



FIGURE 1. Urban river. Minneapolis skyline over the Mississippi River gorge.

Chapter 8

Settlement and Urban Residential Development

Along the River, 1841-1950

Patrick Nunnally • University of Minnesota

This chapter focuses on the process of urban growth in the MNRRA corridor, examining what towns began where, when and why. It discusses residential settlement patterns but does not detail the commercial and industrial patterns that formed the economic basis for population expansion and contraction.¹ This is not a history of every community, every riverfront neighborhood, along the MNRRA corridor, and it is not an academic urban history. Urban history in the MNRRA corridor is intimately tied to the history presented in foregoing chapters. Geology and geography, the Native American presence, exploration and early military objectives, navigation improvements and economic activities all played a role in determining where towns located, how fast they grew, how they related to the river and how that relation changed over time. The information presented here draws on those stories. (Figure 1.)

Town formation in the MNRRA corridor began soon after settlers came to the upper Mississippi valley in the early 1800s. Between 1820 and 1945 dozens of settlements grew up in the MNRRA corridor. Today, these communities can be understood as having evolved in one of three patterns: towns and cities that formed in the nineteenth century and have endured as distinct urban areas (for example, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Hastings, Anoka, and South St. Paul); nineteenth century settlements that stagnated for a

time and then grew up as suburbs in the expanding metropolitan area (such as Mendota, Fridley, Champlin, and Cottage Grove); and urban areas that formed in the suburban expansion following World War II (for example, Coon Rapids and St. Paul Park).

The present municipalities in the MNRRA corridor are listed in *Table 8.1*, according to the pattern in which they formed. The first column includes cities that established a central economic and population presence in the nineteenth century (all but one, South St. Paul, pre-date the railroad era) and have maintained a distinct downtown commercial district and sense of “municipal place” throughout the twentieth century. The second column includes population centers that reached a peak of regional importance in the nineteenth century, went through a period of stagnation but retain a distinctive “municipal place” in the greater metropolitan region today. Despite their spatial and political independence today, these communities exist largely as suburbs within the larger region. The third column is the most heterogeneous collection. Generally, it includes places that achieved a substantial population and regional presence only after World War II and the subsequent suburban transformation of much of the MNRRA corridor. Most were farming areas, organized as townships. However, this grouping also includes the township of Nininger, which had a brief but memorable life as a distinct community.²

Table 8.1
URBAN CENTERS

Enduring Urban Centers

Anoka
Hastings
Minneapolis
St. Paul
South St. Paul

**19th Century
Population
Centers that are
now suburbs
within the
metropolitan area**

Dayton
Champlin
Cottage Grove
Fridley
Mendota
Newport
Richfield*

**Population Centers that
emerged in the 20th
century (some may have
briefly been population
centers, then declined)**

Brooklyn Center
Brooklyn Park
Coon Rapids
Crystal*
Denmark Township
Grey Cloud Township
Inver Grove Heights
Lilydale
Maplewood
Mendota Heights
Nininger Township
Ravenna Township
Ramsey
Rosemount
St. Paul Park

*Not in MNRRA now.

The formation and development of towns in the MNRRA corridor fits roughly into three periods, defined by transportation modes—river, railroad and automobile—and the concomitant patterns of urban settlement. During the era of river transportation, towns developed at many places throughout the corridor. Between 1841, when St. Paul was established, and 1862, when the railroad connected St. Paul and Minneapolis, there were probably more named towns than at any other time. As railroads expanded, some towns blossomed into railroad hubs and others withered when the railroads bypassed them. During the last four decades of the nineteenth century, both St. Paul and Minneapolis witnessed spectacular population leaps, as they became regional railroad centers. By the end of World War II, railroads had peaked, and automobile use, which had begun as early as the 1920s, boomed in the post-war years. This gave rise to expanded metropolitan

areas that engulfed previous small towns such as Anoka, melding them to the suburban network around Minneapolis and St. Paul. A parallel development is the creation of post-war suburbs on land that had previously been agricultural.

Cities are made up of numerous communities, and St. Paul and Minneapolis have long had communities along their riverfronts. Even as the cities grew in size and area, until they merged into a modern metropolitan region, people lived in small communities along the river. Some of these, such as the Upper Levee and the West Side Flats in St. Paul and the Bohemian Flats area of Minneapolis, were neighborhoods of squatters and others living on the margins of society, in the poorest, most flood prone, and least desirable areas of the riverfront. Other neighborhoods, notably the Highwood section of St. Paul, were designed as picturesque suburbs full of curving streets and with a rail connection to the city. Finally, there are residential areas within the study corridor, such as the Macalester-Groveland/Highland Park neighborhoods in St. Paul, where development has seemingly had little to do with the river.

River Transportation Era (1820-1862)

This section describes the principal population centers during the period that the river dominated transportation and follows with a brief account of settlement patterns in the corridor outside the population centers. The relation of towns to the river varied markedly, depending on their location. Above St. Paul and especially above St. Anthony Falls, the river was not widely used for commercial navigation, although small steamboats plied the river above Minneapolis during the mid to late nineteenth century. Each community, however, depended on the river, whether to transport people, goods, or raw materials, such as lumber. Writing in 1893 about St. Anthony, Isaac Atwater could have been speaking for any community in the region prior to the mid-1860s when he stated, “it is interesting now to recall how the river then dominated the town. It was everything. Every enterprise depended for its vitality on what the river could do for it.”³

The river transportation era in urban development began with the start of construction on Fort Snelling in 1820 and the subsequent founding of the American Fur Company post at Mendota in the 1820s. Traders erected seasonal posts at other locations in the corridor, but it was the mid-1830s before any permanent settlement took root. Prior to 1835, settlements clustered along the river were either military (Fort Snelling) or commercial (the fur post at Mendota). Commercial and military establishments brought people into a relatively confined space, but neither

could be understood as cities. The Treaty of 1837 opened the east bank of the Mississippi, and within five years communities grew up at St. Paul and Cottage Grove. Urban growth received a burst of energy with the founding of St. Paul in 1841.

