

## THE DAKOTA INTERNMENT AT FORT SNELLING

November 13, 1862: The contingent of 300 soldiers, Dakota women, children, a few Dakota men and a group of soldiers arrived at Fort Snelling in the evening. They had walked for one week from the Redwood (Lower Agency), from which they had left November 7. *For details of the journey, see TT.* Lt. Col. William R. Marshall had alerted the state that the Dakota were coming in an article in the St. Paul Daily Press of November 8, and assured the public that these people are "not the guilty Indians but friendly Indians, women and children". The number of people in the contingent was reported by the St. Paul Pioneer as 300 soldiers and 1800 Indians, 45 men and the balance women and children. On the following day a reporter from the St. Paul Daily Press clarified that the group included 40-50 full blooded adult male Indians, and one or two hundred half-breeds, "who are proved guiltless of the late atrocities." DII 37 It should be noted that the families of the "half-breeds" were also in the camp. *Note: "Old Betsy" or "Old Betts", a well-known and liked Indian woman was with the group, and she claimed that her family had done no fighting or harm.*

The first night the group camped on the bluff above the river, but the next day Col. Marxhall moved them down to below the fort. They were guarded by soldiers, and no one was allowed to enter unless they had a pass from the fort commander. In a few days a stockade had been built to keep the Dakota from wandering and to protect them from curious or vengeful whites.

The soldiers guarding the Dakota were from Captain Folsom's Company from Stillwater; 6th Regiment, Co.F.; 7th Regiment; Tenth Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers.

Historic Dakota band affiliations: the Dakota inside of Fort Snelling retained their past village-band associations. Represented there were the nine traditional bands of leaders: Wabasha III, Passing Hail, Red Legs, Simon, Black Dog, Wakute, Taopi, Good Road and Eagle Head. Noticeably absent were the bands of Little Crow and Shakopee (Little Six), many of whom had escaped to Dakota Territory or to Canada after their defeat at the Battle of Wood Lake and the approach of Sibley's troops.

Terminology and definition: What was the stockade and the process of confining the Dakota people considered to be at the time? The terms used by many of the people affiliated with the fort--missionaries, military people, etc. were "camp," "enclosure" , "captivity," and "military surveillance." DII 67-69.

Newspapers provided regular coverage about the interned Dakota, usually with fairly accurate coverage of the situation in the camp. One notable exception of incorrect reporting occurred in the first few days, when it was reported that a Dakota woman had been killed. The truth, which appeared in a correction, was that a Dakota woman had been raped by soldiers. DII 38-39.

Clergy made regular visits, including John P. Williamson, Samuel Hinman, Fr. Augustin Ravoux, Samuel and Gideon Pond, teacher Hugh Cunningham and his wife, Dr. Thomas S. Williamson. Others known to have visited were Harriet Bishop, Colonel Crooks, Lt. Col. Marshall, Indian Agent Thomas Galbraith, Bishop Henry Whipple, and some legislators.

Photographers Joel Whitney, B.F. Upton, R.N, Ranson, and James E. Martin also visited and made many high quality photos that preserved the story of the Dakota people at Fort Snelling. Selling the photographs also became very good business for the photographers. These photographs as well as letters were exchanged between the some of the Dakota at Fort Snelling and those at Mankato. DII 44

Disease was a significant problem among the Indians inside Fort Snelling; in the weeks while they were still on the frontier a measles outbreak had started and spread among both soldiers and interned Dakota. Concentrations of these groups at Camp Release and at the Yellow Medicine Agency in October 1862 during the disease's incubation period allowed the germs to spread and produce disease a few days later, during the November march to Fort Snelling. Measles affected the Dakota both at the frontier, on their march, and after they reached Fort Snelling, where a number of the Dakota, up to 200, died from the disease or its side effects, which included pneumonia and dysentery. Other diseases affecting the Dakota in Ft. Snelling were typhoid fever, smallpox and scarlet fever. It should be noted that soldiers at Fort Snelling, Fort Ridgely and people in St. Peter, Shakopee, LeSueur and Nicollet Counties were also affected in late 1862 and early 1863, with morticians reporting a sharp increase in deaths. A vaccination and quarantine program was instituted in some regions. DII 56.

Burying the dead at the fort: burying the dead presented a challenge. If buried outside the fort, graves were sometimes dug up and the bodies desecrated. Stephen Riggs wrote, "They are now keeping their dead or burying them in their teepees." Note: digging pits within tents had been a usual practice for protecting women and children within tents if an attack was expected. This method was used at Camp Release by friendly Dakota and half-bloods to protect captives. DII 59.

Deaths: Determining the number of Dakota who died at Fort Snelling is complex; see DII for a careful analysis of the factors involved. Total deaths of people interned in Fort Snelling was probably between 160 and 300. DII 57

Schooling at the Fort Snelling camp: There was a strong interest among many of the Dakota at Fort Snelling and the Dakota prisoners at Mankato to communicate with each other. Missionaries would carry written messages back and forth, an important means of communication for the families who were separated. This may have been part of the increased motivation for Dakota at both places to learn to read and write; writing paper and spelling books were in demand, according to Stephen R. Riggs in February 1863. DII 77-81.

Increase in religious conversions: missionaries at the Mankato prison found an increase in the number of prisoners who wished to become Christian converts. While there was some suspicion that the conversions may have been calculated or a convenient way to gain favor with the officials or the Creator, there were many baptisms requested at both the Mankato prison and at Fort Snelling. DII 82-96

"Putting Away Wives": An additional qualification of becoming a Christian and a church member was the abandonment of polygamy. Among the converts who practiced polygamy, they were counseled on the need for having one spouse only. In an assembly at the Mankato prison on March 17, 1863, Dakota men who had more than one wife "came forward and selected one--forsaking the other." The list of wives to be kept and wives to be forwaken was delivered by Stephen R. Riggs to the prisoners at Fort Snelling, bringing relief to some and heartbreak to others. (Many of the wives were sisters who had been living together with their children in the same tepee.) DII 85.

