

Rediscovering Camp Lincoln

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Camp Lincoln was a short-lived internment post for the Dakota Indians convicted by a military tribunal in the aftermath of Minnesota's Indian War of 1862. As a place mentioned frequently in both contemporary and historical writings, it would seem that its precise location would have been ascertained years ago. However, because of erroneous 1862–63 reports and their reiteration by historians, the camp's site has been traditionally and wrongly placed in South Bend rather than at its actual grounds in nearby Mankato.

In 1862, South Bend, a village located on the southernmost bend of the Minnesota River about a mile upstream from the mouth of the tributary Blue Earth River, was an aspiring rival of Mankato. South Bend was platted in December, 1853, when Mankato, approximately two miles downstream, was not quite two years old. The Blue Earth River separated South Bend and Mankato townships. A post office was established at South Bend in 1855 and some stores and other businesses were started within a few years. The 1860 federal census showed the population of South Bend Township as 452.¹

The claim that Camp Lincoln was located at South Bend was first made by a newspaper and state officials. The *Saint Paul Pioneer* of November 13, 1862, reported that the condemned Dakota were being moved "from the Lower Agency to South Bend." Slightly over three weeks later, Governor Alexander Ramsey announced that the prisoners were "in the custody of the United States Military Authorities at South Bend." In his January, 1863, report to the governor, Minnesota Adjutant General Oscar Malmros noted that the captives had been imprisoned "at South Bend, on the Minnesota River."²

The claim that Camp Lincoln was at South Bend was given an extremely significant endorsement in 1924 with the publication of volume 2 of William Watts Folwell's *A History of Minnesota*. Without elaboration, Folwell wrote that Camp Lincoln was "at South Bend, a short distance to the west of Mankato."³ Folwell, who had a tendency to rely heavily on reports by government officials, was probably influenced by the Ramsey proclamation and Malmros report.

Because Folwell's copiously documented book was the first comprehensive, scholarly history of the war, subsequent historians tended to accept it as the authority for much of their information. The Camp Lincoln at South Bend tradition was reiterated by Chester Marshall Oehler in 1959 with the publication of his popularly written *The Great Sioux Uprising*. But, with his characteristic penchant to embellish, Oehler contributed the novel and unsubstantiated assertion that the camp was a stockade.⁴

The South Bend location for the camp was subsequently reinforced by Kenneth Carley in his *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*, which was released in 1961 on the eve of the war's centennial commemoration. The same information was included in a revised edition published in 1976 and presented to a new generation of readers when the Minnesota Historical Society in 2001 reprinted the 1976 edition under the title *The Dakota War of 1862*.⁵

Since Folwell, Oehler and Carley all placed Camp Lincoln at South Bend, it is quite understandable that Duane Schultz and Curtis A. Dahlin in their histories of the war would do likewise.⁶

The long tradition of placing Camp Lincoln at South Bend endowed the claim with an aura of veracity. If an error is repeated often enough to become embedded in popular lore it naturally gains wide acceptance as the truth.

But despite the long-standing Camp Lincoln at South Bend claim, the camp was not there. Rather it was located on the right bank (east side) of the Blue Earth

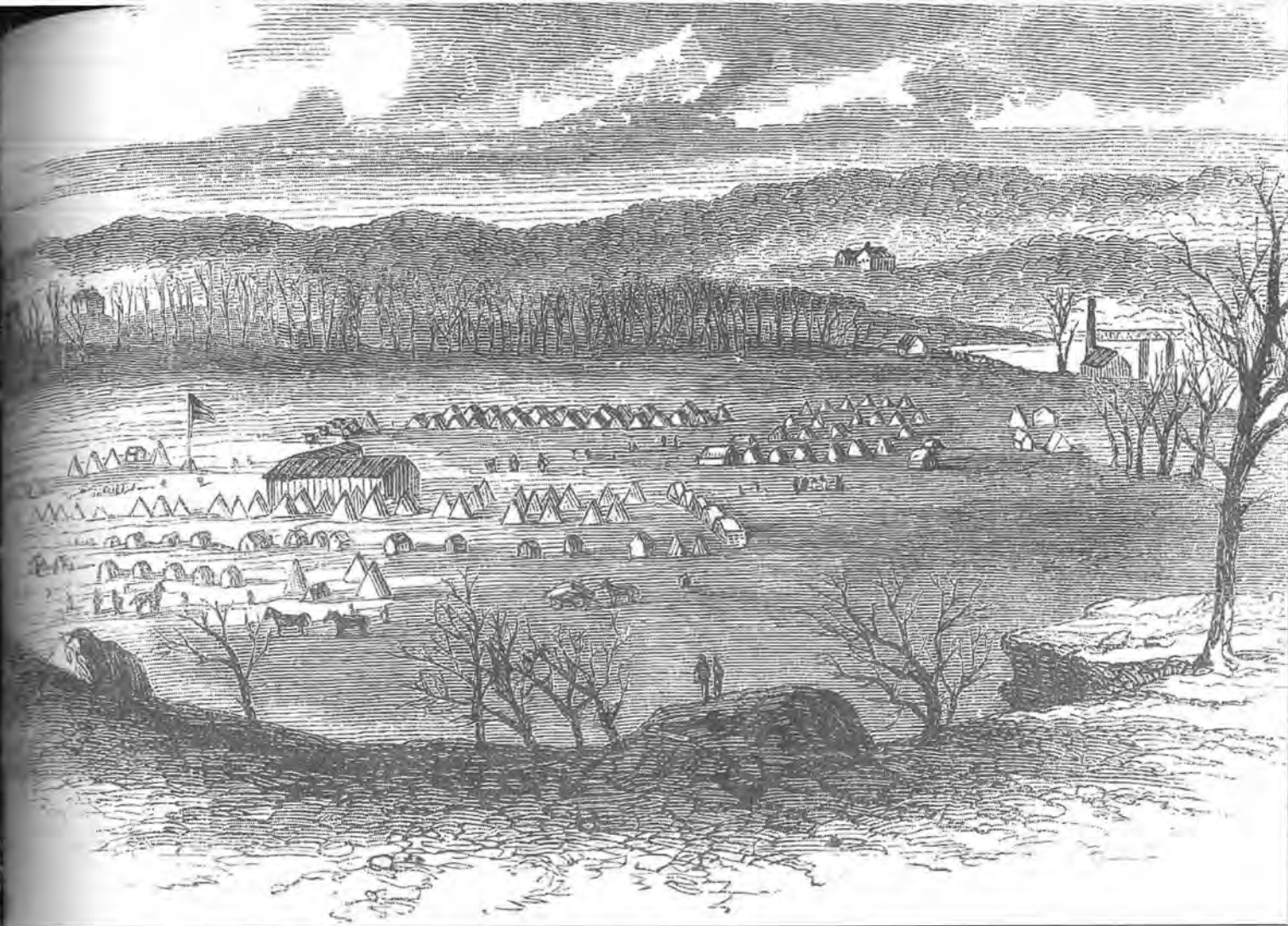


The Camp Lincoln site in Sibley Park, from the same place on the top of Sibley Mound where the artist drew his illustration. Photo taken March 15, 2012 by Prasad Senadheera.

