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**United States Department of 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, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mindoro Cut

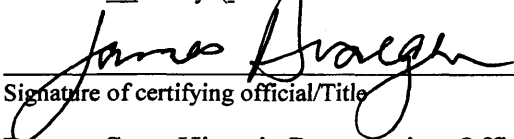
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number	State Highway 108, between Mindoro and West Salem	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Town of Hamilton	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county La Crosse	code 063
			zip code 54644

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.)



Date 4/04/07

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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 commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Mindoro Cut
Name of Property

La Crosse County
County and State

Wisconsin

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.
____ See continuation sheet.
____ removed from the National
Register.
____ other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

5-15-07

ban

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as
as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
district
X structure
site
object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources
in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
	buildings
	sites
1	structures
	objects
1	0 total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)
TRANSPORTATION/Road Related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)
TRANSPORTATION/Road Related

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)
N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation n/a

walls n/a

roof n/a

other Asphalt

Narrative Description

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

Mindoro Cut
Name of Property

LaCrosse
County and State

Wisconsin

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- 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.
- 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:

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation

Engineering

Period of Significance

1908-1956

Significant Dates

1908

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Miller, Louis A. - La Crosse, WI, county surveyor

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Mindoro Cut
Name of Property

La Crosse County
County and State

Wisconsin

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/title	organization	street&number	city or town	state	Date	telephone	zip code
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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 Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Mindoro Cut
Town of Hamilton
La Crosse County, WI**

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INTRODUCTION

The Mindoro Cut is a hand-hewn excavation, cut through a segment of the ridge separating the townships of Farmington and Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin. Completed in 1908, the cut was made as an alteration to the Mindoro-West Salem Highway, of which construction had begun in 1907. The cut, located at the highest point of present-day State Highway 108, between Mindoro and West Salem, is 74 feet deep, 25 feet wide, and 86 feet long. The highway approaches, filled with rubble from the cut, extend a mile to a mile-an-a-half north and south of the site. Although barely wide enough for two cars to pass, the cut itself continues to be used by traffic on Highway 108 and is unaltered since its construction, except for highway paving and the addition of guardrails. The nominated property includes the cut and its approaches and roughly coincides with the construction project that provided access through the cut to the community of Mindoro, located several miles north of the cut.

SETTING – The Coulee Region

The Town of Farmington, the northern terminus of Highway 108 lies in a plateau area of what is known as the Western Upland region of Wisconsin. The Town of Hamilton, where the highway terminates at State Highway 16, in West Salem, descends from what is known as Phillips Ridge, with an elevation of 1300 feet, into the La Crosse River valley. The region north of the La Crosse has been dissected into a system of ridges and valleys, with practically no upland area remaining. The hilltops do not exceed 1100 to 1300 feet above sea level. The area is also referred to by the French name coulee, the designation for valley, prevalent in this region. The area is also entirely within the Driftless Area of Wisconsin, the area that is unglaciated, a feature that contributes significantly to the rough character of the topography of the region.¹ The area was originally heavily forested, mostly of oak savanna. Along the Mississippi are willows, soft maple, and ash; higher in the coulee region, some white, black, and red oak grow. The area was attractive to early settlers, originally for logging, and later for farming. In 1906, the chief occupations were agriculture and dairying. Crops grown in the county included oats, corn, barley, wheat, potatoes, rye, and tobacco. Butter production was also big in the county, whereas cheese production was not. In 1906, the Town of Farmington led the county in oats, barley, wheat, and rye; corn was also popular. The Town of Hamilton led in corn, barley and cultivated grasses; oats were also popular.

¹ Lawrence Martin, *The Physical Geography of Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965) [excerpted and adapted on-line]; available from <http://www.wisconline.com/wisconsin/geoprovinces/index.html>; internet; accessed 14 March 2004.

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Agriculture is still significant in the area, which the visitor will notice as they drive north on State Highway (STH) 108, from the intersection with STH 16, in West Salem. Farms dot the area both east and west of the highway, where farmers have taken advantage of the rich soil of the La Crosse River floodplain. At 2.4 miles north of Highway 16, Eggen Coulee Road intersects from the right. This is the route of the old road, which can be traced north for two miles until it disappears in a sharp rise in the terrain. Highway 108 continues from the intersection and, after going another 1.6 miles, Scotch Coulee Road intersects just south of a stream crossing, at an elevation of 824 feet above sea level. This point marks the southern terminus of the nominated resource. It is at this point that the traveler really begins to get the feel of the area surrounding the Mindoro Cut. The southwest slope of Scotch Coulee rises sharply on the left, an 1100-foot promontory just ahead and to the right. Now, the farmland is behind; ahead is forest, in deep ravines between the ridges. As the road winds for another half mile, you rise nearly 200 feet. At 4.9 miles, the road takes a sharp turn to the right and ahead, to the left, the cut is first visible through the trees. The ridge rises steeply to the traveler's right, 200 feet to the top; the ravine drops rapidly to the left, nearly 200 feet to the bottom. A quarter of a mile farther -- another 100 feet of rise -- and you have arrived at the Mindoro Cut, the rock outcropping in sharp relief to the surrounding forestland. Now the rock rises above you, the last 74 feet to the top. The 86 feet in length marks the narrowest part of the ridge for several miles east or west of the cut. Now you make a sharp turn to the right and you begin the descent down the north slope. The ridge continues its rise sharply on your right, the ravine its steep fall on the left. A quarter of a mile beyond, you are in the middle of a switchback, heading in the opposite direction. Another quarter of a mile, and you have dropped another 100 feet, the ridge still rising sharply on the right, the ravine on the left now gentler. This is the approximate end of the nominated resource.

