

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Graeser Roadside Parking Area

Other names/site number: Graeser Park; Robbinsdale Rock Garden Roadside Parking Area

Name of related multiple property listing: Federal Relief Construction in MN, 1933-1943

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

2. Location

Street & number: NW corner of the junction of TH 100 and Bottineau Boulevard (CSAH 81)

City or town: Robbinsdale State: Minnesota County: Hennepin

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; padding-top: 5px;"> Signature of certifying official/Title: Date </div> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px; padding-top: 5px;"> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government </div>	
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; padding-top: 5px;"> Signature of commenting official: Date </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; padding-top: 5px;"> Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government </div>	

Graeser Park

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register
- ☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☒

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☐

District

☒

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

Graeser Park

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: National Park Service Rustic Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Stone/Limestone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

See attached continuation sheets.

Narrative Description

See attached continuation sheets.

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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.)

- ☐ 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.)

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1940-41

Significant Dates

1940-41

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Arthur R. Nichols / Landscape Architect

Carl F. Graeser / Engineer

Harold E. Olson / Engineer

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

See attached continuation sheets.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

See attached continuation sheets.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See attached continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in 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 # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☒ Other State agency Minnesota Department of Transportation
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HE-RBC-00025

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

2. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

3. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

4. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

2. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

3. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

4. Zone: _____ Easting : _____ Northing: _____

See attached continuation sheets.

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property includes approximately four (4) acres. The boundary is delineated along the lines shown on Map 7 and includes property generally located between the TH 100 ramp at the east, TH 100 at the south, W. Broadway at the west, and Lakeland Avenue at the north.

See attached continuation sheets.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary description includes all of the property developed in 1940-41 as Graeser Park. Modifications have been made to the east and west borders due to highway construction.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Carole S. Zellie
organization: Landscape Research LLC
street & number: 2309 Como Avenue #8135
city or town: St. Paul state: MN zip code: 55108
e-mail: czellie@landscape-research.net
telephone: (612) 616-5353
date: August 15, 2024

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Additional Documentation: Maps

Map 1	Graeser Park USGS, Minneapolis North, Hennepin County. Robbinsdale MN
Map 2	Graeser Park Location Map
Maps 3-4	Graeser Park Site Plan
Map 5	Graeser Park Location and Direction of Photographs 1, 3-22
Map 6	Graeser Park Location and Direction of Photograph 2
Map 7	Graeser Park Boundary and UTM Coordinates

See attached continuation sheets.

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Graeser Park

City or Vicinity: Robbinsdale

County: Hennepin State: Minnesota

Photographer: Daniel Pratt

Date(s) Photographed: June 14, 2023 (#2); September 16, 2024 (#1, #3-22)

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo #1 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0001)

Graeser Park, facing northwest toward overlook and Lakeland Avenue.

Photo #2 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0002)

Graeser Park, facing southeast across overlook from Lakeland Avenue.

Photo #3 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0003)

Graeser Park, facing southeast from overlook.

Photo #4 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0004)

Graeser Park, facing northeast and the soundwall, from Lakeland Avenue. Overlook wall and sandstone curb at right.

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Photo #5 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0005)

Graeser Park, facing southwest toward W. Broadway Avenue, beehive fireplace and picnic tables.

Photo #6 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0006)

Graeser Park, facing east toward beehive fireplace and picnic tables.

Photo #7 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0007)

Graeser Park, facing northeast toward beehive fireplace, overlook and Lakeland Avenue.

Photo #8 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0008)

Graeser Park, facing northwest at northern edge of rock garden, with beehive fireplace and stone picnic table. Metal picnic table at far right.

Photo #9 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0009)

Graeser Park, facing south at head of steps at northern edge of rock garden.

Photo #10 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0010)

Graeser Park, facing southeast toward TH 100 across rock garden.

Photo #11 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0011)

Graeser Park, facing northeast across rock garden toward overlook.

Photo #12 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0012)

Graeser Park, facing east across rock garden from W. Broadway Avenue.

Photo #13 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0013)

Graeser Park, facing northwest across rock garden toward Lakeland Avenue.
Volcano-style fountain mound at center.

Photo #14 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0014)

Graeser Park, facing northwest to rock garden steps and bench.

Photo #15 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0015)

Graeser Park, facing northwest at bench (one of four at rock garden), toward W. Broadway Avenue.

Photo #16 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0016)

Graeser Park, facing northwest at bench (one of four at rock garden), toward W. Broadway Avenue.

Photo #17 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0017)

Graeser Park, facing northwest at rock garden stair, toward beehive fireplace and W. Broadway Avenue.

Photo #18 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0018)

Graeser Park, facing northwest from W. Broadway Avenue toward western park boundary.

Photo #19 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0019)

Graeser Park, facing northeast from W. Broadway Avenue across sidewalk and concrete path.

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Photo #20 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0020)
Graeser Park, facing east across concrete path and metal picnic table.

Photo #21 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0021)
Graeser Park, facing south at Lakeland Avenue entrance peninsula

Photo #22 of 22 (MN_Hennepin County_Graeser Park_0022)
Graeser Park, facing southeast at W. Broadway Avenue entrance triangle.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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Narrative Summary

See Map 2

Graeser Park is a 4-acre highway wayside rest area situated on a diamond-shaped parcel at the northwestern side of TH 100 between W. Broadway Avenue (CR 8) and Bottineau Boulevard (CSAH 81) in Robbinsdale, Hennepin County. Between a curved, Rustic Style limestone overlook wall at the north and a large rock garden at the south, the slightly sloping site is shaded by a canopy of mature mixed deciduous trees and conifers and includes limestone picnic tables on pads and a stone beehive fireplace. The park was built in 1940-41 under the supervision of the Roadside Development Division (RDD) of the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) and the National Park Service (NPS). The park design and stone furnishings are exemplary of the National Park Service Rustic Style. Minnesota landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the MHD, with Harold E. Olson (Engineer) and Carl F. Graeser (Project Engineer).

The property retains excellent historic integrity. Rehabilitation in 2023 by the Minnesota Department of Transportation followed the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The non-contributing resources located at the edges of the site, including a sound wall, stormwater retention pond, electric high-line tower, and chain link fence, do not significantly diminish the property's historic integrity. Nor does the loss of some parkland area along TH 100 and the TH 100 ramp and W. Broadway Avenue, which followed highway reconstruction.

Narrative Description

Graeser Park includes fifteen (15) contributing structures and eight (8) non-contributing structures within a single contributing site as described below and shown on Table 1. All features are labeled on Maps 3-4, Section 10.

Location and Setting

Vehicular access is from the east at 47th Ave N., following along a landscaped peninsula on Lakeland Avenue to a parking bay located along the park's overlook wall. The west entry at Broadway Avenue has a small triangular island. Pedestrian access is unobstructed along Lakeland and Broadway Avenues (Maps 3-4). A slight widening of the curved, bituminous-paved drive along Lakeland Avenue N. provides a parking lot opposite the park.

The southbound TH 100 entrance ramp from Bottineau Boulevard edges the park along its eastern and southeastern sides. A wood-paneled sound wall extends southwest from the intersection of Lakeland Avenue N. and 47th Ave N., and follows Bottineau Boulevard and the TH 100 entrance ramp. It terminates east of the overlook wall (Photo 4). A chain link fence extends along the rest of the property boundary to the W. Broadway Avenue Bridge. A high-line electrical tower is located on the park boundary near the south end of the sound wall (Map 3).

At the western edge of the park, the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) tracks edge W. Broadway Avenue, which crosses over TH 100 on Bridge 27286 (2001). The BSNF railroad crossing

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over TH 100 is Bridge 27170 (2001). A single-family residential neighborhood borders the park to the north and west (Map 2).

Park frontage along the TH 100 entrance ramp, beginning at the end of the sound wall north of the parking area and curving to the W. Broadway Bridge, extends approximately 850 linear feet. The approximate park frontage on the TH 100 ramp between the CSAH 81 Bridge and the W. Broadway Bridge is approximately 470 linear feet. On W. Broadway Avenue, the park extends 507 linear feet between the park entrance at Lakeland Avenue N. and TH 100.

Along the western boundary, a concrete sidewalk (2023) extends from the W. Broadway bridge crossing over TH 100 to the west entrance (Photo 19). As shown in historic photographs, a Rustic Style wooden guardrail was formerly located along Graeser Park's western edge on W. Broadway Avenue (Figure 17).

Park Topography, Vegetation and Viewsheds

The site slopes from an elevation of 872 feet on Lakeland Avenue N. to about 854 feet at the Graeser stormwater retention pond (ca. 2004). From the overlook wall on Lakeland Avenue N., picnic areas and picnic tables, the beehive fireplace, expanses of lawn, and several groupings of spruce and deciduous trees and shrubs are in view (Figure 1, Photo 14). This landscape is typical of the upper-slope area. The replacement bridges that carry W. Broadway and the BNSF tracks over TH 100 are visible from some points in this area of the park, as is a water tower (2022) on the south side of TH 100 (Photo 9).

On the lower slope, the rock garden and stone-walled, concrete-bottomed ornamental pools are partially built into the embankment below the beehive fireplace (Photo 14). The approximately .5-acre stormwater retention pond (ca. 2005) is located along the edge of the TH 100 entrance ramp at the eastern edge of the park.

Many of the construction-era spruce and some early deciduous trees appear to be extant, and there are mature deciduous shrubs primarily at the northern and eastern (TH 100) perimeter. There are no remaining examples of the common lilac (*syringa vulgaris*) and Persian lilac (*syringa Persico*) or spirea (*spirea vanhouttei*) shown on the original planting plan. The lilacs on the planting plan were shown on the small crescent of land opposite the Broadway Avenue entrance triangle.¹

Following the TH 100 Reconstruction Project (2001-2004), perimeter views to and from the park on Bottineau Boulevard were obscured by vegetation planted along the highway entrance ramp and buffer plantings around the new stormwater pond to the northeast and east. Although the ramp edge is buffered with vegetation, portions of the highway remain seasonally visible from the park through the deciduous portions of the buffer, especially from the beehive fireplace area and lower elevations of the park. From the southbound TH 100 ramp, motorists' views toward the park's lower elevations are possible only

¹State of Minnesota Department of Highways, "Roadside Development Plans Trunk Highway No. 100-130. S.P. 2735-03," 1941, Sheet 5 of 5; Figure 1; Andrea Weber, MnDOT, communication 12/9/2022.

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through intermittent seasonal openings.

Circulation

A comparison of current conditions with historic Graeser Park plans and photographs suggests that except for the southeastern portion of the park now devoted to the stormwater retention pond (ca. 2004) and related filling, most of the original formal and informal circulation system appears to be generally intact. The main exception is the new concrete-paved path loop (2023) that provides ADA access from W. Broadway Avenue to the beehive fireplace and an ADA-accessible metal picnic table (Photos 19-20, Map 3).

