

**Alice Henle
Narrator**

**Deborah Locke
Interviewer**

**New Ulm, MN
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**AL = Aimee LaBree
Minnesota Historical Society**

**DL = Deborah Locke
Minnesota Historical Society**

AH = Alice Henle

AL: This is Aimee LaBree at the home of Alice Henle 717 3rd Street North, New Ulm Minnesota and the date is March 31, 2011, interviewer is Deborah Locke.

DL: Could you spell your name for us please

AH: A-L-I-C-E H-E-N-L-E

DL: Do you have a nickname?

AH: No.

DL: When and where were you born?

AH: I was born in a farmhouse out by Brown County near Searles, Cottonwood – what do you call it. I can't remember what they call it. That's where I was born.

DL: How far is that from here?

AH: About seven miles.

DL: What date?

AH: July, 1934.

DL: Who were your parents?

AH: Herbert Griebel and Francis Huff.

DL: How is your father's name spelled?

AH: G-R-I-E-B-E-L

DL: And your mother's last name was?

AH: H-U-F-F

DL: They both are German names?

AH: Yes.

DL: Who are your siblings?

AH: My sister Barbara Ann died about two years ago. She was married to a Smith and he was out by Madelia.

DL: So you had one sister?

AH: Two sisters. Then I have Janet. She married a Martin and lives down in Garden City. I have a brother, Gregory.

DL: Where does Gregory live?

AH: Right now he's here with me. He's my right-hand man.

DL: Who were your grandparents?

AH: On my dad's side, Joseph Griebel and Connie Bietch. She died when Daddy was about nine years old. She died in childbirth. She was full of gangrene so she died. Then Grandpa got married to Anna Reinhardt. On my mother's side, Grandpa was George Huff and he was hurt in an accident in the quarry southeast of here. He was committed to St. Peter for the rest of his life. Grandma was Mary Reinhardt, a sister to

my other grandma. So I had two grandmas that were sisters and – that can't be, that can't be. Well my great-grandma was Bietch and she had five children.

DL: How long have you lived here?

AH: In town here, I've lived about ten years. My husband lives on the home place, the farm site. We're divorced.

DL: Have you always lived in the area?

AH: Yes.

DL: Tell us about the home site.

AH: There are two home sites about maybe four miles cross country from Searles. That's a century farm too. My cousin Jim Griebel and his family live on that now. So Grandpa got that and his brother George lived right across the road. Now George had his head on straight. My grandpa was an alcoholic. So at one time the farm was pretty lost.

Uncle Georgie was in the Marines. He was in Japan, that war. My dad and Uncle Georgie kept that farm in the Griebel name. They worked hard. Now on the Henle place, the one that Athaanasius settled on, that's west of New Ulm. You take 29 out, you come to kind of a Y and you've got a monument dedicated to the people that died during the uprising. You go around the corner and that whole area is the original farm. Charles has sold a little corner of it on the northeast of it and somebody built a house there.

DL: Your former husband's name is Charles?

AH: Yes.

DL: We should get out and try to see that monument.

AH: I think he would be willing to show you that. He doesn't like me. He was going to leave me. I wasn't supposed to divorce him. That got him mad when I got a divorce, but I've got to live. I got this house and I got another little farm. So I'm comfortable.

DL: You're showing us a picture of three of the men in that family.

AH: Yes. John has no interest in the history; Charles' sister has no interest in history. Charles does, always did. We had two people who were killed on our farm site. Riel was married to a Hartman. Hartman was killed as they were coming down... it was just like coming down 29 that's what we call it now but it was really a trail. I don't know if it went as far as South Dakota.

They (the Dakota) came through there. Riel wasn't in the house. I don't know where she was but anyhow they found these two men. They were in the field. Some remember it was a potato field, others say it was a cornfield. A cornfield makes so much more sense in August because they were killed. She went out to them. The news had passed to New Ulm and farther. She went out to the field and he said I'm going to die. She cut a lock of his hair and kept it. The hired man named Roner said you have to get out of here, get away. So she went down into the ravine. Charles said Grandpa said she went with her dog and she had to choke her dog for fear that he would bark and the Indians would look for her. She survived and then they went on to the other Henle farm, the Anton Henle farm. The mother there hid in the ravine. There is a rock with a plaque on that's down there in the ditch a little ways that tells the story that this is the place that the boys from New Ulm came to join the Civil War. The Post Office was in Milford. So they came out and the Indians attacked them and some were killed. That whole story is in this little book here. There's a lot of information, the names of the people that were killed.

