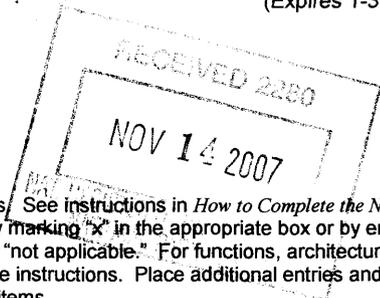


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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.



1318

1. Name of Property

historic name Stillwater Overlook

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

Street & number Lookout Trail near 63rd Street North not for publication N/A

city or town Oak Park Heights vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Washington code 163 zip code 55082

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.)

Britta Bloomberg 11/2/07  
Signature of certifying official/Title Britta Bloomberg, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Minnesota Historical Society  
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:)

for  
Signature of the Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of Action 12-27-07

Stillwater Overlook  
Name of Property

Washington County, MN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
2		structures
		objects
3		Total

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

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

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/Park  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

LANDSCAPE/Park  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: NPS Rustic Style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

foundation Stone  
walls Stone  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/Government

Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1938-1939

Significant Dates

1938

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Nichols, Arthur Richardson (Landscape Architect)

Olson, Harold E. (Engineer)

National Youth Administration (Builder)

Minnesota Department of Highways (Builder)

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

Stillwater Overlook  
Name of Property

Washington County, MN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 4.8 acres

Stillwater, Minn. – Wis.  
1967, Revised 1993

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 516130 4987400  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 15 516160 4987120

3 15 516040 4987120  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 15 516110 4987400  
See continuation sheet

**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, and Liz Morrison  
organization Gemini Research date June 20, 2007  
street & number 15 E. 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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it contains a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C. St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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### 7. DESCRIPTION

Stillwater Overlook is a 4.8-acre highway wayside rest located on the eastern side of Lookout Trail near 63rd St. N. in Oak Park Heights. The northern end of the nominated property lies about 350' south of the Stillwater city limits. Oak Park Heights is a Washington County municipality located immediately south of Stillwater and about 20 miles east of St. Paul.

The wayside rest was designed to provide stunning views of the scenic St. Croix River Valley on the Minnesota-Wisconsin border and to serve travelers on U.S. Highway 212 (now Lookout Trail, a local street) and Minnesota Highway 95 (now Minnesota Highway 95/36). The wayside rest was designed by Arthur R. Nichols, the first landscape architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) Roadside Development Division, working in collaboration with engineer Harold E. Olson, chief of the Roadside Development Division. It was built in 1938-1939 by the National Youth Administration (NYA), working in concert with the MHD.

#### Summary of Principal Resources

The property includes three principal resources. They are two structures (the stone overlook and a stone culvert) and one site (the wayside rest itself). All three resources are categorized as Contributing. Each is described below. See the accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, Stillwater Overlook, Washington Co., MN."

#### Description of Principal Resources

##### *Topography, Setting, and Spatial Organization*

The wayside rest is a triangular parcel of land whose focal point is a large limestone overlook wall. The property is located on top of a bluff overlooking the St. Croix River Valley. The land slopes down in all directions – sharply to the north and east and more gently to the west and south. Original construction plans indicate that a considerable amount of fill material was needed to create the flat area of land encompassed by the wall.

To the east, southeast, and northeast, the overlook wall offers dramatic views of the St. Croix River, here federally designated as the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The site's panorama takes in the river, which is wide at this location and called Lake St. Croix, the scenic river valley including the wooded bluffs of western Wisconsin, and a few riverside businesses and industries, primarily in Oak Park Heights.

South and west of the property are residential neighborhoods whose houses are fairly well screened from the wayside rest by trees. Many of the houses on the west side of Lookout Trail

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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were built in the 1920s and 1930s. Most have large sloping lots, mature trees and shrubs, and grassy lawns. Most of the houses south of the wayside rest (between Lookout Trail and the edge of the bluff) were built in the late 19th century and are not visible from the overlook wall.

The property is immediately flanked by Lookout Trail (a former highway) on the west and present-day Minnesota Highway 95/36 on the east. Both roads are aligned roughly north and south. In circa 1979 the Highway 95/36 corridor was widened and the eastern edge of the wayside rest was lost to the highway. The area lost was about 80' wide near the northern tip of the wayside rest and about 200' wide near the southern end. It comprised part of the steep, forested hillside below (east of) the overlook wall.

The elevation of Highway 95/36 is still about 40' lower than that of the overlook wall. This positioning helps separate the overlook from the noise and motion of the adjacent highway traffic.

### *Circulation*

The wayside rest is entered from Lookout Trail. The entrance road is 24' wide and paved with bituminous. It was originally gravel. As the drive enters the property from the west, it passes over a small stone culvert. Several feet east of the culvert, a narrow gravel road (probably an addition to the site) leads south from the entrance drive to provide secondary access to the handful of houses on the edge of the bluff south of the wayside rest. (The gravel road serves as an informal northern extension of Peabody Ave. N.) East of the gravel road, the entrance drive curves more sharply and rises in elevation as it moves toward the overlook wall. The drive then enters the overlook wall and circles a 50'-wide grassy island in the center of the structure.

There are no formal pedestrian connections to the property – the wayside rest was primarily accessed by automobile. Extending along the wall's inner perimeter is a 5'-wide flagstone pedestrian walkway. The wayside rest has no other formal pedestrian paths, and the hillsides north and east of the overlook wall are generally too steep for comfortable walking.

### *Vegetation*

Most of the wayside rest is covered with trees and shrubs. The forest is now more dense than when the site was originally developed. There are small areas of turf grass close to the northern and western sides of the overlook wall.

Mature red cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*) stand north and west of the overlook wall, helping to frame the view. (Nichols often used red cedars in this way, and some of these trees are probably original plantings.) The view north from the overlook wall is somewhat overgrown.

Below (east of) the overlook wall, trees and shrubs have been kept low to preserve the view. Vegetation on this hillside includes smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*), dogwoods, and other small and

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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medium-sized deciduous trees and shrubs, as well as young red cedars. It is not known how many of these trees and shrubs date from the original planting.

