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St. Paul's Indian Burial Mounds

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St. Paul's Indian Burial Mounds

-- Paul D. Nelson

Six ancient burial mounds crown the crest of St. Paul's Dayton's Bluff. Their setting is spectacular, above the gorge where the Mississippi feints north before turning decisively south. These are the tallest and most prominent burial mounds on the northern 600 miles of the river.

The mounds of Indian Mounds Park are St. Paul's only visible and tangible reminders of a prehistoric human past. They have been excavated, but not for more than a century. They have not been systematically studied; modern methods and scholarship have never been applied to them.

This article will not bring today's archaeological and anthropological tools to Dayton's Bluff; the author lacks the skill and training. Its aims are more modest — to gather together all that has been written about the St. Paul mounds along with the relevant related scholarship of the last several decades. We hope to answer here, to the extent that current knowledge permits, most of the questions that an interested visitor to the mounds might ask.

Six burial mounds stand atop Dayton's Bluff. They are set aside in

park land, protected by law. They are fenced and guarded, sealed and mute. What can they tell us?

How many were there originally?

Theodore H. Lewis found thirty-nine in the late 1870s, in two separate and perhaps unrelated groups. They stretched in an irregular line along Dayton's Bluff, roughly from the current Carver's Cave scenic lookout on the north to the Indian Mounds Park lookout point on the south. All of the twenty-one mounds from Carver's Cave up (the land slopes upward) to the light beacon in the park were small, rarely even two feet tall, and were destroyed in the mid- and late nineteenth century by farming, quarrying, development, and roads. The southern group of eighteen, built on the promontory 200 feet above the Mississippi River, was reduced to six in the building of Indian Mounds Park, which began in 1892, and in later renovations. The surviving six were the tallest and probably the oldest of them all.¹

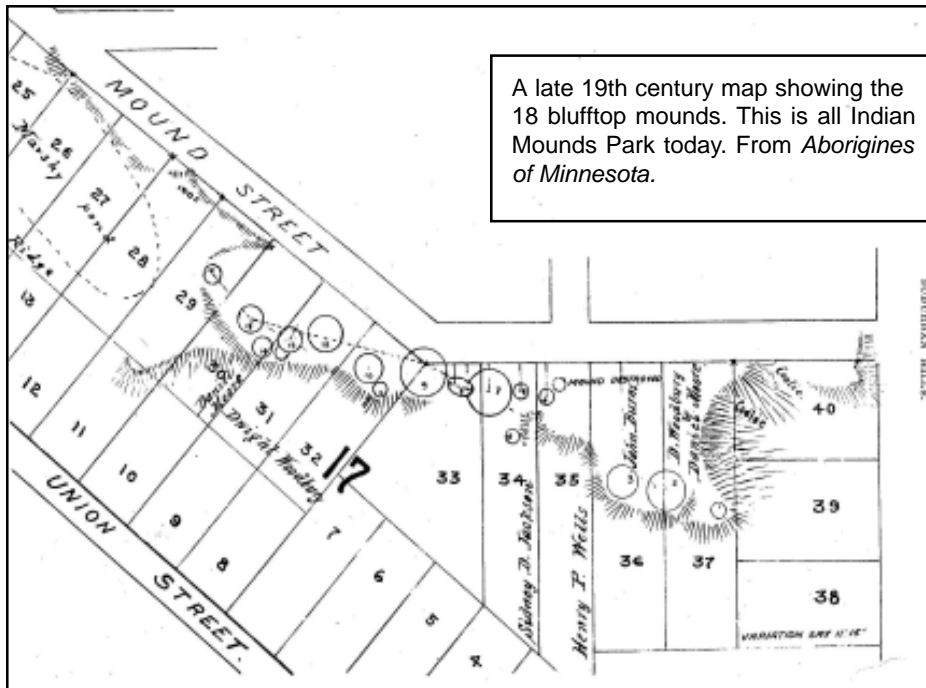
When Were They Built?

Speaking now just of the oldest

mounds (those still standing), they were probably built in the era 200 BC -- 400 AD. Even this spacious estimate rests upon a foundation of guesswork. No radiocarbon dating of anything from the mounds has been done. The dates are based on similarities between these mounds and their contents and similar structures and artifacts found and studied elsewhere — to be more specific, that these are from the Middle Woodland period of eastern North America, which scholars (though hardly unanimously) date between 200 BC and 400 AD or so.

The mounds were probably built one by one, with perhaps decades or even generations separating them. Construction of the smaller tumuli, those that trailed down the bluff slope toward Carver's Cave, likely took place after 1000 AD, and may have continued almost to historical times.²

The photo above shows the park and Mounds 2, 3, 7, and 9, left to right, around 1898. Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) photo.



of southern Minnesota burial mounds were built hundreds of years later than those still extant at Mounds Park. Dakota connection is more likely for later mounds than earlier ones.³

Do descendants of the ancient St. Paulites live today? Probably so. To conclude otherwise is to imagine that the people – or possibly peoples – who built the mounds went extinct. But where they may live, and what name they call themselves will likely never be known.

Where and how did the mound builders live?

The mound builders did not live on Dayton’s Bluff. No evidence of ancient habitation has been found there, and for good reason – it was too far from water. This was ceremonial space.

The mound builders must have lived nearby, but no one knows exactly where. The man who excavated most of the mounds, Theodore H. Lewis, wrote in 1896 that there had been at least ten Indian village sites within St. Paul, one at Pig’s Eye Lake, two on the West Side, “two being located on Phalen’s creek and the others along the river.” He did not provide more detail, and none of these sites has been found and excavated. Nor, after more 150 years of development of the land and filling of the river channel, are any likely to be unearthed.⁴

The area around what is now

Who Built Them?

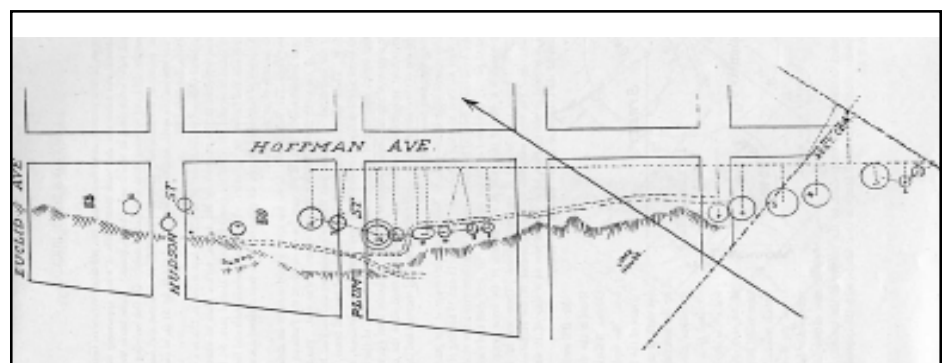
American Indians built the burial mounds. This may be the only assertion on the subject that can be made with confidence. To connect the St. Paul mound builders with any known tribe or nation exceeds the reach of current knowledge.

Of the two dominant nations known to live near St. Paul in historical times, the Ojibwe and the Dakota, one can be eliminated: The Ojibwe moved into Minnesota from the east over a thousand years after the surviving mounds were built, and in any event never lived so far south.

The Dakota cannot be eliminated as mound builders, but neither is there any strong evidence to connect them with mounds built in the period two thousand years ago. Little is known about their ancient origins. The conventional view is that the Dakota homeland lay in northern Minnesota around Lake Mille Lacs, and that they moved into this area only, or at least mainly, as a result of friction with the Ojibwe in the late 17th century.

