

2017 Members Excursion Washington Memorial Chapel

John O. Senior

On Saturday, 8 July 2017, the annual Members Excursion organized by the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society took us to Washington Memorial Chapel, located in the midst of Valley Forge National Historical Park. Many people have driven past the outwardly familiar site without really knowing what treasures are to be found inside, and our excursion was a wonderful opportunity to get a privileged look at the spectacular architecture, stained glass, sculpture, and furnishings, along with insightful commentary by respected experts.

In addition to our own members and friends, we were also glad to welcome members of the King of Prussia and Radnor Historical Societies who joined us for the afternoon, continuing a nice tradition started several years ago.

The Society is very grateful for the exceptional support provided by the staff, vestry, and board of the Washington Memorial Chapel and Heritage, and especially for the invaluable help provided by Roy Almquist and Gardiner Pearson as we were planning for and organizing the event. We are also very appreciative of the generous participation by the gentlemen who shared with us their in-depth knowledge about various aspects of this very special place.

After the audience gathered and settled comfortably in the spectacular (and fortunately air-conditioned) Chapel sanctuary, Society president John O. Senior



(ABOVE) Washington Memorial Chapel, with adjacent Cloister and Bell Tower. (BELOW) George Reisner talking about the history of the Chapel in the beautiful sanctuary, surrounded by remarkable stained glass windows depicting various aspects of American history. *Photos courtesy of John O. Senior*

introduced the Reverend Roy Almquist, Priest-in-Charge of Washington Memorial Chapel, who talked briefly about the Chapel, the congregation that worships there, and the important initiatives underway to protect and preserve the structure. Following his remarks, he showed a very well-produced and informative video program entitled *Answering The Call* (also available for viewing in the visitor center and on their website at wmchapel.org).

After the video, Rev. Almquist then introduced George Reisner, who presented a compelling historic overview, highlighting some of the vast array of artistic treasures and particularly the craftsmanship of four Philadelphia-based artisans responsible for many of the chapel's interior details, including sculpture designed by architect Milton B. Medary, metalwork by Samuel Yellin, woodwork by Edward Maene, and stained glass by Nicola D'Ascenzo. Rather than more typical religious subjects, these windows beautifully depict various themes from the history of America, and are a fascinating story unto themselves. After George's talk concluded, carillonneur Doug Gefvert presented an overview of the history of the Bell Tower and Carillon, and after a few questions were answered, we broke into smaller groups to further explore the facilities.

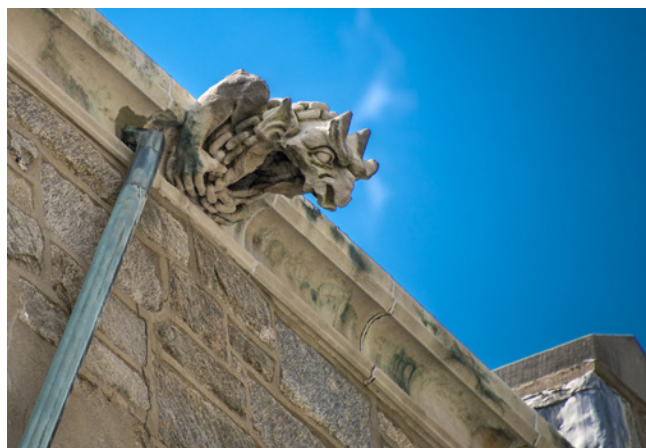
Three guided tours were offered: Carillonneur Doug Gefvert led tours of the Bell Tower and Carillon demonstrations for those willing to make the climb; Associate Priest Rev. Dr. Karl Krueger led the "Outdoor Introduction to the Gargoyles," complete with copies of a self-guiding tour guide for those wishing to engage in further independent study; and finally George Reisner conducted an indoor tour focused on "The Hardware and Lamps of Samuel Yellin."

Our visit concluded with some time for delicious refreshments, including the now-traditional tea sandwiches, and casual conversation in the Bishop White Library on the lower level.

