

“The young folks [want] to go in
and see the Indians”:
Davenport Citizens, Protestant
Missionaries, and Dakota
Prisoners of War, 1863–1866

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ON MAY 6, 1863, the *Davenport Daily Democrat and News* published a short paragraph about the Dakota prisoners confined at nearby Camp McClellan. According to the article, Captain Robert M. Littler, the camp’s chief commanding officer, had experienced “a good deal of trouble and annoyance from repeated requests of the [city’s] young folks to go in and see the Indians.” To halt the frequent appeals, he promised to “make arrangements to receive all the children and the teachers of the different Sabbath Schools in the city on Saturday afternoon of this week. This will be a rare chance for the young folks, and they should turn out *en masse*.”¹ Littler would allow the observers to stand on the raised walkway that surrounded the prison compound and gaze down on the Dakota inmates.

Captain Littler’s order permitted visitors to view the Dakota prisoners who had recently arrived in Davenport from Minnesota. Beginning in April 1863, more than 260 male prisoners were imprisoned at Camp McClellan (renamed Camp Kearney in December 1863) for their alleged roles in the Dakota War of 1862. Most

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1. “The Indian Prisoners,” *Davenport Daily Democrat and News*, 5/6/1863.

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remained jailed until spring 1866. During their incarceration, the prisoners faced physical and emotional abuse, separation from family members hundreds of miles away on the Crow Creek Reservation in Dakota Territory, and an extremely high death rate. They also were subject to the whims of their commanding officers and guards and a public that treated them as a spectacle at best, and as “savages” deserving of extermination at worst.

During their traumatic incarceration, which continued for three years, some prisoners eventually turned the public’s desire to “see the Indians” and purchase their handmade souvenirs into a form of resistance. During the second half of their incarceration, the Dakota prisoners developed ways to raise money that capitalized on the citizens’ fascination with the “exotic” Indian prisoners. They sold handmade objects to tourists, charged for photographs and for viewing their “Indian ceremonies,” and fought to have money released for lands they lost in Minnesota. They used those funds to purchase blankets, clothing, books, and even religious tracts for themselves and their families. They also bought stamps, paper, ink, and postage, which they used to communicate with their distant family members. Most important, some used the funds to fight for their freedom. In many cases, the prisoners and their families relied on Protestant missionaries affiliated with the Episcopal church and especially the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to serve as their intermediaries.²

Other historians have commented on the Dakota prisoners’ metaphysical, cultural, and religious defiance; this article focuses mainly on material resistance.³ As historian Colette Hyman argues, “Production of items for sale [for tourists] is . . . recognized

2. ABCFM missionaries, including Thomas Williamson and Stephen Riggs, collectively spent many months in Davenport ministering to the Dakota prisoners during their incarceration. Their sons, John Williamson and Alfred Riggs, also visited the prisoners. The ABCFM missionaries established a school and a church at Camp Kearney. Episcopal missionaries, including Samuel Hinman and Bishop Henry Whipple, also visited the prisoners, although they spent less time with them than their ABCFM counterparts did.

3. Christopher J. Pexa, in “Transgressive Adoptions: Dakota Prisoners’ Resistances to State Domination Following the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 30 (2015), 32, 34, argues that “Dakota resistance . . . takes a humble, but powerful form: as continuity of a Dakota kinship ethics and epistemology.” The Dakota prisoners and their families “resisted colonial forces by translating and

as both a strategy for material survival” and as a form of resistance.⁴ All forms of resistance—both material and metaphysical—illustrate that even under grievous conditions, the Dakota prisoners showed resilience and countered the pervasive narrative of the time that defined them as defeated.

In order to illustrate the prisoners’ creative responses to incarceration at Camp Kearney, this article follows a rough chronology. First, background information about the United States–Dakota War of 1862 and the Dakotas’ subsequent exile from Minnesota sets the stage for further analysis of the prisoners’ responses to their incarceration. Next, I discuss the prisoners’ first year (1863–1864) at Camp McClellan, when the prisoners suffered from disease, lack of health care, poor living conditions, and draconian rules, which left few opportunities for resistance. In the third section, I examine the following two years of incarceration, 1864–1866, when commanders relaxed some restrictions, allowing limited opportunities for resistance. The prisoners’ ability to raise money to fight for their freedom and families did not, however, end their continued trauma, which included exile from Minnesota, separation from kin, and imprisonment.

adapting powerful state and religious rhetoric to suit their own purposes.” Sarah-Eva Ellen Carlson, in “They Tell Their Story: The Dakota Internment at Camp McClellan in Davenport, 1862–1866,” *Annals of Iowa* 63 (2004), 254, contends that the prisoners “courageously chose to assimilate themselves in an effort to preserve their most basic social units—especially their families—and to protect the individuals who were most endangered and least likely to survive the internment.” Colette A. Hyman, in *Dakota Women’s Work: Creativity, Culture, and Exile* (St. Paul, MN, 2012), writes that the Dakota prisoners “worked to preserve their humanity and dignity,” which allowed them to defy “the genocidal efforts to eradicate their culture” (117). In a previous article, I focused on the prisoners’ adoption of literacy as a form of resistance and survival. See Linda Clemmons, “‘We are writing this letter seeking your help’: Dakotas, ABCFM Missionaries, and Their Uses of Literacy, 1863–1866,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47 (2016), 183–209.

4. Hyman, *Dakota Women’s Work*, 14. For information on Native Americans, tourism, and consumerism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, DC, 1996); and Louise Lamphere, “Women, Anthropology, Tourism, and the Southwest,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12 (1992), 5–12. Susan Roades Neel, in “Tourism and the American West: New Departures,” *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (1996), 517, argues that tourism “obliterate[s] indigenous land uses and convert[s] native cultures into exoticized objects for tourist consumption.”

The United States–Dakota War of 1862 and its Aftermath

The traumatic odyssey of the Dakota prisoners began after the United States–Dakota War of 1862. Many factors contributed to the outbreak of war. By 1862, the Dakota had lost 90 percent of their traditional territory, and a growing number of settlers infringed upon their remaining impermanent reservation.⁵ Dakota men, women, and children also faced increasingly aggressive “civilization” and Christianization programs promoted by government agents and Protestant missionaries. Traders regularly overcharged and cheated Dakota customers in various ways; crop failures in the 1860s led to further dependence on traders and government annuities. For these and numerous other reasons, war broke out on August 18, 1862, and ended six weeks later with the Dakotas’ defeat.⁶

Although the military phase of the war ended relatively quickly, the war’s legacy influenced the treatment of the Dakota for decades to come. Following the Dakotas’ defeat, Minnesotans absolved themselves of any responsibility for the war. Instead, newspapers across Minnesota dehumanized and vilified all Dakota men – whether they had participated in the war or not – calling them “Red Fiends,” “wild beasts,” “hyenas,” and “red-jawed tigers whose fangs are dripping with the blood of innocents!”⁷ Minnesotans derided the Dakota for their supposed “cruelty, blood-thirstiness and general bad character.”⁸ Four Lightning (David Faribault) commented on this virulent anti-

5. John Bell, “The Sioux War Panorama and American Mythic History,” *Theatre Journal* 48 (October 1996), 285.

6. For general information on the Dakota War of 1862, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1660–1862* (St. Paul, 1997), 261–80; idem, *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (St. Paul, 1988); Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul, 1976); Linda Clemmons, *Conflicted Mission: Faith, Disputes, and Deception on the Dakota Frontier* (St. Paul, 2014), chap. 7; Jennifer Graber, “Mighty Upheaval on the Minnesota Frontier: Violence, War, and Death in Dakota and Missionary Christianity,” *Church History* 80 (2011), 76–108; Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln, NE, 1993), 109–32; and John Peacock, “An Account of the Dakota–US War of 1862 as Sacred Text: Why My Dakota Elders Value Spiritual Closure over Scholarly ‘Balance,’” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37 (2013), 185–96.

