



SAWMILL DISTRICT

Mile Post (MP) 23.0-39.5

Anchored by picturesque Stillwater, and only a twenty-minute drive from the Twin Cities, a trip to the Sawmill District portion of the Byway is beautiful all year round, but it is an annual pilgrimage for many during the fall color season, usually September through October. With a mix of maples, oaks, elms, basswood, birches, aspens, and sumacs, set against a background of pines climbing the dramatic bluffs, the 16.5-mile drive through the district is a spectacular scenic experience. Throw in New England inspired towns, the first two European settlements in what would become Minnesota Territory and later the State of Minnesota, and you find yourself immersed in a Currier and Ives landscape. Please refer to Map Legend on p. 1.



Minnesota Territorial Prison Warden's House, Stillwater 1853, photographer Bill Neuman

MP24.6 Territorial Prison Site

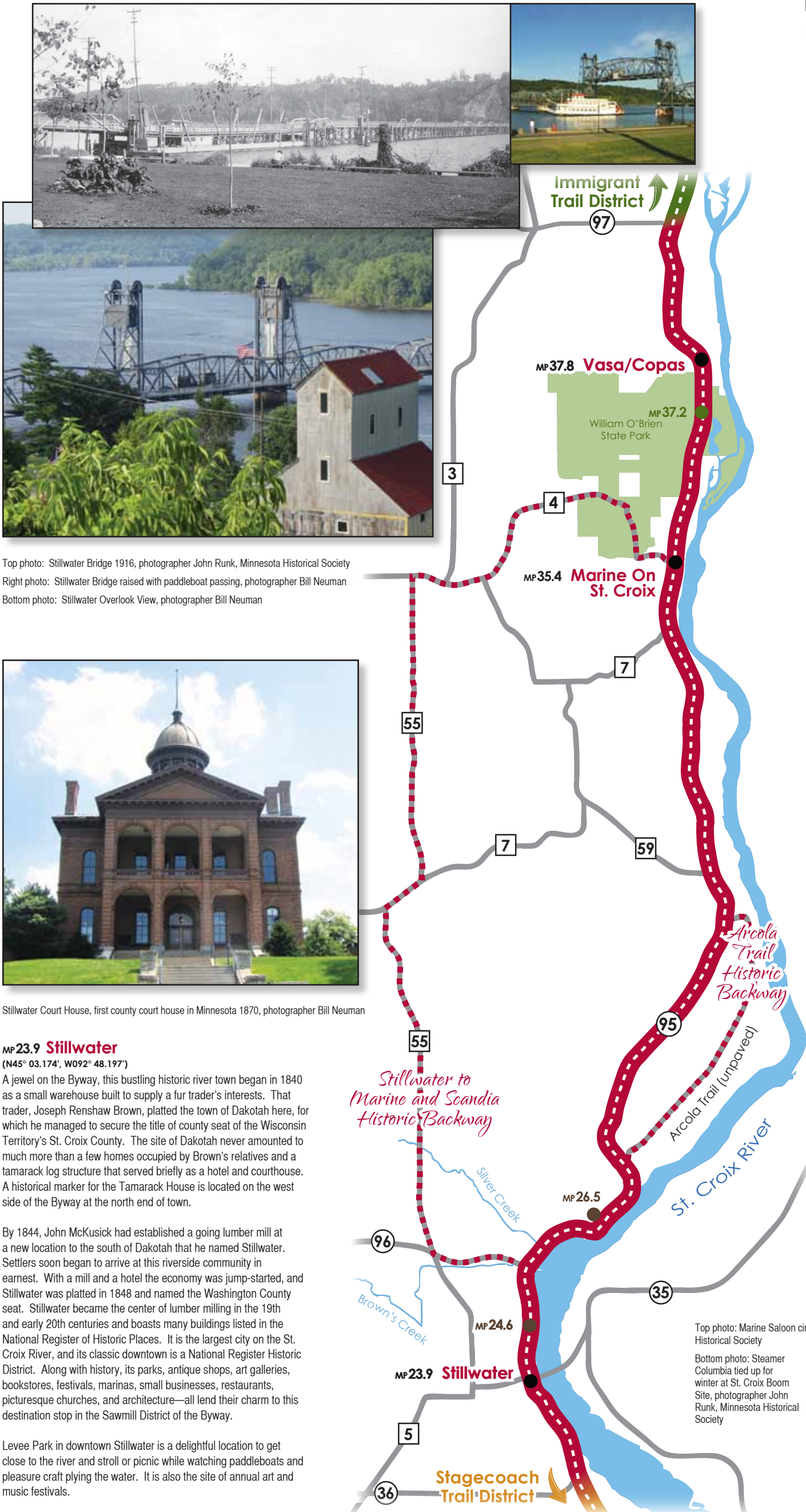
(N45° 03.693', W092° 48.414')

On the north end of town was the old Stillwater Prison ("home" of the infamous Younger brothers after they were captured for the notorious Northfield bank robbery) and the location of the first Territorial Prison, finished in 1853. The remaining buildings were destroyed by fire on September 4, 2002, (a small portion is preserved within the existing development) but the warden's house (1853-1914) still stands adjacent to the prison site. It is now the site of the Washington County Historical Society and is open to the public.

