

The Sixty West Art Project

Four years ago I learned that a section of my favorite highway, Wisconsin Sixty West from Gotham to Muscoda would most likely be re-constructed.....straightened out and widened within the next five years. to accommodate a faster traffic flow.

I don't like change. Life is not static though and nothing, not even a charming old river road will be around forever. That was the reality. I decided to use my art experience and document the value of the landmarks along 60 West. This would be a positive way to direct my understanding of the changes. "The Sixty West Art Project" was created.

The project consists of over 20 paintings, drawings and photos highlighting each city, town and burg along the 93 mile stretch of Highway 60 West, which follows the lower Wisconsin River corridor from Sauk-Prairie to Prairie du Chien. Five more paintings are currently in the works. As more historical information has become available, with public interest and more time to research, I can't stop finding landmarks and important historical icons to paint. I have focused on the 10 mile area including Gotham, Orion and Muscoda which is where most of the re-construction will occur.

The old Eagle Cave Barn that used to usher the motorist into another world called Gotham (formerly Richland City) is gone now, torn down a couple of years ago. History was disappearing rapidly and I felt the need to journal, take photographs, and record the images as quickly as possible

Gotham has always seemed to me as the gateway to the lower Wisconsin River corridor. Here the road, with its natural curves and ancient limestone walls follow the river into a place nearly forgotten in time. Numerous legends of mysterious Bogus Bluff Cave, once used as a counterfeiting hideout post Civil War and rumored to be the site inhabited by a primitive culture of giant humans, still spark the curiosity of many locals.

Richland City is the place where Paul Seifert, American Primitive artist (1846-1921) settled in 1868 from his homeland in Saxony, Germany. Seifert is significant to the history of this area because of his unique watercolors depicting farmsteads, rock outcroppings, and stylistic wispy clouds. Today these paintings have become extremely valuable not only monetarily but historically and they now sell for thousands of

dollars. Seifert sold them to landowners for as little as \$2.50 each. Paul would later move to Gotham where he settled with his wife, Elizabeth (Kraft).

Further west on Highway 60 lie the Shadewald Mounds Group, also known as Frank's Hill which is among my collection of paintings. These 2 groups of mounds are located in the rural countryside of southern Richland County near Muscoda, where Highway 193 north intersects with Highway 60 West. This area is extremely significant as part of Wisconsin's Native American history dating back over 1,000 years.

In an interview with Frank Shadewald, back in February of 2013, he talked about the land's legacy and generously allowed everyone to participate in equinox and solstice events there, which still continue today. Sadly, Frank passed away the following November. He referred to the land as sacred and I truly believe it is. It has an energy that can only be experienced and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Fortunately this area will not see any changes due to the upcoming road reconstruction.

I have an aesthetic investment in capturing these familiar Sixty West landmarks which began for me when I was just ten years old. Back then, my Dad, Norman and I travelled along Sixty West from Madison to Prairie du Chien every few weeks to the Old Fort Crawford Medical Museum where he was the director. I acquired my love for Wisconsin history by listening to many stories of our Native American cultures that called the Mississippi River their home. Those were the best days. The Sixty West Art Project is dedicated to Dad's memory.

Jen Salt, Spring
Green, Wisconsin

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