
Which comes from noble living;
And we shall see our little store,
Depleted oft increasing more,
And multiplied through giving.

[SELECTED.]