

# Spirit Mound Trust News

P. O. Box 603 | Vermillion, SD 57069 | info@spiritmound.org | www.spiritmound.org | December 2016

## Viewing the Year from the Top of the Mound

By Jim Heisinger

Seasonal changes of the Spirit Mound prairie are a sermon about the forces of nature, a sermon given without a spoken word. This winter over 80 native species of plants entered above ground dormancy as daylight and temperatures declined. The orange and gold grasses and other flowering plants, loaded with seeds, will nourish and shelter animals throughout the winter.

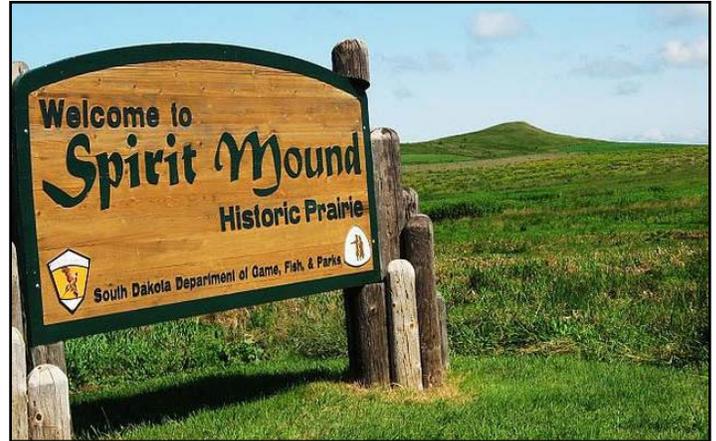


Seasonal Views south of Spirit Mound

In the spring, greening invariably begins with cool season grasses, followed by warm season grasses accompanied by an explosion of prairie flowers with delightfully diverse forms and colors. However, every year nature provides differences in timing according to the intensities of temperature, precipitation and wind velocity. In response new prairie species appear every year.

In 1804 Lewis and Clark made note of how strong winds influenced the distribution of flying insects and the birds feeding on them. Winds favor the growth of flexible prairie grasses by cracking the rigid tree trunks and branches of invasive trees. Winds influence the intensity of prairie fires, the propagation of nesting birds, and even soil temperature and moisture. Winds delight us by causing the dancing spread of prairie flora.

Unfortunately, unceasing winds have also demolished our large wooden entrance sign.



The sign winds destroyed

Our partners at South Dakota Game Fish and Parks hope to have a replacement sometime in 2017.

But winds were not the only destructive force at the Mound. In August vandals carried off the heavy six-sided bench at the top of the Mound, or perhaps sent it rolling down the Mound's steep east face. The bench served as a 360 degree viewing tower for many weary hikers. Hikers, deprived of their perch, notified the sheriff. Our searches on foot and the sheriff's tweets on Twitter and Facebook postings failed to provide any clues. Mysteriously the bench recently reappeared unscathed, and in plain sight, at the bottom of the hill. It was moved to the picnic area. On a warm day we will labor up the hill and restore it to its rightful place as a crown on top of the Mound.



The hexagonal bench now resting in the picnic area

Continued on top of page four

# View from the Parking Lot

By Clarence Pederson

Who comes to visit Spirit Mound? The answer is: Lots of people and for many different reasons. There are two counters: one for vehicles on the east entrance and another for hikers on the sign at the beginning of the trail. In October 2016, 650 vehicles entered the park and 1300 people were on the trail. In November 450 vehicles entered and 900 people walked the trail.

Since I started working as part-time caretaker, I've been observing cars in the lot and talking with the people I meet. I have found this interaction to be very interesting. While my time at the park has been limited, a few hours per week and a couple hours at a time, I am impressed with the number of cars that stop; there almost always is someone there when I arrive, or pulling in when I leave. Here are some of my notes and observations about the Mound's visitors.