River just south of Sibley Mound. Both the mound and the campsite are located in today's Sibley Park, a Mankato municipal park. Sibley Mound, which looms about 60 feet above the floodplain formed by the Blue Earth and Minnesota rivers, is one of Mankato's most distinctive geographic features. With a base of approximately 26 acres, it is partially topped by limestone outcroppings.⁷

There is conclusive evidence that proves Camp Lincoln was on the flat ground just south of the southwesternmost portion of Sibley Mound. The most striking proof is an engraving of "Camp Lincoln" that was first published in the June, 1863 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. The engraving was made from a drawing that was probably done by Albert Colgrave, a Saint Paul scenic artist, who was stationed at Camp Lincoln while serving in Sibley's army.⁸

Facing south from a focal point atop Sibley Mound the drawing shows Camp Lincoln and its ambience. Three limestone outcroppings, which are still in place today, appear in the foreground. Below them the prison for the convicted Dakota shows as a large L-shaped building with vertical siding. Surrounding the jail are dozens of tents, the only housing for the soldier guards and the Dakota women



Camp Lincoln, from Adrian J. Ebell's article "The Indian Massacres and War of 1862," which originally appeared in the June 1863 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. See also the photograph on facing page. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ebell's article, along with other photographs taken by him and sketches made by Albert Colgrave, has been reprinted in *With Camera and Sketchbook: Witnesses to the Sioux Uprising of 1862*, Alan R. Woolworth and Mary Bakeman, editors, Prairie Echoes Press, 2004.

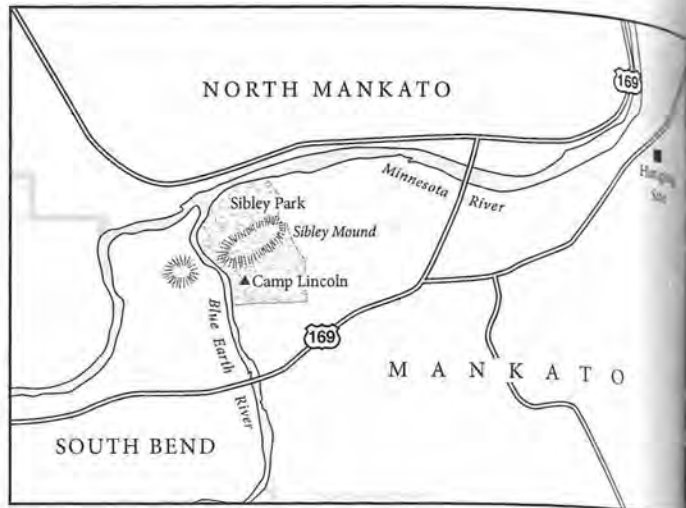
who were brought along to serve as cooks and laundresses for the prisoners. The Blue Earth River shows on the right side of the drawing and the slope leading up to the present-day City of Skyline forms the southern horizon.

Camp Lincoln's site and surroundings have been altered by the thickening of the bur oak stands on Sibley Mound, the development of Sibley Park and the construction of a flood control levee on the east bank of the Blue Earth River. Nonetheless, it is evident to any present-day observer that the drawing depicts a view looking south from Sibley Mound. There is no comparable topography at the site of the abandoned village of South Bend or anywhere else in Mankato's general vicinity.

Henry H. Sibley substantiated the Camp Lincoln site depicted in the drawing. In a November 12, 1862, letter written from "Camp Lincoln" to his wife Sarah, Sibley noted that "singularly enough, my camp is pitched very near an eminence



Le Sueur



St. Peter

Kasota

169

22

14

Minnesota River

Minneopa State Park

North Mankato

Area Enlarged Above

169

Mankato

14

Blue Earth River

South Bend

22

St. Clair

169

22

WINNEBAGO INDIAN RESERVATION

69
Hanging
Sole



The Camp Lincoln site in Sibley Park, looking towards the top of Sibley Mound. Over the course of a century and half the squirrels have been busy burying acorns, so the oak stand on the mound is much denser. Photo taken March 15, 2012 by Prasad Senadheera.

which is known as Sibley's Mound from the fact that it was embraced in a land claim made for me, and without my knowledge several years since, but the claim was subsequently jumped by other parties, as I never bothered myself about it."⁹

A contemporary newspaper and a Dakota War historian who lived in Mankato also verified the accuracy of the Camp Lincoln drawing and Sibley's observation. The *Mankato Record* of November 8, 1862, reported that four days earlier in advance of the arrival of the prisoners, the army had "selected a camping ground, near Sibley's mound [*sic*] . . ." Attorney Daniel Buck, who lived in Mankato during the time of Camp Lincoln, observed that it was "located east of the Blue Earth river and south of the Sibley mound."¹⁰

It is quite understandable that historians generally overlooked the evidence that proves Camp Lincoln was in today's Sibley Park. Soon after appearing in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the drawing of the camp was included in Isaac V.D. Heard's *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863*. It was subsequently printed in Alonzo P. Connolly, *A Thrilling Narrative of the Minnesota Massacre*, and the 1976 edition and 2001 reprint of Carley's history of the war.¹¹

But the drawing alone is meaningless without proper orientation to Sibley Mound and the Blue Earth River. Anyone unfamiliar with Mankato area geography could easily accept the claim that the camp was at South Bend. Historians such as William Watts Folwell apparently did not have either the time or the inclination to visit the Camp Lincoln site. In all likelihood, historians failed to use Buck's information, because they did not consider his book to be a significant history of the Dakota War. Indeed, much of it is poorly organized and contains many errors because of Buck's deficiencies as a researcher and historian. But with respect to those things that he actually saw including the public hanging of 38 Dakota men in downtown Mankato on December 26, 1862, Buck did make a meaningful contribution. Furthermore, it is unlikely that his privately printed book was ever circulated widely and to this day it tends to be known only to specialists of the Dakota Indian War era.

