

# SANKOFA

@Home

*Reconciliation Park/  
U.S.-Dakota War  
of 1862*



Transform Minnesota



# RECONCILIATION PARK

The third installment of Sankofa at Home begins at Reconciliation Park in Mankato.

On December 26, 1862, 38 Dakota men were hanged in Mankato in the largest mass execution in United States history. The men were hanged as part of their alleged involvement and actions during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

Today, several monuments at **Reconciliation Park** in Mankato mark the site of this execution and work to honor the memory of the men who were executed.

In some ways, the executions marked the end of the violence and hostility seen during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. In others, this was only the beginning of a new chapter of mistreatment of the Dakota people.

This 6-week conflict, along with the events before and after, have had a profound impact on the history of Minnesota.



**Reconciliation Park**  
100 N Riverfront Dr.  
Mankato, MN 56001





# BUILD-UP TO THE WAR

"So far as I am concerned, if they are hungry let them eat grass or their own dung."

*-Andrew Jackson Myrick, representative of government traders at the Lower Sioux Agency, in 1862. Myrick was later killed in the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency, and was found with grass in his mouth.*



*Acton Incident Historical Marker outside Grove City, MN*

While the inciting incident of the U.S.-Dakota War is recognized as an attack on a settler family at **Acton Township**, a longer history of U.S.-Dakota relations precipitated the conflict. Numerous treaties between 1805 and 1858 pushed the Dakota onto smaller and smaller parcels of land around the Minnesota river. Treaty-mandated annuity payments from the U.S. Government began to show up later and later, and traders would charge exorbitant prices for food, supplies, and other goods.

Coming out of a harsh winter and with a months-delayed annuity payment, the Dakota were approaching starvation conditions as the summer of 1862 wore on. However, traders refused to sell to the Dakota on credit, and government agents would not release supplies without payment.

The **Sisseton** and **Whapeton** Dakota bands were finally able to obtain supplies from the **Upper Sioux Agency** in early August. At the **Lower Sioux Agency**, however, the **Mdewakanton** and **Wahpekute** bands were again turned away on August 15. Three days later, the Dakota were at war.



# SPLIT DECISION

The Dakota were not unified in the decision to go to war. There was dissent among the bands, and the Sisseton and Whapeton largely refrained from fighting. Chief **Little Crow**, among others, felt his hand forced after a small hunting party killed a settler family on August 17. The decision to go to war was influenced in part by fear of retribution against the entire community for the murders; by decades of mistreatment; and by the starvation conditions being faced.

On the morning of August 18, Little Crow led an attack on the Lower Sioux Agency. Later in the day, Dakota fighters ambushed soldiers marching from **Fort Ridgely** to defend the agency.

The government's annuity payment had arrived at Fort Ridgely that same day. It was not delivered to the Dakota.

## TIMELINE\*

- **8/17/1862:** Attack on settlers at Acton Township
- **8/18:** Attacks at Lower Sioux Agency and Redwood Ferry
- **8/19:** First Strike on New Ulm
- **8/20 and 22:** Battles at Fort Ridgely
- **8/23:** Second Strike on New Ulm
- **8/25:** Evacuation of New Ulm
- **8/28:** Sibley arrives at Fort Ridgely
- **9/2:** Battle of Birch Coulee
- **9/23:** Battle of Wood Lake
- **9/26:** Surrender and release of prisoners at Camp Release
- **9/28:** Trials begin at Camp Release
- **12/26:** Execution at Mankato

*\*This is a list of major events during the war.  
[Click here](#) for a broader timeline of related events.*



*Fort Ridgely provided military support to Central Minnesota and the Sioux Agencies during the mid-1800s*



# POLITICAL PRESSURE

The power brokers in Minnesota were unified in their goal: defeat the Dakota and remove them from the state.

Numerous prominent white Minnesotans were involved in the conflict in some way. These included the **first 6 state governors**, an **associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court**, and the **father of the Mayo Clinic founders**.

"Our course then is plain. The Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of Minnesota."

*-Gov. Alexander Ramsey to a special session of the Minnesota legislature, September 9, 1862*

Governor Alexander Ramsey appointed **Henry Hastings Sibley** as a colonel in the Army and placed him in charge of the forces sent from **Fort Snelling** to engage the Dakota. Sibley, who had previously been an Indian agent and the state's first governor, had no prior military experience.

Amid political pressure for a quick end to the conflict, less than a month passed between Sibley's arrival to Fort Ridgely and the Dakota surrender at **Camp Release**.

