

AMMUNITION, APPLES AND AGRICULTURE By CURT MEINE

The 14,000-acre Sauk Prairie once stretched from the Wisconsin River to the Baraboo Hills, bounded on the east by the terminal moraine of the last glacier and on the west by ancient sandstone bluffs of the Driftless Area. The glaciers and tallgrass prairie left a precious gift: rich soil. The Ho-Chunk and Sauk-Fox people thrived there. After European settlement, Sauk Prairie became home to hundreds of prosperous farmsteads. The prairie itself was all but lost, a new community was gained.

In early 1942 the fate of that community intersected dramatically with global history. As the U.S. entered World War II, the government claimed 80 farmsteads to serve the war effort, making way for what became the Badger Army Ammunition Plant. Within months the farmers were removed, a major industrial facility arose on the prairie and the plant went into production. It remained in operation through WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the remainder of the Cold War. When the plant was decommissioned in 1996, a new phase of its history began, as people wrestled with the question of its future. The result was the "Badger Reuse Plan," a community-driven vision for devoting this storied landscape to ecological restoration, conservation agriculture, the education and recreation.

Over the last decade the Badger lands have been turned over to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the local Town of Sumpster. The Ho-Chunk Nation also stands to receive a portion of the property. Environmental clean-up has continued and hundreds of buildings have been removed. The prairie landscape is now open in a way it has not been in decades. Volunteers work to revive the remnants of the Sauk Prairie, to hold in check invasive shrubs and to monitor the site's abundant grassland birds. Visitors have increasing opportunities to explore this place of history, reflection and restoration.

This spring volunteers documented a rare piece of the farmers' legacy on Sauk Prairie. Somehow, a number of historic apple trees have survived the tumultuous transformations of the Badger landscape, poignant reminders of the lives lived there and the history made there. The volunteer "apple corps" located more than 150 trees, all of them more than 70 years old. They are living connections to the farming community of Sauk Prairie. As the trees are cared for again, they can help to create a new chapter in the story of the Sauk Prairie.

Dr. Curt Meine is a conservation biologist, writer, historian, musician and author of the definitive biography of Aldo Leopold.

FOREVER-NEVERLAND

Fermentation Fest is a brief 10-day event, but Sauk County has many wonders to enjoy year-round; including Dr. Evermor's Sculpture Park on Hwy 12 just south of Baraboo.

A glorious contraption built in the 1980s, the Forevertron is the largest scrap metal sculpture in the world; standing 50 feet high, 120 feet wide and weighing 300 tons. It could inhabit a Jules Vern novel, a Terry Gilliam film, or a steampunk resort.

The sculpture incorporates two Thomas Edison dynamos from the 1880s, lightning rods, scrap from the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant and the decontamination chamber from the Apollo 11 spacecraft. Its fictional creator, Dr. Evermor, was born Tom Every in Brooklyn, Wisconsin and is a former demolition contractor who spent decades collecting antique machinery for the sculpture while inventing his mythical character. According to Every (he refers to himself in the third person), Dr. Evermor is a Victorian inventor who designed the Forevertron to launch himself "into the heavens on a magnetic lightning force beam."

Adjacent to the Forevertron is a tea-house gazebo and a giant telescope. Other sculptures include gigantic insects and the "Epicurean", a bellows-driven barbecue train. The Bird Band and Orchestra includes 70 birds ranging from three to twenty feet tall, all made from scrap



Dr. Evermor's Forevertron

such as survey markers, knives, loudspeakers, springs and musical instruments.

Every takes pride in allowing the original materials to retain their integrity; using their original forms in new juxtapositions. The artist lives nearby and makes an occasional appearance. The Sculpture Park is generally open Thursday through Monday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sundays open at noon).