

**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment

other names/site number Leo and Emma Nohl Residence, Mary L. Nohl Residence

2. Location

street & number	7328 North Beach Road	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Fox Point	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Milwaukee	code 079
			zip code 53217

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination _ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally _ statewide _ locally. (_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _ meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria.
(_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other. (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 structure
 site
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
2	buildings
1	sites
60	structures
63	objects
	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

LANDSCAPE/garden

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

LANDSCAPE/garden

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Concrete

walls Weatherboard

Wood

roof Asphalt

other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

Period of Significance

1943-2001

Significant Dates

N/A

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hay, Henry Harshaw

Nohl, Mary L.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Name of Property

Milwaukee
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Kohler Foundation, Inc.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.37 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 427470 4777665
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Timothy F. Hegland	date	June 10, 2005
organization	Consultant for: The Kohler Foundation, Inc.	telephone	1-608-796-2650
street & number	6391 Hillsandwood Rd.	zip code	53560
city or town	Mazomanie	state	WI

Nohl, Mary L.. Art Environment
Name of Property

Milwaukee
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Ms. Terri L. Yoho/Executive Director	date	June, 2005
organization	Kohler Foundation, Inc.	telephone	920-458-1972
street & number	725 X Woodlake Road	zip code	53044
city or town	Kohler	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Narrative Description:

The Mary L. Nohl Art Environment is located on the west shore of Lake Michigan in the village of Fox Point, one of the northernmost suburbs of Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city.¹ The Art Environment consists of a nearly flat 1.37-acre beach front lot that contains two buildings: a modest size period revival style-influenced single family residence, and a very small adjacent tool shed. Surrounding the house are some sixty concrete sculptures, most weighing many hundreds, even thousands of pounds, and all of which were created by Mary L. Nohl (1914-2001), who lived in this house for most of her life. Besides constructing these free-standing sculptures, Nohl also gradually transformed both the exteriors and the interiors of the house and the tool shed. In the process she turned them and the surrounding grounds into a single unified ensemble that is totally intact today and is one of Wisconsin's most original and outstanding works of art.

This lot was first acquired in 1924 by Nohl's parents, Leo and Emma Nohl, who resided in Milwaukee and purchased the lot with the intention of using it as a waterfront summer retreat. In the same year, the Nohls also erected the first building on their new property, a small prefabricated cottage originally located at the rear end of the lot that they would later move closer to the water. Today, the west half of this lot is densely planted with trees and undergrowth and a second stand of pine trees shades the northeast corner of the house and its north-facing front entrance. In 1924, though, when the Nohls took possession, both this lot and much of the surrounding area had been used as farmland and there were no trees or any other natural features here save for the beach itself. In addition, the paved two-lane North Beach Road of today that runs along the lake shore north of the Nohl property and also along the north side of the lot was then little more than a dirt track that was not plowed in winter. It immediately became the favorite place of the Nohl's 10-year-old daughter, Mary, and it would remain so for the rest of her life.

The North Beach Road property continued to be used just as a summer place until 1941, when improvements to North Beach Road coupled with the advent of winter plowing persuaded the Nohls to transform the cottage into a year-round residence. In order to accomplish this, they hired Milwaukee architect Henry Hay to design a new four-season house that would fill the space between the already existing 1924 cottage and a detached two-car garage building that had been built nearby a few years later. The new one-and-one-half-story period revival style-influenced house that Hay designed incorporated both the older one-story Astylistic L-plan cottage and the rectilinear plan garage into its fabric, creating the irregular plan house that is extant today. Construction was hampered by materials

¹ The population of Fox Point in 2000 was 7012 and the population of Milwaukee was 596,974.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

shortages associated with the United State's entry into World War II, but the house was finally completed in 1943, whereupon the Nohls sold their Milwaukee house and moved permanently to North Beach Road. Also living at the Beach Road house was Mary Nohl, who in 1937, had graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a bachelor's degree, a solid background in art, and a teaching certificate. Armed with this certificate she had then taught art in schools in Baltimore, Maryland and in Milwaukee until 1943, when she gave up teaching art for the more enjoyable act of creating it and established a production pottery studio in a building located not far from her family's Fox Point property. Nohl then moved in with her parents and remained in the North Beach Road house for the rest of her life.

The area that surrounds the Nohl property consists of a shallow mile-and-a-half-long 50-to-400-foot-wide shelf of flat land that lies at the foot of the 100-foot-tall bluffs that line the shore of Lake Michigan.² As previously noted, this shelf was farmed prior to being developed into lots and at the time the Nohls made their purchase it was essentially undeveloped and would remain so for many years thereafter. Today, however, all of this land has been subdivided into large lots that are occupied by very expensive single family residences, most of which were built after the end of World War II. Access to all of these mostly beach front properties is provided by North Beach Road, whose west end intersects with the north-south running Lake Drive, the principal lakefront thoroughfare that connects the several communities that line the Lake Michigan shore north of the Milwaukee city limits. North Beach Road descends the bluffs to the waterfront shelf and then runs north and south along the base of the bluffs before coming to dead ends at both its north and south termination points. Some 1500 feet north of the Nohl property, however, the road comes down from the base of the bluffs to the shore and runs south for about 1500 feet parallel to it. Upon reaching the northeast corner of the Nohl family lot, the road turns and runs west along the north edge of the Nohl lot until it once again reaches the base of the bluffs, whereupon it resumes its southerly path. This deviation had the merit of opening up a small portion of Fox Point's lakeshore to public access but at the same time it also gave the public access to Mary Nohl's work as well, with attendant consequences.

What follows are descriptions of the two buildings and the site that are associated with the Mary L. Nohl Art Environment. Each of these elements will be described first as originally built and then as it was subsequently modified by Mary Nohl. Because the three elements together contain hundreds of individual works of art, only a representative sampling of these works will be mentioned and described.

² These bluffs extend six miles south to the mouth of the Milwaukee River and north for many more miles.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Mary L. Nohl House

1924/1930/1943

Contributing

As previously noted, the earliest portion of this house was built in 1924. This was a one-story, rectilinear plan, jerkinhead gable-roofed, prefabricated cottage that was built by an as yet unknown manufacturer, and its exact original size and original floor plan are also unknown. It is believed, however, that it measured approximately 28.5-feet-long by 19.5-feet wide and it is known that it was originally located at the west end of the lot. In 1930, the Nohls had this building moved to its present location closer to the lake and its ridgeline now runs north-south. At the same time they also had a one-story jerkinhead gable-roofed wing measuring approximately 23.5-feet-long by 19.5-feet wide and containing one or more bedrooms added to the cottage's west-facing elevation. This wing has a ridgeline that runs east-west and it gave the overall building an L-shaped plan. In addition to the cottage itself, the Nohls also had a freestanding, one-story, two-car garage building built on the property between 1924 and 1940. This building measured approximately 20-feet-square, it had a concrete pad foundation, a jerkinhead gable roof whose ridgeline runs north-south, and it was located approximately 26.5-feet north of the north-facing elevation of the cottage.

Both of these buildings were still extant in 1940 when the Nohls decided to turn what was then their summer residence into a year-round one, and it was also their intent to have both buildings incorporated into the overall scheme of the larger residence they were planning. This they accomplished by having the space between the two existing buildings filled with a new 26.5-foot-wide by 40-foot-deep, one-and-one-half-story addition whose roof has a ridgeline that runs east-west. This addition was connected directly to the two existing buildings and it had a full basement story (there were no basements under the older buildings). Its first story contained a new living room, entrance hall, dining room, and kitchen, and its second story contained a stair hall, two new bedrooms, and a master bathroom and dressing room suite. The Nohl's architect, Henry Harshaw Hay, gave this new addition a period-revival style-influenced design that borrowed interior and exterior features from both the Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival styles. He also unified the three separate components of the combined building by giving the new addition a jerkinhead gable roof like the ones found on the other two buildings and by cladding the new addition in the same drop siding that was used to clad the two older buildings.³ The resulting combined house has an irregular plan and asphalt shingle-clad roofs. It was first occupied in 1943 and is essentially intact today with an overlay of art works that Mary Nohl subsequently added to its exterior and interior.

³ The still extant dated blueprints of the addition show that the drop siding used was "to match present buildings," both of which were apparently covered in similar siding. Mary Nohl Archives. Kohler Foundation, Inc.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 4

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Exterior, as Built

The main facade of the house faces north onto North Beach Road and it is asymmetrical in design and comprises the north-facing elevations of the 1943 addition, the earlier garage, and the still earlier 1924 cottage. The north-facing elevation of the 1943 addition is the easternmost (left-hand) of the three and it is three-bays-wide and its center bay contains the principal entrance to the house. This classically derived entrance consists of a six-panel wood door that is flanked on either side by five-light sidelights and it is surmounted by a simplified wood architrave. The left-hand bay contains a quadruple window group that provides light to the living room inside and this group consists of four identical eight-light, metal casement windows. Located on the slope of the roof above and positioned off center between the first story's left-hand and center bays is a nearly flat-roofed dormer that is sided in drop siding, and it contains a pair of six-light, metal casement windows that light the second story's east-facing bedroom. A second and larger five-sided, flat-roofed dormer that lights the stair hall inside is placed on the slope of the main roof to the right of the center bay and it is also sided in drop siding and contains two ten-light, metal casement windows.⁴ The first story of the addition's right-hand-bay, however, is completely covered by the attached and older two-car garage, whose north-facing elevation consists of two large, identical garage door openings that are each filled with a sixteen-panel wood overhead garage door. The north-facing elevation of the 1924 cottage, meanwhile, is asymmetrical in design and two-bays-wide. Its left-hand bay consists of a small two-window group placed high up on the wall that contains a pair of side-hinged four-light wood sash windows, while the right-hand bay consists of a door opening.

The east-facing side elevation of the house faces Lake Michigan and it too is asymmetrical in design and comprises the east-facing elevations of the 1943 addition, the earlier garage, and the 1924 cottage. This elevation is dominated by the symmetrically designed east-facing elevation of the 1943 addition. The first story of this elevation consists largely of a multi-window group that provides light to the living room and which is composed of a single large, fixed, plate glass center light that is flanked on either side by pairs of ten-light, metal casement windows. Centered in the gable end above is a smaller four-window group that is composed of four six-light, metal casement windows and which provides light to the second story's east-facing bedroom. The east-facing elevation of the garage wing is symmetrical in design and contains just a single bay. This bay is centered on the elevation and comprises another small, two-window group that is placed high up on the wall and it also contains a pair of side-hinged, six-light wood sash windows. The east-facing elevation of the 1924 cottage,

⁴ All casement windows used on the 1943 addition are made out of metal and they originally had clear lights that were held in place with metal comes. There is also a chimney stack clad in cobblestones that straddles the peak of the roof and which is located between the two dormers.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

meanwhile, is asymmetrical in design and three-bays-wide. The left-hand (south) bay contains a pair of eighteen-light wood French doors, the middle bay contains a triple window group composed of eight-light, metal casement windows, and the right-hand bay contains a single pair of eight-light, metal casement windows. The doors in the left-hand bay originally provided light for a bedroom but now provide light for what was to become Mary Nohl's wood workshop, while the windows in the middle bay provided light to a study room that was inserted into the original 1924 cottage during the 1943 remodeling. The windows in the right-hand bay provide light to an angled hallway that was also inserted during the 1943 remodeling. Both the middle and right-hand bays also look out onto a 13-foot by 11-foot, rectilinear plan, one-story screened porch that occupies the southeast corner formed by the intersection of the 1943 addition and the 1924 cottage. This porch was built in 1943 and has a concrete pad floor and a flat roof supported by wood posts.

The south-facing rear elevation of the house is also asymmetrical in design and comprises the south-facing elevations of the 1943 addition and the 1924 cottage. The 1943 addition dominates and it is asymmetrical in design and two-bays-wide.⁵ The left-hand of the two bays is actually just about centered on this elevation and its first story contains a group of two ten-light, wooden French doors that are flanked on both sides with identical non-opening doors, and these doors open from the hall inside onto the screen porch. Located on the slope of the main roof above is a large, rectilinear plan, flat-roofed dormer that is inset several feet into the roof slope. This dormer is also clad in drop siding and it contains a single six-light metal casement window that provides light to the second story bathroom. This window is placed to the left of an eight-light wooden door that opens from the master suite's dressing room onto the roof of the porch. The first story of the right-hand (east) bay contains a quadruple window group that provides light to the living room inside and this group consists of four identical eight-light metal casement windows. Located on the slope of the roof above is a smaller, nearly flat-roofed dormer that is also sided in drop siding and it features a pair of six-light, metal casement windows that light the second story's east-facing bedroom.

The south-facing rear elevation of the 1924 cottage consists of the south-facing gable end of the original portion and the south-facing side elevation of the later bedroom wing. The gable end portion to the right is one bay wide. This bay is centered on the elevation and contains a triple window group composed of three small identical six-light side-hinged wood sash windows. The south-facing elevation of the bedroom wing is three bays wide and is symmetrical in design. Each bay features a small, six-light, side-hinged, wood sash window that is set high up on the wall.

⁵ What would have been this elevation's third or left-hand (south) bay is covered by the attached 1924 cottage.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

The west-facing side elevation of the house is also asymmetrical in design and comprises the west-facing elevations of the 1943 addition, the earlier garage, and the 1924 cottage's later bedroom wing. On this elevation, however, the bedroom wing and, to a lesser extent, the garage wing, both project out beyond the elevation of the 1943 addition, creating a modest three-sided courtyard. The elevation of the bedroom wing is located to the right and it is symmetrical in design and three-bays-wide and each bay contains a small six-light wood sash window that is set high up on the wall. The elevation of the 1943 addition is the center portion of this overall elevation and it is asymmetrical in design and three-bays-wide. The right-hand bay contains another group of four ten-light wooden French doors, this one of which opens from the dining room onto a terrace, while the middle bay contains a triple window group composed of three identical six-light, metal casement windows that lights the kitchen. Placed to the left of the kitchen windows in the left-hand bay is the rear entrance to the house, which consists of a six-light over two-panel door that is sheltered by a shed-roofed open porch whose roof is formed by an extension of the adjacent garage wing roof. Centered on the gable end above these three bays is a quadruple window group composed of four identical six-light, metal casement windows that light the west bedroom. This elevation is completed by the west-facing elevation of the garage, which is symmetrical in design and contains just a single bay. This bay is centered on the elevation and comprises another small two-window group that is placed high up on the wall and which contains two six-light wood sash side-hinged windows.

Exterior, as Transformed

As originally constructed, the house described above, despite being mostly architect-designed, was still an essentially modest house of pleasing but unexceptional design whose principal intent was to provide a comfortable setting for lakeside living. It was not until after Mary Nohl's father died in 1961 and her mother took up residence in a nursing home in 1963 that Nohl began to transform the family house into the strikingly original building it has since become. Part of this change involved completely covering the original painted exterior surface of the house with overlay of light blue, gray, or red sponged on paint. So uniform was Nohl's application of this paint that the casual visitor might not even notice, his or her attention being riveted instead by the numerous large and small painted wooden panels that Nohl attached directly to the building's drop siding-clad exterior walls. To most of these panels Nohl attached orderly assemblages of stylized human figures, fish, birds, and other natural subjects, all of which she cut out of wood on the band saw and table saw in her workshop. Other panels have figures attached to them that Nohl made of assemblages of driftwood that she picked up on her walks on the beach. She also attached a number of carved and found objects to her house. The end result of all these additions has been to give the entire exterior of the house a sculptural, bas-relief

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 7

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

quality that has effectively transformed it into the largest of the many sculptures that comprise the Mary Nohl Art Environment.

