

‘... our country will never forget’ Civil War remembered with six monuments in Erie County

BY JOHN HILDEBRANDT



One of six monuments honoring the Civil War in Erie County, the Castalia Cemetery monument depicts a Union soldier at parade rest. At the bottom, the inscription reads “Erected by Citizens of Margaretta Twp.”

Following the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C., where King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans died battling King Xerxes and the Persian Army, the ancient Greeks erected one of the first military monuments. On a large rock was carved an epitaph, created by the poet Simonides: Go Tell the Spartans, passerby, that here obedient to their laws we lie.

Here in Erie County, Ohio, carved on a stone obelisk surrounded by the graves of men who died in the Civil War, are the words: Whether we fight or whether we fall by saber-stroke or rifle-ball, the hearts of the free will remember us yet. And our country, our country will never forget.

The urge to commemorate important events, particularly military events, is almost universal across human cultures and societies. As it was in Greece in 480 B.C., so it was in Erie County, Ohio, in 1913 A.D. when the monument at the Ohio Veterans Home was dedicated.

In the years following the Civil War, many Ohio communities erected public monuments honoring the sacrifice of its young men during the war.

Ohio has 270 Civil War monuments. The largest is the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Public Square in downtown Cleveland.

There are six Civil War monuments in Erie County, located in Castalia Cemetery, Veterans Park in downtown Sandusky, the Village Square in Milan, and at the Ohio Veterans Home.

The oldest is the monument in Milan, a 20-foot high obelisk with an eagle on top, which honors all the men from Milan and Milan Township who fought in the war. It was dedicated on July 4, 1867, only two years after the end of hostilities, and is the second or third oldest in the state. The monument lists the names of all those who served and the major battles in which they participated.

The Milan monument is currently undergoing an extensive rehabilitation, which is scheduled to be complete by this November. The \$70,000 cost is being underwritten by a combination of township funds and private donations.

The obelisk at OVH was sponsored by the Woman’s Relief Corps and dedicated in 1913. At the time, there were a number of Civil War veterans living at OVH, which had been built in 1888 to care for the large number of destitute Union veterans following the war. The obelisk was a popular design for Civil War monuments — there are many obelisks on Civil War battlefields — and the design itself originated in ancient Egypt and was used extensively by both the Greeks and Romans.

The monument at OVH has a four-sided base with an inscription on each side. It is 40 feet high.

The most recent (1988) veterans monument in Erie County is also located at OVH, a life-size statue of a returning Civil War veteran stooping down to pet his ever-faithful dog. Called "Coming Home," it was created by sculptor Larry Anderson and is dedicated to all Ohio veterans who have served their country, encompassing all wars. The monument was donated by Ceil Hough Frost and several others.

At the Gazebo at OVH is an inscription which reads: A Tribute of Love and Gratitude to the Veterans of the Civil War who saved our Union. It was sponsored by the Woman's Relief Corps, Ladies of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), Daughters of Union Veterans/Sons of Veterans Auxiliary Department of Ohio. The Gazebo was dedicated on June 15, 1929.

Perhaps the least known Civil War monument in Erie County is in Castalia Cemetery. The Soldiers Monument was erected in 1904 by Margareta Township and is dedicated to the 264 men of Castalia and Margareta Township who served the Union during the Civil War.

The name of each veteran is inscribed on four granite markers which flank the monument. The contract for construction of the monument was awarded to the Hughes Granite and Marble Company of Clyde. The cost was \$2,500 (about \$35,000-\$50,000 today). At the time, the Hughes Granite and Marble Co. was one of the best known granite companies in the United States. The company also produced Ohio's monument to its Civil War soldiers who died at Andersonville Prison, the McKinley Monument at Antietam, and all of the monuments dedicated to Ohio units which fought at Shiloh and Vicksburg.

The cannons, which flank the monument, were originally placed at Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, and were brought to Castalia by horse and wagon.

The style of the monument, with a soldier standing at Parade Rest at the top, was the most common Civil War monument design of the 19th century.

The monument in Veterans Park in downtown Sandusky is the smallest, but is perhaps the most meaningful. It simply lists the names of the 125 Erie County men who were killed in the war, starting with James Anderson and ending with Jacob Zimmerman.