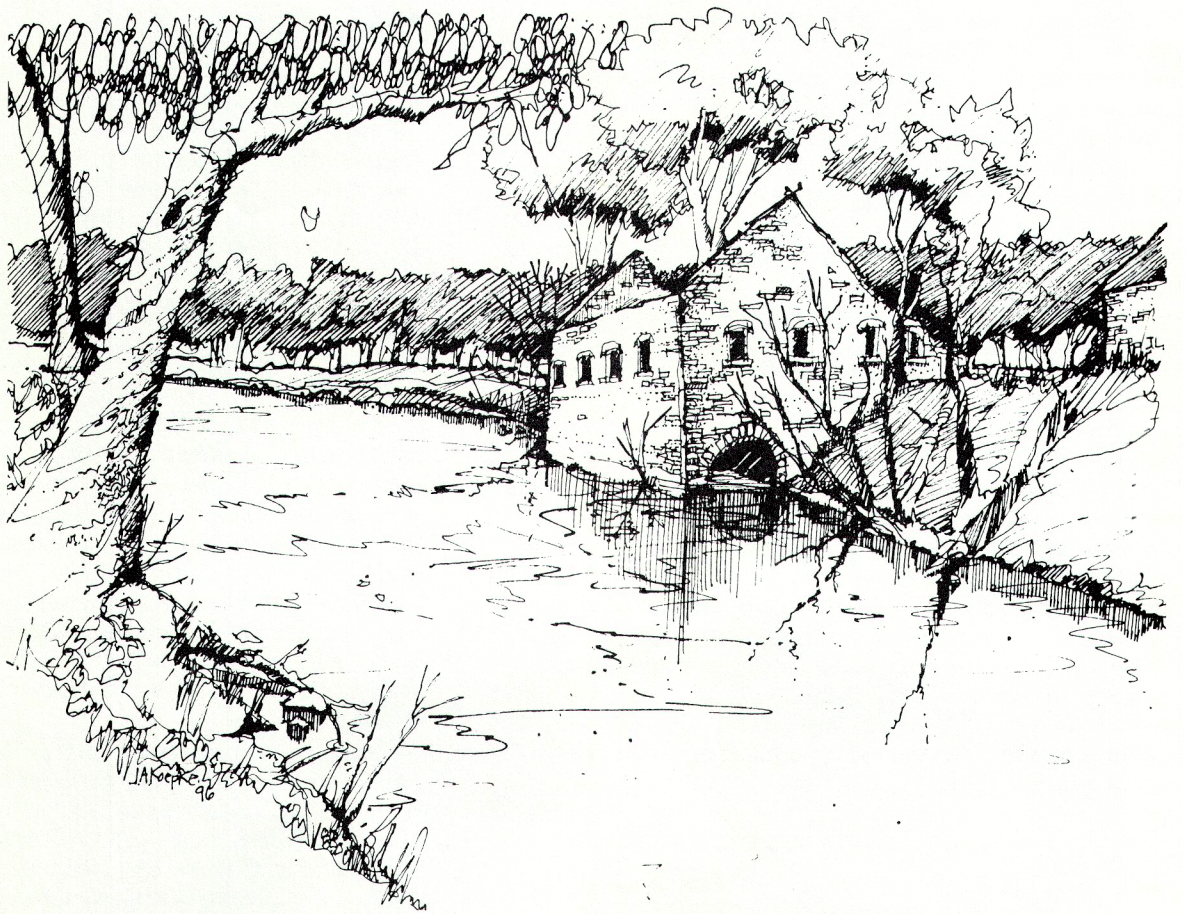


MILL TOWNS TRAIL

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.

