



Historical Setting & Resources

Early History

Long before explorers came to southern Minnesota, Native Americans called this land home for centuries. Stone tools have been found that date back more than 10,000 years. The oldest known inhabitants of the area were the Mound Builders, most likely the ancestors of the Dakota and Iowa Native Americans.

Dakota inhabited much of southern Minnesota after being driven south by the Ojibwe Indians of northern Minnesota. Wahpekute, a tribe of Dakota, were the group that lived on the land that is now Rice County. Wahpekute meant the Leaf Shooters or "The Shooters Among the Leaves." In the winter months, the Wahpekute lived in teepees made from American bison hides. During the summer they lived in elm bark lodges near the lakes and streams fishing, hunting, and raising crops.

Rice County has many lakes, especially in the western half of the county. The first explorers of the region found hardwood forest, primarily in the western half of the county, and rolling prairie on the eastern half. The woods, named "The Big Woods", contained a variety of hardwood species including oak, maple, basswood, butternut, walnut, poplar, elm and many others. This area of Rice County was referred to by many as some of the most breathtaking land in the state. The most significant remnant of the "Big Woods" that remains is in Nerstrand State Park in Wheeling Township.

The first European explorer to visit the area was Le Sueur who came in 1695. Le Sueur built a fort on Prairie Island on the Mississippi, traded with the Mdewakanton Dakota, and explored the area as far as Mankato. It would be another 200 years before the first European settlers would make their claims on the land.

Wahpekute

The Wahpekute tribe traveled and lived along the Cannon River. The Wahpekute called the river "In-Yan Bo-Sda-Ta Wa-Kpa," or "The Standing Rock River." The name came from a tall white sandstone rock formation located along the river where the city of Castle Rock was established. Joseph N. Nicollet, who surveyed and mapped southern Minnesota for the U.S. Government, explored the area. He named the river La Riviere Aux Canots or River of Canoes for the many Indian canoes he saw along the riverbanks. Over time Canots was mistranslated and Anglicized to its present designation, the Cannon River.

Alexander Faribault

Alexander Faribault first came to Rice County in 1826 in his early 20s to establish fur trading posts with the Native Americans in the region. The area had a large population of muskrats and their furs were in demand. He established several posts: one at Lake Sakata on the present site of Waterville, one at the present site of Morrystown, and one at an existing Dakota settlement on the northwest shore of Cannon Lake. The main Wahpekute village was located on the north shore of what is now called Cannon Lake. The Dakota called the lake Me-de-te-peton-ka or the "Lake of the Big Village." The chief at that time was Visiting Eagle and was very loyal to Alexander Faribault.

In 1834, after eight years of trading with the Native Americans and exploring the area, Alexander Faribault built a log home where the Straight and the Cannon Rivers meet and moved his trading post to that same location. He was able to persuade the Wahpekute he'd been trading with to move from their ancestral home site along Cannon Lake to the area. This is now the present site of the City of Faribault and was an ideal location for a post, as many Native Americans passed by the area on their way down the rivers.

Bishop Whipple

Bishop Henry Whipple was an influential figure in the early days of Rice County. A friend of Alexander Faribault, he arrived in 1859. He built the first Episcopal Cathedral in Minnesota. He also built several other churches in southern Minnesota and founded several schools, including the Episcopal Schools in Faribault. St. Mary's School for girls was founded in the Whipple home in Faribault in 1866. He conducted many missions among the Native Americans and contested the way that government treated the Indians. The Native Americans revered him for his honest dealings.

Treaties and Conflict

Rice County enjoyed a peaceful relationship with the Native Americans in the area. There were many stories of settlers and Native Americans helping each other. In 1851, the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and the Treaty of Mendota were signed between the Dakota and the United States. These treaties transferred more than 35,000 square miles to the United States. More than 100 Dakota chiefs and tribal leaders signed the treaties. They included Chief Ta-o-ya-te-duta (Little Crow), Chief Wa-pa-sha (Red Leaf), Chief Wa-keen-yan-wash-tay (Good Thunder), and Chief Sha-k'pay (Six). Alexander Faribault and his son, George, were among the treaty interpreters for the Dakota. As a result of the treaty, the Dakota lost their rights to the land in southern Minnesota, including Rice and Steele Counties, and most of them were moved to reservations.

"We have waited a long time. The money is ours but we cannot get it. We have no food but here these stores are filled with food. We ask that you, the agent, make some arrangement so we can get food from the stores, or else we may take our own way to keep ourselves from starving. When men are hungry, they help themselves." (Chief Little Crow to agent Thomas Galibraith, 1862.)

With delayed treaty annuities and a poor crop year, the Dakota on reservations were starving. In August of 1862, four Dakota hunters killed five white settlers in Acton Township, sparking six weeks of warfare between the Dakota and the United States. When it was all over, more than 600 settlers and 75 Dakota warriors were killed. All Dakota men, women, and children were rounded up and marched to Fort Snelling for the war tribunal. 306 Dakota men were found

guilty and sentenced to death, despite the fact that many of the trials lasted less than five minutes and no translator was provided. At Bishop Whipple's urging, President Lincoln commuted most of the sentences. On December 26, 38 Dakota men were hung in Mankato, Minnesota. The remaining Dakota were forced to leave the state and were either sent to prison in Nebraska or to reservations in South Dakota.

