

Heroes of the U.S.-Dakota War

Jesse V. Branham Sr.

Jesse Branham Sr. is famous for his 100 mile horseback ride along blazed trails to St. Paul where he delivered a letter to Governor Ramsey requesting guns, ammunition, and military assistance. It is written that Jesse rode the first 19 miles bareback. He was sixty years old at the time.

The following is a copy of the letter Jesse carried to Governor Ramsey:

FOREST CITY, Aug. 20th, (6 A.M.), 1862

HIS EXELLENCY, ALEXANDER RAMSEY, GOVERNOR, &c.—Sir—In advance of the news from the Minnesota River, the Indians have opened on us in Meeker. It is war! A few propose to make a stand here. Send us, forthwith, some good guns, and ammunition to match.

Yours Truly, A.C. Smith

After delivering the letter, Jesse then joined his family in Minneapolis and did not return to Forest City until the following spring. Two years later he returned to his original homestead in Litchfield where he began farming once again.

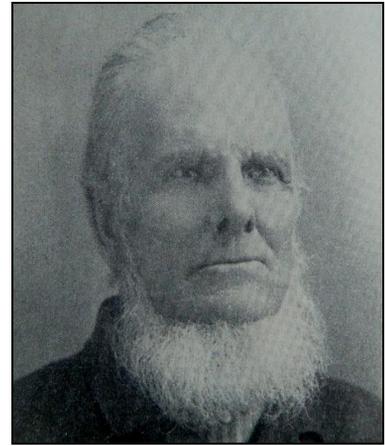
Originally from Kentucky, Jesse moved to Litchfield township in 1857. In 1874, he moved to the village of Litchfield. He served as Meeker County Treasurer from 1864-1870. Jesse V. Branham Sr. passed away July 30, 1893.

Jesse V. Branham Jr.

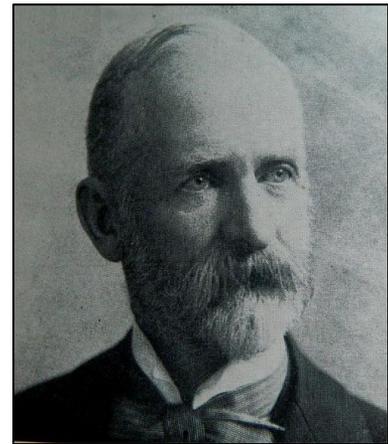
Upon hearing the news of the Baker-Jones massacre, Branham Jr. along with his brother William, jumped up on their horses and headed towards Acton. While on their way, they met some settlers who confirmed the report. Jesse headed back home and gathered neighboring families and brought them to the home of George C. Whitcomb for safety. In the morning, Jesse guided the families to Forest City. . It was Jesse's idea to build the Forest City stockade. A few days later, he took the women and children through the "Big Woods" to Clearwater where they found safety and shelter. Jesse then headed to Kingston by horseback where he discussed plans with the settlers to build the Kingston stockade.

A member of the Forest City Home Guard, Jesse Branham Jr. volunteered to ride at midnight to warn Captain Strout's troops in Acton of a coming surprise attack by the Dakota Sioux. Branham led a squad of sixty men plus teamsters and scouts in the Battle of Acton. He was wounded early in the day and rode in the back of a wagon without medical attention for 8 hours until they reached Hutchinson.

Shot through the lungs, Branham Jr. was not expected to live. The wound was cleansed by running a silk handkerchief entirely through it and he miraculously survived. Jesse Branham Jr., a millwright by trade, is one of Litchfield's founders and its first mayor. He operated the Greenleaf water powered mill from 1863-1864 and served as the County Auditor from 1866 to 1871. Jesse also served as the first town clerk of Ness town which later became known as Litchfield. Jesse V. Branham Jr. passed away August 11, 1914.



Jesse V. Branham Sr.



Jesse V. Branham Jr.

Village of Forest City Heroes

Almost the entire population had deserted the village at the beginning of the Sioux Uprising. There were only thirteen men and three women who remained. Those who remained along with the Home Guard stayed in the J.B. Atkinson hotel.

