

City of North Mankato Historic Context Study



Prepared for the
City of North Mankato

Prepared by
Thomas R. Zahn & Associates LLC

Summer 2018

Historic photographs included in this report are from the collections of the City of North Mankato, the Minnesota Historical Society, Nicollet County Historical Society, and the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

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NORTH MANKATO AREA MAP



City of North Mankato Historic Context Study
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN & NEIGHBORHOODS MAP (DETAIL) CIRCA 1900



City of North Mankato Historic Context Study

INTRODUCTION

With the creation of this set of specific historic contexts, the city takes an important first step in using historic preservation for planning. Historic contexts will allow the city to evaluate its resources and incorporate them in the comprehensive planning process, while securing the unique character and spirit inherent in North Mankato's history.

Though the contexts will be an important planning tool, they also have a measurable community development effect. In North Mankato, the city's history is clearly tied to the city's three pillars of residential development, commerce and industry, and parks and recreation. Many of the owners of historic homes have restored these properties with labors of love, while others who own older homes may appreciate learning more about their past. Businesses would have the opportunity to make use of tax credits in appropriate development.

One of the most exciting parts about working in historic contexts is engaging with communities to develop plans for future action based on that city's unique history and sense of place. We find that this leads to vibrant, and engaged cities that are attractive places for residents, businesses, and visitors.

The Importance of Historic Contexts

The National Park Service, as it evaluates potential National Register of Historic Places properties, is very specific as to the importance of historic contexts. These standards are primarily defined in the publications *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form (Bulletin 16A)*, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Bulletin 15)*, and *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning (Bulletin 24)*. *Bulletin 24* defines historic contexts as "broad patterns of historical development in a community or its region, that may be represented by historic resources." *Bulletin 15* expands on the importance of historic context by remarking that "its core premise is that resources, properties or happenings in history do not occur in a vacuum but rather are parts of larger trends or patterns." *Bulletin 16A* organizes historic context by "theme, place and time" that "allows applicants to understand a historic property as a product of its time and as an illustration of aspects of heritage."

In general, historic contexts are considered most valuable as a framework for evaluating the relative significance of cultural resources such as varied sites, structures, districts, and other elements. They serve as an organizational tool for defining a community's history that is often lengthy and complex.

Rather than concentrating on each individual property, historic contexts focus on broad, overarching themes that would provide the city with the means to organize and evaluate its resources and lend perspective on the past. By developing these historical themes, the city can most effectively evaluate current resources, designate new ones, and set a framework for future generations. The contexts will allow for a clear and fair designation of properties, as each site can then be viewed in terms of what is best for the city as a whole. These contexts also assist planning departments in making difficult decisions about the future of buildings, sites, and structures that best represent North Mankato's history, and to target future efforts in the areas where they are most effective.

The contexts identified herein can also be used as a rallying point for community input, and are integral to future planning for land use, economic development, parks and recreation, transportation, public infrastructure and housing. As more data is organized, the contexts will evolve and change, recommendations will be updated, and this study will become more useful as a long-range planning tool. The expanded contexts, in addition to being a framework for evaluation resources, will be useful in public education programs for neighborhood organizations, government bodies, and local schools.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective in defining historic contexts for North Mankato is to provide a framework for the community's history that can assist in making future planning decisions. This might take the form of more intensive initiatives or the objective might simply be to gain local understanding of the historic resources, and to use them in planning activities.

The study process began with an intensive two days of fieldwork in October 2017, in which the ASSOCIATES toured the city, met with the planning department, and attended a number of meetings with area stakeholders, including historians, preservation advocates, property owners, and historical society representatives. The ASSOCIATES returned for more visits in the fall and winter of 2017-2018, including further touring of the area, photographing hundreds of resources, and conducting research at both the Nicollet County and Blue Earth County Historical Societies.

The ASSOCIATES also consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office regarding federal guidelines and state contexts, as well as with the statewide preservation non-profit, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota.

The ASSOCIATES collected and reviewed information and history on the city, ranging from primary sources such as newspaper clippings, Sanford Fire Insurance maps, historical photo databases, maps, and city directories, as well as secondary sources, including previous studies and reports and several early histories of the area. We also compiled a comprehensive map of the city and historic areas, based on several sources. Particularly informative to the process were the many unique resources contained in both the Nicollet County and Blue Earth County Historical Societies, and we are appreciative of their helpful staff. Area residents were especially generous in sharing resources. We also visited the Minnesota History Center libraries, and the files at the State Historic Preservation Office. The City of North Mankato's Planning Department staff was also instrumental in our work, providing an important survey to base our initial work on, and setting up meetings with various stakeholders. They demonstrated true generosity of their time and resources.

Based on this preparation, we identified six contexts that most clearly demonstrated North Mankato's history. These contexts are arranged as follows:

Context 1 – Pre-Settlement, Native American, Early Settlement – starts with the establishment of the Mesozoic clay deposits in North Mankato and the community's location in the oxbow of the Minnesota River. The context also considers the importance of North Mankato's Native American history, and the early siting and development of the city.

Context 2 – The River, Bridges, and Related Transportation – addresses the importance of North Mankato's relationship to the river. It also ties in early transportation resources. Unfortunately, many of the physical resources referenced in this context are no longer present, but the story is crucial to the city's development.

Context 3 – Agriculture, Commerce, and Industry – covers the wide range of businesses and industries present in North Mankato.

Context 4 – Civic Life – addresses the civic efforts in the town, including public services and buildings, as well as the identification of prominent citizens.

Context 5 – Social, Cultural and Recreational Life – looks at the less tangible, but perhaps more crucial, factors in a city's history — its interpersonal relationships. This context includes religion, parks and gathering spots, and leisure time.

Context 6 – Residential Development – outlines the kinds of housing styles found in North Mankato, including defining architectural elements and providing visual examples. It addresses both the Lower North/Valley area and the newer developments on the bluff. The context also discusses larger housing trends and issues.

Each context is arranged around a short narrative, which is not designed to be a full history, but rather to serve as a brief introduction to the theme. Each section also includes both historic and modern photographs; some also include maps. In several cases, some time is spent on descriptions of the past and on lost resources. These narratives are designed to fill in information that would be missing were only current resources to be considered, and to demonstrate the importance of remaining properties. An additional component is a fairly comprehensive list of typical property types associated with the context. Recommendations for future actions round out the individual sections, and there is a similar section on a larger scale concluding the report.

Current National Register of Historic Places Sites

North Mankato has two National Register listed sites:

- The North Mankato Public School (currently the Belltower Apartments) at 442 Belgrade Avenue, listed in 1982.
- The William E. Stewart House at 733 Range Street, listed in 1984.

Related State Contexts

The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office has identified several major state historic contexts that apply to North Mankato:

Broad Statewide Contexts:

- Indian Communities and Reservations, 1837-1934
- Early Agriculture and River Settlement, 1840-1870
- Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940

Thematic Contexts:

- Bridges (1870-1945)
- Quarries and Mines

CONTEXT 1

PRE-SETTLEMENT, NATIVE AMERICAN, EARLY SETTLEMENT

Time span – 1600 to 1880

Prehistory – the Mesozoic Era

Although, for the purposes of these contexts, the history of North Mankato generally begins with early settlement, it is important to keep in mind the area's prehistory, particularly in consideration of its clay and mineral deposits.

Some resources stem from deep clay deposits formed during the Cretaceous period of the Mesozoic Era. The North Mankato/Mankato area, like much of Minnesota, was at that time covered by a large prehistoric sea, which was home to a number of water creatures. The clay sediment of the sea floor covered layers of stone, including dolomite, sandstone, and even marble. This earthen collection led to layers of high-quality clay and stone, as well as created the natural landscape for the area, with flat areas along the river contrasting with higher hills and bluffs.

Layered on top of this, and much more important for North Mankato's brickmaking industry, were large deposits of alluvial clay from the river. This floodplain clay, slightly sandy and with reasonable plasticity, was the perfect material for the brickmaking industries established in the area between the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Location

North Mankato sits in an oxbow of the Minnesota River, distinctly separating it from Mankato proper. The river, originally formed of glacial melt, then flows into the Mississippi River watershed.

The flat, low-lying plains and grasslands along the river would have stood in great contrast to the wooded river bluffs, even more so to mark the southern edge of the "Big Woods," (the Grand Bois as the original French settlers called it) the enormous area of forest covering much of central and southeastern Minnesota. This mainly deciduous forest contained a wide variety of trees, mostly basswood and sugar maple, but also including ash, box elder, butternut, cottonwood, dogwood, elm, hackberry, oak, and willow. The dense woodlands encouraged an abundance of small game animals, allowing for hunting and trapping, while the waterways provided easy access.

Today, as a result of flood control, bridges, land reclamation, development, and deforestation, the original majestic contrast between the river and the bluffs, the plains and the forests, is no longer evident and no original viewsheds remain. However, it is worth keeping in mind how different this area must have looked originally.

Native American Settlement and Sites

Archeological studies have demonstrated evidence that the area was most likely settled by 1200 BC, and perhaps as early as 3000 BC. Its main settlers were members of the Dakota Sioux, who named both the river and the area Minnesota after *mini* meaning "water" and *sota*, "like the cloudy sky."

Though many tribes may have originally passed through or lived in the area, by the early 1600s it was primarily the territory of the Sisseton ("Lake Village") Dakota Sioux, with Sleepy Eye ("Ish Tak Ha Ba") as their chief. The wooded part of North Mankato along the river often served as their winter camp, though the tribe was nomadic and travelled throughout the area.



*"Ish Tak Ha Ba" Chief Sleepy Eye
as seen in a painting by Henry Inman.*

Sleepy Eye was an important leader in negotiating and signing the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux. The signature site is located nearby in what is now Saint Peter. The treaty, along with the Treaty of Mendota that same year, was negotiated with Minnesota Territory Governor Alexander Ramsey and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea, and ceded land in southern and western Minnesota to the European settlers. In return, the tribes received land on the Upper Sioux and Lower Sioux reservations, as well as cash and annuity payments. Although the Upper Sioux Reservation encompassed several of the tribes' previous campsites and villages, the Lower Sioux Reservation (just south of Redwood Falls) was located on generally new territory. The government's expectation was that the previous nomadic, hunter-gatherer tribes would become an established farm community. Sleepy Eye, however, moved several times with his tribe after the treaties. He died in 1860 in what is now Roberts, South Dakota.

For the Sioux, the change in lifestyle, the loss of both traditionally held and sacred grounds, and treaty violations by the United States (including late and withheld payments) resulted in tensions

both between the tribes and with the new Anglo-European residents. These conflicts ultimately led to the Dakota Conflict of 1862 (also known as the "Indian Uprising" or "Dakota Wars"), in which several different bands made loosely coordinated attacks against the settlers living in the Minnesota River Valley.

North Mankato, which was platted but only barely settled, was not directly affected by the conflict. Other nearby communities suffered severely. In the less than two months of battle, 486 white settlers, and an unknown number of Sioux, were killed. Minnesota's Third, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Volunteer Regiments were called to duty, and most of the Dakota surrendered after the Battle of Wood Lake in September, 1862. Three hundred and three prisoners were convicted of murder and rape by military tribunals and sentenced to death. The Native American prisoners were held at Camp Lincoln, near the current site of Mankato's Sibley Park. Thirty-eight of those prisoners were executed in Mankato on December 26, 1862, in what remains the largest mass execution in United States history.

Early Anglo-European Settlement

The area was claimed by Pierre Charles LeSueur for the French government in 1700 — though many accounts claim that he originally charted the area as early as 1683. LeSueur, travelling up the river from Louisiana with three boats and twenty-two men, established Fort L'Huillier just south of the current site of Mankato in order to trade with the Indians. The fort was abandoned in 1702, but the area remained under French control until sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase. For some time, early European settlers called the Minnesota River "St. Peter's River" or "St. Pierre's River" in his honor.