The establishment of Camp Lincoln was an outgrowth of the army's decision to withdraw from the area ravaged during the Dakota War before the onset of winter. In his September, 1862, offensive against the Dakota Indians, Colonel Henry H. Sibley led his state force of about 1,600 troops up the Minnesota River valley from Fort Ridgely to Camp Release about a mile southwest of present-day Montevideo.¹²

After arriving at the campsite on September 26, Sibley first effected the release of 269 white and mixed-blood captives from a nearby Dakota encampment. On September 29, Sibley was promoted to brigadier general in the United States army. With this change he became answerable to Major General John Pope, commander of the newly created Department of the Northwest, rather than to Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota's governor and commander-in-chief.¹³

In his new position, Sibley developed a plan to apprehend as many Dakota as possible and to try those who had participated in the war before a military tribunal. As soon as he had taken control

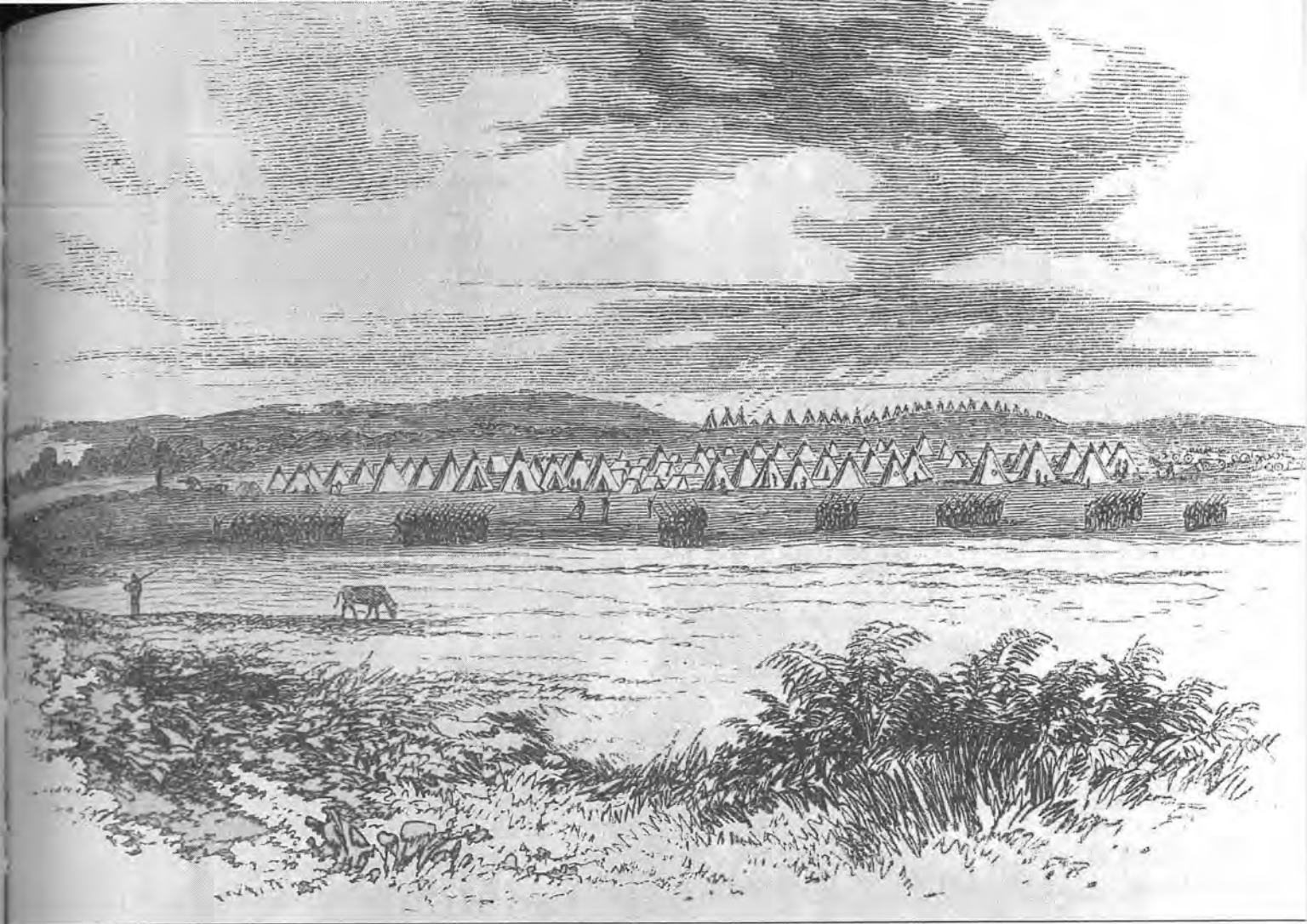
of the Dakota in Red Iron's camp adjacent to Camp Release, Sibley sent messages to outlying Dakota camps requesting that they surrender under flags of truce. This strategy worked well with those who had remained peaceful during the war, but was ineffective with uncooperative renegades. So Sibley augmented it by sending expeditions into the field to take Dakota prisoners and return them to Camp Release. One force led by Lieutenant Colonel William Marshall proceeded as far west as the Big Sioux River near present-day Watertown, South Dakota where it apprehended 39 Dakota men and more than 100 women and children.¹⁴

As refugee and captured Dakota arrived at Camp Release, Sibley became increasingly concerned about likely food and forage shortages and his over-extended supply line. Therefore, he established a satellite camp near the Yellow Medicine River at the former Upper Sioux Agency about 20 miles south-east of Camp Release.¹⁵

The Yellow Medicine camp became the temporary home for most of the Dakota women and children in custody as well as some men, who were initially recognized as non-participants in the war. The Yellow Medicine detainees, supervised by Dakota agent Thomas J. Galbraith and an army escort, were made to harvest potatoes and corn from abandoned fields once tilled by the Dakota near the Upper Agency. Apparently, these foraged crops were their principal means of subsistence for some time.¹⁶

Within a day after arriving at Camp Release, Sibley appointed a court martial board of five army officers to try the captured Dakota men suspected of criminal acts. From the start the officers evidently realized that their superiors expected them to render harsh judgments.¹⁷ Pope made his sentiments very clear when he wrote to Sibley "it is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so. . . . They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromise can be made."¹⁸

The pace of the Camp Release trials was accelerated as more and more prisoners were taken into



Camp Release, from Adrian J. Ebell's article "The Indian Massacres and War of 1862," which originally appeared in the June 1863 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ebell's article, along with other photographs taken by him and sketches made by Albert Colgrave, has been reprinted in *With Camera and Sketchbook: Witnesses to the Sioux Uprising of 1862*, Alan R. Woolworth and Mary Bakeman, editors, Prairie Echoes Press, 2004.

custody. On October 15, Sibley reported that of the 123 Dakota prisoners, only 20 had been sentenced by the tribunal. But within a week he noted that 120 had been tried. The "greater part" of them, he noted, "have been found guilty of murder and other atrocious crimes."¹⁹ At that time Sibley estimated that about 300 remained to be tried.

Sibley abandoned Camp Release on October 24 and within two days had consolidated its troops and prisoners with the captives and troops from the Yellow Medicine camp at the Lower Agency. This shift was the first step in moving all peaceful Indians and those convicted of crimes to places that had not been ravaged during the war.²⁰

The move to the Lower Agency where Camp Sibley was established shortened Sibley's supply line from the east by about 40 miles. This was an important saving in time and transportation costs, because Sibley's troops and captives had become increasingly dependent on shipments from St. Paul and towns on the Minnesota River. The feasibility of partially subsisting about 1,700 troops and 2,000 Dakota with corn and potatoes harvested from reservation fields diminished with each passing day. Furthermore, there was forage for the army's estimated 650 horses at the Lower Agency, but the supply at Camp Release was virtually exhausted.²¹

When the first trials were being held at Camp



Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley, District of Minnesota Commander, Department of the North West. From an album of Rollin Olin in the Stephen and Wendy Osman collection.



