

# The Settler and the Army in Frontier Minnesota

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THE FIRST DETACHMENTS of the United States army to be garrisoned in what is now Minnesota slowly poled their keelboats up the Mississippi in the summer of 1819 to the point where Fort Snelling was to be built. They entered a wilderness almost devoid of white men, for they had not been sent to protect westward moving frontiersmen. They had not journeyed more than a thousand miles from their headquarters at Detroit to answer the call of white settlers who feared the tomahawks or scalping knives of the Sioux. Rather, they came to substantiate the claim of the United States to overlordship of the vast reaches of the upper Mississippi country, which long had felt the dominance of the British government. The English had indeed been defeated and had given up all rights to the area in 1783, and the young American government's claims had been upheld in the War of 1812, but only the presence of army men would convince the Indians that the Great White Father at Washington meant to exert his authority.

In 1819 Minnesota belonged to the Indians—the Chippewa and the Sioux—except for small patches of land where the Minnesota and the St. Croix met the Mississippi. These Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike had arranged to purchase from the natives for army posts in 1805. Since there were no white settlers in the region stretching out from Fort Snelling, there was no one to criticize the actions of the army garrison, to demand protection, or to squat upon lands reserved for military use.

Such a situation could not continue long. The garrison at Fort Snelling was a magnet drawing hardy pioneers into a region which soldiers had tamed. The post was a substantial guarantee against the Indian menace; its men made a success of cultivating the soil; and they set up mills to utilize the water power of the Falls of St. An-

thony and to saw into lumber the rich timber along the rivers. Provisions were at hand to succor families hard pressed by a wilderness that exhausted their supplies as well as their bodies. In fact, it was as a haven that Fort Snelling was first sought out by Swiss and other refugees from Lord Selkirk's settlement on the Red River. These miserable and deluded people left the hardships caused by Canada's grasshoppers and floods, and beginning in 1821 several hundred drifted to Fort Snelling. For many of them this was but a stopping point on a journey to settlements in Illinois or Indiana, but some stayed in the vicinity of the fort, setting up homes on the military reservation by the sufferance of the kind-hearted army officers. Soon they were joined by lumbermen and farmers traveling up the Mississippi. Finally, in 1837, by treaties with the Indians, the delta of land between the Mississippi and the St. Croix was opened to settlement, and the white men living there were enabled to obtain legal title to the lands on which they had been squatting.

By the same token, the army's isolation was gone. There appeared increasing numbers of white settlers, who looked upon the army garrison as subordinate to their wishes and needs. The army faced complaints and criticisms from disgruntled citizens who coveted military lands or called for new western posts and more aggressive protection as settlements surged up the rivers. The complaints often were expressed in the columns of frontier newspapers, and more than once they echoed in the halls of Congress as irate Minnesotans took their troubles to the source of army authority.

There were various reasons for dissatisfaction with the army in Minnesota. Most of them can be traced to the location of the posts, the type and number of troops, the way in which they were used, and the annoying hindrances to settlement caused by the reservation for military use of land around the posts. Fundamentally, of course, the United States troops accomplished their mission, for they prevented Indian uprisings and furnished an umbrella of protection under which settlement advanced. Only in a situation of comparative security did people speak out about the irksome details of the army's presence which seemed to impede the fulfillment of manifest destiny.

As Minnesota developed before the Civil War and the frontier ad-

vanced beyond Fort Snelling, the army moved westward and northward. Large blocks of fertile prairie and rich forest land were purchased from the Indians by the terms of treaties negotiated in 1851, 1854, and 1855, and new, permanent army posts were built on the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers to provide the protection that once Fort Snelling alone had furnished. In 1849 Fort Ripley was established on the Mississippi below the mouth of the Crow Wing River; and in 1853 Fort Ridgely was founded on the Minnesota, in the northwest corner of present-day Nicollet County, to guard against the Sioux who had been restricted to narrow strips of land along the upper river.

