

INDIAN BURIALS NEAR BLACK DOG'S VILLAGE

(A field report)

by

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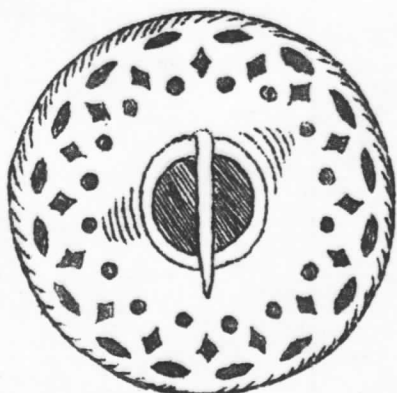
The farm of Mr. Tom Kennealy is the southeast 1/4 of Section 18, Township 27N, Range 23, which is five miles up the Minnesota River from its mouth. This is near the location of the village of Black Dog, a sub-chief of the Mdewakanton Sioux, which was placed by Keating in 1823 as 5-1/2 miles up the river on the south side. A large mound group consisting of 104 mounds was surveyed in this vicinity by Lewis. Winchell, pages 177 and 179, gives these as in the East 1/2 and Southwest 1/4 of Section 19, but Lewis' notes give them as in the Northwest 1/4 of Section 19, which is the quarter whose Northeast corner touches the Southwest corner of the Kennealy property.

The bluff of the Minnesota River valley runs southwest by northeast or rather south southwest by north northeast across the northern part of the Kennealy farm. On the brow of the bluff almost due north of the farmhouse, a pit has been opened for the taking of molding sand. In operations in the pit human bones were uncovered and I was called by Francis Kennealy, the son of Tom. On Thursday, September 9th, 1943 I went to the farm in the morning. The bones had been found in the western end of the north face of the sand pit, and a great deal of partially decayed wood was with them. Bones and wood were mixed in the loosened material in the sand pit in front of the bones protruding from the bank, and some were in the earth that had been thrown up on the surface behind the skeleton. I dug above the bones to see the placement of the body, and found the situation obscure. It was obviously a Christian type of burial in a wooden rough box, and objects found with the bones included glass beads, a steel scissors wrapped in cloth with a quantity of red paint, an object of wood and copper, and one of the boys had a small catlinite pipe which had been found previously, as well as a long shell bead of the type worn in breastplates.

Cutting back into the bank above the bones still in place I found some ribs near the east end and some red glass beads near the west end. These were too far from the ribs to be part of a necklace and I believed they might be beads on a pair of moccasins or on the hem of a dress. I removed much of the dirt with the beads, saving the dirt for future sifting. Beneath the beads was a clavicle, indicating the presence of probably more than one burial. Time did not permit the excavation necessary to expose a multiple burial, so I returned the following day.

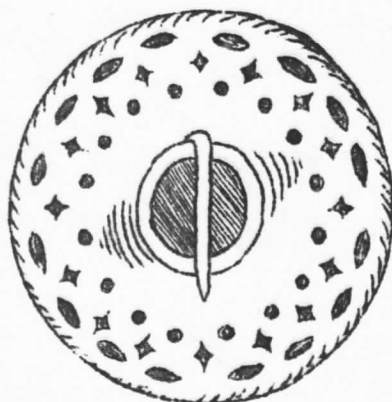
I first located the position of the undisturbed sand beneath the burial easy to detect since the earth above the burial was mottled and horizontally striped with black earth. I trenched down a little below the base of the burial and removed all the loose earth and material thrown back

