

10-1-1980

Our Lady of Victories

Pamela W. Hawkes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [American Art and Architecture Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hawkes, Pamela W.. "Our Lady of Victories." *Maine History* 20, 2 (1980): 79-99.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol20/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

OUR LADY OF VICTORIES

Civic monuments, erected in memory of famous people or events, also symbolize the ideals and aspirations of the society which builds them. Nowhere is this more true than in Victorian America, which became the home of what T. H. Bartlett, late nineteenth-century art critic, described as “the ghastliest army of forms and effigies called soldiers monuments, that has ever inflicted [*sic*] a people since the earth was made.”¹ A well-established social code, a renewal of patriotism and a growing aesthetic self-consciousness interacted with a booming economy in the post-Civil War period. The result was a proliferation of statuary and architecture commemorating America’s solidarity through the events and personages of the Great War of the Rebellion. This created, in turn, a new profession, attracting men and women able to interpret the society’s ideals into tangible yet artistic symbols. Though occasionally more interested in their income than their art, these artists formed the economic and social foundation upon which later generations grew into creative maturity.

Over a dozen of the country’s most prominent artists competed in the 1870s and 1880s for the commission to design a soldiers’ and sailors’ monument for Portland, Maine. Their words, preserved in the monument association papers now stored in the Maine Historical Society, provide a fascinating insight into the men, their art, and the era in which they lived.

In October of 1873, “when griefs were still poignant and tears had not ceased to flow,” the Portland Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Association was formed for the purpose of erecting a monument to “the hundreds of Portland’s young manhood who had paid the price of Union victory.”² Fund raising by association members began soon

afterward with a so-called entertainment in City Hall to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the Boston Tea Party.

Designs for the monument were quickly produced. At the first meeting of the PSSA, Franklin Simmons (1839-1913) addressed the design committee. A Maine native, Simmons had sculpted the first Civil War memorial in the state, a marble statue of General Hiram G. Berry, which was dedicated in Rockland in 1865, as well as a bronze infantryman placed in the center of Lewiston's city park in 1868. By 1873, he had begun working in his Rome studio on the elaborate Naval Monument which now stands just south of the Capitol in Washington.

Simmons's scheme incorporated a thirty-foot shaft with symbols of the Army and Navy at the base and "a very spirited figure of the country extended in the other" on top.³ He had adopted a classic monument form, one which began in the Hellenistic period, flourished in Roman times, and reemerged in the nineteenth century with the Nelson Monument in London and the Collonne de Vendome in Paris. Maximilian Godefroy introduced the format to the United States in his memorial to the War of 1812 for Baltimore, built in 1815-25.⁴ Simmons had used it four years earlier in a Civil War monument in Chelsea, Massachusetts. It was a frequent motif for Civil War memorials in an era when columns were considered "the richest and grandest individual form in architecture,"⁵ and it recurred through the submissions for the Portland monument.

A design sent by Preston Powers (1843-1904) in May of 1874 was the next of these. Son and pupil of the famous sculptor Hiram Powers, Preston had married the daughter of Alfred Dwyer of Portland and set up studios in the city several times during the 1870s and 1880s. He proposed building a granite pedestal with a soldier and sailor upon it

and, on a marble shaft above them, a figure of Liberty trampling the serpent of Dissention which has commenced its career of mad folly at Fort Sumpter and has insidiously writhed and contorted itself with a view to encompass the seat of the nation's government in its numerous coils.⁶

The local press commented that "the figures, especially the sailor, are very good and the whole outline is symmetrical."⁷

Despite a promising start, plans for the monument progressed slowly throughout the 1870s and early 80s. Fund raising was inhibited by the competition from the Longfellow Statue Association, which was canvassing schools and church socials for its tribute to Portland's famous son. According to the association's records, Franklin Simmons was selected as sculptor in February of 1875, but no contract was signed. It appears that the association may have tabled plans until funds were raised, and no further reports came from the design committee until February 1885. At that time, over \$5,000 had been raised and a circular was sent out inviting new proposals. It requested that "the design should be architectural . . . instead of making the monument a mere pedestal for the display of figures," and that the price for such a work not exceed \$20,000.⁸

The nineteenth-century art critic James Jackson Jarves once lamented, "The Profit of a large monument is so large as to turn towards sculpture a considerable business which, as regards art, had better be left to its common pursuits."⁹ The competition for the Portland monument proved no exception.

The circulars drew an eager response from quarries and metal foundaries such as the Smith Granite Company of Massachusetts, which boasted of providing nineteen memorials for Gettysburg alone. Company agents, such as Smith Granite's W. B. Van Amridge, filled letters

with testimonials and flattery – “We are aware of the competition of your committee, and know that nothing short of a perfect monument will satisfy the acknowledged taste and judgement of your members”¹⁰ – but without success.

