



Civil War Valor in Concrete

by Randall M. Thies

Memorial Day, 1917: David Lester looked on with pride as the recently completed Civil War monument was unveiled in Hillside Cemetery, a short distance northwest of Kinsley, Kansas. A Union veteran and longtime resident of the Kinsley area, Lester had a special reason to be proud of the new monument: he was the artist who had created it.

Memorial Day was always a special occasion, but the unveiling of the new monument made this day even more so, attracting a large crowd despite threatening weather and bad roads. After beginning the day with a band concert, speeches, and parade in downtown Kinsley, the crowd gathered at the cemetery to share in the dedication of its new monument. Uniformed members of the Knights of Pythias served as a ceremonial firing squad, while flower girls in white dresses provided a festive air. Honored as the

The Kinsley Civil War monument photographed about the time of its dedication—Memorial Day, 1917.

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David A. Lester and the Kinsley Civil War Monument

creator of the monument, David Lester also read the memorial service, as appropriate to his role as commander of Kinsley's Timothy O. Howe Post 241 of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a nationwide Union veterans organization. The post's other seventeen members stood by, sharing in the success of their joint effort to erect a monument that would serve as an enduring tribute to Union soldiers and sailors.¹

Today, nearly a century later, Lester's monument still stands in the Kinsley cemetery. The monument continues to serve as the focus of Memorial Day ceremonies, although by now it is perceived as honoring all those from the Kinsley area who served in all of America's wars, not just the Civil War.²

1. The Memorial Day services are described in the *Kinsley Graphic*, May 31, 1917, and the *Kinsley Mercury*, May 31, 1917.

2. According to longtime Kinsley VFW member Joe Heinz, the monument has been rededicated on several occasions as Memorial Day speakers extended the monument's dedicatory focus. In a rededication ceremony of April 16, 1998, the author, as main speaker, went a step further, asserting that the monument has come to represent not just those who served but also those who waited and worked at home. The monument was then formally rededicated in honor of those Union soldiers and sailors who helped found the community, their comrades who died in the war, and all those who served in later wars, at home and in military service.



The Kinsley Civil War monument photographed in 1999 from the same angle as was the ca. 1917 photograph on the facing page.

(Far right) Kinsley Civil War veterans, all or most of whom were members of GAR Post 241 and whose joint effort resulted in the creation of the Kinsley monument. (Right) In this enlargement of the photograph at the far right, artist David Lester stands second from the left, holding the flag.



With the passage of time, however, the origins of the Kinsley monument became obscured and confused, and one purpose of this article is to correct this. Likewise, the artistic uniqueness of the monument has been ignored far too long, and one other purpose of this article is to right that wrong. Lester's monument clearly deserves recognition and documentation as "grassroots" art and as a uniquely vernacular expression of a nationwide movement to create Civil War monumentation. At a time when most such monuments were mass produced in bronze or stone and purchased by mail order from foundries and quarries in the eastern United States, the Kinsley monument was created in the local community by a local artist using a common and utilitarian material: cement. It is a homespun creation in "high art" style. Certainly no others like it exist in Kansas, and probably few, if any, do elsewhere in the country.

To understand and properly appreciate this monument, it is necessary to know the historical context. Despite its local origins, the Kinsley monument was part of a nationwide Civil War monumentation movement that was itself only part of an even larger commemorative effort. As noted by G. Kurt Piehler in his book *Remembering War the American Way*, American memorialization of the Civil War was both pervasive and varied. It took on many forms, ranging from the creation of our first national cemeteries to the institutionalization of Memorial Day. Even photographs of Civil War scenes took on a memorial character, as did veterans' reunions.³

The desire for commemoration also took form in monuments, usually dedicated to "the common soldier and sailor" rather than the generals who led

3. G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995). Piehler's chapter, "The Divided Legacy of the Civil War," 47–91, is of particular relevance.

them.⁴ The enthusiasm for monuments was so strong that some were erected even before the war was over. Not surprisingly, the first monuments were built in the Union's populous and relatively prosperous eastern states where communities cheered the heroism and confronted the loss of favorite sons, and where ready access to experienced artisans, quarries, and foundries facilitated the decision for monumentation. Kensington, Connecticut, claims to have the oldest Civil War monument in the nation (an obelisk dedicated on July 28, 1863), and within three years of the war's end Connecticut had nine or ten more monuments.⁵ Kansas, by contrast, was still a frontier state

4. *Ibid.*, 53; for Kansas examples of the "common" theme, see Beloit Woman's Relief Corps No. 52, *History of the Erection and Dedication of the Soldiers' Monument, Elmwood Cemetery, Beloit, Kansas, 1913* (Beloit, Kans.: Beloit Gazette, n.d.), (Mitchell County Historical Society, Beloit).

5. David F. Ransom, "Connecticut's Monumental Epoch: A Survey of Civil War Memorials," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 58, 59 (1993, 1994); Ransom notes that while Kensington's claim is difficult to prove or disprove, no older monuments appear to have been documented.



when the war ended, lightly populated and settled only in the east. It would take several years of settlement and growth before the state had sufficient population and the sort of domestic setting in which its citizens would consider erecting Civil War monuments.

The national appetite for Civil War monuments found a ready response in a monument industry already eagerly responding to the Victorian liking for funerary art and a growing demand for public monuments and sculpture of all kinds. The demand for monuments combined with an unprecedented public interest in painting and architecture to produce a Golden Age of figurative sculpture that was known as the “American Renaissance” in recognition of its similarities to the earlier Italian Renaissance.⁶ Extending from 1876 to World War I, the high point of the American Renaissance was the 1892–1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which ushered in the great age of public monuments and outdoor sculpture and served as a major impetus for the City Beautiful movement that advocated civic improvement through public artwork. According to art historian Horst W. Janson, the demand for public sculpture of every sort became so great that it over-

6. *Ibid.*, 22–29; David Martin Reynolds, *Masters of American Sculpture: The Figurative Tradition from the American Renaissance to the Millennium* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 15.

strained the working capacity of the nation’s sculptors, with much of this due to the victorious North commissioning “hundreds upon hundreds” of Civil War monuments.⁷

A vast array of sculptors, foundries, and quarries was soon dedicated to the production of Civil War monuments, which were

easily and economically delivered by rail to almost any community in the country. Mail-order catalogs facilitated the process, with one company reportedly offering as many as a thousand choices for military monuments. Soldier statues could be obtained for as little as \$450; for \$150 more, companies would “model a new head in a true likeness if provided with a photograph.”⁸

Generally, most of the monuments were made by anonymous sculptors and artisans, and a glance at the documentation in the Kansas Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!) files confirms that fact for Kansas: although particular quarries and foundries are sometimes mentioned, sculptors are listed only rarely. The

7. Ransom, “Connecticut’s Monumental Epoch,” 23–27; Michael Panhorst, “Brief History of Outdoor Sculpture and Public Monuments,” in *The Preservation of Outdoor Sculpture and Monuments*, ed. Kathleen Catalano Milley et al. (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995). See also William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); H.W. Janson, *19th Century Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 249.

8. The reference to “a thousand choices” is from Susan Cooke Soderberg, *Lest We Forget: A Guide to Civil War Monuments in Maryland* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing Co., 1995), xxv. Catalogs examined by the author include *Statues in Stamped Copper and Bronze* (Cleveland: Caxton Co., 1913), which shows some of the offerings of the W.H. Mullins Company of Salem, Ohio; two other examples are from the “Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1882 Catalog,” which specialized in cast zinc or “white bronze,” and a ca. 1891 catalog for one of their subsidiaries, the American Bronze Company of Chicago. The latter publications are part of E. Richard McKinstry, *Trade Catalogues at Winterturth: A Guide to the Literature of Merchandising, 1750 to 1980* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984). The \$450 soldier statues with \$150 remodeled heads (essentially sculptural portraits) were offered by Monumental Bronze, however the W.H. Mullins Company offered a similar service.

