

A Short History

Even though New Richmond is a modern, growing city, there's still the feel of a small town and the distinct echoes of the farming community that New Richmond once was.

Growth continues in the 21st century. The city added more than 3,000 people to its population between the 2010 and 2020 census counts. Now there are more than 11,500 people living here.

Today, New Richmond is among the fastest-growing communities in St. Croix County, which is among the fastest growing counties in the state.

In 1855, this region was a combination of open prairie and heavy woods when the first white settler arrived.

A Maine Yankee named B.C.B. Foster left his home in New England for the wilds of St. Croix County, which had been platted just a few years before his arrival.

Foster, journeying northeast from where the steamboat dropped him off in Hudson, built a home along a ford in the Willow River, just upstream from what is now the Wisconsin highway 65 (Knowles Avenue) bridge downtown.

The settlement's original name was Foster's Crossing, and it was the beginning of a community that was platted by a man named Richmond Day, whose first name may have given New Richmond its name.

The State of Wisconsin granted New Richmond its charter in 1885. Spurred by hard-working settlers and rich farmland, the community prospered and grew.

New Richmond was a bustling farm community of about 2,500 citizens when - on a fateful summer day in June 1899 - the city was all but destroyed by a tornado in what still ranks as one of the worst natural disasters in state history and ranks ninth in the nation's history.

A devastating blow such as that might be expected to have sounded the city's death knell. But New Richmond's citizens worked so hard to rebuild that by the end of the cyclone year, the downtown business district was functioning once more.

From the ruin of 1899 has grown a thriving community. But even as it transforms into a suburban environment, New Richmond hasn't forgotten to maintain the spirit of a rural town.

In spite of the devastation wrought by the tornado, New Richmond's historic nature is still visible in two locations. The First Street I historic District, recognized during the late 1980s by the National Register of Historic Places, is a collection of gracious mansions that escaped the devastation of the 1899 cyclone. Shady streets and Victorian architecture give the neighborhood its unique character.

The other location is the Heritage Center on South Knowles Avenue, a creation of the New Richmond Preservation Society. Its collection of 10 historic buildings includes restored homes, a general store and farm buildings which once were located elsewhere in the city, or were brought in from locations in St. Croix and Polk counties.

Industry and commerce have built and strengthened the economy of New Richmond and promises to grow even stronger in the future. The Business & Technical Park continues to grow each year with companies continuing to be added.