

Honoring Our Veterans

Keeping Lebanon's Soldiers Memorial Building Statues Standing



North Park Street - statue at Soldiers Memorial, 1965



1891: "The Infantryman" is brought to Lebanon



A reminder to honor veterans of all wars

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The Soldiers Memorial Building was originally constructed thanks to the efforts and donations of Lebanon's residents. The cornerstone was laid in 1886, and the completed building was dedicated in 1890. Frank C. Churchill was one of the driving forces behind the building, and after its dedication, he personally purchased a statue of a soldier to stand in front of the memorial. The *Granite State Free Press* reported that "Hon. F.C. Churchill has purchased a fine life-sized figure of a soldier, leaning on an old army musket, which he proposes to present to the veterans of Lebanon. The figure is of bronzed metal and is said to be a work of much merit" (GSFP March 20, 1891).

Churchill was an influential Lebanon resident: he was the co-founder of the Carter and Churchill factory, head of both the National Bank of Lebanon and the Mascoma Savings Bank, and was later appointed special agent for the Department of the Interior by President Theodore Roosevelt. His artistic gift to Lebanon's veterans, known as "The Infantryman," was unveiled in a ceremony on Memorial Day in 1891, and was immediately declared "a splendid ornament" (GSFP June 5, 1891).

Churchill didn't have to look far to find inspiration for his gift to the community. This kind of Civil War soldier statue first appeared in the late 1860s, as communities grappled with the war's aftermath and veterans returning home. Claremont was one of the first, installing a bronze statue of a soldier at rest in 1869, and other New Hampshire towns soon followed. By the time

Lebanon's memorial was completed in 1890, "soldier at rest"-style statues could be ordered from the J.L. Mott Iron Works catalog. The catalog offered the statue either painted or "bronzed" – painted with bronze paint – for around \$150 (roughly \$5,000 today). Unlike the earlier bronze statues, which could cost \$5,000 (over \$100,000 today), the "bronzed" statues were made of zinc, a much weaker material that made the sculptures liable to slumping and breakage.

Lebanon's Infantryman statue experienced this firsthand: in 1973, the figure was found "leaned backwards precariously" after its legs were broken. (A contemporaneous article suggests vandalism, but a more natural failure of the aging zinc seems equally likely). Local history enthusiasts George Corrette and Billy Hubbard undertook the repair, possibly with the help of faculty and students at Dartmouth's Thayer School of Engineering. Regular maintenance and upkeep by the city have kept the figure in stable condition in the decades since.

The other sculptures that decorate the front of the Soldiers Memorial tend to be overshadowed by the Infantryman. The pyramid of cannonballs on the front lawn and the two artillery shells flanking the walkway likely date from 1911 or shortly thereafter. These were artifacts recovered from the USS Maine, sunk in the Havana harbor in 1898 – the inciting trigger of the Spanish-American War. A cannon originally sat over the entrance to the Soldiers Memorial, rumored to also have been retrieved from the Maine. The three rifles and three cannonballs that currently sit over the entrance porch also date from this period, though their origin and significance are unrecorded. ■

