

MOLSTAD LAKE PARK
East of Intersection of 126th Street and 293rd Avenue
Mobridge
Walworth County
South Dakota

HALS SD-6
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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MOLSTAD LAKE PARK

HALS NO. SD-6

Location: East of Intersection of 126th Street and 293rd Avenue, Mobridge vicinity, Walworth County, South Dakota

Lat: 45.56135507, Long: -100.30141958 (where park and dam grade meet, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: Molstad Lake Park is a significant example of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in north central South Dakota. Many local men found work on the project during the Depression. The dam and park are good representatives of WPA projects and architecture. They are also important for the recreation and entertainment role they played locally.

Description: Molstad Lake is an artificial lake built at the upper drainage of Blue Blanket Creek. Low rolling hills surround the lake, some of which are cultivated with row crops while others are short-grass pasture. Shelterbelts of mainly deciduous trees are planted around the southwest corner of the lake and cover approximately 2.5 acres.

The dam runs east to west with the spillway on the west end. It is rip rapped with rock, and deciduous trees are growing on the dam grade.

The park is tucked below the dam grade toward the southwest. Only the dam grade and not the lake is visible from the park. Both deciduous and coniferous trees surround the park. The park is teardrop shaped. The northern one-third of the park borders the dam grade. Eight-inch, round, wood posts sticking 2' above the ground delineate the remaining boundary of the park. A gravel trail leads through the shelterbelts to the park.

Inside the park are a fieldstone bathhouse, three fieldstone fire pits, an obelisk, a metal swingset, and movable metal picnic tables.

The bathhouse has a fieldstone foundation, fieldstone walls, and gable roof covered in wood shingles. A central entry protrudes slightly. There is a chimney on the north slope of the roof. Exposed rafter ends are visible.

The north/south and east/west elevations are identical. The north/south elevations have a central protrusion; there are centered door openings flanked by single-window openings. Above the door and windows on the protrusion are decorative wood window hoods. The window opening on the north elevation of the protrusion (west side) has been infilled on the top ¼ with a wood panel. The

other openings on the north/south elevations are located at the top of the walls and are approximately 2' x 5'. These openings all have wood shutters that fold up from the bottom (awning), with the exception of the opening on the east side of the north elevation.

The east/west elevations have three openings at the top of the walls. The openings are spaced equidistance and measure approximately 2' x 4'. Above the openings in the gable is wood clapboard siding. All the openings on the west elevation have wood shutters; no openings on the east elevation have shutters.

There are three small fieldstone fire pits. The pits measure roughly 3' x 3' and have a metal grate.

The obelisk is built of fieldstone and capped with a large stone. Inscribed on the large cap stone is "MOLDSTAD LAKE 1937-1938." The name of the lake is misspelled on the capstone; there is no "D" in Molstad.

Overall the dam and park are in good condition. The dam and spillway were rebuilt in 1948 but remain in the same location. The dam and spillway together are approximately 1,304' in length. The park structures are in fair shape and have changed little since 1939. Movable metal picnic tables and a metal swing have also been added to the park.

History:

The WPA built Molstad Lake Park in 1938-39. It was part of a larger county-wide park improvement project that included parks at Evarts and Hiddenwood. The total cost for all three projects was \$20,345. Of this amount, \$13,200 went to pay unskilled laborers working on the project. These were the men who needed money the most during the depression.

The WPA work order stated that the goal was to "Improve parks throughout Walworth County, including the construction of bathhouses, beaches, parking areas, shelters and fireplaces, terracing, contouring and planting trees, landscaping, improving grounds and artificial lakes, and performing appurtenant and incidental work." Walworth County was the responsible agent for the projects. The State Department of Game and Fish, Biological Survey Service, and State Extension Service approved the plans for the park in their respective areas of expertise.

The WPA work order for the project standardized bathhouse construction placing these stipulations on construction:

- must be 20' x 45' and constructed of concrete or stone
- dressing rooms and center dispensing room measure 15' x 20'
- roof by a simple gable type of lumber and shingles
- entry portion to protrude 6" for better appearance
- must be made as indestructible as possible as no attendants will be on site

The cost of the fieldstone bathhouse was \$3,400. The fieldstone firepits cost \$167.50 each. The majority of these costs went to labor. The number of men employed at Molstad varied from month to month, but 42 were working on the site in August 1938.

An abundance of fieldstones are found in the glaciated prairies of eastern South Dakota and along riverbanks where erosion has exposed them. Homesteaders used these fieldstones to build houses and barns, or at least foundations for these structures. The use of fieldstone and other natural materials became popular again in park architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. The WPA, Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), Public Works Administration (PWA) and others used these materials extensively in South Dakota during the 1930s. These New Deal programs built masonry structures because they were labor intensive (put many people to work), used available local materials, and provided a finished product of substance that would endure.

Molstad Lake was a popular leisure area for Walworth County residents. The lake was stocked with fish, which provided recreation and food for the table. The state department of Game Fish and Parks has been stocking the lake regularly since 1939.

