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Coll. 467
Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors'
Monument Association (1891-1912)

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Institutional History

Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument Association (MCSSMA) was founded in the spring of 1891 by 23 Civil War veterans of Mercer County, New Jersey. The Association's purpose, as written in their June 11, 1891 articles of incorporation, was to "erect and maintain a Monument at Trenton, N. J., to commemorate the Victories of the Armies of the United States during the late Civil War (1861-1865), and ... to commemorate and perpetuate the patriotism and valor of New Jersey Soldiers and Sailors during said war, from Mercer County particularly." The members voted unanimously to appoint James F. Rusling as President of the Association. Rusling, a Civil War veteran and Trenton lawyer, remained president and was the driving force behind the MCSSMA throughout its over 20-year history.

Unfortunately, the Association's enthusiasm was put in check almost immediately when in January of 1892, officers of the Trenton Battle Monument Association which was still raising money to complete that structure, specifically requested MCSSMA to delay their efforts so as not to compete for donations. While the Battle Monument was dedicated in 1893, this coincided with a wave of economic downturns throughout the 1890s and early 1900s which made MCSSMA progress slow. Regardless, by 1895, the association had subscriptions (pledges for payment) for about \$1,500 including close to \$400 raised by Mercer County school children.

Finally, in 1906, with an increased number of members in the Association (both veterans and civilians) progress was made when a committee on design was created and requested proposals and bids for the structure. After considering submissions from several companies, the Alexander McDonald Company of Trenton was chosen to design and build the monument for \$12,500. Subcontractors for the task included Barre Granite Works, Barre VT which quarried and fabricated

the granite pillar and surrounding steps, and the Bureau Brothers Bronze Foundry of Philadelphia which created the three bronze statues included in the design (a brief description and image of the monument can be found below).

Funds raised from a ball and fair held in February of 1907 and a steady collection of pledges gathered between 1906 and 1909 made the completion of the monument possible. In all, the Association raised close to \$13,000. The largest donation of \$525 came from Washington A. Roebling and the smallest of 25¢ from a Trenton school boy. Other interesting contributions included \$10 from Henry W. Dunn of Trenton, who although a New Jersey native, had served in the Confederate Army and Ian Perdicaris,¹ who lived abroad but gave \$100 because of his fond memories of growing up in Trenton.

On June 19, 1909 the monument was officially dedicated in Cadwalader Park, Trenton, with a fund of \$1,000 appropriated by the New Jersey Legislature to cover the cost of the celebration. During the dedication, the Association announced that it intended to transfer the monument directly to the City of Trenton which was done formerly in May of 1912.

The monument is a granite column mounted on a twelve foot square concrete base which rests on three granite steps. The top of the monument holds an 8-foot bronze color guard (soldier holding an American flag) and at the base the 6-foot tall brass statues of a soldier on one side and a sailor on the other. In all, the monument stands 50 feet tall. There are several inscriptions on the monument including one on the east face of the base which reads: "Mercer County to her sons, who served in the United States Army and Navy, 1861-1865." Also inscribed on the steps are Union victories including Appomattox and Gettysburg. The monument was surrounded by four Civil War-era cannons that had been donated by the United States government, resting on appropriate wagons purchased by the Association.² Finally, a copper box was placed in the monument as a time capsule commemorating the event. Its contents included a Bible, copies of the Declaration of Independence and the constitutions of the United States and New Jersey, several newspapers, a photograph of the monument, a copy of the Association's by-laws, and a Roll of Honor listing contributors.

Once the monument was dedicated, President Rusling completed the work of the Association on his own, becoming Acting Treasurer, arranging for a guard rail to surround the monument, and writing a history of the Association which was published in 1910. One of his final recorded acts is a

¹ Ian Perdicaris was famously kidnapped in Tangiers, Morocco in May of 1904 and held for ransom. President Theodore Roosevelt intervened, demanding that the Moroccan government obtain Perdicaris' release and dispatched naval ships to Morocco to give force to this demand. Perdicaris was eventually released unharmed. [<https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-perdicaris-affair>]

² Regrettably, the cannons were removed many years ago and the statues of the soldier and sailor were stolen sometime after 2007.