Scott Anfinson, recently appointed Minnesota State Archaeologist, wrote over 20 years ago that the Dakota (or

their ancestors) should be considered possible authors of the ancient mounds. “The mound concentrations next to historically known Santee villages in east-central and southeastern Minnesota also argue for a Dakota association with intensive mound building and a strong, early Dakota presence in southern Minnesota unless, of course, the Dakota simply reoccupied locations of the principal mound-building groups.” This is evidence primarily by association; no ethnographic or physical evidence places Dakota forebears at Mounds Park. What is more, the huge majority



The northernmost line of mounds, around 1880. North is to the left; Hoffman Avenue is now Mounds Boulevard, here between Educlid on the left and Urban on the right. These mounds are all gone. Map from *Aborigines of Minnesota*.

downtown St. Paul was probably a good place to live two millennia ago (at least, like today, for the hardy of body and spirit.) The Midwesterners of that distant era favored flood plains and river terraces close to woodlands and open ground; a variety of habitats within a small area could provide food throughout the year. The Dayton's Bluff vicinity had everything. The Mississippi then offered a bounty we can only imagine today; unpolluted and undammed, it brimmed with wildlife, and its yearly flooding and ebbing created seasonal mini-environments, each with its own plants and animals. Just beneath the bluff Phalen Creek and Trout Brook, both good-sized streams, joined and flowed into the Mississippi from the north, beneath today's Seventh and Third Street bridges; to the south lay the shallow wetlands of the backwater Pig's Eye Lake. Across the river lay the West Side floodplain, which had its own creeks and wetlands. And above, on both sides of the river, spread the open oak savannah.⁵

The people who built the surviving Mounds Park mounds were hunters and gatherers. Prehistoric St. Paul offered them abundant deer, fish, shellfish, waterfowl, acorns, wild fruits, and a host of smaller animals and edible plants. They did not have agriculture, though they might have encouraged the growth of certain native seed-bearing plants such as chenopod, knotweed, sumpweed, and maygrass. They did not live in permanent villages, but moved with the seasons, probably much like the Dakota of historical times did.⁶

The Indians of this time and place used tools well known to most people familiar with the basics of Native American history – spear, bone and antler, stone axes, hammers, scrapers, and projectile points. They were familiar with worked metal, copper, both as ornament and tools. They also made pottery and baskets.

The people who built the mounds lived around here somewhere. How

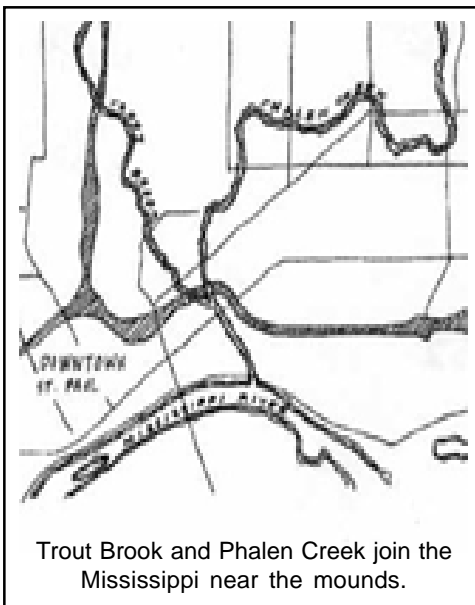
many of them were there? Estimating populations for such a far-off time is so perilous an enterprise that few try; no estimate for this area has been done. David Braun, one of the leading scholars of the Middle Woodland period (200 BC – 400 AD), has commented that even in the most populous regions of the ancient Midwest, western Illinois and southern Ohio, densities were “on the order of only 40 people per 100 sq. km, with the larger villages containing no more than 50-100 people.” Other scholars come in higher, at 100 to 200 per 100 square kilometers. Let us use, for the sake of illustration, Benn's figures (though densities in chilly southern Minnesota were almost certainly lower than Illinois and Ohio.) The area of Ramsey County is 441 km. sq.; add to that, again for illustration, the area of adjoining Dakota County, and we have a hypothetical hinterland of 1960 km. sq. This would yield, by Benn's estimate, a population of 784 people living in eight to eighteen villages or camps.⁷

Could so few people have built a Mounds Park mound? Certainly yes. These are not the pyramids at Giza or Teotihuacan. The building of each more resembled an Amish barn-raising – a strenuous (and community-building) project but not a work of great engineering or stupendous effort.

How Were They Built?

On one level, how they were built is simple enough. People usually scraped away the surface sod in the desired shape of the base, did whatever more surface preparation they desired, then piled up loads of earth, probably carried in baskets, until they were satisfied. If the base was circular, a conical shape resulted naturally from dumping fill at the center and letting it flow toward the edges.

All but two of the Mounds Park tumuli were circular and conical, but they did not have to be this way. Thousands of Midwestern burial mounds were oval, linear, or shaped in animal forms. No, a circular base was a choice



the builders made. This was by far the commonest shape for mounds of this Middle Woodland era, but not earlier or later eras. The symbolism seems clear: the sun, the moon, and the horizon all form circles, and so the mounds begin with an eternal, life-giving shape.

Middle Woodland mounds tend to look alike, the most apparent variables being height and diameter. But exterior sameness hides an enormous variety of interior features – soils, structures, excavations, and layers.

As we shall see, the Mounds Park mounds, so similar in appearance, are not at all the same on the inside. Some were built on the original surface, others over hardened fire pits, wooden burial chambers, and stone chambers. While one would suppose that the mound fill consists of simple Dayton's Bluff earth, this is not quite the case: several of the fills contained foundations or layers of extraneous stuff carried in from elsewhere. Several, too, had boulders placed inside them. There is more to them than meets the eye.⁸

Why were they built?

The mounds probably served three purposes. First and most obvious, they housed the bodies of the dead. They were not, however, cemeteries as we think of them. There were far too few buried in them for them to have served

Text of the Mounds Park Historical Marker

Between 1500 and 2000 years ago, Indian people chose this high bluff above the Mississippi river as the resting place for their dead. The impressive burial mounds built over a period of many years remind us of the diverse peoples and cultures that flourished here long before the first European explorers arrived in the late 1600s.

Archeologists today believe that the original builders of these mounds may have been a Hopewellian culture similar to groups in the Ohio River valley. These people probably moved west into the eastern edge of present day Minnesota about 400 A.D. and were eventually assimilated into other regional groups. Artifacts recovered in 19th century excavations show that the builders had exceptional artistic skills and a complex social structure.

In the ballpark, though 1500 years ago pushes the limits; 400 A.D. is a more likely date for the latest construction. All date foundations are shaky.

There is no evidence that the mound builders moved to this area from the east.

This is probably a reference to certain grave goods found in the mounds. These were probably not made by the mound builders, and in any case were not impressive compared to grave goods found elsewhere.

It would be more accurate to say, a resting place for some of their dead. Only a few were chosen for mound interment, and no one knows for sure how or why.

There is no evidence of diversity one way or another. The mounds might have been built by one group or various. No one knows.

More likely a local culture that absorbed some Hopewellian influences from Illinois.

as the final resting place for everyone in even a small community. They covered the remains of just a few.

The mounds likely served ceremonial functions having to do with group identity, solidarity, and religion. We really know nothing about how the mound builders identified themselves as against the rest of the world, but they almost certainly had regular contact with people from other groups or societies. Whether friendly or rivalrous, contact with people different from themselves was likely to heighten the imperative of self-definition. The building of mounds and burials of the dead provided excellent opportunities for people to gather, work on common projects, and in so doing reaffirm group/clan/lineal identities. Thus people from scattered communities or settlements in this general area likely converged at Dayton's Bluff from time to time to reaffirm what they had in common.⁹

The mounds probably served also

as territorial markers. The tallest of the St. Paul mounds were among the most prominent of any along the Upper Mississippi, and whether they marked off territory good at producing food or just a place of ceremonial importance, they surely carried this message: This land is ours.¹⁰

Who Was Buried in Them?

The question of why particular people were buried in mounds like these has perplexed and animated archeologists and anthropologists for more than a century. To simplify the debate a bit, some believe that people buried in mounds, especially those buried with fine grave goods, must have been members of an elite class— and therefore that the societies they came from had status divisions. Others argue that these ancient mound-building societies were too small and scattered to have much class division, and therefore it is more likely that those given special treatment

in death did so because of their deeds (or other purely individual characteristics) rather than elite status.

