

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

SH-ERC-028
CS 7101
Babcock Memorial Park

Historic Name	Babcock Memorial Park	CS #	7101
Other Name	Babcock Wayside	SHPO Inv #	SH-ERC-028

Location	W side of TH 10 just N of TH 101 bridge over Mississippi	Hwy	TH 10
City/Township	Elk River, City of	District	3B
County	Sherburne	Reference	214.1

Twp Rng Sec	32N 26W Sec 03	Acres	15.75
USGS Quad	Elk River	Rest Area Class	2
UTM	Z15 E456230 N5015250		

Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	10-3-58-B 7101-02 7101-06
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Builder	National Youth Administration (NYA)	SHPO Review #	98-1869
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Historic Use	Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013505.01 013508.12-24
Present Use	Roadside Parking Area		

Yr of Landscape Design	1938-39	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 3.144 Ols 3.145 Ols 3.146
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Overall Site Integrity	Moderately Altered
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Review Required	Yes
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National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance
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Historic Context	
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List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built
01	Council Ring	1938
02	Council Ring	1938
03	Picnic Table(s), Stone	1938
04	Well/Pump	1938
05	Picnic Shelter(s)	1972
06	Restroom Bldg	1972
07	Info Board	1972

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

Fieldwork Date	10-31-96
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Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 3
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Prep for	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

Babcock Memorial Park is a 15.75-acre site that is located on the western side of T.H. 10, within the city of Elk River, on the northern side of the T.H. 101 bridge that crosses the Mississippi. The park is located on the eastern bank of the river.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Council Ring A and Council Ring B. Erected 1938 by the NYA. The original plan specifies two council rings, both extant. They are built of mortared river boulders. Most of the rocks are pieces of pink, gray, red, and black granite that are football- to watermelon-sized. The rings are about 23' in overall diameter. Their walls are about 18" wide and 1' to 1'6" high (the height varies with the terrain). Each ring has an entrance opening on the eastern side. Each ring encloses a grassy area, at the center of which is a circular stone fire ring that is about 6' in outside diameter. Both council rings are missing several stones and need repair.

Stone Picnic Tables. Erected 1938 by the NYA. The original plan specifies 14 picnic tables arranged in pairs with a picnic fireplace located near each pair. Some of these picnic tables were apparently portable wooden tables. There are currently three stone picnic tables with benches. Each set rests on a poured concrete base. The structures are made of tan, roughly-cut, limestone. The sets are about 5'6" in length, 6' in overall width, and 2'10" in height (to the top of the tables). One of the sets is complete, one is missing the eastern bench, and one is missing the table top and the western bench. All stone fireplaces have been removed.

Pump. Erected 1938 by the NYA. The park includes a hand pump on a 9'-square poured concrete pad.

Picnic Shelters. Erected ca. 1972 by Mn/DOT. The site has two picnic shelters that have gabled roofs supported by timber posts. The shelters stand on poured concrete pads.

Restroom Building. Erected ca. 1972 by Mn/DOT. There is a concrete block restroom building located west of the parking area. A concrete sidewalk links the building to the asphalt-paved parking lot.

Information Board. Erected ca. 1972 by Mn/DOT. A gable-roofed woodframe information board is located on the concrete sidewalk just east of the restroom building.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site is located several feet below the grade of T.H. 10 and has a somewhat secluded feel and relatively flat topography.

The original plan specified (or suggested) a kittenball (also known as softball) field to be located southeast of the original parking area, and a small children's playground to be located east of the southern council ring. The original plan shows the park ending at the drainage ditch south of the southern council ring.

The site's original access road entered the park east of the current restroom building and entered a rectangular parking area. In circa 1970, the T.H. 10 alignment was shifted westward and the park lost a fair amount of land. In circa 1972, the asphalt-paved entrance drive was reconstructed so that it entered the site at its northern end and then widened into the current long, paved parking area. From the southern end of this parking area, a gravel road was built southward through the park and over the drainage ditch. A new gravel parking area (with two grassy curb-lined islands) and a boat launching ramp were built at the park's southern edge (just north of the T.H. 101 bridge). The drainage ditch (apparently the original site of a timber footbridge) is now edged with cut log stops and granite riprapping. The park also includes about six metal picnic grills on metal poles and several recent portable wooden and metal picnic tables.

