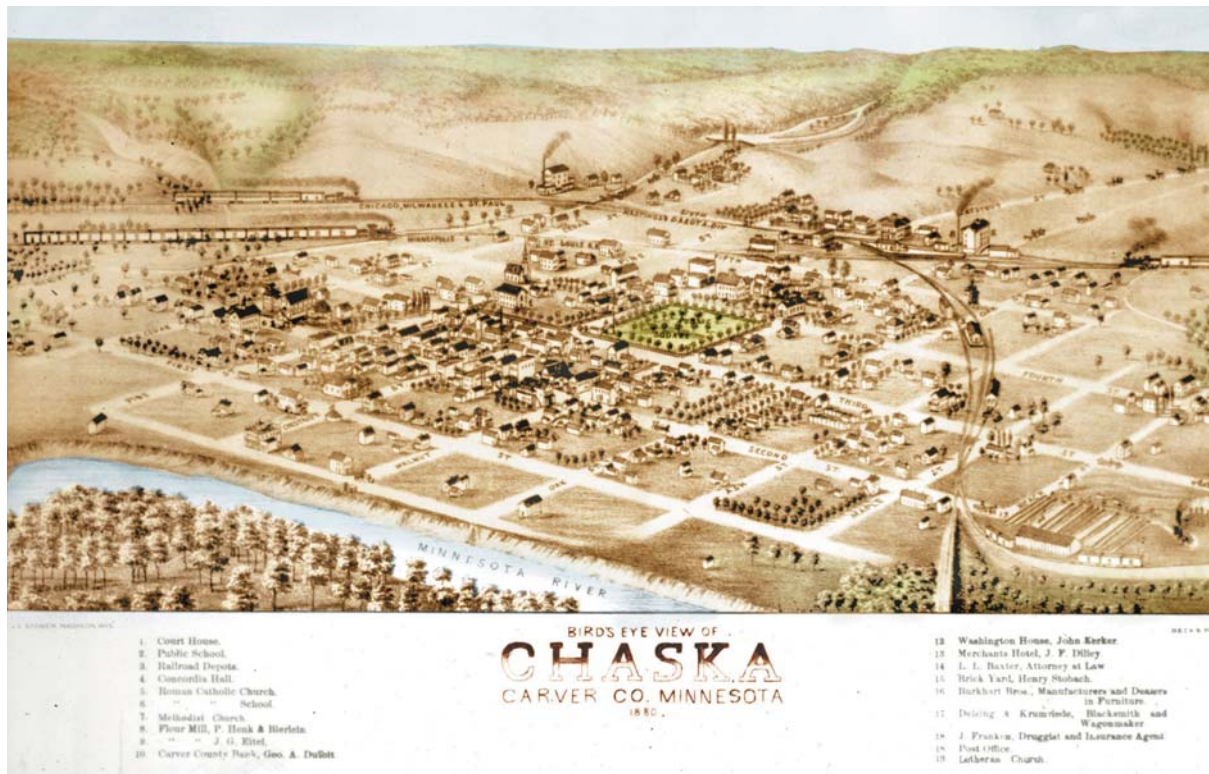


# City of Chaska Historic Context Study



Prepared for the  
Chaska Heritage Preservation Commission  
Chaska, Minnesota

Prepared by  
Thomas R. Zahn & Associates  
Bethany Gladhill, Project Associate  
Spring 2006

Historic photographs included in this report are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Chaska Historical Society.

This project has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, through the Minnesota Historical Society under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act as amended. However, the contents and opinion do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendations by the Department of the Interior.

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write:

Office of Equal Opportunity  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Washington D.C. 20240