The first major settlement in the area, Mankato, was established in 1852 by brothers-in-law Parsons King Johnson and Henry Jackson, originally at what is now Sibley Park. The settlement moved uphill due to the potential for flooding and swampiness. A few years later, and just one year before Minnesota became a state, early land speculation and the creation of "paper towns" (towns that existed only cartographically, with no actual physical development) led to the platting of North Mankato by Isaac Marks, Asa White, and Joseph Gunther in 1857.

Rather than choosing an entirely new name, they chose the name “North Mankato.”

Born in East Prussia in 1823, Isaac Marks came to America in 1840 at the age of 17. Finding his way to St. Louis, Isaac traveled north on the Mississippi River setting up trading posts along the way. By 1856 he had reached the Mankato area and in partnership with Asa White built a general merchandise store — the “White and Marks Emporium of Trade” in Mankato. Little is recorded about Joseph Gunther other than that he was a signer of the platting petition for North Mankato and that for a short period in 1858 he was a Captain in the first military company of Mankato. Isaac died in 1885 and is buried in the Calvary Cemetery in Blue Earth County.

Both the financial and manpower crises of Civil War America and the uncertainty of “Indian Troubles” meant that very few of the “paper towns” actually came to fruition, remaining towns in name only. On this score, North Mankato, though small had some settlement, was notably more successful than nearby places such as Kerns. But for quite some time, North Mankato remained little more than a handful of homes and two ferry landings. The cable-ferry system allowed agricultural products to be moved across the river and sold in Mankato.

By the late 1860s, the region was growing quickly. Civil War soldiers returned to establish businesses and farm the area. River traffic was heavy, with regular service and hundreds of steamboats docking annually. By 1868, the railroad arrived in Mankato, though never gaining a stop in North Mankato.

The relative isolation of North Mankato ended in 1878, when the state legislature authorized Mankato, Belgrade Township, and Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties to construct a bridge between the two communities. The iron bridge was begun in 1879 and finished in 1880. North Mankato quickly became an attractive residential alternative to Mankato proper.

Related State Contexts

North Mankato’s earliest historic contexts are incorporated within three of the larger, statewide contexts that determine Minnesota preservation priorities, as determined by the State Historic Preservation Office. These contexts address over-arching preservation topics statewide. For North Mankato they are:

- “Indian Communities and Reservations, 1837-1934”
- “Early Agriculture and River Settlement, 1840-1870”
- “Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940”

Property Types

Note:

- The lists of property types at the end of each context represent the cultural resources that are present or likely present in North Mankato.
- Many of property types listed may not currently be evident or recognizable due to alterations causing them to have lost most, if not all, of their historic and physical integrity.
- Not all of the cultural resources may have been present in North Mankato, though the ASSOCIATES have generally removed resources not identified through historical survey (for example, in the Social and Cultural context the relatively common resource of a cemetery is not



Gravestone of Isaac Marks at the Calvary Cemetery in Mankato.

listed, because there do not appear to be any cemeteries in North Mankato.)

- *We have also indicated, in some cases, where a good example of that resource is still extant.*

Pre-European sites

Gravesites

Habitation sites
Ceremonial and religious sites
Treaty and meeting sites
Reservation sites
Possible Dakota Conflict sites
Other archeological sites
Viewsheds and prominent natural features – Bluff Park

Pre-settlement

Fort sites
Trading sites
Boat landings and river access
Camp sites

Early settlement

Ferry landings

Bridge site

Early residences

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *It appears that any original archeological sites relating to early Native American settlement have not survived the intense riverside development. Should there be more interest in this time period, the city may consider completing a full archeological survey. At a minimum, research should be required for any new development in the riverside area, in an effort to discover and inventory any early archeological resources.*
- *Concurrently, the city may desire to pay special attention to any early settlement resources, such as boat landings, early bridge sites, and housing and commercial sites. Again, a full archeological survey would provide additional information in this regard.*
- *Historical documents reviewed by the ASSOCIATES place North Mankato squarely outside of any Native American conflicts, which is not surprising as the settlement did not begin to grow until the late 1860s. The city should be especially cognizant of any lost resources or stories that might clarify this association.*
- *Due to flooding and flood control, land reclamation, changes in the river pattern, roads, bridges, and urban development, all but a few of North Mankato's original vistas and viewsheds have been compromised. A sense of these views and the location, as portrayed in early maps, plans, paintings, drawings, and even photographs if extant, would give modern-day visitors a much better sense of the exploration and development of the area. Such an interpretive display would be especially appropriate at Bluff Park or the Taylor Library, given its location between the river and the end of Belgrade Avenue.*

CONTEXT 2

THE RIVER, BRIDGES, AND RELATED TRANSPORTATION

Time span – (starting in 1683 with LeSueur), but mostly 1857 to present

Due to its position in the oxbow of the Minnesota River, North Mankato has been extremely dependent upon that river. Two main factors of its riverfront location affected its development: floods and bridges. This relationship is complicated by the fact that bridges and related transportation and riparian infrastructure are some of North Mankato's most important — yet least extant — resources. Integrally related to these resources are the other transportation elements.

Floods

When Johnson and Jackson founded the City of Mankato across the river in 1852, their preferred initial site was at Sibley Mound, near present-day Sibley Park. However, they soon decided, due to flood risk and swampiness, to relocate to an area of higher ground at what is now the site of the Masonic Temple, where the bend in the river created a natural levee. It soon proved to be a provident choice, whether this was because they were warned by the local Native American tribes that the area flooded in spring, noticed high-water marks on the trees, or relied on common sense to determine that low-lying ground so close to the river would flood.

North Mankato, first established as a “paper town” did not make a similar decision. Its founders were more concerned with the orderly layout of the plats. Almost all of the valley area was tucked into a flood plain along the river, with Belgrade Hill rising sharply to one side. North Mankato was bound to be impacted by spring flooding, however, both due to the natural flooding from spring snowmelt and then more so as the course of the river changed slightly with land reclamation.

The first major flood after North Mankato was platted occurred in 1881 after a particularly snowy winter (in fact, many of the “flood years” followed “blizzard years”). The Minnesota River Valley was strongly affected, with bridges washed away and early homesteads, mills, and boat landings flooded out. North Mankato had very little built environment and no bridges, and so was only minimally affected, but the river ran high and fast throughout the summer, which was to some extent good for the development of the area because it allowed more boats to navigate the route.

Spring floods continued periodically every few years, but the next “Big Flood” was recorded in 1886. The river, which had previously risen no more than twenty-two feet over the low-water mark, rose to twenty-four feet, flooding most of the low-lying land in both North Mankato and Mankato. Again, as North Mankato was only minimally settled, it was not seriously affected, and the new iron bridge held. However, Pleasant Street was totally underwater, and ferry landings were washed away.

Every year spring floods threatened, particularly in 1897 when almost 25% of



Floodwaters surrounding the North Mankato School at the intersection of Belgrade Avenue and Center Street.

the town was evacuated and water ran down Belgrade Avenue. By the turn of the century, city leadership felt the need for a more formal, engineered dike, rather than relying on the build-up along the riverbanks. North Mankato built up Webster Avenue as a dike in 1908 with 100 men and 40 teams of horses. The new dike was generally successful in mitigating the floods of 1917, 1919, and 1929. After a spring flood in 1936 caused a breach in the Webster Street dike and the evacuation of about a dozen families, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project strengthened the dike. This improvement held through the big 1944 flood and smaller spring flood threats in subsequent years.

However, by April 1951, the city's luck had run out. New development had reclaimed land, including the area near the water. Simultaneously, winter snowfall was especially deep and the spring snow melt hard and fast. Both the Minnesota River and the nearby Blue Earth River crested at the same time, and the entire city of North Mankato flooded. Residents tried to hold the dike, adding several feet with sandbags and using dynamite to break up the ice holding the water back. However, the rise of the water was too strong and too fast, cresting at 26.2 feet. Belgrade Avenue was under 16" of water. All volunteers were pulled off of the exhausting dike work, and the city was evacuated.



View of lower North Mankato on April 10, 1951.

It was weeks before the water was contained, and damage topped \$3 million dollars including utility issues with gas and water. The long-term effect was even more substantial, with some homes destroyed by the flood that were never replaced. In other cases, repairs and utility updates took quite some time. Following the flood, the dikes were again rebuilt and strengthened, and they were generally successful in holding back the even higher water of 1952.

The 1965 flood was recorded as the highest water on record, with the river cresting at 29.09 feet. North Mankato was again evacuated, but the dikes, strengthened with several extra feet of dirt and sandbags. Mankato was badly flooded, but North Mankato suffered little damage. High waters of 1969 threatened flooding, but it did not ensue. Though North Mankato still incurs the threat of annual flooding, the combination of flood control dikes and development patterns on higher ground has mitigated the risk.

The U.S. Congress passed stricter flood mitigation legislation in 1958 and in 1972, but effects on the North Mankato area were minimal.

Floods were not the only natural hardships to affect North Mankato. There were a number of severe storms, including blizzards and tornados. There were epidemics of disease. North Mankato farmsteads seemed especially affected by plagues of grasshoppers, especially in the 1870s. However, these tribulations did not effect on the built environment as flooding has over the years.

Bridges

It's simple enough — without bridges over the Minnesota River, the development of North Mankato would likely not have happened.

As mentioned earlier, North Mankato was slow to develop. Though there were two ferries, they were small and generally used for goods, proving ineffective for routine passenger traffic, especially with spring flooding and turbulent river currents. But with Mankato growing quickly after the Civil War, North Mankato became a very attractive place to settle, with strong single family housing options, a business and industrial base, and developing parks and recreational offerings.

In 1878, the state legislature authorized Mankato, Belgrade Township, and Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties bond authority to construct a bridge between the two communities. It's interesting to note that an 1896 newspaper speculated that the local voter turn-out to approve the bridge fund allocations had been low stating, "Quite a number of them are foreigners and they labored under the impression that they would not be permitted to vote."

Once bond funds were raised, an 810-foot iron bridge, with three spans (one on a pivot to allow the few steamboats that plied the river to continue to pass), was built, at a cost of \$30,000. Built 1879-1880, it was instrumental in the development of North Mankato due to its now easy access to Mankato. The bridge was installed just in time, as the 1881 flood washed away the ferry sites.

The bridge was well-used, with a pedestrian footbridge added to each side of the bridge in 1897. It also seemed the bridge was responsible for increased civic interaction, as the North Mankato council took up the issue of couples "spooning" on the bridge in the early 1900s.



North Mankato Bridge circa 1910 looking toward Mankato.

In the 1890s, a pontoon bridge was also planned, but never built. At various points additional footbridges were also under discussion, but also never materialized. There is one account of an informal willow footbridge across the river at what is now Cross Street. The author of the piece, contractor J.B. Nelson, describes it as wooden poles driven into the riverbed and a suspended walkway laid across. The bridge was taken up in the winter. There are no physical resources remaining of this bridge.

The iron bridge held for a number of years, until replaced with an arched concrete bridge (the “Main Street Bridge”) in 1917. The bridge was constructed by the Gustav Widell Company of Mankato for a cost of just over \$95,000 (though originally estimated at \$79,000). Its engineering was considered quite modern, including electrification for streetlights, tracks for a streetcar (though the line never extended to North Mankato), and lanes for both foot and vehicular traffic. Widened and repaved in the 1970s, the bridge was torn down in 1986 when the US Army Corps of Engineers determined that its positioning between the dikes could impede the free flow of the river. It was replaced by the current Veteran’s Memorial Bridge, which was dedicated in 1987.

The North Star Bridge (US-169 Minnesota River Highway Crossing between Mankato and North Mankato) is a concrete bridge built in 1960 and reconstructed in 1992. It is a functional bridge, with no decorative embellishment.

Related Transportation

The bulk of North Mankato’s transportation resources relate to the river as well, and these are also difficult to interpret, with relatively few resources remaining. The actual transportation elements, such as steamboats, barges, and stagecoaches have not survived, and are even more rarely presented in situ. Routes change; roads are upgraded, and in North Mankato’s case, even the river route changes. Related resources, such as boat landings and even newer elements such as service stations have been lost. These are important resources, and the city would benefit from finding innovative ways to interpret cultural resources that have been lost, while acknowledging the historic role any of the remaining resources played.

