

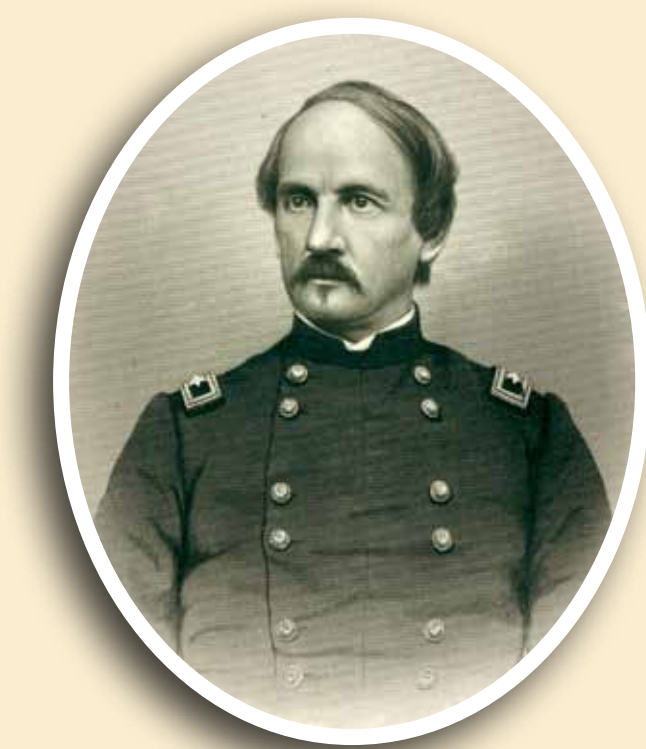
Captives Released



Camp Release, photographed by Adrian J. Ebell, a journalist covering the war

Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

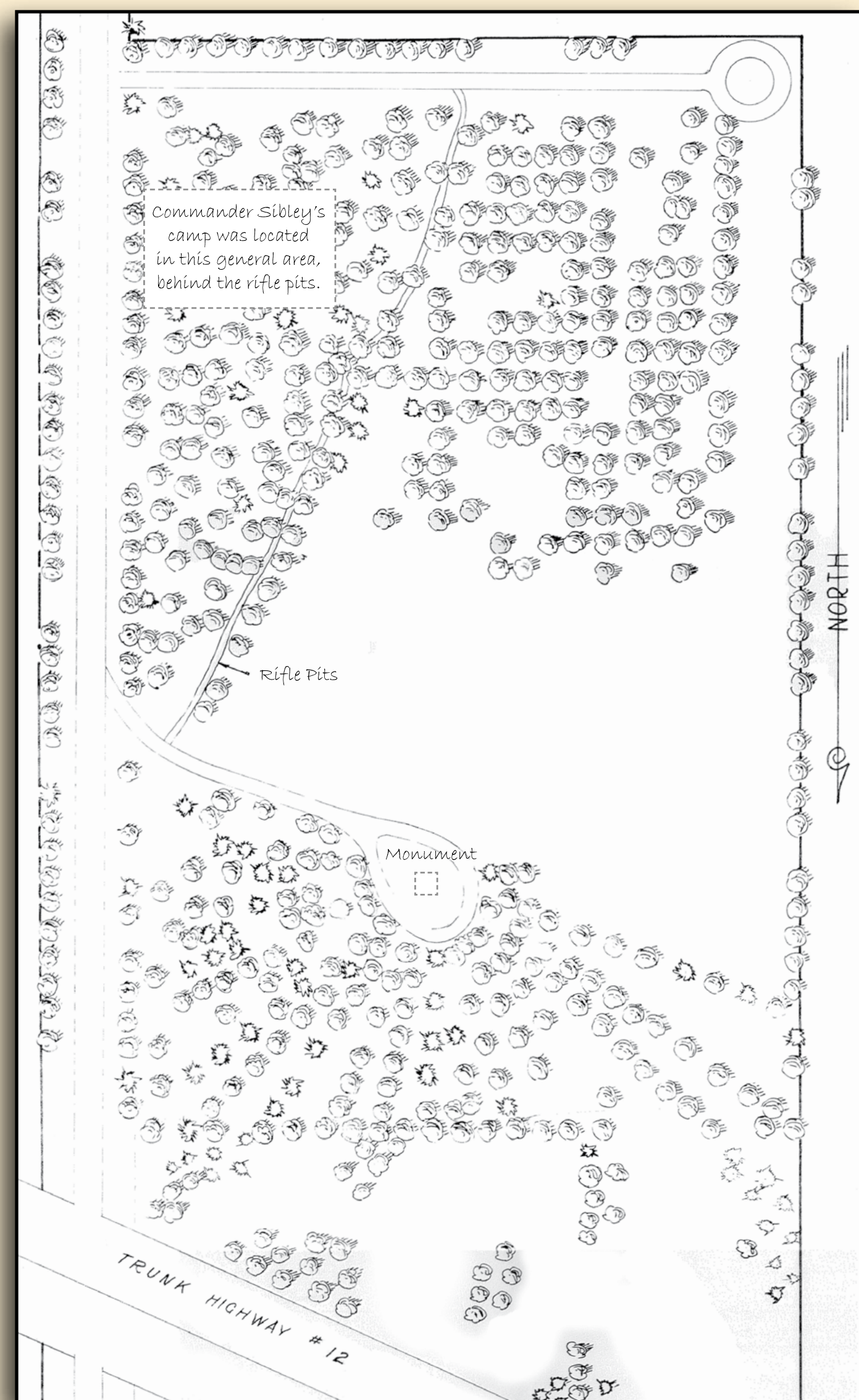
On September 26, 1862, the 270 men, women and children taken captive by the Dakota during the war were released to military commander Henry H. Sibley at this site, known from that time on as Camp Release.