Upon entering the site, a visitor first encounters these panels when viewing the north end of the garage. The broad gable end above the double garage doors are completely covered by one of the largest of the panels that exhibit scroll-sawn figures. Smaller vertical panels covered with non-representational sawn elements are attached to the sides of the garage doors as well. As one approaches the main entrance to the house still more panels can be seen on the east-facing side of the garage, including a large one located beneath the two-window group that is covered with elongated wood figures that once formed a part of a 435-foot-long fence that Nohl built along the north edge of her property. There are three more panels placed to the left of these windows that are made of colored mosaic and which display dancing human figures. Upon reaching the entrance door itself one notices a row of six carved wooden heads suspended from the soffit of the main roof above, while panels covered in scroll sawn fish are located to the right of the door and below each of its sidelights. To the left of the entrance is another large panel that features a red-painted driftwood figure, while two more panels displaying smaller driftwood figures are located on either side of the four window group to the left of the door. Another large panel covered in elongated scrollsawn figures is located below the window group, the window surround itself consists of narrow panels covered with both abstract and representational scrollsawn figures, and a bleached animal skull is suspended from the wall surface above the window group.

The east-facing elevation of the house is similarly treated. The 1943 addition's centrally placed five-window group is entirely surrounded by a broad frame of panels covered in scrollsawn human figures, twin panels covered in scrollsawn leaf-like objects are attached to the wall surface on either side of this window group, a large panel centered on the spandrel between the first and second story window groups displays a stylized, scrollsawn, red-painted fish skeleton, and two more panels that display scrollsawn diving and swimming human figures are placed on either side of the gable end's quadruple window group. Turning the corner, one sees thin column-like panels covering the screen porch roof's supporting posts and another large panel covered in elongated scrollsawn figures is placed below the four window group that is located to the right of the porch on the 1943 addition's south-facing elevation. Just to the left of the porch, on the 1924 cottage's east-facing elevation, the wall surfaces that flank both sides of the French doors are completely covered with two large panels that are themselves covered with a multiplicity of scrollsawn animal, human, and fish shaped elements.

The wall surface of the south elevation is treated just as elaborately as the house's other, more visible elevations. The south elevation of the 1924 cottage has a large panel displaying horizontally arrayed scrollsawn serpent-like elements placed below its centered, paired window group and a panel placed

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

on either side of the window group that displays vertically orientated serpent-like elements of similar design. Two tall, narrow additional panels placed at the ends of this elevation display both scrollsawn fish and elongated human figures and a broad wooden stringcourse that spans this elevation at the level of the window lintels is enlivened with its own collection of scrollsawn creatures. Crowning the elevation is a large panel in the gable end of four figures in a red-painted boat. The south elevation of the bedroom addition to the cottage is similarly treated with panels displaying elongated scrollsawn human figures placed beneath each of the elevation's three windows.

The west-facing elevation of the 1924 cottage's bedroom wing is treated more lavishly. One of the largest of Nohl's panels spans the entire space below this elevation's three windows and it is completely covered with elongated scrollsawn human figures. Here too, Nohl placed a broad wooden stringcourse decorated with scrollsawn elements across the full width of elevation just above the windows. In addition, she decorated the ends of the elevation with pilaster-like panels complete with capitals decorated with scrollsawn fish and elongated human figures, and she placed a large panel decorated with a red-painted smiling fish in the center of the gable end above.

Turning the northeast corner of the bedroom wing, one finds that the entire wall surface to the right of the door on the wing's north-facing elevation has been covered with red-painted elongated human figures that in this instance have been affixed directly to the wall surface itself. A small panel with a driftwood figure is located to the left of the door and a somewhat larger panel depicting elongated female human figures is placed below the elevation's double window group. The most striking feature of this elevation, however, is the wood door itself, which Nohl painted dark slate blue and completely covered with a dense array of mostly abstract wood elements that were given a more three-dimensional treatment than she usually used.

The west-facing elevation of the 1943 addition has only a single small panel decorated with vertical scrollsawn serpent-like elements placed to the left of the French doors and a smaller group of elongated scrollsawn human figures is attached directly to the wall surface below the kitchen windows. Both the French doors and the quadruple window group in the gable end above are enframed with board surrounds that are covered in scrollsawn elements that Nohl made in September of 1965, the one surrounding the French doors being described as a "fish procession."⁶

The west-facing elevation of the garage wing is more densely decorated and its surface is covered by six panels. Placed below the centered two-window group is yet another panel covered in elongated

⁶ Bianco, Jane. *Mary Nohl's Art — Her Best Beloved Home: Happy With Her Own Construction*. University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.A. Thesis, May 7, 2004, p. 20.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 9

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

scrollsawn human figures, and to the left are two more panels, the upper one of which depicts human figures in small boats and the lower, two rows of elongated human heads. Placed to the right of the windows are three more panels, the bottom one of which displays elongated reclining human figures, while a scrollsawn whale-like element is attached directly to the wall surface between the two smaller upper panels.

Interior

Not surprisingly, the interior of Mary Nohl's house is every bit as original and extraordinary as the exterior. Even before one enters the house one senses this as one is about to step up onto the concrete pad that serves as the front entrance porch. To reach it, one first steps up on a smaller concrete step whose upper surface is covered with black cemented-on lake pebbles that spell out the word "BOO," a humorous but also ironic reference to her being called a witch by some local school age children. The six-panel wood entrance door itself is also notable, being painted bright blue and having a metal, claw-shaped door knocker. Notable too are the entrance's sidelights, which Nohl covered (inside) with blue stained glass set into abstract patterns.

The door opens into a 7.5-foot-wide by four-foot-deep entrance vestibule that has plaster walls and ceiling, a floor-to-ceiling mirror to the right (west) and a built-in seat with a lift-up lid to the left.⁷ Sponged paint has been applied over the original paint here and a woven wire, floating figure Nohl made hangs from the ceiling above. The bottom part of the vestibule's walls is covered by a simple baseboard having a molded top portion and a quarter-round molding at its base. The floor is covered in blue linoleum and these tiles also extend further out into the hall beyond.⁸ To reach the hall, one passes through an elliptically arched opening that is supported by two Tuscan Order wood columns that Nohl painted light blue and decorated with gold painted bands that spirals up from the floor like a barber pole.

The hall measures 11.5-feet-wide by 21.5-feet-long and it is rectilinear in plan. The north wall of the hall features the entrance vestibule to the right (east), a doorway in the center that provides access to a short hall that leads to the kitchen, and just to the left of this is the lower flight of the staircase that leads to the second story, which is placed against the west wall of the hall. Also placed on the west wall just a little further to the left (south) is a wide opening that leads to the dining room. Natural light is admitted to the hall by French doors that make up most of the room's south wall and which open

⁷ All the walls and ceilings in the 1943 addition are plastered.

⁸ Identical baseboards were used throughout the 1943 addition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 10

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

onto the screen porch outside.⁹ The remainder of the south wall consists of a doorway positioned to the right that opens into a hall that leads to rooms in the 1924 cottage portion of the house. The east wall of the hall features two door openings placed equidistant along the wall, both of which give access to the living room beyond.

As soon as one enters this room one realizes that there are no plain surfaces in this house. All the walls originally were painted but they were then over-painted by Nohl using a sponge or daubing technique. Color is everywhere and is always the result of her handiwork. For instance, the floor of the hall is covered in linoleum tiles laid in blocks of color that resemble a Mondrian painting, one being dark blue and an extension of the tiles in the entrance vestibule, another being red, another, green and still another, pink and green. Also notable for its new color is the staircase, which is typical of Colonial Revival designs in having a turned newel post, a shaped wood handrail, and turned balusters. Originally, this may have been either varnished or painted but Nohl later painted the newel posts and balusters in fire engine red enamel while the handrail and the open stringers are sponge painted in red over white. Also painted fire-engine red is a swinging wooden gate Nohl made that has turned balusters set in a rectilinear frame, the whole being hinged to the casework of the north entrance to the living room that is located on the hall's east wall. This gate was used to block off access to the living room when Nohl allowed tours to visit her house.

Furniture in the hall belonged to Nohl's family and consists of a Victorian period two-seat sofa whose wood frame she repainted fire-engine red and which she recovered in purple corduroy speckled with red paint. Next to it is an upholstered chair of later vintage that she also reupholstered in purple corduroy. There is also a simple Victorian era four-drawer wooden chest in the southeast corner that she sponge painted with red, and a coffee table and a side table that have ceramic tops that she fashioned. Also present in this room are a number of carved wood sculptures, a sponge-painted telephone, and a wood assemblage hanging on the wall above the dresser and painted in gilt paint, all of which Nohl made, but the most numerous works here are Nohl's oil paintings, which ascend the west wall of the room up the length of the staircase. Somewhat incongruous in this otherwise intensely personal setting are two large 19th century portrait photographs of Nohl's maternal grandparents placed on the east wall above the sofa and these are the only historic photos or other two-dimensional works by someone other than Nohl on display in the house.

The living room is accessed from the hall and it takes up the entire east end of the 1943 addition and it is 25-feet-long and 14-feet-wide. Paired three-panel doors that Nohl later painted pink and covered

⁹ The clear original lights in these doors were later replaced by Nohl with stained glass of her own manufacture and design.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 11

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

with flat wood cutouts of people in conversation open into to the living room from the hall. What the hall lacks in the way of natural lighting is more than made up for by the living room. Both its north and south walls have quadruple window groups centered on them while the east wall, which looks out over the lake, features a large picture window that is flanked by four smaller windows. Even though Nohl later covered parts of these windows with stained glass assemblages of her own (especially those windows in the north wall that face Beach Road), the fact remains that this room was the heart of the house and was the place where Nohl communed with the lake she loved so much. Although the windows in this room and their views are its most important feature, there are several other original features of note. Centered on the west wall is a large fireplace having a classically derived wooden fireplace surround and mantel shelf and the ceiling is spanned by two broad boxed beams. Interestingly, the walls of this room are now covered with mass produced panels of fiber board whose surface is completely covered in very narrow vertical ridges. The original blueprints, however, show that these walls were to be plastered like the ceiling (which is) and it is not known if this wall treatment is original to the room or a later addition. Regardless, both the walls and the ceiling have since been transformed by Nohl's sponge painting, which, in the case of the walls is pink over the underlying white, and on the ceiling, black and blue over white. The floor here is also covered with linoleum tiles but the design is more formal than the hall, there being a large rectilinear area covered in gray tiles that is centered on the floor and which is surrounded by a broad border of cream tiles speckled with green. There are, however, two smaller areas of tiles leading into the room through the two hall doorways, the one to the north consisting of alternating squares of blue and gold, the one to the south being red.

The furniture in the living room is extremely varied in terms of styles and date of manufacture and consists mostly of pieces that Nohl inherited from her parents, as well as a later sofa and a chair and table (copies of works Eero Saarinen designed for Knoll) that Nohl may have acquired for herself.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that Nohl subsequently repainted any piece of exposed woodwork on these pieces and she also experimented with a Jackson Pollock-like drip painting technique on the two overstuffed Art Deco style-influenced chairs in the room that the Nohls had bought from Sears-Roebuck in the 1930s. The living room also contains what is for all practical purposes a gallery of Nohl's work done in a wide variety of media. Her oil paintings can be found on all of the walls, carved heads, ceramic heads, and ceramic mosaic heads decorate the mantelshelf and table tops, driftwood figures are attached to several of the walls, and some of her extraordinary woven wire figures hang from the ceilings. Also hanging from the ceiling are elaborate ceiling light fixtures of Nohl's design that hang above the tables at either end of the room. Both fixtures feature multiple, mobile-like elements made of aluminum, those

¹⁰ It is entirely possible that acquiring furniture designed for the similarly pronounced Knoll, Inc. appealed to Mary Nohl's considerable sense of humor.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 12

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

associated with the south fixture consisting predominately of egg shapes and those of the north fixture, sailboat shapes. Nohl also made a red-painted wood fire screen covered in elongated human figures that she used to cover the fireplace opening in the summer months and she also covered the fireplace's hearth with beach stones.

The dining room occupies the southwest portion of the west end of the 1943 addition. It is almost square in plan and measures 11.5-feet-long by 11-feet-wide. The principal entrance to the room is from the hall and it is centered on the dining room's east wall. Directly opposite, on the room's west wall, is the French door group mentioned earlier and these doors opens onto the terrace outside. A second, smaller opening is located on the room's north wall and its six-panel swinging wood door opens into the kitchen. The walls of the dining room are plastered and are sponge painted in blue over white, while the plaster board ceiling is painted a flat slate blue. The floor is once again covered in linoleum tiles, there being a large center field of blue tiles surrounded by a cream border, and there are two smaller areas as well, the one leading into the hall being of blue and black tiles and the one leading into the kitchen being yellow. Hanging from the ceiling above the table is a fish mobile that Nohl made of old aluminum ice trays.

The kitchen occupies the northwest portion of the west end of the 1943 addition and it measures 10-feet-long by 11-feet-wide. The west wall of the room contains the outside entrance door to the right (north), while the kitchen sink and its associated counter space and cabinets are placed underneath the triple window group to the left. The door to the dining room is placed to the right on the room's south wall and the rest of this wall is covered by upper and lower wood cabinets that have associated counter space. These cabinets and the counter wrap around the room's southeast corner and also cover the right-hand portion of the room's east wall. Centered on this wall is a kitchen table whose east end is attached to the wall surface, and the door to the hall leading to the main hall occupies the left-hand portion of the wall. The right-hand portion of the room's north wall contains the door that opens into the garage and the remainder of the wall is occupied by a refrigerator and stove.

Nohl's alterations to the kitchen consist mostly of repainting. The walls have red paint sponged over white, the ceilings have blue and green paint sponged over white, and the kitchen cabinets are also overpainted with blue paint sponged over cream. The floor consists of red-speckled linoleum tiles, the counter surfaces and their back-splashes are covered in dark blue linoleum, and the kitchen tabletop is covered in bright red linoleum. Nohl also affixed several small panels to the surfaces of the doors of the wall cabinets and these display small human skeletons made out of chicken bones. Several of Nohl's oil paintings are hung on the walls and she also made three small three-dimensional, carved wood figures that rest on the countertop and appear to support the corners of the wall cabinets above.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 13

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

The screened porch has a concrete slab floor and the walls on its east and south sides are screened and a screened door in the south wall opens to the yard beyond. The porch ceiling is made of beaded board that has been painted blue and the surround of the French doors on the north wall that open into the hall have been sponge-painted with a gray color paint.

The interior of the 1924 cottage and its bedroom wing contain several rooms of its own, including a bathroom that contains a bathtub, sink, and toilet, and two former bedrooms and a study that Mary Nohl subsequently used largely for storage purposes. The most significant of the spaces in this part of the house is Nohl's workshop, which takes up the south end of the 1924 cottage. This room measures 12.5 feet-long by 11 feet-wide. It has a floor covered in speckled blue linoleum tiles, walls that are covered in painted drywall, and a ceiling that is open up to the ridgeline of the roof and whose inner surface is composed of plywood sheathing supported by exposed 2x4" wood rafters. The entrance to this room is on the north wall and it opens into the angled hallway that opens into the stair hall. A small side-hinged six-light window is located towards the south end of the room's west wall, a triple group of identical windows is centered on the room's south wall, and a pair of 18-light French doors are centered on the east wall looking towards the lake.

The workshop contains a free-standing drill press, planer, table saw, and band saw. It also contains work benches Nohl made that have storage space below and work surfaces on which are located grinders and other small electric and non-electric tools. Mass-produced wooden bookcases that were originally placed on the walls of the adjacent study room were moved here instead and do duty as storage units as do bookcases of Nohl's own manufacture. Plywood panels on the walls hold an assortment of tools, most of which are as bought. Nohl, however, modified many others. The floors and shelves in the room also contain numerous works of art, many made of carved wood pieces, that were either considered to be unfinished or were simply being stored.

The second story of the house's 1943 addition contains a stair hall, two bedrooms and a bathroom suite. One ascends to the second story by the red-painted staircase noted earlier. This staircase has a dogleg design, its treads and risers are carpeted, and it is open up to the ceiling of the second story's hall. The staircase's balustrade ascends along the edge of both flights of stairs and it also encircles the open well of the staircase before terminating against the west wall of the second story hall. Both the staircase and the second story hall are lit by the polygonal dormer that is located on the north-facing slope of the addition's roof. The dormer's original clear lights now being entirely covered over by stained glass windows of Nohl's design and execution. The second story hall has a T-plan. The hall's principal space measures 12.5-feet-long by 6.5-feet-wide and its north end is polygonal in shape and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 14

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

contains the stair landing. The hall also has a smaller 5-foot-wide by 6.5-foot-deep space that opens off of its east side and forms a vestibule leading to the east bedroom.

