



tour **SAINT PAUL**

east side to
lowertown



ecology
history
community

ecology

As the Mississippi River travels past downtown Saint Paul, it makes a sharp curve beneath towering sandstone and limestone bluffs. This stretch of river has been a focal point of human activity since the earliest phases of our history — and it continues to be a vibrant area that combines rich ecological resources with unique sites that remind us of our area's diverse cultural heritage.

Some 2,000 years ago the ancient Hopewell culture, and later the Dakota, buried their dead in mounds high above the river. At the base of the bluffs, a deep cave with an underground spring became known as a sacred site and images of snakes and other animals were carved into the cave walls. Countless generations of Native Americans passed through and settled in seasonal villages near here. Ancient Native Americans hunted woolly mammoth and giant beaver. Later residents planted crops and hunted bison, bear, deer and waterfowl. A wealth of birds and other wildlife used the river and its tributary creeks as migratory corridors. In 1680 Father Hennepin landed at the mouth of Phalen Creek and 86 years later Jonathan Carver arrived. As the area drew more and more Europeans, the land use began to change.

history

By the mid-1800s, Europeans were flooding into the area and steamboats traveled the Mississippi, landing in what is now the Lowertown district of Downtown Saint Paul. Waves of new immigrants arrived in Saint Paul, and the city became a bustling center of transportation and commerce. Railroad companies and others filled the floodplain, and Trout Brook and Phalen Creek were piped underground in storm sewers. Over time, pollution and poor land use decisions took their toll on the land and urban sprawl and disinvestment in the core city left once busy areas vacant and forgotten.

community

The tide began to turn in the 1970s as communities began to restore and celebrate their ecological and historic features. The East Side communities of Dayton's Bluff and Railroad Island worked to reclaim natural areas and historic buildings in their neighborhoods, and the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, with the support of the McKnight Foundation, sparked and sustained an ambitious public/private partnership effort to adapt to new uses the many abandoned warehouses that still bore witness to the earliest days of the city.

Today, it is easy to see the results of this community-driven commitment to revitalization. Lowertown is now a thriving urban village and historic district that combines a lively arts community and a center of high tech industry with historic streetscapes and popular restaurants. Traveling east, there are many unique cultural resources that have been preserved to illuminate the city's industrial past, and Dayton's Bluff and Railroad Island are becoming known for their urban natural areas, trails and historic housing stock.

The restored ecology, rich history and vibrant network of community organizations combine to make this one of Saint Paul's most fascinating places to visit. We invite you to come take a look at this unique part of Minnesota's capitol city....



Swede Hollow Park

Entry points: Intersections of Payne Avenue & East 7th Street, Drewery & Beaumont and Greenbriar & Margaret



The sounds of the city fade away as you walk or bike down into this valley between the Dayton's Bluff and Railroad Island neighborhoods. Bisected by Phalen Creek, this valley was the first home for many recent arrivals to the United States. In the 1850s, Swedish immigrants settled in the hollow, and Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine gathered in a place they called "Connemara Patch" in the Third Street bridge area. For more than a century, the hollow was a lively neighborhood where immigrants from Sweden, Ireland, Italy and Mexico got their start in a new land. In the 1930s, Phalen Creek was buried as a storm sewer. In the mid-1950s the city condemned the area and burned the remaining houses.



The 1905 state census found 1,000 people living in the valley known as Swede Hollow. For more than 140 years, new immigrants raised their families in the hollow. This photo of the "Swede Hollow junior gang" shows some of the area's young residents circa 1935.

Thanks to the efforts of Friends of Swede Hollow and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, the hollow has been revitalized and is once again a center of the community. A "daylighted" section of Phalen Creek, surfaced again from the underground pipes, now flows through cascading pools that add beauty to the park and provide habitat for ducks, songbirds and other wildlife. Visitors can stroll or bike through the park on the Bruce Vento Regional Trail and enjoy an oasis of nature in the city. With remnants of stone foundations and day lilies and other flowers that were planted in immigrant gardens, the park offers a fascinating glimpse back to early Saint Paul. For information on park activities and events, visit:

www.daytonsbluff.org/old/FOSH.html

Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary

Enter at the corner of Commercial Street and Fourth Street

Two hundred years ago, the Mississippi River and its floodplain extended all the way to the foot of Dayton's Bluff. Two tributaries, Trout Brook and Phalen Creek, flowed together here, creating habitat for a wealth of birds and wildlife. This land, which is now the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, was located at a central point between three Dakota villages and was an important gathering place for trade and ceremonies.

