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Legacy Grant Awarded to Research Boys Totem Town Land for Historical Significance

[SAINT PAUL, MN, September 29, 2020] A Minnesota Historical Society [Legacy Grant](#) has been awarded to research a 72 acre site in the Highwood Hills neighborhood of St Paul (formerly Boys Totem Town or BTT, a juvenile detention center) - much of which is a degraded [Oak Savanna](#) that has been left practically undisturbed. This site is just up the bluffs from historical [Kaposia Village](#) and just south of the sacred [Dakota Burial Mounds](#) and [Wakan Tipi](#). The big question is “What will they find?”

There is evidence from the site itself and surrounding areas that this site could hold a link to history for Dakota People. "A huge part of the work we are doing now is focused on reconnecting Dakota people to their lands, sacred sites, and burial sites in the city. This opportunity to explore 72 acres of mostly undeveloped land here is a rare gift, we are so grateful for the opportunity," states Maggie Lorenz of the Lower Phalen Creek Project.

The \$9,980 grant was awarded to local nonprofit [Lower Phalen Creek Project](#) who is working in conjunction with community group [Boys Totem Town Land Preservation Group](#). The property owner, [Ramsey County](#), will provide access to the site for the research. Initial work funded by the grant will be completed by the [106 Group](#), a cultural resource consulting firm, to better understand the landscape, land use, history, and significance of the site. A resulting report summarizing the site’s cultural, historical and environmental significance will inform preservation needs and suggest development options. If findings support it, the report will serve as the foundation for further study of the area and planning how this site can connect with the larger [East Side River District](#) project of the Great River Passage initiative in the City of St. Paul and other Dakota sites located within the area, such as Wakan Tipi.

This research is especially important in our current cultural climate that stresses the acknowledgement of all cultures and their importance for and in our society. The two major peoples that have had an historical impact on this land and been impacted by it need to be acknowledged and celebrated - Dakota People, who have belonged to this land since time immemorial, and African Americans in respect to their youth being over-represented at the Juvenile Justice Center that operated on this land after the Dakota Exile, from 1913 until 2019.

The Lower Phalen Creek Project and the Boys Totem Town Land Preservation Group hope the results of this study will inform future development and use of this site, development of interpretive features (e.g. interpretive center and/or outdoor interpretive features) and honor the past and educate visitors about the history of the area that is now St. Paul. The site is host to stories beginning with the pre-European landscape and natural environment, to Dakota life and culture, to farming, to the century of use as a juvenile detention center and through to the current changes in the juvenile criminal justice system which is marked by the closure of Boys Totem Town. There are rich stories to be told of this unique and largely undeveloped site in the Capital city; a place where so much has happened through history and so much remains of the native landscape.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Maggie or Patty.

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