However, more than 100 Dakota had fought to protect settlers and many felt they should be honored as heroes. These "friendlies" were allowed to remain in Minnesota, but their safety from angry settlers was a concern. Not knowing where it would be safe for these Dakota to live, Bishop Whipple and Alexander Faribault offered land and protection for them in Faribault. This group would become known as "The Faribault Indians." Among the group was Chief Good Thunder and Taopi. Although the numbers declined over the years, the last group of Dakota remained in Faribault until shortly after Faribault's death in 1882.

Becoming "Rice County"

Rice County is about 40 miles south of Minneapolis and St. Paul, in the heart of the dairy farming region of southeastern Minnesota. The county comprises a land area of 496 square miles. The county was named for Henry M. Rice, a territorial pioneer, fur trader, delegate to Congress, and one of the first senators of Minnesota. In 1857, while he was a territorial delegate, Rice wrote the Minnesota Enabling Act that established the present boundaries of Minnesota.

From 1849 to 1851, this area of Minnesota was first part of Wabasha County (spelled Wabashaw at that time). From 1851 to 1853, it became part of Dakota County (spelled Dakotah in 1851). Rice County was created by the Legislature on March 5, 1853. At that time, the village of Faribault spilled into Rice, Dakota, and Scott counties. The first territorial election in the county was in Faribault in October of 1854. There were 17 votes cast.

The governor briefly named Cannon City the county seat in 1855. At that time influential settlers from Cannon City won the favor of the governor and "stole" the position of county seat from under Faribault. Months later, in a controversial fall election, Faribault won the title of county seat. During this time a famous novelist, Edward Eggleston, wrote *The Mystery of Metropolisville*, which took place in Cannon City.

As southern Minnesota began to fill with settlers, the county lines were changed again. In 1854, General H. H. Sibley was elected to represent the people from the area of Faribault. He ensured that the county lines were rearranged to fully include Faribault in Rice County. Although there were a few minor boundary changes, in 1857 the final lines of the county were established as they remain today. The county was officially organized on May 11, 1858, when Minnesota became a state, and included Faribault as the county seat, fourteen townships, two cities, and five incorporated villages.

Settling Rice County

As each small settlement took hold, a saw mill, flour mill, blacksmith, general stores, hotels, and other businesses sprang up to serve the area. Early settlers lived in small shanties, many with sod roofs, which melted into a muddy mess in the rain. Early settlers endured many hardships as they cleared the land for farming and established their communities. A rush of immigration to the area began in 1856 and when Minnesota became a state in 1858, Rice County was one-third foreign born. Rice County was truly a melting pot of immigrants from all areas of Europe and transplants from the eastern states.

Some important firsts for the county included establishing the first school in 1853, taught by E. J. Crump. The first newspaper, *the Rice County Herald*, was established in 1856 and was published and edited by F. W. Frink. The first railroad, the Minnesota Central Railway Company, came through the county in 1857. Within a few years the county was mostly settled.

In the 1860s there were multiple calls from the President asking men to fight for the Union in the Civil War. Minnesota responded and was the first state to volunteer troops. Each township in Rice County approved bonds to be issued to each man who enlisted. The volunteers met the deficiencies and drafts were avoided.

The many rivers and streams in the county provided the water power for milling wheat and rye and by 1880 the mills of Rice County could produce 3,000 barrels of flour a day. Wheat was the main agricultural crop in Rice County. The flour produced in the area had worldwide reputation for quality. At the turn of the century, milling started moving to other areas of Minnesota. Holstein cows were introduced to the county and dairying became the principal agricultural occupation.

During 1860, official census figures showed that 18,000 acres were cultivated with 260,000 bushels of wheat harvested. In 1860 the county was divided into five commissioner districts. Each district had one representative on the County Board. Carleton College was founded in Northfield with James Strong as president in 1866. St. Olaf College was established in Northfield in 1874. Both colleges continue to be regarded among the top liberal arts colleges in the nation. The courthouse and jail were built from 1873 to 1874 at a cost of \$50,000. The original courthouse burned in 1931, destroying the central building and the west wing. The present Rice County Courthouse was rebuilt as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1934. Several inventions came to Rice County in 1882, including electric lights in the cities of Faribault and Northfield and the first telephone in Rice County.

Rice County Historical Society

The Rice County Historical Society was established in 1926 by the Rice County Old Settlers Association and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and continues to preserve the rich history of the area. The society owns several historic structures in the city of Faribault, including an 1850s log cabin, the Pleasant Valley School (1857), and the Holy Innocents Episcopal Church (1869). The society also owns the first frame home built in the county by Alexander Faribault (1853). The Faribault home remains in its original location.

