

# A Steadfast Soldier: The History of the Astoria Victory Monument

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## Introduction

From 1914 to 1918, World War One reduced much of the European landscape to a series of blood-soaked battlefields and muddy trenches. Although the United States managed to stay out of the conflict for the majority of its duration, the advent of unrestricted U-boat warfare in the Atlantic, among other aggressions, prompted Woodrow Wilson and the 65<sup>th</sup> Congress to declare war on Germany and her allies on April 6, 1917.<sup>1</sup> America's participation in the war was short in duration, but it left a profound effect upon the American people, and the sacrifices of the nation's young men are commemorated in countless memorials across the country. Many of these monuments are remarkably similar, featuring a stone base, inset with a commemorative plaque, and often capped with a statue of an American soldier. However, the Astoria Victory monument, erected in 1926, presents a marked departure from such designs. Boasting both a unique architectural design and a rare bronze statue, this distinctive memorial is a significant architectural landmark that often goes unnoticed.

## Physical Description

The Astoria Victory Monument, also known as the Doughboy Monument, is located within a triangular parcel at the intersection of West Marine Drive and Columbia Avenue in Astoria, Oregon. Nestled within the center of this plot, the memorial is positioned so that it is parallel with Columbia Avenue. A grass lawn surrounds the structure on all sides, except the northeast and southwest ends of the structure. Additionally, a concrete sidewalk encloses the triangular parcel, and a short sidewalk cuts across the plot near its northeast edge.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Eliot Morrison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenberg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, Volume 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 374.

The memorial consists of four primary sections: an octagonal base built in the Spanish Revival style, a tiled cupola, a cylindrical platform, and a bronze statue of a World War One American soldier. The octagonal base is constructed of minimally reinforced concrete and is bilaterally symmetrical. In the center of the north and south elevations, commemorative plaques and planters have been inset into the concrete. The plaques read "Soldiers Monument: Dedicated to Soldiers of World War of Clatsop County By the City of Astoria, July 21, 1926." At the northeast and southwest ends of the base, its concrete walls gradually slope downward, terminating at decorative columns topped with fluted iron lampposts. Between these columns, concrete staircases descend towards the public bathrooms that are located beneath the monument.

A small, octagonal cupola projects upward from the center of the base. This projection is clad in Spanish tiles, and each of its eight walls features a rectangular hopper window protected by a diamond-shaped metal grill. Above the cupola, a cylindrical concrete pedestal serves as the platform upon which the statue is mounted.

The bronze soldier that caps the Astoria Victory Monument undoubtedly serves as its centerpiece. Designed by the artist John Paulding, who designed many World War One memorial statues, the official title of the work is "Doughboy Over the Top at Cantigny." The piece depicts an American Soldier, or "doughboy," charging a German entrenchment at the battle of Cantigny in May 1918. Poised in a running stance, the soldier holds a rifle high above

his head in one hand. Reportedly, the figure faces northeast to represent the direction that American troops charged during the battle of Cantigny.<sup>2</sup>

The prominent details of the statue include the soldier's wrinkled leather boots, canteen, knapsack, and helmet. As in most of Paulding's World War One pieces, the figure appears to be stepping over a small stump wrapped in barbed-wire; the stump is actually attached to the statue's right leg and functions as a brace. Though made of bronze, the statue is heavily oxidized, and now appears green in color. This physical change has likely been accelerated by the marine environment of Astoria.

## History

Historian Samuel Morrison writes that the United States experienced an "ardent nationalism," as a result of its military victory and economic success following World War One.<sup>3</sup> This patriotic spirit, coupled with the American Sesquicentennial (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary) in 1926, prompted the construction of World War One memorials across the nation.<sup>4</sup> Seeking to honor the soldiers of Clatsop County who fought in this war, the city of Astoria, the local post of the American Legion, and the citizens of Uniontown collaborated to construct the Astoria Victory Monument. In the words of Mayor O.B. Setters during the monument's dedicatory address, "It is to the soldiers of Clatsop County, both living and dead, who gave of their services in the World War at the call of their country, that we herewith dedicate this statue."<sup>5</sup> For nearly a century, the Astoria Victory Monument has witnessed a myriad of changes in the surrounding

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<sup>2</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Astoria Victory Monument, Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon.

<sup>3</sup> Morrison, *Growth*, 390.

<sup>4</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Astoria Victory Monument.

<sup>5</sup> *Astoria Evening Bulletin*, July 22, 1926.

cityscape, but still declares the city's appreciation for the doughboys of Clatsop County. The monument itself remains essentially unchanged.

