

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

WB-PEP-012
CS 7906
Reads Landing Overlook

Historic Name Other Name	Reads Landing Overlook	CS # SHPO Inv #	7906 WB-PEP-012
Location	NE side of TH 61 1.5 mi NW of Reads Landing	Hwy District Reference	TH 61 6A 64.6
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Pepin Township Wabasha 111N 11W Sec 14 Wabasha North Z15 E571080 N4917600	Acres Rest Area Class	.6 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	7906-04
Builder	National Youth Administration (NYA)	SHPO Review #	93-2102
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013518.17-25 013519.00-01 013555.14-18
Yr of Landscape Design	1939	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 5.21 Ols 3.171a Ols 3.172 Ols 3.173 Ols 3.174
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance Now listed: 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 Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Overlook Wall	1939	05-13-97
02	Retaining Wall	1939	
03	Marker	1985	
04	Marker	1988	
05	Bench(es), Other	Ca. 1994	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 61
			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

The Reads Landing Overlook, also known as Lake Pepin Scenic Overlook, is a small site located on the northern side of T.H. 61 about 1.5 miles northwest of the town of Read's Landing and about 5 miles southeast of Lake City. The overlook is on the southwestern shore of Lake Pepin in Pepin Township.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Overlook Wall. Built 1939 by the NYA. The site consists primarily of a stone overlook wall that was constructed on the narrow area of fill between T.H. 61 and the shore of Lake Pepin to provide a view of the lake. The wall is built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone laid on a concrete footing. The wall has a long, narrow, somewhat rectangular shape with low stone walls that enclose a raised flagstone terrace on three sides. The overall length of the structure is about 230'. The walls are approximately 18" thick and are anchored at intervals with 2'-square piers. The southern pier at the eastern end of the wall contains a small rectangular bronze plaque that reads "Constructed by National Youth Administration Cooperating with Minnesota Department of Highways 1939."

The northern side of the structure contains a 90'-wide, curving lookout bay that projects outward toward the lake. There were originally three benches with concrete seats and stone pedestals located against the wall within the bay.

Built into the eastern end of the wall is a stone shrine-type marker. It has a rectangular shaft that supports a rectangular aluminum plaque set within a niche. The name "Geological Society of Minnesota" and the seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society are cast near the bottom of the plaque. (The text of the plaque addresses the geology of Lake Pepin. See text at the end of this document.) The top of the stone shaft, the tops of the sidewalls flanking the shaft, and a recessed panel beneath the plaque, are all constructed of hard-surfaced, speckled, orange brick that contrasts in color with the tan limestone. (The brick is specified as salmon-colored on the original plans.) The brickwork forms herringbone-patterned bands on top of the marker and its sidewalls. There is a course of brick laid in sawtooth fashion above the plaque. A small rectangular metal plaque reading "Constructed by National Youth Administration 1939" is set within the brick panel beneath the plaque. The marker shaft is approached via a set of three wide, curving limestone steps. These steps were originally flanked by two benches with concrete seats and stone pedestals that are specified on the plans as being 4' long.

Built into the western end of the overlook wall is another stone shrine-type marker. It has a short square pedestal (rather than a tall shaft) that is flanked by stepped sidewalls. Set into the square pedestal is a handsome circular, bronze plaque (26" in diameter and set into a concrete cap) that contains a map of Minnesota with raised lettering conveying geographic information. The pedestal and the tops of the sidewalls that flank it have well-laid, contrasting brickwork that matches the brickwork on the marker at the opposite end of the overlook. The pedestal and circular plaque are approached via a set of three wide, curving limestone steps. These steps were originally flanked by two benches with concrete seats and stone pedestals that are specified on the plans as being 4' long.

The western side of the overlook narrows at its midpoint to create a curved parking area (originally gravel) located directly south of the overlook's flagstone terrace (and directly adjacent to the T.H. 61 shoulder). The terrace was originally paved with flagstone and had five inset panels that were filled with asphalt. The edge of the terrace was lined with stone curbing.

