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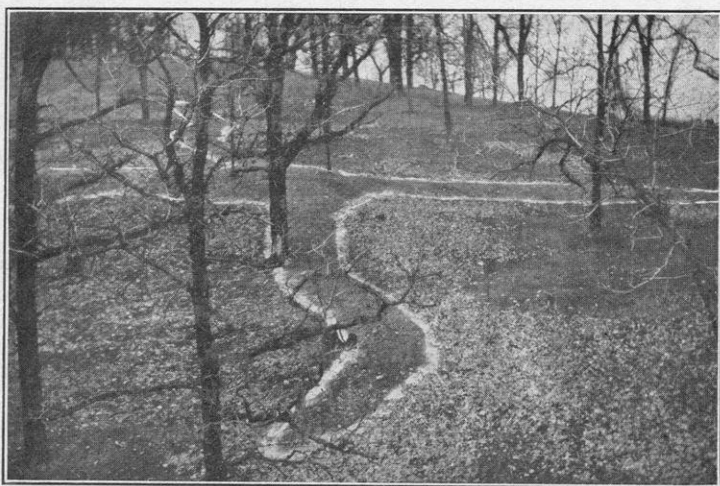
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**LAKE MENDOTA  
HISTORICAL EXCURSION**

Prepared for the Use of Students  
University of Wisconsin  
Summer Session

*Second Issue*



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Chief, State Historical Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin  
1926





### LAKE MENDOTA

A lake, which, lovely in its rest,  
Is grander still with ruffled breast;  
The poet lingers long to note  
The shadowy clouds which o'er thee float;  
And sunset isles of gold and blue,  
Changed by each cloud to its own hue;  
Till, almost, wondering which is sky,  
So perfect is the semblance nigh,  
He turns, and in thy praise he sings,  
Whose every change new beauty brings.

## LAKE MENDOTA

### INDIAN LANDMARKS AND EARLY HISTORY

The Winnebago name for this lake is Wonk-sheck-ho-mik-la, meaning "where the Indian lies." The name Mendota, given to the lake in 1849 by Frank Hudson, a surveyor, is said to mean "great lake." The length of Fourth Lake is 6 1/10 miles and its breadth 4 1/2 miles. Its greatest depth is 84 feet and its average depth 37 1/2 feet. Its area is 151.5 square miles. The walking distance around its shores is 24 miles. There formerly were on the shores of this lake thirty Indian mound groups with a total of 263 mounds. Many of these interesting earthworks are still in existence. The largest of these groups were located in the Fuller Woods, at Maple Bluff, near Bernard's Park, on the State Hospital grounds, at Morris and Baskerville Parks, and at Merrill Springs. A number of other groups were located near the banks of streams and marshes short distances inland from the lake. Winnebago villages and camps were once situated near some of these groups. A census of this tribe, taken on November 8, 1832, shows 155 Winnebago encamped about this lake.

The Sauk Indians, whose village was at the present location of Sauk City, in 1766, probably also camped and hunted about Lake Mendota.

The earliest American travelers to visit the Madison lakes were James D. Doty (afterwards territorial governor of Wisconsin) and Morgan L. Martin of Green Bay, and Lieut. Jefferson Davis (later president of the Southern Confederacy) from Fort Winnebago, at Portage. John Catlin and Moses Strong staked out the center of the village plat of Madison in February, 1837. Mr. and Mrs. Eben Peck, the first white settlers, came to Madison, April 15, 1837.

### NORTH SHORE

**WOODWARDS SHORE.** A line of eighteen Indian mounds extends along both sides of the Pleasure Drive from just east of Bernard's Park to the eastern limits of the State Hospital grounds. In this group are five conical, two oval, four linear and seven effigy mounds. Among the effigies are one representing a bear, two birds and three panthers. Some of these

mounds were explored in past years and human bones, charcoal and a few flint arrow points found in them. Most of the mounds at this place are in a mutilated and neglected state.

The farm home of U. S. Senator Robert M. La Follette lies at the eastern limits of this shore. This farm was formerly a part of the "estate" of James Macbride, an Irish aristocrat, and which extended from the State Hospital grounds to the main road at Lakewood. He built the house on the La Follette farm.

**STATE HOSPITAL.** The fine group of Indian mounds preserved on the lawn of the Wisconsin State Hospital for the Insane, at Mendota, consists of three large bird effigies, a panther, a bear, an unidentified quadruped, and an oval mound. The central bird mound is the largest bird mound in Wisconsin. The length of its body is 121 feet. It has a wingspread of 624 feet. Its height is over 6 feet. It is marked with a bronze tablet erected by the Wisconsin Archeological Society, July 30, 1910. The panther (water spirit) effigy has a curved tail.

