

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*The St. Paul Volunteer
Fireman and the Battle
of Gettysburg*

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Spring, 2003

Volume 38, Number 1

An 'Attempt' on His Life?

Sitting Bull's 1884 Visit to St. Paul

—Page 4



Sitting Bull around 1880, just before his 1884 visit to St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See article beginning on page 4 on Sitting Bull's visit and an alleged attempt on his life. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

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The Society regrets an omission from the 2002 Donor Recognition Roll in the Winter issue of *Ramsey County History*. The list of supporters should have included the name of Albert W. Lindeke, Jr., a generous and loyal supporter. We apologize for this omission.

A Message from the Editorial Board

In 1884 the Lakota Indian leader Sitting Bull visited St. Paul. Our feature article in this issue focuses on the circumstances of his two brief stays in the city that year and whether during the latter visit there was an attempt to assassinate the man who embodied so much of the conflict between the white settlers and the native inhabitants of the American West. This issue also includes Civil War historian Patrick Hill's account of Wilson B. Farrell, a St. Paul volunteer fireman, who gave his life as a member of the First Minnesota Regiment in the Battle of Gettysburg and a brief salute to the sesquicentennial of the founding of St. Paul's Oakland Cemetery, where Farrell is now buried. This issue concludes with Helen Miller Dickison's history of today's Fairmount Methodist Church, Minnesota's first German Methodist church, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2002.

Readers of *Ramsey County History* and anyone interested in the history of Ramsey County and St. Paul now have a new resource for history searches: the Society's web site at www.rchs.com. On the site's home page, the researcher can click on several links that are of value. One is "Ask the Historian," which provides questions and answers about the area's history that recently have come to Society staff members. Another briefly profiles the histories of some of St. Paul's neighborhoods. All the information on this link comes from the Society's *Ramsey County Historic Site Survey Report*, a major resource in the RCHS library. The final link on the Society web page connects the user to information on the contents of the most recent issues of *Ramsey County History* and ties to a complete listing of articles published in the magazine since its initial publication in 1964. We hope this new link will get many hits from users and increase awareness of the richness of the content of our magazine's back issues.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Sitting Bull and His 1884 Visit to St. Paul

'A Shady Pair' and an 'Attempt on His Life'

Mark Diedrich

Adapted, with permission, from a longer article by Paul D. Nelson

September 4, 1884. An attempt on Sitting Bull's life occurs at the Grand Opera House in St. Paul. Sitting Bull is there as part of a program, where, incidentally, he meets Annie Oakley.

—*Minnesota Book of Days* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), p. 181.

He was a living symbol of American Indian resistance—to progress and Manifest Destiny in one view, to genocide in another. In 1884 the Indian wars had not yet ended; many whites still feared the Red Man generally and Sitting Bull in particular. His murder in a downtown theater would have called up wrenching memories nationwide of Lincoln's similar assassination just nineteen years earlier. All eyes would have turned toward St. Paul, not to celebrate its growth and progress, but to lament (or celebrate) an historic crime.

It is surprising how little press coverage this event provoked. The next day's *Pioneer Press* reported only that Sitting Bull planned to leave soon for New York but wished first to visit the German horticultural fair at Market Hall, because he was "desirous of seeing how big the pumpkins grow in these parts." Neither the *St. Paul Daily Globe* nor either of the Minneapolis dailies mentioned the great Lakota leader at all.

How could this be? As it turns out, the 1880s newspapers, from which the *Book of Days* extracted this account, were just as eager to hype a story as they are today. There is both much less to this story of that September 4 and much more.

McLaughlin's Plan

By the early 1880s Sitting Bull had become the most famous American Indian in the United States (though rivaled in the West, at least, by his contemporary Geronimo.) He had become a leader of the Hunkpapa Lakotas on the high northern plains and resisted white intrusion into their ancestral domain. In the 1870s his war parties attacked Northern Pacific railroad crews and the soldiers who protected them. In 1875 he established a

camp in southeastern Montana for all—including not just Lakotas but also Cheyennes, Yanktonai, and Santee Dakotas—who wanted to resist American domination. In June 1876 George Custer's Seventh Cavalry attacked Sitting Bull's encampment on the Little Bighorn River, with electrifying consequences. Although he did not participate in the fight, many whites considered Sitting Bull the "general" of the Indian forces and hence the "killer of Custer."

