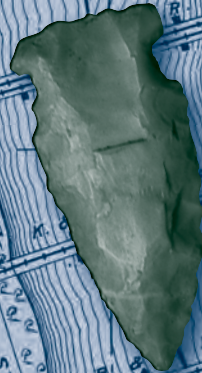
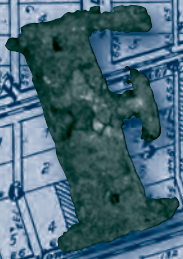
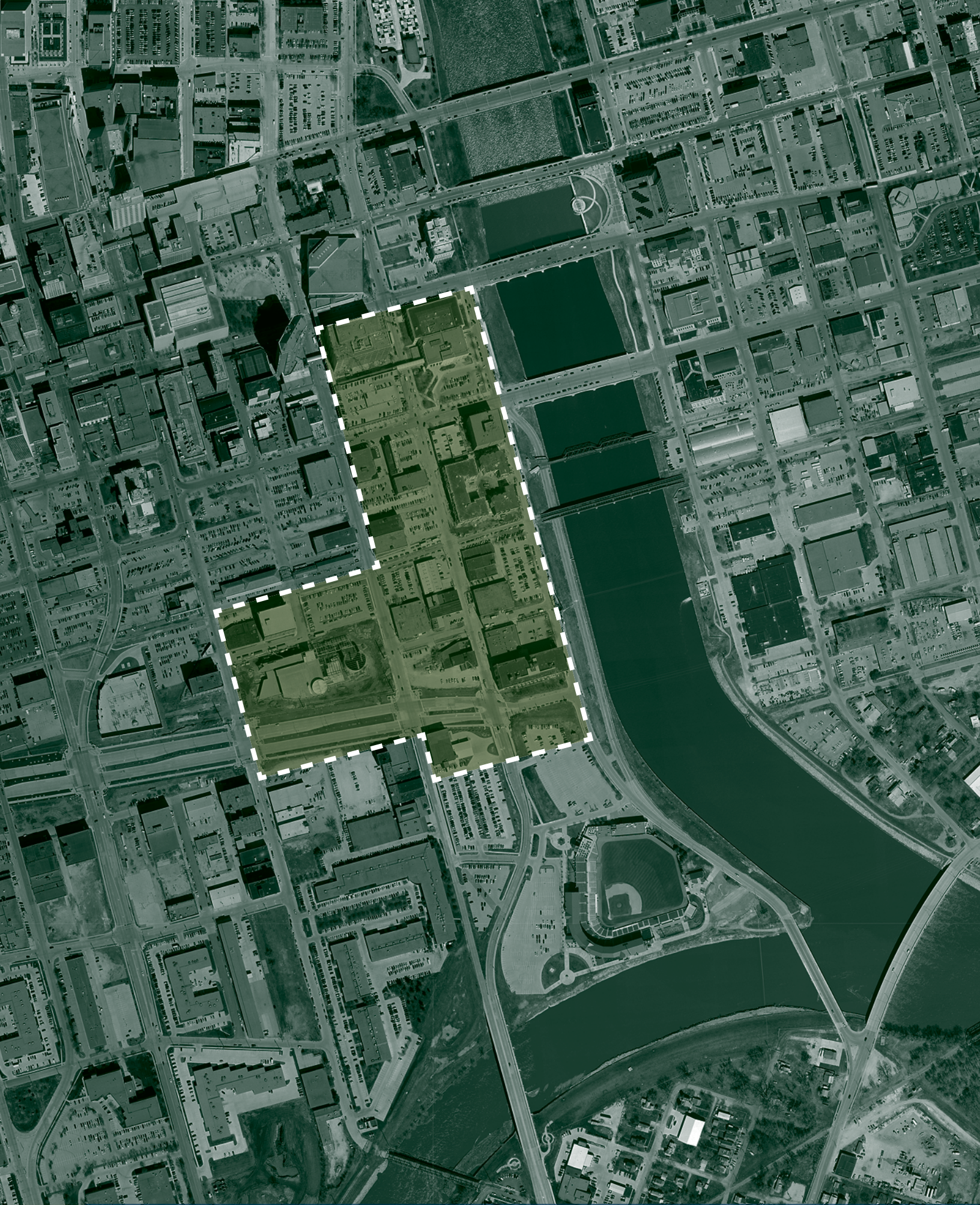


# TWO RIVERS FLOWING

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY IN DOWNTOWN DES MOINES, IOWA





Reverse L-shape outlines official boundary of 13PK61 (Fort Des Moines No. 2)

# TWO RIVERS CONVERGE

**I**n 1843, a military post, Fort Des Moines No. 2, was established on a terrace above the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers. This fort, and the early town that developed from it, would eventually become Iowa's modern capital city, Des Moines.

Since those early days, the urban area south of the Court Avenue District has undergone rapid change and the original land surface of the fort and early town was buried. Archaeological investigations beginning in the 1980's had uncovered artifacts and features revealing the location of one of the fort's structures. Yet the location and layout of the rest of the short-lived post remained unclear. In addition, other recovered data indicated this was not the first time humans had occupied "the Point." The site had been used by Native American Indian groups at different times over thousands of years.

Designated as 13PK61 (Fort Des Moines No. 2) by the University of Iowa's Office of the State Archaeologist, the site was found eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. As the year 2000 approached, planned redevelopment projects in this oldest section of the city were being realized. As ground was cleared for the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway extension, the Vine Street Lofts, and the new Science Center of Iowa, a combination of federal requirements and agreements by government and business groups led to another series of archaeological excavations in the affected area.

Archaeologists would once again probe a buried land surface for clues to the City of Des Moines' past. This unique opportunity to increase our knowledge of the city's history, and its prehistory, was greeted with great interest by the citizens of Iowa. The two rivers of the past and the present were about to meet again.



(Library of Congress)



(USGS)

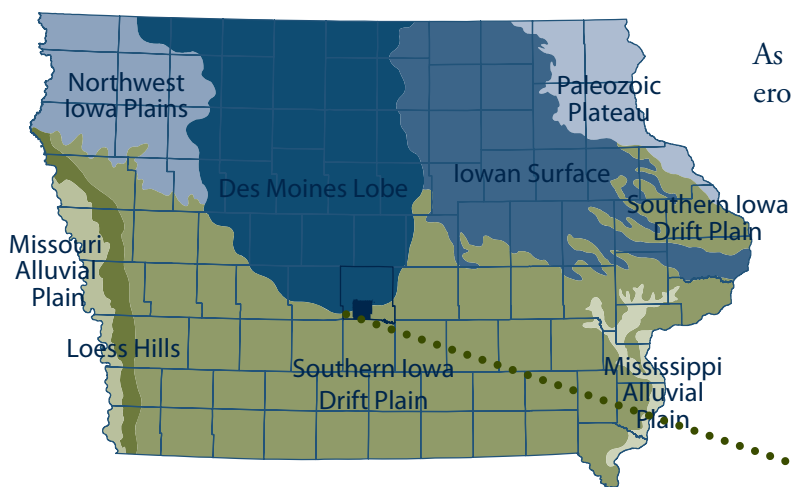
# THE LAND BEFORE

**G**eologists have defined the different landform regions of Iowa based on the earth-shaping processes that formed them and the time period in which they occurred. Periods of glaciation in which the action of ice shaped the land have played an important role in creating many of these landforms.

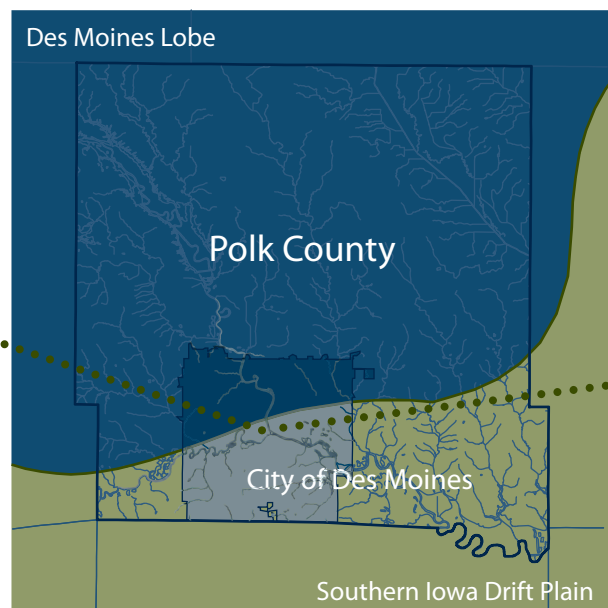
The City of Des Moines lies along the boundary of two of these glacially-sculpted regions, the more recent Des Moines Lobe and the older Southern Iowa Drift Plain. Its location marks the southernmost extent reached by glaciers during the most recent ice age, the Wisconsin. About 14,000 years ago, a finger of ice, the Des Moines Lobe, surged into Iowa from the main ice sheet that lay across North and South Dakota and Minnesota. As

it came to a standstill, the northern portion of the metro area was covered by a glacier several hundred feet high. The Raccoon River formed as meltwater flowed along the glacier's southern margin. Soil and rock deposited along this margin formed the ridges and hummocky terrain of the Bemis Moraine. Iowa's Capitol Building sits on part of this end moraine. Initially, meltwater drained from within the glacier by way of the old Beaver Creek channel that flowed between Capitol Hill and Four Mile Ridge. As the ice began to retreat, the Des Moines River valley north of the present-day city was formed from meltwater flowing in a channel beneath the ice. This became an exposed outwash channel as the ice receded further north that cut off Beaver Creek, diverting the flow to its present channel west of the Capitol. As it met the Raccoon River, the Point at the confluence of the two rivers began to be formed.