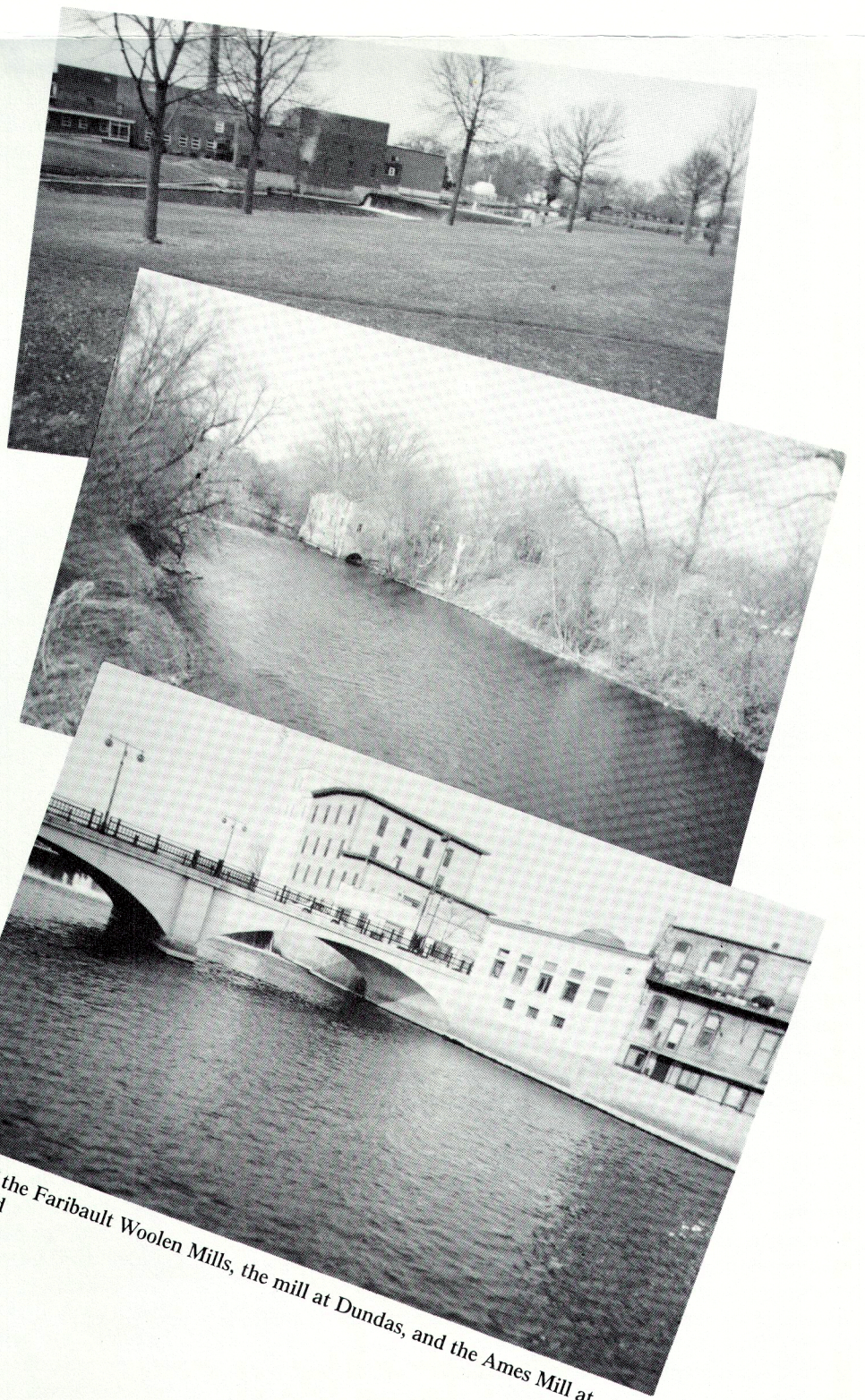


Sketch of the mill at Dundas

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.

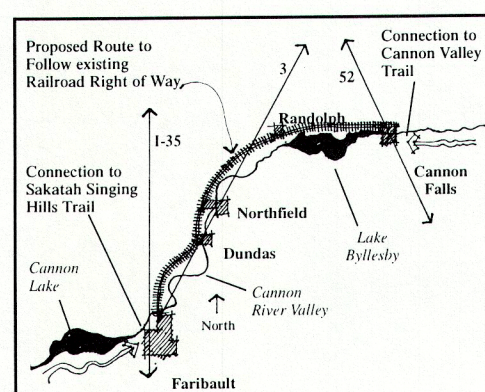
- The first mill at Faribault was built in 1858 for grinding grain. This was followed by three flour mills plus the woolen mill.
- Dundas was the location of 11 mills beginning in the 1850's. The first was a saw mill, but flour mills followed. Part of a successor to the Archibald Mill adjoining the business 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.



