



*North facade of Park Rapids Bathhouse. View to southeast.*

**PARK RAPIDS BATHHOUSE:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY  
CITY OF PARK RAPIDS  
HUBBARD COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

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THE FOSTER HOUSE  
100 NORTH FIRST STREET  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55401**

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## INTRODUCTION



*Photograph showing the location of the Park Rapids bathhouse in relation to the Fish Hook River, downtown Park Rapids, Red Bridge Park, Heartland Park, Heartland State Trail, and nearby highways. (Google Earth, photograph)*

The Park Rapids Bathhouse is located in the city of Park Rapids in Hubbard County, Minnesota. Situated on Beach Road on a small inlet on the west shore of the Fish Hook River, it was constructed for use by swimmers during the summer and skaters during the winter.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources plans to extend the Heartland State Trail, a multi-use recreational trail, through nearby Red Bridge Park, past the bathhouse, and into downtown Park Rapids. As part of that plan, Red Bridge Park will be landscaped as a gateway to the city. The bathhouse might be converted into a welcome center for visitors to the Heartland State Trail. Listing the building in the National Register could provide access to funding for such a re-use.



The City of Park Rapids and the Hubbard County Historical Society retained Hess, Roise and Company, historical consultants, to evaluate whether the property qualifies for National Register. In addition to conducting fieldwork at the property on July 30 and 31, 2012, historian Stephanie Atwood completed research in Park Rapids at the City Hall, the Park Rapids Area Library, the Hubbard County Historical Society, and the Assessor's and Recorder's Offices at the Hubbard County Courthouse. She also interviewed area residents knowledgeable about the community's history. Penny Petersen undertook research at the Minnesota Historical Society in Saint Paul and used online sources. Ms. Atwood wrote the following report. The project manager was historian Charlene Roise, a principal of Hess Roise.



*View to northeast showing (l-r) the bathhouse's west and south facades.  
Pipe bicycle rack is at center of west facade.*

## DESCRIPTION

The Park Rapids Bathhouse is a small, stone building northwest of the intersection of Beach Road and Washington Avenue North in Park Rapids. The bathhouse occupies a parcel that consists of the east half of Lot 3 and all of Lot 4 of Block 2 of Gilbert H. Rice's Addition to Park Rapids.

Beach Road runs immediately south of the building, a small parking lot is at its east facade, and a gravel parking area is its west facade. A slope to the north leads directly down to the riverbank. Grass and other vegetation covers the surrounding yard. Small spirea bushes line the property's west boundary. A pipe bike rack is at the bathhouse's west wall.

The bathhouse is situated in Red Bridge Park, a small city-owned park located on the west bank of the Fish Hook River. The park is primarily open land but has some wooded areas. The majority of the park lies northwest of the building on a small peninsula that extends northwest into the river to a pedestrian bridge. On the opposite side of the bridge is Heartland Park, a large community park on a former sawmill site. The park abuts the Heartland State Trail, a forty-nine-mile, multiple-use recreational trail in a converted



*Detail showing stonework and soffit.*

railroad corridor. At this time, the trail continues south from the park over a former railroad trestle before ending at First Street (Minnesota Highway 34). West of the bathhouse, Beach Road intersects with Park Avenue North, which is also U.S. Highway 71. Commercial development, primarily restaurants and parking lots, is south of the building.

### Exterior

Constructed in 1935–1936 and displaying the New Deal “Rustic Style,” the building is 60' x 30' in size with 9'-high walls on its long facades. It is one story in height with walls of local fieldstone. Both the north and south facades, which are the long facades, are seven bays wide. On both facades, the central bay contains a door, while the outer bays each hold a single window. The entrances originally had transom windows, but the transom at the south entrance appears to have been removed. The north facade has a double-door entrance with concrete steps, designating it as the primary facade.

The window openings are small and sit high in the wall. All openings have thick concrete sills and lintels. The windows on the north, east, and south facades are the original six-light, wood-frame, hopper windows. Some sashes have been removed, and some openings infilled or covered with wood. The windows are set deep in the thick walls. Unframed screen material is stapled to the exterior wood frame of some windows. There



*Detail view of window opening showing six-light hopper window, concrete sill and lintel, and attached screen material.*

are two window openings on both the east and west facades. At the west facade, these windows are large, six-over-six, wood-frame, double-hung sash.

The stone used to construct the walls has typically been left in its natural shape with little cutting or shaping, and it displays a variety of colors and sizes. Most of the pieces at the corner are larger and vertically stacked. The stones have been cemented together with dark-gray concrete that has a rough aggregate.

The bathhouse's side-gable roof has exposed rafter ends and is covered in asphalt shingles. The boards of the roof are exposed at the underside of the soffit. The overhang is low, providing shade for the windows and doorways at the north and south facades. A small chimney of fieldstone rises from the center of the roof ridge.

## **Interior**

The perimeter walls are exposed fieldstone, painted white. The ceiling and non-perimeter walls are finished with large, painted panels separated by battens. Concrete floors are exposed throughout the building. The interior is divided into three sections—changing rooms at the east, a central corridor, and, at the west, a large room referred to as the “warming quarters” at the time of the bathhouse’s construction. The front and rear entrances lead into to the corridor, which composes the central one-fifth of the building’s floor area. The north and south walls contain the entrance doors. The doors are trimmed with simple wood boards while the doorways to the other rooms have a band of molding on the surrounds. Shelving lines the west wall. An access panel in the ceiling leads to a crawlspace in the roof’s gable. Wood and metal-frame theater-style seats are in one corner.



Two doorways on the corridor's west wall lead to the warming quarters. The concrete window sills have been painted green. A paneled wood beam running east-west bisects the paneled ceiling. The beam abuts a brick and concrete-block chimney at the east wall. The room contains various pieces of handmade furniture, including a large table and a counter. A panel door with a three-light window is the room's south entrance. A five-panel door is the room's north doorway.

On the east wall of the central corridor, two doors lead into two separate changing rooms that compose the east two-fifths of the bathhouse. The rooms mirror each other, being nearly identical in design. The concrete floor ramps down from the corridor into each room, with a paneled wall forming a privacy screen. The interior wall is lined with wood changing booths, one of which contains a toilet. Both changing rooms have coat rails made of boards lined with coat hooks that are attached to the walls, and they each have a handmade wood bench.



*The north changing room, with booths at right. The paneled ceiling and painted exposed stone wall are visible.  
View to east.*



*The warming quarters.  
View to northwest (above) and southwest (below).*





## PROPERTY HISTORY

### The Beginning of Park Rapids

Settlement around Park Rapids began as early as 1860 when lumbermen discovered that the local area was filled with harvestable pine trees, bringing logging to the area.<sup>1</sup> Growth was slowed, though, by economic conditions. The United States' banking system had become increasingly unstable after the Civil War, and it was even shakier during the 1870s when government land grants to railroads resulted in an overinvestment in tracks and other facilities.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until 1879 that Park Rapids was platted by homesteader Charles Todd, an Indiana man who built a claim shanty on "Main Street." By 1880, he had sold the land to Frank C. Rice. In the same year, settlers traveled north from Verndale, Minnesota, to three areas—named First, Second, and Third Prairies—which became the sites of Hubbard, Park Rapids, and Osage, respectively. Rice had named his townsite Park Rapids after the "parklike groves" on the prairie and the rapids on the unencumbered Fishhook River. Lumber, however, was not the main draw for these new residents. They acted upon "rumors of the beautiful prairies in this region where homesteading made it possible to possess a home where there was abundance of pure water, wood, wild game, and fertile fields waiting for the plow."<sup>3</sup>

With the arrival of these settlers, the area grew quickly. Within two years, the first school opened, and Park Rapids became the seat of Hubbard County in 1883. It was not served by a rail line, though, until 1891 when the tracks of the Wadena and Park Rapids Railroad Company finally reached the area. The route was soon acquired by the Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway. In 1897, the Park Rapids and Leech Lake Railway Company built a line from Park Rapids north to Akeley that was later extended to Cass Lake.<sup>4</sup>

### The Growth of Automobile Tourism in Minnesota

The timing of the railroad was fortuitous as 1891 also marked the year that Itasca State Park, Minnesota's first state park, was established. Located only twenty miles north of Park Rapids, it encouraged a new marketing strategy for the area.<sup>5</sup> No longer would it be known simply as an agricultural center, but it would now begin to promote itself as a vacation destination, particularly for those interested in outdoor recreation. A *Minneapolis Tribune* article from 1894 informed travelers that they could take a train to "Osakis, Alexandra, Geneva Beach, or Park Rapids for a few days' or weeks' rest." There they would find "fishing unexcelled, comfortable hotels, every convenience to make [their] stay pleasant and profitable." A possible itinerary

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<sup>1</sup> The following section is excerpted from Stephanie K. Atwood, Penny A. Petersen, and Charlene K. Roise, "The Park Rapids National Guard Armory: An Assessment of Historical and Architectural Significance," February 2011, prepared by Hess, Roise and Company for the Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> *Lest We Forget: History of Park Rapids Commemorating Our Centennial 1880–1980* (Park Rapids, Minn.: Haas Printing Park, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Both lines were acquired by the Great Northern Railway Company in 1907. See Richard S. Prosser, *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas* (1966; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 136.

