

**City of Eden Prairie
Heritage Preservation Commission
Yorkville and Bloomington Road Nomination**

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Summary

This report serves as a nomination for Yorkville and Bloomington Road for designation as a Heritage Preservation Site within the city of Eden Prairie, Minnesota. It was prepared by MacDonald & Mack Architects for the City of Eden Prairie and adapted from the Minnesota Individual Property Inventory Form prepared by Two Pines Resource Group in February 2018.

Per Ordinance No. 5-2010, Subd. 3, the City of Eden Prairie’s Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) has established a series of criteria for listing a historic district, site, building, or object as a Heritage Preservation Site. Yorkville and Bloomington Road is eligible for listing under Criterion 1, “[association] with events that have made significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”

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1. Planning Information

Name

Yorkville and Bloomington Road

Location

Approximately 1,000 feet south of the intersection of Riverview Road (former) with Riverview Road (current). It is situated roughly midway between the Minnesota River and Spyglass Drive.

Boundaries

The intact portion of the road within the city-owned conservation area is approximately 1,200 feet long. (See next page.)

Owner

City of Eden Prairie

Classification

The site was used for Transportation during the period of significance.

Present Use

The site is now categorized as Landscape within the James A. Brown Conservation Area.

2. Site Maps and Aerial Photos

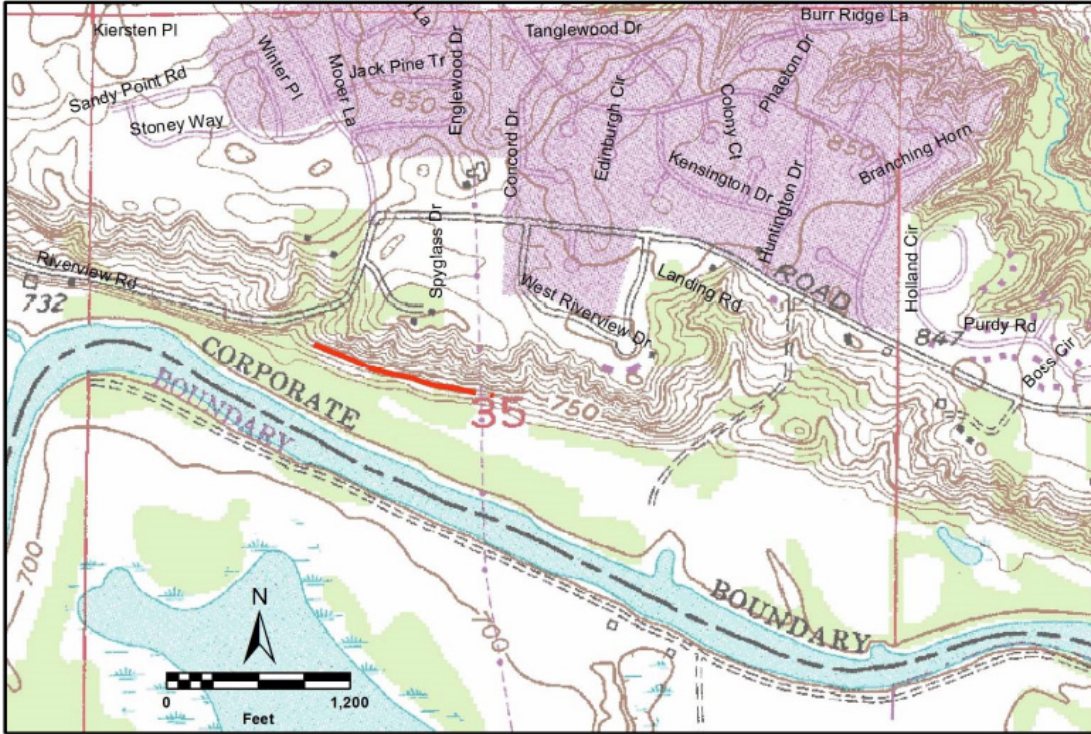


Figure 1 / Topo map showing affected area

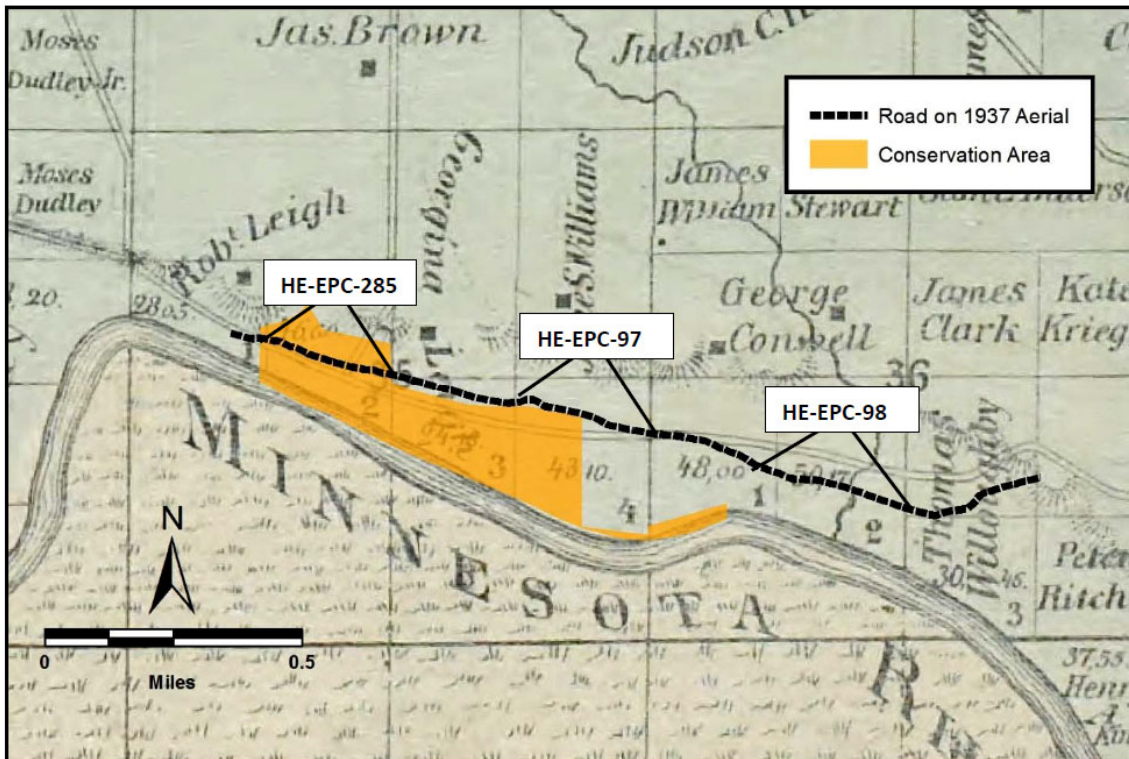


Figure 2 / 1873 map overlaid with local portion of road



Figure 3 / Present-day area of road



Figure 4 / Overhead satellite view of affected area



Figure 5 / Survey and map of affected area by Paul Thorp.

3. Physical Description

This information is adapted from the Minnesota Individual Property Inventory Form prepared by Two Pines Resource Group in February 2018.

General site location and conditions

The site is located within the James A. Brown Conservation Area. The intact road segment within this area is 1,200 feet (0.23 miles; 366 meters) in length and consists of a narrow terrace cut into the hillside about halfway up the bluff at an average elevation of 730 to 740 feet ASL. The visible west end of the continuous segment begins just to the east of a spring and a series of small erosional ravines; the eastern end is marked by a transmission corridor. The route can again be discerned at a distance of about 100 ft. to the east of the transmission corridor where another approximate 30 foot (9 m) length is present within the boundary of the conservation area.