This context begins long before the platting of North Mankato. The Minnesota and surrounding rivers provided an extensive transportation network for the Sioux tribes, and then early explorers and traders, such as LeSueur and Sibley, who also followed these waterways using log rafts, canoes and larger keel boats to transport both people and traded goods. The keel boats were described as somewhat like a shallow barge, propelled by six pole-men to each side, and able to carry between seven and twenty tons of goods and passengers (including the pole-men, a cook, and a trader / agent). Because of their ability to adapt to varying conditions, such as poor river landings and low water levels (especially in the smaller rivers and creeks), these small, easy to navigate crafts dominated early exploration in the area. North Mankato, with high riverbanks, proved an especially good landing point.

Once Mankato opened to settlement, there was an immediate demand for boats that could carry more passengers and enable more extensive and regular importation of goods. Boats begin plying the area by 1850, and by 1852 Mankato had been established as a popular steamboat stop, with three trips by the *Tiger* and three by the *Black Hawk*. By the late 1860s, steamboats were making hundreds of stops annually in Mankato, with George Houghton’s the *Molly Mohler* alone recording 90 separate trips over the summer of 1867. The average travel time from Minneapolis / Saint Paul was 12-19 hours (depending on the number of stops and whether going upstream or downstream), and the fare was 50¢. Though the majority of the boat landings were in Mankato, there were some in North Mankato. Consequently, the community continued to build up the riverbanks to facilitate landings; these banks later served as natural dikes that mitigated flooding.

Steamboats also allowed for a brisk commodities trade, exemplified by over 62,000 bushels of wheat carried from Mankato by mid-July of 1867 alone, at the rate of 5¢ per bushel. Shipping barges also carried goods along the river.

North Mankato's most significant river-related transportation resources were its two ferries. One operated at the river's bend, near the Hubbard Mill and where the bridge was later built. The larger Cummings Ferry, which used a cable and pulley system, plied the river on a diagonal between North Mankato and Sibley Park, which proved to be a relatively stable way to carry passengers, wagons, and goods across the river. A typical ferry fee was 10¢.

Soon, however, railroads began to cut into the steamboat's dominance; later, the advance of the automobile further eroded the importance of the watercraft. In the early 1870s there were less than 100 steamboat landings annually, though it was some time before the last steamboat, the *Henrietta*, went down the river in 1897.

Across the river in Mankato, the steamboats were replaced by robust train services. Four rail lines served Mankato at the end of the 1800s. However, despite efforts by businessmen to attract rail traffic, including an offer to provide the right-of-way land free of charge, North Mankato never gained either a passenger or freight stop and to this day there are no railways in the boundary of Nicollet County.

Bridge connections did allow increased road traffic, and North Mankato was served by Highways 14 and 169. As with the rest of the state and country, roads and automotive/truck traffic became the dominant means of transportation, eclipsing boats and trains. By 1908, the city had re-graded and rebuilt Belgrade Hill to allow better access. The county paid most of the \$6,000 improvements through bonding bills, but the Mankato Commercial Club donated the \$500 North Mankato portion. The hill stood this way for fifty years, until extensively refaced and re-graded in 1959, when it lost 60 feet in preparation for the new highway. In 1967, the road was renamed as Lee Boulevard, which connected the Hilltop area more directly with Old Town. One consequence of the rebuilding of the hill was the loss of several properties along it, though one stone farm still stands.



Stone farmhouse and barn remaining on the bluff side at 1035 Belgrade Avenue.

Unlike the boat landings, which were stationary, and the railroads, which required extensive infrastructure, road-related resources were especially temporal, changing and adapting with traffic patterns. A 1923 article comments “What an improvement the Standard Oil and Filling Station lends to that portion of the city known as ‘Bridge Square.’” (Bridge Square had been right at the end of the bridge, serving as an entryway to the commercial district). The establishment of the highway system led to resources such as lodging and restaurants moving to the outskirts of town.

State Contexts

North Mankato’s river bridges are included in the thematic statewide context of “Bridges (1870-1945).” There is also a Multiple Property Submission of “Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota” associated with the historic context of “Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota, 1900-1945,” as listed on the National Register in 1989.

Property Types

Flood Plains

Flood sites

Flood control mechanisms

 Dikes – esp. Webster Avenue Dike

Ferry sites

 Cummings Ferry

 Main Street Ferry

Highway bridges

 Veterans Memorial Bridge

 North Star Bridge

Former bridges and bridge sites

 Iron Bridge

 Main Street Bridge

River Traffic

 Steamboats

Barges

 Landings and docks

 Warehouses

 Dams

 Levees

 Navigation aids

Roads and Highways

 Current roads

 Belgrade Hill

 Remnants of early roads and trails

 Stage stops

 Truck stops and facilities

 Gas stations

 Standard Oil

 Automobile dealers and repair shops (also under commerce)

 Becker Auto Service

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *Though they had a significant impact on North Mankato, flood sites are difficult to commemorate because there are no associated resources. Even the Webster dike is so integrated into the landscape that its purpose might not be evident to many residents. The city may consider ways to interpret the floods, perhaps through a flood site marker using some of the striking historic photographs, or an interpretive walking trail along the dike.*
- *The former ferry sites, such as the location of the Cummings Ferry site, are also potentially interesting interpretive sites.*
- *The city should consider the number of resources lost to the floods (for example, houses torn down to build the dike and homes lost to flood damage.) It should also consider the effect that these floods had on the construction of homes. One might posit, for example, that brick was a popular building material due to its stability.*
- *North Mankato's original Main Street bridges — the iron bridge and the original arched concrete bridge — have been replaced and are lost resources. Related resources, such as "Bridge Square" also have been lost. The city, however, will need to plan for how to eventually recognize the current bridges, which will eventually pass the 50-year threshold standard if the National Register. The first bridge to consider will be the North Star Bridge, in particular investigating how the 1992 changes affected the original 1960 construction.*

CONTEXT 3

AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY

Time span – 1879 to 1960s

North Mankato started out as an adjunct community to Mankato. “Brooklyn,” as it was affectionately referred to, began as lines on a plat map, then sprung up with just a few farmsteads, and eventually developed as a growing residential area in the “Valley” or what also became known as “Lower North.” These residents needed convenient retail and services, and so a small commercial district grew on Belgrade Avenue. Several industries, including brickyards, were established in Lower North at the same time. Commerce and industry, became strong pillar of the historic development of North Mankato.

Agriculture

Early Farms

North Mankato was not as much of a farming community as other southern Minnesota towns. Nonetheless, there were a few larger farmsteads up on the bluff, and multiple smaller truck farms in the town proper. The May 1891 newspaper reports that Mr. Wheeler maintained 28 acres of produce gardens, as well as his brickyards, and sold his produce as far away as Kasota and Saint Peter twice a week. Direct accounts indicate that Wheeler’s brickyard workers also tended the gardens. While Henry Robel and John Koppen farmed the flats closer to the river, other truck gardens, operated by John Kolbert, Dennis Donahue, and the Windmiller Company, were on the shores of Spring Lake. Donahue was one of the largest operators, and he had a large barn off of Wheeler where the produce was prepared for sale. The local newspaper, through the late 1930s, consistently reported four or more truck farms operating at any one time in North Mankato. In addition, Hans Lund maintained an orchard on Belgrade Hill. These small farms produced harvest to keep a small canning factory going in the 1890s.

Commerce

Retail

Belgrade Avenue was not the first commercial district in North Mankato. Early in its history, the isolation of the village reportedly made it an attractive site for businesses that desired little to no regulation, such as gambling houses, bars, and brothels. Their success came from a proximity to the ferry landings, simultaneous with a distance from police and regulation. One gambling house, called O’Neills, was reportedly where the James brothers finished their preparation for the Northfield bank robbery attempt.

Concern over these sites may have led North Mankato to become a dry town. Though newspapers of the time reported that the first village council president, Wendell Hodapp, was in favor of liquor sales, many residents disagreed with the sentiment. A 1900 ballot favored a “no license” policy on a 91 to 58 vote, perhaps responding to a March 1880 editorial that stated “Strong drink is raging, and it would be very unwise to allow this monster vice to gain a foot hold.” North Mankato remained “dry” (although there were some reports of booze raids during Prohibition) until a beer ordinance was passed in 1933.



Early 20th century photograph of the Bakery Building at 223 Belgrade Avenue.

By the turn of the 20th century, North Mankato had a small but significant downtown business area. An October 1902 article identified three groceries (Smith, Walraff, and Strickland), two blacksmiths (Frank Wildes and William Bohr), a bakery (Burt Keene, whose bakery operated until at least the late 1930s), and a meat market (Damman's), as well as a tailor, shoemaker, and barbers. By 1910 there was also a laundry and a confectionery. As might be expected, these businesses were clustered along the first few blocks of Belgrade Avenue, not far from the bridge.

By the mid-1900s, the number of retail businesses had expanded to meet the needs of the community. Most retail was still mainly in the 100-300 blocks of Belgrade, with some spillover onto Nicollet. By 1920 there were four groceries, two meat markets, and two shoemakers, still one bakery and barbers, as well as a hardware store and two plumbing shops. Unusually, the blacksmith was one of the longest-lasting businesses. Frank Wildes passed it to his son, and that son passed it on to his son in the mid-1940s. Other businesses in the 1930s-40s included filling stations and restaurants, as well as a drugstore, appliance store, and variety store. Services included print shops, auto services, the Urban Theater, and a bowling alley. Many residents had great memories of Page's Bakery, especially its mocha cake, and of Art's D'Luxe Restaurant, as well as Mutch's Hardware. Indeed, when Dave Mutch closed the hardware store in 2012, he was still using the cash register from 1926 that the previous hardware stores on the site had used.

Perhaps because of North Mankato's early "dry" status, restaurants were less prominent than other businesses. After the repeal of Prohibition the town voted to become "wet" in 1933, and several establishments opened. These included Harvey's Northside Bar•Café•Dancing at the end of Belgrade on Bridge Square, and the Century Club, opened by Harvey Rivard in 1946 with its Stage Bar, Bar Lounge, and Rainbow Room. The Century Club was known for its live entertainment. It was also known for its Serviceman's Bulletin publication, and for its walls covered with photos of servicemen home on leave or discharged, as well as their divisional patches (these pictures were rumored to have then been displayed at the area VFW, but they are no longer there). Rivard sold the club in 1949 and it was then run under various names until torn down in 1985 to make room for the Veteran's Memorial Bridge. Another noted bar was the Quarterback Club, established in the late 1960s as part of a chain of clubs owned by a group of Minnesota Vikings players and coaches. The design was supposed to represent a football. After the club closed in the 1970s, the site became home to various restaurants.

Banking

North Mankato's main bank was the People's State Bank, which opened in 1912 on the corner of Belgrade Avenue and Range Street. The bank, an unassuming brick building, was constructed for \$3,800. It was initially capitalized for \$15,000, primarily by 50 North Mankato residents. People's State Bank held much of the bonding for the ongoing sewer and sidewalk projects, as well as the fire equipment and water warrants. In 1928 the bank merged with Farmers and Merchants State Bank to become the Security State Bank, and the building was remodeled. Unfortunately, the new bank closed during the Depression. Today Spinners Bar and Grill is located in the building.

The above-mentioned Farmers and Merchants Bank originally opened in the Stewart Building on Belgrade Avenue and Range Street in 1923. The building was constructed and owned by W.E. Stewart, of the Stewart brickyard, presumably to feature his product. At the time it was one of the city's most elegant buildings. The first floor was designated for the bank. A vault and fireproof room



*People's State Bank, located at 301 Belgrade Avenue
as it appeared ca. 1930.*



The Stewart Building at 300 Belgrade Avenue.

were located in the basement. The second floor was designed for four flats/offices for “professional men” such as dentists and doctors. The third floor had four smaller flats and seven private rooms for rent. As noted above, in 1928 People’s State and Farmers and Merchants Banks merged. The Stewart Building then became home to offices, apartments, retail, and restaurants over the years.

