

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A)*. Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Reads Landing Overlook

other names/site number _____

2. Location

Street & number On Minnesota Highway 61 not for publication N/A

city or town Pepin Township Reads Landing vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county Wabasha code 157 zip code 55968

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Patrick McCormack, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society

Date 11/2/07

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Erson H. Beall

12/13/04

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
3	0	structures
0	0	objects
4	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Monument/Marker

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Monument/Marker

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

NPS Rustic Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Stone

Brick

roof

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed on the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
X Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Site Development Unit, Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), St. Paul

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics and Government

Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1939-1940

Significant Dates

1939

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Nichols, Arthur R., Landscape Architect

Olson, Harold E., Engineer

National Youth Administration, Builder

Minnesota Department of Highways, Builder

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 3.6 acres

Wabasha North, Minn., - Wis. 1974

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	15	571210	4917640
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	15	571210	4917570

3	15	570980	4917550
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	15	570970	4917610
<u>See continuation sheet</u>			

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger, Scott Kelly, Kay Grossman, and Sue Dieter

organization Gemini Research date August 15, 2003

street & number 15 East 9th Street telephone 320-589-3846

city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Report (1024-0018), Washington DC 20503.

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Reads Landing Overlook
Wabasha County, Minnesota

7. DESCRIPTION

The Reads Landing Overlook, also known as Lake Pepin Scenic Overlook and built in 1939-1940, is a highway wayside rest located on Minnesota Highway 61. The property includes land on both sides of the highway. It is located in Wabasha County's Pepin Township about 1.5 miles northwest of the hamlet of Reads Landing and about 5 miles southeast of Lake City. The site is located on Lake Pepin, one of the widest parts of the upper Mississippi River.

The Reads Landing Overlook was created by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD). The property was designed by A. R. Nichols, the first Consulting Landscape Architect for the MHD and its Roadside Development Division, in consultation with Harold E. Olson, the MHD's Roadside Development Engineer. Labor for the project was supplied by the National Youth Administration (NYA), a federal agency that was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's Depression-era New Deal program.

The property's substantive resources are included in the resource count that appears in "Number of Resources Within Property" in Section 5 above. These resources are also listed below in "Summary of Resources" at the end of Section 7.

See accompanying map entitled, "Sketch Map, Reads Landing Overlook, Pepin Twp., Wabasha Co., Minnesota."

Setting and Topography

The Reads Landing Overlook is located northwest of the hamlet of Reads Landing (originally Read's Landing). The settlement was named for Charles Read, an English soldier and trader, and is located along the banks of the Mississippi at Lake Pepin and across from the mouth of Wisconsin's Chippewa River.

The Reads Landing Overlook was established at an outstanding vantage point to view Lake Pepin. The overlook wall was designed to provide long views of the lake, the river valley, and surrounding wooded shoreline. Tall bluffs that form the Wisconsin side of the shore are also a prominent element in the view.

Today, the property is located in a rural setting that has not changed significantly since 1939-1940. The surrounding land encompasses wooded hills and shoreline with few buildings within view.

North of the property, the land descends quickly past the Canadian Pacific Railroad trackbed to Lake Pepin. (These tracks were formerly the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific.) The

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landscape of the shoreline is varied, given its great length, but in general it consists of high (approximately 400') fairly flat-topped bluffs.

Immediately to the south of the property are tall, wooded bluffs that rise sharply from the highway right-of-way.

East and west of the property, the land is generally wooded and undeveloped, except for the Highway 61 roadbed.

Spatial Organization

The wayside rest's principal feature is a Rustic Style, limestone, scenic overlook wall. The property has an unusually narrow layout because of the restrictions of its site. The overlook wall was built on a narrow area of fill between Highway 61 and the Canadian Pacific tracks, which run between the highway and the shore of Lake Pepin. The northern side of the overlook structure contains a 90'-wide, curving lookout bay that projects outward toward the lake. There are two small parking areas that flank the northern and southern shoulders of Highway 61.

The property's principal parking area is adjacent to the overlook wall on the northern side of the highway. It was originally separated from Highway 61 by a 6'-wide island line 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*.) The island was eventually removed but the small parking area remains. It accommodates about four cars that are parallel parked.

Directly across the highway from the overlook wall is a second small parking area supported by a low limestone retaining wall. This parking area is now little more than a widening of the highway shoulder.

