

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

RN-BCO-004
CS 6508
Birch Coulee Historical Marker

Historic Name Other Name	Birch Coulee Historical Marker	CS # SHPO Inv #	6508 RN-BCO-004
Location	E side of TH 71 250' S of CSAH 2	Hwy District Reference	TH 71 8A 83.9
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Birch Cooley [sic] Township Renville 113N 34W Sec 19 Morton Z15 E341680 N4937890	Acres Rest Area Class	.5 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Attributed	SP #	6508-07
Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013500.08-14
Yr of Landscape Design	1950	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 2.117
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible in Near Future, see Statement of Significance Now eligible: see http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf for additional information.		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Marker	1950	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

Fieldwork Date	10-16-96
Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 6
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

Birch Coulee Historical Marker is a .05-acre site that is located on the eastern side of T.H. 71 about 250' south of CSAH 2. It is located about two miles north of Morton.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Marker. Erected 1950 by the MHD. The principal feature on the site is a stone marker that is built of pink, gray, and black, rockfaced Morton granite, most of which is coursed. (The plans specify limestone.) The marker is about 18'3" long and is aligned roughly parallel with the highway. It has a rectangular shaft (about 9'4" tall) that is flanked by two lower walls. Mounted in the shaft is a metal plaque, which is set into a rectangular niche that has a large keystone. There are three stone steps at the front edge of the marker.

The text of the plaque addresses the Battle of Birch Coulee, which occurred during the U.S. Government-Dakota Conflict of 1862. Cast near the bottom of the plaque are the symbols of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Highway Department. (See marker text at the end of this document.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

In front of the marker is a rectangular poured concrete plaza (specified as gravel on the plan). There is a curved, asphalt-paved, highway pull-off drive that creates a narrow island between T.H. 71 and the drive. The island is lined with concrete curb (covered with asphalt). The topography of the site is flat.

The site is planted with grass. There are four evergreen trees and four mature ash trees planted in a row behind the marker. The original plan specifies planting nine Colorado Spruce as a backdrop for the marker, six Savin Juniper flanking the marker, ten American Elm to provide shade, and another 16 American Elm across the road to the west and north.

■ SETTING

The site is located in an agricultural setting about two miles north of the town of Morton. The wooded coulees of the Minnesota River are located a short distance to the east and southeast. The site is bounded by T.H. 71 on the west and is surrounded by fields.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The site appears to have been built close to the original plan.

The drive was originally gravel and is now paved with asphalt. Asphalt almost covers the concrete curbing in front of the marker. Original plantings probably have been removed or replaced.

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

Notes on Condition

The marker is in poor condition and needs repair. It has been crudely and poorly repaired in the past. There are a few stones missing.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the construction of this wayside rest, there was a 3' by 5' steel sign at or near this site. The sign was white with black lettering and had text nearly identical to the text of the metal plaque on the stone marker. (The sign included one more line: "The site is owned by the State".) The steel sign 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 wayside rest and stone marker were designed by the MHD and built in 1950. The original plans were drawn in June of 1950. The design was strongly influenced by the roadside development program's Federal Relief-constructed sites of the 1930s and 1940s, most of which were designed by A. R. Nichols, the MHD's Consulting Landscape Architect. The site may have been designed during this period but not built until 1950, or the plans may have been drawn by Roadside Development's staff landscape architect Fred Vogt who worked closely with Nichols in the 1930s and early 1940s. The plans were signed during June and July by Olson and several Highway Department officials: R. J. Wolfangle (Engineer of Plans), Walter Schultz (Assistant Engineer of Plans and Surveys), C. A. Thompson (District Engineer), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Plans and Surveys), and O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer).

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Birch Coulee Marker was built in 1950 by the MHD. It is one of 18 stone, free-standing, shrine-type historic markers recorded in this inventory. It is one of three sites in the study that commemorate events associated with the U.S. Government-Dakota Conflict of 1862. (The others are Morton Pioneer Monuments R.P.A. and Camp Release State Memorial Wayside.)

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." The site was developed in 1950 and therefore does not meet the registration requirements' 50-year age criterion. However, it is recommended that the property WILL BE ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context when it is 50 years old in the year 2000, because it meets the registration requirements listed below:

Birch Coulee Historical Marker

Non-Federal Relief Property That Closely Resembles a Federal Relief Property. The Birch Coulee Historical Marker is important as an excellent example of a Non-Federal relief property that was built during the decade immediately following the end of the federal relief programs (1943-1953) and which strongly represents a continuation of the design principles and philosophy of the federal relief-built roadside development sites. The Roadside Development Division's stonemasons continued the federal relief era's tradition of excellent craftsmanship when they constructed the marker. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Built in 1950, the Birch Coulee Historical Marker is a well-preserved example of the MHD Roadside Development Division's small pull-off style roadside parking area with a shrine-type historic marker built by the Division's own stonemasons. The marker is an intact example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to an interpretive marker. It displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the 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.