In time he fled to Canada, seeking refuge and assistance from Queen Victoria. The British, however, gave limited help. In 1881 the starving leader and his last remaining followers surrendered to the Americans, who held him for two years at Fort Randall in Dakota Territory. He was then ushered to the Standing Rock Agency at Fort Yates, where he came under the authority of United States Lakota agent James McLaughlin.

The ambitious and possibly self-deluded McLaughlin wanted to reduce Sitting Bull to an "agency Indian" (meaning, presumably, dispirited and compliant) and make him ready for assimilation into white civilization. "I shall convince him first," he said, "that the



A carte-de-visite photograph of the Lakota leader that, at \$1.50 each, found a ready market in St. Paul. Photo by Palmquist & Jurgens, Minnesota Historical Society collections.

whites mean him no harm and bear him naught of malice, and then by some little preferment or authority—almost imperceptible in itself, but to a man who believed he might be hung when captured, a very great deal—he can gradually be induced to learn the truth that his best interests will be subserved by obedience to the power that be." To achieve this goal, McLaughlin allowed, or perhaps urged, Sitting Bull to participate in some public events. On September 5, 1883, for example, he joined former President Ulysses S. Grant and Northern Pacific railroad president Henry Villard in laying the cor-

nerstone of the Dakota Territory Capitol at Bismarck. Sitting Bull proved so popular at this and other such events that he found a ready market for his autographs, often on a *carte-de-visite* photograph, at \$1.50 or more apiece. McLaughlin probably recognized that fame and participation in the dollar economy could prove useful in his plans for Sitting Bull.

In the late winter of 1883–84 McLaughlin planned a trip to St. Paul to purchase some oxen for his Lakota farming project. In pursuit of his acculturation plans for Sitting Bull, he invited the great man and his nephew, One Bull, to come along.

[M]y object in taking Sitting Bull . . . was to show him the importance and power of the whites, to see how they live, the many comforts they enjoy and to impress upon him the importance of industrious habits among the Indians and the education of their children . . .

I knew that his seeing would be more convincing than years of education in any way would affect him.

Put another way, McLaughlin hoped that St. Paul would so impress Sitting Bull that he would give up any further thought of holding onto his and his people's traditional ways.

Minnesota in 1884 boasted a population of some 270,000, mostly immigrants from Germany, Sweden, and Norway. More than a third, approximately 100,000 people, lived in St. Paul. Served by steamboat traffic on the Mississippi in the 1850s and 1860s, the city had been the first great hub of trade in the Upper Midwest. Before long the telegraph, railroad, and telephone made their way to the city, which was showing off every sort of commercial, religious, and educational establishment, including the Union Depot, the State Capitol, the Cathedral of St. Paul, the Grand Opera House, the Olympic Theater, and many other bustling enterprises, plus schools crammed with children. The accounts of Sitting Bull's visit provide the reader with a fascinating historical tour of the city as it then existed.

A Tour of the City

James McLaughlin felt great confidence in the superiority of his Euro-American culture and in his own ability to “de-Indi-



The Merchants Hotel at Third Street and Jackson around 1884-1885 when Sitting Bull stayed there during his visit to St. Paul. The hotel was owned by Colonel Alvaren Allen. Minnesota Historical Society photograph from the St. Paul City Directory.

anize” Sitting Bull. But he underestimated his subject. Sitting Bull had, it was true, suffered devastating defeats, but accepting defeat is one thing; cultural surrender is something very different. McLaughlin hoped to use the St. Paul visit as a demonstration—“You cannot resist a civilization so powerful as to produce such a marvel”—and an enticement—“Your people can share in this marvel if you do as we say.” Sitting Bull doubtless had different objectives in mind.

Sitting Bull was a traditionalist among his people, one of their leading holy men. He had adhered to Lakota cultural patterns and customs all of his life. Yet he was not an immutable traditionalist, as he was in fact open to some degree of change. He may be seen simply as a conservative man who exercised a cautious approach to change and adaptation. He wanted to choose which aspects of white culture would be good for his people, to engage in a selective adaptation of white

civilization. At the same time, he desired to preserve and protect Lakota “Indian-ness” and communal ownership of their lands. So he allowed himself to be placed in circumstances where he would become knowledgeable about white civilization. He had pressing concerns too. His dwindling followers, now just some 180, faced starvation, so getting them quick help was vital. Hence Sitting Bull's St. Paul visit had two objectives: Learn about whites and their ways in order to plan long-term strategy; and make the case for immediate government help in order to ensure short-term survival.

