

**A COMMEMORATIVE
HISTORY OF
SOLDIERS' MONUMENT**



Presented to the City of Oshkosh by John Hicks, 1907

A COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY OF SOLDIERS' MONUMENT

To the Memory of the Wisconsin Men Who Fought in the War for the Union, 1861-1865.

Atlanta
Gettysburg
Bull Run
Pittsburg Landing

Presented to the City of Oshkosh by John Hicks, 1907

RESTORATION PROJECT 2000-2002

Funded by

Conservation Treatment Award from Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!)

A joint project of Heritage Preservation and Smithsonian American Art Museum.

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HISTORY

In March 1906 an anonymous philanthropist offered to present a Civil War monument to the city of Oshkosh. A monument committee of Judge George W. Burnell, Adj. General Charles R. Boardman of the Wisconsin National Guard, and J. Howard Jenkins led the effort to secure a site and City approval. By ordinance of April 10, 1906 the Common Council agreed to the placement of the monument in Opera House Square and “upon completion of the said monument the said city of Oshkosh shall properly care for and preserve the same.” It was signed by Mayor Banderob on April 12, 1906. Burnell, Jenkins and Banderob were all veterans of the Civil War.

On June 30, 1906 John Hicks, U.S. Minister to Chile, was revealed as the donor of the monument in Oshkosh’s *Daily Northwestern*. *Soldiers’ Monument* was the first of ten bronze outdoor sculptures he would give to Oshkosh before his death in 1917. It was the first outdoor public sculpture in Oshkosh apart from cemetery monuments. *Soldiers’ Monument* marked the beginning of the relationship between Gaetano Trentanove, its sculptor, and Hicks, who would commission three more large bronze monuments from Trentanove and several busts. The Hicks Collection of bronze statues and busts in Oshkosh may be the largest such collection given by a single donor to one city.

JOHN HICKS

John Hicks, 1847-1917, was owner and publisher of the Oshkosh’s *Daily Northwestern* newspaper and owner of Hicks Printing Company. Active in Republican politics, Hicks served as U.S. Minister to Peru from 1889 to 1893. In 1905 he was appointed ambassador to Chile. His travels in South America and Europe inspired an interest in civic beautification.

A member of the board of the Oshkosh Public Library from its establishment in 1895, he took an active interest in plans for the new library building in 1899. He was one of the subscribers to the fund that commissioned busts of library benefactors Marshall Harris and Senator Philetus Sawyer from sculptor Preston Powers. He donated marble busts of George Washington by Hiram Powers and Benjamin Franklin, by Preston Powers, to the library in 1902. The Washington bust remains at the library; the Franklin bust is at the Oshkosh Public Museum, transferred there when the museum separated from the library in 1924.



Hicks' first individually commissioned project was *Soldiers' Monument*. It was given in memory of Hicks' father John, a member of Company E of the 32nd Wisconsin Infantry. The elder Hicks was killed February 9, 1865 in a skirmish at Binnaker's Bridge on the South Edisto River, South Carolina.

Hicks also commissioned his next original work from Trentanove. The bronze statue of Chief Oshkosh, the Menominee leader for whom the city is named, dates from 1911. He turned to Trentanove again for a pair of stalking bronze lions placed at the entrance to the Oshkosh Public Library in 1912. The grateful Trentanove sculpted a marble bust of Hicks presented to the library in 1912.

Hicks gave the city a bronze replica of Jean Houdon's statue of George Washington. He commissioned a bronze statue of Carl Schurz by Karl Bitter of New York, and acquired the Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and Longfellow busts that graced the Oshkosh public schools bearing their names. The bronze bust of Theodore Roosevelt now at the Oshkosh Public Museum was given to the library in 1910.

When the foresighted Hicks died in 1917, he left a trust fund of \$25,000 for "the purchase and erection of statues, busts and monuments in the parks and streets of the City of Oshkosh, and the repair of such as are now in existence or may hereafter be erected" and for "the purchase of books, pictures, maps, drawings and works of art to be placed in the High School and ward schools of the City of Oshkosh. This is not to include apparatus of any kind, or equipment for sports or amusements." The fund was to be managed by and under the control of the Board of Directors of the Oshkosh Public Library. The Library Board continues to carry that responsibility.

