

LIVING WITH THE MISSISSIPPI

By Rachel Hines

“Living with the Mississippi” is a blog series that examines the history of the river flats communities and what it means to almost literally live on the Mississippi River.

Follow along to learn more about life on the Mississippi prior to luxury condos and clean river water, before the riverfront was considered a desirable place to live.

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RIVERSIDE COMMUNITIES

OVERLOOKED HINGES BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

by Pat Nunnally

The Mississippi River corridor contains many places that are widely recognized as having national or international significance. But the stories of places where “ordinary” people have made their homes in proximity to the river are, often literally, overlooked.

This week, we begin a [series of blog posts](#) written by recent graduate Rachel Hines, an archaeologist who has conducted extensive study on the various “flats” communities along the Mississippi in the Twin Cities. These low-lying areas were subject to regular inundation by foul-smelling river water, and were sometimes threatened by bigger than usual floods. The people who lived in “Bohemian Flats,” “Little Italy,” “Swede Hollow” and comparable sites were often new immigrants living where land was cheap. In the mid part of the 20th century, these communities often were romanticized as they were destroyed, for various reasons.

But these communities bear closer examination, largely because they have been so easily romanticized and overlooked. Rachel’s series explores the coping strategies that communities developed as they lived in this proximity to a large body of moving water, as well as investigates what happened to these communities and these landscapes after the people left. By studying particular sites closely, and seeing their development through time in detail, we

can gain a measure of insight into what the Mississippi has meant to the communities here.

The series “Living with the Mississippi” takes readers through Bohemian Flats, Little Italy/Upper Levee, West Side Flats, and Swede Hollow: Who was there? How did the community change through time? Why did the people leave and where did they go? What has the land become subsequently?

In some if not all cases, these places are central to the future riverfront planning in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Our series explores themes of place and memory, the river in relation to the communities through which it flows, continuities and differences in ways people have lived in proximity to the Mississippi, and how the river has had variable meanings and uses to different communities through time.

The Mississippi is an iconic, mythic place, as well as a water system of almost incomprehensible complexity. But it is also a location, a place that is central to understanding where we are and what we might imagine our future to be.