

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-GVC-047B
CS 2735
Blazer Park

Historic Name	Blazer Park	CS #	2735
Other Name	Golden Valley Roadside Parking Area	SHPO Inv #	HE-GVC-047B

Location	W side of TH 100 between TH 55 and Lilac Way Dr N	Hwy District Reference	TH 100 Met W 8.1
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City/Township County	Golden Valley, City of Hennepin	Acres	3
Twp Rng Sec	24N 24W Sec 19	Rest Area Class	4

USGS Quad	Minneapolis South	SP #	2735-02 100-130-23
UTM	Z15 E472490 N4980660		

Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SHPO Review #	94-3607
Builder	Works Progress Administration (WPA)		

Historic Use	Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013552.01-18
Present Use	Roadside Parking Area		

Yr of Landscape Design	1939	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 1.19 Ols 2.17 Ols 2.18
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		

National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance Also member of eligible NR district: Lilac Way Historic District Property demolished (stone stored for reuse); District razed as part of TH 100 reconstruction.
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Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960 Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943
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List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built
01	Signpost, Stone	1939
02	Flagpole, Stone	1939
03	Picnic Table(s), Stone	1939
04	Fireplace(s), Stone	1939
05	Refuse Container(s), Stone	1939
06	Foundation of Bldg	1939
07	Flagstone Pad	1939
08	Well/Pump	Ca. 1939
Continued		

Fieldwork Date	11-03-97
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Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 87
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Prep for	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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Continue Table of Site Structures

Feat#	Type	Year Built	
09	Marker	1940	

NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

■ BRIEF

Blazer Park, also known as Golden Valley Parking Area, is a 3-acre site that is located on the western side of T.H. 100 immediately southwest of the cloverleaf intersection of T.H. 100 and T.H. 55 in Golden Valley.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Entrance Sign. Built 1939 by the WPA. At the northern edge of the parking area is a large limestone entrance sign that is highly visible from T.H. 100. The sign marks the park's original entrance from T.H. 100. It is a 4'-square structure built of tan, random ashlar, rockfaced limestone, with the stone cut and laid in complicated angles. The shaft of the marker tapers and steps in as it rises upward to a total height of 10.5'. Two slabs of smooth dark limestone form a cap. There are lancet-like slits on the sides. The eastern and western slits once supported the hanging arm of the sign. There is an iron chain hanging from the eastern side. The structure is in poor condition.

Stone Flagpole. Built 1939 by the WPA. A stone flagpole base is located on the park's highest ground, in the grassy oval at the center of the site. It is an octagonal structure built of tan, coursed ashlar, rockfaced limestone. The 9'-tall flagpole base is supported by four buttresses. The base steps in as it rises upward. Two courses of smooth dark limestone form a cap. The structure supports a tall, rusty flagpole. The shaft (which is about 4' square) is ringed by three octagonal limestone steps. There is a small rectangular plaque missing from the eastern side of the flagpole base. The flagpole base is in poor to fair condition with cracking mortar.

Stone Picnic Tables. Built 1939 by the WPA. The site has three sets of stone picnic tables. Each set sits on a rectangle of flagstone. There are several additional flagstone pads visible that once held picnic tables. The tables and benches are built of tan, ashlar, roughly-cut limestone, most of which is coursed. The stones were carefully chosen and cut.

The tables are in two styles: one of the picnic tables is square, with the table top supported by a random rubble cruciform shape. It was designed to have four 4'-long benches, the seat of each supported by two stone block pedestals. Three of the benches in this set are broken or missing. Two of the picnic tables are rectangular in shape, with two stone 5'-long benches that are each supported by three stone blocks. The table tops and seats are simple slabs that have rockfaced edges. All of the picnic table sets are in poor condition, with stones missing, benches broken, a tabletop missing, and flagstone pads breaking up.

Stone Fireplace. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the southwestern corner of the site is a stone picnic fireplace built of tan and red, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. It is a rectangular structure with an 8'-tall tapered chimney of random rubble. There is a small concrete pad in front of it. The fireplace has brick-lined fireboxes and cooking grates on each of two sides: north and east. The fireplace is in poor condition with cracked mortar and missing stones.

Stone Refuse Container. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the southwestern corner of the site is a square stone "refuse container" (apparently designed to hold a metal can or drum for refuse) that is built of tan, random ashlar roughly-cut limestone. It is 4' square, 2' high,

with walls about 8" thick. The refuse container needs mortar repair. The remains of what appears to be another refuse container are located in the lilac hedge west of the flagpole.

