CHAUVIN — A yard full of brightly painted concrete angels, abandoned by their creator, prompted the first out-of-state foray by a Wisconsin group dedicated to preserving folk art.

The Kohler Foundation Inc. bought 10 acres, including the house Kenneth Hill built on land he rented for 12 years and the yard where he created an elaborate path possibly representing sin and redemption.

Hill would never talk about the meaning of his sculpture garden, where many of the thin, elongated, life-size and larger figures touched each other and the rest were connected by paths and archways.

The work itself was the message, he said: Each person would receive the message meant for him or her. He was continually adding new figures — somber-looking people, and angels who almost seemed onlookers.

He left the house, and everything in and around it, in January.

His neighbors had complained for months that the yard was overgrown. Eventually, Terrebonne Parish cut the grass and billed the landowner $460. The landowner told Hill to pay or be evicted, and Hill allegedly walked away, leaving everything he owned.

Soon afterward, art professors from Nicholls State University and LSU visited and immediately decided that it all needed to be preserved.

Dennis Siporski, chairman of the Nicholls State University art department, called the Kohler Foundation and asked for help.

“A big part of what we do is the preservation of art by self-taught artists,” said Terri Yoho, executive director of the Kohler Foundation. The foundation has been working to preserve such works of art since the early 1940s.

This is the first time the group has bought land outside Wisconsin, Yoho said.

She said Siporski’s enthusiasm sparked her interest. He sent her a video of the site, and she came to Louisiana in late February to see for herself. “We loved the art. We were immediately impressed with the amount of work and the quality of the work,” she said.

The purchase was final less than two weeks ago, and Yoho and other foundation officials were in Chauvin last week to meet with architects and art conservators who will work to preserve the site.

The foundation buys and preserves folk art sites, then gives them to local, stable organizations which will take over the maintenance. This one will go to Nicholls State, Yoho said.

Siporski said he would like to see studios for children’s and adults’ art classes at the site. “It’s evident with the support we’ve seen from Nicholls that they’ll use it to their capacity,” Yoho said.

Yoho said she would not say how much it cost, since the foundation is a nonprofit group. Its preservation coordinator, Michele Gutierrez, said work will include removing ant hills, grass growing through some of the pieces, and lichen clinging to some of the older figures.

In addition, all of the figures must be protected from weather, she said.

However, she said, the first thing that needs to be done is to build a bulkhead to stop the bank erosion that has water from Bayou Little Caillou only inches away from one sculpture at high tide. “That’s vital,” Gutierrez said.

Yoho said the foundation would like to be able to turn the land over to Nicholls State by the end of the year, but may not be able to.