

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
 LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (1)

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common

Vilas Park Mound Group

(2) Historic (if applicable)

Vilas Park Mound Group
(47DA-148)

II. Location

(1) Street Address

702 S. Randall Ave., (in Vilas Park
at the corner of Erin and Wingra Sts.)

(2) Aldermanic District

Thirteenth

III. Classification

(1) Type of Property (building, monument, park, etc.)

Indian Mounds

(2) Zoning District

C W

(3) Present Use

City Park

IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s)

City of Madison - Parks

(2) Street Address

Madison Municipal Building, Ste. 120
Madison, WI 53710

(3) Telephone Number

266-4711

V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number

0709-271-0099-4

(2) Legal Description

All land in sections 21 & 27, T7N,
R9E used for Vilas Park and Zoo.

VI. Condition of Property

(1) Physical Condition (excellent, good, fair, deteriorated, ruins)

Good

(2) Altered or Unaltered?

Altered

(3) Moved or Original Site?

Original Site

(4) Wall Construction

Not applicable

(5) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the present and original physical construction and appearance (limit 500 words).

Landmark Nomination
Vilas Park Mound Group
Description, continued

The approximate location of the bird and two conicals that have been destroyed are shown as A, B, and C on Fig. 2. Although surface indications have been obliterated, there remains a potential that subsurface features, such as burial pits, remain. The Vilas Park Mound Group was marked with a plaque in 1915 by the Wisconsin Archeological Society in a ceremony attended by representatives of twelve American Indian tribes (Brown 1915:93).

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

VI.(5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:

The Vilas Park Mound Group is a prehistoric Indian effigy mound group located on a crest of a ridge overlooking the Vilas Park Zoo and the northeastern shore of Lake Wingra. It originally consisted of eleven low (1 to 3-1/2 ft. in height), earthen mounds. These were two bird effigies, one linear, and eight conicals (Fig. 1, Brown 1915:104-107). One bird, two conical, part of the second bird, and part of a conical have been destroyed by road construction and landscaping. Human remains were discovered during inadvertent destruction of one of the mounds as a result of grading a road that once ran through the area. The bones were immediately interred on or near the spot (Wisconsin State Journal: Oct. 15, 1915).

One mound has been reconstructed (Peterson 1979:84-84), although there is some potential for the existence of undisturbed subsurface features in the vicinity.

Descriptions of individual mounds are as follows. Measurements are approximate since edges of many of the mounds blend with the natural contours of the ridge.

1. Bird (Fig. 2, #1). This bird mound presently has a wing span of approximately 109 ft. and a body length of 54 ft. One wing, however, is partially reconstructed. The original wingspan of this bird was reportedly 200 ft. (Brown 1915:91). An early map of the bird also indicates that it once had a bulbous body (Fig. 1). The body now takes on linear appearance. A slight rise to the south of the body, however, may represent the original mound edge.
2. Conical (Fig. 2, #2). Approximately 24 ft. x 20 ft. A large tree is growing on the northeast edge.
3. Reconstructed conical (Fig. 2, #3). 22 ft. x 18 ft. The surface of this reconstructed mound has been damaged.
4. Conical (Fig. 2, #4). Approximately 28 ft. in diameter. A large tree is growing from the northwest edge.
5. Linear (Fig. 2, #5). Approximately 76 ft. in length and 21-1/2 ft. in width.
6. Damaged conical. This mound was damaged by landscaping. It presently assumes an oval shape and measures 16 ft. x 22 ft. The surface of the mound remnant is slightly eroded.
7. Conical (Fig. 2, #7). Approximately 29 ft. in diameter.
8. Conical (Fig. 2, #8). Approximately 26 ft. in diameter.

(see continuation sheet)

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

VII. Significance

(1) **Original Owner**
People of the Late Woodland Stage
Effigy Mound Tradition

(2) **Original Use**
Ceremonial and Funerary

(3) **Architect or Builder**
People of the Late Woodland Stage
Effigy Mound Tradition

(4) **Architectural Style**
Not applicable

(5) **Date of Construction**
ca. 800-1100 A.D.

