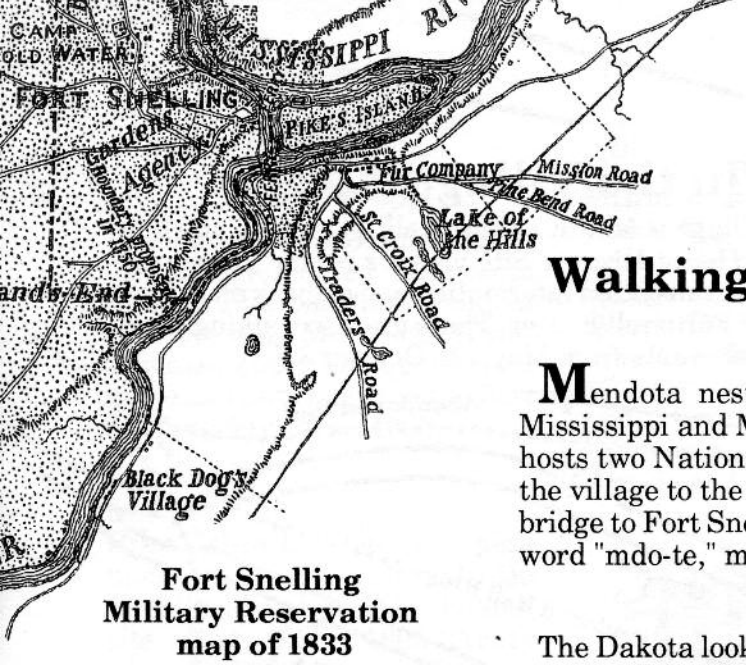



**Fort Snelling Military Reservation map of 1833**

All Dakota County trails lead to the fort through Mendota.

**Mendota's United States family genealogy**

**May 30, 1803**
Mendota acquired in Louisiana Purchase

**March 26, 1804**
In Indiana Territory

**March 29, 1804**
In District of Louisiana

**March 3, 1805**
Renamed Louisiana Territory

**September 23, 1805**
Lt. Pike buys Fort Snelling Military Reserve - Mendota area from the Dakota

**June 4, 1813**
Renamed Missouri Territory

**August 10, 1821**
Orphan Missouri Territory

**June 28, 1834**
In Michigan Territory

**April 20, 1836**
In Wisconsin Territory

**June 10, 1838**
In Iowa Territory

**December 28, 1846**
Orphan Iowa Territory

**March 3, 1849**
In Minnesota Territory

**May 11, 1858**
In State of Minnesota

# Mendota

## Walking in the Foot Steps of History

Mendota nestles among hills and bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. The area is so historically significant it hosts two National Register Historic Districts: the Mendota District from the village to the Mendota Bridge, and the Fort Snelling District from the bridge to Fort Snelling. The name Mendota comes from the Dakota Indian word "mdo-te," meeting of the waters.

### A history making heritage

The Dakota looked upon Mendota's setting as the center of the earth and the tall hill overlooking the rivers, Ohe-ya-wa-he, a sacred burial place.

Mendota's American history began in 1805 when President Jefferson sent Lt. Zebulon Pike to the upper Mississippi to acquire a site for a fort. Pike purchased a military reserve which included the Mendota area.

Construction of Fort Snelling began in 1819 with materials assembled on the Mendota side of the Minnesota River. By 1819, Jean Baptiste Faribault, the US government fur trade factor, was farming on Pike Island. By the1820s a government ferry crossed the Minnesota River to the Fort. After suffering two floods, in 1826, Faribault moved to Mendota.

In 1825 the American Fur Company opened a Mendota post under Alexis Bailly. In 1834 Henry Sibley, a partner, arrived to manage the post. He built a stone warehouse and stone home. Sibley became the civilian host for visiting explorers, statesmen, writers, artists, and international guests.

In 1842 Father Galtier, assigned to the Mendota French-Canadian flock, built a log church calling it St. Peter's. Eleven years later Father Ravoux built today's Church of St. Peter atop the bluff.

By an act of Congress in 1844, called the town site act, Mendota was incorporated. The city was then located in Iowa Territory.

Henry Sibley was elected a delegate to Congress in 1848 for the orphaned Wisconsin Territory between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. Mendota was still Dakota land. He returned home in 1849 with a new Territory of Minnesota extending from the St. Croix to Missouri River.

Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, the Minnesota bill sponsor, included Mendota as the capital. Sibley proposed and won the capital for St. Paul which was open to settlement.

In 1849 Dakota County was created including Mendota. Mendota became Dakota County's second county seat from 1854 to 1857.

When Dakota County fully organized in 1858 the village of Mendota became part of the newly formed Mendota Township.

In 1858 Henry Sibley was elected to be Minnesota's first state governor. The Sibley house became the governor's residence.

In 1887 Mendota again incorporated as a Village.

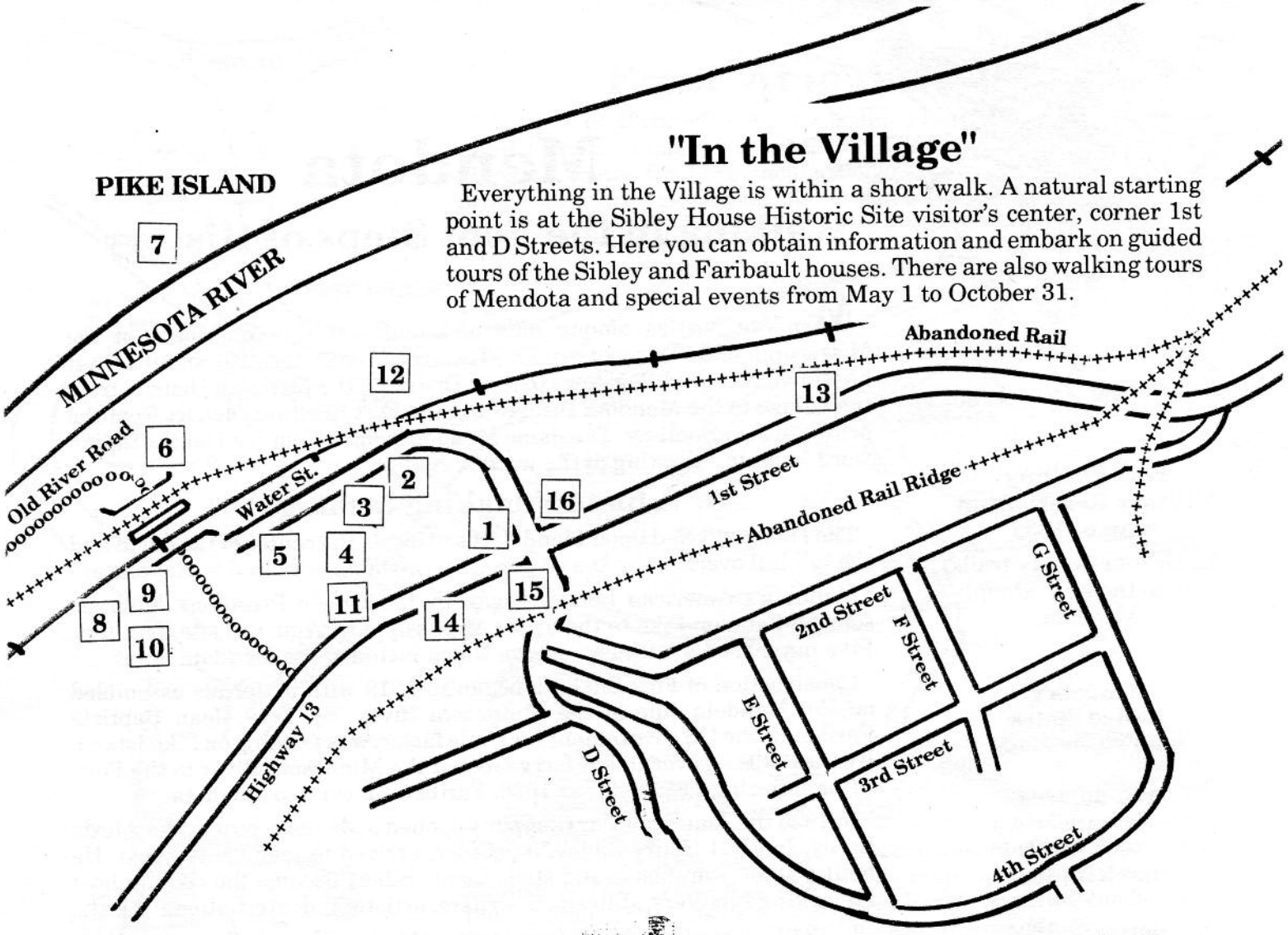
In 1974 Village of Mendota became the City of Mendota under a Minnesota statute making all incorporated communities cities.

