

## CHAPTER TWO



City of River Falls Main Street, 1891.

# HERITAGE RESOURCES

Throughout the public participation processes which lead to the preparation of this chapter, River Falls' heritage resources were cited as some of the study area's major assets. These resources reflect River Falls' geological, archeological, historic, agricultural, and cultural heritage. The physical layout of older and established neighborhoods and proximity to merchants, services and the Kinnickinnic River and its tributaries were looked at as critical elements in planning for sustainable development. The preservation of River Falls' visual character was identified as essential.

This chapter provides a context for River Falls' heritage resources by presenting a historic overview of the development of the City. River Falls' current effort in identifying and managing its heritage assets are described. Heritage assets such as natural resources are discussed in chapter eight Natural Resource Management and Conservation. Implementing policies establish a means by which the City intends to

further its efforts of appropriately managing its heritage resources and integrating them into an urban design in development strategies. The following themes apply:

### THEMES

- **Character.** Maintain and respect River Falls' unique personality, sense of place and character.
- **Community-Oriented Downtown.** Put community activities back into downtown.
- **Urban Form.** Promote a compact urban form that encourages sensitive/compatible infill development.
- **Quality of Life.** Enhance the quality of life of the community and ensure the availability of community services.
- **Intergovernmental Cooperation.** Maintain a regional growth management and historic preservation perspective.
- **Review Process.** Streamline the planning and review processes.

## 2.1 RIVER FALLS' HERITAGE: AN OVERVIEW

The City of River Falls is a picturesque community located in southern St. Croix County and northern Pierce County in west-central Wisconsin. There are many features to be protected, enhanced, and enjoyed. The City is surrounded by scenic vistas of bluffs, coulees, and valleys. The Kinnickinnic River (a Class 1 Trout Stream) flows through the heart of the downtown. There are commercial, residential and institutional buildings constructed before 1940 that have historic significance and an architectural style.

### 1837

Prior to the early settlement of River Falls and the surrounding region, Chippewa and Sioux Native Americans occupied the area. In 1837, the Chippewa ceded to the United States all of the land east of the Mississippi River extending north to the source of the Mississippi River. Despite the opening of the territory, settlement was rather slow until the mid-nineteenth century.



State Normal School Building, 1874.

### 1840s

St. Croix County was created in 1840. In 1853, the State divided it into three separate counties, each with its own seat: Pierce County to the south; Polk County to the north, and St. Croix County in the middle. River Falls straddles the boundary between St. Croix County and Pierce County. The City is situated along the Kinnickinnic River, which flows west into Lake St. Croix. The Kinnickinnic River and its branch, the South Fork played a significant role in the settlement and growth of the community and dictated its early development pattern. Arriving in the fall of 1848, Joel Foster was the first white settler in what would soon be officially known as River Falls.

### 1850s

At the time of initial settlement, approximately three-fourths of the Town of Greenwood in which River Falls is located, was covered by prairie with black sandy loam soil. The remaining land was covered with timber. Some 2000 acres of land were under cultivation by 1856, and the prospects for agriculture were considered to be “first-rate.” To the north, the Town of Troy was organized in 1851 and was first called Malone by the Perrine brothers who were settlers from New York.

The Powell brothers built a sawmill in 1852, constructed the first frame dwelling, which later became a store, and in 1854, laid out a 60-acre plat on the east side of the river for the village of Kinnickinnic. The original plat of River Falls is tilted so that Main Street and other streets are oriented to the Kinnickinnic River; the plat conforms to a common midwestern form consisting of square blocks set on a grid of streets intersecting at right angles. Later plats followed survey lines and compass points thereby creating the familiar rectilinear grid. Early development was focused along the Kinnickinnic River. The Powell brothers built their sawmill on the east bank, south of where the first flourmill would be constructed in 1854.

### 1860s–1870s

The population increased from 312 in 1860 to 1,191 in 1870, and by the late 1870s four more flourmills had been constructed, which collectively produced 150,000 barrels of flour annually.

Contributing to the growth and development was the construction of the fourth State Normal School in 1874, and the arrival of the Hudson and River Falls Railroad, in 1878. The railroad significantly impacted development and growth in the River Falls area. By the late 1870s, River Falls had emerged as a local, if not regional, trade center.

### 1880–1920

In spite of these developments, the City’s early period of rapid growth ended, and the population expanded only 26% from 1870 to 1880 (1,191 to 1,499). Over the next decade, however, the number of residents increased by 975 (65%). River Falls was incorporated in April of 1885 as a City by action of the State Legislature. Its charter outlined the City boundaries, governmental structure, election procedure, City officers and duties, and Common Council powers.

### 1920–1940s

In January 1922, on the basis of the Charter, the City of River Falls was declared a Fourth Class City by the State of Wisconsin. Over the ensuing one hundred years, the strongest growth occurred after 1940. With a population count of 12,560 in 2000, the City of River Falls has experienced approximately a 450% increase since 1940. Growth has been fairly compact in form.