Council Ring Foundation. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the center of the site is the foundation of a council ring. The foundation is 23' in diameter and has a fire ring foundation in the center. The council ring was built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. The ring had a fire ring in the center, flagstone paving around the outside, and a flagstone path leading to its pedestrian opening (see photo in Nichols Vol. 1, p. 19).

Concrete Well Pad. Built circa 1939 by the WPA. Near the southern end of the site is a 6'-square poured concrete pad and poured concrete square base that once supported a pump. The pump has been removed.

Boulder Marker. Erected 1940 by the Golden Valley Garden Club. South of the park's flagpole base is a boulder marker. Affixed to the northern side of the boulder is a small rectangular metal plaque that reads: "Dedicated to the pioneers of Golden Valley. Golden Valley Garden Club. May 7, 1940."

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

The park is located on a hilly site. It has a curbless, asphalt-paved entrance drive that enters the park either from the south or from the northwestern corner. (The park was originally entered from T.H. 100 near the stone entrance sign.) There is an asphalt-paved rectangular parking area along the eastern edge of the site. On the eastern side of the parking area there is an asphalt curb, a guardrail, and the T.H. 100 shoulder. (The original plans specify that the eastern edge of the parking area be lined with a rock wall.) There is a grassy oval at the center of the site, between the parking area and the drive, at the highest point in the park.

The site is planted with grass. There are groups of mature lilac bushes throughout, as well as mature ash, oak, spruce, and other trees. A long lilac hedge runs along the western side.

■ SETTING

Blazer Park is located in a residential neighborhood on the western side of T.H. 100 immediately southwest of the cloverleaf intersection of T.H. 100 and T.H. 55. It is bounded on the west by Turner Crossroad North and houses; on the east by T.H. 100; on the south by Lilac Drive N. and the Soo Line (formerly Minneapolis, Northfield, and Southern RR) tracks and Bridge 5399 that carries T.H. 100 over the tracks; and on the north by the T.H. 100 and T.H. 55 cloverleaf. Across Lilac Drive N. to the south is a wooded ravine that contains the T.H. 100 Culvert (Bridge 5442) that was also included in this inventory (see inventory form).

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The council ring has been removed. A tall, pyramidal-shaped picnic fireplace has apparently been removed (see historic photos in Olson Vol. 2, p. 17). Picnic tables and fireplaces have been removed. The pump has been removed.

The park was originally accessed from T.H. 100. The main entrance from T.H. 100 was closed in 1968 (Schmidt 1994). The eastern edge of the parking area has been reduced in size and once apparently included a rock wall (according to early plans). The northern entrance has been changed slightly. The park lost acreage at the southern end when Lilac Drive N. was built. (When the park was created, the site extended southward to the Minneapolis, Northfield, and Southern Railroad tracks that still exist south of Lilac Drive N. -- see historic photo in Olson Vol. 2, p. 17.) A circular island at the southern entrance road was removed when Lilac Drive N. was built.

The site generally retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. However, its integrity of design and feeling have been compromised by the alterations listed above.

Notes on Condition

The entrance sign structure and the flagpole base are in poor condition with cracking mortar. All picnic table sets are in poor condition, with stones missing, benches broken, a tabletop missing, and flagstone pads breaking up. The fireplace is in poor condition with cracked mortar and missing stones. The refuse container needs mortar repair. The grass and shrubs are fairly well maintained.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Blazer Park, also known as Golden Valley Parking Area, was built in 1939 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of the original construction of T.H. 100. The park was dedicated on May 28, 1939 according to a dated historic photo (see Nichols Vol. 1, p. 19). The WPA's construction of T.H. 100 was one of the largest federal relief projects in the state. The planning and construction of T.H. 100 is significant in the history of transportation in the state. (See Statement of Significance and Additional Background Information near the end of this document.)

The park is shown on plans for a 6.7 mile long road construction project (S.P. 2735-02 -- formerly S.P. 100-130-22 and 23). The plan title sheet is stamped "Final Plans Construction Division N.R.W.R. 3-1-?? to 7-1-38--S.F. 7-1-38 to 8-1-39."

A plan sheet for the cloverleaf intersection of T.H. 100 and T.H. 55 also shows the park.

Blazer Park was designed by A. R. Nichols who was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways during the 1930s through the early 1940s. Nichols designed the landscaping and roadside parks along the entire length of the "Lilac Way" as the original portion of T.H. 100 was called.

