

# Indiana War Memorial

Origins and Development

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ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIANAPOLIS

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

The Indiana World War Memorial Plaza was the largest and most elaborate tribute to the sacrifices of World War I veterans constructed anywhere in the United States. It remains a testament to the patriotism of Hoosier citizens during World War I and their support for the war effort.

Much as the state had excelled in contributing to the Union cause during the Civil War, Indiana out-enlisted and out-subscribed many other states during the World War I. The U.S. War Department set a quota for Army volunteers from Indiana at 5,400, and 25,148 men enlisted, more than any other state. The Navy Department called for 800 volunteers for the naval forces, and Indiana, an inland state, contributed 5,516 sailors. After the conflict, Indiana Governor James P. Goodrich noted that the citizens of the state had oversubscribed substantially to all of the Liberty bond drives to underwrite the cost of the war and to campaigns for the Red Cross, Salvation Army, YMCA, and YWCA.

The Hoosier enthusiasm for prosecuting the war and leading the way carried over in 1919 and 1920. Indiana members of the new American Legion veteran's organization won agreement to locate the Legion headquarters in Indianapolis and for the State of Indiana to build a monumental memorial. The Plaza that resulted, bounded by Meridian and Pennsylvania on the west and east sides and Vermont and St. Clair on the south and north sides, is a visible reminder of the role of patriotism as a primary civic virtue of the state and its capital, Indianapolis.



Indiana World War Memorial Plaza, ca. 2013. Indiana War Memorials Commission.

## Chapter 1

# Before the Monument

### *The Plaza Site in 1919*

In 1919, the five-block-long site for the future Indiana World War Memorial Plaza was occupied by a mixture of city parks, a state institution for the education of the blind, churches, apartment buildings, office buildings, private residences, a cultural institution, and several stores. The block at the south end, University Square, bounded by New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Meridian, had served as a city park since 1865, although it was owned by the State. Its plan and landscape design had been revised in 1914 by noted landscape architect [George E. Kessler](#), and that plan was being carried out in 1919-1920.

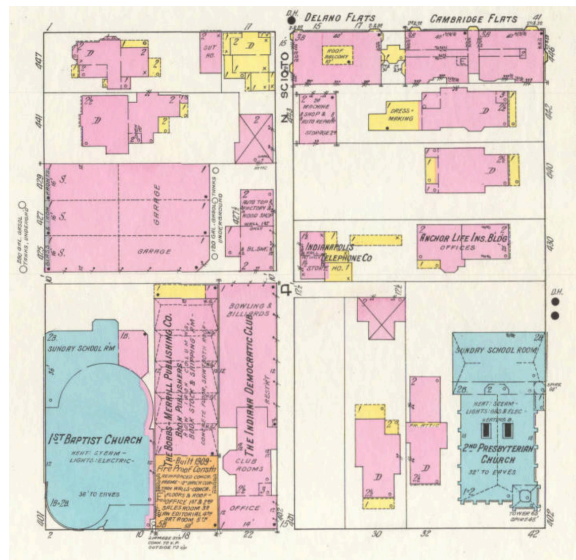
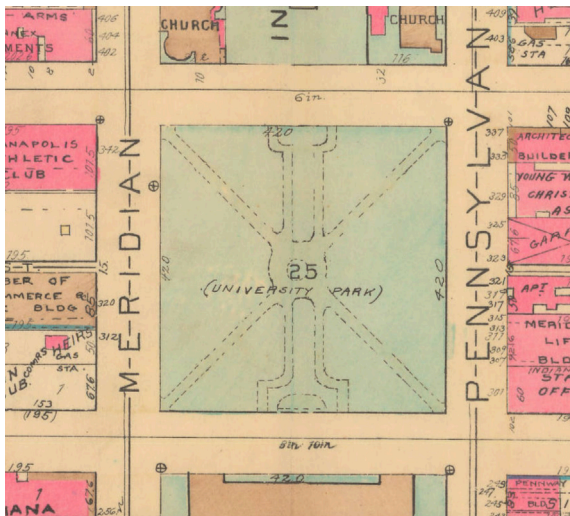
Two prominent church buildings—the First Baptist and the Second Presbyterian—the [Bobbs-Merrill Company](#) publishers office building, the Indiana Democratic Club, the Delano and Cambridge Flats (apartments), Haugh Hotel, several stores with garages behind, six private residences, and a couple of former houses converted to offices--occupied the next block north, bounded by Vermont, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Meridian Streets.

The block between Michigan and North Streets contained primarily houses and apartment buildings. Chief among the latter was the Chalfont Apartments at Michigan and Pennsylvania Streets. The original [Propylaeum](#) building at 17 E. North Street was a center of social and cultural life for the city. There were also several residential doubles facing Pennsylvania and on the alley behind them small doubles, which may have housed domestic servants. Most of the rest of the buildings on the block were private residences.



The northern two blocks of the future plaza site ran without interruption between North and St. Clair Streets, but were divided into two tracts, roughly equal in size. The [Indiana School for the Blind](#) occupied the southern half, fronting on North Street, and St. Clair Park occupied the northern parcel. The State of Indiana owned both properties. The School for the Blind had been founded in October of 1847, and its principal building in the Greek Revival style had been completed in 1851. To its rear were separate dormitories for male and female students. St. Clair Park served as a city park and had a simple plan consisting of diagonal walks coming from the corners and converging in a fountain at center.

At the north and south ends of the five-block-long site stood two buildings with neoclassical designs that would play key roles in the design of the plaza. In the block bounded by Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Meridian stood the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office. Architects John Hall Rankin and Thomas M. Kellogg designed the building, which was built between 1902 and 1905. At the north end, facing St. Clair Street at the center of the block, stood the recently completed [Indianapolis Public Library](#), designed by noted Philadelphia architect Paul Philippe Cret and constructed between 1915 and 1917. Indiana limestone exteriors clad both buildings, and their designs drew on classical architecture of the ancient Greeks and Romans for their detailing.



Plan of University Park as redesigned by George Kessler. 1914. G. Wm. Baist, Real Estate Atlas for Indianapolis, 1941, Plan 5(left) Plans of buildings standing on block between Vermont and Michigan Streets in 1914. Sanborn Insurance Maps For Indianapolis, 1914, Vol. I, Plan 67. (right)



Left column: (Top) Second Presbyterian Church – Vermont and Pennsylvania, ca. 1903. (Bottom) Original Indianapolis Propylaeum Building. Right column: (Top) First Baptist Church, ca. 1915. (Middle) Bobbs Merrill Building, north side of Vermont between Meridian and Pennsylvania, ca. 1920. (Bottom) Italianate and Queen Anne style residences, east side of 500 block, N. Pennsylvania Street, ca. 1920. Source: Indiana Historical Society.





