

## Fort Ridgely

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### **1973 Drawing by Paul Waller, used with permission of the Minnesota Historical Society**

This chapter is included because of the importance of the fort as a refuge for the settlers. Construction of Fort Ridgely began in 1853 and most of it was finished by 1855. It was built as an army outpost to maintain peace on the frontier and on the reservations. In 1862, part of the military post on the south side of the Minnesota River was on the Lower Reservation. Most of the fort was located in Nicollet County with a small portion in Renville County. Hundreds of fleeing settlers from the Minnesota River Valley escaped to the fort for safety.

Two significant battles were fought on August 20 and August 22 during the U.S. – Dakota War. One hundred eighty Army volunteers and citizen soldiers fought back the Dakota during these two battles, and they helped turn the tide in the war. Many accounts have been written about these battles, so this chapter will focus only on the role of the settlers.

The fort was unusual as it had no protective walls or stockade and was situated on a plateau of open prairie. Surrounded on three sides by ravines, the fort was well within musket range from these ravines. It was hardly a fort as it had only a few frame buildings and two stone buildings, one used as a barracks and the other a commissary. The fort did not have a well so water had to be fetched from springs that were a ½ mile away. During the siege, a new well had to be dug on the parade grounds to avoid going outside the fort for water.

Nearly 200 Renville County settlers took refuge at the fort. This includes 38 from Beaver Falls, 74 from Birch Coulie, 11 from Cairo, 31 from Camp, 41 from Flora and 6 from Hawk Creek Townships. Their names are included under each township chapter. Many of these settlers turned out to be an integral

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part of the defense of the fort. They were called upon to man cannon, serve picket and guard duty, make cartridges and assist in the hospital. Julia Sweet, Elizabeth Dunn and Margaret Hern helped to melt spent bullets fired by the Indians and used molds to make new ones, as the defenders were running out of ammunition. Many women cheerfully and bravely assisted providing valuable service. They are listed here.

### Women Who Assisted in Defense of Fort (\*denotes those from Renville County)

Anna **Boesch**, wife of Werner\*  
Kenney **Bradford**  
Elizabeth M. **Dunn**, wife of Joseph  
Margaret King **Hern**, wife of David  
Mary A. **Heffron**, wife of Patrick  
Eliza **Muller**, wife of Dr. Alfred  
Juliette **McAllister**, wife of Henry, killed at Redwood Ferry  
Mary D. **Overbaugh**, wife of Joseph  
Agnes **Overbaugh**, daughter of Joseph and Mary  
Julia **Peterson**, wife of Halleck\*  
Elizabeth **Perreault**, wife of Pierre who was killed at Birch Coulie Twp.\*  
Elizabeth **Picard**, wife of Eusebi who was killed at Birch Coulie Twp.\*  
Wilhelmina **Randall**, wife of Benjamin  
Valencia J. **Reynolds**, wife of Joseph  
Mary **Rieke**, sister to Adam, August, George, Henry and Victor\*  
Mrs. R. **Schmahl**, wife of Jacob  
Mrs. **Spencer**, probable wife of George who was taken captive  
Julia **Sweet**, wife of Joshua  
Emily J. **West**, missionary assistant at the Lower Sioux Agency

### Armed Citizens (\*denotes those from Renville County)

These armed citizens assisted the military troops who were stationed at the fort.

Benjamin H. <b><u>Randall</u></b> (commander) William <b><u>Anderson</u></b> Robert <b><u>Baker</u></b> , killed Werner <b><u>Boesch</u></b> * Louis <b><u>Brisbois</u></b> William <b><u>Butler</u></b> Clement <b><u>Cardinal</u></b> * C. M. <b><u>Dailey</u></b> Joseph W. <b><u>De Camp</u></b> , killed at Birch Cooley
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Joseph <b><u>Coursolle</u></b> Frank <b><u>Diepolder</u></b> Henry <b><u>Diepolder</u></b> Alfred <b><u>Dufrene</u></b> Ezmon <b><u>Earle</u></b> * J. C. <b><u>Fenske</u></b> Joseph Jack <b><u>Frazer</u></b> Thomas J. <b><u>Galbraith</u></b> Edward A. C. <b><u>Hatch</u></b> Patrick <b><u>Heffron</u></b> , gunsmith George P. <b><u>Hicks</u></b>
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Keran **Horan**\*  
John **Hose**\*  
Joseph **Koehler**  
Louis **La Croix**\*  
James B. **Magner**\*  
John **Magner**\*  
Oliver **Martelle**\*  
Pierre **Martelle**\*  
John **Meyer**\*  
John **Nairn**  
Dennis **O'Shea**  
Joseph **Overbaugh**  
B. P. **Pratt**  
Justus C. **Ramsey**  
John **Resoft**  
Adam **Rieke**\*  
August **Rieke**\*

