

WARS OF AMERICA

■ Military Park

Gutzon Borglum
Bronze, 1926

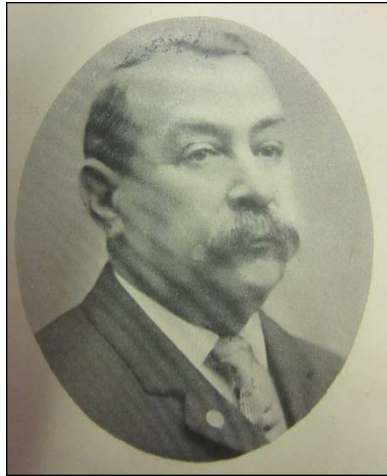


"The Wars of America" tells a wondrous story that will prove worthy of endless repetition to old and young.

—*Jewish Chronicle*¹ May 28, 1926

"Wars of America" was the last—and the most ambitious—of the three public monuments bequeathed to the City of Newark by the will of Amos H. Van Horn (for more about Van Horn, see page XX):

Whereas at the present time a movement is under way to raise by subscription or otherwise money for the purpose of erecting a monument to the memory of the Soldiers and Sailors who served their country in the Civil War and funds for this purpose are not being obtained as readily as desired and as this monument has always been one of my greatest desires I expressly authorize and instruct my



Amos H. Van Horn

executors in case no Soldiers and Sailors Monument shall have been erected by private subscription or otherwise in Military Park in the City of Newark when the time shall arrive as appointed hereinafter by me for the erecting of the same to set aside and use the sum of one hundred thousand dollars out of the proceeds of the trust fund specified heretofore fore and to use the same for the erection of a suitable monument to be selected by them and to be known as the Soldiers and Sailors Monument the same to be erected in Military Park in the City of Newark.²

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the United States had been involved, to varying degrees, in military engagements both throughout the world and at home against Native-Americans. Yet, for all the obvious reasons, it was the American Civil War that inspired a great degree of civic interest in memorialization. By the time Van Horn died in 1908 many communities across the country had erected monuments, though Newark had yet to do so despite the annual patriotic fervor on display each Decoration Day. Some were strictly to commemorate the Civil War, while others were styled as general “soldiers and sailors” monuments, designed to more broadly honor America’s military. Between Van Horn’s death and 1920, U.S. forces had been involved in ten conflicts in the American

West, Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Dominican Republic. The next conflict to inspire memorialization on a similar scale to the Civil War would be the First World War. There was renewed interest in Newark for a soldiers and sailors memorial, but thanks to Van Horn, the city had the money to make it happen.

By 1920, Gutzon Borglum had made a strong name for himself as a sculptor throughout the country and specifically in Newark (for more about Borglum, see page XX). His seated Abraham Lincoln (see page XX) had been roundly praised when unveiled in 1911, and he had been commissioned for two works in 1916 as part of the 250th anniversary of city’s founding, “The Indian and The Puritan” and “First Landing Party of the Founders of Newark” (see pages XX and XX, respectively). He knew that the commission for the second of the Van Horn bequeaths, “George Washington,” had been given to J. Massey Rhind (see page XX) in 1912, but he had reason to hope he might get the third, which promised to be grander still. There was \$100,000 left for the soldiers and sailors monument—no small sum. “With that much money at my disposal,” Borglum wrote enthusiastically, “I can create a monument that will truly do honor to the brave men who have served America in times of war.”³

The timing of the commission was especially good. Borglum had been previously hired to create a statue of Union Army General

Daniel Butterfield by his widow, but she unfortunately died before it was done. Her three executors demanded further changes though she had already approved his design. Once it was finally approved, however, two of the three also had died, and the surviving third failed to honor their contract. Borglum had to sue for the \$32,000 he was expecting. Had the Newark commission not come when it did, the threat to his financial wellbeing might have been worse.⁴

His first thoughts for the Newark monument were something in a more typically classical style—a pillar surrounded by military figures from the various wars to date, shown in appropriate action. Yet he came to realize such an arrangement would fail to convey the range of emotions common to wars of all ages. He wanted a more sophisticated concept that would more fully embrace everything it meant for the nation to be at war.⁵

In the chicken coop-turned-studio behind his “Borgland” home in Stamford, Connecticut, Borglum crafted “sketch models” from clay and plaster until he had something he felt confident submitting.⁶ In February 1921, Newark lawyer Ralph E. Lum, representing the executors of the Van Horn estate, announced that Borglum had been selected. It was said the choice was made on the strength of his reputation and the committee hadn’t even looked at his sketches. Van Horn’s will spoke of a “soldiers