The historic crushed rock path along the overlook wall, the flagstone-paved area framed by the overlook, and the flagstone paths that edge the rock garden are all extant. The curved paths from the overlook to the upper picnic area shown in Figure 14, likely paved in crushed limestone, are not evident today. Filling or removal of portions of the limestone stairway due to the widening of W. Broadway Avenue in 2004 resulted in loss of circulation between the street and rock garden (Figure 17).

Graeser Park Designed Historic Landscape and Park Structures

Park Site (Contributing)

The 4-acre, diamond-shaped park site occupies a slightly sloping parcel shaded by a canopy of mature mixed deciduous trees and conifers. The park site extends to the south and east across a wide landscaped bowl that edges TH 100 and W. Broadway Avenue. Intact historic designed landscape features shown on the original plan include a small, grass-covered park triangle at the W. Broadway entry at the west. A small wooded parcel north of the triangle is an original contributing site feature within the park boundary. At the east a narrow grass and shrub-covered peninsula extends between Lakeland Avenue and the TH 100 ramp south Lakeland of 47th Street N.² Lakeland Avenue N. is a curved, bituminous-paved drive along the northern boundary and links the W. Broadway entry with the Lakeland Avenue entry, and includes a small parking area within the park.

The park site is furnished with fifteen (15) contributing National Park Service Rustic Style limestone structures built in 1940-41, including eleven (11) limestone picnic tables and pads. A 1940 *Robbinsdale Post* article states that project engineer Carl F. Graeser obtained 30,000 cubic feet of stone for Graeser Park and other Lilac Way parks from the demolition site of an unnamed Minneapolis flour mill. The picnic tables, benches and stoves “came from the wrecked elevator foundation,” while the rest came from the Mendota WPA quarry on the Minnesota River.³ This is the only account of the stone having been obtained from an additional source. Minnesota’s RDD waysides seldom utilize more than one type of stone. At Graeser Park, the use of three materials: the Mendota Mifflin limestone in paving and bench seat supports, Kasota Stone for upright structures, and honeycomb-like “holey stone” in the rock garden

² A “Rustic Log Roadside Parking Sign” was originally located at Lakeland and 47th Avenues N. (razed).

³ *Robbinsdale Post*, October 31, 1940.

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is distinctive.⁴ A sandstone curb was also installed along the south side of the parking area. The TH 100 Reconstruction Project (2001-2004) reshaped the park perimeter and added eight (8) non-contributing new structures. These features are described below and in Section 8. See Table 1 and Maps 2-4. Numbers below refer to Table 1 and Map 3- 4 labels.

1. Overlook Wall (Contributing Structure)

The Lakeland Avenue N. parking and arrival point is framed by a 255-foot-long Rustic Style overlook wall. It faces southeast on a site that slopes gradually to TH 100 (Photos 2-3, Figure 15 [background]). The random ashlar, rusticated limestone structure is 18 inches thick and of varying stepped heights, terminating at the centrally located, 14-foot-wide flagstone-paved lookout bay. The overlook is furnished with expansion joints both in the flagstone and through the parapet and retaining wall. The curved lookout bay is about 48 inches high at the eastern exposure, with six courses of random-sized stone. The overlook walls span between piers, each with a limestone slab cap. Three sets of six-foot-wide limestone steps lead to the picnic area. Each is framed by a set of stone piers and has three steps. Most of the mortar is light gray, with sections of missing mortar and stone, and evidence of past repairs. In 2022, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) completed wall stabilization, including cleaning, re-pointing the top of the wall, and re-building the piers at the stairs and wall ends. Stabilization followed the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

2. Rock Garden (Contributing Structure)

The Graeser Park Rustic Style rock garden is located in the southwestern quarter of the park, with some seasonal visibility from TH 100 and W. Broadway Avenue (Photos 10-14; Figures 15-16). With the nearby beehive fireplace, the much-photographed garden is a focal point of the park. From north to south, the garden structures and stone path system extend about 200 feet. The garden is furnished with curvilinear Mifflin limestone paths and mortared "holey-stone" limestone mounds and walls and two pools. In addition to random limestone ashlar and limestone rubble with gray mortar, the holey stone, with striations, holes, and other irregularities, is a striking feature.

The concrete-bottomed, holey-stone-walled pools are connected by a dam-waterfall. They no longer have a water supply, but most masonry features remain. The upper pool had a sheet waterfall that flowed out of a large stone mound rockery feature. Water then traveled through the upper pool and over the concrete dam into the lower pool. This lower pool has a conical fountain that had a volcano-like, straight-up spray. Each pool was approximately two feet deep.

Slight grade changes in the path on either side of the dam between the pools are marked by a limestone step. From the picnic area at the southwest, the garden can be accessed by twelve flagstone steps flanked by retaining walls clad in small pieces of mortared holey stone.

⁴ Andrea Weber, MnDOT, communication, 12/9/2022.

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Four garden benches are built into the embankment above the rock garden and rest on bases of striated Mifflin limestone. They face the rock garden and highway and each is sheltered by an eight-foot-wide stone niche. Each bench is approximately eight feet long, two feet wide and eighteen inches tall, with a two-foot-high backrest comprised of large, irregularly-shaped stone slabs with pointed tops (Photos 15-16; Figure 16).

The walkways adjacent to the pool on either side of the dam have small steps up and then down over a small rise, with stone rockery on either side, creating a walking experience paralleling the water that formerly flowed over the dam. Several mortared stone pockets around the pond edges held potted water plants. Planting rings for trees and other plants are placed in the lower lawn and in the lawn above the retaining wall. Planting beds along the stairs and walls are all edged with mortared stone edging.

There is some remaining evidence of the original plantings, including daylilies, which were concentrated around the pools and at the edges of stairs and in planting beds at the tops of the retaining walls. Historic photographs show that closely mowed grass surrounded the paths and pools (Figure 15), but over the decades, as maintenance declined, a succession of plantings and tall grass created a more enclosed landscape around the edges of the rock garden. Volunteers first uncovered the flagstone paths and cleaned out the pool, which by the mid-2000s were covered in several inches of soil, and began weeding of the stone features. Garden rehabilitation in 2023 included bench and pool-edge repointing to improve safety, and replanting perennials on both sides of the stair and north bench. Volunteers are continuing to clear out and replant the perennial beds surrounding the garden in planting bays above the retaining walls with guidance and plans prepared by MnDOT.

3. Beehive Fireplace (Contributing Structure)

A beehive-shaped picnic fireplace is the focal point of the picnic area south of the overlook wall between the overlook wall and the rock garden (Photos 5-8, 17; Figure 16). The unique design is built of tan, evenly-coursed, rock-faced limestone ashlar after a design for a "Triple Fireplace" by project engineer Carl F. Graeser (MDH 1937; Figure 11). The fireplace is six feet in diameter and eight feet high and is placed on a circular Mifflin limestone pad. Three round-arched fire openings have brick-lined fireboxes and were originally supplied with metal cooking grates. Small limestone side tables are placed between the openings. The fireplace drawing did not include tables. The side tables are seen in post-construction photos, however, and included colored mortar matching the beehive, suggesting they were a change to plans near or at the time of construction. MnDOT cleaned the masonry and rehabilitated the fireplace in 2021-22, following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Dark-colored mortar joints were restored to their original appearance, black woven wire covers were added to the firebox openings to protect the structure from future fireplace use, and a stainless steel dome was added to protect the clay-lined flumes from freeze-thaw damage. The dome is mounted in the mortar joints with space for air movement.

4 (a-k). Picnic Tables and Mifflin Limestone Pads (11 Contributing Structures)

There are eleven (11) sets of Rustic Style stone picnic tables constructed of tan, rock-faced limestone.

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Each rests on a Mifflin limestone pad (Photos 1, 5-7; Figures 14, 17). There are two table styles. Four of the picnic tables are square, with the table top supported by an X-shaped structure of random ashlar. These tables have two benches. Each seat is supported by two stone-block pedestals. Five of the picnic tables are rectangular in shape, with a trestle-shaped base and two stone benches that are each supported by three stone blocks. The table tops and seats are simple slabs that have rock-faced edges.⁵ One table located near the main steps leading to the picnic area has a trestle base and a standing height. It has a square top and no benches.

By 2001, “eight stone tables, one or two stone refuse containers, and three small picnic fireplaces” were missing from the park.⁶ All of the picnic tables were rehabilitated or reconstructed by MnDOT in 2021-22, following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Some of the MnDOT work reconstructed portions of damaged tables and benches from the other TH 100 roadside park locations built by the RDD during the same period. They were rebuilt using a combination of partially assembled bases and table and bench tops. All parts were re-pointed and filled in with new stone as needed. The tables were placed on existing repointed Mifflin limestone bases. The turf area around each table pad was regraded, shaped to drain away from the table, and re-seeded with grass.

5. Stone Curbing (Contributing Structure)

Approximately 320 linear feet of sandstone curbing lines the length of the eastern side of the parking area in front of the overlook wall, wrapping around the ends of the parking area and turning a radius at the southwestern end of the parking bay toward Broadway Ave. N. (Photo 4). Previous application of bituminous paving reduced the exposure of the curb face.

6. W. Broadway Avenue Concrete Sidewalk (Noncontributing Structure)

A concrete sidewalk (2023) along W. Broadway Avenue extends from the W. Broadway Bridge to the Lakeland Avenue parking lot (Figure 19). It adjoins the ADA-accessible path (11) that extends to the beehive fireplace (3) and metal picnic table (12) (Photos 19-20).

7. Stormwater Retention Pond (Noncontributing Structure)

A 6,000-square-foot stormwater retention pond was constructed in ca. 2004 along a portion of the eastern park boundary (Map 3). It is located about 120 feet from the curved bay of the overlook wall and about 30 feet east of the rock garden. It is at an elevation about 18 feet lower than the Lakeland Avenue N. entrance. It occupies the former location of the southern picnic table grouping and a portion of the formerly open, mowed-turf “bowl.”⁷ Depending on water level, the pond surface totals less than 15 percent of the current total park acreage. Buffer plantings around the pond now block views to Bottineau Boulevard and TH 100.

⁵ Granger, 1998b:2.

⁶ Susan Granger and Scott Kelly, “The Potential Effect of S.P. 2735-159 on Graeser Park in Robbinsdale (T.H. 100).” Submitted to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2001, 1.1.

⁷ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.6.

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8. Electrical High Line Tower (Noncontributing Structure)

9. Sound Wall (Noncontributing Structure)

10. Chain Link Fence (Noncontributing Structure)

By 2000, an electrical high line tower (8) previously located just outside of the northeastern boundary of the park was moved about 1000 feet to the park boundary that is now at the south end of the sound wall, displacing some shrubs. It is about 150 feet in height ⁸ (Map 3). By 2004 a wood-paneled sound wall (9) was erected along the western edge of the Graeser Park entry peninsula on Bottineau Boulevard, and also along a portion of the TH 100 ramp frontage. It is twenty feet high and about 1,000 feet in length (Photo 4). A chain link fence (10) was installed in ca. 2021 along the right-of-way between the wall and the W. Broadway Bridge (Map 3).

