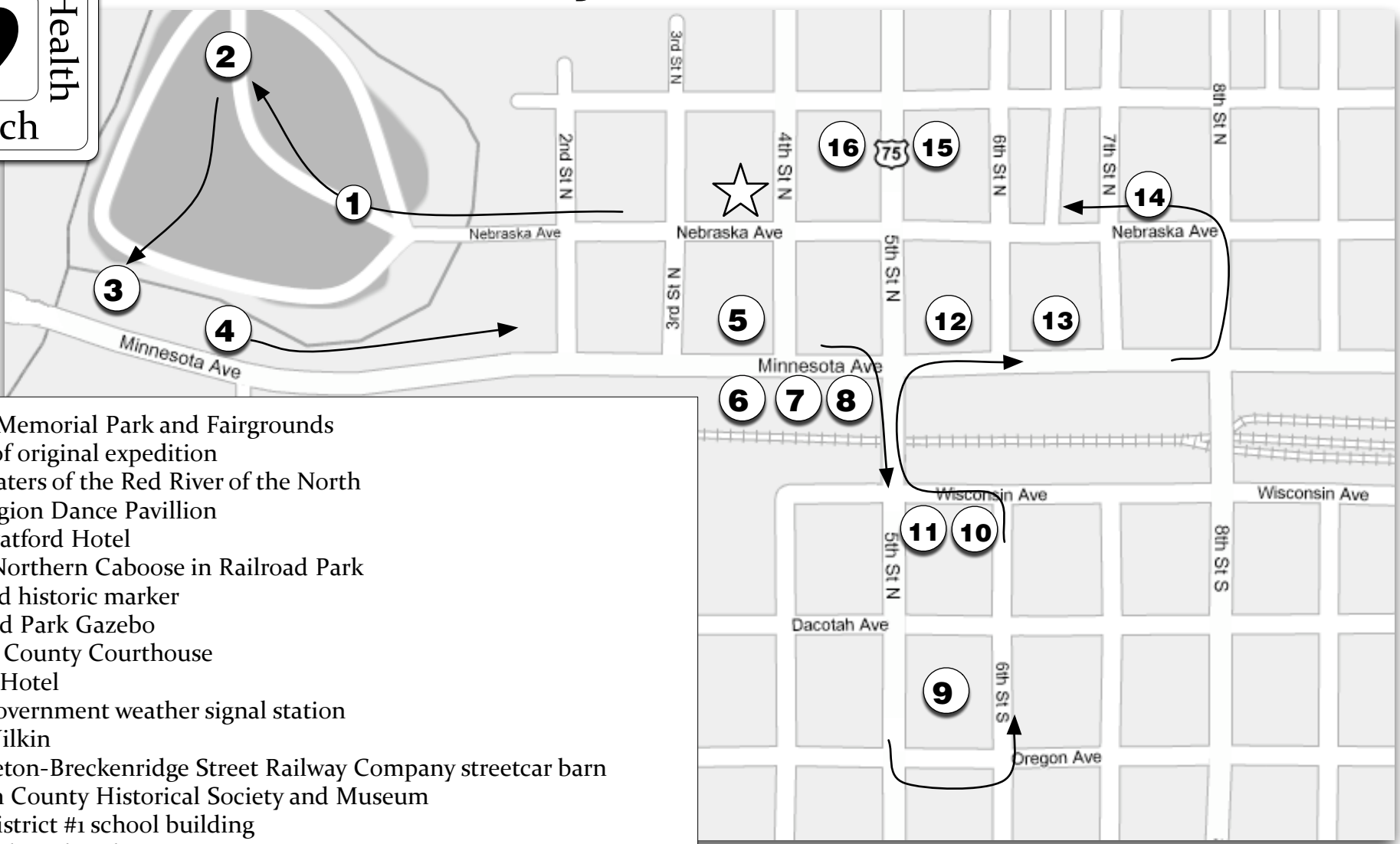
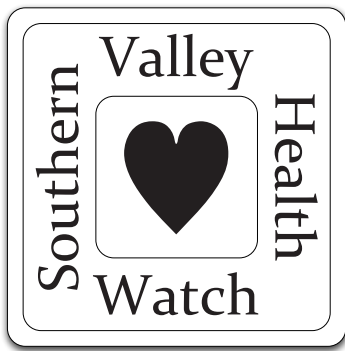


# Headwaters Day Historic Walk



1. Welles Memorial Park and Fairgrounds
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14. Wilkin County Historical Society and Museum
15. Old District #1 school building
16. Methodist Church



# Headwaters Day Historic Walk

## Sites 1-8

### 1. Welles Memorial Park and Fairgrounds

Location: the vehicle entrance is at the west end of Nebraska Avenue in Breckenridge. There is also a walk bridge into the park from the boat landing on Minnesota Avenue.

