Lawrence Taliaferro received his fair share of letters from famous men. As the Indian agent assigned to Fort Snelling, he maintained a correspondence with some of the most influential figures of the 1820s and '30s, including Joseph Nicollet, John C. Calhoun, William Clark, and an assortment of presidents and their secretaries. Luckily for social historians, he also saved the letters he received from lesser known people: obscure merchants, minor fur traders, and other near-unknowns whose names do not appear in major extant documents. These letters are often short on background and refer to places and events that are difficult to identify. But they also open doors to biographical mysteries, leading the researcher-detectives who pursue them into some of the more overlooked corners of pre-territorial Minnesota history.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these mysteries is tied up in a letter that arrived at Taliaferro’s agency on September 23, 1836. In it, a woman named Margaret Hess writes from Prairie du Chien. She begins formally in the style used by the agents, traders, and politicians in Taliaferro’s circle.

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“The Most Satisfactory Proof”

Revising an Anglo-Dakota Family History

Lizzie Ehrenhalt
Dear Sir,
A Treaty held some years since, with the Sioux nation of Indians, granted to the mix'd or half breeds of that nation, a donation of land, which was according to that treaty, to be divided (as specified) between them. I have lately been inform'd (when application was made to me by a gentleman who wish'd to purchase an interest in my claim) that I had no interest to sell, and that I was excluded from the provisions of that Treaty.1

Taliaferro’s papers contain few letters from women—let alone those asking for real estate advice—but Hess’s Dakota heritage makes her an even more unusual correspondent. Her letter refers to the fourth Treaty of Prairie du Chien, an 1830 agreement that ceded large tracts of native-held land to the United States and established new reservations. One such reservation, on the shores of Lake Pepin between present-day Red Wing and Wabasha, was set aside specifically for so-called half-breed Dakotas, and this is the land for which Hess was eligible.2

Having begun so formally, Hess’s letter takes a surprisingly personal detour.

My object my dear sir in troubling you with this communication is to ascertain the facts in the case. I am sir the daughter of Charles Hess, who was himself a half Sioux and my mother a Sioux woman. You I believe knew my Father and probably my Mother too, and I know of no one who can see me righted in this matter, or would probably take a greater interest than yourself. I appeal to you then as the Father and protector of our nation, to see that Justice is done to me, and to three little helpless children. We are poor, and are certainly in a great need of that donation as any other individual to whom it has been given[.]

Hess’s plea is carefully composed, appealing in succession to Taliaferro’s professional, personal, and moral commitments. She holds back the revelation of her father’s name until midway through the letter, heightening its impact. Taliaferro would have recognized it, having traveled to Washington, D.C., with an interpreter of the same name in 1824. It is possible that Margaret knew of Taliaferro’s marriage a la façon du pays to a Dakota woman, The Day Sets, and the 1828 birth of their daughter, Mary; her reference to mixed-blood Dakota children in jeopardy would have resonated with the Indian agent, regardless.3 She closes the letter by returning to the businesslike tone of its opening, promising that “the most satisfactory proof can be given as to the identity of my father and myself.”

Margaret Hess’s letter is a defiantly hybrid document, one that refuses to confine itself to a single register or style. Its writer is polite and urgent, confessional and guarded, emotional and reserved. It belongs to multiple genres, including those assumed to be exclusive to men in the 1830s: the real estate inquiry, the business memo, the personal plea, the affidavit, the petition for justice. In drawing on the conventions of this last genre, Margaret employed a strategy long used by native people seeking to clarify or contest their treatment at the hands of the U.S. government.4

During the Jacksonian era, petitioners often were Margaret’s neighbors living throughout the Upper Mississippi region; sometimes they were also women, acting alone or in alliance. In 1828 Angelia Cutaw (a mixed-blood Ojibwe woman) and Cecille Boyer petitioned an Indian Affairs commissioner in Michigan Territory for land owed to them under the terms of an 1819 Saginaw treaty. Their case, brought before Congress, was decided in their favor. Cecile Comparé, a mixed-blood Kaw woman living in St. Louis, filed a similar petition seeking treaty-guaranteed land in 1834. And in 1829, a group of mixed-blood Sac and Fox people, including several women, asked Congress to confirm their entitlement to a Missouri reservation. Such petitioners followed the bureaucratic protocol of the time and tried to redress their grievances by working within the American legal system.5

Margaret’s letter is more than a petition; it is also a savvy attempt to leverage a personal connection.

