

Their Walk, Our Walk—a Project of Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center for Franklin County Veterans

What is *Their Walk, Our Walk*? How Did It Begin?

The project--*Their Walk, Our Walk*—began in 2014 on the campus of Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center, home to both an arts/academic high school and vocational programs, in the Columbus City Schools. It was the brainchild of four Fort Hayes teachers to blend their disciplines for the 150th anniversary of the former military base in 2014. They wanted to create symbolic representations of the sacrifices of soldiers who passed through Fort Hayes. From the work of Rebecca Woods, Megan Evans, Mary Ann Shrum, and Allison Vrancken the project evolved.

For the four teachers who represented the departments of Mathematics, Visual Arts, Landscape Design, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) the challenge was a large scale collaboration involving hundreds of students, the mathematics of two and three dimensional objects, an Autodesk CAD software program, work in ceramics and glazing, and landscape design layout and installation.

Inspired by the significant installation at the Tower of London in 2014 (the centennial of the start of World War I in Europe), Fort Hayes chose the poppy as the symbolic flower to mark Franklin County lives lost and to build on the poppy as a symbol of the American Legion.

Over 300 students worked to each build one if not more poppies. Two tiers of porcelain clay were used for each flower to give it a more organic form. Blossoms were kiln fired and each has three subsequent coats of glaze. Steel-threaded rods, hex nuts, rubber washers create the stem. The installation of poppies in front of the Shot Tower, in a linear configuration to evoke the imagery of marching units of soldiers, underscores the impact of the history of the base. Each day students and others walk where those who served in the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, and Desert Storm once walked.

The project was aided by Buckeye Ceramic Supply, Beta by Design, Columbus Parks and Recreation, Lowe's, Scott's, the City of Columbus, Teacher Dream Grant Facilitators, and the Columbus City Schools for donations of materials and time.

What is Happening at Fort Hayes on April 15th? Who is Invited? Who Benefits?

Red porcelain poppies, suitable for interior or exterior display, will be featured at silent auction in the Shot Tower gallery, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, on Friday, April 15th. The starting minimum bid for one is \$20 and configurations of multiple poppies will be available. For people who are interested in supporting the project and acquiring one or more poppies, information on how they can do so should be addressed to Doreen Uhas-Sauer at doreencolumbus@icloud.com

All proceeds will benefit veterans' organizations as chosen by the students.

Veteran organizations and their supporters, local history and architecture enthusiasts, and the general public are welcome to attend.

White porcelain poppies will be given to a family member whose Franklin County ancestor was one of the 260 men who died in World War I. (See list of Franklin County Veterans for more information and how to contact us prior to the event).

Student Steering Committee ambassadors will be on hand to talk about the project, and Fort Hayes Historical Society student docents will be available for short tours of the campus. At 2:30 pm, there will be a closing ceremony at the Poppy Garden in front of the Shot Tower.

Fort Hayes is located just north of downtown and Columbus State University, 546 Jack Gibbs Blvd., off Cleveland Avenue. The Shot Tower is an instantly recognizable landmarks from Jack Gibbs Blvd.

This is also the last day of the current art exhibit, *Landmark*, an exhibit of fifty artists associated with Creative Art of Women (CAW). The exhibit, about place and history, often reflects on the buildings of Fort Hayes as landmarks.

Special appreciation to State Representative Hearcel F. Craig, House District 26; Kathy Wellington, Legislative Aide; the American Legion; Faith Mission; Columbus Landmarks Foundation; the faculty and administration of Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center; Jim Coe and WCBE; Dr. Milton Ruffin; Dr. James Good; Gary Baker, president, and members of the Columbus City Schools Board of Education for their support.

Why is Fort Hayes a Special Landmark? What are the Columbus Connections to World War I?

Though students and faculty are aware of Fort Hayes's unique history and understand the buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places, they also know many others are surprised by the presence of a military base turned education center. Over the years, Fort Hayes has been the site for remembrances and celebrations featuring its history—most recently, last September, Fort Hayes hosted veterans who marked the anniversary of their departure as 17 year old soldiers heading to Korea. Currently, the Shot Tower gallery's art exhibit is based on the artistic interpretation of "landmark."