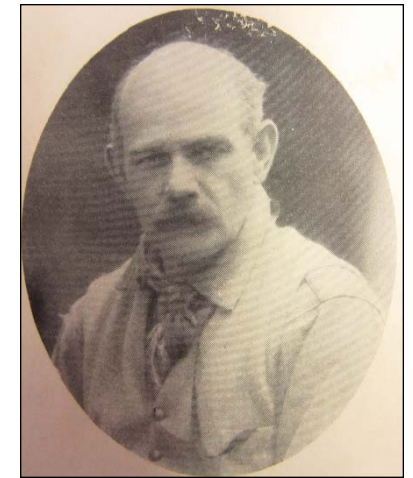
and sailors monument,” but Borglum suggested the working title of “The Mobilization of America.” He envisioned an incredible work in bronze—the largest ever erected in the United States, in fact—measuring 43 feet long, 18 feet high (24 feet with the pedestal) and comprised of forty-three human figure as much as 7 feet, 8 inches tall, and two horses.

Borglum submitted a clay model about 15 feet in length and told reporters he had made seven different configurations before arriving at one that pleased him. He explained:

What I have finally produced is a group of men separating themselves from their civil occupations and home ties, assembling, organizing and arming and moving forward, carrying with them the accoutrements and implements of war. The action of the composition represents a people summoned to defend ideals. The group is placed upon an incline to emphasize the struggle and show the upward character of it.⁷

Borglum further described his vision to the press:

This is the largest group ever built or proposed in America. It tells the complete story of a nation’s effort as no other monument has ever attempted to do. The front of the group is composed of several



Gutzon Borglum



Gutzon Borglum created the first plaster “sketches” in this makeshift studio behind Borgland in Stamford, Connecticut.

men, fully uniformed and definitely at the edge of the battle in the presence of danger. This is shown by their attitude, by the general structure of the ground, by the agitation of the horses and by the rounding of one of the men engaged in harnessing the horses. Back of the entire group is a soldier bidding goodbye to his wife and children, indicating in a very simple and descriptive manner the motive which induces a peaceful nation to take up arms.⁸

When descriptions of his winning entry appeared in the newspapers, other sculptors declared it impossible to make so massive

and complex a casting in bronze. They estimated it would take Borglum on his own about six months per figure and, with forty-two figures total, the whole piece might take as long as 20 years to complete! It was even suggested perhaps he should share the work with other sculptors.⁹ Yet Borglum’s experiences with the Stone Mountain project had inspired him to think in mountainous scales. In his view, the subject demanded nothing short of such ambition. “A puny statue could never tell the heroic story of the American soldier and sailor,” he asserted.¹⁰

His grand theme was to represent, from the rear of the monument to the front, a progression of men leaving behind families and civilian life to head off with grim determination into the perils of battle. It was to embody the citizen soldier rising to arms not for conquest but to defend the values of home. It spoke less to romantic battlefield glory than the ideals of sacrifice by individuals for a greater good. There was even a male figure whose body posture conveyed reticence being entreated by an army officer. This was said to represent the conscience objector, a token to the reluctance with which a civilized people went to war.

Agreeing to a deadline of April 1923, Borglum encountered a complication right at the start. His studio was then-occupied by his second equine statue of Union General Philip Sheridan. The first was dedicated in Washington D.C. in 1908. This second was

destined for Chicago. So Borglum began the process of building armatures from tree trunks for the Newark job and making the clay models in a field outside the studio. He hired builders to actually construct a new and larger studio around him while he worked. By mid-summer, with the first layers of clay in place, the studio walls had become tall enough to think about a roof. Unable to put on a permanent roof with the statue taking shape inside, his wife sewed together tarps that were strung between the walls, which were later replaced by old circus tents.¹¹

Borglum had the help of two able assistants, Luigi Del Bianco and Hugo Villa, who worked hauling the some 40-tons of clay that would ultimately go into the piece.¹² Both were Italian immigrants and Del Bianco would go on to be the chief stone carver on the Mount Rushmore project¹³ while Villa had been a violin maker before turning to sculpting.

On nice days at noon, Borglum's wife, Mary, and their children, Mary Ellis and Lincoln, would bring lunch out to the studio and try to encourage him to take a break. Young Lincoln, who was just eight years old when his father began the Newark job, wanted to skip school so he could watch his father work.¹⁴

Gutzon Borglum had become good friends with Van Horn's executor, Ralph E. Lum, but Lum began to worry that his artist friend's vision exceeded his ability to fund it.



