

## CHAPTER I

### THE IDEA 1918-1920

On November 9, 1918, two days before the Armistice ending World War I, a call came in the Kansas City Journal for a memorial to honor the regiments of youthful crusaders who gloriously asserted their manhood at Soissons and St. Mihiel and at Sedan . . . a memorial befitting their achievement.

This charge in the public press for a monument honoring the heroes of the First World War echoed the one which had been building in the hearts and minds of Kansas City's citizens—to give form to gratitude and pride at the victorious end of that first modern war.

Price does not matter. But it must be beautiful and imposing enough not to allow the intrinsic beauty to fall below the cause for which it is meant and to fit into so beautiful a city.

Thus, from the beginning, the memorial idea was conceived not only as one which must fit the magnitude of the cause, but also be appropriate to grace "so beautiful a city."

A letter from the Joint Councilmanic Committee of the City Council to Robert Alexander Long, Kansas City business man and civic leader, dated November 25, 1918, told of a meeting, November 23, of that committee with Kansas City Mayor James Cowgill to arrange for an appropriate memorial and announcing a general mass meeting. The letter bearing six signatures, informed Mr. Long of his nomination as temporary chairman of the meeting.<sup>1</sup> At the mass meeting on Friday,

---

<sup>1</sup>Joint Councilmanic Committee of the City Council, Kansas City, Missouri to R. A. Long, 25 November, 1918, Liberty Memorial Association,

November 29, 1918, at 8:00 P.M. in the Music Room of the Hotel Muehlebach, R. A. Long was chosen as the permanent chairman.<sup>2</sup>

The first meeting of the Memorial Committee was held in Room 504, R. A. Long Building, at 2:30 P.M., December 12, 1918. The first item of business was the selection of a name for the organization. A variety of names was proposed including: Patriots' War Memorial, Heroes' War Memorial, World War Memorial, Victory War Memorial, Democracy War Memorial, and World War Liberty Memorial.<sup>3</sup> In addition to names including the words War Memorial, the title Victory and Peace Memorial was proposed. Judge Frank P. Sebree thought the name should not be chosen hastily and Jesse Clyde Nichols suggested the name might "have an effect on the success of the enterprise."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Burris Jenkins spoke on behalf of "Liberty Memorial as the word 'liberty' had been used so much in connection with the war." Whether the emphasis was to be on war or on peace was a question which developed early and was to continue. On that occasion it was decided that the selection of a name should be opened to the public and not limited to committee members.<sup>5</sup>

At this same meeting in a comprehensive resolution, a general outline of the organization, its character, purpose and structure was

---

"Minutes," 1. The Minutes of the Liberty Memorial Association will be cited hereafter as "Minutes."

For history of the Liberty Memorial, see the records of the Liberty Memorial Association, which includes minutes, correspondence, and press clipping books, in the Liberty Memorial Museum Library and Archives. Unless otherwise stated, all citations of minutes and correspondence pertaining to the Memorial are from this source.

<sup>2</sup>"Minutes," 2. <sup>3</sup>Ibid., 6. <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 7.

read preparatory to its presentation at a mass meeting to be called by the General Chairman. In brief, a Committee of One Hundred to be appointed by R. A. Long, with him as the permanent Chairman, would establish the character, location and cost (and "plan for raising of same") of the memorial. This committee would be empowered to resolve itself into a legal entity for administration. Another group, the Committee of One Hundred and Fifty, would serve in an advisory capacity. These two committees, acting as a whole, were to invite suggestions, hold meetings and determine the character, location and cost and all collateral matters.<sup>6</sup>

On December 16, the name Liberty Memorial Association was chosen.<sup>7</sup> The Committee of One Hundred, comprised of one hundred leading men and women of Kansas City, was named. Also, to assure wide representation of all groups, members were appointed to the temporary advisory Committee of One Hundred and Fifty.<sup>8</sup> In January, 1919, J. C. Nichols was elected Vice Chairman, along with Frank P. Sebree, second Vice Chairman; William Huttig, Treasurer and John Edward McPherson, Secretary.<sup>9</sup>