It is recommended that the site interpretation be updated for cultural sensitivity.

The text of the historic marker is associated with the general Birch Coulee area "half a mile east of this point." It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

Morton Pioneer Monuments Roadside Parking Area, which is another site in this inventory, is located about 1.5 miles north of this site.

■ REFERENCES

Carley, Kenneth. *The Sioux Uprising of 1862*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976.

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.

Rubenstein, Mitchell E. and Alan R. Woolworth. "The Dakota and Ojibway." 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.

Sketches Historical and Descriptive of the Monuments and Tablets Erected by the Minnesota Valley Historical Society in Renville and Redwood Counties, Minnesota. Morton: Minnesota Valley Historical Society, 1902.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT**

The first Euro-American land claim in Renville County was filed in 1856. The area was named for the Dakota name for the area and the French word "coulee" for the stream bed. Many birch trees, which the Dakota used to make canoes, were located in this vicinity. By the time of organization of Birch Coulee [sic] Township in 1867, the spelling of the place name had been altered and the official spelling of the township became "Birch Cooley."

The Battle of Birch Coulee was the turning point of the U.S. Government-Dakota Conflict of 1862. Birch Coulee was the third confrontation between the U.S. Government and the Dakota. Rubenstein and Woolworth summarize the events:

The late arrival of annuity payments promised by the government [in 1851 treaties], failure to provide agricultural aid, and dissatisfaction with the restrictions of reservation life prompted many Dakota to return to their old homes. . . . These areas were now occupied by white settlers, and distrust between the earlier and later masters of the land deepened as the decade wore on. . . . Friction and local outbreaks of violence, spurred by the whites' growing intolerance of the Indians and Dakotas' increasing disrespect for the United States government, created an inflammable situation. . . . In August, 1862, driven by hunger and disgusted by unfulfilled promises, the Dakota attacked settlements in the Minnesota River Valley in what rapidly became a desperate attempt to drive the whites out of southern Minnesota. The Dakota War of 1862 lasted only a few weeks, but it had far-reaching repercussions for Indian-white relations in the three decades that followed. The death of about 500 whites and the widespread destruction of property evoked cries for the removal, if not the extermination, of all Dakota from the state. . . . From a population of upward of 7,000 the number of Dakota in Minnesota dropped to 374 in 1866 . . . (Rubenstein and Woolworth 1981:22-23).

The so-called Battle of Birch Coulee occurred on September 2, 1862, two days after a burial detail of 160 men under the command of Major Joseph R. Brown left Fort Ridgely (near New Ulm) on August 31. The detail buried 16 settlers who had been found dead along the Agency road, and then camped the first evening at the mouth of Birch Coulee. The next day they traveled up the northern side of the river and eastward to the Birch Coulee woods. The detail made camp approximately 200 yards west of the timbered coulee. At dawn on September 2nd, a group of Dakota attacked. The troops were surrounded for over thirty hours, and then eight companies of the 6th and 7th Regiment from Fort Ridgely arrived and the Dakota eventually retreated. There were many casualties on both sides.

The Battle of Birch Coulee has been commemorated with several markers in the Morton area. The battlefield and approximately 80 adjacent acres were purchased by an act of the 1929 state legislature and the site was named Birch Cooley Battlefield State Memorial Park. It is located approximately one mile east of this wayside rest.

Local Stone

The granite for this marker was probably obtained from a quarry near Morton, which was one of the state's leading granite-producing areas. Morton granite gneiss was quarried in the Morton area as early as 1884. The Saulpaugh Company owned the Morton Quarry from 1884-1887, followed by John Anderson who operated it until 1908 when the Anderson Granite Company was formed. Eventually companies from St. Cloud opened quarries in the

area. The granite was prized for its marble-like coloring and was used extensively in the construction of foundations for large buildings.

Text of Metal Plaque on Stone Marker

"Battle of Birch Coulee On the prairie half a mile east of this point, a party of about 160 troops was attacked by Sioux at dawn, Sept. 2, 1862. During the battle the force was surrounded for thirty hours, losing over a third of the number in killed and wounded."
[Minnesota Department of Highways and Minnesota Historical Society Seals]