



CONTROVERSIES CONCERNING NIMUUÉ

One longstanding controversy surrounding Minnesota Woman/Nimuué is that of when she actually walked the land and touched the waters of what is now known as Otter Tail County. Estimates have ranged all the way from about 8,000 to 17,000 years ago. Efforts in the 1950s to date her bones were, unfortunately, compromised due to the bones having been fossilized by their environment and the manner in which they had been preserved since their discovery. An Accelerated Mass Spectrometry (AMS) measurement conducted in the 1990s yielded an age of 7,840 — a date which has been questioned due to its preciseness. (Plus, the specifics as to how that date was determined have not, to date, been fully explained.)

Another big question revolves around the origin of Nimuué's people. From what direction did they emigrate to this area so long ago? Across the Bering Straits is one possibility, but some information now suggests that certain groups actually may have come to this continent by boat from a Pacific origin, with their descendants eventually traveling into this region from the south. The answer is not yet conclusive, if indeed it ever will be.

Then there are other questions, including: Why did she carry a wolf's tooth? What did she hold in the turtle carapace found with her? Where did the broken clam shell pieces come from?

WHAT IS THE GLACIAL MINNESOTA WOMAN ORGANIZATION?

Formed in 2014, the Glacial Minnesota Woman Organization (GMWO) is a nonprofit group (501c3 status pending) endeavoring to increase knowledge, and expand awareness, of Minnesota Woman and her story. The GMWO Exploratory Committee consisted of nearly a dozen Pelican Rapids/Otter Tail County residents and civic leaders with a strong interest in bringing this story to light.

The Exploratory Committee has been replaced by a GMWO Steering Committee. As the story of Nimuué is increasingly understood and publicized, GMWO is formulating committees in such areas as education, public relations, fund raising, memorial site and displays. It is hoped that someday an interpretive center will be located at the site near where sunlight once again, after thousands of years, touched Minnesota Woman/Nimuué on a warm summer day in 1931. It would be designed to attract and educate students from area schools, as well as visitors to the Pelican Rapids/Otter Tail County area, and, just as importantly, local residents who wish to know more about this intriguing chapter in their community's story.

Fundraising efforts are underway; to support research; expand exhibits; and to create a statue for the "Minnesota Woman" in the Pelican Rapids area.



Glacial Minnesota Woman Organization
P.O. Box 35
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572
Nimuué@arvig.net
www.MinnesotaWomanPelicanRapids.org

For information on how you can contribute to this project:

Send Donations to:
Minnesota Glacial Woman Organization
P. O. Box 35
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

Other Minnesota Woman
& Pelican Rapids History Resources:

Otter Tail County Historical Society
1110 W. Lincoln Ave.
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
(218) 736-6038

Pelican Rapids Historic City Hall
25 N. Broadway,
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572
(218) 863-1221

Maplewood State Park
39721 Park Entrance Rd.
Pelican Rapids, MN 56572

Licensed Nimuué Art and Design
Marcella Rose
Lady of Prairie Lake Art Studio
marcella@marcellarose.com
www.marcellaroseart.com

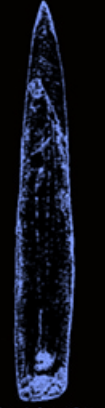


Photo by Leonard E. Mason





WHO IS NIMUUÉ?

Nimuué is the name given to the skeleton of a young woman discovered on June 16, 1931, beneath the center of what eventually would become U.S. Highway 59, located along the east side of Prairie Lake, north of Pelican Rapids, in Otter Tail County, Minnesota. University of Minnesota anthropologist Dr. A.E. Jenks, who was instrumental in the initial investigations of the skeleton, early on estimated the skeleton's age to be around 15,000 years.

Analysis of the bones indicated they were mineralized and had turned into phosphate rocks, suggesting the ancient timeline. While there has been considerable disagreement over the years as to the true age of the bones, it can be stated that Nimuué ranks among the oldest human remains ever found in North America.