## Chapter 2

# Building the Monument

### *American Legion Chooses Indianapolis*

World War I, the “war to end all wars,” halted with an armistice on November 11, 1918. Two million men and women had shipped over to France as members of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, or the Marine Corps in 1917 and 1918. Two million more were still in training or getting ready to ship over when the war ended. Young men in Indiana had responded to the call to arms with impressive numbers. Hoosier citizens in general also over-subscribed many other states in their purchase of Liberty Bonds for paying the cost of the war and in their contributions to the Red Cross, Salvation Army, YMCA, and YWCA.

When American soldiers and sailors decided to meet in Paris in the spring of 1919 to discuss forming an organization for World War I veterans, Hoosiers were part of the caucus. Indiana veterans back in their home state proceeded to organize a state chapter of the emerging [American Legion](#) organization even before the Paris caucus was held. One of the ideas that took hold immediately was the possibility of Indianapolis making a bid for the permanent national headquarters of the Legion.

The state commander of the Legion appointed a committee of three to coordinate a campaign leading up the first national convention of the organization in November 1919. The three—T. Victor Keene, a physician; Walter Myers Jr., an attorney, and Col. Robert Moorhead, a commander in the American Expeditionary Force in France—enlisted the support of Charles Coffin, president of the [Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce](#), and of Indiana governor James P. Goodrich. A coalition of Legionnaires, state officials, and civic leaders raised funds to sway delegates.

At the November convention in Minneapolis, delegates at first recommended the host city for the national headquarters, but Walter Myers acted quickly to prevent its adoption. The convention voted twice, and Indianapolis edged out Washington, D.C., Kansas City, and several other cities. The Hoosiers in their canvassing of delegates had promised to build a headquarters for the Legion in Indianapolis and emphasized their central location in the country, their remoteness from the “corruption” of Washington, and easy access to Indianapolis by rail.

(From Left) Col. Robert Morehead, Dr. T. Victor Keene, Walter Myers Jr.



*Source: IBRC analysis of data from U.S. Census.*

Scene from first American  
Legion Convention in  
Minneapolis, November 1919.  
American Legion Library



## ***The State Agrees to Build a Headquarters and a Memorial***

Within days of the Legion's decision, Governor Goodrich, Mayor [Charles W. Jewett](#), Charles Coffin, and others were talking about not only building a headquarters for the Legion but also constructing an impressive memorial to the sacrifices of Indiana veterans of World War I. Building of a civic plaza in the five blocks between the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office and the public library had been discussed for years. Soon after the Armistice, there had been renewed proposals. Now state and city leaders were talking about creating a monumental memorial similar to what had been accomplished for Civil War veterans with the [Indiana Soldiers and Sailors Monument](#) on the Circle.

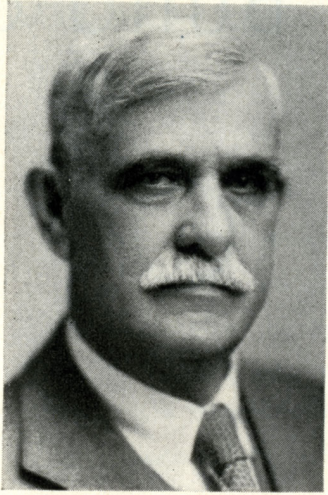
After the Minneapolis convention, the governor and others proposed to build a combined Legion headquarters and war memorial. They and Indiana members of the Legion believed that Indiana had to commit itself to an impressive memorial if Indianapolis was to retain the headquarters. The governor appointed a committee to make recommendations for realizing the concept, and in July 1920, Goodrich called a special session of the Indiana General Assembly. The legislature passed a law dedicating the northern two state-owned blocks of the plaza site to the location for a memorial and the Legion headquarters and appropriated \$2 million (over \$28.5 million in 2020) for the cost of developing and building. It also created an Indiana War Memorial Commission to oversee the project. The legislation provided for commission approval of the design for any future buildings constructed within 300 feet of the plaza. The legislature's swift move confirmed Indianapolis as the site of the Legion headquarters.

From Left: James P. Goodrich, Governor of Indiana 1917–1921, Charles W. Jewett, Mayor of Indianapolis, 1918–1922, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, commander in chief of Allied forces in France, 1918. Source Indiana State Museum (Goodrich), Indiana State Library (Jewett, Foch).



Initially, Mayor Jewett and the Marion County commissioners had offered to acquire the two privately owned blocks between Vermont and North Streets. During most of 1920 and 1921, they, however, were unable to confirm their involvement. The regular session of the General Assembly in 1921 authorized the City of Indianapolis and Marion County each to undertake a bond issue for the purchase of one of the two blocks. Finally, the city and county acquired the blocks and deeded them to the State in 1923. The plaza's site was now confirmed for the full five blocks, with state-owned University Park added at the south end. In November 1921, French [Marshal Ferdinand Foch](#), the





Thomas R. Kimball of Omaha, Architectural Advisor for 1922-1923 architectural competition for Indiana World War Memorial design.

Source: Architectural Foundation of Nebraska

commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in France in 1918, visited Indianapolis and dedicated the future site of the World War Memorial Plaza.

## ***The National Architectural Competition***

The trustees of the War Memorial Commission devoted their energies in 1921 and 1922 to preparing for a national architectural competition that would produce a compelling design for the War Memorial Plaza. In February 1922, they appointed Thomas Kimball, a prominent architect of Omaha, Nebraska, as architectural advisor for the competition. Kimball had been president of the American Institute of Architects and had previously advised Kansas City on its World War I memorial.

Kimball organized a two-phase process, in which the qualifications of all applicants were first to be evaluated, and then those deemed qualified to carry out a plaza design were to be approved for submitting designs in the second phase. The War Memorial Commission appointed three eminent architects as jurors to recommend a winner in the competition: Milton Bennett Medary of Philadelphia and Henry Bacon and Charles Adams Platt of New York. Medary was member of the prominent architectural



From Left: Milton Bennett Medary, Henry Bacon, and Charles Adams Platt. Sources: Medary: Penn University Archives; Bacon: Finadgrave.com; Platt: University of Illinois Press.

Philadelphia firm Zantzinger, Borie and Medary and had collaborated with Cret on the Indianapolis Public Library; Bacon was the architect of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington; and Platt was a well-known landscape architect.