As the ice continued to release its grip on the land, erosion deepened valleys. Wind-blown soil and



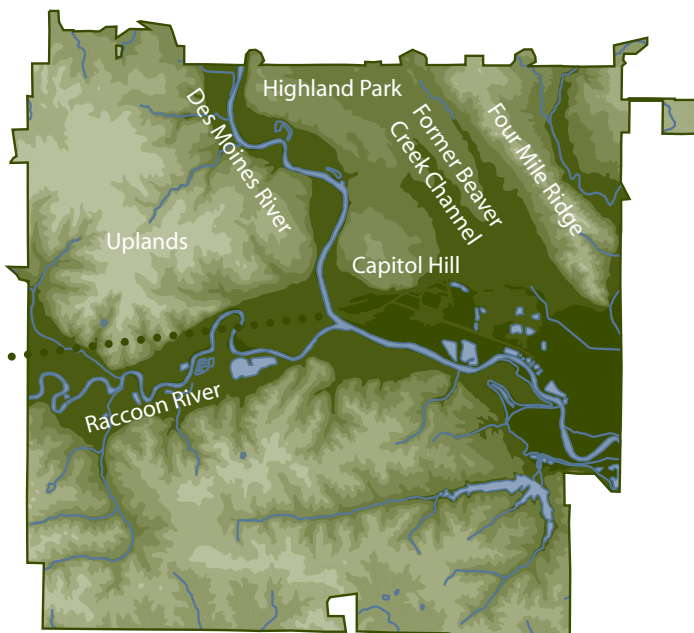
Glacial processes played an important role in the formation of much of Iowa's landscape. The different landform regions formed at different times and have unique characteristics.



The City of Des Moines is sited on the boundary of two of these landform regions

episodes of flooding built up elevated areas called terraces in the low-lying river bottoms. Conversely, other landscape features called benches were formed as flowing water cut into alluvial deposits. High enough above the rivers' flood plains, these landforms invited human occupation. The Point is one such place. Archaeologists have benefited from studying such land-forming processes and can better predict locations of promising sites as a result.

**S**ome 12,500 years later, on August 14, 2001, construction workers were boring holes with a giant auger in downtown Des Moines. They were preparing holes for support columns for the new Allied Insurance and Farmland Insurance parking ramp at 11th and Walnut Streets. As the auger struck bedrock, 55 feet below the surface, it cut through the skeleton of a woolly mammoth lying on the former valley floor of the Raccoon River.



Highlighted are some of the key glacial features within the City of Des Moines.

Allied officials recognized the significance of this discovery and, after contacting the State Historical Society of Iowa, eventually donated the bones of this largest of Ice Age mammals to the museum.

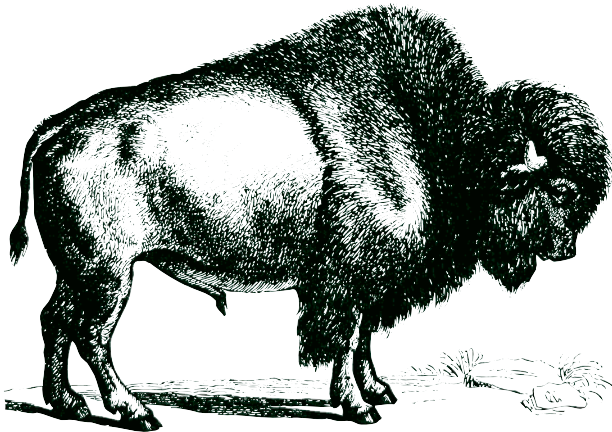
An excellent Ice Age exhibit, “Mammoth: Witness to Change” at the State Historical Building in Des Moines’ East Village features some of these bones as well as the cast of another mammoth skeleton discovered in Wisconsin. Also on display are many related interpretive exhibits that more fully explain the geological events and natural processes that led to the formation of the present Iowa landscape.



Visit “Mammoth: Witness to Change” online at: <http://www.iowahistory.org/museum/exhibits/mammoth/index.htm>

# THE FIRST SETTLERS

**I**nto this renewed landscape Native American Indian groups migrated and interacted with the environment. Archaeologists have identified distinct Native American cultural periods that have occurred in Central Iowa and the Upper Midwest spanning thousands of years. Some of these periods have been subdivided into phases to reflect distinctive approaches to life within that period.



## Paleo-Indian

11,000 B.C. - 8,500 B.C.

**Early**  
11,000 B.C. - 9,000 B.C.

**Late**  
9,000 B.C. - 8,500 B.C.

Recent discoveries have resulted in differing opinions on where the Paleo-Indians migrated from

Small groups of mobile hunters

Hunted large game such as woolly mammoth, mastodons, and giant bison

Sites identified by distinctive spear point types, e.g. Clovis and Folsom

## Archaic

8,500 B.C. - 800 B.C.

**Early**  
8,500 B.C. - 5,500 B.C.

**Middle**  
5,500 B.C. - 3,000 B.C.

**Late**  
3,000 B.C. - 800 B.C.

A period of rapid climatic and environmental change

Hunter-gatherers sought smaller game

Increased use of plant foods

Early semi-permanent settlements

Different phases have characteristic projectile point styles

## Woodland

## Late Prehistoric

## Oneota

## Historic

800 B.C. - A.D. 1200

A.D. 900 - A.D. 1200

A.D. 1250 - A.D. 1673

A.D. 1673 - Present

**Early**  
800 B.C. - 200 B.C.

**Middle**  
200 B.C. - A.D. 300

**Late**  
300 A.D. - A.D. 1200

Introduction, development and use of pottery

Increased agriculture

Construction of burial mounds, interaction with the great mound building cultures of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys

Bow and arrow introduced

Larger populations

Trade networks

Includes Great Oasis, Mill Creek, Glenwood cultural groups

Mixed economy of hunting and gathering and intensive horticulture

Increased use of bison for food and raw materials

Greater complexity in social and political organizations

Distinctive ceramic traditions

Long-distance trade networks

Large permanent and semi-permanent villages

Large scale agriculture with cultivation of beans, squash, and corn

Shell tempered ceramics were thinner and stronger

Large pits used for storage of food and other items

Ancestors of Ioway, Ojibwe, Winnebago, Missouria, and other Midwestern groups that continued into Historic period

Tribes struggle to maintain cultural identity as pressure from Euroamerican settlers mounts

Native life ways and arts decline as European manufactured goods become more common

Villages and whole tribes moved often due to territorial pressures

Rivalry between tribes increases as they compete for resources and territory

Euroamerican diseases contribute to declining Indian population

# TRIBES ON THE MOVE

**I**n the brief period from 1650 to 1673, European colonists began to learn of Iowa's Indian tribes through other tribes they were already in contact with. In turn, the Iowa tribes were introduced to European trade goods and diseases through these same intermediaries. In 1673, two canoes carrying the French explorers Father Jacques Marquette, Louis Joliet, and five companions paddled down the Wisconsin River into the Mississippi, becoming the first white men to land in what would become known as Iowa. An increasing number of colonists and settlers would follow in short order. A tragic result was the wave of displacement, disintegration, and competition among Native American Indian tribes that overtook the region.

Though as many as eighteen different Indian cultural groups have been identified as being in Iowa at the time of first European contact, the predominant tribes in Iowa at this time were the Ioway and the Otoe. Oral tradition and archaeological evidence point strongly to the prehistoric Oneota as their ancestors. During the transitional period into historic times, the Ioway, Otoe, and the related Missouria migrated into Iowa from the Green Bay, Wisconsin area. After living in different parts of the state over a number of years, they had settled in the central Des Moines River valley by 1765.

The Ioway soon came under pressure from the Sauk and Meskwaki (Fox) Indians, two allied tribes that were being driven out of Wisconsin and Illinois by the United States government's quest for more territory. Warfare diminished the population of the Ioway considerably and by 1838, approximately 1,000 were left and they were compelled to sell the remainder of their territory to the government in exchange for land in southeastern Kansas.

