

City of Afton, Minnesota
Heritage Preservation Commission
LOCAL PROPERTY DESIGNATION

DRAFT

NAME OF PROPERTY:

Historic Name: Bissell Mound
Other Names:
SHPO Inventory No.: WA-AFC-
Parcel No: 08.028.20.31.0003

LOCATION:

Street & No.: 13305 15th Street South
City/Town: Afton
State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Washington County, 55001

PROPERTY OWNER:

Owner Name: Karen L. Stoltzmann and M.B. Janel
Owner Phone/Cell:
Street & No.: 13305 15th Street South
City/State/Zip: Afton, Minnesota 55001

CLASSIFICATION:

<i>Ownership of Property</i>	<i>Category of Property:</i>	<i>Number of Resources within Property</i>	
		<i>Contributing</i>	<i>Noncontributing</i>
X private	building(s)		0 buildings
public	district	1	0 sites
	X site		0 structures
	structure		0 objects
	object		
		1	0 TOTAL

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places: 0 *Open to the Public:* No

FUNCTION or USE:

Historic Functions: LANDSCAPE/natural feature
Current Functions: LANDSCAPE/natural feature

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SIGNIFICANCE:

Historic significance: Unique geographical features that have served as visual landmarks to the community, state or nation.

Narrative Statement:

The three Bissell Mounds are located on township section 8 in Afton, Minnesota on Highway 15 east of Mounds Prairie Cemetery. They were named for Elijah Bissell, an early settler to the area, who first laid claim to land that included these three formations in 1842. (The original name of 15th Street South was Bissell Mounds Road.) (Grant) The main road between St. Paul and the St. Croix River once ran past these mounds. (stcroixscenicbyway.org) Little seems to be known about Elijah Bissell, other than that he farmed there for approximately eight years and then left the area.

The mound that is the subject of this study is the most easterly mound located in the cultivated field. Wayne Mays, publisher of *Ancient American* magazine, believes the mound to have historical significance. Mr. Mays has visited this particular mound three times, most recently circa 2012. He was accompanied by Sharon White Rabbit, a Ho-Chunk shaman from western Wisconsin. The top of the mound is flat and appears to have been tilled and used for planting at some point in time. A GPR (ground penetrating radar) device identified an open rectangular “disturbance in the soil” below ground that Mays believes could be a burial site. Pottery and flint fragments were also found which were given to the mound owner. This owner related that as a child (probably in the 1950s) she had found a number of points and fragments, now lost over time. (Mays)

Local lore includes a story of the use of this mound in 1974 as a campsite for Indians who came to Saint Paul for the federal trial of the American Indian Movement activists Dennis Banks and Russell Means. It is believed by some that these supporters camped on this particular mound during the trial because it was a sacred early Indian burial site (Martens) although this could not be verified.

Conversations were held with Bruce Koenen of the Office of the State Archaeologist and David Mather, the State Historic Preservation Office National Register archaeologist. Both Koenen and Mather stated that they believed the mounds to be geological features only; however they also noted that prominent land forms were sometimes used for burials, and that these mounds have not had an archaeological survey.

Various books and manuscripts were reviewed at the Afton Historical Museum, the Washington County Historical Museum and the Minnesota Historical Society library. These included *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley* (Neill, 1881) that describes the mounds but provides no local lore; and *Aborigines of Minnesota* (Winchell, 1911) that makes no reference to Bissell Mounds, although mention is made of the Rattlesnake effigy in Afton.

Narrative Description:

There are three Bissell Mounds with two located immediately adjacent to Neal Avenue South and one in a cultivated field to the east of Neal Avenue and to the south of 15th Street South. The mounds along Neal Avenue have been developed with residential structures on each. The easterly mound has not been inhabited or significantly disturbed by European settlement.

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The mounds are composed of bedrock capped with stratified limestone. Loose sand and gravel, once present on the hillsides of the mounds thousands of years ago, has eroded over time. The mounds were formed millions of years ago when epicontinental seas covered North America. (Collins) Older sources vary on the size of the mounds. Estimates range from forty to seventy-five feet in height and are said to occupy from one-quarter acre to over one acre each. The mounds, which are all presently in private hands, have never been archaeologically surveyed.

