



National WWI Museum and Memorial Overview

The primary focus of the National WWI Museum and Memorial is to honor the memory and sacrifices of all those who served their country and defended liberty during World War I. Additionally, the Museum and Memorial puts into context the consequences of World War I and how they impact the world we live in today.

Overall Museum Environment

Visitors enter the Museum via a long ramp that leads them below ground and into the entrance hall. Patrons experience a psychological transition from their daily lives and have the opportunity to focus on the gravity and scope of the war. Inside the Museum, they cross over the Paul Sunderland bridge from the lobby to the main gallery, and have one last view of the Tower through skylights. On the bridge, visitors pass over a field of 9,000 red poppies, each representing 1,000 combatant fatalities.

Portrait Wall

On the outer wall, a Portrait Wall portrays the personal sacrifices of those who served in World War I. An interactive video portrait gallery enables guests to explore databases to learn more about these people. The Portrait Wall is a living archive — constantly expanding to contain new material.

Main Gallery

William T. Kemper Introduction Theater

The William T. Kemper Introduction Theater provides visitors an overview of the war and its historical context — its origins and significance as the seminal geopolitical event of the 20th century. It shows how the world's most powerful societies and colonial dependents mobilized in a global catastrophe that shaped the world we know today. Archival photographs and historical footage from the Museum and Memorial's collection are prominently displayed. Comfortable seating for 60 individuals through a 12-minute video provides relevant background for all the Museum and Memorial's galleries.

Prologue

The Prologue Gallery gives a deeper idea of what the world was like before the war and the undercurrents that were preconditions for the war in 1914. This is a place to contemplate the sense of optimism and progress, European culture at its pinnacle of achievement, while also gaining insights into the economic and political forces pushing Europe towards conflict. The contrast with what follows presents a stark reversal of fortune — from relative peace and prosperity to the catastrophe of industrialized war.

Chronology of the War

The Chronology of the War covers the origins of the conflict and its year-by-year escalation up to the armistice and the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. A multi-layered timeline — with images, graphics and small objects — presenting the interwoven strands of the story: the military and diplomatic action as it unfolds and the domestic, social and cultural impacts of the war. The narrative is carried through eyewitness testimonies of people from different nations — from military personnel, civilians, politicians, diplomats — to keep before the visitor the individual and diverse experiences of war.

Immersion Galleries

The Immersion Galleries are dramatic installations of key large-scale objects from the collection, in settings that allude to the physical and emotional landscapes of the war. They portray key situations drawn from the chronology and give visitors a deeper understanding of the war's dynamics by focusing on themes that cut across the entire narrative. Each tableau is augmented with immersive video and audio to bring people into direct contact with sets of original evidence, the first-person accounts connected with objects that were used in the war.

Interactive Study Stations

Two Interactive Study Stations are located in the inner circle. Visitors can sit down and explore World War I in more detail. The variety of programming can address different learning styles, using simulations, databases, and decision-making scenarios that pose the question: “What would you do?” A key component of these activities will be the presentation of situations as people saw them at the time — outcomes unknown, consequences unforeseen, addressing the central questions: how, when, and why nations go to war.

Study Collections

Along the central path, large glass cases will showcase the breadth and variety of the museum collection. Organized thematically, these showcases complement the chronology and the immersive encounters and will add a rich complexity to the exhibit program. Comparisons are made from a variety of nations, underscoring again the global nature of the war.

Kemper Horizon Theater: America’s Entry into the War and the 20th Century

This spectacular program shows America at the point of decision, on the threshold of war, and gives visitors an opportunity to experience what that meant at the time. A dramatic wide-screen theater presents guests with the question, “Should America enter the war?” This presentation is integrated with a Field Tableau, a full-scale depiction of “No Man’s Land” and what Americans going to war were to face. The presentation balances positive outcomes of the war with the “Pandora’s Box” of forces and negative consequences that were unleashed.

America at War

The second half of the exhibition takes guests from the United States’ entry into the war in 1917 through the November 1918 armistice and continuing on through the peace negotiations at Versailles in 1919. The western structure of the exhibition mirrors that of the eastern side, but now the contents focus on another of the great strengths of the collection, the American materials, both military and civilian. This is an inspiring story that documents the American war effort, the home-front, and the achievements of the American Expeditionary Forces and their role in saving the Allies from defeat. It takes visitors up to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where values of American democracy and peace, as articulated by President Wilson, established America’s commitment and good will and the beginnings of its role as a world leader.

