

ROSEDALE WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL ARCH, 1923-24

Mount Marty Park

John Leroy Marshall, Architect

Kansas City, Kansas Historic Landmark: July 28, 1982

Register of Historic Kansas Places: July 1, 1977

National Register of Historic Places: August 2, 1977



ROSEDALE WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL ARCH, 1923-24

Mount Marty Park

John Leroy Marshall, Architect

Kansas City, Kansas Historic Landmark: July 28, 1982

Register of Historic Kansas Places: July 1, 1977

National Register of Historic Places: August 2, 1977

The Rosedale World War I Memorial Arch was built to commemorate the service and sacrifice of the men of Rosedale in the Great War. The chain of events leading to the construction of the arch began shortly after America entered the war. It was decided that, unlike the practice in previous wars, the first division of National Guard troops to be called up should be drawn from as many states as possible to demonstrate a sense of unity and common purpose. The new division was designated the 42nd United States Infantry Division and allotments for twenty-six states were drawn up, a mixture prompting Secretary of War Baker to informally christen the 42nd the "Rainbow Division."

In the allotments for the Rainbow Division, the 117th Ammunition Train fell to Kansas. Lieutenant Colonel Frank L. Travis decided to raise six of the twelve truck companies in Wyandotte County. In June, 1917, he took the practical step of placing "Men Wanted" ads in the local newspapers. On the following Sunday he assembled 375 men on top of Mount Marty in the city of Rosedale and had them sworn in. Contrary to popular belief, the men came from throughout the metropolitan area and not just from Rosedale.

The Rainbow Division sailed from Hoboken, New Jersey on October 18, 1917, and was the fourth American combat unit to arrive in France, preceded by the 1st, 2nd and 26th Divisions. The division was trained in trench warfare by French troops during the late autumn and winter, and entered the lines in a "quiet" sector in the French province of Lorraine in late February, 1918. A month later, they became the first American troops to be entrusted with a whole sector of the Western Front on their own as they moved into the Baccarat sector. In late June, they moved into the "lousy Champagne," a desolate battleground east of Rheims. There, they entered their first major battle as the only American unit with the French Fourth Army, commanded by the capable and heroic one-armed General Henri Joseph Eugene Gouraud, the "Lion of the Argonne."

The division spent two weeks preparing their defensive positions in the stifling heat, working at night to avoid enemy detection. On midnight, July 14-15, the greatest artillery barrage of the war opened the battle; guns every 10 meters along 42 kilometers of front on both sides roared for four hours, then 200,000 German infantrymen assaulted the French and American positions. The battle of the Champagne went on through the 15th, 16th and 17th. Much of the fighting was hand-to-hand with grenades, clubbed rifles, bayonets and trench knives. During the three days, the furious artillery barrage continued to rake all areas within ten miles of the battle line; no one was safe from its reach. On the 17th the assault faded away, shattered in front of the Rainbow Division. These three days of horror were subsequently labeled the Champagne-Marne Defensive.

The Rainbow moved immediately to Chateau-Thierry, where it went on the offensive for the first time, driving the Germans back across the Ourcq and Vesle Rivers. This was the Aisne-Marne Offensive. Following Aisne-Marne, they were the spearhead of the St. Mihiel Offensive, then were continuously active in all three phases of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. By the time the Armistice went into effect on November 11, 1918, the Rainbow was the first American Expeditionary Force division to reach Sedan near the Belgian border, in territory that had been held by the Germans for over four years.

The Rainbow Division, 28,105 men and officers from twenty-six states, came into existence in August, 1917. In France they proved themselves to be shock troops, ready for the toughest jobs, a first-class fighting division. They came home in April, 1919, and the division was dissolved in May. They had sustained 16,242 casualties, over half of their original number.

On May 12, 1919, the city of Rosedale held a "Welcome Home" celebration for returning veterans. The streets were decorated with rainbow colored bunting, and Hudson Road was officially renamed Rainbow Boulevard in honor of those who had served in the 42nd. The celebration was shared with communities from Johnson and Miami Counties in an outburst of patriotic feelings.

