

Greene County statues honor local, U.S. history

By John Lydic, for the Greene County Messenger | Posted: Friday, April 1, 2016 2:00 am

WAYNESBURG — Waynesburg Borough is home to three statues of historical importance relating to the area itself or to a significant time in United States history.

There is the statue of Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene atop the Greene County Courthouse. The area also hosts a Civil War and Spanish American War memorial — known as the “Soldiers and Sailors” monument — that is situated a stone’s throw from Waynesburg University’s campus.

“I think it’s amazing that we have it on our campus. It is one of the biggest Civil War statues you’ll see in the country,” said Karen Fisher Younger, chairperson for the humanities department and assistant professor of history at Waynesburg University. “It’s a great story.”

The final statue that is in the area sits in downtown Waynesburg and is the Rain Day Statue representing the annual Rain Day that occurs annually on July 29.

The statue of Nathanael Greene, which was originally created and mounted on the courthouse in 1850, has been replaced three times. A fire in 1925 destroyed the statue and a new one was dedicated in 1927. The statue lasted until 1997 when it was replaced and then finally replaced again in 2013.

The 65-foot “Soldiers and Sailors” statue located in Monument Park in Waynesburg honors those who had fought in the Civil War. The inscription on the base states “Erected by the County of Greene in grateful memory of her soldiers and sailors of the war for the union.”

The statue is dedicated to the Civil War soldiers and represents all four branches of the army: Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery and Navy, according to Younger.

The statue was dedicated on July 4, 1899, 34 years after the Civil War ended, according to Younger.

“The statue tells us more about the time it was dedicated than it does about the actual thing the monument represents,” Younger said.

According to Younger, the time period when the statue was dedicated took place

during the Spanish American War, the first major war since the Civil War.

The statue is topped with Lady Liberty, and according to Younger, the two items she is holding represent the message the monument was telling about the period.

“An olive branch and the wreath. The olive branch is higher than the wreath. The wreath in ancient Greek history represents victory and the olive branch is famously known as symbolizing peace,” Younger said. “Lady Liberty is holding the wreath, but above that wreath is an olive branch and she is looking in the direction of the south. This represents the peace that was desired between the north and south.”

Women from around Greene County raised the funds for the statue, according to Younger.

Younger said statues give a different approach to understanding history as they help the community to remember — they are history outside of the textbook.

Monuments and historic national parks are ways for the more hands-on to visualize what happened in the past.

The final statue, the Rain Day statue, was dedicated by Glenn R. Toothman Jr. and depicts two children playing in the rain, representing the character of the day. Since 1874, it has rained in Waynesburg on July 29 a total of 114 out of 142 years.

With all of the history in Greene County, Younger said knowing about the statues and the history of the area is something that should be of priority to the people of the area.

“Its kind of one of those fundamental things that everyone would do,” she said. “In history there is a national story, a state story; there is a local story. It’s what makes us who we are as Americans or as Greene County people or wherever we find ourselves.”