Rice County Townships and Cities:

Bridgewater Township

The township was named after a southern England seaport city. The Cannon River divides the township and there are many other streams within its borders. The township originally had large areas covered by forest. The earliest transportation ran along the Indian Trail, which had been used by area Sioux. The Hastings stage line passed through the township from east to west along the trail from Fort Snelling to Faribault. The Chicago, Rock Island, Pacific, and the Chicago Great Western railroad lines all ran through the township, encouraging development.

Albon and John Hoyt, brothers from New York, were among the first to venture into the area. They made claims in 1853. Albon left the township that first winter, leaving John to finish the cabin. However, winter came before he could complete the job and he fell very ill. Two Dakota on a hunting party discovered John lying in a field and transported him via horseback to Alexander Faribault to recover.

Among the early arrivals in Bridgewater was Edwin Larkin. Larkin arrived in the fall too late to build a cabin, so he and his family wintered in a covered wagon. Job Chester settled to the south with the Drakes to the north. Jacob Emery took 100 acres in Section 28, and Fred and Henry Albers settled on 300 acres in the northwest corner of the township.

In the spring of 1855, H. N. Matteson built the first mill in the area called Dundas. The post office, known as Fountain Grove, was also established in 1855. The post office was moved a year later to Northfield, founded by John and Ann North. The first township meeting was held in the village of Dundas in 1858 with Benjamin Lockerby, Jacob Emery, and J. A. Upham as supervisors.

Cannon City Township

Cannon City Township is one of the center townships of the county. The smallest township in acreage (19,840 acres), the land was originally timber and limestone in the west along the Cannon River and prairie in the eastern half of the township. The township was named after the first village, also named Cannon City.

One of the first settlers was John Corsett, who arrived from Ohio in the spring of 1854. Eli Cowen and Isaac Amy also made claims in the area in 1854. William N. Ownes farmed on the "Indian Trail" that was used by the Dakota and Winnebago from Red Wing or Hastings, who often set up teepees in front of his house. Owens grew tired of the many people passing through his farm fields so he cut down trees in the area, forcing the travelers to find shelter someplace else.

Brothers G.A and J.D. Sears first laid out Cannon City in 1855. Soon there were several stores, a post office, a steam power sawmill, a tavern, and a hotel. The post office was built in 1880 and named Dean after J.W. Dean, an early merchant in the area. The post office was used until 1901. The first organized religious services were conducted in 1855 by Rev. Hoover. For a brief time in 1858 Cannon City enjoyed the prestige of being names Rice County's first county seat by the governor. Later that year, citizens took matters into their own hands and voted to designate Faribault as the county seat.

The village of Prairieville was established in 1855 and at one time had a school, church, hotel, blacksmith shop, and several stores and saloons. The town has since been abandoned, although both the blacksmith and school structures remain.

Erin Township

Located on the western border of Rice County, adjacent to Le Sueur County, Erin Township was predominantly settled by immigrants from Ireland. General James Shields along with John Tufts, R.W. Russ, F.W. Frink, and John B. Shields, advertised in the papers back East encouraging their native countrymen to join them in Minnesota. Irish settlers quickly responded to the advertisements, and by 1856 most of the township was filled. In 1855, settlers voted and named the township after their beloved homeland.

When the first settlers began to arrive the landscape was mostly dense hardwood forest, part of the "Big Woods." First settlers had to cut their own roads through the trees. The closest place for supplies was either Hastings or St. Paul. The soil of Erin Township is mostly a rich, dark loam with a tendency to a lighter, sandier nature.

The first settlers to make claims in Erin Township were Jeremiah Healy, Sylvester Smith, John Burke, James Cummings, John McManus, and Owen Farley. Sylvester Smith had the first grindstone in the township and people came for miles to sharpen knives and farming implements. By 1856 all parts of the township had settlers. In addition to the Irish settlements in Erin Township, there was a Bohemian settlement in northern part of the township.

Rice County's first precinct election was held in Shieldsville in 1855. The precinct included Erin, Shieldsville, Wheatland, and parts of Forest and Wells Townships. The first township meeting was held in 1858. During this meeting the township was named. Erin was decided on after motions to name the township McBride or Healy failed. The first supervisors were John Conniff, Timothy Foley, and Sylvester Smith.

Forest Township

Forest Township is located in the northwestern part of Rice County. The land had some natural meadows and rolling hills, however, much of the township was dense hardwood timber. There are many lakes within the township, which were favorite fishing spots of the Native Americans. It was said that the trees were so thick and tall that one could not see the sky. The township was named for the wooded condition of most of the area. The thick forest impeded settlement, as newcomers to the area would first choose prairie land in the county to farm.

James Fitzsimmons first settled the township in 1854. Fitzsimmons then sold his claim the following spring to George W. Miller. George W. Miller later plotted this land for the town of Millersburg in 1856. Millersburg was a Swedish settlement in the woods. Some of the founding families included Peter Gustavson, John Johnson, Mathias Johnson, Niles Larson, Christian Lundstrom, and Peter Younquist. Other early settlers were William Henderson and family, who came from Maine in 1854. Wild cranberries were a cash crop for early settlers. Cranberries helped them get through the winter until land could be cleared for farming other crops. The post office was established in 1871 with the name of Lester. The first town meeting was in 1858 and the supervisors were Elias Taylor, Zebulon Sargent, and Charles Brand.