Lizzie Ehrenhalt is a collections assistant at the Minnesota Historical Society. Most recently, she contributed to projects that document Dakota material culture and the history of Fort Snelling.
Margaret’s letter, however, is more than a petition; it is also a savvy attempt to leverage a personal connection. From her base in Prairie du Chien, she might have appealed to local Indian Agent Joseph M. Street or to any of the superintendents, agents, and commissioners assigned to the Upper Mississippi by the Office of Indian Affairs. Instead, she chose Taliaferro—the agent assigned to the Dakota but also a man whose friendly memories of her father might stir his sympathy and inspire him to do more than he might for a writer with an unfamiliar name. The relationship also promised a greater chance that Margaret’s story would be believed and her proof of identity accepted.

Taliaferro, it seems, saw no need to seek such proof. He replied to Margaret a month later—a relatively short turn-around time, given the volume of mail requiring the agent’s attention. In a letter dated November 5, 1836, copied carefully into his correspondence book among dispatches to governors and generals, Taliaferro pledged to bring Hess’s case before his superiors, assuring her of “the best disposition on my part to befriend you in so important a matter.” If he honored that pledge, the written record does not show it. The correspondence book contains neither subsequent letters to or from Margaret Hess nor evidence of the proof of identity that she offered to provide.

It is easy to imagine a scenario in which Hess’s case fell through the cracks. The St. Peters Indian Agency was a busy place in the fall of 1836, and a number of pressing situations were competing for Taliaferro’s attention. Joseph Nicollet had just returned from his latest expedition and was Taliaferro’s houseguest at the agency. Negotiations were underway for a new treaty with the Dakota, and a mentally disturbed soldier discharged from Fort Snelling was at large in the neighborhood after attacking a Dakota widow. The Lake Pepin reservation, moreover, had not yet been parceled out into individual lots, a project over which Taliaferro had little control and which would remain uncompleted for many years.

A document created in the summer of 1838, however, shows that Taliaferro’s and Margaret’s association outlived their written exchange. Her name appears on a
1836, with the fur trade in decline and native groups removed to points farther west, Prairie du Chien's character was changing. The establishment of Wisconsin Territory on July 3 opened the area to floods of easterners eager to build homesteads on the newly available farmland.9

Though the town had always attracted its share of crafty entrepreneurs, these new outsiders could be more sinister. A Michigan speculator named Charles Van Dorn arrived in time to unload $200 half-acre parcels of uninhabitable swampland on unsuspecting buyers before disappearing. In August 1836, Hercules L. Dousman described the prevailing local atmosphere in a letter
to trading partner Henry Sibley: “We are overrun here with land speculators, sharers, etc. etc. They are buying up the whole country—they have got the people here perfectly delirious.” It was in the midst of this delirium that Margaret reached out to Taliaferro. With schemes like Van Dorn’s playing out around her and demand for land skyrocketing, it is no wonder she tried to secure the property she had been promised.

Her connection to Scott Campbell suggests two related explanations for Margaret’s move from Prairie du Chien to St. Peters.

A second set of questions surrounds Margaret’s identity. Who was this woman who wrote to Taliaferro and lived at his agency, and what personal connections might have helped her to move there? The 1838 mixed-blood register lists her location, age (35), and her name—Margaret Hess Campbell, the extra surname suggesting a marriage into the many-branched Campbell family, based in Prairie du Chien. Two of the sons of patriarch Archibald Campbell can be traced to the St. Peters area in 1838—and from there to Margaret. Scott Campbell, Taliaferro’s long-time interpreter, had been living at the agency for more than a decade by then. He had traveled with Taliaferro to Washington in 1824 and, as an interpreter, would have worked side-by-side with Charles Hess. But in 1838 he was already spoken for, having legalized a long-standing relationship with Margaret Menager in 1825. The couple remained married until Scott’s death in the 1850s. None of their five underage sons, moreover, was old enough to have made a match with Margaret.

