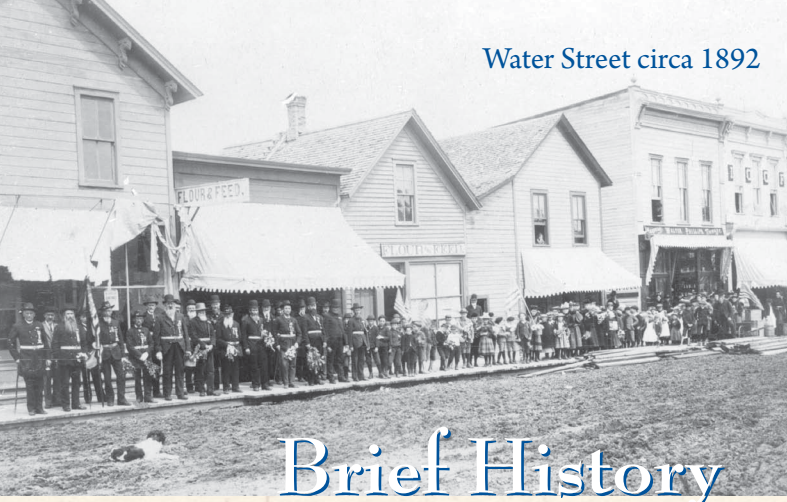


Water Street circa 1892



Brief History

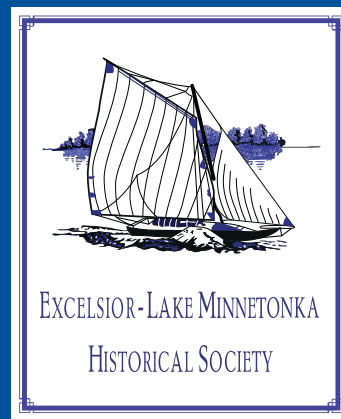
For hundreds of years the Dakota lived in this area, and often fished, hunted, riced, and camped here. A colony of settlers arrived in 1853 to build Excelsior. Organized as the Excelsior Pioneer Association, they were led by New York tailor George Bertram. Excelsior soon became a resort for people from Minneapolis and St. Paul and, eventually, a national tourist destination. A railroad was laid to Excelsior in 1881. Large hotels, steamboats, and summer cottages along the shores of Lake Minnetonka followed.

A fire in 1894 destroyed most of the businesses on west Water Street and changed the face of Excelsior. Another fire in 1902 destroyed some east side buildings. Almost all of the brick buildings that you see today on Water Street between Second and Third Streets were built by Charles F. Miller from 1895 to the late 1930s. Water Street is named for a creek that once ran from Galpin Lake to Lake Minnetonka. The creek now travels through underground pipes below the buildings on the west side of the street.

I worked with the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society to research and publish this tour as an Eagle Scout project in 2015. The numbered plaques you see on a few of the buildings were erected by the city's Historic Preservation Commission. The Society has published a longer and more detailed walking tour titled *Walking the Trails of History*. Learn more about the history of Excelsior at: www.elmhs.org.

Brady Bunkelman

Water Street 1930s



Walking Tour

Excelsior



4



12



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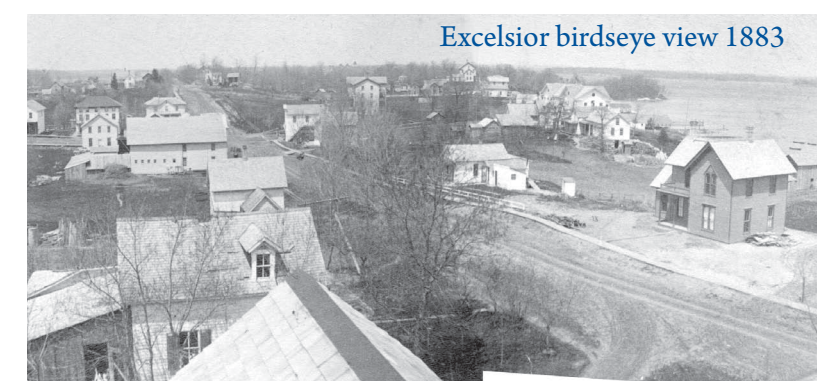
16



