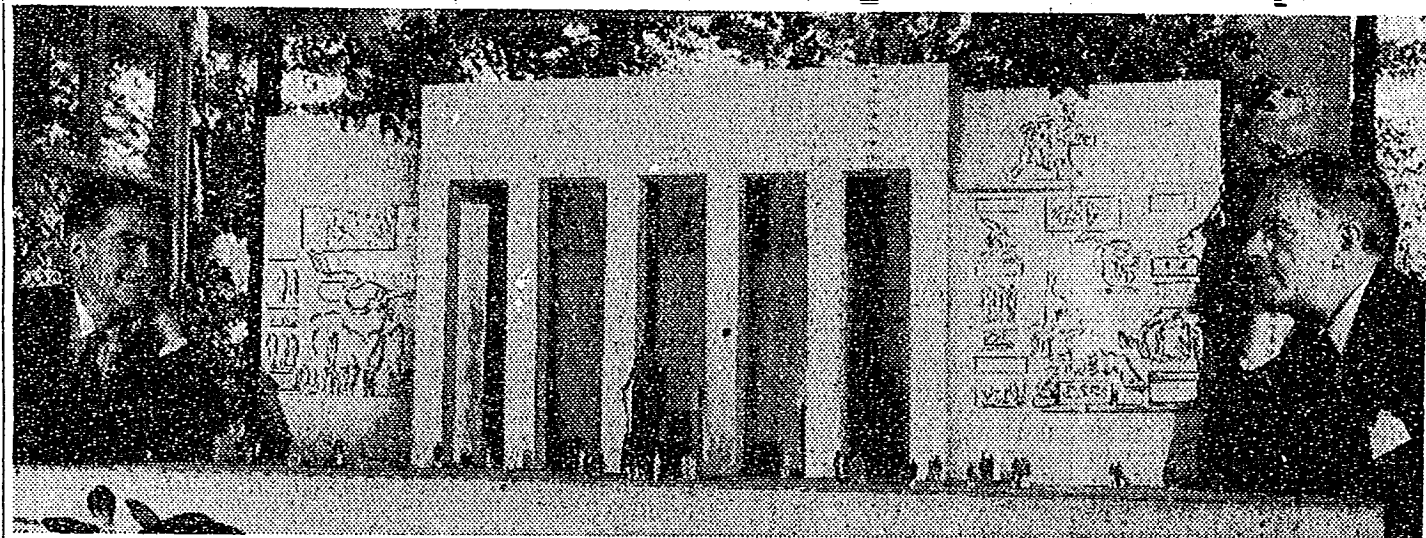


\$24,000,000 Shrine Is Proposed for Capital: Critique of Project ...

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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\$24,000,000 Shrine Is Proposed for Capital



Eric Gugler, left, architect of the proposed Freedom Shrine, and Harry T. Thompson, Superintendent of National Capital Parks, with a model of the structure at Mr. Gugler's studio. Sculptures on walls are by Paul Manship.

Critique of Project Questions Its Style

Ada Louise Huxtable, an architecture critic for The Sunday Times, presents a discussion and critique of the monument sought for Washington.

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

A new monument has been proposed for Washington. Plans were announced yesterday for a \$24,000,000 Freedom Shrine to be built on Federal park land overlooking the Potomac River

adjoining Arlington National Cemetery.

The structure, a large, open court, approximately 327 feet long, 204 feet wide and 68 feet high, was designed by Eric Gugler, New York architect. The proposed site of the memorial is flanked by the existing Marine Memorial and the Netherlands Carillon. Its walls feature reliefs and inscriptions by Paul Manship, the sculptor, recording the history of American democracy.

The project was proposed to Congress by President Eisenhower on May 16 and intro-

duced as a bill in the House and the Senate on Tuesday. The project now awaits the official legislative green light.

In monument-laden Washington, the news of still another memorial, even a giant-sized one, makes little stir. This one, however, is notable for the particularly great silence that has surrounded it during its six years of progress through the necessary committees.

