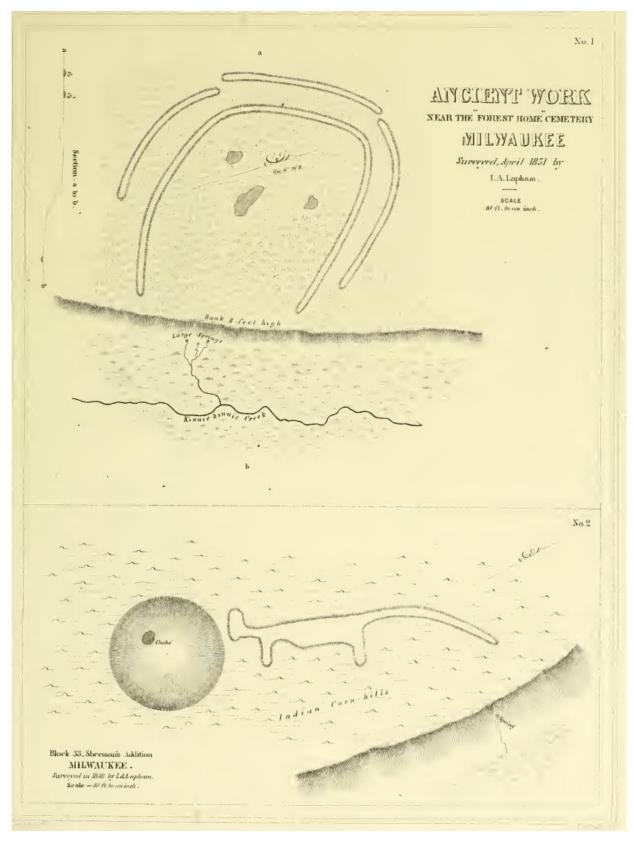
In May 1850, Increase A. Lapham – one of the most celebrated natural scientists in American history – toured the grounds of the Forest Home Cemetery and nearby "Indian Fields" just outside the city limits of Milwaukee. Recently commissioned to survey the "ancient mounds of Wisconsin" now threatened by agricultural and urban development, Lapham marveled at the number of mound structures in the area. As he observed, "these [Indian] fields were...occupied by the Mound builders; about fifty circular mounds and 4 or 5 'Lizards' can yet be traced, although the plow has made great havoc with most." He was particularly astonished that one of those lizard-shaped mounds extended over "250 feet in length [and] is accompanied by a smaller one as if parent and child were consulting upon some important subject," as well as the presence of three enclosed mounds "about 100 feet long & 30 feet wide" situated alongside the Janesville Plank Road and Kinnikinnic River. While Lapham lamented time and again how these "relics of antiquity...are very soon leveled...for agricultural purposes," he proudly remarked in May 1850 that "two of these mounds fall within the cemetery grounds and will doubtless by sacredly preserved." And because of that, the two Mississippian mounds in the Forest Home Cemetery – constructed millennia ago – are still with us today.¹

Throughout U.S. history, nothing has quite captured the public's imagination more than the effigy mounds of the Mississippian – or Mound Builder – civilization that flourished between 500 B.C. and 1200 A.D., which extended from the American south to as far north as the Great Lakes and parts of Canada. As one reader of Lapham's *The Antiquities of Wisconsin* wrote in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1856, "Few subjects have a stronger claim upon the people of the West

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¹ Increase A. Lapham to the Secretary of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, 16 October 1846, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("ancient mounds," "relics"); 24 May 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("Mound builders," "parent and child," "100 feet long," "sacredly preserved"); Milwaukee Co., in "Antiquities in Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 10: Archaeology V, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("Ancient Mound").



The Forest Home Cemetery mounds, in Lapham's The Antiquities of Wisconsin (1855), Plat IV

than the aboriginal remains scattered over the land...[the] only mementos and annals transmitted to us from the ancient races that once inhabited" the area. Archaeologists today estimate somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 mounds once dotted the landscape of Wisconsin, more than any other place in North America, and primarily concentrated in the southeastern parts of the state. Throughout Lapham's life, the public continually debated the origins of these earthworks, with Lapham arguing that the incredible "extent of the ancient works" provided evidence that the "ancestors of the present tribes of Indians" were in fact sophisticated, advanced agriculturalists living in complex societies "different from the purely savage or hunter state," whereas Lapham's contemporaries believed the mounds were built by Mesoamerican civilizations or even the Vikings, Persians, Greeks, or fabled 'Lost Tribe of Israel.' In the decades after Lapham's death, scientists determined from the tools excavated from the mounds – such as ornamented axes – and the presence of seashells "native of the Gulf of Mexico and the south Atlantic coast" that the Mississippian civilization in fact produced the "considerable advances in skillful workmanship, [with a] taste for beautiful and regular" technologies. Today, the Native nations of Wisconsin, particularly the Ho-Chunk, advocate for preserving what few mounds still exist, because those sites remain "eternally sacred places, the graves of ancestors, [and] connect them to the land."²

