

MAP & SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Minneapolis Riverfront History



MEET MINNEAPOLIS VISITOR CENTER

505 Nicollet Mall, Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55402
612-397-9278 • minneapolis.org

Meet Minneapolis staff are available in-person or over the phone at 612-397-9278 to answer questions from visitors, share visitor maps, and help with suggestions about things to do in Minneapolis and the surrounding area. The Minnesota Makers retail store features work from more than 100 Minnesota artists.



Mon–Fri 10 am–6 pm
Sat 10 am–5 pm
Sun 10 am–6 pm

UPPER ST. ANTHONY FALLS LOCK AND DAM

1 Portland Avenue Minneapolis, MN 55401
651-293-0200 • nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/uppestan.htm

St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam provides panoramic views of the lock and dam, St. Anthony Falls, and the surrounding mill district. Exhibits show information about the falls and its place in Minnesota history. Rangers lead short walks onto the lock walls and describe how the falls changed local and national history.



Open seven days a week, Memorial Day weekend–Labor Day • Open Fri, Sat, and Sun in September • 9:30 am–5 pm • Admission is free
Free tours at 11 am, 1 pm, and 3 pm

MILL CITY MUSEUM

704 S. 2nd St., Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-341-7555 • mnhs.org/millicity

A unique blend of raw power, dramatic views, and hands-on fun propels you through this architecturally stunning National Historic Landmark.

Highlights

- Flour Tower 8-story elevator show—so amazing it defies description!
- Hands-on Water & Baking Labs
- *Minneapolis in 19 Minutes Flat!* film by humorist Kevin Kling
- Rooftop views of the Mississippi River, St. Anthony Falls, and Stone Arch Bridge
- Museum store featuring city history and cooking merchandise
- Bushel & Peck Café



Please check mnhs.org/millicity for current hours.

The story of Minneapolis begins at the Falls of St. Anthony, the only major waterfall on the Mississippi River. Owamniyomni (the falls) has been a sacred site and a gathering place for the Dakota people for many centuries. Beginning in the 19th century the falls attracted businessmen who used its waterpower for sawmills and flour mills that built the city and made it the flour milling capital of the world from 1880-1930. The riverfront today is home to parks, residences, arts and entertainment, museums, and visitor centers.

Explore the birthplace of Minneapolis with this self-guided tour along the Mississippi River, with stops at the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Mill City Museum.

1 NICOLLET MALL - HEART OF DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS Meet Minneapolis Visitor Center

Nicollet Avenue has been downtown’s prime shopping and dining street since the 1880s. Threatened by suburban shopping malls, the city hired landscape architect Lawrence Halprin to convert a 12-block stretch into a pedestrian and transit mall completed in 1967. A two-year renovation was recently completed.

2 MINNEAPOLIS CENTRAL LIBRARY Nicollet Mall and Fourth Street

This 2006 library designed by Cesar Pelli is the second public library to occupy this site. In the 19th and early 20th centuries this intersection was a publishing center known as “Newspaper Row.”

3 GATEWAY DISTRICT – SKID ROW AND URBAN RENEWAL Nicollet Mall and Washington Avenue

By the 1950s this was the heart of the city’s skid row, home to dozens of saloons and flophouses. An urban renewal project in the early 1960s demolished 180 buildings on a dozen blocks. Among the modernist buildings that replaced skid row is the white-columned Northwestern National Life Insurance Co. (1965) designed by Minoru Yamasaki, architect of the World Trade Center.



4 BRIDGE SQUARE & GATEWAY PARK Gateway Park

Nicollet and Hennepin Avenues originally came together at the Mississippi River Bridge, forming a triangular open space known as Bridge Square, home to the first Minneapolis City Hall (1873). In 1915, Bridge Square was replaced by Gateway Park and a classical pavilion inspired by the City Beautiful movement. The pavilion was razed during urban renewal in the 1960s. The only reminder of the original park is the George Washington Memorial Flagstaff.

5 RAILROAD STATIONS

Federal Reserve Bank, Hennepin and First Street, west side
This area once was the main visitor entry point into the city. The 1885 Union Depot, on the east side of Hennepin Avenue, was the first downtown passenger depot. It was replaced in 1914 by the Great Northern Station on the other side of the street. The final train departed in 1978 and the station was demolished. As you walk toward the river, view five bronze interpretive panels that trace the history of the riverfront.

