

Armistice and War on the Minnesota Frontier

Edited by Theodore C. Blegen

"WAR, WAR, WAR, will be carried on between the Sioux & the Chippeways . . . as long as there is a *Brave* of either Nation in existence." These words were written by Major Lawrence Taliaferro, the United States Indian agent at Fort Snelling, in his journal during the winter of 1828.¹ The ensuing years did little to alter the pessimistic conviction of this apostle of frontier peace, though he did not cease to work for harmony between the tribes throughout his two decades of service at the fort.

Taliaferro recorded in his journal the agreements made from time to time by the Sioux and the Chippewa. He told of the periods of quiet when the traditionally hostile tribesmen hunted and camped together, sharing, as they said, "one fire side." He described also the sudden eruptions of violence that came when some impetuous young warrior yielded to the temptation to slash off a coveted scalp, or when, by prearranged plan, braves stole into the country of their foes on war parties of vengeance. His record is one of ancient warfare continuing its bloody and implacable course. Treaties, councils, threats, even military interference by the United States, could not end the immemorial cycle of violence and retaliation.

Taliaferro's final summer at Fort Snelling was darkened by one of the fiercest of these recurring encounters—one that he early feared and did his best to prevent. His journal tells of the steps leading up to the two battles, or massacres, of July 3, 1839—one at the site of the old prison in Stillwater, the other on the Rum River, a few miles above the present city of Anoka—events brewed in the cauldron of Sioux-Chippewa hatred. To modern ears the combats may seem of minor significance, but to the missionary Samuel W.

¹ See Taliaferro's entry for December 30, 1828. His manuscript journal, letter books, and other papers are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Pond the number slain was "without parallel in authentic annals of intertribal warfare occurring within the boundaries of the present state of Minnesota."²

Several chronicles of the battles of 1839 have long been available to historians, but most of them were written many years after the events they described, and in some instances time added a filigree of tradition. Major Taliaferro's journal and his letter book offer interesting and important contemporary records of the "dark and bloody ground" of 1839, but the Indian agent's chronicle catches up rumors to be corrected by later information and is interspersed with material not pertinent to the story of the feud. Many years later, in his autobiography, Taliaferro published a compact narrative of the Sioux-Chippewa battles of 1839, but it is too brief to be of very much value.³

Two churchmen had but recently disembarked at the Fort Snelling post when the Sioux-Chippewa hostility burst into flame. To them the events of July, 1839, were a startling and horrible revelation of savagery. One of them was Bishop Mathias Loras, who, as Taliaferro noted in his journal on July 1, "applied for permission to erect a small Church near the Agency for Catholic worship." The bishop, in a contemporary letter, describes how, on America's Independence Day, he was at an altar "offering prayers to heaven, in favour of my adopted country, when a confused noise" burst on his ears. "A moment after, I perceived through the windows a band of savages, all

² Samuel W. Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries among the Dakotas*, 139 (Boston, 1893).

³ Taliaferro's contemporary accounts unfortunately are still unpublished; his brief account of the encounters is in his "Auto-Biography," in the *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:225. Henry H. Sibley published accounts of the battle in his "Sketches of Indian Warfare," in the *Spirit of the Times* (New York), 18:25 (March 11, 1848), where he wrote under the pseudonym, "Hal, a Dakotah"; in the *Sunday Pioneer Press* (St. Paul) for May 13, 1894, which carries the same narrative, with omissions; and in his "Life and Adventures of Joseph Jack Frazer, a Mixed Blood of the Dakota Sioux," published under the pen name "Walker-in-the-Pines" in the *St. Paul Pioneer* for March 3, 1867. Other published sources include Gideon H. Pond, "Dakotah and Chippewa Wars," in the *Chronicle and Register* (St. Paul), May 4, 1850; Samuel W. Pond, "Indian Warfare in Minnesota," in the *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3:131-133; the same author's *Two Volunteer Missionaries*, 139-146, in which he quotes chiefly from an account by Gideon H. Pond; and Stephen R. Riggs, "Protestant Missions in the Northwest," in the *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:125.

covered with blood, executing a barbarous dance, and singing one of their death songs. At the top of long poles brandished fifty bloody scalps, to which a part of the skulls was still attached, the horrible trophies of the previous hard fight of the preceding days. . . . I finished the service as well as I could, and recommended to the prayers of the audience, those unfortunate beings."⁴