The vegetation on the hillside is mature open woodland with an understory of buckthorn and prickly ash. The road alignment is covered by this understory vegetation, which in many places renders it impassable. A former barbed-wire fenceline also parallels and crosses the trail.

The earthen roadbed averages 12-15 ft. in width, though erosion has softened its edges and narrowed its width.

Along the road segment there are occasional small erosional ravines that have removed small sections of roadbed. A single, more substantial ravine was likely in existence at the time of the road's use. The sloped embankments to either side of this large ravine suggest it was bridged in some fashion although no evidence of a bridge structure or support elements remain. No associated features such as retaining walls or culverts were observed. However, on the 1994 inventory form for the Schlampp segment (HE-EPC-097), located 0.25 miles further to the east, the landowner reported that remains of corduroy surfaces had been discovered along the route together with occasional artifacts (Vogel 1994).

Historic use

Evidence suggests that this road may be a segment of the Minnesota Valley Oxcart Trail, given that it is a continuation of road segments (HE-EPC-97 and HE-EPC-98) previously interpreted as part of the trail network. Evidence and analysis by Eden Prairie Heritage Preservation Commission member Paul Thorp, including historic plat maps and surveying information, indicates that this road follows the same path as the Oxcart Trail and may have its origins in that precursor. Heritage Group North's analysis reached a different conclusion, finding that, while the road segment within the conservation area is clearly visible on the historical aerial

photography flown in January of 1937 and on modern LiDAR imagery (Map 2), it was not recorded during the initial 1854 government land survey; on the encompassing 1853-54 plat of the Hennepin townsite; or on Cook's 1860 plat map of Hennepin County. Heritage Group North's work suggests the road postdates 1854 and thus the period of the Minnesota Valley Trail's use (Gilman et al. 1979:8, 16-17, 24-26). In support of the road's later period of origin, a road alignment below the bluff and within the southern portions of Sections 35 and 36 is recorded on the 1873 and 1879 plat maps of Hennepin County (Wright 1873; Warner and Cooley 1879). While the oxcart trails developed organically along the easiest path across an undeveloped landscape, the historic road within the conservation area does not follow a natural terrace, but instead was clearly graded across the hillside midway up the bluff.

We recommend further study to resolve the uncertainty whether or not any roads existed on the same site prior to the Yorkville and Bloomington Road. That said, the Yorkville and Bloomington Road is worthy of documentation, celebration, and local designation unto itself.

Initial impetus for the road

Documentary research revealed that the road segment within the James A. Brown Conservation Area is a remnant of a state road known as the "Yorkville and Bloomington Road," which was constructed at the request of the residents of Carver County who sought a more direct and passable route to Minneapolis and St. Paul (*The Valley Herald* 1863a).

The advantages gained by this road are that you save about five miles travel over a rough and hilly road. In going to St. Paul via Shakopee, you expend one dollar in ferrriage for each trip. The money paid out annually to ferrymen, by citizens of this county in going to St. Paul via Shakopee, would pay for making the road to the eastern line of the county. During high water, and even at its present state, it is almost impossible to go that way, and people are forced to climb the bluffs, and, with loaded teams, follow a circuitous, hilly and poorly work-road, all of which could be avoided by working our new State road, which runs through the Yorkville Prairie and along the foot of the bluff, to Bloomington.

In March of 1863, the Minnesota State Legislature passed "An Act to Locate and Open a State Road from Yorkville in Carver County, to intersect the St. Paul Road south of Gibson's, in Bloomington Township, Hennepin County" (State of Minnesota 1863:242-243).¹ The road was to be a "State road and public highway" platted along the river between Yorkville on the west and a point on the St. Paul Road "about one mile south of Gibson's."² The counties of Hennepin and

¹ Yorkville, or Yorkville Landing, was a location on the Minnesota River in Carver County.