7. “Peace with the Sioux,” *St. Cloud Democrat*, 11/13/1862.

8. “Removal of the Minnesota Indians to Dakota,” *The Dakotian*, 5/19/1863.

Dakota sentiment, writing that the “white people . . . think of us as dogs.”⁹ The supposed inhuman nature of Dakota warriors was used to justify “white acts of retribution against ‘Indian savagery.’”¹⁰ Indeed, calls for vengeance appeared daily in local and national newspapers and magazines. An article in the *St. Cloud Democrat* proclaimed that although the “defensive war” had ended, the “offensive war . . . has just begun.”¹¹

The demand for vengeance appeared simultaneously with calls to remove all Dakota from Minnesota – even though many had not participated in the war and some had even rescued settlers.¹² In a letter to President Lincoln, Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey demanded “the removal of the whole body of Indians to remote districts, far beyond our borders” to “prevent the constant recurrence of sanguinary collisions.” Those Dakota who refused to leave Minnesota might face “extermination.”¹³ Across Minnesota, settlers likewise demanded the “extermination” of the “Fiends.”¹⁴ Four Lightning feared for his life, writing that “the white men think we should have all been killed because of what happened.”¹⁵

Amid the public’s calls for vengeance, extermination, or at the very least their removal from Minnesota, the military held Dakota prisoners in a hastily constructed prison in Mankato, Minnesota. Henry Sibley, who headed the volunteer army during the war, created a five-man military commission to try the prisoners. By the time the trials ended, the commission had brought approximately 400 Dakota men before the panel and convicted 323. Of those convicted, 303 were sentenced to death and 20 received prison sentences; 69 were acquitted. After

9. Clifford Canku and Michael Simon, *The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters: Dakota Kaškapi Okicize Wowapi* (St. Paul, 2013), 11.

10. Bell, “The Sioux War Panorama,” 281.

11. “The Sioux War,” *St. Cloud Democrat*, 11/6/1862 (emphasis in original).

12. See Sylvia D. Hoffert, “Gender and Vigilantism on the Frontier: Jane Grey Swisshelm and the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 29 (1998), 344.

13. “What Shall Be Done with the Sioux? Letter From Governor Ramsey to President Lincoln,” *New York Times*, 11/9/1862; “Peace with the Sioux,” *St. Cloud Democrat*, 11/13/1862.

14. Stephen Riggs, *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux* (Boston), 205.

15. Canku and Simon, *Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, 9.

appointing a two-man committee to examine the trial records, President Lincoln decreased the number to be hanged to 40; one additional prisoner had his sentence commuted by the military commissioners, reducing the number to be executed to 39.¹⁶

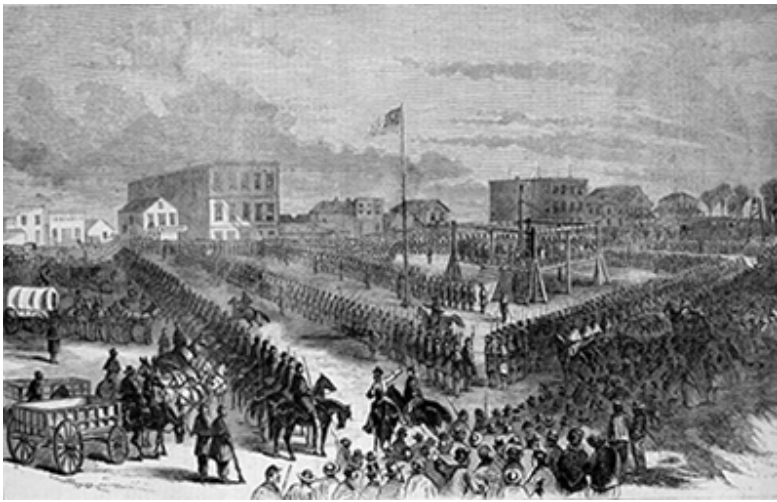
On December 26, 1862, 38 Dakota men (one man received a last-minute reprieve) were simultaneously hanged in Mankato, Minnesota.¹⁷ This hanging was the largest mass execution in U.S. history. Approximately 1,400 soldiers and a crowd of over 4,000 spectators witnessed the executions of the condemned prisoners.¹⁸ The *New York Times* reported that after the hanging a “prolonged cheer [arose] from the soldiery and citizens who were spectators.” As the crowd dispersed, soldiers buried the men in a shallow grave, but local physicians quickly exhumed the bodies for study. The public’s macabre fascination led several men to sell portions of the wooden gallows as souvenirs; later, Minnesota stores sold spoons, coins, and even a beer tray engraved with an image of the gallows. According to historian Julie Humann Anderson, these gruesome and disturbing souvenirs “bolstered the sense of triumphalism white Minnesotans felt when the Dakota were defeated at the end of the war.”¹⁹

16. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 128, 136; Winifred W. Barton, *John P. Williamson: A Brother to the Sioux* (New York, 1919), 59; Peacock, “An Account of the Dakota-US War of 1862 as Sacred Text,” 194. See also Carol Chomsky, “The United States-Dakota War Trials: A Study in Military Justice,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1990), 7.

17. Charles Lewis, “Wise Decisions: A Frontier Newspaper’s Coverage of the Dakota Conflict,” *Journal of American Journalism* 28 (2011), 48. For a lengthy contemporary description of the execution, see “Execution of the Indians in Minnesota,” *New York Times*, 1/4/1863.

18. In 1862 Mankato’s population was approximately 1,500. Lewis, “Wise Decisions,” 48. If the reported crowd of 4,000 is correct, people traveled from other areas around Minnesota to witness the hanging. For example, William Mayo (father of the founders of the famous Mayo Clinic) traveled 25 miles from Le Sueur to Mankato to view the execution. Scott W. Berg, *38 Nooses: Lincoln, Little Crow, and the Beginning of the Frontier’s End* (New York, 2012), 238.

19. “Execution of the Indians in Minnesota: Their Confessions of Guilt—Descriptions of the Parting Scenes—The Execution,” *New York Times*, 1/4/1863; Berg, *38 Nooses*, 240, 242; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 130; Julie Humann Anderson, “Memory on the Landscape: Monuments and Historic Sites Commemorating the U.S. Dakota War of 1862,” in Jeffrey Lee Meriwether and Laura Mattoon D’Amore, eds., *We Are What We Remember: The American Past through Commemoration* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012), 35.



On December 26, 1862, 38 Dakota men were hanged simultaneously in Mankato, Minnesota. This hanging was the largest mass execution in U.S. history. From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1/24/1863.

As Minnesotans witnessed and celebrated the execution, the remaining prisoners nervously waited in the Mankato prison, unsure of their future. The government held at least 1,500 Dakota women, children, and the elderly in a crowded and unhealthy prison camp at Fort Snelling in St. Paul. In spring 1863 Congress passed legislation abrogating all Dakota treaties and removing the Dakota from Minnesota. Officials sent those held at Fort Snelling to an isolated and undeveloped reservation called Crow Creek in Dakota Territory; the Mankato prisoners would be transferred to Camp McClellan, a Civil War recruitment camp located in Davenport, Iowa. That meant that many Dakota families at Crow Creek would be separated by over 600 miles from their husbands, fathers, and sons.

