

Indian Heights Park: A Brief History

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For the Friends of Indian Heights, Rochester, Minnesota

October 2011

Indian Heights Park in Rochester, Minnesota, is a unique place, one where the history of Minnesota's first people, the Dakota, who gave the state its name, is united with natural beauty and significance, recalling the way Minnesota was when whites first came to the region. Together the Native and the natural significance of the site provides strong reasons for its continuing protection and treatment as a site of pristine natural beauty.¹

Because of its Native American heritage, Indian Heights Park is one of Rochester's true treasures and affords a unique opportunity to honor and preserve the city's rich history and diversity. It is one of the few locations in Rochester where Native American history can be celebrated and preserved for residents and visitors alike. In a city that is internationally renowned for healing, Rochester residents have an opportunity maintain an environment to heal old historical wounds, and to maintain a nurturing, sanctifying natural green space where physical, emotional and spiritual healing can be accessed by all. At the same time Indian Heights Park is the tallest hill along the Zumbro River in Rochester and continues to be "the only undeveloped wooded area remaining in Northwest Rochester," as it was described in the 1970s. From before its purchase for the City of Rochester it is clear that it was the City's intention "that with the purchase of the site, the land will be preserved, and with future action it will be put to public use in a way that is hoped to maintain the natural state."

Native American Sacred Site and Burial Grounds at Indian Heights

Many historical accounts record that the area of present-day Rochester was part of a rich region used for hunting and travel by many bands of Dakota from throughout the Dakota homeland of southern Minnesota. In coming to the region Dakota would have used Indian Heights as a lookout point, for ceremonial purposes and specifically, as the evidence shows clearly, for burials. Though the first direct evidence of burials by a Dakota group dates to the mid-1850s, there is evidence to show the importance of the region and the specific site of Indian Heights, long before that time.

According to the main source on these events, an 1883 history of Rochester based primarily on the memories of an early settler named James Bucklen (sometimes spelled Bucklin), a group of about 200 Dakota people camped on the east side of the Zumbro River across from what later became John Cole's flour mill. During the ensuing months, through the winter of 1854-55, as many as ten members of the band died, and the band asked local settlers to help with burial at the east side of the nearby bluff, which is now

¹ This report was prepared with the research assistance of Jennifer Otto.

Indian Heights Park.² This account is important for many reasons, including for the clues it provides about who these Dakota were, why they acted as they did in getting the help of whites to bury their loved ones, and where exactly these burials took place. Bucklen appears to be a trustworthy source of information. He was in the right place at the right time to observe the events of that winter. Around this time he had laid claim to land along the Cascade River just south of Indian Heights, in section 34 of the township. He would later become the first treasurer of Olmsted County and a member of the state constitutional convention in 1857.³

Bucklen's account also fits in with other recorded history about the region and the history and culture of Dakota people. Prior to white settlement, the region of southwestern Minnesota was a country of varying habitat, including a region between the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers of dense forest as the Big Woods (from the French Bois Francs) and the oak savannah more characteristic of the area around Rochester. In this whole region were a number of river systems with headwaters sometimes very close together, including rivers flowing into the Mississippi, such as the Zumbro (which was known to the Dakota as the Wazi Ozu and to early whites as whites as the Embarrass River), the Cannon, the Root, and a number of other rivers to the south such as the Iowa River and its tributary the Cedar River. Other rivers flowed from the region to the north and west, including the Blue Earth and its tributaries such as the Le Sueur River. Dakota people and other tribes traveled overland on foot and by horseback and on the river in canoes, crisscrossing the region. However, since whites seldom ventured into the area, records about the region are sparse prior to the mid-19th century.

The Dakota in southeast Minnesota had spring and summer villages along the Mississippi River, including villages near present-day Red Wing and Winona. To the west, along the Minnesota River there were villages at Traverse des Sioux, Little Rapids and Shakopee, and several villages near Fort Snelling. In these various villages the Dakota grew corn and other summer crops and made use of the other resources of the river valleys. These villages were close to trading posts where the Dakota could get needed supplies. During the winter Dakota hunters and their families ventured into the interior of present-day southeastern Minnesota, up rivers such as the Zumbro to hunt, as did the Wahpekute Dakota who did not have permanent villages, though some of their bands were concentrated along the Cannon River which stretches across southern Minnesota from close to the Minnesota River near Le Sueur to its outlet on the Mississippi at Red Wing. Villagers from the Minnesota River villages may also have come here, including the Wahpeton people of Little Rapids and the Mdewakanton in the villages near Fort Snelling.

² The Bucklen account is given in *History of Winona and Olmsted Counties*, 637-639 (Chicago, H.H. Hill and Co., 1883).

³ Warren Upham and Rose Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 88 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, Collections, Vol. 14, 1912); Minnesota Census, Olmsted County, 1865; Bureau of Land Management, Land Records, SE ¼, Sec. 34, T107N, R14W, 5th PM.

