

Grotto Stories

from The Sisters of Mercy, Alums and
The Mound Farm Neighborhood



MOUNT
MERCY 
UNIVERSITY

www.mtmercy.edu/grotto

Paul Phelan's Story

I grew up near Mount Mercy and when I was five and six and older the Grotto and pond were my habitat. I used to go down to the pond and get some 2 x 4's that had been left there. I'd use them like a canoe and paddle around the pond sitting on the 2x4's. Sooner or later one of the Sisters would catch sight of me and come down, take me by the ear, march me down three houses and report to my mother that, ONCE AGAIN, I had broken the boundaries of acceptable behavior!"

Story courtesy of Paul Phelan

The Schrodermier's Story

Michele Loggins graduated from Mount Mercy in 1974. She met her husband, Richard Schrodermier, in 1981. On December 6, 1981, a snowy evening, they went for a walk along Elmhurst Drive. When they walked under the Arch, he stopped and proposed to her. They were married in 1982. Every year since then, on their anniversary, they walk to the Warde Arch and Richard repeats exactly the same words of the original proposal.

In February, 1983, Michele found out she was pregnant with their first child. Richard did not know yet. She lured him to Mount Mercy under the guise of delivering a paper to Mary Allen (then a student there). They walked under the arch to get to Mary's dorm and when they got directly under the arch, Michele stopped Richard and told him she was pregnant. Richard says the major events of their lives together are connected to the arch at the Grotto and Community. It has become a rite of passage for them.

He also told me that as a child he used to play at the Grotto with other kids from the neighborhood. The nuns would come down and shoo them away. They were afraid of the nuns in their habits as they had seen nothing like that. He laughs now.

Story courtesy of Richard and Michele (Loggins) Schrodermier

Down Memory Lane

Fall and spring dances always invoke a spectrum of memories. One of my fondest of these is during intermission when many couples would stroll through the Grotto and Community—and what a favorite time to steal a tender hug or first kiss of the evening. Another fun time was in the winter when we would “play” in the snow and do everything from walking and building snow sculptures to having snowball fights as a break from studying. The Grotto was also a favorite spot for photo taking.

Story courtesy of Leah Rae Highly, Class 1961

Bill Quinley's Story

I lived in the neighborhood as a child and we used to sneak up to the Grotto and chip “fools gold” out of it. If any of the nuns saw us, they would run down and chase us away—we'd never seen their “uniforms”—and they scared us! We'd run as fast as we could back to our homes a few blocks away.

Story courtesy of Bill Quinley

The Sisters of Mercy talk about the Grotto with Alum Dennis Jennings in 2001 at the Sacred Heart Convent

The pond was really nice. We used to play soft ball games before the pond was there, but then we had to quit when the pond was built.

One of the main memories was when they used to teach Combined Science class, we used to have to identify the rocks in the bridge. I remember spending a lot of time down there on that bridge. The bridge got vandalized frequently when the kids used to chip out the stones. Once, while I was listening to WMT, I heard them ask a boy where he got his rocks, and he said Mount Mercy. It was a little child, a boy. Needless to say, those rocks came back, somebody notified him right away.

Sister Lorenz had memories of the centennial of the state of Iowa in 1946. They had a canoe with Indians. Canoes were also down there other times. They had a pageant of some kind. They had different scenes of the statehood celebrating when Iowa became a state. It was a very lovely thing. People came for the afternoon.

In the summertime, we would sell ice cream on Sunday afternoons. Eddie Toell, I can remember. I was working my way through college, part of my way through college. It was one of my things that I used to have to do. I'm sure they're all in heaven now, except med. Eddie used to help me—we were kind of friends. Mount Mercy furnished the ice cream. We sold ice cream cones. Anyone who came to the Grotto had to buy an ice cream cone. We didn't let anyone out unless they bought an ice cream cone. I don't remember how much we charged, but I'm sure it wasn't any more than 5 or 10 cents. It was in 1932.

In 1932, Lightner was still building. The statue of Mary didn't come until '41. They shipped it in from Italy. They moved her out after she was vandalized and tore out the Grotto and Community. They felt that it was more serious to have it left there vandalized than to not have it at all, so they removed it. It was an all white statue. I can remember the eyes; they were just gorgeous eyes.

I can remember one on of the things we had down there one summer was we had a little orchestra. We played and we had an audience. Sister Mildred and Sister Rosemary Jo helped. There used to be a singing group down there too. The audience sat on the ground. I just remember it being a one-time shot. I remember practicing in the back of Warde hall.

We used to go down to the pond and just walk around and talk a look at the stations. Sister Martin came along while I was looking around and she looked up at and saw that "Thy grace is sufficient." In those days before we were professed, that's when we got our rings, we could tell them what motto we would like in our ring. So sister Martin said, "Oh, I like that, I'm going to have that for my motto."

I remember we used to walk down there when we had our retreats. It was a place of reflection. Individually we were on retreat. I remember the group I entered with, we entered on August 1st, so every August 1st when we were up here, we would go down there and say the rosary first, because the assignments of the year weren't out yet, they came out on the 15th. Then we would play "Spin the Bottle." You would spin it around to see where you were going to go. That was quite a regular thing we did on recreation, down in the Sunken Gardens. They were in front of the Old Sacred Heart and the convent. There were a lot of expansive grounds down there. It was "sunken" because you had to go down a little hill-not very much-a little one, and they called it the Sunken Gardens because you had to go down to get there. We used to pick grapes down there, wild grapes. We used to pick strawberries too. At 5:00 in the morning, they would send us down to pick strawberries because then we couldn't break our fast, we had to go to mass.

In 1924-1928, we used to play softball down there, before they turned it into the lagoon. It was called a lagoon. We had to quit playing softball. Then they started to build the Grotto and Community. Sister Ann used to go down to the lagoon at a certain time of the year and she would gather the tadpoles up for the science department.

In the summer, one summer at least, we would gather down around the lagoon on Sunday afternoon and we would pray the rosary. Then we would go down to the hockey field, which is not the parking lot, and we would have a picnic. Almost every Sunday, we would do that. The hockey field was where "the pit" is now, the parking lot north of Hennessey. We used to row the boat around the lagoon. We used to be able to go under the bridge. The 10 commandments were in the water too.

We used to do interpretive dancing with the scarves. We used to have to take it for Physical Ed. I can't remember our teacher. She wasn't a sister. It was done to music; it was very elegant. Sister Mary Marceline was terrific at it. Sister Mary Rae used to do it too. We did interpretive dancing in '32 and '33.

