

THE INFORMATION BUREAU

GEORGE W. NORTHRUP

May I take the liberty to ask you to inform me in regard to any facts or relics you may have concerning the life of George W. Northrup, an early scout of frontier life? I am his great-niece and am attempting to gather the facts of his life.

MRS. THERESA E. MACEWAN, La Fayette, New York

George W. Northrup was born in central New York in 1837. When he was fifteen years old his father died and Northrup came west to St. Paul. He decided upon the life of a frontiersman and for three years he traded with the Yankton Sioux. During this period he obtained a thorough knowledge of their language and customs and of the country in which they lived.

When he was but eighteen years of age Northrup gained fame as the result of an attempt to follow westward the trail covered by Governor Isaac I. Stevens' party in surveying a route for a Pacific railroad. The young adventurer's only companion was a dog and all his supplies were packed in a handcart. When the contents of the cart were stolen, however, he was forced to abandon his ambitious scheme, and with great difficulty he worked his way back to the trading post at Big Stone Lake. The story of this escapade is said to have been published in newspapers throughout the country, notably in the *New York Tribune*. In *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* for February, 1894, it is told by Edward Eggleston in a sketch of Northrup's life entitled "The-Man-that-Draws-the-Handcart." The greater part of this article is reprinted in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* for February 4, 1894.

Northrup was a familiar figure in the Red River Valley during the late fifties and the early sixties. Captain Russell Blakeley mentions him in his article on the "Opening of the Red River of the North to Commerce and Civilization," in the *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 52, 53, 57. North-

rup was the captain of a flatboat, "the first passenger boat on Red river," which carried a number of travelers down that stream from Fort Abercrombie to Fort Garry in 1858. Englishmen who came to the region to hunt buffalo found in him an experienced and efficient guide. In 1860, with William Tarbell, he carried the mail between Fort Abercrombie and Pembina, using Red River carts in summer and dog trains in winter.

With the outbreak of the Civil War Northrup enlisted in Brackett's Battalion of Cavalry, Minnesota Volunteers. He saw service in the South and in 1864 he went west with the battalion when it joined the Sully expedition against the Indians. The *St. Paul Press* made him its correspondent and his reports of the expedition's westward march appear over the name "Icimani" in the issues of that paper for May 11 and 29, June 2 and 7, July 17, and August 6, 1864. It was left for others, however, to furnish the stories of the battles in which Brackett's Battalion participated, for Northrup fell in the first encounter with the Indians near Tahpahokutah, Missouri, on July 28. Major Alfred B. Brackett's official report of the battle, published in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865*, 2: 535 (St. Paul, 1893), contains the following statement: "In the charge Sergt. George W. Northrup, of Company C, fell, after receiving eight or ten wounds, one of which pierced him through the heart." Reports of the battle furnished by other correspondents appear in the *Press* for September 6 and 7, 1864.

B. L. H.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).