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**Changed Memorial, Changed Meanings:
The History of Oberlin's Soldiers Monument**

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Submitted Spring 2010

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“[A]ll our yesterdays diminish and grow dim: so that, in the lengthening perspective of the centuries, even the most striking events... must inevitably, for posterity, fade away into pale replicas of the original picture, for each succeeding generation losing, as they recede into a more distant past, some significance that once was noted in them, some quality of enchantment that once was theirs.”

-Carl Becker, Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, December 9, 1931¹

Introduction: A Storied History

Oberlin’s Soldiers Monument stands in Wright Park, at the corner of Main and Vine Streets. Visitors to the Monument can walk across a bridge over Plum Creek to get a closer look at the memorial wall. The main features of the brick wall are four large marble plaques, bearing the names of ninety-six Oberlin soldiers who died during the Civil War. The plaques and four smaller plaques below them, stating the battles where these men fell, are of a noticeably different material and style than the other plaques in the wall, which list fallen Oberlin men from World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. The eight Civil War plaques take up most of the Monument’s body, pushing the other wars to the sides. Why are the Civil War plaques the main feature of the Monument? The mystery of the centrality of the Civil War plaques to the Monument is only revealed when the visitor takes a few steps back. Inscribed on the steps leading up to the Monument are the words:

In this Monument erected in 1942 are incorporated the marble tablets and architectural details from the Soldiers Monument, Designed by Charles Churchill, Erected 1870, Dismantled 1935.

The inscription on the current monument immediately implies the most important fact about the Soldiers Monument: it has a storied history. Originally dedicated in 1871 and situated at the corner of College and Professor Streets, the first Soldiers Monument, a gothic spire, was a memorial that celebrated the Oberlin community’s recent triumph in the Civil War and

¹ Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (January 1932): 221-236.

memorialized the sacrifices of those who fought. The Monument fell into disrepair over the years and was deconstructed in 1935. After seven years of stalled action, the Monument was rebuilt in its current form and location. Through the years, the conditions in Wright Park led to further structural danger for the Monument, and significant repairs were done by the American Legion in 1983, adding the plaques for the other wars. Wright Park's conditions continued to cause structural damage to the Monument, necessitating further repairs in 1998.

To date, there has not been a concerted attempt to tell the full history of the Monument. Attempts to summarize the story of the Monument have fallen short in one way or the other, creating flawed impressions of the Monument that which are perpetuated in Oberlin literature. The Monument, in one form or another, has existed for nearly 140 years, around eighty percent of Oberlin's history. Its history is irrevocably linked to the history of the community, and therefore must be understood in the context of the times.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the whole of the Monument's history. In doing so, it will attempt to place the events of the Monument's inception, construction, dilapidation, deconstruction, reconstruction, and continued refurbishing and restorations in the context of their eras: each of these actions was informed by the meanings that the actors placed on the Monument during that time. As such, this thesis will attempt to chart how and why the meaning of the Monument for the people of Oberlin has changed throughout its history.

The dominant narrative about the Monument attributes its 1935 deconstruction to a political gap between the college and the town. This interpretation is lent credence by an event in 1934 where a college peace protest at the Monument was interrupted by townspeople, members of the American Legion. The controversy came from differing attitudes towards war and patriotism held by these groups during the 1930s, and the Monument acted as a point where

those attitudes could come into conflict. While the Monument's deconstruction, a cooperative act between the college and the town, was not directly caused by the conflict between these two ideals, the attitudes present in Oberlin that surround the events of 1934 and 1935 are critical to understanding why the Monument's history can be interpreted in this way.

Because of this controversy, part of this thesis will be devoted to how the Monument is affected by the changing relationship between the college and the town. The Monument plays a unique role in this part of the story: it was created at a time where the college and town held a common identity. The Monument, founded by this more intertwined college and town, fell into disrepair only a few years after its founding because of confusions over which part of the organization was supposed to care for it. As the college and town grew apart over the years, the issue over which group controlled the Monument, which stood on college grounds but was used more by the town, remained unresolved. It was only after the Monument's deconstruction that the town took a more controlling interest in the Monument. The reconstructed Monument stands a block away from Tappan Square, college ground and the center of the town: but a block is a crucial difference. The Monument is outside of traditionally "college" ground, and can be considered almost completely a "town" memorial.

In another way, this thesis will show how basic factors of running a town have negatively impacted the Monument. Securing funding for memorial action is usually the result of a mobilized base of dedicated individuals who wish to enshrine on the landscape the subject they wish to memorialize. The story of the Monument is fraught with incomplete funding, tight budgets, and general lethargy on part of the Oberlin community. The original Monument wasn't dedicated until six years after the war it was meant to memorialize was over, and the Monument's 1942 reconstruction took seven years to happen. Various times throughout its

history, after damage was inflicted on the Monument through natural occurrences, it would take years for the community to gather the organizational muster to repair the Monument.

This thesis will also explore how the Monument's meaning for the town has changed over time, to the detriment of the Monument's original message. The Monument, originally designed as a distinctly Civil War memorial, represented both the ideological triumph of Oberlin's views during its early history and the sacrifice that it paid for that triumph. The Monument was also intended to be used as a didactic tool, teaching future Oberlin generations about the values of patriotism that these men embodied: when war came, they took up arms for their country, no matter how high the cost. This meaning was clearly established for the Monument by the speakers at its dedication, but has changed drastically throughout its history. Because the Monument became the central space for Oberlin's Memorial Day celebrations, the de facto spot for Oberlin patriotic remembrance, its meaning instead adapted to fit whatever paradigm the term 'patriotism' fit into at the time. As such, the Monument lost meanings that were linked to its Civil War origins and to a unique point in Oberlin history. In return, it was symbolically subsumed by remembrance for other wars, and eventually also literally subsumed when other plaques were added to it. To explore these changes to the Monument, this thesis will chart the meanings that the people of Oberlin have placed on the Monument, beginning with its creation after the Civil War.

I. Establishing and Neglecting an Oberlin Monument

“Thus the loyalty of the people, which had been suppressed or overborne for years, at once found free scope, and the national flag was thrown aloft. Oberlin fairly blossomed out with the stars and stripes, and it was a great relief to know that these were the symbols of righteousness and liberty, and not of oppression.”

-James Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College*²

The Righteous Cause

Writing in 1883 for Oberlin’s fiftieth anniversary, College President James Fairchild declared that for the world at large, Oberlin was both an “institution of learning and a community,” the two having “a common origin and a common history.”³ The same cannot be said for today: the town of Oberlin and Oberlin College are very different. The specific details of how the town and the college grew apart are not necessary to understand the story of the Soldiers Monument: it is only important for now to keep in mind that the Monument has its beginnings in the period of time where the college and town were one.

Oberlin’s origins play a large part in the story of the Monument, as they help explain why there was such an overriding need for a Monument to memorialize Oberlin’s involvement in the Civil War. Most Oberlin historians, including College Archivist William E. Bigglestone in *Oberlin: From War to Jubilee*, a history of Oberlin’s 17 years between the end of the war and the town’s fiftieth anniversary, credit the cementing of Oberlin’s attitudes that led to its substantial involvement in the war to the influence of Charles Finney, the Great Awakening revivalist who became the college’s second President. Finney’s appointment, a resolution of the 1835 crisis when the College faced closing, was dependent on the decision to students of all races “helped

² James Harris Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883* (Oberlin, Ohio: E. J. Goodrich, 1883), 162.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

make Oberlin a major source of antislavery agitation” as well as an important stop on the Underground Railroad.⁴

President Fairchild described Oberlin’s conflict with slavery as a moral one, “a conflict of ideas and principles.”⁵ Originally, Fairchild states, Oberlin planned to apply moral pressure on slaveholders so that they would recognize the moral injustice of slavery and release their slaves themselves. At the same time, Fairchild acknowledged that “non-resistance” was not an option, and “the right to repel by force injustice and outrage,” as part of the general Oberlin philosophy, was used to guard the Oberlin community from fugitive slave-catchers.⁶ As the 1850s drew along, the Oberlin community became more and more entwined with anti-slavery action. The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue of 1858, perhaps the most famous event of Oberlin’s early history, showed Oberlin’s willingness to flout national law in favor of moral law. Bigglestone commented that the rescue “nudged the country a bit closer to war.”⁷ Another nudge towards war, John Brown’s 1859 raid at Harper’s Ferry also brought Oberlin to national attention: Brown’s father was a College trustee, and Brown had siblings who attended the college.⁸ In addition, two Oberlin men joined the raid. Oberlin had gained a national reputation for being an instigator of abolitionist sentiments.

Fairchild denied contemporary accounts that Oberlin was an environment that created “younger Browns” who, “from their cradle up,” were taught that they should “rob slaveholders of their property” and “commit murder for the cause of freedom” in God’s name.⁹ He instead characterized Oberlin’s sentiment as a hopefully peaceful one, based on moral principles.

However, if “the woeful day” came, if “hope in moral influence for the abolition of slavery” was

⁴ William E Bigglestone, *Oberlin, from War to Jubilee, 1866-1883* (Oberlin, Ohio: Grady Pub. Co, 1983), xii.

⁵ Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 154.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷ Bigglestone, *Oberlin, from War to Jubilee, 1866-1883*, xiii.

⁸ Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

past, then the men of Oberlin had to “let the responsibility” to take up arms “rest where it belongs,” on their shoulders.¹⁰ When the war broke out, Oberlin’s men quickly took up arms.

The Civil War was, of course, not just the culmination of Oberlin’s early history: it was the defining event of American history for the nineteenth century, and impacted almost every community in the country some way. The war still is the bloodiest in American history, with over six hundred thousand combined Union and Confederate deaths. These deaths impacted almost every town in the country. In addition, the struggle over the South’s secession brought into question the founding values of the Constitution and the purpose of the nation. Like many communities, Oberlin had to find its own meaning from the losses it faced: Ninety-six of the Oberlin men who went to war were killed, and Oberlin had to deal with their loss. What did their sacrifice mean to the community? What could they do to remember them?

The Need for a Monument

Oberlin’s contribution to the war was a point of extreme local pride. Even before the end of the war, Oberlin citizens were taking action to make sure that their soldiers would be remembered. In January of 1865, in his “sketches” column in the *Lorain County News*, Professor Henry Perk, who had taken part in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, mused on the sacrifice of those students. To him, their actions had inspired him so much that they had become “living witnesses of God’s truth” and “standing examples of conduct and trust”.¹¹ Peck felt that the example that Oberlin’s war dead had given was so strong, that it would be “useful” to other students to “have some reminder of the valor and self-devotion of the three hundred and fifty heroes whom the school has sent into the war”.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 159.

¹¹ Henry Peck, “Sketches, Of which Soldiers and their Kinsfolk are the Subjects”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]). January 11, 1865

¹² Ibid.

To this end, Peck felt that the school should construct a monument in a “conspicuous place,” that would tell everyone who saw it the virtues of the Oberlin soldiers. This monument would help preach to future generations: it would “sober” the “frivolous” and teach them “that there is a life better than that of pleasure” and it would teach the “disheartened” that “truest success and rest are found” through “self-sacrificing devotion”.¹³ It would serve to teach everyone who saw it that they should not hesitate to fight for their country. Additionally, Peck wanted the monument to be financed by students and alumni, who from each only a small contribution would be needed. Peck’s comments begin the narrative of the Soldiers Monument as an imparter of values teacher for the Oberlin community.

The movement to build a monument continued through the year. On April 12th, the *Lorain County News* reported that a group of students would be working with the College’s Executive Committee to procure the funds to build a suitable monument.¹⁴ A month later, the newly formed Monument Association sent a letter to community members asking for donations. In this letter, they reiterated that the swift response of Oberlin students to the call of duty was “a source of pride and satisfaction” for anyone who had a stake in Oberlin’s community.¹⁵ To this end, a monument in their honor would be “one of the most useful and impressive” ways that they could impart these values onto the community.¹⁶ The letter also noted that the students had already started contributing to the fund, and that they needed to raise at least \$2000.

While initial plans for the construction of the monument planned for it to be completed during the summer of 1865, funds had not materialized at that point. In August, to celebrate the fifth reunion of many of the students who had gone off to war, there was a large alumni

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Monumental Committee”, *Lorain County News (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio])* April 12, 1865

¹⁵ John Ellis, C. Churchill, & A. Johnson, Executive Committee letter to Minerva E Ellis, regarding funds for Monument, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁶ John Ellis, C. Churchill, & A. Johnson, Executive Committee letter to Minerva E Ellis, regarding funds for Monument

celebration. During this celebration, Professor John Millet Ellis spoke to an “overflowing” crowd on the necessity of memorializing the fallen soldiers. Ellis noted that it they “offered their all” for the community, and it was “by their death we live”.¹⁷ In order to honor this sacrifice, Oberlin’s community needed to “enshrine their memory in [their] deepest hearts and teach it to [their] children,” and it would be a “shame” if they didn’t.¹⁸ At a dinner, Professor Peck and Major General Jacob Dobson Cox, Oberlin alumnus and future Governor of Ohio, both spoke of the need to honor the soldiers by supporting the planned Monument.¹⁹ Their urging resulted in the donation of \$500 more to the monument fund.

Despite these gifts, it took three years for the Monument’s construction to move forward. Unveiled in early 1868, the original plan for the Monument, designed by Professor Charles H. Churchill and the Monument Association, was drafted as a large octagonal stone tower, fifty feet high, and twenty feet in diameter, and lined with marble tablets where inscriptions for the war dead would be made.²⁰ This tower also be a “practical utility,” as It would be would also be used as an observatory, “occupied by the College” and house a new telescope that the college had purchased.²¹ The *Lorain County News* called this design excellent, but practical concerns kept it from becoming a reality. That June, President Fairchild and the College trustees met to consider the question of the monument. Because they lacked a quorum, those involved in the meeting could not take any official action, but all present supported the College working with Churchill’s Association in order to establish the Monument, recommending that the land next to the Second Church, on the corner of College and Professor Streets, should be given for the Monument.²²

¹⁷ “Report of the Soldiers’ Monument Committee”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]). June 8, 1871

¹⁸ “Report of the Soldiers’ Monument Committee” ,

¹⁹ “The Alumni Coalition”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).Aug 30, 1865

²⁰ “The Soldiers’ Monument”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).Jan 29, 1865

²¹ Ibid.

²² Minutes of the College trustees, June 9, 1868, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

However, they changed their decision at a meeting in early August when they decided that Churchill's design, a tower that doubled as an observatory, would "involve a greater expenditure" than they had realized in June, and that as a result, they would have to rescind their backing of Churchill's design.²³

It took another two years for Churchill's Association to come up with both a design for the Monument that would meet the Trustee's approval and the funding to make that design a reality. By April of 1870 the Association had finally decided on the plans for the Monument. After examining Civil War memorials in monuments in New York City and Washington, the Association decided on a sandstone structure, based on the abundant production of sandstone in Lorain County, which was "rapidly gaining a world-wide renown for its beauty and durability."²⁴ However, the initial contractor's estimates for the Monument came in ranging from \$3300 to \$5000, while the Association only had \$2300 in pledges. Most of the rest of the cost was covered by Mr. Clough, who owned the quarry that provided the sandstone for the Monument, leaving \$900 unpaid.²⁵

The new design for the Monument, a forty-foot high gothic spire, was celebrated by the *Lorain County News* as being "one of the handsomest of its kind in the world".²⁶ The new design, created by Churchill, featured designs of all of the army corps the Oberlin men served in and retained the idea of marble plaques for their names. With a design finalized, the next question would be where to place the Monument. All of the talk concerning the Monument's message made it apparent that the Monument would have to be close to the heart of the community, in order for it to be able to pass on lessons of dedication and sacrifice. Many supported putting the

²³ Minutes of the College trustees, August 1, 1868, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

²⁴ "Report of the Soldiers' Monument Committee" ,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "The soldiers monument for Oberlin will be one of the handsomest of its kind in the world", *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).May 12, 1865

Monument on Tappan Square, Oberlin's central space, but there were two problems that prevented it from being placed in the square: firstly, the Monument could not be located near trees, as being in the shade provided by trees in close proximity would allow moss to grow and cover the Monument.²⁷ Secondly, the only land available on the square was prone to flooding, which would over time discolor and ruin the Monument.²⁸ With these concerns in mind, the Monument Association had to select a place that was central enough to the community that it could still pass on its message. The land on the corner of College and Professor that the College trustees were willing to give earlier seemed to be a good place. The *News* noted that unless trees were planted there, the Monument would be able to maintain prominence. Churchill and his Association agreed, stating that that it would be appropriate for the Monument to be "a little away from the throng and bustle of business" while still being easy to access.²⁹

By the end of May, the College's Prudential Committee voted in favor of allowing the Monument Association this land, provided that "the College [would] be permanently relieved of the care of the lot".³⁰ This small caveat, transferring ownership of the space from the College to the Monument Association itself, marked the first move in the Monument's confused history of ownership, which would play a factor in the neglect leading to its deconstruction. But regardless of this small ominous note, the availability of a place for the Monument represented the fruition of the plans for all those that desired it: with the laying of the foundation on Decoration Day, Oberlin would after five years have its memorial to the men who represented the ideals of its community.