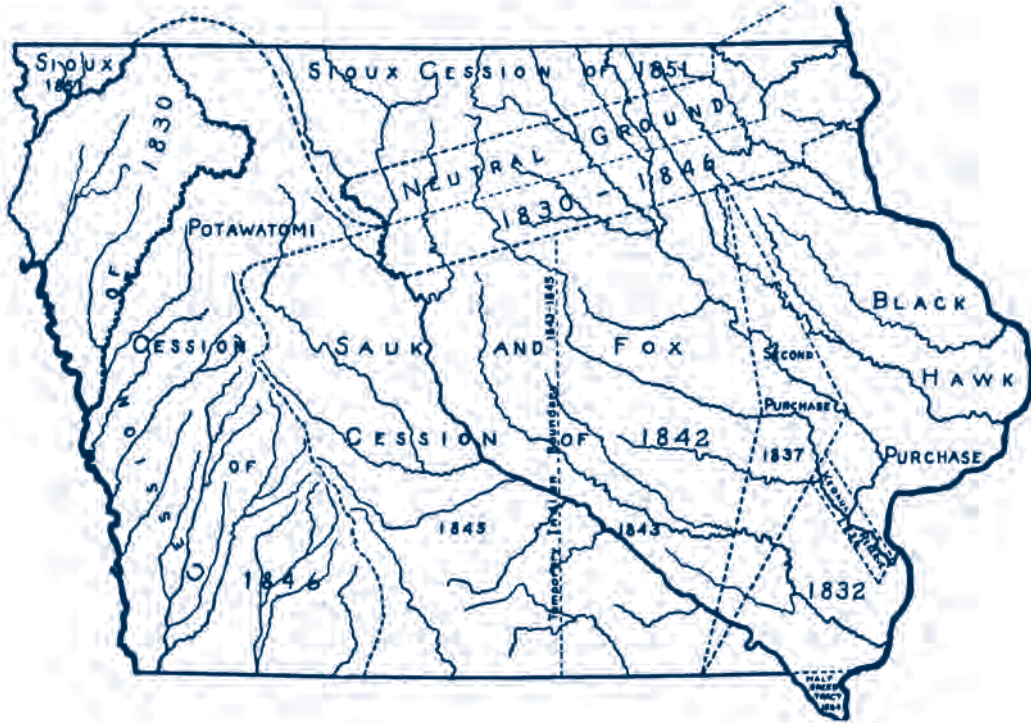
The culturally and linguistically related Sauk and Meskwaki faced mounting pressure themselves from colonists and settlers, first from the French in the early 1700's, and then in conflict with the Americans during the Black Hawk War. Their defeat resulted in the treaty called the Black Hawk Purchase in 1832 in which they relinquished their land along the eastern border of Iowa. A further series of agreements between the government and the tribes caused them to move by increments to the west. Finally, on October 11, 1842 the U.S. government signed a treaty with the Sauk and the Meskwaki in which they agreed to sell all of their lands in Iowa. An important condition of this treaty was that the Indians could remain in central Iowa for a period of three years from the treaty signing to prepare for moving, when they were to be escorted to reservations in western Missouri.

As the Indians gathered and prepared to be removed, chiefs moved their villages into the Des Moines River valley. Pasheshemone's Meskwaki village and Wishecomaque's Sauk village were established within a few miles of the confluence of the Des Moines and the Raccoon Rivers, inside the area now encompassed by Des Moines' city limits.

Redhead Park is located on a small irregularly-shaped city block on Des Moines' east side at East 18th Street and Dean Avenue. The area to the south of this park was the probable location of the Indian Agency established to monitor the Indian villages in the valley below. The agency included an interpreter's house, a smokehouse, a stable, well, and fences. The Sauk and Meskwaki were each provided with a gunsmith and a blacksmith. Josiah Smart was the interpreter and Major John Beach was the U.S. Indian Agent. Not far away, a fort was built at the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers.



(State Historical Society of Iowa - Iowa City)



A succession of treaties resulted in Indian tribes moving west by stages until their eventual removal to reservations in 1846. In 1857, a group of Meskwakis (Fox) returned to Iowa after buying land in the Tama area and starting the settlement that exists today.



The Racoon River Indian Agency building close to the Indian villages, near present day E. 18th and Dean Avenue, as depicted in Harper's Weekly in 1861.



Pash-e-pa-ho, a Sauk chief encamped in the agency area.

# A FORT IS BUILT

**E**ven before the treaty of 1842 that mandated the building of a fort to supervise the three year transitional period, the War Department had dispatched a number of expeditions to explore the region and determine favorable sites for possible outposts. Fort Des Moines No. 1 had been built in 1834 near the confluence of the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers, near present-day Montrose, Iowa. It served as a base for military operations and exploration and was abandoned in 1837. In 1842, Captain James Allen, First Regiment United States Dragoons, recommended the Point, the terrace above the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers, as a site for a new military post. The War Department agreed with Allen's assessment that the location provided excellent natural resources, was well sited to manage the Sauk and Meskwaki groups in the villages nearby, protect those same groups from raids by Dakota Indians, and deter unauthorized settlement by Euroamericans eager to occupy the land. He was directed to build a fort at the site in February 1843.

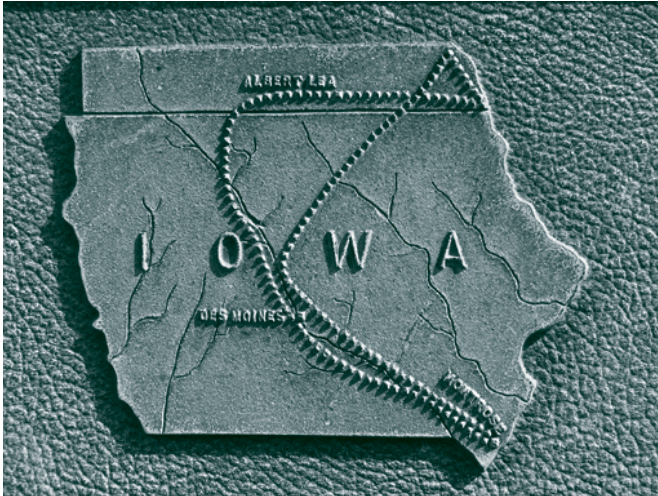
Allen arrived at the high terrace above the confluence with Company I of 1st U.S. Dragoons from Fort Sanford, on May 20, 1843. The four officers, 48 dragoons, and some civilians, including post surgeon, tailor, and blacksmith had traveled to the site up the Des Moines River by steamboat. They were met the next day by Company F, of the First U.S. Infantry. The three officers and 44 men had marched overland from Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien.

By June 2, construction of the fort had begun. A temporary wharf was built near the mouth of the Raccoon River and a garden was established along its north bank. The first buildings erected were the commissary/storehouse and a hospital. The enlisted men's barracks were built next in a style commonly

referred to as a "dogtrot." They were composed of two log cabins built close to each other and joined by a roof over a common area. Each structure housed ten men. This line of cabins, called "Raccoon Row," followed the edge of the terrace scarp along the Raccoon River (Elm Street, and later Martin Luther King Parkway Jr., would run in the same general direction). Last to go up were the five officer's quarters. They were similar in construction to the enlisted men's, except the area between the two sides was enclosed. Each half housed one officer or possibly two junior officers. They were laid out in a line running parallel to the Des Moines River, hence their name, "Des Moines Row."

The simple log structures of the fort were built on limestone foundations with brick fireplaces and chimneys. All the necessary timber and limestone was available nearby in the area. The bricks were produced by two civilian contractors using local clay. The fort had a total of around twenty-five buildings. A blacksmith shop, stables, guardhouse, sutler's house, corrals, and pantry gardens were situated around the wedge-shaped area defined by the barracks and parade ground. Unlike many other frontier forts, it did not have a palisade wall built around it.

