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## FARIBAULT, MINNESOTA THE SEQUENT OCCUPANCE OF A REPRESENTATIVE LANDSCAPE UNIT

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The city of Faribault and its surrounding tributary area is especially attractive to the geographer because of its similarity to the numerous other small county seats of southern Minnesota and northern Iowa. The uniformity of size and pattern of these units is impressive to the casual traveler as well as to the individual investigator. In order to understand the areal arrangement of the various landscapes it is necessary to consider in detail the historical development of the area. By this method many otherwise baffling relationships which exist in the present economic region are explained. The interdependence of the city proper and the surrounding umland was evident at the date of settlement and in spite of the construction of roads leading to adjacent urban centers has become stronger than ever.

### *Sequent Occupance*

Faribault was founded in 1852 by Alexander Faribault, a member of the American Fur Trading Company. (Fig. 1) Three years prior to this date the trader was attracted to the junction of the Straight and Cannon Rivers by a permanent encampment of the Sioux Indians. At that time he saw the possibilities of the site as a trading post and made a formal claim to the area, which is now partly occupied by the city. The first period of settlement was characterized by fur trading with the local tribes, and Faribault and several other traders were the only inhabitants of the settlement.

By 1856 the great migration was underway and Faribault like most of the other smaller neighboring towns began to grow. The confluence of the two rivers had several advantages which were widely advertised in Eastern papers in order to attract settlers. The streams themselves offered power facilities. In addition, large level Pleistocene flood plains offered extensive tracts of fertile land.

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FIGURE 1. — LOCATION MAP

The uplands also invited settlement as this was near the heart of the Big Woods of Minnesota, a dense growth of hardwoods. This was not a solid stand of trees but included many enclaves of natural grass land. One such pasture was located directly south of the junction of the rivers. Here then were three valuable resources for frontier life.

In 1857 Faribault had a tax value of \$600,000.<sup>1</sup> This rapid increase in growth was made possible by the development of communication lines. Two roads were of importance: a plank road to the nearby town of Cannon City, and another similar road to the village of Hastings at the head of Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River. During the fall of this year railroad surveys reached the town and gave it the advantage necessary to surpass the rival centers of Dundas and Cannon City.

Products shipped over the roads from the settlement were restricted to frontier articles. Ginseng root, hides, and furs were the only exports prior to the completion of the railway. With the opening of railroad service the following year, the second stage in the function of Faribault began. At this time also, the town was unconsciously incorporated in the upland of the Twin Cities, Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

The dependence of the village on the railway was not entirely to the advantage of the town. The improved shipping facilities made growth possible, and during the second period, the products changed from compact articles of relatively high value per unit of weight, to the exploitation of the forest. Faribault contributed to the extension of the rails across the Dakotas by furnishing ties to lay the tracks. Another large part of the annual cut was shipped to the Twin Cities where it was used for local building and the manufacturing of barrels. The spread of the lumber city and its reliance on the railroad may be seen from the fact that the year the railroad survey was completed there was only one saw mill in operation. By 1867, three years after the completion of the railway, the cut reached its peak with seven hardwood mills in operation.

During the second period, three elements were at work changing the function of Faribault. The cut greatly exceeded the annual growth so that the supply was rapidly exhausted. It is interesting to note that very little of the Big Woods was removed for the single purpose of clearing land. Apparently the New England settlers who made up the majority of the inhabitants had profited by the experience of Eastern pioneers. As the supply dwindled, the market for the ties also lessened, for the railroads had completed their greatest period of expansion. Finally the removal of the forest opened the land for cultivation.

