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Lodges of Time and Space: the Stone Cairns of Red Wing

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Cultural landscape analysis

- 4) What is the significance of the localized cairn landscape in Red Wing? How do Native peoples conceive of the Red Wing landscape as a whole? Do specific placenames exist? What inherent meaning may be derived from them?

Researchers today are challenged to consider Indigenous concepts of place and meaningfulness as well as to actively engage with the landscape (Allen 2010:828). The Red Wing region should be conceived as a single traditional cultural property comprised of innumerable individual sites imbued with sacred significance (personal communication, Sebastian C. LeBeau II, August 19th, 2017). Furthermore, future ethnographic research must include placename analysis, which illuminates the cultural meaningfulness of individual places and landscapes (Thornton 1997:221). According to local vernacular, the Red Wing cairns were constructed within the "Valley of the Seven Springs" (RWN 2007). Although its origin seems to be Euro-American, this placename is packed with significance from a Siouan perspective. The root of this placename and its meaning in relation to stone cairn construction is very intriguing. On a deeper level, placenames establish and perpetuate cultural identities and attachment to place

(Basso 1996; LeBeau 2009; Tilley 1994:26). This is true of both Native and non-Native people in the Red Wing region.

For example, Khemnican Dakota oral tradition states Barn Bluff or *Khemnican Paha* was the primary religious focal point and ceremonial base for Medicine Dance practices in the region. Furthermore, it is directly associated with the expansive number of earthen mounds built by pan-Siouan peoples during the Silvernale/Oneota phases (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9th, 2007; cf. Bergervoet 2008). A spatial, religious or symbolic connection between Barn Bluff, Spring Creek Oneota people and local stone cairn construction remains unverified but is possible. At the very least it is a prominent cultural landmark in both Dakota creation stories (cf. Campbell 2000; Westerman and White 2012:19).

Moreover, during the course of this study, further linguistic analysis of the placename “Khemnican” assigns another potential layer of meaning to Barn Bluff. In the Dakota language, the word *k/he-mni-can* is often translated as “hill-water-wood” but it should always be translated as “The Root” (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., July 9th, 2007). After some discussion, it is also possible for the word Khemnican to be broken into different segments, i.e. *khe* = turtle; *mnica/mnicob* = to wade in water (email correspondence, Native Informant #1, July 21st, 2017; cf. LLC 2014). According to Campbell’s (2000:37) family oral account from Prairie Island, during the time period when the entire Earth was covered by water, the muskrat was tasked with bringing up mud from its depths in order to create land (Campbell 2000:37). Thus, from this perspective, Barn Bluff or *Khemnican Paha* may be conceived as the specific location where the muskrat piled the mud on the turtle’s back at “The Root” of this new era. If so, a cultural and spiritual connection with Barn Bluff would be reified through adherence to this belief and the observed physicality of the hill itself.



Fig. 7-6: Barn Bluff, Khemnican Paha, Red Wing, MN.

(From: Uniquely Minnesota, <http://www.uniquelyminnesota.com/activities/best-mn-fall-color-destinations.htm>, Accessed April 3, 2016)

Additionally, this linguistic breakdown of the word “Khemnican” is rather intriguing because many Native creation stories speak of a muskrat that piled mud on top of a turtle’s back, which includes one Dakota/Lakota version (email correspondence, Native Informant #1, July 21st, 2017). Local oral tradition also states the Khemnican people lived near Barn Bluff prior to this time period when Earth was covered with water (ibid). The Khemnican sub-band of the Mdewakanton Dakota were also called “The Root” (Campbell 2000:15; Howard 1984:15).

In sum, the significance of Khemnican Paha itself and the inherent meaning of its placename provides an impetus for broader and deeper placename research, from both Dakota and non-Dakota perspectives, in the Red Wing region and in proximity to the stone cairns. Thus,

future research should consider how Oneota-descendant peoples view Barn Bluff and other regional landmarks as well as elucidating the possible connections between them (cf. Appendix I). Ethnic landscapes incorporate cultural, cognitive, and spatio-temporal processes that do not remain still (Anschuetz et al. 2001:181). Therefore, they are by definition *dynamic*. An enhanced interpretation of these landscapes and peoples is possible through collaborative efforts between Western researchers and Indigenous communities (Silliman 2008).

Conclusion

This study compiles and distills various sources of information in order to defensibly suggest who built the stone cairns of Red Wing, when and why. Furthermore, the stone cairns are fundamental components of a larger yet localized ritual landscape and arguably possess multiple linked functions. Moreover, the meaning of these cairn sites and the associated activity within this localized landscape are presented from Siouan points of view. As new information is brought to light during future studies, the assertions made in this dissertation will be modified or perhaps galvanized. The stone feature taxonomy developed for the Red Wing region is an initial attempt to distinguish between the various types of features encountered in the landscape, literature, and in Native testimonials. It merely provides a malleable base template that others may modify as other stone feature types are encountered during future surveys.