GAETANO TRENTANOVE

The sculptor Gaetano Trentanove was born on February 21, 1858 in Florence, Italy, the son of a goldsmith. He studied at Florence and Rome and became a member of the fine arts academies of Florence and Parma. According to the *Daily Northwestern* of July 8, 1907, it was through friendships made in Paris that Trentanove came to open a studio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He became an American citizen and spent much of his life in Milwaukee while spending part of every year at the studio he maintained in Florence.



His American work included *The Last of the Spartans*, which was exhibited in Chicago at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and was purchased for the Layton Art Gallery. It is now in the collection of the Milwaukee Art Museum. In 1894 Trentanove was given the commission for a marble statue of Father Jacques Marquette to be placed in Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol as a representative of the State of Wisconsin. His *Tadeusz Kosciuszko* in Milwaukee, an equestrian bronze, dates from 1905. At the same time as *Soldiers' Monument* was being erected in Oshkosh, his sculpture of Governor Nelson Dewey was being placed in Lancaster, Wisconsin and a monument to President McKinley erected at Somerville, New Jersey. The Inventory of American Sculpture lists 16 pieces, four in the East and the remainder in the Midwest.

In 1897 Trentanove was created a knight of the Crown of Italy. He retired to Italy where he died on March 13, 1937.

WISCONSIN IN THE CIVIL WAR

After the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, President Lincoln called for regiments of state militia to serve for 90 days to quell the insurrection. Wisconsin volunteers quickly formed the 1st Regiment from the state. The 2nd Regiment, which included Company E Oshkosh Volunteers formed under Gabriel Bouck, was the first regiment enlisted for three years to reach the threatened capital of Washington, D.C.

Wisconsin troops would serve in all theaters of the war. The famed Iron Brigade, given its name after the Battle of Antietam, was made up of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin Regiments and the 19th Indiana and fought in the key battles in the East. Six Wisconsin regiments fought at Gettysburg. Wisconsin regiments fought under Grant at Vicksburg, the culmination of the effort to regain the Mississippi River Valley, and under Sherman in the battles leading to the capture Atlanta, in the March to the Sea, and in the Campaign for the Carolinas. Others served in the trans-Mississippi western territories.

The 32nd Wisconsin was formed in the fall of 1862. Company D was recruited in Oshkosh. John Hicks' father was a member of Company E. Of that regiment, which until Sherman's campaign began in May 1864 had seen little action, 17 soldiers were killed in action, 10 died of wounds and 243 died of disease, one of them at training camp, Camp Bragg, in Oshkosh.

According to historian James Metz, "Oshkosh furnished considerably above 1,000 men – probably 1,200 or more – to the war." Nine infantry companies (100 men each) and one cavalry company were raised in Oshkosh or the immediately surrounding rural areas. Omro, Neenah



and Menasha raised their own companies. 35 out of 52 Wisconsin infantry regiments contained some Oshkosh soldiers. Those companies suffered their share of casualties.

With approximately 800,000 residents in 1860, Wisconsin furnished an estimated 80,600 enlistees during the course of the war. More than 11,000 men died from wounds or disease or were reported missing in action. Another 15,000 men were discharged for disabilities incurred in the service. The war would end in April 1865 with Sherman's troops in Goldsboro, North Carolina and Grant accepting the surrender of Lee's army at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

THE SCULPTURE

“Three soldier figures are portrayed on rugged ground (in the form of a common bronze base). The central figure is an officer with sword pointing upward and looking over his left shoulder as if leading troops into battle. The private (proper right) is in crouching posture with rifle and bayonet projecting forward. The bugler (proper left), with left knee down, is aiming the pistol in his right hand with the bugle in his left hand at the rear. ‘They are posed to represent a thrilling episode of battle, to wit, an advance on the position of the enemy with the participants about to engage in a hand-to-hand struggle.’ (*Daily Northwestern* July 8, 1907)

“On the sides of the granite pedestal are bronze laurel wreaths with ribbons which surround names (inscribed in granite) of battles in which Wisconsin troops participated. . . . On the east side of the pedestal, to the rear, just below the bronze base is inscribed ‘G. Trentanove, Florence, Italy’.”

