

MINNESOTA MILITARY MUSEUM

Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars

War Against the Confederacy

Minnesota—a three-year old state—had a small population of only 175,000 when it offered a regiment of 1,000 volunteer militia troops to President Lincoln to uphold the Union in April 1861. It was the first state to do so and first to enlist was Aaron Greenwald of Anoka, who was killed at Gettysburg. Josias B. King from St. Paul later claimed the title of the first volunteer in the Union Army. Over 22,000 Minnesotans served in 22 different volunteer military organizations between 1861 and 1865. More than 600 these died in action and three times that number died of disease and accident.



Co. D of the First Minnesota in St. Paul, May 18, 1861.

Minnesotans played a conspicuous part in many of the major battles of the Civil



Marshall Sherman captured the flag of the 28th Virginia Infantry during the Battle of Gettysburg. He became the first Minnesotan to receive the new Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery.

War. The First Minnesota Infantry fought with the Army of the Potomac in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. The other regiments, battalions, and batteries fought Confederates elsewhere in the south or in pursuit of Dakota Indians in the western campaigns. Altogether, Minnesota fielded eleven infantry regiments, an independent infantry battalion, two companies of sharpshooters, a regiment of mounted rangers, a regiment of cavalry, two cavalry battalions (Brackett's Battalion and Hatch's Battalion), a regiment of heavy artillery, and three batteries of light artillery.

The last surviving soldier in the Union Army was also a Minnesotan. Albert Woolson from Duluth died in 1956 at age 109. He had enlisted as a teenager in the First Regiment of Minnesota Heavy Artillery.

Minnesota's Other War

Minnesotans fought two wars at the same time! The 1862 Dakota War (also known as the Sioux Uprising) erupted in August 1862 when several settlers were killed by a small group of Dakota Indians. Hostilities had been building since the Dakota ceded most of their lands in treaties of 1851 and 1858. Unfair and slow

government payments, pressure on the reservations by white settlers, and unwillingness by many Dakota to abandon their traditional lifestyle and culture, pushed some to the breaking point.



Little Crow

Warriors under Chief Taoyateduta, known as Little Crow, destroyed the Lower Sioux Agency on the Minnesota River near Redwood Falls and burned farms across much of southwestern Minnesota, killing over five hundred civilians. They attacked the town of New Ulm and Forts Ridgely and Abercrombie, defeated Minnesota soldiers at the Redwood Ferry and nearly destroyed a relief expedition at Birch Coulee. After six weeks of fighting, Dakota warriors were finally defeated by Minnesota soldiers led by militia Colonel Henry Sibley at the Battle of Wood Lake near Granite Falls.

Most Dakota fled westward to the plains. Others surrendered at Camp Release on September 26, 1862. Military tribunals sentenced 303 to death, but President Lincoln authorized hanging only 38. They were hung at Mankato in December. Most Dakota were expelled from Minnesota.

Huge military expeditions in 1863 and 1864 pushed the Dakota still further west to reduce threats to settlers. Over half of Minnesota's Civil War soldiers also served time at Minnesota's frontier army posts before heading south to fight Confederates. Difficult campaigning on the open plains and service at scores of small frontier outposts hardened them, making them more effective as soldiers of the Union cause. Some Minnesota volunteer soldiers never left the state, and some continued to serve in Indian campaigns well after Confederate forces surrendered in the spring of 1865.



Henry Sibley

Thus Minnesota provided both the first and some of the last volunteer soldiers of the Civil War.