The Christdala Evangelical Swedish Lutheran Church was built for \$230 in 1878 by John Olson and John Lundberg. The building is still in its original location on the north side of Circle Lake and is cared for by the Christdala Church Preservation and Cemetery Association.

Morristown Township

Morristown Township is located in the southwest corner of the county. The Cannon River crosses the township from west to east. The land north of the river was timber and south was prairie land with groves of trees. Morristown has many rivers, streams and lakes. One of those is Mormon Lake, used by the Mormons for baptismal purposes.

The earliest known settlement was a log home built in 1853 by John Lynch and Henry Masters, who moved from St. Paul. In the spring of 1854, Andrew Storer, his wife Mary, and their four-month-old son came to the township. Another early settler was Mathias Nelson, a native of Norway, who arrived in 1856. The City of Morristown was named for Jonathan and Sara Morris. Arriving in 1855, Jonathan began to layout his land in village plots. He also began construction on a sawmill and began digging the sluiceway for the water. It proved too much for him, and he died of hard work and exposure that first fall. His wife, Sara Starbuck Morris, continued her husband's plans and platted the town of Morristown in 1856, after her husband's death. Soon the town had two stores, a steam sawmill, a water sawmill and gristmill, two taverns, a cabinet shop with water power, two blacksmith shops, a schoolhouse, a house of public worship, and a post office.

The first marriage was between Henry Masters and Anna Randall in 1855 and the first birth was to Andrew and Mary Storer that same year. The first improved wagon road in the county, which ran along the old Indian trail, was completed 1855 by three brothers: Marshal, John, and C.M. Benson. The first town meeting was held in 1858 and the supervisors were Isaac Hammond, Henry Bassett and John Benson.

Northfield Township

Northfield Township is in the extreme northwestern portion of Rice County. This township is a prairie township with rolling terrain. The eastern edge is very hilly with heavy forests and rock formations extending along the lines of trees. The Cannon River and Prairie Creek flow through the township. The first areas settled were along the Cannon River in 1854 by D. Kirkendahl, who came from Germany. This first settlement was in the area of the future city of Northfield. Another early settler was Alexander Stewart. Germans and Norwegians predominantly settled in Northfield Township in the early years.

A Baptist preacher gave the first religious services in 1854 in Alexander Stewart's village of Northfield home. Probably the first birth was James Stewart to Alexander and Hannah Stewart, and the first marriage was in 1855 between John Lamphier and Athea Alexander. The first township meeting was held in 1858. Government records from 1858 to 1862 have unfortunately been lost. However, it is known that the township was named Northfield, after the principal village in the area, during this first meeting.

Richland Township

Richland Township is in the southeast corner of the county. The township is made up of prairie land and rolling hills. There are no large lakes, although there are many small streams throughout the township. Richland was first settled in 1854 by a group of Norwegians that included Halver Halverson, Erik Gunderson, Ole Larson, and Osten Oleson. The area was originally called the "Norwegian Grove."

In addition to Norwegian settlers, many of the newcomers during the first two or three years were of Irish descent. Ole Larson built the first house in 1854. Two years later, he went to Winona on business and never returned. The earliest marriage in the township was in 1856

between E. L. Beach and Elizabeth Beardsley, and Halver Austin was born to Osten Olson that same year.

The first town meeting was held in 1858 at the house of R. W. Mathews. The supervisors were Lafayette Barlow, John A. Mather, and E. S. Stafford. The township was named Richland after the rich soil in the area.

Shieldsville Township

Shieldsville Township is on the western side of Rice County. There are many lakes, including Cedar Lake and Lake Mazaska, originally named Mazuka for an Indian chief's son. The land is a mixture of hills, trees, marsh, and meadows. In some areas the land was heavily timbered. General Shields first settled the township in 1855. The earliest settlers were almost all of Irish decent. General James Shields advertised in the East for fellow Irishmen to come west. The township was nearly settled by 1856, and was known as "General Shield's Colony."

The first settlers had to plant corn and potatoes by hoe alone. Grain had to be threshed and hauled by oxen to Red Wing, a four-day trip there and back. Ginseng and cranberries were the most profitable crops and helped the community survive its first years. Hay was an abundant crop once the land was cultivated.

Shieldsville is located on Lake Mazaska and is two miles from Shields Lake. The village was practically surrounded by water. General Shields, the city's founder, was born in Ireland in 1810 and came to America in 1826. He studied law until 1832 and was a legislator for Illinois and a judge on the Supreme Court. Shields fought in the Mexican War, where he was wounded. He became governor of the Oregon territory and in 1849 was elected U.S. Senator. After settling Shieldsville Township he went to Faribault and was a Minnesota Senator until 1860. General Shields then left for California. He died in 1879.

