

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

RW-RFC-032  
CS 6403  
Redwood Falls Retaining Wall

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Redwood Falls Retaining Wall	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	6403 RW-RFC-032
<b>Location</b>	TH 19 at TH 71 (Mill Street)	<b>Hwy District Reference</b>	TH 19/71 8B 72.0
<b>City/Township County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Redwood Falls, City of Redwood 112N 36W Sec 1 Redwood Falls Z15 E331620 N4934140	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	NA
<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Attributed	<b>SP #</b>	19-14-25-1-C
<b>Builder</b>	FERA/SERA, Suspected	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall Roadside Parking Area Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013559.01-11 013563.03-19
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1935	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Nic 5.24 Nic 5.26
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Moderately 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	Retaining Wall	1935
02	Flagpole(s), Other	1938

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

**Fieldwork Date**  
09-21-97

**Prep by**  
Gemini Research  
Dec. 98 G1. 63

**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 Redwood Falls Retaining Wall is located in the median at the junction of T.H. 19 and T.H. 71 (Mill Street) on the northern edge of downtown Redwood Falls.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Granite Retaining Wall.** Built 1935, probably by local relief labor. The principal structure on this site is a long, curving granite retaining wall that runs east and west in the narrow, roughly triangular median at the junction of T.H. 19 and T.H. 71 (Mill Street). The wall is built on the northern edge of downtown along a hillside created as the land drops down to the river valley. The site splits the intersection of T.H. 19 and T.H. 71 into two levels, with the land south of the wall being at higher elevation than the land north of the wall.

The wall is constructed of randomly-laid, roughly-cut, gray and pink granite. Many pieces of stone measure roughly 12" square and the rocks were laid with deeply-raked mortar joints. The wall is approximately 18" thick and is anchored at intervals with piers that are about 24" square. There were originally ornamental lamp standards on some of the piers. The piers support sections of ornamental railing that vary from 16' to 26' in length. The railing was originally painted with the highway department's standard light green paint, as specified on the plans. (It has been repainted with black paint.) The original plans specify that the southern face of the wall be lined with a 6'-wide concrete sidewalk that, if it is was built, has been removed.

The wall was originally about 330' long. It originally consisted of a gently curving, 285'-long western segment; a small rectangular lookout bay that faces north; and an angled 120'-long eastern segment that has been removed down to the ground level.

The western wall segment has 14 piers that are about 3' tall on their southern face. The height of the northern face of the wall varies with the elevation, with the tallest point being at the midpoint of the western wall segment. A stone and concrete staircase is located about 12' from the western end of the wall. It descends northward to a crosswalk across T.H. 19. The staircase has 13 concrete steps that are 5' wide. (Some of the steps have been replaced or reworked.) The original plans specify 10 steps.

The rectangular lookout bay is 26' wide and projects to the north. Within the bay is a triangular concrete terrace that measures about 26' north to south. The plans indicate that the terrace was originally about 42' north to south and included a small inset triangle of flagstone that, if it was originally built, has been covered or removed.

The 120'-long eastern wall segment was removed down to ground level in the 1980s after it was hit by a vehicle. The stonework that remains is below grade when viewed from the south and about 4"-6" tall when viewed from the north.

**Flagpole.** Built 1938, probably by the local American Legion post. A 25'-tall flagpole is located just south of the retaining wall's lookout bay. The flagpole is supported by a 4'-square, 16" high concrete base. Mounted on the top of the concrete base is a headstone-like

piece of smoothly-dressed gray granite that is inscribed: "Donated to the city 1938 Post 38."

#### ■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The wall retains the upper bluff on which downtown Redwood Falls is located and splits the intersection of T.H. 19 and T.H. 71 into two levels. Only the piers and ornamental railing are visible when the wall is viewed from the south, while the entire northern face of the wall is visible when the wall is viewed from the north.

The wall is located on a long, narrow (26' north to south) island that is lined with a concrete curb. Modern light poles line the site. Historic photographs indicate that ornamental lamp posts were originally both located on and near the wall. Historic photos also show a flagpole in the lawn north of the wall.

