



School of the Art Institute
of Chicago

Roger Brown Study Collection

18 July 2012

Roxann Halverson and Del Twidt
Cochrane/Fountain City Board
Fountain City, Wisconsin 54629

Dear Ms. Halverson, Mr. Twidt, members of the Board, and the community:

I'm deeply disturbed to hear that mining operations, planned to occur throughout the greater Cochrane/Fountain City communities, will entail a tremendous volume of heavy truck traffic passing in front of the Herman Rusch Prairie Moon Museum and Sculpture Garden.

By way of introduction I'm a scholar and historic preservationist and have worked on the documentation, interpretation, and preservation of sculptural environments by self-taught artists since 1985. I serve on the board of trustees of SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments, Aptos, CA), and on the board of directors of Friends of Fred Smith, a sculptural environment closely related to the Herman Rusch site. I serve as curator for Preservation Services, Inc., and I have enclosed a resume outlining my professional experience. I respectfully submit my opinion on the artistic and cultural significance of the Herman Rusch site and the potential for tragic adverse impact on the site, should heavy truck traffic, at the proposed magnitude, occur.

The Herman Rusch site is an outstandingly original combination of individual sculptures and garden elements created by Rusch, in his senior years, after a lifetime of farming. Combining convention with invention, it's a museum where the entire oeuvre of an artist can be seen in one place. The site is an extensive and cohesive site in the international genre of art environments, and is also closely linked to a strong tradition in the Upper Midwest, where the presence of three extensive Catholic devotional grotto environments, all engaging embellished concrete, inspired a number of builders in the region to create sculptural environments with similar materials. The Grotto of

the Redemption (West Bend, IA), The Dickeyville Grotto (Dickeyville, WI), and the Rudolph Grotto (Rudolph, WI) anchor a geographic region in which the tradition of building extensive environments flourished. Artists inspired by these grottos, particularly by the Dickeyville Grotto due to its relative proximity, include the Jacob Baker (northwestern IL), Frederick Schultz (embellished houses, Freeport, IL), Fred G. Zimmerman (garage and flagpole, 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 Wisconsin Concrete Park (Phillips, WI). These sites 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. In short, the Rusch site is not an anomalous site, but rather, is a jewel in Wisconsin's necklace of art environments.

The site reflects Rusch's profound sensitivity to and appreciation for the dramatic landscape. Positioned between the river and the commanding bluffs, with its bold spires, repetitive arch motifs, and ebullient gardens, the site invites wandering, quiet contemplation, and reflection. It's a place where visitors experience a reverence for landscape through Rusch's cohesive aesthetic and innate creativity. Built by a self-taught artist in his senior years, the artwork is accessible to viewers of all ages and backgrounds.

I can't emphasize strongly enough how the constant noise of truck engines, rumbling of heavy loads, and harsh diesel exhaust fumes will shatter the serenity of the site and completely undermine the possibility for the site to be experienced as it was intended, and as the community preserves it.

While supporters of the proposed mining operations may cite statistics of how many guests visit the site per year, and use modest visitor numbers to validate the negative impact on the site, Herman Rusch's Sculpture Garden was not created to accommodate crowds. Its value to the community should not be evaluated by the numbers of guests, but rather, by the quality of the experience for the extended community and visitors from beyond the community. Its value as a place for artistic appreciation and spiritual reflection will be greatly diminished, if not lost, by the continual presence of the industrial trucking operation.

My partner Don Howlett addresses the physical impact of the trucking operation on the site in his letter. If the mining operations should be approved and go forward, I urge the community to insist that an alternative route be found. The proposed truck traffic will have drastic, negative impact on one of County's most significant cultural resources. I'm sorry I'm unable to speak to the committee in person and I thank you for presenting this letter in my absence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Stone". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Lisa Stone

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