

Summary

The Renville County settlers who lived along the Minnesota River had the misfortune of living just opposite the Dakota reservations, and most lived within three miles of it. Three days after the attacks began, the county was virtually abandoned as most had been killed, wounded, captured or had fled. These attacks took the settlers by surprise as many had shown kindness to the Indians, and they didn't feel threatened. The settlers were mostly unarmed noncombatants with no means to defend themselves. When they reached Fort Ridgely for safety, they again had to endure two battles, and many were called upon to help defend the fort and administer to the wounded.

Here is a summary showing those known killed, taken captive, the escapees and the returnees by township.

Beaver Falls: 40 killed, 29 taken captive, 38 escaped; 12 of 26 known families returned, 46%

Birch Cooley: 25 killed, 13 taken captive and 74 escaped; 3 of 21 known families returned, 7%

Cairo: 3 killed, none captured and 11 escaped; 1 of 2 known families returned, 50%

Camp: 4 killed, none captured and 31 escaped; 6 of 10 known families returned, 60%

Flora: 79 killed, 35 captured and 41 escaped; 3 of 30 known families returned, 9%

Hawk Creek and Sacred Heart: 1 killed, 36 captured and 6 escaped; 1 of 10 known families returned, 10%

Total Known Killed: 152

Total Military/Civilian Militia Killed in Renville County: 48

Total Killed in Renville County: 200

Total Known Captured: 113

Total Known Who Escaped: 201

Total known who returned: 26 out of 99 families returned to Renville County – 24%

Renville County was the hardest hit of any county in the state. Fatalities occurred in about seventy families. Most of those killed in the county were Renville County residents; a few were killed while escaping to the fort from other areas. Curtis Dahlin provided this statistic: 21% of the total population of the county were killed in Renville County or one in five people. 10% of the white population in the county were taken captive. These victims totaled 1/3 of this county's inhabitants. The rest escaped.

Of those who escaped, those who lived closest to Fort Ridgely (the residents of Birch Cooley, Camp and Cairo Townships) fared best. Those who lived furthest (Beaver Falls, Flora, Hawk Creek and Sacred Heart Townships) were more likely to have been killed or captured.

Those who returned to the county needed assurances that the outbreak was indeed over. The Wichmann family in Beaver Falls only returned after Col. Phaender of Fort Ridgely offered him arms and ammunition and promised his family protection. Col. Pfaender, then in command at the fort, believed that the danger was past,

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and that settlers were safe in settling in the area ravaged by the outbreak. Pfaender also knew that the return of the Wichmanns would encourage other settlers to come back to the county.

Widowed men and women left with young children were pressed to remarry in order to provide stability for their families. The “possibly remarried statistic” is included because no further records were found on some widows/widowers, and it may be assumed they remarried and had a name change. Orphaned children were either adopted or sent to live with relatives. It was difficult to track these children as many of their surnames were also changed, at least by the census takers. The elderly, many of whom were emotionally traumatized, were taken in by their children to provide for their care the rest of their lives. The emotional toll was also followed. We found cases of insanity, suicides, divorces and separations. Post-traumatic stress disorder was probably rampant but not diagnosable at that time. There were no counselors to assist those who had life-long nightmares. Our research on widows and widowers follows:

Widows/Widowers Who Remarried

Beaver Falls: 4 widows and 2 widowers remarried, 1 possibly had remarried and one who never remarried

Birch Cooley: 3 widows and 1 widower remarried, 1 widower and 4 widows possibly had remarried and 3 who never remarried.

Cairo: 1 possibly had remarried

Camp: 1 who never remarried

Flora: 4 widows and 3 widowers remarried, 1 widower and 3 widows had possibly remarried.

Justina Boelter, widow of John, married her widowed brother-in-law Michael Boelter.

Justina Krueger, widow of Friedrich, married widower John Meyer.

Sophia Lammers, widow of William, married George Rieke of Cairo Township who was a citizen defender of Fort Ridgely.

Hawk Creek and Sacred Heart: 1 widow remarried

Total: 12 widows/widowers remarried; 10 had possibly remarried, and 4 never remarried.

Depredation Claims

Many of the survivors filed claims for property lost in the conflict known as depredation claims. Claimants filed more than 3,000 claims, some with itemized affidavits outlining their losses. The funds to pay these claims were from the annuities that would have been paid to the Indians had the conflict not occurred.

Many claims are stored in the National Archives. A list of about 500 claimants is found on the Park Genealogical Books website. Over seventy Renville County claims were filed. We used Mary Bakeman's *'Index to Claimants for Depredations following the Dakota War of 1862'* to locate those claims. Beaver Falls had 20 claims, Birch Cooley, 23, Cairo, 3, Camp, 7, Flora, 13 and Hawk and Sacred Heart, 8. This information is found on individual settler narratives in the township chapters.

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Researchers will soon have access to more claims as an archivist is searching the National Archives for claims missing since the 1880's. The Brown County Historical Society has received a Legacy Grant to help retrieve these missing records which are a treasure trove of information useful to researchers.

The brave settlers listed in this book were the counted victims, and there were undoubtedly many more uncounted victims that now lie in unmarked graves on sacred ground.



Lone Prairie Grave is from Isaac V.D. Heard's *'History of the Sioux War'*, published in 1863, p. 320