It really is a loss that the Grotto is gone. We used to go down there alone to reflect and pray. There used to be a slip with some of the names of the stones. I remember that he used to travel to many different places to get the rocks. When he went to Arizona or New Mexico, one of the western states to get rocks, he wouldn't let his family go because he had to go in caves to get the rocks and there were so many snakes that he didn't want them to get hurt. I (Sister Dorthea) met Mr. Lightner because he was working down there. He always had a group of people who helped him, I think they were volunteers. It must've been difficult because they had to do their own digging and they had those wheel barrels. He built Warde and he had a lot to do with building Mercy Hospital in Oelwein too.

In 1920, they were still building Warde Hall when I came in for High School. It was called Mount Mercy Academy then, not Warde Hall. We used to live up there; it was boarding school. There was a lot of building going on the first year I was there. It was called Mount Mercy of the Pines in 1924. It was the old Sacred Heart Academy. It's on my old class ring. The next year it got changed to Mount Mercy Academy. There is a ring in the archives with a picture of the graduating class; one young lady did not graduate, so her ring was left. I don't know why she didn't graduate; there's a story in there somewhere. Maybe she didn't turn her English paper in or she was playing around with the Grotto and Community.

I came across a picture postcard of the Grotto in the archives and it was just pristine down there, well taken care of. Later, it became overgrown when Lightner was around to take care of the upkeep. People were concerned about other things during Depression years. I remember there were fears that the same thing would happen in West Branch with Father Dobberstien's elaborate structure. They're doing some stuff to restore that now.

There were stories about the arch near Warde Hall. When the Bishop has a picture standing with all the graduates and it says on the arch "blessed are thou among women," and there he was, surrounded by women.

When they did the May crowning, they came from Warde, because McAuley wasn't there yet. It was a tradition in many parishes. It was to honor the blessed Mary. We would sing the song "Oh, Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today." Whoever was chosen to do the crowning, that was a privilege. They were always members of "Cedality," the group dedicated to honoring Mary. Bob Beseda came over one time because he wanted to take part in it. He was among all the women. He was very interested in it, but it was also probably part rebellion.

I remember one time we went out to our mission, it was in August and it was awfully hot. The place was in disarray and sister Ann Lee sat down and she said, "Let's have May crowning and go home," because it was the last event and she wanted to go home.

They would have the crowning at the Grotto and Community. I think we used to crown the white statue. That's why it was such a privilege to crown her. We would wear long gowns, it looked like we were going to a dance, and it was very formal. It was beautiful. Sometimes each person would carry a votive glass and we would sing as we marched down. May crowning was the rosary, singing and crowning of Mary the Queen of May. The crown would be a little coronet of flowers, and hopefully

it would stay in place. It usually took place in the afternoon or evening. Some parishes still do the May crowning.

I remember we used to have to wear veils. We used to wear white on Sundays and black on the others. I used to go down at night to make a visit to the chapel, but I went to the gallery because I didn't want to go downstairs at night because I was afraid. One night, I went in and I had my veil and it fell off right in front of Father, I was up in the balcony and I was afraid to go down and ask for it. It was my freshman year and Sister Xavier asked me where my veil was and I said, "it must have fell off my head."

She was the English teacher and I was so nervous, of all the people to make a grammatical error in front of. She was the registrar and everything else. I never had an English teacher like her ever since. She was lovely, but oh my! There was a girl sitting beside me in class, one day, and Sister Xavier was handing back our papers. I think the girl must have used a reflexive pronoun, I'm not sure what it was, but Sister had written GR on the side and the girl said, she must not like me, it says "Grrrr." They were great people really; we have been fortunate to have known them.

Sister Monica enters: I remember it was the first visit of Archbishop Beckman to the college for Baccalaureate. Every day we would line up all the way down to the foot of the hill of Warde Hall and Mr. Lightner would drive up in his big black car. We would wave a scarf (white) and practice "Hail, Hail, Hail Your Grace" with Mr. Lightner. And then it rained the day he came so we couldn't do it. Mr. Lightner was around a lot of years.

Sister Delia Berges tells the story about her nephew who was in first grade in Independence. They were getting ready for the priest to come over and sister would pretend she was the priest, they were supposed to shake his hand and say "Good Morning Monsignor." Eventually, he came and nobody moved. They all sat there because he came through the wrong door.

Stories courtesy of a group of The Sisters of Mercy speaking with alum Dennis Jennings in October, 2001 at the Sacred Heart Convent.

One Sister's Story

One Sister lived on campus from 1934 to 1936 as a student and from 1955 to 1989 as a teacher. She attended Mount Mercy College one year, then entered the Convent and completed her college as a Novice. She came home each summer while teaching or going to school.

She remembers the Grotto with the lagoon, beautiful stones and dances. It was a restful place to sit and read and meditate. It was a nice place to visit with mainly and friends. As a college freshman, she had to pass tests on identifying the rocks. Don't ask her now, but at one time she could name them all!

The Grotto was always beautiful in her mind. The history of the rocks and the entire structure fascinated her. As Novices, they often walked around there and meditated on the words. One sister liked the words "thy grace is sufficient" and chose it as her motto.

The bridge fascinated her—its structure and beauty. She often stood on the bridge and watched the gold fish in the ponds. She and the others crossed the bridge in procession while praying the rosary to honor our Lady as pictured in the statue. Some people took out a canoe as part of the programs, pageants and dramatic performances.

She walked through the arches and remembers them as "lengthened shadows." In addition, the ten-column Grotto structure was surrounded by water. She wasn't certain of the sources of the architects choices, but we thought the world being built on and guided by the Ten Commandments of God and His love.

The changes of seasons provided a variety of colors—the quiet of winter, the hope and awakening of spring, the activities and joys of summer and the blaze of fall colors. These gave special beauty as a gentle reminder of the eternal glory that awaits.

She remembers picnics and processions while she was a student and later as a Sister. When she was a freshman at Mount Mercy college, the May Crowning was the culminating event for the activities during the year that honored our Lady. Dressed in formal attire, the procession began in the chapel, proceeded out the front door and down the drive—while they prayed the rosary and sang hymns. At the statue, hymns were sung as someone placed a crown or wreath of flowers on the head of the statue. Then they recited together the Act of Consecration.