Blazer Park was planted with more than 300 lilac bushes. The park was originally accessed from T.H. 100. The main entrance from T.H. 100 was closed in 1968 (Schmidt 1994).

The highway department's 1938 *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* describes the department's roadside development along T.H. 100:

The Minneapolis Belt Line permits both north and south bound traffic to avoid the congestion of the city. . . . Stopping points have been provided for the travelling

public along the Belt Line where they may stop to enjoy the scenery or picnic. These roadside parking areas are equipped with tables, fireplaces, drinking fountains or wells and are situated at strategic points along the Belt Line where right of way widths made possible such a development."

Blazer Park is one of the five roadside parks along T.H. 100 that were included in this Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory. The five parks are listed below as they appear on T.H. 100 from north to south:

Graeser Park
Graeser Park - South
Blazer Park
Lilac Park
St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area

At least two other parks along T.H. 100 have been demolished:

Excelsior Blvd Roadside Parking Area (T.H. 100 at Excelsior Blvd)
Glenwood Avenue Roadside Parking Area (T.H. 100 at Glenwood Ave.)

This inventory also includes two other properties along T.H. 100:

T.H. 100 Culvert (Bridge 5442)
T.H. 100 and T.H. 55 Retaining Walls

See Additional Background Information below for more information.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A series of Section 106 reviews was begun in 1993 in association with the proposed reconstruction of T.H. 100 (SHPO 93-0130, 94-3607, and 98-0306). A portion of T.H. 100 has been determined by the Minnesota Historical Society to be eligible for the National Register as the Lilac Way Historic District. The eligible district includes the roadway itself, as well as bridges, roadside landscaping features, and roadside parks. Survey and evaluation of the segment of T.H. 100 between T.H. 7 (on the south) and 50th Ave. N. (on the north) was conducted in 1994-1997, in part pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the FHWA, the SHPO, the ACHP, and the SHPO that was signed in 1997.

The 1997 MOA stipulated the following: For the northern segment of the project area (between Glenwood Ave. N. and 50th Ave. N.)--photo documentation of National Register-eligible landscape features and development of a video presentation on the history and significance of T.H. 100. For the southern segment of the project area (between the Soo Line RR bridge south of Glenwood Ave. N. and W. 27th St.)--an inventory of structures adjacent to T.H. 100 that predate 1947, and photo documentation of National Register-eligible landscape features. At the time of this writing (Spring 1998), the inventory had been completed and work on the other stipulations was underway. The documents that chronicle the Section 106 reviews (filed under SHPO review numbers 93-0130, 94-3607, and 98-0306) contain the MOA, several items of correspondence, and several reports (see primarily reports by Meyer et al. 1995 and Henning 1997).

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Blazer Park, built in 1939 by the WPA, is a roadside parking area that had a somewhat complex site design. The site is one of 23 properties in this inventory that were built by (or suspected to have been built by) the WPA. It is one of more than 60 properties in this inventory that were designed by, or attributed to, A. R. Nichols. This wayside rest is one of only seven sites in this inventory that retain stone picnic tables, one of only two properties that retain stone refuse containers, one of only four that retain a stone flagpole base, and the only site that has a stone signpost. Blazer Park was built as part of one of the state's largest federal relief projects -- the construction of T.H. 100 (the "Lilac Way") in 1934-1941. The Lilac Way was also one of the Roadside Development Division's largest, most well-publicized, and most visible, single projects.

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 INDIVIDUALLY ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context due to loss of integrity.

However, this property is located within the Lilac Way Historic District, which the SHPO has already determined is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under the "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" historic context. It is recommended that the Lilac Way Historic District ALSO MEETS the registration requirements of the Roadside Development historic context. Blazer Park is a contributing element within the potential historic district.

This property may also be associated with the "Urban Centers, 1870-1940" and "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic contexts.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 100 past this site is a busy, multi-laned highway. The highway traffic travels very close to the eastern edge of the parking area.

The stone picnic tables at this site match those at Graeser Park, Lilac Park, and St. Louis Park R.P.A. (all on T.H. 100), as well as those at Babcock Memorial Park in Elk River.

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

■ REFERENCES

Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development Along the Trunk Highways in Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Highways. 1938 and 1939.

"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. 1935-1936 (pub. Jan. 1, 1937; 1937-1938 (pub. Mar. 1, 1939); 1942-1944 (pub. Dec. 1, 1944).

