

The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine

I, a wandering student, seeking knowledge, came knocking at the gates of the great University of Wisconsin, and it took me in, filled me with inspiration, and when I left its doors the kindly people of the state stretched out welcoming hands and gave me a man's work to do.—An Alumnus.

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PREHISTORIC INDIAN MONUMENTS ON THE UNIVERSITY GROUNDS

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IN no region of a similar area in the state are there to be found so great a number of ancient Indian earthworks as in that about the three lakes surrounding the city of Madison. Every attractive point or sweep of shore-line about these beautiful bodies of water is or was once the site of a group of mounds. Although many of these remarkable earthen monuments have now been needlessly destroyed, a large number of them yet remain to interest all who may desire to become acquainted with the archaeological history of the site of Madison.

Recent investigations conducted by the Wisconsin Archaeological Society show that there were formerly located about Lake Mendota thirty, about Lake Monona twelve, and about Lake Wingra eleven groups of Indian earthworks. Six of these groups, all of them on or near the shore of Lake Mendota, were located on land now owned by the University of Wisconsin.

The classes of mounds represented in the Madison groups are the conical or burial, the linear or wall-shaped, and the effigy or emblematic. Represented among the numerous effigy types are animal-shaped structures intended to represent the eagle, goose, bear, panther, fox or wolf, and turtle. Nearly every effigy type found in the southern half of the state is represented by one or more examples in the Madison area. This fact is significant since it plainly indicates that at one time or another all of these ancient Indian clans had villages here. From this we may infer that in the distant past the site of the present capital city was an Indian clan or tribal center. Attracted no doubt by the abundance of fish, game and vegetable food, and by the greater security obtained through the presence of other friendly clans of their own tribe, these clans chose this region as their home. Where their villages were once located are found the conical mounds which are the burial places of their distinguished dead and the em-

blematic earthworks which are the totems or clan emblems of their inhabitants.

As the purpose of the present article is to describe the groups of ancient Indian earthworks now and formerly located upon the property of the state university, the writer may not at this time enter into a discussion of some of the many problems which archaeological investigators in this state are now endeavoring to solve. It may be stated, however, that these effigy mounds, which are confined almost wholly to Wisconsin and which have been for many years an object of wonder to the archaeologists of the United States, by their character and their distribution in the state form one of the most important clues to our ever broadening knowledge of the habitats, migrations, social organization and religion of Wisconsin's prehistoric Indian inhabitants. The results of seventy-five years of survey and exploration work in the state, beginning with the surveys begun by Dr. Increase A. Lapham in 1836 and continued in recent years by the state archaeological society, have at length placed at our command the data by means of which the life history of these people may be to a large extent unravelled. In the State Historical museum at Madison and in other public museums in Wisconsin are now assembled valuable collections in clay, stone, bone and metal implements which serve to explain the industries and commerce of the pre-Columbian red men.

By leading archaeologists and ethnologists the Winnebago, a prominent Wisconsin tribe, are now considered to be the builders of the emblematic mounds and associated earthworks scattered in such great numbers over

the southern half of this state. The customs, traditions and history of this tribe all appear to give support to this conclusion. These people reached Wisconsin during a prehistoric westward migration of certain tribes of the great Siouan family of American Indians from their original habitat in Virginia and the Carolinas. Archaeological researches conducted in the regions afterwards occupied by some of these tribes, both east and west of the Mississippi river, appear to indicate that some of them besides the Winnebago were also builders of earthen monuments.

In the following paragraphs descriptions of the Indian earthworks located upon the grounds of the University of Wisconsin are given.

UPPER CAMPUS.

According to the late Dr. Reuben G. Thwaites an effigy mound was at one time located at the head of the upper campus where University Hall now stands. It was destroyed when this building was added to the university plant in 1858. It is said to have been an effigy of the common and widely distributed "panther" type. Mr. I. N. Stewart states that two mounds, linear in form, were located between North Hall and the lake bank. These were quite prominent. They were destroyed in the levelling of the land. Some traces of one long, narrow mound could still recently be seen. It is not known whether there were any burial (conical) mounds on the crest of the upper campus.