A cave on the southeastern edge of the nature sanctuary is both a sacred site and a rare vestige of the land's use by native people. Dakota elders have described the presence of snake petroglyphs on the cave walls. An underground spring that feeds pure, fresh water into the cave likely contributed to its value as a



location for healing. In 1760, British Explorer Jonathan Carver visited the cave and reported that it was called Wakan Tipi or "house of the spirits" by the Dakota. Later the cave became known to many as "Carver's Cave" and was a landmark for other European explorers including Joseph Nicollet.

As the city of Saint Paul began to grow, the North Star Brewery, which was later purchased by Jacob Schmidt, modified and used another cave as a cooling house for beer and ale. With the arrival of steam locomotives in the 1860s, the natural valley formed by Trout Brook and Phalen Creek was seen as a useful corridor for trains to travel up out of the river valley. The floodplain was soon filled and the land became a bustling rail yard. By the early 1900s, the entire delta had become an industrial rail corridor. As rail use declined, much of the area was abandoned and for decades it was littered with old appliances and other trash. Local East Side and Lowertown residents saw the site's potential, however, and began a multi-year effort to reclaim and restore the land.

In 1997, organized as the Lower Phalen Creek Project, community members teamed with a range of nonprofit organizations and government agencies to raise funds and advocate for the purchase of



the land as a city park. In 2002, with the help of the Trust for Public Land, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and National Park Service among others, the land was protected and named the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, in honor of the US Congressman who was an early champion of the project and long-time environmental leader. Volunteers joined together to remove more than 50 tons of debris from the land and the community-led vision for the sanctuary was on its way to becoming reality.

The land's soil, which had been polluted by almost a century of industrial use, was cleaned up in 2004 with support from the US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program. Wetlands and a stream, fed by the site's abundant spring water, were excavated and blocks of limestone that had tumbled down the bluffs were used to create a pedestrian bridge over a two-foot waterfall. Walking paths and a bicycle trail loop were created. Over the course of this construction phase, the land's many cultural resources were cataloged and protected. Archeologists found the foundation of the old North Star brewery, and caches of railroad china and other artifacts came to light. Dakota tribal leaders shaped plans for making Wakan Tipi visible again, and the cave can now be viewed across a wetland and shared with future generations. Wetland, prairie and oak woodland habitat is being recreated and restored, and many local young people are getting involved in the effort through the East Side Youth Conservation Corps.

Visitors to the new park can enjoy views of the downtown skyline as well as the dramatic sight of the river bluffs — areas that were long choked with invasive buckthorn but are now revealed in all their glory. Bald eagles, songbirds and other wildlife gather on this rare urban open space that still includes fascinating remnants of its industrial history. Local families and children, and people from around the region, come to this unique ecological and cultural gem, which has been described as an “East Side Masterpiece” by the Star Tribune. The Lower Phalen Creek Project and its partners continue to work to fully restore the land, establish interpretive elements and create a trail connection from the sanctuary to the Mississippi River. For more information, visit the project website: www.phalencreek.org.

Above left: The East Side Youth Conservation Corps. (Photo courtesy of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.) At right is an original watercolor by Leo Mao.



Indian Mounds Park

Earl Street and Mounds Boulevard

Taking in the view from Indian Mounds Park, it is easy to imagine why people have been attracted to this area atop tall limestone and sandstone bluffs. Six burial mounds bear testimony to the land's use as a graveyard and ceremonial area by ancient Hopewell cultures and, more recently, the Dakota. One of the region's oldest parks, Indian Mounds Park was created in 1893 and now includes 2.9 miles of trails and other recreational features. The overlook offers magnificent views of the downtown skyline and Mississippi River as well as the edge of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, which lies below.



