



VFW Post Insurance Program

Loss Control Article

First National World War I Museum Opens

Those who fought in World War I are commonly called “The Lost Generation”, but in the late 1990s it may have been more accurate to refer to the entire event as “The Lost War.” Although school children and scholars still studied the war, it was continually overshadowed by other modern wars. Even the largest U.S. memorial for World War I veterans, the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, had fallen into such disrepair that it was closed to visitors in 1990.

Citizens rallied in 1998 to save the memorial, passing a sales tax increase to raise \$45 million for renovations. The architecture was stabilized, stonework replaced or refinished and its noted artwork – including mosaic tiles, bronze busts and two deco sphinxes – was carefully restored. Handicap accessibility was also integrated into the museum so that everyone would be able to visit the memorial.

A bond issue was passed after reconstruction to design and build a museum to display the memorial’s collection of materials from the war. Designed by the same firm who created the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the National World War I Museum honors the memory and sacrifices of those who served their country in World War I.

When entering the museum, visitors travel on a glass bridge that floats above a field of 9,000 red poppies,

each representing 1,000 military fatalities. Beyond that there is a display of weaponry used in the war, as well as replicas of trenches where soldiers fought and died. A wall of honor stretches through the facility, incorporating eye-witness testimonies, quotations and images to help visitors understand the personal impact of the war. The collection and the contributions of the public meld together to form a dynamic, living archive.

Originally built over three years from 1919-1921, the Liberty Memorial was funded by over \$2.5 million in donations from local and national sources. Although not the only memorial to fallen soldiers, the Kansas City monument became the de-facto national memorial due to its scope. It was so remarkable that President Wilson spoke at its dedication in 1921 and the main Allied military leaders, Lieutenant General Baron Jacques of Belgium, General Armando Diaz of Italy, Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France, General John J. Pershing of the United States and Admiral David Beatty of Great Britain, were present as well.

Congress recognized the memorial’s status prior to the museum opening in December 2006, declaring it the National World War I Museum. It is currently the only national World War I monument in the United States and continues its mission to educate the public about our soldiers’ sacrifices during this “greatest of wars”.

For more information about the National World War I Museum and the Liberty Memorial, visit the website at www.libertymemorialmuseum.org.

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