Stories courtesy an anonymous Sister of Mercy

Sister Pauline Fox's Story

I lived on campus from 1960 to 1991; 1992 to the present (every summer since 1952 on). The Grotto shrine statue was beautiful with lots of petrified wood, moss, copper and green and blue quartz. The bridge had beautiful stones—coral, shells, pyrite, quartz and copper. The arches had dozens of rock formations, white quartz, calcite, and blue azurite. The Ten Commandment structure was lovely gold and silver with strong symbols in the base and ten columns. There were lots of limestone and rocks around the lagoon. In the springtime, the lagoon had thousands of tadpoles along the edge. Sister Margaret Ann McManhus collected specimens for her biology classes.

There were many specific events held at the Grotto and Community—concerts, vocals and instrumentals. The May Crowning and pageant was formal and beautiful. The gowns and capes were lovely while the prayers were somber and reverent. My profession group “celebrated” our entry (August 1) down there.

I remember quiet walks at Christmas time—the snow added beauty and serenity to the Grotto and Community. Singing with the summer choir was a delight. I also remember gathering for the rosary.

Stories courtesy of Sister Pauline Fox

Vivian Triesweiler Le Goube's Story

I had the privilege of working with—and for—Mr. Lightner in 1931–1933 or 1934. He was assisting Mother Ildephonse and the Sisters in the operation of Mount Mercy. He was a fine and wonderful gentleman. I can never forget how hard Mother Ildephonse and Mother Xavier worked to get the college accredited, etc. All the sisters worked very hard.

Stories courtesy of Vivian Triesweiler Le Goube

Blessing for the Scarf Dedication

Blessing for the Scarf Dance Dedication at the Grotto on October 6, 2001

God our creator, we ask your blessing on us and on our surroundings here. Many years ago, women of faith and one man with newly found faith dreamed of a Grotto here to honor the mother of Jesus under her title Our Lady of Sorrows. Their dream was realized, and for years students, their families, Sisters, and visitors enjoyed the Grotto and Community. They strolled, talked, prayed, processed, played music, performed dramatic skits, put on pageants, and gathered tadpoles for the science department.

Time, weather, and occasional mischief have taken their toll on our Grotto and Community. So today we come to discover ways of refurbishing this once lovely site.

You who have praised rock for its permanence and its strength, make our desire strong, our efforts enduring. Direct our purpose, guide our creativity, set firm our drive. We ask you this for your greater honor and glory. Amen.

Sister Pauline Fox

Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto

Every now and then one man creates with his own hands and mind, something unusual, beautiful and expressive. Just such a construction is William Lightner's (Our Mother of Sorrows) grotto and shrine begun in 1929 and today donated to all who will see it. Mount Mercy has a great artist treasure.

Cedar Rapids Gazette, August 10, 1941

Building the Grotto: William Lightner (1885 - 1968)

In 1929 William Lightner's company was building Warde Hall at Mount Mercy Academy. During that time, Lightner felt called to create an extraordinary grotto environment to express his personal artistic vision and religious faith. What began in 1929 as a single structure built as homage to his conversion to Catholicism and a response to a request by the Sisters of Mercy, became a twelve-year multi-structure obsession. Perhaps one reason for the high interest in public artworks on the Mount Mercy University grounds relates to both the process and product of Lightner's twelve-year odyssey designing and constructing the Our Mother (Lady) of Sorrows Grotto and park.

A professional boxer and skilled carpenter early in life, Lightner went on to become a partner in his family's contracting business, Lightner Brothers Construction and later president of the Master Builders of Iowa and the Iowa representative on the National Standardization Committee for the Calvin Coolidge administration. Though Lightner also designed and built other significant structures in Eastern Iowa including Warde Hall on the Mount Mercy Campus (1923), St. Patrick's Church in Cedar Rapids (recently severely damaged in the 2008 flood), and Lamoni's first bank, the Our Mother (Lady) of Sorrows Grotto was Lightner's life's work and his artistic masterpiece.

Lightner began by building the two arched entryways. These were followed by a bridge surrounded by a lagoon, a ten column structure representing the ten commandments, and a monumental central shrine, containing mosaics of the seven sorrow's of Christ's mother. The bridge was intended to represent his personal crossing to faith. The ten-column structure was the centerpiece of the lagoon with each of the commandments inscribed on the base in mosaic. The huge central shrine was a grotto cave holding a white marble statue of the Virgin Mary made from Carrara marble by the Italian sculptor Marcello Rebecchini. The statue, now reinstalled on the site was originally installed in 1949 after the shrines' dedication by Archbishop Beckman in 1941.

On his quest to build the shrine, Lightner travelled more than forty thousand miles throughout the United States and Mexico looking for building materials. He contacted suppliers around the world in search of more than three-hundred unusual varieties of stones used in creating the structures. Over twelve-hundred tons of stones were used, at a personal cost of exceeding forty-thousand dollars. The four structures still standing reveal Lightner's visionary sense of design, as well as providing a multitude of geological specimens, including coral from Hawaii, petrified wood, lapidolite, white quartz, blue azurite, and rose quartz from Colorado and the Black Hills of South Dakota.

A Tradition of Visionary Environments

William Lightner's Our Mother (Lady) of Sorrows Grotto was created in the tradition of such famed visionary art environments as Father Paul Dobberstein's Grotto of Redemption in West Bend, Iowa and Simon Rodia's Watts Towers in Los Angeles. Lightner was one of a handful of Midwestern artists who continued a centuries-old European tradition of creating environments for contemplation in and of nature (i.e. Tivoli Gardens). His is one of a few large grottos built to "transmit the prevailing spiritual beliefs in an atmosphere of supernatural beauty, a place for the spirit to be moved and stored." (Lisa Stone, *Sacred Spaces and Other Places*, The Art Inst. of Chicago Press, '93). Stone also states in "Concrete Visions: The Midwestern Grotto Environment," Image File ('90), that the

re-introduction in the early 20th century of concrete technology and availability of bagged concrete profoundly affected the landscape of the Midwest in two ways: the development of the skyscraper, in the form of grain elevators, and its sacred counterpart the Midwestern grotto environment, built as a result of a growing popular interest in the grotto form.

In her doctoral dissertation curator Susannah Koerber discusses Lightner's important connections to Father Paul Dobberstein's Grotto of The Redemption begun in 1889 and considered one most significant visionary environments worldwide. Lightner consulted Dobberstein about construction techniques and later Father Wernerus, builder of the other major grotto in the Midwest; The Holy Ghost Shrine in Dickeyville, Wisconsin consulted Lightner for help in design and concrete recipes.

