

An Ode to the Riverway.

*Thousands and thousands of years ago, sheets of ice surround the valley,
The ice begins to melt, trickle by trickle a giant lake forms to the north, the ice dam bursts,
A cataclysmic torrent of water cascades south and west and shapes the landscape,
The Sun warms the Earth, plants grow and animals thrive,
PaleoIndians successfully hunt a mastodon,
Death begets Life in the ancient valley.
Who will tell the story of the old ones twenty years from now? I wonder...*

*Twelve millennia pass...
The effigy mound builders are here, the bird people,
Earthworks are created telling profound stories on the land,
Tumuli in the shapes of eagles and hawks, bears, water spirits, and even man,
Linear and conical mounds for the revered dead, calendar mounds to track the sun,
Cave walls speak through art, Red Horn lives on in a secluded coulee,
Who will tell the tales of the mound builders fifty years from now? I wonder...*

*Six more centuries elapse, the new ones arrive...
Marquette & Joliet, Carver and Schoolcraft,
Red Bird and Black Hawk tempt fate and fade into history,
The Ho-Chunk people are removed, but come back and stay,
John Coumbe farms, Henry Dodge rises to power,
John Muir walks along the tracks and cogitates,
Reuben Gold Thwaites floats down the river and pontificates,
Aldo Leopold thinks, Frank Lloyd Wright designs, August Derleth writes,
Who will be the new ones one hundred years from now? I wonder...*

*The twenty first century dawns...
And still, A blue ribbon of water meanders through evanescent, tawny sandbars,
And still, A sparkling river flows past vine clad islands and emerald bound shores,
And still, A full moon rises casting light upon the shimmering, diamond studded stream,
And still, Bottomland forests are heavy with rime, slumbering beneath a blanket of snow,
And still, Majestic bluffs maintain a silent, eternal vigil over the valley below,
What will this landscape and this river look like in the twenty third century? I wonder...*

*A thousand years from this day...
Who will be here to watch in silent adoration as a bald eagle soars overhead, silhouetted against a clear, blue sky,
Who will be here to thrill at the primordial call of the sandhill crane proclaiming spring has arrived,
Who will be here to listen to the susurrus of wind in the trees whispering stories of retrospection,
Who will be here to stand amidst the effigy mounds and contemplate the legacy of those who have gone before,
Who will be here to recognize the powerful spirit of this special place, the valley of the River of a Thousand Isles,
I wonder... I wonder... I wonder...*

*Mark E. Cupp
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