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**EVENTS: battles, deaths, injuries.**

pre-conflict:

The area that is now Wilkin County had been occupied by Dakota and Ojibwe, with Indian viillages located along the river. The Dakota victory over the Ojibway near Battle Lake in around 1795 gave them control over the territory.

The earliest non-Indian settlers were French and British fur traders, who established trading posts. The nearest one to Wilkin County was at Georgetown, in present day Clay County.

The Treaty of 1851 opened the area to settlement by whites.

Travel in the early days of Wilkin County was on foot or horseback, wagon-drawn-ox carts or stagecoaches. A twice-a-week Burbank stage line connected Georgetown and St. Cloud. <http://co.wilkin.mn.us/history.asp>, DW 53.

Early military posts: Fort Sanborn, built by the Minnesota Stage Company, [https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Minnesota\\_Military\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Minnesota_Military_Records)

Fort Abercrombie was established in 1857 to help maintain order. The fort was on the west side of the Red River, in present-day North Dakota, but it was the closest fort to Wilkin County, just across the river and 15 miles north of the main city of Breckenridge. Just before the conflict broke out, Fort Abercrombie was garrisoned by company D of the fifth Minnesota Regiment under Captain John Vander Horck. DW 53

The City of Breckenridge was started in 1857 by land speculators; much of the land had been owned by three French-Dakota (metis) women. The city grew large enough by 1862 to have a hotel and a trading post.

Some problems existed prior to the conflict between the Dakota and the white settlers: Dakota stole cattle and horses in September 1860, as reported in the New Ulm Pioneer; the Burbank Company lost seven stagecoach horses and the Misters Mills and Spencer lost two each. NUP 27

during the conflict:

Note: much of the information below describes the events at Fort Abercrombie, which is not in the boundaries of present day Wilkin County, but was the nearest place from which activity occurred that impacted Wilkin County, as well as being the place that Wilkin County residents likely went for refuge.

Reports of the attacks on rhe Lower and Upper Agencies did not reach Wilkin County and Fort Abercrombie for a few days. Captain Vander Horck learned of the attacks when he received a message on August 23 that contained a clipping from the St. Cloud newspaper about the attacks on the Lower Agency of Aug. 18. Upon learning this news, Vander Horck called the troops stationed in Georgetown back to Fort Abercrombie.

The conflict first made itself felt in Wilkin County with attacks made around August 23, 1862 in and around Breckenridge. A military and citizen party led by Lt. John Groetch sent from Fort Abercrombie to reconnoiter as far as Breckenridge,found the mutilated bodies of three men, a woman, and a child in a Breckenridge hotel plus a wounded, elderly woman crawling near the riverbank, who said Indians had shot her, killed her husband, and kidnapped her grandson. DW 55.

The three guests in the hotel who were killed were: Edward Russell, Chas. Battle of Little Falls, and Martin Fehrenback. The hotel had been plundered, cattle had been killed, and other cattle and horses stolen. TDU 157

August 23, 1862: Capt. Vander Horck sent two volunteer couriers, Elisha .L. Spencer and Walter P. Hills to St. Paul to inform the governor of the situation and to ask for reinforcements and ammunition. *Note: the ammunition available at the fort was the wrong size; Vander Horck had previously asked to have the correct size sent to him but it had not happened.* DW 56

Settlers at Fort Abercrombie for refuge: It is assumed that nearby settlers went to the fort.

Aug. 30, 1862: Dakota made a raid on livestock near Ft. Abercrombie and drove off much of the Fort's cattle that were grazing as far as a mile from the fort. DW 56

Sept. 3 1862: Capt. Vander Horck was accidentally wounded by a sentry. The fort was attacked while his wounds were being dressed by some one hundred warriors, who may have been more intereted in stealing the fort's horses. The Indians were driven off by the fort's military forces and by intense efforts from armed citizens, who wanted to save their animals. DUV 101, DW 56.

Sept. 6, 1862; A second attack on Ft. Abercrombie was much more extensive; the Dakota were repelled after several hours of heavy fighting. Joseph Demarais, the post's mixed-blood interpreter, learned that there were such heavy losses among the Dakota that they decided in the future they would settle for sniping rather than full out attack. Sniping continued, including times when people from the fort needed to go to the river for water. DW 57

Sept. 23,1862: Capt. Vander Horck, had requested relief forces, and unbeknowst to him, several forces were being assembled and headed towards Fort Abercrombie. Not knowing this, Vander hork sent out another messenger accompanied by 20 men; they were attacked by Dakota and two killed: Pvt. William Shulz and citizen-soldier Edward J. Wright, from the Fergus Falls area. Later that day the relief force of some 450 men reached Fort Abercrombie. DW 57

Sept, 26 and Sept. 29: skirmishes occurred. The arrival of the relief forces marked the end of the large attacks.

Sept. 30, 1862: Capt. Ambrose Freeman and his forces left Ft. Abercrombie to escort settlers who wanted to leave. They reached safety at St. Cloud on Oct. 5.

### **HISTORIC PEOPLE CONNECTED TO CONFLICT**

Capt. John Vander Horck, commander of the garrison at Fort Abercrombie

Spencer. Elisha, and W.P. Hills apparently were residents of the county.

### **RESOURCES**

#### **Books (see attached bibliography for titles)**

DUV, DW, DWUSarm, NUP, TDU

A book of historic fiction about the area is [Abercrombie Trail](#) by Candace Simar.

***See Resource section for Book titles and Codes, Journal titles and Codes***

#### **Articles**

"The Siege of Fort Abercrombie", DW 53

St. Cloud Democrat, August 28, 1862: statement of E.L. Spencer of Breckenridge, Indians in Red River country--three men killed--Fort Abercrombie in danger. TDU 157

Letter from soldier David McCauley while stationed at Ft. Abercrombie. TDU 160

St. Paul Daily Press, August 29, 1862: statement from W.P. Hills "Matters on Red River". TDI 158

Excerpt: an unidentified woman wrote about the arrival of the relief force at Fort Abercrombie on September 23, 1862. TDU 161.

***See Resource section for Book titles and Codes, Journal titles and Codes***

## **Photos**

## **Paintings, sketches, & murals**

## **MONUMENTS & HISTORIC SITES**

Edward J. Wright, killed in Wilkin County Sept. 23, 1862 <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=34219908>

## **INTERPRETIVE CENTERS**

## **CEMETERIES WITH GRAVESTONES OF PARTICIPANTS**

## **WEBSITES**

<http://www.ftabercrombie.org/fort-history.html>

## **WILKIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

704 Nebraska Avenue

Breckenridge, MN 56520

218-643-1303

Curator/Treasurer: Ruth Poppel

## **WEB CONTENT**

History of Wahpeton and Breckenridge: page 2 of "The Cities of Wahpeton and Breckenridge Design Guidelines", <http://www.wahpeton.com/vertical/Sites/%7BCD1E1504-3D47-427A-82DF-A4577CD897BE%7D/uploads/%7BB978780E-401A-4097-BBE1-5F71C3AE8842%7D.PDF>

County website has graphics of Indians & whites, ox carts, buffalo, etc. Neoma A. Laken wrote 1 p. history of Wilkin co.

[http://www.riverkeepers.org/images/uploads/Neomas\\_Red\\_River\\_of\\_the\\_North\\_Story\\_with\\_Foreward\\_Web\\_Version\\_Compressed\\_Size.pdf](http://www.riverkeepers.org/images/uploads/Neomas_Red_River_of_the_North_Story_with_Foreward_Web_Version_Compressed_Size.pdf)