**Tour Mendota History**

**Historic places and sites on following pages**

# "In the Village"

Everything in the Village is within a short walk. A natural starting point is at the Sibley House Historic Site visitor's center, corner 1st and D Streets. Here you can obtain information and embark on guided tours of the Sibley and Faribault houses. There are also walking tours of Mendota and special events from May 1 to October 31.



**1**

**Hypolite DuPuis House** built in 1854. DuPuis clerked for Henry Sibley. Between 1928 and 1970 the house was operated as the Sibley Tea House by the Daughters of the American Revolution. The DAR saved and preserved the Sibley properties.

**2**

**Sibley Cold Store**. The 1843 stone building served as a storage vault for furs and goods, cooled by a 15' deep ice vault.

**3**

**Sibley House.** Begun in 1838 with local Platteville limestone. Originally served as fur company headquarters. The back two stories were added about 1845 and the office about 1858. Stepping through the front door you will be in the foot steps of famous explorers, military, government leaders, artists, writers, and Indians of the day.

Sibley was a dominant figure in Minnesota history; congressman from Wisconsin and Minnesota territories, Minnesota's first state governor, and the commanding officer of US forces in the 1862 US - Dakota War.

**4**

**Sibley Wash House, 1854.** Used as wash house and summer kitchen. Now site caretaker's house.

**5**

**Jean Baptiste Faribault House** Faribault was an early British trader in the region and met Pike in 1805. Became American fur trader after War of 1812. He was selected by Leavenworth to run US post in Mendota. Moved to Mendota in 1826 and built his stone home in 1840.

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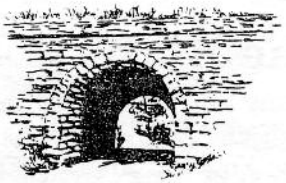


6

**Limestone Rail Bridge, 1864.** The bridge carried Minnesota Central Railroad into Mendota after crossing Minnesota River. The road under the arch carried horse and auto traffic to the Fort Snelling ferry until 1926.

7

**Pike Island.** When you pass under the Limestone Rail Bridge directly ahead is Pike Island, site of Lt. Pike's 1805 Treaty with the Mdewakanton Dakota. Later Col. Henry Leavenworth made a treaty for a larger military reserve. The Dakota insisted on a provision giving Pike Island to Pelagie, wife of Jean Baptiste Faribault. That treaty was never ratified by Congress. Today Pike Island is a park preserve that can be visited using a walking bridge below Fort Snelling.

8

**Site of St. Peter's log church.** Father Lucien Galtier started holding Catholic services in a log church in 1842. Earlier he held some services in Faribault's former log home but it collapsed. When Father Ravoux built the stone St. Peter's church atop the bluff the log church was used as a school. The school building was demolished in 1864.

9

**Minnesota Valley RR Depot Site.** Located along side today's track at the limestone bridge. Minnesota Valley was second rail line in Dakota County. Depot demolished in 1970s.

10

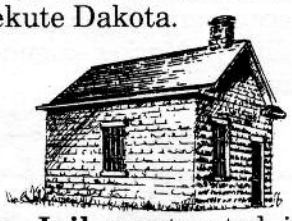
**Minnesota Quartz Co.** Now Jack's Mfg. Co., the 1930s red brick building near the stone rail bridge was the Minnesota Quartz Co. A wrought iron MQ is still on the door. Art Tabor, a geologist, processed crystalline sand for sand blasting and surfacing zinc plates. Tabor stored sand in Faribault House.

11

**E. Bernier Building site** on 1st St. Mendota's commercial center prior to 1934. Housed a tavern, dry goods store, grocery, and post office. Berniers were also onion brokers and at one time used Sibley and Faribault houses for onion storage.

