



THE US-DAKOTA WAR OF 1862

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This news release and high-resolution images are available online at www.usdakotawar.org/media.

REVISITING A WAR THAT CHANGED MINNESOTA FOREVER

New exhibit at the Minnesota History Center and other initiatives mark 150 years since the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862

ST. PAUL (March 2012)—Throughout this year, the Minnesota Historical Society will offer Minnesotans many new ways to learn about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, how it shaped our state and how its bitter consequences are still felt today.

“No series of events in Minnesota history is as important as the chain of events that led to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 and its terrible aftermath,” said Stephen Elliott, Minnesota Historical Society director and CEO. “These shocking events are central to the story of Minnesota. They produced historical traumas that still echo in those living today.”

With these new initiatives, funded in part by the Legacy Amendment, the Society intends to encourage discussion and reflection about the war, its causes and aftermath. Initiatives include:

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Exhibit

Opening June 30, a new exhibit at the Minnesota History Center will offer visitors the opportunity to view documents, images and artifacts relating to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

Exhibit development is one aspect of the “Truth Recovery Project,” a process through which exhibit staff members are meeting with descendants of those touched by the war. Meeting participants are taking an active role in shaping the exhibit by discussing the significance and interpretation of artifacts and primary sources from the Society’s collections.

The final exhibit will incorporate multiple points of view on the war, its causes and its aftermath. Visitors will be encouraged to look closely at the primary sources in the exhibit, to consider the Society’s longstanding role in shaping public perception of these events and to draw their own conclusions about what happened and why. Throughout the exhibit, visitors will have opportunities to add their own comments and reactions to the ongoing interpretation of this critical point in Minnesota history.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Website: www.usdakotawar.org

This interactive website will tell stories of the war and its aftermath through oral histories, photos, journals, letters, newspapers, government documents and other primary resources. The site will also provide resources for classroom use. The site will debut in phases throughout this year.

Oral History Project

Society staff members are recording dozens of oral histories from Dakota elders and settler descendants to be entered into the Society's permanent collection. Full transcripts and audio versions will be available to the public at www.usdakotawar.org.

Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Mobile History Tour

In May, the public will hear multiple perspectives and stories told by descendants of those touched by the war in this media-rich cell phone tour of significant places along the Minnesota River Valley. The tour will also be available online and by phone from any location.

Additional Initiatives

Other new initiatives related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 include publications, educational tools, interpretive signage at historic sites related to the war, a children's photo project and public programs. For an updated list, visit www.usdakotawar.org/initiatives.

The Society encourages all Minnesotans to take advantage of these new opportunities for a deeper understanding of this tragic and important chapter in our state's history.

"If we are to move forward, we must look back to learn," Elliott said. "To understand this painful legacy is to better understand ourselves and where we are today."

Many projects and programs related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 are made possible by the Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008.

The Minnesota Historical Society is a non-profit educational and cultural institution established in 1849. Its essence is to illuminate the past as a way to shed light on the future. The Society collects, preserves and tells the story of Minnesota's past through museum exhibits, libraries and collections, historic sites, educational programs and book publishing.

The U.S. Dakota War of 1862

Exhibit and Truth Recovery Project

Starting in July, visitors to the Minnesota History Center will have the opportunity to examine evidence from the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Inside a new exhibit, visitors will find documents, images and artifacts from the Society's collections.

- Accession records will accompany artifacts for those visitors interested in learning how the Society acquired them.
- Commentary from descendants of those touched by the war will provide multiple viewpoints.
- Throughout the exhibit, visitors will be encouraged to draw their own conclusions about what happened and why and will be invited to add their own observations to the exhibit.

The war, its causes and its aftermath had a profound impact in shaping Minnesota. Historical trauma created by the war still echoes in those living today.

“The impact of historical trauma passes from generation to generation,” said Dan Spock, director of the Minnesota History Center. “This trauma still resonates with the Dakota and with descendants of settlers in the Minnesota River Valley.”

Staff has dubbed the process used to create the exhibit the “Truth Recovery Project.” It is inspired by Healing Through Remembering, a group that deals with the legacy of conflict in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

“A full truth recovery process would look at the causes, nature and extent of a conflict, recording ‘what happened’ but also who did what to whom and why. In conflictual societies where competing versions of what happened often exist, a truth recovery process seeks to increase society’s understanding and potentially acceptance of the facts.”

– Conversation Guide on Dealing with the Past, Healing Through Remembering

The Truth Recovery Project involves meetings between exhibits staff and descendants of those touched by the war. Sessions are being held with Dakota people from throughout the Midwest and Canada, with residents of Brown County, Minn., where much of the fighting happened, and with many others who are interested in the exhibit and its contents.

The term “truth recovery” may imply that there is a single truth about what happened before, during and after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. In fact, there are multiple, often conflicting, interpretations about what happened, why it happened and who was responsible.

“We are committed to an open, transparent process in developing this exhibit,” said exhibit developer Kate Roberts.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Projects and Programs**

Additional programs and observances will be added and communicated throughout the year.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Website: www.usdakotawar.org

This interactive website will tell stories of the war, its causes and its aftermath through oral histories, photos, journals, letters, newspapers, government documents and other primary sources from the Minnesota Historical Society's collections. The site will provide resources for classroom use and also link to resources for deeper research. The site will debut in phases throughout 2012.

