

MY EXPERIENCE DURING THE INDIAN MASSACRE

By Mrs. Caecilie Schilling

(Note: The writer of this article is a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Anton Ochs, pioneer residents of the town of Milford and later of the city of New Ulm, and widow of the late Louis Schilling who was for many years city clerk of New Ulm. At the time of the Indian outbreak she was but nine years of age and was working for Joseph Stocker who lived nine miles west of New Ulm, three miles farther from where her parents lived at the time.)

At the time of the Indian massacre I was working for Joseph Stocker, my duties being to care for his wife who was then sick and confined to her bed. On Saturday, August 16, I was granted permission to spend Sunday with my parents who lived about three miles distant. After a pleasant visit I started back to Mr. Stocker's place on Monday morning and about halfway I met several Indians. Having always been afraid of Indians I ran as fast as I could into the wheat fields. The Indians called to me but in words I could not understand; they did not follow me but continued on their way.

This incident caused me to turn off the regular road to Stocker's and in doing so I had to pass close by Fink's house. Mrs. Fink gave me a melon, and I went rapidly on because there was still a mile ahead of me before reaching my destination. I arrived just at noon and found that Mr. Stocker had prepared the noon meal. Just as we were ready to sit down to the table Mr. Stocker noticed that his neighbor's house was on fire. This was the Fink's house that I had previously passed. Mrs. Stocker begged her husband to go over and help her, which he did, and when he returned after a long absence, he had a great many things to tell us.

New Ulm People Ambushed and Robbed.

Fink's house had burned down and he had been unable to discover anyone excepting a small child, a grandchild of the Fink's, who was lying in front of the door. It had been shot through the breast with an arrow but was still alive. He wanted to take the child to relatives but could find no one in the house. In the meantime, the child had died and so he left it in the house of Max Zeller, a relative. Because of the fact that the Indians had occasionally caused trouble, Mr. Stocker thought that this was the case again. We were discussing this quite excitedly when we saw a wagon approaching with several men on it. The wagon had an American flag, and Mr. Stocker thought they were white men from New Ulm come to help us, but I saw two Indians in their native costumes running across the field and toward our house. We then saw that the others were Indians also, and learned later that they had ambushed a number of New Ulm people and robbed them of their clothes. These men who were ambushed and robbed were men who had started out with a band and a flag and were on their way to Henle's to gather recruits for the Civil war.

Mrs. Stocker Murdered by Indians.

When Mrs. Stocker learned that the Indians were coming she begged us to carry her into the woods, but this was impossible. In order to create the impression that we were unafraid, we sat down to our noon meal. In the meantime one of the Indians had picked up some washing that had been left on the grass to dry. Mrs. Stocker, who was familiar with the artifice practiced by the redskins, said to her husband: "Don't take the washing from him, because he wants to entice you outside." Shortly afterwards, the Indian appeared at the window and motioned to Mr. Stocker, who, however, did not allow himself to be induced to go outside. When the Indian saw that he could not get Mr. Stocker out of the house he threw aside the washing, picked up his gun and with the butt end of it, smashed the upper pane of the window, the broken glass falling on the table and causing us to spring up scared. Mrs. Stocker called out: "Stand aside, he will do nothing to me, only pray." Mr. Stocker sprang into one corner and I into another. Mrs. Stocker then begged the Indian to spare her life and that she would give him everything she had, but he was not to be dissuaded. He took the gun, knocked in the window frame and aimed at her. She took her head shawl and covered her face

with it. I distinctly heard when the rifle was cocked, a report quickly followed and the shawl covering the face of Mrs. Stocker was rent in tow. Mr Stocker, who was near the stairway turned around rapidly and ran upstairs. I, in my fright, ran past the Indian who stood at the window and also mounted the stairs.

Mr. Stocker, however, had dropped the trap door and stood on it. He wanted to get out of the upstairs window. There I stood and before I could gather my thoughts, the trap door opened and Mr. Stocker sprang rapidly down the steps. He told me later that there was an Indian on the roof keeping guard, that's why he had to come down. He ran into the cellar and I followed him. We listened intently to hear what was going on above, and heard the Indians shove the bed out of the way, and then heard them dance and sing the death dance. By that we knew that Mrs. Stocker was dead.

Stocker's Home Fired By Indians.

