



In this issue, Minnesota History introduces two new departments. EyeWitness invites readers to enter the world of an image once frozen in time. LandMarks travels around the state finding the stories behind the places and buildings of Minnesota's historic landscape.

ON THIS WARM HARVEST DAY, if you were the farmer, you'd be pausing for a picture. You'd hold the reins just tight enough to keep the horses still but not so tight as to agitate them. You'd leave the long whip in its place like a slender flagpole to your right. For a moment, you'd try to enjoy the smells of barley and of horse sweat on leather. You'd take a moment away from the talkative machine—the chukka-chukka swipe-swipe of the sickle, the smooth greased sounds of the reel in its paddle-boat paddling of the barley onto the sickle, the sharp thunk of the

knives on the header as they force the twine through a measured bundle with the simultaneous snap of the knotter. You might take a moment to check the condition of the moving slatted canvas that feeds the barley up. You might be wondering what's taking the photographer so long—and whether he brought some extra water.

If you were the photographer, in the foreground of sound you'd hear the light, almost papery, whispers of ripe barley. If you were old, you might be contrasting these wispy barley sounds with your memory of the louder whistling of wind in the white pine forest that stood here only a few decades ago.

The barley comes alive in this light, but the beautiful barley is not the real subject. The real subject—the horses, binder, and farmer—you

will set like a bouquet on the bright tabletop of barley. This moment can't last forever. The wind has died down, letting the barley hold its position. There isn't much time. Already one of the horses is getting impatient and turning its head toward the camera. There. You've got it. If the horse's head isn't blurred from movement, it should be perfect. But who will ever want to look at a picture of a team of horses pulling a binder through a barley field? You hope the farmer will get more for his crop than you're likely to get for this photograph.

—JIM HEYNE

Jim Heynen lives in St. Paul and teaches writing at St. Olaf College in Northfield. He had three books published in 2001: The Boys' House (stories), Standing Naked (poems), and Fishing For Chickens: Stories About Rural Youth, a collection that he edited.

Grain Warehouse *Houston County*

STEAMBOAT TRANSPORTATION in the Upper Mississippi Valley was immensely prosperous in the mid-nineteenth century. With little railroad competition, steamers dominated freight traffic. The Mississippi River between St. Paul and St. Louis bustled with these craft carrying Minnesota and Iowa grain bound for the East. It was the “Golden Age” for steamboats and a potential financial boon to those who tied their fortune to the industry. So went the thinking of William Robinson from Allamakee County, Iowa, when he constructed a grain warehouse along a Mississippi River slough in the southeasternmost corner of Minnesota in 1868.*

Built of native limestone and wood, the warehouse was about one

mile north of the Minnesota-Iowa border in Houston County. Farmers welcomed the structure, since it was the only grain-storage facility for miles. The building edged the water, allowing easy transfer of grain from its basement to vessels moored in the slough. To complement the warehouse, Robinson and R. P. Spencer platted the village of Jefferson. Its future looked bright, but the railroad was coming—and its management had little interest in Jefferson.

Three years after Robinson built his warehouse, the Chicago, Dubuque, and Minnesota Railroad platted the town of New Albin about one mile to the south in Iowa. It hardly mattered that the community was not on the river, since its future was bound to a superior means of transport. Grain-storage facilities were constructed in New Albin,

which quickly flourished. Unable to compete, Jefferson soon failed. Many of the town’s buildings remained until the 1940s, when they were demolished to make way for Minnesota State Highway 26. But after more than 130 years, the heart of Robinson’s dream endures. His steamboat grain warehouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

—DENIS GARDNER

Denis Gardner has documented properties for the National Register of Historic Places and the Historic American Engineering Record. Currently he is writing a book featuring many of Minnesota’s National Register properties.

*SOURCES: David C. Anderson, “Jefferson Grain Warehouse,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Apr. 1994, State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; Kevin Schulz, “Grain Warehouse Outlives Town, Steamboat Travel,” *The Land*, Mar. 3, 1995, A1.





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