

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

CL-TLK-004
CS 0901

Wrenshall Overlook/Veterans' Memorial Ov

Historic Name	Wrenshall Overlook/Veterans' Memorial Ov	CS #	0901
Other Name	Veterans' Scenic Overlook	SHPO Inv #	CL-TLK-004

Location	NW side of TH 23 1.3 mi N of CSAH 18	Hwy	TH 23
City/Township	Twin Lakes Township	District	1A
County	Carlton	Reference	334.4

Twp Rng Sec	48N 16W Sec 13	Acres	10.9
USGS Quad	Esko	Rest Area Class	4
UTM	Z15 E552200 N5164770		

Designer	Nichols, A R, Attributed	SP #	0901 "or SP 5303"
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Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SHPO Review #	91-1430
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Historic Use	Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013537.01-10
Present Use	Roadside Parking Area		

Yr of Landscape Design	1947-49	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 1.14 Ols 1.14a Ols 1.15
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Overall Site Integrity	Very Altered		
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Review Required	Yes		
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National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
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Historic Context			
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List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Overlook Wall	1949	
02	Overlook Wall	1991	
03	Flagpole(s), Other	1991	
04	Picnic Table(s), Other	1991	

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

Fieldwork Date	10-09-97
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Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 81
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Prep for	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

The Wrenshall Overlook/Veterans Memorial Overlook is located on the northwestern side of T.H. 23 (also called "Evergreen Memorial Drive," now "Veterans' Evergreen Memorial Drive") in Section 13 of Silver Brooks Township. It is located about two miles southwest of the Duluth city limits, and about three miles northeast of the city of Wrenshall. The property is within the boundaries of Jay Cooke State Park. Across T.H. 23 to the east is Fond du Lac State Forest.

This property was originally designed as two separate sites whose entrance drives were located about 1300' apart. The southern site, known as Wrenshall Overlook or Fond du Lac Overlook, consists of a stone overlook wall that is no longer accessible by vehicles. The northern site, known variously as Veterans' Memorial Overlook, Veterans' Scenic Overlook, or Veterans' Memorial Scenic Overlook, originally consisted of a parking area and a single stone marker. It now consists of a parking area and a concrete overlook wall.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Southern Overlook Wall. Built 1949 by MHD. The southern structure consists of the remnants of a stone overlook wall that was built on a high bluff overlooking the St. Louis River Valley and Jay Cooke State Park (primarily to the north and west). The only portion of the overlook that is still standing is the circular lookout bay.

The overlook was originally a rectangular structure that was aligned north and south. It consisted of stone walls that enclosed a 165' by 80' parking area that was paved with asphalt. A 24'-wide gap in the walls created an entrance to the parking area on the southern side of the structure. At the northwestern corner was a circular lookout bay. Today this is the only extant portion of the Wrenshall Overlook. At the northeastern corner was a smaller square lookout bay. The plans specify that the stone walls were to have been lined with a concrete walkway.

The circular lookout bay has a radius of about 15'6" and a 14'-wide opening. The walls are about 18" and 30" tall. They are anchored at intervals by piers that are about 36" square and 36" tall. The walls are made of random ashlar granite rubble (and some split boulders) in various shades of light and dark gray and pink. The piers are made of ashlar, rather than rubble. The circular lookout bay has a poured concrete floor that has been replaced. There were originally four curved benches with poured concrete seats and stone bases located within the circular bay. The benches are missing.

The overlook wall was originally accessed via a 550'-long entrance drive that led westward from T.H. 23. It is now accessed via an asphalt-paved walkway (about 1500' long) that leads to the Southern Overlook from the parking area near the Northern Overlook.

Northern Overlook Wall. Built 1991 by Mn/DOT. The northern overlook area, which also overlooks the St. Louis River Valley and Jay Cooke State Park, originally contained a lectern-style marker and a small gravel parking area that were built in 1947. The northern area now contains a concrete block overlook wall that was built in 1991. It is a circular structure built of textured gray concrete block laid three courses tall and topped with a poured concrete

cap. The walls encircle a poured concrete floor. There are five lectern-style concrete piers on top of the wall. Three of the piers are mounted with metal plaques. The texts of the plaques commemorates veterans and the Evergreen Memorial Drive. (See texts at the end of this document.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The southern stone overlook is approached via a newly-paved, 8'-wide, asphalt walkway that leads from the northern overlook's parking area. The original gravel entrance road that led from T.H. 23 to the Southern Overlook is now overgrown with grasses and a few small pines.