The war department considered these concentrations of troops the best means for overawing the redmen and preventing attacks on isolated families in the river valleys. The number of men available to the secretary of war seems pitifully small to those accustomed to thinking of armies in terms of hundreds of thousands, but penny-pinching Congresses in the decades before the Civil War made a total of even ten to fifteen thousand men difficult to maintain. It took no small skill to distribute these meager forces along two extensive coasts and from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico. By keeping men in sizable groups, the government hoped to use them most efficiently. "The multiplication of small posts," the secretary of war asserted in 1853, "however much it may appear to have been called for by the necessities of the service, is of more than doubtful policy. The system is expensive far beyond any good results that are attained by it. It is injurious to the discipline [*sic*], instruction, and efficiency of the troops, and it is believed that it often invites aggression by that exhibition of weakness which must inevitably attend the great dispersion of any force."<sup>1</sup>

Yet the "multiplication of small posts" and the dispersion of forces was what many Minnesotans demanded. The fingers of settlement into the western area of the state and the islands of settlers that sprang into being around such points as Pembina called for a military post near by as effective protection; and, as a corollary, the maintenance of garrisons in sections well populated and in little

<sup>1</sup> 33 Congress. 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 6 (serial 691).

danger were severely denounced. The war department just did not move fast enough—or in enough directions—to keep pace with advancing settlement.

In 1858 the editor of the *Pioneer and Democrat* of St. Paul urged a new policy for the disposition of troops in an article entitled “Military Defence of Our Western Frontier.” To him the “defenceless state of our frontier settlements, everywhere exposed to the incursions of tribes which recent events have shown to be capable of any atrocities” and the “proved inadequacy of the few companies which are cooped up at Forts Ridgely and Ripley to defend the immense extent of country which the emigration of the past few years has carried far beyond the line of protection afforded by those posts” required a reallocation of troops along the frontier and a “new system of military defences corresponding to the new disposition of the Indian tribes, and the new exigencies to which the recent extraordinary extension of our settlements have given rise.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Sauk Rapids Frontiersman* was even more explicit in its criticism, and its program for improvement is in sharp disagreement with the war department’s policy of concentration. The editor of this small weekly journal gave voice to a proposal which would meet the demands of Minnesota citizens—a clear statement of dissatisfaction with things as they were. He asserted that “the mistake in our military system for the past thirty years, so far as it has referred to the defence of the Indian frontier, has been that too much money has been expended in the *building of Forts* and Barracks for troops, and that they have been *occupied too long* after the frontier has gone beyond them.” Seldom during the past twenty years, he pointed out, had the frontier long remained stationary, nor had troops been needed at the same point for more than three or four years. Restraint imposed by the actual presence of troops in the neighborhood was needed, rather than a display of expensive military fortifications. “For all purposes of defence against Indians, or protection of the white settlements,” the editor continued, “if, instead of vast outlays of money in erecting expensive barracks, cheap but comfortable quarters were provided and occupied only so long as the

<sup>2</sup> *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, June 30, 1858.

settlements were in their infancy, our little army would have been much more efficient, and at a comparatively trifling cost: it would have been able to prevent the waste of blood and treasure which our Indian difficulties have involved. . . . A large and inviting region of country is now open to settlement lying northwest of this place, and the advance settlements have already penetrated far beyond the reach of assistance from either the military posts or the volunteer troops of the more populous counties. . . . Troops have not been needed at Fort Snelling since the removal of the Sioux to their present position near Fort Ridgely, and even Fort Ripley has been useless as a military post since the removal of the Winnebagoes." The Sauk Rapids editor asserted that if the troops from these forts had been used on the remote frontier, somewhere on the Red River, the country in between would be filled with settlers, Dakota Territory would have twenty thousand settlers, and the soldiers would be free to move farther westward.<sup>3</sup>

The most insistent demands for a new disposition of soldiers came from settlers in the Red River Valley. There substantial numbers of French-Canadian half-breeds had congregated near Pembina, just south of the Canadian border.<sup>4</sup> Under constant threat of attack from Indians of Canada and Dakota, these men sent up cry after cry for military protection, and the government could not be deaf to their pleas forever. "For five years," complained the *Minnesotian* in 1854, "the Legislative and Executive authorities of Minnesota have been asking for a small appropriation to sustain a military force at Pembina. No appropriation having a greater degree of right and justice on its side has ever been asked by a frontier people; and yet the measure has been continually delayed from some cause or other, which we could never learn." Finally in February, 1855, Congress appropriated the small sum of five thousand dollars for the erection

<sup>3</sup> *Sauk Rapids Frontiersman*, June 24, 1858.

