

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-SHC-022 ~~HE-MKC-065~~

CS 2706

Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area

Historic Name	Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area	CS #	2706
Other Name		SHPO Inv #	HE-MKC-065

Location	N and S sides of TH 7 between Radisson Rd and Old Market Rd	Hwy	TH 7
City/Township	Minnetonka, City of Shorewood	District	Met W
County	Hennepin	Reference	184

Twp Rng Sec	117N 23W Sec 25 117N 23W Sec 36	Acres	16.5
USGS Quad	Excelsior	Rest Area Class	4
UTM	Z15 E457610 N4972470		

Designer	Nichols, A R, Attributed	SP #	7-12-28-1A 2706-23
Builder	National Youth Administration (NYA)	SHPO Review #	

Historic Use	Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013525.01-24 013526.01 013526.03-15
Present Use	Roadside Parking Area		

Yr of Landscape Design	1937-41	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 1.15 Nic 5.34 Nic 7.25 Ols 2.01 Ols 2.02 Ols 2.03 Ols 2.04 Ols 2.05 Ols 2.06 Ols 2.07
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		Fieldwork Date	07-09-97
Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	

01	Council Ring	1937	
02	Curb, Stone	1937	
03	Fireplace(s), Stone	1937	
04	Well/Pump	1938	
05	Fireplace(s), Stone	1938	
06	Overlook Wall	1938	
07	Marker	1941	
08	Bench(es), Stone	1941	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			
		Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 13
		Prep for	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit

Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

Shorewood

The Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area is a 16-acre site that is located on both the northern and southern sides of T.H. 7 within the City of ~~Minnetonka~~. The site is roughly bounded on the east and west by Radisson Inn Road and Old Market Road. It is located northeast of Christmas Lake, and about one mile east of the center of Excelsior. The site is divided into three separate parcels, designated as "units" for the purposes of this study: Unit A is a picnic area south of T.H. 7, Unit B is a scenic overlook north of T.H. 7, and Unit C is a picnic area north of T.H. 7.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Structures in Unit A:

Council Ring. Built 1937 by the NYA. The council ring is located on a shady knoll on the northern side of Radisson Road in Unit A. It is built of tan, random rubble limestone. The ring is about 23' in diameter and its wall is about 18" thick and 16' tall. There is a fire ring in the center (about 5'10" in diameter with a brick-lined fire pit) and a pedestrian opening on the southern side of the ring. At the curblin south of the council ring are two poured concrete steps. The steps probably led to a gravel path that originally approached the council ring from the south.

(A few feet northeast of the council ring in Unit A is a flat, circular, poured concrete headstone that apparently marks the grave of a (beloved?) pet. The concrete disk is about 10" in diameter and is inscribed with the name "Wally." It probably dates from circa 1980.)

Well Enclosure. Built 1938 by the NYA. A hexagonally-shaped well enclosure is located on the northern side of Radisson Road in Unit A. The well structure is built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. The structure has a raised poured concrete floor with holes for drainage. The floor is surrounded by a low limestone wall anchored by six limestone piers. The enclosure is entered via two limestone steps on the northwestern side and two limestone steps on the southeastern side. Rising from the center of the floor is a cast-iron pump cast with the brand name "Red Jacket." (The upper portion of the pump has been removed.) A flagstone walkway originally approached the well from the southeast. (Only a couple of stones from the path remain near the curblin of Radisson Road.) Historic photos indicate that the floor of the enclosure was originally paved with flagstone, and that the piers supported six round timbers that, in turn, supported a wood shingle-covered polygonal roof with exposed log rafters. Simple, squared timber railings originally linked the piers.

Picnic Fireplace A. Built 1938 by the NYA. The collapsed remains of a picnic fireplace are located in the triangular island that comprises the southern part of Unit A. This pile of tan limestone rubble covers a rectangle about 4'6" by 5'. Historic photos show that this picnic fireplace was about two courses tall with a metal grate set in the top.

Historic Marker. Built 1941 by the NYA. A stone shrine-type historic marker is located against the side of a hill near the western end of Unit A. The marker, which faces west, is aligned roughly perpendicular with the highway. It is built of tan, random ashlar, rockfaced limestone laid on a stone footing. It is about 26'6" long. At the center of the marker is a projecting, rectangular shaft that is about 8'6" tall. The shaft has a rectangular niche in

which a bronze plaque is mounted. The shaft rests on a wide limestone base that is flanked by low stone sidewalls. The marker doubles as a low, stone retaining wall that holds back the grassy hillside on which the council ring is located.

The marker's bronze plaque addresses the naming of Christmas Lake. The seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society are cast near the bottom of the plaque. (See marker text at the end of this document.)