Most of the rest of the site is populated by a forest of red oak (*Quercus rubra*), bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), American linden (*Tilia americana*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), poplar, and other trees, plus honeysuckle and other deciduous shrubs. Invasive buckthorn has become quite thick in some areas. In general, the trees and shrubs give the property a sheltered and somewhat secluded feeling.

Today there are also five mature flowering crabapples (*Malus* spp.) in the circular island, eight southwest of the overlook wall, and one northwest of the overlook wall. These trees are inconsistent with Nichols' typical designs. They were likely planted by the MHD sometime after 1970 to replace American elms and other overstory trees lost to disease or storms.

An original planting plan for the wayside rest has not been located, and no historic photographs showing early plantings have been found. Although it is known that the NYA planted 25 evergreen shrubs, 28 evergreen trees, 513 deciduous shrubs, and 135 deciduous trees at the wayside rest in 1939, the species are not known.

On similar state highway wayside rests, Nichols typically used hardy, low maintenance trees and shrubs to frame exceptional views, supply comfortable shade, screen adjacent properties, and control erosion. Nichols sometimes directed that trees and shrubs be transplanted from nearby forests so that installed plantings would blend seamlessly with native vegetation.

Nichols' and Olson's original plans for improvement of the adjacent 0.9-mile stretch of Highway 212 (which exclude the wayside rest) specify that the roadside be planted with Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*), Carolina poplar (*Populus eugenei*), Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra italica*), American elm, smooth sumac, red rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*), and common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*), as well hardy groundcovers such as Kentucky blue grass (*Poa pratensis*), red top (*Agrostis polustris*), brome grass (*Bromus inermis*), Alsike clover (*Trifolium hybridum*), and domestic rye grass (*Lolium perenne*).

In 1953, the Roadside Development Division planted about 8 green ash trees southeast of the overlook wall and 12 American elms north and east of the wall. These areas are now densely forested. It is assumed that the ash are extant but it is not known how many of the elms survived the Dutch elm disease that moved through the Stillwater area beginning in the 1960s.

### *Furnishings*

The wayside rest originally contained a Rustic Style historical marker. It was located about 6' west of the wall (near the wall's north-south midpoint) where its simple below-grade poured concrete footing remains in place. (The visible upper surface of the footing is about 5' x 18" and is surrounded by turf.) The marker was a 3' x 5' rectangular steel sign framed with logs. The

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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sign had black lettering on a white background that read:

Lake St. Croix. Waters from melting glaciers several thousand years ago carved wide deep valleys for the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Deprived of the glacial waters the rivers shrank and could not clear the ancient channels. Accumulated bottom silt of the Mississippi now dams the St. Croix outlet from Stillwater to Point Douglas.

The marker was one of dozens of similar markers erected by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Highways in the state's first cooperative highway marking program, established in 1929. Most of the markers were similar in design to the one at Stillwater Overlook, but were not framed with logs. The marker at Stillwater Overlook may have survived until 1954.

The wayside rest was originally furnished with wooden Rustic Style picnic tables. A June 1940 highway department photograph shows two tables standing on the central grassy island. The tables were likely built by the NYA at one of its residential vocational centers. Today there are no tables or benches on the property.

### *Stone Overlook*

Built: 1938  
Designer: Arthur R. Nichols (with Harold E. Olson)  
Builder: NYA and MHD  
One Contributing Structure

The overlook is a lovely, curved structure whose overall dimensions are about 125' x 125'. It is shaped like a "D" with the main curve facing east toward the St. Croix River. The overlook wall completely surrounds visitors giving the impression of a large outdoor room. The northern and southern ends of the eastern curve terminate in graceful reverse curves – a design motif characteristic of Nichols' work.

The wall was built of approximately 551 cubic yards of tan, random ashlar, roughly-cut dolostone (limestone) laid on a stone footing. The stone was salvaged from the Minnesota Territorial Prison.

The wall is about 18" wide at the top and, according to original plans, about 8' wide at the base (below grade). The wall is about 30" high on the inside, measured up from the surface of the flagstone walk. The wall's exterior height varies with the topography. On the eastern side where the land drops off most sharply, the wall is about 9' high. The wall is segmented at various intervals by 2'-square piers that project a few inches above the wall.

There is a parking bay along the wall's western side, a rectangular seating bay along the northern side, and a rectangular lookout bay projecting from the curving eastern side. The flagstone

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walkway extends into these bays.

The eastern lookout bay originally contained an 8' x 18" stone and concrete bench, mounted in the center of the bay. The bench had a smooth flat poured concrete seat that rested on two limestone pedestals. In 1954, a sensitively-designed limestone lectern-style marker was mounted on the wall at the approximate location of the bench. The limestone marker has a 2' x 4' metal plaque. The text of the plaque is a revision of the original historical marker installed at the site in 1939 and reads:

Lake St. Croix. Waters from melting glaciers several thousand years ago carved deep valleys for the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Deprived of the glacial waters the rivers were so reduced in volume and carrying power that they were unable to maintain clear channels. Eventually sediments of the Mississippi partially blocked the St. Croix outlet to form Lake St. Croix from Stillwater to Point Douglas.

The rectangular bay along the northern side of the wall has a 7'-wide pedestrian opening at its west end that gives visitors access to a small flat grassy area north of the overlook wall. This bay was originally furnished with two 8' x 18" benches identical to those in the eastern lookout bay. Evidence of the bench pedestals remains.

Mortared limestone curbing lines the entrance drive and the circular island. (The edge of the overlook wall's flagstone walkway also serves as stone curbing.) Most of the curb stone was likely salvaged from the Minnesota Territorial Prison. Most of the curbing is 5"-6" tall.

The curb stones around the island are generally square-cut. The stones along the entrance drive are larger and more irregularly shaped. Most of the site's curbing is intact, although some of the stones have been inadvertently covered with overlays of bituminous paving material.