Welles Memorial Park was born January 8, 1889. This Park has also been called “Island Park” and was officially platted as the Peninsula. This parcel of land was originally part of the original city of Breckenridge and the notation “subject to inundation” is noted thereon.

Originally, Henry T. Welles, proprietor of the city, gave a site south of town to the village for “Welles Park and Fairgrounds.” The city accepted but defaulted in advancing the Fairgrounds and the few buildings were torn down.

Breckenridge city officials in 1919 went to St. Paul and consulted with the attorneys for the heirs of the Welles estate. They asked that a change be permitted through which the land could be sold and property known as “The Island” purchased and converted into a park and fairgrounds. This was agreeable to the Welles heirs. A stipulation was that a small monument be placed in the Park, noting it was a donation from Henry T. Welles. The monument exists at the east entrance to the Park.

The Peninsula was originally larger in acreage than at present. A portion of the Otter Tail River was filled in to make a good roadbed into North Dakota and the river channel was changed. Minnesota Avenue was constructed on the filled in land.

There is a small strip of land on the north side of the Park through which you can walk or bike when the rivers are at normal levels. This walkway takes you into Park Addition, a portion of which contained the original site of Breckenridge which was burned in 1862 by the Sioux. At this point the Otter Tail River flows south and the Red River flows north. It's quite a unique site!

### 2. Cabin of the original expedition

Location: Welles Memorial Park on the north side.

This marks the approximate site of the cabin of the first expedition of ten men to arrive in Breckenridge on January 29, 1857. The cabin was constructed in February, 1857.

Members of the first expedition were:

- J. W. Prentiss, St. Paul, resident town site manager
- Daniel S. B. Johnson, St. Anthony, resident town site manager
- J. C. Moulton, St. Anthony, traveling superintendent
- English Bill, the cook
- Pierre Bottineau, French-Chippewa guide
- Charlie Bottineau, French-Chippewa guide
- Ed Dunn, ox team driver
- Barrett, ox team driver
- Bill, ox team driver
- Bob, ox team driver

The financial backers were (they did not accompany the first expedition into Breckenridge):

- George F. Brott, St. Cloud
- E. Demortimer, St. Paul

On April 3, 1858, the water from the river came into the cabin—about 4 feet 8 inches. On April 5th the weather became intensely cold and ice froze the water during the night thick enough to bear an ox in the cabin.

By April 12th their beds drifted over with fine snow that sifted through the roof in a blizzard during the night.

April 14th brought another terrible day of snow and cold. Food was running out as they awaited the relief teams, who finally arrived on April 17th.

Quote by Daniel S. B. Johnson: “The men of those days were here mainly for what they could make, and were willing to take chances to get what they were after. We, of this Red River venture, were built that way. We though we saw Opportunity at the door, we locked arms with her, but found on this trip it was not Opportunity at all. The medicine I took during six months of that year (1857) cured me of the town site speculation fever so completely that I have never felt a touch of it since.”

### 3. Headwaters of the Red River of the North

Location: Minnesota Avenue west at the interstate bridge and via Welles Memorial Park. The fishing pier marks the site where the Red River begins.

Breckenridge, Minnesota, is the source of the Red River of the North. At this historic point the mighty Red River of the North begins its unique northward flow almost 600 miles to Lake Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba, Canada. The Red River of the North is the longest north flowing river in America.

The Headwaters of the Red River is the number one attraction in Breckenridge.

The Red is formed by the union of the Bois de Sioux (formerly called Sioux Wood) River and Otter Tail River and forms the boundary between Minnesota and North Dakota.

From 1763 (Treaty of Paris) until 1849 (Minnesota becomes a Territory) the drainage basin of the Red River of the North and the Mississippi River were the two most important “boundary lines” of the ever changing political subdivision now called Minnesota.

It is assumed the headwaters were first observed by white men in 1734 when they became acquainted with the country in connection with the activities of the fur companies. These pioneers were Scotch, English and French-Canadians who established a number of trading posts on the riverbanks.

Breckenridge was head of steam navigation on the Red River for many

years, beginning in 1859. On May 26, 1859, the first steamboat the "Anson Northrup" plied these waters. The boats, built with long sweeps used as rudders, steamed north to Canada laden with cargo and passengers.

