

Friendship Memorialized:

Joseph G. Butler and the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis "Friendship Memorialized: Joseph G. Butler and McKinley National Birthplace Memorial" describes the history of how the first to be completed Congressionally authorized presidential memorial was conceived and dedicated. The crucial role of William McKinley's boyhood friend, steel magnate, and philanthropist, Joseph G. Butler is documented. The campaign to construct and dedicate the second memorial in Ohio to the assassinated leader rivaled McKinley's presidential campaigns in scope and effort. Butler's seven-year campaign tapped the esteem and goodwill many Americans still felt for the fallen favorite son from Niles years after the president's death. The work places the construction of the birthplace memorial in context with other American reform efforts occurring in the United States at that time. Most notable influences exhibited at the monument in Niles were those involving the City Beautiful movement that mobilized people from diverse backgrounds in civic improvement projects, the American Renaissance movement by sculptors and architects who sought to address civic concerns with the monuments, and Andrew Carnegie's extensive library grant program that dramatically changed public education and literacy. Finally, the thesis addresses how the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial affected the commemoration and formation of public memory regarding the twenty-fifth president in the years following its dedication.

The author based the research for this work upon primary source material from Butler's personal correspondence and papers located at the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, artifacts and documents from the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, as well as local newspapers. "Friendship Memorialized" summarizes how historians

portrayed William McKinley's presidency, addresses a lack of scholarly research regarding the history of presidential memorials in the United States, and contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the history of the Mahoning Valley.

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PREFACE

I first became aware of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial in 1965 when I was nine years old. My brothers, parents, and I were eating dinner when my father asked what we had done at school that day. I replied that I was to do a report on a president of the United States but did not know who I wanted to do it about. Dad said, "Why not do it on William McKinley? He grew up around here." I vividly recall my brothers' and my reaction of "Oh, yeah. Nice one Dad. Like someone around here was President." Upset with our incredulity, my father immediately told us to put down our forks and spoons, made us leave dinner on the table, and drove all of us the seven miles down State Route 46 from Austintown to Niles. That was when I first saw the white marble presidential monument to Niles' favorite son and America's twenty-fifth president. Who was this person for whom such a building was named? What did he do to merit statues, a museum, and a library? Such were the questions that ran through my mind when we first visited Niles, Ohio. Needless to say, I did my fourth grade report on William McKinley. I have had other opportunities since then to learn much more about the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial and President McKinley; as a teacher who took his students to tour the museum, as a librarian/historian who had the wonderful opportunity to actually work there for four years, and as a student of history who has done additional reports and papers on this topic. I hope that this paper will encourage others to visit the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial to learn more about a very important era in our country's history, and the man from Niles who was our president. May they in some measure experience there the wonder that is history.

Thanks Dad.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the Town Beautiful meeting in Niles, Ohio, on February 4, 1910, Joseph G. Butler first publicly stated his desire to have a memorial built to honor his life-long friend and Niles' favorite son, President William McKinley.¹ Butler already doubted the Canton mausoleum's ability to be an enduring monument that would preserve and promote the life and times of the twenty-fifth President of the United States of America. He wrote in his memoirs that "impressive as this memorial is, it was designed solely as a tomb, and apparently did not attract many visitors or serve to encourage to any great extent emulation of McKinley's virtues by future generations."² Over the course of the next six-and-a-half years Butler would campaign for donations, garner Congressional authorization for the project, and oversee the construction of a presidential memorial that was unique in purpose as well as design. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was the second such monument authorized by Congress, literally just days after the first, President Lincoln's memorial, was proclaimed. It was the first, and until November, 1997, the only, Congressionally authorized presidential memorial to be constructed entirely with donated monies. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was also the first such monument to include a public library, a museum, an auditorium, as well as the busts and plaques that honored important political and economic leaders who worked with William McKinley. The edifice that the Butler and the Birthplace Memorial Committee dedicated in

¹Joseph G. Butler, Jr., *Recollections of Men and Events: an Autobiography*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927, 90.

²*Ibid.*

October 1917 commemorated the Mahoning Valley's most popular political leader, and also marked the community's apogee in national influence and prominence.

It is the author's contention in *Friendship Memorialized: Joseph G. Butler and the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial* that Butler wanted to promote an elite historical interpretation of the President's life and times with the construction of the Niles monument. Butler referred to the statue that dominated the building's central courtyard as depicting a "statesman engrossed with the heavy task of steering the ship of state through troubled waters and formulating the policy of a great nation growing greater under his beneficent guidance" and that the busts and tablets formed "a most appropriate setting for the heroic figure about which they are grouped."³ Butler's selection of McKim, Mead, and White to design the memorial was in large measure based upon this architectural firm's previous works along neo-classical lines with other landmark buildings. With this memorial Butler sought to place the martyred president in the pantheon of democratic, American heroes such as Presidents Washington and Lincoln. By his insistence that the memorial be privately funded and constructed in Niles, and not in Washington D.C., Butler felt that the long-term commemoration of his boyhood friend, and the preservation of the artifacts associated with him, would be insured.

Butler's portrayal of an elite history of McKinley has been blurred by factors not foreseen or anticipated when the memorial was dedicated in 1917. The roles of public monuments, and the history that these buildings portray, have been the topic of discussion amongst historians. John Bodnar described how official and vernacular interpretations of

³Joseph G. Butler, Jr., *Life of William McKinley and History of National McKinley Birthplace Memorial*, [Cleveland: Penton Press], 1924, 12-13.

history are constantly at odds.⁴ Official interests are ones that the author described as emphasizing national unity and one's duties and citizenship in the United States.⁵ Vernacular interests arise from the diversity of ethnic, social, and foreign backgrounds of the varied communities across the country. Many of these interests stem from our immigrant past, and derive from long-lasting cultural traditions.⁶ These conflicting interpretations are the product of not just the knowledge of the historical facts, but the issues prevalent when a memorial was built, as well as ones of concern to succeeding generations that later view it.

Similar to Bodnar's official and vernacular interests, are those described by John R. Gillis' suggesting that history is composed of popular and elite memories.⁷ Popular memories are often dependent upon local or recent events, and can be ephemeral in nature. These can also be subject to local demands for fame/popularity that may overwhelm or ignore historical fact.⁸ Elite memories, on the other hand, usually have a broader appeal to a much larger community, ones "who regard themselves as having a common history."⁹ Often these historical interpretations are promoted by members of government or business, whose agendas seek to

⁴John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992. See also Bodnar's "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity* /edited by John R. Gillis, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, 74-89.

⁵Bodnar, 14, 170.

⁶*Ibid.*, 77.

⁷John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, 3-24.

⁸*Ibid.*, 6.

⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

promote tenets that foster national unity or economic progress. Gillis also related how these memories can be subsumed by myth making or propaganda.¹⁰ How well the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial preserves and presents the life and times of McKinley can be judged by considering these official/elite and vernacular/popular interests. The relationship between the two boards managing the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is a case study illustrating how memorials exemplify competing interests in regards to monuments and the formation of public memory. The relationship has had a mixed impact on the elite/official history that Butler wanted to portray with the memorial. The museum board has answered only to the local community or to itself since Butler's death. It has been content to allow the library staff to see to the day-to-day operations of the museum, and to administer any of the commemorative activities that the museum board endorsed. This is outside the usual mission and scope of most public libraries. These factors have led to the vernacular/popular interests at times taking precedence over those that Butler sought to commemorate.

Diane Barthel described factors in historical preservation and interpretation that could lead to the monument and/or artifacts becoming divorced from the historical reality that they purport to represent.¹¹ She analyzed who organized public support for a memorial, paid for it, managed the facility, and how it was used. These were crucial elements that affected what history was portrayed at a monument.¹² Similar to what Barthel described with other historical

¹⁰Gillis, 9-12.

¹¹Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

¹²*Ibid.*, 19-20.

commemorative and preservation works in America, the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was the product of a grass-roots effort that had popular support to memorialize an important local citizen who rose from their midst to national prominence. Despite Congressional authorization for the project, Butler's control and insistence that it be built in Niles ensured that historical accuracy was always a priority with the museum's collection. The connection between the local citizenry and this project was as important to Butler as the large donations from business and political leaders with whom he worked. For Butler, location was everything, and establishing the memorial's proximity close to where McKinley actually lived and grew up he considered an asset for the long-term commemoration of the president.¹³

The Niles location of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is in contrast to James Loewen's hieratic scale. The Niles location supports Kathryn Fanning's contention that the memorial's distance from Washington D.C. contributed to its failure to properly perpetuate the public memory of McKinley's administration.¹⁴ It is this author's conclusion that the location of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial has been a mixed blessing. The memorial's location in Niles has led to the substantial growth of the artifact collection by donations from community members over the decades, much as Butler anticipated. However, the memorial's distance from the Washington, D.C., sites has mitigated against its ability to commemorate McKinley's presidency.

¹³Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 15.

¹⁴James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, New York: New Press, 1999, 43-47. See also, Kathryn Fanning, "American Temples: Presidential Memorials of the American Renaissance," Ph.D. diss., Bethesda, Maryland: University of Virginia, 1996, 97.

During the time of Butler's efforts to have the Niles memorial constructed there was a great deal of social change in America. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is reflective of the events and issues at that time. William H. Wilson described how the City Beautiful movement led to important reforms in urban planning and architecture.¹⁵ He also portrayed how the City Practical movement evolved out of the City Beautiful, and that the former helped usher in the economic growth and improved living conditions for these rapidly increasing population centers.

A concurrent growth in public libraries, as described by Abigail Van Slyck, profoundly impacted the educational opportunities for children in these urban centers, and helped elevate the status of women in the professional library community.¹⁶ Before the construction of Butler's memorial, no presidential memorial located a public library within it. The incorporation of the Niles public library, with donated monies from Pittsburgh's millionaire Henry Clay Frick, was similar to the massive public library construction program fostered by Carnegie's largesse.

The McKinley National Birthplace Museum is also indicative of the transition that Fanning described in public monuments and memorials taking place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Previous to the American Renaissance period of memorial construction all presidential monuments were either tombs or watchtower-like shafts that served as pilgrimage sites or park landmarks.¹⁷ The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was the first

¹⁵William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

¹⁶Abigail Van Slyke, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁷Fanning, 66.

presidential memorial to have a library, museum, and auditorium incorporated into its design from the outset. It is an example of the transition described by Fanning of architects as well as City Beautiful adherents, of which Butler was one, to have public structures built that were not only beautiful to behold but served utilitarian, civic needs as well. Subsequent presidential memorials have deviated from this design approach only with a degree of controversy and taxpayer resentment.

The present-day efforts in Niles to replicate the birthplace home of William McKinley are in marked contrast to those of Butler nearly ninety years ago. Butler undertook the six-and-a-half year campaign to build the memorial with a great degree of popular support, both locally and nationally. Land, money, books, and artifacts were all donated, and each step of the building's construction was eagerly reported from 1910 to 1917. Today the library and museum boards of the memorial are jointly managing the efforts to have a replica of the McKinley birthplace house built on the site in downtown Niles that the original structure once occupied. This nearly three-year-long project has encountered resistance from city officials and civic leaders, as well as engendering some ill-will amongst community members.¹⁸

Questions concerning the mission and role of the replica building mirror those issues raised by Loewen, Bodnar, and Gillis concerning historical interpretation and commemoration. Loewen wrote of the African concepts of "Sasha and Zamani" histories to illustrate the differences between traditional and commemorative histories.¹⁹ He felt that the passage of time

¹⁸John Booth, "McKinley Plan Loses 'Friend'," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, April 28, 2000, 10A.

¹⁹Loewen, 37-38.

was critical to a public memorial's objective and accurate portrayal of the history that was to be commemorated. Unlike most historians who place a high value on the testimony of primary source participants (Zamani history), Loewen argued that it was only after the last such person who possessed first-hand knowledge or participated in an event died (Sasha history) that a memorial should be built. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial would seem to counter this argument. It is unlikely that the memorial would have been built but for the influence and wealth of McKinley's boyhood friend, Joseph G. Butler. The passage of time has done little to overcome the delays and difficulties in getting the replica home built. The timing of the replica home project during the centennial of McKinley's presidency has done little to foster increased community support, or public awareness of the importance of McKinley's administration. Further, the lack of philanthropic financial involvement by a modern-day Butler or Frick begs the question of just how important taxpayer supported presidential memorials are today in the formation of public memory. Nearly a hundred years ago such generosity by a local leader ensured that a prominent building with new public facilities would once again make Niles the center of national attention such as their favorite son had done decades earlier. Barthel wrote that "to some the world is becoming one great theme park, with authentic cultural experiences being swapped by their replications, and by the tourist trade they attract."²⁰ With pursuing a replica home project, in lieu of other commemorative projects, the boards of trustees that manage the Niles monument may only muddy the waters further as to whose interests/history will be commemorated in the future, that of McKinley's as envisioned by Butler, or something else entirely.

²⁰Barthel, 140.

The thesis, "Friendship Memorialized: Joseph G. Butler and McKinley National Birthplace Memorial," will address the need for increased academic research regarding presidential memorials. The work will analyze how the memorial has been affected by the local community, and the formation of public memory regarding William McKinley's life and presidency. It will seek to put into perspective this unique time and event in our community's history, and the roles Joseph G. Butler and the memorial in Niles played in its commemoration.

CHAPTER 2: McKINLEY, PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIALS, AND HISTORIANS

Presidential memorials have a unique place in the commemoration of America's past. These buildings were erected across the country to honor a number of the nation's chief executives, and to remember the issues and events that were hallmarks of their administrations. Those on the Mall in Washington D.C. to Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln are among the most popular tourist sites maintained by the National Park Service and became icons for the United States. Buildings in which presidents were born, lived, worked, or died were preserved and made open to the public all across the nation's landscape by a diversity of public and private foundations. Most of these were built or renovated with Congressional authorization and at public expense, but not all have done so without some degree of controversy or celebration. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial in Niles, Ohio, is a case in point of the many issues that pertain to the commemorative and preservationist history concerning these presidential landmarks. John Gillis, as the editor of *Commemoration: the Politics of National Identity*, stated that "commemorative activity is by definition social and political; they are in fact the product of processes of intense contrast, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation."¹ Given the role these public and expensive buildings have had, it is surprising to note how little has been written on the history of presidential memorials. Identifying why the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was built, who were responsible for erecting it, and how or if its commemorative role has changed since its dedication are the main points of this work. It will also address the need for historical research regarding the memorialization of our nation's

¹Gillis, 5.

presidents.

Joseph Butler, the life-long friend of President McKinley and driving force behind the construction of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, did write a short pamphlet history of the Niles memorial seven years after its dedication.² This work, however, was more of a description of what could be found in the museum's collection at that time, included a brief background history of the president that emphasized his boyhood days when he lived in Niles, and listed donors who contributed substantial amounts for the building's construction and maintenance. Most other works that pertained to the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial dealt only with the building's architecture. Probably the first to be written was one by the firm that designed the building, McKim, Mead, and White. In the December 1919 issue of *Architectural Forum* a two-page article described the main components of the memorial, its architectural details, and the building's floor plan.³ During the bicentennial of the United States *The Pictorial History of Niles* was published.⁴ The book featured a chapter on the construction of the memorial. It reproduced pictures of what was in the museum's collection, and featured very little text regarding the building's history.

Current historical research and discussion reflects the concern over what purpose presidential memorials have in the formation of historic memory, as well as questioning the roles they play in public commemoration. An unpublished dissertation, *American Temples* by

² Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 1924.

³ McKim, Mead and White Architects, "William McKinley Memorial, Niles, Ohio," in *Architectural Forum*, volume 31 (December, 1919), 81-84, 205-06.

⁴ Niles Bicentennial History Committee, *A Pictorial History of Niles, Ohio: Bicentennial Edition*. Niles: Niles Historical Society, 1976.

Kathryn Fanning, was an extensive architectural history of presidential memorials, and included the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. In this work the author referred to President McKinley as being “in many ways a dull and uninspiring figure”⁵ and that the building was reflective of that sentiment. Despite describing the Niles monument as being a reliquary of McKinley artifacts, Fanning concluded that the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, together with the tomb in Canton, did little to perpetuate or promote the memory of the twenty-fifth president.⁶

There are few scholarly publications relating to the history of presidential memorials. The completion of the most recent, that for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, inspired the publication of numerous articles on the controversies and issues pertaining to the public commemoration of historic personages and events. Hugh Sidey’s “A Monumental Mistake”⁷ and Charles Krauthammer’s “Dignity of Denial”⁸ took opposing views on how the President’s disability should be portrayed. Sidey believed a statue showing President Roosevelt in a wheelchair, physically crippled by polio, would not only be an honest and humane portrayal of the President, but a source of inspiration to any and all Americans who strive to overcome a disability. Krauthammer resented those who called for a politically correct sculpture of FDR. He reminded readers that Roosevelt went to great lengths to avoid being seen as a cripple, that he was “intent

⁵Fanning, 73.

⁶*Ibid.*, 97.

⁷Hugh Sidey, “A Monumental Mistake,” in *Time*, volume 149, number 17 (April 28, 1997), 4.