Retaining Wall. Built 1939 by the NYA. The original plans specify an approximately 250'-long, 75 cubic yard, dry stone rubble retaining wall to be constructed across T.H. 61 from the overlook to support the widening of the T.H. 61 shoulder for extra parking. The original plans specify that the wall be 18" tall (measured from the bottom of the ditch), 6" thick, and be located 4' from the base of the bluff that rises above the ditch.

The wall is now in two sections with a 23'-wide drainage culvert and approach road between the two. The wall sections are 28' from the T.H. 61 centerline, and the top of the wall is below the elevation of the T.H. 61 paving. The wall sections are built of limestone rubble (most of which is coursed) and are 3' tall above the ditch and about 18" wide. At the ends of the western wall (which is 180' long) are short endwalls that further retain the earth. The western end of the western wall begins about 37' west of the end of the overlook structure. The eastern wall section is about 100' long (the eastern end has crumbled so its length is uncertain). Both wall sections have been patched with mortar and the western section is now partially covered with a poured concrete cap.

Metal MHS Marker. Built 1985 by MHS. A metal marker on a metal pole is located on the overlook's terrace. The text indicates that the marker was erected by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1985. (See text at the end of this document.) The marker was originally located north of (outside of) the overlook wall and was moved onto the terrace in 1994.

Metal Great River Road Marker. Built 1988 by MnDNR. This marker is located on the overlook's terrace. It is built of metal with a plastic sign containing the text. The text indicates that the marker was erected by the Department of Natural Resources in 1988. The text of the marker is different on each side. The text addresses The Great River Road and Eagles Aloft. (See text at the end of this document.)

Concrete Benches. Moved to site in 1994 by Mn/DOT. Two 6'-long poured concrete benches were placed against the northern wall of the overlook by Mn/DOT during the 1994 reconstruction. The benches are more modern in style than the original benches.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The overlook's parking area was originally separated from T.H. 61 by a 6'-wide island lined with a stone curb. (This island does not show on the original plans but is mentioned in the Roadside Development Division's 1939 *Annual Report* (see below.) Additional parking was provided on the opposite side of T.H. 61 where the shoulder was widened and supported by the retaining wall described above under "Standing Structures."

Circa 1940 historic photos show a timber post guardrail extending along the shoulder of the highway west and east from the overlook.

The overlook wall is surrounded by natural grasses, brush, and small trees. No original planting plan has been located.

■ SETTING

The site has a rural setting with Lake Pepin on the north, T.H. 61 and a wooded hillside on the south, and the wooded shoreline of the lake to the west and east. The overlook is built on a narrow area of fill. The land descends quickly down to the lake north of the overlook, and rises into tall wooded hills south of the site.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The overlook wall appears to have been constructed as per the original plan. The retaining wall across the road differs slightly from original plan (see "Standing Structures" above).

The original bronze plaque was replaced by the current geological plaque in 1950. The small rectangular plaque beneath the aluminum geological plaque was installed at an unknown date, possibly 1950. The island adjacent to the overlook wall has been removed. The limestone curbing was replaced with poured concrete curbing at an unknown date. The gravel parking area adjacent to the overlook wall was paved with asphalt at an unknown date. The seven original concrete and stone benches were removed at an unknown date. Two metal markers were added to the site in 1985 and 1988.

In 1994 Mn/DOT rehabilitated the overlook. Among the changes were the following: A poured concrete cap was added to the top of the eastern marker shaft. The terrace was reconstructed with the majority being poured concrete (rather than flagstone) and the five inset panels now being flagstone (rather than asphalt). The shape of the terrace was made more angular (adjacent to the parking area). Handicap access ramps were added to the terrace and new poured concrete curbs were installed. The front corners of the overlook structure were repaired and rebuilt. The steps in front of the circular bronze plaque were rebuilt. Two 6'-long poured concrete benches were placed against the northern wall of the overlook. The metal markers were moved onto the terrace. A small rectangular bronze plaque reading "Constructed by National Youth Administration Cooperating with Minnesota Department of Highways 1939" was installed on the end pier at the eastern end of the overlook to replace the original plaque which had been lost at an unknown date.

The retaining wall has been patched with mortar and poured concrete.

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

Notes on Condition

The mortar on the overlook wall has been patched through the years. A few stones are missing from the overlook. The retaining wall is in poor condition. The site is fairly well maintained.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the construction of this overlook, there was a rectangular, steel, 3' by 5' marker at or near this site that had been erected in the early 1930s. (The marker was white with

black lettering.) This was one of a series of identical markers erected during the first cooperative trunk highway marking program of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society, which was established in 1929. The text of the steel marker was identical to the text of the original bronze plaque on the overlook wall's eastern stone marker. This text discussed the history of the lake including the capsizing of a steamboat during a storm in 1890. (See text at the end of this document.)

Original plans for the overlook indicate that they were drawn in August of 1939. They were signed in August of 1939 by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), J. C. Robbers (District Engineer), and O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer). They were revised Sept. 15, 1939. The plans were then labeled "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. Mar. 10, 1940." The plans indicate that the overlook wall was constructed at a site where the highway had been previously widened to create a pre-existing overlook.

The MHD Roadside Development Division's 1939 *Annual Report* described the partially completed project:

Along Trunk Highway No. 61, a stonemasonry overlook is being constructed at an outstanding vantage point, with both an historic marker and a geographical marker incorporated in the concourse. A six foot curbed island separates the parking area from the main traffic lane. On the opposite side of the road, additional parking space has been provided by the widening on the shoulder which is protected by a dry wall (*Annual Report 1939:22*).

The original bronze plaque on the overlook wall's eastern stone marker repeated the text of the previous steel sign. By 1950 it "had been removed by persons unknown, presumably because it described Lake Pepin as a stormy and treacherous body of water" (Geological Society of Minnesota typescript). In 1950 the missing plaque was replaced by the current aluminum plaque that was erected by the Geological Society of Minnesota in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society. The text on the 1950 plaque addresses the geology of the region. It is also presumed that, at this time, the NYA metal plaque was installed on the marker directly below the aluminum plaque (it does not appear in earlier photos.)

The circular plaque on the western end of the overlook wall was erected by the NYA in 1939, in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society. It is original to the overlook and has not been altered.

A metal historic marker was erected in 1985 by the Minnesota Historical Society. The marker was originally located north of (outside of) the wall and was moved onto the terrace in 1994. A Great River Road marker was erected in 1988 by the Department of Natural Resources.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A Section 106 review was conducted in 1993 in preparation for the repair and reconstruction of the overlook by Mn/DOT (S.P. 7906-68) (SHPO 93-2102). The review included evaluation by the Minnesota Trunk Highway Archaeological Survey program. Regarding archaeological resources, the Trunk Highway Archaeological Survey concluded that "the completion of this [overlook reconstruction] project as it is presently designed should not affect any significant

archaeological site or data. Should the wayside area be extended beyond its current designated limits, the archaeological potential would increase dramatically along the bluff area and any alternative would require further archaeological investigation" (Peterson 1993).

In a letter to Richard D. McAtee (Mn/DOT) dated August 18, 1993, the Minnesota Historical Society concluded that the Reads Landing Overlook is eligible for the National Register (Bloomberg 1993). In June through September of 1993 Mn/DOT and the SHPO consulted on the proposed project to develop plans that were sensitive to the character of the original design. The reconstruction occurred in 1994. The documents that chronicle the Section 106 review contain the archaeological survey report and several items of correspondence regarding the proposed undertaking.

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Reads Landing Overlook was built in 1939-1940 by the MHD in cooperation with the NYA. It is one of 37 stone overlook walls recorded in this inventory, and has an unusual design that is unique in the study. The Reads Landing Overlook is one of 19 sites in the inventory on which the NYA worked. It is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory 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, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the Reads Landing 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. The Reads Landing 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. The site is important as an elaborate and well-preserved example of the work of the NYA and 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 Reads Landing Overlook is an unusual and basically intact example of the stone overlook walls built by the Roadside Development Division. It is an excellent example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a roadside development facility, and skillfully exploits and enhances T.H. 61's striking views of Lake Pepin. The overlook has stone and brick work 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 Reads Landing Overlook is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The SHPO also determined the site to be ELIGIBLE for the National Register during a 1993 Section 106 review ("Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" historic context).