Major General John Pope. Photo by Mathew B. Brady, Mathew B. Brady Collection of Civil War Photographs, National Archives.

Release, Sibley planned to have those sentenced to death by the military tribunal executed in the field. He intended to move all the remaining Dakota including the peaceful contingent to Fort Snelling and complete the trials there.²²

But revelations in the early trials and consultations with Pope caused Sibley to adopt a different plan. As the trials at Camp Release proceeded, it became apparent to the two generals that concluding them at Fort Snelling would conceivably preclude access to key witnesses. So they decided to try all of the accused Dakota near scenes of the recent fighting. Since the Lower Agency was the most important site in the war's first phase, it was a logical place to conclude the trials of the Dakota.

But Sibley and Pope decided that more than Dakota suspects had to be tried. During the Camp Release trials, Otanka, a Winnebago who had lived among the Dakota for some time, was charged with having participated in the war. Otanka's testimony implicated eleven other Winnebago, who had been visiting with Little Crow at the Lower Agency when the war started. Otanka was acquitted by the tribunal, but his accusations were taken seriously.²³

Once Sibley became aware of the alleged Winnebago involvement he decided that chief Little Priest and some other Winnebago had to be tried and informed Pope of that need.²⁴ Assuming they would be found guilty, Pope on October 20 reported to his superior Major General Henry W. Halleck that "many Sioux and some Winnebago criminals must be executed. Will send names as soon as possible."²⁵

The Winnebago tribe of about two thousand members was located on a reservation whose agency was about ten miles southeast of Mankato's river front near present-day Saint Clair. Desirous of trying Little Priest and his men near the agency and using some Dakota prisoners as witnesses, Sibley decided before leaving Camp Release to establish a camp for all the convicted Dakota as well as the Winnebago who were to be taken into custody at either "South Bend or Mankato."²⁶

Aside from providing convenient access to the Winnebago reservation, Sibley apparently chose the Mankato vicinity because of its economic advantages. Sibley realized that his new camp would be dependent on locally accessible provisions, forage and fuel as well as some civilian laborers. As the largest place in the central Minnesota River valley, the Mankato locale was best qualified to provide the required services.²⁷

Anxious to get his troops and his prisoners out of the field, Sibley stayed at Camp Sibley only from October 26 to November 8. His concern about rapidly getting the peaceful Dakota to Fort Snelling and those condemned by the tribunal to South Bend or Mankato probably was the principal reason the trials were speeded up. By the close of the Camp Sibley trials, the tribunal, since its formation at Camp Release, had heard 392 cases and sentenced 307 Dakota men to death and 16 to prison terms. In the tribunal's judgment, anyone who had done nothing more than fire a gun during an attack was given the same verdict as convicted murderers and rapists—death.²⁸

With the end of the Camp Sibley trials in sight, Sibley sent Lieutenant George A. McLeod to select the next campsite at either South Bend or Mankato. The 42-year old McLeod, a native of Canada, had moved to Minnesota in 1852 where he joined his brother Martin as a trader with the Dakota. He served as one of Sibley's main scouts during the war and on expeditions dispatched from Camp Release.²⁹

McLeod and his reconnoitering party reached Mankato on November 4 after traveling on the well-established road on the south side of the Minnesota River from Camp Sibley via New Ulm. They arrived at South Bend before the site McLeod selected just south of Sibley Mound. Since he had been instructed by Sibley to choose a campsite in either South Bend or Mankato, McLeod probably considered South Bend. If so, he would have immediately recognized its disadvantages. South Bend's steamboat landing on the Minnesota River was at the base of a rather steep embankment. This sloping part of the village was not suitable for a campground and a site on the ground above the incline would have placed the troops and prisoners perilously close to potentially vengeful villagers. Sibley and his subordinates, well aware that settlers generally wanted to harshly punish the Dakota, took the threat of civilian violence seriously. Furthermore, if McLeod considered a site on the bottomland between South Bend and the Blue Earth River he would have found that it was partially

occupied by settlers who had started the village of Le Hillier five years before.³⁰

But once he crossed the Blue Earth River, McLeod determined that the flat ground just south of Sibley Mound was to his liking. Not only was it about a mile and a half removed from downtown Mankato, but it also offered some protection from the crisp northwestern winds characteristic of late autumn.³¹

While in Mankato, McLeod procured about 25–30 wagons and teams to assist Sibley in moving the prisoners, equipment and provisions from Camp Sibley. Sibley needed dozens of wagons. Not only did he have to transport the freight for his 1,700 man-army, but the estimated 370 Dakota prisoners had to ride in wagons because they were chained together in pairs by leg irons.

Sibley's army escorted the prisoners out of Camp Sibley on November 8, the day after Lieutenant Colonel William Marshall started for Fort Snelling via Henderson with a military escort and about 1,600 peaceful Dakota. Sibley's troops, prisoners and about 40–50 Dakota women who were brought along to serve as cooks, laundresses and wood gatherers arrived at the site selected by McLeod about noon on November 10. Within a few days it became known as Camp Lincoln. While passing around New Ulm some of the prisoners were attacked and injured by a mob hell-bent on revenge. This incident further heightened Sibley's anxiety about the threat of civilian attacks on the prisoners and for that matter any other Dakota.³²

By the time Sibley arrived at Camp Lincoln, one of his men noted that "winter had set in, and it was cold and dreary camping."³³ That sentiment was no doubt shared by the Dakota prisoners, who were chained together in pairs by leg irons on the dirt floor of their jail.

Missionary Thomas S. Williamson, who visited the prisoners the day after they arrived at Camp Lincoln, confirmed the appearance of the jail as shown in the drawing published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. He described it as "a rudely constructed building on which the carpenters were

still at work made of rough boards set on end with a cover of the same." Williamson estimated that the longer part of the L-shaped structure was nearly 100 feet and the other was 50. The width throughout both sections was only 15 feet. Williamson found "some 400 Indian men and boys" seated on a "little straw" that had been placed on the frozen ground. The prisoners were "chained by the ankle two & two the right of one to the left of the othe[r] with a bar or chain about a foot long between." He noted that they "seemed to cover nearly the whole surface except a few spaces half a dozen or more in which fires were burning. These spaces might be 5 feet square and a narrow crooked passage extending the whole length of the building so narrow that two persons pass each other with difficulty. A guard of about a dozen soldiers were [sic] standing in the passage with about twice that number of spectators passing hither & thither through it."³⁴

During most of its three and a half week existence, Camp Lincoln was commanded by Colonel Stephen Miller, who was named to replace Sibley only five days after the arrival of the troops and prisoners. Sibley was ordered to St. Paul as part of the reorganization of the Department of the Northwest. The highlights of Miller's time at the camp were the Winnebago trials and a mob threat to the prisoners.³⁵

Shortly after the Winnebago chief Little Priest and some of his men were implicated during the Camp Release trials, they were taken into custody on October 11 by army troops stationed in Mankato. They were escorted from their reservation to Mankato, jailed overnight and then sent to Fort Snelling to be tried. The *Mankato Record* reported "we believe there were eleven prisoners in all, two or three witnesses and an interpreter."³⁶ Soon after reaching Fort Snelling the escort commander was told to return the prisoners to Mankato, because Pope and Sibley had decided to try the Winnebago near their reservation. Subsequently the suspected Winnebago and the witnesses were held at Mankato until Camp Lincoln was established.³⁷

In anticipation of the Winnebago trials, Mankato's two fear-mongering newspapers, probably reflective of local public opinion, hoped the accused Winnebago would be found guilty and hanged along with the Dakota. Despite being a relatively small place, Mankato somehow supported two newspapers, because the Democrats and Republicans each insisted on having their own organ. From its start in 1857 the *Independent*, owned and published by Clinton B. Hensley and Frank W. Gunning, supported the Republican cause. The rival *Record* was owned and edited by John C. Wise, whose strident Copperhead sympathies caused him to routinely lambast the Lincoln administration and Republicans in general.³⁸

Although the two newspapers barely agreed on anything other than possibly the time of the day, they both insisted on harsh punishment for the Dakota and any convicted Winnebago. By the time Camp Lincoln was started, it was generally known that 303 Dakota had been sentenced to death, but that President Abraham Lincoln was reviewing the sentences to determine if he should grant clemency to any of the condemned.

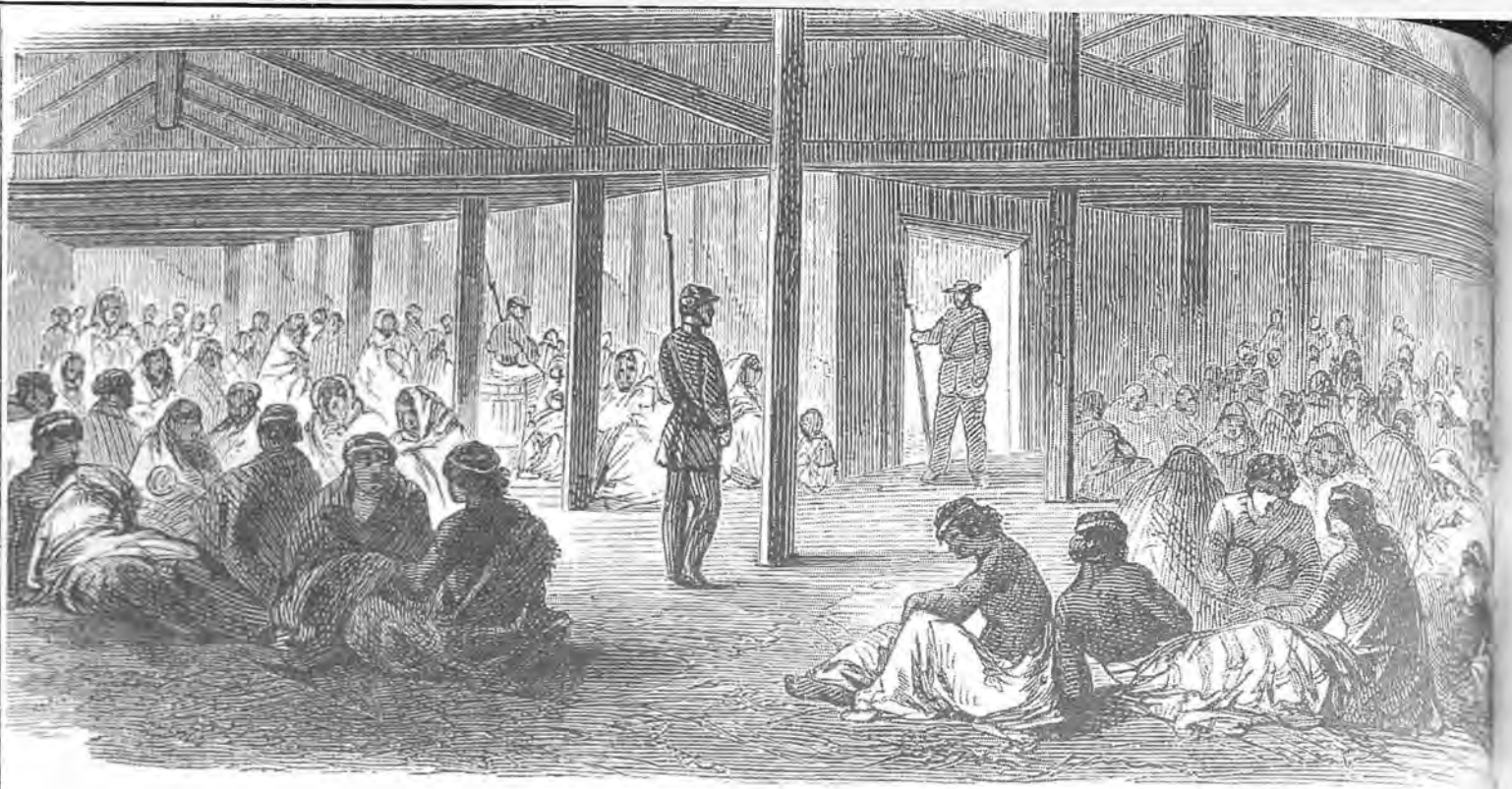
Aside from the public's hysterical reaction to the Dakota War, the Mankato newspapers also reflected long-standing local resentment of the Winnebago. From the start, the federal government's decision to move the Winnebago in 1855 from their reservation along the Long Prairie River southward to some of Minnesota's finest agricultural lands in Blue Earth County was sharply criticized in Mankato. Mankatoans were particularly upset because some white settlers were displaced when the reservation, which entailed about a third of Blue Earth County, was established. Seeing agricultural development at the surest path to a prosperous future, Mankato's leaders regarded the Winnebago reservation as a deterrent to progress.³⁹

The emotional response to the Dakota War provided a marvelous opportunity for Mankatoans to settle their grievances against the Winnebago. Their desire to remove the tribe from Blue Earth



COL. STEPHEN MILLER,
Seventh Regiment Minnesota Volunteers.
WHITNEY'S GALLERY, SAINT PAUL.

Colonel Miller was placed in command of the troops at Camp Lincoln. See Walt Bachman's article entitled "Colonel Miller's War," in *Trails of Tears*, (Roseville, MN: Prairie Echoes Press, pp. 107-122) for more on his leadership during this assignment. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Interior of Indian Jail, from Adrian J. Ebell's article "The Indian Massacres and War of 1862," which originally appeared in the June 1863 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. This is the jail at Camp Lincoln, where the Dakota were held awaiting their execution. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ebell's article, along with other photographs taken by him and sketches made by Albert Colgrave, has been reprinted in *With Camera and Sketchbook: Witnesses to the Sioux Uprising of 1862*, Alan R. Woolworth and Mary Bakeman, editors, Prairie Echoes Press, 2004.