Most Civil War monuments fall into four basic categories, one being the multifigure sculpture seen here in the Sedgwick County Soldiers and Sailors Monument.

exceptions to this rule include three nationally known sculptors: Frederick Hibbard, who was responsible for a soldier statue in Great Bend and the four military figures on the Sedgwick County Soldiers and Sailors Monument; Lorado Taft, who created a statue of General Ulysses S. Grant erected at Fort Leavenworth; and John Paulding, who sculpted an equestrian statue of General James B. McPherson for the McPherson County courthouse grounds. In addition, two Kansans are credited with creating Civil War monuments: J.R. Carmichael, a local stone cutter in Stafford who carved a limestone tree stump monument that stands in the Stafford cemetery, and David Lester, who created the Kinsley Civil War monument.⁹

The commemoration effort was tremendously important for Kansas, as it created a plethora of war memorials and the state's first statues.¹⁰ In fact, so many Civil War monuments were created that they almost seem to have sated much of the desire for more—for some communities, the local Civil War monument is still the only war memorial in town.¹¹ Even today, with all the other wars that have occurred, Civil War monuments constitute around 40 percent of the veterans monuments and



war memorials in Kansas, if one does not count the many utilitarian structures (such as civic auditoriums, bridges, and highways) that were nominally dedicated as memorials to veterans of the two world wars.¹²

Civil War monumentation did not begin in Kansas until two decades after the war ended, but once begun, it grew steadily, with at least one monument being erected nearly every year until efforts dwindled around the time of the First World War. Virtually all of the Kansas Civil War

9. Kansas SOS! files, Cultural Resources Division, Kansas State Historical Society. The Kansas SOS! files consists of field survey reports and associated historical documentation (such as newspaper clippings) gathered by the author and other volunteers in the Kansas Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!) project. The project was sponsored in Kansas by the Kansas State Historical Society as part of a national effort to inventory and promote the preservation of public outdoor sculpture. The nationwide SOS! inventory, 1993–1995, was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of American Art, and the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property. The SOS! effort continues in Kansas. See Randall M. Thies, “Kansas Sculpture and the SOS! Project,” *Kansas Preservation* 20 (January/February 1998).

10. The Kansas SOS! files indicate that the state's first statue was a Civil War soldier erected in Marysville in 1885. Unfortunately, no single authoritative listing exists for Kansas Civil War monuments; the SOS! project was confined to statues and other forms of sculptural artwork, leaving nonsculptural war memorials unrecorded. Kansas veterans organizations have not attempted a comprehensive listing of such monuments. Kansas VFW and American Legion headquarters, telephone interviews by author, 1996.

11. Kinsley is an example, as are Bronson in southeast Kansas and Smith Center in northwest Kansas.

12. The 40 percent figure is based on the author's count after five years of assiduous search, but it is admittedly somewhat impressionistic due to the difficulty of defining exactly what constitutes a monument and to whom it is dedicated. By the author's last count, Kansas has 149 Civil War monuments, or more than 42 percent of 350 war monuments in the state.

monuments were erected between 1885 and 1918, in a fury of monument-building that seems best described as the "Great Monument Era." Ninety percent of the state's existing Civil War monuments were built during that time, and the percentage would be even higher if one were to include the dozen or more Civil War cannon monuments lost in the scrap metal drives of the two world wars. Only fifteen Civil War monuments were erected in Kansas after 1918, compared with 135 still in existence that were created before that time.¹³

Civil War monumentation has been the subject of some scholarly interest over the years but is yet to be fully documented, particularly at the state and local levels. The relatively extensive general literature on Civil War monuments deals primarily with battlefield monuments and civic monuments of national importance rather than local civic monuments.¹⁴ Fortunately, due in part to the recent SOS! initiative, publications are now beginning to appear focusing in varying degrees of detail on the monuments of particular states or regions. Although no such publications have emerged recently for Kansas, the SOS! project and related research efforts have made it possible to discern the temporal and physical characteristics of the state's Civil War monumentation.¹⁵

13. The phrase "Great Monument Era" can be found in Randall M. Thies, "Monument(al) Anthropology in Kansas: Civil War Monuments and Our Cultural Landscape" (paper presented at the Flint Hills Archeological Conference, Norman, Okla., March 17, 1995). The post-1918 Civil War monuments include eight apparently erected in the 1920s, four in the 1930s, one in 1969, one in 1976, and one in 1994. The latter, in Emporia, actually has only a partial Civil War theme (one of several statues in a group depicts Civil War general Nathaniel Lyon, for whom the county was named).

14. Ransom, "Connecticut's Monumental Epoch," 10; see, for example, Michael Wilson Panhorst, "Lest We Forget: Monuments and Memorial Sculpture in National Military Parks on Civil War Battlefields, 1861-1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1988); Dennis Robert Montagna, "Henry Merwin Schady's Ulysses S. Grant Memorial in Washington, D.C.: A Study in Iconography, Content, and Patronage" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1987). Civil War monuments also are considered in two recent books that discuss them within the context of a long and continuing tradition of American war memorials. See James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*.

15. Three excellent examples of state-focused publications involving detailed description and discussion are Soderberg, *Lest We Forget*; Robert S. Siegler, *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina: "Passing the Silent Cup"* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997); Ransom, "Connecticut's Monumental Epoch." At the other end of the spectrum is *Grand Army of the Republic Monuments* (N.p.: Department of New York Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, 1992), a booklet consisting simply of a photographic cataloging of New York mon-

Currently it appears that the first permanent Civil War monuments built in Kansas were a granite obelisk in Waterville and a marble soldier statue in Marysville. Both were erected in 1885, twenty years after the end of the war.¹⁶ In the years that followed, many different types of monuments were erected in the state. Most are sculptural and fall into four generalized categories: statues of specific individuals (Abraham Lincoln, Generals Ulysses S. Grant and James B. McPherson), multifigure monuments, single soldier statues, and funerary sculptures. The latter term encompasses a wide variety of funerary icons including sculpted stone tree stumps, obelisks, classical columns, and other such design elements along with simple upright rectangular stelae. Civil War cannons occasionally accompany these various sculptural expressions, lending a bellicose flavor to the memorialization. In other communities Civil War monuments consist simply of a cannon standing alone, thus creating a fifth, but nonsculptural, monumentation category.¹⁷ Similarly, Kansas has three

uments. Similarly, Ralph W. Widener Jr., *Confederate Monuments: Enduring Symbols of the South and the War between the States* (Washington, D.C.: Andromeda Press, 1982), provides a photographic presentation but very little discussion of Confederate monuments nationwide. For a scholarly analysis of Southern monuments, see John J. Winberry, "'Lest We Forget': The Confederate Monument and the Southern Landscape," *Southern Geographer* 23 (1983): 107-21. Kansas monumentation has received some attention, but it is obviously out of date. See George W. Martin, "Memorial Monuments and Tablets in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections 1909-1910* 11 (1910): 253-81. More recently, Mildred C. Baruch and Ellen J. Beckman, *Civil War Union Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, 1978), contains an inventory of Kansas Union monuments. Attempted as part of a nationwide inventory, the report is marred by incompleteness and some inaccuracies, at least for the Kansas monuments; only some forty are listed, some of them being duplicates, grave markers, or non-Civil War related.

