

Oregon Historic Site Record

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME					
address:	7930 SW 77th St Redmond vcty, Deschutes County		historic name:	Petersen Rock Garden	
assoc addresses:			current/other names:	Petersen Rock Gardens and Museum	
location descr:	Rd Between Redmond & Bend		block/lot/tax lot:		
			twshp/rng/sect/qtr sect:	16S 12E 11	
PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS					
resource type:	district	height (stories):		total elig resources:	12
elig evaluation:	eligible/significant			total inelig resources:	2
prim constr date:	1935	second date:	1952	NR Status:	Individually Listed
				date indiv listed:	10/30/2013
primary orig use:	Garden			orig use comments:	
second orig use:	Work of Art				
primary style:	Not Applicable			prim style comments:	
secondary style:				sec style comments:	
primary siding:	Stone:Other/Undefined			siding comments:	
secondary siding:					
plan type:				architect:	
				builder:	Petersen, Rasmus
comments/notes:					
Formerly listed as "Bend vicinity," though the mailing address is now Redmond; 1923 Craftsman house also on property.					
GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS					
Not associated with any surveys or groupings.					
SHPO INFORMATION FOR THIS PROPERTY					
NR date listed:	10/30/2013		106 Project(s):	None	
ILS survey date:			Special Assess Project(s):	None	
RLS survey date:			Federal Tax Project(s):	None	
Gen file date:	08/03/1976				
ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION					
<i>(Includes expanded description of the building/property, setting, significant landscape features, outbuildings and alterations)</i>					
<p>The parcel within which Petersen Rock Garden is located is a small portion of approximately 256 acres that Rasmus Christian Petersen established as an irrigated farm after homesteading an original eighty-acre parcel, beginning in 1906. Construction of the rock gardens began in the winter of 1935-36 and ended with Petersen's death in 1952. Today the property is 12.36 acres in size, with the gardens occupying approximately four acres. Buildings on the site include Petersen's own residence (1927), the museum, a restaurant building, restrooms, two additional residences, an ice house, a pump house, and a shed. Site structures include a cistern, root cellar, two stone outdoor cook stoves, and bird pens. All resources are contributing to the site, as part of Petersen's homestead and gardens, with the exception of the bird pens and the third residence, neither of which share the common features of the other buildings and structures. The gardens occupy five distinct areas, one of which is the parking lot. Landscaping is both formal and informal, but is clearly integrated with the site. The northeast and southeast corners of the site still relate to the original farm function of the property.</p>					
HISTORY					
<i>(Chronological, descriptive history of the property from its construction through at least the historic period - preferably to the present)</i>					
<p>Petersen Rock Garden, which has state-wide significance, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the areas of Art and Landscape Architecture, as a folk art environment, for its significance as an exceptional work of art that combines architecture, landscape, art, and sculpture in a unified whole. Located approximately eight miles southwest of Redmond, Oregon, the work recalls European and American grotto traditions, juxtaposed with American iconography and vernacular folk art traditions, through the creativity and artistry of Danish immigrant Rasmus Christian Petersen. Petersen, who began constructing the garden after finishing his education in Danish and American culture at Nysted Folk High School in Nebraska and three successful decades of farming, was also influenced by his homestead's setting in central Oregon, with its dramatic views of the Cascade range. Creation of the garden represents the last chapter in Petersen's life. The gardens are all the more remarkable for their unexpectedness in the desert landscape and their lack of precedent in their creator's life. The Period of Significance for the site is 1927, the date of construction of the Petersen's residence, to 1952, the date of Petersen's death. The gardens and property as a whole retain excellent integrity and easily convey the reasons for their significance. Petersen Rock Gardens is significant as a work of art and landscape architecture, and as the work of a master craftsman, that retains excellent integrity and maintains the same extraordinary presence today that it had over 75 years ago when visitors started touring it in the thousands. Rasmus Christian Petersen, the creator of Petersen Rock Garden, immigrated to the United States in 1901 at the age of 18, after which he studied for four years at the Nysted Folk School in Nebraska, one of five Danish-American folk schools in America. This school, as well as the others, was modeled on Danish Folk Schools in Denmark and Europe as conceived by Danish philosopher, theologian, educator, composer, and poet Nicolai Frederick Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872). In the United States they were organized through the Danish-Lutheran Association in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After leaving the Nysted Folk School in 1905 Petersen homesteaded near the newly formed town of Bend, successfully farming and ranching for three decades. In this time period Petersen acquired land until his homestead was over three times its original size; experimented with a number of crops and types of livestock, for which he was recognized at the regional level and beyond; continually improved his homestead, including building a substantial and fashionable Craftsman bungalow in 1927; and became a leader in his community, co-founding the community hall and local grange and serving on a number of boards. Upon his retirement, his energy and engagement with his surroundings did not wane, but took on another dimension. Petersen began building his rock gardens in 1935 and began selling his farm land in the early 1940s until he was left with twelve acres. By 1941 he had built the museum and by 1942 he had completely retired from farming. In this time frame he also expanded his collecting, gathering rocks for his gardens but also obtaining and acquiring impressive specimens of rocks and minerals including lava casts, petrified wood, including a petrified palm, quartz crystals, and other semi-precious stones. At the time of his death his rock and landscaped gardens, ponds, and visitor facilities filled four acres around his home. The Petersen Rock Garden closely fits the definition of a folk art environment as outlined by architectural historian John Beardsley in his seminal work, Gardens of Revelation, Environments by Visionary Artists. It is a handmade environment that expresses Petersen's personal vision; fabricated of found, mostly local, materials; built around and encompassing his homestead. These types of environments are not constructed by those who primarily identify themselves as artists. Yet they often display extraordinary craftsmanship and artistic vision, such as seen in the Petersen Rock Garden. The garden also fits within this genre in that it fills the space to which it was allotted; incorporates fantastic motifs; and distorts scale to an advantage, creating an otherworldly experience. While it is clear that Petersen Rock Garden developed in an organic, incremental fashion, it is remarkably formal, with pronounced north-south axes, lesser east-west axes, as well as less formal areas, such as the design and arrangement of the islands. Historically these were reinforced by the plant materials of the gardens, from trees to flowers, as well as minor paths. Fantastic motifs are seen in garden structures that resemble castles, churches, public buildings, and peasant houses set in environments that take on the appearance of mountain villages. The vignettes appear 'life size' when viewed in juxtaposition with the desert landscape, yet many can be traversed by</p>					