Most of the west side of the hall consists of the staircase, but a door opening just beyond and to the left (south) opens into the west bedroom. The south wall of the hall features a door that opens into the bathroom, while the east wall is partially taken up by the staircase and by the five-foot-wide opening that leads to the east bedroom. Like the living room below, the hall also functions as another gallery space for Nohl's work. The walls are densely covered with her oil paintings, sculptures of several different media hang from the ceiling, and large carved wood figures inhabit the corners. The floor is covered in cream-colored linoleum speckled with green. The east, west and north walls are sponge-painted with green paint over an off-white ground, and the south wall is sponge-painted with blue paint over an off-white ground.

The broad opening in the east wall of the hall that leads to the east bedroom has a shallow arched shape and the north wall of this vestibule consists of a large, built-in linen closet that has two large six-panel doors placed above two smaller one-panel doors. A semi-circular-arched door opening in the east wall of this vestibule opens, through a similarly shaped six-panel door, into the 12.5-foot deep by 16-foot-wide east bedroom, which was called the "daughter's room" on the 1940 blueprints. The west wall of this room has a second identical semi-circular-arched door opening located equidistant to the left (south) that opens into the dressing room off the bathroom, while the east wall opposite has a quadruple window group centered on it that overlooks the lake. Because the ceiling of this room follows the slope of the roof, the upper halves of the north and south walls slope up to the ceiling's flat central section. Inset into these slopes and placed opposite each other on the room's north and south walls are dormers, both of which have paired windows with bookcases placed below them that are protected by glass doors. The floor of this room has a central rectangular field that is covered in black linoleum and this is bordered by a broad band of cream-colored linoleum speckled with green, while the walls and ceiling are sponge-painted with gray paint over an off-white ground.

The dressing room occupies part of the south side of this story and it measures 8.5-foot-long by 5-foot-wide. The south wall of this room contains a door that opens onto the porch roof, the north wall has doors that serve a large built-in closet, the east wall has a door that opens into the east bedroom, and the west wall has another door that opens into the bathroom.

The bathroom is located just to the west of the adjoining dressing room and it measures 8.5-foot-long by 6-foot-wide. A door in the bathroom's east wall opens into the dressing room and a second door located in its north wall opens into the hall. The west wall of the bathroom features a sunken tub to the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 15

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

right and a toilet to the left. The south wall features a single window opening, and the east wall has a sink centered on it that has a mirror above it and a counter top that is covered in smooth lake pebbles that Nohl cemented to it. The floor of the room is linoleum and the off-white walls have been sponge-painted with blue paint.

The smaller west bedroom measures 11.5-feet-deep by 15.5-feet-long. Centered on its east wall is the door that opens into the hall and centered on the west wall opposite is a quadruple window group. The south wall has an alcove centered on it that holds a dresser and there are closets placed on either side of the alcove that are accessed through six-panel wood doors. A small four-panel door in the north wall gives access to an attic space beyond. Here too, the ceiling shape follows the shape of the roof and the upper half of the north and south walls slope up to the ceiling's flat central section. The floor is covered in cream-colored linoleum tiles that are flecked with green and the walls and ceiling are off-white and have been sponge painted with blue paint. This room contains two single beds that have headboards decorated with Nohl's elongated scrollsawn wood figures and the dresser and chair in the room were also repainted by Nohl in fire-engine red.

Tool Shed

ca.1943

Contributing

Located just to the west of the garage wing of the house is a small, square plan, one-story building that was at least occasionally used as a tool shed.¹¹ This building measures about eight-feet-square and has a concrete pad foundation, walls that are covered in drop siding, and a hip roof that is clad in asphalt shingles and which has overhanging open eaves that are supported by exposed rafter tails. Each of the building's east, west, and north-facing elevations have a single small six-light wood sash window centered on them, while the south-facing elevation contains a door.

Here too, Nohl worked her transforming magic. All the walls have been sponge-painted like those on the house and the corner boards and window and door surrounds are even more densely covered with sponged-on black paint. Nohl also positioned small groups of elongated, gray-painted, scrollsawn human figures below the windows on both the north and west sides of the building and she placed additional groups of them on either side of the door on the south elevation. The most elaborate feature of the building, though, is the door itself, which Nohl completely covered in scrollsawn elements in a manner that echoes the design of the door in the north wall of the 1924 cottage's bedroom wing, which faces the tool shed's door on the other side of the rear courtyard.

¹¹ Not much is known about the use of this building, but judging from the different names shown on various maps associated with this property – frame shop, play house – it is probable that Mary Nohl and her parents used it for a number of different things, none of which could claim absolute priority.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 16

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Site & Sculptures

1963-2001

Contributing

The 1.37-acre lot associated with the Mary Nohl Art Environment is essentially flat land whose east end is formed by the Lake Michigan shore. The west half of this lot is now largely given over to unmanaged woods made up of a dense mixture of trees and shrubs, and similar growth covers most of the south lot line as well. It is the east half of the lot that contains the house, the tool shed, and the outdoor sculpture garden that encircles the house and extends down to the lake shore. The surface of the east half is essentially given over to mowed grass but there is a stand of pine trees in front of the house and encircling its northeast corner that Nohl planted to ease mowing demands and to decrease the visibility of her outdoor work.¹² The entire lot is also completely encircled by a six-foot-tall cyclone type wire fence that Mary Nohl had installed in 1970 to deter theft and vandalism, and portions of this fence are topped with barbed wire as well.

A visitor first becomes aware of the site when driving south on the asphalt-surfaced North Beach Road, the route of which closely parallels the lake shore at this point. Upon reaching the site, the road makes a 90-degree turn to the right and continues west along the entire north edge of the lot and for a short distance beyond before turning 90-degrees once again to continue south along the base of the bluffs that help define this area. Entrance to the site is gained by passing through a pair of wire gates located in front of the house on the north side of the encircling fence. These gates are made of the same cyclone fencing as the rest of the perimeter fence and they are attached to two six-foot-tall, one-foot-square cement gate posts that are studded with smooth, medium-size beach stones and topped with simple square concrete capitals, the street-facing surface of the right-hand (west) one of which bears the incised name "Nohl." Mary Nohl helped her father build these gate posts shortly after the family acquired the property in 1924. Two smiling concrete busts (1A and 1B) perched on top of the gate posts are Nohl's later additions to the gates.¹³

Just inside the gates is a concrete-surfaced area in front of the garage which serves the garage and provides a parking space for visitors. A curving flagstone sidewalk leads from the left edge of the driveway to the entrance of the house. Half-way up on the right is a short stretch of balustrade that consists of two three-foot-tall one-foot-square concrete pedestals that are covered in smooth beach stones and topped with flat, square, concrete capitals (5). Placed between these two pedestals is a short

¹² Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. December, 1968. Mary Nohl Archives, Kohler Foundation, Inc. In this newsletter Nohl states that: "Each year I give more space to woods and less to lawn, and like it better. And just incidentally, woods don't have to be mowed or raked."

¹³ Numbers in parentheses are keyed to the accompanying site map.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 17

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

stretch of balustrade whose balusters consist of the elongated, scrollsawn wood human figures that are one of Nohl's signature creations.

Flanking both sides of the entrance walk are the first of the 60 mostly concrete yard sculptures that surround the east, north, and west sides of the house. The densest concentration of these sculptures is situated around the entrance to the house (2-15) but other tightly clustered concentrations also occur on the lake front portion of the yard (30-34 and 39-43), which is where most of the sculptures are located. No works are placed near the south lot line of the site because it is so close to the house, but three more significant concentrations of sculptures can also be found on the building's west side. The first of these is centered on the flagstone-covered courtyard and the sculptures here (45-48, 50) are easily visible from the dining room windows. The second group borders a path that leads west into the woods (49, 51-54), and the third group is located at the west end of the parking area (55-60).¹⁴

Helping to access the various sculptures on the grounds is a system of paths (27) that Nohl began building shortly after her mother moved into a nursing home in 1963. These paths consist of 14-inch-square cast concrete sections whose surfaces are covered in small pebbles that Nohl brought up from her beach. They were among the first works that Nohl made of concrete. Besides being functional, these paths also helped Nohl organize the site as well. As she noted in her diary:

My sidewalks are growing—in about 4 different directions—and they are more than decorative—they sort of make spaces for outdoor sculpture.¹⁵

Some of these paths lead to specific destinations, such as the beach or around the perimeter of the house. Others lead to or partially enclose sculpture groups that Nohl built later.

A few of Nohl's yard sculptures are relatively small in scale, although they are still heavy enough to deter thieves, but others are massive, weighing many hundreds and even thousands of pounds. In her master's thesis on Nohl, Debra L. Brehmer divided these works into several distinct groups: monolithic heads, figures and groupings; mythic animals; and architectural ruins.¹⁶ Brehmer described the building process as well:

¹⁴ Placed flat on the ground near #54 are two nineteenth century gravestones that Nohl "saved from the bulldozer," both of which memorialized earlier women named "Mary." A typical instance of Nohl's sense of humor.

¹⁵ Nohl, Mary. *Diaries, 1960-1973*. December, 1967. Mary Nohl Archives, Kohler Foundation, Inc.

¹⁶ Brehmer, Debra L. *The Handcrafted Universe of Mary Nohl*. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: M.A. Thesis, December, 1995, p. 35.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 18

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

To build these pieces, Mary first develops a rough idea on paper. She then makes armatures out of metal rods, old pipes, fence wire or tin and fills in the forms with stones she collects by the beach in an old red wagon. She applies concrete in sections, from the ground up, allowing each to dry for two or three days before adding the next. She often combs or trowels a texture into the wet medium and adds subtle decorative flourishes, such as beach stone, marbles or reflector eyes and ornamental bits of pottery or tile.¹⁷

The iconography of these pieces is complex and is sometimes specific to a particular piece, but several dominant themes can be seen. These themes can also be seen in all the other mediums she explored, be they scrollsawn wood, painting, or silver jewelry. Stylized human figures predominate and are found in many different guises, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs, and sometimes in groups. Many of these figures are busts that have faces that are without expression and resemble maquettes for Easter Island figures (12). Others are more playful, especially if found in groups (9, 21, 23). Another commonly encountered theme is fish, which are sometimes grouped with human figures (10), and sometimes with each other (4, 20). Other water-related themes can also be found, including mermaids (25) and other water dwelling creatures (7).

Much more complex in form and design are several large scale works that reveal a vast multitude of small, carefully designed and crafted elements that when fitted together create a small world of their own. The fountain in the front yard (37) is one such creation, which Nohl described to friends in one of her biannual mimeographed newsletters.

It will be a glass palace with about three or four hundred windows, colored glass windows, all different sizes and shapes, set in cement so light can come through. The water will go up the center with the aid of a fountain pump and it will drip from the top making nice water noises.¹⁸

Other examples of this type of work include the Wall of Faces (29) on the lake side of the house, and the Wall of People (56) that borders part of the parking area in front. Both are three-to-four-foot-tall concrete fences that enclose parts of the site, and the North Tower and the South Tower (52, 53), which flank the entrance to the path on the far west side of the house that gradually vanishes into the woods.

Nohl's earliest adult work in concrete actually dates from the summers of 1935-1937, when she was otherwise enrolled in school at the Art Institute of Chicago. This is a squat sculpture that resembles a

¹⁷ Brehmer, Debra L. Op. Cit. p. 36.

¹⁸ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. June 1976. Mary Nohl Archives, Kohler Foundation, Inc.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 19

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

nesting chicken covered in beach stones and Nohl soon moved it to the rear of the site where it still is today.⁽⁵¹⁾ Nohl's later decision to work once again in concrete was partially a result of her renewed interest in the medium, and she was spurred on to some degree by her experience making the paths mentioned earlier. Working in concrete also possessed other advantages; it was easily worked, was cheap, and sand for the mix was available at Nohl's doorstep. Sadly, though, the decision to work in concrete was also a response to the vandalism and theft that dogged Nohl from the beginning of her time living alone in the house. Nohl's earliest outdoor sculptures were frequently made of driftwood found on the beach, but these sculptures were relatively light and could be easily stolen and they could also be set on fire. To deal with the problem Nohl turned to concrete for its greater weight and greater degree of permanence. And just as her choice of material was partially dictated by necessity, so to a lesser extent were her designs. Nohl soon found that thinner pieces were far easier to damage than more substantial ones. Consequently, few of the human figures she made of concrete exhibit arms or fingers. And yet, from this adversity Nohl discovered a whole new medium, one that enabled her to leave a stunning legacy of sculptures that have a degree of permanence that her more fragile and easily damaged wooden sculptures could not have achieved.

Much fewer in number today than when Nohl was alive are the numerous wind chimes, wind mills, and hanging sculptures that she suspended from tree branches on the site. Nohl made these kinetic works out of a wide variety of materials, such as metal, wood, and glass, and she delighted in the sight and sound of them. She wrote: "When the waves roar and the windmills carry on a conversation with each other...and the glass chimes tinkle—all is right with the world."¹⁹ Today only a few of these works still exist *in situ*. Time, the elements, and vandalism and theft have all contributed to the lessening of their numbers. A few, however, are still located where Nohl put them and others are in storage or are being conserved. Otherwise, the grounds and Nohl's North Beach Road home are still almost exactly as she left them when she died in 2001 and display the highest degree of integrity.

Inventory

For the purposes of this nomination, all of the extant outdoor sculpture groups are considered to be contributing resources within the scope of the overall Art Environment. What follows is a listing of these resources keyed to the site plan that is provided. All sculptures are made of concrete unless otherwise noted. Mary Nohl seldom gave her works formal names so the ones given below are the descriptive ones generated by Jane Bianco for her M.A. Thesis.

¹⁹ Bianco, Jane. Op. Cit., p. 46.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 20

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Site Plan #

Sculptures

1A	Front Gate Post
1B	Front Gate Post
2	Dinosaur
3	Head & Shoulders
4	Standing Fishes
5	Front Door Posts
6	Network of Faces
7	Sea horse
8	Leaning Pair
9	Woman & Children
10	Man & Fish Conversing
11	Head w/Colored Glass Hair
12	Pointed Large Head
13	S-Shaped Figure
14	Two Facing Lions
15	Long Heads in Hats
16	Tall Green-Eyed Figure (wood)
17	Crowned Heads
18	Head w/Glass Necklace
19	Tall Horned Figure (wood)
20	Fish w/noses Upward
21	Four Seated Singers
22	Thick-Legged Creature
23	Embracing Couple
24	Dinosaur + Person
25	Mermaids
26	Three Witches
27	Pebble Pathways
28	Two Seated Fish
29	Wall of Faces
30	Straight Back Figures
31	Black-Eyed Bust

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 21

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

32	Long Head, facing South
33	Long Head, facing East
34	Black Eyes, facing East
35	Arches
36	People-Birds
37	Fountain
38	Leaning Torso
39	Large Ground Face
40	Smaller Ground Face
41a	Small Ground Face
41b	Small Ground Face
42	Torso in Hat
43	Armless Figure
44	Tree Stump Face
45	Couple Holding Hands
46	Happy Balancing Figure
47	Cylindrical Head
48	Elongated Head
49	Ring of Architecture
50	Cylindrical Heads
51	First Cement Animal
52	South Tower
53	North Tower
54	Large Face
55	Two Figures, Glass Medallion
56	Wall of People
57	Blue-Eyed Figure
58	Brown-Eyed Figure
59	Man & Woman Singing
60	Elongated Trio

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Significance

The Mary L. Nohl Art Environment is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its national significance under National Register (NR) criteria B and C. Research was undertaken to assess this potential utilizing the NR significance area of Art, which is defined in NR Bulletin 16 as "The creation of painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture, and the decorative arts." The results of this research are detailed below and have determined that the Mary L. Nohl Art Environment, which is composed of a single family residence, a small outbuilding, and their surrounding grounds, meets NR criteria for listing in the NRHP. The interior and exterior of the house and its sculpture-filled grounds form a single unique artistic whole that was created single-handedly over a nearly 40-year period by Mary L. Nohl, whose extraordinary combination of energy and artistic vision produced one of the nation's most unusual and memorable artistic entities and one which has achieved international recognition. The property is also the resource most closely associated with Mary Nohl productive life as an artist. The period of significance begins in 1943 when she returned to this house after a period of teaching, and ends in 2001, the year of her death.