January 30, 1911 letter to New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson (mounted in the Association's minute book) which summarizes the history of the Association, describes the monument, and provides a detailed account of monies spent for the dedication. The final entry in the minute book is his report that the Association's deed of conveyance had been issued to and accepted by the City of Trenton in May of 1912.

Scope and Content Notes

This collection contains minutes, by-laws, correspondence, financial records, and newspaper clippings which document the work of the Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument Association from its inception in 1891 to the transfer of the monument to the City of Trenton in May of 1912. Together, these records provide a clear and transparent accounting of how the Association spent the money collected from private donations to create the monument which still stands in Cadwalader Park. This collection will be of interest to those researching the history of war memorials in general, and Civil War monuments in particular.

The collection consists of 2 boxes and one corporate seal. It is divided into 10 series as described below.

Series Description

Series 1. Organizational Records, 1891-1906

This series consists of a certified copy of the Association's June 11, 1891 Certificate of Incorporation. In addition, there are records documenting MCSSMA's first official meeting held on September 25, 1891 including a copy of the program or agenda of the meeting, a "waiver notice of first meeting" signed by the members, and the oath of office of the secretary, Alphonso S. Hill. It also includes two printed booklets of the incorporation and the 1906 revision of the by-laws.

Series 2. Minutes, report, and resolution, 1891-1912

This series includes the bound minutes of the MCSSMA, a printed 1906 annual report of the president, and a hand-written copy of the June 11, 1909 resolution to pay the McDonald Company their final bill. The minute book contains the meeting records of the Association and the Executive Committee, resolutions, and reports of the treasurer and president. In addition, a copy of the dedication program and James F. Rusling's published 1910 history of the MCSSMA and the monument have been pasted into the minute book, as well as a copy of his January 30, 1911 letter to Governor Woodrow Wilson.

Series 3. Records of the Treasurer, 1891-1911

This series includes the Treasurer's Account Book, 1891-1911 which provides a full accounting of all monies donated to and spent by MCSSMA, as well as a folder of receipts for payment to various vendors. Also included are notebooks recording all subscriptions received with notations of payment as well as a recording of lists of subscribers that were sent to newspapers for publication. There is a bank book (1905-1910), and loose treasurer's reports (1907-1909). Finally, there are surety bonds of the Association's treasurers, Richard A. Donnelly (1895-1905), E. V. Richards (1907 & 1908).

Series 4. Legislative Bills and Brief, 1908-1909

This series includes copies of a variety of New Jersey legislative bills aimed at giving financial appropriations to New Jersey Civil War monument associations in general and MCSSMA specifically. Also included is a brief written by President James F. Rusling to the New Jersey Legislature Joint Committee on Appropriations urging them to appropriate the \$2,000 promised MCSSMA in 1907. Ultimately, the Legislature appropriated them \$1,000.

Series 5. Contracts, Affidavits and Bill of Sale for fabrication of Monument, 1906-1909

This series includes legal documents pertaining to the manufacturing of the monument, including the contract with Alexander McDonald and Company of Trenton which describes the original design. Also included are affidavits from Barre Granite Works in Vermont and McDonald concerning progress made on the project (which allowed for partial payment for work), McDonald's Release of Liens on MCSSMA, and the final Bill of Sale for the Monument.

Series 6. Correspondence, 1906-1910

The first of two subseries in this group is the general correspondence of James F. Rusling. This material, dating from 1906 to 1910, includes copies of his outgoing correspondence and originals of incoming letters. The correspondence documents all aspect of the monument project including creation of the monument, obtaining the cannons, and arranging the dedication. Rusling's correspondents included: A. R. Baxter, manager of Alexander Mc Donald & Co.; Representative Ira W. Wood who assisted in obtaining cannon and accompanying materials; various members of the War Department with whom Rusling consulted regarding proper placement of the cannon and Gov. John Franklin Fort who was to attend the dedication but declined at the last minute; and Attorney General Edmund Wilson who attended the dedication instead of the Governor.

The second group consists of transmittal letters from 1906 to 1909 from Rusling sending donation checks to MCSSMA Treasurer E. V. Richards. Each letter includes names and amounts of donation checks received. Once received, the Treasurer would record these figures in his ledger, sign the transmittal note to acknowledge receipt and return it to Rusling.