### **Planning the Monument**

In 1926, a group of influential Astorians envisioned a celebration to commemorate "Astoria's early settlers for their role in expanding the United States to the Pacific Coast."<sup>6</sup> In the spirit of "ardent nationalism" mentioned above, no less than four monuments were planned to be unveiled at the Astoria Founders' Day celebration, which was scheduled for July 1926. They included the Astoria Victory Monument, the Lewis and Clark Salt Cairn, a reconstruction of Fort Clatsop at its original site, and, most famously, the Astoria Column.<sup>7</sup>

The city of Astoria began planning the Victory Monument in March of 1926 with the intention of unveiling it at the upcoming Founders' Day celebration in July. The first mention of the structure occurred on March 5, 1926, when the Astoria Evening Budget announced a future monument featuring "a handsome concrete base with wing walls and buttresses . . . situated in a setting of lawn, beautified with flowers and shrubbery." On March 9, the same paper reported that an "artistic war memorial" had been approved by a vote of the Clatsop County post of the American Legion. By March 23, the American Legion had selected John Paulding's "Over the Top at Cantigny" as the sculpture for the monument. Upon the architect's recommendation that the statue should be "at least lifesize," it was ordered at a height of 10 feet.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "History of the Astoria Column," Friends of the Astoria Column, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://astoriacolumn.org/about/history-of-the-column/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Clatsop County Historical Quarterly* 16, no.4 (Fall 1996): 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Astoria Evening Budget*, March 23, 1926.

From the outset, the city intended to pay for the base of the monument, while the American Legion was tasked with raising the necessary funds for the statue. Remarkably, all but \$250 of the \$1,400 required for the Doughboy was raised in one April afternoon, and the rest less than one week later.<sup>9</sup> Although it is not clear why, the American Legion explicitly refrained from asking the “businessmen of the city” for donations, and all of the funds for the statue came from the canneries and citizens of West Astoria (Uniontown), where the monument was to be located. The most notable donations were from large Uniontown businesses and organizations, including the Union Fishermen’s Cooperative Packing Company, the Columbia River Packers Association, the Anderson Fish Company, and the Sanborn Cutting Company.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the monument’s construction, Astoria’s Uniontown was a vibrant Finnish working class community. Now registered as a National Historic District, Uniontown was once home to numerous packing companies, canneries, hotels, commercial buildings, and residences that supported an almost exclusively Finnish population. In fact, Astoria’s Uniontown was the largest Finnish community in the western United States and was known in Finland as the “Helsinki of the West.”<sup>11</sup> Although the reasoning behind the decision is unclear, the Astoria Victory Monument was placed near the commercial heart of this district. One author suggests that Uniontown was chosen because “the residents of that largely Finnish district had such a good record of paying their taxes,” but primary sources do not shed any further light upon the

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<sup>9</sup> Astoria Evening Budget, April 14, 1926.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Utzinger, “Over the Top at Cantigny: The Doughboy Monument,” *Clatsop County Historical Quarterly* 26, no.2 (Winter 2006):4.

<sup>11</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Uniontown-Alameda Historic District, Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon.

question.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the reasoning, the monument is closely tied to the history of Uniontown, and the memorial “stands today as a sign of the pride the Finns at that time had in their community.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Artist and Architect**

The Astoria Victory monument was designed in two parts: the Spanish Revival base was designed by local architect Charles T. Diamond, and the statue was cast by the artist John Paulding. Charles Diamond designed a few notable buildings in the city, including the Associated Building, the Rivera Building, a local Odd Fellows lodge and Elks lodge, and he played a part in the construction of the Hotel Astoria.<sup>14</sup> Paulding was a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute, owned a studio in that city and, according to one newspaper, was “one of the recognized sculptors of America.”<sup>15</sup>

Taking advantage of the nationwide trend of constructing war memorials during the 1920s and 30s, several artists strove to produce and sell commemorative statues in large quantities. Famously, sculptors E.M. Viquesney and John Paulding sold their works across the United States. Interestingly, these artists’ most famous pieces (Viquesney’s “Spirit of the American Doughboy” and Paulding’s series of “Over the Top” statues) were remarkably similar. Each typically features an American soldier in full combat gear, posed as if charging, with a grenade held high in the right hand and a rifle low in the left. In fact, the pieces are so similar that only those who are familiar with both works can likely tell them apart; Viquesney’s statues

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<sup>12</sup> Colonel Arnold Seeborg, “Vic and Fanny Seeborg,” *Clatsop County Historical Quarterly* 4, no.4 (Autumn 1994): 9.

<sup>13</sup> National Register, Uniontown.

<sup>14</sup> National Register Nomination, Downtown Astoria Historic District, Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon.

<sup>15</sup> “John Paulding, Sculptor”, *Official Souvenir McPherson County*, July 4 1917, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://www.ksgenweb.org/archives/mcpherson/1917/16.html>.

stand more erect than Pauldings, possess a flat pack rather than a round bedroll, and always feature two tree stumps at the soldier's feet. The easiest way to identify an "Over the Top" by Paulding is the brace, wrapped in barbed wire, that attaches below the figure's right knee.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1920s, the two artists clashed in a fierce marketing campaign that culminated in a legal battle. Because Viquesney's statues were made of either pressed copper or cast zinc, and merely coated in bronze, Paulding touted the high-quality of his full-bronze figures.<sup>17</sup> However, Viquesney's cheaper statues greatly outsold Paulding's, as he sold at least 145 "Spirit of the American Doughboy" monuments versus only 40 of Paulding's "Over the Top" series.<sup>18</sup>