At 6.7 miles, another stream crosses under the highway, and immediately afterward Larson Road intersects on the right. Larson Road, the northern end of the old road, can be followed east and south .6 mile to the end of the pavement at 1000 feet elevation. The northern end of Eggen Coulee Road is about a mile away, separated by a ridge, a valley, and another ridge. At Larson Road, the traveler will notice that the forested ridges have given way once again to rolling farmland. You have entered the plateau above the ridge, the highland above the river valley. Another mile through this rich farmland, and you reach the village of Mindoro, the northern terminus of the historic, scenic Mindoro-West Salem Highway.

The nominated roadway has had few alterations. The route closely mirrors the original roadway. Changes have been limited, including new paving, several improved shoulders, and the replacement of guardrails. As noted above, the area of the cut is approximately 86 feet long, cut at the top to a depth of

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74 feet. The outcropping tapers away at the sides and ends of the cut. While the roadbed is modern, the travel along the route closely resembles the experience of traveling to and from the cut when the project was completed in 1908.

The Mindoro Cut is representative of a time in state and national history when the importance and value of good roads was beginning to be realized by both government and private citizens. The cut and the road it was made for are reflective of the culmination of efforts by private citizens, agricultural forces, and government to improve highway infrastructure at the beginning of the 20th century. As one of the first efforts by La Crosse County to "make improvements of a lasting nature" to the county roads,² it represents the wisdom and foresight of the supervisors of that time, especially when viewed in light of the fact that the road and the cut are still very much in use. The Cut is significant as the deepest hand-hewn cut made in Wisconsin history, and the second deepest cut nationwide. Also of importance is the fact that it is the only hand-hewn cut remaining unaltered since it was made. It is significant, therefore, as the remaining intact specimen of highway clearance and construction done by hand. Its prominent situation, cut through the ridge overlooking the La Crosse River valley, allows its natural beauty and scale to be appreciated by the contemporary traveler. Its connection to the past makes it a treasure comparable to other historic highways throughout the country.

² La Crosse County (Wis.) County Clerk, *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of La Crosse County, Wisconsin for the year 1907-1908* (La Crosse, WI: Office of the County Clerk, 1908), 85-86.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mindoro Cut is eligible under National Register criterion A in the area of Transportation and under criterion C for its Engineering significance. The Mindoro Cut, a hand-hewn deep highway cut out of a limestone ridge, is locally significant in demonstrating the importance of improved roads in their support of the burgeoning early 20th century dairy and butter industry in southwest Wisconsin, and also under criterion C for the scale of the work and method of construction exemplified in making a deep hand-hewn highway cut through solid rock. Built in 1907-08, the Mindoro Cut has a period of significance from 1908 to 1956. The period of significance begins with the completion of the project in 1908 and runs through the end of the historic period. The cut is still in use today as the ridge top passage along State Highway 108 between West Salem and Mindoro in La Crosse County, Wisconsin. The cut remains essentially as it was when finished in 1908. The Mindoro Cut is believed to be the largest hand-hewn cut still extant in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

La Crosse County was designated a county in 1851, and the present boundaries were established in 1857. The first white settlers of the La Crosse area were Yankees from the New England states, such as the fur trader Nathan Myrick, who was the first settler in what would become the city of La Crosse. Germans, Norwegians, Dutch, French, and then Bohemians followed the Yankee migrants to the La Crosse region. The first census taken of La Crosse County in 1855 showed 3,904 residents. In 1905, that population had risen to 42,850. German was the largest ethnic group in the county at that time, with an abundant Norwegian population a close second.

Highway 108 connects Mindoro to West Salem; Mindoro is located in the Town of Farmington and West Salem in the Town of Hamilton. Lorenzo L. Lewis and his family were the first settlers in Farmington Township in 1846. The Lewis and Downer families established the first farm, built the first saw mill, and constructed a post office in what is now Mindoro before 1850. The population of the Town of Farmington was 1,898 in 1905.

Thomas Leonard arrived in Hamilton Township in 1850 and established the village of West Salem, which lies nine miles south of Mindoro. The Milwaukee Railroad came to West Salem in 1858, followed by the Chicago and NorthWestern in 1874. The nearby settlement of Neshonoc, bypassed by the railroad, disappeared as its people and businesses moved closer to the rail lines. As with all rural villages that were connected to the rail lines at this time, the railroads were instrumental for farmers to

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get their crops to market and for local businesses to bring customers to their shops.³ In 1905, Hamilton Township had a total population of 1,256, and as in Farmington Township, Norwegian was the largest foreign ethnicity.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the decline of wheat as the principal industry in Wisconsin and the rise of the dairy industry. The Wisconsin Dairyman Association was established in 1872, and it acted as an explosion for the dairy industry and for the crumbling Wisconsin economy which was based on wheat and logging. By 1900, dairying became primary and economic localism flourished with the rapid development of farmer cooperatives and associations.⁴ La Crosse County, along with Trempealeau County, Vernon County, and Monroe County became part of what was known as the "New Butter Region" in the state of Wisconsin, notable for its rapid appearance and the unique institutional form of the cooperative creameries.⁵

Importance of Cooperatives to Norwegian Immigrants

In *Between Memory and Reality*, Jane Pederson analyzed the importance of the dairy cooperatives to the Norwegian farm community in Trempealeau County, located directly north of La Crosse County. The cooperative is a Norwegian peasant tradition in which the farmers could maintain a level of control in their neighborhoods and their products, as well as a means of protecting themselves.⁶ By 1880, peasants in Norway were well experienced in consumer and producer cooperatives that were organized, owned and operated by the peasants in the local communities to maintain their subsistence-oriented economy and community traditions, and to "encourage a more productive, individualistic, market-oriented farmer."⁷ Pederson also discovered that the cooperative farmers quickly organized both politically and economically at the local level.