<sup>4</sup> After leading an expedition to the Red River in 1856, Colonel C. F. Smith, commandant of Fort Snelling, reported that the town of Pembina, at the junction of the Pembina and Red rivers, had a thousand inhabitants, and that St. Joseph, farther up the Pembina, had fifteen hundred. Debating in Congress in 1855 in favor of a Red River Valley post, Henry M. Rice declared that four thousand people were living at Pembina and that they were twenty days away from the nearest settlement to the south. See 35 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 427 n. (serial 975); *Congressional Globe*, 33 Congress, 2 session, p. 454.

of a military post on or near the Pembina River, and in June of the next year two companies of infantry were sent out to explore the Red River country and determine the "most eligible site for a military post in that quarter."<sup>5</sup>

The outcome of the expedition was a recommendation that the fort should be located at Graham's Point on the Red River near the present city of Breckenridge. In the years that followed its establishment, criticism of the new post, named Fort Abercrombie, continued to pour from the settlement at Pembina, which was still without the protection it had demanded. It was alleged that the location had been decided upon with more regard to speculators than to the military needs of the region. One newspaper correspondent, who signed himself "Veritas," pointed out that the settlers were dissatisfied with Graham's Point as a fort site because it was in a region still unsettled and not well suited to agriculture. The editor of the paper likewise condemned the site and called for a military establishment farther north on the Red River. "The Government is so familiar with the language of appeals for military protection from the settlements of our extensive frontier," he noted ironically, "and has so often been seduced by false or exaggerated pretexts into useless and extravagant expenditures, that it has learned to see even in the most clamorous calls for assistance, and in the most alarming menaces of danger, only a conspiracy of contractors and town-site speculators to induce appropriations of the public funds for some one's private benefit. Fortunately the amount of money necessary for the construction and maintenance of a military establishment on the Pembina river, is not large enough to tempt the cupidity of the mercenary bands of contractors and lobby agents, while the situation is too remote from the sphere of real estate operations to afford any suspicion that the demand for Government appropriations is simply to lend importance to some town-site. In conceding Fort Abercrombie to the clamors of these men, the Government may now feel itself at liberty to provide for the real necessities of defence on the Red River." Nevertheless, the site of Fort Abercrombie was maintained.

<sup>5</sup> *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), August 1, 1854; United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:608; 34 Congress, 3 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 5, p. 3 (serial 876); 35 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 435-437 (serial 975).

Not until 1870 was a post established at Pembina, after internal revolutionary disturbances in Canada and incursions of hostile Sioux across the boundary.<sup>6</sup>

Isolated white settlers were not the only ones interested in changing the locations of the army garrisons. Sometimes the Indians themselves were the center of the argument, for the army was as much their protector as that of the whites. Intertribal warfare had to be stopped if peace were to be maintained in any region, and the troops were influential in keeping Indian affairs in order. The army post was considered essential, too, for groups of Indians who had forsaken the ways of the tribe for that of the white man and who needed protection from their more warlike brethren. This was especially the case among the Indians of Joseph R. Brown's upper Sioux agency on the Minnesota at Yellow Medicine. Brown had persuaded many of his charges to adopt the white man's clothes, houses, and agricultural pursuits, and he attempted to find for them the security they needed in their new way of life. The location of Fort Ridgely, to his mind, was not suited for the protection of his "blanket Indians." "However proper the location of Fort Ridgely may have been in 1852," Brown asserts in his report for 1860, "it is now within the settlements, and for all practicable purposes connected with the control of the wild Indians, troops would be as effective at Fort Snelling as at Fort Ridgely. Before assistance could be obtained from either post to quell disturbance or prevent hostilities, the evil would have been consummated, and the aggressors be far beyond the reach of foot soldiers." Brown cited as confirmation of his views the report of Captain A. A. Gibson, who had been on duty at the two Sioux agencies to attend to annuity payments. Gibson declared that Fort Ridgely should be situated at the upper agency, which had to bear the brunt of every contact with the wild bands to the north and west.<sup>7</sup>

The citizens of Minnesota were critical enough of the location of the posts that the army had set up in their midst, but when troops were for some reason withdrawn, the chorus of complaints invari-

<sup>6</sup> *Pioneer and Democrat*, April 21, October 15, 1859; 41 Congress, 3 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, part 2, p. 27 (serial 1446).