One of the most grandiose designs in the competition came from Melzar H. Mosman of Chicopee, Massachusetts, owner and head designer of the Ames Foundry,¹¹ the first commercial bronze casting operation in the United States. The architectural portion was to be Roman Doric, “being the best adaptation of the highest form of Grecian architecture,” and, according to Mossman, the statuary included a soldier “relating with a countenance full of patriotic fire the achievements of the Army upon its well-fought fields” to History, a Sailor, Peace, and, on top, America. The cost of this sculptural battery was \$40,000.¹²

Despite their organized sales pitches, none of the company designs was considered until the committee became desperate. Perhaps the members shared the opinion of one disappointed sculptor who, upon hearing that the Hallowell Granite Company had at one point won the contract by default, wrote, “I am surprised that you can go to a granite company and expect to get any art.”¹³

“Art” was nevertheless provided from well-qualified sources in more than sufficient amounts. Among the first to respond was Clarence S. Luce (1851-1924), described as “one of the best-known architects in the country” by the *New York Times*.¹⁴ Luce had designed mansions in Boston, Newport, and New York, as well as exhibition buildings for the Philadelphia, Paris, St. Louis, and Jamestown fairs. He also prepared drawings during this time for the Ottawa Hotel in Casco Bay and a studio for Harrison B. Brown.¹⁵

Despite the design committee's emphasis on architecture, and Luce's own background, his design followed the lines of earlier ones. According to a letter dated December 1885, the platform was to be of mosaic and stone. At the base were panels for sculpture and at the apex of a forty-foot column was a group of bronze figures representing Peace, History, and Courage.¹⁶ The *Portland Daily Press* commented that "the design is original and striking and will repay study."¹⁷

In June of 1885 came a proposal from Alexander Doyle, also a resident of New York City. Doyle (1857-1922) was the son of a quarryman, studied sculpture in Italy from 1869-1872 and went into partnership with an English sculptor named Moffitt around 1878. Benefiting from a felicitous mixture of connections through his father's business and his partner's Roman Catholicism, he became so successful that, according to his obituary, "at 33, he had done more public monuments than any other sculptor and was producer of more than one fifth of those standing in the country."¹⁸ His connections extended to Maine as well, for in 1880, he married Fannie B. Johnson of Hallowell and became, "to an extent [,] financially interested in the success of the Hallowell Company"¹⁹ – though it was none other than Doyle who made the earlier comments about the quarryman's art.

Doyle's letters were filled with references to the volume of this other work and tend to dismiss the hurried submissions for the Portland monument as "merely a crude idea, lacking all its development and without detail, although I am sure that I could with more study make an effective monument of it."²⁰ Though his designs were never described in detail, they were consistently listed among the top contenders by the local papers.

Preston Powers submitted a second design in April of 1866 which was more in keeping with the new

requirements. Intended to be a reproduction of the United States Capitol dome, it incorporated thirteen columns representing the original colonies, reliefs of army and navy symbols, and a crowning figure of Liberty trampling the serpent of rebellion, all done in a style “bordering as closely on the classic as circumstances permit.”²¹

From Florence, in December of that year, came photographs of a clay model by William G. Turner (1833-1917), a dentist-turned-sculptor of portraits and ideal works. The group was “intended to represent the story of the Spartan mother who, in sending her boy off to the wars, charged him that he must return with or upon his shield.”²²

From Henry O. Avery and Launt Thompson of New York arrived a proposal deliberately intended to break the column-and-figures pattern. Avery (1852-1890) was an established architect who had attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts and practiced with Richard Morris Hunt before setting up his own office in 1883. Thompson (1833-1894) had been a pupil of the sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer and spent over a decade studying in Italy. The two had already collaborated on an equestrian monument of General Burnside in Providence, Rhode Island.

“Our design does not belong to the category of the shaft or obelisk, which have become vulgarized in our country by repetition, but it represents a fortified place which stands on guard, the defender of the flag,”²³ stated Avery in a letter dated March 1887. A photograph of the model made at that time (Fig. 1) shows a soldier and sailor below massed flags, the sculptural group placed atop a squat pedestal decorated with patriotic motifs. This iconoclastic scheme was nearly four months in preparation for, according to Avery, his partner was frequently confined to bed with colds or rheumatism. Only four years later,