The release of the design now, in approved final form, raises belated considerations of procedure, suitability, style and the desirability of another ad-

Freedom Monument Asked in Congress

dition to Washington's "monument belt."

Most important of all, it spotlights the fact that an extremely large public structure, to be subsidized with at least \$12,000,000 of public funds, has been inadequately commended to public attention, except in the local Washington press, over a long period of time. That

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Monument Proposed for Capital Challenged on Need and Design

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this is so should be a matter of public concern.

The history of the monument began in 1953. On Aug. 9 of that year The New York Times Magazine carried a cover story of a design for a Hall of Our History, an open-air court with wall reliefs of the American past, to be erected in central Georgia.

The Hall of Our History was to be paid for by voluntary public subscription. Among its sponsors were former Judge Learned Hand, who wrote a description of its intent and style in suitably soaring prose. The executive committee for the project was made up of Gen. Lucius D. Clay, John A. Krout, N. Baxter Jackson and Arthur Hays Sulzberger. The architect and promoter was the same Mr. Gugler.

Neither funds nor monument materialized, but in August, 1954, Congress created a National Monument Commission. Its stated purpose was "to secure plans and designs for a useful monument to the nation symbolizing to the United States and the world the ideals of a democracy as embodied in the five freedoms..." The commission was to consist of four Senators, four Representatives, and "four eminent citizens to be appointed by the President."

The wording of this law made it quite possible to appoint a commission, members of which might be respected legislators and august public figures, but who might know nothing at all about art or architecture, beyond the certainty that they knew what they liked. This is not an uncommon condition of Congressional committees dealing with the arts. Their selection of a design was to be approved by the Secretary of the Interior, the National Capitol Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts.

On April 15, 1960, after the proposal had been the center of considerable local controversy, the commission announced in a letter of transmittal to President Eisenhower that it was pleased to report that its function had been accomplished, plans and designs selected, and approval secured. The Hall of Our History had become the Freedom Monument.

The report also suggested that the \$12,000,000 cost of building the monument should be paid for by appropriation of Federal funds, with the financing of the sculpture, estimated at another \$12,000,000, by public contribution.

In the meantime, the commission has been enriched by consultants. John Harbeson, its consulting architect, is also serv-

ing as adviser on the controversial remodeling of the East Front of the Capitol. This undertaking is considered by many to be of extremely dubious merit, involving the destruction of the building's priceless historic facade. This ill-advised and vigorously opposed rebuilding has been officially, but ineffectually, protested by most of the qualified professionals in the country—the American Institute of Architects, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Society of Architectural Historians.

The second consultant, Gilmore D. Clarke, is the landscape architect of the proposed memorial. The third consultant is Mr. Gugler.

Certain pertinent questions arise:

Q Did the National Monument Commission, or members of Congress, know of Mr. Gugler's design at the time that the commission was formed?

Q Who or what made Congress feel that such a monument was necessary, to the point of creating a commission to procure one?

Q Was there any public invitation of designs? What other schemes were investigated as possible alternatives?

Q Why did it take the commission six years to come up with a previously completed and published concept?

Q Is it customary or proper for "consultants" to such a commission, the function of which is to provide expert, impartial advice, to be the same architects who get the job? If it is customary, shouldn't the custom be changed, quickly?

Q And why was the search conducted without proper public information and the opinion of qualified and concerned professionals?

These questions are even more pertinent in view of the results. The building is a tired cliché. Although the roofless walled court, set in a grove of trees, has been an agreeable form since the open Greek peristyle, it is executed here in a flaccid, watered-down classic style, innocuous and uninspired. The sculptured reliefs are carried out in that peculiarly artificial and specialized manner that might be called "historical realism," which relies heavily on groups of explorers, patriots and Indians balanced with mechanically-molded trees, cotton-ball clouds and overly familiar symbols.

It would be unfortunate, indeed, if Congress were to approve the construction of a monument that offers neither truth nor esthetic excellence. Its empty pomposity is a poor substitute for one visit to the original documents of freedom.