Scott’s half-brother John Campbell appears on the 1838 census of Wisconsin Territory as a resident of Clayton County north of the Root River, an area that included St. Peters. Born in Ireland in the 1780s, John followed his father Archibald to Canada and eventually to Wisconsin Territory, where he was the only second-generation Campbell who could not claim Dakota heritage (Scott and his full siblings shared a Dakota mother). The 1838 household John headed consisted of four males (including himself) and one female. The 1850 census of Minnesota Territory offers more information about the members of that family, albeit 12 years later: John’s wife “Margerite” (45, maiden name not given, born along the Red River of the North) and three sons (John Jr., 20; Jerry/Jeremiah, 17; and David, 11, all born in Minnesota). Given that ages and birthdates tend to be approximate in early census records, these details align with what we know about Margaret Hess, who would have been about 45 in 1850. Charles Hess traded along the Red River of the North, making it a likely birthplace for his daughter.

And the “little helpless children” Margaret mentions in her letter to Taliaferro find counterparts in the sons listed in the census. Supported by these convergences, and by John’s status as the only eligible Campbell present at St. Peters in 1838, we can identify him as the man who passed on the Campbell name to Margaret Hess.

As a young man, John Campbell traveled throughout the Great Lakes region. He helped run his father’s portage business in what is now central Wisconsin and served as a volunteer at Fort Michilimackinac during the war of 1812. But he seems never to have settled on a profession (the 1850 census records his occupation as farmer) or made a name for himself to equal the reputations of his better-known half-brothers.

The strongest evidence of John’s lack of success is Margaret’s letter, which implies that her husband failed to provide for his children. Margaret’s apparent resolve to sell her land for extra income, even when it required admitting her poverty to Taliaferro, suggests that by the fall of 1836, the family was struggling. Their struggle may have been more than financial. In the 1834 census of Crawford County (then a part of Michigan Territory), the household of John Campbell contained four children—two boys and two girls—under the age of ten. Four years later, the Clayton County census lists one female (Margaret) and four males: John and three children (one just born, according to their ages in the 1850 Minnesota census). The two females do not appear. While there is no proof that the girls were John and Margaret’s daughters, the possibility remains that the couple lost two children between 1834 and 1838.

Her connection to Scott Campbell suggests two related explanations for Margaret’s move from Prairie du Chien to St. Peters. In the first, Scott orchestrated the move, using his influence with Taliaferro to find a place for his half-brother’s family to live inside the agency. Though he had six children of his own, in 1836 the interpreter was prospering and in a secure enough position to help a relative fallen on hard times. In the second possible scenario, Taliaferro proposed the arrangement, realizing that though his hands were tied in the...
Lake Pepin case, he could help in other ways. Attractive though this explanation is—it finds a way for Taliaferro to have honored his promise to help Margaret—it remains speculative. John Campbell is not on the list of smiths and farmers contracted to work at the St. Peters Agency between 1837 and 1839, so Taliaferro did not go so far as to provide a job. But the family does appear to have lived within the agency proper, rather than on a homestead nearby. The 1838 mixed-blood register distinguished between claimants living within the agency complex, those living around Fort Snelling, and those in the general St. Peters vicinity. For example, agency blacksmith’s wife Madeline Campbell Rusico was traced to “St. Peters Agency, Fort S.,” farmer Oliver Faribault to “St. Peters near Fort S.,” and trader’s wife Margaret Mooers to “Below Fort Snelling 18 mi.” This level of specificity suggests that Margaret Hess Campbell, listed at “St. Peters Agency, Fort S.,” lived close to Taliaferro indeed, in one of a handful of buildings surrounding his home.15

Margaret makes no mention of John Campbell in her letter to Taliaferro. She signs her name Hess rather than Hess Campbell, as it appears two years later on the mixed-blood register. This may indicate that her relationship with John rested on a mutual understanding *a la façon du pays* and that they did not marry legally until after 1836—if at all.16 But it may also reflect a strategy of representing herself to Taliaferro as her father’s daughter and on terms that were most likely to spur his intervention. Margaret seems to have believed that the surest route to success lay in emphasizing her connection to Charles Hess rather than to the father of her children. Given an opportunity to link herself to Scott Campbell—one of Taliaferro’s oldest and most trusted employees—Margaret turned it down.