As the Valley became settled, supplies were hauled by ox cart from St. Paul to the river at Breckenridge and McCauleyville, then by boat to their destinations downstream. Later the merchandise arrived on the railroad and was loaded on steamboats and barges for the trip downstream.

The railroad, while responsible for much of the growth of Breckenridge and the Red River Valley, was eventually responsible for the disappearance of steamboat traffic on the Red River of the North.

Along with the coming of the railroad, the low water years of 1911 and 1912 stopped commercial navigation on the river and it never revived.

#### **4. The Legion Dance Pavilion**

Location: Pavilion restaurant on Minnesota Avenue

Was built in the summer of 1928 with funds raised by Alfred Lockman American Legion Post at a cost of \$4,700. The original size was 50' x 100' and overlooked the Ottertail River. Built with "sides that could drop down to insure dancers a comfortable place to seek pleasure." As the years passed, many additions were added on to the original building to accommodate larger crowds, as well as refreshment vending. Wedding dances were almost a weekly occurrence during the spring and summer. In its later years, the spring also held the "Senior Citizens Hobby and Talent Show," with a King and Queen crowned each year.

Called the "Dance Palace of the Northwest," the site hosted many famous entertainers. Among them were Jerry Lee Lewis, Bobby Vee, The Angels, The Shadows, The Crickets, Al Mikes and the very popular TV personality Lawrence Welk, The Flippers, and Buddy Knox, just to name a few!

The pavilion survived the Great Depression and the war years, but was demolished in October of 1985 "to make room for progress."

#### **5. The Stratford Hotel**

Location: Corner of 4th Street and Minnesota Avenue

The Grand Stratford Hotel was built in 1913. There were 60 rooms adorned with state-of-the-art Axminster carpets, stained oak trim, and brass beds – the most comfortable of the time. The lobby floor was of Trazza with massive oak furnishings. There were 20 baths to be shared by the guests. A grand opening was held to proudly display this fine new business. A nine-course dinner was served to 174 seated guests.

At 4:59 a.m. on January 28, 1977, the first call came in announcing the fire in the hotel. By 5:10 there were 10 trucks and 60 men on the scene. The weather was a bitter -26 degrees and the men fought against the freezing hoses as well as the fire itself. 16 people that were in the hotel lost their lives on that day, two of which were the owners and living in the building, with just one guest surviving. At the time the building housed an Auto Parts Store, a Beauty Shop and an Insurance Agency as well as the hotel and café. The fire is still noted as one of the worst fires in Minnesota, with the most deaths noted in one incident. This is the third hotel to burn in the city of Breckenridge, with the other two earlier in history and much smaller scale with no lost lives.

#### **6. Great Northern Caboose in Railroad Park**

Location: Minnesota Avenue and 4th Street North on the south side of the avenue

Breckenridge has established a Railroad Park near the depot in the midst of flower beds. In September 1990, a Great Northern caboose was acquired and refinished. It now stands proudly in the Park as a tribute to

all the men who served the railroad in Breckenridge.

Breckenridge remembers its railroad heritage because it gives vision for the future.

There is also a marker dedicated to "Boomer" the railroad dog who is buried here.

#### **7. Railroad historic marker**

Location: In Railroad Park, near the Great Northern Caboose, on the south side of Minnesota Avenue at the corner of 4th Street

October 25, 1871, brought the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad to Breckenridge.

Platted in 1857 and burned in 1862, Breckenridge was more or less abandoned because of the Civil War and Indian uprising. However, with the coming of the railroad, development of the town took place.

Breckenridge became the distribution point for the entire area. 65 miles by wagon was a shopping tour. In this prairie country, people came for wood. They brought their wheat along for shipping on the railroad.

James J. Hill acquired the railroad and in 1879 reorganized it as the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway Company. On February 1, 1890, the Great Northern Railway Company purchased the stock and holdings. A great railway system was built and as a result agricultural land and towns were brought into touch with the outside world. In turn, the wonderful resources of this territory were made known to others.

With the coming of the railroad, commodities could be exported. Before the railroad, there was no market for grain in the county and most crops were raised to feed the animals. But now merchandise could be brought up from St. Paul on the railroad. Then it would be loaded onto steamboats and flatboats and carried downstream all the way to Canada.

Breckenridge was the "end of the line" for the railroad for nine years. The railroad crossed the river into Dakota Territory on July 27, 1880. Breckenridge was division headquarters of the Great Northern Railway Company for 30 years, from August 1, 1898.

By consolidation and merger in 1970 and 1981 the name was changed to Burlington Northern Railroad Company. Local service today is provided by the Red River Valley & Western.