Most of the site is planted with grass. There are widely spaced ash and oak trees planted east of the parking area against the grassy T.H. 10 ditch. There are ash, maple, and linden trees spaced about 20' apart in the grassy picnic area along the river, west of the parking area. The river bank is lined with overgrown brush and small trees and an area of gently sloping grassy lawn. Historic photos indicate that the site was originally shaded by many tall elms.

The original plans made use of the natural forest. A 1939 planting plan also specifies 15 Green Ash, 20 Weeping Willow, and 30 American Elm to be planted at the site. A 1972 planting plan specifies the planting of 18 Silver Maples, 40 White Ash, 10 Red Maple, 8 American Linden, 12 Sugar Maple, and 12 Siberian Elm.

■ **SETTING**

The site is located within the city of Elk River. It is a long, narrow parcel located between the Mississippi River and T.H. 10, which runs north and south, parallel with the river. The site is bounded by T.H. 10 on the east, the T.H. 101 bridge on the south, and the Mississippi River on the west. The United Power Company plant and various commercial structures are located across T.H. 10 to the east.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

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

While the park retains several early stone structures, its landscapes have been altered. T.H. 10 has been moved westward circa 1970, cutting into the park's acreage. The original entrance road and parking area have been replaced by the current entrance road and much larger parking area circa 1972. Two gable-roofed picnic shelters, a concrete block restroom building, a gable-roofed information board, and the southern parking lot and boat launch were all added to the site circa 1972. New plantings were added circa 1972. Several picnic tables, 7 picnic fireplaces (apparently stone), and a timber footbridge have been removed. In addition, a marker built by the NYA (probably a rectangular timber sign) has apparently been removed.

A geological marker was added to the site in 1953. It was located near the current information board. It has since been removed.

The property retains integrity of location, setting, and association. However, its integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling has been compromised by the loss of park acreage, the reconstruction of the entrance road and parking area, the construction of a restroom building, picnic shelters, information board, and southern parking area, and the loss of stone picnic fireplaces and a timber footbridge. While the historic council rings and picnic tables are relatively unaltered, the property's overall landscape design has been changed considerably.

Notes on Condition

The stone council rings both need repair and are missing several stones. The limestone picnic tables also need repair -- one of the sets is complete, one is missing the eastern bench, and one is missing the table top and the western bench.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Babcock Memorial Park was constructed in 1938-1939 by the National Youth Administration (NYA) in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Babcock Memorial Committee. Overseeing the project for the NYA were John J. Tessari of St. Paul, state supervisor of work projects; John Sullivan of St. Cloud, NYA supervisor; Larry Reider of St. Cloud, area NYA supervisor, and Parker Drago of St. Cloud, project foreman. The NYA received an allocation of \$5,000 for the six-month period of January to June, 1938, to develop the land for the park. Approximately 35 young men from Elk River and the surrounding area worked as part-time employees. Work began in January of 1938 with the NYA crew clearing underbrush and trimming trees. The project was announced in the January 20, 1938, issue of the *Sherburne County Star News*:

Elk River is to have a large and attractive roadside park along the Mississippi River east of town, to be known as the Babcock Memorial Park. . . . The park will be developed along rustic lines, with trails, stone picnic tables, fireplaces, rustic footbridges and other improvements. Native split stones will be used in the work and the whole scheme will blend in to the natural beauty of the scenery, with the small brook running through the park being used to good advantage (*Sherburne County Star News*, Jan. 20, 1938).

