

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

A Register of Its Records in the Library of Congress

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Collection Summary

Title: Records of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

Span Dates: 1965-1994

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1978-1985)

ID No.: MSS61695

Creator: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

Extent: 43,700 items; 132 containers plus 1 oversize; 53 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Organization founded for the purpose of erecting a national memorial honoring American veterans of the Vietnam conflict. Administrative files document the operations and technical resources required for the erection of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as well as the surrounding political controversy.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Names:

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
Carhart, Tom
Century, Larry
Clinton, Bill, 1946-
Copulos, Milton R.
Doubek, Robert W.
Hart, Frederick, 1943-
Lin, Maya Ying
Perot, H. Ross, 1930-
Scruggs, Jan C.
Sherwood, Carlton
Webb, James H.
Binswanger Glasscraft Products
Cooper-Lecky Partnership
Gilbane Building Company

Subjects:

Memorial Day
Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975
Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975--Monuments
Vietnamese Conflict, 1961-1975--Psychological aspects
War memorials--Washington (D.C.)

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The records of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund were donated to the Library of Congress in several installments, the first in 1984 upon completion of the memorial. Additional gifts followed, 1985-1999.

Transfers:

Photographs, photographic slides, posters, blueprints, and drawings have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division; videotapes, audiotapes, and phonograph records have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and

Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress. These transfers are identified as part of the fund's records. A scale model of the memorial has been transferred to the National Park Service, the government agency responsible for the administration of the memorial, along with a large poster and banner associated with the National Salute to Vietnam Veterans.

Copyright Status:

Copyright in the unpublished writings of members of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund span the years 1965-1994, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period between 1978 and 1985. The records document the administrative and operational history of the fund, a nonprofit, charitable organization founded for the purpose of erecting a national memorial honoring American veterans of the Vietnamese Conflict. The fund's files detail all phases of the activities associated with this undertaking, including the design, construction, financing, and promotion of the memorial. The main body of the fund's records is arranged in two series identified as [Office Files](#) and [Project Director's Files](#), while documentation of the organization's [fund-raising](#) activities is grouped under a separate series. Material relating to the [National Salute to Vietnam Veterans](#) (10-14 November 1982), a five-day tribute to Vietnam veterans consisting of commemorative events and the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is also organized within its own series. Although the original organization of the files maintained by the fund has largely been preserved, some rearrangement was undertaken to achieve consistency and clarity.

Incorporated on 27 April 1979, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund completed its mission in the fall of 1984 with the addition of Frederick Hart's life-size sculpture to the entry plaza of the memorial grounds. Although the vision and determination of a small group of individuals led by Jan C. Scruggs, president of the fund, culminated in a public memorial honoring Americans who served in Vietnam, construction of the memorial had proved divisive, mirroring the political passions and controversies concerning the war. Both the [Office Files](#) and [Project Director's Files](#) provide the researcher with documentation of the administrative operations and technical resources which affected the building of the memorial as well as of the political controversy which surrounded its construction.

The [Office Files](#) contain general administrative records of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund arranged under the following headings: administration, expenses and contracts, fiscal, general subject file, memorial design, project construction, and public relations. The files include architectural drawings, business and financial records, and construction reports. The fund solicited designs for the memorial in open competition and received 1,421 entries in reply. On 1 May 1981, an eight-member jury announced the selection of the design submitted by Maya Ying Lin. The memorial design files contain material relating to the design competition and to Lin's selection, as well as to hearings before the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, agencies whose approval of the design was necessary before construction could begin. Records concerning Frederick Hart's sculpture are filed under the same heading.

The chevron-shaped, black granite memorial represented a negative symbol to many and was characterized by Tom Carhart, a prominent critic, as "a black gash of shame and sorrow." Material documenting Carhart's criticism and that of others concerned with the controversial design, including Milton R. Copulos, H. Ross Perot, Carlton Sherwood, and James H. Webb, is contained under the memorial design heading within the [Office Files](#). Other records concerning Sherwood, an investigative reporter whose series, "Vietnam Memorial: A Broken Promise," was televised on the local news broadcasts of WDMV-TV, Washington, D.C., 7-10 November 1983, are in the public relations files.

In 1981, the fund engaged the Cooper-Lecky Partnership, an architectural firm, to assist Maya Ying Lin in developing her design and Gilbane Building Company to manage its construction. Files located under expenses and contracts relate to these and other companies employed by the fund to build the memorial.

Verifying and inscribing the names of the war dead on the memorial's panels posed major administrative and technical problems. Binswanger Glasscraft Products was awarded the contract for inscribing the names and, with the aid of a new

stenciling technique designed by independent inventor Larry Century, completed the inscriptions in three months. The [Office Files](#) series contains material relating to names and inscriptions in the project construction files, which also include a complete set of blueprints for the memorial and its surrounding area.

As project director, Robert W. Doubek, a cofounder of the fund, was also directly responsible for the design and construction of the memorial. As a result, while the [Office Files](#) are more comprehensive in scope, the records in the [Files of the Project Director](#) series more fully reflect the administrative and technical aspects of Doubek's dual responsibilities. Since the Office Files and Project Director's Files contain similar types of records, both series should be consulted to insure complete coverage of a particular topic.

The [Addition](#) series contains material arranged subsequent to the initial organization of the Fund's records. Items in the series document activities surrounding the tenth anniversary celebration of the memorial in 1992 and Memorial Day ceremonies held at the memorial in 1993. The series also contains printouts and registration labels of entrants in the memorial design competition, as well as working copies of printouts listing the veterans whose names were inscribed on the memorial.

In order to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the fund sponsored a year-long program of special events culminating on Veterans Day, 11 November 1992. As part of this program, the fund presented a series of educational seminars on various topics analyzing the effects of the Vietnam War on America. The [Addition](#) contains transcripts from most of these seminars as well as from the Veterans Day commemoration ceremony held at the memorial wall. The Addition also includes informational pamphlets and printed items promoting the anniversary events. Correspondence and miscellaneous items relating to the participation of President Bill Clinton in the Memorial Day ceremony of 1993 consists chiefly of letters from veterans reacting to the president's presence at the event.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in eight series:

- [Office Files, 1979-1985, n.d.](#)
- [Files of the Project Director, 1965-1984, n.d.](#)
- [National Salute to Vietnam Veterans, 1979-1983, n.d.](#)
- [Fund-raising, 1979-1984, n.d.](#)
- [Miscellany, 1966-1985, n.d.](#)
- [Card Files, ca. 1980-ca. 1984](#)
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