

WHAT'S SHAKIN' / Wednesday, July 1, 2009

OUR WASHINGTON MONUMENT

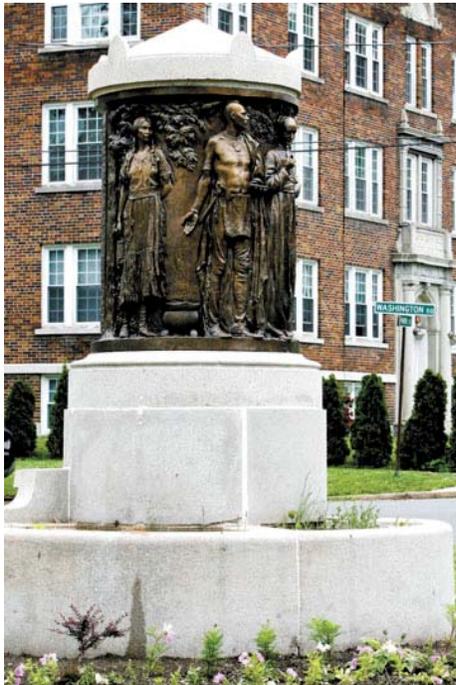
By Staff

<http://www.syracusenewtimes.com/newyork/article-3254-our-washington-monument.html>

Whether this writer's May 2, 2001, cover story, "[Monumental Stupidity](#)," had anything to do with it or not, it's refreshing to see that the city has decided to reclaim its wealth of monuments and historic plaques, and return them to their former glory. The latest monument to receive restorer Sharon BuMann's Midas touch stands, once nearly forgotten, in Washington Square Park, the northernmost greenspace within city limits. In its restored state, it is an amazing piece of work.



Park place: The location of the soon-to-be-rededicated Washington Square Park Monument is pretty close to its original spot but still within the friendly confines of the former common for the village of Salina. A closeup of the unusual cap, and the statue's bronzework shows incredible detail as well as the impressive restoration work of Sharon BuMann. **MICHAEL DAVIS PHOTO**



Originally dedicated on July 1, 1908, the Kirkpatrick Monument is one of three built in Dr. William Kirkpatrick's honor and to memorialize the importance of the Onondaga Nation to the history of the Salt City. North Sider Gail Sherman Corbett sculpted the monument; she also created the Hamilton White Monument in Fayette Firefighters' Park. It certainly harkens to the early 20th century—on three sides the pink granite was cut to accommodate troughs for horses; the fourth side was a fountain for humans.

The Washington Square Neighborhood Task Force, part of the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today initiative, had planned on rededicating the monument on its 100th birthday, but a missing piece forced its delay to this year. Still, the Wednesday, July 1, celebration, which will include a re-enactment of the original dedication ceremony, will be no less auspicious.

"When we formed this task force, we were looking at the advantages we have in this neighborhood," said Jeanette Pietrantoni, a member of the TNT group and organizer of the dedication ceremony. "It's an old neighborhood, and this park has been quite historical. It's the oldest part of the city. This was the common for the town of Salina, and the park was the site of the first school and the original Westminster Presbyterian Church. We were wondering if we could get this park back to what it had once been."

While those discussions were ongoing, the group realized that the monument's centennial was fast approaching, so they targeted its rededication as a starting point. The largest problem, however, was that the monument's original pink granite base was missing, and it sat on a puny limestone base mere inches off the ground. "It looked insignificant," Pietrantoni noted.

Furthermore, the once-glorious bronze centerpiece, the castings of which show the Onondagas' discovery of salt springs and the introduction of the saline solution to Jesuit missionary Simon Le Moyne, stood muted and grimy after years of neglect. "It had some challenges," admitted Sharon BuMann, a Central Square sculptor and expert in bronze restoration. Those included accumulated chewing gum (ew!) that BuMann had to meticulously chink off using dental tools and damage from when a car hit it several years ago.

"Restoration is something that I do because I can," she continued. "It's such an honor working with these pieces, to bring them back to their

original condition. Oftentimes when they're ignored, they look like the best place for them is the city dump. To bring them back is a special place in my heart."

It took nearly a year for BuMann to fix up the monument, and its restoration certainly had its surprises. For one, all but one piece of the original support structure to the bronze cylinder were found inside a hangar at Hancock International Airport. How long they collected dust there is anyone's guess. And the distinctive cap to the cylinder—found underneath a tarp in the hangar's corner—has its own unusual history. Apparently, it was a rite of passage for neighborhood children to climb to the top and have their picture taken. Pietrantonio admitted to owning such a photograph.

As for the missing piece, the fabrication of its replacement delayed the monument's completion in time for its centennial. Meanwhile, BuMann worked on realigning the monument to its original orientation within the park. The committee decided against placing it in its original location, about 10 feet south and abutting the street, where the notorious automobile accident threw it out of whack.

"The project became one of reconstructing what we already had," BuMann said. "We were able to do that but the difficult part was we didn't have any blueprints to go by; only photographs. The installation procedure was based on what we thought would be the best way to go about it. I'm not sure if we were accurate in aligning it, but we came as close as we could. We used some of the historic photographs to try to align the monument with the houses."

A \$50,000 grant secured by state Sen. John DeFrancisco (R-Syracuse) funded the project. Pietrantonio got some other lesser grants to install benches and shrubbery around the monument. "The neatest thing about this restoration," said Pat Driscoll, commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Youth Programs, "is that members of the committee did a lot of research about the history of this particular monument, and it speaks to the history of our city."

Citizens are invited to relive that early history when the Washington Square Park Monument is rededicated Wednesday, July 1 from 6:30 to 8 p.m. The park is located along Park Street on the very north side of the city. Politicians and dignitaries who participated in the original dedication will be represented this time by those who hold similar offices currently. So, 2nd District Common Councilor Pat Hogan will "play" Mayor Alan Fobes since Mayor Matt Driscoll will not be available.

Missing from the original ceremony, Pietrantonio noted, was a representative from the Onondaga Nation. "We don't know if that was deliberate," she said. To redress that wrong, the committee has asked Onondaga Faithkeeper, Chief Oren Lyons, to participate on Wednesday. And the Syracuse Parks and Recreation All-Star Band will play before and after the ceremony. For more information, call 471-0440.

"I hope the community embraces it and understands what this monument is all about," BuMann said. "When I was working on it, neighborhood children would come and ask questions about it. Before it was something to climb on, a rite of passage to get to the top. I hope that some of those children have been instilled with the concept that it's more than just a piece of playground equipment."

[See an older picture of the sculpture that ran in the April 9, 2008 issue of *The New Times*](#)