Walking Tour Points of Interest

- 1 **Excelsior Depot**
305 Water Street
- 2 **Clark/Aldritt House**
371 Water Street
- 3 **Hennessy Lumber**
340 Water Street
- 4 **Fred Hawkins Hotel & Café**
235-237 Water Street
- 5 **I.O.O.F. Lodge**
250-252 Water Street
- 6 **The Beehive**
321-323 Third Street
- 7 **Trinity Episcopal Church Chapel**
300 Second Street
- 8 **Frank L. Perkins House**
332 Second Street
- 9 **Bacon Drug**
205 Water Street
- 10 **The Phillips Building**
420 Second Street
- 11 **Bardwell House**
429 Second Street
- 12 **Bennett's Livery**
432-438 Second Street
- 13 **Excelsior Public School**
261 School Avenue
- 14 **Wyer/Pearce House**
201 Mill Street
- 15 **Johnson Memorial**
Corner of Lake Street & Excelsior Boulevard
- 16 **Excelsior Amusement Park Site**
603 Lake Street to 687 Excelsior Blvd
- 17 **Tonka Theater**
26 Water Street
- 18 **Port of Excelsior**
399 Lake Street
- 19 **Excelsior Commons**
Northwest Excelsior
- 20 **Porter/Dillman House**
175 First Street
- 21 **Palmer's Grove**
Between 140 & 148 West Lake Street

Excelsior birdseye view 1883



1 Excelsior Depot

The Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway first laid tracks here in 1881, bringing tourists to the Excelsior area. A depot (shown) was built in 1883, followed by a new depot in 1952; now home to the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society museum. Passenger service to Excelsior ended about 1960 and the line was abandoned in 1981. Twin City Rapid Transit Company, the region's streetcar company, provided service from the Twin Cities to Excelsior beginning in 1905. Their streetcars ran down Water Street until the line was abandoned in 1932. Today the Minnesota Streetcar Museum operates trolleys on the old rail right of way next to the former depot.



2 Clark/Aldritt House

1858—This building has always been inhabited by boarders. The small, east wing was built by James H. Clark in 1858 for use as a boarding house. He enlarged it in 1867, and by 1883 it could room 30 people. The house went through two owners between 1921 and the 1990s, as well as extensive remodeling by John Edwin Aldritt. It was remodeled in the 1990s, based on an old painting from the Clark family. It is now a bed and breakfast.



3 Hennessy Lumber

1906—J.E. Hennessy Lumber Co. built this structure in 1906, and sold it to Lampert Lumberyards in 1938. In 1983, it was extensively remodeled into the Excelsior Mill shops.

4 Fred Hawkins Hotel & Cafe

1902—Excelsior first permitted the sale of alcohol in 1897, but Hawkins ran into trouble for selling alcohol to minors and selling without a license. The village turned dry again in 1905, so Hawkins converted the saloon into a cafe. In 1913, Hawkins was convicted of selling liquor without a license and run out of town. The words "Fred Hawkins Hotel & Cafe" can still be seen on the south side of the building.

5 IOOF Lodge

1897—The Excelsior Independent Order of Odd Fellows received its charter in 1885. Originally, a dry goods store occupied the first floor and the Odd Fellows used the second floor. The lodge hosted many community functions, including dances and religious services. The building still serves its original purpose.



6 The Beehive

1857—The oldest part of this structure was built as a frame school at site 13. During the U.S. - Dakota War in 1862, it was stockaded against a feared attack from Dakota Indians. It was moved here in 1883 and expanded in 1891 to a 23 room dormitory, called Sheldon Hall, for the Northwestern Christian College located nearby. When the college burned in 1896, this building became a boarding house. The one story addition was later added as an apartment. The Beehive got its name from the frequent movement of people into and out of the building.

7 Trinity Episcopal Church Chapel

1862—The oldest Episcopal Church building still in use in Minnesota, this structure was built using concrete poured into wood forms, an early use of this building technique in the area. Lake stones and shells are still visible in the concrete.



Exposed wood trusses, probably made from local timber, support the roof. Originally near Third and Water Street, the building was moved here in 1907 to make way for streetcar tracks.

8 Frank L. Perkins House

1885—Built to resemble a Swiss cottage, Frank Perkins had this house built in 1885. Perkins was proprietor of the Blue Line Pavilion on the lakeshore. Dr. Edward Perkins, Frank's brother, operated out of a barn in the rear, where he concocted Excelsine, an anti-bacterial ointment made from clay that helped heal victims of the 1894 Hinckley fire.



9 Bacon Drug

1941—After a fire in 1941, Red Owl Groceries rebuilt using its distinctive glazed brick. In 1955, Bacon Drug moved in, serving as a community hub until it closed in 1993. According to local legend, it was here at the soda fountain that Mick Jagger was told by Excelsiorite James Hutmaker, aka Mr. Jimmy, that "you can't always get what you want." The Rolling Stones were in Excelsior to play Danceland (site 16) in 1964.