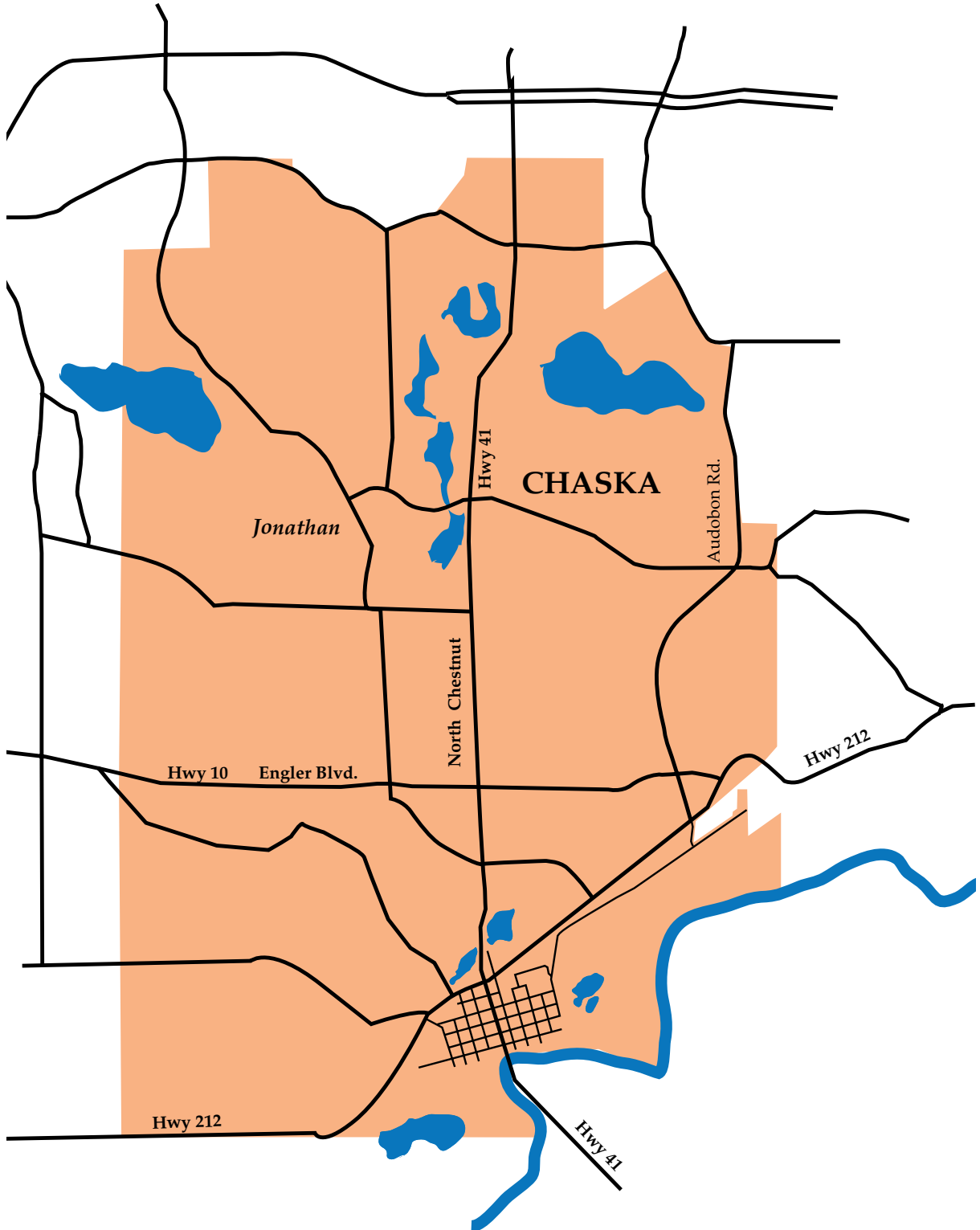
# City of Chaska Historic Context Study

## Table of Contents

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....  | 1     |
| Importance of Historic Contexts.....   | 2     |
| Objective and Methodology .....  | 3     |
| Current National Register Sites .....  | 5     |
| Related State Contexts.....  | 6     |
| <br><b>Brief History of Chaska</b> .....   | <br>7 |
| <br><b>Context 1—Native American, Early Archeological, Early Settlement: 1700-1858</b> |       |
| Geography and Location .....   | 9     |
| Native American Settlements and Sites.....   | 10    |
| Early Anglo-European Settlement.....   | 11    |
| City of Chaska .....   | 12    |
| Related State Contexts.....  | 13    |
| Property Types .....   | 13    |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....   | 14    |
| <br><b>Context 2—Chaska Brick: 1857-1950</b>   |       |
| “A Love Affair with Brick” .....   | 15    |
| Brickyard Beginnings .....   | 15    |
| Brickmaking Techniques.....  | 17    |
| Aesthetic Character of Chaska Brick.....   | 18    |
| The Brick as an Economic Engine.....   | 19    |
| Social Implications of Chaska Brick .....  | 21    |
| “The Brick City of the West” - Physical Implications of Chaska Brick .....             | 22    |
| Chaska Brick Throughout the State.....   | 23    |
| Lost Resources .....   | 24    |
| Sites Currently Designated.....  | 24    |
| Property Types .....   | 25    |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....   | 26    |
| <br><b>Context 3—Commerce and Industry and Civic Services: 1850s-1950s</b>             |       |
| A Center for Commerce, Industry, and Civic Pride .....                                 | 29    |
| The Downtown Core .....  | 30    |
| Commerce .....   | 30    |
| Services .....   | 31    |
| The <i>Chaska Herald</i> .....   | 32    |
| Industry .....   | 32    |
| Ess Foundry .....  | 33    |
| Civic Structures .....   | 33    |
| Floods .....   | 34    |
| Property Types .....   | 35    |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....   | 37    |
| <br><b>Context 4—Farmsteads and Agricultural Life: 1852-1950s</b>                      |       |
| The First Farmsteads .....   | 39    |
| Vernacular Construction on the Farmsteads.....   | 40    |
| Chaska’s Agricultural Businesses.....  | 41    |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Milling .....  | 42        |
| “Sugar City” .....   | 42        |
| “It’s the Minnesota Pickle” - Pickling and Canning .....       | 43        |
| Creameries .....   | 44        |
| Breweries .....  | 44        |
| Summary .....  | 44        |
| Sites Currently Designated .....                               | 45        |
| Property Types .....   | 45        |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....                       | 45        |
| <b>Context 5—Transportation: 1700-1950s</b>                    |           |
| River, Road and Rail .....                                     | 47        |
| The River .....  | 47        |
| Roads .....  | 48        |
| The Railroad .....   | 49        |
| Other Transportation .....                                     | 49        |
| Lost Resources .....   | 50        |
| Property Types .....   | 50        |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....                       | 51        |
| <b>Context 6—Religion: 1842-1950s</b>                          |           |
| Three Pillars of the Community .....                           | 52        |
| Guardian Angels .....  | 52        |
| St. John’s .....   | 54        |
| Chaska Moravian Church .....                                   | 55        |
| Other Congregations .....                                      | 57        |