Memories Encoded

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Report of the Soldiers' Monument Committee" ,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, May 24, 1870, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

The original message of the Soldiers Monument is important to an understanding of the Monument's story, as it colors the impression of the Monument for those involved in its deconstruction and reconstruction, and therefore the impression that people hearing that story give. It also helps see just how the message changes over time. Knowing why the Oberlin community felt they needed to memorialize the soldiers, the question now changes. What ideals and messages did they attempt to inscribe on the Monument and ascribe to it during its construction? How solidly these ideals were encoded into the Monument will help show why they did or didn't survive throughout Oberlin's history.

When the Oberlin community began to plan the Monument, they were driven by two basic needs: the first was to honor the sacrifice of the Oberlin men who went to war, and the second was to use impart onto new members of the Oberlin community of the values that the community held dear. These two ideals were reiterated in the addresses during the foundation of the Monument. In the *Lorain County News's* coverage of the events of 1870's Dedication Day, it stated that "Oberlin was founded on the principles of patriotism and liberty" and that when the war started, young men from the community took that message to heart and enlisted so "that the country might be saved and its institutions made free to *all* men."³¹ The *News* also bragged that Oberlin's contributions were so great that a man from Oberlin could be found "in nearly every brigade in the Western army."³² The ideals of honoring the dead were so important to the community and the *News* that the paper went out of its way to make a point of pride as to how many stores were closed in observance of Dedication Day. It also disparaged the owners of the

³¹ "Decoration Day", *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).June 2, 1870

³² *Ibid.*

stores that didn't close, stating that "[s]ome... will be anxious to peddle... when the world is on the brink of dissolution."³³

Patriotism had been a tricky subject in Oberlin before the war. Fairchild, in *Oberlin: The Colony and the College*, noted that two years before the war, Oberlin had been in conflict with the government over the issue of slavery and Oberlin citizens and students had been imprisoned. Fairchild remarked that "an antislavery man had found it difficult, for many years, to maintain his loyalty," and that for many, the flag had become a "symbol of oppression."³⁴ With the election of Lincoln and the beginning of the war, Oberlin's abolitionist men could proudly stand with their government in the pursuit of a righteous cause. This change in attitude towards patriotism in Oberlin at the beginning of the Civil War is similar to the change in attitude that occurs at the beginning of World War II.

Professor Smith's address at Westwood Cemetery stressed honoring the fallen Oberlin soldiers, "not [because] they were nobler or better than their comrades who survived" but because "we love the nation... they saved" with their sacrifice.³⁵ Smith called the volunteers an example as to why America was a land of heroes who made "[their] times the heroic age of modern history."³⁶ This made it necessary for everyone "to take afresh the vows of loyalty" and to "swear by these martyrs' graves" that they would "maintain and defend" the institutions and country that they died defending.³⁷ For the *News* and the large crowds involved with the Decoration Day services, the Civil War was a defining moment for the whole community.

Oberlin had fought and sacrificed for what they believed was right, and had ended up saving the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 161.

³⁵ "Decoration Day",

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. The strong attitude towards memorializing Civil War heroes was again seen by the *News* when they discussed the decoration of another monument at Westwood, this one for John Brown and his followers, including John A. Copeland, Jr., an Oberlin native. See Nat Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

country. The ideals of the town, supporting the Union and abolition, had prevailed in the war, and it was the survivors' duty to keep upholding those ideals.

After the ceremony at Westwood Cemetery, Oberlin's Decoration Day party moved to the site of the future Soldiers Monument, where members of the Monument Association laid the foundation stone. President Fairchild then remarked on the Monument. He began by calling the work of remembering "easy," compared to "the long years of the war," where so much time was spent anxiously awaiting news from the front.³⁸ As such, creating the Monument "should be an occasion of great gratitude," as Oberlin was finally able to "commemorate the triumph of principles" that the community honored.³⁹ Fairchild closed his remarks by wishing the Monument would stand for a long time in order to teach all who saw it "the lessons of courage and faith" that the soldiers gave them.⁴⁰

After President Fairchild spoke, General Giles Waldo Shurtleff, an Oberlin alumnus who organized the 127th Ohio Volunteer Infantry/5th US Colored Infantry, the first black regiment in Ohio, gave his address to the crowd. For Shurtleff, building the Monument was a permanent act of memorialization, as compared to the transitory ones of Decoration Day. The concept and the message behind the Monument were important to Shurtleff. Instead of being another piece of "undue admiration" that rewarded prowess or ambition, this Monument would be an offering to the memories of men of all ranks who died for their country.⁴¹ Instead of commemorating "national conquest" and inspiring "military spirit," the Monument would "commemorate and inspire that spirit of self-sacrifice which characterized the martyr soldiers" of Oberlin.⁴² Instead of the "heartless" wars that inspired the Spartans or the Romans, or the desire for more land that

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

prompted the Mexican-American War, or “national pride” for the War of 1812, the Civil War captured the “earnest heart of the nation.” Shurtleff characterized the outbreak of the War as a moment where as a people; Oberlin had to face “imminent peril to [their] national life.”⁴³ As a result, “all the hearts” of Oberlin came together, and the people of the town were “transformed into earnest, self-sacrificing patriots.”⁴⁴ Therefore, it was entirely appropriate to create a true Soldiers Monument for the Oberlin men, as they fought with a “genuine devotion to the cause of humanity.”⁴⁵ The cause of the Civil War, for Shurtleff, was the culmination of the spirit of the town’s founding and the greatest cause that it could commit itself too.

Shurtleff himself is honored in Oberlin by a statue, which stands in front of the aptly named Shurtleff Cottage on South Professor Street and states:

Believing in the ability of the negro to aid in the fight for his freedom, he organized the first regiment of colored troops raised in Ohio. Inspired by his leadership they offered their lives for the freedom of their race.

The text of Shurtleff’s statue brings to mind the “Shaw Memorial,” the monument in Boston that memorializes the Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth Regiment, the first black regiment in any state.⁴⁶ The Fifty-Fourth has a specific tie to Oberlin: John Mercer Langston, Oberlin graduate and the first black lawyer in Ohio, was recruiting officer for the regiment⁴⁷.

The history of the Fifty-Fourth is also fraught with complications. Kirk Savage, in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, which deals with the complexity of Civil War memorialization, notes that the “glorification” of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the regiment, “tends to obscure the even greater risks of and challenges the black

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, Public planet books (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

⁴⁷ Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War*, 248.

troops faced.”⁴⁸ The Shaw Memorial, like Shurtleff’s statue, shows the white leader as the central figure. However, Savage argues that through the depiction and humanization of the black troops marching with Shaw, the memorial “was able to elevate the white hero without demoting the black troops,” paying a proper tribute to all the men of the Fifty-Fourth.⁴⁹ This is reflected in the Shaw Memorial’s text. The memorial admittedly does glorify Shaw and the white officers by stating they “cast in their lot with men of a despised race unproven in war and risked death as inciters of servile insurrection if taken prisoners.”⁵⁰ However, it also points out the hardships and accomplishments of the black men of the regiment. The Memorial’s text claims that the men of the Fifty-Fourth “volunteered when disaster clouded the Union cause” and “were brave in action, patient under heavy and dangerous labors, and cheerful amid hardships and privations.”⁵¹ The inscription on the Shaw Memorial focuses on the actions of both the white leaders and the black soldiers, and notes their joined accomplishments. Shurtleff’s statue does no such thing: the statue itself only shows Shurtleff, and the text focuses solely on the white hero and his inspiring leadership that allowed the black men to take up arms for their race.

Shurtleff’s statue, and his comments concerning the nature of the Civil War at Oberlin’s Decoration Day bring to question what truly was the most important issue concerning Oberlin and the nation during the war. The prevailing modern sentiment about the war is that slavery was its most important cause and issue. It would be wrong to criticize Shurtleff or any other Oberlin soldiers for ignoring the issue of slavery, but the remarks at Decoration Day give the impression that, for those living at the time, the central issue of the war was the maintenance of the Union,

⁴⁸ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 195.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵⁰ “NGA -- Shaw Memorial -- The Memorial and Its Conservation -- Inscriptions 1,” <http://www.nga.gov/feature/shaw/s4200.shtm>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

not the abolition of slavery, despite the centrality of slavery to Oberlin's reasons for going to war in the first place.

In order to properly honor those who gave their lives for Oberlin's defining cause, the Monument had to preserve that memory for the future. For Shurtleff, the Monument should not only keep the names of those who died on its marble tablets, but it should also inscribe those names "on the fleshy tables of our hearts," so that all young people who come to Oberlin would "gain inspiration from their sublime example."⁵² It would also serve to act as a reminder of the devotion that Oberlin showed its soldiers during the war, "a perpetual memorial of that inspiration to worthy achievement which [their] *Alma Mater* gave [them]."⁵³ The Monument would tie the vision of the founders of Oberlin into the fulfillment of that vision by "the blood" of those who "died in the cause for which Oberlin was founded". Shurtleff ended his address by reiterating the belief that the Monument should always stand as a "constant reminder" of Oberlin's values for the future.⁵⁴

After the Monument's foundation on Decoration Day, the construction proceeded rather quickly, and was nearly finished by late October of the same year.⁵⁵ Funds from declared pledges still were missing however, and the *Lorain County News* urged citizens to contribute so that the Monument Association did not bear the entire cost of the Monument. The *News* stressed that the Monument was a matter of public interest, and that if everyone in Oberlin contributed; the cost to each would be little.

The Monument was dedicated on Decoration Day in 1871. The *Lorain County News* had nothing but praise for the new Monument, describing the surface of the spire as "bright and

⁵² "Decoration Day",

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "The Soldiers monument is nearly completed", *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]) October 20, 1870

cheerful in tone,” “free from blemishes,” and made in “the most workman-like manner” with “solid masonry”⁵⁶ The *News* described the architecture as Gothic, but “not severely copied from any existing example” of the style while remaining stylistically similar enough to avoid charges of “being hybrid or inelegant”.⁵⁷ While this charge was perpetuated by the *News*, little evidence exists to support that the Monument truly was stylistically unique. The Monument resembles both a memorial dedicated in 1844 to Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh and the famous memorial to Prince Albert in Hyde Park, London, which was dedicated in 1872 but had its designs approved in 1863.⁵⁸

The tallest spire of the Monument, resembling a church’s steeple, was home to the engravings while a smaller spire stood in each corner. The inscription on the Monument read: “To our brave volunteers who fell in the war for the Union-1861-1865”. This inscription, while short, holds important meaning: it defines the Civil War as “the war for the Union,” implying that the values central for the war were the preservation of the country and the values it holds. The inscription also stresses the fact that Oberlin’s soldiers were volunteers who willingly fought for that cause. Again, the Monument’s inscription pushes the question of slavery’s role in the war away in favor of concentrating on the preservation of the Union.

Like in the previous year, stores were closed and “teams in numbers” were out to observe the proceedings.⁵⁹ Professor Smith again gave the first address, noting the community’s “public duty” to preserve the memory of the “heroic deeds” that Oberlin’s soldiers committed towards a

⁵⁶ “Decoration Day. Dedication of Soldiers Monument”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]). June 3, 1871. On a sadder note, William Schallenberg, who did the largest part of the carving for the Monument, was hanged on the 18th of May that year for murdering his adulterous wife. The *Lorain County News* remarked that if he had shot the man, he would have gotten only a few years. See “Village Notes”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]). February 9, 1871

⁵⁷ “Decoration Day. Dedication of Soldiers Monument”,

⁵⁸ British History Online and F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor), “Albert Memorial - Design and commissioning,” June 22, 2003, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47523>.

⁵⁹ “Decoration Day. Dedication of Soldiers Monument”,

“public cause.”⁶⁰ By creating the Monument for them, Oberlin had, as part of the nation that they fought to save, born witness to their memory and the fact that “the race of heroes is not yet extinct.”⁶¹ Those who follow those heroes must cherish their love of the country the heroes died for; otherwise they would “tarnish” the name of the Monument and make the “speaking stone a witness at once of their glory and our shame”⁶². Smith also noted that the patriotism that Oberlin’s men showed stripped away all their differences and made them equal as heroes. He finished by noting that the Monument was a testament for Oberlin’s love, honor, gratefulness, and obligation to the soldiers, and that they should “solemnly swear” to not let anything “destroy what these died to save,” dedicating themselves “to country, and liberty, and God.”⁶³ Professor Ellis spoke next, on how distant the war seemed, six years after the fact but “a hundred years away.”⁶⁴ He remarked that because of this distance, it was ever more important to “call to mind the spirit” of the soldiers, so that memories of them would help those in the present “stand faithful.”⁶⁵ Ellis’s comments about the distance of history are important to remember going forward, as the meaning that these men gave to the Monument would be pushed further and further into the past.

The final speaker, introduced by General Shurtleff, was the noted Oberlin alumnus and future professor, State Representative, Lincoln administration consular, and future Representative James Monroe. Monroe’s popularity in Oberlin was so great that the first company of men from the community took the name “Monroe Rifles,” and his presence was noted by loud applause.⁶⁶ Monroe spoke on the character of monuments in general, stating that

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the question of utility had been asked about this particular one. He agreed that monuments did have to have a utility: they needed “to exert the influence of a salutary character upon the human heart.”⁶⁷ Monuments to heroes and martyrs, according to Monroe, “inspire noble thoughts” in the young as they “instinctively place [their] character against that of the hero” and “feel how [small] they are,” spurring them to action.⁶⁸ Monroe stated that monuments were a direct link to the past, that held the truth on a “sacred page of marble” that young people can “be taught the lesson of patriotism” in the best way.⁶⁹ He hoped that every young man in Oberlin who saw this monument would be driven to “higher purposes” and “loftier goals”⁷⁰. Monroe derided historians and poets, who gave “accounts of base and unworthy lives,” and stated that a “moral eclecticism” kept people from erecting a monument to “base men.”⁷¹

Monroe also spoke of the human need to create monuments, alluding to the fact that the people of Oberlin did that so the Monument “would teach a lesson to all who look at it” in the future.⁷² Monroe spoke to the heroism of the Oberlin soldiers, and how they fought for Oberlin’s principles, not for glory. Just as the Oberlin soldiers didn’t fight for ambition, the Monument was not made for vanity, but to be an influence to the future. Monroe noted the fact that the people of Oberlin gave their money to a Monument when they could have “invested in halls, schools churches, or even sidewalks” was proof of their dedication to “perpetuate [the] memories” of the soldiers and to “teach the young a valuable lesson in freedom and virtue.”⁷³ Lastly, Monroe called attention to the lack of racial distinction on the Monument, once again praising Oberlin’s

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. During his speech, Monroe incorrectly predicted that like Aaron Burr and Benedict Arnold, Jefferson Davis would not receive any monuments like his worthier counterpart, Lincoln. A Jefferson Davis memorial was created in Kentucky in 1924.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

character and the progress of the times. With that, he finished, and received “a tremendous testimonial of applause.”⁷⁴

Monroe’s final comments bring to mind a particularly interesting issue surrounding the Monument: race. Oberlin today certainly derives historic pride from its abolitionist actions in the late antebellum period and the Civil War. Likewise, Bigglestone contends that “when the fighting ended the vituperation [Oberlin] received for advocating an end to slavery and for aiding black people proved not to have been in vain,” and that “Oberlin was a bit smug after the war.”⁷⁵ Yet neither the speeches at Dedication Day nor the inscriptions on the Monument itself give the question of race much pause. Perhaps the pride that Oberlin felt at helping fight to preserve the Union included pride for the fulfillment of Oberlin’s abolitionist spirit, but if it did, that aspect was subsumed completely by larger Union context. For a town that was described as the breeding ground of John Browns, the Monument’s silence towards slavery is puzzling.

