

A. D. 1876

# The History of Morrison County

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Written by order of the Board  
of County Commissioners

# Organization of Morrison County

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Morrison County was organized by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Minnesota, approved February 25, A.D. 1856.

That portion of it laying east of the Mississippi river was originally a part of Benton County, and the portion afterwards added to it from the west side of the Mississippi river was taken from the original territory of Todd County. The originally organized portion of the County, consisting of what lies east of the Mississippi river, is 23 miles wide from north to south, and averages 27 miles from east to west; and that portion west of the Mississippi river averages 37 miles from north to south, and 14 miles from east to west, making 518 square miles on the west side of the Mississippi river, and 621 square miles on the east side, and 1139 square miles in all.

At the first election, held April 14, A.D. 1856, the following named persons were elected to office.

Wm. Trask, Elliot J. Kidder, and W. W. Stebbins were elected County Commissioners. Nathan Richardson was elected Register of Deeds, and was therefore ex-officio Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners.

James Fergus was elected Judge of Probate; Jonathan Pugh, Sheriff; W. B. Fairbanks, District Attorney; W. W. Tuttle and John Fry, Assessors. The first meeting of the Board of County Commissioners was held at Little Falls, the County seat, May 1st A.D. 1856, at which meeting the County Commissioners organized election precincts, Little Falls, No. 1; Swan River, No. 2; Platte River, No. 3. The first term of Court was held May 15th A.D. 1856. On the 5th day of November, A.D. 1856, the Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution to pay Wm. Sturgis the sum of eight thousand dollars, to build a court house for Morrison County, and on the 24th day of that month, the said sum of eight thousand dollars in Morrison County Bonds was, by order of said Board, issued and delivered to the said Sturgis for said purpose. The bonds consisted of one thousand dollars each, the first falling due in three years, and one on each subsequent year until all became due and bearing interest at the rate of 12 per cent annum, until paid. Mr. Sturgis, being considered perfectly reliable, was only required to give his personal bond for the completion of his contract. He, however, proceeded to build a courthouse for the County, and after getting the same enclosed, he failed, leaving the house far from completed, but

## Sioux and Chippewa Occupation

had duly disposed of the bonds to a banker in Washington city, who demanded payments as the bonds fell due, but was refused payment by the County on account of the court house not being completed according to contract.

Finally, after many attempts at an adjustment of the bond claim, for several years, a compromise was effected, on the 1st day of July, A.D. 1869, under the administration of Wm. Butler, Wm. Harrison, and Richard L. Trask as County Commissioners, by which the old bonds were surrendered to the County, and new bonds were issued in their stead to the amount of eight thousand dollars, bearing seven per cent interest, one thousand dollars falling due each year until paid. The bonds have been promptly paid by the County as they have become due, leaving but one thousand dollars still unpaid. While some denounce the action of the County Board for the action they took with regard to the old bonds, the people generally approved of the terms of settlement.

I will not now pursue the doings of the County Commissioners farther, but will take up the history of the County before its organization.

Morrison County shows clear evidence of having been settled by a race anterior to the Indian, and of which the Indian himself has no tradition.

The principal evidence consists of mounds of earth thrown up in different parts of the County, which are found the most numerous east of Rice Creek Lake, near the north line of Sec. 8, Township 40, Range 31, where no less than a dozen appear upon the level prairie within a distance of sixty rods. They are now from 4 to 5 feet in height, and about 25 by 75 feet at the base.

