

MARTELL

A PIONEER GONE

From the December 29, 1904 edition of the "BIG STONE HEADLIGHT"

Big Stone City, South Dakota

Stories of early life and obituary

Contributed by Mrs. Lawrence C. Lissack  
(Musette Marian Lorenz, daughter of Jeanette Rosalie Martell Lorenz,  
daughter of Mary Jane Salisbury Murray Martell and Oliver Martell.)

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June 21 1978  
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From the newspaper "BIG STONE HEADLIGHT" Thursday Dec. 29, 1904  
Big Stone City, South Dakota Grant County

#### A PIONEER GONE

Oliver Martell, pioneer, trader, and early resident, died at his home here Thursday of heart trouble, in his 87<sup>th</sup> year.

He was born Nov. 6, 1818 in the Province of Quebec, Canada, and came to Green Bay, Wisconsin, when a lad of 17. He remained there about a year and then went to Grand Rapids where he engaged in lumbering for a time. A good share of his early life was spent in rafting lumber and he soon became a skillful pilot whose services were in great demand.

From this occupation he became an Indian Trader and few of the forest trails of the old Wisconsin but did receive the imprint of his roving moccasin. His occupation at this time supplied him with an immense fund of reminiscences of wild scenes and thrilling adventure. In 1855 he came to Minnesota with some capital and a partner, one St. Germain. They built a small sawmill at Waterville, starting the settlement there. The panic of 1857 followed and they were unable to dispose of their lumber and the investment proved disastrous. Mr Martell moved to the Lower Agency in the year of 1859 and began the operation of a ferry across the Minnesota River. This was his business at the time of the Indian Outbreak of 1862.

We quote from his own narrative of his experience at the time, which was reduced to writing some years ago. "Between seven and eight o'clock on the morning of August 18, 1862, I was standing in the door of my house by the ferry and Wacouta, a Sioux Indian chief's son appeared on the opposite side of the river, and shouted something to him (Wacouta) in the Indian language. Wacouta at once seemed excited and started quickly for the ferry and my partner ferried him across. Then he and his son disappeared in the direction of the agency. During the crossing of the river, firing of small arms and guns began at the Agency, accompanied by the war whoops of the Indians. The firing was sometimes desultory and again it sounded like a hundred or more being discharged simultaneously. As the ferry boat reached the other shore and the Indians left it, it was boarded by an Episcopal missionary, Rev. Hinman, and a party of ten or twelve men, women and children, and immediately brought across.

Mr. Hinman told me that an employee of the government, John Lamb, had been killed by the Indians, but they had let him and his family pass unharmed. There was no doubt that the Indians had broken out. He asked me if I had any horses. I replied that I had a team and a single horse in the stable. Mr. Hinman said, "Give me the team to take my family and these people to the fort and you saddle the single horse and go to Fort Ridgely and notify the commandant of the outbreak." I immediately started for the fort riding as fast as possible, and notifying all the settlers along the road of the trouble. On arriving at the fort I reported to Captain Marsh, the commandant who sent a man to St. Peter for reinforcements and prepared to go to the Agency at once.

While he was getting ready, La Croix and family, one of the settlers I had warned, arrived at the fort and he and I mounted and went back to see what the Indians were doing. When out about ten miles and four miles from the agency, we found three dead bodies lying beside the road; Ed Mager, Smith and another man I did not notice sufficiently to recognize. These men had just been killed, for fresh blood was oozing from the wound in Mager's neck. So La Croix and I put back to the fort.

Five or six miles from the fort we met Captain Marsh with forty-five or six soldiers. He asked "How do things look up there?" I answered "We went as far as Mager's place and found Ed Mager, Smith and another man dead and we could see fire at the agency." I continued, "Captain, I don't know as how I have the right to give you advice, but if you will allow me I will tell you what I would do in your place." The captain asked what I would do and I replied "I wouldn't go up there at all." "I have no doubt but that the Indians have broken out for good, and you haven't enough men to do any good." I described to him the position of the ferry saying, "On one side is willow brush as thick as they can grow and on the other side is an old field grown up to artichokes as high as a man's head. This is a splendid place for Indians to ambush, and whatever you do, don't try to cross the river there."

We then returned to the fort and the troops went to the agency.

