

## Who's Who in the Rogues' Gallery

To call it a “rogue’s gallery” just might be understatement.

But first, let’s admit that distinguishing history from myth or legend is not only difficult but impossible, witnesses long gone, histories copywrited years ago. So exactly how evil these bad guys were is answerable, truthfully, only by saying they were inspiringly bad.

Iowa was not friendly to Native people in the early years of the 19th century. When the Blackhawk War ended in 1832, the Sac and Fox tribes were banished way out west to central Iowa, still the actual frontier. Creating a home was difficult, but made more trying by enemies like the renegade Sioux, who made life miserable for both white men and red.

The rogues I’m talking about were a long way down the road from mere “bad guys,” although their terror was directed, for the most part, toward Sac and Fox and a few Winnebagos. Between the Vermillion River on the west, and the Des Moines River on the east, lived a band of outlaws who happened to be Indians.

Their leader was a man named Sidominadota, or “Two Fingers,” a guy you’d wouldn’t care to meet some night beneath the moon. No handbrakes on the man. His favorite haunts? —the Little Sioux River and the Iowa Lakes. Only a dozen or so outlaws in his band, hardly a heavyweight fighting crew; but what they lacked in numbers, they made up for in treachery.

But then, one man’s treachery is another man’s powerful defense. More on that later.

Two Fingers shook his fist at a pioneer named Henry Lott, who is, by the way, the second rogue in this gallery. Henry Lott pedaled whiskey as an equal opportunity retailer and in the process made no friends. Two Fingers wanted him the heck out of his territory.

And told him as much.

Lott barked back, so Two Fingers decided his gang would move him. For reasons known only to God, Lott high-tailed it, leaving his wife and son in the cabin he’d built at the mouth of the Boone River. Both died, Mom from what she suffered in that cabin, son froze to death when he tried to get help from Ft. Dodge, two days’ travel away.

Henry Lott, whiskey peddler, horse thief, and family deserter, took revenge on Two Fingers by disguising himself and conning him into a hunting trip, then dispatching him forthwith before returning to his lodge to kill his whole family—mother, wife, and kids.

That’s an Iowa rogue’s gallery to be sure.

Another band reported the mass murders, and a coroner’s jury indicted Henry Lott. Wasn’t all that difficult. But meanwhile, Lott had taken off for California, where he was hanged, people said, none of them shedding tears.

So what has all this medieval ugliness to do with anything, pray tell?

The best-known Old West story of this region is what we call “The Spirit Lake Massacre,” horrifying blood-letting that took place three years later. The perp at the helm of all that malevolence, as most people know, was Inkpaduta, whose hungry band murdered 35 to 40 men, women, and children and took four women captives. Wasn’t pretty.

Now Inkpaduta could easily be elected to the Siouland’s own Rogue’s Gallery. He’d get a lot of votes, I’m sure. His school of scoundrels were beloved by no one, hated by all—including a ton of other Native people.

But among some, Inkpaduta, despite the slaughter, is a hero. One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter. And these days, with more than 150 years behind us and them, it’s much easier to praise Inkpaduta for never giving up to the white hordes taking a land and a way of life from the Dakota Sioux, who left the plains bereft of buffalo.

There are no pictures of Inkpaduta. Like Crazy Horse, Inkpaduta, the man who perpetuated the Spirit Lake Massacre, was never photographed. What’s more, throughout his life he refused to sign a single worthless treaty. And this--he was never captured.

For some, Inkpaduta remains free, in the spirit of Crazy Horse.

If you can’t get your mind around that, try.