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Excavating Des Moines' First Paved Street

by William E. Whittaker

Early Des Moines was a famously muddy place. During a visit in early 1851, Arizona Perkins noted “This is the greatest place for mud I ever saw– I have waded thro’ it for several days.” After the great flood of 1851, the situation was probably much worse, with most of the east side of town destroyed and the west side badly damaged by flood waters. A general cleanup ensued and most of the old Fort Des Moines structures, which dated to 1843, were probably demolished.

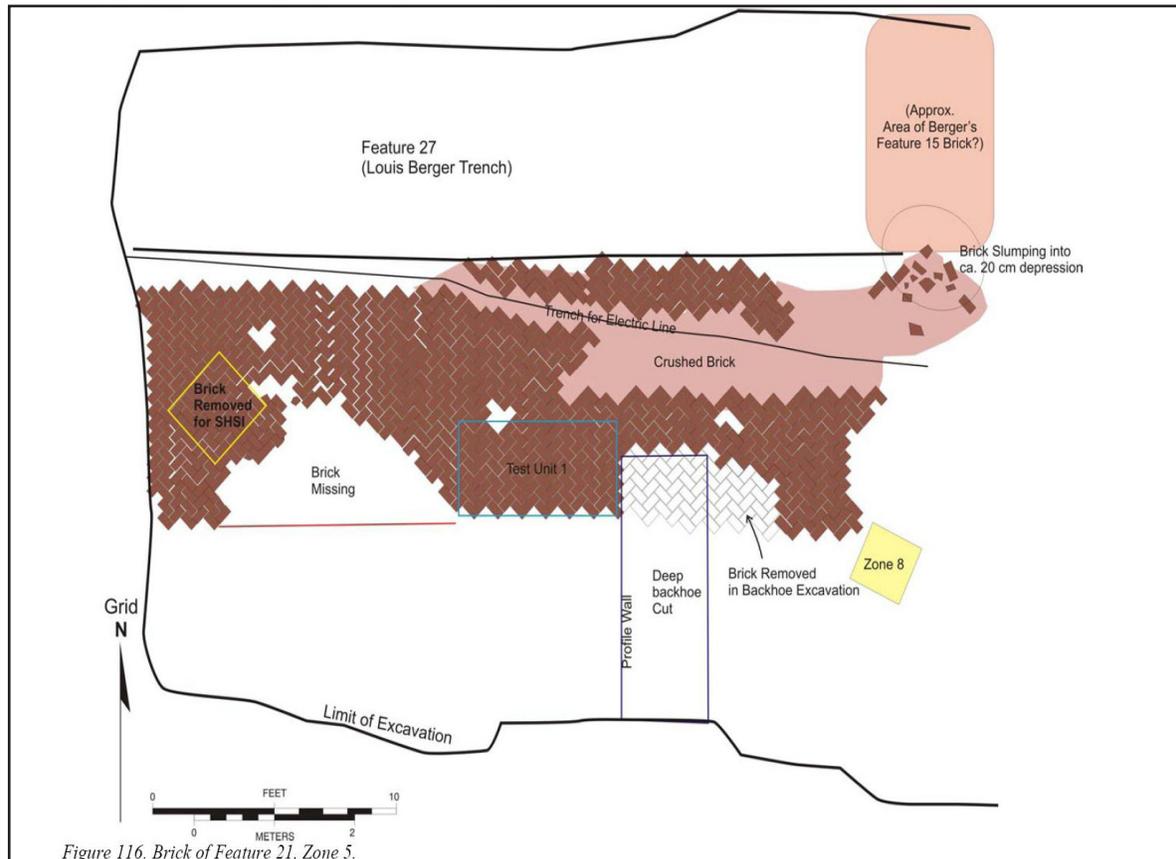


Figure 116. Brick of Feature 21, Zone 5.