The other clergyman was the Reverend Ezekiel Gilbert Gear, who, with his family, had recently arrived in the north country as the newly appointed chaplain of Fort Snelling. He was a native of Connecticut and an ordained minister of the Protestant Episcopal church who had spent some time as a missionary in western New York. There he had acquired an interest in the Indians which was rekindled on his appointment to what was then the St. Peter precinct of Iowa Territory.⁵ Taliaferro records the coming of Gear on the steamboat "Gipsy" on May 2, 1839, and adds the somewhat cryptic line in his journal, "I don't like his *abolitionism*." On July 18 the Virginian major again mentions the Yankee minister, this time with somewhat grudging praise. He relates that he has been shown by Major Joseph Plympton, commandant at the fort, the manuscript of "Mr *Gears* piece on the Sioux & Chippewa difficulty." Taliaferro records his opinion of it in these words: "This production is in the main correct—on Rum River however instead of 130 Chippewas killed not more than 70—were killed of men women & children. . . . On the S[t.] Croix some 40 or 50 more Chippewas killed."

⁴ Extracts from Bishop Loras' letter, written in July, 1839, are printed in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, 3:344 (July, 1840). The chapel which Loras asked permission to build was erected in 1841 by Father Lucian Galtier and named in honor of St. Paul.

⁵ A satisfactory biography of Gear is yet to be written. From New York he went as a missionary to Galena in 1836. Permanently lamed by a fall on his trip to Fort Snelling, he led nevertheless an active and vigorous life in Minnesota, conducting services at the fort as well as teaching school. When his chaplainship terminated with the temporary abandonment of Fort Snelling in 1858, he officiated for several years for the families still living in the vicinity, and he served as chaplain of Fort Ripley from 1860 until his retirement in 1867. He died at the age of eighty in Minneapolis. The Minnesota Historical Society has in its possession the Gear family Bible and a collection of his manuscript sermons. See George C. Tanner, *Fifty Years of Church Work in the Diocese of Minnesota, 1857-1907*, 23-28 (St. Paul, 1909), and a short account of Gear by Samuel C. Edsall, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:691-696.

Here, in a contemporary diary, is an allusion to a narrative of the events of July, 1839, written shortly after the battles by a man who was himself in the Indian country—a record read and approved, with some qualification, by Taliaferro. The narrative is one that has been completely unknown to historians of the early Minnesota scene. Now I believe it has come to light. Recently my attention was called to a letter by Gear written to an older brother named Hezekiah,⁶ which was printed on August 3, 1839, in Illinois in the *North Western Gazette & Galena Advertiser*. This letter, copied in full for me by the Illinois State Historical Library, is nothing less than a lengthy narrative of the Sioux-Chippewa hostilities of 1839. It is dated at Fort Snelling on July 19, 1839, the day after Taliaferro recorded that he had read "Mr Gears piece." I believe it may safely be concluded that the letter which appeared in the Galena newspaper of 1839 is in fact the very piece that came to Taliaferro's attention. Ten days after the date entered upon the manuscript by Gear, his brother in Galena despatched the communication to the editors of the newspaper published in that city, and a few days thereafter, on August 3, it appeared in print. Now, more than a hundred years later, the account returns to Minnesota and is made available to students of the early history of the Northwest. Readers will find it, I think, a vivid contemporary account of a dramatic episode in wilderness Minnesota. But it has a larger claim than that upon the attention of modern readers, for it places the episode, with its barbaric detail, in the general setting of the relations between the Sioux and Chippewa nations and portrays the murky era of recurrent armistice and war on the old frontier of the Northwest.

⁶ Captain Hezekiah H. Gear, a veteran of the Black Hawk War, was a pioneer of Galena, where he made a fortune in the lead mines. *History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois*, 248 (Chicago, 1878).

[From the *North Western Gazette & Galena Advertiser*, August 3, 1839.]

SIoux AND CHIPPEWAYS

MESSRS. EDITORS:

The following communication from my brother, who is U.S. Chaplain at Fort Snelling, may be interesting to your readers, and is at your disposal.

GALENA, July 29, 1839

H. H. GEAR.

FORT SNELLING, July 19, 1839.

