

A PAPER BY CHARLES ALDRICH.

The facts given herein were derived from conversations with Mrs. William L. Church* shortly before the family removed to the state of Washington.

We have placed conspicuously upon this beautiful Memorial Tablet the names of Mrs. William L. Church, and her sister Miss Drusilla Swanger, with a high tribute to those heroines. Why we have done this I will briefly explain. Not many months before the massacre, the Churches had settled at Springfield (now Jackson), Minn., some fifteen miles from Spirit Lake, and about eight miles north of the Iowa line. They resided there when Ink-pa-du-tah's band so terribly raided the little settlement at Spirit and Okoboji Lakes. Of this massacre Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp gives a full and most vivid narration in her book. At that time, in the absence of Mr. Church to this county, his wife was living in their log house, with her two little boys and her sister. When the news came to this settlement—of four or five families—of the murders at Spirit Lake, the people assembled at the home of Mr. Thomas, one of the settlers, and prepared to defend themselves. This was what is called a double log-house—quite a large building for that locality at that day—and standing in the margin of the oak grove, not far from the west branch of the Des Moines river. There were in the party, Mr. Thomas, his wife and five children; Mrs. Church and two children; Mrs. Strong and two children, Miss Eliza Gardner, Jareb Palmer, David Carver and John Bradshaw. John Bradshaw had first settled about a mile and a half northwest from where I now stand. His house stood there vacant some years after I came here in 1857. Old settlers will all remember "the Bradshaw House." But he had removed to the Spirit Lake country. Just after they had assembled, two young men, whose names I have forgotten, volunteered to go on foot to Fort Ridgely, seventy-five miles away, and appeal to the commandant for aid. Those who left were well armed, reasonably provisioned, stout of heart, and determined to make the best defence in their power, if they should be assailed. A week had nearly passed when little Willie Thomas, aged nine, came running in, exclaiming that "the boys were coming"—meaning those who had gone for the soldiers! This was good news, and the people rushed to the door, forming a little group outside. Sure enough, two men were seen coming, dressed like whites, but they were Indians dressed in the clothing of men killed at Spirit Lake. Just then, the main party of the Indians, who were approaching from another direction, fired a volley from a dozen pieces into the group of men, women and children near the door. Willie Thomas was shot through the head and fell to the ground. Miss Swanger was shot through the shoulder, receiving a severe flesh wound. Thomas was shot through the left arm, which was broken and bled profusely. Carver was shot in the body, and for a time suffered the severest pain. All except the wounded boy rushed into the house and speedily barricaded the doors and windows. In fact, the poor boy would seem to have been forgotten at the instant. But it mattered little, in the result. The firing on both sides now became hot and frequent and continued so for two or three hours. Port holes were made on the four sides of the house by removing the "chinking" from between the logs. Through these the besieged could plainly see the Indians without exposing themselves. Whenever an Indian showed himself he was fired upon, and so they were held at bay. Several times, however, the red devils made a rush toward the house, which they wished to set on fire, but each time "discretion proved the better part of valor" and they fell back.

*Mrs. L. J. Church was born in Richland county, Ohio, April 27, 1828. She removed with her husband, Wm. L. Church, to Webster county, Iowa, in 1855. The following year they settled at Springfield (now Jackson), Minnesota. After the Indian raid they returned to the vicinity of Webster City. The family removed to Port Angeles, Washington, in 1887, where Mrs. Church now (1898) resides.



Mrs L. J. Church

MRS. L. J. CHURCH.

During this time the condition of things in this remote little fortress can scarcely be imagined or described. Miss Swanger and Mr. Thomas were bleeding profusely from their wounds, while the little wounded boy lay shrieking and groaning outside. The little fellow lived about two hours, when death mercifully ended his suffering. At one time the poor mother feared her husband would bleed to death in spite of everything she could do, while the shrieks and groans of the poor dying boy could be distinctly heard just outside of the door. Miss Swanger at first bled very freely, but Mrs. Church stuffed her handkerchief under her sister's dress and so stopped the flow of blood; while Mrs. Thomas bound up her husband's arm and stopped the bleeding, which otherwise would very soon have ended his life.