Settlement concentrated around Fort Snelling and St. Paul until the early 1850s, when a combination of factors led to widespread settlement throughout the corridor. The Treaties at Mendota and Traverse des Sioux in 1851 opened the west bank of the Mississippi to settlement, and the burgeoning steamboat trade brought thousands of settlers annually to Minnesota. As a result, new towns grew up at Anoka (1852), Hastings (1852) and Minneapolis (1854), as did towns that lasted for only a short while (Nininger and Pine Bend, for example). (Figure 2.)

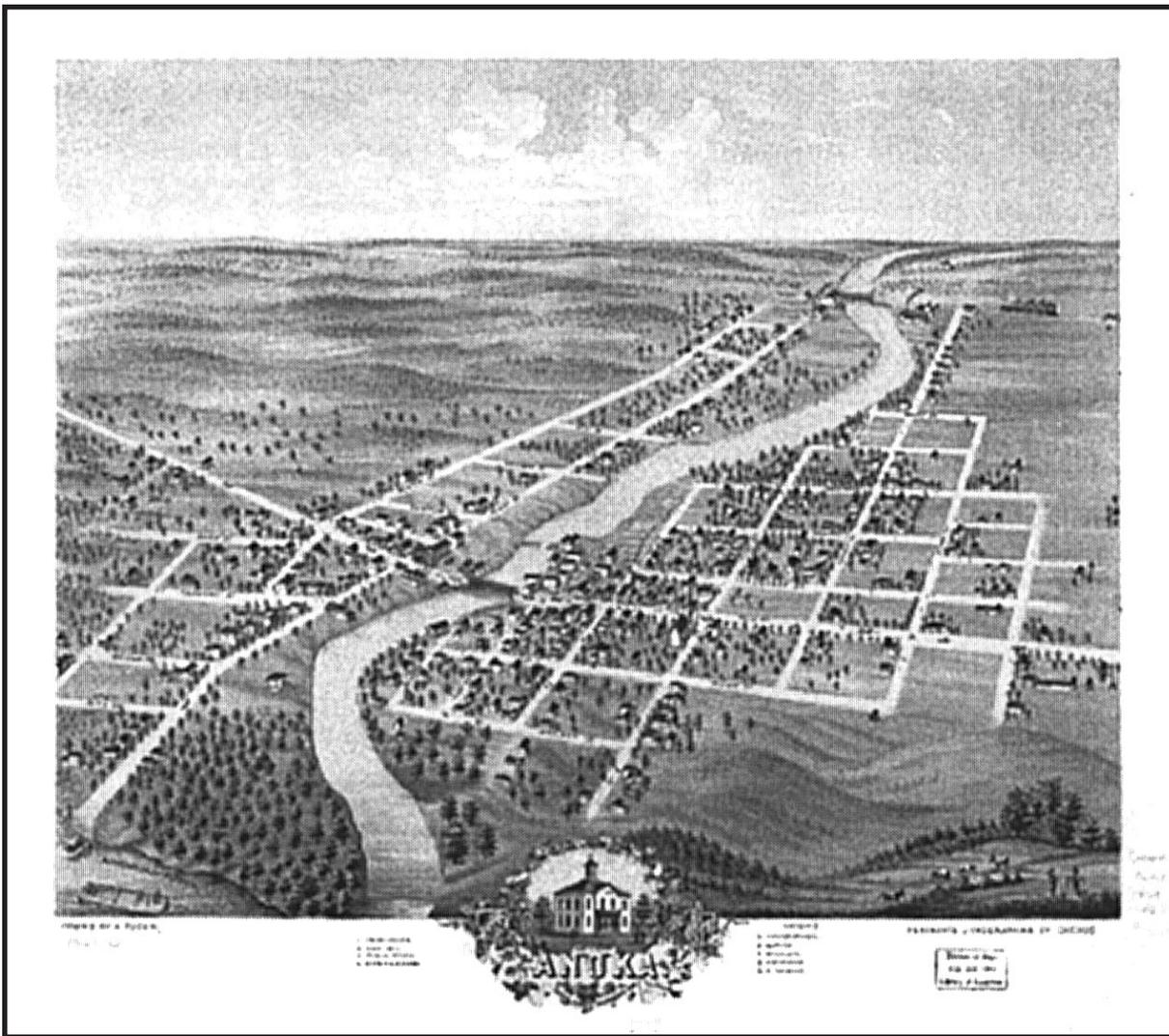


FIGURE 2. Panoramic Map of Anoka, 1869. American Memory Project, Library of Congress.

The Civil War and the Dakota Conflict of 1862 stalled new settlement in the early 1860s, but following the war, the population boomed and railroads spread across the region. The balance of the nineteenth century saw spectacular growth in short bursts within Minneapolis and St. Paul and steady growth throughout the portions of the corridor connected by railroad. Other places, such as the towns of Nininger and Pine Bend in Dakota County, were bypassed by the railroad and, as a consequence, died out by the end of the 1860s.

Throughout the river transportation period, residential settlement in concentrations that could be called urban was tightly focused at particular points along the river. St. Paul's town center ranged for several blocks on either side of the Upper and Lower Landings, but the rest of the present St. Paul riverfront was either unsettled or claimed by isolated farmers. The same pattern essentially held true upriver, with stretches of sparsely settled land separating Minneapolis and St. Anthony from upriver settlements such as Anoka and the cluster around Banfil's Tavern that would eventually become Fridley. These towns, as well as places like Hastings, remained relatively small centers during this period, established where the shore provided some natural amenity.

Much of the shoreline, according to early accounts, either was marshy and unsuitable for settlement or featured high bluffs facing the river. Places where small rivers or creeks joined the Mississippi provided natural settlement spots, as did, of course, the falls at St. Anthony. Concentrations of settlement during this period catered to the new farmers coming into the territory as well as to the lumbermen and traders. The settlements developed more or less according to the natural features of a particular location and the drive and initiative of the town's proprietors.