Detailed accounts of residence in the region are rare because of the absence of white traders in the interior. In a unique account, Ite Maza or Iron Face, known also as Jack Frazer, whose father was English and mother Dakota from Red Wing's village, told the trader and Minnesota's first governor Henry H. Sibley, in a narrative of his life, about hunting bears one winter in the 1820s near the forks of the Zumbro, near present-day Oronoco. Frazer and his relatives traveled west on the Middle Fork of the river to Wazi Ozu (literally "pines planted") or Pine Island, a well-known grove of white pine trees which provided the Dakota name of the Zumbro River.⁴ This was a favorite location of Frazer's uncle Wacouta, the leader of the Red Wing village. The band continued hunting along the Zumbro until spring when flooding forced their return to the Mississippi River.⁵ In another part of his narrative Frazer told of the ease with which the Dakota traveled in the region, describing how one year he journeyed with a forty-three lodges (or families), of Dakota, probably more than 200 people, up the Whitewater River as far as the falls.⁶ They then crossed overland to the upper part of the Root River where they hunted for bear deer during the winter, along with Grey Iron and his band from Black Dog's village near Fort Snelling. At this time, Frazer was married to Grey Iron's daughter. In the spring he and his wife decided to accompany Grey Iron on his return journey overland, as far as Pine Island, then returning south to the Root River, a journey that could have taken them through the area of present-day Rochester⁷

According to the Fort Snelling Indian agent Lawrence Taliaferro in 1831, the region between the headwaters of the Cannon and the Des Moines River to the south were "the heart of the Wahpacoota [Wahpekute] Country."⁸ This would have included or bordered closely the area of present-day Rochester. The geographer Joseph Nicollet traveling along the headwaters of the Cannon River in September 1838 noted that the Wahpekute continued to hunt through the region despite fears of attacks by the Sauk and Fox who lived to the south. He found them gathering wild rice near Lake Elysian along the border between present-day Le Sueur and Waseca counties. He noted that "from time to time some of them wander alone on the prairie or on the summit of hills where they stop to weep on the tombs of some of their buried kin."⁹

As Nicollet's accounts suggest, prominent hills such as Indian Heights were long places of importance to Dakota people, for burials and other purposes. For burying their loved ones the Dakota favored such sacred sites on prominent locations above waterways, sometimes near their villages, if that was possible, but always in a place where the graves could be protected from flooding and other dangers. Since such sites were sacred in their

⁴ Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 11, 207 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969).

⁵ Henry H. Sibley, *Iron Face: The Adventures of Jack Frazer, Frontier Warrior, Scout, and Hunter*, 51, 70-71 (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1950).

⁶ An 1894 map of Whitewater Township, Winona County, shows a town named Whitewater Falls in section 27 of the township.

⁷ Sibley, *Iron Face*, 54-58.

⁸ Journals of Lawrence Taliaferro, Aug. 7, 1831, original in Minnesota Historical Society.

⁹ *Joseph N. Nicollet on the Plains and Prairies*, ed. by Edmund C. Bray and Martha Coleman Bray, 125 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976).

own right, it meant that, at least among people steeped in Dakota culture the burials would be respected. When possible burial scaffolds would be raised onto which the deceased could be placed. Later on the remains would be buried in the ground on the same site.¹⁰

Long before the arrival of whites in the Minnesota region the Dakota people and their ancestors had long been burying their dead at sites such as Indian Heights. Other prominent examples throughout Minnesota included the area of Mounds Park in St. Paul and Oheywahi/ Pilot Knob in Mendota Heights, both documented Dakota burial sites which were desecrated in the past and have now been protected.¹¹ An 1855 account in the *New York Tribune* of a traveler among the Yankton Dakota near Fort Pierre states that the Dakota people of that region chose “the highest hills and those commanding the finest view” for burials, “for they say that the that as beautiful scenery was pleasing to the dead while living they must be so to the spirits also.”¹² According to the missionary Stephen R. Riggs, natural elevations such as Indian Heights were given the name *paha*. Riggs provided an explanation for the use of such hills as burial mounds. He stated:

If the question be asked: Why do the Dakotas prefer these mounds as the places of deposit for their dead? I answer: *First*, as before suggested, that the place may be seen from a distance all around. As they wail morning and evening they can conveniently look to the abode, not only of the body of their departed friend, but as many of them believe, of one of the spirits also. *Secondly*, all *pahas* are under the guardianship of their god Heyoka. *And thirdly*, a hill may be regarded as a more congenial place of rest for a spirit than a valley; and thence too, the earthly spirit may the better hold communion with the one which has gone to the east along the “iron road,” or is above making progress on the “wanagi tachanku,” . . . or spirit’s road.¹³

As Riggs makes clear, the sites chosen for burials had a sacred character for the Dakota, which led them to be used as burial places; the sites did not become sacred solely because loved ones were buried there, though this fact added great importance to these sites. However, not all of such sites were sacred because of their association with Heyoka.

¹⁰ Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834*, 162-169 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986); Ella Cara Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*, 62-69 (Rapid City, SD: Mariah Press, 2007).

¹¹ On Pilot Knob see Bruce White and Alan Woolworth, “Oheyawahi/ Pilot Knob: A Hill of State & National Significance in Dakota County,” *Over the Years*, 45 (2): 1-24. This journal is the publication of the Dakota County Historical Society. On the Mounds Park area of St. Paul, see Constance M. Arzigian and Katherine P. Stevenson, *Minnesota’s Indian Mounds and Burial Sites: A Synthesis of Prehistoric and Early Archaeological Data*, 472-477 (St. Paul: Office of State Archaeologist, 2003).

¹² *New York Daily Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1855. The author of the article stated that the Yankton used scaffolds but never buried the deceased in the ground. Other evidence cited below shows that this was not true of the Minnesota Dakota.

¹³ Stephen R. Riggs, “Mounds of Minnesota Valley,” *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1: 149-152 (St. Paul: Ramaley, Chaney & Co., 1872).