Through all of the speeches given on these two dedications, the same two ideals were extolled over and over again. The Monument was to honor the sacrifice of the soldiers and to act as a future transmitter of the values that Oberlin held dear. However, the message actually engraved on the Monument is lacking in comparison to the speech. Recall that the only inscription on the Monument besides the names and companies of the ninety-six soldiers is “[t]o our brave volunteers who fell in the war for the Union-1861-1865”. While an inscription can never compare to a speech, the inscription on the Monument is so brief that, while it does impart valuable meaning about Oberlin’s participation in the war, it can be easily looked over in favor of other meanings for the Monument. The speeches that fully defined the Monument could not stay to protect that definition, and the Monument would have to stand for itself.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Bigglestone, *Oberlin, from War to Jubilee, 1866-1883*, xiv.

Neglect and Confusion

Even though Oberlin had established its Soldiers Monument, it had yet to fully pay for it. Earlier it was noted that the Monument Association had shouldered a part of the cost for Monument. In their report, the Association released the figures: for a \$4,500 Monument, \$900 of funds were still lacking, which the Association paid in order to construct the Monument on time.⁷⁶ At the Monument's dedication, Shurtleff remarked on that "little item of business," and a mixture of subscriptions and contributions equaling about \$300 was raised at that time.⁷⁷ By the time that the missing funds were realized, however, construction was all but underway, and the Monument Association, already having spent so much time working and raising funds with no Monument to show for it, felt the need to complete the work and secure the remaining funds later. However, months after the dedication, the needed funds had still not been raised. The lack of funds calls into question the Oberlin community's zeal towards the memorial endeavor. Despite the messages of and positive response to all the speeches given on the two Decoration Days, the community's inaction on the question of fundraising raises the question: if the Monument was so important, both to and for the people of Oberlin, why did they have such a hard time raising the money for it?

In October of 1871, the *Lorain Country News* remarked on this after a meeting had taken place between President Fairchild and influential men from the town in order to discuss the debt. At the meeting, seven members of the community pledged to cover part of the debt if needed, but first they agreed to make a "general canvass" of the town in order to try to raise funds.⁷⁸ The *News* discussed that because "the people of Oberlin take... pride in the monument," they "owe a

⁷⁶ "Report of the Soldiers' Monument Committee" ,

⁷⁷ "Decoration Day. Dedication of Soldiers Monument",

⁷⁸ "Local Facts and Fancies", *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).October 5, 1871

duty” to the Association, and accordingly, they should pay the money back as soon as possible, perhaps by contributing on the upcoming election day.⁷⁹ With these measures, the needed funds were eventually raised.

The story of the Soldiers Monument after its establishment is primarily one of confusion. While the Monument, for virtually all of its lifetime, acted as the principal site for Oberlin’s Memorial Day celebration, confusion over its ownership caused its continued upkeep to be a tricky question. This confusion over ownership is also what drives some of the current misconceptions over the Monument. Instead of considering the entire story of the Monument, those who confuse the Monument’s story think of it as a primarily town memorial, which it only really became after its reconstruction in the 1940s. Instead, think of the Monument as a product of the time it was built: a Civil War memorial that was created an era where the town and the College were unified. The problem that resulted for the Monument’s upkeep over the years was a procedural one. While a monument may be easily established by a joint organization, the upkeep of a monument is done by one organization. Attempting to answer the question of who was primarily responsible for the upkeep of the Monument after its establishment illuminates the confusion that led to the Monument’s dilapidation.

As mentioned before, when the Prudential Committee voted in favor of granting the lot on which the Monument was to be built to the town, they did so provided that “the College [would] be permanently relieved of the care of the lot.”⁸⁰ This condition was the College’s final word on the matter: a bit later, Shurtleff asked the Town Council for the care and control of the Monument, which the Monument Association had gained from the College, be transferred to the

⁷⁹ “Local Facts and Fancies”,

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, May 24, 1870, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

town.⁸¹ This matter was referred to the Street Committee, who apparently made no report on the subject.⁸² In July of the same year, the College trustees voted to grant the land to the Monument Association.⁸³ Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, the Council handled all requests relating to the Monument, mostly relating to the care and cleaning of the sidewalk around the Monument, including the creation of a new sidewalk cutting a bit across the grounds and joining with the Second Church in order to mow the Monument's lawn. As long as things continued down this relatively hum-drum path, then there would be no problems.

In 1885 a larger issue finally arose that brought the ownership of the Monument into question: repairs. Twice in the year the question of repairs to the Monument was brought before the Council, once in May for repairs of the sidewalk, and again in August for general repairs.⁸⁴ When the Council investigated the matter more closely, it could not discover any record of having received control of the Monument and its grounds from the College.⁸⁵ This was because the attempt in transferring control had taken place through the Monument Association, and the matter had been referred to the Street Committee without any acknowledgement. The Council, however, despite not having record of their control of the Monument, decided to go ahead and find out whether repairs to the Monument were necessary. They sent the matter to the Finance Committee, who in turn asked John Decker, who was in town building Peters Hall, to look over the Monument. Decker reported that while the foundation of the Monument was in good

⁸¹ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, June 28, 1870, Secretary's Office Papers ('RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁸² "Village Council", *The Oberlin News*, July 8, 1898

⁸³ "Village Council",

⁸⁴ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, May 6, 1885, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A, Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, August 19, 1885, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁸⁵ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, September 2, 1885, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

condition, the surface would need to be worked over “to keep the monument from crumbling.”⁸⁶

Despite this warning, the council did not take action on the Monument at this time.

Nature, as it would do several times in the future, forced the Monument issue. In March of 1887 a heavy wind storm hit the town, breaking off the top ornament of the Monument and smashing it into one of the side spires, resulting in several broken points on the Monument’s surface that *The Oberlin Weekly News* described as “quite a disfigurement,” overall.⁸⁷ The Council discussed the dilemma at the next meeting, and resolved to meet with a committee of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veterans association, in order to address the problem.⁸⁸ At the same time, however, Charles Metcalf, who finished serving as mayor, wrote to the Council to once again remind them that the Monument “was never accepted as the property of the Village.”⁸⁹ Therefore, despite the fact that many often complained about the bad condition of the Monument, the Council had no control and the only way to repair it would be through some kind of private subscription.

In May of 1888, *The Oberlin Weekly News* reported that repairs had still not happened, and, more importantly, there seemed to be no one responsible for the upkeep of the Monument.⁹⁰ The *News* decided that while the council, the Grand Army of the Republic, and the citizens had attempted to do something about this issue, nothing had been resolved, and so the matter would fall to the Sons of Veterans, the successors to the Grand Army of the Republic, to initiate a public drive to have the Monument ready for Decoration Day.⁹¹ However, the Sons of Veterans

⁸⁶ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, September 16, 1885, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁸⁷ Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). March 17, 1887, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁸⁸ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, April 6, 1885, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁸⁹ Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). April 12, 1888, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹⁰ “Repairs for the Soldiers Monument”, *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). May 10, 1888

⁹¹ “Repairs for the Soldiers Monument”,

were not the ones who solved the problem. At the next Council Meeting, Mr. O. F. Carter spoke to the Council on the subject of the Monument. Citing the record of Shurtleff's proposition, detailed above, for the Council to take control of the Monument, Carter asked the Council to now take charge of it, citing the "general desire of the citizens that the authorities have the care" of the Monument.⁹² In response, the Council appointed a special committee in order to investigate this matter as well as the cost of repairs to the Monument.⁹³ This committee met with the College's Prudential Committee later that month, and the Prudential Committee voted to approve leasing the Monument's grounds to the village as long as they would be "used for that purpose and the monument" would "be kept in good repair."⁹⁴ The Council accepted this resolution, but needed to deal with legal aspects of the decision before taking further action.⁹⁵ This included meeting with the Township trustees and having them investigate whether the township could assume the costs of gaining control of the Monument.⁹⁶

A year later, action had still not been taken. *The Oberlin Weekly News*, again speaking for the people in standing up for the Monument, bemoaned the fact that no one had done anything: the Village Council didn't have the funds and pushed the matter onto the Town trustees. The Town trustees in return claimed they had no authority. The Grand Army of the Republic/Sons of Veterans felt it was not "in accordance... for the soldiers to attend to it exclusively, when the Monument was in some sense in commemoration of their own deeds": they shouldn't have to be

⁹² Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). May 17, 1888, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹³ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, May 16, 1888, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, May 29, 1888, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹⁵ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, June 6, 1888, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹⁶ Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). July 19, 1888, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

in charge of taking care of their own Monument.⁹⁷ The *News* suggested that, given the lack of a more expedient option: the townspeople take actions into their own hands, form a Monument Association, take custody of the Monument, and raise funds in order to repair the damage to the Monument, so that they can show that “people will not fail in doing honor to the fallen soldiers.”⁹⁸ Despite the *News*’s pleas, no action was taken on the Monument in several months.

Somehow, the situation resolved itself: In November of 1889, John Decker, who was in charge of building Peters, Warner, Talcott, and Baldwin Halls for the College, restored the Monument, replacing the broken pieces and restoring it to the point where it had “a finished and creditable appearance.”⁹⁹ The records from this event are spotty at best: In 1898, Architect William Gerrish, who worked on the Memorial Arch in Tappan Square, reported that in the months leading up to the renovation, the College had paid for the stone pavement on both street sides of the Monument.¹⁰⁰ Given that even after the renovation, the Street Committee was continuing to meet with the Town trustees concerning street pavement, we have to agree with Gerrish’s 1898 conclusion: even though the College had twice shown, in 1870 and 1888, that they were willing to grant control over the Monument to the Town Council, no formal acceptance of the control had ever taken place, even though the town was informally performing these duties “virtually... in accordance with the terms.”¹⁰¹

After Decker repaired the Monument, the Town Council’s concerns returned to the more mundane task of taking care of the grass around the Monument. This confusing state of arrangement between the college and the town concerning the Monument lasted through the next

⁹⁷ Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). May 9, 1889, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Collected Excerpts from *The Oberlin Weekly News* (Oberlin, Lorain County, [Ohio]). November 14, 1889, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁰⁰ “Village Council”, *The Oberlin News*, July 8, 1898

¹⁰¹ Excerpts from Minutes of the Council of the Village of Oberlin, December 18, 1889, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A, “Village Council”,

few decades: in 1917 the town took the care of placing new sidewalks on the Monument, informing the College that the town expected to be reimbursed if the College wished to retake the corner for its own purposes within five years.¹⁰² This confused state of ownership, however, also made it difficult for any further repairs to be done to the Monument, leading to its dilapidation by the 1930s, when the sentiments of the times would conspire to redefine the Monument, this time as the stage for a conflict between college and town.

¹⁰² Minutes of the Prudential Committee, September 27, 1917, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

II. The 1930s: The Meaning of Memory?

“[W]ar is no longer the universally accepted and glorified instrument of national policy which it has been in the past: and that we have now alternatives to war, actual and potential, such as our predecessors never had. The old saying, then, Dulce et decorum est pro patria mort, is only partially true. But this is true beyond peradventure, that it is sweet and right to live for one’s country: Dulce et decorum est pro patria vivere. Patriotism, in the future, is to be measured chiefly in terms of life.”

- Ernest Hatch Wilkins, annual assembly of Oberlin College Students, September 18, 1935¹⁰³

Disillusioned about War

For everyone living after 1941, the 1930s would be forever enshrined as the era between the two World Wars. However, for inhabitants of the time, it was the post-Great War era. Students entering the college during the 1930s were old enough to see the effects of the immediate post-war era, and grew up with the disillusionment that fell after the Great War.

According to President Woodrow Wilson, the end of the Great War promised an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. This idealism had spread to Oberlin through College president Henry Churchill King, a supporter of Wilson and co-head of the King-Crane Commission, which was appointed by Wilson to investigate the disposition of citizens in the former Ottoman Empire towards the political organization of the lands. Oberlin Professor Leonard V. Smith, in his article “Wilsonian Sovereignty in the Middle East: The King-Crane Commission Report of 1919,” describes King’s connection with Wilson’s ideals. King ardently supported Wilson’s views of spreading democracy and national self-determination. However, with the war’s abrupt end, King worried that the war-weary world would allow a “patched-up peace” that would let “the largest single opportunity that the race has ever had for a great forward advance” “slip out of our hands.”¹⁰⁴ This is exactly what happened: The Wilsonian ideals

¹⁰³ “Higher Duty is to Live for Country”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 20, 1935.

¹⁰⁴ Leonard Smith, “Wilsonian Sovereignty in the Middle East: The King-Crane Commission Report of 1919,” in *The State of Sovereignty, Territories, Laws, Populations*, ed. Douglas Howland and Luise White (Indiana University Press, 2008), 62-63.

that had inspired many Americans to embrace participation in the Great War had yielded bitter fruit. By the 1930s, the world had been plunged into a global depression. A militarized Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931. The young men who had fought in the “War to End all Wars” felt deceived by their government, and, for many of those in college in the 1930s, the end lesson of the war was to not fight in an attempt to change the world, but attempt to change the world by refusing to fight.

It was this change in attitude by college students that gave rise to the Oxford Pledge. The Pledge was the result of a February 1933 meeting of the Oxford Union Society, which was debating whether students should pledge to fight “for King and Country.”¹⁰⁵ Kenelm Digby, a third-year student, proposed that “to fight for “King and Country... was a sacrifice of wealth and happiness to the selfish wishes” of the country’s leaders.¹⁰⁶ Digby continued by “[condemning] the martial displays that took place on [A]rmistice [D]ay and [arguing] that the people of the world were far ahead of the statesmen in their desire for peace”.¹⁰⁷ The motion to “in no circumstances fight for its King and Country” passed 275 to 153.¹⁰⁸ The resolution provoked backlash from those who claimed that it would incense Britain’s enemies, who would see pacifism as an appeasement and a weakness. William L. Anderson, a self-proclaimed “anti-state, anti-war” professor at Frostburg State University in Maryland, argues that the Pledge was made by students “who had heard many times of how the state conscripted young men to fight unwinnable battles in horrid conditions,” and who had seen “democratic governments that supposedly held the keys to utopia [manage] to destroy what the bullets and bombs of the Great

¹⁰⁵ Martin Ceadel, “The ‘King and Country’ Debate, 1933: Student Politics, Pacifism and the Dictators,” *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 2 (June 1979): 397.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 397.