DEAR BROTHER:

As we have some reason to expect a boat up the river soon, I embrace the opportunity of giving you some account of the unpleasant affair that recently occurred between the Sioux and the Chippeways in this neighborhood, and which for a time caused a good deal of excitement and painful feeling among us.⁷ This I should have done before, could I have succeeded in collecting and arranging the facts, so that the statement might have been relied upon as correct.

It may not, perhaps, be generally known, that hostile feelings have existed between these two great divisions of Indians from time immemorial, and that they rarely ever meet without some acts of violence or bloodshed. The cause of this state of things, it is believed, is not now known. The Chippeways belong to the Algonquin race, and differ from the Dacotas, or Sioux, not only in language, but in some particulars of manners and customs; and as their countries border, to a great extent, it is not improbable that some encroachment of one party or the other might have been the origin of the existing difficulties.

In my last letter to you, if I rightly remember, I mentioned the arrival of the Chippeways at this place, to the number of seven or eight hundred. They came down the Mississippi in bark canoes, and as they shot round the bastion of the Fort, presented one of the most vivid and picturesque scenes that is possible to imagine of savage life. The party consisted of men, women and children, of all ages, from the hoary headed patriarch to the infant of a day; and acknowledged as their leader and chief, PAGONAGERIG. This man is, perhaps, one of the finest specimens of his race, and possesses no common share of intellect, bravery and tal-

⁷ In a letter of July 27, 1839, published in the *Spirit of Missions* (New York), 5:41 (February, 1840), Gear mentions the recent tragedy, adding, "I will not wound your feelings, by a description."

ent. His name literally signifies, *hole in the sky*, or bright spot in the clouds; but he is commonly called HOLE IN THE DAY. His warriors, to the number of two or three hundred, were all armed, and principally with guns, and appeared to be well supplied with ammunition; and their conduct, while here, was peaceable, dignified and manly. This array of strength was supposed to be in consequence of the disturbance of last year, and with a view to over-awe their enemies.⁸

The Chippeways have been in the habit of visiting this post for many years, and transacting their business with the Government, through the commanding officer and their former agent, who resides in the vicinity, and to whom they look for counsel and advice; and it was here that Governor Dodge met them by appointment, and arranged the late treaty, by which they have surrendered a large tract of country to the U.S.⁹ When here, the understanding always has been, that hostilities should cease, and that the Chippeways should go and come without molestation, upon the principle that they were authorized and invited by the Government to do their business here, and that the Military Reservation was to be considered as neutral ground. But it has rarely happened that this understanding has been regarded, or any conditions observed. Misunderstandings have arisen, and aggressions have been committed, by one party or the other, which have almost always terminated in the loss of life, and frustrated all efforts to keep the peace. The Sioux are said, generally, to have been to blame on these occasions and justify themselves on the ground that the Chippeways have no right on this side of the river; and that they themselves should expect the same treatment if they should encroach upon their territories. This plea, it must be admitted, is at least plausible, when separated from other circumstances, and we take into consideration the fact that the Sioux do not admit that they ceded

⁸ Hole-in-the-Day, the Elder, was not a hereditary chief, but had acquired his title by merit of bravery and leadership. He had removed his band from La Pointe to the Gull Lake region — a migration that the Sioux considered a fresh encroachment on their territory, and that already had been the cause of several massacres. See Julius T. Clark, "Reminiscences of the Chippewa Chief, Hole-in-the-Day," Alfred Brunson, "Sketch of Hole-in-the-Day," and Lyman C. Draper, "Note on Hole-in-the-Day," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 5:381-386, 387-399, 400.

⁹ Although after the spring of 1827 Taliaferro's jurisdiction no longer included the Chippewa, they continued to go to Fort Snelling to confer with their former agent. The treaty mentioned is that of July 29, 1837, negotiated by Governor Henry Dodge of Wisconsin Territory as commissioner for the United States. For annuities and other considerations the Chippewa ceded their portion of the delta formed by the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers, including the southern parts of Crow Wing and Aitkin counties and the northern part of Pine County. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:141n., 159 (St. Paul, 1921).

this place to the Government, until the late arrangement, and likewise their peculiar notions in relation to these things. The great mistake, unquestionably, has been in inviting the Chippeways into the country of the Sioux, to transact the Government business. It would have been much better to have sent agents into their own borders. This, however inconvenient and expensive it might have been, would have saved the effusion of much blood, and prevented future difficulties. It is believed that most, if not all, the disturbances that have occurred for the last twenty years between these people, are mainly to be attributed to this cause. A constant excitement has been kept up, and the worst passions have been engendered.