While the practice of mound-building dates as far back as 5600 B.C., archaeologists and other natural scientists largely agree that the first ceremonial mounds were erected in Wisconsin sometime around 600 B.C., followed by a sustained and increased mound-production between

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² 12 April 1856, *Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel)* Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collections ("mementos"); Robert A. Birmingham and Leslie E. Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 3 (15-20,000), 6 (origins debated), 13 (Mesoamericans, etc.), 14 (Ho-Chunk), 19 (agricultural civilization), 188-189 ("eternally sacred"); Increase A. Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin, Surveyed and Described by Increase A. Lapham* (Washington D.C. and New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1855), 89-90 ("extent," "ancestors," "hunter"); "Some Items of the Antiquities of Wisconsin," pg. 15, in *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 12: Archaeology I, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("workmanship").

500 B.C. to 500 A.D., and culminating with the Mississippian earthworks from 700-1100 A.D. Through radiocarbon dating and excavations, this pattern of mound-building demonstrates how Native populations "continually evolved in response to social and environmental changes," and represents a "history [that] is deep, dramatic, and complex, spanning 12,000 years or more." Logistically, most mounds in Wisconsin were constructed on waterways or hilltops, because – as Lapham wrote in 1856 – the "borders of the lakes, or...watercourses all over the State" provided "favorable sites for modern settlement," which Mississippian peoples understood even millennia ago. And while many mounds were ear-marked by Mississippian peoples for burial purposes, Lapham observed "no two [mounds are] precisely alike in their dimensions, or in their direction" and the sheer number of burial mounds could "not [be] found elsewhere in the world in such concentrations." Meanwhile, the Mississippians erected palisades, houses, and other structures nearby, between, and alongside these mounds to both "secure greater strength and permanency," and express their culture, ceremonies, and "rituals surrounding death and the desire to create visual and symbolic links among human beings, the land, and the supernatural." In fact, burial mounds mirror the sophisticated and complex evolution of mound-building over millennia, as the earliest earthworks were reserved for burying the most prestigious individuals – those of "high social status" – entombed with ornamented tools, pottery, arrowheads, chunkey stones, shells, and other prestige goods, whereas later burial mounds – built anew or even on top of the elder mounds – embodied the new meanings invested into those earthworks as sacred sites.³

Although burial mounds – also called circular mounds – constituted the majority of earth-

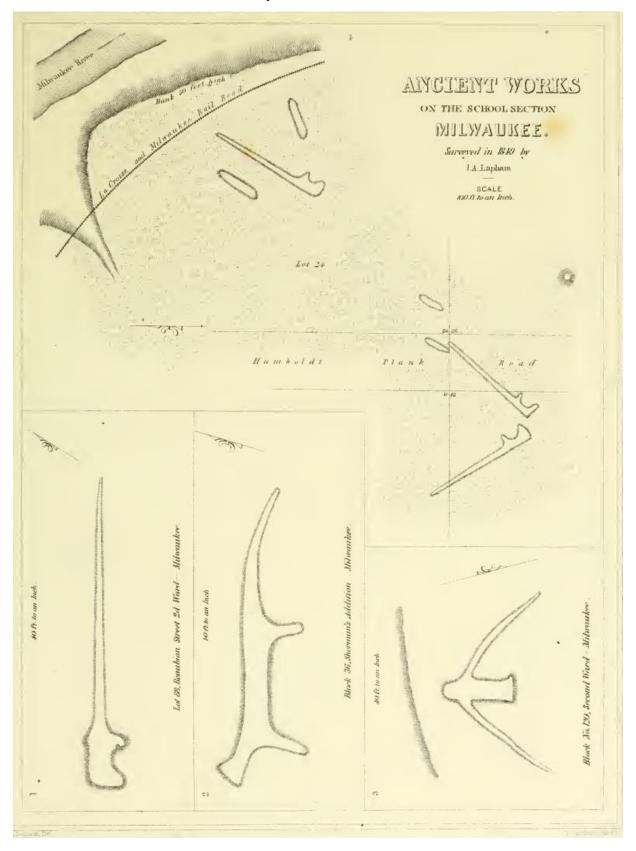
³ Birmingham and Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, 3 (waterways), 5 ("concentrations"), 79 (5600 B.C.), 81 ("status"), 87-88 (500 B.C.), 90-91 (pattern of mound-production), 97 (settlements) 100 (700-1100 A.D.), 188 ("changes," "dramatic"); 12 April 1856, *Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel*) Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930* ("watercourses," "modern settlement," sacred sites); Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*, 14 ("dimensions," "permanency"); "Some Items of the Antiquities of Wisconsin," pg. 19, in *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 12: Archaeology I (shells, tools, etc.).

