

Naming Minnehaha Falls

Thank you all for your assistance in my search to determine the origin of the name “Brown’s Falls” as an early name for Minnehaha Falls. I thought I’d let you know of my findings to this point.

The over whelming evidence points to Brown’s Falls (and creek) being named for Jacob Brown, major general and commander in chief of the army from 1814 – 1828 rather than for Joseph R. Brown, teenage musician at Fort Snelling and later army sergeant (1820-1828), fur trader, politician, editor, and inventor. However, I have not yet found a document that officially or specifically mentions Jacob Brown as the namesake. As many have pointed out, naming the falls/creek for a teenager, which Joseph R. Brown was in 1823 when the first use of “Brown” appears, seems unlikely.

The name “Browns Fall/Creek” seems to be most associated with military maps and personnel while “Little Falls/Creek” seems to be favored by those without a strong military connection although there are exceptions. The Dakota name for the falls might benefit from more research.

I list my sources below. It has been suggested that the Jarvis letters at Fort Snelling may yield information. Jarvis would ride his horse each day and recorded the landscape. A map by Taliaferro is cited but Agency Records may yield more information (through a search for coal burning because oak trees near the creek were used.) Books written by Jon H. Stevens, William Folwell and William Joseph Snelling or Henry Hunt Snelling may also yield additional information.

Sources:

- *Geographic Name Places of Minnesota* by Warren Upham
- *Minnesota’s Major Historic Sites, A Guide* by June Drenning Holmquist and Jean A Brookins.
- *Joseph R. Brown, Adventurer on the Minnesota Frontier 1820-1849* by Robert & Nancy Goodman
- Conversation with author Nancy Goodman
- Urbancreek.com, site creator Karen Cooper
- E-mail correspondence with Karen Cooper
- Before the Fort: Native American Presence at the Confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, 2002, Prepared for the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Archaeological Research at the former Twin Cities Bureau of Mines Testing Facility, Minnesota by Robert A. Clouse, RPA Archaeology Department, MHS, 2001, Prepared for the National Park Service
- History of Minnehaha Creek Watershed by Rich and Susan Cairn For the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District 2003
- <http://web.mac.com/alliesms/Memory/MinnehahaFallsandCreek.html>

Dates and Names of Minnehaha Falls and Minnehaha Creek

Date	Name of Falls	Name of Creek	Source
Dakota	Haha Little Waterfall		<p>The common Dakota word for waterfall is <i>haha</i>, which they applied to the Falls of St. Anthony, to Minnehaha, and in general to any waterfall or cascade. To join the words <i>minne</i>, "water," and <i>haha</i>, "a fall," seems to be a suggestion of white men, which thereafter came into use among the Indians.</p> <p>The late Samuel W. Pond, Jr., in his admirable book, <i>Two Volunteer Missionaries</i>, narrating the lives and work of his father and uncle, Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond, wrote: "The Indian name, 'Little Waterfall,' is given . . . in speaking of the falls now called by white people 'Minnehaha.' The Indians never knew it by the latter name, bestowed upon it by the whites."</p> <p>Minnesota Place Names, Warren Upham, 1920</p>
Dakota	Mini Haha	Wakpa Cistinna (Little River)	History of Minnehaha Creek Watershed by Rich and Susan Cairn For the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District 2003, Study cites: Where the Waters Gather and the Rivers Meet: an Atlas of the Eastern Sioux," by Paul Durand, Prior Lake, 1994.)
Dakota	Mnigaga	Wakpa Cistinna	The Dakota name, Mnigaga, is a compound work - Mni- means 'water,' and gaga means - 'curling' or 'waterfall.' The translation 'laughing waters' is incorrect and became popular after Mary Henderson Eastman published her book, "Dacotah" in 1849. http://web.mac.com/alliesms/Memory/MinnehahaFallsandCreek.html
1823	Brown Falls	Not named	Ca. 1823 topographical map of Fort St. Anthony (Ft. Snelling) vicinity (cartographer thought to be Lt. Morrill Marsdon), "Before the Fort"
1824	Browns Fall		Narrative of an expedition to the source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeck, Lake of the Woods, Vol. 1, Ch. 7, Stephan Long, 1824
1820-30s	Little Falls		"But the most charming of all our recreations was a ride to "Little Falls" now 'Minnehaha'." "Three Score Years and Ten' Life-Long Memories of Fort Snelling, MN, and Other Parts of the West, 1888 by Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve
1835	Little Falls	Falls Creek	Taliaferro Map- MHS 2F G 4144 .M5:2F39 1835 .T334
1835		"...it is called by the Indians 'the little river'..."	Samuel Pond as cited in the study, "Before the Fort"
1839	Little Falls	Falls Creek	R. Ames Colby, Topographical View of a Portion of the Military Reserve, Embracing Ft Snelling, ca Oct., Nov. 1839
1839	Brown's Falls	Brown's Creek	Topographical Survey of the Military Reservation Embracing Fort Snelling, Thompson- "Before the Fort"
1843		Cascade Creek	Joseph Nicollet- Map of the hydrographical basin of the upper Mississippi river, 1843
1847		"a small river, without a name, the parent of a most beautiful waterfall"	<i>A Summer in the Wilderness; embracing a Canoe Voyage up the Mississippi and around Lake Superior</i> , by Charles Lanman (1847, 208 pp.) Urbanecreek.com
1849	"Little Falls" but notes the Indians call the Falls Mine-hah-hah		Mary Eastman- <i>Dacotah Life or Life and Legends of the Sioux</i>
1855	Minnehaha		H. W. Longfellow, Song of Hiawatha- cites M. Eastman