Those feelings received a further encouragement in 1921 when the Kansas Legislature passed an authorization for municipalities to expend public funds, issue bonds and levy taxes for the erection of permanent memorials. Accordingly, a special election was held in Rosedale on June 21, 1921, "Voting on the establishment of a memorial park and the erection of an Arch at its entrance...The improvement will cost \$25,000 for which bonds are to be issued..." The proposal carried by a vote of 129 to 77. (The election to approve bonds for a memorial building in Kansas City, Kansas was held just three weeks later, on July 12.)

A committee consisting of Dr. O. M. Longnecker, Dr. B. M. Barnett, Frank Rushton, Otto Ziegelmeyer, Rolla Duncan, and Henry C. Alwes was appointed by Mayor S. H. Rennick to carry out the project. A young architect named J. Leroy Marshall offered his services to plan the proposed arch. Marshall, a member of the Rosedale American Legion Post #346, had served in France and had taken advantage of his situation to make a large number of sketches before his return home in 1919. Among those sketches were drawings of the Arc de Triomphe, the model on which the Rosedale Memorial Arch was based.

The committee recommended the purchase of a tract of land on the crest of Mount Marty overlooking the Turkey Creek valley as the site for the memorial. Here they proposed "to lay out an athletic field 150 feet by 290 feet on the tract, erect a stone arch as an entrance to the field and some day convert the rest of the land into a memorial park, with proper utilitarian facilities and embellishment."

Marshall's plans were drawn and approved by both local bodies and the state architect before the end of the summer. Acquisition of the desired land took somewhat longer. On April 24, 1922, Rosedale City Attorney Louis R. Gates filed a petition for the appointment of appraisers in condemnation proceedings. The 5.2 acres of land to be acquired for \$10,000 were 21 lots in the subdivision of Marty's High School Park, so named because it was adjacent to the Rosedale High School. The Rosedale city council then passed an ordinance for the issuance of \$25,000 of special improvement bonds.

Before the bonds could be issued or sold, however, the City of Rosedale had ceased to exist. There had been agitation since 1909 for the consolidation of Rosedale with Kansas City, Kansas, and in 1913 a small majority in Rosedale had actually voted in favor of consolidation, only to have the Rosedale city council refuse to certify the results. In 1921, the state legislature passed an act providing for consolidation, but the non-certification of the election results remained an obstacle. In an attempt to force certification, the matter was taken before the state supreme court. Before the court could resolve the matter, however, the Rosedale city election in 1922 brought in a council favorable to consolidation. Certification of the election results (nine years late) on April 5, 1922 was followed on April 7 by a proclamation of consolidation by Governor Henry J. Allen. At midnight on April 25, 1922, Rosedale became part of Kansas City, Kansas.

Given the timing, the validity of the bond ordinance was highly questionable. The former Rosedale City Attorney, Louis R. Gates, was also a member of the state legislature. He introduced legislation amending the original memorial statute in such a way as to allow Kansas City, Kansas to issue the bonds. The legislation passed on February 24, 1923, and on July 19 the Kansas City, Kansas city commissioners authorized the bond issuance. The groundbreaking was held the following day.

The groundbreaking ceremonies were the most elaborate ever held in Wyandotte County. General Henri Gouraud was touring the country, and the date for breaking ground for the arch, July 20, 1923, was so arranged that he could be the guest of honor of the occasion. It was an all day service. The General arrived on an early morning train and was taken to the Grund Hotel at 6th and Ann, across the street from the Kansas City, Kansas City Hall, for breakfast. At noon a dinner was served to 400 guests at the Chamber of Commerce. E. S. McAnany was the toastmaster, Mayor Gordon extended the freedom of the city to the distinguished guest, and speeches were made by Governor Davis, Senator Capper, Congressman Little and Mayor Cromwell of Kansas City, Missouri. The Government sent 350 men from Ft. Leavenworth to assist in the ceremonies.