11. ADA-accessible Path (Noncontributing Structure)

12. ADA-accessible Metal Picnic Table (Noncontributing Structure)

13. ADA-accessible Interpretive Sign (Noncontributing Structure)

In 2023 an ADA-accessible concrete path loop (11) was constructed between the W. Broadway Avenue sidewalk (6) and the beehive fireplace. An accessible metal picnic table (12) occupies a concrete pad (Photos 19-20). The table overlooks the north end of the rock garden and connects to the top of the stone steps leading to the garden. The ADA-accessible interpretive sign (13) is located south of the W. Broadway entrance. It was designed by Karen Laukkonen of Laukkonen Design and installed in 2023 (Photo 22).

Table 1. Graeser Park Contributing and Noncontributing Resources. See Maps 3 and 4.

	Map Number and Resource	Classification	Status	Location	Date
	Graeser Park	Site	Contributing	NW side of TH 100 between W. Broadway Avenue (CR 8) and Bottineau Boulevard (CSAH 81, formerly TH 52) in Robbinsdale, Hennepin County	1940-41
1	Stone Overlook Wall	Structure	Contributing	316 feet along Lakeside Avenue N. from vicinity of W. Broadway Avenue entrance	1940-41
2	Rock Garden	Structure	Contributing	Southeast park corner	1940-41
3	Beehive Fireplace	Structure	Contributing	Southeast park corner	1940-41
4 a-k	Picnic Areas, 11 Stone Picnic Tables	Structures	Contributing	Upper and lower park areas	1940-41

⁸ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.5.

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	and Pads				
5	Stone Curbing	Structure	Contributing	Along entry drive	1940-41
6	W. Broadway Avenue Concrete Sidewalk	Structure	Noncontributing	Along W. Broadway Avenue	ca. 2023
7	Stormwater Retention Pond	Structure	Noncontributing	Along TH 100 frontage	ca. 2004
8	Electrical High-Line Tower	Structure	Noncontributing	Along TH 100 ramp from Bottineau Boulevard	ca. 2004
9	Sound Wall	Structure	Noncontributing	Along Lakeland Avenue N. opposite TH 100 ramp from Bottineau Boulevard	ca. 2004
10	Chain Link Fence	Structure	Noncontributing	Along TH 100 ramp and highway frontage	ca. 2021
11	ADA-accessible Path	Structure	Noncontributing	To beehive fireplace and picnic table	2023
12	ADA-accessible Metal Picnic Table	Structure	Noncontributing	North of Rock Garden	2023
13	ADA-accessible Interpretive Sign	Structure	Noncontributing	Southwest side of W. Broadway entrance	2023

Integrity

Graeser Park retains good overall integrity. On its sloping site between TH 100, Bottineau Boulevard, W. Broadway Avenue and Lakeland Avenue N., it is accessed by its original entry points and retains integrity of location. In nearly continuous use as a small roadside park, except during periods of adjacent road reconstruction including 2001-2004, it conveys its association with the adjacent highway as well as surrounding Robbinsdale neighborhoods. Planned for highway access to serve as a rest point for the traveling public and always edged by busy streets or highways, the surrounding neighborhoods have maintained street connection to the park. Views of TH 100 and Bottineau Boulevard, while seasonal in some directions, maintain some of the intention of the roadside park design that was originally intended to face a cloverleaf, and retain a good level of the qualities of setting and feeling.

The grass-covered park is sheltered by a mature tree canopy and retains its original pattern of circulation and most of its original stone furnishings, with overall good integrity of design. The park design and most of the furnishings are exemplary of the principles of the Rustic Style recommended to landscape architects for federal relief projects by the National Park Service, one deployed for the TH 100 "Lilac Way" roadside parks completed between 1934 and 1941. The Rustic Style limestone features specified by the park designers, including the overlook wall, rock garden, fireplace, and picnic tables date from the original period of construction. Needed stone restoration has followed Secretary of Interior Standards, and the integrity of materials and workmanship is excellent. With the exception of relocation of the picnic tables that were moved during construction and the loss of a small amount of park area to a new stormwater retention pond, the park structures retain their original locations. Missing historic structures from the original design are the Broadway stone stair, a stone culvert, rubbish bin and privies,

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wooden guardrails at and along park entries, and two wood entry signs.

Graeser Park therefore retains sufficient integrity to support its eligibility for the National Register and to convey its significance as an outstanding example of the National Park Service Rustic Style as executed in 1940-41.

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Summary Statement of Significance

Graeser Park (1940-41) is significant at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Landscape Architecture for its outstanding expression of the National Park Service (NPS) Rustic Style, that characterized federal-relief-era roadside park design in Minnesota. Landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols' naturalistic design conserved the sloping topographical character of the narrow site and some vegetation and introduced compatible new plantings and limestone Rustic Style structures. Views of two new highways were provided, as well as the wooded fringe of Twin Lakes to the east. The structures reflect excellent design and a high level of masonry craftsmanship, all placed in a heavily traveled, unique modern highway setting.

Recent recommendations for evaluation of the significance of this property type were consulted in addition to the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled *Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943* and National Register bulletins. *Minnesota's Trunk Highway Roadside Properties, 1932-1975, a Cumulative Study* (2020) considers the many resources designed and built by the MHD during the federal relief period and provides guidance regarding revised evaluation criteria, excluded property types, property types and categories, areas and periods of significance, property boundaries, and integrity assessment. The authors of the *Cumulative Study* take a more rigorous approach to eligibility than the MPDF currently on record with the Department of Interior.⁸

According to Registration Requirement 4 in the "Waysides and Overlooks" subsection of the MPDF, a roadside development property eligible for the National Register under Criterion C must meet one of three sub-requirements:

- a) It "must be a noteworthy example of the National Park Service Rustic Style or another specific design tradition, or be associated with a significant movement or trend in landscape architecture, or be noteworthy for a particular innovation in landscape design or roadside development design. The design of the site may have superior artistic value. The property may represent one of the few known or few remaining examples of a particular type of structure or category of roadside development property."
- b) "the property must represent the work of highly skilled craftsmen, or display the distinctive use of indigenous materials, or be built using a distinctive or innovative construction or engineering method."

⁸Andrea Pizza, *Minnesota's Trunk Highway Roadside Properties, 1932-1975, a Cumulative Study*. Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2020. Significance under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment and Recreation was considered, but these local activities did not rise to the level necessary for National Register eligibility. Significance under Criterion C, for Graeser Park's association with landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols, was also considered. Nichols' long career encompassed many public and commissions across Minnesota and roadside parks were a focus of his work during the federal relief period. Graeser Park, however, does not singularly represent his accomplishments at the state, regional, or national level, or as the work of a master.

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- c) “the design of the property must be noteworthy within the body of work of an important landscape architect, artist, architect, engineer, or horticulturist.”³

Graeser Park meets registration requirements 4(a) and 4(b) because it is the largest, best-furnished, and only remaining intact example of the original seven parks of the TH 100 Belt Line (known as the Lilac Way), the park remains an outstanding example of the Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) and Roadside Development Department’s (RDD) roadside parks in this period.⁹

As recommended for federal-relief projects by the National Park Service, the style emphasized preservation of natural topography and scenery, and retention of extant plant materials. Construction of new structures relied on the use of natural materials such as stone and wood, and required labor-intensive handwork modeled on “pioneer craftsman” construction techniques. The Consulting Landscape Architect, Arthur R. Nichols, created a naturalistic design that conserved the topographical character of the narrow, sloping site and some existing vegetation, and provided views of two new highways as well as the wooded fringe of Twin Lakes to the southeast. The plan introduced compatible new plantings and Rustic Style structures. During this period Nichols was nationally recognized for his efforts to create scenic roads that also reflected modern highway engineering principles.

Graeser Park retains its restored, Rustic Style beehive fireplace and a complex rock garden, a 320-foot limestone overlook wall with a lookout bay, and limestone picnic tables on stone pads, all skillfully arranged around a wide, mowed-turf “bowl” that provided views across the TH 100 – Belt Line and Highway 52.¹⁰ Much of the character of the historic bowl remains despite 2001-2004 retention pond construction.

The overlook was furnished with a stone wall that included a broad, Mifflin limestone-paved lookout bay. The park site was planted with a variety of trees and flowering shrubs, and demonstrates the ways in which existing topography, views, and access points were tailored to the requirements of the jigsaw pattern of the Belt Line roadside park sites. The ramp along Bottineau Boulevard (the former TH 52 constructed in the early 1930s), has nearly twice the length of the TH 100 frontage, a situation which Nichols controlled to offer a tree-framed panorama of both highways.¹¹

Graeser Park constitutes “the largest collection of A. R. Nichols-designed stone structures of any

⁹ The reconstruction of TH 100 in the early 2000s resulted in razing and/or alteration of the seven waysides of Lilac Way. Of the original seven, only Graeser Park remains largely intact. Among the others, only a fragment of the original Lilac Park on Minnetonka Boulevard in St. Louis Park remains, and the park is now named “Rock Island.” It includes one of its original two rock gardens. The former St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area is now named “Lilac Park.” It includes a beehive fireplace moved from the original Lilac Park. Rock Island and Lilac Park are owned by the City of St. Louis Park.

¹⁰ Carole Zellie, “Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota Phase II Evaluation.” Prepared by Landscape Research for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2023. Includes Appendix A, “Graeser Park Rock Garden” and Appendix B, “Graeser Park Beehive Fireplace.”

¹¹ TH 52 was later designated CSAH 81 and appears to have been named Bottineau Boulevard in the 1980s.

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roadside park in the state.”¹² The masonry structures feature three types of limestone, and their design and execution displays a high level of craftsmanship and “distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota.”¹³ There is also a sandstone curb. While conceived in the Rustic Style and following naturalistic National Park Service principles, Graeser Park’s unique rock garden, however, also illustrates the landscape architect’s flexibility with the Park Service canon and the contributions of local masons. Placed near the highway, the rock garden provided an unusually ornamental attraction for passing motorists, at a time when many varieties of rock gardens were widely popular for private and public landscapes and had a devoted do-it-yourself following.¹⁴ Similarly, engineer Carl F. Graeser’s beehive fireplace design, with its unique domed form and regularly coursed masonry, presented a very distinctive, eye-catching structure. Of the two surviving along TH 100, the Graeser Park beehive is the only one in its original location.¹⁵

The mature landscape of hardwoods, conifers and shrubs has been maintained with new plantings, including lilacs.¹⁶ The park retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as an outstanding example of a Rustic Style, federal relief-era roadside park planned for beauty as well as function, reflecting National Park Service style guidance as well as Nichols’ principles of “Safety, Good Construction, Economical Maintenance, and Natural Beauty.” The period of significance is the date of construction, 1940-41.