On April 22, 1863, guards shackled 272 prisoners together and marched them under strict guard onto the steamer *Favorite* for transport down the Mississippi River to Iowa. Those prisoners—along with 16 Dakota women and 4 children—reached Davenport on April 24. Military authorities took charge, assuring the public that the prisoners would be “confined to hard labor . . .

probably for life." The majority of prisoners also faced death sentences, as Lincoln had not officially decided whether to free or execute the remaining prisoners. This led to constant fear that the 38 hanged at Mankato were but "the first installment."²⁰

Public calls for continued vengeance certainly added to the prisoners' anxiety. Two days after the prisoners arrived, Davenport newspapers, echoing the vitriolic language of the Minnesota press, lamented the influx of the "bloodthirsty copperskins" and "murderers." An article in the *Daily Democrat and News* expressed "horror" that the government compelled their city to "harbor in our midst nearly three hundred of the red devils." The author complained that the "most beautiful camp in the West must be polluted by these fiends in human shape, fed and taken care of by the people they would not hesitate to murder and scalp at the first opportunity." Davenport citizens should not be "burdened forever with the worthless, cruel vagabonds." The article ended with a macabre solution: "The State of Minnesota offers \$25 each for male Sioux scalps. We have over \$50,000 invested in the article right here in Davenport, and the sooner the Government realizes on them the better satisfied will be the people." Another article also suggested extermination, proposing that the government "arm the Winnebago braves to hunt their enemies, the Sioux," which would save the "expense" of imprisonment.²¹

Despite the calls for vengeance that appeared in local newspapers, Davenport citizens gathered to witness the prisoners' arrival. From about 40 miles downriver, the *Muscatine Daily Journal* reported that a "large number of our citizens visited the boat to gratify their curiosity by a sight of the Indians."²² Bill Boldt, who was 10 years old when the prisoners arrived, remembered that

20. "The Indian Murderers at Post McClellan," *Daily Democrat and News*, 4/27/1863; "Minnesota Indian Matters: The Mankato Murderers Sent to Iowa," *Chicago Tribune*, 4/2/1863; Walt Bachman, *Northern Slave/Black Dakota: The Life and Times of Joseph Godfrey* (Bloomington, MN, 2013), 299; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 217.

21. "The Indian Murderers at Post McClellan"; "More Indian Barbarities in Minnesota," *Daily Democrat and News*, 7/18/1863; "More Indians," *Daily Democrat and News*, 5/18/1863.

22. *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 5/9/1863, quoted in "Chapter 19—Camps at Davenport—Camp Kearney," in "Iowa's Rendezvous Camps, 1861–1866," 558. This unpublished manuscript, held at the Davenport Public Library, contains transcriptions of primary source records related to the Davenport prison.

“the folks stood here watching the Indians get off the boat. . . . I can see them marching now. The soldiers were there to guard them. When they marched them offboard, down the gang-plank they had them chained two by two. There were women, papooses and kids coming off the boat—all those over 12 or 14 years were chained. Soldiers lined up on each side and they marched them up hill through the swath that had been cut through the woods.”²³ This duality of responses to the prisoners—both fear and fascination—continued throughout their three-year confinement.

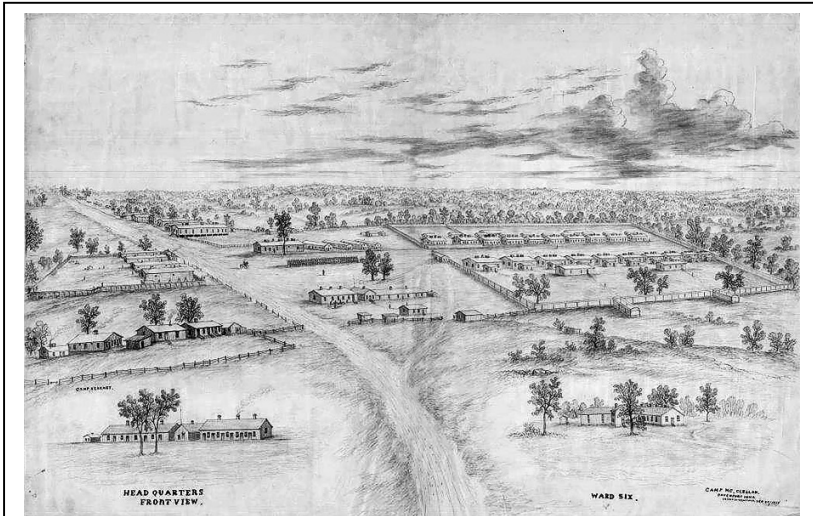
The Trauma of Prison Life, 1863–1864

During their first year at Camp McClellan, the Dakota prisoners faced harsh conditions and discipline, which left few opportunities for resistance or challenges to their imprisonment. Upon entering the camp in April 1863, the so-called “Indian Murderers at Post McClellan” were confined to a 200-square-foot “pen” that contained four barracks with the bunks taken out. “Two of these barracks are occupied by the prisoners as sleeping quarters, one is assigned for hospital and the occupation of the women, and the other is the guard house of the Post. Outside of the fence and four feet from the top is a staging running clear around, on which the sentries walk.” In December 1863 commanders further separated the Indian prisoners from the Civil War soldiers training in the other portion of the camp. The commanders drew “a line along the west side of the wagon road that passes through Camp McClellan, and afterwards erect[ed] a partition fence. The Indian quarters will be in Camp Kearney. . . . This entirely separates the Indian business from the recruiting and instructing camp.”²⁴

According to an article in the *Daily Democrat and News*, the Dakota prisoners were “highly satisfied with their new quarters,

23. “Sioux Indian Prison, Post McClellan, Davenport, IA, 1863–66, per Bill Boldt, January 31, 1927,” in Notebook #14: The Sioux Prison at Camp McClellan, Davenport, Iowa, scans 101–2, John Henry Hauberg Papers, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL. This collection is available digitally at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/aug_hauberg/id/390/rec/1.

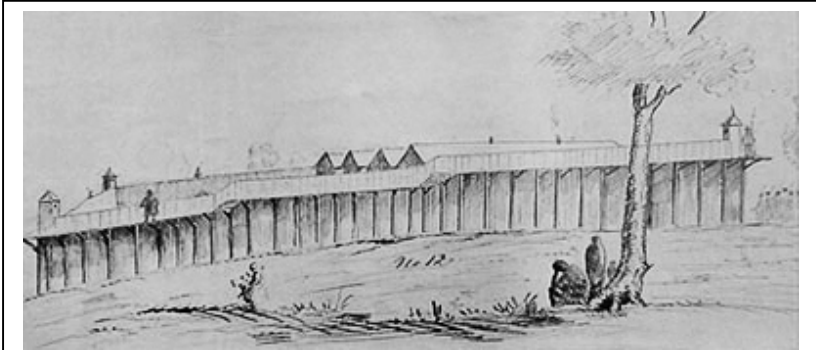
24. “The Indian Murderers at Post McClellan”; “Camp Kearney,” *Daily Democrat and News*, 12/5/1863.



In this 1865 drawing of Camp McClellan, Camp Kearney – the Dakota prison – is located at the upper left. Image from Record Group 92, Post and Reservation File, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

where they have plenty of room outdoors and in.”²⁵ Conditions in the Indian prison supposedly compared favorably with the Civil War training camp located on the other side of the fence. Private military correspondence, as well as letters written by the prisoners, however, challenge the positive evaluations of the prison’s rations, living quarters, and work conditions. Despite reports to the contrary, rations were insufficient and paled in comparison to those provided on the other side of the camp. Robert Hopkins, a Dakota prisoner, reported that “we are living in great difficulty with little or no food.” They “say the food we are given is good” but “it is terrible.” Initially, the commander supplied the prisoners with coffee, sugar, and other provisions, but orders from Washington discontinued these “luxuries” after the first months of their incarceration. The prisoners subsisted on “only such quantities of beef, salt, and corn as shall be found necessary for their health and the support of life.” Just across the fence, however, the Civil War trainees ate “vastly superior rations” of “beef,

25. “The Indian Murderers at Post McClellan.”