*First day of work: Tuesday, July 26. Family of four from South Carolina, on way to the Black Hills via the southern route. Were referred to the park by Interstate Travel Center personnel. They really enjoyed walking to top of hill as a relief from being in the car.*

*Wednesday, July, 27: Four cars, two from Nebraska, one from Oklahoma, one from Colorado. One couple from San Francisco, USD Alumni from the 70s, were very pleased to see the beautiful park in place of the feedlot.*

*Thursday, July 29: Seven people, five cars: one from Nebraska, three from South Dakota, one from California. Four of the people were there as part of a film crew for a Vermillion Chamber of Commerce promotional film. The others were there individually to take walks.*

*Saturday, August 13: Six people, three cars, one motorcycle. One couple from Maryland was traveling to Seattle. They had read about the proposed Spirit Mound project in an old brochure and how plans were being made to try to purchase the farm and make a park. They stopped to see if that had been accomplished and were*

*very pleased to see the park in all its beauty.*

*Monday, August 22: Five cars. One couple from Seattle, WA; two from SD and one from Missouri with a sign on the side that said, "Rollin' on the River AfterMathEnterprises." Dr. Larry Campbell, a retired math professor, was retracing Lewis and Clark's route up the Missouri with the intention of writing a book. He was excited to learn that he was only three days from the anniversary of Lewis and Clark's visit. (website address: [www.AfterMathEnterprises.com](http://www.AfterMathEnterprises.com))*

*Wednesday, August 24: A minivan, pulled in, doors flew open and three kids leapt out and began racing up the trail. Mom reported they were from Centerville and that this is a regular stop after shopping in Vermillion, a treat for kids to run up the trail as a reward for being good in the car and while shopping.*

*Sunday, September 11: Sixteen people arrived in seven groups. One student reported that he was there because of a requirement by his USD Environmental Psychology class.*

I wonder how many classes at the University of South Dakota, other nearby colleges, high schools or elementary schools, utilize Spirit Mound Park as a resource. I have met the USD and Vermillion High School Cross Country teams, other runners, many dog walkers and regular walkers who find Spirit Mound Park the perfect place to get out and about. Several times I have seen a car pull in and a parent frantically take a small child to the bathroom. The park fulfills many needs.

Everyone who comes to the park seems to read the information on the kiosk and take a brochure. Several tourists reported that they were there because of information they received from the staff at the Interstate Information Center. This report is based on a very small slice of actual visitation, and it makes a person wonder what other stories could be told by and about the Mound's visitors.

## Second Pin in the Series Available



Harrier. 'Marsh Hawk' to older birders, it is a beautiful, distinctive raptor of open country. The males are an ashy grey and the females mostly brown, both with a white

Last year we issued the first in a series of limited edition, Spirit Mound Bird Pins, each intended to honor a prairie bird that is returning to the restored habitat there. This year our subject is the Northern

patch at the base of the tail. They nest on the ground. Lucky visitors to the mound's summit may look down on them as the hunt flying low over the prairie.

Sales income supports our efforts at the mound. The 1" by 2" enamel pins are \$10 each plus \$4 shipping for one, or \$5 shipping for two pins. For those near Vermillion, they may be purchased at the Pressing Matters located at 102 East Main Street, or email [info@spiritmound.org](mailto:info@spiritmound.org) and we will arrange pickup or delivery, or use the order form on the back page of newsletter.

# Spirit Mound Cemetery Update

By Nancy Carlsen

An ending, a beginning, and ancient re-emergings tell the story of 2016 at Spirit Mound Cemetery, a mile northeast of Spirit Mound.

The only tree within the pioneer burial enclosure, a stately Scotch Pine which had stood vigil among the graves at Spirit Mound Cemetery for at least the past century, began dying in 2012 from a probable pinewood nematode infestation. Its bones continue to stand for now, as architecturally stunning perches for multiple bird species and other creatures.

