

The Todd Memorial

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Parks are favorite places for the erection of memorials to honor people who are admired for their lives and their deeds. In Brandywine Park, a tall grey and pink fountain commemorates the life of humanitarian Ferris Bringhurst, an Italian fountain celebrates Josephine Tatnall Smith, a bas-relief sculpture memorializes President William McKinley, and a modest granite horse trough honors Clark Churchman. The Washington Memorial Bridge is dedicated to the memory of the Delawareans who died in World War I. Just north of the bridge is the Todd Memorial that also honors the men and women of Delaware who gave their lives in the Great War.

Just north of the bridge lies a triangle of land, bounded by Washington Street, 18th Street, and the Boulevard [later Baynard Boulevard] and part of Brandywine Park. On Armistice Day, 11 November 1925, over 9,000 people gathered there to see the William H. Todd Memorial [depicted in the 1930s postcard below] unveiled. Warm weather and cloudless skies helped insure the good turnout for a ceremony to honor the Delaware soldiers and sailors who had died in World War I.



William H. Todd, the monument's donor, was a Wilmington native, though by 1925, Brooklyn, New York, was his home. Born in 1867, by the age of 13, he was learning the ship building trade when he worked during school vacations as a rivet boy in the Pusey and Jones Shipyard boiler shop. Within three years, he was working full time for the ship builder as a rivet heater, gradually working his way up to assistant foreman.

He took a job with the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1893 and moved to a foreman's position with Robins Dry Dock and Repair Company three years later.

He quickly rose in the company to vice president by 1900 and to president by the end of 1909. In 1913, in a cooperative venture with one hundred of his employees, Todd formed the William H. Todd Corporation, which in turn purchased the company for which they all worked. The company was reorganized into the Todd Shipyards Corporation in 1916. Todd relied on a profit-sharing system for the company, protecting and rewarding the employee stockholders through a series of corporate reorganizations. At the time of Todd's death, the company owned shipyards in Brooklyn, Portland [Oregon], Tacoma, New Orleans, and Mobile. He died in May 1932 from injuries sustained when he fell down a flight of stairs.

The memorial that Todd donated to Wilmington in 1925 is a bronze sculpture, "Winged Victory," created by Augustus Lukeman. Mounted on a rectangular granite pier, it is set in a circular plaza in front of a thirty-five-foot granite shaft. Cast at the Roman Bronze Works, the larger-than-life winged figure is a woman in classical dress, her arms raised and a branch grasped in her left hand. Stylized arrows bound by bands decorate the granite shaft near the top and an urn-shaped sculpture surmounts it. At the foot of the plaza, a granite base bears a bronze plaque listing the names of the 262 Delawareans "Who Died in the Service of their Country 1917-1919." The granite plinth on which the bronze figure stands is carved with the words "Erected in Honor of the/Soldiers and Sailors/of Delaware/Who Served in the World War/1917—1918/A Gift of William H. Todd/in Memory of His Father and Mother/1925."

During the ceremony, a wreath of California laurel was placed on the roster of names and Todd's daughter, Natalie Mae Todd, unveiled the memorial. Speakers at the ceremony included New York Governor Alfred E. Smith and Delaware State Senator Thomas F. Bayard. A large contingent from New York attended the unveiling as an honor to Todd, who held a prominent position in New York. In addition to Governor Smith, former U.S. Senator from New York William Calder and Justice John MacCrate of the New York State Supreme Court traveled to Wilmington that day.

In addition to giving a memorial to Wilmington, Todd donated a similar World War I memorial to his adopted hometown, Brooklyn. Also sculpted by Augustus Lukeman and cast by the Roman Bronze Works, it too features an angel, although one that is more an angel of death than of victory. The angelic figure with huge wings seems to be supporting or protecting or perhaps "gathering in" a weary soldier. While the mood of the Wilmington memorial seems victorious, the Brooklyn monument has a somber mood. Dedicated in Prospect Park in June 1921, the memorial lists the names of the borough's dead and honors "the men and women of Brooklyn who died/in the world war" and "gave their lives for liberty/and universal peace/honor duty country."

The Todd Memorial in Brandywine Park is linked to the larger world of American sculpture. Lukeman, the memorial's sculptor, studied with Daniel Chester French and with Launt Thompson. French and Lukeman collaborated on the 1917 Lafayette memorial in Prospect Park and then worked together again on the Brooklyn memorial that William H. Todd donated, Lukeman sculpting the figure and French preparing the bronze plaques. Launt Thompson, Lukeman's other principal teacher, created the statue of Admiral Samuel Francis duPont in Rockford Park. All three artists enjoyed wide renown during their careers and produced a vast number of commemorative sculptures throughout the country.

The Roman Bronze Works, which cast the statue of "Winged Victory" in 1925, also cast the 1921 sculpture that Todd commissioned for Brooklyn. Established in 1897, the foundry cast the works of most major sculptors working in bronze during the twentieth century. In 1908, a Wilmington committee hired New York artist James Edward Kelly to create a sculpture honoring William McKinley. Kelly also chose the Roman Bronze Works to produce the final bas-relief panels of the McKinley Memorial, now located at West Street and South Park Drive.

Over the years elements used in commemorative art have changed. It is rare, for example, to see an urn used to signify death and mourning, as it does with the Todd Memorial, nor do angels appear with any frequency to indicate victory over death. Nonetheless, the Todd Memorial gives witness to the human impulse to record publicly the contributions of particular people or groups of people to the society, an impulse that, though articulated differently, still seeks expression in public places.

[Readers may be interested to know that the Division of Parks and Recreation has earmarked \$38,000 for restoration and conservation work on the Todd Memorial's bronze figure and its granite base.]