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An Historic Indian Burial in Southwestern Renville County
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Abstract: In June of 1962, an historic Indian burial was uncovered on the Marvin Kemnitz farm during gravel removal operations. The burial was that of a young female approximately 21 years of age. The burial probably occurred between 1834 and 1863. Based on historic records, it is possible that the young woman belonged to the Wahpeton band of the Dakota.

The Kemnitz site (NW $\frac{1}{4}$ -NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 20, T.113N, R.35W) located near the intersection of Renville county roads 1 and 2 is on the north bluff overlooking the Minnesota River valley. The single burial was accidentally discovered in a sand and gravel deposit, approximately 42 meters from the edge of the bluff. This sand and gravel deposit is now utilized as a gravel pit.

During gravel removal operations, the skeleton was discovered on a talus pile at the base of the east wall of the gravel pit. As gravel was removed from the lower half of this wall, the upper portion caved in exposing the burial and dumping it on the pit floor along with the gravel debris. In order to avoid the loss of the skeletal remains, and the cultural material after its discovery, Mr. Kemnitz removed all the material, and then notified the State Archaeologist, Dr. Elden Johnson. Judith K. Anderson and myself, both research assistants for the Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, were sent out to get the material, map the site area, and check the area for other cultural evidence.

When we reached the site area, we found traces of the intruded pit and coffin still present in the wall, making it possible to ascertain the N-S axis of the coffin. The pit into which the coffin was placed was approximately 12 cm. below the surface of the earth, and was 100 cm. long and 33 cm. high. Splinters of wood from the coffin remained in the wall so it was possible to get the general dimensions of the coffin. The coffin was about 80 cm. long and 25 cm. high. It was not possible to estimate the width. Judging from the pieces of wood scattered on the talus pile, the coffin appeared to have been constructed of rough planks.

The burial was that of an Indian female in her early twenties. The bones of the skeleton were in good condition and the skeleton was almost complete, lacking only the bones of the hands and feet. In addition to the skeletal material, several locks of black hair were found, including a short length of braided hair wrapped in a piece of cloth. Found in association with the skeletal material were several pairs of silver plated on copper earring-like objects (Wilford, 1944:92). However, these objects were more likely hair ornaments, since there was no way to fasten them onto the ears. Also found were beads of three types: amethyst faceted (7 mm. x 9 mm.), light red faceted 3 mm.-6 mm. in diameter, and black tubular beads 1.5 cm. long and 3 mm. in diameter. The light red beads were the most numerous. Other artifacts included a square metal nail (8 cm. long), a fine-toothed wooden comb (6.5 cm. x 4.3 cm.) perforated at one end, a pair of scissors (11 cm. long) tucked into a piece of folded woven cloth (cotton?) which had a green pattern still visible against a faded red or orange

background, and a piece of woven material (wool?) covered with small feathers. This latter piece of material was the remnant of a braid covering; inside it was found the braided lock of hair and a hair ornament, plus many beads.

This burial is similar to several historic burials located downstream along the Minnesota River at Shakopee (Steele mounds), and near Burnsville (Black Dog Village). In mound four of the Steele mound group, excavated by the University of Minnesota in 1964, another historic burial was discovered. Dr. Lloyd A. Wilford in 1944 excavated a group of four coffin burials near Black Dog Village. Dr. Wilford estimated the time of these burials between 1834 and 1855 (Wilford, 1944:92).

During the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a great deal of missionary work being done by whites among the Indians along the Minnesota River, particularly among the Sioux (Dakota). The Pond brothers worked with the Sioux at Fort Snelling, Lac Qui Parle, and at Prairieville (now Shakopee). About the same time that the Ponds were at Prairieville, S. R. Riggs and R. Williamson worked with the Wahpeton band of the Dakota at Lac Qui Parle (Riggs, 1880).

Thus, based on the similarity of location, burial modes, and artifacts, it is likely that the burial found on the Kemnitz farm dates between 1834 and 1863 when the Sioux were removed from Minnesota following the massacre of 1862 which spread from Lake Traverse to New Ulm (Winchell, 1911). It is possible that the young woman was a member of the Wahpeton band of the Sioux as they lived in the region.

References cited:

- Riggs, S. R. 1880, Mary and I, W. G. Holmes, Chicago.
Wilford, Lloyd A. 1944, "Indian Burials Near Black Dog Village", The Minnesota Archaeologist, Volume X, Number 3, pp. 92-97, Minneapolis.
Winchell, N. H. 1911, The Aborigines of Minnesota, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.