

# NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – July 2024

2024-07-26

We're celebrating the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our seventh article, "Remembering Vietnam!"

If you are traveling from Greensboro to Charlotte on I-85, you may notice something unusual happens near Lexington and Thomasville. The northbound lanes of I-85 move to the west of the southbound lanes and vice versa. The lanes stay that way for about three miles. So whether you are traveling north or southbound, you exit to the right to enter the Davidson County Rest Area that is located in between the north and southbound lanes. The area between the lanes forms a very large median with a beautiful nature area accessible from the rest area parking lots that includes a very special feature: The North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park.

The memorial has special significance for the Association. NCMCA built it.

Dedicated on Memorial Day 1991, the memorial includes a wall made of North Carolina brick. The front face of the memorial wall holds engraved brick, each one with the name of one of the over 1620 North Carolinians killed or missing in Vietnam. The foot of the monument holds paving brick engraved with the name of the home counties of those listed on the wall. A separate plaque honors those who lost their lives and those who served during the war. A landscaped brick walkway leads visitors through the park to the monument. The 58,000 evergreen trees surrounding the monument were planted by the North Carolina Forest Service "to symbolize everlasting memory of the 58,000 Americans who lost their lives in this conflict."

Past NCMCA President (1985-1987) Charles "Ray" Holyfield was a U.S. Army Veteran of the Vietnam War and served on the board of The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, the group that instigated the project and pushed to make it a reality.

President Ray encouraged NCMCA's participation in the project.

Brick masonry is the majority component of the memorial's construction and NCMCA is listed as a major benefactor along with the Brick Association of North Carolina. The Brick Association secured the brick and NCMCA provided the craftsmen, labor and additional materials needed for the installation of the masonry.

The project faced major challenges. A February 1991 article in The Lexington Dispatch says, "Considering all the troubles and obstacles the memorial has faced, it's rather remarkable that the end result will be a memorial that is as attractive and as powerful as this monument promises to be. The first engraved brick was put into place on Monday (February 18, 1991.) Ground was broken for the memorial on Veterans Day 1986 in a pouring rain. That rain may have symbolized the problems the memorial was to encounter over the years as the drive to raise the necessary money hit snag after snag." The project all but ceased soon after the groundbreaking. It regained momentum in early 1988 with renewed fundraising efforts and after several project plans were developed and rejected.

Governor Jim Martin and the Wake Forest University band were on hand for the groundbreaking.

As of April 1991, NCMCA local chapters had contributed \$13,500 with \$2,500 each coming from the Central Piedmont, Metrolina, Raleigh, Triad, and Western Carolina chapters, and \$1,000 coming from the Wilmington Chapter.

The first mention of the memorial project in the archived NCMCA board minutes is August 1986. Tom Bricker of the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program was introduced. He shared the design and explained the plan for the project noting that the Brick Association of North Carolina had agreed to (secure) the brick for the project. Upon then-president Ray Holyfield's suggestion, Gary Joyner motioned that NCMCA donate the labor for the project. Gary's motion was seconded by James McCarson and approved by the board.

At the February 1987 board meeting, the minutes report Tom Bricker was in attendance, and introduced the project architect Bob Gunn and Larry Throneberg, project manager for Hickory Construction Company, the project's general contractor.

(Note: Larry Throneberg won the NC Department of Labor State Masonry Apprenticeship Contest in 1965.) The plan called for the project to be constructed of some 58,000 “handmade brick” to represent the number of lives lost, to be furnished by the brick association. At that time, startup was set for June 1987 with completion and dedication set for Veterans Day 1987. Some \$60,000 had been raised toward the cost. President Holyfield appointed past-president Richard Robertson to chair a committee directing NCMCA’s participation with Dan Hutchins as co-chair for the East and C.D. “Red” Brookshire co-chair for the West. There was discussion of additional masonry material donations.

The following is the content of a letter dated May 7, 1987 from Vietnam Memorial Committee Chairman Richard Robertson:

TO: All Members

FROM: Richard Robertson, Chairman, Vietnam Memorial Committee

The Vietnam Memorial Committee met at the site of the memorial on Interstate 85 near Lexington at 1 p.m., May 5. In attendance were myself, Red Brookshire, Ben Brookshire, Bob Gates, Belton Koontz, Gary Joyner and Bob Upton. The first item we discussed was the revised drawing for the masonry... Red Brookshire said he had built a section of the block wall at his office yard. The section does all right when laid for four feet in height and allowed to set up. Red noted that leaning the wall this way is the only way to keep the cavities open and allow concrete to pour in and strengthen the wall. The block used were ivany type. Several ways were discussed about how to go about laying the block and the brick. It was decided the best way is to set all the block so that lines can be popped on the block to guide the stacked bond brick courses. In other business, the committee noted that two fulltime masons have been promised for the project; one each from Brookshire and Thistle Construction. Another mason is a strong possibility. This means we need just one more fulltime mason to complete a crew of four that will be on the job for the duration of the project. Also, we need helpers for each mason. This does not rule out other masons coming on the job to help at various times. Volunteers will be accepted and the times they work will be coordinated through the state office of the association. Also, money donations instead of labor will be accepted. Also noted was the firm offer by Belton Koontz to lay the 1600 brick that make up the central part of the memorial for North Carolina veterans... The water trough and resulting waterfall over the bricks has been eliminated. Water will be used in the central part of the memorial only.