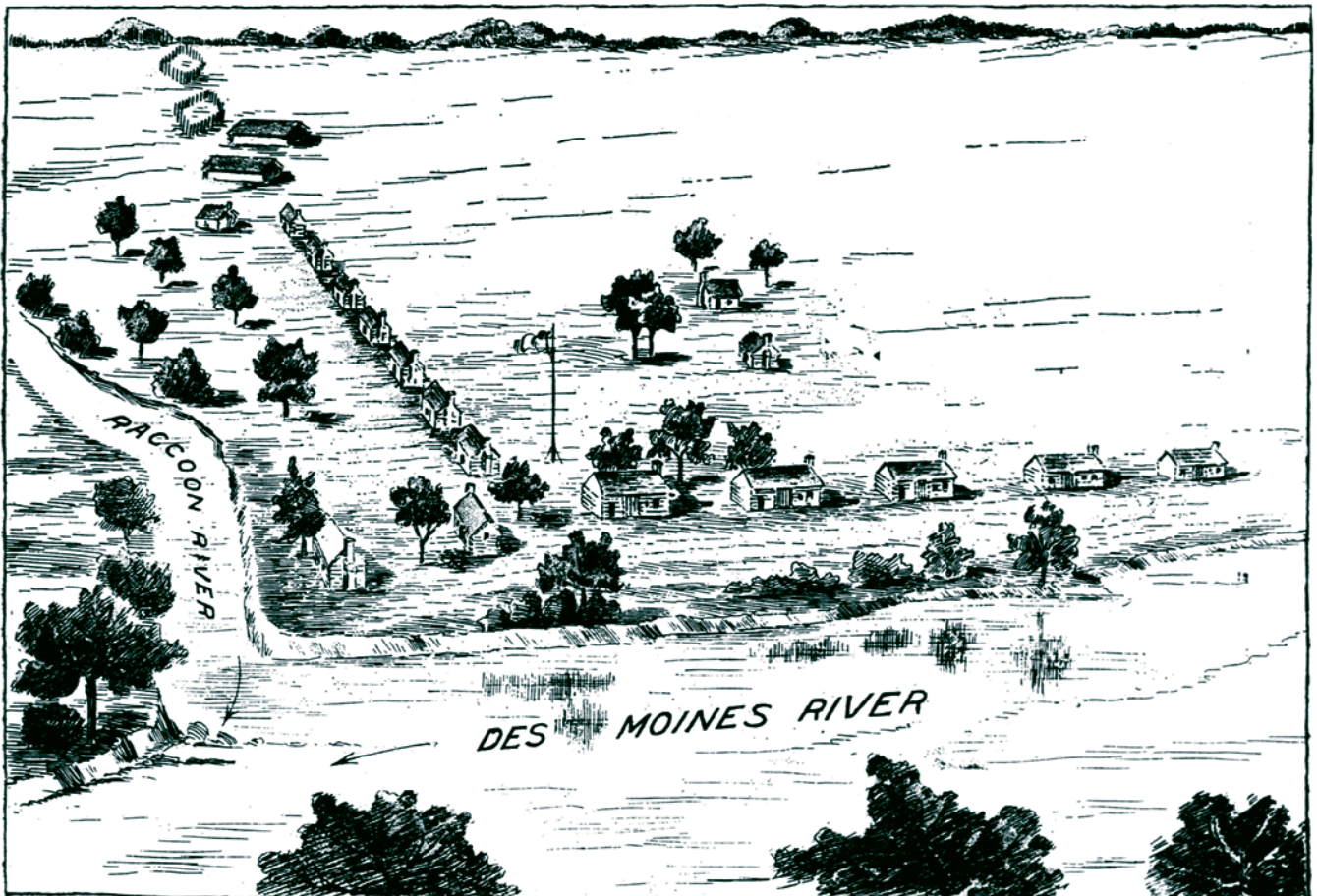
Captain Allen's suggested name of Fort Raccoon for the new post was rejected by the War Department as being in bad taste. Instead, he was instructed to name it Fort Des Moines No. 2. Allen became Post Commander and Lieutenant Grier took over his responsibilities as Commander of the Dragoons. Periodic patrols began to ensure the peace between the various parties present in the area. Fort Des Moines No. 2 operated until March 10, 1846, and was decommissioned for military purposes in May 1846.



Part of a historical marker near the Des Moines' Birthplace Cabin on Water Street commemorating an early Dragoon exploratory expedition up the Des Moines River and beyond.



Modern day signage marking the Dragoon Trail honors these unique horse-mounted soldiers and the duty they performed on the American frontier.



Artist's conception of Fort Des Moines No. 2 illustrates the basic layout of Fort Des Moines No. 2 in 1844.

# THE FORT BECOMES A TOWN

**A**t midnight on October 11, 1845, three years after the signing of the treaty with the Indians, a lone musket shot rang out from the Indian Agency east of the fort. It was repeated by riflemen on surrounding hilltops above the valley surrounding the Point. At this signal, waiting settlers fanned out across the countryside to stake claims in the newly opened land around the fort and beyond. By morning, thousands of acres had been claimed. However, no claims were made in the area of the fort because the United States government had reserved the land and buildings of the military post. These properties were ceded to the newly formed Polk County in January of 1846. They were sold to the public for the benefit of the county later that year after Fort Des Moines No. 2 was officially decommissioned in May 1846.

Iowa became the 29th state at the end of 1846, the same year that the Town of Fort Des Moines was first platted six blocks north to south and seven blocks east to west. Water Street, or First Street, was aligned parallel to the Des Moines River and the officers' quarters of "Des Moines Row." The streets of downtown Des Moines are still askew to the points of the compass as a result. The town was incorporated in January 1853 and shortened its name to Des Moines in 1857, the same year it became the state's capital.

Many of the lots and buildings of the fort were purchased by civilians involved with its military operations and quickly put to other uses. Some buildings were used as residences and others were adapted for commercial purposes, establishing the nature of the area for the next quarter of a century. As time went on the old structures of the fort were torn down, incorporated into other structures, or moved. Not much remained of the fort by 1870.

The town grew rapidly. In 1847, the population was 127. By 1850 it had grown to 502. With population growth came more enterprise and construction, including the first brick buildings and the first bridges to supersede the early ferries. The focus of business in this mixed residential and commercial neighborhood was Second Street. By 1850, Hoyt Sherman had built the first frame Post Office on that street and the town included two hotels, nine dry goods stores, two drug stores, a hardware store, a tinware manufacturer, two weekly newspapers, a bakery, three or four blacksmith shops, six to eight printers, a gunsmith, six to eight plasterers, several shoe stores, a barrel factory, cabinet makers, painters, tailors, lawyers, and doctors.

A major flood in central Iowa in 1851 was the cause of an early pause in Fort Des Moines' growth. It was reported that 74 1/2 inches of rain fell from early May to mid-July. Business ground to a halt, crops were ruined, and the food supply ran low. Four adventurous men, including Hoyt Sherman, took a flat-bottomed skiff down the rain-swollen river to Keokuk. From there they continued down the Mississippi to St. Louis where they chartered a steamboat. After filling it with flour and other supplies they headed back towards Fort Des Moines. Their first attempt to get back up the Des Moines River failed and they had to offload the cargo at Bonaparte. Their second attempt to deliver the relief supplies with a different steamer reached the beleaguered town on July 5 and caused much rejoicing among the citizens. The hardship of that year gave added impetus to some of the town's residents to head for the gold fields of California.

In spite of these early difficulties the population of Des Moines swelled to 3,965 persons in 1860.



The first brick building constructed in Fort Des Moines by Dr. James Campbell at the Point, next to one of the original fort cabins. Campbell was one of the town's early merchants and operated a grocery store out of the fort's old guard house located near 3rd and Vine when he first came to town in 1846.



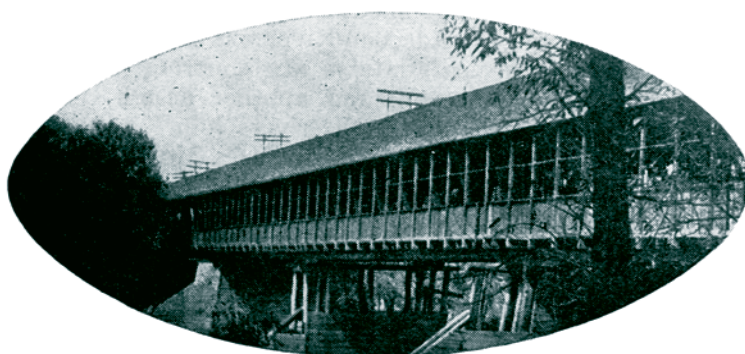
This photo in the collection of the Library of Congress is listed as "the first house in Des Moines." The cabin was part of Des Moines Row and likely was the residence of Lieutenant William N. Grier, Commander of the 1st U.S. Dragoons. An example of adaptive reuse of the fort's structures, this photo indicates it was reduced from its original "double cabin" size. While revisiting the area in August 1863 Colonel Grier stated that Des Moines was still "one of the most promising points in the West."

(Library of Congress)



The early town, as depicted by Ruger in 1868, shows the brick building pictured above on the nearest corner to the covered bridge pictured at right.

(Library of Congress)



For fifty years, beginning in 1862, a covered bridge spanned the Raccoon River at the Point. The first one was swept away by ice in 1865. The bridge was rebuilt twice after that and was destroyed again by ice in February of 1916, shortly before the work in which the river channel at the confluence was moved about 2,000 feet to the south was completed.