The Nohl Art Environment occupies a 1.37-acre beach front lot on the shore of Lake Michigan in the village of Fox Point in Milwaukee County. Prominent Milwaukee attorney Leo Nohl and his wife, Emma, purchased this lot, in 1924 to provide a summer retreat for themselves and their two children, Gene and Mary. To house the family during the summer months they purchased a small, rectilinear plan, prefabricated building that was originally placed at the west end of the lot and there it would remain for the rest of the 1920s.²⁰ In 1930, the cottage was moved to the east end of the lot to be nearer to the lake, a bedroom wing was added to it, and a separate two-car garage was built close by. Mary Nohl finished high school in Milwaukee in 1932 and began to take college level art courses, first at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and then, beginning in 1933, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, from which she graduated in 1937 with a B.F.A. degree and, a year later, with a teaching certificate. In 1939, Nohl moved to Baltimore, Maryland and began to teach art at a junior high school in that city.

Meanwhile, Nohl's parents had decided in 1940 that the time was now ripe to turn their Fox Point summer residence into a permanent one and commissioned an architect to design an addition that could accommodate comfortable year-round living and also link the existing cottage and garage

²⁰ Prefabricated houses of this type were then offered by a number of local, regional, and national manufacturers of prefabricated houses including such well-known brands as the Simplex Ready Made Houses and Garages made by Sears, Roebuck & Co., and the widely distributed Hodgson Camp Houses manufactured by the E. F. Hodgson Co. of Boston, Massachusetts.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

together into a single building.²¹ The following year, Mary Nohl moved back to Milwaukee, taking a position as an art teacher at North Division High School. In 1943 she moved into her parent's new home where she would continue to live for the rest of her long life. After a second year teaching art at Steuben Junior High School, Nohl resigned, having decided that she would rather pursue a life making art than teaching about it. Within a year she created a pottery studio and factory in the nearby community of Whitefish Bay and she operated this as a successful commercial enterprise until 1954, when the factory property was taken for the construction of an adjacent highway. Fortunately, Nohl had also discovered silversmithing not long after she began to pursue her work as a production potter and she had begun to create jewelry of her own design in the studio she had established in her parents home. It was to this new medium that she turned after the loss of her studio. Some of the works she created there would subsequently be exhibited in a show at the Milwaukee Art Museum and in a traveling show sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution.

Nohl's father died in 1961, and her mother moved into a nursing home two years later. Nohl thus found herself alone in her home for the first time and not long afterwards began the process of transforming it and the surrounding lot into the total art environment that it was to become. After her mother died in 1968, Nohl inherited both the house and an estate of sufficient size to ensure that she would be completely independent for the rest of her life. With this legacy came the freedom to create a life dedicated to her art and the creation of a setting of her own choosing. As her work on the transformation of her house progressed and began to involve not only the interior but also the more visible and public exterior and grounds, Nohl began to achieve a degree of local fame (and notoriety) that she enjoyed but which also resulted in the vandalism and theft that would continue to dog her thereafter. For the next thirty-three years, Nohl devoted herself to her work and to the pleasure she found in everyday living, often taking time out from both to travel about the world. She was still hard at it in 1996, when she began the process of gifting her entire collection to the Kohler Foundation in order to ensure its preservation, a process that was completed after her death in 2001, at the age of 87, when the Foundation received ownership of her entire art environment. By this time, knowledge of Nohl's extraordinary creation had traveled far beyond Fox Point and Wisconsin, and she had achieved fame both as an artist and visionary and also as one of the very few women who has undertaken such an extensive transformation of her personal world.

²¹ The Nohl's architect was Henry Harshaw Hay of Milwaukee, who had studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and spent 10 years in the Milwaukee architectural offices of Howland Russell, Kirckhoff & Rose, and Judell and Bogner before becoming a registered architect in 1931 and becoming a partner with Judell in the firm of Judell and Hay.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

History

Mary Louise Nohl was born in Milwaukee in September 1914, and was the youngest of three children. Her oldest brother, Gene Nohl (1910-1960), was always called "Max" by the family and was one of Mary's heroes. Her second oldest brother, Frederick Nohl, died in an accident at the age of one the year before Mary was born. Their father, Leo F. Nohl (1877-1961), was a well known and successful Milwaukee attorney who had come to Milwaukee with his parents from Ripon, Wisconsin at the age of six and had subsequently graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a law degree. Their mother, Emma Parmenter Nohl (1875-1968), was the daughter of a wealthy Menomonee, Michigan, lumberman and she was a trained singer and pianist. The Nohl family lived on Stowell Avenue in Milwaukee and the children attended the public schools in that area.

The parent's decision to purchase a lot for a summer residence on Lake Michigan would appear in hindsight to have been a seminal event in the lives of both their children. Gene Nohl, for instance, would spend much of his life on and around water, becoming an engineer who achieved international fame at the age of twenty-seven for inventing the first helium/oxygen underwater breathing apparatus and for using it to set a world diving record in Lake Michigan in 1937 of 420 feet, a record that would stand until 1948. Nohl went on to a career that involved designing diving gear, orchestrating salvage dives, and designing submersible boats. Scrapbooks that Nohl compiled throughout her life show that she followed his very public career with great attention. Mary Nohl was also profoundly influenced by life on the lake and she appears to have treated it as her personal playground from her earliest days there. Debra L. Brehmer, whose thesis on Nohl's life and work was based in part on extensive interviews with Nohl, places considerable emphasis on the importance that this water world played in forming Nohl and her work:

Nohl's specific "hybrid world" is one peopled with the mysteries and reveries of ancient cultures as well as the magical properties she remembers from her youth. She frequently recalls the fun she had as a child imagining mythic worlds where there were no streets, only waterways; secret underwater villages; dreams of being chased by Indians and flying away. As a child, Mary and the neighbor boy, John Willetts, would build makeshift rafts and sail to fantasy islands. The compelling freedom of these games whereby Mary could enter a transhistorical place of reverie (supported by the natural splendor of the site) was something she would continue to value all her life.²²

²² Brehmer, Debra L. Op. Cit., p. 31. John Willetts was Mary's life-long Beach Road neighbor and friend.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

The two children were also lucky in their parents, who appear to have given them a remarkable degree of freedom for the time. Both children received an unusual amount of attention from their parents, most especially from their father, who was much more the social and gregarious of the two and who took them on trips all over the world: "As a girl, Mary saw India, Africa, Russia, Japan, Cuba, and Latin America. She sailed on ocean liners and sailed dinghies on Lake Michigan."²³ And it was their father who also appears to have given both children lessons and experience in the use of tools, experiences that were to be extremely important in both their lives. For instance, one of Mary Nohl's earliest memories of the lake site involved helping her father build the gate posts that still flank the entrance to it. (1A & 1B)

Sometimes when I go through the 7328 gates I remember how much fun it was when Dad and I were making the gate posts. I was in grade school and I worked for dad for the magnificent sum of twenty-five cents an hour. The beach was all sand at that time and most of the right size stones had to be gotten from the lake. Dad knew all about wooden frames that moved up higher and higher as the gate posts grew bigger. The joy of being paid for having so much fun I have long remembered. The pleasure of mixing concrete in a wheelbarrow and straining sand from the beach for the concrete – I am sure my sculpture filled yard had its origin in the gate posts.²⁴

Not surprisingly, Nohl was the first girl to ever enroll in the eighth-grade manual training class at her grade school. In 1928, when she was thirteen, she put her evolving shop skills to good use and received a considerable amount of recognition by winning a city-wide model airplane building and flying tournament in which she was the only girl competing against twenty-six boys.²⁵ As Nohl grew older she would often stand in for her mother at the numerous social events that her father attended and of which her mother had grown tired.²⁶

By the time Nohl graduated from the Milwaukee University School in 1932 she had become an unusually confident and competent young woman for her time and social position and had decided to pursue a life as an artist.

²³ Bianco, Jane. *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

²⁴ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. December, 1991, p. 3.

²⁵ *Milwaukee News*. March 25, 1928 (photo). Nohl's winning rice-paper and bamboo airplane was still hanging in her Beach Road bedroom at the time of her death and is now being conserved as part of the Mary Nohl Collection.

²⁶ Leo F. Nohl was a popular toastmaster and was at one-time the national president of the Optimist Club and was also a grand master in one of Milwaukee's Masonic Lodges.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 5

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

She [Nohl] and a high school friend then attended Rollins College in Winter Park Florida. There she took art classes for a year, but quickly realized that the small school of five hundred girls did not have enough of an art department to meet her needs. In 1933, she transferred to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which she attended for five years, receiving a Bachelor of Fine arts in 1937 and a teaching certificate the next year. While in Chicago, she lived in the Three Arts Club, a residence for women in art, dance, and music.²⁷

Nohl always retained very fond memories of this period in her life and later wrote:

Mother and Dad were so worried about my being in that big, bad city – at a school at Michigan and Adams with no campus after transferring from Rollins College in Florida with Palm trees and sandspurs. But the galleries of the Art Institute served as a nice campus, and the whole setup was certainly a fun time in my life.²⁸

At the Institute, Nohl took classes in drawing, sculpture, fashion design and other related topics such as art history, but was especially fascinated by ceramics and the potential of working in clay. She was also fortunate to find herself attending the Institute school in the 1930s because this was a period in which the classically derived teaching of art that had predominated in the first three decades of the twentieth century was beginning to be challenged by Modernism. Excellent examples of works exhibiting both aspects of artistic creation were readily available to Nohl at the Art Institute and at local galleries, as were outstanding examples of ethnographic art in the Field Museum of Natural History. Aspects of all of them would find a place in Nohl's later works. She was also good at making art. Work she created as a student at the school was exhibited in an exhibition there in 1939, a fact that was reported in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, which noted that "Mary Nohl of Milwaukee has several pieces of craftwork – a wooden bowl and three ceramics – in the current exhibition of work by students of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago."²⁹

After graduation, Nohl moved to Baltimore, Maryland and taught art at a high school there for a year, then returned to Milwaukee and taught first at North Division High School and a year later at Steuben Junior High. Teaching as a career did not satisfy her needs, however. As she was to note later in life: "It was very hard work and I was really too interested in doing my own art to continue teaching."³⁰ Instead, she moved with her parents into their newly constructed year-round residence on North Beach

²⁷ Brehmer, Debra L. Op. Cit., p. 13.

²⁸ Nohl, Mary L. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. June, 1985, p. 3.

²⁹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 5, 1939. This carved wooden bowl is still part of the Mary Nohl Collection.

³⁰ Brehmer, Debra. "One Corner of the World." *Milwaukee Magazine*, October, 1997, p. 56.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 6

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Road and constructed a 40-foot by 40-foot square pottery studio and factory at 5644 Green Bay Road in 1943.

For the next 10 years, she designed, molded, and mass-produced ceramic wares and retailed them to florist and gift shops in five states. She made fish-shaped lamp bases, bells, angels, vases in the shape of female torsos and "spooks," ghost-like figures with concave faces (prototypes for later yard sculptures). Her pottery seemed influenced by the American art deco movement, which drew from mixed cultural sources: Minoan, archaic Greek, Egyptian, Mayan and Aztec. Yet her work had its own distinction—a persistent whimsical sensibility.³¹

Her pottery studio work also once again brought Nohl to the attention of the local media, something that she and her work have always managed to enjoy without any special effort on her part. Partly, this is a tribute to the work itself and to its decidedly individualistic creator, but it also happened because Nohl was a member of a well-known Milwaukee family and was also one of the very few women that made a career out of making art in Wisconsin in the years just after World War II. Nohl's business hours at her studio were from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and, as one article emphasized, hers was a one-woman operation, with Nohl making the works, handling the orders, and doing the delivering.³²

Nohl's creativity, curiosity, and strong work ethic were by no means exhausted by her work with ceramics.

Nohl worked in the pottery studio every day, and at home in the evenings she painted and made silver jewelry. Between 1950 and 1960, she created some 350 pieces of jewelry with mermaids, fish and boat motifs, dancing bodies and smiling faces – images that recur throughout her work.³³

This work and her other work in painting and watercolors would continue throughout the rest of her life, but Nohl's large scale work in ceramics came to a premature end in 1954.

In 1954, the year she turned 40, Nohl closed her pottery studio when the building was demolished to make room for the new I-43 expressway. That year also marked one of her

³¹ Brehmer, Debra. "One Corner of the World." *Milwaukee Magazine*, October, 1997, p. 56-7. 'Spooks' was Nohl's own name for these pieces.

³² *Milwaukee Journal*, December 2, 1951, p. 28. In this article Nohl also was quoted as saying; "Idea's are what is fun."

³³ Brehmer, Debra. "One Corner of the World." *Milwaukee Magazine*, October, 1997, p. 57. Nohl's work in silver began in earnest after she attended classes at the Oxbow Summer School in Saugatuck, Michigan, in the summer of 1943.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 7

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

infrequent gallery shows: fifty pieces of silver jewelry at the Wisconsin gallery of the Milwaukee Art Institute (now the Milwaukee Art Museum). The next year, several pieces of her silver work traveled in a Smithsonian Institution craft show.

These were to be the last formal public showings of any of her works until 1991. Nohl spent the rest of the decade producing small scale works, primarily watercolors and paintings, enjoying her life in the place she loved most, and becoming the principal care-giver for her increasingly elderly parents. In 1960, her brother and sister-in-law were killed in an auto accident and the following year her father also died at the age of 84. Suddenly, Nohl was alone in the world except for her 90 year-old mother, who by this time was bedridden and in failing health.

In 1964, Emma Nohl moved into a nursing home. Even the year before, though, Mary Nohl had begun to sense the change that her mother's inevitable leaving would have on her own life. As she admitted in a diary entry of that year, "I'm really coming into my own at last—even if it does mean Mother's departure...and,...I get such satisfaction...now that I'm the boss."³⁴ It is clear that the desire to control her environment and to expand the scope of her work had been building for some time.

Until 1961, her working areas at home were relegated to the basement, back yard, or bedroom; she still had to be careful about offending her parent's sensibilities with display of her work in a domestic setting.³⁵

After the death of her mother, all this changed, and it changed quickly too. Fortunately, a great deal is known about the years that followed because, beginning in December 1967, Nohl began to write a mimeographed letter to a large list of friends and acquaintances every six months in which she detailed the highlights of the previous six months. Fortunately, too, Nohl continued this practice until at least December of 1995 and she kept copies of them all. Consequently, a great deal is known about this most fruitful and important period in Nohl's creative life and these letters, coupled with the diary entries that she made every day from 1960 through 1973, make it possible to look over her shoulder as she went about creating her art environment.³⁶

Soon after her mother died, Nohl began to reorganize the house to suit her work methods and she also began to refurbish the house. Both efforts were considerably hindered by the fact that Nohl was a

³⁴ Nohl, Mary. *Diaries, 1960-1973*. As quoted in: Bianco, Jane. Op. Cit., p. 9.

³⁵ Bianco, Jane. Op. Cit., p. 8.

³⁶ Nohl, Mary. *Diaries, 1960-1973*. Op. Cit. Nohl noted that she wrote eight lines a day in her diaries "so that she would know where the time goes."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 8

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

compulsive saver of just about everything and she also was a compulsive organizer, which meant that while she could hardly ever bear to throw anything away, she at least knew where it was.

My very best guest room [in the 1924 cottage] has just been converted into a tool room – mostly machine tools up from the basement – band saw, circular saw, drill press, silver soldering, welding, stone cutting equipment. But I still have two guest rooms left if anyone wants to risk a visit.

