### "The Art of the Monument in 1921"

# A critical review of the changing Aspects of Monumental Design

By Ernest Stevens Leland

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This article begins:

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**Note:** Included at the end of this document is the obituary for J. A. Briar, President of Northeastern Iowa Granite & Marble Works, Monona, Iowa.

This article, which begins on the next page, is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

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## THE ART OF THE MONUMENT IN 1921

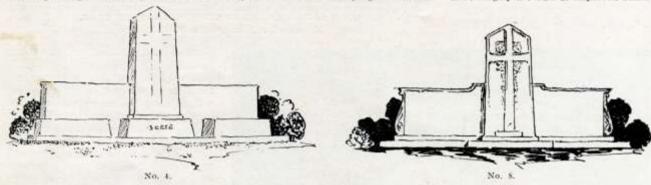
A critical review of the changing Aspects of Monument Design

#### By. ERNEST STEVENS LELAND

Contrasted with the halcyon days of hectic prosperity entailed by the late war, the year 1921 will long be remembered as a period during which the much heralded agencies of readjustment bore down upon our craft with a vengeance that gave no sign of mercy until the year was quite spent. There have been lean years full many in the past, but the precipitous reaction from an unprecedented prosperity was so overwhelming that only a philosopher could penetrate the

dealers everywhere, the News advised the trade to be prepared for a great pressure of business, and one that would tax the capacity of our manufacturing centers to an extent which would work a grave handicap upon those who were hesitant to stock up before the boom overwhelmed manufacturers. If the prediction fell short of the truth, it was not because events failed to justify the prophecy, for the period of prosperity surpassed the cautious prognostications

swept over the craft throughout the country. In the pages of this journal, writers have repeatedly noted the progress of industrial art in America. We have been taught to realize that the public has become more discriminating and that popular magazines, the daily press, schools, house-furnishings, and countless other influences are educating the popular taste for better things. Those who prefer to believe that this progress is more largely a result of improved stand-



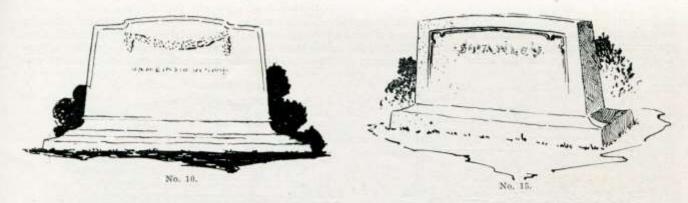
gloom to see the silver lining of the clouds beyond. It was indeed a trying year and one fraught with innumerable problems none of which, however, was either new or unexpected. The more astute and foresighted business men were unshaken by the intensified readjustment because they reasoned that the Intensity largely governed the ordeal's duration. In other words, the thing had to run it's course, and the faster it ran, the sooner it would be over with. While in the face of world problems, government debts, political and economic conditions in general, none would be so foolish as to claim we are on the eve of a great period of prosperity, nevertheless there are sound reasons for good cheer which only the foolish or confirmed pessimists can ignore. Efforts aplenty were made to artificially restore confidence but these predictions of professional optimists have been rather more harmful than beneficial because now that a real improvement is imminent there are many who will insist that the talk of better times is but another attempt to inspire courage.

Readers of MONUMENTAL News will recall how the recent prosperity was predicted in these pages,—a feat which is probably without an equal in the annals of our business press. When skepticism was rampant and grave doubts concerning the war and its outcome depressed

of the News staff. Again the first of last year, after deliberate study and investigation, the News anticipated a year of restraint in buying but one to be distinguished by the superiority of work produced. It required no extraordinary perspicacity to foresee a year of lean business but the editors may be pardoned a well earned satisfaction over the fulfillment of the predicted quality of artistic production during the year. In appraising the annual work of our craft it is necessary to regard the great numper of memorials which for many reasons are never illustrated in periodicals. The reviewer of necessity must travel extensively and observe carefully the work erected in many parts of the country. The observations and conclusions introduced in this article represent a personal study of production in some fourteen states and a survey of work executed and photographed in almost every state of the Union. Hence in venturing to opine that no single year has contributed so much to the art of the monument as the year 1921, the writer cannot be charged with the offense of arriving at his conclusion superficially nor with committing that more common error of reserting to unfounded and indiscriminate superlatives.

