

106 SUCCESS STORY

Reconstruction of Cemetery Monument Preserves Legacy for Future Generations Kennebec County, Maine



“The poor condition of this obelisk meant NCA had to completely rebuild it. This is an extreme preservation effort, but it resulted in the exciting discovery of an 1889 time capsule. Now the restored monument will assuredly anchor the Togus cemetery landscape for years to come.”

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



THE STORY

After the Civil War, the Eastern Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was established in 1866 outside of the city of Augusta, Maine, in an area referred to as Togus. Established by Congress in 1865, the Home system was designed to provide medical, surgical, and domiciliary care for disabled Union veterans in a comforting and homelike setting. A cemetery was established west of the Eastern Branch main campus as the final resting place for resident veterans; eventually the cemetery became Togus National Cemetery.

In 1883, to recognize those interred, Gen. Luther Stephenson, governor of the Eastern Branch, ordered the construction of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument consisting of a 26-foot-tall obelisk on a rise at the north end of the cemetery. The local newspaper proclaimed in 1889, “All the other National Home cemeteries are furnished by the Government with large, beautiful and costly monuments, but as Togus is in somewhat of an out-of-the-way place, it has been overlooked in this matter. General Stephenson, however, has determined to remedy the deficiency...”

William Spaulding, a home resident and former marble worker from Pennsylvania, reputedly drew the monument’s design. Additionally, the stonework was completed under the supervision of Jeremiah O’Brien, also a home resident and formerly a noted Massachusetts stonecutter. The granite for the monument was quarried on the home grounds. With the exception of a dedication plaque replaced after World War I, the monument has stood unchanged for more than 120 years. It and the entire cemetery were listed on the National Register in 2012.

THE PROJECT

In 2008, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) conducted condition assessments of its most significant monuments, identifying preservation treatments for 49 of the oldest and neediest monuments in VA national cemeteries. The study determined that Togus Soldiers and Sailors Monument was in desperate need of repair due to the deterioration of the inner core. NCA used funds

Photos: Above, view of completed monument (photo courtesy NCA); Right, historic postcard view of Soldiers Monument (photo from NCA History Program Collection); obelisk in process of being reconstructed August 2010 (photo courtesy NCA)



Photos: Left, contents of the time capsule: a green glass bottle with rolled paper inside, 1889 Boston newspaper, smoking pipe; Right, rededication ceremony showing placement of the new time capsule under capstone (photos courtesy NCA)

provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to implement the recommended repairs.

THE 106 PROCESS

VA, the federal agency carrying out this project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur.

NCA, in consultation with the Maine State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), agreed that the condition of the obelisk required complete deconstruction and rebuilding to ensure it would stand another 120 years. NCA worked closely with the SHPO to develop specific treatment conditions to avoid adversely affecting the historic monument. These conditions included individually cataloguing the 285 stone blocks to ensure reconstruction replicated original details of the monument; reviewing samples of the masonry repointing, joint work, and tooling; and requiring that the masons undertaking the work have proven experience working on historic properties.

NCA agreed to these requirements, and work began in 2010 to disassemble and repair the monument. Two months later, the obelisk had been rebuilt on a sturdier foundation with a reinforced structural core. Additionally, weep holes were incorporated into the mortar joints, and lead caps were installed on skyward-facing joints to provide an extra measure of water-tightness. While dismantling the monument, masons discovered a time capsule in the upper base containing artifacts from the original construction. As part of the rededication ceremony in September 2010, VA placed a new time capsule inside the monument for future generations.

THE SUCCESS

NCA's reconstruction of the Togus obelisk exemplifies the benefits of a federal agency working closely with the SHPO to refine their decisions in order to avoid adversely affecting historic resources. The Togus consultation also highlights the benefit of federal agencies utilizing experienced preservation craft professionals for the treatment of historic properties. The repairs and preservation practices undertaken by VA will ensure the Soldiers and Sailors Monument will stand for another 120 years.

Consulting Parties:

Department of
Veterans Affairs,
National Cemetery
Administration
Maine State Historic
Preservation
Officer

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Section 106 and
the ACHP go to
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