

Pieces of Iowa's Past



Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

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THIS WEEK: William B. Allison Memorial Fountain

BACKGROUND: This article is copied from the *Capitol Building Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook*. It appeared in the *Des Moines Tribune* on August 29, 1964. The scrapbook contains clippings from 1906 to 1970's and was compiled by the Iowa State Law Library.

THE ALLISON

Pool F

By Lillian McLaughlin

A flowerbed around the base of the Allison Memorial on the Iowa Statehouse grounds fills in space that once was a fountain basin, an unofficial wading and splashing pool for kids and sometimes — when grown-ups weren't looking — a hippodrome for daring bike rides.

The memorial is the ornate allegorical assemblage behind and to the east of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument.

This awkward position is explainable perhaps by the fact that the memorial was planned and erected at one of the times when a furor was on to move the latter.

The original fountain, in the way of fountains, eventually leaked, was difficult to maintain. It was filled in about 15 years ago, said Rex McMahill, superintendent of the

Statehouse buildings and grounds.

Shallow Pool

But before the days when wading and swimming pools were plentiful in the city, the fountain basin provided a shallow expanse of water that steamy Des Moines youngsters converted into a wading pool on hot summer days.

No one objected to such a comparatively safe sport. But when the basin was drained—or leaked dry—young bike riders turned it into a racing stage, its sloped sides permitting high speeds.

This was judged dangerous, and the State Executive Council ordered the fountain pool filled in and planted with flowers as a safer and more satisfactory adornment of the grounds.

The man to whom the monument was erected (at a cost of \$45,000 given by his friends and \$10,000 appropriated by the state) probably would not have objected to youngsters' frolicking about the allegorical figures (Peace, Knowledge, Humanity, Legislation, the Republic, etc.)

National Figure

He was Iowa's long-time U. S. Senator William B. Allison of Dubuque, a delegate to the Republican convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln, a national figure who intimately knew all the American presidents from Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt.

It was said that William McKinley earnestly solicited Allison to accept the vice-presidential nomination in 1900, but the Iowan preferred to remain in the Senate.

An article in a 1925 Palimpsest, publication of the State Historical Society of Iowa, refers to Allison as "a diligent, public servant for 43 years."

The article also gives an appealing picture of Allison as a 16-year-old schoolboy which links him in spirit to the splashing waders and fast-peddaling cyclists of a later day.

"Big-eyed Bill, as he was known, was an awkward, overgrown, good-humored youngster whom girls like to tease none the less, because he ran after them and kissed them when he caught them."

The articles reported that

Big-eyed Bill "never wore suspenders, was always hitching up his trousers." He had "a strong tobacco breath and never told the teachers about his tormentors and soon showed he had good stuff in him."

This stuff was quickly proved when Allison came as a young lawyer to Dubuque in 1857. Dubuque then had a population of 15,000. Almost 1,000 steamboats a year touched its wharves. From that time on, Allison was a part of Iowa politics.

Memorial Design

The Allison Memorial, completed in 1915, was erected under the supervision of a commission headed by Gen. Grenville Dodge, Allison's long-time friend.

An invitation for designs was issued to members of the National Sculpture Society. The winning design was the unanimous selection of the jury of five—three commission members and two experts. Charles Grally, a sculptor who had won many awards and was an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and

E. L. Masquerery, chief of design and architecture at the 1904 St. Louis (Mo.) Exposition.

The winner was Evelyn B. Longman of New York, who submitted her design after studying a detailed fact sheet about Allison and Iowa prepared by the commission for competing artists.

Miss Longman's "nom de plume"—judges were not given names until the selection was made—was *Four Leaf Clover*.

The memorial, she specified, was designed "with a water setting, the pedestal resting upon a flight of steps, on the top one of which is a bronze inlay of water flowers. From the center of the water flow the fountain is designed to bubble quietly and flow into the basin below.

"To add a touch of beauty," she suggested, it might be used "on festive occasions or to refill the basin."

But, she added, its omission would not impair the general beauty of the design.



WADING POOL — This photo of a beat-the-heat group splashing in the Allison Memorial fountain was made in the summer of 1936 near the end of a hot week of 95-to-100 degree weather.



FLOWER BED—This is the Allison Memorial as it looks today — a colorful flower bed around its base. Beneath the flower bed, there once was a fountain bowl.