The subject mound is the tallest of the three mounds and supports the second highest elevation in Afton, superseded only by Mount Hope Cemetery on the bluff overlooking Afton Village. The easterly mound is covered with wild vegetation and volunteer growth with the top of the formation relatively flat.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT: The Bissell Mound is significant as a unique land formation that has served as a natural landmark in the Afton area and is a site with Native American associations and where artifacts have been found in the past.

OTHER ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

<i>Related Historic Contexts:</i> Early Agriculture and River Settlement 1840-1870 Railroads and Agriculture Development 1870-1940	<i>Significant Person(s):</i> Elijah Bissell
<i>Period of Significance:</i> Pre-historic to 1966 (50 years back)	<i>Cultural Affiliation:</i>
<i>Significant Dates:</i> 1842 when Elijah Bissell procured the property	<i>Architect/Builder(s):</i>
<i>Contributing Resources (within the Period of Significance)</i> The most easterly mound on parcel 08.028.20.31.0003	
<i>Non-contributing Resources (outside the Period of Significance)</i> None	

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Acreage of Property: approximately 1.00 acre

Legal Description of Property:

PT S1/2-NE1/4 COM AT SE COR SD S1/2-NE1/4 THENCE W ALONG THE 1/4 SEC LINE 10 RODS TO A PT THENCE NORTH 16 RODS TO A PT THENCE EAST 10 RODS TO A PT ON THE SEC LINE THENCE SOUTH ALONG SD SEC LINE 16 RODS TO POB SECTION 07 TOWNSHIP 028 RANGE 020

Boundary Justification: Washington County tax records.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION:

Current Photographs:



Bissell Mound looking south from 15th Street South. The sister mounds that are developed upon and flank Neal Avenue, are to the west and south of the main Bissell Mound in the picture.

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AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH(S) AND SITE MAP(S) OF THE PROPERTY:



There are three Bissell Mounds near the intersection of 15th Street South and Neal Avenue South. Two developed mounds are located immediately adjacent on the east and west side of Neal Avenue South. The most easterly mound in the center of the cultivated field is the target mound of this nomination.

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Close-up aerial photograph of the nominated mound.



Parcel map for the Bissell Mound site to the south of 15th Street South and east of Neal Avenue South in Afton Minnesota.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES:

Published

“After 50 Years: Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church 1882-1932.” Swedish Evangelical Church. 1932.

Afton Historical Museum Library. Newsletter. April 2014.

Grant, Evelyn. “Afton Road Names.” Minnesota History Magazine. Spring 1974.

Minnesota Historical Society library. Various publications.

Neill, E. *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*. North Star Publishing Company. 1881.

Saint Paul Dispatch. Index. June-December 1974.

Saint Paul Pioneer Press. Index. June-December 1974.

St. Croix Scenic Byway. stcroixscenicbyways.org

Washington County Historical Society Museum. Various manuscripts.

Winchell N.H. *Aborigines of Minnesota*. Minnesota Historical Society Press. 1911.

Zellie, Carol. *From Palisade Head to Sugar Loaf: An Inventory of Minnesota's Geographic Features of Historic and Cultural Significance*. (Prepared for State Historic Preservation Office 1989).

Unpublished

Collins, Sue. Interview with Gary N. Meyer. Jim Cox papers. 1992.

Koenen, Bruce. Phone conversation with Will Stark. Spring 2016.

Martens, Ken. Phone conversation with Peg Reilly. January 2016.

Mather, David. Conversation with Peg Reilly. Spring 2016.

Mays, Wayne. Phone conversations with Peg Reilly and Tom Zahn. Fall 2015 and Summer 2016.

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FORM PREPARED BY:

Name/Title: Thomas R. Zahn & Associates LLC
Street & No.: 807 Holly Avenue
City/Town: Saint Paul
State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Ramsey County, 55104
Telephone No.: 651-221-9765
Date Prepared: July 28, 2016

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER COMMENT:

Review and comment by the State Historic Preservation Officer pursuant to Minnesota Statute _____; Subd. ____.

Date Submitted to SHPO: _____ Date of SHPO Comment: _____

AFTON CITY COUNCIL REVIEW / APPROVAL:

Designation of property pursuant to: _____

Date of Action: _____