

# Liniments and the Native American People In Frontier Minnesota

By Boyd Beccue

The 1905 Kandiyohi County (Minnesota) History is one of the most interesting, well-written and thorough histories compiled in any county in America. The book, printed in a limited edition of only 1,500, has itself become a prized collectible in the years since it was published. Edited by *Willmar Tribune* and Old Settlers Association founder Victor Lawson, it remains a respected and much-used reference for those who compile genealogies, research local history or just enjoy reading about the early years of frontier Minnesota. But, the careful historian also knows that even such well-respected volumes can and do sometimes contain errors.

A few years ago, I came into possession of an early Minnesota patent medicine bottle embossed "MONITOR LINIMENT" and "D. EDWARDS ST. ANTHONY, MINN." The bottle is hand-blown in a hinge mold similar to many medicine bottles produced just after the Civil War. After acquiring the bottle I

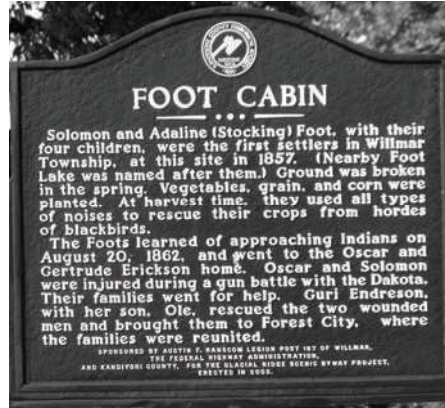


**Monitor Liniment in two sizes:  
5 3/4 and 5 1/4  
front and back embossings  
hinge mold**

recalled that I had once read a mention of it in the 1905 Kandiyohi County History.

Taking my copy of the 1905 history from its place of honor on the shelf, I was soon able to locate the reference in a memoir written by one of the earliest Kandiyohi County settlers, Solomon Foot. His cabin and

homestead were located on the north shore of what is now Willmar Lake in west central Minnesota. He described



**Plaque now located where Foot's  
cabin stood**

an incident which occurred there in 1858, when a visiting Indian was bitten by his dog.

(In those days the early settlers and the various Dakota tribes of Minnesota lived in what might now be described as a state of peaceful coexistence. While not always friendly, the pioneers and the tribes managed to get along well enough until a growing flood of European settlers, repeated treaty violations and government failure to pay promised annuities forced the desperate Dakota into open warfare. The Dakota Conflict of 1862 saw the deaths of as many as 500 settlers and probably more of the native people, ending with the expulsion of many Dakota from Minnesota. Pushed to the back pages of newspapers then and history books since that time by the Civil War, the Dakota Conflict remains one of the most tragic incidents in the history of American expansion in the west. The Native American heritage of the area remains primarily in place names, including Kandiyohi, which in the Dakota language means "place of many buffalo fish.")

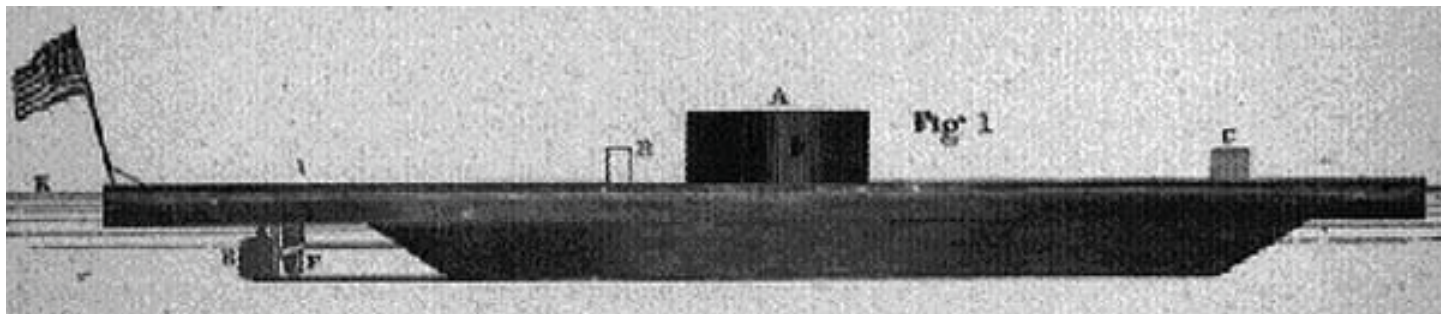
After the 1858 incident, Foot wrote: "I doped (the Indian's) thigh and the bite liberally with 'Monitor

