They were all wooden-shoe clad. I’m told klompen are wonderful insulators and they had to be because that morning the temperature was –22, if you can believe the stories, which is risky.

Snow quilted everything, and there was no road, nothing really but experience to guide those sleighs all from Orange City west to Calliope, 23 miles in insufferable cold. It was January 22, 1872.

If all those Hollanders weren’t carrying heat, you might call what they were up to “civil disobedience.” But it was no peace march. Fifty-some Hollanders got together early that morning in an Orange City tavern—yes, there was one—run by the widow Mouw, who set coffee in a washtub. They were intent on wrestling the county seat from the gang at Calliope, just up river from Hawarden.

The Hollanders claimed they weren’t getting justice from self-appointed commissioners. Such injustice happened often when territory opened for homesteading.

The morning was clear and cold. “The air was filled with snow crystals that sparkled like diamonds and a sun dog scintillated brilliantly on each side of the sun,” says Charles Dyke in his *History of Sioux County*. But passions were hot. They were going after the fat old county safe and its attendant authority, then moving it all to the heart of their own Dutch colony, Orange City.

With the kind of precision one expects of deeply righteous folk, another delegation of 25 sleighs—northern Sioux County Hollanders—met up at the prescribed time and place. A cold cheer rose valiantly from the congregation of Orange City sleighs.

Some Dutch power-brokers had descended on Calliope, Sioux County’s very first village, the day before, to convince the crooks to give up authority. But the blackguards laughed, fearing nothing from all the wooden-heads, certainly not a bloody revolution.

The self-declared County Board of Supervisors just happened to be in session when a hundred sleighs packed with huffy Hollanders descended from the hills east of
town. Charles Dyke makes them sound like a company of angels. “The sun burst forth in all its glory...Nature fittingly set the stage in snow, blue sky, and color.”

There’s no Gandhi here. This is ice-cold, hot-headed Siouxland frontier stuff. If the Dutch posse didn’t get the safe, they made very clear they would take it. That’s right, they’d take it.

“Over my dead body,” the swaggering Sheriff said, or something to that effect.

The Dutchmen claimed his body wouldn’t need burying since they’d drop it in the river after filling it with lead.

Now the Hollanders knew the scripture well enough to remember what Jesus said about peacemakers; but there were, among them, several Civil War vets, who’d long ago determined that sometimes you had to take scripture with a grain of salt or even powder.

The sheriff saw those vets, and that was it. He went home. Those burly Dutchmen packed up sleighs with documents, including a massive safe that probably required most of Rock Valley to lift out of the old log courthouse.

Today county government operates out of Orange City, and Calliope is a cute little tourist attraction.

That “over-my-dead-body” sheriff, a man who counted red noses and gray gun barrels, was voted back in when the next election came around. The Dutch appreciated how he’d used his head and not his handgun.

I mentioned that Calliope is just a tourist stop, just north of Hawarden. Check it out sometime when drive up the Big Sioux.

Among other attractions, the old village has a bank, a doctor’s office, a church, and school, and just down the road, the childhood home of its once-famous novelist, Ruth Suckow.

And a log cabin replica of the old court house, just a little thing really, so small your family might have to take turns going in. But when you do, make note that there at the heart of the place stands—you guessed it—that huge safe a hundred incensed Hollanders once stole and took to Orange City.

Thar’ tis—right back in Calliope, 135 years later. Don’t miss it.