

New Bank Raid Exhibit: Fact Sheet

The Northfield Historical Society is planning to install a new bank raid exhibit in 2019. The current exhibit will be 14 years old and focuses more on the James-Younger Gang than the heroic people of Northfield who defended the bank. The new exhibit will shift the focus to Northfield and its people amid the events of September 7, 1876. It will better highlight what sets Northfield apart from every other town and site that the James-Younger Gang robbed.

The Best Laid Plans

Planning for this re-interpreted exhibit began in 2015. Two grants were written contracting an exhibit company to design a new layout for the exhibit within the museum and to research the townspeople who witnessed the robbery to bring their stories to life. The loan and display of Henry Wheeler's gun was the first step in fabricating the new exhibit. All of the research and designs as well as support letters were submitted for the final fabrication and install grant in July 2018.

Go Big or Go Home

The grant application was written in July for \$250,000. For that price, the exhibit company was going to do all of the graphic design work, create custom-built cases for items, install audio and touch-screens with additional stories, as well as build out walls using shapes and color to evoke a sensory experience. The grant was denied funding in September. Of the two reasons given, the amount of the request was the prevailing reason for declining to fund the grant.

Re-visioning

It would be possible to reapply for the grant again, but large grants over \$10,000 are only accepted once a year. NHS does not want to wait another year to resubmit the grant and take the chance that funding will again be denied. Even resubmitting the grant after cutting out elements of the plan would be risky as the grants committee gave no indication on what amount they felt would be more appropriate for the exhibit. So the staff at NHS is digging in their heels. The research is finished, the script is written, and the exhibit has a design. Plans have been greatly scaled back, but the focus remains the same: Northfield's place in history and the stories of the men and women who helped it survive. The target installation date is December 2019.

Next Steps

Scaling back a \$250,000 dream exhibit to something fundable with little grant money is a tall order but it can be accomplished.

1. Begin exhibit fundraising	November 2018 – June 2019
2. Apply for graphic design grant (\$10,000)	January 2019
3. Graphic design of text panels	March 2019 – July 2019
4. Recruit volunteers for construction of frames, risers	April 2019 – May 2019
5. Print text panels	August 2019
6. Construction of temp. walls, risers, pedestals	October 2019
7. Purchase display cases, shadow boxes, vitrines	October 2019 – November 2019
8. Installation	December 2019
9. Exhibit opening	January 2020

Funding Plan

- \$10,000 – Grant funding for graphic design
- \$5000 – NHS exhibit budget = construction materials
- \$9000 – Private donations = construction materials, printing costs, display cases
- \$10,000 – City of Northfield support

Total \$34,000

City of Northfield

NHS is requesting support from the City of Northfield in the amount of \$10,000. This amount would be used as match money in a January grant request for graphic design work. The graphic design of the text panels will carry the exhibit, so NHS does not intend to take any shortcuts in this most important step.

Additionally, funding from the City would kick start fundraising efforts with NHS members and supporters. Buy-in from the City and the community will help re-engage our local population and it will strengthen Northfield's cultural tourism presence throughout the state and region.



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November 5, 2018

Northfield City Council
City of Northfield
801 Washington Street
Northfield, Minnesota 55057

Dear Mayor and Members of the Northfield City Council,

On behalf of the Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Staff and Board of Directors, the Chamber supports the Northfield Historical Society request for funding to support a new bank raid exhibit.

The history of this community, especially the bank raid, continues to be a valuable resource and is an important tourism and economic driver for the community. The Northfield Historical Society plays a key role in Heritage Tourism, which is part of the City's strategic plan and part of the Arts and Culture plan as well.

Refreshing and expanding the bank raid exhibit to include focusing on the Northfield Townspeople will not only increase new visitors but allow the center to attach former visitors as well. Heritage tourism continues to expand and will have a greater impact to the community of Northfield.

The Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the request of the Northfield Historical Society for their special funding request to develop a new bank raid exhibit, and encourages the City Council to support this initiative as well.

Sincerely,

Todd J. Bornhauser
President
Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism

Lisa Peterson
Tourism Director
Northfield Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



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To Whom It May Concern:

Cathy Osterman, the Executive Director of the Northfield Historical Society in Northfield, Minnesota, asked me to review an exhibit proposal for the Northfield Museum and provide a critical analysis. I have been associated with the Northfield Historical Society for 25 years as a volunteer tour guide, coordinator of four distinct programs for local youth (Junior Curator, SCOPE, Jr. Posse, Summer Assistant), training adult tour guides and have served two terms on the Board of Directors.

