

## Fort Fairmount

The early 1860s presented much different challenges to citizens of Fairmont and Martin County than they might encounter today. In August of 1862, shortly after the first settlers arrived in Martin County, the few citizens that comprised the population of Fairmont fled the area as news of Indian uprisings at the Lower Sioux Agency and New Ulm spread to the area. Surrounding community residents, as well as Fairmont residents, fled to what was considered better protected settlements to the east, including Winnebago.

Area residents, totaling about 300 persons, began their exodus at noon on August 26, 1862, after news reached here of the Indian attacks. The settlement in Fairmont, as well as neighboring settlements, were abandoned for more than a month. When military protection was eventually provided, some returned, while others were never heard from again.

Major General John Pope of the U. S. Army from St. Paul was sent by President Lincoln to this area as commander of the Department of the Northwest, a somewhat hastily formed military branch to meet the needs of the Indian threat. General Pope's forces included approximately 4,000 Civil War volunteers, comprised primarily of Minnesota volunteers, five companies of the 25<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry, and about 500 men from the 5<sup>th</sup> Iowa Cavalry.

On September 23, 1862, General Pope issued the order establishing Fort Fairmount. It was to become one of the protective forts on the southern Minnesota frontier. Captain Jeremiah Rusk, commander of Company K of the 25<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry, who later became governor of Wisconsin, was assigned to the Fairmont and Winnebago area. The soldiers of the 25<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry built Fort Fairmount in the fall of 1862 before being ordered south for Civil War duty.

Fort Fairmount was built of logs cut from what is now the Woodland Avenue area. The courthouse of that era, a wooden log building, was entirely enclosed by the fort. In addition, the fort included officer's quarters, barracks, and stables for horse. It was located at the site of the present Martin County Courthouse. In addition to Fairmont, the soldiers guarded the settlements of Elm Creek, East Chain, Twin Lakes, Tenhassen and Center Chain.

The company in Fairmont, which included about 80 officers and men, remained here until ordered to move south, at which time Captain Asgrim K. Skaro and Company D, 9<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Voluntary Infantry, took over the fort. Captain Hiram F. Bailey, commander of Company C of the 6<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, next arrived on the scene and took command of Fort Fairmount.

The soldiers stationed at Fort Fairmount were reportedly quite happy to be here. They deemed their duty at the fort a pleasant interlude preceding their Civil War assignments. They considered their quarters, location, as well as weather, to be very pleasant. The soldiers enjoyed the fishing and hunting of the area, including the hunting of buffalo spotted several times on the west shore of Lake Sisseton. They also captured live animals, some of which were foxes, prairie chickens, quail, cranes, geese, and ducks. A tamed hawk was said to leave, and then return to the camp in response to the bugle calls for meals.

Additional entertainment involved a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration in which invited relatives and guests came from Blue Earth City on up to St. Peter. The soldiers reportedly had good musicians among them, and provided a variety of musical selections for these celebrations.

With the fear of Indian uprisings diminishing, Fort Fairmount was abandoned and slowly disappeared. The settlers used some of the logs from the fort to build homes. A. L. Ward bought the old wood courthouse which he kept behind the Martin County National Bank for many years. The remains of that structure were eventually torn down in 1902. Today, the site of Fort Fairmount is remembered with a marker commemorating its historical significance on the grounds of the present Martin County Courthouse.

To find out more about Fort Fairmount and the early history of Martin County, visit the Pioneer Museum and review *The Daily Sentinel* Centennial edition of April 26, 1958, which served as one of the primary resources for this article.