

Dignitaries on hand for dedication of Felicity monument

By Chris McDaniel Yuma Sun Staff Writer Feb 22, 2014



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Felicity Mayor Jacques-Andre Istel recognizes members of the Hall of Fame of Parachuting at the Museum of History in Granite at Felicity, Calif., on Saturday.

The Granite History of the United States of America monument at Felicity, Calif., was officially dedicated Saturday afternoon during a ceremony attended by ranking members of the military, foreign delegates and area politicians.

Saturday was chosen for the dedication in commemoration of President George Washington's birthday -- Feb. 22, 1732.

The monument, part of the Museum of History in Granite, includes a series of more than 60 granite panels chronicling some of the most important events defining and shaping American history, including the arrival of Europeans, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and westward expansion. Some panels had up to 60 drafts before the final version was chosen.

The newly dedicated monument is one of several at the museum detailing world history. The museum was founded by Felicity Mayor Jacques-Andre Istel in the early 1990s to commemorate the history of humanity.

Creating the monument has been "a considerable responsibility, and you will see a few things that I hope are funny and in good taste," Istel said Saturday.

The granite panels were engraved by Memorial Design, a South Carolina based company. Before engraving each panel, the granite was covered by a rubber stencil and blasted with sand to etch out text. A diamond cutting tool was used to carve images into the stone. Each monument at the museum is designed to remain legible for several thousand years.

"The purpose of the monument is to summarize" the history of the U.S. -- "hopefully in a readable and interesting manner, so that hundreds of years from now" those who view it are inspired to learn more about history.

The monument includes a half-size replica of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, Pa. The functional replica, complete with the iconic crack, was initially rung during the ceremony by a French consul stationed in San Diego, "in honor of centuries of friendship between France and the United States," Istel said.

Other guests and dignitaries then took turns ringing the bell, including 13 times in a row to commemorate the 13 original colonies.

Ranking military officers -- including Vice Admiral Tom Copeman III, commander of the Naval Surface Forces of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and Col. Reed Young, commander of Yuma Proving Ground -- rung the bell once each in honor of their respective military branch.

"I am very proud to represent the United States Navy at this auspicious event," Copeman said.

The bell was crafted by the Verdin Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.

"It is exact half scale," said Tim Verdin, company plant manager. "We used a specific bronze mixture. It is 80 percent copper, 20 percent tin. That is your typical bell bronze of today."

The Verdin company was careful to make the replica as close to the original as possible.

"We actually took a digital scan of the real liberty bell and we transferred everything – all the letters, the lines, and even the crack onto a half scale pattern. The crack is exactly the same shape – half the size – but it has all the same jagged edges as the original."

The low humidity of the Sonora Desert should help preserve the bell for centuries to come, Verdin noted.

"As long as somebody takes care of the structure that it is hanging in, it will last forever."

The museum has over 900 granite panels installed - about half of which are engraved. The state of Arizona and the state of New Hampshire have both crafted resolutions to request the Museum of History in Granite be officially named a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The museum is located off Interstate-8 at exit 164 a few miles west of the city of Yuma. For further information, log onto www.historyingranite.org or call 760-572-0100.

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