² According to the Cook's 1860 plat map the Gibson place was on Section 19 in Bloomington Township, which would place the east end of the road in Section 30 of T 27N R 24W, however the east terminus was pulled back to an intersection with the Chaska and Bloomington Road at "a point eighty rods east of the quarter section post, between section 31 and 36, on the range line between 21 and 22 town 116" (*The Valley Herald* 1864b).

Carver were responsible for opening and improving the road within six months of the passage of the bill. Within two months, in May of 1863, Carver County had contracted for the Construction of the road to the county line (*The Valley Herald* 1863a). An article about the plans to complete the Carver County segment urged the completion of the Hennepin County portion by highlighting the economic benefits of the road (*The Valley Herald* 1863b):

Now that we have provided for the building of the road through Carver County, an effort should be made to secure an appropriation from Hennepin County to build that portion of the road lying within its borders. The trading men of Minneapolis and St. Anthony should know that good roads to their market are essential requisites to prosperity in business; that immense quantities of pork and produce from Carver County are taken to their market and exchanged for lumber and other kinds of goods, not easily obtained nearer home; that the better the road, the less inducement is required to bring the people of Carver County to their market. This road, once built, will avoid the roughest, longest, and most dreaded portions of the road leading to Minneapolis.

Great interest is felt here in having the road pushed through, and the market to which it leads must receive even greater benefits than parties traveling the road. The influence of the city of Minneapolis can secure a necessary appropriation, and will oblige its business men and a large scope of country lying west of the road by making an effort to see the road completed. We are informed also, that citizens of this county are ready to subscribe liberal sums in aid of that portion of the road lying in Hennepin County. If the citizens of Minneapolis will do as well, either by private subscriptions or through their county board, the road may be in a condition for travel in the fall.

Despite this appeal, the commissioners of Hennepin County were resistant to opening the road due to the perceived difficulty of constructing the route as platted (*The Valley Herald* 1864a). However, after mediation with an arbitrator and further examination of the route, the originally platted alignment was recommended for construction in 1864 (*The Valley Herald* 1864b).

Road construction

The platted route as surveyed in January of 1863 went “from the county line between Carver and Hennepin counties to a point where said road intersects the section line between Section 28 and 33 Town 116 Range 22, thence easterly along the base of the river bluff on the most feasible ground to the Bridge across the creek, on the surveyed route of the Yorkville and Bloomington road in Section 33, then along the line of the road as surveyed by J. O. Brunius to a point of junction with the old Chaska and Bloomington road eighty rods east of the quarter stake between section 31 and 36 on the range line between section 21 and 22 town 116” (*The Valley Herald* 1864b). The road was to be constructed so that it was “not less than eighteen feet in width on its face, and so as to allow teams to safely pass each other at any, and all points on said road” (*The Valley Herald* 1864b). The revised completion date was pushed back to October of 1864 (*The Valley Herald* 1864b).

That the historic road within the James A. Brown Conservation Area is a portion of the Yorkville and Bloomington Road is confirmed by a number of references to the road passing through the lands of Georgiana F. Leigh. According to the 1873 plat map, members of the Leigh family owned all that land north of the Minnesota River in the W ½ and the W ½ of the E ½ of Section 35 which encompasses the historic road alignment and the majority of the James A. Brown Conservation Area (Wright 1873). By 1879, this land was consolidated under the ownership of Georgiana F. Leigh, whose house was located on the SE ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 35 (Warner and Cooley 1879). Among the recorded notices is a petition entered on December 6, 1875 by James A. Brown and others requesting an alteration to the Yorkville and Bloomington Road to which Mrs. Leigh was opposed (Hennepin County Board; MHS 127.F.7.7B; 461). The county sided with Mrs. Leigh and rejected the proposed change.

However, just two years later, in December of 1877, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners had an official survey completed of the same proposed change to the Yorkville and Bloomington Road (Hennepin County Board; MHS 112.J.16.3.B-1):

Commencing in Sec 34 T116 R22 at a point in said road about 12 rods east of a point where said road crosses the line between Secs 34 & 35, T116 R22 and running thence northeasterly and south of Mrs. Leigh's house, Thence Easterly to the road running south from the Wolf schoolhouse, Thence South Easterly so as to intersect said Yorkville and Bloomington road where said road is crossed by "Purgatory" Creek.