<sup>5</sup> Portions of this section are excerpted from Atwood, Petersen, and Roise, "Park Rapids National Guard Armory."

would have a Minneapolitan leaving the city at 9:00 a.m. on a Northern Pacific train and arriving at Park Rapids by 5:00 p.m. The next day, the traveler could take a carriage to visit Lake Itasca.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Park Rapids and the local area continued to grow. The city built its first courthouse in 1900, and four years later, Douglas Lodge was constructed at Itasca. A decade later, Park Rapids, which billed itself as the “Gateway to Itasca,” boasted a population of 2,000 residents.<sup>7</sup>

The village seemed to have an interest in providing outdoor recreation in the community as well. In 1893, it purchased land along the Fish Hook River from Frank Rice’s brother Gilbert, who was also one of the town’s pioneers and had platted a self-named addition.<sup>8</sup> According to the warranty deed, Gilbert and his wife, Martha, sold Lots 3 and 4 of Block 2 of that addition to Park Rapids at a cost of twenty-five dollars. A proviso, however, allowed for flooding onto the property, a likely occurrence due to milling operations along the river.<sup>9</sup> Recreational use of the site seems to have come early. The Sanborn fire insurance map from November 1900 depicts a small, one-story, frame boathouse on the property at the riverbank. By 1907, the site had cluster of four boathouses. Two that were constructed on the lot line may have been associated with a nearby residence.<sup>10</sup>

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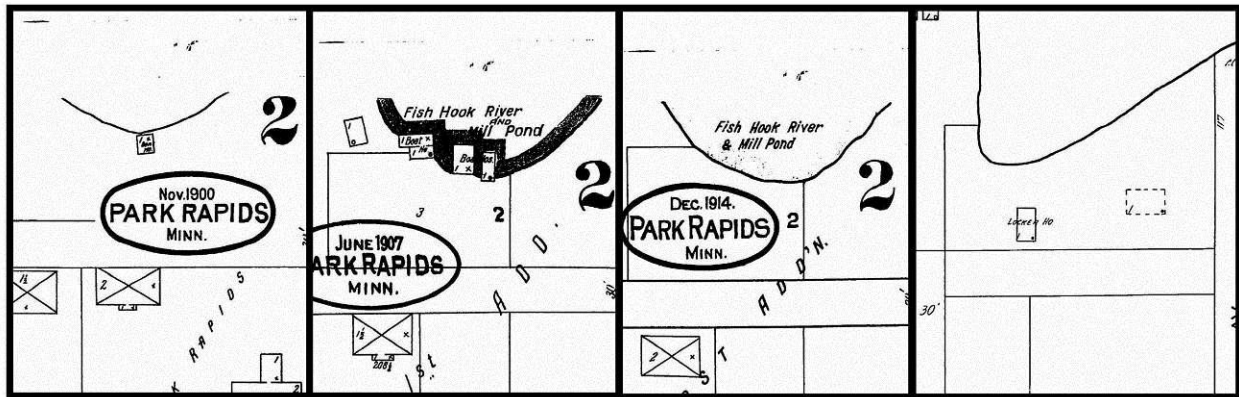
<sup>6</sup> *Lest We Forget*; Prosser, *Rails to the North Star*, 156, 168; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, “Itasca State Park: Minnesota DNR,” [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/itasca/index.htm](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/itasca/index.htm) (accessed October 29, 2010); “Where Shall I Go?” advertisement, *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 17, 1894; “The Itasca State Park,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 16, 1899.

<sup>7</sup> “Itasca State Park”; *Lest We Forget*; “Park Rapids, Typical Town in Heart of the Itasca Park Region in Minnesota, Offers Unusual Advantages to Permanent Home Maker or Transient Visitor,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 17, 1912.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert H. Rice was born on March 13, 1838, in Harmony, Chautauqua County, New York. At the age of nineteen, Rice moved with his four siblings and his widowed mother to Mitchell County, Iowa. In December 1861, Rice enrolled as the first student of Cedar Valley Seminary in Osage, Iowa. Rice and his brothers developed the land that his mother received for his father’s service in the War of 1812, platting it as the townsite of Riceville. The enterprising brothers constructed a flour mill and a sawmill. They subsequently built mills near Osage, Iowa. In 1881, he came to the area that would become Park Rapids, Minnesota, where he built the town’s first frame house. The next year, he assisted in laying out the townsite for Park Rapids, and in 1883, he built the area’s first flour mill. At the time of his death in 1908, the *Park Rapids Enterprise* wrote: “In the death of Gilbert H. Rice, Park Rapids has lost one of the men, if the man, who has contributed most towards the building up of the town and establishment of those influences which have contributed to the moral, the spiritual and material welfare of the community. He . . . eminently fitted to mould the rude elements of society into form and consistency and aid in raising a high standard of citizenship in this new country.” His wife, Martha Elizabeth (Pierce) Rice, was born on October 18, 1848, near Madison, Wisconsin. Along with her parents, she moved to Riceville, Iowa, at age 15. She married Gilbert Rice on September 17, 1866. They had four children—Edith, Leonard, Arthur, and Ethel. She is credited with establishing Park Rapids’ first Sunday school, which was held at the Rice residence for many years. About her, the *Enterprise* wrote: “Park Rapids lost one of its oldest and most beloved residents. Forty-seven years of her long and useful life were spent in this community, helping in the up-building of its social and religious life as no other one person has done.” “He Did Much for Our Town,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, April 30, 1908; “Mrs. Martha Rice Was Early Pioneer,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, August 16, 1928; 1885 State of Minnesota Census, Todd Township, Hubbard County, Minnesota, page 4.

<sup>9</sup> The south 30 feet of the lots had previously been deeded for public use as an alley and were not included in the parcel. Although the deed was dated May 5, 1893, it was not recorded until May 22, 1894. Hubbard County Recorder’s Office, Warranty Deed No. 3025 (dated May 5, 1893); “History of Red Bridge Park,” undated manuscript in possession of LuAnn Hurd-Lof, Park Rapids.

<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1900), sheet 2; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1907), sheet 2. All these boathouses appear to have been removed by 1914. Sanborn



The city-owned park land as depicted in the Sanborn fire insurance maps in (l-r) 1900, 1907, 1914, and 1928, indicating the site's use for recreational purposes since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, automobile ownership increased after the introduction of the Model T Ford in 1908, and the promotion of automobile tourism in Minnesota grew rapidly during the late 1910s. This included the organization of the Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association in 1917. Operated in conjunction with the Minnesota State Department of Conservation, it was the first major effort to promote Minnesota as a “summer vacationland” on a nation scale. Credited with creating the nickname “Land of Ten Thousand Lakes,” it was the major marketer of the state’s tourism industry until the early 1930s, when the Bureau of Tourism was developed. Beginning in 1917, it published *Recreation Days*,<sup>11</sup> a brochure highlighting various communities in the state and accommodations that were available. Issues noted that Park Rapids had three hundred lakes within a close radius, which “make this a paradise for the lover of outdoors.” It could be reached by automobile via Minnesota Trunk Highways 4 and 34 and U.S. Highway 71. Deane Park, located one mile north of the city, was listed as a tourist camp.<sup>12</sup>

Also key to automobile tourism was the creation of interstate routes, which often used existing roads. Particularly important for Park Rapids was the Jefferson Highway. Conceived in 1915 and dedicated in 1919, the route stretched from New Orleans to Winnipeg, Canada. In September 1917, Charles M. Babcock, Minnesota State Commissioner of Highways, approved the application of the Jefferson Highway Association to register a route beginning in Freeborn County at the state’s south border and ending in Kittson County on the Canadian border. According to an informational booklet for the highway from the early 1920s, the route passed through Park Rapids on Highway 71, traveling directly past the land the village had purchased along the Fish Hook River.<sup>13</sup>