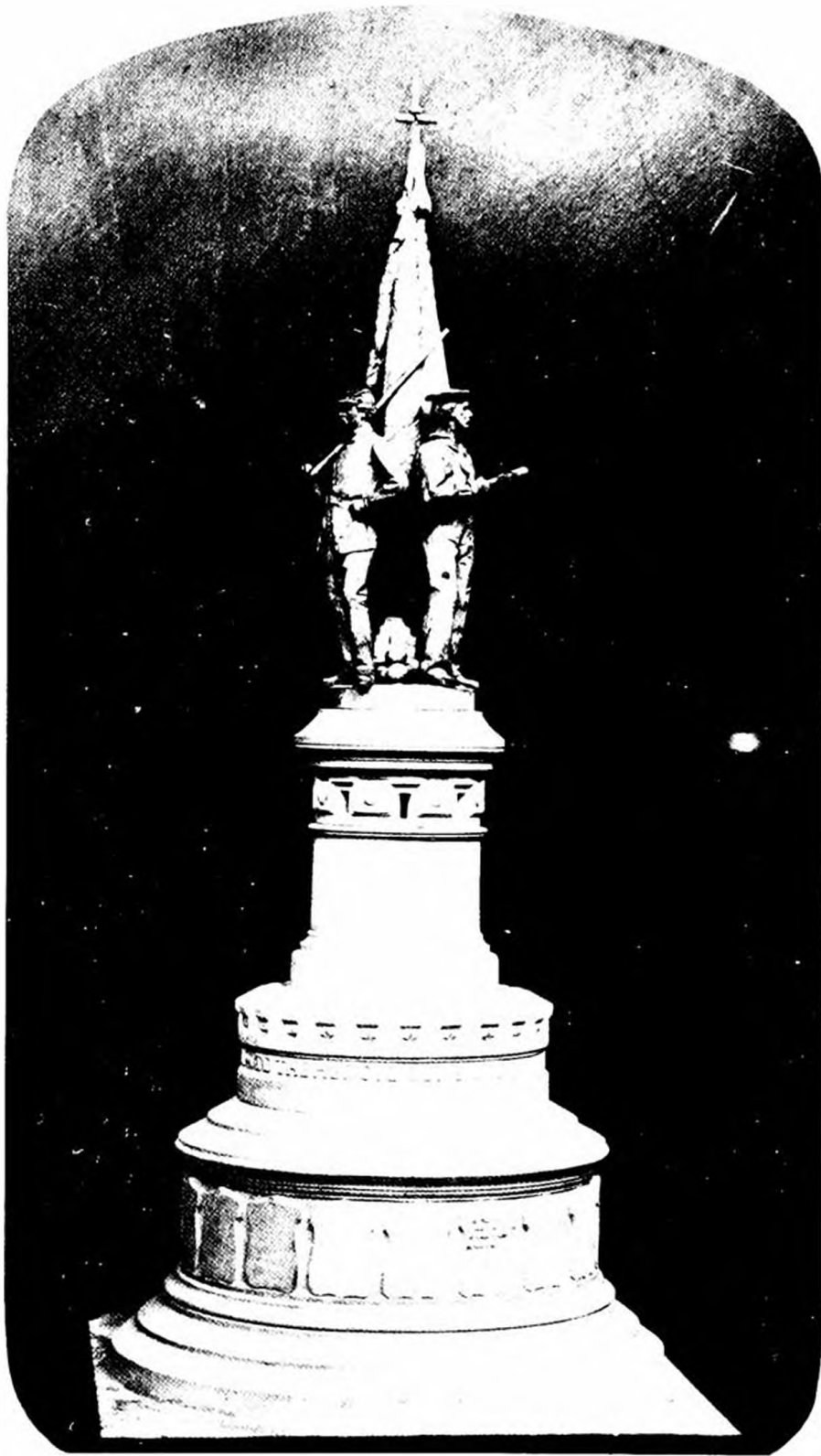


Fig. 1. Model by Launt Thompson and Henry O. Avery.
(Courtesy Avery Library, Columbia University.)

Thompson was sentenced to one month's imprisonment on Blackwell's Island following a ten-day drinking spree,²⁴ and one wonders whether this might have been the true cause for the delay.

In 1887, serious planning for the monument began at last. According to the annual report read January 17, 1887, \$16,519.62 had been raised. The site for the monument was of great concern for its purpose was, based on a contemporary newspaper report, "to be a lasting, permanent and daily lesson for all time," and to be effective, it should be located in "the most conspicuous and public place possible, where it will be oftenest seen by men, women and children in their everyday life, as they go to their business, their pleasure and their schools."²⁵ Market Square, then the location of the old City Hall, was selected after much debate, and the building was condemned. In February, with the funds and the site nearly secured, the design committee sent out a new circular requesting that any new designs or modifications be submitted within sixty days and raising the spending limit to \$25,000.

The next two months were filled with frantic preparations. Artists sent models and watercolor renderings or visited Portland to market their proposals. Rumors were frequent, especially within the New York art community. Henry Avery wrote that "a New York architect" (no doubt Luce) was exhibiting a model as the accepted design, and later asked for verification of a report that \$40,000 would be available.²⁶ Alexander Doyle told the committee that he had heard from "a certain sculptor here that he [had] been awarded the monument in connection with a certain architect"²⁷ – doubtlessly referring to competitors Thompson and Avery. Despite the offense taken, all stories appear to have been unfounded.

Several new designs were presented at this stage, all primarily architectural. John Calvin Stevens (1885-1940), noted Portland architect of Shingle Style and Colonial Revival residences, prepared a classically restrained variation on the columnar motif. An anonymous "Citizen" provided another, including niches at the base for Union, Justice, Mercy, and Charity, representing "one of Lincoln's most celebrated sayings."²⁸ Henry Avery submitted a sketch of a hundred-foot tower (Fig. 2) which he said had been "intended for New York, but the Legislature having refused the necessary appropriation, the matter was never considered."²⁹ It was, in fact, Avery's proposal for Grant's Tomb, an octagonal winding staircase "giving an unobstructed view at any point . . . of the city and country," which was also suggested as a Civil War monument for New Haven in early 1886. The design was clearly based on the medieval staircase at the Chateau of Blois, which Avery had sketched during earlier travels in France.

None of these designs seemed to fit what the committee had in mind. Francis Fassett (1823-1890), Stevens's architectural mentor and a member of the committee, finally made a sketch to illustrate his conception of "architectural." The other members found it most suitable. The composition (Fig. 3) demonstrated true Victorian eclecticism, the stepped pyramid roof suggesting the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, then under study by archeologists,³⁰ and the arched niches with clustered Gothic columns recalling the Albert Memorial built in London a decade earlier. A finished rendering was exhibited in committee chairman H. B. Brown's study, and the *Daily Press* reported that "very many citizens availed themselves of this opportunity, and the verdict of the visitors was practically unanimous in favor of it."³¹