I spend a good deal of time condensing things in the basement, so I'll have room for more things, which in turn will probably have to be condensed, so I can at least walk sideways between the shelves. There are boxes labeled "leather" which include fragments of Dad's old brief cases. One box marked "mouse traps" I was able to eliminate because I prefer the poison method of attack, but then the mouse traps were added to the "miscellaneous" box, so I didn't really get rid of them after all. There are boxes marked "junk" which are not much different than the boxes marked "miscellaneous." There is even a box marked "boxes," which is a large box with smaller ones inside. There are boxes of colored church window glass, carved linoleum blocks, small picture frames, hotel paper, springs – clock and door, puppet heads. There is a box of chains, bracelet size to something large enough to hold a raft in position. There is a box of watches and clocks that don't work, pine cones, bamboo, kiln brick.³⁷

All of these things were saved because Nohl believed they had at least some potential for being incorporated into her work, but they were also a product of her essentially frugal nature, a nature that she appears to have inherited in part from her equally frugal parents. Again, quoting from one of her newsletters:

I am famed for some of my economies, I use rag mops long after they should be discarded, long after they begin to leave rotted strands over the wet mopped areas. Unwittingly, I used too much detergent on the dog trails around the house. In these areas the linoleum cracked into little crevasses. Had my choice of removing all the old linoleum or covering over the rough areas, which I did, but couldn't match the colors, so the next best thing was contrasting colors. So now my floors are beginning to look like abstract contemporary geometric paintings.³⁸

Before long, Nohl's seemingly limitless energy turned from the reordering of the inside of the house to the transformation of the exterior and to the grounds of the house. One of her first exterior works was

³⁷ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. June, 1968, p. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid*, June, 1973, p. 2.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

meant to cover the entrance gates to her yard. This work began in 1963 and consisted of sections of wood framing she assembled in her living room and which she covered with elongated silhouettes of fish and people, all of which was painted a "Lullaby Blue." "From the beginning she intended the gates for display, and wondered if she should cut the plant growth back, to make it worthwhile."³⁹ She also intended that this work should cover a fence that would ultimately extend from both sides of these gates along the entire 435-foot-long north edge of her property. The sizable portion of this fence that she completed she covered with flat, elongated cut-out wood human figures that represented her friends and family depicted in profile.⁴⁰ This proved to be too much for the teenagers and college age kids in the area, however, who quickly stole large numbers of the figures, which Nohl at first replaced but then realized would continue to be stolen. She, therefore, dismantled the fence and replaced it with the cyclone wire fence that is still in place today. The pieces that she salvaged were kept and many were recycled onto panels that she attached to her house. Others were turned into mobiles that she hung from the trees. Indeed, among Nohl's most endearing characteristics were her resourcefulness in the face of adversity, her never failing though sorely tried sense of humor, and her seemingly endless ability to channel her energy in new directions.

Her ability to turn adversity into something positive is nowhere better illustrated than in the story she recounted about the fate of an extraordinary fifteen-foot-tall painted driftwood figure that she had constructed on her front lawn.

I was awakened early one Sunday morning to the sound of a crackling fire, and relieved to find that the fire was burning a driftwood figure in the front yard – and not the house. This particular sculpture has been a target for the kids for years – about fifteen feet high and so encrusted with paint and so dried in the sun, that the burning was like a series of explosions. Called the poor, overworked police who sat in three squad cars outside the fence and watched it burn. Sass, Basil and I sat inside and watched from the front window with the aid of a beer. All that was left were two ten-foot pipes anchored in cement, and before the last sparks had drifted off I had plans for my largest cement animal. The two pipes conveniently became the two front legs of a less destructible cement creation.⁴¹

³⁹ Bianco, Jane. Op. Cit., p. 20.

⁴⁰ Dewey, Violet E. "Artist's Whimsies Overflow Home." *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 29 1968. The article has pictures of the fence when it was still in place.

⁴¹ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. December, 1973, p. 1. The new sculpture was Dinosaur + Person (24). Sass and Basil were Nohl's dogs. A photo of the driftwood sculpture before the fire can be found in: Lewis, Robert E. "Art at the Grassroots." *The Milwaukee Journal*, Insight Magazine, p. 6. Sunday, August 20, 1972.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 10

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

This fire occurred in 1973, by which time Nohl's evolving art environment and the problems she faced from vandalism were significant enough to be deemed newsworthy and resulted in a series of newspaper articles in the 1970s that kept her work in the public eye. But being in the public eye came with a price. When one reads Nohl's newsletters and diary entries from the 1960s and especially from the 1970s, with their tales of her ongoing battles with vandals and thieves, it is all the more remarkable that she continued to be so productive during this period. And yet, despite all the problems that Nohl had with kids, they fueled something in her that she was able to use to her advantage.

During the day when car horns are tooting, and I look out to find out why – and there are five cars lined up at the gate, and the last two are honking because they can't get past the first three, and there are eight or ten kids standing at the gate looking in, with their cars parked in the "no parking" area at the corner – it is then that I am sure I've done something – not sure exactly what – but I am being noticed!!!⁴²

Like the untrained artists with whom she is frequently compared, Nohl gained inspiration from many sources, including photos in magazines and things she saw in her travels. She began to make wire sculptures, for instance, after a trip to New York and a visit to a show of the work of Alexander Calder. But her greatest source of ideas was her own imagination and her greatest inspiration was her beach front life. For instance, one motif that is frequently encountered in all of her media is that of a floating boat filled with people and one could be pardoned for imagining that seeing such a thing would be an ordinary part of Nohl's waterfront life. The actual inspiration, however, may have come from experiences that were far more poetic, however commonplace they might seem. As Nohl mentioned in one newsletter:

And in front the freighters float in a vapor on the horizon – ships in the sky.⁴³

Indeed, it would be impossible to overestimate how much Nohl's lakeside life meant to her and how central it was to her artistic life. Images of this life recur throughout her newsletters and diary entries. The following is just one of many:

But it is the sunrises and the rear of the lake when it is stormy and the lightning that needles down along the horizon, and the sea gulls that wheel and turn a screech that make living here spectacular beyond what anyone – even a good kid like me – deserves.⁴⁴

⁴² Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. June, 1981, p. 1

⁴³ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. June, 1970, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends*, 1967-1995. December, 1983, p. 2.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 11

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Not even the constant vandalism and theft she had to contend with could make her contemplate leaving her lakeside home, and it needs to be remembered that Nohl had the financial ability to live anywhere she wished and could have had as much privacy as she desired.

No amount of disorder will induce me to give up my front row seat on the changing moods of Lake Michigan – the ice hills against the blue water in the winter, and the afterglow of the sunsets in the summer, and the infinite variety in between.⁴⁵

During all of this period Nohl also enjoyed the more ordinary social pleasures as well. Her art may have been a solitary pursuit but Nohl was no recluse cut off from the rest of humanity. Sports were important to her and she was an enthusiastic bridge player, sometimes playing as often as five times a week, and she also curled and enjoyed lawn bowling, tennis, and volleyball. In addition, she treated herself to travel, at one point mentioning in her newsletter that she had crossed the ocean twelve times in the first twelve years after her mother died.

As Nohl grew older, though, she spent less time with the most physically demanding of the media she had previously worked with and turned instead to her old love/hate affair with oil painting. Not surprisingly, her capacity for work in this medium once again bordered on the obsessive.

I am going through life convinced that I will never really feel that even one of my oil paintings is really finished. I have something like 150 to 200 of them – all sizes but mostly 24 by 36. They are hanging all over the place and also resting in recently constructed racks, First I discovered I wasn't getting enough dark parts in one and upon further investigation decided that they all needed some more dark parts. And when 150 to 200 paintings need more dark parts – that spells trouble. Soon after I concluded that there were not enough light contrasts. At first I noticed this problem in just one painting and then found they all likewise needed the same thing. And suddenly awakened to the fact that that they all without question needed more detail. So for the last two years I have disciplined myself by not allowing me the fun of new paintings.⁴⁶

Towards the end of her life, Nohl began to give thought to what would happen to her work after her death. She ultimately entered into an agreement with the Kohler Foundation of Kohler, Wisconsin, in which the Foundation would ultimately be responsible for the conservation and preservation of her

⁴⁵ Ibid, June, 1972, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid, December, 1992, p. 2.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 12

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

work. In 1996, she deeded her entire collection to the Foundation while retaining the right to live in her house for the remainder of her life. Employing live-in caregivers allowed her to continue working, which she did until shortly before her death in 2001 at the age of 87. Subsequently, the Foundation received title to both the house and its grounds and it is now in the process of conserving the collections. Much of the remainder of Nohl's estate, some \$11.3 million, Nohl gave to the Greater Milwaukee Foundation to provide continuing support for visual arts and art-education programs in the Milwaukee area, this last act being one final reaffirmation of Nohl's long-held belief in the value of art to society.⁴⁷

Context

Lisa Stone is the co-author, with Jim Zanzi, of the important recently published guidebook entitled *Sacred Spaces and Other Places: A Guide to Grottos and Sculptural Environments in the Upper Midwest*, and she is also the author of the recently accepted NRHP nomination for the Fred Smith Concrete Park, an art environment located in Phillips, Wisconsin. In this nomination, Stone provides a general definition of art environments that can also be used when discussing the work of Mary Nohl.

The Wisconsin Concrete Park relates to a tradition of combining elements of sculpture, architecture and landscape architecture into art environments that are integrally incorporated into, and extensions of, an artist's home. Such composite sites can include elements of some or all of the elements of art, architecture and landscape architecture, in varying degrees, according to the vision and inclination of their makers.⁴⁸

Stone then goes on to state that such environments are typically associated with persons who "often lack an academic orientation to the fine and/or building arts." Certainly this was true of Fred Smith, who could neither read nor write, and it has also been true of many of the persons most closely associated with the creation of art environments both here and abroad, such as Simon Rodia, whose Watts Towers in Los Angeles, California was listed in the NRHP in 1977 and which has since been designated as an NHL, and S. P. Dinsmoor, whose Garden of Eden and Cabin Home in Lucas, Kansas, has also been listed in the NRHP (1977). It is not true of Mary Nohl, however, and it is this distinction that makes Nohl's work especially intriguing because while the individual creations that make up her environment can often be linked to her own earlier commercial ceramic works and sometimes to works made by other artists working in the larger art world of her time, the totality of her achievement is the

⁴⁷ Washburne, Carolyn Kott. "Art Enclave." *Milwaukee Home Magazine*, Jan./Feb. 2005, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Stone, Lisa. National Register of Historic Places Nomination of the Fred Smith Concrete Park, Phillips, WI. Written in December, 2004, pg. 8-1. On File at the Division of Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Historical Society.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

product of her own unique vision and its size and scope places it into a realm of creative activity that she shares only with those who have made art environments of their own.

Surviving examples of art environments of the type described by Stone have been created in this country and in Europe since the end of the nineteenth century: Ferdinand Cheval's Palais Idéal in Hauterives, France, completed in 1912, and S. P. Dinsmoor's work in Kansas, completed in 1920s. Other well publicized examples located closer to home include two extensive Catholic devotional grottos: the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa, designed and built by Father Paul M. Dobberstein between 1912 and 1954, and the Dickeyville Grotto in Dickeyville, Wisconsin, designed and built by Father Mathias H. Wernerus between 1924 and 1930. These last two examples share work methods and materials with other regional artists who have built such environments, including both Smith and Nohl, but Stone and Zanzi have demonstrated that these religious works really belong to a centuries-old tradition of grotto building in Europe and should therefore be seen in a somewhat different light than more personal and site-reflective art environments such as Nohl's.

Partly as a result of the influence of the works of Father Dobberstien and Father Wernerus, Wisconsin, and especially southwest Wisconsin, has a particularly rich legacy of outdoor art environments whose creators used concrete as their primary medium.

Artists inspired by these grottos, particularly by the Dickeyville Grotto due to its relative proximity, include Jacob Baker (individual embellished sculptures, Northwestern IL), Fred G. Zimmerman (garage and flagpoles, New Glarus, WI), Nick Engelbert's Grandview (Hollandale, WI), Bill Notzke's Jubilee Rock Garden (Brimfield, IL), the Paul and Matilda Wegner Grotto (Cataract, WI), James Tellen Sculpture Garden (Black River, WI), Molly Jensen's Art Exhibit (River Falls, WI), Herman Rusch's Prairie Moon Museum and Sculpture Garden (Cochrane, WI), and Fred Smith's Concrete Park (Phillips, WI). These sites can all be linked to the presence of the three religious grottoes, and reflect a strong tradition of creative expression within the contexts of home and landscape that is firmly rooted in the region, and contributes significantly to its cultural identity.⁴⁹

Regardless of who built them or why, all art environments such as those listed above were seen more as local curiosities than as works of art until they began to come to the notice of students, academics, and members of the art establishment in the mid-1960s who were starting to look askance at the traditionally built environment they were inheriting and studying. Seminal works such as Bernard

⁴⁹ Stone, Lisa. *Op. Cit.*, p. 8-2. Although Stone knew about and admired Nohl's work she did not include it in her book out of respect for what she believed was the then seventy-nine-year-old Nohl's desire for privacy.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects*, published in 1965, brought the architecture developed by indigenous peoples to a wide audience while various counter-culture publications began to discover the works of individuals such as Rodia and Dinsmoor, works that showed the youth of the day that there were alternative ways of living and thinking. These were soon followed by still other works such as the *Whole Earth Catalog*, first published in 1970, which showed how such alternative lives might actually be built. At the same time, and for some of the same reasons, interest in unschooled "folk artists" and in the works produced by the insane – the "Art Brut" celebrated by French artist Jean Dubuffet – began to stretch the definitions of what art was and could be. Out of this period came terms such as "Outsider Art" and "Visionary Art" that helped create conceptual frameworks within which works like those produced by Mary Nohl could finally be appreciated for the extraordinary artistic achievements that they are.

The art environment that Nohl created is similar to other outdoor art environments in that Nohl used concrete embellished with found objects to make the yard sculptures for which her environment is now best known. It is also similar in that the placement of these sculptures was carefully considered, although Nohl's potential for placement was more limited than her peers that lived in rural settings because of her relatively small urban lot, and her decisions about where to place pieces were also essentially personal and were not usually influenced by whether or not anyone else could see them. She also shared with these other artists an enormous capacity for work and a capacity for invention and for reinvention that was, in part, fueled by things she saw in her everyday life, be they magazines, television, or art produced by others that she encountered in her travels.

Still, Nohl's art environment also differs from others in some important ways. For one thing, it took form in an urban rather than a rural or small-town location and was the work of a trained artist. It was also created as a private pleasure and was never really intended to be a public place during Nohl's lifetime. Neither was Nohl's work limited just to the grounds surrounding the house, as was true of most other art environments in Wisconsin. The grounds of the Mary Nohl Art Environment are only one part of the whole, which also includes the exterior and interior of the house and all of its contents besides. Nohl was also unique in that she generated a substantial amount of written autobiographical material during her lifetime that has given scholars an unprecedented understanding of her work and of the artist who made them. The conclusion to Jane Bianco's thesis that follows (abridged), with its insights into Nohl's life and work, could only have been written by someone who had access to this wealth of personal material.

The unconventional and profuse embellishment of Mary's yard and house has linked her with outsider artists, largely self-taught and highly productive—and particularly those who invent

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

their own self-contained environment by virtue of their creative output. Nohl did invent her own contained world, which she continued to modify and build, but she never fully retreated from the world beyond her gates, and she was comfortable in both settings. Mary Nohl's yard art, the product of a trained mind, reflected her affinity for the lake, a deliberate sense of playfulness and design—and it did not conform to notions of "tasteful" (and sparse) lawn decor prevalent in her own neighborhood. She did not consistently attempt to sell or exhibit her art work, but she was receptive to media coverage or occasional invitations to display work, or to modest requests for contributions of her talent towards worthy causes.

She is notable because she made things for the pleasure of making them. She was self-directed and exclusive to her work—she was honest in a most personal sense because she allowed her aesthetic sensibilities to flourish in and about her, as she surrounded herself with the things she made, and which pleased her. She was fortunate to have a flow of ideas that prompted her creativity, and in having the freedom to pursue art without concern for other basic needs.