Henry H. Sibley

J.C. Buttre, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Years later at the dedication of this monument, Major James Madison Bowler described the scene that September day: “The officers and frontier troops formed in line along the road near the wheat field...We had not [yet] had our tents pitched when General Sibley marched up and received the surrender of the Indians and the release of the captives....They marched down that slope and were delivered to us upon this very ground.”



This plan dates from 1894, when a monument was dedicated at Camp Release. Some of the trees planted to radiate out from the monument still stand today. Also still visible are the rifle pits built in Sibley's base camp to protect the officers' tents.

From Minnesota State Parks archives

Some of the freed captives also wrote of their experiences that day.

Samuel J. Brown

Seventeen-year-old Sam Brown was one of many captives released from the camp near Maza sa's village. He and his siblings, along with their mother, a member of the Sissetoway tribe, had been seized after their house was attacked and burned while their father, the prominent pioneer and politician Joseph R. Brown, was away on business. In his journals, young Sam told of the day Sibley and his men arrived to free them.



Samuel J. Brown

Minnesota Historical Society

“No grander sight ever met the eyes than when the troops marched by with bayonets glistening in the bright noonday sun, colors flying, drums beating, and fifes playing. I shall never forget it.... Very soon Colonel Sibley came into our camp and, after calling the Indians together, made formal demand for the captives, which were readily given up.”

Brown also made a count of those in the camp, which grew more crowded as other Dakota were brought in or came of their own accord. Excluding the soldiers, he wrote, “there were at Camp Release 2,188 souls — Indians 1,918, captive white men 4, captive white women and children 104, captive mixed bloods 162.”

From “In Captivity,” published in the Mankato Weekly Review, April–May, 1897.

Sarah Wakefield

The wife of the Yellow Medicine (Upper Sioux) Agency doctor, Sarah Wakefield was captured along with her two young children as they fled toward Fort Ridgely; a man accompanying them was killed. She later wrote about her fears and the hardships of life during her captivity but she praised the Dakota who had treated her kindly. Conditions during her brief stay at Camp Release proved difficult, too.

“About 3 o'clock Sibley and staff arrived and ordered those having prisoners to give them up. Old Eagle Head and C'aske came to get me and, before I left, the old woman tore her shawl and gave me half, as I had none. I was conducted to a large tent soon surrounded with soldiers. We were given some straw to lie on and a blanket. We must cook our own food exposed to the gaze of several hundred ignorant men....



Sarah Wakefield

Minnesota Historical Society

“[The following day] they had a sort of court inquiry, and we were all questioned....I left Camp Release with four ladies who had also been prisoners. We were sent away without any escort over 70 miles through the scene of those awful murders.”

From “Six Weeks in Sioux Teepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity” (University of Oklahoma Press).