Two days after the surrender, Sibley convened trials of the Dakota combatants. As many as 42 trials were conducted in a single day, with some lasting less than 5 minutes. Of the nearly 400 Dakota tried, **303 were originally sentenced to execution**. This number was ultimately lowered to 38 after a review by **President Lincoln**.



*The fort was attacked twice, and later housed reinforcements from Fort Snelling*



# AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

"I told the members of the commission several times that I should be sorry to have my life placed in their hands."

*-Rev. Stephen R. Riggs, who served as a translator during the trials.*



*Camp Release State Monument  
in Montevideo, MN*

The Dakota 38 were executed at Mankato on December 26, 1862. **An estimated 4,000 spectators watched the hanging.**

In the summer of 1863, a committee found that Sibley did not have authority to convene the trials due to his level of prejudice. However, by that point the executions had already been carried out.

During the winter of 1862-63, nearly 1,600 Dakota were held at a concentration camp below Fort Snelling. The following spring, the survivors were forcibly removed from the state. The group was herded onto steamboats and brought to the **Crow Creek reservation in South Dakota**, before eventually being brought to the **Santee reservation in Nebraska**.

In 1912, a 4-ton granite marker reading "Here were hanged 38 Sioux Indians" was erected at the site of the hanging by two Dakota War veterans. The marker stood for nearly 60 years, until public pressure led to its removal in 1971.

Reconciliation Park, the current memorial to the hanging victims, was dedicated in 1997.





# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## As you visit Reconciliation Park:

- What do you feel?
- Imagine being present in Mankato on December 26, 1862:
  - What would it have been like have thousands of people at this site watching the hanging?
  - How do we think about executions, especially with the nature of the trials?
- What does reconciliation look like?\*

---

## As you learn more about the history of the U.S. - Dakota War of 1862:

- What's new to you?
- How did the events of the preceding decades influence the war?
- How do we still feel the impact of the war?\*\*\*
- How do we think about the violence within the conflict?

## A CALL FOR RECONCILIATION

☆☆

In 2012 and 2013, Gov. Mark Dayton marked the 150th anniversary of the war by repudiating Gov. Ramsey's comments and calling for a day of Remembrance and Reconciliation. In 2019, Gov. Tim Walz issued an apology for the hangings at Mankato.

- *What role do official apologies play in the process of reconciliation?*
- *What other steps are necessary in the process of reconciliation?*

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

☆☆☆

Names of participants from both sides of the war live on in Minnesota: Ramsey, Sibley, Mankato, Shakopee, Little Crow, Mayo, Flandrau, Marshall, and more.

- *How does naming a place after a person influence how we think about them? About our history?*
- *How do the monuments and markers we erect influence our understanding of our past? Of ourselves?*



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862

Ed. Gary Clayton Anderson and  
Alan R. Woolworth

“This collection of thirty-six narratives presents the Dakota Indians' experiences during a conflict previously known chiefly from the viewpoints of non-Indians.”

## The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War Kenneth Carley

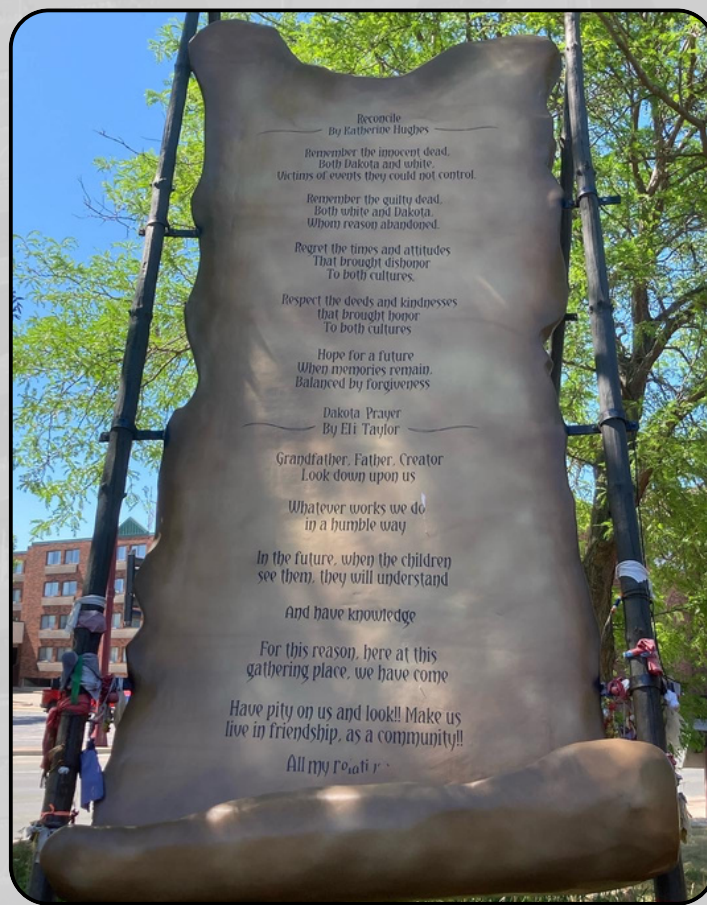
“The Dakota War of 1862 draws on a wealth of written and visual materials by white and American Indian participants and observers showing both the sources of the Dakotas' wrath and the terrible consequences of the conflict.”

