

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

GD-FLC-056  
CS 2513

Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	2513 GD-FLC-056
<b>Location</b>	NE side of TH 61/TH 63 just W of CSAH 2	<b>Hwy</b> <b>District</b> <b>Reference</b>	TH 61/63 6B 79.0
<b>City/Township</b> <b>County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Florence Township Goodhue 112N 13W Sec 13 Maiden Rock Z15 E553710 N4928180	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	.5 4
<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	<b>SP #</b>	2513 2513-04
<b>Builder</b>	National Youth Administration (NYA)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013555.05-13
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1940	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 1.98 Ols 1.99 Ols 1.100
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
<b>National Register Status</b>	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
<b>Historic Context</b>	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		
<b>List of Standing Structures</b>			
<b>Feat#</b>	<b>Feature Type</b>	<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Fieldwork Date</b>
01	Marker	1940	11-06-97
02	Info Board	Ca. 1975	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			<b>Prep by</b> Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 23
			<b>Prep for</b> Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)		

■ BRIEF

The Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker is a .5-acre site located on the northeastern side of T.H. 61/T.H. 63 just west of CSAH 2. It stands in Section 13 of Florence Township, about 1 mile south of the town of Frontenac and about 5 miles north of Lake City. It is within both Frontenac State Park and the Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood State Forest.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Stone Marker.** Built 1940 by the NYA. The principal feature on the site is an historic marker built of tan, random ashlar, rockfaced, limestone laid on a stone footing. The marker has a central shaft that is flanked by 3'-tall wing walls, and is about 19' in overall length. The shaft has a rectangular niche with a gray limestone keystone. Near the base of the shaft, below the niche, is a small rectangular metal plaque that reads, "Constructed by National Youth Administration 1940." There are three wide, polygonal limestone steps in front of the niche.

The niche originally held a rectangular bronze plaque with the seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society cast near the bottom. The text of the plaque addressed the establishment of Fort Beauharnois. In 1985 it was replaced with the current plaque, which had a longer text on the same subject. The current plaque, which does not fit within the niche, is black metal with raised gold lettering and has the seal of the Minnesota Historical Society cast near the bottom. (See marker texts at the end of this document.)

In front of the marker is a raised, 19' by 10' terrace paved with limestone flagging (specified as gravel on the original plans). The terrace is approached via three 6'-wide limestone steps with low stone sidewalls. The upper step is actually a flagstone-paved landing (at the same elevation as the terrace) that is 4' by 6'. At the bottom of the steps is a 5' by 6' flagstone plaza (now covered with earth and gravel) that is edged with a 6'-long section of limestone curb. The curb separates the plaza from the site's gravel drive.

**Information Board.** Built circa 1975, probably by the MnDNR. About 68' east of the historic marker is a woodframe information board that is sheltered by a gabled roof. The structure stands on a 3' by 13' poured concrete slab. The board contains information about the state park.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site is located north of an asphalt-paved frontage road that was the original alignment of T.H. 61 (T.H. 61 has been shifted south at this point). The site includes a curving gravel highway pull-off road that is entered from the old T.H. 61 alignment. (The eastern end of the pull-off road has apparently been altered so that it now travels straight east to enter CSAH 2, rather than curving southward to return to the old T.H. 61 alignment.) The gravel pull-off road is lined on the northern side with timber posts. One early historic photo shows posts lining both sides of the pull-off road, while another (possibly taken when the eastern end of the pull-off was altered to enter CSAH 2) shows posts painted white and located only on the northern side of the pull-off road. There is a small gravel parking area near the

eastern end of the site. There is a grassy island between the pull-off road and the old T.H. 61 roadway.

Historic photos show several wooden picnic tables and what may be a limestone picnic fireplace located northwest of the marker. One historic photo also shows a boulder with a small metal plaque mounted on it. Fieldworkers did not see the boulder at the site.

The site is located on the edge of an oak forest and is planted with grass between mature oak trees. There do not appear to be any other plantings associated with the site. The topography of the site is flat.

#### ■ **SETTING**

The site is located in a rural setting surrounded by forest. It is within the boundaries of both Frontenac State Park and the Richard Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest.

#### ■ **INTEGRITY**

##### **Alterations**

The site appears to have been built fairly close to plan except that the marker's terrace is specified as gravel, rather than flagstone, on the original plans.

In 1985 the marker's original bronze plaque was replaced with the current plaque. The mortar on the marker was patched several years ago. The eastern end of the pull-off road has apparently been altered so that it now travels straight east to enter CSAH 2, rather than curving southward to return to the old T.H. 61 alignment. Four low stone picnic fireplaces have been removed from the site. The wooden posts have been removed from the southern side of the pull-off road. An information board has been added to the site.

