

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WA-SWC-714  
CS 8210  
Tamarack House Historical Marker

<b>Historic Name</b> <b>Other Name</b>	Tamarack House Historical Marker	<b>CS #</b> <b>SHPO Inv #</b>	8210 WA-SWC-714
<b>Location</b>	W side of TH 95 .3 mi S of jct of TH 95 and TH 96	<b>Hwy</b> <b>District</b> <b>Reference</b>	TH 95 Met E 103
<b>City/Township</b> <b>County</b> <b>Twp Rng Sec</b> <b>USGS Quad</b> <b>UTM</b>	Stillwater, City of Washington 30N 20W Sec 21 Stillwater Z15 E515230 N4990670	<b>Acres</b> <b>Rest Area Class</b>	.2 4
<b>Designer</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SP #</b>	8210
<b>Builder</b>	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use</b> <b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013514.01-04 013514.12
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1954	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 3.181
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
<b>National Register Status</b>	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
<b>Historic Context</b>			

**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built
01	Retaining Wall	Ca. 1860
02	Cave	Ca. 1870
03	Marker	1954

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

**Fieldwork Date**  
05-10-97

**Prep by**  
Gemini Research  
Dec. 98 G1. 76

**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 Tamarack House Historical Marker is located on the western side of T.H. 95, .3 miles south of its junction with T.H. 96 in the city of Stillwater near the northern city limits. This small, .2-acre site consists of a small asphalt-paved parking area and a metal plaque mounted on a limestone wall that is built into the side of a natural bluff.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Limestone Brewery Wall.** Wall built 1860s for Knipps Brewery. The site's principal feature is a wall built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone that retains the steep face of the natural limestone bluff. This was originally the back wall of the four-story Knipps Brewery that was built on this site in the 1860s. The existing wall is about 12' tall at its tallest point and about 55' wide. It is rather crudely constructed. The building was razed in 1935 (see Historical Background below).

**Cave Opening.** Cave created circa 1860s-1870 by Knipps Brewery. A few feet south of the plaque is the opening to a cave. The opening has been closed with tan, random ashlar limestone. It is not known when the stones that closed the cave were placed.

**Historical Plaque.** Erected 1954 by MHD. Mounted on the limestone wall near the midpoint of the site is an aluminum plaque cast with the seals of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways. The text of the plaque addresses the Tamarack House, a log building that originally stood one block south of this site. (See text at the end of this document.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The site has a small, asphalt-paved parking area (located immediately east of the wall) with no amenities except one garbage can. The parking area does not seem to have a formal shape, but appears to conform to the natural shape of the site. A short, narrow asphalt walkway leads from the parking area to the plaque. There is a small strip of grass planted in front of the wall, and grass north of the parking area. There are no other plantings associated with the site.

North of the limestone brewery wall is another wall, a 60'-long random ashlar limestone retaining wall (possibly also part of the brewery). This wall has a 20'-long section of poured concrete retaining wall attached to its northern end. Both the stone and concrete sections are about 6' tall. Together these two form an 80'-long wall that retains the side of the bluff north of the parking area. Undoubtedly this 80'-long wall was part of a building; today the land is vacant. Part of this land may be on Mn/DOT right-of-way.

■ SETTING

The wayside rest is located in a generally residential setting. The rest area is nestled between the highway and the bluff (the bluff is located about 85' west of the centerline of T.H. 95).

The site is surrounded by T.H. 95 and a set of railroad tracks on the east, a tall steep bluff on the west and south, and houses to the north.

The St. Croix River is located less than one-quarter mile east of the site but is not visible from the rest area. This portion of the St. Croix has been designated the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

#### ■ INTEGRITY

##### Alterations

Originally, the parking area was probably gravel and later paved with asphalt.

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

##### Notes on Condition

The wall, marker, and site are in fair condition.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This wayside rest was established circa 1954 by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD). (No plans have been located.) The plaque was erected by the Minnesota Historical Society and the MHD in April of 1954, in cooperation with the Washington County Historical Society (WCHS). Sherman Crane of the WCHS wrote the text for the plaque. In 1954, picnic tables and benches were also installed.

The historic plaque commemorates the site of a tamarack log house built by Joseph R. Brown in 1841. (Tamarack is a type of pine tree that grows in swampy land and is generally not used for lumber.) The house was located approximately one block south of the wayside rest. Brown was the first settler in the St. Croix Valley and, in 1839, laid out the town of Dahcotah at this site. He was a member of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature that established St. Croix County. Brown built the house to serve as the first capitol building in the county and in Minnesota but, despite what the plaque says, it was never used for this purpose according to the WCHS (Peterson 1997).

The wayside rest is located on the former site of the Knipps Brewery (also called the St. Croix Brewery). Gerhard and Robert Knipps built this four-story stone brewery in the 1860s. The brewery was connected with several large caves that reached far back into the bluffs and were used for cooling and storing beer. For example, in 1870 the *Stillwater Gazette* reported:

The brewery of Mr. G. Knipps has been greatly improved during the past summer. This is partially owing to the work done by the Railroad company, in digging away a large portion of the immense bluff adjacent to his building. He has made large excavations under the bluff in the rear of his brewery, about 60 feet in length, which will eventually be extended to about 125 feet (*Stillwater Gazette*, Dec. 13, 1870).

**Tamarack House Historical Marker**

By the 1880s, the brewery had become a private residence. During World War I, employees of the Stillwater munitions factory were housed in the old brewery. At one time, as many as 16 families resided there. In 1935, the structure was condemned and torn down by the MHD when T.H. 95 was rerouted and the highway widened. The back wall of the stone brewery was left in place for a retaining wall.

The Tamarack House Historical Marker is the most recent of sites in this Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Structures Inventory that are located in and near Stillwater:

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

The first four sites were built in 1936-1940 by the National Youth Administration (NYA). The Tamarack House site was developed in the 1950s.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Tamarack House Historical Marker is a roadside parking area with a very simple site design. It was developed circa 1954 by the MHD. This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the site is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it does not meet the context registration requirements.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

The site is close to the T.H. 95 roadway, making the highway noise and motion somewhat intrusive.

The text of the marker is specifically associated with the site of the wayside rest.

It is recommended that site interpretation be expanded to explain the brewery wall and cave opening to the public.

■ **REFERENCES**

"Brewery Improvements." *Stillwater Gazette*, Dec. 13, 1870.

"Old Brewery Building Being Razed by State." *Stillwater News*, Nov. 15, 1935.

Peterson, Brent Thomas [Washington Co. Hist. Soc.]. Letter to Kay Grossman [Gemini Research]. Nov. 10, 1997.

*Stillwater Post-Messenger*, Aug. 1, 1935.

"Two Historic Spots Marked." *Stillwater Gazette*, Apr. 22, 1954.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND TEXT OF PLAQUE**

**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 Plaque**

"Here in 1839, in Crawford County, Wisconsin Territory, Joseph R. Brown, first settler of this valley, laid out the town of Dahcotah. The following year as a member of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature, Brown secured passage of a bill setting up St. Croix County. In the election to select a county seat Dahcotah won and here Brown built Tamarack House to serve as a courthouse, the first capitol building in Minnesota." [Seals of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways]