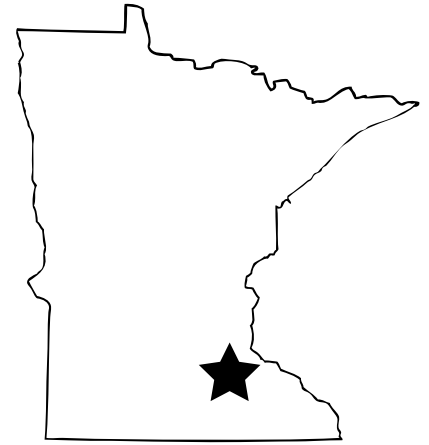


Greetings from Northfield

By Amy Acheson for the
Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce



Ahhh ... somewhere deep inside us, maybe it's from our roots, we long for the authenticity of a small town. A place that feels familiar. A place where the townspeople greet each other on the street by name, shops are met by foot, and you can find shade under an old tree. In the not so far off distance, church bells chime and the railroad creates a sort of rhythmic tempo to the town.

One wonders where this comes from, certainly, taking a lot of thought and intention. It must have been purposefully protected over the years to allow one to enjoy a town's rich history today.

This is Northfield, Minnesota — a quaint yet progressive river town that has maintained its small town appeal and charm, because it has truly embraced its own cultural heritage.

Northfield has always had a good sense of itself — a dedication to community, strong values and a high commitment to education. The town's past is architecturally well captured and its heroic history proudly preserved.

Sought out for the river that runs through it, John W. North settled the town on the banks of the Cannon River in 1855 for the purpose of milling and saw promise in the rich soils and geological resources of the countryside.

The early settlers were Yankees, mostly from New England and upstate New York. They were people of conviction: abolitionists and advocates of temperance and women's suffrage who came to build upon these idealistic views.

One of North's first initiatives was to found a civic organization called the Northfield Lyceum Society in 1857. The Lyceum

building was a public auditorium meant for discussion and lecture. It was a place to go for intellectual improvement. It gave the town a distinct sense of community. North also established a town center, now called Bridge Square, which was used for markets and town gatherings. Its purpose still remains the same today.

Religion and education were so important to the townspeople that churches and schools were being built before some of them had homes of their own! Carleton College, founded by the Minnesota Conference of Congregational Churches in 1866, was first put on the map for its Goodsell Observatory where stars were studied to calculate Central Standard Time and telegraphed to the Northern Pacific Railroad. St. Olaf College, established in 1874 by the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, became known worldwide for its choir. Its location, high on a hill, still gives a spectacular birds-eye view of the town.

In September of 1876, when the James-Younger gang attempted to rob the First National Bank, Northfield showed once again its integrity and strong belief in itself. Joseph Lee Heywood, the bank teller at First National Bank, did not back down to the robbers and it was the common citizens who rose to his aid yelling, "Get your guns boys; they're robbing the bank!" Northfield was the last stop for these fearless gangsters that were finally defeated.

Ames Mill / Malt-O-Meal building on the Cannon River



Photo courtesy of the Northfield Historical Society