In general, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

##### **Notes on Condition**

The marker is in poor condition with several stones missing. The flagstone needs repair. The lower flagstone plaza is covered with earth and gravel.

#### ■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Prior to the erection of the stone marker, a 3' by 5' white steel sign with black lettering stood 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. The legend on the steel marker was similar to the original plaque on the stone marker.

The stone marker was constructed in 1940 by the National Youth Administration (NYA) in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways. The NYA also constructed four fireplaces and stone curbing at the site (*Final Report of the NYA 1943:183*).

The original plans were drawn May 1940. They were signed in May 1940 by A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), J. C. Robbers (District Engineer), and O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer). The plan sheet is stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. June 2, 1941."

At the March 24, 1960, meeting of the Minnesota Historic Sites and Markers Commission, it was noted that the Fort Beauharnois marker had been defaced and the plaque was in poor condition. It was recommended that the legend be revised and the plaque replaced.

MnDOT Site Development Unit files indicate that in 1961 there were three picnic tables, four fireplaces, drinking water, and toilets available at this site.

#### ■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

#### ■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker was built in 1940 by the MHD and the NYA. It is one of 18 stone, free-standing, shrine-type historic markers recorded in this inventory. It is one of 19 sites in the inventory on which the NYA worked. It is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory that were designed by, or whose design is attributed to, Arthur R. Nichols.

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

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker is among the 68 Depression-era properties in the inventory that represent the MHD's first large-scale effort to construct roadside development facilities in the state. The site is important as an example of the accomplishments of the NYA working in cooperation with the MHD. The property is an example of the distinctive and well-constructed public facilities, built by the MHD in partnership with federal relief agencies, that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed during the Depression. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker is a good example of the MHD Roadside Development Division's small pull-off style roadside parking areas -- this one with a shrine-type historic marker. The marker is an intact example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to an interpretive marker. It displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Furthermore, the Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property may also be associated with the "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" and "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic contexts.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

The current replacement plaque does not fit well in the marker's niche. It is recommended that it be replaced with a plaque of more appropriate size.

T.H. 61 is busy past this site in the summer months. Visitors to the marker are separated from the current highway by the old T.H. 61 alignment (now a frontage road). Despite this distance, the noise and motion of the traffic are somewhat intrusive.

T.H. 61 at this location has been designated part of the Great River Road.

The text of the historic marker is associated with Fort Beauharnois and vicinity. It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ REFERENCES

Blegen, Theodore C. *Minnesota: A History of the State*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975.

*Final Report National Youth Administration for the State of Minnesota: Sept. 1935 to July 1943*. U.S. National Youth Administration, Minnesota. 1943.

Folwell, William Watts. *A History of Minnesota*. Vol. 1. 1921; rev. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1956.

Frontenac State Park Summer Trails." Pamphlet. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, n.d.

*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, Work Projects Administration. St. Paul: May 1940.

Holmquist, June Drenning and Jean A. Brookins. *Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1972.

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

Minutes of Minnesota Historic Sites and Markers Commission, Mar. 24, 1960. Mathilde Rice Elliot Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

Reiman, Richard A. *The New Deal and American Youth*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

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

Tweton, Jerome D. *The New Deal at the Grass Roots. Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXTS**

**Local Stone**

The limestone used to construct the historic marker may have been obtained from a quarry within Frontenac State Park. Layers of Shakopee and St. Lawrence limestone are located in the bluffs of the Mississippi River Valley, with quarrying beginning at Frontenac as early as 1855. A quarry was located within the current boundaries of Frontenac Park on the bluff below the picnic area. The quarry has been inactive since the 1940s. Limestone from this quarry was used to construct the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1883 ("Frontenac State Park Summer Trails").

**Frontenac State Park**

The Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker is located within Frontenac State Park. The state park, which now encompasses approximately 2,600 acres, was established in 1957. The initial proposal for a state park at Frontenac was presented to legislative committees in the mid-1930s. This proposal suggested establishing a state park so that a CCC camp could be located within it. The proposal was rejected because it was decided that Goodhue County did not have enough relief labor available to warrant a CCC camp.

In 1954 the Frontenac State Park Association was formed to lobby for a state park. The first bill was presented to the legislature in 1955 but met with citizen opposition. In its continuing pursuit of a state park, the Frontenac State Park Association purchased the 160-acre Munro Estate in 1955 and, in 1956, 200 acres were donated by John H. Hauschild, board chairman of the Great Northern Insurance Company. (See also inventory form for the Frontenac State Park Entrance Gates, which are the former gates of the Munro Estate.) The legislature finally established Frontenac Park in 1957, but actual development did not begin until 1964 when a road was built to the top of Garrard Bluff and camping and picnicking facilities were constructed. Frontenac was classified under the 1975 Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA) as a natural state park, which means that the land should be preserved for biological values rather than recreational development.

