

# The Indian Prairie Burial and Ceremonial Site at Kletzsch Park

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## Introduction

*This essay releases research findings related to effigy mounds. My effigy mound research introduces an analytical methodology that systemizes examination of ancient earthworks with a particular focus on southern Wisconsin's effigy mounds. This work derives from an intentional effort to decode effigy mounds.*

*During the Late Woodland era, religious celebrants in southern Wisconsin created several thousand burial mounds shaped like animals. The scholarly opinions that suggest this monumental building program was something considerably less than orderly offended logic and stands in contrast to ethnographic and mortuary theory. That there were thousands of these symbols with known characteristics led me to believe that these traits could be used as symbols to essentially "break the code". This systematic approach would help determine the type of information that is retained by these earthworks.*

*A far more comprehensive work titled "Ancestral Memories and Effigy Mounds: An Ancient Religion Decoded and Described" is anticipated to be available in May 2019. This essay on the Indian Prairie site introduces the topic to a wider audience and illuminates an underappreciated southern Wisconsin culture.*

## The Indian Prairie

When Increase A. Lapham, Wisconsin's first and finest scientist, surveyed the Indian Prairie in May of 1850, we were the youngest state in the fledgling nation at exactly two years old. In 1848 the newly-formed Smithsonian Institution published the first volume in its "Contributions to Knowledge" series, "*Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*". This publication focused on indigenous earthworks in the Mississippi River Drainage. Several Wisconsin monuments were included.

Seven years later the Smithsonian Institution published Increase Lapham's seminal work, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin as surveyed and described* (1855). Among the ancestral earthworks mapped by Lapham is the Indian Prairie site which is located in and near today's Kletzsch Park. The site sits above the west bank of the Milwaukee River in the city of Glendale, Wisconsin.

Southern Wisconsin's indigenous burial mounds belong to an underappreciated and misunderstood culture. Academics and authors of popular effigy mound texts have miscast this monumental building program and consider it something less than organized and cohesive. These conclusions were based largely on faulty precedents and too little fact-based research. This is especially so as regards to directional attributes of effigy mounds.

Based on several years of study, I will unequivocally state that there is an inherent and logical order encoded in Indian burial and ceremonial mounds. This includes conical mounds and linear mounds, both of which were also found on the Indian Prairie site.

One longstanding opinion tends to only designate people as “civilized” if they organize in hierarchical structures similar to western institutions. This type of Victorian-era thinking has been hurtful and is factually wrong. Stateless societies, like the mound builders of ancient Wisconsin, organize and build complex societies based on shared rituals, which help enforce social norms (Stanish 2017). Ceremonial sites like the Indian Prairie are evidence of this form of social organization. Ritual and religion is not always the same thing; a nuanced understanding is required.

Places like the Indian Prairie were known to family and friends who lived throughout southern Wisconsin. These are not primitive societies. The mound builders weren’t pagans either. I support through extensive research that the path to “heaven” for the effigy mound celebrants is the same one, the Milky Way, which is described by Plato and that describes the worldview of people in the Near East when the New Testament is written. The Milky Way as the Path of Souls is the core ideology encoded in conical, linear, and effigy mounds.

Foundational stories in Genesis, such as Jacob’s Ladder, also support the notion that North America’s indigenous religion shares core traits with the Babylonian and Sumerian traditions that are known to have contributed to the Old Testament. We have gotten so much, so wrong, for so long that it is hard to correct or explain everything at once but we can do better in the future. The formal religion practiced by the effigy mound celebrants includes belief in an afterlife and deep reverence for ancestors.

The Indian Prairie, like other earthwork sites, encodes and records a cohesive and logical afterlife-based religion. Most Indians, almost all of them, are not buried in mounds. Ancient burial mounds are also ceremonial monuments that can be thought of quite literally and accurately as prayers written in earth. The Indian Prairie seems undeniably linked to several effigy mound sites upstream on the Milwaukee River near present-day West Bend, Wisconsin. These sites are all within one day’s canoe ride and share similar cross-shaped mounds that are a somewhat rare subset of effigy mound. This is a sign of cultural complexity and suggests that a religious guild of some sort operates in the locality.

Indian Prairie was a shared sacred site where people gathered to trade, socialize, and celebrate. Effigy mound celebrants likely petitioned ancestors with health and resource-related prayers that were directed towards the Milky Way’s position just after dark in southern Wisconsin’s summer months. An alternate portal to this Path of Souls, the Hand-and-Eye constellation, based on our Orion seems used in other-than-summer months. The three belt stars in Orion form the wrist of the hand in the sky that is part of many oral histories.

