

MONUMENTS

Gratitude Etched In Stone

Civil War Launched Modern Tradition Of Veterans' Memorials

By MARY M. DONOHUE

The groundbreaking Wednesday for the \$1.2 million Connecticut State Veterans Memorial in Rocky Hill will continue a process — honoring veterans living and dead — that reached an apogee 150 years ago. Connecticut's people have expressed deep and heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to veterans of all wars. But when it comes to creating monuments to veterans, the Civil War stands alone.

Not only did we create more monuments to those who fought in the War Between the States, we created a monument industry. So great was the pull of the Civil War that the last two memorials were completed just two years ago. In 2008.

The democratic revolutionaries who won independence for this country had an initial distaste for monuments, thinking them the province of monarchies or papists. The first publically funded Revolutionary War monument, to Nathan Hale in Coventry by noted architect and designer Henry Austin, wasn't done until 1846 (the earlier Groton Heights memorial was privately funded).

But that changed with the sheer numbers of men who served and the unprecedented collective grief for the many state residents among the Union dead. There was a groundswell of demand for memorials that helped to create an industry. Connecticut's numerous stone quarries, stone yards and metal casting companies began to produce public monuments for sites across the country.

In Hartford, this industry was promoted by businessmen such as Hartford's James G. Batterson. In addition to establishing the Travelers Insurance Co., of which he was president, in 1864, he was the owner of a cemetery monument company. A dealer and importer of stone, Batterson employed Carl Conrad, a German sculptor, to design sculptures, and George Kellier, an Irish-born architect, to design their bases. Their work can be seen at the national battlefield parks at Gettysburg, Penn., and Antietam, Md.: Hartford has a remarkable eight major Civil War monuments, including Kellier's Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Bushnell Park, and there are another 130 Civil War monuments across the state.

The Civil War touched someone in every town in the state, even those in groups at the bottom of the ladder. African Americans and Irish Americans, groups that were economically disadvantaged and marginalized by Connecticut's upper classes in the 1800s, served the Union cause loyally in Connecticut's Civil War regiments. They were remembered in 2008, when the two newest Connecticut Civil War monuments were dedicated.

The Connecticut 25th Colored Regiment Connecticut Volunteers Memorial is in Criscuolo Park, New



THE "FORLORN SOLDIER" stands at 119 Airport Road in Hartford. The 19th-century statue is attributed to James G. Batterson. The evocative brownstone piece was never completed.

Haven, the regiment's original muster and camp grounds. Nine hundred African American and American Indian free men and former slaves from 120 Connecticut towns joined the regiment beginning in 1863. The unit saw action from Maryland to Texas. A small group of descendants of the veterans of the 25th Regiment began meeting in New Haven in 1990s. Inspired by the dedication of the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, the "Descendants of the 25th Regiment" raised \$200,000 in public and private funds, and the resulting monument was dedicated with hundreds in attendance. Nationally known sculptor Ed Hamilton designed the memorial, which is now listed on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, the state's African American heritage trail.

Another New Haven unit, the Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers, known as the "Irish Regiment" due to its predominant makeup of soldiers born in Ireland, mustered in September 1861. Like the group that formed to honor the 25th Regiment, one that would go on to honor the "Irish Regiment" started with a visit to Vicksburg National Military Park in Mississippi by a descendant of the regiment. Unable to find a

monument on the battlefield with his ancestor's name, Bob Larkin of Cheshire began digging.

Connecticut has dozens of Civil War monuments spread across the nation's battlefields, located, as required, at the precise locations where Connecticut men fought and fell. After an invitation was extended in 2006 by the National Park Service to the governor of Connecticut to allow a Connecticut memorial at Vicksburg, a volunteer group got the job done.

The Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers memorial is located at Grant's Canal, where the regiment was ordered to dig an ill-considered and ill-fated canal to divert the Mississippi River. The men of the Ninth and the 25th regiments, Irish immigrants and African Americans, are now remembered and celebrated by permanent memorials meant to last longer than a single lifetime. They will be remembered again in Rocky Hill.

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