

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-MPC-9013
CS 2751

Olson, Floyd B., Memorial Statue

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| Historic Name Other Name | Olson, Floyd B., Memorial Statue | CS # SHPO Inv # | 2751 HE-MPC-9013 |
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|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Location | SE corner of TH 55 and Penn Ave | Hwy District Reference | TH 55 Met W 188 |
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| City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM | Minneapolis, City of Hennepin 118N 24W Sec 21 Minneapolis South Z15 E475750 N4981020 | Acres Rest Area Class | NA |
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|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|--|
| Designer | Brioschi-Minuti Company | SP # | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|--|

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| Builder | Local Government Roman Bronze Works | SHPO Review # | |
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| Historic Use Present Use | Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area | MHS Photo # | 013565.01-07 |
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| Yr of Landscape Design | 1940 | MnDOT Historic Photo Album | Ols 2.27 |
| Overall Site Integrity | Intact/Slightly Altered | | |
| Review Required | Yes | | |

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| National Register Status | Eligible, see Statement of Significance |
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| Historic Context | Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960 |
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List of Standing Structures

| Feat# | Feature Type | Year Built | |
|---|------------------|------------|--|
| 01 | Statue | 1940 | |
| 02 | Bench(es), Stone | 1940 | |
| NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table | | | |

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| Fieldwork Date | 12-15-97 |
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| Prep by | Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 104 |
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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 Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue is located at the southeastern corner of T.H. 55 (Olson Memorial Highway) and Penn Avenue within the City of Minneapolis, near the western city limits. Olson Memorial Highway is also known as Sixth Avenue N.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Statue. Erected 1940, probably by the City of Minneapolis and private donations. The bronze figure of Floyd B. Olson faces north. The figure is speaking and has its right arm extended in a gesture. An owl and a pile of books (presumably symbolizing education) are located behind the figure. Cast into the bottom of the western side of the statue are the words: "Carl Brioschi, A. J. Brioschi, L. R. Kirchner, Associate Sculptors." Cast into the northern side is "Roman Bronze Works N.Y."

The statue stands on a stepped, rectangular, gray granite pedestal that may be built of St. Cloud granite. Incised on the front (northern side) of the pedestal are the words: "Floyd B. Olson. 1891-1936. 22nd Governor of the State of Minnesota."

The pedestal stands on a rectangular terrace of speckled pink and gray granite that has square rear corners and canted front corners. Two steps lead to the top of the terrace. The terrace, in turn, stands on a rectangular plaza made of poured concrete squares. The plaza has curved corners.

Stone Benches. Erected 1940, probably by the City of Minneapolis and private donations. Two Classically-inspired benches of speckled pink and gray granite stand in front of the statue, near the northern edge of the plaza. The seats of the benches measure 2' by 7'.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

T.H. 55's poured concrete sidewalk runs along the northern edge of the site. A secondary sidewalk leaves the T.H. 55 sidewalk and travels south to enter the site and approach the front of the statue.

The site is planted with grass and has several deciduous trees, most about 25 to 50 years old. Bands of neatly-trimmed spirea hedges line the approach sidewalk and curve along the front and sides of the plaza.

■ SETTING

The site is located within the continuous, wide, grassy boulevard that lines the southern side of T.H. 55, a busy, divided street. It is located at the southeastern corner of T.H. 55 and Penn Avenue N. A poured concrete alley runs along the southern edge of the site. The alley becomes S. Frontage Road near the southeastern corner of the site. The southeastern corner of the site is the intersection of S. Frontage Road and Oliver Avenue N. The overall setting is residential.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The statue and its pedestal and base originally faced east. They have been turned to face north, and the plaza's poured concrete squares have been replaced. The two stone benches originally stood on the eastern side of the statue, and were moved when the statue was turned so they are now north of the statue. The hedges along the southern side of the plaza have been removed. A set of evergreens that were originally planted west of (which would have been behind) the statue have been removed.

