

Map of Midwest Grottoes and Related Sites



GROTTOES

1. SHRINE OF THE GROTO OF THE REDEMPTION Father Paul Dobberstein Built 1912 to 1952

208 1st Ave. NW, West Bend, IA 50597
Daylight hours
(515) 887-2371

Largest man-made grotto in the world and home to a sizeable collection of precious and semi-precious stones.



Father Mathias H. Wernerus, Holy Ghost Park (the Dickeyville Grotto, site view, c. 1955), Dickeyville, WI, c. 1920-1931. Photo: John Michael Kohler Arts Center Artist Archives.

2. THE DICKEYVILLE GROTO Father Mathias Wernerus Built 1924 to 1931

255-377 Great River Rd., Dickeyville, WI 53808
Mid-April-mid-October
Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
(608) 568-3119

Includes a variety of materials from around the world including glass, antiques, rocks, and minerals.



Paul and Matilda Wegner, Paul and Matilda Wegner Grotto (site view, 2022), Cataract, WI, c. 1929-1942. Photo courtesy of Monroe County Local History Room & Museum.

3. PAUL AND MATILDA WEGNER GROTO Built 1929 to 1936

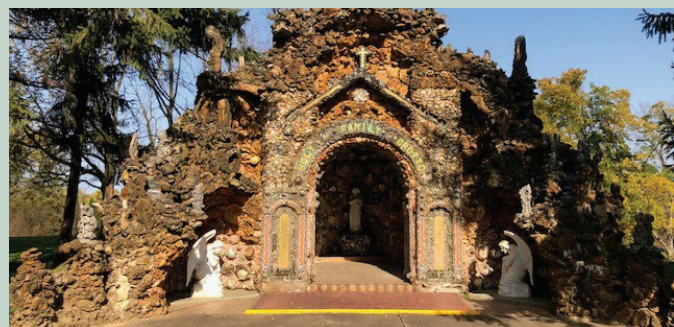
7788 Daylight Rd., Sparta, WI 54656
Open May-September, daylight hours
(608) 269-8680

Features the Glass Church, capacity 7, which honors the three main German religions (Lutheran, Catholic, Judaism).

4. RUDOLPH GROTO GARDENS AND WONDER CAVE Father Philip Wagner Built 1920 to 1959

6975 Grotto Ave., Rudolph, WI 54475
May 1-October 30, daylight hours
(715) 435-3247 or (715) 459-5547

Site includes over 5 acres of gardens, including a picnic area, museum, and gift shop. Grotto is constructed from locally collected stones and materials and features the Wonder Cave, an underground pathway lined with shrines, and designed based on Roman catacombs.

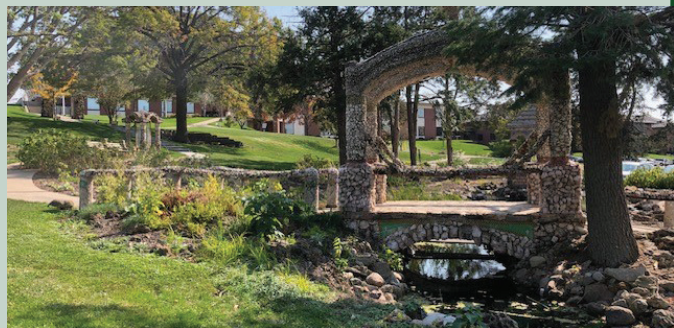


Father Paul Dobberstein, Holy Family Grotto (site view, 2021), Dubuque, IA. Photo: Laura Bickford.

5. HOLY FAMILY GROTO Father Paul Dobberstein Built 1928 to 1929

3390 Windsor Ave., Dubuque, IA 52001-1311
Visible year-round, daylight hours
(563) 583-9786

Located on the grounds of the Mount St. Francis Convent and features an abundance of pink quartz.



William Lightner, Our Mother of (Lady) Sorrows Grotto (site view, 2021), Mount Mercy University, Cedar Rapids, IA. Photo: Laura Bickford.

