

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WA-SWT-013  
CS 8210  
Stillwater Overlook - North

<b>Historic Name Other Name</b>	Stillwater Overlook - North	<b>CS # SHPO Inv #</b>	8210 WA-SWT-013
<b>Location</b>	S side of TH 95 .8 mi E of CSAH 11	<b>Hwy District Reference</b>	TH 95 Met E 101.7
<b>City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM</b>	Stillwater Township Washington 30N 20W Sec 15 Stillwater Z15 E516470 N4991810	<b>Acres Rest Area Class</b>	1.48 4
<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	<b>SP #</b>	8210-08 95-95-21
<b>Builder</b>	Natl Recovery Work Relief (NRWR) National Youth Administration (NYA)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	91-0754
<b>Historic Use Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013514.05-11
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1936-39	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Nic 1.11    Nic 5.17 Nic 7.23    Nic 7.24 Ols 3.184    Ols 3.185 Ols 3.186
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Moderately Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
<b>National Register Status</b>	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance Also member of listed NR site: St. Croix Boomsite; 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.		
<b>Historic Context</b>			
<b>List of Standing Structures</b>			
<b>Feat#</b>	<b>Feature Type</b>	<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Fieldwork Date</b>
01	Overlook Wall	1936	05-10-97
			<b>Prep by</b>
			Gemini Research Dec. 98    G1. 75
			<b>Prep for</b>
			Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			
<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)		

■ BRIEF

The Stillwater Overlook - North is a 1.49-acre site that is located on the southern side of T.H. 95 in Stillwater Township about .8 mile east of CSAH 11, north of the northern city limits of Stillwater. It is located on Lookout Point on the western bank of the St. Croix River.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Overlook Wall.** Built 1936 by the NYA. The site's principal feature is a curving overlook wall constructed of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone laid on a stone footing. There was originally a flagstone walkway and stone curb along the inner curve of the wall (now replaced or covered with concrete). At the western end of the wall is a circular lookout bay that was filled with flagstone (now replaced or covered with concrete). At the eastern end of the wall is a rectangular concrete-paved lookout bay that was also originally paved with flagstone. A geological marker on a stone lectern-type pedestal was installed in the bay in 1950. (See marker text at the end of this document.) Between the two lookout bays the wall has a graceful curve. There are 4'-wide pedestrian openings at the western and eastern ends of the wall where stone steps originally allowed visitors to walk down to the river to the south. (The steps still exist but a chain-link fence bars visitors from climbing down the hill.) The wall is about 120' long and 18" wide. The southern face varies in height with the terrain. The wall is anchored at intervals by stone piers that are about 6" wider and 3" taller than the main portions of the wall.

In the early 1990s the wall was remortared, a new poured concrete cap and a metal railing were added to the wall, and the flagstone walkway and terraces were replaced or covered with poured concrete. The elevation of the poured concrete is higher than the original flagstone, reducing the effective height of the wall.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The rest area's curving drive and parking area originally formed a simple highway pull-off and two islands: a larger semicircular island adjacent to T.H. 95, and a smaller curving island adjacent near the overlook wall. The islands and drive were originally lined with limestone curbing. The entrance drive, parking area, and islands have been redesigned.

There was originally a guardrail (presumably wooden) extending for about 600' along the northeastern side of T.H. 95 north of the rest area. There may also have been original stone retaining walls along the T.H. 95 shoulders near this site. A circa 1964 photograph indicates that there was a row of timber posts forming a guardrail along the drive north of the wall. They do not show in earlier photographs and have since been removed.

The site has several widely-spaced, mature deciduous trees and several young deciduous trees that have been planted recently. There are mature evergreens at the western and eastern ends of the wall. Most of the site is planted in grass. The topography is basically flat but the site is surrounded by hills and bluffs. A chainlink fence keeps visitors from climbing down the river bluff.

The original planting plan notes several large existing oak trees. The plan specifies the planting of 45 Pfitzer Juniper shrubs, 90 Coral Dogwood shrubs, 45 Red Cedar trees, and 20 Sugar Maples. The planting plan contains the statement "Note: All Junipers, Cedars, and Maples Planted Under National Youth Movement [sic]."

#### ■ **SETTING**

The overlook wall is located on a high point called Lookout Point on the western bank of the St. Croix River. It provides a view of the St. Croix to the south/southeast. This portion of the St. Croix River has been designated the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

The site is located in a forested setting with trees and hillsides that screen nearby development. It is surrounded by wooded hills and bluffs to the north and east, a marina along the bank of the river below the site to the west, and a steep drop to the St. Croix River to the south. T.H. 95, which is divided at this point, forms the northern boundary of the site.

#### ■ **INTEGRITY**

##### **Alterations**

The site appears to have been built close to plan.

A geological marker on a stone lectern-style pedestal was added to the site in 1950. Timber and stone guardrails on and near the site have been removed. The original stone curbing has been replaced with concrete.