It appears from the concurrent testimony of the principal chiefs of the Chippeways, that Gov. Dodge, "the man with the big plume," as he is styled, assured them that they should receive their payments at the Falls of the St. Croix river, or at some point convenient to them, on the lands they had sold to the Government—though in the treaty, this matter is left to the discretion of the President of the United States. The President, it seems, ignorant of this assurance, has appointed La Point[e] on Lake Superior. This place may, possibly, have been designated, with a view to prevent future collisions with the Sioux, as it is situated some three or four hundred miles in an opposite direction, and in a country in which these bands have no interest or connexion, and they do not hesitate to say that the President has been misled by artful and designing men; and that their wishes and views have been misconceived and misrepresented to him.

When the communication was made to them of this arrangement, so unexpected by them, and contrary to the assurances of "the man with the big plume," involving a journey which they contended would be impracticable and impossible, on account of the distance, the great number of portages, and scarcity of game; and the utter hopelessness of the attempt to bring back their property, or to subsist while there, they came to the conclusion, as they were already upon the point of leaving, to come to this post, where the treaty had been made, and in the neighborhood of which they expected its fulfilment, with the expectation, as they afterwards expressed it in council, of seeing Governor Dodge, and expostulating with him, on the change of place for the reception of their annuities—most evidently under the conviction that the Falls of St. Croix were designated in the instrument, and consequently binding upon

the parties. And here it may be proper to add, that the messenger who bore this communication to them carried presents of tobacco from at least one of the principal chiefs of the Sioux, and an invitation to come and smoke with them, as the Sioux wish to purchase some of their canoes, and other articles of traffic.

The authorities have had no reason to expect the Chippeways down this season, after the word had been conveyed to them, informing them that their annuities would be paid at La Point — taking it for granted, as a matter of course, that they would turn their attention in that direction. This is mentioned because some persons have received the impression that they came here by the invitation of the government agents, and that they are indirectly implicated in the business. — So far from this being the case, when it was understood that they were on the way, a messenger was dispatched to them, urging them not to come, on the ground that perhaps disturbances might occur between them and their old enemies. And when here, they repeatedly warned them to be on their guard against the treachery of the Sioux, and to be careful themselves not to give offense in any thing.¹⁰

The Chippeways arrived here the latter part of June, in the manner and numbers which have been mentioned.¹¹ The commanding officer and their former agent, met them in council, or rather held a formal talk with them, in presence of the other officers, and the citizens of the vicinity, and transmitted their wishes and views to the Government at Washington, in relation to their payments and other matters of importance to them. — On this, and subsequent occasions, their chiefs and

¹⁰ Taliaferro received word on June 8, 1839, that the Chippewa under Hole-in-the-Day were on their way to Fort Snelling, having refused to go to La Pointe, and that "*nothing could keep them back.*" The agent publicly explained to the Sioux that the visit was to be a friendly one which they must meet "*on the same grounds . . . and not infringe the rights of hospitality,*" but he confided to his journal that in his "own private opinion" difficulty was to be apprehended. He despatched the Negro-Chippewa fur trader, Stephen Bonga, to intercept the chief and direct him "to hold still where he is and not to come here." The Indians were already below Rum River when Bonga met them and the chief refused to stop, saying that he would stay but three days at the fort. He added that he hoped Taliaferro would keep the Sioux from interfering with him and that "*he would be quiet in turn.*" Taliaferro Journal, June 8, 9, 16, 18, 20, 1839; Taliaferro to Governor Dodge, June 10, 17, 25, 26, to Hole-in-the-Day, June 18, 1839, in Taliaferro Letter Book, B.