So far as we have any account, the Sioux tribe of indians first occupied this section of the country, and was driven back from it to the south-west not far from one hundred years ago; but an incessant warfare was kept up between the Sioux and the Chippewa indians until the Sioux outbreak, in the fall of 1862. Although this was acknowledged to be Chippewa country long before the country commenced to be settled by the white people, there were frequently raiding parties of Sioux going through the country numbering from half a dozen to twenty five, passing through looking for Chippewa scalps. They frequently went as far up the Mississippi as Crow Wing, and generally as soon as they succeeded in getting a few scalps by pouncing upon some

## Conflicts Between the Sioux and Chippewa

unprotected mother and her children, they would make all possible speed back to their tribe and have a great scalp dance. The Chippewa hunted the Sioux in the same manner. The Chippewas, however, would frequently stop on their return from the war path when they had been successful in securing scalps, and entertain us, at Little Falls, with a big war or scalp dance. On the occasion of a successful raid, their joy apparently would know no bounds. The Chippewas were seldom known to treat the white settlers uncivilly, while out on the Sioux hunt; but the Sioux would frequently kill stock belonging to the settlers to supply themselves. Some made application to the Government to get pay for their stock out of the indian annuities, but found that if they had any rights that the indians were bound to respect, it would cost more to enforce them than the losses would amount to, therefore but few complaints were entered.

There are still plainly visible several pits, on the top of the east bank of the Mississippi river at Little Falls, and above, near the ferry. They are about twelve feet square, and dug to a depth of 2 ½ to 3 feet, and are about three rods apart. The same display of pits are found along the north shore of Fish Lake. They were quite fresh looking twenty-one years ago, when I first saw them. The statements of the indians conflict somewhat as to the use made of them. As to those dug at Little Falls, an indian who claims to have been present when they were made makes the following statement: They were dug in about the year 1835, on an occasion when a heavy battle was expected with the Sioux indians, who had collected in large numbers, on the high grounds back of Little Falls, while the Chippewas gathered along the Mississippi river bank, at the same time digging those pits as fortifications. Each party remained in position four days expecting to be attacked by the other, when the Sioux drew off and went in the direction of home without striking a blow for their native land. Among the Chippewa warriors old Hole-in-the-day and his son, bearing the same name, are supposed to have been the greatest. Old Hole-in-the-day, when a boy, resided near Sandy Lake, but after he became a man he resided mostly in Morrison County, generally near the mouth of the Little Elk river.

After a brilliant career as a great chief and warrior, he died at the residence of some half-breeds, about two miles north of Little Falls, on the east side of the Mississippi river. At his own request he was buried on a high eminence near by, on the range of bluffs east of the

## Hole-in-the-Day Threatens an Attack

Mississippi river.

The high peak where he was buried had been used as a point of look out for Sioux indians, as it commanded the view of a large extent of country.

His son succeeded him as Chippewa Chief, and, it may be said, gained a national reputation, not on account of his good qualities, but on account of his successful raids against their enemies, the Sioux indians. He had the pleasure of taking off many of their scalps with his own hand, and a very good job he made of it. Some specimens that I saw him bring up at one time included, not only the whole of the scalp, but a pair of ears besides, which, from their appearance, were not accustomed to the use of soap. He was always a very hard chief to make a treaty with, making very exorbitant demands from the government, and giving the agents generally a large amount of trouble, and appearing to be possessed of a treacherous and malignant disposition. In the fall of 1862 simultaneous with the Sioux outbreak of that year, Hole-in-the-day proceeded to organize the Chippewa warriors for an attack upon the white settlers in Northern Minnesota. He succeeded in raising about three hundred, mostly from Leech Lake and the upper Mississippi. They made prisoners of all the government employees about Leech Lake, and after gathering at Gull Lake, soon moved down near to Crow Wing. It is generally believed that his attack was first delayed, and finally abandoned, because Hole-in-the-day failed to get all of the Chippewa bands to unite with him in a war against the whites. The Mille Lacs band sent him word that in case of a war they would join the whites and fight against him, and, without doubt, there was a strong element in his own camp opposed to his scheme, headed by two of the most influential chiefs among the Leech Lake indians, Buffalo and Big Dog. The prisoners who were taken at Leech Lake agency, said that their lives were saved at the moment they were taken, only by the great exertions of these chiefs.

On that occasion, Buffalo sprang in front of the gun of a young warrior as he drew it up to shoot Arthur Garden, who was residing there with his family, but had previously resided in Little Falls.