

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-SLC-017
CS 2735

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area

Historic Name Other Name	St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area	CS # SHPO Inv #	2735 HE-SLC-017
Location	SE corner of the jct of TH 100 and TH 7	Hwy District Reference	TH 100 Met W 5.0
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	St. Louis Park, City of Hennepin 28N 24W Sec 6 Minneapolis South Z15 E472640 N4976350	Acres Rest Area Class	2.72 4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	2735-02 100-130-22
Builder	Works Progress Administration (WPA)	SHPO Review #	98-0306
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013560.03-12
Yr of Landscape Design	1938-39	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	Nic 6.07 Ols 2.12
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Eligible, see Statement of Significance Also member of eligible NR district: Lilac Way Historic District Property determined ineligible in August 2006; 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	Council Ring	1939	12-29-97
02	Picnic Table(s), Stone	1939	
03	Fireplace(s), Stone	1939	
04	Refuse Container(s), Stone	1939	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			Prep by Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 86
			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

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area is a 2.7-acre site that is located on the eastern side of T.H. 100 and the southern side of T.H. 7 in St. Louis Park. The park is located in the southeastern corner of the intersection of T.H. 100 and T.H. 7, just north of the trackbed of the Soo Line Railroad (formerly Minneapolis and St. Louis RR tracks and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, and Pacific RR tracks).

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Council Ring. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the center of the picnic area is a council ring built of tan, coursed ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. The ring is about 20' in diameter and its wall is about 18" thick. There is a fire ring in the center (about 5' in diameter) and a pedestrian opening on the southwestern side. The council ring is in poor condition and may be missing an entire course of stones.

Stone Picnic Tables. Built 1939 by the WPA. The site has four existing stone picnic table sets and apparently once had about five. Each set sits on a rectangle of flagstone. The tables and benches are built of tan roughly-cut, limestone, most of which is coursed. The stones were carefully chosen and cut.

Two of the tables have tops that are nearly square (about 3.75' by 4.5'). These tables each have four stone benches that are supported by two limestone blocklike pedestals. Two of the tables have 3' by 5' rectangular tops. These tables each have two 4'-long benches that are supported by three blocklike limestone pedestals. The table tops and seats are simple slabs that have rockfaced edges. The tops are supported by trestle-like bases. All of the picnic table sets are in fair condition. One of the square sets is missing one of its benches.

Stone Fireplace. Built 1939 by the WPA. North of the council ring are the remains of a crumbling picnic fireplace. It was built of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. It is a rectangular structure that measures about 5' by 9' at the base. The structure is in deteriorated condition, with only the lower courses of stones remaining.

Stone Refuse Container. Built 1939 by the WPA. Near the southeastern corner of the picnic area is a square stone "refuse container" (apparently designed to hold a metal can or drum for refuse) that is built of tan, roughly-cut, random ashlar (with some rubble) limestone. It is 5' square, 4' tall, with walls about 8" thick. It is in fair condition.

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area is a small, 2.7-acre site. An asphalt-paved drive enters the site from the east. It originally circled through the park, creating an oval island in the center. The circular drive is now closed to vehicles and is a 9'-wide asphalt-paved footpath. Vehicles stop at a small gravel parking area near the eastern edge of the site.

The park rises above the elevation of the T.H. 100 roadway. Its highest point is near the center where the council ring is located. The railroad tracks along the southern boundary

are raised and planted with dense brush, creating a screened hillside at the park's southern edges. Bridge 5462 carrying T.H. 7 over T.H. 100 is raised along the northern edge of the site.

The site is planted with grass and widely-spaced shade trees. There are stands of mature ash, evergreens, and other trees, particularly on the edges of the site, and clumps of woody shrubs such as lilac. There is a swampy area near the northeastern corner of the site. The southern and eastern edges are dense with trees and brush.

■ **SETTING**

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area is located in a mixed commercial, industrial, and residential area at the southeastern corner of the intersection of T.H. 100 and T.H. 7. It is surrounded by the T.H. 100 roadway on the west and north, the T.H. 100/T.H. 7 intersection on the north, commercial and industrial areas to the east and southeast, and a wide railroad trackbed comprised of the tracks of the Soo Line Railroad (formerly Minneapolis and St. Louis RR and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, and Pacific RR) on the south. The Peavey-Haglin Experimental Concrete Grain Elevator (listed on the National Register in 1978 and named a National Historic Landmark in 1981) is located in the industrial complex southeast of the site.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

The site is missing picnic tables. One of the picnic tables is missing a bench. The fireplace has deteriorated. The council ring is missing stones. A well (probably a hand pump) has been removed.

Despite the loss of some features, the site generally retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The picnic tables, council ring, and refuse container need repair. The fireplace has deteriorated to a pile of stone. The loop road has been recently paved with asphalt.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area was built 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 probably completed in 1939, which is the year that Lilac Park and Blazer Park (both a few miles to the north on T.H. 100) were completed, according to dated historic photos. The T.H. 100 and T.H. 7 cloverleaf intersection had been built in 1936. The two railroad bridges south of the site that carry tracks over T.H. 100 had been built in 1936 (Bridges 5308 and 5309). Bridge 5462 north of the park that carries T.H. 7 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 St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area was designed by A. R. Nichols who was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways from 1932 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*).

The St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area 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

St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area 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 property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the property is individually ELIGIBLE for the National Register because it meets the following registration requirements:

Important Federal Relief Project. The St. Louis Park R.P.A. 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. (National Register Criterion A.)

Rare Federal Relief Property Type. This wayside rest is one of only eight properties in this inventory that retain stone council rings, one of only seven that retain stone picnic tables, and one of only two properties in the inventory that retain stone refuse containers. (National Register Criterion A.)

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The St. Louis Park R.P.A. was built as part of the "Lilac Way," an extensive highway landscaping project that was one of the Roadside Development Division's largest, most well-publicized, and most visible, single projects. Designed by MHD Consulting Landscape Architect A. R. Nichols, the Lilac Way's landscaping represents the Division's first large-scale use of flowering shrubs on highway roadsides, and includes a large, coordinated collection of Rustic style roadside parks, bridges, culverts, and retaining walls that were designed to both serve the traveling public and to soften the view of the new highway from surrounding suburban areas. (National Register Criterion A.)

Furthermore, the St. Louis Park R.P.A. 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 important as an example of the work of the WPA in partnership with the MHD. Together, the MHD and various New Deal agencies like the WPA built a number of distinctive and well-constructed 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.)

Significant to Transportation History. The St. Louis Park R.P.A. was built as part of a highway segment important to the history of transportation in the state. T.H. 100, built in 1934-1941, was a highway construction project of regional significance. The highway played a key role in the post-World War II economic development and growth pattern of the western Twin Cities metropolitan area. T.H. 100 is also significant to the history of highway design and engineering in Minnesota and includes such elements as the state's first cloverleaf intersection. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The St. Louis Park R.P.A. is a good example of the Roadside Development Division's roadside parks of the 1930s. The site's landscaping and structures are excellent examples of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" as applied to a roadside development facility. The site's masonry is well-executed, and the stonework 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. The St. Louis Park R.P.A. was built as part of the Lilac Way, an extensive highway landscaping project that is significant within the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

This property is also 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. St. Louis Park R.P.A. is a contributing element within the potential historic district.

The property may also be associated with the "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" and "Urban Centers, 1870-1940" 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 T.H. 7 north of the site. The traffic noise and motion are intrusive, but the site retains a somewhat secluded feeling because of its low elevation, screens of trees, and quiet industrial area to the south.

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

■ 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.

■ 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 Division'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.