The afternoon services were held on Mount Marty and were described in the afternoon paper as follows:

"The street program started when the parade assembled at Thirty-Ninth Street and the State Line and marched through the Rosedale residence district, to the arena for the arch dedication, Thirty-Sixth and Springfield Avenue. As the motor section bearing the Gouraud party from the Chamber of Commerce came into view over the hill, the 17th Infantry band swung into line ahead of the infantry and artillery details. Behind them came the Rosedale post American Legion color guard consisting of Elmer J. Allen, a 117th Ammunition Train veteran, and John Nolan, a seaman in the navy, with a detachment of marines from the local recruiting station. Two hundred Rosedale ex-servicemen, marshalled by C. E. Sanders, followed their flag. Next in line came the standards of neighboring Legion posts. These represented the posts of Rufus J. Montgall, William F. Fitzsimmons, William R. Nelson, Hewitt Swearingen, Tank Corps 381, Joseph Liebman, James Cummings, Arthur Maloney, Peter Smith, Overland Park, Wyandotte and Olathe.

"The standard of the 117th Ammunition Train, presented the outfit by the citizens of Kansas City, was displayed for the first time in parade.

"Mount Marty, and the streets adjoining, were festive in appearance with flags and banners and drapes, and a crowd of 6,000 assembled rapidly as the parade swung into action.

"After the general's salute of twenty one guns and the playing of the Marseillaise and America, the troops were inspected and the attending dignitaries took their places upon the decorated platform on the crest of Mount Marty. The invocation by the Rev. Father A. Dorseifer preceded the award of the Distinguished Service Cross to H. D. Heitz by Gen. B. H. Duncan, commanding the 17th army corps area.

"In the stand with the notables were three Kansas City men who had distinguished themselves in conflict, representing services in the Civil War, Spanish American War and the great war.

"Speeches were made by Mayors Gordon and Cromwell, Representative E. C. Little, Senator Arthur Capper, Governor Davis, W. P. McLean, State Legion Commander, and John B. Smith, General Chairman of the day. The address, through an interpreter, by General Gouraud was greeted with great applause. After his talk, General Gouraud turned ground for the arch with a gold spade."

Despite the groundbreaking, the purchase of the property was not finalized until August, and the project was not advertised for bids until the following year, on March 15, 1924. The reasons for the delay are hard to understand, but it is possible that the Rosedale Arch was already being relegated to second place in the City's priorities, behind the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building. The contract was finally awarded to Henry C. Readecker, a contractor and stone mason who lived in Rosedale.

On April 1, 1924, a committee including Marshall, Louis R. Gates and Frank Rushton met with Park Commissioner Kaelin and the park department engineer to settle on the placement of the arch within the memorial park. They finally decided on the north end of the park, on the edge of the bluff overlooking the valley. Construction began almost immediately thereafter, and was completed by September.

The monument designed by Marshall was an arch in the classic pattern, a scaled-down version of the Arc de Triomphe. Three of the five sheets of working drawings are dated June 14, 1921, revised November 3, 1923, with the two detail sheets being dated November 22 and 23, 1923. The arch was 34' 6" in height and 25' 5" by 10' 5" in width at the base, the individual pillars measuring 10' 5" by 8' 3". The arch opening was 10' in width and 20' high. Each pillar rested on a separate concrete foundation extending down to solid rock, although given the location that depth at some points was only 18". Contrary to some descriptions, the arch was not constructed of limestone blocks but consisted of a 4" limestone facing over brick, the brick varying in thickness from 21" at the base to 9" at the top. The roof behind the parapet of the arch was a reinforced concrete slab covered with 2-ply felt and tar. A 4" iron drain pipe led down the inside of one pillar to a tile pipe emptying out on the hillside below, and a scuttle in the roof allowed access to the interior of the arch.

