

## OUR JOURNEY TO BUILD A COASTAL VETERANS MONUMENT

In 2015, one of our coastal residents had the inspiration to create a veteran's monument in our local area. After a visit to Scotland, where it seemed that every town, village and hamlet recognized its brave men and women who served in World War One, it occurred to him that there is not currently a veteran's monument in the coastal areas of Mendocino and Sonoma counties, and thus the journey began to create a lasting testament to their service to our country.

Another inspiration came from him reading the powerful and emotional stories of a veteran in our community who served in Vietnam in 1967, at the same time as the Summer of Love in San Francisco. The vet's comments and photographs of soldiers serving, suffering and yearning for home, compared to those in the U. S. enjoying a life of freedom, helped move the idea of a monument one step closer to reality.

Although not a veteran himself, the originator of the monument concept began discussing his idea with local veterans who expressed enthusiasm for the project. He then brought the idea to the publisher of the local weekly newspaper, the Independent Coast Observer, who was happy to publish an article about creating the monument.

The article sparked the interest of a group of dedicated local veterans and their supporters who kicked the idea of creating the monument up to the next level, and The Northern California Coastal Veterans Monument Project Team was formed.

Local longtime stone enthusiast and host of The International Stonework Symposium, Peter Mullins, was approached and asked if he would be interested in the creation of this monument. Peter totally embraced the idea and brought in world renowned stonemasons, Atlanta native Peter Carman and John Shaw-Remington of Ontario, Canada, to develop the initial concept of what the monument would look like.

While the stonemasons were busy with design, the NCCVM team began searching for a suitable location.

The site had to be visible, public, easily accessible and provide an atmosphere conducive to reflection and contemplation.

As the location search continued, legendary Fort Bragg stonemason John Fisher took the lead on a design for a massive, 6 column, circular stone elevation with connecting stone benches and a center stone carving to represent an eternal flame in a collaborative process with John Shaw-Rimmington and Kevin Carman, who sketched the first concept images of the monument.



The team explored the possibility to partner with the City of Point Arena to place the monument on the grounds of the city hall, which was in the process of being renovated and is aptly named the Veterans Building.

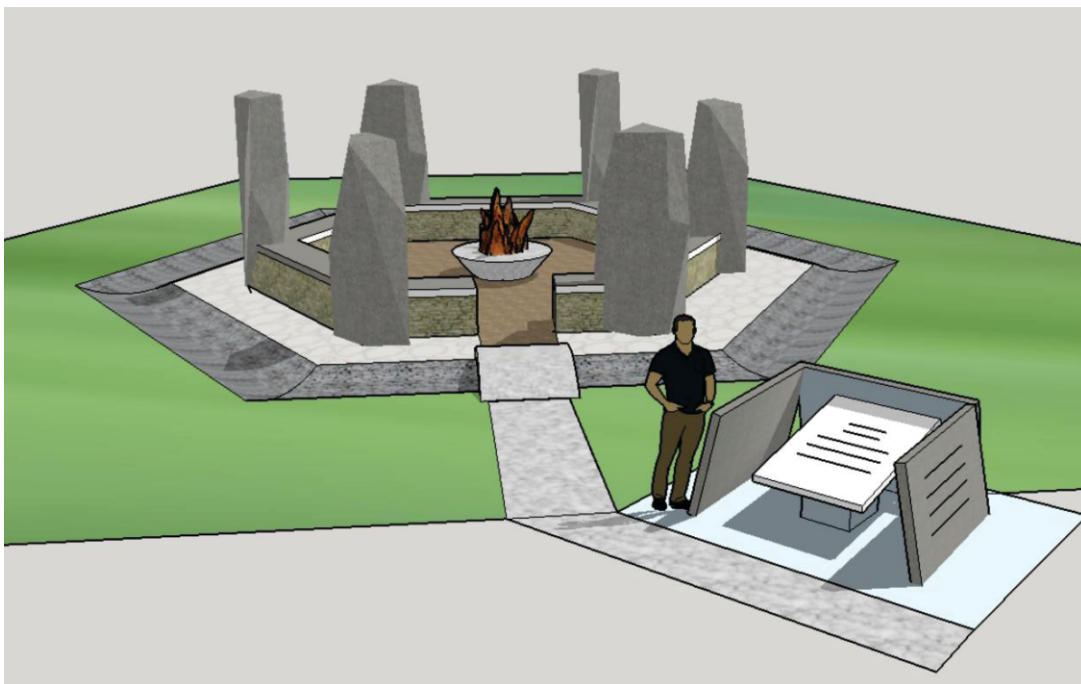


The team felt that there could be many potential benefits to this arrangement and asked Point Arena's own renowned graphic artist, Steve Oliff, if he would sketch our monument concept as how it would look in the existing Veterans Building parcel.



However, although the August 2019 meeting with P. A. City Manager Richard Shoemaker was positive, the complexities and timeline of the City Hall building renovation prompted the team to continue to look for other site possibilities.

Artist/Stonemason John Shaw-Rimington then generated a 3D computer-aided drawing of the envisioned monument, moving the design from concept sketches to preliminary drafts.



As with all grand ideas, projects such as this take a great deal of time, sometimes years to become a reality. And such was the case with this.

Then, one day while driving along Highway 1, it occurred to one of the project's team members that the perfect location could be the historic Point Arena Lighthouse grounds. He felt that the site, surrounded by ocean, open space and magnificent sounds, would coincide perfectly with the veteran's early vision of the monument. For many years, the light station was managed by one of the branches of the military, the U. S. Coast Guard, which could make it the perfect site for such a grand concept.

After the idea was presented to the monument team, it was enthusiastically embraced and a plan was put in motion to make a presentation to the Point Arena Light House Keepers Board to gauge their interest and hopefully secure their agreement.

Early on the morning of December 16th, 2019, in a utility building that doubled on this morning as a conference room, NCCVM board members Kenny Jowers, Tim Balambao, Mary May, and Hal Ferguson pitched the idea of locating the Northern California Coastal Veterans Monument on the lighthouse grounds. The lighthouse board's reaction was mixed, but they were willing to further explore the idea with the team.

Much back-and-forth conversation ensued, and then the global pandemic hit, but the board remained interested. Agreements such as this can be complicated, but finally in November 2020, the Lighthouse Board agreed that that the monument would augment their own mission while providing an ideal setting for the Northern California Coastal Veterans Monument.

The monument team and the board agreed that, in addition to the historic Point Arena Lighthouse and the Point Arena/Stornetta Public Lands California Coastal National Monument, the Northern California

Coastal Veterans Monument would be a welcome and beneficiary addition.

In February 2021, with the help of local architect Matthias Oppliger, the NCCVM application, along with architectural drawings and renderings, was submitted to Mendocino County Planning and Building for approval. That approval is still pending.



Once the dream of our monument finally becomes a reality, it will offer lasting proof that our veterans will never be forgotten.

Since that 2021 application was submitted, the county has had many requirements in order for us to continue to move forward. Our archaeological survey has been completed by Sonoma State University, which found no historical archaeological issues with the site. We have presented that report to the Mendocino County Archaeological Commission hearing for the project.

We have also completed our botanical survey which was performed by Sol Ecology of Petaluma. The CEO, founder and principle biologist of that company, Dana Riggs, is a woman veteran herself and has graciously donated all of her time and much of the expense of this project which has been extensive. We are very grateful for Dana's participation and pushing this process through the county planning department. In early January 2023, a third completed proposal to the Mendocino County Planning Department has been submitted for approval. We are cautiously optimistic that they will allow our project to move forward this year.