County would certainly be strengthened if some Winnebago were found to have cooperated with the Dakota in the recent war and sentenced to death. It is not at all surprising that Mankato's newspapers, once they were aware that Little Priest and some of his men were guests of Little Crow when the war started, rushed to a guilt by association judgment. With respect to these Winnebago, Wise insisted that "their very presence at the massacres is sufficient cause to hang them."⁴⁰

Little Priest and the other suspected Winnebago were delivered to Camp Lincoln on November 10 and their trials were commenced the next day. Reportedly, Saint Andre Durand Balcombe, the Winnebago agent, requested that civilian attorneys be allowed to represent the Winnebago. But Sibley refused because these were military trials. Perhaps, with the aim of influencing the tribunal, Wise wrote that "an unusual effort was made by

Indian officials and sympathizers to save their [the accused Winnebago] necks, but we hope they will not succeed."⁴¹

Wise and other zealots were obviously disappointed when the military tribunal concluded only that Little Priest and some ten other Winnebago were at Little Crow's camp when some Dakota attacked the Lower Agency on August 18. Their apparent reason for being there was to benefit from Little Crow's hospitality when the long-anticipated annuities arrived. The tribunal, which determined there was no credible evidence proving that the Winnebago had joined the Dakota in the attack on the Lower Agency or the subsequent attacks on Fort Ridgely and New Ulm, had no choice other than to acquit them.⁴²

For some unapparent reason the accused Winnebago were detained at Camp Lincoln far longer than was necessary for their trials. They were finally

released about 11:00 p.m. on November 26. After being escorted to the edge of the camp they were turned loose to make their own way back to their reservation. Evidently this stealth by night tactic was to preclude any attacks on the Winnebago.⁴³

Naturally, the local press railed against the acquittals and hoped Little Priest and the other Winnebago would be punished anyway. Wise wrote that after the Winnebago were released, they were chased by four troops, but “unfortunately” the Winnebago escaped.⁴⁴ Wise, was obviously influenced by the widespread belief that the Winnebago had conspired with the Dakota. That sentiment was so strong that years later Mankato attorney and local historian Thomas Hughes wrote that “there is no question” that Little Priest tried to convince other Winnebago to join the Dakota war effort.⁴⁵

The acquittal of Little Priest and the other Winnebago did not ease local hostility toward the tribe. In the several months after the Camp Lincoln trials, Minnesota’s congressional delegation, which included Senator Morton S. Wilkinson of Mankato, campaigned to have the Winnebago along with the Dakota removed from Minnesota. After Congress approved the removal act, the Winnebago were moved from Mankato to Crow Creek, Dakota Territory in May 1863.⁴⁶

When the Winnebago were being held at Camp Lincoln there was widespread public fear that President Lincoln would deny justice for revenge-minded Minnesotans by commuting the death sentences of most of the condemned Dakota. But in criticizing the president for even considering such a course, the Mankato *Independent* predicted “that they [the Dakota prisoners] will be finally executed, however, whether by order of the President or by *the will of the People* [italicized in source], who make Presidents—we do not harbor a doubt.”⁴⁷

This none-too-subtle call for vigilante justice probably helped incite the mob that moved against Camp Lincoln about 11:00 p.m. on December 4. The size of the group cannot be ascertained precisely. On the high side, Daniel Buck, who was in

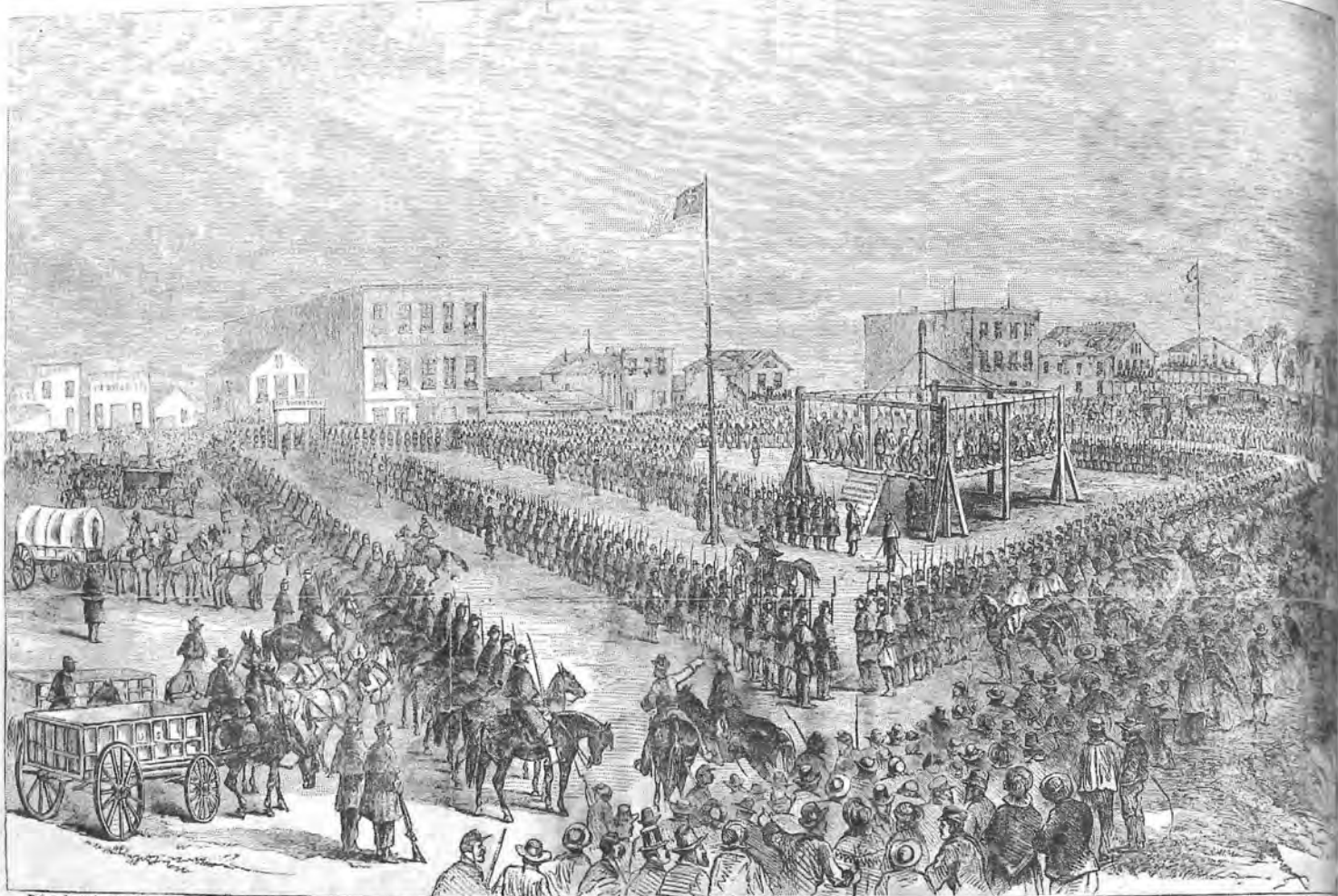
Mankato at the time and may have been an eyewitness to the event, placed its number at “nearly two hundred men.” But John C. Wise, a certain eyewitness, insisted that “not more than one hundred and fifty persons” were involved. Charles S. Bryant, then living in nearby Saint Peter, agreed with Wise.⁴⁸

Although these three sources differ somewhat on particulars, they provide a general consensus that the mob was leaderless and unarmed except for some clubs, hatchets and knives. Rather than move as a unit, the mob straggled in a series of small squads from downtown Mankato toward Camp Lincoln. Since some of the group had been openly talking about raiding the camp since early morning, Colonel Miller had enough forewarning to call in reinforcements from such nearby posts at Lake Crystal and the Winnebago Agency. Consequently, the contemplated raid never occurred. Miller’s cavalry intercepted the head of the column before it reached the camp and forced some of the most demonstrative men to meet with Miller. After they professed to nothing more than wanting to innocently “visit” the prisoners, Miller released them with the understanding that they go home and refrain from further agitation.

