



The
Legend
of

Hole
in the
Day

by **Mary Warner**

The Legend of Hole in the Day

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Cover photo: View of Hole in the Day Bluff north of Little Falls, MN. Photo donated to the Morrison County Historical Society in 1979 by Valentine Kasparek. Photo c. 1939.

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The Legend

I first heard the Legend of Hole in the Day from my father when I was a young girl. It goes something like this: So long as no one disturbs Chief Hole in the Day's grave on the bluff north of town, Little Falls will be spared from tornados and other severe weather. What's amazing about this legend is its persistence across time. If it were a YouTube video, it would be considered viral because of how often it has been shared, yet the sharing of this legend has been occurring for generations, not the mere months of a popular online video.

Few locals are unaware of the legend and those who know it are remarkably consistent in their transmission of it. Chief Hole in the Day is always the protector; the grave is always on the bluff and is not to be disturbed; Little Falls is always the place that enjoys protected status. The one part that tends to be a little fuzzy is the sort of weather the Chief is supposed to ward off. Tornados are always included, but people aren't certain about other forms of severe weather. Periodically, someone might include a statement about how the Chief made this proclamation on his death bed.

Through my years with the Morrison County Historical Society, I became suspicious of the legend because I couldn't find conclusive confirmation of its source (aside from the obvious doubt that no one, living or dead, seems to be able to predict the weather, let alone control it). As I had never done comprehensive research on the legend, I couldn't be sure there wasn't some source, however obscure, that would give me the historical foundation I needed to be able to discuss it with visitors. My years of curiosity finally got the better of me and in June 2010, I set to work on thoroughly examining the legend.

Taking Inspiration from the *Mythbusters*

Before digging into the resources on file at The Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum, I needed a strategy for studying the legend. I was well aware of the likelihood that I might end up deflating a cherished piece of local

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history, rather than affirming it, so I wanted to be as complete as possible in my inquiry and remain open to whatever the research turned up. To that end, I adopted the mindset of the *Mythbusters*, Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage.

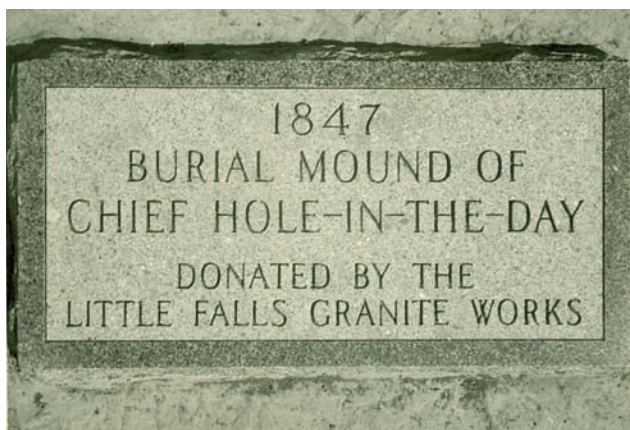
Mythbusters, for those who've never heard of it and for readers 150 years hence, is

a television show on the Discovery Channel. During the show, the hosts and their various co-hosts, set up experiments to prove or disprove urban legends. Prior to running their experiments, they discuss what conditions they need to create to properly investigate each legend.

Performing an experiment to prove or disprove the Legend of Hole in the Day was not an option because it would mean desecrating a grave to see if bad weather followed. The *Mythbusters* would never go so far as to put human beings into definitively life-threatening situations. They have Buster, the crash-test dummy, for that, and use extensive safety precautions for human testing. Nor would they use artifacts with priceless historic value for their experiments. Disturbing a grave for *any* reason, let alone merely to prove a local legend, is a serious violation of the wishes of the deceased and the emotions of their families, along with potentially destroying part of history. Further, disturbing an Ojibwe grave would be a violation of the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Instead, I devised a series of questions to which I would seek answers within the historic record.

1) Is Chief Hole in the Day's grave located where tradition says it is? Is the Chief actually buried there?



