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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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BRIDAL VEIL FALLS

By Hilary Holmes

Many Minneapolis residents don't know about Bridal Veil Falls, yet there was a time when it was one of the area's most memorable and sought after tourist attractions. An excerpt from Dr. Otto Schussler's 1928 book, *Riverside Reveries*, describes with eloquence the historical importance of the falls.

"In those simple but (I believe) better days, before the advent of trolley cars and automobiles, this romantic 'Falls' was well out in the country, and the iron bridge... was by no means an overcrowded thoroughfare...No other natural beauty spot, with the exception, of course, of the

world-famous Minnehaha, was more frequently mentioned by the people of the city. Photographs of [Bridal Veil Falls] were commonly seen in the shop windows and picnic parties often made it their place of meeting."

With words that seem ahead of their time, Schussler also expresses the effect humans have had on the natural environment surrounding Bridal Veil Falls and on the Mississippi River:

Those were happy, care-free times for the little waterfall, but dark days were in store for it. The vigorous, enterprising



*Bridal Veil Falls on the East Bank of the Mississippi River, 1860.
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*



*Bridal Veil Falls on the East Bank of the Mississippi River, 1860.
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.*

city which had grown up about the great Falls of St. Anthony two miles farther up the stream, began a rapid march down both sides of the river and in a few short years the territory drained by the little creek underwent incredible change. Broad meadows and quiet woodlands that had lain undisturbed for ages were torn and perplexed by numberless freshly-graded streets; ditches and tunnels ran here and there; hundreds of cellars and basements were dug; wells were sunk, water mains and sewers were laid and soon the great watershed to which the little stream had always looked confidently for an unfailing supply of pure sparkling water was so altered that the rains which fell upon it

found themselves directed into a thousand unfamiliar channels. The once sizable creek became a modest brook, then dwindled to the dimensions of a tiny rill and finally disappeared from sight altogether save at the very rim of the ledge at the head of the glen where a pitiful trickle (barely enough for comforting tears but none at all for song) may now and then be seen by those whose hearts are touched by the little stream's sad fate.

Urbanization of Southeast Minneapolis since the 1860s buried the creek that fed the falls. The history of Bridal Veil Falls is one of both human admiration and change.

The Watershed

What is now known as the Bridal Veil Watershed was once a 300-acre wetland that drained into Bridal Veil Creek, which wound its way to the East Bank of the Mississippi River, spilling over the edge at the site known as Bridal Veil Falls. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the wetland was drained and the creek was put into a culvert; yet the falls survived, albeit in a lessened state. Lots were platted, a street grid was laid down, and railroads began to crisscross at the northern edge of the Bridal Veil Watershed, establishing an industrial area of Southeast Minneapolis that remains today. Along with the industrial landscape, the residential neighborhoods of St. Anthony Park in St. Paul and Southeast Como and Prospect Park in Minneapolis were also developed.

Over the years, the area continued to be altered by industrial development, the construction of Highway 280, the filling of ponds, flooding, and the reconstruction of sewer lines and drainage systems. In the 1960s, as I-94 was being constructed, Bridal Veil Creek was almost entirely

eliminated. Some of the spirit of the old Bridal Veil Creek endured, however, thanks to residents of the area who talked roadway engineers into saving the creek.

Unfortunately, decades of industrial use have polluted the watershed, including the natural and artificial ponds near Kasota Avenue and Highway 280 at the creek's northern edge, as well as the creek itself. As a result, remediation efforts on Bridal Veil Pond began in 2008.

It is remarkable that Bridal Veil Creek and its once famous falls have survived, avoiding the fate of two other nearby East Bank falls—Fawn's Leap and Silver Cascade, both once found on what is now the University of Minnesota campus. Bridal Veil Falls can still be seen today from the Franklin Avenue Bridge or from a pedestrian path near the bank of the river.

People have altered and continue to alter the landscape of the Bridal Veil Watershed. Many parties have been involved in discussing the



Postcard of Bridal Veil Falls circa 1908. Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

redevelopment of the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area and the environmental rehabilitation of Bridal Veil Creek Watershed. Many agencies, including the St. Anthony Park Community Council, the Southeast Como Improvement Association, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minneapolis Public Works, and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, collaborated to remediate contamination of Bridal Veil Pond and Open Space. It was converted back to a wetland area, allowing the creek to meander to promote natural bioremediation (MWMO et al. 2016).

The story of Bridal Veil Creek is an interesting one: humans spent a century continually

degrading a natural feature that we are now working to restore. The residents of Minneapolis have shifted from admiring the natural environment of Bridal Veil Creek and its falls to desecrating it, back to embracing it once again. While the story of Bridal Veil Falls may not necessarily be unique, as one of only eight waterfalls that flow directly into the river, it nonetheless illustrates an important part of the history and ecology of the Mississippi (Arey 1999).

This article first appeared in River Life's River Atlas in 2009. Content has been updated and edited for Open Rivers.

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