<sup>7</sup> Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Reports*, 1860, p. 55-58.

ably reached a new high pitch. The necessity for economy in the war department during the 1850's and the belief in official circles that large concentrations of troops would be more effective on the frontier than small separated detachments brought about the evacuation of Fort Ripley on July 8, 1857. The Chippewa of the northern area were considered peaceful, and the usefulness of the post was believed to have been diminished by the founding of Fort Ridgely. But no sooner had the troops disappeared than the Chippewa caused trouble. The action of the war department in withdrawing the soldiers was severely condemned. The *Pioneer and Democrat* called it "one of the most ill-advised measures ever perpetrated by the Federal authorities, in this Territory."<sup>8</sup>

When Fort Abercrombie was abandoned for a brief period in 1859-60, there were more complaints. They reached a bitter peak in the vitriolic columns of Jane Grey Swisshelm's *St. Cloud Democrat*. After denouncing the government for neglecting the people of Minnesota in various respects, the editor added: "And now they have directed the Troops to abandon the only stations between you and the savages, and intend that you shall protect yourselves and families from the Indians, or take the consequences." After Fort Abercrombie was reoccupied, however, Mrs. Swisshelm still found cause for complaint. "Now that the winter is over and the Indians have ceased to rob and maltreat the frontier settlements," she wrote, "the Administration has, as we are informed, ordered three or four companies to Fort Abercrombie. A most delightful way to spend the summer and a few hundred thousand of Uncle Sam's revenue.—But just as soon as Autumn and the starving, thieving savages approach the settlement, these same troops will be sent to New York or some other safe and agreeable winter retreat. No matter; our hardy pioneers are getting used to it, and can protect the army in addition to their other duties, without serious inconvenience."<sup>9</sup> An ardent abolitionist, Mrs. Swisshelm could not forget her prejudice against any-

<sup>8</sup> 32 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 71 (serial 659); 35 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 11, p. 151-153 (serial 920); *Pioneer and Democrat*, August 23, 1857.

<sup>9</sup> *St. Cloud Democrat*, April 21, 1859; March 29, 1860. Mrs. Swisshelm's journal was established in 1857 as the *St. Cloud Visiter*.

thing the Democratic administration did, and her attacks on war department activities were colored by her views. Nevertheless, she expressed in an exaggerated degree the feelings of frontier Minnesotans who feared for their security when the strong arm of the military disappeared.

The troops located in Minnesota were the subject of caustic comment by newspaper editors whenever some action displeased the settlers or the soldiers failed in their assignments. When six Indians who were being taken from Fort Snelling to Benton County in irons escaped from their military escort, the editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer* exclaimed: "Suffering this escape, is wholly inexcusable—shameful. Has it come to this, that 25 regulars are insufficient to guard half-a-dozen Sioux Indians? What is the service coming to? What are officers and men kept dressed up in regimentals for, at our garrison at an immense expense?" While the Sioux and Chippewa were engaged in one of their numerous conflicts in the summer of 1858, troops were withdrawn from the state, leading another editor to remark sarcastically, "The Indians being so quiet, peaceable and orderly in Minnesota, is thought to be the occasion for this retrograde march!" The writer continues by asking, "What! are the soldiers frightened at the Indian warfare so near them?"<sup>10</sup>

Inactivity of troops in the garrisons was a further point of contention. "The feverish excitement which certain interested persons have managed to keep up in regard to the dangers of a general Indian war upon our frontier," peevishly observed a writer for the *Minnesotian* of August 22, 1857, "is now aggravated by the inactivity of the troops recently sent here to protect the settlers. Some three or four companies, it will be recollected, were announced as having arrived several days ago; but we believe they are as yet all quietly resting at Fort Snelling, and recruiting themselves after their fatiguing march by railroad and steamboat from the Atlantic coast. Why they have not been despatched to the frontier quarters, which the people were led to believe was their original destination, is a question which perhaps cannot be answered except through Secretary Floyd's circumlocution office at Washington." The writer asserted

<sup>10</sup> *Minnesota Pioneer*, June 19, 1851; *Minnesotian*, June 2, 1858.