Cooperative creameries flourished in the "New Butter Region." West Salem established a cooperative creamery in 1890, and the Mindoro Cooperative Creamery Association was established in 1896. The Association was composed of members including Peter Gulickson, a Norwegian immigrant, who would become politically active within his community and serve as the Farmington County Board Supervisor and actively support the construction of the new Mindoro-West Salem Road. Farmers

³ Errol Kindschy, *Leonard's Dream: A History of West Salem* (Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1981), 23.

⁴ Jane Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870 - 1970* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 78.

⁵ Pederson, 80.

⁶ Pederson, 78.

⁷ Pederson, 83.

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gathered cream in 30-gallon cans and then hauled them, by horse-drawn wagons in the summer and sleighs in the winter, to West Salem to be loaded on the railroad.⁸ The Mindoro Cooperative Creamery is still in operation today making bleu cheese and gorgonzola for Swiss Valley Farms. It is the oldest cooperative in Wisconsin to be in continuous operation.⁹

Good Roads Movement and Progressive Wisconsin

The "Good Roads Movement" began in Wisconsin in the 1890s and dawned in the Progressive Age in Wisconsin under Governor Robert La Follette.¹⁰ The last three decades of the nineteenth century were the "Dark Age" in the development, construction, and maintenance of rural transportation in Wisconsin. This was due partly to the reliance on railroads to fulfill transportation needs and also due partly to ineffective highway practices fostered by state law, particularly an 1848 state constitutional prohibition against state aid for road construction. The Good Roads Movement in Wisconsin was primarily a campaign to convince farmers of the need for state road aid, and the existence of the Progressive political climate which approved the expansion of governmental activities was essential for the success of the Good Roads Movement.¹¹

The Good Roads Movement included interests from adult bicycling clubs who wanted highway improvement for easier and safer bicycle transportation, as well as from merchants and businessmen whose interest in highway reform was propelled by an economic interest in improved shipment of goods. The third and most influential source of pressure for the Good Roads Movement came from the progressive farm leaders, whose membership included the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association, the Masters of the Wisconsin State Grange, and the Wisconsin Farmers' Institutes. These farm organizations realized the dependence of dairy farmers upon the roads to haul dairy products to the factory, creamery, and the market.¹²

The automobile age emerged in Wisconsin in 1899 and contributed to the pressure for highway improvement. The Good Roads Movement quickly received legislative attention, and in 1901, Governor Robert La Follette created the Good Roads Commission to improve country roads. The Commission sent "Good Roads Advocates" to educate the rural public, which became a distinctive

⁸ Shirley Sullivan, "Longtime Mindoro Creamery Secretary Shares Some History," *West Salem Chronicle*, 30 June 1993, 22.

⁹ Sullivan, *West Salem Chronicle*, 22.

¹⁰ Ballard Campbell, *The Good Roads Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1911* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1980).

¹¹ Campbell, 17.

¹² Campbell, 6.

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feature of the Good Roads Movement in Wisconsin.¹³ Advocates targeted farmers and stressed the economic importance of good roads, as well as the social interaction good roads would produce for rural farmers.¹⁴ Advocates spoke at public meetings and wrote in campaign literature and posters, newspapers, and farm journals, including the special "Good Roads" edition of the *Wisconsin Agriculturist* in 1895.

Not all farmers jumped on the Good Roads bandwagon and opposition did arise, especially in the unglaciated regions of Wisconsin, including La Crosse County, where rugged terrain and the lack of materials made road improvements costly.¹⁵ Many farmers were bound to the tradition of building and maintaining their own roads, and felt Good Roads meant increased taxes and loss of control over local highways. Ballard Campbell, author of *The Good Roads Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1911*, believed that this opposition from pockets of Wisconsin farmers reflected the widespread rural resentment towards the emergence and growth of the urban and industrial state.¹⁶ Rural complaints quickly diminished due to improvements in public finance, and the work and publicizing by the "Good Roads Advocates."¹⁷ When the Mindoro-West Salem road was proposed in 1906, Good Roads advocates were in full force to publicize the upcoming vote on the constitutional change for state aid for highway projects in 1908.

The main force for the creation of the new Mindoro Road to connect the Creamery Cooperative in Mindoro and the Chicago and NorthWestern Railroad in West Salem was the West Salem Progressive Association.¹⁸ On May 17, 1907, the W.S.P.A. approved the current site of the Mindoro Road, running between West Salem and Mindoro through a large limestone ridge. The proposal was presented in the form of a resolution to the La Crosse County Board, and on June 20, the W.S.P.A. and William A. Bradley, the West Salem Supervisor, brought the entire La Crosse County Board, delegates from the town boards of Hamilton and Farmington, and "scores of interested farmers" to West Salem by railroad. Over one hundred people were in the party.¹⁹ They proceeded to the proposed road site by horse-drawn carriages and investigated the site, and according to the *La Crosse Tribune*, June 21, everyone was very impressed and the "work of the [West Salem] Progressive Association was very

¹³ Campbell, 22.

¹⁴ Campbell, 8.

¹⁵ Campbell, 22.

¹⁶ Campbell, 8.

¹⁷ Campbell, 17.

¹⁸ West Salem Progressive Association hereafter referred to as W.S.P.A.

¹⁹ "Surprising Enthusiasm for Improved County Roads Being Developed: Supervisors are all "Boosters,"" *The La Crosse Tribune*, 21 June 1907, sec. 1 page 1.