The Astoria Victory Monument features a unique version of Paulding's "Over the Top." Produced in four versions, designated the A, B, C, and D models, these variations chiefly differed regarding the figure's raised right hand. The first two featured an open hand or clenched fist, while in the last two, the soldier held either a rifle or grenade over his head. The statue placed atop the Astoria Victory Monument is one of Paulding's Model C variations, as the figure holds a rifle high above his head. Uniquely, this monument features one of only two of Paulding's Model C variations known to exist; the other is in Catskill, New York.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Earl D. Goldsmith, "The Doughboy War: E.M. Viquesney vs. John Paulding," accessed February 2018, <https://doughboysearcher.weebly.com/john-pauldings-doughboys.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Amanda Sedlak-Hevener, "Why Do So Many Towns Have the Same WWI Soldier Statues," Atlas Obscura, last modified April 11, 2017, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/wwi-doughboy-statue>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Goldsmith, "Doughboy War."



## **Dedication of the Monument, July 1926**

As the Founders' Day Celebration neared, the schedule for the festivities was announced in the *Astoria Evening Budget*. The celebration was to begin on Tuesday, July 20, 1926 with the dedication of the Lewis and Clark Salt Cairn, followed by the dedication of a historic marker at the Pioneer Presbyterian Church on the Clatsop Plains, and finally the unveiling of the Doughboy Monument. This last event was to be coupled with an "elaborate program."<sup>20</sup> The main event of the celebration, the dedication of the Astoria Column, was scheduled for the following day. Completed by July 15, the Doughboy Monument was draped in an American flag until it was unveiled.<sup>21</sup>

The dedication of the monument occurred, as scheduled, on the evening of July 21, 1926. At least 5,000 people attended the ceremony which was followed by a military parade featuring a naval destroyer division, a local National Guard unit, the Seventh Infantry Band, a drum corps, and other civic ensembles.<sup>22</sup> Later, there was boxing, dancing, and a "midnight supper" to kick-off the Founders Day Celebration.<sup>23</sup> On July 22, the primary event featured similar activities, with an even larger parade, as well as street dances, formal balls, log rolling contests, athletic competitions, band concerts, and singing festivals. To mark the importance of the occasion, five naval destroyers anchored in Astoria's harbor.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Astoria Evening Budget*, April 22, 1926.

<sup>21</sup> *Astoria Evening Budget*, July 22, 1926.

<sup>22</sup> *Astoria Evening Budget*, July 22, 1926.

<sup>23</sup> *Clatsop County Historical Quarterly* 16, no.4 (Fall 1996): 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Clatsop County Historical Quarterly* 16, no.4 (Fall 1996): 11.

## History of Treatment

In 1950, the public facilities below the monument were reopened and the structure was repainted; they had been closed since some time before World War II.<sup>25</sup> The monument was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, along with several other local buildings. In 1991, the statue was cleaned using crushed walnut and hot wax, and the base was renovated in 2006 with a grant from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).<sup>26</sup> Sadly, a local citizen experienced a medical emergency in August 2017, and crashed his pick-up truck into the east side of the monument. Consequently, the lamp posts of the east-end have been removed, and the walls of the stairwell are heavily damaged. After a professional inspection, it was determined that the statue must be removed from its base for repairs. Funding for the restoration has been achieved through a grant from the Oregon SHPO, as well as a donation from the Samuel S. Johnson foundation.<sup>27</sup> The city hopes to have the monument repaired by November of 2018, in time for the centennial of the end of World War One.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the span of 92 years, the Astoria Victory Monument has witnessed many economic and social changes in this coastal city. Under the Doughboy's watchful gaze, the Astoria-Megler bridge was constructed in 1966, Uniontown transformed from a vibrant Finnish community to a significant, integrated historic district, and the canneries, packing plants, and other industrial

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<sup>25</sup> *Astoria Evening Budget*, August 9, 1950.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Stratton, "Astoria's Damaged Doughboy Monument on Track for Repair," *Daily Astorian*, November 10, 2017, accessed February 26, 2018, [http://www.dailyastorian.com/Local\\_News/20171110/astoriasdamaged-doughboy-monument-on-track-for-repair](http://www.dailyastorian.com/Local_News/20171110/astoriasdamaged-doughboy-monument-on-track-for-repair).

<sup>27</sup> "Uniontown Landmark on Track for Fix," KAST1370, last modified February 22, 2018, accessed March 15, 2018, [http://www.kast1370.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4795:uniontown-landmark-on-track-for-fix&catid=17&Itemid=101](http://www.kast1370.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4795:uniontown-landmark-on-track-for-fix&catid=17&Itemid=101).

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Astorian*, November 10, 2017.

facilities along the waterfront gave way to restaurants, hotels, and shops. One-hundred years after the end of the Great War, this beautiful and unique monument continues to convey the city's appreciation for the doughboys of Clatsop County.

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