Preserving the Grotto

By the late 60's, the Grotto and Lagoon had fallen into ruin as neither the college nor the Sisters (now dwindling in number) had the finances to maintain the site. The lagoon was drained in 1970. Erosion, lack of funding and vandalism made it necessary to level the grotto's main structure in 1974.

By the mid 70's, however, the international art community began to recognize the value of a number of visionary environments built by untrained artist. Professor Jane Gilmor came to the College in 1974 and immediately took an interest in Lightner's work and it's relationship to this form of architecture unique to the upper Midwest. After years of outreach and connecting with the stewards of other such sites, Gilmor got a 2001 S.O.S. (Save Outdoor Sculpture) grant from the Smithsonian Institutions Preservation Heritage millennium initiative, as well as a Linn County Historic Preservation grant. By matching these funds with donations from alumnae and College friends Mount Mercy was able to address the most serious structural problems. This began a community-based effort lead by Gilmor and Conservator Anton Rajer to make the most needed repairs to the structures and to build community and national awareness of Lightner's work of art and it's importance both culturally as well as academically.

As brutal winters and summers take their toll, it has come time to assess damages over the past ten years and to set up a new long-term plan for regular cleaning and restoration. In 2010, the Art Club and the University hired Lisa Stone and Don Howlett of Preservation Services, Inc., nationally known visionary environment conservation experts working with the Kohler Foundation in Wisconsin, to do a complete Preservation Plan for the Grotto. The first stage of the plan will be completed in summer 2011 to coincide with the completion of the new University Center.

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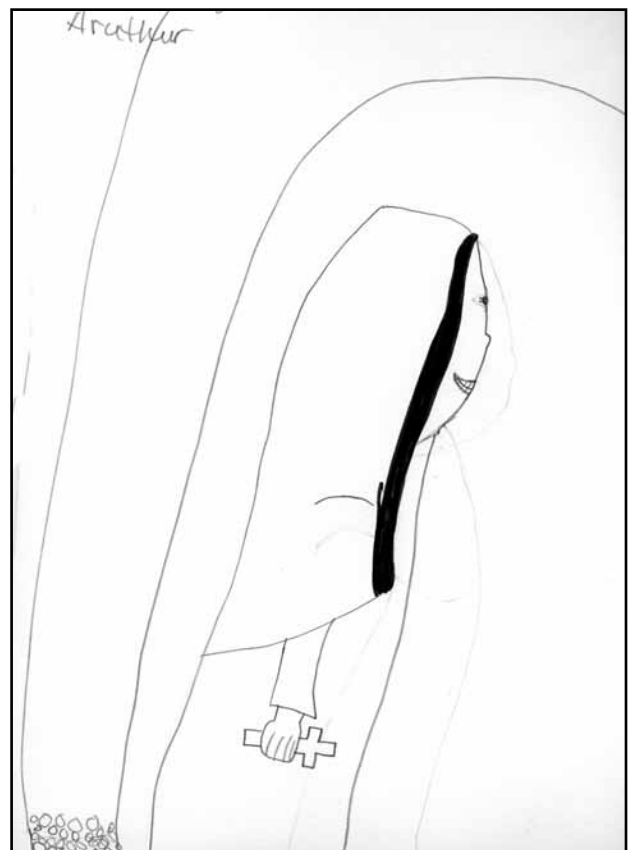


Top: May Pole Dance, Grotto Park

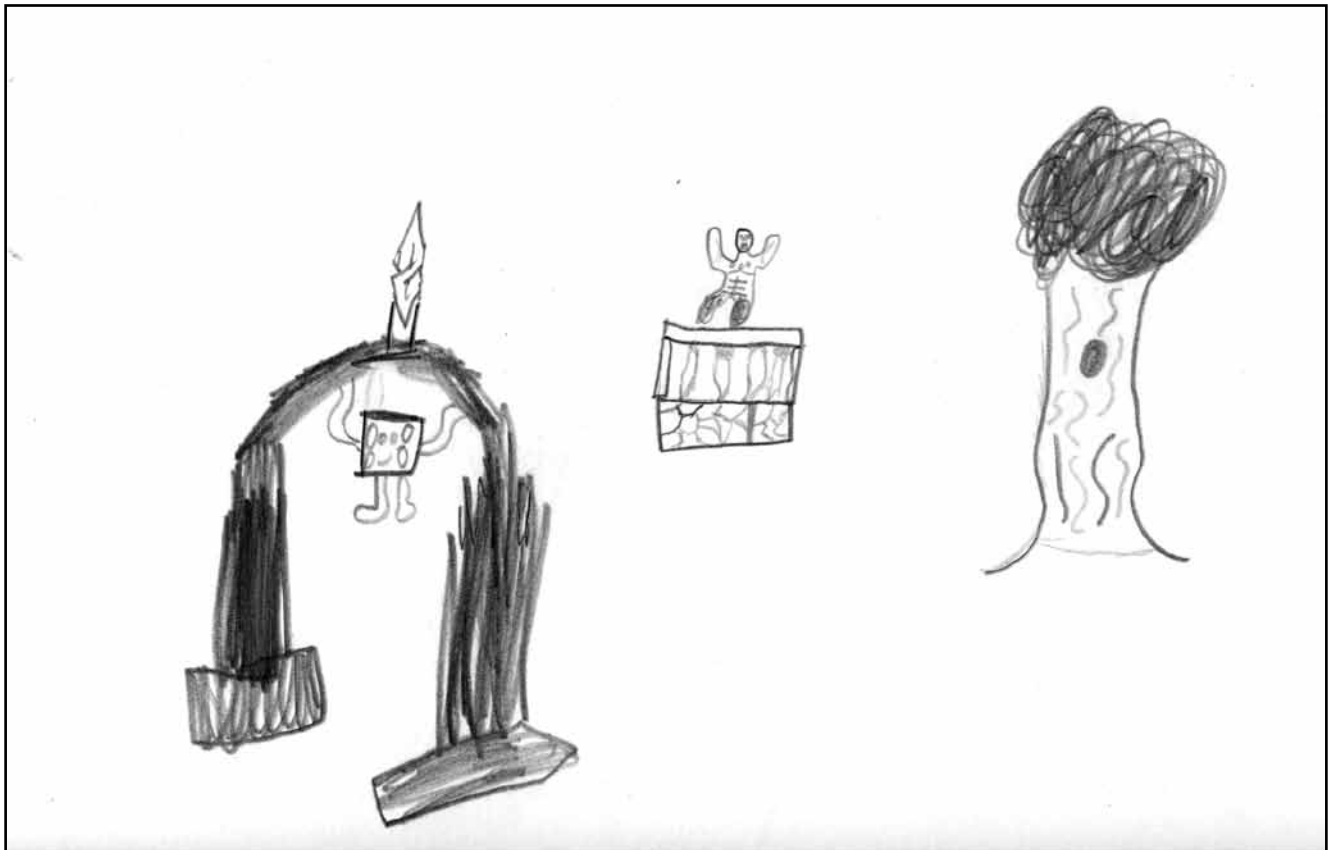
Bottom: Isadora Duncan Modern Dance by students, c. 1930's