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noticeable.”²⁰

The reasons for the construction of the Mindoro Road and Cut were economic. William A. Bradley announced to the County Board that approximately 70 tons of merchandise crossed the old Mindoro-West Salem Road every ten days. In addition, moved goods included \$114,000 worth of butter, and at least as much in livestock, every year.²¹ The old road was a clay pioneer town road located one mile east of the new proposed road site. The new road would be 172 feet lower than the old road and would effectively reduce the arduous trek from Mindoro to West Salem by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. He stated that the new road would increase tremendously the amount of merchandise that traveled back and forth. A new hard-bottom (macadamized) road, Bradley said, would facilitate transportation of heavier loads. It was also believed that the new road would be an incentive for the Mindoro Creamery to send more dairy to West Salem, which would then be sent to the city of La Crosse by the railroad instead of the products going over an easier route to Bangor and Galesville.²²

It was also believed that Mindoro would grow in population, size and prestige because of its central location between Sparta and La Crosse, and between Melrose and West Salem. The new road was thought to be able to ease transportation to this centralized village, which would increase population and bring customers to the downtown businesses in Mindoro. Mindoro had the signs of an up-and-coming village, with two doctors, two hotels, two blacksmith shops, and three stores at the turn of the century, and it was believed that a new road would help propel the village to a higher status.

County Board Proceedings before the Cut / Road Economics

According to the May 23rd, 1907 County Board of Supervisors minutes, the Town of Hamilton proposed a petition for a land grant of 800 acres given to the Town of Farmington for the construction of the new road. The petition was voted upon in a Hamilton town meeting on April 2, where more than one-third of the legal voters approved the gift of land. It was believed at the time that the gift of land to the Town of Farmington would defray the cost of the new road, as well as provide funds for its upkeep and maintenance.²³ Farmington was willing to accept these conditions, believing that the advantages of the new road would far outweigh the costs and maintenance.

²⁰ *The La Crosse Tribune*, 21 June 1907, 1, 1.

²¹ “Mindoro Cut: Men and Muscle Turn Pathway into Highway,” *Columns* (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1968), 4.

²² *Columns*, 4.

²³ La Crosse County (Wis.) County Clerk, *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of La Crosse County, Wisconsin for the year 1907-1908* (La Crosse, WI: Office of the County Clerk), 85-86.

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This would turn out not to be true. On Nov. 12, 1907, the County Board agreed upon a county property tax to raise \$10,000 for road construction and maintenance, and adopted a town initiate plan for establishing a system of county highways, in which five county highways would be established. The board funded this Good Roads proposition by adopting a special tax on all taxable property in the county. This was done in accordance with an 1898 Wisconsin State Statute, out of which a resolution was passed that appropriated \$8,500 for the creation of the new Mindoro-West Salem Road. The board appointed Supervisor Peter Gulickson of Farmington, Supervisor Ray Lewis of Hamilton, and Supervisor William Bradley of West Salem to a commission to supervise the construction of the new road.²⁴

Another source of income for the road came from farmers within the Mindoro Cut vicinity, who raised and donated over \$1,500 for the creation of the new road, in addition to a \$500 grant by the village of West Salem.²⁵ On April 8, 1908 another \$2,000 was appropriated by the La Crosse County Board to complete the Mindoro Cut, which brought the total allotment for the new road to \$10,500. The final total cost of the new county highway was \$11,241.29. The \$741.29 over the allotted cost of the road was finally appropriated in November 1908. The new Mindoro Road was the most expensive road construction project in La Crosse County up to its time.²⁶

ENGINEERING SIGNIFICANCE – Building the road, making the cut

The Mindoro-West Salem Highway

The Mindoro Cut was part of a highway project that had its beginning in a 1907 decision by the La Crosse County Board to make improvements of a lasting nature on county roads. The crooked road between Mindoro, in the Township of Farmington, and West Salem, in the Township of Hamilton, was “one of the first – and one of the worst – to be tackled.”²⁷ At the turn of the century, travel between the two communities was on what was a pioneer town road, originally called the “Mindora [sic], West Salem Road,” ten miles in length that proceeded a mile east of the present-day cut. That road is still traceable going east from STH-108 on Larson Road, in Section 33, Farmington, and continuing through the southwest corner of Section 34. It is no longer in use, but is traceable through the forest. It continues southward through Section 3, in Hamilton, over the ridge where it crosses McClintock Road, then down the south slope of the ridge, and becomes visible again in the northeast quarter of Section

²⁴ La Crosse County, *Proceedings 1907-1908*, 86-87.

²⁵ “New County Road Provided By Board,” *La Crosse Daily Chronicle*, 13 Nov. 1907, 3.

²⁶ *Columns*, 5.

²⁷ *Columns*, 4.

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10, on the present-day Severeid property. It continues southward, splitting the east half of Section 15, and re-joins Highway 108 at the stream crossing just south of the boundary of Sections 15 and 22.²⁸

Austin Byrne, an internationally distinguished civil engineer, author of *A Treatise on Highway Construction*, and Ernest R. Buckley, then-Assistant Superintendent of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, who wrote *Highway Construction in Wisconsin*, were recognized authorities on highway construction of that period, Byrne at the national and Buckley at the state level.²⁹ Both agreed that good roads would improve the economy, save time and provide ease and comfort to those using them. Buckley said, "Good roads mean heavier loads, more rapid transit and a longer life for vehicles and horses."³⁰ Both they and William O. Hotchkiss, state geologist from 1908 to 1925, emphasized the importance of gradient and smoothness in the making of a good roads, especially as it affected the economy of movement of goods and livestock over those roads, as well as the economy of maintaining them.³¹

Making the Cut

The La Crosse County Board, at its May 23, 1907 meeting, having received "a petition signed by upwards of sixty resident free-holders of La Crosse county" and a resolution in favor of the "new proposed Mindoro, West Salem road," passed by the West Salem Progressive Association, May 17, 1907, appointed a committee "to decide upon said application for the laying out and extending of said highway."³² The County Board personally examined the proposed route on June 20 and held a hearing in West Salem, which was subsequently continued to June 26. At the June 26 meeting, resolutions were passed to acquire the necessary land and set damages to the landowners, and directed the laying out of the route by the county surveyor. On November 12, 1907, the board heard the results of the survey reported by the county surveyor, as well as his explanation of the blue prints and profile. They then set an appropriation of \$8,500 for the road, and designated special commissioners and the county surveyor "to have full authority and charge in letting the contract, inspecting and accepting said work."³³ There was no mention in the County Board records that an engineer was ever involved in the project.