Soldiers guarded the Dakota prisoners from the raised walkway that surrounded Camp Kearney. Captain Littler allowed members of the public to stand on the walkway and gaze down on the Dakota men. Image from Record Group 92, Post and Reservation File, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

fresh and salt, good bread, rice, beans, sugar, potatoes, onions and other vegetables . . . in liberal quantities, they themselves choosing what articles they prefer.”²⁶

The prisoners also lived in “housing of the most temporary kind.” Military officials in Washington ordered the camp commander to construct a “small cheap guard house and such other cheap buildings as are actually necessary.” The poor construction meant that the barracks were drafty and freezing during the Iowa winters. ABCFM missionary Stephen Riggs noted that the barracks “were so cold and uncomfortable that I would hardly stay two hours at a time.” In contrast, earlier inspectors had a “very

26. Canku and Simon, *Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, 41, 209; Orders to General Littler, 5/12/1863, Record Group 393, entry 3436, part 1, lot 3, vol. 4/4, p. 486, National Archives (hereafter cited as NA), Washington, DC; Command of Brigadier General Benjamin S. Roberts to General Robert Littler, 6/19/1863, Record Group 393, entry 236, part 3, lot 2, vol. 59/55, NA; “Camp McClellan Under a New Administration,” *Daily Democrat and News*, 10/12/1861. It is important to note that I am comparing the Dakota prisoners’ rations and living conditions to those of Camp McClellan (located next door to the Indians’ barracks), which served as a training camp for Union soldiers. Nearby Rock Island held a Confederate prison, where inmates also suffered from hunger and disease—such as smallpox—and lacked warm clothing. See Benton McAdams, *Rebels at Rock Island: The Story of a Civil War Prison* (DeKalb, IL, 2000).

favorable opinion of Camp McClellan and the buildings," which were supplied with ample stoves and were "comfortable."²⁷

Poor diets and unheated barracks led to illnesses, including pneumonia, smallpox, tuberculosis, and an eye disease that led to blindness.²⁸ The prisoners received no medical care for these illnesses. Riggs, after a visit to the prison, wrote that the "care and the surroundings are not favorable to health. . . . The physician who only occasionally comes to see them wishes them all dead."²⁹ Thomas Williamson, another ABCFM missionary, also reported that the sick prisoners "look very badly. The confinement and hot weather is very detrimental to their health which pleases Gen. Roberts [the commander in charge of the camp] who wishes them to die of sickness since he cannot hang them."³⁰

The lack of food, heat, and medical care contributed to the death of numerous prisoners. In March 1864 the *Daily Democrat and News* reported that "the Indians confined at Camp McClellan are dying off fast. There are but about 250 left, and fifty of them are in the hospital and pest house. Smallpox has got among them and is thinning them out rapidly." By April 1864, 45 had died since their arrival in Davenport. When the prison finally closed in 1866, ABCFM missionaries estimated that 120 prisoners had died while incarcerated, which they thought represented about 25 percent of the total population.³¹ Given the relatively fluid nature of the prison inhabitants (transfers in and out), and poor record-

27. Riggs, *Mary and I*, 221; Orders to Benjamin Roberts, 12/12/1863, Record Group 393, entry 3436, part 1, vol. 5/5, NA; Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 11/11/1863, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, Oahe Mission Collection, South Dakota Conference of the United Church of Christ Archives, Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD (hereafter cited as CWS); "Local Matters," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 7/10/1862.

28. For references to illnesses at the prison, see Barton, *John P. Williamson*, 72; and Riggs, *Mary and I*, 221, 229.

29. Stephen Riggs to Selah Treat, 11/7/1863, MSS 310, no. 36, ABCFM Papers (typed transcripts of ABCFM Papers, Minnesota Historical Society [hereafter cited as MHS], St. Paul, MN; originals found at Houghton Rare Book Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA).

30. Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, [n.d., 1863], folder 8, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS.

31. "Indians Dying Off," *Daily Democrat and News*, 3/11/1864; Canku and Simon, *Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, 35; *Missionary Herald* 60 (May 1864), 137; *Missionary Herald* 62 (January 1866), 11; Barton, *John P. Williamson*, 72.

keeping, the missionaries' estimate is difficult to confirm. Historians' estimates of the number of prisoners vary from 250 to 407.³² If the number of prisoners is the median of those estimates (i.e., about 300), and 120 died while in prison, the death rate, approximately 40 percent, would be much higher than the missionaries' estimate of 25 percent.

The trauma and indignities associated with the "Indian prison" continued even after death. Soldiers buried the deceased men in unmarked graves just outside the Indian prison.³³ Bill Boldt remembered that members of the public – including a prominent dentist – dug up the Dakota graves looking for "relics," just as their relatives' bodies had been exhumed following the hangings at Mankato. The grave robbers, however, were disappointed to find that most of the Dakota prisoners "had been buried without anything," so they "found nothing but bones."³⁴ Even without the discovery of artifacts, the desecration of the graves continued for decades. On July 25, 1878, a group of workers associated with the Davenport Academy of Natural Science opened four graves and removed several skulls, which remained at the Putman Museum of Natural History until 1986, when they were supposed to be repatriated to the Dakota of Morton, Minnesota, for burial.³⁵

32. According to an article in the *Davenport Daily Democrat*, the prison records were "kept in a very irregular manner." See "Camp Kearney – The Indian Prisoners," *Daily Democrat*, 2/19/1866. For the range of 250–407 prisoners, see Peacock, "An Account of the Dakota-US War as Sacred Text," 196. Confederate inmates at the nearby Rock Island Prison also suffered from smallpox, pneumonia, and tuberculosis, with an overall death rate of 16 percent. However, at Rock Island, the Confederate prisoners had a hospital and medicine, while for much of their imprisonment the Dakota prisoners had neither medical care nor a doctor. Of course, given the medical knowledge of the time, treatments for the Confederate prisoners were not necessarily effective. See McAdams, *Rebels at Rock Island*, xi, 210.

33. In the 1920s Bill Boldt remembered the Indian graveyard as having "three or four rows" of unmarked graves just outside of the camp. See Notebook #14: The Sioux Prison at Camp McClellan, Davenport, Iowa, scans 104, 111.

34. *Ibid.*, scan 104.

35. "The Two Sides of Camp McClellan," 4–5 (pdf), Davenport Public Library, www.davenportlibrary.com/files/5213/2586/6624/Camp_McClellan_also_known_as_Camp_Kearney.pdf.



Soldiers buried the deceased Dakota men in unmarked graves just outside the Indian prison. Members of the public – including a prominent dentist – dug up the Dakota graves looking for “relics.” This photograph of the graveyard was taken in 1927 based on information provided by Bill Boldt, who lived in Davenport during the 1860s and visited Camp Kearney. Image from Notebook No. 14, pp. 15–16, undated, folder 1, box 44, in MSS 27 Hauberg (John Henry) Papers, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

Witnessing the desecration of the graves of their compatriots was just one example of the emotional abuse and trauma experienced by the surviving prisoners. Commander Benjamin S. Roberts, who was in charge of the prisoners for the first year, stated that the prisoners needed “to feel that they are objects of abhorrence and undergoing punishments for crimes of unexampled enormity.” To achieve that goal, he implemented a series of punitive rules. First, the majority of prisoners remained in chains during their first year-and-a-half of incarceration. Second, Roberts attempted to socially isolate the prisoners. He ordered that the prisoners could not “be visited by any parties or persons on any pretense without special authority from these headquarters.”