St. Paul can justly be called the first urban center in the MNRRA corridor. Legitimate settlement could begin only after the Dakota ceded their lands east of the Mississippi in the 1837 treaty. Some pioneers settled as early as the 1830s on sites across from the fort and as far north as the

present Lake Street Bridge area. St. Paul started as a settlement just downstream from Fort Snelling, when officers in charge of that installation cleared it of non-military personnel in 1837. In 1837 and 1838 many of these refugees had settled near a marshy area just downstream from present St. Paul. This collection of domiciles was alternatively named for its topography ("Grand Marais" or Great Marsh) or for its best known inhabitant, Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant, a popular whiskey seller.

By 1841 more intentional settlers had joined the whiskey sellers and refugees from Fort Snelling and other settlements, and the community had moved to the bluff between the upper and lower landing. That same year, Father Lucien Galtier, a Catholic priest who had been sent from the Diocese of Dubuque to minister to the fur traders and growing community in the vicinity of Mendota, established a chapel on the bluff and named it for Saint Paul. The name stuck, and the community grew quickly and assumed regional importance as the closest landing to Fort Snelling, as well as the head of steamboat navigation on the Mississippi. When the Territory of Minnesota was established in 1849, St. Paul was one of three population centers. By the time Minnesota achieved statehood in 1858, it was chosen as the capital over the lumbering center at Stillwater and the milling and waterpower concentration at St. Anthony and Minneapolis.⁴

As St. Paul grew, settlement centered in three distinct areas, each with its own character and economic foundation. The so-called Lower Landing grew up just upstream of the marsh where Trout Creek and Phalen Creek entered the Mississippi. This area was the best natural steamboat landing in the settlement that was located outside the military reservation. The Upper Landing developed less than a mile upstream, below the current Irvine Park neighborhood. John Irvine began cutting timber for steamboats, as he and other settlers engaged in some small-scale shaping of the riverfront in order to create a levee and landing in this vicinity. The third area concentrated along the road that ran over the bluff separating the Upper and Lower Landings. This

road, which became known as Third Street when the town was platted in 1847, became the first commercial center of St. Paul. Bench Street, which snaked down the bluff, and a set of stairs connected Third Street to the Lower Landing.

There were, of course, isolated houses, farms, trading posts, and whiskey shops located throughout the valley. Residential development grew up on the bluff downstream of the Phalen/Trout Creek lowlands as well, with Lyman Dayton establishing early plats on the bluff that still bears his name. All this settlement had visible impact on the landscape, as architectural historian Larry Millett, among others, has noted, “To make room for the growing city, ravines and bottom lands were filled, hills leveled, lakes drained, streams diverted, and bluffs shaved away.”⁵

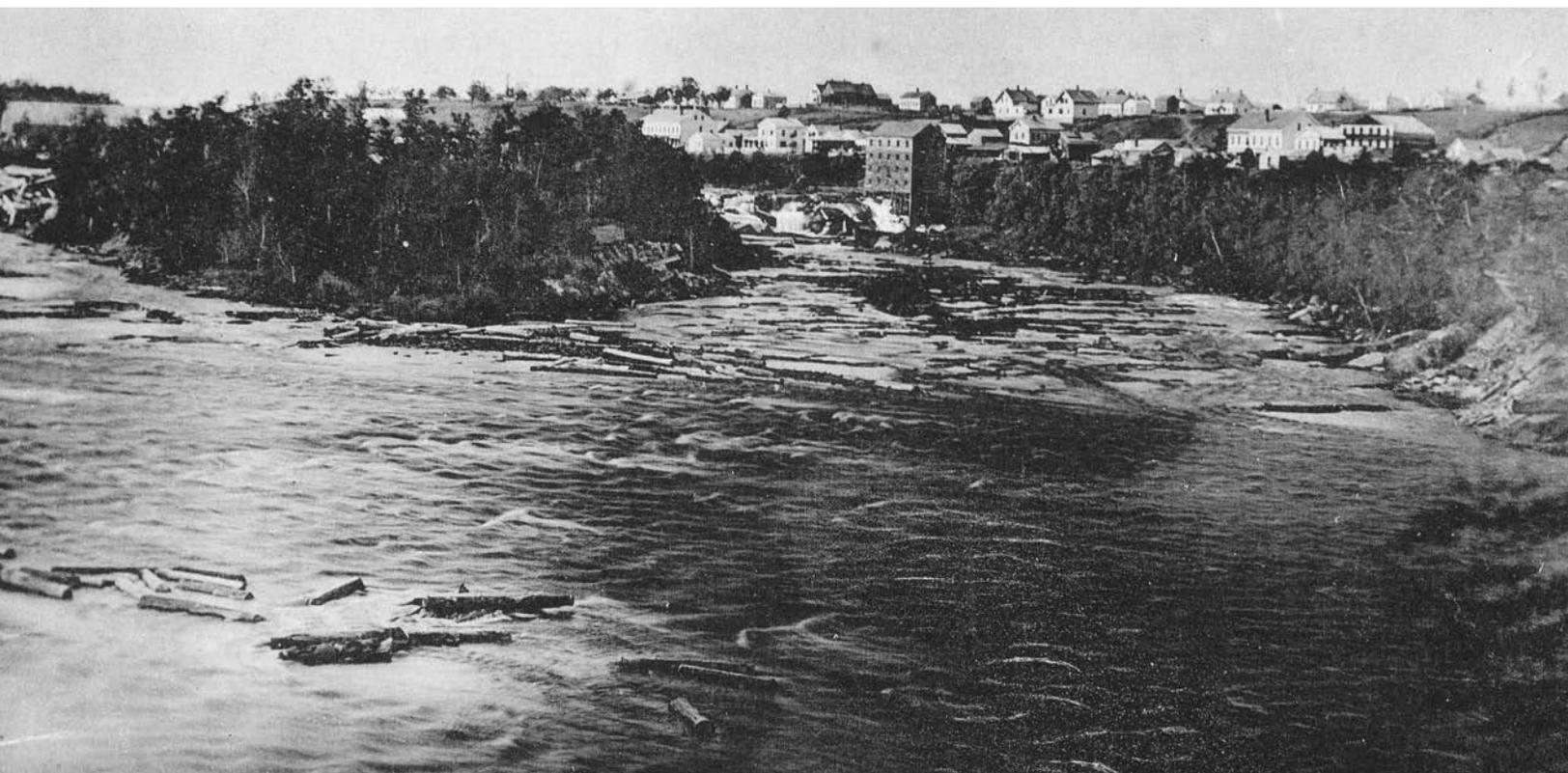
St. Paul was organized as a village on November 1, 1849, and incorporated as a city on March 4, 1854.⁶ As a frontier town at the head of navigation in a rapidly expanding region, St. Paul’s growth was explosive. Contemporary accounts from the middle 1850s document streets swarming with people unloaded from the several steamboats a week that arrived from downriver. Would-be settlers were warned to bring camping supplies, as a room or a house was not to be had for any price in the city. Although St. Paul never became a sawmilling center like Minneapolis or

