

106 SUCCESS STORY

Dedicated Stewards Re-Vision and Preserve Oldest Civil War Monument Louisville, Kentucky



“This project benefited from a team of dedicated NCA staff and contractors, from the inception and management by the NCA History Program, to the conservators, stone carvers and the participating institutions in Louisville. The project complexity and application of technical expertise demonstrated NCA’s commitment to stewardship of important national cemetery cultural resources.”

—PATRICIA TYSON
Director, Management and
Communication Service, National
Cemetery Administration



THE STORY

The 32nd Indiana Infantry was organized during the summer of 1861. Every man in the regiment was a German immigrant from Indiana or neighboring Cincinnati, Ohio—earning the unit the unofficial name of “First German” Indiana regiment. The 32nd Indiana Infantry and Confederate forces fought the Battle of Rowlett’s Station on December 17, 1861, at Munfordville, Kentucky. The battle was small and results were indecisive, but 40 Union and 91 Confederate casualties resulted. In Kentucky, the importance of the battle was soon overshadowed by the Union victory in the Battle of Mill Springs on January 19, 1862, which led to the Union campaign into Tennessee.

After the battle, the 32nd Indiana camped near Munfordville for approximately two months. During this time, Private August Bloedner carved an impromptu memorial to the soldiers killed in the fight. He used local stone and inscribed it with an elegant German script and American iconography. The monument was installed in late January of 1862 on the battlefield graves, less than a year after the start of the conflict. Following the war, the remains and the monument were relocated to the new Cave Hill National Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky. The 32nd Indiana Monument, the oldest existing Civil War monument, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing object in the Monuments of Kentucky Multiple Property Nomination in 1997.

THE PROJECT

By the 1950s, the monument carved from soft, porous Genevieve limestone, was spalling, with the ornate panel describing the battle, and names, birth dates, and birthplaces of those who fell, quickly vanishing. By the early 2000s, about half was gone. In 2008, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), supported by the Louisville German American community and various Civil War heritage groups, realized the object required immediate stabilization. NCA proposed to relocate and conserve the deteriorating monument with the goal of permanently placing it in an environmentally controlled facility for display and interpretation. To ensure the 32nd Indiana’s sacrifice would continue to be honored on site, NCA also proposed to construct a successor to the original monument at the national cemetery.

Photos: Above: moving day, 2008; Right, dedication event Cave Hill National Cemetery; Frazier International History Museum, new home of original monument (photos courtesy NCA)

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Photos: Left, during treatment in 2009; Right, installation of successor monument; Below, carving the successor (photos courtesy NCA)

THE 106 PROCESS

NCA, an administration under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the federal agency carrying out the project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 review process under the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires agencies to identify historic properties and objects and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those resources. Federal agencies are also required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of historic properties when adverse effects are likely to ensue.



From the beginning of consultation, NCA and the Kentucky State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) agreed that the preservation of the 1862 monument was the top priority, despite the recognized adverse effect of removing the object from its historic setting. Acknowledging that the adverse effect was unavoidable because the monument would continue to deteriorate if it remained outside, NCA focused consultation on resolving how the monument would be cared for in the future. NCA entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the SHPO to guide the implementation of the project, including a framework for the conservation, stewardship, and eventual display of the monument. The MOA also outlined requirements for the successor monument and guidance on interpretive signage at Cave Hill.

Consulting Parties:

Department of
Veterans Affairs,
National Cemetery
Administration
Kentucky Heritage
Council (SHPO)

Following execution of the MOA on December 3, 2008, the monument was removed for professional conservation. In 2010, the preserved monument was placed on public display in the lobby of Louisville's Frazier History Museum. NCA dedicated the new monument at Cave Hill National Cemetery on December 16, 2011, a day shy of the Battle of Rowlett's Station's sesquicentennial. The successor was carved by hand from hardy local Indiana limestone and echoed the original work in appearance with one major exception: the German inscription is carved on the front face, but the back is inscribed with an English translation. A wayside sign tells the monument's story and guides visitors to see the historic monument in its museum location.

THE SUCCESS

The 32nd Indiana Infantry Monument illustrates the value of long-term planning, technical expertise, and outreach that can be achieved through collaboration in the Section 106 process. Consultation produced an innovative outcome preserving and interpreting a unique Civil War German American artifact for future generations, ensuring the sacrifices of the "First German" regiment would not be forgotten.

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