

SPOTLIGHT

Fame's sculptor enjoyed his own artistic fame in 1860s

This monthly feature serves to explain the efforts now under way to replace the Civil War Monument and Statue of Fame that mark the earliest days of Sewickley Cemetery.

This effort is borne by Citizens for Soldiers, a group of dedicated residents of the Sewickley Valley, but the success of this project is dependent upon the support of all of the people of the valley.

As Citizens for Soldiers continues to raise the balance needed to erect the replica of the Civil War Monument and statue of Fame, these articles have explored the original fund-raising efforts and the many design elements incorporated in the memorial.

The symbolism attached to these features — such as the inverted trumpets carved into the lower panels, the choice of an angel rather than the more popular obelisks and soldiers, and the use of marble instead of more durable granite — have all been studied.

Constructed in 1865-1866, prior to pneumatic tools and computer imaging, it can be difficult to appreciate the dimensions involved in Fame's inception.

Considering the design of the original monument and the work required, one can not help but wonder about the man responsible for its creation.

The little that is known about Isaac Broome provides glimpses of a multi-faceted artist who was highly regarded during his life, and continues to be appreciated and valued today.

Isaac Broome was born in Valcartier, Canada, on May 16, 1835. He was raised in Philadelphia where he attended the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, exhibiting there in 1855 and 1859.

In 1861, at 26, he filled a vacancy at the academy becoming one of 12 academicians. He worked in Pittsburgh and in Brooklyn, N.Y., prior to settling in Trenton, N.J.

Pittsburgh in the mid-1860's was a thriving industrial community known for iron, steel, coal and aluminum, but it was also a vital center for many notable local artists.

These artists included; Chester Harding, Thomas Sully, J. C. Darley, Albert L. Dalbey, Jasper Lawman, Russell Smith, W. C. Wall and David G. Blythe who would meet at J. J. Gillespie's at 86 Wood Street in Pittsburgh to view one another's works, discuss those exhibited locally and exchange theories and plans.

It was their one-room Montmartre.

A watercolor attributed to Blythe, depicting himself and Broome standing outside of Gillespie's in 1865, illustrates that Broome was a member of this group. It was within this art community that D. N. White, superintendent of



BLYTHE AND Broome outside Gillespie's (above) and a collection of Broome's ceramics created in 1877.



Sewickley Cemetery, and other members of the board found the man to create their monument.

Prior to 1865, Broome had been assistant to Thomas Crawford (1813-1857), an American neo-classical sculptor, working in marble. No works attributed to Broome earlier than 1866 have been identified in recent research.

It appears Broome was a serious and gifted sculptor at this time but somewhat unknown.

American-made pottery and ceramics were just coming of age in the early 1870s. A rising sense of pride in American accomplishment, radiating first from the kilns of Trenton, N.J., and then from the furnaces of nearby East Liverpool, Ohio, brought about a change in the ceramics industry providing great opportunities to men like Broome.

With such talent available and artists able to originate new designs more elegant and suitable to the taste of the American people, the pottery industry began to flourish.

The first national association of potters in the United States was formed in January 1875, and the 70 representatives who attended this meeting agreed to participate in the U.S. Centennial Exhibition the following year.

Ott and Brewer, a pottery established in 1863 in Trenton, was one of the more noteworthy potteries to participate. To their good fortune, they were able to hire Broome in 1876, several months before the centennial exhibit.

The wide variety of styles displayed in Broome's works showcased his creativi-

ty and craftsmanship. Among the pieces were busts of Christ, the Madonna, Washington, Lincoln and other distinguished men, vases, statuettes, a life-size bust of Cleopatra, tea services and toilet sets. Many of these works were produced from molds made by Broome and fired in a special kiln he designed.

The following is a partial description of a piece displayed at the 1876 exhibition known as a Pastoral Vase:

"(It) is covered with molding in relief composing a design partly suggested by mythology, partly original.... (It) carries us back to an age of poets.... The details are all in perfect harmony.... To produce a good effect work of this kind, all in relief and uncolored, demands the nicest finish, and a design which should lean neither toward scantiness on the one hand, nor over loaded ornamentation on the other."

Much of this description can be applied to Broome's Civil War Monument.

Still considered one of the greatest American ceramicists, Broome died in Trenton on May 4, 1922, but his works are prized by collectors to this day.

Prices paid for Broome's works in auctions demonstrate the continuing appreciation and value of his work.

In the past 15 years a number of his pieces have been put up for auction at such places as Christie's in New York. A ceramic tile depicting a farm scene valued at \$800 - \$1,200 sold for \$2,200; another tile depicting a pastoral scene valued at \$600 - \$800 sold for \$1,100; and a third tile panel depicting a Greek goddess estimated at \$650 - \$850 sold for \$1,000.

Most impressive was a 15-inch ceramic sculpture of a baseball pitcher created in 1875 and likely displayed at the centennial exhibition. This statue, incorrectly labeled Vroom for an auction, was valued at \$900 - \$1,200; however, many knowledgeable collectors recognized the description and hoped for a bargain.

The bidding started at \$800 and shot immediately to \$2,500. Dealers took the bidding to \$9,000; private collectors, to \$10,000. At \$16,500, 20 times the original estimate,

The Pitcher found a home. What could the Civil War Monument and Statue of Fame, his largest work that we know of, be worth today?

Contributions to Citizens for Soldiers will provide the money desperately needed to recreate the original monument, and dismantle the old monument and move key elements to indoor locations where Broome's work can be protected and enjoyed.

Tax-deductible donations may be sent to: Citizens for Soldiers, Fame Fund, P. O. Box 293 Sewickley, PA 15143.

No Donation is too small or too large.

Citizens for Soldiers is a Pennsylvania not-for-profit organization. It has a 501(c) (3) designation from the IRS.

The committee meets the third Wednesday of each month and welcomes your interest and support. Visit www.CitizensForSoldiers.org, or call 412-980-6013.