

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WA-OHC-005
CS 8214
Stillwater Overlook - South

Historic Name Other Name	Stillwater Overlook - South	CS # SHPO Inv #	8214 WA-OHC-005
Location	E side of Lookout Trail near 63rd St N	Hwy District Reference	TH 36/95 Met E 105.4
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Oak Park Heights, City of Washington 30N 20W Sec 34 Stillwater Z15 E516100 N4987250	Acres Rest Area Class	.6 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	212-45-22 8214-01
Builder	National Youth Administration (NYA)	SHPO Review #	94-1390 90-0040
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013515.02-17
Yr of Landscape Design	1938-39	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 1.14 Nic 1.30 Nic 5.19 Ols 3.188
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960 Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	1936-37	05-10-97
02	Curb, Stone	1936-37	
03	Flagpole(s), Other	Ca. 1970	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 74
			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

The Stillwater Overlook - South is located on the eastern side of Lookout Trail (the former T.H. 212 alignment) near 63rd St. N., just within the northern city limits of the city of Oak Park Heights and just south of the city limits of Stillwater. The site is located on land west of the original intersection of T.H. 212 (now T.H. 36) and T.H. 95. It is a triangular, 0.6-acre site that has a limestone overlook wall and an asphalt-paved parking area lined with stone curbing.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Limestone Overlook Wall. Built 1936-1937 by the NYA. The principal structure on the site is an overlook wall (roughly 140' square) constructed on the top of a hill overlooking the St. Croix River Valley. The wall is built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone laid on a stone footing. The top of the wall is about 18" thick and the wall is anchored at intervals with 3'-tall piers. The stonework is unusually well executed. (The limestone for the project was salvaged from one of the buildings of Minnesota's first Territorial Prison (built 1851-1853) that was demolished by the NYA in 1936-1938.) The wall has a horseshoe-shape with the major curve of the wall facing east. The northern and southern ends of this major curve end with small reverse curves. The inner side of the wall rises about 30" above a flagstone walkway and stone curb. On the eastern side of the wall (at the midpoint of the major curve) is a rectangular lookout bay that is filled with flagstone. An 8'-long, 18"-wide stone and concrete bench (visible in historic photos) was originally located at the center of the bay. An historic marker on a stone lectern-style pedestal was mounted on the wall at the location of the bench in 1954. (The marker's metal plaque is missing.) (See marker text at the end of this document.) At the northern end of the wall is a rectangular bay that is also filled with flagstone. There were originally two 8'-long, 18"-wide stone and concrete benches within this bay. Evidence of the bench pedestals remains. There is a pedestrian opening in the wall near the wall's northwestern corner. On the opposite side of the wall, near its southwestern corner, is a small bay-like corner that is also filled with flagstone.

The elevation of the ground along the western and southwestern sides of the wall (both of which are straight) is even with the top of the wall, so that these two sides of the wall are essentially below grade. The land on the eastern side of the wall drops off sharply below the wall's major curve. In the center of the parking area is a circular island which is about 46' in diameter.

Limestone Curbing. Built 1936-1937 by the NYA. Limestone curbing lines the entrance drive, the circular island, and the flagstone walk. While the curbing along the island and flagstone walk is square-cut, the curbing along the entrance drive consists of larger, more irregularly shaped stones.

Flagpole Base. Built circa 1970. A poured concrete flagpole base is located in the grass a few feet west of the wall.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The wall encloses an asphalt-paved parking area and circular island. The curb-lined drive enters the site from the south.

Much of the site is planted with grass. There are several low spreading junipers and tall evergreens (both mature) north of the wall. Dogwoods, other deciduous shrubs, and other tall evergreens are growing on the hillside east of (below) the wall. There are five small flowering trees in the circular island and eight similar trees southwest of the wall. Tall deciduous shrubs and small trees screen the site from the nearby roadway.

An original planting plan for the site has not been located. However, the 1939 *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* indicates that in 1939 the NYA furnished and installed 25 evergreen shrubs, 28 evergreen trees, 513 deciduous shrubs, and 135 deciduous trees (*Annual Report 1939:26*).

