

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

SL-DUT-002
CS 6926

Clifton-French River Historical Marker

Historic Name Other Name	Clifton-French River Historical Marker	CS # SHPO Inv #	6926 SL-DUT-002
Location	SE side of TH 61 150' SW of the French River	Hwy District Reference	TH 61 1A 11.7
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Duluth Township St. Louis 51N 12W Sec 17 51N 12W Sec 18 French River Z15 E583820 N5194730	Acres Rest Area Class	.1 4
Designer	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SP #	6926
Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD) Youth Conservation Commission (YCC)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013545.09-12
Yr of Landscape Design	1959	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly 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	Marker	1959	10-12-97
			Prep by
			Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 24
			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 Clifton-French River Historical Marker is located on the southern side of T.H. 61 about 150' west of the French River, at the intersection of T.H.61 and Balsam Road (now Ryan Road/CSAH 50).

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Marker. Built 1959-1960 by the Youth Conservation Commission (YCC). This free-standing, lectern-style stone marker is positioned about 10' east of the site's pull-off road. It is built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone laid on a concrete footing. The marker is approximately 9' wide by 4' deep and is about 4' tall. The sides of the marker are stepped to form two low stone seats. On the western side of the marker is an aluminum plaque mounted at a slant. The text of the marker addresses the founding of Clifton. (See text at the end of this document.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The marker stands on a triangular-shaped site at the southeastern corner of T.H. 61 and Balsam Road. A simple, curved, asphalt-paved pull-off road enters the site from Balsam Road. The plans show a narrow curb-lined island separating the pull-off from Balsam Road, but there is no island today.

In front of the marker is a poured concrete curb that is overgrown with grass. There is a narrow, 40'-long poured concrete sidewalk running north and south in front the marker, parallel with the curbline. A wider sidewalk (10' long and 8' wide) leads from the curbline up to the marker.

The topography of the site is sloping and a berm has been created behind the marker. The site is planted with grass, with the forest growing up to the edge of the grass. The original planting plan specifies six Savin Juniper flanking the marker, five Red Cedar behind the marker, and 11 Silver Maple scattered throughout the triangular site. These plantings do not exist today.

■ SETTING

The site is located in a primarily rural, wooded setting, about 200' west of the French River. T.H. 61 forms the northern boundary of the site and Balsam Road forms its western boundary. The site is surrounded by T.H. 61 to the north, and woods on all sides that essentially screen it from surrounding properties.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The site appears to have been built according to plan, although the narrow island drawn on the plan does not exist.

The site is intact except that the island is missing (it was perhaps not built). The original plantings have probably died or have been removed.

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

Notes on Condition

The marker is in fair condition but parts of a few stones have broken off. The site is not well maintained and the grass is overgrown.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Plans for the wayside rest were drawn in August 1959. They were signed in 1959 by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development) and L. H. Miller (District Engineer). This roadside development project apparently focussed solely on the rest area, rather than being part of a several-mile highway improvement.

At a meeting held June 9, 1958, the Minnesota Historic Sites and Marker Commission approved the request of Mrs. Josiah E. Greene, executive secretary of the St. Louis County Historical Society, for a marker to be erected at Clifton-French River. The text of the marker was approved at the Commission's June 15, 1959, meeting. Harold E. Olson, a member of the Markers Commission and Engineer of Roadside Development for the MHD, reported to the Commission in March 1960 that the marker had not yet been erected but was "in process."

The historic marker was apparently erected under a cooperative program of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Youth Conservation Commission (YCC). The labor consisted primarily of youth on parole or probation from the Red Wing Correctional Facility. In a July 21, 1960, press release, Governor Orville L. Freeman announced that 34 roadside parking areas would be improved and/or constructed in cooperation with the Youth Conservation Commission. The erection of a historic marker at French River was noted on the list of proposed projects to be completed in 1960. (The Taylors Falls Overlook - North was also built by the YCC. See that inventory form.) In the press release Freeman was quoted as saying:

perhaps the most important benefit . . . is that insofar as possible, youths under the jurisdiction of the Youth Conservation Commission will be employed in the construction of these areas. I believe this is a very worthwhile and needed type of rehabilitation for these young men, and will give them gainful employment which they probably would not be able to secure from private employers ("Roadside Development Program" 1960).

