



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

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Memorial Amphitheater

Arlington National Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater was dedicated on May 15, 1920. While Memorial Day ceremonies are held throughout the United States, many consider the services at Memorial Amphitheater to be the nation's official ceremony honoring American service members. The president of the United States traditionally gives an address during Memorial Day ceremonies at the amphitheater.



Some 5,000 visitors attend each of the three major annual memorial services in the Amphitheater, which take place on Easter, Memorial Day and Veterans Day and are sponsored by the U.S. Army Military District of Washington. The Easter sunrise service begins at 6 a.m.; Memorial Day and Veterans Day services begin at 11 a.m. Many military organizations also conduct annual memorial services at the amphitheater.

By the early 1900s, Arlington National Cemetery's original amphitheater — now called the James R. Tanner Amphitheater — could no longer accommodate the crowds that flocked to ceremonies held there. Efforts to construct a new amphitheater were led by Judge Ivory G. Kimball, an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic (a fraternal organization for Union veterans of the Civil War). For years, Kimball and the GAR lobbied Congress to authorize construction of a place for the public to honor American service members. Finally, in 1913, Congress passed legislation authorizing the construction of Memorial Amphitheater. President William Howard Taft (one of only two presidents buried at Arlington) signed that legislation into law on March 4, 1913. Judge Kimball participated in the groundbreaking ceremony on March 1, 1915, but did not live to see his dream completed. Ivory Kimball died on May 15, 1916, and was buried in Section 3 of the cemetery, near the Memorial Amphitheater he campaigned to build.

President Woodrow Wilson placed the cornerstone of Memorial Amphitheater on October 13, 1915. By Armistice Day on November 11, 1918, nearly all of the building's exterior was complete. Interior construction was completed in June 1919. Designed by Thomas Hastings, the colonnaded building consists primarily of Vermont-quarried Danby marble. Its interior spaces include Memorial Chapel and Memorial Display Room, the latter of which features exhibits on the history of Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.



A copper box placed in the cornerstone contains copies of the Bible, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; a U.S. flag; designs and plans for the amphitheater; a map of Pierre Charles L'Enfant's design for Washington, D.C.; one of each U.S. coin and postage stamp in use in 1915;



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an autographed photo of President Woodrow Wilson; and other documents pertaining to the history of the amphitheater and the nation's capital.

Inscriptions on the frieze above the colonnade list 44 battles fought by the U.S. military, from the American Revolution through the Spanish-American War. The names of 14 U.S. Army generals and 14 U.S. Navy admirals (all from before World War I) are inscribed on either side of the stage. Other inscriptions feature quotations:



- Inside the aspe: "When we assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside the citizen."
- George Washington, letter to the New York Provincial Congress, June 26, 1775
- Above the stage: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." — Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863
- Above the west entrance: "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori." ("It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.") — Horace, Odes (III, 2, 13)

Ongoing preservation projects aim to maintain this hallowed space for generations to come.