that there were plenty of troops in Minnesota if only they were sent where they were needed. He believed that the settlers would continue to feel alarmed until the troops manifested "more activity and a more thorough disposition to do something to intimidate the refractory Indians." He suggested that "these soldiers be put upon active service, instead of idling away their time in comfortable quarters," adding that "They will then enjoy better health, and produce a more healthy state of affairs on the frontier of Minnesota." Mrs. Swisshelm had her bit to say, too, in 1860, after hearing a rumor that there was an Indian uprising along the Minnesota River. "We insisted on sending to Fort Ripley for troops," she recorded, "for a probability that a single family had been murdered, appeared cause sufficient; but the rule as understood, appeared to be that the soldiers will not come until all the fighting is over."<sup>11</sup>

The *Henderson Democrat* did not want its censure of the army to fall on the men and officers stationed in Minnesota, for, wrote the editor, "It is the war department we blame for the inadequacy of the force in the Territory." He pointed out that "Infantry is very useful in its place, but I question if there is any officer in the army who will hold that it is the proper arm of the service for operations outside a garrison, in the Indian country. Mounted men are necessary to the successful pursuit of Indians, and a sufficient force of either mounted infantry or dragoons should be stationed in the Territory, and be held in readiness to march at any time it may be necessary, either for the protection of our settlements or the punishment of offences." Any increase in numbers, however, served to mollify the demands of the citizens. Commenting on a detachment of a hundred and fifty men who arrived in St. Paul in 1858, one observer noted, "An additional force has been long needed . . . for the more complete protection of the settlers on the Western frontier of the State, the number already stationed there being too limited for the purpose, and this new addition will, no doubt, have a beneficial effect on the Indians."<sup>12</sup>

While Minnesotans were quick to call for new cantonments of

<sup>11</sup> *St. Cloud Democrat*, July 12, 1860.

<sup>12</sup> *Henderson Democrat*, July 16, 1857; *Pioneer and Democrat*, July 11, 1858.

troops to protect western settlements, they were equally ready to condemn the continuation of posts in areas where the density of the population was itself adequate protection against the Indians. This hostility toward old posts in settled areas arose partly out of the wish that troops should be used in new regions where the Indian danger was still acute. But it was caused also by the settlers' eagerness to acquire the military reservations around the posts. When each post was established, an extended area around the actual fort was withdrawn from sale and reserved for use as garden plots, hay meadows, and wood land for members of the military garrison. Others were prevented from settling on these lands, although many people did locate on reserves through oversight or by permission of the army officers. In any case, settlers found the reserved lands attractive, and they made repeated attempts to persuade the federal government to curtail or abolish the military reservations, which, the pioneers argued, had served their military purpose and were a serious hindrance to settlement. Long after the Indian danger had been obviated by the removal of Indians from the state or to reservations, the question of reducing the military reserves continued to plague the relations between Minnesotans and the army.

Fort Snelling was located at the mouth of the Minnesota River, near the Falls of St. Anthony, and at the head of navigation on the Mississippi. Its reservation, embracing territory of obvious economic importance, was much coveted by the citizens of the territory. In 1838-39 the actual limits of the Fort Snelling reserve were well defined for the first time. At the same time the commanding officer advocated extending the reservation in order to control the liquor traffic near the post. His suggestion met with violent opposition from settlers in the area, who steadfastly refused to move and who attributed the proposal to various base motives.irate citizens, meeting on November 16, 1839, adopted a series of resolutions condemning the officers, assailing the attempt to extend the reservation as "alike derogatory to the principles of common honesty and justice," and complaining because they were forced to abandon improvements on the military land and to face the hardships involved in moving. As a result of the settlers' complaints, a resolution protesting the exten-

sion of the reserve was sent to Congress by the legislative assembly of Wisconsin Territory. It stressed the importance of steamboat landings to the agricultural district, protested the loss of good agricultural land, much of which was improved and under cultivation, and charged speculation by the post officers.<sup>13</sup>

But resolutions and complaints had no effect, and the secretary of war, relying on the reports of government officials, ordered the squatters removed. This was done with considerable harshness by the soldiers of the fort, and the settlers, many of whom had been refugees from the Selkirk settlement, were forced to take up new residences farther down the Mississippi, where St. Paul later developed. More than a decade passed before any reduction was made in the size of the Fort Snelling Reservation.<sup>14</sup>