Oral History Project

Society staff is recording dozens of oral histories from Dakota elders and settler descendants for the Society's permanent collection. Full transcripts and audio versions will be available to the public on the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 website, www.usdakotawar.org.

Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Mobile History Tour

In this media-rich cell phone tour, travelers along the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway will hear stories of the Dakota homeland, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, the settler experience and the struggle for land told by Dakota and settler descendants. The tour is funded by a grant from the National Scenic Byways Discretionary Grants Program administered by the Federal Highway Administration. Available in May 2012. The tour will roll out Memorial Day weekend with six audio stops. Expanded information and visuals will be added in September. An additional six stops will debut in 2013.

Treaty/1862 Computer Interactive

This educational tool, part of the "Our Minnesota" exhibit opening at the Minnesota History Center in fall 2012, will introduce schoolchildren to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. It will guide them through a series of choices related to treaties, including the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, one of the factors leading up to the war.

DE UNKIYEPI - 'We Are Here'

The Society is partnering with the Native American Community Development Institute to sponsor a juried art exhibit at All My Relations Gallery in Minneapolis in August 2012. Contemporary American Indian artists will show works related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. A smaller version of the exhibit will travel to the James J. Hill House Art Gallery in November 2012. Funded in part through a grant from the Grotto Foundation.

Children's Photo Project

Young people, including children of Dakota heritage, will learn to use cameras and produce images for use on the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 website, www.usdakotawar.org.

Public Programs

Throughout 2012, public programs at the Minnesota History Center and other historic sites related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 will provide multiple perspectives on the war. Programs will also give voice to Dakota history and identity through a variety of formats including lectures, films, tours and workshops. Visit www.usdakotawar.org/events for an updated list.

Education

In fall 2012, a new, interactive Dakota history lesson will be delivered to classrooms across the state and country using video conferencing technology. The lesson is being developed by the Society's award-winning History Live program.

Since 2010, workshops offered by the Society about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 have been giving teachers expert content knowledge and resources to help them accurately teach this subject from a variety of perspectives.

In addition, the Minnesota Historical Society will soon publish a revised edition of "Northern Lights," a Minnesota history textbook for grades 5-8 which includes chapters on the Dakota and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The revised edition will be available for the 2013-2014 school year.

The War and Legalities Exhibit

William Mitchell College of Law and the Society are collaborating on an exhibit focusing on treaties and legal matters related to the war. The exhibit, at William Mitchell, includes reproductions of documents and photos from the Society's collections and runs through March 30.

Interpretive Signage

New historic markers at Historic Fort Snelling describe the internment camp and the hangings of Dakota Chiefs Shakopee and Medicine Bottle. A third, to tell the story of the Indian Agency at Fort Snelling, will be added in spring 2012. At least nine historic markers at Fort Ridgely, the Lower Sioux Agency and the Upper Sioux Agency will be updated.

Historic Fort Snelling Interpretation

Visitors can learn about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 and its aftermath in an orientation film, a cell phone tour and on the fort's new website, www.historicfortsnelling.org. Detailed information about the Indian Agency and treaties is now available in the wood barracks. New signage about the Indian Agency will be installed by May 1. A travelling exhibit titled "Why Treaties Matter: Self-government in the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations," sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Center, will be at the fort May 1-30.

Historic Fort Snelling Online Lesson

A multimedia computer lesson will teach students in grades 9-12 about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 through the interpretation of primary resources. Classes can access the hour-long lesson online or at Historic Fort Snelling in fall 2012.

Virtual Tour: Fort Snelling Perspectives

Thousands of digitized maps, photos, letters and government documents relating to Fort Snelling will be available on the Historic Fort Snelling website, www.historicfortsnelling.org/collections. Three computer models of Fort Snelling will illustrate the fort during three time periods including 1862. The website will complement on-site interpretation at the fort, offer educational content for students and teachers, and allow everyone to visit Historic Fort Snelling via the web. The models were built by the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia in collaboration with the Minnesota Historical Society.

New MHS Press Publications

“Beloved Child: A Dakota Way of Life,” by Diane Wilson, investigates how Dakota people are transforming the legacy of colonization and assimilation into a better way of life for their children. August 2011.

“Dakota Women’s Work: Creativity, Culture and Exile,” by Colette Hyman, examines how the decorative work of Dakota women embodies the culture, spirit and history of the Dakota people, before, during and after exile. April 2012.

“Lincoln and the Indians,” by David A. Nichols, is the only thorough treatment of Lincoln’s American Indian policy during the Civil War and the corrupt “Indian System” of government aid that mainly benefited ambitious whites. May 2012.

“Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Afraid to Ask,” by Anton Treuer, addresses more than 100 stereotype-debunking questions with solid information, humor and compassion. May 2012.

“The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters: Dakota Kaskapi Okicize Wowapi,” by Clifford Canku and Michael Simon, shares 50 extraordinary letters written by Dakota men imprisoned after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The letters give direct witness to a harsh and painful history still felt by Minnesotans today. September 2012.

“Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota,” by Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, tells the detailed history of the Dakota people in their traditional homelands for hundreds of year prior to exile. September 2012.

“Tokaheya Dakota Iapi Kin: Beginning Dakota, 24 Language and Grammar Lessons with glossaries,” by Nicolette Knudson, Jody Snow and Clifford Canku. The Workbook, Teacher’s Edition and digital audio downloads of spoken word Dakota and English to accompany lessons will be available in spring 2012. Workbook, December 2010. Teacher’s Edition, August 2011.