### 1950–2000s

Over the past decades, large tracts of land have been annexed and development has occurred to the north and southeast of the City. The City is approximately 6.3 square

miles with a 2004 population of approximately 13,000. Over this same period of time, development in the towns has dramatically increased the non-farming population and reduced the number of active farms. The increase of residential lots of two acres and larger, rising housing prices and population are creating a nontraditional land use form of development. This type nontraditional land use is not consistent with the long history of agricultural preservation.

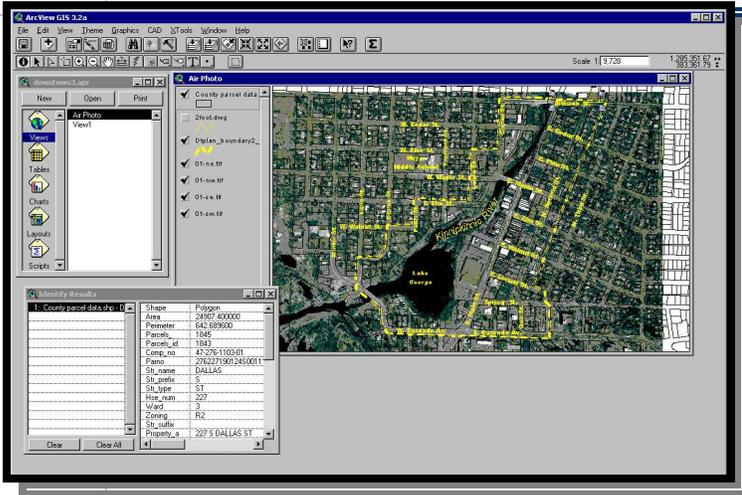
According to 2000 statistics, the County populations are increasing twice as fast as in previous years and are setting new records. In 2001, St. Croix County issued 649 housing permits and approved rezoning for over 1,000 acres.

## 2.2 HERITAGE RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION

The history of River Falls is evidenced by and reflected in the wealth of historic resources that have been built and identified by the community. The following section presents an overview of this effort to identify and manage the historic assets and provides a plan for conservation and preservation of these assets.

### 2.2.1 Architectural and Historic Inventory

The Architectural and Historic Inventory (AHI) is a database that records historic structures compiled by the Wisconsin Historical Society. The River Falls Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has obtained a copy of that database and will use it with discretion along with geographic information systems (GIS) data to document the characteristics of the historic resources within the City. The database currently contains data documenting construction dates, demolition dates, architectural styles, AHI identification numbers, builders names, property addresses, historic building names, and historic designations and dates. Maintaining and updating the local AHI database is a HPC priority.



Architectural and Historic Inventory Database.

### 2.2.2 Designating Historic Properties

Historic properties can be listed as historic on the National Register of Historic Places, State Register of Historic Places or designated by local ordinance. The City of River Falls historic preservation ordinance allows for three different designation categories:

1. Historic structure or building,
2. Historic district, and
3. Historic site.

Local designations depend on the type of property under consideration and its location in relation to other historic buildings. For example, cemeteries would fall under the historic site designation. However, a building could be designated either as a historic structure or if enough historic buildings are clustered together, as part of a historic district. The type designation is determined by the historic importance at either the local or federal level.

To determine which properties should be designated, the River Falls HPC process considers properties that have one or more of the following five criteria:

1. Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community;

2. Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state or local history;
3. Embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship;
4. Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect who influenced his or her age; or
5. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history.

Determining which properties meet these criteria will require research. Utilizing the existing AHI and updating records through historical research, updates will be made to the list of Important Historical Properties. The HPC will review original plats to identify key properties. Where individual buildings meet the criteria for local designation, the “historic structure” designation will be used. If or when a cluster of historic structures is recognized, a “historic district” designation will be used. The HPC encourages, supports and will assist owners in designating their historic property.

### 2.2.3 Historic Buildings and Sites

An “intensive survey” was conducted from August 1990 through September 1991 to research and evaluate the historical and architectural properties, including buildings, structures, sites, and districts within the City. This survey updated an earlier windshield survey undertaken by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division, in 1978. A professional architectural historian employed by the City gathered the intensive survey information. The funding for the survey was made available to the City through a grant program of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

During this project, each property included in the reconnaissance level survey was evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility according to the criteria

adopted by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. It identified approximately 585 individual properties in the City, of which 24 were of historic architectural significance. These 24 properties are likely to be eligible for listing on the state and national registers of historic places. During the intensive survey phase of the project, detailed research on the community's history helped form the basis of information necessary for the evaluation of historic properties. For each property identified as historically or architecturally significant in the reconnaissance survey and in the intensive survey, a four-page intensive survey form was completed with photographs, architectural descriptions, and historical information. The survey findings lead to the delineation of two residential historic districts and one commercial historic district shown on page 2-6. The report included a brief history of the City's survey, methodology, results, and a description of significant properties and historic districts.

