



## Great River Road Network of Museums and Interpretive Centers Nomination Form

Name of organization: Oliver Kelley Farm, Minnesota Historical Society

Address: 15788 Kelley Farm Road, Elk River, MN 55330

Phone: 763-441-6896

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Title: Program Manger

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**Introduction:** This is a network of museums and interpretive centers about the Mississippi River along the Great River Road. It is not our intent to select every museum or interpretive center along the Mississippi River, even though we recognize there are hundreds of museums that are doing excellent work. Our goal is to have a network of premier institutions that are willing to work t o g e t h e r to further the interpretive and marketing goals for the Great River R o a d .

### Section 1- Qualifications

The institution must interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river with a high level of quality and be open to the public on a published, regular basis.

1. What story does your institution tell about the Mississippi River as part of its regular daily visitor experience? How does it relate to the themes for interpretation which are attached? Why do you feel that this significant aspect or relationship to the river is presented at a high level of quality? Describe the quality of the visit your guests receive.

Oliver Kelley arrived in Minnesota in 1849 and began working as clerk for the territorial legislature. Like many enterprising young men, when some legislators began to lobby for an act to move the territorial capital from St. Paul to the town site of Itasca, located on the Mississippi River about 35 miles above St. Anthony falls, Kelley saw a chance for profit. While many including Kelley staked claims in nearby Itasca, the capital remained in St. Paul, and Kelley began the arduous task of farming his land.

At first blush, a farm along the banks of the Mississippi River is a good location: there's plenty of wildlife and fish for food, plenty of lumber in the woods for building structures and fires, prayers to be plowed and planted, and the river itself for transportation between Sauk Rapids and St. Anthony. All would have been well had Kelley's land not been so sandy that successful wheat farming was not going to happen. However, following several drought years in the 1860, Kelley invested in a pump and windmill to raise water 20 feet up and out of the Mississippi River to irrigate 10 acres of his land. This was the first irrigation system in Minnesota.

Kelley was also a huge advocate for Minnesota. He loved living here, and purchased another 60 acres of land on the other side of the River to develop a new town, Northwood. However, the panic of 1857 forced Kelley to relinquish his interest and the town quickly died.

Kelley used the river for travel on a steam packet, The "Governor Ramsey" traveled up and down the river twice a week. A toot from the steam pack whistle would bring Kelley to his landing to perform weddings (he was a justice of the peace) signing legal papers (he was a Notary Public) or send correspondence (he was a columnist for the Sauk Rapids Frontierman.)

During Kelley's time, the river would have been more visible as the woodchoppers would have chopped down trees for firewood. It would have been more accessible for obtaining water for livestock. In the winter, it froze over and Kelley noted that he cut ice during the winter in the 1850s.

Today, the Mississippi River is mostly sheltered from view while standing on the front porch of the historic house when the trees are leafed out, (the other side of the river has more modern development on it). On a horse drawn trolley ride, visitors ride through the woods, and along the river, stopping for several minutes to enjoy the view in an overlook opening and hearing about the story you have just read. They also discover the rich beauty of this active wildlife corridor filled with waterfowl, Bald Eagles circling above and hundreds of Great Blue Heron nests nearby. The river is filled with fish, and the woods with deer, coyotes, and turkeys. And sometimes, boats come by with people fishing, or floating, or waving to our passengers.

The themes of the river as a ribbon of life for people, plants and animals are covered, how the river has influenced people and people have influenced the river is covered, how the river has profoundly shaped American History is covered, that the Mississippi River is one of the world's great rivers noted for its beauty, grandeur and diversity is covered, the history of river transportation and the dramatic story reflecting the river's economic and commercial importance is covered, and the story of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century river towns is covered.

Visitors experience the impact of the river during their visits through discussions with staff, and glimpses of the river through the trees from the historic farmstead. The horse drawn trolley interpretive program provides an in depth look at the specific points mentioned above. Visitors may also walk the trail and hike almost half a mile along the bank of the river. A mowed path from the farmstead area between the garden and cattle yard provides access for visitors to walk down to the river and dip their toes in, skip rocks, or admire turtles sleeping on logs, or ducks swimming by.