DL: Let's back up and talk about the people you're describing here, the two men who were out in the field that day.

AH: Florian Hartman. He was the husband to Marie Henle. They lived in the field a little bit west of the house that we had. A couple of years ago, my son-in-law and my husband and the kids were out plowing in the fall. They hit something and on the way back, Charles stopped and found a stone that was almost like a square. Underneath there, Charles thought what in the world is a bottle cap... here it was a quarter. The quarter was kind of split and Grandpa said it was a tradition to bury a coin the year that a house was built. Grandpa said, "Oh for heaven sakes, you're plowing up money." [Laughter] He was the one that was killed.

DL: So Florian Hartman is the man that was killed in August of 1862. And he was married to Marie Henle.

AH: Yes.

DL: How would Marie be related to your husband's family?

AH: Marie was a daughter of Athanasius Henle.

DL: Is that your husband's grandfather?

AH: Yes, great-grandfather.

DL: Florian Hartman. Who was that person?

AH: He was married to Marie and I don't know. Evidently he came from around Ulm, Germany.

DL: He was directly from Germany then.

AH: They all were. All from around the Ulm area – a little town called Erbach. There's a Hans Henle living over there now but he's quite old already. My daughter and her husband went to Germany and met him. He invented Moly Oil. It's a very slippery oil that they use on special engines and stuff. He had some factories and he owned some houses in downtown Ulm. But see he's part of them that stayed over there. Athanasius and Anton, they came to Minnesota.

DL: Florian Hartman married Marie Henle. They were both from Germany, born there and came here. Florian, how did he get the land? How did Florian come to be a farmer?

AH: I don't know. He worked on that farm. Athanasius worked on that farm. Grandma was a Siens, Marie's mother came from that area too. She was like a nanny or something to the Duke of Erbach and his wife. When Gwen and Vick were in Germany, they went to Erbach-- Hans said this is where my roots are – in Erbach. She got married to Grandpa in the United States when she came with her folks, the Siens. They came over with this group, the German Society. They kind of owned the land. When the old deeds were recorded and stuff it always went back and forth so evidently Marie's Dad and Mom must have had some money and could do that.

DL: What was the German Society?

AH: It was the German Land Society I think it was called. That's where somehow or other they were promised the "Land of Milk and Honey," so they came here to find it. First they went to Chicago for a couple of years before they came here. It had something to do with the settlement. You go into this area and set up a homestead or

something and then it's yours. I really don't know all the particulars but that's how I understood it. So it went back and forth between the Sienks and the Henles very often, the ownership of the land.

DL: Then, I understand there was this farm that Florien and Marie farmed.

AH: Yes, and then Grandpa Athanasius, the father of Marie Hartman, farmed part of it too. On our farm we understand at one time, there were three houses. One was the Hartman's, that was on the west. Athanasius's farm, that would have been a little bit east of them. Then there was another one east and north of them. We never could figure out exactly where that was. Grandpa thought there were a lot of big stones in that place. We didn't know if that was the foundation. It's our farm now, but at that time there were three people. It was over 360 acres.

DL: So we have Florien out in the field that day, who is Marie's husband, and they have a home and a portion of this land. Who was in the field with him?

AH: A man by the name of Roner. I can't think of his first name. He was from Switzerland the way I understand.

DL: Was he a neighbor or friend?

AH: No, he was a hired man.

DL: And you think they were in a cornfield.

AH: I think it was a cornfield.

DL: And they were probably just doing farm work.

AH: Yes, weeding or... I have no idea what they were doing. Maybe farmers go out and see how far the corn comes or you're always on guard when you're on the farm.

DL: Because the potatoes would not have been harvested at that point.

