Highlights from
Burnsville History

and map of historic sites

O n May 11, 1858, Burnsville, then spelled Byrnesville, organized as one of Dakota County's first 17 townships. A month later seven western sections of Burnsville were attached to Scott County. In March 1860 the seven sections were returned. The only other change in Burnsville's area occurred in 1964 when Burnsville acquired the northwest corner of Apple Valley. Construction of I-35E separated the corner from Apple Valley making it more practical for Burnsville to provide services to the area.

First settlers

Burnsville's first settlers were Irish: Byrne (Burnsville's namesake), Nixon, Woodruff, McCoy, and Martin arrived in 1852. In 1853 Father Ravoux, a Mendota priest, held the first church services in William Byrne's home. The last appearance of the spelling "Byrnesville" in town records was March 6, 1882. The first burial was at "Tepee Hill," a location used by the Dakota Indians.

Roads and Rails

The old St. Paul and Shakopee Road followed Indian trails along the river and the Judicial Road connected Shakopee and Lakeville. McLeod's ferry crossed the Minnesota River just east of Lyndale.

In 1865 the Minnesota Valley Railroad traveled west from St. Paul through Burnsville. In 1911 the "Dan Patch" line crossed Burnsville, opening travel from north to south.

The 1920 Lyndale draw bridge crossed the Minnesota River and allowed travel to Hennepin County which gave Dakota County $20,000 to extend Lyndale Avenue south to Orchard Gardens and Lakeville's Antlers Park.

Electricity

The Rural Electrification Administration first delivered electricity in 1935. Power has been supplied by Northern States Power and Dakota Electric.

Schools

John McCoy's home hosted Burnsville's first school in 1856. Five years later the school district organized and built a new school for $250. Four districts that evolved over the next 100 years were consolidated as District 191 serving Burnsville and portions of Eagan and Savage. Today the schools in the district include Burnsville Senior High, Junior Highs in Burnsville, Savage, and Eagan, and Elementary Schools in all three cities.

Libraries

The 1956 Federal Library Services Act established a joint Dakota-Scott County Library system. Burnsville was active in its growth which eventually permitted separate systems. The Burnhaven Library opened in March 1974, including offices of the Dakota County Library system for several years.

A very inviting place to live

The County Road 34/Judicial Road intersection became the first town center. William Byrne gave property for St. John the Baptist Church and cemetery, and John Berrisford operated his general store here.
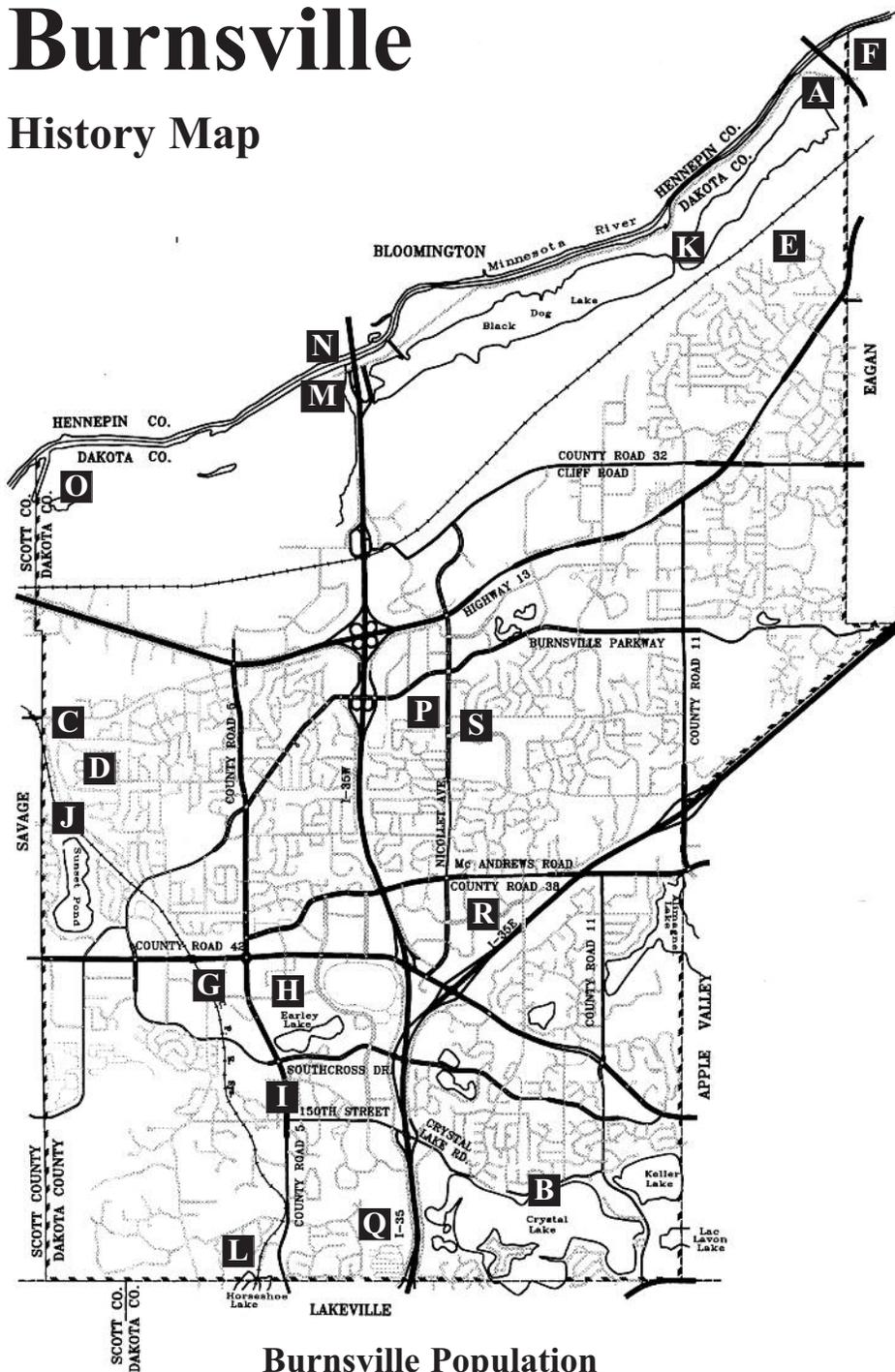
Early pioneers often referred to the beauty of Crystal Lake and its "Maple Isle." Like the Dakota Indians, they fished for the lake's pike and pickerel.

