



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hennepin Paper Mill, Little Falls Case Study

Location: Mill Park, Little Falls,
Morrison County

Agency: Environmental Protection
Agency

MOA Signed: March 2004



Signatories: Environmental Protection Agency
Minnesota State Historic Preservation
Office
City of Little Falls
Little Falls Heritage Preservation
Commission
Morrison County Historical Society
Mille Lacs Tribal Historic Preservation
Office



“You wish that some of the original buildings could have been saved, but we’re happy to save some of the elements and let people know that something important was there.”

–Jan Warner, executive director, Morrison County Historical Society

Background:

Hennepin Paper Company was Little Falls’ major employer for over a hundred years, making many types of paper including newsprint, poster and specialty papers, construction paper and, at one time, every Crayola crayon wrapper in the country. Fred Rogers visited the plant in the late 1980s for his popular children’s television show, Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood. When the paper mill closed its doors in 1999, the City of Little Falls set about to find another commercial enterprise to take its place. Due in part to the age of the buildings and the long, narrow shape of the property none was found, and city leaders began to imagine developing the parcel as a recreational park. Sitting on the banks of the Mississippi River, just upstream from the Charles Lindbergh House, it was an appealing choice.

After its closing the abandoned buildings fell into disrepair and in 2002, the main warehouse sustained major fire damage. Plans for its demolition quickly followed. The presence of asbestos

and other pollutants caused city leaders to apply for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) money through the 2001 federal brownfields act. This application triggered review under Section 106 of the National Preservation Act.

The Review Process:

The EPA and Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (MnSHPO) worked with the city of Little Falls and engaged a consultant to assess the historic significance of the property. Hess, Roise and Company of Minneapolis conducted the assessment in 2003, and determined the Hennepin Paper Company complex met criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. When assessment of the buildings determined them beyond saving, the conversation turned to the possibility of saving certain elements of the Mill to include in the future park.

An archeologist surveyed the property for below-ground artifacts, and the City of Little Falls and two preservation groups, Little Falls Heritage Preservation Commission and Morrison County Historical Society, together entered into discussions to determine what artifacts might be saved and how they might be incorporated into the park’s design. Signatories of the March, 2004, Memorandum of Agreement outlining the park planning effort, included: the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (MnSHPO), the City of Little Falls, Little Falls Heritage Preservation Commission, Morrison County Historical Society, and Mille Lacs Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO). The EPA gave a \$600,000 grant to the City of Little Falls to remediate the site; the Minnesota Legislature contributes \$1 million, and Minnesota Power and Morrison County each contributed funds to develop and build the park.

The Result:

When Mill Park was dedicated in June 2005 it reflected the results of civic initiative and federal and state involvement. What was to have been merely a recreational park – a place to picnic, ski and walk along the river – now integrates and interprets the cultural resource values present there. Folded into the park layout are artifacts from the Hennepin Paper Mill, including the Hennepin Paper Company sign, brick arches, mill stones, the salvageable bottom section of the smokestack, and the canal that diverted water from above the dam and powered the mill. Once the construction is complete there will be informational kiosks and a memorial to workers lost in industrial accidents at the site, as well as an informational plaque at the north end of the property acknowledging an important Indian gathering spot near the river.



Photos: MN Historic Properties Record MO-LFC-026 and Mill Park during construction