The Minneapolis Riverfront –
a showcase for historic architecture, historic preservation and the best of today’s architecture.

1930s

The architectural heritage of the Minneapolis Riverfront is many-layered. The first layer contains historic structures from the city’s birth along the Riverfront in the 1800s and its growth into the flour milling capital of the world from 1880 to 1950. These structures represent architectural styles and engineering accomplishments warranting the listing of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. The second layer is the historic preservation over the last three decades that brought back almost all of these historic structures from decay into new, vibrant life. The third layer is the current generation of new architecture that is creating today’s and tomorrow’s landmarks.

2007

History

• Track the founding and growth of Minneapolis and its glory days as the flour milling capital of the world while visiting the Mill City Museum, Mill Ruins Park, First Bridge Park, Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock & Dam Visitor Center, Federal Reserve Bank Plaza, Whitney Plaza and Water Power Park.
• Explore the beautiful St. Anthony Falls Heritage Trail on a self-guided walking tour.
• Visit the restored Ard Godfrey house, the oldest home in Minneapolis.
• Experience the power of St. Anthony Falls from the magnificent Stone Arch Bridge.

Culture and entertainment

• Take in performances at two Tony Award-winning Minneapolis theaters — The Guthrie and Theatre de la Jeune Lune.
• See cutting-edge art at the Soap Factory.
• Revel in the literary arts at the Open Book.
• Enjoy a movie or live music.

Food and shopping

• Savor the cuisine at an outstanding restaurant.
• Sip a cocktail on an outdoor patio.
• Explore fascinating shops in Northeast and the North Loop.

Parks and recreation

• Walk, bike or blade miles of trails.
• Find out why this special area is a national park and earn your Junior Ranger badge.
• Take in the sights on the Minneapolis Queen excursion boat, a Twin Cities Trolley ride or a romantic horse-drawn carriage ride.
• Relax and admire scenic views of the river, the downtown skyline and the historic district from the Riverfront parks.
• Explore the district on a Segway tour.
• Ice skate at the historic Depot Ice Rink.
• Celebrate with one of the many festivals, events or fireworks displays.

Endless reasons to visit the Minneapolis Riverfront District!
EVENT CALENDAR
A sampling of events is shown below.
For more, call the Hotline at (612) 673-5123.

Soap Factory Tours
Every other Thursday from May 3 through Oct. 18 (except Aug. 9), 7 p.m.
The Soap Factory, 518 Second St. SE, www.thesoapfactory.org (612) 623-1696

Built in 1892, The Soap Factory is the oldest unconverted warehouse space in the Minneapolis Riverfront District. Since 1963 the former home of the National Purity Soap and Chemical Company has been a nonprofit art gallery catering to younger emerging contemporary artists. Take a half-hour tour of the historic 19th century building. FREE.

Guthrie Theater Design Tours
See Web site for dates and times

Learn about the unique building highlights and key architectural elements of the Guthrie’s new, state-of-the-art complex designed by French architect Jean Nouvel. Admission charge.

Rangers on the River
Saturdays in June and July, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Stone Arch Bridge or Water Power Park, www.nps.gov/miss (651) 293-0200

Join national park rangers on Saturdays to discover the architectural treasures of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. Children can earn a Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Junior Ranger badge by completing fun activity books available at Mill City Museum or Mill Ruins Park. FREE.

Architecture of the Book
Saturday, June 2 and Saturday, Sept. 22, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Explore the Minnesota Center for Book Arts’ building’s unusual architectural details and translate them into a book to take home with you. While learning about the history of the building and traditional and contemporary book arts, create textural rubbings and learn how to incorporate elements of architecture into a book. Admission charge.

Mill Ruins Park Digs
Sunday, June 17, and Saturdays, June 23 through Aug. 11, check Web site for times
Mill Ruins Park, Portland Avenue & West River Parkway, www.minnesotalsparks.org (search for dig) (612) 313-7793
Dig into archaeology and architecture underground. Learn more about historic flour mill construction and materials. FREE.

It’s an Art Affair at Mill City Farmers Market
Saturday, June 6, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Mill City Farmers Market, Chicago Avenue at Second Street South, www.millcityfarmersmarket.com (612) 341-7980

Watch local artists paint or sketch the Riverfront District’s signature structures including the Mill City Farmers Market. All selected entries will be for sale and exhibited every Saturday through July 21 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Mill City Museum Rail Corridor.

