

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

HE-RBC-160
CS 2735
Graeser Park - South

Historic Name Other Name	Graeser Park - South	CS # SHPO Inv #	2735 HE-RBC-160
Location	NW side of TH 100 just S of Broadway Ave and BN Railroad	Hwy District Reference	TH 100 Met W 11.9
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	Robbinsdale, City of Hennepin 29N 24 Sec 6 Minneapolis North Z15 E472810 N4986660	Acres Rest Area Class	4
Designer	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	SP #	2735-03 100-130-23
Builder	Work Projects Administration (WPA)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Roadside Parking Area Roadside Parking Area	MHS Photo #	013551.03-07
Yr of Landscape Design	1940-41	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	
Overall Site Integrity	Moderately Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance Also member of eligible NR district: Lilac Way Historic District Property demolished; District razed as part of TH 100 reconstruction.		
Historic Context	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960 Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943		

List of Standing Structures

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Council Ring	1940	
02	Flagstone Pad	1940	
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			

Fieldwork Date	11-03-97
Prep by	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 91
Prep for	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit

Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

Graeser Park - South is a small, triangular-shaped park that was given this name for the purposes of this inventory. It is located on the northwestern side of T.H. 100 immediately southwest of the Great Northern Railroad tracks and West Broadway Avenue (Co. Rd. 8) in Robbinsdale. The park is located on the western side of the intersection of T.H. 100 and the Great Northern tracks and is bounded by Scott Avenue on the west.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

Council Ring. Built 1940 by the WPA. At the center of the site is a council ring built of tan, coursed ashlar, roughly-cut limestone. The ring is about 23' in diameter and its wall is about 18" thick. There is a crumbling fire ring in the center (about 5' in diameter) and a pedestrian opening on the western side of the ring. The council ring is in poor condition and missing many stones.

Flagstone Pads for Stone Picnic Tables. Built 1940 by the WPA. The site has six flagstone pads on which stone picnic tables originally sat. The pads are arranged around the council ring on all but the western side of the ring. The picnic tables were undoubtedly like those still standing in Graeser Park to the north (see inventory form).

■ OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS

Graeser Park - South is located on the northwestern side of T.H. 100 immediately southwest of the Great Northern Railroad tracks and West Broadway Avenue (Co. Rd. 8) in Robbinsdale. The park has a basically triangular shape, but has a long extension that continues down T.H. 100 to the southwest. It is located on the western side of the intersection of T.H. 100 and the Great Northern tracks and is bounded by Scott Avenue on the west. The park is at about the same elevation as the T.H. 100 roadway.

The park is planted with unmowed grass and widely spaced mature trees such as elm and maple. The northeastern side of the site is screened by brush, evergreens, deciduous trees, and woody shrubs such as lilac along the railroad tracks and the elevated trackbed.

The landscaping along T.H. 100 and at the intersection of T.H. 100 and the Great Northern tracks (mostly above the elevation of the park) is visible from the site. Bridge 5523 (built 1940), which carries the tracks over T.H. 100, is also highly visible.

■ SETTING

Graeser Park - South is located in a residential neighborhood near the northwestern corner of the City of Robbinsdale. It is bounded by Scott Avenue and houses on the west, the Great Northern Railroad tracks on the northeast, and T.H. 100 on the southeast.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

The site has lost one stone refuse container, one stone "Roadside Parking" sign, one stone fireplace, six stone picnic tables, and one water well with pump. Some plantings may have been removed, but in general the landscaping seems fairly intact, although overgrown.

The site's integrity of design, materials, and feeling have been compromised by the loss of most of the stone features. In general, however, the site retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The council ring is in poor condition, missing many stones, and its fire ring is crumbling. The stone picnic tables have been removed. The grass is unmowed and the landscaping appears unmaintained.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This small triangular-shaped park is being called Graeser Park - South for the purposes of this inventory. The WPA's construction of T.H. 100 was one of the largest federal relief projects in the state. The planning and construction of T.H. 100 is significant in the history of transportation in the state. (See Statement of Significance and Additional Background Information near the end of this document.)

Graeser Park - South was built in 1940-1941 as part of a 1.24-mile-long roadside development project built in association with the original construction of T.H. 100 (S.P. 2735-03). The project included extensive plantings along the T.H. 100 roadside and the building of two parks with stone structures: Graeser Park - South and Graeser Park, which is located several feet to the north on the other side of Broadway Avenue. Bridge 5523 (located immediately north of the park) was built in 1940.

The park was built by the Work Projects Administration. The Work Projects Administration which had been established in 1939 to continue the programs of the Works Progress Administration, which had been working on T.H. 100 since 1936. Both were known as the WPA.