Grave marker of Chief Hole in the Day I. This marker was placed on the bluff by the Morrison County Historical Society and Little Falls Granite Works in 1938. Photo dated August 4, 1939.

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2) Is there any confirmation in the historic record that the Chief made a death bed proclamation about protecting Little Falls from tornados or severe weather?

3) What is the definition of bad weather in relation to the legend? Is it limited to tornados, or does it include other severe weather events?

4) Has the grave ever been disturbed and, if so, was this event followed by severe weather? (With this question, even if answered in the affirmative, we have to remember that correlation does not equal causation.)

5) If the legend didn't come from a confirmed death bed proclamation, when and how did it arise?

6) Does the legend appear within the oral tradition of Hole in the Day's tribe and/or descendents, or is it limited to the oral tradition of the citizens of Little Falls?

Chief Hole in the Day's Obituary

The first thing I needed to do was pin down the date of Hole in the Day's death. There was more than one Hole in the Day within the Ojibwe nation, all of whom were fairly concurrent with each other. There was Chief Hole in the Day I, whose Ojibwe name was Pugona-geshig in one traditional spelling or Bagone'giizhig in the modern spelling. Bagone'giizhig translates as "make a hole in the sky." (1) Hole in the Day II was the son of Chief Hole in the Day I and took over the chieftainship when his father died. His Ojibwe name was Kwiwisens, which translates as "boy." (The modern spelling is Gwiiwizens.) There was another Hole in the Day, nicknamed "Old Bug," who was involved in the 1898 Battle of Sugar Point. (2) The legend concerns the first Hole in the Day, although his son played a tangential role in regards to the gravesite.

Chief Hole in the Day I was born around 1800. He and his brother Strong Ground (Songa-cumig) served as pipebearers for Chief Curly Head (Babesi-kindibay) and were named co-chiefs of Curly Head's band following the signing of the Treaty of 1825 at Prairie du Chien. The men had all been present during the treaty signing, as had the father of Hole in the Day and Strong Ground. Hole in the Day's father and wife and Chief Curly Head became ill on the return trip. All three died from this illness. Before his death, Curly Head passed his chieftainship to Hole in the Day and Strong Ground. (3)

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Without going into the details of his life, suffice it to say that Hole in the Day was considered a charismatic and influential chief during his remaining twenty-two years, signing several treaties on behalf of his band. He had, in fact, attended a tribal council at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin Territory, in regards to a treaty related to the Winnebago Indians prior to his death in 1847. (4) While many sources mention the year of his death, none indicate a month or day.

Because Minnesota was then part of Wisconsin Territory, and thus lightly populated by European Americans, no newspaper was produced in the central Minnesota region. I thought there wasn't any hope of finding an obituary for Hole in the Day, but in a careful reading of the citations in Mark Diedrich's book *The Chiefs Hole-in-the-Day of the Mississippi Chippewa*, I discovered a possibility. An issue of *The Patriot* newspaper of Prairie du Chien, dated June

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CHIEF'S DEATH

Tuesday, June 8, 1847

HOLE-IN-THE-DAY, the Chippewa Chief, who recently met, in Council, with another tribe at this place, fell from a carriage at few days since, at St. Peters, and broke his neck – killing him instantly. Although somewhat dissipated, he had great power among his people, being one of the highest chiefs in the tribe, and his loss will be regretted, not only by his own race but by the whites, as he has been friendly to our government.

Prairie du Chien Patriot, Prairie du Chien,
Crawford County, Wisconsin Territory

8, 1847, was mentioned as having an account of his death. (5) I *had* to see this newspaper, so I ordered it on microfilm from the University of Wisconsin through inter-library loan. When it arrived, I immediately scrolled past a half-year's worth of papers to June 8 and there it was – a short announcement of Hole in the Day's death.

