

Museum of History unveils new monument

BY CHRIS McDANIEL - @YS_CMCDANIEL Feb 23, 2013



PHOTO BY RANDY HOEFT/YUMA SUN

A U.S. Marine Corps color guard presents the colors next to the newly unveiled 100-foot-long Museum of History in Granite monument in 2013 in Felicity, Calif. Felicity has recently been featured in a Time magazine list, "American Design Worth the Trip: 24 inspired works of art to visit this summer."

Progress continues on the Granite History of the United States of America monument at Felicity, Calif. Once completed, the monument will include more than 60 individual granite panels chronicling some of the most important events defining and shaping American history.

The new monument is part of the Museum of History in Granite, founded by Felicity Mayor Jacques-Andre Istel in the early 1990s to commemorate the history of humanity. The museum includes several other monuments detailing world history.

The U.S. monument is about half completed and includes information about the arrival of Europeans, the Revolutionary War, Civil War and westward expansion.

"The monument was built some years ago, and over a year ago we engraved the first half because when you deal with distant history, that is a lot easier," Istel said. "I must tell you, at times I wondered if I had bitten off more than I could chew, because doing panels about the history that we have lived through is very difficult."

Some panels had up to 60 drafts before the final version was chosen, Istel noted.

A crew with Memorial Design, a South Carolina-based engraving company, began working on the 30 remaining panels on the U.S. monument Wednesday. To engrave each panel, the crew covers the granite with a rubber stencil and blasts it with sand to etch out text. They will later use a diamond cutting tool to carve images into the stone. The monument is designed to remain legible for several thousand years.

To celebrate the progression of the monument, Istel hosted a preview event Friday afternoon attended by dignitaries including former French ambassador to Bulgaria Jean-Marie Daillet, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma commanding officer Col. Robert Kuckuk, Yuma Proving Ground commanding officer Col. Reed Young, and Winterhaven Fire Chief Steven Taylor.

The event began with the airborne arrival of Jay Stokes, president of the U.S. parachute association, who parachuted into Felicity with a giant American flag. This was followed by a presentation of the national colors by the MCAS Yuma Color Guard and a brief speech by Daillet.

"On the grand occasion of the completion of the granite history of the United States of America Monument, designed for millennia and recalling the historic friendship of France and the United States dating back to Washington and Lafayette, I take this occasion to thank the United States for immense assistance and valor in two world wars," Daillet said.

Daillet will ask the French government to name the Museum of History in Granite a World Heritage Site, "thus taking its rightful place next to the Statue of Liberty among the 962 sites in 157 countries considered as having universal value," he added.

Istel is pleased that people from around the globe visit his museum each year. "It makes me happy, particularly when they don't notice the mistakes," he joked.

Istel hopes the museum will continue to expand with new monuments long after his death, and said it will "never" be completed.

"When I say never, we have a couple thousand acres here, and these monuments should go all the way around the church (at the center of the property). There are endless topics."

The museum currently has 922 granite panels installed, of which more than 450 are engraved.

12/3/2016

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The museum is located off Interstate 8 at exit 164 a few miles west of the city of Yuma. For more information, visit www.historyingranite.org or call 1-760-572-0100.