The Lower Phalen Creek Project *St. Paul, Minnesota*

The Lower Phalen Creek Project is a community-led partnership working to restore the ecological health and economic vitality of Saint Paul's East Side and Lowertown neighborhoods. For more information, visit www.phalencreek.org.

HISTORIC SAINT PAUL

Celebrate Heritage | Renew Neighborhoods | Strengthen Community

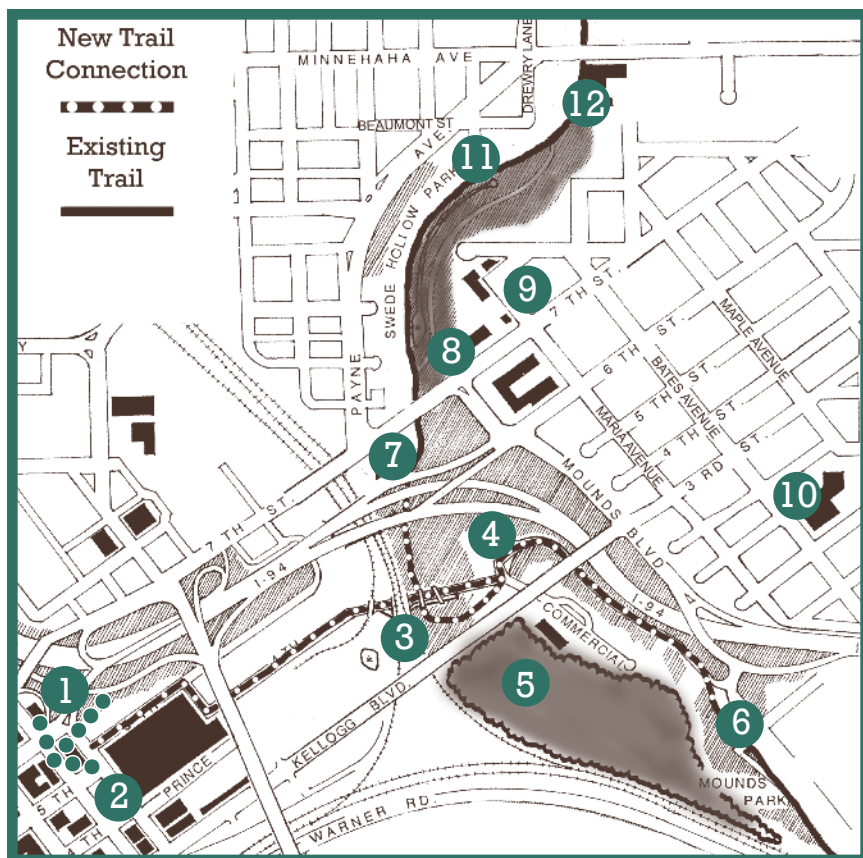


This guide was developed in cooperation with Historic Saint Paul as part of a series of interpretive guides highlighting Saint Paul's historic and cultural resources. For additional information, visit www.historicsaintpaul.org or www.saintpaulculturalheritage.org.

Many thanks and historic photo credits are due to Minnesota Historical Society. Visit them on the web at www.mnhs.org.

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Mears Park

One square block bordered by: E. 5th, E. 6th, Sibley and Wacouta Streets

Nestled in the heart of the historic Lowertown District, Mears Park is a charming, nature-filled square. The parkland was donated to the city in 1849 and originally featured stately elms and a central fountain. The park declined after an ill-fated restoration attempt in the 1970s and deteriorated further until the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, Public Art Saint Paul, community members and the City of Saint Paul took action. After a national search, landscape sculptor Brad Goldberg was selected to help make the park a functional work of art that reflects the neighborhood's history as well as the needs of modern-day users.

A low Kasota stone wall cuts diagonally across the park, dividing a formal side, which includes a grid of 59 summit ash trees, and an informal space that features a garden walk and thousands of red tulips and perennials. The walkways converge in a central gathering area and a stream links the two sections of the park. The beautiful water feature alludes to Lowertown's river heritage and a popular pavilion recalls the metal roofs of 19th century train stations. The park is considered a model for design excellence and in 1999 the National Association of Landscape Architects designated it one of six "Valued Places" in Minnesota.