⁸Charles Krauthammer, “The Dignity of Denial,” in *Time*, volume 149, number 19 (May 12, 1997), 42.

upon concealing his disability.”⁹ To do otherwise, he argued, would be a disservice to this very important president, and contradict the leadership and vision he sought to cultivate during his administration. J. William Thompson’s “The Power of Place” was another architectural interpretation of the FDR memorial’s design, and explained how and why its design was chosen over others as the one to be built.¹⁰

Tom Bethell, in his essay, “Memorials are Made of This,” commented on the role the federal government had in the design and selection processes for memorials.¹¹ He noted that this institution often dominated these crucial decisions, even overruling the suggestions and desires expressed by family and associates of the President. Richard Cohen in “Presidential Valhallas” questioned the cost-effectiveness of maintaining so many presidential libraries in memorials. He noted that these institutions are primarily celebrative, and that their main function was “extolling the virtues and attempting to redeem the faults of the presidents in whose names they were built. The archival function...is a subliminal one, there for the use of the scholar and history but ignored by the great majority of visitors.”¹²

Andrea Gabor’s excellent article, “Even Our Most Loved Monuments had a Trial by

⁹Krauthammer, 42.

¹⁰William J. Thompson, “Power of Place,” in *Landscape Architecture*, volume 87, number 7 (July 1997), 62-70.

¹¹Tom Bethell, “Memorials are Made of This,” in *American Spectator*, volume 30, number 3 (March 1997), 20-21.

¹²Richard Cohen, “Presidential Valhallas,” in *American Monarchy: a Social Guide*, /edited by Jerrold M. Packard. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983, 195-196.

Fire,” came closest to the mark in describing the history of presidential memorials.¹³ Gabor put into perspective the debates concerning FDR’s monument that was then under construction with the controversies that accompanied the construction of Presidents Washington’s and Jefferson’s memorials, as well as that of the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial. Finally, there are numerous almanacs and directories that briefly describe the history and unique aspects of presidential memorials, Geneva B. Pulitzer’s “A Presidential Gazetteer” being one such example.¹⁴ Public monuments and presidential memorials, as many authors have shown, do play a role in the formation of public memory and commemoration. How these public interpretations have evolved with the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, however, needs to be addressed.

There have been many books and articles published on President McKinley’s life and times. One of the first monographs, *The Authentic Life of William McKinley*, by Alexander K. McClure and Charles Morris was published immediately following McKinley’s assassination.¹⁵ This work was issued earlier in 1898 during the president’s first term, and the 1901 edition featured add-on chapters that dealt with his assassination, as well as dedicatory notes from such notaries as Theodore Roosevelt, Marc Hanna, and Myron T. Herrick. All of these individuals would play a role in later years with the commemoration of President McKinley. Joseph G. Butler wrote several pamphlets and four books that dealt with his friendship and workings with

¹³Andrea Gabor, “Even Our Most Loved Monuments had a Trial by Fire,” in *The Smithsonian*, volume 28, number 2 (May, 1997), 97-106.

¹⁴Geneva B. Pulitzer, “A Presidential Gazetteer,” in *American History Illustrated*, volume 24, number 2 (April 1989), 43-52.

¹⁵Alexander K. McClure and Charles Morris. *Authentic Life of William McKinley: Our Third Martyred President*. Philadelphia: 1901.

William McKinley.¹⁶ All of these, as with McClure and Morris, were hagiographic works that had little in documentation or scholarly research. Margaret Leech's *In the Days of McKinley* was a well-researched history of the twenty-fifth president's administration.¹⁷ She relied extensively on interviews and papers provided her by surviving members of the president's administration, most notably John Cortelyou, McKinley's chief of staff and secretary. Leech was laudatory of McKinley's presidency and portrayed him as one who fully measured up to the demands and democratic traditions of the executive office. The author noted, "his critics called him changeable and lacking in conviction, but McKinley's adaptability was a political advantage. It denoted a ready sympathy with contemporary trends."¹⁸ Unlike others who viewed McKinley's personality as being weak or changeable, Leech portrayed a president who could listen as well as lead.

Paul Glad in *McKinley, Bryan and the People* did not treat William McKinley so kindly. His presidency was portrayed as the product of the machinations of Republican party boss, Marc Hanna, and big business, not the ideals or accomplishments of the Ohio governor. The real hero for Glad was McKinley's democratic opponent, William Jennings Bryan who, despite never

¹⁶See Joseph G. Butler's *Autographed Portraits*, Youngstown, Ohio: Butler Art Institute Publishers, 1927, 438-40, *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley*, Volume 2, Ohio, Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921, 8-11, *Life of William McKinley: and History of the National Birthplace Memorial*, Cleveland: [Penton Press?], 1924, *President's I Have Seen and Known: Lincoln to Taft and a Day in Washington's Country*, Cleveland: Penton Press, 1910, 39-62, *Proposal to Build a Monument and Memorial to William McKinley at Niles, Ohio the Place of His Birth*, Cleveland: Penton Press, 1911, and *Recollections of Men and Events: an Autobiography*, Youngstown: [Penton Press?], 1925, 88-98.

¹⁷Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 34.

holding the highest office, was able to see many of his populist reforms brought about. Indeed, Glad wrote that “long after McKinley lay dead at the hands of a demented assassin, Bryan was a force of major importance in American politics.”¹⁹

William H. Armstrong’s *Major McKinley* addressed William McKinley’s military career, and how it affected his later life in politics.²⁰ As a soldier in the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, McKinley quickly impressed his commanding officer, Rutherford B. Hayes, with his organizational abilities and coolness under fire.²¹ McKinley rose through the ranks, to eventually become an adjutant to General George Crook, issuing orders to the unit in which he was once a private.²² His admirable service record was appreciated by voters after the war, and colored McKinley’s decision-making as a politician. As president, Armstrong described how McKinley did much to reconcile the relations between the North and South by appointing blacks to federal government positions,²³ as well as former Confederate officers to the U.S. Army in the Spanish-American War.²⁴ President McKinley also established monuments that commemorated the sacrifices of both sides in the Civil War.²⁵ Armstrong described in this book a politician

¹⁹Glad, Paul, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1964, 207.

²⁰William H. Armstrong, *Major McKinley: William McKinley and the Civil War*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000.

²¹*Ibid.*, 40-41.

²²*Ibid.*, 77.

²³*Ibid.*, 126, 131.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 131-133.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 135-36.

who sought to be the president of a unified nation, and a leader of all Americans.

Lewis Gould was the last historian to write a detailed history of McKinley's administration. In *The Presidency of William McKinley* the author described McKinley as "...the first modern president."²⁶ McKinley's abilities as a consummate politician ushered in a new era of prosperity after the depression of 1893, despite such handicaps during his terms-of-office as the death of the vice-president, a Democratic Congress, and a lackluster or even uncooperative cabinet. Gould credited McKinley's statesmanship as being key to dealing successfully with issues that made the United States a world power. It was McKinley's abilities to work with and draw together people from diverse backgrounds, and articulate practical and successful agendas, that were the hallmark of the twenty-fifth presidency. Gould wrote "McKinley's use of what Theodore Roosevelt called the bully pulpit is still one of his least recognized contributions to the emergence of the modern presidency" and his speeches "were masterful examples of how an adroit leader can set the terms of a public discussion in his own favor."²⁷ The McKinley portrayed by Gould was not the pawn of business, or the tool of Hanna, but a skillful chief executive who was able to firmly set the nation on the path to prosperity and world power.

The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, as with other presidential memorials, plays a role in the formation of the historiographic record of McKinley's life and times. Joseph G. Butler portrayed McKinley as an outstanding president and statesman, a model of democratic

²⁶Gould, Lewis L, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1980, vii.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 137.

citizenship. However, by having the memorial constructed in the place where he grew up, Butler also sought to have the humanity of William McKinley promoted in addition to the commemoration of the president's accomplishments. However, the role the Niles monument plays in historical research, and the public's subsequent understanding of McKinley's life changed over the years since it was conceived and dedicated.

One must consider the motivations of those who wished to have a presidential memorial constructed in order to describe the history and commemoration of the building. A biography of Joseph G. Butler has not been published to date, but his autobiography *Recollections of Men and Events* did deal with the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial and those who supported him in its construction.²⁸ The Niles monument, along with the Institute of American Art, and his efforts on behalf of the construction of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, were three of "Uncle Joe's" most public philanthropic endeavors. This gift-giving occurred at a time when other public-works projects were being undertaken to improve city and urban living conditions.

Butler first publicly spoke of his desire to have a memorial built at the Town Beautiful meeting on February 4, 1910 in Niles.²⁹ The history of the Town/City Beautiful movement, of which the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was a part, was detailed in William H. Wilson's *The City Beautiful Movement*. This history described the roles Frederick Law Olmstead, his sons John and Frederick, architects David H. Burnham, John Horace McFarland, and others such as Boston mayor Josiah Quincy, had in bringing about and shaping this movement to improve America's urban centers. Wilson portrayed this era as one that reversed

²⁸Butler, *Recollections*, 1925.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 90.

the trend in which cities were seen, with their squalid tenements, noisy industries, and labor unrest, as constituting a threat to democratic government. Those who emulated the City Beautiful movement, Butler among them, felt that by improving the architecture and landscapes of cities, the resultant “beauty created a positive environment capable of influencing human thought and behavior.”³⁰ Further, City Beautiful proponents felt that cities could become the new sites of societal change and progress. The followers of the City Beautiful led the public’s switch in thinking of cities as dens of iniquity to being sites of culture and social progress.³¹ The author described how the City Beautiful would evolve into the “City Practical” due to its dependence on taxpayer support and the vagaries of local politics. It did, however, lead to the growth of grass-roots political activism in city planning, and “it left a legacy of civic activism and flexibility in the urban political structure.”³²

Concurrent with the City Beautiful movement was a philanthropic endeavor that profoundly affected America’s public libraries and influenced Butler’s vision of the Niles monument. From 1890 until 1917, the year the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was dedicated with its new public library located inside, millionaire Andrew Carnegie donated over \$41 million to construct over seventeen hundred public libraries across the United States. Joseph Frazier Wall, wrote of the steel mogul’s library giveaway that “certainly no man had made as many public expressions of the obligation for men of wealth to give away their riches as

³⁰William H. Wilson, 29.

³¹*Ibid.*, 21.

³²*Ibid.*, 302.

he.”³³ The biographer noted that Carnegie sincerely believed that a duty of those who prospered was to use their wealth to improve the lives of those less fortunate. However, the millionaire did not want to rely solely upon his own intuition and personal initiative to enable change. Carnegie desired “his trust be so administered as to stimulate the best and most aspiring poor of the community to further efforts for their own improvement.”³⁴ He saw free public libraries as an ideal method by which the wealth of the few could bring countless opportunities for others to improve themselves.

George S. Bobinski’s *Carnegie Libraries* is a detailed history of the millionaire’s library gift-giving.³⁵ Bobinski examined the role played by Carnegie’s secretary, James Bertram, in establishing guidelines for the gift-giving. Bertram’s insistence, with Carnegie’s approval, that cities that wished to benefit from the millionaire’s largesse had to construct libraries that served children and women, provide free access to the books, as well as a professional staff, were fundamental and long-lasting benefits for Americans of all backgrounds and regions.

Abigail Van Slyck’s *Free to All* is an analysis of the effects of this library gift giving. While Van Slyck did consider the roles of Bertram and Carnegie, their efforts were placed in the context of other reforms that brought benefits to women, children, and immigrant residents of urban centers. The author portrayed how the millionaire’s generosity, along with concurrent efforts by the American Library Association, fostered improvements in library design and usage

³³Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, 805.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 808.

³⁵George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*, Chicago: American Library Association, 1969.

by professional librarians, many of whom were women. For Van Slyck, Carnegie's "philanthropy augmented the conditions that supported the entry of women into librarianship."³⁶ Further, she showed that these institutions became much more than repositories in which patrons could quickly locate and obtain reading materials. The rising population of America's cities, as well as popular demands for better educational and recreational centers, were important additional considerations in the improvement of public libraries during that time. For her, the "Carnegie libraries were self-consciously designed to encourage a process of social and cultural transformation."³⁷

That the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial includes a public library was in large measure due to the generosity of a one-time business partner of Carnegie and business associate of Joseph G. Butler, Henry Clay Frick. There have been numerous books written on this steel magnate's life and times. Kenneth Warren's *Triumphant Capitalism*, the most recent analysis of Pittsburgh's most controversial businessman, portrayed Frick as being the power-behind-the-throne who aggressively led Carnegie Steel from a local concern to regional, then national dominance. Reviled by many for his role in the Homestead strike, and eventually a bitter enemy of his former partner Carnegie, Frick was described by Warren as one "who would never allow sentiment to interfere with good business principles."³⁸ Nevertheless, the author described how Frick quietly, and often without fanfare, gave away the vast majority of his monies and

³⁶Van Slyck, 165.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 216.

³⁸Warren, Kenneth, *Triumphant Capitalism: Henry Clay Frick and the Industrial Transformation of America*, Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996, 329.

properties to charitable causes. Among these was a fifty-thousand dollar donation to Butler so that the Niles public library could be installed in the new building. This was the largest single donation to the memorial, and would be followed by more to the library once the building was completed.

The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial exemplified the philanthropic endeavors of turn-of-the-century Americans in which the wealth of the few could be redirected/reallocated to the benefit of the many. Butler echoed the sentiments expressed by Carnegie and Frick by having the Niles monument constructed with its library, auditorium, and museum. His actions in soliciting donations from the wealthy for the Niles monument matched that of the one transpiring across the United States in which the business elites sought to improve and reform the communities in which they lived.

The edifice Butler commissioned for Niles put into tangible form the dignity and fame William McKinley earned as a soldier, statesman, and as a martyr to democracy. The architectural firm that designed the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was New York City's prominent McKim, Mead, and White. This firm designed other important landmarks such as the New York Public Library, the Boston Public Library, and in later years the Butler Institute of American Art. Leland Roth's *The Architecture of McKim, Mead, and White, 1870-1920* is a photographic architectural history of many of the buildings constructed by the firm, including the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial.³⁹ The work has extensive photographs and illustrations, along with detailed floor plans of the structures.

³⁹Leland Roth, *The Architecture of McKim, Mead, and White, 1870-1920: a Building List*. New York: Garland, 1978.

Richard Guy Wilson's *The Architecture of McKim, Mead, and White in Photographs, Plans and Elevations* is another architectural history of the three designers.⁴⁰ The work briefly discussed the impact they had on the City Beautiful movement, the Columbian Exposition, and other monumental structures such as churches and museums. A hallmark of these designers was their connection of the modern-day buildings they designed with classical themes of ancient Greece and Republican Rome. All three traveled extensively to European sites, especially Rome and Athens, to study the ruins. In their buildings a physical link between the past and present was purposefully intended. Wilson noted that "they paraded their knowledge, education and travels, and in turn brought into question the ability of architects who lacked training and firsthand experience with the past."⁴¹ For them, the buildings that dealt with our democratic government were meant to help people trace the origins of our way of life to those of the Greek Demos and Roman Republic.

Finally, when dealing with the history of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, one must consider the roles of monuments and memorials in public commemoration and historical preservation. John Bodnar wrote of public memory as "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand its past, present, and by implication, its future."⁴² This public memory is constantly evolving and the product of two contending forces, official and vernacular interests. Official interests were those in which national political goals

⁴⁰Richard Guy Wilson, *The Architecture of McKim, Mead and White in Photographs, Plans and Elevations*. New York: Dover Publications, 1990.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 45.

⁴²Bodnar, 15.

and concerns were paramount. Vernacular interests were ones in which local issues, events, and experiences were important. Public monuments and memorials reflect these competing aspects of public memory and the ability to discern them is critical for the understanding of the memorial's history.

Taking the notion of public memory further, James W. Loewen stated "history is power. Those on top of society...know this. Therefore they take the time to determine how history will be remembered."⁴³ The elite and powerful members of society traditionally have easy access to the three elements necessary for the construction of public monuments: money, political influence, and some historical expertise.⁴⁴ Joseph G. Butler certainly had all three when he conceived and had constructed the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. However, Loewen also described how a monument's "hieratic scale" was an important consideration when determining what history was being portrayed, and that it reflected the changes in public perception and relevance for that elite history.⁴⁵ This hieratic scale referred to the monument's size, its surroundings, the ease of access and viewing by passers-by, as well as changes to its physical condition and maintenance.⁴⁶ Signs of neglect, poor attendance, or the monument being surrounded and/or overwhelmed by other structures, relegate a monument to a low end of this scale. An example of this was John Logan's monument in Chicago. A Civil War hero, his statue was unveiled amidst much pageantry and fanfare. Since then the statue has been moved

⁴³Loewen, 25.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 43-47.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 44.

to a remote corner of Grant Park, is not readily accessed or seen by those who stroll the grounds, and is in deteriorating condition.⁴⁷ Alternatively, monuments such as the Jefferson or Lincoln Memorials in Washington D.C. are not only well used and attended, but have become national symbols and therefore rank high on the hieratic scale.⁴⁸

Loewen also discussed cultural differences and changes in historical interpretation regarding historical monuments. To illustrate the difference between traditional and commemorative histories he used the African concepts of “Sasha and Zamani”⁴⁹ histories. The amount of time that has passed between the occurrence of the historical event or a person’s death, the dedication of a monument’s commemoration, and the time when it is viewed by others were keys to understanding the history being portrayed by the memorial. Sasha and Zamani histories illustrated how a monument’s relevance and focus for a given group change with time. These concepts of primary source material, and its implications for historical research and preservation can be important, and needs to be taken into account in the history of public commemoration.