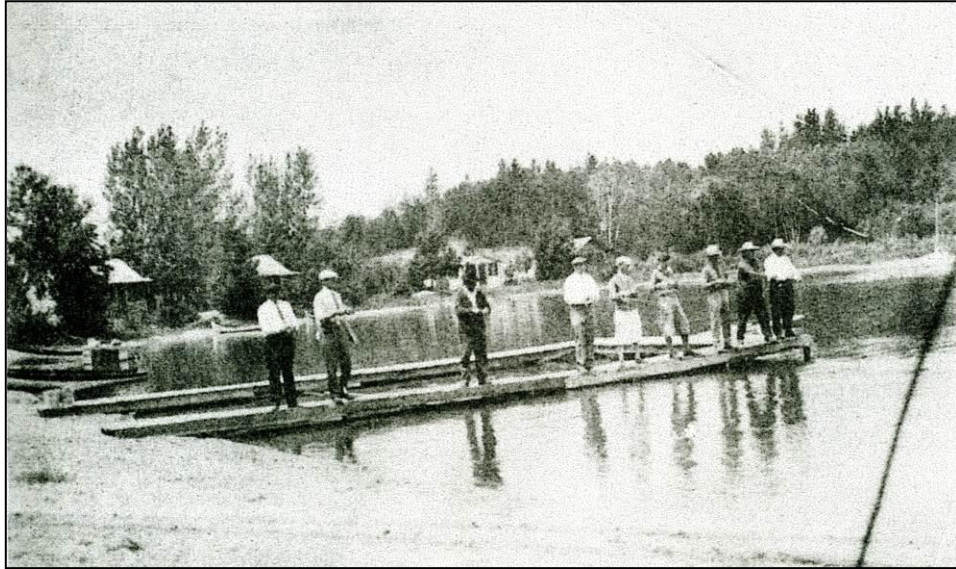
Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914), sheet 2.

<sup>11</sup> Later renamed *Minnesota, Land of Ten Thousand Lakes*.

<sup>12</sup> Minnesota Historical Society, “Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association,” [http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=Ten\\_Thousand\\_Lakes\\_of\\_Minnesota\\_Association](http://discovery.mnhs.org/MN150/index.php?title=Ten_Thousand_Lakes_of_Minnesota_Association) (accessed September 5, 2012); Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association, *Recreation Days* (Saint Paul: Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association, 1917), 96–97.

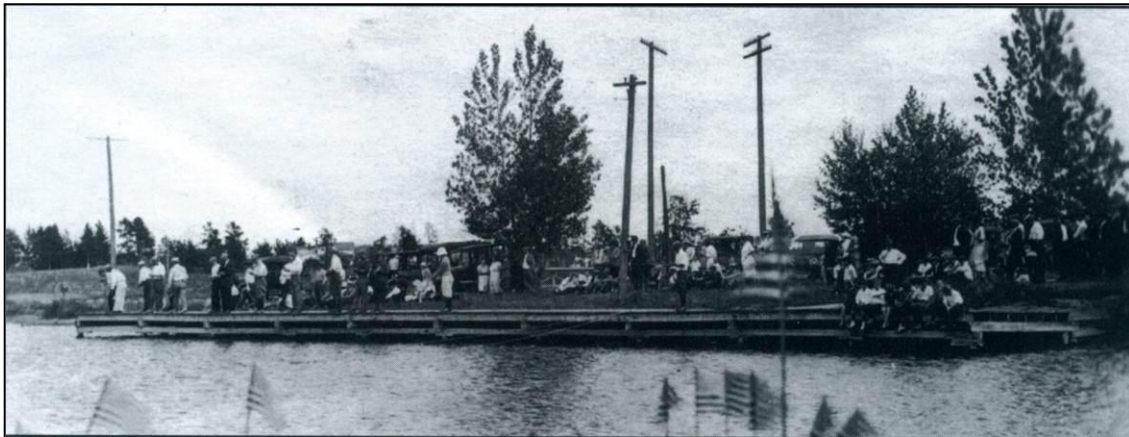
<sup>13</sup> Jefferson Highway History, “History of the Jefferson Highway (Pine to Palm Highway),” <http://maps.bc.ca/jeffhwy/jeffhistory.htm> (accessed September 5, 2012); State of Minnesota Highway Department,





*Above: Participants in the annual casting contest stand on a dock at the Park Rapids bathing beach, c. 1925. Cabins and residences along the west bank of the Fish Hook River are in the background.*  
(Seventh-fifth Anniversary Album, 1880–1955: A Book of Cherished Memories of the Old Days in Park Rapids Minnesota)

*Below: Park Rapids residents at the bathing beach during a summer celebration, c. 1920s–early 1930s. (Hubbard County: A Century of Growth, 1900–2000)*



Park Rapids continued its investment in automobile tourism by improving its road system. In his 1920 report, “Minnesota’s Pretentious Highway Program,” Commissioner Babcock noted that Park Rapids would undertake twenty-four miles of grading and graveling work east from the village and nine miles of work north to Arago, two of only three projects in the entire county. In a 1921 spotlight piece on the city, the *Minneapolis Tribune* added that “excellent auto roads from the Twin Cities . . . take motor parties directly to the many resorts in the vicinity.” In that and the

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Order No. 136 (dated September 15, 1917); “The Land of Ten Thousand Lakes over Jefferson Highway,” booklet, (Minnesota: s. n., 1922?), 59.

following year, Hubbard County spent a total of \$260,000 on road construction, including nine miles between Park Rapids and Itasca and a new gravel road that ran six miles northwest from Park Rapids, “tapping a beautiful lake country.”<sup>14</sup>

The efforts yielded results. In July 1921, for example, the State Automobile Association’s annual two-day scenic tour of Minnesota began in Saint Cloud and ended in Park Rapids. Some 225 “autoists” participated, most from Minneapolis. Unfamiliar with “Minnesota’s Lake District,” they remarked on the impressiveness of the area’s natural beauty. C. W. Wilkins, mayor of Park Rapids, and local residents gathered at the town square to welcome the travelers. Among the crowd was “Frenchy,” a black bear who reportedly took kindly to the visitors.<sup>15</sup>

By 1914, the boathouses had been removed from the village’s property on the Fish Hook River. Fourteen years later, the site included a small, one-story building labeled “locker house” and a second, one-story, open-air building.<sup>16</sup>



*Visitors at the bathing beach, c. 1930s–1940s. The railroad trestle is visible at rear left.*  
(Hubbard County: A Century of Growth)

### **The Depression and Federal Relief Programs**

Due to the effects of the Great Depression, the number of unemployed Americans grew from nearly 4 million to almost 7 million during 1930. While initial relief efforts had been in the hands of local governments, the unprecedented unemployment rates necessitated the assistance of state

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<sup>14</sup> C. M. Babcock, “Minnesota’s Pretentious Highway Program,” *Western Magazine* 15 (February 1, 1920): 66–67; “Park Rapids Resorts Are Popular with Twin City Tourists,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 5, 1921; W. H. Brill, “Counties Co-Operate in Lacing State with System of Good Roads,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 31, 1922.

<sup>15</sup> “Autoists End Two-Day Journey in Annual State Scenic Tour,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 24, 1921.

<sup>16</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914), sheet 2; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1928), sheet 6.

governments. By the end of 1932, half of the states had established Emergency Relief Administrations.<sup>17</sup>

In Minnesota, prior to 1932, relief had been handled on a local level with no support from the state. As the numbers of people without work grew, it became clear that many of these smaller government entities, particularly those in northern Minnesota, were having difficulty assisting all on their rapidly growing relief rolls. Governor Floyd B. Olson recognized that the state would have to step in, and the State Board of Control was created. Its role was to oversee the applications for relief, which came from counties, and ensure the proper expenditure of funds. Eighteen rural counties sent in applications, including Hubbard County. Each county established an Emergency Relief Committee to distribute funds to individuals in need.<sup>18</sup>

As the number of unemployed in the country burgeoned, it became clear that federal assistance would be necessary. In 1933, the Federal Relief Administration (FERA) was created. Harry Hopkins, FERA administrator, approved the Minnesota State Board of Control as the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA). The FERA's intent was to streamline and improve the relief programs that had been in place prior to its inception, which were often "make-work" projects that did not take the skills and abilities of the workers into account. "The FERA work program was intended to conserve the skills, work habits, and morale of the unemployed through work which was suited to their abilities and of value to their communities."<sup>19</sup>