**Charles Hess, as it turns out, was no mere interpreter.** He was also a local legend, a trader and frontiersman who achieved near-mythic status in the published collections of pioneer lore that became popular after his death. He appears in no fewer than four such collections, among them William Joseph Snelling’s *Tales of the Northwest* (1830); L. H. Young’s *Daring Exploits and Perilous Adventures* (1843); Edward D. Neill and Charles S. Bryant’s *History of the Minnesota Valley* (1882); and volume two of Warren Upham’s *Minnesota in Three Centuries, 1655–1908* (1908). *Tales of the Northwest* is clearly the source text for the Hess story; the later works borrow liberally from Snelling’s descriptions and dialogue, sometimes reproducing whole passages verbatim.17

Although Snelling appears to have met his subject, the theatrical anecdotes he offers are fictionalized at the very least, and he seems interested in Hess as an excuse for sensational storytelling rather than as an opportunity to report facts. Luckily, an even earlier source exists against which Snelling’s claims may be checked, one written while Hess was still alive. A detailed record of Stephen H. Long’s 1823 expedition to the source of the St. Peters River, compiled by William H. Keating and others, contains a profile of Hess—“one of the most respectable traders whom we have seen”—convincingly based on interviews with the man himself, carried out while the exploring party stopped at Fort St. Anthony (Fort Snelling).18

From the combined Keating and Snelling accounts emerges a timeline of Hess family history that contradicts Margaret’s 1836 letter. Having established himself in the 1810s as a successful trader in the service of the American Fur Company, Charles married an Ojibwe woman, with whom he had at least two children. By 1822 they had settled at Pembina, an area known for its large Métis community. In that year, either on assignment for the Columbia Fur Company or in search of food, the family set off in the direction of Lake Traverse. One day, the party stopped to make camp and Hess rode off to hunt buffalo. When he returned, he found that a group of Yankton Dakota had murdered his wife and children. Devastated, he traveled on alone until he learned that one daughter...
was alive and being held captive at a Dakota village. Hess made his way to the village, tracked down the captors, and negotiated for his daughter’s release. After that ordeal, Hess returned to trading. He made the trip to Washington with Taliaferro in 1824 and died that same year, perhaps of the chronic “calculous disease” Keating mentioned.19

Keating and Snelling diverge in their descriptions of the attack. Where Snelling reports the deaths of Hess’s wife and all of their children except the ransomed daughter, Keating maintains that the only casualties were a daughter and two traveling companions, unrelated to the Hesses. Both versions, however, support the conclusion that it was Margaret who was captured and ransomed. If Snelling is correct that only the ransomed daughter was spared, then she must have been Margaret, whose 1836 letter proves her survival. Keating’s account states that Hess had two children and that one of them was killed; in this case, too, the sole survivor must have been Margaret. In any event, Margaret lost at least one sibling and experienced a sudden separation from her family.20

Turning back to Margaret’s letter, we find two challenges to these published biographies. First, she states that her father is half Dakota. This is not impossible, since Hess fits the profile of an Anglo-Dakota trader, and both Keating and Snelling report that he was called by a version of the Dakota name Tatanka Nazi (Rising—or Standing—Buffalo). But Keating identifies Charles as French, and though Snelling refers suggestively to his “unknown origins” and a youth spent living with different tribes, he depicts Hess in no uncertain terms as the archetypal white man seduced by “the wild, independent habits of the wilderness” away from “the refinement and artificial wants of civilized society.”21

Second, Margaret says that her mother is Dakota. This goes against Keating and Snelling, who agree that Charles married an Ojibwe woman. More important, it upends their premise for the family murder: the Yankton Dakota attacked the Hesses because they were Ojibwe, and, therefore, enemies. Keating explains, “Having always traded with the Chippewas, married among them, and been considered as connected with them, [Hess] had entertained great apprehensions of the Dacotases.” And Snelling, providing his own “motive for aggression,” states that “[t]he wife of Hess was a Chippeway, and the blood of that hated race ran in the veins of his children.”22

