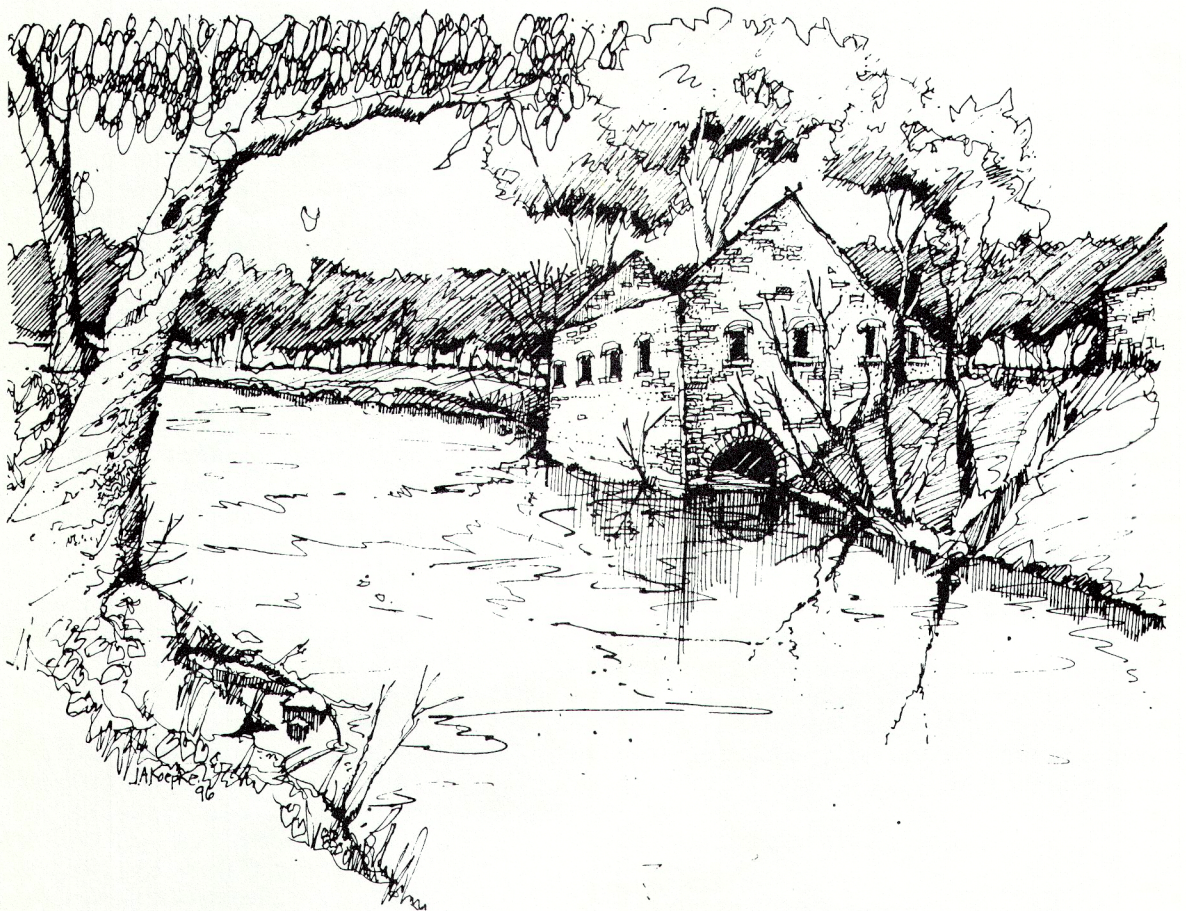


MILL TOWNS TRAIL

INTRODUCTION

The primary function of this trail is to provide a facility that will serve the recreational needs of residents living in the townships and cities adjoining its right of way. By serving local people well, this trail soon will be recognized as an important recreational feature within the region. As a result, the adjoining communities will benefit from increased economic development activity. The one hundred mile recreational resource created by linking the Cannon Valley and the Sakatah Singing Hills trails is likely to serve as an inspiration to other local groups, leading ultimately to a state-wide network of interlocking trails.

