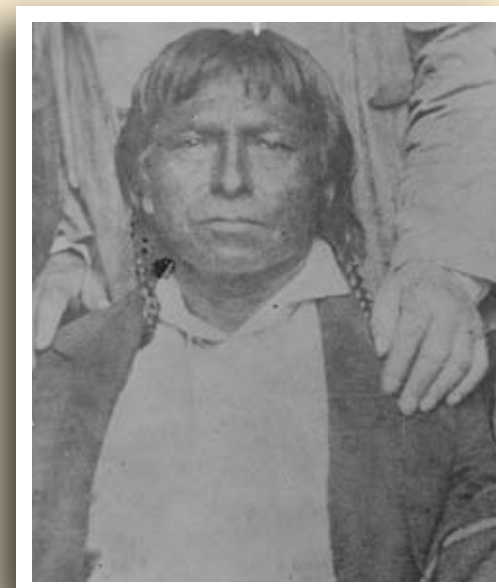


Taoyateduta Leads His People in War

On August 17, 1862, Dakota leaders held a series of councils to discuss going to war. Earlier that day an incident in Acton Township had brought conditions to a crisis when young Dakota hunters killed five immigrants. The council began at the Rice Creek village of Hoc' okatduta (Red Middle Voice), then moved to the village of S'akpedaj (Little Six), where the Dakota leaders sent word to others — Wabas'a (Red Staff), Wakute (I Shoot), Waymdi tan ka (Big Eagle), Maka to (Blue Earth) and Wasuhyahidan (Traveling Hail) — to meet at the house of Taoyateduta (Little Crow). Throughout the night, they debated what to do.

Some at the council thought they should turn in the young hunters. Others argued that the time was right to force the immigrant settlers out of the Dakota homeland; they had endured too many hardships, and the Dakota were not willing to sacrifice any more. But most agreed that their people faced grave risks in going to war; they would need a strong hand to lead them. Finally at daybreak, after long hours of debate, the council reached a decision. They would go to war, and they chose Taoyateduta to lead them.



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Wabas'a
(Red Staff)



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Wakute
(I Shoot, or The Shooter)



Human Studies Film Archives,
Smithsonian Institution

Waymdi tan ka
(Big Eagle)



Minnesota Historical Society

Maka to
(Blue Earth)



Charles DeForest Fredericks, courtesy
of Minnesota Historical Society

Wasuhyahidan
(Traveling Hail)



Julian Vannerson, courtesy of Denver Public Library, Western History Genealogy Department

Taoyateduta (Little Crow)

One of the Dakota leaders who had expressed grave doubts about going to war was Wasuhyahidan (Traveling Hail), chief speaker for the tribe:

We should not talk about war with the whites. Dakota are brave and proud, but [we] are not fools.... We have no cannons and little ammunition. There are few Dakotas and many Americans. The Americans are as many as the leaves on the trees in the Big Woods. Count your fingers all day long and white men with guns will come faster than you can count.

Taoyateduta (Little Crow) also said it was a war they could not win:

We are only little herds of buffalo left scattered; the great herds that once covered the prairies are no more. See — the white men are like locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm. You kill one, two, ten — yes, as many as the leaves in the forest, and their brothers will not miss them. Kill one, two, ten, and ten times as many will come to kill you.

But Taoyateduta had a duty to help his people. Despite his reservations, they chose him to lead them. He accepted the role, telling them:

Taoyateduta is not a coward. He will die with you.

As daylight broke on August 18, a group of Dakota crept toward the Redwood Agency, its inhabitants unaware of imminent attack. The war was about to begin.

Little Crow's words were written down by H. L. Gordon in 1891. Gordon claimed to have heard them directly from Little Crow's son, Wowinapa.

Struggles for a Home



The Minnesota River Valley has stories to tell...about the indigenous people struggling to keep their land and their way of life, and about immigrant families who began new lives here. Their stories came together, with tragic consequences for all, in what has become known as the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862 — a war that had repercussions for the whole country.



mnrivervalley.com

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