

# Ann W. Hawkins

June 13 - Friday  
11:30 - 3:30 PM

Residential Studio  
Washington, D.C.



As passersby, we have the benefit of walking by *Ann Hawkins'* portfolio when we visit the National Gallery of Art, the Washington National Cathedral, and various public buildings and memorials that feature her carved lettering within their inscriptions. She has always held an unusual connection with architecture. This is not necessarily attributable to her stonecarving. She possesses a sense of how space functions when she is observing a building or memorial... its positive footprint, as well as the negative spaces and how they complete the total design and contribute to its mood and character. She was married to an architect for 30 years from whom she learned to recognize a building's historical style.

Understandably then, the beginning of our conversation centers on certain war memorials in Washington, D.C. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is "simple, yet visually powerful." The flow of 58,260 names was typeset in *Optima*, Hermann Zapf's typeface (upon the recommendation of John Everett Benson, a noted New England carver), and sandblasted into the polished black granite. The numerals for the years the conflict began and ended were hand carved by Benson, himself. In contrast, the Korean War Veterans Memorial has many elements including heroic-scale sculptures of 19 soldiers, a pool of water, and a walk bordered by a low wall bearing the names of all the countries involved in the United Nations. Ann served as a consultant to the architects on all the lettering, and laid out the most prominent texts: one v-cut into a monolithic 16-foot long wall; the other composed of individually cast metal letters inlaid in stone. The architects specified the typeface, *Syntax*, the same one that Ann had used for the names on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. The National World War II Memorial features lettering designed and carved by Nicholas Waite Benson. His alphabet design "is gorgeous," combining strength and grace, and bringing "warmth" to the memorial's formal Roman-forum columns and carved laurel wreath and Field-of-Stars embellishments.

Ann talks of the particular role and presence throughout her life of institutions bearing the name, Carnegie. When she was nine years old, she began attending Saturday morning art classes at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, continuing in

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this program through high school with its curriculum of drawing from life and basic design. As a direct result of that training, she won, in 1957, a National Scholastic scholarship to study graphic design at Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University). “Tech” would serve as the nexus for bringing on board the three major influences in Ann’s lettering career: Jack Stauffacher, Arnold Bank, and Hermann Zapf. Stauffacher taught a class in typography: setting and spacing metal type by hand, then printing it by letterpress. Bank was a tour de force in the fields of calligraphy, architectural lettering, typography, and advertising. He moved from Brooklyn to join the faculty at Carnegie in 1959, teaching basic calligraphy. She states, “He pushed us rapidly through different historical broad pen and pointed pen styles. When we studied Roman capitals, we v-cut them in damp plaster with a pocketknife. Bank was pleased with what I did but I had no idea at the time that I would one day actually carve letters in stone.” Zapf, an influential calligrapher and prolific type designer for the Stempel Foundry in Germany, conducted a ten-week seminar in the fall of 1960. It was the first time he taught in the United States. He showed his students how to indicate type in a layout using a broad pen and Chinese stick ink. He taught his students to see the differences in typefaces and to recognize the fundamental characteristics of the different families of typefaces. These three teachers instilled in Ann a lifelong love for letterforms, and beautifully designed and printed books.

Ann has always followed the bold muse of curiosity, which has led her through an interesting timeline with regard to both calligraphy and carving. As a small child she watched her father, a sign painter and commercial artist. He would loosely sketch letters with vine charcoal on a long piece of

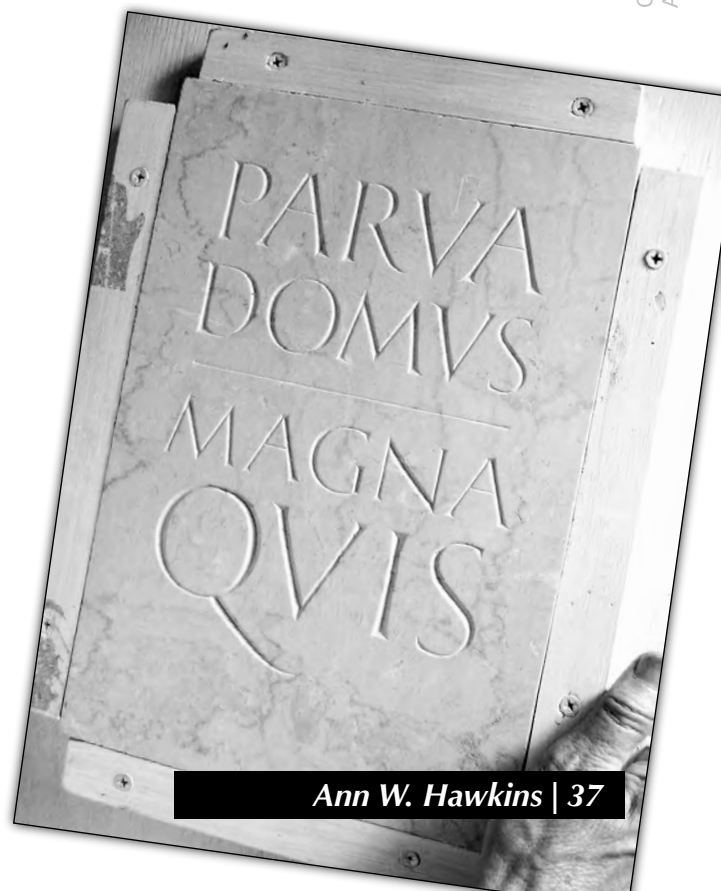
\* This shop had been revived by his father, John Howard Benson, a prominent letterer and carver. The operation and creative direction of this shop is now managed by his son, Nicholas Waite Benson (aforementioned as the inscription carver for the WWII Memorial). Visit [www.johnstevensshop.com](http://www.johnstevensshop.com).

