

Civil War Era in North Dakota

Lesson 3

Commemorating the Civil War

Memory and Loss

The Civil War was the most severe trial the United States and its citizens had endured since the American Revolution. People felt they could not, and must not, forget the war. Personal grief over lost loved ones or lost homes reminded people every day of the horrors of the war. Those who fought and those who had lived through that time believed that remembering the causes and the effects of the war would be important to future generations. They thought it was important to remember not only the suffering, but that our democracy is fragile and requires careful attention to be successful.

There were many reasons to commemorate the Civil War in North Dakota. Many war veterans moved to Dakota Territory after the war, using their legal advantages as veterans to claim a homestead. In addition, the battles fought in Dakota Territory had to be honored and commemorated so they would not be forgotten.



Commemoration had many forms. Some cities erected statues of Civil War soldiers in a park or on the courthouse lawn. The scenes of battles were located and monuments were built to the men who fought and died there. Veterans organized themselves into memorial societies. The most important of these in the northern states was the Grand Army of the Republic, commonly known as the GAR. Veterans established chapters of the GAR in many North Dakota cities. The GAR held regular meetings in many towns. Members attended the national encampments (or gatherings) where they reunited with the survivors of their regiments. The GAR placed iron markers on the graves of deceased veterans that honored their service to their nation.

The national GAR leader, General John Logan, proclaimed May 30, 1868, as the first official day of remembrance. Memorial Day, or Decoration Day as it was then known, was celebrated by placing flowers on the graves of soldiers at Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Soon the tradition spread and states began to officially recognize Memorial Day. By 1890, all northern states celebrated Memorial Day. Today it is a national holiday.

During the Civil War, concern for the welfare of disabled soldiers led to passage of federal legislation in 1865 to establish the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers which had branches in many different states. In 1887, Congress followed up with a law to set aside land for homes for Union Army veterans.

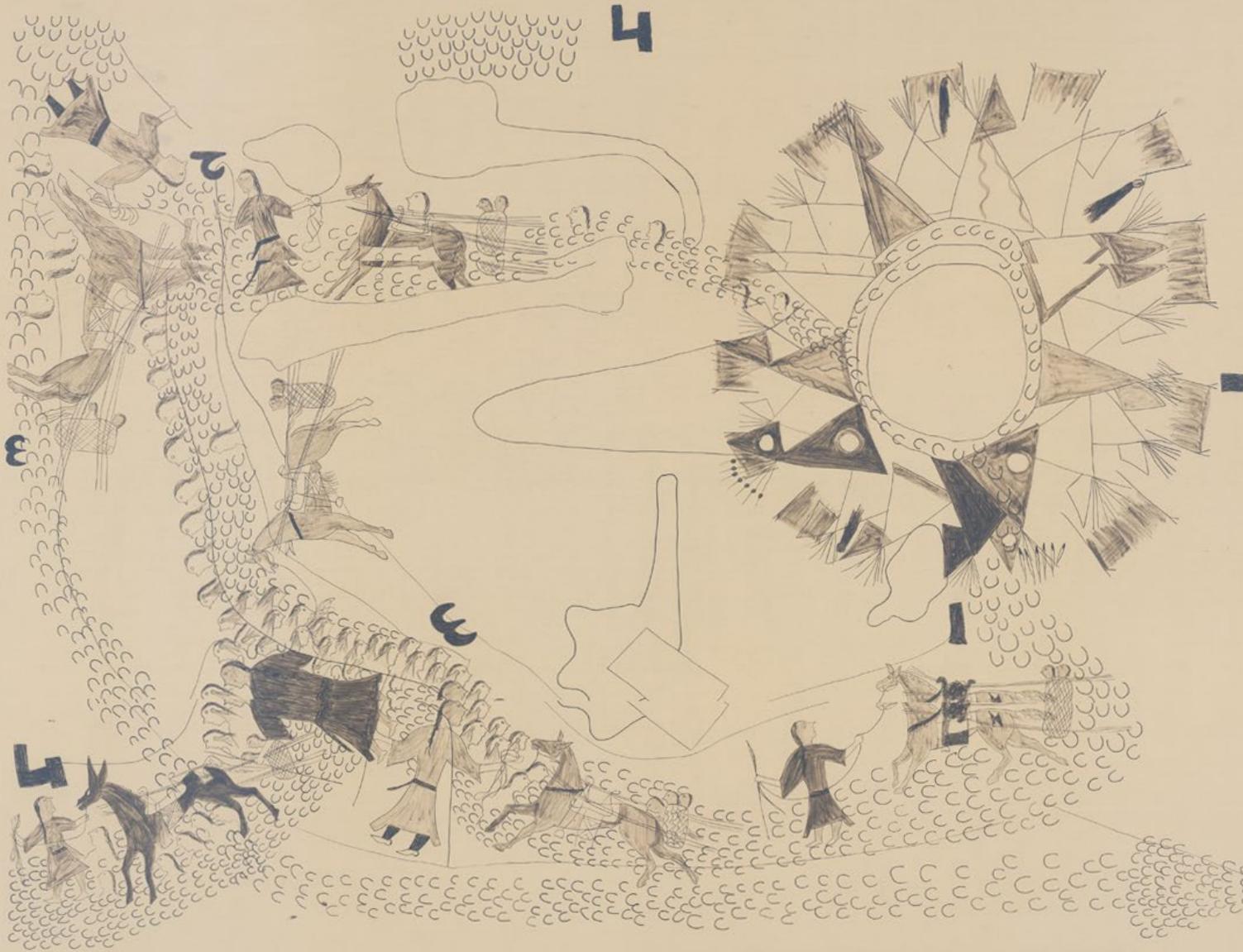
The first legislative assembly of the state of North Dakota passed a law to build a veterans home at Lisbon. Governor Andrew Burke, a veteran himself, signed the bill into law. The board of commissioners purchased 90 acres on the Sheyenne River for a beautiful building and a small farm. Another 40,000