¹¹ Five hundred Chippewa arrived on June 20 under Hole-in-the-Day and during the next five days more and more canoes kept appearing, "announced by volleys from many guns," to join the Chippewa encampment "opposite the Fort East of the Mississippi." By the twenty-fourth Taliaferro counted 900 Chippewa and 856 Sioux, a total of 1,756 Indians. "*I have my hands full,*" he wailed, and predicted "*trouble on trouble with Indians at war.*" Taliaferro Journal, June 20-24, 1839.

principal men expressed the deepest sorrow and regret at the disappointment of not receiving their annuities as they had expected; that they never had but one word; that they always pursued a straight course; that they were sick at heart; that they could not go to La Pointe for the reasons which have been mentioned; and more than insinuated that good faith had been violated. Finally, before they left, they endeavored to effect an arrangement to go on to Washington this fall, and lay their grievances before their Great Father, the President. The commanding officer and their former agent most kindly entered into their views and feelings, and assured them that they would do all in their power to further their interests, advising them at the same time to go to La Pointe this season, with the belief that when the President should have the whole matter before him, that he would fix upon some place more convenient for them in future. It will appear in the sequel that part of them came to the conclusion to follow this advice.¹²

They remained encamped on the east side of the Mississippi, in the place assigned them, for several days, and the utmost harmony seemed to exist between them and the Sioux. Feasts, dances, games of various kinds, and interchanges of visits were constantly kept up during the whole time, and hopes were entertained that a better state of feeling had taken place, and a permanent peace might be arranged.¹³ Nothing occurred of a suspicious or exciting nature, until a short time before the Chippeways left, when a Sioux is affirmed to have fired into a canoe of Chippeways nearly or quite under the walls of the Fort. This was not discovered by his people, who would have punished him, had he not immediately escaped up the valley of the St. Peter, and eluded pursuit. It is further reported and believed that STRONG GROUND, a Chippeway

¹² The Chippewas lingered at the post until July 2, conferring with Taliaferro and Major Plympton. Taliaferro, in his journal for that period, records the council words of many of the braves — speeches bitter with disillusionment and anger at a government which they felt had deceived them with false promises. They contended that they had been promised payment at a convenient spot, that the trip to La Pointe was impossible. They stated that they could not sustain their 2,800 people even on a march of two days, whereas the La Pointe trip would take thirteen. They would starve and lose their little children on the way, and if by chance they did get there, they could not take back supplies over such a distance. They would rather lose the entire payment than attempt such an excursion. In letters to Governor Dodge and Governor Robert Lucas, June 10, 1839, Taliaferro defended the Indians' viewpoint. Taliaferro Letter Book, B.

¹³ On June 21 a lacrosse game with eighty contestants on a side was played between two of the Sioux bands on "Lands End Prairie." All the ladies and gentlemen from the fort rode out to watch the game. On June 23 the Sioux and Chippewas had a dance and they ran foot races in the evening. One Sioux beat five Chippewas in succession, before he was finally defeated by the sixth. Taliaferro Journal.

chief, and brother of HOLE IN THE DAY, was watched with evil intentions by a number of the Sioux, one evening as he was returning from the Fur Company's store; but, being informed of the fact, he escaped the snare and reached the camp in safety. Notwithstanding these disturbing influences, the day before the Chippeways left, they met the Sioux at the agency house in council, smoked the pipe of peace, and in the presence of the agent, agreed to suspend hostilities for one year. This council was asked by the Chippeways the day previous, but there not being a full delegation of the Sioux chiefs present, it was continued by adjournment. These events took place on the twenty-ninth and thirtieth of June. The agent informs me in a note which I have just received from him, upon conclusion of the truce, he "expressed an honest hope that it might long continue; for the best interests of both nations demanded it." With this understanding they separated, and the Chippeways made preparations to return to their own country — neither party probably dreaming that the armistice would so soon be broken.¹⁴ Previous to their departure, the Chippeways separated into two nearly equal divisions. One division under the conduct of Strong Ground went by the St. Croix, on their way to La Point, or with the intention of making an effort to reach that place, and to look after their annuities; while the other, with Hole in the Day, directed their course north, having refused to entertain the idea of going to La Point. Both these divisions left on the last day of June.

HOLE-IN-THE-DAY, with his party, encamped the night of the same day at the Falls of St. Anthony, the distance of about seven miles from the Garrison. — Here they were visited by a company of Sioux from the Lake Calhoun Band,¹⁵ who were received and entertained in the most friendly and hospitable manner: — They were feasted, as they had been while the Chippeways were at the Fort, upon dogs; the highest honor, it is said, that the Indians of these tribes can confer upon strangers or friends. And it was during this entertainment probably, that the seeds of the difficulty were first sown, as other matters appear to have occurred.