Sheet 4 of 5 of the S.P. 2735-03 plans estimates the following quantities for structures in the park:

- one stone refuse container
- one stone "Roadside Parking" sign
- one stone council ring
- one stone fireplace
- six stone picnic tables
- one water well with pump

A "Revised Sketch Plan" for "Plant material required in addition to that shown on original plans" was drawn February 1940 (S.P. 2735-03). The plan shows five picnic table sets, three fireplaces, a council ring, and a pump with a pump shelter on the site.

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A copy of the title sheet for S.P. 2735-03 that accompanied a planting plan contains the notations "In Cooperation With Work Projects Administration" and "Final Plans Showing Material Placed Construction Div. W.P.A. November 30, 1941."

The park was designed by A. R. Nichols who was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways during the 1930s through the early 1940s. Nichols designed the landscaping and roadside parks along the entire length of the "Lilac Way" as the original portion of T.H. 100 was called.

The highway department's 1938 *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* describes the department's roadside development along T.H. 100:

The Minneapolis Belt Line permits both north and south bound traffic to avoid the congestion of the city. . . . Stopping points have been provided for the travelling public along the Belt Line where they may stop to enjoy the scenery or picnic. These roadside parking areas are equipped with tables, fireplaces, drinking fountains or wells and are situated at strategic points along the Belt Line where right of way widths made possible such a development (*Annual Report 1938*).

This park is the smallest of the five roadside parks along T.H. 100 that were included in this Mn/DOT Historic Roadside Development Structures Inventory. The five parks are listed below as they appear on T.H. 100 from north to south:

Graeser Park
Graeser Park - South
Blazer Park
Lilac Park
St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area

At least two other parks along T.H. 100 have been demolished:

Excelsior Blvd Roadside Parking Area (T.H. 100 at Excelsior Blvd)
Glenwood Avenue Roadside Parking Area (T.H. 100 at Glenwood Ave.)

This inventory also includes two other properties along T.H. 100:

T.H. 100 Culvert (Bridge 5442)
T.H. 100 and T.H. 55 Retaining Walls

See Additional Background Information below for more information.

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

A series of Section 106 reviews was begun in 1993 in association with the proposed reconstruction of T.H. 100 (SHPO 93-0130, 94-3607, and 98-0306). A portion of T.H. 100 has been determined by the Minnesota Historical Society to be eligible for the National Register as the Lilac Way Historic District. The eligible district includes the roadway itself, as well as bridges, roadside landscaping features, and roadside parks. Survey and evaluation of the segment of T.H. 100 between T.H. 7 (on the south) and 50th Ave. N. (on the north) was

conducted in 1994-1997, in part pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the FHWA, the SHPO, the ACHP, and the SHPO that was signed in 1997.

The 1997 MOA stipulated the following: For the northern segment of the project area (between Glenwood Ave. N. and 50th Ave. N.)--photo documentation of National Register-eligible landscape features and development of a video presentation on the history and significance of T.H. 100. For the southern segment of the project area (between the Soo Line RR bridge south of Glenwood Ave. N. and W. 27th St.)--an inventory of structures adjacent to T.H. 100 that predate 1947, and photo documentation of National Register-eligible landscape features. At the time of this writing (Spring 1998), the inventory had been completed and work on the other stipulations was underway. The documents that chronicle the Section 106 reviews (filed under SHPO review numbers 93-0130, 94-3607, and 98-0306) contain the MOA, several items of correspondence, and several reports (see primarily reports by Meyer et al. 1995 and Henning 1997).

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Graeser Park - South was built in 1940-1941 by the WPA. The site is one of 23 properties in this inventory that were built by (or suspected to have been built by) the WPA. It is one of more than 60 properties in this inventory that were designed by, or attributed to, A. R. Nichols. This wayside rest is one of only eight sites in this inventory that retain stone council rings. The site was built as part of one of the state's largest federal relief projects -- the construction of T.H. 100 (the "Lilac Way") in 1934-1941. The Lilac Way was also one of the Roadside Development Division's largest, most well-publicized, and most visible, single projects.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1889-1960." It is recommended that, despite the factors listed above, the property is NOT INDIVIDUALLY ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context due to loss of integrity.

However, this property is located within the Lilac Way Historic District, which the SHPO has already determined is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under the "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" historic context. It is recommended that the Lilac Way Historic District ALSO MEETS the registration requirements of the Roadside Development historic context. Graeser Park - South is a contributing element within the potential historic district.

As a member of the Lilac Way Historic District, this property may also associated with the "Urban Centers, 1870-1940" and "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic contexts.

■ OTHER COMMENTS

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

T.H. 100 past this site is a busy, multi-laned highway. The highway traffic and noise is at the same elevation as the park and close enough to be intrusive to the experience of being at the park.

