

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

YM-GRN-078  
CS 8707  
Granite Falls Overlook

<b>Historic Name Other Name</b>	Granite Falls Overlook	<b>CS # SHPO Inv #</b>	8707 YM-GRN-078
<b>Location</b>	SE corner of the intersection of TH 67 and TH 212	<b>Hwy District Reference</b>	TH 67 8B 32.3
<b>City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM</b>	Granite Falls, City of Yellow Medicine 116N 39W Sec 33 Granite Falls Z15 E298720 N4964260	<b>Acres Rest Area Class</b>	4
<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	<b>SP #</b>	212-12-33 8707-01 8712
<b>Builder</b>	WPA, Suspected	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
<b>Historic Use Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013564.02-08
<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1937	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Ols 3.201 Nic 1.15 Ols 3.202
<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
<b>National Register Status</b>	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
<b>Historic Context</b>	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		

**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built
01	Overlook Wall	1937
02	Bench(es), Stone	1937
03	Flagpole(s), Other	Ca. 1960

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

**Fieldwork Date**  
07-12-98

**Prep by**  
Gemini Research  
Dec. 98 G1. 103

**Prep for**  
Site Development Unit  
Cultural Resources Unit  
Environmental Studies Unit

**Final Report** Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)

■ BRIEF

The Granite Falls Overlook is located at the southeastern corner of the intersection of T.H. 67 and T.H. 212 on the southwestern bank of the Minnesota River within the City of Granite Falls. The site is located at the western end of the T.H. 212 bridge.

■ STANDING STRUCTURE

**Stone Overlook Wall.** Erected 1937, probably by the WPA. The principal feature on the site is a stone overlook wall that faces southeast and offers a view of the Minnesota River to the south and east. The wall is built of gray and black, random rubble granite. The wall has a symmetrical design and is 41' long. Its walls, which are 30" tall on the western side and about 5' tall on the eastern side, are anchored with piers. A wide, curving lookout bay faces the river to the east.

A 1'-wide "stone border" -- somewhat like an at-grade stone curb -- extends westward from the ends of the wall to outline a roughly-rectangular plaza area which the wall and the stone border enclose. Three stone and concrete benches (see below) rested on the plaza, which was paved with gravel according to historic photos (Olson vol. 3:201-202). A gravel foot path originally ran northeast to southwest through the plaza.

**Stone and Concrete Benches.** Built 1937, probably by the WPA. The site originally contained three stone and concrete benches, one measuring 8'-long and two measuring 4'6" long. The 8'-long bench stands on the western edge of the plaza. The two shorter benches flanked the curved lookout bay. The southern bench is missing. All three benches had 18"-wide concrete slab seats that rested on granite pedestals.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

This triangular site has a scenic view of the Minnesota River. The wall stands on the river's southwestern bank and is aligned parallel with the bank. There is approximately 5' of land between the wall and the river, and the water is about 15' below the wall. A 5'-wide gravel foot path originally ran northeast to southwest through the plaza. The path had been replaced by a concrete sidewalk by 1941, according to historic photos (Olson vol. 3:201). The sidewalk is still concrete. The sidewalk travels through city-owned land along the river, going under the T.H. 212 bridge (which was a metal truss bridge when the site was built) northeast of the site, and also extending along the river south of the site. A 30'-tall modern flagpole is located approximately 25' north of the stone wall, and a spotlight on a wooden pole is located about 20' west of the flagpole.

The site is unusual among roadside development properties because it originally had no parking area. Historic photos show that cars apparently parked on the highway shoulders (which were relatively quiet) and visitors walked down to the site (Olson vol.3:202).

The site is planted with grass and scattered mature deciduous and evergreen trees. An original planting plan has not been located, but historic photos show that the site was originally planted with young deciduous and evergreen trees and low juniper shrubs (Olson vol. 3:201).

## ■ SETTING

The site is located within the city of Granite Falls. It is bounded by T.H. 212 on the north, T.H. 67 on the west, and the Minnesota River on the east and south. The overall setting is commercial, with gas stations located across T.H. 212 to the north, and a new commercial building across T.H. 67 to the west. The Yellow Medicine County Historical Society building is about 1/8 mile to the south. Memorial Park is also located to the south.

The stone wall is located 30' south and below the elevation of T.H. 212, and approximately 75' east of T.H. 67. It is located at the toe of slope of the western end of the T.H. 212 bridge.

## ■ INTEGRITY

### Alterations

The site was built according to plan.