War could not.”¹⁰⁹ The Pledge eventually made its way over to the United States and was a strong source of motivation for the students who took part in the 1934 protest at the Soldiers Monument.

This change in the attitude towards war was reflected in Oberlin during the decade. One of the greatest trends in Oberlin’s student body during the 1930s was the movement for peace. The Oberlin Peace Society, founded by President Ernest Hatch Wilkins, was the largest campus organization during the decade.¹¹⁰ The peace movement steadily grew in strength so that by the middle of the decade, the Peace Society counted in its members around half the student body.¹¹¹ Wilkins remained steadfast to the ideals of the peace movement while still stressing the honor of those who sacrificed their lives. In his address at the opening annual assembly for the 1935-36 school year, Wilkins told his students that they should not “accept” the phrase “love of country,” and its more formal equivalent, “patriotism,” without “exploring its real meaning.”¹¹² A classics scholar, Wilkins argued that while, in the past, “[p]atriotism” was “measured chiefly in terms of death,” and quoted Horace, who claimed that “it is sweet and right to die for one’s fatherland.”¹¹³ Wilkins argued with this sentiment, stating that he couldn’t find any modern reason to “suppose that death on battlefield is sweet.”¹¹⁴ For Wilkins, the “right to ask American youth to undergo the terrible experiences of war” was morally inexcusable unless there was only a choice between “abhorrent war and some condition which is even more abhorrent.”¹¹⁵ He therefore found “nothing incompatible between the active abhorrence of war and the honoring of

¹⁰⁹ William Anderson, “The Munich Crisis and Iraq,” April 7, 2003, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/anderson/anderson65.html>.

¹¹⁰ Geoffrey Blodgett, “Campus Life at Oberlin 1930-1945” *Oberlin Alumni Magazine* Winter 1998. http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oampast/oam_winter/campuslife.html

¹¹¹ Blodgett, “Campus Life at Oberlin 1930-1945”

¹¹² “Higher Duty is to Live for Country”,

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

those who... gave themselves.” He commented that the men “commemorated by the crumbing Soldiers’ Monument” volunteered because they recognized the great ill of slavery was more abhorrent than war, and were honored “not because they fought, but because utterly, they gave.”¹¹⁶

Wilkins’ interpretation of the actions of the men on the Soldiers Monument is a slight but noticeable departure from that of the Monument’s creators. To those who established the Monument, fighting in the Civil War itself was a worthy cause, as those who fought did so to preserve the Union. It was right and necessary to praise and glorify them and their cause. Wilkins’ view removes the glory, focusing on the hardships of war. This shift in attitude helps explain the clash between the college students, who followed Wilkins, and the townspeople, who hewed closer to the older meaning of honoring veterans, at the Monument.

Protest at the Soldiers Monument

By the 1930s, the Soldiers Monument, while still being used for the town’s Memorial Day celebrations, had lost much of its prestige. Once the pride of the community, it had gained the derisive nickname “the sunken church,” based on its resemblance a church’s steeple. While its architecture was crumbling from the outside, the ability of the Monument to act as a unifying point for the community was crumbling even faster. The peaceful ideals of college students stood in a contrast with the American Legion and others who used the Monument as a space for memory.

The contest over the Monument as a memory space brings up questions of the division between college and town. What had began as a single community in the 1830s was by the 1930s two separate ones. Only one of these groups, the town, was thoroughly anchored to the history of

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the area, whereas the college community was more transient, especially students who would mostly graduate and leave. Therefore, the Soldiers Monument, the site of the town's Memorial Day celebrations, was a more important artifact for the townspeople than for the students. For these two different groups, the Monument represented two different things: for the students, the Monument represented the needless deaths in war. For the townspeople who continued to participate in the Memorial Day services, the Monument was still a link to the past which continued to carry the spirit of its founding: honoring the sacrifice of Oberlin's Civil War dead. At the same time, since the Monument had also served as a sight for Memorial Day celebrations for so long, it also gained the interpretations of patriotism from every age. Therefore, for the town, honoring the Civil War dead in the Monument became wrapped up in what patriotism meant then, continuing to support the leaders of the United States. These two groups, with two different interpretations of the same artifact, came into conflict with each other on May 30, 1934.

The incident over the Monument was a result of actions taken by the peace movement. Organizers had publicized plans in *The Oberlin Review* to stage an anti-war rally after the Memorial Day services at the monument. Members from three campus organizations: the Radical Club, the National Student League, and the Public Affairs Society, all would come together to perform the rally. Once there, James Austin Richards from the First Church, Clarence T. Craig from the School of Theology, and Wilfred Cromie of the Radical Club would deliver addresses.¹¹⁷ The rally had been called by members of the National Student League, and tied into an event called National Youth Day, which was sponsored by the Youth Section of American League Against War and Fascism. This organization had developed strong ties with Oberlin's peace community, and contributed much to the character of the peace movement's stance and

¹¹⁷ "Radical Club, N.S.L., Public Affairs Society Members To Stage Anti-War Rally Following Services Tomorrow", *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 29, 1934.

actions. A month earlier, Robert Morss Lovett, a vice-chairman of the League, had spoken at the school on the subject of peace. Lovett stressed a very strong form of anti-war protest: he equated war and fascism as being irrevocably linked. He described fascism as “the matrix in which war is formed,” pushing an imperialist, pro-war view on youth.¹¹⁸

The meeting was part of a group of sessions sponsored by campus peace groups, including the aforementioned National Student League and Public Affairs Society. Ninety-six of the hundred and nine students in attendance voted to support a pledge to not “support or cooperate with the United States in any war it may conduct.”¹¹⁹ As another testament to the character of the demonstration, the *Review* urged “all who are opposed to war” to come to participate in the demonstration, and specifically invited students who had signed the Oxford Pledge.¹²⁰ The character of the demonstration, then, was not simply anti-war, but against a kind of culture that promotes reverence for soldiers who died in war: to the students making the movement the message of the Soldiers Monument was not to remember the sacrifices of the soldiers whose names were engraved on it by lauding their actions, but to instead to try to create a world where war didn’t exist. The students, through the context of the 1930s, had created a new meaning for the Monument.

The intent of the demonstration had not been to interrupt the town’s Memorial Day activities: the rally had purposely been scheduled to take place after the ceremonies were over. However, since the rally took place so soon after the Memorial Day ceremonies were over, participants in the town’s ceremonies still remained, and their presence precipitated an incident. During the demonstration, Charles Olds, a college senior, and two other students, Alice Allen

¹¹⁸ “Ninety-Six Students Pledge Selves By Vote Never to Bear Arms”, *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 12, 1934.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Radical Club, N.S.L., Public Affairs Society Members To Stage Anti-War Rally Following Services Tomorrow”,

and Genevieve Olds, had placed eight signs near the monument¹²¹. These cards included the slogans: “Schools, not Battleships,” “Transfer War Appropriations to Needy Students,” “Support the Program of the American League Against War and Fascism,” and “Abolish Military Training In Schools And Colleges.”¹²²

As Richards delivered his address and a student laid flowers to honor those fallen in the Great War, members of the Karl Wilson Locke Post of the American Legion and the Oberlin police department moved in and removed the signs¹²³. Richards made no mention of the removal of the signs during his speech, but continued to speak, arguing that demonstrations like these would show those in charge of the government that there were “many intelligent youth” in the country who, “if war comes again, . . . will take up arms only if their individual consciences” are sure that the government made every step possible to maintain the peace.¹²⁴ There was no confrontation between the two groups during the demonstration, but controversy broke out immediately afterwards.

Controversy surrounding the incident erupted over the anger from groups at the college from their signs being removed. In the following issue of the *Review*, two groups wrote in to express their dissatisfaction with the actions of the Legion. The first was a letter signed by members of the college faculty addressed to the mayor that defended the actions of the students. In the letter, they protested the “discourteous and provocative action” of the Legion men. While the faculty members noted that the placing of the signs may have been “out of character with the place and the occasion” and a “mistake,” they argued that the signs were not disrespectful or in any way conflicting with decorations placed on the monument during the earlier Memorial Day

¹²¹ “Student Signs Anger Oberlin Legion, Police”, *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 1, 1934.

¹²² Ibid., “Legion Men Remove Signs At Monument”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 1, 1934.

¹²³ “Student Signs Anger Oberlin Legion, Police”,

¹²⁴ “Legion Men Remove Signs At Monument”,

service.¹²⁵ And while the faculty members acknowledged that putting up the signs was a mistake, they argued that the greater mistake was made in taking the signs down, as it lent credence to criticisms of the American Legion.¹²⁶ The professors continued to defend the students' program by pointing out that the students had laid down flowers at the monument and were offering homage "to our Soldier dead," just like town groups like the American Legion had done in the Memorial Day service.¹²⁷ In addition, the actions of the students at the demonstration were to honor those who died "by opposing the inhumanitarian institution of war," and the fact that the Legion disagreed with them was not "sufficient justification" for interrupting their demonstration.¹²⁸ The professors concluded their letter by expressing their concern that the Oberlin Police had assisted in the removal of the cards, meaning that this action had been sanctioned by city officials.

The main point of the faculty letter was to express concern over the actions of the American Legion members without creating more tension between the groups. This was not the case with a letter sent by college student Richard Adams, who condemned the Legionnaires, and noted that everyone who believed in the freedom of expression, "particularly the kind... that seemed to intolerable to the outraged Legionnaires," should move to boycott establishments run by those Legionnaires involved.¹²⁹ According to Adams, these included Hill's clothing, Vic's barbershop, Rosa's garage, and Watson's hardware shop.¹³⁰ Adams didn't limit himself to condemning the Legionnaires' actions, as he also ascribed negative motivations and depictions to several of them, including Mr. Hill, who "applauded as loudly as he could the actions of the

¹²⁵ R. S. Fletcher, L. W. Taylor, H. A. Wooster, and C. H. Hamilton, "Faculty Letter to Mayor", *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 1, 1934. This claim was disputed by the *Oberlin News Tribune's* version of the events

¹²⁶ "Faculty Letter to Mayor",

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Richard Adams, "Sheep In Wolves' Clothing", *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 1, 1934.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

marauders,” and a clerk who worked at Hill’s Clothing, who “proudly” uprooted signs with “his face contorted into a horrid grimace.”¹³¹ Adams finished by stating that the Oberlin Police collaborated with the Legionnaires and suggested that the town pay back the police force for helping remove the signs by “removing [them] at the next election.”¹³²

Those who wrote to the *Review* were members of the college community and supported the actions of the students while condemning the actions of the Legionnaires. On the other side, Charles Kinney, editor of the *Oberlin News-Tribune*, praised the League. He said the removal of the signs needed to happen instantly, to emphasize how objectionable the actions of the students were, and the signs’ “bad taste.”¹³³ Mentions of poor taste or rudeness were also brought up by townspeople who were present. Nearly thirty years later, townspeople and American Legion member Carl Spitler recalled that “[t]he students rushed in” for their demonstration immediately after the Memorial Day services, keeping the townspeople from getting away.¹³⁴ Kinney also belittled the students’ actions by supposing that for “young people,” the Monument was simply an old stone with no significance, instead of a site to remember the actions of those who “[offered] their lives to preserve the Union.”¹³⁵

Kinney’s defense highlights the ideological divide between the protestors and the Legionnaires: to both, the Monument represented the cost of death in war. To the protestors, it represented the cost as an example as to why war should be avoided at all costs. To the Legionnaires, the lesson of cost encoded on the monument represented a reason to continue supporting the country in order to respect the cost that those memorialized on the monument paid. The monument became, for the first time in years, a relevant area of controversy because

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Charles Kinney, “The Old Order Changeth”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 1, 1934.

¹³⁴ Andy Ruckman, “Even now, a fighting man’s holiday”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 30, 1963. Spitler would later serve on the committee to reestablish the Soldiers Monument.

¹³⁵ Charles Kinney, “The Old Order Changeth”

the competing ideals of the time, peace and pride, each had a legitimate stake in the message that the Monument represented.

While the removal of the signs flared up controversy in Oberlin, the controversy ended fairly quickly, as all sides made some sort of amends for their actions. City Manager Sears apologized to the College for the police's part in removing the signs, stating that the police "acted on the basis of a misunderstanding and without due authority."¹³⁶ In reply, the students who placed the signs released a statement explaining their actions, confirming that the signs were not meant to disrespect the soldiers named on the Monument, but to instead honor their efforts.¹³⁷ They continued by acknowledging the offense their actions gave to the Legionnaires, but restating that they meant no offense was intended and wished that the Legionnaires had been present at the entire demonstration "to sense the spirit that prompted the placing of the signs."¹³⁸

The speed of these attempts to make amends underscores how the Monument itself was not the real issue, but how the issue was how the anti-war controversy manifested itself at the Monument. Both groups involved were able to see how the message of the Monument supported their side: the students wished honor the death of the soldiers by ensuring that more would not face the same fate, and the townspeople wished to honor them by ensuring that others would follow their example. Neither of the groups wished to disrespect or remove Monument: it was simply the stage where these actions played out.

The controversy around the protest and the actions of the Legion again raised the recurring question of who was in charge of the Monument. In Kinney's defense of the Legionnaires' actions, he deflected the argument that the students were justified in holding their demonstration at the Monument because it was on college property, stating that "[t]he average

¹³⁶ "Student Signs Anger Oberlin Legion, Police",

¹³⁷ Charles Olds, Alice Allen, and Genevieve Olds, Statement Concerning Actions at Soldiers Monument, June 11, 1934, Correspondence Series, Earnest Hatch Wilkins Papers (RG 2/7), Box 87, O.C.A

¹³⁸ Ibid.

good citizen” would not think the Monument as belonging to either the college or the town, but somehow “above” a “sense of property.”¹³⁹ Wilkins did not agree. On June 11th, he met with members of the American Legion in order to discuss the incident. In this meeting, Wilkins impressed upon the Legionnaires that the College was “the custodian of the monument,” a sentiment that the Legionnaires did not dispute.¹⁴⁰ Wilkins later contacted Clayton Fauver, a lawyer and future college trustee who worked closely with the city council, concerned about the legal status of the Monument. The consensus reached from the conversation, including researching into the events of the 1870s and 1880s, was that neither the college nor the town had a full title to the monument, and that it was owned in part by each.¹⁴¹ The renewed interest of the college in the monument hastened its destruction.

Deconstructing the Monument

Knowing only the basic facts and events concerning the Soldiers Monument, one would assume that the 1934 incident concerning the Monument and its deconstruction in 1935 were directly linked: a reasonable assumption would be that the Monument had become too much of a controversial, contested space, and either the college or the town acted in order to prevent more controversy. This theory, however, puts too much weight on the controversy of the times over the meaning of the Monument, an issue talked about very little during the events leading towards its destruction. Instead, the Monument’s deconstruction was a deliberate, unwanted, joint action between the college and the town because of the Monument’s poor state. The fact that this action was necessary shows how neglected the confusion over the Monument’s ownership left it.

¹³⁹ Carl Kinney, “The Old Order Changeth”

¹⁴⁰ Statement from Secretary’s Office, Regarding Meeting between President Wilkins and American Legion, June 13, 1934, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁴¹ Ernest Wilkins, letter to Clayton Fauver, Regarding Rights of College to Soldiers Monument, March 10, 1935, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

The ownership of the Monument was the most pressing issue the 1934 incident raised. President Wilkins had declared, and the Legion had accepted, that the College was the custodian of the Monument. However, taking on these responsibilities led Wilkins and the College to take a closer look at the Monument itself. It had already needed repairs several times in the past, but by 1935, it had become so dilapidated that many in the community considered it beyond repair.¹⁴² The college had been made aware of this through an incident in May of 1930 when Walter Coplin, a conservatory freshman, attempted to climb the Monument. The Monument was so unstable that when Coplin was near the top he fell to the ground and pieces of the Monument fell on him. He sustained several injuries, the most significant a fractured jaw.¹⁴³ As a reaction, the college and the town both appointed committees to inspect the Monument's safety, but nothing materialized from these.