What drove Mary Nohl to such a prodigious body of work? Initially, the catalyst may have been the death of her family, the ownership of the place with which she could most identify, and from which she became inseparable, as she transformed it. Nohl had already developed a strong work ethic, with many years of experience and ability in the arts, and she had great physical strength and an unending flow of potential projects.

Nohl's home was a work in progress, revised according to her need to continuously explore, and to delight her senses. The products which filled her home were products of that ongoing process. Dating art pieces would have been a finalization, a damper on the freedom for change, which managed to coexist with the order inherent in Nohl's home and activities.

She was conscious of response to her work and to her person, but she did not always conform to others' expectations. Though she enjoyed positive acclaim, Nohl's drive to make things was not dependent upon public response—her satisfaction in her material behavior came primarily from the process of doing it, and its relevance to the pattern of her days. It is evident through an examination of her creative practices, that Nohl worked out solutions to ideas through a practice of mulling out, through a wide range of expressive forms, over many years, and that her work is recognizable by her style, which she had formulated early in her career.

Nohl's *place* as an artist was most intimately tied to her sense of home—it defined her as a person and as an artist, for whom art was integral with life. Her art must be evaluated as a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

whole, in terms of the house, its interior, facade, the garden landscape which surrounds it—a gestalt. Mary Nohl attached value to her life's work and intended that it be seen after her death. She gave her art to the Kohler Foundation so that her home and garden would remain to be cared for—as a legacy to the generations of children and adults, including other artists, who come after those whose imagination may have been sparked by the evolving personal landscape of her 'best beloved home.'⁵⁰

Finally though, nothing can entirely explain why an individual will choose to step well outside the norm in order to create environments such as the one that Mary Nohl made. Such environments are, by definition, unique and intensely personal manifestations of the individual will, and they comprise some of the most wonderful and enigmatic works of art our society possesses. It is therefore believed that the Mary L. Nohl Art Environment is eligible for listing in the NRHP at the national level of significance in the area of art because of its importance as a unique, well documented, and highly intact artistic ensemble that contains literally thousands of works of art, all of which were created by Mary L. Nohl. Ensembles such as this are very rare and are highly endangered and intact ones of artistic significance are even more so and constitute an important cultural legacy for the inhabitants of Wisconsin and beyond.

Nohl's work is clearly exceptional in relationship to other surviving artist environments. Her scholarly artistic training was an anomaly among the artists who created such places, resulting in an environment steeped not in vernacular tradition, but fully embracing Modernism.

Nohl absorbed and responded to the artistic trends of her time, and to the materials she worked with, with great fluidity. Rather than developing a tightly defined aesthetic (and like the work of the Milwaukee self-taught artist Eugene Von Bruenchenhein) she responded to various mediums with freshness and originality, allowing materials themselves to lead her into different ways of working. Her figural work, whether amorphous doll-like objects made of hemp, or the monolithic concrete sculptures rising from her yard, bring to mind the visual vocabularies of several Surrealist artists, notably Yves Tanguy, Paul Delvaux, and Rene Magritte. Her work was integral to and incorporated within her home environment and the environment itself brings to mind the sensibility of Surrealist space.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Bianco, Jane. Op. Cit., pp. 47-49.

⁵¹ Email correspondence Lisa Stone to Jim Draeger, dated 6/23/05.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 17

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

It is Nohl's unique position between the conventional artistic context of her time and the work of so-called "outside" artists, which makes her work nationally important. She created personal work in a personal space, far removed from the context of mainstream art, but using an aesthetic approach firmly rooted in the Modernist community. Stone writes:

"...choosing not just to work at home, but to have home be the entire context of one's work, is the single thing that makes most environments by self taught artists (and Nohl's), so remote from the art world. Among other things, the legacy of Modernism was to isolate the artist in the studio, where the mysterious activity of art, which had no nexus whatsoever (supposedly) with ordinary life, could take place."⁵²

Mary Nohl saw no distinction between life and work. Although her work compares well to professional mainstream artists of her day, she consciously chose to go against prevailing notions of commercial art and craft an impressive body of work that in total, comprises one of America's most important art environments. As Lisa Stone writes, "Many artists leave behind important bodies of work, but more rare is the instance where the public can experience an entire home/studio environment, and thus connect with the intimate artistic process, as the artist lived and created within it."⁵³

In addition to being eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion C, it is also believed that the Mary L. Nohl Art Environment is eligible for listing under Criterion B because of its close association with Mary L. Nohl, a noted artist. Nohl first came to public attention with student work produced during her college years, but it was the successful ceramics studio that Nohl operated from 1943 to 1954 that first brought her a measure of local fame at a time when she was one of few women in Wisconsin working as a professional artist. Her subsequent work in silver was accorded a museum show of its own at the Milwaukee Art Institute in 1954 and it was also shown in a traveling show sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution in 1955. It was not until word began to spread about the unique art environment she was creating at her own home after 1963, however, that Nohl's work began to be truly noticed and her importance as an artist appreciated. Newspaper accounts and magazine articles written about her and her art during her lifetime make it clear that Nohl quickly became one of the best known woman artists in the Milwaukee area, and an acknowledgment of this status came in 1991, when she was given a retrospective show in Milwaukee at the Cardinal Stritch College's Layton Gallery. Since then, knowledge of her work has spread around the world. Her subsequent involvement with the John Michael Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan has resulted in her work being included in several exhibitions

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 18

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

at that museum as well. Currently, her collection is being processed and her art environment conserved. When this work is completed it is likely that Nohl's life and her importance to the genre of art environments will become even better known.

Criteria Consideration G.

National Register Bulletin 16 states that a property that has achieved significance in the past 50 years can be listed in the National Register of Historic Places "if it is of exceptional importance." National Register Bulletin 15 expands on the concept of "exceptional importance" and states that "the phrase "exceptional importance" may be applied to the extraordinary importance of an event or to an entire category of resources so fragile that survivors of any age are unusual." The Bulletin then goes on to state that "the phrase "exceptional importance" does not require that the property be of national significance. It is a measure of a property's importance within the appropriate historic context, whether the scale of that context is local, state, or national." And finally, Bulletin 15 states that a "property that has achieved significance within the last fifty years can be evaluated only when sufficient historical perspective exists to determine that the property is exceptionally important. The necessary perspective can be provided by scholarly research and evaluation, and must consider both the historic context and the specific property's role in that context."⁵⁴ It is believed that the Mary Nohl Art Environment meets all the tests imposed in Bulletin 15. Art environments are, by their very nature, closely associated with the vision of usually just a single person and when that person dies or is compelled for some other reason to leave their site, the subsequent maintenance and preservation of the site becomes a matter of chance. This is especially true of privately owned sites that are not included among the sizable number of religious grottos associated with the Catholic Church. By way of illustration, seven of the 35 sites that Stone and Zanzi documented in *Sacred Spaces and Other Places*, published in 1993, had already been demolished by the time of publication. If it were not for private efforts to ensure their preservation there would be little hope for the continued survival of the sites that remain. Art Environments are fragile in construction and are often not built with longevity or continued maintenance in mind. They are often targets of vandalism due to their conspicuous nature, as in the case of the Nohl property, which has been repeatedly vandalized.

It should also be noted that artist created environments differ from other parts of the built environment due to the intention or need of their creators to continue building as a expression of their artistic vision. Unlike a building or piece of sculpture, which is designed, executed and considered complete, by their

⁵⁴ National Register Bulletin 15. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991, p. 42.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 19

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

very nature, art environments are organic and changeful. It is an inherent quality of that property type, that the artist never deems their work to be finished, consequently the most developed, ambitious, elaborate and significant examples have a long horizon of activity. Nohl's work, begun in 1943, first reflected in the output of a traditional artist's studio, but gradually came to encompass the embellishment of the house and its grounds and continued until her death. Any attempt to delineate an end date for the period of significance that precedes her death would be an arbitrary decision, since her art and life were exceptionally intertwined.

It is further believed that the amount of scholarly research that has so far been focused on the Mary Nohl Art Environment is in itself a recommendation for the claim of exceptional importance. Much of the information that is contained in this nomination is based on two accepted master's theses devoted to Mary Nohl and her work, both of which were written by candidates supported by committees of scholars who are members of the Art History departments of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. An article devoted to Nohl and her work has been published in *Raw Vision*, a magazine published in England and devoted to outsider art, art brut, contemporary folk art, and marginal art that is the most important international publication of its kind, and other articles about Nohl have appeared in magazines devoted to Milwaukee and to Wisconsin. Nohl's work and Nohl herself have also been seen in television interviews conducted by both the BBC and by Milwaukee-area television stations, and her work has been included in two recent important publications devoted to art environments that are both international in scope: *Self-Made Worlds: Visionary Folk Art Environments*, by Roger Manley and Mark Sloan, published by the Aperture Press in 1997; and *Fantasy Worlds*, by John Maizels, published by Benedict Taschen in 1999. Inclusion of Mary Nohl's work in these publications is significant. She was also the subject of a retrospective show of her work at the Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee in 1991 and subsequent shows at the John Michael Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, in 1997 and again in 2001. Finally, the significance of the involvement of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and the Kohler Foundation in Kohler, Wisconsin, in the preservation of this site should also be noted. The Kohler Foundation has made it a part of its mission to preserve important art environments throughout the country and its choice of the Mary L. Nohl Art Environment as one of the latest of the sites it intends to conserve and preserve is in itself a significant acknowledgment of the exceptional importance of this property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 20

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Major Bibliographical References:

Anderson, Jay. "Nights of Vandalism Haunt Fox Point Home." *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 6, 1979.

Bianco, Jane. *Mary Nohl's Art — Her Best Beloved Home: Happy With Her Own Construction*. University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.A. Thesis, May 7, 2004,

Brehmer, Debra. "One Corner of the World." *Milwaukee Magazine*, October 1997.

" Mary Nohl on North Beach Drive." London: *Raw Vision Magazine*, Spring, 1999.

Brehmer, Debra L. *The Handcrafted Universe of Mary Nohl*. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: M.A. Thesis, December, 1995.

Danoff, I. Michael. "Mary Nohl: Sophisticated Naïve." *Midwest Art Magazine*, February 1975.

Dewey, Violet E. "Artist's Whimsies Overflow Home." *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 29 1968.

Jensen, Dean. "Sculptor Fights Intruders With Barbed Wire, Dogs." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 27, 1973.

" The Dreamers and the Dreams." *Wisconsin Trails Magazine*, May/June, 1984.

Lewis, Robert E. "Art at the Grassroots." *The Milwaukee Journal*, *Insight Magazine*.. Sunday, August 20, 1972.

Maizels, John. *Fantasy Worlds*. Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1999.

Maney, Roger and Mark Sloan. *Self-Made Worlds: Visionary Folk Art Environments*. New York: Aperture Press, 1997.

Milwaukee Journal, December 2, 1951.

Milwaukee News. March 25, 1928.

Milwaukee Sentinel, July 5, 1939.

National Register Bulletin 15. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991.

Nohl, Mary. *Diaries, 1960-1973*. Mary Nohl Archives, Kohler Foundation, Inc.

Nohl, Mary. *Newsletters to Friends, 1967-1995*. Mary Nohl Archives, Kohler Foundation, Inc.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 2

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Stone, Lisa. National Register of Historic Places Nomination of the Fred Smith Concrete Park, Phillips, WI.

Stone, Lisa and Jim Zanzi. *Sacred Spaces and Other Places: A Guide to Grottos and Sculptural Environments in the Upper Midwest*. Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press, 1993.

Taschen, Angelika (ed.) *Eccentric Style*. Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 2002.

Washburne, Carolyn Kott. "Art Enclave." *Milwaukee Home Magazine*, Jan./Feb. 2005.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All that part of the Southeast fractional quarter (SE frac. 1/4) of Section Sixteen (16), Town Eight (8) North, Range Twenty-two (22) East, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, described as follows: to-wit:

Commencing at a point which is Fifteen Hundred Fifty-nine and Eighty-nine hundredths (1559.89) feet S-0° 42'-W of and Five Hundred Seventy-seven and Fifty-five hundredths (577.55) feet S-89° 57'-E of the center of said Section Sixteen (16), said point being the intersection of the center line of the Northerly and Southerly course of the Public Highway with the center line of the Easterly and Westerly course of said Public Highway; thence N-84° 27'-E along the center line of said Public Highway; Two Hundred Twenty-five (225) feet to a point (which point is the point of commencement of the land to be described); thence N-84° 27'-E along the center line of said Public Highway and said center line produced, Four Hundred Thirty-two and Forty-eight hundredths (432.48) feet to the shore line of Lake Michigan; thence S-8° 59'-W along the shore line of Lake Michigan; One Hundred and Fifty-four and Ninety-six hundredths (154.96) feet to a point; thence S-84° 27'-W, Three Hundred Sixty-one and Ninety-one hundredths (361.91) feet to a point; thence N-5° 31'-W, One Hundred fifty (150) feet to the point of commencement containing 1.3677 acres more or less.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries described above enclose all the land that has historically been associated with the nominated property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Section photos Page 1

Items a-d are the same for photos 1 - 20.

Photo 1

- a) Mary L. Nohl Art Environment
- b) Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI
- c) Timothy F. Heggland, April 14, 2005
- d) Wisconsin Historical Society
- e) General View looking SW
- f) Photo 1 of 20

Photo 2

- e). Entrance gates, View looking S
- f) Photo 2 of 20

Photo 3

- e) Entrance path, View looking SE
- f) Photo 3 of 20

Photo 4

- e) Main entrance, View looking S
- f) Photo 4 of 20

Photo 5

- e) General view looking WSW
- f) Photo 5 of 20

Photo 6

- e) General view looking ESE
- f) Photo 6 of 20

Photo 7

- e) General View looking ESE, w/#31-35
- f) Photo 7 of 20

Photo 8

- e) Two seated fish (#28), View looking S
- f) Photo 8 of 20

Photo 9

- e) Man & Fish Conversing (#10), View facing E
- f) Photo 9 of 20

Photo 10

- e) General view w/#33-36, View facing SW
- f) Photo 10 of 20

Photo 11

- e) Original 1924 wing, View facing W
- f) Photo 11 of 20

Photo 12

- e) View of west-facing elevation, looking E
- f) Photo 12 of 20

Photo 13

- e) North and South Towers and first cement animal (#51-53)
View facing W
- f) Photo 13 of 20

Photo 14

- e) View of west-facing elevation, looking SE
- f) Photo 14 of 20

Photo 15

- e) Interior of entrance hall, looking NNW, entrance door to right
- f) Photo 15 of 20