Federal relief programs were administered by the Civil Works Administration (CWA) from November 1933 through March 1934, which was followed by the Work Progress Administration (WPA) in May 1935. By that point, 20 percent of Minnesota's population was on relief. The WPA, which had the authority to fund work sponsored by any governmental subdivision, would go on to support the broadest range of activities of any New Deal program, including construction, conservation, service, and professional projects.<sup>20</sup>

Most WPA projects were initiated when a sponsor, usually a local unit of government, completed an application that included a description of the proposed work, plans and sketches when appropriate, an estimate of costs and labor requirements, and a statement of need. Sponsors were responsible for paying a portion of the costs. The proposal had to pass a review at the state level before being forwarded to the WPA's central office in Washington. Final approval was given by the president. In the eight years before the WPA ended in 1943, it had employed around 8.5 million people across the country and supported projects totaling around \$250 million in Minnesota alone.<sup>21</sup>

### **Attention to the Parks**

By the mid-1930s, Hubbard County had already received aid from New Deal programs, including a project underway in early 1935 to improve Deane Park and Rice Park. Two crews of

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<sup>17</sup> Rolf T. Anderson, "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933–1941," October 9, 1900, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, available at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, E-27–E-28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., E-29–E-30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., E-27–E-28, E-32–E-34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., E-35, E-41, E-48–E-49.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., E-52–E-53, E-59, E-67.



men were under the direction of the Park Rapids village council and the county relief organization. In the meantime, despite the Depression, it appears that the village still had a steady tourism industry. The *Park Rapids Enterprise* wrote: “There are few towns in the Northwest so blessed with natural attractions as is Park Rapids. Summer visitors from many states frequently comment on this situation. . . . The improvements being made are timely and should inspire property owners to similar efforts.”<sup>22</sup>

In January 1935, Leon Archibald, district engineer of the SERA, outlined “twenty-five ways in which local communities [could] participate in the public works program to be inaugurated by Congress.” In anticipation of the federal funding that would be made available by the WPA for the “continued campaign of national recovery,” Archibald highlighted various projects that included improving parks, swimming pools, rinks, and landscaping, and creating large relief maps, including one of Park Rapids.<sup>23</sup>

At its February 14 meeting, the Park Rapids village council discussed using relief funds for athletics and recreation, including constructing an athletic field for Park Rapids. Sponsored by the Park Rapids baseball team and the Otto Hendrickson Post of the American Legion, the project would include reconstructing the baseball diamond, installing a new dugout, and other work. Additionally, the council contemplated an “enlargement of the present river park.” The *Enterprise* remarked that “the bathing beach is thronged with bathers during the summer, and more room is needed.” Adding land east of the bathing beach would improve the situation, and upgrading the landscaping would make it “one of the prettiest parks in the state.” These ideas were taken under consideration for possible action at a later date.<sup>24</sup>

Also in February, it was announced that a reorganization of the FERA would take effect May 1 with the appointment of full-time ERA engineers. County highway engineer A. R. Taubman would no longer also have to serve as county ERA engineer; that position would be filled by Thief River Falls resident Gilbert J. Fabrick.<sup>25</sup>

By June 1935, the WPA had been officially established by Executive Order No. 7034, and communities all across the country contemplated what local projects might qualify for the program.<sup>26</sup> An editorial in the *Enterprise* mused that “there are great possibilities for the Park Rapids community, for Hubbard county, and for this entire region.” Meanwhile, it was well into the summer tourist season. At the June village council meeting, Mr. H. M. Fake requested funds

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<sup>22</sup> “Park Work Being Done,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, January 10, 1935. Dean[e] Park is located north of Park Rapids on Eagle Point Drive on the Fish Hook River’s west bank. Rice Park is located on the east bank of the Fish Hook River on South Grove Avenue.

<sup>23</sup> “Public Works Program Suggestions Made by District SERA Engineer,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, January 31, 1935.

<sup>24</sup> “Athletic Field Improvement under SERA Given Approval; Work Will Start in Spring,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, February 14, 1935. Details on this landscaping work and when it may have been undertaken was not specified at this or later council meetings.

<sup>25</sup> “ERA Set-Up Changed; New Engineer Is Here,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, February 14, 1935.

<sup>26</sup> According to A. T. Gilbertson, director of Minnesota’s WPA District No. 2, the WPA was allotted only \$640 million of the \$4.9 billion that Congress appropriated, “hardly more than 12 percent of the total.” “County Gets Eleven New WPA Projects,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, November 14, 1935.

to operate the “Municipal Bathing Beach.” At the next council meeting a month later, a Mr. Delaney asked for assistance in repairing the dock at the bathing beach.<sup>27</sup>

Later in July, Minnesota’s WPA administrator, Victor Christgau, announced: “Dirt will begin to fly in the very near future. We are driving for action, immediate action.” President Franklin Roosevelt had appropriated around \$1.7 million to begin the WPA program in Minnesota, money that would be supplemented by funds from state and local sponsors. Unemployed residents were encouraged to register at the National Reemployment Service offices to prevent their exclusion from relief rolls. The offices would be “classifying applicants and referring them to jobs for which they [were] best qualified.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Bringing the WPA to Park Rapids**

In August, the village’s Community Club met at the request of Park Rapids major M. M. Nygaard to discuss possible WPA projects that could both improve the community’s infrastructure and provide needed employment to local residents. One of the projects they discussed was a new sewer system with an adjoining sewage plant. A petition for this project had been in circulation for some time, and it received strong support at the meeting. The demolition and reconstruction of the local auditorium was also proposed. Other minor projects were considered, and a future “mass meeting” to discuss WPA projects was planned.<sup>29</sup>

Mayor Nygaard was so enthusiastic about the new sewer project that he personally sought the \$80,000 in funding from WPA Administrator Christgau, delivering the application to Saint Paul in late August. At that time, it was the only application for WPA work that the Village of Park Rapids was submitting, although there was a county proposal for highway work awaiting “official approval.” Nygaard returned from his meeting with Christgau with the news that the sewer system was “practically assured,” with the federal grant covering 45 percent of the cost.<sup>30</sup>

In early September, county ERA engineer Fabrick announced that he had submitted three grant proposals to the WPA that were sponsored by the village council. The first called for demolishing “the old Methodist church” and erecting a war memorial and community building on the site. The new structure, measuring 56' x 100', was estimated to cost \$20,760. The second project, a band shell, would be located in the village park and cost \$815 to construct.<sup>31</sup>

The third project was a combination bathhouse and warming house, “all under one roof,” that would replace two existing structures at the bathing beach. Materials salvaged from the

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<sup>27</sup> Anderson, “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota,” E-48; “Planning Board Is Needed,” editorial, *Park Rapids Enterprise*, June 6, 1935; Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, June 6 and July 5, 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota,” E-56; “Works Program to Start Soon,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, July 25, 1935.

<sup>29</sup> “WPA Projects to Be Talked,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, August 15, 1935; “WPA Funds Will Be Sought for Local Projects,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, August 22, 1935.

<sup>30</sup> “Mayor Will Ask WPA Grant of \$80,000 for New Sewer System,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, August 29, 1935; “Many WPA Projects for Hubbard County Filed as Dead Line Nears,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, September 5, 1935; Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Adjourned Meeting, September 5, 1935.

<sup>31</sup> “Many WPA Projects for Hubbard County Filed as Dead Line Nears”; Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Adjourned Meeting, September 5, 1935.

demolished buildings would be “used in in the new construction insofar as possible,” and the walls of the new 30' x 60' building would be locally gathered fieldstone. These measures would keep expenses low—the budget was anticipated to be less than \$1,000—and, at the same time, encourage a “rustic” design.<sup>32</sup>

### **An Architectural Style Is Born**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the National Park Service developed a philosophy of design known as the “Rustic Style.”<sup>33</sup> Dedicated to promoting and preserving natural resources, the agency felt that manmade resources should complement rather than disrupt the natural environment. As its 1935 publication *Park and Recreation Structures* explained, “The park structure is designed with a view to subordinating it to its environment, and it is located so that it may profit from any natural screening that may exist.”<sup>34</sup>

This approach was adopted by state parks as well. In Minnesota, for example, architect Ed Barber worked in the Minnesota Central Design Office during the 1930s responsible for creating many state park buildings in this style including the Forest Inn at Itasca State Park near Park Rapids.<sup>35</sup>

The Rustic Style incorporated local building materials. This not only helped the structures complement the natural environment but was also economical. Minimizing the cost of materials was particularly critical for WPA projects because project sponsors were required to cover the cost of all non-labor items. As a result of the use of local materials, regional variations of the style began to appear.<sup>36</sup>

### **A Flurry of Projects**

By September 12, the sewer and band shell projects for Park Rapids as well as some road projects sponsored by Hubbard County had been approved at the WPA’s state office and forwarded to Washington.<sup>37</sup> In early October, Washington sent an official notice to Park Rapids that it would receive a \$38,700 Public Works Administration (PWA) grant for upgrading the sewer system.<sup>38</sup> The village would be responsible for covering the remainder of the \$80,000 cost.

