

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word process, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Titanic Memorial
other names _____

2. Location

street & number Reservation 717, Southwest Waterfront Park, Water and P Sts., S.W. not for publication
city or town Washington vicinity
state D.C. code DC county n/a code 001 zip 20024

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying office/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying office/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

Determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____
Date of Action _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- Private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
1	_____	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

number of contributing resource previously listed in the National Register

Memorials in Washington, D.C.

0

6. Function of Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION and CULTURE: work of art

RECREATION and CULTURE: work of art

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Academic Abstraction

foundation _____
walls _____

roof _____
other Granite, concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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Titanic Memorial
Name of Property

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DESCRIPTION

The *Titanic Memorial* is located at the southern limit of the Southwest Waterfront Park (Reservation 717) near the intersection of Water and P Streets, S.W. Sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney completed it in 1916; thereafter, architect Henry Bacon designed the exedra. The pink granite memorial originally stood at the intersection of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and New Hampshire Avenue, N.W. It was erected there in 1930 and dedicated the following year. The memorial was relocated to the present site in 1968 as a result of its proximity to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The design of the *Titanic Memorial* is representative of Academic Abstraction, popular during the beginning of the twentieth century.

Three granite steps lead to a shallow landing comprised of concrete with a dense, small aggregate. The landing is defined by a 30-foot-long granite exedra with ends that feature dolphins diving over stylized waves. (The Graeco-Roman culture associated the dolphin with maritime deities. Roman artisans also employed depictions of dolphins as psychopomps—bearers of souls to the afterworld—on sarcophagi. In Christian art, the dolphin symbolizes salvation, transformation, and love. The use of the fish-and-wave motif on an exedra initially appeared in the nation’s first Beaux-Arts monument, *Admiral Farragut* (1881, New York City), a collaboration between Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Stanford White.

A granite pedestal projects slightly from the center of the exedra. Its front features the following inscription:

TO THE BRAVE MEN
WHO PERISHED
IN THE WRECK
OF THE TITANIC
APRIL 15 1912
THEY GAVE THEIR
LIVES THAT WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
MIGHT BE SAVED

ERECTED BY THE
WOMEN OF AMERICA

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The east face of the pedestal incorporates the year of dedication (1931) and the sculptor's name. The rear features the following inscription:

TO THE YOUNG AND THE OLD
THE RICH AND THE POOR
THE IGNORANT AND THE LEARNED
ALL
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES NOBLY
TO SAVE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The top of the pedestal incorporates a band of shallow relief featuring stylized waves. Above, a young partially-draped male nude stands on an uneven block with irregular horizontal markings. The representational figure and long flowing drapery are rendered abstractly. The man's face points towards the sky, while his arms extend outward with the folds of the drapery suggesting cuffs. The overt crucifix-form, without any sense of pain in the body or face, evokes heroism and optimism. The use of the striated standing block, alludes to the three-step base on a Calvary Cross (representing the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity).

The memorial, which had stood in a private gallery in New York City for more than a decade while the various requisite approvals were obtained and the site was readied, was finally erected in 1930 at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.¹ The dedication ceremony was held on May 26, 1931. Historic photographs reveal that the memorial was sited at the western edge of the parkway's roadway. In 1968, as a result of the obliteration of the southern end of New Hampshire Avenue to allow for construction of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (1965-1971, Edward Durrell Stone), the *Titanic Memorial* was relocated to the Southwest Waterfront Park.²

¹ Construction on the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway began in 1929 and was completed in 1936.

² The new siting is much less successful because the memorial was placed next to the brick perimeter wall and gable-roof structures of Fort McNair (and a mod lamppost in the park), creating a jarring contrast.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property as yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

Period of Significance

1916-1930

Significant Dates

1916
1930

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
Henry Bacon

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:
NPS, National Capital Region Headquarters

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SIGNIFICANCE

The *Titanic Memorial* is one of five public sculptures created by a woman in Washington, D.C.³ It is one of four representational figures in the city and a rare example of a secular monument with overtly religious symbolism. In 1914, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney won her first significant commission with the *Titanic Memorial*. Although a talented sculptor, today she is most recognized for her vision and energy associated with promoting American art and as the founder of the Whitney Museum of American Art (1930). Completed in 1916, the *Titanic Memorial* was granted the approval to be erected in Washington by Congress on March 3, 1917 (29 Stat. 1046). It was installed in 1930 and dedicated on May 26, 1931. The statue's optimism is indicative of the pre-World War I culture from which it emerged. Despite the fact that the memorial was relocated to a less successful site in 1968, it retains integrity and is significant under Criterion C in the area of Art.

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942), the daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt II and Alice Claypoole Gwynne, received a pious and rigidly-structured upbringing. In 1900, at the age of twenty-five, she turned to modeling clay to seek a personal fulfillment not obtainable from her husband or two young children. A friend, academic painter Howard Cushing, arranged for her to receive instruction from sculptor Hendrik C. Andersen, who had just returned from Europe.⁴ During a five-month trip to Europe and Africa in 1901, Whitney decided to commit her life to art as an artist and patron. The *Titanic Memorial* was Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's first significant commission.