The article stated that the Chief had recently met in tribal council at Prairie du Chien and on the trip home he “fell from a carriage at [*sic*] few days since, at St. Peters, and broke his neck – killing him instantly.” (6)

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Diedrich's book also cited the May 11, 1847, issue of *The Patriot*, which I turned to next. It contained an account of the tribal council meeting and mentioned Hole in the Day by name, saying that he and two other "Chippewa Indians came down on the steamboat "Argo," their object was to visit the Winnebagoes and have a friendly talk." (7)

Sidetracked by the Argo

Taken together, these articles from *The Patriot* raised a number of questions that weren't on my original list. When I read that Hole in the Day had been in St. Peters, I made the assumption that this was the current city of St. Peter on the Minnesota River. This didn't make sense to me because if he was heading to Prairie du Chien, why would he take such an indirect route, traveling by land to St. Peter and then up the Minnesota River in order to hook up with the Mississippi River? Why not just travel down the Mississippi?

Further, I was surprised that Hole in the Day and his companions had traveled by steamboat. It had never occurred to me that this mode of transportation was available to them because the Mississippi River in central Minnesota is not navigable by steamboat. I knew nothing about steamboat history in the state and possibly could have ignored this in relation to Hole in the Day's death, but the specificity of the named boat made the clue too tantalizing to drop. Besides, I wanted a full understanding of all circumstances surrounding the Chief's death in case anything cropped up in relation to the legend. It was research on the *Argo* that cleared up the location of St. Peters.

I conducted an online search for the *Argo* first, finding sources that said the steamboat was part of what would become the Galena & Minnesota Packet Company. The *Argo* was apparently the first in the Galena Line and it traveled between Minnesota and Galena, Illinois. It was not a long-lived boat, having been put into service in 1847 and sinking later that year. (8, 9, 10)

A steamboat schedule regularly published in *The Patriot* showed that one of the stops of the *Argo* was St. Peters, which still wasn't making sense to me. Would a steamboat travel up the Mississippi and then down the Minnesota River to St. Peter? It was time to contact historians more knowledgeable about the area. With the help of Ben Leonard, Executive Director of the Nicollet County Historical Society, and David Grabitske, Manager of Outreach Services at the Minnesota Historical Society, I learned that the Minnesota River used to be called St. Peters and the likely steamboat stop would have been at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Peters, near either Fort Snelling or Mendota. The reference to Hole in the Day being at St. Peters

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prior to his death suddenly became clear.

Little Falls Didn't Exist

What can the articles from *The Patriot* tell us about the Legend of Hole in the Day? They don't mention the gravesite or any deathbed proclamation. Later historians say that Hole in the Day made his request to be buried on the bluff during a tribal council meeting, but if he made it at the Prairie du Chien meeting, the newspaper account makes no note of it.

Perhaps the most important contribution these articles make in regards to the legend is their dates. Hole in the Day died between May 11 and June 8 in 1847. Little Falls as a town or village did not exist in 1847. James Green, the first settler at what would become Little Falls, did not take a squatter's claim at the site until 1848. He and his copartners built a dam and sawmill at the waterfall that was the town's namesake between 1848 and 1849.

After Green's untimely death in 1849, his copartners sold the dam and sawmill to William Sturgis, who formed the Little Falls Manufacturing Company with James Fergus and Calvin Tuttle in 1854. Little Falls as a town site was officially platted in 1855. (11) That's eight years after Hole in the Day's death, which means that if he had promised protection from storms, he could not have made such a promise in regards to the city.

While that fact may seem to debunk the legend, there's more to investigate. What if Hole in the Day had been more general about location in his supposed proclamation, referring to what could be seen from the bluff, rather than a specific city?

A 1938 article in the *Little Falls Herald* indicates this possibility. In discussing the placement of a marker at the gravesite by the Little Falls Granite Works and Morrison County Historical Society, the article states that "before he died he expressed the wish to be buried on the Mound so that his spirit could overlook the beautiful valley (Belle Prairie) below." (12) In addition, a Historical Marker and Monument Report, dated January 22, 1942, and created by Valentine Kasperek, first president of the Morrison County Historical Society, says, "Hole-in-the-Day wanted to be buried there so that his "Spirit" could overlook the valley below." (13)

As the investigation into the Legend of Hole in the Day proceeds, let's assume that it relates to the land that is within sight from the top of the bluff, rather than to the city of Little Falls.