The Mounds Park remains do nothing to help resolve the debate. Around 20 substantially complete (though often headless) skeletons were found in the mounds – primary burials – and fragments of around thirty more, though any count of individuals based on fragments is an educated guess at best. Two of the fragmentary remains – a jawbone and a skull — were believed to be those of children. Some of these remains were probably intrusive burials, that is, dug into the mounds after – sometimes centuries after — they were built. We do not know the ages or sexes of any of the people buried in the mounds; the science to determine such things was not available to T.H. Lewis and his colleagues, and none of these remains is available for testing today.

A tall mound placed on the edge of a precipice overlooking a river – such

as all of the surviving Mounds park structures — places the remains of the dead between water and the heavens. The mound itself does something similar, rising from a circular base toward the sky. Though we cannot know the minds of the ancients, it seems clear that burial in one of these mounds was charged with significance and would have been reserved for an important few. But the question of how these ancient people determined importance is beyond resolution right now; the mound builders probably felt no need to behave in ways that conformed to today's theories of their beliefs and practices.¹¹

What Was in Them?

This question must be answered with a prominent qualifier. The mounds were excavated by 19th century investigators, some of them amateurs in their day, all of them amateurs by today's standards. The first digs took place in 1856, the last in 1891 (except for an accidental dig in 1895.) These are the digs for which we have records. Hobbyists and looters may have started before 1856 and kept at their work with more persistence than the scholars. Whatever they took is lost for good. We do not know what objects were carried away in the night or missed due to careless excavation.

The early students of the mounds gave them identifying numbers, starting with No. 1, the southernmost, and proceeding north along the bluff (toward downtown) through No. 18. These numbers remain in use even though only six mounds survive. We will proceed here, one by one, summarizing what is known about each one and signaling which mounds still exist.

Mound No. 1 (destroyed 1895.) This was the second-smallest of the blufftop mounds, just two feet tall with a 23-foot diameter. Excavated in 1882 by Theodore H. Lewis. Parts of three skeletons and eleven mussel shells were found inside. Its dimensions were very common for Middle Woodland mounds.

Mound No. 2 (extant.) Never ex-

cavated. It is, or was, twelve feet tall with a 60-foot diameter. If truly untouched, it is the only Mounds Park mound still in its original state. It stands right on the edge of the bluff looking due south.

Mound No. 3 (extant.) Originally eight feet tall (by another estimate ten), it appears to have been built directly on the surface (some, in contrast, began with excavation below surface level.)

Charles DeMontreville, an amateur scholar and historian, dug into this one in 1867, and Theodore Lewis followed in 1882. DeMontreville found a cluster of skulls three to six feet west of the mound center, and about six feet down from the top (that is, about two feet above the original surface.) (This off-center placement was common.) Lewis found a cranium near the center, about 3.3 down from the top, a cluster of four crushed skulls several feet to the east at the same level, cremated remains at the same level a few feet away, and two boulders atop some fragments of remains near the base. Scattered human bone fragments and mussel shells were found throughout the mound fill. The placement of the various skulls and other bone pieces suggests that they were not all buried at the same time.

Lewis also found an item unique in Minnesota archeological lore. We will let him, writing fifteen years later, de-

scribe the find:

About one foot further to the east of these [the four crushed skulls mentioned above] was the seventh skull, which proved to be a rare find, indeed I know nothing similar ever having been found in the mounds or ancient graves. The facial bones of the skull in question had been covered with red clay, thus producing an image of the original face. . . . From the size of the skull and the teeth it is evident that it belonged to a child about five years of age.¹²

Mound No. 4 (destroyed 1895.) This one was very small, about thirty inches in height. Alone among the Dayton's Bluff mounds, it had an "elliptical approach" ten feet wide, sixteen feet long, and two feet tall. One skeleton, a primary burial, and some bones of a secondary burial were found in the mound, along with two mussel shells placed directly atop it. Another burial, with mussel shells, was found in the approach structure at about the level of the original grade. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 5 (destroyed 1895.) The original dimensions of this mound are not recorded. There were two headless skeletons and two mussel shells inside, probably at around the level of the original surface. Excavated by DeMontreville in 1867.

Mound No. 6 (destroyed 1895.)



Mounds Two and Three in 1898, MHS photo.

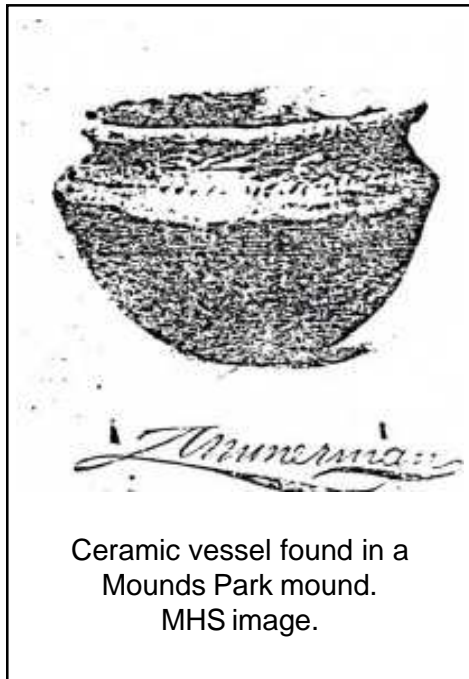
The smallest, a foot tall and 18 feet in diameter. Sparse contents: two human bones, a stone tool, a mussel shell, and an arrowhead, all found at or below the original surface. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 7 (extant.) Originally twelve feet high and 70 feet in diameter, Lewis and colleague William Gross dug into this one in 1879. Near the mound center, seven feet down from the apex, they found first a bone awl. Beneath it, a stake about two feet long, three inches in diameter, pointed on the bottom, apparently driven down into the fill. Two feet further down, near the original surface, they found a burial chamber.

The chamber consisted of five wood poles or planks, eight feet long, laid side by side but not adjoining, separated each several inches from the other. They were positioned on a north-south axis. Seven small boulders had been placed atop the central plank. Under the wood they found a layer of black loam earth and a few scattered human bones – a well-preserved thigh bone, part of an arm bone, and one vertebra. Below this layer, ash and charcoal, below that, five inches of hard yellow clay, packed and apparently hardened by fire. And beneath this, six inches of loose, sandy clay containing some teeth and fragments of shell-tempered pottery. This was a simple but carefully constructed burial chamber or crypt.¹³

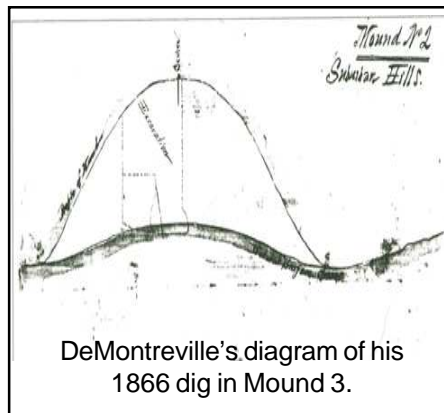
Mound No. 8 (destroyed 1895.) It was an oval four and a half feet tall, 28 feet in diameter, and built over a fire pit some fifteen inches below the earth surface; and about two feet above the former pit, a layer of red earth or ocher. When Alfred J. Hill and William Kelley dug into No. 8 in 1866 they found just a few human remains, but also a ceramic pipe and “a large number of sea shell beads closely packed together” as though forming a bracelet.

Only four complete skeletons have been found on Dayton’s Bluff, all of them by accident. On September 20,



Ceramic vessel found in a Mounds Park mound. MHS image.