Diane Barthel analyzed many factors that contributed to public preservation and commemoration of historical events. In the United States, she described how preservation and commemorative efforts began as primarily grass-roots endeavors initiated often times by women.⁵⁰ The author went on to show that the public’s role diminished to the present-day

⁴⁷Loewen, 44.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 327-337.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵⁰Barthel, 21.

situation when the federal government or corporations are often the only institutions that can initiate or support historic preservation or commemoration projects.⁵¹ The high costs of such projects gave rise to the growth of an antique industry, as well as the need for corporate sponsorships. These often undermined or overwhelmed the history that was presented. Barthel wrote that due to this distancing of the individual from history “the world is becoming one great theme park, with authentic cultural experiences being swapped by their replications, and by the tourist trade they attract.”⁵² She lamented that the control over what is preserved and commemorated is being lost by historians. This author wrote that the eclecticism and diversity of what was done in recent years also led to a loss of professional focus or mission. The lack of professional direction or consensus in historical preservation has led to the squandering of resources or the alienation of public support.⁵³

Butler sought to perpetuate and preserve the history of William McKinley’s leadership and presidency in Niles, Ohio. Evidence of what is currently being discussed by historians and preservationists can be found at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. However, given the lack of historical study on presidential memorials, and the current discussion regarding public memory and identity, the history of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is one in need of telling. Based upon the review of the literature, the reasons for the construction of this building, the history Joseph Butler wanted to commemorate, and how these relate to the Memorial’s commemorative use today must be considered.

⁵¹Loewen, 127.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 140.

⁵³Barthel, 153.

CHAPTER 3: McKINLEY, BUTLER, AND EARLIER PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIALS

The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial in Niles, Ohio, was the product of a number of events occurring in turn-of-the-century America. A variety of reform movements that sought to improve the standards of living for all Americans, not just those financially well-off, were attempted. Two of these reform efforts, the City Beautiful movement and the tremendous changes wrought by the free public Carnegie library grants, found expression in the presidential memorial constructed in Niles. Additionally, the boom in monument construction across America following the Civil War and the nation's centennial celebrations were, by the beginning of the twentieth century, evolving under a new school of architects who espoused an American Renaissance. They wanted to commemorate America's heroes and achievements by designing monuments that addressed a civic need or purpose. Finally, the sentiments felt by many Americans for William McKinley, a president who presided over an era of tremendous economic change and growing world power, were still very strong. Despite the passage of over a decade and a half since his assassination, many people from diverse means and backgrounds willingly and eagerly endorsed and contributed to a birthplace memorial for the favorite son from Niles. All of these factors would be articulated by a life-long friend of the president, Joseph G. Butler. It would be Butler's vision and organizational abilities that saw the McKinley National Birthplace completed. The resultant building would be a unique and enduring testament to an Ohio president's accomplishments, as well as those of the Mahoning Valley and the entire nation.

On September 6th, 1901, William McKinley was attending the Pan-American Exposition

in Buffalo, New York, for a second day. On the previous day a crowd of fifty-thousand had heard him speak on the Esplanade of the fairgrounds in ninety-degree heat with humidity to match.¹ After touring Niagara Falls in the morning of the 6th, and seeing his wife, Ida, off at John G. Milburn's house after lunch to rest, the president returned to the fairgrounds for a reception at the Temple of Music. It was announced earlier that at 4:00 PM the president would shake hands with fair goers before the dinner. By that time a crowd numbering in the thousands awaited outside the Temple of Music's doors. The president had been shaking hands for only seven or eight minutes when Leon Czolgasz, an anarchist, stepped up to William McKinley. His right hand was wrapped in a cotton bandage in which he concealed a thirty-two caliber Iver-Johnson revolver. At point-blank range Czolgasz shot the president twice. Bodyguards and spectators wrestled the assassin to the ground. Despite the pain and shock, McKinley told his secretary, John Cortelyou, "Don't hurt him" and "My wife, be careful how you tell her--oh be careful."² Surgeons soon discovered that one of the bullets was deflected by a button on McKinley's vest, while the other passed through his stomach and lodged in his back.³ After the surgery, the president seemed to be recovering. Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt, who sped to Buffalo after learning the news about the shooting, thought that the president "was coming along splendidly and on the way to recovery"⁴ and returned to his vacation in the Adirondacks on the 8th. However, the effects of gangrene set in on the 12th and the president's condition

¹Leech, 586.

²Gould, 251.

³McClure and Morris, 320-21.

⁴Leech, 599.

suddenly worsened. In the early morning hours of September 14th William McKinley died.

Similar to what happened six decades later when people could recall what they were doing and where they were when news of President Kennedy's assassination first reached them, the death of President McKinley was seared into the national consciousness. Outpourings of grief were nationwide and effusive. For the previous week the president's recovery was anticipated, and his sudden death at the hands of an assassin seemed a tragic and ill-begotten omen for the start of the twentieth century. For those who did not hear the church bells that tolled across the country in the early-morning hours of the 14th, black draped headlines announced the horrible news in the Mahoning Valley.⁵ Newspaper articles and letters to the editor reflected grief, outrage, and genuine affection for the fallen president.⁶ The *Youngstown Vindicator* quickly printed up special portraits of the late president and put them on sale for five cents each. These were just-as- quickly sold out that very day.⁷ Thomas Edison's film company rushed to Buffalo, then to Washington, and finally to Canton to record for posterity McKinley's funeral processions and the crowds of people who turned out to say goodbye. Now part of the Library of Congress' *American Memory* collection, these were among the first documentary films made that were distributed nation-wide.⁸ Special editions of McKinley biographies written

⁵"Nation's Chief Now at Rest," *Youngstown Vindicator*, September 14, 1901, 1.

⁶See Edith A. Elton, "In Loving Memory," *Youngstown Vindicator*, September 15, 1901, 2, "Offensive Publications Regarding the Dead President," *Youngstown Vindicator*, September 15, 1901, 1, and Pastor E.O. Buxton's "Special Services, Eloquent Pulpit Eulogies," *Youngstown Vindicator*, September 16, 1901, 2.

⁷"McKinley's Picture," *Youngstown Vindicator*, September 15, 1901, 2.

⁸Thomas A. Edison, *President McKinley's Funeral* [video recording]. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1995.

by Colonel G.W. Townsend, and Murat Halstead were quickly printed.⁹ These featured new frontispieces memorializing McKinley. Townsend's pictured two Lady Liberty-like women with down-cast eyes gazing forlornly upon a headstone that read "In Memoriam President McKinley, 1843-1901."¹⁰ Halstead's, as with some 1901 edition's of McClure's and Morris, had the twenty-fifth president's black-bordered picture flanked by those of Lincoln and Garfield with the caption, "Martyrs of Democracy."¹¹ *Colliers Magazine* ran a special issue dedicated to the assassination and funerals, the cover featuring the president's portrait surrounded by an eagle with outstretched wings, while a stern Lady Liberty overlooked protectively the throngs of mourners gathered in the background.¹²

Unlike the previous two assassinated presidents, McKinley's death was genuinely mourned across the entire United States. Souvenirs that commemorated the assassinated leader were quickly produced, many by firms that made similar items for the 1896 and 1900 presidential campaigns, and earnestly snatched up by mourning citizens across the country.¹³ Leech noted that "never in history had the Union of the States been joined in such universal

⁹George Washington Townsend, *Our Martyred President: Memorial Life of William McKinley*, [Philadelphia?], 1901 and Murat Halstead, *The Illustrious Life of William McKinley Our Martyred President*, [Chicago?], 1901.

¹⁰Townsend, frontispiece.

¹¹Halstead, frontispiece.

¹²*Colliers Magazine*, volume 27, number 25 (September 21, 1901).

¹³An extensive collection of many of these items, ranging from commemorative plates, clocks, ribbons, and plaques can be seen on display at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial's museum. Most bear the president's last words, "It is God's way, his will be done."

sorrow.”¹⁴

As evidenced by the news coverage, and the diversity of commemorative objects that were produced following the president’s death, McKinley’s assassination was a national trauma that shocked and in many ways unified the citizens of the United States. Such a violent death of a popular president at the hands of unremorseful killer seemed to strike at our nation’s core, and elevated the fallen leader in the minds of many to the status of martyrdom. If so worthy in death, then surely the deeds he accomplished and the principals he stood for in life must in history follow with increased stature. So it seemed to many of McKinley’s contemporaries, especially those with whom he worked most closely in life.

Nearly a week of mourning followed McKinley’s death. The president’s body lay in state first in Buffalo, then in Washington, D.C., and finally at home in Canton, Ohio. It was in Canton that President McKinley was buried. For five minutes at 3:30 on September 19th all work ceased and silence was observed across the nation as the president’s casket was interred.¹⁵ In death, as in life, McKinley brought the country together. One of the honorary pallbearers, a close friend of the McKinley family as well as most of the administration members, was Joseph G. Butler from Youngstown, Ohio.¹⁶ His involvement in the preservation of William McKinley’s memory would not end on that sad day in Canton, Ohio.

Joseph G. Butler was born on December 21, 1840, in Temperance Furnace, Mercer County, Pennsylvania. When he was only a year old, Joseph’s family moved to Niles, Ohio, so

¹⁴Leech, 602.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 10.

that his father could work in the growing iron business.¹⁷ It was in Niles that Joseph Butler befriended young William McKinley. Both boys attended the little white school house that was located in the middle of town. In 1853 Joseph and another friend, Jacob Sheler, saved 10-year-old William McKinley from drowning while they were swimming in Mosquito Creek.¹⁸ Later that year the McKinley family moved to Poland, Ohio, so that their children could attend the schools in that town which were thought to offer more than the those in Niles. Joseph and William would renew their friendship after the Civil War. By then Joseph had become the manager of the Girard Iron Company and William was a young lawyer in Canton as well as a war hero.¹⁹

Butler's success in the steel business brought him into contact with others whose personal ascendancy in life mirrored that of the steel industry. Henry Clay Frick, Charles M. Schwab, Andrew Mellon, and Andrew Carnegie were all friendly business associates in a field which was, to say the least, extremely competitive. Butler also became a go-between of these steel magnates and his other friends in the Ohio and federal governments. McKinley was the Canton area's congressman from 1876 to 1890 and was much concerned with protectionist legislation for the iron, steel, and pottery manufacturers that employed many of his area's constituents. These concerns were manifested in the 1890 protectionist legislation which was dubbed the "McKinley Tariff." As his friend rose in politics, McKinley becoming governor of Ohio in 1892, Butler's circle of friendships broadened to include Marcus Alonzo Hanna,

¹⁷Butler, *Recollections*, 11.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 346.

¹⁹Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 335.

Republican Party Chairman, John G. Sherman, a charter member of the Ohio Republican Party and brother of the Civil War hero William Tecumseh Sherman, William Howard Taft, and Warren G. Harding, two other prominent Ohio Republican politicians.²⁰

Joseph Butler witnessed tremendous change in the Mahoning Valley's way of life. In 1860 Youngstown Village had a population of 2,759.²¹ By 1910, when Butler delivered his Town Beautiful speech and proposed a McKinley memorial, the city of Youngstown had over 79,000 residents.²² In the decade of 1880 to 1890 alone the city's population increased 115%.²³ During the same period the steel industry grew dramatically in importance in the Valley's economy. From roughly ten small iron smelting furnaces in the 1850's the Steel Valley took form. The Civil War saw massive expansion in the Mahoning Valley's iron industry as it built the implements of war and supplied those who wielded them. By 1900 mills of the mighty U.S. Steel Corporation competed with Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Republic Iron and Steel, and Ohio Steel. Numerous subsidiary industries supported the steel manufacturers, such as Girard Leather Works and General Fireproofing, and these firms employed thousands more.²⁴ An example of this tremendous growth was that of Youngstown's Sheet and Tube. This firm grew

²⁰Butler, *Recollections*, 308-36.

²¹Youngstown Sesquicentennial Committee, *Youngstown Grows With Ohio*, [Youngstown?]: Youngstown Sesquicentennial Committee, [1953?], 3.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Howard C. Aley, *A Heritage to Share: the Bicentennial History of Youngstown and Mahoning County, Ohio*. Youngstown: Bicentennial Commission, 1975, 134.

²⁴Frederick J. Blue [et al.], *Mahoning Memories: a History of Youngstown and Mahoning County*, Virginia Beach, Virginia: Donning Company Publishers, 1995, 94.

from the small Mahoning Valley Iron Company with a net worth of \$600,000 in 1897 to the third largest steel manufacturer in the United States. By 1910 Sheet and Tube employed 25,000 with an annual corporate income of \$200,000,000.²⁵

Butler worked closely with the leaders of the steel firms, and played a key role in the industry's recovery following the Panic of 1907.²⁶ Following the disastrous economic collapse, in which 175 out of 314 blast furnaces in America were closed, Elbert H. Gary held a series of dinner meetings that became known as the "Gary Dinners." These were conducted to counter the bad press engendered by trusts and to set "a policy that would prevent further disaster and hasten the return of prosperity...instead of trying to get business at the expense of one another and at prices below actual costs."²⁷ Although these "dinners" were seen by some as a venue by which collusion and market manipulation could be arranged, Butler described them as providing an environment in which a "code of ethics in American steel business, covering both its internal regulations and its relations with labor and the public"²⁸ were firmly established. Butler assisted in making arrangements for all of these dinners, and also spoke at them. He viewed these meetings as another example of men of action who first built and then saved the steel industry, a form of economic statesmanship worthy of praise, not condemnation, commemoration rather than repudiation.

Key to the expansion and prosperity of the American steel industry for Butler was the

²⁵Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 312.

²⁶Butler, *Recollections*, 151-52.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 153.

²⁸Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 10.

role played by his friend, William McKinley. McKinley's protectionist policies as an Ohio congressman, and later as president, were vital. These policies afforded shelter to the iron firms in the Ohio and Mahoning river valleys during their expensive transition to steel manufacturing.²⁹ Without this protection, the iron industries would not have reaped the profits of the 1880's and 90's they then reinvested to expand into steel manufacturing. McKinley's protectionist policies kept the more advanced British, and the government subsidized German, steel industries from overwhelming the businesses led by Carnegie, Frick, Butler and others that eventually employed hundreds of thousands and transformed the United States into a world economic power. Butler would write that the "factory chimneys aglow all over the country are in themselves inanimate monuments to the memory of William McKinley."³⁰

Joseph Butler was present at many important events in McKinley's political life. In 1893 he helped arrange the necessary financing when another Niles acquaintance, Robert L. Walker, whose loans McKinley underwrote, declared bankruptcy.³¹ Butler campaigned for McKinley in 1896 and was in the delegation from Youngstown and Niles that visited McKinley at his porch-front in Canton. In 1900 it was Butler who placed Theodore Roosevelt's name in nomination as Vice-President at the Philadelphia convention.³² Having declined a personal invitation to accompany President McKinley to Buffalo, Butler was one of the last to see-off the president

²⁹Butler, *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, Ohio*, volume 2, 8.

³⁰Joseph G. Butler, *The National McKinley Birthplace Memorial*, [Cleveland: Penton Press?], 39.

³¹Butler, *Recollections*, 363-64.

³²*Ibid.*, 241-42.

from Canton, but not before warning him to take more precautions. Years later Butler would write,

I remarked that I had something private to say to him if he could be excused. He put his arm around me and went into an adjoining room. He asked me what I had in mind. I responded as near as I can recall the words, 'I want to impress upon you that you are not careful enough of your safety from assault. One of these days something will happen which we will all regret.' This did not make much of an impression. 'Why should anyone seek my life? What have I done to justify it?' I repeated the warning. He thanked me and we returned to the room.³³

Butler was a person of financial means, had extensive personal contacts in both industry and politics, and was shocked by the violent and tragic circumstances of his boyhood companion's death, one which he unsuccessfully warned against. He was in an ideal position to seek the means by which to memorialize his friend. Similar to Carnegie, Butler wrote "every man of wealth owes something to the community in which he has lived, as well as to his country and society at large."³⁴ These sentiments he would put into practice with a birthplace memorial in Niles to his life-long friend.

The first steps to build "a suitable memorial to the lamented dead" followed the funeral in Canton.³⁵ On the 26th of September the National McKinley Memorial Association formed, with the widow Ida Saxton McKinley suggesting names to President Roosevelt for membership. On October 10th an executive committee convened, composed of the following individuals: William R. Day as president, Marcus Alonzo Hanna as vice-president, Myron T. Herrick as

³³Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 9-10.

³⁴Butler, *Recollections*, 88.