The Reads Landing Overlook features four separate markers: a stone shrine-type marker built into the eastern end of the overlook wall; a similar marker in the western end of the wall; and two metal markers on the overlook wall's terrace.

Vegetation

The wayside rest was created in an area that is naturally forested. Research has revealed no original planting plans or instructions, and it is suspected that A. R. Nichols originally made use of the existing forest and native vegetation in the original site design. Judging by similar MHD Roadside Development projects of the period, Nichols probably directed that materials be transplanted from the surrounding area into the site to erase construction scars and to help the completed structures blend with their environment. Today, vegetation on the site includes tall grasses and wildflowers, deciduous shrubs, and small deciduous trees. Trees in the surrounding forest include elm, silver maple, linden, sumac, willow, bur oak, birch, and ash.

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Reads Landing Overlook
Wabasha County, Minnesota

Structures and Furnishings

Overlook Wall

Built: 1939-1940
Designer: A. R. Nichols
Builder: NYA and MHD
One Contributing Structure

The property's principal feature is a 230'-long overlook wall with a symmetrical, narrow shape. Original plans suggest that it was built on the site of a previous, informal pull-off area along the highway. The overlook wall has a poured concrete foundation. The superstructure is built of random ashlar, roughly-cut, tan limestone with brick trim. The salmon-orange-colored brick has an unusual hard, smooth, speckled surface.

The wall has 18"-thick stone parapet walls on three sides that enclose a raised terrace. The parapet walls are anchored at intervals with 2'-square piers. The terrace was originally paved with flagstone and had five inset panels that were filled with bituminous. The southern edge of the terrace was originally lined with stone curbing. Short sections of modern post-and-rail guardrail extend off each end of the overlook wall. These replace sections of timber post-and-cable guardrail that were erected originally. In 1994, to make the structure handicapped accessible, the terrace was repaved with poured concrete and the inset panels were paved with original flagstones, in a reversal of the original design. Handicap access ramps were added to the outer ends of the terrace, slightly altering the shape of the ends. Four simple bollards were added to protect the stonework from damage by highway snowplows.

The overlook wall has three particularly inviting features, a lookout bay near the center, and an informative marker at each end of the structure.

The 90'-wide, curving lookout bay is located on the northern side of the overlook wall where it projects toward the Lake Pepin. It was originally furnished with three 4'-long limestone benches. The benches were removed at an unknown date, probably because some had fallen into disrepair or were missing. In 1994 the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) placed two modern 6'-long poured concrete benches within the bay in locations where benches were specified on the original construction plans.

Built into the western end of the overlook wall is an unusual interpretive marker. It has a short square pedestal that is flanked by stepped side walls. There were originally two limestone benches flanking the pedestal. Set into the square pedestal is a handsome circular bronze medallion that is cast with a map of Minnesota with raised lettering conveying geographic information. The medallion is 26" in diameter and set into a concrete cap. The square pedestal and the tops of the side walls that flank it have salmon-orange brickwork that contrasts with the tan limestone. There is herringbone-pattern brickwork, for example, on top of side walls

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flanking the pedestal. The pedestal and medallion are approached via a set of wide limestone steps.

The eastern end of the overlook wall incorporates another interpretive marker, this one a rectangular shaft that is approached by wide limestone steps, similar to those at the opposite end of the overlook wall. Two limestone benches originally flanked the marker. The 8'-tall shaft is decorated with brickwork that matches the brickwork on the opposite end of the overlook wall and is laid square and in herringbone and sawtooth patterns. In 1994 a thin poured concrete cap was added to the top of the eastern marker to check deterioration of the masonry.

A rectangular aluminum plaque is set within a niche in the rectangular shaft. The name "Geological Society of Minnesota" and the seals of the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Minnesota Historical Society are cast into the plaque. The text of the plaque reads:

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 the 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.

The overlook wall has two smaller plaques. On the tall marker shaft, several inches below the "Lake Pepin" plaque, is a small, rectangular, bronze plaque that reads "Constructed by National Youth Administration 1939." On one of the stone piers near the eastern end of the wall is a small, rectangular, bronze plaque that reads "NYA. Constructed by National Youth Administration Cooperating with Minnesota Department of Highways. 1939."

Two modern interpretive markers have been added to the terrace of the overlook wall near its midpoint. The first is a black metal marker on a metal pole. It was erected by the Minnesota Historical Society and Mn/DOT in 1985. It was first located a few feet north of the overlook

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wall (and designed to be read from the overlook wall's terrace by a visitor facing north). It was moved onto the terrace to its current location in 1994. The second marker has a rectangular metal framework that supports a plastic text panel. The marker was erected by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Mn/DOT in 1988 and was moved to its current position on the terrace in 1994.