In November 1922, Kimball announced the competition and invited applications. The announcement specified that entry designs should be monumental and harmonize with the classical designs of the existing federal courthouse and public library. The announcement drew attention to the monumental qualities of the existing Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Indianapolis and suggested that



the War Memorial Plaza design should take inspiration from the Monument, but not compete with it. The War Memorial Commission also expected that architects entering the competition would demonstrate a capacity to collaborate on the design with sculptors, painters, and landscape architects.

The competition closed in April 1923, and 25 qualified entries were received. In the blind selection procedure, the jury did not know the identity of each entrant as it judged these 25 entries. Cleveland architects Walker and Weeks submitted the winning design.

## ***The Winning Design***

The architects who won the competition—Frank R. Walker and Harry E. Weeks—headed an influential firm based in Cleveland. Their winning design for the World War Memorial Plaza embodied the Beaux Arts method developed by the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and used in many American architectural schools. The Beaux Arts curriculum emphasized formal planning, clear circular patterns, and articulation of functions in designing buildings. The centerpiece of the Walker and Weeks design was to be a monumental Memorial building in the block between Vermont and Michigan. The design called for a one-story podium on top of which was to rise a rectangular pavilion, culminating in a pyramidal roof with steps, capped by a small lantern. The Tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, a 4th-century B.C. royal tomb that was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, inspired the overall concept. It was also a monument studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Walker and Weeks' memorial building, like the reputed appearance of the tomb, consisted of a monumental pavilion with a pyramidal roof mounted on a podium. And like the ancient structure, the four sides of the memorial pavilion were to feature colossal Ionic columns (columns with scroll-like volutes in capitals and usually fluted shafts).

A terrace around the pavilion, a grand stairway leading to the terrace and pavilion from the south and switched back stairways leading up to the terrace on the north side enhanced the monumentality of the Memorial. The terrace design included sculptures of lions much like those of Mausolus' tomb and funereal urns as further enhancements. Inside the pavilion was to be a grandly scaled shrine paying homage to the sacrifices of the veterans and the values for which they fought. The language of the memorial design, overwhelmingly neoclassical, drew not only from the Greek-inspired Mausolus tomb but also other monuments of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Walker and Weeks intended the language, siting, and scale of the memorial to complement and link the neoclassical design of the U.S. Courthouse one block to the south with the Greek classical façade of the Indianapolis Central Library three blocks to the north. The use of Indiana limestone for all the buildings also would unify the architecture of the plaza.

Most of the rest of the plaza design used other features to memorialize the sacrifices of Indiana's veterans and provide imposing vistas of the Memorial building from the south and north. In the block between Michigan and North Streets, the plan included a 100-foot-high obelisk surrounded by multiple fountains at center, with a macadam (a mix of stone and tar) pavement surrounding it and trees at the corners. The design transformed the block occupied by the Blind School at center

into a sunken grassy mall, flanked by parterres (ornamental, low-profile gardens) consisting of diagonal walks and circular plots at center.

In the block occupied at the north end of the plaza by St. Clair Park, the architects placed a memorial cenotaph (monument), at the center, honoring the veterans who had given their lives in the war, surrounded by a sunken garden. Flanking the garden, they provided for a rectangular “Building B” on the west side for the national headquarters of the American Legion and for an identical future building on the east side to house—possibly for the Indiana Historical Society. The southernmost block of the plaza, University Park, remain unchanged in the plans, as George Kessler’s design harmonized with the Beaux Arts treatment of the rest of the plaza.

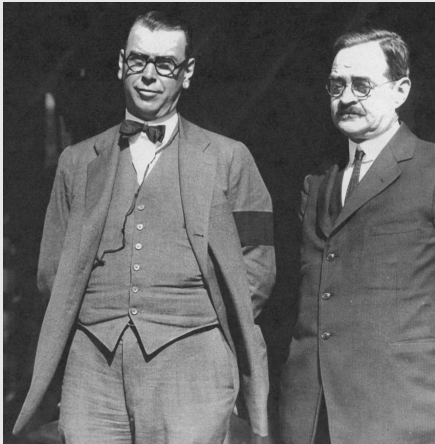
The Beaux Arts emphases on axes and on terminating vistas dominated the whole of the Walker and Weeks design. A great north-south axis ran from the center of the U.S. Courthouse north through the center of University Park, up the south stairs of the Memorial, through the center of the Shrine Room, north through the central entry to Memorial, thence through the center of the obelisk, north through the center of the sunken mall, through the center of the cenotaph, and finally up to the central entrance to the public library. Other minor axes served to link the parterres in the north blocks to each other, the two buildings on either side of the cenotaph to each other, the west and east entrances of the Memorial to one another, and the DePew Fountain at the center of University Park to the four corners of the park. The three principal buildings along the principal axis also served to terminate vistas dramatically with their monumental scale and details.

## ***Construction of First National Headquarters of the American Legion***

The next task for the War Memorial Commission was to keep the commitment of the State to build a national headquarters building for the American Legion. Walker and Weeks prepared working drawings for “Building B,” a four-story classical building with simple Greek Doric pilasters (rectangular columns) adorning the exterior that would pay deference to the Indianapolis Public Library to its north and the future Memorial Building to the south. The cornerstone was laid in 1924, and the building was completed in 1925 at a cost of \$416,030 (over \$29.7 million in 2021)<sup>x</sup>, which was drawn from the \$2 million appropriation made by the legislature in 1920.

Initially, the national headquarters of the American Legion, the national headquarters of the American Legion Auxiliary, the headquarters of the Indiana Department of the American Legion, the Indiana American Legion Auxiliary, the national headquarters of the 40- and- 8 veterans organization (an honor society for certain American Legion Members founded in 1920), the offices of the War Memorials Commission trustees, and the Indianapolis office of the American Red Cross occupied the first three floors of the building. On the fourth floor, the national executive committee of the American Legion met in an auditorium with especially designed wooden desks.

During the 25 years that the national headquarters of the American Legion resided in Building B, the Legion became the largest veterans organization in American history, with a membership of 3.5 million by 1945. It advanced the interests of World War I veterans in several critical ways. These programs and initiatives included strengthening the capacity of the Veterans Bureau (now Department



## Profile **Walker and Weeks**

Frank Walker and Harry Weeks were both born in Massachusetts and studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Walker in addition did advanced study at one of the ateliers associated with the famed Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Both men were trained in the Beaux Arts method, which emphasized formal planning, clear circulation patterns, and articulation of functions in designing the buildings. Walker and Weeks formed a practice together in 1911 and soon became one of the principal architectural firms in Cleveland, designing major public buildings in the neoclassical or Italian Renaissance styles. Their other commissions in the 1920s included the Indiana World War Memorial Plaza, the Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland Municipal Stadium, Severance Music Hall, and the Cleveland Post Office.

of Veterans Affairs) for the medical care of veterans, creation of adjusted compensation for World War I veterans, rehabilitation and care of disabled veterans, adoption and care of fatherless children of veterans, and passage of the GI Bill of Rights (see photos below). The American Legion Auxiliary, made up of women related to male veterans of World War I, complemented the activities of the American Legion. The Auxiliary advocated for the interest of veterans, caring for orphaned children of veterans, training of girls in civics, and service to their communities. Its membership also grew during the 1920s and 1930s, reaching 600,000 in 1945.