Railroading diminished greatly in Breckenridge in the 1960's and 1970's. Today the once bustling passenger depot stands empty and unused. There is no passenger service. But many freight trains run through the city on a daily basis.

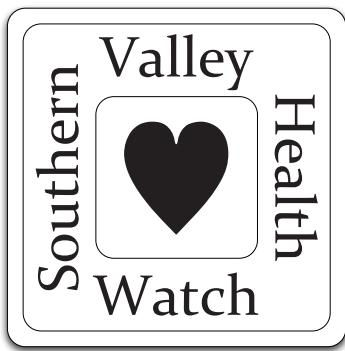
James J. Hill, however, taught Breckenridge no dream is impossible, no goal too high when committed men and women dedicate themselves to the accomplishment. Breckenridge today aspires to a dream.

#### **8. Railroad Park Gazebo**

Location: Minnesota Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets North on the south side of the avenue.

This gazebo is dedicated to the memory of Michael Caspers, long time Breckenridge City Clerk.

Please stop and rest a while. You are probably tired from the first part of your walking tour. Enjoy the beautiful summertime flowers in Railroad Park and contemplate on what you have already seen of the history of Breckenridge.



# Headwaters Day Historic Walk

Sites 9-16

## 9. Wilkin County Courthouse

Location: 300 5th Street South (whole block)

On this site stands the Wilkin County Courthouse, constructed in 1928. It is on the National Register of Historic Places in the United States because of its unique construction and ornamental rotunda.

The courthouse was constructed, decorated and furnished for \$205,753.51. Wilkin County was the first county in the state of Minnesota to pay for such a venture without a bonding issue.

Approaching the courthouse from 5th street south you see the white Bedford stone on the exterior of the first story. Cream-white pressed brick constitutes the outer walls of the second and third stories. We call your attention to the Veterans Memorial on the front lawn. This was constructed in 1991. Sit on the bench, meditate and read the names inscribed.

Let your eyes travel upward to see the inscription: TO NONE WILL WE DELAY, TO NONE WILL WE DENY, RIGHT OR JUSTICE. This unique inscription is taken from the Magna Carta of King John, accepted by him in 1215 AD at Runnymede, England. This was the greatest charter of liberty known prior to the writing of the United States Constitution. People are very proud to have this inscription grace the courthouse, dedicating the structure to the rights of the people.

## 10. Heysler Hotel

Location: Wisconsin Avenue and 6th Street South

In 1871 this was the site of the Hyser Hotel, a hotel and eatery for railroad crews.

Edward, Robert and George Hyser followed the line of the railroad. They boarded the construction crews in tents along the way as the line progressed.

St. Paul & Pacific Railroad reached Breckenridge on October 25, 1871. Upon arriving in Breckenridge, the Hysers set up a tent hotel to house and board the railroad construction crew. Later that year they built the Hyser Hotel. In 1883 the old hotel was torn down and a new one built. It was located across the street from the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway Company Depot (where Red River Valley & Western Freight Depot is currently located) and called the Hyser House. This was a convenient location for the railroad crews.

The Hyser House burned in 1908.

People living in the house on the lots many years ago tell that they found pieces of old dishes buried in the ground on this site.

## 11. U.S. Government weather signal station

Location: South 5th Street where Tesoro is located, just a little to the south

This was the site of the United States Government Weather Signal Station in 1871. A Dr. Hearn was in charge of the station. It later became known as the Haire residence and was ornamented with a cupola. It was moved to Moorhead in 1892.

## 12. The Wilkin

Location: 508 Minnesota Avenue

1862 had seen the destruction of Breckenridge by fire due to the massacre by the Sioux Indians. The father of Frank Miksche Sr. began operating a mercantile store in 1863, as there was a great need for rebuilding. The coming of the railroad in October 1871 put new demands on the business community and in 1892, Frank started a hotel-cafe and saloon, hoping to attract the local and traveling employees of the railroad. In 1896 he bought the Wilkin Hotel building. This was a three story building with a bar annex. In the early 1900's his two sons, Tony & Leo (third generation) joined him in the hotel and restaurant business. In 1934, Frank bought the adjoining building and started a liquor store. Frank died in 1939 with almost 47 years in the hotel/bar business.

Leo and Anthony continued on with the business. Anthony's sons, Richard & Anthony, Jr. (fourth generation) joined him in business in 1953. The operation of the hotel business soon became secondary to the bar business and was demolished to make room for more restaurant and bar area. Anthony moved from Breckenridge in 1971 and Richard continued to operate The Wilkin. Richard's son Robert (fifth generation) joined him in the business until Richard retired. Robert then continued to operate the business until it was sold in February, 2002.

