



Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity

By Sarah F. Wakefield

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The Dakota War (1862) was a searing event in Minnesota history as well as a signal event in the lives of Dakota people. Sarah F. Wakefield was caught up in this revolt. A young doctor's wife and the mother of two small children, Wakefield published her unusual account of the war and her captivity shortly after the hanging of thirty-eight Dakotas accused of participation in the "Sioux uprising." Among those hanged were Chaska (We-Chank-Wash-ta-don-pee), a Mdewakanton Dakota who had protected her and her children during the upheaval. In a distinctive and compelling voice, Wakefield blames the government for the war and then relates her and her family's ordeal, as well as Chaska's and his family's help and ultimate sacrifice.

This is the first fully annotated modern edition of *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees*. June Namias's extensive introduction and notes describe the historical and ethnographic background of Dakota-white relations in Minnesota and place Wakefield's narrative in the context of other captivity narratives.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

An unusually sympathetic record, by the victim of a historic kidnapping. Wakefield was the 33-year-old wife of a prosperous Indian Agency doctor when the so-called Dakota War broke out in Minnesota in 1862 (the war cost the lives of some 500 whites and an unknown number of Indians). A small band of Sioux captured her and her children and held them hostage for a month and a half, during which time Wakefield, an observant chronicler, noted the ways of her captors and explained their good reasons for having risen in revolt. Weighing more than 200 pounds and captured with a huge larder of food in her reservation home, Wakefield observes, "People blame me for having sympathy for these creatures, but I take this view of the case: Suppose the same number of whites were living in sight of food, purchased with their own money, and their children dying of starvation, how long do you think they would remain quiet?" In constant fear of enduring what the 19th century deemed "the fate worse than death"--namely, rape--Wakefield found herself protected by the band's leader, Chaska, and no harm came to her. In the brief war's aftermath, 392 Dakotas were sentenced to hang for their role in the outbreak. President Lincoln pardoned all but 39; one of the unlucky men to hang was Chaska, Wakefield's protector, about which turn of events she is duly indignant. The editor, historian June Namias (Univ. of Alaska, Anchorage), tries a little too hard to justify this reprinting of Wakefield's intrinsically interesting document, delving into psychobiography to establish it as different from the many captivity narratives now in print, as indeed it is. But Namias does a fine job of annotating Wakefield's memoir, and her introduction provides needed context. Students of Native American and Western women's history will find this a valuable contribution. (15 b&w illustrations) -- *Copyright* ©1997, *Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

June Namias was associate professor of history at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Her publications include *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier, 1607-1862*, and a new edition of Sarah F. Wakefield's *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity*.

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