

**This history was provided to the City of Red Wing by
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**A Monument Mosaic:
Merging Indian Oral Tradition and Scientific Method**

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*Chapter 5 of the thesis that focuses on Red Wing and
He Mni Can – Barn Bluff is printed here.*

CHAPTER 5: A BRIEF DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY OF RED WING



Fig. 5-1: Barn Bluff (*Khemnichan Paha*), Red Wing, MN

Multiple cultural groups inhabited the Red Wing Locality, concurrently or vice-versa. The primary residents of the area may have varied from time to time, among these being the Dakota, Ho-Chunk, Oto, Ioway, etc. Commonalities between these groups indicate the trade of not only day-to-day goods but also customs. Past research has indicated that “the Otos, Missouris, Omahas and Ponkas once formed part of the Ho-

Chunk nation” (Dorsey 1886:212). Each individual group explains that they along with Ho-Chunk people traveled to their present tribal homelands from the north during a distant epoch (Dorsey 1886:213) and Iowa Indian oral tradition bears a strong similarity to that of the Eastern Dakota (Skinner 1925:425). According to *Khemnichan* Dakota oral history, there were seven sub-bands of Dakota living in the Red Wing Locality. Cross-cultural comparison denotes that the Ho-Chunk also has seven divisions or bands (Michelson 1935:446). The number seven is considered sacred to Dakota and non-Dakota peoples. The number seven is significant because it represents the seven directions honored during prayer: above (Grandfather), below (Grandmother Earth), North, South, East, and West and a seventh direction whose spiritual significance is difficult to explain to non-Indians (personal communication, Native Informant #1, n/d). Further discussion of this topic is necessary with Indian informants in order to grasp the significance of the seventh direction. In order to obtain explanations to questions such as these it is necessary to ask Indians (Yarrow 1976: v).

For this research, *Khemnichan* Dakota oral history information was primarily gathered. The Dakota nation is comprised of seven bands forming the original Seven Council Fires or *Oceti Sakowin*: *Mdewakantonwan*, *Wahpetonwan*, *Wahpekutewan*, *Sissitonwan*, *Ihanktonwan*, *Ihanktonwana*, and *Titonwan*. According to oral history, the Dakota sub-bands living in the Red Wing Locality included: the *Khemnichan* (the Hills, Trees, Roots and Water); the *Wah-kuh-tay* (Things That Are Tired For You); the *Wamnduska Emnisha Okodakiciye* (the Serpent Cliff Society); the *Ch-oo-tey* (Shooters); the *Ey-i-te-o-pa* (the Stone Door); the *Me-ke-ak-tu-sh-sni* (Do Not Forget Me); and some

of the *Ey-i-bo-sda-ta* (Standing Rock) bands (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d).

These periods of cohabitation would undoubtedly have lasting effects on each pertaining to customs, life ways, and ceremonies. According to *Khemnichan* Dakota oral history, Indian people conducted an inter-tribal renewal ceremony each spring at the Kiyuska village near present-day Winona, Minnesota:

An honoring of the dead of all the Mdewakanton and other Dakotas, along with mixed-blood Ho-Chunks, was held every spring. They knew where their relatives were buried. It was a time to gather every spring when the lightning and thunder made the land new to honor those in the spirit realm. (Personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d)

For pre-contact peoples, the Red Wing Locality supported an abundance of plant and animal life, and thusly provided food, shelter, and clothing. Their interactions with the physical environment transcended into a spiritual realm as well. To the Dakota the Red Wing Locality was considered *Wakan* for many reasons. First of all, the area is considered *Wakan* because of a plethora of medicinal plants used for doctoring and spiritual cleansing that grew abundantly in the area (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 12, 2007). Also, many geologic anomalies and formations border both sides of the Mississippi River and adjacent tributaries. Geologic formations such as Barn Bluff or *Khemnichan Paha*, the Small First-Born or *Cha-ske Ci-stinna* (a face-like outcropping on the western face of Barn Bluff destroyed during bridge construction in the early 20th century), and a ceremonial soft red stone, or *Ey-i-sha Pan-pan-na*, which is found no where else except locally in the Cuning Fox Hills or *Sundigan Ey-i-sha*

Wicasasni Paha makes the Red Wing Locality especially sacred or *Wakan* to Indian people (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d).