# FROM TOWN TO CITY

**A**s the town of Fort Des Moines emerged from the Civil War years, great changes were in store. Railroads were attracted by the abundant supply of coal in the area and the growing number of businesses to be served. The laying of tracks for the railroads began a dramatic reshaping of the Point. Originally, the terrace at the confluence was about eight feet above the rivers' water level with a steep scarp on the east and south sides. To the west, where the scarp sloped downward toward S.W. 5th Street, was a wetland. Ballast laid for the tracks began raising the land surface. Continuing development of the area into



This cistern feature excavated near 3rd and Market at the site of an early town residence was used to gather and store water for daily use.

a warehouse and manufacturing district led to the razing of most of the original residences and business structures. Railroad depots and roundhouses were built and there was additional extensive surface filling between 1903 and 1907, especially south of Elm Street. The result was the raising of the grade to its present level and the masking of the 1840's terrace escarpment. An important effect for future archaeological work was the subsurface preservation of remnants of the fort and early town for later investigations.

Another engineering feat affected future studies by obscuring the location of the original Point. Hoping to reduce flooding problems in the residential area south of Elm Street, the Des Moines City Council decided in 1910 to rechannel the Raccoon River so that it drained into the Des Moines River about 2,000 feet to the south of the original confluence. Dredging began in 1914. The vacated channel was used as a landfill and by 1932 the dumping had raised the ground surface some 30 feet above the river.

As the landscape changed, so, too, did the location of the business district, first moving to Court Avenue and later to Walnut Street and beyond. The railroads contributed to a healthy economy in Des Moines until they began to be superseded by the automobile after 1900. Nevertheless, the area south of Court Avenue continued to be a center for the trucking and warehouse industry and by 1920, Des Moines had a population of over 100,000.



The rapid growth of the early town was due to a healthy economy (Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Bottles excavated at the site of the Science Center of Iowa indicate the wide range of products available in the early town and even contained some of the original product.



Part of a fascinating panoramic view of Des Moines in 1914, this photo is available for download or viewing from one of the many digital collections of the Library of Congress' American Memory web site. Shown are two long, low Des Moines Union Railroad freight houses that once occupied the site where the Vine Street Lofts now stand, just to the left of the large building on the right. (Library of Congress)

# THE PROCESS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

**T**he success of an archaeological investigation in a modern urban setting is based upon methodical scientific processes, which are dependent upon approved techniques and the use of many different resources. Before any digging tools even touch the ground, early maps and historical records are consulted. Previous research and archaeological reports also are invaluable in reviewing what has already been recovered and what may likely be revealed. Also, questions that researchers wish to answer in the course of the investigation are formulated.

The physical assessment of the site is another preliminary step. Geomorphologists are often consulted to examine the manner in which soils have developed or eroded over the past several thousand years. Arrangements must be made for needed heavy equipment and the site must be carefully gridded and mapped to ensure accurate recording. Computer and GPS technology enhance the process.

Meetings between archaeologists, local and state government officials, and local business leaders further shape the process. Funding is an important

issue and affects the scope and extent of the investigation. All parties involved regularly share progress reports on the work. Indian tribes with possible connections to the site and concerns about ancestral remains may be contacted and invited to participate.

Finally, data recovery commences. After any overlying fill is removed, shovel tests sample small sections of the site. Promising areas may be chosen for more detailed excavation. Artifacts and structural features uncovered are recorded and analyzed. Some are sent to laboratories for analysis. Documentation is thorough and reports are produced. All these findings are archived to ensure their access by future archaeological investigators and historians.

Where possible, excavated features are reburied and preserved in place, available for future re-examination with more sophisticated methods. In the case of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway project, the road design was actually altered in places to make this possible. Inevitably, some of what has been uncovered is destroyed by development, thus the importance of thorough documentation.



Staff archaeologists from the Louis Berger Group work to expose the foundation of an early structure along Third Street.



Project Archaeologist Chris Schoen of Berger interprets a privy feature of the type that yielded a wealth of artifacts and information on daily life in early Des Moines.



Looking down the excavated length of a utility trench along Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway Portions of the enlisted men's cabins of Raccoon Row were exposed here.



The scope of the latest excavations at 13PK61 in downtown Des Moines were limited in the sense of being restricted to the limits of utility construction, areas where the design of the road grade would



In the initial phases of the excavation at the Vine Street Lofts site, a backhoe removes the overlying fill dirt to get down to the original level of the land surface.



The dig at the Vine Street Lofts projects revealed portions of the footings and piers for the old Des Moines Union Railroad Freight House No. 1 that stood near Water and Vine Streets.

impact the 1840's native soils, and portions of the areas affected by the construction of two large buildings - the Vine Street Lofts and the the Science Center of Iowa.



Staff archaeologists from Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center (GLARC) worked inside tents during the cold winter months of November and December 2001.



Dr. David Overstreet of Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center stands on an excavated railroad freight house footing.

# WHERE'S THE FORT?

The search for cultural deposits related to 13PK61 (Fort Des Moines No. 2) was set in motion by the planned Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway extension project, then known as the CBD Loop Arterial Project, in the early 1980s. The use of federal funds required the city, state, and federal agencies involved to meet obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

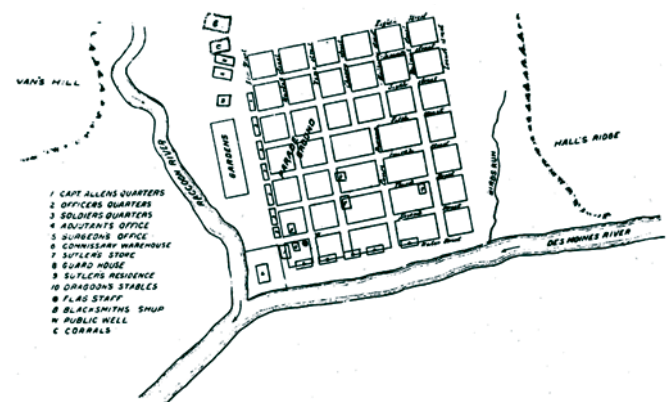
Due to the relatively short life of the structures that comprised Fort Des Moines No. 2, the exact layout and location of these buildings were unknown. The few maps produced after the garrison was decommissioned combined with slightly varying pioneer accounts provided only the essence of the post's arrangement. To further compound things, none of the site was visible on the surface. A series of studies beginning in 1982 began solving the problem. The first, by Dale Henning, combined a geomorphological study, background historical research, excavation of a series of backhoe trenches, and hand excavated test units. Although no structural remains of fort buildings were identified, it was determined that intact buried surfaces existed in the project area at depths of up to three meters. These surfaces were considered to have high potential for significant archaeological deposits.

Brice, Petrides & Associates, Inc. conducted another study in 1985 aimed at the location of Fort Des Moines No. 2 structures. Geomorphological, archaeological, and architectural studies were supplemented with geophysical remote sensing methods. An electromagnetic survey probed for anomalies in the soil. Ground-penetrating radar then attempted to reflect radar signals off of these anomalies for a more refined image. This study confirmed the conclusion of the earlier study by not only recovering prehistoric and historic artifacts, but

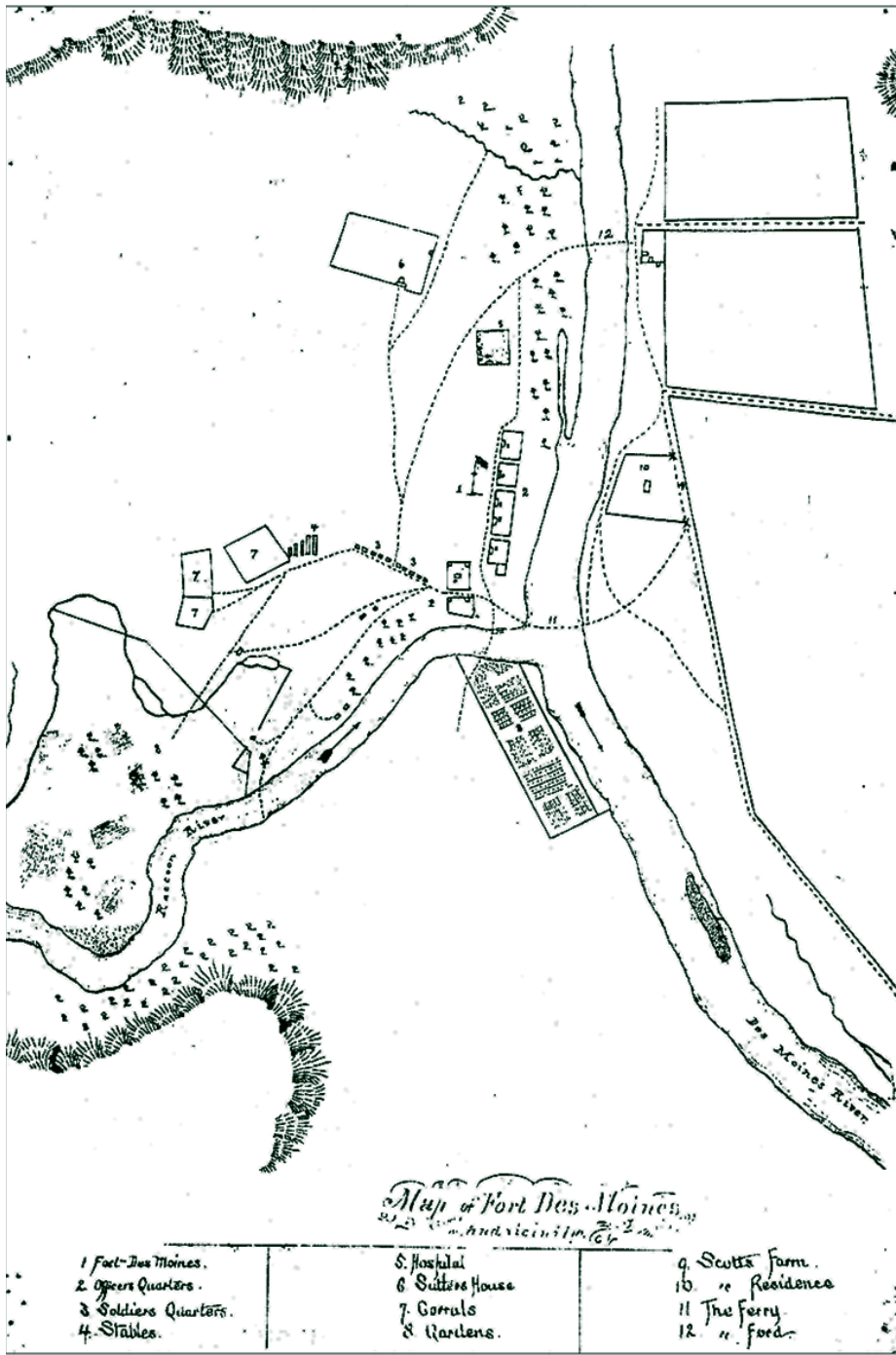
also finding structural remains of one of the officer's cabins of Des Moines Row. This cabin was west of Water (First) Street and just south of Market Street.