Taku Wakan Tipi or Morgan's Mound, a hill located near Fort Snelling, and now the site of the Veteran's Administration Hospital was sacred for the Dakota because of the Dakota belief that it was the dwelling place of an underwater being known as Taku Wakan or Unktehi.¹⁴ Similarly Oheyawahi/ Pilot Knob was said to have been created by Unktehi.¹⁵

Constance Arzigian, research archaeologist and the co-author of *Minnesota's Indian Mounds and Burial Sites: A Synthesis of Prehistoric and Early Historic Archaeological Data*, published by the Minnesota Office of State Archaeologist in 2003, wrote recently about Indian Heights: "Bluff-top locations such as this are frequently found to have been used for burial, as workshops and as habitation sites. Historic records indicate that one part of the park had been used for burials, though the current status of those remains is unknown. Further, the area is a logical place to have been occupied throughout the past, from the historic era back into prehistoric contexts potentially thousands of years old."¹⁶

Bucklen's account of the burials in Rochester provides unique evidence of a Dakota burial at such a site at the very moment when the Dakota were to be exiled from their homelands. The 1850s, at the very time of the white settlement of Rochester, was a time of great change for Dakota people. With the signing of the 1851 treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux the Dakota gave up ownership of their land west of the Mississippi River. In 1853 the federal government began to remove the various Dakota bands from the Mississippi River to new reservations on the Upper Minnesota River. Some Dakota did not go right away. Because of limited food and resources on the reservations other Dakota returned to hunt and live in their old homelands, in places such as the Zumbro River. Willis A Gorman, territorial governor of Minnesota who was responsible for removing the Dakota wrote in November 1853, that a portion of Wabasha's band, which had its summer village at Winona, or near the mouth of the Root River, had taken refuge "in the country on the Red Cedar river near the Iowa."¹⁷ The Red Cedar River, now known as the Cedar River, has its headwaters in Dodge County, Minnesota, a few miles from the headwaters of the South Fork of the Zumbro River.

This information provides support for the belief that the Dakota people who were in Rochester the following winter were members of Wabasha's band. However, other Dakota may have returned to the area early in the winter of 1854-55. According to government officials the Dakota at the new reservations were not paid their annual annuities until late November 1854. After that, because of the lack of food on the

¹⁴ Mary Henderson Eastman, *Dahcotah or, Life and Legends of the Sioux around Fort Snelling*, 2 (Reprint ed., Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 1995).

¹⁵ White and Woolworth, "Oheyawhi/ Pilot Knob," 45 (2): 4.

¹⁶ Letter of Constance Arzigian, sent to the Friends of Indian Heights, July 12, 2010.

¹⁷ Gorman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Nov. 15, 1853, in NAM M234, R. 761.

reservation, many returned to hunt for the winter in their traditional hunting areas east of the lower Minnesota River, which could have brought many to the Zumbro River area.¹⁸

Corroboration of the accuracy of Bucklen's account of the Dakota in Rochester in the winter of 1854-55 comes from his description of the disease from which they suffered. Bucklen's account states that the first Dakota woman who died was believed to have died of smallpox, although since the disease did not spread widely, it was concluded that it could not be smallpox. However, the account states that at least ten Dakota died. Given the fact that the Dakota had been exposed to the disease before and that some, though not all, were vaccinated against it in 1830s and later by government officials, this would leave open the possibility that she and others at Rochester could have died of that disease, without affecting the entire band.¹⁹

Several historical accounts state that various bands of Dakota were affected by smallpox during the winter and spring of 1855. Several St. Paul newspapers reported that one family of Wabasha's band—said to have been at the new reservation at Redwood—had died of the disease and that five Wahpekute, “now at Cannon River, have fallen victims to the fearful scourge.” This evidence puts the Wahpekute in closer proximity to Rochester than Wabasha's band can be documented to have been that year. However the fact that these two bands were suffering from the disease suggests the possibility that they had been in contact with each other during the winter away from the reservation at Redwood and that the members of Wabasha's band had since returned there.²⁰

Bucklen also provided clues about the identity of the Dakota in giving some of their names. He noted that one of the chiefs was a young man “Coskass,” described as “a smart young fellow, not more than twenty years,” who died of injuries he had sustained when kicked by his pony during the winter. Another chief who helped arrange for the burials of his fellow band members was named Haboo. In addition to these individuals, Bucklen named other Dakota, including a young woman named Winona, and her father Muzomoney, who was described as an “Indian doctor.” Some of these names are common and could be from any band, though several appear similar to names listed on government annuity rolls for Wabasha's band at that time. The name Muzomoney was similar to that of Mazomani or Iron Walker, the leader of the Little Rapids Wahpeton village on the Minnesota River, although similar names were found in other bands including Wabasha's band.²¹ Given the documented presence of people from Wabasha's

¹⁸ Willis A. Gorman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 30, 1855, NAM M234, R. 762; copy in Minnesota Historical Society cataloged as M175.

¹⁹ Lea Vander Velde, *Mrs. Dred Scott*, 82 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰ *Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul weekly), March 7, 1855, reprinting and earlier report from *the St. Paul Pioneer*. See also Mark Diedrich, *The Chiefs Wapahasha*, 109 (Rochester, MN: Coyote Books, 2003).

²¹ The name Haboo is similar to the name Haybo given as the a head of family listed in an 1852 annuity roll for the band of Tahtaypsin, an alternate name for the leader of Wabasha's band at that time. The closest equivalent to the name Coskass on the list is a single man named Chaskay dan, a version of the name Chaska or Çaske, given by Dakota to the first-born son in a family. The name Winona is also a generic name given to the first-born female child. The name Muzomoney appears close to the Dakota name

band in the region at the time, and the reported deaths of members of the band from smallpox it appears possible this was the origin of the Dakota in Rochester. However, since members of different Dakota bands often hunted together over the course of a winter, it is still possible that Wahpeton and Wahpekute could have been included.

An important feature of Bucklen's story was that the Dakota involved asked whites to bury the band members who died. It was noted that "through fear or superstition, or some other impulse the Indians engaged the whites to bury their dead." The most detailed story involved the burial of Coskass. To bury him, they hired settlers hired James Bucklen and another man named Lewis "Bucklin," who may have been the son of James.²² These men constructed a coffin out of puncheons, or hand-hewn boards, placed the remains on a sled drawn by oxen, and they set out for the burying-ground.