16. The Waterville monument has the date marked on it. The Marysville monument's dedication is described in the *Marysville County Democrat*, June 4, 1885. Note that these were the first permanent Civil War monuments in Kansas. The 1885 Kansas State Fair, held in Peabody, featured a monument to General Ulysses S. Grant consisting of an obelisk made of ears of corn standing on a base of corn stalks. Created by local artist Harry Christ, the monument apparently was dismantled soon after the fair ended. A written description and photograph are provided in Sondra Van Meter, *Marion County, Kansas, Past and Present* (Hillsboro, Kans.: M.B. Publishing House, 1972), 285. See also a line drawing and incomplete newspaper clipping description, Photograph Section, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

17. At least eight communities exist (Axtell, Caney, Hiawatha, Horton, Larned, Sedgwick, Seneca, and Wellington) in which a cannon is the town's only Civil War monument, and twelve other communities in which a cannon is not the only Civil War monument but is located separately from other (usually sculptural) monuments. Unfortunately, many of the state's (and nation's) Civil War cannon monuments were lost to scrap-metal drives in World Wars I and II.

The single soldier statue is probably the most easily recognized Civil War monument. This example stands in the Ellis, Kansas, city cemetery.

buildings that serve as Civil War monuments even though one of them was also designed for utilitarian purposes, and at least three churches have stained-glass windows that would seem to qualify as Civil War monuments.¹⁸

The single soldier statue is probably the most easily recognized kind of Civil War monument both in Kansas and nationally; stylistically, it is regarded as an “archetypal” design. Piehler, in *Remembering War the American Way*, observes that throughout most places in the North, especially small towns, “the typical memorial” features a realistic bronze statue of a lone soldier commemorating the service of the common soldier or sailor.¹⁹ These statues generally depict a private soldier in an infantryman’s caped overcoat with a kepi on his head, standing alone in a “parade rest” position with one foot forward, both hands clasping the barrel of his rifle that stands in an upright position before him, the butt resting on the ground in front of his rearmost foot. Despite Piehler’s assertion of bronze being the foremost media, probably most of these statues were made of granite, if two states as widely separated as Connecticut and Kansas can serve as examples.²⁰



18. One of the buildings is the GAR Memorial Building in Topeka, which served for many years as headquarters for the Kansas State Historical Society. The two other, much smaller, buildings are a concrete rotunda in the Parsons city cemetery and the Civil War “pavilion” or “gazebo” in Wichita’s Maple Grove Cemetery. See Martin, “Memorial Monuments and Tablets in Kansas,” 271; Larry O. Jochims, “A Classic in Marble: The Memorial Building,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Spring 1984): 4–21; *Wichita Eagle*, March 24, 1997. Stained glass memorials are in United Methodist churches in Cherryvale and Beattie, and a Presbyterian church in Wilson. For a description of the Beattie windows, see *Marysville Advocate*, October 19, 1995.

19. Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 53; Ransom, “Connecticut’s Monumental Epoch,” 16.

20. Ransom’s two-volume study clearly demonstrates the comparatively small number of bronze statues in Connecticut. The field studies for Kansas, where virtually all of the monuments were imported from eastern suppliers, reveal that nineteen (or half) of the thirty-eight Kansas soldier statues are granite, two are cast bronze, four are pressed copper sheeting, and four are cast zinc, also known as “white bronze.” The remaining nine statues include three of limestone and six of marble. See Ransom, “Connecticut’s Monumental Epoch,” 33.

Of all these various choices for Civil War monuments, the multifigure monument was the most elaborate and therefore the most ostentatious. As Piehler described, these monuments featured common soldiers and sailors and quite commonly had bas-reliefs and additional statuary depicting famous events, leaders, or allegorical figures such as History, Peace, or Justice, although the feminine figures of Liberty and Victory were the most popular. The basic design consists of a large base (sometimes a temple-like structure with an interior space) supporting a central pinnacle of some sort—often a shaft, column, or dome—crowned by a statue (usually an allegorical figure) overlooking several other statues that frequently stand on the base. The lower statues often are military figures representing

the four major branches of the Union military: a sailor, an artilleryman, an infantryman, and a cavalryman.²¹

The popularity of the multigure monument design is generally attributed to the National Soldier's Monument completed at Gettysburg in 1869, although the four lower statues on that monument are allegorical figures rather than the standardized military figures common to most Civil War monuments. The earliest example to employ the four military figures is the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Monument erected in Providence in 1866–1871 by Randolph Rogers.²²

Because of the cost, multigure monuments generally are found in large and prosperous communities where sufficient money was available, often in combination with government subsidies secured by vote-conscious public officials. The multigure monument in Wichita, for example, was paid for by a one-time county tax specially authorized by the 1911 state legislature for counties with populations of greater than seventy thousand. A multigure monument in Hutchinson likewise benefited from county taxation.²³

Many of these “grand city war memorials,” as James Mayo calls them in *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, were built as part of the City Beautiful movement; city leaders, beginning to consider the need for urban design in their communities, saw war memorials as a means to remember the Civil War and simultaneously beautify their cities. Mayo notes that virtually all of these monuments are in northern cities, in part because the South could not afford them. In the North these monuments serve as proclamations of victory and symbols of the prosperous North; they “recollect northern sentiment that they had defeated an immoral enemy and saved the

Union”; and while remembering Union soldiers was one important purpose, “the dramatic style of these memorials said something more basic to their builders: ‘We won and they lost.’”²⁴

Multigure monuments are relatively rare in Kansas, which has only three.²⁵ One is in Wichita, on the grounds of the old Sedgwick County courthouse. Another is in Hutchinson, occupying the remnant of a park in a downtown street setting. The third is the subject of this article, the monument constructed by David Lester in the Kinsley cemetery. All three were erected toward the end of the Great Monument Era: Wichita in 1913, Kinsley in 1917, and Hutchinson in 1918. The monument in Wichita, and to a lesser degree the one in Hutchinson, are certainly the most elaborate of all the Kansas Civil War monuments and probably the most costly. More than \$22,000 was spent on the Wichita monument, and \$20,500 was authorized for the Hutchinson monument, neither price including landscaping. The Kinsley monument is just about as elaborate as the Wichita and Hutchinson monuments but cost only \$1,100, about a twentieth of their price.²⁶

The Kinsley monument differs from the monuments in Wichita and Hutchinson and every other Kansas Civil War monument in that it was hand built by a local artist using a remarkably commonplace building material: cement. It is not fine art or “high art,” but vernacular art, a case of “grassroots art” imitating monumental high art. Rather than using Vermont granite, Italian marble, or Indiana limestone, or relying on a foundry for its expertise in casting metal, Lester chose to use an utterly utilitarian material and do the work himself. The fact that he would do so is not surprising, since he was, in fact, an artist, even though he had no formal training of which we are aware today.

21. Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 53.

22. Panhorst, “Brief History of Outdoor Sculpture and Public Monuments,” 3; M.F. Rogers Jr., *Randolph Rogers* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971).

23. Michael Panhorst, “Brief History of Outdoor Sculpture and Public Monuments,” 3; *Wichita Eagle*, December 1, 1911; Proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, October 3, 1905, to December 27, 1913, Sedgwick County Courthouse, Wichita; *Kansas Laws* (1911), ch. 289; *ibid.* (1917), ch. 141; see also Tim Johnson, “Rare Cannons Guard Hutchinson Memorial Statue,” *Kanhistique* 14 (November 1998): 8–11. Johnson’s article also was published as “A Tribute to Our Civil War Ancestors: The G.A.R. Monument and Cannon of Reno County, Kansas,” *Legacy: The Journal of the Reno County Historical Society* 10 (Fall 1998): 16–27.

24. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, 180–85.

