



Removal of the Sioux Indians from Minnesota

Author(s): Frances H. Relf

Source: *Minnesota History Bulletin*, May, 1918, Vol. 2, No. 6 (May, 1918), pp. 420-425

Published by: Minnesota Historical Society Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20160261>

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REMOVAL OF THE SIOUX INDIANS FROM
MINNESOTA.

The demand from the people of Minnesota that the Sioux Indians be removed beyond the boundaries of the state came as a natural result of the horrors of the Sioux outbreak in August, 1862. Ignatius Donnelly, the lieutenant governor, in a report of the massacre made to Governor Ramsey as early as August 29, declared that the Indians "must disappear or be exterminated." The reason he gave was that otherwise immigration to the state would stop. The commissioner of Indian affairs in his formal report to the secretary of the interior in November spoke of the "exasperation of the people of Minnesota," and the secretary himself urged that the government abandon its policy of treating the Indians as quasi-independent nations with whom treaties must be made, that it recognize in theory what had long been the practice, that the Indians were to be moved on whenever their lands were needed by advancing settlements.¹

The general policy advocated by the secretary was not adopted at this time, but as soon as Congress met the specific problem of the removal of the Indians from Minnesota was taken up. Mr. Windom secured the adoption by the House of a resolution by which the committee on Indian affairs was "instructed to inquire as to the most speedy and economical mode of removing beyond the limits of the State of Minnesota all the Indian tribes within said state."² In the end the Chippewa were not interfered with at this time, but an act approved February 16, 1863, declared that the Sioux by "most savage war upon the United States" had lost all their treaty rights, and that "all lands and rights of occupancy within the State of Minnesota . . . be forfeited to the United States." This was followed by an act authorizing the president to remove the Sioux

¹ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1862, pp. 7, 22, 68.

² 37 Congress, 3 session, *House Journal*, 10 (serial 1155).

Indians to "a tract of unoccupied land outside of the limits of any state."³

From this action one might think that there was in Minnesota a formidable band of Sioux Indians. This was not at all the case. Of the 6,600 annuity Sioux of the Mississippi, only about eighteen hundred had surrendered to General Sibley; the rest had escaped to Dakota or Canada. Of the eighteen hundred, over three hundred were held as prisoners in a camp near Mankato. The others, who were at Fort Snelling, were the only ones to whom the law could be applied. Of these, Galbraith, the Indian agent, wrote January 27, 1863: "there are only sixty men, and those mostly old ones." It was this band of women, children, and old men which was deported in 1863.⁴

One of the best friends the Indians had at this time was the Presbyterian missionary Rev. Thomas S. Williamson, who had worked among the Sioux since 1835. When the Indians were rounded up by Sibley the missionary called to his aid his son, John P. Williamson, who at the time was teaching school in Indiana. Early in 1863 this son received from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions the appointment to go with the Sioux to their new home for permanent work among them. An account of his journey with these poor Indians, contained in a letter written to his mother, was found in a collection of Williamson papers recently presented to the Minnesota Historical Society. This letter, printed below, contains information about the circumstances of the trip and the conditions under which it was performed.

FRANCES H. RELF

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

³ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 12: 652-654, 819.

⁴ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1863, p. 296.

JOHN P. WILLIAMSON TO HIS MOTHER, MAY 13, 1863

[Williamson Papers—A. L. S.]

ST. JOSEPH MO. MAY 13, 1863

MY DEAR MOTHER,

I am glad to have the time to write you a few lines, for I know you will be anxious to hear how we are getting along. For myself I am in very good health in deed, and the Indians with us are as well as when we started. There was one small child died and we buried it at a wood yard a little below Burlington, Iowa.

You will have heard long ago some things about us starting. 770⁵ left on Monday the 4th of May in the Steamboat Hannibal.⁶ They were all Lower Sioux.⁷ Mr Hinmann⁸ and Thos. A Robertson⁹ went with them and I waited till the next day about dark when the rest got on board the Northerner. There were 540 of them.¹⁰ We also left about 200 who were going to be let go around with the Scouts.¹¹ Among those we left

⁵ There were 762 Indians according to the *St. Paul Daily Press* and the *St. Paul Pioneer* for May 5, 1863. The *Press* adds that in the whole company there were only about fifty men.

⁶ The *St. Paul* papers state that "Davenport" was the name of the boat.

⁷ They included the bands of Wabasha, Good Road, Wakute, Passing Hail, and Red Legs. *St. Paul Press*, May 5, 1863.

⁸ "The Rev. S. D. Hinman, a zealous missionary to the Dacotahs, who was in charge of the Mission of St. John at Red Wood, at the time of the breaking out of the Indian War, accompanied the Indians who left on Monday evening in the steamer Davenport, and will remain in charge of them on their new reservation near Fort Randall, Missouri."—*St. Paul Pioneer*, May 6, 1863.

⁹ Thomas A. Robertson is listed as a half-breed in the census of the Indian camp at Fort Snelling taken December 2, 1862. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1863, p. 316.

¹⁰ The *St. Paul Press* of May 6 gives the number as 334. The same account adds that they consisted of the bands of Taopi, Eagle Head, and Yellow Medicine.

