

WITMER MODELS

This issue will focus on the Witmer Models. They are housed in a separate, large room on the end of the Nixon Building. It is really hard to do the exhibit justice with pictures. Please consider a visit to really 'see' the remarkable work of a truly skilled craftsman. Skill was required but so was a lot of time and determination to 'do it right'. The Museum has a few newspaper articles that feature his life and work. I will excerpt a few notes

from the articles but you really need to visit and read the whole item.



Bruce was born on July 22, 1921 on a farm in Pennsylvania. He moved to Oregon in 1959, looking for steadier work. He lived for a long time at 480 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street here in Harrisburg. The house is adorned with a lot of

nice rock work. I have not been able to find any relatives. He has/had a daughter. She wrote a short note when the Museum began displaying a lot of his models. I will copy it here:

"Bruce, my father & Verne, my mother:

One of their heart gifts to me; Look outside the box--you'll be surprised & delighted by an infinite world & one not limited or restricted by rigidity from living inside a box."

"Look around this room--really look closely with intent & thoughtfulness & see the joy & love in these creations. Its all about the FUN in doing--bringing mental ideas & images into a touchable, seeable world."

"All of us are special creations with talents & there is NO limit except in our own thoughts & perceptions as to what we can do or create."

"So let your spirit soar!

JUST DO !!!"

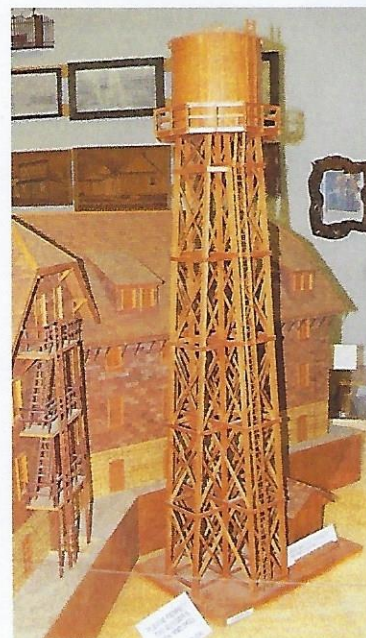
Bruce built or at least was deeply involved in many construction projects, both in Harrisburg and beyond. He built houses but also large stores and banks and even had a hand in the Washington-Jefefrson Street Bridge and Autzen Stadium. The Crater Lake Lodge

(shown below) was started in 1988 and finished in 1990.



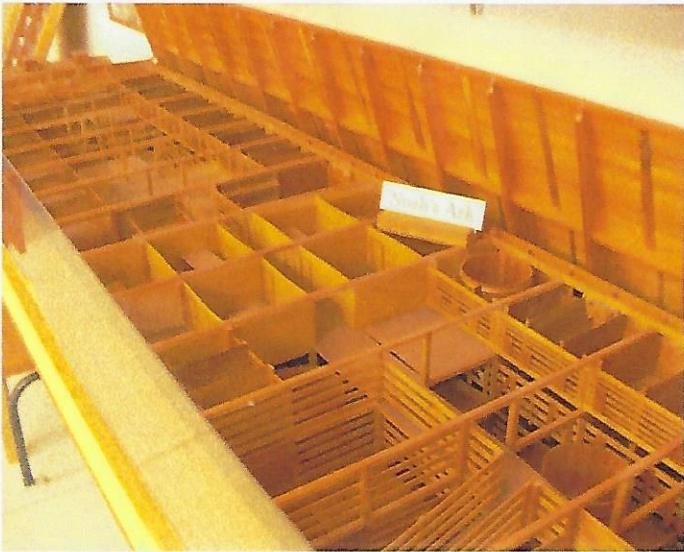
*Crater Lake Lodge*  
 222 windows  
 24 doors  
 62 dormers  
 6 fire escapes  
 Redwood shingle siding  
 Cedar shingles on roof  
 Over 50,000 shingles

The lodge is built to accurate scale. This necessitated four trips to the lodge to get measurements. Another project was Harrisburg's early wooden water tower. It has exactly 180



cross braces, just like the original. That's the end of the Crater Lake Lodge to the left. Note the fire escapes. A newspaper article says that Bruce used a radial arm saw for much of his work. I'm not sure...It seems to me that a table saw would have worked better! Most of the wood used was scrap wood salvaged from other full sized projects.