works constructed by Mississippian peoples in Wisconsin, the most well-known earthworks are the effigy mounds shaped predominantly in the likeness of animals (such as a lizard, turtle, otter, buffalo, snake, etc.) but at times in the shape of human and spirit figures. For the most part, effigy mounds remain a mystery today, as they did for Lapham in 1851, when he observed "the animal-shaped mounds have never been productive in ancient relics or works of art" and were constructed "probably for purposes other than the burial of the dead." What is known about the effigy earthworks is that they represented "ceremonial landscapes" with religious purpose – be it as altar or temples, or sacred sites for communing with the Sky or Upper World – and thereby reflected an "ancient belief and social system rooted in the more ancient past but expressed in monumental form." But the Native nations of Wisconsin also consider the effigy mounds to have some kind of clan or totemic connection by which their ancestors identified themselves and their families, as well as their connection to a specific place. In addition to conical and effigy mounds were linear or chain mounds, enclosure earthworks, and platform mounds where homes, gardens, storehouses, and other structures were built, as well as other earthworks in the shape of "large circles, squares, and rectangles" with various meanings and purposes.⁴

The Milwaukee area was an epicenter for the construction of Mississippian mounds in southeastern Wisconsin. As Lapham recorded in 1856, there existed "numerous earthworks about Milwaukee, [that] attest at once [to] the attractiveness of that favorite locality to the aboriginal inhabitants," and he identified the 'Indian Fields' adjacent to (and now part of) the Forest Home

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⁴ Increase A. Lapham to Samuel F. Haven, 28 June 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collections (circular mounds); Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*, 16 ("relics," "dead"); Birmingham and Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, 7-8 (types of animal mounds, spirit figures, enclosures, "landscapes," "rooted," "range," rectangles), 155 (platform mounds); 12 April 1856, *Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel)* Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 (types of animal mounds); Increase A. Lapham, "On the Man-Shaped Mounds of Wisconsin," in *The Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Years 1857 and 1858*, Volume IV (Madison: James Ross State Printer, 1859), 359-368 (human-shaped mounds).



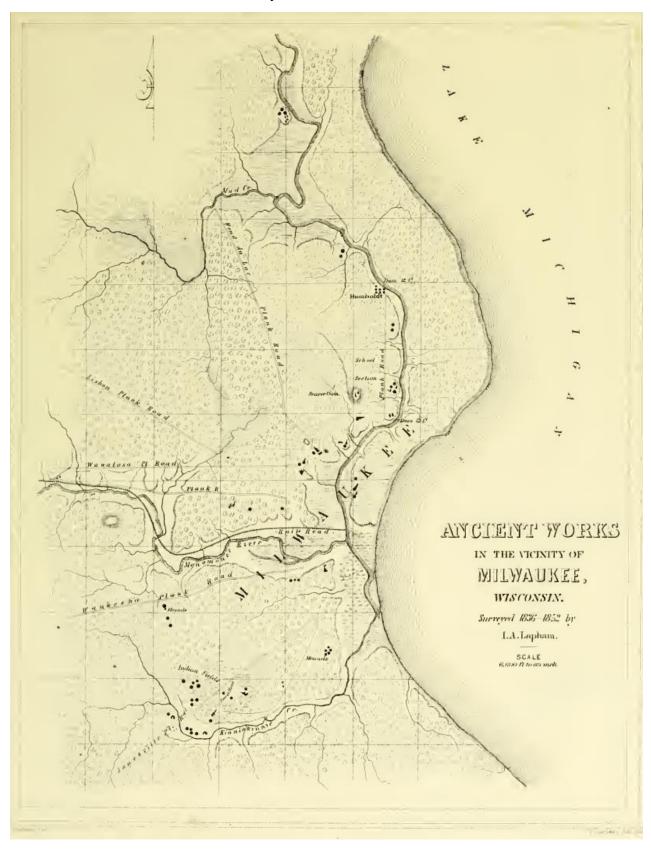
Mississippian Mounds in Milwaukee, in Lapham's The Antiquities of Wisconsin (1855), Plat VII