¹⁴ On June 28, 1839, Taliaferro recorded in his journal: "The Chippewas met the Sioux in Council. . . . The *Pipe* of peace went round & after 4 hours in conclave the Council broke up — both parties promising to abstain for *one* year from war & longer if practicable."

¹⁵ At the request of Chief Cloudman that his band at Lake Calhoun might be taught how to farm, Taliaferro had established an agricultural colony among them some ten years earlier. The Pond brothers and later the Reverend Jedediah D. Stevens established missions on Lake Calhoun, now within the city of Minneapolis. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:185-189.

Some of the Pillagers, a band of the Chippeways, who have long been notorious for their infamous conduct, either actuated by the spirit of vengeance and regardless of the late armistice, or jealous of the distinction conferred upon the Sioux, showed a strong disposition to quarrel, if they did not break out into actual violence. This induced HOLE-IN-THE-DAY, to send his visitors home to their lodges under a strong escort, and at parting charged them to beware of the Pillagers as they were bad people, and that he could not be responsible for their conduct. The next morning HOLE-IN-THE-DAY broke up his camp and moved up the River; and it appears from circumstances, that during that day or the following night, two of the Pillagers fell off from the party, and went into the neighborhood of the Calhoun Band;¹⁶ for on the morning of the second, before it was fairly light, they fell upon a respectable Sioux by the name of the Badger, murdered and scalped him, and made their escape undiscovered.¹⁷ This barbarous act was well calculated to rouse all the savage tempers of revenge. Runners were immediately despatched to all the Bands in the neighborhood, and by 10 o'clock the same morning, two large war parties had collected and gone in pursuit of the Chippeways.¹⁸

Those on their way to La Point were overtaken near the head of Lake St. Croix. It appears on their way down they had obtained whiskey from some of the wretches, who in defiance of all law and moral principle, have established themselves on the borders of the Indian territory, and almost under the very walls of the Fort, and who are doing more injury than all virtuous efforts can counteract, and they were in a state of intoxication all the previous day. This is an evil which calls loudly for

¹⁶ According to Pond, the two Chippewa remained to weep at the grave of a kinsman murdered a year before by the Sioux. Folwell adds, "It may be assumed that they felt themselves called upon by the spirit of the dead to avenge his murder." The temperature, Taliaferro notes, was 100° on July 1 and 110° the next day. Taliaferro gives the number of the assassins as four. Pond, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3:131; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:155; Taliaferro Journal, July 1, 2, 1839.

¹⁷ Cloudman's young son, who was out with the Badger looking for a horse, escaped unnoticed by the Chippewa. He ran to give the alarm. The Lake Calhoun band sent Stevens to tell Taliaferro of the attack and to ask his advice, but, as they later told the agent, when the people "looked a moment" on their friend's "bleeding body — Their feelings could not be *stopped*" and the young men rushed on for revenge. They did not wait to hear Taliaferro's counsel, but said later that even if he had told them to stop "they would still have done as they did." Taliaferro described the Badger as "a most respectable & much esteemed Sioux Indian." Folwell, in his *Minnesota*, 1:157n., questions the name of the murdered Sioux, but Taliaferro referred to him as the Badger years before his death. Taliaferro Journal, August 15, 1830, July 2, 5, 1839.

¹⁸ Gear here adds the following footnote: "In one of which there were twenty squaws, and are said to have been the most cruel." One of these was the widow of the Badger. Taliaferro Journal, July 2, 1839.

the interference of proper authority; and unless something is soon done to prevent the evil, sad must be the consequences. The Sioux approached them in the night, as they were encamped in their lodges and probably still under the influence of the late debauch, and totally unprepared for resistance. They waited, however, until the dawn of day before they commenced the attack, with a view it is believed, to avoid injuring an Indian trader who was in the company.¹⁹ They then tore down their lodges and fell upon them. From a report of an officer who was sent into that neighborhood in pursuit of deserters, and with instructions to afford protection to any Chippeways or others who might need it, and who visited the horrid scene, it appears that the Chippeways were encamped on a spot of ground from which no successful defence could have been made, and which afforded every advantage and facility to the assailants. The slaughter therefore must have been great; and is estimated to exceed fifty, including three canoe loads of women and children, who were either shot or drowned in the Lake. In this number, however, is classed those who are ascertained to be mortally wounded, and were taken away by their people. The officer alluded to, found the dead bodies, some lying on the ground, others partly buried in heaps, some in a sitting posture, eight of whom had been scalped, and among them, "the remains of A Sioux who had been burned and mutilated in a most horrid manner."²⁰