History: Graeser Park and Belt Line Planning

The Minnesota Department of Highways and the Roadside Development Division

The Minnesota Department of Highways (MHD) created the Roadside Development Division (RDD) in 1932. The RDD reflected the effort to expand the national highway system with federal relief funds during the years of a struggling Depression economy and high unemployment. Federal relief programs opened the door to the employment of “hundreds of architects, landscape architects, engineers and others” who worked throughout the U.S. on federal relief-sponsored park development.¹⁷ The RDD was

¹² Susan Granger and Scott Kelly, “The Potential Effect of S.P. 2735-159 on Graeser Park in Robbinsdale (T.H. 100).” Submitted to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2001, 1:9.

¹³ Susan Granger, “Graeser Park (HE-RBC-025) Inventory Form,” *Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways*, 1998b:7.

¹⁴ Granger et al., 1998a:5:41; “Graeser Park Rock Garden.” Appendix A in Zellie, “Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota Phase II Evaluation.” Prepared by Landscape Research for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2023.

¹⁵ “Graeser Park Beehive Fireplace.” Appendix B in Zellie, “Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota Phase II Evaluation.” Prepared by Landscape Research for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2023.

¹⁶ New 2023 plantings included gro-low sumac between the new ADA metal picnic table and the north stone bench, and a mix of perennials in the stone-lined planting beds. Planting is planned for a few small lilacs at the extreme south end of the rock garden at the base of the former stair.

¹⁷ Granger et al., *Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways*. Submitted to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1998a:3.12-13.

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established in anticipation of a requirement by the U.S. Bureau of Roads that a minimum of one-half of one percent of all federal highway funds be spent on roadside development. Engineer Harold E. Olson led the new division. "Improvement of well-traveled highways near major population centers, in part so they could serve as demonstration projects of roadside development work," was encouraged.¹⁸ In their publications, the Bureau noted the need for roadside landscaping in highway construction, and its connection to tourism. They encouraged the expertise of landscape architects and horticulturists in project planning, and recommended "selectively cutting roadside trees to achieve a parklike appearance, creating shoulders with natural contours, storing roadside topsoil during construction for reuse, and softening with plants the harsh line between the road cut and surrounding vegetation."¹⁹

Highway Planning Foundations

By the turn of the 20th century, the national Good Roads movement that had initially advocated for improved roads for cyclists was expanded for the needs of motorists and called for "publicly funded, durable, all-weather, smoothly paved highways."²⁰ The movement grew with steadily increasing vehicle ownership and an interest in recreational automobile touring. Further encouraged by the establishment of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, motorists sought out scenery and recreational destinations that demanded not only better paved roads but standardized highway signage.²¹ A steadily increasing volume of agricultural and freight truck traffic also occupied the fragile system of roadways.

The Minnesota Department of Highways was created in 1917, with Charles M. Babcock (1871–1936) of Elk River as its first commissioner. Babcock was very active in national road building organizations and authored the Babcock Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution (1920) that established the Minnesota Trunk Highway System. Enabling legislation was passed in 1921, and the system included the state's first 70 "Constitutional Routes."²² Creation of a national trunk highway system was made possible by passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1921.²³

Planning for Minnesota's first modern Belt Line Highway in the late 1920s was concurrent with general trunk highway improvement projects and the planning and design of a system of roadside properties for well-traveled scenic routes across the state. The Belt Line encompassed modern highway planning principles that RDD landscape architects and engineers would integrate with National Park Service landscape and design principles, including those recommending naturalistic landscape design and use of the Rustic Style for buildings and structures.²⁴

¹⁸ Granger et al., 1998a:3.3.

¹⁹ Granger et al., 1998a:3.3.

²⁰ Pizza, 11.

²¹ Pizza, 12.

²² *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 28 August 1921:11.

²³ Pizza, 12.

²⁴ Granger et al., 1998a:3.2; Pizza, 21-22.

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Belt Line Planning and Design

Construction for the Belt Line (S.P 100-130-22 & 23) was underway by 1934-5. Financed almost entirely with federal relief funds, it was Minnesota's largest highway construction project undertaken with relief labor and received only one percent of its funds from the state.²⁵

As projected, the future Belt Line loop would incorporate existing roads as well an entirely new segment stretching between CR 5 in Edina and TH 52 in Robbinsdale. (TH 52 is now Bottineau Boulevard – CSAH 81). The Belt Line was regarded as a model of modern highway design and became an important component of Twin Cities economic development.²⁶

Planners announced that the Belt Line would “drain Minneapolis traffic from many points in the city and permit incoming traffic to find an open and safe radial route directly to any section of Minneapolis, St. Paul, or South St. Paul.”²⁷ All project labor for the highway and parks, including masonry work, was supplied by the Works Progress Administration (WPA, after 1939 the Work Projects Administration). Initially funded by the Economic Recovery Act (ERA) during a period of high unemployment, in 1936 it was incorporated into the WPA. The project employed between 2,500 and 3,000 men.²⁸ At the peak of construction in 1937, approximately 1,500 workers were employed daily on the highway construction.²⁹

The need to create a safe, modern highway circling the expanding Twin Cities metropolitan area was increasingly evident to planners as well as motorists. Articles such as “America's Highways Obsolete and Dangerous” were standard features in local newspapers.³⁰ The American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) and the HRB were among state and federal organizations seeking solutions to increased volume and speed on American highways.

Exemplary of safety design practice, the Belt Line design was intended to “avoid the congestion of the city” while providing safe, efficient traffic flow with two 24-foot lanes separated by 30-foot medians, grade separations at railroad crossings and major intersecting highways, cloverleaf connections, and limited access points.³¹ Described as “a highway of extreme width,” it was designed to carry the heaviest traffic of any road entering the city and it was predicted to “change the route of travel into Minneapolis from the northwest, west, and southwest.”³² The seven well-furnished roadside parks could provide rest for motorists as well as gathering spots for local residents. While not conceived as a true

²⁵ Mead & Hunt, *Minnesota Trunk Highways (1921-1954): Historic Context and National Register Evaluation and Integrity Considerations*. Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2016, 40.

²⁶ Granger, 1998b:8.

²⁷ “Splendid Highway Will be Opened Next Spring,” *Hennepin County Review*, December 16, 1937.

²⁸ Granger, 1998b:4.

²⁹ Meyer et al. 78; Granger 1998a:9.

³⁰ “America's Highways Obsolete and Dangerous,” *Minneapolis Star*, September 1, 1936:17.

³¹ *Annual Report of the Minnesota Department of Highways* (1938), 45.

³² “Highway Department Approves ‘Lilac Way’ West of City,” *Minneapolis Journal* 28 July 1935:4.

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parkway, which might have limited the type of vehicles, the divided-lane, generously planted design benefited from early urban parkway designs such as those for New York City developed under Park Commissioner Robert Moses.³³

During the first years of World War II, TH 100 construction ended at TH 52 (present-day Bottineau Boulevard–CSAH 81; Figure 9). Construction resumed by 1942 with a bridge across Twin Lakes. The Graeser Park planting plan (1941; Figure 1) showed a full cloverleaf at TH 52 and TH 100.³⁴ It was never realized, with only a single ramp constructed in 2004.

By 1950, the Belt Line encircled the Twin Cities with 66 miles of roadway. Planning for a broader metropolitan loop that would be part of an interstate system was already underway, however. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 authorized a national system of Interstate Highways intended to connect principal cities and industrial centers. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 resulted in decades of nation-wide Interstate Highway construction.³⁵ In Minnesota, the controlled-access I-94 and I-35 were the first to be completed. By the mid-1960s, MnDOT began plans to upgrade all of TH 100 to freeway standards and conversion was largely complete or underway by the Reconstruction Project completed in 2004. During the expansion of the interstate highway system around the Twin Cities, the Belt Line –TH 100 loop would be replaced by Interstates 494 and 694.³⁶

Introducing Lilac Way

Considering the suburban character of the belt line, a landscaping development in which lilacs form the keynote has possibilities of great beauty.

Consulting Landscape Architect Arthur R. Nichols, *Minneapolis Journal* 28 July 1935:4

The proposed new Belt Line highway construction gathered significant initial public support. The *Minneapolis Journal*, a leading local promoter, guided newspaper coverage in the early 1930s. The initial construction between CR 5 and TH 52 was always called the Lilac Way, and the landscape design and beautification project, combined with a safety program, was an important part of its public introduction. The details of the seven Lilac Way roadside parks were not explained in the original press coverage, since they would have still been under development.

The effort to build and enhance the landscape along the 12.5-mile highway corridor included planting of more than 7,000 lilacs. Designed to create “a drive so beautiful as well as so unusual that it will attract thousands of visitors who will come to the city to enjoy the delightful experience of a ride through its

³³ Bugge and Snow, 41.

³⁴ State of Minnesota, 1941, Sheet 5 of 5.

³⁵ Mead & Hunt, 60-61.

³⁶ St. Louis Park Historical Society, “Highway 100,” 2022.

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fragrant splendor,” beauty and safety were combined.³⁷ More than 420 evergreens, and 37 varieties of deciduous trees, shrubs, and vines were planned. In addition to 1,890 American elm and 9,478 sumac, plantings included 2,487 Persian lilac (*syringa Persico*) and 5,408 common lilac (*syringa vulgaris*).³⁸ This large-scale investment in flowering plants deviated from prior RDD practice, which seldom used flowering species, preferring preservation of native plants and new evergreens.³⁹

Construction began in 1934-5 and was completed as far as TH 52 in 1940-41. Despite World War II, construction resumed to the northwest in the early 1940s because of the location of ordnance plants to the northeast in Fridley and New Brighton, and included the bridge crossing at Twin Lakes opposite Graeser Park.

The National Park Service and the Rustic Style

The RDD and the State Parks Division received support from the National Park Service during the Depression. Consulting Landscape Architect Arthur B. Nichols and other RDD engineers and landscape architects were guided by the agency’s recommendations for the deployment of the Rustic Style. The recommendations encompassed landscapes, structures, and buildings in roadside locations across the state. At the same time the National Park Service was developing park design standards, the agency assisted federal relief projects by supplying architects, landscape architects, engineers and horticulturists as well as other expertise, and set up a short-term office in Saint Paul in 1935-36.⁴⁰ Illustrated NPS publications such as *Park Structures and Facilities* and the three-volume *Park and Recreation Structures* provided plans and design guidance.⁴¹

Graeser Park and the other Belt Line roadside parks exemplified Rustic Style landscape architectural principles as guided by the NPS in the 1930s. Throughout the country, the style “was implemented by hundreds of architects, landscape architects, engineers, and others working throughout the U.S. on federal relief-sponsored park development.”⁴² The style was inspired by diverse sources including the writings of mid-19th-century New York landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing, Adirondack Mountain camps, rustic pioneer log cabins of the West, and Gustav Stickley’s influential periodical, *The Craftsman*.⁴³ Naturalistic landscape principles were further articulated in the 1920s by influential

³⁷ “Highway Department Approves ‘Lilac Way’ West of City,” *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935:4.