1895, city park workers, razing Mound 8 to improve the view from the park road, came upon “a gruesome find”: Several tons of earth had been removed before the center of the mound was reached. The four skeletons were found together at a depth of about six feet from the top of the mound. They were embedded in the original clay. When the dirt had been cleared so the remains could be seen, it appeared evident that the bodies had been cast roughly into the pit. There were really three layers of bones, as though one body had been thrown in above the other. The one found first appeared to have been in a reclining position. The skull, vertebrae and ribs were on a



DeMontreville’s diagram of his 1866 dig in Mound 3.

higher level than the bones of the legs. Directly beneath this skeleton lay another, crosswise, it seemed, of the pit. The third and fourth skeletons were still lower down, though not entirely separated from them by a layer of earth.

They also recovered two breastplates of hammered copper. These finds caused quite a stir, and the superintendent of parks took custody of the artifacts. They have since disappeared.

If the measurements were correct, this mound featured a burial pit some eighteen inches beneath the original grade and floored with clay. The burials appear to be “in the flesh,” and not at all likely to have been “cast roughly into the pit.” The presence of the relatively rare copper ornaments refutes that notion.¹⁴

Mound No. 9 (extant.) This was and is the tallest of the mounds. Most of the early writers gave its height as fifteen feet; one (its first excavator, Edward Duffield Neill) estimated eighteen. This one appears to have been built on a natural rise at the most prominent point of Dayton’s Bluff, on the edge with a commanding view of the gorge.

No. 9 yielded surprisingly little to investigators. Dr. Neill, who cracked it open in 1856, found just fragments of a skull rather high up. An 1862 dig, by Hill and Kelley, found an oar-shaped layer of clay, about 15 inches thick, about halfway down from the peak. They also found one human jawbone, believed to be that of a child, three feet up from the original surface. This mound was probably also the first one built. Scholars have concluded from studying other sites from this era that the first mounds were often placed on the most prominent spot and had few burials in them. This description fits No. 9 precisely. It may have stood alone on Dayton’s Bluff for many years.

Mound No. 10 (destroyed.) No. 10 yielded just a little more than No. 9: one cranium with a projectile point nearby, four feet from the top, and an-

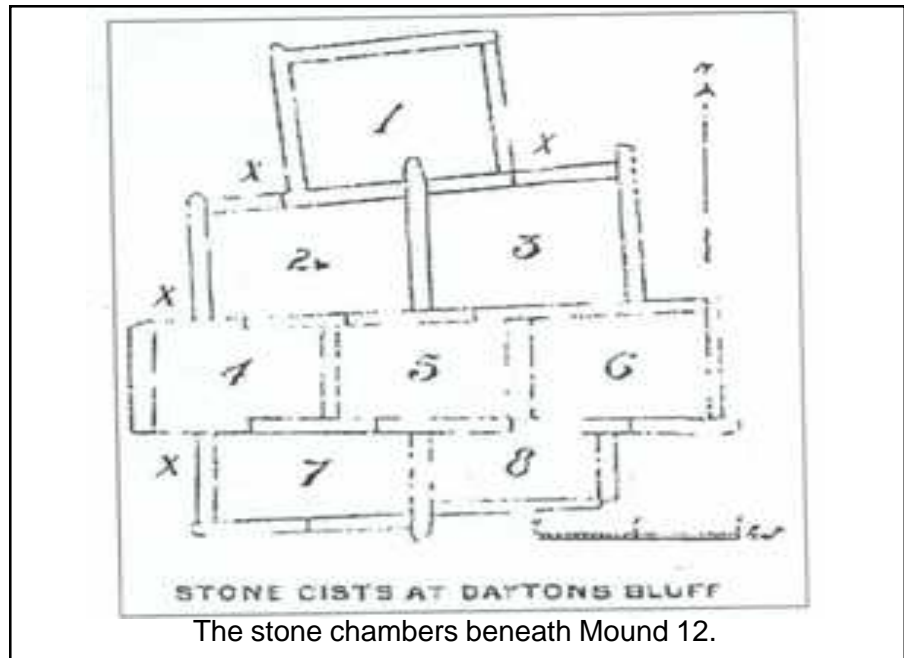
other at the same level a several feet to the west. These, clearly, were secondary burials. Just above the original surface, there was a layer of ash and charcoal two or three inches thick. This mound was ten feet tall with a diameter of 46 feet. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 11 (destroyed 1895.) This was another small one, just 18 inches. It had a skeleton, probably a primary burial, two mussel shells, and some small boulders inside. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 12 (extant.) Originally eight and a half feet tall, this one had a basement. The builders dug three feet below the original surface to fashion eight chambers, called cists by the archeologists, of upright limestone slabs. These in turn were covered by limestone slabs, then boulders, followed by a seven-foot-long ridge of sandy clay. Each of the chambers had been filled with black loam and contained a few bones lying on the bottom, a piece of skull and a leg bone. Parts of twelve bodies in all were found. All were secondary burials. Some of the chambers also contained grave goods: twelve limestone arrowheads, a bear tooth, a chunk of lead ore, a piece of red clay, and a copper ornament. Lewis described the ornament thus: "oval in outline, flat on one side and convex on the other, with a small hole on each end for inserting a string. It is made of a thin sheet of hammered copper, the edges of which were notched in order to fit around a wooden pattern of oval shape." Nearly all of the chambers also contained mussel shells. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 13 (destroyed.) Number 13 was unusual. Just four feet tall, it contained six boulders placed over a cranium, and beneath these features, at or slightly below ground level, two headless skeletons apparently lying on their sides facing one another. Excavated by Lewis in 1882.

Mound No. 14 (destroyed.) Five feet tall, and five skeletons inside, along



with seventeen mussel shells and five mussel shell spoons. Excavated by Lewis in 1883.

Mound No. 15 (destroyed.) Four and a half feet tall, built over a pit five feet in diameter, two and a half feet deep, and filled with river sand. A skull and parts of three skeletons were found here too, and one arrowhead.

Mound No. 16 (destroyed 1905.) Mound 16, a bare rise in the earth 28 feet in diameter and 18 inches tall, was built over a six-inch pit and a layer of black loam in which were found parts of three skeletons and twenty-two mussel shells.

Mound No. 17 (destroyed 1895.) Just like No. 16. No. 17, also 18 inches tall, was built atop a subsoil foundation of limestone slabs. Bone fragments and arrowheads.

Mound No. 18 (destroyed 1862.) Just like 16 and 17.

This listing of mound dimensions makes clear that though St. Paul city park planners were responsible for leveling most of the Dayton's Bluff mounds, they did so with discrimination. Whether they knew it or not, by preserving the tallest of the mounds, they preserved the oldest and most interesting ones. The smallest ones – Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, and 18 – would have

appeared barely perceptible rises in the earth; from a monument-presentation perspective, they likely would have confused the public more than enlightened. Removing the smaller, vaguer mounds emphasized (and emphasizes still) the bigger ones.¹⁵

What Do These Mound Features Tell Us?

The Fill. It isn't just dirt. Or, it is just dirt, but it has something to tell us just the same. Every fill element introduced into the mounds was done so for a reason, probably a religious (or at least spiritual) one.

In these mounds we see a variety of bases and fills: sand, sandy clay, packed clay, red ocher, charcoal and ash. Some of the clays were soft, others fire-hardened. All of the mounds also contained mussel shells or shell fragments. All of these had to be carried to the site at some cost of time and effort; they had to be important. Such elements were common in burial mounds of this vintage all over the Midwest, though there was no consistent pattern. Clays, river sands, even ashes are all believed to be symbolic references to water, and mussel shells must fall into the same category. Some believe them to relate to a common wa-

ter-diver creation story, in which the earth was formed from mud dredged from the bottom of a lake or river.

These humble fills, then, tell us that at least some of the Mounds Park mounds were used in mortuary ceremonies that probably involved rebirth and renewal.

The Human Remains. Few were recovered, none has been scientifically studied, and none is available now for examination. Adults and children are

represented, buried in a variety of ways. Some burials are clearly primary, that is, buried in the flesh; these are skeletons. Others are secondary, and usually fragmentary. Those, for example, in the limestone chambers of Mound No. 8, consisted of just a handful of fragments each. The people had been de-fleshed elsewhere, either by burial or exposure to the elements, then brought to the mounds for final interment. It may be that all eight were

brought at once, or that the chambers were filled in over a long period of time before being sealed and the mound built atop. There were also intrusive burials, that is, remains inserted into the mounds after they had been built, perhaps hundreds of years later.