A complete list of MHS Press titles can be found online at www.mhspress.org.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Spokespeople**

Stephen Elliott, Director and CEO of the Minnesota Historical Society, joined the Society in May 2011. Previously, Elliott was president and CEO of the New York State Historical Association where he led two related organizations with significant cultural collections: the Fenimore Art Museum with its world-class American Indian art and nationally important American folk and fine art collection, and The Farmers' Museum, an outdoor living history museum of 19th-century rural life. From 2000-2005, Elliott was the executive director of the First Freedom Center in Richmond, Va. In addition, he served the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for 28 years in various capacities including vice president of education, administration and planning. He also has served on numerous museum, history, education and civic boards and currently is the chair of the American Association for State and Local History.

Dan Spock, Director, Minnesota History Center, has worked in museums for more than 28 years in numerous positions including exhibit designer, exhibit developer and program administrator. At the Minnesota History Center, Spock oversees exhibits, including the development of the exhibit about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 and also educational programs, visitor services and facilities management.

John Crippen, Director of Historic Sites and Museums, has worked at the Minnesota Historical Society for nearly 25 years, with much of that time spent in State Historic Sites Network administration. Prior to his current position, he was director of Mill City Museum, and currently serves on the boards of the Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership and the Mill City Farmers Market. He holds a Master of Arts in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program in Cooperstown, New York.

Jennifer Jones, Director of Library and Collections, joined the Minnesota Historical Society in 2006. She holds a Master of Arts in American History from the College of William and Mary and did doctoral work in early American history. Prior to working at the Society, Jones was head of the Digital History Center and Visual Resources Department at the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Deborah Locke, Program Manager for Minnesota Historical Society Projects Related to 1862, joined the Society staff in September 2010. Locke assists in planning, promoting, providing content and overseeing the budget for projects related to the war's commemoration. Locke is a former newspaper editor, editorial board member and reporter.

Kevin Maijala, Manager for Curriculum Development and Teacher Education at the Minnesota Historical Society, has been with the Society for 12 years. He helped develop the exhibit at Lower Sioux Agency and has done extensive research and developed programs on U.S.-Dakota relations for Fort Snelling and the Sibley House Historic Site.

Continued on following page.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Spokespeople** (continued)

Kate Roberts, Senior Exhibit Developer, Minnesota History Center and exhibit developer for “The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862,” has worked for the Minnesota Historical Society since 1989. Roberts developed the permanent exhibits for Mill City Museum, the “Minnesota 150” exhibit at the Minnesota History Center and also developed interpretive signs at Birch Coulee. Roberts has taught several history-related courses and has written articles and books on Minnesota history.

Travis Zimmerman, Indian Affairs Liaison for the Minnesota Historical Society, also serves as Site Manager of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post. Zimmerman has served on several boards for American Indian non-profit organizations, and recently graduated from the Seminar for Historical Administration: Developing History Leaders program. Zimmerman is a Veteran of the United States Army and National Guard and received a BA in History from St. John’s University in Collegeville, MN.

Historic Sites Related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862

Alexander Ramsey House, St. Paul

Alexander Ramsey served as both the first governor of the Minnesota Territory and the second governor of the state. In 1851, as territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs for the Minnesota Territory, he negotiated treaties on behalf of the U.S. government with the Dakota for the cession of large areas of Minnesota land for white settlement.

Ramsey served as governor during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. He appointed his longtime friend and political rival Henry Sibley to command forces raised to fight against the Dakota, notoriously stating that “the Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the state.” Ramsey’s descendants willed the home and all of its contents to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1964. www.mnhs.org/ramseyhouse

Birch Coulee Battlefield, near Morton

Site of one of the hardest fought battles of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Visitors can tour the self-guided site where markers explain the battle from Dakota and U.S. soldiers’ perspectives. www.mnhs.org/birchcoulee

Fort Ridgely, Fort Ridgely State Park, near Fairfax

The fort was attacked twice after the U.S.-Dakota War broke out in August 1862. Visitors can see the reconstructed foundations of the 1853 fort and the restored commissary building. Visitors can also walk an interpretive trail that describes the history of the site. Managed by the Nicollet County Historical Society. www.mnhs.org/fortridgely

Historic Fort Snelling and Sibley House Historic Site, St. Paul and Mendota

Fort Snelling served as a launching point for soldiers sent to fight in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. After the war, Dakota prisoners were held in an internment camp, sometimes called a concentration camp, along the Mississippi River flats below the fort. Today, visitors can learn about the war and the camp, as well as military and civilian life at the fort over its 120 years of active duty.

Across the river from Fort Snelling, at the restored home of Col. Henry H. Sibley along with other historic buildings, visitors will hear about the fur-trade era of the early 19th century, Sibley's interaction with the Dakota before the war and how the fur trade was a primary reason for the establishment of the fort in the 1820s.

www.historicfortsnelling.org

Lac qui Parle Mission, near Montevideo

A mission established in 1835 where the first Dakota dictionary, grammar and gospel were completed. The site features artifacts and exhibits related to Dakota people and the missionaries who worked with them. Managed by the Chippewa County Historical Society.

www.mnhs.org/lacquiparle

Lower Sioux Agency, near Redwood Falls

The site of the outbreak of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, the visitor center features exhibits on Dakota history, life and culture. Self-guided interpretive trails allow visitors to explore the landscape and the warehouse building and to walk along the Minnesota River. Managed by the Lower Sioux Indian Community.

www.mnhs.org/lowersioux

Traverse des Sioux, near St. Peter

On a self-guided interpretive trail, visitors can explore the site of 1851 treaty negotiations between the U.S. government and the Dakota. Visitors to this site can learn about Dakota history and culture and the lives of the people who settled in the area. Managed by the Nicollet County Historical Society.

www.mnhs.org/traversedessioux.