■ SETTING

The overlook was built on top of a hill with an excellent view of the St. Croix River Valley. This portion of the St. Croix has been designated the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The site is surrounded by residential neighborhoods to the south and west, Lookout Trail to the west, and T.H. 95 and the river valley to the north and east.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The site appears to have been built close to plan, with the exception of the guardrail extending southward along the eastern edge of the entrance drive. No guardrail exists there today.

Three stone and concrete benches have been removed from the inner side of the wall. A timber-framed steel marker installed on site by the NYA in 1939 has been removed. A flagpole was added to the site circa 1970. The asphalt-paved drive and parking area was originally gravel. A lectern-style historic marker was added to the wall in 1954. (The marker's metal plaque is currently missing.) Some pieces of the wall and the flagstone are missing. Some plantings have been replaced and added.

In general, the site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

Both the wall and flagstone need repair. Some pieces of stone from both the wall and flagstone are missing. The historic marker plaque is missing.

The site is fairly well maintained.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Stillwater Overlook - South was built as part of an extensive roadside development project in the Stillwater area. Work on the Stillwater-area projects apparently occurred in 1935-1939, first using federal relief labor hired under the National Recovery Work Relief (NRWR) program in 1935-1936, and then using labor from the National Youth Administration (NYA) in 1936-1939.

A. R. Nichols, the MHD Roadside Development Division's Consulting Landscape Architect, designed the Stillwater-area projects.

The Stillwater Overlook - South was constructed in 1936-1939 as part of a roadside development project that improved a .9-mile stretch of T.H. 212 (now T.H. 36). The overlook was established on the site of an old borrow pit. The wall was built in 1936-1937 by the NYA. (One historic photo of the nearly-completed wall is dated November 1, 1936 (Nichols photo album, vol. 5, pg 19).)

The NYA landscaped the site in 1938-1939. In 1939 the NYA also installed a steel historic marker here. The marker was a free-standing, 3' by 5' steel sign that was framed with rustic timbers. It had a white background and black lettering. This style of marker (usually without the timber framing) was erected by the first joint trunk highway marking program, which was established by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways in 1929.

In 1954 a stone lectern-style marker was added to the overlook wall by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways. The text of this marker was identical to the site's original steel sign.

The title sheet of the original plans contains the statement "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. June 1, 1938." The plans were approved by A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), C. W. Lilly (Engineer of Plans), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and Jay T. Ellison (Chief Engineer).

The stone used to build the site was salvaged from a three story stone building of the Minnesota Territorial Prison in Stillwater that the NYA demolished (*Annual Report 1939:27*). (See Additional Background Information at the end of this document.)

The 1935-1939 roadside development work in the Stillwater area is represented by four properties in this inventory:

- Indian Battleground Historical Marker
- St. Croix Boomsite Roadside Parking Area
- Stillwater Overlook - North
- Stillwater Overlook - South

This roadside development work also included at least one additional site, known as Stillwater Spring Development (S.P. 212-45-22). It was built in 1938 by the NYA, and has been razed. (See photo in Olson photo album.)

This Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Structures Inventory also includes one other site in Stillwater, the Tamarack House Historical Marker, which was built by the highway department in 1954.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A Section 106 review was conducted in 1990-1995 in association with the proposed reconstruction of T.H. 36 and the Stillwater/Houlton Bridge (SHPO #94-1390, cross ref. 90-0040). This overlook was included in the review. In a letter to Joseph G. Hudak (Mn/DOT) dated Aug. 15, 1994, Britta L. Bloomberg (MHS) concurs with Mn/DOT's finding

that the overlook is eligible for the National Register. The documents that chronicle this Section 106 review contain several items of correspondence.

