



National WWI Museum and Memorial Overview

Quick Facts

- The National WWI Museum and Memorial is the nation's only museum dedicated to preserving and recognizing the history of the Great War and its enduring impact.
- The National WWI Museum and Memorial holds the most comprehensive collection of World War I artifacts in the world.
- The National WWI Museum and Memorial houses a collection of more than 350,000 objects and documents.
- The National WWI Museum and Memorial is the #1 Attraction in Kansas City, according to TripAdvisor reviews, as well as one of the best museums in the nation.
- More than 95 percent of the Museum's collection was obtained through donations and only 5% of the collection is on display at a given time.
- The National WWI Museum and Memorial has the distinction of being formally recognized by Congress twice. In 2004, Congress designated the Museum as the nation's official "World War I Museum" and in 2014, Congress designated Liberty Memorial as the nation's official "World War I Memorial."

History

- Just two weeks after the Nov. 11, 1918 Armistice, Kansas Citizens embarked on a campaign which would one day create the National WWI Museum and Memorial.
- A community-based fundraising drive in 1919 raised more than \$2.5 million from more than 83,000 contributors in less than two weeks to build what was then known as the Liberty Memorial – the equivalent of more than \$45 million in today's dollars.
- Following the drive, a national architectural competition for a monument design was held by the American Institute of Architects.
- The site dedication in 1921 was attended by more than 100,000 Kansas City area residents and by the military leaders of the five Allied nations – the first time in history these five were together at one place.
- The Liberty Memorial opened on Nov. 11, 1926, immediately becoming an iconic landmark. More than 150,000 Kansas City area residents witnessed remarks by U.S. President Calvin Coolidge – the largest crowd a U.S. president had ever addressed.
- In the late 1990s and early 2000s, more than \$100 million was raised for restoration as well as to construct a significantly larger museum. The expansion of the Museum debuted in December 2006.
- Heading into its Centennial, the Museum and Memorial worked to create a richer and more immersive visitor experience by refreshing and expanding the galleries and access to the Museum and Memorial's collection.

Architecture of the Museum and Memorial

- The Liberty Memorial is one of the largest war memorials in the world.



- The Liberty Memorial Tower rises 217 feet above the main courtyard and 268 feet above the North Lawn, making it taller than the Statue of Liberty. The cylindrical Tower is 36 feet in diameter at its base, tapering to 28 feet at the top.
- At night, a Flame of Inspiration, created by steam and lighting effects, is emitted from the top of the Tower and can be seen from miles away.
- The monument received designation as a National Historic Landmark in 2006.
- Carved by Robert Aitken and each standing 40-feet tall, four Guardian Sprits watch over the Memorial from the top of the Tower. As protectors of peace, each guardian holds a sword and is named for the virtue it represents: Honor, Courage, Patriotism and Sacrifice.
- Two Assyrian Sphinxes guard the south entrance of the Liberty Memorial. "Memory" faces east toward the battlefields of France, shielding its eyes from the horrors of war. "Future" faces west, shielding its eyes from an unknown future.
- Located on the North Wall of the Museum, the Great Frieze measures 148 feet by 18 feet and represents the progression of mankind from war to peace. Sculpted by Great War veteran Edmond Amateis, each collected figure or grouping of figures is rich in symbolism. At each end of the Frieze is a sword with the Stars and Stripes representing the defense of our country. The story of the Frieze depicts the end of the war and the creation of an era of greater peace and amity.
- Located at the northern edge of the Memorial Grounds near Pershing Road, a stone wall holds the bronze busts of the five Allied leaders present during the site dedication on Nov. 1, 1921: Gen. Baron Jacques of Belgium, Gen. Armando Diaz of Italy, Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France, Gen. John J. Pershing of the United States and Sir Admiral Earl David Beatty of Great Britain.