North Mankato Commercial Club

North Mankato businesses banded together as early as 1901 and offered free right-of-way to the Great Western Railroad to extend tracks to North Mankato. Though that never came to pass, the businesses worked together on other issues over the years, officially calling themselves the North Mankato Commercial Club, which changed to the North Mankato Boosters in 1924 and the North Mankato Civic and Commerce Association in 1935. The Club was responsible for business development and community events, such as the annual “Fun Days,” and remains to this day, promoting business interests in North Mankato.

Industry

Land Speculation

With a start as a “paper town,” it only made sense that land speculation was an important industry for North Mankato. H.P. Christensen was a realtor and insurance agent who sold a large number of lots between 1885 and 1888. Builders and land agents followed this trend, as North Mankato experienced several building booms. Houses were added with the addition of the Roe Crest subdivision of 1958, and developed extensively in the 1960s and 1970s. *Century 21* extensively marketed the “Northridge Properties” along the bluff. More of this history is addressed in the residential section.

Carlson Craft

The story of Carlson Craft is one of North Mankato’s quietest success stories. William (“Bill”) Carlson and his wife Betty began Carlson Letter Service in the basement of their house on Mound Avenue in 1945. From \$25 in sales during their first month in business, the company grew steadily and they were able to add some equipment in the 1940s, though Carlson retained his day job for a number of years. In 1948, they renamed it Carlson Wedding Service.

The 1951 flood, however, led them to move the business from their home, and it was this flood, and the lack of copy machines in common use, that may have ushered in their huge growth. They moved to a friend's house (Carlson proudly notes that the flood caused them to only miss one day of business, since they were able to get all stock and machinery out of their home), and then twice to small sites in Mankato.

1962 was an enormous year of growth for the company. Renamed Carlson Craft, the business moved into a new plant at 100 Garfield Avenue in North Mankato. The company also installed its first "modern" printing press that year, a Heidelberg. Glen Taylor moved into a managerial role in 1962, having started in the company stockroom part-time in 1959 while he was still in college. The later 1960s and 1970s were periods of more growth. When Glen Taylor purchased majority interest in 1975, it became the Taylor Corporation, which remains in North Mankato today.

Food Services

Both the Sanitary Dairy and Schaefer Lake Dairy started in the early 1920s with only farm sales and rudimentary delivery systems. There may have been other, smaller dairies as well. Sanitary and Schaefer Lake dairies merged in 1926 to create Purity Dairy in a plant located at 110 Nicollet Avenue. In 1936 co-founder Merrill Claridge left Purity to form Marigold Dairies. Marigold then constructed a large new plant on Belgrade Avenue near the bridge, a \$25,000 one-story simplified deco-style building constructed by Neitge Construction. Marigold proceeded to dominate the local market, producing milk, ice cream and sherbets, cottage cheese, and frozen strawberries with an initial staff of 25 (including delivery drivers). Between 1940-1965, Marigold was one of the largest employers in North Mankato, with 80 people on the payroll, and was one of the top-rated independent dairy companies in the nation. Marigold merged with Quality Check/Kemps in the mid-1960s. Following the merger, the Belgrade Avenue plant underwent a \$200,000 expansion in 1970, adding a large milk cooling room and loading area. It was then sold in 1981 and torn down in the 1990s.

Media

Although North Mankato news was generally covered by the Mankato Free Press, it did have its own newspaper for a time called, the North Mankato Review. Published by George Pusch, the Review began circulation on September 8, 1921. It sold to Nick Stemper in the mid-1930s, then in 1944 to William Schudt, who ran it until 1947.

North Mankato's radio station, KYSM, went on the air in 1938 and within a year became an affiliate of NBC due to its large audience. In 1948, an FM band was added, allowing the station to gain stronger clarity and still more listenership. KYSM continued as an adult format station until switching to a country format in 1977 and remains so today.

Brickyards and Quarries

North Mankato brickyards were founded to harvest the area's generous supply of floodplain clay. These were alluvial deposits carried by the Minnesota River. General characteristics were sandy composition, with fair plasticity, and a red or salmon color. Bricks manufactured from the clay were moderately strong.

Martin Meihoffer and the Hauerwas brothers opened North Mankato's first brickyard, though their business struggled from the start. Just a few months later, A.L. Wheeler and O.E. Bennett started their brickyard in North Mankato in 1886/87, on 26 acres of land purchased from the original owner, Dr. William F. Lewis. The fates of the various brickyards seemed intermingled from the start.

Nicholas Welter also ran a small brickyard from 1888 to 1892, when he sold it to Wheeler and Bennett. Meirhoffer took over sole possession of his yard in 1890, then selling the yard to Wheeler and Bennett in 1893 and opening a smaller yard on land purchased from Wendell Hodapp.



This photograph of the Wheeler and Bennett Brickyard reads: "Brick yard, North Mankato, about 1895." Note the women in the foreground, the workers with other family members and horse drawn carriages behind, and the long drying racks across the yard.

They were followed by the W.E. Stewart Brickyard and the Shingles yards (at the Meirhoffer site), and later by the North Mankato Brick Company. Stewart Brickyard opened in 1905 adjacent to the Wheeler and Bennett Brickyard, and became the last remaining North Mankato brickyard, operating (albeit at reduced capacity) into the 1950s.

The dominant brickyards were those of Wheeler and Bennett and Stewart, who employed close to 200 men between them. While Mankato had more brickyards than North Mankato, North Mankato's brickyards were a more important part of its economy, and so North Mankato became known as a brickyard town.

Part of this was the local effect. With no railroad access, it was not easy to transport heavy bricks. Thus, many of North Mankato's bricks were used in town for the residential building boom. Many North Mankato houses, ranging from small cottages to large houses of local businessmen, and especially on Belgrade and Nicollet Avenues, were built of North Mankato brick (see the Residential section for more on this subject.) In some cases, such as the Wheeler House, the Bennett House, and the Stewart Building, the construction showcased the brick.

Brickmaking faced challenges beyond transportation. The yards generally closed for the winter, and spring floods could literally wash the clay away. However, like Mankato stone, the market did expand, particularly as transportation improved. Mankato and North Mankato gained dominance in the stone and brick industries of the time, with brickmaking rivalled only by similar operations in Chaska.

The boom was relatively short-lived. Clay reserves dwindled, and what remained was of lower quality. Construction fashion began to trend towards other kinds of brick, including sand lime brick, pressed brick, veneer, tapestry brick, enameled brick, and Occidental brick. Some of these bricks were also cheaper to produce, increasing the competition.

In 1905, Wheeler and Bennett closed the North Mankato yard to open a small yard in Wrenshall, Minnesota, operated by Mr. Bennett's son Frank. A few years after the brickyard was closed the city bought the land for a park (Wheeler Park). The depression from the clay pit is still evident in the park today.

Stewart, however, continued until 1935, producing one to two million bricks annually in a variety of styles. Considered to be of a very high-quality, Stewart bricks were featured locally in a number of buildings, including the Stewart Building itself. The North Mankato School building and a number of other prominent buildings in the region also utilized Stewart bricks. Stewart's large house, built next to the brickyard and whose lot incorporated several brickyard buildings, was also built of his brick. Although encompassing a relatively brief period of time, the development of North Mankato brick has been especially significant for the built environment of the town.

North Mankato was also home to three small quarries, mainly along the cliffs — Nelsen's, Weimer's, and Coughlin's. Though small, they compared favorably with their larger Mankato counterparts. Mr. Nelsen, who employed thirty men at the quarry, was also a contractor. These quarries stripped away the top layer of clay, which was found to be insufficient for brickmaking, and used it to enhance the dikes. The layers below it contained sandstone and even some marble that was "at the present time attracting eastern builders."

Other Sectors

Along with its many homes under construction and its brickyards, North Mankato also had some pre-eminent contractors, including Otto Nietje and Q.M. Hagwall. J.B. Nelsen was the largest and most well regarded.

Many early reports of the time noted Henry Mayer's tent and awning business, that created "tents, awnings, wagon covers, separator covers, [and] stack and hay covers." In some reports, there was a division of this business called the "People's Laundry." Mayer was also known as an excellent taxidermist. He also owned a carpet cleaning business and feather renovating business, as well as mattress construction, and "J.C. Mayer" owned another.

Other summaries of town businesses in the early 1900s mention a cigar factory, a garage, a mill, and a small canning factory (as mentioned in the section on Early Farms). At the other end of the timeline is the L.L. Dewey Trucking Distributors, established in North Mankato in 1959.

Property Types

Note: Although this is a comprehensive list, it should be noted that in most cases there are no extant resources relating to these property types (and some that remain have lost a great deal of their integrity). There are a few exceptions, especially in the 100-300 blocks of Belgrade Avenue.

We have included this list to indicate the full range of commerce and industry included in North Mankato's past.

As many of these buildings and related resources were scattered throughout the city, they may turn up, hidden under later development, in future preservation efforts, and should be watched for.

Retail and Entertainment

Appliances

Automobile dealers and repair shops (also under commerce)

eg: Becker Auto Service

Bakeries

eg: Keene's

Bars and Clubs

eg: Harvey's, Century Club, Quarterback Club

Bowling Alleys

Confectionery / Candy Stores
Clothing and Dry Goods
Drugstores
 eg: Wendell Hodapp's
Furniture and Cabinetry
Gas Stations / Service Stations
 eg: Standard Oil
Grocers / Food Markets / Butchers
 eg: Smith's, Walrath's, Stricklands. Damman's
Hardware Stores
 eg: Mutch's
Jewelers / Watchmakers
Meat Markets
Movie Theaters
Plumbing Shops
Restaurants and Cafes
 eg: Art's
Shoe Stores and Shoemakers
Tents and Awnings
Theaters / Performance Spaces

Services
Architects
Attorneys
Banks
 eg: People's, Farmers and Merchants
Barbers
Blacksmiths
 eg: Wildes', Bohr's
Boarding Houses
Builders and Contractors
Doctors
 eg: Stewart Building
Dentists
 eg: Stewart Building
Equipment Distributors
Funeral Homes / Undertakers
 Nichols Funeral Home
Garages
Insurance
Land Agents
 eg: Christensen
Laundries
Lawyers
Liveries
Machine Shops
Notaries
Painters

Photographers
Plumbers
Printers
 eg: Eckes'
Realtors
Repair Shops
Tailors
Taxidermy
Tents and Awnings
 eg: Mayer's
Wagon makers

Industry
Agricultural
 Farms/Truck Farms/Produce
 eg: Wheeler's, Kolber's, Koppen's, Donahue's, etc.
 Orchards
 eg: Lund's
Livestock/Game/Animals
 Dairies and Creameries
 eg: Purity, Marigold, and others
 Feathers
 eg: Mayer's
 Harness and Saddlery
Livestock/Farmer's Market
 Veterinarians
Brickyards
 esp. Wheeler and Bennett, Stewart's
Contractors
 eg: Nelsen, Nietje, Hagwall
 Canning
Cigars
Ice Factories/Plants
 eg: Mankato Ice Company
Lumberyards
Media
Newspapers – North Mankato Review
Radio - KYSM
Mills
Print Shops
 Carlson Craft
Quarries
 eg: Nelsen's, Weimer's, Coughlin's
Trucking
 eg: Dewey

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *Significant exterior alterations have been made to the Stewart building and as currently identified in City plans it is a candidate for both redevelopment and economic development incentives. Any projects considered for redevelopment should incorporate historic recognition and any feasible preservation of the original materials. Based on its construction and history, it could potentially be a candidate for National Register listing, which would facilitate historic preservation tax credits.*
- *Design guidelines for the historic commercial core on Belgrade Avenue are not new, with community meetings on the topic occurring as early as the mid-1970s. Lately, businesses such as Neutral Groundz have capitalized on the historic charm of their locations. Adhering to the design guidelines adopted in the Belgrade Master Plan will capitalize on the remaining historical aspects Belgrade Avenue has to offer.*
- *Marigold Dairy was an important influence on the city, and though the physical resource is gone, the new housing is still called “The Marigold Apartments.” It would fit well within their identity to have a small interpretive exhibit as part of the complex.*
- *The impact of the North Mankato brickyards on the built environment of the town cannot be overestimated. North Mankato has already completed a survey of many of the older area homes, several of which are brick. The city should consider evaluating houses that warrant recognition for use of the local material.*
- *The city should consider the interpretation of Wheeler Park for its historical association with North Mankato brickyards.*



Early 20th century tourist camp in North Mankato advertizing cabins with a view for “\$1.00 a night.”