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Other Accounts of the Chief's Death

Further research indicates *The Patriot's* account of Hole in the Day's death was not complete. Mary Eastman, author of the book *Dacotah Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling*, which was published in 1849, just two years after Hole in the Day's death, shares this account in her book:

The chief Hole-in-the-Day has been dead some years, and, in one of the public prints, it was stated that he was thrown from his carriage and killed. This was a genteel mode of dying, which cannot, with truth, be attributed to him.

He always deplored the habit of drinking, to which the Indians are so much addicted. In his latter years, however, he could not withstand the temptation; and, on one occasion, being exceedingly drunk, he was put into an oxcart, and being rather restive, was thrown out, and the cart wheel went over him.

Thus died Hole-in-the-Day – one of the most noted Indians of the present day; and his eldest son reigns in his stead. (14)

Nathan Richardson, who knew Hole in the Day II and wrote the first two histories of Morrison County (dated 1876 and 1880), indicates that the Chief's death was not instantaneous:



Val Kasperek, first president of the Morrison County Historical Society, points out the view from Hole in the Day Bluff, August 4, 1939.

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Old Hole-in-the-day, when a boy, resided near Sandy Lake, but after he became a man he resided mostly in Morrison county, generally near the mouth of the Little Elk river. After a brilliant career as a great chief and warrior, he died at the residence of some half-breeds, about two miles north of Little Falls, on the east side of the Mississippi river. At his own request he was buried on a high eminence near by, on the range of bluffs east of the Mississippi river. The high peak where he was buried had been used as a point of look out for Sioux Indians, as it commanded a view of a large extent of country. (15)

The book *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley*, published in 1881, mentions the general location where Hole in the Day fell from his conveyance:

In the spring of 1847, while intoxicated, Hole-in-the-Day fell from a Red River cart, in which he was riding, near Platte River, in Benton County, and died. He was buried upon a high bluff not far distant. (16)

William W. Warren, author of *History of the Ojibway People* and a contemporary of Hole in the Day I, gives further detail about the location of the grave in an article he wrote for the *Minnesota Chronicle and Register* in 1850:

The next and the last visit Hole-in-the-Day made to St. Peters was on his way down to Prairie du Chien, when he went there to invite the Winnebagoes to come and live in his country.

This act, in this chief's eventful life, may, with some propriety, be called the birth of young Minnesota: for events followed close upon it which brought the territory into notice, and has made it what it is, and will be.

Soon after his return from this visit this noble and brave chief died, and the long wished-for scalp (over which, one of the late massacre vindicators, who rails so hard on the memory of the dead chief, would probably, with his Dakotah friends, have been happy to dance the merry scalp dance) was peaceably laid in the grave; for it appears the gods willed it so.

The last resting place of this noble son of nature, Hole-in-the-Day, is on a high hill called the 'Lookout Place' by the Chippewas, between Fort Gaines and Swan river. His grave overlooks a portion of the country from which his prowess in war drove his enemies, and on which the scenes of his various exploits had been enacted. I could say much on the character of this chief, with whom I was intimately acquainted, but have now no time. Endowed with many noble traits, yet he still was not perfect or free from some of the failures of human nature. (17)

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ANOTHER QUESTION CONCERNING THE CHIEF'S DEATH

I have to question whether Hole in the Day was truly intoxicated when he fell from his conveyance. The distance from St. Peters to the Platte River is approximately 105 miles by highway, which would take one-and-a-half to two hours to travel by automobile. Imagine traveling that distance by oxcart or horse-drawn carriage on rough trails. Unless Hole in the Day had been drinking the entire trip, it's not likely that he was still intoxicated. Restive, perhaps, as Mary Eastman said, or hung over, but not drunk. While I don't have the time or resources to test this theory, it is precisely the sort of experiment the *Mythbusters* would tackle.