The area where the prison stood is also referred to as "Battle Hollow," the site of an intense and fatal encounter between groups of Ojibwe and Dakota Indians. This event occurred in 1839 as a party of Ojibwe were returning home from a tense meeting at Fort Snelling. As displaced eastern native peoples were forced farther west and land was reduced, pressure on the Plains groups mounted, resulting in increased tensions. During the 1700s, conflict arose between the Ojibwe and Dakota, who had previously been trading partners and allies. During this earlier era, the valley of the St. Croix River was often a contested border between these groups. Because treaties, as noted in the map below, would eventually displace both of these peoples from their lands, the "Battle Hollow" site records one of the last altercations between these two tribes.



Pine Tree Treaty 1837, ceded Ojibwe and Dakota lands



Top photo: Stillwater Bridge 1916, photographer John Runk, Minnesota Historical Society
 Right photo: Stillwater Bridge raised with paddleboat passing, photographer Bill Neuman
 Bottom photo: Stillwater Overlook View, photographer Bill Neuman



Stillwater Court House, first county court house in Minnesota 1870, photographer Bill Neuman

MP23.9 Stillwater

(N45° 03.174', W092° 48.197')

A jewel on the Byway, this bustling historic river town began in 1840 as a small warehouse built to supply a fur trader's interests. That trader, Joseph Renshaw Brown, platted the town of Dakotah here, for which he managed to secure the title of county seat of the Wisconsin Territory's St. Croix County. The site of Dakotah never amounted to much more than a few homes occupied by Brown's relatives and a tamarack log structure that served briefly as a hotel and courthouse. A historical marker for the Tamarack House is located on the west side of the Byway at the north end of town.

By 1844, John McKusick had established a going lumber mill at a new location to the south of Dakotah that he named Stillwater. Settlers soon began to arrive at this riverside community in earnest. With a mill and a hotel the economy was jump-started, and Stillwater was platted in 1848 and named the Washington County seat. Stillwater became the center of lumber milling in the 19th and early 20th centuries and boasts many buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is the largest city on the St. Croix River, and its classic downtown is a National Register Historic District. Along with history, its parks, antique shops, art galleries, bookstores, festivals, marinas, small businesses, restaurants, picturesque churches, and architecture—all lend their charm to this destination stop in the Sawmill District of the Byway.

Levee Park in downtown Stillwater is a delightful location to get close to the river and stroll or picnic while watching paddleboats and pleasure craft plying the water. It is also the site of annual art and music festivals.

Stillwater to Marine and Scandia Historic Backway

(The south end of this Backway route diverts from the Byway at MP 25.5 just north of Stillwater, then west 1.1 miles on MN Hwy 96, north on Washington Co Rd 55, east on Washington Co Hwy 4, then north on Co Hwy 3 to Scandia; or from the intersection of Co Hwy 55 and Co Hwy 4 continue east on Co Hwy 4 to Marine—the Marine option rejoins the Byway at MP 35.4; the Scandia option rejoins the Byway at MP 39.5)

An alternate route between Stillwater and Marine on St Croix can be taken by following Washington Co Rd 55 (Norell Ave) between MN Hwy 96 on the south and Washington Co Hwy 4 (170th St N) on the north. To connect to Co Rd 55 (Norell Ave), take MN Hwy 96 west 1.1 miles from MN Hwy 95 just to the north of Stillwater.

This Historic Backway takes you away from the river but into a restful rural countryside with excellent fall color and dramatic winter scenery. You will see the historic May Township Hall, (MN Hwy 96 and Norell Ave), travel past farms, wend your way between lakes and ponds, and pass through the Lee and Rose Warner Nature Center, run by the Science Museum of Minnesota and open to the public. Paved and well marked, the rolling and curving nature of the northern portion of this route makes for a wonderful drive.

An option is to extend this Backway farther north by following Co Rd 3 (Olinda Trail) to the north of Co Hwy 4. This route provides a connection to the town of Scandia and the Swedish Ring Historic Backway; however, if you do not loop back along the Byway you will miss William O'Brien State Park and the historic towns of Marine on St. Croix and Copas located on MN Hwy 95.



Top photo: Marine Saloon circa 1890, Minnesota Historical Society

Bottom photo: Steamer Columbia tied up for winter at St. Croix Boom Site, photographer John Runk, Minnesota Historical Society