AH: No, and they aren't that high. Marie walked out in the cornfield and looked for them. She would have been hidden better by corn than she would have by potatoes.

DL: How did anybody know there was trouble? How did she find out? They didn't come back.

AH: I have no idea. I suppose she heard the Indians and then she went to see what happened out in the field. Then she finds both men dying. Her husband was still lucid at that time. He said that she should go back and hide because the Indians would be coming back again on the same route.

DL: What a horrible sight that must have been for her.

AH: But every generation has horrible things happen. Like now, there are terrible things happening in Africa, not only in Libya but all over. So I guess that's the way history repeats itself.

DL: Did you know if either or all of the families had any kind of relationship with Indians before this?

AH: Well the legend is that yes, they would give them food if they asked them. They were friendly to the Indians.

DL: But apparently on this particular day...

AH: Well, see this awful thing happened up in Morton. They were supposed to be given money or food or something and the guy up there didn't give them any. It's just like Marie Antoinette, [when the peasants were told they] can eat bread. Well here it's ["You] can eat grass." [The hardship] went even farther back, to South Dakota on the Reservations where the young braves were getting very upset because they weren't getting what they were supposed to get. They were entitled to... or at least [they should have expressed] some compassion to these people that were dying of hunger. You can see why this all happened.

DL: Marie finds her husband and realizes she better get out of there fast. Does she take anyone with her?

AH: No.

DL: So it's just her in the house.

AH: Yes.

DL: So she goes to hide in this place that you described earlier. That saved her life.

AH: Yes, but Grandpa Athanasius had a bunch of kids already. I think Anton was born the year after the massacre. Grandpa took his children down to the river and crossed over and from there they went to Mankato. So that whole family was saved.

DL: Antoine, Anton...

AH: Anton, see now this is a problem too because every generation [of German settler farmers] had an Anton and an Athanasius. The other Anton was living down the road. He had the farm where the Post Office was. He also had a bowling alley.

DL: This had to be much later.

AH: No.

DL: He had a bowling alley in the 1800's?

AH: Outside. It was like wood like a trough. The bowling balls were ungodly heavy. Rosenau's have them. A couple years ago they had them down at the museum. They have that, I have an ax head. You don't know how they could cut a tree down. It is so heavy, those men must have been ungodly strong.

DL: Unfortunately they were unarmed on this day in August of 1862.

AH: Nobody knew what was hitting them.

DL: I wonder if they had heard any rumors about some trouble at Morton or anything like that.

AH: No, because now you've got the phone, you've got something. They didn't have anything, unless somebody was someplace... They did say there was a person coming, telling the people of trouble but maybe this person didn't hit everybody either.

This is a whole different story now. The Indians went to this field. There was an Indian lady that married a Black man, African-American. They told him if he wanted to live, he better put a loin cloth on and come with them. So that's what he did or he'd have been killed. He drove the wagon. As they went down 29, they went into a place, killed them, went down to the next place, killed them. So this Black man told the story in, "Through the Eyes of the Indians," "Through Indians Eyes" – that book. He said they went into the farms and killed an old man at the table. I think that's what it was. And they killed

other people. Somebody that survived was a relative of Craig Deering, the guy that got this book all together.

When we planted beans about August 19th and 20th we were pulling cockleburs and stuff and we'd say just imagine – now in 1862 these are the places – that the Indians came through, these fields here. It was kind of interesting. Here we are in these same fields too, like they were and out of the blue came the Indians.

DL: You mentioned beans?

AH: We were walking beans. They grown were in the cornfields back then. They didn't have beans yet. We didn't raise beans until after the Second World War.

DL: Then you said something about burs.

AH: Cockleburs, you know those weeds. Cockleburs and elephant ears, we had to pull them. That's what we pulled. We did that every summer. [Laughter]

DL: That's when you were working the farm as a young person. You were in this place that you recognized as very historical and tragic.

AH: Oh yes, that we know. But we knew this story and even at Searles where the Indians came through at my Great Grandpa's farm. They knew ahead of time. They went to Mankato from there. There were a few people out there too that were massacred but the Griebels, they went to Mankato.