The issue wasn't raised again until March of 1935, when Wilkins wrote to Clayton Fauver concerning the ownership of the Monument, doing so in order to raise the issue of the Monument's continued dilapidation. After asking about the College's right to limit usage of the monument, Wilkins raised his main question, stating: "[t]he chances are that we shall want to take the monument down some time before long, preserving the marble tablets," and he wondered if the College had the right to do so.¹⁴⁴ In July of 1935, Wilkins brought up the matter before the Prudential Committee, reminding them of the 1930 incident and noting the lack of progress. Again, a committee was created by the college in order to cooperate with a town

¹⁴² "Monument Committee Appointed", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), July 23, 1935

¹⁴³ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, May 14, 1930, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁴⁴ Ernest Wilkins, letter to Clayton Fauver, Regarding Rights of College to Soldiers Monument, March 10, 1935, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

committee to investigate the Monument.¹⁴⁵ The town's committee was led by Fauver, who worked closely with Wilkins and the college on the project.

Fauver's committee concluded that the Monument was in "dangerous condition" and needed to be removed.¹⁴⁶ They reported that the monument had reached such a dilapidated condition that portions of it were already gone.¹⁴⁷ In addition, the sandstone of the Monument had disintegrated so badly that it would be liable to fall down on its own. It was dangerous enough to be considered a "menace to those who approach."¹⁴⁸ While Fauver's committee agreed that the Monument and its message were "of unquestionable value to Oberlin," they saw no option but to unanimously conclude that the Monument had to be dismantled "as a protection against possible serious damage" to members of the community.¹⁴⁹ On September 4th, both the college's Prudential Committee and the town council agreed with the plan to dismantle the Monument, with plans to construct a new one at Westwood Cemetery.

The news of the planned deconstruction brought criticism from patriotic organizations both within and outside of the Oberlin Community. Within days of the announcement, the Karl Wilson Locke Post of the American Legion voted unanimously to protest the removal of the Monument.¹⁵⁰ In addition, they wrote a protest to the Fauver's committee. Less expected than the Legion's disapproval, however, was the attention the proceedings attracted from groups outside of Oberlin. One of these groups, the Sons of Veterans, visited Oberlin in mid-August after hearing "outside [newspapers'] distorted stories" of Oberlin trying to "discard" its "tribute to

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, July 10, 1935, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, August 24, 1935, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁴⁷ "Dismantle Soldiers Monument",

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, September 4, 1935, Secretary's Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁴⁹ "Dismantle Soldiers Monument",

¹⁵⁰ "Legion Acts On Removal Of Monument", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 10, 1935

soldiers”.¹⁵¹ After being told that the committee’s plans included rebuilding the Monument, the Sons of Veterans suggested that the town could take advantage of a section in the Ohio statutes to make the county commissioner repair the monument. Fauver wrote to his nephew King Fauver to relay this information, but with the caveat that he believed that this statute only applied to Monuments located in cemeteries.¹⁵² King wrote back to his uncle a few days later, agreeing with him that the listed statute did not apply in this case, and that the town should have permission, after obtaining permission from the College, to proceed with the deconstruction.¹⁵³ The most important thing to glean from these groups resisting plans to dismantle the Monument was the reaction to them: for all parties involved, the plan to remove the Monument was not one that was desired, but one that was necessary given its condition.

Another criticism of the announced plan to dismantle the monument was in the planned area of reconstruction. While the *Oberlin News-Tribune* admitted that Fauver’s committee had a “thankless task” that it had performed “to the best of its ability,” it joined the American Legion in disapproving the removal of the Monument from its current spot.¹⁵⁴ The original plans concerning where to reconstruct the Monument were based on the availability of land. Fauver’s committee discovered that at Westwood Cemetery, located away from the center of town, there was a plot that had been set aside for soldiers. While the plot had been filled, there was still a space within the plot sizable enough to place a new monument in.¹⁵⁵ The College’s Executive Committee and the Town Council both approved this plan. The *News-Tribune* agreed with the Legion’s fears concerning the Monument’s removal, which were based on Westwood’s distance

¹⁵¹ “Delegation S.O.V. Inspects Old Monument,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), August 23, 1935

¹⁵² Clayton Fauver, Letter to King Fauver re: Soldiers Monument, August 22, 1935, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁵³ King Fauver, Letter to Clayton Fauver re: Soldiers Monument, August 27, 1935, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁵⁴ “Locating the Monument,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 13, 1935

¹⁵⁵ Clayton Fauver, Letter to King Fauver re: Soldiers Monument, August 22, 1935, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

from the center of town. Having the Monument, and therefore the Memorial Day services, at Westwood would lead to “a steady decline in interest and attendance.”¹⁵⁶ Instead, the *News-Tribune* recommended that the Monument be restored closer to the center of the town, where its “beauty and historic significance” would be available to all who wanted to see it.¹⁵⁷

At the September 4th Town Council meeting when the deconstruction of the Monument was approved, it was suggested that land held by the Village Improvement Society along the bank of Plum Creek at the corner of Vine and South Main would be a good location for the reconstructed Monument.¹⁵⁸ Professor Louis Lord, both president of that association and a supporter of reconstructing the Monument, felt that the society would be willing to lend their land for such a purpose.¹⁵⁹ The *News-Tribune* felt this was an acceptable place for keeping the Monument in town.

Likewise, some members of the Oberlin community felt that the Monument should be placed somewhere in town, as a central place for Oberlin memories. Ella Platt, a resident of the town who enlisted in the navy during the Great War, wrote in to the *News-Tribune* to discuss her memories of Oberlin in the Civil War, including her father taking her over “to see the soldiers form their regiment and march away to war.”¹⁶⁰ This, along with many of Oberlin’s other events in the Civil War, took place on the campus: therefore, according to Miss Platt, the center of the campus would be “the most appropriate place for the renewal of the Monument.”¹⁶¹ The writer of the *News-Tribune*’s “Under the Elm” column, under the pseudonym Peter Pindar Pease II, from the name of Oberlin’s first settler, agreed with the others that a rebuilt Soldiers Monument

¹⁵⁶ “Locating the Monument”,

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ “Legion Acts On Removal Of Monument”,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ella Platt, “Voice of the People”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 13, 1935

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

should be located as close to the center of town as possible.¹⁶² Pease noted that the Monument was a “precious inheritance” and that it needed to be in the center of Oberlin’s community in order that would “receive its influence as we go about our daily business.”¹⁶³

Despite these misgivings, the deconstruction of the Monument proceeded exactly as planned. The deconstruction started on September 13th, and finished less than a week later. As much as the original monument as possible was saved, including the marble tablets that bore the soldiers’ names.¹⁶⁴ But even as the *News-Tribune* reported the Oberlin landmark’s destruction, it mentioned that “substantial pledges” had already been made to rehabilitate it.¹⁶⁵ By Memorial Day of the next year, Professor Lord had made good on his word and the Village Improvement Society had given a portion of Wright Park as a site for the new Monument, which was dedicated that day.¹⁶⁶ Despite these plans, the Monument would not be reconstructed for eight more years.

Telling the Story

I first heard of Oberlin’s Soldiers Monument while I was researching Oberlin’s WWII Memorial Garden. What piqued my interest were references to the Memorial Garden and the Monument I found in *Ancient History: Monuments and Documents*, written by Charles W. Hedrick, Jr., a Professor of History at UC Santa Cruz who taught at Oberlin. Hedrick uses the Monument as an example of “public writing” and what stories inscribed on monuments can and cannot tell. He compares what we can learn from what is inscribed on the Monument to the story that he has found, and makes the assumptions that piqued my interest in the first place. Hedrick described a “local crisis” in 1934 around the town’s original Monument, pitting pacifist students

¹⁶² “Education: Peter Pindar Pease,” *Time*, May 1, 1933, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,847258,00.html>.

¹⁶³ Peter Pindar Pease II, “Under the Elm,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 27, 1935

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of the Prudential Committee, September 18, 1935, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

¹⁶⁵ “Monument Is Removed From Original Site,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 17, 1935

¹⁶⁶ “Dedicate Site For Monument Memorial Day,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 26, 1936

against patriotic townsfolk.¹⁶⁷ Hedrick then immediately tells of the Monument's 1935 deconstruction, stating that the College, acting alone, "pleading the dilapidation of the monument", had it removed.¹⁶⁸ Hedrick goes on to imply that the townspeople acted alone in rebuilding the Monument and that their choice of sites, Wright Park instead of a more central location, reflected their anger towards the College for the initial removal of the Monument.

Hedrick also relates a personal anecdote about his personal investigation of the Monument. When he took a class to see the Monument, neighbors summoned the Oberlin Police. The Police claimed that due to the Monument's recent redecoration, they were worried about student vandalism, which, as far as my research suggests, has never been a concern for the Monument.¹⁶⁹ Hedrick's interpretation of the Monument's story implies a certain amount of animosity in the actions of the townsfolk towards the College. Interpretations of the Monument's story, most importantly of its 1935 deconstruction and 1943 reconstruction, and how these events reflect the relationship between the town and the college either tend to side with Hedrick, or give a more neutral response.

When the story of Oberlin's Soldiers Monument is told in a modern source, the first source cited is invariably Geoffrey Blodgett's *Oberlin Architecture, College and Town*. Blodgett's work, the defining short reference work on the varied architectural styles around Oberlin, devotes an equal amount of concise but in-depth detail to most of Oberlin's varied architectural works. Blodgett tells the Monument's history without much commentary. He addresses the issue of the Monument's deconstruction by noting that "its twentieth-century fortunes oddly reflected shifting attitudes toward commemorating war."¹⁷⁰ He continues by

¹⁶⁷ Charles W. Hedrick, *Ancient History: Monuments and Documents*. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 109

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 109

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 109

¹⁷⁰ Geoffrey Blodgett, *Oberlin Architecture, College and Town: A Guide to Its Social History* (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, 1985), 207.

noting the low patriotic sentiment of Oberlin in the 1930s and the 1934 College protest, then immediately jumps to its deconstruction. The only mention Blodgett gives of the Monument's extensive and unsafe dilapidation by the 1930s is pointing out that it "looked like a crumbling medieval ruin."¹⁷¹ In doing so, Blodgett inadvertently shifts all the blame for the Monument's deconstruction onto the attitudes of the 1930s. He compounds this by implying that World War II was solely responsible for the Monument's reconstruction, even though he states that a drive "to build a new memorial" was underway "[even] before Pearl Harbor."¹⁷²

In attempting to create a short, detailed description of the story of the Monument, Blodgett's short description of the Monument helps perpetuate a more simplistic understanding of the Monument's story. It's difficult to fault Blodgett too much for this: the story of the Monument is a complicated one, and summarizing it while still leaving in pertinent details necessitates including the 1934 protest story. However, Blodgett's summary places an undeserved burden on the relationship between the College and the town as the fault for the Monument's removal, and ignores the cooperation between the two that helped reestablish it.

Modern descriptions that turn to *Oberlin Architecture* as their authority on the Monument naturally tend to summarize down his description of the Monument's history. However, in doing so, they run the risk of emphasizing the conflict between the college and the town as the reason for the Monument's removal even more than Blodgett does. The Oberlin Heritage Society published an online brochure in 2002 for a bicycle tour of Oberlin that included a similar history of the Monument. The tour, authored by Morgan Franck, a Heritage Society Intern, used *Oberlin Architecture* as a source. It states that "in the 1930s, when patriotism was running low... the aging monument was dismantled," implying that low patriotism was the reason for the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Monument's deconstruction.¹⁷³ This account makes an even more generalized account of the Monument's reestablishment by stating that the reason for reconstruction during the 1940s was the fact that "Oberlin viewed its veterans more favorably" because of the war.¹⁷⁴ Franck's account of the Monument's history was subsequently used, almost word-for-word, by other Heritage Society works, including, most troublingly, the Monument's application into the Ohio Historic Inventory. This interpretation of the Monument's story simplifies the reason for the Monument's deconstruction and reconstruction to be the varying levels of patriotism in Oberlin throughout the 1930s and 1940s, where in fact the deconstruction was a necessary action due to the Monument's dilapidation and was only related to the controversy of the times, not caused by it.

A small group of other sources concerning the Monument do not resort to explaining the Monument's deconstruction and reconstruction as a conflict. The Electronic Oberlin Group, an organization devoted to providing online material about Oberlin, pushed a short page about the Monument. This page emphasized the actual text of the Monument, but gave a brief history of the Monument. The note that this history gives about the 1930s is that "the monument was taken down to prevent it from falling down."¹⁷⁵ Likewise, most Oberlin *News-Tribune* articles relating to the Monument after 1943, which feel compelled to relate the story of the Monument to the reader, summarize the story by noting only the Monument's dilapidation as the reason for its deconstruction.

Corroborating the Story

¹⁷³ Morgan Franck, "Biking Tour of Historic Oberlin" Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin Heritage Society. 2008. <http://www.oberlinheritage.org/cms/files/File/webtour%205-2008b.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Franck, "Biking Tour of Historic Oberlin"

¹⁷⁵ Electronic Oberlin Group, "Soldiers Monument," March 10, 2003, http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Civil%20War%20Monument/soldiers_monument.htm.

The idea that Monument was deconstructed because of tensions between the college and the town is a misinterpretation, but one that fits in with the general facts and attitudes in the era. That is why it has survived for so long. While the college and town acted together in cooperation to remove the monument and plan for its rebuilding, the circumstances of the contentious protest, only a year before the Monument's removal, and the continued anti-war attitudes of those at the college helped create an atmosphere around the Monument's removal that illustrated tensions between the town and the college regarding the issue of war.

On Memorial Day in 1935, after the protest but before the Monument's deconstruction, the *News-Tribune*, in an editorial, disparaged "certain of the younger groups" that felt that any expression of patriotism wasn't "modern."¹⁷⁶ At the same time, the *News-Tribune* contended that the "movement for peace has also been distorted by certain factions who are for communism first and peace last."¹⁷⁷ In July of the same year, when the college and town established the joint committee in order to figure out the fate of the Monument, the *News-Tribune* again took the opportunity to attack the peace movement. In an editorial lamenting the all-but guaranteed loss of the Monument, the *News-Tribune* compared the high patriotism that existed in Oberlin during the Monument's founding to now, and decided that "patriotism is running a thin white line with an occasional tinge of pink or yellow."¹⁷⁸ These comments are the harshest criticism present related to the Monument and the peace movement, calling out the peace movement for perceived weaknesses in courage and patriotism. The *News-Tribune's* stance on these matters shows a growing level of bitterness in the ideological divide between the college and town, and helps explain why the ideological divide during this era is still linked to the story of the Monument's destruction.

¹⁷⁶ "Carrying on Memorial Day", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 28, 1935

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ "The Chapter Closes", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 28, 1935

Proponents of the Monument's reconstruction stressed the lack of patriotism as a necessity for rebuilding the Monument close to campus. When "Peter Pindar Pease II" contended that the Monument needed to be rebuilt in the center of town, he did so because he believed all of Oberlin needed to be "reminded, frequently, of what those who have gone before did to make possible our living today," and that, "especially in recent years... we need to hear more of sound American citizenship both from our college platform and from certain non-academic rostra."¹⁷⁹ Pease's words once again focus on the use of the Monument as a didactic tool; one could teach the proper lessons of patriotism and sacrifice to Oberlin's community. The problem for the 1930s was that both groups were learning this lesson; they were just learning it in different ways.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Pindar Pease II, "Under the Elm",

III. World War II and Memory Resurgence

“Memorials have a history of disappearing during moments of intense political turmoil and war because of their power to incite emotion and political response. During World War II, however, critics dismissed them not for their power but ostensibly for their lack of power, the reverse of iconoclastic violence.”