Copies of the survey results were also provided to the Wisconsin Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division in Madison, the City of River Falls, the River Falls public library and the Area Research Center located in Davee Library at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF).

The list below contains some of the many important buildings and sites worthy of preservation. The Architectural and Historical Survey Report identified some of these important buildings. Supplementary research has identified additions to that list. These properties are worthy of recognition in some manner, either through historic designation or by erecting educational plaques and historic markers.



*Birthplace of Wisconsin Governor Warren P. Knowles, 127 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street. He was born August 19, 1908 and was governor from 1965 -1971. He died on April 1, 1993.*

## **2.3 HERITAGE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

### **2.3.1 Certified Local Government Status**

The City is committed to the management and sensitive treatment of archeological, cultural, and historic resources. In 2003, the City became a designated, Certified Local Government (CLG) by Wisconsin's State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, amended in 1980. As a Certified Local Government, the City has a Historic Preservation Commission that meets monthly, adopted a Historic Preservation Plan, ordinances and designated historic structures.

***“The Historic Preservation Commission encourages, supports and will assist owners in designating their historic property.”***

**A LIST OF IMPORTANT BUILDING AND SITES WORTHY OF PRESERVATION**

1. Swinging Bridge, Glen Park
2. Glen Park Swimming Pool, Glen Park
3. Prairie Mill Building, 421 N. Main Street
4. Masonic Hall, 122 E. Walnut Street
5. Junction Mill Smokestack, 401 S. Winter Street
6. Gladstone Hotel, 121-123 S. Main Street
7. Lord Livery Building, 101 S. Main Street
8. Brackett Building, 128 S. Main Street
9. Johnson & Ellertson Hardware Store, 126 S. Main Street
10. White Front Bakery, 124 S. Main Street
11. Rosenberg Building, 122 S. Main Street
12. Unnamed Building, 120 S. Main Street
13. Unnamed Building, 6-118 S. Main Street
14. S. D. Dodge Building, 114 S. Main Street
15. A. P. Roberts Building, 100 S. Main Street
16. Lime Kilns, Lower Kinnickinnic
17. Foster Cemetery, Lower Kinnickinnic
18. South Fork School, 817 S. Main Street
19. George Farnsworth House, 722 W. Cedar Street
20. Ole Ostness House, 521 W. Cedar Street
21. Thomas Walker House, 403 E. Division Street
22. Kimble House, 211 E. Elm Street
23. William Alton House, 603 W. Elm Street
24. Andrew Lund House, 127 S. Fourth Street
25. R. W. Freeman House, 220 S. 4<sup>th</sup> Street
26. R. N. Jenson House, 121 Fremont Street
27. F. Hardy House, 321 Fremont Street
28. Charles Parker House, 315 E. Maple Street
29. Unnamed House, 431 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
30. Stella Deneen House, 120 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street
31. John Reed House, 127 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Street
32. Hocking House, 127 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
33. R. S. Freeman House, 220 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
34. Ferris White House, 518 W. Walnut Street
35. The Academy, 211 N. Fremont Street, former Junior High School and High School, longest continuing school site in this area.
36. Ole H. Olsen House, 210 N. Fremont Street
37. Jens Larson House, 214 N. Fremont Street
38. Olive G. Davis House, 315 W. Maple Street
39. G. T. Smith House, 323 W. Maple Street
40. W. P. Knowles House, 127 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street
41. North and South Hall, 410 E. S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 320 E. Cascade Ave., UWRF campus
42. Silas Symes House, 309 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
43. P. W. Ramer House, 104 S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
44. Thomas Tubbs House, 302 E. Walnut Street
45. Tremont Hotel, 102 N. Main Street



*The "Swinging Bridge" in Glen Park Built in 1925 and Reconstructed in 1986.*



*South Hall located on the University of Wisconsin - River Falls campus was constructed in 1875 and was listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1976.*

Avenues for achieving this goal included the maintenance of a system for identifying historic resources, the establishment and administration of qualified preservation commissions, provisions for public participation in a local historic preservation program, and the enforcement of local laws for the designation and sensitive management of such resources. The Certified Local Government program, administered by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division, will be a major source of support and guidance for technical and financial assistance. It is through this assistance that the City will be able to undertake its historic building resurvey and other archeological, historic, and cultural heritage resource projects.

### **2.3.2 River Falls Local Resource Management Ordinances**

In January of 1996, the City of River Falls added §17.76 Historic Preservation to the Zoning Section of the Municipal Code. The purpose and intent were that the City of River Falls thereby declared that a matter of public policy the protection, enhancement,

perpetuation, and use of improvements or sites of special character or special architectural, archeological, or historic interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the health, prosperity, safety, and welfare of the people. The ordinance outlines procedures for designating historic properties and powers for preserving historic architecture.