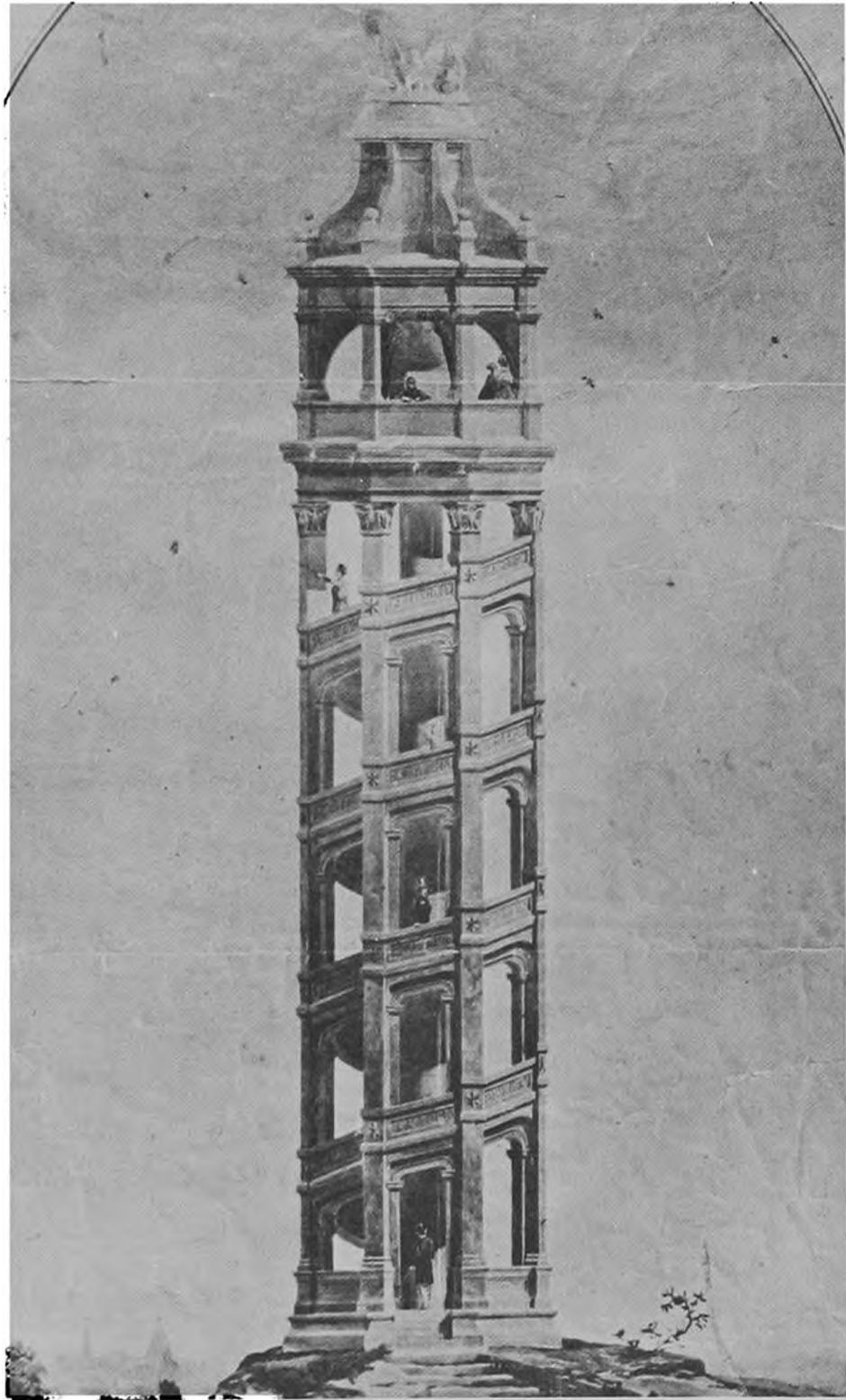
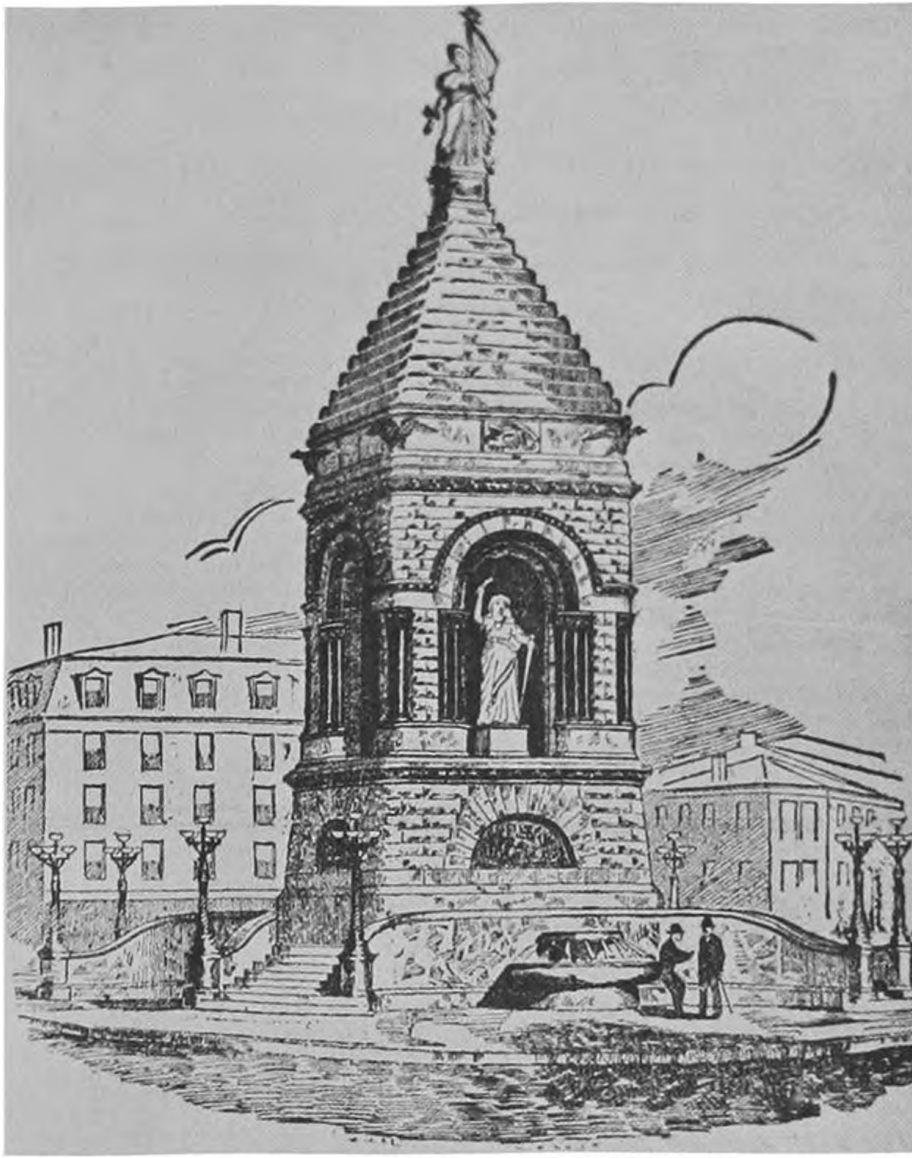