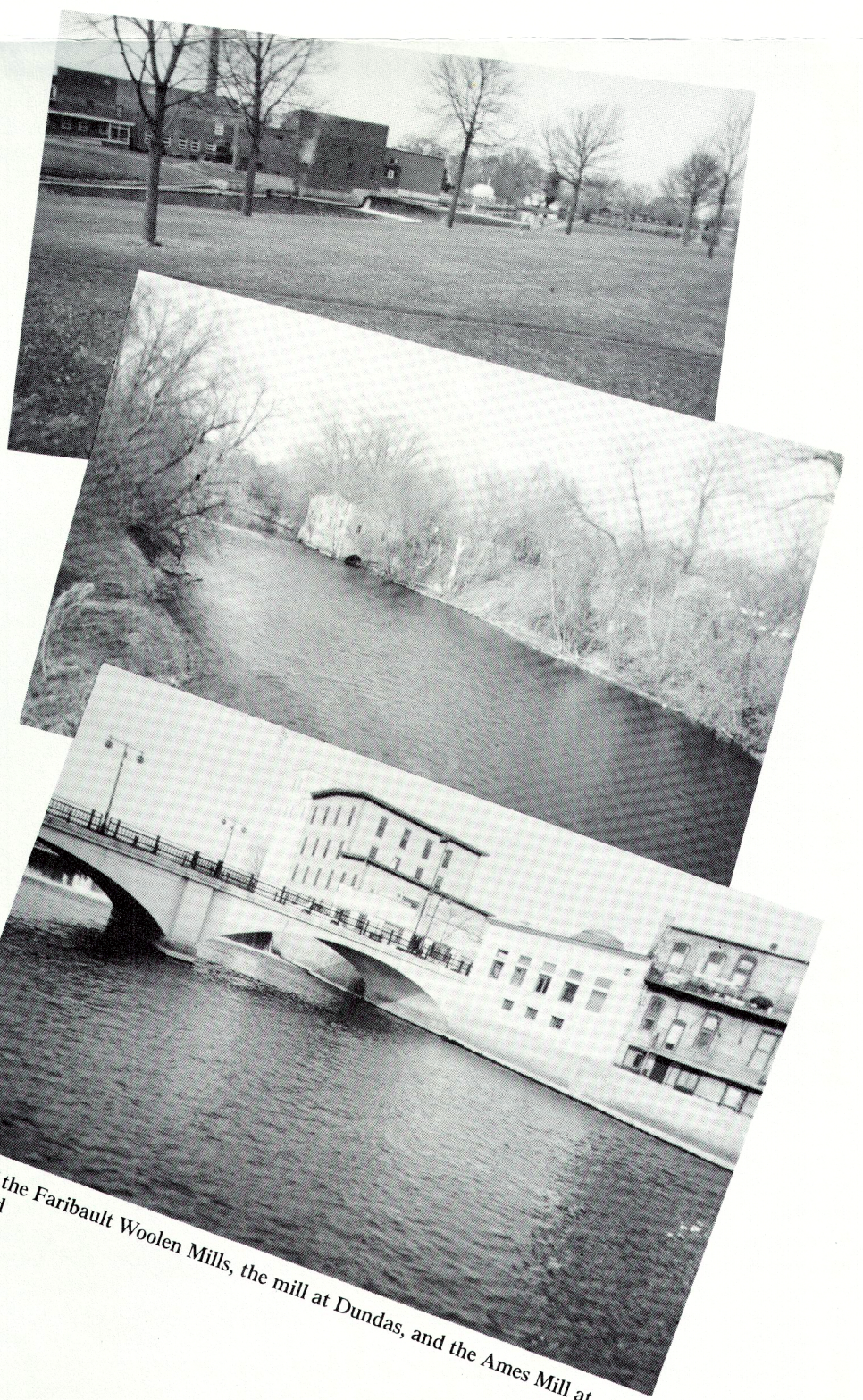


Sketch of the mill at Dundas

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The communities along Mill Towns Trail have both natural and cultural history in common. They share the broad Cannon River Valley, plus the efforts of previous generations to make use of the river's energy through the creation of a series of mill dams. Local historian, Tom Neuhaus, has identified 118 mill sites in Minnesota, including 30 that are located along the Cannon River between Cannon Falls and Faribault. The period of local milling began in the 1850's and was largely over by 1910. The difficulty in finding mill remains today is due in part to their construction which typically was of wood on a lime stone base.