It is now pretty accurately ascertained, that the Chippeways on this

¹⁹ William A. Aitken was the principal trader involved in the Sioux attack, though he had several other white men with him, among them Francis Brunet. All the traders were at first reported to have been wounded, but later Taliaferro said that Aitken had merely a scratch on the thigh, "*supposed* by some to have happened in his *flight* a *Scratch* from a *bush or stick*." Aitken was much angered at the affair, entered charges of three hundred dollars against Little Crow's band for damages to his tent, which he said was "shot to pieces," his clothing, and other items, and damned the agent and the Sioux roundly for playing a trick on him. Later he wrote to Sibley, speaking of "your Infernal Sioux," and asserting that "for the Manner they very nearly made me Close all my worldly Concerns do not Ever Speak in their favour hereafter." The Indians from Little Crow's village, estimated at from a hundred to a hundred and fifty warriors, were the chief attacking party in the St. Croix battle. Little Crow was not present in the village when the war party started out, but he joined it later. He said his people "might have killed *every* soul of the Chippewas had there been no white people along." Taliaferro Journal, July 2-5, 14, 1839; Aitken to Sibley, October 12, 1839, Sibley Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁰ On July 5 Major Plympton sent a Lieutenant McPhail with a detachment of men and the interpreter Peter Quinn to report on the St. Croix casualties and succor the wounded. McPhail and a companion reported three days later that they had counted some thirty-five to forty dead Chippewa and but one dead Sioux. Because of the stench from the bodies they had been unable to enter the ravine near by, where "the conflict was thought the most sanguinary." Counting the Chippewa killed in their canoes,

occasion, notwithstanding the cowardly onset of their enemies, their great number of killed and wounded, and the fearful situation in which they found themselves, rallied under STRONGGROUND, their chief, drove the Sioux from the ground, pursued them a considerable distance, and came very near taking their wounded; and in the estimation of those who are acquainted with them, maintained their reputation for bravery and courage.²¹

But a still heavier calamity fell upon the division of the Chippeways, that went North. They separated seven or eight miles above the Falls of St. Anthony, entirely ignorant, it is believed, of the murder which had been committed by two of their number, and which was so soon to be visited upon the innocent. — HOLE-IN-THE-DAY with his own Band and the Pillagers, pursued their course up the Mississippi, leaving the Mill Lack Band to seek their home in another direction. These last fell victims to the Sioux. It appears from the statement of an individual who has long resided in this vicinity, and conversant with the history of these people, that this band and the Sioux have been on friendly terms for more than fifteen years, and that nothing in that time had occurred to disturb the harmony, until the events which have been mentioned. When HOLE-IN-THE-DAY separated from them, they struck their course in a diagonal direction, with a view of reaching Rum River, some distance above its mouth — a stream of considerable magnitude which puts into the Mississippi from the left bank, and up which lay their journey. This they did with a view of procuring game, as they were nearly destitute of provisions. The Sioux came upon them early in the morning of the third, as they were making a portage from Red Cedar, or Rice Lake, across to Rum River, encumbered with canoes, children and luggage, where they had made their encampment the night previous. Most of the warriors

Taliaferro estimated the number killed as "not less than 50." During the last week in August the Sioux of the various bands went out to collect the bones of their dead. They found only one body — wolves and vultures had carried off the others. Taliaferro Journal, July 5, 8, August 23, 24, 1839.