Various reasons may be responsible for the wave of creative design which has ards among the craftsmen, rather than the public at large, have good grounds for their claims albeit the cause is probably attributable to both. In our own fle'd it cannot be denied that craftsmen have been ahead of the public in advancing higher ideals in design. More and more we find competition today based upon design rather than clever salesmanship of the price or shop-talk variety. This rivalry of design has obviously emphasized the importance of good designers as an indispensable sales-factor and the demand for draftsmen and designers is being largely supplied from the ranks of architecturally trained experts. During the year 1921 all these influences were keyed up to a high pitch. To use a trade phrase,-"it was a buyers market" the year through. The public was more exacting and the limited demand entailed a keener competition. That design and not price was the antidote for poor business is conclusively demonstrated by the records of these firms which based their appeal upon the former.

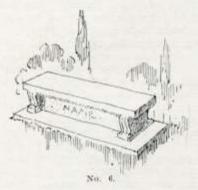
The several thumb-nail sketches introduced in this review serve merely to indicate tendencies in design, and they are by no means offered as criteria. A cursory glance at these little memoranda in ink, and study of the collected illustrations on other pages, will afford a basis for some general and interesting



conclusions. Refinement of proportions, and the absence of exotic and superfluous detail are outstanding qualities of the year's work. This prevalence of carefully studied lines and the predominance of plain surfaces may very well be a result of economy in design,—but whatever the cause, the effect gives reason for rejoicing. With refinement of design has come a searching after variety in form

the introduction of a lagoon or small pool on a cemetery plot. Heretofore neglected cross forms were employed, thus sustaining the departures which last year gave us the Way-side Cross as a substitute for the overdone Celtic Cross of the St. Martin's variety. These and similar tendencies were all supported and en-

elliptical and semi-circular forms were not so prevalent during 1921 as the forms suggested by sketches. The almost severy simplicity of No. 4, erected by Presbrey-Leland, suggests the degree to which plainness may be successfully carried. Number 5, executed by Jones Bros. for Puffer and Company, is an elongated horizontal tablet introducing a simple rarden bench. The elementary simplicity of the conception and the scale at which it was carried out bespeak the



and theme. The year 1921 witnessed a determined effort to break the shackles of a stagnant adherence to stereotyped design. While there was nothing "new under the sun" created there was a definite tendency toward attaining new forms with old themes. For example, the semi-circular exedra gave way to the straight screen with a simple garden bench against the wall or tablet. The parapet and the balustrade were motifs for wings of these screens and in numerous instances the results bordered on sheer originality of conception. The formal garden theme in at least one instance progressed so far as to witness

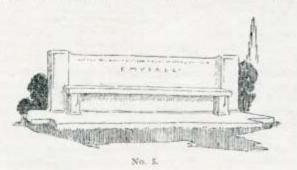


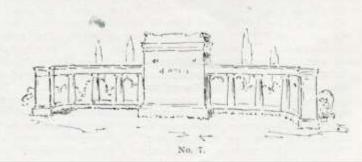
hanced by a general revival of interest in the landscape treatment of cemetery plots,—a feature the possibilities of which may perhaps transcend in importance all else the year has given us.

Exedrae and Screens retained their favour as themes for monuments of the more ambitious variety. In obedience to the dictates of a desirable economy, the



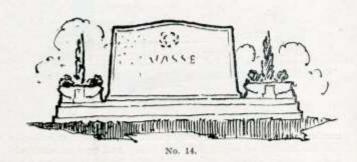
possibilities of achieving new effects through the co-ordination of old themes. The garden bench was again successfully given a new form by Edw. A. Carroll Co. as indicated in sketch No. 6. The interval between the standards was made solid, thus successfully lending massiveness to the result and affording space for inscribing the family name. The platform moreover served to give a monumental dignity to the composition. The Baylis Memorial by Davis Granite Company of New York City, sketch No. 7. introduces a balustrade in place of the more familiar solid walls for the Aside from the architectural





beauty of a well studied use of the baluster, the lightness or airlness of the result is welcome particularly where a planting scheme supports the strucof medieval crosses were erected during the year as a welcome departure from the various types inspired by Celtic forms. Weeping and Way-side Crosses vor and their vogue is not confined to any one section of the country. During the past year a great number of horizontal tablets similar to sketch 14 were