–Andrew Shanken, “Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II”¹⁸⁰

Peace versus Survival: Oberlin’s Community and the Road to War

Although Oberlin’s peace movement remained strong throughout the late 1930s, mounting world crises created more support in the community for American military buildup and even intervention to fight the increasing threats of Germany and Japan. As mentioned before, Oberlin’s Peace Society was the largest organization on campus during the 1930s, and student attitudes tended sharply towards the support of pacifism and the avoidance of warfare. President Ernest Hatch Wilkins, who supported the student protests for peace at the Soldiers Monument in 1934, continued to speak out in favor of peace. In 1937, he stated clearly before a mock Congress that the nation’s people wanted peace and the prevention of war above all else.¹⁸¹

But the desire for peace did not equal ignorance of the world’s problems. However, as the threat of Nazi Germany loomed, Oberlin’s community, while in favor of keeping the United States in its state of peace compared to the growing war in Europe, began to harbor a push either a form of non-isolationism and, in stronger cases, US military intervention. Wilkins, an ardent internationalist, considered isolationism as impossible and futile in the world they lived in, a subject which he addressed college students on in 1938.¹⁸² Professor Oscar Jaszi told students mobilized for peace in April 1937 not to allow ideals for peace to blind them to mobilization and

¹⁸⁰ Andrew M. Shanken, “Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (March 2002): 136.

¹⁸¹ Robert Lewis, “As Oberlin Viewed War’s Approach,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Jan 12, 1942.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

atrocities across the world.¹⁸³ In April of 1939, the College observed “Peace Day” with a mock Senate hearing where the students voted in favor of a “majority report on neutrality” that “[discriminated] against aggressor nations.”¹⁸⁴ That May, Wilkins declared that “[i]solationism is as obscure as the dinosaur,” because “all the nations of the world” were linked together to the “ambitions of world-wide domination held by Germany and Japan.”¹⁸⁵

With the breakout of the European war in the fall of 1939, members of the Oberlin community pushed even harder for some form of intervention. A letter signed by many professors, including Jaszi and Louis Lord, stated that the war “[seemed] certain to be long and bitter, but all its waste cannot be compared with the evil consequences of capitulating to Hitler.”¹⁸⁶ That month, Jaszi spoke against isolationism to a group of college students. At this speech, he acknowledged that “the seemingly useless sacrifices” that the United States experienced in World War One made “the overwhelming majority of this country... determined to keep out of the terrific slaughter.”¹⁸⁷ However, he stressed that isolation and total pacifism was unsustainable, and “fundamental conflicts” between states “must be fought out.”¹⁸⁸

At the end of the 1940 school year, President Wilkins openly supported the country’s rearmament program as being “justified and necessary.”¹⁸⁹ He argued that ‘Scholarships, not battleships’, a phrase almost identical to the “Schools, not battleships” card that had been laid on the Soldiers Monument during the 1934 protest, didn’t apply “under present conditions” where “battleships may be necessary for the preservation of any scholarships at all.”¹⁹⁰ However,

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Lewis, “Reviewing War’s Approach As Oberlin Saw It,” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Jan 19, 1942.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “Dr. Jaszi On Isolationism”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 7, 1940.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Lewis, “Reviewing War’s Approach As Oberlin Saw It,”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Wilkins' attitudes towards rearmament seemed to apply only as a defensive matter, as he continued to openly advocate a peaceful course of action for the country. During a Mock Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in February, Wilkins argued that Lend-Lease, President Roosevelt's controversial strategy of lending military supplies to Great Britain, could provoke open war.¹⁹¹ His opponent in the debate, Economics Professor Harvey Wooster, supported Lend-Lease on the grounds that it represented a peaceful answer to "the Nazification of Europe."¹⁹² Throughout the year, Wilkins continued to state his beliefs that while there was "grave danger that we may be drawn into the war," the war was still avoidable.¹⁹³

In October of 1941, the *Oberlin Review* published an editorial by student and future trustee Victor Stone, who stressed that while his generation were living with "the hope that [they] were living in a postwar period," the dangers presented by Nazism were too great and they needed to "brutalize, conscript, and regiment" into the war in order to prevent future ones.¹⁹⁴ Oberlin students were torn between peaceful ideals and the situation of the war.

Given the increased support for some form of intervention, the change in attitudes when the war finally broke out was understandable. On December 9th, two days after Pearl Harbor, President Wilkins addressed the student body with a completely different tone and message than before. "Fate has given you a job to do... a terrible job- but it is your job," he told his students¹⁹⁵. Wilkins continued by asserting that "[w]hatever our hatred of war," the college was now bound to the rest of the nation, and the students should do their new task, "however unwelcome," with all of their strength.¹⁹⁶ The editors of *The Oberlin Review* agreed with this sentiment, stating that

¹⁹¹ "Before "Senate" Committee," *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Feb 13, 1941.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ "Wilkins Says War Is Not Inevitable," *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 1, 1941.

¹⁹⁴ Geoffrey Blodgett, "Campus Life at Oberlin 1930-1945" *Oberlin Alumni Magazine* Winter 1998.

http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oampast/oam_winter/campuslife.html

¹⁹⁵ Lester Gordon, "Wilkins Says Students Have War Job". *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), Dec 9, 1941.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Oberlin students could “best serve the world to come by devoting all [their] energies... to the defeat of the forces of militarism and brutality, and thereafter to the establishment of a world order worthy of the dreams of... idealists.”¹⁹⁷

Oberlin’s gradual shift in attitudes towards the war is important for a variety of reasons: The first is that it helps supply the impetus for the rebuilding of the Soldiers Monument. While plans to rebuild the monument were already underway before the outbreak of the war, they were moving slowly. With the outbreak of war, there was a sudden need for the Monument to again act as a gathering point for memorialization. Death was imminent for Oberlin’s men, and the town needed a place to remember their sacrifice. The second reason that this shift in attitude is important is that it effectively resolves the 1930s conflict over the meaning of the Monument. With the war’s outbreak, the peace movement died, and the interpretation of the Monument as a place to laud and honor patriotic action emerged triumphant.

Rebuilding the Monument

While the Oberlin community, both town and college, showed stalwart support for those it was sending into the war, there was still an important issue concerning the memories of those who had served from Oberlin in previous years: the Soldiers Monument. The town had entered the war without a place to pay honor to its war dead. Plans to rebuild the monument, established after its removal in 1935, had proceeded slowly enough because of “[o]ne thing or another” that they were still stalled in May of 1941.¹⁹⁸ It was only at a special council meeting that month where Clayton Fauver’s memorial committee announced that they had sufficient funds to cover the \$3,800 cost of a new monument in Wright Park.¹⁹⁹ The college had been involved in the

¹⁹⁷ “V.J.S”, “Plain Talk... Direct Action”. *The Oberlin Review* (Oberlin, Ohio), Dec 12, 1941.

¹⁹⁸ Louis Lord, “Professor Lord’s Letter Reviews the Plans For Oberlin’s Soldier’s Monument,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Sep 24, 1942.

¹⁹⁹ “Accept Plans for Soldiers Monument,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 2, 1941.

planning of the new memorial, giving a “substantial gift” that helped cover the part of the cost. Additionally, Professor Lord worked on a college monument committee and Professor William Hoskins Brown designed the new monument.²⁰⁰

But for all the talk of progress, plans continued to stall for another year, most certainly not helped by Fauver’s death in 1942.²⁰¹ Fauver, a College trustee and prominent Oberlin community member, had been a diehard supporter of replacing the monument since its deconstruction. In addition to Fauver’s passing, monument pledge funds that had been promised during a fund drive in 1938 had not been fully collected, and were written off, leaving the town with insufficient funds to complete work on the monument.²⁰² Plans could not continue until May, when President Wilkins spoke on behalf of the monument to the College Trustees, asking for additional funds. Wilkins urged the trustees to grant additional funds for the monument not only because the monument project was “important for good relations between the College and the village,” but because it was such an important issue for Fauver, a close friend of Wilkins’.²⁰³ Based on Wilkins’ urging, the trustees voted to make an additional contribution of \$1000 to the monument fund.²⁰⁴ With this additional gift from the college, the town finally had enough money to begin accepting bids from contractors on the construction, which began in early September.²⁰⁵

Initial plans for the monument’s construction indicated a grand design for the monument, a reassertion of the Soldiers Monument as the focal point for Oberlin war memories. Not content with simply remaking the original monument, both the Oberlin public and the monument committee wished to make this the singular Oberlin war monument.²⁰⁶ The new monument

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ “Comings on Monument Committee,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Mar 19, 1942.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Minutes of the College Trustees, May 25, 1942, Secretary’s Office Papers (RG 5/I), Series 6, Subseries 1, Box 6, O.C.A

²⁰⁴ “Will Erect New Soldiers’ Memorial,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 28, 1942.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., “Work to Start on Soldiers’ Memorial” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Sep 3, 1942.

²⁰⁶ “Monument Will Be Erected at Wright Park,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 30, 1938.

would be a single brick wall that, while fairly modest in size, would be wide in scope: In addition to the original plaques listing both fallen Oberlin College students and town natives who fought in the Civil War, dedications were also made for those who fought in the Spanish-American War and First World War, with space for the names of those who would die in the ongoing Second World War. This decision marks the end of the Monument's history as a Civil War Memorial: the Monument had become so wrapped up in the definitions that the people of Oberlin placed around it that it had become a less unique war memorial: the messages inscribed on it about its founding about the preservation of the Union and the destruction of slavery were being pushed aside in favor of a more general message of remembering the sacrifice of Oberlin soldiers from all wars.

Plans for a "memorial bridge" to cross the creek in front of the monument were also made, but put on hold thanks to the war making steel unavailable.²⁰⁷ The most impressive part of the committee's plans were what Professor Louis Lord described as "a piazza, paved with brick, large enough to accommodate the town band" that would be used as a prominent spot for concerts. Lord declared that the new memorial would be "a permanent memorial, of which we shall all be proud, honoring our fellow citizens who gave their lives for our country."²⁰⁸ Lord's words show that his committee viewed the new Soldiers Monument as an integral part of the Oberlin community and the central space for war remembrance. This sentiment is echoed by the inscriptions placed on the reconstructed Monument. While the new Monument does acknowledge that it incorporates the tablets from the original, it incorporates two new inscriptions with quotes from Pericles. These quotes, chosen by Lord, who had a classics background, show the new character of the Monument:

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Lord, "Professor Lord's Letter Reviews the Plans For Oberlin's Soldier's Monument."

Esteeming courage to be freedom and freedom to be happiness, do not weigh too nicely the perils of war.

There abideth also an unwritten memorial of them graven not on stone but in the hearts of men.

Both quotes come from Pericles's funeral speech in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.²⁰⁹ The first important note about these quotes is the lack of specificity: they refer to no exact American war, instead using classical lessons to inform the reader about the nature of the Monument. This works in stark contrast to the speeches given during the Monument's original dedication, which firmly placed the Monument in its context as a specific Civil War memorial. The first quote also enshrines in the new Monument the victory of the WWII mindset over the 1930s conflict over the Monument: the "perils of war," those that the pacifist college students were working to avoid, were nothing compared to fighting for courage and freedom.

Despite the lofty plans of all involved, there still were hints of flaws in the project. The most notable of these flaws was the committee's choice of old, used bricks in order to build the memorial wall. In answering various townspersons' concerns, Lord stated that the committee chose to use for old bricks for a variety of reasons, the most important aesthetics.²¹⁰ For Lord and the committee, it was important for the bricks in the new wall to match the plaques from the original Soldiers Memorial, so they don't stand out like "patches of old material on a new garment."²¹¹ Doing so, Lord contends, would help the new monument "stand for many years and... be an object of increasing delight to all the people of Oberlin."²¹² Lord also cited cost as a

²⁰⁹ Benjamin Jowett, "Pericles' Funeral Speech and the Plague in Athens." Excerpted from *Thucydides*, tr. A. P. Peabody, ed. (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1883), http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Pericle.html

²¹⁰ Louis Lord, "Lord Explains Use of Old Bricks in Soldier's Monument," *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Sep 10, 1942.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

reason that they used old bricks, which must have been important considering the constraints they were working under. Lord contended they could find high quality old bricks for far less than the cost of new bricks of the quality they needed for this project. Anyways, he stated, while used bricks can become softer, that only matters for bricks being used in building construction or used to bear a load. For a simple curtain wall, like this one, “will last for an indefinite period.”²¹³

Lord’s words concerning the committee’s choice of older bricks are sadly ironic. In less than forty years the Monument would need to be restored again because it was deteriorating from structural pressures. The bricks in the Monument would become cracked and loose because of a load they had to support. The wishes of the monument committee for a permanent and enduring memorial seem sadly juxtaposed with the amount of money they were able to secure, the materials used in the construction, and the ultimate fate of the monument.

By April of 1943, except for the missing bridge, construction had finished on the monument. Its first use fit with the monument committee’s goals: the Oberlin College Women’s Band preformed in a show that included a community sing.²¹⁴ The committee’s vision of the memorial being used as a central community space seemed to be coming together. Another aspect that the old Soldiers Monument played in the community was restored later that month when the Monument hosted the town’s Memorial Day celebration.²¹⁵ Congressman Ed Rowe was the speaker at the monument’s first Memorial Day, and the monument continued to serve as the focus of the town’s Memorial Day celebration in future years.²¹⁶

Even though the process to rebuild the Soldiers Monument was slow, punctuated by a lack of funds, and had a concerning use of older materials, the town did have a new monument in

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “Plan Concert Sunday by All Girl Band,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Apr 29, 1943.

²¹⁵ ““There Abideth Also an Unwritten Memorial of Them Graven Not on Stone but in the Hearts of Men”,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 27, 1943.

²¹⁶ “Memorial Day Services at Soldiers Monument in Wright Park,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 25, 1944.

less than ten years. With the incorporation of acknowledgment of the dead from the Spanish-American war and World War I and the plans to incorporate the names of the war dead when World War II ended, the Monument's original purpose as a Civil War memorial was pushed aside, and Oberlin had a cohesive, fully representative war memorial that brought together the whole town's memory into a single space, at the cost of the unique perspective on Oberlin history that the original Soldiers Monument brought. But actions would happen very soon that would bring the question of the legitimacy of the Soldiers Monument as the focal space of Oberlin war memorialization.

A Living WWII Memorial?

With the memorial committee's insistence that the new Soldiers Monument would be the principal spot for Oberlin war memory, it seems strange that the town would consider creating another monument to fallen WWII soldier. And yet, that is exactly what happened. In August of 1945, plans were beginning to ferment concerning the creation of a new monument that would challenge the Soldiers Monument. At this time, the work completing the bridge at the Soldiers Monument in Wright Park had not been completed, due to the lack of material, and there had been no motion to put the names of fallen Oberlin men on their appointed space.²¹⁷ But talk had come up of building a new swimming pool for the town, and it was suggested that the pool additionally serve as a memorial pool for the town.²¹⁸ It is not my primary concern here to detail the plans of building the newer memorial, but to instead explore why the plans came about so soon to the creation of the soldier's monument and offer an explanation as to why the town was so eagerly considering superseding the Soldiers Monument as the pre-determined pivotal place for Oberlin's WWII memory.