²⁸ The route of the old road was taken from a "Map of the County of La Crosse," made by Brice & Smith, Engineers and Surveyors, dated 1890, then compared with a 2000 La Crosse County Plat Book.

²⁹ Austin T. Byrne, *A Treatise on Highway Construction* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1907); and Ernest Robinson Buckley, *Highway Construction in Wisconsin*, (Madison, WI: State of Wisconsin, 1903).

³⁰ Buckley, xiii.

³¹ Byrne, 2-13, 441-452; Buckley, Introduction, Chapter 1; Hotchkiss, 7-15.

³² La Crosse County Board, *Proceedings for 1907-1908*, 18.

³³ La Crosse County Board, *Proceedings for 1907-1908*, 85-86.

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As the county surveyor originally thought that the hill contained no limestone or other solid rock and that most of the work could be done with a plow, the estimate for the work was \$7,000. It was later revised to \$8,500. In April 1908, a resolution was passed appropriating an additional \$2,000 for use in the construction.³⁴ By the time the Mindoro-West Salem highway was finished in November 1908, at a cost of \$11,241.29, it was the greatest expenditure to date for a single road improvement in La Crosse County.³⁵

Lewis A. Miller, of La Crosse, was contracted to excavate the cut, and began the work on the south slope. Elbert S. Mead was sub-contracted by Miller to do the job on the north side.³⁶ The cut was made in the narrowest width of the hog's back on Phillips Ridge.³⁷ According to John Bryhn, who worked on the project, Miller thought he had an easy venture, since the ridge supposedly contained only a slight stratum of sandstone, but the center portion turned out to be solid rock and they had to use dynamite. Almost the entire lower center of the cut had to be dynamited. The material was then cleared and removed by hand and wheelbarrow. Miller was reported to have lost money on the job.³⁸

Although steam-powered equipment was available in some places, and had been in use for some years for highway and railroad cuts since the mid-1800s, it was apparently not available in La Crosse. Even if it had been available, it is unlikely that it could have been used along Phillips Ridge, as it was too steep. Not even horse-drawn equipment could be used at the top and was only used to haul away debris and rocks that had been hand-carted down from the work site.³⁹

John Bryhn, quoted in a 1968 article in the *La Crosse Sunday Tribune*, recalled that all of the work was done by hand, using picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. The men wheeled the rock and sand down the

³⁴ La Crosse County Board, *Proceedings for 1907-1908*, 23.

³⁵ La Crosse County Board, *Proceedings for 1907-1908*, 5.

³⁶ "Muscle Hewed Mindoro Cut," *La Crosse Sunday Tribune* (La Crosse, WI: May 12, 1968), 33.

³⁷ "(Geol.) A ridge formed by tilted strata; hence any ridge with a sharp summit, and steeply sloping sides." Source: *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: MICRA, Inc., 1996, 1998). So-called because it literally resembled the spine-ridge of a hog's back. The ridge was named for A. Jud Phillips who came to Wisconsin from Pennsylvania in the early 1850s and purchased this high ridge land to plant apple trees.

³⁸ Estella Bryhn, "Hand Carved Mindoro Cut Was 2nd Deepest," *West Salem Journal*, (West Salem, WI: May 9, 1968), 1. The Mindoro Cut exposed two geologic formations. The sandstone is the uppermost "member" of the Jordan Formation, a quartz-rich sandstone. The harder rock is of the Oneota Formation, primarily a dolomite, a rock composed of magnesium and calcium carbonate. Source: Evans, Thomas J., *Geology of La Crosse County, Wisconsin*, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey Bulletin 101, (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, 2003).

³⁹ Bryhn, "Hand Carved Mindoro Cut," 1.

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hill on planks that had been laid down to prevent the wheels sinking into the sand. The work was back-breaking for the men handling the wheelbarrows because it was hard to keep on the planks and not tip over and spill the load on the side.⁴⁰ Mr. Bryhn lived a little east and south of the Mindoro Cut at the time it was being made. He remembered only a few of the local people who worked on the cut, including Sever Severson, and Carl and Emil Jacobson. Chris Olson, who lived west of the cut, was the hand driller and blaster for Miller. Olson had one of the crew help him drill, but did all of the loading of the dynamite charges himself, not wanting to trust any of the crew to do the delicate and risky job.⁴¹ Bryhn also recalled that most of the crews were hoboes that were only interested in a short job, and a lot of transients that were drifting through the area at the time. He said that the work on the Mindoro Cut was highly advertised in all the papers at the time, and everyone around seemed to know about it.⁴²

Bryhn said that Lewis A. Miller was a tough man to work for. He gave each man three chances to keep his wheelbarrow on the plank. If he failed, he was fired. He said there was a great turnover of workers on the cut, and each man worked by the day and collected his wages at the end of each day. Many men made just one trip down, dumped the load, left the wheelbarrow, and walked off the job. Some never even stayed long enough for one hot meal at the cook shanty.⁴³ Wages were \$1.25 per day. Wages for a man with his own team of horses were \$2.00 per day, but horses were only used in hauling away the rocks and sand that were brought down from the cut.⁴⁴

Bryhn said that Sever Severson, one of the local workers, was the last man to actually work on the cut. He had to clean out the cut, and this was the only time that horses were used on the job. He used a plank wagon, which was unloaded by removing planks from the side of the wagon and letting the rocks and sand fall around and below the wagon. To smooth the road, Severson used a horse-drawn slip scraper.⁴⁵ Ultimately, fourteen thousand cubic feet of rock was excavated from the Mindoro Cut.⁴⁶ Most of the rock and sand that was removed from the cut was used to pave the road (macadam) leading away from the cut, for about a mile and a half north and south. On November 13, 1908, in accordance with the state and local statutes of the time, a resolution was passed by the county board "reverting control of the new West Salem-Mindoro highway to the sole control of the towns of Hamilton and

⁴⁰ "Muscle Hewed Mindoro Cut," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 12, 1968, 33.