- The first mill at Faribault was built in 1858 for grinding grain. This was followed by three flour mills plus the woolen mill.
- Dundas was the location of 11 mills beginning in the 1850's. The first was a saw mill, but flour mills followed. Part of a successor to the Archibald Mill adjoining the business district is still in place.
- John North was responsible for several mills at Northfield including both a saw mill and a flour mill in the early 1850's. The earliest was situated across the Cannon River from the historic, and newly restored Ames Mill. Sechler Park was the site of a wood burning steam powered saw mill built in 1855.
- Waterford's Grange Mill and Cooperage was erected in 1873. Its foundation is still visible between the railroad and the river. By 1896 there was also a steam generating plant built by Northfield Heat, Light and Power Company.
- Lewiston at Alta Avenue was the site of the Granville Flour Mill built in 1851. The town site for Lewiston existed between 1855 and 1871, but was erased by a dam failure which flooded the community, leaving no remains of the mill. The town was not rebuilt even though it had been larger than present day Randolph. The Sciota Township Hall, built in 1860, was formerly owned by Lewiston School District 69 and is the only building that remains from that period.
- Cannon Falls included the Old Stone Mill on a site that has never been rediscovered, plus the Oxford Mill in Stanton Township. These mills were established in 1864 and both were closed in the "panic of '73". The Oxford Mill was re-opened in 1876 and continued to function until it burned in 1905.



Views of the Faribault Woolen Mills, the mill at Dundas, and the Ames Mill at Northfield

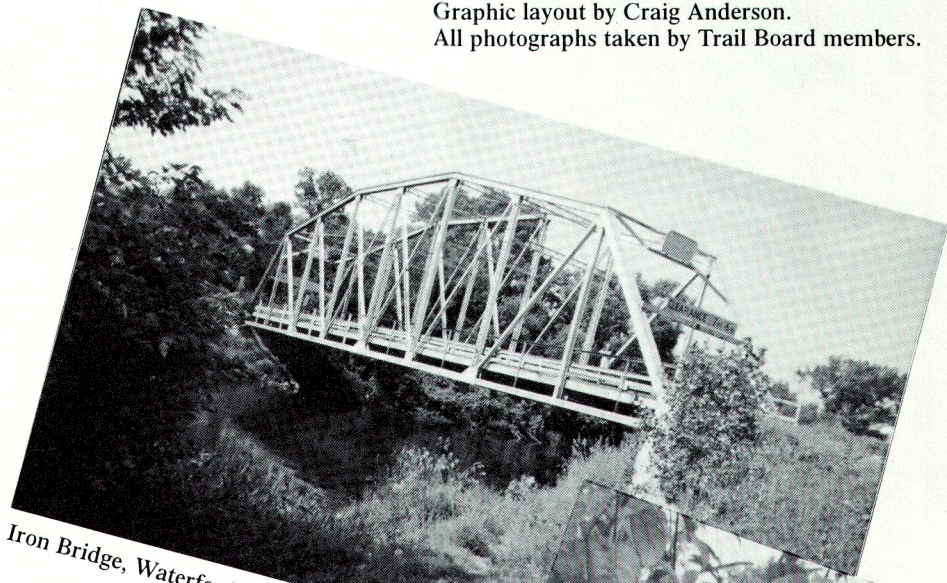
VISION

Past discussions of the trail proposal have emphasized linking adjoining trails at Cannon Falls and Faribault. Such a facility will also provide a connection between public and semi-public open spaces serving three counties and five cities. A well kept secret of this portion of the Cannon River Valley is the brief period in history during which thirty mills were built and operated here. The mills served a variety of local needs within these agricultural communities and some were recognized well beyond this region. Mill Towns Trail is envisioned as a recreational investment that will link these communities in a way that will ensure their continued vitality.

GOALS

1. Develop a trail route which can be used for hiking, biking and snowmobiling or skiing which links Cannon Falls, Randolph, Waterford, Northfield, Dundas and Faribault.
2. Provide a permanent trail right of way linking the Cannon Valley Trail at Cannon Falls and the Sakatah Singing Hills Trail at Faribault.
3. Establish a recreational facility focused upon the communities along the proposed right of way.
4. Create an individual identity for Mill Towns Trail which will distinguish it from both adjoining trails.
5. Establish alternative rights of way or loop options for trail users in each of the communities along this twenty-eight mile segment of the Cannon River Valley.
6. Identify and provide access to public spaces, historic mill sites and both cultural and natural features along the trail right of way.
7. Identify trail head sites in each community to facilitate economic development related to this recreational feature.
8. Promote the trail as an integrating element in the regional open space system.

Publication written and designed by Charles Tooker & John Koepke.
Graphic layout by Craig Anderson.
All photographs taken by Trail Board members.



Iron Bridge, Waterford



FUNDING

While various grants have been requested for land acquisition and development, they generally require a local match. Contributions are tax deductible and very much needed to assure the future of this trail. Checks can be mailed to either the Chair or Treasurer of the Cannon River Link Trail Board at Box 282, Northfield, Minnesota 55057.



Sketch of the Oxford Mill on the Little Cannon River near Cannon Falls