### *Stone Culvert*

Built: 1938  
Designer: Arthur R. Nichols (with Harold E. Olson)  
Builder: NYA workers and MHD  
One Contributing Structure

A stone culvert is aligned roughly north-south at the western end of the entrance drive, just east of Lookout Trail. (The culvert is labeled "masonry spillway" on the original plans.) The culvert carries water flowing along Lookout Trail's eastern ditch. The only parts of the culvert that are visible are the mortared limestone rubble headwalls. The headwalls appear to be intact, but are engulfed in overgrown vegetation. Stone for the culvert was likely salvaged from the Minnesota Territorial Prison.

The overlook's final appearance closely matches Nichols' plan with one exception. The original plan specifies that the eastern side of the entrance drive be supported by a low stone retaining

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wall. The retaining wall was apparently not needed, perhaps because Nichols and Olson altered the topography with fill. Today the topography along the eastern side of the entrance drive does not appear steep enough to require either a retaining wall or a guardrail.

The overlook is largely intact, apart from the missing stone benches and the lectern-style stone marker added to the eastern lookout bay in 1954.

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### 8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Stillwater Overlook, a highway wayside rest built in 1938-1939, 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 early wayside rests developed by the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) Roadside Development Division, which was established in 1932. Stillwater Overlook is a sophisticated and well-preserved example of the National Park Service Rustic Style and an important example of the work of its designer, prominent Minnesota landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols. The property is significant on a statewide level.

The National Register eligibility of Stillwater Overlook was evaluated using the registration requirements in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." As described below, the property meets two of those registration requirements:

*Requirement 2: Significance to the History of Roadside Development*

*Requirement 4: Design Significance*

Additional contextual information is available in the Multiple Property Documentation Form in Section F, "Waysides and Overlooks."

#### **History and Development of the Site**

Stillwater Overlook was so named by the Minnesota Department of Highways because it was built on the southern edge of Stillwater, a city in the St. Croix River Valley. The site was referenced in some MHD documents as being at the southern "entrance" to the city. But the wayside rest is actually in the city of Oak Park Heights – originally a village between the communities of Stillwater and Stillwater South, which was later renamed Bayport. Oak Park Heights was platted in 1857, replatted in 1938, and incorporated as a city in 1959. It now has about 4,000 people.

The St. Croix River Valley's early historical associations, scenic beauty, and close proximity to the Twin Cities made it a popular tourist destination in the late 19th century when most visitors traveled by rail. The number of tourists to the valley increased considerably after highways were improved in the 1930s.

Stillwater may have been named for the still waters of Lake St. Croix, a 20-mile widening of the St. Croix River above which the Stillwater Overlook is perched. Another theory is that

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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Stillwater derived its name from Stillwater, Maine, home of some of the area's first Euro-American settlers.

Stillwater played a prominent role in Minnesota's early history. The community was founded in 1843 and incorporated in 1854. It became known as the cradle of the region's white pine lumber industry after its first sawmill was built in 1844. It has been called the birthplace of Minnesota because it was the site of the 1848 convention that led to the formation of Minnesota Territory. Stillwater was chosen to be the site of Minnesota's first territorial prison in 1850.

Stillwater Overlook was developed in 1938-1939 by the MHD Roadside Development Division to enhance two adjacent highways: U.S. Highway 212 (now Lookout Trail), a generally east-west route that linked with Stillwater with the city of St. Paul, and Minnesota Highway 95, a generally north-south route that connected Stillwater with other St. Croix River communities such as Taylors Falls (25 miles to the north) and Hastings (21 miles to the south). Highway 212 at this location had been surfaced with gravel until 1932 when it was paved with concrete to a width of 20'. Highway 95 at this location was added to the state highway system in 1934. It was surfaced with gravel until 1941 when it was first paved with bituminous to a width of 36'.

Stillwater Overlook was specifically built as part of the improvement of a 0.9-mile section of Highway 212. The northern terminus of the project was the southern Stillwater city limit. Plans for the 0.9-mile segment were drawn and approved in 1936 and 1937. The work was designed by landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols, working with highway engineer Harold E. Olson.

In addition to the wayside rest, the 0.9-mile project included flattening shoulders, contouring slopes, and planting the roadside with 165 trees (Colorado spruce, Carolina poplar, Lombardy poplar, and American elm), 490 rose bushes (red rugosa rose), 150 common lilac shrubs, and several acres of grass groundcover (all outside of the wayside rest). The wayside rest was developed at the northern end of the project on a former MHD borrow pit or quarry with a commanding view of the valley.

The wayside rest was built during the 1938 and 1939 construction seasons by unemployed young men, hired by the National Youth Administration (NYA), who worked in cooperation with the highway department. Unfortunately, no details are known about the number of NYA workers in the crew, how they were organized, or which skilled stonemasons supervised their work. The stonework is of very high quality.

Stillwater Overlook was built with locally-quarried St. Lawrence limestone (also known as dolomite) that was salvaged from the Minnesota Territorial Prison. Located about two miles north of the wayside rest (just north of downtown Stillwater), the prison had been authorized by the Territorial Legislature in 1849 and built beginning in 1851. The facility became the state prison when Minnesota achieved statehood in 1858 and operated for many decades, closing in 1914. The buildings stood vacant and deteriorating until 1936 when the State of Minnesota used NYA labor to dismantle the stone buildings and use the salvaged stone for construction projects including state highway roadside development work. (Only one prison building, the Warden's

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House (1853), remains standing. Since 1941 it has been the home of the Washington County Historical Society. It was listed on the National Register in 1974.)

The Roadside Development Division's annual report for 1938 briefly describes the Stillwater Overlook project. The report states, "At the junction where Trunk Highway #212 and #95 intersect lies a large triangular tract of ground on one of the picturesque hills of Stillwater overlooking the scenic St. Croix Valley. On this triangular piece of ground a large stone masonry concourse was constructed using stone from the Old State Prison buildings. A roadside parking area is also being developed in connection with the concourse." The 1938 report estimates the cost of the project at \$10,368 (about \$143,700 in 2005 dollars), with the State of Minnesota paying about half (*Annual Report 1938: 7*).

The overlook wall was nearly complete when the MHD photographed the property on November 1, 1938. During the 1939 construction season, NYA workers completed the wayside rest by installing about 70 trees and shrubs, building the historical marker, and completing the gravel parking area. The estimated cost of the 1939 work was \$1,583 (about \$21,940 in 2005 dollars).