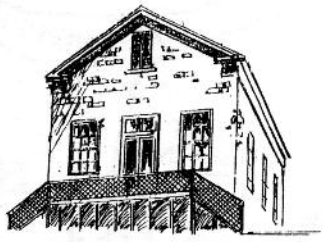
12

**Site of fur warehouse and Third District Court.** In 1849 Mendota became seat of third judicial district. Court was held in 1836 Sibley stone warehouse. Judge David Cooper presided over first Minnesota court west of Mississippi River. Mendota Treaty of 1851 negotiations started here with Mdewakanton & Wahpekute Dakota.



13

**Mendota Jail** constructed in July 1915. It is spartan with two cells, potbellied stove, chamber pot, and no water. It was used mostly for Hobos and drunks sleeping it off. John Drew Jr. was the constable. Prior to 1915 a jail cell was located in Town Hall basement at 1st and D St.

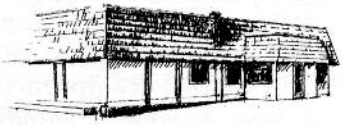


14

**Site of the Episcopal Church.** The church, built in 1856, was located across the street from its memorial marker. It was financed entirely by Henry Sibley. There's no record of church activity. It served as Mendota's school from 1867 to 1925.

15

**Mendota City Hall site.** The 1910 structure was at the corner of 1st St and D St. A gas light from the front of the building was later used at O'Conners on the bluff in Lilydale. When the village school burned down in 1925 the city council gave up this building for school use. A newspaper commented that use as a school deprived young people of a place to dance.

