

# The Post-Standard

## How the 'Rock of the Marne' sculpture came to be in Syracuse (Your letters)



The Rock of the Marne Monument, in downtown Syracuse: Famed sculptor Roland Hinton Perry designed the monument in honor of a regiment that trained at the state fairgrounds and distinguished itself in battle. (*Onondaga Historical Association | Submitted photo*)

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By **Your Letters**

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To the Editor,

I was pleased to see a photo of the "**Rock of the Marne**" sculpture in the most recent Sunday Post-Standard. As Memorial Day approaches, I thought more description of this monument was in order.

For more than 90 years, Syracuse has been the site of this important World War I sculpture. The Rock of the Marne Monument was created by artist Roland Hinton Perry, dedicated July 15, 1920. It stands in a small downtown public space known as Billings Park, where Warren Street originates from South Salina. The monument commemorates the men of the 38th Infantry/3rd Division US Army, originally posted to Fort Syracuse, which was the hastily converted New York State Fairgrounds in Geddes, pressed into service for the national emergency. This group of men from all over the country prepared in Syracuse for service in Europe, and as an amusing distraction, adopted as nicknames the names of the animals which had last occupied their bivouac.

This group distinguished themselves in France during World War I in the Second Battle of the Marne, July 15, 1918, and stood fast when their British and French Allies collapsed, earning their sobriquet, the "Rock of the Marne." The men of the 38th Infantry/3rd Division, conceived of the idea of a "Rock of the Marne" Monument to honor their fallen comrades while still engaged in battle in France. They begin pooling funds, and as they were paid in French Francs and German Marks, they suffered a financial loss when they returned to the United States, due an unfavorable exchange rate. The men successfully petitioned the U.S. Congress to make up their loss and complete the monument.

The men of the 38th Infantry/3rd Division considered a battlefield location in France for the monument, and also Arlington National Cemetery, but instead selected Syracuse as the site by an 81 percent majority in their poll. The sculpture in Billings Park is of a "doughboy" in combat garb, which includes his trench helmet and gas mask apparatus, an acknowledgement to the horror

of the campaign in Europe. The Commander of the American Expeditionary forces, General John "Black Jack" Pershing, extolled his troops not to "put his faith in trenches, artillery, or machine guns but in his rifle, bayonet, and the will to win." Certainly the artist has captured this spirit in bronze.

*Bill Orzell*

De Ruyter