From its discovery in 1931 until 1968, the skeleton was referred to as "Minnesota Man." In 1976, the name was correctly changed to "Minnesota Woman." Recently, members of the Glacial Minnesota Woman Organization bestowed upon her the name "Nimuué" — "Lady of the Lake."

Following the 1931 excavation, her bones were taken to the University of Minnesota. They later were placed on display at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul for 10 years prior to being retired from view. In 1999, in response to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, Minnesota Woman's bones were repatriated by the Dakota tribe to a site in South Dakota.



A shimmering glow appeared in the highway attracting the attention of workers, and led to the discovery of Minnesota Woman, Lady of the Lake, on the morning of June 16, 1931.

WHERE & HOW WAS SHE DISCOVERED?

In 1929, construction commenced on 28 miles of gravel road between Pelican Rapids and Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. To accommodate the project, more than nine feet of soil were removed from a hill near Prairie Lake, a short distance north of Pelican Rapids. The road was graded and then covered with two feet of gravel, high in the center and sloping toward the edges for purposes of moisture runoff.

During the winter/spring of 1930/31, the yellow clay-silt soil beneath the road retained moisture that froze, thawed and then heaved into a 600-foot-long frost boil. That June, a crew began removing the boil and fixing the road surface. (Ironically, a letter had been sent to the State Commissioner of Highways asking him to alert his road bosses and road crew workers to be on the lookout for possible skeletons along the route.)

As a grader was removing the frost boil, crew member Carl Steffen noticed what he later described as a "white shimmering glow." Steffen stopped the grader, dug into the clay with his bare hands and uncovered a skull and pieces of clam shell reflecting the sun's bright rays. He and co-worker Eugene Russell continued digging — and, in the process, unearthed a human skeleton. They moved the skeleton to the side of the road and reassembled the bones as they'd found them. An assortment of artifacts, found with the skeleton, were laid beside it. Among the artifacts were an elk horn dagger or scraping tool, clam shells — and, most curiously, part of a conch shell whose native habitat is along the coast of Florida. Found during additional digs were a tooth (later identified as from an eastern timber wolf), a metatarsal from a juvenile loon, a Painted Turtle carapace (upper shell), numerous bird and animal bones and bone tool fragments.

This momentous discovery was quickly reported to Dr. Jenks, the then-chairman of the University of Minnesota's Department of Anthropology. Away on another dig at the time, Jenks sent a colleague, geologist Dr. C.F. Stauffer, to Pelican Rapids. Stauffer examined the site, wrapped the bones within crunched-up newspapers and sealed them in a carton for transport to Minneapolis.



WHY IS NIMUUÉ IMPORTANT?

The discovery of Minnesota Woman/Nimuué brings a degree of illumination to an ancient, largely mysterious chapter in the history of this region. Uncovering the nearly complete skeleton of a young woman, perhaps once lying beneath the waters of Glacial Lake Pelican, was an electrifying development for laymen and scientists alike. From 1931 to 1937, nearly three dozen distinguished scientists from 12 universities and other institutions immersed themselves in studying her skeleton and the artifacts found with her, working to determine her identification and age, as well as her geological and archaeological surroundings. Ten of the scientists visited the burial site repeatedly in their quest for additional details. Published research findings drew worldwide archaeological attention to western Minnesota.

There has been considerable dispute among scientists and others, during the ensuing decades since Nimuué's discovery, regarding the origin of her clan and the age of her skeleton. While those controversies have not been fully resolved, her ancient presence in this area, along with the contents of her gravesite, provides a precious link to the area's long-distant past — a past where huge glaciers and melted glacial waters once dominated the landscape. She is a vehicle to help today's residents and visitors understand more about those prehistoric times and the impact they had in forming the Otter Tail County and western Minnesota that exists today. Nimuué is a bridge to assist us in our understanding of who we were — and who we are.



She stimulates creativity and promotes the inquiring mind to desire to know more about her, her people, and her environment.



Our mission is to promote the legacy of Minnesota Woman for the city of Pelican Rapids in Otter Tail County in the state of Minnesota helping people visiting our city to identify Pelican Rapids as a site contributing to the history of the world.