The Roadside Development Division's annual report for 1939 contains an 8" x 10" photograph of the stone overlook wall (*Annual Report 1939: 26*). The National Youth Administration's final report for Minnesota, issued in 1943, also contains a large photo of the newly-completed wayside rest (*Final Report 1943*).

In 1954 a stone marker bearing a metal plaque was installed on the eastern side of the overlook wall by the MHD and the Minnesota Historical Society to replace the site's original historical marker. The text of the two markers is very similar. Like its predecessor, the 1954 marker represented a standardized design – it is similar to more than two dozen such markers installed at state highway wayside rests and parks throughout Minnesota beginning in 1949. (Many of the markers had geological themes and were co-sponsored by the Geological Society of Minnesota.)

In circa 1980 vandals stole the metal plaque from the stone marker. Surprisingly, the plaque was recovered in 2002 when Hennepin County narcotics agents discovered it stashed behind a television in the basement of an Eden Prairie home. The plaque was returned to Stillwater Overlook, sparking local interest in "restoration of the site and its vista," according to Oak Park Heights Mayor David Beaudet (Becker 2002). The site is currently awaiting rehabilitation.

Stillwater Overlook has been in continuous operation as a highway wayside rest since 1938.

### Significance to the History of Minnesota Roadside Development

Stillwater Overlook is one of the most sophisticated and intact of about 70 wayside rests built by the Minnesota Department of Highways during the Depression in the State's first large-scale effort to construct public roadside amenities.

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Stillwater Overlook  
Oak Park Heights, Washington Co., MN

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The wayside rest is an excellent example of how the MHD's Roadside Development Division fulfilled its early goals of improving highway aesthetics and safety, promoting state tourism, and enhancing the public's traveling experience. The division was formed in 1932 at a time when highway construction, highway beautification, public park development, and automobile tourism were becoming increasingly important nationwide, and the wayside rest exemplifies the well-designed facilities created by the MHD to respond to these growing societal priorities. The division built wayside rests with scenic overlooks, historical and geological markers, looping footpaths, and rustic picnic areas to entice travelers out of their cars to refresh themselves for safer driving and appreciate beautiful natural surroundings. Many facilities provided safe vantage points from which to enjoy or photograph spectacular scenic views.

Most of the Depression-era wayside rests were built with federal New Deal funding and workers, and designed by consulting landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols, working with engineer Harold E. Olson. Most were designed in the National Park Service Rustic Style, and differ significantly from wayside rests built after 1950, when resources were shifted to the new interstate highway system, simpler modern designs were in vogue, and less labor-intensive construction was used.

Stillwater Overlook is the jewel of a series of roadside improvements built in the Stillwater area in the 1930s, all designed by Nichols and Olson and all built with federal relief labor. The work extended several miles from Oak Park Heights to a former logging center called the St. Croix Boomsite. It included contouring and planting the highway right-of-way, building Rustic Style limestone retaining walls, and creating five wayside rests in a five-mile stretch: Stillwater Overlook (the most intact of the five), Indian Battleground Historical Marker (mostly razed), St. Croix Boomsite Roadside Parking Area, an overlook wall just south of the Boomsite, and Stillwater Spring (razed). Unemployed workers were hired first through the National Recovery Work Relief (in 1935-1936) and then through the National Youth Administration (in 1936-1939). Salvaged stone from the territorial prison was used for the Stillwater Overlook and the Indian Battleground wayside rest, and likely for the others.

Statewide, the Roadside Development Division built only three other comparable clusters of roadside development facilities: on present-day Highway 61 along the Mississippi River southeast of the Twin Cities, on present-day Highway 61 along the North Shore of Lake Superior, and on and near Mille Lacs Lake on present-day Highways 18 and 169. Most of the rest of the MHD roadside development projects were scattered throughout the state.

Stillwater Overlook is also an excellent example of the partnership between the Roadside Development Division and federal New Deal agencies. The Roadside Development Division and the NYA built at least 20 wayside rests in Minnesota, including two that are listed on the National Register: Craigie Flour Mill Historical Marker (built 1940, listed 2003) and Reads Landing Overlook (built 1939, listed 2004). Others include wayside rests with stone overlook walls at Glenwood, Lake City, and Mendota; wayside rests with historical markers at St. Cloud, near Frontenac, and near Elk River; and wayside rests with more extensive picnic facilities at Elk River, New Ulm, Pine and Hickory Lakes (north of Mille Lacs Lake), and Christmas Lake (west of Minneapolis). NYA residential training centers also built Rustic Style tables, signs, and other

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furnishings for the MHD wayside rests. In 1938 and 1939, for example, NYA centers built 400 picnic tables, 188 refuse containers, 122 fireplace grates, dozens of signs, 6 stoves, 4 sod cutters, and 3 tree knives for the MHD (*Annual Report 1938*: 1; *Annual Report 1939*: 1). At least two of the picnic tables are believed to have been placed at Stillwater Overlook.

### *National Youth Administration*

The National Youth Administration was established during the Depression in June 1935 as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal. The NYA was first a subsidiary of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and later became a separate program.

The NYA was designed to help alleviate the despair that poverty, unemployment, and economic collapse had created among youth. It also aimed to counteract rising juvenile delinquency and homelessness. The NYA served young people between 16 and 25, most of them from families who were receiving federal relief payments. The program provided part- and full-time jobs, job training and counseling, and meaningful leisure activities.

Prior to World War II, the focus of the NYA was to encourage adolescents to remain in school, yet provide them with work experience. These goals were designed to preserve for the nation an educated and well-trained future work force, while discouraging youth from competing with adults for jobs. NYA work projects included professional and clerical work, homemaking, public service, recreational leadership, conservation, production work, and construction projects. The NYA often built or improved playgrounds, swimming pools, and other public facilities that were used by children. A significant part of the NYA construction program in Minnesota focused on state highway roadside development.

