

ISSUE FIVE : WINTER 2017

OPEN RIVERS : RETHINKING THE MISSISSIPPI



NETWORKS &
COLLABORATION

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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image is of a Healing Place Collaborative network diagram. Members are listed around the outside of the circle and each line between them indicates a collaboration or work done between those two members. Image courtesy of Mona Smith.

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IN REVIEW

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET'S *WATER/WAYS*

By Joanne Richardson

In November 2016, I visited *Water/Ways*, hosted from October 1 to November 13 at the Goodhue County Historical Society in Red Wing, Minnesota. This traveling exhibition and community engagement initiative— which then moved on to Sandstone, Minnesota—is part of the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street and is

available at a series of venues nationwide through April 2017. *Water/Ways* is touring Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wyoming; visit the Tour Schedule for more details.

Partners involved in Minnesota's exhibitions include the Minnesota Humanities Center,



Water/Ways exhibition in the atrium of the Goodhue County Historical Society.

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Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Section of the American Water Works Association, and six community hosts in greater Minnesota: Spicer, St. Peter, Red Wing, Sandstone, Lanesboro, and Detroit Lakes.

The *Water/Works* exhibition comes straight from the Smithsonian and forms the base of the experience, supplemented with exhibits specific to the state and hosting institution's region. Each host, therefore, offers a unique and specialized experience to its visitors. As an added benefit for visitors to Red Wing, this exhibit also provided an opportunity to visit the Historical Society and its thoughtful permanent exhibits.

From the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street [web site](#):

The Smithsonian's *Water/Ways* exhibition dives into water—essential component of life on our planet, environmentally, culturally, and historically.

In societies across the globe, water serves as a source of peace and contemplation. Many faiths revere water as a sacred symbol. Authors and artists are inspired by the

duality of water – a substance that is seemingly soft and graceful that is yet a powerful and nearly unstoppable force.

Water also plays a practical role in American society. The availability of water affected settlement and migration patterns. Access to water and control of water resources have long been a central part of political and economic planning. Human creativity and resourcefulness provide new ways of protecting water resources and renewing respect for the natural environment.

The exhibit I visited was being hosted at the Goodhue County Historical Society in Red Wing, an attractive river town on the banks of the Mississippi River, north of Lake Pepin in Minnesota. Nestled snugly among bluffs, hills, farms, and forests, the town and surrounding area are appealingly picturesque.

The main part of the exhibit, from the Smithsonian, was formed of dramatically curving panels in the atrium of the historical society. Methodically, not wanting to miss anything, I started at one end and tried to fully experience each panel before I moved on to the next. The richness, variety, and layers of information



View of Red Wing and the Mississippi River from the Goodhue County Historical Society.



The curved panels of the exhibition create spaces for exploration.



Not merely blurbs of text, the rich imagery and interactive displays keep the information fresh and varied.

proved to make this challenging. The exhibit lends itself, appropriately, to exploration and discovery, rather than methodical review.

The content of the displays included themes that explored the behavior and material physicality of water and interventions upon it, functional aspects of water from agriculture to drinking water, meaning and placemaking, and culture and heritage. The displays included interesting facts, discussions, and sources, as well as a few well-chosen interactive elements, to the delight of the pokers, prodders, and children visiting.

They were illustrated throughout with excellent photographs and diagrams.

The statewide partners provided a mapping exhibit called *We are Water*, which allows the visitor to read personal stories about the water landscape adjacent to Red Wing, and to contribute his or her own stories directly on the map. I contributed one, but it was unclear from the exhibit whether this would be preserved in perpetuity, or if the stories would be ephemerally wiped away with each successive generation of visitor.



The exhibit's interactive displays read well at a distance, as well as up close.



Tactile displays illustrating the Elwha River watershed are appealing to adults and children alike.



The We are Water display encourages examination of the stories of nearby water landscapes, as well as inspires the visitor to contribute his or her own story.

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The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency provided an excellent interactive exhibit titled *How's the Water?* which took a more focused look at water quality and quantity, and issues of stewardship. With hands-on components and clear messaging, this exhibit is particularly well suited to hands-on visitors, especially children.

The exhibit also included two interactive kiosks that allow the visitor to choose from a large array of multimedia stories about rivers and water. Initially thinking they were gimmicks, I found myself immersed and lost track of time. At the time, they felt as though they were the real-world manifestations of the lessons and questions

presented and posed in the rest of the exhibition. Unable to review all of the content without dramatically adjusting my travel arrangements, I was curious to discover if the content of the kiosks (and the panels) would be made available online at some point.

After finishing the crisp, modern exhibition in the main atrium, I went deeper into the museum to explore a new Historical Society exhibit that made its debut during *Water/Ways*, and will remain at the museum. This exhibit has four main themes; Cloudy Waters, Sacred Water, Consuming Water, Protecting Water.



How's the Water? encourages play and exploration, and strongly connects the exhibits to water issues specific to Minnesota.

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All the exhibits were very interesting, but in particular, I was drawn to *Cloudy Waters*, an installation by Mona Smith, a Sisseton–Wahpeton Dakota Oyate artist born and raised in Red Wing, Boulders and a nestlike wreath of twigs surround a small blue pool, lightly illuminated in a calm and shadowy room. Projected into the pool from above are images that fade in and out: clouds, fish, waterfalls, landscapes. All this was overlaid by sounds of water, loons, and Dakota voices talking about water, place, meaning, and indigeneity. Reminding us to start with the indigenous, *Cloudy Waters* illustrated clearly that people

have lived here for thousands of years, and are still living here today. We would do well to listen to their knowledge and experiences.

Water/Ways is thoughtful, detailed, complicated, and accessible, and the opportunity it has provided for partner institutions to develop additional exhibitions is extraordinary. The addition of the Goodhue County Historical Society's new permanent exhibit is an enduring reminder that water issues are not fleeting, but are ongoing, and is well worth a visit long after *Water/Ways* has moved on.



Cloudy Waters is also on permanent display at Mill City Museum and The Science Museum of Minnesota.

Other *Water/Ways* venues include:

- [Audubon Center of the North Woods](#) (Sandstone, Minnesota), Nov. 19, 2016 – Jan. 1, 2017
- [Lanesboro Arts](#) (Lanesboro, Minnesota), Jan. 7 – Feb. 19, 2017
- [Becker County Historical Society](#) (Detroit Lakes, Minnesota), Feb. 25 – Apr. 9, 2017

For more information

- [Water/Ways](#)
- [Museum on Main Street](#)
- [Smithsonian](#)
- [Goodhue County Historical Society](#)

All images in this article courtesy of River Life, University of Minnesota.

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