With the transition in the upland from forest products to agriculture, the town entered the third stage in its development. The

<sup>1</sup> Neill, Rev. Edward W., and Bryant, Charles S., *History of Rice County, Minnesota* Historical Company, Minneapolis, 1882, p. 321.

wheat fields of the northwest, the Red River valley, Canada, and the Dakotas had not been broken, and Rice County, Minnesota became one of the most important wheat counties in the country. This was reflected in the town of Faribault by the conversion of the saw mills to grist mills. Prior to 1862 there were seven sawmills and only one flour mill within the town. By 1866 there were seven flour mills within Faribault and by 1870 there was one rolling mill for each mile of the Cannon River within the county. At this time the La Croix process of milling was developed in Faribault. By this method it was possible to further refine the hard wheat grown here so that a white flour could be obtained, a fact that made Rice County millers among the most famous in the world. By 1882 the

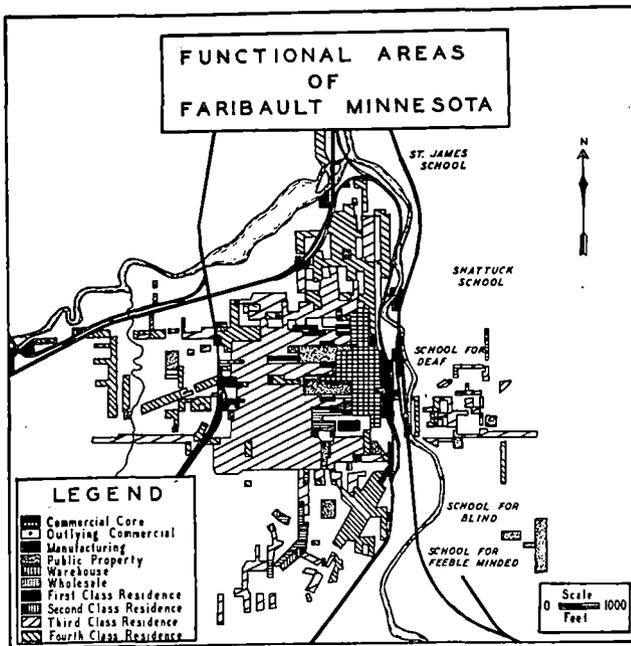


FIGURE 2. — FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF FARIBAULT, MINNESOTA

city shipped 24,000 tons of freight over the railroads.<sup>2</sup> Of this freight 6,500 tons were wheat and flour. The remaining shipments were hogs and cattle.

Another function, which is of significance today, was started in 1868. A military academy, the first of four private and three state institutions, was founded. However, none of these was important during this period.

The railroads which contributed to the early advantage Fari-

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 329-33.

bault held over its local competitors later aided in the decline of the town as a wheat center. The speeding up of freight, combined with rate reductions, made for the concentration of milling in the Twin Cities. The expansion of the railroads to the previously mentioned wheat lands of the West hastened the decline of wheat production. By 1910 the Cannon River area ceased to be a milling center and only one of the fifteen mills remained.

#### *Present Distributions and Functions*

The decline in wheat production marks the beginning of the present function of Faribault. The city now is a minor center in the

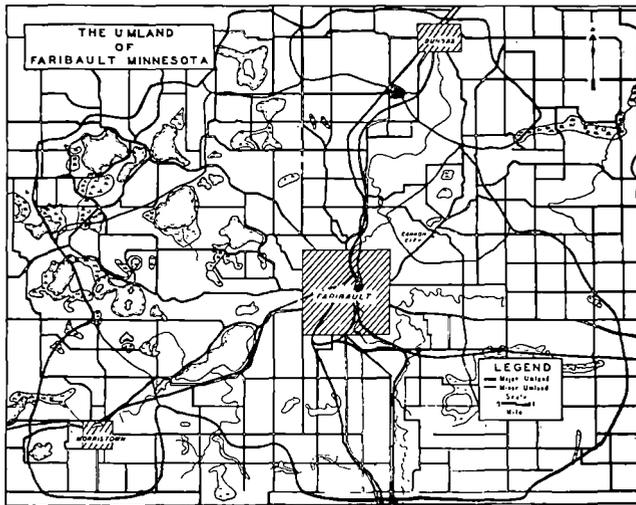
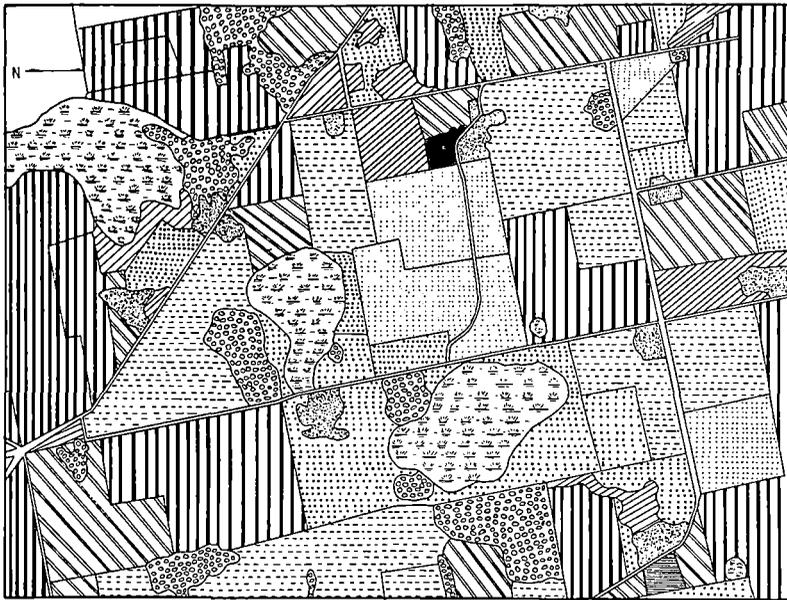


