

Browns Creek State Trail Public Open House



Historical and Cultural Resources

The “Birthplace of Minnesota”

Even before ratification of treaties with American Indians in 1838, white settlers began pouring into the newly ceded triangle of land between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. Among them was a former soldier, trader, and Justice of the Peace named Joseph R. Brown. Brown kept a small warehouse at the head of Lake St. Croix to supply upriver fur trading operations. This warehouse, which was in what is now North Stillwater, became the center of a new village that he called “Dacotah.” Brown’s claim became the county seat of St. Croix County, Wisconsin Territory in 1840.



In 1841, Brown built a house of tamarack logs, a courthouse and jail in Dacotah, near the mouth of Browns Creek. (A historical marker on the west side of MN-95/St. Croix Trail notes the location.) Two eastern lumbermen, John McKusick and Elam Greeley, looking for a good site to build a sawmill, stopped at the Tamarack House. They were pleased with the potential for waterpower and completed the construction of a sawmill, the Stillwater Lumber Company in 1844. This was the first frame building in Stillwater.

As the mill prospered, most of the settlers of Dacotah moved south to Stillwater. Brown’s courthouse was never completed and Dacotah was all but abandoned. In 1846, Stillwater was made the new seat of St. Croix County. The first court was held in Stillwater in 1847 in McKusick’s store.

After Wisconsin became a state in 1848, all the ceded lands west of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers were left without government. Brown and others called together settlers in this unorganized territory to meet at Stillwater on August 26, 1848, in what has become known as the “Stillwater Convention.” At this convention, held in McKusick’s store, the delegates drafted a Memorial to Congress that a new territory be created and this territory be named “Minnesota,” and elected Henry Sibley to deliver this citizen’s petition to the U.S. Congress. Sibley’s actions in Washington helped speed the formation of Minnesota Territory, which was organized in March, 1849. Because of this convention, Stillwater calls itself the “Birthplace of Minnesota.”



*Looking south on South Main Street, Stillwater ca. 1865.
Photograph by E.F. Everitt.*