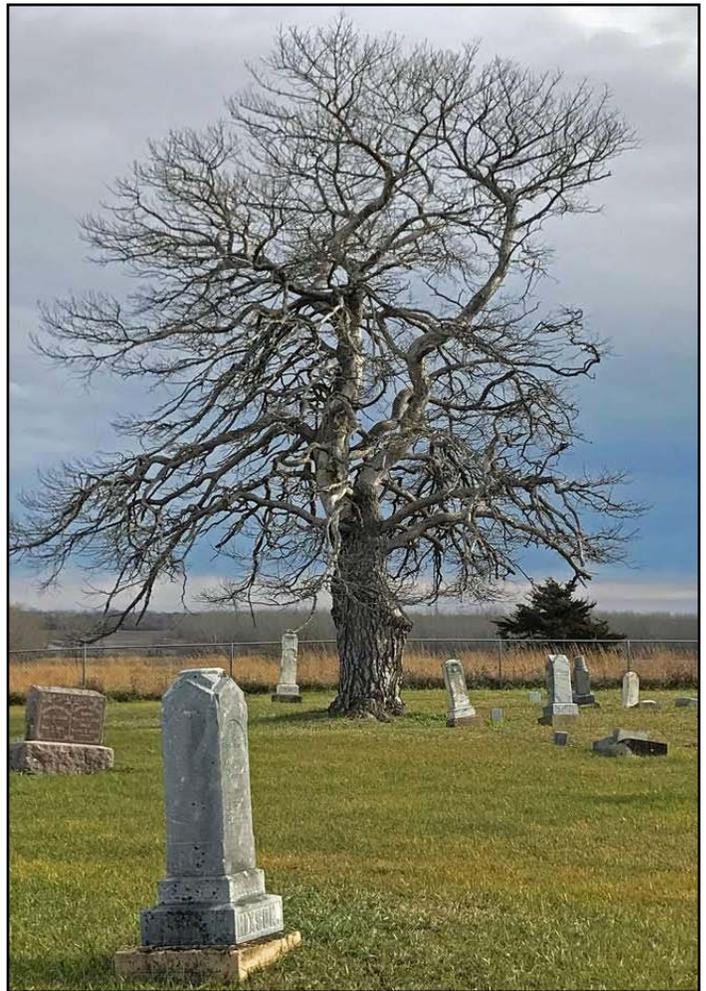
In honor of that beloved tree, we decided to carry on the tradition of the lone-tree by planting one native to the prairie. And so, on May 5th, Clarence and Sandy Peterson, with their shovels, landscape mesh and fencing, and Cindy Kirkeby, Mark Wetmore and I helped in planting a sturdy little Cottonwood seedling in the southeast corner of the pioneer enclosure with a clear sight-line to Spirit Mound itself. With weekly waterings over the summer, the hardy sprout entered December as a thriving young sapling. We wish it healthy growth for the next century.

It is our hope to develop some sort of seating area near the Cottonwood to further tie Spirit Mound with Spirit Mound Cemetery and to provide a resting place to watch the myriad birds observed still using the Scotch Pine as a prairie perch.

The burial enclosure was lovingly mowed and weed-wacked again this year by Marvin Walz. He also kept a gently winding access pathway open from the gate on the road to the gate at the pioneer enclosure and provided and tended the American flag.

We continue to be happy with the progress that native grasses, and some forbs, are making to re-emerge in the areas east and north of the pioneer burial enclosure. Evidently big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, side oats gramma, and prairie dropseed were already present, but just mightily suppressed by the brome. Mark's annual June mowing is doing wonders to allow them to show themselves in some profusion. Plans are to increase the area mowed, and perhaps experiment with limited areas of glyphosate treatment in very early spring to further suppress the brome, without harming native species.

A pair of bluebirds raised a family in one of Mark's bluebird houses again this spring! They may return in 2017. We invite you to visit the little pioneer cemetery with its reviving prairie. You'll enjoy the serenity and the view from the bluff overlooking the Vermillion River on 463rd Ave. between 311th Street and 310th Street in Spirit Mound Township.



*The remains of the century old scotch pine*

*Photo by Nancy Carlson*



*Mark Wetmore, Sandy Peterson, Cindy Kirkeby and Clarence Peterson at the Cemetery*

*Photo by Nancy Carlson*

*Only Spirit Mound Trust membership fees or donations that are specifically directed towards the cemetery effort are used there. All undesignated funds are reserved for the Mound site. Please remember if you wish to help the cemetery restoration, funds must be specified accordingly.*

## Viewing the year continued from page one

We are still waiting for the results of the soil analysis in the feedlot area. If the soil chemistry has improved, the soybeans grown there last year will be replaced with prairie species. In the spring of 2015 the creek side, 10-acre Monarch Meadows tract was seeded (see 2015 newsletter). Just as soil chemistry, plants and manmade structures change, so do the humans who help with prairie restoration.

I am happy to announce that Meghann Jarchow, an experienced prairie researcher, is Spirit Mound Trust's new Vice President. She is an assistant professor in the biology department at the University of South Dakota. Happily, Mark Wetmore who previously held both the Vice President and Treasurer positions will continue as our Treasurer. Our new board member is Molly Rozum, an associate professor in the USD history department. Among her research interests is the environmental

history of the Great Plains.