George **Rieke**\*  
Heinrich **Rieke** (died)\*  
Victor **Rieke**\*  
Louis **Robert**  
Louis **Sharon**  
Chris. **Schlumberger**\*  
Gustav **Stafford**  
Joshua **Sweet**, Chaplain  
Louis **Thiele**\*  
Nikolas **Thinnes**  
Onesime **Vanasse** (perhaps  
Nicholas Vanosse), killed  
A. J. Van **Voorhees**  
John **Walter**  
John C. **Whipple**  
Cyrus G. **Wykoff**  
Xavier **Zollner**

### Defenders Who Were Killed

Pvt. Mark **Greer**

Robert **Baker**, civilian, member of the Renville Rangers from the Lower Sioux Agency

Nicholas **Murnan**, civilian, member of the Renville Rangers

Nicholas (or Joseph) **Vanasse**, civilian, member of the Renville Rangers

### Known Dakota Who Were killed

**Horpi-maza** (Iron Nest)

**Wasutah**

**Upi-hdi-ga** (Striped Wing Feather)

### Families Who Were Living at the Fort During the Battles

N., 40 and Anna **Buehro**, 33, children, W., 5, E. and H., age 1, living near Fort Ridgely

Joseph and Elizabeth **Dunn**, 27, children, H. A., 8, Marshall, 7 and W.A. 3, from Meeker County

Captain James C. and Mrs. **Edson**

S., 40, **Halter** and child C., 8 (husband enlisted in Hamilton's)

David and Margaret **Hern**, 23, Minnie, 4 and Walter, 3, from Lowell, MN

Sgt. And Mrs. M. **Jones**, children G.W., 6 and E.L., 2

Dr. Alfred and Eliza **Muller**

Benjamin H. 39, and Wilhelmina **Randall**, Sutler and Frank, 6, and two other children

John **Resolf**, village blacksmith

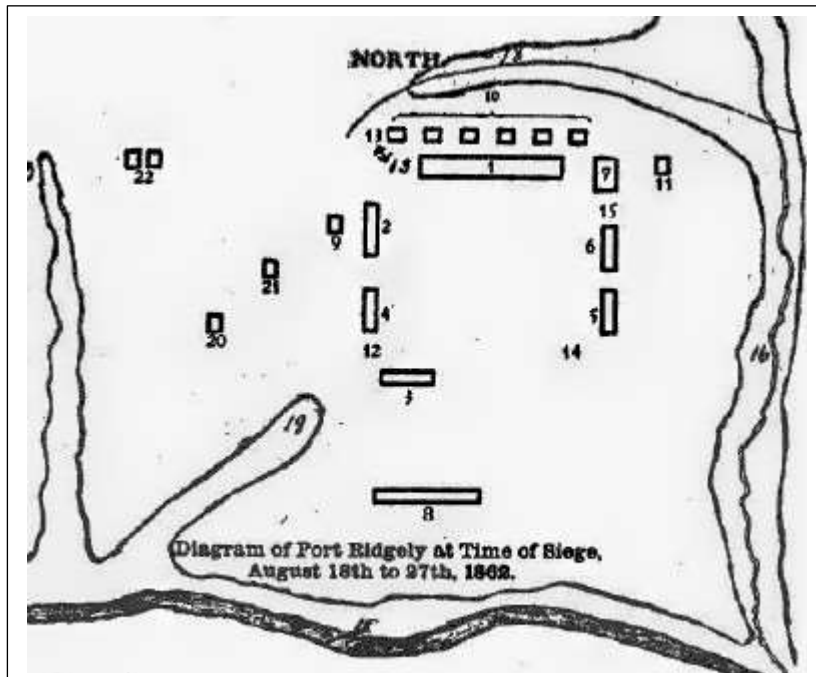
E. **Schilling**, 16

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Jacob, 45 and R. **Schmahl**, 36 and children, J., 7, M., 6, S., 4, Al., 3, and H., 2  
Sgt. Cyrus L. **Snyder**, his wife and three children  
Joshua and Julia **Sweet**, Chaplain, William, 11, Mary Emily, 13 months, and Reuben, 1 month



This is a black and white view of Fort Ridgely under siege in 1862. The oil painting was done in 1890 by Sgt. James G. McGrew who painted this based on his 1862 sketch. McGrew manned one of the howitzers located on the northwest corner of the fort.