The letter was copied to Marion Cochran, NC Brick Association, and to Ken Thomas of the North Carolina Concrete Masonry Association.

Subsequent board meeting minutes report updates to the project's progress, including changes to the plans to address engineering issues and fundraising concerns. But minutes from the April 1988 board meeting read "...the Vietnam program appeared completely inactive at this time." It's interesting to note that the project isn't mentioned in the minutes again until April 1990. Memorial project director Tamera Lane addressed the 1990 annual meeting and asked that NCMCA renew its pledge to provide labor. After extensive questions and answers, the commitment was reaffirmed. At the September 1990 board meeting, Ben Brookshire said masonry installation would begin by October and Craig Koontz had agreed to supervise the project for NCMCA. At the February 1991 board meeting, Brookshire reported the memorial to be ninety percent complete, and urged "anyone who wants to lay a brick to do so right away." (A number of individuals including family members of the deceased did have the opportunity to lay one or more of the commemorative bricks.) At that meeting, Brookshire said \$18,000 from local chapters was needed "right away" to pay the three companies responsible for providing masonry labor. (The archives are not clear but the three companies were probably R. C. Koontz & Sons Masonry, Brookshire Masonry, and Koontz Masonry.) At the April 1991 annual meeting, Brookshire praised Craig Koontz "for the great job he has done coordinating and managing the project" and announced the Memorial would be ready for its dedication on May 27, 1991. NCMCA items for a time capsule at the memorial were discussed as well as the possibility of chartered buses from local chapters to attend the dedication.

Pete Cieslak is retired from the Brick Industry Association/Southeast Region. He began a thirty-three year career as an executive with the Brick Manufacturers' Association in 1982 and recalls the conception and the building of the memorial park. "My first position was as Director of Public and Government Relations. The position and my hiring were brought about by the continued loss of market share by the brick industry in both manufacturing and sales. The job was to increase public awareness of the many positive attributes of brick versus vinyl siding, wood and other non-masonry products. To that end, I put forward a strategy and budget recommendation, which included hiring an advertising agency to design and administer a statewide

promotional plan.

“After a statewide search the then named, Brick Association of North Carolina (BANC) hired a marketing/advertising agency named Griffis/Hollingsworth out of Winston-Salem. The agency proposed an aggressive advertising plan to promote the advantages of brick homes via radio and print. This campaign would be hard-hitting and pervasive throughout the state. As a leveling tool, the agency recommended the BANC embark on a public relations (PR) plan that established an industry presence as a ‘good neighbor’ with a community service outreach.

“The PR campaign was in league with the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Organization with its HQ and governing body in Winston-Salem. The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC was a national story and the plan conceived by the NC Vets was to build something of a memorial to North Carolina Veterans who had died in the war. The relationship of a State Memorial to the National Memorial seemed to be a natural bridge for public interest and participation.

“In 1986, The BANC board approved a plan for a 1.5 million dollar advertising and PR budget, \$400,000 of it to be used to manage and fund a PR plan revolving around the NC Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A wide reaching campaign was launched which included the creation of posters bearing the slogan, ‘It’s Time To Honor Them All.’ (Unfortunately I do not have any of the posters or a picture.) Also part of the campaign was a design competition among North Carolina architects.

“The selected project design was conceived by Bob Gunn, AIA, from Charlotte. It included individual bricks with the names of the fallen vets engraved in the face of the brick. Each brick representing a single North Carolina veteran. At time of design and construction, over 1,600 named bricks were installed in the memorial.

“The brick for the Memorial were donated by Taylor Clay Products. Charles Taylor, Sr. was, at the time of the Memorial's construction, owner of Taylor Clay Products in Salisbury, NC. A former WW II bomber pilot, Mr. Taylor took personal interest in the project and ensured that all things related to the brick in the project were up to top standards. Including working with the masonry contractor.

“A short time after the program became public, additional participants and sponsors

came forward, including the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association (NCMCA.) The NCMCA stepped into the project with enthusiasm led by their officers and Vietnam Veteran Ray Holyfield, a past NCMCA president.