Thousands of St. Paulites gathered at the brand new Union Depot (the downtown Post Office now occupies the spot) to meet Sitting Bull and his party on the early morning of March 14, 1884. The crowd was disappointed, though, when the party quickly boarded a coach and was taken to Colonel Alvaren Allen's Merchant's Hotel at Third Street (now Kellogg) and Jackson. There Sitting Bull

was immediately beset by reporters from the local newspapers, who took a lively interest in everything about him. One described him as “a man of short stature, heavily built, and with a particularly stolid expression. His features are massive and his hair turning gray.” Of his dress it was said that he was in “all the beaded magnificence which befitted his rank, and during conversation was engaged in cleaning a very large pipe.”

He wore a buckskin shirt, with a white shirt on the outside, as well as leggings, moccasins, and an overcoat. In his hair was an eagle feather, and while on the street he wore a fox cap with the entire animal’s face intact. He carried with him a war club of box elder, with a small medicine pouch at the base. The pipe he was seen cleaning was three and one half feet long, with the carving [of] an Indian figure at the head. He had come, in short, dressed as he wished and not as an acculturated Indian. His appearance made a clear statement.

Sitting Bull showed himself an effective handler of the press. Asked if he liked white people, he replied, “I like white people very much, and I want my children to be raised among them.” Asked if he was impressed with what he had seen, he said, “I think the white people ought to be well pleased with their country, with all its civilization and improvement.” Of the houses he had seen and the locomotive that brought him to St. Paul he commented, “I think the houses of the whites are very grand, their machinery curious and cunning. My first impression of the iron horse was that it was so fast I wanted to get out of its way as quickly as possible.” It should be noted here that all quotations from Sitting Bull come through two filters, the white interpreter and the various reporters; what he said in Lakota is lost forever.

Still, it seems likely that his meanings were conveyed accurately. The reporter who asked about Sitting Bull’s assessments of white civilization realized that his answers, superficially positive, were in fact noncommittal: whites ought to be pleased with their country. Answering different questions he revealed his true thoughts about whether he would submit to acculturation. “I am naturally wild and

love wild country. I do not understand white ways. With my children it will be different. I love my own country best and prefer to live there.”

‘Our food is not enough’

The press gave Sitting Bull an opportunity to pursue one of his objectives in the St. Paul visit, and he grabbed it. Was he satisfied with the government’s supplies to the Lakota? Sitting Bull was noted as giving the “usual deliberation” to his answer, and finally said, “Well, we live, but I don’t think that we get enough rations. I wonder why the Great Father does not give us more food.” In response to another question he commented, “Our food is not enough; and if the Great Father does not give us more, we are likely to starve.” A reporter asked about the sufficiency of buffalo in Lakota country, provoking this reply:

I wish to say that in our own country our white brothers killed the Sioux’s buffaloes. Our young men took some buffalo skins and

the white men made us pay for them. I think the Great Father should command that we receive our money back and our loss on account of the killing of the buffalo made good. I think he should order that no more buffaloes or game should be killed in our country by white men.

With this, the interview ended. One of the reporters assessed the performance this way, and hit the mark: “It is seen by the close observer that he is an adroit reasoner, a consummate flatterer, and weighs every word he utters before giving it expression.”

Not all press coverage displayed equal thoughtfulness and respect. With Minnesota’s Dakota Conflict (1862), the carnage at Little Bighorn (1876), and the years of war that followed still in living memory, the *St. Paul Dispatch* reflected much popular sentiment when it charged that Sitting Bull, “for his past infamies [was] worthy of the title of ‘The Great Unhung.’” Other papers called him “butcherer of Custer,” “ferocious sav-



The interior of St. Paul’s Union Depot as it looked upon Sitting Bull’s arrival there in 1884. Accounts of his visit provide the reader with a fascinating historical tour of St. Paul as it was during the 1880s. Minnesota Historical Society photograph from the Northwest Magazine, March, 1885.