The Nicollet County Historical Society's Treaty Site History Center is adjacent to Traverse des Sioux.

www.nchsmn.org/sites.html

Most of the Minnesota Historical Society sites listed above are open May-Sept. Please visit visitmnhistory.org for more information.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Resources**

Collections in the Library and Online

The Minnesota Historical Society has extensive collections of books, artifacts, letters, photographs and art related to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. The library catalog can be searched online at www.mnhs.org/library.

An online “History Topics” section, <http://sites.mnhs.org/library/node/92>, is available for the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. It includes a brief overview of the war and a list of primary and secondary resources for further research.

A timeline of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, is at www.usdakotawar.org/timeline.

The Society holds the largest single collection of Minnesota newspapers, with dates ranging from 1849 to the present day. The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 was widely covered in newspapers of the era. Access to selected newspapers is now available online at www.mnhs.org/newspapers.

Manuscript collections contain the papers of many people involved in the war, including multiple collections of letters and diaries from both settler and Dakota participants or witnesses.

www.mnhs.org/library

The Society holds numerous three-dimensional objects related to the war. Images of these objects can be viewed at www.mnhs.org/searchcollections . Enter “1862” into the box labeled “Search Term.” On the next page, in the left column, choose “3D Objects.”

New Historic Fort Snelling Website

An updated Historic Fort Snelling website, launched in May 2011, includes expanded content on Dakota and Ojibwe people, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, its causes and its aftermath, the fur trade and the Civil War.

www.historicfortsnelling.org

Books

The Minnesota Historical Society Press offers a number of books about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 as well as Dakota history and culture and the lives and experiences of white settlers and public figures of the time.

www.mhspress.org

Histories of the War and Biographies of Major Participants

“Lincoln and the Indians,” by David A. Nichols, May 2012

“Creating Minnesota: A History from the Inside Out,” Annette Atkins

“The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota’s Other Civil War,” Kenneth Carley

“Henry H. Sibley: Divided Heart,” Rhoda R. Gilman

“A History of Minnesota,” Vols. 2, p. 109-302, William Watts Folwell

“Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862,” Gary Clayton Anderson

“Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux,” Gary Clayton Anderson
“Little Crow,” Gwenyth Swain
“Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862” Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds.

Books About Dakota People

“Mni Sota Makoce,” Gwen Westerman and Bruce White,” September 2012
“The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters: Dakota Kaskapi Okicize Wowapi,” by Clifford Canku and Michael Simon, September 2012
“Spirit Car: Journey to a Dakota Past,” Diane Wilson
“Beloved Child: A Dakota Way of Life,” Diane Wilson
“Dakota Women’s Work: Creativity, Culture, and Exile,” Colette Hyman, spring 2012
“Being Dakota: Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton,” Amos E. Oneroad and Alanson B. Skinner, ed. by Laura L. Anderson
“Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest,” Samuel W. Pond
“Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought,” David Martinez
“Honor the Grandmothers: Dakota and Lakota Women Tell Their Stories,” Sarah Penman
“Sister Nations: Native American Women Writers on Community,” Heid E. Erdrich and Laura Tohe, eds.
“To Be an Indian,” Joseph Cash and Herbert Hoover
“What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village,” Janet D. Spector

Settlers and Frontier Life

“900 Miles from Nowhere,” Steven R. Kinsella
“Blue Star: The Story of Corabelle Fellows, Teacher at Dakota Missions 1884-1888,” Kunigunde Duncan
“Land of the Burnt Thigh,” Edith Eudora Kohl
“Making Minnesota Territory, 1849-1858,” edited by Anne R. Kaplan and Marilyn Ziebarth
“Old Rail Fence Corners,” Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris

Dakota Language Resources

“550 Dakota Verbs,” Harlan LaFontaine and Neil McKay
“Beginning Dakota/Tokaheya Dakota Iyapi Kin: 24 Language and Grammar Lessons with Glossaries,” Nicolette Knudson, Jody Snow, Clifford Canku
“Beginning Dakota/Tokaheya Dakota Iyapi Kin: 24 Language and Grammar Lessons with Glossaries, Teacher’s Edition,” Nicolette Knudson, Jody Snow, Clifford Canku
“A Dakota-English Dictionary,” Stephen R. Riggs
“Dakota Grammar: With Texts and Ethnography,” Stephen R. Riggs
“An English-Dakota Dictionary,” John P. Williamson

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Historical Background**

2012 marks 150 years since the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, a tragic time in Minnesota's history.

The war followed years of broken treaties and promises to the Dakota people in a state with a burgeoning white population. In August 1862, when late annuity payments and the refusal by agents and traders to release provisions found the Dakota facing starvation, some factions attacked white settlements, the Lower Sioux Agency and Fort Ridgely in south central and southwestern Minnesota. A significant number of Dakota were not in favor of the war and did not participate.

The fighting lasted six weeks. Between four and six hundred white civilians and soldiers were killed. The number of Dakota killed in battle is not known. Troops under the command of former Gov. Henry Sibley were sent to support Fort Ridgely and the settlers, ultimately defeating the Dakota forces and bringing the war to a close by the end of September 1862.