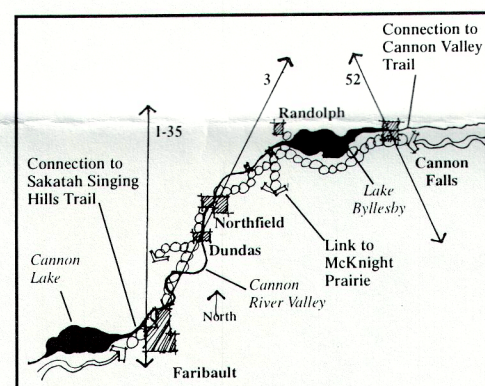
Views of the Faribault Woolen Mills, the mill at Dundas, and the Ames Mill at Northfield

PLANNING PROCESS

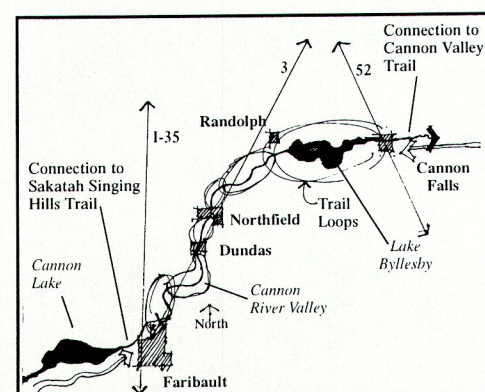
The Cannon River Link Trail Board has been actively pursuing a trail connection between the Cannon Valley Trail and the Sakatah Singing Hills Trail since 1991. In the summer of 1995, the Board hired two Landscape Architects to prepare a conceptual plan for use in fund raising activity to support acquisition and development, as well as to begin the process of reducing trail right of way options until a preferred route for the trail is selected. The planning approach places emphasis on the Board's ability to evaluate the route, outline a range of options and plan a course of action. Board members were asked to take photographs of specific segments of the trail corridor to bring to the surface values that should be recognized in the planning process. Discussion of the pictures brought out the mix of environmental resources, urban development and civic features that will contribute to the experience of trail users. Three practical trail alignment options described below were developed, evaluated by the board and reduced to the proposal now being discussed. In a unanimous decision, the board determined that establishing a trail route which can be immediately used is its highest priority, but that other, more satisfactory routes will be substituted when they may be feasibly added to the system. For example, while the utilization of township, county and state road rights of way by the trail is possible now, if authorized, railroad rights of way may be preferred later if abandoned or offered to be shared with the trail.



OPTION 1



OPTION 2



OPTION 3

The favored route for a consistent trail experience would follow existing railroad rights of way. Those portions of this alignment not abandoned could be developed as a multi use facility serving commercial/industrial needs and recreational use within a shared right of way separated by a three to four foot high fence.

An alternative alignment has been selected utilizing the existing road system in the valley to connect communities along the trail with each other, and both public open space and semi public facilities that may be of interest to the trail user. An advantage of this system is that it is likely to be a much more attractive approach to this valley. Because of restricted space at certain locations, there would be provisions for both on-road and off-road paths.

A final option involves a long range implementation program which can create a series of loops made possible at intentional connection points of the first two alignments. As it develops, the system would be comprised of elements of both previous options, but ultimately could feature at least two routes to select in utilizing any portion of the trail system. If the entire loop system were to be delayed or not developed at all, certain legs of this concept could stand alone, allowing circular connections between communities or communities with specific features along the trail.

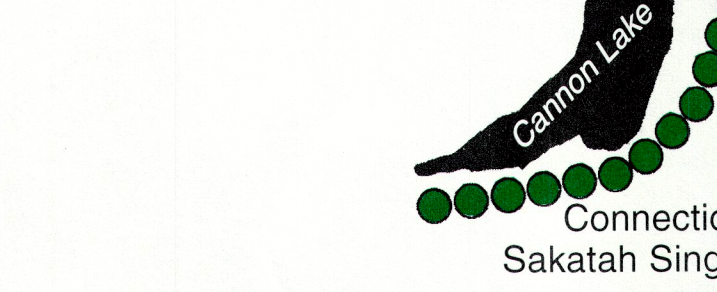
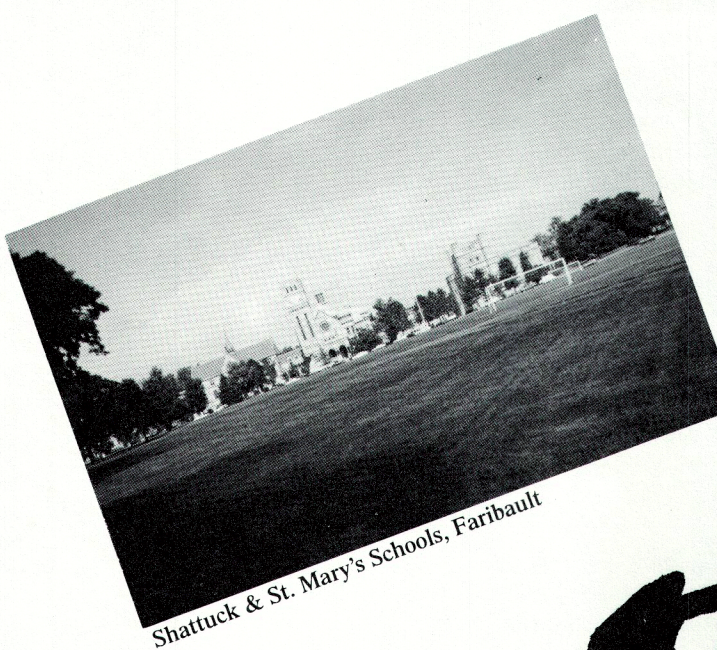
TRAVELOGUE;
CANNON FALLS TO FARIBAULT