In 1986, the Keeper of the National Register formally determined the site eligible for inclusion in the National Register of the Historic Places. The site's outline is a reverse L-shaped area just north and west of the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers. While it should be noted that the fort's actual limits may have extended beyond 13PK61's current boundary, particularly to the west, recent recommendations are to maintain this boundary until physical evidence proves otherwise. Though named for the 1840s military post established at this location, 13PK61 is actually a multi-component site containing evidence of these cultural components:

Middle to Late Archaic	(5,500 - 2,800 B.C.)
Middle to Late Woodland	(200 B.C. - A.D. 650)
Moingona Phase Oneota	(A.D. 1250 - 1300)
Fort Des Mines No. 2	(1843 - 1846)
Town of Fort Des Moines	(1846 - 1870)
City of Des Moines	(1870 to present)



This map of the fort's layout in relation to the first platted streets of Des Moines was based on pioneer accounts. Somewhat idealized, it shows the cabins of Raccoon Row and Des Moines Row at a right angle.



There are no known maps of the fort drawn during the post's existence. This one, filed with the War Department in 1885, some years after the fort was decommissioned has proven to reflect most accurately the layout and location of various fort buildings and features.



This 1840s period cabin which sits near the site of the old fort on the north end of the Principal Park parking lot is not an original fort building. It was placed by the Polk County Historical Society in remembrance of Des Moines' origin. The Birthplace Cabin was dedicated in 1965 after being brought to Des Moines from Washington County.

# ANCIENT PIECES OF THE PAST

**P**rehistoric settlements are not the first thing the average person thinks about when visiting downtown Des Moines. Yet we now have clear evidence that the area near the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers attracted Native American Indians at least three separate times. Characteristic stone tools and projectile point types are key indicators of which cultural period an archaeological site is associated with. The context in which they are found gives us clues to what kind of activity went on at the site. The prehistoric cultural periods represented at 13PK61 by recovered data are the Archaic, the Woodland, and the Oneota.

A Middle to Late Archaic (5,500 - 2,800 B.C.) feature is interpreted as a chipped-stone tool workshop and is evidenced by a concentration of a small number of finished stone tools and large amounts of flaking debris, the waste from the flint-knapping process of making the tools. The finished tools included a T-shaped drill. Made of Winterset

chert, the tools and flakes were found in a buried context that would have been one of the highest points of land along the original terrace scarp. Archaic period hunters may have added to their inventory of tools while scanning the landscape around the confluence of the two rivers for game.

The Middle to Late Woodland (200 B.C. - A.D. 650 ) connection to 13PK61 is based on projectile points, stone tools, and pottery sherds. The sparse number of sherds and the disturbed nature of the context in which the artifacts were found make it difficult to provide a definitive interpretation of Woodland activity at the site.

The Oneota Culture found a home at the Point during the Moingona Phase sometime around A.D. 1250 to 1300. Amongst other numerous diagnostic artifacts are characteristic triangular projectile points, smaller and without the distinctive side-notched bases of their Woodland predecessors.



Middle to Late Archaic (5,500 - 2,800 B.C.) stone tools = T-shaped drill, end scraper, and early stage biface.

(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Middle Woodland stone tools (200 B.C. - 300 A.D.) - three projectile points, an ovate end scraper, and a bifacial knife. (Great Lakes Archaeological Center)



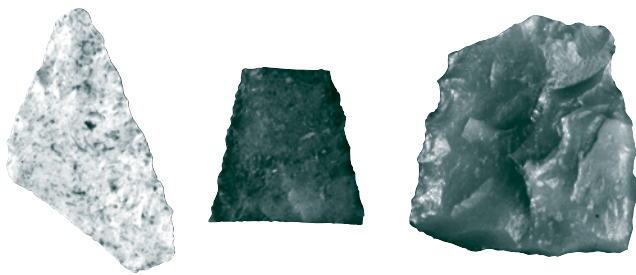
Moingona Phase Oneota projectile points - A.D. 1250-1300 (Louis Berger Group, Inc.)

# ARTIFACTS DATE THE SITE

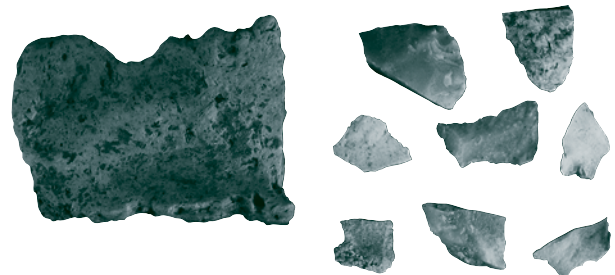
**I**t's not surprising that of the prehistoric periods, the Oneota Culture is best represented at 13PK61, being the most recent and thus the least impacted by the effects of time. Archaeologists recovered evidence of four activity centers concentrated in a two block area near the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway right-of-way. A midden, or refuse disposal area, yielded information on the game hunted, the plants cultivated, and daily life at the site. Three probable households, indicated

by two pit clusters and a house floor with post molds point to these features being part of a small seasonal camp or village.

Triangular projectile points and pottery with distinctive, symbolic designs were recovered, as were the typical flakes of flint that were debris from tool making. Charcoal from three different pit features were radiocarbon dated and indicate the site was used between A.D. 1250 and A.D. 1300.



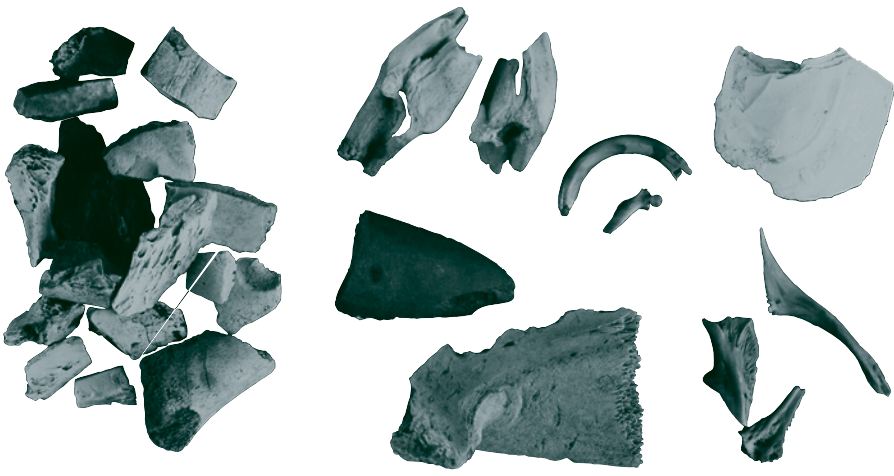
Fragments of Oneota triangular-shaped arrowheads and hide scraper.  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Oneota pottery and stone tool waste flakes (flint chips)  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Panoramic view of the area along present day Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway in which the Moingona Phase Oneota cultural features were discovered.