Indications of a former Indian village site are found in a cultivated field lying west of the mounds. Here many stone and other implements have been found. A number of refuse pits explored contained bushels of clam-shell valves, animal bones, potsherds and broken implements. Faint indications of a former plot of Indian corn hills and several corn caches are to be seen on the lawn between the mounds and the lake shore.

In 1849, the Winnebago Indians camping here and elsewhere on this shore, organized a great game drive, some five hundred deer being surrounded and killed.

The State Hospital was opened in July 1860. It has about 600 patients.

**FARWELL POINT.** On the grounds of the Wisconsin Psychiatric Hospital, on this beautiful point overlooking Lake Mendota, is preserved a group of twenty-eight Indian earthworks. It consists of 17 conical, an oval, 4 linear and 6 effigy mounds. Two of the effigies represent birds and two are panther mounds. The largest of the latter is 460 feet long and the largest linear mound 535 feet long.

Two of the large conical mounds were excavated in 1877. The largest, constructed of black soil and yellow clay contained a chamber constructed of stone and stone slabs. Within this

vault were the bones of several adults and of a child, accompanied by ashes, charcoal, potsherds, shell beads and pieces of flint. The other mound was constructed of several layers of sand and gravel and black earth. At its base a rude stone altar and charcoal and ashes rested on a bed of yellow clay. Pieces of flint were found on the altar.

From the Point northward the sites of former Indian camps and villages extend along the shores of Yahara (Catfish) bay and river for over a mile.

The Point was the place of residence of Leonard J. Farwell, the second governor of the state, 1852-54.

He was the most enterprising and public spirited citizen of early Madison. In 1849, "he began the improvement of the waterpower, the erection of mills, the opening of streets, the draining of low lands, and other measures designed to benefit the village."

**GOVERNOR'S ISLAND.** On an Indian camp site located here fireplace stones, potsherds and stone implements have been found. The island was once a great resort for rattlesnakes. From the cracks and crevices in the limestone wall of its waterfront the skulls and vertebrae of many of these reptiles have been collected. In other localities in Wisconsin these snakes were held as sacred by the Indians, who would not kill them. The island contains  $31\frac{1}{4}$  acres of land.

**CAMP INDIANOLA.** Four conical burial mounds were formerly located at this boy's summer camp ground, once known as Borchers's Beach. One of these tumuli was explored in 1907 and 1908. It contained three human skeletons and parts of three or four others. With these interments were found a small broken earthenware vessel, a badger skull, a lump of galena, valves of clam shells, sea-shell beads, fragments of a turtle carapace, a small stone celt, flint arrow points and other objects. Charcoal and burned earth were with the fragmentary skeletons. One full length burial was surrounded by a single line of cobblestones. Two flexed burials, found in a shallow pit beneath the center of the mound, are preserved in a case in the State Historical Museum.

An Indian camp site is located at Indianola. Here flint points, stone celts, potsherds, and pieces of a trade metal kettle have been collected.

**MORRIS PARK.** Two groups of mounds are located at this pretty north shore resort. They are separated by a small ravine. The group west of this ravine consists of a row of four conical mounds and a bird effigy. These are separated from each other by distances of from 6 to 19 feet. The diameters of the burial mounds are 18, 23, 25, and 40 feet. The body of the bird is 80 feet long, its drooping wings are each 70 feet long. Its body is 3 feet high.

A short distance east of these earthworks, on the opposite side of the ravine is a group consisting of six conical mounds, three panther mounds, a mutilated goose effigy and a long linear mound. The finest of the panther mounds, 282½ feet in length, is preserved on the Y. M. C. A. camp ground. Three fine burial mounds are prominently located on a hill top on the adjoining Y. W. C. A. camp ground.

At the eastern end of Morris Park is a plot of Indian corn hills.

**FOX BLUFF.** On the crest of this high, picturesque bluff is a group consisting of a turtle and panther effigy and two conical mounds. One of the latter was excavated on November 4, 1908. It contained a vertical chamber constructed of large and small boulders. At its base were the bones of a human skeleton. The heavy boulders must have been carried up the steep bluff side from the lake shore several hundred feet below.

**WEST POINT.** Here is situated a group consisting of four tapering linear mounds, a single conical mound and a bird mound. The cottage of the late Judge Henry M. Lewis rests on portions of the two linear mounds. The conical mound was explored on August 28, 1903. No human remains were found.

At West Point was located, in 1832, the cabin of Wallace Rowan, an Indian trader. In 1833 he disposed of his post to Michel St. Cyr, a French Canadian, who with his Winnebago wife dwelt here trading with the Indians and entertained travelers until after the building of Madison, in 1837.