Who, then, are we to believe? The mismatched facts set up a kind of contest of trustworthiness, with Margaret Hess on one side vying against her father’s biographers on the other. Keating and Snelling could only gain from embellishing their stories with the drama of an unprovoked intertribal massacre—a drama their white audience, primed by stereotypes of bloodthirsty Indians, was only too ready to believe. Assuming that she was not Dakota, Margaret also stood to benefit from misrepresenting herself. But for her, the stakes were higher; Keating and Snelling wrote to entertain their readers, while Margaret wrote to lift herself and her children from poverty. Lying would have been risky, especially given her belief that Taliaferro “knew my Father and probably my Mother too.”

The question of Margaret’s truthfulness is ultimately resolved by the testimony she gave to the U.S. commissioners in 1838. In the eyes of W. L. D. Ewing and S. J. Pease—and, by extension, the federal government—Margaret Hess was a mixed-blood Dakota woman. Registering payout claimants was a serious business, and commissioners took care to investigate would-be recipients. Dakota tribal members also scrutinized the roll in order to vouch for the signers’ claims. Therese le Clair and Joseph La Frambois were stricken from the final version of the 1838 register after they were “found not to be related to the Indians interested in this treaty.”23 For Margaret to have faked her way onto the list would have been difficult, to say the least. All available evidence indicates that she was telling the truth and that Snelling and Keating were either freely inventive or misinformed.

Margaret’s letter to Taliaferro calls into question the most basic details of her father’s life, family, and identity as recorded by his biographers, whose accounts acquired the patina of fact as the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth. It serves as a reminder of the unreliability of frontier lore, no matter how canonical or widely published. In the end, the back-story of Charles Hess is valuable not for its biographical details but for the insight it provides into Margaret’s character as it was shaped during her young adulthood. The Hesses may not have been attacked in 1822 on their way to Lake Traverse in exactly the way Keating and Snelling describe. But those
Dear Sir,

A Treaty held some years since with the Cloud Nation & Indians by granted to the chief, or half breed of that nation, a donation of land, which was according to that Treaty to be divided (as specified) between them. I have lately been informed (when application was made to me by a gentleman who wished to purchase an interest in any claim,) that I had no interest to sell, and that I was excluded from the provisions of that Treaty. My object, my dear sir, in troubling you is, to ascertain the truth of this communication; it to ascertain the truth in the case. I am an the daughter of Charles Hylton, who was himself a half blood. I remember my Mother and present yourself. You, I believe, know my Father & probably my Mother too, as I know of no one who can see me right in this matter, or would probably take an interest than yourself. I appeal to you, then, as the Father & protector of our nation, to see that justice is done to me, to three little helpless children. We are poor, & are certainly
accounts were probably inspired by some kind of violent event—an episode that would have affected 18-year-old Margaret and resulted in a personal loss. Her ability to endure that loss and the death of her father two years later and go on to raise three children, appeal directly to a government official, and move to his agency suggests determination, resilience, and will. She survived, and her early trials may have made her stronger.

Margaret’s life after the 1830s is sparsely documented. By 1839 she and her family had left St. Peters for a settlement outside St. Paul called Little Prairie. There, John Campbell voted in the 1840 election of the third Wisconsin territorial legislature. Afterwards, they moved 80 miles south along the Mississippi River to a farm near Wabasha—the area included in the Lake Pepin reservation that was the object of Margaret’s inquiry to Taliaferro. It is here that the territorial census taker

facing: Opening page of Margaret Hess’s 1836 letter.
below: Lake Pepin, engraving by Jacob C. Ward, about 1840, when Hess was living nearby.
brothers wanted to determine whether the government owed them scrip—a credit they could have inherited from their mother upon her death but also may have qualified for on their own.26 Twenty years after Margaret wrote to Taliaferro, her sons were grappling with the same slow-moving bureaucracy that had thwarted her efforts to claim a piece of the Lake Pepin reserve.

