

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 19 2000

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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 any 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: The Grotto of the Redemption

2. Location

street & number: 300 North Broadway

not for publication

city or town: West Bend vicinity

state: Iowa code: IA county: Palo Alto code: 147

zip code: 50597

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Patricia Shurking
Signature of certifying official

DSTPD

12-8-00
Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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 or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Edson H. Beall 2/23/01

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

[Signature]
Signature of 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
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
	<u> </u> sites
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> structures
	<u> </u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

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6. Function or Use
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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Religion Sub: Religious Facility/Shrine

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Religion Sub: Religious Facility/Shrine
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7. Description
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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions): Other

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: stone

Roof: stone

Walls: stone

Other: stone

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for 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.
- x 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. Property may qualify for criteria A and B, with further research.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

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

- x A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ___ B removed from its original location.
- ___ C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
Architecture
Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance: 1912-1950

Significant Dates: 1912

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder: Dobberstein, Father Paul Matthias

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

___ 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: The Grotto of the Redemption Museum and Office

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1.6 acres

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

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	<u>15</u>	<u>392100</u>	3	_____
2	_____	_____	4	_____
	<u>x</u>	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.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title: Peter M. Nessen, Coordinator

organization: West Bend Economic Development date: May 31, 2000

street & number: P.O. Box 111, 311 2ND ST SW telephone: (515) 887-3264

city or town: West Bend state: Iowa zip code: 50597
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Additional Documentation
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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)
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Property Owner
=====

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

name The Diocese of Sioux City

street & number 1821 Jackson telephone (712) 255-7933

city or town Sioux City state IA zip code 51102-3379
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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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 7 Page 1

The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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7. DESCRIPTION

The Grotto of the Redemption is an 88-year old structure built of a variety of stones collected from around the world, and comprises nine contiguous grottos that illustrate the story of Christ's Redemption of man, from the Fall to the Resurrection. It showcases 26 religious stations featuring sixty-five statues of Carrara marble carved by Italian sculptors. Within the site is one noncontributing building, the gift shop.

The Grotto is located within the city limits of West Bend, in north central Iowa, on property adjacent to Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. Highway U.S. 18 lies 8 miles to the north, U.S. 169 is 9 miles to the east, and State Highway 15 runs along the east edge of West Bend.

The Grotto was begun in 1912 by a young Roman Catholic priest, the late Father Paul Matthias Dobberstein. Father Dobberstein was born in Rosenfeld, Germany, on September 21, 1872, and received his early education at the University of Deutsche-Krone. He emigrated to America when he was 20 years old, and entered the Seminary of St. Francis near Milwaukee, to prepare for the priesthood. It was there that he began to show signs of the unusual artistic ability that was to characterize most of his adult life.

He completed his studies for the priesthood at St. Francis and was ordained on June 30, 1897. In 1898 he became the pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in West Bend and remained there until his death on July 24, 1954, after which work on the Grotto continued under the direction of Father Louis Greving.

Besides the Grotto at West Bend, Father Dobberstein built several other smaller grottos or memorials at the following locations:

- Carroll, Iowa - Immaculate Conception Grotto
- Dubuque, Iowa - Grotto at the Franciscan Convent
- Humboldt, Iowa - Grotto in John Brown Park
- La Crosse, Wisconsin - Shrine in the St. Rose Convent, Franciscan Sisters
- Parkston, South Dakota - Shrine in honor of Our Lady
- Pocahontas, Iowa - War Memorial, on site of first county court house
- Riverside, Iowa - Sacred Heart Church, Lourdes Group

The story of how the Grotto of the Redemption began is as moving as the scenes depicted therein. While in Seminary, Father Dobberstein became critically ill with pneumonia. As he fought for his life, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin to intercede for him. He made a solemn promise to build a shrine in her honor if he lived. The illness passed, the student completed his studies and after his ordination he came to West Bend in 1898. For a decade he stockpiled rocks and precious stones. He first started giving permanence to his promise in 1912.

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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Until 1947, all the work on the Grotto was done by hand; that is, the cement, mortar, rocks, steel and precious stones were moved to the building site either by bucket or wheelbarrow. In 1947, when perhaps 80 percent of the project was completed, an electric hoist was installed to assist the ailing artist. After Father Dobberstein was physically unable to continue the work, his general plan was carried out by Matthew Szerensce, with direction from Father Louis Greving. Father Dobberstein often referred to Mr. Szerensce as "his good right hand," since the two had worked together, side by side, from the time the first stone was laid.

