

Norfolk Insider

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“Little Sister of Liberty Back at Central Park”

Thomas Bressler was surprised to see that Norfolk, Nebraska was missing from a website listing all of the Little Sisters of Liberty in the United States. He submitted the picture of the statue located in Central Park and subsequently embarked on a goal of refurbishing the dented and dinged statue. Two years and \$12,000 later, Norfolk’s Little Sister of Liberty is back home in the park, beautiful and patriotic as ever.



While watching the statue being carefully replaced on the pedestal at the north end of the park, Bressler said many people think the statue is a replica of Lady Liberty located in New York City. It’s not. In the 1950’s there were 200 of a more youthful 15-year-old version of the liberty statue named “Little Sister of Liberty” that were placed by Boy Scout groups around the nation.

Each group was sent a statue “kit” with 40 sheets of copper that they had to solder together. Of those statues, there are currently only 100 left, 14 of them in the state of Nebraska. Norfolk’s statue was placed in Central Park in 1950.

Bressler and his wife, Linda, have seen nearly all of the Little Sister Statues in the state. He said that most all of the statues have been refurbished in some shape or form as vandalism and weather has been hard on the statues. The refinishing of the statue in Norfolk was spearheaded by Bressler and became a project of Preserve Norfolk headed up by Chris Amundson, owner of the Nebraska Life magazine.

Since last October, Mayda Jensen, a conservator of fine art from Omaha, has been working on the statue which is her fourth statue of liberty replica project. She first thoroughly cleaned the Little Sister of Liberty then fixed the dents that had flattened the toes and the chain at the base of the statue. She said that for historical preservation she doesn’t completely correct the soldering imperfections that were part of the

original Boy Scouts’ construction work. She also had to add solid spikes to the crown as all had been broken off. She and her husband transported the statue back to Central Park Friday noon.

Bressler said that patriotism for his country was the main motivation behind his goal of getting the Little Sister refinished.

“I felt she was standing between two wonderful war memorials (the World War I statue in the Norfolk Junior High lawn and the World War II memorial in Central Park) and she needed to be restored to a level of pride. I feel proud now,” Bressler said.

The Boy Scouts of America were looking how to celebrate their 40th anniversary in the early 1950’s- their motto being “Strengthen the Arm of Liberty.” The completed project to emphasize that theme was the placement of 200 replicas of the Statue of Liberty known as the Little Sisters of Liberty in 39 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and the Canal Zone.

J.P. Whitaker, a Kansas City businessman was the Scout Commissioner of the Kansas City Area Council at the time and paid for the original \$3500 Little Sister mold. The stamped copper replicas were approximately 8 ½ feet tall and were made up of more than 40 sheets of copper with a wooden frame inside that Boy Scout Troops put together. Each statue kit cost the troop \$350 plus freight with the communities responsible for the constructing a base.

Weather and vandalism has taken their toll on many of the statues. In 1998, a Cheyenne Wyoming Boy Scout Troop decided to track down all of the existing statues and established a website- troop101.thescouts.com/liberty- which invited visitors to send in photos and information on as many statues as possible. To date there are nearly 100 statues that have been photographed and sent to the site.