Mn/DOT altered the site circa 1991 by adding a new poured concrete cap and metal railing to the wall, remortaring the wall, covering the flagstone walkway with poured concrete, altering the route of the entrance drive, adding new curbs, altering the shape of and resurfacing the parking area, adding a chain-link fence, and adding some plantings. The poured concrete cap and the concrete covering over the original flagstone walkway have the effect of downplaying the wall's original stonework and reducing the stone wall's height.

Some original plantings have been removed, a few remain. The trees have grown up so that the view from the overlook wall is blocked.

The site retains integrity of location and setting. Its integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association have been compromised by the circa 1991 alterations.

##### **Notes on Condition**

The overlook wall is in good condition and the site is fairly well maintained.

#### ■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Stillwater Overlook - North was built as part of an extensive roadside development project in the Stillwater area. Work on the project 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) 1936-1939. A. R. Nichols, the MHD Roadside Development Division's Consulting Landscape Architect, designed the Stillwater-area projects. Nichols included a photograph of the Stillwater Overlook - North in an article he wrote for *Landscape Architecture* magazine in 1940 (Nichols 1940).

Several sets of plans exist for the Stillwater Overlook - North -- as well as for the nearby St. Croix Boomsite R.P.A. -- making it somewhat difficult to trace the construction history of these properties. (The entire Stillwater roadside development project was referred to by the highway department and the NYA in various ways, making the task of separating the sites even more difficult.)

Initial construction of the Stillwater Overlook - North site apparently occurred in 1935-1936 as workers from the NRWR improved a 4.5-mile-long section of T.H. 95. The title sheet of a set of plans for this 4.5-mile project (S.P. 95-95-21-1) is stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.R.W.R. 82-1, Dec. 16, 1936."

Three photographs of the Stillwater Overlook - North appear in the *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota For 1935-1936*, which was published on January 1, 1937 (*Biennial Report 1937:30-31*), suggesting that the wall was built in 1936. It is not clear whether the wall was built by the NRWR or the NYA.

A plan for the overlook wall (entitled "Plans and Details for Overlook Wall" (S.P. 95-95-21)) was drawn in January of 1935, according to its title. The same plan sheet for the overlook wall is stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. March 25, 1939." The late date on the stamp -- March 25, 1939 -- perhaps refers to the landscaping of the site, which may have occurred last.

One set of roadside development plans that include this site was signed in the spring of 1938 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). Ellison dated his signature March 29, 1938. These plans may have been planting plans.

It is possible that the stone for the overlook wall was salvaged from the buildings of the Minnesota Territorial/State Prison in Stillwater. The NYA razed these structures in 1936-38 and used the stone for roadside development projects. The Indian Battleground Historical Marker and the Stillwater Overlook - South were built by the NYA from this stone (see those inventory forms).

The geological marker was added to this overlook wall in 1950 by the Geological Society of Minnesota and the MHD.

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.)

The 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 of cultural resources in this vicinity was conducted in 1991 in preparation for the reconstruction of a seven-mile-long segment of T.H. 96 (91-0754). This review apparently determined that the Stillwater Overlook - North was not eligible for the National Register, although available documentation does not explicitly state this. The documents that chronicle the Section 106 review contain several items of correspondence and reports on archaeological resources in the vicinity.

#### ■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Stillwater Overlook - North, built in 1935-1936 by the NYA, is a roadside parking area that contains 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. The site 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 on which the NYA worked.

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, the property is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context due to loss of integrity.

#### ■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

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

The trees have grown and now block the view from the overlook wall.

The text of the marker is associated with a specific location and uses the phrase "the site of this tablet marks the northern limit of Lake St. Croix."

#### ■ REFERENCES

Anderson, Rolf T. "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form. Oct. 9, 1990; amended Aug. 30, 1993.

*An Appraisal Inventory of Work Done with W.P.A. and Other Federal Relief Funds Through the Functioning of the Department of Highways, State of Minnesota.* Unpublished manuscript, 1938.

*Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota For 1935-1936.* Jan. 1, 1937.

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

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.

Nichols, Arthur R. "Landscape Design in Highway Development: A Coordinating Factor in the Layout of Traffic Ways." *Landscape Architecture*, April 1940.

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

### **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 the Metal Plaque**

"Geology of Minnesota Stillwater Region. The site of this tablet marks the northern limit of Lake St. Croix, impounded by the natural dam of sand and gravel, made by the Mississippi

where it is joined by the St. Croix River, twenty miles below Stillwater. The valley, with its steep banks, is typical of youthful topography -- of a young stream -- and its size, compared with the river, indicates that a much larger volume of water flowed here when the St. Croix was an outlet of Glacial Lake Duluth, the ancestor of Lake Superior. The highway and picnic grounds occupy a river terrace on which the river flowed at an earlier stage. The rock walls of the valley are chiefly sandstones formed in the sea when it covered Minnesota during the Cambrian period 500 million years ago. Because of the thickness of the beds and the excellence of the exposures along the river, these formations, wherever they appear in North America, are known as the St. Croixian series.

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