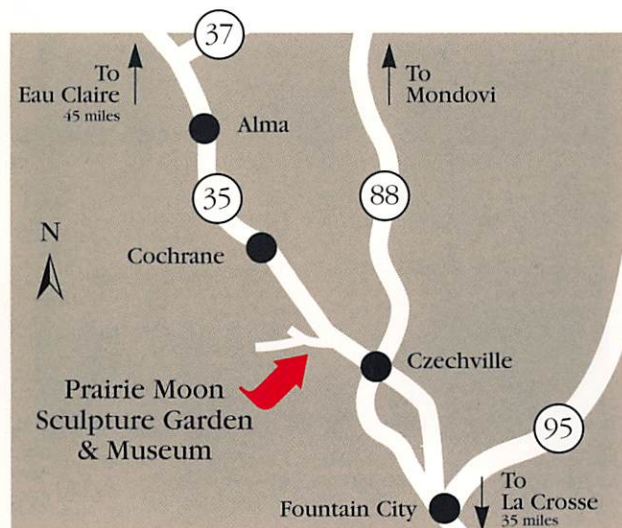


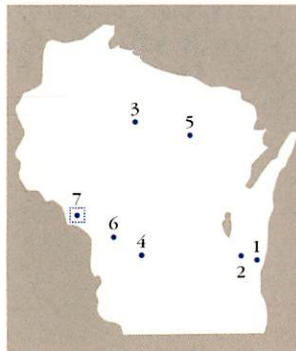
In rural western Wisconsin, on the edge of a lazy tributary of the Mississippi River, stands a colorful art fantasy that enchants adults and children alike. The Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum was created by farmer, fiddler, and artist Herman Rusch who had no formal training in either construction or the arts. Perhaps, both Rusch's drive to build this art environment — and his 100-year life span — can be attributed to his belief that “beauty creates the will to live.”



Located in Buffalo County between the communities of Fountain City and Cochrane, Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum can be reached by taking Highway 35 northwest from Fountain City about 6 miles. Just past the Cochrane-Fountain City School, turn left onto Prairie Moon Road; site is located $\frac{1}{2}$ mile on the left. When traveling on I-90, take the La Crosse Highway 53 exit north to Highway 35, then north to Fountain City. When traveling on I-94, take the Eau Claire Highway 37 exit south through Mondovi continuing on towards Alma, then Highway 35 south to Cochrane and Fountain City. Information: Town of Milton, S2921 County Road G, Fountain City, WI 54629 or call (608) 687-9874.

Wisconsin Art Environments and Historic Architecture Preserved by Kohler Foundation, Inc. of Kohler, Wisconsin:

1. Waelderhaus, Kohler (1929-1931). Owned and operated by Kohler Foundation.
2. Wade House, Greenbush (1847-1851). Restored and gifted to The State Historical Society of Wisconsin by Kohler Foundation in 1953.
3. Wisconsin Concrete Park, Phillips (1950-1964). Acquired and gifted to Price County by Kohler Foundation in 1978.
4. The Painted Forest, Valtou (1896-1900). Conserved and gifted to Sauk County by Kohler Foundation in 1982.
5. Mecikalski Stovewood Building, Jennings (1899-1905). Restored and gifted to Town of Schoepke by Kohler Foundation in 1987.
6. Paul and Matilda Wegner Grotto, Cataract (1929-1936). Conserved and gifted to Monroe County by Kohler Foundation in 1987.
7. Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum, Cochrane (1958-1974). Conserved and gifted to Town of Milton by Kohler Foundation in 1994.



Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum

The Art of Herman Rusch

COCHRANE, WISCONSIN



Farmer, Fiddler, Artist

Some remember Herman Rusch for his curious view of the natural world, made manifest in his roadside museum. Others recall with fondness his lively fiddling at barn dances and weddings. But Rusch is most widely acclaimed for his Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum — and for the powerful vision, tireless labor, and organic sense

of rhythm, form, and color that made such a feat possible. Today, this extraordinary site is an important part of Wisconsin's cultural heritage.

Herman Rusch was born in 1885 to parents who had emigrated from East Prussia to Trout Run Valley near Arcadia in northwestern Wisconsin. He began working

Rusch's painted concrete self-portrait gazes at his sculpture garden. The artist noted: "I'll still see what's going on here when I'm not around."

as a hired hand in his teens. Eventually he and his wife Sophia took over the family farm where they raised three children. Rusch loved to fiddle at community events and fiddling contests.

In 1952, after 40 years of working the land, Rusch retired. "To kill old-age boredom," he first rented, then purchased the Prairie Moon Dance Pavilion in order to transform it into a museum. Rusch filled the arched-roof building to the bursting point with natural phenomena, curios, unusual machines, and personal mementos. Among them were a tree grown around a scythe, a washing machine powered by a goat on a treadmill, and taxidermy specialties such as a hollow log in which a fox and rabbit had been trapped.

Deciding that the grounds of the museum were barren, Rusch built his first concrete and stone planter circa 1958. That effort led to two new engrossing interests: the creation of huge sculptures and related flower beds. Rusch said that he "just kept on building. You don't ever know where it will end up when you start." He became a consummate craftsman, searching



Rusch's signature piece is the gracefully arched fence that runs over 260 feet: "You could go around the world five times and never see another like it."

local quarries for appropriate stone, and developing exceptional masonry skills.

Rusch built the 260-foot arched fence that spans the north perimeter of the site in just one year. Its precisely aligned conical posts were constructed with alternating bands of chiseled white rocks and pie-shaped red bricks, while the arches were molded with concrete over the iron wheels of old grain drills that had been cut in half and stretched.

Other sculptures include a "Rocket to the Stars," a Hindu temple, dinosaurs, even a miniature mountain. At times, Rusch added color to the freshly mixed concrete; at other times he painted the surfaces. He embellished the sculptures with seashells, bits of broken bottles, and shards of crockery and mirrors.

Circa 1959, Rusch purchased four sculptures created in the 1930s by Halvor Landsverk of Minnesota, and added them to the garden. By 1974, at the age of 89, Rusch had built nearly 40 sculptures; he concluded his project with a 13½-foot watchtower. He collected rocks for the tower from a quarry high in the nearby bluffs, then pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle. Rusch died in 1985, but his art remains a visual testament to his claim that, in life, "a fellow should leave a few tracks."

Preservation: A Unique Collaboration

When, at the age of 94, Herman Rusch sold Prairie Moon at auction, nearly the entire contents of the museum were dispersed. The new owners of the site turned the Pavilion into a dog kennel. Thirteen years later, in 1992, Kohler Foundation, Inc. purchased Prairie Moon as part of its ongoing commitment to the preservation of significant art environments by self-taught artists. The efforts that followed were undertaken through an extraordinary collaborative process. The Foundation brought together a team of professional conservators with area contractors, and the community provided a host of enthusiastic volunteers, from government officials to student groups and the local historical society.

Conservation of the sculptures involved: structural stabilization; surface repairs and cleaning; paint analysis including stereoscopic microscopy; and painting to re-establish the original palette. The Pavilion, too, was restored, and an interpretive exhibition was developed that includes documentary photographs, museum artifacts, and personal keepsakes. Landscaping revived the garden environment.

In late 1994, Kohler Foundation, Inc. donated the Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden & Museum to the Town of Milton to be maintained as a public art site. A joyful opening celebration in 1995 brought the community and Rusch family together with preservationists, artists, and art historians from throughout the country, an affirmation of the national significance of the art of Herman Rusch.



Conservators replaced missing shards to fit original concrete impressions.