²¹ According to Taliaferro, the officers from the fort reported that the Sioux lost but three men in the field and had but eight wounded, yet they "were *beaten* & fled from the *field* & were heard crying for fear their wounded would be taken from them on *their retreat*." Taliaferro adds that many champions of the Chippewa were calling the Sioux cowards," and that the reporting officers were especially prejudiced. Apparently he did not share this opinion. As Folwell points out, the Sioux "had not come to lose men." Strong Ground's wife was killed in the conflict. Strong Ground was a famous warrior who boasted thirty-six eagle plumes in his headdress, each feather representing an enemy scalp. Taliaferro Journal, July 8, 1839; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:156; William W. Warren, "History of the Ojibways," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:353.

had left in pursuit of game; and the old men were nearly half a mile from those in the rear with the canoes, and the women and children following with the infants and lighter baggage. The slaughter was indiscriminate, and principally with the knife and tomahawk. The person alluded to above, has furnished me with a statement, which he collected from a number of the Sioux who were actors in this cold-blooded tragedy; and it appears that the whole line was attacked almost simultaneously, and that there was one continued shriek for the space of half an hour, the whole distance, the women holding up their children, and begging for mercy, and clinging to them in death; and what is still more barbarous, if possible, they not only scalped but cut off the hands and feet of the children, and fastened them to poles, and carried them about in triumph. At length the warriors were recalled by the noise and tumult, returned and drove the Sioux from the slaughter; and as they retired, a kind of running fight was kept up for a considerable length of time. The loss of the Chippeways at this place is variously estimated, some putting the number as high as a hundred thirty-three, and others admitting only sixty or seventy, but all, that it consisted principally of women and children. The Sioux, in order to swell the amount are charged with dividing the scalps; and this is supposed to be true.²²

The Sioux will lose in killed and wounded from sixteen to twenty warriors, a number, it is supposed, exceeding the same class of men among the Chippeways. They left their dead at the St. Croix, and had seven or eight wounded. At the Rice or Red Cedar Lake, they left seven dead and had nine wounded. Many of the wounded have since died, and probably more will share the same fate. The whole number of lives sacrificed in this bloody business, including men, women and children I am inclined to think will not fall much short of two hundred; a number

²² When Taliaferro remonstrated with the chiefs of the Sioux villages after the massacres he met with the same reply from all. They were sorry for the slaughter of so many women and children, but "we did not begin it. We had *smoked*, eat[en] & made peace together but the day before. . . . We did this that we might be at peace and hunt quietly on our lands, but it was all *spoiled* by the bad conduct of the *Pillager Chippewas*." Chief Shakopee said that they did this of their "own free will & nothing could have stoped us. We thought of the many insults offered our people — & the murder in *cold blood* of 3 Lodges of our *women* & children last year by the Hole in the Day." Chief Good Road hoped that Taliaferro would give a fair account of the matter to the president, whose words the Indians recollected. The president had told them to go back "to your people and keep the peace with all nations — go to war against none, but if struck upon by your enemies, then you may revenge it. We have been struck upon & we have revenged it. We will never be Still." Taliaferro Journal, July 5, 6, 1839.

far exceeding any thing that has ever been known by the oldest traders among these miserable and degraded people.

But the most disgusting part of the story remains to be told. The two war parties to the number of three or four hundred, returned in triumph, accompanied by the women and children from the villages, leaving the scalps of their victims stretched upon ozier hoops or branches, and elevated upon poles, and commenced the horrid dance peculiar on these occasions. And it seemed as if all the spirits of darkness had been let down upon us. Nothing can be conceived more horrid and disgusting, than this exhibition, and it is with pleasure that I turn from it, to mention that many of the old men, heathen though they are, possess the feelings of humanity, and lament with the deepest sorrow such a sacrifice of human life, and have been seen weeping over the bloody trophies of the victory.

In conclusion, I would mention, that the belief generally prevails, among those who are best acquainted with the character of the Chippewas, that they will rally before winter, and make a descent upon the Sioux in some unguarded hour, and take ample vengeance; and that nothing else can make an atonement. They are reported to be brave and daring, and not behind their neighbors in cruelty. Though equally wild and savage, they appear to be a warlike race, if not superior in point of intellect and character.²³

Most truly yours

EZEKIEL T. [*sic*] GEAR.

²³ Taliaferro warned the Sioux to be ready for the Chippewa's revenge at any time, for "attacked they would be sooner or later on that fact they might rely." In the spring of 1841 the Chippewa retaliated, and again in the summer of 1842. Taliaferro Journal, July 14, 1839; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:179.



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