In connection with the task of establishing the character and location of the Memorial, H. M. Beardsley, Chairman of Committee "C" on Public Opinion, Memorial and Location, requested from the president of the American Institute of Architects "names of three or four architects of national reputation" to visit Kansas City to describe other

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 18.



great memorials and to make suggestions about a memorial for Kansas City.<sup>10</sup> Also, one or more sculptors were to be invited. The possibility of a competition of architects or artists under "rules of their respective national institutes in furnishing a design" was proposed.<sup>11</sup> At a meeting on January 11, 1919, a number of "prominent citizens" presented ideas as to the form the Liberty Memorial would take and where it should be. A monumental building opposite Kansas City's Union Station was an often repeated proposal.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the first mention in the press had been for "a Victory monument, on the [Union] Station Plaza."<sup>13</sup>

From the very beginning, the idea of a World War I monument in Kansas City, the Liberty Memorial, was on the highest plane—a noble concept for a noble cause. Of course, there was the civic enthusiasm for Kansas City itself, the Kansas City Spirit, the beginning of the growing heartland euphoria of the twenties. But, more than that, throughout the planning, promotion and realization, there was an element of idealism—the Great War had been the war to end all war and this monument "for the ages" was to be a worthy one. In R. A. Long as the chief officer, the city had a business man who seemed to dedicate himself tirelessly to the nobility of the purpose. He strove selflessly to secure a monument which would represent Kansas City at its best. An early decision, December 16, 1918, was to define just what

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 39-40. <sup>11</sup>Ibid., 40. <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>13</sup>Kansas City Journal, 9 November 1918. This citation and most others referring to newspaper articles are taken from press clipping books of the Liberty Memorial Association, in the Liberty Memorial Museum Library and Archives. These clippings do not include page numbers.

the area of representation was to be.<sup>14</sup>

There were those who spoke for a Missouri-Kansas monument or the larger Kansas City community. However, the popular choice and the final decision, approved by vote of the joint Committee, March 27, 1919, was that the Liberty Memorial would be a Kansas City, Missouri monument.<sup>15</sup> There was a real effort to learn the wishes of Kansas City citizens in regard to their World War monument during the preliminary formation of plans. Purd B. Wright, Head Librarian of the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, organized a public exhibit of literature and photographs pertaining to memorials of the past and possibilities for the present one.<sup>16</sup> Committee "C" on Public Opinion received and reviewed suggestions of the widest variety from public spirited individuals and groups.

Throughout coverage by press and as meticulously recorded in Minutes of the Liberty Memorial Association, a high minded approach was conspicuous. Extensive advice of experts was sought and then given thoughtful attention. The request to the American Institute of Architects for guidance brought the name of H. Van Buren Magonigle to the attention of the Liberty Memorial Association Committee "C" on Public Opinion, Memorial and Location. Mr. Magonigle, a well known New York architect, had served briefly as Chairman of the A.I.A. Committee on War Memorials.<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Kimball of Omaha, A.I.A. President, advised great care in the war monument movement. Patriotic

---

<sup>14</sup>"Minutes," 14. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 151-152. <sup>16</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 53.

monuments erected without careful consideration could be less than ideal and this was to be avoided. Hastily conceived Civil War statues were referred to frequently and deplored.<sup>18</sup>

School children delivered 55,000 invitations announcing general public meetings. Between January 16 and March 21, 1919, thirteen such meetings were held to inform the public.<sup>19</sup> So that no segment of citizens should be missed, a meeting for Colored Kansas Citizens was held at Lincoln High School.<sup>20</sup> The sculptor Lorado Taft was invited to address a public meeting. Since he was touring European battlefields on a war monument commission, Miss Nellie V. Walker from Taft's Chicago studio came in his stead with stereoptican slides.<sup>21</sup> The Chicago architects D. H. Perkins and Jarvis Hunt as well as H. Van Buren Magonigle each spoke at public meetings early that spring.<sup>22</sup>

Committee "C" continued to survey monuments of other cities. The question of a utilitarian memorial versus a nonutilitarian memorial was repeatedly addressed with preference seeming to reside with the nonutilitarian concept. It was a question of national interest. The

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 115; J. E. McPherson, "Kansas City's Liberty Memorial," Part II, Arts and Decoration 15 (July 1921): 161.

