

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-GVC-052
CS 2752
TH 55 Retaining Wall

Historic Name Other Name	TH 55 Retaining Wall	CS # SHPO Inv #	2752 HE-GVC-052
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Location	S side of TH 55 just west of Meadow Lane N	Hwy District Reference	TH 55 Met W 187.5
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City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Golden Valley, City of Hennepin 29N 24W Sec 19 Minneapolis South Z15 E473850 N4981020	Acres Rest Area Class	NA
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Designer	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SP #	
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Builder	Work Projects Administration (WPA)	SHPO Review #	
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Historic Use Present Use	Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall	MHS Photo #	013551.13-15
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Yr of Landscape Design	Ca. 1942	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	
Overall Site Integrity	Moderately Altered		
Review Required	Yes		

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	Retaining Wall	Ca. 1942	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

Fieldwork Date	11-04-97
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Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 101
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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 T.H. 55 Retaining Wall is a MHD-built highway retaining wall that is located on the southern side of T.H. 55 (Olson Memorial Highway) at the southwestern corner of T.H. 55 and Meadow Lane N. The wall is located one long block west of Theodore Wirth Parkway, and about one-half mile east of the T.H. 55/T.H. 100 cloverleaf.

■ **STANDING STRUCTURES**

Retaining Wall. Built circa 1940 by the WPA. This approximately 240' retaining wall, built of gray, coursed ashlar, striated limestone, is located on the edge of the shoulder of the eastbound lane of T.H. 55. It retains the land south of T.H. 55, which is a few feet higher than the roadbed. The western end of the wall is located at approximately Indiana Avenue N., and the eastern end is at approximately Meadow Lane N. The wall has piers spaced about 10' apart. The wall steps upward in height toward its approximate midpoint, where it is about 4'6" tall (above the roadway).

A railing has been added to the top of the wall. It consists of 25 concrete pylons (about 2'6" tall and about 1' in diameter) which support a set of simple concrete beams. The pylons are spaced about 10' apart and located approximately above the limestone wall's piers.

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The wall stands within a long grassy island with overgrown grasses and volunteer trees. South of the island is a curbless, asphalt-paved frontage road. There are no specific plantings associated with the site.

■ **SETTING**

The wall is located in an urban setting and is surrounded by a residential neighborhood to the south, office buildings to the north, and the T.H. 55 right-of-way (a busy divided highway) to the east and west. Theodore Wirth Parkway is located one long block to the east. The T.H. 55/T.H. 100 cloverleaf is located about one-half mile to the west.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

A railing has been added to the wall (see description above). In general, the site retains integrity of location, setting, workmanship, and association, but has lost integrity of design, materials, and feeling.

Notes on Condition

The wall is in poor condition. The limestone is breaking off in layers and the railing is broken and wearing away. The site is badly overgrown.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This retaining wall was probably constructed circa 1942 by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) as part of the construction of T.H. 55. T.H. 55 had been designated as Floyd B. Olson Memorial Highway in 1937.

This portion of T.H. 55 was graded and paved during the 1942-1944 biennium by the WPA, working in cooperation with the highway department. T.H. 100 (a north-south highway) had just been completed by the WPA about a mile west of here, and the highway department then began to improve T.H. 55 from T.H. 100 eastward into Minneapolis. A photograph of the newly-completed T.H. 55 appears in the Highway Commissioner's *Biennial Report* for the 1942-1944 biennium (*Biennial Report* 194:25-26). The T.H. 55 improvements would have been among the last completed by the WPA for the MHD.

Olson Memorial Highway commemorates Floyd B. Olson (1891-1936), Minnesota's very popular 22nd governor who died in 1936 at the age of 45. Floyd B. Olson grew up in the Minneapolis neighborhood that surrounds this site. The highway was named a year after his death.

The wall may have been designed by A. R. Nichols who was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways during the 1930s through about 1940. The MHD built highway retaining walls of similar design along T.H. 100 (the Belt Line). Nichols was Consulting Landscape Architect for the construction of T.H. 100. A similar wall also stands on Point Douglas Road in St. Paul. (See inventory forms for two sites: T.H. 100 at T.H. 55 Retaining Walls and Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall.) (Other, similar limestone retaining walls also apparently elsewhere on the Metro Area trunk highway system.)

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The T.H. 55 Retaining Wall was built circa 1942, probably by the WPA. It is one of 23 properties in this inventory that were built by (or suspected to have been built by) the WPA. (The T.H. 55 improvements would have been among the last completed by the WPA for the highway department.) The retaining wall apparently represents a standard MHD trunk highway design of the 1930s and 1940s.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that this property is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it does not meet the context registration requirements.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 55 is a very busy divided highway at this point.

■ REFERENCES

Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota From July 1, 1942 to June 30, 1944. Dec. 1, 1944.

McGrath, John S. and James J. Delmont. *Floyd Bjornsterne Olson, 1891-1936. Minnesota's Greatest Liberal Governor: A Memorial Volume.* N.P.: McGrath and Delmont, 1937.

Minnesota Legislative Manual. 1931 and 1937.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Floyd B. Olson (1891-1936) was Minnesota's 22nd governor, serving three terms from 1931 to 1936. He was influential in the founding of the state's Farmer-Labor (now DFL) party. Floyd Bjornsterne Olson was born in Minneapolis in 1891 to Scandinavian immigrant parents. He attended Minneapolis Public Schools, graduating in 1909, and attended one year at the University of Minnesota. In 1914 he joined the law firm of Frank Larrabee and Otto Davies and attended night school at the Northwestern College of Law. He was admitted to the bar in 1915 and worked for Larrabee and Davies until his appointment in 1919 as special assistant to the Hennepin County Attorney's office. In 1920 he was elected Hennepin County Attorney. He was reelected to the office in 1922 and 1926.