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<sup>32</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Adjourned Meeting, September 5, 1935. This is the first and only time that the construction of the bathhouse is mentioned during village council proceedings. No further information is given regarding how and when the village funded the project. Many of the future village meetings were dominated with discussions of the sewer project.

<sup>33</sup> A portion of this section excerpted from Stephanie K. Atwood and Charlene K. Roise, “Lake Bemidji South Shore Bathhouse: An Assessment of National Register Eligibility, City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota,” March 2009, prepared by Hess, Roise and Company for Widseth Smith Nolting, 23.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Park Structures and Facilities, Department of the Interior* (Rahway, New Jersey: Quinn and Boden Co., 1935), 4.

<sup>35</sup> David R. Benson, *Stories in Log and Stone: The Legacy of the New Deal in Minnesota State Parks* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources), 63.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota,” E-59.

<sup>37</sup> “WPA Project for County Approved,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, September 12, 1935; “More WPA Projects for County Listed,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, September 19, 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Created by the National Industrial Recovery Act on June 16, 1933, the Public Works Administration (PWA) was aimed at “providing employment, stabilizing purchasing power, improving public welfare, and contributing to a revival of American industry.” The PWA spent billions of dollars on over 34,000 public works projects that improved the country’s infrastructure with new facilities like hospitals, airports, and hydroelectric plans and gave the federal government its “first systematic network for the distribution of funds to localities.” George Washington



The new system would cover the entire village west of the river and was direly needed. The *Enterprise* reported that the “sanitary condition of Park Rapids [was] in a deplorable condition, and [Mayor Nygaard] predict[ed] that it would only be a matter of time before the state board of health would step in and order the construction of an adequate sewerage system and sewage disposal plant, unless such action is taken by the village itself.”<sup>39</sup>

The *Enterprise* announced the approval of the sewage system grant in its October 3 issue. It also reported that the Hubbard County board of commissioners was holding a meeting with WPA representatives that afternoon in which plans for WPA projects in Hubbard County would be discussed “and an understanding reached with county officials as to proper procedure and other details.”<sup>40</sup>

Within a couple of weeks, Fabrick reported that a number of projects would likely begin November 1, including major improvements to roads and school grounds. He also noted that “in Park Rapids a combination bath house and skating warming house at the city dock is planned and a band shell in the village park.” Labor from local labor would be used to construct these two structures. Both proposals had been approved by the WPA in Washington, and work would begin once funding was available to pay workers.<sup>41</sup>

In late October, Fabrick expressed concern that the start-up date of November 1 was unlikely as the county had not yet received authorization from the WPA to commence work. The approval finally came through at the last minute. On October 30, sixty-five men were told to report for work on the WPA highway project the following day, with construction commencing on November 1. The school improvement project was also planned to begin at the same time. There was no word, however, on when work on the band shell and bathhouse-warming house would begin.<sup>42</sup>

In early November, the *Enterprise* claimed that “rapid expansion of the WPA program in Hubbard county [was] assured,” but no mention was made of the bathhouse in the list of projects. By mid-November, the county had received grants for eleven new projects. The most important project was the production of snow fencing, which had received over \$21,000 in WPA funding. No mention was made of when work commenced on the construction of the bathhouse, but that apparently occurred around this time.<sup>43</sup>

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University, “The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project: Public Works Administration,” <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/pwa.cfm> (accessed September 10, 2012).

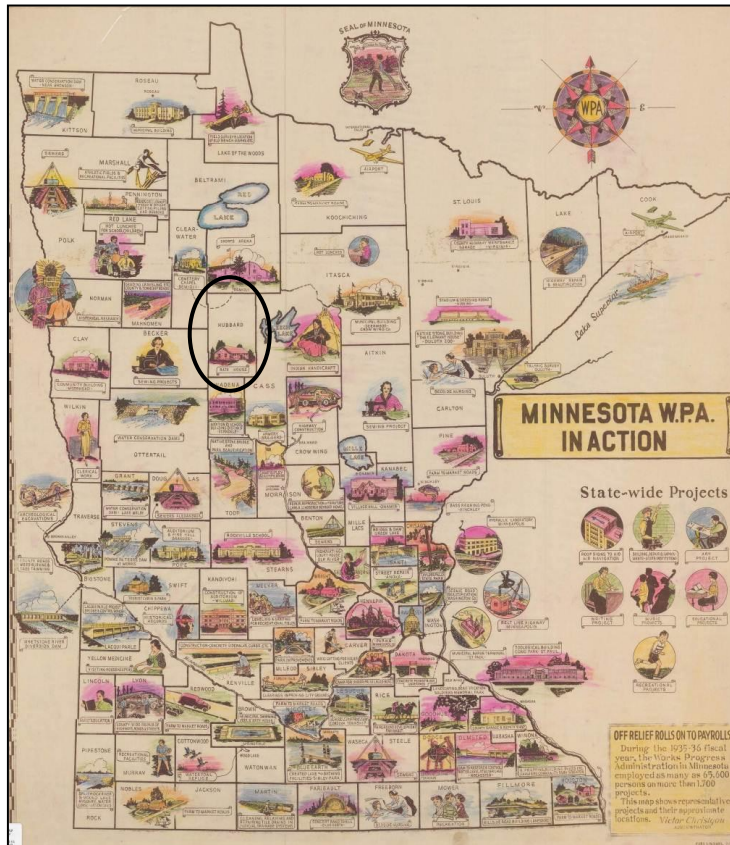
<sup>39</sup> “Sewer Project Gets Approval in Washington,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, October 3, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> “WPA Officials to Meet County Board,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, October 3, 1935.

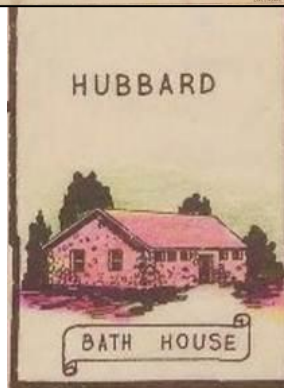
<sup>41</sup> “WPA Work Will Start Soon in Hubbard County,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, October 17, 1935.

<sup>42</sup> “WPA Projects Held Awaiting Authority,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, October 24, 1935; “WPA Projects Give Work to Sixty-five in County,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, October 31, 1935.

<sup>43</sup> “Nearly One Hundred Now on WPA Payroll,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, November 7, 1935; “County Gets Eleven New WPA Projects.” Beginning in November, the *Enterprise* began referring to Fabrick with the title “assistant supervisor of projects and planning.” Prior to that, he was designated “WPA engineer.”



A 1936 poster highlighted the accomplishments of the Minnesota WPA during its first fiscal year. The Park Rapids bathhouse (detail from map, right) was the project chosen to represent Hubbard County (circled on map above). (Minnesota Historical Society Collections, Saint Paul [hereafter MHS])



By late February 1936, the *Enterprise* reported that laborers were to begin wrecking “the old Methodist church as part of the Legion hall building project, which had been hanging fire for several months.” The project, which was still awaiting official PWA approval, would give employment to twenty men. As was the common practice at the time, salvaged materials would be reused in the construction of the new building, which would be located near the courthouse on land that the Legion Hall had purchased the previous autumn. Progress was also being made on other projects, including the new band shell, which hosted its first concert on June 5.<sup>44</sup>

As the WPA’s 1935–1936 fiscal year drew to a close, Fabrick presented the numbers for Hubbard County’s first year with the program. The WPA had paid \$112,063.22 to cover the cost of labor and materials on twenty-seven projects, fourteen of which had been completed or suspended. (Suspended projects had the possibility of being resumed at a later date.) The peak of employment had been reached in January.<sup>45</sup>

### Building the Bathhouse

Construction was underway on the bathhouse by November 1935. It was “practically completed” by the following April, when the *Enterprise* commended two projects as “outstanding” examples of the WPA program in Hubbard County. The first was the production of miles of 4'-high fencing that the county would use to reduce snow drifts on farm-to-market roads, a project described as unique in the state. The second project was the bathhouse: “The building, of stone structure, is 60 x 30 feet, with a 9-foot wall made of field rock.” The 20"-thick walls had 4'-deep footings, enabling the building to withstand frost heave. Thirty-three cords of “field rock,” 420 sacks of cement, and 60 cubic

<sup>44</sup> “Old M. E. Church to Be Torn Down,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, February 27, 1936; “Listeners Like Band and New Band Shell,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, June 11, 1936; “WPA Program to Continue with No Material Change,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, June 25, 1936.