Other than the moldings and entablature, sculptural decoration was kept at a minimum. Each of the four spandrel panels of the arch contained a bas relief carving of a laurel branch surmounted by a shield of Columbia. (In execution the carving was considerably more skillful than Marshall's tentative indication on the plans.) The only other decoration was a carved inscription repeated on both the north and south faces of the parapet, which read as follows:

ERECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF ROSEDALE IN –
HONOR OF ITS CITIZENS WHO ANSWERED
- THEIR COUNTRY'S CALL AND SERVED
UNDER ARMS FOR THE TRIUMPH OF RIGHT
OVER MIGHT IN THE WORLD WAR. –

The architect's name does not appear, but the name of the mason is carved at the base of the south-facing parapet. The cost of the arch was \$12,179, which with the \$10,000 for the land meant that the total was well below the bond amount.

The Rosedale Memorial Arch was finally dedicated on September 7, 1924, in a ceremony much less elaborate than the groundbreaking had been, and almost immediately began its descent into obscurity and neglect. A football field for the adjacent Rosedale High School was established to the south of the arch, but the other projected improvements for the memorial park were never carried out. When a stadium was added to the west side of the field in 1929, it was viewed primarily as an adjunct to the school.¹

Disaster came in 1935. In that year a major expansion of the football field and stadium took place as a W.P.A. project. In order to provide level ground for the expansion, a massive stone retaining wall was built extending some 750' along the east, north and west edges of the field. At a point just 82' south of the arch the wall was nearly 22' high, without steps or any other means of access to the most important civic monument in Kansas City, Kansas.

For the next thirty years trees and weeds grew up around the now-isolated arch. The City refused to maintain the property, and even denied that it was part of a public park. In 1962 various civic groups joined together to clear weeds and trash away from the site and install fluorescent light fixtures atop the arch. On November 11, 1962, the arch was rededicated to the veterans of all wars ...and promptly fell back into overgrown obscurity once more.

That same year saw the beginning of the University-Rosedale Urban Renewal Project. In 1968, the Kansas City, Kansas Urban Renewal Agency, with its usual sensitivity, proposed dismantling the arch and reassembling it next to the new Bell Recreation Center at 36th and Rainbow Boulevard. The move was rejected, and in its place the Rosedale Business Association sponsored a second clean-up of the arch and its surroundings. Two flood lights on poles were erected on the north side of the arch, and the City Park Department graded and graveled a road up to the arch from Booth Street to the east. Sketchy as these improvements were, they at last led to the City's acknowledgement of its responsibility for the arch and the surrounding park.

Finally, in 1972, the City paved and curbed the new access road and began planning for additional improvements. The firm of Buchanan and Winters, Architects, was hired to design the improvements, which included a small parking area at the end of the new road, a walk and steps from there to a circular plaza around the base of the arch, two overlooks taking advantage of the impressive views to the north and east, landscaping, and a professional lighting system replacing the attempts of '62 and '68. This work was finally carried out in 1976. More recently, ornamental light fixtures similar to those found in several of the city's older neighborhoods were installed along the length of the access road. At last the arch came close to the dignity and prominence its original proponents had hoped for, visible by day and by night to the thousands of cars that pass along I-35 in the valley below, a source of pride rather than shame.

¹ It has been generally forgotten (or ignored) that the football field and stadium are actually on city park property rather than school property.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harrington, Grant W. Historic Spots or Mile-Stones in the progress of Wyandotte County, Kansas. Merriam, Kansas: The Mission Press, 1935.

Landis, Margaret. "The Winding Valley and The Craggy Hillside:" A History of the City of Rosedale, Kansas. Kansas City, Kansas: self published, 1976.

Webb, Dick. E-mail to Steve Speise dated July 2, 2000, giving a brief history of the Rainbow Division (paragraphs 3 through 6 above) and correcting the errors found in an earlier draft of this paper.

Copies of John Leroy Marshall's original working drawings, as well as Buchanan and Winters' 1973/1976 plans, are in the possession of the Kansas City, Kansas Planning and Zoning Division.