

Lewis Brockman

[This account has been written and submitted by Curtis Dahlin on behalf of his grandchildren, Ellie and Andrew Phillips, who are six and four years of age. They are the great-great-great-great grandchildren of Lewis Brockman.]

Lewis Brockman was a surveyor who was born in Mecklenburg, Germany, in about 1828. He was living in New Ulm by 1860, working at his surveying business. The Dakota attacked settlers living in Milford Township just outside of New Ulm on August 18, 1862. Terrified men, women and children, some of them wounded, rushed into New Ulm, reciting their tales of terror. An attack on the town was expected at any time, so the citizens worked to erect barricades around several substantial brick and stone buildings which were in the central business district. At the break of day on the morning of August 19, Lewis Brockman set up his surveying instrument on the flat roof of the Erd Building, which was a 2-story structure. Here, he watched for the approach of the Dakota.

At about 3 p.m. that day, he saw the Dakota coming from the northwest, which was the direction of their reservation. The Dakota, who numbered perhaps 100 or so, attacked the town of 900 residents, plus those many settlers who had fled there. The defenders did manage to hold out, in spite of being poorly armed. Those many men who did not have guns armed themselves with pitchforks, axes and iron bars, which they intended to use if things went badly for the defenders and hand-to-hand combat ensued. Some residents of New Ulm were killed, and several buildings were burned. It is unknown if any Dakota were killed.

In the following days, Lewis or perhaps an assistant continued to scan the countryside, looking for Dakota. In the morning of August 23, Brockman saw smoke to the northwest, in the direction of Fort Ridgely. Plumes of smoke began to rise from various points, as the Dakota who were advancing on New Ulm burned settlers buildings. This time, the Dakota came in large numbers – perhaps 650. But New Ulm had received reinforcements in the form of militia units from Le Sueur, St. Peter and Mankato. Even so, the battle which took place that day was very intense and closely fought, with the outcome hanging in the balance. Nearly 30 defenders were killed along with an unknown number of Dakota. But still the defenses held. Running short of food and fearing yet a third attack, the town was evacuated on August 25. Brockman and his surveying instrument, which had served its unusual purpose so well, was one of the 2,000 people who left the town.

Unfortunately, little is known about Lewis or his life. He later lived at or on Lake Minnetonka in Hennepin County. He died there in 1875 and is buried at an unknown location.