### ***Construction of the War Memorial Building***

In 1926, the War Memorial Commission trustees moved to construct the Memorial Building itself, which was called "Building A." The first order of business was to demolish or move the buildings that stood on the block between Vermont and Michigan Streets. Much controversy had ensued since the announcement of the plaza plans about acquiring the properties of the First Baptist and Second Presbyterian Churches, and despite additional debate, agreement could not be reached to obtain the church properties.



Construction of Building "B". The original national headquarters of the American Legion and associated organizations, November 1924. War Memorials Commission.

Walker and Weeks modified the plans for the Memorial slightly to accommodate the continued existence of the churches, and most of the other buildings in the block were razed. Two exceptions were the fairly new Haugh Hotel and the Cambridge Flats, both of which faced Michigan Street. They were moved to new locations just east of the plaza site. Excavation of the site for the foundation for the Memorial began in 1926, and the foundation, basements, and ground floor structure were completed by the spring of 1927.

On July 4, 1927, General John J. Pershing, commanding general of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, laid the cornerstone after serving as grand marshal for a parade of 5,000 World War I veterans through downtown. Construction of the tower (pavilion) and pyramidal roof took shape in the rest of 1927 and was completed in the fall of 1928. The foundation was sunk 30 feet below the street level, and the Memorial at its apex stood 210 feet high. The podium containing the ground floor measured 240 by 327 feet. The foundation and ground floor structure were made of





Moving Haugh Hotel from site on Michigan Street out of path of War Memorial Building, 1926. War Memorials Commission

reinforced concrete, and the tower and roof were constructed with a steel skeleton. A limestone veneer hung on the skeleton's exterior. Funds ran out for completing the Shrine Room, the auditorium, or meeting rooms in 1928, so only the exterior was finished at that time.

### ***Construction of Obelisk Square***

The War Memorial Commission next turned to creation of Obelisk Square, in the block immediately north of the War Memorial. All the buildings occupying the square were demolished by June 1928, and grading of the cleared block began.

Construction at the center of the 100-foot obelisk, a memorial symbol going back in its origins to ancient Egyptian culture, was completed by 1930. It was constructed of black Berwick granite and at its base were two marble fountain basins with colored electric lights installed for vivid displays of water and color. Above the base of the obelisk on its shaft were installed four bronze tablets with bas-relief sculptures by sculptor Henry Hering (see photos below). Most of the surface of Obelisk Square surrounding the obelisk was paved with macadam, leaving the space open for gatherings and for an unobstructed sight line along the main axis running through the center of the square between the Memorial Building and the public library. Trees and grass were installed according to the Walker



Source: Indiana State Library

## Profile

### Corporal James Gresham

Corporal James Bethel Gresham (1893-1917) was born in Evansville and enlisted in the U.S. Army as a career soldier in 1914. In 1916, he served under General John J. Pershing during his expedition to Mexico and in the fall of 1917, Gresham was among the first American troops to be shipped over to France to join the Allies in World War I. On November 2, 1917, Corporal Gresham and infantry unit were serving in the French battle line extending through Lorraine, in northeastern France, when German shock troops attacked Gresham and his platoon. Despite being greatly outnumbered, Corporal Gresham and two of his comrades fought fiercely and lost their lives combatting the attack. Gresham was identified as the first member of the American Expeditionary Force to lose his life in action during the conflict. After the war, Gresham's mother requested that his body be returned home and in November 1921, his body lay in the Statehouse rotunda as the State of Indiana conducted a public funeral. He was laid to final rest in Locust Hill Cemetery, in Evansville.

and Weeks landscape plan at the corners of the square. Captured German field guns from World War I were placed on the macadam surface at four points.

### ***Construction of Cenotaph, Sunken Garden and Mall***

In 1930, the War Memorial Commission demolished the buildings of the Indiana School for the Blind on the block north of North Street and began the excavation and grading necessary to construct the mall, sunken garden, and cenotaph between Obelisk Square and the public library. The sunken garden was created immediately east of Building B, which contained the American Legion organizations. At its center, the contractors built a cenotaph of black granite on a floor of red and green granite.



Grading cleared site for Obelisk Square. Between Michigan and North Streets, July 1928.  
War Memorials Commission

The rectangular cenotaph was a symbolic tomb for all of the dead who lost their lives in the service of their country during World War I. On the north and south sides were inscribed the following: "A tribute by Indiana to the hallowed memory of the Glorious Dead who served in the World War." On the north side of the cenotaph was placed a bronze plaque in memory of Corporal James Bethel Gresham of Evansville, Indiana, the first member of the American Expeditionary Force to lose his life in the war. At the four corners of the granite platform containing the cenotaph were raised black granite columns crowned by eagles of gold. Above the garden to the north, an 86-foot-high pole was constructed to fly the American flag.

From the sunken garden south to North Street, at the center of the block, the Walker and Weeks plan called for a sunken mall offering a clear view from the library of the Memorial Building and from the Memorial Building of the library. Flanking the mall, a series of parterres were built, consisting of diagonal walks, stone benches, and circular grassy plots, originally lined by shrubs. The cenotaph was dedicated in 1932.

## **Completion of Shrine Room**

In 1931, the Indiana General Assembly finally voted to provide state funds to complete the interior design of the lofty Shrine Room in the War Memorial and the auditorium, vestibule, foyer, and meeting rooms on the ground floor. After two years of work, the Shrine Room was finished and dedicated in 1933.

Walker and Weeks' design called for a space of monumental scale, brilliant colors, costly materials, and a powerful interpretive program through sculptures, paintings, and symbolism. The main hall at center rises nearly 100 feet, culminating in the hollowed interior of the pyramidal roof. In the undersides of the steps composing the roof were installed blue electrical lights that shone like stars in the sky. From the apex of the pyramid hangs the crystal Star of Destiny, shining brightly. It symbolizes guidance for the nation's welfare. Below the Star and dominating the room is an immense American flag, symbol of the nation.