⁴¹ Estella K. Bryhn, *Around the Coulees*, (West Salem, WI: La Crosse County Countryman, 1973), 2.

⁴² Estella Bryhn, "Historical Information Relative to Mindoro Cut," (La Crosse, WI, April 1968), on file at La Crosse Public Library.

⁴³ Bryhn, "Historical Information."

⁴⁴ *Columns*, 5.

⁴⁵ *Columns*, 5.

⁴⁶ *Columns*, 5.

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Farmington, effective January 1, 1909.”⁴⁷

The Completed Road

The new Mindoro Road certainly accomplished its economic goals. In 1918, economic figures were gathered by West Salem financiers on the amount of business that came through the cut. The results were disseminated at a road hearing held in La Crosse at the Wisconsin State Legislative Highway Committee in 1921, and republished in a *La Crosse Tribune* article entitled, “Mindoro Cut Attracts Million Dollars Worth of Business Annually.” It stated that \$450,000 worth of livestock and \$300,000 worth of butter travel over the cut from Mindoro to West Salem per year. The figures did not include goods that traveled from West Salem to Mindoro, but was estimated that at least \$150,000 went back through the cut to Mindoro.⁴⁸ In nearly ten years from William Bradley’s estimates to the County Board in 1907, the amount of butter that traveled the road more than doubled, and the amount of livestock had increased almost four times from the numbers in 1907.

The Mindoro-West Salem Road succeeded in the social benefits that were predicted. Picnics were often held at the cut, and the locals were very proud of their creation that they believed at the time to be the second-largest hand-hewn cut in the United States. Postcards were created of the cut, and it was visited by “automobile tourists from every part of the nation.”⁴⁹

Many expected the new road to propel Mindoro from a village to a larger, wealthier status in the county. This hope never came to fruition. Urbanization, modernization and the decrease of the family farm led to meager increase in population in the Village of Mindoro, and actually a decrease in population in the Town of Farmington.

The Mindoro Cut has never been widened or adjusted, and remains essentially the same now as it was when it was finished in 1908.⁵⁰ The road became State Trunk Highway 108 in 1917, by way of

⁴⁷ La Crosse County, *Proceedings 1908-1909*, 105-106; and Davis, M. G., *A History of Wisconsin Highway Development, 1835-1945*, (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation, 1989), 14-16. Specifically, “A county road laid out and approved by the county board, a record of which was filed in the county court, became a highway of the town through which it passed, the same as any other highway laid out by the town supervisors. County boards were authorized to adopt town roads as part of the system of county roads, but the maintenance of such roads remained a responsibility of the towns.”

⁴⁸ “Mindoro Cut Attracts Million Dollars Worth of Business Annually,” *The La Crosse Tribune*, 7 August 1921.

⁴⁹ “Mindoro Cut,” *La Crosse Tribune*, 7 August 1921.

⁵⁰ According to Bob Von Ruden, Maintenance Supervisor for the Wisconsin Department Of Transportation, in *The La Crosse Tribune*, 18 March 1995, sec. E, page 4.

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passage of the State Trunk Highway Law by the Legislature that year. The road has since been paved with asphalt and guardrails added.

Conclusion

The Mindoro Cut deserves National Historic Register recognition under criterion A for participating in a larger historical movement, the improvement of transportation networks and for fulfilling the goals of the Good Roads movement. The Cut is also eligible under criterion C in the area of Engineering. It is a rare surviving example of the hand-hewn method of construction. No other original examples of a hand-hewn cut are known to exist in Wisconsin yet today, and likely not even in the United States. The Mindoro Cut embodies distinct and unique movements associated with Progressive Wisconsin, including the decline of the wheat industry and the development of dairying as the primary industry, the emergence of the "New Butter Region" in the unglaciated region of southwest Wisconsin, and the "Good Roads Movement" primarily designed to facilitate the transport of dairy products to market.

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Boundary Description:

The nominated property is an approximately two mile stretch of road with the cut through the stone bluff located approximately in the middle. The southern terminus corresponds with the north side of the intersection of STH 108 with W Scotch Coulee Rd. The northern terminus is at the driveway of N7236 STH 108. The boundary of the cut consists of three segments. The southern segment runs from the intersection with W Scotch Coulee Rd to the point located at Zone 15 E 652798 N 4870699 (located south of the bluff). This linear boundary is described as 33 feet to each side of the center line of STH 108. From point Zone 15 E 652748 N 4870683 to point Zone 15 E 652798 N 4870699, the boundary is drawn at 70 feet to each side from the center line. Point Zone 15 E 652748 N 4870683 on the north side of the cut roughly corresponds to the north edge of pavement of McClintock Rd. The third segment is from the point at Zone 15 E 652748 N 4870683 to the driveway of N7236 STH 108. This linear boundary is described as 33 feet to each side of the center line of STH 108.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries of the Mindoro Cut include the cut itself, as well as approximately 1 mile north and 1.2 miles south of the cut, for a total of 2.2 miles, which includes the portions of the road which were built in order to construct the cut, as well as the road which became access up over the hill, utilizing the cut. The 66 foot width of the boundary along the roadway corresponds with the standard right of way easement for state highways. This width encompasses the structure of the roadway, as well as areas of cutback and fill created by the construction of the road. The setback at the cut was drawn to encompass the cut itself and the bluff that necessitated the project.