By the end of the project in November 1938, the NYA had constructed a small marker (probably wooden), foot trails, council rings, fireplaces, a parking area, picnic tables, a rustic footbridge, and a well, besides clearing brush and dead trees. The estimated total cost to the state was \$4,965 with the actual state expenditure being \$1,295 (*Annual Report* 1938:28).

The original plans were signed by A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development Division), A. W. Moulster (District Engineer), and O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer). The plans are stamped "Final Plans Construction Division NYA Nov. 1, 1938."

The Department approved a planting plan in May of 1939 for a 4.5-mile stretch of T.H. 10, including Babcock Memorial Park and the National Grange Historical Marker (located a few miles to the south). The plan was signed by A. R. Nichols and Harold E. Olson, as well as six other Highway Department officials: C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), H. E. Chard

(District Engineer), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Survey and Design), C. L. Methven (Assistant Construction Engineer), J. T. Ellison (Chief Engineer), and S. Rex Green (Engineer of Lands and Right-Of-Way).

Between 1946 and 1948, the highway department constructed a rustic footbridge of heavy square timbers in Babcock Memorial Park, according to the *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota from July 1, 1946 to June 30, 1948* (1948:55). It is not clear where this bridge was located. It may have replaced the original timber footbridge across the drainage ditch near the southern end of the site.

The Geological Society of Minnesota erected a marker in the park in 1953. The geological marker was a metal plaque attached to a dolomite pedestal. The marker was removed fairly recently. (See marker text at the end of this document.)

Babcock Memorial Park was named to commemorate Charles M. Babcock (1871-1936), who served as Minnesota's first Commissioner of Highways from 1917 to 1933 and who initiated the "Babcock Plan," which established the state trunk highway system. (See Additional Background Information at the end of this document.)

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A Section 106 review was conducted in 1998 in preparation for a Mn/DOT project to construct a new geological marker at the Babcock Memorial Park (SHPO Rev #98-1869). The review occurred while this Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory was underway, and a draft version of the inventory form was submitted to the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) as part of the review. In a letter to Allyson Brooks (Mn/DOT), dated April 27, 1998, Britta L. Bloomberg (MHS) concurred with Inventory's recommendation that the property is not eligible for the National Register (Bloomberg 1998). The documents that chronicle this Section 106 review contain a few items of correspondence.

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Babcock Memorial Park, built in 1938-1939, is a Rustic style roadside parking area with a complex site design. Babcock is one of only seven properties in this inventory that retain stone picnic tables and one of only eight properties that retain council rings. Babcock is an example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. It is one of a group of Depression-era sites that represent the MHD's earliest roadside development facilities, and is one of 19 properties in the inventory that were built by the NYA in partnership with the MHD.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that, despite the factors listed above, Babcock Memorial Park DOES NOT MEET National Register eligibility criteria due to loss of integrity. The study found that, while some structures (such as the council rings and stone picnic tables) are relatively unaltered, the property has lost many site elements and its overall landscape design has been altered considerably.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 10 is fairly busy past this site but the site is below the elevation of, and some distance from, the roadway.

The stone picnic tables at Babcock match those at four other parks that were inventoried: Blazer Park, Graeser Park, Lilac Park, and St. Louis Park R.P.A. (all on T.H. 100 west of Minneapolis).

This portion of T.H. 10 has been designated part of the Great River Road.

■ REFERENCES

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

Astrup, Joni. "Charles Babcock: Solving Local Road Problem Leads to Career Developing Highway System." *Sherburne County Star News*, Sept. 24, 1985.

"Babcock Native of Sherburne County." *Sherburne County Star News*, July 23, 1931.

Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota From July 1, 1946 to June 30, 1948. Published Dec. 1, 1948.

Blegen, Theodore C. *Minnesota: A History of the State.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975.

Bloomberg, Britta L. (MHS). Letter to Allyson Brooks (Mn/DOT). Apr. 27, 1998.

"Charles M. Babcock Road Commissioner. Governor Burnquist Appointed Local Man to Newly Created State Office Last Week." *Sherburne County Star News*, April 15, 1917.

