

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HU-JEF-007  
CS 2802  
Reno Spring Roadside Parking Area

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Reno Spring Roadside Parking Area	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	2802 HU-JEF-007
<b>Location</b>	W side of TH 26 2.5 mi N of Iowa border	<b>Hwy District Reference</b>	TH 26 6A 2.5
<b>City/Township</b> <b>County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Jefferson Township Houston 101N 4W Sec 23 Reno Z15 E638800 N4821660	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	.8 4
<b>Designer</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SP #</b>	2802-23
<b>Builder</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	014749.02-23
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1950	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 2.31
<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		

**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Spring Water Outlet	1950	
02	Culvert	Ca. 1930	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

<b>Fieldwork Date</b>	01-11-03
<b>Prep by</b>	Gemini Research May. 04 G1. 109
<b>Prep for</b>	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit

<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minn Trunk Hwys (1998) <b>Addendum</b>
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■ **BRIEF**

Reno Spring Roadside Parking Area is located on the western side of T.H. 26 about 2.5 miles north of the Minnesota-Iowa state line and about 4.5 miles south of the town of Reno. The wayside rest is located about 300' west of the western bank of the Mississippi River. Its principal structure is a stone spring enclosure.

■ **STANDING STRUCTURES**

***Stone Spring Enclosure.*** Built 1950 by the Minnesota Department of Highways. The focal point of the site is a 22'-long structure built of random ashlar gray limestone over a poured concrete footing. Built against a bluff, the structure serves as both a retaining wall and as a device to deliver natural spring drinking water to passing travelers. The 22'-long wall has a symmetrical design with corner piers (2'6" tall) that give it visual solidity, and sidewalls (each 2'6" long) that project forward to form an enclosure. At the center of the wall is a 4'9"-tall fountain structure that delivered the free-flowing water. The fountain's spigot is fed via an iron pipe that emerges from the hillside. The supply pipe is currently disconnected from the stone structure and is visible in the grassy hillside behind the wall. After emerging from the fountain, the water spilled down into a stone bowl and through a drain opening, and then was carried southward via an underground 6"-diameter clay pipe to a culvert.

***Culvert Headwall and Wing Walls.*** Built circa 1930, probably by the Minnesota Department of Highways. The spring enclosure's underground clay pipe stops near the southern end of the wayside rest and the water emerges from the ground. Here the water enters a series of pre-existing drainage structures. Only the western part of one of the drainage structures is within the boundary of the wayside property. It is a double-culvert headwall and wing walls built of limestone. The wing walls guide the water into the culvert opening, and the headwall supports the edge of the roadbed and the ends of the culvert's two corrugated metal pipes which are aligned east-west under the T.H. 26 roadway.

Outside of the boundary of the wayside rest, the drainage system continues: It includes the pair of corrugated metal culvert pipes (previously mentioned) that extend under the T.H. 26 roadbed, the eastern headwall of the culvert which is built of poured concrete and probably dates from 1947, a 10'-wide and 50'-long concrete flume (circa 1947) that carries the water eastward from the highway, and another single culvert that carries the water under the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific trackbed. The water then continues to flow eastward toward the Mississippi.

This drainage system was probably built when T.H. 26 was constructed (pre-1934) and altered slightly in 1947 when T.H. 26 was regraded. (The limestone portions probably date from pre-1934 and the poured concrete portions probably date from 1947.) The system was built to drain the hillside above T.H. 26 to prevent field erosion, and to protect the highway from washing out. In developing Reno Spring the MHD was able to make use of this drainage infrastructure rather than creating new water-carrying elements for the spring enclosure.

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The site is about 450' long, measured from north to south. It was developed against the side of the grassy bluffs that rise up from the western side of the T.H. 26 roadbed.

The site has a curved, gravel highway pull-off drive that doubles as a parking area. The original plans specify that the drive be 18' wide. The drive is separated from T.H. 26 by a narrow traffic island between T.H. 26 and the drive. The original plans specify that the traffic island be 4' wide, 50' long, and edged with a 6"-tall concrete curb. Circa 1952 MHD photos of the site suggest that the island was built as planned (Olson vol. 2, pg. 31.). Today the island is a narrow ellipse (much shorter than the specified 50'), is curbless, and is covered with gravel and weeds.

On the original plans, the 22'-long area directly in front of the spring enclosure was to be surfaced with poured concrete to create a walkway. The walkway was to be edged with a 6"-tall poured concrete curb. Circa 1952 MHD photos suggest that the walkway and curb were perhaps not built, although the photos are not clear (Olson vol. 2, pg. 31.). Today there is no sign of a walkway or curb and this area consists of weeds and gravel.

The wayside rest is protected by a lush backdrop of beautiful mature cedars, planted as part of the creation of the site. The cedars form a windbreak that extends about 330' north and south along the hillside at the western edge of the site. Some of the trees, newly installed, are visible in circa 1952 MHD photos (Olson vol. 2, pg. 31.). Four small coniferous shrubs (possibly also cedar) have been recently planted near the northern end of the windbreak.

See also drainage system described in Standing Structures above.

#### ■ SETTING

The wayside rest is located in an agricultural setting about 4.5 miles south of the town of Reno. There are two farmsteads located west and northwest of the site on the hillside that rises above the western side of T.H. 26. The farmstead immediately west of the site is picturesque with turn of the century buildings and limestone retaining walls. Some of the farm buildings are visible in a circa 1952 photo of the site (Olson vol. 2, pg. 31.). The main driveway to this farmstead is located at the northern end of the wayside rest. There is another approach road into this farmstead at the southern end of the wayside rest.

East of the wayside rest are the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad tracks. The tracks run north and south, parallel with T.H. 26, about 90' east of the T.H. 26 centerline.

East of the wayside rest is relatively undeveloped, forested land that forms the western bank of the Mississippi River. On the eastern side of T.H. 26 about 700' north of the wayside rest is the entrance to Millstone Landing, one of four recreational areas operated by the St. Paul District of the Army Corps of Engineers. This facility has a public boat access to the Mississippi, picnic tables and grills, campsites, two new privies, and a beautiful forested site.

#### ■ INTEGRITY

##### **Alterations**

Spring water no longer flows through the structure. The traffic island has been reduced in length (north to south) and its curb has been removed. (It is possible that the curb was removed after snowplow damage, and that the island began shrinking in size after its protective curb was gone.)

### Notes on Condition

There are a couple of stones missing from the spring enclosure and it is overgrown with weeds. The mortar joints are not in severe condition, but need rehabilitation. The traffic island is covered with gravel and weeds.

### ■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Reno Spring Roadside Parking Area was constructed in 1950 by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) (S.P. 2802-23). Construction plans, entitled "Flowing Well Near Reno, Minn.," indicate that they were drawn in November of 1949 and signed by Harold Olson, head of the Roadside Development Division, in April 1950.

The individual designer of Reno Spring has not been identified. The site was probably designed by the Roadside Development Division staff, which included landscape architect Fred Vogt. Vogt had returned to the Roadside Development Division in March 1948 after working during World War II on defense-related projects. He was the Division's sole landscape architect until 1952 when Bill Chapman joined the Division (Granger et al 1998:3.17-3.19). Preliminary design work may also have been done by A. R. Nichols, who served as Consulting Landscape Architect for the Roadside Development Division from 1932-ca. 1940. Several of the Roadside Development Division projects that were built in the years after World War II were conceived or designed by Nichols during the Depression but not executed until after the war when national priorities shifted back to domestic construction. Whether designed by Nichols or by MHD staff, many of the roadside development projects built in the first decade after the war, like Reno Spring, were strongly influenced by the design principles of the Depression-era. These include National Park Service (NPS) Rustic Style treatment of landscape elements and vegetation, man-made structures designed in the Rustic Style, use of local stone, and use of hand-built techniques.