Stillwater, six sawmills grew up along the St. Paul riverfront to satisfy local needs. The economic contraction of 1857 stopped a period of tremendous growth, as it practically eliminated credit and made the already scarce hard currency more difficult to find. Industry in St. Paul during this period remained in its infancy. No railroads or associated facilities developed during this period, and St. Paul lacked the waterpower to attract industry, as at St. Anthony Falls.

The village of St. Anthony started on the east side of the river, near the sites claimed by Franklin Steele for their industrial potential, as soon as the land was opened to settlement in 1838. A store and sawmill were constructed on the east bank of the river in 1847-1848, and St. Anthony “boomed” with the establishment of the Minnesota Territory in 1849 and the opening of a suspension bridge, in 1855, to the settlement that became Minneapolis.⁷ (Figure 3.)

St. Anthony was incorporated as a city on March 3, 1855, and a township was organized for the surrounding territory on May 11, 1858. The location saw a number of plats and names, however, including St. Anthony Falls Village (platted as part of Ramsey County in 1849 and a part of that county until March 4, 1856), and St. Anthony City, platted in 1848-1849 and more popularly known as “Cheevertown.”⁸ “Cheeverstown,” or “Cheever’s Landing,” was named for William Cheever, a New York native gifted

FIGURE 3. *Village of St. Anthony, 1851, from downstream.* Minnesota Historical Society.



with frontier entrepreneurship and a wry sense of humor. According to Atwater, Cheever acquired land below the University of Minnesota, “where he subsequently erected a farmhouse, and built an observatory on the high bank, over the entrance of which he placed the legend, ‘Pay your dime and climb.’”⁹ Some settlers reached the falls by stagecoach, although some did make it up the gorge on steamboats to Cheever’s Landing.¹⁰ Throughout the 1850s tourists from the South came to the Windsor House in St. Anthony for a respite from the sultry southern summers. It is probable that at least some of these travelers on the “fashionable tour” disembarked at Cheever’s Landing rather than arriving by stage from St. Paul. The place took on a different aspect in winter, when, as Atwater later remembered it, “the Mississippi, its [St. Anthony’s] only medium of connection with the outside world, was a dreary, trackless barrier of ice and snow.”¹¹

Minneapolis was founded by Colonel John H. Stevens, who operated a ferry above St. Anthony Falls. Stevens built the first house west of the Mississippi in this area in 1849. Platting for the town began in 1854, with the town government inaugurated on July 20, 1858. The city was incorporated on March 6, 1866. Among the most notable additions to the city (it did not achieve its present spatial extent until 1927) was the village of St. Anthony on February 28, 1872. The name “Minneapolis,” combining “minne” from the Dakota for “water” and the Greek word “polis” for “city,” apparently first appeared in print in November 1852. Charles Hoag, the reputed originator of the name, took it to George D. Bowman, editor of the St. Anthony Express, who publicized it.¹²

The riverfront in St. Anthony and Minneapolis was a mixture of residential, industrial and commercial land use. Housing appeared on Nicollet Island as early as the 1840s. In later periods, as riverfront land became more valuable, industrial uses crowded out all residential use, except in particularly undesirable areas such as Bohemian Flats. Unless buried by later activities, very little may remain from the earliest decades of development, particularly from

the residential districts that lined the river until the railroads and expanding mills pushed them out.¹³

In 1850 Henry Bailly established Hastings, even though there had been no treaty relinquishing Indian title to land west of the Mississippi. Until the treaty could be ratified by the U.S. Senate (which would not take place until 1852), there could be no legal occupancy except by licensed fur traders. Knowing the potential of this site at the falls of the Vermillion River and its juncture with the Mississippi, Bailly obtained a fur traders’ license and set up a post. The area had been known as “Oliver’s Grove (sometimes erroneously shortened to “Olive Grove”), because Lt. William G. Oliver had stopped here when ice forced him ashore as he ascended the river in the fall of 1819.¹⁴

Once settlement started, the village grew rapidly. The first year of permanent settlement was 1853, and the following year entrepreneurs started a hotel, blacksmith shop, ferry, and established a wharf on the levee for shipping farm products. After its founders drew lots, the town received its name from the middle name of Henry Hastings Sibley, one of the leading citizens of territorial Minnesota. In 1855-1856, milling of flour and lumber began, using the power from the Vermillion River. According to Neill, 1856 marked the high point in this period of rapid growth. Between the opening of navigation and July 1, 73 stone and frame houses were constructed, along with 100 temporary structures. There was certainly the population to fill these buildings; the winter 1855-1856 census counted 1,918 people in Hastings, up from 650 the year before and a twentyfold increase over the 1854 population of about 100.¹⁵ (Figure 4.)

