

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WR-RKT-006
CS 8607
Dickinson Spring Roadside Parking Area

Historic Name Other Name	Dickinson Spring Roadside Parking Area	CS # SHPO Inv #	8607 WR-RKT-006
Location	SW side of TH 55 1.5 mi SE of the jct of TH 55 and CSAH 14	Hwy District Reference	TH 55 3B 160.4
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Rockford Township Wright 119N 25W Sec 15 Delano Z15 E436030 N4996500	Acres Rest Area Class	.25 4
Designer	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SP #	8607-05 8607-21
Builder	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013508.06-11
Yr of Landscape Design	1948	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 3.197
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance Property determined ineligible; see http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf for additional information.		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Spring Water Outlet	1948	10-30-96
02	Marker	1989	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 19
			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

Dickinson Spring Roadside Parking Area is a small, .25-acre site located on the southwestern side of T.H. 55 about 1.5 miles southeast of the junction of T.H. 55 and CSAH 14. It is located about two miles southeast of the town of Buffalo.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Spring Enclosure. Erected 1948 by MHD. This rectangular stone spring enclosure is located southeast of the asphalt parking area. The enclosure is made of slabs of roughly-cut red, black, and gray granite, most of which is coursed. The cap of the wall is made of slabs of polished granite, most of which are missing. The wall is about 1'7" thick and 3' tall. It has 2'-thick corner piers. The wall forms a 16' by 18' rectangle that has an opening on the side that faces the parking area.

The stone wall encloses a grassy area with a 3'-wide poured concrete square in the center. An iron supply pipe, through which the spring water continuously flows, extends out of this concrete square. The water drains through an opening in the northeastern side of the wall beneath a large, rockfaced, red granite lintel. The original plans indicate a 3'-tall, 2'-square stone drinking fountain within the enclosure. Early historic photos suggest that the drinking fountain was not built. The plans also called for a 6'-long, 2'-wide poured concrete bench within the stone enclosure against its southwestern wall. It is not clear from photos whether the bench was ever built.

Wooden Marker. Erected 1989 by the Wright County Historical Society. Between the spring enclosure and the parking area is a wooden marker with incised and painted lettering. The text of the marker addresses Dickinson Spring. (See text at the end of this document.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

A set of three concrete steps and a gravel path lead from the parking area to the spring enclosure. The original plans call for concrete steps and a sidewalk between the parking area and the enclosure.

The parking area was originally a 40' by 35' gravel rectangle surrounded by a 6" concrete curb and timber posts that were painted white. Historic photos show a culvert (possibly granite-faced) under the parking area's entrance. The parking area was tripled in size (105' added) and the access to the site altered in 1960. There is currently a concrete curb along the western and southern sides of the parking area. There are seven cut log posts along the northern side of the parking area. It is now paved with asphalt.

Most of the site is planted with grass. There are two mature evergreens and two mature ash trees near the spring, five mature oaks west of the parking area, and about seven large tree stumps (probably elm). The topography of the site is flat.

The 1948 plans specify that 23 Colorado Green Spruce and 12 American Elm be scattered through the site about 6' apart, which would have created a fairly shady site.

■ **SETTING**

The site is located in an open, relatively treeless, agricultural setting and is surrounded by farm fields and wetlands. It is bounded by T.H. 55 on the northeast and the tracks of the Soo Line on the southwest.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

The spring enclosure appears to have been built fairly close to the original plan.

The parking area has been expanded in size and has been paved with asphalt. Its simple post guardrail has been removed. A bench may have been removed from the spring enclosure (or perhaps it was not built.) The concrete sidewalk between the steps and the stone enclosure has been removed. The wooden marker was added in 1989. Plantings have died and been removed.

In general, the site retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. The integrity of design and feeling have been altered somewhat by the tripling of the size of the parking area.

Notes on Condition

The stone enclosure is in poor condition and missing many stones. The marker is in fair condition.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In 1916, farmer Thomas Dixon had a well dug on his farm that was eventually called Dickinson Spring. John C. Murphy, an implement dealer in the settlement called Dickinson Station, installed the Dickinson Spring well. The spring became a popular stopping place for travelers and tourists who were welcome to drink the water. The spring went dry in 1934.