Main Gallery Features

- **Paul Sunderland Glass Bridge.** Guests enter the Museum from the lobby to the main gallery and pass over a breathtaking field of 9,000 silk, red poppies, each representing 1,000 combatant fatalities – 9 million total.
- **Prologue: Grand Illusions.** Setting the stage for war, a map-based interactive and large-format media frieze brings a global perspective to the gallery by showcasing empires, strategic alliances and everyday citizens who would soon be in the midst of catastrophe.
- **Interactive Touch Tables.** Four new interactive touch tables feature unique programming covering aircraft, communications, maritime and uniforms – with the overarching theme of wartime innovations.
- **Into the Trenches.** Guests can step inside the trenches and immerse themselves in five different trench settings. Cast figures and props, created using 3D scans of live models, have been added to enhance the experience. An animated film details war plans like the Schlieffen Plan, which envisioned a quick-moving offensive leading to a rapid victory. A second video shows archival materials of destroyed trenches and the true terrors of trench warfare.
- **Kemper Horizon Theater.** Starting in January 2025, the special effects lighting and projector systems in Kemper Horizon Theater underwent important and exciting upgrades. Halogen bulbs were exchanged for LEDs, increasing efficiency and cost savings. Updated video projectors with motion capabilities replaced older models, sharpening and refreshing the original presentation.



- **America Mobilizes.** The story of America's great mobilization for the war – including Uncle Sam and a heavy emphasis on American patriotism – highlights the mood as Americans joined the war effort in 1917. The gallery also sets the stage for provocative stories of dissent.
- **Field Hospital and Casualties.** A fully-themed display gives guests a peek into the workings of a field hospital and the realities and innovations of battlefield medicine during WWI. The field hospital is evocative of a bombed-out church that would have been repurposed for treating the wounded.
- **Battlescapes Crater.** An immersive film is projected onto the inner surface of a recreated battle crater, allowing visitors to access deeply affecting scenes that graphically depict the horrific reality of WWI artillery. Using narration, light and sound, guests' senses are heightened by what they see, hear and feel.
- **Encounters.** Through cutting-edge visual storytelling, visitors meet 16 individuals and hear their intimate first-person accounts crafted from diaries, letters and photos.
- **Epilogue: A World Transformed.** The final physical space visitors encounter in the Main Gallery, this narrative film surrounds guests with large-scale imagery, spoken word, sound design and music to provoke an understanding of the outcomes, continuing effects and challenges experienced in the 20th century and today, set off by the events of WWI.

Prominent Objects of the Museum

- **French FT 17 tank.** This was the first tank with a fully revolving turret. Operated by two-man crew, this tank still has its 37mm gun and original camouflage paint. At one point, it was worked on by American repair crew. The damage sustained to the tank likely caused injuries incompatible with life.
- **French 75mm field gun.** A Standard French field gun used throughout the war; field gun used also by Americans, including Captain Harry Truman – future U.S. President; given to the museum by the French government)
- **Ford 1918 Model T ambulance.** Americans volunteered with the Allies before the American entry into the war (1917) by driving trucks and ambulances. Many groups took donated vehicles with them.
- **Naval torpedo.** A symbol of submarine warfare in WWI, torpedo attacks sunk many ships including the Lusitania. This type was used by the Allied nations.
- **Uncle Sam "I Want You" recruiting poster.** Likely the most famous U.S. poster from the war, Uncle Sam was painted by noted artist James Montgomery Flagg. The artist was the model for Uncle Sam.
- **British body armor.** Trench warfare led to the development of personal body armor. Much of it was discarded so the remaining examples are few.
- **U.S. Browning M1917 machine gun.** One of the most important weapons in the American arsenal late in the war, the Museum's example has all the accompanying accoutrements including ammunition boxes and the ammunition loader.
- **German thermite bomb.** The actual bomb dropped from a zeppelin on London. One of first examples of total war, most burned up.



- **Pershing Headquarters flag.** General John J. Pershing was the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces. This flag flew over his headquarters in Chaumont, France. It was given to Wellesley College during the war in honor of his wife who had attended the college.
- **Field Marshal von Hindenburg tunic.** The second-most powerful man in Germany, Hindenburg was a revered commander and symbol of Iron Germany. This is an excellent example of his uniforms.
- **U.S. Navy woman's uniform.** American women served in many areas of the American war effort, including as Yeoman (F), nurses and Signal Corps operators.
- **Model 1917 Harley Davidson motorcycle.** An Army model, the motorcycle has original paint and most parts. It was used by both Americans and Brits.
- **Pantheon de la Guerre.** Formerly the largest painting in the world at 402 feet by 45 feet, this painting was originally an internationally famous cyclorama that featured about 6,000 prominent figures from World War I. Essentially forgotten after a tour in the U.S. in the 1930s, it was acquired in 1957 by the Museum and Memorial, which salvaged two large sections for display in Memory Hall and Exhibit Hall.

For more information:

Karis Erwin

National WWI Museum and Memorial

816.888.8122

kerwin@theworldwar.org