

Historic Downtown Stillwater

1 Lowell Park Chestnut Street

Inspired by the City Beautiful movement, and supported by a donation from businessman Elmore Lowell, the city worked to improve its riverfront in 1909, hiring landscape architect William Finklenburg to design a new park on the levee. A few years later, after the railroad turned over land on the north side of Chestnut Street, nationally known landscape architects Morell and Nichols created the plan for that section of the park. The pavilion was built in 1923.

2 Lift Bridge Chestnut Street

Stillwater's first bridge across the St. Croix opened in 1876. The lift bridge was completed in 1931, and is one of the three remaining vertical-lift highway bridges built in Minnesota and Wisconsin prior to World War II. This style of lift bridge is commonly known as a Waddell and Harrington vertical lift. The span is raised and lowered by steel cables passing over sheaths at the top of steel towers mounted on the span's piers.



3 Freight House 233 Water Street

From the date of its construction in 1883 until recently the commerce of Stillwater centered on the railroads. The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad freight house and depot served virtually every commercial interest in the city. The builders set to work using heavy mill timber; two foot thick limestone foundation walls, and eighteen inch exterior walls hovering thirty feet high. Flooring four inches wide and one inch thick were milled from the maples found on the river islands nearby. Finally, the heavy ceiling trusses were placed, carrying the full weight of a solid slate roof. The depot was finished in January 1883, and during its heyday, handled as many as seventy rail cars a day while housing the area's telegraph office. In 1970 the Milwaukee Road Railroad closed the agency and the building was sold.



4 Commander Mill 413 Nelson Street

The Commander Elevator is one of the most visible buildings on Stillwater's skyline. The elevator, built in 1898 by the Woodworth Elevator Company, was originally located at the corner of Main and Nelson Streets. Just six years later the elevator was moved to its present site, making way for a new flour mill, with both operated by the Minnesota Flour Mill Company until 1908. The mill passed through many hands over the next eleven years. The Commander Company purchased the elevator in 1919 and operated it until 1961 when G.T.A. bought out all Commander elevators. The name "Commander" stuck with the elevator, and the building is still known by that name.



5 Joseph Wolf Brewery 402 Main Street South

In 1868 Martin Wolf established a brewery in Stillwater. Three years later, his brother, Joseph Wolf, along with Joseph Tanner, purchased the site. In 1873 they opened the first steam powered brewery in Minnesota. Wolf became the sole proprietor in 1876 with new name, the Empire Brewery. The caves were completed in 1880, and the brewery produced more than 5,000 barrels of beer that year. The name changed to the Joseph Wolf Brewing Company was in 1896. For the next two decades, the company flourished, but with the advent of prohibition in 1919, Wolf's production ceased and the company converted operations to bottled water, soda, and sparkling water. In 1921, at age 89, Joseph Wolf died suddenly and the family blamed Prohibition, claiming it had broken his heart. In 1925 the company shut down and the buildings were rented.



6 Washington County Courthouse 101 Pine Street West

The Washington County Courthouse is the oldest courthouse in Minnesota. It was designed in the Italianate style by Augustus Knight of St. Paul. When it opened in 1870, the county was doing a booming business in the lumber industry. The courthouse reflected the county's wealth and overlooked the city from atop Zion's Hill. When the county offices were moved to the new Washington County Government Center in 1975, efforts began to reuse the structure. The historic courthouse is still in operation and serves as a venue for community and private events.



7 National Guard Armory 107 Chestnut Street

The National Guard Armory was built in 1922. Stillwater has a long tradition with the National Guard, and after World War I, the city pressed for a new building. Oscar Lang, a well-known Minneapolis architect, designed the hall. It was used not just for military training, but also for public events, sports, and concerts.



8 Brunswick House 114 Chestnut Street East

Known as the Brunswick House, this building was constructed by William C. Penny, a carpenter by trade, about 1848 — the same year in which Stillwater was platted as a town and the year the territorial convention took place. In 1849 the first meeting of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) in Minnesota took place in the upstairs of the house. The Pennys sold the house in 1863 to Julius Brunswick. Brunswick, from Switzerland, worked in the mercantile trade and was a well-respected citizen of the community. He and his wife, Margaret, raised a family with seven children here. Their daughters, Anna, Emily and Mollie, remained in the house until the last sister, Mollie, died in 1968.