After a trial by military tribunal, 38 Dakota men were hanged in Mankato on Dec. 26, 1862. It remains the largest mass execution in U.S. history. More than 300 Dakota men had initially been condemned to death but President Lincoln commuted all but 39 of the sentences. One man was reprieved at the last minute.

The rest of the approximately 1600 non-combatant Dakota and mixed-race people (mostly women, children and the elderly) who surrendered at what came to be known as Camp Release near Montevideo were forced to march for six days to Fort Snelling. There, they were held over the winter of 1862-63 in an internment camp, sometimes called a concentration camp, below the fort. Eventually, they were forcibly removed from the state to reservations in the Dakota Territory and what is now Nebraska. The convicted prisoners whose death sentences were commuted were transported to a military prison at Camp McClellan, near Davenport, Iowa.

After the war, thousands of Dakota fled Minnesota for Dakota Territory. Col. Sibley and Gen. Alfred Sully, a Civil War veteran, led punitive expeditions in the territory in 1863 and 1864. The expeditions resulted in numerous battles in which hundreds of Dakota were killed or forced farther westward. Although these expeditions ended the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, the conflict between the Dakota and the U.S. government that started in Minnesota continued in bloody battles at Fort Phil Kearney, the Little Big Horn, and finally, in 1890, at Wounded Knee.

While the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 lasted just six weeks, the issues surrounding its causes continue to affect Minnesota and the nation to this day.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 **Timeline**

Pike's Treaty: September 23, 1805

Zebulon Pike, a lieutenant in the U.S. Army, meets with a party of about 150 Dakota at the confluence of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) and Mississippi Rivers. Pike's commanding officer, Gen. James Wilkinson, wants to obtain sites for future military posts in case of war with Great Britain. Pike makes a deal with two Dakota leaders for roughly 100,000 acres of land; enough for the U.S. government to build a trading post and fort.

Though the boundaries are poorly defined, the agreement becomes the basis for U.S. claims on the land at the confluence. The "treaty" was ratified by Congress in 1808, but since Pike didn't have the authority of the U.S. Senate or the President, it was not an official government act. According to an 1856 Senate committee report, "There is no evidence that this agreement, to which there was not even a witness . . . was ever considered binding upon the Indians, or that they ever yielded up the possession of their lands under it."

1837 Treaties

The United States negotiates treaties with the Ojibwe and the Dakota for the wedge of land between the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers—land that will later become part of Minnesota. Ratification of the treaties opens the land for new settlement by immigrants and European-Americans. The Ojibwe will receive payments in money, goods and provisions for 20 years; they also reserve the right to hunt, fish and gather wild rice within the ceded area. The Dakota do not reserve their hunting or fishing rights, but their annuities are to be perpetual. Indian Agent Lawrence Taliaferro boasts that he made the better bargain for the Dakota.

Doty Treaty: July 31, 1841

James Doty, the governor of Wisconsin Territory, fashions a treaty intended to provide a permanent home west of the Mississippi River for the Dakota, the Ho Chunk and other tribes. Tracts of land are to be set aside for each band on the west bank of the Mississippi; each tribe is to have a school, agent, blacksmith, gristmill and sawmill. The initial treaty is negotiated with the Sisseton, Wahpeton and Wahpekute bands; negotiations with the Mdewakanton collapse. The United States does not ratify the treaty.

Treaty of Traverse des Sioux: July 23, 1851 and Treaty of Mendota: August 5, 1851

Facing mounting debts to fur traders and the pressure of new settlers pouring into the newly established Minnesota Territory, the Dakota leaders reluctantly sign treaties, hoping that government promises of reservations and annuities will provide a secure future for their people. Powerful and influential fur traders coerce the Dakota into giving up their land in exchange for promises of cash, goods, annuities and education.

U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea and Minnesota Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey negotiate separate treaties with the Upper and Lower Dakota Bands. In July they meet with the Upper Bands (Sisseton and Wahpeton) at Traverse des Sioux. After several weeks of discussions and threats, the Upper Bands relinquish their claims to all Minnesota lands west of the Mississippi in exchange for an immediate cash payment of \$305,000 and annuity payments in goods, food, education and gold. The treaty also provides for a reservation along the upper Minnesota River. Thinking they are endorsing a third copy

of the treaty, the Dakota leaders sign “Traders’ Papers,” illegal documents drafted by the traders themselves. The documents promise much of the \$305,000 cash payment to the traders to fulfill “just obligations.”

In August, 1851, the commissioners begin negotiations with the Lower Bands at Mendota. The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute are pressured into agreeing to terms similar to those forced on the Upper Bands, including \$220,000 in upfront cash to the fur traders. Both treaties promise the Dakota new reservations along the Minnesota River “in perpetuity,” a pledge that will not be kept.

Treaties Ratified by Senate without Land Guarantee: June 23, 1852

The treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota go to the U.S. Senate to be ratified, but become entangled in the battle over the balance of power between the slave and free states. Southern senators hope the Dakota will refuse because of a key change in wording: in reference to reservation lands, the Senate replaces “in perpetuity” with “at the discretion of the President.” Before final ratification, the Dakota must agree to changes in the treaty. Minnesota Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey is charged with attaining the necessary signatures to finalize the treaties, which he accomplishes through a combination of negotiation, withholding of goods and food, and the threat of military force. The Dakota are left with little choice and begin moving to the new lands along the Minnesota River in 1853.