TRADE GOODS from "BLACK DOGS" VILLAGE SITE



BROOCHES

Silver Plated on
Brass



BRACELET
BRASS

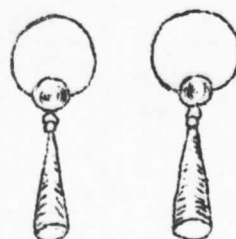
BRASS BELL



FRONT



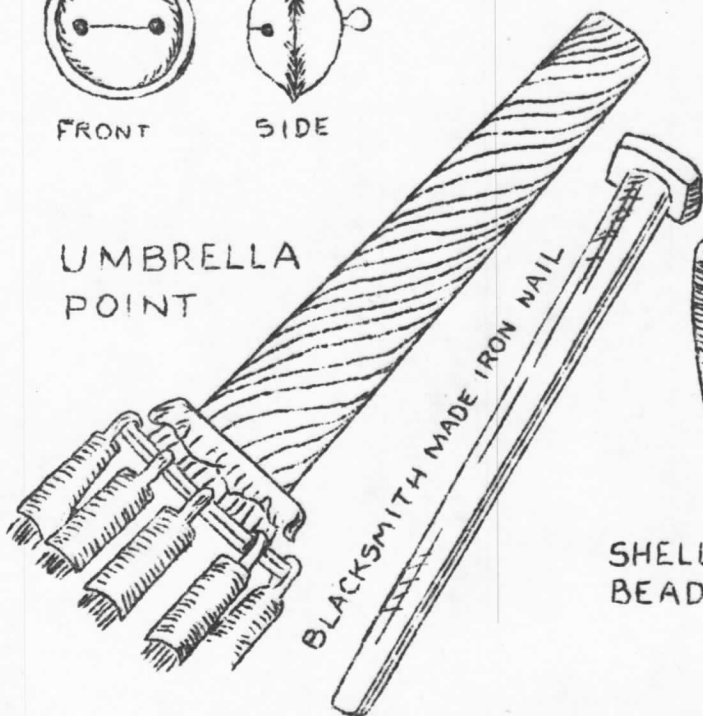
SIDE



EARRINGS

SILVER PLATED ON COPPER

UMBRELLA
POINT



SHELL
BEAD

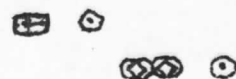
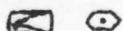


SCISSORS



Side End
LIGHT RED COLOR

Side End
AMETHYST



FACETTED GLASS BEADS - DOUBLE SIZE

previously by the men removing the sand. In the loose material were many broken bones and pieces of wood, and also a quantity of thin glass as of a small pane. I then removed the loose material on top of the bank, finding many more broken bones and pieces of wood. When all loose material had been removed the length of the grave from east to west was clearly outlined in the face of the bank, and the highest portion of the wood was 2 feet and 4 inches below the surface. I then dug a trench three feet wide to come down on the burials from above. This exposed the wooden boards of the coffins which though badly decayed were strong enough to remain in place and permit of being brushed off.

There were four coffins placed side by side and tightly against each other. Each was placed in a north - south direction heads to the south. The width of the four coffins from east to west was only six feet, an average of one foot six inches for each coffin. The boards of the top of each coffin ran lengthwise, and had settled down onto the bottom boards except where held apart by the bones of the skeletons. The wood was so badly decayed that in many places the larger bones protruded through the upper boards. The boards between the coffins appeared heavier than those of the top and bottom, but the decayed wooden masses in these spaces were elevated only a little above the top boards. The outer sides of the two end coffins, however, were better preserved; the west side (left side) of the westernmost coffin showed portions of 2 or 3 boards superimposed above each other, and the right side of the easternmost coffin was represented by decayed wood above the general level. Since these two sides were next to the west and east walls of the pit respectively, the pit walls had protected them from the full pressures which had collapsed the boards within the pit. There were many rusted iron nails, of different sizes, but all were the old-fashioned nails, square or rectangular in cross-section.

I have spoken of these as coffins, but they were probably rough boxes, with one exception. The glass that I found in the loose dirt in front of the burials would have been adequate for a small pane, in a coffin, or might have been placed in a rough box as a window.

The skeletons were all those of adults, buried full length on the back, heads south, and arms at the side or loosely across the pelvis. The workmen had unfortunately been digging at the south end of the burial when they discovered it and had already removed the heads of all four individuals. They had cut somewhat diagonally across the burial pit so the easternmost skeleton, here designated #1, had only a portion of the pelvis and the leg bones remaining. Skeleton #2, at the left of #1, had a complete pelvis, the lower limbs and the bones of the forearms remaining. Skeleton #3, at the left of #2, had part of the vertebrae and ribs showing as well as one clavicle, and #4, farthest west, was nearly complete except for the skull. All of the bones were in a very poor state of preservation. Because of the lack of skulls and the badly disintegrated condition of the bones it was impossible to ascertain the age and sex of the individuals. Many skull fragments were found in the loose dirt but could not be assigned to the individual skeletons.