Alice Alexandrescu, our part time Mound caretaker, has moved from Vermillion. Fortunately, Clarence and Sandy Pederson were willing to serve as new caretakers, helping in our battle with thorny thistles and other invasive plants. The storage shed previously called the "Alice Palace" is now known as "Clarence's Castle." On hot days Clarence refers to it as "Sandy's Sauna." The Pedersons are retired educators, history buffs and conservationists who enjoy working outdoors and meeting the diverse visitors at the Mound (see accompanying article). We are very lucky to add them to our restoration team.

During the coming year, our team will be busy working with Jason Bauman, the park Supervisor, developing plans for our dream prairie, one that is beautiful, diverse in fauna and flora, and rich in historic significance. Thank you for helping us pursue this dream.

# Changes Coming to Spirit Mound in 2017

By Jason Baumann, District 8 Park Supervisor

Even though Spirit Mound is an historic place, some changes in 2017 will be providing this location with new additions and some long awaited reconstruction. Much work has been done by the Spirit Mound Trust board and past park personnel to get the prairie looking as great as it is. I hope that over the next five years we will be able to finish much of the work that has been started and move into a maintenance mode as the prairie reconstruction comes to an end and other facilities are constructed.

## Natural Resource Work:

Currently there are four natural resource projects in the works at the Mound:

1. Monarch Meadows is a nearly ten-acre plot on the west side of the Mound that was planted to pollinator plot mix picked by local experts. This site threw us some challenges with weed control and flooding issues along the creek. The standing water on parts of the site may have set us back a year, but plans are in the works to rejuvenate the site. Members of the Spirit Mound Trust board, Game Fish and Parks and prairie experts from Nebraska met on site last fall to formulate a game plan. More work will

be done to establish these ten acres as a pollinator plot.

2. Rehabilitation east of the Mound: One of the most frequently asked questions I get when I talk to people about the Mound is, "What's up with that bean field?" Well hopefully 2016 was the last year any of us will hear that. Soil samples have been taken and we are waiting for the test results. Our hope is that after three years of corn and this last year in beans (a better seed bed for planting with a drill), the site will be rehabilitated enough to get some native grass stands going. The company that is doing the actual soil test will recommend grass and forb types that would do well in the soil to give us a place to start. I look forward to the day I can stand on top of the mound, look east as Lewis and Clark did and see only native grasses and forbs.

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You're looking at the early stages of a



# POLLINATOR PLOT

Once established, this field will contain a variety of wildflowers and native grasses, providing food and habitat for numerous pollinators such as bees, butterflies and birds. Pollinators provide the essential task of transporting pollen between flowers, allowing plants to make seeds, grow fruits and reproduce.

The diverse mix of flowering plants especially benefits the pheasant population. The plants attract a variety of insects which pheasant chicks rely on for food. They also provide ample brood cover, shielding chicks from avian predators.



## Changes Coming in 2017 continued

3. Mowing: Some of you may have noticed that some mowing took place at the Mound in late fall. The plots mowed on the west side will serve as fire breaks next spring. Currently GFP staff are writing a five-year burn plan for the Mound to aid in the reconstruction efforts and the rejuvenation of existing native grass stands. Their plan is to burn selected parcels over the next five years, apply glyphosate to the brome as it sprouts, and drill the area to plant it to native grasses. During the next five years we hope to cover the entire mound site in order to transition into maintenance, instead of reconstruction.

4. The smallest but maybe the most important natural resource project is a one to two acre area just north of the bridge across Spirit Mound Creek. It is an area we are going to manage so that students can come and plant their own prairie seeds. They can come back later and see the flowers of their labor. Hopefully, this will spark their interest in Spirit Mound and in the restoration of native prairies.

## Grounds and Facilities Additions:

For the summer of 2017 five areas of work have been identified.

1. A small picnic shelter is on the agenda for construction. It will be a nice place for individuals and families to stop at to rest or picnic after hiking to the top of the Mound. The shelter will be a great addition to the current facilities, a water fountain and a vault toilet, and it will encourage people to stay longer and enjoy the peaceful setting of the prairie and the view of the Mound.



2. A new bulletin board will be placed in the shelter. This will allow visitors to register where they traveled from, and will allow us to provide information for them, such as announcements of current activities, events and fundraisers. It will also allow us to inform them of current projects around the park so they can keep an eye on our progress.