Because the installation of the poppy field has an impact on those who have seen it and because the United States will soon be commemorating its own centennial for America's entrance into World War I, the project grew substantially in 2015 to include special emphasis on World War I.

The Fort Hayes Social Studies teachers and others joined the Poppy Project, as it came to be known, providing historical context and supporting service learning opportunities.

A student steering committee was formed with representatives from each of the many classes involved. A Design Committee of students created World War I like posters urging canned food and material assistance for homeless veterans. They also did bulletin boards, designed invitations and thank you notes and were instrumental in planning the April 15th event.

Columbus Landmarks Foundation provided transportation and historical context to help students and teachers to learn more about life, landmarks, and local context in Columbus during World War I, from the Billy Cartoon Library at Ohio State which featured displays of World War I posters and *Columbus*

Dispatch political cartoons to Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's resting place at Green Lawn Cemetery, an authentic bakery in German Village to former Memorial Hall on Broad Street.

Some World War I memorials throughout the city have disappeared or are in storage awaiting the rebuilding of Veterans Memorial. Some stained glass windows remain; statues of Victory personified or doughboy statues stand on Capital Square; sports fields and air fields were named for World War I veterans like Hank Gowdy and Fred Norton; and Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's house is a National Landmark, becoming an educational center.

Students visited or learned about the contributions of African Americans and immigrants from Columbus, some newly arrived from the Great Migration or from Eastern Europe. In addition to Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, Columbus made significant contributions through the talents and interests of people like vaudevillian Elsie Janis, Ohio State president William Oxley Thompson, professional ball player Hank Gowdy, OSU athlete and aviator Fred Norton, and humanitarian Mrs. John Battelle.

Though World War I began in August, 1914 as a European war, within a few years, the war became global, spreading to European colonies in Asia and Africa. Trench warfare, mustard gas, and airplanes made their first appearance. World War I was a modern killing machine. Most of the fighting took place in France, and in 1917 the United States was drawn into the conflict.

Volunteers and draftees came to the Columbus Barracks, as Fort Hayes was known, to begin training. They enlisted from across Columbus and many small towns and rural areas in Ohio. However, they also came from surrounding states or were newly-arrived from Greece, Italy, Hungary, Russia, and even Germany. It is estimated that 1700 men came and left from Columbus Barracks (Fort Hayes). Soldiers drilled in front of the Shot Tower and posted letters home from a small building at the entrance. Officers gathered in a building where today students eat lunch.

Most of the men were associated with the 166th Regiment, though Franklin County veterans who gave their lives also were from the 326th, the 148th, the 47th, the 319th, the 131st, the 126th, the 328th, the 23rd, and others, as well as, from the 22nd, the 27th, and the 94th Aero Squadron, from the 67th Company of the United States Marine Corps or from the United States Coast Guard.

The men of the 166th Regiment of the 42nd Division, formerly called "The Old Fourth," left here for Camp Sherman in southern Ohio and then to the battlegrounds and fox holes of France. Before departing, they learned basic Army skills and even a little French, taught by volunteer young ladies from the Columbus School for Girls.

African American men from Columbus joined others and embarked from Newport News, Virginia in 1918. Racially segregated, their regiment's story is part of the story of the 372nd Infantry and, more specifically, many from Columbus were in Company B, 9th Training Battalion Infantry, 37th Division.

The Franklin County men who lost their lives in World War I combat were reported to be buried in cemeteries at Meuse-Argonne, Oisne-Argonne, Aisne-Marne, or Surenus, France. Those who came home, arrived between May 5th and May 16th, 1919, just in time for Mother's Day. They arrived at Union Station (where the convention center now stands) and marched down High Street to cheering grounds and band music.

While many made it home, 260 did not. (see Fort Hayes in World War I for a listing of their names).