

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-SLC-013
CS 2735
Lilac Park

Historic Name	Lilac Park	CS #	2735
Other Name	Minnetonka Boulevard R.P.A.	SHPO Inv #	HE-SLC-013
Location	NE corner of the jct of TH 100 and Minnetonka Blvd	Hwy District Reference	TH 100 Met W 6
City/Township	St. Louis Park, City of	Acres	4.96
County	Hennepin	Rest Area Class	4
Twp Rng Sec	29N 24W Sec 31	SP #	2735-02 100-130-22
USGS Quad	Minneapolis South	SHPO Review #	93-0130 98-0306
UTM	Z15 E472620 N4977250	MHS Photo #	013552.19-25 013553.01-18
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Ols 2.13 Ols 2.14 Ols 2.15
Builder	Works Progress Administration (WPA)	Yr of Landscape Design	1938-39
Historic Use	Roadside Parking Area	Overall Site Integrity	Moderately Altered
Present Use	Roadside Parking Area	Review Required	Yes
National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance Also member of eligible NR district: Lilac Way Historic District District razed as part of TH 100 reconstruction.		
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	Fireplace(s), Stone	1939	11-04-97
02	Picnic Table(s), Stone	1939	
03	Flagstone Pad	1939	
04	Wall	1939	
05	Rock Garden	1939	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 89
			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

Lilac Park, also known as Minnetonka Boulevard Roadside Parking Area, is located on the eastern side of T.H. 100 and the northern side of Minnetonka Blvd. (CSAH 5) in St. Louis Park. The park is located in the northeastern corner of the intersection of T.H. 100 and Minnetonka Blvd.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Stone Fireplace. Built 1939 by the WPA. At the center of the picnic area is a beehive-shaped picnic fireplace. It is built of tan, coursed ashlar, rockfaced limestone. It has dark red mortar joints that contrast with the light-colored stone. The fireplace has a 23' perimeter, is about 10' tall, and was built on a circular flagstone pad. It has three rounded-arched fire openings in which each firebox is lined with brick and has metal cooking grates. Between the openings are small limestone ledges. The fireplace is in poor condition. It is missing several stones and needs mortar repair.

Stone Picnic Tables. Built 1939 by the WPA. The site has three existing stone picnic table sets. (Eleven sets are shown on the plans and approximately that number are visible in historic photos.) Each set sits on a rectangle of flagstone. There are several empty flagstone pads still existing that once held picnic tables. The tables and benches are built of tan, roughly-cut limestone, most of which is coursed. The stones were carefully chosen and cut.

One of the tables south of the fireplace has a 4' by 5' rectangular top. The table southwest of the fireplace is in the shape of an elongated octagon (roughly 6' by 5'). Near the southern end of the picnic area is a table with a long, rectangular top that is 9' by 3'. The tables were designed for stone benches that were supported by rockfaced limestone pedestals. 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 missing and broken, and flagstone pads breaking up.

Stone Wall. Built 1939 by the WPA. North of the picnic area (near the point where 29th St. meets Toledo Avenue) is a low stone wall that is buried deep within a group of lilac and buckthorn and is not visible from the roadway. It is 18" thick and built of tan, random ashlar, rockfaced limestone. It has a 162'-long, curved shape and runs at an angle along the crest of a hill. The wall is anchored with stone piers at the ends and at two pedestrian openings. This wall was originally longer and was lined with a short, curved pull-off drive (from Toledo Ave.) that probably formed a parking area. Several feet of stonework from each end of the wall were removed and the curved drive eliminated circa 1968 when an exit ramp from northbound T.H. 100 was built through the site.

Northern Rock Garden. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the northern end of the site is an elaborate rock garden that is almost hidden by overgrown brush. It is built of tan, mortared limestone rubble. Two sets of five stone steps lead down into the garden from its southeastern and southwestern corners. Near the southern end of the garden is an oval-shaped pool that is lined with stones and encircled by a flagstone path. In the center is an island (about 18-20' in diameter) that is ringed with tan limestone rubble. A willow tree grows out of the island. A 10'-long footbridge, comprised of two slabs of limestone on limestone piers, leads to the island from the eastern side. At the southern end of the pool is a waterfall

made of mortared rocks. There are curving limestone steps climbing the back of the waterfall. East of the waterfall is a small niche that contains an L-shaped stone bench with a 2'-tall backrest. The garden's curving paths are paved with flagstone. The lower path encircling the pool is edged with low, stone retaining walls. Another path, which runs at a higher elevation along the eastern side of the garden, is lined with stones that are set so the triangular ends point upward. The garden is overgrown and surrounded by mature evergreens, deciduous trees, and deciduous shrubs. It was separated from the rest of the park circa 1968 by the exit ramp from northbound T.H. 100 to Minnetonka Blvd. which cuts through the park near its northern end. (See May 1939 photo of rock garden in Olson Volume 2, pp. 13, 15.)

