

Stephanie Chappell

2401 14th Street East
952-250-6108

Glencoe, MN 55336
fussy@hotmail.com

January 8, 2022

Chair Ginny Klevorn and Members
Minnesota House State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Chair Klevorn and Committee Members:

The Minnesota Historical Society is a nonprofit organization created in the 1850s. Since that time, the Society has swayed from its responsibilities to protect and preserve Minnesota History.

Contrary to public perception the Minnesota Historical Society is *not* a Minnesota governmental body. The State Historic Preservation Office and the Office of the State Archaeologist are the State's authority.

Over the past few years, MNHS has neglected to refer to State Offices for guidance and care of Minnesota's historic properties. MNHS employees have lied to the public claiming the nonprofit owns state property to silence and intimidate historic site visitors and advocates for history.

When MNHS discovered historic artifacts on state property, legal protocol defined by federal and state authorities requiring notification, consultation, and direction for storage or disposal of the state asset was not followed. Minnesota Historical Society employees instructed personnel to toss the items into a dumpster.

Since unionization, MNHS employees have refused to remove insensitive and false statements from U.S. Dakota War exhibits at Historic Fort Snelling. MNHS Press publications continue to make false statements about Governors Ramsey and Sibley. The \$30 million renovation of Historic Fort Snelling ousted military facts to display Dakota Indian religious symbols.

Controversary continues. The Star Tribune recently published a story about an event meant to honor 38 Dakota Indians hanged at Mankato, Minnesota in 1862. In response to the article, Author and noted Historian Curtis Dahlin provided context that has opened a dialogue for understanding and change among the general public including additional Star Tribune published opinions and social media comments. Curt's counterpoint article is attached for your review along with the original article.

Links:

Curtis Dahlin's article: [Star Tribune Counterpoint Victim Remembrance](#)

Original article: [Star Tribune 330 Mile Horse Ride](#)

Minnesota Historical Society cannot provide empathetic, straightforward, or accurate Minnesota History. Unionization is not going to help. It is time to entrust Minnesota's History with an institution that can provide accurate context with multiple viewpoints in a nonpartisan environment.

I welcome opportunities to answer your questions and share my experiences with you in more detail,



Stephanie Chappell

VOICES Federal Signatory, Historic Fort Snelling Revitalization Project

Counterpoint: We should also remember other victims of 1862

The 650 men, women and children deserve our thoughts, too.

By Curtis Dahlin

DECEMBER 29, 2022 — 5:45PM



DAVID JOLES, STAR TRIBUNE

A deer grazes in a field in the Minnesota River Valley near Morton, Minn., and seen July 12, 2012. The scene is near the site where on Aug. 18, 1862, two dozen government soldiers died after being ambushed during the war's first day at the Redwood Ferry crossing.

Opinion editor's note: *Star Tribune Opinion publishes a mix of national and local [commentaries](#) online and in print each day. To contribute, click [here](#).*

...

In "Riders share history's burden" ([Dec. 27](#)) the Star Tribune reported about Dakota Indians riding to Mankato and gathering there on Dec. 26, the anniversary of the hanging of 38 Dakota in 1862. Gov. Tim Walz was in attendance, and he apologized to the Dakota for the hanging of the 38 and for the removal of Dakota from Minnesota.

But there is more to the story, as Walz, a former teacher, knows.

In 1862, the Dakota were unhappy and angry over their situation for a variety of reasons. By 1862, they had sold most of their land to the U.S. government. By mid-August, grievances came to a head among the Dakota, and some decided to wage war on settlers along the Minnesota River valley.

Early in the morning of Aug. 18, 1862, Dakota attacked the Lower Sioux Agency and then settlers who were living near them in Renville and Brown Counties. The Dakota's attacks that day were devastating, resulting in the killing of about 265 mostly unarmed men, women and children. Five Dakota warriors were killed. In the following days, the Dakota attacked Fort Ridgely twice and the town of New Ulm twice, but they were unable to take either place.

Ultimately, 650 whites were killed. Among them were 40 adult women and 100 children age 10 or under, including infants. Some were killed with great brutality, which particularly enraged the white population. In addition, the Dakota took about 150 white women and children captive, along with many mixed-bloods.

By the end of the conflict some 100 Dakota warriors were killed, but no Dakota women or children.

Gov. Alexander Ramsey learned of the attacks on the settlers on Aug. 19, and he selected Henry Sibley to lead the military response and stop the killing. Things got off to a rocky start for Sibley when on Sept. 2 and 3, a large burial party he had by then dispatched was badly mauled by the Dakota at the battle of Birch Coulee. Sibley continued to gather his force, and on Sept. 23 he defeated the Dakota at the Battle of Wood Lake. Three days later, he freed the captives at what became known as Camp Release.

Sibley established a military commission to try those Dakota who were accused of crimes. Nearly 400 were tried, with just over 300 being convicted of capital offenses. The trials were brief and the Dakota were not represented by counsel. But neither were Civil War soldiers accused of crimes. It was a different time. White settlers were clamoring for justice, and after the war ended, had made several attacks on Dakota prisoners, killing three.

President Abraham Lincoln had his staff review all the trial transcripts. He cut the number to be executed to 39, and one late reprieve brought the number to 38. Lincoln spared the lives of 265 convicted Dakota.

The 38 were hanged at Mankato on Dec. 26, 1862. It was the largest mass execution in U.S. history, in response to the deadliest Indian uprising in U.S. history.

In November 1862, about 1,600 Dakota dependents were taken to a camp at Fort Snelling. Here they were humanely treated, fed soldier's rations and protected from revenge-minded whites, of whom there were many. While at least 100 Dakota died in the camp from disease that winter, the same type of disease toll was taking place in the white community. The following spring, many but not all Dakota were shipped out of the state, to ensure none could resume killing settlers.