No one could “pass up on the platform or . . . hold any conversation or intercourse of any kind with them from there or elsewhere.” Third, he prohibited the prisoners from holding “their dances and games or amusements.” Finally, Roberts forbade them from receiving “presents of food or clothing of any kind.” Each of these orders was designed to “make their confinement hourly felt as part of the retribution that is awaiting their inhuman murder of men and slaughter and torture of women and children.” In addition to these strict rules, Roberts warned the prisoners that they could be executed at any time. During one visit, Thomas Williamson noted that “in an interval of about 20 minutes he [Roberts] thrice repeated that if it was in his power he would have them all hung before sunset.”³⁶

While Commander Roberts treated the prisoners as savage murderers, some members of the public viewed the men and women held at Camp Kearney as exotic spectacles and entertainment. In spring 1863, just after the prisoners’ arrival at Camp McClellan, an article in the *Davenport Democrat and News* described them as possessing “native majesty” and as “fiery . . . strong patriotic savages.” Members of the public also read about the “Indian princesses” who lived at Camp Kearney and worked as cooks, servants, and nurses. One article described the imprisoned daughter of Little Crow (the leader of the war) as a “splendid specimen of an Indian princess.” She was “very agreeable in appearance—probably a decided belle among the Indian damsels. She dresses better, has finer blankets and ornaments than the rest of the females and has a really distinguished air.” Echoing the wording of these articles, Levi Wagoner, a resident of Davenport, planned to visit the “stalwart warriors” he called “models of muscular build and strength.”³⁷

Like Levi Wagoner, numerous other citizens of Davenport demanded to be allowed to observe the prisoners. General Roberts complained that “strangers” constantly inundated him with re-

36. Benjamin Roberts to Robert Littler, 6/19/1863, Record Group 393, entry 236, part 3, lot 2, vol. 59/55, NA; Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 8/18/1863, folder 8, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS.

37. *Davenport Democrat and News*, 4/27/1863; “The Indian Murderers at Post McClellan”; Levi Wagoner, “Camp McClellan and the Red Skins,” *Annals of Jackson County Iowa* (1908), 20.

quests to visit Camp Kearney. He lamented that "the prison at Camp McClellan has become a sort of Menagerie, where all the idle and curious people [want] to congregate and amuse themselves with the antics of these savages." ABCFM missionary Stephen Riggs confirmed that whenever he visited the prison, "there were a good many white people about the doors." Even Civil War recruits in the other portion of Camp McClellan spent so much time watching the Dakota prisoners that they failed to perform "their proper duties." The local tourists became so intrusive that Commander Roberts (begrudgingly) rescinded his ban on visitors and allowed the public to stand on the platform and look down on the prisoners for two hours every afternoon except Sunday.³⁸

In contrast to Roberts's grudging willingness to allow citizens of Davenport into the prison, Captain Littler played up the spectacle. In June 1863 Littler proposed "fitting up a car on the 4th of July in which he will place about twenty Indians in 'full dress,' the whole surmounted by a gay bower of flowers, with a young girl perched on the top representing the 'Goddess of Liberty.' The Captain is going into the celebration with his whole soul and energy, and when he takes hold with a will things have to move."³⁹ It is not clear whether Littler carried out his plan, but the proposed float would have symbolically portrayed the Dakota as defeated and under the control of the United States; the commander wanted to dress the prisoners according to his specifications and to have them literally stand under Lady Liberty, a symbol of the United States. The proposed float illustrated the prisoners' position in Davenport in general: because the Dakota had been defeated militarily and imprisoned, they had been redefined as harmless objects of fascination. The commanders' contrasting actions actually were two sides of the same coin: one attempted to keep the Dakota subservient through punishment and restrictions; the other used humiliation and symbolism to achieve the same goal.

38. Benjamin Roberts to Robert Littler, 6/23/1863, Record Group 393, entry 236, part 3, lot 2, vol. 59/55, NA; Benjamin Roberts to J. F. Meline, 8/22/1863, Record Group 393, entry 236, part 3, lot 2, vol. 59/55, NA; Stephen Riggs to "My own dear home," 10/22/1865, folder 8, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Correspondence, CWS; Benjamin Roberts to Pickenpaugh, 9/4/1863, Record Group 393, entry 236, part 3, lot 2, vol. 59/55, NA; Carlson, "They tell their story," 262.

39. "Big Ingin," *Davenport Democrat and News*, 6/2/1863.

Resistance at Camp Kearney, 1864–1866

Even as members of the public gazed down at the prisoners from the platform surrounding Camp Kearney or perhaps in the Fourth of July parade, the prisoners looked back at the tourists. Evidence from disparate sources shows that the prisoners eventually capitalized on the public's fascination to raise funds that made their lives—and the lives of their families at Crow Creek—a little more tolerable. By 1864, conditions within Camp Kearney had improved slightly for the prisoners, which opened up a space for resistance.

On January 13, 1864, General Roberts left his post as Camp Kearney's commander. After his resignation, Thomas Williamson reported "great changes" in the camp. Subsequent commanders treated the prisoners somewhat less harshly, in large part because of the prisoners' "highly commendable" conduct. In May 1865, for example, the new commander commented that the prisoners' "conduct has been good. They work well and they do work cheerfully. They seem to be very much changed from the wild Indians and are very quiet and very much devoted to religion. . . . They seem to entertain friendly feeling toward the whites." This change in tone from the camp leadership trickled down to the guards. Stephen Riggs noted, "Generally, the soldiers who guarded them treated them kindly. It was remarked that a new company . . . when assigned to this duty, at the first treated the prisoners with a good deal of severity and harshness. But a few weeks sufficed to change their feelings, and they were led to pity, and then to respect, those whom they had regarded as worse than wild beasts."⁴⁰

Most important for the prisoners, subsequent commanders ordered the removal of their irons, after which "they enjoyed comparative liberty."⁴¹ Although still confined within Camp Kearney at night, some could leave the prison under guard during the day. At first, however, "freedom" meant that the prisoners performed forced labor for the prison or for surrounding Davenport farmers.

40. Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 12/24/1863, folder 9, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; *Missionary Herald* 61 (1865), 183; "Headquarters Indian Prison, Camp Kearney," 5/17/1864, folder 2, box 1, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, MHS; Riggs, *Mary and I*, 221.

41. Barton, *John P. Williamson*, 69.

For example, several prisoners, along with a small guard, left Camp Kearney “to cut wood, carry up water from the river, and, in general, to do the work of the camp.” In August 1864 the camp commander hired out the prisoners to work on the harvest for local farmers. That practice continued over the next two years, and “during hoeing and harvest times, squads of prisoners were sent out to the farm-houses around, with or without a guard.”⁴²

Over the months, the prisoners’ time outside of the camp extended beyond work details. Some men went out “frequently . . . even to the city.” Other times “a dozen Dakota men would be permitted to go out on a deer-hunting excursion, with but a single white soldier accompanying them.”⁴³

As their time outside of the prison increased, some considered running away. When word of the escape plans spread, a group of elders took the plotters aside and convinced them that running away “would result in their all being more severely dealt with, and perhaps they would again be reduced to chains; and, finally, that it would put off the time of their hoped-for release.” They also worried about retribution against their families at Crow Creek for infractions committed within the prison.⁴⁴ Moreover, any escaped prisoners faced the daunting challenge of traveling over 600 miles to reunite with their families.

Not all members of the public supported allowing the prisoners to spend time outside of the camp. In August 1864 an anonymous “tax payer” wrote to the *Davenport Daily Gazette* demanding to know “why the Indian prisoners of Camp McClellan are escorted about the city by a small guard and allowed to enter private garden[s].” The citizen thought it “a sufficient hardship [for] the people to labor in the harvest field and on the streets to furnish taxes to pay for the food of these murderers of defenseless and innocent women and children, without having our homes invaded and disturbed by them.” The author suggested that the “idle prisoners . . . be placed at labor on some of the Government works and be made useful, at the same time relieving the guard at the camp

42. Stephen R. Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kaí: or, The Gospel Among the Dakotas* (Boston, 1869), 370, 371; Canku and Simon, *Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, xix.

43. Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 12/24/1863, folder 9, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kaí*, 371.

44. Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kaí*, 371-72.

for duty in the field." Another unidentified "tax payer" also complained about the "laxity in allowing the Indians to be out of camp." The prison commanders reassured the public that the prisoners were compelled to "do as much work as possible," and they only left the prison to "obtain water from the river." At all times guards accompanied the prisoners to ensure that "nothing shall be permitted that in any way annoys our citizens."⁴⁵

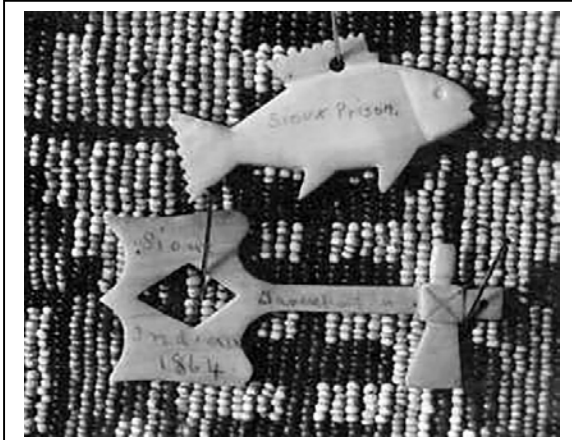
While some citizens complained about the prisoners' time outside of the prison, others remained fascinated with their plight. The Dakota men used this knowledge to help themselves and their families survive their forced separation and poor living conditions. Throughout the second half of their confinement, the prisoners gathered materials such as shells, wood, feathers, and stones during their expeditions outside the camp. The few women and children living at the prison also collected shells and other materials from the banks of the Mississippi. The prisoners used these supplies to carry on "a brisk business in making finger rings from clam shells."⁴⁶ By 1864, Stephen Riggs reported that "every one [was] busy making rings, crosses . . . watch chains, etc. They have presented me with about fifty rings, a dozen hatchets, and a few fish, and also a couple of large birds." The prisoners added moccasins, beadwork, crosses, and "other ornaments" to their repertoire. They made bows and arrows, which appealed to "little boys." The prisoners were so industrious that they continued their production on Sunday, leading to a strong rebuke from staunch Presbyterian Thomas Williamson, who demanded rest on Sundays.⁴⁷

Beginning with their arrival in Davenport in 1863, the prisoners had noted the public's fascination. By 1864, they had par-

45. "Editor Gazette," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 8/19/1864; "The Indians," *Daily Democrat and News*, 8/20/1864.

46. Stephen Riggs to Selah Treat, 11/7/1863, ABCFM MSS 310 no. 36, ABCFM Papers. The prisoners actually started to make "trinkets" in 1863 from materials gathered by the women and children, but Commander Roberts took away the tools used to make the items. See Stephen Riggs to Selah Treat, 11/7/1863, MSS 310 no. 36, ABCFM Papers.

47. Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 9/12/1864, folder 7, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kaí*, 372; "Put Them Where They Belong," *Morning Democrat*, 6/23/1865; Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 3/3/1864, folder 11, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS.



Dakota prisoners at Camp Kearney made and sold items to the public in order to raise money to help themselves and their kin. Dakota men made and sold these items in 1864. They were kept by the Dart family of Davenport until the 1920s. Notebook No. 14, pp. 15–16, undated, folder 1, box 44, in MSS 27 Hauberg (John Henry) Papers, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

layed that interest into selling items to the public. John P. Williamson, the son of Thomas Williamson, wrote that the prisoners were “often permitted to go to town to trade their bows and arrows and other trinkets.” Little boys clamored for their parents to buy them “Indian bows and arrows,” which sold for “four bits a piece.” Returning Civil War soldiers, many of whom were flush with cash, provided an especially lucrative market for the prisoners’ goods. Stephen Riggs reported that “the Indians here are in possession of more money than at any time previous when I have been here. Many Iowa soldiers are returning and have plenty of money, which makes quite a demand for their trinkets.” The prisoners even sold their goods to “the soldiers who guard them.” The ABCFM missionaries extended the prisoners’ market beyond Iowa. After a brief visit to the prison, Alfred Riggs received “a quantity of rings . . . for the sale of the prisoners,” which he probably sold back in Chicago, where he attended seminary at the time. Anticipating a trip to Washington, D.C., Stephen Riggs

promised to “scatter [the Dakota ‘trinkets’] along my path in the East.”⁴⁸

In addition to making and selling trinkets, the prisoners received payment or provisions for performing their “Indian dances.” Stephen Riggs noted that “a white man, for the purposes of making money,” hired several Dakota prisoners to dance in the camp center. For their efforts, the man “furnished them food and drink and paid them \$2 each.” In 1865 “Arnold the settler” hired a “party of the young men to dance Indian dances at the County Fair.” In September 1865 “the soldiers persuaded Antoine Leblanc to get up a dance. In this there was some twelve engaged.”⁴⁹ Missionaries like Riggs sharply criticized these dances, not because the settlers exploited the Dakota – which they did – but because they believed that Indians should not participate in such “savage displays.” Certainly, the settlers exploited the Dakota for their own gain and amusement; as prisoners, the Dakota men could hardly refuse. However, the Dakota added the compensation they received from the dances to their profits from selling items.

Compensation aside, the prisoners “said very frankly that they liked to dance – they had grown up with the love of dancing.”⁵⁰ These hired dances let them outside of the prison and allowed them to perform something that had been forbidden, especially under Commander Roberts. The prisoners also may have used the dances as a way to help the sick. When “Arnold the settler” hired the young men to dance at the County Fair, the “wapiyapi” (medicine man) led the dance to help the sick left behind at the prison. Upon questioning by Stephen Riggs, a dancer “took the

48. Barton, *John P. Williamson*, 69; “Put Them Where They Belong,” *Morning Democrat*, 6/23/1865; Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 7/7/1865, folder 12, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS; *Missionary Herald* 60 (1864), 138; Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 3/23/1864, folder 11, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; Stephen Riggs to Mary Riggs, 9/12/1864, folder 7, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

49. Stephen Riggs to “My Dear Home,” 10/25/1865, folder 3, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS; Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 12/12/1865, folder 12, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS; Stephen Riggs to “My Dear Home,” 9/30/1865, folder 3, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

50. Stephen Riggs to “My Dear Home,” 10/25/1865, folder 3, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

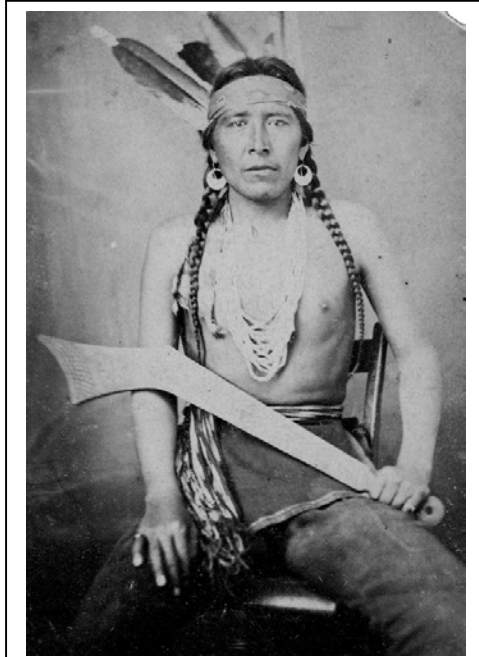
ground that the wapiyapi was right. It was right to heal the sick and to keep men from dying, and this was the only mode of doing so that they understood."⁵¹ Thus, the dance can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Arnold and fair participants were entertained and amused by the "savage" dance. As a Protestant missionary, Stephen Riggs derided the dancers for embracing "superstition" and "heathenism." The dancers themselves, however, may have viewed their dance as a way to save the lives of their fellow prisoners who were dying from smallpox and other diseases without medical care.