The sketch above is from a 1909 book called "Recollections of the Sioux Massacre" by Oscar Wall, a Fort Ridgely veteran.

1. Enlisted men's barracks, made of solid granite blocks
2. Commissary/mess hall, made of granite blocks
3. Post surgeon quarters, hospital, post headquarters
4. 5.6. Officers' quarters
7. Bake house and laundry
8. Stables
9. Blacksmith
10. Log quarters for families
11. Building Whipple fired
12. Jones and Renville Rangers
13. McGrew's position
14. Bishop's position
15. Geer and Whipple position
16. Fort Creek located in ravine
17. Minnesota River
18. St. Peter Road
19. Depressed ground
20. Sutler store
21. Guardhouse
22. Magazines
23. Ravine



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## Renville Rangers

The Renville Rangers were a group of citizens, many of them mixed-bloods, recruited for the Civil War but when the uprising broke out, they were called upon to help defend the fort. Their commander was 1st. Lt. James Gorman and he led about fifty men through these battles and the Battle at Wood Lake. They have been memorialized at Fort Ridgely with a plaque in their honor erected in 1896 by the State of Minnesota with this inscription: In Memory of the Fallen: In Recognition of the Living and For the Emulation of Future Generations.

Renville County can take pride in the Renville Rangers who served from August 19 to November 28, 1862 and fought in important battles during the U.S. – Dakota War. A roster of the Rangers can be found in the following list from: *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865* (St. Paul 1891), p. 780. Document below provided by Don Heinrich Tolzmann.

**ROSTER OF THE RENVILLE RANGERS, COMMANDED BY CAPTAIN JAMES GORMAN.  
ORGANIZED AUG. 19, 1862, AND SERVED UNTIL NOV. 28, 1862. WERE IN BATTLES OF FORT RIDGLEY AND WOOD LAKE.**

NAMES.	RANK.	REMARKS.
James Gorman.....	1st Lieutenant.....	
Theophyle Richer.....	1st Sergeant.....	
John McCoke.....	2d Sergeant.....	
Warren Carey.....	3d Sergeant.....	
Louis Arner.....	1st Corporal.....	
Diendonner Sylvester.....	2d Corporal.....	
Roufer Bourger.....	3d Corporal.....	
Amot, Eurgel.....	Private.....	
Auge, Joseph.....	Private.....	
Bakerman, George.....	Private.....	
Berthleuson, Rock.....	Private.....	
Bibeau, Edward.....	Private.....	
Bourcier, John.....	Private.....	
Breuell, Samuel.....	Private.....	
Carpenter, David.....	Private.....	
Campbell, John.....	Private.....	
Campbell, Jaire.....	Private.....	
Chose, Antoine.....	Private.....	
Dagenais, Geo.....	Private.....	
Danzer, Frederic.....	Private.....	
Danzer, Henry.....	Private.....	
Demer, Algis.....	Private.....	
Demers, Francois.....	Private.....	
Dickinson, Carlton.....	Private.....	
Delaney, James.....	Private.....	
Fortier, Joseph.....	Private.....	
Hoback, Richard L.....	Private.....	
Labate, George.....	Private.....	
Lacroltz, Frederick.....	Private.....	
Leclair, Suprien.....	Private.....	
Lucier, Medore.....	Private.....	
Milard, Joseph.....	Private.....	
Mireau, Moses.....	Private.....	
Morin, Thobule.....	Private.....	
Mitchel, Charles.....	Private.....	
Murk, A. B.....	Private.....	
Pffainer, Henry.....	Private.....	
Pole, Ernest.....	Private.....	
Pierce, Henry.....	Private.....	
Paro, Joseph.....	Private.....	Killed at battle of Wood Lake.
Quinn, Thomas.....	Private.....	
Rabidous, Magloire.....	Private.....	
Robert, Charles.....	Private.....	
Robinet, Joseph.....	Private.....	
Shet, Francois.....	Private.....	
Wagner, John.....	Private.....	

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## Fort Ridgely Monument



Dedicated August 20, 1896

It should be noted there are errors and omissions on this monument.