Most NYA enrollees lived at home and reported to a job site each day. However, beginning in 1938, the NYA established a series of residential training camps where youth lived for short periods. There were about 12 residential centers in Minnesota, most located at existing public facilities such as college campuses. The centers offered room and board, educational and vocational coursework, and job training. The NYA residential training centers built hundreds of tables and other furnishings for state highway wayside rests.

When World War II began, several of Minnesota's NYA resident camps were converted to NYA war-training facilities where 16- and 17-year-olds were trained in skills needed by defense industries such as welding, sheet metal work, and machinery. By early 1942, many NYA youth from Minnesota were assigned to work in factories such as the Rock Island Arsenal in Clinton, Iowa; Northwest Airlines in Seattle, Washington; and defense-related companies in Sacramento and San Luis Obispo, California (*Final Report 1943*: 262).

Minnesota's average monthly enrollment in the NYA varied through time. In July 1941, for example, there were 2,678 youth working in the regular, non-defense NYA program. The youth were divided between construction projects (about 1,000 workers), production projects (about 1,400), and professional and clerical projects (about 260). By June 1942, most Minnesota

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projects were defense-related and only 349 Minnesota youth were employed in non-defense construction work (*Final Report* 1943: 190).

In total about \$14 million were invested in NYA activities in Minnesota (equivalent to about \$194 million in 2005 dollars). Nationwide, about 4.8 million youth were enrolled in the NYA during its eight-year history. The NYA program ended on June 30, 1943.

### Design Significance

Stillwater Overlook displays exceptional design quality and is one of Minnesota's premier New Deal-era wayside rests. It is an elegant example of the National Park Service Rustic Style as applied to a highway wayside rest. The gently curving overlook wall follows the shape of the bluff, making the most of amazing views to the north and east. Low profiles, compatible form and scale, and local building and plant materials help the man-made work blend with the setting, as well as making it durable and low-maintenance.

Stillwater Overlook is one of the most elaborate of the scenic overlook walls designed by Arthur R. Nichols for the MHD, comparable to Garrison Concourse on Mille Lacs Lake and Lake City Concourse in Lake City. The design exemplifies Nichols' sophisticated aesthetic and his distinctive, classically-inspired interpretation of the National Park Service Rustic Style. Nichols' structures were often more formal and less rugged than Rustic Style structures seen elsewhere in the United States. At Stillwater Overlook, he combined curves, reverse curves, and straight lines in an refined and balanced design. The effect is remarkable – a structure that draws visitors in and invites them to linger, experiencing the warmth and strength of the indigenous stone and the beauty of the river valley's spectacular scenery.

#### *Arthur R. Nichols*

Arthur R. Nichols (1880-1970) was a prominent Minnesota landscape architect who served from 1932 to about 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 curtailed his private practice. Nichols designed a majority of the wayside rests and much of the roadside landscaping carried out by the MHD in the 1930s and early 1940s. Through this work Nichols strongly influenced the theory and design of roadside development in Minnesota. 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 also a major author of the State of Minnesota's *Minnesota State Park and Recreational Area Plan* (March 1939), also a Depression-era project.

Nichols was originally from Massachusetts. He studied engineering, architecture, and landscape design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and in 1902 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

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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

Morell and Nichols' 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 the popular Glacier Park Hotel. Nichols worked on several Minnesota state parks in the 1950s.

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 facilities. For the University of Minnesota, he designed projects on at least five separate campuses between 1910 and 1952. Nichols redesigned 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 had been working for the state highway department for ten years when, in 1932, he organized the MHD's new Roadside Development Division. He led the division for 31 years. During the Depression, Olson helped arrange many partnerships between the MHD and federal New Deal relief agencies, and worked closely with Minnesota's Department of Conservation (now Department of National Resources) on the construction of many state parks and related roadside development. Like Nichols, he was prominent in the roadside development movement nationally. For example, beginning in 1938 Olson and Nichols were leaders in the multi-state effort to establish the Mississippi River Parkway, now called the Great River Road, which follows the Mississippi from its headwaters in northern Minnesota to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. Olson served as the Roadside Development Division's primary ambassador to state and national conservation groups; civic, tourism, and development associations; and various public agencies on the topics of scenic highway construction and roadside beautification. Olson retired from the Roadside Development Division in 1963 and continued to work with the MHD until January, 1968. (The dates of his birth and death have not been identified.)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Stillwater Overlook, built in 1938-1939, is an important and well-preserved example of the early roadside development work of the Minnesota Department of Highways. The wayside rest represents the successful collaboration between the MHD Roadside Development Division and the National Youth Administration, a relationship that created nearly two dozen well-built public roadside facilities in Minnesota while also providing work and job training to young people during the Depression. In addition, the property is an exceptional illustration of the National Park Service Rustic Style and an important example of the roadside

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development work of pioneering Minnesota landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols.

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### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA, CONTINUED

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown by the black lines on the accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, Stillwater Overlook, Washington Co., MN." This map was drawn using a Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) Right-of-Way Map and a Mn/DOT aerial photo taken in 2002.

