

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WA-SWC-713  
CS 8210

Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker

<b>Historic Name</b>	Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker	<b>CS #</b>	8210
<b>Other Name</b>	Stillwater Territorial/State Prison Grnd	<b>SHPO Inv #</b>	WA-SWC-713

<b>Location</b>	W side of TH 95 .5 mi N of Stillwater Lift Bridge	<b>Hwy</b>	TH 95
<b>City/Township</b>	Stillwater, City of	<b>District</b>	Met E
<b>County</b>	Washington	<b>Reference</b>	103.7

<b>Twp Rng Sec</b>	30N 20W Sec 28	<b>Acres</b>	.2
<b>USGS Quad</b>	Stillwater	<b>Rest Area Class</b>	4
<b>UTM</b>	Z15 E515190 N4989660		

<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	<b>SP #</b>	8210-08
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<b>Builder</b>	National Youth Administration (NYA)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
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<b>Historic Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013514.13-24
<b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area		

<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1939-40	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 3.180
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		

<b>National Register Status</b>	<del>Eligible, see Statement of Significance</del> Now ineligible: see <a href="http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf">http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf</a> for additional information.
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<b>Historic Context</b>	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960
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**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built
01	Retaining Wall	1868
02	Marker	1939
03	Bench(es), Stone	1939
04	Curb, Stone	1939

<b>Fieldwork Date</b>	05-10-97
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<b>Prep by</b>	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 73
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<b>Prep for</b>	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

The Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker is a 0.2-acre site that is located on the western side of T.H. 95 about .2 mile north of historic downtown Stillwater. It stands on the grounds of the Minnesota Territorial Prison, which is listed on the National Register.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Limestone Retaining Wall.** Built 1868 by the State of Minnesota. At the northern end of the site, the land within the T.H. 95 right-of-way includes a section of the limestone retaining wall that originally surrounded the prison. The wall is quite tall and built of tan, random ashlar, rockfaced limestone. It retains the steep bluff on the northern edge of the site. The wall is one of a series of retaining walls that were built in 1868 by convict labor as part of a building project to enlarge the prison.

**Stone Marker.** Built 1939 by the NYA. The principal feature on the site is a marker that is built of tan ashlar (most of which is coursed), rockfaced limestone laid on a stone footing. The limestone was salvaged from former Territorial Prison buildings (built 1851-1853) that originally stood on this site. The marker is aligned roughly parallel with the highway. Its overall dimensions are about 22' long (north and south) by about 14'8" wide (east and west). The marker has low sidewalls that enclose a terrace paved with flagstone. The terrace is elevated about 15" above the ground and is entered via three limestone steps that span the front edge of the marker. The marker's walls are anchored by corner piers. The western wall has a central shaft that rises about 9' from the terrace. A metal plaque is mounted in a rectangular niche that is enframed by large stones. The text of the plaque addresses a skirmish between a group of Dakota and Ojibwe that occurred here in 1839. The seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society are cast near the bottom of the plaque. (See marker text at the end of this document.)

Historic photographs show there was a small rectangular metal plaque (probably indicating NYA construction) mounted on the front of the marker near its northeastern corner. A stone is currently missing from this position. Several other NYA-built sites in this Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory have similar plaques.

In front of the marker is a rectangular flagstone plaza. (This is drawn as a semicircular plaza on the original plans.) A flagstone walkway that is about 6' wide extends north and south of the plaza along the western side of the drive. (This is specified as a bituminous walkway on the plans.)

**Stone Benches.** Built 1939 by the NYA. Two stone and concrete benches rest on the marker's terrace against the northern and southern walls. The benches are 8' long with poured concrete seats that rest on stone pedestals.

**Stone Curbing.** Built 1939 by the NYA. Limestone curbing lines the site's drive. (This curbing is specified as concrete curbing on the original plans.)

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

A curb-lined, asphalt-paved highway pull-off drive curves into the site from T.H. 95. The drive widens in front of the marker to create a small parking area lined with a stone curb. The remaining buildings of the Territorial Prison are located west of (behind) the marker. (See Historical Background below.)

This site is deeper than most rest areas with similar, simple highway-pull off designs. The depth of the site places the stone marker farther back from the trunk highway than is typical. The drive creates a large island between the drive and T.H. 95.

