

MINNETONKA

Minne is the common Dakota word for water, and **tonka** is likewise their common word meaning big or great, but the name thus compounded seems not to have been used by the Dakota until Governor Ramsey coined it for the lake. So far as records show, the Dakota appear to have had no term for this large and many-featured body of water.

Although **Minnetonka** has a long history stretching back to the mid-1850s, when the first settlement was established along Minnehaha Creek, it's the **50th anniversary of incorporation as a village** that the city celebrates in 2006. Here's a brief look at some of the highlights of Minnetonka's history.

The early years

The land that would come to be known as Minnetonka was sacred ground for American Indians. The dense woods and open prairies made for good hunting, while Lake Minnetonka provided excellent fishing. The Dakotah Sioux and Ojibwa Chippewa would cross through Minnetonka as they traveled between Shakopee and Mille Lacs. A major Indian trail through Minnetonka crossed Minnehaha Creek just below the rapids at present-day Minnetonka Mills, and ran along the present Baker and Plymouth roads.

In 1851, Indian tribes signed an agreement allowing settlement of lands west of Fort Snelling, and by 1852, Minnetonka's first settlement was established at the current Minnetonka Mills site. Available water power and the clearing of trees for farms provided the right ingredients for establishment of a saw mill, the only one west of the Mississippi River. A few years later, the addition of a furniture factory created the largest business center in Hennepin County. By 1869, the saw mill was replaced by a flour mill, which operated until the mid 1890s when it could no longer compete with the larger mills on St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis.

Early settlers came to Minnetonka primarily from New England and other states east of Minnesota, from northern Europe and the British Isles, and from Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic). The Bohemians, or Czechs, introduced the techniques to grow raspberries in this climate – a success the neighboring city of Hopkins has been capitalizing on since 1935 with its annual Raspberry Festival.

As Minnetonka was settled, several small, distinct commercial areas, all two to three miles apart with farms and homes in between, developed over the years. Those areas came to be known as Minnetonka Mills, Glen Lake, Groveland, and Oak Knoll.

1822

First recorded sighting of Lake Minnetonka



1852

Minnetonka Mills



1916

Construction of Glen Lake Sanitarium



1867

Great Northern Railroad is built through Minnetonka



1860 – 1906

Lake Minnetonka Steamboat Era



1906

Streetcar Service to Minnetonka



1854

Groveland Elementary



1883

Burwell House



1906

First Town Hall



1857

Population = 192



1910

Population = 1,538



1940

Population = 6,466



1820

1840

1860

1880

1900

1920

1940



1804
Lewis & Clark Expedition



1861 - 1865
American Civil War



1886
Statue of Liberty given to America



1912
The Titanic sinks



1932
The Great Depression begins

1950's

Minnetonka, Hopkins, Wayzata school districts formed



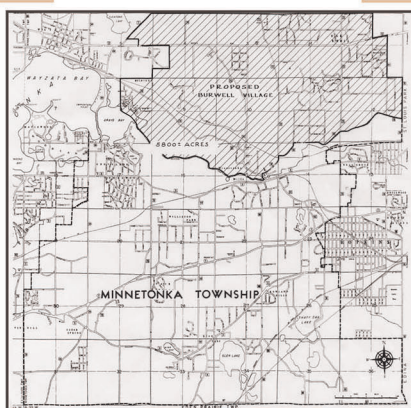
1955

Building of Bennett Park



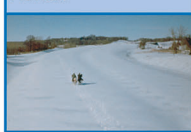
1957

Glen Lake



1965-1969

I-494 built



1952

Minnetonka High School built



1956

Population = 15,600



1960

Population = 25,037



1970

Population = 35,000



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

From Township to Village

After World War II, between 1946 and 1955, Deephaven, Wayzata, Hopkins and St. Louis Park annexed additional newly developed residential areas in Minnetonka Township – and as a township, Minnetonka had no legal authority to stop the annexations. By 1956, Minnetonka Township's area had been reduced from 36 to 28 square miles, while at the same time the population was increasing – rising from 6,466 in 1940 to about 15,600 in 1956.

It was time to become a village. Bill Frommes, who was active in township government, and Carl Dever, a township resident and lawyer who was to serve as village, and later city, attorney for 19 years, led the 1956 effort to incorporate Minnetonka Township into a single village.

Meanwhile, a group of Minnetonka Mills residents believed one village would be too large and difficult to govern, so they proposed creation of two villages: one north of Cedar Lake Road and Minnehaha Creek to be called Burwell, and another that included the rest of the township, to be called Minnetonka.

A race to the Hennepin County Courthouse with the paperwork resulted in the proposal for two villages being presented just moments before the petition for one village. The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners decided an election should be held on the question of the entire township becoming a village.

In the largest turnout of any previous election, voters cast ballots in the hotly contested election, held August 22, 1956, deciding by a vote of 2,309 to 1,275 to change the township to one village. Annexations by adjacent communities were no longer allowed, and Minnetonka's boundaries were stabilized.