In April 1912, more than fifteen hundred people drowned on the maiden voyage of the R.M.S. *Titanic*, which had been advertised as "unsinkable." Those who died included hundreds of immigrants in steerage, men, women and children traveling in second class, as well as prominent individuals such as John Jacob Astor, Benjamin Guggenheim, and Isidor Strauss traveling in first class. The disaster shocked and infuriated the civilized world. Faith in technology was shaken. The tragedy occurred before the horrors of the First World War. The *Titanic Memorial* alludes to the sense of invincibility that commonly was held and defended during this era.

By January 1914, the Women's Titanic Memorial Association had raised \$43,000 and sponsored a design competition.⁵ The *Evening Star* reported that eight prominent sculptors submitted entries, the

³ The other examples of outdoor sculpture in Washington located on NPS land created by women are: *Admiral David Farragut* (1881, Farragut Square, Vinnie Ream Hoxie), *Sarah Louisa Rittenhouse Armillary Sphere* (1956, Montrose Park, Gertrude Sawyer), *Justice William O. Douglas* (1977, C&O Canal at 30th Street, N.W., Wendy Ross), and *George Mason* (2002, West Potomac Park, Wendy Ross). Washington is also home to two other Whitney pieces, located on private property: the *Aztec Fountain* (1910, Pan American Union Building, 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W.) and *The Founders of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (1929, DAR Administration Building, C and 17th Streets, N.W.).

⁴ Andersen was Cushing's brother-in-law.

⁵ Mrs. John Hays Hammond led the organization, founded shortly after the disaster.

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association wanted the memorial to be erected in Potomac Park, and that it was to be completed in white marble framed by a semi-circle of Lombardy poplars.⁶

Whitney's winning entry featured a figure in a crucifix-form. Faith was important to her and she attended, sometimes sporadically, the Episcopal Church throughout her life.⁷ The women's association had some influence on the final design; it insisted that the representational figure incorporate drapery to obscure the phallus. Whitney, on the other hand, ultimately won the dispute over whether or not the figure should be a youth. (Interestingly, her brother, Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, died at the age of 38 when the R.M.S. *Lusitania* was hit by a German torpedo in May 1915.)

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the design on January 24, 1919, and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress accepted it on February 21, 1922. In early 1925, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds requested proposals for the rip rap and foundation work that was required along the embankment of (West) Potomac Park. The tons of stone clay were deposited during the second half of the year. When the memorial was finally dedicated in 1931, Whitney was not able to attend the ceremony due to a recent death in the family.

In 1913, the same year that Whitney began sketching for the *Titanic Memorial*, she stepped up her role as a patron. She chose to contribute ten percent of the funding for the famous Armory Show.⁸ Her sponsorship probably precluded her work from being exhibited.⁹ At that time, she had plans to build a studio in New York City, while holding on to her existing studios in Newport, Rhode Island and Westbury, Connecticut. In 1914, she opened the Whitney Studio at 8 West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. Its ground floor incorporated two large exhibition spaces, because she recognized that young American artists lacked a place to show their work in a city that was obsessed with European art and culture. Whitney also provided financial support to struggling young artists, such as Edward Hopper and Reginald Marsh. She purchased their art and gave them stipends.

⁶ "No Design Selected for Titanic Memorial," *Evening Star* Jan. 8, 1914, p. 9.

⁷ Flora Miller Biddle, *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Made: A Family Memoir*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999) 23.

⁸ She contributed \$1000 which is equivalent to \$18,000 in 2002 dollars. This calculation was determined by Economic History Services at www.eh.net using the consumer price index.

⁹ B.H. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978) 326.

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Whitney collected art at such a rate that in 1929 she approached the Metropolitan Museum of Art and offered the institution more than 600 pieces of contemporary American art. The Euro-centric Metropolitan refused the gift. The following year she founded the Whitney Museum of American Art, which opened to the public in 1931. Virtually all of the works obtained by the museum during the following two decades came from her generosity. Today, the museum holds one of the foremost collections of twentieth-century American art.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biddle, Flora Miller. *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Started*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999.

Friedman, B.H. *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978.

Goode, James. *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.

“No Design Selected for Titanic Memorial,” *Evening Star* Jan. 8, 1914, p. 9.

Reynolds, Donald Martin. *Masters of American Sculpture: The Figurative Tradition from the American Renaissance to the Millennium*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1993.

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre.

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8	3 2 4 6 8 1	4 3 0 4 8 7 6	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eve L. Barsoum, Historian
organization National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers date May 2006
street & number 444 North Capitol Street, N.W. telephone 202.354.1822
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name U.S. Government, administered by the NPS, NCR, National Mall & Memorials Parks
street & number 900 Ohio Drive, S.W. telephone 202.485.9686
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20242

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et. seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The *Titanic Memorial* is located in the Southwest Waterfront Park (Reservation 717) at the intersection of Water and P Streets, S.W. The boundary of the object includes the land occupied by the granite memorial.

Boundary Justification

The present boundary of the *Titanic Memorial* has been associated with the object since 1968. The boundary is justifiable as the object remained visible in a public space.