

**Friends of Fred Smith  
Wisconsin Concrete Park Preservation and Conservation History  
1977 – 2002**

Preservation and Conservation activities at the Wisconsin Concrete Park address the sculptures (263 tableaux or components), the historic Smith house, and the landscape. Preservation activities strive to maintain the sculptures, house, and landscape as close to their original state during Fred Smith's artistic activity, 1948 – 1964, as is possible, according to the highest preservation and conservation standards achievable. The Friends of Fred Smith (FoFS) conservation committee maintains an archive of photographic documentation and records documenting preservation activities since 1977. A site database created in 2001 contains records for each component, accommodating information in 48 fields. All detached fragments are inventoried and stored, and detached embellishment materials are collected and organized bi-annually.

Conservation of sculpture addresses a large number of works made by a self-taught sculptor, using non-traditional sculpture techniques, with varying but generally limited budgets. The FoFS conservation committee consults with architects, engineers, conservators, and sculptors, and retains the services of professionals in each field, depending on the level of expertise required for specific projects. We have found that an appropriate way to execute conservation plans is with a curator, technicians, and trained assistants.

- **Curators:** people with comprehensive knowledge of the art of Fred Smith, with the history of the site each component in question; familiar with preservation and conservation theories and practice; and familiar with the FoFS archive, who can make decisions regarding overall approaches, methodologies, and treatment implementation.
- **Technicians:** Individuals with the appropriate skills to take direction from curator(s) and implement a particular activity; can include sculptors, conservators, architects, engineers, and interns.
- **Trained assistants:** Individuals who can be trained to carry out activities under the direction of curator(s), technicians, and/or conservation committee members; assistants can include interns and volunteers.

**Synopsis of work from 1977 to 1987**

After Fred Smith's death in 1976, the site was purchased by Kohler Foundation, Inc. The first restoration project began in 1977, undertaken by sculptors Don Howlett and Sharron Quasius. In July 1977 the site was struck by a cyclonic downburst which caused extensive damage to the natural landscape and many sculptures. Howlett and Quasius restored all of the sculptures and replanted trees, pioneering the restoration of environmental art. The site was gifted to Price County, to be maintained by Price County Forestry Department (PCFD maintains all County parks). In 1987 Price County received funding from Kohler Foundation, Inc. to assess conservation and maintenance needs and to hire technicians to implement a maintenance and conservation program. In July 1987, when the project was underway, a second wind storm hit the site and caused damage to about 35 sculptures. Damage was assessed, a conservation plan drafted, and technicians were hired to work on site in the fall of 1987, and from June through August, 1988. Since that time preservation and conservation activities have been conducted annually.

**2002**

- Project addressed structural stabilization and surface repair of 9 sculptures, database development, archive organization, planning.

- Veterans' Memorial completed and dedicated.
- A sculpture (male figure) with a high degree of integrity to its original condition was moved to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI, so an example of Smith's work will be preserved in perpetuity, and on view indefinitely, in a museum environment.
- Exterior construction of new educational programming and conservation studio completed; interior to be built out when funding is available.

#### **2001**

- Major footing excavation and interior structural stabilization of 3 figures.
- Preparation and reattachment of 11 detached arms.
- Armature preparation and surface treatment of 6 deer legs.
- Interns from University of Wisconsin-Madison worked on surface treatment of 60 sculptures.
- Construction of new educational programming and conservation studio begun.

#### **2000**

- Archive organization.
- Consultation with engineers from Construction Technologies Laboratory, Skokie, IL, on structural stabilization methodologies. CTL reviewed method for stabilization of Paul Bunyan figure and other works.
- Mortar analysis and color matching by CTL petrographer completed.
- Site condition report updated, detached glass collected.
- Fund raising for 2001 conservation project.
- Plans began on the design of a new educational programming and conservation studio.

#### **1999**

- Construction Technologies Laboratory report completed and submitted.
- Rock Garden room interpretation and exhibit prepared; interpretive rock garden installed.
- Interns from the University of Wisconsin-Madison worked on surface treatment of sculptures. All sculptures measured, dimensions recorded for archival documentation.
- Site drainage improved.