From Village to City

As late as the 1960s, Minnetonka still contained many farms, greenhouses and horse and cow pastures. As bus service and highways improved, this second-ring suburb was increasingly accessible to Minneapolis and large tracts of land attracted developers. People continued to move to Minnetonka, with population doubling from 25,000 in 1960 to more than 50,000 today.

As the population grew, so did the need for fire and police protection. The new village established its own volunteer fire department, which continues today as one of the largest volunteer fire departments in the country. Five fire stations around the city house the equipment for 80 paid-on-call volunteer firefighters and seven full-time staff.

The police department grew from one chief and one patrolman, assisted by the Hennepin County Sheriff's department, to more than 70 officers today.

In the 1960s, I-494 was built through Minnetonka, and large commercial developments soon followed including the 7-HI strip mall along County Rd. 101 where SuperTarget now stands. In 1968, the village officially became a city.

1945

1950

1955

1960

1965

1970

1975



1941-1945
World War II



1955
First McDonald's
restaurant opens



1958
Frisbee is invented



1967
The first Super Bowl is played
between the Green Bay Packers
and the Kansas City Chiefs



1969
Neil Armstrong walks
on the moon

1970s

Stoplights and water and sewer are installed



1982

Opus Center



1997

Glen Lake Golf Course



The last 30 years

During the mid 1970s, city sewer and water lines replaced individual septic tanks and wells in most of Minnetonka. Minnetonka's current city hall was built in 1970, and over time the facility grew to the extensive Civic Center campus it is today, containing a community center, fire station, police department, ice rinks, soccer fields and a water treatment plant.

Ridgegate Mall opened in the early 1970s. In 1982, the Opus Center, a large mixed-use development of office, light industrial, hotel and residential areas, was built between Shady Oak Road and Hwy. 169, just north of the Crosstown (Hwy 62).

Minnetonka continues to be home to several major corporate headquarters, including Carlson Companies and Cargill, Inc., as well as many other thriving companies.



1985-1992

I-394 built



2000

Gray's Bay Bridge



MINNETONKA MILLS



In 1852, Simon Stevens and Calvin Tuttle filed a claim for a dam site on Minnehaha Creek at present-day Minnetonka Mills, creating the first settlement in the area. Construction of the mill was completed in January 1853, and in May 1853 this first private sawmill west of the Mississippi River began sawing logs.

This first mill burned in 1854 and was replaced by a combination sawmill and furniture factory. By April 1857, more than 2,000 chairs, bedsteads, rockers and chairs were being produced each week by the mill, making it the largest business center in Hennepin County. The mill closed in 1860 and was destroyed by fire in 1868.

The site began its third life in 1869 when a flour mill and cooper shop for making barrels and kegs was built – the Minnetonka Mill Company, with Charles H. Burwell as the company secretary. By 1881, this was one of the most productive flour mills in the region, producing 300 to 400 barrels of flour daily. When the Minnetonka mill closed in 1885, unable to compete with the larger flour mills in Minneapolis, the property was purchased by Burwell.

The final mill on the property was a grist mill that ground grain for farmers, sold corn meal, and manufactured Pettijohn's Rolled Wheat Cereal. In 1895, the mill was demolished. While it remained the political center of the township, Minnetonka Mills was no longer its dominant retail center.



Burwell House

The Burwell House was built in 1883 by Charles H. Burwell and was occupied by members of his family until 1959. It is not the oldest building in either Minnetonka Mills or the city of Minnetonka, but it is significant because its history is intertwined with that of the previous milling industries nearby and for its location at the hub of historic and modern transportation modes. Restoration of the house to its 1894 appearance was completed by the Minnetonka Historical Society and the city of Minnetonka in 1999. Tours of the house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are available June through September each year. Call (952) 939-8200 for more information.



Town Hall

Built in 1907, this Greek Revival-style building at Baker Road and Minnetonka Boulevard housed first the town council, then the village council, and finally the city council. While the current city hall was being built, the city's first city manager worked out of a trailer, because there wasn't enough office space in the building at Baker Road. After Minnetonka's government offices moved to the current city hall in 1971, the Town Hall was sold to the Minnetonka Community Church, which has owned it ever since.



1980

Population = 38,683



1990

Population = 43,000



2005

Population = 50,000



1980



1977
First home video game consoles introduced

1985



1980
Miracle on Ice at the Winter Olympics

1990



1982
Compact disc introduced

1995



1991
World Wide Web debuts

2000



2004
Pictures from Mars

2005

2010

GLEN LAKE



Glen Lake, located on Excelsior Boulevard and Eden Prairie Road, and not to be confused with the nearby body of water also called Glen Lake, has been a

thriving commercial and residential area for many years.

In 1907, Chris Kraemer opened a general store in Glen Lake, allowing farmers to shop locally rather than traveling to Hopkins or Minneapolis. At the same time, electric streetcars and freight trains began traveling between Minneapolis and Lake Minnetonka, making a stop in Glen Lake at a station that was well used by commuters, farmers and Glen Lake Sanitarium workers. In 1923, with buses becoming the primary mode of mass transportation, the train lines were discontinued. Traces of the tracks, originally installed in 1881, can still be found in the area, especially at the entrance to Purgatory Park where a bridge crossed Purgatory Creek.