The *Cha-ske Ci-stinna* is said to face in the direction of the *Canku Sha*, or the Red Road. The Vermillion River was called *Wa-se-sa* or *Wa-sha* and it had “various types of red color in certain places along this river nearby Prairie Island” (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d). The soft red stone, or *Ey-i-sha Pan-pan-na*, is of particular importance because of its use in burial practices of the head people of some of the Dakota families, and the Ho-Chunk as well:

When the deceased was fully dressed in his Indian clothes and just before he was to be laid in the casket he walked up to him and, taking some paint from a little bundle he carried, he painted a red mark across his forehead, then a black one with charcoal immediately below this one, and finally he daubed his entire chin red. (Lamere and Radin 1911:438)

The red ochre symbolizes the “Red Road”, or the path of righteousness and one of a true human being. “Walking the Red Road” is a metaphor for a person who is living a true spiritual life (personal communication, Native Informant #1, n/d). The *Ey-i-sha Pan-pan-na* was used during Medicine Lodge practice (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d). *Inyan*, the original spirit, is also said to live in high places such as hills and peaks, therefore mounds, or *Paha Ci-stinna* (small hill), is also a hill that is created and *Inyan* subsequently lives within it. *Inyan* has no beginning and has no end, which is similar to the concept of God or Allah in Judeo-Christian and Islamic belief.

Comprised of sharp contours in an isolated area, Barn Bluff rises out of the valley to over 1000 feet MSL (Mean Sea Level) in elevation and provides a viewshed of the Mississippi River Valley. A hill, or *paha*, due to its sacredness would be used for prayer

in a multitude of ways: examples including offering sites, prayers of thanksgiving, and crying for a vision. Barn Bluff, or *Khemnichan Paha*, is considered one of the original places to pray by the Dakota and hills like it are considered sacred as well:

Khemnichan Paha is a sacred place and has significance to the Mdewakanton and other bands of the Dakota. Hills like Khemnichan on both banks of the Mississippi have great significance, too. Most of the rivers of this area in earlier times had many types of medicine plants that were useful to all Dakotas. Many Dakotas of earlier generation are buried in these valleys. Some of the head people are buried in and around these bluffs in most of these valleys. This was an earlier practice. Throughout different time periods, there were other burial practices. (Personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d)

On *Khemnichan Paha*, or Barn Bluff, young Dakota men and women would ascend the hill in order to kill a rattlesnake to be used in Medicine Lodge practices. After the young person had a finished serpent staff they could become involved in Medicine Lodge, or *Tipi Hanska Wakan* practices. This act served as a rite of passage for Dakota youth. During the time the young person ascended the hill; people in the village below would sing and instinctively know when to stop once the rattlesnake had been killed. A rattlesnake is not normally found at such high elevations, and it is believed that the snake would sacrifice itself for the sake of the young person (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 12, 2007).

According to *Khemnichan* Dakota oral tradition, in the Wisconsin Dells there is a hill similar to *Khemnichan Paha* and its features and was used by the Dakota and Ho-Chunk simultaneously for inter-cultural ceremonies and meetings (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 19, 2007). During these events a food offering would be made to snakes so that the alliance between the people and these creatures would continue, and therefore no one would be bitten and killed. The significance of the

relationship between pre-contact Indians and the rattlesnake was represented in physical form, too. In the South one-half of the Southwest Quarter of Section 27 – T113 N – R15 W; about 40 ft. above Spring Creek, there is/was a group of 20 mounds of which 8 are broad-elongated: No. 3 – 430 ft; No. 4 – 105 ft; No. 5 – 105 ft. In his survey report, T.H. Lewis stated:

It is problematic what may have been the purpose of these serpentine, low embankments. Perhaps the most reasonable hypothesis is that they were intended to imitate the form of the rattlesnake, whose bite may have caused the death of the parties inhumed in the mounds from which they extend. (Winchell 1911:163)