My experience as a tour guide, local expert on the Northfield Raid story and as a teacher of students and adults in how to give a tour provides me with a sincere investment on the museum space. Currently, the layout of the exhibits is not conducive to the flow of a tour, especially on busy days. My critical analysis, therefore, will be informed by 25 years of using the space as an interpreter of the Northfield Raid.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The stated intention to create an exhibit that takes the spotlight somewhat off the band of outlaws and places it more centrally upon the brave citizens of Northfield is refreshing. The objective of this project is to tell visitors what they don't know. Many of our visitors arrive with preconceived notions of the James and Younger Gang but with little, if any, information on what the Northfield citizens did to thwart the gang and why. Northfield is known to history not simply because of the presence of the James and Younger Gang (they have visited at least a dozen other banks and train locales), but because their plight here took a radically different turn. It was the first time in ten years of robbing banks and trains that the bank employees and citizens actively resisted to a successful end. I applaud the endeavor to share our story with guests who travel from all over the nation (if not the world) to see our museum. This proposed exhibit, in effect, draws them in with the Jesse James mystique but leaves them with an appreciation of what otherwise ordinary citizens can do to impact a town and history.

In addition to being more inclusive of the Northfield people who took part in the defense of the town, NHS wants to make important additions to the story. The aftermath of the robbery is an aspect of the raid that has rarely been told. It is fitting for a guest to ascertain how Northfield

was impacted by the immediate knowledge of the death of Heywood and the fear that surrounded what might have been the death of others. This would be an excellent part of the story that has never been told either on a self-guided tour or by the tour guide. Many elements of this proposed exhibit is beneficial for a tour where time is limited with a tour guide, but allows the visitor to learn more after the tour.

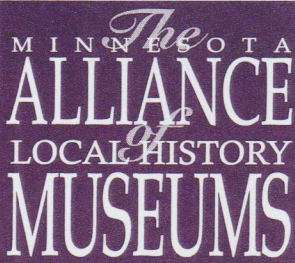
Additionally, providing details on the disposition of the outlaws' bodies after the robbery would be a captivating and curious addition to the story. It might be enhanced to explain the bodies were put in a "Potters Field" and that paint back then came unmixed in powder form (which is why the outlaws could be shipped in barrels). These details paired with the purpose of the death photos would help visitors to better understand the time period of the robbery.

Finally, the primary purpose of our tour and the mission of the museum is to honor the first man in 10 years to stand up to the gang. There is currently no such tribute in the museum and consequently, the visitor does not leave with knowledge of our mission and the heroics of Heywood. They currently leave with a sense that Jesse James once came to the bank. Honoring our local hero is an improvement that is long overdue.

CONCLUSION

I strongly and passionately approve of the proposal and the expanded interpretation of the First National Bank Museum. The most compelling reason for the need for these changes is to enhance the visitor experience (with or without a tour guide) while shifting our focus from the outlaws to the citizens of Northfield. Since I have been associated with the Northfield Historical Society (since 1993), I have seen three revisions to the exhibit spaces. None of them had the focus of this proposal or what I envision as the permanence of this plan. The changes outlined within this proposal are particularly welcome because they will move the museum from a sedate exhibit with limited information to a vibrant entity that meets the needs of a 21st century visitor.

Earl Weinmann
Social Science Teacher



July 15, 2018

Dear Grants Staff:

The Northfield Historical Society has asked me to provide a letter of critical review for their planned exhibit to interpret the narrative of the 1876 bank raid from the perspective of the local townspeople rather than focusing solely on the James-Younger Gang. After reviewing the exhibit scripts, plans, and exhibit items, I am happy to provide my assessment of the project. It is an honor to provide this assessment as I have worked for over a decade in local history after completing my bachelor's degree at Minnesota State University-Mankato in 2007.

To date, the Northfield Historical Society has received tremendous visitation due to the high volume of interest in the James-Younger Gang throughout the United States, with the height presumably correlating to the town celebration of the event each September. This should not be a surprise as the Greatest Generation and baby boomers were inundated with western movies highlighting the heroics of the Wild West. Interest in the James-Younger Gang is evident through the number of books and motion pictures on their deeds, with specific focus on Jesse James. This is a story, which must be told in Northfield, as it is central to the early history of this community.

In an effort to change the narrative and provide a spotlight on the townspeople, the Northfield Historical Society has made an intentional choice to highlight the fact that Northfield defeated the James-Younger Gang. This matches the community's focus on their annual event called The Defeat of Jesse James Days. As previously mentioned, the James-Younger Gang have been romanticized to almost a frontier Robin Hood status, when truly there are some of our country's most notorious criminals of the 19th century. By interpreting a majority of the exhibit through the lens of townspeople, visitors can begin to understand that Northfield was not such an easy target as the gang had assumed. Those who want to know the background of the gang can still get it, but the townspeople discussing their wariness of the men whom had appeared in town, is the centerpiece.

The interpretation provided is sound and important. Visitors will now be introduced to what for many decades was the sidebar in the James-Younger story. Northfield has a rich history and its townspeople did something in 1876 that no other town could lay claim. By reintroducing the voice of the townspeople, the Northfield Historical Society will be able to build from these points of reference as they further develop exhibits and programs for their community and visitors.

Sincerely,

Dustin Heckman
Alliance Coordinator