The settlers continued to come in to the fort and I remained there to assist in its defense. The troops began to straggle in about sundown and kept coming until about midnight and of the 46 who went out only 22 returned. Captain Marsh and the remainder of his command were killed at the ferry from which I had warned them to keep away.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> day of August, the Indians attacked the fort about one o'clock P.M., which continued until about five o'clock. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> they renewed the attack and continued it for several hours. I assisted in the defense of the fort both of these days, using a double barreled shotgun and cartridges loaded with buckshot, as this was the only arms I had. Mager's and Smith's families told me at the fort that their husbands

had stayed behind to drive stock in to the fort after being warned by me.

After the fort was relieved by General Sibley, Mr. Martell went to Fairbault having again lost all his property. He remained there until 1871, when he came to Big Stone Lake and took claim comprising part of the land on which Big Stone City now stands. In 1877 he spent the summer in the Black Hills prospecting.

In 1873 he was appointed one of the first board of county commissioners of Grant Co., then about to be organized. The organization was not completed. In 1878 another organization movement started and was completed, in which Mr. Martell was appointed county treasurer, an office not very burdensome in those days.

In 1898, when 80 years old, he left for Alberta, Canada and took a homestead, and since that time has spent most of his (the old paper was folded here and faded out) made a final proof of his claim. His health being impaired, he returned to Big Stone where loving hands gave him every attention until his death.

He was buried Saturday from the home of his son-in-law, George Lorenz. Father Hepperle conducted the services according to the ritual of the Catholic Church, in which faith Mr. Martell was reared. Father Hepperle gave those present, many of which were Protestants, an interesting and instructive exposition of the service.

Mr. Martell was married in 1843 to Miss Louise Johnsten. They had three children who lived to maturity. One of them, Mrs. York of Sioux City survived him, and was present during his last illness.

In 1875 he was married again to Mrs. Murray, and to them one child was born, Mrs. George Lorenz, of this place. Mrs. Martell makes her home with her daughter. Mrs. Thomas Dawson of Appleton, Mn. and Mrs. Charles Gottschalk of Aberdeen So. Dak. stepdaughters of the deceased, attended the funeral.

Comments by Musette: (Musette Lorenz Lissack)

One of the interesting things about this article is that the name of Martell is sometimes spelled with an "e" on the end of it and sometimes not. Also the paper is dated "Thursday, Dec. 29, 1904" In the article it states that he died on Thursday and was buried on Saturday (past tense). We have a memorial card which gives the date of death OLIVER MARTELL  
DIED Dec. 31 1904  
Age 87 years

On grandmother's "Card of Remembrance" it is

MRS. OLIVER MARTELLE ( "e" on end of name)  
DIED Jan. 20, 1907

Among the same papers in which we found the Martell article, there was an endorsement pertaining to a "claim for relief of Oliver Martell". He was asking for \$500.00 from the government. The petition is to the legislature of the State of Minnesota, dated Jan. 23, 1903, but apparently it had been begun in Jan. of 1899.

"I certify that during the Sioux Massacre, I was in command of the troops and citizens at the seige and battles of Fort Ridgely. In August, 1862, and that Oliver Martell was at that time a member of my command and served as a citizen soldier during the seige and battles of Fort Ridgely, Minnesota from the 19<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1862 up to and including the 27<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1862, during the entire seige of said Fort by the Sioux Indians, commanded by Little Crow and other noted warriors.

Oliver Martell's name is inscribed on the Fort Ridgely monument with many others for gallant and conspicuous service. He was continually on the fighting line of battle and did other service as a citizen soldier that he was called upon to do."

L.J. Sheehan  
Late Commander of Fort Ridgely

Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1903. I approve and endorse all the statements above made by Col. L.J. Sheehan, late Commander of Fort Ridgely.

Charles E. Flandrau  
Commander at Battle of New Ulm

This was the first sheet of the petition. Then followed five pages of Oliver Martell's own story which he apparently had dictated to a A.J. Parker, Notary Public and this was written in long hand...beautiful penmanship. This was

followed by another statement given and signed by Francois Shet. The last sheet carried a newspaper clipping dated August 18, 1896. It begins with this paragraph:

Oliver Martell - "The man who helped save 20 lives, and who gave timely warning to Captain Marsh, which would have saved his life and twenty-four of his command had his advice been heeded. Well acquainted with Judge Charles E. Flandrau and Major Brown in the early days when the village of Flandrau, So. Dakota was founded. Himself, one of the founders of Waterville, Minnesota and Big Stone City, So. Dakota." A special invitation extended to him by the soldier's Monument Committee of Fort Ridgely, about to convene.