¹¹ In May, 1863, General Sibley led an expeditionary force of about four thousand men against the uncaptured Sioux. Part of this force consisted of 170 scouts headed by Major Joseph R. Brown who had preceded Galbraith as agent to the Sioux. William W. Folwell, *Minnesota, the North Star State*, 234.

at Ft Snelling were all the Renvilles¹² including the Widow,¹³ Paul, Simon, Kawanke, and all the Campbells.¹⁴ We had a very pleasant trip down to Hannibal which you know is a little below Quincy on the Missouri side—where we got Saturday evening about 4 O'clock. We stayed there over the Sabbath which I was very glad of, though we did not have much rest. There were so many visitors thronging around them all day. We had the large freight depot for the Indians where we had meeting twice & shut most of the whites out. We left there Monday afternoon about 3 O'clock. They crowded them into freight cars about 60 in a car, and I thought that they would suffer a great deal, but it came up a rain & cooled off the air so that when we got off here the next morning (yesterday) they got off in good spirits. And we are now camped in 60 soldiers tents waiting for the boat that is to take us up the river. It will probably be 2 or 3 days before it is here & then we shall probably be nearly two weeks going up the river, so that I have not much expectation of getting to our new home before the first of June. They did not bring the other Indians by the same route that we have come but took them down to St Louis, and we are now waiting for them. They expect to put us all on the same boat. If they do I think it will be nearly as bad as the middle passage for the slaves. Coming down there was enough for comfort in our company of 540—more than would have been comfortable on the Lower deck if they had not had two or three barges all along the way, and on the Missouri river they cant run barges they

¹² The Renvilles were a large family of mixed-bloods. Nine of them are given in a list of scouts made out by Sibley under the date of May 28, 1863. The first on the list, Gabriel, has written an account of the Sioux outbreak in which he claims that it was at his suggestion that the government decided to use half-breeds and even full-blooded Indians who had been faithful to the whites in the capacity of scouts. Sibley Papers; *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 611.

¹³ This was probably the Rosalie Renville who is listed among the heads of families in the census of the Indian camp. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1863, p. 316.

¹⁴ In Sibley's list of scouts are to be found the names Paul Maza-Koo-ta-Mannee, Simon Awagmannee, Joseph Kawanke, A. J. Campbell, and Scott Campbell. The last two are also listed among the half-breed heads of families in the census of the camp.

say so I dont know where they will stow themselves even if they give them the whole boat. But then folks say they are only Indians.¹⁵ In the manifest of freight taken down by the Northerner they published *30 horses, 540 Indians*.

I am glad I was not with the other Indians for I would rather come the way we have than by St. Louis. St. Joseph is a very pretty place nearly as large I should judge as St Paul, though it shows the effects of the war more than St. Paul. All the way by railroad thro Missouri we could see some of the effects of Secession. Some houses burnt—a good many deserted & the farms gone to rack. Now however all north of the Missouri feel comparatively secure. And they make Secessionists keep shut up pretty close. I have heard more Union talk and less Secesh talk since I came into Missouri than before. We are now just over the river from Kansas and they are a raving kind of Union folks there I judge.

We have not heard anything more about where we are going than when we started. We have only heard that the Superintendent went up past here with some supplies for Indians.¹⁶ The Missouri river is pretty low now but they say a rise is coming down the Platte, and the Missouri generally begins to rise about this time.

I dont get along writing very well as I stay in a tent adjoining the Indian Camp & they keep coming in and bothering me. There is no one along for an interpreter Lorenzo is the best English

¹⁵ The *St. Paul Press* for May 5 gives an account of the treatment the Indians on the "Davenport" received when they passed through St. Paul. Led by a soldier who had been wounded at Birch Coolie the crowd "commenced throwing boulders at the Indians and as they were so closely packed upon the boiler deck as to be scarcely able to move it was impossible for them to escape the missiles. Several of the squaws were hit upon the head and quite severely injured." No violence was reported when the "Northerner" left the next day though again at crowd gathered as the boat lay at levee.

¹⁶ The superintendent was Clark W. Thompson who had come to Minnesota in 1853, and in 1861 had been appointed to the northern superintendency. His headquarters were in St. Paul, but he had gone in advance to purchase supplies and select the new home for the Sioux. He left St. Joseph on May 5 and reached Fort Randall on the nineteenth. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1863, p. 310.

talker there is. So that they want me to interpret a great deal. The man in charge of these is named Benj. Thompson.¹⁷ Whether Agent Galbraith is going to come around & be our Agent I doubt some, though some who saw him said he expected to come around in a week or so afterwards.¹⁸ And Dr. Wakefield¹⁹ told me he was coming around with him, though I hope to never see him²⁰ out here, & all the Indians wish the same thing most heartily.

The Indians have a great deal of singing on the road. In the Steamboat in the cars & in the camp & they would sing a good deal more but wherever they sing the Whites gather around so thick that is really very unpleasant.

I hope to hear from you soon by way of Ft Randall

Your own Son

JOHN P. WILLIAMSON

¹⁷ Benjamin Thompson came to St. Paul from Pennsylvania in 1850. His acquaintance with the Sioux, though of a business character, led him to take an active interest in their welfare. He was in sympathy with the work of Joseph R. Brown and the missionaries with the Indians, and this work he himself helped to carry on when in 1867 he became agent of the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands of the Sioux in Dakota Territory. *St. Paul and Minneapolis Daily Pioneer Press*, April 16, 1861; Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1867, p. 245; 1869, pp. 323-326.

¹⁸ Galbraith left St. Paul for St. Joseph May 20, on his way to Fort Randall. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Report*, 1863, p. 311.

¹⁹ Dr. J. L. Wakefield located at Shakopee in 1854. He was at this time Indian physician under Galbraith. *St. Paul Pioneer*, February 19, 1874.

²⁰ The reference is probably to Galbraith rather than to Wakefield. Galbraith was a political appointee without any special qualifications for the position of Indian agent. His incompetence may have been a factor in bringing about the outbreak in 1862.