Creating the clay form was one thing; finding someone able to cast so large a piece within budget was another. When the first bid came in, Borglum wondered if it was a typo, but it was not—the quote was for \$120,000 when the total allotted bequeath had been \$100,000! Scaling down the monument was never an option for Borglum. “Throughout his life Gutzon considered only his own point of view valid,” Borglum biographers Howard and Audrey Shaff wrote in 1985.¹⁵ He would just keep writing to more foundries until he found one that could do it cheap enough. At last he found one in Italy, Gusmano Vignali, which would cast the whole thing for an estimated \$20,000.¹⁶

As Borglum worked outdoors, builders constructed a new larger studio around him.



The massive clay form of “Wars of America” taking shape.

Work, however, ran into delay after delay. Among them were his responsibilities to the contentious Stone Mountain Confederate monument project in Georgia. Work also ground to a halt in 1922 as he grieved the death of his brother, Solon Borglum, at age 53 from complications associated with an appendectomy.¹⁷

Borglum’s agreement with Vignali was he would send them the 42 total figures in eight groups, but by December of 1922 only four figures were actually shipped. Clearly the April 1923 deadline would not be met, adding to Lum’s worries. A harsh winter didn’t help, as rain and sleet leaked through the tent roof. The modeling clay froze despite the bonfires

lit around Borglum and his assistants as they labored in coonskin coats and fur caps. Borglum, of course, couldn’t work with gloves and his hands were sore and bleeding.¹⁸

The sculptor’s own perfectionist nature also got in the way. Unable to get a sailor figure just right, he tore it down and rebuilt it multiple times. Even once he started shipping them to Italy, he would regret not having just a little more time to perfect them. At long last, however, the final pieces were shipped in the summer of 1924. In the meantime, his detractors in the controversies over the Stone Mountain project had been trying to malign his reputation, and delays in this much-anticipated job for Newark did not help. When he hadn’t heard back from Vignali, Borglum sent Hugo Villa to Italy to see what the problem was. Work was only just beginning and the figures sent back in 1922 were yet to be cast. An unveiling that had been scheduled for November 11, 1925 had to be cancelled, straining Lum’s patience. He wrote to Borglum in exasperation:

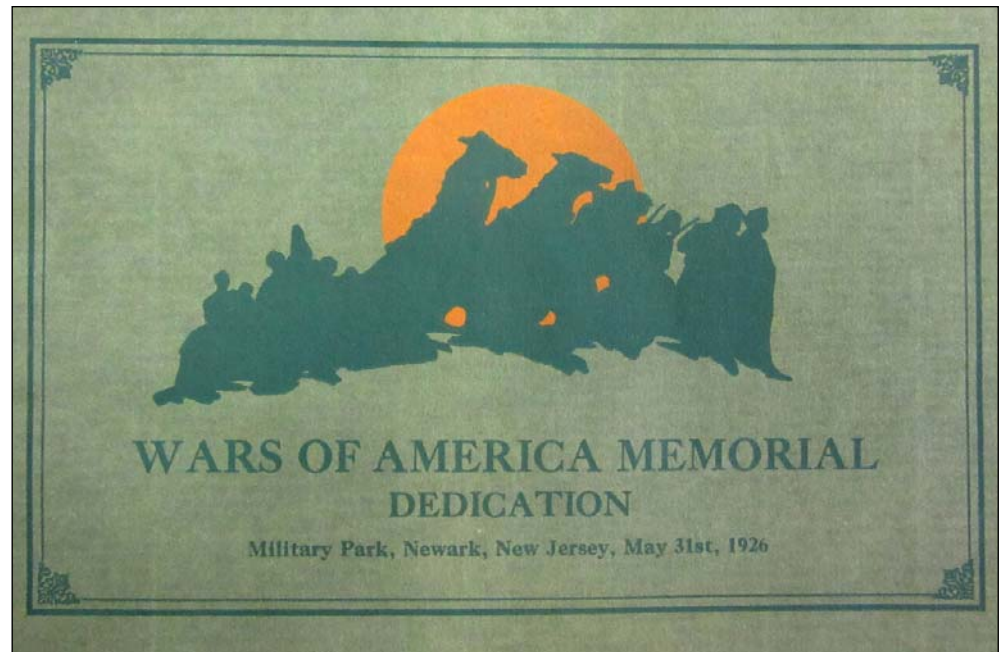
I will give no further thought to the subject and forget it, as nearly as I can come to doing that, until someone tells me there is some chance of getting the monument during my lifetime.