Forest City Village in 1862

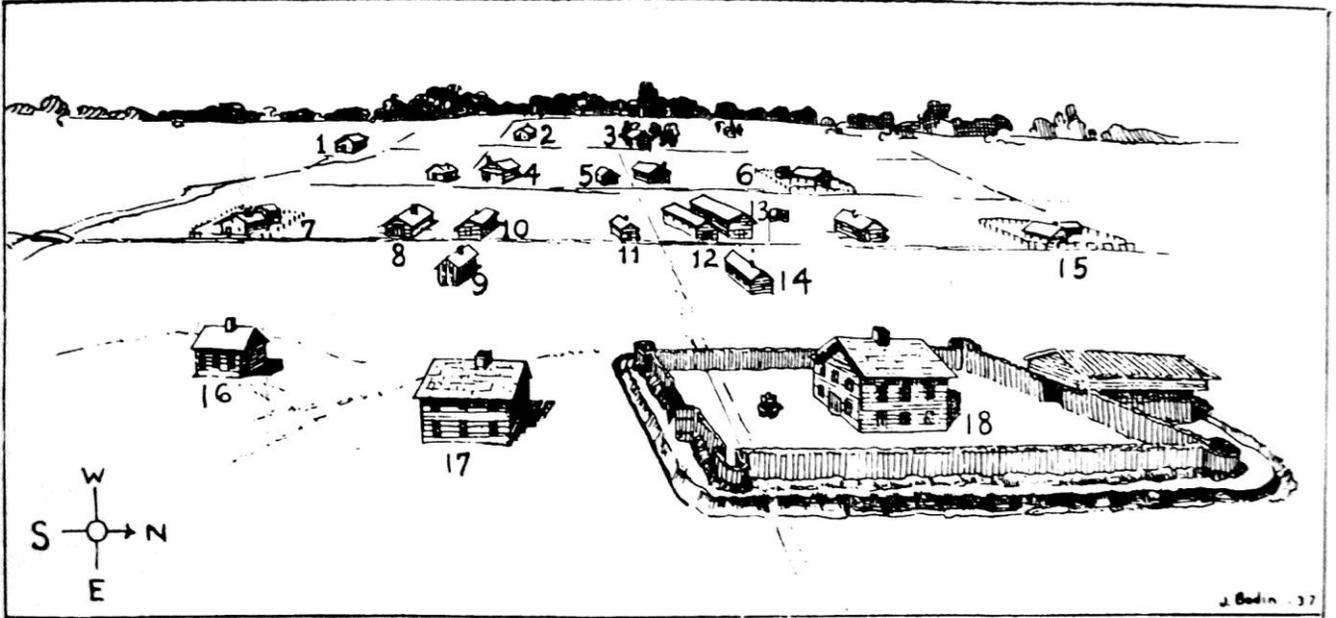


Illustration was produced from a pen and ink copy of a penciled drawing by H. Koener Strong and executed by John Bodin of Dassel. The houses and buildings include: 1. Robinson, 2. Hoyt, 3. Heath, 4. A.C. Smith's shop, 5. Unknown, 6. Mallery, 7. Taylor, 8. Blacksmith shop, 9. Welles, 10. U.S. Land Office, 11. Shoemaker shop, 12. Hotel barn, 13. Atkinson Hotel, 14. Atkinson's General Store, 15. Hamlet Stevens, 16. Schoolhouse, 17. T.C. Jewett, 18. Stockade.

The following is a list of the brave men and women who made the decision to take a stand and guard their homes and possessions. They did not leave Forest City. These heroes devoted themselves to saving their town and county.

- J.B. Atkinson (Elected 1st Lieutenant in Sioux Uprising, County Commissioner 1862, 1869, Sheriff Part of 1862-3-4)
- Thomas Grayson
- Milton Gorton
- William Towler – Stockade Guard
- James M. Harvey (County Auditor 1862-3-4, Register of Deeds 1866, Probate Judge 1865)
- T.C. Jewett (Register of Deeds 1861-2, Sheriff 1857-8-9)
- Mrs. Jewett
- George S. Sholes (Sheriff 1864-5-6-7)
- Dr. Thomas H. Skinner (County Commissioner 1856, Auditor 1858-9, Register of Deeds 1857-1860, 1863-until he died)
- Abner Comstack Smith (Attorney 1863-66, Probate Judge 1860-63)
- Henry L. Smith (Guard watch the night of Forest City attack – fired first return shot at the Indians)
- Judson A. Stanton (Forage detail in stockade, Clerk of Court 1860-63)
- Sylvester Stevens (Guard watch the night of the Forest City attack)

- Hamlet Stevens (Elected 2nd Lieutenant during Sioux Uprising, guard watch the night of the Forest City Attack, gave warning shot, Auditor 1875-6, Register of Deeds 1863-4, partner of Hiram Branham (son of Jesse V. Branham Jr.) of Stevens & Company Bank in 1881)
- Mrs. Whitcomb
- Mrs. Brown

References:

- Ketcham, Roule and Marsh, Tracy H., n.d., Action in Acton, Litchfield, Minnesota: James J. Reed Co.
- Lamson, Frank B., n.d., Condensed History of Meeker County, Litchfield, Minnesota: Brown Printing Company
- Smith, Abner Comstock. A random historical sketch of Meeker County, Minnesota from its first settlement to July 4th, 1876. Litchfield, Minnesota: Belfoy & Joubert. 1877
- Forest City Stockade, (2017, July 3) Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_City_Stockade