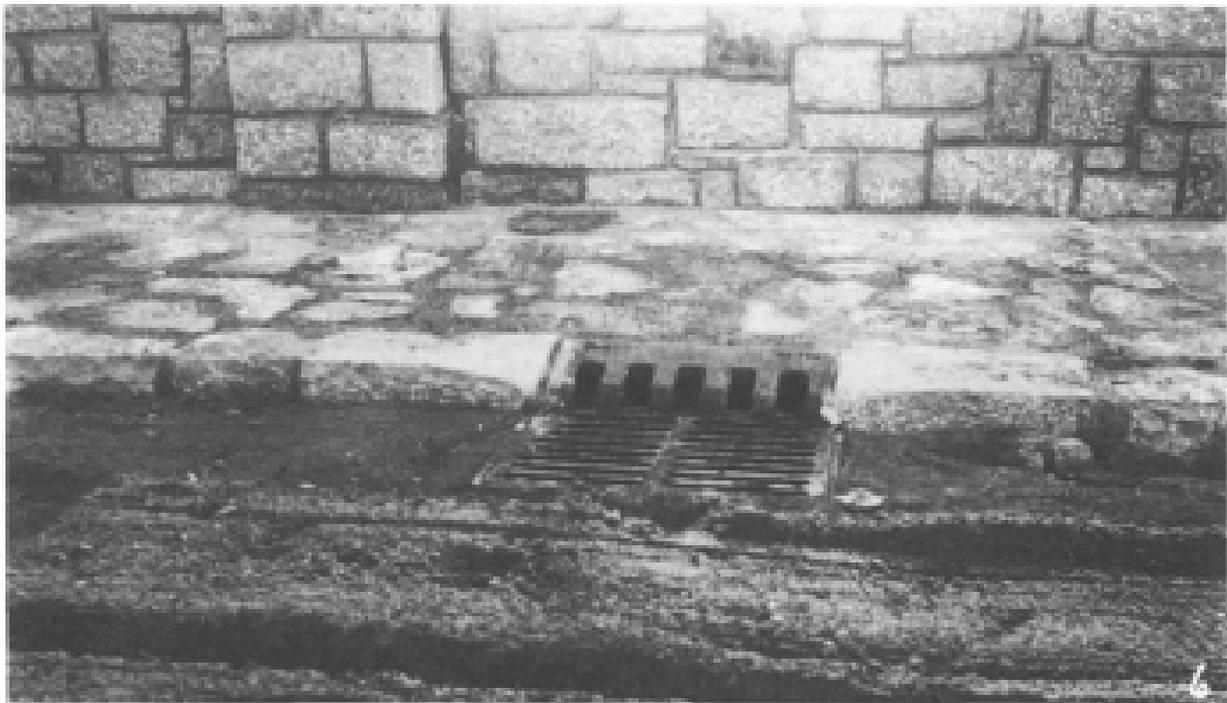
The eastern boundary of the property follows the western edge of the shoulder of Minnesota Highway 95/36. The western boundary follows the eastern curb line of Lookout Trail. The southern boundary is a roughly east-west line located about 470' south of the centerpoint of the overlook wall's central island. (This line follows the northern curblineline of Chestnut Street, a local street that appears on the city plat map but was never actually constructed.) The northern boundary is a roughly east-west line located 450' north of the centerpoint of the overlook wall's central island.

#### Boundary Justification

The nominated property encompasses the parcel of land historically associated with the wayside rest, less the eastern portion of land lost circa 1979 to the expansion of Highway 95/36.



Stillwater Overlook under construction. Facing north. MHD photo, ca. Nov. 1938, from volume 1 of Nichols photo album (Mn/DOT).



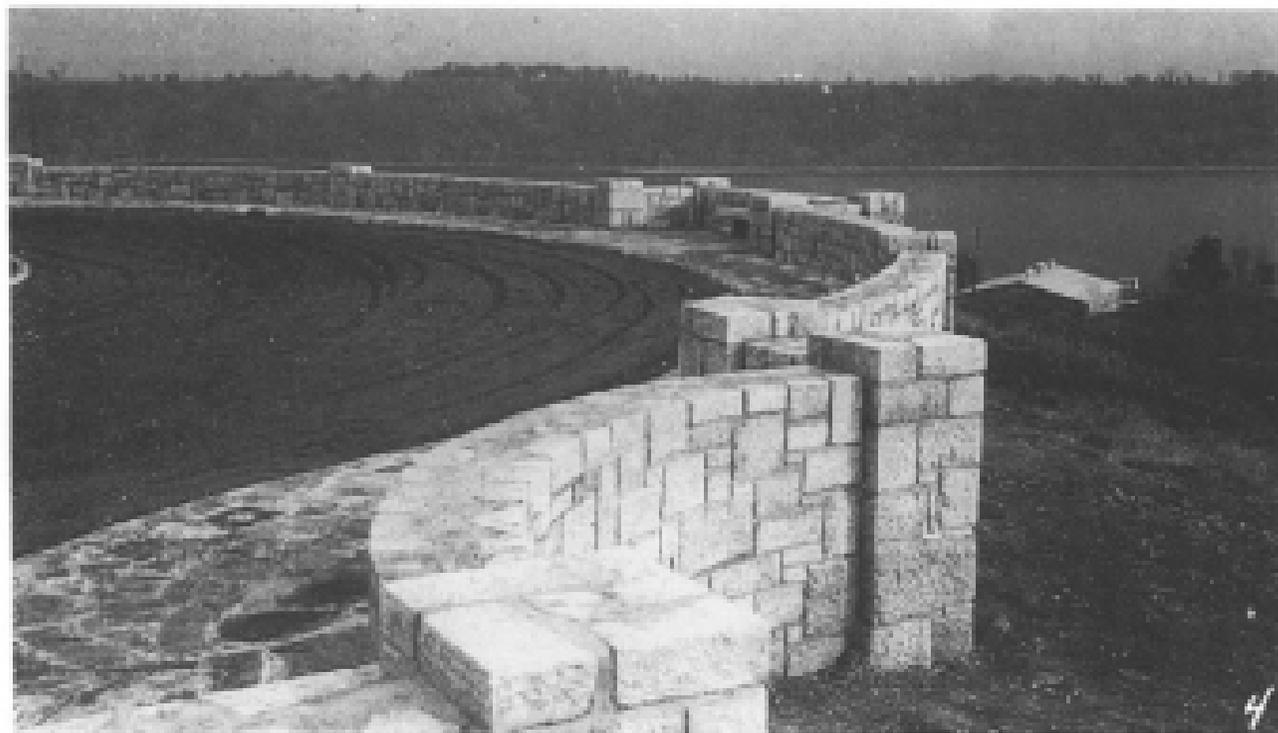
Stillwater Overlook under construction. Catch basin, facing either northeast or southeast. MHD photo by Klett, Nov. 1938, from volume 1 of Nichols photo album (MnDOT).



Stillwater Overlook under construction. Curved eastern side, facing south. MHD photo by Klett, Nov. 1936, from volume 5 of Nichols photo album (Mn/DOT).



Stillwater Overlook under construction. Northern bay, facing east. MHD photo, ca. Nov. 1958, from volume 3 of Olson photo album (Mn/DOT).