The Artifacts. Most were unremarkable, projectile points and the like. A handful, though, put the historical imagination into gear. The copper ornaments, lumps of lead, marine shell

The Great Excavator: Theodore Hayes Lewis



Most of what we know about the Dayton's Bluff mounds we know because of one man, Theodore H. Lewis. Born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1856, he spent a few years as a young man at Chillicothe, Ohio, near some of the greatest of all North American Indian earthworks. There he caught the archaeology bug. Lewis moved to St. Paul in 1878.

In 1880 he met Alfred Hill, an Englishman, civil engineer, real estate investor, and amateur archeologist who had settled in St. Paul. They formed a partnership to produce the Northwestern Archeological Survey, with the goal of documenting and preserving the ancient earthworks of the Mississippi Valley.

Hill paid Lewis \$3 a day to find, mea-

sure, sketch, and investigate burial mounds and other structures, mostly in the Upper Midwest. As Charles Keyes wrote in 1928, "Nearly fifty-four thousand miles of travel and more than ten thousand of these on foot!" And not just travel: locating the mounds, pestering landowners for permission, slogging through field and forest in all weather, then taking whatever shelter might be at hand for the night. And then writing it all up: the solitary work of an obsessive.

Lewis's achievement was titanic. He documented perhaps as many as 17,000 burial mounds, including almost 7,700 in Minnesota, over 4,000 in Wisconsin, almost 800 in Iowa, 700 in South Dakota, and about 600 each in North Dakota and Illinois. He and Hill planned to publish their findings, but Hill died in 1895 without leaving money to complete the project. Jacob Brower took it up then to a limited degree, but Brower died in 1905. Whether coincidentally or not, Lewis left St. Paul in 1905 also. The Northwestern Archeological Survey has never been published, though it did lead to A.N. Winchell's *Aborigines of Minnesota*, published in 1911 and still a remarkable work; it comprises the Minnesota portion of the survey.

Lewis, sometimes alone, sometimes with a collaborator, excavated thirteen of the eighteen mounds atop Dayton's Bluff and many of the smaller ones that trailed down toward Carver's Cave, mostly in the 1880s. He was a careful archeologist for his time (a time when digging into a mound was a respectable

Sunday pastime.) The standard method was to cut a wide trench from the top center down to the original grade, extract artifacts and remains, then fill the thing back in. With smaller mounds, Lewis sometimes did two or three in a single day.

Lewis published a great many articles – about sixty according to Fred A. Finney's compilation – but almost nothing after leaving St. Paul in 1905.

Lewis lived in Colorado for a time and then St. Louis, where he apparently ran a newsstand. He never married. Lewis died in the St. Louis poor house in 1930 and was buried in a potter's field. It is a cliché but true; the man died alone, impoverished and forgotten, but his work lives on, admired as never before. Without Theodore Hayes Lewis, inestimable knowledge of ancient America would have been lost.

Sources: Scott F. Anfinson, "Cultural and Natural Aspects of Mound Distribution in Minnesota," *Minnesota Archaeologist* (1984); Robert A. Birmingham and Leslie Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); Fred A. Finney, "The 1860-1873 Mounds Survey Made by Alfred J. Hill in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and South Dakota" *Minnesota Archaeologist* 64 (2005): 145-151; Fred A. Finney, "Theodore H. Lewis (1856-1930): An Obituary," *Minnesota Archaeologist* 64 (2005): 11-20; Charles R. Keyes, "The Hill-Lewis Archaeological Survey," *Minnesota History* (June, 1928): 96-108.

beads, and bear tooth, are all typical objects of the ancient exchange network known as (and so named by twentieth-century scholars) the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. This was a network of astonishing scope, covering nearly all of the eastern half of what is now the United States. The objects that traveled in this network were mostly finished goods: obsidian from Montana and Idaho, copper from Michigan, lead from Illinois, shells from Florida, mica from the Southeast. Some of these objects were extremely fine.

The finest came from southern Ohio, from earthworks excavated on the farm of one E.C. Hopewell. Burial mounds there yielded mica cut in the shapes of stylized hands and faces; enormous ceremonial obsidian blades; more blades of fine chert. Southern Ohio was proved to be one center of a culture that flourished around 200 BC to 400 AD. A second center was later found along the Illinois River Valley near its confluence with the Mississippi. This one is called Havana-Hopewell, named for a town nearby. The beliefs and artistic styles of these peoples proved to be enormously powerful and persuasive throughout the ancient Midwest and Upper South.

The items traveled by exchange, of sorts, from one people to another, but not in trade in a commercial sense. They probably traveled by gift (a “prestige chain” in the words of one scholar), and may have taken many years to travel across the continent. They may have changed hands in diplomacy between peoples, and then in ceremonial gift-giving within societies, before ending up as grave offerings.

Archaeologists have traced Hopewell influences from culture to culture, site to site, mound complex to mound complex. Certain patterns are clear. One is that the various peoples and cultures that encountered Hopewell styles and ideas reacted differently, adopting some aspects, rejecting others. The second is that distance from Hopewell centers mattered; as a gen-

eral rule, the farther away, the weaker the Hopewell effect.

The copper ornaments, lumps of lead, the perforated bear tooth, and marine shells found at Mounds Park are typical objects of the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. What their presence tells us, then, is that Hopewell influence reached this far, probably having made its way up the Mississippi from Illinois. In fact, the St. Paul site (along with another at Howard Lake in Anoka County) represents precisely the far northwest limit of the Hopewellian. Put another way, the ancient St. Paulites participated in the Hopewell Sphere as the most distant of outliers. The grave goods recovered at Dayton’s Bluff are notably fewer and humbler than similar items found in mounds of the same era, not far away, at Trempealeau, Wisconsin, and northeastern Iowa.

This relative poverty of mortuary offerings may have had various causes. The people may simply have been poorer and fewer than those further south, hence less attractive recipients of impressive gifts. Living so far from the Havana-Hopewell center in Illinois, it is possible that distance drained vigor from the Hopewell influences as they passed from one people to another. Perhaps, too, the local people found Hopewell ideas and practices less compelling. Or they picked and chose: impressive mounds, yes, rich grave goods, no.¹⁶

The shape and placement of the mounds themselves.

The mounds were built right on the edge of Dayton’s Bluff. From below – and below, along the river, is where people would have lived – they would appear positioned between the earth and the heavens. The mound itself rose from the earth toward the heavens, and its internal structure often repeated the theme, with subterranean chambers and layers of fill suggesting water.

These mounds, especially No. 9, are the tallest ever known to have existed in Minnesota (except for the one-of-a-kind, 45-foot Grand Mound near

International Falls) or Wisconsin, the states that rank second and first, respectively, in numbers of American Indian burial earthworks. We cannot know what importance the ancients found in the height of mounds, but the taller the mound the greater the community effort, and certainly human beings everywhere have built tall for religious reasons. We cannot know, either, the extent to which the mound builders knew what other people in the region were doing. Did they think, “Let’s build one bigger than anyone else?”

What we do know is that they did build the biggest; not only the biggest, the last – there are simply no ancient burial mounds along the Mississippi River upstream of Indian Mounds Park. There were thousands built north of St. Paul, mostly around lakes and smaller rivers, but not along the Mississippi.

If, as the weight of expert opinion supports, the surviving Dayton’s Bluff mounds were built by participants in the Hopewell phenomenon, then David Braun (though not writing about this region specifically) offers a possible view of the society from which the mounds arose:

The picture emerging of the local organizational base for the Hopewellian inter-regional network, then, is not one of great complexity. The ingredients – weakly to moderately developed village segmental organization, weakly to moderately developed regular pan-residential ritual, personal dominance within and perhaps differential dominance among local social segments, an absence of consistent symbols of hierarchical gradation, a mixed hunting-gathering-gardening subsistence system, and modest densities of population residing in relatively small villages – are familiar ones, even if their patterns of combination here are peculiarly eastern North American.¹⁷

Will We Ever Know More Than We Know Today?