Here are the inscriptions: "Erected A. D. 1896, by the State of Minnesota to preserve the site of Ft. Ridgely, a United States military post established in 1853, and especially to perpetuate the names and commemorate the heroism of the soldiers and citizens of the State, who successfully defended the fort during nine days of siege and investment, August 18-27, 1862, and who gallantly resisted two formidable and protracted assaults upon it, made August 20 and 22, 1862, by a vastly superior force of Sioux Indians under command of Little Crow and other noted Indian leaders and warriors.

August 18, 1862, the Sioux Indians of the Upper Minnesota River, in violation of their treaties, broke into open rebellion, and within a few days thereafter, massacred about one thousand citizens in the south western part of the State, and destroyed property of the value of millions of dollars. Many men, women and children fled to Fort Ridgely and were under its protection during the siege. The successful defense of the Fort by its garrison, consisting of parts of Companies B and C, Fifth Regiment, Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, the "Renville Rangers," and citizens and refugees, was very largely instrumental in saving other portions of Minnesota from ravage and devastation, and greatly contributed to the ultimate defeat of the Indians and their expulsion from the State..."

During the entire siege of Fort Ridgely, the garrison was skillfully commanded by Lieut. Timothy J. Sheehan of Co. C, 5th Regiment, Minnesota Infantry. He was ably assisted by Lieut. Norman K. Culver, Co

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B, of the same regiment, acting Post Quartermaster and Commissary in charge of detachments; Lieut. Thos. P. Gere, Co. B, 5th Minnesota Infantry, in command of the portion of his company present, (Capt. John F. Marsh and 23 men of that company, and Peter Quinn, U.S. Interpreter, having been killed by the Indians at Redwood Ferry, August 18, 1862); Lieut. James Gorman, in command of the Renville Rangers; Hon. Benj. H. Randall, in charge of armed citizens; Ordnance Sergeant John Jones, of the Regular Army, in general charge of the artillery, with Sergt. James G. McGrew, Co. B, 5th Minnesota Infantry, and Mr. John C. Whipple, each in charge of a gun. Dr. Alfred Muller, Post Surgeon. The names of the other defenders of the fort appear elsewhere on this monument.

### RENVILLE RANGERS

First Lieutenant James Gorman, Commanding (Wounded)  
Sergeants, Theophile Richer, John McCole, Warren Carey  
Corporals, Louis Arner, Dieudonne Sylvestre, Roufer Burger  
Privates, Urgel Amiot, Joseph Auge, Geo. Bakerman, Rocque Berthiaume, Ed. Bibeau, John Bourcier, Pierre Boyer, Samuel Brunelle, David Carpenter, Antoine Chose, Geo. Dagenais, Fred. Denzer, Henry Denzer, Alexis DeMerce, Francois Demerce, Carlton Dickinson, James Delaney, Louis Demeule, Joseph Fortier, (w'd), B. H. Goodell, R. L. Hoback, Geo. LaBatte, Fred. LaCroix, Joseph LaTour, Cyprian LeClaire (w'd), Medard Lucier, Moses Mireau, Theophile Morin, A. B. Murch, Ernest Paul, Henry Pflaume, Henry Pierce, Joseph Perea, Thos. T. Quinn, Magloire Robidoux, Chas. Robert, Joseph Robinette, (w'd), Francois Stay

### ARMED CITIZENS

B. H. Randall, Commanding; Wm. Anderson, Robt. Baker (killed), Werner Boesch, Louis Brisbois, Wm. Butler, Clement Cardinal, M. A. Dailey, J. W. DeCamp, Frank Diepolder, Henry Diepolder, Alfred Dufrene, J. C. Fenske, (w'd), Jo. Jack Frazer, T. J. Galbraith, E. A. C. Hatch, Patrick Heffron, Geo. P. Hicks, Keran Horan, John Hose, Joseph Koehler, Louis LaCroix, James B. Magner, John Magner, Oliver Martelle, Pierre Martelle, John Meyer, John Nairn, Dennis O'Shea, Joseph Overbaugh, B. F. Pratt, J. C. Ramsey, John Resoft, Adam Rieke, August Rieke, Geo. Rieke, Heinrich Rieke (died), Victor Rieke, Louis Robert, Louis Sharon, Chris. Schlumberger, Gustav Stafford, Joshua Sweet, Louis Thiele, Nikolas Thinner, Onesime Vanasse (killed), A. J. Van Voorhes, John Walter, J. C. Whipple, C. G. Wykoff, Xavier Zolner

A number of women cheerfully and bravely assisted in the defense of the Fort:

The following named rendered especially valuable services: Anna Boesch, Kenney Bradford, Elizabeth M. Dunn, Margaret King Hern, Mary A. Heffron, Eliza Muller, Juliette McAllister, Mary D. Overbaugh, Agnes Overbaugh, Julia Peterson, Mrs. E. Picard, Mrs. E. Perea, Wilhelmina Randall, Valencia J. Reynolds, Mary Rieke, Mrs. R. Schmahl, Mrs. Spencer, Julia Sweet, Elizabeth West.