³⁸ State of Minnesota, 1941, Sheet 5 of 5.

³⁹ Granger 1998b:9; “Lilac Way Here Soon,” *Minneapolis Journal*, January 30, 1938:2.

⁴⁰ Granger et al., 1998a:3.10-11.

⁴¹ Albert Good, *Park Structures and Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1935); Good, *Park and Recreation Structures* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1935); Linda McClelland, “Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service 1916 to 1942.” National Park Service, Interagency Division, 1993:126-127, 260.

⁴² Granger et al., 1998a:3.13.

⁴³ Linda McClelland, “Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks.” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1995, E:18.

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landscape architects including Henry Hubbard at Harvard University. With Theodora Kimball, Hubbard's *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* was the major textbook advocating the study of nature as the basis for informal or naturalistic landscape gardening."⁴⁴ National Park Service guidelines emphasized preservation of natural topographical contours, existing vegetation, and aquatic features, with landscapes designed to be enjoyed throughout the year. Among the architectural principles of the Rustic Style was reliance on masonry techniques that gave stone structures naturalistic shapes and uneven, textured surfaces, with an avoidance of symmetry and rigid, straight lines. Plantings were used to integrate structures with their settings, while avoiding the appearance of new installations by avoiding linear planting arrangements.⁴⁵ Adoption of the National Park Service Rustic Style declined after World War II, in part because the large federal-relief workforce was no longer available to execute the "hand-built, labor-intensive designs."⁴⁶ Pizza notes that the "Rustic style lost its de rigueur status in favor of a Modern aesthetic featuring a functional orientation, avoidance of unnecessary ornamentation or other extravagances of detail, clean simplicity of line, and an embracement of alternative building technologies and materials."⁴⁷

Arthur R. Nichols

The landscape design of the Belt Line and its roadside parks is credited to Consulting Landscape Architect Arthur R. Nichols (1881-1970). In 1902, Nichols was the first graduate of the landscape architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he also trained as a civil engineer. He partnered with landscape architect Anthony Morell (1875-1924) in 1909. During the 1930s he was recognized for his previous decades of private, municipal and institutional planning and landscape design as Morell & Nichols. Named a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) in 1915, in 1933 he became the first registered landscape architect in Minnesota.⁴⁸ Nichols was among the very first 20th-century landscape architects to bring architectural and engineering training to professional practice. Beginning in the early 1920s, Morell & Nichols worked for the University of Minnesota and Nichols and the firm served as campus master planners during the following decades. They used their skill in topographic analysis to site schools, hospitals, prisons, and other state buildings for the State Board of Control. Nichols was involved in national organizations devoted to landscape architecture and transportation planning, including the ASLA and the Highway Research Board (HRB).

Between 1932 and 1940 Nichols was teamed with chief highway department engineer, Harold E. Olson, project engineer Carl F. Graeser (1875-1944), and staff landscape architect Fred Vogt (1903-1985). Olson "coordinated, reviewed, approved, and directed" the state's roadside development projects and

⁴⁴ McClelland, 1995, E:19.

⁴⁵ Granger et al., 1998a:3.12-13.

⁴⁶ Granger et al., 1998a:3.13.

⁴⁷ Pizza, 23.

⁴⁸ Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Arthur R. Nichols," 2022.

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served as a conduit to the HRB and other national and state groups.⁴⁹ Graeser joined the MHD in 1922 and became known as the “Father of the Belt Line.” In addition to his design and construction supervision for the highway, he is credited with promoting the Belt Line concept and its funding, personally taking the idea to Governor Floyd B. Olson. He is also credited with the design of the parks’ distinctive beehive fireplaces.⁵⁰ Minneapolis mason John J. Schulte of B. Schulte & Sons (1862-1946) was the chief project stone cutter and draftsman.⁵¹

“Consulting Landscape Architect”

Nichols joined the RDD in 1932 with the title “Consulting Landscape Architect.” In 2001, Adella (Peggy) Nichols Andersen explained that her father took this assignment because there was very little work for landscape architects after the 1929 stock market crash. She remembered, “there was a Depression, and in the ‘30s, there were not these large estates that he and Mr. Morell originally did. And he realized that he was not going to have the type of work that he had had previously. So, he went to work for the Highway Department in 1932.”⁵²

Nichols appears to have focused on the RDD roadside work for most of the decade. His former firm, by that time Nichols, Nason & Cornell with the addition of Harvey H. Cornell and George Nason after Anthony Morell’s death in 1924, remained in practice. Reuben W. Law (1898-2005) joined the firm in the late 1920s but left in 1935 to become Deputy Director of the Minnesota Division of State Parks and to work for the National Park Service.⁵³

Nichols “is believed to have designed most of the division’s scenic overlooks, picnic areas, and historical markers during the 1930s, and helped formulate the division’s early policies and goals.”⁵⁴ Between 1932 and the early 1940s, Nichols signed and is credited with at least 63 of the roadside development projects completed by the MHD.⁵⁵ The projects included waysides, scenic overlooks, and historical markers. Eleven of these properties have been listed in the NRHP. No drawings for certain types of structures, including the Graeser rock garden, appear to have been prepared, and their masonry design and details would likely have been left to skilled masons.

The contributions by Arthur R. Nichols to “the landscape of Minnesota highways, roadside development

⁴⁹ Pizza, 35-6.

⁵⁰ Scott B. Meyer, 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., 1995, 79; Granger, 1998b:5.

⁵¹ *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, 18 December 1941.

⁵² “Highway 100 ‘Lilac Drive.’” Twin Cities Public Television (2001).

⁵³ Minneapolis and St. Paul City Directories, 1933-35; Granger 1998a:3.28-29.

⁵⁴ Granger et al., 1998a:3.4; 4.13-13.

⁵⁵ Granger et al., 1998a:4.11-13.

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facilities, and state parks” have been identified in previous historic context studies.⁵⁶ When Nichols joined the RDD in 1932, he had nearly thirty years of national experience across many types of park and transportation planning. Throughout the 1930s he adapted NPS standards to the RDD’s program. The completed Belt Line – TH 100 and its seven parks reflected his evolving highway and landscape design principles, and his published articles and contributions offered important national highway planning models. The largest and last of the waysides to be completed, Graeser Park was placed at what was then the end of the new highway. Apparently sited to conserve a portion of the site’s sloping topography, it was adjacent to a planned cloverleaf and fully furnished with a Rustic Style overlook, rock garden, beehive fireplace and picnic facilities. Graeser Park represented Nichols’ effort to integrate naturalistic principles and the Rustic Style with evolving modern highway design and landscape architectural practice.

In 1935, Nichols’ prominent role on the Belt Line project was highlighted. When the project received final funding approval, his portrait was featured on the front page of the *Minneapolis Journal* with those of Minneapolis Park Superintendent Theodore Wirth and Highway Commissioner N. K. Elsberg (Figure 2).⁵⁷ The *Journal* outlined Nichols’ approach to planting the hardy lilacs, in which he created a naturalistic scheme that did not permit hedges or rows, rather placement in irregular masses against backgrounds of elm, evergreen, and other species. Nichols emphasized that “it would be our purpose to fit the plantings to the natural topography along the highway.”⁵⁸

Although extensive grading was required along the Belt Line route, native vegetation was apparently preserved where possible. Nichols explained, “We are very anxious to preserve all of the natural growth and to make any additions in the way of plantings fit in perfectly with the surrounding growth over which we do not have control.”⁵⁹ Each roadside park was fitted into an existing right-of-way that variously could include buildings, roads, and other features. At the time of the Graeser Park development, for example, several mostly unbuilt subdivisions and the 20-acre estate of the late Andrew and Adelaide Robbins extended from Twin Lakes to W. Broadway Avenue and were adjacent to the park site (Figure 6).

“Stopping Points” and Vehicular Access

The anticipated “stopping point” program for Graeser and the other roadside parks was apparently intended for relaxation and casual picnicking. As noted in the MHD’s 1938 *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development*,

⁵⁶ Granger et al., 1998a:3.4-6; 3.29; Pizza, 36.

⁵⁷ “Highway Department Approves ‘Lilac Way’ West of City,” *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935:1.

⁵⁸ “Highway Department Approves ‘Lilac Way’ West of City,” *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1935:4.

⁵⁹ “Belt Line Road to be Landscaped,” *Minneapolis Journal*, August 1, 1935:10.

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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 traveling 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 and wells and are situated at strategic points along the Belt Line where right of way widths made possible such a development.⁶⁰

Motorists' apparent inconvenient access to several parks, however, appears to have contradicted Nichols' objective of "utility," which he first wrote about for the Highway Research Board in 1937 in connection with "safety" and "landscape beautification." In many cases, the visitor may have been little prepared for quick deacceleration or a sudden turn-off.

The parks were intended for use as stopping places and picnic areas. Aerial views of Graeser Park from the 1940s and 1950s suggest that there may have been formal or informal kittenball or other ball fields along the eastern side of the park (Figures 7, 8). These features do not appear on the original plan (Figure 1), and there is no information about their installation.

The Belt Line's divided roadways, however, were features introduced during a period when traffic volume and speed was possibly more moderate, although by the 1930s many vehicles were capable of at least 60 miles per hour. Each park site was unique, with irregular parcel sizes and topographical characteristics not all entirely ideal for the desired "stopping places." The sites were sometimes constrained by railroad tracks and bridges, or with short sightlines giving motorists little time to safely turn off.

Aerial views of the 1940s show that "easy-on" and "easy-off" from the Belt Line was not a standard feature for some roadside parks, including Graeser. The Belt Line had many at-grade crossings, however, and right- and even left-hand turns provided quick access to parks such as Blazer in Golden Valley, located on the western side of TH 100 immediately southwest of the cloverleaf intersection of TH 100 and TH 55 in Golden Valley (razed). The Minnetonka Boulevard Roadside Parking Area, the original Lilac Park (HE-SLC-013), is located in the northeastern corner of the intersection of TH 100 and Minnetonka Boulevard (CR 5) in St. Louis Park (Figure 3). Bordered on the east side with a residential neighborhood, northbound access from the Minnetonka Boulevard overpass was by a ramp that invited motorists into a parking lot; southbound access is unclear. It is also not clear how the St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area (HE-SLC-017; the "new" Lilac Park) at the southeast corner of the TH 7 and TH 100 cloverleaf near a busy rail corridor, was best accessed. A northbound ramp to TH 7, and a quick turn to the south may have been the most direct route (Figure 4).

"Meet Safety and Utility, and Incorporate Beauty"

⁶⁰ *Annual Report of the Minnesota Department of Highways* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Highways, 1938), 45.