The highway wayside was created in 1938 when the Minnesota Department of Highways acquired the land in association with the construction of T.H. 55. The construction crew accidentally struck the well pipe and the spring began to flow again. The site was improved by the Department of Highways with a stone enclosure and drinking fountain in 1948. Harold E. Olson was the Roadside Development Engineer. The plans were drawn in 1948 and signed in November by Olson and four highway department officials: R. J. Wolfangle (Engineer of Plans), Walter Schultz (Assistant Engineer of Plans), G. G. Gladman (Engineer of Plans and Surveys), and O. L. Kipp (Chief Engineer).

One source indicates that a parking area was built next to the spring by the CCC in 1938 (*Wright County Journal-Press*, 1991). The spring enclosure clearly dates from the 1948 construction plans, however. No information on CCC involvement has been found, but it is possible that the CCC created a small parking area here in the 1930s.

Dickinson Spring Roadside Parking Area

Mn/DOT Site Development Unit files indicate that circa 1964 the site had picnic tables, a privy, fireplaces, and a council ring. The reference to a council ring may be in error, because no other references to a council ring have been located.

The wooden marker was erected in 1989 after the Wright County Historical Society received permission from the Mn/DOT to erect the sign, and the Minnesota Historical Society wrote the text. Glenn Dixon, the son of the well's original owner, Thomas Dixon, routed and painted the marker.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

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

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Dickinson Spring Roadside Parking Area, apparently built in 1938 and 1948 by the MHD, is a wayside rest with a simple site design. It may have been designed by Fred Vogt, who was the Roadside Development Division's landscape architect during this period.

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

Non-Federal Relief Property That Closely Resembles a Federal Relief Property. Dickinson Spring R.P.A. is an excellent example of a Non-Federal relief property that was built during the decade immediately following the end of the federal relief programs (1943-1953) which strongly represents a continuation of the design principles and philosophy of the federal relief-built roadside development sites. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Dickinson Spring R.P.A. is a good example of a MHD wayside rest that tapped a natural spring for roadside drinking water. It is one of only five properties in this inventory that include a spring outlet structure, and one of three properties in which the spring forms the focal point around which the rest area was created. (The other two are Spang Spring R.P.A. and New Ulm Spring R.P.A.) Dickinson Spring is an example of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" as applied to a roadside development facility. The rest area 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. (National Register Criterion C.)

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.

Traffic on T.H. 55 past this site is heavy, making it difficult to turn into the parking area. The site is close to the roadway and may feel dangerous for visitors who might have children or pets.

The text of the wooden marker is associated with the Dixon farm and town of Dickinson and uses the phrase "1/4 east of here."

■ REFERENCES

"Dickinson Spring History." *Wright County Journal-Press*, May 2, 1991.

"Dickinson Spring To Get New Sign." *Wright County Journal-Press*, June 15, 1989.

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

Thiel, George A. and Carl E. Dutton. *The Architectural, Structural, and Monumental Stones of Minnesota*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1935.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXT

The spring enclosure was probably constructed of St. Cloud granite. The St. Cloud-Cold Spring area is one of the state's largest granite quarrying regions and produces a fine-grained granite that ranges in color from black to gray, to varying shades of red and pink, to a clear white. Granite quarrying began in Stearns and nearby counties in the 1860s.

Dickinson Spring was named for the Soo Line railway station that was located 1/4 mile east of the spring in Section 15 of West Rockford Township. The station was named for Amos C. Dickinson on whose farm it was located. The Dickinsons operated a brick kiln on their farm and often shipped brick by rail. They also shipped logs that had been cleared from their land and milk from their dairy operation. The railroad depot at the site was a converted railroad boxcar. By 1903 a creamery had been constructed, and in 1904 a general store was built. By 1915 the settlement had 50 people. Through the years, the small community has been called Dickinson, Dickinson Spring, Dickinson Station, and Dixon's Spur. The county maps of 1900, 1915, and 1948 refer to the settlement as Dickinson Station. The 1948 construction plans for this wayside rest indicate that the wayside rest was to be located "near Dickinson, Minn." By 1956 the community no longer existed.

Text of Wooden Marker

"Thomas Dixon had this well dug on his farm in 1916. It went dry during the drought in 1934. Minnesota Highway Department equipment struck the pipe while building Highway 55 in 1938. It started flowing again.

"The ghost town of Dickinson, which was located 1/4 mile east of here, was a station on the Soo line and had a population of 50 in 1915. It was named for pioneer settler Amos Dickinson on whose farm it was located."