OBSERVATORY HILL GROUP.

Figure 1.

On the crest of Observatory hill are preserved the two effigy mounds shown in Figure 1. They are located

at the western extremity of this ridge and within a short distance of Washburn Observatory, Agricultural Hall and the old Horticultural building. One of the mounds is the effigy of a bird. Its wings are spread and it is represented as flying toward the south. The length of its body is $52\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The width of its head is $12\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Just below the wings its body is 13 feet wide and at the end of the tail 17 feet wide. The wings are each about 11 feet wide at their union with the body. A portion of each wing has been obliterated by the levelling of the lawn. This effigy originally had a wingspread of about 133 feet. Other bird effigies of this form are found about the Madison lakes.

The other effigy, which lies but a few feet west of the bird mound, is thought to be intended to represent the turtle and bears a strong resemblance to some of the numerous conventionalized representations of that reptile. It differs from other turtle effigies, however, in having two converging instead of one central caudal appendage.

In this remarkable mound this reptile is represented in the act of crawling over the crest of the ridge. Its total length is 104 feet. Its four limbs are from 18 to 22 feet in length. The width of the body between the limbs is $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet. One of its limbs and the tails are mutilated by the laying of a concrete walk over portions of them. The mutilation of these fine mounds is greatly to be regretted. It might have been avoided if a proper interest in their protection had been shown by those in authority at the time. The plat of these mounds from which this illustration is copied was made by Dr. Arlow B. Stout, in 1905.

One or more conical mounds formerly located on the land below the ridge were destroyed when Agricultural Hall was erected.

These mounds were marked by the university in 1909, at the request of the Wisconsin Archaeological Society, with temporary explanatory wooden signs. They are now to be replaced by the Board of Regents with artistic bronze tablets. The mounds are viewed each year by thousands of students, and by hundreds of visitors from all parts of Wisconsin and other states who take the long walk across the grounds for the express purpose of seeing them.

In the orchard below Observatory hill and between it and the Lake Mendota shore, evidences of an Indian camp and workshop site have been found. Flint chips were formerly scattered over the ground in parts of this orchard. Numerous flint arrow points and several grooved stone axes and celts have also been found here in past years.

DRIVE GROUP.

Figure 2.

These mounds are located in a strip of wooded pasture on the University farm, a short distance northwest of the residence of Dean H. L. Russell, and near the Lake Mendota shore. The lake shore drive passes by them. The linear mound is 92 feet in length and has a uniform width of 17 feet. It is about 3 feet high. The tapering mound is 123 feet in length and 20 feet wide at its widest part, where it is crossed by the fence. About 5 feet of its widest end extends beyond the fence to near the edge of the drive. At this place it is about 3 feet high. Both of these mounds are quite well preserved. In the northeast corner

of the adjoining field was a third mound, probably formerly also linear in form. It is now nearly obliterated through cultivation.

CREEK GROUP.

Figure 3.

This group consists of three mounds of curious form located near the creek, on the experiment farm of the agricultural department of the university.

other. The body of this mound is about 100 feet long and 20 feet in width. It is about 2 feet high at its highest part.

Across the road from this mound, in a wooded pasture, are two tapering mounds both unlike any which have been encountered elsewhere about Lake Mendota. The smaller of the two is 52 feet in length. It has a projection on one side of its widest extremity. The other mound has a