Again, Mrs. Leigh successfully appealed the county's proposed change in the road (*St. Paul Daily Globe*, 27 Feb. 1878). Then, in September of 1880 Mrs. Leigh, herself, successfully petitioned the Eden Prairie supervisors to open a route that would connect the Yorkville and Bloomington Road with the Wolf School house road, but not continue east to Purgatory Creek. Her petition describes a road leading from the "road running south from the Wolf school house" along the centerline of Section 35, west to a point at "the top of the hill opposite Mrs. G. F. Leigh's Residence" then to the west of the rut of the "old travelled track" (the former Hennepin Landing Road) to its intersection with "the Yorkville and Bloomington road six rods [99 feet] west of Mrs. Leigh's Spring on said Yorkville and Bloomington Road all in Sec Thirty Five Township 116 R 22" (Eden Prairie Clerk's Records, MHS).

This alignment corresponds to the portion of Riverview Road (now closed) that descends the bluff along the west boundary of the conservation area.

An actively flowing spring about 100 feet into the James A. Brown Conservation district and located along the path of the historic road corresponds to "Mrs. Leigh's Spring."

The road's final years and closure

Eventually, new roads in the area and changes to the Yorkville and Bloomington Road itself led to the closure of the portion within the James A. Brown Conservation Area.

While an alternative route up the bluff past Mrs. Leigh's was opened in 1880, the portion of the Yorkville and Bloomington Road below the bluff between Riverview Road (now closed), on the west, and Purgatory Creek, on the east, was still in use through 1892. In July of that year, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners approved a change in the road's alignment from "a point in said highway sixty rods east of the section line running north and south between sections 34 and 35, town 116, range 22, to the creek in the northeast quarter section 36 in said town and range" (*The Minneapolis Tribune*, 7 Sept. 1892, p.7). With that alteration, the segment of the Yorkville and Bloomington Road within the boundary of the conservation area was abandoned.



Figure 6 / Portion of the affected area, looking west (October 2017).

4. Statement of Significance

As an overland transportation route, the segment of the Yorkville and Bloomington Road within the James A. Brown Conservation Area is evaluated under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A, association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

For three decades, this road was a key component of a critical area of transit within the southern Twin Cities region – as an article at the time stated: “This road, once built, will avoid the roughest, longest, and most dreaded portions of the road leading to Minneapolis” (*The Valley Herald* 1863b). It served this purpose for nearly three decades, during a period when this area of Minnesota was growing, as seen in the table below, which shows county population per U.S. Census data (National Historical Geographic Information System, www.nhgis.org).

Year	Carver	Hennepin
1860	5,106	12,849
1870	11,586	31,566
1880	14,140	67,013
1890	16,532	185,294

Unlike many early roads that were eventually upgraded and widened, this road segment was abandoned and not subsequently modified. In its unimproved condition, the road retains its original trajectory while its narrow width reflects its use during a period of animal-drawn transportation. As such, it retains excellent integrity of location and association.

While the roadbed has suffered in places from the effects of erosion, the overall integrity of the design and workmanship is good as the length of this segment is sufficient to retain the sense of a continuous corridor despite minor losses. The integrity of setting and feeling of this segment is also good as its location within a conservation area has kept it free of modern visual intrusions. However, presently, the alignment is overgrown with wooded undergrowth which diminishes its setting and feeling. For this reason, it is recommended that a vegetation management plan for the road be developed in consultation with the City.

Based on these findings, the portion of the Yorkville and Bloomington Road within the James A. Brown Conservation Area is recommended as for designation as a Heritage Preservation Site within the city of Eden Prairie under Criterion 1, “[association] with events that have made significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.”

5. Bibliography

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Two Pines Resource Group

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