Probably not. Archaeology and ancient American anthropology will con-

tinue to advance, and some developments may bear on our St. Paul site. But with the mounds' artifacts scattered and lost, the human remains lost too, and the data from the mounds so flawed and incomplete, there is not much grist for the scholarly mill.

Most archeological attention in this field has shifted away from mounds and toward habitation sites. No habitation sites related to the St. Paul mounds are likely to be found after nearly 150 years of urban development.

Only the excavation of the supposedly untouched Mound No. 2 might yield something new. Such an event is extremely unlikely. It would require an archaeologist with a conviction in its importance, funding to match, and the political skills to fight through the restrictions and prohibitions of statutory protections, not to mention the local opposition such a project would incite. This is not going to happen, and that may be for the best.

What Do Our St. Paul Mounds Tell Us?

The mounds remind us that where we live today, others lived two thousand years before. There were probably relatively few of them, but they did not live in isolation. They traded ideas with people nearby and far away, and participated in a wider regional culture. We do not know who they were or what became of them, and we probably never will.

We can guess that they responded to the beauty of the river valley much like we do. We know that they honored their dead, at least some of them, with monuments, and built religious structures up toward the sky. We do the same. Still, their hunting-gathering ways, their religion and their ceremonies, are incomprehensible to us – just as our ways and beliefs would be to them.

The chasm between us and them, in time and in mind, is unbridgeable. And yet we and they have something in common. We find this place, despite the cli-

mate, congenial. We live far from the centers of culture (in our case national, in their case regional), but we participate in the whole. We stand a bit apart from the rest of our society, picking and choosing (or so we like to think) those elements of it that suit us best, just as our mound-building predecessors picked and chose from the great Hopewell cornucopia. We are both peripheral and integral, and we like it that way.

Acknowledgments: I want to thank John Fino for his assistance and helpful comments, especially in the early stages of this project; Daniel Cagley and Patricia Emerson of the Minnesota Historical Society for their help in learning what became of artifacts from the mounds; Alan Woolworth for his information and guidance; State Archaeologist Scott Anfinson and Professor Kelli Carmean of Eastern Kentucky University for reviewing the manuscript and saving me from various blunders; Ellen Holt-Werle, Macalester College Archivist, Susan Otto from the Milwaukee Public Museum; and the staff of the St. Paul Public Library for their invaluable assistance through inter-library loan.

Citations

¹ T. H. Lewis, "Pre-Historic Remains at St. Paul," *American Antiquarian* 18(4) (July 1896): 207-210, quote at 207. Lewis here specified: "In 1878 there were four groups of mounds located on the east side of the river with a total of fifty-eight mounds of all classes." Of these, eighteen stood atop the bluff, and thirty-two trailed down toward Carver's Cave. A map published in N. H. Winchell, *The Aborigines of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1911): 265, shows the northernmost most near Euclid St., a few hundred yards north of the Carver's Cave lookout and marker. The bluffline there has been mostly covered by roads. T. H. Lewis, "Mounds and Stone Cists at St. Paul, Minnesota," *American Antiquarian* 18(4) (July, 1896): 314-320 (dates of his count and destruction by quarrying.) Jane E. Buikstra and Douglas K. Charles, "Centering the Ancestors: Cem-

eteries, Mounds, and Sacred Landscapes of the Ancient North American Midcontinent," in Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp, eds., *Archaeologies of Landscape, Contemporary Perspectives* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 202-227.] "Middle Woodland, or Hopewellian, peoples again turned to the bluff crest, where formally organized communities cemeteries led, over time, to the creation of mound clusters arranged in linear fashion. The earliest mounds tended to be positioned nearest the valley on the most prominent natural feature, with the more recent, frequently larger structures in less conspicuous locations." 212. On Dayton's Bluff the four tallest, Nos. 9, 7, 3, and 2, stand right on the bluff edge. Winchell, *Aborigines of Minnesota*, 262. Personal communication with Tim Wahl of the Minnesota Geological Survey, 5 Dec. 2006: \blufftop elevation, 880 ft., average river elevation, 687 ft. above sea level.

² Brian Fagan, *Ancient North America, The Archaeology of a Continent* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 369, places it 200 BC – 400 AD, but this is a general statement for all of eastern North America. Robert A. Birmingham and Leslie E. Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000): 92, date the Middle Woodland at 100 BC - 500 AD. They observe also, however, that the building of large earthworks in North America ended between 200 and 400 AD: p. 98. In Stuart Struever, *The Hopewell Interaction Sphere in Riverine-Western Great Lakes Culture History*, Illinois State Museum, Scientific Papers, Vol. XII, No. 3 85106, Struever dates the Middle Woodland in this area at 400 BC to 350 AD, and the Hopewell period to 100 BC -- 350 AD. Douglas K. Charles, "Woodland Demographics and Social Dynamics in the American Midwest: An Analysis of a Burial Mounds Survey," *World Archaeology* 24(2) (1992): 175-197, 186: Constance M. Arzigian and Katherine P. Stevenson, *Minnesota's Indian Mounds and Burial Sites: A Synthesis of Prehistoric and Early Archaeological Data* (St. Paul: Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist, 2003), gives a range of Middle Woodland in Minnesota as from 400 BC

(Howard Lake) to 700 AD (Laurel), with the Hopewell period (including Mounds Park) as 200 BC -- 300 AD, pp. 84-91. "An important corollary is that only one mound appears to have been in use at a site at any given time throughout the Archaic and Woodland periods."

³ Duane Champagne, *Chronology of Native North American History: from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present*, (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994): 66. Scott R. Anfinson, "Cultural and Natural Aspects of Mound Distribution in Minnesota," *Minnesota Archaeologist* 43(1) (Spring 1984): 3-31. 27-28. Gary Clayton Anderson, "Early Dakota Migration and Intertribal War: A Revision," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11(1) (January 1980): 17-36. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Precontact American Indian Earthworks Minnesota*, Section E, "Statement of Historic Contexts," 6-7 (early Dakota history in Minnesota.) Arzigian and Stevenson, *Minnesota's Indian Mounds*, 116 (early Dakota history.)

⁴ T. H. Lewis, "Pre-Historic Remains at St. Paul," 207.

⁵ David W. Benn, "Some Trends and Traditions in the Woodland Cultures of the Quad-State Region in the Upper Mississippi River Basin," *Wisconsin Archaeologist* 60 (1) (1979), 49; John O. Anfinson, *The River We Have Wrought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), nicely describes the Mississippi before its human re-engineering, at pp. 9-22. Writing of the "driftless [that is, unglaciated] area a little more than a hundred miles downriver from St. Paul, James Stoltman wrote, "For horticulturalists as well as the hunter-gatherer, the richest habitat for human occupation was the Mississippi Valley and the lower Wisconsin Valley. Nearly all of the important edible animal and plant species available in the uplands were also available here, but an important bonus was the high concentration of aquatic resources, such as fish, coak savanna were excellent for deer, "the most important game animal" in the region. James B. Stoltman, "Middle Woodland Stage Communities of Southwestern Wisconsin," in David S. Brose and N'omi Greber, ed., *Hopewell Archaeology, The Chillicothe Conference* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Uni-

versity Press, 1979): 122-139, 124. The area around St. Paul was glaciated, but in many other ways similar to southwest Wisconsin. Benn, "Some Trends and Traditions," 47-82.