6 FIRST BRIDGE ACROSS THE MISSISSIPPI

West River Parkway below the Hennepin Avenue Bridge
In 1855 a wooden suspension bridge opened on this site to link the towns of Minneapolis and St. Anthony. It was the very first bridge anywhere to cross the Mississippi River. The towns merged in 1872, and four years later they replaced the bridge with a sturdier structure. By 1890 a steel arch bridge carried the streetcars and automobiles of a growing city and lasted 100 years. Today’s Hennepin Avenue Bridge opened in 1990. Visit the foundations of the first two bridges beneath the railings in First Bridge Park.

7 NATIVE AMERICANS AND THE RIVER

West River Parkway upstream from the Third Avenue Bridge
Minneapolis is located on Dakota Homeland. The Dakota consider Owamniyomni (St. Anthony Falls) a sacred site. Haha Wakpa (Mississippi River) was a highway for food and travel. Oral tradition suggests frequent fishing and maple sugaring in the area. Dakota walking trails later became Hennepin and Hiawatha Avenues. A series of treaties removed the Dakota to reservations, and they were forced from Minnesota after the US-Dakota War of 1862. Over time many Dakota have returned and their relationship to the falls continues.

8 NEW USES FOR OLD BUILDINGS

West River Parkway at Water Works
The red brick building at the end of the Third Avenue Bridge (1918) was one of many factories that supplied barrels used for flour. The skilled workers, or coopers, who made barrels, pioneered a new role for labor in Minneapolis. When their wages were cut in 1874 and a strike was broken, some of them formed a co-op. The idea spread, and by 1886 two-thirds of coopers at the falls worked at shops owned and managed by workers.

In the 1960s Fuji Ya Japanese restaurant was built atop the ruins of the Bassett Sawmill and the Columbia Flour Mill. The restaurant moved in the 1990s, and the mill ruins will soon be home to the Water Works Pavilion.

9 STONE ARCH BRIDGE

Sidewalk on the Stone Arch Bridge
In 1879 St. Paul railroad magnate James J. Hill opened his “Manitoba line” to the Canadian border. This railroad linked the wheat fields of the Red River Valley to the flour mills of Minneapolis. To improve passenger train access to downtown Minneapolis, Hill built the 2,100-foot Stone Arch Bridge. Completed in 1883 with a sweeping curve at its west end, the bridge is a unique example of skilled masonry construction. In 1974 it was named a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.



10 ST. ANTHONY FALLS

West River Parkway at water intake
St. Anthony Falls formed 12,000 years ago near what is now downtown St. Paul. Over the years it naturally eroded eight miles upstream. European Americans in the 19th century appreciated the falls’ natural beauty, but primarily valued its waterpower for sawmills and flour mills. By the 1850s, the cataract was approaching the upper limit of the limestone ledge that sustained it. In the course of time, without human intervention, the falls would have soon become a rapids. In the 1870s engineers built a concrete dike under the river and an apron over the ledge, protecting and hiding the face of the falls.

11 UPPER ST. ANTHONY FALLS LOCK AND DAM Foot of Portland Avenue

When flour milling began a long decline in the 1920s, Minneapolis leaders dreamed of bringing commercial river navigation to the city. In 1937 the US Congress authorized the extension of the 9-foot navigable channel above the falls. When completed in 1963, the Upper and Lower Lock at St. Anthony Falls made Minneapolis the head of navigation on the Mississippi River for 50 years. Congress closed the lock to navigation in 2015.

12 WEST SIDE MILLING DISTRICT Location: Portland Avenue and West River Parkway

Minneapolis milling boomed because of its efficient use of the waterpower from St. Anthony Falls. In 1857 landowners on the west side began work on a canal along South First Street. Enlarged and extended several times, it provided waterpower to 25 assorted factories and mills by 1871. As flour production boomed in the 1870s, other industries were crowded out. From the 1880s through the 1920s, more than two dozen flour mills lined the canal.