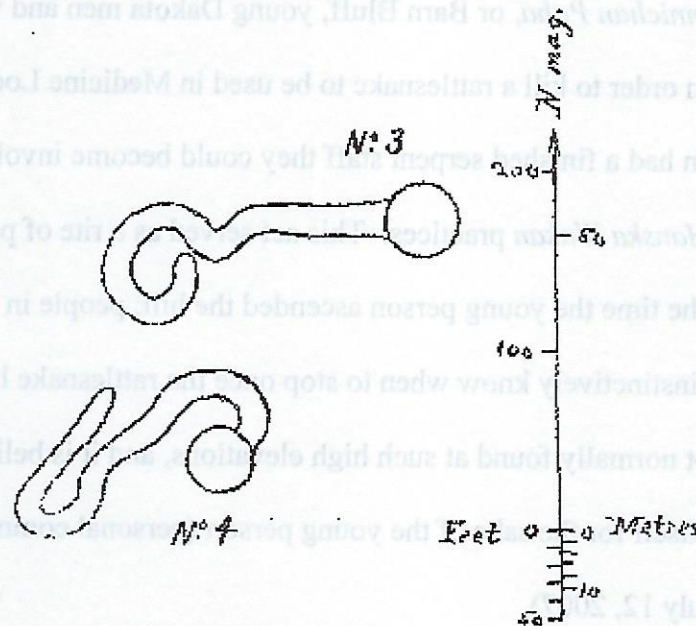


Fig. 5-2: Rattlesnake Effigies, T.H. Lewis 1887.

The rattlesnake or *wamnduska* is considered *Wakan* since it is an ally to the Dakota people. Contrary to the statement made by T.H. Lewis, no rattlesnake is known to have bitten a Dakota (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9, 2007). This creature has a significant role in Dakota belief and ritual. A rattlesnake staff was

used during Medicine Lodge or *Tipi Hanska Wakan* practices. The young person would bring back a rattlesnake that they killed to the village, which would be skinned, and a staff fashioned using wood from Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) or *Wazi*.

Medicine Lodges were located not too far from springs (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 19, 2007). The Red Wing Locality was also known as “The Valley of the Seven Springs” (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., June 20, 2007).

Water, and particularly a spring, is deemed sacred because of its life-sustaining force.

Water, or *Shkan*, is believed to be the blood of *Inyan* (personal communication, Native Informant #1, n/d).

Wamnduska is revered because it is in a constant state of motion when it moves, is always connected with Earth, or *Maka*, and according to Dakota oral tradition the snake sacrificed itself for the sake of the turtle and is said to have swallowed the last egg of the turtle (*keya*) because it was under attack from *Iye*, or the Twister, and the snake thusly saved the turtle from extinction (personal communication, Native Informant #1, n/d).

Keya kept Indian people from starving on multiple occasions (*ibid*). Dakota oral tradition states *Keya* is the creation of three spirits: *Unk*, *Gneski*, and *Iye*. These spirits are said to commonly exhibit non-altruistic behavior, and created *Keya* in spite of *Wakinyan*, or the Thunderer. *Unk* and *Gneski* were proud of their creation and were singing its praises.

Keya possesses body armor, the ability to draw up inside itself in times of strife, and a powerful bite. Because of its strength *Iye* became jealous and decided to kill *Keya*.

Nearing extinction, *Keya* called upon *Wakinyan* for help and promised to be his helper for eternity if *Wakinyan* saved him from *Iye*. *Wakinyan* sent the snake to swallow the last turtle egg, and it is because of this act that *Keya* was spared.

In rituals turtle-shell rattles are associated with the power of *Wakinyan* (personal communication, Native Informant #1, n/d). It is also said that Serpent Mound in Ohio is of Siouan origin and was constructed to honor the snake and to depict this event in oral tradition. According to *Khemnichan* oral history, the Dakota lived amongst the Shawnee of the Ohio River valley before moving back to their ancestral territory of Minnesota and Wisconsin (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9, 2007). Their departure from the Ohio River Valley was due to sickness associated with insects in more humid climates and because of the lessons that could be learned from the four seasons (*ibid*).

As stated, *wamnduska* serves a purpose on this earth and helps maintain the balance of life but is also considered particularly sacred because of its ability to detect “bad medicine”, and those who carry it (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9, 2007). This is particularly why the rattlesnake is considered a friend or ally to the Dakota. Sometimes during prayer a gourd or *shi-sho-qua*, which imitates the sound of the rattlesnake’s tail, is used to send a message to *Wakan Unktehi* (Holy Being) that the prayer comes from a human ally, or one who possesses good medicine (*ibid*). By constructing such large earthworks, the importance of the rattlesnake and its attributes is demonstrated in Dakota belief and practice. Ho-Chunk people also revere the rattlesnake and held ceremonial activities such as dances in which the participants, following a leader, would move in sinuous curves simulating the movement of the snake (Densmore 1947:76).