What These Accounts Tell Us

I purposely sought accounts of Hole in the Day's demise written as close to his death date as possible, written by people who knew him directly or were only one or two degrees removed from the man. We can learn several things from these additional accounts. Later articles regarding Hole in the Day's death indicate he was drunk when he fell from the carriage or cart. (18, 19, 20, 21) We know that Mary Eastman is an early source for this information, as is the *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley*. William Warren may also be alluding to this in his final assessment of the man.

If, as Nathan Richardson indicates, Hole in the Day's death was not immediate, he would have had time to make a death bed proclamation, but notice that not a single one of these early accounts mentions anything about the Chief's spirit protecting the area from tornados or other severe weather. Richardson, does, however, say that Hole in the Day was buried on the bluff at his own request and both William Warren and the *History of the Upper Mississippi* confirm that the bluff "between Fort Gaines [Old Fort Ripley] and Swan river [extinct town a few miles south of Little Falls]" is Hole in the Day's burial site.

While the bluff north of Little Falls is Hole in the Day's confirmed burial place, the exact site of his grave is unknown. There are two high points on the bluff, and the Chief could have been buried on either, or somewhere else

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on the bluff. A grave marker for Hole in the Day sits on the high point that is closest to Highway 371. The current marker replaced the aforementioned one that was originally set there in 1938.

Prior to making arrangements for a marker, Val Kasperek conducted research into the exact location of Hole in the Day's grave. Father Benno Watrin, O.S.B, who "read and wrote the Chippewa language fluently and spent 45 years at Indian missions in northern Minnesota," (22) responded to an inquiry of Kasperek's concerning the location of the grave. In a letter dated June 10, 1937, Watrin told Kasperek:

As I remember the first chief (the father) died in 1847 being hurt at the crossing of Platte River and was then buried on a Bluff or Mound over looking [sic] the Mississippi which is the present "Hole in the day hill" back of the French cemetery.

On visiting the spot, I understood a depression at its summit marked his grave (1925). That some boys years before had dug into the grave for curiosity' [sic] sake which caused the depression.

I know nothing of Mounds there. Old Indian claims he was buried there on a hill but I never ascertained the exact spot with any certainty. (23)

What Does It Mean to Desecrate a Grave?

It's important to note, and perhaps somewhat obvious, that in order to desecrate a grave, one must know where it is located. We can't determine that with any precision for Hole in the Day.

Let's pretend for a moment that the site of the marker is, indeed, the Chief's grave. If we were the *Mythbusters*, we'd need to define our terms. So, what does it mean to desecrate a grave? Digging up the bones or any portion of the interred body surely qualifies. Destroying a grave marker also seems like desecration. What about respectfully visiting the grave? Could that upset the Chief's spirit enough to bring on severe weather?

How close does a disturbance to a grave need to be in order to be considered desecration? Because the bluff is Hole in the Day's final resting place, is the entire bluff considered sacred and, thus, should not be bothered in any way?

Working backward through the historical record, there are a number of events that need to be considered in terms of their potential for being defined as desecration of Hole in the Day's grave.

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Vandalism, Construction, Scattered Bones

The most recent occurred in May 2006. Three men in their 20s destroyed the marker that had been placed on the bluff in 1938 because they wanted to disprove the legend. They were curious to see if a tornado would develop in Little Falls after vandalizing the stone. (24) Note that it was the legend itself that led to the grave desecration. A new stone was placed at the site by the Little Falls Granite Works in August 2007. (25)

Prior to the stone vandalism, residents of Little Falls often cite the construction of the Highway 371 bypass north of town as a grave disturbance because the highway runs beneath the bluff. Many believe the construction caused Hole in the Day to bring a severe flood to Little Falls in 1972. Flooding was so bad that Mayor Kenneth Flolid ordered the highway to be cut to create a drainage ditch to divert the water. (26)

Another desecration has already been touched upon in this article, the one mentioned in Father Benno Watrin's letter, wherein he says, "That some boys years before [1925] had dug into the grave for curiosity' *[sic]* sake which

caused the depression." (27) Provided the boys had found the actual gravesite, this could be considered one of the most direct and severe grave disturbances, except for an incident that occurred much earlier that made the boys' digging an empty exercise.