9 Post Office 220 Myrtle Street

Stillwater's post office moved between several locations during the nineteenth century. Designed by James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, and built with Bedford stone, it opened its doors in 1905. A newspaper editorial declared, "It is an ornament to the city." It remained in use until 1967.



10 Lowell Inn 102 2nd Street N.

The Lowell Inn, named for Stillwater entrepreneur Elmore Lowell, was built in 1927, designed by architect William Ingemann in the Colonial Revival style.. The inn was run for many years by Arthur and Nelle Palmer, former vaudevillians, who made the inn nationally famous for its unique furnishings and excellent food. When critic Duncan Hines reviewed the inn in 1938, he wrote, "Through it all could be seen the fine hand of a woman of extremely good taste." A portrait of Nelle hangs in the George Washington Room.



11 Staples Sawmill 402 Main Street North

This mill was built in 1853 by Seth Sawyer and Alvah Heaton. It was purchased in 1869 by Isaac Staples. He was a powerful lumber baron in the St. Croix River Valley during the logging boom of the late nineteenth century. Staples arrived in Stillwater, from Maine in 1853 as a representative of eastern investors. Hersey, Staples, and Company became the largest single owners of timberland in the St. Croix valley. Aside from his massive holdings and operations in timber, sawmills, and the St. Croix Boom Company, Staples was also the region's most successful farmer and an important banker.



12 Warden's House 602 Main Street North

The Minnesota Territorial Prison, later known as the Minnesota State Prison, operated from 1853 to 1914. Construction of the prison began in 1851, shortly after Minnesota became a territory. The first warden, Francis Delano, moved into this house, one of the oldest homes in the state, on April 4, 1853. The prison was well-known because it once housed the Younger Brothers (Cole, Bob, and Jim) following their failed attempt to rob the First National Bank in Northfield. The Warden's House is now the home of the Washington County Historical Society.



13 Territorial Convention Site Myrtle & Main Street

When Wisconsin became a state in 1848, there was uncertainty about the legal status of the lands between the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. On August 26, 1848, a gathering was held at John McKusick's store in Stillwater. This convention elected Henry Sibley to represent their interests in Congress with the goal being the establishment of the Minnesota Territory. The following year, Congress formally approved organization of the new territory, extending from the new state of Wisconsin on the east to the Missouri River on the west.



14 Lumberman's Exchange 101 Water Street South

The Lumberman's Exchange Building was constructed in 1890 during the boom years of logging on the St. Croix River. It was built as the first modern business block in the city and equipped with modern heating, plumbing, electricity, and even an elevator, one of the first in the state. Its early tenants included logging and lumbering firms.



The Story of Stillwater

In 1837 the United States entered into a treaty with several bands of Ojibwe and Dakota Indians. Under the terms, the Indians ceded the northern third of present-day Wisconsin and more than three million acres of land between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. Soon after, Joseph R. Brown, a colorful Indian trader and promoter, opened a small warehouse at the head of Lake St. Croix to supply his upriver fur trading operations.

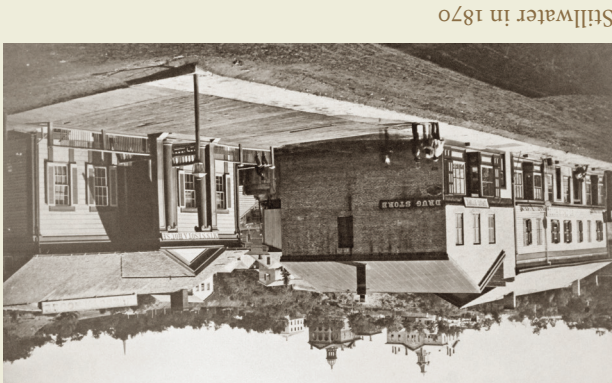
A new mill opened just south of Brown's warehouse, and it soon became the preferred location for new arrivals looking for work.