Henning, Barbara J. *Phases I and II Cultural Resource Historical Investigation: T.H. 100 (Lilac Way) S.P. 2743.* Prepared for Minnesota Department of Transportation by Rivercrest Associates, Inc., September 1997.

Lee, Rudolph. "Highway Department Approves 'Lilac Way' West of City." *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935, pp. 1 and 4.

"Lilac Way Here Soon." *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 30, 1938, p. 2.

Meyer, Scott B., Richard L. Mattson, Andrew J. Schmidt. *Phase I and II Cultural Resources Investigation for Trunk Highway 100 Reconstruction.* Prepared for Minnesota Department of Transportation by The 106 Group Ltd., Feb. 15, 1995.

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.

Olson, Harold E., comp. *Historical Markers in Minnesota.* 4 vols. Prepared by the Roadside Development Division, Minnesota Department of Highways. Ca. 1942, updated ca. 1954.

Schmidt, Andrew. Inventory form for Blazer Park. July 15, 1994.

■ ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

T.H. 100 -- The Lilac Way

The Lilac Way Historic District has been determined to be eligible for the National Register as the most intact portion of the original western segment of T.H. 100. The eligible district is in two distinct segments, a northern segment (about 4.5 miles long) between Glenwood Avenue in Golden Valley and T.H. 52 (now CSAH 81) in Robbinsdale, and a southern segment (1.4 miles long) in St. Louis Park located between a set of Soo Line tracks south of T.H. 7 and W. 26th St.

Built between 1934-1941, largely by the WPA, Lilac Way (originally 12.5 miles long and running from T.H. 5 in Edina to T.H. 52 in Robbinsdale) was one of the state's largest federal relief projects. Lilac Way was the first section completed of the western leg of T.H. 100. The western leg of T.H. 100 was the first portion of a "Belt Line Highway" that, by 1950, encircled the Twin Cities with 66 miles of roadway. The National Register-eligible segment of Lilac Way is significant to the history of suburban development in the Twin Cities and regional transportation (affecting residential development, economic development, tourism, etc.), and significant as one of the state's largest federal relief projects. It is also significant for its distinctive roadside landscaping that features wayside parks, hundreds of native lilac bushes, other intact landscaping elements, and as an excellent example of the work of landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols.

T.H. 100 was originally a Public Works Administration (PWA) project funded by the Economic Recovery Act (ERA). When the WPA was created in 1935, T.H. 100 became a WPA project

that employed between 2,500 and 3,000 men during that year alone. The project used almost 800 workers daily in 1935 and approximately 1,500 men daily at the peak of construction in 1937 (Meyer et al. 1995:78). The building of T.H. 100, like the Thompson Hill Overlook and T.H. 61 in Duluth (also in this inventory) was a large federal relief construction project that was established close to one of the state's large urban centers where unemployment was high. Some of the workers on the T.H. 100 project were ". . . formerly unemployed masons hired to build the stone benches, grills, and posts in the roadside parks" (Meyer et al. 1995:79).

Historian Barbara J. Henning writes that,

The belt line was intended to provide safe, efficient traffic flow, but also an aesthetically pleasing experience. Features designed to enhance the parkway experience included grade separations at railroad crossings and major intersecting highways, cloverleaf connections, limited access points to the highway, absence of private frontage, two lanes in each direction, a median between them, extensive landscaping, and small parks (Henning 1997:10).

Henning describes landscaping along the segment of T.H. 100 in St. Louis Park:

Landscaping for the highway, including the number and types of vegetation, was extraordinary in scope. A dozen types of evergreen trees totaling 420 plants headed the plant material list for St. Louis Park. There were 37 varieties of deciduous trees, shrubs, and vines. The total number of deciduous plants called for in the plan came to 23,505. The largest units were American elm (1,890) in several sizes, sumac (9,478), three kinds of spirea (2,199), Persian lilac (2,487), and common lilac (5,408). Uncommon examples, perhaps representing in-place plants, included limited numbers of butternut (1), ironwood (5), horse chestnut (1), and Chinese matrimony vine (32) (Henning 1997:12).

The Lilac Way's lilac bushes were an exception to the Roadside Development unit's general policy of not planting flowers or flowering shrubs along highways. The landscaping include more than 7,000 bushes of 12 varieties of lilacs and thousands of other vines and trees ("Lilac Way Here Soon" 1938).

See sources cited under References for more information.