At the center of the Shrine Room was placed the Altar of Consecration, dedicated to good citizenship and patriotism. On top of the altar in multi-colored enamel appears at center the American shield and a golden American eagle. On the marble sides of the altar were engraved four inspirational inscriptions by Royal Cortissoz, author of the inscriptions at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. The one on the south reads: "Within this shrine there lives the spirit of brotherhood binding the people of the United States with the Nations of the world."

Along the four sides of the main Shrine Hall stand 16 columns with shafts 40 feet high, constructed of red Vermont marble symbolizing the color of the blood that was shed to bring peace. At the top of the walls of the four aisles surrounding the main hall were installed large stained-glass windows with blue panes that translate natural light into blue hues that contrast with the red of the columns. Below the windows an allegorical frieze was constructed, composed of bas-relief sculptures by sculptor Frank Jirouch. The frieze depicts America joining the Allies in World War I, engaging in the fierce battles of 1917 and 1918 resulting in victory, and achieving peace and its benefits. At eye level on the aisle walls were installed marble niches in which oil paintings of the chief Allied commanders by artist Walter Brough were installed. The whole was intended to inspire good citizenship by all who visit it.

## **Completion of Rest of War Memorial Building**

A \$850,000 loan from the New Deal Public Works Administration in 1933 made possible the completion of the rooms on the ground floor and basement of the War Memorial. The vestibule to the building, entered from the north entrance, is richly appointed with Neshobe Gray marble (quarried in Vermont) walls, Tennessee marble floors, bas-relief plaster eagles, and a beamed ceiling with colored fret (key) patterns.

Next to the south is the foyer of the building, a rectangular hall modeled on the nave of an ancient Roman basilica, with Verde Antique (a dark green veined stone quarried in the Green Mountains



of Vermont) Ionic columns lining the sides and ends, and an arched plaster ceiling overhead with coffers (recessed panels).

The central feature of the ground floor is the auditorium for patriotic events constructed directly below the Shrine Room. Seating 500 people, the auditorium consists of three sections of seats on a raking floor leading to a recessed speaking platform. The style of the details is Renaissance, with Corinthian columns and pilasters (columns and pilasters having capitals decorated with volutes and acanthus leaves) and pilasters flanking the speaking platform.

Marble niches appear on either side of the platform and at the rear. The walls are covered with rusticated blocks of plaster. The dado (lower part of the wall), niches, and columns are fashioned from red American marble. Overhead, the domed ceiling is covered with Guastavino acoustical tiles (tiles patented by Rafael Guastavino Jr. and Wallace Sabine in 1911 that improve interior acoustics).

Highlights of the auditorium at its four corners are bas-relief American eagles alighting on the shield of the United States. After World War II, the auditorium was named in honor of General John J. Pershing, and his portrait was placed on the rear wall of the speaking platform.

East and west of the foyer and the auditorium were constructed meeting rooms, each seating 200-250 people. The rooms are paneled in oak, and the entries and speaking platforms are enframed with oaken Corinthian pilasters and classical entablatures (in classical architecture, the architrave, frieze, and cornice supported by a column) with bas-relief eagles incorporated. Above, larger plaster entablatures with painted friezes (horizontal bands in an entablature) adorn the junctures of walls and ceilings. Large rooms in the basement were finished for a future museum of artifacts recording the experience of World War I.

The completed interiors below the Shrine Room were dedicated in 1937. The total cost of construction for the entire plaza through 1937 was estimated at between \$12 million and \$15 million (\$215.4 million to \$269.3 million in 2020). For comparison, the Lincoln Memorial when completed in 1922 cost about \$3 million (about \$46.2 million in 2020).

## ***Influence of War Memorial Plaza on the Design of Buildings Fronting the Plaza: Part I***

From the beginning of planning for the plaza in 1920, the advocates for the World War Memorial and Legion headquarters wanted buildings constructed along the west side of Meridian Street and east side of Pennsylvania to harmonize with and pay deference in their designs to the scale, materials, and style of the buildings, objects, and landscape design of the War Memorial Plaza. The July 1920 act of the General Assembly authorizing construction of a memorial established a War Memorial Commission and gave it the authority to “limit the kind, character and height of buildings located or erected thereafter, within three hundred (300) feet of the outside boundaries of such memorial place.”

Existing buildings along the plaza site in 1920 were either private residences or modestly scaled apartment buildings, such as the Blacherne Apartments at Vermont and Meridian. The expansion

of the commercial business district north of Ohio Street was likely to expand up both Meridian and Pennsylvania Streets, so the provision of design review by the board was timely.

Almost immediately, sponsors of new buildings along the two streets tried to build structures with compatible designs for what was anticipated would be constructed in the plaza.

Even before the design of Walker and Weeks was selected, [Edgar G. Spink](#) built in 1920-1921 the Spink-Arms Hotel just north of the Blacherne. The design was scaled to conform to that of the Blacherne next door, and the materials used for the façade were red brick and limestone, just as with the apartments to the south.

The following year in 1922, the [Indianapolis Athletic Club](#) erected a 10-story clubhouse at 350 N. Meridian that seemed unlikely to compete visually with a monumental memorial. Its Italian Renaissance design by architect [Robert Frost Daggett](#) and brown brick and terra cotta exterior also seemed compatible with a neoclassical memorial.

At 445 N. Pennsylvania Street, Edgar Spink constructed the Medical Arts Building between 1922 and 1924. The 10-story brick building, designed by local architect Donald Graham, involved the use of neoclassical pilasters in terra cotta along the first two stories and along the top two stories, with a classical projecting cornice. The scale and details were likely to be compatible with the as-yet unknown plaza design.

A short distance to the south, in 1924-1925, the Reserve Loan Insurance Company constructed a four-story office building at 425 N. Pennsylvania Street. Architects [Rubush and Hunter](#) designed a marble façade with colossal Corinthian columns from Roman Imperial architecture, sure to harmonize with the now-unveiled neoclassical design of the War Memorial Building across the street.

Up North Pennsylvania Street, at 711, the Indiana National Guard constructed between 1925 and 1927 what was later named the [Tyndall-Moorhead Amory](#). The design of the four-story façade was in the Italian Renaissance style, with arched windows and rusticated blocks and faced with limestone, just like the material to be used for the plaza.

Back on Meridian Street, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Building rose at 320 N. Meridian in 1926. The architect, again Robert Frost Daggett, used a neo-Gothic design for the details of the 11-story office building, which was faced in limestone. The scale, materials, and handling of the details complemented the War Memorial design.