It has been said that the sum of what the artist, Father Dobberstein, intended to do in a creative way was to retell the story of the Redemption. That story, of how man lost favor with God but was redeemed by Jesus, is portrayed in nine grottos or scenes from the life of Christ. These are:

- Garden of Eden - Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and are cast out.
- Stable of Bethlehem - The Divine Child is born.
- Home in Nazareth - Jesus' boyhood home and humble beginnings are depicted.
- Trinity - One God in three Persons is symbolized in three half circles.
- Ten Commandments - Man is told to keep Commandments to gain eternal life.
- Gethsemane - Christ is shown praying and suffering on eve of crucifixion.
- Stations of the Cross - Christ is degraded, crucified and dies for all.
- Fourteenth Station - Christ is buried.
- Resurrection - Christ is not here, in the grave; He is risen.

The Grotto of the Redemption is above all an expression of unwavering devotion to an ideal. It is an example of how one man of talent used his gifts to the full to inspire countless thousands, by the beauty of his work, to seek after Everlasting Beauty. To that end, Father Dobberstein traveled far and wide to gather many carloads of rocks and stones, the bulk of which had to be handled, classified, processed and stored properly. He was often hampered by bad roads and weather, and poor transportation. He was injured in auto and construction accidents, but nothing could keep him from his work for very long.

The Grotto of the Redemption represents the largest collection of semi-precious stones, ores, minerals, fossils, petrifications, corals and shells concentrated in one place in the United States, with a value of several millions of dollars. It has been recognized as a significant cultural and historical attraction in a number of books and publications over the years, and recently was the backdrop for a major motion picture.

Each year, the Grotto draws tens of thousands of visitors from around the U.S. and from many foreign countries who appreciate its artistic beauty, geological character, and religious and spiritual importance.

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Grotto of the Redemption is eligible under Criterion C as the finest and grandest example of a phenomenon known as regional grottos, where an ancient architectural form was transplanted to the Midwestern prairie landscape. It is one of the world's largest manmade grottos and the most extensive mosaic ever created. Accordingly, this work of artistic distinction satisfies requirements of Criteria Consideration A.

In their book, Sacred Spaces and Other Places, Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi quote a Father Steven Avella of St. Francis Seminary who once outlined the background history and context for Father Dobberstein's promise to build a shrine:

"The grotto is one manifestation of a common Catholic practice, prevalent especially in Europe, of erecting outdoor shrines to favorite saints or special manifestations of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This custom may possibly be a practice that carried over from pagan religion and was integrated into Christian practice. In any event it was and I believe still is not unusual to see small wayside shrines in Europe."

The regional, religious grotto form has had an undeniable influence on artists and builders in the upper Midwest since the early part of this century, and the Grotto of the Redemption was the first in the area. The radiating presence of this exotic sculptural and architectural wonder inspired a number of people to create other sculptures and sculptural environments of originality and personal significance. Thus, a tradition of creative expression within the contexts of home and landscape became firmly rooted in the region.

According to Stone and Zanzi, the social and spiritual consciousness regarding the relationship of man to nature, and the status of nature itself, that Father Dobberstein and many of his contemporaries embraced corresponds with historical and conceptual development of the grotto. In its ancient and classical forms the grotto was a form of nature incarnate, a place where spiritual and oracular experiences were inseparable from the form, context, and essence of its natural surroundings. The artificial grotto, a step removed from its origin, could imitate and elaborate on nature, while the potential for departing from it altogether was limitless. Dobberstein revered natural materials for their power to evoke a religious experience, but he removed them from their natural setting and manipulated them to create a supernatural effect.

The Grotto is an amalgamation of geological treasures, architectural styles and amorphous forms that must be wandered through to be experienced. The rock work is complemented by plantings of canna lilies and other flowers, along with many

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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examples of traditional religious statuary, commissioned and carved in Carrara bianco chiaro marble by Italian sculptors. Dobberstein was a firm believer in the communicative power of exotic and precious materials in great variety. He wrote about the annex depicting the Passion of Christ, a work in progress:

"When we consider that the annex is, for the most part, built out of material taken from the lowlands, we cannot fail to appreciate that a greater and more harmonious spectacle will present itself when the various colored stones of the Rocky Mountain region will blend with the mosaics of the Venetian masters."