<sup>20</sup>"Minutes," 115.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 54. The invitation to Lorado Taft which resulted in Nellie Walker's visit came about following a request to Robert W. DeForest, President of the American Federation of Arts for suggestions by H. M. Beardsley, Chairman of Committee "C." This was recorded 18 January 1919.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 80, 97, 107, 112, 115-116. D. H. Perkins came to Kansas City 28 February 1919; Jarvis Hunt, 6 March 1919; and Magonigle, 13 March 1919.

Acting Secretary of the National Committee on Memorial Buildings listed thirty-two specific types, from a drinking fountain to a memorial university.<sup>23</sup> Sir Alfred Mond, M.P., in the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, warned against the "art of the monumental mason."<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Magonigle, an eloquent speaker, presented the historical evolution of memorial monuments with stereoptican views including a number of his own design, March 13, 1919. He also advised that first the money be secured, then an architect and the site be chosen. He mentioned two possible sites, the hill south of Union Station and Swope Park. Above all though, Mr. Magonigle emphasized that Beauty should be the first consideration.<sup>25</sup> These public meetings to hear from eminent authorities served not only as sounding boards for giving and receiving information but also stimulated enthusiasm for the project. It should be recalled that the months during which these well-attended meetings were scheduled there had been great loss of life from influenza. It was a time when health officials had discouraged public gatherings. However, there was no lack of publicity, attention or concern in Kansas City for the movement that would result in the Liberty Memorial.

On April 3, 1919, the Committee on Public Opinion presented a ballot in final form listing seven possibilities. (Fig. 1) This

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 90. Included in the report of Committee "C" on Public Opinion, Memorial and Location by H. M. Beardsley, Chairman.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 115-116.



ballot was distributed to the combined Committee of One Hundred and the Committee of One Hundred and Fifty. The overwhelming choice was for a "MONUMENT PLUS A BUILDING, not for utilitarian purposes." To implement this decision, five committees including ones on Architect, Location and Finance were named.<sup>26</sup>

The critical decision was made to wait until October for the financial campaign saying that "sentiment and enthusiasm [for the Memorial] would have to be created by publicity." It was felt that "every person in Kansas City should participate, . . . school children and all organizations in the city."<sup>27</sup> When the Committee on Finance proposed \$2 million, a far larger amount than had been in the thinking of some of the group, it was evident that not only was more time necessary for organization but also a leader of consummate capabilities was needed.<sup>28</sup> Once again, it was R. A. Long who was chosen to lead. It was only later, when the Liberty Memorial program was nearing completion, that Mr. Long's fundamental role in that bold and expensive concept was revealed.<sup>29</sup> Be that as it may, this ambitious financial campaign of public subscription, brilliantly conducted between October 27 and November 5, 1919, resulted in pledges well over the \$2 million goal.<sup>30</sup> More than one-fourth of the city's population of 320,000, some 83,000 Kansas City men, women and children participated.

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 188-189.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid., 191.    <sup>28</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>29</sup>Kansas City Times, 8 November 1924. The Kansas City Times is the morning newspaper of the Kansas City Star Company.

<sup>30</sup>Henry C. Haskell, Jr., and Richard B. Fowler, City of the Future (Kansas City, Missouri: Frank Glenn Publishing Co., 1950), 116. "It was a drive for 2 million dollars for the Memorial linked with the regular charities campaign for \$500,000."



The press records an almost religious fervor in the Liberty Memorial financial campaign with ministers urging their congregations to contribute, bells tolling and school children parading. It was a demonstration "without parallel."<sup>31</sup>

With the general type of memorial settled and the means established, the question of where in Kansas City the memorial would be built needed an answer. From the very beginning of the memorial idea, the area of park property south of the Union Station Plaza had been proposed. There was much to recommend this site. The craggy promontory was the first view which met the eyes of those arriving in Kansas City and emerging from the imposing depot designed by Jarvis Hunt. This was Kansas City's gateway. Little had been done by city fathers at the time of its opening in 1914 or since to enhance the appearance of Union Station surroundings, so it was ready for improvement.<sup>32</sup> It was, to a large extent, already park property and the precipitous bluff certainly was impressive. Swope Park was the only other site that had received much consideration. That site was a very large park of natural, rolling landscape on Kansas City's then far southeast side which had been given to the city in 1896 by Thomas Swope.