Reservations Halved: 1858

By 1858, more than 150,000 immigrants and European-Americans are living in Minnesota. Seven years earlier, their population was just 6,000. The U.S. government seeks more land to accommodate this influx of settlers. As a result, 26 Dakota leaders are pressured to negotiate yet another treaty. After four long months spent in Washington, D.C., the Dakota are forced to sell the north half of their reservation in exchange for goods and annuities and the continuing right to live on the southern strip of their reservation.

Homestead Act: May 20, 1862

Congress passes the Homestead Act, a law signed by President Abraham Lincoln on May 20, 1862, offering millions of acres of free land to settlers who stay on the land for five years. The act brings 75,000 people to Minnesota over three years. To qualify for 160 free acres, settlers have to live on it for five years, farm and build a permanent dwelling. Those able to spend the money can buy the 160 acres at \$1.25 an acre after living on it for six months.

U.S.-Dakota War Begins: August 18, 1862

By the summer of 1862, living conditions on the Upper and Lower Sioux reservations have deteriorated further. Assimilation policies mandated by the U.S. government use the withholding of food and other supplies as a means of forcing the Dakota to conform to white ideals.

The appointment of Thomas J. Galbraith as Indian Agent at Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies exacerbates the situation. Galbraith is considered arrogant, emotionally unstable and rigid in his adherence to rules. By the summer of 1862, tensions on the reservation are unbearable. Annuity payments are late again, and the traders refuse to extend further credit. The Dakota “Soldiers’ Lodge” advocates the use of force to acquire food for the Dakota people. The situation falls apart on August 17, when four young Dakota men kill five settlers near Acton. The Soldiers’ Lodge gains power and convinces a reluctant Taoyateduta (Little Crow) to lead the fight against the traders and settlers.

Dakota warriors attack the Lower Sioux Agency in the early morning of August 18, killing traders and government employees. The Dakota then attack settlements along the Minnesota River valley, killing hundreds of white settlers in the first few days. A U.S. Army force sent up from Fort Ridgely is ambushed at Redwood Ferry; 24 soldiers are killed. The Dakota forces are primarily young men, mostly from the Mdewakanton band, led by Chiefs Sakpe (Shakopee), Wakanozhanzhan (Medicine Bottle), Taoyateduta (Little Crow), Wamditanka (Big Eagle) and Mankato. Most Dakota, however, choose not to fight.

U.S.-Dakota War, First Strike on New Ulm: August 19, 1862

On hearing about the attacks, the men of New Ulm quickly build barricades in the center of town. About 100 Dakota soldiers attack New Ulm at 3:00 p.m. After almost two hours of fierce fighting, the Dakota break off the attack due to torrential rains. Word of the attacks reaches St. Paul. Governor Alexander Ramsey commissions Col. Henry Sibley to lead the response against the Dakota. Sibley gathers his forces, mostly untrained civilians, and heads up the valley in pursuit of the Dakota.

U.S.-Dakota War, Battles at Fort Ridgely: August 20 and 22, 1862

Dakota forces attack the fort twice-on Aug. 20 and Aug. 22. The fort, which had been a training base and staging ground for Civil War volunteers, suddenly becomes one of the few military forts west of the Mississippi to withstand a direct assault. Fort Ridgely's 280 military and civilian defenders hold out until Army reinforcements end the siege.

U.S.-Dakota War, Second Strike on New Ulm: August 23, 1862

In the morning, Dakota soldiers surround the town of New Ulm; the fighting soon moves into town. Using outlying buildings for cover, the Dakota fire on the town's defenders from windows and doorways. Taoyateduta's (Little Crow) men set fire to buildings near the river. The smoke causes panic and confusion, but the defenders hold their ground. After hours of fighting, the defenders make a desperate charge at the Dakota, even setting fire to the building the Dakota are using as cover. At sunset the Dakota retreat, leaving 32 townspeople dead and more than 60 wounded. More than a third of the town lies in ruins.

U.S.-Dakota War, Evacuation of New Ulm: August 25, 1862

With little food and ammunition left in New Ulm and fear of another attack, about 2000 people, residents of New Ulm and outlying areas, are evacuated to Mankato. Some flee to St. Peter and St. Paul. People begin returning to New Ulm in early September and small military posts spring up throughout the county. In December, the town officially reorganizes its government.

U.S.-Dakota War Battle of Birch Coulee: September 2, 1862

While at Fort Ridgely, Sibley sends out a burial party to locate and bury the remains of civilians. The burial party is attacked by Dakota soldiers at Birch Coulee, one of the hardest fought battles of the war. The Dakota keep U.S. soldiers under siege for 36 hours before a relief detachment arrives from Fort Ridgely.

U.S.-Dakota War Battle at Wood Lake: September 23, 1862

In early Sept., Sibley tries to negotiate a settlement with Taoyateduta (Little Crow), but Taoyateduta is not ready to quit. He explains the reasons for the war and states that he is willing to release prisoners. Sibley demands surrender. Taoyateduta refuses.

By mid-September, and under considerable political pressure to defeat the Dakota quickly, Sibley and his troops move up the Minnesota River, arriving at Lone Tree Lake (mistakenly identified as Wood Lake) where they camp on the night of Sept. 22. Early the next morning, a group of U.S. soldiers searching for food stumbles upon a group of Dakota soldiers who had been preparing to attack Sibley's forces. The ensuing Battle of Wood Lake was the last major battle of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, resulting in a decisive defeat for the Dakota.