3. In the effort to assure high maintenance, the trail to the Mound will be resurfaced again in 2017. A crushed asphalt layer will be added to the already solid base to keep the trail in great condition. As work progresses, the wood trail retainers will be inspected, and any found to be rotted will be replaced.

4. As many of you know, we were saddened by the loss of our bench at the top of the mound. We feared it was lost, and were making plans to replace it. However, after harvest of the bean field, the bench was found and appears to have rolled down the hill into the field. It will be placed back on top of the mound, but this time will be permanently attached to prevent this from happening again.

5. And finally the entrance sign. After a long and hard search, a business has been found to reproduce our broken entrance sign. Avery Brothers in Sioux City has agreed to make the sign, and construction will soon begin. A better support system will be installed in the hope that this sign will last for many years to come.

With so many projects planned for Spirit Mound Historic Prairie in 2017, it will be fun to see the many positive changes to such a historic place. Through the additions and natural resource work, I hope to grab local and area interest, bringing more people out to this wonderful place that we all love so we can share it with them.

## A Spirit Mound Pioneer Passes On

We have lost another of Spirit Mound's pioneer daughters this year. Elizabeth "Betty" (Piersol) Torkildson was born the daughter of Martin and Helen (Engman) Piersol, December 7th, 1918, just southwest of Spirit Mound; and the Mound was a beloved part of her horizon. She loved to spend time at the farm beneath the Mound at the home to her uncle and aunt A. Virgil and Blula May (Engman) McDonald and her cousin Laura Lou McDonald Marsh. Virgil and Blula are buried at Spirit Mound Cemetery and Laura Lou's deeded interest in the Piersol farm is now part of the Spirit Mound Historic Prairie. Betty Piersol attended Spirit Mound School and graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1940. She left the area, married Robert Torkildson, and raised a lovely family. Betty passed away June 26th at the age of 97. And so the circle of those original pioneer families continues to get smaller.

## Spirit Mound Trust's Board of Directors:

James Heisinger (President)  
Meghann Jarchow (Vice President)  
Mark Wetmore (Treasurer)  
Norma Wilson (Newsletter Editor)  
Paulette Wipf (Newsletter Format Editor)  
Tim Cowman (Web Editor)  
Dianne Blankenship, Brian Hazlett,  
Nancy Carlsen, Jim Peterson,  
Clarence and Sandy Pederson, Mound Caretakers

**Spirit Mound Trust**  
P.O. Box 603  
Vermillion, SD 57069

# Support the Mound

Spirit Mound Trust membership is \$10 per year. Additional donations, as well as the purchase of Bird Pins and the Ron Backer prints are welcome. All donations are tax deductible. Your support helps to develop a better, more diverse historic prairie and fund other programs to make the Mound a more interesting place to visit. Our address is P.O. Box 603, Vermillion, SD 57069. If you live in the Vermillion area and would like to avoid shipping charges on the pins, send an email to [info@spiritmound.org](mailto:info@spiritmound.org) to make arrangements.\*

## Spirit Mound Historic Prairie Membership Renewal and Order Form

*Spirit Mound Trust membership is \$10 per year. Additional donations are welcome, and all are tax deductible. Your support helps to develop a better, more diverse historic prairie and fund other programs to make the Mound a more interesting place to visit. If you live in the Vermillion area and want to avoid shipping charges on the pins, send an email to: [info@spiritmound.org](mailto:info@spiritmound.org) to make arrangements.\* Please join us:*

Please add my name to the 2017 membership rolls of the **Lewis and Clark Spirit Mound Trust**. I enclosed my check for \$10 (tax deductible\*). Members will receive our newsletter. Additional contributions are welcome.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/email (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Tax exempt 501 (c) (3) organization (No 93-0921345)

Please send me the following:

\_\_\_ Ron Backer print \$100 ea \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ 2016 Bobolink Pin \$10 ea \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ 2017 Harrier Pin \$10 ea \$ \_\_\_\_\_

+ \$4 shipping for 1 pin / \$5 for 2 pins

Shipping on pins \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership \$10 form on the left \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

REMIT TO:

**SPIRIT MOUND TRUST**

P. O. Box 603  
Vermillion, SD 57069

*Thank  
You!*