

Alois Palmer Story

When Granny came for visits with us, I often asked her to tell about the Indian uprising. One time during a visit in the early 50s, I borrowed a reel-to-reel tape recorder and I made a recording of her. Of course she was unfamiliar with taping things. She was understandably nervous and needed some prompting.

Her father, Alois Palmer, operated a ferry across the Minnesota River. He and his family, Rosalie and Otto, lived in a building that also housed some supplies that he sold to Indians and other settlers. One day an elderly Indian came and warned him that the Indians were planning to come and take back their land by killing the settlers. Her father said that he wasn't scared because he had gotten along very well with the Indians. They liked him and he had always treated them fairly. They dismissed the threat.

The next day, while they were at the dinner table, they became aware of the burning of haystacks and neighbor cabins. They realized that they needed to escape immediately. They quickly ran down to the ferry, which was a ways away, so they could take it across the Minnesota River.

They had one child at the time, named Otto. He was too small to run, so they put him in a grain sack and carried him down to the river. After taking the ferry across, they cut the rope so that the Indians were unable to pull the ferry back to cross. Fort Ridgley was close to the place where the ferry landed so the Palmers joined other settlers from that side of the river who had gathered there.

They knew that the Indians would eventually reach the fort; so several men rode to New Ulm to alert the government and warn everyone. There was an old cannon left in the fort and one cannon ball. One of the settlers ("Mr. McGeggor?") fired the ball against one side of the fort through the night. That was the only ammunition available for the settlers, but the Indians didn't know that, and the sound of the cannon was enough to scare them off.

Help eventually came from New Ulm but the Indians had burned all of the settlements. The parents of Rosalie Palmer, Charles and Johann Pelzl, lived within a mile of the Palmers. They died when they hid in a haystack, and it was burned.

This is what I recall “Granny” telling us about the “Indian uprising.” She always mentioned that she and her family had no “bad feelings” about the Indians. Her father had told them that the Indians had really been mistreated and had cause for unrest.

I had no negative opinions about Indians and seldom saw any as I was growing up. I was proud to say that I had no prejudice when I went to my first teaching job at Waubun MN. It was the school that was available for children from the White Earth Reservation. My attitude about the reservation and the Indian culture has changed much throughout the years.