This special members' event was a great success and was thoroughly enjoyed by those who attended. For those who have not yet visited, you are strongly encouraged to explore the Chapel, Bell Tower, Churchyard, Cloister, Cabin Shop, and other features of the surrounding area, and to lend your support to the preservation of this wonderful cultural resource. Visitors are also welcome at the worship and music services held in the Chapel.



Rev. Karl Krueger pointing out the gargoyles that surround the roofline of the Chapel. The gargoyles are a subject that Father Krueger knows well and his enthusiasm was shared by his audience, some of whom were equipped with binoculars to better view the gargoyles at the Chapel roofline high above. *Photos courtesy of John O. Senior*



The gargoyle named "Aart - Like an Eagle."
Photo courtesy of Roger D. Thorne





The structure on the southeast corner (left side in the adjacent photo) of the Bell Tower houses the steep spiral staircase that leads up to the small chamber where the carillonneur performs. Those able and willing to make the climb were rewarded with a demonstration performance of the bells by carillonneur Doug Gefvert, and a chance to ask questions about how the complex mechanism works, and what is involved in a performance on the massive instrument.



(ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) The Bell Tower; several of the massive bells, housed in the lower section of the bell area in the upper section of the tower; the small performance chamber high in the tower, above some of the bells and below others; Doug Gefvert demonstrating performance technique, using his closed fists on the wooden levers; the steep spiral staircase that leads up to the top of the tower. *Photos courtesy of John O. Senior*



(BELOW) Doug Gefvert playing a piece for an appreciative audience of intrepid climbers. *Photo courtesy of Roger D. Thorne*





Rev. Roy Almquist (on the right) enjoying refreshments and conversation with a guest during the reception in the Bishop White Library. Note the painting (upper left) of Bishop William White (1748–1836), first and fourth Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States, and founder of the Episcopal Academy in 1785. *Photo courtesy of Roger D. Thorne*

(LEFT) The Justice Bell, a replica of the Liberty Bell, once again on display in the ground-floor entry hall of the Bell Tower, with new interpretive signs, following reinstatement after recent restoration and the replacement of its wooden yoke. *Photo courtesy of John O. Senior*

The following background information concerning the Carillon and the Chapel was obtained from the Washington Memorial Chapel website (wmchapel.org), and is used here by permission

THE CARILLON

The beauty of the historic rolling hills of Valley Forge National Historical Park is enhanced by the stately presence and noble sound of the National Patriots Bell Tower, a gift of National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Completed in 1953, the tower and its carillon are living memorials dedicated to the memory of General George Washington.

THE BELL TOWER AND CARILLON

With 58 tuned bronze bells, the carillon ranks as one of the world's largest and most beautiful. The bells weigh a combined total of 26 tons (ranging from 13½ pounds to 8,000 pounds) and cover a range of nearly five octaves.

Many modern carillons are played electronically, but this carillon is played entirely by hand from a keyboard located in the midst of the bells. The bells do not swing, but are bolted stationary in a steel framework. Keys and pedals are

connected to the bells' clappers by a mechanical system of direct cranks, roller bars, and steel cables.

The keyboard of 58 oak batons and 24 pedals provides the carillonner sensitive musical control of the instrument. Directly beneath the bells is the carillonner's studio with a piano and practice keyboard. This keyboard uses hammers to strike small metal bars rather than the bells, allowing the carillonner to practice quietly.

In addition to the carillon, the National Patriots Tower is also home to the Justice Bell, a full-size replica of the Liberty Bell that traveled Pennsylvania between 1915 and 1920 in support of the women's' suffrage movement, and a wonderful collection of over 1,400 porcelain, glass, and metal miniature bells.

Also within the tower are the names of many patriots inscribed in stone, stained glass, on brass tablets, and in a huge Book of Remembrance.

HISTORY OF THE CARILLON

The Washington Memorial National Carillon evolved from a smaller collection of fourteen bells dedicated in 1926. Construction of the bell tower began in 1941 and was completed in 1953.

