

First Inhabitants

Sylvan Township Historical Series

June 25, 2019

By Mike North

Glaciers Receded 8000-12,000 Years Ago

- First inhabitants (Paleo-Indians) arrived ca 9500 B.C. as the glaciers receded
 - ◆ Hunted mammoths, mastodons, sloths, giant bison to extinction
- Archaic Tradition (6,000-800 B.C.)
 - ◆ Shift in technology from hunting slow extinct megafauna to smaller swifter animals (bison, elk, caribou no longer exist here)
 - ◆ Small nomadic families, left little concentrated evidence behind
 - ◆ Itasca Bison Kill Site, 7-8,000 years ago, 16 long-horned bison killed at creek leading into Lake Itasca; discovered 1937

Woodland Tradition (800 B.C.- 1700 A.D.)

- ◆ Peoples of the Middle Woodland period occupied the area from 500-1300 A.D.
- ◆ Three "hallmarks": ceramics, burial mounds, horticulture
- ◆ Start of reliance on wild rice
- ◆ Large village site on bank of Crow Wing River near Sylvan Dam (net-impressed ceramics; quartz, chert, basalt flakes; lithic [stone] tools like points and scrapers)

Woodland Tradition (800 B.C.- 1700 A.D.)



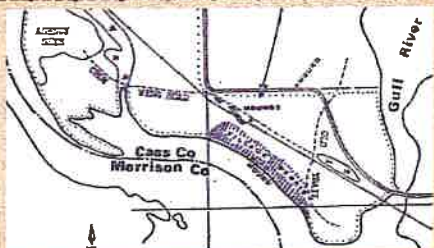
Woodland Tradition (800 B.C.- 1700 A.D.)

- ◆ Mound builders
- ◆ Sylvan Township has largest concentration of burial mounds west of Mississippi. Once at least 150, many now destroyed.
- ◆ Westernmost(?) effigy mounds on the continent (and only a few are farther north)
- ◆ Laurel Culture (?-1000 A.D.)
- ◆ Blackduck Culture (1000-1600 A.D.)

Woodland Tradition (800 B.C.- 1700 A.D.)



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Gull Lake Mound Group (implicated as containing oldest burial mound in MN, **160 B.C.**, but date not universally accepted). Contains moose bones.

Still Called One of the Gull Lake Native American Sites

The Gull Lake Mound Group is a collection of mounds located in the Gull River area of Cass County, Minnesota. The mounds are thought to be of Woodland Tradition origin and are believed to be the oldest burial mounds in Minnesota. The mounds are located on a peninsula in the Gull River, which is a tributary of the St. Louis River. The mounds are located in the Gull Lake Mound Group area, which is located in the Gull River area of Cass County, Minnesota.

160 B.C. - The date of the oldest burial mound in the Gull Lake Mound Group area is believed to be 160 B.C. This date is based on radiocarbon dating of the mounds.

1200 B.C. - The date of the oldest mound in the Gull Lake Mound Group area is believed to be 1200 B.C. This date is based on radiocarbon dating of the mounds.

1200 A.D. - The date of the oldest mound in the Gull Lake Mound Group area is believed to be 1200 A.D. This date is based on radiocarbon dating of the mounds.

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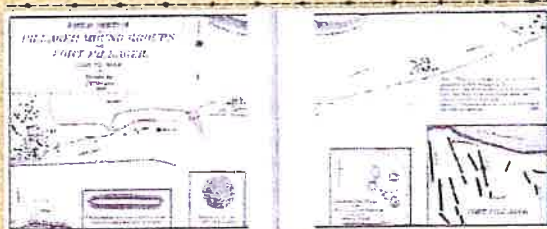
Pillager Mound Group Map, showing two effigy mounds



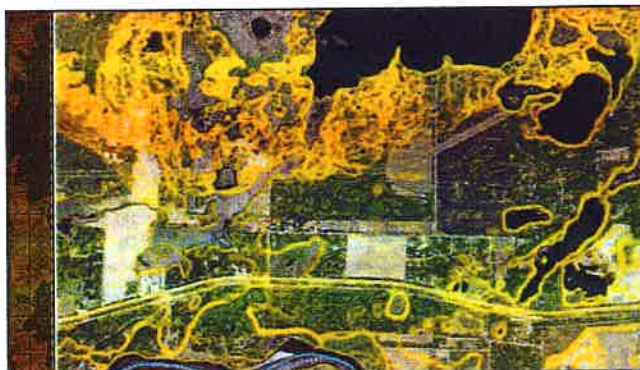
Extent of Effigy Mounds in the Midwest (Musil 1985)



Woodland Tradition (800 B.C.- 1700 A.D.)