Analyzing the Dakota name for mounds, *Paha Ci-stinna*, elucidates their spiritual significance as well as indicates areas of prehistoric Indian occupation where they are

found in groups. The name translated into English means “small hill.” In Dakota belief, the significance of the hill, or any high place, correlates to the spirit *Inyan*.

Surveyed mound patterns also indicate that families were buried together as in modern society. *Khemnichan Dakota* relatives would know “where the various medicine plants would be, and where some of their ancestral burial places in the area were” (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d). The memories of ancestors’ lives were kept alive by their descendants and others, so that their stories and the meaning behind the mound would be told to future generations. A mound not only tells a story from the past, but also gives direction for the future.

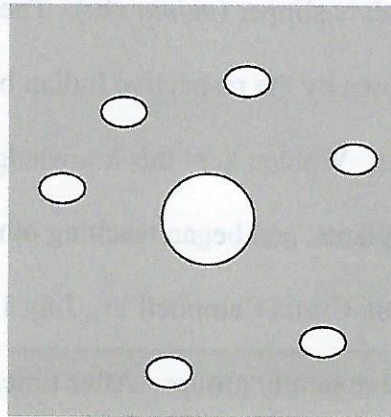


Fig. 5-3: Characteristic Mound Arrangement, Belle Creek Mound Group (Yamada 2007)

It was verified during a visit that the Dakota would scaffold their bodies, collect the bones, and bury them in mounds (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9, 2007). It was the responsibility of a “bone man”, or *hu-hu-wicasa* to bundle the skeletal remains and bury them. Both men and women participated in the ceremony. Also according to Mr. Campbell, the clustering of Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), or *Wazi* in the Dakota language, indicates prehistoric scaffolding areas or a

place where a person has died by natural or unnatural causes. *Wazi* is then said to grow in these spots, and is considered a “soul tree.” Reverend Stephen R. Riggs, an early resident of Minnesota, commented upon these burial practices:

The custom of burial, however, soon after death was not the Dakota custom. It would interfere with their idea that the spirit had not yet bidden a final farewell to the body. Therefore the laying up on a scaffold which was erected on some mound, where it would have a good view of the surrounding country. After a while the bones would be gathered up and buried in the mound and an additional quantity of earth carried up to cover it. This is partly the explanation of burial mounds made since the period of the mound-builders. (Riggs 1893:212)

According to *Khemnichan* Dakota oral history, in the early times the people also discovered the healing properties of the medicine plants, i.e. ginseng (*hutkan*), bitterroot (*sinkpa tawatue*), and lady’s slipper (*pejuta ska*). The *Khemnichan* and *Wah-kuh-tay* Dakota groups were known by the respective Indian bands as the most knowledgeable pertaining to these plants. Women kept this knowledge, were responsible for the collection of medicinal plants, and began teaching others about their medicinal properties (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 12, 2007). The plants were bundled and given to the respective family groups. After time, the plants began to spread and were found throughout the landscape (*ibid*). It was the use of the medicinal plants, especially during Medicine Lodge practices, that reinforced the Dakota ideal of *Wico-we-chi-wazi*, or “relatedness through sharing” (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d). Pre-contact peoples in the Red Wing Locality lived throughout the landscape for centuries before dwelling in large communities along major waterways. For what specific reason did these people begin to congregate en masse? The reason for village formation, according to Dakota oral history, was Medicine Lodge activities (personal

communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., September 15, 2007). It is said that food and game were always plentiful around Prairie Island or *Tinta Wita*. Social contact always existed between the various groups of people that inhabited the area. It was through the act of using medicinal plants, and the Medicine Lodge ceremony that reinforced the ideal of *Wico-we-chi-wazi*, or Relatedness through Sharing. In Dakota belief, plants were placed on Earth by the *Wakan Unktehi* (Holy Being) for the Dakota people to use as a “continuance of his creation of a way of life to be used as a proper maintenance in the balance of this life in proper harmony with the land” (*ibid*).