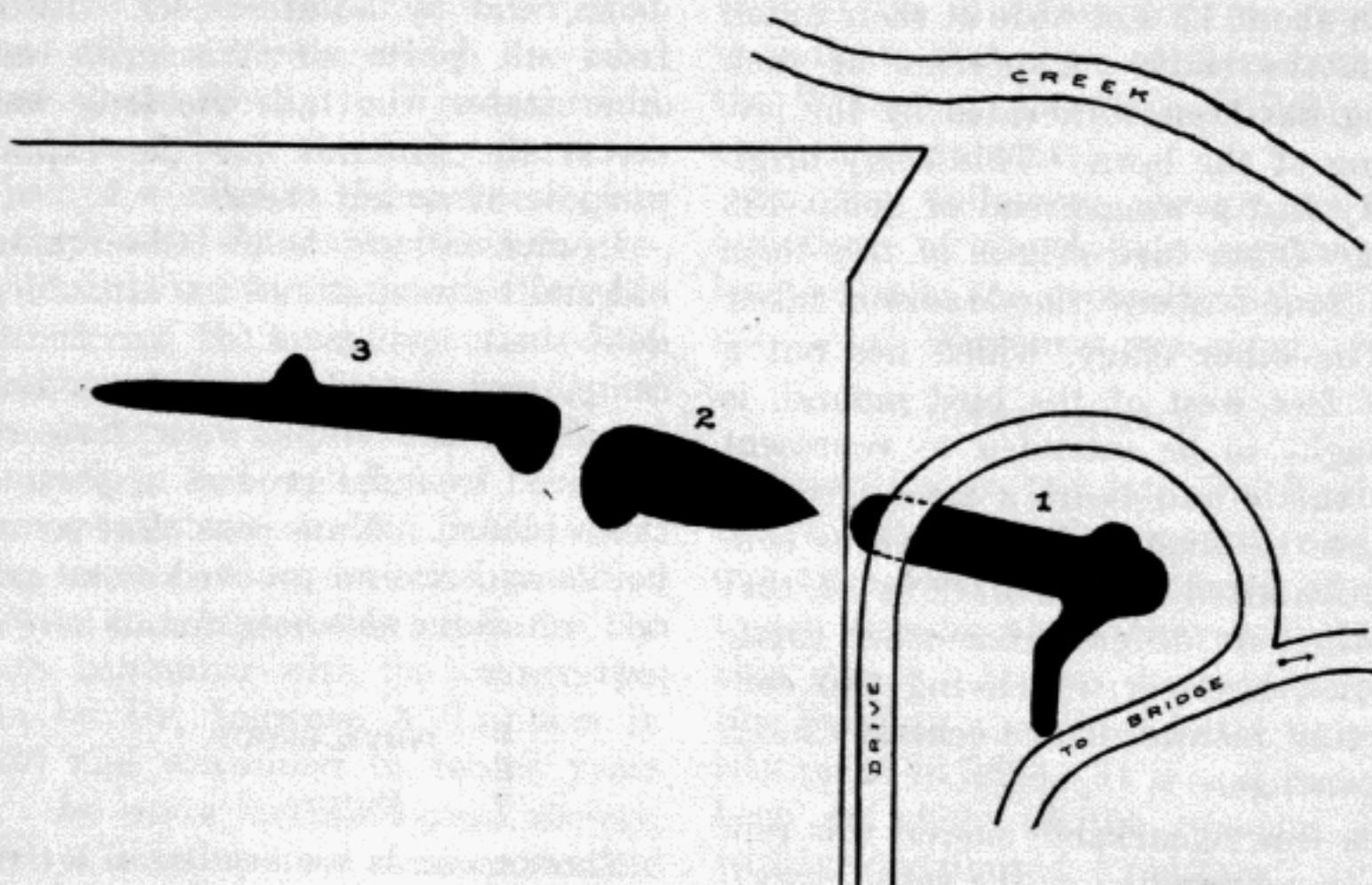


FIGURE 3

All are within a short distance of the Lake Mendota shore. No. 1 is located on a small oval encircled by the drive. It is surrounded by evergreen trees and its presence is therefore noted by but few of the hundreds of persons who walk or drive by it. The drive cuts through a portion of one extremity.

It is not certain but that this mound has lost through grading of the land at the time of the making of this road and grading of this portion of the oval, on one side of its body, a wing similar to that which appears on the

projection at one end and another about half way down its opposite side. This mound is 133 feet in length.