In 1851 settlers established permanent housing and other improvements at Anoka, a former fur trading post near the junction of the Mississippi and Rum Rivers. The name “anoka” apparently derives from a Dakota term for “on both sides” and refers to the settlement’s location on both sides of the Rum River at its junction with the Mississippi.¹⁶ Brothers named Peter and Francis Patoille established a trading post at the point where a 15-foot drop in the Rum necessitated a portage on early trading routes.



FIGURE 4. Hastings, 1850. Minnesota Historical Society.

In 1851 Henry M. Rice and his brother Orrin made permanent improvements, which by 1853 included a store and houses on the river's east side. A dam and sawmill soon followed, and in the mid-1850s the government built a bridge across the Rum. A flour mill was built at Anoka in 1854, and growing mill development throughout the 1860s attracted the attention of Minneapolis miller W. D. Washburn, who bought the complex around 1870.¹⁷

Fridley has one of the more unusual political histories of any town in the corridor. John Banfil, the first state auditor and the first postmaster in this part of the state, established a tavern near the mouth of Rice Creek around 1848. A year later, Henry M. Rice became interested in the site and began farming nearby. The area was originally designated Manomin County by the territorial legislature in 1857. In 1870 residents petitioned to be added to Anoka County as a township, retaining the name Manomin, derived from the Ojibwa term for "wild rice." It received its present name only in 1879, for Abram McCormick Fridley. It remained

largely agricultural throughout this period.¹⁸

The town of Mendota is thought of by some as "the birthplace of Minnesota." Henry Sibley's stone house here, built in 1835, became a gathering place for politicians, artists, scientists, and adventurers. The settlement began as a commercial venture by the American Fur Company's Duncan Campbell, and became the central trading post for the region. Alexis Bailly, Sr., had charge of the post until 1834, when Sibley arrived.¹⁹ As distinctive as Mendota's history to about 1850 is, its subsequent story is less well known. In 1866 the railroad came through town, establishing an alternative transportation mode between the Minnesota River Valley and St. Paul and, for all practical purposes, eliminating Mendota's role as a regional trade center.

Grey Cloud Township lies on the east side of the Mississippi, just south of Cottage Grove. Grey Cloud is an island named for Mahkpia-hoto-win (Grey Cloud Woman), a significant Dakota woman from the fur trade era. Her husband, Hazen Mooers, operated a trading post on the island for a time, and it has been the site of sporadic native settlement and planned cities.²⁰

The city of Nininger, the site of which was in present-day Nininger Township, is one of the most celebrated mid-nineteenth century towns in Minnesota. Nininger attracted considerable attention from investors as far away as Chicago and New York City. The city was platted in 1856 and named for John Nininger, brother-in-law to Governor Alexander Ramsey and friend of the politician, author, and orator Ignatius Donnelly. Nininger and his associates “talked up” the city to the point that it had nearly 1,000 residents when incorporated in 1858. The booming community claimed seven to eight merchants, three to four blacksmiths and wagon shops, a plow factory, a sash and door factory, six saloons, three hotels, a drugstore, a physician and an unusually large assortment of lawyers and real estate dealers. By 1880, however, its population had declined to just 239, a loss attributed in part to the fact that the railroad bypassed the town and took regional growth to other cities (such as Hastings) and partly to the scarcity of hard currency on the frontier. These causes made Nininger only the most spectacular of the “boom and bust” cities in Minnesota’s early years, or, as one writer put it, “The period of Nininger’s founding and growth is an interesting, but not altogether unique, story.”²¹

The historic settlement pattern in Denmark Township, located in Washington County at the juncture of the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers, resembles that of Nininger in some important respects, in that both are the locations of failed early cities. The causes of their demise are substantially the same—failure to attract a rail line and thus keep up with regional transportation patterns—but the particulars are different in important ways. The settlement center for Denmark Township was Point Douglas, settled in 1839

and named for Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, but not formally platted until 10 years later. The post office established at that site in July 1840 was the oldest in Minnesota outside Fort Snelling. The village was an important early regional center “at that time and for a number of years the depot where all supplies were purchased for the interior.”²² Like its downstream neighbor Hastings, Point Douglas became the location of both sawmills and gristmills, a ferry across the Mississippi River, and a hotel. As late as 1881, Point Douglas warehouses still held in excess of 100,000 bushels of grain, but the town did not develop the diverse commercial base that sustained Hastings.²³ Much of the Point Douglas site lies outside MNRRA’s boundary, but archeological and historic research is necessary to determine if a portion lies within the boundary.

Railroad Era (1862-1940s)

The railroad era comes with the emergence and then dominance of the railroad as the transportation system that served the Twin Cities area. After the first railroad line in Minnesota connected St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1862, the new transportation mode quickly expanded and took over the region’s economy and defined its geographic development. The impact of the railroad’s coming can hardly be overstated. It changed both form and function of particular spaces. St. Paul’s Lowertown, for example, transformed from a wealthy residential neighborhood to the city’s warehouse area, as the Lower Landing entered its prime period as a transfer point for goods onto rail cars headed for the prairies. Likewise, railroads filled the valley of Trout and Phalen Creeks to raise the rail bed out of the floodplain and afford trains an easier ascent up the slope north of the river.

As Nininger, bypassed by the railroad, withered and slowly died off as a population center, the rail transportation to Chicago spurred the 1886 creation of South St. Paul as a stockyard town. In fact, the story of South St. Paul may be seen as a microcosm of this period’s developments. Although located on the Mississippi, the river was a secondary factor in the city’s development and transportation network. Cattle

came in and meat went out by rail. Meat processors did, however, employ the river to carry away animal wastes.