Wamditanka (Jerome Big Eagle) — and perhaps other prisoners as well — also demanded payment for taking his picture. W. W. Hathaway, the assistant commissary at the prison, wanted to take a formal portrait of Wamditanka dressed up in his "Indian clothing." According to an article in the *Davenport Weekly Democrat*, "Big Eagle put on all his finery and paraphernalia and we went down to the studio of a photographer. . . . Everything went well until we neared the place when Big Eagle began to remove his finery. We asked him what the trouble was and he said he would not pose unless we paid him \$15."⁵² In addition to asking for payment, Wamditanka, historian Stephanie Pratt argues, transformed the portrait into "a means of self-expression and self-representation." In the photograph, he wore six eagle feathers and held a gunstock club (although the blade had been removed) which signified his importance as a warrior. He posed without a gun, thus insisting "on a more Native based understanding of warfare and indigenous signification systems."⁵³ On several different levels, Wamditanka manipulated a situation that at first glance seemed designed to exploit and stereotype the warrior.

51. Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 12/12/1865, folder 8, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS. Riggs translated *wapiya* as "to conjure the sick"; *wapiyapi* was "conjuring," while *wapiye* was "a conjurer, an Indian doctor." Of course, from Riggs's perspective, "conjuring" was a "savage" practice that needed to be discontinued prior to accepting Christianity. See Stephen R. Riggs, *A Dakota-English Dictionary* (1890; reprint, St. Paul, MN, 1992), 533–34.

52. *Davenport Weekly Democrat*, 9/28/1905, quoted in "Iowa's Rendezvous Camps," 563.

53. Stephanie Pratt, "Restating Indigenous Presence in Eastern Dakota and Ho Chunk (Winnebago) Portraits of the 1830s–1860s," in *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming*, ed. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Rebecca Tillett (Albany, NY, 2013), 18, 25–26.



Wamditanka (Big Eagle) demanded payment for this portrait and staged the image himself. "Big Eagle, leader in the U.S.-Dakota War," 1863, Simon & Shepherd, Collections Online, Minnesota Historical Society, E91.1W r19. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Finally, several prisoners enlisted missionaries who visited them throughout their confinement to fight for compensation owed to them for lands lost in Minnesota following their exile from the state. Red Iron spoke to John Williamson during his visit to Camp Kearney. After the visit, Williamson wrote to Stephen Riggs, stating that "Red Iron has heard he has some money in lands. He wants you to draw it and send it to him. I send you his receipt which you can use if the money is there. . . . If you send a draft I can cash it here" and give it to Red Iron. Another time, Thomas Williamson received some "Minnesota money" from a prisoner's land claim. In Iowa, however, the Minnesota money was useless, so Williamson worked to find out how much the

money was worth so that he could “pay the amount . . . to whom it belongs.” Sarah Marpihdagawin asked Episcopal Bishop Henry Whipple for assistance getting land for her son so that they could “once more look upon the faces of our relatives in Minnesota.”⁵⁴

The amount of money collected from all of these sources was not insignificant. Compensation for land claims and photographs tended to bring in one-time payments. The sale of manufactured items was much more lucrative. Weekly forays into Davenport to sell “trinkets” brought in approximately \$80 to \$100 a week – and sometimes more. For example, “in the last week of their imprisonment, the [prisoners] worked in real earnest, making bows and arrows, which the women and boys took down to the town to sell.” By Saturday, they had raised \$80. Another week netted them “nearly ninety dollars.” In one month, Stephen Riggs reported, the prisoners raised over \$230 of “their own money” (equivalent to approximately \$3,600 in 2016 dollars).⁵⁵

The prisoners used these funds to help survive their confinement. Although conditions improved slightly after 1864, inmates at Camp Kearney still lacked necessities, including blankets, clothing, and food. The money they raised helped to fill some of those gaps. At times, the prisoners shopped for themselves. However, some members of the public complained about prisoners “congregat[ing] before stores to the great annoyance and fright of the women and children.” It was easier, then, to have intermediaries, especially Protestant missionaries, make purchases for them. In June 1864 Thomas Williamson wrote that he spent “four to five or six hours a week in going to the city and making purchases for them.” Over the months, Williamson used the Dakotas’ money to purchase spectacles, clothing, blankets, bread, “light” (presumably lanterns), and other “sundries.”⁵⁶

54. John P. Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 7/14/1864, folder 13, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 2/17/1865, folder 17, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; Hyman, *Dakota Women’s Work*, 115.

55. *Missionary Herald* 62 (1866), 164; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kari*, 372; Stephen Riggs to Thomas Williamson, 3/26/1863, folder 12, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

56. Editorial, *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 8/19/1864; Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 6/12/1864, folder 11, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; *Missionary Herald* 60 (1864), 138.

In addition to purchasing goods for themselves, the prisoners sent blankets, clothing, and money to their families at Crow Creek. In 1865 the prisoners mailed their relatives “a supply of clothing.” A prisoner called “Joe Allord” sent \$20 to his wife, “Mniordawin,” at Crow Creek. Another prisoner sent Thomas Williamson \$10 to forward to his family.⁵⁷ The mailed goods went both ways. Although those at Crow Creek also suffered starvation, disease, and oppression, they managed to send moccasins, clothing, blankets, and money from Crow Creek to Camp Kearney.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, on numerous occasions the prisoners failed to receive their packages from their relatives. During his visits, Thomas Williamson heard complaints from prisoners who failed “to get money and other things sent them by their friends.” Williamson agreed to investigate. Visiting the camp’s “mail shanty,” he found it to be a mess and agreed that the prisoners’ packages were probably lost. Williamson stopped short of accusing the guards of stealing the prisoners’ goods, but that was certainly implied by his investigation.⁵⁹

Although the prisoners failed to receive some of their packages, they did successfully exchange hundreds of letters with their relatives at Crow Creek. By 1864, almost all of the prisoners had learned to read and write in the Dakota language from the Protestant missionaries.⁶⁰ The amount they spent on sending letters to Crow Creek illustrates the importance they placed on maintaining kin ties during their forced separation. Again, Thomas and John Williamson and Stephen Riggs used Dakota funds to facilitate this communication. During one trip to Davenport, Williamson “purchased for them stationary, including postage

57. John P. Williamson to Thomas Williamson, 1/24/1865, folder 3, box 1, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, MHS; John Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 7/5/1864, folder 13, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS; Hyman, *Dakota Women’s Work*, 115.

58. John Williamson to Thomas Williamson, 1/5/1865, folder 3, box 1, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, MHS.

59. Thomas Williamson to Stephen Riggs, 1/22/1865, folder 17, box 1, Stephen R. Riggs and Family Papers, MHS. Evidence does not show whether Williamson’s inquiry yielded any improvements.

60. In November 1863 Stephen Riggs noted, “I think the number of readers is about two hundred” at Camp Kearney. Stephen Riggs to Selah Treat, 11/7/1863, MSS 310 no. 36, ABCFM Papers.

stamps to the amount of between twenty and thirty dollars, with their own money." Riggs confirmed that the prisoners used money from their sales to supply themselves with "materials for writing." On July 1, 1864, Williamson spent \$116 on postage for letters and packages mailed from Davenport to Crow Creek.⁶¹

Of course, communicating with their relatives through letters was not enough. The prisoners wanted to leave Camp Kearney entirely and be reunited with their families. The missionaries noted that "there is an increased longing to be released. They want to get back to their own people."⁶² To achieve that goal, some prisoners again enlisted the missionaries to fight for their freedom. First, the prisoners used the paper, ink, and stamps they purchased to write numerous letters to Stephen Riggs and Bishop Henry Whipple proclaiming their innocence. Fifty of the letters they wrote to Riggs have been translated by contemporary Dakota elders; many more letters in the Minnesota History Center's archives remain untranslated. While covering numerous issues, including conversion to Christianity, many of these letters professed the prisoners' innocence and asked the missionaries to fight for their freedom. For example, Elias Ruben Ohanwayakapi wrote to Riggs asking for "help from you all." He noted that he had "killed not one American, yet I have suffered for a long time." He implored Riggs and his fellow missionaries to let government officials know that he was innocent of charges so that he could end his lengthy prison sentence. Another prisoner, Antoine Provençalle, wrote that he had "not participated in any bad things our Dakota have done, now I have suffered terribly for a long time." He asked Riggs to "see Major Forbes" about obtaining his release. Wamditanka stated that he "had not been a murderer, or present when a murder had been committed." He especially pleaded his case to Thomas Williamson, noting that he "was at home on the morning when the traders were killed at the Lower Agency." Many other prisoners also professed their innocence to both missionaries and government officials.⁶³

61. *Missionary Herald* 60 (1864), 138; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kań*, 372; "Postage Receipt," 7/1/1864, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, MHS.