Though this struggle was part of the Hess-Campbell family legacy, Margaret seems to have passed on to at least one of her children a connection to his Dakota heritage that ran deeper than property claims. Jeremiah, her middle son, married a mixed-blood Dakota woman and had a daughter who married and had children with a Dakota man. Jerry, as he was called, eventually followed his mother’s people to the Santee Sioux Reservation in northeast Nebraska, where he passed into late middle-age surrounded by his Dakota kin, including two grandchildren.27

The story of Margaret Hess and her family is valuable as many things: as a window into pre-territorial Minnesota history, as a case study in the struggle of mixed-blood Dakota people to assert their rights, and as a snapshot of a moment in the life of a Dakota woman of the 1830s, taken from her own perspective. We may never know Margaret’s complete life history, but her letter to Taliaferro points us in the right direction.

Notes

The author thanks Jim Hansen of the Wisconsin Historical Society for sharing his research into the lives of John Campbell and his sons and especially for identifying Campbell as the husband of Margaret Hess. Thanks also to Mary Bakeman, Debbie Miller, and Duane Swanson for their research leads and feedback.


2. For the Lake Pepin reservation’s boundaries, see Article 9 of the treaty in Charles J. Kappler, Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2: 307, also available online. “Half-breed” has long been sensitive to the welfare of mixed-blood children. If his efforts to support his own daughter are any indication, Taliaferro was sensitive to the welfare of mixed-blood children. See Jane Lamm Carroll, “Who Was Jane Lamont? Anglo-Dakota Daughters in Early Minnesota,” Minnesota History 59 (Spring 2005): 189–92.


7. Two years later, more than 100 mixed-blood Dakota people petitioned Secretary of War Joel Roberts Poinsett to divide the land into individual plots; Members of the Sioux Nation to Joel Roberts Poinsett, Sept. 5, 1838, Alexis Baillly Papers, MHS. Though the petition claims to list “nearly all the half and quarter breeds of the Sioux Nation,” Margaret Hess (Campbell) does not appear. For a compilation of related documents, see Register of Claims, frame 42, copy in MHS. For the treaty, see Kappler, Indian Affairs, 2: 493–94.


9. Register of Claims, file 200, Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807–1904, National Archives microfilm M289, roll 59, frame 42, copy in MHS. For the treaty, see Kappler, Indian Affairs, 2: 493–94.


11. Register of Claims, frame 42, also lists Margaret as one-fourth Dakota, whereas in her letter to Taliaferro she iden-
tifies herself as three-fourths (“my mother a Sioux woman” and her father “a half Sioux”). James L. Hansen, ed., “Two Early Lists of Mixed-Blood Sioux,” Minnesota Genealogical Journal 6 (Nov. 1986): 253–30 includes a transcription of the 1838 register. His introduction (p. 253) explains, “The degree of Indian blood should be considered more cautiously as the principal concern was to verify that the applicant had at least ¾ Sioux blood, the minimum required for inclusion. In fact some of the quarter bloods are known from other sources to be ¾ Sioux.” On Scott Campbell, see James L. Hansen, “Crawford County, Wisconsin Marriages, 1816–1848,” Minnesota Genealogical Journal 1 (May 1984): 43; for an overview of his life and milieu, see Annette Atkins, Creating Minnesota: A History from the Inside Out (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008), 26–33.


13. Crawford Co. deeds, Book A, 13–14, cited in James L. Hansen, “The Campbell Family of Prairie du Chien,” 5, Archibald Campbell file, Woolworth papers; Harpole and Nagle, eds., Minnesota Territorial Census, 1850, p. 72. Like his brother Scott, Duncan Campbell enjoyed success in the fur trade and as a Dakota-language interpreter; see his file in the Woolworth papers. In their compilation of the area’s 1838 “civilian, non-Indian population,” White and White group “Marguerite Hess” with Duncan’s household (Fort Snelling, p. 223), but this is most likely an error. The mixed-blood register identifies the “foot of Lake Pepin” as Duncan’s residence in 1838 and the St. Peters Agency as Margaret Hess Campbell’s; Register of Claims, frames 40, 42.