At the beginning of the railroad era, the population distribution within the corridor was centered in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Minneapolis in 1865 was home to approximately 4,700 people, while St. Paul's population stood at approximately 13,000.²⁴ The railroad era saw these two cities grow explosively, in a series of "booms" followed by periods of relative stability. Between 1865 and 1880, Minneapolis grew from 4,700 to 47,000, while St. Paul's population tripled to more than 41,000. By 1900, St. Paul had quadrupled again to 163,000, while Minneapolis had grown even faster to 202,000.²⁵

With the establishment of railroads, land uses along urban riverfronts changed dramatically, as industrial and commercial uses replaced residential land uses. In part, this was a matter of economics: riverfront land became too valuable for housing. In part, it was a matter of aesthetics: riverfront land was too close to dangerous and dirty industrial developments for all but the very poorest inhabitants. And, in part, the transition was a measure of the growing centralization of regional transportation patterns on the railroad. By the turn of the century, river navigation (other than timber) had all but ceased, and railroads were carrying passengers and freight from Minneapolis and St. Paul to destinations all over the region.

In addition to altering land use patterns in existing urban areas, the development of rail networks throughout Minnesota served to centralize the population. Hamlets off the rail alignment withered, disappeared or moved to more favorable locations on the new lines. Moreover, the development of shops and other ancillary functions in some cities and towns guaranteed a certain level of employment and economic development. The result was the elimination of numerous small hamlets along the river and the concentration of population and economic resources in fewer places.

Within the city of Minneapolis, river-oriented residential development concentrated in three areas and emerged at different times. The "Gateway Residential Complex" at the

west end of the Hennepin Avenue Bridge grew up with the emergence of Minneapolis in the 1850s.²⁶ It was moved out by the 1880s, as railroads and other industrial land uses came to dominate the riverfront at the falls. Joseph Stipanovich has written that Poles lived along the riverfront in northeast Minneapolis and that residential districts emerged along the river in north Minneapolis, as workers moved close to their places of employment in the sawmills.²⁷

The most romanticized community along the riverfront in Minneapolis was "Bohemian Flats," located on the river bottom flats below the University of Minnesota West Bank campus (*Figure 6, following page*). The flats community emerged in the 1880s and existed until the city cleared the land of residences in the early 1930s. Many in this neighborhood subsisted on wages earned at nearby breweries, liberally supplemented by gathering lumber and logs that had washed over the falls from the dozens of sawmills upstream (*Figure 5*). According to Millett, a skilled gatherer could pull in as much as 300 cords of wood in a good year.

Although termed "bohemian," in fact, people of many nationalities lived in the small collection of wooden houses

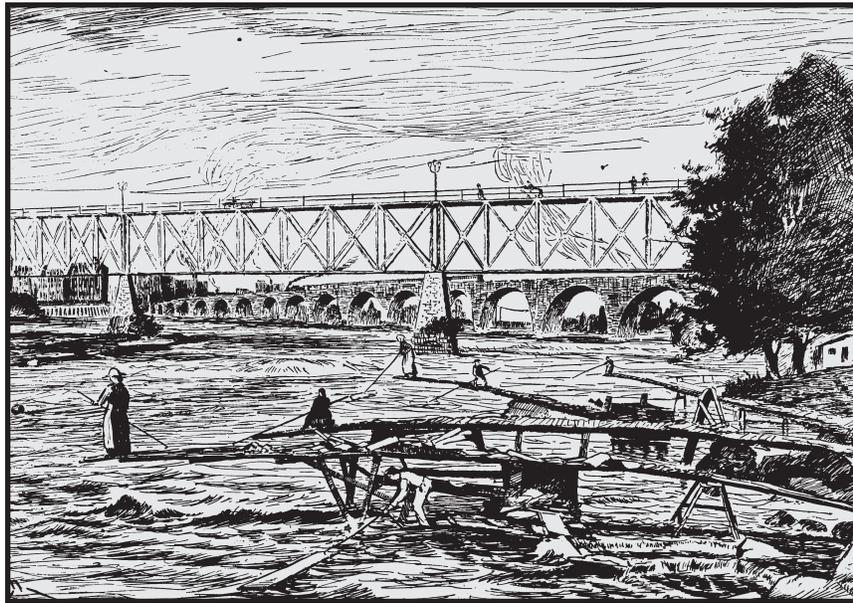


FIGURE 5. *Gathering wood at Bohemian Flats, 1887. Minnesota Historical Society.*





along dirt streets running parallel to the river. Regular spring floods kept investment in larger buildings to a minimum, although the flats still boasted a church, a store and other nonresidential buildings. The St. Anthony Water Power Company owned the land at Bohemian Flats and in the 1880s rented house lots for \$12 per year.²⁸

With 1,200 people by 1900, Bohemian Flats probably ranked as the largest river flats settlement in the MNRRA corridor, including the Italian neighborhood on the Upper Levee in St. Paul and the community of, first, Jewish and, later, Latin American residents on St. Paul's West Side. All these communities shared a common history and spatial arrangement. Home to the poorest and most recent of the area's immigrant populations, they typically featured small wooden houses, board fences, cows, some stores, saloons, perhaps a brick apartment building (where investors felt the floods would not harm them) and quite often a church. The river flats settlements grew most rapidly during the regional population and economic boom of the 1880s. By and large, these settlements disappeared with various urban renewal schemes after World War II. Minneapolis cleared most of Bohemian Flats during the 1930s, when it began plans for a municipal barge docking facility on the site. Not until 1963, however, did the last resident vacate the flats, allowing it to become a coal terminal.²⁹

The railroad period saw a mixed pattern of residential development away from the downtown center in Minneapolis. For the most part, however, the riverfront upstream from St. Anthony Falls was industrialized by the 1890s.³⁰ Rising land prices pushed out even prosperous owners with large houses. Immediately around the falls, the land use conversion was total. Nicollet Island became the site of fashionable homes beginning in the 1870s, but gradually the island became separated into distinct industrial, commercial, and residential zones. Industrial development completely replaced the large houses along the bluffs on the river's west side, just below the falls, by the 1880s.³¹

FIGURE 6. Bohemian Flats, 1880. Minnesota Historical Society.