A stop on Sitting Bull's tour: the St. Paul Armory at West Sixth Street and Main in 1895. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

Reminder of a Catastrophe

After lunch the party visited the St. Paul Cathedral. As it turned out, Bishop Thomas Grace was then entertaining Father Augustin Ravoux, who had been a missionary among Minnesota Indians and spoke Lakota. Ravoux, though a friend to Indians, was a living reminder of catastrophe. He had served as counselor to many of the thirty-eight Dakota executed at Mankato after the Dakota Conflict of 1862 and to Little Six and Medicine Bottle, hanged at Fort Snelling in 1865. Also present at the cathedral that day was Bishop Martin Marty of Dakota Territory, whom Sitting Bull had met in 1877 in Canada. Marty had gone to Saskatchewan to persuade the Lakota to surrender and return to the United States. At that time Sitting Bull was reported to have said to Marty, "You know, as the messenger of God, that they [the Americans] tried to kill me. Why did you wait until half my people were killed before you came? I told the Americans to keep off my land . . . You are waiting for my people to come to your land so that the Long Knives may rush at them and kill them." There is no record that Marty and Sitting Bull reminisced over their previous meeting.

The group moved on then to the new State Capitol, on Tenth Street between Wabasha and Cedar (later the site of the Science Museum of Minnesota.) They started to climb to the cupola atop the Capitol's central tower, but only One Bull made it all the way; Sitting Bull tired half way up and sat down for a smoke. One Bull was rewarded with a fine view of the city. From there the party traveled by sleigh to Dayton's Bluff, site of the ancient burial mounds, and a place not so many years before used by the Dakota for funeral platforms. Dayton's Bluff also offered still more excellent views of the city, and especially the vast railroad yards, inescapable symbols of the expansive drive and power of Sitting Bull's host and adversary, the United States of America. That night the group disappointed the curious public by staying in.

Sunday began with church, naturally, a 10:30 Mass at Assumption Church, the only building visited by Sitting Bull that

age," and "old scalawag." Before the trip was over, one Minneapolis editor went so far as to denigrate the entire visit by writing that Sitting Bull was "probably now convinced that it is a good thing for an Indian to murder white men, and slaughter women and children." Similar comments studded other press accounts.

His busy first day was far from over. Sitting Bull rested until about five in the afternoon, when McLaughlin began conducting him around town. The party first visited Patrick H. Kelly's Mercantile Company in the wholesale district. There the curious crowds grew so great that the visitors had to give up and return to the hotel. Later that evening they toured the *Pioneer Press* newspaper and spent about two hours "witnessing type setting, job printing, telegraphing, telephone exchange . . . and steam heating apparatus. . . ." Sitting Bull was given the opportunity to try out a telephone. He and his nephew One Bull were placed about 100 feet apart on opposite ends of the line. When he heard his nephew's

voice through the receiver, he grinned and exclaimed, "*Wakan.*" "The telephone," wrote a reporter, "broke him all up and forced the first exclamation from him." The journalists translated *wakan* to mean The Devil, though it was a Lakota word for spiritual or holy mystery.

It is impossible now to know what James McLaughlin had in mind when he lined up particular sites and events for Sitting Bull. Looking back on that Saturday of March 15, it appears that, regardless of what McLaughlin may have planned, the day was filled with painful reminders. The party went first to Kelly's wholesale grocery (where Sitting Bull rode in an elevator), then to the Auerbach, Finch and Van Slyke store nearby; in both, the abundance of food and goods must have contrasted painfully with the want then being suffered by Sitting Bull's people. Curious throngs gathered outside, and later in the morning the Lakota leader sold his autographs for \$1.50 each; his celebrity had cash value, while his people counted for little.

still stands today. A Minneapolis reporter wrote: “[Sitting Bull] . . . assumed a penitent and contrite spirit when he gazed upon the crucifix and the saints in chromatic colors. Possibly he was meditating upon the day of atonement for that hideous butchery on the green slopes of the Little Big Horn.”