| Associated Properties .....                                    | 57        |
| Lost Resources .....   | 58        |
| Property Types .....   | 58        |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....                       | 59        |
| <b>Context 7—Residential: 1857-1950s</b>                       |           |
| Chaska’s Residential History .....                             | 60        |
| Housing Styles .....   | 60        |
| Residential Special Features .....                             | 67        |
| Multi-Family Housing .....                                     | 67        |
| National Register Properties .....                             | 68        |
| Property Types .....   | 68        |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....                       | 69        |
| <b>Context 8—Preservation of the Recent Past: 1956-present</b> |           |
| A Controversial Topic .....                                    | 71        |
| Recent Past in Chaska .....                                    | 71        |
| Jonathan .....   | 72        |
| Hazeltine Golf Course .....                                    | 74        |
| Other Elements .....   | 75        |
| Property Types .....   | 76        |
| Recommendations and Future Actions .....                       | 77        |
| <b>Recommendations and Future Action General Summary .....</b> | <b>79</b> |
| <b>Bibliography and Sources .....</b>                          | <b>81</b> |
| <b>Appendices .....</b>  | <b>84</b> |
| Chaska Designated Properties .....                             | 84        |
| Proposed Designation Guidelines .....                          | 85        |

# City-Wide Chaska Map



# Downtown Chaska Map



# City of Chaska Historic Context Study

## Introduction

The City of Chaska is proud of its past, and very cognizant of the role its history can play in future development. With the creation of a set of specific historic contexts, the city takes the next important step of tying preservation to planning, ensuring a vibrant future for the community by building on the resources of its past. Historic contexts will allow the city to evaluate its resources and incorporate them in the comprehensive planning process, while securing the character and spirit inherent in Chaska's history.



*Gazebo in Chaska's City Square Park*

The city has long shown a great pride in its past and an emphasis in chronicling its history. This civic spirit is demonstrated in its history books, *Chaska, A Minnesota River History (Volumes 1 and II)*, with *Volume III* underway. The city proceeded to designate its historic resources through several National Register nominations (see below), and through design guidelines for its historic downtown. The *Chaska Herald* has also been an important chronicle of the past. Recent development of this area has capitalized on this preservation planning.

These efforts have been facilitated through leadership and citizenry who are both aware of and involved in historic preservation as an integral part of their daily lives. The city's historical society was established in 1980, and is active in a number of projects ranging from preserving historic resources to collecting oral histories and hosting public presentations. Its museum and

offices are located in a recently-restored 1890 livery stable, located next to City Hall at 112 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The Heritage Preservation Commission is equally active and committed, having commissioned the above work and guided preservation-friendly development.

Chaska is proud of its past, and has done a good job of preserving and enlivening its historic resources. This spirit will carry on in its next efforts, as the city goes about "building the future from its past."