FIGURE 3. — THE UMLAND OF FARIBAULT

corn and dairy regions of the United States. The spread of highways throughout this section disregarded the small agglomerations which had marked the mills along the river and today land utilization in the umland is expressed by small creameries scattered throughout the area. These are oriented with reference to highways but as yet have no agglomerations. Faribault today has a population of approximately 11,000. This is a decline of about 400 from the census of 1920. Little new building has been done within the city. It is no longer confined to the Pleistocene flood plains of the river but has spread to the upland as well. It is divided roughly in two parts (Fig. 2). The eastern part is the site of the educational center which contributes to the trade of the city. The western half comprises the major part of Faribault. Along the Straight River may be found the manufacturing, wholesale, and railroad areas. Slightly higher in elevation, on the Pleistocene flood plain is the commercial

REPRESENTATIVE COVER MAP  
FARIBAULT MINNESOTA



LEGEND

-  Corn
-  Wheat
-  Trees
-  Idle Land
-  Raspberries

-  Swamp

Scale  
0 ————— 1/2  
Mile

-  Farmstead
-  Alfalfa
-  Pasture
-  Hay
-  Peas

FIGURE 4. — COVER MAP OF FARIBAULT

core, a representative haphazard collection of two and three story stone buildings. West of the center of the city is the residential section, now largely third class but formerly the exclusive dwelling district. This is situated on the interfluvium between the two rivers. On the western periphery of the city the interfluvium gives way to the flood plain of the Cannon River. This is utilized for modern third class dwellings, one and two story clapboard houses which are closely spaced.

There is no grouping of industrial properties according to type. Five major factories exist: a woolen mill, a small furniture factory, a creamery, a shoe factory, and a seed company.

*The Umland*

Faribault apparently reached its period of greatest prominence during the wheat era. At present the city depends upon the trade of its umland and schools, as well as on the distribution of products

to the small rural centers located on the border of the trade area (Fig. 3). These rural centers have been affected, even more than Faribault, by the decline in wheat production and the establishment of surfaced highways. In nearly every village may be found the remains of a mill, now no more than a pile of crumbling stone. These small communities serve a relatively unimportant function during the summer months, but during the winter, with its usual heavy snow, the farmers must revert to horse and sleigh. The cleared highways serve as effective barriers to this mode of travel so that the driver must of necessity depend more upon the small country town, such as Dundas or Cannon City.

The individual farmers have turned from wheat to corn and dairy farming. Except during very dry years these products divide the attention and total income of the farmer (Figure 4). The dependence of Faribault upon its trade area is vital, and the crop combinations representative of the agricultural landscape hold the key to the prosperity, activity, and growth or decline of the city.

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## NEW APPARATUS FOR USE IN SYNTHESIZING MUSICAL SOUNDS

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