After a short time, Mr. Stocker said; "Now, they have set fire to the house." He laid down on the ground and commenced digging in order to cover himself with the earth as protection against the fire. I immediately tried to do the same thing, but was not able to get loose more than a handful of earth. Then Mr. Stocker said: Oh, that won't help us, when the house falls we shall be suffocated." We next made a further attempt to save ourselves by trying to dig a hole under the front side of the house for the purpose of getting out. He soon noticed, however, that the Indians were on that side. At the further end of the house was another cellar used for the storing of potatoes. This depression was filled with straw and was in no wise connected with the cellar in which we were. Mr. Stocker thought that on that side of the house would be a better chance to escape as the burning straw would no doubt keep the Indians away. It was dark in the cellar there being no window. Mr. Stocker again commenced to dig with his hands until he found a shingle which made work much easier. When the hole was large enough Mr. Stocker wanted to help me out, but I refused to go, being afraid. I said, "Mr. Stocker, you go first, if I hear shooting I shall stay here." Mr. Stocker then left me, and soon afterwards hearing no shooting I made up my mind to go also. I could not reach the opening, however. I got a bench but this was not high enough to enable me to get out. Then I noticed an earthen milk vessel, and by placing this on top of the bench, I was enabled to reach the opening, but by this time the fire was being carried unremittingly into the opening through which I intended to escape. Remembering that my father had always told us children that we should be careful that our hair should not become ignited, I took off my apron and wound it tightly around my head, then I crawled through the hole and through the flames. A few feet from the house was a cornfield into which I ran and then turned to look once more at the house; the flames were mounting high into the air. I ran deeper in to the woods and there found Mr. Stocker.

Mr. Zettel and Children Murdered by Indians.

We went three miles through the woods in the direction of New Ulm and coming out passed a house where lived a family by the name of Zettel. Upon entering, we found Mr. Zettel dead on the floor, in his arms a loaf of bread saturated with blood. We stepped over his body and in the next room found the corpses of three children, one of them being a schoolmate of mine. I was filled with horror and turned back again, and with Mr. Stocker came out of the house. We heard someone call and following the sound found Mrs. Zettel in a shock of wheat. She had heard us for a long time, but was afraid that we might be Indians. We found her bleeding from several wounds on the head, and she begged us to help her to her bed, which we did, in doing so having to step over the body of her dead husband. She told us the Indians had come just as the family were about to sit down to the noon meal, and that they had perched on the fence. Mr. Zettel had said: "I will give the Indians something also." He took a half loaf of bread and as he stepped outside the Indians fired at him and mortally wounded him. They had taken the little child out of the mother's arms. She asked us to look after it. We found it dead behind the house and brought it to the mother who took it with her into the bed.

Assistance Comes From New Ulm.

We then returned to the woods and after walking another mile and a half came to the Fischerbauer place. Mr. Fischerbauer, thinking we were Indians was going to shoot but recognized me, so asked us to come in which we did and found there the Schillings who had fled from their own home and found refuge there. Mr. Schilling had been killed on the way, his wife had been wounded with a tomahawk, and the Indians had thrust a knife in the back of the son, which he himself had removed.

As previously mentioned, men had been on the way to Henle's to get recruits. There were teams in all, also Mr. Henle came from town and drove the last team. When he saw that the Indians had overwhelmed those on the other wagons, he turned around post-haste for New Ulm to secure assistance. Just as we were gathered at the Fischerbauer place, help came from New Ulm. They took all the wounded people on the wagon, left the dead behind, and the others followed on foot. In this manner, we went back half mile to the Henle place.

Child and Parents Re-United.

The home of my parents was a half mile from Henle's, and Mr. Stocker thought I should go and see if the folks were still home. So I went off alone and when I came to the house, found no one there. A neighbor's boy, Christian Haag, came running and told me that his father had been murdered. His mother and four children were still at home. I went with him to his mother; then we all started on the way to New Ulm. When we were about five miles from New Ulm, we again came together with Mr. Stocker, Mr. Henle and the others. By this time I was quite fatigued and two of the men took hold of my hands and helped me along. In this manner we came to New Ulm and made halt at the Dakota House. There I found my parents who were overjoyed when they saw me, for they could hardly believe that I was still living.

Robert Stocker, the well-known Naval Constructor in the United States Navy, is a son of the Joseph Stocker of this story, by a second marriage.