The site alterations are minor and are not inconsistent with the original design intent. In general, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The site is in fair to good condition.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue was erected in 1940, three years after T.H. 55 was designated as Floyd B. Olson Memorial Highway. It commemorates Floyd B. Olson (1891-1936), who served as Minnesota's very popular 22nd governor, and who died in 1936 at the age of 45. The statue was designed and executed by Carl Brioschi, A. (Amerigo) J. Brioschi, and L. R. Kirchner. The senior designer was St. Paul sculptor Carl Brioschi. The statue was cast at the Roman Bronze Works in New York. It is not known who designed or built the site's landscaping features. The statue was apparently erected by private donations and/or the City of Minneapolis.

Floyd B. Olson grew up in the Minneapolis neighborhood that surrounds this site. The statue was unveiled and dedicated in November of 1940 at a ceremony attended by more than 1,000 people. Patricia Olson, the late governor's daughter, unveiled the monument. The statue was formally presented by Chief Justice Henry M. Gallagher of the Minnesota Supreme Court. (Brioschi's full-scale plaster cast of the statue had been on display at the Minnesota State Fair in September of 1938, two years after 150,000 people had attended Olson's funeral.)

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 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 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 highway department.

It is probable, but has not been confirmed, that the WPA also helped build the Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue site.

A photo of the statue appears in a Mn/DOT historic photo album that was compiled circa 1942. The typed caption on the photo album page includes the words "No State Part" suggesting that the highway department was not involved in the site's original construction (Olson ca. 1942/1955:vol. 2, p. 27).

The Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue was designated a "state monument" by the Minnesota legislature in 1983. (There is one other state monument in the inventory, the Camp Release State Memorial Wayside.)

Carlo Brioschi

The Olson Memorial Statue on T.H. 55, erected in 1940, was Carlo Brioschi's last major commission and is significant within the body of his work (Harris 1998). Carlo (Carl, Charles) Brioschi (1879-1941) was born in Italy and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Brera, Milan. He immigrated to the U.S. when he was 20 years old with Adolph Minuti. The two sculptors formed an architectural sculpture business in New York where they worked on such projects as Grand Central Station. They moved to St. Paul in 1909 and established the Brioschi-Minuti Company, an architectural sculpture and ornamental plaster company that was one of the first companies of its type to locate in the Twin Cities. The studio was located on Hill Street, and later on Third Street, and then at 908-910 University Avenue, all in St. Paul. Amerigo Brioschi eventually joined his father in the firm.

The Brioschi-Minuti Company specialized in sculptures, stone carving, terra cotta, and other ornamentation for building interiors and exteriors. They provided much of the early architectural ornamentation for leading Twin Cities buildings, and worked with the region's foremost architects. The firm also worked nationwide. It designed and executed ornamental work for many churches including the St. Paul Cathedral, often working with the cathedral's architect, Emmanuel Masqueray. Brioschi-Minuti worked with Cass Gilbert, architect of the State Capitol and New York landmarks, and for the notable New York firm of Stanford White, for whom Brioschi-Minuti remodeled interior architectural sculptures in the White House during the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Brioschi-Minuti's work in Minnesota includes buildings at the University of Minnesota such as Northrop Auditorium and the Law Building. Elsewhere in the Twin Cities, they worked on the Foshay Tower and the State Theatre in downtown Minneapolis, the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, the St. Paul Auditorium, the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Hamline University in St. Paul, the St. Paul Athletic Club, the Hotel St. Paul, and St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester. Most of these buildings are extant and several are on the National Register.

The firm's sculptures of prominent men in the state include images of the Drs. Mayor, Governor Winfield S. Hammon, Archbishop Brady, and Governor Harold Stassen, in addition to Governor Floyd B. Olson. Brioschi also created several sculptural pieces within the State Capitol.

Two Brioschi statues were commissioned for the State Capitol grounds. The first was a statue of Christopher Columbus by Carlo Brioschi that was dedicated on Columbus Day in 1931. It had been commissioned by Minnesota Italian-Americans and its dedication was witnessed by over 25,000 people (O'Sullivan 1994:93). It is located at the former Minnesota Historical Building next to the State Capitol (now the Minnesota Judicial Center).

