



Oberlin Monuments & Outdoor Sculpture: World War II Memorial Garden



Location: Near 90 N Professor Street

Initiated - 1995

Dedicated - 1996

Built - 1997

Located along the south side of Finney Chapel, the World War II Memorial Garden is dedicated to Oberlin College alumni who died in

the Second World War. The garden features a long low wall with bronze tablets for names, class year, and military service of each of the 75 alumni who died in the war. It has four wooden benches facing the inscriptions and a small fountain, surrounded by perennial plantings.

The idea for a war memorial originated during an alumni reunion in 1995, when William H. (OC 1948) and Caroline Warren (OC 1946) received their inspiration from a similar memorial at Oxford University. After speaking favorably with their fellow alumni, the Warrens presented their idea to the college administration. Both the President, Nancy Schrom Dye, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, William Perlik (OC 1948), supported the idea. In September 1995, a sponsoring committee, headed by Mr. Warren, was formed to conceptualize, design, build and fund the memorial.



The fall of 1995 saw a series of meetings and correspondence among the committee members regarding the details of the memorial. The general consensus was to build a monument listing all alumni who had lost their lives due to the War. Leading the research project, Don Van Dyke (OC

1947), a College Archives volunteer researcher at the time, took responsibility to construct a complete list of the dead. Margaret Sahs Erickson (OC 1962) of the Alumni Office had developed a list for Mr. Dyke to work on. He was also aided by a card file of names of those in service from the Archives Office. A notice placed in the local newspaper eventually produced additional names through family contacts.

It was agreed that the list would include only those who died between September 1, 1939 (invasion of Poland) and December 31, 1945. The committee stumbled upon the discovery of Masaru Nakamura, an Oberlin Alumni who served and died in the Imperial Japanese Navy. Among the eight committee members available for discussion, the majority agreed to include Nakamura on the wall memorial, with special identification to indicate that he had served with the Japanese forces, so that he does not appear to be a Nisei (second generation Japanese-American) in the U.S. forces. In later discussions, it was agreed that all 75 names would be inscribed with service connection, regardless of nations served. The idea of including Korean and Vietnam Wars were considered but later rejected. The committee decided to limit the scope of this particular memorial because they could not speak for the veterans of those wars, who had experienced a very different kind of war and aftermath with far different consequences.

Fundraising for the War Memorial lasted from late 1995 until its construction in 1997. About 5000 alumni who attended Oberlin from 1930 to 1949 were contacted for contribution. The college also agreed to provide limited materials and labor for construction. The committee and college staff chose architect James McKnight of Cleveland to be in charge of final design.

Inspired by the Cass Gilbert Romanesque design and the materials of Finney Chapel, McKnight created a low wall in the garden with bronze name plaques, reminiscent of ruins from a cloister. While the college suggested using sandstone to reduce costs, the committee agreed with McKnight's choice of bronze because it "weeps" due to the oxidation, causing light stains to flow off the plaques. The committee also requested the cuttings of ivy included on top of the low wall, which were planted by President Wilkins in 1946 near Wilder Hall in

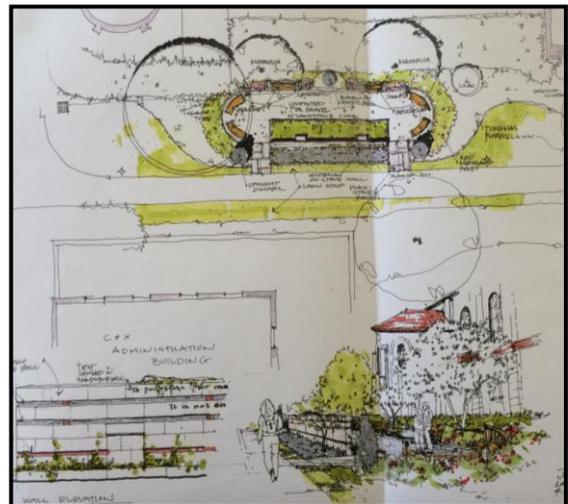


Image Courtesy Oberlin College Archives

memory of an Oberlin war casualty, Herbert Derwig (OC 1946). The four wooden benches as well as the fountain directly across the low wall are designed to encourage meditation.

Symbolic groundbreaking happened during 1996 commencement weekend, when President Nancy Dye accepted McKnight's design through William Warren. Actual construction began in March of 1997, followed by its completion in May 1997, in time for commencement weekend. In addition to materials and labors contributed by the College, the Memorial Garden was finished at a total cost of \$52,026. The college, to cover maintenance and repair costs, established an endowment fund. In May 2000, a second endowment established a World War II Memorial Scholarship Fund, providing financial aid to an entering student. The first recipient, an entering student for the 2000-2001 academic year, received a letter from the Memorial Garden Sponsoring Committee, encouraging visits to the garden, and to commemorate the 75 Oberlin alumni who lost their lives during the War.



Source:

Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio. William H. Warren. Papers RG 30/332.

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