Crystal, Early, Alimagnet and Orchard Lakes became sites for cabins and summer homes. Many a Dan Patch railway traveler to Antlers Park in Lakeville later made stops in Burnsville. For some it became a commuter line.

Construction of the Lyndale Avenue bridge in 1920-21 gave Burnsville a direct doorway to Minneapolis and gave Minneapolis residents easy access to Burnsville's and lakes and hills. Burnsville was "out in the country" until the 1960s. The population was 419 in 1920 and 495 in 1940 before jumping to 2,716 in 1960.

Burnsville

History Map

A   **Black Dog's Village**
Located near today's Cedar Ave. bridge, this was one of six Mdewakanton Dakota villages. Chief Black Dog fought in the 1862 uprising, later writing a book reviewing the Indians' side.

B   **Crystal Lake**
The lake was a favorite Dakota camp site for abundant pike and pickerel fishing and deer hunting.
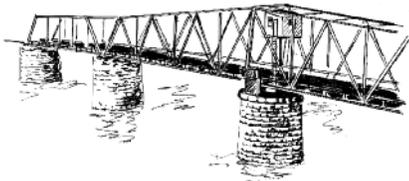

C   **St. John the Baptist**
The original 1855 Catholic log church served 10 families, including William Byrne's. A frame-built church was dedicated by Bishop Grace in 1866.
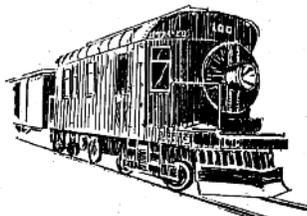

D   **Berrisford Store**
Englishman John Berrisford operated the town's general store within walking distance of the church. It now stands in Savage as the Razor's Edge Barbershop.

Burnsville Population

Township		Village incorporated	
1860...........214	1910..............385	1970................19,940	
1870...........361	1920..............419	**City**	
1880...........388	1930..............490	1980...............35,674	
1890...........309	1940..............495	1990...............51,288	
1900...........358	1950..............583	2000...............60,220	
	1960...........2,716	2005 (est).......65,000	

Prepared by W. G. Wolston

E James and Mary Connelly

The Connellys were one of the first to settle in what is now the River Hills area. In 1868, James built a combination dug-out and log cabin where Mary gave birth to seven children.

F The Cedar Avenue Bridge

The 1890 swing bridge required six men to open and close it. In its last year, 1980, a car was placed on one arm for balance during opening. The new bridge has three spans; two for cars and one for bicycles and walkers. Oddly, bicycles enter from Burnsville and cars enter from Eagan.

G The Dan Patch Line

The gas-electric line opened its passenger service in July 1910, and freight service later. Its original purpose was delivering people to the Savage race track and later to Lakeville's Antlers Park. It opened routes for Burnsville farmers and comfortable transportation to the big city. It also made the hills, trees, and lakes of Burnsville a summer retreat for many "city people."

Burnsville Will Fight, Throngs Protest Grabbing Of Black Dog

BURNSVILLE TOWN HALL

H   The founders of today's Burnsville

Questions may remain as to who gave their name to Burnsville but there's no question as to who preserved Burnsville and why.

