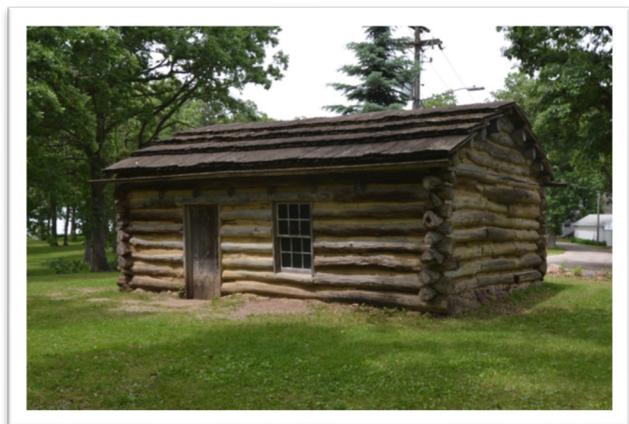


## Abbie Gardner Sharp Cabin History



Known first as one of the sites of the 1857 Spirit Lake Massacre and later as one of Iowa's first tourist attractions, the Gardner Cabin survives as a reminder of one of Iowa's tragic frontier events. Here you can learn the dramatic stories of Abbie Gardner and the Dakota leader, Inkpaduta. The State Historical Society of Iowa owns and preserves the Gardner Cabin and Museum. The cabin is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Compared with the rest of the state, European-American settlement came late to northwest Iowa, where settlers faced isolation and harsh frontier living conditions. The Dakota Indian

nation had for years led a successful hunting and gathering way of life in the same area. Relations between the original inhabitants and the new settlers were usually peaceful, but there was little friendship as the two groups competed for the land and its resources. One of the few violent conflicts between European-Americans and Native Americans occurred at Arnolds Park and became known as The Spirit Lake Massacre.

Left out of the 1851 treaty negotiations that transferred northwestern Iowa from the Dakota nation to the United States, Dakota leader Inkpaduta refused to recognize the treaty restrictions. Early on he became a scapegoat for some of the tensions between the new settlers and the original inhabitants. Between 1853 and 1856, he was involved in several conflicts with settlers, including Henry Lott, who killed several members of Inkpaduta's band. Government officials recognized that Lott had started the problems, but refused to apprehend him. During the winter of 1856-1857, Inkpaduta's band traveled north from Smithland, Iowa, arriving at Lake Okoboji in March 1857 in search of food.

The Gardner family came to Lake Okoboji in July 1856 from New York. Because it was too late in the season to plant and harvest crops, the family brought enough food to last the winter months. They managed to build one cabin by winter, but weather prevented them from finishing a second. At the time of the massacre, Rowland Gardner, his wife, son, two daughters, a son-in-law and two grandchildren occupied the Gardner Cabin. A third daughter was in Springfield, Minnesota at the time of the massacre.

By late winter in 1856, both the settlers and Inkpaduta's people were running out of supplies. Tensions ran high as Inkpaduta's people tried unsuccessfully to get food from the settlers. Finally, on March 8, anger turned into violence. Over several days, Inkpaduta's band killed 33 settlers and abducted four women, including Abbie Gardner. No one recorded the Dakota's losses. After the Okoboji attack, Inkpaduta's band travelled north, unsuccessfully attacked Springfield, Minnesota settlers and then fled west to the Dakotas where they killed two of the four captives. Later that spring, Inkpaduta released Abbie and another Okoboji captive after ransom was paid by Indian Agents from Minnesota.

After the uprising, Inkpaduta's reputation grew to mythic proportions partly because he eluded capture. He spent several years in the Dakotas skirmishing with the U.S. Army and was reported to have been present at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Inkpaduta eventually moved to Canada where he died in 1881. After her release, Abbie Gardner joined her sister in Hampton, Iowa. In August 1857, she married Cassville Sharp. They raised two children before separating sometime in the 1880s.

Returning to Arnolds Park in 1891, Abbie purchased the cabin, operating it as one of Iowa's first tourist attractions until her death in 1921. For a quarter, or ten cents for children, visitors could see the displays in her log cabin museum and listen to her stories of the Spirit Lake Massacre, her captivity and rescue.

In her later years Abbie forgave the Native Americans and even developed a lifelong interest and admiration for Native American culture. She collected many examples of Native American artifacts which she displayed in her museum located in the log cabin. She collected pipestone from southwestern Minnesota and brought it back to Arnolds Park where she commissioned her neighbors to carve miniature replicas of the Spirit Lake Monument (dedicated in 1895). She sold these replicas as souvenirs in her museum shop. As part of her tourist business, Abbie Gardner-Sharp sold her book, *The Spirit Lake Massacre*, postcards and other souvenirs.

Abbie died in Colfax, Iowa, in 1921, leaving the cabin to her son and daughter-in-law, Albert and Mary Sharp. They sold it to the Iowa Conservation Commission in 1941.

The Gardner Cabin has undergone many changes since it was built in 1856. Unlike the other cabins, the Gardner Cabin was still intact after the massacre. It was purchased by Philander Prescott, who later sold it to Samuel Pillsbury. Until 1891, when Abbie Gardner-Sharp purchased it, the cabin had been enlarged with shed additions and a second story. To enhance the cabin's tourist potential, Abbie added a framework and lattice to hide the cabin from view by non-paying visitors. The Iowa Conservation Commission later removed the lattice. After the cabin was transferred to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1974, architects and archaeologists conducted research and decided to return the cabin to resemble its 1856 appearance. The State Historical Society of Iowa placed a portion of the contents of Abbie Gardner Sharp's tourist museum in the visitor's center and transferred the rest of the items to the Dickinson County Historical Society in Spirit Lake. The cabin is now furnished with pioneer artifacts gathered by Abbie Gardner-Sharp.