In front of the marker is a rectangular asphalt-paved plaza with a poured concrete rectangle set into the center. The original plan for the plaza has a mildly Craftsman-style design, with a cross-like treatment at the corners.

Stone Benches. Built 1941 by the NYA. In front of the historic marker, flanking the rectangular shaft, are two 6'-long benches with poured concrete seats resting on mortared limestone pedestals.

Structures in Unit B:

Stone Curbing. Built 1937 by the NYA. Original limestone curbing lines portions of the parking area adjacent to the overlook wall in Unit B. These curbs line the southern side of the parking area (adjacent to the overlook wall) and the southern side of the narrow grassy island. The curbing on the northern side of the island has been either covered with asphalt or removed.

Overlook Wall. Built 1938 by the NYA. The overlook wall is located on the northern side of T.H. 7 in Unit B. It stands on a hillside above T.H. 7 and overlooks Unit A and Christmas Lake to the southwest. The wall is not accessed directly from T.H. 7 -- instead cars drive into its asphalt-paved parking area from Excelsior Blvd. at St. Alban's Bay Road (north of the wall).

The overlook wall has a semicircular shape with two 9'-long endwalls. It is built of tan and gray random rubble limestone. The stones vary considerably in size. The wall is about 18" thick. The northern face is about 2'8" tall and the southern face is about 4'8" tall at its midpoint. There is an incised stone on the northern face of the western end that reads "Constructed by National Youth Administration 1938." Extending from the eastern end of the wall is a 15'-long section of low limestone retaining wall. This retaining wall originally formed the northern edge of a gravel path that led eastward from the overlook wall. (The retaining wall is overgrown by brush and is not easily visible.)

Structures in Unit C:

Picnic Fireplace B. Built 1937 by the NYA. A large picnic fireplace stands on an asphalt-paved circle (about 19' in diameter) that is located west of the parking area in Unit C. The fireplace is about 6'2" square and is built of tan and gray random rubble limestone. It originally had a tall chimney and metal grates on all four sides. The chimney has been removed and the structure is now about 2'7" tall. It has grates on the western and eastern sides, no chimney, and a crudely applied concrete cap. The fire boxes are lined with brick.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area is bisected by T.H. 7, which travels east and west through the site. There was originally a wooden sign in the T.H. 7 median that was built of round timbers and sheltered by a gabled roof. The sign had incised lettering reading "Roadside Parking Area." Historic photos also show several portable timber picnic tables scattered throughout the site. Today, T.H. 7 through the site is landscaped with grassy inslopes, many tall pines, and areas of thick brush. It is a busy divided highway that cannot be crossed by pedestrians.

Landscape features in each unit:

Unit A is located on a shaded hilly area on the southern side of T.H. 7. It is bounded by T.H. 7 on the north and Covington Road and Brooms Blvd. on the south. Radisson Road runs east and west through the site, creating a triangular island that comprises the southern part of Unit A. Covington, Brooms, and Radisson are asphalt-paved with most portions curbed in concrete. Unit A has a small parking area on the northern side of Radisson Road that holds about six cars and was originally lined with a stone curb. (It now has a concrete curb.) There is an additional parking area (about 100' long) on the southeastern side of Brooms Blvd. that is edged by concrete curbing and a concrete guardrail. Unit A is landscaped with grassy lawns, mature lilac and spirea bushes, and mature ash, spruce, maple, and elm trees. The historic marker near the western side of Unit A was originally approached via a highway pull-off road that is now closed. The historic marker is surrounded by 6 mature spruce trees, ash, maple, and buckthorn trees, and a tall lilac bush. (The original planting plan specified that 21 Colorado Spruce be planted behind the marker and that 32 spirea flank it.) There is a large grassy, weedy triangle west of the marker. A limestone picnic table with stone benches has been removed from Christmas Lake, presumably from Unit A (exact location unknown).

Unit B is located on the northern side of T.H. 7 on a bluff overlooking Christmas Lake to the south. It has a secluded feeling and is screened by woods from surrounding residences, although the noise from T.H. 7 is intrusive. The overlook's pull-off drive creates a narrow grassy island between the parking area and Excelsior Blvd. Grass is planted along both the northern and southern sides of the wall. The southern side and ends of the wall are overgrown with buckthorn, spruce, sumac, ash, and elms. Historic photos indicate that the wall was once overlooking a shady, grassy slope and that small groups of evergreens were originally planted just south of its endwalls.

Unit C is located in a relatively low, flat area on the northern side of T.H. 7. It has a large, rectangular, concrete curb-lined, asphalt-paved parking area that is aligned north and south. The parking area is entered from St. Alban's Bay Road which leads off of Excelsior Blvd. The parking area is surrounded by mature pines and scattered ash and elm. A long grassy aisle, created by two curving lines of mature pines, leads westward from the parking area. Picnic Fireplace B stands near the western end of the aisle.