The final major building erected along the plaza during the 1920s was the most monumental, and yet was quite compatible. The Scottish Rite of Masonry constructed a new [Scottish Rite Cathedral](#) costing \$2 million at 650 N. Meridian between 1927-1929 (around \$29.9 million in 2021), across the street from the new American Legion headquarter building and a block north of the War Memorial. The architect, George Schreiber, derived inspiration from English cathedrals, in laying out a nave, a crossing tower, and a choir and scaled all but the tower to pay deference to the War Memorial. The one feature that was comparable in height to the Memorial—the tower—was a single vertical accent that did not compete directly with elements of the plaza.

The buildings constructed facing the plaza during the 1920s set a standard for later construction. Little was built during the Great Depression. The next new structures took shape in the late 1940s.

## ***The G.I. Bill of Rights***

One of the greatest accomplishments of the American Legion in its 100-year history was proposing the G.I. Bill of Rights and then successfully lobbying for its passage by Congress. During World War II, the Legion realized that the 16 million veterans in the Armed Forces returning from the war would require much support to adjust to civilian life.

In November 1943, the National Executive Committee of the Legion, meeting in its fourth-floor meeting room in the national headquarters on Meridian Street, voted to address the needs of veterans in the postwar era. National Commander Warren Atherton appointed a special subcommittee to advocate the consolidation of all government functions concerning veterans under the control of the Veteran's Administration and to introduce and advocate veteran's legislation.

By January 1944, the subcommittee had drafted a bill that the Legion called "the G.I. Bill of Rights." After the bill was introduced in Congress, the Legion mounted an effective national campaign in the press, radio, and in movie theaters promoting the benefits for millions of veterans of the legislation. The bill was approved by Congress and signed by President Franklin Roosevelt in June 1944.

The G.I. Bill addressed 10 issues: education opportunity; vocational and on-the-job training; unemployment compensation; loans for the purchase of homes, farms, and small businesses; review of discharge status; adequate hospitalization; prompt disability claim settlement; muster-out pay; an employment or placement service; and the concentration of veteran services under the purview of the Veteran Administration. It transformed American life in many ways after the war, making colleges and universities accessible to millions of veterans, expanding higher education, making home purchase feasible for many veterans across the country whose families had never owned their homes.

## ***Construction of New National Legion Headquarters Building***

In 1944, in anticipation of a large increase in membership arising from returning World War II veterans, the American Legion requested that the State of Indiana construct three new buildings on the two sides of the cenotaph—an expanded Legion national headquarters on the east side and a third, smaller building south of the 1924-1925 Building B on the west side to provide additional space for the Indiana Department of the Legion and the National Auxiliary.

Walker and Weeks prepared plans for both buildings, but the high increase of construction materials and building costs after the war ended caused the Indiana General Assembly to appropriate funds only for the new national Legion headquarters. The final design consisted of a structure more than twice the size of the original headquarters building. The design consisted of two pavilions, each largely replicating the exterior appearance of Building B, joined to each other at center by a masonry hyphen. The result was a single Building "C." Construction of the new headquarters began in 1948

and was completed in 1950. Highlights of the interior were an expanded national executive committee room on the fourth floor, the National Commander's suite of offices, a library and archives, and a Legion museum.

## **Completion of Plaza with Removal of Churches**

In 1924, debate ensued over whether the State should acquire and remove the Second Presbyterian Church and the First Baptist Church from their two corners on Vermont Street, flanking the site of the War Memorial Building. There was no decision in 1924. After construction of the War Memorial structure in 1929, another movement began to appraise the value of the church properties and remove them. That movement ended inconclusively in 1930.

The issue did not come up again seriously until after World War II, when the American Legion began to advocate for removal of the churches and completion of the World War Memorial Plaza design. Finally, in 1955, the Indiana General Assembly appropriated \$800,000 (around \$515 million in 2021) for the purchases of the two church properties, and in 1957 the congregations agreed to sell their parcels. Both church buildings were demolished in 1960. The Indiana War Memorials Commission requested additional funds to grade the sites and complete the landscape design of the War Memorial on the two corners.

Establishment of the military museum, another feature of the War Memorial intended for the basement, also urgently needed action. The lower level had stood vacant since the 1930s. The War Memorial Commission gathered and installed artifacts from World War I, World War II, and other conflicts beginning in 1962. The museum was completed in 1965.

## **Sculptures of the War Memorial Plaza**

From the beginning, one of the premises of the World War Memorial Plaza design was that its execution would be a collaboration of the architects with sculptors, painters, and landscape architects. Artisans painted the multi-colored stencils in the vestibule of the War Memorial and in the upper reaches of the Shrine Room. Walter Brough, a portrait painter, created the portraits of the leading Allied generals of World War I within the Shrine Room.

Some of the most evocative art in the plaza, playing major roles in its interpretive program, were the works of sculpture. Within the Shrine Room Frank Jirouch created the stirring allegorical frieze. Henry Hering of New York, who had collaborated previously with Walker and Weeks, designed the primary sculptures on the exterior of the War Memorial and in Obelisk Square.

As his major master work for the War Memorial, Hering created the immense sculpture, *Pro Patria*, for the south steps of the building. The statue depicts an athletic young man holding the American flag on one hand and grasping for the olive branch of peace with the other. With *Pro Patria*, Hering created a figure who is without military character and who represents "the free spirit of American youth" and the dedication of the nation's youth to their country and the flag. Rising 24 feet on a



marble pedestal and weighing seven tons, *Pro Patria* when completed in 1929 was the largest bronze statue ever cast in the United States.

Above the six Ionic columns and their entablature on each face of the War Memorial tower, six limestone statues stood in solemnity. Hering designed and carried out all of them. The same six symbolic female and male figures stood on each side: Courage, Memory, Peace, Victory, Liberty, and Patriotism. Female figures in classical garb represented Memory, Peace, Victory, and Liberty, while male figures with helmets and shields represented Courage and Patriotism.

As his final commission for the plaza, Hering produced bronze tablets with bas-relief sculptures on the four sides of the lower shaft of the obelisk at the center of Obelisk Square. The human figures represented the four fundamentals on which the creators believed the nation was founded: Law, Science, Religion, and Education. Male figures represented Law and Science, while female figures symbolized Religion and Education.

## ***Sculptures of University Park***

University Park was intended from the beginning to form part of the World War Memorial Plaza, but its final design largely had been completed before the plaza itself was designed. George Kessler's redesign of the park created north-south axes and diagonal axes quite compatible with the Beaux Arts design of the plaza as a whole by Walker and Weeks.

