

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.

March 4, 2009

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

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 grownups weren't looking - a hippod r o m e

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 drainedor 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 satgrounds.

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

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 vicepresident ial nomination in 1900, but the Iowan preferred to remain in the Senate.

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

The article also gives an appealing picture of Allison isfactory adornment of the as a 16-year-old schoolboy which links him in spirit to the splashing waders and

fast-pedalling cyclists of a later day.

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

He was Iowa's long-time Big-eyed Bill "never wore E. L. Masquerery, chief of desuspenders, was always hitch- sign and architecture at the ing up his trousers." He had 1904 St. Louis (Mo.) Exposi-"a strong tobacco breath and never told the teachers about his tormentors and soon Longman of New York, who showed he had good stuff in submitted her design after him."

> proved when Allison came as pared by the commission for a young lawyer to Dubuque in 1857. Dubuque then had a population of 15,000. Almost 1,000 plume"-judges were not givsteamboats a year touched its wherves. From that time on, Clover. Allison was a part of Iowa politics.

Memorial Design

The Allison Memorial, completed in 1915, was erected unville Dodge, Allison's longtime friend.

An invitation for designs was issued to members of the Naimous selection of the jury of to refill the basin." five-three commission members and two experts, Charles Grafly, a sculptor who had won many awards and was an instructor at the Pennsylvania The articles reported that Academy of Fine Arts, and

tion.

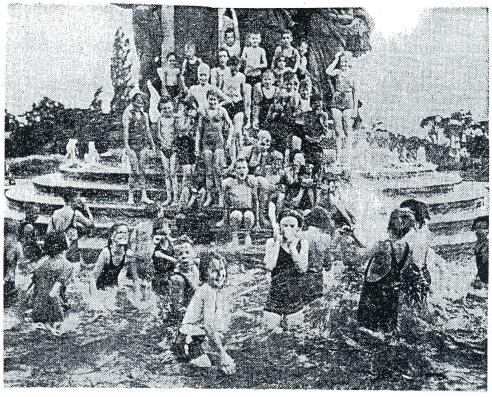
The winner was Evelyn B. studying a detailed fact sheet This stuff was quickly about Allison and Iowa precompeting artists.

> Miss Longman's "nom de en names until the selection was made — was Four Leaf

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 der the supervision of a com- inlay of water flowers. From mission headed by Gen. Gren- the center of the water flowers the fountain is designed to bubble quietly and flow into the basin below.

"To add a touch of beauty," tional Sculpture Society. The she suggested, it might be winning design was the unan- used "on festive occasions or

> 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.