

KOF - Kooi

Harriet
Mrs. Charles Kooch
Holt County
Oregon, Missouri

Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt
Washington D. C.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: - After reading
this wonderful article on -
"Monuments and Memorials," which
voices some of the thoughts in your
column - which you have expressed
recently - about unveiling your
dear husband's monument,

Have you marked the place where every
one took off their hats in passing the
monument

If you could suggest they do that
in passing Pres. Roosevelt's monument -
It would be a beautiful tribute to
him -

Hope you enjoy this article
as much as I do -

Be assured of my high esteem
and most sincere and fervent wish
for your health and happiness -
throughout the coming year -

For you have a great task in U. S.
to complete -

Cordially yours
Harriet Kooch



To Mrs. F. G. Bennett
From
Harriet Kooch

Monuments and Memorials



Photograph from F. P. G.

There are two ways to build a monument for posterity. One is to magnify the person or group whose gift created the monument. The other is to perpetuate the spirit the monument stands for.

Which way will America build its war memorials? Will our communities imitate the Pharaohs and build some equivalent of the Pyramids? Will they raise columns and triumphal arches and massive tombs, like the column of Trajan, the triumphal arch of Constantine, or the tomb of Hadrian? Or will they take the stand of the group of Vermont legislators who in the days of the WPA Arts Projects were considering the erection of a statue to Calvin Coolidge in his birthplace? Will they decide, like these solemn-faced Yankees, that a "deaf-and-dumb asylum" would be a more appropriate memorial?

Our own past does not offer any very useful clues for settling this problem. The cast-iron monuments that celebrated the heroes of the War Between the States were caricatures of art, which almost added to the horrors of war. And the monuments erected after the First World War were hardly, with a few exceptions, much better, because too many of the sculptors thought it necessary to put into the very center of the monument the tanks and machine guns our men used, as if our machines were as much entitled to reverence as our dead. Many of these monuments portrayed the fighting man with great fidelity, down to his buttons and leggings. Few revealed his spirit. There were communities that solved the problem of war memorials by sinking a secondhand seventy-five or a captured mortar

into a bed of concrete, thinking thereby they had discharged their whole duty to both the dead and the living.

At present there is a considerable body of opinion that believes a fitting war memorial to the men and women who served, suffered, perhaps died in the present war should take the shape of something useful. They believe the best war memorials would be community houses, athletic fields, stadiums, parkways. This conviction was not absent at the end of the last war; and some very worthy memorials, like the Baltimore Municipal Auditorium, were erected with the thought of celebrating the dead by serving the living. But however well-conceived such memorials may be, I do not believe they meet the essential requirements of a war monument. They are rather a complacent way of getting benefits for ourselves and at the same time flattering ourselves that we are spending large sums of money to commemorate our heroes. That is too easy. If we want community houses and parkways, let us have them, without pretending that they are also perpetuating the devotion and sacrifice of those who have served us.

What, then, should a war monument actually be? First, let us ask what such a monument attempts to do. The chief thing that every monument aims to achieve is to fix in some enduring form, with permanent materials, a memory that will otherwise too easily pass. The word monument itself comes from the Latin word meaning reminder. In all monuments, the ideas of permanence and preciousness are essential: (Continued on page 106)

BY LEWIS MUMFORD

Monuments and Memorials

(Continued from page 17)

they are man's way of conferring immortality on deeds, or the memories of deeds, that otherwise would be too easily forgotten. With their monstrous egoism and their tyrannous command of servile labor, the Pharaohs contrived a high degree of immortality for themselves and their names.

However, what the Egyptians did by sheer energy and massiveness, other builders of monuments achieved in a more simple and human manner. For mankind still remembers the modest monument the Spartans erected to their soldiers who died at Thermopylae, with the inscription by Simonides: "O passer by, tell the Lacedaemonians that we lie here obeying their orders." Such pride and such sense of duty never have been expressed in briefer compass, and note that the words were written by the survivors, who thereby reminded *themselves* of the exemplary devotion of their famous three hundred.

The second important feature of all
Advertising Guaranty—Page 6

monuments is that they should be conspicuous, whether they are built in some remote place, accessible only by a special pilgrimage, like the church built as a resting place for the kings of Serbia, or placed directly in the hurly-burly of a city. Of all the ingredients that make a monument, mere size and costliness count least, while the skill and imagination of the artist, his capacity for expressing and interpreting the feeling that went into the memorial are the most significant. Here is a place where the art of the sculptor and the art of the poet should be combined, as they were combined so often on the little Greek tombstones from which we preserve a whole anthology of beautiful epitaphs.