This was not the first time that the area south of Kansas City's Union Station had been singled out for civic improvement. History of this area is thoroughly chronicled in the chapter, "Jarvis

---

<sup>31</sup>J. E. McPherson, "Kansas City's Liberty Memorial," Part I, Arts and Decoration 15 (June 1921): 98.

<sup>32</sup>William H. Wilson, The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1964), 110.

Hunt and the Union Station," in The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City by William H. Wilson.<sup>33</sup> Actually the die had been cast in dialogue between the railroads and the city council in 1906 when the terminal company insisted the station must face south. Although some had wanted the new Union Station to face downtown to the north, railroad company engineers agreed that it would be "absolutely impractical to build a station facing north . . . on low ground."<sup>34</sup> Only with the station facing south would it be possible to build three levels as planned. Also, only on the south could sufficient land be secured to furnish a plaza and adequate surroundings.<sup>35</sup> The demand in 1909 that the terminal company buy as a park eight-and-one-half acres immediately south of the station apparently was a maneuver to prevent another Union Avenue with saloons and the like which had blighted the previous depot.<sup>36</sup> With all the prior attention on the Union Station and its south-facing portals in 1914, Station Park and the adjoining area must have seemed a natural solution to the location of the Liberty Memorial.

It was the site south of the Union Station Plaza which was recommended by the Liberty Memorial Committee on Location. This area ran into Penn Valley Park, that section of natural, rolling terrain, transformed from an ugly slough by George Kessler, city landscape architect, some years earlier. In a meticulous detailing of its investigation and implementation, J. C. Nichols, Chairman of the Committee on Location, reported on January 24, 1920 concerning the

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 100-119.    <sup>34</sup>Kansas City Star, 4 October 1906, 2.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.    <sup>36</sup>Wilson, City Beautiful, 101.

summer-long task of site location.<sup>37</sup> Aided and advised by George Kessler, a leading United States authority and the architect of Kansas City's park and boulevard system, an exhaustive survey took place. The one and only choice was

the eight-and-one-half acre Station Park . . . and the ground lying between that and Penn Valley Park . . . Kansas City will never outgrow the desirability of this location . . . may become the inspiration and the nucleus of a great art center.<sup>38</sup>

Swope Park was dismissed as being too distant. Mr. Nichols was able to report that to assure fair prices for properties to be purchased, options had been taken, purchases made and necessary condemnation proceedings for park purposes had been instigated. Some of the purchases were made through the privately organized Mazda Company.

Altogether, in addition to the eight-and-one-half acres of Station Park, there was a thirty-three acre tract to its southwest plus 132 acres in nearby Penn Valley Park, a total of 173 acres. The commanding elevation, the highest point 134 feet above Station Plaza, was especially choice. It was "readily accessible to the center of population, . . . its topography is rugged, varied, and picturesque."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it was the picturesque character of the site, which some referred to as "the new Acropolis in the new Athens," which made it both highly desirable as well as often frustrating. Thomas Kimball had said, "It is providential that such a site should have been left for this use."<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>"Minutes," 230-235.      <sup>38</sup>Ibid., 231-232.

<sup>39</sup>McPherson, "Kansas City's Liberty Memorial," Arts and Decoration 15 (July 1921): 184.

<sup>40</sup>"Minutes," 239.



On October 14, 1920, at a meeting of the Committee of One Hundred which had become the Board of Trustees of the incorporated Liberty Memorial Association, Mr. Long "in a brief statement" reviewed the work of the Committee of One Hundred and various subcommittees to date. "Subscriptions aggregating \$2,000,000 have been secured . . . condemnation proceedings are under way . . . your Committee on Architecture, with the advice of Mr. Thomas R. Kimball, recently president of the American Institute of Architects, is preparing for competitions to be held in connection with the selection of the architect who will have charge of the construction of the Memorial."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 238-239.