The Catholic Church of Shieldsville was built in 1857 for \$1,200. The church did not have any seats, stove, or furniture, until 1867 when Catherine Deming and others organized a picnic and ladies fair and raised \$160 to install these items. The church was used until 1878. The present building was built for \$16,000 and was completed in 1882. It seats 620 and has standing room for over one hundred. The Church of St. Patrick was erected in 1881 of blue limestone and seats six hundred. The spire can be seen for several miles.

The first birth was John Hunt in 1856 to Bernard Hunt. The earliest marriages occurred outside of the township. Prior to the Indian outbreak of 1862, Indians had been allowed to camp on General's Island. When the outbreak occurred, 100 townsmen forced them out of the area. The first township meeting was in 1858; the supervisors were Joseph Hagerty, Patrick Cunniff, and Patrick Smith. During the meeting the township was named in honor of General James Shields.

Walcott Township

Walcott Township is on the southern side of Rice County. The Straight River is the principal river that runs north through the center of the Township. The east side of river is the "East Prairie" and west side is comprised of low and high prairies. Edward H. Cutts from Vermont first settled the township in 1853. He returned in 1854 with Jacob Hesrown and a man by the name of Rouse. Mr. Cutts who built the first log cabin and first frame house, which burned in 1856. Other settlers who came in 1853 were Nathaniel Meyers and family and John Luther Cabot, all from New York. The township was mostly filled by 1855.

In 1856 Samuel Walcott laid out the village of Walcott. The village grew up around the Walcott's mill and most that lived in the area worked at the mill. Mr. McLaughlin lasted two years,

building the first blacksmith shop in 1860. A new shop did not open until the 1880s. The first railroad through Walcott Township was completed in 1868. A fire on November 3, 1895, burned the mill and other nearby buildings. The town was never incorporated and the mill was relocated and rebuilt in Faribault.

The first religious services were officiated by Elder Crist, a Methodist minister, in 1855. The first birth was a daughter named Laura to George and Hanna Dorrance in 1855. The first remembered marriage was 1856 between Edward Beach and Elizabeth Beardsley.

The Straight River Grange was organized in 1872 with 70 charter members and lasted until 1881. Other early groups in the area included the Hunters of the Prairie Society. The society was organized in 1860 and continued for ten years. Officers were chosen to lead in a war of extermination against the predatory animals in the vicinity. Two clans with captains were organized and all was fair game. Trophies were the caudal appendages, and the losing party had to pay certain prizes. The number of gophers, considered pests at that time, taken during summer events would run into the thousands. Another group was the Redfield Old Settlers' Association. The group was organized in 1858 and met annually until 1868. All were admitted, including men, women and children. The only requirement was that one had to have come from the township of Redfield in New York State.

The first township meeting was held in 1858. After naming the township after Samuel Walcott, other business included: setting a \$200 assessment for township improvements; deciding the requirements of a lawful fence; allowing horses and cattle to run at large from November to the first of April; and prohibiting sheep and hogs from being at large in the township.

Warsaw Township

Warsaw Township is in the southern part of Rice County. Inside the township are the Cannon River, Cannon Lake, and several streams. While the land was mostly prairie with groves, the northern part was wooded and part of the "Big Woods."

During the organization of Minnesota in 1858 there was difficulty naming the township. Dr. Charles Jewett said that Sargent, a wealthy friend visiting from Massachusetts, would move there if they named the township after him. Sargent would build a town hall and donate \$500 to the public fund. The township was named Sargent until 1864, when the citizens voted to rename the township, Warsaw, because the wealthy man never appeared. The post office was established in 1856 and was already named Warsaw, in honor of a town in New York where many area settlers had come from.

A trading post was established by Alexander Faribault on Cannon Lake between 1826 and 1834. The area had been the pathway of Native Americans in the area for many years. In 1852 Alexander Faribault hired Peter Bush, a blacksmith, to come to Rice County. After spending a year in Faribault, in 1853 he secured a claim of his own along Cannon Lake in Warsaw Township. He built a home and blacksmith shop and platted the village of Lake City on his farm that same year, the first village platted in the township. In 1855 George Burns arrived and put up a hotel and saloon. In the fall of 1856, a sawmill was built, destroyed by fire a year later, and rebuilt again.

The first birth was in 1854 to Thomas and Desire Blackburn, who had a son named William. The first marriage took place in 1855 between Alexander McKenzie and Sarah Gilhousen. In 1857 Christian Hersey and Freedman Weatherhead platted the village of Warsaw on their own farms.

Webster Township

Webster Township is located in the northwestern part of the county. The township was originally covered in timber but is now mostly farm fields. At one time there were large walnut forests. There are no lakes wholly within its borders or any large rivers or streams.

In 1855 a settlement in the southeastern part of the township began when Harry Humphrey, a native of New York, built a log house and opened it as a hotel. An Irish native, Martin Taylor, also secured a claim and began farming in 1855. Later that year Ferris Webster and his sons also settled in the township. Ferris Webster was a prominent and active figure in the early settlement of the township. He remained on the first farm he claimed until his death in 1880.