acres around the state was set aside to help support the home and its residents. The home, completed in August 1893, had rooms for 30 men and a small hospital. The first resident was George Hutchings. Hutchings, and the other residents until the 1950s, wore a blue uniform. Residents who were able performed some work at the home. This work might be on the farm, in the laundry or kitchen, or in their quarters. Today, the original building is gone, but it was replaced by a modern building that still houses veterans and their spouses.

Whitestone Hill Pictograph

Around 1914 or 1915, Takes-His-Shield, a survivor of the massacre at White Stone Hill, explained his view of the events at White Stone Hill on September 3, 1863. The map was drawn on paper by Richard Cottonwood as Takes-His-Shield re-told the events of that day.



In 1932, Aaron McGaffey Beede, an attorney and former missionary to Standing Rock Reservation worked with Judge J. M. Austin to write a full interpretation of the pictograph. In 1932, Judge Austin also created copies of the document by means of a blueprint process (dry copiers had not yet been invented) and sent the copies to the State Historical Society and individuals who were interested in the pictograph

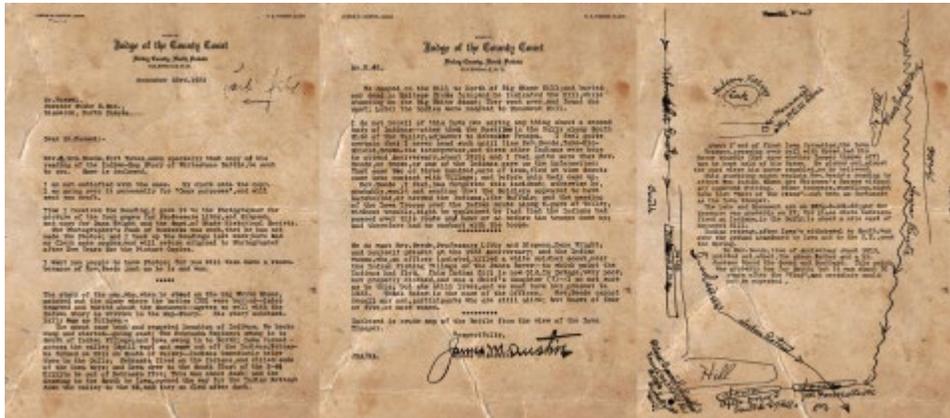
and the events it described.

Takes-His-Shield's pictograph is the only primary source document available that tells the Dakota experience at the massacre and subsequent battles. For that reason, it is extremely important to "read" it along with the documents produced by General Sully and his officers.