62. *Annual Report of the ABCFM* (1865), 143.

63. Elias Ruben Ohanwayakapi to Stephen Riggs, 6/25/1864, folder 12, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS (translated in 2016 by Louis Garcia and Eric

In addition to writing letters asking the missionaries to fight for their freedom, the prisoners helped to pay for Thomas Williamson's April 1864 trip to Washington, D.C., where the elderly missionary met with government officials to ask for the prisoners' release. Prior to his trip, "Dakota prisoners . . . gave Williamson \$80 of their own money which they had raised selling bows and arrows to local citizens." After his return, Stephen Riggs reported that the prisoners "appropriated the entire earnings of a week, amounting to nearly ninety dollars, to reimburse expenses incurred in efforts to obtain their liberation." During his time in Washington, D.C., Williamson met with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and President Lincoln, both of whom "declared themselves in favor of releasing part of the prisoners." However, the president "made a proviso" that the Minnesota delegation in Congress needed to approve the prisoners' release. Unsurprisingly, the Minnesota congressmen refused.⁶⁴

Although Williamson failed to obtain the release of the majority of Dakota prisoners as he had hoped, on April 30, 1864, Lincoln issued an order releasing 25 of them. Lincoln also promised Williamson that he would soon free all of the other prisoners. Unfortunately, Lincoln's assassination put the plan on hold, and the surviving inmates waited another two years until President Andrew Johnson finally ordered their release in April 1866.

Conclusion, 1865–1867

In the 1867 *Annual Report of the ABCFM*, Thomas Williamson and Stephen Riggs noted that, following their exile from Minnesota, the Dakota "encountered many trials and discouragements."⁶⁵

DuMarce); Canku and Simon, *Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, 61; Jerome Big Eagle, "A Sioux Story of the War," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 6 (1884), 399; Thomas Williamson, "Information on Prisoners," 2/12/1864, in MSS 122 Williamson Family Papers, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL.

64. *Missionary Herald* 62 (June 1866), 164; Riggs, *Tah-Koo Wah-Kań*, 372; Stephen Riggs to Alfred Riggs, 4/19/1864, Alfred L. Riggs Papers, Oahe Mission Collection, South Dakota Conference of the United Church of Christ Archives, CWS. The ABCFM also contributed funds to Williamson's trip. See Selah Treat to Thomas Williamson, 1/25/1864, ABCFM Indians vol. 23, p. 282, ABCFM Papers.

65. *Annual Report of the ABCFM* (1867), 130.

By any standard, that is an understatement. The prisoners in Davenport and their relatives at Crow Creek faced disease, emotional and physical abuse, and separation from their kin. It is a testament to both groups that they used all options available to endure the unspeakable hardships that followed their expulsion from Minnesota in 1863. As one survival tactic, the Camp Kearney prisoners used various techniques to raise money; they spent those funds on items that would ameliorate their situation and that of their families. They also used some of the funds to fight for their freedom and to attempt to maintain kinship ties through letters.

Despite this resistance, the amount of suffering—both emotional and physical—cannot be overstated. Blankets, clothing, and lanterns certainly helped, but deaths continued within the unhealthy prison during their last year of imprisonment. Stephen Riggs made two visits to Camp Kearney in September 1865 and January 1866, the latter just prior to the prisoners' release in April. In 1865 he noted that the prisoners still suffered from pulmonary consumption, smallpox, and "ophthalmia," which led to blindness.⁶⁶ In January 1866 five prisoners died, as "the waves of cold prove[d] to be waves of death to the sick." Also in 1866 the poor, cheap construction came back to haunt officials when "one of the buildings in the Indian camp fell down—being pressed by a weight of snow. . . . Fortunately no one was injured by its fall."⁶⁷ The collapsed building was just one symbol of the generally decrepit nature of Camp Kearney after three years of use. While a brisk correspondence continued between Crow Creek and Davenport, the letters produced anguish, as they often brought bad news, and both sides felt powerless to help their relatives.

Yet the money the prisoners raised allowed them to purchase items that helped themselves and their families. The funds, however, were predicated on the fact that members of the public viewed the Dakota as less than human—as exotic, defeated spectacles and even as animals to be "petted."⁶⁸ Nothing illustrates this better than the "horse-versus-Indian races" that were held at

66. Stephen Riggs to Mary Riggs, 9/30/1865, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

67. Stephen Riggs to "Dear Ones at Home," 1/25/1866, folder 3, box 3, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, CWS.

68. A journalist described visitors at the prison "petting" the "animals." See Carlson, "They Tell Their Story," 262.

a racetrack in Muscatine, Iowa, in October 1865. Guards transported several Camp Kearney prisoners to the racecourse and dehumanized them by giving them stereotyped names, including "Deerfoot" and "Fleetwing." For a purse of \$1,000, the Dakota racers ran a little over four miles, while racehorses brought in from Chicago covered eight miles at the same time. Organizers also staged a series of shorter man-versus-horse races with prizes of \$500, \$100, and \$50. The *Davenport Daily Gazette* enticed its readers to attend, noting that "it would be *very* funny to see a half-naked human trying to outrun a beast." The races would be "excellent," "exciting," and "lots of fun." Spectators watched a horse win the longer race, but Dakota runners won some of the shorter contests. The prize money was not insignificant, but it came at a great cost. No amount of money could compensate for the fact that the races dehumanized, exploited, and humiliated the Dakota racers for entertainment. Even the *Davenport Daily Gazette* later questioned the races. One of its editorials criticized its rival, the *Democrat*, for calling the races "excellent" and observed that while "there is some excuse for trying the speed . . . of horses," there is "none for matching a man against a brute."⁶⁹

Not just at the races, but during their entire imprisonment, citizens of Davenport constructed "white man's Indians," as historian Robert Berkhofer Jr. called them. These "Indians" had no relationship to the prisoners' daily lives, personalities, or life histories.⁷⁰ The representations presented the Dakota as caricatures and attempted to silence their voices. However, Dakota men and women, including Wamditanka, Elias Ruben Ohanwayakapi, Antoine Provençalle, Robert Hopkins, and hundreds of the other prisoners, refused to be silenced. They turned the public's gaze back on itself, and used the public's fascination "in ways not intended by the dominant culture."⁷¹ The prisoners made and sold objects to tourists and performed dances that capitalized on the

69. "Indian Races," *Daily Democrat*, 10/17/1865; "What Next?" *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 10/18/1865; "The *Democrat* Thinks . . ." *Daily Democrat*, 10/21/1865; "The Races," *Daily Democrat*, 10/20/1865; "The Races," *Daily Democrat*, 10/21/1865.

70. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1979).

71. Neel, "Tourism and the American West," 518.

public's fantasies of stalwart Indian warriors and exotic Indian princesses. While funds raised from these activities helped to ameliorate some of the material conditions at Camp Kearney and Crow Creek, they could not begin to erase the three years of continuous trauma suffered by the prisoners and their families.