CONTEXT 4

CIVIC LIFE

Time span – 1860s-current

North Mankato experienced some development between the 1860s and 1880s, but it really began its growth in late 1898. That's when the village separated from Belgrade Township and met in December at the home of O.E. Bennett to elect the first city government. Wendell Hodapp was elected president; O.E. Bennett, Andrew Weymar, and Frank Wilder trustees; A.A. Anderson the recorder; W.E. Stewart treasurer; S. Fuller constable; T.A. Tidland and S.A. Walrath, justices of the peace. They also voted to hire a surveyor and have the plats confirmed. Other first actions included establishing a fireman's hall and having the streets graded and the boardwalks laid out. The population was 937 then, but it grew to 2,814 by 1930.

Annexation

From the time it was established, North Mankato struggled with annexation issues. The town was established as part of Belgrade Township and Nicollet County, but the county seat was in Saint Peter, twelve miles away. As early as the late 1800s, many residents believed the natural course for the town was to merge with Mankato, taking advantages of the sister city's already established civic services.

The first potential annexation vote was held in December 1889, where incorporation of the town as its own municipality won over annexation with Mankato on a vote of 74 to 53. In 1901 and 1905, annexation petitions resurfaced (including a plan to totally re-route the river!), but did not come to fruition. A 1911 proposal was endorsed by North Mankato and Mankato businesses, but it failed in council hearings despite comments such as "North Mankato's marriage to Nicollet County was an unhappy one...and it was about time to get a divorce." The idea of annexation was persistent: In 1917 another proposal was made -- and it too failed. By 1922 North Mankato had grown to the size of "city of the fourth class" under Minnesota state law, and in 1923 there was a strong heated debate about whether or not to put annexation to a public ballot. This seemed to determine the annexation question for good.

Utilities and Public Services

The first town council meeting was on January 10, 1899, and it was clear that civic services were a strong focus of the young town. At that meeting, they granted franchises to the Citizens and Northwestern Telephone companies, as well as engaging a surveyor and electing a village attorney. Though the first streets were rough, ungraded dirt roads, they were quickly improved.

By 1901 Mankato Gas and Electric was hanging lines and establishing streetlights. By 1906 they had laid two miles of gas mains, mainly along Belgrade and adjoining streets.

North Mankato sidewalks started out as rough pine boardwalks. In 1903, the Council ordered that all new sidewalks be constructed of cement or stone, and by 1905 the wood plank sidewalks were substantially replaced with cement or stone. Newspapers were very detailed about these costs, commenting in 1905, for example, that "About two hundred feet of six-foot cement sidewalks have been laid, mainly on Belgrade and Sherman Avenues, costing \$120." These sidewalks gave the city, especially along Belgrade Avenue, a neat and ordered appearance. Through the years, newspaper reports continually discussed the upgrading, expansion, and repair of these

sidewalks and storm sewer systems, indicating that maintenance (and repair after flooding) were major concerns for the city. At the end of 1921, for example, the Mankato Free Press reported that North Mankato had spent over \$18,500 on curb, storm sewer, and sidewalks that year.

In 1906, the council even voted to purchase and install house numbers for all properties after they renumbered lots and changed street names. The name Belgrade Avenue was kept, and it was determined that the streets running parallel to it would be called avenues, and the cross streets called streets. At that point the streets were also to be renamed, but this did not actually occur.



The North Mankato Public Library and the Fireman's Hall located at the southeast corner of Belgrade Avenue and Center Street sometime after 1921 when the city purchased an electric siren for the firehall's tower.

The city established a library in 1907, with 150 volumes. It was a voluntary association, not tax-supported. First housed in the North Mankato School, the library moved to a wood-frame, former bakery building purchased for \$100 in 1909, which was moved onto a lot adjacent to the fireman's hall. In 1925 the library returned to the school while a new municipal building was being constructed. When that municipal building opened in 1926, the library was relocated. By then it had 2,840 volumes. It was open nine hours a week, and the librarian was paid 40¢ an hour. In 1967, the library became a member of the Minnesota Valley Regional Library System, and it moved into another new municipal building in 1969.

By 1911, after the council had determined that private wells were inadequate and after several high-profile fires, the city established a \$20,000 waterworks system with a 350-foot artesian well, a large reservoir, and 16,000 feet of water main piping. The June 1911 newspaper reported a celebration for the opening of the waterworks.

The 1930s continued North Mankato's trend of rich municipal services with upgrades to most systems, including streets, grading, power, and sewers. Systems were upgraded again in 1945, as North Mankato experienced post-war population growth.

Utilities, especially gas and sewer services, were continually challenged by flooding, especially the massive 1951 flood.

Fire and Police

The North Mankato Fire Department was established in 1901. Although it was originally a volunteer system and hampered by a lack of waterworks, by 1911 the infrastructure had improved. The department purchased a motorized truck in 1917, which contributed significantly to their organization, though the fire-fighters were still all-volunteer. By 1920 the department had fifty men, twenty-five each for the hook-and-ladder team and twenty-five for the hose team. In 1925, the fire department purchased a significantly upgraded truck and equipment system, including a larger pump, longer hoses, and chemical tanks. Newspapers of the time reported on the heavy testing done on the equipment before the city agreed to finally purchase it. At that point, it was determined that the floor in the fire hall / municipal building was not strong enough to bear the equipment, perhaps leading to the construction of the new municipal building in 1926.

The police department became mobilized in the 1930s, when Chief H.M. Quimby purchased a car and the police force paid for gas. North Mankato has never had a jail.

Municipal Buildings

Perhaps it was the new fire equipment, the larger library, or simply the need for consolidated services that led North Mankato to erect an imposing municipal building. The building was designed by Henry Gerlach and built by Joel Bergstrom for a cost of \$30,000 in 1926.

The new municipal building was built on the site of the former public library and fireman's hall. It was a multi-purpose building, with library, city council chambers, the courtroom and city offices (including a fireproof vault) on the first floor, as well as rest rooms and locker rooms. The second floor held a 700-person auditorium with a 23' x 25' stage, a projection booth, and kitchen services, as well as storage.

The fire hall was 23' x 51' and opened onto Center Street, with the fire whistle on top of the building calling curfew each night for North Mankato's youth.



The Municipal Building and fire engine as viewed from the intersection of Belgrade Avenue and Center Street.

The 1926 building, now called the Brandt Building, still exists under private ownership. The floor plan is substantially different, but the exterior remains the same.

The current municipal building, at 1001 Belgrade Avenue, was constructed beginning in 1967 (completed in 1969), so does fit inside the 50-year bright line for historic resources. This building, constructed for a cost of \$434,000,

originally held city staff, council chambers, the police and fire departments, and the library. Since then, the police and fire departments have moved, the police to a nearby annex and the fire department to Hilltop.

Schools

North Mankato School

North Mankato quickly grew enough to require a school. The first classes were taught by Jane Parsons in the rooms above Strickland's grocery store, that later became R&J Liquors. The North Mankato School, called "an edifice which would do credit to a much larger city" and "one of the best schools in the state," opened in the 1890-91 school with 200 students. The cost to build was \$4,000. It was a simplified Queen Anne brick building, likely designed by George Pass, with four classrooms in a two-over-two layout. By 1904, capacity was such that the building needed to be doubled with a symmetrical addition, retaining the central tower. This addition was certainly by Pass, and cost \$5,380. A final two-story section with seven classrooms was added in 1920. The school taught through 8th grade, with peak enrollment at almost 500 students.



North Mankato School as it appeared circa 1900. View from Belgrade Avenue looking to the northwest.

The building was known for its attractive countenance and the fact that it was entirely constructed of North Mankato brick with a chocolate mortar. The building was said to be fireproof, with concrete and terrazzo floors, though classroom floors had a hard maple-finish overlay. The building was especially noted for its number of large windows and the natural light inside the classrooms.

As well as being attractive, the school was known for early innovation, including much-remarked upon steam-heat and HVAC system, a "sanitary drinking fountain system," a playground, and a free textbook system. It was also recognized for having both shop and home-economics facilities.



The building went through several uses after being decommissioned as a school when the Mankato and North Mankato districts merged and the building was sold in 1959. For some time, it was used for a printing business, and later as practice space for bands. There was even discussion of demolition before it was sold and became rental units in the early 1980s. Its 1982 listing on the National Register likely saved the building, and the listing allowed the use of tax credits to renovate it into apartments.

Garfield Elementary School

The North Mankato school system experienced expanding classroom needs in the late 1940s. To address a growing student population the school board determined that a new elementary school facility should be built and an open site along Garfield Avenue between Center and Range streets was selected. The new school would be designed to house grades five through nine.

The building was rendered in the International Style by the architecture firm of Pass and Rockey that was known for its focus on school design in the region. Construction of the school began in 1950, but the 1951 spring flood delayed completion for a few months.



Garfield Elementary School was built in the lower North Mankato on open land occupied by brickyards at the turn of the century.

The school served the community for over 60 years until it was closed in 2016. The school building was then renovated and renamed the Bridges Elementary School, a charter school that provides a kindergarten through fifth grade program.

Monroe Elementary School

Though the school districts merged in the late 1950s, North Mankato still needed an elementary school. In 1958, the remnants of Tanley Field were demolished to make way for the new school, which now serves levels kindergarten through fifth grade. Monroe Elementary spans most of the south side of Monroe Avenue between Center and Cross Streets. The stone clad, mid-century modern building sits to the northwest of the original Garfield Elementary School.



The Monroe Elementary School, with its alternate banding of glass and Kasota limestone, displays the influence of the International Style and the horizontal orientation of Prairie Style architecture.

Holy Rosary School

Classes began at Holy Rosary School in the fall of 1925. As the enrollment grew, the Catholic school's physical footprint expanded significantly from 1940 to 1960. Through the second half of the 20th century the school continued to provide a parochial education alternative for the parish and surrounding area. From 1993 until 2005 Grades 4-5 from all of the Mankato/North Mankato parishes were taught at Holy Rosary School.



With the consolidation of local Catholic education services to Mankato's Loyola Catholic School, in the spring of 2005 the Holy Rosary School building no longer functioned as a grade school. Since that time the school building has become a multipurpose facility housing the parish offices, providing classrooms for religious education, and supplying assembly space for various organizations and gatherings.

Prominent Citizens

North Mankato is significantly represented by a number of businessmen and civic leaders who worked and lived in the town. There are several impressive homes in town that are associated with these men. These leaders include:

- Wendell Hodapp – drugstore owner and first village president, whose original home on Lake Street has been substantially altered.
- William E. Stewart – brickyard owner, whose house at 733 Range Street is listed on the National Register.
- Oscar E. Bennett – brickyard owner, in whose home at 322 Wheeler the village cast its incorporating vote.
- Almon L. Wheeler – brickyard owner, house at 348 Wheeler.
- Otto Nietje – contractor, whose house at 412 Sherman Street served as an advertisement for his work.
- Jacob B. Nelsen – contractor, whose house at 503 Cornelia Street demonstrates top quality brick and stone construction.

Property Types

Civic

Civic/Municipal Buildings

Brandt building

New municipal building

Fire

Library

Police

Public Services

Gas lines

Electricity

Sewer

Telephone
Telegraph
Water
Residences of Civic Leaders
Hodapp, Stewart, Bennett, Wheeler, Nietje, Nelsen
Schools
North Mankato school building (now Belltower apartments)
Monroe School
Street Paving and Numbering

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *The Brandt Building, a significant building for its role in the city's civic past, could be considered for local recognition or even a National Register nomination.*
- *The library has long served, and been a valuable resource for, North Mankato since its establishment. The city should work with the library to create an interpretive exhibit on the city's history.*
- *The city has some attractive mid-century modern civic buildings, including the late 1960s municipal building and Monroe School. Further investigation should be completed for recognition.*
- *The adaptive use of the North Mankato school into Belltower Apartments is an early success in this field. It could be replicated with other adaptive use housing.*
- *In the past, the city has offered a self-guided walking tour featuring the homes of prominent citizens. This would be a great project to bring back, perhaps with historic photos.*

CONTEXT 5

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL LIFE *Time span – 1890s-1960s*

Social North Mankato

North Mankato offered more to its residents than homes and businesses. A thriving community needs places to recreate and to join together. The interconnectedness of the North Mankato community is demonstrated in the ways that this context overlaps with others; in a town where all business is local, social and cultural connections have a strong link to commerce and industry.