visitors through paths and stairs. At the same time, they appear as gardens when seen in the context of the farmstead buildings, such as Petersen's house and the museum. This distortion of scale contributes to the experience of the gardens. The circumstances of Petersen's life fits within the definition of the artists who create gardens and environments such as these, in that he began the garden when he retired, he worked in relative isolation, and its completion took many years; in fact we do not know what it would have looked like had Petersen lived longer than the 17 years he was engaged in building the garden. Like many of these artists, Petersen did not discuss the source of inspiration for his imagery and motifs. The two written messages within the garden, which are juxtaposed with patriotic imagery, are "God Bless America" and "Enjoy Yourself. It is Later Than You Think." While falling firmly within the folk art environment genre, it is clearly a singular, personal expression and continues to defy categorization. Petersen created this significant art environment and museum utilizing and showcasing the geological and mineralogical materials found in his environs and beyond. When completed, the wealth of materials represented an outstanding collection of semi-precious stones, a rarity outside of an American museum. The Period of Significance is 1927, the construction date of the home that became the center of his enterprise, to 1952, when Petersen died. The Petersen Rock Garden is an excellent example of a folk art environment translated into rock gardens and plant materials that encompasses Petersen's homestead as well, resulting in a total environment that is both Petersen's home, the center of his operation, and his creation. It fits well within this genre, which is often characterized by an installation that is constructed incrementally, over a long period of time, often from found elements, by artists that typically have no formal training, but communicate their message through the construction of a total, living, environment. Sixty years after his death, Petersen's rock garden remains a testament to his talent and determination. It has been visited by hundreds of thousands of people from around the world and is as unexpected today in the desert landscape as it was when he began creating it in the midst of the Great Depression. The garden is singular in the state of Oregon and an excellent expression of its type, a twentieth century folk art environment, in the United States. It is renowned for the vision it embodies and the craftsmanship and materials that allowed Petersen to realize his masterpiece.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Title Records	Census Records	Property Tax Records	✓ Local Histories
✓ Sanborn Maps	Biographical Sources	✓ SHPO Files	✓ Interviews
Obituaries	✓ Newspapers	State Archives	Historic Photographs
City Directories	Building Permits	State Library	

Local Library:	University Library:
Historical Society:	Other Repository:

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