Grave marker of Chief Hole in the Day I. This marker replaced the original marker, which was destroyed by vandals in 2006. It was placed at the bluff site by the Little Falls Granite Works in 2007.

Photo by Mary Warner, July 16, 2010.

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In 1860, Hole in the Day II chased down a group of Dakota warriors who had dug up his father's grave and supposedly scattered or burned the bones. (28) Notes written by Belle Prairie historian Stella LeBlanc include a story passed down by her aunt, Julia Houle, related to this incident:

Hole-in-the-Day II stopped at Margaret Bisson's home and asked if she had seen some Indians. She said, "yes." When asked which way they went, she told them. Later in the day Hole-in-the-Day's group stopped at the Bisson home. He opened a bloody sack, pulled out three heads and asked if these were the Indians. They were. This was Hole-in-the-Day II's way of avenging the desecration of his father's grave. (29)

Other accounts suggest only one man was beheaded and several were scalped by Hole in the Day II and his warriors. (30, 31)

These incidents need further examination in regards to the legend, which I'll return to shortly, yet there's one more event that has me questioning whether merely visiting the grave could rouse the spirit of Hole in the Day.

Tornado Warning

In the interest of full disclosure, my husband Erik and I visited the site marked as the grave on July 16, 2010, after seeking permission from the land owner, Bruce Geyer. We took pictures of the stone to add to the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. We also snapped photos of the current view from the site in order to see the terrain Hole in the Day's spirit is said to watch over. The following day, there was a tornado warning in Morrison County.

If the legend holds true, my trip to the grave caused the tornado warning, which means that walking up the bluff and viewing the stone is grave desecration. Intuitively, that doesn't seem right. It would mean that every visit to the grave ought to result in severe weather, even the two times at which grave markers were placed.

Before attributing the tornado warning to my visit, it needs to be pointed out that central Minnesota has seen many long stretches of hot, humid weather followed by severe storms this summer. In fact, because of the weather, I have heard the Legend of Hole in the Day invoked more this year than in all of my previous fourteen years at the Historical Society. The city of Wadena suffered major damage due to a tornado on June 17, 2010. (32) On August 14, severe weather downed an extensive number of trees and power lines just

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south of Morrison County, in Rice and at Little Rock Lake. (33) We would have to figure out whether any of these weather events, which also affected Morrison County, were preceded by graveside visits, not an easy thing to prove due to the potential for secretive forays of people sneaking onto private property.

Though there was a tornado warning the day after my visit to the Chief's grave and severe weather throughout the state, no damage was reported within sight range of the bluff. (34)

Further Analysis

Rather than attempt to match the multitude of grave visits with storm events over 163 years, let's return to the four grave disturbances for legend-related analysis.

Did any tornados or severe weather events follow the May 2006 destruction of Hole in the Day's stone? The National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), posts a database of severe weather events online starting from January 1, 1950, through the present. By searching the database for a list of Morrison County weather events, I discovered that Little Falls received hail on May 29, 2006, and again on July 16, 2006. (35) Since hail has never been a weather condition associated with the legend, we can probably disregard these events. On July 31, 2006, Little Falls experienced a thunderstorm wind of 55 knots. (36)

This begs a question. Exactly how long after a grave disturbance are we supposed to wait for the wrath of Hole in the Day to take effect? This thunderstorm wind was two to three months after the vandalism. I'd expect to see a more direct correlation between events in order to consider the possibility of causation. There were no further reports of strong winds or tornados in the Little Falls area in 2006 on the NCDC's database.