To understand why the Dakota would have asked white settlers to help bury their dead at Indian Heights one must understand more fully the historical context. The fact that the Dakota were under strong pressure to remove at the very time these deaths took place meant that they would have had great difficulty taking the remains with them halfway across the state. In addition it was winter, which meant that burial in the ground might be difficult. Usually the remains would have been placed on a scaffold, wrapped in a blanket or animal hide, though by the 19th century Dakota often placed bodies in coffins on top of scaffolds. The coffins were given them by missionaries, Indian agents, or by the Army at Fort Snelling. For example in February 1836, Skush kah nah, a chief of the Wahpekute Dakota from the Cannon River came to see Indian Agent Lawrence Taliaferro to obtain a coffin for his young son who had recently died.²³

In the case of the burials at Rochester, the Dakota would not have been able to obtain coffins from earlier sources, nor would they be assured that burials in the ground would be respected by the whites flooding into the area. The account from James Bucklen state that it was from "fear or superstition" that the Dakota hired the whites to help them, but it seems more likely that hiring whites to aid in the burial was not only a means of getting their loved ones buried but also to assure that these remains would be respected once buried, by creating a sense of obligation among the whites who helped them.

The question of how remains would be treated after the Dakota left the region was certainly one of concern to Dakota communities at this time, as they removed to the Upper Minnesota River from their ancient homelands. In the same 1883 history that

Mazamani, meaning Iron Walker. This was the name of a leader of the Wahpeton village Little Rapids on the Minnesota River, although there were a few others of this name in other bands. In Wabasha's band in 1852 there was a single man named Mahzah and a married man named Mazah kokepah pi. See Stephen R. Riggs, *A Dakota-English Dictionary*, 97, 309, 577 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992). For more on the Wahpeton chief see Janet D. Spector, *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village*, 43 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1993).

²² In the U.S. Census, Minnesota, Olmsted County, Rochester, 1857, both James, age 46, and Lewis W. are listed with their last names spelled Bucklyn.

²³ Journals of Lawrence Taliaferro, Feb. 21, 1836, originals in Minnesota Historical Society.

recorded Bucklen's account of what occurred in Rochester is another account regarding Dakota burials in the area of Winona. John Burns who settled in a valley adjacent to the later town of Winona received permission to settle there from Wabasha's band. "The locality was the special home of Wabasha and his family relatives when living in this vicinity. It was sometimes called Wabasha's garden by the old settlers." The account states that this land contained a burial ground. The Dakota asked Burns to respect the burials which he did faithfully:

Quite a number of Indian graves were on these grounds. Nearly in front of the farmhouse there were two or three graves of more modern burial lying side by side. These were said to be the last resting-place of some of Wabasha's relatives. The Sioux made a special request of Mr. Burns and his family that these graves should not be disturbed. This Mr. Burns promised, and the little mounds, covered with billets of wood, were never molested, although they were in his garden and not far from his house. For many years they remained as they were left by the Indians, until the wood by which they were covered rotted away entirely. A light frame or fence of poles put there by Mr. Burns always covered the locality during his lifetime.²⁴

From the Dakota point of view—often recorded in a variety of sources in the 19th century—the choice of burial location in Rochester, on a prominent nearby *paha*, that is Indian Heights, was also important for the long term protection of the burials. Bucklen's account states that the burials took place "on a bluff nearly west of where the Cascade mill now stands." The account stated "there were, in all eight bodies of deceased Indians buried there [though others may have been buried there later that winter], and the spot has ever since been known as the 'Indian burying-ground.'" Bucklen also noted that after the burials, the Dakota moved "to the head of a ravine on the north side of the bluff, north of the present residence of Dr. Eaton." This would appear to have placed them closer to the burying ground. The Dr. Eaton mentioned in the account appears to have been Roswell Eaton, a physician listed in the Rochester censuses for 1870 and 1880 as living in the third ward, the same ward, including a portion of Cascade Township, in which the Bartholomew Donohue, whose quarry was located on the north side of Indian Heights. The 1870 census lists Eaton and Donohue only a few households apart from each other.²⁵ Thus, rather than avoiding the area of the burials, these Dakota returned to the area where they were located prior to their departure in the spring of 1855.

Later accounts provide even more details relating to the location of the burials on Indian Heights. The evidence suggests that Dakota may have returned to these burials in later years, though most Dakota were exiled from Minnesota in 1863. Another newspaper article in the *Rochester Post & Record* in April 1918, refers to a "certain point upon the brow of the hill back of where Carl Schultz, now deceased, used to live, there was a spot

²⁴ *History of Winona and Olmsted Counties*, 276-277.

²⁵ U.S. Census, Minnesota, Olmsted County, Rochester, Ward 3, p. 9, 10.

which was known as the Indian burial ground.”²⁶ The article continues: “The reference to the location of the burial ground tallies with the spot which the boys of Northwest Rochester years ago used to know by that same name. It seems strange that in all the years which have elapsed, no venturesome person has ever sought to search the place to ascertain whether or not skeletons rest beneath the soil of the sun-kissed hillside.” According to an 1896 plat map Carl Schultz owned land south of the Donohue quarry on top of the hill.²⁷

The earliest published reference to the burial of Dakota on Indian Heights in Rochester comes from the *Rochester Free Press* in August 1859, in an unusual account, a poem by an author only identified by the initials A.N.M.²⁸ The poem, entitled “The Indian’s Grave” gives a romantic account of the burial of an Indian chief on a hill above the Zumbro River, in a setting very similar to the geography of Indian Heights. The poem begins with these two stanzas:

Here sleeps the Indian in his grave,
Here long and quiet be his rest,
No more he leads his warriors brave,
Ah no! the sod lies on his breast.