Effigy mounds and other earthworks encode a lot of information, including dates, that can be deciphered as if symbols or letters of an alphabet. Asking or expecting living descendents of the mound builders to have retained this type of ultra-specific information is both unrealistic and I think vastly unfair. It is little different than demanding that I recall and explain specific information from the Viking era in 800CE. It doesn’t make sense.

None of this means that the Indian Nations present in Wisconsin today, particularly those most-closely associated with known deep-history links to Wisconsin, the Menominee and the Ho-Chunk Nations, have forgotten their past. Quite to the contrary, this research reveals that common themes retained by Indian Nations today, such as honoring the cardinal directions, showing deep reverence for ancestors, and considering the Milky Way as the Path of Souls supports the idea of a continuous culture that extends deep into history. Some Algonquian speaking peoples know the Milky Way as the Path of Birds; this similar theme is found in northern Eurasia as well as among indigenous people in South-Central Siberia. The deep history potential of this concept is astounding.

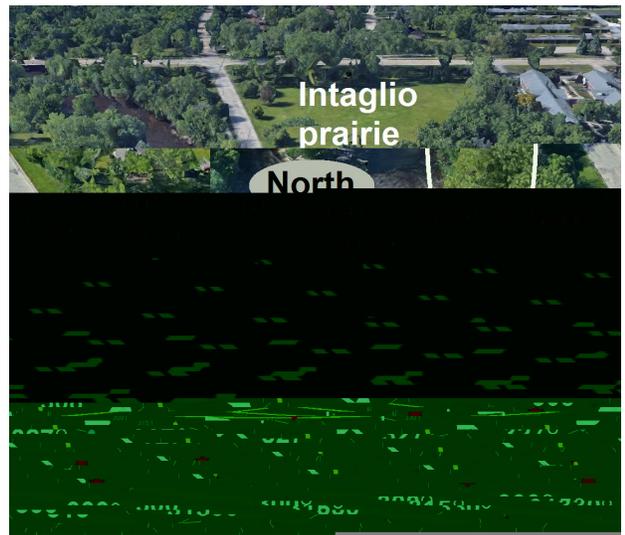
The precise timing mechanisms that are encoded in earthworks such as at the Indian Prairie seem to me to be lost cultural knowledge. That core parts of this encoded system survive in many current-day forms is precisely what we should expect based on some anthropologic theories.

## Ideology at the Indian Prairie

Few people even know that Milwaukee County’s Kletzsch Park was once a significant ceremonial and religious setting for American Indians. The sacred gathering site stretched for nearly one-half of one mile on the Milwaukee

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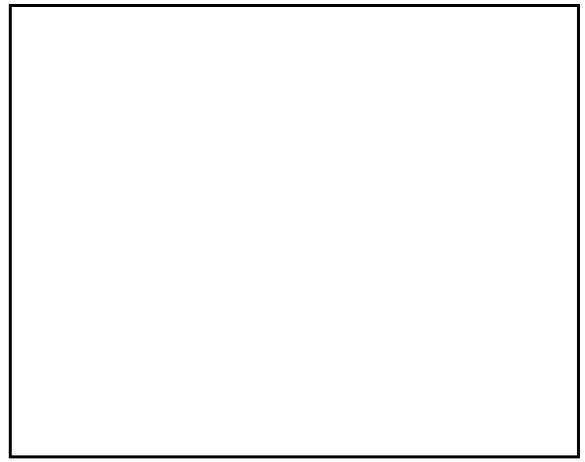
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In summation, I wanted to show and share some of the sophistication and humanity that was recorded at these types of mound sites. The Indian Prairie was an important cultural site that is still important. I recommend that we leave what is still intact in place. Let's honor these sacred soils.

With hopes that this essay has helped illuminate a bright era in human history, I thank you for your time and attention.

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**Figure 4. Bent-tailed cross mound outlined against summer sky. Photo and adaptation by author.**

The northernmost cross in this twinned-pair has a long staff that points to a 312° azimuth. This was troubling as it is not a Path-of-Souls-allowed orientation.

Postscript –This essay first appeared in print on February 08, 2019 in LocaLeben Magazine.

<https://www.localeben.com/2019/02/08/the-indian-prairie-burial-and-ceremonial-site-at-kletzsich-park/>

**Figure 5. Northern Cross set pint in 850 CE. Map data: SkyMap Pro 12; adapted by author**

Eventually, I determined that this odd directional characteristic seems to relate to the Northern Cross's set point where it drops below the northwestern horizon in the 850CE timeframe. This is shown in figure 5. Star rise and set points change slightly but steadily over time because of precession. This needs to be calculated and is helpful in dating mounds.

