

Kansas City: National World War I Museum

Just two weeks after the Armistice on November 11, 1918 that ended the fighting on the Western Front in World War I, leading Kansas Cities gathered to formulate a way to honor and remember those who served in the war and those who died, creating the Liberty Memorial Association, then the actual memorial.



With the Liberty Memorial came the concept of a museum to showcase objects from the war. The museum, then called the Liberty Memorial Museum, actually began collecting in 1920 before the design for the memorial was completed. The two flanking museum buildings, opened in 1926, provided a modest 5000 square feet of exhibit space. By 1939 the Liberty Memorial Association, which has always owned the museum collection, started plans for expanding the museum underneath the main courtyard of the memorial.

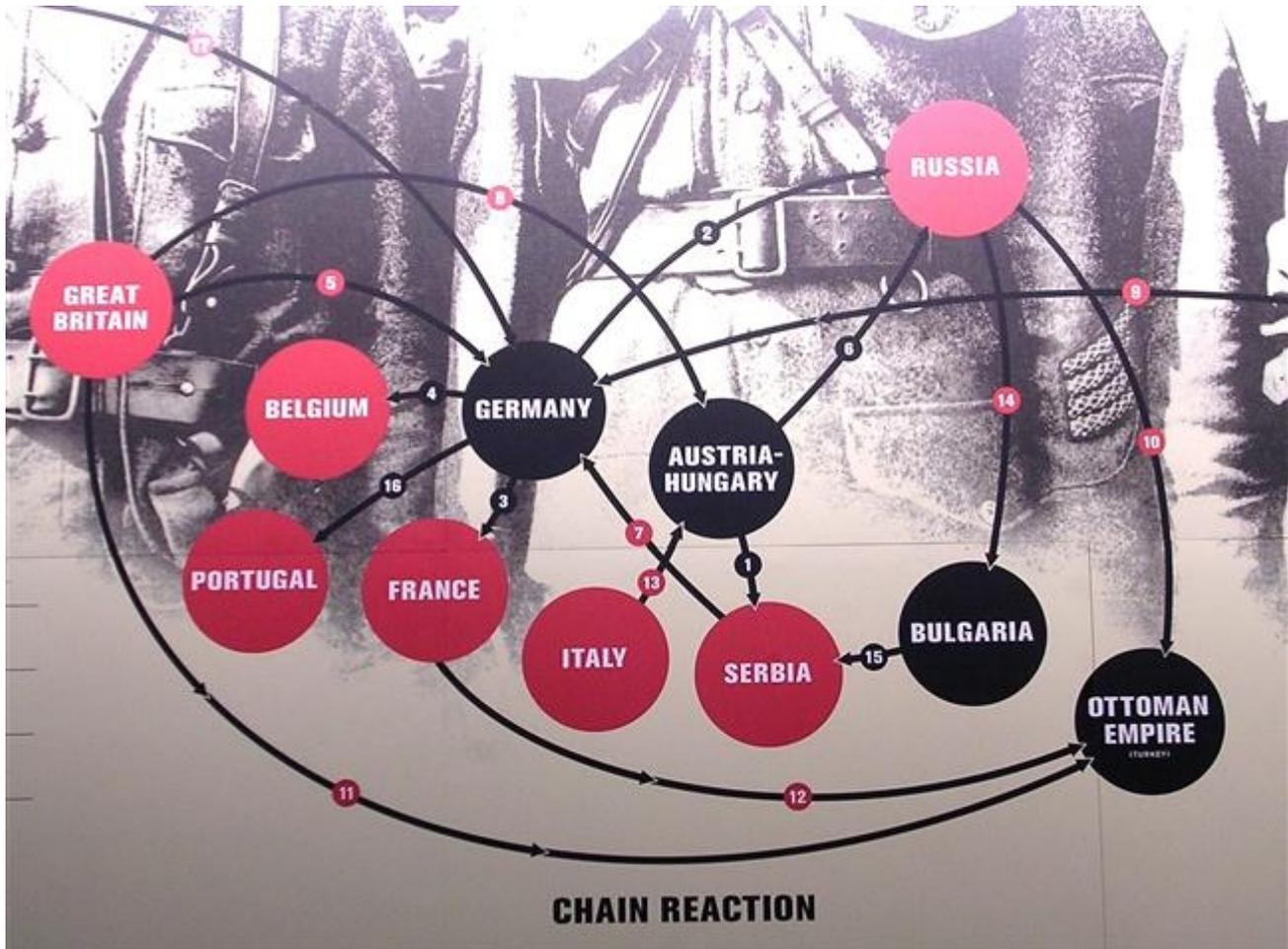
An election in 1998 passed overwhelmingly a half cent sales tax for eighteen months to completely restore and upgrade the Liberty Memorial. During that process from 2000 to 2002, the expanded museum exhibit space was created, but no funding existed for the actual exhibits and support areas. On Tuesday, April 6, 2004, Kansas Cities came through again with a positive vote to allow the City Council to issue bonds for twenty million dollars for the museum. Six million dollars were raised from other sources.

The design for the federally-designated "National World War I Museum" was created with the museum staff and Ralph Appelbaum Associates of New York. The new exhibit space of 32,000 square feet holds the permanent exhibit, "The World War, 1914-1919," a comprehensive presentation about World War I which was opened to the public on December 1, 2006.



The museum collection is exclusively dedicated to objects and documents from World War I and the history of the Liberty Memorial. Diverse collections from all the belligerent nations - uniforms, weapons, accoutrements, personal items, artillery pieces, a torpedo and a naval mine, photographs, posters, letters, diaries, field orders, and published accounts from the battlefield and the home front, help tell the story of this cataclysmic event of the 20th century through the exhibits and a widely-used research collection.

The cased exhibits offer content about the beginnings of the war, how and why countries went to war, how societies mobilized and how the war affected civilians as well as military participants, the global nature of the war, and many other experiences.



The exhibition absolutely respects the integrity of its content. The collections used represent all the belligerent nations involved in the war. The collections represent not only the rare, but the common, the home front as well as the battlefield object.

The content reflects current scholarship on the history, while also connecting it to common experiences to which modern visitors can relate. The content poses as many questions to the visitors as answers and reflects current world events in questions such as what makes a country go to war, how the war is justified, the memory of war and sacrifice and what lasting ramifications may occur? The main point-of-view throughout the exhibition is from actual participants in the events taken from original documents.

Quotes of Visitors

“Congratulations to you on the fascinating, rich experience that your museum affords to the outsider less familiar with the history of World War I and for the museum insider, the wondrous journey through a collection of infinite interpretive depth.” Jan Ramirez, Chief Curator, World Trade Center Memorial Foundation, New York, NY 1/5/07

“An exciting, world-class exhibition on the First World War. Your museum engages one in a fascinating tour of discovery. I was the last visitor to leave the galleries Friday evening.” Karl Niederer, Immediate Past President, Council of State Archivists, Trenton, NJ 7/27/07

“One of the top museums in the flipping world, just spectacular. The museum offers insight into the roots of the conflicts that plague Iraq and the Middle East today.” General Barry McCaffrey, U.S. Army (Ret.) 10/18/07

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