Animal bones from Oneota midden - cooked/burned bone fragments, deer teeth and long-bone fragment, turtle shell, fish bones, mussel shell.  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Decorated rimsherd of a small globular shell-tempered Oneota pot. Note the similarity of surface designs with the 3-D model below, which was rendered from fragments recovered from a related Oneota village site north of Des Moines.  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



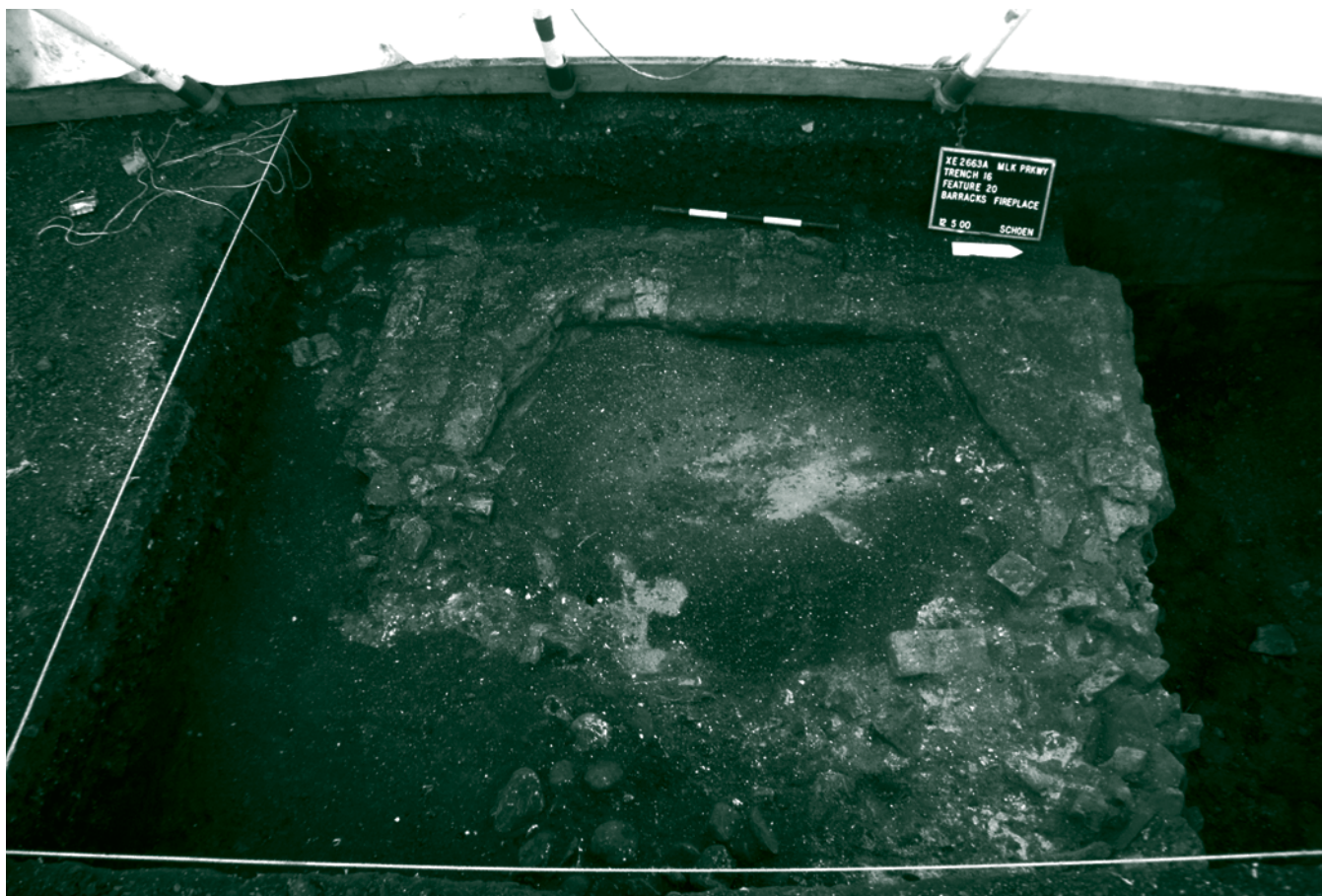
# FORT ARTIFACTS AND FEATURES

**S**ignificant new information about Fort Des Moines No. 2 resulted from the data recovery excavations of 1998-2002. Identified were numerous features associated with the fort including two enlisted men's barracks fireplaces, three barrack foundations or floors, a drainage line under a barracks, a storage pit or sump in a barracks, several builder's trenches, clusters of brick rubble, and a refuse midden on the terrace slope. Retrieved in the context of several of the features were military and domestic artifacts from the period.

Finding features of the enlisted men's barracks solved the question of the location of Raccoon Row. Historical accounts had placed the barrack's along

the edge of the terrace that paralleled the Raccoon River. This was confirmed by the recognition of the terrace edge at four points in project trenches. The alignment of the four barracks trended slightly west-northwest with respect to the grid of streets, crossing from the south side of Elm Street at SW 2nd Street to a little north of Elm Street west of SW 3rd Street.

The case for the site's inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places was strengthened by evidence directly linking the garrison's tailor, Josiah Thrift, with one of the barracks features discovered along Elm Street. Thrift and his family remained at the fort after it was decommissioned as early residents. He operated a tailoring business until 1856, with a brief hiatus in California seeking gold.



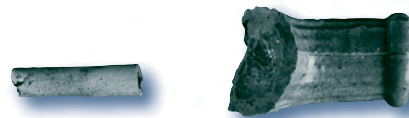
Brick fireplace feature of one of the enlisted men's barracks of Raccoon Row.

(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)

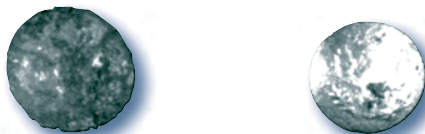




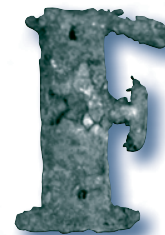
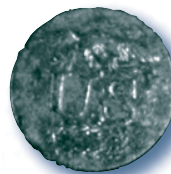
Machine-cut (square) nails.



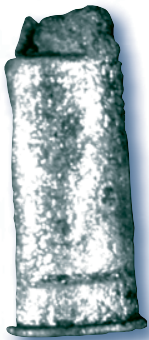
Smoking pipe stem fragments.



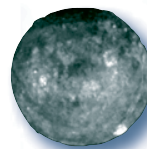
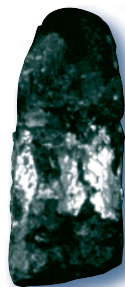
U. S. Military uniform buttons.



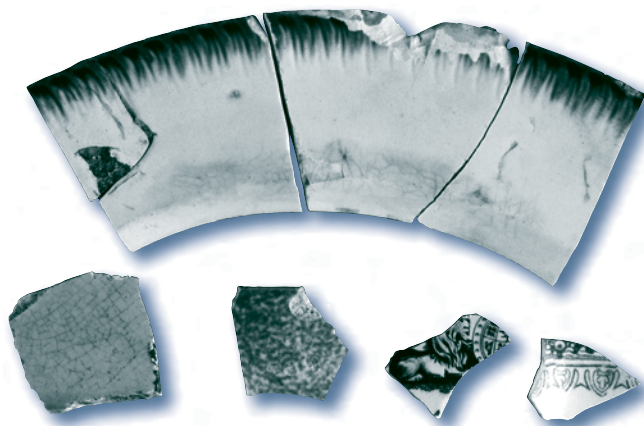
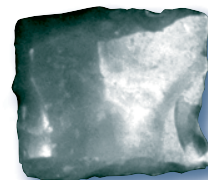
U. S. Military uniform button and cap insignia from Company F of the 1st U.S. Infantry.



U.S. Army ammunition.



Musket ball and gunflint.



Miscellaneous European-made decorated fort-era ceramics.



U.S. President William H. Harrison



Independent Order of Oddfellows symbolism

Watch plate cover recovered from barracks feature.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF A PRIVY

**A**s the early settlers occupied the fort's buildings and began transforming it into the Town of Fort Des Moines, the increasing intensity of their residential and commercial activities generated a need to dispose of the waste products of daily life. Some of the most common historical features encountered and excavated at 13PK61 were privies, refuse pits and middens. The lack of a trash collection system in these early days required other methods of garbage disposal. Besides their obvious function, privies were convenient receptacles for broken household items and food waste. Refuse pits and the edges of lots were also used as disposal sites. Excavated privies prove to be very helpful in dating an associated structure as well as providing glimpses into the use of a particular location. One particularly large privy

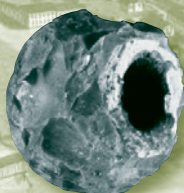
excavated, associated with an early hotel, the Collins house at SW 3rd and Market Streets, yielded a wealth of well-preserved artifacts that offered insight into the lives of Des Moines' early citizens.