Retaining Wall

Built: 1939-1940
Designer: A. R. Nichols
Builder: NYA and MHD
One Contributing Structure

Across Highway 61 from the overlook wall is a much smaller limestone retaining wall that originally helped support the property's secondary parking area. This parking area accommodated about five cars parallel parked.

The retaining wall is located within the southern inslope of the current Highway 61 roadbed. The wall is aligned about 28' south of the current highway centerline, parallel with the centerline. Unlike the elaborate overlook wall, the retaining wall is a utilitarian structure with a simple design. It was created to serve a very practical function and to blend with the environment. It is approximately 300' long, 3' tall, and 18" thick. It was built of coursed, tan, limestone rubble that was laid dry, without mortar. The stone was probably gathered nearby. The wall is in poor condition. A poured concrete cap and new mortar have been added to some portions to help arrest crumbling and other deterioration. The wall is interrupted by a short, 23'-wide approach road that is built over a drainage culvert that runs under the approach, parallel to the highway. (Since the site is edged by steep bluffs, the approach leads nowhere, but is apparently used to help vehicles turn around on the highway.)

Highway 61

Built: graded 1921, first paved 1936
Builder: MHD
One Contributing Structure

Highway 61 is aligned east and west at this location and bisects the wayside rest. In 1939-1940, when the Reads Landing Overlook was created, the highway had been recently paved for the first time. The paving was concrete and the width of the driving surface was 20'. In 1969 the highway past this location was resurfaced with bituminous to 24' with 6'-wide gravel shoulders. Today the highway is still bituminous and the driving surface is still about 24'. The shoulders have been paved with bituminous and are about 8' wide. It is still a simple, rural roadway with no extra turning lanes, passing lanes, or other improvements in the vicinity.

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Reads Landing Overlook
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Summary of Resources

The Reads Landing Overlook includes four substantive resources, all of which are categorized as Contributing. They consist of three Contributing Structures (the stone overlook, the small stone retaining wall, and Highway 61) and one Contributing Site (the wayside rest itself).

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Reads Landing Overlook
Wabasha County, Minnesota

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Reads Landing Overlook, built in 1939-1940, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, significance to the broad patterns of our history, in the area of Politics and Government, and under Criterion C, design significance, in the area of Landscape Architecture. The property is an excellent example of the wayside rests that were built during the formative years of the Roadside Development Division of the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) and an outstanding example of the fruits of the partnership between the division and federal relief agencies. Architecturally, the property is an excellent example of the National Park Service (NPS) Rustic Style. It displays the work of highly skilled craftsmen and the distinctive use of indigenous materials, both characteristic of the style. Finally, the property is an outstanding and well-preserved example of the work of its designer, prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. The property is significant on a statewide level.

The National Register eligibility of the Reads Landing Overlook has been evaluated using the registration requirements in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." The property meets two of those registration requirements:

Requirement 2: Significance to the History of Roadside Development. The Reads Landing Overlook is significant to the history of roadside development in Minnesota as an excellent example of the roadside parks that were built during the formative years of the Minnesota Department of Highway's Roadside Development Division, thereby meeting Registration Requirement 2. As a Depression-era, MHD, federal relief-built roadside development property, the Reads Landing Overlook is a good example of the well-designed public facilities that were built by the MHD in partnership with federal relief agencies to meet the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the unemployed. These productive partnerships were critical to the MHD's first large-scale effort to construct roadside development facilities and resulted in the first set of roadside development properties to be built and managed by the division.

Requirement 4: Design Significance. The Reads Landing Overlook is a good example of the application of National Park Service Rustic Style to a highway wayside rest, thereby meeting Registration Requirement 4a. In its overlook wall, the Reads Landing Overlook displays the work of highly skilled craftsmen and the distinctive use of an indigenous material -- local limestone -- thereby meeting Registration Requirement 4b. The Reads Landing Overlook is an excellent example of A. R. Nichols' work and is therefore noteworthy within the body of work of a prominent landscape architect, meeting Registration Requirement 4c.

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Further contextual information is available in the Multiple Property Documentation Form. The information may be found under "Waysides and Overlooks" in Section F of the document.