The Cannon Falls entry onto Mill Towns Trail begins at one of several parking lots within the downtown and follows the off road city trail to Old Highway 20. It will utilize this thoroughfare to its intersection with the new entrance of County Road 88. The trail then follows County Road 88 to Lake Byllesby County Park, which is located one mile west of the trunk highway 52 overpass.

Lake Byllesby Regional Park is the site of a hydro-electric dam operated by Northern States Power Company. Land on the north and south sides of the lake were given to Dakota and Goodhue Counties, respectively, for park development. There is a plan to link both parks by means of a bridge east of the dam. Goodhue County is currently seeking funding for construction. The park on the Dakota County side of the dam features camping, picnicking, swimming and boating for Twin Cities Metropolitan area residents at relatively low cost, and close to home. Both parks offer excellent potential trail heads. County Road 88 to the west provides opportunities to view the lake and associated lakeshore development to the south before crossing the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad and entering Randolph.

Randolph is situated at the intersection of two railroad rights of way. The Chicago and Northwestern railroad abandoned its north/south right of way a relatively short time ago and there is currently an on-going effort to convert it to a trail. The east/west Chicago and Northwestern right of way would share the same outcome if abandoned. But until this occurs, County Road 88 will be Mill Towns Trail through this community. A convenience store in the downtown area is likely to become a popular refreshment stop for trail users. Other points of interest include the former Randolph Hotel, the leaning grain elevator, the city park (a valuable rest stop), the mix of urban and agricultural development at the edge of town, plus the land owned by Dakota County known as Lake Byllesby Regional Park West, which so far is in the acquisition phase of development. Ultimately it will provide a direct recreational link between the city and the Cannon River and another trail head opportunity. From Randolph, people can make side trips to Stanton Airport or the McKnight Prairie to the south by way of Trunk Highway 56. At the west edge of Randolph the trail turns to the south on Cannon River Boulevard.

Sciota & Waterford Townships are divided northwest and southeast by the Cannon River. Cannon River Boulevard will provide space for the trail between the west edge of Randolph and the Alta Avenue Bridge. It is tucked between the railroad and the river, and provides occasional opportunities for river



