This brief report is based on a visit (June 2011) to the Grant County Historical Society facility in Elbow Lake, Grant County, MN by George Holley and Michael Michlovic. The material was on display behind a glass case and thus it was not possible to physically examine the specimens. It is hoped that in the future this could be rectified; however, all artifacts are glued to poster board. Only the ceramics are briefly described and documented.

Lithic tools were quite common comprising a long sequence from Paleo through Late Prehistoric. Knife River flint was about 10-15% of the source used. Obsidian also present. Point types were Plains and Woodland affiliated (for example small Adena points), with Plains examples more common.
The display was erected by William Goetzinger, who worked with Elden Johnson on the identifications. Most of the material appears to derive from the Barrett Lake site 21GR5.

The GLO survey reveals no timber in the vicinity of the site (1861). The site thus lies fully in the prairie, although it is quite near the Lake Forest boundary.

**Ceramic Collection Description**

The pottery sample represents a considerable time span and is important in developing an overall regional sequence for Southwestern Minnesota. Caveats, of course, are not inconsiderable. All artifacts were glued to a board and viewed from behind a glass. I hope to revisit the collection with an aim of filling in the gaps (a few sherds were not quite visible or are problematical) and with hope viewing the collection up close. All of the ceramics appear to be grit-tempered; however, those listed as “Mississippian” may have shell temper. I have included color photos that may help in fully seeing some of these sherds.

Middle Woodland is possibly represented by a few sherds. The most obvious sherd has large diagonally placed stamps on the jar body and is likely a diagnostic for a “Havanoid” time frame. The dentate stamped sherds are another indicator (Figures 2 and 4), however, one may date from Onamia contexts (Figure 4). There is a consistent pattern of finding one of these in a collection (Gillingham site and Briscoe Collection, for example). It is also possible that all of these sherds fit St. Croix Dentate Stamped. I reject the notion that this material dates 600-700 AD and would be more comfortable with 300-500 AD.

The few grooved paddle stamped sherds must be Early Woodland-Middle Woodland (Figure 5). The body shape of the large sherd appears elongated (EW-MW trait, see discussion of Fox Lake below). These are not at all reminiscent of simple stamped body treatments of the Middle Missouri (see below).

Fox Lake Horizontal Cordmarked may be the most common type in the collection (Figure 3). Judging by the vessel shape, I would argue that the horizontal cordmarked vessel is on the cusp of the Middle Woodland-Early Late Woodland, but would not be surprised if they were Early Woodland-Middle Woodland. The shape appears to be a bulbous bag and is atypical for Late Woodland. I do not feel that all examples of trailed over cordmarked (Figure 7) are contemporaneous with the horizontal cordmarked. There is also a problem with taxonomic placement as the horizontal incised pattern (HIP) is quite common in Middle Missouri traditions for a considerable time span (it is also present at Brown’s Valley).

Brainerd Net-impressed (Figure 6) is also well represented and is unlikely to date from Early Woodland times. I believe that what are called Brainerd ceramics span from terminal Middle Woodland to Late Woodland. These sherds, when found in Ottertail and Norman Counties and here, appear to be well made with thin walls.

Onamia dentate stamped (Figure 8) must date somewhere in Late Woodland times. Also of interest is a bar stamped patterned decoration (Figure 9) that is obviously Late Woodland and
overall similar to Iowa examples. This could also be Lake Benton Dentate Stamped. Another unidentified stamped specimen could be part of this as well (Figure 10).

Other examples in the Late Woodland menagerie are Lake Benton, which is well represented (Figure 17) and vague Kathio-Blackduck examples (Figures 14 and 16). The paucity of the latter is intriguing, although there are a handful of bona-fide cordmarked sherds that must date from Late Woodland (Figure 15).

The other bar-stamped sherds are likely Late Woodland (Figure 11), but this technique, especially with smoothed plain surfaces are most decidedly Plains in affiliation. Cord impressions are uncommon at the site and in keeping with this the example (Figure 12) is a bit unusual. Perhaps the reduced presence of cord impressions is due to what I can clearly recognize behind the glass.

Another problematical sherd is the sublabial row of punctuations on a cordmarked surface (Figure 13). I’ve seen examples of this at the Dead River site and Brown’s Valley (although sometimes the surface may be smoothed plain). Given the widespread appearance of this decoration (on Fox Lake vessels, Blackduck, Brainerd, even in far away Canada), I am perplexed as to its temporal provenience, or whether it is a type or a mode.