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The information below applies to all of the following photographs:

**Mindoro Cut
State Highway 108
Town of Hamilton
La Crosse County, Wisconsin
Photographer: Barbara Kooiman
Date: July 2005
Negatives located at Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI**

Photo 1 of 19

Mindoro Cut, from north facing south

Photo 2 of 19

Mindoro Cut, from cut (behind) facing down north slope of STH 108

Photo 3 of 19

Mindoro Cut, taken from north, to south showing Cut's west wall

Photo 4 of 19

Mindoro Cut, taken from north slope southward, toward Cut, facing south

Photo 5 of 19

Mindoro Cut, taken from north slope, facing south, showing Cut's west wall

Photo 6 of 19

Mindoro Cut, taken from north slope southward, toward Cut, facing southeast, showing Cut's east wall

Photo 7 of 19

Mindoro Cut, historical marker, located on north side of cut, west side of STH 108, facing west

Photo 8 of 19

Mindoro Cut, detail of east wall of Cut, facing east, showing graffiti carved into the sandstone

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Photo 9 of 19

Mindoro Cut, south slope, showing road downhill from south side of the Cut, facing southeast

Photo 10 of 19

Mindoro Cut, south slope, from road facing Cut in northerly direction

Photo 11 of 19

Mindoro Cut, south slope, from road facing Cut in northwesterly direction

Photo 12 of 19

Mindoro Cut, south slope, facing north, facing Cut in northerly direction

Photo 13 of 19

Mindoro Cut, detail of Cut's east wall, facing northeast

Photo 14 of 19

Mindoro Cut, detail of Cut's east wall, facing east

Photo 15 of 19

Mindoro Cut, detail of Cut's west wall, facing northwest

Photo 16 of 19

Mindoro Cut, detail of Cut's east wall (upper section) facing east

Photo 17 of 19

Mindoro Cut, north of Cut, McClintock Road, facing east

Photo 18 of 19

Mindoro Cut, north of Cut, west side of STH 108, showing historic marker and part of west wall

Photo 19 of 19

Mindoro Cut, approach to cut from south slope, facing north



Mindoro Cut photos, courtesy of La Crosse Public Library, La Crosse, WI, undated, circa 1915

Figure 1: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin



Mindoro Cut construction, Spring 1908, collection of John and Joan Dolbier, La Crosse County, WI

Figure 2: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton,
La Crosse County, Wisconsin



Mindoro Cut construction, Spring/summer 1908, collection of John and Joan Dolbier, La Crosse County, WI

Figure 3: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin



Mindoro Cut construction, Summer 1908, collection of John and Joan Dolbier, La Crosse County, WI

Figure 4: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin



Mindoro Cut construction, Summer 1908, collection of John and Joan Dolbier, La Crosse County, WI

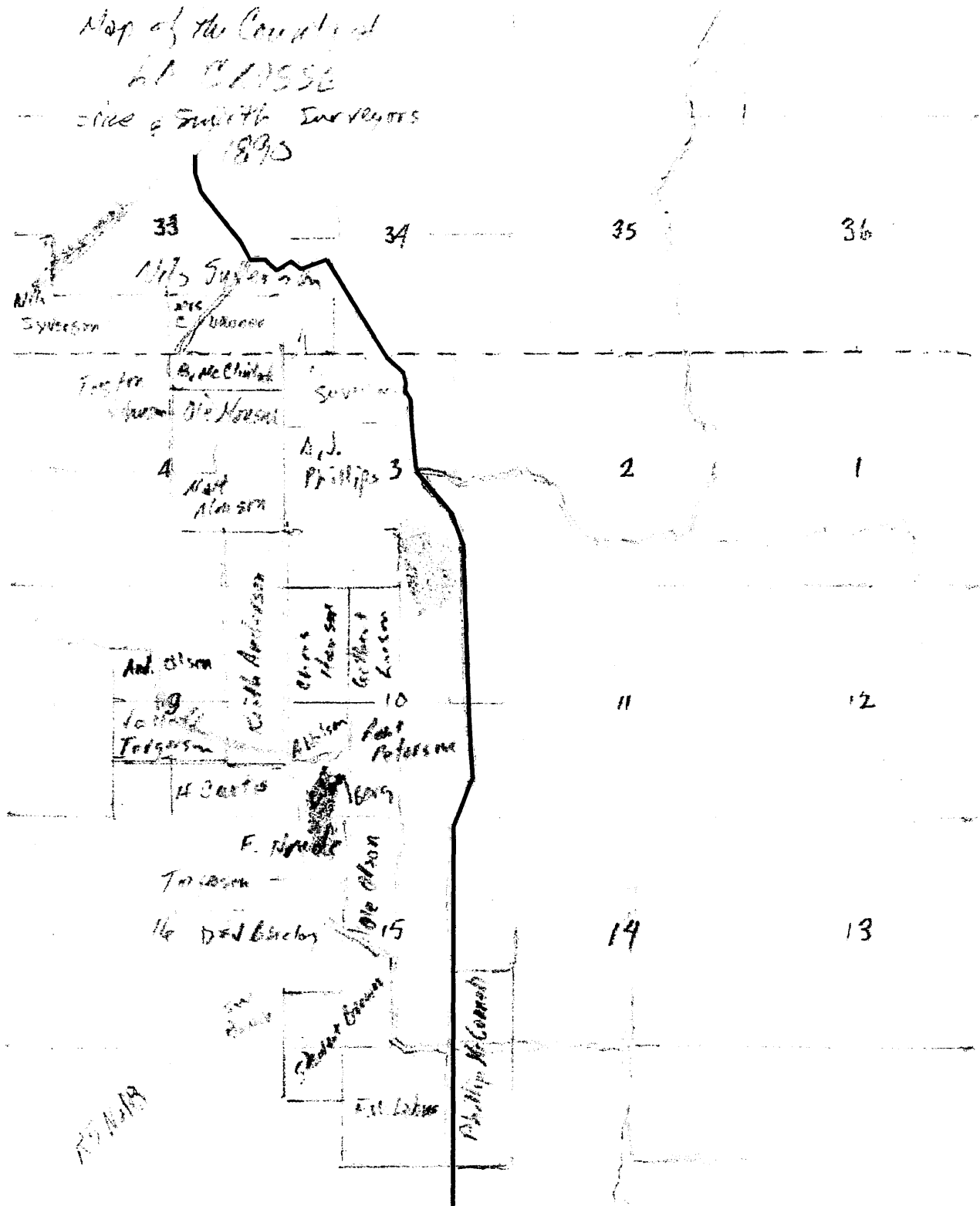
Figure 5: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton,
La Crosse County, Wisconsin



