

Castle Rock, Dakota County



IT'S ANYONE'S GUESS how many formations named Castle Rock dot the American landscape, but a cursory search reveals that the name is attached to outcroppings from New York to Wisconsin to California. Most of them don't really resemble castles, but geographic nomenclature does not always inspire feats of the imagination. Castle Rock is also the name given by Steven King to a fictional town in Maine where bad things happen with stunning regularity.

Naturally, Minnesota has a Castle Rock of its own. Actually, there are at least two, including one relatively obscure formation in Winona County. Minnesota's best known Castle Rock, however, is located in Dakota County, not far from the small community of the same name. The rock—an irregular mass of St. Peter sandstone that managed to survive the pulverizing effect of glaciation—is now hidden away in woods on private property, and it's a well-worn nub of its former self.

Before erosion, human mutilation, and a windstorm in 1920 took their toll, the rock was an impressive piece of natural sculpture, rising more than 45 feet above the surrounding prairie, with a picturesque pinnacle balanced precariously atop its broad base. It was well known to the Dakota people of the region, who named it *Inyan bosndata* ("standing rock"). Explorer Joseph Nicollet visited the rock in the 1830s and incorporated it into his famous 1843 *Map of the Hydrographical Basin of the Upper Mississippi*. Later, Newton H.



Winchell and Warren Upham offered a detailed description of the rock, one of several formations of its kind in Dakota County, in their final report on *The Geology of Minnesota*, published in 1888.

Once said to have been visible from 20 miles away, the rock was already a much-visited landmark by 1870, when this photograph was taken. The two men poised on the rock are unidentified, but it's a good

bet they carved their names or initials into the soft white sandstone before moving on, as did many hundreds of others. With so many tourists scrambling about the fragile rock over the years, it's little wonder that the pinnacle eventually collapsed. It's not clear exactly when Castle Rock lost its most spectacular feature, but photographs show that the pinnacle was gone by the 1920s.

—Larry Millett

LARRY MILLETT is a St. Paul historian and mystery novelist. Among his recent books are *Heart of St. Paul: A History of the Pioneer and Endicott Buildings* (Minnesota Museum of American Art, 2016) and *Minnesota's Own: Preserving Our Grand Homes* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014).



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

Students and researchers

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

Teachers

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

About Illustrations

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).