

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

CR-CKC-057
CS 1013
Chaska Historical Marker

Historic Name Other Name	Chaska Historical Marker	CS # SHPO Inv #	1013 CR-CKC-057
Location	NW side of TH 212 .25 mi SW of Co Rd 140	Hwy District Reference	TH 212 Met W 146.6
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Chaska, City of Carver 115N 23W Sec 8 Shakopee Z15 E451640 N4958830	Acres Rest Area Class	.25 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	1013 212-12-22
Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013526.16-24
Yr of Landscape Design	1938	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 1.25 Ols 1.19
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		
List of Standing Structures			
Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Marker	1938	07-09-97
			Prep by
			Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 11
			Prep for
			Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			
Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)		

■ BRIEF

The Chaska Historical Marker is a .25-acre site located on the northwestern side of T.H. 212 just within the western city limits of Chaska.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Marker and Retaining Wall. Erected 1938 by MHD. The principal structure on the site is a combination marker and retaining wall built of random ashlar blocks of striated gray limestone laid on a stone footing. The marker is aligned roughly parallel with the highway. It is about 77' long and forms a long, low stone wall that retains the wooded hillside. At the center is a projecting rectangular shaft that is about 11'6" tall. The shaft has a rectangular niche that is framed with red Chaska brick. The bronze plaque has the seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society near the bottom. The text of the marker addresses the Little Rapids Fur Post. (See text at the end of this document.)

In front of the plaque is a rectangular plaza paved with flagstone. Two 6'-long benches with poured concrete seats and stone pedestals originally sat on the plaza -- today only three limestone pedestals remain. The original plans specify a gravel walkway along the wall. This walkway is currently overgrown with weeds and grass.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site has a curving, 24'-wide asphalt-paved pull-off drive that is lined with concrete curbing. The drive creates an oval-shaped, curb-lined island between the marker and T.H. 212. Within the island is a poured concrete rectangle on which a timber picnic table is attached.

Most of the site is planted with grass. It is shaded by two huge maple trees standing on the island. The marker wall retains a wooded hillside on which is planted about 15 mature spruce trees, many ash trees, and a buckthorn forest. (Historic photos show that this was an essentially unwooded hillside at the time the marker was completed.)

The original landscaping made use of several existing elm, oak, maple, and basswood trees in the vicinity. The original plan specifies 250 Smooth Sumac forming a backdrop to the marker and 52 Chinese Matrimony Vines climbing on the wall. Thirteen American Elm were to be planted on the hillside behind the marker. Twenty-four Laurel Willows, 52 Rosy Tartarian Honeysuckle, and 48 Siberian Pea Trees were to be planted to screen the gravel pit north of the marker.

The site itself is relatively flat but a hill rises behind the marker wall and the land drops off into the river valley across T.H. 212 from the site.

■ SETTING

The site is located in a residential and rural setting and is surrounded by T.H. 212 and the low-lying Minnesota River Valley to the south, a wooded bluff and a gravel pit to the north, the townsite of Chaska to the east, and woods and fields to the west.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The site appears to have been built closely to plan.

The site is essentially intact. Some stones from the marker are missing. The two bench seats and one of the bench pedestals are missing. The drive was originally gravel and is now paved with asphalt. Most of the original plantings have been removed.

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

Notes on Condition

The marker is in poor condition. It is cracked, stones are missing, and mortar needs repair. The site appears to be only minimally maintained. The marker, flagstone plaza, and gravel walkway are overgrown with weeds.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the erection of the stone marker, a 3' by 5' white steel sign with black lettering was at or near this site. It had been erected as early as 1930 by the first joint trunk highway marking program that was established by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways in 1929. Historic photos indicate that, when the stone marker was built, this steel sign was installed in the stone marker prior to the installation of the current bronze plaque.

