

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

OL-ROC-105
CS 5510
Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area

Historic Name Other Name	Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area	CS # SHPO Inv #	5510 OL-ROC-105
Location	E side of TH 63 at South Branch of the Zumbro River	Hwy District Reference	TH 63 6A 41.6
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Rochester, City of Olmsted 107N 14W Sec 26 Rochester Z15 E543090 N4875850	Acres Rest Area Class	4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Attributed	SP #	63-59-22
Builder	Works Progress Administration (WPA)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013518.04-12
Yr of Landscape Design	1937-38	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 2.89 Ols 2.90
Overall Site Integrity	Moderately Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
Historic Context			
List of Standing Structures			
Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	1937	05-13-97
			Prep by
			Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 64
			Prep for
			Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			
Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)		

■ BRIEF

The Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area is located on the eastern side of T.H. 63 (locally called North Broadway Street), on the southern bank of the South Branch of the Zumbro River, within the city of Rochester. The site is adjacent to Bridge No. 5859 and a concrete dam (MN 00515) that creates a widening of the river called Silver Lake. The site is adjacent to (and functionally part of) Rochester's Silver Lake Park.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Overlook Wall. Built 1937-1938 by the WPA. The site's principal feature is a gray, coursed ashlar, rockfaced limestone overlook wall that stands on the shore of Silver Lake and provides a view of the dam, water, and surrounding park land. The wall stands in a grassy, shady park-like setting and is approached on foot. It is aligned north and south, parallel with the highway. Its southern end begins near the pedestrian sidewalk at the southern edge of the block. The wall extends north until it joins the southern end of the walkway that crosses over Dam MN 00515. Originally, a section of the overlook wall then turned to the northwest when it met the dam, and continued to the northwest for about 32' (perpendicular with the dam).

The wall is approximately 2' thick. Its western face varies in height from 2' to about 3'6". There are two projecting lookout bays, one an 18'-wide rectangular bay and the other a 94'-wide curved bay. The height of the eastern face of the wall (over the water) at the curved bay is about 11'. A small rectangular plaque on the western side of the wall reads "Works Progress Administration Project, State of Minnesota, Department of Conservation Cooperating, 1937."

The upper portions of Dam 00515 appear to date from about 1978. Bridge 5859 was built in 1978.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site is located on the eastern side of T.H. 63 (also called North Broadway Street), on the southern bank of the South Branch of the Zumbro River near the center of Rochester. The site is adjacent to Bridge No. 5859 (built 1978) and Dam 00515 (rebuilt circa 1978), which creates Silver Lake. The site is adjacent to Silver Lake Park, which includes land on both the north and south sides of the river. The topography of the site is relatively flat.

There is a grassy lawn immediately west of the wall (the grass grows right up to the stone). Deciduous shrubs have recently been planted along the southern end of the wall (obscuring part of the wall), and there are a few young and mature deciduous trees scattered near the southern end. Four spruce (about 15 years old) and a garden of deciduous shrubs have been placed west of the wall. No original planting plan has been located.

■ SETTING

A city parkway called Silver Lake Drive (originally 13th Place NE) runs along the southern side of the site and continues eastward along the southern shore of the lake. The wall is

located at the northeastern corner of Silver Lake Drive and N. Broadway Street (T.H. 63). The lakeshore east of the site is occupied by city park with grassy banks and an asphalt walking path.

The site is bounded by T.H. 63 on the west, the bridge and dam on the north, the lake and park land on the east, and Silver Lake Drive on the south. There are commercial areas along T.H. 63 both north and south of the bridge, and residential neighborhoods east and west of the site.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

An original construction plan has not been located.

Although it was originally called Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area, the site was apparently used as a parking area for only a few years (circa 1938-1941), and was then converted to pedestrian-only access. See Historical Background below.

The bridge was replaced in 1978 and the dam superstructure appears to date from circa 1978.

Historic photos show that, at the time that the wall was built, Bridge 5859 was a narrow structure and the dam was lower, so that the overlook wall was a prominent structure on the site. Today, the wall is in visual competition with a great deal of concrete (the rebuilt bridge and dam).

The northwest portion of the wall (about 32' long) has been removed (probably when the dam was improved in the 1970s).

Plantings have been added west of the wall and along its southern end. The grassy area west of the wall has been filled about 8" higher than the original landscaping, burying one course of the wall and, unfortunately, reducing its height by about 8".