The Flood

The 1972 flood is an interesting case. Prior to the actual flood, no one had ever mentioned flooding as part of the legend, only tornados and "killer winds." (37) In fact, the legend was reiterated on July 7, 1972, in the *Little Falls Daily Transcript* in an article concerning an eclipse of the sun:

It was an eclipse of the sun, back in the early 1800s, that gave the name to the famed Indian chief Hole-in-the-Day, who, according to legend, still protects

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*the Little Falls area from tornados and violent storms because the settlers buried him on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, as he had asked before his death. (38)**

***Note: Examination of the historical record by other historians shows that Hole in the Day was not born during an eclipse. The man's life is surrounded by legends.**

Fifteen days after this newspaper article, the flood came. It was the result of a thunderstorm that started Friday, July 22 and "dropped be-

tween six and 14 inches of rain on Morrison County and Central Minnesota Friday and Saturday." (39) Several communities in Morrison County, including Randall, Lastrup, and Royalton, were affected by the storm and flooding, not just Little Falls. Roads were closed and several tornados were spotted in the Randall area. (40) Flood loss was estimated at approximately \$9 million, with eleven counties suffering damage, including "Aitkin, Carlton, Crow Wing, Douglas, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Otter Tail, Pine and Todd." (41) President Nixon declared the flood-damaged areas "a presidential disaster area," which allowed for federal funding to aid in repairs. (42)

Locals eventually attributed the flood to the disturbance of Hole in the Day's grave by construction of the Highway 371 bypass, yet construction never touched the gravesite. In fact, state officials were well aware of the highway's planned distance from the grave long before construction began. A letter from Art Warner, President of the Morrison County Historical Society, to Arch Grahn, Director of Field Services for the Minnesota Historical Society, dated August 7, 1967, mentions that the northbound lane of Highway 371 would pass within 100 to 200 feet of the grave and suggests that the Minnesota Highway Department be contacted about building a recreational turn-off at the site. (43) Highway construction started April 20, 1972, with road surfacing beginning August 8, 1973. The highway officially opened on August 26, 1974. (44)

Efforts were underway as early as 1937 by the Morrison County Historical Society to get Hole in the Day's gravesite marked, with the eventual goal being to "... acquire the "Hills" ... as a state Park or at least the "Mounds." (45, 46) Val Kasperek was hoping to draw tourists to the area by marking historic sites.

While the park never materialized, the bluffs have been used by local ski clubs and significant development has occurred on and around them. There is an active gravel pit southeast of the high peak on which the gravestone sits. A real estate development called Balder Bluffs was surveyed and platted on the

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south slope of the bluffs in 1959 and an industrial park, appropriately called the Chief-Hole-in-the-Day Addition, was platted at the foot of the bluff, just west of Highway 371, by the City of Little Falls in 2002. Both developments garnered



View from Hole in the Day's marked gravesite, looking northwest, July 16, 2010.

Photo by Mary Warner.

newspaper articles because of their proximity to the grave. (47, 48, 49)

If the Highway 371 bypass construction disturbed Hole in the Day's spirit enough to cause a flood in eleven counties, surely the rest of this activity ought to be keeping the area in a constant state of severe weather.

Null and Void

We don't have enough data on the boys' pre-1925 excavation of the grave to properly analyze it in terms of the legend, so we'll turn instead to the 1860 desecration by Dakota warriors. Rather than figure out what storms followed this event, which would be difficult considering recordkeeping of the time, let's look again at the legend itself. Supposedly, so long as the Chief's grave is not disturbed, the land in view of the bluffs will be protected from tornados and severe weather. Yet, according to the historical record, the Chief's grave was not only disturbed in 1860, his bones were disinterred. Wouldn't this act make the Chief's promise null and void from that moment on?

If that is the case, Little Falls and the area around the bluffs should have storms with the same general frequency as any other area in Central

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Minnesota. We can check this by returning to the National Climatic Data Center's online database.