Historic Sites Today



Historic Sites Today



Historic Sites Today



Historic Period

- Dakota arrived ca. year 1600
- Ojibwe arrived in 1600's
- Ojibwe drove Dakotas from forested areas of MN by 1739
 - Ojibwe and Dakotas contested this area (part of a 1000-mile war front) until 1862
 - "No Man's Land" 1739-1766
 - Permanent Ojibwe village at Gull Lake in 1800 by Curly Head

1768 – Battle at Mouth of Crow Wing River

- 200 Dakota from village at mouth of Rum River organized a raid on Ojibwe capital at Big Sandy Lake (Aitkin County)
- Dakotas went up Mississippi, Crow Wing, Gull Rivers to Pine River to Boy River to Leech Lake
- Meanwhile, 70 Ojibwe went down Mississippi to attack Dakota village at Rum River
- Dakota massacred village at Big Sandy (except 30 women they took as captives); Ojibwe found a deserted Dakota village

1768 – Battle at Mouth of Crow Wing River

- Ojibwe assessed situation and correctly deduced what was happening
- Ojibwe started north on Mississippi and stopped where Crow Wing River meets Mississippi to set up an ambush
- Supposedly dug rifle pits (identified by markers today in Crow Wing State Park), but this seems somewhat dubious
- Didn't take long for Dakota war party to proceed downriver, stopped across river for a meal in sight of waiting Ojibwe

1768 – Battle at Mouth of Crow Wing River

- After meal, canoes departed
- As Ojibwe fired first shots, the captive women flipped the canoes and swam towards the shots
- Dakota suffered heavy casualties, and after a brief battle, survivors recovered their canoes and fled downstream

1770's – A Period of Winter Truce

- For brief period, warring stopped during the winters as both Nations often wintered along the Crow Wing and Long Prairie Rivers
- This area rich in bison, elk, deer, bear and beavers

1780's – Dakota Attack French Trading Post

- French trading post at mouth of Partridge River, where it meets Crow Wing River (4.7 miles North of Hwy 210 in Staples)
- Trading post heavily barricaded, staffed by 20-40 traders, French voyageurs, and Ojibwe trappers armed with guns
- Attacked in winter by party of 200 Dakota armed with bows and arrows
- Dakota could not penetrate barricade and lost several warriors
- Dakota cut holes in ice in river to bury their dead before retreating

Old Wadena County Park



Also known as
Little Round Hill
in archaeological
community.

1781 – Incident at Pillager Creek (version 1)

- In spring, an ailing French trader (with several voyageurs) stopped at mouth of a creek to camp
- Ojibwe coming down Gull River found him, wanted to trade
- Trader too sick to barter, so Ojibwe started taking things they wanted to trade for, got too rowdy
- Voyageurs fearing for their safety, took trader south in their canoes, where he died near Sauk Rapids
- Local Ojibwe thus became known as the Pillager band

1782 – Aftermath of Incident at Pillager Creek

- Concerned that the incident of prior year would frighten potential traders away, local Ojibwe sent delegation to Mackinac Island to make amends
- Amends made, and Ojibwe returned with trade goods – and possibly small pox
- Villages throughout Minnesota wiped out by small pox
- Alternative theory: small pox picked up in the Dakotas by an Ojibwe war party

1767-68 – Incident at Pillager Creek (version 2)

- A trader named Berté had a trading post at mouth of Pillager creek
- Some Ojibwe robbed him of his goods
- Local Ojibwe had become known as the Pillagers as early as 1775

- Version 2 originates with Henry Schoolcraft ca. 1832
- Version 1 originates with William Warren ca. 1851

1800 – Permanent Village Established at Gull Lake

- Established by Chief Curly Head at NE corner of Gull Lake (Dutchman’s Bluff)
- To serve as outpost for war against Dakotas and as buffer to villages farther north
- Volunteered, or delegated?
- Teamed up with Flat Mouth (Leech Lake) and led a raid on Dakota encampment up Long Prairie River ca. 1800-1802
- Curly Head picked as his successor Hole-in-the-Day (I)

Bust of Flat Mouth, on Display in U.S. Capitol



References

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References

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- Douglas Birk. *Chippewa Agency Historic District.* National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form.
- *Native American History in the Mississippi Headwaters Region.*
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- Chip Borkenhagen. *Pillager Gap: Gateway of the Ages.* Lake Country Journal.

Next Month

“First Non-Native Settlers”

July 30th

6:30 PM

