

**A SIOUX NARRATIVE OF THE
OUTBREAK IN 1862, AND OF
SIBLEY'S EXPEDITION IN
1863; PP. 595-618**

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Gabriel Renville & Samuel J. Brown

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GABRIEL RENVILLE & SAMUEL J. BROWN

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A SIOUX NARRATIVE OF THE OUTBREAK IN 1862,
AND OF SIBLEY'S EXPEDITION IN 1863.*

BY GABRIEL RENVILLE.

WITH A BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR BY
SAMUEL J. BROWN.

This Narrative is supplied through the kindness of Mr. Samuel J. Brown, son of Major Joseph R. Brown. The circumstances of his receiving the original Sioux manuscript, and of its translation, are told by Mr. Brown as follows:

This is to certify that I was well acquainted with Gabriel Renville, and know his handwriting, and also know that he was unable to speak or write the English language; that said Renville died at my house in Brown's Valley, Minn., August 26, 1892, aged about sixty-eight years; that sometime before the death of the said Renville his son, Rev. Victor Renville of Sisseton Agency, South Dakota, stated to me that he had in his possession an old manuscript written by his father concerning the Sioux outbreak of 1862; and that, upon my request, the said Victor Renville delivered to me the said manuscript, which appeared quite old, the first two or three pages being missing.

I further certify that Gabriel Renville, herein referred to, is the Gabriel Renville who was prominent in the councils of the Sisseton and Wahpeton Indians prior to and during the outbreak of 1862, who was appointed Chief of Scouts by General Sibley, and subsequently, at the suggestion of the Department of the Interior, was made Head Chief of said bands and remained such chief until his death.

I further certify that I examined the manuscript given to me by Victor Renville, and recognized it as being in the Sioux language and in the handwriting of said Gabriel Renville; that said Victor Renville stated to me that the manuscript was written by his father, Gabriel Renville, and was given to him about the time of his father's death; that I went to work upon said

*Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, Dec. 14, 1903, by Mr. R. I. Holcombe, who has added several foot-notes.

manuscript, which was in the Sioux language, and, in connection with Thomas A. Robertson of Veblin, South Dakota, an educated mixed-blood, made, in March last, a complete and accurate translation of the same; that the paper to which this certificate is attached is the original Sioux manuscript prepared by said Gabriel Renville; and that the copy with corrections, also hereto attached, is a true and correct translation of said manuscript into English.

SAMUEL J. BROWN.

NOTE.—As a few pages at the beginning of Gabriel Renville's manuscript had been lost, it may be stated that he relates first what he saw at the Yellow Medicine Agency, also known as the Upper Agency, near the junction of the Yellow Medicine river with the Minnesota river, about thirty miles above the Redwood or Lower Agency, and nearly fifty miles above Fort Ridgely. The time was Tuesday, August 19th, the next day after the outbreak and massacre at the Lower Agency. Renville appears to be on the way from his farm, north of the Minnesota river, when he met a party of the Sioux, from whom he learned of the general outbreak, and of the attack against the Upper Agency during the preceding night.

THE OUTBREAK AT THE YELLOW MEDICINE AGENCY.

. . . It was some of these who came that night and drove away the storekeepers and plundered. They also reported that all the whites at the Agency had made a stand in the Agency buildings. They who reported this were of those who were not enemies to the whites.

I then went on as fast as I could towards the Agency, and stopped suddenly in front of the west door of the warehouse building. I did not see a single person, but heard very much of thumping noises. I then went around to the east door, and there saw that they had gone in that way and were plundering inside.

There was a house about four hundred yards south of the Agency buildings, from which I saw a woman come crying. I went towards her, and when I reached her I found it was my mother. She was very much frightened. When she saw that it was I, she was overcome and fell to the ground, and though she tried to get up she would fall to the ground again. I got down and took hold of her, assisting her to rise, and said, "Don't cry, but stand up. A great calamity has come to us, and we may all die. Stop crying, and try to control yourself."

I asked her what had become of the white people who belonged at the Agency. She said that that night, near daylight,

John Other Day had started with them all towards the east, and that among them was one white man who had been shot but was still alive and was taken along. [This was Stewart B. Garvie.] Then she said, "Your brother has gone to your sister's. It has now been a long time since he went, but he has not come back. I expect they are all dead." She meant my sister who lived with her children about eight miles south of the Agency. Then I said to her, "Mother, go back into the house and stay quiet there, and I will go home and come here again." I then mounted my horse, and rode as fast as I could towards my home.