From “Condition Assessment” by Venus Bronze Works, Inc. Center for Conservation, 1998.

The medium is cast bronze executed by the Galli Brothers foundry in Florence, Italy. The bronze group has approximate dimensions 12' high, 8'6" deep and 6'8" wide over a bronze base 10' high, 4'8" deep and 4'4" wide. The weight was approximately four tons before the removal of sand from the interior during conservation. The *Daily Northwestern* of May 11, 1907 reported the monument was too large to pass through the railroad tunnels of Italy. Scheduled to come with its granite pedestal, the bronze's shipping had been delayed until it could be moved overland from Florence to Leghorn. It arrived in New York May 23 and was shipped on to Milwaukee.



On May 10, 1907 excavation for the Hicks' monument was underway in Opera House Square. The foundation is 16 feet by 16 feet 4 inches and about 7 feet in thickness. The concrete base was finished May 24, 1907.

The pedestal of granite blocks was shipped from Italy in twenty cases. Trentanove had selected rose granite from Baveno Lake of Garda, Italy. At its base the pedestal is 17' deep by 16'4" wide with a height of 15'4". The bronze wreaths attached to the pedestal are 3'4" high by 4' 0" wide. The contract for setting up the monument was held by Mr. H. F. Wenrich of Oshkosh.

The cornerstone was laid on June 6, 1907 in a ceremony that was part of the state encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic at Oshkosh.

Inventory of American Sculpture Reference Number 71500374.

THE DEDICATION

Dedication of the monument took place on July 8, 1907 with Minister Hicks, newly returned from Chile, in attendance. The honor of unveiling the monument was given to Mrs. John Hume, the daughter of the late Lt. Col. John W. Scott, killed at Chancellorsville, after whom one of the Oshkosh GAR posts was named. Patriotic music was performed by the Arion Band and military honors provided by Companies B and F, Second Regiment, Wisconsin National Guard.

After the brief outdoor ceremony, the proceedings moved into the adjacent Grand Opera House. The flag-bedecked stage and boxes accommodated dignitaries and honored guests including Minister Hicks, members of his family, Chevalier and Mrs. Gaetano Trentanove, Mr. and Mrs. Arminio Conte of the Italian consulate, members of the monument committee and their wives, the Common Council, officers of the Oshkosh Yacht Club, and the speakers.

The audience included members of the John W. Scott and Phil Sheridan GAR posts; Nelson A. Miles Camp No. 1, Spanish American War Veterans; Nathan Paine Camp, Sons of Veterans; the Deutscher Krieger Verein von Oshkosh; John W. Scott Post, Woman's Relief Corps; and Oshkosh Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution.

"Exercises inside the Opera House opened with an invocation by Rev. John W. Greenwood, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church. Judge G. W. Burnell acted as master of ceremonies. The presentation speech was delivered by J. H. Jenkins of the monument committee, and Minister John Hicks formally presented the monument to the city. Mayor Banderob accepted the gift on



the part of the city. Lt. Gen. Arthur MacArthur, ranking officer of the US Army, gave a short talk. The song, "Red, White and Blue" was then sung by a chorus of girls from the high school, led by W. H. Babcock. Bishop Samuel Fallows of Chicago [Reformed Episcopal Church] then delivered the address of the day. Then followed the anthem, "America" by the choir and the audience, and the benediction by Rev. Edward H. Smith, pastor of the First Congregational church, and chaplain of the Second Regiment, Wisconsin National Guard." *Daily Northwestern* July 8, 1907.