The lake was also a popular swimming and picnicking destination for Mobridge and Glenham residents in particular. The Missouri River is only a few miles away from the lake, but its swift currents, caving banks, muddy water, and sandbar dropoffs made it too dangerous for swimming and general recreation.

When the Missouri River was dammed downstream in Pierre in 1958, it created the massive Lake Oahe, which stretches from Pierre, S.D. to Bismarck, N.D. Lake Oahe became the primary camping, fishing, and swimming destination and a whole new industry around the reservoir developed. Consequently, use of Molstad Lake and Park has declined. A local sportsmen's group oversees the park (2014) and uses it occasionally.

Molstad Lake Park has the most integrity of the three WPA parks projects undertaken in Walworth County (Molstad, Hiddenwood, Evarts). At Hiddenwood, only a park wall constructed by the NYA remains from the New Deal era. The Oahe Reservoir inundated Evarts.

Sources:

Monographs

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Newspapers

Mobridge Weekly Tribune, 25 August 1938.

Government Records

South Dakota WPA Records. South Dakota State Archives. Roll 5936.

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Entry 2014 HALS Challenge: Documenting Landscapes of the New Deal



Entry obelisk at Molstad Lake Park (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



Shelterbelt at southwest corner around park (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



View of lake looking south toward dam face (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



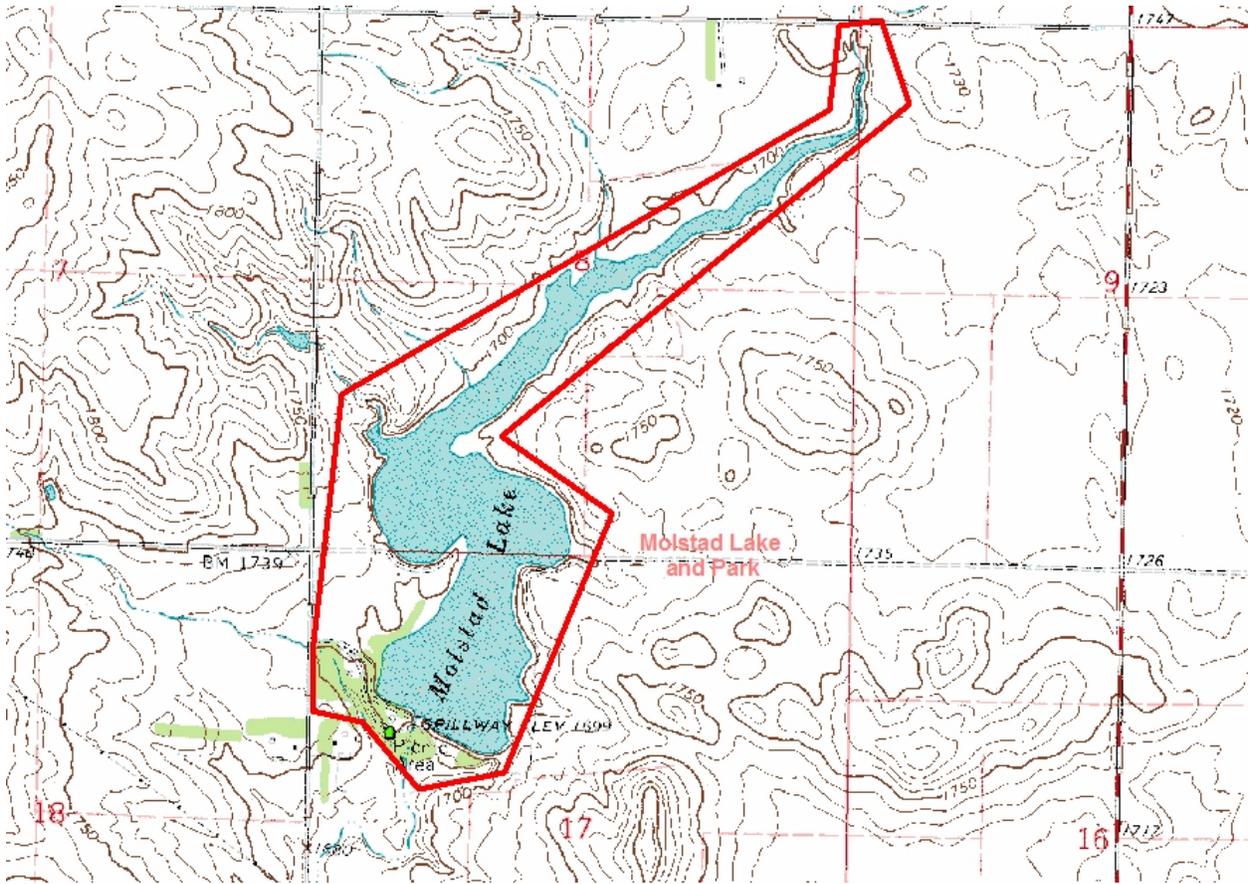
WPA fire pit in park (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



View of park looking east, bathhouse on right side surrounded by trees (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



View of bathhouse looking west (C.B. Nelson, 2014).



Molstad Lake Park image created in ArcMap 10, USGS map underlay (C.B. Nelson, 2014).