Though North Mankato was conspicuously missing any public parks in its early history, it did develop those amenities (including a ball field) as it matured. The city also gained several churches. Finally, there were some important social clubs, though there are no longer any related remaining resources.

North Mankato's Churches

In a town like North Mankato, churches provide more than just a faith experience. They also serve as a place for people to gather and to deepen community.

As with many Minnesota towns, the first religious services were conducted by itinerant preachers long before there were organized churches. Robert Sharp and Archibald Law were the main preachers. They organized services in various residents' homes, walking the 10 or more miles between the towns they served every week.

One of North Mankato's oldest prominent buildings was the Swedish Congregational Church, on the corner of Belgrade Avenue and Ball Street. Organized by Professor D. Magnus and Reverend J.A. Berg and built in 1889, it was the town's first church. It later became the Mission Covenant Church, and was torn down in 1959 to make room for the highway interchange.

The Belgrade Avenue Methodist Church was organized in 1901 by Thomas Smith, T.J. Serk, W.H. Tidland, Leric Rendall, Joshua Hodson, and L. Wetzel. Originally the congregants met in a big tent, then in the old Mayer Building, before constructing a church at Sherman Street and Belgrade Avenue. Their current church building, constructed in 1977, is on the site of the old church.

The first Catholic Church was a wood-frame building constructed in 1861. Holy Rosary Catholic Church was



Holy Rosary Catholic Church at 525 Grant Avenue.



*Belgrade Avenue Methodist Church at
325 Sherman Street.*

organized in 1924, originally meeting in the fire hall. Some residents shared memories of the Ku Klux Klan working actively against the church. Some reports mentioned cross burnings on the hill in protest. Nevertheless, Holy Rosary built a church and a parochial school the following year. 1950 saw the construction of a new mid-century style church at

Sherman Street and Grant Avenue, followed by a convent for 22 nuns in 1957. In the mid-1980s, the convent was torn down and replaced with senior housing. The remaining Holy Rosary buildings are likely North Mankato's most significant remaining religious resources.

Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church was built on the corner of Range and Wheeler in 1922. Organized by Reverend John Youngberg in 1876, the congregation had previously met in various homes, a plumbing shop, and the fire hall. They constructed a new church in 1949 for their rapidly growing congregation at Range and Monroe. It has had several additions.

Other area religious groups, including Trinity Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses, are in newer buildings in the Hilltop area.



Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 304 Monroe Avenue.

North Mankato Parks

Spring Lake Park

Spring Lake, or "Mud Lake" as it was affectionately called, was a North Mankato fixture from the beginning. The lake was a remnant from the river rerouting itself from early flooding, and was originally 8-10 feet deep. It was known for its well-stocked fish and extremely muddy bottom. The youth in that part of town would swim there, while those closer to the river would brave river water instead, with potentially dangerous river currents but less mud. It was originally part of Wendall Hodapp's land. He offered to give it to the city as early as the 1890s if the city would dredge its muddy bottom and allow him to continue to harvest ice. That proposal was turned down, but eventually the city acquired the land for the price of \$3,500.

Wheeler Park

The city of North Mankato badly needed a central park and gathering space, and so the former Wheeler Brickyards land was purchased from Maria Wheeler for \$8,500, and the new park dedicated in 1943. By all accounts, the dedication was quite an event, with over 500 in attendance, a fried chicken dinner, kittenball, and a hog-calling contest.

The Wheeler Park bandshell, made of concrete and Kasota stone, was a National Youth Administration/WPA program building constructed in 1942. The city provided just over a quarter of the cost, with the NYA providing the balance and employing the 40 North Mankato and Mankato youth who built the project. The bandshell was used for a few concerts a year in the beginning,

The park is well used today and maintains its traditional appearance, giving a good sense of place of both the park and the brickyard that preceded it.



Wheeler Park Bandshell and concession stand.

North Mankato Baseball

There's nothing more all-American for a small town like North Mankato than a baseball field. In 1936, Bill Tanley, a bottler for Key City Beverages, came up with the idea of a field sited at the corner of Monroe Avenue and Center Street. Originally called "Key City Park," in 1937 it was renamed Tanley Field after its founder. The original name caused confusion with the City of Mankato, whose nickname was "Key City of Southern Minnesota."



Tanley Field as it appeared in the mid-20th century.

Tanley's recruitment technique was also unusual. He offered potential players a job with Key City Beverages if they played for the team, a double bonus in the Depression-era job market. Soon the team's name was changed to the Mankato Merchants.

The field was expanded greatly in 1938 to include more seating, shower and expanded dressing rooms, covered dugouts, a press booth, lighting for night games, and a loudspeaker. It became a popular park, and in 1947 hosted the Minnesota State Amateur Baseball Tournament, with record attendance. That was also the first year the state adopted the double-elimination system, and an electronic scoreboard was installed for the game.

However, the field suffered serious damage when completely flooded out during the flood of 1951. A few years later, in 1958, the field and its infrastructure was torn down to make room for Monroe elementary school.

Other Social Activities

Marigold Dairy sponsored a marching jazz group called the Marigold Dixielanders in 1955, one of the few New Orleans-style marching jazz bands in the area. The group was active into the 1970s, winning the 1960 National Dixieland Band Contest.

The patriotic city has long honored its soldiers. Pictures of soldiers lined the walls of the Century Club. A Roll of Honor commemorating those lost in battle was erected in front of the municipal building at Belgrade and Central in 1943. The municipal building was one of the few in the area to host WPA wartime programs during World War II.

Similar to other cities, North Mankato had a wide range of civic clubs, including Masons, Elks, Knights of Columbus, and Lions. There was a Commerce Club, as well as Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. Churches had their own social groups. One of the oldest and most unusual clubs was the Fortnightly Study Club, a women's group organized in 1921. Their history presentations resulted in many of the materials for this study.

Property Types

Churches and related buildings

- Parochial schools
- Convents and monasteries
- Church social halls

Rectories and other residences
Church administrative buildings and offices
Especially noted: Holy Rosary, parts of Saint Paul's Evangelical Church
Meeting halls and social halls
Sports grounds
Baseball fields – site of Tanley Field
Parks
Wheeler – especially the bandshell, Veteran's Memorial, old brick pits
Spring Lake

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *North Mankato's churches are a crucial part of the city's history. Many original churches have been lost but some still remain, i.e. Holy Rosary. The city should look into designation, protection, and interpretation of the facility, perhaps with other mid-century buildings.*
- *Wheeler Park is important, not only for its history as a park, but also for its previous use as a brickyard. As such, its topography is especially important.*
- *Key parts of Wheeler Park are the Veteran's Memorial and the bandshell. These sites should be individually assessed for historic significance and for potential listing on the National Register.*



Looking north across Wheeler Park with Monroe Elementary School in the distance.

CONTEXT 6

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Time span – 1857-1960s

Building Styles and Vernacular Architecture

Architecture in general is made up of three core components: function, structure, and aesthetics. These basic elements interface in varying degrees to form two design categories: “Vernacular” and “High Style” architecture. The majority of North Mankato’s structures are “vernacular” in design and disposition. Often these homes were more modest in scale and in application of ornament—utilitarian in function and layout. They, as a congregate, were no less important to the community’s development than the more elaborate or expansive structures that housed North Mankato’s business owners and more wealthy families. Beauty and importance can be found in both the stately, ornately adorned dwelling and the simpler, well-constructed mid-century bungalow cottage.

In vernacular and even in high-style dwellings, individuality is expressed not only by scale and shape, but also by details such as the turn of the porch post, or the return on a roof profile. In the more exuberant architecture there may be a flourish of details that lead to defining the style. In the vernacular the details, where they exist, are subtler. And often in both there may be a liberal mix of style details that reflect a structure’s evolution through time and fashion, making attributing any one style to the structure difficult, if not impossible.

“Style” is defined as those consistent qualities and features that link different elements together into groups. While buildings of a similar style provide continuity to a neighborhood, differences in style can create visual variety and help to distinguish one home from another and one neighborhood from another. These differences result from what was popular at the time of construction, or the whim of the designer, builder, or owner. Learning about the style of one’s home can help answer many preservation questions, including those regarding original treatments, color schemes, and what should replace missing elements.

Recognizing the limitations, residents should always look for design clues that will aid them in making appropriate and sound decisions in maintaining North Mankato’s broad residential fabric. A good understanding and appreciation of all styles of residential architecture, new or old, will serve the long-term best interests of North Mankato’s diverse housing stock and will encourage the general growing acceptance of preservation as a benefit to the economic and cultural wellbeing of the community.

North Mankato also needs to integrate three very defined periods of construction. Houses in the valley, especially along Belgrade, Nicollet, and Park Avenues and the cross streets are from the early period of development of the community, up to the 1920s. To the north of Wheeler Park, the period of influence is generally later, mainly from the 1930s through mid-century. In the Hilltop area, with the exception of a few early farmsteads, the houses are mainly from the 1960s on. These periods of development reflect three distinct “building booms” in North Mankato’s history.



The brick house at 529 Belgrade Avenue as it appeared in the early 20th century. This residence is a fine example of Dutch Colonial Style architecture as defined by a dual-pitched roof slope.

Early North Mankato residential construction was highly praised for its value and appearance. A 1912 bulletin proclaims “The type of houses is an index to the character of the people. No ‘shacks’ or cheap houses are found here. There are no undesirable citizens, but a happy intermingling of English-speaking people of various racial stocks.” Numerous similar sentiments were expressed over the years, with Mayor H.C. Wollam quoted in 1945 as saying that “North Mankato is one of the finest residential sections in southern Minnesota.”

Brick Masonry Residential Construction

Across the river, Mankato became known especially for its Mankato stone houses, often built near the quarries for convenience while serving as showpieces for their stone quality. North Mankato has a similar story, but here it featured the city’s several brickyards. Local brickyards started appearing in North Mankato in the 1880s with brick production continuing on into the mid-1900s.

There were a number of reasons that brick was a popular material in North Mankato. While the iron bridge made it feasible to transport the product out of the immediate area, brick was a relatively inexpensive structural material, making it an attractive resource for North Mankato’s initial building boom. In some cases, such the O.E. Bennett house, and the A.L. Wheeler house (and even the Stewart Building) the homeowners were also brickyard executives who likely wanted to promote their product.

Brick was sturdy. For a flood-prone area like North Mankato, this made it especially attractive. And finally, brick appealed to North Mankato’s residents for its connotations of permanence, stability, durability, and prosperity. Especially for the new German and Scandinavian immigrants, brick was a highly sought-after material that indicated social importance and a significant role in the community.

This attribute was of course demonstrated in larger homes, such as the aforementioned Wheeler and Bennett houses, contractors’ residences, the Otto Nietje house and the J.B. Nelson house, the W.J. Nixon house, the Nichols funeral home, and several downtown storefronts. But it was also seen in many smaller cottages, particularly along Belgrade Avenue. Of the 40 properties surveyed in October 2017, 33 were entirely or partially of brick construction. North Mankato’s brick properties do not only reflect the history and development of the town and the local brick industry, they also demonstrate a remarkable congruity of style and material that offers a unique “sense of place” to the city.



A pair of brick Queen Anne Style brick homes at 618 & 614 Belgrade Avenue were both built in 1900.

Housing Styles

Providing residents with clear and accessible information about their houses is probably the best way to draw them into historic preservation. People love their homes, and are usually eager to preserve and protect them. By demonstrating how different housing styles fit into North Mankato's historic contexts, and by providing preservation information to homeowners, historic preservation in North Mankato could gain many new supporters and advocates, while having a dramatic effect upon the good stewardship of the city's housing stock.