After lunch the party was invited to see Engine Number 2 of the St. Paul fire department in simulated action. A crowd of 500 surrounded the firehouse to watch, with Sitting Bull and One Bull looking on from a neighboring balcony. Trained engine horses were summoned and hitched to the wagon; the engine then took in water at the Sixth and Wacouta hydrant. Firemen hooked up three hoses and set the engine to full power. One horse escaped the firemen’s grasp and “went through the street like a snake and water was thrown in all directions,” to the great amusement of Sitting Bull and everyone else. One reporter jibed that “it was probably as near as [Sitting Bull] . . . ever came to taking a bath.”

The party then went to the central firehouse, where Sitting Bull added his personal touch by pressing the electric signal that rang the gong for the next operation. Firemen slid down a pole from the upper floor and hitched the horses very quickly to a hook and ladder unit, then dashed to O’Leary’s packing plant, extended the ladders, and climbed to the top. Sitting Bull professed to have enjoyed the entire demonstration very much.

A View of the Schools

On Monday morning—St. Patrick’s Day—Sitting Bull prepared for a fourth straight day of public appearances. McLaughlin arranged to take the him first to Adam Fetsch’s cigar store (one of many in the city in those days), where Sitting Bull witnessed the process of cigar making and received a gift: two twelve-inch cigars specially decorated for him and One Bull with a St. Patrick’s Day ribbon. Sitting Bull sampled his and expressed his delight “with some very significant demonstrations.”

At nine the party began its tour of the St. Paul public schools. The two carriages also bore the school board president and school director, prompting one newspaper wag to



Assumption Church as it looked when Sitting Bull attended 10:30 a.m. mass there. This is the only building visited by Sitting Bull that still stands today. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

joke about a recent school board row and “their recent attempts to take each others’ scalps in true Indian fashion.” At Franklin school they toured the building and then watched the children at their calisthenics, elocution, and music, then witnessed a fire drill. At the high school Sitting Bull and friends endured a program of singing and recitation before the Lakota leader made a short speech, saying that he was pleased that

the Great Spirit had been kind to the children of the white man and that he hoped to live to see the day when the children of his own race would enjoy similar advantages.

St. Paul was then a shoemaking capital, supplier to the Great Northwest and the home to several shoe factories, so this industry made a natural destination. After lunch, the group went to Forepaugh and Tarbox, then C. Gotzian and Company.

At Forepaugh's, Sitting Bull's measurements were taken and a pair of shoes made for him in twenty minutes, right before his eyes.

That evening Sitting Bull took in a St. Paul tribal ceremony, the St. Patrick's Day celebrations at the Armory. After music by the Crusaders Society, Father Shanley introduced Sitting Bull to the large audience as a possible representative of a "lost tribe of Celts." Greeted by loud applause, the guest made his now customary and diplomatic remarks about the fine churches and schools he had seen, and advising the citizens of St. Paul not to neglect to make use of them. A "musical extravaganza" entitled "The Happy Man" closed the ceremonies. The sponsors reported that a "very generous sum" had been raised for the church schools, and no doubt Sitting Bull had a lot to do with the evening's success. No note was made of the irony of Sitting Bull's raising money for white folks' schools while the children of his Lakota people had none.

An Old Enemy

The following afternoon, travelling in a government ambulance pulled by four mules, Sitting Bull and his party journeyed down Fort Road to Fort Snelling for a meeting with, of all people, General Alfred Terry. Known to Indians as One Star, Terry had been George Custer's commanding officer at the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Arriving at the scene not long after the battle, Terry was among those who faced the gruesome realization that the strange white spots on the prairie near the river were dead cavalymen, stripped naked. In an 1876 report, Terry had written of Sitting Bull that he "has always been the white man's most inveterate enemy and a bitter opponent of any policy other than that of driving the white man back into the sea whence he came. . . . I believe that if he were out of the way we would have much less trouble with the Sioux people hereafter." The two had met in Saskatchewan in 1877 when Terry tried, but failed, to induce Sitting Bull to surrender. Now they would meet again.