**Fort Beauharnois**

Fort Beauharnois, erected in 1727, is considered to be the last French fort in operation along the Mississippi. (It is presumed that the fort was constructed on a low point of land in Lake Pepin, now known as Point au Sable (Sand Point). Although a number of archaeological investigations have been conducted, no evidence has been discovered that Fort Beauharnois was actually located at this site.) Since the 17th century, the French had been exploring what is now Minnesota and developing a system of forts along the Mississippi River from which they explored the countryside and sought the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Rene Boucher and an expedition from Montreal arrived on the shores of Lake Pepin in June 1727, established a trading post with the Dakota, and erected a fort which they named for the Marquis de Beauharnois, Governor General of New France (Canada). The fort was to be the outpost from which the French would establish a fur trade with the Dakota and begin their search for a route to the "Western Sea." Holmquist writes that

The notion that the fort could be used to further explorations toward the Western Sea was undoubtedly a powerful motivating force in its establishment. The pursuit of a route across North America to the Pacific Ocean was one of the dominant objectives

of the period. Many men searched for it, all of them unaware of the vast width of the continent that balked their success (Holmquist 1972:91).

Folwell describes the fort and its structures in *A History of Minnesota*:

A substantial fort was erected, consisting of a stockade one hundred feet square of tree trunks set on end twelve feet out of ground, 'with two good bastions,' each of which gave a flank fire on two sides of the work. Within were three log buildings, all sixteen feet wide, one thirty feet long, another thirty-eight, the third twenty-five. Upon the completion of the work the garrison celebrated in November the birthday of Beauharnois, the governor of Canada, whose name was given to the post (Folwell 1921:46).

Two Jesuit missionaries accompanied the expedition and established what is thought to be the first Christian church in Minnesota -- the Mission of St. Michael the Archangel, a small chapel erected in 1727 within the stockade. Cabins, a blacksmith shop, and warehouse were constructed outside of the stockade. The fort and mission were abandoned in 1736 following the signing of the treaty with Britain in which Great Britain gained control of North America.

#### **Town of Frontenac**

In 1853 Evert V. Westervelt began a trading post and platted the town of Westervelt that was later renamed Frontenac for the Comte de Frontenac, the governor of New France from 1671 to 1698. (Old Frontenac is located just north of the Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker on CSAH 2.) The town of Frontenac grew to include hotels, commercial businesses, a sawmill, quarry, and a popular steamboat landing. It was also a fashionable summer resort during the 1870s and 1880s. In 1870, when the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad planned to continue its line through Frontenac, General Israel Garrard donated land for a railroad station 2 miles inland to prevent commercialization of the town. The railroad bypassed old Frontenac, resulting in its decline. Frontenac Station (west of the historic marker on T.H. 61) was established as a post office and railway station.

#### **Text of Original Plaque on Stone Marker**

"On the shore of Lake Pepin just north of here, a French expedition commanded by La Perriere and accompanied by two Jesuits in September, 1727 built a substantial log fort and the mission of St. Michael the Archangel. The post was occupied periodically until about 1756."

#### **Text of Current Plaque on Stone Marker**

"French trading post on Lake Pepin. In September 1727 a party of French soldiers and traders under the leadership of Rene Boucher Sieur de la Perriere built a fortified post on Lake Pepin from which they traded for two years with the Dakota (Sioux) Indians. They were there to secure an alliance with the Dakota in order to gain access to the fur and possible mineral wealth of the area and to eventually press westward in search of the 'great western sea.' Accompanying the group were two Jesuit missionaries, Michel Guignas and Nicholas de Gonner. A letter from Father Guignas to the governor general of New France, Marquis de Beauharnois, reported that 'the day after landing axes were applied to the trees, and four days later the fort was entirely finished.' Various referred to as the 'post among the Sioux' or 'Fort Beauharnois,' it included several trading houses, a guard house, quarters

for the members of the party, and a chapel named in honor of St. Michael the Archangel. Several trading posts were built on Lake Pepin by the French from 1686 until they abandoned the area in the 1750s during the French and Indian War. Most are believed to have been located on the east side of the lake, but the remains of only one, near Stockholm, Wisconsin, have been found. The locations of all the others, including Fort Beauharnois, are unknown. Erected by the Minnesota Historical Society 1985." [Seal of the Minnesota Historical Society].