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Concurrent with planning for the Belt Line Highway project that culminated with Graeser Park, Nichols used several national publications to outline his approach and experience with Minnesota roadside and other projects. In 1937, he authored "Highway Design: Its Relation to Landscape Objectives," which provided a comprehensive outline of the integration of highway engineering and aesthetic principles.⁶¹ He presented the paper at the HRB's Seventeenth Annual Meeting. The HRB was part of the National Research Council and was created in 1920 to serve as the leading national forum for transportation planning.⁶² In 1932 the HRB defined the term "roadside development" and subsequently conducted research and professional education on all aspects of the topic.⁶³

Nichols' 1937 article emphasized early integration of landscape architecture into roadside planning and new highway design. He noted that "highway design has been concerned essentially with engineering objectives in the scientific solution of grading, paving, alignment, profile, cross section, drainage and maintenance problems."⁶⁴ He argued that these were important but were incomplete in their relation to the natural landscape. Nichols encouraged highway designers to "meet safety and utility but to aim for ideals in the realm of landscape objectives and incorporate beauty in the completed structure." He offered eight principles including "the desirability of taking advantage of the outstanding opportunities for the creation of concourses, outlooks, picnic areas and parking spaces wherever such development is justified by scenic interest and public use." He noted that highway design should address utilitarian objectives, but with the increasing tourist travel, "we should recognize as a desirable part of the highway design, the landscape objective of providing stopping places for full appreciation of areas of commanding view, and for suitable rest and recreation."⁶⁵

The Complete Highway

The design of the complete highway must take into consideration all the ramifications of the many types of rural and urban land-use which form the background of the regional or metropolitan master plan. Local roads, express highways and freeways, and the satellite parking facilities, waysides, flight strips, etc., are all to be given a place in the designing of a system of complete highways.

Arthur R. Nichols, et al. "Report of Subcommittee on Roadside Design" (1943)⁶⁶

⁶¹ Arthur R. Nichols, "Highway Design: Its Relation to Landscape Objectives." *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Highway Research Board*, December 1937.

⁶² W. A. Bugge and W. Brewster Snow, "The Complete Highway." In W. Brewster Snow, ed., *The Highway and the Landscape* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1959), 18.

⁶³ Highway Research Board, *The Art and Science of Roadside Development: A Summary of Current Knowledge* (Washington D.C.: Highway Research Board, 1966), 1.

⁶⁴ Nichols, 1937, 269.

⁶⁵ Nichols, 1937, 275.

⁶⁶ Arthur R. Nichols et. al., *Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Highway Research Board Held at Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago, Illinois November 27-30, 1943*. Highway Research Board *Proceedings*, 23:258-263.

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Nichols' 1937 article appears to have provided background for development of the "Complete Highway" term adopted by the HRB in 1943. The term was adopted to "describe succinctly the importance of blending into a highway the important elements of design, construction, and maintenance." The Complete Highway needed to incorporate "utility, safety, beauty, and economy."⁶⁷

In 1943 Nichols served as Chairman of the HRB's Roadside Design and Development Committee and authored the report that appeared in the *Proceedings of the Highway Research Board*.⁶⁸ The report illustrated how the Complete Highway and a high standard of landscape design in highway development were central to the master plan for "city, town, or rural region."⁶⁹ The report looked toward the future of freeway construction, and had been influenced by Nichols' recent Belt Line experience. Looking forward to the post-World War II period, he noted

Congestion, obsolescence and decay must give way to light, air, orderliness and adequate environments. This can be accomplished only by scientific planning and scientific planning can only result where the research necessary for master plan development broadens to the complete city and the regional area served by a complete transportation system. The design of the complete highway is thus far reaching and involves coordination of traffic needs with scenic and aesthetic values. Completeness is only resultant from design and design must aim to fulfill not only utilitarian needs but to incorporate beauty in its structure.

Nichols' national prominence in freeway planning and research reflected his experience with the MDH and the multi-year Belt Line planning and design process that included the design of Graeser Park.

Graeser Park: Best Enjoyed from Bottineau Boulevard

Bottineau Boulevard (TH 52 – CSAH 81) and the vehicle ramp to TH 100 edge the northeast side of Graeser Park, and W. Broadway Avenue is on the west side. W. Broadway retains the altered but approximate alignment of a mid-19th century route between Minneapolis and Osseo, and various atlases and maps confirm that the names "Bottineau Prairie Road" and "Bottineau Road" are associated with W. Broadway Avenue and not Bottineau Boulevard.⁷⁰ W. Broadway was designated in 1917 as part of the Jefferson Highway.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Highway Research Board, 1966:1-2.

⁶⁸ Nichols et al., Highway Research Board 1943, 258-263.

⁶⁹ Fred Burggraf, ed. *Reports and Special Papers Presented at the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting, November 1943* Highway Research Board, Roadside Development. Committee on Roadside Development (Washington, D.C., 1944), 5.

⁷⁰ P. M. Dahl, *Atlas of Hennepin County, Minnesota* (Northwestern Map Publishing, Minneapolis, 1898); C. M.

Foote, *Map of Ramsey and Hennepin Counties with Adjacent Portions of Anoka, Wright, Carver, Scott, Dakota and Washington Counties, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: C. M. Foote, 1890).

⁷¹ William Stark and Greg Mathis, *Phase I and II Architectural History Survey for the County State Aid Highway 81 (Bottineau Road) Reconstruction Project, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Maple Grove, Osseo and Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota*. Prepared by the 106 Group for the Hennepin County Transportation Department, 2007, 14.

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In the early 1930s, MHD acquired land for the new segment of TH 52 between Minneapolis, Osseo, and St. Cloud and the route was authorized in 1933.⁷² (Near Graeser Park this segment is now Bottineau Boulevard – CSAH 81) Road construction was complete by the time of Graeser Park development. The project was exemplary of Minnesota trunk highway improvement and new construction during the Depression, when “the MHD was able to complete many alignment and grade improvements and surfaced the vast majority of the Trunk Highway System, as well as cooperating with federal-relief programs to construct projects that served automobile tourists and alleviated urban congestion.”⁷³

Graeser Park was not designed to be directly accessible from TH 100, but only from W. Broadway Avenue and Highway 52. The park entrance at the intersection of 47th Street N. and Lakeland Avenue N. was marked by a Rustic Style sign (razed). Motorists northbound on the Belt Line would have quickly passed the park before making an at-grade, left-hand turn on Highway 52; southbound motorists would have made a right-hand turn. Views of the park from the Belt Line were not impeded by the Bottineau Boulevard (Highway 52) overpass until bridge completion in 2004. The park would have been in full view for the southbound drivers and, depending on road elevation, also from Bottineau Boulevard and the southbound ramp back to the Belt Line. Southbound Belt Line motorists, however, could not directly access the W. Broadway entrance (Figure 5). Local access on the east side of the park was from W. Broadway Avenue.

Therefore, although the advertised focus was on Belt Line or “Lilac Way” improvements, aerial views show at about the same time as Graeser Park was constructed, the new TH 52 was planted with street trees as far as 53rd Avenue N. (Figures 7-9). With the entrance sign at 47th Street, TH 52 was clearly designed as the principal park approach.

Graeser Park and Highway Reconstruction after 1959

Only 4-acre Graeser Park and portions of two other Lilac Way parks remain. The pressure to upgrade the highway was already evident by 1959, when the Glenwood Roadside Parking Area in Golden Valley, a small, sloping park at the northwest corner of TH 100 and Glenwood Avenue, was eliminated for lane widening. The Excelsior Boulevard Roadside Park, at the northwest corner of Highway 100 and Excelsior Boulevard in St. Louis Park, was removed in 1969 for new highway construction. To the north, the 2.72-acre St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area (HE-SLC-017) at the southeastern corner of Highway 7 and TH 100, is now named (the new) Lilac Park. It was reconstructed with original and relocated features from other Lilac Way sites including the beehive fireplace from the original Lilac Park. The original 4.96-acre Lilac Park (HE-SLC-013), northeast of the Minnetonka Boulevard and TH 100 intersection, is still partially extant. It retains one of its two original rock gardens. The remaining rock garden is about half the size of that at Graeser Park. This park is now informally called “Rock Island Park” to differentiate it from the re-named “new” Lilac Park (formerly the St. Louis Park

⁷² Steve Riner, “Minnesota Highways,” 2022.

⁷³ Mead & Hunt, 37.

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Roadside Parking Area (HE-SLC-017) at Highway 7 and TH 100.

Blazer Park (razed 1997) occupied a 3-acre site at Lilac Drive and Highway 55 near TH 100 in Golden Valley. Graeser Park South (razed 2001) was about 1.75 acres located southwest of Graeser Park. Separated by railroad tracks and W. Broadway Avenue, Graeser Park and Graeser Park South were apparently not connected by any formal pedestrian walkway under the BNSF and W. Broadway bridges. Retaining walls at TH 100 and TH 55 and the TH 100 Culvert (Bridge 5442) have also been razed.

TH 100 construction was stalled at the intersection with TH 52 for a short period during World War II but resumed to the northwest in the early 1940s because of the location of ordnance plants to the northeast in Fridley and New Brighton. Construction continued with a bridge across Twin Lakes. Its replacement, Bridge 27288, dates from 2003.⁷⁴ In 1975, turning lanes were added to the intersection of TH 100 and Bottineau Boulevard (CSAH 81), followed in 1984 by realigned ramps at the intersection, which slightly increased the acreage at the northeastern corner of the park.⁷⁵

2001-2004 Reconstruction Project

The major 2001-2004 TH 100 Reconstruction included reconstruction of the TH 100 and Bottineau Boulevard – CSAH 81 intersection, reconstruction of the southbound ramp from CSAH 81 to TH 100, replacement of the W. Broadway Avenue and BNSF bridges and widening of W. Broadway Avenue (Figure 11).

By 2000, the southbound ramp from CSAH 81 to TH 100 was decommissioned, and by 2002 a temporary bypass lane was constructed through the eastern and southern portions of the park, encroaching on both the eastern and southern picnic table groupings as well as resulting in loss of shrubs and trees. The park was also used for construction material staging and the extant stone picnic tables were removed, and parts were salvaged off-site. By 2004 an approximately 50-foot-wide, two-lane entrance ramp was completed just outside the northern two-thirds of the park boundary before it crossed the former park boundary at the southern end, an area previously occupied by picnic tables as well as tree-planted areas.⁷⁶ Some of the ramp, however, occupied the area previously reserved for the northwest corner of the unbuilt cloverleaf. The boulevard-like park extension to the north, terminating at 47th Street N., has been widened at some points (Figure 12).

TH 100 was increased from four to six lanes, with reduction of the central median allowing for most of the needed area. There was minimal widening of the outside edges of the highway, and retention of its approximate elevation past the park.⁷⁷ CSAH 81 was raised over TH 100 on an overpass structure

⁷⁴ Minnesota Department of Transportation, Bridge Interactive Map, 2023.

⁷⁵ Granger 1998, 4; Meyer et. al 1995:64, 69.

⁷⁶ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.5.

⁷⁷ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.4.