“Trust me a little longer,” Borglum replied.¹⁹ The occasional news article or photos of progress in newspapers around the country

kept up the public interest during the delays. Borglum himself gave a presentation broadcast by the Newark radio station WOR in March of 1924. The station had been a product of the promotional prowess of Newark's department store magnate and philanthropist Louis Bamberger. WOR began broadcasting on February 22, 1922, using a 500-watt transmitter on 360 meters (833 kHz) from Bamberger's Department Store. Bamberger was an enthusiastic booster of Newark's civic and cultural life, gifting, in just one example, the land on which the Newark Museum was built. He understood the benefits of good will towards the city to his business and evolved a symbiotic relationship. Before the memorial was at last ready to be unveiled, he had Borglum's clay models on display in his store's window and put on an exhibition of photographs taken by the project's official photographer.²⁰

When Borglum had to be at Stone Mountain, Mary took over the arrangements getting the castings shipped from Italy. Vignali wrote to her of complications he faced moving the massive works from the foundry to the dock. He needed to build a custom truck, but local authorities refused him permission to use them on their streets, adding:

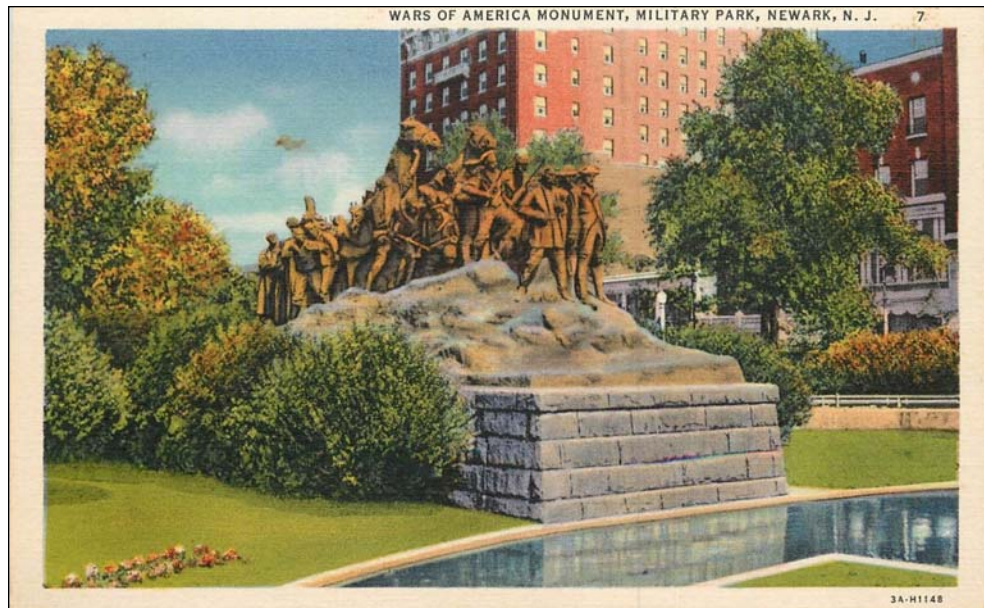
We therefore put eight string horses to a wagon. They were accompanied by a crew of electricians because in many towns the electrical wires had to be



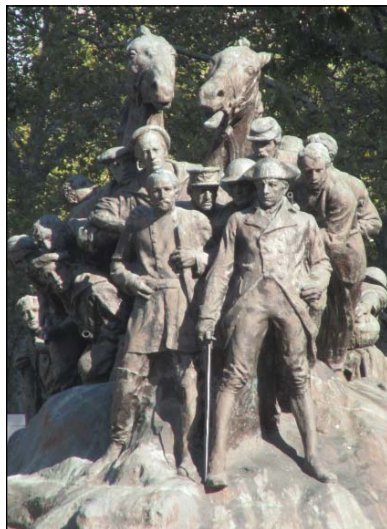
removed before the wagon with its giant load could pass.

Needless to say, the whole thing was now over budget. But, at long last, the bronze castings arrived safely at Newark and the dedication could be firmly scheduled for May 31, 1926.²¹ Van Horn's bequeath had stipulated that the monument was to be erected in the city's Military Park—an appropriate site indeed (for more about Military Park, see page XX). It was placed opposite the Robert Treat Hotel. From a bird's eye perspective, it would form the handle of a sword-shaped shallow basin of water, hilt and blade, pointing towards the apex of the triangular park.

