

Alexander John Jordan

The man behind the creations at the House on the Rock

We all have dreams and visions; however, for many of us, they remain just that. Alex was a man of action and he turned his visions and dreams into reality.

Alexander John Jordan was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1914 to Mary Magdalena Pregler and Alexander P. Jordan. He spent his whole life living in Madison. He attended St. Norbert's High School in DePere, Wisconsin. After graduating high school, he attended the University of Wisconsin – Madison and had declared pre-med as his major. After about one year of college, Alex grew restless and dropped out.

Alex then went from job to job. He had driven taxi and worked for Rayovac. He also worked for his father maintaining a family apartment building, the Villa Maria and he also worked construction for his father. Working for his father is where Alex acquired the basic knowledge of construction. During World War II, he worked at Badger Ordnance Company making ammunition

In the 1940's, Alex discovered Deer Shelter Rock and began having small picnics atop the rock. He then started bringing his tent and camping out. One night, his tent got blown away and from that day, Alex decided he wanted to build something more stable. That was the beginning of his dreams.

Alex started off by renting the rock and a bit of land around it from a local farmer. He first built a small studio with a fireplace. Then Alex, with the help of his parents, purchased the 240 acre property so he could build as he pleased. What took shape on and around the Deer Shelter Rock was truly a remarkable achievement. More remarkable still is the fact that he built much of the original house himself carrying the materials up the 75 foot high rock.

As curiosity grew surrounding his project, Alex became somewhat irritated. Alex decided he was going to charge people 50 cents to visit, thinking that would drive them away; however, people gladly paid the fee. In 1960, Alex decided to open the House on the Rock to the public. This increased the interest and the crowds grew. All of the money taken in over the years was put directly back into the House on the Rock. Alex had no other source of income.

In 1964, Alex suffered a severe heart attack damaging 30% of his heart. He barely survived. This halted his smoking four packs of cigarettes a day, drinking, eating whenever he was hungry and sleeping at odd times. The FAA also took away his pilot's license. Before this medical issue, he had flown his airplane out to the House on the Rock from Madison landing on an airstrip near the House on the Rock workshops. Alex then began driving from Madison. In 1972, Alex was involved in a near fatal car accident. He had hit a horse broadside. He sustained multiple injuries including a broken neck. Although he recovered and continued his dream at the House on the Rock, he lived the last years of his life in chronic pain.

Alex was devoted to the House on the Rock. It was his life, dream and passion. He only stayed at the House on the Rock 4 nights of his life. Alex lived very modestly in a small apartment in Madison in one of the buildings he had managed for his parents. He never married nor had any children; however, he lived close by his lifelong companion, Jennie Olson whose apartment adjoined his own. She was the love of his life and with him to the end.

On December 15, 1988, Alex sold the House on the Rock to a longtime business associate, Art Donaldson, a collector and businessman from Janesville, Wisconsin who shared many interests with Alex. The Donaldson family still owns and operates the House on the Rock as a privately held family business.

Alex Jordan was a complex and creative man filled with boundless energy. After the sale of the House on the Rock, Alex became the Artistic Director up until his death. He never grew old in his imagination and though his body did fail him in the end, he continued to create every day of his life. Alex was hospitalized on October 11, 1989 and he passed away from congestive heart failure surrounded by friends and associates on November 6, 1989. His final request was that his ashes be distributed over the House on the Rock which was done in December of 1989.

The House on the Rock continues to build on Alex's dream of entertaining visitors from all over the world. Alex continues to be, in his own words, "present but not voting."