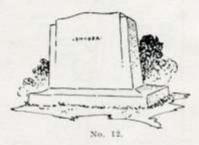


ture. The Baylis Memorial was done in White Vermont Marble and the presence. of verdure between the balusters or small columns produces an altogether lovely effect. Numerous screens of other types were fashioned during the year with only minor touches of note-worthy individuality. Conspicuous among the notable contributions to the art of the monument during 1921 was the Bloom Memorial Cross, No. 9, illustrated on the cover of the Moxu-MENTAL NEWS in October. For sheer loveliness of line and composition, masterful detailing and execution it is one of those rare masterpieces which serve as milestones of progress in any art. An essentially simple variant of the Celtic Cross, this memorial is an eloquent example of sublime proportioning, restraint in the use of detail and resourcefulness in adaptation. In passing we cannot pause to do this gemjustice in words but we urge the reader to study the graceful albeit strong lines of



this cross, the consummate modeling of the ornament and the interesting platform upon which it stands. The unique genius of Stanley Pool was at its best in designing this memorial for the family of a leading firm of retailers, with whom he is associated as a designer. We have already observed that variants distinguished by Gothic detail were erected and there is reason to believe that these crosses of English source will come into greater favor during 1922.

Sustained improvement in the character and treatment of ornament, the occasional and successful elimination of all



ornament, and progress with sand process carving are outstanding qualities of the tablet forms both vertical and horizontal, produced during the year. Sketches 10 and 11 outline two tablets designed by Walter Fuller of the Smith Granite Company, New York and Westerly, which for loveliness of detail and proportions deserve to rank among the notable contributions of the year. The Snyder Memorial by the Twin City Granite Works, No. 12, was a novel composition in that the designer employed the form and proportions of the usually small tablet for a monument of rather imposing scale. Stateliness and an accentuation of height distinguishes the character of vertical tablets designed during the year. Sketch No. 13 indicates a memorial erected by Farrington, Gould and Hoagland of New York, in which the tall and slender massing is pronounced. The positioning of pilasters on the ends rather than as more customary on the face, is an effective if not original detail which serves to accentuate the grace of line. It is interesting to observe that horizontal tablet forms were employed more extensively during the year than the vertical.

The vase and the urn, used either as a detail or a feature, have come into fa-

designed. Precursors of this type were in evidence several years back but the past twelve months have witnessed a pronounced interest in this form, doubtless enhanced by the revival of cemetery plot planting. Many designers prefer to recommend the Urn in place of the Vase, not only because it requires no attention, but probably because the urn may be treated in both detail and proportions without regard for utilitarian proposes. Moreover, the 'cover' of the urn lends itself to a variety of interesting effects which are of necessity impossible in the vase. On the other hand, designers who favour the vase enlarge upon the colour value and the relieving qualities of plant life which likewise give a sort of living symbolism to the memorial. It should be remembered that the vase, both in relief and in the round, was a common theme for memorials in ancient Greece, and indeed in many other lands. So far, we have not here in this country recognized the possibilities of a free-



standing urn as a theme for the memorial. One or two lovely examples are to be found, notably the Slade Memorial in Woodlawn Cemetery, New York, illustrated in the News some two or three years ago.

In the last annual review considerable space was devoted to a discussion

of the conspicuous improvement in our treatment of inexpensive memorials, particularly those of the so-called 'stock' variety. The undeniably good influence of the sand process in developing better standards of design in these modest tablet forms was at that time considered in detail. Little can be said to supplement the observations then made. It was predicted that geometric and other conventional ornament would replace the frivolous and "jig-saw whirls" which typified much of the earlier and amaturish sand-blast carving. This prediction, like the others, was well made. A noteworthy trend in the treatment of less expensive tablet forms may be found in the return to Gothic panelling. Numerous effects similar to sketch No. 15 were employed during the year and on a variety of memorials, ranging from tablets to sarcophagi. There is substantial evidence of an increasing partiality for Gothic detail in American memorial art,

Markers and headstones in 1921 offered no unusual features. The practice of setting markers very low, ranging from grade to four or five inches out of ground, is gaining favor throughout the country. Cemeteries are very generally adopting regulations restricting the use of headstones,-that is to say headstones of the tablet form. These rules, which superficially considered may seem to intercept much of the dealer's business, are as a matter of fact a force for better and more profitable business. An intelligent, liberal and foresighted study of such restrictive regulations cannot but convincingly demonstrate the advantages to the dealer in this policy of saving the cemetery from the aspect of a stoneyard. Experience moreover has proved that the tendency to subordinate markers and headstones has encouraged greater interest in the central monument. Sketch No. 16 indicates an interesting double headstone by Leaman and Faverio of Orange, N. J. Bird baths, suggested in sketch No. 17, were used for memorials during the year, sustaining a development which gained impetus in 1920. The novel use of a bird bath as a headstone is interesting, provided no other interments are to be made on a plot.