The Northern Overlook Wall is located at the western edge of a recently reconstructed, asphalt-paved parking area that is lined with a concrete curb. There is a narrow concrete island between the parking area and T.H. 23. A wide concrete sidewalk runs along the western side of the parking area. Near the parking area are two flagpoles and two modern wooden and metal picnic tables bolted to poured concrete pads and two flagpoles.

The topography of the site is very hilly, with the overlooks located about 250' above the elevation of the river. All portions of the site are naturally forested. Small areas of grass appear to comprise the only additional landscape plantings.

■ SETTING

Both overlooks provide outstanding long views of the St. Louis River Valley, Jay Cooke State Park, and surrounding forests to the north and west. The site is located within the boundaries of Jay Cooke State Park. Across T.H. 23 to the east is Fond du Lac State Forest. The site is surrounded by trees. One residence is located across T.H. 23 to the east. T.H. 23 forms the eastern boundary of the inventoried property.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

At the Southern Overlook, the existing circular lookout bay appears to have been built according to plan, suggesting that the rest of the Southern Overlook was probably also built to plan.

Most of the Southern Overlook was removed in 1991. The remaining portion, the circular lookout bay, has been patched poorly several times with various mortar materials. The benches have been removed from the circular bay and a new concrete floor has been poured.

The northern portion of the site was also altered extensively in 1991. It has been changed from a small parking area with one stone lectern-style marker to a modern paved parking area with a new concrete block overlook wall, flagpoles, and permanent picnic tables.

The site retains integrity of location and setting. The site has lost integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The Southern Overlook needs mortar repair. The Northern Overlook and its surrounding site are in good condition.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This site was originally two scenic overlooks whose entrance drives were located about 1,300' apart. The Veterans' Memorial Overlook (the northern site) was established in 1947. The Wrenshall (or Fond du Lac) Overlook (the southern site) was established in 1949.

The first structure at the northern overlook was a free-standing, coursed ashlar granite, lectern-style marker with a plaque entitled "Evergreen Memorial Drive." The marker was dedicated in October of 1947, at the same time that Evergreen Memorial Drive was dedicated to the men and women of Carlton, Pine, and St. Louis Counties who had served in the Armed Forces. (The plaque of the 1947 marker is mounted on the current Northern Overlook Wall.) A 1953 photograph shows that the gravel parking area was lined with a guardrail comprised of timber posts joined with a cable. The guardrail presumably ran along the western edge of the parking area. At some point, the upper course of stone on the lectern marker was replaced with poured concrete.

The Southern Overlook and parking area were built in 1949 as a roadside development project. MHD site plans for the Southern Overlook include one plan sheet, which was drawn in December 1940, for an overlook wall similar, but not identical, to the wall that was constructed in 1949. The 1940 plan sheet is entitled "Tentative Study for Turnout and Overlook on Trunk Highway No. 23 Near Fondulac [sic]." It includes the notation "Study by A.R.N. [A. R. Nichols] and H. E. O. [Harold E. Olson]."

The final plans for the Southern Overlook were signed in July of 1948 by S. Rex Green (Engineer of Lands and Right-of-Way), Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), R. J. Wolfangle (Engineer of Plans), Walter Schultz (Asst. Engineer of Plans and Surveys), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Plans and Surveys), O. L. Kipp (Chief Engineer), and J. F. Eichstadt?? [illeg.] (no title given).

In circa 1955, a lectern-style stone marker with a geological plaque was added to the top of the Southern Overlook wall. The text of this plaque addressed the geology of the St. Louis River. (See text at the end of this document.) The plaque is no longer at the site.

On October 5, 1986, a 43-mile-long portion of T.H. 23 was rededicated as Veteran's Evergreen Memorial Drive. Dedication ceremonies were held at the city park in Bruno, Minnesota. Local, district, and state Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) dignitaries, and other officials attended, and featured speaker was the legislation's sponsor, State Senator Florian Chmielewski.

Mn/DOT closed the Southern Overlook during the 1980s because of its poor condition, but local citizen groups requested that both overlook sites be improved. In 1991, Mn/DOT Environmental Services Division and the Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) collaborated to improve the sites and the MnDNR assumed control of the Southern Overlook and incorporated it into the Jay Cooke State Park. Most of the southern overlook wall and the entrance road were removed. The current Northern Overlook wall and parking area were constructed in

1991 as a result of a cooperative effort of the Carlton VFW Post 2692, the City of Wrenshall, the Carlton County Board of Commissioners, the MnDNR, and Mn/DOT.

