

Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp's Letter

Abbie Gardner Sharp

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until eleven o'clock on that memorable night, instead of returning home at nine—as was our usual custom. I believe it no accident that you reached our path just before instead of after we crossed it. But I believe God was guiding your weary feet and did not allow your strength to give way until you reached the right place, and then by causing you to sink down He placed you within the possibility of being saved. That we may all learn wisdom from the things of the past—is the prayer of your friend,
 SARAH W. COLLINS.

MRS. ABBIE GARDNER SHARP'S LETTER.

ОКОВОЖ, Aug. 4, 1887.

At the request of C. T. Fenton, Esq., I write the following account of the Spirit Lake massacre of 1857:

It is with sadness that I recall to memory the ill-fated March the 8th, 1857—when Inkpadutah and his murderous band invaded the peaceful and happy little settlement of Spirit and Okoboji Lakes and completely demolished it. It is now thirty years since those horrible atrocities were enacted, and having lost all on that sad day that made life dear to me, and though wrecked in health, I still live a witness to those terrible scenes.

The outbreak was as sudden and unexpected as a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky. The Indians approached, and through their professions of friendship got into the houses, taking the people by surprise, and attacking in such a way that one family could not help another. My father was shot down while his back was turned getting the Indians some flour. They then rushed upon my mother and sister, beating them over the head with the butts of their guns, and drove them out in the door yard and killed them. My brother and two sisters, all little children, were clinging to me in speechless terror. They next seized these helpless children, heedless of their piteous cries for the help I was powerless to give them, dragging them out of doors, and beating them to death with sticks of stove wood. All through their course they shot down the men when their backs were turned, and then rushed upon the helpless and terror-stricken women and children and killed them in the most cruel and shocking manner.

At the time of the massacre I was little more than a child of less than fourteen summers, and was with three other women taken captive, suffering for three months all the cruelties and indignities that Indians, only, know how to inflict. The dreadful news created intense feeling throughout the country, and excited the wrath and sympathy of all who heard it. Three companies of volunteers, under the command of Maj. Williams, of Fort Dodge, went from Webster and Hamilton counties, and proceeding through snow-banks and swollen streams flooded with ice, surmounted every conceivable difficulty while pressing forward to relieve the living and bury the dead.

On the 15th day of May following, the then territory of Minnesota passed an act appropriating \$10,000, to be used in securing the rescue of the captives, of which \$3,000 was expended in the release of Mrs. Marble and myself. To the State of Minnesota and Charles E. Flandrau, of St. Paul, I owe a debt of gratitude that I shall ever recollect. I am greatly pleased with the kindly interest manifested by the generous-hearted people of Hamilton county in erecting this Tablet to the memory of the heroic volunteers who so bravely risked their own lives to save their fel-



MRS. ABBIE GARDNER SHARP.

The only survivor of the massacre at Spirit and Okoboji Lakes.

low-creatures from the scalping-knife and tomahawk of the Indians. I hope the occasion may result in suggesting to the General Assembly of Iowa, whether some public recognition is not alike due to mark the spot which is consecrated to civilization by the blood of the brave and true-hearted settlers who fell victims to the vengeance of the savages on the shores of these far-famed beautiful Lakes.

ABBIE GARDNER SHARP.

LETTER FROM SERGT. HARRY HOOVER.

86 DIAMOND STREET, PITTSBURG, PA., August 5, 1887.

Gentlemen:

I learn from a friend in Florida that a "memorial tablet" is about to be erected to the volunteers who formed the Expedition that left Webster City for Spirit Lake, March 23, 1857. It was my fortune to be "one of the boys," and although many and important events have transpired since then—many joys and sorrows intervened—still

Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me,

and looking back over the vista of thirty years I see the details of that memorable march with a panoramic distinctness that annihilates time and space. Almost forgotten forms and faces crowd around me. Old friendships are renewed and experiences duplicated. Again I see the light that gleamed in J. C. Johnson's eyes as he listened to the recital of Mr. White's story of the massacre. Again I tread the snowy trail, plunge through the swollen creeks or bivouac on the bleak prairie. And again I pay the silent tribute of a tear to the silent dead.

From notes hastily taken on the march I compiled an account of "The Expedition to Spirit Lake," which was published in *The Hamilton Freeman*, in August, 1857, and although that account is necessarily imperfect it may serve to indicate to the citizens of the flourishing Webster City of today what it meant to be a pioneer thirty years ago.

I understand that my old friend, W. K. Laughlin, to whom I am indebted for many of the most valuable facts in that narrative—will be with you, and will, no doubt, be able to supply any of its deficiencies.

In behalf of my comrades permit me (through you) to thank the generous citizens of Hamilton county for this token of appreciation of our humble efforts to be equal to *our duty*. While claiming no merit for ourselves, we confess to a feeling of gratefulness that our dead comrades will not have died in vain. I regret that I cannot be present at the contemplated ceremonies, but desire to say a few words to the survivors who may be present:

Comrades, I greet you! From the mountains in Pennsylvania to the prairies of Iowa I stretch my hand to clasp yours. Although four years' service in the "War of the Rebellion" may have given some of us a wider experience and riper knowledge, yet our "first campaign" will never lose its thrilling interest, and the trip to Spirit Lake will form the nucleus, around which will cluster, some sad, yet many happy memories during our declining years. As in the past, so let us continue to do what we can and leave the world better than we found it.

So shall our lives, serene at eve'n,
Be nourished by the dews of heaven,
Our duty done, our heads shall rest
Soft pillowed on kind Nature's breast.

Cordially and fraternally yours,

H. HOOVER.

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