(6) **Indigenous Materials Used**
Not applicable

(7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words.

VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used

1. Please see continuation sheet
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) **Name and Title** Robert A. Birmingham, State Archeologist, and
Katherine H. Rankin, Preservation Planner

(2) **Organization Represented (if any)**
State Historical Society of Wisconsin
and City of Madison

(3) **Address** P.O. Box 2985
Madison, WI 53701

(4) **Telephone Number**
266-6552

(5) **Date Nomination Form Was Prepared**
March 13, 1990

Landmark Nomination
Vilas Park Mound Group

List of Bibliographical References Used

Arzigian, Constance

1986 - The Emergence of Horticultural Societies in Wisconsin. In William F. Keegan (ed.) Emergent Horticultural Societies of the Eastern Woodlands. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale Center for Archeological Investigations Occasional Paper No. 7.

Brown, Charles E.

1915 - Lake Wingra. The Wisconsin Archeologist. 14(3).

Mallam, R. Clark

1976 - The Effigy Mound Tradition in Iowa: An Interpretative Model. Report No. 9. Office of the State Archeologist, Iowa City.

1984 - Some Views on the Archeology of the Driftless Zone in Iowa. Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science.

Peterson, Robert

1979 - The Wisconsin Effigy Mounds Project, I. Unpublished report on file, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

Salkin, Philip

1987 - The Late Woodland Stage in Southeastern Wisconsin. Wisconsin Academy Review, pp. 75-79.

Scherz, James

1987 - New Surveys of Wisconsin Indian Mounds. Wisconsin Academy Review, pp. 63-66.

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria:

The Vilas Park Mound Group is significant because it is one of the relatively few surviving Late Woodland ceremonial centers in the Madison lakes area of Dane County. Although a portion of the group has been destroyed, the mound group retains sufficient integrity to provide important information concerning the Late Woodland Stage in southwestern and south central Wisconsin.

Effigy mound groups like Vilas Park are generally dated to the Late Woodland Stage circa 650-1200 A. D. Many believe, however, that the effigy mounds themselves were built during a rather narrow time span of 800-1100 A. D. (J. Stoltman, personal communication). Effigy mound groups are believed to have functioned as ceremonial centers for the periodic reinforcement of kinship ties and belief systems of individual Late Woodland social groups. Dane County once contained over 1,000 mounds in approximately 115 locations or centers that are attributable to the Late Woodland Stage (Peterson 1979:53). This figure includes at least 289 effigy mounds. Most of these were found in the four lakes area around Madison and most have been destroyed by agricultural practices and urban expansion. Approximately 200 mounds in approximately 50 locations remain. These include less than 60 effigies.

The Vilas Park Mound Group has the potential to yield important information on the Late Woodland Stage. For example, ceramics and other artifacts can help clarify the nature of the Late Woodland sequence. This is important, since it has recently been proposed that not all Late Woodland populations participated in the construction of effigy mounds (Salkin 1987). Charcoal and other organic material associated with ceremonial activities can provide radiocarbon dates that will further refine the temporal span of mound construction. Recently, the role of maize horticulture in Late Woodland society has been a research issue (Arzigian 1987). Since these types of mounds frequently contain burials, analysis of teeth and bone chemistry can provide insights into diet of the effigy mound people.

However, in light of the fact that mounds are now protected as burial places under Wisconsin State Law, it is relevant to point out that significant information concerning Late Woodland peoples can be gained from effigy mound groups such as Vilas through non-destructive studies. Clark Mallam has studied the location and arrangement of effigy mound groups as well as effigy mound types in Iowa and has gained some insights into late Woodland social systems and ideology as a result. By analyzing the geographical distribution of effigy mound types, for example, he was able to determine that a number of separate social groups were responsible for effigy mound construction in northeastern Iowa (Mallam 1976).