Setting dynamite during Mindoro Cut construction, summer 1908, collection of John and Joan Dolbier, La Crosse County, WI

Figure 6: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin

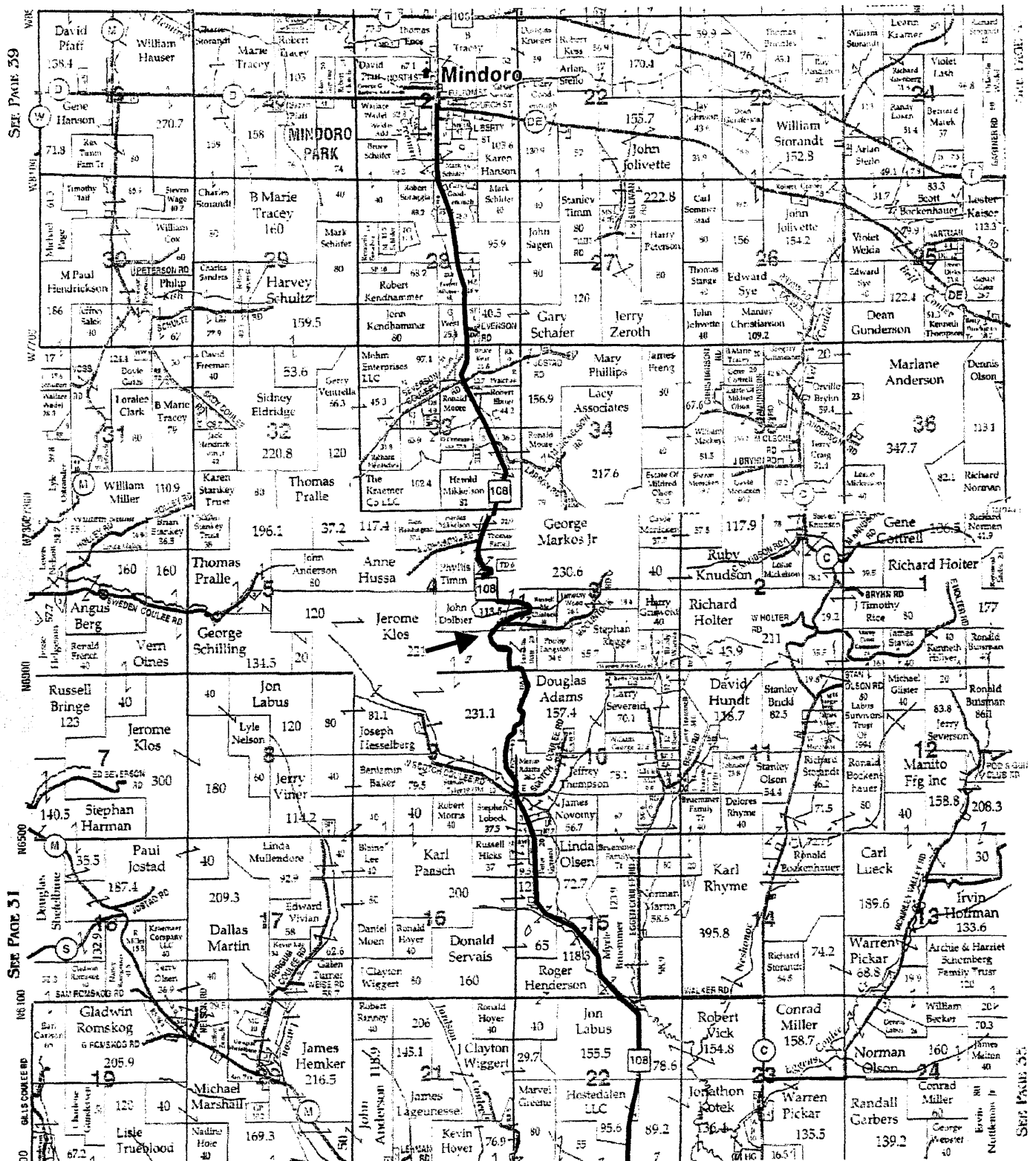
The Original Mindoro-West Salem Road – 1890



The route of the original road from West Salem to Mindoro is depicted in BOLD on this map, traced from an 1890 plat map of La Crosse County.

Figure 7: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin

The Mindoro-West Salem Road Today



Wisconsin State Highway 108 now covers the route of the Mindoro-West Salem Road created by the La Crosse County Board in 1907, depicted in BOLD. The arrow points to the Mindoro Cut.

Figure 8: Mindoro Cut, Town of Hamilton, La Crosse County, Wisconsin