The following style section may prove to be the most valuable part of the entire context study for North Mankato homeowners, because it allows them to see and understand their particular home within a larger historic framework and it may provide ideas for restoration and ongoing care. Starting on page 38, the **STYLE GUIDE OF NORTH MANKATO'S RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE** defines the North Mankato housing types by giving some background history on the various styles, lists the style's identifying features, and provides visual references of good examples of that style within the community.

In viewing the guide it should be remembered that much of the residential building stock does not necessarily fit within a specific style. Many of the local residential structures may represent a combination of styles or have been modified with new architectural features as the housing fashions changed. It should also be noted that due to its location and the availability to a variety of local building materials, North Mankato displays a higher percentage of brick and stone residences than most cities in Minnesota. Another somewhat unique feature is that the use of indigenous stone in most communities is likely tied to specific time periods of construction or styles of architecture. North Mankato presents a variety of styles rendered in native stone over a large expanse of time. These include: an English cottage at 711 Nicollet Avenue to a Ranch house at 401 Page Avenue; and a Modern Eclectic home at 732 Park Avenue to the Cape Cod house at 825 Nicollet Avenue.



This early vernacular house located at 501 Garfield Avenue has the hint of Greek Revival influence in its footprint and profile. The "temple" form is seen in the front facing gable and simple rectilinear framing—a popular building form in early American settlement architecture.



The Victorian Cottage located 604 Page Avenue was built in 1890. The home's design displays the transition from the simple "Homestead-L" farmstead cottage into the era of Queen Anne architecture with its asymmetric front facade, turned porch posts and spindles, fretwork, divided-light transom window, and classical Palladian window-set in the front gable.

STYLE GUIDE OF NORTH MANKATO'S RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

Vernacular Gabled-L/Gabled-T/Homestead Cottage (circa 1870-1910)

The Gabled-L and Gabled-T layout refers to the non-style-conscious house design that evolved from the rural dwelling of the mid-1800s to the modest village cottage. Simple in layout, and home to an emerging working class, the Homestead dwelling generally rejected ornate architectural detailing for simple, utilitarian functionality.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Minimal architectural detailing.
- Defined by shape, rather than architectural detailing.
- Tri-gabled, in the shape of an L or T, with a front porch or side porches tucked into the crook of the L or T.
- Indigenous brick or wood frame construction with clapboard siding.
- Simple, box-like massing.



531 Nicollet Avenue as it appeared in 1909.



335 Wheeler Avenue is a fine example of the Homestead architecture with side porch.



The corner home at 401 Wheeler Avenue is a Vernacular-T example.



Belgrade Avenue displays many fine brick homes. The house at 632 is an example of brick Vernacular-L Homestead architecture.

Queen Anne (circa 1880-1910) Shingle (circa 1880-1910)

The Queen Anne style was conceived in the 1870's by the English architect Richard Norman Shaw, who was in search of a style suitable for domestic and public building structures. It draws heavily from Tudor and Stuart eras in Great Britain, but has little to do with the English Renaissance style popular during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714). The style became popular in this country after its introduction at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. It reached North Mankato around 1890.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- More complex and irregular than any formal style before it.
- Irregular in plan and asymmetrical in massing.
- Strong vertical orientation.
- Variety of surface texture, roofs and wall projections.
- Roofs are multiple and complex.
- Two-story bay may project from the principal facades.
- Rounded turrets (towers) often anchor a main facade's corner.
- Shingles and clapboards are common exterior wall materials. In North Mankato bricks are more prominent.
- Tall, thin chimneys.
- Main floor "picture" windows

For the Shingle Style, a derivative of the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival.

- Asymmetrical elevations with wood shingle sheathing.
- Dutch Colonial Revival gambrel gables.



322 Wheeler Avenue was built in 1886 by O.E. Bennett, co-founder of the Bennett and Wheeler Brickyard.



348 Wheeler Avenue was built in 1892 by A.L. Wheeler, co-founder of the Bennett and Wheeler Brickyard.



442 Wheeler Avenue, built in 1894 was the home of W.J. Nixon.



The corner house at 601 Grant Avenue is a good example of a wood frame Queen Anne design.



412 Sherman Avenue was constructed in the Shingle Style, an architectural style defined here by its upper-story wood shingle sheathing and its Dutch Colonial Revival gambrel gables. This type of architecture is commonly associated with Eastern coastal cottages and great homes. This house was built in 1902 by Otto Nietge, a prominent contractor and builder in the village.

Hipped Rectilinear (circa 1900-1925) Vernacular Variation: American Four-square

This early 20th century form of residential architecture can be rendered in a variety of styles depending upon its use of details and ornament. With classical details such as Palladian windows (a centered arched window with shorter flanking side windows) it might be classified as vernacular Colonial Revival, or if it is highly bracketed it might fall into the Craftsman category. With wide overhanging eaves and a strong horizontal banding it might be seen as a design of the Prairie School. No matter what style they are rendered in, they all share some simple footprint and roofline features.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Rectilinear foundations; for American Four-square the footprint is generally square.
- Front elevation is less wide than the side elevations.
- One-story porches generally span the front elevation.
- Side elevations may display bowed or angled one- or two-story bays.
- Two full stories under a low-pitched hipped roof. In Colonial Revival cases the dormers may be gabled.
- Hipped dormers centered on the front elevation roof plane.
- Often side hipped dormers on the roof.
- The American Four-square has a simple four-room floor plan on both levels.



403 Cornelia Street (1904) was the home of the Jacob and Anna Nelsen family. Jacob was a building contractor and a stone quarry operator.



The William E. Stewart house, barn and carriage house at 733 Range Street are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1910, this was the home of the William E. Stewart family. Stewart was the founder of the Mankato Brick and Tile Company. The main house displays some Colonial Revival detailing.



540 Belgrade Avenue is a wood-frame American Four-Square.



The Hipped Rectilinear house at 515 Belgrade was built in 1918.

Colonial Revival (circa 1910-1940)

In the United States, the Colonial Revival style dominated domestic architecture throughout the first half of the 20th century. However, North Mankato, due to its intermittent residential growth spurts, has very few residences rendered in the end gabled Colonial Revival style.

The name Colonial Revival came from a rebirth of interest in the early English and Dutch homes prominent along the Atlantic coast. Another source of inspiration came from the colonial style commonly known as Georgian Colonial (1800) and from English architecture of the same period. This renewed interest in classical forms dates from Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Symmetrical placement of windows and door on the main facade.
- Side-gabled form.
- Chimneys are often placed to contribute to overall symmetry.
- Chimneys are often engaged to the end walls.
- The standard window is the rectangular double-hung.
- May have true divided light windows
- Main entrance may be framed by classical detailing, like fluted pilasters.
- Shutters are often a decorative feature.



The Colonial Revival home at 751 South Avenue displays symmetry of fenestration, gabled wall dormers at the roofline, a one-story end pavilion, and an end-gable chimney stack.



This brick Colonial Revival house at 540 Harrison Avenue displays engaged chimney stacks in both the end gables.

Gambrel Cottage or Dutch Colonial Revival (circa 1910-1945)

Around the turn of the century it became popular in America to look back nostalgically to the architecture of the original colonies. The romantic view of the gambrel dwelling focused on the architecture of the Dutch colonies on the east coast that brought their building traditions from the Netherlands, Germany and the Rhine River region of Europe. One unique feature of this tradition was the extensive use of the Gambrel roof defined by the double-pitched roof plane.

While North Mankato does not have many end-gabled Colonial Revival style houses, the community does have an abundance of Gambrel Cottages sprinkled throughout the early, historic neighborhoods near the river. In most Midwest communities the Dutch Colonial Revival houses make up only about 10% of the residential Colonial Revival architecture population. These percentages appear to be reversed in North Mankato. This may be attributed to the origins of the early settlers and founders of the community.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Symmetrical placement of windows and door on the main facade.
- Side-gabled form in some more classical Dutch Colonial traditions.
- Front or cross gambrel roof also common.
- The standard window is the rectangular double-hung.
- May have true divided light windows.
- Main entrance may be framed by classical detailing with side windows.



640 Park Avenue is a fine example of a end-gable wood-frame classical Dutch Colonial Revival house.



The home at 618 Grant Avenue is a unique example of a front double gambrel roof.



The cross gambrel house at 441 South Avenue displays the scale and detailing of a more formal, classical design.



Gambrel houses, side-by-side at 429 & 433 South Avenue.

Cape Cod Cottage (Circa 1920-1940)

The Cape Cod cottage evolved as a picturesque, more compact form of the Colonial Revival residential architecture. Its form and scale origins are a reference to the early Massachusetts's Cape cottage architecture, often then clad with wood shingles like its stately neighboring Shingle Style homes of the eastern coast line.

Almost all of the features of the end-gable Colonial Revival house can be seen in the Cape Cod, but more modestly displayed. North Mankato has a fine collection of Cape Cod cottages rendered in wood, native stone and brick.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Simple rectilinear footprint.
- One and a half stories in height.
- Symmetrical placement of windows and door on the main facade.
- Front entry centered on the long, street facing, one story elevation.
- Symmetrically place, two or more gabled dormer windows.
- Engaged chimney stacks on the end gables are common.
- The standard window is the rectangular double-hung.
- Many have true divided light windows.
- Shutters are often added on the front elevation.



The white picket fence at 925 South Avenue contributes to the picturesque charm of this Cape Cod home.



The house at 825 Nicollet Avenue is a good example of the Cape Cod style rendered in native stone.



506 Garfield Avenue displays the symmetry of a front three-dormer, side chimney Cape Cod.



The classic Cape Cod at 249 Wheeler Avenue is a fine rendering of the style in brick.

Bungalow & Craftsman (1905-1940)

The Craftsman designs were influenced by the English Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century and growing interest in the designs of the Far East. The bungalow was popularized in America by the broad distribution of California bungalow magazines in the teens and twenties.

The Craftsman style was influenced by the California designs of the brothers Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Green. The firm of Greene & Greene was located in Pasadena California and developed and refined the Craftsman style bungalow between 1893 and 1914. The Craftsman home and its variations peaked after the Prairie School influence was waning, and nationally had a period of popularity that stretched from the turn of the century until around 1940.

Of the many early 20th century styles of residential architecture in lower North Mankato, the Bungalow / Craftsman Bungalow houses are the widespread. So it is no surprise that some of the community's most historic homes are rendered in this American embraced and evolved style of single-family architecture.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Low-pitched, gabled roof.
- Use of decorative beams and braces under eaves.
- Common use of wood shingle covered exterior walls.
- Usually one or one-and-a-half stories high.
- Banding of wrapping windows.
- Recessed porches under a front slopping roof.
- Roofs may display shed, hipped or gabled dormers.
- Double-hung windows with multi-pane sash above single-pane glass lower windows.



The shingled Bungalow at 623 Belgrade Avenue displays a shed dormer on the front sloping roof.



The house with garage at 516 Sherman Street is an outstanding example of the Craftsman Bungalow style.



The shingled Craftsman Bungalow at 513 Park Avenue displays a wide, sheltering and welcoming double gable.



The Bungalow at 509 Nicollet Avenue displays almost every defining feature of this picturesque style.

Tudor Revival/English Cottage (citca 1910-1940)

The Tudor Revival style was part of the eclectic resurgence of the early 20th century. Eclecticism—copying elements from various styles of the past—could be seen in stylistic interest in English Tudor architecture. Tudor architecture was prominent in England from 1485 to 1603 and derived its name from the surname of the English royal family of Henry VII through Elizabeth I. The Tudor stylistic details became quite popular in Minnesota beginning in the 1920s.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Very steep roofs, sometimes with more than a 12-12 slope.
- Two-story sweeping roof slopes.
- Half-timber (exposed framing) on the exterior walls often applied only as design, with no structural purpose.
- Decorative patterned brickwork on the chimneys.
- Decorative flues (chimney pots) extending above the chimney tops.
- Arched entries.



The house at 535 Nicollet Avenue is a fairly unadorned, yet fine example of Tudor Revival architecture.