The database can easily be searched by county and type of severe weather. Because the legend mentions tornados and high winds, I selected tornados and thunderstorm winds for Morrison and each of the surrounding counties to see how many of these weather events had been reported between January 1, 1950, and June 30, 2010. Here are the results:

County	Tornados	Thunderstorm Winds
Benton	6	42
Cass	20	113
Crow Wing	22	104
Mille Lacs	13	63
Morrison	20	94
Sherburne	12	84
Stearns	39	165
Todd	15	60
Wadena	13	62

As you can see from the chart, Morrison County has had its share of tornados and thunderstorm winds within the region. The database is not specific as to location within the county until the mid-1990s. Of the twenty tornados reported in Morrison County, one of those was reported in Little Falls in 1999. Ten of the reported thunderstorm winds between 1994 and 2010 were in Little Falls. (50) Because of the lack of specificity, it's likely that a number of the Morrison County storm events prior to the mid-1990s were also in Little Falls.

Origin of the Legend?

After examining various aspects of the Legend of Hole in the Day and finding little evidence to support its validity, the next logical question is "Where did the legend come from?" I wondered if there was any reference to it within Ojibwe culture. To find out, I contacted the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and historical anthropologist Bruce White, who has done extensive research on the Ojibwe and Dakota in Minnesota. Bruce's reaction to my query was that the legend sounded "non-Indian, related to this idea that

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Indian people have some influence on natural forces.” (51) He and staff at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum suggested I contact Dr. Anton Treuer, Professor of Ojibwe at Bemidji State University. Dr. Treuer has written *The Assassination of Hole in the Day*, a book about the death of Hole in the Day II.

I asked Dr. Treuer the following via email: “Is there anything within Ojibwe burial traditions or customs that might have given rise to the legend, perhaps something that might have been misinterpreted?” His response: “Not really.” (52)

So the legend didn’t arise from the Ojibwe and, as we’ve discussed previously in this article, the legend wasn’t mentioned around the time of Hole in the Day’s death. The earliest written account of the legend I’ve been able to find appeared in the Centennial Supplement of the *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, dated June 12, 1948. The article states:

Through the lives of several generations of Little Falls residents the legend has persisted that the city has had no serious tornados nor windstorms because the wishes of the elder Hole-in-the-Day, the Chippewa chief for whom the bluff was named, have been respected.

Hole-in-the-Day is said to have pledged that so long as his final resting place was not disturbed so also would the area his spirit could survey from the bluff be unvisited by devastating winds. (53)

The article indicates that the legend has been around for “several generations,” but without further documentation, we can’t pin down exactly how it started.

Conclusion

At the end of every *Mythbusters* show, the evidence is summarized and the *Mythbusters* make a proclamation on whether a myth is confirmed, plausible or busted. It’s time to make a determination on the Legend of Hole in the Day.

The bluffs north of Little Falls are Hole in the Day’s confirmed burial place, although the exact location of the grave is unknown.

There was no town of Little Falls when Hole in the Day I died in 1847, which indicates the legend arose after his death. The legend does not appear in the written record until 1948, over one hundred years after his death. A further indication that the Chief did not promise to protect the area from severe weather is that none of the earliest accounts of his death mention such

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a promise.

Morrison County and Little Falls do not appear to have suffered fewer severe weather events through time than the surrounding areas. Storm events don't neatly correlate to activity at the marked gravesite. The 2006 destruction of the stone led to no direct severe weather, yet my visit was followed by a tornado warning. There have to have been hundreds of visits to the grave over the years, yet there has not been a corresponding amount of tornado warnings.

Highway construction never touched the marked gravesite, so the eleven-county flood (a much bigger area than indicated in the legend) cannot have been the result of grave desecration. (We do know that Hole in the Day's actual grave was on one of the high points in the bluffs, not along a side or at the base, where construction took place.) If the flood had been a result of disturbance in the bluffs and not the grave itself, all the other development and activity in the bluffs should keep Little Falls in a perpetual state of storm activity.

There is nothing within Ojibwe tradition that suggests the spirits of their ancestors control the weather. That doesn't mean the Ojibwe don't take grave desecration seriously. Hole in the Day II meted out his vengeance against Dakota warriors for digging up his father's grave. Desecration of American Indian graves today is dealt with through the legal system.

An examination of the evidence leads me to conclude that the Legend of Hole in the Day is debunked.

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Please forgive me if I've forgotten you.

Mary Warner
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