15. Between 1837 and 1839, St. Peters Agency records list Scott Campbell’s salary as $300; White and White, Fort Snelling, 120; Register of Claims, frame 42. For various ways of measuring the relative value of Campbell’s salary in 2012, see www.measuringworth.com.


17. Reviewing Snelling’s treatment of the Hess saga, Allen E. Woodall remarked, “The story of Charles Hess is fairly well established as a fact” but did not elaborate or name sources. He maintained that Snelling’s contribution was to transform Hess into a hero. Tales of the Northwest was published anonymously, but insiders recognized Snelling as its author. See Woodall, “William Joseph Snelling and the Early Northwest,” Minnesota History 10 (Dec. 1929): 380, 378 note 16.


18. William Joseph Snelling, Tales of the Northwest; or, Sketches of Indian Life and Character (Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins: Boston, 1830), 68, refers vaguely to a fireside interview with Hess, but that detail may arise from Snelling’s attempt to evoke an intimate storytelling atmosphere. William H. Keating et al., Narrative of an Expedition to the Sources of St. Peter’s River . . . (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey & I. Lea, 1824), 408–09, also online. According to Keating, Hess was at the fort to seek treatment for “a very painful calculous disease.”

19. Keating, Narrative, 52, claims that Hess had two daughters; Snelling, Tales of the Northwest, 77, 80, mentions six children. On Hess’s health, see Keating, Narrative, 409. Calculous disease (lithiasis) is caused by the concretion of stones inside an organ. If Hess did die from lithiasis, it is likely to have involved his gall bladder or pancreas, since kidney stones are rarely fatal, even if infected; “Kidney stones: definition,” www.mayoclinic.com/health/kidney-stones/DS00282 (accessed Sept. 25, 2012).

20. Keating, Narrative, 410; Snelling, Tales, 79–80. This description of the attack is so gratuitously violent as to suggest exaggeration for dramatic effect. It is likely that Snelling inflated the number of casualties and embellished the circumstances, all of which would fuel the story’s melodrama and prepare readers for the tragic climax to come.

21. Keating offers the English translation Standing Bull (Narrative, 411); Snelling’s transliteration is Tahtunkah Nahzee (Tales, 82). Snelling, Tales, 67 (for quotes), which also asserts that, as a child, Hess “witnessed the burning of his paternal roof, and the slaughter of his family by a party of Indians”—making it illogical, within the context of Snelling’s narrative, for Hess himself to have been Indian. Following Snelling’s lead, L. H. Young’s 1843 version of the story calls Hess “a remarkable illustration of the superiority of white intellect over aboriginal genius and cunning.” This narrative does not mention the attack, murders, or ransom but reproduces word-for-word other Snelling descriptions; Daring Exploits and Perilous Adventures (New Haven, CN: Hitchcock and Stafford, 1843), 405–10.

22. Keating, Narrative, 409; Snelling, Tales, 79.


24. John Campbell was among the voters interviewed by a county commissioner after a losing candidate contested the 1840 election results. In his deposition, Campbell testified that he had lived in St. Croix County for one-and-a-half years before September 1840; Minnesota Beginnings: Records of St. Croix County, Wisconsin Territory, 1840–1849 (Stillwater, MN: Washington County Historical Society, 1999), 268.

25. U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, Records Related to Mixed Blood Claimants under the Treaty of Prairie du Chien, 1855–1856, National Archives microfilm M550, copy in MHS. Hess is also missing from the list of mixed-blood claimants included on the same roll.

26. June 4, 1859, letter cited and described in Hansen, “Campbell Family,” 6. As the children of a white father and a mother who self-identified as three-fourths Dakota, they would have been three-eighths Dakota. The eligibility cutoff for the group in the 1838 mixed-blood register was one-quarter. 27. Jerry Campbell in U.S. census schedules, 1900, Santee Township, Knox County, Nebraska, accessed on Ancestry.com (Sept. 25, 2012).

The original map (p. 150) is in the National Archives, Record Group 75, Washington, D.C.; all other images, including the seal, photographed by Adam Harris, are in MHS collections.
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