The date was Wednesday, August 23, 1961, when Burnsville Township residents learned they might lose their most significant source of tax revenue. Without warning, the City of Bloomington, with Northern States Power's agreement, planned to annex NSP's Black Dog plant for its tax base.
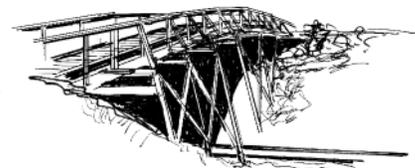
On Friday, August 25, 1961, about 500 Burnsville residents met at the town hall to "learn what's happening and react." Bloomington's plan was challenged. In one day a "Citizens League" formed and 465 residents petitioned to incorporate Burnsville Township as a city.

Two years and eight months later in April 1964 the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled in favor of Burnsville. In June 1964 Burnsville Township became the Village of Burnsville.
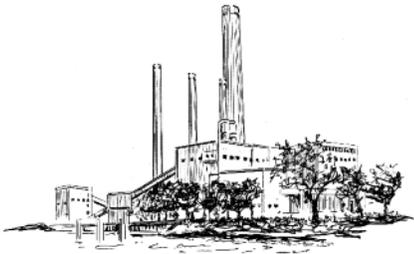
Those organizing the August 25th meeting and those over-flowing the hall were the founders of today's Burnsville.
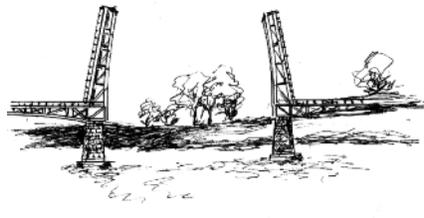
I Orchard Gardens Depot

The 1910 depot, on the National Register of Historic Places, served the Dan Patch line for farm produce and passengers north and south. It once handled 36 box cars of onions in one day.
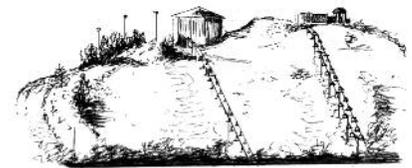
J Billy Goat Bridge

The 1910 wooden bridge, originally called McDermott's bridge, crossed the Dan Patch Railroad tracks until 1987. It became the "Billy Goat" when the nearby Peters Family had a herd of goats.

K   **Black Dog Power Plant**
The electric generating plant built by Northern States Power Company on the Minnesota River. A 2000 upgrade converted coal-burning units to natural gas, reducing harmful emissions.
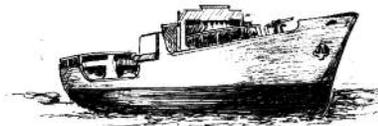

L   **The Sea Girt Inn**
The Sea Girt on Orchard Lake offered a beautiful setting with cabins, recreation, and dining. Featured name bands for dancing.

M   **Jens' Embassy**
Jens Caspersen, Danish immigrant, developed the Embassy Club on the river as an outstanding 1950s and '60s restaurant.

N   **The Lyndale Avenue Lift Bridge**
The Lyndale Bridge built in 1920 was unusual with its lift sections. In 1957 the 35W bridge replaced its two lanes with six lanes.

O   **Naval Shipyard**
World War II tankers and tugs built in Cargill's Savage shipyard were fitted-out from docks in Burnsville's northwest corner.

P   **Burnhaven Library**
Opened in 1974 with a 50,000 book capacity, it served as the county library administrative office. Prior to Burnhaven, starting in 1965, a bookmobile offered 6,000 books and   a 1968 storefront library offered 2,200 books.

Q   **Buck Hill**
Today Buck Hill has earned Olympic skiing stature. It also is a US Coast and Geodetic Marker site. Dakota Indians took advantage of the clear view of Crystal Lake when hunting deer.
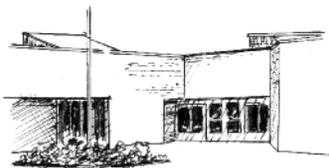

R   **Fairview Ridges Hospital**
A perfect example of foresight and persistence. What became the Ridges Campus was purchased in 1965 for a nursing home and retirement facility. When plans were delayed by a state veto, Fairview Hospital proposed a Health Center. Persistence resulted in a 150-bed hospital on a campus with a children's medical center and emergency services. Today the service area includes a YMCA, Medical Office Center, and Lutheran church.

The City of Burnsville

S   In 1964 Burnsville Township incorporated as the Village of Burnsville. In 1974 the village became the City of Burnsville in keeping with state legislation. Burnsville's mayor and council members are elected at large for four year terms. The council establishes policies and an appointed City Manager handles the day to day management of the city and its services.

Special thanks to DCHS member and Burnsville native Jack Kennelly for his generous assistance.

From the Dakota County Historical Society....collecting, preserving and presenting the history of Dakota County.