Fig. 2. Rendering by Henry O. Avery.



THE SOLDIERS' MONUMENT.

Fig. 3. Design by Francis Fassett.

The monument association's opinion, too, was unanimous, but when bids for the work came in \$12,000 above the budget, they rejected the proposal and turned to the Hallowell Granite Company up the coast. That company's seventy-two foot version (Fig. 4), sketched by

company designer Alexander Currier, included a pedestal with “two typical bronze figures in a sitting posture”³² and the inevitable vertical shaft. Though initially satisfied, the committee eventually turned this down as well.

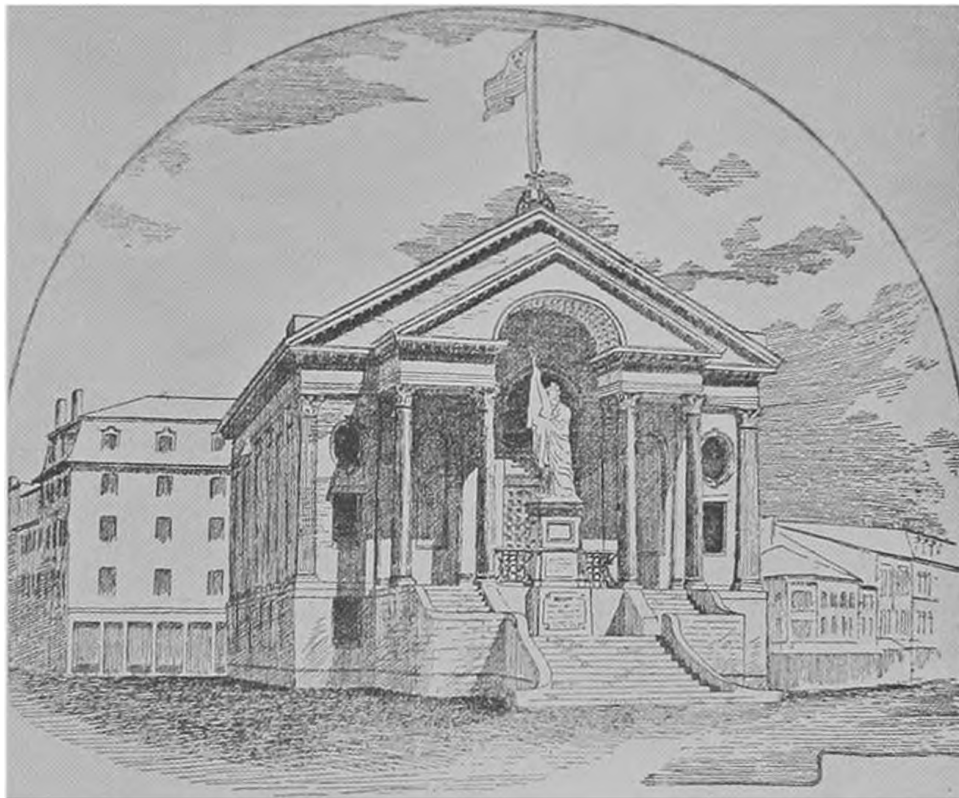
Suggestions continued to trickle in from all quarters as the committee was stymied once again. Mayor James P. Baxter proposed recycling the old Greek Revival City Hall



Fig. 4. Design by the Hallowell Granite Company.

as a home for the Grand Army of the Republic and its records (Fig. 5). He argued that “massive and memorial tombstones – many of them unsightly in the extreme – are scattered abroad over the face of the entire continent” and that “the new way is to erect buildings, in which memorials appealing *directly* and *definitely* to the eye and thought can be preserved.”³³

Karl Gerhardt (b. 1853), a machinery designer who had shown such promise in sculpture that a benefactor had sent him to Paris to study, sent a sketch from his studio in Hartford. It showed an assemblage of figures around the base, including groups depicting “The Rally” and “The Return” with “the City of Portland offering her sword to the defenders” on top.³⁴



DESIGN FOR THE PROPOSED MEMORIAL BUILDING.