DL: They went to Mankato by way of the river.

AH: No. They went over land. I don't think there's any river from... Well maybe there is but not like we have, like the Minnesota and the Cottonwood.

DL: The Griebels went to Mankato and the Searles, did they go anywhere?

AH: That was them. They were from Searles.

DL: So Searles was a place.

AH: It's a little town. If you blink as you go by...

DL: You have direct relatives then. Marie Henle was your Grandmother?

AH: That was my husband's family.

DL: Do you have any direct relatives now?

AH: The Griebels from Searles. That was my great-grandpa. That's their pictures there, that family tree.

DL: Oh, I see.

AH: They came from Germany too.

DL: So the Griebels escaped in time. How did they get there and how many were there?

AH: Whether the Henles and the Griebels knew each other, I don't know. Most of the people that settled around here were from that German Land Company and probably went to Chicago. From Chicago, the river must have been open more. What river would it be... the Mississippi, does that go down through Chicago? Now Grandpa and that family, they all came by horse as far as St. Peter. St. Peter was already settled then. They already had some treaty with the Indians at that time. They walked – or they had horses – in this area. They figured this valley here was so much like Germany, the hills etcetera. But they went seven miles further and there was no water there. Here there's water. You've got the river if nothing else. So they went a little bit west. There were creeks and stuff in the ravines so there would be a water supply. They would go down there and carry pails. Of course they didn't take baths like we do.

DL: The Griebels must have been very frightened if they were basically running for their lives.

AH: Yes, I'm sure. I know that they knew they were coming back. Somebody made a hole in the ground and hid the dishes. When they got back, their dishes were gone. Then they went to visit somebody and their dishes were on the table. [Laughter]

DL: Their neighbors dug up those dishes. Oh, that's not right.

AH: That's not right but then you know some people aren't so good.

DL: Did they ever get their dishes back?

AH: I have no idea but Grandpa would tell that story. Evidently Grandpa Griebel, Michel belonged to the army in Germany. He went AWOL. He just left. Here they would all say aren't you afraid they are going to come after you, charge you with treason, that

they'll shoot you? He said nobody's going to go through that trouble to get me. People must have been sick on those ships. It must have been a horrible, horrible thing. Now I went in a different direction again but that's me. What else do you want to know?

DL: We'll jump back to the 1862 stuff and then we'll be done. I want to look at this [a book] later too. Do you think whoever wrote this book had an understanding of why the Indians did what they did?

AH: Yes. It's a priest, Father Birkholz. He established the cathedral and got the sisters over here. The hospital, that's something that he founded. Up the hill by the hospital on 5th North, there is a statue of him. He did a lot for the city. He was a priest that traveled around saying Mass at farm homes.

Did you ever read the story of the Cavalry in South Dakota? The Cavalry went and killed women and children. I don't know if you ever saw the movie with Kevin Costner, *Dances With Wolves*. Well that's basically what happened to the people in the Dakotas. That's why the young warriors were so angry. Father Birkholz talks about that, how unfair... He understood why they rebelled.

DL: Do you think that's widely understood in this area, that the non-Indians whose families were tragically involved have an understanding of what the cause was?

AH: People are funny. There's only one thing, it bothers me too and I think it bothers a lot of people, is [the matter of] giving the land back to the Indians. It was a war, we won the war, and so the people that win get the spoils of war. Now all at once you have some people that want to give it back to the Indians. I'm sure you've heard of that.

My friend and I went up to Red Lake and it's just like they still aren't -- I hate to use word --but they aren't civilized like we're supposed to be. They still want to live off the land. When an Indian dies in some cases in some families they have holes in the box so the spirit can come and go from that person. We went to the cemetery and they decorate their cemetery. This was a Catholic cemetery. This man's wife died and he put a bench out there, he had these posts, and he had little boxes with teddy bears for each one of his children. Every day he'd go out and have a cup of coffee with his wife and talk to her. I thought how sweet. I don't know -- if push comes to shove how many people have any kind of empathy, sympathy, for the Indians. When you think of Mystic Lake, the Indians that get the money from that, that's a lot of money a year. So that is theirs. We shouldn't complain. They got something for what... But just imagine what they did. They came in with a bunch of baubles and beads and bought land. I think that's what the German Land Company did. They bought X number of acres or what from here to

God knows where, Morton. Once the animals were gone then the Indians quit trapping so I don't know. It was a terrible thing.