Further downstream from the falls, residential development assumed a middle class look. Beginning in the 1880s, at the suggestion of the renowned landscape architect H.W.S. Cleveland, the Minneapolis Park Board began buying tracts of land along the river between Riverside Park (near the present University of Minnesota West Bank campus) and Minnehaha Park to the south.³² The presence of parkland, coupled with the topographical pattern that put the river at the bottom of a 100-foot gorge, helped create an attractive neighborhood. This area, comprising the present Seward, Longfellow, and Cedar-Riverside neighborhoods on the west side of the river, remains poorly understood in terms of its precise historical development.

A number of distinct river communities also developed within St. Paul during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Upper Levee and West Side Flats both solidified and expanded during this period, as earlier scattered settlement saw a large population influx in the 1880s (Figure 7).³³ Both of these communities originated as squatter settlements on land unattractive to anyone who could afford to live elsewhere. In contrast, the Donnelley atlas of 1892 shows platted subdivisions in the Highwood area, with curving streets indicating either a steep bluff or an intent for a picturesque suburban enclave. Although full development of Highwood would only come after World War II, its origins as a settlement began as a railroad-era amenity suburb that took advantage of the views offered from the bluffs south of downtown St. Paul and from the Daytons Bluff neighborhood.³⁴ Farther north along the river in St. Paul, near the border with Minneapolis, the Merriam Park neighborhood became established. Like Highwood and Reserve Township immediately to the south, Merriam Park was annexed by the city in 1887, bringing St. Paul approximately to its current spatial extent. Reserve Township, currently the St. Paul neighborhoods of Macalester-Groveland and Highland Park, was organized in 1858 but remained largely farmland until the 1950s.³⁵

Writing in 1875, St. Paul historian J. Fletcher Williams summarized St. Paul's evolving relation to the

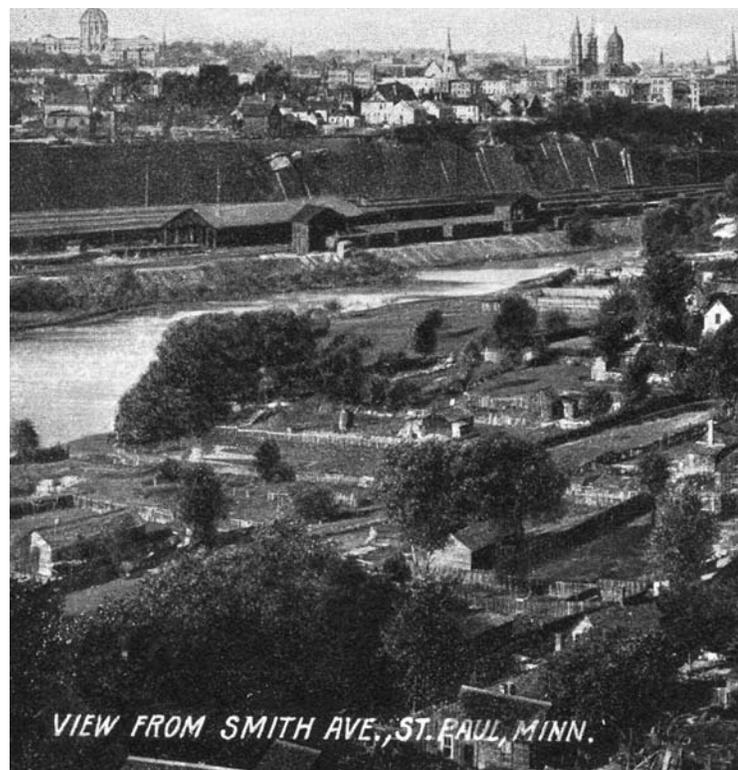


FIGURE 7. Little Italy on the Upper Levee, St. Paul, 1908. Minnesota Historical Society.

river: “of late years, the opening of navigation has ceased to be of any importance or interest. Our railroads have changed all that.” St. Paul early established a rail connection to the Minnesota River valley and from there to the opening wheat fields of the Red River Valley and the Dakotas.³⁶ This period saw other changes in St. Paul's relation to the river as well. Dr. Justus Ohage purchased Harriet Island (government lot 6) from 20 landowners and conveyed it to the city in 1900 for public recreation. At Harriet Island's opening on June 9, 1900, the 40-acre island had paths, two pavilions, and a bathhouse. In 1929 the island and its facilities were transferred to the St. Paul Parks Department, and subsequent work on the island by Depression-era public relief crews included the construction of the existing pavilion, designed by St. Paul's city architect Clarence W. Wigington.³⁷



Atlases of Minneapolis and St. Paul, which began to be published more systematically in the 1880s, give a sometimes-misleading picture of residential growth during this period. Often riverfront areas are shown as platted, when in fact housing was not built until much later. For example, Crosby Farm, located on the floodplain below present-day Highland Park in St. Paul, was platted in 10-acre lots early in the twentieth century, although the farm had very little non-farm development at the time it was made part of the city's park system in the 1950s.³⁸

During the railroad era, land use and residential patterns became more economically and socially stratified. Industry took over much riverfront, particularly near the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis. With industry came noise, disagreeable smells, and danger, to add to the seasonal threat from floods. Historian Larry Millett describes the resulting class separation:

The hierarchy of altitude was especially strong in the Twin Cities in the late nineteenth century. While the

rich resided in their mansions on Summit Hill in St. Paul and Lowry Hill in Minneapolis, the poorest Twin Citians were tucked away (out of sight and mind) in deep holes like Swede Hollow or on the floodplains below the river bluffs. Isolated from the city by barriers of language, culture, and geography, these enclaves were often identified with a particular ethnic group, although most were actually quite diverse in their makeup.³⁹

Historical geographers David Lanegran and Paul Donald Hesterman argue that the river assumed a double character to area residents during this period. For the wealthy, who could afford to move uphill away from the grime and danger, the river became an aesthetic amenity, with river views a large part of the attractiveness of places such as St. Paul's Summit Avenue. Yet areas close to the river grew unattractive and became the home of the city's poorest residents. Enclaves such as Nicollet Island in Minneapolis, where an upper middle class community flourished in the midst of the chaos of the St. Anthony Falls industrial area, seemed the exception to the rule. The relative isolation of the island, perched on a limestone shelf out of the reach of all but the highest floodwaters, may have contributed to its anomalous position.⁴⁰

Outside the major cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, several fairly distinctive patterns began to emerge. Some locations did not adapt to the new transportation system and declined during this period. Some places that had early assumed regional prominence retained some importance but began to be overshadowed by Minneapolis and St. Paul. Hastings serves as a prime example of this pattern. Other places, such as Richfield (which once bordered on the river) and Newport, assumed a distinctive importance in relation to the central cities, often as vacation spots. Yet other cities, such as the industrial town of South St. Paul, emerged during this period as a direct response to the new railroad transportation pattern.

