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"Living" Type of War Memorial Has Edge in Nation-Wide Survey of Plans

In Trend Toward Utility, However, Lies Danger of Omitting Symbolism Conveyed by Aesthetic Monuments and Problem Is to Combine the Two—Kansas City Will Try to Co-ordinate Ideas of Various Organizations

By Charles S. Stevenson

Kansas Citizens who may feel somewhat confused regarding the selection of a proper memorial to the memory of their World War II veterans will feel relieved to know that many other communities are experiencing the same uncertainties as to leadership, form, site, financing and other related problems.

Already nearly 500 cities and towns are shaping plans for such tributes, varying from Los Angeles's 25-million-dollar proposal of an auditorium and opera house to a modest bandshell in Anniston, Ala., and most have had the same problems as are evidenced here.

An outstanding note in all discussions, however, seems to be the determination that any memorial erected be one of utility, with resistance to anything that appears to have even a slight aesthetic touch. Whether this thinking reflects a desire to help provide a better cultural and physical framework for the future generations, or is rebellion against purely ornamental and useless structures of extravagant costs, is a matter of conjecture, but it is reasonably certain that most memorials erected after this war will be quite different from those built after other wars.

Cast-Iron Soldiers

Before the Civil war, memorials generally took the form of glorifying war leaders, men who commanded soldiers. Those erected after the Civil war followed this pattern, but added tributes to the common soldier, as exemplified by the many statues of cast iron soldiers leaning on rifles and surrounded by cannon ball, some of which were contributed to scrap drives in World War II.

After World War I, there appeared definite indication of a movement toward memorials of a useful nature. The Municipal Art Society of New York City in 1920 issued a booklet on war memorials and expressed fear of a return to the "dismal stone age," as it referred to Civil war memorials. While stressing culture and art in the choice of a memorial, the society listed many suggestions for practical expressions, laying special emphasis on "The Liberty House," suggesting it as a place for music, drama and exhibitions of paintings and sculpture. This did not prove popular, but from it did evolve the community house, well known now, particularly to small communities.

The present trend toward useful memorials is confirmed by studies of memorial projects in nearly 100 cities. Leading by far in the proposals, for example is the municipal auditorium, apparently to follow the pattern of Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium, with each community embellishing the building and grounds with local improvements. While an auditorium is generally not considered quite as intimate a memorial as others of the "living" type, it does have considerable utilitarian value, as shown by the varied uses of the Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, the site of the recent United Nations conference. If present planning prevails, Dallas, Des Moines, Duluth, Los Angeles, Memphis, Schenectady, San Diego, South Bend, Utica, Providence and numerous others, will build auditoriums as memorials.

It Was a People's War

The philosophy of the "living memorial" is that such are a testimonial that this is a people's war, and that its memorials shall not only symbolize the principles for which the war was fought, but shall also embody in them something which will concretely serve the people's good. The danger that can come from extremes in this approach is one of losing the significance of a memorial, and unless a combination of the aesthetic and the utilitarian is the result, the memorial is likely to lose its effect as a reminder of the sacrifices of the dead, and become a purely functional project. When most of the country's memorials have been erected, it will probably be noted that the outstanding ones will be those that fulfill all the requirements of utility, symbolism and architectural propriety. Good examples from the last war are the Memorial bridge across the Potomac in Washington and the huge Soldiers and Sailors Memorial field in Chicago.

With health and rehabilitation centers becoming more and more important in community life, memorial hospitals and clinics blessed with endowment funds, are certain to receive much consideration.

Arkansas City, Kas., is now thinking of the erection of a hospital as a memorial. Houston, Tex., has in mind a memorial building for its medical center. Tacoma, Wash., has an orthopedic hospital on its list of proposals.

Community centers will apparently continue to be popular. With housing for veterans groups, Boy Scouts, auditoriums, dance halls and other facilities for social features, this idea combines social, political, and cultural projects in a most workable manner. Coral Gables, Fla., has allotted 75 million dollars for such a center, which will feature outdoor and indoor sports, a library, lunchroom and craft rooms. Louisville, Paducah and Muskegon are considering similar layouts, while Pueblo, Colo., has blueprints of postwar plans calling for hospitals, playgrounds, recreation centers and civic improvements.

Veterans' Buildings

Keeping in mind the needs for veterans organizations, Detroit, New York City, Salt Lake City and Wilmington, Del., are thinking of war memorial buildings to house veterans activities and to provide meeting places for men of all wars. Detroit veterans organizations, on the other hand, are considering a campaign to raise 2 million dollars for their own housing needs, this in addition to Detroit's civic project. Airport improvements are part of plans for the Evansville and Canton, O., memorials, while a 1,000-acre park is favored by Chattanooga, Tenn., memorial boulevards by New York City and Ft. Worth, Tex., and an art gallery by Miami, Fla.

Emphasizing the importance of physical fitness in the youth of America, the American Commission of Living War Memorials, working in co-operation with the National Commission on Physical Fitness of the Federal Security agency, has suggested more than 200 living memorials in a published brochure. George M. Trautman, president of the American Association baseball league, Louis Bromfield, writer, and Gene Tunney, former heavyweight boxing champion, are leaders in this group, whose recommendations include such a variety as hunting and fishing reservations, elaborate play centers for children, marksmanship ranges, golf courses, baseball, football, polo and hockey fields, basketball courts, gymnasiums, field houses, swimming, boating, and fishing facilities, ski jumps, outdoor stadiums and a multitude of other projects.

Many communities are considering this type of memorial but no particular swing toward nation-wide adoptions is yet noticeable, although, Oakland, St. Louis and Yonkers very definitely have something of this nature in mind. The American Legion monthly recently published complaints by Legionnaires to the effect that projects of this nature could never be memorials unless a separate part is set aside where a true memorial may be erected, one that will give the people a place to stop and "remember," and where they can pause for their silent prayers for peace. Many persons, too, feel that recreational facilities are the natural obligation of a city, and as such, should be supplied from tax funds, which would naturally make public response for money somewhat limited. Also, operating costs with small prospective revenues, add to the hazard of such memorials.

The Stadium Idea

High in popularity, with excellent possibilities for spectator interest, but limited individual participation are athletic stadiums. Baltimore is planning one to cost 6 million dollars, with Hartford, Long Beach and Reading following with considerably smaller amounts. Washington, D.C., with a national memorial stadium already authorized by Congress, and a memorial auditorium project now pending there, both financed by federal funds, appears to have the most elaborate plans in the country.

Brooklyn's war memorial board intrigued public interest by a \$5,000 contest for suggestions, while citizens of Milwaukee subscribed \$15,000 to employ a secretary to do research work and make recommendations.

In Kansas City, the American Legion, the War Dads and the Military Order of the World War have advanced their ideas of a fitting memorial, but no one plan has been accepted. In an attempt to co-ordinate ideas, energy and views, the Citizens Planning Council is soon expected to call a meeting of all interested groups, organize an over-all committee, and proceed with open discussions of types of memorials, suitable sites and methods of financing, eventually submitting for public approval a memorial best suited to Kansas City's needs.

Along with the text of this article are line drawings of "The Pioneer Mother," "Liberty Memorial," "Thomas H. Swope Memorial," "Loose Park," and "The Scout" with the caption "The Kansas City Trend in Memorials, as Revealed by These Outstanding Monuments, Has Emphasized Utility, Aesthetic and Cultural Qualities."