John Allen and his family were the first to settle in the new village of Stillwater. By 1846 the town had around ten families and twenty single men.

Wisconsin became a state in 1848 with its western boundary set at the St. Croix River. This left the people who lived in Wisconsin Territory in the delta between the

Historic photographs are used with permission of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Washington County Historical Society.

His sawmill, business investments, and vast land holdings made this lumberman one of Minnesota's first millionaires.



Stillwater in 1870

Mississippi and St. Croix rivers uncertain about their government. A convention met in Stillwater in August 1848 and elected Henry Hastings Sibley to take a petition to Congress to create a new territory. earning Stillwater its title as the birthplace of Minnesota. Sibley was successful and Minnesota became a territory on March 3, 1849. The first Minnesota Territorial Legislature named the city as the seat of Washington County. In 1851 Stillwater was awarded roads connected the city to the south, and early stage roads connected the city to St. Paul and Point Douglas. Railroads arrived in the early 1870s, expanding markets for timber and manufactured goods.

The town was platted in 1848 with 600 residents "of whom nearly all of the men were lumbermen," as one historian wrote. It was lumber that drove Stillwater's economy in the nineteenth century

By the late nineteenth century, Stillwater had entered a golden age that produced one of the largest opera houses west of Chicago, the elegant

The Golden Age

Excellent transportation helped the city prosper. The river carried goods between Stillwater and river ports to the south, and early stage roads connected the city to St. Paul and Point Douglas. Railroads arrived in the early 1870s, expanding markets for timber and manufactured goods.

Following. Products included wood finishing industries Croix in the 1850s, and mills sprang up on the St. from Stillwater. Steam holding boom just upriver the north down to a log- from the pine forests to river that carried timber taking advantage of the



Stillwater in 1870



Joseph Wolf Brewery

For more information

To learn more about Stillwater's past, visit the Washington County Historical Society, 602 Main St. North, Stillwater www.wchsmn.org

To find information about restaurants and accommodations, contact Stillwater Convention and Visitors' Bureau. www.discoverstillwater.com

Stillwater Heritage Preservation Commission www.ci.stillwater.mn.us



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Photograph by Josh Haroldson

Explore Stillwater's past

Stillwater, Minnesota, is a city filled with historic buildings and great stories. This video tour takes you to some of its most interesting sites and introduces you to a few of the city's most colorful characters. On this tour, you can . . .

- Trace the rise and fall of the lumber industry in Stillwater, and follow the men and women who made it happen.
- Find out about the vaudeville act that turned the Lowell Inn into one of the Midwest's great hotels.
- Learn about the old state prison and its most infamous inmates — the Younger gang.

About the tour

This tour brings story and place together, using new technology to offer a self-guided video walking tour of downtown Stillwater. You can download it from the city's website, or, if you have a smartphone, use this QR code to stream the tour on YouTube.



Lowell Inn

The Lowell Inn, advertised as "The Mount Vernon of the West," opened in 1927.

Stillwater began to range of the Twin Cities. residents in commuting and automobiles put War II when good roads to recover after World century, Stillwater is a hotel in the Lumbermans old utility buildings, and a the 1880s to a low of around the 1880s to a low of around high of more than 13,000 in population declined from a As the jobs left, Stillwater's received new life as bed Register. Old mansions moved to South Stillwater. year that the state prison took place in 1914, the same raft leaving Lake St. Croix closed. The last lumber giving out and the mills By 1900 the lumber was in Stillwater in June 1889. Minnesota began operation electric street railway in on Main Street. The first commercial buildings mansions of the lumber barons, and many brick destination, highlighting its outstanding historic buildings. In 1992 the downtown commercial district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Freight House, Washington County Courthouse, Wardens House, and Staples Mill, all part of this tour, are also found in the National Register. Old mansions received new life as bed and breakfasts. Restaurants opened in the caves and the freight house, shops in old utility buildings, and a hotel in the Lumbermans Exchange. In its third century, Stillwater is a bustling community boasting a variety of industry and business.

Stillwater Today

7,000 in 1940.

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