

Historic Fort Snelling

There are some interesting things going on at Historic Fort Snelling. The Minnesota Historical Society is undertaking a large project of revitalizing the historic fort. Last fall, the Society asked the public for comments and suggestions on the project. They had a very good response and are now moving forward. Historic Fort Snelling was opened in the 1820s, was originally known as Fort St. Anthony and is located at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. The 23-acre site revitalization project will include exhibits and stories of the many who have crossed paths with the fort. Some of those were soldiers, veterans and families; enslaved and free African Americans, Japanese Americans during WWII and Native Americans who have lived in the area for 10,000 years. In the Dakota language, the confluence is called Bdote. In doing more research, I found the Dakota story of the creation with one account held by the people near Bdote. It is believed that the spirits of people came down the spirit road made of the stars of the Milky Way and when they arrived on Earth, the Creator shaped the first people from clay of Mother Earth at Bdote. Missionary Stephen Riggs, who worked among the Dakota for many years, noted that the local Natives believed that mouth of the Minnesota River is precisely over the center of the earth. I'm looking forward to the grand opening in 2022.

Of course, we have our own historic fort near Moorhead – Fort Abercrombie. Originally established by Lt Colonel Abercrombie in 1858. Due to frequent flooding, the fort was moved to higher ground in 1859. Abercrombie served as the gateway for supplies and goods for people heading west including miners going to the gold fields, military roads followed by Sibley and later by settlers in the Dakota. Once the railroad arrived in Moorhead and crossed the river to Fargo, the fort became much less important. The fort was officially vacated by Congress in 1876.

Fort Garry at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers is significant to the development and settlement of Western Canada and is only a few hours drive from Moorhead. It was started as an outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company received a royal charter in 1670 and was the de facto government for parts of Canada for nearly 200 years. Traders of the Company extended westward and even traded in what is now California. The Company's monopoly ended when a Métis trapper and trader was accused of illegal trading in furs. Although found guilty, he was not fined nor sentenced, mostly because of an armed group of Métis supporting him. Upper Fort Garry was the heart of Winnipeg but as many cities along the Red River was prone to flooding. Lower Fort Garry was built on higher ground and is now a wonderful tourist destination. Historical reenactments and cultural festivals are a couple of their major attractions.