6. OUR MOTHER OF (LADY) SORROWS GROTO William Lightner Built 1929 to 1941

1330 Elmhurst Dr. NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
(319) 363-1323

Located on the grounds of Mount Mercy University and one of the rare Midwestern grottos not built by a priest. Features structures arranged around a lake and includes stone inlay, Italian mosaics, and geological specimens.

7. OUR LADY OF GRACE GROTO Built 1929

500 W. Mt. Pleasant St.,
West Burlington, IA 52655
(319) 752-6733

Built by Benedictine monks, the grotto consists of embellished concrete encrusted with materials from around the world.

8. SACRED HEART GROTO Father William Cremer Built 1945 to 1948

311 15th Ave., Gilbertville, IA 50634
(319) 296-1092

Located on the grounds of the Immaculate Conception parish, the grotto primarily features natural stones and geodes.



Father Philip Wagner, Rudolph Grotto Gardens and Wonder Cave (site view, 2009), Rudolph, WI, c. 1927-1969. Photo: Jeff Stashek.



St. Francis Grotto at the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, WI. Photo: Chava Krivchenia.

9. ST. FRANCIS GROTO Built 1933

3221 S. Lake Dr., St. Francis, WI 53235
(414) 744-1160

Found on the grounds of the Sisters of St. Francis Convent, this grotto was built by a beloved groundskeeper named Jake and mimics grottoes' original locations in caves.

10. MINI GROTO Postmaster Bud Allen Built 1952 to 1957

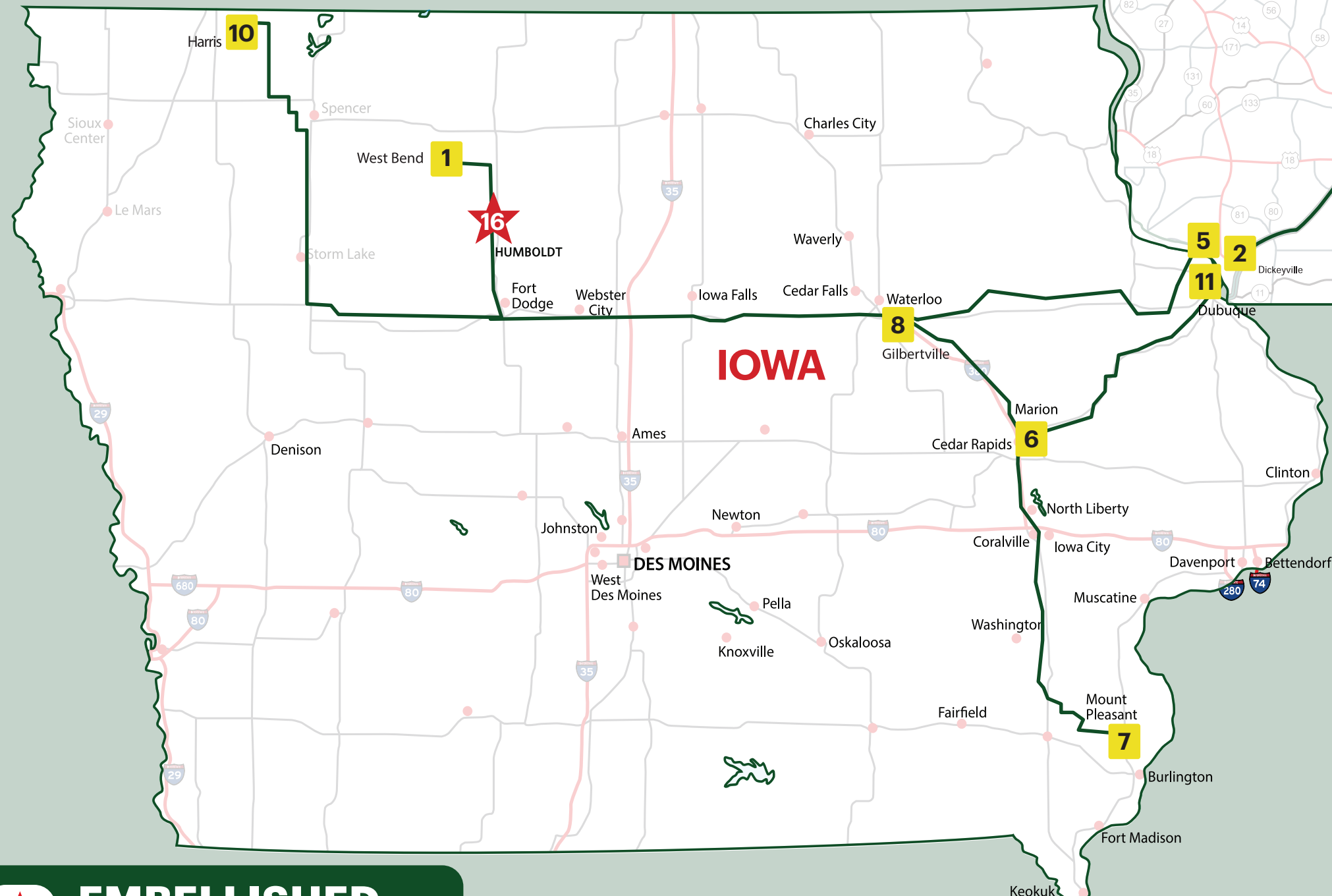
122 Main St., Harris, IA 51345
(712) 832-0094