The post-flood reconstruction provided opportunities to improve streets. One of the few streets still in use from the fort period was “Raccoon Row” so named because it connected enlisted men’s quarters along the banks of the Raccoon River, with the fort headquarters on Raccoon Point, now the entrance to the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway Bridge. After the flood it was straightened and made to conform to the new city grid, and given the more prosaic name of “Elm Street.”

In 2006, the OSA was excavating the area around the fort headquarters in preparation for the construction of the MLK bridge and uncovered a curious pavement made of soft mud bricks in a herringbone pattern. This was called Zone 5 of Feature 21. The color and dimensions of the bricks matched those from other Fort Des Moines features, but there was no record of a paved road at the fort and maps and early histories suggested

Map of the exposed brick road.

that the fort used dirt trails. The paved area measured 12 m east-west and ca. 2.5 m north-south, the far east end of the zone descended into a shallow depression; this may be associated with Louis Berger’s (Schoen 2003a:194) Feature 15, a layer of brick they had excavated in 2000 in a different trench.

How old was the brick road? Ceramics found in the prepared surface below the road level refit with ceramics found from a latrine that was built by the Army and filled in by early settlers. Other ceramics matched another fort-era feature. Two Native American shell beads suggest the ground was covered at roughly the time of Indian Removal, 1846. The prepared surface below the paving brick also contained several pieces of lead type. Two newspapers were situated near the road in the earliest days of Des Moines, 1848-1850. The Star and the Gazette were both housed in former fort cabins, both

moved to different parts of town after the flood of 1851.

The Iowa Star was first issued in 1849 by Barlow Granger & Co. from one of the Dragoon buildings along the Raccoon River (Mills and Company 1866:13; Mills 1949:275–282), probably in one of the barracks along Raccoon Row, near 2nd and Elm. “Skinner Bro’s erected a large brick building on the corner of West 2nd and Elm streets, where the first drug store and the Star office stood” (Union Historical 1880:771). The account in the 1866 directory (Mills 1866) implies that the paper moved from this location after one year because the press would not work in the drafty cabin if it was too cold. The paper moved to new quarters probably in early 1850 (Mills 1949:279–280). The Star is believed to be a direct ancestor of the modern Des Moines Register. In September of 1851 the Star purchased new type, and therefore either discarded or sold their old type (Iowa Star 1851). The Fort Des Moines Gazette was located “at the Point” (north of where the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers meet) from January 14, 1850 until November 15, 1850, when it was moved a few blocks away to SW 2nd and Walnut (Brigham 1911:73–75). It was founded by Lampson Sherman, brother of William Tecumseh Sherman. One of its early editors was John Teesdale, a supporter of John Brown, the famed abolitionist (Mills 1949:295–296). Early Des Moines settler Tacitus Hussey (1919:26–27) notes that, like the Iowa Star, the Fort Des Moines Weekly Gazette was published “in one of the deserted cabins in Raccoon Row.” Possibly, it was in the same building just vacated by the Star.

The first known paved road in Des Moines shows both the



Photo by William E. Whittaker

Removal of brick segment for curation at State Historical Society. Left to right: Whittaker, Steve Hanken, Dan Higginbottom.

ingenuity and difficulties early settlers had. The fort had been abandoned for only three years when a newspaper took over one of the abandoned fort cabins. Even after the flood of 1851 probably left the cabin uninhabitable, the bricks of the fort chimneys were cleaned and reused as pavers along Raccoon Row. Soon Raccoon Row was promoted to Elm Street, which was a residential area in the mid-1800s, but an industrial area in the late 19th through the mid-20th centuries. Elm Street was obliterated by the new Martin Luther King Parkway; ironically the newest paved street in Des Moines was built on top of the oldest paved street in Des Moines.

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Seniors Like to Dig, Too!

by Fred R. Gee

For the last six years I have been teaching a variety of classes on archaeology and the Bible for the Ray Society (the college for seniors at Drake University in Des Moines). Two of the classes focused on digs in which I have participated in Iowa and at Cahokia Mounds. Two of the common responses were: "I always wanted to do something like that" and "could we do a dig?"

