

After confinement for three years at Camp McClellan in Davenport, Iowa, Joseph Godfrey was pardoned and freed in 1866. He settled on Santee Reservation in Nebraska.

In later years, Joseph was called Takankanajin, or Standing Buffalo.

Joseph lived at the reservation for almost forty years as a peaceable and industrious man. He married two other Dakota women, Icazonte Wiŋ, called Emma, and Jennie Goodteacher. He prospered as a farmer.

Joseph Godfrey died on July 1, 1909 and was buried at Holy Faith (Hobu Creek) Cemetery in Knox County, Nebraska.



“In Minnesota, there were never large gangs of farm workers, or auction blocks. There weren’t those trappings of the worst forms of slavery,” he said. “But there is ample evidence of brutality towards slaves in Minnesota, including a slave who was whipped to death by her Army officer master. Slavery, wherever it was practiced, was a pernicious institution, and Minnesota was no exception.”

-Walt Bachmann



Prairie des Français



Faribault Trading Post at The Landing in Shakopee by David R. Schleper, 2019

Prairie des Français or French Prairie was the area where the Faribault Trading Post was located starting in 1844. The French Canadian and Métis people (the children of voyageurs and Native Americans) traded goods and supplies for fur.

Coller, Julius A. II (1960). *The Shakopee Story*. Shakopee, MN: North Star Pictures, Inc., p. 12.



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Joseph Godfrey

1830-1909



Painting by Dave Geister of Oliver Faribault, Wakan Yanke Wiŋ, and their four girls, Pelagie Eliza, Sarah-Irène, Mary Josephine Jessie, and Jane Luce. In the background is Joseph Godfrey around 1848. Painting © 2019 by the Shakopee Heritage Society.

Joseph Godfrey was born in ca. 1830 in Mendota, Minnesota. His father was French Canadian, and his mother was an enslaved Black woman. Joseph's mother was sold to well-known fur trader, Alexis Bailly and his wife, Lucy Faribault Bailly, which made Joseph enslaved, too.

Philander Prescott and his wife, Na-he-no-Wenah (Spirit of the Moon), also known as Mary Ke E Hi, noted that Lucy Faribault Bailly whipped the children. Philander, lived in the Bailly house, saw Lucy mistreated the children, including Joseph.

“And whilst I am speaking about the whipping business—Mrs. Bailly had a little black child raised in the family and a young Sioux girl. Those two children, I actually believe, would get from 25 to 50 lashes a day and sometimes more, every day almost. I frequently would leave the house to get away from the miserable crying of those children when she was cowhiding them.” Both the Black boy (Joseph) and the “Sioux girl” (Angelique Skaya) were between 3 or 4 years old when they got whipped.



Pictures of Alexis Bailly (painting by Theophile Hamel) and Lucy Faribault Bailly (from Minnesota Historical Society.) Alexis Bailly (1798–1860) was an American politician and fur trader. Lucy Faribault Bailly was born in 1808 in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and died on May 4, 1855. Her parents were Jean Baptiste Faribault and Pelagie Ainse Faribault. Both the Bailly and Faribault families had slaves.



Joseph Godfrey helped build the log cabin in 1844. The Faribault Trading Post is now located at The Landing in east Shakopee. Photos by David R. Schleper, 2019.

As he grew older, Joseph Godfrey was hired out to serve as an aide for Henry H. Sibley, a prominent trader and later the first governor of Minnesota.

In 1844, Joseph was transferred to Lucy's brother, Oliver Faribault and his wife, Wakan Yanke Wiŋ. Joseph helped build the Faribault Trading Post in Prairie des Français in what was later called east Shakopee.

At the trading post countless tasks might have been assigned to an enslaved person: supplies and trade goods that Faribault exchanged for furs would have to be toted and warehoused; when furs arrived they would need to be counted, sorted, bundled, and loaded for transport downriver; and sundry nineteenth-century household chores such as water drawing and fire tending would have kept Godfrey very busy, according to Walt Bachman in his book, ***Northern Slave, Black Dakota: The Life and Times of Joseph Godfrey.***

In the late 1840s, a conversation with an abolitionist missionary spurred Godfrey to risk a run for freedom. Around 1848, Joseph walked for 40 miles along the Rivière Saint-Pierre (St. Peter's River) to freedom. According to Eli Lundy Huggins, son of Alexander Huggins who was a missionary and abolitionist who helped Joseph escape, “He had been beaten and abused and could not stand it no longer.”

Fearing that he would be taken back into slavery if he stayed in the missionary's home, Joseph sought refuge among a band of Dakotas whose language and customs he had learned in the fur trade.

Lacking free papers, he became Minnesota's only home-grown fugitive slave.

He later married Louisa Takanheca, daughter of Wah-Pe-Duta (Scarlet Leaf) and Mazaiyahdewin of the Wapahaša's Mdewakanton Dakota band in 1857.

In 1862, Joseph joined the Dakota to fight in the U.S.-Dakota War. He was called Atokte, or Many Kills. Godfrey denied he had killed anyone. There were conflicting reports about his role in the conflict and how active he really was.

In an effort to escape execution, Godfrey testified against eleven of the thirty-eight Dakota warriors, including his father-in-law, Wah-Pe-Duta, who were eventually hung on December 26, 1862, the largest mass execution in U.S. history.