Grotto installation consists of a church replica, wishing well, castle, and stone wall containing Psalm 23 using rocks from 40 states and countries.

11. MADELINE BUOL'S ORIGINAL HOUSE Built 1946 to 1960

1501 Garfield Ave., Dubuque, IA 52001

The former site of Madeline Buol's home and 13-piece grotto, there is no longer artwork on the site.



SITES WITH LIVING ARTISTS

17. WOUTERINA DE RAAD Ongoing, started 1990s

Beldenville, WI 54003
(715) 273-5959

Built by Wouterina de Raad on her property, the environment includes life-size concrete mosaic statues in the tradition of American outdoor folk art. Located in a private home—arrangements to visit should be made in advance.



Shari Tuska's Wayward Garden, Milwaukee, WI, 2022. Photo: Marty Peters, courtesy of SPACES-Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

18. SHARI TUSKA'S WAYWARD GARDEN Ongoing, started 2011

Milwaukee, WI
To schedule a visit, contact SPACES at
info@spacesarchives.org

The garden includes embellished concrete sculptures featuring women from antiquity.

19. JULIE DAUL'S DAUL HOUSE Ongoing, started 2000

Mosinee, WI
To schedule a visit, contact exhibitions@jmkac.org.

Julie Daul actively works on her house in the summer months.

EMBELLISHED CONCRETE

12. NICK ENGELBERT'S GRANDVIEW Built 1937 to 1953

7351 WI-39, Hollandale, WI 53544
Daylight hours
(608) 574-7169 or (608) 967-2322

Site includes over 40 sculptures of animals, historical figures, architectural models, and mosaics covering the entire home.

13. THE ART PRESERVE OF THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

3636 Lower Falls Rd., Sheboygan, WI 53081
Tuesday-Wednesday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Thursday: 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Friday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday-Sunday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
(920) 453-0346

Only museum in the world dedicated to the study and preservation of artist-built environments.



Herman Rusch, Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden and Museum (site view, 1967), Cochrane, WI, 1952-79. Photo: Robert Mertens.

14. HERMAN RUSCH'S PRAIRIE MOON SCULPTURE GARDEN AND MUSEUM Built 1959 to 1974

52727 Prairie Moon Rd., Fountain City, WI 54629
Daylight hours
(608) 687-8250 or (608) 248-2987

Includes 40 huge concrete, stone, and rock sculptures made of bricks, iron wheels, old grain drills, crockery, glass, and seashells.

15. FRED SMITH'S WISCONSIN CONCRETE PARK Built 1948 to 1964

N8236 State Hwy. 13, Phillips, WI 54555
Daylight hours
(715) 339-7282

On the grounds of Fred Smith's tavern, the site consists of 237 embellished concrete and mixed-media sculptures depicting people, animals, folklore, and events. Some sculptures from the site are on view at the Art Preserve.