Removal of Dakota Survivors: November 7-13, 1862

Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey declares that "the Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the state." About 1600 Dakota women, children and older men are marched from the Lower Sioux Agency to Fort Snelling. Along the route they are attacked by mobs of angry settlers.

Dakota Internment at Fort Snelling: November 1862-Spring 1863

Dakota men, women and children are imprisoned in an internment camp, sometimes called a concentration camp, on the river flats below the walls of Fort Snelling. Nearly 300 Dakota prisoners die over the winter, victims of illness and of attacks by civilians and soldiers.

Trials and execution of Dakota at Mankato: December 26, 1862

Of the hundreds of Dakota people who surrendered or were captured during the U.S.-Dakota War, 303 men are tried in a military court and convicted of raping and murdering civilians. At the urging of missionary Henry Whipple, President Abraham Lincoln reviews the convictions and commutes the sentences of 264 prisoners. Lincoln then signs the order condemning 39 men to death by hanging. One prisoner is reprieved just before the sentencing is carried out. The remaining 38 men are hanged at Mankato on December 26, 1862—the largest mass execution in U.S. history.

Dakota Banished from Minnesota: Spring 1863

After the deadly winter of 1862-1863, more than 260 Dakota men convicted the previous fall are brought to a compound in Davenport, Iowa, where they spend three years before being exiled. The Dakota at Fort Snelling are sent by steamboat down the Mississippi and up the Missouri Rivers to new reservations including Crow Creek in Dakota Territory, a dry, barren place that was unsuitable for farming.

A federal law, the Dakota Expulsion Act, abrogates all Dakota treaties and makes it illegal for Dakota to live in the state of Minnesota. The act applies to all Dakota, regardless of whether they joined the war in 1862. This law has never been repealed.

Taoyateduta (Little Crow) Killed: July 3, 1863

Dakota leader Taoyateduta, who fled to Canada after the battle of Wood Lake, is shot and killed by Nathan Lamson near Hutchinson, Minnesota. Lamson is awarded a \$500 bounty by the state of Minnesota.

Bounties and Punitive Expeditions: Summer 1863

The state of Minnesota places bounties—ranging from \$25 to \$200—on the scalps of Dakota people. Governor Alexander Ramsey orders punitive expeditions into Dakota Territory to hunt down Dakota people. Two forces totaling more than 7,000 soldiers are formed under Gens. John Pope and Alfred Sully. When the Dakota hear of approaching soldiers, they flee their camps, leaving valuable supplies. Most of the fleeing Dakota are women and children. Many die from starvation and exposure over the winter.

Sakpe and Wakanozhanzhan Kidnapped and Executed: 1864-1865

Dakota Leaders Sakpe (Shakopee) and Wakanozhanzhan (Medicine Bottle) are drugged and kidnapped near the Canadian border. They are brought to Fort Snelling to be tried for war crimes; they wait almost a year for their trials. Witnesses called by the U.S. government provide only hearsay evidence. The two Dakota leaders have no witnesses to summon on their behalf, nor can they cross-examine U.S. government witnesses. Sakpe and Wakanozhanzhan are sentenced to death and hanged at Fort Snelling November 11, 1865. The day before, the St. Paul Pioneer Press states that “no serious injustice will be done by the execution tomorrow, but it would have been more creditable if some tangible evidence of their guilt had been obtained.”

Santee Reservation Established: February 27, 1866

The U.S. Indian Office establishes a reservation for the Santee Dakota—who are facing starvation at Crow Creek—at the mouth of the Niobrara River in Nebraska. Pardoned prisoners from the military prison in Davenport, Iowa, join the Crow Creek survivors in this new location.

Sisseton Wahpeton Reservations Established: February 19, 1867

The Sisseton (or Lake Traverse) Reservation in northeastern South Dakota and the Devil’s Lake Reservation in central North Dakota are established for the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands, originally from Minnesota. These two bands had argued for the restoration of their treaty rights on the grounds that they had not fully participated in the war of 1862.

Reestablishing Dakota Communities in Minnesota: 1865 to 1890s

About 150 Dakota who assisted in the punitive expeditions are allowed to remain in Minnesota after the war. They take refuge on lands at Mendota and Faribault owned by Henry Sibley and the Faribault family. As the decades pass, more Dakota find their way back to traditional homelands, living near old villages at Prairie Island and the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies. In 1889, Congress passes legislation allowing the Dakota to establish communities at Lower Sioux, Shakopee and Prairie Island. A similar community on former Upper Sioux land is established in 1938. These four communities are all that remain of federally recognized Dakota land in Minnesota. In addition, several Dakota communities are established in Canada.

The General Allotment Act (Dawes Act): February 8, 1887

Congress enacts legislation that allots 160-acre tracts of land to heads of households of American Indian families. The rest of the reservation land is opened to homesteaders. Eventually, American Indian-held lands are reduced by more than two thirds.

The Indian Reorganization Act: June 18, 1934

Congress passes the Indian Reorganization Act, sometimes called the “Indian New Deal.” The legislation reverses the Dawes Act’s privatization of Indian lands, and allows for a return to tribal sovereignty, or local self-government.

Mankato Wacipi: 1972

The first Mankato Wacipi (powwow) is held in Mankato, Minnesota, to honor the 38 Dakota men hanged in 1862 and to celebrate the coming together of Dakota people.