CONSERVATION PROJECT

Hicks did not consider himself an orator. When prevailed on to speak about the monument by the audience, his comments were brief. The *Daily Northwestern* of July 9 reported his remarks. "...No city has finer men and women. Other countries have their great men, men of education - of the better class they call them - men who are acknowledged to possess a degree of greatness, but it is the ordinary everyday American citizen who lives here that makes this the great place, and the great country...As to the monument, I doubt if we realize what it means. I say frankly that I did not fully realize what it means...Did you ever stop to consider what it means? Buildings may be destroyed. The city hall or High school may burn and the cornerstone may be removed, but that monument may stand there for no one knows how long..."

Buildings *were* destroyed. The Athearn Hotel, facing the square and decorated for the festivities, was demolished in 1964. The Grand Opera House declined, but was restored in the 1980s. *Soldiers' Monument* lost its prominence as streets were altered. And the monument itself did not age gracefully.

A local group was formed under the Save Outdoor Sculpture program of the Wisconsin Arts Board and the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property (NIC) in the mid-1990s. After a preliminary survey of Oshkosh monuments, the group encouraged the Library Board, as trustees of the Hicks Fund, to undertake conservation work.

In the spring of 1997 the library solicited proposals from firms skilled in assessment and treatment of outdoor bronze sculpture to do a detailed assessment and propose treatment plans for the monuments. Work was to be conducted in accordance with the *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice* of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. Venus Bronze Works, Inc. of Detroit, Michigan, which had done similar work for the Wisconsin State Capitol and in many cities in the Midwest, was awarded the contract.



Their assessment found *Soldiers' Monument* to be in the worst condition of all of the Hicks monuments. It was essentially coming apart at the seams, perhaps due to the sculptor's vision exceeding the technical skill of the foundry he used. "The *Soldiers' Monument* is in very poor and deteriorating condition, due largely to the poor quality of the castings and fabrication, but also due to weathering over 90 years. Holes, separation, cracks, thin castings, porosity, failing lead plugs, retained investment and sand fill materials, and rusting iron have contributed to a dynamic situation which has caused the relatively rapid deterioration..... A large crack on the bugler's arm revealed rust which is probably indicative of 'oxide jacking' as the cause of the crack. An impinging iron member has rusted, occupying more space than the original iron, causing expansive stress and cracking the bronze." It also appeared that the figures were becoming detached from the bronze base.

The conservation treatment of the Hicks monuments began with the *Library Lions* in 1998 and continued with the school busts and Washington statue. *Soldiers' Monument* was to be the largest, most complicated and most expensive of the projects. It was deferred until funds could be found to supplement the Hicks Trust Fund.

In 2000 the Oshkosh Public Library received a grant of \$15,000 toward the conservation of the *Soldiers' Monument*. The Conservation Treatment Award was granted by Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a national program to heighten awareness of public sculpture.

This award was made possible with generous support from Target Stores and the National Endowment for the Arts. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the program in July 1998 as part of the White House Millennium Council's Save America's Treasures. Save Outdoor Sculpture! Conservation Treatment Awards were to help cover the costs of conserving public sculptures in communities across the country.

"This remarkable effort will help monuments stand proudly and fully preserved for the new century," Clinton said. "It is an example of how we can rededicate ourselves to preserving what is best about America. It is up to all of us to preserve our heritage."

According to the Spring 2001 issue of *SOS! Update*, 123 awards totaling \$1.2 million were made from 349 applications. At least one award was made in each state plus the District of Columbia. *Soldiers' Monument* (1907) in Oshkosh and *The Victorious Charge* by John S. Conway (1898) in Milwaukee received grants for Wisconsin.

SOS! is a joint project of Heritage Preservation and Smithsonian American Art Museum. Additional information is available on the SOS! Web page at www.heritagepreservation.org.



Matching funds for the \$60,000 project were provided by the Hicks Trust Fund and from community donors. A \$5,000 gift came from the Ameritech Wisconsin Chapter #4, Telephone Pioneers of America.

The bronze figures and wreaths were removed on November 29, 2000 for extensive treatment at Venus Bronze Works, Inc.'s facility in Detroit, Michigan. C.R. Meyer of Oshkosh did the rigging and removal work.