³⁵McKinley National Memorial Association, *The Nation's Memorial to William McKinley*, (Baltimore: Mundes-Thomsen, 1913), 65.

treasurer, and Ryerson Ritchie as secretary.³⁶ In October of 1904 the executive committee selected Harold Van Buren Magonigle of Vaux and Radford as the architect.³⁷ Funding to pay for the structure was by private subscription with Ohio state government underwriting.³⁸ Appointed a “committee of one,”³⁹ Joseph Butler sought to raise funds for the Canton memorial in the Mahoning Valley. On June 15, 1905 groundbreaking took place and on September 30, 1907 the mausoleum was dedicated. Interred beside the President were Ida, who died the previous May, and their two daughters who died in early childhood.⁴⁰

Despite the grandeur of the new Canton memorial and the ceremonies for its dedication-- President Roosevelt was the main speaker-- Joseph Butler was not satisfied with this building's value as a memorial to President McKinley's life and times. “Impressive as this memorial is, it was designed solely as a tomb, and apparently did not attract many visitors or serve to encourage to any great extent emulation of McKinley's virtues by future generations, which is the real function of an institution of this character.”⁴¹

On June 6, 1908, Philadelphia dedicated a statue of William McKinley, sculpted by

³⁶McKinley National Memorial Association, 66.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 11.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Ida, the second daughter lived only a few days after a difficult birth. Katie, age 4, succumbed to Typhoid fever a few months later in the summer of 1876. Leech, 17.

⁴¹Butler, *Recollections*, 99.

Charles Albert Long and Isodore Kent, and located on the south side of the City Hall building.⁴² Joseph Butler attended the event and stayed for a week afterwards. It was in the city of brotherly love the Republicans held their convention of 1900, and where William McKinley secured his nomination for a second term. By this time statues of McKinley were erected in San Francisco and San Jose, California, Adams, Massachusetts, Muskegon, Michigan, Canton, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York.⁴³ The California statues commemorated the late president's final, nationwide trip there during the fateful summer of 1901. Canton's of course celebrated the fact that it was in that city McKinley lived most of his adult life and established his career in law and politics. Those in Massachusetts, Michigan and other sites across the north, commemorated the Major's Civil War service with local veterans who served with him.⁴⁴ All of these monuments indicated the wide-spread popularity of the twenty-fifth president, and the public's desire to commemorate the assassinated leader. At some point, Butler cut and pasted atop a brochure from the Philadelphia statue's dedication ceremony a souvenir post-card picture of the McKinley birthplace house. He pasted it in the very front of the picture scrapbook that he was making on William McKinley. It is an intriguing hint at what was on his mind in late 1908.⁴⁵

Personal reasons may also have motivated Butler's desire to have a monument

⁴²Sculpture Center, *Philadelphia Public Art* [internet publication] Altavista: artguide page, November 7, 1997, <<http://www.libertynet.org/~artguide/mckin.jpg>>

⁴³Nat Gorham, "Why So Many McKinley Statues?" *Buffalo Evening News*, September 15, 1973, B-7.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵"Memory of McKinley," *Souvenir Program* (Philadelphia: June 6, 1908), contained in Joseph G. Butler's, *Scrapbook Collection: McKinley Memorial*, vol. 70.51.32 (Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society), unnumbered.

commemorating the life and times of William McKinley built in Niles. In the fall of 1909 the first reunion of those who attended the little white school house was held.⁴⁶ The classmates of Butler in the old school were counted by him as his closest friends,⁴⁷ and the passage of so much time since those childhood days struck home. He wrote nostalgically “the affection and friendships of youth must always mean more than those of later years.”⁴⁸ By 1909 many of these childhood friends had passed on, were infirm, or no longer residing in the area. One can only speculate, but Butler’s awareness that an era was passing must have weighed upon his mind. A memorial to their most famous alumnus, William McKinley, built upon the spot where they all learned and played together in childhood, earning “a warm place in my affections”⁴⁹ would be a most fitting and enduring testament of Butler’s friendship.

Joseph Butler was asked by the Niles Board of Trade to speak at their annual banquet on February 4, 1910. The event honored those who recently secured the commitment of the Fostoria Glass Company in locating to Niles. Although he would later write “I knew but little of city planning or any such matters”⁵⁰ Butler had already been, and would become, engaged in many civic works in the Mahoning Valley. In addition to his extensive business interests, as well as his recent assistance in Niles, Butler played a key role in Youngstown’s successful

⁴⁶A picture of the Little White Schoolhouse, along with one of McKinley’s first teacher Mrs. Maria Kyle, are on display at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial’s museum.

⁴⁷Butler, *Recollections*, 16.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 339.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 90.

application for a Carnegie library grant. In April of 1907 he traveled with the new librarian, Anna Louise Morse, to New York to lobby Andrew Carnegie personally for the money to construct a new library building on the corner of Wick and Rayen Avenues.⁵¹ In early 1912 Butler led an amazingly successful, and ecumenical, six-day fund raising campaign for a modern St. Elizabeth's Hospital.⁵² In later years he personally paid to construct the Institute of American Art in Youngstown on Wick Avenue, and helped gain funding for a new post office in Niles.⁵³ Butler also served as the President of the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, and President of the Humane Society of the Mahoning Valley.⁵⁴ In all of these endeavors, "Uncle Joe" was putting into practice what many advocated with the City Beautiful movement.

In his keynote, "Town Beautiful" speech Butler, "advocated the erection of a suitable monument to his [President McKinley's] memory here in Niles" and "that he intended taking up the matter personally and heading the subscription list with a most substantial sum."⁵⁵ Butler,

⁵¹"Library History, 1870-1909," *Youngstown Library Vertical File--Library History*, Youngstown: Reuben McMillan Free Public Library, 7. See also *Pieces of the Past: Sketches of the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County*/ edited by Jeanne Dykins and Robert H. Donahugh, Youngstown: Reuben McMillan Free Public Library Association, 1980, 5.

⁵²Maribeth Burke Hernan, *A Circle of Caring: the Story of St. Elizabeth Hospital Medical Center*, Youngstown: St. Elizabeth Hospital Medical Center, 1986, 29-31. See also Joseph G. Butler's "Note to Hospital Staff, April 23, 1912," Youngstown: St. Elizabeth Hospital archives, and "Youngstown Workers Busy Winding Up Six Day Campaign," from *The Youngstown Telegram*, April 24, 1912, 1.

⁵³Jacob D. Waddell, "Letter to Joseph G. Butler, February 17, 1927," in *Scrapbook Collection*, vol. 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society.

⁵⁴"Butler Gives Two Busts to the Memorial," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, October 6, 1917, 1.

⁵⁵"The Board of Trade Entertains its Friends," *Niles Daily News*, February 5, 1910, 1.

however, had in mind more than a brass or iron tablet proposed earlier by the Board of Trade.⁵⁶ In addition to statues and tablets, Butler felt that by constructing a “modest structure” a social obligation could be met as well.⁵⁷ “In addition to providing for his descendants,” Butler observed, “every man of wealth owes something to the community in which he has lived, as well as to his country and society at large.”⁵⁸ Like his contemporary, Andrew Carnegie, who was giving away millions to build libraries, promote social organizations, and aid charities, Joseph Butler hoped to show his gratitude for a good life. By helping to build a monument to his hometown’s favorite son, William McKinley, Butler would be fulfilling an obligation to the community as well as to a friend.

Butler’s desire to commemorate the twenty-fifth president was a relatively innovative approach to memorializing the slain leader. There were only four presidential memorials constructed by 1910. These were George Washington’s monument in the nation’s capitol, Abraham Lincoln’s in Springfield, Illinois, James A. Garfield’s in Mentor, Ohio, and Ulysses S. Grant’s in New York City. Except for Washington’s, these were built near, or used as, the president’s tomb. In all of these memorials, the impetus to erect a monument came about from an anniversary or an event in the deceased leader’s life, and were undertaken by some voluntary association headed by a friend or associate of the late president. Private subscriptions and donations paid for all of these structures.

Not all of these monuments were well received by the public. The idea for a monument

⁵⁶Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 21.

⁵⁷Butler, *Recollections*, 99.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 97.

commemorating the first president originated with Pierre L'Enfant's plan for the new capitol. The design for the monument was not established until 1838 when Robert Mills' obelisk, to be surrounded by a Greek-like temple base, was accepted by the private monument society formed earlier in 1833.⁵⁹ Work on the project did not begin, however, until 1853. A donation of marble by Pope Pius IX in 1854 led to violent protests. Members of the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Know-Nothing party brought construction to a halt when they stormed the work site and threw the marble blocks into the Potomac river before ransacking the Society's office.⁶⁰ Nearly thirty years later, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Casey of the Army Corp of Engineers redesigned the uncompleted monument, discarding the temple base and incorporating an elevator as well as electrical lighting. Noted Gabor, "this unsung hero persuaded the commission to dispense with the sculptural ornamentation originally planned for the base and, more amazing, to let him build the thing."⁶¹ Its completion in 1884 capped a half-century long commemorative project that endured a civil war, civil unrest, and budgetary crises. It was not, however, a momentous beginning to the public commemoration of our presidents.

Even Lincoln's Springfield memorial tomb was one in which the motivations and desires for the commemoration of the assassinated president can be questioned, particularly of those who lived in the South. Barry Schwartz described how not all of those who attended Lincoln's funeral procession and rites actually mourned. This author noted "everywhere there was talk of a community doing its duty and doing itself honor through the mourning ritual. It is also true,

⁵⁹Gabor, 98.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 100.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

however, that this duty was often neglected; the feeling rules, violated.”⁶² The funeral procession, rites and the monument later constructed at his tomb served a commemorative purpose that sought to bind the nation together. Lincoln’s assassination was a direct assault upon the federal government and a national leader who had just successfully concluded a civil war in which the very survival of the nation was at stake. The funeral and monument served to demonstrate the new role and power of the victorious federal government. The desire for a Lincoln Memorial arose as much from the need to commemorate the office of the presidency following a bitter civil war as it did to mourn a fallen leader. Despite the loathing some felt in the nation for this particular president, the reunified nation and its democratic institutions were in dire need of public support. The author described how the commemoration of the executive office was as much compelled by some as it was desired by others. Schwartz noted “Lincoln could be universally mourned without being universally admired because the celebration of America’s moral unity and cohesion was the ultimate object of his funeral.”⁶³

The monuments to Civil War hero President Grant and assassinated President Garfield served as the late presidents’ tombs and pilgrimage sites that reaffirmed the principles of federal, democratic government. In her architectural history of presidential memorials, Kathryn Fanning considered these typical of other commemorative structures built in the nineteenth century in the United States, as well as other nations. She noted that during the latter half of this century, “nations sought definition through the celebration or creation of a history. They [architects] built pantheons

⁶²Barry Schwartz, “Mourning the Making of a Sacred Symbol: Durkheim and the Lincoln Assassination.” *Social Forces*, volume 70, number 2 (December 1991), 354.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 355.

to transform worldly heroes into mystical embodiments of prized cultural virtues.”⁶⁴ Presidential monuments built in the 19th century not only glorified the heroic aspects of the late chief executives, but reinforced concepts such as self-sacrifice, unity, and progress in the land of democracy. Butler sought with the monument in Niles, however, to have a structure that did more than serve as a place where one paid homage. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was to be one that served the community, as McKinley served the people. Besides being a place where the martyred president could be remembered, it would also be a site where visitors could learn more about themselves, and the community at large.

The post Civil War boom in monument construction coincided with the City Beautiful movement. This reform of America’s urban centers started in the 1880's and achieved national prominence at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893. Before the City Beautiful movement many held the growth of cities, with their overcrowded tenements, squalor, labor unrest, and noisy, dirty industries, as a threat to the well-being of democracy. City Beautiful architects and landscapers sought to reverse this thinking by improving urban living conditions with parks, tree-lined boulevards, aesthetically designed buildings, and attractive city skylines. William H. Wilson wrote that the City Beautiful proponents “leapt from accepting the city as commercially necessary but humanly destructive to acknowledging the city’s role as the carrier of culture.”⁶⁵ By 1910, however, changes in the City Beautiful movement led to followers’ stressing the practical aspects of city planning and tax-payer supported projects over aesthetic ones. While advocates “could embrace playgrounds, zoning and improved housing without betraying the

⁶⁴Fanning, 21.

⁶⁵William H. Wilson, 21.

movement,” wrote Wilson, “their eclecticism did not deflect the bureaucratic thrust toward utilitarianism.”⁶⁶ Commemorative structures built during this time of civic improvement were influenced by the need to serve the public, as well as memorializing a leader or event.

Concurrent with the City Beautiful movement there was an American Renaissance in public monuments. Fanning wrote how architects of this school of thought sought to use the architecture of public buildings and monuments to portray America’s democratic heritage as having evolved from the days of the Roman republic or ancient Greece.⁶⁷ Further, adherents believed that memorials should address some civic need or purpose. They believed that “a utilitarian structure, a ‘living memorial’ fulfilled some specific social need, such as auditorium, gymnasium, or library. It was believed such structures would encourage altruism and community spirit, helping to build a new society free of ancient enmities.”⁶⁸ By placing the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial within the scope of the Niles Town Beautiful movement, Butler extended the proposed monument’s purpose to one far beyond that of just commemorating a deceased president. This memorial would be one that would address the community’s needs, as well as ensuring the president’s status in the public’s memory for years to come.

Another reform movement that attracted Butler’s attention during this time was the one involving public libraries. Between 1890 and 1920 millionaire Andrew Carnegie donated over \$41 million dollars to construct 1,679 public libraries in over 1,400 cities across the United

⁶⁶William H. Wilson, 289.

⁶⁷Fanning, 38.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 12.

States.⁶⁹ This largesse was unprecedented and would usher in fundamental changes to public education and literacy. Carnegie sincerely believed the adage “the man who dies thus rich dies disgraced” and sought to use his fortune to bring about wide-spread social improvement.⁷⁰ Carnegie was not content to merely pass along his wealth to the next generation, or entrust it to others who lacked his vision of a harmonious democratic society. This era of tremendous economic progress was a unique opportunity for men of wealth, and to squander or miss the opportunities then present would be a mistake with far-reaching implications for capitalism and democracy. He stressed, “it is well to remember that it requires the exercise of not less ability than that which acquires it, to use wealth so as to be really beneficial to the community.”⁷¹ With his library gift-giving, Carnegie challenged other men of wealth to use their fortunes as change-agents for the communities in which they lived.

Carnegie’s secretary, James Bertram, managed the library donation program. He standardized the process under which communities applied for a library donation, modeling the application process after policies and procedures used within the Carnegie Steel Corporation. Bertram required individual cities and towns that applied for a donation to submit a detailed report on the community to be served, document the population’s willingness to provide land, as well as tax itself in order to develop the collection, provide staff, and ensure long-term maintenance of the gifted building. Bertram even published a pamphlet on recommended

⁶⁹Van Slyck, 22.

⁷⁰Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1933, 17.

⁷¹Carnegie, 9.

library designs, entitled *Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings* that was approved by the American Library Association.⁷² The planned usage and patronage of the granted libraries were affected by the Carnegie grants. Public service was of great concern to Carnegie and Bertram, and any library that was to be built with the donated monies needed to reflect this sentiment. Fanning wrote that “Carnegie libraries, for instance, were more likely to include children’s rooms, reference rooms and lecture halls, [they] were more likely to provide free access to the books than their non-Carnegie contemporaries.”⁷³ Due to the large number of Carnegie libraries built across the country, public libraries in the United States became more open and accessible to a diverse population.

A result of this tremendous surge in library building was an increase in the educational and social opportunities for the children and working-class people who lived in the communities in which the libraries were built. Previously most libraries forbade the entry of persons under the age of 16, or those who had not paid a subscription fee, for fear of loss or damage to the collection. The widespread restricted use of public libraries changed radically with the construction of so many institutions that stipulated children’s reading rooms, open collections, and taxpayer funding before the cornerstone could even be laid. Van Slyck noted “no matter what their class or cultural background, the young generation of library patrons who came of age in the era of Carnegie were unusually well-placed to understand the complex meaning of the simple phrase ‘free to all’.”⁷⁴ Before, most public libraries were institutions that served an

⁷²Van Slyck, 34-35.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 215.

exclusive minority of upper-class males and valued the preservation of the collection over that of the public's need for information. Public service, an eclectic collection that reflected the community's needs and interests, monitored by publicly appointed or elected trustees, and more often than not supervised by professional and educated women were all hallmarks of public librarianship fostered by the Carnegie grants.⁷⁵ These endowments changed the role of the public library from being a meeting and discussion place for the community's elite, to that of providing efficient and easy access to information for patrons of all ages and backgrounds.⁷⁶

The reforms of the City Beautiful movement, American Renaissance, and Carnegie libraries would find expression in the memorial envisioned by Joseph G. Butler. It would take nearly seven years of work, however, to make that vision a reality.

⁷⁵Van Slyck, 200.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 220.

CHAPTER 4: FINANCING AND BUILDING THE MEMORIAL IN NILES

The financing and construction of a public monument are important steps in the commemorative process. Andrew Carnegie, noting that outright gifts of buildings, statues, or money to a community were not always well-received or appreciated, wrote “the cases are not few in which the real object sought by the testator is not attained, nor are they few in which his real wishes are thwarted.”¹ In order for the Niles monument to be truly successful, Butler sought to mobilize supporters from a number of sources using a variety of approaches. The campaign to construct the birthplace memorial would rival those of McKinley’s presidential campaigns. Butler’s efforts to memorialize his friend attracted rich and working class followers; Democrats as well as Republicans, from all across the country. In speeches, fund-raisers, personal appeals to business and political leaders, as well as with ceremonies marking the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial’s construction and dedication, Butler tapped a wellspring of popular sentiment for the martyred president.