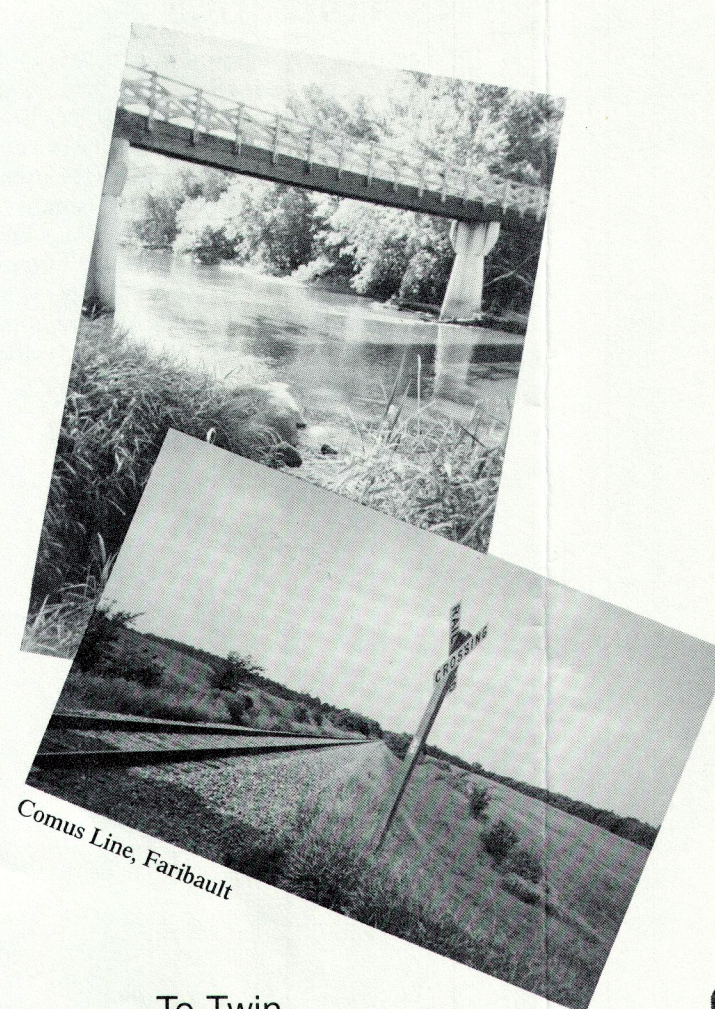
views. Alta Avenue bridge provides access to the Sciota Township Hall where suitable shade and grass are available for picnicking. This shift from the north to south side of the river provides a dramatic change in environment. The township road is barely two lanes wide and has for many years served only as access to scattered farms along the way. Currently this trail segment provides the most immediate contact trail users will have with contemporary agriculture. This is likely to change. Urban development is beginning to find its way into these townships. This township road could be paved and utilized as a shared right of way for the trail and the mix of farm and urban development along it, between Sciota Township Hall and the intersection with the

east/west road one mile to the south. The trail will be located on the north side of this road, all the way to the Iron Bridge over the Cannon River at Waterford.

Waterford has a community center and park which also may be considered as a potential trail head location. Trail users can access this site using existing roads from the Iron Bridge.

Carleton Arboretum will be observed from the sliver of land between the rail connection to Minnesota Malting in Cannon Falls, and the northwest side of the Cannon River. This alignment between the Iron Bridge and city owned property at Second Street contains several pinch points that will require relatively sophisticated construction techniques to keep the trail out of the flood plain. This section of the trail provides a sustained opportunity for close observation of the river. It is likely to become an early test of shared facility types for both trail and rail.

Downtown Dundas is the point at which the trail leaves Armstrong Road by shifting to follow the abandoned Chicago Great Western Railroad right of way, if it can be acquired from the property owners who purchased it from the railroad. Dundas is also a place where hungry and thirsty tourists can stop to replenish their energy, but unique in that the stop is immediately across the street from the site of one of the historically significant mills along the trail. The Archibald Mill in the downtown significantly impacted the flour industry in the late 1850's. The historical marker at this site provides the concept for former mill site identification along the trail. Mill Park Bike Trail is an example of the type