According to original construction plans for the current site, it was built as part of a .4-mile-long roadside development project. The title sheet states that the site was designed by A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect) and Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development Division). The plans are signed by Nichols, Olson, and C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), illegible (District Engineer), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and Jay T. Ellison (Chief Engineer). Ellison has dated his signature February 9, 1938.

The *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* for 1938 indicates that this was a "regular Federal Aid Project" -- as differentiated from a federal relief agency project -- suggesting that the MHD provided all of the labor and that no federal relief program was involved (*Annual Report 1938:cover page*).

The *Annual Report* summarizes:

This project of .41 of a mile in length lies wholly within the corporate limits of Chaska on T.H. #212. The location of this stretch of highway is along the base of a steep hill with steep slopes on one side and flat river bottom on the other side. This project involves cleanup along the highway, erection and perpetuation of an historic marker, masonry retaining wall, turnout drive, screen planting of an old gravel pit, ornamental planting and flattening of backslopes (*Annual Report 1938:4*).

It is likely that the stone used to construct this site was obtained from a local quarry. Outcroppings of the Shakopee limestone strata form ledges in the bluffs of the Minnesota River just a few miles southeast of Chaska.

Site Development Unit files indicate that in 1961 this site contained water, two tables, and two fireplaces.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

There have apparently been no previous SHPO cultural resource reviews of the property.

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Chaska Historical Marker was built in 1938 by the MHD. It is one of 18 stone, free-standing, shrine-type historic markers recorded in this inventory. It is one of more than 60 sites in this inventory that were designed by, or whose designed is attributed to, A. R. Nichols.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the property is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Non-Federal Relief Property That Closely Resembles a Federal Relief Property. The Chaska Historical Marker is an excellent example of a Non-Federal relief property, built during the Depression, which strongly represents the same design principles and philosophy as the federal relief-built roadside development sites. (National Register Criterion A.)

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Chaska Historical Marker is one of 68 Depression-era properties in this inventory. These sites represent the MHD's first large-scale effort to construct roadside development facilities in the state. The site is an excellent example of the distinctive and well-constructed public facilities that were built by the MHD during this period, often in partnership with federal relief agencies. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Chaska is an excellent example of the application of the National Park Service Rustic Style to a highway wayside rest. It has stonework of high quality and displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials characteristic of federal relief construction. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic context.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 212 is very busy past the site, making it somewhat dangerous to locate and enter. The traffic noise and motion are fairly intrusive.

This site may also be associated with local historic contexts established by the City of Chaska's Heritage Preservation Commission.

The text of the historic marker is associated with the Little Rapids Fur Post "5 miles south of this point." It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ REFERENCES

Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development Along the Trunk Highways in Minnesota. State of Minnesota Department of Highways. 1938.

Guide to Historic Markers Erected by the State Highway Department, Cooperating With the Minnesota Historical Society. Prepared by the Minnesota Historic Records Survey, Division of Professional and Service Projects, Works Projects Administration. St. Paul: May 1940.

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

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT

The Chaska area was probably first visited by Euro-Americans in the 18th century. French traders trapped and hunted animals along the Minnesota River near here, as well as trading for pelts and hides with the Dakota. By 1804 Jean Baptiste Faribault, a French-Canadian fur trader, established a trading post near a portion of the Minnesota River known as the "Little Rapids," about five miles south of the site of this wayside rest.

Chaska, the seat of Carver County, was named for a Dakota chief and a Dakota village that had been located near the town. The first Euro-American settlers arrived in 1853. The village was founded in 1854 by the Shaska Company, and incorporated as a city in 1891.

Text of Bronze Plaque on Stone Marker

"Little Rapids Fur Post"

"By 1804 Jean B. Faribault was trading in furs for the Northwest Company near the 'Little Rapids' of the Minnesota River, 5 miles south of this point, and in this vicinity. His fur post of 1824 on the site of Chaska became the nucleus for the first Catholic mission in Carver County under Father Ravoux." [Seals of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways]