

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

MU-AVC-010  
CS 5104  
Avoca Historical Marker

<b>Historic Name Other Name</b>	Avoca Historical Marker	<b>CS # SHPO Inv #</b>	5104 MU-AVC-010
<b>Location</b>	NE side of TH 59 about 400' SE of CSAH 6	<b>Hwy District Reference</b>	TH 59 8B 34.5
<b>City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM</b>	Avoca, City of Murray 106N 40W Sec 34 Avoca Z15 E288010 N4869220	<b>Acres Rest Area Class</b>	5 4
<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Attributed	<b>SP #</b>	5104-05
<b>Builder</b>	Work Projects Administration (WPA)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013501.01-15
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1941	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 2.72 Ols 2.73
<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	Marker	1941
02	Bench(es), Other	1941

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

**Fieldwork Date**  
10-17-96

**Prep by**  
Gemini Research  
Dec. 98 G1. 2

**Prep for**  
Site Development Unit  
Cultural Resources Unit  
Environmental Studies Unit

<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

The Avoca Historical Marker is located on the northeastern side of T.H. 59 about 400' southeast of C.S.A.H. 6 within the city of Avoca. It is a narrow, 5-acre site with an asphalt-paved highway pull-off drive, grassy lawns, and a stone marker.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Stone Marker.** Erected 1941 by the WPA. The principal feature on the site is a stone marker built of coursed ashlar red, gray, and purple split granite boulders with dark mortar joints, laid on a stone footing. The boulders vary from the size of large bricks to the size of watermelons. The masonry is well executed, with the stones carefully selected and placed. The marker is rectangular in shape and about 10'11" long, 8'3" tall, and 3'8" thick at the base. It is aligned parallel with the highway. Mounted in a rectangular niche is a bronze plaque with raised lettering and the symbols of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways cast near the bottom. The text of the marker addresses the founding of the townsite of Avoca. (See text at the end of this document.)

The original plans call for "either concrete or stone curb and terrace acceptable depending upon type of labor available to W.P.A" to be built in front of the marker. Existing at this location is a concrete terrace (about 17'10" long and 9'3" wide) poured with a 6" curb. In front of the marker is a 4' by 8' rectangle of crushed rock (shown as a bituminous panel on the original plans).

**Concrete Benches.** Erected 1941 by the WPA. There are two original, handsome, poured concrete benches resting on the terrace, perpendicular with the marker. (The original plans specified benches with stone legs and concrete seats.) The benches are 6' long, 1'6" wide, and 1'6" tall.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The asphalt-paved drive (about 20' wide) is edged with concrete curbing. Flanking the poured concrete terrace are two 8'-square flower beds edged with treated lumber (circa 1980s). In front of the poured concrete terrace is a round metal picnic table (circa 1990) sitting on a 12'6"-wide area of poured concrete sidewalk squares.

Most of the site is planted with grass. There is a row of mature trees (including several evergreens and a couple of ash) planted about 15' apart behind (east of) the marker. There are four evergreens in the grassy island west of the drive. The southern portion of the site (south of the asphalt pull-off drive) is a rectangle of tall, unmowed prairie grasses. The topography of the site is flat.

The original plans call for the site to be planted with 20 spruce trees, 28 green ash, 76 American elm, and seven clumps of juniper shrubs. Historic photos indicate that the site was probably planted as planned. When these trees matured, the site would have been fairly shady.

■ **SETTING**

The rest area is located in an agricultural setting on the edge of Avoca. The site is bounded by T.H. 59 on the west, by fields on the west, south, and east, and by the townsite of Avoca on the north.

■ **INTEGRITY**

**Alterations**

The site appears to have been built fairly close to plan.

The drive was originally gravel and is now paved with asphalt. The bituminous rectangle in front of the marker is now filled with crushed rock. A picnic table was added in front of the marker. Most of the original plantings have been removed.

The site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**Notes on Condition**

The marker is in poor condition and needs mortar repair. The poured concrete benches have chipped.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Prior to the construction of this wayside rest, there was a 3' by 5' steel sign at or near this site. The steel sign was white with black lettering and was one of the markers erected during the first cooperative marking program of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society, which was established in 1929. The text of the steel sign was identical to the text on stone marker.

The current site was constructed in 1941 by the Work Projects Administration (WPA), working in cooperation with the Highway Department. It was built as a 1,300'-long roadside development project that focused specifically on this site. The plans were drawn in December 1940 and signed in December 1940 and January 1941 by S. Rex Green (Engineer of Lands and Right-of-Way), Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development Division), C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Survey and Design), C. J. Swift (District Engineer), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and J. T. Ellison (Chief Engineer). The title sheet contains the notation "Final Plans Construction Division W.P.A. Dec. 2, 1941."

The site was probably designed by A. R. Nichols, who served as Consulting Landscape Architect for the Roadside Development Division of the MHD during the 1930s and designed most of the roadside development facilities from this period. The design of the site's landscape and structures closely resembles sites confirmed to have been designed by Nichols.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Avoca Historical Marker is one of 23 properties in the inventory that were built by (or suspected to have been built by) the WPA and one of more than 60 sites that were designed by, or whose design is attributed to, Arthur R. Nichols. The site was built in 1941 and has stonework of excellent quality.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the Avoca 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. Avoca 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. Avoca is also important as a well-preserved example of the work of the WPA in partnership with the MHD. Together, the MHD and various New Deal agencies like the WPA built a number of distinctive and well-constructed 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. Avoca Historical Marker is an intact example of a "highway pull-off" style roadside parking area and an excellent example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to roadside development structures. Its stone marker displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both this style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Furthermore, Avoca 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. 59 is quiet past the site.

The text of the historic marker is associated with the town of Avoca. It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ REFERENCES

*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.

Luehmann, Maxine Kayser. *The Sun and the Moon: A History of Murray County.* Murray County Board of Commissioners, ca. 1982-1986.

*Murray County History.* Murray County Historical Society, 1982.

Regan, Ann. "The Irish." In *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups.* Ed. June Drenning Holmquist. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981.

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

Shannon, James P. *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

#### ■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND TEXT OF MARKER

##### **Avoca**

Avoca was founded by Catholic immigrants who were settled in Murray County by St. Paul Archbishop John Ireland as part of a Catholic resettlement program that placed 4,000 Catholic families in west central and southwestern Minnesota during the years 1875-1885. Ireland's program was the largest and most successful Catholic colonization program in the United States. Avoca was one of ten villages in five counties in western Minnesota that was established by Ireland to serve as trade centers for the colonists. Most of the Catholics settled by the Archbishop were Irish who had been living in the eastern U.S. or Ireland, but the program also attracted Catholics from France, Belgium, Germany, and England. Ireland's Catholic Colonization Bureau worked in cooperation with James J. Hill's St. Paul and Pacific Railroad and four other railroad companies to settle the colonists on 369,000 acres of land that had been granted to the railroads by Congress.

Colonization near Avoca began in 1877 when the Catholic Colonization Bureau began to offer 50,000 acres to Catholic immigrants at \$5-\$7 an acre. A post office was established at the future town in 1878 and, in 1879, railroad tracks were constructed through the county. Avoca was platted in October of 1879, two months after the first train arrived. Ireland named the town after a river in County Wicklow, Ireland (40 miles south of Dublin), which poet Thomas Moore wrote of in the poem "Sweet Vale of Avoca."

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

"This town, begun in 1878 and named for a river in Ireland, became a key point for the sale of 50,000 acres of railroad lands to Catholic colonists in Murray County through the activities of Archbishop Ireland and the Catholic Colonization Bureau. Early erection of a church, immigrant house, and other public buildings greatly facilitated settlement." [Seals of the Minnesota Historical Society and Minnesota Department of Highways]