It is surmised the stone cairns of Red Wing were built by Spring Creek Oneota peoples (arguably ancestral Ioway) circa AD 1300 – 1400. Also, the cairns were constructed near a secluded valley, which served as a physical and spiritual sanctuary during a macro-level period of significant social change across the Upper Midwest. The stone cairns were principal

components of a localized ritual landscape woven together through line-of-sight bonds in order to evoke altruistic/protective deities in pan-Siouan belief(s). Moreover, based on the juxtaposition of contemporary Ioway cosmology and the original/intact architectural profile of the stone cairns (cf. Brower 1903; Winchell 1911; Winchell and Upham 1888), the stone cairns also function as effigies in order to preserve and communicate a shared cosmological belief and social identity. Also according to a local Dakota informant, effigies are built in order to preserve ideals and philosophies (personal communication, Curtis Campbell Sr., September 15th, 2007). The aforementioned hypothesis is also consistent with the documented emergence of unique tribal identities in the Upper Mississippi region circa AD 1300 (Gibbon 2003:40-43). Additionally, the Ioway are confirmed Oneota descendants and emerge as the primary occupying group in southern Minnesota during the late pre-contact era.

By constructing the stone cairns, the familial bonds amongst the Spring Creek Oneota would be maintained and reified during a period of environmental and/or social uncertainty across the region. Renewal ceremonies provide a means to maintain order within the cosmos, which is an important responsibility for Native peoples to uphold (Ridington 1987:155). Ho-Chunk philosophers constantly reflected upon the pervasive influence of both positive and negative forces in daily and spiritual life (Radin 1991:52). Peoples alive during the pre-contact era were subject to similar social dilemmas and personal shortcomings as contemporary peoples who also become lax in these responsibilities at times. Furthermore, as Campbell (2000:72) states, "When we would forget these things, the songs and the drum would remind us that this was our purpose in life--to be a good relative...and to have successful relationships with one another." Also, when prayers are not only said but actually sung an emotional bond with the environment and fellow singers deepens (Tuan 2012:27). Therefore, the stone cairns of Red

Wing stand as witness to these long-ago prayers and songs of the Spring Creek Oneota and their shared desire to strengthen existing relationships amongst themselves, the landscape, and the cosmos.

For those living individuals rooted in traditional knowledge and possessing the ability to recognize the sacredness of altars and topographic features, the spiritual connection between the individual, the landscape and his/her ancestors is always maintained (BLM 2005:120).

Pedagogically, the spirit of a place resides in the landscape and “[f]amiliarity with the land, being able to read and decode its signs allows individuals to know ‘how to go on’...” (Tilley 1994:26). On one hand, the stone cairns of Red Wing convey a specific message according to the time and place in which they were built (cf. Clouse 2004:124-125). Additionally, the experience derived from paying homage at a stone cairn also offers something unique for the individual. As Basso (1996:7) writes, “...for what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth.”

At a base philosophical level, a *hekti* – “lodge of time and space” may be conceived as a place that allows an individual to seek solace and spiritual direction in the company of the Creator. Fundamentally, an individual is more able to accept his destiny if it is “decreed not merely by his mortal peers, but by the stars” (Tuan 1971:46). Individuals obtain inner peace when they realize “their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its Powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka [Creator], and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us” (Brown 1953:115). Although human beings are subject to the confinements of space, time, and mortal bodies, the Creator is ever-present and accessible especially in specific places made holy, i.e. consecrated through ritual prayers and acts (cf. LeBeau 2005). As a result, the limits of time and space collapse; therefore making them

irrelevant in the presence of holy, eternal energy. In Native mindsets, “[t]he past and the future are one in the same – it’s all connected” (personal communication, Sebastian C. LeBeau II, July 17th, 2007). Thus, from an ethnographic point of view, the stone cairns of Red Wing not only mark the locations of spiritual wellsprings, but also offer the opportunity for supplicants to be in the presence of holy energy.

Summarily, the Red Wing landscape is deemed sacred by Native peoples namely for its natural features imbued with sacred power as well as multitudes of monuments made holy through prayers still captured within its hills, stones and soil. The spirits of past peoples and the meaning of their actions are not forgotten by those humbly seeking to understand their ideals and philosophies. This old knowledge lies dormant in the land; and from every generation someone will hear the voices of the past and pursue them (recorded interview, Jimm GoodTracks, Rundle and Rundle 2008). If one is truly willing to suffer for this knowledge, wisdom and endurance will be gained. Furthermore, as individuals spiritually mature, they learn an extremely valuable lesson: how to cope (recorded interview, Mae Murray Sine, Rundle and Rundle 2008). Most importantly, as a result of this personal sacrifice, a fire is rekindled to light the way for others.

In conclusion, the stone cairns of Red Wing were built by Spring Creek Oneota peoples who banded together and relied upon traditional ways and prayer in order to persevere during a period of significant change (cf. Betts 2010). Therefore, these monuments are not mere piles of stone but serve as a humble reminder that humans draw more from the land than mere physical needs – it inspires us to keep going.

Aheri hegradanwena Maka mitawe ida wahu ke. (Baxoje)

I look unto the hills from which comes my strength. (Ioway)