13 MILL CITY MUSEUM

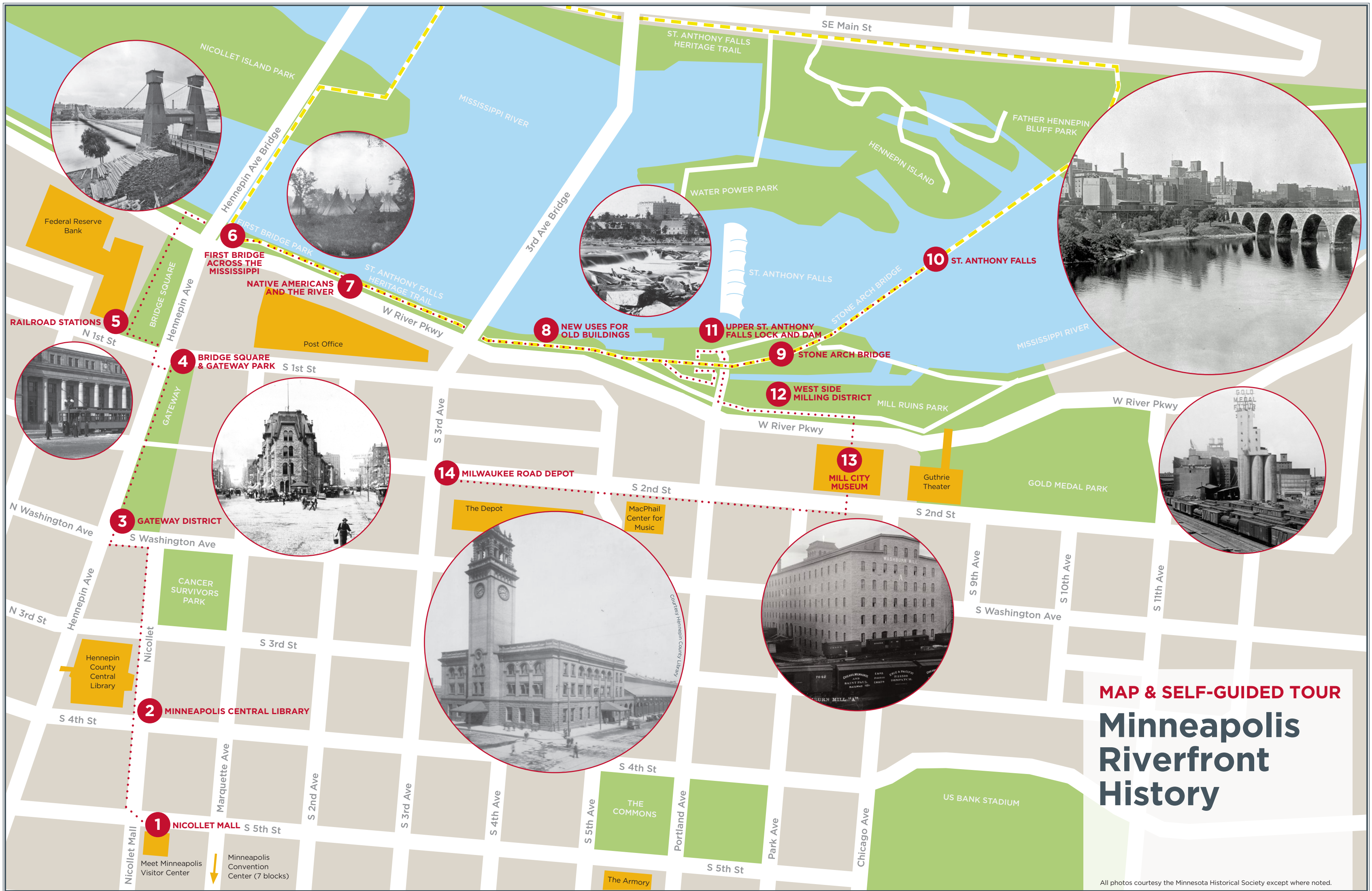
Mill City Museum Ruin Courtyard
Mill City Museum was built within the fire-damaged ruins of the Washburn A Mill, the flagship mill of the Washburn-Crosby Co. (later General Mills). It was the largest and most technologically advanced flour mill in the world when it was completed in 1880. Washburn millers perfected a new process for milling that changed the way we eat and made Minneapolis the flour milling capital of the world.

14 MILWAUKEE ROAD DEPOT

Second Street South at Third Avenue South
This 1899 Renaissance Revival style depot for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad found new life as a hotel and event center in 2001. Its highlights include a magnificent marble-floored waiting room and a 625-foot-long iron train shed, one of few left in the United States.

LEARN MORE

- Stroll the **St. Anthony Falls Heritage Trail**, a 1.8-mile loop on both sides of the river with informational signs marking the way
- Hike to the edge of the falls at **Water Power Park**
- Explore the remains of underground Minneapolis in **Mill Ruins Park**



MAP & SELF-GUIDED TOUR
Minneapolis Riverfront History

All photos courtesy the Minnesota Historical Society except where noted.