The second State Capitol statue was a near-duplicate of the Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue on T.H. 55. It was created in 1958, 17 years after the elder Brioschi's death, under the direction of Amerigo Brioschi. The statue was financed by labor union members and Minnesota statehood centennial funds, and was dedicated on Labor Day in 1958 on a site that faces the State Office building on the State Capitol Approach. The Olson statue is a nearly identical, but simpler, composition than the original Olson Memorial Statue on T.H. 55. The statue on the Capitol mall is missing the owl and books resting on the pedestal behind the figure's legs, has a different pedestal and base, and has a much smaller and simpler site design.

Amerigo J. Brioschi (1908-1977) operated the Brioschi Studio after his father's death in 1941. He had apprenticed with his father and later studied terra cotta, sculpture, and ornamental design with Angelo Ricci in New York. In 1959, Brioschi Studios (then located at 908-910 University Avenue) merged with two other architectural sculpture firms -- the St. Paul Statuary Company (founded in 1905) and Carlquist and Son (founded in 1902). The new company was known as the St. Paul Statuary Company and Amerigo Brioschi served as its first president. He was still president when the firm rehabilitated the interior of the Cathedral of St. Paul in 1977.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue was erected in 1940 on T.H. 55. The site was apparently sponsored by a group of citizens in cooperation with the City of Minneapolis. It is the only statue that was recorded as part of this inventory. The statue was designed and executed by senior designer Carl Brioschi with follow sculptors Amerigo J. Brioschi and L. R. Kirchner. It is possible, but has not been confirmed, that federal relief labor was involved in its construction.

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:

Design Significance. The Floyd B. Olson Memorial Statue, erected in 1940, is significant within the body of work of Carlo Brioschi, one of the Twin Cities' earliest and most important sculptors. While a second statue -- cast from the same mold -- stands on the State Capitol grounds, it was erected 18 years after the original statue on T.H. 55 and is not as elaborate as the original structure. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property may also be associated with the "Urban Centers, 1870-1940" historic context.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 55 is very busy past this site.

This site is also associated with local historic contexts established by the City of Minneapolis' Heritage Preservation Commission.

■ REFERENCES

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

"Charles Brioschi, Sculptor, Dies." Uncited Twin Cities newspaper clipping, March 28, 1941.

Harris, Moira F. *Monumental Minnesota. A Guide to Outdoor Sculpture.* Minneapolis: Pogo Press, 1992.

Harris, Moira F. Telephone interview. October 1998.

"Labor of Love Needs a Home." *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Aug. 16, 1959.

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.

"Noted St. Paul Sculptor Dies." Uncited Twin Cities newspaper clipping, March 28, 1941.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota.* 4 vols. Prepared by the Roadside Development Division, Minnesota Department of Highway. Ca. 1942, updated ca. 1954.

O'Sullivan, Thomas. *North Star Statehouse. An Armchair Guide to the Minnesota State Capitol.* St. Paul: Pogo Press, 1994.

"Several Thousand See Olson Statue Dedicated." *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Nov. 18, 1940.

"Throngs View Olson Memorial." *St. Paul Dispatch*, Nov. 18, 1940.

Towne, Oliver. "'Babe' the Sculptor." *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 16, 1977.

■ 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.

Olson first ran for governor in 1924 against Theodore Christiansen (a Republican) as the nominee of the newly-formed Minnesota Farmer-Laborer party. He lost by a small margin. In 1930, Olson ran against Ray P. Chase (a Republican) and was elected governor. He was reelected in 1932 and 1934. In 1936, Olson announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate and Elmer A. Benson became the Farmer-Laborer nominee for governor. Before he could launch his senate campaign, however, Olson died in August of 1936 at the age of 45. His funeral, held at the Minneapolis Civic Auditorium, was attended by approximately 150,000 people, attesting to his immense popularity in the state.