On May 25, 1832, Col. Henry Dodge, with a company of fifty mounted volunteers from the lead mining region in southwestern Wisconsin, under James H. Gentry and John H. Rountree, here held a council with the Winnebago for the purpose of

urging them not to participate in the then impending Black Hawk war. John H. Kinzie, Indian Agent at Fort Winnebago, afterward also held a council with the Winnebago here. Major Rountree's sword is in the State Historical Museum.

At West Point land speculators laid out the early paper "City of the Four Lakes." A copy of this interesting early plat (July 7, 1836) is preserved in the manuscript department of the State Historical Society. A metal tablet to commemorate these historic events was erected by the Wisconsin Archeological Society, June 26, 1914.

Near West Point was the early Indian trail, later the U. S. military road from Fort Winnebago, at the Fox-Wisconsin portage, to Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien.

**BASKERVILLE PARK.** At this summer resort, formerly known as Livesey's Springs, there is a fine group of twelve linear or embankment shaped and two conical mounds. One of the linear earthworks is tapering in form, the others are straight, parallel-sided mounds. The largest of these linears is 180 and the smallest 80 feet in length. These mounds are from 15 to 20 feet in width and from 1½ to 3 feet high. The two conical mounds are 35 feet in diameter. Some of these mounds lie among the cottages and others in the woodland in their rear.

In the early days of Wisconsin history a Winnebago village was located on the banks of Pheasant Branch, a stream which here enters Lake Mendota at its northwest corner. Indians, at one time and another, camped over the entire region from Baskerville Park and Camp Sunrise to West Point and Fox Bluff. Here many stone implements have been found. Two small groups of mounds are located at the head of the Branch (Bellefontaine) at a distance of three-fourths of a mile from the lake. An Indian trail from Blue Mounds leads to Pheasant Branch.

## SOUTH SHORE

**MENDOTA BEACH.** Among the cottages at Mendota Beach are three conical mounds. These are about 47 feet in diameter. One is on the property beyond. This is 30 feet in diameter. On this place several Indian burials were recently disturbed in a gravel bank. An effigy mound is located in a grove on the Heim farm. Evidences of a former Indian village site are found in cultivated fields and gardens at Mendota Beach.



**MERRILL SPRINGS.** (Spring Harbor). At this favorite picnic place on the south shore of the lake are three fine springs, the largest being surrounded by a circular stone curb 33 feet in diameter. This spring is preserved in a small public park. Here an irregular line of Indian earthworks extends from east of the summer cottage of John B. Parkinson, vice-president of the University, westward across the Pleasure Drive. Some of these have been mutilated and others destroyed. The group formerly consisted of two bear and two bird effigies, seven conical and two short linear mounds. Several of the conical mounds have been explored and found to contain bone burials and charcoal. In the cultivated fields are evidences of a former camp site.

On the elevated land on the west side of Spring Brook was a group consisting of two birds and a bear effigy and three linear mounds. The bear mound has been preserved by being included in a small park.

**BLACK HAWK COUNTRY CLUB.** The trail followed by the Sauk Chief Black Hawk and his warriors and their women in his retreat to the Wisconsin River, July 21, 1832, ran over these grounds. On the golf course up to 1922 there were in existence three small conical mounds, three tapering linear earthworks, a bird and goose effigy and three bear effigies. The bear effigies are on the north side of the Pleasure Drive. The other mounds were on the hillside. The goose mound is one of the most remarkable of the effigies on the Lake Mendota shore. The length of its long neck and head is 108 feet and of its body 50 feet. The spread of its twice-bent wings is 135 feet. The largest of the linear mounds (length 240 feet) extended from the Pleasure Drive to the hilltop. The best preserved of the bear mounds is 80 feet in length.

A panther effigy is preserved on the adjoining property of Dr. Melvin E. Diemer.

The Country Club grounds was once a farm (1873) of Alfred Merrill, known locally as the "Golden Farmer." When he sold his wheat crop he took payment for it in gold coin. The Merrill Springs bear his name.

**EAGLE HEIGHTS.** This bluff is the highest point on the south shore of the lake. Its elevation above the water is 150 feet. On the wooded crest of the Heights is a large conical mound 40 feet in diameter and two tapering linear earthworks 100 and

108 feet long and from 8 to 14 feet wide. These mounds are permanently preserved and are marked with a metal tablet erected by the University Board of Regents in 1923. They are in the care of the Madison Boy Scouts.

Adjoining Eagle Heights on the east is the University farm, and on the lake shore, a short distance away, the University summer session "Tent Colony."

