

HOPEWELL BURIAL MOUNDS

INDIAN MOUNDS PARK — ST. PAUL

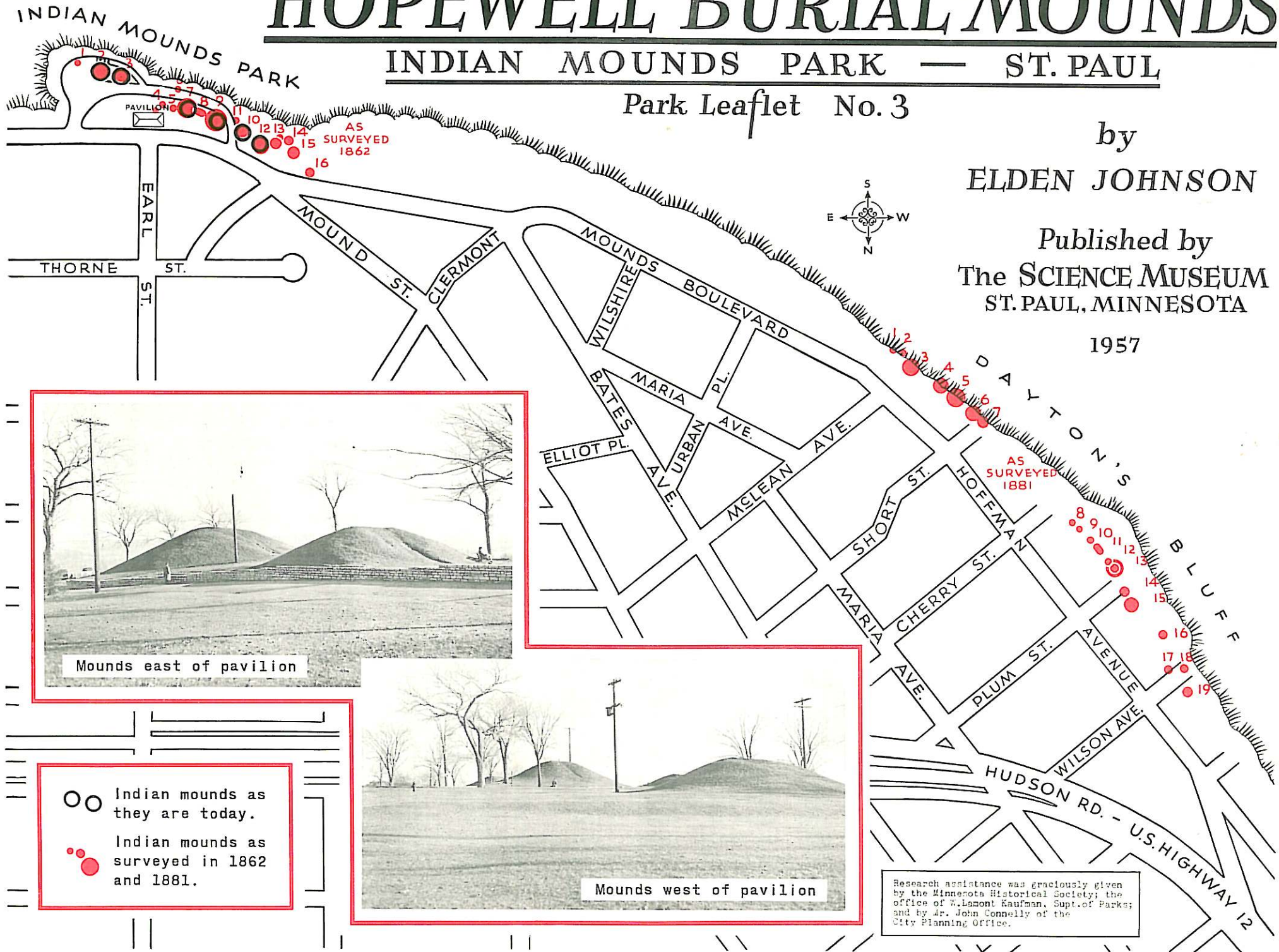
Park Leaflet No. 3

by

ELDEN JOHNSON

Published by
The SCIENCE MUSEUM
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

1957



HOPEWELL BURIAL MOUNDS

INDIAN MOUNDS PARK - ST. PAUL

Six Indian burial mounds atop the bluff in Indian Mounds Park in St. Paul preserve for future generations a reminder of Minnesota's Indian prehistory. Minnesota was a center of burial mound building during the prehistoric period, for over 10,000 of these earth mounds have been located and surveyed in the state. Burial mounds are found throughout the state -- from the Rainy River in the north, where the largest mound in the state is located, to the Iowa border, where some of the most recent mounds are found.