In a more recent essay, he suggests that the meaning and function of effigy mound groups can be addressed through such analysis aided by ethnographic analogy. He observes, for example, that effigy mound groups tend to be located near zones of predictable and annual occurring resources. This suggests to him that a complex set of ideological, social, political, and economic relationships may be involved in mound construction. He suggests

(see continuation sheet)

Landmark Nomination
Vilas Park Mound Group
Significance, continued

that mounds "are not so much burial sites as they are metaphorical expressions about the idealized state that should exist between nature and culture--balance and harmony" (1984:19). In his view, the Late Woodland people were expressing their "cosmological convictions" by "sacralizing the earth" through the construction of mounds.

In other words, they consecrated the mosaic environment with its varied resources and ecological relationships by defining it as sacred space. If the rhythm--balance and order--of this region could maintained, the resources on which humans depended would continue. In this sense, mound building may be perceived as an ongoing world renewal ritual, a sacred activity humans entered into in order to insure regular and consistent production of natural resources (1984:19).

Mapping of mound groups and mound alignments have convinced others that they functioned primarily as calentric devices and to record symbolic geometries. (Scherz 1987).

Similar analyses of mound group location, arrangements, and physical relationships to other sites can make substantial contributions to our understanding of Late Woodland society in the southwest and south central part of Wisconsin.

