

Stephen and Clarissa Henderson Family

On August 18, 1862, the Henderson family and their two daughters, one named Lydia, were part of the group of twenty-seven men, women and children that gathered at the Jonathan Earle house to plan their escape from the marauding Dakota. As they began their exodus, Clarissa lay ill on a feather mattress in their family buggy. They had only traveled one-half mile when sixteen Indians came upon them and blocked their path. Stephen, who spoke Dakota fluently, negotiated with them and agreed they would give up their two teams and two wagons, but keep the buggy and one team for his wife and children. The Dakota agreed but then shortly after changed their minds and demanded the horses as well. They now had to pull the buggy by hand.

The party had proceeded but a short distance when the Indians began firing on them. The men dropped the buggy and ran, but Stephen and young Jehiel Wedge stayed with Clarissa, Jehiel only to be killed as he was attempting to wave a white pillowcase showing surrender. Stephen had his forefinger clipped while holding the other side of the pillowcase and then he took off. Clarissa watched as the warriors threw her two-year old and nine-month old daughters out of the buggy and beat their heads with violins. They then dumped Clarissa on the ground with her children, threw the mattress over them and set it on fire. The eleven captives watched in horror at this terrible scene. Stephen escaped and eventually joined a militia group that was involved in the Battle of Birch Coulee. He was killed on September 2, 1862 and may still be buried on the battlefield.

His wife and daughters are memorialized on what is known as the Henderson Monument located four miles north of Morton, MN. Here is the inscription: "Erected by Renville County Pioneers August 18, 1907. In memory of Mrs. S. R. Henderson and her two little daughters, Jehiel Wedge and Eugene White who were killed by the Indians in the massacre of August 18, 1862."