Cambria is represented by a classic example of a singular (as opposed to interlocking) scroll (Figure 18). This Cahokia-inspired example is the real thing, although the rim (not sure if from same vessel) is a stubby neck with thinned direct lip, which is unusual for Cambria and even the Cambria found in nearby Ottertail County at the Dead River site.

One rim on a well-defined neck (Figure 23) is smoothed over cordmarked and must date from the Terminal Late Woodland period, of which I am sure others are present in this collection. Rim notching for most of the collection appears reduced in frequency as compared with any other collection from the surrounding region. Perhaps this is due to my problems with visibility.

What we have left are ceramics with affiliations to Initial Middle Missouri, Cambria, Middle Missouri, and Northeastern Plains, and possibly Oneota. I can treat these individually. First is an example of simple stamping (Figure 19) that must be Plains-related. There is a plain surface sherd (Figure 21) most likely Late Prehistoric in vintage. One rim is a variant of Great Oasis (Figure 20) that has a “shelved-rim” with cord impressions. A decorated sherd with alternating lines and punctuations is straight out of Oneota-influenced Northeastern Plains (Figure 22), while the cordmarked sherd with a chevron punctuation design that could be Late Woodland as well (Figure 21). One fragmentary rim might be identified as Lake Benton; however, the plain surface and almost S-shape neck are Plains in affiliation (Figure 21). The sherd with small incised chevrons is generically Cambria-Oneota (Figure 20). There is also a well-defined necked jar rim with large interior impressions (Figure 22), a vogue that is typical of the Northeastern Plains. A rim designated as Mississippian may be Oneota, but it appears to be grit-tempered (Figure 24).
Observations and Comments

All collections from Southwest Minnesota reveal a great time depth and a bewildering diversity. I think we can presume that diverse modes/types/wares are coeval, which led Leigh Syms to propose multiple sequential occupations by diverse groups for the Northern Plains. I do not ascribe to this position, it seems clear that we do not at the outset need to think that these ceramics represent successive occupations by Brainerd, Lake Benton (etc.) peoples. Each successive occupation was likely heterogeneous. The problem is identifying what is coeval. And, revealing my bias, with something like Brainerd Net Impressed, what vogues may last multiple units of time.

One of the problems with Minnesota ceramic wares/types is that they tend to bleed and become a polyglot that covers the entire Woodland period – conflating modes, vogues, traditions that are clearly distinct. We can be sure that some of these elements are part of a broader Midwest evolutionary sequence. Why must we ignore this definite sequence? Take the Fox Lake Ware. The 4-5 types of this ware contain the entire Woodland sequence, thus when r-c dates are used that range from 100 BC to 700 AD, one is left with only one resort – punt. There is no stated reason why these diverse surface finishes and vessel forms should be brought together, except for provenience. I presume this is a residual of the McKern system in Wisconsin and Minnesota that hinders clear thinking.

I could keep picking on the scab that is Minnesota ceramic typology – St. Croix stamped has four likely candidates (http://anthropology.umn.edu/labs/wlnaa/pottery/ware/st_croix.php), all of which should be given separate type names (and NOT LUMPED TOGETHER AS A SINGLE WARE). To wit: a dentate stamp over cordmarked; a patterned dentate stamped over cordmarked; a combed patterned stamped over cordmarked; and a cordwrapped rod stamped on a plain surface. Even if these things were found in one pit, they should still be differentiated.

The only way out of this swamp is to use dates selectively from feature contexts or single-occupation sites. Priority must be given to these instances and not to investigating the conflated lake peninsula site, which are so intriguing to the archaeologist in southwestern Minnesota. We do not need another working of beach deposits with no stratigraphy and a mish-mash of the entire Woodland sequence. A healthy skepticism of r-c dating must also be practiced. For some reason, Midwestern archaeologists tend to believe that r-c dates are sacred, while what lies before them (the ceramic data) is a chimera. We must also focus on tightly-defined regional sequences. Regional differences have been appreciated – Lake Benton versus Blackduck, but such things as Kathio remain a muddle.