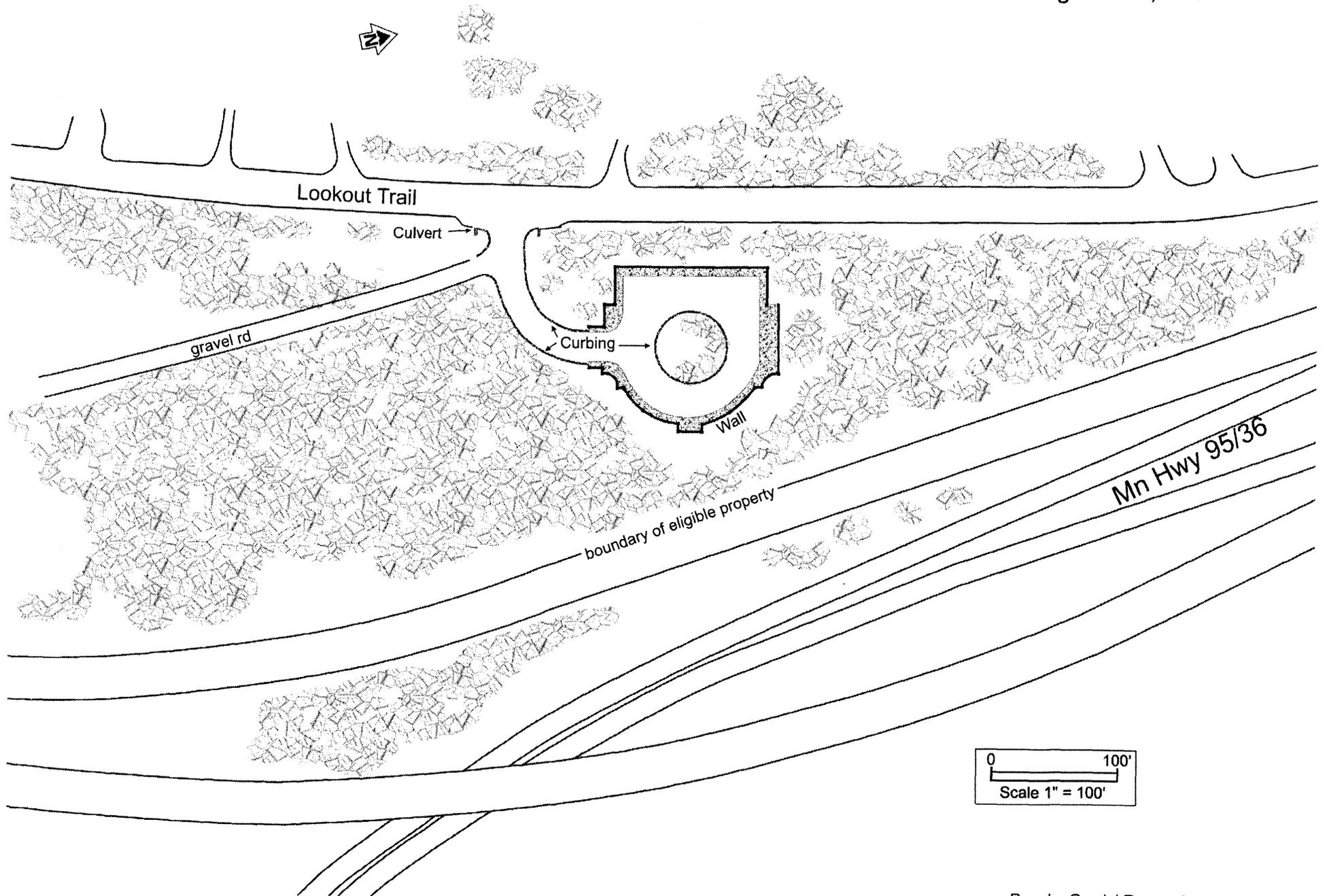


Stillwater Overlook under construction. Facing northeast. MHD photo, ca. Nov. 1938, from volume 4 of Nichols photo album (Mn/DOT).