²¹⁷ "Stirring Up Discussion," *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Aug 23, 1945.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The idea of using a pool as a “useful memorial” was part of a nationwide trend of post-WWII memory action that stressed making memorials an active part of the community rather than statues and monuments. In “Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II,” Andrew Shanken described living memorials as a way of moving ahead from two terrible recent wars that had rocked the country and “a means of folding the sacrifices of war into the pattern of democratic community life.”²¹⁹ The original ideals behind living memorials came from criticism behind memorials erected after World War I. Shanken establishes that the traditional memorials that “that dominated the American memorial landscape” were criticized for, among other things, “their clutter, sense of age and decay, vulgarity and expense, and superfluousness and ineffectiveness.”²²⁰ The mocking criticism of the old Soldiers Monument as the “sunken church” seems to echo these critiques. A World War I-era critic of traditional memorials writing that “mere shafts of granite and statues of bronze” were “inadequate” could have just as easily been writing about the old spire.²²¹ In addition, traditional means of representation for soldiers and warfare had become obsolete: Civil War-era generals on horses were no longer able to represent the large and complex machinery of war. Because traditional memorials could no longer suggest the full measure of memory that memorials required, more abstract or utilitarian memorials would have to fulfill that void.

In addition, the conversation around living memorials in the 1940s revealed that by that time, “expectations for what to memorialize were in flux.”²²² Instead of memorializing concepts like “the heroics of war, sacrifice, death, or victory,” living memorials instead demonstrated values like community living and democracy, by affixing the memorials to “facilities that

²¹⁹ Shanken, “Planning Memory,” 130.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

²²² *Ibid.*, 135.

promoted these ideals.”²²³ Living memorials were meant to integrate the memory of soldiers into the fabric of the American social structure by putting their memories into buildings, parks, roads, and other useful facilities for the society that remembered them. This would demonstrate that the community remembered their sacrifice by continuing to live by the values that they died to uphold.

The arguments surrounding the possible new Oberlin World War II Memorial and how it relates to the Soldiers Monument echo the arguments made by both sides in Shanken’s piece. J. L. Edwards, writing to the *News-Tribune*, suggested that the town erect a memorial “of real value,” rather than “the monstrosity erected on the banks of the “Raging Plumb Creek,”” clearly referring to the new Soldiers Monument.²²⁴ Edwards suggested building a “suitable building” akin to an American Legion building, for the “special use” of returning war veterans, “with a well equipped kitchen,” to be used for “social meetings and banquets”²²⁵. These comments generated their share of controversy. In a reply the next week, the author of the *News-Tribune*’s “A Bower Quiet” column sarcastically suggested that a “well equipped kitchen” would make the perfect memorial, “because... no one ever forgets to eat!”²²⁶ Through his sarcasm, the writer pointed out that Oberlin already had many buildings to accommodate community gatherings, and that the use of a building would not seem like an “eminently dignified and fitting” tribute to those who died in the war.²²⁷

The following week, while the editors of the *News-Tribune* abstained from offering their own commentary on the “monstrosity” comment, they did comment that they did “dislike the

²²³ Ibid, 135-6.

²²⁴ J. L. Edwards, “Suggests Memorial Building For Veterans Organizations,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Sep 27, 1945

²²⁵ Edwards, “Suggests Memorial Building For Veterans Organizations”

²²⁶ “A Bower Quiet: A War Memorial?” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Oct 4, 1945.

²²⁷ Ibid.

idea of rushing off to build a new memorial until we finish the one we have.”²²⁸ Professor Lord, one of the most vocal supporters of the Monument, didn’t shy away from his opinion on the letter describing the Soldiers Monument as a “monstrosity.” In his first reply, he defended the artistic merit of the monument by commenting on the need to maintain the plaques and some details from the original monument. Additionally, he chastised Edwards for judging the monument in its incomplete state, offered his own interpretation on the “monstrosity” comment. A monstrosity, he replied, was defined as being something extraordinarily large, while the Soldiers Monument could only be described as such “from the point of view of something very small and insignificant.”²²⁹ Lord’s defense of the Monument obviously stemmed from his involvement in the construction: to Lord, the purpose of the new Soldiers Monument was to carry on the ideals of the original. In a second letter to the review, Lord outlined his thoughts on the matter: to Lord, the Soldiers Monument was an important link to Oberlin’s past, a past that he felt was slipping away from the city. The new monument presented a link to the “proud past” and “unique” history that Oberlin represented.²³⁰

In addition, Lord questioned the nature of living memorials, noting that the difference was whether the town wished “to do something for those who came back from the war and for ourselves, or whether we wish merely to perpetuate the memory of what they did for us.”²³¹ Lord argued that the most enduring memorials were not buildings, but instead words, tributes that don’t fade or crumble over time. As works of art, traditional monuments were secondary to words, but still superior to utilitarian monuments that have their meanings eroded over time and simply become used for their utilitarian purpose. Lord acknowledged that different people have

²²⁸ “How About The Bridge In Wright Park?,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Oct 4, 1945.

²²⁹ Louis Lord, “Lord Replies to Edwards’ Letter on “Monstrosity””, *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Oct 18, 1945.

²³⁰ Louis Lord, “Writer Questions Wisdom of Building “Useful” Memorial”, *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Nov 1, 1945.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

different aesthetic tastes, but urged the point that the new Soldiers Monument was designed by a Professor of Art from the college, and affirmed by many who “had some competence to judge its aesthetic qualities.”²³² Lord finished his reply by stating that the spirits of Oberlin’s soldiers would find joy in finding a memorial to their names, and the most important issue was to remember the soldiers who died for them.

Lord’s obvious intent in writing this letter was to stress his views on the difference between traditional and living memorials. In doing so, he not only defended the new Soldiers Monument by tying it in with the old, but he defended the traditional memorials that it exemplified. Lord’s defense does have a certain sense to them: traditional memorials keep themselves from becoming “dememorialized” because they are set apart from the fabric of the community, and don’t become defined by their utilitarian attributes. However, Lord’s interpretation of the staying power of traditional memorials seems strange when he was defending a memorial that was so recently dismantled.

This sentiment was not shared by the rest of the town, and Oberlin citizens voted unanimously for a committee to create a new memorial the very next week.²³³ At this meeting, Oberlin resident John C. Kennedy, described the old Soldiers Monument as “a town joke” and the newer one, while beautiful, was “hardly justified as a memorial.”²³⁴ Kennedy went on to comment that while the new monument had “quiet, natural beauty,” it “hardly suggests the causes for which men die,” mirroring concerns by critics of traditional memorials over how such a memorial could convey the breadth of war and the values that soldiers died to protect.²³⁵ Kennedy, in envisioning plans for a memorial pool, rejected concerns that the pool would engender racial tensions, stating that the pool would be a “healthy influence... to bind the

²³² Ibid.

²³³ “To Elect Memorial Committee of Ten,” *The Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), Oct 11, 1945.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

community together” and that “those who died fighting to preserve democratic ideals would approve this type of memorial.”²³⁶ Kennedy’s comments again bring up the contentious issue of race in relation to Oberlin memorials, this time around the highly controversial area of a swimming pool. This conjunction between race and memorials brings to mind the strange non-mention of race in the original Soldiers Monument. The effect that both of these issues of race together gives is that Oberlin’s overall history of race relations isn’t as pristine as the community today would like to present.

The debate over the Oberlin memorial pool took on its own significance, but its importance in relation to the Soldiers Monument has already been established. Why was the Monument being so quickly dismissed by members of the Oberlin community in favor of attempting to build a newer WWII Monument? The Monument, while speedily rebuilt, was rebuilt at the wrong time: Shanken notes that the debate between living and traditional memorials was unprecedented because it began during the war as opposed to after it: the Monument was rebuilt right at the time when Oberlin’s attitudes concerning the role of the monument in the community were beginning to shift. The new Monument could only serve a limited function: while small concerts were possible, the Monument’s use over the years again reverted to being the site of the town’s Memorial Day services. While the Monument reemerged during the war because of the new attitude towards patriotism, all it really did was regain its old place in the community.

²³⁶ Ibid.

IV. Falling Apart over Time

“As a young boy, I felt a sense of awe as I looked at the names listed on the Soldiers Monument... As a grown man, I now have an added appreciation for the people listed on our present memorial.... Having given the “supreme sacrifice,” they remain a vital part of our individual and collective Oberlin heritage. May we never allow ourselves to forget this fact, and may our Soldiers Monument be a constant reminder to us never to do so.”

-Richard Lothrop, “Parade is gone, but memorial remains”, May 29, 2001²³⁷

Over the Years

The Monument was back, and had regained its status as the focal point for the city’s Memorial Day celebrations. But the Monument returned in an incomplete form and with baggage. The planned addition of a bridge across Plum Creek had yet to materialize, and the Monument only bore the names of the Civil War soldiers from the original Monument: no names from later wars had been, despite Professor Louis Lord’s wishes. The circumstances of the Monument’s removal had created enmity in the community over College students’ seeming disrespect for the dead. And the controversy over living memorials soon after the Monument’s reconstruction raised the question to many in the community of whether the Soldiers Monument was the appropriately modern way to honor Oberlin’s war dead, or if it, and the style of memorialization it represented, had become obsolete.

All of this baggage followed the Monument into the following decades. Problems that were already present in the Monument needed to be solved. Problems that arose for the Monument during this time began to be viewed through the lens of what came before, entrenching the view that the College no longer cared about the Monument into the minds of the city, despite the fact that the Monument had begun slipping from the city’s consciousness as well.

²³⁷ Richard Lothrop, “Parade is gone, but memorial remains”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 29, 2001.

Despite the wishes of Lord's committee, the names of Oberlin's Soldiers from World War II, as well as other post-Civil War wars, were not added to the Monument in the wake of the war. For years, the new Monument stood as an anachronism: newly constructed, but still primarily memorializing the oldest of wars. By the 1950s, however, there were plans to change this. The passage of time had taken its toll on the Monument, and the City was finally going to do something about it. In March of 1953, the city finished its first step in renovating the Monument, re-laying the bricks on the steps and replacing the brick floor in front of the Monument with flagstones.²³⁸ In addition, the City hoped to join with the American Legion in paying for the rest of the work, including removing the brick "wings" of the Monument, installing plaques for both World Wars, and creating a place reserved for the names of Korean War veterans. Some of this work was finished three years later, in 1956, in order to prepare the Monument for the city's Memorial Day celebrations. With the construction of retaining walls on the sides of Plum Creek and, finally, the construction of a bridge crossing the stream, as Lord had envisioned fourteen years ago, the Monument's appearance had been restored to the point where *The Oberlin News-Tribune* boasted that it was "more attractive" than it had been "in many years."²³⁹ These repairs had been financed and carried out by the Village Improvement Society, which also planned to carry out other minor landscaping duties to the Monument that summer. What had not been addressed, however, was the continued lack of names from other wars being placed on the Monument. This issue, as well as an extremely more pressing one, would have to wait for another twenty years.

The Monument's biggest enemy in the 1960s and 1970s was not confusion over ownership, or weather, or even a student peace movement: it was the ground itself. In 1963,

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ "Beautification Project Puts Park in Top Shape For Memorial Day Rites" *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 24, 1956.

Andy Ruckman reported for the *News-Tribune* that the Monument was in danger of having to be moved again, this time because of the circumstances of its geography. According to the Lorain County Metropolitan Housing Authority, the hillside that the Monument rested against “shoved [it] into a tilt.”²⁴⁰ Either the Monument would have to be built, or the architect planning the apartment complex going up behind the Monument, the reason for the shifting ground, would have to change his plans.²⁴¹ Ruckman noted that the “recurring, recent” hints that the Monument would have to be moved again brought up the bad memories of the 1935 deconstruction, interviewing American Legion Captain Frank Tanner, who claimed that moving the Monument would be “sacrilege.”²⁴² Ruckman also brought up the question of the missing names from the two World Wars. The World War I dead were remembered by an “inconspicuous” plaque in the lobby of City Hall, “sandwiched between a more prominent display... and the door to the police station.”²⁴³ The World War II names fared even worse, listed on a certificate in “the shadows of the hallway at the Oberlin Junior High School,” where even the principal was unsure to their exact location.²⁴⁴ Ruckman, for better or worse, chose to tie this most recent question concerning the Monument to the older one, despite the differences in the actors involved and the circumstances. In doing so, he helped reinforce the notion of conflict involving the Monument’s 1935 deconstruction that he reported on.

Despite the fears that Ruckman and the *News-Tribune* reported, there was no action taken on the Monument. In 1966, a committee had been appointed by the City Council to investigate the problem, and had even got to the point of choosing a design, by College art professor Paul Arnold.²⁴⁵ However, these plans hit a snag: the Council denied the use of \$5000 from the general

²⁴⁰ Andy Ruckman, “Even now, a fighting man’s holiday”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 30, 1963.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Cynthia Evans, “Monumental Rescue”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 23, 1981.

fund to rebuild the Monument, and the committee did not wish to take on the responsibility of fund-raising.²⁴⁶ Without funding, nothing could be done in order to help preserve the Monument. This situation of affairs would continue to last through the next decade, with the Council paralyzed from the lack of funds, and the Monument continuing to lean.

A Tipping Point

By the late 1970s, the Monument was at its lowest point since the 1930s. The names of soldiers from World War II onward had never been added to the Monument, leaving it more obsolete than ever. The hillside that once supported it was forcing it over, and the city that had once so vehemently supported it was doing nothing to stop this situation.

In February of 1978, College Archivist William E. Bigglestone wrote to Richard Lothrop, who would act as an interim City Manager throughout 1978 and 1979, concerning the Monument. Bigglestone urged Lothrop and the city to ensure the “necessary repairs” of the Monument, claiming that it was “an important part of the history of the town” and that every group the city represented had given, “at first to create a monument and later to build the present memorial”²⁴⁷.

In May of 1978, Lothrop wrote his column “Elm St. Thoughts” about the state of the Monument. In this column, he recalled walking in his first Memorial Day parade, marching down to the old Soldiers Monument. He quickly went over the history of the Monument, choosing not to bring up any controversy involving the 1934 protest or to mention any controversy concerning the deconstruction the following year. Instead, Lothrop discussed the teamwork and cooperation involved in reconstructing the Monument. However, he did have

²⁴⁶ Memorial Day will start with Main St. March” *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 25, 1967.

²⁴⁷ William Bigglestone, letter to Richard Lothrop, Regarding Soldiers Monument, February 19, 1978. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

negative things to say about the current state of affairs, commenting that “Memorial Day celebrations are no longer well attended and veterans are... overlooked in today’s society.”²⁴⁸ In addition, he lamented the current state of the Monument, commenting that Council has finally taken some action, requesting funds for the repairs in the 1979 budget.²⁴⁹ In January of 1979, Lothrop responded to an earlier letter in which Bigglestone had inquired about the plaque to World War I soldiers which was currently hanging in City Hall. Lothrop shared Bigglestone’s concerns about the plaque, and hoped it could “be attached to the present war memorial in some manner.”²⁵⁰ Lothrop also mentioned that he hoped the budget for 1979 would contain \$5,000 for the renovation of the Monument.

While the budget passed for 1979 did contain \$5,000 for the Monument’s renovation, the availability of money turned out to be the least of the Monument’s problems. In March, the Office of Public Works examined the Monument, and observed that both the Monument wall and foundation were not able to handle the weight of the Monument and the pressure of the earth around it. In addition, the water pressure from Plum Creek was leading to the soil around the Monument becoming weaker, which could lead to a structural failure. Michael Mahaney, the Director of Public Works, told the *Oberlin News-Tribune* that “the cost estimate” to repair the Monument “was around \$17,000” and that attempting to use the \$5,000 to repair the Monument was “throwing good money away.”²⁵¹ Instead, Mahaney recommended dismantling the Monument, so it could be “rebuilt in a more appropriate location.”²⁵² Mahaney supported this idea so much that he even suggested getting the College’s Art Department to design a new

²⁴⁸ Richard Lothrop, “Elm St. Thoughts”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 18, 1978.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Richard Lothrop, letter to William Bigglestone, Regarding Soldiers Monument, January 5, 1979. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

²⁵¹ “City will mothball monument”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 19, 1979.