Joseph Butler hoped to build a “modest structure” that would cost approximately one-hundred thousand dollars.² Shortly after his Town Beautiful speech, he traveled to Washington, D.C., and spoke with President William Howard Taft to determine the feasibility and advisability of obtaining Congressional authorization for the project. He was advised by the President that such a charter could be obtained provided “that I do not ask the government for

¹Carnegie, 9.

²Butler, *Recollections*, 99.

any contribution.”³ This was satisfactory as Butler felt that “I had friends enough in addition to my own subscription to carry through the project.”⁴

A new memorial was needed, according to Butler, not only due to the shortcomings of the Canton mausoleum in preserving the memory and deeds of William McKinley, but also because of the deteriorating conditions of the houses in which McKinley once lived. Ida willed the Canton home upon her death in 1907 to the Canton hospital. The house, site of the last porch-front campaign in Presidential history, served as a nursing ward. The house in Niles, that had been remodeled and moved twice, noted Butler, was by 1911 “fallen into decay and has been removed.”⁵ The home in Poland, Ohio, was in private hands as well, and difficult to restore.

At the same time Butler met with President Taft about a Niles memorial for McKinley, Congress was considering a memorial to Lincoln that would be built in Washington D.C. Unlike the Washington Monument, which was started by a private association, paid for by donations, and only taken over by the Army of Corps of Engineers after decades of neglect and controversy, Lincoln’s monument would be the first Presidential memorial considered by Congress from literally the very start. Butler believed that by having Congress authorize, but not pay for a second McKinley memorial, it would be easier to accomplish the project successfully.

³Joseph G. Butler, “Letter to Governor, Frank B. Willis, March 10, 1924.” Contained in Joseph G. Butler’s *Scrapbook Collection: McKinley Memorial*, vol. 70.51.32 (Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society), unnumbered.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Joseph G. Butler, *Proposal to Build a Monument and Memorial to William McKinley at Niles, Ohio the Place of His Birth* (Cleveland: Penton Press, 1911), 10.

Congressional authorization would also ease fund-raising concerns by allaying any suspicions that money given over to the project would not be spent on the memorial. He anticipated that a memorial in Niles would provide an ideal location where, over time and with proper guidance, artifacts could be most easily identified and acquired. He wrote “it is expected to have here in time the most notable collection of relics of McKinley to be found anywhere in the country, this being the most suitable place for the presentation and display of such relics.”⁶ For Butler, the connection between the location of the memorial with those who grew up in the same area with McKinley was crucial. Butler reasoned that having it built outside of Washington, specifically in Niles, would be of greater benefit in preserving McKinley’s status in history. The Niles location would make it easier for those who actually grew up and knew the Major to participate in the commemoration and preservation of his history. Also, Butler felt that those who knew the president best would be greatly interested in perpetuating in the long term memory of William McKinley. Butler stressed that the Niles location would be a powerful asset in the preservation and presentation of an elite history for McKinley’s life and times. He noted “for not only Niles, but also the country for a score of miles around, affords many extremely interesting historical data, mementoes, etc. pertaining to the young man McKinley, the soldier, the Congressman, and finally the President.”⁷ By having the memorial located in Niles, Butler felt it well-placed to develop and preserve over time an elite history of the town’s favorite son.

On February 9, 1911, President Taft signed into law the authorization to construct

⁶Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 15.

⁷Butler, *Proposal to Build a Monument*, 13.

President Abraham Lincoln's Memorial in Washington, D.C.⁸ On March 4, 1911, Congress unanimously authorized a second, the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. President Taft, Vice-President John G. Sherman, and Senator Joseph G. Cannon, all personal friends of Joseph Butler signed the Act.⁹ The passage of this bill had a dramatic effect on bringing about material and monetary contributions. The City of Niles immediately donated the land in the center of town where the little white school house once stood as the site for the new building.¹⁰ Judge Elbert H. Gary of the U.S. Steel Corporation pledged to identify one hundred individuals who would contribute one thousand dollars each to the birthplace memorial.¹¹ Fulfilling the pledge he made in his "Town Beautiful" speech back in February of the previous year, Butler donated five thousand dollars on May seventh to add to an already-growing subscription fund.¹² On that day as well executive officers for the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Association were chosen. Joseph G. Butler was made President, John G. Milburn Vice-President, J.G. Schmidlapp Treasurer, and William A. Thomas as Secretary. Milburn was the president of the 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition where McKinley was shot, and it was in Milburn's house that McKinley died.¹³ Jacob G. Schmidlapp was Chairman of the Board of the Union

⁸61st Congress, *Congressional Record* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 2472.

⁹Butler, *Proposal to Build a Monument*, 14.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹Butler, *Recollections*, 23.

¹²Joseph G. Butler, *Canceled check to the National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association and letter of receipt*, May 17, 1911 (Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial collection).

¹³Leech, 598-601.

Savings Bank and Trust of Cincinnati and a supporter in all of McKinley's gubernatorial and presidential campaigns.¹⁴ Thomas was a steel entrepreneur from Niles, who became President of the Brier Hill Steel Company.¹⁵ The formation of an executive committee of Butler, Thomas, and Myron T. Herrick, former governor of Ohio and McKinley's banker and confidant, saw to the fund-raising details.¹⁶ These individuals would be most-concerned with coordinating and mobilizing support from a variety of sources for the birthplace memorial.

Upon the announcement of building a birthplace memorial in Niles, letters of support came in along with donations. Former president William Howard Taft, who signed the authorization to build the presidential memorial into law, wrote Butler that McKinley, "was a man who rose to the exigency, and whose capacity and greatness impressed themselves upon everyone."¹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt elevated his predecessor to the highest standing, stating McKinley, "shall stand in the eyes of history not merely as the first man of his generation, but as among the greatest figures in our national life, coming second only to the men of the two great crisis in which the Union was formed and preserved."¹⁸ President of Jones and Loughlin Steel Corporation, Willis L. King was also effusive in his praise of Niles' favorite son, writing , "McKinley was a plain man of the people, doing his duty as he saw it faithfully. He was always

¹⁴*Williams Cincinnati Directory*, Cincinnati, Ohio: Williams Directory Company, 1908, 1631.

¹⁵Butler, *Recollections*, 236.

¹⁶Butler, *Proposal to Build a Monument*, p. 11. For more on Herrick see Leech, 59, 68, 70, 76, and 89.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 27.

animated by a desire to better the condition of his countrymen.”¹⁹ These communications, and many other letters and telegrams, testified to the esteem and regard many felt for President McKinley, over ten years after his assassination.

In May, 1912, James Boyle, former private secretary to William McKinley when he was Governor and first-term President, traveled to Youngstown to meet with Butler. Boyle was anxious to help the Memorial Association. He proposed that the memorial display busts of others who figured prominently in McKinley’s life. Boyle wrote “To my mind the memorial should be an opportunity to commemorate not only McKinley but also his contemporaries in the Mahoning Valley.”²⁰ A little over a week later the McKinley National Birthplace Association chose Boyle to take charge of the subscription effort.²¹ All of these individuals Boyle had in mind would agree with Butler’s goal of promoting and preserving the elite history of McKinley’s life and times. Their large donations would to a large measure ensure the success of Butler’s vision. The commissioning of busts of these individuals would also assure a very public and prominent means by which a visitor’s understanding could be formed concerning the effects of McKinley’s policies on the development of the region’s and nation’s economy.

Butler took steps early-on to raise small-scale donations, however. On behalf of the Association he wrote a *Proposal to Build a Monument and Memorial to William McKinley at Niles, Ohio the Place of His Birth*. He arranged to have his publisher John A. Penton of

¹⁹Butler, *Proposal to Build a Monument*, 21.

²⁰“Extend Scope of Niles Memorial,” *Scrapbook Collection*, May 28, 1912 (Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial archives), unnumbered.

²¹“McKinley Memorial Officers take active steps,” *Scrapbook Collection*, June 13, 1912 (Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial archives), unnumbered.

Cleveland, Ohio, publish the booklet. These he then sold for five dollars, the proceeds of which went to the Association's fund.²² Numerous speeches were given by Butler in a variety of locales to spread the news of the planned memorial and collect donations. In January of 1913 the Ohio Society invited Butler to speak at the McKinley Banquet in Columbus about the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. Before the speech he spoke for a half-hour with President Woodrow Wilson about the project, who thereupon promised to speak at the memorial's dedication. Butler also spoke with members of the Hanna family who, Butler would write to his daughter, Grace, later that evening "...are very much interested in the memorial and will make a substantial contribution."²³

Also in 1913 Butler and John Wesley Hill, President of the International Peace Forum, began a series of trips to raise money for the memorial. The first was to Cleveland, at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church where the pair spoke about the proposed new building. Following the speeches, Dan Hanna, son of the late Marcus Alonzo Hanna, presented them with a twenty-five hundred dollar donation.²⁴ The next trip was to Detroit, home of the assassin, Leon Czolgasz. The two spoke to a capacity crowd on March 31st at the Detroit Armory.²⁵ The final trip was to Chicago in July. There they were joined at the Hamilton Club by local dignitary and

²²"Book of Value to McKinley Lovers," *Niles Daily News*, June 27, 1912, 1.

²³Joseph G. Butler, *Letter to Grace Butler-McGraw*, January 29, 1913. Contained in *Scrapbook collection: McKinley Memorial*, vol. 70.51.32 (Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society), unnumbered.

²⁴"Big Meetings," *Scrapbook Collection*, February 17, 1913, (Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial archives), unnumbered.

²⁵"Fine meeting in Detroit," *Youngstown Vindicator*, April 1, 1913, 7.

Ambassador to Brazil under McKinley, Charles Page Bryan. By this point, Butler told his audience, only fifty-thousand dollars remained to be pledged in order to begin construction.²⁶

After a year of fund-raising it became apparent to Butler that it was possible to build more than the modest structure originally envisioned. Butler mentioned building a library in his “Town Beautiful” speech.²⁷ Having a memorial with a public library dovetailed nicely with Butler’s vision of a monument used by the public for many years. The local library, founded in 1908 as a subscription-type library (one that charged patrons a fee to borrow books or even to gain admission to the building), was at the time located in a former storefront owned by Ward H. Thomas. In 1914 the library trustees noted that they were in financial troubles and that an “...earnest effort should be made to obtain a larger city appropriation for the library.”²⁸ The library’s budget in June of 1915 totaled \$731.29 of which \$500.00 was earmarked for books.²⁹ Sunday hours proved to be beyond the staff’s capabilities, and the addition of a fiction collection in 1913 was “deemed inadvisable.”³⁰ A merger with neighboring Mineral Ridge was explored over the years, but that community was unable or unwilling in the end to support a library financially.³¹ The incorporation of the Niles library into the memorial, along with an auditorium

²⁶“Wm. McKinley’s memory honored in many tributes,” *Scrapbook Collection*, July 17, 1913 (Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial archives), unnumbered.

²⁷“The Board of Trade Entertains its Friends,” *Niles Daily News*, February 5, 1910, 1.

²⁸Niles Library Trustees, *Board Meeting Minutes, April 8, 1908 to August 4, 1941*, Niles: McKinley Memorial Library, 65.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 76.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 54.

³¹*Ibid.*, 61.

to house the busts and McKinley relics, would raise the memorial's anticipated cost of construction to two-hundred thousand dollars.

On September 30, 1915, Butler traveled to Pittsburgh to see Henry Clay Frick at his home, the Clayton in Pittsburgh. He planned on asking Frick for a donation to the memorial and advice on how best to approach Andrew Carnegie about funding the public library addition. Frick asked him how much the library would cost and Butler replied that fifty-thousand dollars would be needed. Much to his astonishment, Henry Clay Frick then went to his study and returned with a personal check for the entire amount. The only stipulation that he attached to the donation was that his name not be used in the library's name.³² By early 1915, Frick and other contributors pledged to Butler donations that totaled nearly two-hundred thousand dollars. In addition to those who gave one-thousand dollars or more, much of the money came from smaller donations, many of only one dollar.³³

The growing size of the memorial, however, added another facet to Butler's fund-raising concerns. On November 4, 1914, he donated another five thousand dollars to raise "...a substantial endowment fund so that the building and property will be taken care of for all time to come."³⁴ On February 23, 1916, Congress authorized the minting of special McKinley silver

³²Butler, *Recollections*, 302. This check is part of the permanent display of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. It bears the likeness of Henry Clay Frick's young daughter who died in infancy. These checks were only used by Frick for charitable contributions. Butler, in gratitude, did commission a bust of Henry Clay Frick and had it placed in the center of the library's main lobby. It has resided there to the present day.

³³Butler, *Life of William McKinley and History of National McKinley Birthplace Memorial*, 22.

³⁴McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Association, *Ground breaking Souvenir*, (November, 1915), unnumbered.

dollars.³⁵ The legislation was proposed earlier by Ohio congressman William A. Ashbrook the previous December.³⁶ The coins were given to the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Association to be sold for fund-raising purposes. A first set of 9,977 coins were minted in 1916 and purchased outright by Butler. These he had plated with gold and then sold for three dollars each, the proceeds of which went to the Association.³⁷ Another set of ten thousand silver dollars were minted in 1917 and sold directly by the Association for two dollars. After the second minting the dies were destroyed as per the Act. Butler hoped to raise one-hundred thousand dollars for the endowment fund by this and other fund-raising methods by the time of the memorial's dedication, but additional plans were also being considered.³⁸

The speaking tours, as well as the sales of books and specially minted coins, were popularly received and established the public's participation in the construction of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. Far from being just the product of several very rich individuals commemorating a president whose policies helped build their personal fortunes, the lower-cost subscription efforts, sales of mementos, and well-attended speeches pointed out the large degree of popular support for a president who was fondly remembered, and who presided over an era when many experienced increased prosperity. A popular leader in life, individuals from all over

³⁵McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Association, *Groundbreaking Souvenir*, unnumbered.

³⁶"McKinley Silver Dollars Announced," *Niles Daily News*, December 16, 1915, 1

³⁷"McKinley Dollars on Sale," *Youngstown Vindicator*, August 5, 1916, p. 1. See also Butler's "Letter to Subscribers, Souvenir Gold Dollars, August 22, 1916," contained in *Scrapbook Collection*, volume 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society.

³⁸Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 20.

the country became financially involved and personally interested in perpetuating the history of William McKinley, nearly a decade and half after his death.

Saturday, November 20, 1915, was an exciting day in Niles, Ohio. The groundbreaking and cornerstone-laying ceremonies for the National McKinley Birthplace Memorial were taking place. A parade, led by Colonel Leonard L. Holloway, the senior Niles Civil War veteran, was followed by speeches by Joseph G. Butler, Governor Frank B. Willis, and former Governor and ex-Ambassador to France, Myron T. Herrick. Acting Grand Master of the Masons, B.F. Perry laid the cornerstone for the memorial while the marine band played McKinley's favorite hymn "Lead Kindly Light."³⁹ The architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White furnished the design of the planned marble building. Butler stated in his speech that day that the firm, "...secured the contract by what is known as invisible competition; in other words, plans were submitted by six noted architectural firms and it was not known until after the plans were selected who the author was."⁴⁰ The on-sight manager for the memorial's board of trustees was Edward R. Edwards.⁴¹ McKim, Mead and White had already designed the New York Public Library (1897), the Boston Public Library (1895), remodeled the White House adding the West Wing (1909), and in a few years would fashion Butler's Institute of American Art (1920). The completion date was anticipated to be Labor day of the next year. Butler noted in his speech that the nation was undertaking the construction of two presidential memorials, one to Lincoln in Washington, D.C.,

³⁹McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, *Record Book, volume 2: September 21, 1915, to September 26, 1957*, Niles: McKinley Memorial Library, 21

⁴⁰"Memorial to be Completed Sept. 1st," *Niles Daily News*, November 20, 1915, 3.

⁴¹McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 11

as well as the one to McKinley in Niles. To his audience he said that this was fitting since "...in pureness and loftiness, in patience, in serenity of disposition, in un-demagogic democracy, in absence of malice, and in a broad sympathy with human kind, there are no two characters in American history more akin than Abraham Lincoln and William McKinley."⁴² By this point, over fourteen years after McKinley's death, the two assassinated presidents were linked in the public's mind with these two memorials. One president had saved the union in a vicious Civil War, the other had served honorably, even heroically in that war, and most felt McKinley's economic policies elevated the nation to prosperity and world power. Not just for Butler, but for many Americans, these chief executives were indeed martyrs to democracy and worthy of Congressionally authorized monuments. The structure to be built in Niles, now officially started with the groundbreaking, would rival any yet built in the United States.

The architects fashioned the planned building in the Greek Revival style, in white Georgia marble, to measure two-hundred and thirty-two feet in length, one-hundred and thirty-six in width, and thirty-eight feet in height. An open-air central court of honor, dominated by a thirteen foot tall statue of the president, featured bronze busts of prominent politicians and administration members in niches around the perimeter. An auditorium located in the northern wing could accommodate up to one-thousand occupants, while the southern wing included the Niles library and a museum located on the lower and upper floors respectively.⁴³

The statue and busts for the memorial were to be done by J. Massey Rhind, who Butler

⁴²"Memorial to be Completed Sept. 1st," *Niles Daily News*, November 20, 1915, 3.