## The Importance of Historic Contexts

The National Park Service, as it evaluates potential National Register properties, is very specific as to the importance of historic contexts. These standards are primarily defined in the publications *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form (Bulletin 16A)*, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Bulletin 15)*, and *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning (Bulletin 24)*. Bulletin 24 defines historic contexts as “broad patterns of historical development in a community or its region, that may be represented by historic resources.” Bulletin 15 expands on the importance of historic context by remarking that “its core premise is that resources, properties or happenings in history do not occur in a vacuum but rather are parts of larger trends or patterns.” Bulletin 16A organizes historic context by “theme, place and time” that “allows applicants to understand a historic property as a product of its time and as an illustration of aspects of heritage.”

In general, historic contexts are considered most valuable as a “framework” for evaluating the relative significance of cultural resources such as varied sites, structures, districts, and other elements. They serve as an organization tool for defining a community’s history, a past which is often otherwise extremely lengthy, complex, and unwieldy.

Rather than concentrating on each individual property, historic contexts focus on broad, overarching themes that would provide the city with the means to organize and evaluate its resources and lend perspective on the past. By developing these preservation themes, the city can most effectively evaluate current resources, designate new ones, and plan for preservation in future generations. The contexts will allow for a more fair designation of properties, as each site can then be viewed in terms of what is best for the city as a whole, rather than as a single instance in isolation. These contexts also assist commissioners in making difficult decisions about the preservation of buildings, sites, and structures that best represent the history of the City of Chaska, and to target future preservation efforts in the areas where they are most effective.

It is the consultants’ understanding that the Heritage Preservation Commission expressly wishes to identify more properties suitable for local and National Register nomination. Although these contexts do not specifically list properties for such designation (except for a few suggestions in the “Recommendations and Future Actions” section), they should help to guide these efforts.

The contexts identified herein can also be used as a rallying point for educational and community participation initiatives and are integral to future planning for land use, economic development, parks and recreation, transportation, public infrastructure, and housing. As more data is organized, the contexts will evolve and change, recommendations will be updated and the contexts will become more useful as long-range planning tools. The expanded contexts, in addition to being a framework for evaluation resources, will be useful in public education programs for neighborhood organizations, government bodies, and local schools. Rather than serving as a static end point that mothballs historic resources, this study designed to be an exciting jumping-off point for the future of preservation in Chaska.

## Objectives and Methodology

As defined above, the main objectives of defining historic contexts for Chaska were to provide a framework for the community's history that can assist in making future planning decisions, including though not limited to National Register nominations.

The study process began by meeting with Chaska's planning staff and its Heritage Preservation Commission to identify prominent local resources, sites, and priorities. The consultants then met with the State Historic Preservation Office regarding federal guidelines and state contexts. They collected and reviewed information and history on the city, ranging from primary sources such as city records, Sanford Fire Insurance maps, and city directories, as well as secondary sources including previous studies and reports and the two immensely helpful Chaska histories. They also compiled a comprehensive map of the city and historic areas, based on several sources. Particularly informative to the process were the many unique resources contained in the History Center.

Working with the Heritage Preservation Commission, the consultants identified eight contexts that most clearly demonstrated Chaska's history as a Minnesota river town and industrial/agricultural center, as well as the particular features that distinguish the community and demonstrate its unique character. The period of influence was defined by the consultants and the Commission as the period between 1769 (when Chaska's written history began) and 1976 (which is when HUD foreclosed on the important planned community of Jonathan, Minnesota).

These contexts are arranged as follows:

Number 1 – "Early History" reflects the Chaska's location, the importance of Woodland and Dakota tribes in the area, and early settlement.

Number 2 – "Chaska Brick" addresses the importance of the town's major industry, including the resources that led to the success of the brickyards, a discussion of the brick industry, the economic and physical implications of Chaska brick, and the use of the material statewide.

Number 3 - "Commerce, Industry, and Civic Leadership" considers the wide range of businesses, industries, and governmental units prevalent in the town, from the importance of the city as the county seat, to the plethora of retail establishments, to services from attorneys to undertakers. The major brick and agricultural industries, however, have their own dedicated contexts.

Number 4 - "Agriculture and Farmsteads" is influenced by the important relationship between Chaska's rural farmsteads and the city. It also looks at Chaska's important agricultural industries, from sugar to pickling to mills and granaries.

Number 5 - "Transportation" focuses on the congruence of river, rail, and road in the city. As time passed the river became less important and the roads more so. Unfortunately, many cultural resources relating to the Transportation context have been lost.

Number 6 - "Religion" looks at the three major Chaska churches and congregations — Guardian Angels Catholic Church, St. John's Lutheran Church, and the Chaska Moravian Church.