However painful it may have been for the vanquished to visit the victor, Sitting



The interior of the St. Paul's old Cathedral and its third, as it looked in 1889 when it was decorated for the consecration of Bishops John Shanley, Joseph Cotter, and James McGolrick. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

Bull may have welcomed the meeting as an opportunity to make his case with someone in a position of genuine authority. He took advantage of it. After his formal introductions to General Terry and the other dignitaries and various acts of military etiquette were performed, Sitting Bull had a ten minute conversation with One Star about the conditions of his people and his hopes for help from the Great Father. The general then invited his former adversary to make a speech. After his standard remarks about his enjoyable visit and the kindness shown him, Sitting Bull made the crucial point: "I have come to tell One Star how I and my people are getting along at the agency, so that he may go and repeat my words to the Great Father. The One Star is the head soldier and chief of everybody at this place, and his words in behalf of me and my people will have great weight with the Great Father." From there Sitting Bull went on to promise that his people would take up farming and to wish for "the mutual enjoyment of this world and all it contains."

Terry responded with words that probably pleased James McLaughlin but sound patronizing to today's ears. He told Sitting Bull that his visit to St. Paul

would be productive of much good, that he must faithfully tell his people what he had seen, and that honest work was the only solution to the problems besetting the Indian. He concluded by saying that it was not impossible that a grandson of Sitting Bull might one day become the Great Father of the country. Of more immediate interest to Sitting Bull, no doubt, he promised to send more cows to the Lakota reserve that summer. After the speeches Sitting Bull and his party joined Terry and his officers for lunch at Terry's residence.

'Little Sure Shot'

Back in downtown St. Paul that evening the grind of public appearances resumed, this time with a visit to the Grand Opera House for a performance of a play entitled "Cheek," featuring singer and comedian Roland Reed. Despite the language barrier, Sitting Bull appeared to have enjoyed the show. A reporter wrote that his "taciturn visage was often lighted with smiles" and that "when the dude song was sung the ferocious savage actually burst out laughing." McLaughlin wrote that his guest had been "delighted with the play and was amused to see how mis-

taken he was in the actors, especially the old couple after they changed costumes. Seeing that they were all young people, and their taking off their wigs pleased him very much.” A newspaper reporter had a different take on the removal of wigs. He wrote that Sitting Bull became “a total wreck mentally” when he saw Reed and his co-star, Miss Vaughn, “voluntarily scalp themselves.”

Sitting Bull returned to the theater the next evening, this time for the Arlington and Fields Combination—the greatest aggregation of talent ever on a single stage—at the Olympic Theater. The attractions, a wonderful example of late nineteenth century travelling entertainments, included the three Wertz Brothers, an acrobatic act, and a young female “professional wing and rifle shot” named Annie Oakley. She awed the audience by knocking corks out of bottles, snuffing candles, and shooting cigarettes out of her husband’s mouth. She so impressed Sitting Bull that he asked to see her, then sent \$65 (possibly his autograph money), requesting a photo. Miss Oakley later recalled, “I sent him back his money and a photograph, with my love, and a message to say I would call the following morning. I did so, and the old man was so pleased with me, he insisted upon adopting me, and I was then and there christened ‘Watanya Cicilla,’ or ‘Little Sure Shot.’” Oakley’s husband, William Butler, later used this event for publicity, claiming with showbiz hyperbole that Annie had “captured Sitting Bull,” and that he had given her “the original pair of moccasins he’d worn in the Custer fight.”

The Minnesota Book of Days places this event incorrectly at September 4 rather than March 18. It also erroneously has Sitting Bull “part of the program.” But this may have been the occasion that introduced him to the possibility of his later brief career on the variety stage.

Minneapolis and Farewell

Sitting Bull’s sojourn in urban America wound down with a March 20 visit to Minneapolis. Travelling by train, he and his party were met at the Minneapolis Depot by Thomas Walker, a lumberman and art collector for whom the Walker



Franklin School at Tenth and Broadway where Sitting Bull witnessed a fire drill. Minnesota Historical Society photograph from the Minnesota State Archives Collection.

Art Center later was named. Walker showed Sitting Bull and the others through the largest grain mill in town and then drove them in an open carriage through the city’s principal streets. They stopped at the Nicollet House, where a crowd gathered to catch sight of the visiting leader. Sitting Bull sat in the rotunda, smoked his pipe, and agreed to meet a limited number of those who had come. Asked by a reporter how he liked Minneapolis, he replied, “I have been here but a short time but I like it very much.” All Minneapolitans must have been gratified to read then that Sitting Bull went on to say that “the people [of Minneapolis] are just as good here as they are in the other city [St. Paul].” Still, after just two and a half hours, he was ready to return to St. Paul. A writer for a St. Cloud newspaper observed that the Lakota leader had not received much of a reception in Minneapolis compared to St. Paul, and wrote with satisfaction that the Mill City had “declined to follow the example of St. Paul in making a fool of itself over the butcherer of Custer and his soldiers.”