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(Bridge 27203). The overpass replaced an at-grade crossing served with stoplights. CSAH 81 was elevated about 25 feet and a partial cloverleaf constructed at the northeast corner of the intersection. The original Graeser Park plan showed an elevated overpass as part of a proposed cloverleaf (Figure 1).⁷⁸

The 2001-2004 TH 100 Reconstruction included raising of a portion of W. Broadway Avenue adjacent to the southern half of the park about two feet and widening the roadway about 60 feet. Two 10-foot shoulders and two sidewalks were added. Loss of park area and trees and shrubs resulted, as well as filling of the slope over the western stone stairway. The steep slope between W. Broadway Avenue and the Graeser Park rock garden was recontoured (Figure 16). The water line that supplied the rock garden was also interrupted.⁷⁹ The condition of the western stairway and a remaining retaining wall under the fill is unknown. The ca. 1940 W. Broadway overpass bridge over TH 100 was replaced in 2001 (Bridge 27170). The new bridge is about two feet higher than the previous bridge.⁸⁰ The ca. 1940 BNSF overpass bridge over TH 100 (1940), south of the W. Broadway Bridge, was replaced in 2001 (Bridge 27286). The rehabilitation of the Graeser Park landscape and structures by MnDOT began in 2021 and was completed in 2024.

Although highway reconstruction has reshaped portions of the eastern and southern edges of Graeser Park, the restored 4-acre park remains a noteworthy National Park Service Rustic Style landscape that includes a distinctive beehive fireplace and a rock garden. As such, the property meets Registration Requirement 4(a) and 4(b) in the "Waysides and Overlooks" subsection of the MPDF and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

⁷⁸ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.4.

⁷⁹ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.6-7.

⁸⁰ Granger and Kelly, 2001:1.6-7.

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Minneapolis Journal

Minneapolis Star

Minneapolis Sunday Tribune

Minneapolis Tribune

Robbinsdale Post

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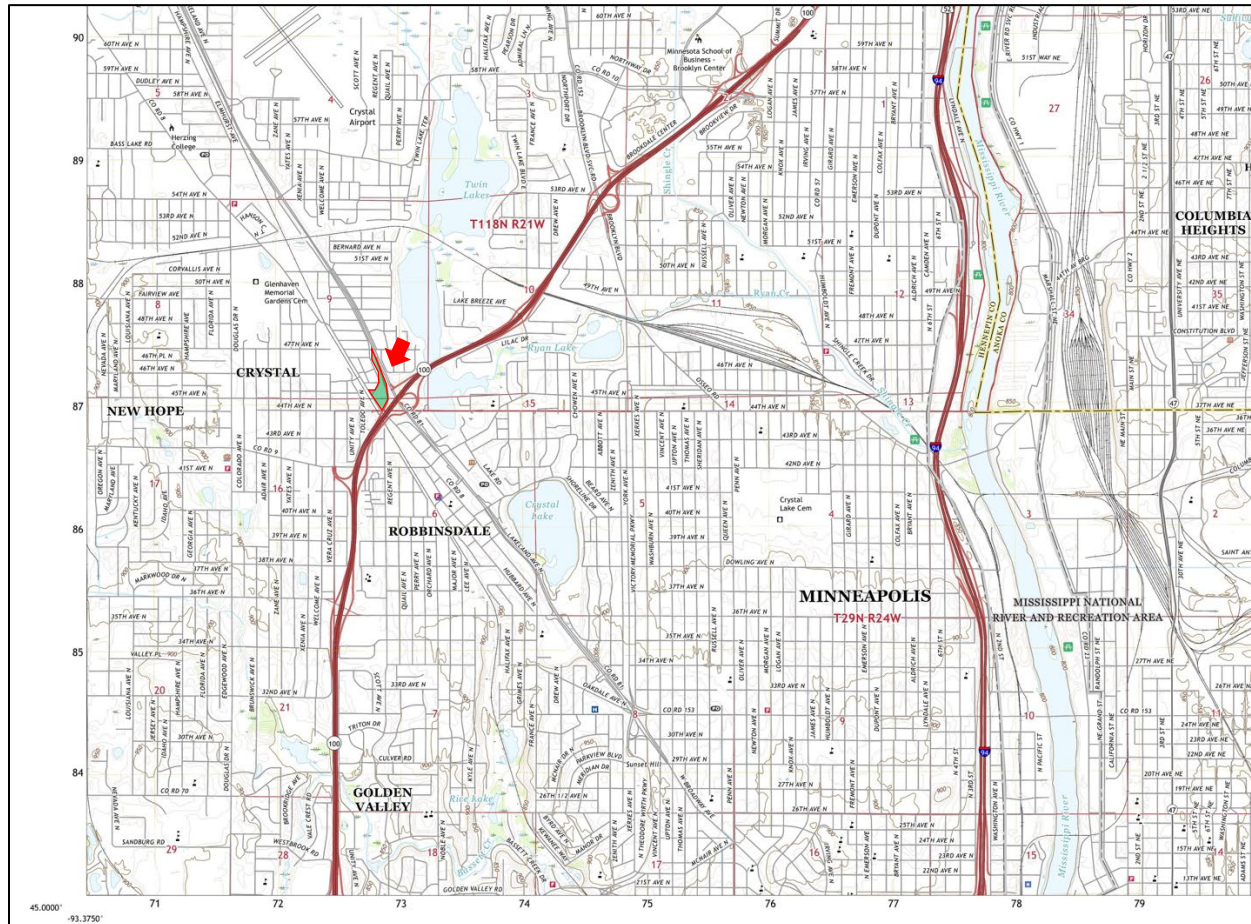
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USGS 2022



Map 1. Graeser Park. Minneapolis North, MN 2022.

N ▲

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Google Earth 2023



Map 2. Location Map. Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota.

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Map 3. Graeser Park Site Plan, 2024. (Google Earth 2023)

Map Number and Resource			
	Graeser Park	9	Sound Wall
1	Overlook Wall	10	Chain Link Fence
2	Rock Garden	11	ADA-accessible Path
3	Beehive Fireplace	12	ADA-accessible Metal Picnic Table
4 a-k	11 Picnic Tables and Pads	13	ADA-accessible Interpretive Sign
5	Stone Curbing		
6	W. Broadway Avenue Concrete Sidewalk		
7	Stormwater Retention Pond		
8	Electrical High-Line Tower		

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Map 4. Graeser Park Site Plan, peninsula and entrance.

Map Number and Resource	
9	Sound Wall

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▲ Map 5. Location and Direction of Photographs 1, 3-22.
(Google Earth 2023)

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N▲ Map 6. Location and Direction of Photograph 2.
(Google Earth 2023)

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N ▲

Map 7. UTM Coordinates. Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota.

	UTM Coordinates UTM 15 NAD 83
1	472771.31E, 498744.39N
2	472846.35E, 4987184.50N
3	472880.58E, 4987187.72N
4	472778.27E, 4987074.88N
5	472906.30E, 4987073.49N
6	472857.09E, 4986946.64N
7	472737.07E, 498713960N

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Figures

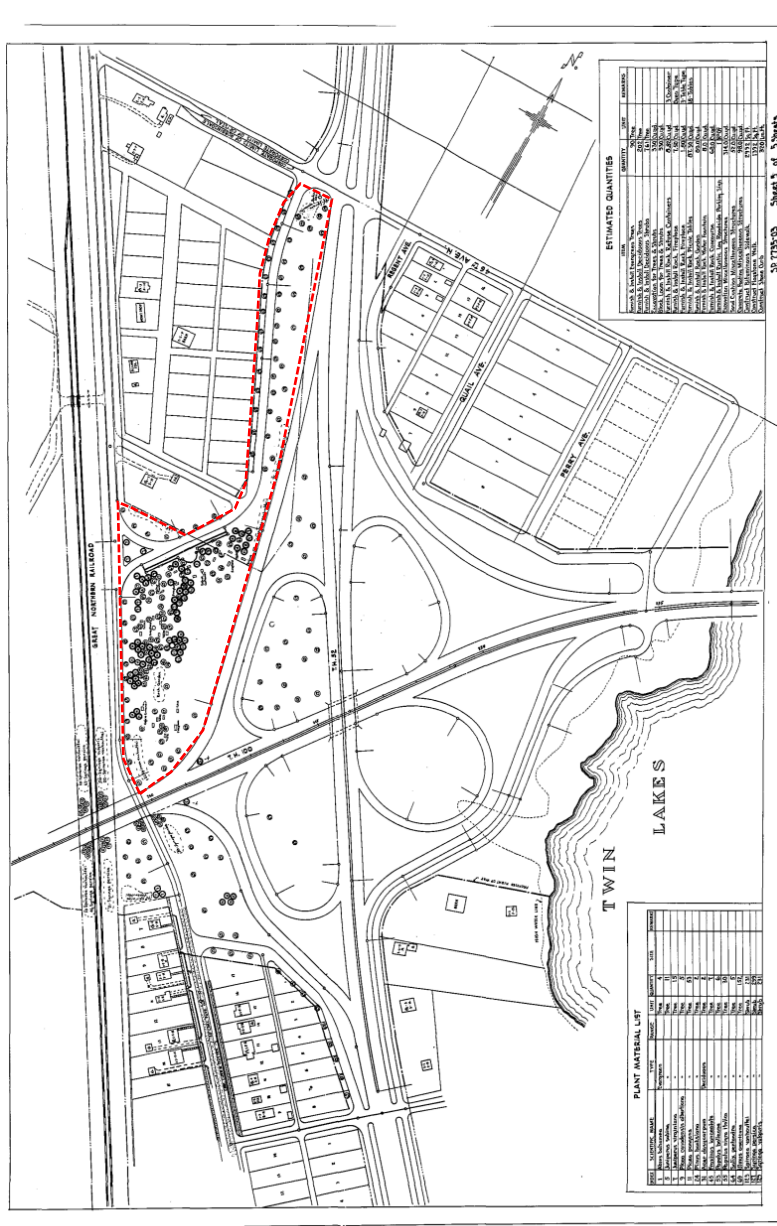


Figure 1. Graeser Park (red dashed outline). Planting Plan, 1941. State of Minnesota Department of Highways. Roadside Development Plans. Trunk Highway No. 100-130. SP 2735-03. Sheet 5 of 5.

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THE MINNEAPOLIS JOURNAL
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN., SUNDAY, JULY 28, 1935.

Highway Department Approves 'Lilac Way' West of City




Journal's Plan for Beautifying Belt Line OK'd
Ready to Start Work if Public Wants It, Says
Elsberg

FLOWERS PLANNED TO LINE SIX-LANE ROUTE
Landscaping First of Kind, Rivaling Washington Cherry Drive

By RUDOLPH LEE

Twelve miles of lilacs, fringing the magnificent six lane belt line highway being constructed just west of the city limits from Robbinsdale to the Fort Snelling-Shakopee road.

A beautifully landscaped lilac hedge on both sides of the great highway that will give Minneapolis a drive that will rival the cherry blossoms of Washington, the apple blossom drive of Spokane and Wenatchee.

The state highway department Saturday approved the proposal, conditioned only on public interest in the plan.