A beginning was made in 1849 on plans to move the Indians to the western part of the state in order to free the land around Fort Snelling for settlement. At the same time ambitious settlers began to work for a definite reduction in the size of the military reserve, realizing that Fort Snelling must soon pass from the picture as an important post. Their efforts were rewarded in 1852, when Congress finally passed a law redefining the boundaries of the reserve and directing that the area excluded be surveyed and sold at public auction. The people of Minnesota had been most anxious that the bill become law, and even before the final action the squatters had continued their improvements on the land. "Good houses are in course of erection, and farms are being systematically improved," reported the *Minnesotian*. "Particularly is this the case in the neighborhood of the Falls of Saint Anthony, and out at Lakes Calhoun and Harriet. Fort Snelling no more needs the use of these lands than she needs a battering train, were she called upon to lay siege to Crow Village. They are among the most fertile, well watered and timbered, and eligibly situated lands in the Territory. Now that the Indian title is extinguished upon the country all around them, the people have a right to demand that they be given up for their

<sup>13</sup> 26 Congress, 1 session, *House Documents*, no. 144, p. 1-4 (serial 365).

<sup>14</sup> William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:222 (St. Paul, 1921); *Statutes at Large*, 10:36.

use." The *St. Anthony Express* hailed the act as a "measure imperiously called for by the state of affairs in this vicinity" and declared that the retention of the whole reserve by the government "would have operated as an embargo upon our town and the country adjacent."<sup>15</sup>

Two years passed, nevertheless, before any lands were sold under the provisions of the law of 1852, for the necessary surveys were not speedily made. But the limits then defined continued as the boundaries of the Fort Snelling reserve until after the Civil War. During part of that period, however, the reserve was owned by Franklin Steele, to whom it was sold in 1857. In 1871 the government and Steele came to an agreement by which the military holdings were reduced to about fifteen hundred acres.<sup>16</sup>

The question of opening to settlement the Fort Ripley Reservation on both banks of the Mississippi near the mouth of the Crow Wing was the cause of a long and bitter controversy in that area and in Congress. The story has been told elsewhere in great detail by the present writer.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps sufficient to note here that the reserve was not opened to homesteaders until 1880.

With variations, the same theme was repeated at Fort Ridgely. In 1854 the area around the new fort was surveyed and the post commander issued a proclamation defining the limits of the reserve and prohibiting settlement on the military lands. But it was ten years before the interior department was asked to have the sections withdrawn from sale by the land office. In the interval between 1854 and 1864 many settlers took out patents on reservation lands at the St. Peter land office, and when the war department in 1869 began to threaten forcible ejection of squatters from military reservations,

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota Territory, *Session Laws*, 1849, p. 161; *Statutes at Large*, 10:36; *Minnesotian*, August 28, 1852; *St. Anthony Express*, September 3, 1852.

<sup>16</sup> Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:434, 503-515; Rodney C. Loehr, "Franklin Steele, Frontier Businessman," *ante*, 27:309-318. The details of the sale can be traced in *Fort Snelling Investigation* (35 Congress, 1 session, *House Reports*, no. 351 — serial 965) and *Sale of Fort Snelling Reservation* (40 Congress, 3 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 9 — serial 1372).

<sup>17</sup> See F. Paul Prucha, "Fort Ripley: The Post and the Military Reservation," *ante*, 28:215-224. A map showing the extent and boundaries of the reservation is reproduced on page 217.

Minnesotans involved cried in anguish.<sup>18</sup> "We learn from the *St. Peter Advertiser*," reported the *St. Paul Pioneer*, of September 5, 1869, "that considerable alarm exists among the settlers on the military reservation at Fort Ridgely, caused by the recent order of the war department that settlers upon the military reserves shall be ejected by the commanding officers having jurisdiction. The settlers upon that reserve number 300 to 400 families, and they are expecting a detachment of soldiers, with bayonets fixed, to hasten their departure by a few gentle pricks of their warlike implements."

