

SESQUICENTENNIAL STORYTELLING  
FEBRUARY 29, 2008

I come from a family that values history, which means we are also storytellers. When I reflect upon my family's history, I can talk about martyrdom, heresy, exploitation, persecution, rebellion, wars involving religion, and Native Americans. It is a history that reaches back to 16th Century Scotland when an ancestor was put to death for importing the scriptures in the common tongue. I have an ancestor who was a friend of John Knox, another ancestor who went to Ireland with the army of James I and settled there. His descendants came to Minnesota in the 1850s. I am part of the ethnic diversity tonight. Not all of Minnesota's early settlers were Yankees, Scandinavians, Germans, Irish or Italian. I am three-fourths Norwegian, but I am also one-fourth Scots-Irish, and I am proud of it.\*

My ancestors came to Minnesota using a somewhat different route from what is considered the norm. They came from Northern Ireland to Liverpool, England and then to New Orleans. They came up the Mississippi River on a paddleboat. On the six and one-half week trip across the ocean, they experienced fires on the ship, storms, and when coming up the Mississippi River on a paddleboat, they survived a Cholera epidemic. They first came to Galeena, Illinois and then to Minnesota in the mid 1850s. There are so many stories to tell of their early settlement, but I want to focus on a couple with respect to my ancestry. In this regard, I am very fortunate that many of my family members recorded their stories, and so we still have them today.

\* At this point, Justice Anderson showed the members of the audience that he was wearing a kilt made from the Anderson tartan.

The reason that my Scots-Irish ancestors came to Minnesota is a result of an Indian Treaty signed in 1851 — The Treaty of the Traverse De Sioux. This treaty opened up Minnesota west of the Mississippi for settlement. When I go to the Governor’s reception room, I can see a picture on the wall depicting the signing of this treaty. When I view that picture, I often reflect upon what the Indians gave up so that my ancestors could settle here. In 1854, the boat carrying the first of my relatives docked just a few blocks away from here at Saint Paul’s lower levee. They went to a store about two blocks from where we sit

tonight and bought some supplies. The men drove their cattle from here to Fort Snelling and then on to Eden Prairie where they settled on the western shores of Anderson Lakes which are named after my family. The boat the women and children took up the Minnesota



Justice Paul Anderson and Retha Clark King at unveiling of Minnesota Suesquicentennial Stamp.

River—the Iola—sank on its next trip down the river. Such catastrophes were part of the risks that early settlers undertook. When my ancestors settled in Eden Prairie, there was no Homestead Act, that act would come later, so they had to stake a claim and be able to pay about \$1.25 per acre. There were frequent conflicts over land. One day a man who came to the Anderson settlement said that he was going to bring 1000 men to drive them

off their land. One of my ancestors said, “well, if you do that, you are going to leave with fewer men than you came with.” The man did not come back to drive them off—he settled on some land in Bloomington. So, I come from a sturdy stock of people who would stand up for their rights.

One aspect of the early settlement of Minnesota that sometimes gets overlooked is the role Indians played in the lives of the settlers. This is why I want to tell you that my ancestors survived not only with the generosity of white settlers who came before them but also through the generosity of the Indians. My ancestors had to pay \$1.25 per acre for their 160 acres, and they borrowed the money at 25 percent interest. Money was hard to come by. Mary Jane Hill Anderson, my great grandfather’s sister-in-law tells about the day she was taking food out to her husband who was in a far field. She came upon some female Indians who were picking some berries, and as she was watching these women, six warriors jumped up and scared her away. In her panic, she left the tea and the food in the field. As she hid behind a tree, she watched the Indians eat the lunch she had prepared for her husband. As she watched, she discovered the women were picking a type of berry she was not familiar with. She later learned they were cranberries. The next year, her family picked over 300 bushels of cranberries and sold them for a dollar a bushel. They used this money to pay off the debt for the land. In her autobiography, Mary Jane Hill Anderson said how grateful she was for the Indians having shown her family how to survive on the prairie.

Mrs. Anderson also tells the story about the time she was in the family’s log cabin when all of a sudden, without a sound, there stood before her a man she later called the

“big Indian.” The big Indian stood there in her cabin with squirrels, pheasants, venison and many other things on his belt. She panicked out of fear for her own life and that of her children. She quickly poured the Indian some tea, and then ran outside in a desperate effort to find her brother-in-law. When she found Archie Anderson, she said, “Oh Archie, Indians—Please save my babies.” So Archie ran to the cabin to save her children. He rushed into the house where he found the Indian rocking the cradle and cuddling the five-year old son. The Indian looked up and said, “white squaw heap afraid, big Indian no hurt papoose.” The big Indian shared supper with the family that evening and slept in a corner of the cabin overnight. This was the first of many visits. He would return every year and spend the night until one year he did not come anymore.

So that was how it was with the settlers who came and took the land from those that were here before them. As I read their stories, I am pleased that my ancestors show they were capable of seeing these events with a certain sadness in their hearts for the plight of the Indian. When they talked about the uprising of 1862, they talked about their fear but also about the injustices that had been done to the Indian and the pain they saw in the Indians’ suffering as their way of life disappeared. They knew that this was the way it was going to be in the future but yet they also understood what was happening to the natives of this land.

We need to tell our stories, we need to know our history. I am grateful to my ancestors for their stories, it helps to explain why I am the way I am, so independent of mind. Why I have a certain patriotism, why I care for the common good and the common health. Why I believe that we measure the health of our society at its base not its apex. I

learned from their stories that these were their values. I learned about who I am by telling their stories. We need to do this for ourselves and our children. That is one reason why we celebrate Minnesota's Sesquicentennial. We need to understand and celebrate our ancestors.

At this time, I am going to leave with two final points. First, I am going to read from the diary of Grandpa Kucera who explained to his child what it was all about for him to come here and why he loved America so much. Grandpa Kucera wrote:

American was worthwhile for us for which we all thank God so we wouldn't be like the hogs who feed on the acorns but never look up to see where the acorns fall from. Finally, my dear children, I am begging you not to forget our good fortune and take care of our inheritance which you got with our help. May God bless you, keep the Sabbath all day in honor of God, read the bible to all children, may God advise and lead us that we may meet in our eternal rest.

This is why we celebrate the Sesquicentennial. So that we do not forget our inheritance, so we do not forget the good fortune that has been passed down to us by the sacrifices and struggles of our ancestors.

My second final point is to leave with a toast. I note that we now have a poet laureate for the State of Minnesota. As a Scotsman, I must share with you a quote from the patron saint of Scottish poetry. Today is leap day – February 29 – a day noted for love and Jane Leonard talked about our mutual love for our state. So, I leave with this toast from the Scots poet Robert Burns: “And here's to all those that love those that I love, and all those that love those that love me.” Thank you and good evening.