Comus Line, Faribault

To Twin Cities

I-35

To Twin Cities

Dundas

Cannon River Valley

Faribault

To Owatonna

Connection to Sakatah Singing Hills Trail

I-35

To Owatonna

Connection to Cannon Valley Trail

To Red Wing

To Rochester

To Twin Cities

I-35

To Twin Cities

Dundas

Cannon River Valley

Faribault

To Owatonna

Connection to Sakatah Singing Hills Trail

I-35

To Owatonna

Connection to Cannon Valley Trail

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To Owatonna

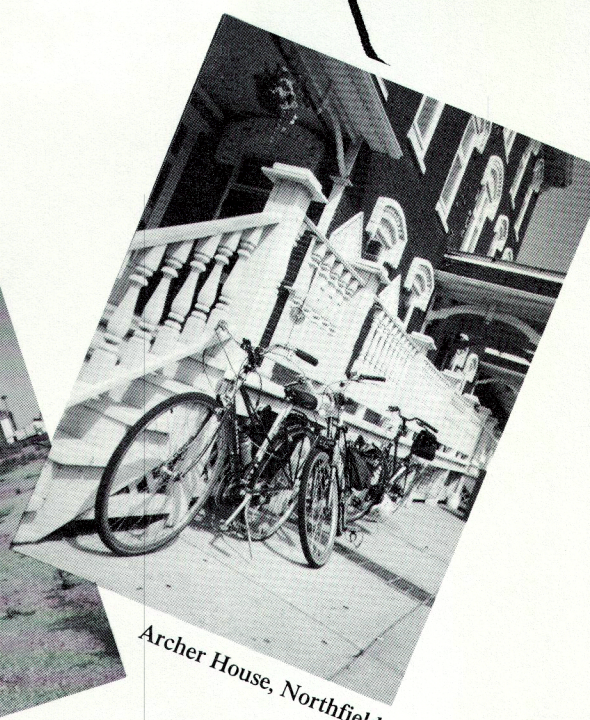
Connection to Cannon Valley Trail

To Red Wing

To Rochester



Grain Elevator, Randolph



Archer House, Northfield

Northfield is slightly south of the trail mid-point and includes many varied features to be explored by tourists. The trail turns to the west on Second Street and crosses Water Street to enter the former Northfield Depot property, an ideal trail head site to serve downtown. A simple deviation from the trail at Second Street would follow Division Street to Bridge square passing a mixture of old and new business uses, including the Archer House, a good example of available trailside lodgings, the former City Hall and adjoining fire station, plus the current First National Bank building. Also nearby is the original First National Bank, the centerpiece of the Jesse James bank raid, and the river walk which offers access to restaurants and watering holes that emphasize a different sort of recreation experience. For those who are interested in an urban rest stop, both Ames and Sechler Parks offer opportunities for picnic lunches. These parks also provide either access or information about the extensive Northfield trail system which can open the trail to both college campuses. Actually, the trail in Sechler Park is the primary Mill Towns Trail link between the former railroad station and Armstrong Road at the Heath Creek Trail entrance. A roadside trail along Armstrong Road again draws attention to agricultural production in this river valley.

of side trips that will be available along the main route. The bridge across the Cannon River provides access to the baseball park, children's play equipment and an excellent rest stop for those who want to maximize their contact with the river. Dundas also includes two bed and breakfast inns for anyone needing an overnight stop. The trail continues along the Chicago Great Western Railroad line to County Road 8 when it turns to the west.

Little Prairie Church & School House are landmarks which identify a community of interest in the midst of productive agriculture. The story of this investment and continued use is also worthy of an historical marker. The four way intersection marks another turn to the south along County Road 77 to the Trunk Highway 3 right of way and a right turn onto County Road 83 for a short distance before taking 140th Street East to the right.

Comus identifies the place in Bridgewater Township on 140th Street East where the Chicago Milwaukee & Pacific and the Chicago Rock Island & Pacific railroads separate before entering Faribault some five miles to the south. The Chicago Milwaukee & Pacific, known as the Comus Line, provides continued access to the south and also a connecting link with the Chicago Great Western line which is now known as the Sakatah Singing Hills Trail. The Comus Line passes through predominantly agricultural lands with an abundance of wildlife for the trail user to observe. If the trail is built within a shared right of way, three bridges will be needed within Faribault to get to the Sakatah Singing Hills Trail.

The Faribault park system is connected by a city trail system that will provide an abundance of side trip opportunities to add interest to the Mill Towns Trail. In addition, the City of Faribault Heritage Preservation Commission developed a brochure outlining guided tours of the city which will be useful in developing information about the city at trail heads. The walking tour of the "Original Town" offers twenty points of interest in the historic commercial district alone. A similar cluster is presented in the driving tour of the city at the Shattuck Historic District which is a private school campus comprised of distinctive academic buildings and school related residences. The Cathedral of Our Merciful Savior and both Shattuck and St. Mary's schools are the result of Bishop Henry B. Whipple's decision to establish the center of authority for the Minnesota Episcopal Church at Faribault. The wide range of architectural styles in housing, the County Fairgrounds and the Park System, restaurants and the business activity associated with the Mills that remain in place, each contribute to the concept of Faribault as a major destination on Mill Towns Trail.