Sitting Bull left for home that evening. On the train voyage west he found that

the St. Paul visit had enormously enhanced his fame. Reaching Fargo and later Jamestown, Dakota Territory, McLaughlin was compelled to take his guest off the train so that the “anxious hundreds” might get sight of him. McLaughlin later reflected upon the trip that Sitting Bull’s “eyes had been opened . . . by the recent visit to civilization and it is showing itself in many ways since his return. . . . What influence he has is now being turned in the right direction and the recent trip to St. Paul has been largely instrumental in bringing this about.”

Return to St. Paul

While the accuracy of Laughlin’s assessment is debatable, Sitting Bull’s visit to St. Paul certainly whetted his appetite to see more of the United States, and particularly to secure an audience with the president. Alvaren Allen, who had been Sitting Bull’s host at the Merchant’s Hotel, decided to try to get permission to take him and a few others on a tour of New York. Allen went to Washington D.C. and, arguing that the trip would help break down Lakota prejudice against civilization, persuaded Interior Secretary

Henry Teller to approve the venture. So on September 2 Sitting Bull returned to St. Paul, this time accompanied by a wife, a niece, a cousin named Spotted Horn Bull, and a few others. Alvaren Allen, of whom it was said Sitting Bull had become quite fond, put him up again in the Merchant's Hotel. Allen had prepared publicity for the trip, photos of Sitting Bull and wife, Sitting Bull and family, and Spotted Horn Bull, but he probably overestimated public interest. This time the newspapers, at least, took little note.

One reason, then, for the press's lack of interest in the "attempt" on Sitting Bull's life on September 4, was simply that people were not paying much attention to it and few, if any, reporters were on hand. Just one story from the St. Paul and Minneapolis daily press survives, and this one must be the source of the *Minnesota Book of Days* account. A front page headline (though in type smaller than most of the advertising banners on the page) of the *St. Paul Daily Globe* on the morning of September 5 read:

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION

An Unknown Draws a British Bull-log Pistol On Sitting Bull

The text of the story proceeded breathlessly: "Sitting Bull came near following in the footsteps of the lamented martyr, Abraham Lincoln, who was assassinated in a theater. Sitting Bull and his party of wild Indians went to the Grand Opera house and greatly enjoyed seeing Mr. Louis Aldrich and his company act in the play entitled "My Partner." When the Indians were leaving the theater in single file, and while the great Sioux leader was still in the foyer, an attempt was made to take his life."

The Globe reporter had found a witness to the event who described it in detail. W.R. Fish and his father had followed Sitting Bull out of the theater and were behind him when they noticed two men beside them. One wore gray clothes and a black, soft-brimmed hat; his most memorable feature was a "thin Roman nose which was more hooked than that of John Wilkes Booth." His companion wore brown and had a brown mustache.



"Little Sure Shot," Annie Oakley. Photograph from the Annie Oakley Foundation Collection, Greenville, Ohio.

The witness, remarkably versed in assassination lore, continued:

"Without any warning the man in gray took a short nickle[sic]-plated revolver from his pocket and without raising it, leveled it at the body of Sitting Bull, so that, had it discharged the chief would have been shot in about the same portion of the back where Garfield was hit. The reflection of the electric light along the barrel attracted my attention and my father's simultaneously. We were very much surprised and expected to hear the gun go off and see Sitting Bull fall dead in the foyer.

"But he did not. Instead, the man's brown-clad companion grabbed the gun, saying 'Don't make a fool of yourself.' 'Give me the gun and let me shoot the son of a bitch,' replied the first man, 'Damn him, I'll shoot him!' The Indians left the building, got into a horse-drawn omnibus, and left. The two men appeared to follow on foot."

The Globe reporter proceeded to the Merchants Hotel and asked to interview Sitting Bull. Alvaren Allen shoed him away, saying, "That's just what I will not

permit. He knows nothing about it and I do not intend to have him scared." Though he presumably did learn of the aborted event, no further mention of it appeared in the St. Paul press, and neither of the shady pair ever was identified. Whether the acts of that September 4 night at the Opera House qualify as an attempt on Sitting Bull's life is a semantic question open to debate.