The objects found with the burials were of great interest. Skeleton #1 had had the entire torso and head removed before I saw it, and no ornaments were with it. This burial had the remains of bark showing and may have been wrapped in bark. The bark may have been part of one or more of the boards of the rough box which had not been planed off, though no bark was noted in the case of the three other boxes. The boards were of white pine.

Skeleton #2 had with it a small pair of scissors wrapped in cloth which contained some very bright red material apparently too bright for red ochre, but which may be red paint. It also had the remains of an umbrella with a wooden stem, its tips sheathed in sheet copper, and with wooden ribs which were inserted in 8 copper sockets. These sockets had small closed rings at their bases by means of which they were attached to a single copper ring which was around the central stem, permitting up and down movement of the ribs. This object of wood and copper has been previously noted. Bits of cloth adhered to the outside of the object. With skeleton #2, I believe, was a copper ornament consisting of small hollow balls to which copper wires had been soldered, and small cones with loops at the tips. Fourteen such balls and 11 cones were found which precludes the latter from being tips of the 8 ribs of the umbrella.

Skeleton #3 had a string of red glass beads in the vicinity of the neck. Skeleton #4 has a great many dark-colored beads of 3 sizes, in the region of the neck and clavicle, but a large number of the beads were found beneath an object of iron so badly rusted as to be disintegrated, but which may have been a small box. At the neck was a series of 9 silverplated brass disks two inches in diameter, and with a cut out design. Each had a central opening with a clasp or pin which had been pinned through the cloth dress. The copper had preserved a lock of black hair as well as the cloth with which it was in contact. On the right forearm near the elbow were three open rings of trade brass.

Thrown out before I had seen the burial were a steel blade probably half of a pair of scissors, a long shell bead, a brass bell of the sleigh-bell type, and a small catlinite pipe.

There is no doubt that the burial is Indian. The place of burial, the catlinite pipe and the long shell bead are evidence of this fact. The time of burial can be closely estimated. The Pond brothers came to Fort Snelling as missionaries in 1834 and one or both of them was in the vicinity of the lower Minnesota River more or less constantly until their deaths. The village of Black Dog was well known to the Ponds as it was to Keating and to the men of Fort Snelling. It was abandoned in 1855 when its inhabitants were removed to a reservation on the Upper Minnesota River. The Ponds very early began making rough boxes for their Indian friends and converts, and Samuel remarked that it took a good deal of their time. It is almost certain that this multiple burial dates between the year 1834 and 1855. It is in all probability a burial of members of Black Dog's village.

Many burials of the Mission period have been found, both near the Pond Missions and near the Williamson-Riggs Mission at Lac Qui Parle. To date all of these burials of which I have knowledge have been in preexisting mounds.

The fact that four burials were made at once is easily explained as the normal Dakota custom. Prehistoric Dakota retained the bodies of the newly dead, placing them on platforms near the villages. Ultimately, after dissolution of the bodies, the bones were gathered and buried in mounds, multiple burials being common. Exposure of the dead bodies was still being practised in 1846 as Samuel Pond describes the platforms covered with ill-smelling bodies behind Shakopee's village when he moved there in that year. The four bodies in this multiple burial may have consisted of one newly dead and three that had died sometime previous and been exposed on platforms, or all four may have been exposed for sometime and given multiple burial when all the necessary arrangements had been made.

EXPLANATION OF FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

The fur-trading post symbolizes a fascinating and intriguing period in the history of Minnesota. The great companies represented in the Minnesota region after the French period were the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company during the years from 1763 to 1816, and the American Fur Company from 1816 to the middle forties.

The illustration on our front cover is the coat of arms or Armorial Bearings of the Hudson's Bay Company. This seal consists of a white or silver shield enclosing a red cross between four black beavers. This cross indicates the cross of St. George. The crest is a fox sitting on a red cap. An elk on either side serve as supports. The motto of the company is "Pro Pelle Cutem", and various translations are given. The most reasonable seems to be "A skin for a skin's worth" for goods were valued in terms of beaver skins. A shorter translation is simply "skin for skin", which is a quotation from the Book of Job. Another version is "The skin for the fur", meaning that originally the beaver skins were wanted for the fur which was clipped off and felted into beaver hats.

A Royal Charter was granted the Hudson's Bay Company, May 2nd 1670.

BWT