For weeks The Journal has been studying the feasibility of the project, the adaptability of lilacs for the purpose, and programs of maintaining the lilac drive after once installed.

The state highway department is in heavy approval of the plan and it will be carried out if Minneapolis citizens endorse the plan and really want it.

Six Lane Wide

The belt line, which is to be a magnificent scenic highway in itself, six lanes wide with space on each side 70 feet wide, lends itself ideally, experts say, to the beautification plan. The landscaping will take advantage of the high slopes and broad curves of the road for a background of trees and grass. The lilacs in clusters, and groups will fill in to complete the picture.

It is hoped that planting can begin this fall. Within two years, it is then predicted, Minneapolis will have a drive so beautiful as well as so unusual that it will attract thousands of visitors who will come to the city to enjoy the delightful experience of a ride through its fragrant splendor.

Rivals Washington Drive

Minneapolis lilac way as planned has promise of rivaling the famous cherry blossom drive in Washington, known the world over for its beauty and charm. In some years, more than a hundred thousand visitors come to Washington to enjoy the sight of the Japanese cherry trees in bloom. So great is the attractiveness of the cherry tree drive that excursions are run to the city from wide areas and "cherry blossom time" in the national capital, although only 10 days in length.

Continued on page 4

'Human Cannon Ball' Killed in California
By United Press

Santa Monica, Calif., July 27. — The body of William C. Miller, 34-year-old New York driver, was found wedged under the pulley of a pair here today. The "human cannon ball" lost his life when shot from a huge gun.

1,700 Guests of Journal Have Happy Day on River
Good Ship Capitol Bears Bloomington Avenue Folk on Fifth of Excursion Series

Pictures on Page 6

Summer time on the river. Green, arm and grey-haired mothers, banks slipping away into motionless water. White cliffs standing alert against the sky. Fluffy clouds reflected on the surface.

Summer time on the river—and more than 1,700 guests of The Min-

When they climbed on the street-

Weather for Week

For the region of the Great Lakes—Seasonable temperatures first of week, followed by warmer; generally fair beginning of week, showery conditions by middle of week.

For the upper Mississippi and lower Missouri valleys and the northern and central Great Plains—Temperatures mostly above normal.

1,500 to Play in Park Fete This Week
"In a King's Garden" Will Be Offered Tuesday and Wednesday

Pictures on Page 4

A child's dream will be unfolded on the shores of Lake Harriet next Tuesday evening. That fantastic revelation will be the first performance of the all-city pageant of the parks, "In a King's Garden," which will be presented by 1,500 children in Lippitt park near the Rose Gardens Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

Flowers, tops and kites will be given life by the children in gaily colored costumes, while frogs, turtles, birds, cats, dogs and elephants will do funny little dances.

The story of the pageant is similar to any child's dream after last-

THEODORE WIRTH
Superintendent Minneapolis Parks

"A fine addition to the community's parkway system and a driveway in which the citizens of Minneapolis can take much pride and pleasure."

N. W. ELSBERG
Commissioner of Highways

"If the project is developed successfully, and I see no reason why that is not possible, it should attract wide attention within a few years."

A. R. NICHOLS
Highway Landscape Architect

"Considering suburban character of the belt line, a landscaping development in which lilacs form the keynote has possibilities of great beauty."

The Belt Line highway under construction from Highway No. 4, the Fort Snelling-Shakopee road, to Robbinsdale. It parallels the city about a mile west of the west city limits. The map shows all intersecting highways running into Minneapolis. The top picture shows how the highway will appear when the proposed beautification project is completed. The 12 mile road would be banked on either side by hedges of lilacs, giving Minneapolis the only "lilac-way" in the country. The picture was prepared by Harry Poague, Journal staff photographer, by superimposing pictures of lilacs in Lippitt park on a picture of the Belt Line under construction near Robbinsdale. Below:—The "cannon ball" pass, two of which are included in the plans for the highway. One is to be built at the intersection of the highway and Excelsior boulevard and the other at the intersection of Wagstaff boulevard. The "cannon ball" pass eliminates all left hand turns.

Figure 2. "Highway Department Approves Lilac Way West of City."
Minneapolis Journal 28 July 1935:17.

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Figure 3. Minnetonka Boulevard Roadside Parking Area (Lilac Park, now "Rock Island Park"), at arrow, St. Louis Park, 1945. MHAPO

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**Figure 4. St. Louis Park Roadside Parking Area at arrow (now the “new” Lilac Park),
St. Louis Park, 1945. MHAPO**

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Figure 5. TH 100 at W. Broadway Bridge, looking west,
1958. Graeser Park is at right. MHS, Norton & Peel Photo

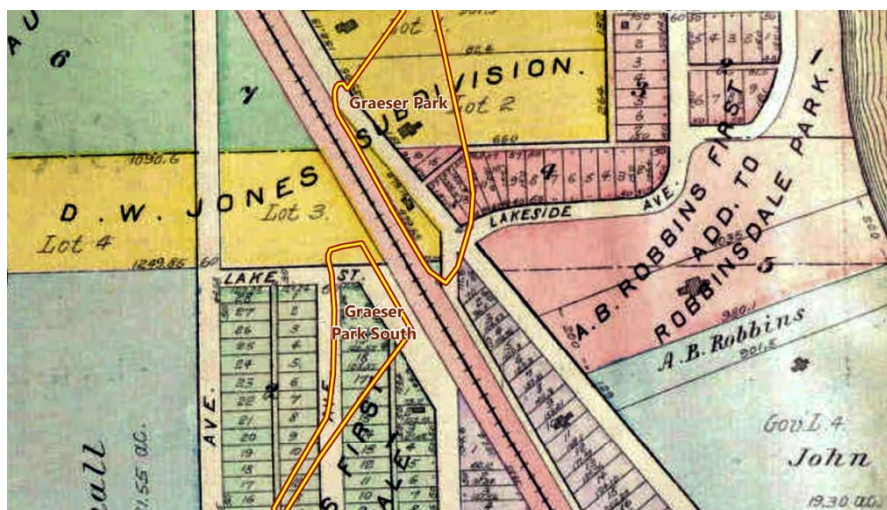


Figure 6. A. B. Robbins Addition to Robbinsdale Park, partial park outline
shown. Dahl 1898

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Figure 7. Detail of Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota, 1945. MHAPO

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Figure 8. Graeser Park, Robbinsdale, Hennepin County, Minnesota, 1956. MHAPO

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Figure 9. Looking northeast over Graeser Park and Graeser Park South (razed), Belt Line Highway/Lilac Way, 1941. Highway construction did not resume until ca. 1943. MnDOT

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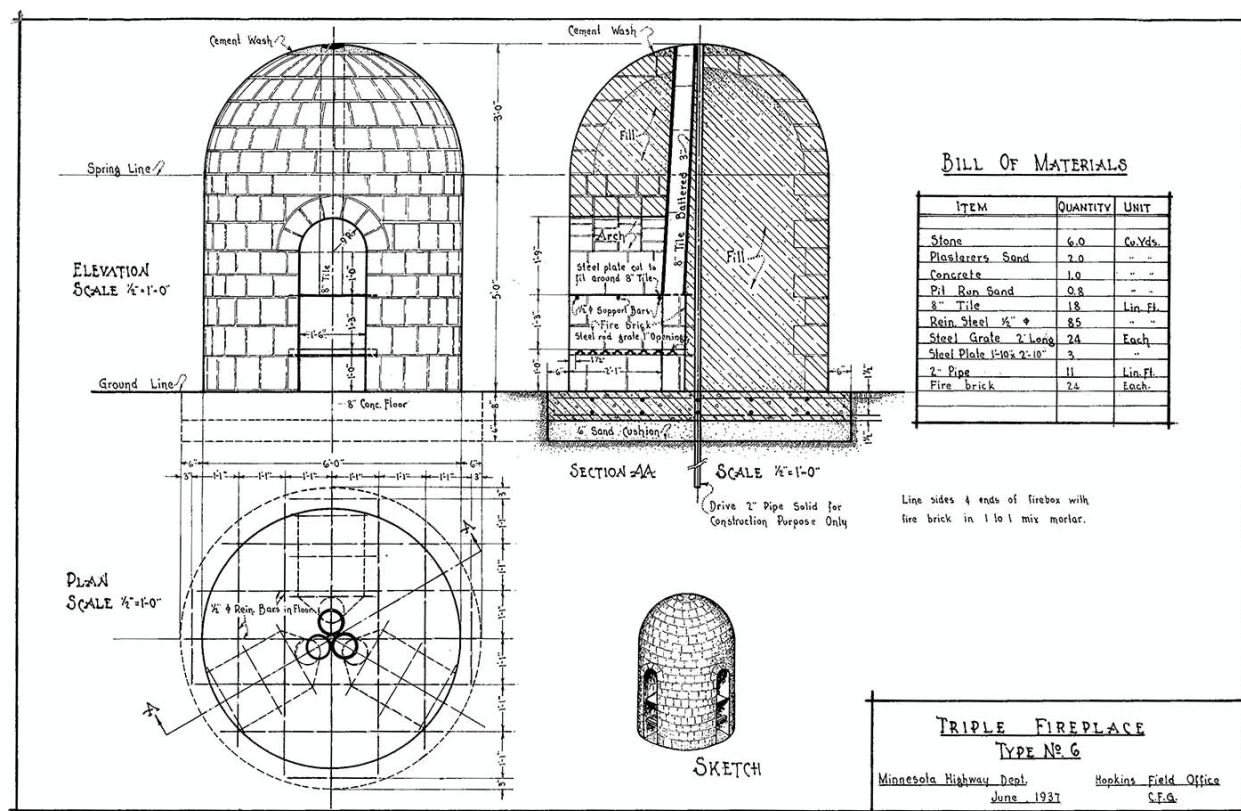
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Figure 10. Minnesota Highway Department. Carl F. Graeser,
Triple Fireplace Type, No. 6, June 1937. MnDOT

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Figure 11. TH 100 ramp in 2002 (left) and temporary bypass ramp (right) in 2004.
Hennepin County GIS

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**Figure 12. New TH 100 ramp and partial cloverleaf,
2012. Henn Co. GIS**

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**Figure 13. Graeser Park overlook and picnic and lawn area, facing southwest and W. Broadway, ca. 1942.
Beehive fireplace in background. MnDOT**

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Figure 14. Graeser Park rock garden, looking northeast, ca. 1941. Fountain is in the foreground. The southbound ramp to TH 100 is at right; the overlook wall and privy (razed) are in the background at left. MnDOT

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Figure 15. Graeser Park rock garden, including benches and fountain, looking northwest, 7/18/1940. W. Broadway Avenue, beehive fireplace (extant) and Rustic Style guardrail (razed) are in the background. MnDOT

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Figure 16. Graeser Park, looking west at W. Broadway stair, benches, picnic table, and Rustic Style guardrail (razed) ca. 1940. The stair and slope have been filled in. MnDOT