The Youth Conservation Commission, established in 1947, was created to centralize the youth corrections process in Minnesota. This commission was given jurisdiction over the Red Wing Correctional Facility. In 1959 the Minnesota Corrections Department was created with a Youth Conservation Division. The Red Wing Correctional Facility and the Youth Conservation Commission were placed under the new department's jurisdiction.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Clifton-French River Historical Marker is a roadside parking area with a simple site design that was developed in 1959-1960 by the MHD in cooperation with the YCC. It is one of two properties in this inventory that were built by the YCC, a program that employed youth on parole from the Red Wing Correctional Facility. The rest area's stone marker is nearly identical to the markers at Bolles Mill and Minnesota Woman, also in this inventory. Numerous lectern style, tan, limestone markers in this series were built by the MHD in the 1950s-1970s.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the property is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it does not meet the context's registration requirements.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 61 past the northern side of this site is a busy, divided highway and turning into the site from T.H. 61 is difficult from the westbound lane. Balsam Road along the western side of the site is a quiet county road. Approaching the site from the south is much easier.

It is recommended that the YCC builders of the site be interpreted for the public.

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

■ REFERENCES

Community Planning and Roadside Parking Areas Committee. Meeting minutes, April 28, 1960. [MHS Collections, MHD Subject Files Box 8.]

Fritzen, John. *Historic Sites and Place Names of Minnesota's North Shore*. 1974.

Minutes of Minnesota Historic Sites and Markers Commission, 1944-1960. Mathilde Rice Elliot Papers. MHS.

"Roadside Development Program." Typewritten press release. July 21, 1960. [MHS Collections, MHD Subject Files Box 8.]

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

Upham, Warren. *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance*. 1920; Second Rev. Ed. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT

In 1848, the discovery of copper ore along the French River brought prospectors to the area, which resulted in Clifton being the first townsite along the North Shore to be surveyed.

Clifton was platted in October, 1855, however the town never developed because the small amounts of copper mined in the area had very little commercial value.

The French River was originally called Angwassago zibi, an Ojibwe word meaning "Floodwood River." It was known to early French explorers as "Riviere des Francais" or French River.

Lake Superior and T.H. 61

Lake Superior is the largest body of fresh water in the world. The lake is 383 miles long, 160 miles wide, and is 489' to 1,400' deep. The Ojibwe called the Lake "Kitchigumi," meaning "Great Water." The early French traders called the lake "Lac Superieur" because it was located at the head of the Great Lakes. By the early 1920s, Duluth and the North Shore area had become a mecca for tourists.

Trunk Highway 1 along the North Shore was built during the 1920s and 1930s and named the "Lake Superior International Highway" by the highway department in 1926. Its number was changed from 1 to 61 in 1934. The highway was the only thoroughfare to serve North Shore towns in Minnesota and to provide access to the Canadian North Shore from the state. It was specifically designed (and in some places, realigned) to provide outstanding views of the lake. Between Duluth and the Canadian border, T.H. 61 travels approximately 165 miles through three counties: St. Louis, Lake, and Cook. With the completion of the highway, recreation and tourism became important components of the North Shore economy.

Text of Plaque on Marker

"Clifton, first townsite surveyed in the United States section of the North Shore, was platted west of the mouth of the French River in 1855. The river was known to early explorers as Riviere de Francais. Rumors of nearby copper deposits resulted in widespread prospecting and townsite planning in the 1850s. Like many of the projected towns, Clifton never developed. From 1864 to 1866, the French River Mining Company and the North Shore Mining Company dug several exploratory shafts, but failed to locate profitable copper deposits. Extensive lumbering operations were carried on here in the 1880s. Erected by the St. Louis County Historical Society in cooperation with the Minnesota Highway Department - 1959."
[Seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society]