Year of Reconciliation: 1987

In an effort to reconcile the events of 1862, the state of Minnesota and Dakota communities proclaim a Year of Reconciliation on the 125th anniversary of the war.

First Dakota Commemorative March: November 7-13, 2002

The first Dakota Commemorative March is held along the route of Dakota prisoners of war who were forced to march to Fort Snelling in 1862.

150th Commemoration of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862: 2012

Communities and organizations throughout Minnesota provide many opportunities for people to learn about and discuss the war, its causes and its aftermath.

Remarks by Minnesota Historical Society Director Stephen Elliott

at the Dakota Iyuhenapi Owanzida “We Gather Together as One” Dakota Nationwide Conference, Friday, Sept. 30, 2011

Welcome to the Minnesota History Center.

And to those Dakota who have come a long way for this conference, welcome to Minnesota, a place we know is the Dakota ancestral homeland, the origin place and center of the Dakota universe. It is our great pleasure to help sponsor this conference for the third year.

We believe that “History Matters.” This is not an empty slogan. As everyone in this room knows, history matters because it shapes all of our lives. We have shared, albeit painful, history and to understand that legacy is to understand better ourselves and today.

MHS’s history is permanently tangled with the history of the Dakota. Because of this history, there is damage that must be acknowledged. MHS was founded in 1849 at the very time that the same men were taking Dakota and Ojibwe lands for settlement. They participated in businesses that exploited native people and in governments that acted deplorably. Those men went on to wage the war of 1862 and said horrendous things.

For many years MHS’s interpretation of history in its exhibits, at its sites, and in its publications was at times insensitive to Dakota conceptions and perspectives and did not include the Dakota in its processes. This may not all be rooted out yet. At times MHS was silent when we should have talked about the historical traumas surrounding the war. At times our collections have contained materials we should not have had and displayed. As you will see today, there are still things in our collections that should be examined with the Dakota. As with all humans, MHS simply does not know what it does not know.

We need your help. MHS needs to listen more closely and demonstrate a new spirit of openness and transparency to the Dakota as we recover the past together. We acknowledge that we can do better and are committed to that effort. MHS has a lot to learn from the Dakota and a lot to learn about itself. Together we can be powerful educational partners.

No series of events in Minnesota history is as important as the chain of events that led to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 and its terrible aftermath. These shocking events are central to the story of Minnesota, and they produced historical traumas that still echo in those living today. It’s time to speak up about them. It can be tempting to turn away from the pain of these events, to deal with the trauma by suppressing the truth. But if history matters, we cannot get over it by turning away from it. We cannot shrink from our history.

If we are to move forward, we must look back to learn, to understand. With historical trauma, every generation must struggle to find its own meaning in the past, and to prepare our children for the future. There aren’t two sides to this story. There are as many sides as there are people who carried—and who still

carry—the wounds of war, though the people who waged it long ago are long dead. It is everyone’s duty to face the past honestly and learn from it. Without the truth, there can be no peace.

The responsibility to show the story is our responsibility, but it is a shared responsibility because it cannot be told today in its fullness without Dakota voices. “To commemorate” literally means to remember together. MHS has an amazing and rich record of the events surrounding 1862. It documents corruption and atrocities. It documents courage, compassion and resilience. But it is incomplete because it scarcely contains the essential oral traditions that the Dakota keep and pass from one generation to the next.

We need a fuller understanding today. Understanding how the treaties dispossessed the Dakota of their homelands and the failure of U.S. authorities to honor the promises contained in the treaties, is central to understanding how such a terrible war could have happened. We have to look unflinchingly at the violence of the war: the killings, the marches, the internment camp, the hangings, the expulsion, the punitive expeditions, the forced assimilation policies, because all are a part of our collective DNA. These traumas are a part of us, as Minnesotans, as Dakota, as Americans.

In the months ahead, MHS commits itself to a process of truth recovery. To recover can mean to reclaim something, to reveal it, to save it or pull it out of oblivion. To recover can also mean a process of returning to health. Complete recovery may be impossible, but we know recovery will never be possible without the truth. Through the truth recovery process, MHS will work with the Dakota and others to make available the primary documents, images, objects, and perspectives that make the story whole and have the power to make us whole. Through exhibits, a website, oral histories, publications and programs like this, we can recover our collective past.

We can make this story available to everyone, in the service of remembrance and justice. We look forward to working with you.

— Stephen Elliott, Sept. 30, 2011

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Images

High-resolution images are available online at www.usdakotawar.org/media.



“The Signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux,” by Frank Blackwell Mayer, 1885.



Settlers escaping from the fighting, Aug. 21, 1862.



“The Battle of Birch Coulee,” Lithograph by Paul G. Biersach, 1912.



Little Crow, photograph by Joel Emmons Whitney, 1862.



Alexander Ramsey, 1862.



Col. Henry H. Sibley, pictured in his army uniform in 1862, Engraving by J. C. Buttre.



“Attack on New Ulm,” by Anton Gag, 1904.



Little Crow's wife and children at Fort Snelling, ca. 1863.



Internment camp at Fort Snelling. Photographer unknown.



Sakpedan (Little Six) and Wakanozhanzhan (Medicine Bottle) at Fort Snelling, by Joel Emmons Whitney, 1864.



Public execution of 38 Dakota Indians at Mankato, by W. H. Childs, 1862.



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