Perhaps the best monument of the First World War, from this point of view, was that wrought by Ernst Barlach and set in the very midst of the daily traffic along the Alster in Hamburg—a monument so tender in its presentation of sorrow and love, so universal in appeal, that

it was promptly removed by the Nazis as soon as they got into power. The monument was a simple shaft of stone. It showed no struggling men, no machine guns and cannon, no agonized heroes. It presented a woman with a child in her arms, the symbol of all that was good in the fighting men on both sides, and of all that might redeem the world from its monstrous dedication to destruction and death. The inscription on this monument was worthy of the sculpture itself; as I recall it, it said only this: "People of Hamburg, Remember the Fifty Thousand Men Who Died for You." No decent soul could pass that monument without being reminded, despite a thousand other preoccupations, that only by a positive application of the spirit of love could those deaths finally be justified.

The aim of any monument to the dead, then, is to utilize every power of art to evoke in people their best selves, and to lift them up daily to the level of those who have so completely yielded their "last full measure of devotion." That purpose is a highly practical one; for nothing could so betray the loving faith and unconditional loyalty of our fighting men during this war as a speedy forgetfulness of the meaning of those sacrifices. We need such reminders in every city and village, to keep us from neglecting our own duties and sacrifices as citizens of our country and of the world—hard burdens we must vigorously bear if the Second World War is not, through the shortsightedness, apathy, and self-deception we showed at the end of the last war, to lead to even more terrible disasters.

PLAINLY, such a practical result cannot be achieved by an auditorium or a swimming pool, perfunctorily named a memorial. These useful structures do not bind us to our dead; they do not stir the feelings and rouse the energies that will keep us from being content with such debilitated efforts at cooperation as would merely give us the illusion of "peace in our time." That higher function and that higher purpose belong to the sphere of art, and such art is essentially of a religious character.

Indeed, the religious purpose of a war memorial may be fulfilled even when, by some misfortune, the art itself is inadequate. The best example of this fact is the cenotaph in Whitehall, London. Though as architectural sculpture this monument is of mediocre caliber, it brought the memory of the treasured dead to thousands of Londoners who passed it daily on busses. The ritual of lifting the hat as the bus passed the cenotaph was one of the few universal acts of spontaneous religious devotion our modern world can show. Such a monument helped foster a spirit of peace and cooperation in England that might have proved capable of making over Europe, if not the world, had not the furor Teutonicus in the meanwhile roused itself to a fresh pitch of hate, destructiveness, and brutality.

What kind of memorial, then, will best perpetuate the spirit in which our fighting forces, including our brave women and our merchant sailors, have served and suffered and died? Remember the chief qualities of all such art: permanence, conspicuousness, eloquence, and imagination. This gives us a larger range of choice than people commonly believe; for none of these qualities depends on

4

either bulk or what usually is called monumentality; and where funds are meager, time and loving thought may in the end achieve more than money ever could.

In the small communities the planting of a grove of trees would make a noble war memorial. Each tree should be dedicated to a single person, whose name and birth and death should be commemorated on a tablet, preferably of bronze or even hardwood. An alley of trees, leading perhaps to the high school, would be equally appropriate. By putting such trees under the perpetual care of the children of the community, with provisions for replanting, they would be as permanent as a stone monument, and they would introduce each new generation to the highest lessons of citizenship.

The second kind of memorial is a handsomely carved stone honor roll, with an appropriate inscription. The devising of such inscriptions should not be the hasty work of some committee or some self-important chairman; it should take place only after a canvass of the whole community. The task of writing an epitaph or a verse should be a welcome one for American writers and poets. Emerson's verses for the Concord monument serve as example. Not a few good lines could be culled from soldiers' letters. From my own soldiers' mail I would offer an example, almost literally transcribed:

"We who live only because we cooperate find it hard to make ourselves understood by those who live only private lives, seeking only a private good."

SUCH monuments should be erected in the most-frequented public place—the post office, the town hall, the high-school auditorium of a small community; the public park or the most-frequented square in the heart of a larger one. Here is a task that should evoke the best efforts of that not inconsiderable body of sculptors and craftsmen the PWA and the WPA put to work almost a decade ago. Though the demand for memorials should be far beyond the capacity of our best artists to fulfill, much can be done with a simple plaque or shaft, with good lettering and fine materials. An empty niche or pedestal can bide its time for the statue that will endow it with a sure immortality. But if anyone wishes to know how impressive good lettering can be, let him look at the inscription, designed by Bruce Rogers, on the 68th Street side of the new Hunter College in New York.

Whether we are to have good or bad monuments will depend, in no small measure, upon the spirit in which our citizens themselves approach this task. It deserves time, thought, public discussion, patient esthetic devotion, and, above all, humility before the example of our wounded and dead. No worthy memorials ever have been conceived in a hurry, so that they might come under the wire to receive a federal grant-in-aid or to meet a rich man's deadline. A memorial is a religious act of dedication—an attempt to renew in ourselves the spirit of better men and women which is their surest form of resurrection. To approach the task in any other fashion would be to betray ourselves and to belittle the heroism and the bitter sacrifices of those who have served us unsparingly, "obeying our orders."

THE END