Two hundred settlers signed petitions to the secretary of war, asking that the recent order to force settlers off the military reservation be revoked. "We the undersigned residents of the Military Reservation at Fort Ridgely, Minn would respectfully represent," the petitions ran, "that many of us made entries of Lands, at the U S Land Office and our homes, within the present limits of the reserve, while it was public land and under the laws of Congress allowing homesteads to actual Settlers on the public domain . . . and believing the reservation made in 1864 was made during an emergency and was intended only to be temporary, others have settled here and are now occupying and cultivating the soil. That an Enforcement of the recent order of the War Dept for the removal of *all* Settlers from the Military reservation . . . would deprive hundreds of families of all their means of subsistence the approaching winter, and would occasion suffering second only to the Indian Massacre of 1862."<sup>19</sup>

Governor William R. Marshall added his official voice in a telegram to the president and was assured in a reply from the secretary of war that the commanding officer would be instructed to respect the rights of bona fide settlers on the Fort Ridgely Reservation. An order issued by the commanding general of the Department of Dakota on October 21, 1869, protected the rights of holders of patents

<sup>18</sup> The commandant's order, dated February 13, 1854, is in an unpagged manuscript history of "Fort Ridgely, Minnesota," compiled in the war department and sent to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1880. The narrative shows that before 1866 more than eighty pre-emption and homestead entries had been made within the limits of the reservation.

<sup>19</sup> Photostatic copies of three undated petitions are in a folder of letters relative to abandoned military reserves, 1857-70, among some United States General Land Office Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

and land office certificates, but as the editor of the *Pioneer* warned his readers, "the order relating to the Fort Ridgely settlers has been modified only — not revoked. . . . In cases where *settlers on the reservation held patents or Land Office certificates*, they will not be removed. The order, however, relating to squatters, or settlers without title, remains in force. . . . The holders of patents and land office certificates are but a small number of the settlers."<sup>20</sup>

The war department soon indicated its willingness to relinquish the reserve, but action was delayed because of complications in one of the claims. Meanwhile, in 1868 and 1870, the Minnesota legislature memorialized Congress to open the Fort Ridgely Reservation and to perfect the claims of settlers living there. Eventually, as in the case of Fort Snelling and Fort Ripley, the reserve at Fort Ridgely was abandoned and opened to public settlement under the land laws of the federal government.<sup>21</sup> The lands reserved on the Minnesota side of the Red River for Fort Abercrombie, too, were returned to the body of public lands at the request of Minnesota citizens.<sup>22</sup> Their pleas answered, Minnesotans had little left about which to complain in their relations with the army and the war department.

It must not be concluded that Minnesotans allowed their criticism of the army to affect their booster spirit. The newspapers might condemn military protection as inefficient and call loudly for new posts or augmented garrisons, but their words were for the administration in Washington and not for prospective settlers. Promoters realized that a Minnesota pictured as a place in constant danger from Indian uprisings would not attract newcomers — settlers who would help to develop the resources of the territory and the state. When it came to fundamentals, the army was doing its job. If any hint of criticism came from the East, Minnesotans were quick to insist that everything was safe in Minnesota. Even the *St. Cloud Democrat*, in

<sup>20</sup> *St. Paul Pioneer*, October 21, 24, 1869.

<sup>21</sup> 40 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 44 (serial 1317); 41 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 6 (serial 1405); 41 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Miscellaneous Documents*, no. 87 (serial 1408); *Statutes at Large*, 16:187, 21:506.

<sup>22</sup> *Statutes at Large*, 16:430, 22:168; 44 Congress, 1 session, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, no. 137 (serial 1702). The part of the reserve in Dakota Territory was made subject to homesteading and pre-emption in 1880. *Statutes at Large*, 21:172.

its issue of May 16, 1861, had a good word for the army: "We beg to assure our Eastern friends once again that there is not the slightest danger to the people of Minnesota from Indians. The three forts—Abercrombie, Ripley and Ridgely—in the Indian districts are well garrisoned and perfectly sufficient to prevent all disturbances of this kind, were any imminent."

As settlers pressed forward on the advancing Minnesota frontier, they called back over their shoulders to the federal government, asking it to send on soldiers. Fort Snelling anticipated settlement by two decades; Fort Abercrombie was established in response to demands from people already in the Red River Valley. The two posts symbolize the lag in military protection against which voices of protest were raised in Minnesota. When the Indian danger had been removed—first in eastern Minnesota, then throughout the state—demands for more posts and more troops gave way before complaints that military reservations were impeding settlement. This phase, too, passed, and eventually Minnesota's interest in the army paled into insignificance.



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