⁶ Guy C. Gibbon and Christy A. H. Caine, "The Middle Woodland to Late Woodland Transition in Eastern Minnesota," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology*, 5(1) (1980), 57-71, quote 60-61. Benn, "Some Trends and Traditions," 47-82; Richard W. Yerkes, "Hopewell Tribes: A Study of Middle Woodland Social Organization in the Ohio Valley," in William A. Parkinson, ed., *The Archaeology of Tribal Societies* (Ann Arbor: Archeological Series, No. 15, International Monographs in Prehistory, 2002), 227-240, 235-237 (knotweed, goosefoot, sunflower, chenopodium, maygrass in Eastern North America generally. He cites: Dee Anne Wymer, "Cultural Change and Subsistence: The Middle Woodland and Late Woodland Transition in the Mid-Ohio Valley," in C. Margaret Scarry, ed., *Foraging and Farming in the Eastern Woodlands* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993): 138-156, 148.

⁷ David P. Braun, "Midwestern Hopewellian Exchange and Supralocal Interaction," in Colin Renfrew and John F. Cherry, ed., *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 117-126, quote at 119. Paul J. Pacheco and William S. Dancey, "Integrating Mortuary and Settlement Data on Ohio Hopewell Society," in Douglas K. Charles and Jane E. Buikstra, ed., *Recreating Hopewell* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 3-25; Gibbon & Caine, "The Middle Woodland to Late Woodland Transition," 57-59.

⁸ David W. Benn, "Some Trends and Traditions," 47-82, 56-57.

⁹ Richard W. Yerkes, "Hopewell Tribes," 231. Douglas K. Charles, "Woodland Demographics and Social Dynamics in the American Midwest: Analysis of a Burial Mounds Survey," *World Archaeology*, 24(2) (1992), 175-197, at 176. But this scarcely seems possible. Paul J. Pacheco and William S. Dancey, "Integrating Mortuary and Settlement Data on Ohio

Hopewell Society," in *Recreating Hopewell*, 3-25, 6:

¹⁰ Jane E. Buikstra and Douglas K. Charles, "Centering the Ancestors: Cemeteries, Mounds, and Sacred Landscapes of the Ancient North American Midcontinent," in Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp, eds., *Archaeologies of Landscape, Contemporary Perspectives* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 202-227. Douglas K. Charles, "Woodland Demographics and Social Dynamics in the American Midwest: Analysis of a Burial Mounds Survey," *World Archaeology*, 24(2) (1992), 175-197. Robert A. Birmingham and Leslie E. Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000): 77. A. Martin Byers, "The Earthwork/Habitation Dichotomy," in *Recreating Hopewell*, 62-73.

¹¹ Joseph A. Tainter, "Woodland Social Change in the Central Midwest: A Review and Evaluation of Interpretive Trends," *North American Archaeologist*, Vol. 4 (2) (1983), 141-161. James A. Brown, "The Shamanic Element in Hopewellian Period Burial," in *Recreating Hopewell*, 475-488, 488.

¹² T.H. Lewis, "Mounds and Stone Cists," 315-316.

¹³ Havana ware was grit tempered, Hopewell ware limestone tempered. Shell-tempered pottery seems to have been rare. Lewis, unfortunately, was not much interested in pottery; modern archeologists prize it as frequently "diagnostic," that is, a reliable cultural identifier. Mark F. Seaman, *The Hopewell Interaction Sphere: The Evidence for Interregional Trade and Structural Complexity* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical society, 1979), 282. Prof. Kelli Carmean of Eastern Kentucky University points out that shell-tempered pottery arose in this area much later than the likely dates of the Mounds Park mounds, making Lewis's find, or his description of it, hard to explain. That piece may have been inserted into the mound hundreds of years after it was built.

Only one piece of pottery from the mounds can still be found – the small pot shown in this article – but it is comparatively recent (according to MHS archeolo-

gist Patricia Emerson), and apparently came from one of the 32 smaller mounds, not from one of the 18 blufftop mounds.

¹⁴ “Uncovered Skeletons,” *Pioneer Press*, September 26, 1895, p. 5. Arzigian and Stevenson (see Note 15) do not mention the objects from the 1895 accidental excavation in their summary of remains and objects recovered. Identification of the 1895 discoveries as coming from Mound 8 derives from Lewis’s 1896 “Pre-Historic Remains At St. Paul” article. There he refers to this mound being elliptical, 4.5 feet tall, and next to the tallest of the mounds. Though he uses different numbers (7 and 8, respectively), these can only be No. 8 and No. 9; No. 8 was the only elliptical mound, it was 4.5 feet tall, and right next to No. 9, the tallest mound.

¹⁵ Mound descriptions come from various sources, but they have recently been very ably synthesized in Arzigian and Stevenson, *Minnesota’s Indian Mounds and Burial Sites*, 472-477. Dates for the mounds’ destruction come from Nancy L. Woolworth, *An Historical Study and a Cultural Resources Survey of Indian Mounds Park (21RA10) Ramsey County, Minnesota*, prepared for Department of Parks and Recreation City of St. Paul, Minnesota, 1981. Scott R. Anfinson, “Cultural and Natural Aspects of Mound Distribution in Minnesota,” 8 (older mounds generally taller than younger ones. “It has generally been believed that large mounds are earlier than small mounds.”) Charles, “Woodland Demographics,” 177: “Interestingly, there tends to be an inverse relationship between MC [Middle Woodland] mound size and number of burials, with larger mounds containing fewer skeletons.”

¹⁶ Yerkes, “Hopewell Tribes,” 227-228. David G. Anderson and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., “An Introduction to Woodland Archaeology in the Southeast,” in David G. Anderson and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., ed., *The Woodland Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002): 1-19. Fagan at 373-374 describes the “big man” theory.

¹⁷ Braun, “Midwestern Hopewellian Exchange,” 119.

Burned, Neglected, Purloined, Lost: What Happened to the Remains and Artifacts Found in the Mounds?

The 19th century diggers harvested lots of stuff, human remains and other artifacts. There is no definitive inventory.

The Minnesota Historical Society kept some of the first-excavated artifacts in a drawer at its offices at the first state capitol building. When a fire destroyed much of the Capitol on March 1, 1881, all of those artifacts were destroyed too. There is no list, so we will never know which ones.¹

Hundreds of objects went into the Mitchell-Lewis Collection, part of the work of T.H. Lewis. Most of this collection went to the Minnesota Historical Society. MHS preserves, though not in its public collection, Lewis’s detailed log – a description of each item, where found and when. Lewis at one time possessed scores of artifacts from the Dayton’s Bluff mounds. MHS also maintains a database of these items (and others.) A comparison of the two lists leads to this conclusion: Almost everything recovered from the mounds, including all of the most important objects, is lost.²

Three copper ornaments were dug from the mounds. All are lost or missing. One of them, the copper breastplate from No. 12, ended up at Macalester College. In 1887 Lewis entrusted “various articles of ancient pottery and curiosities” to the college, to be placed in “four wood cases with glass windows” in the library building for a five-year period. Apparently Lewis

never reclaimed them, as they (or, rather, a dwindling number of them) remained at Macalester until 1955. Some time that year Elden Johnson, a professor at the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Archeologist, visited the college with Louis H. Powell of the Science Museum of Minnesota and “received the remains of the Lewis collection from President Turck of Macalaster [sic]. I accompanied Powell when he went to the college for the materials and helped him search the attic of what was then the science building. . . . There was a fair amount of archaeological material, much of it badly damaged, but none of the copper described by Neill [Edward Duffield Neill, first president of Macalester College and first known mound excavator] was found. . . . In trying to run down the copper, we discovered that a couple of anonymous collectors had systematically rifled the collections over the years and that the copper had disappeared while the collection was still on display.”³

The Science Museum still holds some copper items from the Lewis collection, but not the ancient bauble from Mound No. 12. This, no doubt, was the fate of many ancient objects removed from American Indian grave sites: collected, held, transferred, neglected, stolen, dispersed, lost.

No human remains from the mounds can be found today. The four complete skeletons found by St. Paul city workers in 1895 were supposedly preserved, along with the copper ornament found with them, but they are lost, and there is no reference to them in the voluminous Mounds Park files of St. Paul’s department of Parks and Recreation.