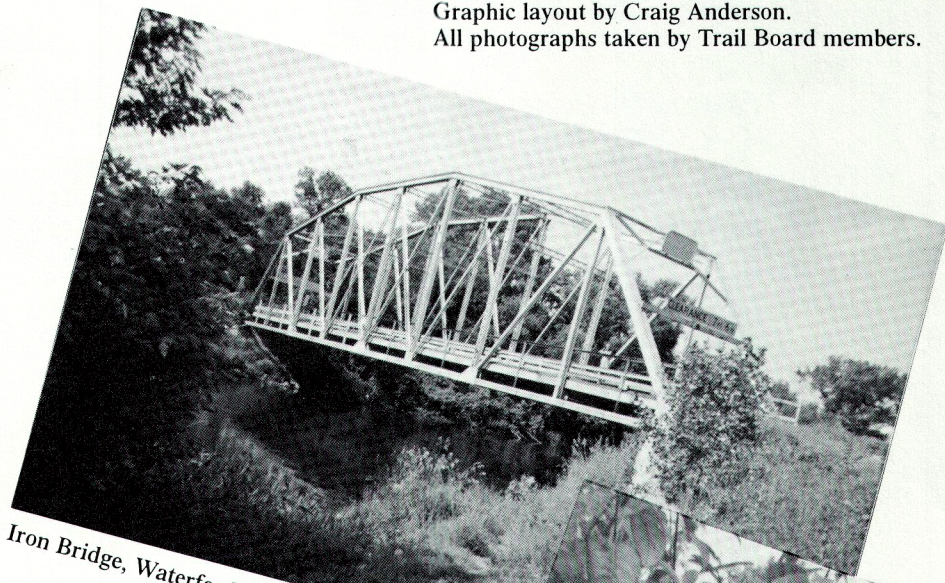
VISION

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.

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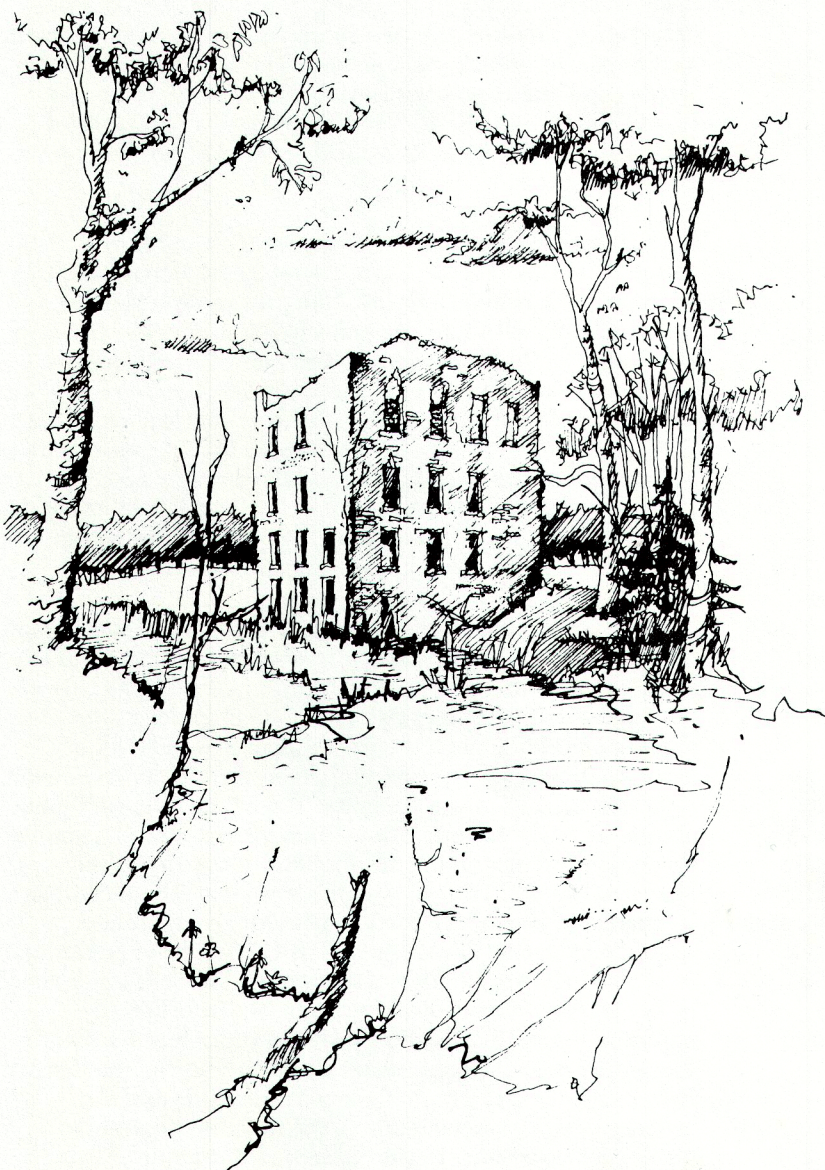


Iron Bridge, Waterford



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