At least 16 burial mounds were originally present on top of the high bluff in Indian Mounds Park. 19 more burial mounds were found along the Dayton's Bluff area. Both of these mound groups were surveyed in the 19th century, the majority by T. H. Lewis, and a record of their location published in *The Aborigines of Minnesota*. This book, published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1911, records the location of thousands of Indian mounds in Minnesota.

Most of the mounds in Indian Mounds Park were destroyed and all of those along Dayton's Bluff are now gone. Our map shows the original survey, the entire mound group, and marks the location of the remaining mounds in the park.

It is fortunate that many of the mounds in these two mound groups were excavated by people with an interest in Minnesota prehistory. Edward Duffield Neill made the first excavation of one of these mounds in 1856. Later the Minnesota Historical Society worked on mounds in both locations under the leadership of Col. D. A. Robertson. T. H. Lewis contributed the most to our knowledge of these mounds in a later series of excavations. Lewis kept careful field notes during his excavations and also reported his finds in publications. Much of Lewis' material can be found in the old *American Antiquarian* and *Oriental Society Journal*.

From these published accounts and the notes in the manuscript collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, we can obtain a fair picture of the mounds that were excavated. Burials of several types were found in both Indian Mounds Park and on Dayton's Bluff. Most common were simple interments or primary burials, frequently accompanied by mussel shells and occasionally a projectile point. Small bundle burials seem to have been found in the upper parts of several mounds -- we know now that such burials were often placed in previously built mounds by later peoples. Log tombs were found at the base of at least three mounds, though the logs had collapsed. A pit burial was reported for one mound.

Two mounds in Indian Mounds Park were most interesting. Mound number 12 was found to contain eight stone cists about seven inches high and made of thin limestone slabs set upright. Human bones were found in each cist and many of the burials were accompanied by grave offerings. The latter included quantities of mussel shells, lumps of lead ore, lumps of red ochre, perforated bear canine teeth, a copper ornament, and a piece of hammered sheet copper. Also found with these burials were 12 projectile points.

Mound three contained the most startling find of the group. Lewis describes the seventh skull in the mound as proving "to be a rare find, indeed. I know of nothing similar ever having been found in the mounds or ancient graves. The facial bones of the skull in question had been covered with red clay, thus producing an image of the original face." This death mask was apparently removed intact during the excavations.

It is clear from the descriptions of the mounds that those of neither Mounds Park or Dayton's Bluff belong to any single prehistoric period. These mounds were built by different peoples over a time span of many hundreds of years. A strong element of Hopewell culture is seen in some of the mounds which must date from the period at about the beginning of the Christian Era. Log tombs, use of red ochre and lumps of lead ore, hammered sheet copper, and especially the clay death mask, belong to the Hopewellian period.

Later peoples built additional mounds and some of them placed bundle burials in mounds already built. This practice must have continued into the late prehistoric period as bits of pottery from the mound-fill in some mounds were described as made of mixed clay and shell, a distinctive mark of Mississippian pottery made in late prehistoric times.

Burial mounds are just that -- mounds of earth heaped over burials of human beings. They vary greatly in size and shape as does the type of burial placed within the mound. The majority of them are low, circular mounds of earth 15 to 20 feet in diameter and less than two feet in height. Others are 80 to 100 feet in diameter and 15 to 20 feet in height. Some mounds are long, narrow embankments; others show a ground plan of animal forms such as turtles. Most mounds seem to have been built during a single brief time span, but others had successive layers of earth added to them and additional burials placed in them over long periods of time. Burial mounds were built in Minnesota from a beginning period over 3,000 years ago through all of the succeeding centuries to the end of the prehistoric period.

The particular kind of burial within a mound can often tell the archeologist the time period at which the mound was built. The majority of Indian mounds excavated by archeologists have been found to contain few burials and rarely any grave offerings. In many mounds, all evidence of the burial itself has been destroyed by acid soils, rodents, and frequently disturbances caused by indiscriminate digging.

Burial types found include cremations of individuals or groups of bodies, primary burials in pits under the mound, simple interment on the mound floor, and in still others, burial in more elaborate log or stone tombs. Additional evidence for the period in which a mound was built is sometimes found in the earth composing the mound itself. Bits of broken pottery in this mound-fill are frequently of major diagnostic importance.

Elden Johnson