Edward Duffield Neill's *History of Dakota County and the City of Hastings* (1881) provides a vivid sketch of

Hastings at that point in its history. Hastings certainly impressed Neill (or whoever was actually conducting the research on the town; see endnote 2), as it had attained a population of some 4,000 within three decades of its establishment. The city had an air of enduring permanence; as the writer noted, “It appears to the eye as if having been endowed with perpetual prosperity and as if having always existed in the same form as today . . . it is a type of western achievement.”⁴¹ Impressive though that achievement may have been, the writer felt that it could have been greater: “It is scarcely doubtful, that that city (Hastings) would have had a much greater growth without them (railroads).”⁴² Thus, within 50 years of the first permanent American settlement in the MNRRA corridor, new transportation systems were creating “winners” and “losers” among the region’s communities as they vied for prominence.

Some places in the MNRRA corridor that grew up during the last third of the nineteenth century achieved their greatest visibility as satellites of the larger cities. Richfield, a farming township that had been established in 1858 with the rest of the corridor west of the river, became a tourist attraction in the 1880s. Hotels, landscaped gardens, a new railroad depot (the “Princess Depot”) and pleasure drives all lined the vicinity of the river near its junction with Minnehaha Creek. Now part of the city of Minneapolis, the area surrounding Minnehaha Falls became a formally designated park in 1885.⁴³ There was a different impetus for growth in what is now the community of Newport. Originally the site of a mission to the Dakota (1837-42), a railway village called Red Rock grew up there in the 1860s. In 1869 the village became the site of summer religious revivals held by the Red Rock Camp Meeting Association, an affiliate of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Red Rock derived its name from a five-foot-long red rock, painted with stripes and venerated by the Dakota during their residence in the area. The rock was formerly on the bank of the river; it was moved in the early twentieth century to a point near the railroad station.⁴⁴

Railroads, by allowing the rapid transport of freshly-

cut meat, made South St. Paul one of the winners. Alpheus Beede Stickney of St. Paul formed the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad to establish a line between St. Paul and Iowa, which would then connect to lines running to Chicago. When the line opened in 1885, the trip between St. Paul and Chicago was reduced to 13 hours, 30 minutes. The railroad and the river location just downstream from St. Paul were an important part of the marketing of “South Park,” as the residential development was initially called. Dakota County gave land for industry, particularly car shops for the railroad. With James J. Hill as one of his backers, Stickney incorporated the St. Paul Union Stockyards on June 30, 1886, with the stockyards to be built on 260 swampy riverfront acres that needed to be filled before construction could take place. Separating from West St. Paul Township, South St. Paul was formed in 1887 and saw a period of rapid growth in the 1890s, as its stockyards expanded to include meat processing and slaughterhouses.⁴⁵

The Modern River

Automobiles increasingly defined the urban and suburban landscape after World War II. Since the general end date for this study is about 1950, this era is not examined in depth. The central purpose of this study has been to provide the context for sites that could merit inclusion in the National Register. Unless sites are of exceptional significance, they must be older than 50 years to be listed on the Register. This means that most properties constructed after the early 1950s are not yet eligible.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, a few comments are in order. (*Figure 8.*)

After World War II, the fabric of urban settlement in the river corridor underwent significant change, as the combination of growing population and developing regional highway systems pushed population rapidly away from the central cities. This development, popularly characterized as “sprawl,” was responsible for the conversion of farm country in places such as Coon Rapids into acres of suburban development. At the same time, the residential pattern that Lanegan and Martin call “suburban in city” filled in the



FIGURE 8. East River Road, Fridley, 1945. The Northern Pump Company is the large building complex. Minneapolis Star Journal Tribune Photograph, Minnesota Historical Society.

Highwood and Highland Park sections of St. Paul, completing the residential urban growth within the city limits of the area's largest cities.⁴⁷

Urban development in the MNRRA corridor represents many processes. Where cities began, how quickly and fully they developed, and their relation to the river varied in important ways. Some cities began as river towns, some as railroad towns and others as suburban communities. Some feature all three types of development. The MNRRA corridor's communities possess sites and structures that represent each era, each type of growth. These sites offer an opportunity to educate residents and visitors about the area's urban development.

Geology, geography, Native American history, the decisions of explorers and traders, and the focus on a variety of economic activities all played a role in how the MNRRA corridor's cities formed and grew. St. Anthony Falls and the gorge downstream helped make Minneapolis the nation's leading flour and timber milling center and dictated that St.

Paul become the effective head of navigation until the 1960s. Native American occupation of lands east and west of the river determined where and how fast settlers moved into the area. Zebulon Pike's 1805 decision to acquire the Fort Snelling reservation determined urban development in and around the reserve for decades, and the federal government still occupies lands acquired by Pike. Early settlement along the river and the river's nearly level, floodplain grade drew railroads. The railroads then began altering the processes of urban development, as the streetcar and automobile would do subsequently.

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is the largest urban center between Chicago and Denver. Urban development in the metropolitan river corridor is significant not only regionally but nationally. The history of industrialization, transportation, settlement and evolving economies is indicative of the Area's uniqueness and illustrative of broader regional and national processes.