In the 1930s, Glen Lake contained two grocery stores, filling stations, a post office, a garage and a barber shop. However, during the gas rationing of the 1940s, traffic through Glen Lake was so light that a storeowner's dog would often sleep in the middle of the street, undisturbed for hours!

In 1958, Kraemer's included his expanded store in a new shopping center he built on the southwest corner of the intersection. By the 1980s the business, now primarily a hardware store, was in a new building across Excelsior Boulevard where it remains today.

The original Glen Lake School, located east of Glen Lake on Excelsior, was replaced in 1911 by a two-classroom brick building on Woodhill Road and Excelsior. The building was enlarged in 1945, and in 1946 Glen Lake School became part of the Hopkins School District. In 1960 the city of Minnetonka purchased the building for use as a community center, tearing it down in 1990 to make way for soccer fields and a skateboard park.

Glen Lake Sanitarium

Located south of Glen Lake on the east side of Eden Prairie Road, the Glen Lake Sanitarium was opened by Hennepin County in 1916 as one of the three top tuberculosis treatment centers in the world. At the height of the 1930s tuberculosis epidemic, 715 people lived and received treatment at the sanitarium.

In 1962, the state of Minnesota assumed operation of the sanitarium, converting it to the Oak Terrace Nursing Home. In 1991, after a combined 75 years of service to 17,000 patients, the state closed the facility and demolished the buildings.

The Glen Lake Golf and Practice Center, a public nine-hole golf course operated by the Three Rivers Park District, was opened on the site in 1997.

GROVELAND

Located at Minnetonka Boulevard and County Rd. 101, Groveland was first settled by workers who helped build the sawmill, boarding house and Minnehaha Creek dam at present-day Minnetonka Mills.

In 1854, William Chown donated land on Minnetonka Boulevard and built a log schoolhouse, the first school building in Minnetonka. To accommodate the area's growing population, a larger school was built in 1871 at the present site of Groveland Cemetery. The water pump from that school remains in the cemetery to this day. In 1915, a four-room school was built on the location of the present school. Groveland School became part of the Minnetonka School District in 1949. Nine years later, another new school was built. Since then, additions, remodeling and new construction have resulted in the present-day Groveland Elementary School, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2004.

In 1946, Ty Abel built a service station on the northeast corner of the intersection. The architectural style of the building, the length of time Ty operated the station and other businesses in the area, and his community involvement all contributed to Groveland also coming to be known as Ty Abel Corner. This crossroads remains a thriving commercial, retail and office area.



As tourism on nearby Lake Minnetonka diminished in the early 1900s, city dwellers began building summer homes along the shores of Wayzata and Grays bays. One of Minnetonka's first residential developments, Tonkawoodcroft, was platted in 1913.

Bennett Field, a few blocks south on County Rd. 101, is on land donated in 1955 by Ted Bennett to the Deephaven Gun Club, which allowed Little League baseball on a portion of the property. By 1959, the entire parcel was being used for recreation. Now, Bennett Family Park is self-supporting and run by volunteers.



Groveland Cemetery

In 1856, a Pennsylvania pioneer was the first person buried in this cemetery. That same year, the 16-month-old son of the Grays, for whom Lake Minnetonka's Grays Bay is named, died and was buried there. Groveland Cemetery is still in use today.

Gray's Bay Dam

Built in 1897 at the outlet of Minnehaha Creek from Gray's Bay, this dam replaced the one near Minnetonka Mills, which had operated since 1853. At the time it was built, there was no screen on top of the dam so, when the water was high, fish flowed over the dam – making for very good fishing in Minnehaha Creek!

OAK KNOLL

Oak Knoll was located at Hopkins Crossroad (County Road 73) on both sides of a popular route from Minneapolis to Lake Minnetonka – now I-394. Oak Knoll started out as a farming community known as Boulevard Gardens, but in the 1920s, a few families looking for country places near Minneapolis began buying land in the new Boulevard Gardens housing development. The area soon became known as Oak Knoll, named for the forests of oak trees on rolling hills.

Businesses located in this area over the years included grocery stores, a root beer stand, a drug store, a tavern, garage and automobile service stations, and a kennel that trained guide dogs.

The Oak Knoll community was nearly wiped out in the 1960s when the east-west highway was widened to four lanes with a median, and a bridge was built over the highway to carry the north-south traffic of Hopkins Crossroad. A few of the small store buildings on the north side of the highway stood until the late 1980s.

Today, the only remnants left of this once-vital community are the Oak Knoll Lutheran Church a few blocks north of I-394, and the former Oak Knoll School on Hopkins Crossroad, now a private facility for special-needs students.



MINNETONKA CIVIC CENTER

Built in 1971, just three years after Minnetonka became a city, the Minnetonka Civic Center campus at 14600 Minnetonka Boulevard now includes the city hall, community center, ice arenas, senior center, police station and fire station #1. Extensive reconstruction of the Civic Center grounds took place in 2005-06, including rerouting of the road and redesign of the city hall parking lot; construction of soccer fields and an amphitheater; construction of a new water treatment plant; and trail connections to Jidana Park.