There are no plantings on the southern side of the wall except a 6'-wide grassy boulevard between the wall and the curb. The grassy lawn on the northern side of the wall is planted with four mature evergreen trees (possibly original) and several fairly young deciduous trees. An original planting plan has not been located. However, historic photos show groups of newly-planted evergreens and deciduous trees located north of the wall.

#### ■ SETTING

The site is located on the northwestern edge of Redwood Falls' business district. It is bounded by T.H. 19 (a two-way road) on the north and by a "Y"-shaped split of T.H. 71 as it meets T.H. 19 to the south. Commercial buildings are located east and south of the site. North of the site is a residential neighborhood and a few commercial properties. West of the site is a residential area and the Redwood River.

#### ■ INTEGRITY

##### **Alterations**

The wall appears to have been constructed closely to plan.

The eastern wall segment was removed in the 1980s after being damaged by a truck. A poured concrete sidewalk along the southern side of the wall has apparently been removed. The small terrace within the lookout bay has been reduced in size and has been completely filled with concrete, apparently replacing or covering a triangular panel of flagstone. The T.H. 19 shoulder has been widened along the northern side of the site, resulting in the loss of about 3' of grassy lawn. Portions of the wall have been poorly patched with mortar and some of the concrete steps have been repaired or replaced. The railing has been repainted (the original green paint is still partly visible). Original lamp standards have been removed from the site and modern highway lights have been installed. A flagpole has been removed from the lawn north of the wall.

Despite the alterations described above, the Redwood Falls Retaining Wall retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Its integrity of design has

been compromised by the removal of the eastern 120'-long wall segment, representing about one-third of the wall's original length. However, because the majority of the wall remains, and because the demolished section was essentially identical to the existing sections, and because the wall in general retains the six characteristics of integrity just listed, it is recommended that the demolition of the eastern segment has not altered the wall to the point that it is ineligible for the National Register.

#### Notes on Condition

The wall is in poor condition. Stones are missing and it needs mortar repair. A few sections of railing are deteriorating and the railing's paint is flaking. The grassy island is mowed and well maintained.

#### ■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The retaining wall was constructed in 1935 as part of a reconstruction of a .26-mile segment of T.H. 19. The project widened and improved a section of T.H. 19 over the Redwood River and through the intersections of T.H. 19 with S. Minnesota Street and T.H. 71 (Mill Street) on the northern edge of downtown Redwood Falls. The wall was built on a hilly, east-west median at the junction of T.H. 19 and T.H. 71. It replaced a smaller pre-existing retaining wall. The title sheet of the construction plans was signed by C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), H. E. Chard (Division Engineer), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and Jay T. Ellison (Chief Engineer and Deputy Commission) in October 1934.

"Before" and "after" historic photographs of the site, dated March 12, 1935, and May 6, 1936, appear in the Site Development Unit's Nichols photo albums (Nichols album, vol. 5, pg. 34).

The site was undoubtedly designed by Arthur R. Nichols of the firm Morell and Nichols. Nichols, who was one of Minnesota's most prominent and prolific landscape architects, served as Consulting Landscape Architect for the Roadside Development Division of the Minnesota Department of Highways during the 1930s and designed most of the roadside development structures of this period. Although the original plans do not list a designer, several photographs of the wall appear in a set of photo albums compiled by Nichols for the Department circa 1940. The photographs create an ad hoc portfolio of Nichols' work for the Department, and the inclusion of the Redwood Falls photographs in the albums strongly suggests that the wall is Nichols' work. (The photo albums are located in the Mn/DOT Site Development unit. See album page numbers on page 1 of this inventory form.)

The retaining wall site, and the entire .26-mile-long project, were apparently constructed by unemployed workers that were hired through the local "re-employment office." The primary contractor for the road construction project was Woodrich Construction Company of Minneapolis, which was awarded the bid for the project in May of 1935. The *Redwood Gazette* announced:

Bids for the completion of the new Redwood bridge approaches and of the pavement for the rerouting of highway 19 will be called for May 3 . . . The project, .3 of a mile in length, includes 8,929 square yards of concrete pavement, 9,169 yards of excavation and the construction of a masonry retaining wall extending across the foot of Mill and Bridge streets (*Redwood Gazette*, April 25, 1935).