The removal of many early structures as the railroad came to Des Moines may partially account for the lack of structural remains of the early mixed residential and commercial neighborhood. Evidence of the warehouse and manufacturing district that succeeded it after 1870 included foundations and the pier supports of two Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad freight depots, a warehouse foundation and associated footings, a house foundation, the basement foundation of the Union Brewery, a brick walk, a wood-lined latrine pit, a limestone gutter and roadbed, and wooden boardwalks.



U.S. Navy uniform button, ca. 1850  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)

19th Century coins - not everything deposited in a privy was waste, some things had just fallen out of pockets  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Glass trade bead, Cornaline d'alleppo type, manufactured in Czechoslovakia ca. 1850  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



19th Century pharmacist's bottle  
(Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



Leather boot recovered from early City of Des Moines feature.



19th Century residence foundation excavated near 4th and Market Streets.

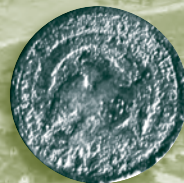
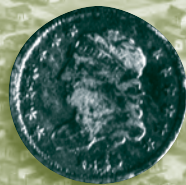
Background - Bird's eye view of the city of Des Moines, the capital of Iowa 1868. Drawn by A. Ruger. Library of Congress Map Collections: 1500-2004 - Panoramic view of Des Moines shows how rapidly the town had grown since its inception as a fort 25 years earlier. Visit the excellent American Memory website at (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>) for this and other wonderful views of early Des Moines.



“Saw cut” cow and pig bones from historic deposits indicate early Des Moines residents enjoyed butchered cuts of meat. (Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



One hundred and fifty years of burial beneath the streets of Des Moines has not diminished the beauty of this 19th century three cent piece. (Louis Berger Group, Inc.)



1843 half dime. (Louis Berger Group, Inc.)

# INDIANS REVISIT THE SITE

Steps have been made toward a greater sensitivity to American Indian concerns about archaeological pursuits. Indian beliefs regarding the sanctity of ancestral remains and ideas about sacred space are now, at least to some extent, taken into consideration by law. A newspaper account from the 1860s tells of an Indian burial being excavated at 3rd and Vine Street. Such

reports are one of the main reasons Indians are interested in archaeological excavations at the Point.

In 1976, Iowa was the first state to enact legislation protecting ancient Indian burial sites. Iowans Maria Pearson, Don Wanatee, and other Indian individuals were instrumental in setting in motion the efforts that brought about this law.



Chris Schoen, principal investigator for the Louis Berger Group, interprets the different layers exposed in a trench in the area of the Oneota site features.



Chris Schoen, Marianne Long, Victor Roubidoux, Jeb Brewer, and Gene Schmitt inspect a deep trench excavation that required supports to prevent cave-ins.



**G**uidelines on how to respond to the discovery of human remains during the downtown Des Moines excavations were detailed in legal agreements signed by the participating agencies and other interested parties. Digging was to stop immediately and the proper officials notified if discoveries were made. Discussions would then ensue to ensure proper treatment of the remains.



Victor Roubidoux and Chris Schoen discuss aspects of the site.

During excavations, representatives of the several tribes believed to be descendants of the Oneota culture were invited to review the work. Representatives of the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma visited the site. Victor Roubidoux and Marianne Long examined the excavated Oneota features in November 2000. Their presence and input was an important contribution to the site's interpretation.



Marianne Long, Gene Schmitt, and Chris Schoen examine excavated storage pits of the Oneota culture.

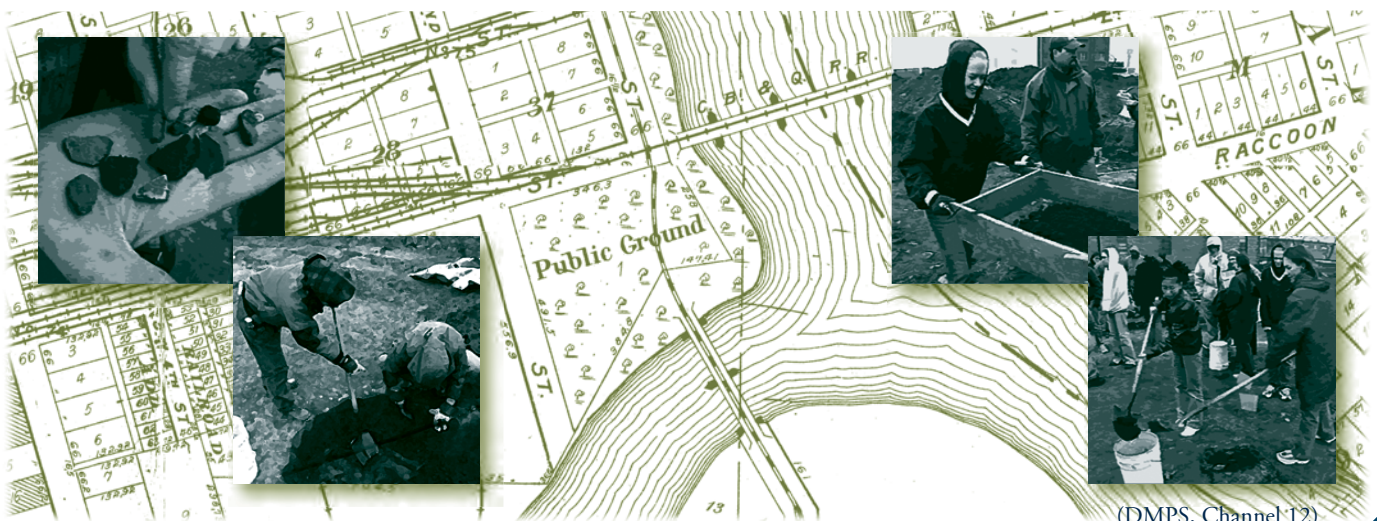
# TWO RIVERS EVER-CHANGING

**B**uried beneath the changing modern cityscape south of Des Moines' business center are clues about the people and events that preceded us. Artifacts and the remnants of simple structures left by prehistoric American Indians indicate they were attracted to a good quality of life on the terrace above the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers long before the arrival of Euroamerican settlers. These later immigrants brought a different civilization and set in motion a series of rapid changes and alterations in the natural and built environment. They, too, left traces of residential and commercial activities as buildings went up, were subsequently altered or demolished, and the original shape of the land changed. As a result, a surprisingly undisturbed patchwork of features and artifacts covering a broad span of time lies well preserved beneath the surface. The Point is still there, even if invisible to the naked eye. The archaeological excavations sampled only a small portion of what remains buried.

In a time of unprecedented change we have the opportunity to continue our stewardship of these cultural resources that promise to reveal even more of the story of our city's past. On December 17,

2002, students from Central Academy history classes and Central Campus Marine Biology Program visited the dig that was being conducted on the future site of the Science Center of Iowa near 4th and Market Streets. Staff archaeologists from Great Lakes Archaeological Resource Center worked closely with the inquisitive young people to explain the multifaceted field of archaeology. Students were briefed on the site and given the opportunity to do some digging themselves. Their enthusiasm confirmed the appeal of archaeology, the draw of a good mystery, and the thrill of holding freshly excavated pieces of the past in one's hand. It also generated hope that a new generation of investigators will once again peel back the layers of time and add to the knowledge of Des Moines' origin at the confluence of these two great rivers.

Postscript: In 2007, the Office of the State Archaeologist carried out additional excavations within a portion of 13PK61 and uncovered previously uninvestigated features of Ft. Des Moines No. 2. The data from this investigation are being analyzed, but promise to provide additional understanding of this important cultural resource.



## SOURCES

The following sources were consulted in the production of this booklet:

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Des Moines River Front - Panoramic Photographs Collection

Iowa Biographies Project - Polk County - <http://www.rootsweb.com/~iabiog/polk/polk.html>  
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### Images

Picture sources are shown in parentheses by image. All other photos and graphics by Richard Dressler or Public Domain.

The map showing the cession of Indian territories on p. 7 originally appeared in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. 38, 1957, p. 61, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

Special thanks to David G. Stanley, President of Bear Creek Archeology, Inc., P.O. Box 347, Cresco, Iowa 52136 for use of 3-D illustration of Oneota pot from Data Recovery Excavations At The Christenson Oneota Site (13PK407), Polk County, Iowa - Prepared By David W. Benn, Principal Investigator, et al.

Thanks to staff members of City of Des Moines, the State of Iowa Historic Preservation Office, the Downtown Community Alliance, the Louis Berger Group, and Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center for reference material, images, and editorial assistance.

### For more information:

Office of the State Archaeologist Fort Des Moines Archaeology Site Excavations  
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~osa/gcp/Fort/index.html>

David Mather and Ginalie Swaim

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Booklet written, designed and produced by Richard Dressler - July 2005



This booklet was produced in compliance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the development of the Vine Street Lofts in downtown Des Moines in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The MOA is among the State Historic Society of Iowa, the Iowa Department of Economic Development, and the City of Des Moines. It was adopted by Des Moines on October 22, 2001 by City Council resolution 01-532.