#### **1998**

- Boroscope, sound, and other diagnostic testing done by the Construction Technologies Laboratory, Skokie, IL.
- Structural and surface repair to 7 sculptures.
- Deteriorated footings removed from 5 sculptures and 2 tableaux, and replaced.
- Collection of detached glass, and other tasks.
- New information area and other exterior renovations constructed by Wisconsin Conservation Corps.
- FoFS celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fred Smith's first sculpture and the beginning of construction of the Wisconsin Concrete Park.

#### **1997**

- Guided by recommendations in sculpture conservator Andrej Dajnowski's survey and report, sculptures cleaned of biological growth, detached appendages reattached to 2 sculptures; metal components treated with corrosion converter; cracks in sculptures filled with caulk, a temporary application.
- Architect retained to design sculpture covering system; this project has been researched and discussed but never implemented. Six tableaux with wooden wagons, buggies, or sleighs are covered with systems allowing sculptures to breathe each winter.

- The 1991 version of *The Art of Fred Smith* revised and republished, with a self-guided tour brochure.
- Conservation committee designed renovations to Smith house exterior, including visitor orientation area and display cases.

#### 1996

- Conservator Andrezej Dajnowski retained to survey the site; his report and recommendations submitted in August.
- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) conservation project completed; begun in 1994, project addressed the conservation of all tableaux with wooden elements, including harnesses, buggies, wagons, and sleighs, and all original wheels. The design of #21 sleigh (original completely deteriorated) was replicated exactly in stainless steel by the fabrication shop of Marquip, Inc. Wagons were painted by local boy scouts; one scout received his Eagle Award for work on the project; Budweiser Clydesdale wagon replicated to its original design, using all available original parts; Smith's informational signs repainted.
- Handicapped accessible ramp constructed.

#### 1995

- ISTEA project continues. Eleven anodized aluminum plaques are designed and produced to replicate Fred Smith's original designs and texts in a permanent medium; work continues on wagon and buggy restoration. All metal components treated with corrosion converter; unstable figures fitted with cribbing systems (these systems remain in place until 2001, when a system for stabilizing figures has been determined, after much research).
- Rotting wood armatures removed from 27 horse sculpture interiors.
- New parking area created and driveway re-paved.

#### 1994

- Work begins on Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) Transportation Enhancements Program grant project: treatments researched; wagon wheels and wooden components receive treatment; research on anodized aluminum plaques begins; glass and surface embellishment collected and organized.
- Driveway entrance widened to accommodate increased traffic; one sculpture moved to allow this change.
- Areas of original paint consolidated on 5 sculptures.
- Conservator Anton Rajer retained to survey site conditions; report submitted in September.
- Preservation architect William Coney retained to survey site conditions; report submitted in October.

#### 1993

- Site condition report completed; research into a new methodology for the structural stabilization and surface conservation is sought, beginning several years of research and consultation.
- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) funds approved but not allocated.
- First Theatre Nana performance production inspires community involvement in site. Founders continue to work to establish Friends of Fred Smith.

#### 1992

- Momentum and funding decrease drastically. Little work conducted. Founders work to create a not-for-profit support organization, Friends of Fred Smith.

#### 1991

- NEA grant funds major conservation of Double Wedding Tableau and the American Eagle sculpture; many sculptures opened up at cuffs and ankles to allow drainage.
- Wood components treated with Abatron (unsuccessful method for preserving historic fabric).

#### **1990**

- Major conservation of #13, Kerosene Wagon and Hans Everson figure; minor work on additional sculptures.
- Landscaping plan implemented. Areas of ground cover planted around tableaux to create a passive barrier and deter visitor handling of sculptures. Many red pines planted to replace those lost in 1977 storm, and to landscape east meadow.

#### **1989**

- Interior stabilization and surface treatment of 15 sculptures.
- Landscaping plan researched.

#### **1988**

- Treatment of storm damaged sculptures continues; 30 sculptures addressed.

#### **1987**

- Site assessment begins after 9 years of intermittent work by non-professionals..
- Site organization and structural and surface treatment begins.
- July 5 storm damage assessed; planning and treatment of damaged sculptures begins.