

NICOLLET-FREMONT MARKER
Pipestone National Monument
36 Reservation Avenue
Pipestone
Pipestone County
Minnesota

HABS MN-171
HABS MN-171

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Interior Regions 3, 4, and 5
U.S. Department of the Interior
601 Riverfront Drive
Omaha, NE 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NICOLLET-FREMONT MARKER

HABS No. MN-171

Location: Pipestone National Monument, 36 Reservation Avenue, Pipestone, Pipestone County, Minnesota

USGS Pipestone North Quadrangle – Minnesota 7.5 Minute Series, 2010

Significance: The Nicollet-Fremont marker, placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1925, was included in the 1976 National Register of Historic Places nomination and commemorates graffiti left during the expedition of 1838. The inscriptions are the first by Euro-Americans in the area. The nomination focused on the quarries as the source for sacred pipestone, but briefly discusses the increased popularity of the site to Euro-Americans through the writings of George Catlin and Joseph Nicollet, American settlement in and around the site, and the eventual establishment of the Monument.

Description: When the exploration and cartography party led by Joseph N. Nicollet and John C. Fremont scouted the Pipestone area in 1838, they left inscriptions on a prominent quartzite outcrop near Leaping Rock. Nicollet carved his name while others in the party chiseled their initials. After almost a century of erosion, the threat from weathering was not as extreme as that brought by human forces as travelers arrived at the site and left their own markings of visitation. Protecting the stone carved by representatives of the United States seemed of national importance and therefore a patriotic duty to the Catlinite Chapter. The chapter's preservation plan included the retracing of the carvings with a chisel, the erection of a barrier in front of the stone, and the placement of a bronze marker on the cliff describing the rock's importance to American heritage.¹

Located off the Circle Trail extension on the north side of Winnewissa Falls close to Leaping Rock, the Nicollet-Fremont Marker is a 2' x 1', rectangular bronze plaque adhered by concrete to a Sioux quartzite stone. The marker, placed by the Catlinite Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution eight years before the site became the Pipestone National Monument, commemorates the Nicollet party that camped at the spot during their 1838 expedition and the six men who carved their initials into a nearby rock. The stone with the nineteenth-century inscription is enclosed by pipe iron railing. The plaque reads:

THE
J.N. NICOLLET
EXPEDITION
OF 1838
RESTED HERE THREE DAYS.
John C. Fremont
Charles A. Geyer
Joseph LaFromboise
J.E. Flandin

¹ Sally J. Southwick, *Building on a Borrowed Past: Place and Identity in Pipestone, Minnesota* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005), 99-100.

Joseph Reville

Erected by
Catlinite Chapter
Daughters of the
American Revolution
1925

History: Located in the southwest corner of Minnesota, the Pipestone area had been a sacred place for American Indians for hundreds of years. Long before it became a National Monument, tribes from around the country traveled miles to the site to quarry sacred pipestone. Pipestone or catlinite is a soft red stone found within Sioux quartzite that was carved into objects, most notably pipes, for use in sacred rituals. European explorers ventured into the Pipestone vicinity during the eighteenth century, but it was not until Philander Prescott's 1831 stop at the Pipestone quarries that there was a written account of visiting the site.²

Throughout the 1830s frontiersmen traders continued to stop by the quarries with growing frequency. In 1838, U.S. Army Corp of Topographic Engineers commissioned French astronomer and cartographer Joseph N. Nicollet to survey and map western Minnesota. The expedition included adventurer John C. Fremont, botanists, guides, and eight voyageurs. The party stopped in Pipestone Valley seeking shelter from a thunderstorm and observed American Indians quarrying and practicing rituals associated with pipestone excavation while camped at the site. Before leaving, Nicollet and five other members of the expedition carved their initials and the date into a piece of quartzite near Leaping Rock, a 25' high geological landmark.³ The map resulting from Nicollet's 1836-40 journeys was the first extensive map of the Upper Mississippi drainage basin and the first to depict the Pipestone quarries which now constitute Pipestone National Monument.

By the 1880s, Pipestone County residents saw the importance of the Pipestone site and proposed the quarries become a protected national or state park. While an 1896 bill sponsored by Congressman J.T. McCleary to establish "The Indian Pipestone National Park" died in committee, local individuals and civic organizations continued to push for recognition either as a national or state historic park or as a municipal recreation site.⁴ The local American Legion organized a volunteer force in 1924 to maintain the site and create more attractive and accessible recreation amenities including a small dam and swimming area.

During the 1920s, fraternal groups in Pipestone remained in support of the park idea. However, preservation of the Pipestone quarries was spearheaded by local women. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women across the country acted to identify and preserve sites with natural and historical significance. Women in Pipestone were no different as they appointed themselves

² Hal K. Rothman and Daniel J. Holder, *Managing the Sacred and the Secular: An Administrative History of Pipestone National Monument*, U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1992, 23.