The northern overlook was rededicated as Veterans' Scenic Overlook at ceremonies held on October 12, 1991. The dedication ceremony was sponsored by the Carlton VFW Post 2692. Several local, district, and state VFW officers, and Senator Chmielewski were featured speakers at the event.

One of the plaques on the Southern Overlook is dedicated to Alex J. Laveau. Laveau was the 4th District Carlton County Commissioner who, after giving a speech at the dedication ceremonies of the overlook in 1991, collapsed and died of a heart attack. Laveau was a World War II Navy veteran and served five years on the Carlton County Board of Commissioners.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A Section 106 review of the property was conducted in 1991 (SHPO #91-1430). The SHPO concluded that the property was ineligible for the National Register. The documents that chronicle this Section 106 review contain several items of correspondence between Mn/DOT and SHPO.

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wrenshall Overlook and Veterans Memorial Overlook site contains two adjacent roadside parking areas that were established by the MHD in 1949 and 1947, respectively. The more extensive Wrenshall Overlook (at the southern end of the site) is one of more than 60 sites in this inventory that were designed by, or have been attributed to, A. R. Nichols. Both overlooks have been changed considerably.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the site is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context due to loss of integrity.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 23 past this site was fairly quiet during this October field visit but is probably busy during the summer months. Visitors to the southern overlook are quite a distance from T.H. 23, so highway noise and motion are not intrusive.

The text of one of the plaques on the new overlook is associated with Evergreen Memorial Drive. One of the other two plaques dedicates the overlook. The other is not site specific.

■ REFERENCES

Dedication Program of Veterans' Scenic Overlook. Oct. 12, 1991.

Duluth News Tribune, Oct. 13, 1991 and Oct. 14, 1991.

Fleischer, Lester. *Eighth District VFW Newsletter*, Aug. 15, 1986.

Meyer, Roy W. *Everyone's Country Estate: A History of Minnesota's State Parks*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991.

Moose Lake Star Gazette, Dec. 20, 1990; May 23, 1991; Aug. 15, 1991.

Site Plans. Minnesota Department of Transportation, St. Paul.

WPA Federal Writers' Project. *WPA Guide to Minnesota*. 1938; Rpt. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXTS

Jay Cooke State Park

Jay Cooke State Park was established in 1915-1916 when the estate of Jay Cooke donated 2,000 acres of land, located on both sides of the St. Louis River, to the state of Minnesota. Jay Cooke was an early Northern Pacific Railroad financial agent who planned to make Duluth the terminus of the Northern Pacific. (The Panic of 1873 halted the railroad's expansion and Cooke's plans.) During the 1930s, Jay Cooke State Park was expanded and additional acreage donated. By 1938 the state park included 3,375 acres. The *WPA Guide to Minnesota* describes the park as ". . . an area of rugged woodland, jagged rocks, evergreens, and rushing water. Directly through it, bordering the road, the St. Louis River cuts a picturesque gorge, dropping 395 feet within a few miles" (*WPA Guide* 1938:291). By 1948 the park's acreage had expanded to 8,366 and by 1967 to 11,316 acres, making it one of largest parks in the state park system.

Text of Metal Plaques

There are three metal plaques on the Northern Overlook Wall. The northern plaque reads: "You've never lived until you almost died. For those who fight for it life has a flavor the protected will never know. Viet Nam 1969-1975."

The southern plaque reads: "For God and country. Alex J. Laveau 1928-1991. . . . [etc.] WWII for their dedication for this Veterans Scenic Overlook."

The third plaque reads: "Evergreen Memorial Drive dedicated Oct. 5, 1947, in grateful memory of all men and women from Carlton, Pine, and St. Louis Counties, who served in the armed forces of our country during the World Wars."

Text of Geological Marker Removed from Southern Overlook

"St. Louis River. The broad valley of the St. Louis River, visible from this point, is a western extension of the Lake Superior basin. The rounded banks are composed of red clay deposited in Glacial Lake Duluth during the centuries in which it flooded the St. Louis Valley. The scenery at this time is due to the partial removal of that clay by the river as the lake surface fell to its present level.

"The St. Louis River today is the result of stream piracy and now comprises parts of two river systems. The Prairie River, which rose 30 miles north of Two Harbors, ran southwest from its source to the Mississippi, while the turbulent St. Louis flowed southeast to Lake Superior. The St. Louis River, falling rapidly in its steep descent, extended itself by erosion toward its source until it intercepted the Prairie River and, by an act of river piracy, diverted the headwaters of that stream to its own channel. The main stream of those headwaters is now the Cloquet River.

"Erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota and the Department of Highways, State of Minnesota aided by a grant from the Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation, 1955."