⁴³Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 11-13.

commissioned personally.⁴⁴ When Massey completed the statue of McKinley he informed Butler that he, “unhesitatingly declares it to be the best work of his life.”⁴⁵ (See appendix, figure 5) Rhind also completed an additional thirty-seven bronze busts. Subjects for the busts included presidents and McKinley administration officials such as Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, other McKinley administration members, such as Secretary of the Interior Cornelius Bliss, Judge William Rufus Day, Ambassador to England John Hay, McKinley’s second Secretary of the Interior Joseph McKenna, his second Secretary of War Elihu Root, Attorney General Philander Chase Knox, financier Andrew W. Mellon, and Ohio Senator Marcus Alonzo Hanna. Also to be featured in the pantheon of busts were local civic and business leaders such as Benjamin Franklin Jones, founder of the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, and James Ward, pioneer iron manufacturer of Niles, amongst others.⁴⁶ All of these individuals played a prominent role in the development of the steel industry, both in the Mahoning Valley and nationwide. All of the business leaders benefitted immensely from the protectionist policies of William McKinley. Their commemoration at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial lent credence to the statesmanlike leadership of the president that Butler sought to promote. These busts also demonstrated, in solid bronze, the support and influence the former Niles resident earned from political and economic leaders from all across the United States.

The John H. Parker company, selected as the construction firm, was noted in the day’s

⁴⁴Butler, *Recollections*, 274.

⁴⁵National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association, *National McKinley Birthplace Memorial* (Cleveland: Penton Press, 1918), 9.

⁴⁶Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 17-18.

news coverage as, “one of the largest contractors and builders in the United States. They have erected many of the largest public buildings in the country and have ever maintained a most enviable record.”⁴⁷ Work in preparation of the groundbreaking was already well along, local officials earlier saw to clearing the sight of shrubbery and existing structures. A small building which at one time served as the city jail was moved two blocks south, and the Grand Army of the Republic monument was relocated on the sight a few feet to the southwest corner of the lot. Additionally, a temporary rail spur from the main line was laid to aid in the transport and off-loading of the blocks of marble.⁴⁸

Construction proceeded energetically but delays did occur due to the weather, as well as quarrying and shipping the marble blocks from Georgia. Tourists and the curious also had a slowing effect on the construction. Sightseers wandered occasionally onto the construction sight, endangering themselves as well as construction workers. In one article, newspaper reporters described how souvenir hunters were carving off so many pieces of wood from the memorial’s trees that they were in danger of dying.⁴⁹ Despite the delays, local enthusiasm did not waver. Area workmen from the Niles Firebrick Company volunteered to lay all of the brick in the structure. The only payment they sought was to parade in the dedication ceremony and having their group picture taken.⁵⁰ The greatest engineering difficulty involved erecting the

⁴⁷“Memorial to be Completed Sept. 1st,” *Niles Daily News*, November 20, 1915, 5.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹“Memorial Trees Being Injured by Visitors,” *Niles Daily News*, July 24, 1917, 1.

⁵⁰*National Brotherhood of Potters, local 57* [photograph], (Niles: B.R. McIntyre, 1917), McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Collection.

twenty-eight solid marble columns in the center of the building. Each was quarried from a single block of marble, was over thirty feet in height, and weighed several tons. The delicate task of transporting, off-loading, erecting, and securing all of the columns took several weeks to accomplish. Special derricks, two steam-powered cranes and gangs of workmen were involved in the process. On October 3, 1916, the last of the columns was set in place (see appendix, figure 3).⁵¹ The volunteers and sightseers, as well as the extensive news coverage of each step of the memorial's construction evidenced the high degree of popular support the McKinley monument enjoyed.

At the beginning of 1917 memorial trustees worked out the final details of the new building. After numerous discussions, they finally established seating and lighting arrangements for the auditorium in January.⁵² The trustees hired Martha Owsley to design the landscaping in February, and accepted her renderings in March. By this point, however, the unpaid construction costs totaled \$117,000.00 with only \$45,593.00 collected. With only a hundred days before these bills came due, Butler pledged, "he would personally assume the payments of the amount, as he felt personally responsible. It was through his initiative that the work was undertaken."⁵³ Butler's associates also attended to some questions regarding the long-term upkeep of the building. In May they hired a collection agency to see to the unpaid subscriptions and pledges. At the same time the trustees began negotiations with the city to waive the

⁵¹Niles Bicentennial History Committee, *A Pictorial History of Niles, Ohio: Bicentennial Edition* (Niles: Niles Historical Society, 1976), 239-40.

⁵²McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 79

⁵³*Ibid.*, 101-102

payment of utilities for the building. The mayor informed the board that he felt these should be free since it was “for public use.”⁵⁴ Finally, Joseph Butler, a frequent visitor to the site, toured the nearly-completed building on August 6, 1917. With several friends and some reporters present, he turned on the building’s lights for the first time.⁵⁵

October 5, 1917, was the day of dedication for the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. Special trains brought people to Niles for days and all of the hotels were booked. Despite heavy, overcast skies thousands turned out for the ceremonies. A parade, again led by Colonel Holloway, marked the beginning of the festivities. Former President William Howard Taft was the keynote speaker. His speech highlighted President McKinley’s leadership qualities, his Civil War record, and his modest and unostentatious lifestyle.⁵⁶ In the speech, President Taft cited his personal friendship with the martyred leader. He noted that “what he did for America by his vision concerning our country’s needs and his steadfast efforts on behalf of protection to our then struggling industries may never be fully known; but it is safe to say that much of our present greatness and the proud position we occupy in the present crisis of the world’s history would have been impossible if he had never lived.”⁵⁷ For those attending the dedication ceremonies, the relevancy and importance of the McKinley presidency were immediate and long-lasting to the entire nation.

Joseph Butler spoke immediately after the parade, and was the first to address the crowd.

⁵⁴McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 125.

⁵⁵“Custodian Chosen for Memorial,” *Niles Daily News*, August 7, 1917, 1.

⁵⁶National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association, *National*, 62-82.

⁵⁷Butler, *Recollections*, 95.

He explained at first that, due to the demands and pressures of office stemming from the world war, President Wilson, Ohio Governor James M. Cox, and Senators Atlee Pomerene and Warren G. Harding were unable to attend. Butler began by reading aloud their telegrams of regret and congratulations. Butler then noted that the memorial was the result of seven years of effort, but, more than that, it represented "...the discharging of a high duty on the part of the American people and performance of an obligation on the part of the Mahoning Valley. And it means that we have given testimony of our love and veneration for one of America's greatest men, whose character and example deserve to be kept in perpetual memory."⁵⁸ A news reporter noted that in Butler's speech "...while there was a note of triumph in his voice, there was also intermingled a tone of sadness."⁵⁹

The climax of the day's festivities was reached when Helen McKinley, President McKinley's sister, pulled a cord that unveiled the statue of her brother. Following the unveiling, Joseph Butler and President Taft cut the ribbon that stretched across the front of the court of honor, opening the building to the public. The ceremonies were not quite finished for the day, however. When Butler led the first group into the auditorium, he discovered another veiled bust in the center of the stage. When unveiled, it was shown to be a bust of Joseph G. Butler. A news reporter noted that Butler "...struggled to remain composed," and that he "would respond with appropriate remarks of gratitude at a later time."⁶⁰ (See appendix, figure 1) Butler

⁵⁸National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association, *National*, 59-60.

⁵⁹"Martyred President's Sister Unveils Memorial to Him," *Newcastle News*, October 6, 1917, 1.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*. This bust may have been commissioned by Joseph G. Mather, a close friend for thirty years of Butler, and who paid for many of the busts done by Rhind. Butler, *Recollections*,

sought to commemorate his friend, William McKinley, as well as those who worked closely with him as congressman, governor and president. The bust of Butler put into tangible form the importance that others felt of the friendship between “Uncle Joe” and William McKinley. The man who was McKinley was in some measure the product of this friendship. It was only fitting for those dedicating the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial that this friendship be memorialized as well. The busy day’s ceremonies concluded with an evening concert of Professor Lynn B. Dana’s original composition, “A Character Symphony: Based on the Life of McKinley.”⁶¹

After years of grief, political persuasion, fund-raising, and construction, Joseph Butler saw the completion of the memorial. The Lincoln Memorial’s construction was not yet started and would not be completed for another five years. Disputes over that building’s location, objections of some Southern state politicians who did not want to see any of their state’s resources and monies being used for that Republican’s monument, as well as delays due to the war effort stalled the sixteenth President’s memorial. That Butler accomplished what he did at the same time is remarkable. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial cost \$278,840.00, almost three times what was originally estimated.⁶² In addition to paying off the entire sum upon completion, the endowment fund that Butler started obtained over \$200,000.00 by 1920. Popular subscription, largesse by corporate and political leaders, unanimous Congressional

325-26.

⁶¹National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association, *Dedication Program*, October 5, 1917. McKinley National Birthplace Memorial collection.

⁶²Roth, 90.

authorization, the minting of special silver dollars, and donations of land, books, and artifacts from many people of diverse backgrounds and means were all important and necessary components in the seven year effort alluded to in Butler's opening remarks. These also point out the popularity and esteem many felt for President McKinley. That such a variety of contributors were reached is a testament not only to the sentiments expressed for William McKinley at that time, but also to Joseph Butler's organizational abilities. It was Butler who was able to articulate, coordinate, and recruit so many to his vision of a McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. Once again the area from whence the twenty-fifth president came was the center of national attention. The history of McKinley's life and times, and those who played a role in it, was one that many both locally and nationally felt secure in commemorating and preserving in Niles, Ohio.

CHAPTER 5: THE MCKINLEY NATIONAL BIRTHPLACE MEMORIAL

Presidential memorials, as with other public monuments, are vital elements in the formation and preservation of public memory. Not only do these buildings serve as places where one can learn about a president's life and times, these structures are also sites where the community often celebrates and/or reflects upon contemporary events. What occurs at these memorials can be as important as the artifacts, statuary, and plaques located within. How a community utilizes a memorial can tell an insightful visitor much about the community's history and inhabitants, as well as those who were commemorated when the monument was first conceived and dedicated.

The construction of a presidential memorial in Niles to the twenty-fifth president proved fortuitous for the preservation of artifacts relating to the history of William McKinley. The passage of time has not been kind to the houses in which William McKinley once lived. When the Canton hospital expanded in 1928 to build a new wing, his Canton home was torn down. Part of the house was moved to another site, with the intention to rebuild it at a later date. Unfortunately, the Depression made reconstruction at that time financially impracticable. In 1952 it was discovered that exposure to the elements, vandals, and thieves had rendered the reconstruction of the home impossible. Some wood from the porch railings was salvaged to make gavels for the Republican convention that would nominate another war hero to the Presidency, Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹

¹Edward Thorton Heald, *The William McKinley Story*, (Canton, Ohio: Stark County Historical Society, 1964), 124-25.

The Niles birthplace home fared even worse over the years. Restored by its owner after the dedication of the Memorial, Miss Lulu Mackey, the building became involved in litigation with Joseph Butler. He learned that false and misleading stories about William McKinley were being told to visitors by staff members, who were also charging patrons admission.² The dispute lasted years, with tourists writing complaining letters to Butler. With growing frustration and anger, Butler denounced the owners and property, writing that “the so-called McKinley Birthplace at McKinley Heights has grown into what it might be termed a public nuisance.”³ As the letters and complaints continued to arrive, Butler wrote to his attorney, William M. Zimmerman, advising, “the place should either be abolished, or if kept up, should be kept up in its truthful sense.”⁴ In 1931 the McKinley Memorial head librarian, Ida Sloan, asked the museum board to again try to purchase the birthplace home. The bad feelings engendered between the owner and the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial trustees led to abandonment of this effort.⁵ In April 1937 the homestead house, and most of its contents burned to the

²Joseph G. Butler, “Address at the Dedication of the National McKinley Birthplace Memorial Association, October 5, 1917,” p. 2, in *Scrapbook Collection*, vol. 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society, unnumbered.

³Joseph G. Butler, “Letter to Jacob D. Waddell, September 7, 1920,” in *Scrapbook Collection*, vol. 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society, unnumbered.

⁴Joseph G. Butler, “Letter to William M. Zimmerman, February 9, 1921,”. For more evidence of this long and bitter feud between Butler and the Mackey family see “Letter from Earl F. Hetzler to Joseph G. Butler, February 25, 1921,” Butler’s “Letter to Samuel G. McClure, Vindicator Editor, February 25, 1921,” B.H. Darrow’s “Letter to Mr. Butler, November 9, 1921,” and William W. Zimmerman’s “Letter to the National Birthplace Memorial Association, February 22, 1921,” all in *Scrapbook Collection*, vol. 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society, unnumbered.

⁵McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 224.

ground.⁶ The last home of McKinley stood in Poland until 1985. Abandoned for several years, it was torn down to make room for a fire station parking lot. These misfortunes, however, have increased the role envisioned by Butler of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial in preserving and promoting the times and events of William McKinley.

The construction of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial led to some dramatic changes for the citizens of Niles. The public library benefitted the most. It changed its name in April of 1918 to the McKinley Memorial Library to become a school-district, free public library, ending its days of charging patrons subscription fees.⁷ Similar to the changes described by Van Slyck, the library expanded its services to the residents of Niles. The collection grew to include not only fictional titles, but those for children as well (see appendix, figure 8). The Ohio Library Association held its northern Ohio chapter meeting in the auditorium and toured the new facility in May. This was the first time the group visited Niles.⁸ In November 1919, Henry Clay Frick donated one thousand new books to the collection, which nearly matched the number of new titles that the library was able to purchase since its founding in 1908.⁹ Already the drastically increased traffic, usage, and circulation in the library led to similar increases in the library's staffing and hours.¹⁰ For an institution that

⁶*Pictorial History of Niles*, 237-38.

⁷Niles Library Trustees, 95.

⁸*Ibid.*, 96.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 106. See also "H.C. Frick Helps Memorial Library," from an untitled and undated newspaper, contained in *Scrapbook Collection*, volume 70.51.32, Youngstown: Mahoning Valley Historical Society, unnumbered.

¹⁰Niles Library Trustees, 101-102.

earlier spent entire trustees' meetings discussing the merits of having rubber-tipped chairs versus carpeting to protect the floor, or whether to install a telephone, these were dramatic improvements indeed.¹¹

Shortly after the dedication of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial the American Automotive Association erected signs around the city directing motorists to the new memorial. By 1920 the tourist trade sale of books, postcards, commemorative coins, as well as the payment of delinquent pledges, not only paid off Butler's personal debt for the memorial's construction, but also accumulated an additional \$200,000 that was used to establish an endowment fund for the long-term maintenance of the building.¹² In 1922, Congress authorized a five-member museum board, with Butler as its first president, to permanently oversee the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. The law stated that "vacancies caused by death, resignation, or otherwise, shall be filled by the remaining trustees."¹³ At the July 1925 meeting Butler informed the memorial trustees that upon his death another \$100,000 would be donated from his estate to the memorial's endowment fund.¹⁴ When Butler died in 1927, the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was a busy landmark in Niles that attracted visitors from far and near.¹⁵ Financially secure with its endowment, equipped with a fine public library and auditorium, the Niles monument was well used and well received by the public it served.

¹¹Niles Library Trustees, 43, 47.

¹²McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 173.

¹³68th Congress, *Congressional Record*, Number 111, S.2821.

¹⁴McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 215-216.

¹⁵"Butler Dies on Eve of Birthday," *Youngstown Vindicator*, December 20, 1927, 1-4.

How has Butler's vision of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial held up over the years? The two boards charged with the daily operation of the building, that of the library as well as the museum, have worked well together and with no sign of public disagreement. In 1932 the library began paying rent to the museum board.¹⁶ By this time all of the museum board members were from Youngstown or Niles. John G. Milburn resigned in 1922 and was replaced by Charles M. Schwab.¹⁷ Schwab was a banker from Pittsburgh who financed much of Frick's and Carnegie's business ventures, headed Bethlehem Steel, as well as being a supporter of McKinley.¹⁸ Schwab's and H.C. McEldowney's resignations, following Butler's death in 1927, marked the end of trustee management by anyone outside of the Mahoning Valley.¹⁹ This change in trustee membership brought an end to the management of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial by those who once knew William McKinley personally, and who would be most concerned with the promotion of an elite/official history of the twenty-fifth president. The change in the board's membership would also mark the beginning of an increased role by the library in the daily use and management of the entire facility.

James W. Loewen described a hieratic scale as a means by which one can measure a memorial's significance.²⁰ Butler was very much concerned with the memorial's

¹⁶McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 225.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁸Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 314.

¹⁹H.C. McEldowney had been president of the Union Trust Company in Pittsburgh and friend of Henry Clay Frick. Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 247.

²⁰Loewen, 43-47.

commemoration of President McKinley's life and times, and the building's use and appearance were key components in that commemoration. When the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial first opened, the north wing housed a large auditorium (see appendix, figure 9). Along its walls could be found busts mounted on pedestals, similar to those in the central court of honor, as well as bronze tablets that commemorated leaders of the steel industry, local civic and business leaders.²¹ Many of those commemorated were known by Butler personally. These were individuals that he felt were crucial to the formation of the Mahoning Valley's economy, and hence benefitted the entire nation. Two large rooms on the upper floor of the south wing housed artifacts relating to McKinley (east room) and the Civil War (west room). Some of the artifacts located in these rooms, such as McKinley's law desk, a piano William gave his mother, and his White House office chair, were sought after and donated by Butler himself. The library, occupying the lower floor of the south wing, included reading areas for children as well as adults, the book collection, and a staff/cataloging area. Butler and the museum board were also able to negotiate a "right of first refusal" clause for all of the deeds to property on the block upon which the memorial was built for future development.²² The goal was to have a building that would eventually dominate the center of Niles.