About three miles north of the Agency there lived a white man who was a minister [Rev. Thomas S. Williamson]. He was the first man who came among the Wahpetons to teach them, and was called the Doctor. He came out and met me, and asked what was being done and what the news was. I told him, "My friend, a great commotion has come. All the people at the Redwood Agency, and all the farmers across the river from that Agency, are reported to have been killed. But the people of the Yellow Medicine Agency, and the traders at that place, have all fled under the guidance of John Other Day last night. Everything in the stores has been taken, and those buildings have been burned. The Agency buildings have been plundered and everything taken, but they are not burned. These things are true. Therefore, my friend, flee." He replied, "I have been a long time with the Dakotas, and I don't think they will kill me. My children have all gone, and I am alone with my wife." Then I said to him, "It is reported that even the mixed-bloods who are Dakotas have been killed, and the only thing for you to do is to flee." I then went into the house and shook hands with the woman, and again urged them to escape. Their fright was very great, as could be told by their paleness of countenance; and the wild look in the eyes of all whom I met, being the same in the faces and eyes of these people, moved by heart.

I came out of the house, rode swiftly away, and, fording the river, reached my home. I found the horses already hitched to the wagon, and we started in a hurry, going toward a ford which was a good crossing for wagons. I saw at that time the Doctor's children and others with them, who were crossing the river and fleeing towards the east under the guidance of an Indian who was friendly to the whites.

We crossed the river and went towards the Agency, and when we had gone about four miles some of the people I met were drunk. Two men took my horses by the bits, and accused me of fleeing towards the whites, and said that whoever did that was now an enemy. I told them I was not going there, but they did not believe me, and they used me roughly. I saw they were drunk, because one of them had a bottle tied to his arm. I then jumped to the ground, tore their hands loose from me, and took the bottle away from the man who had it. Pulling out the cork, I took a mouthful and swallowed some of it, but it burned my mouth and throat, so that I did not swallow all of it. I poured it out, and threw the bottle away and then went on. The reason why it burned my mouth was that it was white liquor and had not been mixed with water.

In a cellar under one of the buildings at the Agency was a forty gallon barrel of alcohol for the use of the Agency physician, which had been found by them and created very much of a commotion among the people who were then about the Agency. Every person had his gun, and those who were drunk were preparing to shoot at one another; but those that were not drunk held them, and that was how it came that no one was killed.

I saw this and went on to my mother's house, and found that my brother who had gone to where my sister and her children were living had come back. He reported that they had fled, but that some of the hostile Indians came, and that he thought they must have all been killed. These hostiles had their minds made up to kill him, but there was one who took his part and saved his life. Runners were continually arriving from the hostile Indians.

It was next reported that a detachment of soldiers that had been sent out from Fort Ridgely had been all killed.* About five o'clock in the evening it was reported that Major Brown's wife, children, and son-in-law, had all been taken prisoners. Major Brown's wife was our sister.

Thirteen of us decided to go into the Agency buildings and make a stand there, because they were strong, brick buildings. In the Agent's house were Mazo-ma-ne (Walking in Irons), Hin-tah-chan (Basswood), Shu-pay-he-yu (Intestines came out),

*Reference is made to the affair at Redwood ferry, August 18, 1832.

and Pay-tah-koyag-enah-pay (Appeared clothed in Fire). In the doctor's house were Ah-kee-pah (Coming together), Charles Crawford, Thomas Crawford, and Han-yo-ke-yah (Flies in the Night). In the school building were myself (Gabriel Renville), Two Stars, and E-nee-hah (Excited). In the farmer's building were Koda (Friend), and Ru-pah-hu (Wing). It was the next morning that we did this. Then Charles Crawford and Ah-kee-pah went to get Major Brown's wife and children, and got them and brought them back.

News was coming in every day, that Fort Ridgely was being attacked, that white settlers to the east and south were being massacred, and that New Ulm was attacked. It was also reported that a party of hostile Indians, many young men, had gone north on a war party, there being white people there and also a fort toward which they went.*

After these many things had come to pass, the hostile Indians, with their families, moved up towards the Yellow Medicine Agency, and had now arrived. Then Tah-o-yah-tay-doo-tah, or Little Crow, the chosen chief of the hostile Indians, came to where we were, and told us to get out of the houses that we were in. He said, "These houses are large and strong, and must be burned. If they are not burned, the soldiers will come and get into them, Therefore get out, and if you do not you will be burned with the buildings." So we got our horses and hitched them to our wagons, into which we put our belongings, and started north.