Upon this bluff he often stood,
And gazed upon the vale below;
Here viewed the rolling Zumbro’s flood,
And marked its rapid winding flow.

Although the following nine stanzas do not identify the chief as Dakota, the details given, telling of these Indian people hunting buffalo, make clear the tribal connection. Other details accord with the identification of Indian Heights, including the chief standing on this hill and looking “down the eastern vale,” which would have been the view from the hill to the Zumbro and the future location of Rochester. In this vale he foresees the arrival of the white man and gathers his fellow tribesmen to foretell the demise of his own people in the face of ten thousand white men who will replace them. He concludes:

I now am old,—I’ve spent my breath;
My top is dead—I’ve lived my time;
My hands are growing cold—‘tis death!
Here, brothers, bury me and mine.

²⁶ “Sauntering Around Olmsted County, The Indian Burial Ground,” *Rochester Post & Record*, April 22, 1918, p. 3. The reference to the Carl Schurtz property is also found in Joseph A. Leonard, *History of Olmsted County Minnesota*, 23 (Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1910).

²⁷ Plat map for “North Part of Rochester,” 1890.

²⁸ *Rochester Free Press*, Aug. 6, 1859.

It is unclear if the author of the poem had been in Rochester four years before. He or she may have simply heard the story of a chief buried on the hill and romanticized the story in the typical rhetoric of the time about the “Vanishing Race” of Indian people, not realizing that the chief had not been aged as written in the poem, but rather a young man. The poem certainly did not acknowledge that the Dakota still survived as a people, though they were on reservations in another part of the state.

It is unclear whether Dakota were still making visits to Rochester in 1859. Bucklen’s account stated that the Dakota left Rochester in the spring of 1855 and did not return, although Ho-chunk—known to whites then as Winnebago—did pass through the area in the years following. Records of the visits to Rochester by Ho-chunk have been found in early newspapers.²⁹ In addition later reminiscences of early Rochester residents suggest that Dakota may have returned also. Further research is needed into Rochester newspapers and other sources to provide more information on the question.

Other contemporary references to the burials on Indian Heights have not been found prior to the publication of the Olmsted County history in 1883. Rochester was a growing community that, at least at first did not look back on the history of the area. Settlers were creating their own institutions, and their own cemeteries. In a speech to the Board of Alderman of the City of Rochester in August 1858, Acting Mayor C. H. Lindsley wrote of the importance of “provisions for the proper internment of the dead.” He stated that “nothing indicates the character of a people more surely, than the condition of the place where its dead are laid, and no spot is more sacred, or can cluster around it as many sweet and tender associations.” He spoke of the need for the city to set aside “some retired spot,” neither a steep hillside or a level plain, but a place of “undulating surface, amid groves,” for this purpose.³⁰ Much of his opinions about cemeteries would have been shared by the Dakota themselves.

After the 1883 publication of the account of James Bucklen about the Dakota burials, Rochester residents kept alive the memory of what had occurred on Indian Heights, recording further details about the exact location. In a *Rochester Post-Bulletin* article in June 1929, containing interviews with Edna Emerick, who was born in 1852 and came to Rochester with her parents in 1856, and Burt W. (also spelled Bert) Whiting, who spent most of his boyhood days in Rochester, though he did not come to the area until the 1860s.³¹ Both knew of the burial places although only Emerick was quoted. The article stated that “the Indians would return each year to their cemeteries.” They camped near Cascade Creek in the vicinity of the site of old Tondro's Mill (now Thompson Mill Race

²⁹ One article notes that a dozen Ho-chunk men had visited the newspaper office, on their way to Winona. See *Rochester Free Press*, July 23, 1859.

³⁰ *Rochester Free Press*, Aug. 18, 1858.

³¹ “Indian Sacred Burying Ground Here,” *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, June 7, 1929. Whiting and Emerick are mentioned in Leonard, *Olmsted County*, 220, 228. See also for Emerick, U.S. Census, Minnesota, Olmsted County, Rochester, Ward 2, 1865; on Whiting, U.S. Census, Minnesota, Olmsted County, Rochester, Ward 3, p. 5.

Park), and then going up to their cemetery which was on the hill north of town to the south of where Dr. Joseph T. Asbury's house was later located, on the east side of Indian Heights bluff. The white children evidently interacted with the Native children. Emerick recalled picnicking where the Indian burying ground was. She indicated there were about five or six mounds there. After the Indians stopped coming people went up to the burying grounds and opened them. The article stated: "Quite a few arrow heads and some beads were found. It seems a pity that white people should have disturbed these mounds, because they were graves the Indians had made for all times, so they supposed, just as white people make their own graves. The Indians made a sort of head stone for these mounds, with pointed sticks."

Emerick's account provides evidence that the site had been both sacred and used as a burial site for a long time prior to the 1854 burials there. And like sites such as Pilot Knob/ Oheyawhi, a burial site recently protected from development in Mendota Heights in Dakota County, Minnesota, the site may have drawn Dakota who in returning to Minnesota from exile beginning in the 1880s, would have served as a point of veneration for them. The Dakota ethnographer Ella Deloria wrote that in the 1930s a woman from Prairie Island told her: "We were driven out of Minnesota wholesale, though the majority of our people were innocent. But we could not stay away so we managed to find our way back, because our makapahas were here."³² Ella Deloria noted that the term means earth-hills and is the Santee idiom for graves. This further corroborates the statement made by the missionary Riggs about the used of such hills called *paha* for burials.