Also, it was desired that each sequential generation would become increasingly proficient in the use of medicine plants and pass on that knowledge to secure a healthy future for the people. It is said that through the use of the Medicine Lodge, the family groups could foretell the sex of an unborn child and their duty within the tribe. This act was also dependent upon astronomical phenomena such as the position of the stars. The Standing Star Lookers’ Society, or *Wicanphi Wanyaka Nazin Okodakiciye*, a group of non-Dakota origin, was credited as experts in this aspect. The Ho-Chunk, an Indian group known to have resided in the Red Wing Locality during pre-contact times, would also summon a medicine man to pray and foretell the life and career of a newborn child (Bergen 1896:54). The Medicine Lodge of the *Wakan Unktehi* has not been practiced in the Red Wing area or at Prairie Island for approximately two centuries neither as a community nor by a society group (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d).

Khemnichan Dakota oral history tells of a time period when visitors of non-Dakota descent were in the Prairie Island / Red Wing area and lived amongst the people residing there at that time. Some of these family groups lived across the Mississippi

River, *Wak-pa Kai-Kai*, to the north of Prairie Island where the Serpent Cliff Society or *Wamnduska Em-ni-sha Oko-dak-ici-ye* Dakota groups lived many centuries before the arrival of Europeans. This place is now known as Diamond Bluff, Wisconsin (*ibid*).

Dakota and non-Dakota groups inhabited both sides of the Mississippi River:

The Wahpekuta Dakota and some of the Mdewakanton families had villages near the Cannon River down to what is now Red Wing. They also had villages in the valley of the Khemnichan Wa-kpa-da or Spring Creek. There were families of Mdewakanton Dakota and the Wahpekuta and some Wahpe-tu Dakota on all the small rivers and creeks in the valleys on the west bank of the Mississippi River in the Prairie Island/Red Wing area. Most of the Wah-kuh-tay lived primarily near the Kai-kai-ton-wan Wakpa, or the Chippewa River in Wisconsin. Some of these families and some of the Wahpekuta Dakota lived near the Wa-kpa-da Ton-ka in the area of the Wamnduska Emnisha Okodakiciye. Some members of the Me-ke-aktu-sh-sni, the Ch-oo-tey, and Wah-kuh-tay also lived with some of the Serpent Cliff Society Dakota families. This river, the Wa-kpa-da Ton-ka (or the Little Big River), is now known as the Big River in the Diamond Bluff area in Wisconsin. There were also some Wahpetonwan, Wahpe-tu, and Wahpekuta Dakota families who lived near some of these rivers that flowed into the east bank of the Mississippi River. (Personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d)

Respective bands and tribes cross-culturally acknowledged the meanings associated with specific earthworks even though many creation stories exist amongst Indian peoples (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., September 15, 2007).

Whatever form a creation story may take, the meaning is “the real truth of the experience and not its objective reality” (Beckwith 1930:343). Scientists and researchers, as in the case of studying Indian oral history, should not feel obligated to believe literal truths exist in creation stories but should understand that lessons and teachings can be derived from them.

According to Curtis Campbell Sr., *Khemnichan* Dakota oral tradition states that during the period when the Earth was covered by water, *Unktehi* wished to create land. It

was decided to recruit an aquatic creature to gather mud at the bottom of the water for the construction of it. The beaver, or *capa*, known for its intelligence and construction abilities, was asked by *Unktehi* to gather mud. It never returned. The otter, *ptan*, a playful and carefree creature, was then asked to complete this task. The animal dove to retrieve mud but did not return either. *Unktehi* then asked the muskrat, or *sinkpa*, to complete this task and gather the mud needed to construct land.