The site was built by MHD staff, as were many Division projects of the 1940s and 1950s. (Research in local newspapers was unable to uncover information about construction.) Kenneth Madole, retired MHD engineer who worked in the Division, was the field engineer for the Reno Spring project. He remembers the pre-existing spring, and recalls staking out the site. He said, "It was just a flowing well. We'd [the Minnesota Department of Highways] like to take advantage of the flowing springs in those days, and provide a drink of water for travelers who wanted to pull off the road" (Madole 2003).

The section of T.H. 26 that passes by Reno Spring was added to the trunk highway system in 1934. The MHD has no record of the road's original construction in its Construction Project Log. The highway was gravel until 1948 when it was first paved with bituminous.

Since 1938 this segment of highway has been part of the Great River Road (also known as the Mississippi River Parkway), a scenic highway designated by Congress in 1938 to follow the banks of the Mississippi River through the United States. At the same time that it authorized the road, Congress created the Mississippi River Parkway Planning Commission to administer and promote it. Both A. R. Nichols and Harold E. Olson of the Roadside Development Division were leaders in the multi-state effort to establish the scenic highway. In fact, the Commission's inaugural meeting was held in St. Paul.

Although the Great River Road was established in 1938, Congress did not approve funding for the first feasibility study until after World War II. In 1959 the Minnesota legislature officially designated the Minnesota segment of the Great River Road. The Minnesota segment extends the length of the state.

Harold Olson was still involved with the Great River Road in 1963 when he left the Roadside Development Division to become the Executive Secretary of the Minnesota Parkway Commission, the state's version of the national commission. The national organization, now called the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, is still in existence and is headquartered in Minneapolis.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Reno Spring Roadside Parking Area was built in 1950 by the Minnesota Department of Highways. Reno Spring is one of a small number of roadside development properties recorded in Mn/DOT's Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory that include natural spring drinking water structures.

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 Registration Requirements:

Non-Federal Relief Property That Closely Resembles a Federal Relief Property. Reno Spring is an excellent example of the Roadside Development properties that were built during the decade immediately following the end of the federal relief programs (1943-ca. 1953) and which represent a continuation of the design principles and philosophy of the MHD's federal relief-built sites. The overall site design, its high quality craftsmanship, and the use of native stone are all examples of this design tradition. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Reno Spring is an intact example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a small highway wayside rest. Despite the fact that it was built after the New Deal federal relief period, Reno Spring displays the landscape design, labor-intensive construction techniques, and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the NPS Rustic Style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. (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. 26 is relatively quiet past the site.

■ **REFERENCES**

Construction Plans. Plans for S.P. 2802-23 (T.H. 26-198). One sheet. Drawn in Nov. 1949, appr. by O. L. Kipp on May 17, 1950.

Construction Project Log Record. CS 2802. Minnesota Department of Highways. St. Paul.

Granger, Susan, Scott Kelly, and Kay Grossman. *Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways*. Prepared for Mn/DOT. Dec. 1998.

Madole, Kenneth [retired Mn/DOT engineer]. Telephone conversation with Kay Grossman. Oct. 13, 2003.

Murphy, Angela [Houston County Historical Society staff]. Correspondence with Kay Grossman. Feb.-May, 2003.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota*. Vol. 2. Photo album prepared by Department of Roadside Development, Minnesota Department of Highways, circa 1942, updated circa 1954. Mn/DOT Site Development Unit. St. Paul.

Upham, Warren. *Minnesota Geographic Names*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969.

#### ■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

##### Reno

The town of Reno was a railway town that was first named Caledonia Junction. It was later renamed Reno for Jess Lee Reno, a Major General in the Civil War who was killed in battle in 1862 (Upham 1969:239). Reno was served by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. The area is noted for its picturesque hills, valleys, ridges, and bluffs.

##### Local Stone

It is possible that the limestone used to build Reno Spring came from a nearby source. Extensive quarrying of limestone along the Mississippi River Valley began in the 1850s, although limited quarrying had been occurring as early as 1819-1820 at Fort Snelling near St. Paul. Much of the Mississippi River limestone -- or Oneota dolomite -- is a gray or buff color. One of the early quarries in Houston County was a limestone quarry near Hokah, about 15 miles northwest of Reno. The quarry near Hokah closed about 1935 (Thiel 1935:152).