Before Kessler completed his plan for the park, a new fountain had been proposed for the center, given in memory of Richard Depew. Nationally noted sculptor Karl Bitter of New York, originally from Vienna, created the initial design. After his death in 1915, fellow sculptor A. Stirling Calder carried out the commission and cast the bronze statuary that composes its core.

A granite column forms the center of the five-level fountain, around which are sculptures of eight children playing. On the third level, 16 fish jump and play with the children. A woman in a classical toga with a cymbal in hand and poised to dance tops off the fountain on the final level. Architect Henry Bacon, responsible for plans for the Lincoln Memorial, designed the setting for the fountain.

Other sculptures in the park were created as memorials to figures from Indiana important in national politics and government. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows commissioned the earliest in 1887 to memorialize one of its leading members, former U.S. Vice President Schuyler Colfax of South Bend, Indiana. It was moved to its current location east of the Depew Fountain probably in the early 1930s. Noted Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft created the bronze standing figure of Colfax and its granite and limestone pedestal.

Next was Indianapolis' tribute to its only U.S. president, Benjamin Harrison. In 1908, sculptor Charles Niehaus designed the Harrison memorial that stands at the center of the north-south axis through the park at its southern end. The statue of Harrison himself is bronze, depicting him standing while giving a speech in his front-porch campaign for president in 1888. A limestone pedestal, which is set within a semicircular limestone seat or exedra, supports the statue and a bronze chair. Henry Bacon designed the plaza and exedra. In response to a bequest, Henry Hering created the last sculpture to be commissioned for the park in 1934. The bronze statue on a granite pedestal depicts Abraham Lincoln, who grew up in Indiana. Lincoln is pictured seated as president, in a similar pose to Daniel Chester French's famed statue at the Lincoln Memorial.



*Pro Patria*, statue by Henry Hering on south steps of War Memorial, 1932 Bass Photo Collection, Indiana Historical Society.



Depew Memorial Fountain, Karl Bitter and Stirling Calder.





## Chapter 3

### ***New Designs for Obelisk Square***

In the 1920s, Walker and Weeks designed Obelisk Square to be a space with a striking centerpiece—the black granite obelisk, with its bas-relief tablets, surrounded by an elaborate fountain. Most of the square, however, was covered with a macadam surface suitable for assemblies and displaying captured field pieces from World War I. In 1975, civic leaders, in cooperation with the War Memorials Commission, expressed support for redesigning the setting of the obelisk, as part of beautification efforts to mark the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. In a new design by Indianapolis landscape architecture and architecture firm Browning Day Pollack, grassy areas and brick pavements were added and trees at the four corners. On the northern mid-block edge of the square, a regiment of flags representing each state of the Union marked the central formal axis of the whole plaza design. Obelisk Square was renamed Veterans Memorial Plaza.

In 2004, the Indiana War Memorials Commission decided to replace the 1975 alterations to the square with a design that provided more continuity between the landscape design of the War Memorial block and that of the American Legion Mall blocks. The new design by then-Assistant State Architect Jason Larrison created a plan that strengthened the principal north-south axis of the War Memorial Plaza between the Indianapolis Public Library and World War Memorial Building block. Larrison's design included running two concrete walks through the Obelisk Square/Veterans Memorial Plaza that are on the same alignment as the two walks that border the American Legion Mall to the north.

In addition, Larrison's plan placed lawns to the north and south of the obelisk fountain and its surrounding circular plaza that are on the same plane as the sunken mall in the American Legion Mall blocks to the north. On either side of the two north-south walks, the design created bermed



Obelisk Square as redesigned by Browning Day Pollack in 1975 and renamed Veterans Memorial Plaza War Memorials Commission

lawns containing three rows of trees to the east and west. The maturing trees provide the same sort of visual border for the central lawn and obelisk as those located on either side of the sunken mall in the block to the north.

The 2004 design placed diagonal walks from the four corners of the square to the central Obelisk promenade, similar to those found in University Park. Two, parallel east-west walks provide pedestrian access to the Obelisk from Meridian and Pennsylvania. There are two rectangular spaces to the east and west of the central obelisk and its promenade. Each space is paved with concrete, is located between the parallel walks, and contains 25 bronze flagpoles, each flying one of the flags of the American states (50 poles total). Also in 2004, the War Memorials Commission placed steel light standards of the 1920s that had previously stood in University Park around the perimeter of the central promenade of Obelisk Square and along each of the new walks.

## ***Memorials for World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War Veterans***

From the late 1920s to the early 1990s, the principal features of the World War Memorial Plaza served to commemorate the sacrifices only of Indiana World War I veterans. In 1993, the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs and Indiana War Memorials Commission decided to incorporate into the plaza design memorials for three conflicts since World War I—World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

Fort Wayne architect Patrick Brunner won a design competition held in 1994 with his designs calling for three partial limestone and granite cylinders. To fit into the architectural and landscape design context of the American Legion Mall and overall War Memorial Plaza, the competition specified that the proposed designs honoring the veterans for each war be scaled to fit within the center of one of the parterres on either side of the sunken mall and be made of Indiana limestone, the material for all of the buildings in the War Memorial Plaza.

Brunner's cylindrical designs met the criteria. The memorials for the Korean War and the Vietnam War were constructed first and dedicated in 1996. Brunner designed the two memorials to comple-



World War II Memorial. Designed by Patrick Bruner, view in 2019. James Glass



ment each other. Together, their partial cylinders make up a complete cylinder. The Vietnam War Memorial is larger because of the greater number of veterans who lost their lives.

The World War II Memorial, dedicated in 1998, is located in the next parterre north of that containing the Korean War Memorial. It too is cylindrical but forms a larger partial cylinder, due to the larger scale and worldwide impact of World War II. On the outside of the cylinder are carved the names of Hoosier recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, a list of distinguished Indiana military units, a map of the war, and a brief history of the conflict. On the inside, on granite tablets, are found excerpts from letters home from World War II G.I.s. On a circular limestone column opposite the inside of the cylinder are carved the names of the major battles of the war.

The Korean War Memorial is located in the southernmost parterre on the east side of the mall, and the Vietnam War Memorial in the corresponding parterre on the west side. In both designs, quotations from letters home from soldiers, sailors, marines, or airmen are carved on the exterior of the rounded shapes, along with a map of the conflict and histories of each war. The names of those who lost their lives in each war are inscribed in granite on the inside of each cylinder.

## ***Plaza Influence on Building Designs, Part II***

Since World War II, the criteria set by the state law of 1920 has continued to shape the design of buildings constructed facing the War Memorial Plaza. The designs of such structures are to pay deference to the scale, monumentality, and language of the plaza. The Indiana War Memorials Commission has approved all designs of new buildings within 300 feet of its boundaries since the early 1920s.