McLaughlin's Plan a Failure

The rest of Sitting Bull's second St. Paul visit passed without incident and he left for New York on September 8. There he labored for a time as the feature of an Indian show at the Eden Musee. The following year he toured the United States and Canada in Buffalo Bill Cody's "Wild West." The theater bug seems to have bitten. Whereas McLaughlin might have expected Sitting Bull's growing celebrity and participation in the white man's economy to denature him as an indigent leader, he was horrified to see the opposite take place: the celebrity/leader used his status to object all the more to the government's heavy-handed policies. In 1886 he refused to travel with Buffalo Bill to England so that he could stay to fight the government's efforts to break up the Standing Rock reservation. He particularly opposed a new treaty proposal that would have permitted Lakotas to take individual allotments of land and sell the rest of the reserve. During this period Sitting Bull began to consider Agent McLaughlin hostile.

Relations between McLaughlin and Sitting Bull worsened a few years later when the Ghost Dance came to Sitting Bull's village in the summer of 1890 and people began performing ceremonies associated with it. McLaughlin urged him to stop the Ghost Dance, but Sitting Bull declined. He wrote, "You should say nothing against our religion for we said nothing against yours. You pray to God. So do all of us Indians." He added that he knew McLaughlin now hated him for his supposed obstruction of civilization: "You don't like me because you think I am a fool, and you imagine that if I were not here all the Indians would become civilized, and that because I am here all the Indians are fools."



The Grand Opera House, the scene of the supposed attempt on Sitting Bull's life. Photo from the Northwest Magazine, 1885, Minnesota Historical Society collections.

The government, fearing a Lakota uprising, already had planned for Sitting Bull to be taken out of the picture. McLaughlin sent Indian police to capture him at his home on the early morning of December 15, 1890. The consequences of such an action were predictable. During the arrest, Sitting Bull's followers fired on the police; the police in response killed Sitting Bull and a son, Crowfoot. After the great man's death, McLaughlin wrote smugly, "...[T]he shot that killed

[Sitting Bull] put a stop forever to the domination of the ancient regime among the Sioux of the Standing Rock Reservation."

However gratified McLaughlin may have been to see the ancient regime end, Sitting Bull's death represented a personal failure. He had come to his position at Standing Rock boasting that he would turn Sitting Bull into an "agency Indian." In 1884 he had written that the trip to St. Paul would play a key part in persuading

him to abandon traditional ways and persuade his people to do the same. At the end, however, he was forced by events to admit that Sitting Bull remained, as he put it, "an unreconstructed Indian."

For his own part, while Sitting Bull consistently gave polite and diplomatic praise to what he was shown during his St. Paul visits, he kept some of his private assessments to himself. He did not see the taking on of a white education or other benefits as meaning that he must abandon his religious and cultural beliefs. In fact, he had not been impressed with everything he saw in his travels. He particularly had noted that there were many poor people among the whites. How would the government feed his people if they would not feed their own? In 1888 he told a missionary, "The white people are wicked and I don't want my women to become as the white women I have seen. I want you to teach my people to read and write, but they must not become white people in their ways; it is too bad a life. I could not let them do it. I would rather die an Indian than live a white man."

Mark Diedrich is a frequent contributor to Ramsey County History. His account of the life of the Dakota leader Cloud Man also appeared in a recent issue.

Sources

Paul D. Nelson adapted this article from Mark Diedrich's longer manuscript. Roger Buffalohead, a member of the Gibbs Farm Museum Native American Advisory Board also reviewed it for publication. The facts of Sitting Bull's visit, came mainly from accounts in the *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press*, *St. Paul Daily Dispatch*, the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, *Minneapolis Evening Journal*, *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, and the *St. Paul Journal Press*. Information came also from the Major James McLaughlin Papers at the Minnesota History Society, and from Folwell's *History of Minnesota*, Robert Utley's *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*, Shirl Kasper's *Annie Oakley and Sitting Bull: The Collected Speeches*, compiled and edited by Diedrich.



"Little Sure Shot," Annie Oakley. Photograph from the Annie Oakley Foundation Collection, Greenville, Ohio. See article beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.

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