Spring flooding forces camp to move: on March 19, 1863 the camp was forced to move to higher ground. They remained at that site until the final removal of Dakota dependents from the Fort Snelling compound in May, 1863. DII 65.

Removing the Dakota from the Fort Snelling camp and from Minnesota.

A continuing debate was "What shall be done with the Dakota Indians?" The final decision was to send them to central Dakota Territory near Fort Randall, where there would be a fort for protection and a river for transporting people and goods. The Winnebago Indians were also to be moved out of the state.

Removing the Dakota was done in several stages: the prisoners from Mankato, numbering 278, along with military guard of the 7th Minnesota, were taken by boat in April, 1863, down the Minnesota River to Davenport, Iowa where they were confined at Camp McClellan-Camp Kearney. DII 105. 48 Dakota men who had been acquitted following their trials were not taken to prison but were discharged from the boat at Fort Snelling, where they joined the others.

The first group of Dakota interned at Fort Snelling, numbering 771, were sent on the steamer 'Davenport' on May 4, 1863. When the steamer stopped in St Paul, several soldiers threw rocks at the Dakota on board, injuring several Dakota women. The commanding officer threatened these soldiers with bayonets to stop the attack. DII 107. The Davenport reached St. Louis on May 8, 1863, where the passengers were transferred to the steamer 'Florence' and sent up the Missouri River.

The second group of interned Dakota from Fort Snelling, 547 Dakota accompanied by John P. Wiliamson and special agent Benjamin Thompson, left the next day and traveled down river on the steamboat 'Northerner' to Hannibal, Missouri, where they were transferred to railroad freight cars, 60 to a car, and sent overland to St. Joseph, Missouri. There they joined the group on the already crowded 'Florence' for the final leg of the journey. The Winnebagos were removed along with the Dakota in the general area of Crow Creek, Fort Thompson, in Dakota Territory. DII 108.

Early reports from the Dakota and Winnebago people at Fort Randall indicate they were living "in a desolate wilderness where nothing can be raised any season, this least of all....Captain LaBarge, who is commander of a small body of troops here, thinks it would have been an act of humanity on the part of the government to have ordered their execution in Minnesota, rather than send them to such a desolate waste." DII 108

## **THE NEXT PHASE AT FORT SNELLING**

The internment camp 1863-1864.

The camp at Fort Snelling remained in use after the May 1863 removal of the Dakota people. It was used as a protected area to house the families of the scouts who were part of the Sibley and Sully expeditions; they came to Fort Snelling in August 1863. The camp was also used to contain the recently captured Dakota such as Wowinape, Little Crow's son, who had escaped to Dakota Territory, was apprehended in Dakota Territory and requested to have his trial at Fort Snelling; he arrived at the fort September 12, 1863.\* Other new groups were those who had been captured by Sibley's or Sully's forces or who had surrendered from out on the prairie or in Manitoba, where some 600 Dakota had fled. DII 111, DU 272. The winter of 1864 brought more Dakota surrendering at Pembina, Fort Abercrombie and Fort Pierre. Some were in such dire straits from starvation that they sold their children to families in Fort Garry; this included the children of Andrew Myrick, the trader who had been killed at the Lower Agency during the first days of the conflict. DII 112.

\*Wowinape was found guilty at his trial, sentenced to hang, and sent to prison but he was pardoned in 1865. In prison he became a Christian and later went to Flandreau, South Dakota where he and some friends founded the first Sioux Y.M.C.A. For more information about Wowinape see section (Some) Notable People of the U.S.Dakota War of 1862.

A different group of Dakota now inhabited the internment camp: the people who had been at the camp from November 1862 to May 1863 were the "friendly" Dakota families of non-combatants and the half blood people who had been protectors of the settlers. The group at the camp starting in August 1863 were the warriors and their families from the bands of Little Crow, including the four wives of Little Crow. DII 122. The presence of this group brought photographers Joel Whitney and B.F. Upton back into the camp, where they historic photos of one of Little Crow's wives and children, his son Wowinape, White Spider (Unktomiska), and Nispipe, one of Little Crow's nephews. DII 116.

Shakopee (Little Six) and Medicine Bottle were captured near Fort Garry, Canada in January 1864 and delivered to Fort Snelling, but they were kept inside the fort's prison, not in the stockade area, for their trial and until they were hanged on November 11, 1865. DII 124, DU 272.

Some final notes

•A short-lived policy to aid in the removal of the Dakota was the adoption of offering rewards of \$25, \$75, and \$200 for Indian scalps. Only 4 such rewards were reported. The policy was in effect from July 1863 to September 1863. DII 122.

- Two of the Dakota Indians who had started the war by their actions at Acton were "killed by their own brethren, as they attribute their difficulties with the whites to those murders", a statement made by Red Cloud, a member of Little Crow's band, who was captured by some of Sibley's scouts near Fort Ridgely. His report was part of a story in the *St. Paul Daily Press of April 17, 1863*. DII 114.

- In May, 1864, a Dakota boy was accidentally shot and killed within the enclosure during a soldier's target practice by a shell that ricocheted and hit the boy, who was lying on the ground not far from the target. He was reported to be a relative of Little Crow's. DII 123.

The last group of Dakota left the enclosure at Fort Snelling.

The group of hostile Dakota warriors and their families were sent by steamer to the prisons at Davenport-Rock Island on June 6, 1864. This ended the internment of the non-hostile Dakota and imprisonment of the hostile Dakota people at Fort Snelling.