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Stillwater Overlook - South, built in 1936-1939, is one of 37 stone overlook walls recorded in this inventory. It is one of several wayside rests that were developed as part of an extensive MHD roadside development project in the Stillwater area. (Workers were first hired using federal NRWR funds and, beginning in 1936, were enrollees of the NYA.) The overlook is one of 19 properties in this inventory on which the NYA worked. It is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory that were designed by, or have been attributed to, A. R. Nichols. The site has well-executed masonry and a large amount of intact limestone curbing.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the Stillwater Overlook - South is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Stillwater Overlook - South 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. It is one of four extant sites that represent an important roadside development initiative in the Stillwater area, a popular tourist destination. The site is important as a well-preserved example of the work of the NYA in cooperation with the MHD. The property 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 Stillwater Overlook - South is unusually well-preserved. It is one of the most elaborate stone overlook walls built by the Roadside Development Division. It is an excellent example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a roadside development facility. It has stonework of excellent quality, and 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. Furthermore, the Stillwater Overlook - South is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The SHPO also determined that the Stillwater Overlook - South is ELIGIBLE for the National Register during a Section 106 Review conducted in 1990-1995 ("Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" historic context).

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.

Visitors to the site are quite a distance from T.H. 36 and T.H. 95, therefore highway noise and motion are not intrusive.

The "footprint" of this overlook wall is almost identical to the Mendota Overlook, which is also included in this inventory.

The text of the marker is associated with "Lake St. Croix." It is not specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

■ 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.

Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development Along the Trunk Highways in Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Highways, 1939.

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

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.

Hackett, John J. National Register nomination for Territorial/State Prison Warden's House. October 8, 1974.

Harvey, Tom. National Register nomination for Territorial/State Prison. March 1981.

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. Mn/DOT Site Development Unit.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota.* 4 vols. Photo albums prepared by Department of Roadside Development, Minnesota Department of Highways, circa 1942, updated circa 1954. Mn/DOT Site Development Unit.

Reiman, Richard A. *The New Deal and American Youth.* Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

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

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

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT**

Territorial Prison

The stone used to built the site was obtained from the razed buildings of Minnesota's first Territorial Prison. In 1849, the Minnesota Territorial Legislature designated Stillwater as the site for the Territory's first prison, which was located on what was then the northern limits of Stillwater (now the site of the Indian Battleground Historical Marker in Stillwater -- see that inventory form). Stillwater resident Jacob Fisher designed the first prison buildings. Construction began in 1851, and by 1853, a three-story cell block, a warden's home, and a workshop had been constructed of native St. Croix Valley limestone. Stone for the prison was apparently quarried near the site. The prison operated for 61 years, closing in 1914. Its buildings stood vacant until most were demolished in 1936-1938 by the National Youth Administration. The stone was used for various roadside development projects including the Stillwater Overlook and the Indian Battleground Historical Marker. The Territorial/State Prison Warden's House (now the Washington County Historical Society Museum) was listed on the National Register in 1974 and the remnants of the prison were listed on the National Register in 1982.

Local Stone

It is probable that the limestone used at the site is St. Lawrence limestone, or dolomite, a type of stone that was quarried throughout the Stillwater area beginning as early as 1847. Layers of St. Lawrence limestone, one of the region's oldest limestone deposits, are exposed in the steep bluffs of the St. Croix Valley, including at Stillwater.

Stillwater

Stillwater was allegedly named for the still waters in Lake St. Croix. It may also have derived its name from Stillwater, Maine, where a number of the first Euro-American settlers originated. The town was founded in 1843 by John McKusick and was incorporated in 1854. The first sawmill was built in 1844 and Stillwater came to be known as the "cradle" of the white pine lumbering industry. It is also referred to as the "Birthplace of Minnesota" because it was the site of the 1848 convention that led to the formation of the Minnesota Territory.

Text of Historical Marker's Missing Metal Plaque

"Lake St. Croix. Waters from melting glaciers several thousand years ago carved deep valleys for the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Deprived of the glacial waters the rivers were so reduced in volume and carrying power that they were unable to maintain clear channels. Eventually sediments of the Mississippi partially blocked the St. Croix outlet to form Lake St. Croix from Stillwater to Point Douglas." [Seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society]