Ezekial Rose, Co. B, 5th Reg. Minn. Vols., was wounded when Capt. Marsh and 23 men of his company were ambushed and killed. Sergt. J. F. Bishop, Co. B, 5th Minn. Vols., was in charge of a reserve gun during the siege.

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The following citizens also rendered valuable services:

Rev. S. D. Hinman, Alfred Valliant, John Robinson, James B. Robinson, Wm. R. LaFramboise, John Loeffelmacher, Henry Elfkamp, Peter Glaser, Patrick Murname, Wm. Haley, Wm. Smith, John Smith and Miss Elizabeth West.

### COMPANY C, 5th MINNESOTA INFANTRY

First Lieutenant T. J. Sheehan, Commanding  
Sergeants, John P. Hicks, F. A. Blackmer (w'd) John C. Ross.  
Corporals, M. A. Chamberlain, Z. C. Butler, Wm. Young, Dennis Porter (w'd).  
Privates, S. P. Beighley, E. D. Brooks, J. M. Brown, J. L. Bullock, Chas. E Chapel, Zachariah Chute, Sidney Cook, L. H. Decker, Chas. Dills, Chas. H. Dills, Daniel Dills, S. W. Dogan, L. A. Eggleston, Halvor Elefson, Martin Ellingson, C. J. Grandy, Mark M. Greer (killed), J. P. Green, A. K. Grout, Andrew Gulbranson, Peter E. Harris (w'd), Philo Henry, James Honan, D. N. Hunt, L. C. Jones, N. I. Lowthian, A. J. Luther (w'd), John Malachy, John McCall, Orlando McFall, F. M. McReynolds, J. H. Mead, J. B. Miller, Dennis Morean, Peter Nisson, Andrew Peterson, J. M. Rice, Chas. A. Rose, B. F. Ross, Edward Roth, C. O. Russell, W. S. Russell, Isaac Shortledge (w'd), Josiah Weakley, G. H. Wiggins, J. M. Ybright, James Young.

### COMPANY B, 5th MINNESOTA INFANTRY

First Lieutenant N. K. Culver, Post Quartermaster and Commissary  
Second Lieutenant Thos. P. Gere, Commanding  
Sergeants, Jas. G. McGrew, A. C. Ellis, Jno. F. Bishop  
Corporals, W. E. Winslow, T. D. Huntley, C. H. Hawley, Michael Pfremer, Arthur McAllister, Allen Smith, J. C. McLean, Drummer, Chas. M. Culver; Wagoner, Elias Hoyt  
Privates, Geo. M. Annis, Jas. M. Atkins, Chas. H. Baker, Chas. Beecher, Wm. H. Blodgett, Christ Boyer, John Brennan, L. M. Carr, W. H. H. Chase, James Dunn, Caleb Elphee, A. J. Fauver, J. W. Foster, Columbia French, Ambrose Gardner, Wm. Good (w'd), W. B. Hutchinson, L. W. Ives, J. W. Lester, Isaac Lindsey, Henry Martin, J. L. McGill (w'd), John McGowan, J. M. Munday, Jas. Murray, E. F. Nehrhood, Thos. Parsley, W. J. Perrington, H. F. Pray, Antoin Rebenski, Heber Robinson, Andrew Rufridge (w'd), Lauren Scripture, John Serfling, R. J. Spornitz (w'd), Saml. Steward, Wm. J. Sturgis, Wm. A. Sutherland, Ole Svendson, M. J. Tanner, J. F. Taylor, J. A. Underwood, Stephen Van Buren, Eli Wait, O. G. Wall, A. W. Williamson, M. H. Wilson.

The fort was abandoned in 1867. In 1911, Fort Ridgely Park became Minnesota's fourth state park. The Minnesota Historical Society took over management of the historic site which lies inside the state park. The historic site interpretive center is managed by the Nicollet County Historical Society under the direction of the Minnesota Historical Society and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The commissary has been restored. Building foundations of the officers' quarters, barracks and other buildings have been located and marked. There is a private cemetery within the park that contains settler graves from the uprising, soldier memorials, and present day burials.