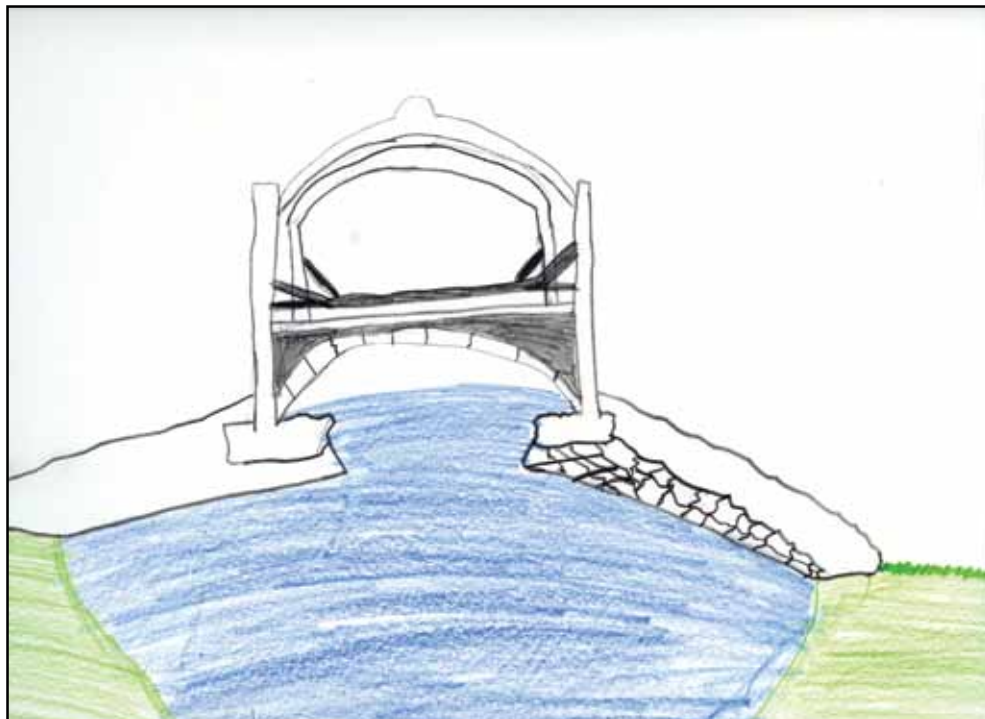
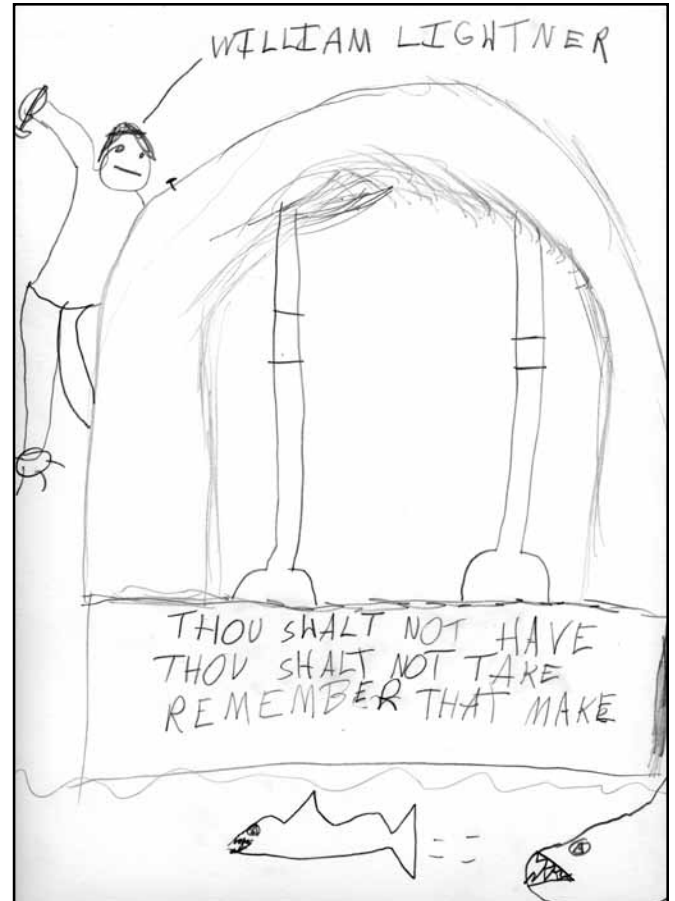
Top: Sisters of Mercy at William Lightner's Our Mother of Sorrow Grotto, c. 1950.
Bottom: Grotto Bridge, 2012



Top: Anna Huggins – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School
 Bottom Left: Angela Gasawax – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School
 Bottom Right: Autumn Crippen – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School
 All children's drawings are from 2012.



Top Left: Warde Hall Arch, Top Right: Kaitlyn Woolf – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School
 Bottom: Jacobi – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School
 All children's drawings are from 2012.

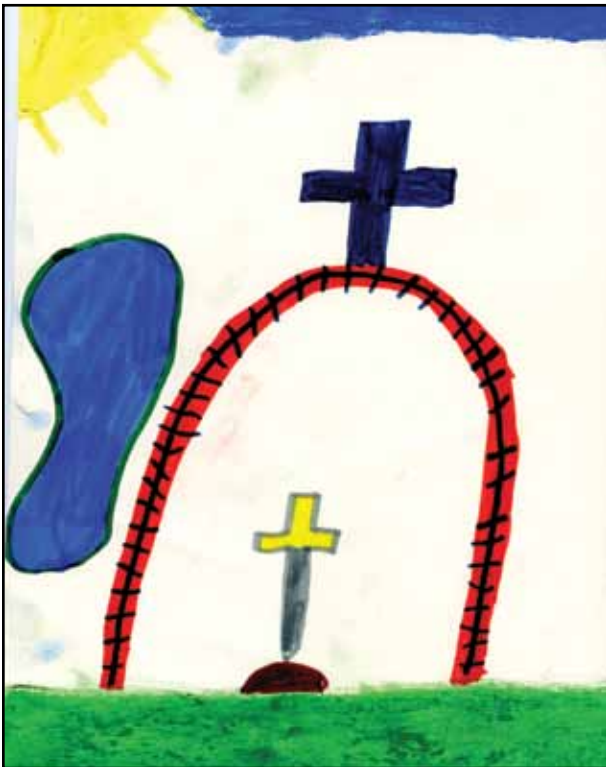


Top Left: Rhiannon – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School

Top Right: Tyler – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School

Bottom: Luke – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School

All children's drawings are from 2012.