This portion of the Mississippi River at the Oliver Kelley Farm tells the story of human survival that the river provided during a time of exploration, settlement, and economic growth in Minnesota.

2. What is the length of stay for the typical visitor experience at your institution? Please provide what you consider an average time, what you consider a short stay and what you consider a long stay for regular attendance.

The typical length of a visit is 90 minutes. A short stay is 45 minutes; a long stay is over 2 hours. Many families bring a picnic lunch and stay almost all day. Visitors explore and participate in activities and discussions that are ongoing across the entire farm site, and choose how much time they wish to devote based on their own level of interest and engagement.

3. What educational or interpretive programs beyond exhibits do you conduct that interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river?

We offer a horse drawn trolley ride that travels a short distance along the Mississippi River. We stop for 5 – 10 minutes at an area that has a great view of the river and discuss how the river impacted Oliver Kelley's life, others that lived and worked on the river, and how the use of the river has changed over time.

We also have a hiking trail that goes along the bank of the river for ½ mile that visitors enjoy at their leisure.

Staff also use the river during discussions with visitors to help illustrate Kelley's activities that relied upon the river as a farmer, newspaper columnist, Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, and town developer.

4. What are your published and regular hours? Please describe hours for various seasons.

We are currently open Weekends in May (Sat. 10 am – 5 pm and Sun. Noon – 5pm)  
Memorial Day – Labor Day (Wed. – Sat. 10 am – 5 pm, Sun, Noon – 5pm)  
Weekends in September and October (Sat. 10 am – 5 pm, Sun Noon – 5 pm)

These hours will be changing in 2017 to:

Weekends in April and May (Sat. 10 am – 5 pm and Sun. 10 am – 5pm)  
Memorial Day – Labor Day (Tues. – Sat. 10 am – 5 pm and Sun. Noon – 5pm)  
Weekends in September and October (Sat. 10 am – 5 pm, Sun Noon – 5 pm)

5. What is the annual attendance for regular museum hours at your site, exclusive of special events? What is the admission fee?

Current annual attendance for public hours is 15,000 visitors.

Admission is \$9.00 for adults, \$7.00 for seniors, college students and active military, \$6.00 for children ages 5 – 17 years, free for children age 4 years and younger, and Minnesota Historical Society members.

6. What is your proximity to the Great River Road?

The Great River Road runs the length of the property on the other side of the river. It is accessible two miles from the Kelley Farm via Highway 101.

7. Did you enclose a letter of endorsement from your state Mississippi River Parkway Commission?

Attached.

**Section II-Duties and Obligations:**

1. Members of the network must have the Great River Road map at their site, at a minimum for reference, but preferably for sale or for distribution to visitors. One map will be provided as will an order form for additional maps. Will you agree to stock and/or sell the Great River Road map?

Yes, we can both stock and sell maps.

2. Members of the network must ensure that front line personnel who have contact with the public are knowledgeable of and will promote the Great River Road and the museums and interpretive centers in the region. Describe how you will ensure that your front line personnel will be trained, briefed and monitored.

We train staff every spring before we open for public hours. We provide training materials for staff that will be working the admissions desk. Copies of those materials and any updates are included in a staff log book located at the admissions desk.

The Oliver Kelley Farm Historic Site will work with other MNHS sites designated as GRR Interpretive Centers to ensure initial training sessions and provide materials for newly designated sites as well as annual review visits for all GRR Interpretive Centers under the MNHS umbrella. The MNHS Director of Historic Sites and Museums will coordinate with the MN-MRPC Director and Regional Commissioners to schedule the training sessions and meetings. The MN-MRPC office will also serve as an on-going contact point for questions and needs during the year.

3. Are you willing to display signage at your center showing that you are a member of the Great River Road Network? This may be inside or outside signage, but must be prominently displayed. Where will you display the Interpretive Center sign?

We are willing to display signage. We will need to determine the best location once our new construction is completed whether it is inside or outside of the Visitor Center.

4. Are you willing to secure the needed funds to have an officially approved Great River Road Interpretive Center sign erected at your site?

Yes.

### **Section III -Capacity:**

The following questions are asked primarily for information purposes and will not be major factors in determination of inclusion in the network.