## Northern Slave, Black Dakota: The Life and Times of Joseph Godfrey Walt Bachman

Joseph Godfrey is the only known home-grown fugitive slave and only non-Dakota to fight with the Dakota. In this biography, historian and retired trial lawyer **Walt Bachman** untangles his story and his involvement in the Dakota War.

## 38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier's End Scott W. Berg

Scott W. Berg details the events of the U.S. - Dakota War “within the larger context of the Civil War, the history of the Dakota people and the subsequent United States–Indian wars, and brings to life this overlooked but seminal moment in American history.”



*Reconcile poem and Dakota Prayer  
at Reconciliation Park*



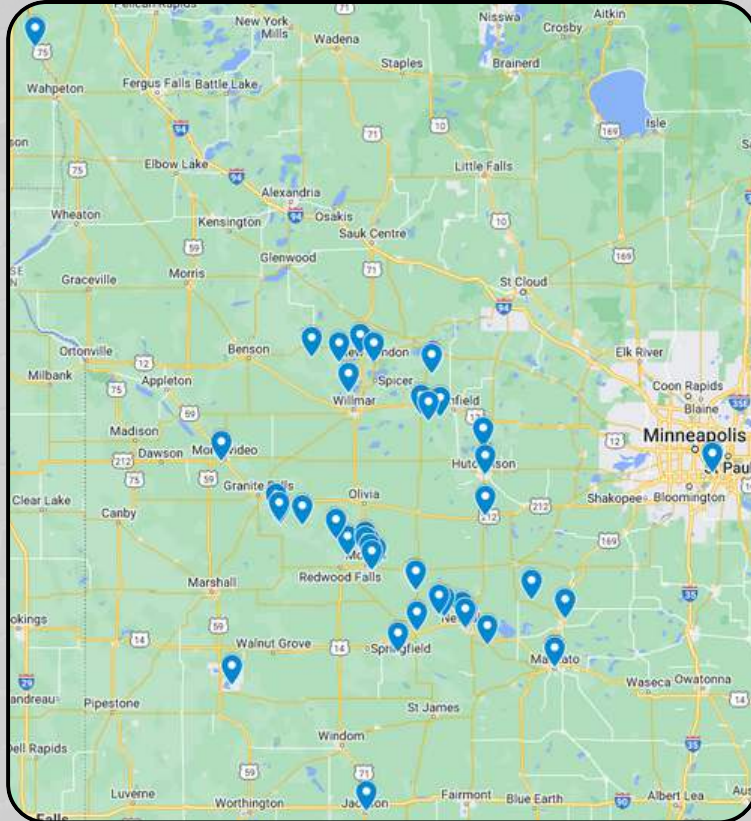
# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## **The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862**

### **Minnesota Historical Society**

- [Minnesota Treaty Interactive](#)
- [Timeline](#)
- [Fort Snelling](#)
- [Sibley Historic Site](#)
- [Lower Sioux Agency](#)
- [Alexander Ramsey House](#)

*At least 45 markers, monuments, or historic sites related to the U.S.-Dakota War are spread across Central Minnesota. Click the image below to view their locations in Google Maps*



## **Lower Sioux Agency**

### **Historic Site**

Lower Sioux Indian Community

## **Fort Ridgely**

Minnesota Historical Society

## **Dakota 38 + 2**

Smooth Feather Productions

## **Little War on the Prairie**

This American Life

## **The U.S.-Dakota Conflict:**

### **The Past Is Alive With Us**

Twin Cities PBS

## **Dakota Exile**

Twin Cities PBS

## **Healing is a journey, not a destination**

Mayo Clinic

A broad booklist from the Minnesota Historical Society can be found [here](#)





# **Transform** Minnesota

COMPLEX ISSUES. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE.

This resource list is part of Transform  
Minnesota' Sankofa @ Home series

Inclusion of a resource on the list does  
not represent a full endorsement of  
stated beliefs