In 1951-1952, veterans Marvin Warner and Joseph Kanter constructed the Essex House apartments, the first large post-World War II large building along the plaza on the northeast corner of Vermont and Pennsylvania. Like several buildings along the plaza of the 1920s, the height of the Modern-style building was 10 stories, and its exterior materials were brick.

The next notable building erected along the plaza was what is now known as the Minton-Capehart Federal Building at 575 N. Pennsylvania Street. Designed by Indianapolis architects Woollen Associates and constructed in the early 1970s, the building occupies the entire block facing the Veterans Memorial Plaza (Obelisk Square) and provides with its oblong shape a massing that creates a border for the plaza without competing with its scale. Its reinforced concrete exterior, articulated ribbon windows and piloti columns (cylindrical columns composed of reinforced concrete) show the influence of such Modern landmarks as L'Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, France, designed by architect LeCorbusier.

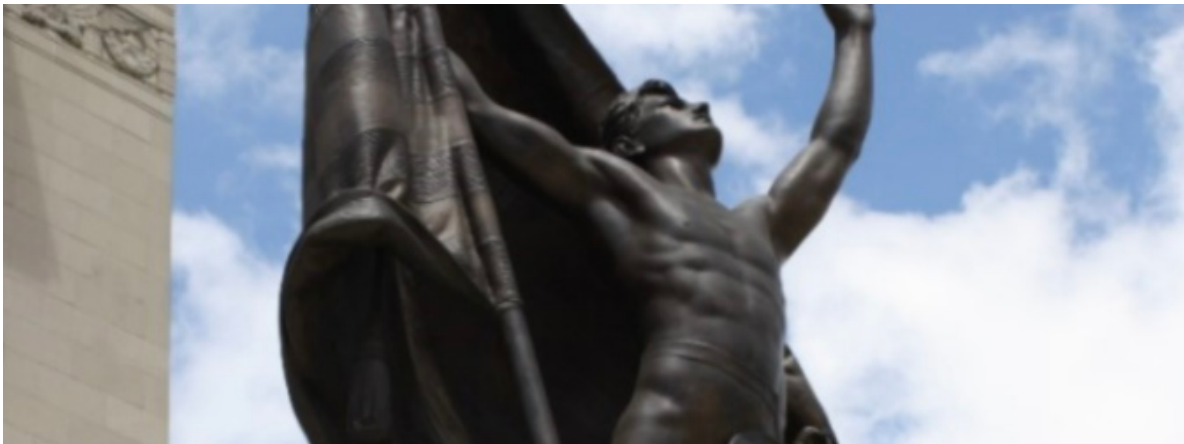
A final major work of architecture shaped by the plaza was the addition built between 2003 and 2007 to the 1915-1917 Indianapolis Central Public Library at the north end of the plaza. [Woollen, Molzan and Partners](#) served as architects. The firm designed a curving, six-story structure with a glass curtain wall façade facing south. [Evans Woollen](#), the primary architect, conceptualized the ad-



dition as a secondary terminus to the War Memorial Plaza. He left the Central Library's limestone, classical façade as the primary terminus.

### ***Designation as a National Historic Landmark District***

As the largest and most elaborate memorial in the United States to the sacrifices of World War I veterans, the World War Memorial Plaza has considerable historical significance. It is also architectural and artistically significant for its monumental neoclassical and Beaux Arts design. It also is a major work of 1920s urban design in the spirit of the City Beautiful movement in American city planning. Because of this national significance, the War Memorials Commission, Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indiana Landmarks, and National Park Service cooperated in 1994 in the designation of the plaza as National Historic Landmark District, certifying its significance to the nation as a whole. In 2016, the Park Service amended the nomination for the Landmark District to include the nationally significant Indiana Soldiers and Sailors Monument, and the district became known as the Indiana War Memorials National Historic Landmark District.



Restored *Pro Patria* statue in 2013. James Glass

### ***Restoration of the Plaza***

All buildings, objects, and landscape features require maintenance, rehabilitation, and restoration over time. As a memorial to the state's veterans and as part of a National Historic Landmark district, the Indiana War Memorial Plaza requires a regular program of maintenance, rehabilitation, and restoration. The State of Indiana, through the Indiana War Memorials Commission and the Indiana Department of Administration, over the past two decades has undertaken major restoration projects along the plaza and adopted a regular schedule for maintenance of the many historic features.

For example, about 2005, part of the structure broke that supported the legs of the *Pro Patria* statue on the south steps of the War Memorial building. The breakage could have caused a collapse of the statue. The Commission made repairs to the seven-ton statue and restored its bronze surface. In University Park, the commission and Department of Administration have restored the surfaces of the bronze statues of Vice President Schuyler Colfax and President Abraham Lincoln and rehabilitated the Depew Memorial Fountain.

On the War Memorial building itself, the War Memorials Commission and Indiana Department of Administration spent \$2.9 million between 2018 and 2020 to replace the granite slabs that covered the steps of the pyramidal roof and some of the limestone veneer. Leaks had developed that threatened the plaster decorative details in the Shrine Room below. Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, a Northbrook, Illinois, engineering and architectural firm that specializes in resolving difficult structural problems, served as restoration consultants.

## **Community Uses**

From the time of its completion in the 1930s, the Indiana World War Memorial Plaza has hosted public rallies and patriotic celebrations. In recent years, the Indiana War Memorials Commission has made available the American Legion Mall and the Veterans Memorial Plaza for a variety of public events and private rentals. For example, a popular community event is the annual 4th Fest in the Veterans Memorial Plaza, celebrating the Fourth of July. Another is the Indianapolis Public Schools' annual "Back to School Festival."

In the War Memorial Building, the War Memorials Commission makes available the Pershing Auditorium for funerals of Indiana veterans. The auditorium, Woodfill Boardroom, Spruance and Shoup Halls, the Grand Lobby, and West Foyer can be rented for private and public events, such as ceremonies, receptions, meetings, and conferences. In the basement and main floor, the War Memorials Commission since 2005 has developed a comprehensive Indiana War Memorial Museum that interprets the roles of Indiana veterans in all wars since 1800 and displays artifacts with Indiana connections from all of those conflicts.



Left: Indy Pride Festival in Veterans Memorial Plaza and American Legion Mall. War Memorials Commission. Right: Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Ceremony on steps of War Memorial. September, 2019.



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The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis was developed by The Polis Center at IUPUI and the Indianapolis Public Library. For information, contact [info@indyencyclopedia.org](mailto:info@indyencyclopedia.org).