Aaron Beede, whose interpretation of the pictograph is presented here, was able to read the pictograph because of the many years he spent working with the Lakotas and Dakotas who lived on Standing Rock Reservation. However, as he notes, his ability to interpret the image is limited. His knowledge of the culture is deep, but not as comprehensive as those who were raised in the traditions and cultures of the Sioux. One of the valuable comments that Beede makes concerns the way the history was told in the pictograph. Only events that took place in daylight are told in the pictograph. Events that took place after dark (which occurred before the fighting ended) can only be told, not drawn, because they were heard not seen.

Judge Austin has also included in his letter (dated December 23, 1892) his own memory of his discussion with a veteran of one of the Iowa regiments at the battle. Austin does not give the man's name, and it is possible that his re-telling of the veteran's story may have some mistakes.

These letters allow us to compare perspectives on the massacre and battle. They are first-person



accounts (also called primary sources) and as such are just as important as the reports of General Sully and his officers. Historians must read as many primary sources as possible to gain a full understanding of past events. This pictograph and the letters that explain it provide another perspective on the conflict at White Stone Hill.

Judge Dallas Duell and the Grand Army of the Republic

Dallas Duell was born in New York in 1845 and grew up in Illinois. At 16, he lied about his age to enlist in Company D, 72nd Illinois regiment. He served under General Ulysses S. Grant in the western theatre of war and participated in the siege of Vicksburg.

In 1884, with his second wife Viola, Duell moved to Dakota Territory. He took up farming near Starkweather on a "soldier's homestead," where he also served as justice of the peace. In 1889, he moved to Devils Lake where he completed his study of the law and was admitted to the North Dakota bar. He was elected county judge, a position he held for 14 years. He was later elected state's attorney. Duell also served as Police Magistrate in Devils Lake for many years.



Dallas Duell was a charter member of General Crook post, Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), and served as the post commander for years. He attended many of the encampments, or national conferences, of the GAR. At the age of 93, he attended the reunion of Union and Confederated veterans at Gettysburg, and attended his last Encampment at the age of 95. He also served on the board of commissioners for the Soldiers' Home in Lisbon, North Dakota. Duell died in 1943. He was the last surviving member of the GAR in North Dakota.

Mr. Duell's biography appeared in the Devils Lake World beginning on March 3, 1926. Below are some excerpts from his story.

"On the morning of July 30, [1862], we boarded a train and started out for Chicago. When we arrived in the city we had no trouble in finding recruiting offices, for they were very numerous and the fifes and drums were calling for volunteers from every vantage point in the city. After being rejected at two places on account of being too small and under age I was finally accepted by Captain James A. Sexton as a full fledged member of Co. D. 72 Illinois Volunteers. As soon as our names were taken and the oath administered we were conducted to a back room and uniforms were issued to us. The sleeves of my coat were too long and my trousers had to be rolled up at the bottom, but when the blue suit was on my happiness was complete."

At Columbus, Mississippi, Duell and two friends foraged for food:

"It was at this place that I became acquainted with the art of foraging. [We] secured passes and went a few miles into the country. We came to a plantation and found the owner at home sitting on the back porch of his house. Just in rear of the main dwelling, was a small smoke house, which was standing on blocks leaving quite a space between the floor and the ground. On three sides of the building that space was boarded up, leaving the space in the rear open. In the yard a flock of fine ducks were discovered, and they were very tempting to us. . . . One of the boys entertained the old gentleman on the back porch. The ducks . . . continued to draw nearer to the opening under the smoke house and finally went under. The boys soon gathered around to prevent the ducks from coming out, . . . and I being the smallest one of the lot, was detailed to crawl under the house to get a few of the ducks. I carried three haversacks under and came out with three good fat ducks.

After strolling around a short time longer we lit out for camp and that night enjoyed a good duck supper. I for one, felt that I had stolen something, and I believe yet that I did. I have no doubt that the owner knew what we were up to but was afraid to say anything to us."

Duell's Company traveled to join General Grant's Army by train. In the South, they met African Americans for the first time. When Duell uses the term "Uncle Toms," he means it in reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, not in the derogatory way used in recent years.