### **2.3.3 Heritage Resource Management by State and Federal Agencies**

The Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Historic Preservation presently provides preservation assistance and presentations to all 72 counties and funds six regional archeological programs, which are located in LaCrosse, Rhineland, Stevens Point, Green Bay, Oshkosh, and Milwaukee. The Division's state and Federally mandated responsibilities are handled with the following programs: Architectural Services, Burial Site Preservation, Compliance, Local Assistance and Editorial, Office of the State Archeologist, and Survey and Registration.

Through these programs, the Division maintains an inventory of Wisconsin's historic properties, archeological sites, and burial places. The Division also administers survey and inventory grants, conducts and supports archeological research. The Division provides technical assistance to local governments and owners of historical properties, administers the Certified Local Government program, nominates sites to the national and state registers of historic places, supports research on historic architecture, administers federal and state tax credit programs for the rehabilitation of historic properties, catalogs burial sites, and reviews public projects for their effects on historic properties.

activities. River Falls, along with many other municipalities, has passed zoning codes for altering properties designated historic. These rules vary greatly from community to community. Some communities may wish to follow the stronger standards as provided by the Secretary of Interior for rehabilitation, while others may be less restrictive and allow for modern materials. City, state and federal governments all promote historic preservation by coordinating education programs. Informational resources are created through conferences, publications, the Internet, and classes on preservation.



*North Hall on the UWRF campus was constructed in 1914 with an addition in 1927.*

As stated above, the state and federal government provides recognition for historic places and financial incentives. The state and federal governments provide tax credit incentives for qualified properties to rehabilitate those properties to objective standards. The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation must be followed to receive tax credits. Currently the State of Wisconsin offers a 25% tax credit for the restoration of qualified residential properties.

A local government can have a regulatory component among many of its preservation



*The City of River Falls Main Street Sesquicentennial Logo.*

## GUIDING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

River Falls' heritage preservation program is intended to do more than preserve isolated buildings. In order for the City's sense of history and sense of place to be cared for, River Falls has taken steps to sensibly manage its identified heritage resources. These resources include archeological sites, architectural, agricultural, and historically significant buildings and structures, waterways such as the Kinnickinnic River, historic neighborhoods, and other cultural landscape features. Additional background information and procedural steps about these management tools are discussed in the Historic Preservation Plan, historic preservation ordinance, historic residential design guidelines, water management plans and documents.

Through cooperative management strategies with the National Park Service, the Wisconsin Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division, Department of Natural Resources, private preservation-oriented groups including the Pierce and St. Croix County Historic Foundation, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, Trout Unlimited and the general public, the City of River Falls can successfully ensure that archeological, cultural, agricultural, and historic resources are sensibly managed and integrated for the benefit of the community. These benefits are educational in nature and instill pride in citizens about the City's heritage.

**2-G-1** Inventory and assess historical manmade and natural resources for the aesthetic, economic, educational and scientific contributions they make to the City of River Falls and the quality of life of its citizens.

**2-1-I-1** Work with local and regional groups to develop a complete inventory of historic buildings, sites, neighborhoods, and resources that includes their unique physical features and historic significance.

**2-G-2** Coordinate the development and implementation of policies that promote the preservation of the cultural, historic and visual qualities of the City of River Falls while preserving the affordability of housing and commercial space.

**2-2-I-1** Encourage partnerships between River Falls based and non-community based public and private historic preservation entities within the region and at the state and national level to assist in the identification and preservation of our historic resources.

**2-2-I-2** Continue to work with groups that organize and promote educational and other activities in River Falls that preserve our historic cultural traditions by bringing residents and visitors into physical contact with our tangible heritage resources.

**2-2-I-3** Seek to maintain the unique physical character and landscape features for the benefit of the community.

**A Regional:** Cooperate with adjacent townships, Pierce, and St. Croix counties in implementing historic preservation programs.

**B Infill development:** Encourage early consultation with representatives of proposed development to ensure that potential development is compatible with River Falls' historic pattern of land use and construction.

**C Transitional zones:** Evaluate the need for establishing standards for transitional zones between the City's current and future historic district to ensure compatibility with physical development in these locations.

**D City-wide:**

- Evaluate zoning codes to ensure compatibility of density, use, physical character within established neighborhoods and historic areas while maintaining and providing for affordable housing.
- Evaluate the need for standards for the proper treatment of historic resources such as homes, buildings, bridges, cemeteries and other cultural landscape features.



City of River Falls Central Business District in 1886.



*Historic  
Preservation  
Commission*

C i t y o f R i v e r F a l l s

*City of River Falls Historic Preservation Commission Logo.*