Series 7. Dedication Programs and Flyers (1909)

This series includes three copies each of the June 19th 1909 dedication programs (booklet and single sheet flyer), a printed image of the monument and the poem "George Washington's Call." Written by "Jersey Blue" and originally published in the State Gazette in November of 1906, this ode presents a fanciful conversation between George Washington's statue atop the Trenton Battle Monument and the Mercer Monument. In essence, it urges Trenton residents to "hasten their subscriptions large and small, Press forward now, one and all! Remember this is George Washington's Call."

Series 8. *Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument*, by James. F. Rusling, 1910

This series includes two copies of James F. Rusling's history of the MCSSMA. Rusling provided a narrative of the activities of the Association, a description of the monument, and listing of all the

subscribers. Also included are the texts of addresses given at the dedication, photographs of some of MCSSMA's members and the dedication speakers.

Series 9. Miscellaneous., 1891, 1907-1909

This series consists of various artifacts and ephemera. Included is the Association's 1891 corporate seal [on display in the Trentonian Room], a ticket to the 1907 fair held to benefit the monument fund, the business card of A. R. Baxter of the Alexander McDonald Co. (with an image of the monument on the back), and the December 1909 typed description of the monument written by Baxter. In addition, there is a 1909 dedication ribbon.

Series 10. Newspaper Clippings, 1906-1909

The clippings are divided into two folders. One holds clippings of published listings of subscribers and the money they pledged, and the second contains general articles about the Association with reports on fundraising efforts, progress in the production of the monument and extensive coverage of the dedication.

Container List

Box / Folder / Folder Title

- 1 / 1 / Organizational Records, 1891-1906
- 1 / 2 / Minute Book, 1891-1912
- 1 / 3/ President's 1906 Annual Report, (2 copies) and 1909 resolutions to pay Alexander McDonald and Company and authorization to transfer monument to City of Trenton, June 11, 1909
- 1 / 4/ Treasurer's Records - Account, 1891-1911
- 1 / 5/ Treasurer's Records - Receipts, 1908-1911
- 1 / 6/ Treasurer's Records - Subscription Book, 1891-1910; Press Book, 1909, Bank Book, 1909
- 2 / 1/ Treasurer's Records - Reports and Correspondence, 1899, 1905-1909
- 2 / 2/ Treasurer's Records - Treasurer's Surety Bonds, 1895, 1907 & 1908
- 2 / 3/ Legislative Bills and Brief, 1908-1909
- 2 / 4/ Contracts, Affidavits and Bill of Sale for fabrication of Monument, 1906-1909
- 2 / 5/ General Correspondence - 1906-1907
- 2 / 6/ General Correspondence - 1908
- 2 / 7/ General Correspondence - January-April 1909
- 2 / 8/ General Correspondence - May 1909
- 2 / 9/ General Correspondence - June 1909-December 1910
- 2 / 10/ Correspondence, Subscription transmittal letters, 1906-1909
- 2 / 11/ Dedication programs and flyers, June 19, 1909
- 2 / 12/ *Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument*, by James. F. Rusling, 1910
- 2 / 13/ Miscellaneous: 1907 fair ticket; A. R. Baxter, Alexander McDonald Co. business card; December 1909 typed description of the monument written by Baxter.

2 / 14/ Miscellaneous: Dedication Ribbon, 1909

Miscellaneous: Association's corporate seal, 1891 [on display in Trentonian Room]

2 / 15/ Newspaper Clippings - Subscription Notices, 1906-1909

2 / 16/ Newspaper Clippings - General, 1907-1909

Wooden, lidded storage box with metal handles (18-1/2"L x 12-1/2"D x 10"H) with "Mercer County / Soldiers' and Sailors' / Monument Association / Books and Records" printed on the top

Provenance

It is assumed that the Association's records, along with unrelated correspondence of James F. Rusling (see Coll. 468) were donated by Mr. Rusling or his descendants. The papers are believed to have been stored in the wooden box.