■ SETTING

The site is located in a mostly-wooded, suburban setting northeast of Christmas Lake. (The lake is visible only from Unit B.)

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The only original plans that have been located are for the historic marker in Unit A. (It was built according to plan.) It is not certain, therefore, that the actual construction of the other features conformed to original plans. However, a set of early historic photographs shows many of the original structures and their relationships to each other and the highway.

Much of the site's original landscaping appears to be intact, although overgrown. The wooden "Roadside Parking Area" sign has been removed from the T.H. 7 median. The site has always been split by a divided roadway and therefore is less tightly knit than many roadside parking areas in this study.

In general, the Christmas Lake Parking Area retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. There have been some mostly-minor changes to the design and materials, as described below.

Unit A: The stone curbing in the parking area near the well has been replaced with concrete. A lectern-style limestone marker was added, then removed, from the council ring area. (It had a bronze geological plaque and was erected just north of the council ring in 1953. It was moved circa 1995 to the Excelsior Commons, a park near downtown Excelsior.) The stone enclosure has lost its roof, railings, flagstone floor (which has been covered with, or replaced by, concrete), flagstone walkway, and upper pump piece. Concrete caps have been crudely added to the walls and piers. Unit A originally had a timber-framed, steel historic marker, erected by the NYA in 1938. It was replaced by the current historic marker in 1941. The highway pull-off road leading to the historic marker (from T.H. 7) at the western side of Unit A has been closed. A stone picnic table has apparently been removed from Unit A or Unit C. (A stone picnic table, perhaps this table, is apparently now located in the Excelsior Historical Society in Excelsior.)

Unit B: The parking area has been paved with asphalt.

Unit C: The picnic fireplace is missing its chimney and two metal grates. The parking area was probably enlarged and paved circa 1960.

Notes On Condition

Unit A: The council ring is in poor condition, has been poorly patched, and is missing several stones. The well enclosure is in fair condition but missing its upper structure. The picnic fireplace has collapsed. The historic marker is in poor condition and its benches are in fair condition. The plaza in front of the marker has heaved and cracked and is overgrown with weeds and grass.

Unit B: The overlook wall and attached retaining wall are in poor condition, overgrown, and missing stones. The limestone curbing is in poor condition and is missing many stones.

Unit C: The picnic fireplace is in poor condition with stones missing, and has a crudely poured concrete cap.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This rest area was one of the first roadside construction projects that the Roadside Development Division of the highway department developed in cooperation with the National Youth Administration (NYA). The *Final Report of the NYA* reports that this was one of four projects that launched the roadside development and construction phases of the NYA program: "The construction types of activities were started early in 1937 with the Christmas Lake Roadside Park, the Bemidji State Park Bathhouse, Chisholm City Tourist Cabins, and the erection of an historic marker at St. Cloud [also in this inventory], opening the way to the development of this phase of the NYA" (*Final Report 1943:25*).

The highway department Roadside Development Division's annual report for 1938 summarizes the work completed in 1938:

On T.H. #7 adjacent to Christmas Lake lies a heavily timbered area of right of way ideally suited for a roadside parking area. The construction of this development was begun in the spring of 1937 and presents a complete roadside parking area and picnic grounds which includes council ring, fireplaces, picnic tables, athletic field and shelter house, together with an historic marker. The items of work completed this year are as follows: trail construction, 666 lineal feet; 1 stone table and seats; 2 parking area signs; historical marker; pump and shelter house; 3 picnic tables; cleanup of 6 acres; 1 fireplace (4 grates); 6 refuse containers; crushed rock surfacing, 16 cubic yards; seeding, 2.6 acres; sodding, 63 square yards. Estimated Unit Cost Value to State -- \$1,608.03. Actual State Expenditure -- \$1,536.23. State Participation 95.5% (*Annual Report 1938:27*).

A photograph of picnickers at the Christmas Lake site was chosen to illustrate the *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota for 1937-1938* (March 1939).

The *Final Report of the NYA* (1943) reported that the Christmas Lake roadside development project employed an average of 50 NYA workers each month of construction. The NYA also provided a supervisor for the project, and the NYA contributed approximately \$3,500 to the total project, most of which was spent on youth labor (*Final Report 1943:41*).

It is likely that the Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area was designed by Arthur R. Nichols of the firm Morell and Nichols. Nichols served as Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways in the 1930s and designed most roadside development sites built during this period. Photographs of the Christmas Lake site appear in an album of photographs that Nichols compiled for the highway department circa 1937-41. The photographs serve as a sort of portfolio of Nichols' work for the department, and the inclusion of Christmas Lake photos strongly suggests that he designed the site.