The first birth to the settlers was to John McGuire in 1857. The first marriage was between Salmon Webster and Fannie Humphrey in 1856. Government surveyors originally called Webster Township "Minnemada." Later, the area was known as Carroltown and then Pigtown after Magnu Olson's large pig farm. Finally the commissioners named the township Webster in honor of Ferris Webster. Along with the organization of Minnesota as a state, the first township meeting was held in 1858. The supervisors were George Carpenter, James Kelly, and J. J. McCabe.

Wells Township

Wells Township is one of the central townships in Rice County and the second smallest in size. The area has many lakes, ponds, and rivers. Originally, the township was covered in timber with only a few small areas considered prairie land.

One of the first settlers was Mark Wells who arrives with Luke Hulett in 1853. Mr. Wells erected the first cabin. Also the same year, a man named Standish and Bully Wells also made claims in the township. Very little settlement occurred until 1855 due to the amount of forested land that hindered setting up a farm.

The first child born was in 1855 to Thomas and Mary Kirk, a daughter named Elizabeth. The earliest marriage took place between Martha Roberds and J.S. McCartney in 1855. William Roberds erected first blacksmith shop in 1855. The first township meeting was held in 1858. The original supervisors were Thomas Kirk, William McCalla, and Patrick O'Brien.

The township was named after James "Bully" Wells, a fur trader and farmer who was born in New Jersey. He ran away from home to be a cabin boy at sea. He enlisted in the U.S. Army and served for 15 years. Wells came to Fort Snelling in 1819 with Colonel Leavenworth. Later he started a trading post at Little Rapids, which is now Chaska. He married Jane, sister of the wife of Alexander Faribault, in 1836. Wells moved his trading business a few more times over the next several years. In his final years he turned his attention to farming, but was killed in the Sioux War in 1863.

Wheatland Township

Wheatland Township is located in the northwest corner of Rice County. The land was made up of undulating plains and was covered by the "Big Woods" when the first settlers arrived. The township has a few lakes and no rivers. Cody Lake is one of the larger lakes, and was named for Patrick Cody who lived on its shores.

The first settlers were Bohemians (Czechs) in 1854. The group included John Markovsky, Johan August Botset, and Raimund Pacovsky. The Bohemians formed a colony and erected their first church in the area that later grew into the village of Veseli. The village was named after the

city of Veseli in Bohemia where all the settlers were from. The settlement contained many musicians and a zest for theater. The railroad did not go through Veseli as was hoped for and later Lonsdale was platted along the railroad. Bohemians had a great influence on the politics and development of the township.

Some other early settlers were of Scotch and Canadian-French decent. Shortly after these first few settlements took hold, an Irish settlement was also established. Of these, the first permanent settlement was established in 1855 by John Augustus Botset, Raimund Pacovsky, John Markovsky, Joseph J. Fraizier, John P. Cook, David S. McCormick, Jeremiah Wilson, Mathew Everson, Thomas Lambert, and Louis Plaisance. This area was known as the Scotch settlement after the homeland of the settlers. Joseph Frazier was a hunter and Indian warrior. He was at Fort Ridgley when it was attacked by Native Americans, breaking through the lines to get word to Fort Snelling. Frazier served under General Sibley.

Wheatland Village was first platted on the south shore of Metoggha Lake, but the railroad did not go through the area and no buildings were erected. Later in 1902 the area was named Willow Grove. The first public highway in the township was the Wheatland & Scotch Settlement Roadway established in July of 1858. The road was built after a petition was presented and passed. The name of the township was derived from the summer residence of President Buchanan.

Wheeling Township

Wheeling Township is located on the eastern side of the county, one of the prairie townships of the county. The early settlers were met with fine meadows for grazing. There are no large streams in the township or large lakes, but there are a few small streams and brooks.

Settlement began in 1854 when a party of Germans, including Henry Bultmann and family, Jacob Blank and family, Louis Helberg, Friederich Hogrefe, and John George Veeh, arrived. Jacob Blank made the first claim. The earliest settlers to the area were primarily of German and Norwegian descent.

The village of Nerstrand was platted in 1885 along the railway and named for an earlier post office established in 1878. Osmund Osmundson named the post office for his former home in Norway. The first baby was born in 1854, in Blank's hay shanty to Jacob and Elizabeth Blank. The child was named Caroline. The first marriage was in 1855 between Louis Helberg and Wilhelmina Meyer.

The first township meeting was held in 1858 in conjunction with the organization of Minnesota as a state. The first supervisors were Watts Pye, Christian Erb, and Lewis Everson. The town hall was built in 1870 for \$600.

City of Dundas

Dundas is located in the northeastern part of Rice County. Settlement of the area dates back to the 1850s when the Archibald family built the first grist four-mill system in the nation. The mill enabled flour to be refined to a much finer consistency than any other mill in the United States. In 1856, Mr. Veely erected a sawmill. The town was named after a Canadian county near Archibald's birthplace. Dundas is located on the railroad and Cannon River, three miles from Northfield. By 1858 there were several stores, a post office, and a hotel. The village was organized in 1879.