Cemetery as the place "where they are most abundant" and "enclosed." As other surveyors and natural scientists similarly noted at that time: "it would be difficult to travel five miles" outside of Milwaukee "without finding some traces of an ancient population, in [the] shape of mounds." These several observers also commented how the Mississippian mounds of the Milwaukee area remained in use by Native communities even into the mid nineteenth-century, as sites "annually visited by a few [Indian] families, and [with] numerous traces of their presence...still visible." In some cases, Native communities from the Ho-Chunk and Potawatomi utilized the Mississippian mounds "for the burial...of Indians recently deceased," while in other instances occupying those sites with "several wigwams" where they continued "at work...[and] doctor[ed] a boy sick with the ague."

Lapham's celebrated survey of the Mississippian mounds in southeastern Wisconsin in the summer 1850 proved foundational to much of what is known about the Mississippian culture today. In fact, he made plans for this survey as early as 1846 when writing to the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries in Copenhagen for financial support, in which he disclosed to his potential financiers how "I have made careful measurement and triangulation" of all the mounds "that exist within the limits of this city [Milwaukee]," and he even included a few sketches of the effigy mounds to induce support. Upon starting, Lapham deemed his survey as vital "before they [mounds] are 'destroyed from the face of the earth'" and thus "a task which should be performed immediately, or it will in many cases be forever too late!" By the end of summer, Lapham wrote: "I have visited about fifty different localities, and made maps of nearly all – Measured perhaps

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⁵ 12 April 1856, *Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel)* Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930* ("attractiveness," "abundant," "enclosed"); "Extracts: A Note on the Frequency of Effigy Mounds in Wisconsin," in *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 10: Archaeology V ("difficult," "traces"); Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*, 19 ("still visible," "recently deceased"); 19-20 October 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("Juneau," "wigwams," "doctoring"); 12-13 October 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II (Potawatomi).



Map of the Mounds in the Milwaukee Area, in Lapham's The Antiquities of Wisconsin (1855), Plat III

one hundred different 'Animal Mounds' and opened several. My notes now cover about 100 pages and 50 more of drawings, maps, sketches, &c," and he later remarked how "the localities where ancient works are situated are [so] very numerous...it will be impossible for me to visit all of them." Throughout his travels, Lapham identified two places as the most unique: the "ancient works about Milwaukee [that] are most numerous" and the "Ancient City" of Aztalan. As he detailed the Milwaukee earthworks, there "were numerous mounds occupying the several promontories overlooking the city and bay" and "the most remarkable group was near the intersection of Walnut with Sixth Street," where he found "four different varieties of structures." Meanwhile, Lapham marveled at the Aztalan mounds which he considered to be "one of the wonders of the West," especially Monk's Mound which he explained as having "the appearance of a pyramid 'rising by successive steps, like the gigantic structures of Mexico."

However, agricultural and urban development in southeastern Wisconsin destroyed the great majority of these mounds over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Lapham lamented as early as 1846:

"Many of these earth works are but slightly elevated above the surrounding surface, so that their existence would not be suspected in many cases even by careful observers; and hence also they are very soon leveled, when the ground is occupied for agricultural purposes. Many of them have already from this came [to be] injured...[and] 'destroyed from the face of the earth.""

⁶ Increase A. Lapham to the Secretary of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, 16 October 1846, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 ("triangulation," "limits," "earth," "too late"); Increase A. Lapham to Samuel F. Haven, 28 June 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 ("Measured"); Increase A. Lapham to Samuel F. Havens, 15 November 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Box 8, Folder 1: Correspondence, 1851, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("impossible"); Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*, 13 ("most numerous"), 16 ("bay," "intersection," "varieties"); Increase A. Lapham to Ann Lapham, 29 June 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collections ("Ancient City"); 12 April 1856, *Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel)* Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 ("wonders," "pyramid").

⁷ Lapham continuously articulated his frustrations and remorse with the destruction of the Wisconsin mounds in the name of industrial and technological progress, whether it was the "mounds at Summit so much injured by cultivation that a regular survey would be of no use" to the "great number of mounds nearly leveled by the plow." Increase A. Lapham to Ann Lapham, 29 June 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 ("Summit"); 28 May 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("plow").