Saint Paul Farmers' Market

Fifth and Wall Streets

Local farmers have congregated downtown to sell their produce since 1853, when Saint Paul was a frontier town with steamboats, dirt streets and log cabin homes. On weekend mornings, visitors could find any number of items in this busy market as they moved among horse-drawn wagons to buy fruits and vegetables, flour and dairy products. Today, the market is still busy, and still committed to selling directly from grower to consumer with no "middleman." For hours, parking tips, events and other information check:

www.stpaulfarmersmarket.com.

Trout Brook Canal

On the south side of Fourth Street, west of Commercial Street


At the end of the Pleistocene ice age, Saint Anthony Falls was located in the spot where the Trout Brook Valley meets the Mississippi River, approximately where the Lafayette Bridge is located today. By the time European settlers arrived thousands of years later, Trout Brook was a tributary stream, and like Phalen Creek it was largely buried as a storm sewer to make room for new developments. A section of the brook is still visible on the south side of Fourth Street along the new Bruce Vento Regional Trail connection. Constructed between 1891 and 1894, the sandstone and limestone canal offers a glimpse of the brook before it plunges back under ground and connects to the Phalen Creek storm sewer.



Seventh Street Arches

Seventh Street and Payne Avenue

In 1884, the City of Saint Paul embarked on an ambitious plan to improve Seventh Street and create a new streetcar line between downtown and the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. Characterized as the heaviest piece of public work ever attempted in the city, the project added 15 feet of earth on top of Seventh Street to make it level. Immigrant workers created a rare, technically demanding helicoidal brick arch that had been designed to support the massive weight. At the time of its construction, the bridge was thought to be one of the few of its type in the United States. Today, it is the only known example in Minnesota, and on the National Register of Historic Places. As you walk through these side-by-side arches, which form an entry into Swede Hollow Park, you will notice the unique skewed brickwork.



The Bruce Vento Regional Trail connection links Swede Hollow Park, Mounds Park and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. The new trail connects 84 miles of existing trails and feeds recreational trails into the Lowertown neighborhood via Fourth and Fifth Streets.



Hamm Brewery

707 East Minnehaha Avenue

German immigrant Theodore Hamm became owner of this brewery complex in 1865, when the operation had five employees and brewed 500 barrels a year. Over the course of 100 years, Hamm and his descendants expanded the business to include a bottling works, refrigeration and other modern brewing activities. Plant productivity soared and thousands of local people worked at the plant, which by the 1960s was the eighth largest beer producer in the nation. By the time it closed in 1997, the brewery included more than 40 buildings. Today, many of the original structures remain on the now 30-acre complex that lies at the head of Swede Hollow Park along the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. A team of city and community interests is working to determine the best use for this unique resource, located in between the Dayton's Bluff and Railroad Island neighborhoods.



Maria-Bates Rain Garden and the Stutzman Building

725 East Seventh Street

In the early 1990s, this historic building was a prime example of urban decay, a problem area for both police and local neighbors. The land around the building was heavily paved, littered with trash and blighted by billboards. Despite these problems, the Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhoods Association saw its potential. Years of grassroots efforts and fundraising from private foundations led to the restoration of the building's unique architectural features. The building is now home to nonprofit organizations, affordable rental housing and a busy café with a beautiful outdoor patio and fountain.

In conjunction with the building's restoration, the Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhoods Association, along with the Lower Phalen Creek Project and Community Design Center, worked with the city to change the street and sidewalk system and send rain and snowmelt into a new garden area instead of the storm sewer. The garden, known as the Maria-Bates Rain Garden, is now considered a national model and has been featured in magazines and conferences across the country.

As you walk through the garden, you will notice two large depressions in the ground. These areas, called swales, create a natural pool for rain and snow melt. The swale closest to the building was set up to capture all of the stormwater from the building's roof. The stormwater that flows down the street and sidewalk here goes to the larger swale near the corner. In the fall and spring you can see the pipe that drains into the garden, which includes plants with deep roots that filter the water — and beautiful flowers that provide resting habitat for birds and butterflies. The Lower Phalen Creek Project has also worked with the Community Design Center to create rain gardens on Preble Street and the grounds of Dayton's Bluff Elementary School.