Another *Post-Bulletin* article from August 1949, based on Rochester community tradition about the burials on Indian Heights, reports that "An illness struck the camp and four Indians died. Their graves were arranged on top of the bluff near cascade Creek and the Donahue quarry. The bodies were laid on the rocky surface and a roof of shakes was built over each to protect it from the elements." This supports speculation that perhaps white people had desecrated the graves.³³

Although it is not known if all of the Dakota graves Indian Heights were destroyed or removed, another source suggests that some were destroyed during the Rochester Tornado of 1883. Joseph A. Leonard, in his 1910 history of Olmsted County stated that the Dakota buried in the 1850s were only placed on the surface and while the graves were still visible for many years, they were swept away in the Rochester tornado of 1883, something not mentioned later by Edna Emerick who was also living in Rochester in that period.³⁴ An unlabeled article in the archives of the Olmsted County Historical Society cited the Leonard reference and noted:

The Eastern most section of the hill which overlooks the area between 5th and th Avenues N.W., North of 14th Street, is known as Indian Heights. From the crest

³² Ella Cara Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 67-68.

³³ "Early Day Good Samaritan Earned Gratitude of Indians," *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, August 2, 1949.

³⁴ Leonard, *Olmsted County*, 23.

of the hill one can see the living mural of our City. This bluff, which points toward the Zumbro River to the East, was once the burial ground for the Sioux or Dakota Indians who lived in this area a century ago. . . . If you stand on Indian Heights and look out into the valley of the Zumbro, you may catch the sense of freedom and pride possessed by the Indian; freedom given to him by a land that knew no fences; pride in understanding the true beauty and worth of nature.

While the *Post-Bulletin* articles indicated Native Americans returned to the sacred burying ground for several years, the exile of Dakota from Minnesota provided impediments for Dakota to continue to honor the place in the 19th century. Dakota people were widely hated by whites in the state, even those who had protected whites during the 1862 war who were allowed to remain at such places as Mendota and Faribault. In 1863 bounties were offered for the scalps of Dakota people. And it should be noted that religious suppression of Native American practices occurred legally when the Dawes Act of 1887 prohibited Native American religious ceremonies and traditional practices. This suppression lasted until 1978 (approximately five years after the City purchased Indian Heights), when the U.S. Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.³⁵ Thus, it would have been illegal for Native Americans to have used this area for sacred practice until well after the site was purchased as a City Park. Additionally, the legal protection of Native American burial sites, such as Indian Heights Park, did not occur in Minnesota until 1976.³⁶ On a national level the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was not passed by Congress until 1990.³⁷ For all these reasons written records of continuing Dakota visits to the Indian Heights would be impossible, even though the Dakota would not have abandoned their beliefs in the importance of this place.

Writing in 2011, Valerie DeCora Guimaraes, a resident of Rochester, who is Ho-hunk and whose grandmother Marie Crowe Decorah was Dakota, made clear the difficulty that many Dakota had in getting their point of view about their sacred sites understood by non-Dakota residents of Minnesota. Writing to the *Rochester Post-Bulletin* on June 1, 2011, she stated:

Indian Heights Park was used as a burial site for the Dakota people long before European settlers moved into the area. In fact, the Dakota or Mdewakanton peoples and the Ho-Chunk peoples roamed the area around Rochester long before there were settlers. Evidence to support this claim are abundant In time, the knowledge of the existence of this sacred piece of land was lost to the Dakota people through genocidal and extermination tactics, removal acts to lands which they had no historical connection, relocation acts to distant lands (Los Angeles,

³⁵ American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Public Law No. 95-341, 92 Stat. 469 (Aug. 11, 1978) (commonly abbreviated to AIRFA), codified at 42 U.S.C. § 1996.

³⁶ Minnesota Laws, 1976, Chapter 48, House File 1904. An updated version of that law is found currently in Minnesota Statutes 307.08.

³⁷ 104 Stat. 3048, Public Law 106-601, Nov. 16, 1990.

Chicago, and New York), and assimilation tactics (boarding schools) by an early U.S. government and European settlers.

But Guimaraes pointed out, the disappearance of knowledge among the Dakota people about Indian Heights did not change the sacred character of the place. She compared Indian Heights to another burial ground about which knowledge had been lost but which was later re-discovered and protected by the community in Rochester:

The cemetery for the Rochester State Hospital was lost over time-lost in the growth of a “forward thinking and developing” community, overtaken by the local natural plants and animals. In time a few local compassionate people rediscovered this site, and through the combined efforts of several community members and organizations they were able to reclaim the dignity and respect deserving of this area without having to probe or dig up a single grave site to prove that the parcel of land was once used as a cemetery. The cultural evidence was readily recognizable by the predominant society to whom this historically important sacred land was a part of. So too with the land at present day Indian Heights Park. The archeological, historical and traditional evidence all point overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the area of land now known as Indian Heights Park was once a sacred burial site for the Dakota people. . . . Forgotten and now re-recognized, it is still deserving of the dignity and respect owed to those Dakota peoples buried there and to those ancestors who still live in the area.³⁸

In the case of the Rochester State Hospital Cemetery, some of the burial sites had numbered markers at least to show where people were buried. Markers at many Dakota burial sites have disappeared long ago, which makes it difficult to note where they exist, without other documentation. Because of this fact there is often an impetus to do an archaeological survey when a site is suspected to be a Dakota or other Native cemetery. The thought is often that development or some other activity can be undertaken once remains are located, protected or removed. However in cases such as Indian Heights, such efforts are often misguided. Even with the most thorough survey possible of a site that was known to be a burial place, there is no guarantee that some obvious evidence of human remains can be found in the ground. Excavation of burial sites is not usually legally under Minnesota law. And it is never possible to dig up an entire site such as Indian Heights and bones and other human remains do deteriorate in the ground. Even if no bones are found, this does not prove a site like this was not a burial site, or a sacred site. In eloquent testimony about Pilot Knob in 2003, Michael Scott, then chairman of the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community stated that even if one found bounds in the ground, “it does not change the significance of the land. . . My ancestors are in the whole hill, in the dirt, you can not remove them. Their hair and skin is in the dirt, in the whole

³⁸ For more on the Rochester State Hospital Cemetery, see <http://www.accesspress.org/2006/11/coalition-seeks-lost-cemetery/>, accessed Sept. 23, 2011.