In general, the site retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association. However, its integrity of setting, feeling, and -- to some degree -- design, have been altered by the removal of a portion of the wall, by the reconstruction of the adjacent bridge and dam, by new plantings, and by the raising of the grassy area immediately west of the wall by about 8".

Notes on Condition

The wall is in poor condition and needs repair. Many stones are missing -- for example, nearly the entire upper course of the curved lookout bay is missing.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area was constructed in 1937-1938 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) working in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways and

the Minnesota Department of Conservation. (No original plans have been located. According to the Mn/DOT plan room, it is possible that the plans were retained by the Department of Conservation.)

The Roadside Parking Area was constructed as part of a large federal relief effort that included the construction of Bridge 5859 (built circa 1937), the construction of the Silver Lake Dam and the creation of Silver Lake (built circa 1935-37), extensive city park development, and possibly the improvement of T.H. 53. Federal relief labor was apparently involved in many or all phases of this work.

The highway department's 1938 *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* briefly described the highway department's portion of the project:

Along T.H. 63 in the City of Rochester adjacent to the dam which crosses the Zumbro River, a stone masonry concourse and lookout was constructed on a high scenic spot overlooking the river. A pedestrian walk was incorporated into the concourse and a parking area was developed off of the traveled portion of the highway (*Annual Report 1938:46*).

The report indicates that 270 lineal feet of stone curbing and 2,200 square feet of flagstone walk were constructed, but they do not show in a May 16, 1940, historic photo (Olson photo album, Vol. 2, p. 89, Mn/DOT Site Development Unit).

It is likely that the Silver 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 structures built during this period. His firm of Morell and Nichols also did extensive work for the Rochester parks department -- it is likely that they designed the other structures in Silver Lake Park as well.

The Minnesota Historical Society has an historic photo dated 10/20/36 which shows a federal relief work crew with hand shovels "At work on new road being built along the edge of Silver Lake in Rochester" (see MHS photo # HE3.81/p6, taken 10/20/36).

Early plans show that both river banks near the bridge and dam were rippedraped with stone (possibly mortared). An historic photo taken May 16, 1940, shows that the river bank at the base of the dam was retained with coursed limestone that appears to match the limestone of the wall (Olson photo album, Vol. 2, p. 89, Mn/DOT Site Development Unit).

Although it was originally called Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area, the site was apparently used as a parking area for only a few years (circa 1938-1941). The parking area was originally a shallow rectangle. It was not placed immediately adjacent to the wall (which would have been typical for the Roadside Development Division's 1930s overlooks), but rather was closer to the T.H. 63 driving lane. An historic photo dated May 16, 1940, shows a shallow rectangular parking area adjacent to T.H. 63, an unfinished gravel and grass area west of the wall, and no walkways (neither concrete nor flagstone) (Olson photo album, Vol. 2, p. 89-90, Mn/DOT Site Development Unit).

The wall seems to have been converted to pedestrian access-only in 1941. A highway department plan for the paving of T.H. 63 shows the elimination of the wall's parking area (S.P. 5110-04, signed in Sept. 1940 and March 1941). The plan proposes to replace the

parking area with a 5' concrete pedestrian sidewalk along T.H. 63, 1610 sq. yds. of sod immediately west of the wall, and a "proposed future walk" to line the inner side of the wall. The "walk" was apparently never built. (See the undated photo on p. 90 in the Olson photo album (Vol. 2, pg. 90) for a view of the wall when the ground was prepared for the sodding.)

See information on Silver Lake Park, which was built in conjunction with the roadside parking area, at the end of this document.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Silver Lake Roadside Parking Area, built 1937-1938 by the WPA, is a small roadside parking area with a stone overlook wall. It was developed by the MHD in cooperation with the state Department of Conservation (now MnDNR) and the City of Rochester. The wall is one of 37 stone overlook walls inventoried in this study. It is one of 23 sites in the inventory that are known or suspected to have been built by the WPA. It is 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 Silver Lake R.P.A. is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context due to loss of integrity.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

This stretch of T.H. 63 is a busy thoroughfare, but the distraction of the traffic is somewhat ameliorated by the quiet of the adjacent lake and parkland.

The wall appears to be functionally part of, and may be maintained by, the Rochester parks system.

■ REFERENCES

Anderson, Rolf T. "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." National Register 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.