25. The Civil War statue complex created in 1907 at the Parsons cemetery could very nearly be included in this category, as it comprises four military figures on pillars around a flagpole, but it lacks a central statue and pinnacle. A rotunda, two cannons, an obelisk, and numerous Civil War veterans’ graves are located nearby in this rather elaborate memorial complex. For an early description, see Martin, “Memorial Monuments and Tablets in Kansas,” 264–65.

26. *Wichita Eagle*, February 21, 1913; Johnson, “Rare Cannons Guard Hutchinson Memorial Statue,” 8–11; *Kinsley Mercury*, June 7, 1917; *Kinsley Graphic*, May 31, 1917.

The obelisk is yet another major category for types of monuments. This obelisk was erected in the Howard, Kansas, city cemetery.

While little has been established about Lester's childhood and the development of his artistic abilities, his military pension records offer a wealth of information about his adult life. Born on a farm near Schenectady, New York, on March 10, 1843, he served as a private in the Twenty-seventh New York Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. His regiment saw action at First Bull Run, Gaines Mills, Crampton Pass, and Marye's Heights before mustering out in 1863. Lester married in 1873 and moved his family to the Kinsley, Kansas, area in March 1878.²⁷

Their move to Kansas is not surprising. The state offered homestead land and myriad opportunities, and its population grew rapidly as immigrants came west to begin new lives. Many of them, like Lester, were Union veterans. In fact, there were so many that Kansas was referred to as "the Great Soldier State," and so many of them joined the GAR that for a time Kansas had more GAR members per capita than any other state.²⁸

Lester described himself as "an artist" and listed his occupation as "decorative art."²⁹ In practice, his choice of occupation apparently found resolution in everything from fine art to house painting, with an emphasis on the utilitarian. Kinsley was a raw new



community, only about four years old at the time of Lester's arrival in 1878, so much could be done in the way of artistic refinements. Kinsley newspapers describe his early activities as sign painting and house painting, and he advertised that his abilities as painter, paper-hanger, and decorator could make your home into "a veritable Monte Christo palace."³⁰ His first large-scale project apparently was on a new bank building in 1885, where his painting and decorating was judged to be "a fine piece of work" reflecting "much credit on the artist." Later Lester took an interest in photography, and within a few years time he become so successful at it, or so enamored of it, that he listed his occupation for the 1895 census as "Photographer."³¹

27. David Lester, Pension File, certificate no. 623.206, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: Dyer Publishing Co., 1908); Frederick Phisterer, comp., *New York in the War of the Rebellion 1861–1865* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1890), 394. The Lesters began their Kansas residence by homesteading land in eastern Hodgeman County, about fifteen miles northwest of Kinsley. In 1886 they moved to a small acreage outside of Kinsley and in 1915 sold that land and bought a house in town. See Randall M. Thies, "David Lester: Pioneer Artist" (manuscript, Kinsley Public Library, Kinsley, Kans.).

28. Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 65.

29. "Declaration for Pension," May 23, 1912, Lester, Pension File; *ibid.*, May 13, 1924; U.S. Census, 1880, Kansas, Hodgeman County, Sterling Township, 10.

30. *Kinsley Graphic*, July 23, 1881; *Kinsley Republican-Graphic*, September 14, 1882; *Kinsley Graphic*, July 31, 1891.

31. *Kinsley Mercury*, December 5, 1885; *Kinsley Graphic*, July 31, 1891; *Kinsley Mercury*, February 11, 25, 1892; Kansas State Census, 1895, Edwards County, Kinsley Township, 5.

Roughly at the same time, the Great Monument Era was beginning in Kansas. Western Kansas communities, only recently founded, were understandably somewhat late in becoming involved. Once they started, however, it seemed as if they all had to have a monument. In 1913 Wichita dedicated its elaborate multigure monument in a well-publicized ceremony that attracted a thousand cheering citizens. Closer to Kinsley, monuments were erected in several nearby towns: Jetmore in 1913, Dodge City in 1914, and Great Bend in 1915, with Larned making arrangements in 1916 to place a mortar in front of the newly built city library across from the courthouse.³²

In Kinsley, as often was true elsewhere, the local GAR initiated and carried out the creation of a Civil War monument. The Kinsley post, formally known as Timothy O. Howe Post 241, was formed in 1883 by sixteen “old soldiers,” and by 1894 the membership had expanded to twenty-seven. David Lester joined the post in 1912 and became post commander in 1916, a position he held until 1921 when he left Kinsley.³³ By the end of his first year as commander, he was deeply involved in creating a monument for the post.

Even though the building of Civil War monuments was commonplace by that time, the use of concrete for such a project was decidedly uncommon. It is possible that Lester came up with this idea on his own, but it seems more likely that he was inspired by newspaper stories or verbal accounts of concrete sculptures being created at the “Garden of Eden” in Lucas, a small central Kansas community about one hundred miles northeast of Kinsley. The sculptures were the creation of Samuel P. Dinsmoor. Much has been written of Dinsmoor’s postrock home and its surrounding fantasmagoria of allegorical figures, and an adequate description of his work is far beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to note the technique Dinsmoor used to construct his many

fanciful figures: cement mix (supposedly made from a secret recipe, of course) applied by hand or trowel to wire armatures or frameworks.³⁴ Lester apparently used this same technique, more or less, to build major portions of the Kinsley Civil War monument.

It is important to realize the unusual nature of this particular form of sculpture. Cement can be used to make sculpture through two basic methods, and apparently both were applied in constructing the Kinsley monument. One method is hand molding, in which wet cement mix is applied by hand to a framework made of metal rod, wire, or wire mesh. The other method involves the creation of a cast concrete object by pouring cement mix into a hollow sculpture that serves as a rigid exterior form. Metal reinforcing rod also can be fixed in place within the form to strengthen the sculpture.

In addition to their metal frameworks, cast concrete sculptures are, obviously, solid concrete. They have some serious limitations: they are quite heavy, require large amounts of cement mix depending on their size, and need suitable forms—and the bigger the object, the stronger the forms. Early-day Kansas sculptors did create cast concrete statues, but there are very few examples and all of them postdate the periods of Dinsmoor’s and Lester’s creativity.