Father Dobberstein scorned the use of ordinary glass and china and refused to use common materials. He compromised only when he needed a translucent blue color to suggest water and could not find, or afford, a suitable mineral. He used melted blue glass in this instance but objected to so base a material.

Although the Grotto of the Redemption was built to fulfill spiritual needs, Dobberstein was also aware of the importance of an attraction that would draw both pilgrims and tourists, and described the dual purpose of the Grotto thus:

"Besides this religious object, the spiritual improvement of the people, the builder has a second object in mind. He is adorning this shrine with precious stones, ores, minerals, fossils, petrifications, corals, and shells from the whole United States and its bordering lands and waters. . .the Grotto will exhibit in artistic settings the most complete geological collection in the United States."

For decades, the Grotto has been the place where people from all cultures have come to learn about art, architecture, geology, sculpture, and the insight and determination of one human being. The Grotto draws thousands of visitors each year from around the U.S. and from many foreign countries who appreciate its beauty, geological character, and religious and spiritual importance.

The Grotto was built without formal plans, blueprints, sketches, or paperwork of any kind. The whole panorama is a complex of nine grottos or scenes from the Life of Christ, each portraying part of the Redemption. It was constructed with stones gathered from every state in the union and from every region of the globe. Hundreds of thousands of precious and semiprecious stones were bonded in special cement to form columns, archways, rooms and shrines. One grotto alone is made of 65 tons of petrified wood. It is recorded that foundations had to be sunk 20 feet into the ground to support the weight of the structure. Stones include alexandrite from emerald mines in Russia, purple amethyst from the Andes, green jade from China, lapis lazuli from the Near East, and a rock brought back from Admiral Byrd's expedition to the South Pole.

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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Walt Disney once said that the Grotto was one of the most spectacular shrines he had ever seen. He said he wanted to build a duplicate for Disneyland but was told by his engineering consultants that such a work occurred "only once in a lifetime."

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The Grotto of the Redemption
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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Beardsley, John. *Gardens of Revelation*. New York, New York. Abbeville Press, 1995.

Stone, Lisa and Zanzi, Jim. *Sacred Spaces and Other Places*. The School of Art Institute of Chicago Press, 1993.

Stone, Lisa and Zanzi, Jim. "Miracle in Stone," *The Iowan* 44:3 (Spring 1996), 24-31.

John Maizels. *Fantasy Worlds*. Cologne, Germany. Taschen, 1999.

Barbara Brackman and Cathy Dwigans. *Backyard Visionaries*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1999.

Grotto Father. Foundation Books, Lincoln, NE. Duane Hutchinson, 1989.

Father Louis Greving. *A Pictorial Story of the Grotto of the Redemption*. Barnhart Press, Omaha, NE, 1993.

Ohrn, Steven. *Passing Time and Tradition*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984), 129-141.

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References

Provided by John Wright, Palo Alto County Engineer, Emmetsburg, Iowa

Easting - 382,089.902 meters Northing - 4,757,742.633 meters

Measured from Cross of the Catholic Church to South side of the Grotto

Verbal Boundary Description

City Lot 4, Rearrangement Younies Subdivision, West Bend, Iowa

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the property include the entire area on which the Grotto structure has been historically situated.

