



History of the Spirit Lake massacre and captivity of Miss Abbie Gardner

Abbie Gardner-Sharp

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The last Indian raid in Iowa

The winter of 1856-7 was a particularly severe one in Iowa, with prolonged heavy snowfall across the region. In March 1857 a chronic shortage of game and other food persuaded the renegade Santee Sioux leader, Scarlet Point, to lead a band of fourteen warriors into the widely separated settlements near the Okoboji and Spirit Lakes, in north western part of the state close to the Minnesota border. Whether or not the violence that followed could have been avoided is unclear, but certainly the Indians had enough experience to know that they could expect little charity from the settlers who had treated them harshly in the recent past. The raid resulted in the deaths of some 35-40 pioneer settlers as the Indians plundered their properties for provisions. The war party also took prisoners-three married women and a girl-whom they dragged northwards into the wilderness. A relief party from Fort Dodge, hampered by the extreme weather failed to defend the settlements and another from Fort Ridgely was unable to catch up to the fugitives. The youngest of the captives was fourteen year old Abie Gardner. She was held prisoner until the summer months of 1857 before being freed on payment of ransom. Two of the adult women were murdered but Margaret Ann Marble, the last of them, was also ransomed. This was the last Indian raid on settlers in Iowa though dissatisfaction among the Sioux was to lead to the Sioux Uprising and far greater bloodshed. Abie Gardner eventually married and, after a period away from her family home, returned to live in the cabin from which she was abducted and from there sold her book about the raid, her capture and ordeal to interested visitors. Leonaur editions are newly typeset and are not facsimiles; each title is available in softcover and hardback with dustjacket; our hardbacks are cloth bound and feature gold foil lettering on their spines and fabric head and tail bands.

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