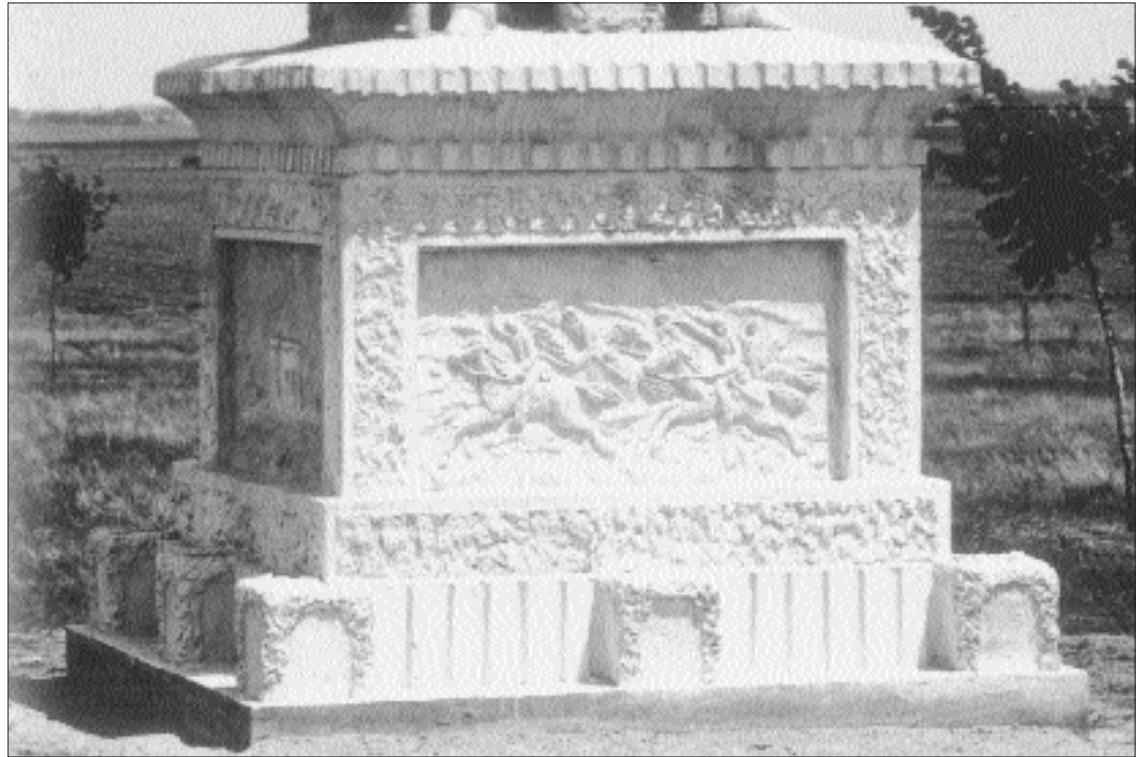
Dinsmoor chose the method of creating concrete sculpture that involves applying cement mix to wire frameworks. In the early decades of this century, however, the sculptural use of cement appears to have been a virtually unknown technique—except for Dinsmoor, and then Lester. How did Lester get the idea? Dinsmoor’s artistic efforts were well publicized in many newspapers and magazines; according to one biographer these included everything from the *Scientific American* to *Boys World*. Even if Lester was not enlightened by those publications, he surely would not have missed an illustrated article entitled “The Garden of Eden in Cement” published in a

32. *Wichita Beacon*, June 14, 1913; *Larned Chronoscope*, August 17, 1916; *Larned Tiller and Toiler*, August 18, 1916.

33. *Kinsley Republican-Graphic*, June 28, 1883; *Roster of the Members and Posts Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Kansas* (Topeka: Frost Printers, 1894); “Post Returns for GAR Post 241, Kinsley, Kansas,” Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

34. Dinsmoor and the Garden of Eden are discussed in varying detail in Carroll J. Jones, “Lucas’ Garden of Eden,” *Kansas!* no. 1 (1979): 19–20; O.D. Hoopes, *This is my Sign—“Garden of Eden”* (Lucas, Kans.: Lucas Publishing Co., 1972); Jennie A. Chinn, “The ‘Second Adam’ and His ‘Garden,’” in *Personal Places: Perspectives on Informal Art Environments*, ed. Daniel Franklin Ward (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984), 83–97.

Photographed in ca. 1917,
the cavalry mural on the
west face of the Kinsley
monument's base reveals
detail that is now dimin-
ished by the many coats of
paint applied to it
over the years.



Kinsley newspaper in April 1916.³⁵ Word of mouth also could have been a factor. Both men were in the GAR, and both were uncommonly involved in producing art while living in communities where the occupation of artist was extremely rare. Living only about a hundred miles apart, it was certainly possible that they could have met to discuss the problems and potentials of cement-mix sculpture. Unfortunately, this must remain as speculation since there are no known records of any contact between the two men.³⁶

By whatever means Lester obtained the idea for using concrete, by late 1916 he not only had the thought in mind, he also had a model in hand. On November 24, 1916, the *Kinsley Mercury* reported:

D.A. Lester, a local artist, has constructed a model of a monument which he believes would fill the desires for a statue as expressed for some time by old soldiers and other Kinsley citizens. Mr. Lester's idea is to build the monument from rein-

forced concrete, and he states he has the ability and experience to go ahead and construct it. His plan sounds pretty good and will no doubt be considered when the committee in charge determines upon the monument they desire to erect. The model is a handsome piece of work. It has been constructed on a scale of an inch to a foot, and with the idea that the finished job shall be 24 feet in height with a base eight feet square. The design shows a large pedestal surmounted by "Winged Victory." On the front of the base is a cavalry scene, on the right a group of infantry, and on the left an artillery scene. On the rear will be a design including the corps badges. At each corner of the pedestal stands the figure of a soldier. The whole is conceived and finished in a highly artistic manner.³⁷

It is clear from this report that Lester hoped to build his own version of a multifigure monument using some form of a cement-mix construction technique. It is interesting that the term "reinforced concrete" was used, as today it refers to cast (or poured) concrete containing reinforcing rod. As will be discussed later, portions of the Kinsley monument may have been constructed in that manner although the statues were most certainly hand molded.

35. Hoopes, *This is my Sign—"Garden of Eden,"* 7; *Kinsley Mercury*, April 27, 1916.

36. Information on this point was sought from University of Kansas art professor John Hachmeister, a member of the board of directors for Grassroots Art, Inc., which operates Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden as a museum. According to Hachmeister, very few of Dinsmoor's records have survived the ravages of fire, mildew, and neglect, and no mention of Lester is known to exist in the remaining records.

37. *Kinsley Mercury*, November 24, 1916.



"Winged Victory" atop the Kinsley monument is typical of the allegorical figures often placed at the apex of multifigure monuments.

On November 25, 1916, the local GAR post held a "special meeting" to consider erecting a monument and decided in favor of Lester's design. The newspaper account of this meeting makes no mention of anyone else submitting a design; likewise, no evidence indicates that any other possibilities were discussed. As previously noted, a wide variety of monuments was available from commercial sources. These possibilities may have been overshadowed by Lester's advocacy of his own design, coupled with his artistic credentials and his status as post commander. Local pride and the opportunity for a "bargain" also may have been a factor for the post: Lester's proposal was for an elaborate monument of the sort usually seen only in big cities, created for comparatively low cost by not only a local citizen but a fellow Civil War veteran and GAR member. The committee apparently was convinced, and it

approved Lester's plan. At the same time, the committee indicated its desire to confer with the citizens of Kinsley to obtain their opinions on the matter. To give the residents a chance to judge for themselves, Lester's model was put on exhibit in a local store window.³⁸

The proposal must not have met with any serious objections. The next mention of the monument, in the *Kinsley Mercury* of March 15, 1917, noted that its construction was well under way, with several major elements already completed. The *Mercury* article offers some tantalizing glimpses of the construction process along with some observations as to time and technique. For example, it was noted that after laboring long hours for several months, Lester would complete the monument in a few more weeks. The self-admittedly "inartistic" reporter was greatly impressed by the lack of machinery or tools in the construction process, observing that "Mr. Lester moulds the concrete into the desired forms almost entirely with his hands."³⁹

The article clearly states that the various statues were made in the workshop for later placement on the monument. In fact, "The first thing the visitor observes as he approaches the Lester studio, is a lifelike figure of an infantryman standing guard at the door." Three more figures (the sailor, artilleryman, and cavalryman) remained inside the studio as they were "still too tender to be exposed to the rigorous March weather." In the reporter's opinion, each figure "carries himself like a perfect soldier, and is correctly accoutered." The figures are described as five feet two inches tall—a rather notable diminutiveness, for most statues of this sort are literally "monumental" in that they are slightly larger than life size. The *Mercury* reporter was particularly taken by the "top-

38. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1916.