After repeated requests and some negotiation with the Ray Society administration, I agreed to offer a four-day field experience for seniors. We thought we might possibly get 10 or 12 senior citizens to register and were blown away by the response. After agreeing to offer a second field session, we cut off registration at 24. In the end, 21 persons participated—eight in the first session and 13 in the second.

The field school site, designated 13GT176, was on a terrace overlooking the South Raccoon River in southeast Guthrie County, close to the site of the Rivermill Field School in 2006. This site was chosen based on three factors: 1) my knowledge of the site and the owner from prior surveys in the area; 2) easy access from the road; and 3) potential for historical and pre-historical discoveries. The site is part of a farm which has been in the owner's family for nearly 150 years. The owner has a collection of axes, manos, metates, and points spanning the full spectrum of Paleo to late Woodland periods. The original 1860s homestead was

also located on the western end of the site and may also have been the site of a prior log cabin, as well as having an enticing surface scatter of FCR, flakes, and shards.

The format of the school consisted of a 90-minute classroom orientation to the site and archaeological procedures on Monday of the first week, followed by two four-day, 9:00–4:00, excavation sessions (Tuesday–Friday the first week and Monday–Thursday the second). A rain date was built in at the end of each week. Participants were required to provide all their own equipment, except screens. I recruited Tom Harvey and Don Raker from the IAS, to help with the school. Their assistance was invaluable.

The first morning on-site, Tom and I demonstrated how to lay out a 1 x 1m unit and how to excavate with a shovel and trowel. At lunch one day each week, Tom did a flintknapping demonstration and the last afternoon of each week, I shared the family artifact collection with the group.

Prior to the first day of the field school, Tom Harvey and I surveyed and probed the 300-meter-wide site. We established a permanent datum point and multiple reference points relative to the terrace. We then randomly laid out 13 1 x 1m units along the slightly southwest-northeast spine of the terrace and one on a lower area near the east end of the site. Units were



Photos by Fred R. Gee

oriented north-south using a compass and southwest corner datum points were given north and east UTM designations using a hand-held GPS unit.

Two of the units (Unit 1 and Unit 2) were located on the site of the homestead where there were numerous limestone slabs on the surface. The other units were where we expected to find prehistoric material. Unit 1 quickly revealed sub-surface limestone, brick-like material, and 19th century ceramics and cut nails related to the homestead.

By the end of the second session, we had revealed what appeared to be a northeast foundation corner and a 260 cm-long east-west limestone foundation. The surprise came when Unit 5, located 68m to the east, immediately encountered a jumbled area of limestone and sandstone, brick-like material, and considerable charcoal. This unit was eventually enlarged in half-meter increments to a 2 x 2m unit and excavated to a depth of 50 centimeters below datum (cmbd) where possible with no definitive shape emerging. It was speculated that this could be the remnants of a smokehouse or perhaps the log cabin—which we later learned was reported to have been somewhere east of the house.

For most of the two sessions, the other units opened east of Unit 5, produced very little other than a few pebbles, FCR, plow scrapes, and clay. By early in the

second session, we had abandoned all the original units except Units 1 and 5. By the end of the two sessions, we had laid out 28 units, 15 of which were excavated to depths ranging from 20 to 50 cmbd. After a weekend rain and bean planting between the two sessions revealed scatter—including flakes, a very small point, and small shards of pottery—in an area 12–20m east and 30–50m north of Unit 5, we moved our concentration into that area and opened eight new units.

Of these new units, Units 20, 22, 26, 27 and 28 were most productive. Unit 20 encountered the first interesting “feature”—a large rodent run in the northwest corner at 40cm. Unit 22 had the first significant artifact discovery—1/4th of what we first thought might be a chunky stone, but was probably either a paint palette or fine grinding stone. This piece was polished red granite, 8 mm thick, and would have been 10 cm in diameter, if whole.