Clark, James W. "We Owe Our Roads to Charlie Babcock." *Minneapolis Tribune*, undated clipping.

"Develop Babcock Memorial Park here as National Youth Project." *Sherburne County Star News*, Jan. 20, 1938.

Final Report National Youth Administration for the State of Minnesota: Sept. 1935 to July 1943. U.S. National Youth Administration, Minnesota, 1943.

"Former Governor Christianson Eulogizes Memory of Babcock." *Sherburne County Star News*, Nov. 6, 1947.

Larsen, Arthur J. *The Development of the Minnesota Road System*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND TEXT OF MISSING GEOLOGICAL MARKER

Charles M. Babcock

Charles M. Babcock (1871-1936) served as Minnesota's Highway Commissioner from 1917 to 1933. Born and raised in Elk River, Babcock attended the University of Minnesota in 1892 where he studied engineering. His education was cut short by the financial panic of 1893 and he returned to Elk River to work at the family's general store. Babcock organized a group of farmers and businessmen to improve the roads in Elk River and, as a result, he was elected as a county commissioner. Babcock's success in developing the county's road program led to his appointment in 1910 to the newly-formed state highway commission that was composed of three members. In 1917, the highway commission was abolished and its duties assumed by the office of the State Highway Commissioner. "It was a foregone conclusion that the new office would be offered to Charles M. Babcock. He had been active in good roads work for so many years, and had acquitted himself so well in his nonsalaried position, that most people seem to have felt that he deserved the place" (Larsen 1966:440). Soon after Babcock was appointed as Minnesota's first highway commissioner in 1917, he developed a plan to improve the state's road system. The local newspaper wrote in 1931:

The study of road conditions in Minnesota convinced Mr. Babcock that it was necessary to find a new source of highway revenue. . . . Therefore Mr. Babcock proposed that part of the cost of maintaining the roads and providing for improvements be borne by those who traveled them. His plan for a state system of trunk highways to be improved and maintained with motor vehicle tax revenue and federal highway aid, is outstanding in the substantial success into which it culminated (*Sherburne County Star News*, July 23, 1931).

The Babcock Plan became an amendment to the state constitution in 1919 and was approved by the voters in 1920. This highway development plan called for improvement to 7,000 miles of roads and the creation of a state trunk highway system of 70 major highways. Additions to the plan in later years included a bond issue that raised additional revenue for highway development, increased car license fees, and instituted a gasoline tax. By 1930, toward the end of Babcock's tenure as commissioner, approximately "1,400 miles of road had been paved, and nearly as many had been given bituminous treatment. These developments were supported by a succession of governors" (Blegen 1975:484).

Elk River

The Elk River was named for the herds of elk that populated the area. Zebulon Pike christened the river with this name during his journey up the Mississippi in 1805. Two towns developed on the northern and southern banks of the Elk River, Orono on the north, which became known as 'lower town', and Elk River on the southern side. The village of Elk River was platted in 1865, and in 1880 Orono merged with Elk River (the new town was incorporated in 1881). The county seat was moved to Elk River in 1867.

Text of Missing Geological Marker

"Geology of Minnesota. Elk River Region.

"The glaciers which covered Minnesota at intervals during the last million years brought with them from Canada thousands of cubic miles of rock debris. The sand, gravel, and granite boulders came chiefly from Ontario to the northeast, the limestone and clay from Manitoba to the northwest. When the ice melted, the transported material -- Glacial Drift -- was dropped to form a mantle of soil over the glaciated area. It is estimated that the fertility of the soil in Minnesota has been increased 30 per cent by glacial action. The glacial deposits in the Elk River region vary in fertility depending upon the proportions of sand, clay and limestone.

"The melt waters from the glaciers tended to collect in streams which flowed away from the ice in a radiating pattern. The Mississippi River at this point is such a stream started during the last or Wisconsin stage of glaciation.

"Erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota in cooperation with the Department of Highways State of Minnesota, 1953."