The community grew to contain several hotels and many commercial businesses, flourishing on the success of the flour mill. The mill burned in 1892. By the 1890s there were other mills using

the roller system. Even though the demand for the mill was not great, it was still rebuilt. In 1914 a community-wide fire destroyed the mill again. The mill was rebuilt again, but the business community never recovered.

City of Faribault

The village of Faribault is located where the Cannon River and Straight River join. In this area the bluffs rise 200 feet above the confluence of the rivers. Alexander Faribault established fur trading posts in the area in 1834. In 1853 he moved the post from Cannon Lake to the present site of Faribault. Soon after, many people came to the area. French-Canadians were the most numerous early settlers. In 1853 Alexander Faribault built the first frame house for a cost of \$4,000. The home still stands where it was constructed near downtown, and the city of Faribault grew up around this pivotal center. Alexander Faribault remained in the city until he died on November 28, 1882.

The first church services were held in Faribault's home. The frame house also served as a meeting place. In the fall of 1857 there was a depression in the country, but Faribault was prospering. Faribault had become the center for trade in the region. The first daily mail began in 1862 and the first sawmill was constructed in that year. The Faribault Woolen Mill was launched in 1865 by the Klemer family and is still in operation today. The railroad reached Faribault in late 1865-1866. There was a boom of growth in 1856 and the population grew to 1,500.

Faribault has been a center for education since its early days. There were four Episcopal schools established by Bishop Whipple. These schools included Seabury Divinity School in 1858, Shattuck School (originally a military academy) in 1865, St. Mary's Hall (a girl's secondary school) in 1866, and St. James School (a boy's primary school) in 1901. There were several other parochial schools established, including Bethlehem Academy, a Catholic girl's finishing school, in 1965 and Trinity Lutheran School in 1975.

The Minnesota legislature granted three state schools to Faribault at the request of Rodney Mott. The school for the deaf opened in 1866 in a rented store. A division for the blind was added in 1866. The school for the blind moved to Alexander Faribault's home in 1874. The schools are now called the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf and the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind. A pioneering school for the deaf for those as young as three opened in 1924, but was not a state school. The third state school opened in 1881 for the mentally impaired and was called the Faribault Regional Center when it closed in 1998.

City of Lonsdale

The City of Lonsdale is located in the northwestern part of Rice County. The village came into existence because of the railroad. The Farmington-Mankato branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway ran through the center of town. Jacob Schultz and wife were one of first settlers to the vicinity. The Schultz's had 11 children, the youngest, Beatrice, was the first baby born in the city. The Wilbys donated the land for the town in 1902 and the grand opening was held on July 16 of that year. Lots sold at auction for \$100 to \$400. On July 1, 1903, settlers voted to incorporate the city and to name it Lonsdale. The town was named after the surveyor for the railroad that was so instrumental to the town's development. The initial population in 1903 was 184. Early settlers were primarily of Czech or Norwegian descent.

In 1903 the Herda Harness Shop was built and upstairs was the office of Dr. Fr. J. Lexa. Dr. Lexa made early house calls via horse and buggy as far as halfway to New Prague or Montgomery. Lexa's wife was a pharmacist and operated a drug store and prescription service. The town

continued to have medical practices over the years by several other physicians until the 1960s, when several practices failed to establish.

In 1907 a public school and water tank were constructed. The school building is still there and is on the National Historic Register. The school is maintained by the 3R Landmark organization. The first floor holds exhibits and the second floor is a 1900-era schoolroom. A Catholic Church was built in 1908 and a school followed in 1912. A volunteer fire department was organized in January of 1908.

Electricity was brought to Lonsdale in the early 1920s and to the surrounding farming communities in the 1930s. County Commissioner Ben Shimota was instrumental in routing the Colville Memorial Highway through Lonsdale, today's State Highway 19. The first ballpark was in a pasture west of town; a new one was established closer to town and still remains in the same place. The D-R-S and Town and Country leagues were formed during WW1 and are still going.

City of Morristown

The town was named for Jonathan Morris, an early settler in the area. The city is located along the Cannon River. In 1853 John Lynch and Henry Masters relocated to the area from St. Paul. In 1854 Jonathan Morris erected a log cabin and a sawmill. He purchased a large portion of land that is now the town. Logging was the main interest in the early years and several sawmills were established. The town relied on the lumber industry for its early growth. There were many sawmills in and around town by the late 19th century. Morristown Mills started in 1876, was later sold, and finally named the Big Diamond Milling Company. The mill was a major source of employment in town. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1932 and was not rebuilt.

