



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
April 8, 2014

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Russ Ferrin (952) 212-4385
museum@whcpa-museum.org

Radiocarbon Testing Shows Lake Minnetonka North Arm Dugout Canoe One of the Oldest in Minnesota

LONG LAKE, MN – Recent radiocarbon testing results indicate the Native American dugout canoe at the Western Hennepin County Pioneer Association (WHCPA) Museum in Long Lake is one of the oldest of its kind ever found in Minnesota. A study from Maritime Heritage Minnesota (MHM) released today reports the WHCPA dugout canoe was constructed between AD 1025-1165, making it about 1,000 years old.

“We were pleasantly surprised to learn this canoe is far older than previously thought,” said WHCPA President Russ Ferrin. “The radiocarbon testing show this canoe to be one of the premier archeological finds in Minnesota,” Mr. Ferrin continued, “and we are proud to display this rare artifact in our Museum.”

Some scholars have suggested dugout canoes, made from hollowed tree trunks, were the earliest form of water transportation in Minnesota.

Ann Merriman, PhD and Christopher Olson, MA, nautical archaeologists with MHM, briefly examined the dugout at the WHCPA Museum in June 2013. MHM subsequently obtained a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant, part of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to conduct a comparative study of 8 dugout canoes recovered in Minnesota. The grant included funding for radiocarbon analysis and research about when and where the Minnesota dugouts were recovered. MHM returned to the WHCPA in January 2014 to document the Lake Minnetonka dugout. A link to MHM’s report, “The Minnesota Dugout Canoe Project Report,” is available to read or download on the internet at <https://archive.org/details/MDCProjectReport>

MHM plans to continue documenting more dugout canoes with Minnesota provenience since two more of these watercraft have been located in Beltrami and Blue Earth Counties, with hopefully more to come. MHM urges other Minnesota museums and historical societies to come forward with information about other dugout canoes to add to our growing list. These types of artifact studies are part of MHM's mission to locate, document, preserve, and conserve Minnesota's finite maritime and nautical cultural resources within a not-for-profit paradigm, where the health and safety of the artifacts studied is paramount.

The WHCPA dugout found in Lake Minnetonka in 1934, a year when many Minnesota lakes experienced extremely low water levels. While Gustave A. Gunnarson and his sons, Arthur and Helmer, were extending their dock on the southwest shore of North Arm in August 1934, one of their dock posts would not penetrate the lake bottom. Thinking they had struck a sunken log buried under about 12 inches of lake bottom silt, the Gunnarsons extracted the obstruction and dragged it onto the shore.

After removing embedded silt and clay, the Gunnarsons realized they had something far more significant than a submerged log because the object had been hollowed out in the shape of a canoe. The dugout is 11.1 feet in length, 1.4 feet wide and .55 feet deep.

The age ranges for the eight Minnesota dugout canoes described in MHM's study, the years and locations where they were recovered and current locations are as follows:

- 1025-1165 1934 North Arm, Lake Minnetonka, Henn. Cty. WHCPA Museum, Long Lake
- 1039-1210 1957 Big Swan Lake, Meeker County McCleod County Historical Society
- 1436-1522 1867/8 Chippewa River, Chippewa County Chippewa County Historical Society
- 1626-1679 1982 Minnesota River, Chippewa County Chippewa County Historical Society
- 1770-1830 1973 Dutch Lake, Aitkin County Cokato Museum
- 1790-1850 1967 Minnesota River, Bloomington, Henn. Cty. Bloomington Historical Society
- 1790-1850 19?? Rice Lake, Dodge or Steele County Dodge County Historical Society
- 1920-1933 1933 Lake Auburn, Carver County Minnesota Historical Society

- 30 -

The WHCPA is a non-profit organization formed in 1907 by Minnesota Territorial pioneers to preserve and promote the history of Western Hennepin County. Public exhibit hours at the WHCPA Museum in Long Lake are 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. The Museum Research Center is open to the public 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays or by appointment. Call (952) 473-6557 or visit the WHCPA website at www.whcpa-museum.org.

Visit Maritime Heritage Minnesota's website at <http://www.maritimeheritagemn.org/>.