The picturesque English Cottage at 805 Nicollet Avenue displays a variety of Tudor features.



The home at 712 Nicollet Avenue displays a good example of half-timbering on an English Cottage.



The English Revival house at 628 Grant Avenue is stately in appearance due to its step sloped roof.

Prairie (circa 1905 to Present)

The Prairie style, indigenous to America, was developed and popularized through the Chicago School of Architecture and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The horizontal emphasis in the banding of windows and wide overhanging eaves was a philosophical response to the prairie origin of the style. Though pure Prairie styling in an architect-designed home is relatively rare, elements of the style, including banded windows, wide front porches with massive columns, and the wide, symmetrical style, are evidenced in a number of vernacular homes of the time. The American Foursquare, a standard plan with four rooms up and four down around center hallways, is a commonly seen example of this style.

While there are only Prairie detail references in a few of North Mankato's mid-20th century residential architecture, the style may be seen in later architecture in upper North Mankato.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Low pitched hipped roofs with wide, overhanging eaves.
- Horizontal emphasis in the banding of windows.
- Windows are generally casement or double-hung.
- An open plan, integrating all aspects of the home into a unified whole.
- Massive fireplace stacks of stone or brick help define the buildings profile.



This Prairie home on Roe Crest Drive displays many defining architecture elements of this original American style.

Ranch (circa 1945 to late 1970s)

The Ranch home is a twentieth-century vernacular style that grew out of expansion of the middle-class domestic needs of America's postwar population explosion. As soldiers returned from World War II and started new families, there was a growing need for quickly constructed, simple-in-plan, and affordable homes.

The single-story Ranch home was influenced in style, by the Prairie School work of Midwest architect Frank Lloyd Wright, with its long, horizontal orientation, its low-pitched roof, and window banding (ribbon windows). However, the Ranch often took advantage of factory-made materials such as imitation stone, pressed fiber wood siding, and metal siding. Short of the vague references to Prairie School, and some use of stone, as influenced by California residential architecture, the Ranch home is generally devoid of historic stylistic detailing.

The Split Level, popular starting in the 1950s, is a variation on the one-story Ranch. The Split Level incorporated an additional story to allow for better separation of living functions, and provided interior interest to the floor plan.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Single-story residence with a strong horizontal orientation.
- Low-pitched gable and hipped roofs.
- Often an exterior attached brick fireplace stack on the gable end.
- Use of a variety of exterior materials including face brick and stone.
- Window banding.
- Wide use of "picture windows" with or without flanking side windows.
- Often displaying a garage door at one end of the front façade.



The Ranch house at 844 South Avenue is a fine example of the style rendered in native stone.



This handsome stone Ranch house is located at 401 Page Avenue, across the street from Wheeler Park.

Mid-Century Modern (circa 1955-2000) Contemporary (circa 2000-Present)

Remaining examples of this style are often architect-designed, high-style homes. Many evolved from the teachings and writings of modern architects such as Charles Moore and Robert Venturi, and from commercial and industrial design. These residences generally appear to be multi-faceted blocks, with architectural interest deriving from geometric shape rather than detail.

Upper bluff North Mankato serves as the home to many modern to contemporary residences.

Identifying Characteristics in North Mankato

- Roof variations: either flat (International style) or very pitched (shed style) and sometimes gabled.
- Little to no decorative embellishment.
- Extensive use of natural materials, especially wood siding, often vertical and sometimes at a diagonal.
- Integrated to site and landscaping.
- Entrances usually recessed and obscured.



Cubist in inspiration these residences display the International Style in their block-like massing with flat roofs.



This home displays the “shed” form and massing of modern architecture popularized in Minnesota by modernist architect Ralph Rapson.

Other Residential Considerations

Residential Special Features

In addition to the main dwellings, many houses have notable features that add to the character of the property. These features, while often not remarkable in their own right, contribute substantially to the character of the home, and should be recognized.

The most evident examples of these elements are garages, carriage houses, and outbuildings. Often, these structures are not original to the home; if they are, they should be treated with special care, as they represent part of the historic fabric of the home. Even if an outbuilding was added later, it demonstrates the house's history and period of influence, and ought to be treated in a similar way to the main building. A good example of this in North Mankato is the outbuildings that are part of the Stewart House property, which tie them to the context of the original brickyard.

While other houses may not have such clear-cut examples, it is likely that some of the properties in the older part of town may have some significant outbuildings.

Other examples of exterior detailing include sidewalks, walls and fencing. Original walks are also uncommon, but should be preserved if available, especially given North Mankato's early focus on sidewalks and paving. Fences and walls are important because, like front porches, they mark the transition between the public streetscape and the private yard. In all of these cases, any repairs and new construction of the related elements should be compatible with the original materials and design of the home.

The final consideration would be the relationship of the street to the home. The consultants did not note anything of significance for this in North Mankato, but future development should keep this relationship in mind when determining setbacks, etc.

Multi-Family Housing

The majority of the houses in North Mankato, as described above, are single-family homes. There are some duplexes and triplexes; most of these are converted from single-family homes. The city's current rental restrictions seem to have curbed much of this development.

Several of the commercial buildings on the early blocks of Belgrade were constructed with apartments overhead (for example, the second and third floors of the Stewart Building). In cases like the Stewart, these units were designed both as offices and for residential use. Elsewhere on Belgrade, commercial properties were likely constructed as two-story buildings so that the shopkeeper could live above his store to make access and service easier, and/or to provide extra income for the landlord. Today, many of these units have been converted to offices or storage.

Koppen Gardens was built in 1968 at Nicollet and Sherman, where John Koppen's truck farm had been situated. It was the first low-income apartment complex in North Mankato, with 76 units.

Finally, in at least one notable case — the Belltower Apartments — a former institutional building has been successfully converted into multi-family units.



The buildings at 317 & 325 Page Avenue are a rare example of multi-family housing in lower North Mankato.

An Unusual Situation

North Mankato has a particularly unusual example of historic preservation in the Adam Jefferson house, built in Mankato in 1865 by Jefferson, with stone from his adjacent quarry. The house was in poor repair and was especially threatened due to its location, so it was disassembled and painstakingly rebuilt in North Mankato in 2005. Though the restoration was extremely well-done, and Tom Hagen received a preservation award for the project, the move did result in the house being removed from the National Register, and destroyed the time-place continuity of the site.

The house now sits on a property that holds several other historic homes that have been moved to the site, as well as an exceptional version of a new-construction octagonal house. The forested grounds include hand-built brick driveways and paths leading to the homes.

Conventional preservation mores would eschew a property like this, as the buildings are not original to the site. However, the consultants find this a unique case that is of great interest. The owner of the properties appears quite content to take this on as his own personal project, without any city assistance or intervention. The consultants recommend that the City of North Mankato recognizes this unique property as the resource that it is.

National Register Properties

The following North Mankato properties are currently individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

- William E. Stewart house
722 Range Street
listed 1984
area of significance: industry
- The North Mankato Public School (currently the Belltower Apartments)
442 Belgrade Avenue
areas of significance: architecture, education
listed 1982

The following home was on the National Register in Mankato, but has been moved and thus de-listed:

- Adam Jefferson house
areas of significance: architecture, industry
listed 1980
removed 1987, when moved offsite, but re-assembled and preserved

Property Types

Single-family homes

Vernacular

Architect designed

Apartments and multi-unit homes

Apartments above storefronts

Multi-family units

Adaptive Use Housing
Outbuildings
 Carriage houses
 Garages
 Sheds
Barns
Other outbuildings
Landscaping and gardens
Sidewalks
Fences and gates
Walls

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

- *The City of North Mankato has performed an excellent Level I windshield survey of lower North Mankato (completed in October, 2017 by Courtney Kietzer, Planning Analyst). The surveyed buildings were primarily residential in nature. The city should determine next steps from that survey, including local historic recognition.*
- *The city should consider completing an expanded Level I survey for a greater area, perhaps extending as far north as the brewery.*
- *It should also consider surveying related residential features such as outbuildings and street amenities; these elements could be included as a Level I or a more intensive survey.*
- *From these surveys, the city could consider a more intensive Level II survey for more detailed potential historic designation, including National Register listings.*
- *The city might consider establishing a local nomination process for properties that are in good condition and locally notable but do not rise to National Register standards. These homes should be documented and interpreted as above.*
- *It is not clear from current surveys if there is potential for a historic district in North Mankato, but this should be considered after more survey. Another option might be the designation of historic conservation districts. These districts, a unique blend of preservation and planning, generally seek to preserve a specific neighborhood's "sense of place," rather than individual structures, and make use of zoning and land use regulations to influence future development through historic patterns.*
- *As noted above, North Mankato retains a number of brick homes that are historic in their own right and also tie to the brickmaking industry in North Mankato. The city should consider how best to designate these properties to showcase this unique factor. For example, based on a 2009 recommendation from the consultants, in 2013 Chaska Minnesota prepared a Multiple Properties nomination for "Chaska Brick Resources in the Vicinity of Carver County, 1857-1961."*
- *One challenge that the city faces is that owners of more recent homes (basically those from the 1930s on, and especially those from the 1950s on) do not recognize the historic value of their homes. North Mankato has some fine examples of mid-century construction (both in public buildings and residential stock), and should work to promote an understanding of the historic value of these properties.*
- *The city should conduct outreach to city residents regarding architectural styles and preservation techniques. Such information would allow homeowners to understand their home's distinguishing features, and assist them in planning for the*

preservation of their property. In many cases, alterations have been made to houses (such as enclosing porches) that are easily reversible and would do much to restore the historic character of the house. Such outreach should not ignore elements such as outbuildings, landscape, fences, walks, and other details. Ideally, this process would occur through some sort of residential design guidelines.

- It appears that initial meetings with property owners of historic homes have had mixed results. While in some cases the owners were excited about the opportunity to recognize the history of their home, they were concerned about any regulations that would place limits upon the properties. This is an ongoing discussion to be had.*
- From those meetings, two points of interest identified were 1) a historic plaque program, and 2) developing improvement assistance that helps to preserve historic assets. Both are eminently do-able projects that many communities of North Mankato's size have implemented.*
- From the previous context on Civic Life, the city might want to consider interpretation such as a walking or self-guided tour that includes the residences of prominent citizen and other significant properties. Meetings with homeowners have indicated no opposition to this idea.*

Recommendations and Future Actions

General Summary

As stated in the Introduction, the primary purpose of historic contexts is to provide a framework for evaluating historic resources, acting as a set of organizational tools for categorizing the past, as a planning tool for guiding future development while incorporating the past, and as a rallying point for educational and outreach activities. They will, almost necessarily, grow and change as the city refines its cultural resource priorities.

Each individual context in this study contains its own list of “Recommendations and Future Actions,” which can be changed, amended, added, or deleted as priorities change. These recommendations offer specific, context-related suggestions to further the historic preservation agenda in North Mankato, particularly with regards to interpreting sites and increasing public buy in.

The planning department is to be commended for including historic resource planning in its work, to build upon this historic resource contextual work, North Mankato might benefit from further consideration of the pros and cons of seeking Certified Local Government (CLG) status. With continued good stewardship of the community’s historic resources and an affiliated CLG classification, the City of North Mankato could gain access to a significant funding source for cultural resource planning efforts.

One important next step that the city could take would be to expand and intensify the survey work already done. Such an initiative is quite large and time-consuming, but could be done by a team of enthusiastic volunteers under professional leadership. There is already a strong base for it.

Another recommended priority is the commissioning of general design guidelines, both for the remaining commercial buildings and for the residential districts. Such guidelines would increase public participation in the cultural resource management process, and help property owners leverage their resources with tools like tax incentives.

North Mankato should investigate a local designation process. This designation would help to identify significant resources and offer them a level of appropriate protection, while also increasing public participation. A corollary would be increasing the number of National Register designated properties, based on suggestions made within the individual context discussions.

Other cities have been successful in using completed context studies as a kind of training and introduction manual for commissions or history study groups. And context studies can also be a useful tool in the development of local school curriculum on local history and the importance of good stewardship for our remaining historic resources.

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