The site may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in Minnesota, 1870-1945" historic context.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 61 is very busy past the site making the site difficult to access. The noise and motion of the traffic is intrusive to pedestrians on the overlook, in part because of the overlook's shallow site.

It is recommended that Mn/DOT replace the current modern benches with benches that match the original plan.

The text of the aluminum plaque is associated with Lake Pepin and uses the phrase "above this point for a distance of 22 miles." The text of the Eagles Aloft/River of Rafts marker is associated with the general area from which eagles can be viewed. The black metal marker is associated with Lake Pepin.

■ REFERENCES

Anderson, Rolf T. "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." National Register 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. State of Minnesota Department of Highways. 1939.

Bloomberg, Britta L. (MHS). Letter to Richard D. McAtee (Mn/DOT). August 18, 1993.

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Geological Society of Minnesota. Typewritten information, n.d.

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, Works Projects Administration. St. Paul: May 1940.

Peterson, Leslie D. Minnesota Trunk Highway Archaeological Reconnaissance Study, Environmental Assessment Review Form. April 20, 1993.

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

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.

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.

Upham, Warren. *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance*. 1920; Second Rev. Ed. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969.

WPA Federal Writers' Project. *WPA Guide to Minnesota*. 1938; Rpt. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND MARKER TEXTS

Local Stone

The overlook is located near the Chippewa and Mississippi rivers along T.H. 61 (part of the Great River Road and a Federal Scenic Byway). The 500'-tall limestone bluffs along the river near this overlook may have been the source of the limestone used to build the structure. Quarrying of limestone along the Mississippi River Valley began as early as the 1850s. Presumably, limestone was quarried in the immediate vicinity of this site. By 1935, at least three limestone (Oneota dolomite) quarries near Reads Landing had become inactive and were abandoned. It is also possible that the limestone for this site was quarried at Frontenac (a few miles northwest of this site) where a limestone quarry was first established circa 1855.

Reads Landing

Reads Landing (originally Read's Landing) was named for Charles R. Reed who operated a trading post at the present site of the town in 1847. (The trading post had been established as early as 1810 by Augustine Rocque.) The village was platted in 1856 and incorporated in 1868. It became a prominent wheat-shipping port and the town grew to include 27 hotels, 20 saloons, and numerous stores and warehouses. Early railroads constructed through the area bypassed Reads Landing, and by the early 1900s the town had declined.

Text of Current Aluminum Plaque on Stone Marker

"Lake Pepin"

"Lake Pepin occupies the Mississippi Valley above this point for a distance of 22 miles. The lake is formed by the delta of the Chippewa River which enters the Mississippi directly east of this site.

"The Chippewa, a relatively small river, has a much steeper gradient than that of the Mississippi. It was therefore able to transport more sand and coarser gravel than the master stream could remove. In consequence the Mississippi was dammed back in the gorge to form Lake Pepin.

"The surface of the lake is 664 feet above sea level and 450 feet below the top of the bluffs which line its shores.

"The sand and limestone walls of the gorge are composed of material deposited in Cambrian and Ordovician seas when the continent was submerged some 400 million years ago.

"The bottom of the gorge is 150 feet below the lake surface having been filled to its present elevation as the carrying power of the river decreased. Geological Society of Minnesota." [Seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society]

Text of Original Bronze Plaque on Stone Marker

"Lake Pepin"

"The present name first appears on a French map of 1703, and about its shores centered many French military and trading activities of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Always dangerous, this lake was dreaded by boatmen, and in 1890 the capsizing of the steamboat Sea Wing during a storm, cost about 100 lives."

Text of Metal MHS Marker

"Lake Pepin"

"City dwellers need go no farther than this"

Text of Great River Road Marker

Western Side of Marker: "Eagles Aloft"

"This is a prime area for viewing bald eagles. They are drawn here all winter long by open water and an abundant supply of fish. Eagles build their nests near the water in the tops of tall trees. Majestic birds, bald eagles are easily identified, even in flight, by their white heads and tails. A mature bald eagle can have a wing span of 200 centimeters (80 inches). Minnesota has the third largest bald eagle population in the United States."

Eastern Side of Marker: "River of Rafts"

[Text was unavailable from MnDNR.]