The early townspeople attempted incorporation in 1878, but were resisted due to the large size of the area to be included. The two-mile tract also included a large agricultural district. In 1879 a measure was introduced in the Legislature to annul the incorporation. Incorporation was finally accomplished in 1892 with one square mile as the city limits. The Chicago and the Great Western Railroad, then the Cannon Valley Railroad, began an operation through Morristown in 1882. The Morristown Creamery was established in 1896 and later Four County Agricultural Services began. In 1900, fire destroyed a large part of the business section of town and a portion of the village was wiped out by a tornado, killing seven people.

City of Nerstrand

The City of Nerstrand is located in the northeastern part of Wheeling Township. The area was originally part of the Nerstrand Woods and later the land was cleared for farming. The main street of Nerstrand extends through the township and once divided the German and Norwegian settlements on either side.

The city was named by a pioneer for his home in Norway. Osmund Osmundson was one of the original settlers; he hailed from Nerstrand, Stavanger, Norge (Norway). He came to the United States in 1850. The town was established in 1885. Osmundson was a county commissioner for two terms and served in Minnesota State Legislature.

City of Northfield

The City of Northfield is located along the Cannon River, 40 miles south of St. Paul/ Minneapolis, in the northeast corner of county. The first settlers to the area included Daniel Kiekendahl in 1854. John W. North, lawyer, anti-slavery lecturer, temperance advocate, and believer in women's suffrage, first built a sawmill on the Cannon River in 1855 and then laid the

foundations of the city in 1856. The village was incorporated in 1872 and G.H. Tower was inaugurated as first mayor on April 9, 1872. Northfield was named for John W. North.

The city's first buildings were constructed in 1855 with the New England vernacular strongly influencing its architectural design. The Lyceum Society was formed as the first debating society, and a public library was built in the year the town was established. Several stage lines ran through the village before the railroad came through. Ames Flourmill was built in early years of the city's history and won a prize for its wheat at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition. The mill was operated by Malt-O-Meal from 1927 until early 2015 when Malt-O-Meal was purchased by Post.

In 1876 the James-Younger Gang made their raid in Northfield. The original target was Mankato, but armed citizens made them change their minds. Instead, the Gang's attention was focused on the First National Bank of Northfield. Due to the heroism of the acting cashier, Joseph Lee Heywood, and citizens A. R. Manning, a hardware merchant, and Henry M. Wheeler, a medical student home on leave, the gang was unsuccessful. Unfortunately, the bank cashier was killed for not opening the safe. A Swedish immigrant, Nicklaus Gustafson, was also killed in the street because he did not understand the gang's orders to get out of the way. The raid only lasted seven minutes, two of the gang members died, and the rest escaped, riding south out of town. A posse at Madelia captured the Younger brothers and killed another gang member. Northfield still celebrates the Defeat of Jesse James Days every year on the weekend following Labor Day.

In 1866 the Minnesota Council of Congregational Churches established Carleton College in Northfield. The college was named after an early benefactor, William Carleton, who hailed from Charlestown, Massachusetts. The college enrolled 23 students in its first term. Rev. Bernt Julius Muus, a Lutheran missionary pastor in southern Minnesota, founded St. Olaf College in 1874, opening with 36 students. The college continues to be a place of Norwegian culture. Both colleges are rated among the top liberal arts colleges in the country.

The first baseball game in Minnesota was played in Northfield in the late 1860s. A New York immigrant showed several people how to play and the first game was held in the high school square. Another important visitor included Mark Twain, who visited in 1886 to commemorate the first opening of a YMCA in greater Minnesota. The first radio station began broadcasting in 1918 from St. Olaf College. WCAL was the country's first listener-supported radio station. By 1880 there were 2,300 people in the city, and dairy farming was replacing wheat, not only in Northfield but also throughout Rice County.

Historic Resources Preservation Needs

Over the last ten years, Rice County has begun to experience growth pressure, primarily around the lakes and in the northern portion of the county. Over the next ten years further growth is expected around many of the municipalities in Rice County. As growth and change in the county continues, preserving the area's history will become increasingly more important.

The preservation of historical resources is significant in developing and enhancing a community's identity and remembering the heritage of its past. Rice County, in conjunction with the Rice County Historical Society, recognizes the importance in preserving the history and traditions of the area. Historical areas in need of preservation have been identified and continue to be discovered throughout the county, ranging from buildings to cemeteries.

There are a number of available organizations in Rice County aiding in providing communities with a sense of their historical place. The Rice County Historical Society, located in Faribault, was formed by a group of volunteers in the 1940s. Chapters of the Rice County Historical Society have also been instituted in Lonsdale, Northfield, and Morristown. This organization relies heavily on volunteers working to collect, preserve, and interpret Rice County history for future generations.

In addition, the State Historic Preservation Office has also compiled a dataset of historic sites in Rice County. In Rice County alone there are over 70 recognized Historic Places on the National Registry. In addition, Rice County is home to a National Landmark (The Thomas Veblen Farmstead); there are only 20 recognized Landmarks in Minnesota. The National Registry of Historic Places is the nation's list of properties deemed worthy of preservation and recognizes local, state or national properties of significance. Recognition may be due to an association with significant persons and events, a result of their architectural or engineering significance, or because they contain important information about a community's history or prehistory.