Photo 16

- e) Interior of entrance hall, looking S toward porch doors
- f) Photo 16 of 20

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 2

Nohl, Mary L., Art Environment
Village of Fox Point, Milwaukee Co., WI

Photo 17

- e) Interior of Living Room, General View looking NW
- f) Photo 17 of 20

Photo 18

- e). Interior of Living Room, General View looking SE
- f) Photo 18 of 20

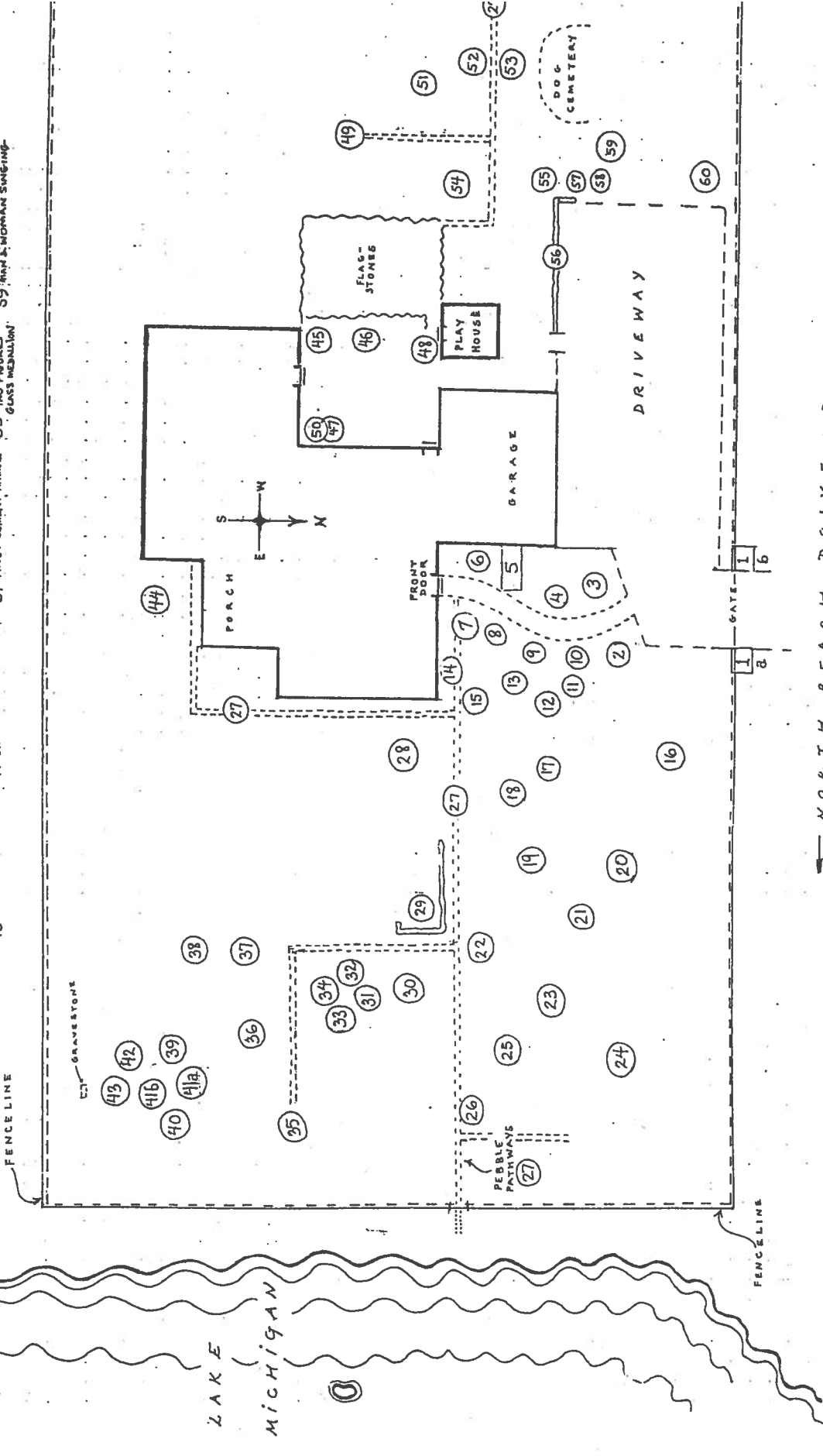
Photo 19

- e) Workshop Interior, View looking SW
- f) Photo 19 of 20

Photo 20

- e) Second Story Stair Hall, View looking N
- f) Photo 20 of 20

- 41a } TWO SMALL
- 41b } GROUND FIGS
- 42 TORSO IN HAT
- 43 ARMLESS FIGURE
- 44 TREE STUMP FACE
- 45 COUPLE HOLDING HANDS
- 46 HAPPY BRANCHING FIG.
- 47 CYLINDRICAL HEAD
- 48 BELOUNTED HEAD
- 49 RING OF ARCHITECTURE
- 50 CYLINDRICAL HEADS
- 51 FIRST CEMENT ANIMAL
- 52 3-TOWER
- 53 N-TOWER
- 54 LARGE FACE
- 55 TWO FIGURES
- 56 WALL OF PEOPLE
- 57 BLUE-EYED FIG.
- 58 BROWN-EYED FIG.
- 59 MAN & WOMAN SINGING

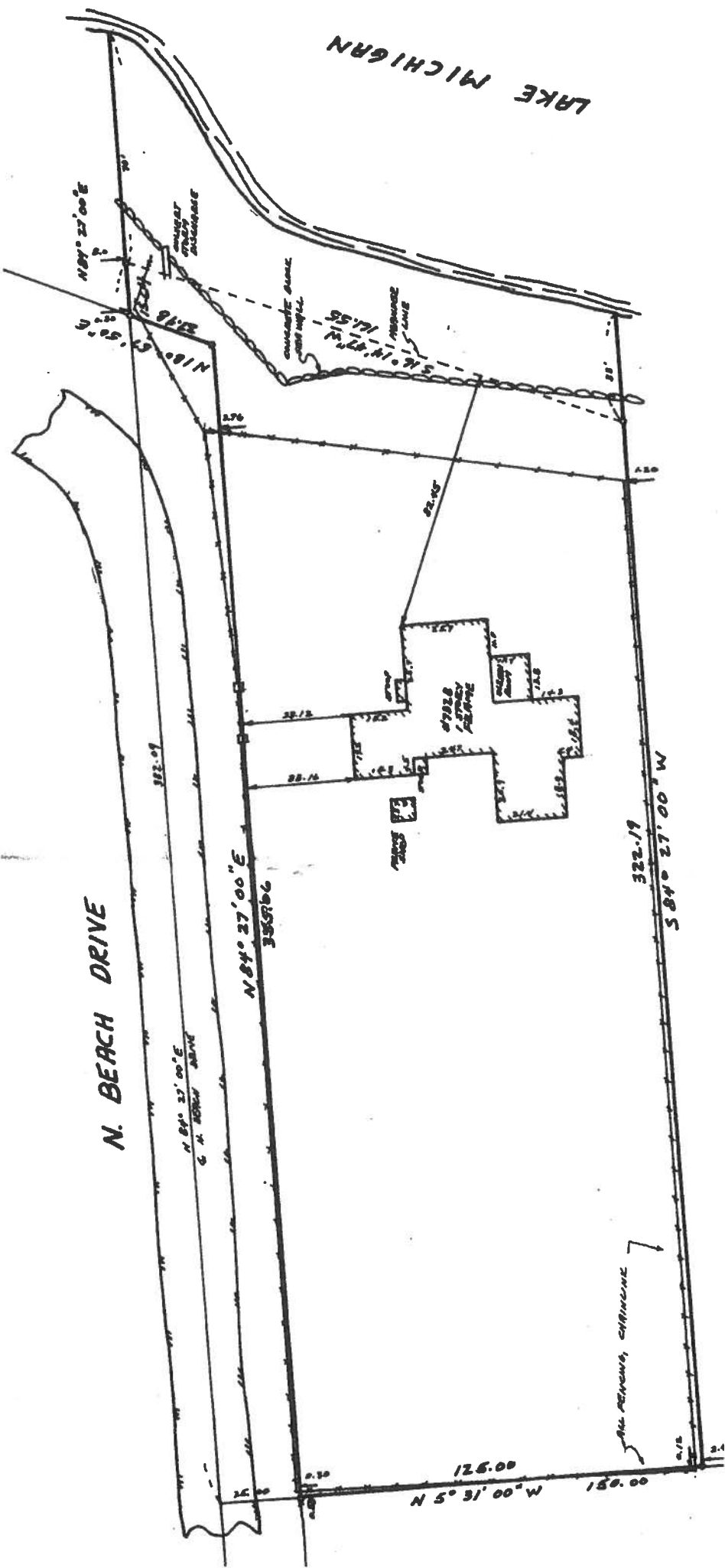


**MARY NOHL'S
YARD SCULPTURE**
• (NOT A MEASURED DRAWING) •
• JANE BIANCO JUNE, 2003 •

- 1 FRONT GATE POSTS
- 2 DINOSAUR
- 3 HEAD & SHOULDER
- 4 STANDING FISHES
- 5 FRONT DOOR POSTS
- 6 NETWORK OF FACES
- 7 SEAHORSE
- 8 LEANING PAIR
- 9 WOMAN & CHILDREN
- 10 MAN & FISH CONVERSING
- 11 HEAD W/ COLORED GLASS HAIR
- 12 PAINTED LARGE HEAD
- 13 3-SHAPED FIGURE
- 14 TWO FACING LIONS
- 15 LONG HEADS IN HATS
- 16 TALL GREEN-EYED WOOD
- 17 CORNED HEAD
- 18 HEAD W/ GLASS NECK
- 19 TALL TORNADO W/ FIG.
- 20 FISH W/ HOSES UPWARD
- 21 FOUR SEATED JINGERS
- 22 THICK-LEGGED CREATURE
- 23 EMBRACING COUPLE
- 24 DINOSAUR + PERSON
- 25 MERMAIDS
- 26 THREE WITCHES
- 27 TALL TORNADO W/ FIG.
- 28 FISH W/ HOSES UPWARD
- 29 WALL OF FACES
- 30 STRAIGHT-BACK FIGS.
- 31 BLACK-EYED BUST
- 32 LONG HEAD → S
- 33 LONG HEAD → E
- 34 BLACK-EYES → E
- 35 ARCHES
- 36 PEOPLE-BIRDS
- 37 FOUNTAIN
- 38 LEANING TORSO → N
- 39 LARGE GROUND FACE
- 40 SMALLER GROUND FACE

← NORTH BEACH DRIVE →

LAKE MICHIGAN



N. BEACH DRIVE

ALL REMAINS, CHIMNEY

N 5° 31' 00" W

N 84° 27' 00" E

322.19
61-22-19

382.09

N 84° 27' 00" E
G. H. BERRY DRIVE

126.00

180.00

26.00

2.30

0.12

2.1

335.86

28.74

28.72

712.0

772.0

82.80

2.96

4.20

N 84° 27' 00" E

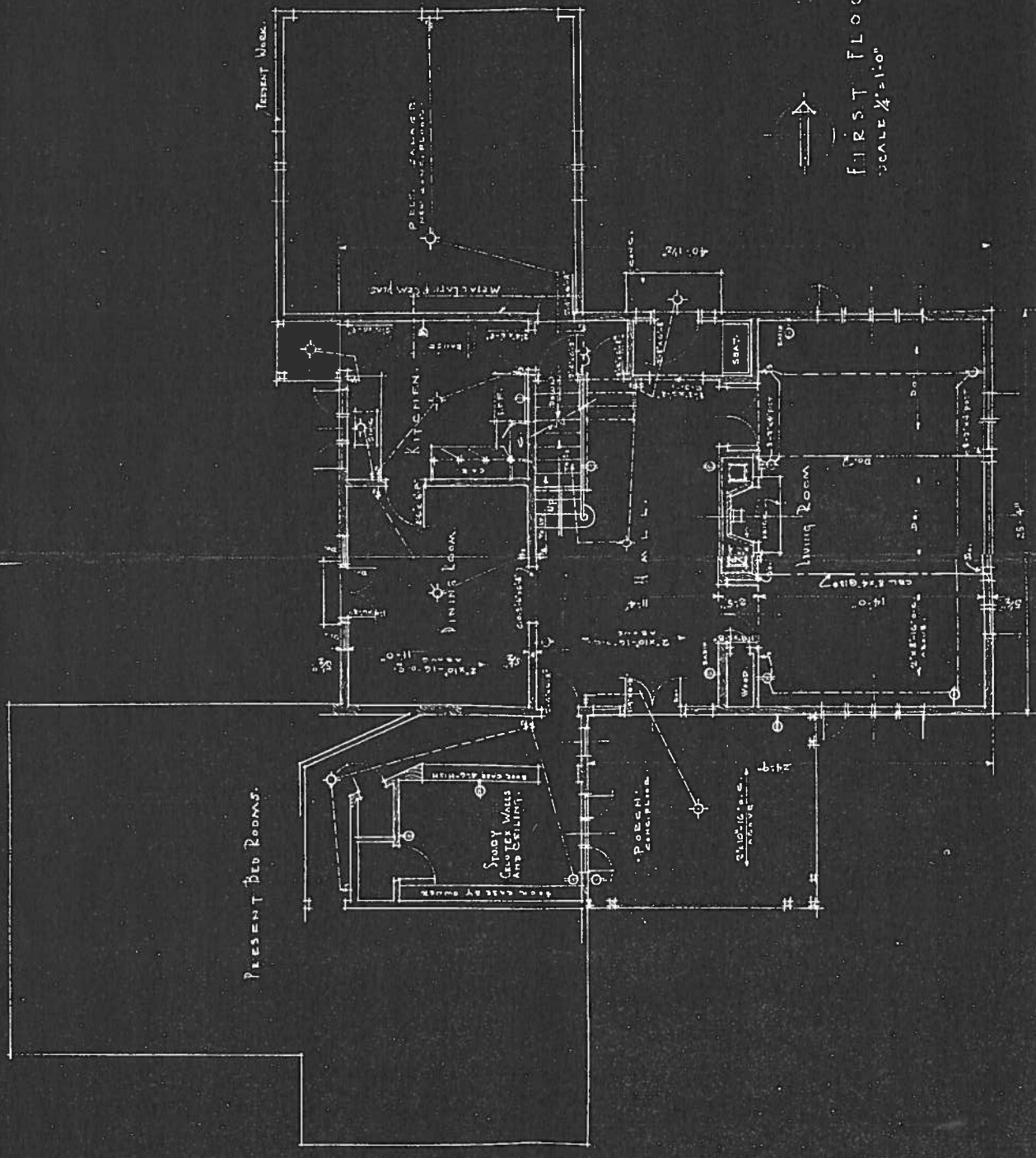
N 18° 57' 50.0" E

516.18
121.55

CONCRETE BANK
1988 M.P.L.

