



Lake Shetek Survivors at Fort Randall, Dakota Territory. November 1862
 Rose Ireland on far left, her sister Ellen Ireland on far right.
 Photo from the Collections of South Dakota Historical Society and Archive

Rosanna Ireland Miller VanAlstine (1853-1936)

Minnesota 1862 was a time of opportunity for the white settlers. But gain for the settlers and loss for the Dakota people meant conflict. Rose survived captivity and was rescued by ten young Lakota men who became known as the “Fool Soldiers.”

- **1853-Birth.** Rosanna was born on September 16, 1853 in New Bedford, Bureau, Illinois. She was the second of four daughters of

Thomas Ireland and Sophia Walters Ireland.

- **1861.** Like many other families of the time, her parents moved farther west, looking

for better land and more opportunities. The family eventually reached Lake Shetek in Murray County, Minnesota. They lived in a cabin near the southeast corner of Owanka Bay.

- **The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862.** Unfortunately a clash of cultures resulted between the settlers and the Sioux Indians who were trying to maintain their own ways. As a result of this conflict, a band of Indians determined to attack settlers and push them eastward.
- **August 20, 1862.** When Rosanna was nine years old attacks began at several locations in the area. The Irelands fled their cabin to seek safety with others at a nearby home. One group of Indians in the area told the settlers that they would not be harmed if they left immediately. The settlers left with women and children in a wagon, but the Indians pursued and shot at them. The settlers sought refuge in a slough that contained high grass. Rose’s parents were shot and injured as were many other adults and children. The Indians said that if the women and children would come out, they would not be harmed. The women came out with their children in tow. Along with other women and children, Rosanna’s mother was shot and killed as were her sisters Sarah Jane (11) and Julianne (3).
- **Captivity.** Rosanna, her sister Ellen (7), four other girls, and two women were taken captive. The Indians travelled about 800 miles in three months, trying to stay away from pursuers. The captives had only the clothes they were wearing and worn out moccasins. When food was scarce they were not fed. Rosanna was the most favored above all the other captives and she was given some blue trading beads which she kept wrapped around her waist under her petticoat so that she would not lose them. She given the name “Ondee” meaning “Rain.”
- **November 1862.** In November 1862 a group of ten Teton Lakota Indians negotiated with the captors, risking their lives and traded their own horses, guns, and other goods for the release of the prisoners. Once freed, the two women and six girls were taken by foot about 100 miles in wintery November weather to Fort Pierrre in South Dakota then by stagecoach back to their homes. Some bands called this group of Indians “fool Soldiers” because of their efforts to bring about peace with settlers.
- **Reunited.** When Rosanna and Ellen returned home they found their father had survived after being shot eight times. He lived another 35 years.
- **1875.** By the time she was 16, Rosanna had moved away from Lake Shetek. By 1875 she lived with her father, step-mother Sally, and sister n Mankato, Minnesota.
- **1880.** Rosanna was a servant in the household of a Presbyterian minister.
- **1885.** Rosanna was hired as a servant for a Prussian couple. After the death of her stepmother in February 1885, Rosanna’s father moved in with her. Thomas died in 1897 in Mankato, Minnesota.

- **1898.** Rosanna moved to Butte, Montana as a live-in domestic for the family of Thomas Buzzo, a mine superintendent in Walkerville.
- **1903-Marriage.** At the age of 50, Rosanna married a widower, Joseph R. Miller in Butte, Montana. Joseph was a carpenter from Missoula, Montana where the couple resided after their wedding. Only 17 months later, Joseph died of heart failure at Orchard Homes on the outskirts of Missoula, Montana.
- **1906-Marriage.** Rosanna married her second husband, Samuel VanAlstine. He had worked as a teamster in Lincoln, Montana. In 1909 they owned a farm in Orchard Homes. By 1915 they were living in town at 1117 Grand Avenue where Rosanna lived the rest of her life.
- **1915-Deserted.** On about July 20, 1915 Samuel left Rosanna and apparently left the state. After four years of being deserted, Rosanna filed for divorce on April 10, 1919. The grounds for her petition were that Samuel willfully neglected to provide her with the common necessities of life, namely food, clothing, and shelter. Rosanna said that from the time they were married, she had to work and earn money to provide for herself, and that Samuel had the means to do so, except for his idleness. The sheriff's department tried to find him to serve the summons and the court sent a letter to the Missoula post office which was not deliverable. Finally, an advertisement was posted in the Missoulian with the text of the summons. Samuel was not to be found. The divorce records show no final action taken by the court, so it appears that the divorce was never finalized.
- **1917.** The city directory listed Rosanna as the widow of Samuel so perhaps she did not want people then to know she had been deserted.
- **1920-Cook.** Rosanna worked as a cook at the YMCA. In later years, the jobs were described as waitress at the YW and helper at the YMCA.
- **1936-Death.** Rosanna died on April 16, 1936 in Missoula, Montana from heart disease. Her only surviving immediate relative named was her sister Ellen. Rosanna had no children of her own.



Researched by Susan Hintz, researcher. Information resources: Legal documents, census reports, and library archives.