Top Left: Angus Versy

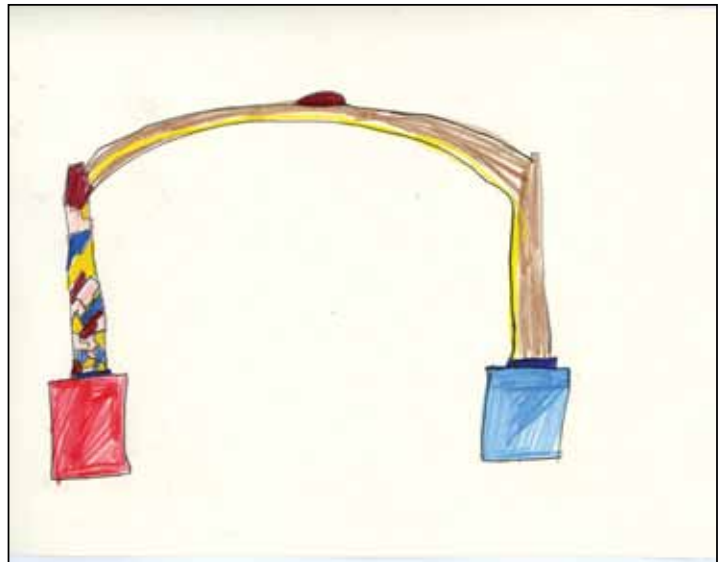
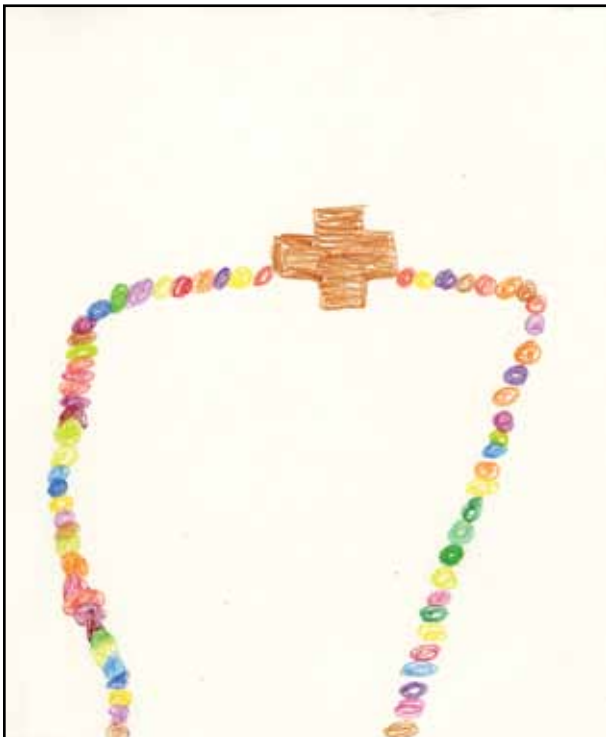
Top Right: Aryn Marner

Center Right: Kaitlyn

Bottom Right: James Gatewood

Bottom Left: James Hutchins

All children's drawings are from 4th Graders at Erskine Elementary School, 2012.



Top Left: Rachael Girman
 Top Right: Nathan Thompson
 Bottom Left: Tajia Frantz
 Bottom Right: Riliegh Hogan

All children's drawings are from 4th Graders at Erskine Elementary School, 2012.



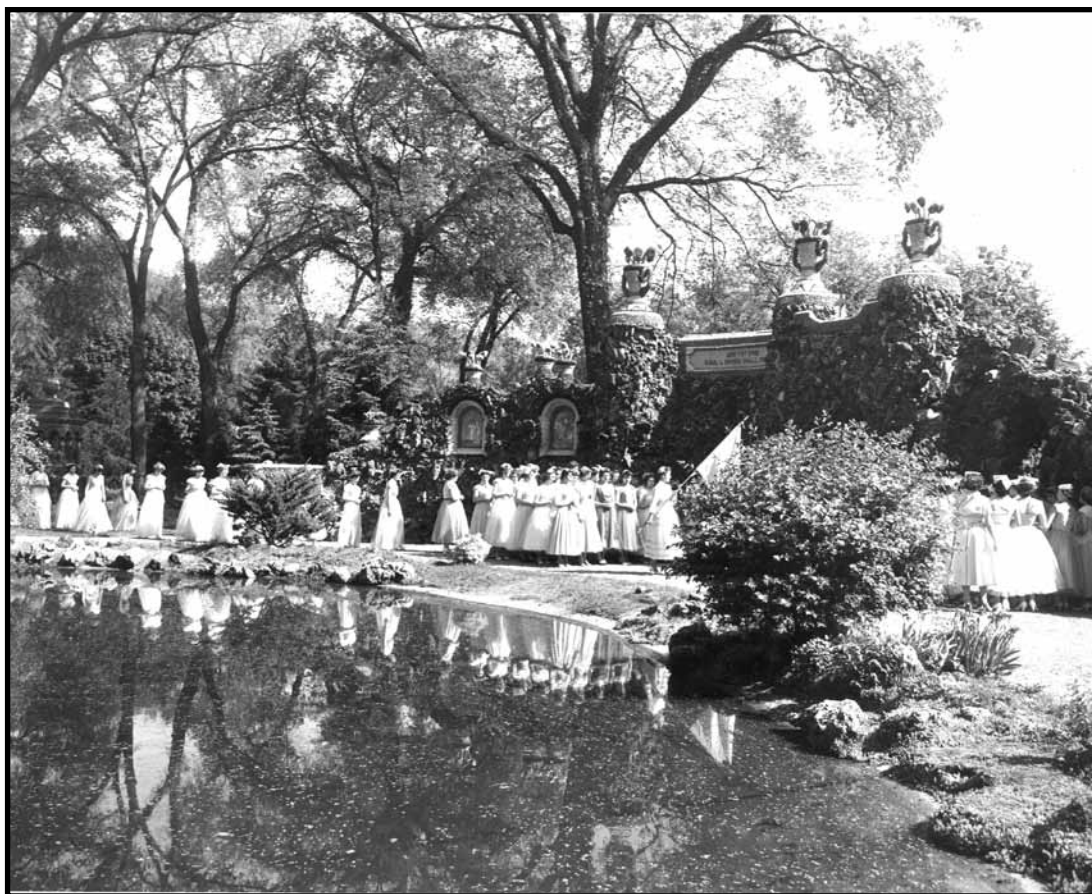
Detail, Warde Arch, Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto, 2010