²⁵² Michael Mahaney, Memo to Doug Ward, Regarding Soldiers Monument, March 30, 1979. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

monument, as to keep the \$5,000 in the city budget from being tied up in the costs involving a new Monument. On April 16th, the Council authorized dismantling the Monument after Memorial Day and preserving the original historic plaques.²⁵³

Retired Army Colonel Norman Long wrote in to the *News Tribune* to protest this action, stating that there were already “too many unsung heroes of Oberlin and the nation,” and “hiding” the Monument was a deplorable action.²⁵⁴ By the time of the city’s 1979 Memorial Day celebration, which happened during a “dismal drizzle,” the city’s Committee on Visual Environment had already begun looking for a new location for the Monument.²⁵⁵ This committee advised to delaying the deconstruction in order to create a steering committee in order to “explore the possibilities of preserving the present memorial,” and recommended various people to serve on that new committee, including William E. Bigglestone, College History Professor Geoffrey Blodgett, and Carl Bruening, from the Karl Wilson Locke Post of the American Legion.²⁵⁶ This committee, which eventually included Richard Lothrop, did get together to meet a few times. At one of the earlier meetings, Lothrop raised again the questions of the missing memorials for soldiers from wars after the Civil War²⁵⁷. Eventually, however, the committee got bogged down because “members had difficulties... getting together,” resulting in a lack of progress, while the Monument continued to lean over.²⁵⁸

This inaction lasted for almost two years: eventually, however, the Monument’s salvation came, but not from the City Council. In early 1981, Carl Bruening and the Karl Wilson Locke

²⁵³ “City will mothball monument”,

²⁵⁴ Norman Long, “Col. Long questions council action on monument”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 19, 1979.

²⁵⁵ “Monument’s farewell”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 31, 1979, “Memorial Day: service but no parade”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 24, 1979.

²⁵⁶ Louise Dunn, Memo to Michael Mahaney, Regarding Soldiers Monument, March 30, 1979. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

²⁵⁷ Richard Lothrop, Letter to Sherry Suttles, Regarding Soldiers Monument Committee, March 30, 1979. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

²⁵⁸ Cynthia Evans, “Monumental Rescue”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 23, 1981.

Post requested the Council to provide authority for the Post to go ahead with restoring the Monument and for \$5,000 to contribute to the cost of the restoration, which the Legion estimated at \$25,000.²⁵⁹ The Legion planned to rebuild the Monument, keeping it “in its present design and at its present location,” by “correcting the drainage and embankment problems, resetting brick... [p]utting in fresh landscaping, and adding commemorative plaques for World War II, [the] Korean conflict, and Vietnam.”²⁶⁰ The Legion’s plan was to restore the Monument by the city’s Sesquicentennial in 1983, using mostly Legion funds, but they also planned to investigate other sources for funding. The city also looked into an innovative way for paying for the Monument: suing the owners of the apartment complex that had caused the damage to the Monument. Lothrop responded to Bigglestone’s concerns along these lines, and had asked around for responses. According to Lothrop, in order to prove damages, the Council would need both pictures and plans of the Monument before the apartments were built, which to Lothrop’s understanding, didn’t exist. In addition, the entire process would be “quite expensive, and in the end probably not worth the cost and delay,” even if the city won the suit.²⁶¹ Eventually, the Legion received a gift of \$5,000 from the College, which helped alleviate the overall cost.²⁶²

By early 1982, the Legion had begun its work renovating the Monument. In March, they were waiting for Oberlin’s regular poor winter weather to subside before continuing work, which included strengthening and waterproofing the foundation, refurbishing and waterproofing the masonry of both the wall and the plaza, and adding new tablets for soldiers from the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam, perhaps made of aluminum to honor Charles Martin Hall. The plaques concerned Bruening the most: he had a partial list of names, but “[didn’t] want to

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Richard Lothrop, Letter to William Bigglestone, Regarding Soldiers Monument Committee, May 28, 1981. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

²⁶² “Legion awaits weather break to work on sagging monument”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), March 4, 1982

exclude anyone.”²⁶³ At the beginning of April, the *News-Tribune* printed Bruening’s partial list of names and asked readers to check over the list to make sure that no one had been omitted.²⁶⁴

William Bigglestone wrote to provide Bruening with the names of more World War II and Korea soldiers. In this letter, Bigglestone also asked that if the monument “must be used to commemorate more than Civil War dead,” that the plaque for World War I in City Hall not be moved to the refurbished Monument, where it would remain “safe from vandalism and the elements” and remind citizens “on routine errands... of these men and their sacrifice.”²⁶⁵

Bigglestone also asked Bruening to “enlist the aid of an appropriate committee or persons with artistic qualifications” to help with the new plaques, and that the new plaques should “compliment the original plaques.”²⁶⁶ This included not making the new plaques from aluminum “if some material other than aluminum would better serve” the Monument, because the fact that “Charles Hall and... aluminum came from Oberlin had little bearing upon what these men did” and that the Monument “[recalls] a contribution quite distinct” from Hall’s, which were already memorialized in Oberlin.²⁶⁷

Neither Bigglestone nor Bruening nor did the *News-Tribune* brought up the obvious exclusion of names: those of College students who fought in these wars. It is interesting to think that in all the talk of respecting the original Monument, which included the names of both College students and townspeople, no one involved in refurbishing and adding names to the Monument considered adding names of College students along with townspeople who died in battle. But on the other hand, after the Monument had been reestablished in 1942, it had truly become a town memorial. While college professors were influential in crucial aspects of the

²⁶³ “Legion awaits weather break to work on sagging monument”,

²⁶⁴ “Checking the lists”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), April 1, 1982

²⁶⁵ William Bigglestone, Letter to Carl Bruening, Regarding Soldiers Monument, April 5, 1982. Papers of William Bigglestone (RG 30/151), Series 3, Subseries 2, Box 12, O.C.A

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Monument's reconstruction and college personal like Bigglestone and Blodgett were still involved in issues surrounding the Monument, the College itself had relinquished control of the Monument to the city.

The Monument's refurbishing was incomplete by Oberlin's 1983 Memorial Day celebration, as the new plaques were still being engraved.²⁶⁸ However, the Monument was rededicated at the beginning of July.²⁶⁹ The addition of a new plaque for World War I as well as plaques for WWII, Korea, and Vietnam sealed the Monument's fate that had been ordained for it since the early 1940s. Instead of keeping its unique Civil War-era message, the Monument had literally gained the role that it had played in the community since its recreation: a memorial space for Oberlin from all wars.

After another flirt with deconstruction, Monument had emerged triumphant once again, but like in 1942, the triumph was ephemeral: the memorial simply resumed its place in the Oberlin community, waiting for the next threat to its existence.

Turn of the Century

By 1997, the Monument was again in bad condition. The hill in Wright Park was pushing forward, causing the Monument to bow.²⁷⁰ In 1997, the city attempted to address the problem, but "couldn't work it into the budget," according to public works director Mike Sigg.²⁷¹ In 1995, the Council had established a "War Memorial Trust Fund" to set aside donations that could be used for maintenance and improvements to the Monument, but the amount of repairs needed outweighed the money available to the Council.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ "Memorial plans set for Monday", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 26, 1983

²⁶⁹ "Soldiers monument to be rededicated", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), June 30, 1983

²⁷⁰ "Memorial, gas house get attention from city", *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), September 22, 1998

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Ordinance establishing "War Memorial Trust Fund", November 6, 1995. Soldiers Monument File, Oberlin Heritage Society Archives.

During this time, the Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization, known today as the Oberlin Heritage Society, took an interest in the Monument. Knowing that the Council was working on the Monument, O.H.I.O. wondered whether the Monument could be “[reconstructed] as it was originally,” built back into the Gothic spire, incorporating the plaques with soldiers’ names from the newer wars.²⁷³ O.H.I.O. contacted Robert Lodge, director of the McKay-Lodge Conservation Laboratory, an Oberlin art conservation agency that operates nationwide. Lodge replied positively, noted that their own subcontracted stone carvers would be “far too costly,” and he wondered “if costs [were] within possibility” for the city.²⁷⁴ For whatever reason, these plans fell through, but O.H.I.O.’s desire to see the original design of the Monument recreated raises important implications for the current Monument. Certainly the Civil War was an important and unique point in Oberlin’s history. The original Monument harkened back to that point, and helped convey the values that helped Oberlin succeed in the war. In contrast, the current Monument, by combining the original plaques with others to remember the dead from all wars, loses something. The modern Monument loses the unique connection to an important era in Oberlin’s past and instead portrays a more generic, if important, message about honoring Oberlin’s War dead. The modern Monument is symbolically weaker than the old one.

In 1998, the Council was able to set aside \$38,000 for the restoration of the Monument, and embarked on their restoration project, dismantling the wall and building a retaining wall between the hill and the Monument.²⁷⁵ Council contracted an Amherst firm to do the work, beginning in the last week of September.²⁷⁶ Sigg predicted that the restoration work would allow

²⁷³ Pat Murphy, Letter to Robert Lodge, regarding Soldiers Monument, April 21, 1997. Soldiers Monument File, Oberlin Heritage Society Archives.

²⁷⁴ Robert Lodge, Letter to Pat Murphy, regarding Soldiers Monument, May 7, 1997. Soldiers Monument File, Oberlin Heritage Society Archives.

²⁷⁵ “Memorial, gas house get attention from city”,

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

the Monument to “keep... standing well into the next century.”²⁷⁷ The refurbished Monument was rededicated on May 29th, 1999. The rededication events included a reading of the Gettysburg Address, harkening back to the Monument’s Civil War history, while including celebrations related to Oberlin’s history in other wars, including a presentation on the Tuskegee Airmen.²⁷⁸ It was clear that Oberlin has embraced the Monument as being for all of its fallen soldiers. For Memorial Day 2001, Richard Lothrop wrote in his “Elm Street Thoughts” column about his memories of the old Monument. Lothrop recalled his excitement about marching in the parade and meeting George A. Houghton, Oberlin’s last surviving Civil War Veteran. In the column, Lothrop compared his childhood “sense of awe” at reading the names of the fallen Civil War soldiers with the “added appreciation” to the names now listed, including some he knew personally.²⁷⁹ For Lothrop, the Monument helped those names “remain a vital part of our individual and collective Oberlin heritage.”²⁸⁰

The modern history of the Monument is fraught with damage and repair. Its history has called attention to the slowness inherent to Oberlin’s institutions. However, the Monument, for nearly seventy years, has been used by the Oberlin community for its Memorial Day celebrations, and has continued to receive the care it needs to keep it that way. For better or for worse, the Monument has become institutionalized within Oberlin’s community, and it looks to stay that way.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ “Refurbished soldier monument to enjoy rededication May 29”, *Oberlin News-Tribune* (Oberlin, Ohio), May 25, 1999

²⁷⁹ Lothrop, “Parade is gone, but memorial remains”,

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

“All monuments are efforts, in their own way, to stop time... History, of course, moves relentlessly to mock any such beliefs.”

-Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone*²⁸¹

Conclusion: A Monumental Failure?

The point of any memorial is to enshrine a particular interpretation of the past on the public landscape. The success of the memorial in promoting that interpretation can then be measured by the memorial’s impact on the community. The creators of the Soldiers Monument certainly had a message about the Civil War that they wished to impart on the Oberlin community. They wished to stress the importance of Oberlin’s ideological triumph in the Union’s victory, and how the sacrifice of ninety-six Oberlin soldiers proved critical to bringing about that triumph. They also had a clear wish for the Monument’s impact: that it exist in the community, perpetuating both the memory of Oberlin’s soldiers’ sacrifice and teaching future generations to value “Education... and Patriotism”²⁸² enough that in both war and peace, they follow the examples that these Oberlin men set, in both scholarship and duty.

If a memorial’s success is measured this way, then did the original Monument fail in its purpose? The history of the Monument shows that the original message of the Monument was subsumed over time by the different meanings attached to it, and eventually changed to reflect not Oberlin’s unique Civil War past, but the meaning needed for its use as a constant Memorial Day site: a place to remember Oberlin’s dead from all wars. In order for the people of Oberlin to be able to use the Monument during wars, they had to adapt what the Monument meant for them. The lessons and meaning of the Civil War were unable to provide meaning for current conflicts, and the Monument had to change in order to be relevant to the situation at hand.

²⁸¹ Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, Public planet books (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 7.

²⁸² “Decoration Day”, *Lorain County News* (Oberlin and Wellington [Ohio]).June 2, 1870

The misinterpreted story that originally drew me to the Monument is also a result of the Monument's meaning changing over time. The reason the students and the townspeople at the 1934 protest came into conflict is because they were both using their own definitions of what the Monument meant: the students seeing it as a warning not to get trapped in war, and the townspeople seeing it as a celebration of heroes who did their duty for the country. These meanings were so powerful that they provided a context for the Monument's deconstruction even when they didn't directly cause it.

The fact that the meaning of the Soldiers Monument changed over time gives me concern about the success of another of Oberlin's memorials. Earlier I stated that my first encounter with the Soldiers Monument was during research for a paper on the World War II Memorial Garden. My original plan for this thesis included a study of the Memorial Garden in comparison to the Monument. The Memorial Garden, dedicated in 1997, was partially inspired by Oberlin alumni's memories of the same spirit in the 1940s that motivated the restoration of the Monument. The history of the Memorial Garden also has a drastic sense of urgency: forty years after the end of the war, the alumni who designed the Memorial Garden felt the need to memorialize their fallen friends before the survivors, who had the clearest memories of their classmates, died and lost those memories forever. This memorial impulse is reflected in the inscription on the Memorial Garden:

To perpetuate the memory of the men of Oberlin College who among untold millions lost their lives in the Second World War 1939-1945. They paid the ultimate cost of war.

The message of the Memorial Garden, while coming out of the same era that spawned the reconstructed Monument, hews more closely to the original meaning of the Monument. Both were made in response to a specific war, both have specific, historically relevant reasons to wish

to perpetuate the memory of those who died in that war. If the original meaning of the Soldiers Monument has transformed, will the same thing happen to the Memorial Garden?

Nonetheless, it seems wrong to call the Soldiers Monument a failure. In the face of the passage of time, the decay of sandstone and a hill that really wants to push it over, the Monument has stood, and when it has succumbed to natural forces, the people of Oberlin have always been there to repair it. In retrospect, it seems arrogant for a founder to assume that the meaning that they give a memorial is the one that it will always share. As each successive generation passes through Oberlin, they find their own meaning for the Monument, and the story of the Monument holds all of these meanings. The meaning that, over time, the people of Oberlin have given the Monument was not the one that its creators originally intended, but it is still a meaning that has importance for the Oberlin community. If it wasn't, then there would be no people like William Bigglestone, Geoffrey Blodgett, Carl Bruening, or Richard Lothrop, who all clearly cared about the Monument and put effort into preserving its memory. There would be no American Legion action in 1983 to restore the Monument and add plaques to it to cement it as the central space for Oberlin war memory. There would be no movement to recreate the Monument in its current form in the early 1940s. And there would even be no controversy in 1934 for modern writers to attach significance to. While it is a loss for the Oberlin community that the Monument has lost its strong tie to Oberlin's unique Civil War history, the current Monument plays the role in Oberlin's community that Oberlin has shown that it needs to play.

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“[M]uch the greater part of these events we can know nothing about, not even that they occurred; many of them we can know only imperfectly; and even the few events that we think we know for sure we can never be absolutely certain of, since we can never revive them, never observe or test them directly. The event itself once occurred, but as an actual event it has disappeared; so that in dealing with it the only objective reality we can observe or test is some material trace which the event has left—usually a written document. With these traces of vanished events, we must be content since they are all we have.”

-Carl Becker, Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, December 9, 1931

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