Early MHD Wayside Rest

The Reads Landing Overlook is an interesting example of the facilities built by the MHD Roadside Development Division in the 1930s and early 1940s in its efforts to serve an increasing number of motorists using the state highways. The MHD created scenic overlooks like this one to give people a safe and organized place to pull off and enjoy a spectacular view, instead of randomly stopping along the highway shoulders and causing a safety hazard. The Reads Landing Overlook's interpretive markers are good examples of those developed by the MHD as another way to encourage tourism. Reads Landing is unique among early MHD scenic overlooks because of its design adaptation to a very narrow site, and because it combines interpretive markers and a scenic overlook in a single structure.

The property was developed along a stretch of state highway that has been a popular tourist route since auto tourism began in the 1910s. From the mid-1910s through the 1930s, this stretch of highway was part of at least two well-known tourist routes: the "Mississippi Valley Highway" and the "Mississippi River Scenic Highway." Tourist highways such as these were named, "blazed" or marked, and promoted by private groups interested in auto tourism. The naming, marking, and mapping of these routes was especially important in the years before highways were numbered and marked by the state in a standardized system. Tourist highways were usually welcomed by local communities because they helped draw motorists who then spent money on gas, food, and lodging.

In 1921 this portion of the highway became part of the state's original trunk highway system, which was implemented that year. It was first called Minnesota Highway 1, which stretched along the eastern edge of the state from Iowa to Canada. In 1925, the highway was mainly gravel with short paved sections near urban centers (Ketz and Alexander 1993:36). In 1925 it was also named a U.S. Highway -- U.S. Highway 61. Historians Ketz and Alexander write that in 1925-1926 "The Minnesota Highway Department and county highway engineers touted this trunk highway for the many vital services it performed. TH 61 served as a 'gateway route' for interstate travel, a primary artery between the Twin Cities and Duluth, a major link for all other trunk roads in the counties it transected, an important roadway for farmers transporting dairy products to these metropolitan areas, and as a principal avenue to hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreational sites" (Ketz and Alexander 1993:36).

In 1933, the highway was renumbered from Minnesota Highway 1 to Minnesota Highway 61 during a statewide effort to make state and U.S. highway numbers correspond. The highway near the Reads Landing Overlook was surfaced with oil-treated gravel until 1936 -- three years before the overlook was built -- when it became a 20'-wide ribbon of concrete. That the paving was concrete, rather than bituminous, suggests that the road was heavily traveled and/or

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considered important to commercial and recreational traffic and therefore merited the more expensive treatment.

In 1938, just before the overlook was built, the Mississippi River Parkway Planning Commission was formed to develop plans for a new designated scenic highway that included this portion of Highway 61. Called the Great River Road (also known as the Mississippi River Parkway), it would follow the banks of the Mississippi River through the U.S. The commission was formed by the governors of 10 states adjacent to the river with the support of U. S. Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes (Haas Smith 1999). Harold E. Olson, MHD Roadside Development Engineer, was a leader in the multi-state effort, and the commission's inaugural meeting was held in St. Paul. (Olson was still involved in 1963 when he became the Executive Secretary of the Minnesota Parkway Commission, the state's version of the umbrella commission. The multi-state Mississippi River Parkway Commission is still in existence and headquartered in Minneapolis.)

Although the Great River Road was established in 1938, Congress did not approve funding for the first feasibility study until after World War II. In 1959 the Minnesota legislature officially designated the Minnesota segment extending the length of the state. The portion of the route along Lake Pepin is considered one of Minnesota's most scenic stretches.

The Reads Landing Overlook was one of a series of at least five small wayside rests built by the Roadside Development Division along Highway 61 in the vicinity of Lake Pepin. All were built in the 1930s and all are believed to have been federal relief projects. They are the Reads Landing Overlook, the Lake City Concourse, the Frontenac Roadside Parking Area, the Fort Beauharnois Historical Marker, and a more simple pull-off with a wooden marker and guardrail located about three miles south of the Reads Landing Overlook. (The latter has been razed.) The Roadside Development Division built closely-spaced wayside rests on scenic highways in three other locations in the state -- along Highway 95 near Stillwater, along Highway 61 on the North Shore of Lake Superior, and along Highway 169 (and Highway 18) near Mille Lacs Lake.

National Youth Administration

The National Youth Administration was a federal program established in 1935 as part of the New Deal's broad set of social and economic programs created in 1933-1941 to benefit the mass of working people. Administration of the NYA began on June 26, 1935. During that same year, the social security system was established.