ORIGINS

An inspiration of the founder of the Chapel, the Rev. W. Herbert Burk, the Washington Memorial National Carillon evolved from the Star Spangled Banner National Peace Chime, which consisted of fourteen bells—one for each of the thirteen colonies and one representing the “National Birthday.” This fourteenth bell bears a star and the name of every state in the order it came into the Union.

The first fourteen bells ranged in weight from 3,500 pounds to 225 pounds. The chime was dedicated on July 4, 1926 in commemoration of 150 years of American independence.

CONSTRUCTION AND COMPLETION

The chime had been intended only as the initial step in securing enough bells for a National Carillon. Fourteen more Meneely bells were added in the late 1920’s and 1930’s and were assigned in the order of the individual state’s population. These lower 28 bells were cast by the Meneely Bell Foundry of Watervliet, New York.

Construction of the new bell tower began in 1941 but had to be suspended for the duration of World War II. Mrs. William Stark Tompkins, State Regent of the Pennsylvania Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, established the Washington Memorial Committee in 1941 to raise funds and build the new tower and complete the carillon.

The DAR undertook not only the construction of the tower but also included an honor roll for all Revolutionary War soldiers and one open to all men and women serving in World Wars I and II, and several special memorials such as the State Seal of Pennsylvania, the Keystone above the main entrance, and the DAR windows. In 1950, the construction of the new tower was resumed and took three years to complete.

The lower 28 bells were cast by the Meneely Bell Foundry of Watervliet, New York. The upper 30 bells were cast by the Paccard Bell Foundry of Annecy, France.

The tower and carillon were dedicated on April 18, 1953. The ceremony was followed by the Dedicatory Recital performed by our first carillonneur, Frank Péchin Law. The first musical composition played on the carillon was our national anthem.

HERITAGE

Washington Memorial Heritage is an independent nonprofit organization that supports urgently needed preservation and restoration work at Washington Memorial Chapel.

OUR MISSION

Over the past century, the ravages of climate and environmental pollution—along with the wear and tear wrought by the many thousands of visitors we receive each year—have taken their toll on Washington Memorial Chapel. The Washington Memorial Heritage works to restore, preserve, and enhance the art and architecture that are the fabric of the Chapel and its grounds.

HISTORY OF THE CHAPEL

The Washington Memorial Chapel was built as a tribute to General George Washington and the patriot soldiers of Valley Forge. The inspiration for the Chapel resulted from a sermon preached by our founder and first rector, the Rev. Dr. W. Herbert Burk, of Norristown, Pennsylvania.

In June 1903 the cornerstone was laid on private property donated by the I. Heston Todd family. A small framed building preceded the present structure which became known as the Theodore Roosevelt Chapel, in honor of President Roosevelt, who visited the site in 1904. The Chapel was completed in 1917.

Designed by Milton B. Medary, Jr., the Chapel was erected for two purposes. It is the home of an active parish as well as a national memorial to Washington and the Continental Army, welcoming visitors from all over the world and serving as a “wayside chapel” for those who visit Valley Forge National Historical Park.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Both the Chapel and the Washington Memorial Heritage are private organizations. Visitors are often surprised to learn that we receive no funding from the National Park Service and are not formally affiliated with the Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Washington Memorial Heritage was created as a secular nonprofit technically separate from the Chapel itself, qualifying as a charity under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. This allows foundations and individuals who might not contribute to a purely religious organization to aid in the preservation of this magnificent building, which has been described one of the foremost examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the United States.

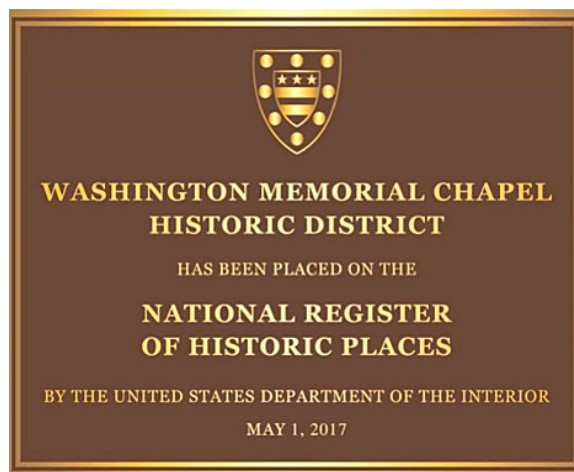


Interior woodwork. © 2017 John O. Senior

Preserving the Heritage, Building the Future — Adapted from progress reports by Rev. Roy Almquist in PATRIOTS' NOTES, the church newsletter of Washington Memorial Chapel, Valley Forge, Pa.