During treatment forty-five five-gallon buckets of wet sand were removed from the interior, the deteriorated non-functional iron armature was removed, and the interior cleaned. Various damaged pieces were removed, repaired with bronze replacing iron pins and plugs, and reattached. The surface was cleaned, with bare and ground welded areas patinated resulting in a "marbleized" green-black patina. The statue was then waxed for protection. It was reinstalled December 11, 2001.

The engraving on the pedestal had become illegible. The decision was made to take a rubbing of the lettering, remove the granite, shave the faces leaving unpolished areas for the inscriptions and re-engrave the inscriptions. The work was performed by G. Reinke Monuments of Oshkosh.

Although the projects were developed independently, the conservation of *Soldiers' Monument* happily coincided with a downtown revitalization project. At the time of the grant application in 1999 a chain drug store in an adjacent building had just closed and the City was beginning a downtown planning process. That led to the purchase and demolition of the vacant 1960s building to create a civic space in the heart of the downtown completed in September 2002. The small, triangular site of *Soldiers' Monument* has been incorporated in a full-block urban park, Opera House Square, the name revived from 1900. The monument is now a prominent feature of the site, visible from Main Street.



THE HICKS COLLECTION

Marble bust of Benjamin Franklin by Preston Powers, 1902. Formerly at Oshkosh Public Library, now at Oshkosh Public Museum.

Marble bust of George Washington by Hiram Powers, 1902. Oshkosh Public Library

Bronze Soldiers' Monument by Gaetano Trentanove, 1907. Monument Square.

Bust of Senator Matt Carpenter by Gaetano Trentanove, 1909. Location unknown.

Bust of James G. Blaine by Gaetano Trentanove, 1909. Location unknown.

Bronze bust of Theodore Roosevelt by James Earl Fraser, 1910. Formerly at Oshkosh Public Library, now at Oshkosh Public Museum.

Bronze bust of Abraham Lincoln by Adolph Weinman, 1909. In front of Lincoln School.

Bronze statue of Chief Oshkosh by Gaetano Trentanove, 1911. Menominee Park

Bronze statue of George Washington after Jean Antoine Houdon, 1911. New York Avenue at Hazel Street and Menominee Drive.

Bronze bust of George Washington by Thomas Crawford, 1911. In front of Washington School.

Bronze bust of Benjamin Franklin after Houdon, 1911. In front of Franklin School.

Bronze bust of Thomas Jefferson by an unknown sculptor, 1911. In front of Jefferson School.

Bronze lions by Gaetano Trentanove, 1912. In front of Oshkosh Public Library.

Bronze statue of Carl Schurz by Karl Theodore Francis Bitter, 1914. East end of Washington Avenue.

Bronze bust of Longfellow by Thomas Brock, 1915. Formerly at Longfellow School, demolished. Now at Oshkosh Public Library.

White marble bust of Benjamin Franklin by an unknown sculptor. Date unknown. In the building of the *Daily Northwestern* from at least 1919 until 1999. Given to the Oshkosh Public Library in 1998 as part of the Hicks collection. Now at Oshkosh Public Library.

Bronze dragons. Unknown sculptor. Purchased by John Hicks in Hong Kong, March 1911. Believed to be 400-500 years old at that time. Located in the Carthage Building in 1919. Formerly in the *Oshkosh Northwestern* building. Donated to Oshkosh Public Library in 1998 as part of the Hicks collection.



CITATIONS/REFERENCES

A chronology of events leading to the erection of the Monument at Opera House Square was researched and prepared by Michael Wertel, Oshkosh, member Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War SUVCW, Old Abe Camp #8. April 2001. The citations to the Oshkosh *Daily Northwestern* (ODN) are from his work.

ODN March 5, 1906	ODN June 5, 1907
ODN March 14, 1906	ODN June 6, 1907
ODN March 20, 1906	ODN June 7, 1907
ODN June 30, 1906	ODN July 8, 1907
ODN May 10, 1907	ODN July 9, 1907
ODN May 11, 1907	ODN July 11, 1907
ODN May 24, 1907	ODN July 16, 1907
ODN May 25, 1907	ODN July 18, 1907
ODN May 28, 1907	ODN July 27, 1907
ODN June 4, 1907	

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