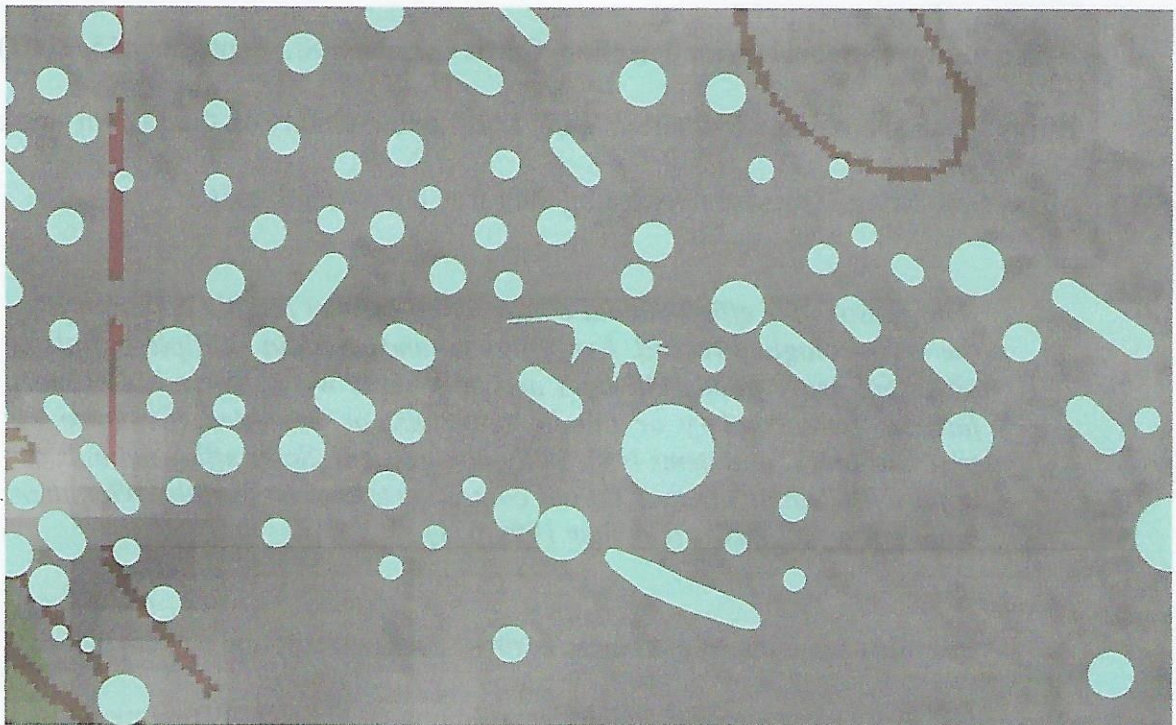


Fig. 5-4: Muskrat effigy mound, Mero/Diamond Bluff complex, Wisconsin

It is said because of the muskrat's humble nature that it indeed retrieved the mud necessary to construct land in accordance with the wishes of *Unktehi*. The muskrat succeeded where the proud and playful creatures had failed. Humbleness was the critical factor in completing what *Wakan Unktehi* had asked. *Sinkpa tawatue* (bitterroot or muskrat root), one of the animal's foods, is one of the four medicine plants that is used in

lodge practices for healing sicknesses, particularly among the young (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., n/d). A muskrat effigy within the Mero/Diamond Bluff mound group, confirmed by Curtis Campbell Sr., therefore reinforces the ideal that humility was a desired trait amongst all Indian people and those who possessed and practiced that philosophy of life would be justly rewarded spiritually.

Respective Indian groups cross-culturally acknowledged the meanings associated with specific earthworks even though many creation stories exist amongst respective Indian groups (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., September 15, 2007).

Effigy mounds are found in the Red Wing Locality but mainly on the eastern side of the Mississippi River. Questions regarding their true purpose still exist:

The reasons for effigy-mound construction are not readily apparent from the archaeological record. Few effigy mounds contain multiple burials or abundant grave goods. All ages and both sexes were interred in primary fashion, as secondary or bundle reburials, or cremated. Evidence for precious and exotic items is virtually non-existent. Some effigy mounds are apparently 'empty' as they do not contain artefacts or burials. Why, then, build effigy mounds? (Gartner 1999:671)

Scientists have interpreted these earthworks as ceremonial centers where respective family groups would congregate (Gibbon 1972:167). Effigy mounds, according to *Khemnichan* Dakota oral tradition, did indicate spots where people congregated, but also had special significance to all Indian people and not merely those belonging to a specific spiritual clan. Effigy mounds were also constructed to keep alive Indian philosophy and teachings courtesy of a specific animal and its importance within the ecosystem in maintaining the balance of life. Effigies were constructed as a means to teach lessons to future generations and to keep the oral tradition alive as well. Effigies, in

short, would preserve ideals and philosophies taught by that creature for the future generations of people that would visit those sites (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., September 15, 2007).