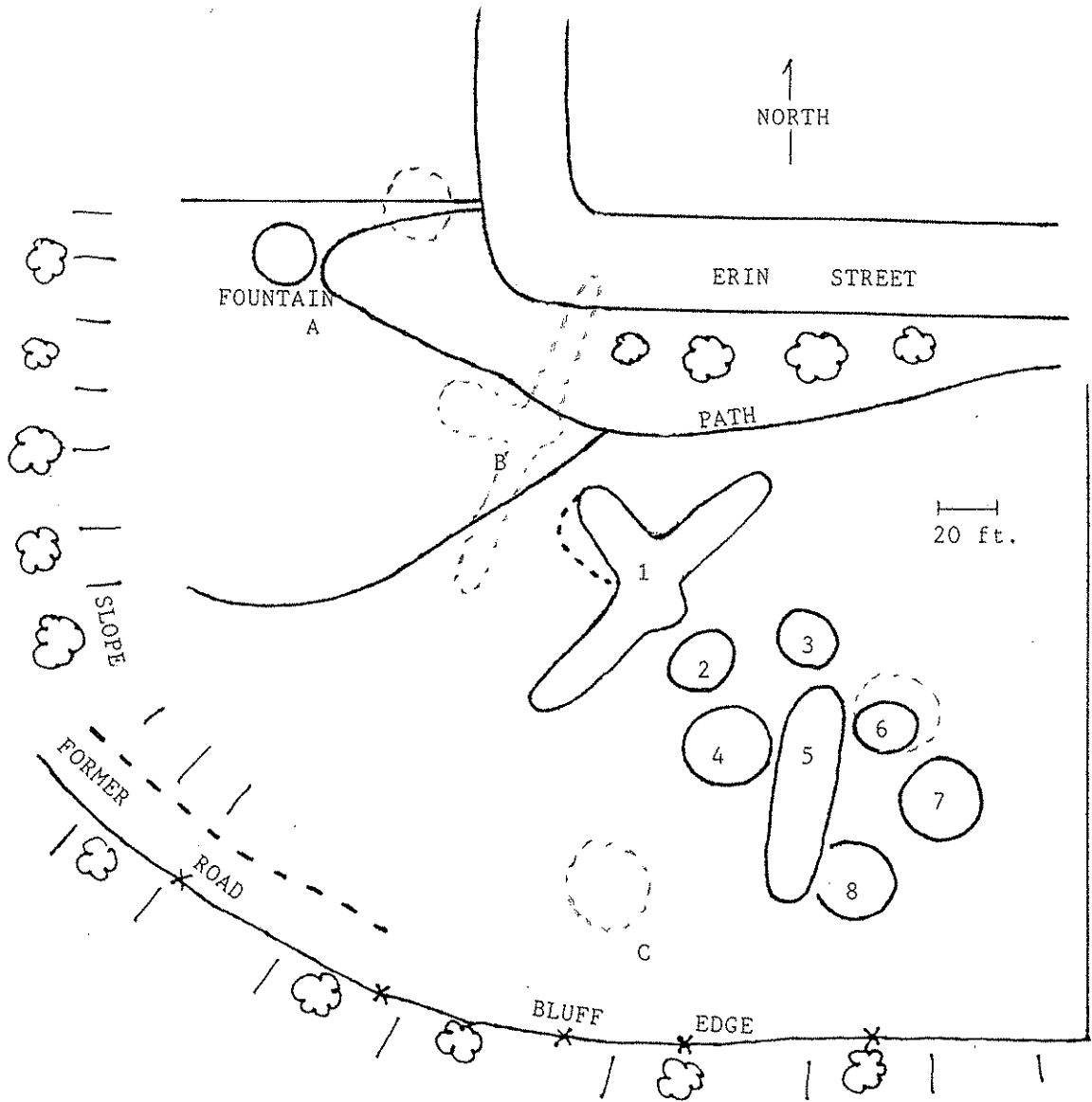


Figure 2: Vilas Park Mound Group and vicinity, 1989

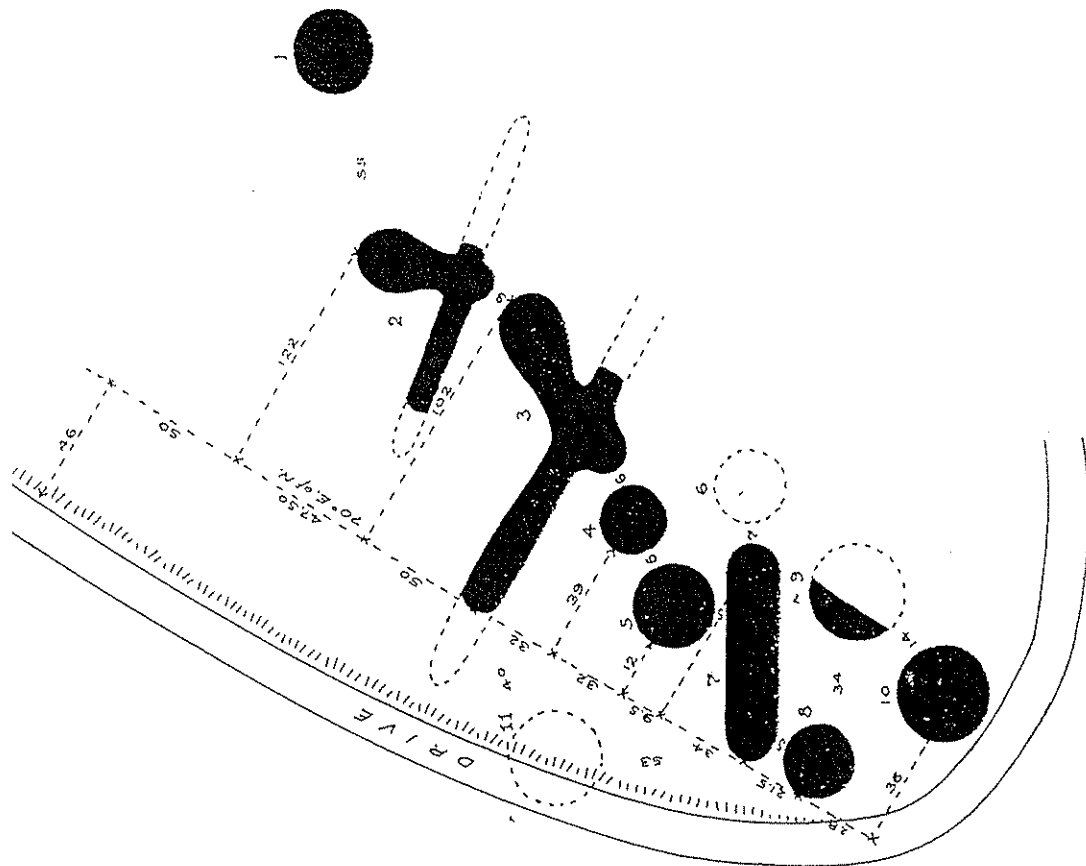


Figure 1: 1915 Charles E. Brown map of Vilas Park Mound Group.