Buck, Bryant and Wise portrayed the disturbance as nothing more than a trifling incident. But Miller and other authorities, seeing the mob action as a harbinger of worst to come, were alarmed. The very day after the mob’s march, Miller abandoned Camp Lincoln in favor of accommodations in downtown Mankato.⁴⁹

The mob incident may have caused Miller to leave Camp Lincoln quicker than he had intended. But he had been planning to vacate the camp well before the mob threat. Camp Lincoln had proven to be a cold and sickly place. Before he summoned reinforcements on December 4, Miller had only about 225 troops at the camp. Reportedly, about a third of them were sick and all were suffering from the wintry conditions.⁵⁰

Miller’s new facilities were near the junction of Front and Main streets (the location of the



Printed at the Record Office, Mankato

From Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

EXECUTION OF THE THIRTY-EIGHT SIOUX INDIANS, AT MANKATO, MINNESOTA, DECEMBER 26, 1862.

Lithograph of the execution on December 26, 1862, originally published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and copyrighted by John C. Wise. The large three-story building to the left rear of the flagpole was the place where the 38 condemned Dakota were kept for the five days just prior to the hanging. The log building to the immediate right of that building was the newly constructed jail for all the prisoners after they were moved from Camp Lincoln to Mankato. The two-story building just to the right of the low, windowless jail was used as military headquarters. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

present-day Blue Earth County Library). They consisted of four buildings—two that been previously built and two newly constructed. The most impressive of the three buildings facing Front Street and the steamboat levee was the three-story Leech Building, which was made of stone. It had served as a refuge for Mankatoans when they feared an imminent Dakota attack in the first days of the war. The second existing building, which Miller used as his headquarters, was at the corner of Front and Main streets. Miller had a large building made of

heavy logs and roofed with boards constructed in the space between the Leech Building and the two-story building. This low one-story, windowless structure was evidently as long as the Leech Building. It was used as the jail for the Dakota prisoners. The new jail, which was heated with several large stoves, had more space than the Camp Lincoln building. The Leech Building, jail and two-story building all show to the left rear of the flagpole in the lithograph "Execution of Thirty-Eight Sioux Indians." The fourth building, newly built behind

the two-story corner building, faced Main Street. Major Joseph R. Brown, who was placed in charge of arranging the execution, and his staff were housed in it.⁵¹

In moving the Dakota prisoners from Camp Lincoln to the downtown Mankato location, Miller demonstrated the might of his forces. About 11:00 a.m. on Friday, December 5, some Mankatoans saw the head of a half-mile long procession approaching their downtown. As word spread quickly, the sidewalks were soon "lined with men, women and children." The cavalry led the way with the artillery units right behind. Next in line were wagons loaded with Indian women (some of whom had babies) and their camping equipment. The blanketed prisoners chained in pairs trudged after the wagons. Infantrymen flanked both the wagons and the prisoners to preclude any civilian contact with the Dakota.⁵²

When he left Camp Lincoln, Miller also alerted Sibley, his immediate superior, who was then commanding the District of Minnesota, about the possibility of rushing reinforcements to Mankato. In his subsequent letter to the Department of the Northwest, only two days after the mob's dispersal, Sibley reported that "nearly 200 men" had "assaulted" Camp Lincoln. Ostensibly relaying information from Miller, he also stated that the mob "had the avowed intention of murdering the condemned prisoners." As for the future, Sibley wrote that "Colonel Miller informs me that large numbers of citizens are assembling, and fears a serious collision."⁵³

Since Sibley was convinced that civilian attacks on the prisoners were likely, he apparently asked Governor Alexander Ramsey for assistance. On the very day Sibley reported the incident to his military superiors, Ramsey issued a proclamation to all Minnesotans. He deplored the Camp Lincoln affair as "an unlawful attempt, by a large body of citizens, to seize and put to death the unarmed and manacled prisoners. . . ." In imploring the people to exercise restraint, he wrote: "The victims and witnesses

of the horrible outrages perpetrated by the savages may consider their sufferings and wrongs a justification for this summary and high-handed method of retaliation, but the civilized world will not so regard it." Therefore, the governor appealed "to the good sense of the people, to await patiently and peacefully the due course of law."⁵⁴

The Mankato mob incident and President Lincoln's decision to commute the death sentences of all but 39 of the condemned Dakota prisoners increased fears of mob retaliation. Five days prior to the mass hanging, the prisoners who were given death sentences were removed from the jail building to the first floor of the adjacent Leech Building. When 38 Dakota men were hanged in Mankato on December 26, 1862, Miller had about 1,500 troops on hand and placed the entire town under martial law. This was probably a wise precaution. The well-publicized event attracted some 4,000 civilian spectators who jammed the streets.⁵⁵

Over the ensuing years this execution continued to be an object of fascination to those interested in the Dakota War. But aspects of the historical memory of the Camp Lincoln experience were either misrepresented or lost.

During its brief existence the camp stimulated Mankato's moribund economy. Like the rest of Minnesota, Mankato was still ailing from the after shocks of the Panic of 1857. But Camp Lincoln brought a sharp infusion of government money. The prisoners and permanent guards at Camp Lincoln added about 600 people to the local population. Providing them with foodstuffs and wood for fuel as well as hay for the army's horses instantly created a booming local market. The army's procurement system also employed many civilian teamsters and laborers. Aside from the military income, Mankato benefitted from numerous visitors attracted by the camp, who depended on local food, housing and transportation.⁵⁶

In the longer view the rediscovery of Camp Lincoln's site and aspects of its history should enhance understanding of the Dakota War's aftermath.