The NYA was first a part of the newly-formed Works Progress Administration (WPA), and then became part of the Federal Security Agency. Later it was relocated under the War Manpower Commission. The NYA focused on granting jobs, education, recreation, and counseling to people between age 16 and 25. The NYA hired youth to work on highways, playgrounds, schools, recreational parks, and public buildings. The wages normally ran between ten and twenty dollars a month. Approximately 184,500 Minnesota youth worked for the NYA.

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Reads Landing Overlook
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The Reads Landing Overlook is an excellent example of the size and scope of the NYA roadside development projects in Minnesota. The NYA worked with the Roadside Development Division on at least 19 roadside development properties that are still standing. They are all wayside rests with historical markers, overlook walls, council rings, and other amenities. All but 2 of the 19 properties are located in southeastern Minnesota. They were built from 1936-1940, and all were probably designed by landscape architect A. R. Nichols (Granger et al 1998). The NYA also built many of the log and plank picnic tables that were placed at MHD roadside development facilities statewide in the 1930s and early 1940s.

As unemployment began to wane and U.S. involvement in World War II approached, priorities for the NYA shifted. Starting in 1939, the NYA emphasized training youth for defense-related industries. Despite the NYA's success, Congress discontinued funding for the program as wartime spending increased. Congress abolished the NYA in 1943.

Design Significance

The Reads Landing Overlook is an excellent example of both the National Park Service Rustic Style, and the roadside development work of accomplished landscape architect A. R. Nichols.

The property illustrates many basic NPS Rustic Style precepts. Rustic Style designers sought to preserve and capitalize on a site's natural topography and vegetation. Manmade elements were considered to be intrusive and were therefore designed to blend inconspicuously into their surroundings. Structures were designed to harmonize with the environment through compatible scale, form, and materials. They were often built with local stone. Structures were also designed to be durable and to require little maintenance. All of these principals were employed in the design of the Reads Landing Overlook.

Reads Landing is a unique example of the roadside development work of A. R. Nichols, who designed more than 60 facilities for the Roadside Development Division. The narrow, angular plan of the principal structure combines attributes of a scenic overlook with those of an historical marker. The plan represents an interesting solution to the challenges of a very narrow site confined by bluffs, a steep drop-off, a railroad trackbed, and a busy highway. With its symmetrical design and fine brick detailing, Reads Landing exemplifies the sophistication and formality that A. R. Nichols often lent to his Rustic Style designs.

Original plans for the property were drawn and signed in August of 1939. The plans were revised September 15, 1939. The plans are labeled "Final Plans Construction Division N.Y.A. Mar. 10, 1940."

The NYA and MHD began construction of the Reads Landing Overlook in 1939. The Roadside Development Division's 1939 *Annual Report* reported on the progress:

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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*).

Reads Landing displays excellent craftsmanship, another characteristic of both the Rustic Style and of early MHD roadside development facilities. The stones were carefully chosen, cut, and laid. The brick masonry is of high quality and the hard-surfaced, speckled brick is unusual. (The source of the brick is not known.)

The Oneota dolomite limestone used to build the structures probably came from the area. The 500'-tall bluffs along the Mississippi River near the property have extensive formations of this very hard rock. Quarrying of limestone in this region began as early as the 1850s. By 1935 at least three limestone quarries near Reads Landing had become inactive and were abandoned.

The wayside rest has served its original purpose since its completion in 1940.

Additional Historical Background

Reads Landing

The place called Reads Landing, located about 1.5 miles southeast of the overlook, was the site of a succession of fur trading posts in circa 1810-1860, and was a steamboat landing and lumber and wheat trade center in the mid- to late-19th century. Charles R. Read, who came to the site in 1847, was one of the last of the Dakota, French, and English fur traders to live at Reads Landing. Steamboats carrying passengers and freight docked at Reads Landing, as did steamers used to tow large rafts of logs harvested from western Wisconsin's vast pineries. The village became a service center for lumberjacks and at one point boasted about 20 hotels and boarding houses, about 20 saloons, and numerous stores, and warehouses. In the 1870s Reads Landing was one of the busiest wheat shipping ports on this stretch of the Mississippi. The building of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway along the western bank of the Mississippi in 1871 robbed the settlement of its importance as a shipping port and eventually the nearby city of Wabasha superseded Reads Landing as a center of commerce and transportation. Today the population of Reads Landing is about 200. The hamlet is under the political jurisdiction of Pepin Township.

