

WHEN PVT. ALBERT COLGRAVE, a scene painter for St. Paul theaters, carried his illustration pencils, paints, and chinks to the Dakota War of 1862, art and war unexpectedly collided. In April 2006 the Minnesota Historical Society acquired six carte de visite photographs that show Colgrave as artist and soldier. These images complement the 63 Colgrave drawings—including 24 firsthand views made during the war—also in MHS collections. Together, they document one man and his efforts to record one of the most turbulent episodes in Minnesota’s history.

Born in England in 1839, Colgrave immigrated with his father and brother to Columbus, Ohio. As an 18-year-old, he moved in with his brother’s family in St. Paul, where he applied his artistic skills to painting theater sets. An advertisement in a local newspaper boasted that he could produce “Banners, Transparencies, Flags, Emblems, Decorations, &c. on short notice for Processions, Parades, &c.”

After the United States erupted in civil war, Colgrave joined a group from the printing industry to organize “The Young Men’s Guard.” In July 1862 this unit mustered in as Company G of the Sixth Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. Rather than being sent South to battle Confederates, the Sixth was rushed to St. Peter to assist in quelling the hostilities between government troops and Dakota soldiers. Company G participated in the actions at Birch Coulee, Fort Ridgely, Wood Lake, and Camp Release before moving on to the Lower Sioux Agency, Mankato and, finally, Fort



Albert Colgrave, artist and soldier: a hand-colored carte de visite of the artist with his canvases, about 1860; an 1862 portrait in federal uniform



Snelling. Along the way, Colgrave sketched views of people, camps, and battles. Engravings prepared from his sketches and the photographs of fellow soldier Adrian J. Ebell would later illustrate Ebell’s 1863 *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* article, “The Indian Massacres and War of 1862.”

Albert Colgrave did not leave Minnesota when the Sixth Minnesota was transferred to the South. While on march, he contracted typhoid fever and died on March 4, 1863. His remains were carried to St. Paul, where a large funeral was held and his body interred in Oakland Cemetery.

The Colgrave drawings and photographs preserve part of Minnesota’s social, artistic, and military history. They can be viewed in the History Center library and at www.mnhs.org/photos.

—Diane Adams-Graf, sound and visual collections curator

*For Colgrave and Ebell, see Alan R. Woolworth and Mary H. Bakeman, ed., *Camera and Sketchbook: Witnesses to the Sioux Uprising of 1862* (Roseville, MN: Park Genealogical Books, 2004).



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