1. George E. Warner and Charles M. Foote, eds., *History of the Minnesota Valley* . . . (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co., 1882), 578–79; Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County* (Chicago: Middle West Publishing Co., [1909], 34–35, 49–50; U. S. Census, *Population in 1860*, 255.
2. Alexander Ramsey, "Proclamation of December 6, 1862," in Alexander Ramsey Papers, and Records, vol. 8 of "Governors Records: Proclamations, Messages, etc., 1860–1863," 210–11. Microfilm copy in Memorial Library, Minnesota State University, Mankato; [Minnesota Adjutant General's Office], *Perspectives on the Sioux War: Oscar Malmros, Minnesota's Adjutant General: Reports of the Adjutant General to the Governor of Minnesota, September 1862 & January 1863*, edited by Mary Hawker Bakeman (Roseville, MN: Park Genealogical Books, 2007), 6.
3. William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, vol. 2 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1924), 200.
4. C[hester] M[arshall] Oehler, *The Great Sioux Uprising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 212.
5. Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1961), 64; 1976 ed., 70 and 2001 reprint, 70.
6. Duane Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 254; Curtis A. Dahlin, *The Dakota Uprising: A Pictorial History* (Edina MN: Beaver's Pond Press, 2009), 243.
7. Author's reconnaissances of Sibley Mound and calculations from Mankato West Quadrangle map, rev. ed., U. S. Geological Survey, 1993.
8. For detailed information on Colgrave and his artistic career, see: Alan R. Woolworth and Mary H. Bakeman, comps. and eds., *Camera and Sketchbook: Witnesses to the Sioux Uprising of 1862* (Roseville, MN: Prairie Echoes, 2004), 21–28, 76–77; For the first publication of the "Camp Lincoln" drawing, see: Adrian J. Ebell, "The Indian Massacres and War of 1862," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (June 1863), 24. This article was reprinted in Woolworth and Bakeman, comps. and eds., *Camera and Sketchbook*.
9. "Extracts from Gen. Sibley's Letters to His Wife Written on the Indian Campaign of 1862," in the Henry Hastings Sibley Papers, microfilm copy in Memorial Library, Minnesota State University, Mankato, reel 11, p. [28]. In his *History of Blue Earth County*, 35, Thomas Hughes presented Sibley as playing a much more active role in claiming and naming Sibley Mound. Writing about the activities of Mankato's first townsite company in February, 1852, Hughes stated: "Sibley's trading post and the Frenchman in charge of it had both disappeared from the other side [i.e., the north] of the mound, but on top of it where the flagstaff now stands Mr. Sibley had caused the sides of a log shanty to be erected with a view of claiming the location for a townsite."
10. Daniel Buck, *Indian Outbreaks*, (Mankato: By the author, 1904), 24. Although less precise than Buck, Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County*, 126, also reported that Camp Lincoln was near Sibley Mound. He wrote that the camp "was located on flat ground in West Mankato lying between Front Street and the mound in Sibley Park." When Hughes was writing his history, which was published in 1909, Front Street ran through downtown Mankato all the way to the Blue Earth River bridge. Hughes did not indicate his observation point on Front Street, but obviously he was referring to the westernmost part of the street, which was the closest to both the bridge over the Blue Earth and Sibley Mound. The "West Mankato" mentioned by Hughes was not legally distinct from Mankato. Rather, it was the section of Mankato that was west of the Indian Creek Slough where Mankato West High School is located today.
11. Isaac V.D. Heard *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863), 249; A[lonzo] P. Connolly, *A Thrilling Narrative of the Minnesota Massacre* (Chicago: By the author, 1896), 159; Carley, (1976), 71 and (2001), 71.
12. Carley, *Sioux Uprising* (1976), 59–66.
13. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), Series 1, 13: 688, 708. (Hereinafter cited as *Official Records*.)
14. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars 1861–1865*, 2 vols. (2d ed.; St. Paul, 1892) 1: 352.
15. *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 710.
16. *Ibid.*, 740
17. *Ibid.*, 679–80.
18. *Ibid.*, 686.
19. *Ibid.*, 756.
20. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1: 353.
21. *Ibid.*, *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 757.
22. Here and the paragraph below *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 728, 740.
23. "Records of the United States Senate pertaining to Indian barbarities in the State of Minnesota," Case No. 13, microfilm copy in Southern Minnesota Historical Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato. Originals in National Archives, Washington D.C.; Karin Thiem, "The Minnesota Sioux War Trials," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Mankato State University, 1979), 89.
24. *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 741.
25. *Ibid.*, 755.
26. *Ibid.*, 757. On the history of the Winnebago in Blue Earth County, see: William E. Lass, "The Removal from Minnesota of the Sioux and Winnebago Indians," *Minnesota History* 38 (December 1963): 353–64 and Harold Andrew Shogren, "A History of the Winnebago Indians in Blue Earth County 1855–1862," (unpublished M.S. thesis, Mankato State College, 1968).
27. According to the 1860 federal census the population of Blue Earth County was 4,802. The respective populations of Mankato and adjacent South Bend townships were 1,559 and 452. (U. S. Census, *Population in 1860*, 254–55.)
28. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:353; Carley, *Sioux Uprising* (1976), 69.
29. Warner and Foote, *Minnesota Valley*, 672; *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 745.
30. *Mankato Record*, November 8, 1862; Warner and Foote, *Minnesota Valley*, 579.
31. *Mankato Record*, November 8, 15, 1862.
32. Corinne L. Monjeau-Marz, *The Dakota Indian Internment at Fort Snelling, 1862–1864* St. Paul: Prairie Smoke Press, 2006), 37; *Mankato Record*, November 15, 1862; *Mankato*

Independent, November 15, 1862; *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1: 353.

33. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1, 353.

34. Williamson to S.B. Treat, November 21, 1862, in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

35. *Mankato Record*, November 22, 1862; *Official Records*, Series 1, 13: 799.

36. October 18, 1862.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Mankato: Its First Fifty Years . . . 1852-1902* (Mankato: Free Press Printing Co., 1903), 230, 343; Author's analysis of Wise from files of the *Record*.

39. Lass, "Removal from Minnesota," 353; Shogren, "Winnebago Indians," 20.

40. *Mankato Record*, November 15, 1862.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, November 29, 1862; Thomas Hughes, *Indian Chiefs of Southern Minnesota* (Mankato: Free Press Co., 1927), 100.

43. *Mankato Record*, November 29, 1862.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 103.

46. Lass, "Removal from Minnesota," 354, 360-63.

47. *Mankato Independent*, November 15, 1862.

48. Buck, *Indian Outbreaks*, 223; Charles S. Bryant and Abel B. Murch, *A History of the Great Massacre By the Sioux Indians in Minnesota* (St. Peter, MN: E. Wainwright & Son, 1872), 467; *Mankato Record*, December 6, 1862.

49. *Mankato Record*, December 6, 1862.

50. *Ibid.*

51. John C. Wise, "Execution of the Thirty-Eight," in *The Standard Historical and Pictorial Atlas and Gazetteer of Blue Earth County, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Central Publishing Co., 1895), 93-94; *Mankato Record*, December 6, 1862.

52. *Mankato Record*, December 6, 1862.

53. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian War*, 2: 290.

54. Ramsey proclamation, December 6, 1862.

55. *Mankato Independent*, December 26, 1862. On December 6, 1862, Lincoln wrote out a list of the 39, who were to be executed. The sentence of one of them was later commuted. (Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 210.)

56. *Record*, November 29, 1862; A. Katherine Hughes, "The Developmental Stages of a Frontier Town: Mankato, Minnesota, from Inception to Maturity, 1852-1868," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Mankato State University, 1991), 102.

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