WONDERFUL ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

Last April, we received the very good news that the Chapel has succeeded in our efforts to have Washington Memorial Chapel added to the **National Register of Historic Places**. The National Park Service has recently advised us that we have been added to the register effective May 1, 2017. This action is an extremely valuable designation, as we move into Phase Two of our campaign and solicit support from foundations, corporations, and historical restoration trusts. Many will not consider a project that does not have NRHP designation. This project has been in the works for almost ten years, guided by George Reisner, Gardiner Pearson, and our consultant, Jane Dorchester. We thank them for their tireless efforts. In coming weeks, the Heritage will attach a plaque to the Chapel to announce the designation.



This spring, we also learned the Chapel has succeeded in our application to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for a matching grant (a Keystone Grant) for the repair and restoration of the Chapel. The grant is for \$80,000. Obviously, this is a very positive development and will also assist us as we move into the next dimension of our Campaign and begin to raise funds and to contract for the next dimension of the vital restoration work.

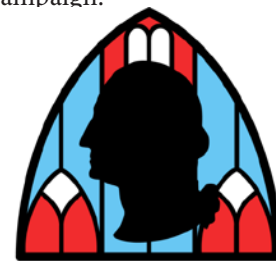
RESTORATION CAMPAIGN COMPLETES PHASE ONE



Starting in the fall of 2016, members of the congregation and good friends were approached in Phase One of the **Campaign for the Restoration of the Chapel** and asked to make a commitment for a gift that could be given over the thirty-six months of the Campaign. Initial response from members and others was most encouraging. At the Celebration Dinner on June 10, 2017, those attending watched the Campaign video, *Answering The Call*, produced by our own Liam and Fionn Reid. A report from John Carey, Vice President of the Heritage and coordinator of construction, reviewed what has been accomplished to date and noted that pledges and gifts to the Chapel and to our partner organization,

Washington Memorial Heritage, surpassed our intended goal of one million dollars. We are now moving into Phase Two and the leadership for the Campaign switches from the Campaign Steering Committee to the Washington Memorial Heritage Board. A new member of the Board and of our congregation, James Dawson, will be providing some important leadership, along with our other consultant, Lisa Titus, Director of Development for Daikon Lutheran Ministries. Both are career fund-raisers and development officers. For Phase Two, we will depend on professional leadership and we will soon be hiring people to carry out the many important tasks for a successful regional and national campaign.

Approximately \$150,000 worth of emergency repairs has already been completed. Three of our thirteen stained-glass windows have been restored. We thank the Color Guard of the Pennsylvania Society, Sons of the Revolution (the John Paul Jones window), the Huguenot Society (the Lafayette Window), and Dr. David Humphrey, Ms. Gayla McCluskey, and Ann & Lanny Patten (the Anthony Wayne Window) for their generous gifts that have enabled the restoration of those three windows.



A significant segment of restoration commenced in fall 2017 (\$390,000), which will include major masonry repairs, repointing, removing coping stones at the Sanctuary parapets and rebuilding masonry below as needed, removal of deteriorated sealant and replacing all failed sealant joints, including coping stones, deep grouting of two hollow wall areas, rebuilding the chimney cap on Bishop White Library chimney, removal of all sheet copper built-in gutter linings, and provision of new alloy-coated copper linings with expansion joints, reinstalling some slate shingles, re-pointing all obscured joints prior to new gutters, and providing new cornice coping flashings to replace all sky-facing reglets (thin flat bands that receive the top edge of the flashings). This work is funded by contributions to the Campaign and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Keystone Grant (\$80,000). John Carey, Vice President of the Heritage, is overseeing all of this work. We look forward to your support in helping us to complete our mission.