Dunn, David F. "Olmsted County Parks, Then, Now, and When." *Pro Memoria*. Rochester: Olmsted County Historical Society, 1965.

Minnesota Work Relief History During the Period April 1, 1934 to June 30, 1935. State Emergency Relief Administration. 1935.

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

Rochester Post-Bulletin, June 19, 1937; June 24, 1937; and June 25, 1937.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Silver Lake Park

The Roadside Parking Area was most likely part of the Silver Lake Project. The impetus for this large park project began as early as 1916 when the North Rochester Civic Association began lobbying for the construction of a recreational lake. By 1925, the Rochester City Council had acquired 20 acres for a tourist park [a camping area for auto tourists] and, by 1929, a proposed lake was added to the plans. Several Rochester organizations were involved in the development of the recreational area: the Rochester Park Board, Rochester Chamber of Commerce, Izaak Walton League, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Society of Power Engineers, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Elks Club, and the Trades and Labor Assembly.

The City of Rochester hired S. A. Norling of Minneapolis, hydraulic engineer, in 1930 to survey and report on the feasibility of impounding water for a lake. In 1930, the Greater Silver Lake Committee, chaired by H. E. Whiting, was organized, and the Rochester Park Board obtained plans for a tourist park and lake from a landscape architect [unfortunately, not identified]. The initial funding was provided by the City of Rochester. The *Rochester Post-Bulletin* reported that, in 1932, "With hundreds looking for jobs, the [Rochester City] Council authorized a \$5,000 expenditure by the Park Board for the unemployed, and many men were put to work removing dirt from the area" (*Rochester Post-Bulletin*, June 24, 1937).

The Civil Works Agency (CWA), established in November of 1933, became the supervising agency of the project in 1933, and supplied the relief labor for the Silver Lake project. The CWA carried on the project and, when the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) succeeded it in 1934, the project was continued. A 1935 SERA report states that:

In Rochester . . . more than \$155,000 was expended on a park program resulting in construction of three parks and improvements to three others. Of the total expended, about \$130,000 was for relief labor and the \$25,000 balance was the city's contribution for equipment, tools, and materials. . . . At Silver Lake Park more than 100,000 cubic yards of dirt was moved by relief labor to help construct an artificial lake. The city had one of the most extensive park improvement programs in the state . . . [p. 99].

An artificial lake was constructed in one of the city parks in Rochester in Olmsted County. Work relief labor prepared the lake bed and a small spring-fed stream was diverted into the area to form the lake [p. 130] (*Minnesota Work Relief History 1935:99, 130*).

In 1935, the project was turned over to the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Rochester Parks Board was the sponsoring agency, providing the original plans and paying for materials. Estimated final cost of the entire project was \$500,000.

A dedication celebration was held June 24, 1937, in the park and along the shore of Silver Lake. Approximately 6,000 people took part in the many events held throughout the day and evening. R. C. Jacobson, field representative of the Chicago Regional WPA Office, was featured speaker at the dedication. Other speakers were: W. A. Moore (mayor), Harold Thompson (President of the Rochester Park Board), Harold Whiting (Chair of the North Rochester Civic Association), Colonel F. C. Harrington of Washington (National Deputy WPA Administrator and its chief engineer), and Victor Christgau (State WPA Administrator). During his remarks, Christgau commented that the project took 608,000 man hours to complete. He commended the WPA employees and the City of Rochester and presented a certificate of completion to the park board.

Activities held throughout the day included a community sing, a band concert, and over 40 events for children and adults. The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, headquartered at LaCrosse, Wisconsin, arrived during the day and stocked the new lake with thousands of big-mouthed bass and bluegills. The day concluded with a concert by the Rochester Symphony and a 45-minute fireworks display.

Remaining structures in Silver Lake Park today include three small stone arch limestone bridges, a limestone and wooden picnic shelter, and other stonework, much of it constructed by the WPA. Also standing in the park is a limestone marker erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota in 1954. (A likely source for information on the park is Dunn 1965.)

Local Stone

The stone overlook wall may have been constructed from local limestone. Outcroppings of dolomitic limestone are located in the bluffs of the Zumbro River and its tributaries. Several quarries cutting Galena and Platteville limestone once existed in Olmsted County.

Rochester

Rochester, named for the city in New York, was platted in 1855 and incorporated as a city in 1858.