DL: It might have been one of the very worst chapters in State history.

AH: Oh, yes.

DL: It's been called the Un-Civil War.

AH: That's right. The Indians were smart enough to know that the soldiers were busy down south. They knew that, so they thought, "Now, we'll win." I know that Sibley, these are great names in Minnesota history, Sibley, even William Pfaender, one of the people that came to Minnesota and settled in the New Ulm area – they were not nice to the Indians. I read this book where they walked the Indians through New Ulm and threw things at them. It was just a horrible thing. I think they walked them all the way from here to Fort Snelling in this kind of weather.

DL: In December of 1862 they hung 38.

AH: Yes, in Mankato. I can remember when, in Mankato where the buffalo statue is now, they had a building where they showed how they hung them.

DL: From what you've described, it sounds like there were some real misunderstandings on both sides.

AH: Oh, yes.

DL: And there was some cruelty on both sides. When the Indians attacked, certainly there was a great deal of cruelty there.

AH: Well, even out east when we first settled in the United States, the Indians were fighting for what they had. Some people wanted to be friends. It's just like people think that human beings, Negroes, the yellow man, the black man -- to the white man they're all sub-human. You take the Japanese and the Chinese: they were more ahead of a lot of things than the white race was.

DL: Why don't we talk a little bit about the Griebels? They escaped. They walked or maybe they had a wagon. I'd love to know how much time they had to pack and how quickly they moved.

AH: I would just think that they just went and took very little if anything along – maybe the clothes on their back, because they were fighting for their lives.

DL: How large was the family? How many children did they have?

AH: I don't know. That's the family [shows a photograph]. Don't know who was born and when. They were all girls except my grandpa and Uncle George. I have that picture hanging in my bedroom.

DL: Now your grandpa, what was his name again?

AH: Joseph.

DL: How is he related to the family that left?

AH: Well, he was one of the children.

DL: Did he ever talk about that walk?

AH: I think he wasn't born yet. I think he was born after the massacre.

DL: Did he ever talk to you about it when you were growing up? Did you ever hear stories?

AH: He would talk to my dad. But he was in the Army and if he'd have been caught, he would have been executed for treason. I heard that story, and the story about the dishes being buried.

DL: The story of the dishes that were buried for safety and then stolen.

AH: Not by the Indians. [Laughter]

DL: They must have been nice dishes.

AH: Well, anything was special. In the Henle field where they picked up that quarter, there was a pile and there were dishes, like parts of a saucer or a cup or something like that. Charles found that and we took that up and we just kind of kept it. It was junk. You can't use it for anything but kind of – "hey we found this."

DL: Joseph was your grandfather. Do you mean your great-grandfather?

AH: No, my grandfather.

DL: Your grandfather. And he was a child of the Griebels who fled.

AH: Yes. Michael Griebel.

DL: Michael was the father of the family who fled?

AH: Yes.

DL: So it was Michael Griebel and his wife and his children and Joseph was not born yet.

AH: Yes.

DL: Joseph was not born yet. Joseph was born after 1862 but he heard a little that he told his son, your dad.

AH: Yes, this is what we figured. When you came here you had to fight for survival. Now I don't know who it was but they did write diaries and stuff. Some of them were that smart but most of the people really had to fight for a living. They didn't have time for writing a diary. They would just celebrate one day a year. [Laughter]

DL: So the stories would have been told, not written down and your father could have heard more and just didn't tell you. So that's probably lost. Did your father have brothers or sisters who are still living?

AH: No. His half brother just died three months ago. Uncle Josie was 92, I think. Now Uncle Josie told a lot of history but not from 1862. He had other stories to tell about what happened in the family – like about his brother across the road who had his head on straight and how often he helped Grandpa.

DL: We are doing other projects to commemorate the 1860's. What are your thoughts on that? Do you think it's a good idea to remember that period?