1. Do you have access to the internet? If your facility has a website, what is the address? Do you have the ability to post the [www.experiencemississippiriver.com](http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com) website on our website?

Yes, we have internet access. Our website is [www.mnhs.org/kelleyfarm](http://www.mnhs.org/kelleyfarm)  
We can include the link on our website.

2. Do you have traveling exhibit space? If so, what size is it in square footage? Would you be willing or interested in hosting a traveling exhibit?

We may have up to 200 square feet in our new visitor center. There may also be an option for exhibit space in our Multipurpose building of 100 square feet, which is adjacent to our nature trails.

*Please send photos of your interpretive center, both inside and outside, to 701 E. Washington Ave. Suite 202 Madison, WI 53703. Call 866-763-8310 if you have questions.*

### **PROCESS**

Nominations may be sent simultaneously to the chair of your state Mississippi River Parkway Commission and/or directly to the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission Office, 701 E. Washington Ave. Suite 202 Madison, WI 53703. Nominations must be received by September 1 to be eligible for consideration at the Annual Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting each year. Please include a letter of endorsement by your state Mississippi River Parkway Commission Commissioner. This is extremely important.

Nominations are reviewed by the Heritage and Culture Committee of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission. This committee has representation from all 10 states of the Mississippi River. Nominations are then also approved by the Board of Directors of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission.

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To date, there are over 70 centers in the Great River Road Network that interpret the stories of the Mississippi River. These centers reside along the 10-state stretch of the river and range from museums, parks, nature centers, aquariums, historic and prehistoric sites. Benefits to Network members include: a listing on the Great River Road map distributed nationally, a listing in the touch screen kiosk at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium in Dubuque, listing on the MRPC website, and listing on signage at each GRR center along the river.



## Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission

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**Members of the House:** Sheldon Johnson (DFL – 67B) – Chair **Members of the Senate:** David Senjem (R – 25); Patricia Torres Ray (DFL – 63) **State Agency Appointees:** Paul Hugunin – Agriculture, Scott Bradley – Transportation, Adam Johnson – Explore Minnesota Tourism, Keith Parker – Natural Resources, Andrea Kajer – Historical Society **Regional Appointees:** Nancy Salminen – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids, Anne Lewis – Grand Rapids to Brainerd, Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River, Cordelia Pierson – Elk River to Hastings, Sheronne Mulry – Hastings to Iowa Border **Member at Large:** Mark Anderson

July 29, 2016

Mississippi River Parkway Commission  
701 E Washington Avenue, #202  
Madison, WI 53703

Re: Oliver Kelley Farm Interpretive Center Nomination

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Minnesota is pleased to recommend the Oliver Kelley Farm for addition to the Network of Great River Road Interpretive Centers. The Kelley Farm is a Minnesota Historical Society property located on the banks of the Mississippi River and focused on the history and tradition of agriculture in the region.

As a National Historic Landmark, the highest designation given by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Oliver Kelley Farm is a nationally-significant feature. The site is a working 1860s farm and was home to Oliver H. Kelley, founder of the first successful national farming organization, the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange. A historic wayside at the entrance to the farm was recently restored as part of a project including 12 Great River Road historic waysides on the National Register of Historic Places.

The MN-MRPC featured the Kelley Farm as a regional highlight in our Great River Road video series. When Minnesota hosted the National Scenic Byways Conference, the site and its management were selected for a mobile workshop, sharing best practices with specialists from around the world. The Commission also provided letters of support for the site's request for funds to upgrade the visitor center, now under construction and scheduled for completion in fall of 2016 and a grand opening in spring of 2017. The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) is a member agency of the Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission, and the new Minnesota Great River Road Corridor Management Plan includes a recommendation to nominate MNHS sites that are not yet included in the Network of Great River Road Interpretive Centers. This nomination helps carry out that recommendation.

The MN-MRPC looks forward to the Oliver Kelley Farm's selection as a National Great River Road Interpretive Center, and to helping promote this unique and exceptional site to travelers from all Mississippi River states and beyond.

Sincerely,

Rep. Sheldon Johnson  
Chair