Or throughout his survey, he continually wrote how the earthworks – especially around the Milwaukee area – "have been entirely removed...in the process of grading streets" and other agricultural and urban developments. Well into the twentieth century, Lapham's contemporaries continued to invoke his sentiments that the destruction of the Wisconsin mounds represented a "crime which should never have been perpetrated."

The other – and quite literal – criminal act of destroying the Mississippian mounds of Wisconsin revolved around the everyday acts of vandalism and grave-robbing from those sacred sites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Lapham observed during his survey in 1850, "several mounds...[have] been opened by citizens of the place" and looted, which prevented him from "learn[ing] any discoveries." More horrifically, though, these acts of digging up "numerous skeletons" represented a desecration of human remains, whose descendants in the Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, and Menominee communities still call Wisconsin home today. Therefore, when natural scientists like Lapham or Dr. P. R. Hoy attended the excavation of a Mississippian mound nearby Racine in May 1850 where it was discovered "seven skeletons in a sitting posture sideby-side, facing toward the east," this act amounted to sacrilege. Moreover, human remains were not only disinterred by grave-robbing or scientific curiosity, but literally stolen in the name of science, including "two skulls of the ancient Mound-Builders preserved at Milwaukee" and a "skull from a Mound at Wauwatosa." In one disturbing case, the same Dr. P. R. Hoy nonchalantly described how he "obtained a skull of a Pottawatomie chief" from one of the mounds and "it is now in the U.S.A. medical museum at Washington." It is also quite chilling to read Lapham's fieldnotes – particularly Box 12, Folder 11: Archaeology VI – and to observe the many sketches

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⁸ Increase A. Lapham to the Secretary of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, 16 October 1846, *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930 ("suspected," "antiquity," "task"); Lapham, *The Antiquities of Wisconsin*, 80 ("streets"); Charles E. Brown, "Lake Wingra," *The Wisconsin Archaeologist*, Vol. 14: No. 3 (September 1915): 89 ("crime").

of human skulls extracted from the "various effigy mounds" around Wisconsin, particularly the skull collected by the German Natural Historical Society in Milwaukee. Thus, the remains of these ancestors were not simply disturbed or destroyed, but stolen and passed around, such as the skull that Lapham 'borrowed' from George P. Delaplaine in 1859, who wrote how "Mr. Lapham has returned to me the skull & other relics which he took to Milwaukee to examine & study at his 'leisure,'" who then forwarded those remains to an ethnological society for further 'study.' Needless to say, these acts of grave-robbing, destruction, and desecration are a sobering reminder of the *human cost* that came with our advances in the natural sciences and our understandings of the Mississippian past, for it is estimated the "remains of tens of thousands of Native American people [have] been disinterred" in Wisconsin alone.⁹

This, then, is the paradoxical legacy of Lapham's work on the Mississippian mounds in Wisconsin. On the one hand, his survey of the mounds in 1850 formed the basis for so much of what we know today about the Mississippian people and their world, particularly what was learned from his excavations and the human remains and other items taken for 'study' from those sacred sites. On the other hand, Lapham's work amounted to grave-robbing and desecrating the remains of ancestors, while in other cases the excavation of mounds by other people – whether in the name of scientific curiosity or urban development – destroyed said remains and more.

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⁹ 19 July 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("citizens"); 12-13 October 1851, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("discoveries"); 27 May 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("numerous"); 28 May 1850, *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("seven skeletons"); "Some Items of the Antiquities of Wisconsin," pg. 19, in *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 12, Folder 12: Archaeology I ("ancient," "Wauwatosa"); "Address to the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences by Dr. P. R. Hoy, Dec. 26-28, 1882," pg. 100 in *Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930*, Box 2, Folder 4: Lapham Miscellaneous Biographies, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI ("chief," "museum"); "Sketches of Skulls Excavated from Various Effigy Mounds," Box 12, Folder 11: Archaeology VI, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison WI (German); Birmingham and Eisenberg, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, 33 ("disinterred").