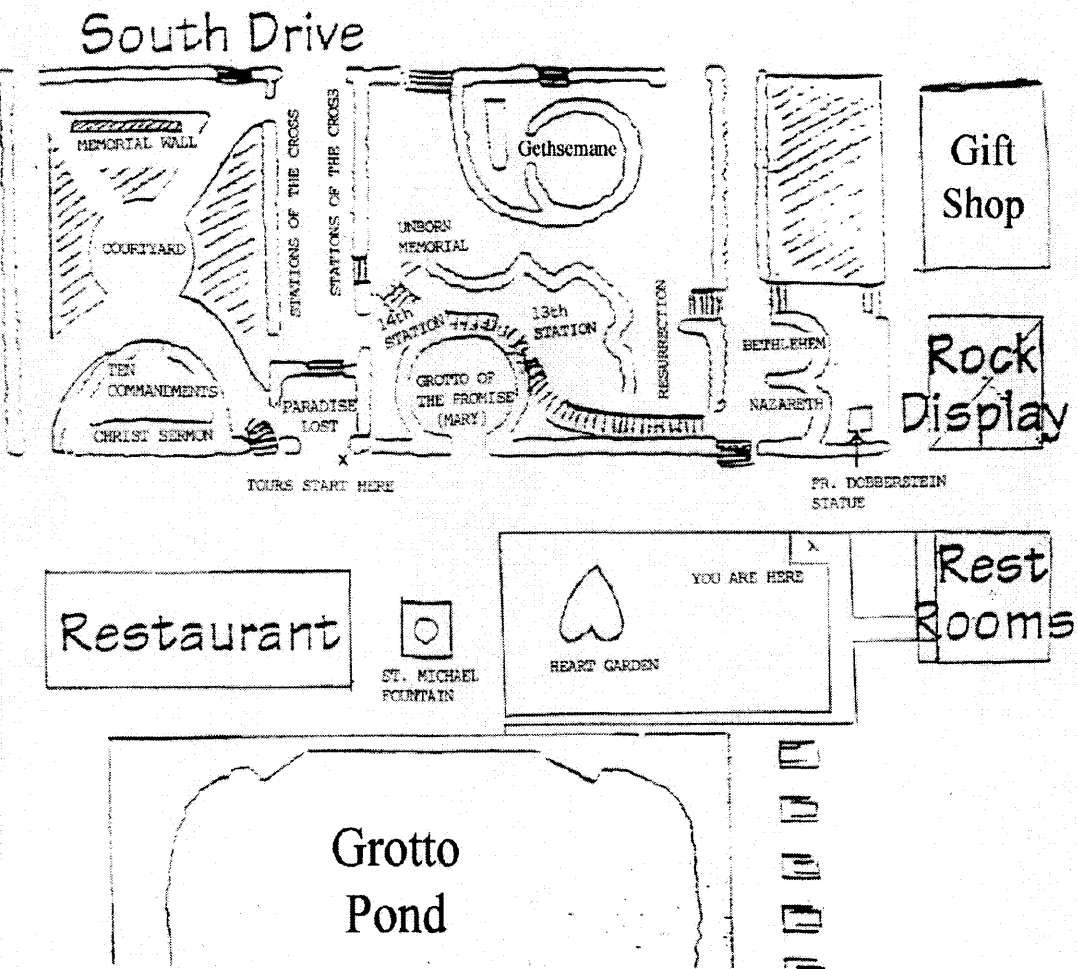
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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