He will attend the meeting and personally explain events that happened which will go to fill up the vacuum in unwritten history. This was written as a preface to the article, which started out:

Perambulating the streets of Big Stone City, So. Dakota, can be seen daily a gray haired old man with the unpretentious mien and bearing which is a signification of men who are great of greatness, and in this case it applies, as the writer is personally acquainted with this character, and knows him to be a hero in disguise. He is old and decrepid bowed down with honest toil, and has passed through the epochs of Western life and has cut a figure in the western history of borderism which should not be passed by with the cold respect of a passing glance, but should be made a part of historical reserve not only as an accurate part to become historical but the subject spoken of here should receive from the government just recognition for services performed by him for the part that he took in the saving of human life.

The individual I speak of is Oliver Martell. By parentage he is French Canadian born Nov. 6 1818, in Canada East, in the district of Three Rivers, some 100 miles west of the city of Quebec, midway between that city and Montreal. He continued to live there until the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 1835, when he left with his older brother Augustus for the west and landed in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where Oliver stopped for about a year, (his brother having left for Prairie du Chein and settled some months previous) and then located at Grand Rapids and started a lumber business which he continued to carry on until the summer of 1856. He then emigrated for and settled in the village of Waterville, in that state and was one of the founders, with three other persons, of that now promising village, and started and established the first saw mill and lumber yard there and continued to carry on the business until he sold out in Nov. 1859, and located in what was then known as the Redwood Agency, later known as the Lower Sioux Indian Agency, some two

miles from the village now known as Morton, in Renville county, on the Minnesota River at the mouth of Birch Coulee Creek, where he carried on the ferry business which was then extensively patronized by the red men as well as the whites. He continues to carry on that business until the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1862, memorable as the date of the Sioux Indian Outbreak. "On the morning of that eventful day, etc. (See page 1 for story.)

The closing paragraph; About three days after the battle some 400 mounted volunteers came to the fort under the command of Major Dyke of Fairbault. Two days later General Sibley came with a regiment. A conference was held, and it was decided that Major Dyke and his men were not needed and they returned to Fairbault. Our old hero, Oliver Martell, having lost everything, ferry boat, and home, returned with them. He remained there some two years, then in 1864, he returned to his Redwood Ferry, built a new boat and carried on the business of ferrying until he left, turning over the business to his two sons. Then he started for the foot of Big Stone Lake, and located a quarter section of land which has since become a portion of Big Stone City, So. Dakota. This was in June 1871. But the trouble with Oliver seems to be that he is too much of a philanthropist, always ready to help the poor and unfortunate. Philadelphia's great criminal lawyer, who truly said, "For even courtesy shrinks from, and shuns the unfortunate." Oliver continues to live at Big Stone City, So. Dakota and is in financial straits. He has been particularly invited to attend the notable event on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of August, the completion of the Soldiers Monument at Fort Ridgely. The writer doubts if a more deserving hero will be present on the occasion, either known or unknown and he will feel well repaid if steps are taken by the citizens of the great commonwealth of Minnesota, to have a special act passed in congress granting poor, old, decrepid, gray haired, almost sightless Oliver Martell, one of the heroes of Fort Ridgely, a good round sum to keep him the balance of his few remaining days.

Edgar M. Bennett

Mary Jane Salisbury -- Oliver Martell

Mary Jane Salisbury Murray was married to Oliver Martell in 1875. She went to live on Oliver's homestead claim at Inkpa City, Dakota Territory at the foot of Big Stone Lake. Oliver was one of the first white men to locate there and establish that settlement that later became Big Stone City, So. Dakota. They were the parents of a daughter, Jeanette Rosalie Martell. They lived on their homestead until the infirmities of age required care. Then they lived with their daughter and her family. Mary Jane died January, 1907, and is buried in the old cemetery, Big Stone City. Oliver died 22 Decmeber, 1904 and is buried somewhere in Grant County.

Oliver Martell was born 9 Nov. 1818 at Three Rivers, Quebec, Canada. In 1835 he migrated to Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was a real French Voyageur, a very colorful character and story teller. He was an Indian trader and guide, hunter, trapper. He established a lumber mill at the site that is now Waterville, Minn. One of the first three men to settle in Dakota Territory in 1871. Most of his life he spent ferrying lumber across rivers. He had a ferry boat business at New Ulm at the time of the Sioux Indian Uprising, in 1862. He warned settlers of coming Indians and then served as civilian soldier all during the battle and siege of Fort Ridgely. In 1903 he was awarded a pension for his services.