

Article take from THE ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS NEWSPAPER (August 15,1926)

## WARNING UNHEEDED, CHILDREN SEE PARENTS DIE

Brother and Sister living here, Tell of massacre of 1862 in which Father, Mother, Sister were killed.

“The wolf! The wolf! Everyone remembers the fable of the boy who shouted the false alarm as a prank, and then when the danger really came, shouted in vain for help, because the people believed he was up to his old trick.

So when the parents of John Kochendorfer, now a truck farmer of South Park, were told by their son the day before the great Sioux massacre of August 18,1962, that an Indian woman had given warning that the Indians were about to attack the Whites, they gave no heed, for this same woman squaw had spread a similar report three years before. Many people at that time had left their homes in flight and no outbreak had occurred. Although John’s mother had been strangely prompted the week before to write to her sister, Mrs. Michael Evert, in Illinois, expressing herself ready to die, this presentment was not definite enough to cause her any great apprehension.

Both she and her husband and one of their five children were slain in the raid.

The sixty-fourth anniversary of the massacre falls on Wednesday this week. John Kochendorfer and his sister, Mrs. Rose Keller, 756 Waseca Street, St. Paul, related their experience recently to a Pioneer Press reporter. Mr. Kochendorfer was 11 years old at the time of the outbreak; his sister Rose was 9. John saw both parents murdered by the band that attacked his home; Rose was standing with her father’s hands on her shoulders when a treacherous Indian, whom they had shown hospitality shot him in the back.

“Our mother, standing at the corner of the house, her arms up, screaming, was the last sight we had of her,” Mrs. Keller said.

“By this time the rest of the Indians had arrived and were running here and there looking for us. We saw one of them take a pointed stick that father had used to pack dirt around fence posts and pierce fathers breast with it.”

“Another Indian picked up a club and threw it after us. It grazed Margaret’s ear as she climbed over a log that lay across our path.”

Then began the children’s flight of 25 miles to Fort Ridgely, through a country where the Indians were searching for any whites who had not already reached that place of safety.

“Our parents, who were natives of Germany, arrived at St. Paul by steamboat in 1857 and lived there till the spring of 1862.” Mrs. Keller said “Our father was part owner of the first threshing machine in the vicinity of St. Paul and when threshing was not in progress he was employed as

a teamster and freighter.

“In April of 1862 father again moved his family of five children....there were, besides John and me...Kate 7, Margaret 5, and Sarah 3. Our new abode was a homestead above Red falls, on which father had previously located near what was then the Lower Agency, near the present site of Redwood Falls.”

“Our three horses, a wagon, a cow and household goods were unloaded on the Minnesota river bank from a steamboat. We set up our coal stove: mother cooked dinner, set the table and we had a hearty meal. Then we loaded our belongings and drove eight miles to our new home. Father pitched a large tent in which we lived while he broke up some land, planted a garden and also oats and corn, felled trees and built a log house into which we had partly moved at the time of the massacre. The land in front of our house was prairie and back of it was forest.”

“Our life during the spring and early part of the summer was peaceful and uneventful. Most of the families in our settlement were Germans, honest, industrious, God-fearing people. The Indians came across the Minnesota river to visit us nearly every day and were always friendly. We learned a little of the Sioux language..enough so that we could understand them.”

“On Sunday, the day before the massacre, nearly 100 adults and about 30 children were present at a religious service at the home of a Mr. Lettau, a throng so large that most of the men and boys sat outside the open door to listen to the sermon. Of all within 24 hours, not more than 30 were living. The others, including the minister, Rev. Mr. Mierentz of the Evangelical association, had been murdered by the Indians.”

“Father had been asked permission by a band of Sioux the day before to store some of their belongings in our house. They said that they were going to fight the Chippewa’s and were afraid their goods would be stolen by the enemy. So they were allowed to conceal beneath our beds their tomahawks and other articles of warfare.”

“On Monday an Indian wearing a belt of cartridges and carrying a gun came to the house. Before this we had seen red men armed only with bows and arrows.”

“Soon we children saw a band of Indians in our field and reported to father. He came from the house, stood beside me with his hands on my shoulders. I had mounted a bench to see whether the Indians were stealing our turnips and saw that they were. Then the Indian who had accepted our hospitality shot father. He fell to the ground carrying me down with him. John, running toward the woods, saw the Indian turn and shoot toward mother...who was still at her washing.”

“We girls afraid the Indians would find us under the bed, where we had taken refuge, ran outdoors...all but Sarah, who would not follow us, and who soon after was slain. Father, still lying on his back, was unable to speak, but he groaned and motioned for us to run into the woods.”

“We met John in the forest. He said that we should go to a neighbor’s home in the river bottoms, so we went a little way through the heavy timber, then crossed a small strip of breaking

that father had recently done, and reached the bluff overlooking our neighbor's place. Our gaze rested on Indians in the act of killing our friends there."

"Father had once pointed out to John the direction of the New Ulm road, from which, some distance on, the Fort Ridgely road branched off across the prairie. As we walked on we heard now and then the sound of guns and we hid in the long grass until we felt that the danger had passed...We had gone 11 weary miles, carrying the smaller children part of the time...We met a neighbor whose wife, children, brother and mother-in-law had been killed by the Indians that morning. About sunset neighbors driving ox teams to Fort Ridgely reached Beaver Creek, where we had hid. They took us with them to Fort Ridgely."

"At the gates of the fort we were refused admittance because the people within feared that the Indians would rush the gate were they to open it. So we slept under the wagons until next morning, in peril of possible night attack on the fort by the savages, who would have had us at their mercy. The next morning the fort's gates opened and admitted us, and we remained there through the memorable siege that was ended by the appearance of the relief expedition led by General Sibley."

"Our adventures were not then at an end. On the way to St. Paul the steamboat struck a snag and sank. The upper deck was not submerged and there the crew managed to distribute the passengers so that the boat kept on its keel until all persons on board had gone ashore in skiffs."

The Kochendorfer children were taken into the homes of friends in St. Paul. John and Margaret became members of the household of Gottfried Schmidt on a farm in the district now the site of South St. Paul. Before John married he bought 50 acres and he and his bride went to live on the land and have remained there since that time. Twenty acres have been sold for industrial and residential occupancy. The 30 acres that remain comprise a farm that is worked by John Kochendorfer and his son Carl who lives near the old homestead. Of the four other children, Milton, a son-in-law of Andrew Schoch, lives in St. Paul; Alfred near Highwood, Verna (Mrs. A.E. Hopkins) in Long Beach California, and Miss Hazel, a teacher in the Van Buren school in St. Paul at home.

When John Kochendorfer was 30 years old, he received a letter from a Mr. Timm, who had homesteaded on the land where John's parents had been slain, and which had reverted to the government. Mr. Timm wrote that while he was digging post holes for a garden fence he had found the graves of Mr. and Mrs. Kochendorfer and little Sarah for which John had searched futilely some time after the massacre. Burial of all three in Oakland cemetery, St. Paul, followed as the final incident of the family's tragedy.

(I have retyped this account as it was written in the Pioneer Press since the copy of the paper was difficult to read in places. Growing up, my sister and I remember hearing of this story and my Grandma and Grandpa Keller had a copy of this paper. As I got older the historical significance of this story interested me. Rose Keller was Grandpa Perle's mother....so Rose would be my Great grandmother. It was hard for me to grasp that this event happened to the Kochendorfer

family...which really was not that long ago. Unfortunately, I did not know Rose ...She certainly seemed to be a strong spirited woman who was somehow able to deal with this tragic event.)

Joyce A Keller