Catholic Church



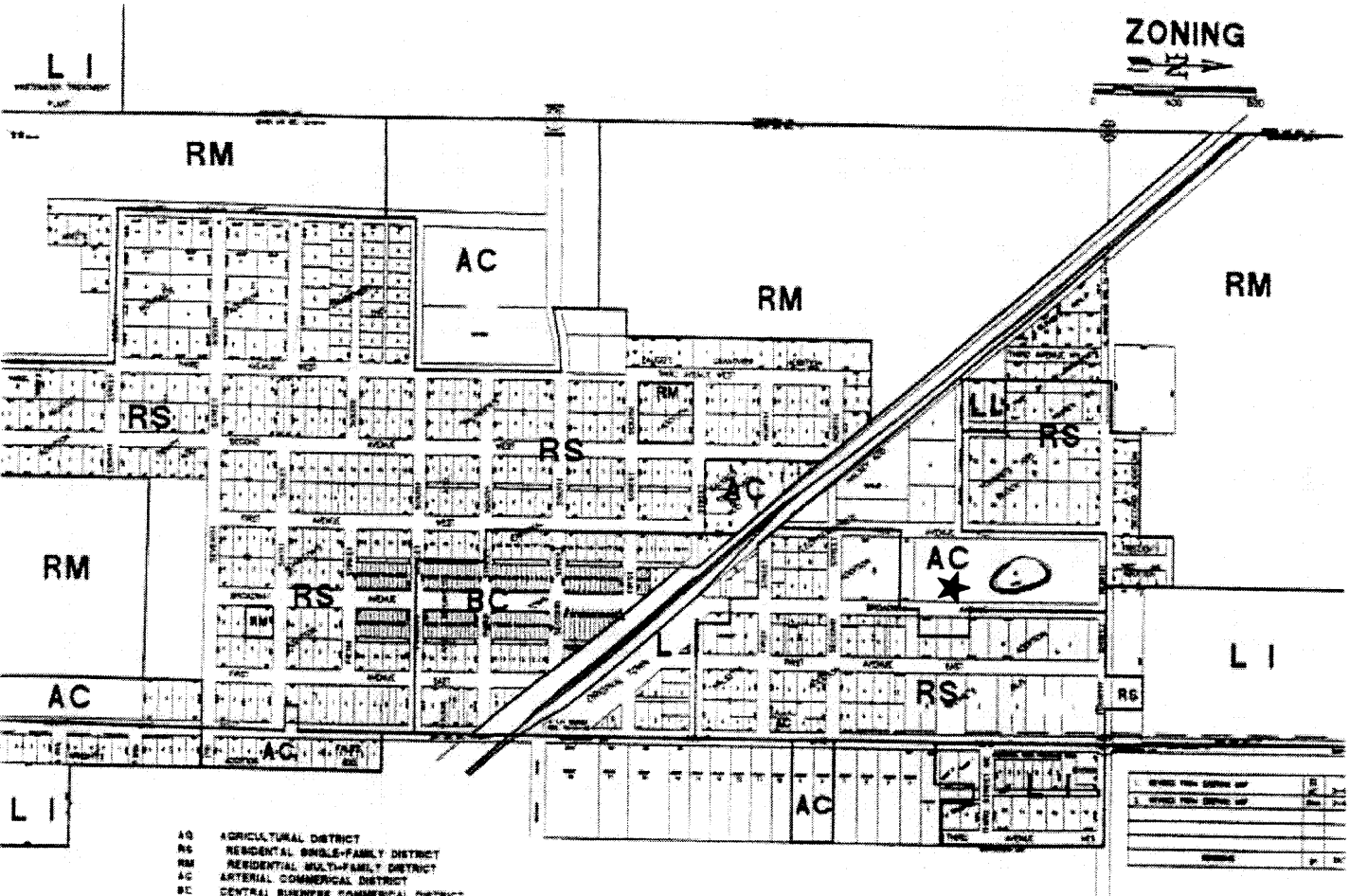
Grotto of the Redemption Site Diagram

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The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa



City of West Bend Zoning Map, Grotto of the Redemption located at star (*)

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Section Photo Page 10

The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

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The following information is common to photographs 1 through 13:

Photographer - Tim Dahlhauser

Date - July 21, 2000

Location of Original Negatives: Tim's Photography, West Bend, Iowa

1. North side of Grotto, Mary's grotto, first grotto completed, 1912. Camera facing almost directly South.
2. North view of Grotto, including part of Grotto Pond and Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic church. Camera facing South.
3. Northwest side of Grotto. Camera facing Southwest.
4. Inside of the East wall of Grotto, built 1933. Camera facing South.
5. Interior of Grotto, Paradise Lost grotto. Camera facing West.
6. Interior of Mary's grotto. Camera facing South.
7. West part of Grotto, Tomb of the Resurrection grotto. Camera facing West.
8. Close-up of section of first grotto, where building began. Camera facing South.
9. Center of the Grotto, Thirteenth Station, Stations of the Cross grotto. Camera facing West.
10. East center of the Grotto, Stations of the Cross. Camera facing North.
11. Pillar at entrance to Jesus' tomb, Fourteenth Station, West part of Grotto. Camera facing Northwest.
12. Symbols in Mary's grotto, north side of Grotto. Camera facing West.
13. Aerial overview of Grotto. Camera facing South.

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Section _____ Page 11

The Grotto of the Redemption
Palo Alto County, Iowa

Additional Documentation

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The following are included to illustrate several features of the Grotto of the Redemption:

1. Miracle in Stone, article by Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi, photography by David Thoreson, (see pg. 27).
2. A Pictorial Story of the Grotto of the Redemption, by Father Louis H. Greving, photography by Earl Iverson, (see pg. 10).