And so the discussion of specific types might be prolonged for many pages. In forecasting probable tendencies for the new year, one needs only to analyze the possibilities in such types as the past year developed, bearing in mind the transient nature of fads and vogues, the probable acquisition of new ideas and giving thought to economic conditions which govern the buying power of the public. Accepting as we must the statistics which demonstrate a gradual but sustained improvement in general conditions, we are Justified in anticipating a very substantial increase of business in our field during the year. While we may not go so far as to believe with many dealers that Spring will bring a lively market, nevetheless better business in other lines cannot but find reflection in our industry and the craft in general should not ignore the outstanding fact that the enormous total of unmarked plots and graves are sooner or later to command the attention of the public. Not even the war period of prosperity appreciably reduced this nation-wide host of unmarked plots. It is not unreasonable, nor over optimistic, to suggest that a period of even fair prosperity will bring a wave of monument building rivalling the war-time pressure. Adopting for a basis of prediction the acceptable conviction that we will experience a gradual and sustained expansion of buying during the coming year, we may anticipate intelligently a few general tendencies in design. Among more expensive memorials we may expect to see the balustrade with an intervening sun-dial, seat or tablet more generally adopted. This form has architectural possibilities which have been exhausted on other themes. The under-ground tomb with a monumental ledger as a cap-stone gives evidence of coming into nation-wide favour. This type of sepulchre has for many years been used extensively in Philadelphia. Following the garden idea of cemetery development, there will doubtless be interest in the sun-dial. Thus far, dial-stones have been designed for

horizontal dials alone, but the quest for individuality will sooner or later focus attention on the possibilities of wall or vertical dials perhaps secured to the face of upright tablets. In an early issue of MONUMENTAL NEWS, this type will be discussed in detail. The sculptured memorial figure or statue, particularly of bronze, is again commanding the interest of wealthier lot owners and sculpture is coming into its own for cemetery memorials. A number of truly important sculptures were erected in 1921 and as many are already under way in the studies of noted artists. Many metropolitan dealers frequently introduce sculpture in their memorials and these firms usually collaborate with some artist regularly engaged to conduct such commissions for them. The garden bench, either of straight lines, elliptical or semicircular; with some feature such as a bird-bath, sun-dial or recumbent tomb in the foreground gave evidence in 1921 of a popularity which the new year will sustain. Very imposing effects are possible with this theme at minimum outlay. If among memorials of the less expensive type, the progress and achievements of 1921 are sustained, the year should find the craft very definitely beyond the 'growing-pains' which the art of the monument in America has witnessed during the past decade or two of artistic evolution.

#### THE OBITUARY RECORD

J. A. Briar, President of the Northeastern Iowa Granite & Marble Works, at Monona, Ia., died November 20 at his home in Monona. The cause of his death was cancer of the stomach. For the last year or so Mr. Briar has been troubled somewhat but did not consider it serious until this Fall. During the month of August he went to North Dakota to supervise work on his farms. While there he did considerable work in helping thresh. Along about the first of October he became very sick and weak. Whereupon it was decided to go to Rochester. However matters prevented him from going until the middle of the month. Upon examination it was found that the disease had advanced so far along that nothing could be done for him. He was brought home and lived a month. His son, C. A. Briar, and C. C. Tucker, both of whom have been members of the firm, will continue the business under the old firm name.

William E. Hughes, of the Hughes Granite Co., Clyde, Ohio, died suddenly of heart failure December 1, at the Apollo Club in Montpelier, Vt. He was seemingly in good health, and was stricken while in the coat room of the club. He was born on his father's farm at McPherson Highway, June 20, 1862. He graduated from Clyde High School and furthered his education by graduating from the Spencerian School at Cleveland. His first work in the business world was in Chicago in the employ of a mercantile concern. At the age of 22 he entered the granite business in partnership with the late Carmi G. Sanford, and at the death of the latter he assumed the management of this company. In 1898 he incorporated The Hughes Granite Co., and was its successful manager until his death. He was also a builder of community mausoleums and was the organizer of the American Mausoleum Co. and later of The American Mausoleum & Construction Co. These two companies are said to have erected about 100 mausoleums from coast to coast. In July, 1919, he acquired quarry interests in the Barre granite district in Vermont, which he successfully operated until his death. His entire attention was given to this property since last August.