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The Davenport Tablets

The Davenport calendar stones are controversial items. They were found in 1877 by Reverend Jacob Gass in a mound in a local archeological site called Cook's Farm. The discovery was immediately and widely published with much speculation of their origin ranging from the Lost Tribes of Israel to the burial of the stones by the Mormons when they were forced to move west.

The Smithsonian Institution, by studying photographs of the stones along with photographs of elephant effigy pipes discovered during the same period, declared the entire group to be fakes. This was published in the Second Annual Report of the U. S. Bureau of Ethnology. Charles E. Putnam, a former Academy president and prominent Davenport attorney, sprang to the defense of Reverend Gass, the Academy and the authenticity of the artifacts. The argument was debated in scientific publications of the day and the Academy's own *Proceedings*. No final decision on the matter was ever made. However in the published *Proceedings* of the Academy, it was noted that two members were expelled from membership for declaring that the stones and pipes had been made in the basement of the building by members and planted in the mounds.

In 1970, Dr. Marshall McKusick, then State Archeologist of Iowa, conducted an exhaustive search of the Museum's archives with the expressed purpose of publishing the complete, true and documented story about the stones and pipes. His conclusions were originally published in 1970 as *The Davenport Conspiracy*. He rewrote the book for a more general audience with the title *The Davenport Conspiracy Revisited*, published in 1991 by Iowa State University Press. McKusick discovered enough documentation to make the conclusion that the three stones and the pipes were indeed made in the Academy basement. He also concluded that the expulsion of the Academy members was done in the heat of emotion without due regard to the facts. The final explanation was that a few academy members salted the mounds with the artifacts so that Reverend Gass would discover them, make great claims about them and then be embarrassed when they would be shown to be fakes. But before the hoax could be completed, the publication of the finds went forward and the perpetrators chose not to embarrass the Academy and themselves.

In 1976, Dr. Barry Fell wrote the book *America B.C.* in which he claims that two of the three stones are of great antiquity dating from the times of Ancient Egypt. Without having seen them in person, he contends that they were buried here by ancient voyagers and contain ancient inscriptions concerning ritual practices. He states that they contain Egyptian, Iberian and Punic languages and symbols and are a key to the translations of these languages. And thus, the controversy resurfaced.

Professional archeologists consider the tablets to be fakes and have shown no interest in even looking at them. In fact, except for Dr. McKusick's research, no recognized person in the field has examined them this century. Dr. Fell's book, on the other hand, has generated great non-professional interest.

And that is the story of the stones. You are welcome to draw your own conclusions.

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