"We were loaded on closed freight cars and started on our way towards . . . the Tallahatchie River. We could not see out of the cars except through the doors and there were so many in each car that we could not get to the doors as often as we liked. . . . The country . . . was most beautiful. . . . There was still enough cotton on the plants to make a pretty picture, and it reminded me of the scenes in the south described by the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." . . . [The] cars attached to our train . . . were heavily armored and carried artillery on them for defense against the guerilla bands that infested the country. . . . Everything seemed very wonderful to me. I had read Uncle Tom's Cabin written by Mrs. Stowe, and had heard Frederick Douglass lecture upon his experience as a slave, and here I was, face to face with the Uncle Toms, Elizas and the great cotton fields of the South."

As Company D approached Vicksburg, they knew they would be engaged in combat. Company D was assigned to cut off the retreat of the Confederates, but the rebels managed to get away before Company D arrived. This is what Duell saw at the sight of the battle just ended.

"We stacked arms on the battle field and I had a chance to view the havoc that had been wrought by the contending forces. The dead lay very thick upon the ground and the wounded who could walk were trying to get back to the field hospital. It was an awful sight, ambulances were going down the road towards the hospital and blood could be seen dripping from the cracks in the bottom of the box. In going over the field I came across a young soldier, who was about my age, propped up against a tree, dressed in the rebel gray, who had been shot in the abdomen. I gave him a drink from my canteen and talked with him for quite a little while. He said that he knew that he was going to die, that he had been forced into the army and that it was against his will that he was fighting against the North. He said that he was not afraid to die and if only he could have seen his mother before going, he could die happy.

This conversation with the boy caused me to feel pretty creepy and wonder when my turn would come to be in the same fix that he was."

At the siege of Vicksburg, Duell and his company experienced combat.

“Then ensued one of the most gallant assaults made during the Civil War or any other war, . . . Comrade F. W. Mann of this city [Devils Lake] was a member of the 124th and did his full share in the engagement. I feel like taking off my hat to him when I meet him and remember what he went through in this hand to hand conflict on the 25 day of June 1863.

Our boys were in the crater and the rebs were above them throwing down shells by hand with the fuse lit so they might explode when reaching them in the crater. Sometimes they would not cut the fuse the right length and our men would seize them and hurl them back into the ranks of the rebels. The slaughter was immense on both sides. About three hundred men were blown up with the fort. One colored man who was in the [Confederate] fort was blown and fell on the Federal side. . . . [He] was not seriously injured.”

Duell remembered the end of the siege and Grant’s victory

“July 3, 1863, was a memorable day in the great struggle to gain possession of the strong and strategic position of the rebels at Vicksburg. On that day my regiment was in the trenches and the firing was going on as usual when all at once the orders came for all firing to cease. The enemy had hoisted white flags all along their line and the information was passed along that they were making overtures to General Grant for the surrender of the city. I peeped over our works and sure enough all along their works that I could see, small white flags and large ones were being displayed. In a short time the men in blue were standing on our entrenchments and those in gray on the rebel line, . . . exchanging witticisms with each other as if they had not a short time previously been trying to seek each other’s life.”

Dallas Duell was mustered out of service on March 20, 1866.

Commemorating Battles

On September 3, 1914, hundreds of people gathered at Whitestone Hill to commemorate the battle and massacre that took place there fifty-one years previously. They stood below the memorial to Civil War soldiers and listened as Red Bow and Takes-His-Shield spoke of their experiences in the massacre. Red Bow was just seven when the soldiers rode into his village; he was captured. Takes-His-Shield was a young warrior, eighteen years old, when he fought the soldiers. Redfish, a Cuthead Dakota, spoke of the long oral history of the massacre as he learned it from his relatives who were in the hunting village at White Stone Hill. * Holy Horse, a child of nine in 1863, appeared, but did not speak. Their words were part of the oral tradition of the Dakotas who lived through the massacre or had learned about it from others. Oral tradition was a form of historical preservation among people whose language did not have a written form. They also used pictographs, or story pictures, to record the events they experienced. Historians have found oral tradition to be a reliable resource.



Governor Hanna was present to dedicate the park. He gave the final speech “setting forth that if Indian affairs were handled by the several states where Indians are, we might even now hope to inspire the Indians with hope and a true desire for progress.”