The site is planted with grass. The marker is nestled within a protecting semicircle of tall mature cedars. At the northern end of these trees is a patch of raspberry bushes that seems to be encroaching. Brush is grown up along the northern edge of the site. There are two mature elm trees and about four mature evergreens near the eastern edge of the site. Beneath these evergreens is a perennial flower garden and a wooden sign that reads "Stillwater 1843 Birthplace of Minnesota, a Bicentennial Community" (with symbols of the Rotary Club, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and the Lions Club). (A similar sign appears in a circa 1964 photograph of the site.)

There are a few pieces of concrete and limestone embedded in the grass near the western edge of the island, southeast of the marker. Their purpose is unknown (possibly a prison building foundation?).

The original planting plan specifies 30 Red Cedar trees to be planted behind the marker, 20 evergreen shrubs to be planted in front of (flanking) the marker, and 52 Savin Juniper shrubs to be planted in four groups in the grassy island between the marker and the highway.

■ **SETTING**

The site is located in a hollow (once called Battle Hollow) that is surrounded by 100'-tall bluffs. The topography of the site itself is flat. The setting is mixed commercial and residential. The site is surrounded by T.H. 95 on the east, a tall limestone bluff that is retained by the Limestone Retaining Wall on the north, the remaining buildings of the Territorial Prison on the west, and a vacant lot and the Territorial/State Prison Warden's House (also listed on the National Register) on the south. The site is located about one block west of the bank of the St. Croix River, which is barely visible from the site. This portion of the St. Croix has been designated the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

■ **INTEGRITY**

**Alterations**

The site appears to have been built closely to plan except that the flagstone plaza is specified as semicircular, the flagstone walkway is specified as bituminous, and the stone curbing is specified as concrete on the plans.

The small rectangular NYA plaque on the front edge of the marker has been removed. The pull-off drive was originally gravel and is now paved with asphalt. A wooden sign and

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perennial garden have been added near the eastern edge of the site. (A similar sign appears in a ca. 1964 photograph.) The only original plantings are the tall cedars behind the marker.

The site has a strong sense of integrity of feeling and association, partly because the marker is set so far back from the highway, partly because it is nestled in tall cedars, and partly because the Territorial Prison behind it is relatively intact and vacant (or at least very quiet). The site has a quiet, shady, comfortable sensation.

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. Stones are missing, stones are broken, and it needs to be remortared. The marker has been patched several times with various mortar materials. The small NYA plaque is missing. The flagstone plaza and walkway need repair -- portions are covered up and worn away, and some stones are missing. (The southern portion of the walkway is more intact than the northern portion.) The limestone curbing needs repair. Some curb stones are missing, others have been moved out of position.

The site appears to be minimally maintained.

**■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker 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.

Prior to the construction of the wayside rest, there was a 3' by 5' steel sign on this site (erected at an unknown date between 1929 and the mid-1930s). The sign was white with black lettering and was located close to the highway shoulder. The text of the steel sign was identical to the current marker text. Between 1939 and circa 1941, the steel sign was temporarily installed within the stone marker's niche. This 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 site was developed and the stone marker constructed in 1939 by the National Youth Administration (NYA), working in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways. The wayside was established on the property of the former Minnesota Territorial (subsequently State) Prison. The site may have been chosen because it was already State-owned land. This marker was constructed with stone salvaged from two of the former prison buildings (built 1851-1853) that were demolished by the NYA in 1936-1938. An historic photo dated September of 1939 suggests that the marker was unveiled or dedicated that month. The site was landscaped in 1940.

The original plans are stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. Sept. 1, 1939." The plans are signed by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), A. R. Nichols

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(Consulting Landscape Architect), J. C. Robbers (District Engineer), and S. Rex Green (Engineer of Lands and Right of Way). The accompanying planting plan was signed by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development) on May 1, 1940 and is stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. Oct. 1, 1940."

The highway department's *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* for 1939 summarizes the project:

One-half mile north of the intersection of Trunk Highways No. 212 and No. 95 lies the old prison grounds. On this site stood an old three story stone building which, in connection with this project, was demolished and the stone salvaged for use on roadside development projects. A considerable amount of topsoil loam was hauled in so as to properly grade the area and provide for the landscaping of same. An historic marker was removed and replaced. The marker was constructed of a stonemasonry using stone from the demolished building. A flagstone walk and stone curbing was placed along the driveway of the turnout (*Annual Report 1939:27*).

The *Final Report of the National Youth Administration for the State of Minnesota* (1943) states: "The [NYA] youth received training in cutting and laying stone and in landscaping the grounds. A site that heretofore was neglected is now an interesting beauty spot for the local community and the traveling public" (*Final Report 1943:66*).