<sup>45</sup> “WPA Summarizes Year in County,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, July 2, 1936.



*The Park Rapids Bathhouse, taken after its completion.  
(WPA Negative Collection, MHS Collections)*

yards of sand were used were used in the construction of the walls. Although fieldstone had the virtue of being inexpensive, it also had aesthetic value. The “exterior rock,” according to the *Enterprise*, was “carefully selected so as to make an attractive wall.” The article noted that the stones “vary in size from three to ten inches in diameter.”<sup>46</sup>

Around two-fifths of the interior of the building was partitioned into two changing rooms, one for men and one for women. Each side had eleven “dressing booths” Another two-fifths of the building was a large, open room that could serve as a warming house during the winter. The remainder of the building, located between the other sections, would be furnished as the quarters for a matron. To enable year-round use, the building was equipped with concrete floors.<sup>47</sup>

The project had provided employment for ten to fifteen men who worked under the supervision of a non-relief foreman. Half of the crew started by demolishing the old bathhouse on the site while the other half hauled rock. Fabrick believed the project would “be completed in every detail by the middle of May.” The *Enterprise* anticipated that “for many years to come, in summer and in winter, residents of Park Rapids will be able to enjoy the bath house.”<sup>48</sup>

Neither the *Enterprise* nor minutes of the village council’s meetings provide the exact date that the bathhouse was finished. On April 2, W. D. Robbins appeared at the council’s regular monthly meeting and requested permission to install a drainage pipe for the bathhouse, a

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<sup>46</sup> “Unique WPA Project in the County Is a Success,” *Park Rapids Enterprise*, April 16, 1936.

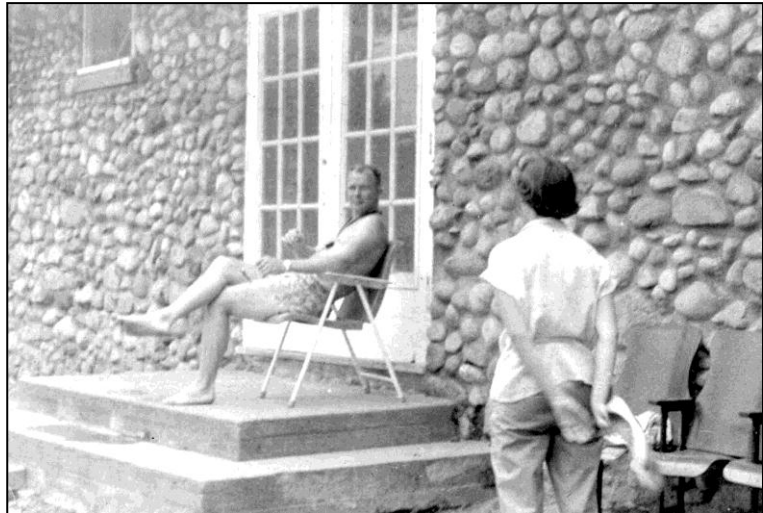
<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

necessity for keeping the building clean. The item was approved. The following month, the park board came to the monthly meeting to present several requests for park improvements during the coming summer, but the council did not take action.<sup>49</sup>

Although the building was complete, site work continued. At the August 6 village council meeting, a resident named Jack Grover offered to purchase the “old Bathhouse” from the village council for \$36. This was probably the former “locker house,” which remained on the site and was used as a shed.<sup>50</sup>

In 1937, Mrs. Hinchcliff was paid \$1.50 to be the matron at the bathhouse for two days per week. Teachers from the local school served as lifeguards at the beach, which was a popular attraction. Park Rapids continued to be a busy tourist destination. A 1938 state guide written by the WPA Federal Writers’ Project described Park Rapids as a center of recreation in Minnesota’s northern wilderness, accessible by “good roads.” The area offered excellent fishing and canoeing. Also in the vicinity was Itasca State Park, the third-largest state park in the country and “Minnesota’s most frequented State Park.” Many tourists visiting the park would travel on Highway 71, previously known as the Jefferson Highway, driving directly past the new stone bathhouse as they passed through Park Rapids. Many of these tourists presumably took advantage of this amenity, which included a dock that predated the bathhouse and had a tower for diving.<sup>51</sup>



*1950s photograph of the north facade of the bathhouse showing what are likely the original double doors. Theater-style chairs, two of which are still extant in the building, are at right. (Photograph in possession of LuAnn Hurd-Lof, Park Rapids)*

Although the tourism industry slowed during the winter, the building served the local community as a warming house. The warming room was heated by a small stove attached to the chimney on the east wall. To ensure good skating conditions and provide thick ice for the safety of the skaters, the fire department would flood an ice rink on the river. The bathhouse was also used for other purposes, such as holding classes. Resident Dave Konshok remembers WPA workers

<sup>49</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, April 2 and May 6, 1936.

<sup>50</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, August 6, 1936; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1928 [updated August 1936]), 6; “History of Red Bridge Park.”

<sup>51</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, June 3, 1937; Dave Konshok, interview by Stephanie K. Atwood, July 31, 2012; *Minnesota: A State Guide* (1938; reprint, Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1985), 128, 310. The guide also mentioned that a “tourist park” with “free camping, running water, [and] swimming” was located “at the eastern edge of town.” It did not specify if this is the park on Beach Road.



teaching him and a group of boys how to make model airplanes. Such classes ended when the men left to serve in World War II.<sup>52</sup>

During the 1930s, the village had erected a footbridge near the bathhouse that crossed a narrow channel between two peninsulas extending from opposite banks of the river. This provided a popular route linking the east and west areas of the village, but the narrow waterway underneath the bridge created a powerful current that resulted in deaths by drowning. To alleviate this danger, the waterway was widened significantly by 1966, requiring the replacement of the old bridge with the current structure.<sup>53</sup>

The municipal bathhouse continued in operation until the 1970s. While the city retained ownership, it subsequently leased out the facility. In 1993, it granted a conditional use permit to Don McBurney to use the building to sell snacks and rent skates, skis, canoes, bikes, and other recreational equipment. The permit was an amendment to his earlier lease for the bathhouse.<sup>54</sup>



*Aerial photographs of the bathing beach shown in 1939 (left), 1966 (center), and 1978 (right).  
(John R. Borchert Map Library, Wilson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis)*

### **Plans for Reuse**

By 2011, there were plans for extending the western terminus of the Heartland State Trail from Park Rapids to Moorhead. Instead of going south from Heartland Park on a former railroad trestle, the trail would go across a new Red Bridge through an expanded Red Bridge Park. “Red Bridge Landing” would become “a clear and attractive multi-purpose pathway” from the trail to downtown Park Rapids. The plan calls for converting the stone bathhouse, which has been dormant for nearly a decade, into a welcome center for trail users.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Konshok interview; LuAnn Hurd-Lof, conversation with Stephanie K. Atwood, July 31, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, August 6, 1936; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minn.* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1928 [updated August 1936]), 6; “History of Red Bridge Park”; 1966 and 1969 aerial photographs of Park Rapids, John R. Borchert Map Library, Wilson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

<sup>54</sup> Miscellaneous information from City of Park Rapids City Planner’s Office; City of Park Rapids, Order Granting Conditional Use Permit (dated May 10, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Laurie Young and Suzanne Rhees, “Heartland State Trail Extension Park Rapids to Moorhead Master Plan,” June 2011, report prepared by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails, 20, 22; City of Park Rapids, “From the Desk of the City Administrator,” <http://ci.park-rapids.mn.us/Administrator%20Notes/Administrator%20Notes.htm> (accessed September 7, 2012); Hurd-Lof conversation.

## EVALUATING THE BATHHOUSE'S NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY

The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) on “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933–1941” has a section that analyzes social and recreation facilities. Bathhouses are included in this category. The Park Rapids bathhouse is evaluated below under the National Register registration requirements (in italics below) that the MPDF provides for this property type.<sup>56</sup>

*1. The construction of a Social or Recreation Facility should have been financed through a grant or loan from the federal government, or federal funds should have been utilized for materials, labor, or supervision.*

Proceedings from the meeting of the Park Rapids village council on September 5, 1935, state the council’s intent to sponsor the project. An article in the *Park Rapids Enterprise* on April 16, 1936, identifies the bathhouse as a WPA project, confirming the involvement of federal funds.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the Park Rapids Bathhouse meets this registration requirement.

*2. Construction should have been completed by the end of 1941.*

The *Enterprise* reported that “the [bathhouse] project will be completed in every detail by the middle of May [1936].” Its definite completion by 1937 is indicated by the hiring of a local resident to work at the bathhouse as a matron in June of that year. Thus, the bathhouse meets this registration requirement.<sup>58</sup>

*3. Due to the large number of surviving resources, and because many Social and Recreational Facilities may be considered historically significant for their association with the unprecedented federal response to the Great Depression, the following criteria should also be applied:*

*a. A Social or Recreational Facility should be eligible under National Register Criterion A as a particularly important project through the size and scope of the work involved, or by the number of people employed, or the project should represent a significant contribution to the community by providing a new and modern facility which offered programs, amenities, recreational activities, or community services which were previously unavailable.*

The size, scope, and number of laborers of other federal-relief projects, including the local PWA-funded sewer system improvements, overshadow the scale the Park Rapids bathhouse project, so it cannot be considered “particularly important” for its scale. In considering the bathhouse’s contribution to the community, historic photographs reveal that the site that had been used for some time for recreation, and boathouses had been located there since the beginning of the century. The bathhouse replaced an older bathhouse, but the earlier structure was not specifically constructed as a year-round facility. It was much smaller than the current building, and would not have included a large “warming quarters” that could also serve other purposes. For a time, relief workers taught activities to local children in this room. Because the new bathhouse provided amenities unavailable in its predecessor, it is eligible under Criterion A.

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<sup>56</sup> All criteria quoted from Anderson, “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota,” F-27–F-29.

<sup>57</sup> “Unique WPA Project in the County Is a Success.”

<sup>58</sup> Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Regular Monthly Meeting, June 3, 1937.

*b. A Social or Recreational Facility should be eligible under National Register Criterion C for incorporating the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values. This criterion may be met if a building is constructed with finely crafted indigenous materials, a distinctive construction method often associated with specific Federal work programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps or the Works Progress Administration; or a building may be considered eligible if it contains art or sculpture which has been evaluated as artistically significant.*

The MPDF highlights a group of fieldstone buildings in west-central Minnesota near Park Rapids, including one bathhouse, calling them “one of the most interesting examples of the use of native materials.”<sup>59</sup> These buildings, however, use split or cut fieldstone, where the pieces have been purposefully shaped. In the Park Rapids bathhouse, the natural, spherical form of the fieldstone is maintained. This same type of construction was used at the Big Fork Village Hall, which was recently nominated to the National Register. While the MPDF specifically states that “an undistinguished stone shelter building may not [be considered eligible]” under Criterion C, it notes that a building with the “distinctive construction method often associated with specific Federal work programs” may be eligible. The fieldstone walls of the Park Rapids bathhouse are a direct response to WPA funding restrictions. The result, in the case of the bathhouse, is an interesting regional variation of the “Rustic Style.” Thus, the Park Rapids bathhouse is eligible under Criterion C.

*4. A building or structure constructed as part of a larger complex, such as a park, parkway, wayside, or zoo, may not be considered eligible unless the original landscape design and spatial and functional relationships remain intact. In such cases the property should be nominated as an historic district. . . . A single building constructed at a park or fairgrounds may not be eligible, yet, there may be situations where sufficient components exist to form an historic district.*

The bathhouse was constructed in an existing park. While this setting, particularly the bathhouse’s relationship to the beach, is noteworthy, the park is not of sufficient scale or significance to qualify as a historic district.

*5. A Social or Recreational Facility should possess integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association, and should be without major alterations. Original material and prominent features should remain intact, and any alterations should be modest in scale without impacting or obscuring major facades, elements, or design features.*

The Park Rapids Bathhouse maintains very good integrity. Other than the loss of original doors and some windows, the original structure remains essentially intact, without additions or substantial alterations. On the exterior, other than the installation of modern asphalt roofing shingles, there have been no changes. The interior also has integrity of materials. The paneled walls and ceilings, which are found throughout the building, appear to be original. The building has specially designed original furnishings, such as the dressing booths, coat racks, and benches, which are extant. The wood features have sustained some water damage at ground level. The sound fieldstone and concrete construction of the building has required little exterior repair, allowing the original workmanship of the builders to be maintained. As the building and site are still municipally owned, it maintains integrity of association.

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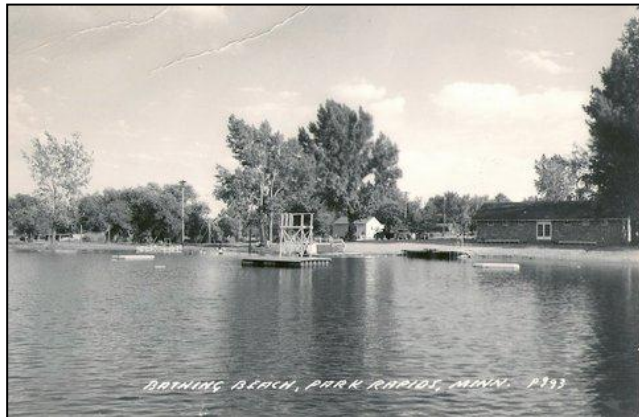
<sup>59</sup> Anderson, “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota,” E-61.

### Additional Areas of Significance

Minnesota's administration for the WPA program was in place in July 1935. The first round of submissions for project proposals had to be submitted to the state by early to mid-September.<sup>60</sup> Park Rapids mayor M. M. Nygaard personally travelled to Saint Paul with the proposal for a new sewer system. The *Enterprise* reported that, as of August 29, this was the only application for WPA work submitted by the village. At the September 5 meeting of the village council, WPA county engineer Gilbert Fabrick announced that he had submitted nineteen proposals for the county, three of which were construction projects for Park Rapids—and one of these was the bathhouse.<sup>61</sup>

The *Enterprise* followed the progress of the Park Rapids projects. In October, it reported that the sewer system had received a PWA grant, not a WPA grant. In February 1936, PWA officials authorized the construction of a new Legion Hall using materials salvaged from the demolition of the Methodist church. WPA funds for the band shell became available in November 1935, and it was completed the following June. The bathhouse was constructed between November 1935 and May 1936.<sup>62</sup>

The band shell and the bathhouse, therefore, appear to be the only construction projects completed in Park Rapids using WPA funds from the first round of submissions. Both were outdoor recreation facilities and both were estimated to cost less than \$1,000. The band shell is no longer extant. The bathhouse, therefore, represents the early influence of the WPA on Park Rapids—providing work for unemployed men in the short term and a recreational amenity that was well-used for decades by both local residents and tourists. Therefore, the bathhouse is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of “Community Planning and Development” and “Recreation.”



*C. 1940s photograph of the Park Rapids bathing beach showing the sand beach and concrete pier (center behind diving tower). The bathhouse (right) is at seen with its double-door entrance. The handmade benches now in the interior appear to be outside and placed at both sides of the doorway. (Photograph in possession of LuAnn Hurd-Lof, Park Rapids)*

<sup>60</sup> On August 29, the *Enterprise* stated that “President Roosevelt has fixed September 7 as the deadline for submitting applications.” On September 5, the submission date was given as the twelfth of that month. “Mayor Will Ask WPA Grant of \$80,000 for New Sewer System”; “Many WPA Projects for Hubbard County Filed as Dead Line Nears.”

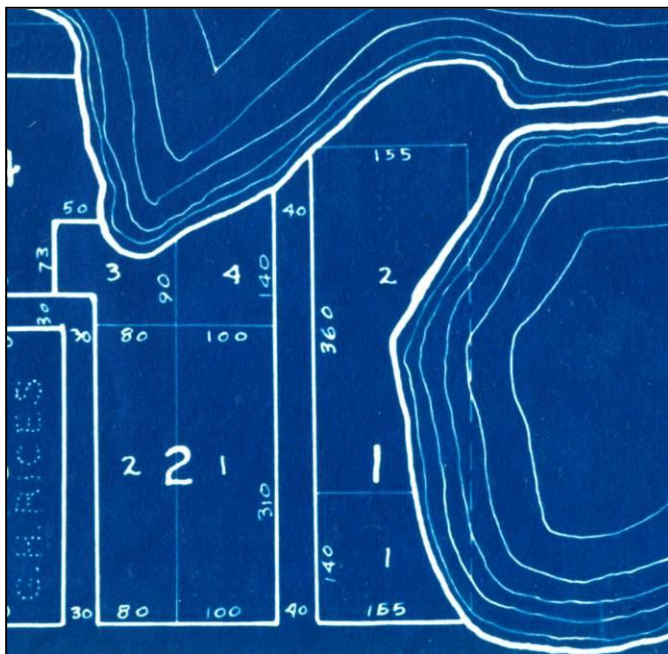
<sup>61</sup> “Mayor Will Ask WPA Grant of \$80,000 for New Sewer System”; Village Council of Park Rapids, Minutes of Adjourned Meeting, September 6, 1935.