AH: Yes. This is Minnesota and this is family history even though some couldn't give a hoot about it. But there are a lot of people that do care. It's just like that story on Channel 2, "Antique Road Show." This lady brings this shawl and here it's a blanket made by Indians and used for celebrations. I don't know if it had the jingles on but it was a very, very [unintelligible] piece. I think it was a couple thousand dollars worth. I

can't remember how that was gotten by this family. I don't know if one of the men married an Indian girl or something.

DL: Have you ever been to Mankato to the execution site?

AH: Yes, I said when we were little kids we went to that building right on the corner there.

DL: That's right, you saw some sort of painting or...

AH: It was a little thing built out of wood.

DL: Do you recall how you felt when you were there?

AH: I was little, I don't know, I can't remember. I just know that I thought it was a horrible thing to die that way.

DL: Some accounts we've read, President Lincoln felt he had to give the green light to some deaths of the Dakota. He didn't want to kill all 303 who were in prison but he wanted to kill some. And he did. Do you think that in some way that eased the racial tension in Minnesota by killing thirty-eight or forty?

AH: Well for some the idea was revenge. It's unbelievable what revenge is to people. That's why we've got war right now in the Holy Land. [The area is] holy to three great religions. Now we were taught that war doesn't help – Mom didn't believe in that, an eye for an eye – not my folks. Some people think that way but Jesus didn't come here for that. He wants you to forgive. Can you imagine how you'd feel if somebody is right there in front of you, kills your mom and dad while you are in the basement and you can peek through and see what's going on upstairs? Can you imagine as a little kid how you'd just...? It kills you from the inside too. The kid thinks "I'm going to get even with them." That's how a kid thinks, most of them I think.

DL: What is your opinion of the war? Did it resolve anything?

AH: Well, I don't think so. The perennial state of anything – always at war? I don't know. I just don't know why that had to be but you can't blame them. You just cannot blame them.

DL: As a last question, you described some hard feelings still here today.

AH: I think that some older people, they don't like the Blacks, they don't like the Jews, they don't like Indians, they don't... You know it's the old mentality.

DL: It's still around. How do we ever get over that? How do we ever forget what happened and move on?

AH: There is always someone that reminds the others. It's terrible. We're supposed to be Christian—even if you're Jewish that isn't right, if you're Mohammedan [Muslim] that isn't truly what religion is all about. These fanatics -- this dad shot his daughter because she walked down the street with this guy. Well for gosh sakes. Or was it the cousin of the father was shot by another cousin because he didn't shoot his daughter. It's happened in the United States here. They kill their own children. How can you do that? They're nuts.

DL: Do you think New Ulm will ever fully recover from that war?

AH: Well, I think so. Our history is so much more than that. We have our ties to Germany like our Hermann statue. Two years ago we had a great big celebration because 2,000 years ago, the Germans fought the Romans. They had this whole setup around Herman Park. The reason the Germans won was because they knew the Romans were coming so they took briars – they didn't have barbed wire – they put them in strips and the Romans couldn't fight because they were all tangled up... That's what they say anyway.

DL: So your history is broader than this one period in August of 1862. You're talking about other events in the history of Germany that were celebrated here in New Ulm.

AH: We had a wonderful Heritage Fest, which is no longer, but now we have something called the Bavarian Blast and that's a lot like our Heritage Fest where they would bring bands in. Music is a big thing in our community too. Years ago when I was a child, they had a big picture that in *Life* magazine I think. All the musicians in New Ulm got together down at Johnson's Field. They had this humongous amount of people who played the piano, sang, bands, you know – Whoopee John, Babe Wagner, Harold Loeffelmacher, all that. They called this the polka town.

DL: Is New Ulm welcoming to the Dakota people today?

AH: Oh, I don't know, I think so. I can remember a Centennial in 1962, there was supposed to have been some kind of friendship pact or something. Every time we have something there are some Indians invited, like for Heritage Fest we have them and I suppose maybe now for Bavarian Blast, because it's going to be out at the Fair Grounds again.

DL: Thank you so much for your time.

AH: You're welcome any time.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Oral History Project
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