Fig. 5. James Phinney Baxter's Proposal.

W. Clark Noble (1853-1938), a Maine native just starting his career in sculpture, wrote from Newport. He had begun modeling in the clay hills of Gardiner, Maine, and gone on to study under Horatio Greenough and William Morris Hunt in Boston. In the early years of the twentieth century, he supplied numerous monuments and portrait statues to cities throughout the nation, but in the final days of the Portland competition, he could only pull together a few rough sketches.

None of these ideas captured the fancy of the committee. Finally, in the spring of 1888, the frustrated members concluded that “the idea of a competition seems to be a waste of time” and recommended that “the entire matter be placed in the hands of one man, . . . a sculptor of national reputation, a citizen of Maine and one who would take pride in designing a monument to be erected in this city.”³⁵

That man was Franklin Simmons, who had remained strangely absent from the entire proceedings since his design had been accepted without action in 1875. A journalist noted several years later that Simmons “never [broke] the rule he early made, barring himself from the entering of a competition,”³⁶ and he apparently counted on the influence of friends H. B. Brown and John Neal, and he waited until the time was ripe. In 1887 he told the committee that “I will take home a design for your monument, if it is not too late,” and in June of 1888 explained his views on the proposed monument:

A general similarity seems to prevail in the style of soldiers and sailors monuments that have been erected in our country Where a small sum of money is expended, there is one statue, and where a large sum is expended, there are only additional figures of about the same size The idea which I regard with the most favor . . . is the idea of one figure which shall symbolize the triumph of the Union . . . to be accompanied . . . not by a *single* statue of a soldier and sailor, but by a *group* of soldiers on one side and sailors on the other.³⁷

Simmons told the committee, "a work of this kind is impressive either on account of its originality, its magnitude or its superior execution,"³⁸ and set out to fulfill all three points. In execution, the military figures (Fig. 6) are rich with historical detail, yet boldly modeled, showing an allegiance to the new realism of Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French which Simmons

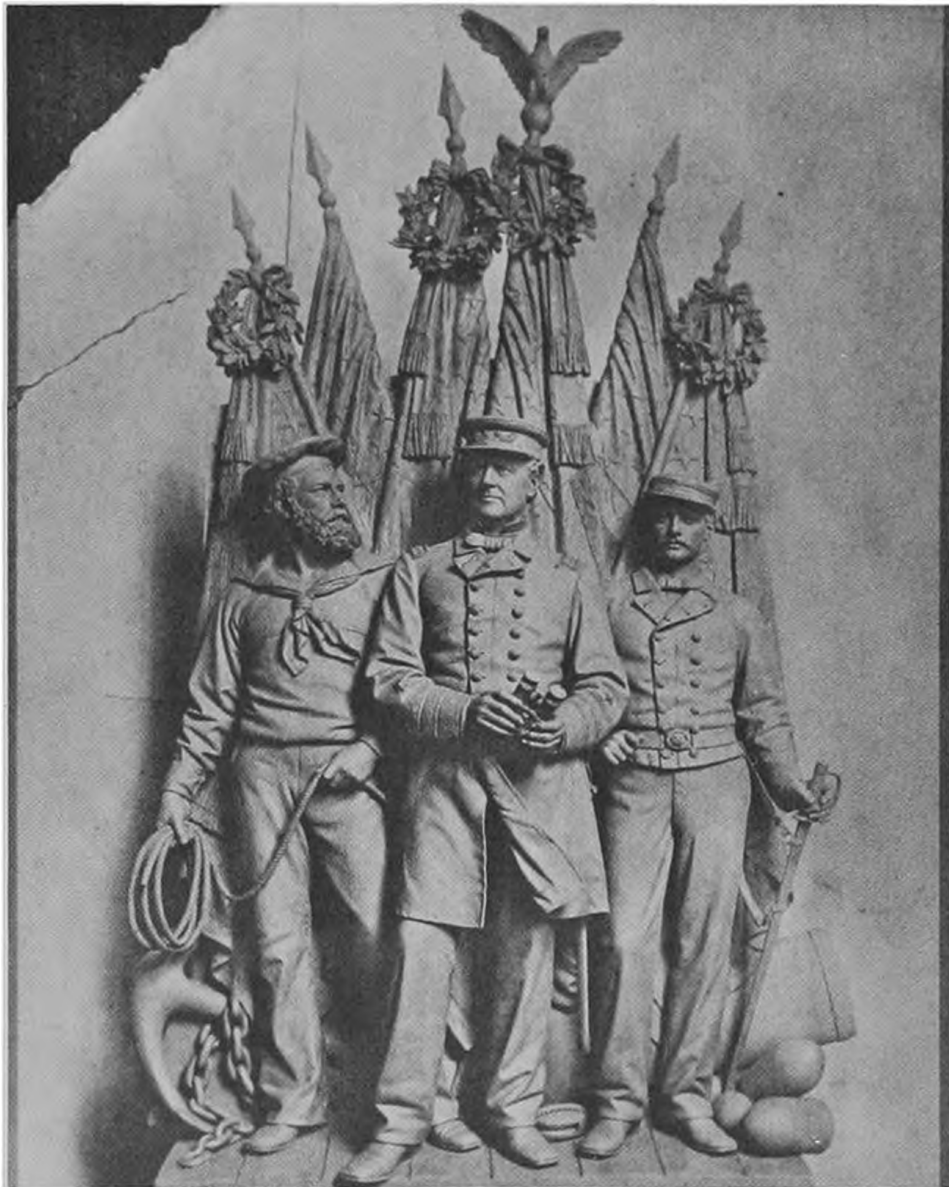


Fig. 6. Plaster model of the naval group in Simmons's studio in Rome, c. 1890.

