
War memorial has strong R.I. ties; [All Edition]

BILL VAN SICLEN *Journal Arts Writer*. *Providence Journal*. Providence, R.I.: Apr 18, 2004. pg. A.16

Abstract (Document Summary)

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"He meant it in the sense that once you saw Friedrich's design, you couldn't imagine anything else," says Atherton, who served with Brown on Washington's Commission of Fine Arts.

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Full Text (784 words)

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Friedrich St. Florian isn't the only Rhode Islander to have an important role in the design and construction of the National World War II Memorial. Here are quick snapshots of other members of the memorial's Rhode Island contingent:

J. Carter Brown

Inevitable.

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"He meant it in the sense that once you saw Friedrich's design, you couldn't imagine anything else," says Atherton, who served with Brown on Washington's Commission of Fine Arts.

But if St. Florian's design was inevitable, it was only because Brown, who died two years ago at age 67, helped make it possible.

When plans for a memorial honoring World War II veterans first surfaced in the early 1990s, the Rainbow Pool wasn't even on the list of potential sites. Brown, in his capacity as Fine Arts Commission chairman, made sure that it not only got on the list but went right to the top.

"He felt very strongly that World War II deserved a prominent place on the Mall," says Atherton. "To him, it was as important as the Revolutionary War or the Civil War, which are commemorated by the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, respectively."

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At the same time, Brown didn't mind tinkering with details of St. Florian's work rejecting, for example, his cutoff columns symbolizing American casualties.

The youngest son of Brown family patriarch John Nicholas Brown and his wife, Anne Kinsolving Brown, Brown spent most of his adult life in public service, mainly in Washington.

He spent more than 40 years at the National Gallery of Art, 23 as the museum's director. His tenure at the Commission of Fine Arts, the main architectural watchdog panel for the nation's capital, was almost as long, beginning in 1971 and ending just

a few months before his death.

During that time, the commission approved a number of important monuments, including Maya Lin's controversial Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and the memorial to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Still, says Atherton, Brown viewed the World War II Memorial as perhaps his most important legacy.

"I don't think I'd ever seen him more involved or more intensely interested in a project," Atherton says. "It was obvious that he regarded it as the most important project during his tenure as chairman."

Asked what Brown would have thought of the completed memorial, Atherton thinks he would have been pleased.

"Conceptually, I think he was very confident in how the memorial was going to turn out," he says. "He knew the plans inside and out, and he lived long enough to see much of the actual construction. But now that it's finished, I think he would feel very proud. The attention to detail has been amazing."

Nicholas Benson

Benson, 40, is responsible for the dozens of inscriptions that adorn the World War II Memorial.

You might say it's a role he's trained for all his life.

His grandfather, John Howard Benson, was considered one of the finest carvers and calligraphers of his day. His father, John "Fud" Benson, designed and executed the inscriptions for dozens of projects, including the John F. Kennedy Memorial in Virginia's Arlington National Cemetery and the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Like his father and grandfather, Benson runs the John Stevens Shop, a Newport stonecarving studio that traces its beginnings back to the Colonial era.

Antonio C. Ramos

As the owner of New England Stone Industries, a major stone supplier with operations in Smithfield and Quonset/Davisville, Ramos, 61, is responsible for most of the 8,500 tons of granite used in building the World War II Memorial.

Much of that amount, including all the granite used on the memorial's walls, pillars and pavilions, is a light gray-pink granite known as "Kershaw" so called because it comes from a New England Stone-owned quarry in Kershaw, S.C.

The memorial also features granite from Georgia, North Carolina, California and Brazil.

Gilbane Building Company

As project manager, Providence-based Gilbane was responsible for overseeing construction of the World War II Memorial. The firm was hired in 1999, following a competitive bidding process.

By all accounts, Gilbane and the dozens of other contractors involved in the \$110-million project came through with flying colors. According to officials of the American Battle Monuments Commission, the memorial was completed on time and under budget.

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Section: *News*

Text Word Count 784

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