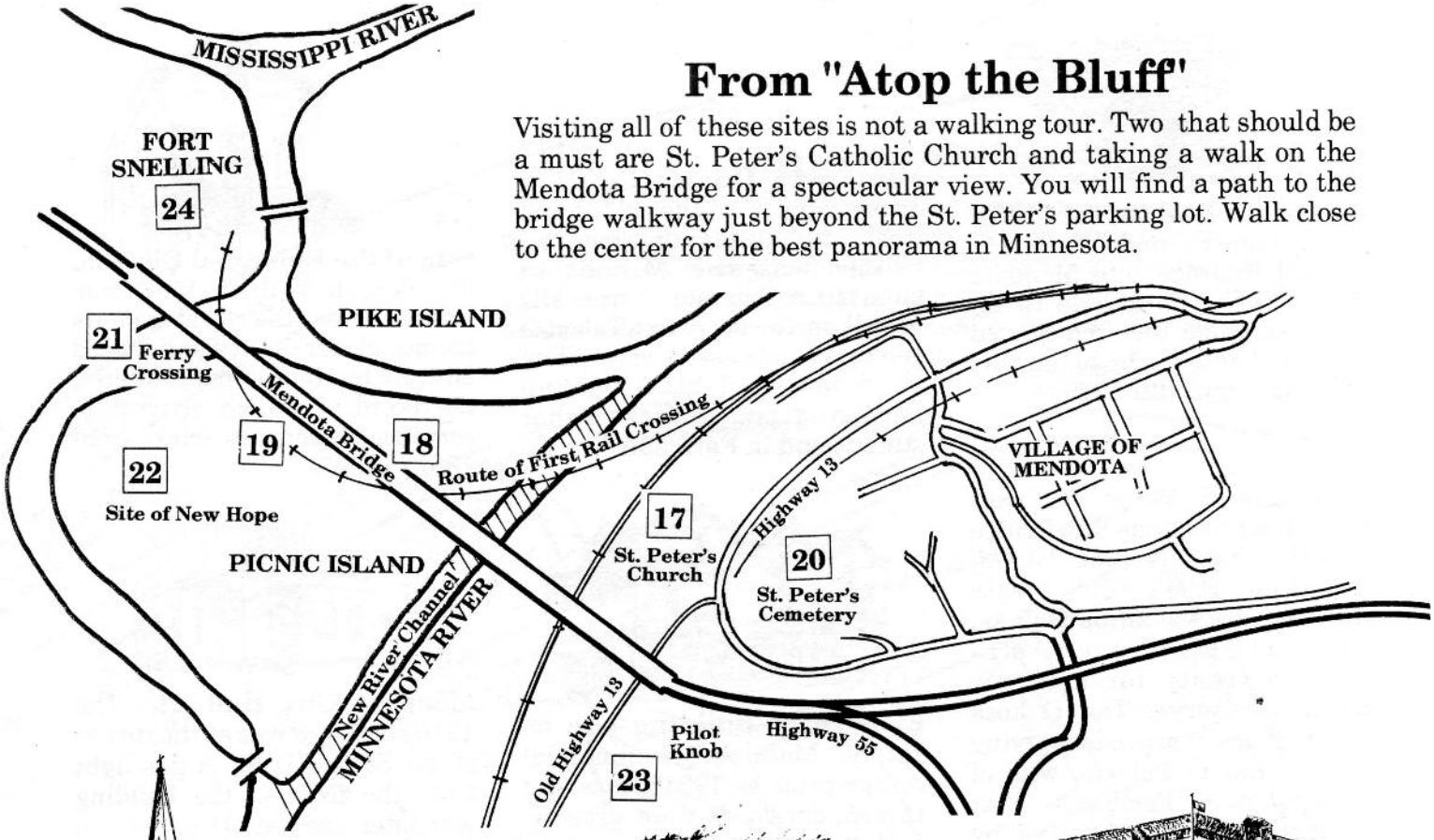


16

**The Site of Jazz.** Across D St. from the DuPuis house was the Bow and Arrow, Rampart Club, and Emporium of Jazz. All were generations of Jazz starting with Red Dougherty's quintette at Mitch's 1930s roadhouse atop the bluff. The Bow and Arrow offered jazz in the early 1940s. Doc Evans took over in the 1950s renaming it the Rampart Club. After a break of fifteen years as a potato shed it opened again as the Emporium of Jazz. Enthusiasts from all walks of life performed together as the Hall Brothers. The buildimg also housed the Hot Fish Shop and Mariners restaurant.

# From "Atop the Bluff"

Visiting all of these sites is not a walking tour. Two that should be a must are St. Peter's Catholic Church and taking a walk on the Mendota Bridge for a spectacular view. You will find a path to the bridge walkway just beyond the St. Peter's parking lot. Walk close to the center for the best panorama in Minnesota.

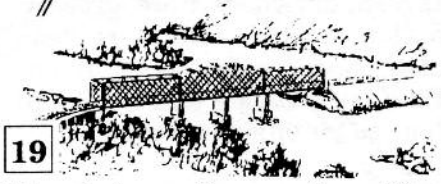


17

**Church of St. Peter,** completed in 1853, the oldest Minnesota church in continuous use. Father Ravoux helped lay-up the native limestone. Faribault, Sibley, and the Fur Comany were major donors. Fort Snelling soldiers often attended services.

18

**The Mendota Bridge**, world's longest poured concrete bridge when constructed in 1926. Thirteen equally spaced arches spanned 4,119 feet. The view from the bridge is outstanding. Dedicated as a memorial to World War I artillery gunners .

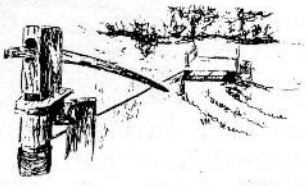


19

**Mendota rail crossing.** The 1865 crossing from Mendota to Fort Snelling traversed a half mile wooden trestle, 520 foot iron trestle and swing bridge, and a quarter mile of dike. It served the Minnesota Central, first line in Dakota County.

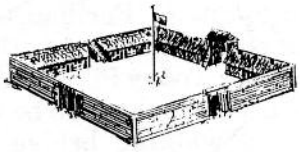
20

**St. Peter's Cemetery.** Resting place of early Mendota settlers and military. Marker commemorates Mendota's name.



21

**Site of Mendota Ferry.** Henry Sibley built the ferry in 1836 crossing to Fort Snelling. It continued in use for 90 years



22

**Cantonment New Hope site.** Built in 1819 prior to Fort Snelling by Col. Henry Leavenworth. Half of his 122 men died of disease during the winter of 1819-20.

23

**Pilot Knob**. Site of 1851 Treaty of Mendota with eastern Dakota Indians. Treaty opened land west of Mississippi River to settlement. Treaty marker near crest of Acacia Cemetery. Pilot Knob was river navigation point.

24

**Fort Snelling,** originally Fort St.Anthony was renamed in 1825 honoring fort's builder and commandant Col. Josiah Snelling..

Prepared by the Mendota/West St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society