



Left: Reverend W. H. Knowlton, Episcopal missionary, and Dakota men, Redwood Mission
Photographer: Edward Augustus Bromley
Subjects: Chanta-Wanica (James Hart, sitting left-side of photo), George W. Crooks, W. H. Knowlton, John Reuillard, Henry Whipple St. Clair (standing 2nd from left side of photo), White Spider (Little Crow's brother, sitting to the right of the Reverend)

Right: George Wakanajaja Holy Lightning Crooks, Stephen Crooks's grandfather, and one who Stephen looked up to.



Stephen Crooks, age 15, and his family, including his parents, Amos H. Crooks, Sr. (1886-1958) and Jemima LaBelle Crooks LaCroix moved from Prior Lake to Shakopee in 1923.

Stephen's grandparents were George Wakanajaja Holy Lighting Crooks (1856-1947) and Alice Tatawaŋ Blue Star Boyd Crooks (1865-1954); and Louis JR Heraka Hekeakea LaBelle, Jr. (1845-1927) and Martha Jojowiŋ Toyowiŋ Shortfood (1856-1935).

George wrote an account of the journey of the prison camp after the U.S.-Dakota War in the *Morton Enterprise*, January 29, 1909.

Though the war that ranged across southwestern Minnesota in 1862 between settler-colonists and a faction of Dakota people lasted for six weeks, its causes were decades in the making. Its effects are still felt today, according to *MinnPost*'s "The U.S.-Dakota war of 1862 lasted just six weeks, but its effects are still felt today."

George noted in the January 29, 1909 *Morton Enterprise*, "The excitement of the Indians knew no bounds when they realized they were in the power of the soldiers and the scene was terrifying to behold, fear and despair completely carried them away and the impression gained an everlasting hold on his [my] youthful mind.

"It was repeatedly told us we were all to be executed and the insults of the soldiers who spoke the Indian tongue seemed a convincing fact that all were to be put to death immediately. This cruel order was constantly in our minds until the verdict of our trial was given us through an interpreter, some months later.

"After the surrender the Indians were loaded into old Red River carts and started for the Lower Agency and Manatee. The carts were small, drawn by an ox, and it was with difficulty for any more than four persons to occupy the box. In the cart I was forced to occupy were two Indian men and my sixteen year old brother.

"We were bound securely and on our journey resembled a load of animals on their way to market. We traveled slow meeting now and then a white person who never failed to give us a look of revenge as we jolted along in our cramped condition.

"As we came near New Ulm my brother told me the driver was … afraid to go through New Ulm, my heart leaped into my mouth and I crouched down beside my brother completely overcome with fear. In a short time we reached the outskirts of the town and the long looked for verdict — death, seemed at hand.

"Women were running about, men waving their arms and shouting at the top of their voices, convinced the driver the citizens of that village were wild for the thirst of blood, so he turned the vehicle in an effort to escape the angry mob but not until too late, they were upon us.

"We were pounded to a jelly, my arms, feet, and head resembled raw beef steak. How I escaped alive has always been a mystery to me. My brother was killed and when I realized he was dead I felt the only person in the world to look after me was gone and I wished at the time they had killed me.

"We reached Mankato late that evening and the trial conviction and sentences are merely a matter of history. I can truthfully say the experience photographed on my youthful mind can never be defaced by time."

The December 26, 1862 mass hanging marked the end of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, which took place along the Minnesota River Valley that fall.

After the war, 1,600 Dakota were held at a camp at Fort Snelling and then sent out of state, while virtually all other Dakota fled Minnesota. A memorial to 38 Dakota men who were hanged in the largest mass execution in U.S. history was added in 2012.

"Today, being here to witness a great gathering, we have peace in our hearts — a new beginning of healing," said Arvol Looking Horse, the leader of the Dakota/Lakota tribe, according to the *Free Press of Mankato*.

Stephen always remembered what his grandfather said about the time, and it was always on his mind.

Stephen was a sixteen-year-old teenager who was chopping wood near his home on Third Street in Shakopee. Using an axe, he chopped wood, and suddenly he cut his foot.

In pain, Stephen was taken to Acker hospital in St Paul, where he was diagnosed with tetanus.





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Tetanus is a serious bacterial infection that causes painful muscle spasms and can lead to death.

The painful muscle contractions, particularly in the jaw and neck, can interfere with the ability to breathe, eventually causing death. And this happened in 1924 in Shakopee.

Stephen, age 16, died.

"The body was brought home Wednesday evening, and funeral services were held yesterday afternoon from the home on Third street…" said the *Shakopee Argus* on February 22, 1924.

Stephen's grandfather, George Wakanajaja Holy Lightning Crooks, a lay reader, officiated.

Interment was in the Valley Cemetery, according to the *Shakopee Argus*.

In 2000, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) established a community cemetery, and with the correct state permits and assistance from the proper authorities, Stephen Crooks's remains were moved to a new plot in SMSC.

It's traditionally done at dawn to deter gawkers and to avoid offense to funeral-goers. The aim is to rebury the body within a day, so it makes sense to start as early as possible.

For more information about the Dakota from the Shakopee area, please visit Hoċokata Ṫi, the SMSC cultural center and gathering space that is used to interpret and encourage traditional Mdewakanton Dakota cultural heritage, language, and history by sustaining this inherent knowledge for SMSC members through exhibitions, preservation, and education.





Bibliography

DeCario, Peter J. "The U.S.-Dakota war of 1862 lasted just six weeks, but its effects are still felt today." *MinnPost*, 7 Mar 2022. www.minnpost.com/mnopedia/2022/03/the-u-s-dakota-war-of-1862-lasted-just-six-weeks-but-its-effects-are-still-felt-today/.

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Stephen Crooks
1909-1924

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