On the west side of the creek on the higher land near the university sand pit are to be seen the usual surface indications of an Indian camp site. After the plowing of this field, in 1911, the writer collected here a considerable number of flint arrow-points and potsherds. A sandstone arrowshaft grinder was also obtained here. At this time flint chips and the burned and cracked stones from the wigwam fireplaces were quite nu-

merous on the surface of the ground. Early settlers of Madison state that the small grove below the sand pit and fronting on the willow drive of Picnic Point bay was up to about the year 1885 a favorite camping ground of the Winnebago Indians who gathered here, sometimes in considerable numbers. They came largely for the

1909, an effort was made by the writer in behalf of the Wisconsin Archaeological Society to secure the permanent preservation of the three mounds composing this group. All were then unmutilated and otherwise in fine condition. This attempt, however, failed of success, it being stated that the ridge-top was required by the ag-

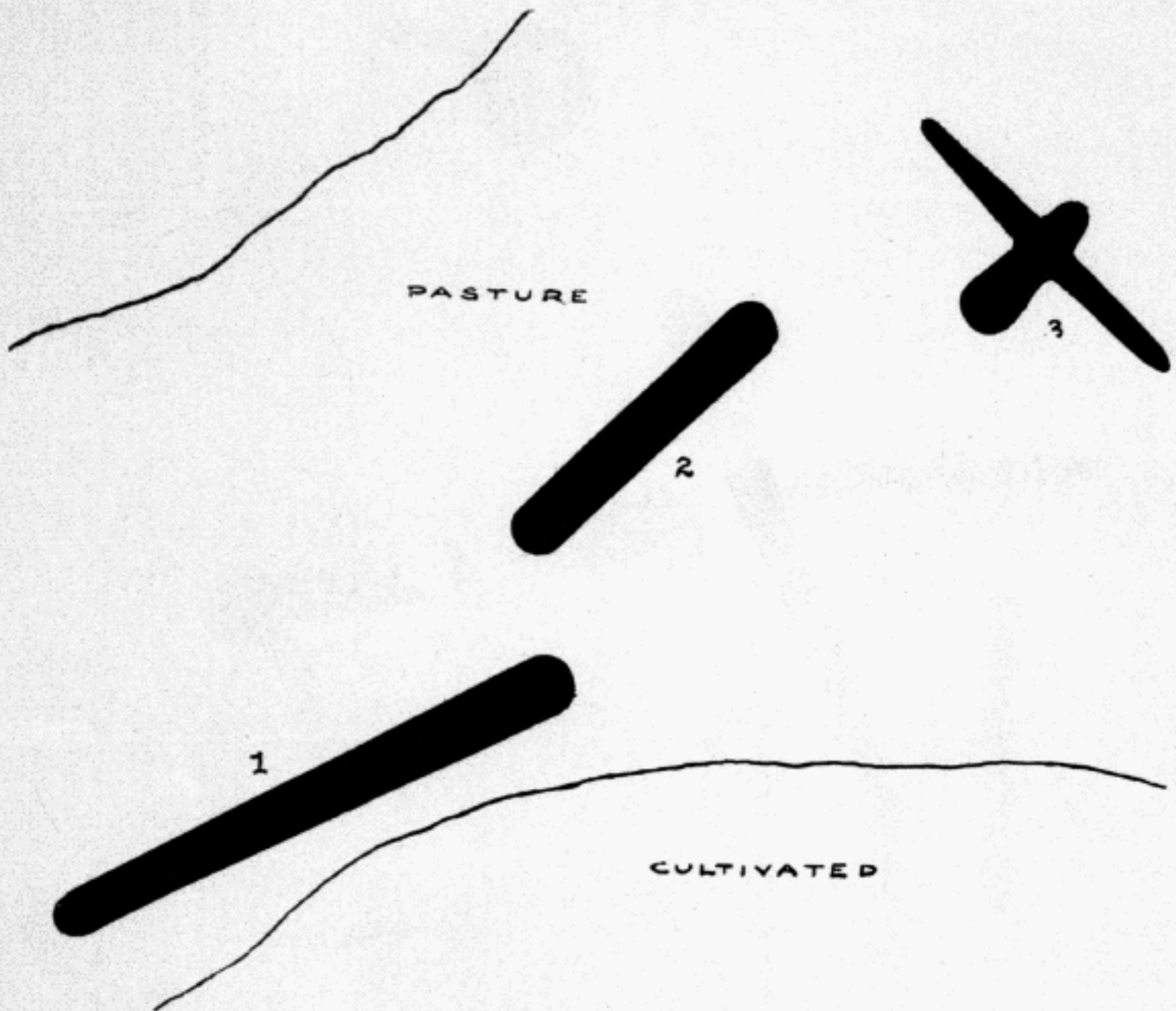


FIGURE 4

purpose of hunting the muskrats which were then numerous in the adjoining marshes.