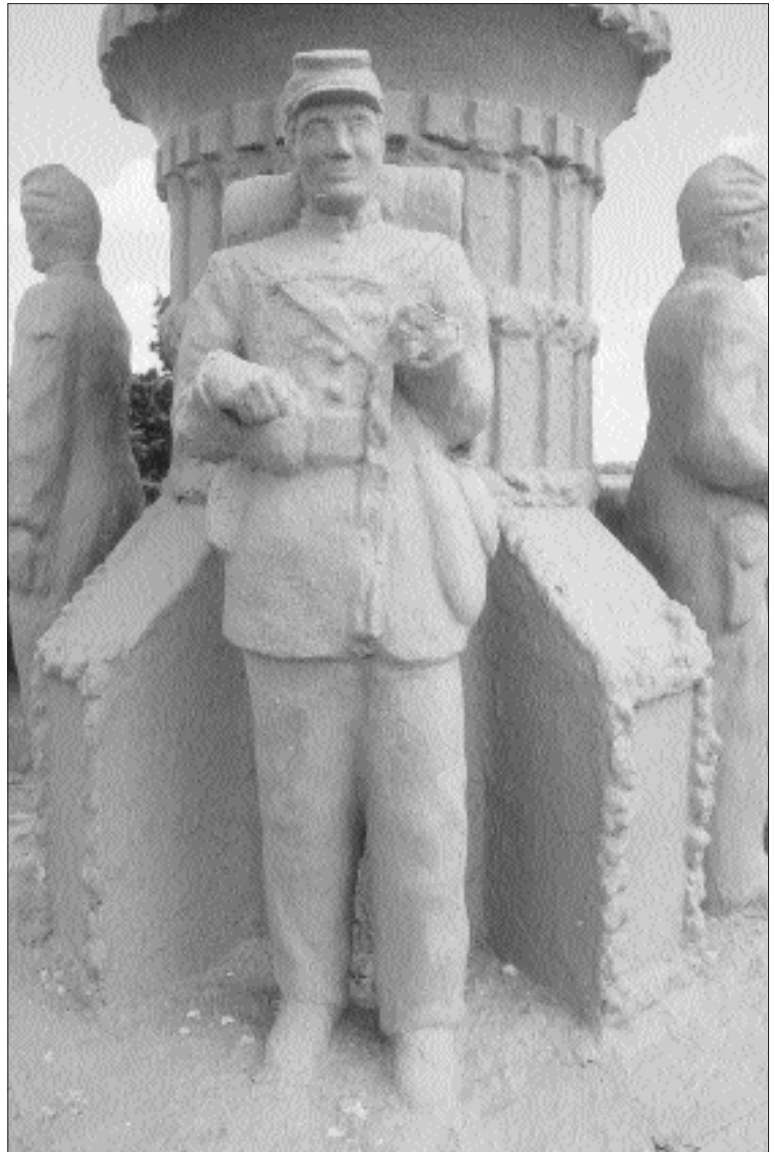
39. *Ibid.*, March 15, 1917.

Is this the face of David Lester? Some people think that one of the monument's statues "pictures" the artist. The best guess may be the infantryman since Lester served in the infantry during the Civil War.

piece" of the monument, which he referred to as "crowning victory." Noting that it had been the first of the statues to be completed, he asserted that it would be "one of the handsomest parts of the finished job."⁴⁰

As an addendum, the reporter noted that as of that date (only two and a half months before Decoration Day), no definite decision had yet been made as to whether the monument would be erected at the cemetery or in the city. Unfortunately, the historical record is silent on subsequent decision making—nothing was mentioned in local newspapers or in the records of city or county commission meetings. Nevertheless, the result of that decision is quite clear today—the cemetery was selected, not the city.

Cemeteries were common choices for Civil War monuments, so it is not surprising that the cemetery won out. One probable purpose of the monument was to embellish the local "soldiers' plot"—actually two plots, both thirty feet square, separated by a road that curves in a roughly north-south orientation along the east side of the cemetery. The plots had been established in 1891 and 1908, respectively. Each was designed for twelve grave sites laid out in two rows of six. By 1917 they contained the graves of several Union veterans as well as one Spanish–American War casualty.⁴¹ Then as now, the plots are centrally located along the eastern side of the cemetery, about midway up a long gentle slope that rises to the north. The spot chosen for the monument was to the south of the two plots and more or less between them, at the intersection of the north-



south road and an east-west road that separates the monument from the plots.

The monument's association with the two soldiers' plots is made explicit by the fact that the figure of "Winged Victory" faces to the north and toward the plots rather than south toward the cemetery entrance as would seem more logical from the visitor's point of view. Despite the lack of historical documentation as to the reasons for the choice, it seems clear that the monument's location was chosen for its association with the two soldiers' plots. It is also an eminently suitable spot for a monument. The location is on the east side of the cemetery, which is the direction from which the cemetery is approached from town. Due to the rise of the hill on which the cemetery is located, the monument stands prominently on the

40. Ibid.

41. The author documented the soldiers' plots on April 16, 1998. Additional information was provided by the current sexton, Ray Wetzel, who has exhaustively researched the available documentation pertaining to veterans buried in the cemetery.

landscape and must have easily captured the attention of passersby prior to the tree growth that tends to obscure the monument today.

Judging from the previously mentioned March 15 article in the *Kinsley Mercury*, and allowing for some bad weather, barely two months time must have been available for the on-site construction of the monument. This must have been sufficient, however, because it was finished by Memorial Day.

The completed monument apparently differed only slightly from the model Lester exhibited in November 1916. The only major differences appear to be in the layout and subject matter of the bas-relief sculptures on the four faces of the monument's base. The model reportedly had a cavalry scene on the "front" of the base, with a group of infantry on the right and an artillery scene on the left. The "rear" was to have "a design including the corps badges" (badges of the various Union corps units). We are left with a small degree of doubt as to what are actually the "front" and "rear" of the base, but the finished monument has a cavalry scene on the west face, infantry on the south, and four artillerymen with a field gun on the east. (Perhaps significantly, the cannon points to the south.) Rather than corps badges on the remaining (northern) face, a naval vessel, appearing to be the well-known *Monitor*, is shown.⁴²

The newspaper article also described the model as having "the figure of a soldier" standing on each of the four corners of the pedestal. One suspects this was simply the reporter failing to recognize one of the figures as a sailor. Alternately, it may be that Lester originally intended to create a statue of an army engineer or signal corpsman, as was sometimes the case with multigure monuments.⁴³

The statues deserve further attention here, for they provide the monument with a "folk art" flavor of the kind often associated with self-taught artists. That flavor derives in large part from the diminutive size of the statues, a characteristic that makes them appear as toy figures, especially in comparison with

the larger-than-life "monumental" figures usually seen on war memorials.

The statues have several clearly negative aspects, particularly the rather stiff-backed stance of most of the soldiers, especially the artilleryman, who also suffers from being knock-kneed. In fact, the artilleryman appears to be the worst executed of the five statues, with an ill-proportioned head and shoulders and an overly straight left arm. "Winged Victory" also draws attention from a critical standpoint, for her gown seems "lumpy" rather than naturally flowing, her legs are ill defined, and she seems to lack hips. The latter, combined with other underemphasized features, makes her seem somehow "wrong": she lacks the voluptuous curves that are such a common characteristic of allegorical maidens in the Victorian age.

Despite these criticisms, the statues are surprisingly well executed when one considers that they apparently were the artist's first and only figurative sculptures. The infantryman and cavalryman are by far the best of the figures, appearing well proportioned and naturalistic. A surprising amount of "action" takes place overall: the infantryman is reaching into his cap box, the sailor is either saluting or "halloing" with cupped hand, and the cavalryman is grasping the hilt of his saber, while above them all "Winged Victory" flies forward, holding a victory wreath for all to see.