“An interesting side story: Near completion of the project, it was discovered that several inscribed bricks had been left behind at the engraver’s location in Raleigh. Upon hearing this, then NC Governor James Martin had a series of NC State Troopers to, ‘Pony Express’ like, drive the bricks to the site, to be installed on time for the dedication.

“The project was completed in time for a Memorial Day (May 27, 1991) dedication. Many dignitaries attended and made remarks. Approximately 700 people were in attendance.”

Writing on the “vietvet.org” website, Veteran Doug Maston said, “As a Vietnam veteran (1966-1967 - Nakorn Ratchisima, Thailand), I am gratified to see the memories of those who did not come home preserved.

“The North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 27th, 1991. On its brick walls are the names of the 1,624 North Carolinians who gave their lives for their country during the Vietnam War. The Memorial was built with private funds on a site donated by the North Carolina State Department of Transportation.

“I was fortunate to be at the dedication ceremony. It was a cloudy overcast day that threatened to rain and spoil the ceremony.

“Speeches were given by those who had organized and coordinated the fund raising, building, and dedication. Speaking also was Howard Coble (R-NC, U.S. House), as well as then Lt. Governor James Gardner, along with other dignitaries from around the state.

“At the conclusion of the ceremony, all Vietnam veterans in the audience were asked to come down to the front of the dais and be recognized. Of course, at that particular moment God showed He has a sense of humor. It began pouring rain as hard as it could. It was cold and miserable; but someone said, ‘Hey guys, they brought in a

monsoon for us.’ Somehow, it seemed more fitting than any other tribute to those who had suffered through the real monsoons...and fallen in battle.

“The crowd began applauding us, and I felt very uncomfortable. I would have enjoyed the applause, if only the forgotten vets of Korea, Grenada, etc., could have been remembered also.”

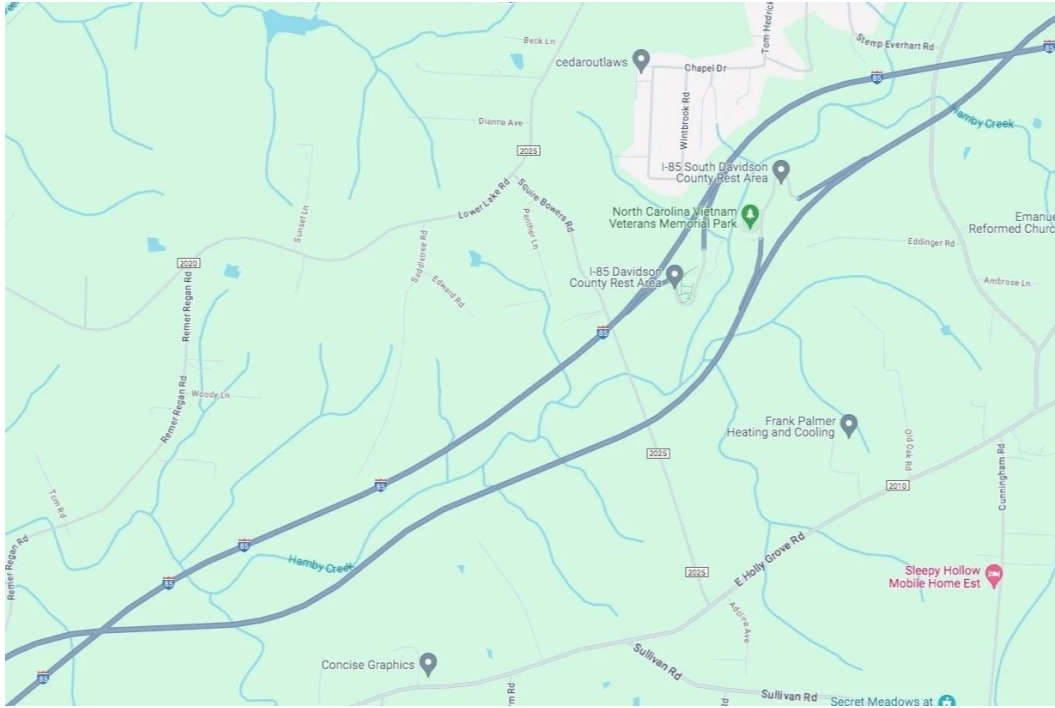
Included in the Memorial’s “time capsule” vault is an engraved silver commemorative trowel donated by Marshalltown Trowel and a directory of the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association.

As the years pass, the detailed memories of NCMCA milestone events and projects are beginning to fade. And so it is with the Memorial. But even as recollections of the masonry industry’s participation diminish, NCMCA can take great pride in knowing the Association played a major role in making sure the ultimate sacrifice of these North Carolina Veterans will never be forgotten.