Scarf Dancers on the Bridge at Rededication, Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto, 2002,



Archbishop Francis Beckman with Graduating class in 1940's,
Warde Arch, Our Mother of Sorrows, Grotto



Our Mother of Sorrow Grotto, May Day Event c. 1950's



May Crowning, Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto, c. 1940's



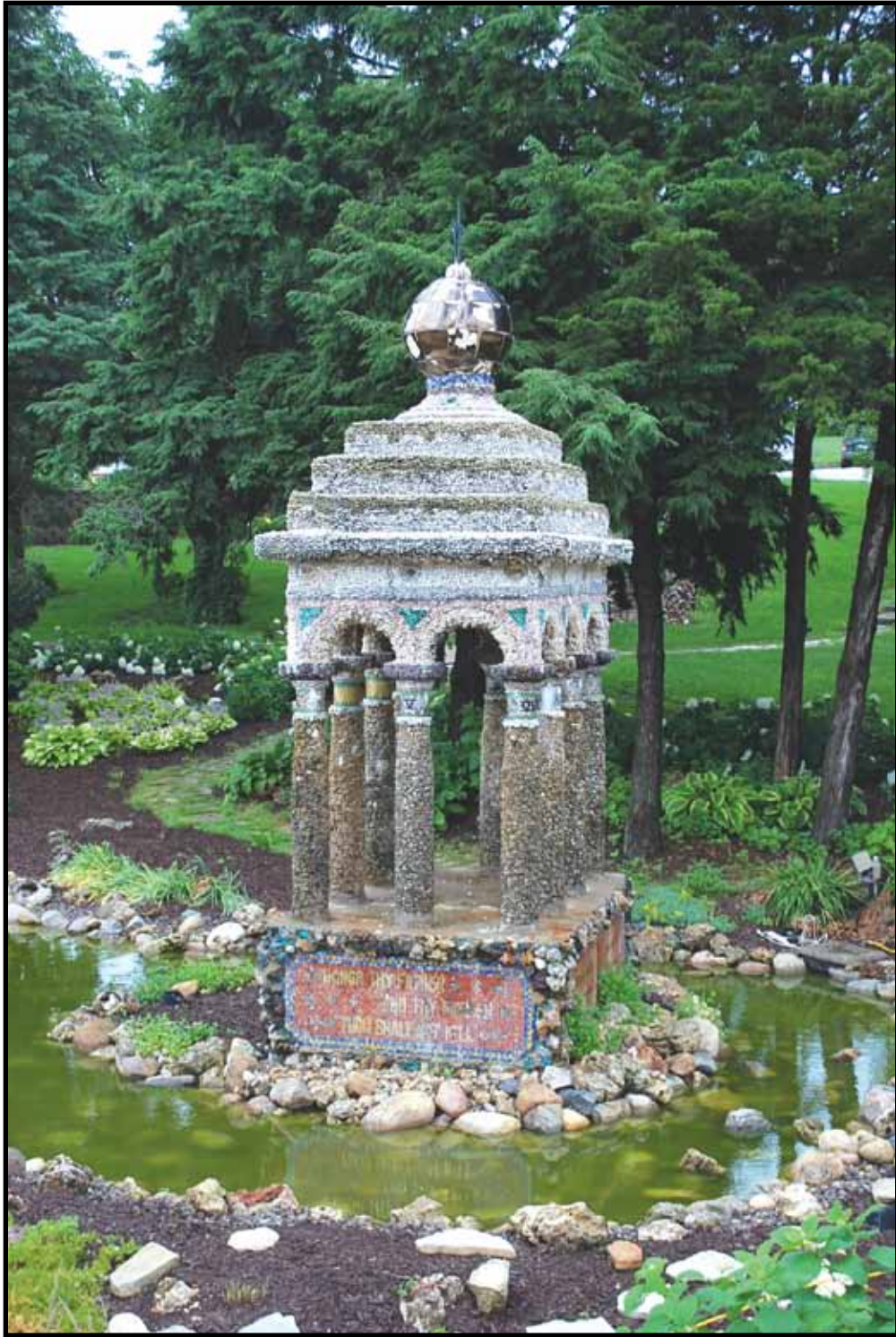
May Crowning, Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto, c 1940



