

THE STORY OF EMANUEL REYFF submitted by Bob Reyff, great-great grandson of Eusebius Reyff, nephew of Emmanuel.

We moved from Helenville, Jefferson county, Wis., in the spring of 1862 and settled at Middle Creek, Minn. We filed on our claim and went to breaking up the sod. We had settled at Forest City, Minn. [this is near Atwater where he is buried], two years previous.

Monday, August 18, [1862] I was working on the Minnesota River, driving rafting logs down to New Ulm for the sawmill. The boss said the river was too low so we could not go down. So he paid us off and I started to go to my brother, Eusebius, with whom I then lived. A friend of mine named Bill Laur went with me. We went together as far as the hill at Beaver Creek and then parted. He went to New Ulm, where his folks lived and I went to my brother's.

Just as I was coming to the cow yard the Indians were coming from the opposite direction to the house. My brother and his son Ben, a boy about 10 years of age, were stacking hay near the house. One of the Indians shot at my brother with an arrow. It struck him under the jawbone near the ear. As he fell from the load the Indians grabbed him, cut off both his hands and scalped him before he was dead.

Ben jumped off the stack and tried to escape, but there were about forty Indians and poor little Ben had no show. One of the Indians grabbed him by the hair and held him while the other Indian dumped off the hay rack, which was nearly empty, turned up the wagon tongue and tied Ben's feet together with a rope and hung him to the wagon tongue by his heels. Then they cut his pants off with a butcher knife and slashed up his body as only an Indian knows how. Then they poured powder over his body and set it on fire. He died quickly. I thanked God when he was dead. They scalped him, also. He was such a fat little fellow and they seemed to like the job.

My sister-in-law came out of the house and begged on her knees for her life. An Indian rudely seized her by the hair and held her while the other Indians drove four stakes into the ground and then tied her to them; then they mutilated her body with butcher knives. After she was dead they scalped her, too.

Little Annie rushed out of the house screaming with fright. Two squaws grabbed her by the arms and cut her to pieces with butcher knives on the doorstep.

When the first shooting commenced I climbed a tree that was covered with a grape vine near the cow yard. From my hiding place I could see all that was passing, but dared not move. Twice I drew my revolver to shoot, once when they tied my sister-in-law to the stake, and when they cut up little Ben. But it was only one against forty Indians, and it would have given them another victim if I had revealed my hiding place.

As soon as the killing was all done the Indians passed right under the tree I was hiding in and went to the Kochendurfer place, our next neighbors. I climbed out of the tree and ran as fast as I could to the Smith place. Here I saw one of the most horrible sights I ever witnessed in my life. Mrs. Smith's head was lying on the table with a knife and fork stuck in it. They had cut off one of her breasts and laid it on the table beside the head and put her baby nursing the other breast. The child was still alive. The dog they had killed on the doorstep.

I ran out of the house as quick as I ran into it and ran down to the Minnesota River, right below Smith's house, for there were a whole lot of Indians coming over the bluff and they had not discovered me yet. I swam the river and started for Fort Ridgely, but there were so many Indians around the fort I changed my course and went to New Ulm and got there just before it was attacked by the Indians and helped to defend the town during the siege.

My nephew, Eusebius, was working near New Ulm and my nieces, Mary and Emma, were both away at work. I found all and told them all the sad story of their parents' and Annie's death. My nephew and I both enlisted in Company K, the Seventh Minnesota. We were sent out to help bury the dead. We commenced near New Ulm and it took us three weeks before we got to my brother's place. We found the bones of the four bodies and buried them in one grave near the garden. Our lieutenant was with us.

Afterwards we were detailed to guard the thirty-eight Indians at the hanging at Mankato. There were nine names called to place the ropes around the Indians's necks. My name was among them and I performed the task with pleasure. Afterwards we were sent south and I helped fight thirty-two battles including the Indian war.

[The following part was written by Minnie Buce Carrigan.] The Reyff family lived about one mile and a half from our home. They had not lived there very long. We used to meet at Sunday School. Before the outbreak we met at Sunday School and walked part way home together. When we parted that day we did not know that that day was the last time we would ever meet; that the next day three of us six would be killed, and that my sister, Ben and Annie, would be the victims.

While I was a prisoner with the Indians and they were moving, I saw a little girl riding on a wagon with Annie Reyff's dress on. I followed her all the afternoon, thinking it was my little friend Annie. When I caught up with her I found it was a quarter-blood Indian girl with Annie's dress on. I knew then that Annie must be dead or they would no have her dress. I felt so sorry and disappointed I sat down and cried.

Written by Minnie Buce Carrigan
Told by Emanuel Reyff