Fortunately, though, two Mississippian mounds have somehow remained preserved at the Forest Home Cemetery in Milwaukee. As Lapham wrote in May 1850, the cemetery grounds evoked "signs of Indian occupancy and cultivation," surrounded by not only mounds, but rows of corn-hills and an "embankment...[of] a distinct gate or opening," all evidence of the agricultural community that once thrived in the area. The corn-hills especially fascinated Lapham, who believed these "ancient garden-beds...indicate an earlier and more perfect system of cultivation than that which now prevails," in addition to finding ornamented axes, stone pestles, and other tools. Specific to the mounds, he remarked "they are most abundant" in the Forest Home area and he estimated "about fifty circular mounds, and four or five of the lizard form," all of which "attest at once [to] the attractiveness of that favorite locality to the aboriginal inhabitants" and thus "a considerable number are appropriately enclosed in the 'Forest Home' cemetery." The Forest Home area also remained a home for post-Mississippian communities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as the "several Potawatomi villages in and about...Forest Home cemetery." However, the cemetery grounds and 'Indian Fields' were also the site where the federal government forcefully removed Potawatomi peoples from Wisconsin after the signing of the Treaty of Chicago (1833). As residents described the scene: the "Indian 'Deportation' of 1833...[was] Possibly the greatest mass movement of human beings in the early history of Milwaukee...when a whole tribe assembled here to be transported to new homes west of the Mississippi." Or as one resident observed more aptly: "Indian men, women, and children were herded into the drays and the procession rumbled off toward" Kansas, and therefore "The Indian population here [Milwaukee] was much reduced" (although a number of Potawatomi peoples avoided removal by relocating northward to what is today Forest Co.). In the aftermath of this removal, it was Lapham and members of the Cemetery Committee who purposely shaped the

"new cemetery grounds...to display & not destroy...[the] ancient mound[s]," even as the rest of the surrounding area was subjected to "grading roads and smoothing the landscape," effectively "destroying several Indian mounds in the process." ¹⁰

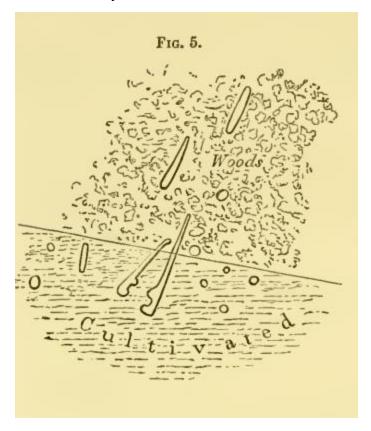
Today, Forest Home Cemetery is spearheading the efforts to preserve the two mounds on its grounds and in relationship with the Ho-Chunk nation, the "Indigeneity Lab" at Marquette University, and UW-Milwaukee's Department of Anthropology / Archaeology. Because so few of the Mississippian mounds remain intact today, and only one known to survive in the Milwaukee area (Lake Park mound), this work is vital to protecting the history of the Mississippian peoples and their world, as well as honor the meanings they invested into those spaces and the ancestors buried in those places.



The Forest Home Cemetery mounds, in Lapham's May 24, 1850 letter Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collections

¹⁰ 24 May 1850, Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 7: Archaeology II ("occupancy," "gate"); Lapham, The Antiquities of Wisconsin, 14 ("fifty"), 19 ("perfect system"); "Some Items of the Antiquities of Wisconsin," pg. 19, in *Increase A. Lapham Papers*, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 12: Archaeology I (axes, pestles, etc.); 12 April 1856, Milwaukee Sentinel (Daily Sentinel) Newspaper, Vol. XI, Issue 4411, pg. 2, in "Antiquities of Lake Michigan and Wisconsin," Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930 ("abundant," "attest," "enclosed"); "The Wisconsin Indian Tribes by F.V.V. - The Potawatomi in Wisconsin," in *The Milwaukee Journal*, 21 January 1926, pg. 10, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Historical and Current Collection, Newsbank Database, Raynor Library Database Collections ("Potawatomi"); "100 Years Ago," in Milwaukee Sentinel: Extra! 5 July 1937, pg. 10, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Historical and Current Collection, Newsbank Database ("Deportation"): "The Milwaukee Story: The Making of an American City," in The Milwaukee Journal, 1 May 1946, pg. 37, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Historical and Current Collection, Newsbank Database ("herded," "reduced"); Milwaukee Co., in "Antiquities in Wisconsin," Increase A. Lapham Papers, 1825-1930, Box 12, Folder 10: Archaeology V ("destroy"); Letter from Increase A. Lapham, 8 May 1850, in Silent City: A History of Forest Home Cemetery, by John Gurda (2000) (Committee, "grading," "process").

A History of the Forest Home Cemetery Mounds Bryan C. Rindfleisch



The Forest Home Cemetery mounds, in Lapham's The Antiquities of Wisconsin (1855), pg. 14