**The History Of Bethesda’s ‘Madonna Of The Trail’ Statue**

**FROM BETHESDA NOW - BY AARON KRAUT**

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With this week’s news of [a new tenant](http://www.bethesdanow.com/2015/03/25/fitness-center-will-to-take-over-historic-bethesda-post-office/) at the historic Bethesda Post Office, some have asked about the story of another historical landmark just outside the building.

That would be the “Madonna of the Trail” statue that stands on the Wisconsin Avenue sidewalk between the Hyatt Regency hotel and the soon-to-be-filled 1938 post office structure.

Regional Services Center Director Ken Hartman passed along [this history](http://www.marylanddar.org/madonna.html) of the statue in his latest email newsletter, courtesy of the Maryland chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The DAR erected the statue in 1929 and 11 others like it in 1928 and 1929:

The Madonna of the Trail is a pioneer woman clasping her baby with her young son clinging to her skirts. The face of the mother, strong in character, beauty, and gentleness, is the face of a mother who realizes her responsibilities and trust in God. It has a feeling of solidarity — a monument which will stand through the ages.  
The figure of the mother is of heroic proportions — 10 feet high with a weight of 5 tons. The base upon which the figure stands is 6 feet high and weights 12 tons. This, in turn, rests upon a foundation that is placed on the ground, standing 2 feet above the level which makes the monument 18 feet above the ground.  
The figure and the base are made of algonite stone (a poured mass) of which the Missouri granite is used as the main aggregate, thus giving the monument a warm, pink shade which is the color of the Missouri native granite. It was thought and expected that this stone had admirable aging qualities and, with time, would improve in color and solidarity.  
On the two sides of the base are to be found words of historical data or local commemoration. These inscriptions are of the Revolutionary period or the early history in respective localities. These monuments were erected in each of the 12 states through which the National Old Trails Road passes.  The design of the monument was that of sculptor August Leimbach of St. Louis and was offered by Mrs. John Trigg Moss, Chairman of the DAR national committee.

The Bethesda statue marks the spot where pioneers heading west spent their first night out of Georgetown. Bethesda was the eastern terminus of the Cumberland Road, the first portion of the National Old Trails Road leading to the Santa Fe Trail.  
The statue was dedicated on April 19, 1929. Walter R. Tuckerman, the first president of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce, and his wife Edith dedicated the plot of land for it, according to the DAR. Due to the positioning of the site, the statue is actually facing east — the only one of the 12 statues to do so.  
In 2004, [the statue was temporarily removed](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56501-2004Dec10.html) to repair a sinkhole below its foundation, apparently caused by a water main break in front of the hotel.  
The inscription on the south side of the statue reads:

OVER THIS HIGHWAY MARCHED THE ARMY OF  MAJOR GENERAL  EDWARD BRADDOCK  APRIL 14-1755  ON ITS WAY TO FORT DUQUESNE.

And on the north side:

THIS, THE FIRST MILITARY ROAD IN AMERICA BEGINNING AT ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC RIVER, GEORGETOWN, MARYLAND LEADING OUR PIONEERS ACROSS THIS CONTINENT TO THE PACIFIC.

The post office next door came almost a decade later as part of the New Deal. After it was sold and closed in 2012, the county’s Regional Services Center [eventually got a hold of](http://www.bethesdanow.com/2013/12/04/bethesda-post-office-mural-to-reemerge-at-regional-center/) the 1939 mural of the Bethesda Farm Women’s Market that was proudly displayed above its front desk.  
It now hangs in the lobby of the Regional Services Center at 4805 Edgemoor Lane.