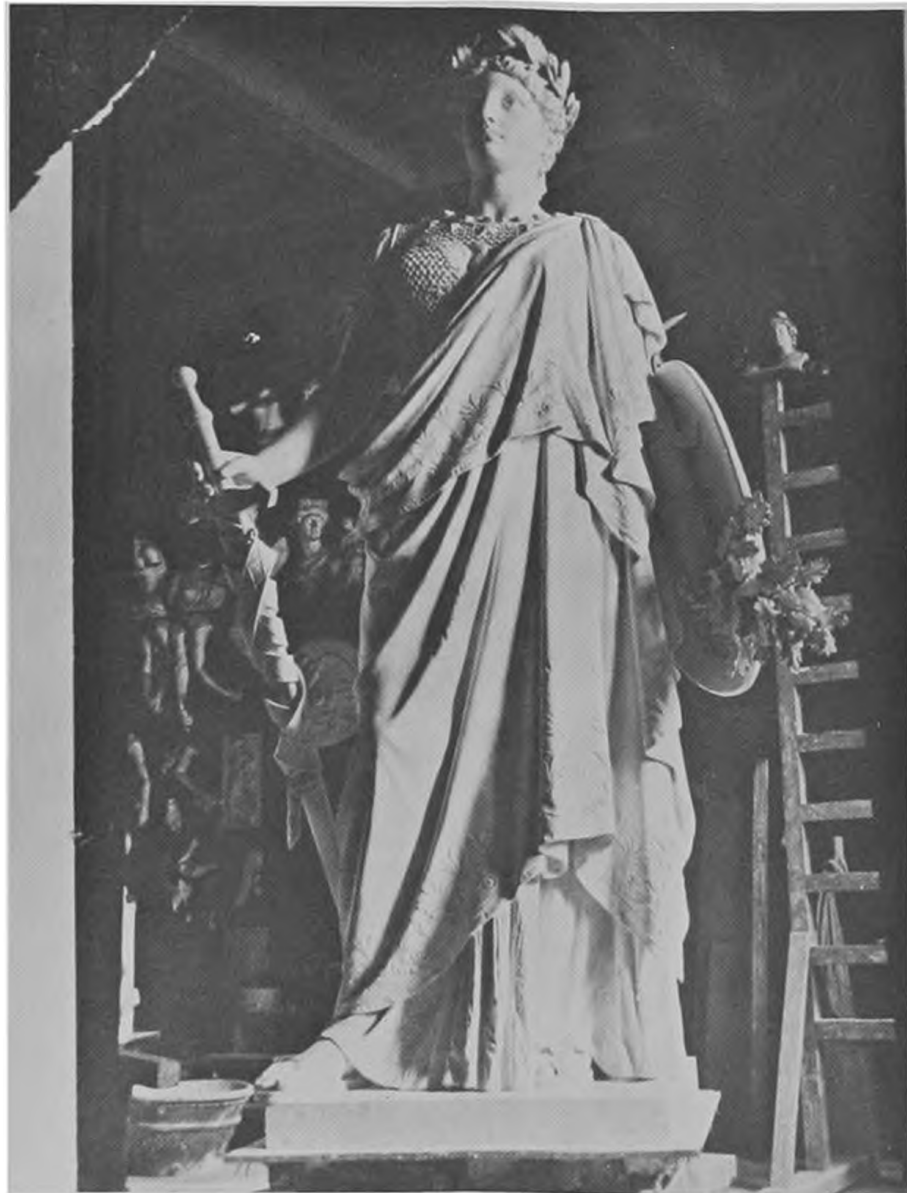


Fig. 7. Plaster model of the Victory figure in Simmons's studio in Rome, c. 1890.

had adopted in earlier memorials to Edward Little and Longfellow. In terms of sheer size, the Victory (Fig. 7) was reported to be the largest bronze in the country after Crawford's Liberty atop the Capitol dome, and shipment of the sculpture from Naples was delayed over a month in 1891 until a large enough vessel could be found.³⁹ The

classically simple base and gracefully massed figures were as different from the cluttered compositions common to contemporary monuments as Romanesque and Shingle Style architecture was from Ruskinian Gothic and Queen Anne, giving a total effect which is indeed “most original and . . . most impressive.”⁴⁰

Though the original concept was Simmons’s, the finished work (Fig. 8) owes much to the architect of its base, Richard Morris Hunt. The first American to graduate from the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Hunt (1828-1895) was a master of classical composition and creator of a long list of monuments, headed by the base for the Statue of Liberty. The stark simplicity of the Portland monument, as well as its classical detail, are very similar to Hunt’s more famous work.