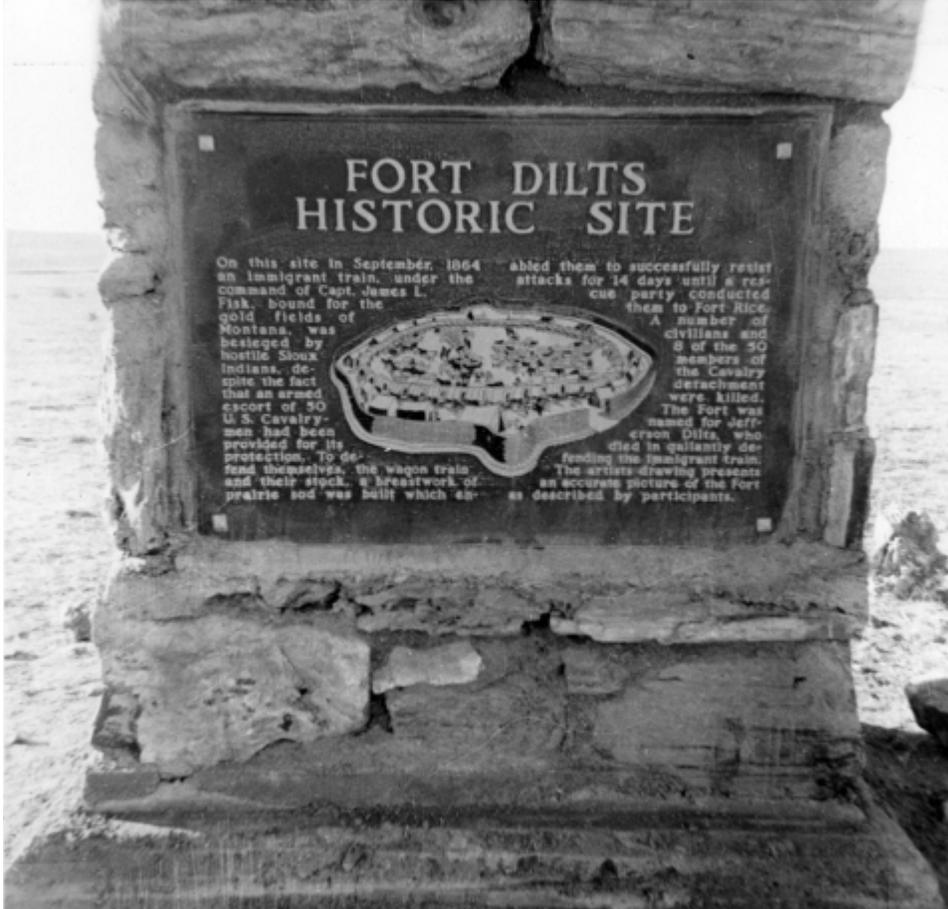
The Bismarck Tribune newspaper covered the dedication and published a story about the event on September 9, 1914. The title of the article included the words: “Now Realized That Fight Was a Mistake.” The article went on to state: “Hemmed in and fired upon, the Indians fought back with telling results, as the 60 killed and wounded soldiers show. The Indian loss in killed and wounded was about 400 and we now realize that it was all due to a mistake, as most wars are.”

Though Dakotas were invited to participate and their words were clearly heard and understood at the dedication of the site, there was no memorial comparable to the Civil War Soldier memorial at the site



in 1914. In 1942, a memorial was built and dedicated to the Dakotas who were killed, wounded, or captured at Whitestone Hill.

The Battle of Killdeer Mountain has a memorial plaque. There is also a memorial plaque at Fort Dilts. The site of Fort Rice was dedicated as a state park in 1913 and today is a state historic site.



The deaths of Lt.

Beaver at Apple Creek and Dr. Weisser at Big Mound are commemorated by grave markers, though their remains have been removed.

Visiting Civil War Monuments

There are Civil War commemorative statues in Fargo at Island Park; in Grand Forks in a small park on Belmont, in Devils Lake at the cemetery, and Lisbon at the Soldiers' Home.



Wm Johnson John Brader John Davies
Civil War veterans at Beaver's grave

There are also graves of Civil War soldiers at the Big Mound battle site, at the Heart River Corral where two soldiers were buried after the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, and south of Bismarck where Lt. Beaver and Private Miller were originally buried. Many Civil War veterans were buried in local cemeteries. Their graves originally had GAR iron markers on them. Some have their service record noted on their stone.

** White Stone Hill was the preferred spelling of this location in 1863. Today, it is Whitestone Hill. You will find both spellings in these essays.*