<sup>62</sup> “Sewer Project Gets Approval in Washington”; “Old M. E. Church to Be Torn Down”; “County Gets Eleven New WPA Projects”; “Unique WPA Project in the County Is a Success.”



### Associated Setting

Records show that in 1894, the Village of Park Rapids acquired the lots on which the bathhouse was constructed, but they do not specify for what purpose. Sanborn maps indicate that the site had recreation usage (boathouses) by 1900, and, according to historic photographs, a large dock had been constructed by the 1920s. The land does not appear to have been officially designated as a park with a name and boundaries when the village council considered an “enlargement of the present river park” by adding land east of the municipal bathing beach in 1935. Council



Map showing the G. H. Rice's Addition to Park Rapids plat. The city acquired the north half of Lot 2, Block 1 in 1944, fifty years after acquiring Lots 3 and 4 of Block 2. (1954 Banister Engineering map, John R. Borchert Map Library, Wilson Library, University of Minnesota,

members discussed “proper landscaping” that would improve the site and make it “a better recreation center.” Subsequent council proceedings and issues of the *Park Rapids Enterprise*, however, do not mention landscaping prior to or in conjunction with the construction of the bathhouse. The historic design of the site, therefore, can only be determined from historic photographs, which show some landscape and recreational features that are no longer extant. Some of these features, such as the wood docks and the sand beach immediately north of the bathhouse, predate the building’s construction. Photographs from the 1950s show a short concrete pier in place of the docks, but this is also gone today.

The property associated with the bathhouse at the time of its construction, namely the land owned by the municipality, consists of Lots 3 and 4 on

Block 2. Although in 1935 the council considered purchasing additional land east of the former bathhouse, it was not until 1944 that the village obtained the eastern parcel (the north half of Lot 2, Block 1).<sup>63</sup>

In general, the utilitarian character of the park’s setting has been retained. Additionally, the “spatial and functional relationships” between the bathhouse, the road, and the riverbank remain. As the history of the beach, bathhouse, and parkland are so closely intertwined, it is probably appropriate to include the property as a whole as an eligible site. Further investigation of the site should be conducted if a National Register nomination is prepared.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Hubbard County Recorder’s Office, Warranty Deed No. 75625 (dated March 28, 1944); 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minnesota, 9A; 1940 U.S. Federal Census, Brooklyn Borough, New York, Kings County, New York, Sheet 5B.

<sup>64</sup> Patrick W. Andrus and Rebecca H. Shrimpton, eds., *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 11. In its explanation of

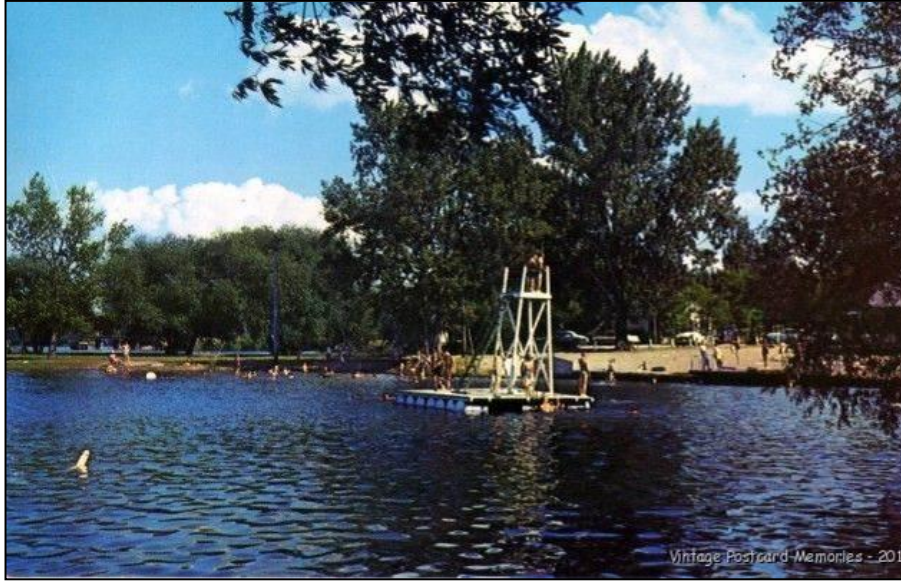
## CONCLUSION

The Park Rapids bathhouse and the adjacent land that was part of the park during the period of significance, 1936–1963, appear eligible for National Register listing under Criterion A. The dates of the period of significance extend from the completion of the building’s construction to the fifty-year cut-off date established by National Register guidelines. The property is locally significant for its association with federal relief programs of the Depression in the areas of “Community Planning and Development” and “Recreation.” The bathhouse is also eligible under Criterion C for its noteworthy use of fieldstone, a local adaptation to WPA funding restrictions. It maintains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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how to classify properties with more than one resource, *National Register Bulletin 16: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* classifies a city park with a small fountain as a “Site (for park).” *National Register National Register Bulletin 16: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997, rev. 1997), 14.

## ADDITIONAL IMAGES



*Above: Color postcard of Park Rapids bathing beach showing peninsula (left), diving tower (center), and bathhouse (far right), 1959.*

*Below: Visitors at the bathing beach. Concrete pier is at right. The site that is now Heartland Park is visible at rear left.*

*(Both photographs in possession of LuAnn Hurd-Lof, Park Rapids)*





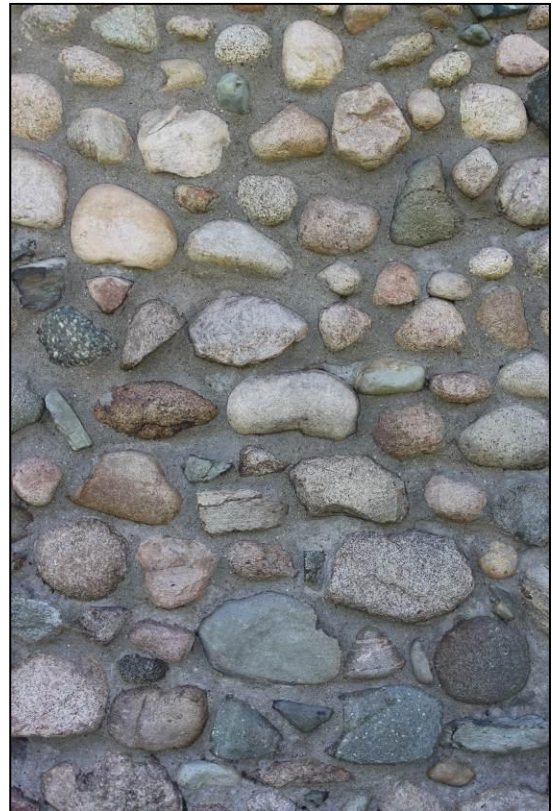


*Above: General view of Park Rapids Bathhouse showing (l-r) south and east facades.  
View to northwest.*

*Below: View of main entrance on north facade  
showing double-door entrance with transom and  
concrete stair. View to southeast.*



*Below: Detail view of stonework.*







*Above: Interior view from corridor of north entrance with transom window above. View to north.*



*Above: North entrance door to "warming quarters" from corridor. View to northwest.*



*Left: South entrance door as seen from corridor. Theater seats are at left. View to south.*



*Above: Entrance to north changing room with changing booths, handmade bench, and coat hooks. Ramp into room can be seen in the concrete floor.  
View to west.*

*Below: Detail view of fieldstone wall and paneled ceiling. View to north.*







*Above: Bathhouse and park from North Washington Avenue.  
The Fish Hook River is in the background. View to northwest.*

*Below: Red Bridge Park. View to northeast.*







*Above: View southeast from Red Bridge Park showing railroad trestle bridge that now carries the Heartland State Trail across the Fish Hook River.*

*Below: View from Heartland Park to southwest showing (l-r) the Red Bridge, Red Bridge Park, and the bathhouse.*





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