Epilogue

An Epilogue gallery looks at the war through a selection of notable excerpts and reflections on the meaning of war and peace. This is a companion space to the prologue exhibit on the other side of the hall. There is also an exhibit on the building of what would become the National WWI Museum and Memorial, a symbol of hope that endures today.

Wylie Gallery

The state-of-the-art Wylie Gallery opened in 2018 and showcases limited-run special exhibitions curated by organizations throughout the world.

Ellis Gallery

Located on the Research Level, the Ellis Gallery features special exhibitions from curated by other institutions in nations across the globe as well as special exhibitions organized by the Museum and Memorial.

Elements of the Liberty Memorial

Exhibit Hall

Located on the west side of the Liberty Memorial Tower, Exhibit Hall served as the main museum gallery of the Liberty Memorial from 1926 to 2006. Today, Exhibit Hall serves as gallery space for the Museum and Memorial's limited-run exhibitions. It also contains a surviving section of the Panthéon de la Guerre mural, depicting the figure of Victory in front of a “temple of glory,” surrounded by thousands of French heroes. Colorful flags of the 22 Allied nations of World War I, arranged in the order in which each country entered the conflict, line the north and south walls. The exterior of both Exhibit and Memory Halls are decorated with mosaic tiles that depict a night sky strewn with gold stars. These gold stars represent the sacrifice of the Gold Star Mothers during the Great War.

Memory Hall

Located on the east side of the Liberty Memorial Tower, Memory Hall contains a portion of the Panthéon de la Guerre, a monumental French painting depicting the Allied nations of World War I. Additionally, Memory Hall houses bronze tablets listing 441 Kansas Citizens who died in World War I, computer kiosks that provide in-depth information about the Liberty Memorial and limited-run exhibitions.

Liberty Memorial Tower

The Liberty Memorial Tower rises 217 feet above the main courtyard and 268 feet above the North Lawn. The cylindrical tower is 36 feet in diameter at its base, tapering to 28 feet at the top. Guests can take an elevator followed by 45 stairs to the open-air observation deck for a breathtaking view of the Kansas City skyline. At night, a Flame of Inspiration, created by steam and lighting effects, is emitted from the top of the tower and can be seen from miles away. The monument received designation as a National Historic Landmark in 2006 and recognition from Congress as a national memorial in 2014.

Guardian Spirits

Carved by Robert Aitken and each standing 40-feet tall, four Guardian Spirits watch over the Memorial from the top of the Liberty Memorial Tower. As protectors of peace, each guardian holds a sword and is named for the virtue it represents: Honor, Courage, Patriotism and Sacrifice.

Assyrian Sphinxes

Two Assyrian Sphinxes guard the south entrance of the Liberty Memorial. "Memory" faces east toward the battlefields of France, shielding its eyes from the horrors of war. "Future" faces west, shielding its eyes from an unknown future.

Cinerary Urns

Two empty cinerary urns, which traditionally contain the remains of a cremated body, flank the entrance of both Memory Hall and Exhibit Hall. Sculpted from limestone, each urn is decorated with a band of laurel with emblems recognizing each of the branches of service that helped to win the war: the Army and Navy, the Red Cross, Agriculture and Manufacturing and Transportation.

The Great Frieze

Located on the North Wall, the Great Frieze measures 148 feet by 18 feet and represents the progression of mankind from war to peace. Sculpted by Great War veteran Edmond Amateis, each collected figure or grouping of figures is rich in symbolism. At each end of the Frieze is a sword with the Stars and Stripes representing the defense of our country. The story of the Frieze depicts the end of the war and the creation of an era of greater peace and amity.

Dedication Wall

Located at the northern edge of the Memorial Grounds near Pershing Road, this stone wall holds the bronze busts of the five Allied leaders present during the site dedication on November 1, 1921: Gen. Baron Jacques of Belgium, Gen. Armando Diaz of Italy, Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France, Gen. John J. Pershing of the United States, and Sir Admiral Earl David Beatty of Great Britain.

For more information:

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