Bruce took the specs for Noah's Ark from the Old testament. You may be surprised that it is rectangular with square ends. His Pastor objected...said they had a picture in the Sunday School room. Bruce was unimpressed! He noted that they hadn't actually seen the Ark either! And, when you think about it, square ends make sense for a ship that wasn't made to travel, just float! It is more than 9' long (Scale 1/4 inch per foot) and is shown with the top opened up so one can see the intricate structure. There are three levels with 300



Noah's Ark

pens plus some bird coops. He says that the only place he 'cheated' and didn't make the item was when he used tooth picks for some bird roosts! It has 84 windows and some 'muck chutes'! After all they were there for more than a year. Gonna have to do something with the used bedding...You really need to come an see it.

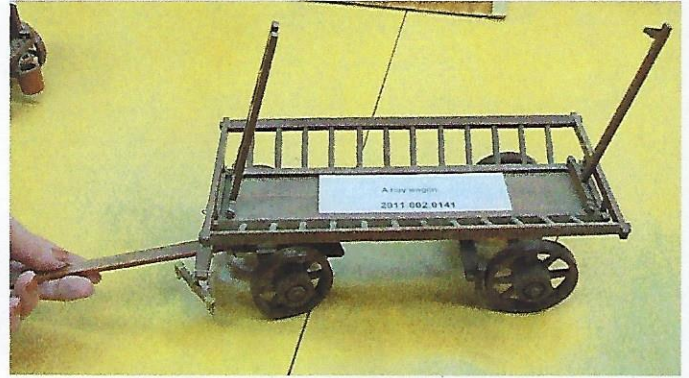
Pictures do not do it justice! Just think of the number of finely crafted boards and framing, all glued and fastened together with care, precision and planning.



Detail to show size. Round

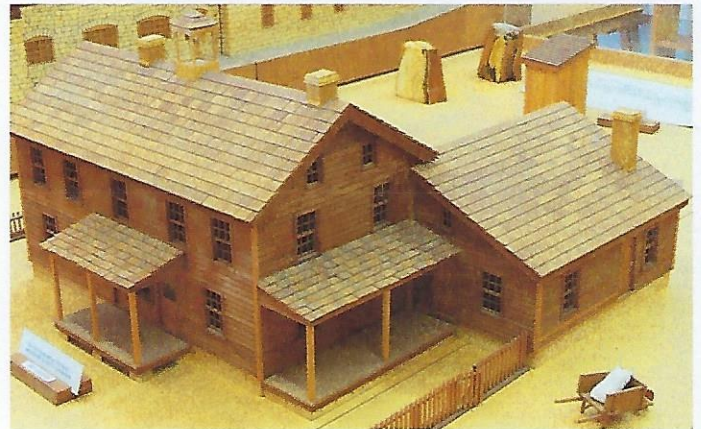
item is water container  
The walls of the display room are covered with smaller models and some bird houses. Most of the displays have placards that tell something about the item. You may recognize some of them since several are of Harrisburg structures.

Not all of Bruce's models are buildings. See the 'Hay Wagon' below.



The picture doesn't show it but the wheels are held on the spindle with a large, square nut, just like a real wagon. I remember our wagons had such a nut. It was probably 3 inches across the flats and was left hand thread on the left and right hand on the right so that as the wheel turned it would tighten the nut. We had a 'wagon wheel jack' that was used when the wheel needed grease. Our grease was from a gallon bucket and was VERY thick and black. But I remember Grandad saying that sometimes lard was used when grease was not available.

Mr. Witmer made a model of his childhood home in PA. Shown below.



It was a sort of Duplex with two 'front doors'. Their grandparents lived in one side. He includes a barn and a number of other structures. Come visit the Museum and marvel at the work. It will take a little while to really understand the exhibit. It is not JUST a model of things. It also helps us understand how life was in time past. The Museum is open Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday...10:00-4:00. To "do it right" requires quite a bit of time...or better yet, several visits. Enjoy the Summer. Editor: Charlie Kizer