RIDGE GROUP.

Figure 4.

The group of mounds shown in this figure was situated on the top of a ridge, on what is now known as the new university fruit farm, located to the west of the stock barns. In May

ricultural department for the planting of an experimental orchard and with the planting and cultivation of which these earthworks would interfere. In preparing the land for the setting out of the trees mounds Nos. 2 and 3 were destroyed, mound No. 1 alone being spared. The latter, the largest of the two linear earthworks, is 165 feet in length and about 14 feet in width at one extremity and 17 feet

in width at the other. It is about 2 feet high at its highest part. Mound No. 2 was 96 feet in length, and had a uniform width of 17 feet. It was of about the same height as mound No. 1. The bird effigy (No. 3) was of a type common to a number of Madi-

and which now forms a part of the grounds of the University of Wisconsin. This crest is said to be about 125 feet above the level of the lake. Its northern side slopes very steeply down to the lake shore. It is thickly wooded on all sides.

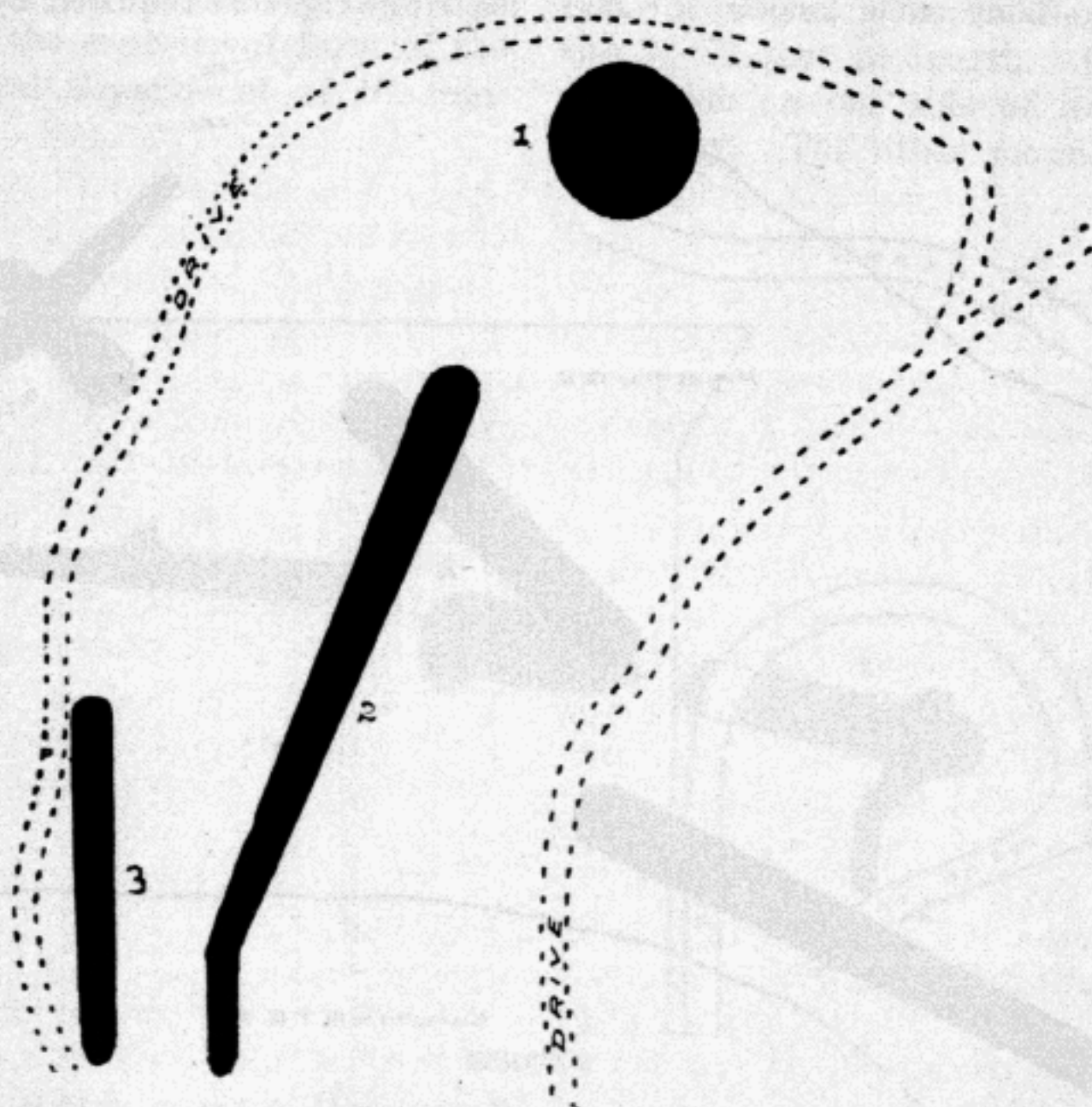


FIGURE 5

son mound groups. The length of its body was 45 feet, and it had a wing-spread of 94 feet. The height of its body was about 2 feet. It is greatly to be regretted that all of these fine mounds could not have been spared.

EAGLE HEIGHTS GROUP.

Figure 5.

These mounds are located on the crest of Eagle Heights, a promontory on the south shore of Lake Mendota,

The mounds are encircled by a drive. No. 1, the conical mound, lies directly at the edge of the drive. This fine mound is 40 feet in diameter and was formerly about 5 feet high. A slight depression on its top shows where it has been several times dug into in recent years by relic-hunting summer resorters of the neighborhood. Both of the other mounds are of the tapering linear form. They are partly hidden by young trees and shrubs.

The larger is 208 feet long and 14 feet wide at the broadest extremity. The smallest mound (No. 3) is 100 feet long and 10 feet in width at its broadest extremity. It lies by the side of the drive but is partly hidden by shrubbery.

It is to be hoped that these mounds will never be disturbed.

PRESERVATION OF THE MOUNDS.