The most unusual object recovered from the Mounds Park mounds has gone missing rather recently. The child’s skull and clay mask taken from Mound No. 3 in 1882 rested undisturbed in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society for more than a century. According the longtime MHS archaeologist Alan Woolworth, it sat in a box, still



A ceramic mask found at Rice Lake, Wisconsin, courtesy of Milwaukee Public Museum. The mask found in St. Paul's Mound No. 3 has disappeared.

wrapped in 19th century newspaper, until the early 1990s. And then it was gone. MHS has no record of what became of it; its database lists it simply as "missing." If any photograph of it was ever taken, none can now be found.

This mask was one of just a handful ever found in this region. Wilford Logan found fragments of two masks in mounds at Howard Lake, Anoka County, in the 1930s. Leland R. Cooper found two clay burial masks at Rice Lake, Wisconsin, also in the 1930s. At about the same time, five more (all incomplete) were unearthed in McKinstry Mounds No. 2, near Grand Mound in far northern Minnesota. These masks have been photographed, reconstructed, studied, and compared with others, including those from Rice Lake.⁴ The clay mask from Mound No. 3 has been cited by scholars as evidence of Hopewell influence at the Dayton's Bluff site. Perhaps it was. But this mask will never be studied, and the knowledge of ancient people of this area that it carried will never be revealed.

A relative handful of Mounds Park artifacts are still in safekeeping. They rest in a drawer at MHS headquarters,

in a drawer for items designated for repatriation to Indian tribes but never claimed. They are: some 17 small projectile points; a glass bottle of reddish powder (red ochre) from Mound No. 8; a small earthenware vessel, found in shards (and probably not in one of the older mounds) and reassembled around 1920; a box of small shells strung on a string. Whether these are the shell beads that Lewis found in Mound No. 8 is unlikely. These are the only objects from the mounds known still to exist. They are not available to the general public because, at least in the view of MHS, they exist in a legal limbo, belonging neither to the public nor to any Indian tribe. They rest, no longer under tons of earth, but rather under tons of architecture, deep within the headquarters of the Minnesota Historical Society. They rest.

Sources:

¹ *Pioneer Press*, 2 March 1881, p. 2; *Biennial Report of the Minnesota Historical Society* (Minneapolis: Johnson, Smith & Harrison, 1883): 8-9. "The fine cabinet of archeological and historical relics belonging to the Society was quite destroyed . . . There was also a good collection of pottery, beads, skulls, and implements found in mounds."

² Interview with Daniel Cagley of MHS, 9 August 2006; *Archaeological Catalog, T.H. Lewis-Mitchell Collection* (St. Paul: MHS).

³ Letter from Elden Johnson to Tim Fiske dated 29 December 1965, found in *Archaeological Catalog, T.H. Lewis-Mitchell Collection*, 9 August 2006 at MHS. Memorandum of Agreement between T.H. Lewis and Macalester College, 9 September 1887, Macalester College Archives.

⁴ Personal communication with Alan Woolworth. Interview with Daniel Cagley of MHS, 9 August 2006. L. R. Cooper, "The Red Cedar Variant of the Wisconsin Hopewell Culture," *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee*, No. 16, 20 Dec. 1933. Elden Johnson and Tim Ready, "Ceramic Funerary Masks from McKinstry Mound 2," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 17(1) (1991): 16-45.

The St. Paul Mounds in Context

About 100,000 burial mounds once studded the eastern half of what is now the United States. Over 20,000 of these were built in Wisconsin and perhaps another 15,000 in Minnesota. Most of these were put up in the second millennium, hundreds of years after the Mounds Park structures that we see today. Of the Minnesota mounds, around 2,000 were built along the Mississippi between the Iowa border and St. Paul. The rest, which is to say, the huge majority, were scattered across the state, mostly near lakes, in small groups. Large assemblies, like the 50 at Dayton's Bluff, were rare.

Six counties accounted for nearly 5,000 Minnesota mounds: Goodhue, 1261; Hennepin, 1122; Scott, 635; Mille Lacs, 588; Wabasha, 551; Aitkin, 549; Crow Wing, 501.

The building of tall, conical mounds was a Middle Woodland phenomenon, from the period roughly 200 BC-400 AD. The most important nearby mound clusters comparable to those of Dayton's Bluff were at Trempealeau, Wisconsin, northeastern Iowa, and Albany, Illinois: a few words about each.

Albany. We start with the southernmost because it is believed that the Hopewellian mound-building ideas moved up the Mississippi Valley from the Hopewell center near Havana, Illinois. Albany is on the east side of the Mississippi across from Davenport, Iowa, over 300 miles river distance from Dayton's Bluff. This is a large complex, over 80 mounds, all believed to be from around 0-200 AD. Almost all of the mounds were conical and some tall: fifteen of them seven feet or taller (the tallest 32 feet.) These were similar to the St. Paul mounds in appearance, though a bit flatter in profile. The burial structures inside tended to be more elaborate, the remains more numerous, and the grave goods finer and more diverse than those found in St. Paul. There were sheets of mica, pearls, cop-



Copper ear spools, beads, and blades from a burial mound at Trempealeau, Wisconsin. Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Museum. This is a tiny fraction of the goods found in a single mound, a collection that exceeds in quantity and quality all of the objects found at Mounds Park.

per tools, silver, conch shells, and crystals, none of which appear at Mounds Park.

Northeastern Iowa. Allamakee and Clayton Counties, along the Mississippi just north and south of the mouth of the Wisconsin River, are home to many groups of burial mounds, hundreds of structures in all. About 200 of them are preserved in Effigy Mounds National Monument. Though these mounds are much lower than those of Indian Mounds Park, there are believed to be contemporaries, and many of them have similar features: mussel shells, layers of red ocher, sand, clay, and ash deposits, stone structures within mounds, subfloor burial pits, projectile points and other tools, and of course a variety of human remains, some whole or nearly so, others fragmentary.

Trempealeau, Wisconsin. Trempealeau County is chock-a-block with burial mounds, more than a thousand in Trempealeau Township alone. The mounds are not impressive to see, but . . .

In 1927, in a single mound, archaeologist W.C. McKern found the remains of at least forty-five people and an astonishing array of grave goods: ear

spools, tubular beads, necklaces, and breastplates, all of copper, silver-and-wood buttons, perforated bear teeth, chalcedony blades, all in and around a very large rectangular pit. Similar objects were found in other mounds in the group. In the tallest (10.5 feet), McKern found an obsidian knife. In another, pearl beads.

McKern concluded that the site represents a local adaptation of Hopewell influences. Trempealeau is only about 120 river miles south of St. Paul.

The Mounds Park site is believed Hopewellian too, and the most striking differences between that site and Trempealeau is the relative poverty of the former compared to the latter. The Dayton's Bluff mounds contain much simpler structures, fewer human remains, and much simpler and less varied grave goods – no obsidian, no silver, no chalcedony, no copper beads.

Grand Mound on the Rainy River in far northern Minnesota offers us an illuminating contrast to Mounds Park and its Mississippi River Valley siblings.

This is the biggest of a small group of mounds from the Laurel Culture. Laurel was a Middle Woodland culture, contemporaneous with that of Mounds

Park and sharing many elements. The Laurel people built burial mounds, deposited grave goods, and engaged in regional trade. Laurel mounds have been found to contain projectile points, stone tools, copper beads, and copper sheets. But this was not part of the Hopewell sphere. Rather, Laurel shared traits more with a tier of cultures stretching across the northern Great Lakes.

Sources: Michael K. Budak, *Grand Mound* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995); James B. Stoltzman, *The Laurel Culture in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1973); Scott R. Anfinson, "Cultural and Natural Aspects of Mound Distribution"; Arzigian; Clark Alan Dobbs, "Precontact American Indian Earthworks, 500 B.C. – A.D. 1650," *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form* (Minneapolis: Institute for Minnesota Archeology, 1994.)