The infantryman is notable in several ways, not least in the fact that he seems to be reaching into his cap box, an action not at all common to Civil War soldier statues.⁴⁴ Since placing a cap is the last step in firing a Civil War musket, presumably this soldier is getting ready to fire his weapon. Also notable are his sack coat (rather than a caped overcoat) and the pack and bedroll on his back. As stated earlier, these are not the characteristics of most sentinel statues. However, they are common to the other main genre of infantrymen statues, those produced by the W.H. Mullins Company of Salem, Ohio, and therefore it seems likely that Lester obtained the idea from them.⁴⁵

42. For a description of the model, see *Kinsley Mercury*, November 24, 1916.

43. Panhorst, "Brief History of Outdoor Sculpture and Public Monuments," 3.

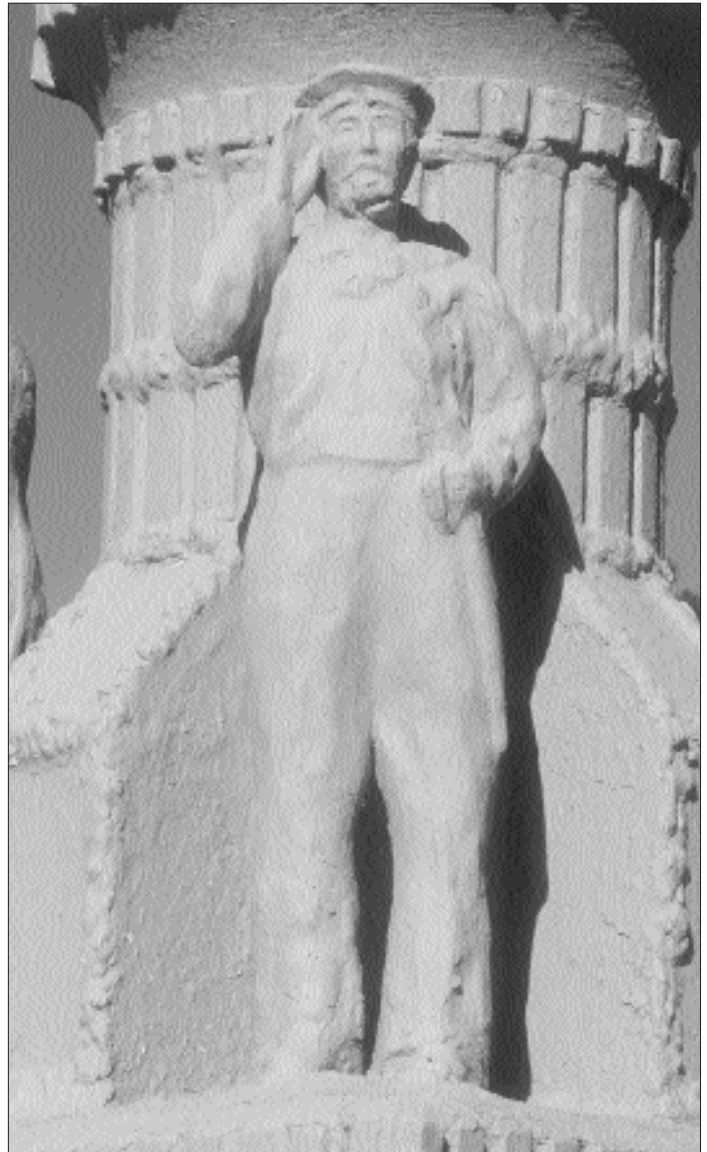
44. This action appears on no other Kansas statues, nor is it among the descriptions and photographs in Ransom, "Connecticut's Monumental Epoch," or Soderberg, *Lest We Forget*.

45. Unlike most sentinels, which were said to be standing "at rest" or assuming a "parade rest" position, the pack-bearing soldiers in

The sailor statue appears to be saluting or "halloing" with cupped hand.

Artistically the bas-relief murals featured on the four faces of the base comprise one of the best aspects of the Kinsley monument. If they are indeed hand molded, as seems to be the case, they are a rare item—Kansas, certainly, has no other known examples of Civil War art created in what could be termed "cement stucco bas-relief." It is unfortunate that the faces' low relief allowed them to be so obscured by the many coats of paint that well-meaning cemetery workers applied over the years.⁴⁶ Similarly, the expressiveness of the soldiers' faces has been diminished by paint and weathering. Even worse is the loss due to vandalism of such essential sculptural elements as the infantryman's rifle and the artilleryman's ramrod and right forearm. A portion of the sailor's beard also seems to have been broken off by vandalism or weathering.

Fortunately, copies of an early-day, but undated, photograph have survived to depict the monument at an early stage of its existence, probably as it looked at the time of its dedication.⁴⁷ Any viewer familiar with the current look of the monument is sure to be struck by the clarity of sculptural detail and the interesting use of color, presumably paint, to accentuate the horizontal dentil course and floral decoration on the upper part of the monument. Unfortunately,



both the detail and the color have been lost due to later repainting.

Artistic considerations aside, we are still left to wonder about the exact nature of the construction technique for all the various elements of the monument. The large square base, for example, has an exactness of angle and shape that suggests the use of rigid exterior forms to create cast concrete walls for at least that portion of the monument, followed by cement stuccoing to achieve the bas-relief scenery sculptures and decorative detail. The complex curves of the upper part of the monument, however, appear unlikely to have been created with the use of exterior forms. It seems more likely that the pedestal results from a ferro-cement construction technique, probably stuccoing on wire mesh around an interior form.

Mullins's statues sometimes were described as "in marching order." See *Wathena Times*, July 19, 1915. Five such statues are in Kansas, four of them erected prior to the Kinsley monument. The one that Lester may likely have seen was erected in southwestern Kansas at a Liberal cemetery in 1916; the others are in Parsons, erected in 1907; Arkansas City, 1911; Wathena, 1914; and Mount Hope, 1922.

46. The monument has been painted numerous times over the years, as this seemed to be a logical way to preserve and beautify it. On some occasions the painters used "slurry paint," a thick cementitious paint with strong sand content, often applied on concrete basement walls. Joe Heinz, telephone interview by author, May 17, 1995. Heinz is a member of the Hillside Cemetery Board and a longtime resident of the Kinsley area.

47. One copy of the photograph is in the Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. The other is with the Edwards County Historical Society, Kinsley.



The artilleryman of the Kinsley monument seems to be the worst executed of the five statues. He exhibits a stiff back, knock knees, and ill-proportioned head and shoulders.

Unfortunately, the newspaper description of March 15, 1917, tells us virtually nothing about how the bulk of the monument was constructed, as it states only that Lester “moulds the concrete into the desired forms almost entirely with his hands,” and as interesting as this is, it applied only to the statues on which Lester was then working.⁴⁸ Do the statues have an interior framework? As wet cement mix does not stand well on its own, it seems likely that Lester created some sort of framework around which the cement could be molded. Following the example provided by Dinsmoor, it is reasonable to presume that Lester used a metal screen or wire framework to create an armature or skeleton for his statues.

48. *Kinsley Mercury*, March 15, 1917.

Information on this point was provided by longtime Edwards County resident and cemetery board member Joe Heinz.⁴⁹ He recalled that “#6 wire” was exposed once when vandals shot the knee of the sailor statue, and that the wire was “sticking straight out” rather than seeming to be wrapped around as in an armature. It thus seems likely that the statues were built around a skeletal wire framework rather than an armature of screen or steel mesh. Heinz also noted that “red brick” was used to form at least some of the dentil courses of the monument, this observation occurring when “practically two thirds of the north side” ledge on the upper part of the base broke away and he could see the bricks clearly.