## 13. Wahpeton-Breckenridge Street Railway Company streetcar barn

Location: Minnesota Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets North—was a white ram-shackled building in the alley.

In the early years the streetcar was one of the first means of joining Breckenridge, MN, and Wahpeton, ND.

The Street Car Corporation was organized in 1907 and ran from 1910 until its abandonment in 1925. The rails have been removed in Wahpeton and covered over in Breckenridge. However, pieces of the rail are still visible in the sidewalk going into the street car barn.

The streetcar ran from 6th Street North in Breckenridge, along Minnesota Avenue, to 6th Street North in Wahpeton, along Dakota Avenue. This was the very outer limits of both cities in those days. It traveled about 15-20 mph.

The yellow streetcar would leave Breckenridge at 6 AM and Wahpeton at 6:10 AM each day and run a 10 minute schedule until 11:30 PM on weekdays. Sundays the cars began one hour later. Round trip took 30 minutes. In 1912 the daily average number of passengers was 748.

The fare was 5 cents to begin with and later raised to 7 cents. Some sources say it later went to 10 cents. Two conductors operated it. Over-

head wires provided the electricity to operate the car. The motorman would stop the car on any corner where passengers were in sight.

When a car packed with passengers left Wahpeton for Breckenridge after a dance or movie, it passed a wide track near the present Pavilion restaurant. From the side track an empty car left for Wahpeton for another waiting crowd. This arrangement provided a 15 minute service on busy nights instead of the regular 30 minute service.

Historical lore says the streetcar company was financed largely by liquor interests in Breckenridge. North Dakota was dry and the street car was a convenience to visit the eleven saloons in Breckenridge. A saloon aptly named "The First and Last Chance Saloon" stood where Casey's Bar is currently located.

When the city began to pave the streets the streetcar company couldn't afford to share the costs of the pavement requested of them. In addition, automobiles began to replace the horse and buggy, so the street car began to fade out. They went out of business in 1925.

## 14. Wilkin County Historical Society and Museum

Location: 704 Nebraska Avenue, corner of 7th Street North & Nebraska Avenue

This is a very interesting and well-planned small city museum. Exhibits are changed frequently.

The Wilkin County Historical Society was organized March 29, 1965, and headquartered in the basement of the Breckenridge Saving & Loan building. In May of 1976 it was moved to the upstairs of the Wilkin County Jail building.

On March 11, 1977, the former Masonic Temple became the property of the Wilkin County Historical Society. The museum officially opened on Sunday, May 20, 1979, with appropriate ceremonies.

Throughout the years many antiques have been donated. In March 1980 the furnishings and artifacts from a seven room house in Rothsay, MN, which had been willed to the Historical Society, were received and taken to the museum.

Currently on the main floor the museum has eight rooms furnished with antiques. The rooms include a living room, a bedroom, a 1920s kitchen, a hospital room, a small chapel and an old back which had been located at Kent, MN.

On the lower level you will find a bedroom, pioneer kitchen and laundry room. In addition, you will find pieces of small farm machinery and other machines. Also countless smaller exhibits. The museum possesses many old clothes, hats and other artifacts as well.

## 15. Old District #1 school building

Location: Current site of post office

The one room frame building was built in 1873 at a cost of \$1000, on the corner of 5th Street and Mendenhall Avenue. There were several additions to the original building, the first in 1882 to accommodate the rising number of children in the town of Breckenridge. Additions were made again in 1889 and 1902. There was no money for supplies during the time of the original school, so the children brought their own books, as well as tablets and pencils.

The original part of the current school building that stands on Beede and 8th Street was constructed in 1934, and many additions have been made to that building as well. The current Senior High School was built in 1969 at a cost of \$2,000,000!

## 16. Methodist Church

Location: Current site of Bremer Bank

The first Methodist church was built on the corner of 5th Street and Mendenhall Avenue in 1929. The site was purchased by the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank in 1975, which later became the current Bremer Bank. It was a very sad day when the original church met with the demolition crew to make room for the bank. The parsonage was moved to its current location on north Main Street, and the beautiful, new, 8800 square foot church was erected at that site.

### End of tour

This concludes the historic walk. Please return to the beginning of the route. We hope you had an enjoyable and educational time.

Visit us online at [svhw.org](http://svhw.org) to see our upcoming events and guides for healthy living in the Red River Valley.