Pilot Knob up there. It's impossible to remove them." The removal of the bones from the ground does not remove the sacredness of places like Pilot Knob or Indian Heights.

One way or another, as stated earlier, Dakota burial sites, such as Oheyawahi/ Pilot Knob in Mendota Heights and Indian Heights in Rochester did not derive their sacredness from the burials but were in fact sites sacred in their own right, for their prominent, notable, unusual nature. That sacredness provided the setting for burials not the other way around. Regardless of the presence of human remains that sacredness will always be present in the ground and in the place.

Indian Heights Park

Beginning in the 1960s, the City of Rochester sought to preserve Indian Heights for its beauty and its pristine nature. The first mention found of proposed park at Indian Heights was a *Post-Bulletin* article from October 25, 1967, with accompanying photo of view from the southeast corner on the bluff above the Crenlo factory at 4th Ave. NW. The article reported that the 1968 City Parks and Recreation Department prospectus mentioned the possibility of acquiring a 9.7 acre, 1,100-foot-high overlook park on Indian Heights in northwest Rochester. The City Council had given the Parks Department the green light to negotiate for purchase of the property from Robert Springer, a Rochester realtor who had purchased the land from Robert Taft of Vista, California. The city appraised the land at \$1000 per acre, while Springer was asking \$3000 per acre. The City and Springer remained at impasse for several years over the price, and Springer entertained other options and continued to develop adjacent properties.

The beauty of the site provided strong reasons to continue to find a way to purchase it for the city. Jerome G. Hildebrandt, district conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture wrote in a 1971 letter that the site lent itself "very well as a natural area within the city." There were many trees which could provide wildlife food and cover.³⁹ He stated that the site was suited for "a quiet park and a very desirable conditions within a city where people could relax and get away from the busy city." He ended, noting "Therefore, ecologically, it would be desirable to maintain this area as a natural park area. In the fall of 1971 local residents circulated petitions to call for the purchase of the Indian Heights land. Trudie Konicek, who lived with her husband Dr. Robert G. Konicek and their family at the old Joseph T. Asbury House on the east side of Indian Heights, stated that "the location and features of this area are of such a unique character and outstanding potential that they cannot be duplicated."⁴⁰ She noted that Indian Heights provided opportunities for nature study by students of six nearby schools. To further the aim of park creation Konicek said she had deposited "a sum of money in a local bank. This was

³⁹ Hildebrandt to Trudie Konicek, Oct. 26, 1971, included with "Proposal for Northwest Rochester Park," submitted by Trudie Konicek to Rochester Park and Recreation Board, Nov. 2, 1971.

⁴⁰ "Proposal for Northwest Rochester Park"; article on the Konicek family in Rochester Post-Bulletin, June 6, 1969.

prompted, she said, “by the enthusiasm of people who visited us and saw the well established nature trails, virgin woods, and scenic overlook of the city of Rochester.”

The years of 1972 and 1973 witnessed a flurry of activity between the City and Springer concerning the resumption of very contentious negotiations for land in Indian Heights. A December 5, 1972, a *Post-Bulletin* article reported that, much to the chagrin of Springer, the preliminary plat for development of Indian Heights Fourth Subdivision was tabled by the Rochester City Council to allow the Parks Department time to seek federal funds for the possible purchase of the property. Two weeks later, on December 22, the *Post-Bulletin* reported that the Rochester City Council was seeking an appraisal and entering into formal negotiations to purchase 38.7 acres of land in Indian Heights from Springer and Metro Development Corporation. Springer (K&S Construction Company) owned approximately 17 acres of the site, while Metro owned the other 20 acres. The City was seeking \$100,000 from the federal government via a grant provided through the Land and Waters Conservation (LAWCON) Act of 1965, and another \$50,000 from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

On January 16, 1973, the *Post-Bulletin* reported that the City had received the appraisal for the Indian Heights property, but that the appraised value of \$125,000 came in at less than half the price of \$325,000 asked by the owners. The city had received approval from state and federal agencies for reimbursement of up to 75 per cent of the acquisition costs. Plans called for the site to remain largely natural for a park similar to Rochester’s Quarry Hill Park. Roy Watson, Park Board president, stated that the site was well-suited for a nature park, and that other sites in Rochester would not be suitable for these funds. Also, the size of the site was now reported at about 36.5 acres, with K&S owning 17.25 acres, and Metro 19.0 acres. Because of the impasse with Springer, the City voted to initiate condemnation proceedings in District Court to obtain the property as negotiations continued to deteriorate.

As time seemed to be running out on possible acquisition of the property, city officials noted: “The acquisition of this parcel is essential . . . The strategic location, uniqueness of the area, and the fact that this will be our last opportunity to acquire the 37 acres makes it mandatory that we act now.” Since federal funds were involved city officials sought to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. On November 6, 1973. Director of Parks Donald N. Orke wrote to the State Historic Preservation Office in St. Paul, commenting that the site was “the only undeveloped wooded area in Northwest Rochester. It also provides a very scenic overlook of the City. It would be managed as a resource-oriented park with limited development of hiking trails, primitive picnic sites and a parking lot on the periphery.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Donald N. Orke to Charles W. Nelson, Nov. 6, 1973. See also letter of Donald N. Orke to Alice Beckham, Aug. 9, 1973, which includes a description of the park area and also refers to it as “the only undeveloped wooded area remaining in Northwest Rochester.”

On December 5, 1973 the *Post-Bulletin* reported that the City Council had passed a resolution to proceed immediately to purchase the properties for the appraised price of \$194,340, just under \$5300 per acre, provided that state and federal funding could be obtained. The City and property owners had 40 days to accept the price determined by court-appointed appraisers during condemnation proceedings, which Taylor described as absolutely the last opportunity for the City to purchase the property because of pressure to develop that acreage. On February 6, 1974, the *Post-Bulletin* reported that the long saga was finally over as Indian Heights had been acquired as Rochester's newest park. Taylor stated that except for the possibility of some hiking trails, a parking lot, and a picnic area, they planned to leave the wooded site in its natural state.

The City's LAWCON application dated August 16, 1973, indicated that the actual size of the park is 37.25 acres, and that federal funds of \$99,130 and state grants totaling \$100,00 made up the purchase price \$199,130. Monies were received via LAWCON through the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in accordance with the Outdoor Recreation Grants-in-Aid Manual. Preliminary plans called for nearly two miles of hiking trails, primitive picnic sites, and a 70' by 150' parking lot. The application alludes to the extremely diverse vegetation and abundant animal life, to include the following varieties: 20 trees, 17 shrubs, 50 plants, 73 birds, 14 mammals, and 5 reptiles. The application states that the land acquisition would result in the preservation of this natural area. It describes this site as the only undeveloped wooded area remaining in northwest Rochester, and indicates that with proper regulating the proposed activities that would be supported would not take toll on the biota of the area. According to the application, with the purchase of the site, "the land will be preserved, and with future action it will be put to public use in a way that is hoped to maintain the natural state." City park planners believed that "Indian Heights will provide a trail system of a great enough scale to disperse users and minimize negative effects to the environment." Lastly, the application indicated that the public land acquisition, which would result in lost tax revenue to the City, would offset this through reassessment of adjacent properties."

As indicated in these various accounts, the City of Rochester and its residents acquired the land for Indian Heights Park with the understanding that it was a unique and unmatched natural area, the last undeveloped site in the city, one which would be preserved as a quiet, undeveloped natural park, where residents could enjoy the natural beauty and get away from the bustle of the city.

Nearby Historic Sites and Structures

The first settlement within the present city limits of Rochester was made by Thomas C. Cummings and Robert McReady in the spring of 1854. They made their claims and built their shanties on the west side of Cascade Creek. By July of 1854, George and Jonathan Head, considered by some historical accounts to be Rochester's founders, made claims on the Zumbro River.

Donahue Quarry

Bartholomew Donahue, a native of Ireland, came to Rochester from Wisconsin in 1856 and opened a quarry of limestone just outside of the city to the northwest, in northern portion of the bluff where the bluff now called Indian Heights. He and his sons furnished most of the stone for the early buildings and residences of Rochester. A second quarry was subsequently opened adjacent to the Donahue site by George Waldee. Geologist Oliver Bowles wrote, "Rochester is admirably situated to supply surrounding towns with stone and the local demand is good. Much rock is available." Chris Nielsen later owned and operated a cement block factory near this site.⁴²

Cascade Mill

In about 1864, John S. Humason and Gilbert Smith built a mill on the northwest side of the confluences of Cascade Creek and the south fork of the Zumbro River. In 1867 they sold it to Lewis and Abraham Harkin, who sold it to Lyman Tondro in 1871. Tondro was born in Niagara county, New York, in 1842, and he moved west with his family to Beloit, Wisconsin, in 1852, and to Blackhawk County, Iowa, in 1859, where he enlisted in Company B, 31st Iowa Infantry, from 1862 to 1864. Tondro was shot through both hips during the Civil War and suffered greatly throughout his life. Despite his injury, he was unusually active and energetic in business. Tondro was elected as an alderman in 1884, representing North Rochester in the city council for six years. He was postmaster from 1889 to 1894, later transferring to Alaska and California. Cascade Mill produced both flour and livestock feed, and it was noted that "no mill in the city puts a better grade of flour in the market than the Cascade." Its prized product was Cascade Mills Extra Graham Flour. The mill was destroyed during the 1883 tornado and subsequently rebuilt. The mill operated until about 1902 .. It caught on fire and burned in about 1919.

In 1903, Clarence Thompson bought the mill and the adjacent property. The land remained in the Thompson family for 83 years. Clarence Thompson served as Mayor and was also a past president of the Park Board. In 1986 Thompson's son, Robert, donated the land to the City for Thompson Mill Race Park. A limestone structure, which dates from the 1860's and at one time served as a boiler room for the mill, remains on the site. A *Rochester Post-Bulletin* article from June 7, 1995, reports that Parks Superintendent Roy Southerland indicated the City was set to spend about \$25,000 to restore the structure. At this time it remains in a deteriorating condition.

Asbury House

Joseph T. Asbury purchased a hilltop site adjacent to Donahue Quarry in 1927 and built the beautiful 10-bedroom structure known as Hilltop Guest House.⁴³ He died in 1929. It had several subsequent owners until 1947, when it was purchased by Dr. Grindlay, who

⁴² *The Structural and Ornamental Stones of Minnesota*, United States Geological Survey Bulletin 663, 1918.

⁴³ Asbury's first name was given in the U.S. Census, Minnesota, Olmsted County, Rochester, Ward 2, Sheet 9.

sold it to the Konicek family in 1968. In 1995 Jeff and Ann Bolin purchased the home and operated Hilltop Bed & Breakfast until 2001. It remains their private family dwelling.