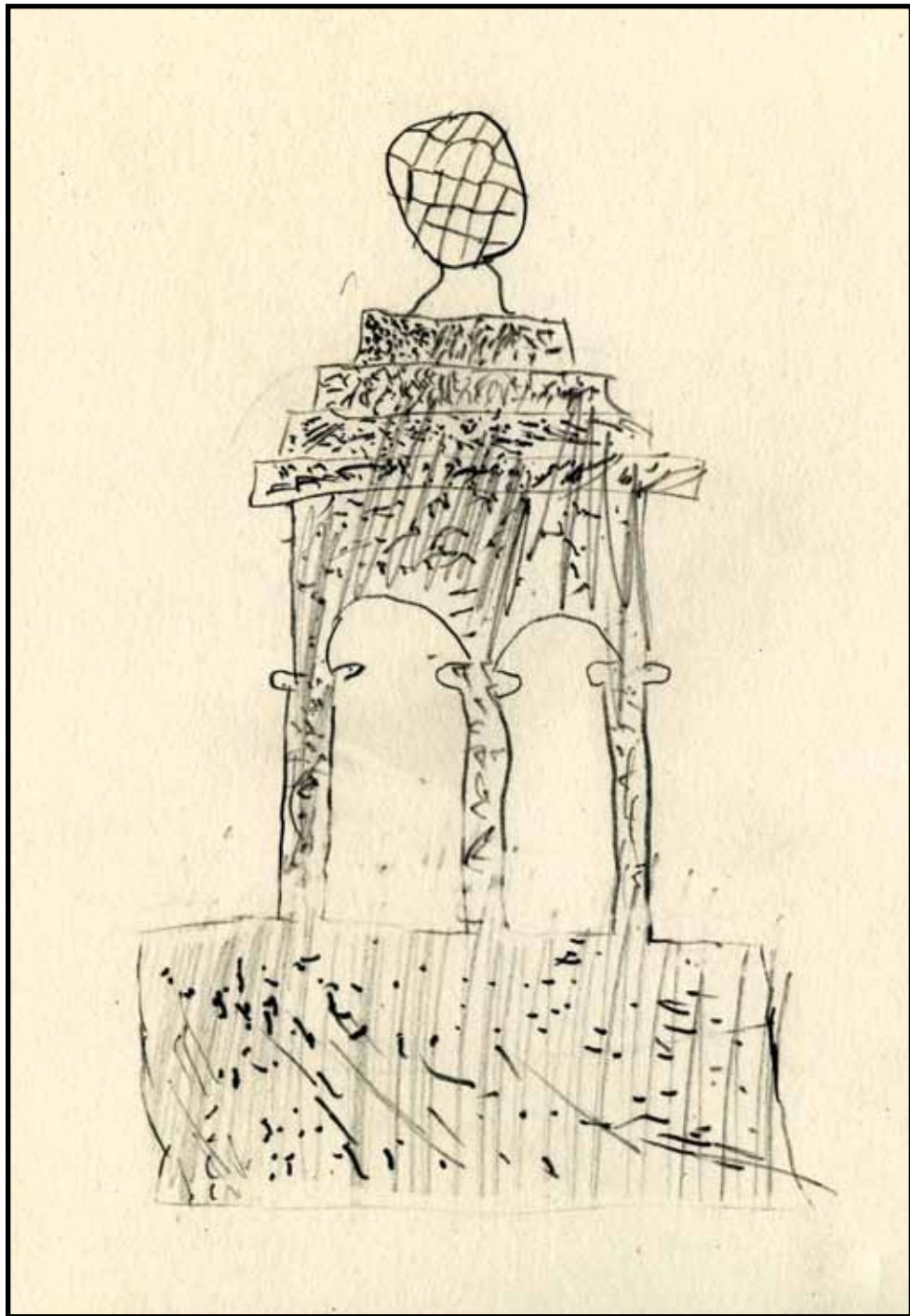
William Lightner in his days
as a professional wrestler, c. 1920's.



William Lightner – builder of
Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto,
c. 1950



Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto, Ten Commandments Structure, 2002



Maria Enos – 4th Grade Arthur Elementary School, 2012

Special Thanks

We are indebted to the Greater Cedar Rapids Foundation, The Linn County Historical Society, The Iowa Arts Council, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Smithsonian Institution's Heritage Preservation's Save Outdoor Sculpture Grant and many other area organizations for past support. Thanks to the many donors and volunteers, too numerous to mention here, who have contributed to saving this important historic site. Their support is testament to the enduring legacy of William Lightner and his Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto. Special thanks for their donations of time, talent and treasure to Grotto preservation is given to the following groups:

- A legacy fund from the late Ortha Harstad, whose father worked with Lightner on the Grotto
- The Friends of Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto
- The Sisters of Mercy and Mount Mercy University
- An S.O.S. (Save Outdoor Sculpture) Grant from the Smithsonian Institution's Heritage Preservation Program
- The Linn County Board of Supervisors Preservation Society
- The Greater Cedar Rapids Foundation
- The Cedar Rapids Rock Club
- Rinderknecht Construction
- Webber Stone Co.
- Fairfield Greenhouses
- Special thanks also to the Lightner family for their cooperation and support.

Historical research was provided by:

- The late Sister Augustine Roth, RSM
- Mount Mercy librarian Kristy Raine
- Mount Mercy alumni Kathleen Braun, Marlena Hinzman and Robert Marrs

Original research and films on the Grotto:

- Mount Mercy alum Dennis Jennings, for his original research in making the film Visionary, a biography of William Lightner
- Kansas City Public Television's Rare Visions and Roadside Attractions series
- Kim O'Meara and the Cedar Rapids School System
- Donations from The Cedar Rapids Rock Club and Rinderknecht Construction were invaluable. Major contributions of labor and materials were given by Webber Stone Co, and Fairfield Greenhouses.

Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto is considered one of the most important visionary grotto sites of the Midwest!

Please help us ensure that this wonderful historic and artistic treasure endures to be enjoyed by future generations!

A Rich History

Mount Mercy's Mother of Sorrows Grotto, architect William Lightner's masterpiece, was constructed between 1929 and 1941, and has been exposed to the elements 24 hours a day, every single day since its completion. Diligent, ongoing care and maintenance is crucial to ensuring that the grotto continues to stand as a source of inspiration and beauty to Mount Mercy and the surrounding community.

Private funding is the sole source of support for the University's continued efforts in preserving the grotto's historic and celebrated structures. As history tells, the preservation efforts have earned the support of countless individuals, starting with the Smithsonian Institute in 2001, who funded the first stage of a preservation project. Since then, hundreds of "grotto guardians" have contributed their time and efforts to the ongoing cultivation and protection of the grotto.

In 2010, Mount Mercy partnered with national environment restoration experts of the Preservation Services of Wisconsin to complete an extensive site evaluation and cast a vision for long term restoration. Their efforts were rewarded in 2011, when the Iowa Arts Council provided a Historic Preservation Grant to restore the Warde Arch. Experts in historic preservation, the Technical Associates of Cedar Rapids, have been engaged to provide professional maintenance to our historic site, conducting annual inspections and restoration.

The Next Stage

As stewards of this rare and artistic wonder, we are committed to its care and future integrity and are thrilled to announce that in April, 2012, *Mount Mercy was awarded a \$30,000 National Endowment for the Arts matching grant to help fund renovation of the grotto bridge and Ten Commandments column!*

We need your help to match the \$30,000 grant dollar for dollar. Please consider a financial gift to help restore and preserve this wonderful piece of history on the Mount Mercy campus!

Contributions for the grotto may be designated to the current Grotto Restoration and Conservation Project 2011-13, or the J.J. Feld Grotto Reflecting Pool Maintenance Endowed Fund.

You may make a gift online at www.mercy.edu/make-gift or mail your contribution to:

Office of Development and Alumni Relations, Attn: Grotto,
1330 Elmhurst Drive NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402-4797.

For additional information call us at **319-368-6468**.

Thank you!

Your support ensures this historic treasure lives on for future generations.

Grotto Stories

from The Sisters of Mercy, Alums
and The Mound Farm Neighborhood



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www.mtmercy.edu/grotto