

## Family stories from the Sioux uprising

By **Shelby Lindrud**  
Staff Writer

In 1870, the Tolzmans arrived in Renville County, 12 years after the 1862 Great Sioux Uprising took the lives of 800 settlers.

Don Tolzmann, native of Renville County who now lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, grew up listening to the stories his father, grandfather and great-grandfather told about the area's history and their own farm's history.

"Renville County has a rich history," said Tolzmann.

Tolzmann has published and edited several books about the uprising and passed the stories on when he visited the Olivia Public Library June 22. With the help of a slide show, Tolzmann told the stories of several German immigrant families who suffered greatly during the uprising and what took place after the attacks on the settlers.

The Tolzmann family farm actually belonged to another family before the Tolzmans took it over. The farm used to be the home of the Schwandt family. The entire family, except for children Mary and August, were killed by the Sioux on August 18, 1862. Mary was then kidnapped by the Sioux, where she endured gang rape several times, before the wife of Good Thunder, Snahnah, rescued the 14 year old girl.

August suffered a tomahawk blow to his forehead during the attack. The blade did not penetrate the brain, but for the rest of his life August wore a hat to hide the scar.

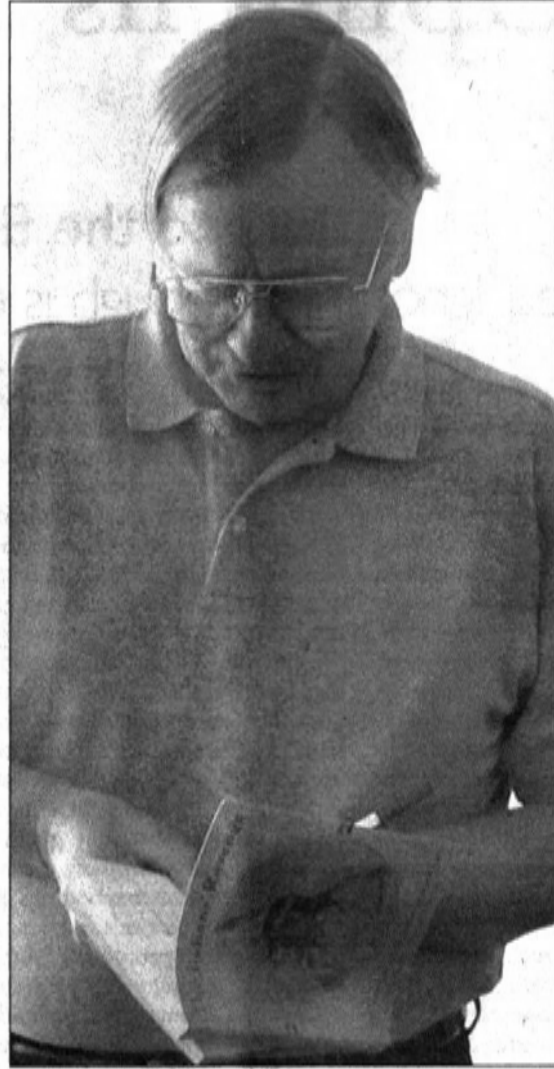


Photo by Shelby Lindrud

**Don Tolzmann signs one of his books after giving a talk on German immigrant families who lived and died during the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862.**

Mary used to visit her old farm, once the Tolzmann's moved in. Tolzmann said she would come back looking for buried family money.

Today there is a monument on the farm, remembering Mary and her family.

The Schwandts were not the only family to suffer at the hands of the Sioux. Flora Township lost 39 people in the uprising.

The Kochendarfer family moved to Renville County only a month before the uprising began. The parents and their infant daughter were killed, but three other children escaped thanks to the help of other settlers.

The Busse family moved to Flora Township in 1860. They too suffered tragically. The parents and two infant daughters lost their lives and three older children were kidnapped by the Sioux, later to be released once the uprising had ended. One son, August, later joined the Seventh Cavalry and lost his life at the Battle of Little Bighorn.

Indian visits to the settlers farms were an everyday occurrence. They would come asking for food. So, the settlers were caught unaware and unarmed when the Sioux attacked.

"They didn't come screaming or yelling at you," said Tolzmann.

But, not all the Sioux agreed with the uprising. Many saved the lives of settlers.

"It was not a clear-cut case," said Tolzmann.

The uprising began on August 17 with the murder of settlers. The attacks continued the next day.

The military battles began on August 20 with attacks on Fort Ridgley. New Ulm was attacked on August 23.

"They weren't going to give up," said Tolzmann about the soldiers and settlers of New Ulm that fought to save the town. Their battle cry was 'Victory or Death.'

The largest battle at Birch Coulee took place on Sept. 2. The decisive battle of Woodlake was fought Sept. 23, bringing an end to the uprising.

Military commissions were formed to try the Sioux responsible for the attacks. Over 300 Sioux were sentenced to hang, but President Abraham Lincoln reduced the number to 38. The hanging took place on Dec. 24. It was the largest mass hanging in American history.

"It took place as a result of the largest massacre in American history," said Tolzmann.

The official death toll of the uprising was 800 settlers, 77 soldiers and 77 Sioux, including those hung. Minnesota lost 532 soldiers during the entire Civil War.

Because of the Civil War, the uprising did not get much attention outside of Minnesota. The country's attention was on the war and most people couldn't believe the news they were hearing about the uprising.

Now, 146 years later, Tolzmann believes the stories about the uprising – from the settlers themselves – need to be heard and remembered.

"It is an important story to tell," said Tolzmann. "We need to honor the pioneers."