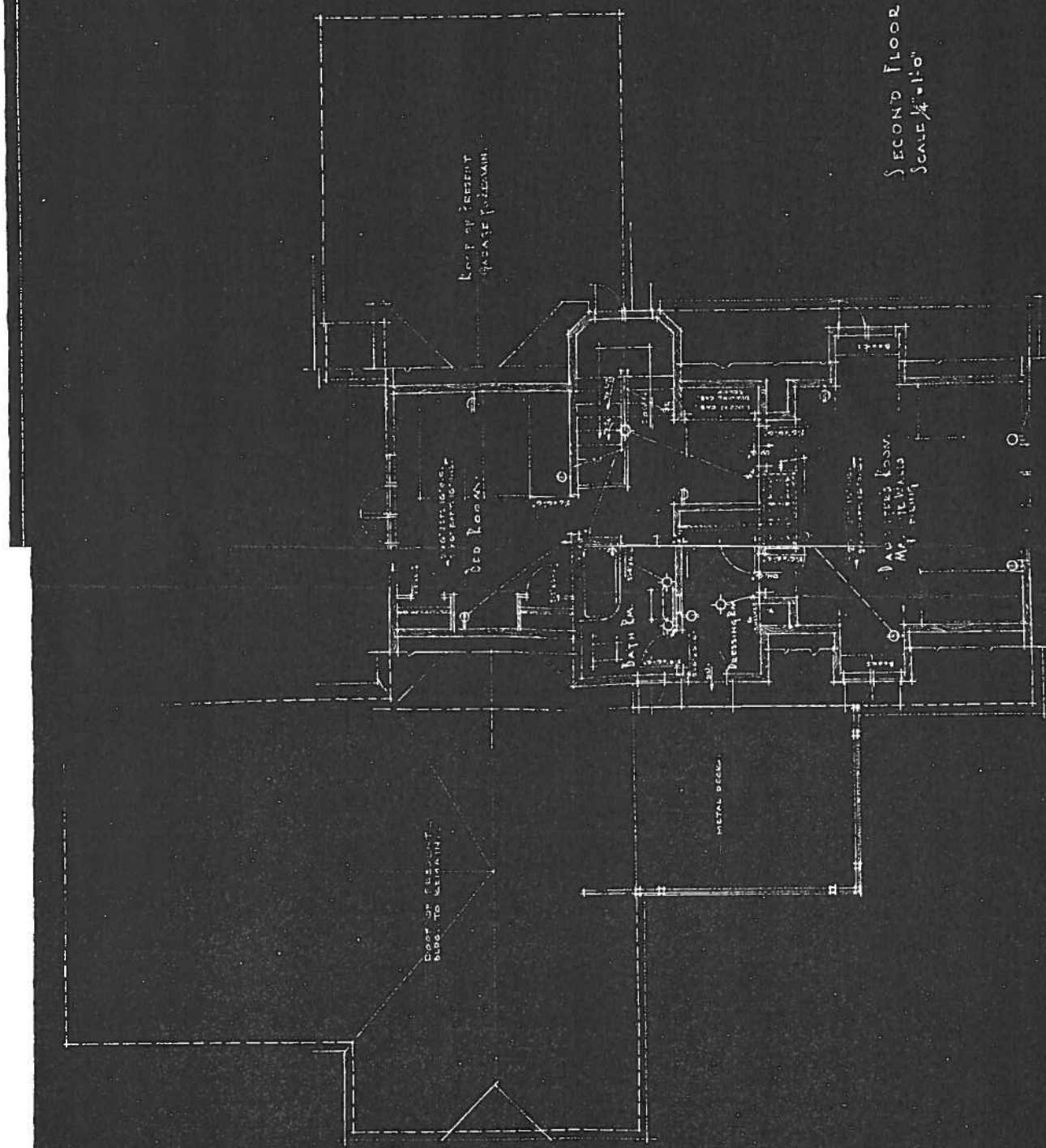
REINFORCED
CONCRETE

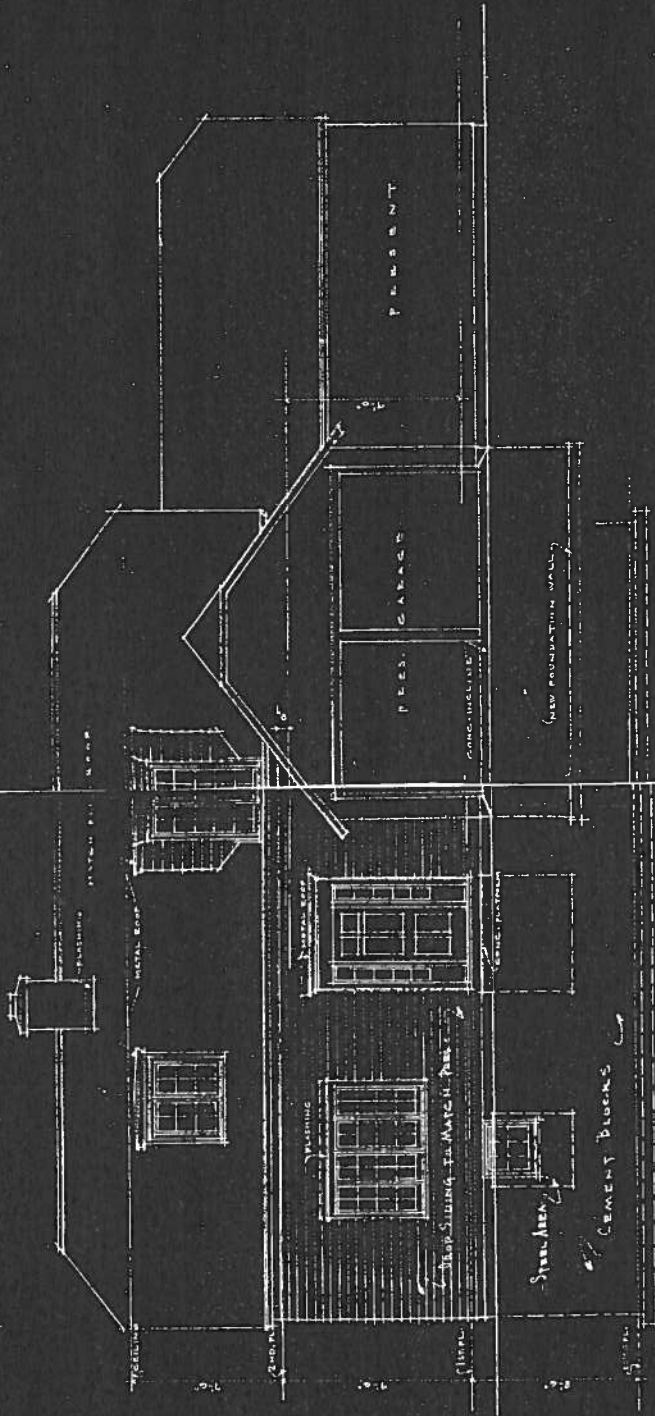
PRESENT BED ROOMS.



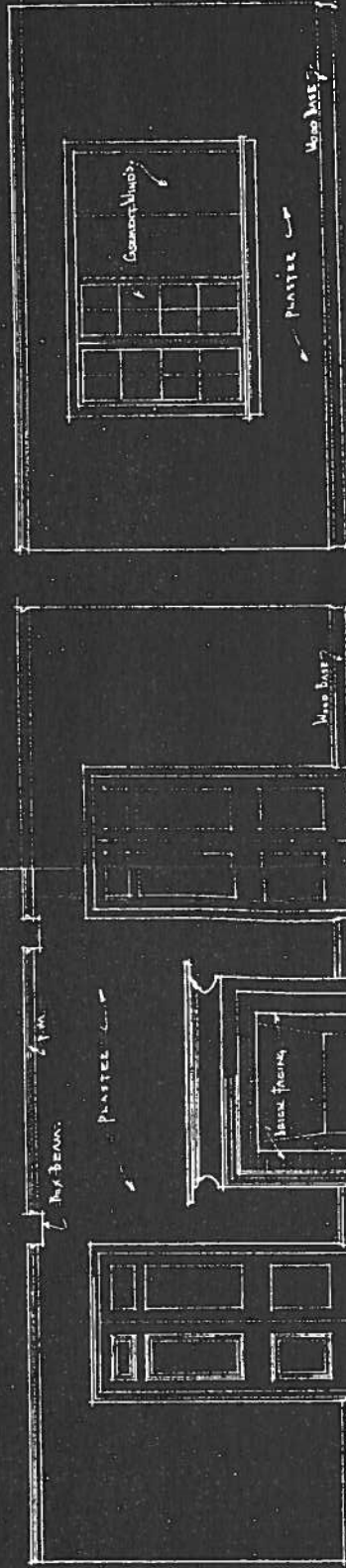
FIRST FLOOR PLAN.
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



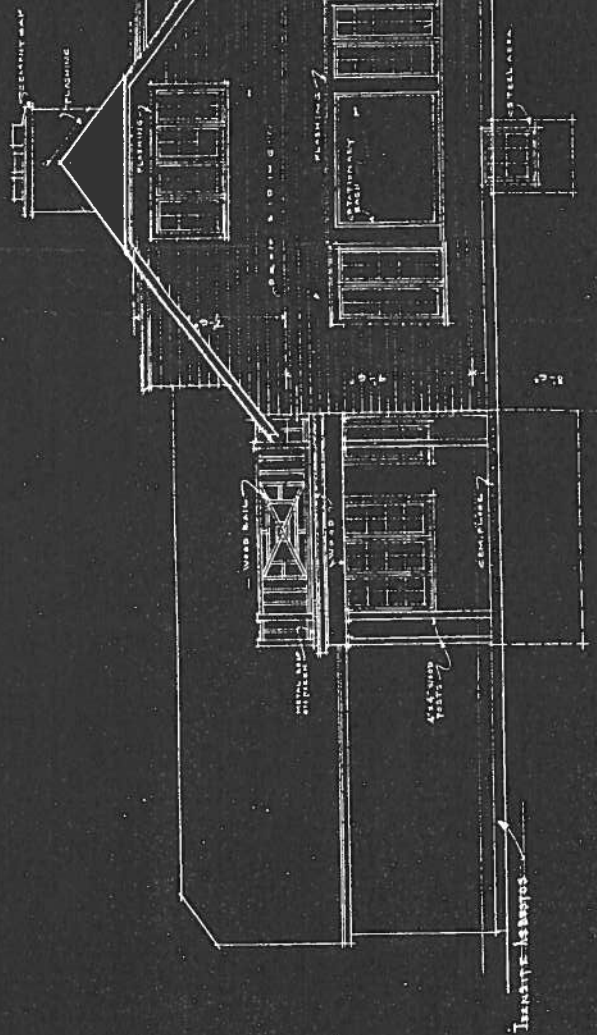


NORTH ELEVATION.
SCALE 1/2" = 1'-0"

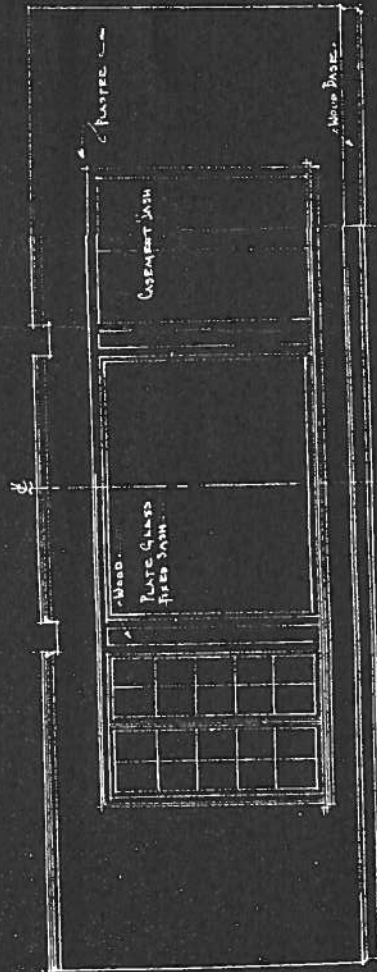


NORTH WALL OF LIVING ROOM.

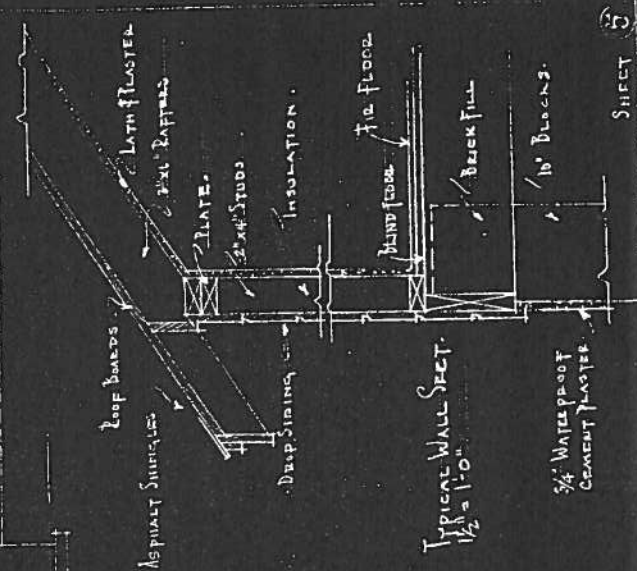
WEST WALL OF LIVING ROOM.
SCALE 1/2" = 1'-0"



EAST ELEVATION.
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

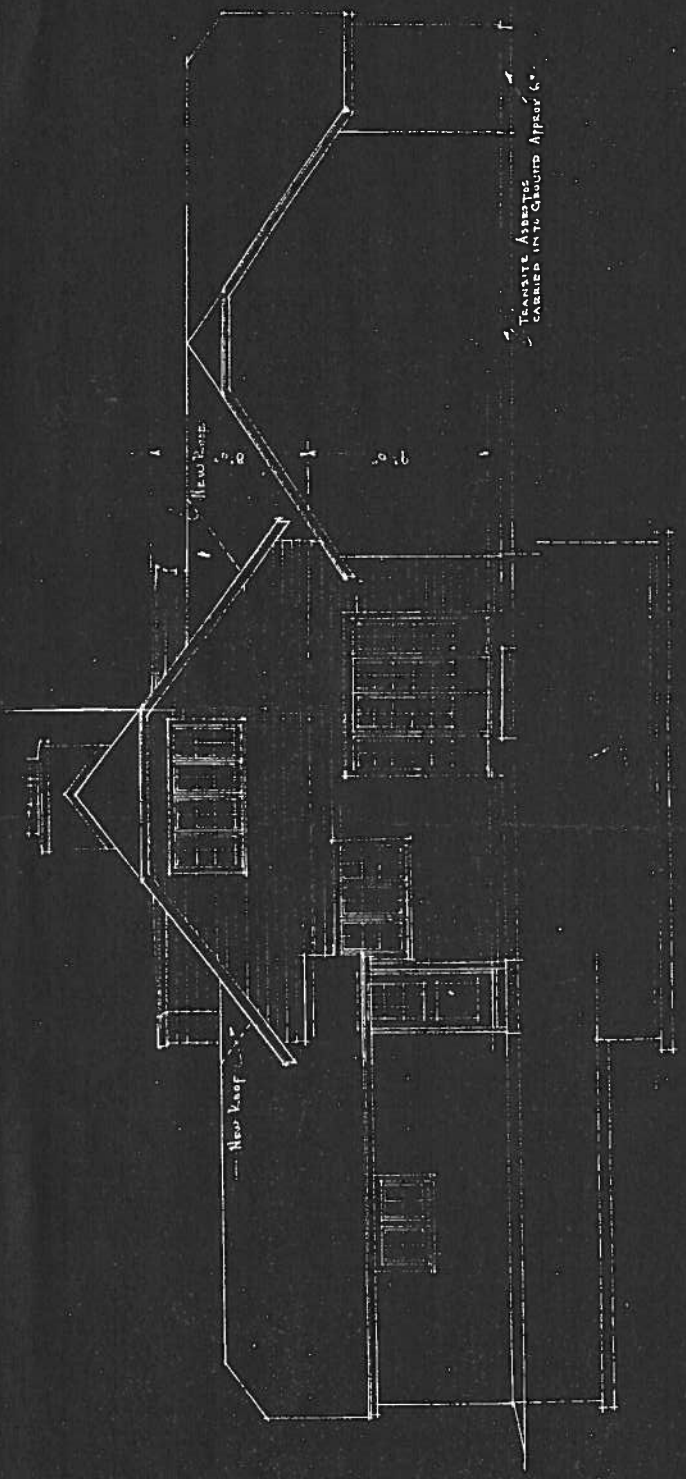


EAST WALL OF LIVING ROOM.
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



TYPICAL WALL SECT.
1/2" = 1'-0"

5/8" WATERPROOF CEMENT PLASTER.

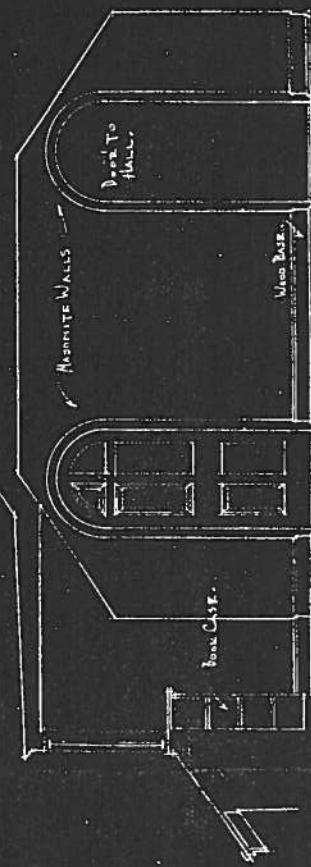


TRANSITE ASBESTOS
CARRIED INTO GROUND APPROX 6"

New Roof

New Roof

WEST ELEVATION
SCALE 1/2" = 1'-0"



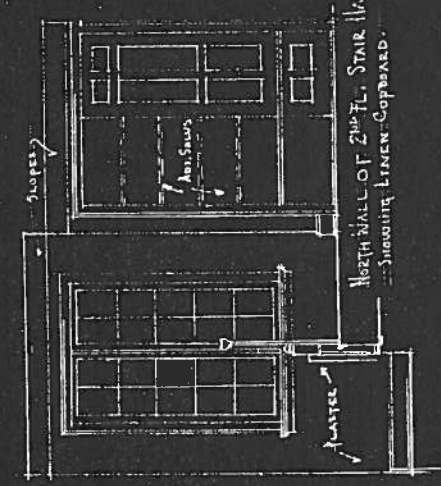
Door Case

Masonry Walls

Door to Hall

Wood Base

WEST WALL OF DAUGHTER'S ROOM
SCALE 1/2" = 1'-0"



Staircase

North Wall of 2nd Fl. Stair Hall
Showing Linen Cupboard

Staircase

SHEET

PREPARATION FOR MR. LEO NOHL - BEACH ROAD - FOX POINT, WIS.