How Hunt became involved, and how much creative input he provided, are unclear. The first reference to him in the association records was an entry on July 24, 1888, stating that drawings by Hunt had been received from Simmons. In May of 1889, Simmons wrote to express his disappointment that Hunt and the committee could not agree on a fee, saying, “I hope the Committee will employ him if they have the means. He gave a great deal of time to the monument, wrote a lot of letters and did a lot of talking and has as good taste in such matters as anybody we know in our country.”⁴¹ Hunt’s papers contain only a brief reference to a visit by Simmons to his Newport home in 1889.⁴² The relationship was apparently mutually satisfactory, for the two later collaborated in designing the General John A. Logan Monument in Washington, D. C.

After the design committee’s laborious fifteen-year search, the execution of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument proceeded smoothly. By the fall of 1890, plaster models of the sculpture were being cast in bronze at the Italian foundry. The king and queen of Italy viewed



Fig. 8. Soldiers and Sailors' Monument, Portland, c. 1895.

the work there, and knighted Franklin Simmons. The finished sculptures reached Portland the following summer, and on October 21, 1891, with oratory and fanfare, Our Lady of Victories was formally dedicated. The words of General John Marshall Brown, head of the monument association, provide a fitting conclusion to the story of this Victorian landmark:

There have been obstacles on the way, but they have been surmounted; there have been delays, but we have forgotten them now; there have been moments of despondency and doubt, but there are none tonight; for the work is done and well done, and Patriotism and Loyalty and Death for the Nation's life has, at last, a fitting monument on the fittest spot, of the fairest city of our land.⁴³

NOTES

¹ T. H. Bartlett, "Civic Monuments in New England," *American Architect and Building News* 10 (1880): 28.

² *Portland Sunday Times*, August 15, 1909.

³ *Portland Daily Press*, October 4, 1873.

⁴ Robert L. Alexander, "The Public Memorial and Godefroy's Battle Monument," *Society of Architectural Historians Journal* 17 (March 1958): 19.

⁵ Bartlett, *Civic Monuments* 10 (1881): 303.

⁶ Preston Powers to Committee on Design, April 27, 1866, Portland Soldiers' and Sailors' Association Papers, Maine Historical Society (hereafter cited as PSSA).

⁷ *Portland Daily Press*, May 16, 1874.

- ⁸ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1887.
- ⁹ Quoted in Albert Ten Eyck Gardiner, *Yankee Stonecutters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 13.
- ¹⁰ W. B. Van Ambridge to H. B. Brown, February 17, 1887, PSSA.
- ¹¹ Courtesy of Ms. Juliette Tomlinson, director of the Connecticut Valley Historical Association.
- ¹² M. H. Mosman to [Committee on Design], undated, PSSA.
- ¹³ Alexander Doyle to H. B. Brown, January 31, 1888, PSSA.
- ¹⁴ *New York Times*, March 23, 1924.
- ¹⁵ This information, as well as that on Alexander Currier and John Calvin Stevens and numerous nineteenth-century Portland newspaper citations, was offered by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. Reference to Brown's studio was made in a letter from Clarence S. Luce to H. B. Brown, March 20[?], 1886, PSSA.
- ¹⁶ Clarence S. Luce to H. B. Brown, December 1, 1885, PSSA.
- ¹⁷ *Portland Daily Press*, November 23, 1885.
- ¹⁸ *Boston World*, December 22, 1922.
- ¹⁹ Alexander Doyle to H. B. Brown, January 31, 1888, PSSA.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1885.
- ²¹ Preston Powers to Committee on Design, April 27, 1886, PSSA.
- ²² William G. Turner to [Committee on Design], December 14, 1886, PSSA.
- ²³ H. O. Avery to H. B. Brown, March 24, 1887, PSSA.
- ²⁴ *New York Herald*, December 4, 1890.
- ²⁵ "War of the Rebellion," undated newspaper clipping in PSSA.
- ²⁶ Henry O. Avery to H. B. Brown, January and February 21, 1887, PSSA.
- ²⁷ Alexander Doyle to H. B. Brown, February 24, 1887, PSSA.
- ²⁸ Anonymous letter to Committee on Design, April 24, 1887, PSSA.
- ²⁹ H. O. Avery to [H. B. Brown], May 21, 1887, PSSA.
- ³⁰ Marvin Tractenburg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), p. 15.
- ³¹ *Portland Daily Press*, September 3, 1887.
- ³² *Ibid.*, November 9, 1887.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, January 9, 1888.
- ³⁴ Karl Gerhardt to H. B. Brown, February 9, 1888, PSSA.

³⁵ Committee on Design to Executive Committee, June 14, 1888, PSSA.

³⁶ Stephen Cammett, "Franklin Simmons: A Maine-born Sculptor," *Pine Tree Magazine* 8 (August 1907): 95.

³⁷ Franklin Simmons to H. B. Brown *et al.*, June 14, 1888, PSSA.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Portland Transcript*, September 2, 1891; Franklin Simmons to H. B. Brown, April 20, 1891, PSSA.

⁴⁰ Franklin Simmons to H. B. Brown *et al.*, June 14, 1888, PSSA.

⁴¹ Franklin Simmons to H. B. Brown, May 11, 1889, PSSA.

⁴² Alan Burnham, ed., "The Richard Morris Hunt Papers," unpublished manuscript, New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, p. 197.

⁴³ *Portland Daily Press*, October 28, 1891.

Pamela W Hawkes is a native of Portland. After receiving her B.A. from Williams College in 1975, she did graduate work in historic preservation at Columbia University where she received an M.A. in 1978. Ms. Hawkes now lives in Washington, D.C. where she is employed as an architectural conservator.