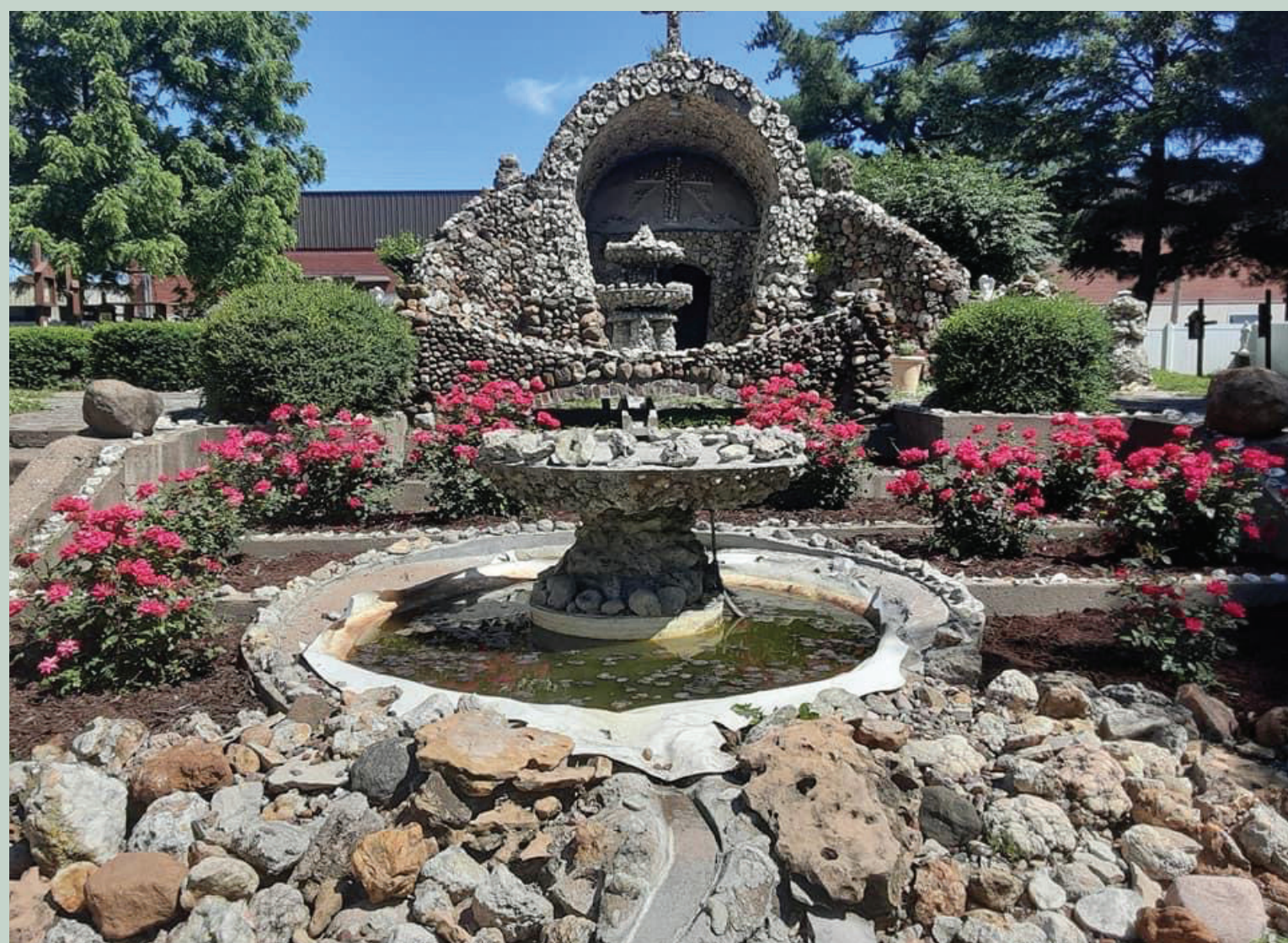
16. LIBERTY FOUNTAIN Father Paul Dobberstein Built 1918

John Brown Park, Humboldt, IA 50548
Daylight hours

Built to honor a local girl who died of tuberculosis and features the words LIBERTY, JUSTICE, VICTORY, and HUMANITY around the rim.