³ William P. Corbett, "A History of the Red Pipestone Quarry and Pipestone National Monument," (M.A. Thesis, University of South Dakota, July, 1976), 16-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

guardians of the past and stewards of public heritage.⁵ One such local women's group was the Catlinite Chapter of the DAR. The DAR, founded in 1890 in Washington, D.C., worked to promote historic preservation, education, and patriotism. The DAR encouraged each chapter to work separately to promote patriotism by commemorating local historic sites. As a result, thousands of memorial markers and hundreds of historic buildings dedicated or restored by local DAR chapters exist throughout the country.⁶

In commemorating historic sites or by serving as the custodian of historic land or a building, the DAR oftentimes acted as a catalyst in preserving a site that eventually became a national park. On September 20, 1925, to bolster the site's historical significance, the Catlinite Chapter staged an elaborate dedication ceremony for a plaque commemorating the 1838 Nicolette-Fremont expedition and also they purchased land around the Three Maidens, a spiritual site consisting of three large boulders of granite. The DAR transferred the land to the city and, in 1929, passed a resolution that the quarries become a national park. Winifred Bartlett, the first woman county clerk in Minnesota and president of the Pipestone Indian Shrine Association, led the DAR's efforts. "It was our duty to support the Indians," she said. "We should help protect it on their behalf because they couldn't do it." In addition to protecting the quarries, Bartlett sought to continue the pipestone craft, believing, she said, that "we should keep to the traditions and legends just as nearly true to the Indian story as possible."⁷

When Pipestone National Monument was established on August 25, 1937, by an act of Congress, the 1925 Nicollet-Fremont Marker was included within the monument's original boundaries. Later, when the park began to develop interpretive offerings in the 1950s, the marker and the 1838 engravings were included along the Circle Trail, a ¾ mile self-guided path which led park visitors past Pipestone's most notable geological and historical locations.

Sources:

Corbett, William P. "A History of the Red Pipestone Quarry and Pipestone National Monument." M.A. Thesis. University of South Dakota, July 1976.

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Kaufman, Polly Welts. *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: a History*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

⁵ Southwick, 98.

⁶ Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: a History*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 49.

⁷ Ibid., 49-52.

“List of Classified Structures.” Internal Assessments. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska. Accessed 2 August 2010.

Rothman, Hal K., and Daniel J. Holder. *Managing the Sacred and the Secular: An Administrative History of Pipestone National Monument*. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1992.

Southwick, Sally J. *Building on a Borrowed Past: Place and Identity in Pipestone, Minnesota*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005.

Historian: Pipestone National Monument was recorded from 2009-10 by Katherine Kaliszewski, NPS Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) intern with supplemental material provided by Donald L. Stevens, Jr., Chief of History and National Register Programs MWRO. Photographs were taken by Daniel R. Pratt in July 2009. Interns Hilary Retseck and Kayla Hassett and MWRO historian Alesha Cerny completed the report narratives in 2012. The survey was reformatted and edited for transmittal in 2021 by Cerny.

Project Information: This report was commissioned in order to comply with a stipulation in a programmatic agreement between the National Park Service and the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Officer regarding the treatment of historic buildings and structures at Pipestone National Monument. The Nicollet-Fremont marker, a contributing marker in the park historic district, will be retained and preserved as a result of general management planning for Pipestone National Monument.

The CCC Dam (HAER No. MN-118) and Footbridges (HAER No. MN-119), the Circle Trail (HALS No. MN-3), the South Quarry Line Trail (HALS No. MN-4), and the Sioux Quartzite Steps (HALS No. MN-4) will also be retained and preserved as part of the programmatic agreement that implements the preferred alternative of the general management plan. However, the Mission 66 Visitor Center (HABS No. MN-167), Residence (HABS No. MN-168), Restroom (HABS No. MN-169), and Entry Road (HAER No. MN-116), as well as the 1950 Residence (HABS No. MN-170) and the Residence Access Road (HAER No. MN-117) will be demolished. The buildings and structures interfere with the spiritual significance of the Pipestone quarries and associated natural/ethnographic elements of the National Monument. The ethnographic landscape will be restored to a more natural appearance. HABS, HAER, and HALS documentation will be completed on several buildings, structures, and landscapes in the park to mitigate the adverse impacts of this extensive landscape restoration project.

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Scale stick in photographs in 4 feet long.

INDEX TO BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Daniel R. Pratt, photographer, July 2009

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| MN-171-1 | Context view of Nicollet-Fremont Marker from above Sioux quartzite escarpment, looking southwest. Extension of Circle Trail (HALS No. MN-3) follows treeline to Winnewissa Falls overlook in background. |
| MN-171-2 | View of Nicollet-Fremont Marker from extension of Circle Trail (HALS No. MN-3) looking southwest. Daughters of the American Revolution commemorative plaque (1925) is visible below and to right of Nicollet-Fremont expedition inscription enclosure. |
| MN-171-3 | View of Daughters of the American Revolution commemorative plaque (1925), looking south. |