EFFORTS TO AID THE WHITE CAPTIVES.

When we had gone about a mile and a half, we came to where the hostile Indians had formed a camp. As we were passing through the camp, I saw many white prisoners, old women, young women, boys and girls, bareheaded and barefooted, and it made my heart hot, and so I said to Ah-kee-pah, Two Stars, and E-nee-hah, "If these prisoners were only men, instead of women and children, it would be all right, but it is hard that this terrible suffering should be brought upon women and children, and they have killed many of even such as these." I therefore had in mind to call a council, invite the hostile Indians, and appoint Mazo-ma-

*Fort Abercrombie, on the Red River of the North, about twelve miles north of Breckenridge.

ne and Marpiya-wicasta (Cloud Man) to say to the hostiles that it was our wish that the prisoners should be sent home. Ah-kee-pah, Two Stars, and E-nee-hah, agreed with me in my idea, and they told me to go on and do so.

We had by this time got about five miles from the Agency, at the home of Mr. Riggs. These houses were not yet burned and were occupied by some of the friendly Indians. John B. Renville was with them, and we made our camp near them.

I told Mazo-ma-ne and Cloud Man what I wanted of them, and they said they would do as I wished. I then went to the people that were in the Hazelwood Mission house, and told them what I was planning to do, and they also told me to go ahead and do it, and J. B. Renville gave me a calf to kill to feed the people that were to be called to that council. This was in the evening. The next morning early I killed a cow which I had tied up, and picked out two men, Tah-ta-wah-kan-hdi and Iiin-ta-chan, to do the cooking.

When all was ready, but before the invitation was sent to the hostile camp, a large body of horsemen came towards us from that camp, two hundred or more. They all had their guns, their faces were painted, and they were gaily dressed. They came and stopped at our camp. Then I said to them, "We were about to send for you to come here to a council. But as you are here, whatever your purpose may be in coming, for the present get off your horses and have something to eat." They then got down, and after they had eaten they mounted again, and, forming around our camp, said, "We have come for you, and if you do not come, the next time we will come to attack you;" and firing their guns into the air they departed.

By this time Cloud Man, Mazo-ma-ne, and all those of our people who were about there came, and were much angered and said, "The Medawakantons have many white prisoners. Can it be possible that it is their object to make the Wahpetons and Sissetons their captives too? Call together those who are Wahpetons and Sissetons, and we will prepare to defend ourselves."

I at once sent out the two young men whom I had helping, and they on horseback went about and gathered our people together. When about three hundred had arrived, we painted our faces and got our guns, and, mounting our horses and singing, went towards their camp. When we arrived near the hostile

camp, we kept firing our guns into the air until we got within the circle of their encampment, and then rode around inside and came out again where we went in.

It was decided at that time that we would get all our people together and in the future act on the defense. With this understanding, all started to bring in their families for the purpose of forming one general camp of those friendly to the whites and apart from those who were hostile. We formed our camp in a circle west of Mr. Riggs' Hazelwood Mission buildings, and a large tent was put up in the center of the camp.

A soldiers' lodge was organized, and four men, myself, Joseph La Framboise, Marpiya-hdi-na-pe, and Wakpa-ee-yu-way-ga, were chosen as the chief officers or directors of this soldiers' lodge, to act for the best interests of the Sisseton and Wahpeton peace party.

After these four had been duly installed and authority given them, the first question discussed was the release of the prisoners, both whites and mixed-bloods; and it was decided that the effort should be made to have these prisoners returned to the whites, excepting that the men who were able to fight might be retained. The reason for this decision of the directors of the soldiers' lodge was that the hostile Indians would claim that if the men were released they would turn right around and fight them. Little Paul (Maza-ku-ta-ma-ne) was chosen as spokesman to present this to the hostile Indians.

Then the Medawakantons, the very enemies of the white people, called a big council, and invited us to it.* So we prepared ourselves by arming ourselves and painting our faces, and went over to their camp. It was decided, before we started, that now was the time for Little Paul to present the case for the release of the prisoners. When we arrived at the council, the Medawakantons made many speeches, in which they urged strongly the prosecution of the war against the whites to the fullest extent. Then Little Paul arose and made a speech, in which he said all he was instructed to say in regard to the release of the prisoners.

The spokesman of the Medawakantons was Wa-ki-yan-to-eche-ye (Thunder that paints itself blue), who arose and said

*For a report of this council, Little Paul's speech, etc., see Heard's History of the Sioux War, pp. 151-153.