Lake Pepin

Lake Pepin is a natural reservoir formed by siltation from the rapidly flowing Chippewa River in western Wisconsin, which meets the slow-moving Mississippi across from Reads Landing. The lake is 22 miles long and 2 to 3 miles wide.

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The lake first appeared on a map that was published in 1682, but was unnamed. The present name first appears on a French map of 1703. French explorers named the lake in honor of the 8th century French ruler "Pepin the Short."

Lake Pepin is bordered by Goodhue and Wabasha counties in Minnesota and Pierce and Pepin counties in Wisconsin. The sport of water skiing was born on the waters of Lake Pepin in 1922.

Arthur R. Nichols

Arthur R. Nichols (1880-1970) was a prominent Minnesota landscape architect who served from 1932 to circa 1941 as the first Consulting Landscape Architect for the MHD and its Roadside Development Division. Nichols began to consult for the highway department in 1932 as the worsening Depression reduced his private clientele (TPT 2001). Nichols designed the majority of wayside rests and much of the roadside landscaping executed by the MHD during this period. Through this work he strongly influenced the theory and design of roadside development in the state. He was trained as both a civil engineer and a landscape architect, and became a leading figure in the roadside development movement nationwide.

Nichols was originally from Massachusetts. He studied engineering, architecture, and landscape design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and was the first person to graduate from MIT's newly created landscape architecture program. During his early career he prepared plans for Monument Valley Park in Colorado Springs while working in the office of New York City landscape architect Charles W. Leavitt, Jr. In 1909 he formed a partnership with fellow Leavitt designer Anthony Morell (1875-1924) and both men moved to Minnesota. (They had become acquainted with the state while working for Leavitt on the landscaping of "Glensheen," Chester A. Congdon's mansion in Duluth. Glensheen was listed on the National Register in 1991.) Morell and Nichols' public park designs in Minnesota included extensive work in Duluth, as well as parks in Minneapolis, Thief River Falls, Albert Lea, and elsewhere. In 1926, after Anthony Morell's death, the firm designed scenic roadways in Glacier National Park, as well as the grounds of Glacier Park's popular Glacier Park Hotel.

Nichols was one of Minnesota's most prolific landscape architects and played a leading role in establishing the profession in the state. He designed numerous campuses, parks, private estates, cemeteries, and urban master plans. During decades of consulting for the State of Minnesota, he planned dozens of hospitals, prisons, state parks, schools, colleges, and other campuses. For the University of Minnesota, he designed projects on at least five separate campuses between 1910 and 1952. Nichols designed the State Capitol Approach in St. Paul (1944-1950). After a long career, he retired in 1960 at the age of 80.

Harold E. Olson

Harold E. Olson served as head Roadside Development Engineer for the Reads Landing project. Olson had been working for the MHD for ten years when, in 1932, he was charged with

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organizing the MHD's new Roadside Development Division. He led the division for 31 years. During the Depression, Olson helped orchestrate many partnerships between the MHD and New Deal relief programs. Like Nichols, he was prominent in the roadside development movement nationally. Beginning in 1938, Olson was a leader in the multi-state effort to designate the Great River Road along the Mississippi River. He served as the MHD's primary ambassador to state and national conservation groups; civic, tourism, and development associations; and various public agencies on the topics of scenic highways and roadside development. Olson retired from the Roadside Development Division in 1963 and continued to work with the MHD until January of 1968. (His dates of birth and death have not been identified.)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Reads Landing Overlook (1939-1940) is a unique and largely intact example of the small wayside rests and stone overlook walls built by the Minnesota Department of Highways in partnership with federal relief agencies -- in this case, the National Youth Administration. It is a significant reminder of the development and growth of automobile tourism along the Mississippi River. It is also an excellent example of the National Park Service Rustic Style and the skillful application of that style by Minnesota landscape architect A. R. Nichols.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA, CONTINUED

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown by the solid line on the accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, Reads Landing Overlook, Pepin Twp., Wabasha Co., Minnesota." The northern and southern boundary lines follow Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) right-of-way lines. The eastern and western boundary lines are drawn 350' east and 350' west of the midpoint of the overlook wall.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property is comprised of the parcel of land historically associated with the Reads Landing Overlook.

Sketch Map
Reads Landing Overlook
Pepin Twp., Wabasha Co., Minnesota