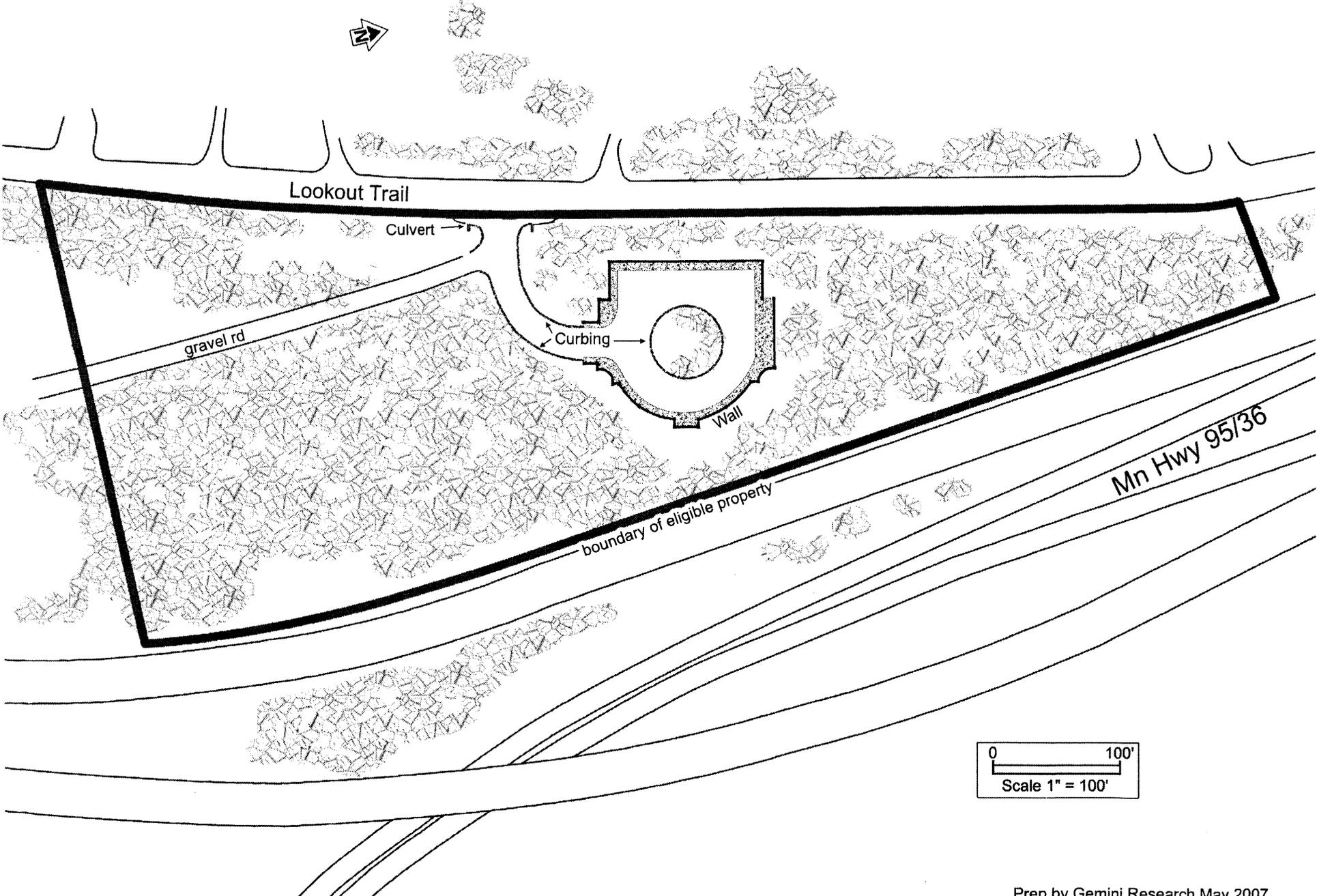


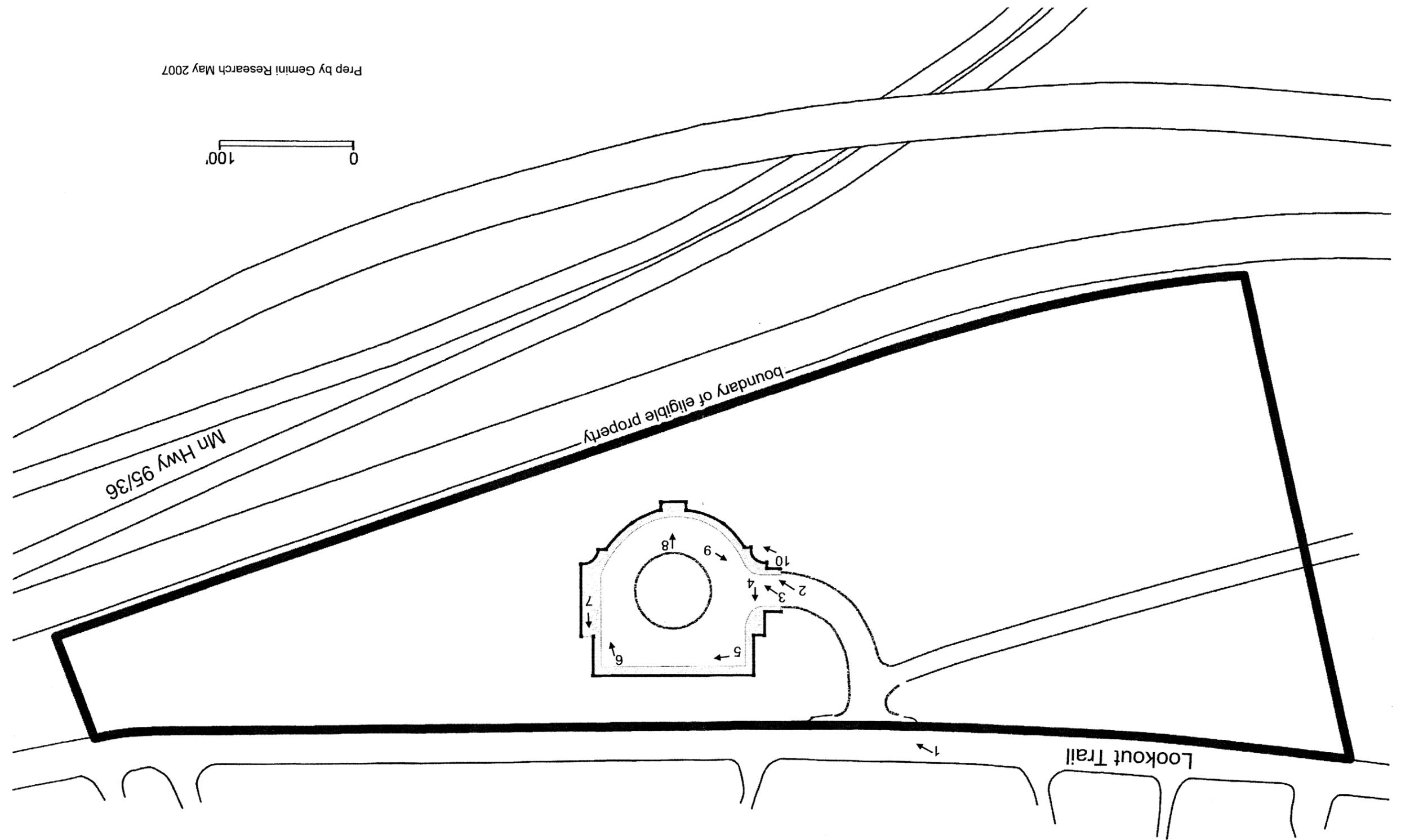
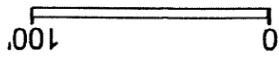
Stillwater Overlook. Facing northeast. MHD photo by Lynn, June 1940 (Mn/DOT).

Sketch Map  
Stillwater Overlook  
Washington Co., MN



Sketch Map  
Stillwater Overlook  
Washington Co., MN





Min Hwy 95/36

boundary of eligible property

Lookout Trail

Photo ID Map  
Stillwater Overlook  
Washington Co., MN