Mrs. Church and Miss Gardner loaded the guns, and kept watch at some of the port holes. At one time it was thought their bullets would be exhausted, and Misses Swanger and Gardner cast some from an old iron spoon. The fight went on until the dusk of evening.

It then happened that Mrs. Church and Miss Gardner were in one of the rooms watching, while the men were in the other. They now saw an Indian dodge behind a large oak tree. While there he kept peering out toward the house. No man was handy to "draw a bead" upon him, and Mrs. Church picked up a shot-gun heavily charged with buckshot, and encouraged by Miss Gardner leveled it in that direction. Presently the Indian stuck his head out again farther than before. Mrs. Church said to me: "I plainly saw a large dark object by the side of the tree, which I knew to be the head of an Indian, and at this I discharged the gun! I was terribly excited and fell back, and cannot tell you whether I hit him or not! I certainly wanted to kill him!" Miss Gardner, who was watching the Indian, averred that she plainly saw him fall! In the account written two or three months later, at my instance, for *The Hamilton Freeman*, by Jareb Palmer, who was one of the besieged, he states it as a fact, that Mrs. Church killed this Indian. So, also, Harris Hoover, a very intelligent young man then of Webster City, whose name stands conspicuously upon our Memorial Tablet, mentions this result as a fact in his well-written narrative prepared for me, and which I also published. He says that Mrs. Church sent the red-skin to the "Happy Hunting Grounds of his fathers!" The belief that she killed him was entertained by all who were with her, though opinions might vary as to his going to "the happy hunting ground."

A year or more later, the body of an Indian was found upon a rude platform, in a tree-top—tree-burial being the custom of the tribe. The body had been wrapped in a buffalo robe, and some white woman's feather pillow was under his head. What was left of this dusky brave was tumbled down upon the ground, by the men of Capt. H. B. Martin's command, from our county. The skull was brought to me and I sent it to the Phrenological Collection of Fowler & Wells, New York City. I saw it there some time later, with a notice which had appeared in *The Freeman* pasted across the forehead. Upon the return of some of the men to the locality a few months later, the tree was examined and part of the charge of buckshot was still imbedded in it near the spot where Mrs. Church had aimed, and the other part had plainly passed on. It would thus seem to be settled as nearly as any such an event can be proven, that she killed one of the assailants. Immediately after this event the Indians ceased firing and left the place.

One of the settlers, a man named Stewart, had been stopping with his wife and three children, at the Thomas house—"Fort Thomas," it really deserves to be called, henceforth; but the poor wife and mother became insane through her fears of the Indians, and being in such a crowd of people added to her discomfort and mental trouble. Her husband finally concluded to return to their own house, a mile or two distant, believing

the danger had passed away. But the same band which had infested the Thomas house came to Stewart's. They called him to the door, and shot him the instant he appeared. The fiends then murdered the insane mother and her two little girls. The boy—"Johnny"—who was eight or nine years of age, managed to hide behind a log. The Indians plundered the cabin and soon left. The boy then fled to the double log-house, where he was recognized and taken in at one of the windows. The home of the Churches was also pillaged and everything moveable carried away or destroyed. The other houses in the settlement shared the same fate. A span of horses was in the barn at the Thomas' place, but the Indians took them away when they left.

When darkness came at last, the besieged determined to start south towards the nearest settlement, with an ox-team and sled, which was the only means left them. The oxen were yoked and hitched to the sled, upon which were placed the wounded and the little children and such provisions and clothing as could be carried. The forlorn little party, with this poor means of locomotion, probably started near the middle of the night, traveling very slowly, as the ground was covered with snow. Mrs. Church or her sister each led or carried one of her little boys. The march was kept up until the oxen tired out, when there was a short rest. Progress was very slow and most wearisome for some two days. Finally, they saw several men approaching from the south, whom at first they mistook for Indians. This was a trying time for the poor refugees. The men who were rapidly advancing upon them wore shawls, which made them look like Indians with blankets, and it was evident that they were well armed. Some of the women and children were wild with affright, and gave utterance to shrieks and lamentations. Two of the men were helpless from wounds, and another was not naturally an Indian fighter, though doubtless brave enough. John Bradshaw thought his time had come, but far from flinching, he took their eight loaded guns, and stacked them some rods in advance. He asked the other well man to stay with the women and children and wounded, and keep them from embarrassing him, and he would sell his life as dearly as possible. Thus the dauntless hero stood until he saw a signal from the advancing party and knew they were friends! When the latter came up his face was pale as ashes, but no one doubted that he would have fought while life lasted! We can well imagine that men can be brave when they are surrounded by other brave men, whatever the odds. But what a grand figure was that of our Hamilton County Bradshaw, going out alone to yield up his life, as he supposed, in so hopeless a fight with merciless savages! It seems to me that that was a scene for a painter, or sculptor, and that at some time it will be placed upon canvas or in imperishable marble for the adornment of our magnificent Capitol. Where did you ever read of anything more grandly heroic?