During the year 1912 all of the mound groups on the university grounds not already marked were marked with explanatory wooden tablets. This has been the means of interesting in these prehistoric Indian memorials many students and other visitors who formerly passed by and over them without noticing them.

The Indian earthworks on the university grounds have received very little attention from officers in the past. They have been mutilated and obliterated at will. Only now and then has a protest against this de-

structive work been heard. It is a pleasure, therefore, to note that in the past several years a live and growing interest in their historical and educational value and permanent preservation has been aroused. This should have a widespread good effect in other parts of the state where valuable aboriginal monuments are being needlessly destroyed each year because their owners and communities do not yet realize their importance and value. The good example now being set by the university will soon be emulated in many places.

The state legislature of 1911 enacted a law prohibiting the destruction, mutilation or removal of prehistoric or historic Indian remains located upon the public lands, state parks, forest reserves, lands of state educational or other state institutions, or upon other lands or properties belonging to the state. A penalty of fine or imprisonment or both is provided for the violation of this statute.

KEYSTONE REUNION

THE Keystone alumnae will hold their first annual banquet in Lathrop Hall at 12 o'clock noon on Alumni Day, and will have as their guests of honor the Keystone members who are to be active the following year.

This arrangement is in accordance with a resolution drawn up at the Devine cottage last summer when an alumnae chapter of Keystone was formed in order that its members, having gained experience by their completed duties as active members and having acquired a new perspective from their consequent disassociation with the work of the organization, may come together each spring to talk over the problems of the coming year with those who will be actively in charge of the work.

Because Keystone (an organization made up of the presidents of every woman's organization in the university) represents the spirit of leadership and moral support of women's activities at the university, its possibilities for constructive work among the women students are many and varied, and it is hoped that this banquet may be the inspiration of a new year's work.