(‘Big thanks to Pete Cieslak for his great assistance in gathering information and photographs for this article.)

Article Written by Lynn Nash

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Near Lexington and Thomasville, the northbound lanes of I-85 move to the west of the southbound lanes and vice versa. The lanes stay that way for about three miles. The area between the lanes forms a very large median with a beautiful nature area accessible from the rest area parking lots that includes a very special feature: The North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park.



NCMCA installed the masonry used to construct the Memorial.



Past NCMCA President Ray Holyfield, far right, a Vietnam Army veteran, took the lead in encouraging NCMCA involvement in the Memorial project.

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NCMCA members building the Memorial.

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NCMCA Executive Manager Eleanor Upton installs a paving brick at the Memorial.

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Pete Cieslak installs one of the engraved memorial brick.

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NC House Representative (Rockingham) Donald Dawkins, himself a Vietnam Army Veteran, lays the brick with his brother's name engraved in the face, Sergeant Benjamin Dawkins, who died from a mine explosion in September of 1968. Family members and friends of the lost veterans laid many of the engraved memorial bricks, as did many NCMCA members.

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1620 engraved brick, one for each North Carolina veteran lost or missing in the conflict.

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# CONTRIBUTORS TO THE NORTH CAROLINA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

A TIME CAPSULE IS AT THE ENTRY OF THE PARK WITH THE NAMES  
OF THE PEOPLE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS MEMORIAL

## MAJOR BENEFACTORS

BRICK ASSOCIATION OF NORTH CAROLINA  
N.C. MASON CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
U.S. ARMY, FT. BRAGG  
N.C. NATIONAL GUARD  
FIRST CITIZENS BANK  
N.C. ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITY  
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

## BENEFACTORS

THE WINSTON-SALEM FOUNDATION  
THE DAVIDSON COUNTY VETERANS COUNCIL  
J.G. HANES FOUNDATION  
GUILFORD MILLS INC.  
THE WACHOVIA FOUNDATION  
THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

## PATRONS

NCNB CORPORATION CHARITIES  
BURLINGTON INDUSTRIES  
DILLARD PAPER CO.  
DICKSON FOUNDATION  
SARA LEE CORP.  
JOHN W. & ANNA HANES FOUNDATION  
N.C. ARTS COUNCIL  
MARTIN MARIETTA AGGREGATES  
CAROLINA STEEL  
RJR TOBACCO CO.  
R.C. KOONTS & SONS MASONRY  
N.C. NURSEYMEN ASSOCIATION  
PITTSBURGH BREWING CO.

## SPONSORS

MONTGOMERY MONUMENT WORKS  
JACOBS CREEK STONE CO.  
BLUMENTHAL FOUNDATION  
GREENSBORO NEWS & RECORD  
LANCE CORP.  
NATIONAL CHAMPIONS FOUNDATION  
NORTHERN TELECOM INC.  
SMITH RICHARDSON FOUNDATION  
SOUTHERN BELL TELEPHONE & TELEGRAPH CO.  
TEXPI INDUSTRIES  
SMITH TURF AND IRRIGATION CO.  
FLOYD LEE BARRIER POST (NO. 377)  
CAROLINA CONCRETE MASONRY ASSOCIATION  
LUCY MAYO BOODIE FOUNDATION  
TURFGRASS COUNCIL OF NORTH CAROLINA  
FIRST UNION FOUNDATION FOR THE CAROLINAS  
SIDLEY & AUSTIN  
J. DENNIS HOBAN  
WALT F. ULMER  
J. KENNETH TORREYSON  
JOHN P. D'ARCY  
DAVID KIRK TATE  
PAUL TRUSIK  
CURVED PLYWOOD INC.  
JEFFERSON PILOT FOUNDATION  
CHARLES AND CLARA HIRSH  
TAMARA NELSON LAINE  
ARCHIBALD G. RUFFY  
FAMCO

MANY THANKS GO TO THE N.C. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD, BRICK ASSOCIATION OF  
NORTH CAROLINA, N.C. MASON CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION, AND THE  
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SPECIAL THANKS IS EXTENDED TO THE N.C. FOREST SERVICE PATRICK DONAHUE  
AND PLANTED 58,000 LOBLOLLY PINE SEEDLINGS ALONG THE 10 MILE STRETCH  
BETWEEN GREENSBORO AND THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK. PLANTED  
FIVE YEARS AGO, THE EVERGREEN TREES SYMBOLIZE THE ENDLESS MEMORY  
OF THE 58,000 AMERICANS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.

A plaque at the entryway of the Memorial Park recognizes the masonry industry as  
“Major Benefactors” of the Memorial project.

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The North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park (Photo: Albert Dulin).

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