

George Edwin Bissell

1839 - 1920

Award winning sculptor, George Edwin Bissell, was born near New Preston, Connecticut on February 16, 1839. His ambition to become a sculptor was influenced by his father, who was a quarryman and marble worker in New Preston and Waterbury. When he was still a boy George moved with his family to Waterbury where he worked as a store clerk. Though he later left Waterbury he kept his connection with Waterbury all his life, and married into one of Waterbury's most prominent manufacturing families, the Weltons.

Bissell attended school at the Gunnery in Washington, Connecticut, and in 1862, he enlisted in the twenty-third regiment of Connecticut volunteers and served a year in the army. After a year's tour of duty, he was appointed paymaster in the navy and served in that position until the end of the Civil War. In 1869, Bissell moved to Poughkeepsie, New York and apprenticed in the marble business established by his father and brother.

Bissell's career began by carving unsigned tombstones for Waterbury's cemeteries (Riverside Cemetery and St. Joseph's cemeteries both have such pieces); he once called himself an "untutored gravestone man". He produced monuments for a number of families in Waterbury. In 1878 he created a monument for the family of John C. Booth, a colossal figure in granite located in the Riverside Cemetery in Waterbury. Bissell's portrait-statue of Colonel John L. Chatfield, a Civil War hero from Waterbury, is in the Riverside Cemetery. In addition to these creations, Bissell executed eight or nine more monuments as well as the Elton Vase in Riverside Cemetery.

Bissell often studied and worked abroad. In 1875, Bissell took the first of many trips to Europe to study and work. He studied in Florence, Rome and Paris. In Paris he was mentored by Aime Millet and Paul DuBois. DuBois was director of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1878 and advocated a style that combined 15th century classical elegance and the detailed naturalism of the mid-19th century.

Bissell's best-known Waterbury creation is the Soldiers' Monument, which was dedicated in 1885. This is Bissell's largest known piece with eleven separate pieces of bronze. The classical character of the sculpture, the allegories that it articulates, and the locale of the modeling and casting all express the 19th century European tradition in art and aesthetics.



Bissell also executed many works outside Connecticut. Bissell's busts and portrait sculpture can be found at various locations. His work can be seen in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and in the rotunda of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. In Manhattan three of Bissell's outdoor statues are the John Watts monument in the Trinity Church cemetery, the Abraham De Peyster monument in Hanover Square, and President Chester A. Arthur's monument in Madison Square Park. Bissell's work can also be seen in Clermont, Iowa, and in Scotland.