The vision Butler and his fellow trustees had of the building has been to a great extent realized and maintained. There has been little to no degradation in Loewen's hieratic scale for this presidential memorial. The first major renovations to the McKinley National Birthplace

²¹Butler, *Life of William McKinley*, 17-18. This source lists all of the busts that were located in the Niles memorial. The collection is still intact, and comprises the largest set of works by J. Massey Rhind in the country.

²²McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 175.

Memorial were carried out in 1958-59. This project included a reconstruction of the roof, cleaning of the marble exterior, and electrical upgrades. At the same time the memorial trustees acquired the Presbyterian Church on the northeast corner of the memorial's lot and then contracted to tear it down.²³ Unfortunately, among the improvements made at that time was the installation of a drop ceiling that covered the auditorium's ornate plaster work, and fluorescent lighting that replaced the Steuben glass chandeliers.²⁴ By this time the seating in the auditorium was removed, and the growing museum collection relocated to the upper floors of the memorial's north wing. The library moved into the vacated rooms in the south wing's upper floor to accommodate the growing business within the library.

1992 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the memorial's dedication and in 1990 a second major renovation project, more akin to a restoration, began with a joint effort by both the library and museum boards. Before this project started, two buildings on the southeast corner of the memorial's lot were acquired in 1989, torn down, and the lots re-landscaped.²⁵ The renovations to the building included the removal of the drop ceilings in the auditorium, restoration of the ceiling and reinstallation of its chandeliers, the rearrangement of several busts, plaster repairs, as well as upgrading the electrical system yet again. Repairs to McKinley's statue and some of the marble pedestals were carried out. An expanded parking lot in the back

²³"We Remember McKinley, What About his Memorial?" *Flyer*, Niles: Niles Daily Times, 1958. Also, *Quit Claim Deed*, #511954, volume 726, p. 557, Niles: McKinley Memorial Library archives.

²⁴Marty Douce, "McKinley Face Lift," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 19, 1992, 1-8E.

²⁵Robert K. Yasov, "Razings to herald history," *Youngstown Vindicator*, August 20, 1989, 1,3.

of the building was also constructed.²⁶ Currently the museum and library boards are again working together to have the busts that are located in the central court of honor cleaned of their decades-long accumulation of grime and verdigris. Today the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is still a showpiece for downtown Niles (see appendix, figure 10).

There are, however, some changes to the building that Butler dedicated in 1917. The busts of industrialists Alexander Crawford, Henry Bessemer, and John Warner that once resided in the hall of fame, as well as those from the museum room of John Gordon Battelle, Frank H. Buhl, and James Ward, were placed on the second floor of the library. All of these individuals played major roles in the development of the steel industry. Few patrons or tourists venture here, or even become aware of these monuments' presence. There is, as a result, less opportunity for visitors to the Niles memorial to gain insight into the importance of the steel industry in the area, or of McKinley's importance in the development of the nation's economy into a world power. For these individuals it has been quite a fall on Loewen's hieratic scale. Three other busts enjoyed an elevation, however. Carnegie's and Butler's were both relocated to the library, close by the large picture windows that face the court of honor, and near display cases that feature artifacts pertaining to local and presidential history. Henry Clay Frick's bust, honoring the one whose donation made the library's move to the memorial possible, was placed in the middle of the library's lobby. Situated directly in front of the circulation desk, and in line with the main entry way, every person who enters this much-used wing of the memorial is greeted by the visage of Pittsburgh's most controversial business leader (see appendix, figure 2). Library patrons always have occasion to learn, or be reminded of how the library came to be in

²⁶Douce, 8E.

the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, and those responsible for bringing that about.

Fanning criticized the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial's ability to commemorate the president due to the distance the Niles monument, as well as the one in Canton, was from Washington, D.C.. She was impressed with the memorial's statue, busts, ornamentation and artifacts. She noted, "it was more than simply a shrine to William McKinley, the building houses a veritable pantheon to capitalism...even if it could not house his tomb, the Niles monument would still serve as his reliquary."²⁷ Location was, however, crucial to her for the long-term ability of the memorial to maintain the president's status and presence in the public's historical consciousness. Fanning noted that having these monuments located so far away from the nation's capitol has "...made them even less important as national icons than the Grant monument. The legacy of William McKinley no longer possesses power to inspire."²⁸ This sentiment is in stark contrast to Butler's belief that the Niles location would be an asset to the long-term promotion of McKinley's elite history.

One reason Butler wanted the memorial built in Niles was to facilitate the development of a McKinley artifact collection that would eventually become superior to any other in the country. In this regard the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial can be considered a success. The collection, which is jointly owned and administered by the museum and library boards,²⁹ has grown considerably since Butler's initial donations when the building was first

²⁷Fanning, 88.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 97.

²⁹Patrick Finan, Director of the McKinley Memorial Library, *Oral interview*, September 7, 2000, Niles, Ohio.

dedicated. Among the many artifacts are an extensive collection of campaign buttons and souvenirs, autographed photos of the president, as well as a sleigh in which young William and Ida courted.³⁰ Every year new items are donated or purchased which the library staff catalogs and verifies for provenance. However, the public's lack of use and appreciation of these artifacts does appear to bear out Fanning's sentiments, and establishes a rather low rating on Loewen's hieratic scale. It is estimated that less than ten thousand of the three-hundred thousand visitors to the Niles memorial actually tour the museum.³¹

Despite the museum and library both being made part of the Ohio Historical Society in 1992, there has been little work done with those in Columbus regarding the commemoration of President McKinley.³² There has been sparse cooperation between the Niles museum board with their counterparts in Canton, or any other of Ohio's other presidential memorials, in the promotion or lending of one another's collections. Since the seventy-fifth anniversary observances in 1992, bus tours and school visits to the museum have dropped off as well. Even with the state's newly-erected signs along local highways, there are few today who are drawn from outside the community to view and reflect on what can be found concerning the twenty-fifth President at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. Butler hoped that the Niles location would be an asset for the preservation of McKinley's history. However, the memorial's

³⁰Cynthia Vinarsky, "McKinley sleigh will be displayed," *Youngstown Vindicator*, July 9, 1992, B1-2. See also Joseph Bogar's *Letter of Provenance to the McKinley Memorial*, June, 1991, Niles: McKinley Memorial Library.

³¹McKinley Memorial Library Trustees, *McKinley Memorial Library Annual Reports, 1992-1999*. Niles: McKinley Memorial Library.

³²Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums, *Document of Certification*, April 11, 1992, Niles: McKinley National Birthplace Memorial.

hometown location means that today few residents, let alone visitors from afar, avail themselves of the historical artifacts depicted and preserved there. The distance of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial from Washington D.C., and its mall filled with monuments and museums that attract thousands of tourists, may indeed be a factor in the decline of the McKinley's stature in public memory.

John Bodnar and John R. Gillis wrote of official/elite interpretations of history as being in constant conflict with those of local/popular interests in regard to public commemorations and historical memory. Gillis noted that "commemorative activity is by definition social and political...they are in fact the product of processes of intense interest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation."³³ This interplay has been exhibited with the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial over time. Despite Butler's prohibition that the memorial "under no circumstances" be used for political purposes, local issue advocates and leaders used the memorial as a platform to air their views and stage events.³⁴ In April of 1937 the museum board authorized an annual McKinley banquet celebration that would be held on a Saturday at or near the president's birth date of January 29th.³⁵ This event evolved over the years to become the annual Mahoning Valley Republican Party convention that features state and local Republican Party candidates, office holders, or speakers that espouse party policies. The event is now by

³³Gillis, 5.

³⁴McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 175.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 238.

invitation only from the Mahoning Valley Republican party.³⁶ Over the years, Republican Party candidates have also visited the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial while on campaign for photo opportunities and press announcements.³⁷ The contravention of Butler's expressed wishes in regards to the use of the memorial, in this case his desire not to politicize the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, could be another reason for some to not view the Niles monument as a place for personal reflection, public commemoration, or nonpartisan patriotic tribute.

Local issues also influenced what occurred at the Niles memorial. In 1924 Niles was the scene of violent clashes between immigrant and ethnic residents with members of the Ku Klux Klan. A burning cross, erected across from the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, was destroyed by a bomb on July 19th.³⁸ Three to five hundred opponents of a Klan parade met in the memorial's auditorium on October 30 to draft resolutions that would be presented to the mayor, giving reasons why the parade permit should be denied. Although the meeting was one of the few peaceful gatherings relating to this matter, Niles mayor Harvey Kistler did not rescind the Klan's permit, citing the Klan members' constitutional protections of free speech and

³⁶*McKinley Dinner Programs*, Niles: McKinley Memorial Library archives. Also see Bob Coupland, "Club holds tribute to McKinley," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 30, 1996, 3A, and "McKinley Banquet," *Youngstown Vindicator*, January 9 1994, B2.

³⁷Ellison Nye, "McKinley Memorial to Host Rhodes," *Niles Daily Times*, June 17, 1965, 1. See also Bob Coupland, "Taft Touts Niles History of Giving," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, April 28, 1994, 1B, Jim Flick, "Governor Visits," *Niles Times*, June 17, 1993, 1A, Jennifer Houtman, "Voinovich Leads Tour of Valley," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, January 29, 1993, 10A.

³⁸William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990, 120.

assembly.³⁹ Labor protests in 1941 over non-union musicians performing in the auditorium led to the memorial board's decision "to allow only recognized organizations" use of the facilities.⁴⁰ The lack of consistent or publicly understood policies for use of the memorial's facilities led to further public disagreements after the outbreak of the Second World War. The planned 1942 silver anniversary celebrations of the memorial's dedication were canceled due to the war effort. The Red Cross was notified that the auditorium could be used as a temporary hospital or children's shelter should the need arise.⁴¹ However, disagreements over Mothers' Day observances and the Blue Star Mothers organization with the museum board led to town council members calling for the federal government's takeover of the monument.⁴² The museum board responded forcefully to the press agitation stating "conditions were never more favorable than they have ever been both as to the building and grounds and that no change whatever should be made or should be considered."⁴³ No trip or petition was made to Washington D.C. from Niles to have the memorial's management or ownership changed. It would have been highly problematic for the Roosevelt administration to have done so given the war effort then underway, or the headaches endured in recent years with the just completed

³⁹Jenkins, 127-128.

⁴⁰McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 252.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 257.

⁴²"Holmes suggests Mayor Fisher take trip to Washington to unload 'white elephant'." *Niles Daily Times*, January 1, 1943, 1. See also, "Niles council authorizes mayor to seek U.S. relief on memorial," *Youngstown Vindicator*, January 14, 1943, 13, "Youngstown opposed to memorial transfer," *Youngstown Vindicator*, January 14, 1943, 13, and "Honoring Niles Blue Star Mothers in public rally," *Niles Daily Times*, May 11, 1942, 1.

⁴³McKinley National Birthplace Memorial Trustees, 261.

presidential memorial to Thomas Jefferson.⁴⁴

John Bodnar wrote that vernacular expression's "very existence threatens the sacred and timeless nature of official expressions" in regards to public monuments. Evidence of this conflict has been manifested at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. During the bicentennial celebrations of the United States female members of the McKinley Memorial Library's Friends organization and the Niles Historical Society created replicas of the inaugural ball gowns worn by the First Ladies. A pageant was performed at the memorial that featured the complete set of gowns, and modeled by the women who created them.⁴⁵ To raise funds for this and other local bicentennial projects the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial sponsored rummage sales that featured McKinley artifacts.⁴⁶ It will never be known how many were lost, or later had to be bought back, in this example of vernacular/local interests supplanting the official one sought by Butler.

In recent years the predominance of local/vernacular interests over official ones has seen additional press coverage. In February 1997 the library and museum boards announced another joint effort, that of building a replica of the McKinley birthplace home that was destroyed by fire in 1937. The replica was to be built on the site the original building once occupied when McKinley was born, just a few lots south of the memorial on Main street.⁴⁷ In regards to such

⁴⁴Gabor, 98.

⁴⁵Niles Bicentennial History Committee, 188.

⁴⁶Cynthia Vinarsky, "Museum Discovers Election Posters," *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 5, 1991, B1, 2.

⁴⁷David Skolnick, "City and library trustees will meet to discuss McKinley house project," *Youngstown Vindicator*, February 3, 1997, B1-2.

projects, Diane Barthel noted that “preservation can form local and even national arenas in which people join with others who are different, even strangers in the complex flow of time,” and that, “...interpretation will remain political because people have always been political animals.”⁴⁸ It was hoped that the timing of this project during the centennial of McKinley’s presidency would help mobilize the populace to support the endeavor, as well as increase the public’s awareness of McKinley’s place in history. Although \$85,000 was awarded by the state of Ohio to prepare the site and remove asbestos, the project did not garner additional outside funding or engender complete community support. Differences over the purpose and type of building to be built led to disagreements with city officials over costs, school personnel as to its use, and with the president of the Home Builders’ Association, Library Friends president, and McKinley re-enactor, Mike Wilson.⁴⁹ The increasing library staff efforts, the growing reliance on the memorial’s own funds, as well as the community’s less-than-enthusiastic participation in the replica home project resulted in few commemorative activities being held during the centennial years of McKinley’s presidency.

The increased role of the library in the day-to-day operation of the memorial complex, as well as the lack of direction by the museum board regarding commemoration over many years, established a narrowly focused management of what occurs at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. The vision that Butler had of the Niles monument promoting and preserving an elite

⁴⁸Barthel, 154.

⁴⁹See David Skolnick’s articles “Future use of land raises concerns,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, August 29, 1999, B-3, “Demolition bids being reviewed,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, October 26, 1999, B-2, and John Booth, “McKinley plan loses ‘friend,’” *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, April 28, 2000, 10-A.

history of McKinley has been largely eclipsed by one of running and promoting a public library. Local events and concerns have grown in importance over the national and patriotic ones sought by Butler.

The current status of the replica home may be a refutation of Loewen's Sasha and Zamani histories as applied to memorials. It is possible that too much time has elapsed since McKinley's presidency to make the construction of another monument to him relevant for the public today. The current efforts of the two memorial boards, and lack of public support for this project, are in marked contrast to the widespread and popular support garnered by Butler in 1910 to 1917 for the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. It may also mean that the objectivity Loewen sought, by not having monuments built until some time has passed in order to objectively assess the need for a monument, is at work here. The reliance upon local support and the memorial's own funds for the project, aside from the monies used to clean the site of asbestos, differs markedly from the nation-wide donations and support mobilized by Butler. Given the current situation with the replica home, Butler's extensive contacts with people from across the country, and his ability to mobilize popular support from a variety of sources and interest groups for the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial over eighty years ago, are an impressive contrast.

In 1999 the McKinley Memorial Library served a population of 23,857 and circulated nearly 245,000 titles.⁵⁰ Weekly attendance at the library's annual summer reading sessions traditionally nears 500 school-age children and their guardians. The library's patronage and

⁵⁰*American Library Directory, 1998-1999, volume 1: Libraries of the U.S.*, New Providence, New Jersey: R.R. Bowker, 1999, 1692.

usage figures have risen nearly every year for the last ten years.⁵¹ The library staff also created a web site in 1998, with descriptions and photos of the memorial and links to a variety of sites, dedicated to William McKinley and presidential memorials. The library staff arranged and hosted one of the few commemorative programs regarding the McKinley presidency when it held an “Ida’s Tea” that occurred on June 3, 2000. The event was done in coordination with the new First Ladies library that opened in the restored Saxton home in Canton, the house in which Ida McKinley grew up.⁵² These events mark the extent of the commemorative activities honoring the centennial of McKinley’s presidency.

The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is certainly accessible and used by a large number of people. Today, however, most of those who visit the Niles monument do so in order to use the McKinley Memorial library, or attend an event put on by the library staff. Unlike the libraries in other presidential memorials described by Cohen, ones centered exclusively around their president’s memoirs, papers, and artifacts, the library in the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial does provide civic and educational services that benefit a diverse community.⁵³ The museum board’s traditional reliance, however, upon the library’s staff to devise and implement commemorative events and programs is another example of how local and vernacular interests have overtaken the official ones Butler sought to commemorate.

Barthel lamented at the end of her work *Historic Preservation* that “there is no longer

⁵¹Finan, *Oral interview*, September 7, 2000.

⁵²“Ida’s Tea,” *McKinley Memorial Library web site* [internet publication], Altavista: September, 2000, <http://www.mckinley.lib.oh.us/museum/idas_tea.htm>

⁵³Cohen, 195-196.

any bedrock of values supporting what preservationists do, or what any of us do.”⁵⁴ This sentiment is all too applicable to the current state of affairs in Niles, with its dearth of observances of the twenty-fifth president’s centennial currently being planned, all other efforts being put into a replica that is being accepted half-heartedly by the local community. Butler would undoubtedly be pleased that the library located within the memorial is today so well received by the community it serves. He would likely be disappointed, however, in the way that the operation of the library and its programs have all but replaced the commemorative scope of the birthplace monument.

