

Writing a senior thesis as an undergraduate history student was the most difficult project of my college career. My thesis, titled *A Misunderstanding between Cultures: The Causes of the Dakota Conflict of 1862*, examined the Dakota Conflict from the perspective of the Dakota Indians and the Anglo-American settlers in the Minnesota River valley. I chose to write about the subject because I have a strong interest in learning about local history. I was born and raised in New Ulm, MN. The city was the site of two major battles during the Dakota Conflict, and I heard about it throughout my childhood, but I never had a full understanding of the events. The project was lengthy, but for me, it was an ongoing learning process that taught me how to be a historian. For approximately two years, I knew I wanted to write my thesis on the Dakota Conflict, and I could not be more excited about how the paper turned out.

My research for my thesis began in December 2005. After meeting with Dr. Brian Larkin, my advisor, and Dr. Thomas Huffman, my co-sponsor, I began my research at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Brown County Historical Society. At this point, I was unsure of the exact focus my research would take, so I started to gather narratives written by survivors of the Dakota Conflict.

After returning to the College of Saint Benedict in January 2006, I resumed my research at Clemens and Alcuin Libraries. I used MnPALS to find all of the books relevant to the Dakota Conflict of 1862. Clemens and Alcuin Libraries were useful because they owned numerous items that provided me with information on the Dakota Indians as well as information about the Dakota Conflict. Although Clemens and Alcuin Libraries owned useful books, I needed more information. I searched through the bibliographies of the books from Clemens and Alcuin

Libraries, to find out where those authors obtained their information. When I located their sources in the bibliographies, I sought the assistance of Nicole Reuter, the Interlibrary Loan director at Clemens Library. She helped me locate the items in WorldCat that were not owned by Clemens or Alcuin Libraries, and was Nicole helpful in getting the books shipped to Clemens Library. The bibliography of *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux: Fort Ridgely and the Minnesota River Valley, 1853-1867* by Paul N. Beck also pointed me in the direction of the journal *Minnesota History*. He used numerous articles from the journal that were relevant to my research. When I examined the microfilm at Alcuin Library, I stumbled upon a gold mine of information. In 1976, *Minnesota History* published an entire edition dedication to the Dakota Conflict of 1862. I used some of the articles from that edition in my paper, but without examining the bibliographies of my books, that would not have been possible.

While searching in MnPALS and WorldCat, I needed to use multiple keyword phrases to search the databases. Using the word “Dakota” in MnPALS and WorldCat gave me a different list of items compared to when I used the word “Sioux.” I also had to use the phrases “Dakota Conflict” and “Sioux Uprising” in MnPALS and WorldCat because the searches resulted in a different list of items. I also had to use the various phrases when searching for journal articles in *JSTOR* and *America: History and Life*.

Throughout the semester, the focus of my thesis underwent numerous changes. In the beginning, I was interested in emphasizing the city of New Ulm and its role in the Dakota Conflict. While researching the city’s role in the conflict, I quickly realized the events involving New Ulm could not be separated from the battles at Fort Ridgely. My research took its first turn, and I decided to focus on the two battles at Fort Ridgely and the two battles in New Ulm. I wanted to examine the events from the perspectives of the settlers who sought refuge in the two

places. The narratives, however, were limited in number, but I still wanted my thesis to emphasize New Ulm. My research changed again, and I started to focus on the military history of the four battles. It did not take long for me to realize I did not want my thesis to focus on military aspects, and I was more interested in cultural aspects. After reexamining some of my sources, I noticed most of the primary and secondary sources discussed the causes of the Dakota Conflict. Once again, I shifted the focus of my paper, this time, to the causes of the war. When I reviewed the sources I had, I realized many of them only examine the Dakota Conflict from the perspective of the Anglo-Americans. I did not want my paper to be like that. Instead, I wanted my paper to provide a balanced understanding of the Dakota Conflict. After shifting the focus for the final time, I searched MnPALS and WorldCat again to look for more sources that provided information about the perspectives of the Dakota Indians. Once I had all of my sources, I began the long process of writing my thesis.

When I finished writing my paper, I knew my bibliography needed some work. I asked Peggy Roske at Clemens Library and David Malone at Alcuin Library to review the footnotes in my paper and the bibliography. Peggy showed me how to change my bibliography to make it fit the Chicago style. I met with David and we discussed how to change the footnotes so they also fit the latest version of the Chicago style. Without their assistance, my footnotes and bibliography would not be correct.

The process of researching and writing a senior thesis was long, but it was also rewarding. This semester, I learned that a lot of work goes into writing an in-depth analysis paper. I never imagined that researching the Dakota Conflict of 1862 would be as challenging as it was. In hindsight, I realized that without the assistance from the staff at Clemens and Alcuin

Libraries, my research would have been more difficult. The libraries have great resources available to students, and I utilized all of them during my research.