The war was the most significant and tragic event in Minnesota's history. If violence were to erupt today killing the same proportion of the state's population, there would be some 18,000 dead.

So governor, we know your feelings about the 38. What are your feelings about the 650 who were murdered? Are they worthy of being mentioned and remembered? Since this is now a public issue, I would request that you respond in a public setting.

Curtis Dahlin lives in Roseville.

A 330-mile horse ride in remembrance of the mass execution of Dakota people arrives in Mankato

Organizers say the 2022 ride will mark the end of the annual tradition since 2005, but they're planning a new chapter.

By [Josie Albertson-Grove](#) Star Tribune

DECEMBER 26, 2022 — 4:30PM



JERRY HOLT, STAR TRIBUNE Gallery: Riders on their last leg of the journey from South Dakota take off from Land of Memories to Reconciliation Park in Mankato.

Prayers and grit kept a team of Dakota riders traveling by horseback through two snowstorms and long, frigid days this month on a journey through South Dakota and southern Minnesota to reach Mankato on Monday — Dec. 26 — to mark the 160th anniversary of the largest mass execution in American history and honor 38 of their ancestors killed on that day in 1862.

Every December since 2005, riders have traveled 330 miles on horseback from Lower Brule, S.D.. The journey retraces the route of their [ancestors who were forced out of Minnesota](#) and onto a reservation in South Dakota, following the executions in Mankato and a deadly winter in a concentration camp at Fort Snelling.

In Mankato on Monday morning, hundreds of people cheered the riders' arrival, and listened as the names of the executed were read — the 38 killed Dec. 26, 1862, and two others later captured and hanged — together known as the Dakota 38+2.

"I felt the ancestors protected us and were with us all the way," said rider Andrea Eastman, reflecting on the journey through blizzards and deadly cold.

Asked how he managed to keep going through the punishing conditions, rider Darrian Rencounter pointed to his thick black snow pants. "These!" he said.

Todd Finney said his uncle, spiritual leader Jim Miller, organized the ride in 2005 after having a dream.

Todd Finney spoke Monday at Mankato's Reconciliation Park, the spot where 38 Dakota warriors were hanged in 1852.

"He prayed," said Finney, who now helps organize the ride. "And someone forgotten by society started a movement."

Seventeen years later, the ride has attracted the attention of the public, the media and powerful officials. And while this iteration of the ride is coming to an end, Finney said, with the last of the ride's original organizers stepping back. But the work to remember and honor the Dakota 38+2 is just beginning.

Celebrated arrival

The procession entered Mankato just after 10 a.m. Hundreds of people gathered to watch as the horses — their manes fluffy from the wind and their haunches caked with ice and snow — carried the riders north on Riverfront Drive to Reconciliation Park.

A man fanned sweet smoke from a bundle of sage across the crowd of all ages gathered in the park. A woman yelled to clear the street as the riders drew near.

"As we come this way, more people gather," Eastman said. "By the end of the ride, we have like 100 riders."

Two runners joined the procession as the riders arrived. They had set off from Fort Snelling at midnight, running through the night in teams of two down Hwy. 169 to Mankato.

"This is good medicine," said Delilah Rouse of Sioux Falls, S.D., as she took in the crowd amid the sound of drums and singing.

She remembered being angry when she learned about the executions and how hard it was to persuade her white classmates to care about their shared history.

"We carry this stuff with us," Rouse said.

The crowd Monday made carrying the burden of history a little less lonely, she said.

Shifting the burden

For those who grew up hearing about their ancestors' executions and their families' forced exodus from Minnesota, Monday's ceremony was painful.

"I heard the stories when I was little," said Josette Peltier, a descendent of those executed in 1862. "It still hurts to this day."

Those who gathered to watch the riders' arrival included indigenous and white Minnesotans. Peltier said it was time for the descendants of immigrants to Minnesota — those whose arrival pushed the government to remove Dakota people — to share the burden of history.

Finney contrasted the riders' welcome Monday — the cheers of hundreds, a police escort and an apology from Gov. Tim Walz — with the first ride in 2005, when participants said they were shot at and looked on with hostility by law enforcement. That wasn't that long ago, Finney said.

He said he feels hopeful that people in power are finally beginning to account for the past.

The work to come

"As governor of Minnesota, I stand here today to say today I'm deeply sorry," Walz told the crowd.

He apologized for the executions and the removal of riders' ancestors, and for so much done since the state of Minnesota was established on indigenous land.

"Saying we're sorry from the people of Minnesota is the very least we can do," the governor said. "What are we going to do going forward?"

Teaching indigenous history in Minnesota schools is a start, said Walz and state Sen. Mary Kunesch, DFL-New Brighton.

"Remember the horrors of 160 years ago, and make sure it never happens again," Kunesch said.

Watching the riders arrive, high school history teacher Sarah Han of St. Paul said she is committed to teaching about the execution in an effort to ensure her students have a fuller picture of President Abraham Lincoln. Yes, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, but just days earlier, he had signed orders to execute the Dakota warriors, after reviewing the cases of 300 men sentenced to death following the U.S.-Dakota war.

"History has become all about critical thinking, giving students the tools to find out the truth," Han said.

Ethnic studies is [required for some schools](#) in Minnesota, and the Legislature is likely to consider a bill this session to make the requirement statewide.

The ceremonies in Reconciliation Park, growing larger each Dec. 26, have been important for Joanna Meyer of Mankato. She said she is moved by the riders' determination and every year has been a reminder of history and forgiveness. Meyer said she worries that if the annual remembrance ride ends, those lessons could slip away.

"It's hard to see the last one," she said.

"For this ride, it's the last," rider Eastman said. "But we'll be coming again. Stay tuned."