Three weeks later the newspaper reported:

With work on the new bridge approaches underway since Monday, the Woodrich Construction Company of Minneapolis is tearing the old pavement from the north end of Mill Street preparatory to grading and repaving the west approach. . . . A crew of about 30 men, hired through the re-employment office, is already at work (*Redwood Gazette*, May 16, 1935).

The workers may have been hired through a relief office that was operated locally by the City of Redwood Falls or Redwood County. In 1934 such local offices usually registered and coordinated the use of unemployed workers on public projects, often using funds from the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), which administered federal funds allocated through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Sheet 5 (of 19) of the construction plans also indicates that a pre-existing section of wall across the street to the south was to be partially removed "by Relief Labor."

#### ■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

There have apparently been no previous cultural reviews of this site.

#### ■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Redwood Falls Retaining Wall, built in 1935, is one of 17 retaining walls recorded in this inventory. It is one of seven properties in the inventory that are known or suspected to have been built by the FERA/SERA. The wall is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory 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 Redwood Falls Retaining Wall is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Rare Federal Relief Property Type. Despite the fact that the Redwood Falls Retaining Wall is one of 17 retaining walls recorded in this inventory, it is unique. It is the only retaining wall in the inventory that was built in an urban setting, and its design is more formal and less "rustic" than most properties in the study. (For example, it is the only wall in the study with such features as an ornamental iron railing and cast iron lamp standards.) (National Register Criterion A.)

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Redwood Falls Retaining Wall 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. The site is important as an example of the work of federally-funded relief labor in cooperation with the MHD. Redwood Falls is an example of the distinctive and well-constructed public facilities, built by the MHD in partnership with federal relief agencies, that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed during the Depression. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The Redwood Falls Retaining Wall combines the design principles of the National Park Service Rustic Style and the New Deal's emphasis on economical indigenous building materials, labor intensive methods, and fine craftsmanship, with somewhat formal, Classically-inspired elements. The site is an unusual example of the Roadside Development Division's retaining walls because it was built in an urban setting, and because of its unusual design details. The wall is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols, to whom its design is attributed. (See discussion of the wall's physical integrity under Alterations above.) (National Register Criterion C.)

The site 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. 19 and T.H. 71 are busy and noisy past the site. Because the wall was not originally meant to be in a secluded setting, but rather was built on the edge of downtown at the junction of two trunk highways, the traffic does not necessarily detract from the site. Since there is no parking area for the site, visitors must walk across busy highways to approach the wall.

#### ■ REFERENCES

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

"Bids Asked for Road Completion." *Redwood Gazette*, April 25, 1935.

"Emergency Relief Administration." Minnesota State Archives Administrative History. In Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society.

Nichols, A. R., comp. *Album of Roadside Development Projects*. 7 vols. Photo album prepared for the Roadside Development Division, Minnesota Department of Highways. Ca. 1937-1941.

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

Tweton, D. Jerome. *The New Deal at the Grass Roots: Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1988.

"Work Started on Bridge Approach." *Redwood Gazette*, May 16, 1935.

#### ■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is likely that the granite used to construct the retaining wall was obtained from a local quarry. Granite was quarried along the Minnesota River, the Redwood River, and near Morton, which is located about ten miles northeast of Redwood Falls. For example, in 1934 the

North Redwood Granite Company was operating quarries in the Minnesota River Valley north of Redwood Falls. Local granite was often used in construction in Redwood Falls, and was used to build the bridge and other structures in Alexander Ramsey Park located a few blocks north of this site.

Redwood Falls was settled by Euro-Americans in 1864, platted in 1865, and incorporated as a village in 1876 and as a city in 1891. It is the seat of Redwood County. The city was named for the falls of the Redwood River, located within the current city limits within Alexander Ramsey Park. Approximately 60 acres surrounding the falls and river gorge were established as a state park in 1911. (The park was named for Minnesota's first territorial governor.) During the 1930s, the WPA constructed a number of structures within the park. Redwood Falls city boundaries grew to the edges of the park, and in 1957 the park was turned over to the City by the State.