Dunleith Mounds

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Gramercy Park provides both recreational and educational activities. Three conical mounds (below) line the bluff crest overlooking the Mississippi River.

The successful protection of important archaeological sites in Illinois is most often viewed by the public as the result of efforts by state and local governments—but many significant sites are instead protected because of the efforts of civic-minded citizens.

One great success story is the protection and enhancement of the Dunleith Mound Group located in Gramercy Park in East Dubuque. Although financial support for these efforts was funded in part by the Department of Natural Resources, it was the action of local citizens and the Gramercy Park Foundation that made the project a success.

The Dunleith Mounds are located atop the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River and across the river from Dubuque, Iowa. Originally investigated by Col. P.W. Norris for the Smithsonian Institution during the latter half of the 19th century, the mounds are believed to have been built by the Middle Woodland peoples, around 2,000 years ago.

In the late 19th century, the Dunleith Mound group consisted of 26 mounds. Today, only 20 mounds can be identified. Before the Gramercy Park Foundation began its preservation efforts the mounds had become overgrown with trees and other vegetation. The mounds were inaccessible and it was impossible to walk amongst them. Because of the efforts of the foundation, visitors can now walk along newly constructed trails and learn about the site from recently installed wayside makers.

Gramercy Park also contains several structures constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the late 1930s. The Civilian Conservation Corps was created by the federal government to help put young males to work who otherwise were unemployed due to the effects of the Great Depression. Several "council rings" were built atop of mounds at Gramercy Park.

The enhancement of Gramercy Park and the preservation of the Dunleith Mound Group is a testament to the efforts of local citizens to protect and make accessible valuable cultural resources within their community. Constructed more than 2,000 years ago by peoples long since gone, the mounds remind us not only of Illinois' rich cultural heritage but also of the commitment we all should make to preserve that past for the future.

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