The gravel footpath was replaced by a concrete sidewalk by at least 1941. The view from the site was been altered by the overgrowth of brush and trees along the riverbank. It is possible that the site lost acreage in 1975-1976 when the T.H. 212 bridge was built and T.H. 67 was reconstructed. A modern flagpole has been added.

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

### Notes on Condition

The wall is in fair to poor condition. One large chunk of granite is missing from the western end of the curved lookout bay. The 8'-long bench is in fair condition. The southern 4'6" bench is missing and the northern bench is broken.

## ■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This site was apparently built in 1937 under S.P. 212-12-33 (CS 8712), which was a T.H. 212 project. The T.H. 212 plans (212-12-33) 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 J. D. Ellison (Chief Engineer). Kipp dated his signature Oct. 13, 1936. The site also appears in outline form on plans for T.H. 67 for fiscal year 1936 (8701-01). These plans are signed by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development).

It is possible, but could not be confirmed by this study, that this site was constructed with WPA labor. WPA workers constructed Memorial Park (adjacent to the south) in the mid-1930s. The park has several stone features. (See Additional Background Information at the end of this document.)

The current T.H. 212 bridge was built in 1975.

In 2002, learned that Granite Falls Overlook designed and built as part of larger effort to redesign and improve city of Granite Falls' adjacent Memorial Park. See <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/historic/files/wayrep-suppl.pdf> for additional information.

■ **PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS**

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

■ **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Granite Falls Overlook, built in 1937, is a small roadside parking area with a stone overlook. It was probably developed by the MHD in cooperation with local government. The wall is one of 37 stone overlook walls inventoried in this study. It is unusual among the sites in this study because it was apparently not designed with its own parking area. The site is suspected to have been built by the WPA. It is one of more than 60 sites that were designed by, or whose design is attributed to, Arthur R. Nichols.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1889-1960." It is recommended that the Granite Falls Overlook is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. Granite Falls Overlook 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 probably an example of the work of relief labor in partnership with the MHD. Together, the MHD and various New Deal agencies built a number of distinctive public facilities that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. Granite Falls Overlook is an excellent example of the type of small scenic overlooks built by the Roadside Development Division. The site is a good example of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" as applied to a small wayside rest. It is one of only 12 properties in this inventory that contain existing stone benches. The site's stone features display the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Granite Falls is also an example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property 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.

T.H. 212 and T.H. 67 past this site are very busy and noisy. There is no automobile access to the site. Parking is only available across T.H. 67 in a commercial business parking lot, and pedestrians must cross the busy highway to approach the site. However, a sidewalk that runs along the riverbank approaches the site from both north and south.

■ **REFERENCES**

Narvestad, Carl and Amy. *Granite Falls 1879-1979: A Century's Search for Quality of Life*. Granite Falls Centennial Committee, 1979.

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.

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

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

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Local Stone**

The granite used to construct the overlook wall was obtained from a local quarry. Granite was quarried along the Minnesota River since the late 1860s. The Minnesota Valley region's granite outcropping extends from New Ulm to Ortonville. Granite Falls had a number of quarries, most located within a few miles of the city. Most of the foundation stone in Granite Falls, for example, was supplied by two quarries located within a 1/2 mile from town. It is possible the stone for the overlook was obtained from one of these quarries because they produced a very dark granite that was often used only for foundations and walls.

**Granite Falls**

Granite Falls, platted in 1872, is the county seat of Yellow Medicine County. Located on a bluff overlooking the Minnesota River Valley, the city was named for the granite outcroppings and the waterfalls of the Minnesota River. The river figured prominently in the development of the city. It was a major transportation route as well as a source of water supply, food, and for a short time, a clamming industry. The first bridge across the river was built in 1876 and replaced by a steel bridge in 1910. This bridge was replaced by the current T.H. 212 concrete bridge in 1975.

**Memorial Park**

Memorial Park was established on the southwestern bank of the Minnesota River in the mid-1920s. Originally 37 1/2 acres in size, it was expanded in the 1930s to 97 1/2 acres. WPA workers riprapped the riverbanks with boulders (this riprap can be seen from the stone overlook), built a bathhouse, a stone shelter house, a 150' retaining wall, and granite gate pillars. The shelter is Prairie Style-inspired and has a purple granite foundation, a flat roof, and granite steps on the northern facade. The entrance gates are constructed of gray and purple granite and have lamps at the top of the posts. A plaque on the gates reads: "World War Memorial Park, Presented to the City of Granite Falls by the American Legion, Legion Auxiliary, Commerical Club, 1925."