**PICNIC POINT.** On this beautiful point, a favorite picnic ground of several generations of University students, there is a group of seven Indian mounds. Five of these are among the trees near the base of the point. They have been reduced in height and otherwise mutilated by the early cultivation of the land. Three are conical and one oval in form, and one is a short linear mound.

Some distance east of these, near the canoe portage, are two conical mounds. One has been mutilated by relic hunters. The other is quite prominent and is 30 feet in diameter.

Remains of former Indian habitation have been found near the portage and in the cultivated fields at the base of the point. Near the head of the point there is a rather rare group of fine hackberry trees.

**UNIVERSITY CAMPUS.** On the University grounds small groups of mounds existed in five different localities. Those preserved are located at the University Creek near the Willow Drive (goose and two curious linear mounds), in the Picnic Grove (two linear mounds), and on Observatory Hill (a bird and a turtle effigy). These are marked with bronze tablets erected by the Board of Regents in 1914 and 1923. Mounds were also formerly located on the fruit farm and on the Upper Campus.

The course of Black Hawk's retreat over the University grounds July 21, 1832 is marked with a tablet erected June 17, 1913, by the University Class of 1888.

**FOURTH LAKE RIDGE.** On this ridge on the southeastern shore of Lake Mendota, now occupied by some of the finest residences of Madison, and once known as "Aristocracy Hill," there was in 1840 and later a dense forest. This was in 1837 the site of a Winnebago camp.

Between Gorham Street and the lake they had a corn field. On a former ridge on Ingersoll Street, about two blocks west of present Tenney Park, there was a group of several conical and linear mounds.

## EAST SHORE

**TENNEY PARK.** The site of this city park was formerly a marsh. On its borders was a favorite Winnebago camp ground, fish and game being abundant there. The willow trees along Sherman avenue, in the park, were planted by Leonard J. Farwell, afterwards governor of Wisconsin, in 1849-50.

**FULLER WOODS.** The largest group of Indian mounds on the shores of Lake Mendota was on the E. M. Fuller place. There were here originally forty-seven earthworks. Of this number thirty-nine were conical and six linear in form. Of four effigies, three represented birds, and one curious effigy, probably a frog. The largest of the birds had a wingspread of 273 feet. Its body was 70 feet in length. The conical mounds were from 16 to 35 feet in diameter, and from 1½ to 4 feet high. Several have been explored and bone burials found. Most of the mounds on the Fuller place were in a woodland grove and could be seen from Sherman avenue. This place (Chee-nunk, meaning village) was a favorite camp site of the Winnebago, who camped here up to as late as the year 1875. The recent platting of this property has doomed most of these mounds to destruction.

**BURROWS PARK.** A fine bird mound is preserved in this city park. It is marked with a tablet provided by the Roxana (now Gyro) Club of Madison, in 1923. A fine fox or wolf effigy located on the adjoining former George B. Burrows' place was needlessly destroyed in 1923 in improving the land. This was the finest effigy mound on the east shore of the lake. Many Indian stone implements have been collected here in the past years. State Senator George B. Burrows (1877-82) presented a part of his farm to the city for park purposes in 1909.

**MAPLE BLUFF.** A group of twenty-two mounds is located on this prominent rock bluff. These lie along both sides of the Pleasure Drive which here winds through a fine woodland for half a mile. Of the effigies found here six represent birds, three panthers and one a turtle. The other mounds are conical, oval and linear in form. Some have been sadly mutilated in past years by relic hunters. Most are in a sadly neglected state.

This bluff was once known as Macbride's Point, being a part of the lands once owned by James Macbride, already men-

tioned. Prof. Thomas Huston McBride, the noted Iowa botanist, visited here in his boyhood. It was in former years covered with a fine maple forest. The Winnebago, some of whom camped here until 1875 or later, made maple sugar here. They called it the "Sugar Bush." An Indian trail from the Yahara river ran over the Point and on to Madison.

At Maple Bluff was quarried the stone used in the construction, in 1837, of the first Madison capitol. An Indian legend of Maple Bluff tells of an Indian who here killed and ate a "spirit" raccoon (wakanda). Unable to appease by ordinary means the terrible thirst which followed this meal, he was compelled to walk out into the lake the waters of which finally swallowed him. The legend says that on quiet nights one may hear the beating of his war drum. The Winnebago name for the lake is derived from this legend.

Additional. The Winnebago name for Eagle Heights was Sho-heta-ka (horse hill). The hill was believed to be inhabited by a spirit horse. It was a sacred place and the Indians visited it to gain power and inspiration.