With regard to the monument in general, Heinz also provided information suggesting that Lester used railroad cinders for inner mass. The information, however, is second-hand. Heinz often talked about the monument with former Kinsley resident Jack Montgomery (now deceased), who remembered seeing its construction when he was a young boy. According to Montgomery, the statues were filled with railroad cinders. This is a somewhat curious comment, however, partly because the statues were completed in Lester’s studio rather than at the site. Montgomery also described scaffolding around the monument, presumably to permit the workmen to stand at suitable elevations during construction. Considering all these points together, one wonders if Montgomery’s memory was of the upper part of the monument being constructed around a core of railroad cinders held in place by a wire framework.

More recently, empirical data were gained from a condition assessment of the monument conducted in May 1998 by Brothers Julian Sculpture, a Wichita-based firm of sculptors and conservators. By drilling

48. *Kinsley Mercury*, March 15, 1917.

“Action” is apparent in all the Kinsley monument’s statues. For example, the cavalryman is grasping the hilt of his saber, ready for battle.



two holes into the base, they determined that the base consists of a concrete substructure surrounding a crumbly sandy aggregate that is light gray toward the outside and darker gray toward the center. It is uncertain whether this material consists of cinders or a disintegrated concrete, or possibly a mixture of the two.⁵⁰

However the monument was built, we can be sure that in 1917 Lester and his fellow veterans were both proud and delighted to see their monument dedicated. Unfortunately, just as they attained a monumental tribute to their effort as soldiers, they found they were becoming less relevant to the modern world. The United States entered World War I in early April 1917, and Decoration Day speechmaking that year focused as much on the war in Europe as on memories of America’s Civil War. The change in events may have given the occasion an “added solemnity” according to the *Kinsley Graphic*, but Lester and his comrades probably did not appreciate hearing the main speaker declare that “the U.S. never had a cause so just or a call to arms so imperative as now.”⁵¹ It is safe to assume that the Civil War veterans felt *their* war to be the most just, and *their* call to arms the most imperative. No reports are found of any objections being voiced, however.

Both newspapers vied in praising the new monument, pronouncing it to be “a great credit” to Lester and “a very fitting commemoration to the old soldiers both living and dead.” The *Kinsley Graphic* focused its comments on the monument, stating that the “conception and work are both good, and the artistic effect of its setting is very pleasing.” As far as the *Graphic* was concerned, “Every county in Kansas

should do as we have done, even at this late day.” The *Kinsley Mercury* concentrated on Lester, asserting that he “deserves much praise both for the originality and beauty of the design and also for the excellent workmanship.” The *Mercury* concluded that “Being an old soldier himself, he [Lester] understood what would most appeal to his comrades and what would best signify the work which they had done.”⁵²

Beyond these immediate notes of approval, very little about the monument appears in the historical record. Over time, the origin and nature of the monument appear to have become confused or forgotten in the public memory, as witness this 1939 query in the *Kinsley Mercury*:

51. *Kinsley Mercury*, May 31, 1917; *Kinsley Graphic*, June 7, 1917.

49. Heinz interview.

50. “Sculpture Condition Report and Restoration Options,” May 28, 1998, submitted to Hillside Cemetery Board by Brothers Julian Sculpture, Wichita. Copy in private collection of Randall M. Thies, Topeka; Randall Julian, telephone interview by author, August 5, 1998.

When was the monument in Hillside Cemetery built? . . . Some say 15 years ago, others say 20 and still others guess 30 years ago. D.A. Lester, Civil War veteran, did the molding. The form was built out of cement under Roy Hatfield's direction and Mr. Lester molded the figures out of plaster of Paris. One of the soldiers pictures Mr. Lester. He was a painter here for many years.⁵³

The reference to plaster of Paris probably derives from its use to make the model of the monument, not the actual monument. Unknowingly adding insult to the injury of uncertain memory, the story makes Lester sound more like a house painter than the artist that he and his contemporaries considered him to be, and it gives undue primacy to Roy Hatfield, a local building contractor. The reference to one of the soldiers depicting Lester also is curious, since no known earlier references refer to this. One wonders if it is an actual fact or just a thing of folklore. It is a charming story whether it is true or not, in part because we will probably never know the truth of it, and in part because it creates a mystery, posing the question as to *which* soldier "pictures" Lester. The infantryman would seem the most likely, since Lester's Civil War service was spent in an infantry regiment.

Unfortunately for Lester, the historical record became even more confused as time went on. Due to a chain of historical mistakes that occurred in both unpublished and published form, the Kinsley Civil War monument came to be attributed to "Leon Lester" (or "Leon Lester Sr."), with 1912 believed to be the date of its construction.⁵⁴ This misconception of name and date was literally cast in bronze in 1996 when a well-meaning group of citizens, anxious to give the monu-

date was literally cast in bronze in 1996 when a well-meaning group of citizens, anxious to give the monument proper acknowledgement, placed a bronze plaque on a pedestal adjacent to the monument proclaiming it to have been created by Leon Lester in 1912. The situation was soon rectified, however, by installing a new plaque that provided an accurate version of the monument's origin.⁵⁵

And what of Lester, after his moment of glory? He is mentioned only twice more in local newspapers, once in early 1920 as the Kinsley GAR commander organizing Memorial Day services, and later in the year when it was reported that he and his wife would be moving to Oklahoma City where their daughter Marjory lived.⁵⁶ His pension records indicate that he did indeed move to Oklahoma City, where, according to an affidavit filed by his wife, he "was taken very bad sick" in October 1921. Reading between the lines of her description of his condition, it appears that he suffered a severe stroke. Confined to the home thereafter, David Lester died May 21, 1927, and was buried in Oklahoma City at Rosehill Cemetery.⁵⁷

Surely David Lester would be proud to know of the renewed interest in his monument. Overlooked too long, it clearly deserves our attention and appreciation. Today, as we take a new look at our national legacy of outdoor sculpture and the Civil War memorialization that contributed so much to this legacy, the Kinsley monument stands out as a uniquely vernacular example of the Civil War monument genre. The nation has many Civil War monuments, but Lester succeeded in giving us something special, a truly "grassroots" contribution to a monumental effort. High art in style, but vernacular in its medium and ~~its~~

52. *Kinsley Mercury*, June 7, 1917; *Kinsley Graphic*, June 7, 1917.

53. *Kinsley Mercury*, June 8, 1939.

54. This erroneous information apparently originated in 1951 when the Edwards County Historical Society received its copy of the early-day photograph of the monument. On the front of the photo someone has written "1912." The date is obviously derived from a newspaper clipping affixed to the back of the photo next to a handwritten notation indicating 1950 to be the date of the clipping. The clipping reported that the monument had been repainted, stating that it was "the first time . . . since it was made by Leon Lester thirty-eight years ago." In handwriting adjacent to the clipping, thirty-eight years have been subtracted from 1950 to obtain "Year Built 1912." Curiously, the clipping has the name "Leon" scribbled out, with other writing on the back of the photograph specifying that the monument was designed and built by "Mr. Lester Sr. (a painter)." These attributions have a semblance of accuracy in that Leon was the name of

David Lester's youngest son. This handwritten confusion of dates and names became published "fact" in Myrtle Richardson, *The Great Next Year Country: A History of Edwards County, Kansas, and the Surrounding Area for the Years from 1901 to 1925* (Lewis, Kans.: Lewis Press, 1983).

55. On April 16, 1998, the new plaque was dedicated in a ceremony. See *Kinsley Graphic*, April 22, 1998; *Edwards County Sentinel* (Kinsley), April 23, 1998.

56. *Kinsley Graphic*, May 27, 1920; *ibid.*, December 2, 1920.

57. Lester, Pension File. Lester's file also contains his wife's application for a widow's pension (certificate no. 1582861), which is accompanied by a copy of his death certificate listing the place of burial as Rose-