

SIBLEY'S VISIT TO THE UPPER MINNESOTA IN 1835

Henry H. Sibley's unfinished autobiography has an interesting story which involved Joseph Renville and Dr. Thomas S. Williamson. Sibley arrived in Minnesota late in 1834. As the representative of the American Fur Company he desired to visit the firm's trading posts. In doing so he ascended the Minnesota River. Though he visited Lac qui Parle, he did not mention the fact. He wrote:

"In the fall of 1835, I started with but one of my voyageurs, both of us being mounted, to visit and inspect the trading posts, established at long distances from each other.

"The last trading post visited, was situated on the bank of Lake Travers, near the source of the Minnesota River.... The clerk I had placed in charge

of this important depot, was no less a personage than Major Joseph R. Brown....

"A sad accident occurred during my stay, which narrowly escaped being fatal to a pretty Indian girl. Several of us were engaged in pistol shooting at a mark, Joseph Renville the trader at Lac qui Parle, being present, and of the number. He was practising with a fine pair of duelling pistols, furnished with hair triggers, which were the gift to him of a British officer with whom he had become acquainted. When his turn to fire came, he had set the hair trigger of the pistol, and being un-accustomed to so delicate an arm, he unfortunately touched the trigger before taking aim, and the pistol was discharged, sending its missile into a group of women and children, who were assembled to witness the sport. The report was followed by a piercing shriek from the sixteen year old girl, and she was seized by the older women, and placed on a bed in the nearest building. I followed to ascertain the extent of the injury inflicted, and found the bed surrounded by wailing females, who were doing nothing for the sufferer. I pushed them rudely aside for it was no time for ceremony, and found that the girl had been shot in the groin, the ball passing through that portion of the body. I was soon satisfied that no artery, or other important blood vessel had been severed, as there was but little hemorrhage from the wound. My limited knowledge of surgery would not permit of a further diagnosis, but I feared that inflammation might supervene, and prove fatal to the patient. Knowing that Doctor Williamson, a missionary, and physician of repute, was at Lac qui Parle, sixty miles distant, I suggested to Renville, an instant departure for that post, with a view of procuring his aid as soon as possible. We forthwith started, after prescribing the application of cold water to the injured parts, and rode rapidly with a hope of reaching Lac qui Parle some time during the night. But we were overtaken by a fearful wind, and rain storm, after having accomplished about half the route, and the night was so dark, that we could not follow in the proper direction, and were forced to lie down in the prairie, at the crossing the Pomme de Terre River, exposed to the peltings of the tempests until dawn. On arriving at the station, we hastened the departure of the Doctor, who willingly complied with our urgent request, and I continued on my homeward way. I was rejoiced to learn, subsequently, from Dr. Williamson, that the girl was doing well, and all

dangerous symptoms had disappeared. She entirely recovered, and eventually became the lawful wife of Major Brown, by whom she had a number of children, some of whom are yet living, as is the woman herself.

"We were overtaken by a driving snow storm in the wide prairie, the day after our departure from Lac qui Parle, and were glad to find partial shelter in a small grove of poplars, where we spent a day, and two comfortless nights, being poorly prepared for such premature winter experience. We reached Mendota safely, and without further adventure." (Minnesota History 8:359-361.)