10 The Phillips Building

1915—This was Excelsior's first body shop and is the first brick and concrete garage in the area. Built with pre-stressed concrete, the shop featured hydraulic lifts. In 1935, an electric door opener was added which responded to a car's horn. From 1921 to 1971, the building served as a Chevrolet dealership. It was again an auto body shop from 1971 to 2014.

11 Bardwell House

1879—This structure handled overflow from Frank Bardwell's White House Hotel. Elmer, Frank's son, operated his undertaker's office in this building in 1915. Both Elmer and Frank Bardwell were mayors of Excelsior. The White House was on the corner of Water and Lake Streets and was one of Excelsior's largest hotels.



12 Bennett's Livery

1899—This building was initially used as a livery where horses, buggies, wagons and hearses could be rented. The stables were below the main floor. The place accommodated automobiles in 1910, and the building was converted into a car dealership in 1922 that operated here until 1946. One of the first coin laundries in the area occupied the space afterwards.



13 Excelsior Public School

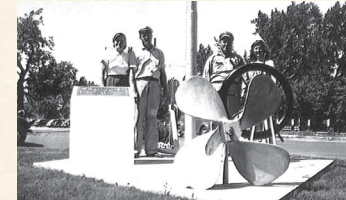
1899—This structure was built at the same time that Excelsior became an independent school district. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it was used as a school through 1960 and now houses offices. Also on this site were a pair of two-story, four-room schools, and the Beehive (site 6).

14 Wyer/Pearce House

1885-87—This house was considered one of the most glorious Victorian houses on Lake Minnetonka. James Wyer, a banker and merchant, moved here from his home in Minneapolis in 1895. This building had thirteen rooms, six fireplaces, a windmill, and gas lighting, and the lot originally ran all the way to the lake. In 1930, the owner of the Excelsior Amusement Park, Fred Pearce, bought the house to board his park managers. The house is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The lamp posts seen here were originally erected in the village by the streetcar company in 1905.

15 Johnson Memorial

Dedicated 1938—"Cap" John R. Johnson arrived from Norway in 1881. Nicknamed Minnetonka's "Sea Dog," he helped build the steamboat *City of St. Louis*, which he later captained. When the popularity of Lake Minnetonka declined, Johnson bought a fleet of steamers and rebuilt them into dredges. After working for 50 years on the lake, Johnson died in 1931.



16 Excelsior Amusement Park Site

1924—Extending along the southern shore of Excelsior Bay, the Excelsior Amusement Park was built in 1924 by "Mr. Roller Coaster" Fred Pearce. The park included a large, wooden roller coaster, a Ferris wheel, and a grand carousel with hand-carved horses. The park's carousel still operates at Valleyfair in Shakopee, but not the wooden roller coaster, as some believe. The park's music hall, Danceland, stood east of Minnetonka Boulevard and hosted musical acts including Lawrence Welk, The Beach Boys, and The Rolling Stones. The park closed in 1973.



17 Tonka Theater

1945—Movies were first shown in Excelsior in 1914. In 1940, the Tonka Theater opened on this site. After a fire gutted the interior in 1945, it was rebuilt three months later, despite a national policy that directed building materials toward the war effort. Many fundraisers for the war were held here. It became the Dock Cinema in 1989 and its art deco motif can still be seen.

18 Port of Excelsior

Reverend Charles Galpin docked Lake Minnetonka's first steamboat, the *Governor Ramsey*, here in 1860. The lake's largest steamboats, the *City of St. Louis* and the *Belle of Minnetonka* operated from this site in the late nineteenth century. The small booth here was originally the Blue Line Pavilion ticket booth, and was later used by the Excelsior Amusement Park.



19 Excelsior Commons

1854—This 17-acre area was set aside for public use in 1854 and essentially became a city park by 1900. The Commons has seen a bath house, a boat builder's shop, water slides, pageants, and rowing regattas. It was also used for camping. Today, it is a place people go to enjoy fresh air and community events.



20 Porter/Dillman House

1870—Captain Hamilton Porter built this house for his growing family. Porter was master of the steamboats *Hattie May* and *Rosander* and once saved two men from drowning off of Gale's Island. Willard Dillman, editor of the *Minnetonka Record*, also lived here.



Minnesota Historical Society

21 Palmer's Grove

Exemplifying the summer rental cottages once common in Excelsior, this site dates back to 1879. Lewis Sturgis moved here and created the resort known as "Elm Grove" sometime later. Rental cottages operated in this neighborhood until at least 2000.