Stone Arch Festival of the Arts
Saturday and Sunday, June 16 and 17, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Historic Main Street, St. Anthony Main, www.stonearchfestival.com (612) 378-1226
Explore the work of more than 250 artists, and enjoy theatrical and musical performers. This year, the festival has commissioned local artist Adam Turman to create an original screen-print featuring the historic architecture of the Minneapolis Riverfront. Original art prints and posters will be for sale at the festival. FREE.

Solstice River
Thursday, June 21, 8 p.m.
cgee.hamline.edu/solstice (651) 523-2591
Watch from the historic Stone Arch Bridge as dancers bring to life the Riverfront’s architectural landscape. FREE.

Nicollet Island Tour
Sunday, June 24, 1 p.m. Wednesday, June 27, 7 p.m.
Meet at the information kiosk by the Nicollet Island Inn, 95 Merriam St, www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/hpc (612) 673-2996
As part of an tour series, this Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission tour will help you discover the island at the heart of the city and the brink of the falls. Among other things, learn about the island’s various 19th-century architectural styles that have survived for 140 years. FREE, arrive early to get a space and a ticket. See web site for full schedule and locations.

Walking Tour with Larry Millett, author of AIA Guide to the Twin Cities
Saturday, July 7, 11 a.m.
Author Larry Millett will lead a walking tour of the Minneapolis Riverfront and sign copies of his new guidebook to Twin Cities architecture. Admission charge, reservations required.

Architecture Expeditions
Saturdays, July through September, 11 a.m.
Walking tours of architecture, landscape architecture and historic preservation projects led by the architects and landscape architects involved. This is a unique opportunity to see the new Riverfront neighborhood from the perspective of the designers who are helping shape it. Tours will include Mill City Museum, Open Book, Milwaukee Road Depot, Gold Medal Park, Humboldt and Park Avenue Lofts and Pracna. See Web site for full schedule. Admission charge, reservations required.

Franklin Steele Calls upon the Godfreys
Sunday, July 15 1:30, 2:30 and 3:30 p.m.
Ard Godfrey House, Central & University aves, www.ardgodfreyhouse.org (612) 815-5319
Learn about the architecture and restoration of Minneapolis’ oldest home and enjoy a performance by History Player Franklin Steele, who hired Ard Godfrey to build his sawmill in 1847. FREE (donations welcome).

The Mighty Mississippi
Wednesday, July 25, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
University of Minnesota, www.cce.umn.edu/cursivity/ (612) 624-4000
University of Minnesota Continuing Education lecture and tour. Registration fee.

Exploring a Lock and Dam
Tuesday, Aug. 7, 9 a.m. 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 1:30 p.m.
Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam, 1 Portland Ave. S.
To reserve a tour time, e-mail dam.tours@usace.army.mil or call toll free (877) 552-1416
Explore the engineering of this facility and learn from Corps of Engineers experts – structural engineers, hydrologists, historians, archeologists, etc. – about their areas of study. Space is limited. FREE.

Join Savvy Traveler Rudy Maxa for a podcast tour of the Minneapolis Riverfront District: www.nationalgeographic.com/podcasts/walks.html
The Minneapolis Riverfront District includes many examples of 19th century architecture, recent historic preservation and today’s architecture and landscape architecture. Included are some of the highlights. Many can be seen from the 1.8-mile St. Anthony Falls Heritage Trail, which guides you through the heart of the city’s birthplace with markers explaining how Minneapolis was born and grew around the waterpower of St. Anthony Falls.

The 1965 (7) Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam is the deepest lock on the Mississippi River and an engineering achievement that solidified Minneapolis as the head of navigation on the river. The magnificent (8) Stone Arch Bridge is recognized as a National Civil Engineering Landmark. It was an engineering achievement when it was completed as a railroad bridge in 1883 and a preservation success when it was rehabilitated for recreational use and reopened in 1994. For more information about the Stone Arch Bridge and the many other fascinating bridges across the Mississippi in Minneapolis, visit www.mrdbridges.com

