

The personal narrative of Mrs. Helen Carrothers in her own words

Helen Paddock married James Carrothers when she was 14 years old. They were the parents of two children, Althea, who was age 4 and Tommy age 2, on the day of the uprising. Helen had been friendly with the Dakota, learning their language and their traditions, and they taught her how to use herbal plants to treat and cure various ailments. James was a carpenter at the Lower Sioux Agency and was away that day. Helen and her two children escaped with the Henderson, Earle, and White families, all from the Beaver Falls settlement. She and her children were captured, but they escaped and finally reached Fort Ridgely after eight days of perilous hardship.

This is a portion of her narrative she wrote and published in 1904:

The teams were all stopped, and Mr. S. R. Henderson and David Carrothers went out to the Indians to learn their intention. On inquiry, they were told that the whites were all to be killed. This was the more shocking to us as these Indians were all well known to me and had hitherto expressed so much friendship toward us. [The Dakota then attacked the party, scattering them, and taking the women and children captive.]

When the Indians came up to us they shook hands with each of the women, and said we were going now to live with them. Here we sat down on the open prairie, guarded by two Indians, and, in some fifteen minutes, eight more came back from the pursuit of our men, and with these we returned.

They would not let us return by Mrs. Henderson's but we saw a fire where she had been last seen, and we supposed they had burned her and her little children. This turned out to be so, as I afterward learned.

The party, of which I was one, now consisted of eight persons, as follows: Mrs. David Carrothers and baby, Mrs. Earle and two daughters, Mrs. White and baby, Julia White and myself [and my two children]. All these were ordered into one of the wagons taken from us, and driven to Mr. Earle's house, when we were told to get out. The conversation was in the Sioux language, most of which I understood.

We stood by the door while the Indians plundered the house, breaking up all the furniture, throwing cups and saucers and other dishes through the windows. One of their numbers, an Indian called John, went to the spring and brought us water in a pan procured from the house; when all they wanted was put into the wagon, we were driven on to Little Crow's house.

We passed on, and came to the Minnesota River, and crossed at a ford. The Indians here walked up the river hill, and I drove. After we crossed we came into a prairie, where John told

me I must drive fast; that he heard the cannon at the fort; that the soldiers, he feared, would come after them and kill them before they reached Little Crow's.

Again we had a steep hill to go up, and all got out and walked. At the top of the hill, an Indian told me he was going to take me to John Moore's house. I inquired if Mrs. Elizabeth Carrothers and myself might not remain together. His answer was emphatic, " No!"

We were then separated, and were not again permitted to stay in the same wagon. The team in which had Mrs. Earle then drove off toward Redwood, and I saw her no more that day. About a mile from the hill last alluded to, they stopped, and loaded the wagon full of different kinds of stores — dried apples, prunes, calico, blankets, and numerous other articles — taken from the Lower Agency.

On the top of this load, with three Indians, we were permitted to ride. Some of the dried apples were given us to eat. At the river they had opened a chest, brought from Mr. Earle's, and which had been packed by him with stores, such as sugar, meat, bread, and clothing. Of these stores they gave us to eat, I suppose to be quite sure they did not contain poison. We soon came in sight of Little Crow's house, and, approaching near, stopped some fifteen rods from the door of the great chief who was himself at home. I asked if I could not go down to the house. The privilege was refused. Here we were given water to drink from an old tin kettle.

In a few moments Little Crow came along, and seemed very much pleased to see us, and extended a cordial hand to welcome us to his own home. I then asked the chief himself if I could not go down to his house. He tried to be agreeable, and said " Yes," and soon showed us the way to his Indian mansion, a two-story frame house, made of boards, set upright and battened, with one room below and two above, all plastered, furnished with a good cooking-stove, chairs, tables, and good common furniture. Besides the usual and ordinary furniture, the house was packed with goods of all kinds, taken as plunder, such as sugar, coffee, tea, calico, and clothing in general.

I told Little Crow that I was hungry. He pointed to a sack of flour, and said, ^' Go and make you some bread if you are hungry." After he had gone out, an old squaw came and made me a cup of coffee, and prepared me some bread fried in grease, and I and the children ate our supper. On the table, at this meal, were good ordinary dishes, knives and forks; and the table was quite well supplied, butter, sugar, and coffee being among the luxuries. It was, however, an extra occasion, both as to the guests and the supply of provisions.

After supper, I went out and sat by the door of the chief, looking after my boy Tommy. While sitting here, Little Crow came along, and gave me a sudden push, saying, " Go into the house; the Indians will kill you if you do not." Thus kindly admonished, I took the boy, went into the house, and sat behind the door, and, taking my boy on my lap, tried to keep him still.