It was presented as part of an educational outreach that shared previously unpublished research with the hopes of creating a better understanding of the deep cultural history at the Indian Prairie site in Glendale Wisconsin. Importantly, this report shows that important cultural features, the intaglio mounds in particular, may have been inadvertently preserved in a field nearby the proposed impact area by the Kletzsich Park Dam. It is hoped that by bringing attention to some of these unknown site characteristics that local planners will have had considered alternatives and options to plans that impact the Indian Prairie site by construction of a fish passage along the west bank of the Milwaukee River when east bank passages seem not to have been fully vetted.

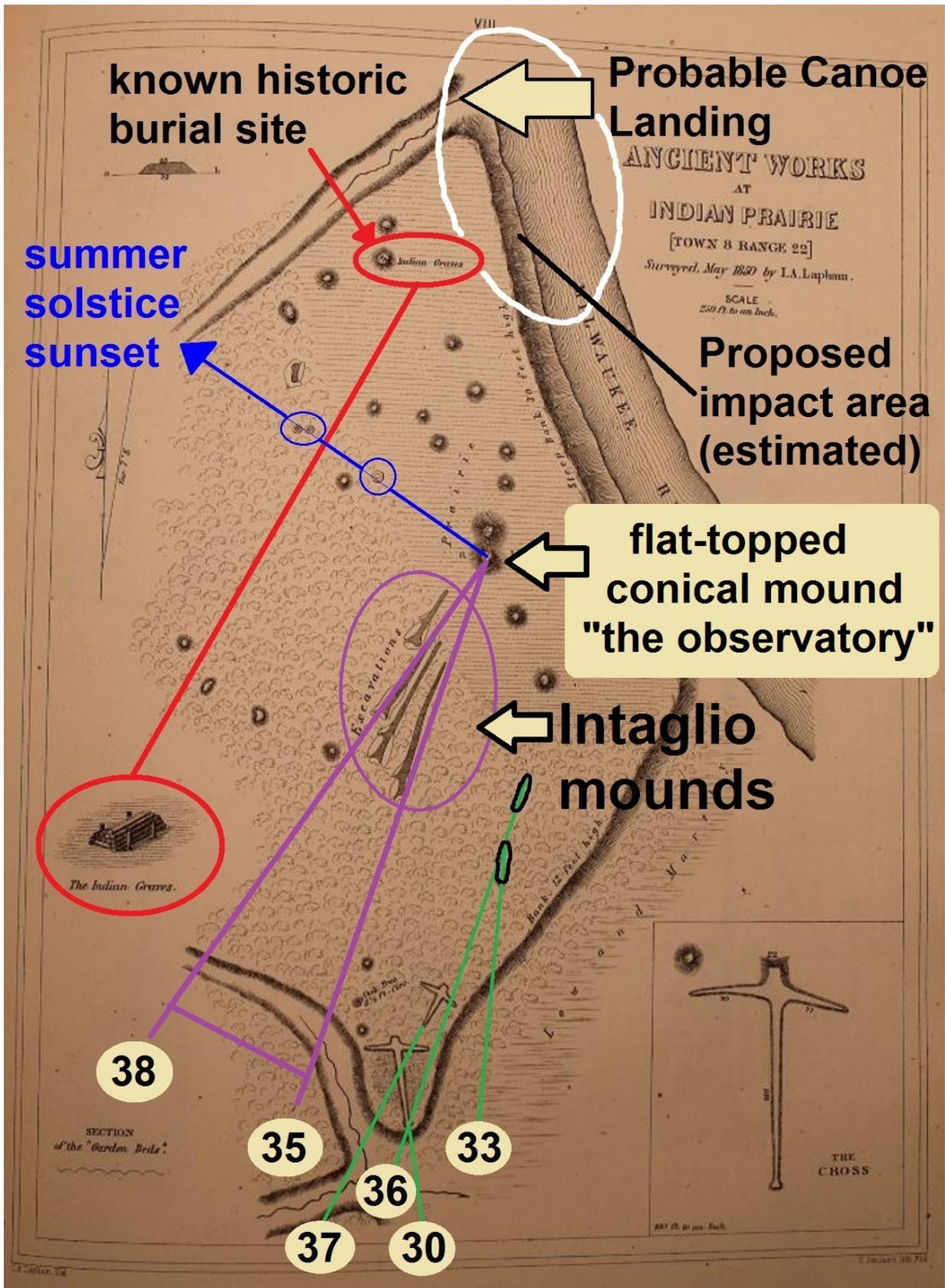


Figure 6. The Indian Prairie. Map Data: *The Antiquities of Wisconsin, as surveyed and described, 1855: Plate VIII*; annotations and photo from 1855 first edition, by author