As is all too common on excavations, things got really interesting the last hour of the last day of week two. Unit 26 got into interesting areas of dark soils at 30 cmbd; Unit 27 encountered two post holes between 30–40 cmbd (one 15 cm in diameter and one 8); and Unit 28 found another 8 cm post hole right at 30 cmbd. Units 22, 26, 27, and 28 were all located within a 4 x 6m area – and this will be the initial focal point of future excavations.



There will be future excavation. The participants insisted on it. The Ray Society has agreed to offer another week of field school for its members this October and the owner looks forward to our return. We are all anxious to see what we find in an expanded area around the postholes and Unit 5.

My sincere thanks to the Ray Society for offering a field school for seniors; the Gerald Harvey family for their interest in and support of the project; the enthusiastic seniors who participated and want to do it again; and helpers, Tom Harvey and Don Raker.

Pioneer Cemetery Commission Helps Restore Historic Cemeteries

by Dale Clark

The work of the the newly formed Pioneer Cemetery Commission was new to Wayne County Iowa in 2011, but its work focuses on some of the oldest history of pioneer settlers in the county. The new organization, Wayne County Pioneer Cemetery Commission, was formed to protect and restore the old cemeteries in the county. The Wayne County Board of Supervisors gave their approval, but were unable to promise funds for the restoration work.

The Duncan Cemetery, north of Lineville, Iowa was chosen as the first project for the newly formed Wayne County Pioneer Cemetery Commission. This cemetery is the final resting place for Polly Duncan, who died in 1846 and is said to be the first recorded burial of a settler in Wayne County, according to "Wayne County Iowa Cemetery records."

The commission members began work in early April, cutting brush and trees. Numerous trees were cut down and the wood stacked. Many gravestones were found lying against the fences, in brush, or buried in the dirt. Some of the stones were easy to spot, others took some digging to unearth. As the group worked it became impossible for the present caretakers to mow the cemetery for a few months.

After the hottest part of the summer was over and the group arrived at the cemetery in August to resume work, they were surprised to find it covered in a thick stand of tall purple grass. Most all the gravestones had disappeared under the grass. Research by naturalist Jon Byrns and the county's Extension Office revealed the grass was called Purple Top Prairie Grass and was most likely indigenous to the area when the first pioneer arrived in the 1840s. The Mormons knew this purple grass as grease grass because of the oils that are produced naturally by the plant; they would use this grass to lubricate between the axle and wheel on their covered wagons. It was decided to harvest the seed from this heirloom grass for the possible use in other pioneer cemeteries.

What fun we had using vintage hand tools called blue grass strippers to harvest the heirloom seed. Once the



Photos by Dale Clark



grass was harvested, the work resumed with mapping the graves in the cemetery. Another old fashioned method, called 'divining or 'witching', was used to find disturbed soil from a burial. These areas were flagged. We used a grid system to make sure we didn't miss any areas of the cemetery. Once the burials were flagged, we used a probe to look for hidden gravestones; this method proved to be successful, finding some stones up

to 3 inches deep. Then a long tape measure was used to measure all dimensions so that we could complete a map of the entire cemetery and its contents. This map was then transferred to computer to become part of the database that will be created for all the pioneer cemeteries within the county.

Along the way we have touched the lives of people like volunteer Kyle Clark, who uncovered the missing gravestone of 2-year-old James Tuck, who died in 1855. Kyle, my youngest son, told me after the unearthing of the stone that he would not ever forget the experience of saving this little boy's monument. It could have been buried forever and gone unnoticed.

Each pioneer cemetery tells a story. The movement of early settlers as they traveled westward, even within a county, can be documented from cemetery records. Another story is the extreme hardships faced by families. There are 26 burials in Duncan Cemetery and 10 of those are children. In 1861, one particular family had an especially hard year, losing three small children, two boys, eight and six years, and the youngest daughter, was only ten months. After this hard year the Powers family moved on.