The terrible alarm was turned in an instant into an abandonment of equally wild rejoicing, for the comers were a detachment from the expedition under Maj. Williams, and Mr. Church was with them! Mrs. Church and her young sister had worn their dresses off to the knees in walking through the crusted snow, and their shoes were nearly gone. They were almost exhausted from the toilsome march, lack of food, exposure to the inclement weather, and the terrible anxiety of the previous week. It was many years before Mrs. Church could speak of these events without shedding tears.

The Churches returned to this (Hamilton) county, where they resided until the spring of the present year (1887), when they removed to Washington territory, whither two of their children and Miss Swanger (now Mrs. Gillespie) had preceded them. Mr. Church was also a soldier in the Union army, as well as a veteran of the Mexican war. All who have known them will agree with me that the permanent record which our county has

here made of their actions and sufferings and the heroism of these matchless women—in our pioneer days, has been well deserved.

INTERESTING LETTER FROM MRS. COLLINS.

LIVERMORE, IA., SEPT. 3, 1887.

Editor Freeman:

Permit me through your columns to express my regret at not having been able to be with the company that assembled in and around the court house in Webster City to witness the inauguration of the Memorial Tablet that shall be to the generations to come an everlasting reminder of the heroism of the fathers and mothers who will soon have passed away. Residing as we did, during the winter of 1856-'57, so near the confines of the Indian atrocities, and hearing as we did, much from the lips of those who proved to be our guests, who were on the terrible march toward their homes in and about your city, the narration of the events as given by the survivors would have been, and are now, of double interest to us. We cheerfully accept the sincere thanks of Frank R. Mason and his comrades. We are glad to have a place in their memories. I have many times thought over the events of that night and told them to my children; how husband and I, after having stayed later than usual at a neighbor's, started for home, he with our first babe in his arms, and kept along the beaten path in the snow. All at once the outline of dark objects appeared before us. They were not moving, and we heard no noise. I at first thought we might be upon a company of Indians! We were too near to retreat, and true to our inclinations we stepped forward to meet what might be danger and trouble. I then heard groans of distress, and I thought sobs. All fear was gone in a moment, and I hastened to know who could be at that time of night in so deplorable a condition. We had a lantern, and as the light shone upon the place my pity was truly stirred. There, with the snow crushed beneath them, were eight men; some sitting, some reclining, and others lying flat upon their backs! I need not say how gladly we ministered to their wants; that has been already enlarged upon by my friend Mason. But one thing I wish to say, is, that we count it all joy that we were enabled to take part (though a humble one) in that heroic task. I think your memory served you well, friend Mason, as to the "bill of fare" set before you on the night and morning in question. I remember the biscuits well. Mixed up with sourings and water, and with no shortening. All the meat we had was bought of a drover, who, I think, was compelled to kill his cattle off to save them—they were so poor, and there was no extra grease for shortening. But I have no doubt my biscuits beat the mush you made with flour and water, if you did boil it for two long hours. Our flour and molasses ought to have been good as they were hauled all the way from Muscatine by an ox-team the fall previous, and flour was selling that spring for from eleven to fourteen dollars per barrel.

I have two requests to make of friend Mason, and then I will close: 1st. Can you give me the names of others of your company of eight, yet living, and their places of abode? 2d. Call and see us if you ever come this way, and you will be made welcome, and if desired you can be shown the spot where we found you in the snow.

With God I believe there are no accidents. An overruling Providence directs each life. I believe it no accident that we stayed at the neighbor's

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