The site originally had tables like those at Graeser Park, Blazer Park, Lilac Park, and St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area, all on T.H. 100.

■ **REFERENCES**

Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development Along the Trunk Highways in Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Highways. 1938 and 1939.

"An Appraisal Inventory of Work Done with W.P.A. and Other Federal Relief Funds Through the Functioning of the Department of Highways, State of Minnesota." Unpublished manuscript, 1938.

Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Highways of Minnesota. 1935-1936 (pub. Jan. 1, 1937; 1937-1938 (pub. Mar. 1, 1939); 1942-1944 (pub. Dec. 1, 1944).

Henning, Barbara J. *Phases I and II Cultural Resource Historical Investigation: T.H. 100 (Lilac Way) S.P. 2743.* Prepared for Minnesota Department of Transportation by Rivercrest Associates, Inc., September 1997.

Lee, Rudolph. "Highway Department Approves 'Lilac Way' West of City." *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935, pp. 1 and 4.

"Lilac Way Here Soon." *Minneapolis Journal*, Jan. 30, 1938, p. 2.

Meyer, Scott B., Richard L. Mattson, Andrew J. Schmidt. *Phase I and II Cultural Resources Investigation for Trunk Highway 100 Reconstruction.* Prepared for Minnesota Department of Transportation by The 106 Group Ltd., Feb. 15, 1995.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

T.H. 100 -- The Lilac Way

The Lilac Way Historic District has been determined to be eligible for the National Register as the most intact portion of the original western segment of T.H. 100. The eligible district is in two distinct segments, a northern segment (about 4.5 miles long) between Glenwood Avenue in Golden Valley and T.H. 52 (now CSAH 81) in Robbinsdale, and a southern segment (1.4 miles long) in St. Louis Park located between a set of Soo Line tracks south of T.H. 7 and W. 26th St.

Built between 1934-1941, largely by the WPA, Lilac Way (originally 12.5 miles long and running from T.H. 5 in Edina to T.H. 52 in Robbinsdale) was one of the state's largest federal relief projects. Lilac Way was the first section completed of the western leg of T.H. 100. The western leg of T.H. 100 was the first portion of a "Belt Line Highway" that, by 1950, encircled the Twin Cities with 66 miles of roadway. The National Register-eligible segment of Lilac Way is significant to the history of suburban development in the Twin Cities and regional transportation (affecting residential development, economic development, tourism, etc.), and significant as one of the state's largest federal relief projects. It is also significant for its distinctive roadside landscaping that features wayside parks, hundreds of native lilac

bushes, other intact landscaping elements, and as an excellent example of the work of landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols.

T.H. 100 was originally a Public Works Administration (PWA) project funded by the Economic Recovery Act (ERA). When the WPA was created in 1935, T.H. 100 became a WPA project that employed between 2,500 and 3,000 men during that year alone. The project used almost 800 workers daily in 1935 and approximately 1,500 men daily at the peak of construction in 1937 (Meyer et al. 1995:78). The building of T.H. 100, like the Thompson Hill Overlook and T.H. 61 in Duluth (also in this inventory) was a large federal relief construction project that was established close to one of the state's large urban centers where unemployment was high. Some of the workers on the T.H. 100 project were ". . . formerly unemployed masons hired to build the stone benches, grills, and posts in the roadside parks" (Meyer et al. 1995:79).

Historian Barbara J. Henning writes that,

The belt line was intended to provide safe, efficient traffic flow, but also an aesthetically pleasing experience. Features designed to enhance the parkway experience included grade separations at railroad crossings and major intersecting highways, cloverleaf connections, limited access points to the highway, absence of private frontage, two lanes in each direction, a median between them, extensive landscaping, and small parks (Henning 1997:10).

Henning describes landscaping along the segment of T.H. 100 in St. Louis Park:

Landscaping for the highway, including the number and types of vegetation, was extraordinary in scope. A dozen types of evergreen trees totaling 420 plants headed the plant material list for St. Louis Park. There were 37 varieties of deciduous trees, shrubs, and vines. The total number of deciduous plants called for in the plan came to 23,505. The largest units were American elm (1,890) in several sizes, sumac (9,478), three kinds of spirea (2,199), Persian lilac (2,487), and common lilac (5,408). Uncommon examples, perhaps representing in-place plants, included limited numbers of butternut (1), ironwood (5), horse chestnut (1), and Chinese matrimony vine (32) (Henning 1997:12).

The Lilac Way's lilac bushes were an exception to the Roadside Development unit's general policy of not planting flowers or flowering shrubs along highways. The landscaping include more than 7,000 bushes of 12 varieties of lilacs and thousands of other vines and trees ("Lilac Way Here Soon" 1938).

See sources cited under References for more information.