The Lac qui Parle Mission
Many years before white settlers arrived at Lac qui Parle, a group of Indians from the Wahpeton band of the Santee Dakota tribe established a village on the western bank of the Minnesota River at the base of a lake called Lac qui Parle (Lake that ‘Speaks’).

In 1826 Joseph Renville, an explorer and fur trader, established Fort Renville, a trading post across the river. The son of a French trader and Dakota mother, he invited missionaries to establish a mission near his trading post to bring Christianity and accompanying benefits to the Dakota. Thus Lac qui Parle Mission was founded in 1835 and remained active until 1854.

Almost 25 years before Minnesota achieved statehood, many significant firsts occurred at the Mission—the first organized Dakota church, the first church bell that tolled in Minnesota, the first school in the Minnesota River valley, the first woven cloth, and the first Dakota Bible, which was phonetically translated by the missionaries who devised their own alphabet. Renville would have each passage recited to him in French and then interpret it orally in Dakota while the missionaries wrote down what they had heard.

The Missionaries and Their Work
Feeling ‘called’ to bring Christianity to the Indians, Thomas S. Williamson, Stephen R. Riggs, Samuel and Gideon Pond and others entered missionary service and were sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

For many Dakota Indians, the mission was their first contact with western civilization. In addition to learning about Christianity, the Dakota were taught to read and write their own language, weave cloth, and till the soil, plant and raise crops.

Relationships between the Dakota and the missionaries were often difficult and full of misunderstandings, but the missionaries persevered despite trying conditions. Following the U.S.-Dakota conflict of 1862 the missionaries ministered to the Dakota in prison and followed them to their new reservations in South Dakota and Nebraska. There they set up training schools and helped establish churches within the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations.

The Story of the “Dakota Hymn”
Composed by Joseph R. Renville before 1846, the tune is a native Dakota air and has been in the Dakota Odowan since 1846. The words are based on Jeremiah 10:12-13.

The hymn was translated into English by Philip Frazier, a third generation Dakota pastor in the Congregational church, at the request of the National YWCA. It was first presented at their convention in 1930. Frazier and his wife, Susie Meek Frazier, then spread the English version throughout the country.

Frazier was a grandson of Artemas Ehnamani, a Santee Dakota who was converted to Christianity by missionaries while in prison after the U.S.-Dakota conflict of 1862. Ehnamani became pastor of the largest Dakota church, Pilgrim Presbyterian. He was followed by Frances Frazier, Philip’s father.

The Dakota Hymn can be found in the hymnals of many denominations and in many youth songbooks such as the Girl Scout Pocket Songbook. It is probably the most widely known Christian Indian hymn in the United States, a legacy to all people from the Santee Dakota, who still sing it in their native language.
Dakota Christians Today

About forty Indian congregations, Presbyterian and Congregational, whose roots lie in the work of the Lac qui Parle Mission, are active today in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Many descendants of the early Santee Dakota have remained in Minnesota communities at Upper Sioux, Lower Sioux, Shakopee, and Prairie Island.

Music editors sometime suggest the use of drums with the hymn but this is not true to the original Dakota Christian tradition.

Dakota Hymn

Lac qui Parle

1835 – 1854

For further information on the work of the Dakota Mission see the following:


Owned by the Minnesota Historical Society • 345 Kellogg Boulevard West • St. Paul • MN • 55102 • 1-888-727-8386 • www.mnhs.org • lacquiparle@mnhs.org

Managed by the Chippewa County Historical Society • PO Box 303 • Montevideo • MN • 56265 • 320-269-7636 • cchs.june@juno.com

Directions: Located at the corner of Chippewa County Hwy. 13 and County Rd. 32, off U.S. Hwy. 59, eight miles northwest of Montevideo.

Hours: Last Sunday in April through Labor Day; 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

MISSION SUNDAY - held annually the second Sunday in July.

The mission church was recreated in 1942 by the Chippewa County Historical Society in conjunction with the Works Progress Administration.

Information provided in part by Lois and Jon Willand.

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