

# A Big Hearted Paleface Man

Nathan Richardson & The  
History of Morrison County, MN

By Mary Warner

Containing the Full Text of  
Nathan Richardson's  
1876 & 1880 Histories of Morrison County

Morrison County Historical Society  
Little Falls, MN  
2006

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Dedicated to the memory of  
William & Burneze Krafve & Carl A. Weyerhaeuser

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Drawing by Nathan Richardson



Drawing by Nathan Richardson

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# Acknowledgments

Any book that has been in the works for over 30 years necessarily has a lot of people who've contributed to its birth in some way. *A Big Hearted Paleface Man* is no different. The original concept for the book was sparked in the minds of Jan and Art Warner shortly after they began their tenure with the Morrison County Historical Society (MCHS) in the mid-1960s. They became aware that the Carnegie Library in Little Falls had a ledger containing newspaper clippings of Nathan Richardson's 1876 history of Morrison County. Anne Merrick typed a copy of this history so that the Historical Society would have it on file. The Warners thought that reprinting this history in book form would be a useful and accessible guide to the area's early history. As Jan learned more about Nathan Richardson, she realized that any republication of his history should also include a biography of this fascinating man. The task was daunting and years passed, with bits of information on Richardson added here and there. The Carnegie Library donated the ledger to MCHS in 1986. The Historical Society acquired newspapers from the 1880s, which contained an update of Richardson's county history. Computer technology was adopted by the Historical Society in the 1990s, and with it came our ability to create publications. The stars aligned on the project and I started serious research for Richardson's biography about three years ago. Jan's incredible mental storehouse of county history was always available to get me out of any jams. With the support of Art and Jan and the Historical Society's Board of Directors, I was given the time and space needed to write the biography and do the myriad other tasks (scanning, typing, editing, layout, etc.) that come with putting together a book, the book you now have in your possession. Jan, Art and the Board deserve my undying gratitude for giving me the chance to work on this book.

Bunches of other people have assisted on this book in some way. Thank you to the following for their contributions -- For past research compiled: Tom Christensen, Bruce Mellor, Kim Czech, and other past employees of MCHS. For retyping Richardson's 1876 history: Gabrielle (VanRisseghem) Meyer and Andrea (VanRisseghem) Skoglund. For research questions answered: Lynn Betlock; Dorothy Locken of the Beltrami County Historical Society; Charleen at the Roseau County Historical Society; Diane Clercx of the Murray County Museum; Mo Galvin of the Wright County Historical Society; Marilyn at the Olmstead County Historical Society; Patricia Maus at the St. Louis County Historical Society; Tom Zoner and Vanessa Temples of the Charter Township of Commerce, Michigan; Richard Carlson, Little Falls City Administrator; Fran Wilson of the Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society in Pontiac, Michigan; and Kathy Evavold of the Ottertail County Historical Society. For providing research resources: Steve Nielsen, Reference Associate at the Minnesota Historical Society; McCormick Books; the Maureen & Mike Mansfield Library/K. Ross Toole Archives at the University of Montana; Connie Waytashek in the Morrison County Administrator's office; and Russ Nygren, Morrison County Auditor. For crucial tips that led to major insights into the life of Nathan Richardson: Duane Lund, Bruce White, and Don Wedl. For helping me figure out the footnote function on my layout program: Ann Delgehausen. For photographing Richardson artifacts: Glenys Warner-Holman. For editing portions of the biography: Camille Warzecha and Deb Collis.

This book would not exist had it not been for the Richardson family: First, and foremost, Nathan, who had the foresight to write so much, which has been both a blessing and a curse; and next, Mary (Richardson) Harker, Nate's daughter, and Severen Hennenlotter, Nate's nephew, for saving family documents, books and artifacts, and for thinking to donate them to MCHS. The Richardson family's interest in history continues with one of his great-great-grandson's, Henry O. Davies. Henry's wife, Toni, contacted me while conducting family research and provided me with information on Raymond Richardson's line. Because of the large amount of data I had to weed through in order to write Richardson's biography, I regret that Toni's information didn't make it into the book, but it is filed at The Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum for those of you who'd like to see it.

A special thank you to the Morrison County Board of Commissioners, William Block, Don Meyer, Jeff Schilling, Tom Wenzel, and Eugene Young, and County Administrator Tim Houle, for being supportive of the mission of MCHS in general and for their interest in this book specifically.

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To Alice Smuda, Museum Assistant, and Ann Marie Johnson, Curator of Collections, thank you, thank you, many times thank you, for running interference when I needed uninterrupted time at the computer, for reading and editing drafts, and for putting up with my piles of research materials and artifacts.

I've been extremely fortunate to have so much support on this book through my job, yet, as anyone producing a book knows, the manuscript and the questions do not remain at work; they follow the writer home. Thank you to my writer friend, Cindy Moore, who supports all of my writing projects and keeps asking me how this one is going. (If you're reading this, Cindy, it's done!) Thanks to my children, Ian, Olivia, and Sebastian, for being so good and self-maintaining that I can work without worry (at least, not much worry). And, last, but not least, I am forever grateful to my loving husband, Erik, for listening as I've imparted endless tidbits of Richardson's life and the trials and joys of writing and publishing. He also spent a crazy day with me at Calvary Cemetery trying to locate Nathan Richardson's gravestone under the snow. (Now that's love!) It is his photo that became "The End."

All of you prove that it truly takes a village to raise a book.



# Foreword

*Nothing happens unless first a dream*  
--Carl Sandburg

The recurring “dream”, over a forty year period, of publishing the life and work of Nathan Richardson has been realized. The book has not been written by me, as I had once planned, but by a more able author, Mary Warner. There are few who understand the important role of this remarkable man, or even recognize his name, but those who begin to study the history of Morrison County and central Minnesota will quickly become acquainted with the legacy he has left. Richardson’s vision, dedication, tenacity and eternal optimism helped move Little Falls from a small settlement to a bustling city, and doubled the size of Morrison County. Through difficult times, when others abandoned the area, Richardson never gave up.