To be truthful, there are numerous problems that lie buried in the current Minnesota typology. These are:
1) that the ware concept is relevant (it is not)
2) that sherds found together must be related by ware, time, or style (perhaps, but only by demonstration)
3) that the evolution of the jar form, temper, and surface finish is not relevant, or for that matter any evolutionary sequence (it is relevant)
4) that surrounding sequences (ND, Canada, Wisconsin, Iowa) are not heavily utilized (Minnesota is not unique for the general trends, although see below)
I do concede that Minnesota ceramics are more problematical to resolve than say Illinois ceramics. The entire Minnesota Woodland sequence is analogous to the Middle Woodland period elsewhere, a mystifying diversity that reveals general trends but defies tight typological resolution. This obviously has social and foodways implications, which we should keep firmly in mind, but we must not continue the fruitless conflation in ceramic analysis. Ask simple things of the ceramics at first and worry about the bigger problems later. The simple things are: when does it date and what does it co-occur with. As an initial guide we can use the evolutionary sequence that exists for the Midwest. Note that this sequence will not work for northernmost Minnesota, which is not part of the Midwest.

1. Vessel shape. The evolution is from an elongated bag shape with conoidal base to a globular shape with a well-defined neck.

2. Wall thickness. As a general rule, walls become thinner through time.


4. Surface finish. Smoothed plain surfaces become more common at the end.

Finally, I mentioned above that Minnesota has unique qualities. First, an example of the relevance of a foodways perspective -- rice processing. What if Brainerd Net Impressed, with its unique shape, represented a long-lasting type that was specialized towards rice production? I realize that this question side-steps all I have argued above about trends, but it underscores that the building of a successful ceramic sequence is fraught with problems and that it involves a lot of hard work. A pot made over hundreds of years will look different spatially and temporally, why should we ignore this reality. Second, an example of style underscores the problems in Minnesota archaeology. I can give two examples that were mentioned above. The first is the sublabial row of exterior punctuations. This is widespread and long-lasting. It may be an example of a regional tradition. The second example is the HIP (horizontal incised pattern), which is also long-lasting but has been incorporated into types. I would argue that this too is a regional tradition. Why does Minnesota have so many weird long-lasting regional traditions? I would venture to say that it is the northern influence (Great Lakes region) that is a factor, something that is not a factor in ND or Illinois. Two other related factors are isolation and recidivism. Lastly, it would appear that social factors must be considered. Low population density, with a corresponding impact on social interaction, combined with the lack of commitment to routine cultivation (especially in the north) and leading to the absence of sedentary communities, can also contribute to the confounding nature of Minnesota ceramics.

I would like to thank Mike Michlovic for offering suggestions on these comments.
Figure 1. Middle Woodland Stamped

Rim is stamped, as well as a sublabial register. Principal decoration is a diagonal toothed stamp.
Figure 2. Middle Woodland Fine Dentate Stamp (only 1 sherd)
Figure 3. Fox Lake Cordmarked (horizontal cm with row of punctuations)
Figure 4. Stamped Over Cordmarked (only 1 sherd)
Figure 5. Woodland – Grooved Paddle Stamped
Figure 6. Brainerd Net Impressed
Figure 7. Fox Lake Cordmarked Trailed (and other?).
Figure 8. Onamia Dentate Stamped

Figure 9. Dentate/Stamped. Onamia or St. Croix
Figure 10. Unidentified Patterned Stamped Late Woodland - Lake Benton Dentate?
Figure 11. Bar Stamped – Plains/Late Woodland
Figure 12. Late Woodland Cord Impressed or St. Croix Dentate Stamped??
Figure 13. Late Woodland Punctuated (see Dead River Site and Browns Valley)
Figure 14. Late Woodland Kathio??
Figure 15. Late Woodland Cordmarked
Figure 16. Late Woodland Blackduck-related
Figure 17. Lake Benton
Figure 18. Cambria

Broad incised, single scroll, rounded-angular shoulder. Rim has small neck and thinned lip and may not be the same vessel, although it does have broad incising.
Figure 19. Simple Stamped (Plains-like)
Figure 20. Middle Missouri affinis

Cord impressed, bolstered/shelved rim. Great Oasis-like.
Figure 21. Middle Missouri affinis

S-shape?

Chevron punctuation?

Plain
Figure 22. Northeastern Plains affinis.

Alternating punctuations and incising

Well defined necked jar with discrete interior notching/impressions

Large notching on interior rim
Figure 23. Terminal Late Woodland – Smoothed over cordmarked, well-defined jar neck
Figure 24. Mississippian? (interior jar rim)
Hi George

Not much in the site file, checked in the U of M files and found an inventory of the collection that had been donated to the museum. The inventory was done by Goetzinger, who was instrumental in starting the museum, wrote an article with Elden on the Peterson Burial (21GR4) and also did an inventory or another aceramic site 21GR6. (21GR6 supposedly had a nice fragmentary banner stone that was donated to the museum) Couldn't find any reference to any testing or even a field visit to 21GR5.

Bruce
Early

Early-Middle

Middle
Terminal