Bibliography

Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, by James. F. Rusling, 1910

Related Material

Books by James F. Rusling:

Across America: Or, the Great West and the Pacific Coast, 1875

European Days and Ways, 1902

Men And Things I Saw in Civil War Days, 1899

The Rusling Family, 1907

Trenton Free Public Library

Collection 468 James F. Rusling

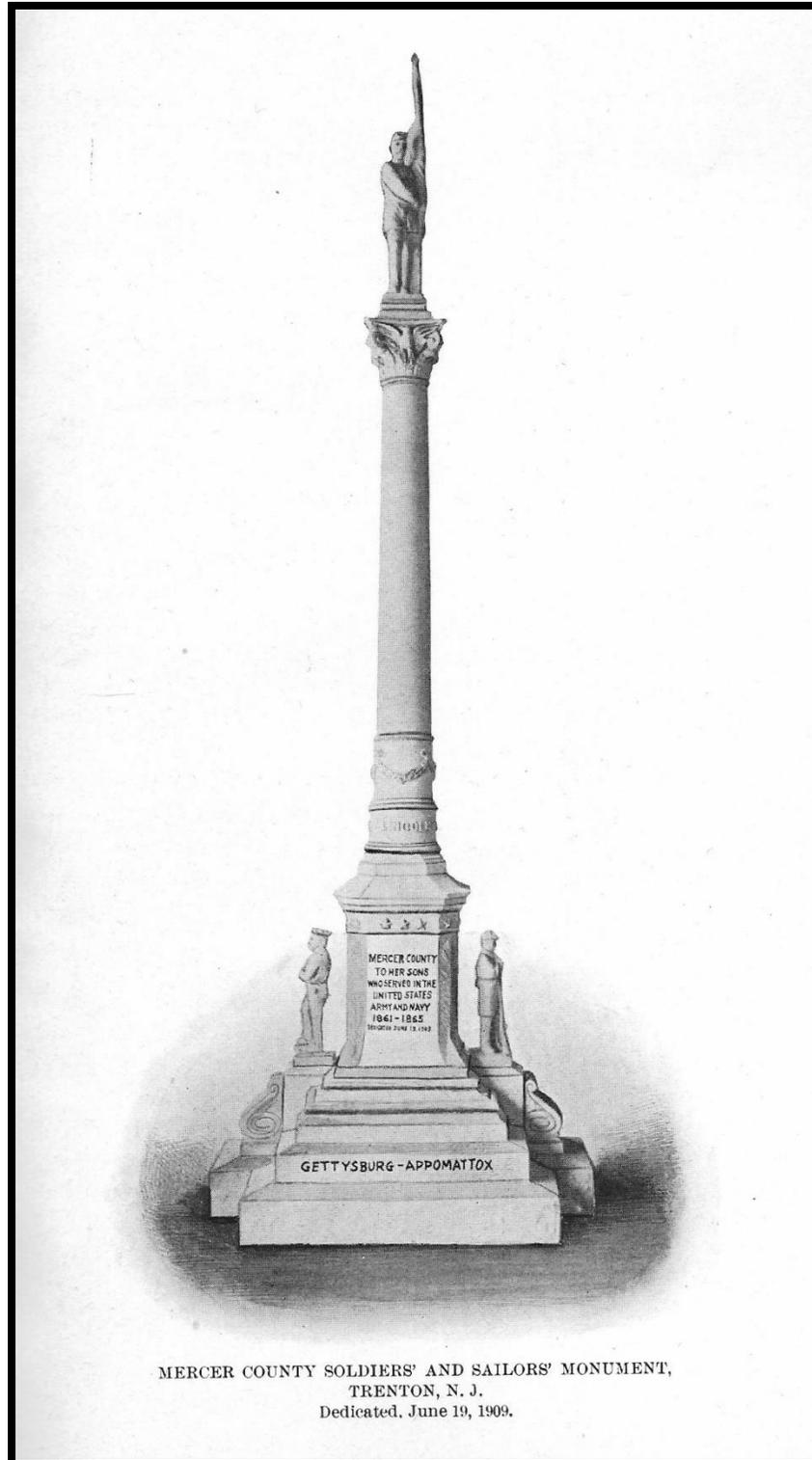


Image from *Mercer County Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument*, by James. F. Rusling, 1910