Stephanie H. Shih, *Toy Building* (detail), 2024–25, mixed media, 49 x 26 x 39 in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Robert Bredvad.



Our Lady of Grace Grotto, West Burlington, IA. Photo courtesy of Burlington Divine Mercy Parish.

Midwest Grotto Tradition

The grotto tradition is rich in the upper Midwest, imported by German immigrants. Grottoes are typically cave-like structures designed for prayer or reflection. In the Midwest, the form was adapted; many of them were created on church grounds out of concrete adorned with precious and semiprecious gems, found trinkets, dinnerware, colored glass, and petrified wood. These sites became nationally known tourist attractions almost immediately after their dedication, and visitors were inspired to try their hand at embellished concrete sculptures.

Map made in conjunction with the exhibition

A Beautiful Experience: The Midwest Grotto Tradition June 7, 2025–May 10, 2026

The exhibition includes objects and ephemera from Midwest grottoes, Madeline Buol's grotto, and new work by Stephanie H. Shih and E. Saffronia Downing, each responding to the grotto tradition.

E. Saffronia Downing

Artist E. Saffronia Downing's (b. 1992) practice and research methods are informed by material studies and vernacular art traditions such as quilting, brick making, and tile making.

In their recent travels to Portugal, where Downing's family immigrated from, they researched a regional tile-making tradition called azulejo. Downing also gathered materials and, for this installation, incorporated them alongside clay foraged from over ten sites in the US where they have lived or visited. In turn, the installation depicts a map or survey of the places where Downing has spent time.

Inspired by the rosaries in Madeline Buol's grotto, the artist gathered clay from Wisconsin and their former home of Maine to create beads. The artwork, *Seed Catcher* (2025), presents strung beads forming a net-like shape. While assembling the work, Downing began thinking of the components as seeds—that each small piece of clay was a seed and could grow into a mountain, artwork, and grotto within its infinite lifetime.

Stephanie H. Shih

During her Arts/Industry residency at Kohler Co. in 2023, Stephanie H. Shih (b. 1986) was touring nearby grottoes and researching local history when she learned of the region's once-vibrant Chinese diaspora. This mosaic sculpture serves as an imaginary artifact bridging these two historical communities—early Chinese immigrants and Midwestern folk artists, both living in and around Wisconsin in the early twentieth century. Inspired by Jacob Baker's *Dream House*, Shih's work pays homage to downtown Milwaukee's former Toy Building (c. 1915–1939), a six-story, green-brick structure that housed entrepreneur Charlie Toy's movie theater, chop suey restaurant, ballroom, billiard hall, and various other enterprises.

Echoing the way grotto makers collected materials from friends and neighbors, Shih crowdsourced Asian trinkets from dozens of people across the US and Canada. The objects she received included plastic toys, ceramic figurines, and tourist souvenirs, as well as traditional porcelain dishware and jewelry. She also incorporated an original Toy's Restaurant matchbook bearing a miniature illustration of the building, and historical sherds excavated from the site of a Chinese fishing village in Monterey, California (c. 1850–1906).



E. Saffronia Downing. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Madeline Buol, Buol Grotto and Sculptures (site view, n.d.), Dubuque, IA, 1946–c. 1960. Photo courtesy of Pam Mendenhall.

Madeline Buol

Beginning in 1946, Madeline Buol, née Magdalena Weicker, built a backyard grotto of embellished concrete at her home in Dubuque, Iowa. Inspired by Father Paul Dobberstein's Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa, and Father Mathias Wernerus' Dickeyville Grotto in Dickeyville, Wisconsin, Buol sought their guidance for building methods. Buol is one of the few known women grotto builders. *A Beautiful Experience: The Midwest Grotto Tradition* is the first public showing of her monumental thirteen-piece grotto since it was saved from her yard in 2011 by the Kohler Foundation, Inc.