How I would have enjoyed visiting with this man. What would it have been like? He is said to have been a big man. How tall was he? What kind of voice did he have? Did he speak in a measured manner or did excitement fill his voice? What color were his eyes? His speeches imply that his tongue could be a sword when he was attacked, but could also be a silver ladle spooning out praise. Some questions cannot be answered in a written history.

In *A Big Hearted Paleface Man*, Mary has brought together the various facets of Richardson’s life. Mary’s curiosity, devotion to the task, and story-telling writing make this book inspiring to read. In addition, the republication of Nathan Richardson’s histories will bring the lives of early Morrison County residents to a wider audience. It is a book that will become a lasting reference used by future generations.

The Hon. George Wetzel has often said that the county should have been named Richardson County considering his immense influence. The lives of today’s residents, the population of the area, and the environment in which we all live are but a few of the things that have been impacted by his more than 50 years of public service.

The Morrison County Historical Society is pleased to publish *A Big Hearted Paleface Man* as part of the Sesquicentennial Celebration of Morrison County. The Morrison County Board of Commissioners has commissioned a monument of Nathan Richardson to be placed on the Government Center grounds. It is appropriate that the man most responsible for the County’s beginnings be honored on this 150th anniversary.

Jan Warner  
Executive Director, Morrison County Historical Society

# Introduction

It's a plain business ledger, commonly used around the turn of the twentieth century, quite tattered, with pale blue, lined pages. Pasted within are newspaper clippings, a serial of the History of Morrison County written by Nathan Richardson and some clippings about Fr. Arthur Lamothe's death and funeral. It's the sort of ledger that could be easily overlooked, or perhaps, tossed in the trash . . . until one looks closer.

Further examination of the ledger reveals that some of the blue pages have been cut out. There are scribbles that don't belong. One of Nathan's children, probably Mary, maybe Clara, has practiced her handwriting in the ledger. It was Mary who donated the ledger to the Carnegie Public Library in Little Falls. Was it she who pasted the clippings into the book? The newspaper clippings are undated. No, wait. A clipping on page 107 ends with "Dated this 30th day of November, A.D. 1876." So this is Richardson's first history of Morrison County. He was hired by the County Commissioners to write it on July 27, 1876, and was paid \$100 upon its completion on December 7, 1876. Less than half a year.

Some of the words in the clippings have been crossed out. There are faint notes penciled into the margins along the edges of the clippings. It becomes clear that whoever pasted the clippings into the book was editing them. And the handwriting is familiar. Could it be? I almost can't believe it, but it must be. Nathan Richardson handled this book. Reverence!

Richardson pasted his articles into an old ledger, something he obviously had no concern for - hence the handwriting practice and cut pages - glued the clippings down and edited away, X-ing large amounts in preparation for the 1880 edition.

But, there's more. This was an account book for a business before it became a scrapbook. People purchasing sundries and flannel shirts and whiskey and tobacco and more sundries. The names are familiar, a regular Who's Who of early county settlers: James Warren, Jonathan Pew, William Nickels, S. B. Olmstead, Captain Todd, William Sturgis, Allen Morrison, Henry Beaulieu, Duncan McDougall and more, recognizable even with some phoenetic spellings. And, what's this date? 1852. It can't be. Well, yes, it is. Page after page of 1852 entries, so I'm not misreading it. That's *three years before* Nathan Richardson arrived in Minnesota Territory. How did he get this ledger? Golly, look at all the people living in the area prior to his arrival, and no record of most of these folks in *History of the Upper Mississippi Valley* (an early history published in 1881). More questions.

But, it's just a plain business ledger, quite tattered . . . rescued.

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Welcome to *A Big Hearted Paleface Man: Nathan Richardson and the History of Morrison County, MN*. The book has several main sections. The Historical Context chapter will give you an overview of what was going on in the larger world between 1855 and 1908, the time Richardson spent in Morrison County. Following this is a biography of Nathan, a text that only covers a fraction of the man's life. Future researchers are invited to use this biography as a jumping-off point for further research. Believe me, there's plenty

more where this came from. The next chapter contains Richardson's inaugural addresses from when he was mayor of Little Falls. The address for 1890 is missing because newspapers, the source for the other addresses, are nonexistent for that year, so far as we know. You'll find a section of color plates after the inaugural addresses. These showcase some of the Richardson family artifacts in the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. I've also included a 1916 map of Morrison County for those of you who need visual reference points for county events. After the color plates are Richardson's 1876 and 1880 histories of Morrison County.

In preparing to reprint Nathan Richardson's 1876 and 1880 histories, there was considerable fretting over editing and arranging the original newspaper articles. We decided early on that for historical accuracy we would change very little, only obvious typographical errors. (We hope we haven't added our own typos to the text!) Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation conventions have been maintained, all of which lend to the flavor of the era. Richardson was fond of run-on paragraphs, and you'll find these intact. We also decided to keep the arrangement of the articles as found in the newspapers, rather than breaking the articles up according to topic. In the case of the 1876 history, each article is begun with a serial number that shows the order the articles appeared as pasted in the rescued ledger book. We do not have the actual dates these articles ran in the newspaper. For the 1880 version, we referenced the newspaper article by date at the head of each serial.

And, to think, this all started with a ledger book that could have found its way to the trash. May our good fortune be your good fortune. We hope you enjoy *A Big Hearted Paleface Man*.

Mary Warner  
Museum Manager, Morrison County Historical Society  
February 2006