The east bank area along historic Main Street originally was part of the town of St. Anthony before it merged with Minneapolis. The restaurants of (1) Riverplace and (2) St. Anthony Main occupy historic rehabilitated commercial and industrial buildings. The 1890 Queen Anne Commercial-style (3) Pracna building was rehabilitated by an early Riverfront preservation pioneer in 1969. The handsome adjacent (4) Martin-Morrison Blocks (1858) have also been rehabilitated as part of St. Anthony Main, as has the 1855 (5) Upton Block on the corner, the oldest surviving brick structure in Minneapolis. Both St. Anthony Main and Father Hennepin Bluffs Park are venues for outdoor concerts. The limestone (6) Pillsbury A Mill is one of two National Historic Landmarks on the Minneapolis Riverfront, recognized for its significance as the birthplace of the Pillsbury Company and the largest flour mill in the world when it was built in 1881. This complex is slated for rehabilitation into condominiums and commercial space. The (7) Soap Factory, a gallery specializing in cutting-edge visual arts, is housed in the historic National Purity Soap Factory building. The (8) Southeast Steam Plant provided power for the streetcar system in the Twin Cities when it was built in 1903. Today, the Renaissance-Revival structure has been rehabilitated and retrofitted to provide steam heating for the University of Minnesota.
Explore the North Loop’s wide variety of shops, restaurants and galleries where rehabilitated warehouse and commercial buildings mix with new construction in a booming new neighborhood. The historic Itasca complex (1886 – 1906) includes some of the many former warehouses along North First Street that helped make Minneapolis the wholesale supply center for the upper Midwest. This complex has been preserved for condominiums, offices, a comedy club and a restaurant. A grouping of three 1892 Richardsonian Romanesque former warehouses now serves as the Minnesota Opera Center, showing an interesting way to preserve a fire-damaged structure. The Lindsay Brothers Building (now Rivewalk condominiums) was designed for a farm implement distributor by local architect Harry Wild Jones and was considered one of the handsomest implement warehouses in the country when it was completed in 1895. The Tony Award-winning Theatre de la Jeune Lune offers a year-round season of plays known for their visual uniqueness. This theater was created in 1992 out of a complex of seven warehouses built in 1889 with a 1906 Gothic-inspired façade designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert.

The Mill District is a growing neighborhood with delights for visitors. The now-vacant former Fuji Ya restaurant was built in the late 1980s on the foundations of two flour mills and was one of the pioneers that showed that the Riverfront could be reclaimed for new uses. The historic Milwaukee Depot complex has two hotels, a water park, historical displays and a winter indoor skating rink. During its heyday in the 1920s, the 1899 Renaissance Revival depot and its unique train shed bustled with train traffic, but the complex sat vacant for decades until it was preserved for new uses in 2001. The Whitney Mill Quarter illustrates solutions to some unusual preservation challenges. The 1908 Ceresota Elevator that had supplied wheat to the adjacent Crown and Standard flour mills had 57 grain bins that had to be removed and new floors added to allow office use. The handsome Crown Roller Mill (1880) had been largely destroyed by a 1983 fire before being saved and rebuilt for use as an office building. The Standard Mill (1879) had fallen into disuse before being rehabilitated for use as a luxury hotel and, more recently, condominiums. The MacPhail Center for Music will combine industrial materials with new forms for a distinctly contemporary addition to the architectural landscape of the Riverfront. Archaeological runs also often merit preservation. At Mill Ruins Park, you can see – and learn more about – some of the foundations remaining from the row of mills that once stood between the plank-covered west side waterpower canal and the river. In a particularly challenging preservation, the Mill City Museum was built within the fire-damaged walls of the 1880 Washburn Crosby “A” Mill, which is the birthplace of General Mills and one of two National Historic Landmarks on the Riverfront. The museum offers year-round adventures, including the Mill City Live music series and performances by costumed History Players. On both sides of the museum, several historic flour and textile milling structures built between 1878 and 1914 have been rehabilitated for residential use (the North Star, Washburn and Humboldt Lofts). Two other new structures on this block illustrate excellent solutions to the challenge of building compatible new buildings in a historic district. The Stone Arch Lofts blends in almost imperceptibly with the older structures, while the Humboldt Annex takes a more contemporary approach. The newest landmark in the district is the architecturally stunning three-theater complex for the renowned Guthrie Theater, with its massing, forms and materials inspired by the Riverfront’s industrial past. Visit its “endless bridge” and see spectacular views of the Riverfront. The Open Book is a fascinating building renovation and offers the best in literary arts, including classes and special events at the Loft Literary Center and Minnesota Center for Book Arts.