

Trygve A. Rovelstad Biography



Trygve A. Rovelstad - Class of 1922 - b. September 27, 1903 – d. June 8, 1990 “Trig” From the EHS Yearbook, the Maroon: Maroon Staff. Light Weight Football '20, '21. League Basketball '18, '19, '20, '21. Stage Manager '22.

An Elgin native was a renowned sculptor and medalist. He was sculptor of the City of Elgin's monumental bronze “Pioneer Family Memorial.” He was the nation's first medalist sculptor of the U.S. War Department and

designed numerous U.S. military medals, and other civilian and commemorative medals. He was selected as the editor and designer of the “American Roll of Honor” located in St. Paul's Cathedral, London. He was the sculptor of the Senator Barr statue displayed in the State of Illinois Capitol Rotunda.

Born on September 27, 1903, in Elgin, Illinois, to Norwegian immigrant parents, Trygve Rovelstad attended Lowrie Grade School and Elgin High School, where he excelled in art classes. After graduation, he studied at the Nellie Fabyan estate art studio in Geneva. Later he was accepted to work and study at the famous Midway Studio of master sculptor Lorado Taft and he attended night classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. He furthered his art studies at Beaux Arts in New York City. He then returned to Elgin and modeled miniature reliefs for Lorado Taft. Next, Trygve traveled west and attended the University of Washington, where he completed four years of sculpture training in just two years. In preparation for his Pioneer Memorial sculpture, he traveled to Paris, France, to do studies of sculpture and the related arts at the Louvre. After a life of artistic accomplishment, Trygve died on June 8, 1990, at age 86 in Elgin.

Trygve sculpted the “Pioneer Family Memorial,” located at Kimball Street Bridge and the Fox River in Elgin, Illinois: “The Pioneer Family Memorial” is a four-figure heroic size bronze sculpture dedicated on November 11, 2001. Trygve Rovelstad began this work in the 1930s as a tribute to the pioneers settling the Fox River Valley. He founded the non-profit Pioneer Memorial Foundation of Illinois Inc. in 1957 with other civic leaders. Its purpose was to raise the funds to erect the sculpture. After his death, this foundation continued and completed the bronze casting and installation of Trygve's signature work in 2001. Substantial financial help came from the City of Elgin, the Elgin Cultural Arts Commission, the Kane County Forest Preserve District, the State of Illinois, and private businesses and citizens. These entities realized the importance of finishing the dream of this prominent Fox Valley artist.

As First Medalist Sculptor for U.S. War Department, during World War II, Trygve Rovelstad designed the following revered military medals and awards: Combat Infantryman Badge, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Occupation of Germany Medal (General John J. Pershing Medal), Unit Blue Citation Badge, Women's Army Corps (WACs) Medal and Insignia Lapel Pins, and the E-Medal Award for “excellence”

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in performance of civilian duties in support of the war effort during World War II. (The letter “E” appears in a wreathed circle placed upon a red and blue striped pennant field.)

Trygve also designed and sculpted commemorative medals and coins:

- Elgin Centennial Half-Dollar Commemorative Coin: Legal tender U.S. commemorative fifty-cent piece struck at the Philadelphia Mint to honor the 100th anniversary of the founding of the City of Elgin. Also, the coin was a fund-raiser for erection of the Pioneer Memorial Statue with the Pioneer Scout head on one side and the Pioneer group on the other side.
- Chicago Fire Medal: Commemorating 100th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire with proceeds to benefit the Chicago Historical Society
- Illinois Sesquicentennial Medal: Commemorating 150th birthday of the State of Illinois
- Chicago Coin Club Medal: Commemorating 50th anniversary of the Chicago Coin Club (coin appears on the Chicago Coin Club letterhead)



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- Screaming Eagle Medal: Commissioned by the 101st Airborne Division Association to honor its history of service to the nation, as well as the Bronze Star Medal.