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

Lilac Park has a long, somewhat triangular shape and extends from Minnehaha Blvd. northward along the T.H. 100 right-of-way. Plans and historic photos show that the site once had approximately three rectangular fireplaces, one beehive fireplace, one refuse container, 11 picnic tables, and a rock garden in the picnic area near the park's southern end. The curved stone wall (existing) in the northern end of the park was once accompanied by a curving drive (probably with parking spaces). The northern rock garden is north of the wall. There were originally flagstone-paved walkways extending from the southern picnic area to the stone wall, and along the northeastern edge of the park.

An exit ramp from northbound T.H. 100 to Minnetonka Blvd. was cut through the site near its northern end circa 1968.

The park is at the elevation of the T.H. 100 roadway. Toledo Avenue on the east and Minnetonka Blvd. on the south are higher in elevation, creating hillsides at the park's edges.

The site is planted with grass. There are stands of mature trees (elm, maple, spruce, etc.) and deciduous shrubs (such as lilac) at the northern and southern ends, and extending along the right-of-way. A dense thicket of buckthorn and lilac has hidden the stone wall from view. There is a guardrail along part of the western edge of the site along the T.H. 100 shoulder.

■ SETTING

Lilac Park is located in a residential neighborhood in the northeastern corner of the intersection of T.H. 100 and Minnetonka Blvd. (CSAH 5). It is bounded on the west by T.H. 100; on the north by the T.H. 100 right-of-way; on the south by Minnetonka Blvd. and Bridge 5598 (built 1939) that carries Minnetonka Blvd. over T.H. 100; and on the east by a three-lane roadway that consists of a northbound entrance ramp to T.H. 100, an exit ramp from northbound T.H. 100 to Minnetonka Blvd., and Toledo Avenue. Facing this roadway is a row of houses.

■ INTEGRITY

Alterations

The site appears to have been fairly close to available plans, except that the curving drive and its adjacent stone wall were built several feet farther to the north than shown on early plans.

Approximately six picnic tables, three rectangular fireplaces, one stone refuse container, the southern rock garden, and the flagstone walkways have been removed. (Some picnic tables and fireplaces were apparently removed in 1968 (Henning 1997:13).)

In circa 1968, an exit ramp from northbound T.H. 100 to Minnetonka Blvd. was built through the park near its northern end. The northern rock garden was separated from the rest of the park, the ends of the stone wall were removed, and the curving drive near the wall was eliminated.

The stone wall and the rock garden are overgrown.

The site generally retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Its integrity of design has been compromised by the removal of many stone features.

Notes on Condition

The fireplace is in poor condition -- it is missing several stones and needs mortar repair. The picnic table sets are in poor condition with stones missing, benches missing and broken, and flagstone pads that are breaking up. The stone wall and rock garden are overgrown.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Lilac Park, also known as the Minnetonka Boulevard Roadside Parking Area, was built in 1939 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of the original construction of T.H. 100 (100-130-22 and 2735-02). The park was completed by May of 1939 according to dated historic photos. Bridge 5598 south of the park that carries Minnetonka Blvd. (CSAH 5) over T.H. 100 was built in 1939. 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."

Lilac 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.

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 (*Annual Report* 1938).

Lilac 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

Lilac Park was built in 1939 by the WPA. 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 beehive fireplaces, and one of only two that have elaborate rock gardens. Lilac 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. Lilac Park is a contributing element within the potential historic district.

As a member of the Lilac Way Historic District, this property may also 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 is a busy, multi-laned highway west of the site. Traffic is also moving very fast along the T.H. 100 exit and entrance ramps that form the eastern boundary of the site. The traffic noise and motion is obtrusive.

The stone picnic tables at this site match those at Graeser Park, Blazer 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 beehive fireplace matches the fireplace at Graeser Park.

■ 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).

Bloomberg, Britta L. (MHS). Letter to Richard D. McAtee (Mn/DOT). July 19, 1993.

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.

■ 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

maisons 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.