Number 7 - "Residential" context spends some time in defining the city's variety of both architect-designed and vernacular housing stock. As many of the remaining resources are constructed of Chaska brick, this necessarily has some overlap with Context #2. This context also suggests some possible National Register nominations.

Number 8 - "Preservation of the Recent Past" is a somewhat unusual context that is based primarily on the importance of Jonathan as an important example of a planned community. It also looks at other recent but influential projects, such as Hazeltine Golf Course, the athletic park, and the levee.

Each context is arranged around a short narrative, which is not designed to be a full history of the city, but rather serves as a brief introduction to the theme. In many cases, some time is spent on descriptions of the past and on lost resources; these narratives are designed to fill in information that would be missing if only current resources were considered, and to demonstrate the importance of remaining properties. The next component is a fairly comprehensive list of typical property types associated with the context; this section also identifies some specific Chaska sites. Visual examples round out the individual sections.



*Turn-of-the-century photograph of the Frederick E. DuToit House at 121 Hickory Street*

Finally, all of the contexts are designed to be modified through time. As mentioned earlier, the City of Chaska has an active Heritage Preservation Commission, which is very interested in preservation and planning. It is the consultants' hope that they will use this context study to develop a number of programs, ranging from a comprehensive site survey to public education processes.

## Current National Register Sites:

Chaska currently has the following listings on the National Register of Historic Places. All were added to the Register in 1980, with the majority of the applications completed by Charles Nelson of the State Historic Preservation Office, with additional research by Lynne Van Brocklin:

|                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Frederick Greiner House            | 319 E. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street |
| Frederick E. DuToit House          | 121 W. Hickory Street         |
| Eder-Baer House                    | 105 N. Elm Street             |
| Brinkhaus Saloon (Livery)          | 112 W. 4 <sup>th</sup> Street |
| Herald Block                       | 123 W. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street |
| EH Lewis House (Lewis-Faber House) | 321 W. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street |
| Simons Building and Livery         | 123 W. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street |

## Walnut Street Historic District — As originally designated

|                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Nord Residence                   | 423 N. Walnut Street     |
| Rowhouses/Tenement Houses        | 414-422 N. Walnut Street |
| Casper Schmidt House             | 415 N. Walnut Street     |
| Dienslake House                  | 412 N. Walnut Street     |
| Moravian Church                  | 4th and Walnut Street    |
| C.P. Klein Mansion               | 205 E. 4th Street        |
| Steinberger Residence            | 320 N. Walnut Street     |
| C.H. Klein Mansion               | 314 N. Walnut Street     |
| Gibson Residence                 | 308 N. Walnut Street     |
| Stege-Klammer House              | 302 N. Walnut Street     |
| Ess Foundry                      | 218 N. Walnut Street     |
| Joseph Ess House                 | 217 N. Walnut Street     |
| Ess House                        | 212 N. Walnut Street     |
| Ess House                        | 211 N. Walnut Street     |
| House                            | 207 N. Walnut Street     |
| Miessler/Schutz House            | 206 N. Walnut Street     |
| Linenfelter & Faber Building (2) | 200 N. Walnut Street     |
| Linenfelter & Faber Building (1) | 123 N. Walnut Street     |
| National Hotel Building          | 123 E. 2nd Street        |
| Phillip Henk Store               | 122 E. 2nd Street        |
| Chaska Auto Body                 | 115 E. 2nd Street        |
| Young Family Home                | 109 E. 2nd Street        |
| Hammer & Bierstettel House       | 107 E. 2nd Street        |
| Diedrick Building                | 100 E. 2nd Street        |
| Werner Store                     | E. 2nd Street            |
| DuToit Bank                      | E. 2nd Street            |
| Ann Marne Decorating             | 224 N. Chestnut Street   |

These sites have been deemed National Register-eligible or pending, but have not yet achieved full listings:

|                       |                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Conrad Fink House     | 322 W. 1 <sup>st</sup> Street |
| Phillip Henk Building | 100 E. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street |
| William Scott House   | 516 Pine Street               |

Finally, these two properties were Register-listed or eligible, but were demolished:

|                             |                                      |                 |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Iltis Brewery and Ice House | Stoughton Avenue and 5 <sup>th</sup> | demolished 1989 |
| Miesler Farmstead           | Chaska Township                      | demolished 2004 |
| Ortlieb Farmstead           | Chaska Township                      | demolished 2005 |

### **Related State Contexts**

The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office has identified several major state historic contexts. Three of these in particular apply to Chaska:

“Indian Communities and Reservations, 1837-1934”

“Early Agriculture and River Settlement, 1840-1870”

“Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940”