

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

RA-SPC-2928
CS 6220
Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall

Historic Name Other Name	Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall	CS # SHPO Inv #	6220 RA-SPC-2928
Location	E side of Point Douglas Rd. just S of Highwood Ave.	Hwy District Reference	TH 61 Met E 134.2
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec USGS Quad UTM	St. Paul, City of Ramsey 28N 22W Sec 14 St. Paul East Z15 E498870 N4973230	Acres Rest Area Class	NA
Designer	Minn Dept of Highways (MHD)	SP #	
Builder	Works Progress Administration (WPA)	SHPO Review #	
Historic Use Present Use	Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall Hwy Retaining Wall/ Sea Wall	MHS Photo #	013549.06-11
Yr of Landscape Design	Ca. 1936	MnDOT Historic Photo Album	
Overall Site Integrity	Intact/Slightly Altered		
Review Required	Yes		
National Register Status	Not Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
Historic Context			
List of Standing Structures			
Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	Fieldwork Date
01	Retaining Wall	Ca. 1936	11-02-97
			Prep by
			Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 100
			Prep for
			Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table			
Final Report	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)		

■ **BRIEF**

The Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall is a MHD-built retaining wall that is located on the eastern side of Point Douglas Road (T.H. 61), just south of the intersection of Point Douglas Road and Highwood Avenue.

■ **STANDING STRUCTURES**

Retaining Wall. Built circa 1936 by the WPA. This approximately 235' retaining wall, built of gray, coursed ashlar, striated limestone, retains the wooded bluffs that rise above the eastern side of T.H. 61. (It is located roughly between sta. 178 and sta. 182.) The wall is about 2' thick and is marked at intervals by several piers. Its height varies with the terrain. It is 7' tall at the southern end (which is its tallest point) and about 2'8" tall at the northern end (one of its lowest points). At its southern end, the wall curves sharply to the east to meet a natural limestone bluff. Near its northern end, the wall is interrupted by a 4'-wide set of 10 poured concrete steps that lead up into the yard of a private residence.

It appears that the wall may have originally had a cap (of the same stone) that has eroded away or broken off. Two sections of metal guardrail have been attached to the wall: a 25'-long section has been attached about 92' south of the wall's northern end, and a 78'-long section extends south from the southern end of the wall.

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The wall is located on the eastern side of Point Douglas Road (35' east of the centerline of the northbound lane of T.H. 61), just south of the intersection of Point Douglas Road and Highwood Avenue. (Point Douglas Road diverges from T.H. 61 and becomes solely a city street north of the wall.) The wall retains a wooded bluff which is also a residential neighborhood. Between the wall and the T.H. 61 northbound lane (and separated from the T.H. 61 roadway by a jersey barrier) is an asphalt-paved bicycle path. East of the wall is the grassy yard of the house now numbered 2034 Highwood Avenue (built 1888) and, south of that, the wooded bluff. There are no plantings associated with the site.

■ **SETTING**

The wall is surrounded by wooded bluffs and a residential neighborhood to the east; the T.H. 61 roadway which runs along the base of the river bluff to the west, north, and south; Point Douglas Road north of the wall; and industrial structures in the distance to the west along Pig's Eye Lake and the floodplain of the Mississippi River.

■ **INTEGRITY**

Alterations

Two sections of metal guard rail have been attached to the wall: a 25'-long section about 92' south of the wall's northern end and a 78'-long section extending south from the southern end of the wall.

In general, the wall is intact and retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Notes on Condition

The wall is in poor condition and the limestone is breaking off in layers.

■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

According to the Mn/DOT plan room, no construction logs for Control Section 6220 are available. (Mn/DOT plan room staff indicate that they were apparently either never produced or have been lost.)

This retaining wall was undoubtedly constructed in the mid-1930s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of an extensive improvement of Point Douglas Road leading into St. Paul from the south. Many pages of existing plans (for example, projects such as S.P. 6620-02, S.P. 6620-11, and S.P. 6620-16) specify WPA-built structures such as culverts, sidewalks, curbs, retaining walls, and catch basins along Point Douglas Road.

The Point Douglas Road project is mentioned in a 1937 article on the WPA's accomplishments, which states that:

in the highway program approximately 8,000 miles of roads have been newly constructed, repaired, and improved [by 1937]. . . . Several of the larger projects in the State have been undertaken to correct alignments or provide greater accessibility to metropolitan areas as are illustrated in the work on the Point Douglas Road in Saint Paul and the Belt Line [T.H. 100] project west of Minneapolis ("The WPA Program" n.d.:5-6).

The wall may have been designed by A. R. Nichols who was the Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highways during the 1930s through about 1940. The MHD built highway retaining walls of similar design along T.H. 100 (the Belt Line). (Nichols was Consulting Landscape Architect for the construction of T.H. 100.) A similar wall also stands on T.H. 55 near T.H. 100. (See inventory forms for two sites: T.H. 100 at T.H. 55 Retaining Walls and Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall.) (Other, similar limestone retaining walls also apparently elsewhere on the Metro Area trunk highway system.)

■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

There have apparently been no previous cultural resource reviews of the property.

■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Point Douglas Road Retaining Wall was built circa 1936, probably by the WPA. It is one of 23 properties in this inventory that were built by (or suspected to have been built by) the WPA. The retaining wall apparently represents a standard MHD trunk highway design of the 1930s and 1940s.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommend that the property is NOT ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it does not meet the context registration requirements.

■ **OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

The wall is located very close to the T.H. 61 roadway, which is a very busy, divided highway.

T.H. 61 at this location has been designated part of the Great River Road.

This site may also be associated with local historic contexts established by the City of St. Paul's Heritage Preservation Commission.

■ **REFERENCES**

"The WPA Program in the State of Minnesota." [Name of periodical unknown], January 1937. [Unlabeled photocopy in SHPO federal relief subject file.]

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Point Douglas Road

Point Douglas Road was the first improved road in Minnesota. It was constructed by U.S. Army engineers in 1849 as a military road which began at a place named Point Douglas at the confluence of the Mississippi and the St. Croix Rivers, and then traveled northward toward St. Paul. The same year, 1849, it was one of five Territorial roads authorized by the newly-formed Minnesota Territorial Legislature. The road was also known as the Point Douglas and Fort Ripley Road because it led north from St. Paul along the Mississippi River to Fort Ripley, located a few miles north of Little Falls. Portions of T.H. 61 follow the original route.