The first historic marker built by the NYA at the site in 1938 was a 3' by 5' steel sign (white background with black lettering) that was framed by timber with a gabled hood. The text of the sign was identical to the plaque of the existing historic marker that replaced it in 1941. The steel sign was one of a series of markers erected 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 only original plans that have been located for the Christmas Lake Roadside Parking Area are for the 1941 historic marker in Unit A. The title sheet for the marker plans is stamped

"Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. Oct. 21, 1941." The plans were signed in February of 1941 by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development Division), C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), S. Rex Green (Engineer of Lands and Right-of-Way), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Survey and Design), illegible [possibly H. E. Chard] (District Engineer), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and J. T. Ellison (Chief Engineer). The plaque on the 1941 historic marker may have been replaced in 1968.

A lectern-style limestone marker (with a bronze geological plaque) was installed just north of the council ring in 1953 by the Minnesota Geological Society in cooperation with Minnesota Department of Highways. It was moved circa 1995 to the Excelsior Commons near downtown Excelsior. The text of the marker addressed the geology of the Lake Minnetonka Region. (See text at the end of this document.)

Mn/DOT Site Development Unit files indicate that in 1961 the site contained a well, three tables, two fireplaces, and toilets.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Christmas Lake R.P.A., built in 1937-1941, is a roadside parking area with a complex site design. It is one of 19 properties in the inventory that were built by the National Youth Administration (NYA), and one of more than 60 sites 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 Christmas Lake R.P.A. is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Rare Federal Relief Property Type. Christmas Lake R.P.A. is one of only eight properties in this inventory that retain stone council rings. It has one of only two elaborate well and pump structures recorded in the inventory. (National Register Criterion A.)

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. Christmas Lake 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. Christmas Lake is also important as a well-preserved example of the work of the NYA in partnership with the MHD. Together, the MHD and various New Deal agencies like the NYA built a number of distinctive public facilities that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Christmas Lake R.P.A. is a well-developed example of the "National Park Service Rustic Style." The rest area's stone features display the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Christmas Lake is an important

example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols, to whom its design is attributed. (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.

T.H. 7 through the site is a very busy divided highway that cannot be crossed by pedestrians. Although the highway is located at a lower elevation than Units A and B and is screened from all three units by trees, the noise from the traffic is quite loud. Loud jets are also passing overhead.

There are no approach markers from T.H. 7, making the site difficult to find.

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

The text of the marker is associated with Christmas Lake. It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ REFERENCES

Anderson, Rolf T. "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Oct. 9, 1990; amended Aug. 30, 1993.

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

Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota for 1937-1938. March 1, 1939.

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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.

Kelly, Mark W. [Excelsior Chamber of Commerce.] Letter to James Reiersen [Mn/DOT]. June 21, 1994.

Nichols, A. R., comp. *Album of Roadside Development Projects.* 7 vols. Photo albums prepared for Roadside Development Division, Minnesota Department of Highways, circa 1937-1941. Mn/DOT Site Development Unit.

Peck, Betty. Telephone Interview. Aug. 3, 1996. [Liaison for the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka 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

It is likely that the limestone used to construct this site was quarried locally or within Hennepin County. Quarrying of limestone along the Mississippi River Valley began as early as the 1850s. Outcroppings of Shakopee, St. Lawrence, and Oneota stratas of limestone (dolomite) occur in the bluffs along the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Text of Plaque on Historic Marker

"Christmas Lake"

"Named for Charles W. Christmas, first county surveyor of Hennepin County, elected in 1852, who platted the original town site of Minneapolis for John H. Stevens and Franklin Steele. This lake and Lake Minnetonka now occupy what in pre-glacial times was part of the channel of the Mississippi River near its junction with the pre-glacial Minnesota River." [Seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society]

Text of Relocated Geological Marker

"Lake Minnetonka Region"

"Prior to the Great Ice Ages the surface of this region consisted of sandstones and limestones deposited in Cambrian and Ordovician seas several hundred million years ago. Previous to glaciation the drainage was to the south. The principal watercourse, several miles wide, had its headwaters in central Minnesota and extended southeastward, under Lake Minnetonka, to Pine Bend on the Mississippi, 10 miles below St. Paul. In that channel, once a conspicuous feature of the landscape, flowed the ancestral Mississippi.

"There were four major epochs of glaciation. The glaciers, 10,000 feet thick at their centers in Canada, moved southward to cover most of the state and filled the pre-glacial valley of the Mississippi with sand and gravel -- glacial drift -- to a depth of several hundred feet. Lake Minnetonka is perched on that drift, 930 feet above sea level and 400 feet above the rock floor of the valley.

"Erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota in Cooperation with the Department of Highways, State of Minnesota. 1953."

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This marker was relocated circa 1995 from the Christmas Lake Parking Area to Excelsior Commons in Excelsior.