⁵⁴Barthel, 153.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is significant in a number of ways. Besides being the first Congressionally authorized presidential memorial to be completed, the Niles monument marks a transition in the design of these national landmarks. Following the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial's dedication additional presidential memorials were built. Although designed concurrently with the Niles monument, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. was not completed until 1922. The next Congressionally authorized monument was one for President Jefferson. This particular presidential memorial's construction, noted Gabor, "spanned an eclectic range of objections from art criticism to environmentalism."¹ Disputes over the monument's design and the destruction of many cherry trees on the site led to Eleanor Roosevelt declaring her public opposition to the project, and a very angry president's intervention in 1938 to resolve the matter.² There was an architectural aspect that made the Jefferson monument problematic for many taxpayers, one which led Fanning to describe it as an "anachronism, reflective of a past era, built after most American architects had become disillusioned with the notion of purely commemorative classical monuments."³ The Jefferson Memorial is the exception to all those designed and built after the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial that a civic component, such as a library or auditorium, be included as a key element of design in addition to the memorial being a place of public

¹Gabor, 97.

²*Ibid.*, 98.

³Fanning, 226.

commemoration. The architects of subsequent presidential memorials have rarely deviated from the principals laid out by city beautiful adherents, and first set in stone in Niles.

Presidential libraries and memorials were built at taxpayer expense for every president from Truman to Carter after the Second World War. Private funding financed the construction of memorials and libraries to other chief executives such as Theodore Roosevelt and George Bush. Despite the increased construction, the proliferation of presidential memorials has not been considered a blessing by some. Barthel derided the post-war boom in presidential memorials, stating “now every president has the right to a shrine, a homestead and/or a library, no matter how illustrious or forgettable his tenure.”⁴ There is a sense that with so many presidential memorials, a loss of focus or significance has set in. Loewen felt that monuments had special power in imparting historical knowledge and forming public memory. Their very size, design, ornamentation, and location “includes an element of consecration, which not only sanctifies the past but also sanctions future actions.”⁵ But what are we sanctifying or consecrating if so many memorials are built to every president? Richard Cohen wrote “...to have served in the Oval Office is the sole requirement for one of these shrines to be raised to one’s memory, with greatness or mediocracy, success or failure having no bearing on it.”⁶ The very number of presidential memorials, as well as their scope of purpose, undermines the commemorative function that many of their founders sought to perpetuate.

To some extent this is part of the issue involving the replica home in Niles. The lack of

⁴Barthel, 122.

⁵Loewen, 44.

⁶Cohen, 180.

understanding by many as to what the new building is to be used for, whether as a third monument in Ohio to McKinley or as additional space for the Niles public library, has to be addressed. How the replica home is to be staffed, and who is supervise them, needs to be decided as well. Will the person who works there promote the history of McKinley or the community, and to whom? Whether a librarian or a historian will be in charge of the facility, if it is indeed built, may determine the future balance of local/vernacular versus official/elite interests portrayed at the Niles memorial. Fanning noted in her conclusion that the multitude of monuments “suggest that the nation’s moral center has become difficult, even impossible, to locate.”⁷ The role and purpose of presidential memorials, such as the one in Niles, exposes the way public memory and the understanding of our history are made. The questions regarding presidential memorials, both in Niles and elsewhere, are evidence that the input of those who wish to promote official/elite history with these monuments is needed to maintain a proper balance with local/vernacular interests.

The McKinley Memorial Library is a popular and extensively used facility. Its popular support is in contrast to the public’s reception to date for the replica home project. For many, a second memorial in Niles, whether as another museum or library so close to the one dedicated by Butler in 1917 is questionable. The memorial and library trustees reliance upon their own funds for carrying out this project is another marked difference between the current efforts to have this monument constructed with the one that Butler organized in the first part of the twentieth century. Clearly the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial today does not inspire many for the extension of commemorative structures regarding William McKinley. It may be

⁷Fanning, 233.

that too much time has passed, the distance from Washington, D.C. is too great, or that local issues have come to so dominate the Niles monument that it can no longer rally others to pay tribute to the twenty fifth president. The local decline of the steel industry could mean that the policies and issues of McKinley's times are less relevant for those visiting or living near the Niles monument today than when it first opened. The lack of commemorative activities, either in Niles or in conjunction with other presidential memorials, can not help increase the public's understanding of the significance of the history Butler hoped to portray. Regardless, the challenges and opportunities that confront the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial today are markedly different from those Butler encountered when he first spoke publicly of a Niles monument to McKinley in February, 1910.

Lewis Gould described McKinley as an underrated leader, "the first modern president. During his four and half years in the White House the executive office began to resemble the institution as the twentieth century would know it."⁸ At the groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies Butler elevated his boyhood friend to the level of Presidents Washington and Lincoln. Other recent historians have not been so kind. Fanning considered McKinley to be a "dull and uninspiring figure."⁹ Charles Faber ranked McKinley twenty-eighth out of the thirty-nine presidents listed in his work.¹⁰ Unlike Butler and Gould, Faber considered McKinley's administration a failure in curbing big business interests and monopolies. He also judged

⁸Gould, vii.

⁹Fanning, 73.

¹⁰Charles F. Faber, *The American Presidents Ranked by Performance*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2000, 168.

McKinley's inability to avert the Spanish-American war, and the militaristic imperialism that followed it, an "immoral and unprincipled act."¹¹ Gillis noted that history "was not born not just from the sense of a break with the past, but from an intense awareness of the conflicting representations of the past and the effort of each group to make its version the basis of national memory."¹² Unfortunately, the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial plays a decreasing role in determining McKinley's role in history for anyone outside of the Mahoning Valley. Despite its artifacts and documents, the Niles memorial is virtually unmentioned in the historical discussion of McKinley's presidency.

The efforts of the boards that manage the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial have, in the decades since Butler's stewardship, increasingly paid attention to those interests of a local/vernacular nature, at times at the expense of the official/elite ones desired by Butler. The last time a member of Joseph G. Butler's family sat as a trustee at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was in December of 1956.¹³ While the management and staffing of the memorial since that time served admirably well in the preservation of the artifacts pertaining to the president, as well with the building itself, it came at a cost of the commemoration of Niles favorite son.

The issues that McKinley dealt with, as a lawyer, congressman, governor and as President of the United States, still resonate today. The value of foreign trade, big business and entrepreneurial activity versus populist demands for government protection, and America's role

¹¹Faber, 168.

¹²Gillis, 8.

¹³Trustees of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, 287-89.

in foreign affairs as a world power, were just a few of the issues that the president from Niles had to address. The current dearth of commemorative activity at the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, especially during the centennial years of William McKinley's presidency, is regrettable. It is a case in point that professional historical and/or preservationist guidance for presidential memorials, as argued by Barthel, is needed to insure that the official interpretations of history they commemorate are not overwhelmed by local agendas, or even simply forgotten.¹⁴

Shortly before he died, Butler wrote that the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial "stands, a tribute of friendship, a testimony of national appreciation, an impressive memorial to a nation's hero, and serves, as he did in life, the welfare of the people."¹⁵ The residents of the Mahoning Valley are indeed fortunate to have such an edifice so close to where McKinley once lived and so well maintained. Its library is well-used by the community it serves, and the building and its park are the centerpiece of town that has seen most of its other pre-World War Two structures torn down long ago. Those who contributed to Butler's fund-raising efforts for the memorial in Niles, or attended the groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies certainly believed that McKinley's life and presidency were worthy of commemoration. They most assuredly felt that the memory of these events was to be preserved for their posterity's benefit. They were honored that those who grew up in the same area as McKinley were entrusted with the president's legacy.

John Bodnar noted that the formation of public memory and our sense of history are

¹⁴Barthel, 151-154.

¹⁵Butler, *Autographed Portraits*, 440.

problematic. He wrote that “certainty has been replaced by doubt and the present is no longer seen as something that emerges neatly and purposefully from the past.”¹⁶ As we have seen, the understanding of our past, and the relevance it has for current events, is constantly evolving. It remains to each generation to rediscover its past and reach its own conclusions as to how best to pass on its sense of history to those who follow. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial does provide our community with tangible evidence, in white Georgia marble, that the Mahoning Valley once produced members who profoundly affected how our nation developed. It is a highly visible reminder that the region was at one time the center of national attention, and that what went on there transcended the local community to the nation as a whole. It also serves as reminder to those viewing the Niles memorial today that they may perhaps do so again in the future. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial is a symbol of pride, loyalty, service, and vision. Not just of those in our past such as Henry Clay Frick, Joseph G. Butler and the rest from that era, but to anyone who can recognize these qualities exhibited in Niles today.

¹⁶Bodnar, 252.

**APPENDIX:
ILLUSTRATIONS**



Fig. 1. Bust of Joseph G. Butler, the driving force for a presidential memorial in Niles to William McKinley. (McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, photo by the author).



Fig. 2. Bust of Henry Clay Frick who donated \$50,000.00 for the construction of a free public library in the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial. This was the largest single contribution for the project. (McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, photo by the author).



Fig. 7. Photograph of the McKinley Memorial Library's circulation desk, taken shortly before the memorial opened. The library's transition from a subscription-based to a free public library, as well as being located in a new, state-of-the-art facility initiated profound changes for the Niles community. (Reprinted courtesy of the McKinley Memorial Library).



Fig. 8. Photograph of the children's reading area in the library. The new library afforded greatly expanded services to the community, especially to that of children. Note the picture of the president's mother, and the bust of Joseph G. Butler, were located nearby this section of the library. (Reprinted courtesy of the McKinley Memorial Library).

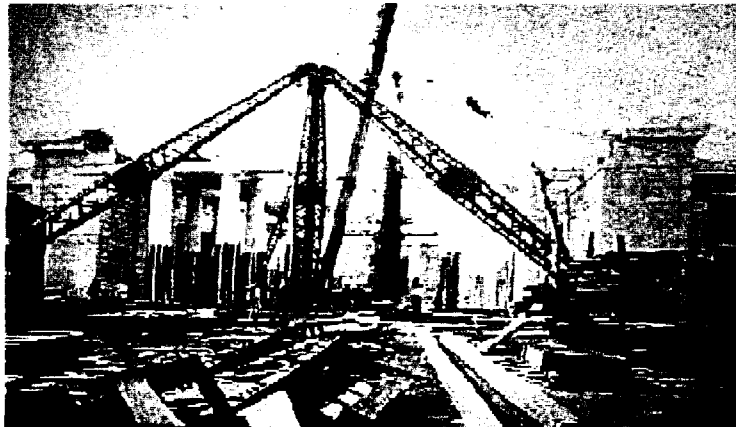


Fig. 3. Setting the last of the 28 marble columns into place. Each column was quarried, and shipped in one piece and weighed several tons.
(Reprinted courtesy of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial).

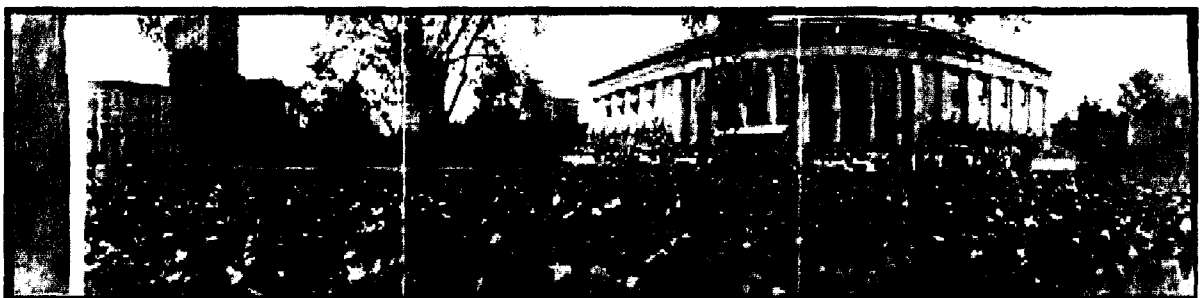


Fig. 4. The McKinley Memorial was dedicated on October 5, 1917. Former President William Howard Taft, as well as Joseph G. Butler, were the keynote speakers.
(Reprinted courtesy of the Library of Congress, American Memory collection).



Fig. 5. A statue of President McKinley is located in the center of the memorial's court of honor. The larger-than-life work of art was sculpted by J. Massey Rhind who considered it "to be the best work of his life." (McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, photo by the author).

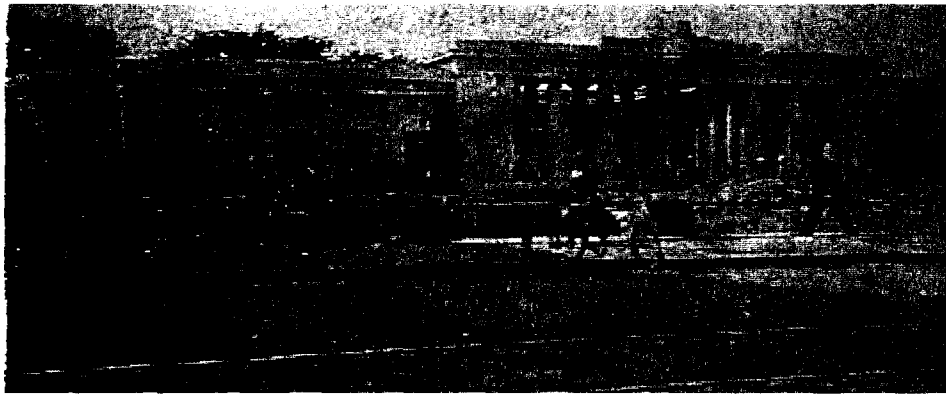


Fig. 6. This photograph of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial was taken shortly after it opened to the public in 1917. (Reprinted courtesy of the McKinley National Birthplace Memorial).

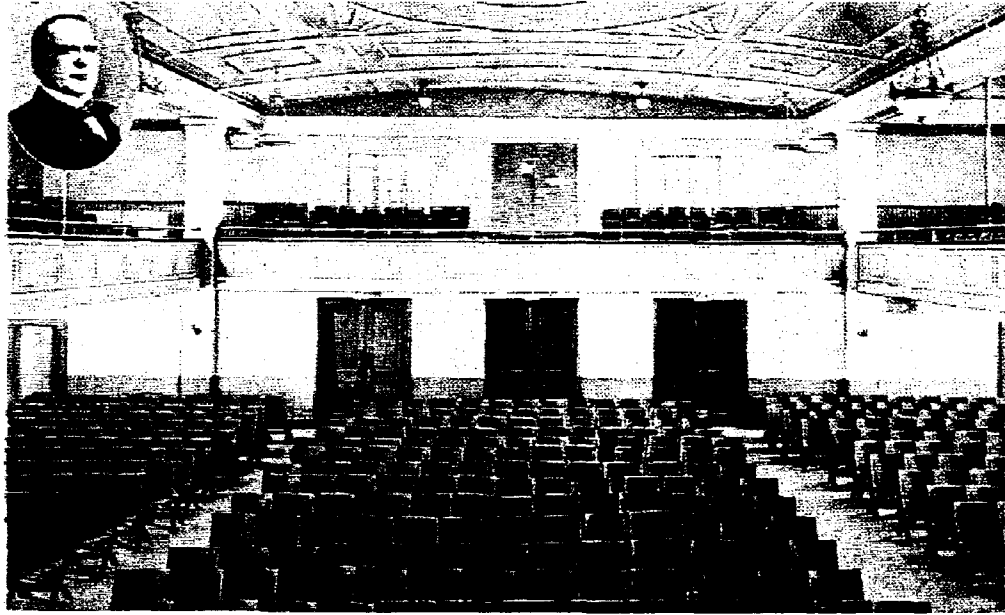


Fig. 9. Postcard picture view of the memorial's auditorium. This area featured an Edison "kinetiscope," an early projector of moving pictures. (Reprinted courtesy of the McKinley Memorial Library).

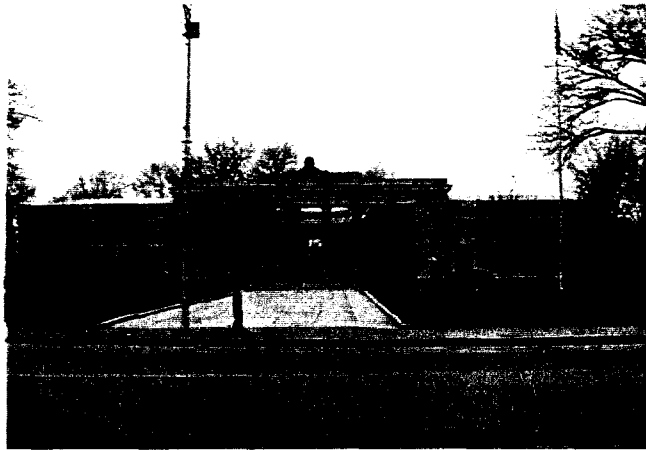


Fig. 10. The McKinley National Birthplace Memorial today. "A tribute of friendship, a testimony of national appreciation, an impressive memorial to a nation's hero, and serves, as he did in life, the welfare of the people."—Joseph G. Butler. (McKinley National Birthplace Memorial, photo by the author).

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