While thus situated, I saw Little Crow's brother come in and sit down by the side of a German girl, and, putting his arms around her in a loving manner, said in the Sioux language, "This is my squaw." The Indian told us that he wished all of the women to go up to his tepee. We had now to obey any Indian who chose to command us. This, too, was the brother of the renowned Little Crow. We all arose and followed him.

On arriving at John's tepee, we found it all fitted up in the nicest Indian fashion, John himself building a fire after we arrived. He seemed to behave as though he expected us to remain with him. Outside of the tepee, supper was being cooked, and we all sat down there, but had scarcely been seated a moment when a squaw came and took Mrs. Earle and her daughter Julia off with her, not permitting them to remain for supper.

Mrs. White and baby, myself, and two children were now all the white persons left at this tepee of the too-much-delighted, Indian John. Here we ate supper. While we were eating, the squaw fitted up the tepee, and supper being over, we all went in. A buffalo-robe was brought, and we sat down, according to the Indian fashion. The squaw now gave me a comb, and told me I must braid my hair after the Indian fashion. After this was done, a comforter was brought for a bed for the children. About ten o'clock Little Crow came around and said we must not be in haste to go to bed, as we must make us some clothes to wear.

The waiting squaw, in obedience to this hint from the chief, soon brought forth a blue-colored cloth, to make into skirts, and a calico sack for each of us. We had soon sewed up a skirt each for ourselves. I had sewed mine up with a seam, in the usual way among white people. The squaw ordered me to take it out, and directed me to place the two edges so that one doubled over the other, and then to run the seam double. This, she said, was their fashion. Owing to this mistake, Mrs. White finished her skirt first, but refused to put it on, it looked so horrible. I very cheerfully put mine on, and laughed heartily at the figure I cut thus half-pressed in Indian costume.

The squaws, too, were taken with a fit of laughter, and went and brought in other squaws and Indians, and we all laughed heartily. Mrs. White reluctantly and soberly put hers on, and the laugh turned on her, but she seemed not to see why anyone should laugh. I felt as Mrs. White did, yet I forced a laugh, with a desire to make myself as agreeable as possible under the circumstances.

In the morning we had, for breakfast, boiled beef without salt. I could not eat it, and asked for salt. The reply I received was that they had no salt, but would have some that day. After giving the children some, I gave the rest back, as I could not eat beef without salt. The squaw told me I had better eat it, for it was all we would get until night, as they were going to Yellow Medicine. They now watched me very closely. I was not permitted to go out of the tepee alone, but was always attended by a squaw, and compelled to wear a blanket over my head.

About eleven o'clock of that day, Tuesday, the 19th of August, a squaw came and took Mrs. White away, and left me quite alone. The Indians now came to me, Little Crow and others, and talked a long time about killing someone, I did not understand who, but now a squaw came and told me that they were going to kill me. The reason alleged was, that four Indians wanted me for a squaw, and as they could not agree. Little Crow, unable, as umpire, to decide the quarrel, had concluded to settle the difficulty in the way intimated.

[Helen managed to escape with her two children, and spent eight harrowing days, hiding from the Dakota, while trying to make her way to Ft. Ridgeley. She eventually did reach the fort.]

I had been out eight days, having had nothing to eat but raw potatoes and a cucumber. I had carried the two children all the way, except about one-half mile. The eldest was nearly four years old. I had traveled, from Little Crow's house, in the route I had taken, over thirty miles. I had been in imminent danger of detection by the Indians several different times. The reader may imagine my joy at reaching Fort Ridgley.

I remained at the fort three nights. The first night I could not sleep. Some fellow sufferers congregated to hear of my escape, which exhausted the night. The eldest child, during this night, would frequently cry out, in its troubled dreams, "Mamma, mamma, I can't walk." While on the route, this little girl would wake from partial sleep, and most piteously cry, "Mamma, mamma, give me some bread." All I could reply from my full heart, with face averted from the child, was, "When we get to the fort you shall have something good to eat."

I remained at the fort three days, and came to St. Peter. I then went to La Crosse, Wisconsin, and remained all winter. In March, 1863, I came to St. Paul, and, in June, returned again to St. Peter, where, at the request of friends, I have furnished this simple story of my adventures among the Sioux Indians."

Helen eventually divorced James, then married Dennis McNanney who died in 1887 and Lemon Tarble who died in 1918. During this time, she lectured on the subject of the uprising, and, for a number of years during the state fair, she had charge of the old settlers building. Helen was indeed a courageous, tenacious, and heroic woman who rebuilt her life several times after extreme hardship.