Mn/DOT Site Development Unit records indicate that in 1961 the site included two picnic tables, two fireplaces, and water.

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.

Most of the site of the Minnesota Territorial (then State) Prison is now privately owned. The buildings are currently used only for storage. The site was the subject of a 1994 adaptive reuse study that was sponsored by the City of Stillwater and the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society (see *Stillwater Territorial Prison Site 1994*). A committee, called the Territorial Prison Site Advisory Group, also participated in the reuse study. No final plans for the prison site have been formulated. The future of the prison site may have implications for Mn/DOT's future plans for the rest area.

### Minnesota Territorial (subsequently State) Prison

In 1849, the Minnesota Territorial Legislature officially chose this site for the Territory's first prison. Stillwater resident Jacob Fisher designed the first prison buildings. Construction

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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 limestone retaining walls were built around the prison by the prisoners during an 1868 expansion. The wooden, brick, and stone prison buildings filled nearly the entire site, including the area immediately adjacent to T.H. 95. The prison operated for 61 years, closing in 1914. Its buildings stood vacant until most were demolished in 1936-1938 by the NYA. The stone was used for various roadside development projects including the Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker and the Stillwater Overlook - South (see inventory form for the overlook). Two remaining prison buildings (built 1884-1891) stand west of the marker (off of Mn/DOT right-of-way). They were used as a prison shoe and twine factory and a prison warehouse. The complex also includes extensive retaining walls, a railroad spur, cave openings, and other features (also off of right-of-way).

The Territorial/State Prison (WA-SWC-239) was listed on the National Register in 1982. The designated property (comprised of Government Lot 1) includes the T.H. 95 right-of-way that encompasses this rest area. The Territorial/State Prison Warden's House (WA-SWC-241) is located on a separate parcel south of the Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker and is now the Washington County Historical Society Museum. The Warden's House was listed on the National Register in 1974.

**■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

**■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker was built in 1939 as part of a series of roadside development projects in the Stillwater area. It is one of 18 stone, free-standing, shrine-type historic markers recorded in this inventory. The site 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.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1889-1960." It is recommended that the Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker 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 Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker 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 Indian Battle Ground Historical Marker is an unusually well-preserved example of a small roadside parking area featuring an interpretive marker. 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 site is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

This property is located within the boundaries of a larger property that was listed on the National Register in 1982, the Territorial/State Prison ("Minnesota State Correctional Institutions" historic context). The wayside rest is a non-contributing element within the listed property.

The wayside rest may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" and "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" historic contexts.

#### ■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

A curb-lined, asphalt-paved highway pull-off drive curves into the site from T.H. 95. The drive is deeper than many rest areas with similar configuration, placing the marker farther back from the trunk highway than is typical. Visitors to the marker are therefore quite a distance from T.H. 95, so highway noise and motion are not intrusive.

This site may also be associated with local historic contexts established by the City of Stillwater's Heritage Preservation Commission.

It is recommended that the site be reinterpreted for cultural sensitivity. It is also suggested that the Minnesota Territorial Prison be interpreted for the public.

The text of the historic marker is specifically associated with this ravine.

Future plans for the prison site may have implications for Mn/DOT's plans for the rest area. (See discussion of prison reuse study in Historical Background above. A photocopy of the reuse study has been placed in the Indian Battle Ground inventory file in the Mn/DOT Site Development Unit.)

#### ■ 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, 1939.

*Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota From July 1, 1976 to June 30, 1948.* December 1, 1948, p. 55.

*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.

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

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

*Stillwater Territorial Prison Site Reuse Study.* Prepared by Minnesota Preservation Consultation Team, Thomas Zahn, Principal Investigator. March, 1994.

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**

This site, known as "Battle Hollow" was the site of a skirmish between groups of Dakota and Ojibwe that occurred on July 3, 1839. Apparently, a group of Ojibwe traveling north from Fort Snelling camped at this site and at dawn were attacked by a group of Dakota.

#### **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 those 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 Metal Plaque on Stone Marker**

"In this ravine at daybreak July 3, 1839, a war party of Sioux overtook a body of Chippewa returning from Fort Snelling where a Sioux had been killed by other Chippewa. A bloody



battle took place, in which the Chippewa losses were about 50 killed and wounded. The Sioux losses were small." [Seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society]