The Wayne County Pioneer Cemetery will be recording historical data on each pioneer cemetery in the county on a survey form created by the State Association for the Preservation of Iowa Cemeteries. The SAPIC form provides an outline to help preserve important historical information on pioneer cemeteries for future generations.

Restoration of the Duncan Cemetery will be completed next year with a concrete monument. This monument will be a long wedge-shaped slab of concrete housing all the broken and misplaced gravestones, so the grave stones will never be misplaced or broken again. Once the monument has been installed, the harvested purple prairie grass seed will be used to fill in areas that were disturbed by dirt work, tree, and brush removal. This will restore this beautiful historic place to its natural state of 1846.



Pipestone National Monument Celebrates 75 Years

by Mark A. Calamia, Ph.D. Cultural Resources Liaison & Program Manager, Pipestone National Monument

Pipestone National Monument, located in Pipestone, MN, will be hosting a celebration for its 75th Anniversary. The event will celebrate the cultural, natural, and historical significance the monument has had over the past 75 years. The event is open to the public free of charge.

The celebration is scheduled for Saturday, August 25, 2012 at the Pipestone National Monument Visitor's Center. Activities will include events in the visitor center and a formal presentation in the afternoon from Government representatives, National Park Service staff, community leaders, and members of tribes affiliated with the monument.

The Pipestone County Museum is currently exhibiting a collection of historic photographs of the Monument through the end of 2012, and the Monument itself also has a display of historic photos for public viewing. The Meinders Community Library will be displaying books and mementos of Pipestone National Monument, the National Park Service, and Pipestone community for the public to view and/or check out.

The staff at the Monument encourages everyone to come and participate in commemorating and reminiscing about the past 75 years. To learn more about the Monument, visit the park's web site at www.nps.gov/pipe or contact the Park Ranger at 507.825.5464 ext. 214.



What's The Point?

by Daniel G. Horgen



Identify the artifact shown here. This point was discovered in Polk County, Iowa. The point measures $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length with a maximum width of $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. These points are distinguished by their U-shaped notches, which tend to be as deep as they are wide. Their squared ears are generally in line with the blade edges. The base types vary and can be slightly convex to straight or slightly concave. Send your responses to Daniel G. Horgen at daniel-horgen@uiowa.edu. Answers will be listed in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Last edition's answer:

The projectile point illustrated in the last issue of the Newsletter is classified as an Avonlea. Paul Naumann, Christy Rickers, James Schmuecker, Dean Steffen, Jimmie Thompson, Joe Tiffany, Larry Van Gorden, and Jim Zalesky submitted correct responses.

These projectile points date within the range of A.D. 200 to A.D. 800. Avonlea sites in the northern Plains are the first indisputable evidence for large-scale communal bison hunting. The most distinguishing feature of the Avonlea point is its delicate manufacturing. The flake scars are very broad and shallow, usually parallel, and extend from the edge of the blade to the midpoint. In most cases, the corners of the base are rounded rather than sharp, and small ears are typical.

The chert type is classified as unheated Grand Meadow. This chert type has a narrow range of color variation, usually light to medium grey, and the cream colored chalky cortex make this chert type easily identified. There is at least one quarry location located in Mower County, southeast Minnesota, but outside of this quarry, the natural distribution is not well known. Grand Meadow chert is found in small amounts on sites in the northern half of Iowa.

About the IAS

The Iowa Archeological Society is a non-profit, scientific society legally organized under the corporate laws of Iowa. Members of the Society share a serious interest in the archaeology of Iowa and the Midwest.

Membership

Contact Alan Hawkins, IAS Membership Secretary, at the University of Iowa, Office of the State Archaeologist, 700 Clinton Street, Iowa City, IA 52242-1030.

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Newsletter Information

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Lauri Chappell, Editor