Booklet cover commemorating the dedication of "Wars of America."



Period postcard



Detail of the forward figures.

Depending on the source, the crowds on hand to witness the event was anywhere from 5,000 to 20,000. The discrepancies might have something to do with whether the count limited itself to those within Military Park alone or included the many more in the surrounding streets or watching from the windows of nearby buildings. At the appointed moment, Alice Mae Waer, the grandniece of Amos Van Horn, drew apart the flags that had been covering the monument and two large yellow balloons carried off a flag of Newark to complete the dramatic unveiling. Among the more curious parts of the celebration was the release of 96 homing pigeons, two for each of the then-48 states of the Union, allegedly to carry messages to their respective governors,

though how many managed to complete their voyages home is unclear. Speakers included Navy Secretary Wilbur, Borglum, Governor Harry A. Moore, and Brigadier General High A. Drum (for the Secretary of War). Hundreds of soldiers, sailors, and marines marched on foot while others on horseback pulled caissons of artillery late of the battlefields of France.²²

Borglum had been running about making last minute arrangements and was still in work clothes when he took the stage. Some in the press speculated he suffered from "mike fright" when he placed aside his prepared remarks. Yet he seems to have been sincerely overwhelmed by the moment of triumph as he improvised:

*It would be impossible for me to express the pleasure and the gratitude to God that I am able today to deliver to you . . . this memorial monument to the people who have founded and protected a new freedom in the world.*²³

"Wars of America" was celebrated as a triumph of the sculptor's art, and Borglum received many letters and notes of congratulations. Evidently, however, the ones he elected to read out at the unveiling displeased at least some. The editors of Newark's *Jewish Chronicle* took Borglum to task for a "display of bad taste."

His secretary was ill-advised or unwise in selecting as the only message to be read of the many received, one that adroitly praised General Robert E. Lee and the Daughters of the Confederacy. All good Americans, no matter from what side of the Mason Dixon Line, know that many of the Confederates were sincere and brave in their determination to fight against the Union forces and the Unity of the Nation. But all must be convinced that the sooner we forget the cause that separated North and South during the Civil War, the better for all of us. The less we draw attention to the old prejudices and the partisan interests, the more we weld out people into a homogeneous national unit, which is the important thing to keep in mind.²⁴

While it was proper for Borglum to receive the accolades—and the criticism—he was nevertheless cognoscente of how “Wars of America” was, in a real sense, a group project. It had begun with the broad thematic commands of Van Horn’s will to fund works he understood that by definition he would never see. There was also, of course, his hardworking assistants, Luigi Del Bianco and Hugo Villa, as well as Gusmano Vignali and his workers at the foundry, not to mention his own family. His friend Ralph Lum had handled the funding and acted as intermediary to assuage frustration when delays ran into years. Borglum gave Lum a set of the several



Gutzon Borglum (right) and his son, Lincoln Borglum, were represented among the monument’s figures.

large photographic prints taken of the completed monument, autographing one, “In happy fulfilment of *our* dream.”

Those who came to admire “Wars of America” could search for figures patterned after real people. Amos Van Horn was represented as a young Union Army volunteer, something he had actually been in 1861. Borglum himself, his wife Mary, and son Lincoln are also to be found. The World War aviator was fashioned after John Purroy Mitchel. He had been known as “The Boy Mayor” when he served as New York City’s mayor from 1914 to 1917. When he lost reelection, he joined the Air Service as a flying



The First World War aviator was modeled after John Purroy Mitchel.



Horses had been an unwitting part of human military forces throughout the ages up to the World War and Borglum thought they too should be represented.

cadet and achieving the rank of Major. He lost his life in a freak accident during a training flight in Louisiana on the morning of July 6, 1918 when his plane went into a sudden nose dive. His seatbelt had evidently been unfastened and he fell out of the aircraft, plummeting some 500-feet to his death.²⁵

Some years later Gutzon Borglum traveled to Italy to visit the Vignali foundry. The owner asked him an odd question—how did he like the champagne? “What champagne?” Borglum replied. It seemed that the workers had stashed bottles of bubbly inside the hollow bronze castings as a gift that never made it to Borglum! What became

of them remains a mystery, but rumors of a hidden alcoholic treasure lingered. In 1990, the *New York Times* reported:

Ron Cavalier, owner of Renaissance Foundries of Bridgeport, Conn., and his son, Chris, recently clambered around inside the statue, poking arms into the heads of two horses where Italian foundry workers were said to have stashed cases of champagne as a gift to Borglum before shipping sections of the work to Newark for assembling in Military Park in 1926. The search produced handfuls of dirt but no champagne. Mr. Cavalier said that he was disappointed but that perhaps some workers had found the gift before the statue was assembled and “had some enjoyable lunches.”²⁶

As fun a story as Cavalier's interior search might have been, his inspections had a serious purpose. The intervening years had taken a toll on “Wars of America.” As the *Times* article described:

Mr. Cavalier said that the steel supports inside the statue had corroded and had to be replaced—“much like the Statue of Liberty”—and that thousands of tiny holes had to be plugged with bronze welds. Seams also were welded, and the outside of the statue was cleaned with acid and wiped with copper nitrate and copper

sulphate to restore what the artisans believe was its original color.

Jerome D. Greco, chairman of the Down Town Park Committee, which was formed six years ago to refurbish the city's parks, said an inspection of the Borglum landmark "showed that it was in danger of collapsing."²⁷

"Wars of America" was rededicated in 1990 after a two year restoration process costing \$300,000. Borglum's daughter, Mary Ellis Borglum Powers, who witnessed the original 1926 unveiling as a young girl, was on hand. With the turn of the 21st century, it has become a centerpiece of an overall downtown revitalization around Military Park. The sword-shaped pool, drained of its water years ago, is now a colorful flowerbed.

Cavalier had added to the monument's history not only by its restoration. *The Times* related:

He said it was not unusual for workers to leave a message or a memento inside a statue they had worked on. "I left something inside the 'Wars of America,' but I won't say what it is," he said. "It will be a surprise for someone when they have to work on the statue sometime far in the future."²⁸

After the first dedication 64 years before, Gutzon Borglum and his family drove that

night back to "Borgland." He suggested to Mary that they move to Texas so they could be nearer to his next undertaking in South Dakota at a place known as Mount Rushmore.

NOTES

- 1 _____. "The Wars of America." *Jewish Chronicle*, May 28, 1926, p.4. <http://www.genealogybank.com>, Downloaded on Oct 2, 2017.
- 2 Borglum, Gutzon; Dana, John Cotton. "The Newark Lincoln, a Memorial." *The Free public library for the trustees of the Van Horn trust*, 1912. pp.12-13.
- 3 Price, Willadene. "Gutzon Borglum: Artist and Patriot." *Rand McNally & Co.*, 1961. p.94.
- 4 Shaff, Howard; Shaff, Audrey Karl. "Six Wars at a Time: The Life and Times of Gutzon Borglum, Sculptor of Mount Rushmore." *The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota*, 1985. p.177.
- 5 Shaff. p.178.
- 6 Price. p.123.
- 7 _____. "Borglum to Make Big War Memorial." *New York Herald*, February 13, 1921. p.17. <https://www.newspapers.com>, Downloaded on Oct 2, 2017.
- 8 _____. "Borglum Design Chosen." *The New York Times*, February 12, 1921, p.7. <https://www.newspapers.com>, Downloaded on Oct 2, 2017.
- 9 Shaff. 178.
- 10 Price. pp. 123-124.
- 11 Price. p.124.
- 12 Price. pp.124-125.
- 13 <https://www.luigimountrushmore.com/>
- 14 Price. p.125.
- 15 Shaff. p.2.
- 16 Price. pp.125, 131.
- 17 Price. pp.126; 130; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solon_Borglum
- 18 Price. p.131.
- 19 Price. p.142.
- 20 L. Bamberger & Co. advertisement. *The Jersey Journal*, May 26, 1926, p.6. <http://www.genealogybank.com>, Downloaded on Oct 2, 2017.



An officer arguing with a conscientious objector.



As the figures move up the incline, they embody a sense of urgency.

21 Price. pp.146-147.

22 "Wars of America' Memorial Dedicated; Largest Bronze Monument in Country." Wilkes-Barre Times Leader, June 22, 1926. p.25. <https://www.newspapers.com>, Downloaded on Oct 8, 2017.

23 Price. p.148.

24 _____. "Two Serious Incongruities." Criticism of Ceremony Jewish Chronicle, June 25, 1926. p.2. <http://www.genealogybank.com>, Downloaded on Oct 2, 2017.

25

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Purroy_Mitchel#Death

26 Sullivan, Joseph F. "A 64-Year Dream About Champagne." The New York Times, June 3, 1990.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/03/nyregion/a-64-year-dream-about-champagne.html>

27 Sullivan.

28 Sullivan.