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- Logan Hay Medal: Commissioned by the Abraham Lincoln Association and awarded annually to select individuals demonstrating “devotion to the ideals of Lincoln”
- Lincoln Heritage Trail Medallion: The Lincoln Heritage Trail Foundation struck this medallion in commemoration of Lincoln’s years in Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois
- Captive Nations Eisenhower Proclamation Medal: On July 17, 1959, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the President of the United States to proclaim the third week in July as Captive Nations Week in honor of those countries whose people live under communism. Trygve was commissioned to sculpt a commemorative medal to recognize the tenth anniversary of the proclamation
- Governor’s Medal, 1953, unveiled in Springfield in the Illinois Senate. One side of the medal is a relief portrait of Governor William G. Stratton
- Mark Twain Medal, commissioned by the Chase Commemorative Society as an historical tribute to Mark Twain. The reverse of the medal states, “Loyalty to Petrified Opinion Never Freed a Human Soul.”
- Pioneer Medal: One of the original fundraisers for erection of the Pioneer Memorial
- Editor and Designer of the “American Roll of Honor,” presented by General Dwight Eisenhower to Queen Elizabeth for display in the American Chapel, St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The “American

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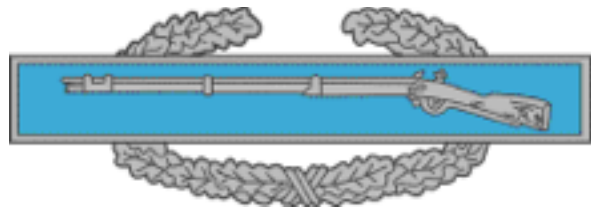
Roll of Honor” is the largest manuscript of its kind in the world. Its vivid watercolor paintings are illuminated in gold. Hand-inscribed on vellum are the names and ranks of over 28,000 American servicemen, who died in defense of Britain before D-Day.

- Sculptor of Senator Barr Statue: Commissioned by the Illinois Legislature in 1952 to create a life size bronze statue of State Senator Richard J. Barr. The Barr Statue resides in the Illinois State Capitol Rotunda.

The Pioneer Family Memorial was selected as one focal point of Elgin’s multimillion dollar Riverfront Redevelopment Project, and the Pioneer Family Memorial sculpture photograph has been used in promotional material for the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce and the Elgin Parks and Recreation Division. A medallion of the Pioneer Family Memorial Dedication Ceremony was chosen by the City of Elgin as a 2001 Holiday Gift to its employees. The medallion was a replica of Rovelstad’s Pioneer Family and was sculpted by St. Charles artist, Guy Bellaver.

- The international numismatic (coin collecting) community has long revered the beautiful Elgin Centennial Half-Dollar Coin designed by Trygve Rovelstad. Its representatives traveled to Elgin for the dedication of the Pioneer Family Memorial statue in 2001. This Fox Valley monument has been the subject of numerous articles in their trade publications and will draw coin collectors to Elgin in the future.

Trygve’s design of the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) became the subject of a David Powers’ large-scale, public sculpture honoring recipients of the CIB as well as its designer. It is located in the Elgin Veteran’s Park along the Fox River near the Gail Borden Library..



Trygve Rovelstad designed a concrete sculpture of the American flag, which was on Elgin’s Walton Island from the 1930s to 1960s. Through time, this sculpture deteriorated and was removed. However, it served as the inspiration for the current monumental steel sculpture of the American flag by David Powers.

Several of Trygve Rovelstad’s sculpture works are displayed at the Elgin Area Historical Museum. A large plaster of paris model of the “I Will” head for his proposed colossal statue for Chicago’s harbor was donated to and is on display at the Illinois Math and Science Academy (IMSA) in Aurora.

Elgin Community College in 1995 sponsored its “Rovelstad Retrospective” in the Safety-Kleen Gallery One to showcase the lifetime body of work of Trygve Rovelstad. Many of his smaller sculptures, paintings and drawings were exhibited. Examples of his watercolor designs for the “American Roll of Honor” were featured.

He established “Tryg’s Sculpture School” at the Rovelstad Studio on Ryerson Avenue in Elgin to instruct new generations in his craft. Students throughout the Fox Valley attended the school, and visitors were always welcome.

Trygve authored the book, American Eagle, which was posthumously published by Elgin Community College in 1998, funded by a grant from the Elgin Cultural Arts Commission. Book proceeds went to the Pioneer Memorial Foundation of Illinois, Inc. American Eagle was his study of America’s national symbol and contained many photographs of his work.

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Trygve Rovelstad, in his 86 years of life, spent mostly in Elgin, compiled extensive accomplishments in the sculptural arts. He served his country and community in an exemplary fashion. His fine work continues in use today, long after his death, in the form of prestigious awards to our nation's military. Civic leaders embraced his monumental vision for a tribute to America's pioneering spirit and erected his signature Pioneer Family Memorial. He will long be remembered as one of the Fox Valley's favorite sons.