liniment' and by his looks I judged the cure was worse than the bite." Foot described a very interesting event, to be sure, including a reference to a well-researched, early Minnesota patent medicine. The only problem is that the medicine Foot used that day in 1858 could not have been Monitor Liniment. According to "The Bottles, Breweriana and Advertising Jugs of Minnesota, 1850-1920," Monitor Liniment was first bottled by David Edwards of St. Anthony in 1866. Now a neighborhood of Minneapolis, St. Anthony was a separate (and older) city in those days.

That the name "Monitor Liniment" originated just after the Civil War is not surprising. Prior to the construction of the famous ironclad USS Monitor by John Ericsson in 1862, the word generally had a meaning different than that used in modern speech. The old definition of the word, still found in most dictionaries, was "One who advises or cautions, especially in matters of conduct, or something that warns or reminds."

According to the archives of the USS Monitor Center, Ericsson himself had that very definition in mind when he suggested the name for the ship to Navy Secretary Gustavus Fox in a letter dated January 20, 1862. "The impregnable and aggressive character of this structure will admonish the leaders of the Southern Rebellion that the batteries on the banks of their rivers will no longer present barriers to the entrance of Union forces. The iron-clad intruder will thus prove a severe monitor to those leaders."

So, it is certain that Foot was mistaken when he named Monitor Liniment as the medicine he used to aid the wounded Indian. Such a mistake was almost inevitable under the circumstances, however, since Foot wrote his memoir in California in 1901, more than 40 years after the event. While he probably did administer some medicine to the injured In-



**Design drawing of the USS Monitor**



**Solomon Foot, ca 1900 - about the time he wrote his memoirs**

dian, the passage of years and the tricks of human memory substituted the name of a product that did not exist in 1858.

Should we disregard Foot's entire story? That would also be a mistake. Foot may have begun to use Monitor Liniment in the years after he fled Kandiyohi County during the 1862 Dakota Conflict, also known as the Sioux Uprising, and inadvertently substituted that name for the liniment he really used in 1858. While there is no way of knowing for certain what liniment Foot used, there is a distinct possibility that it was Dr. Ward's Liniment, one of the few early medicines then being sold in frontier Minnesota.

Ward's Liniment was first manufactured in Minnesota by J.H. Sands, who started his business in 1856 in the river town of Winona. Sands had purchased the formula for the liniment and a supply of labels from Richard Ward of Harrison, Ohio, on July 6,

1856. Ward had been selling the liniment in Ohio under the name "Ward's Botanical Liniment" since the early 1850s. Iron pontiled examples of bottles embossed "Ward's Liniment" are



**Ward's Liniment in two sizes:  
5 1/4 and 8 1/4 - iron pontiled**

known in two sizes. Found in the Cincinnati area, both are very rare.

Foot may have purchased Ward's Liniment in either Winona or St. Paul where he stopped for a few days on his way from his former home in Indiana to Kandiyohi County in 1857. Even if he got the name of the medicine wrong, Foot's narrative gives us an interesting glimpse into the early years of settlement on the prairie. Without trained physicians on the frontier, the early settlers were forced to make do with whatever was on hand, even if it was only some soon-forgotten patent medicine. In a time and place where European settlers and Native Americans still lived together peacefully, people were willing to share what little medicine they had.

The tragedy which followed only makes Foot's story more poignant. Foot was badly wounded in a small but sharp battle with a band of Dakota warriors on Hawk Creek in August, 1862, a little over a mile from his homestead. Left for dead but rescued by another settler after the battle, Foot never returned to Kandiyohi County. What became of the Indian he tried to help in 1858 will never be known, but the likelihood is that he was killed in the uprising or expelled to the Dakota Territory with many of his people.

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#### Note about the author:

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