Above: Paper impressions of Ann’s initial letters carved into smooth rocks.

Right: “Parva Domus, Magna Quies” translates to “Small House, Great Quiet,” or “Little Dwelling of Great Peace.” Though this carved inscription contains a “typo,” it represents one of Ann’s first pieces, and showcases the burgeoning classical and elegant quality of her skill.

paper rolled out on the living room floor. Then he painted perfect letters over top of the rough layout with show card paint and a wide brush. As a brand new mother in 1966, Ann attended a slide lecture by John Everett Benson about his father’s work at the venerable John Stevens Shop\* in Newport, Rhode Island. His grand finale was a carving demonstration of 2-inch high capitals, which he first painted with white tempera onto black slate, a technique he learned from his father. After the lecture, Benson gave Ann the name of a man who made chisels to be used with a handheld hammer rather than a pneumatic hammer. After ordering one, she looked at it, handled it, then set it aside... for about ten years. Once, she tried to use it but was quickly discouraged by the poor result. In 1977, she joined the Washington Calligraphers Guild intending to revive her long-neglected calligraphy. She attended ongoing classes with Sheila Waters and enrolled in a number of guild-sponsored workshops. Almost all the teachers at that time were from Britain. At last, she learned how to use her chisel in workshops taught by a Welshman, Ieuan Rees, and by an Englishman, Richard Grasby from 1978 to 1981. She quickly found that it was easier for a busy mother to stop and resume carving than it was to stop and start pen and ink work. Carving trumped calligraphy since she could stop carving halfway up a letter’s stem, then pick up where she left off an hour or even a week later. In 1981, she attended a weeklong stone carving course in New England, part of a gathering of lettering teachers and students called *Letter Arts, Newport*, taught by none other than John Everett Benson. He would later recommend Ann to the National Gallery of Art to carve his layout for the Patrons Inscription in the East Building. She remembers the anxiety she experienced in being responsible for executing this calibre of work for the first time in a public space with lots of people watching. She depended on Benson’s long-distance guidance via Friday afternoon phone calls for progress reports and to tell him about any problems she was

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having. Benson could describe how to drive a chisel around a curve so well that she felt as though she was actually watching him do it.

Ann also handles more personal commissions for gravestones. She does all her carving using traditional tools and methods, drawing layouts onto paper. She has never learned to use the computer for this. She has never used power tools; she fears they would damage the nerves in her hands. She explains that unless you are carving large letters in hard materials or going for speed, there is no reason to use power tools. Contrary to popular presumption, it does not require much muscle to carve letters in stone. The force from striking the end of a chisel is greatly increased when it is concentrated onto the sharp cutting edge. Because of this, one uses a rather delicate, light handling of the tools with short, quick taps.

As my eyes pass over the chain hoist and the respirator mask in her studio, I begin to appreciate the truly physical aspect of what she does, especially when working on location. When work is too high from the ground to be done from a platform raised on 4 x 4's or milk crates, she needs to climb a scaffold. She loves that. It gives a wonderful stretch. It is much easier than sitting on the floor and working close to the ground, which is very hard on the back.

A lot of her work has been designing and carving additions to existing lists of names. Sometimes the earlier letters reflect bygone styles or were not rendered by lettering artists to begin with. The spacing is irregular... the letter weights, inconsistent. She finds it a challenge to make her additions a little better but not too obviously different. These are not opportunities for expressing oneself, but satisfying in their way and more than compensated for by the sheer pleasure of carving stone and becoming intimate with the atmosphere and personalities of some great buildings.

In her studio, she employs strong men to position the heavier stones. She is grateful that she's never been injured or had her table supports give way. She admits that the heavy stones are scary. She likes them best when they are securely positioned at a good working height on her reinforced workbench. When she talks with her male colleagues, she finds that they, too, have a healthy respect

for the physical mass and weight of the material they work with.

Does she sometimes feel discrimination being a female carver? Rather the opposite, she responds. It is men who have taught her and men who have hired her. The architects she has worked with understand that her experience in lettering design and typography are her real strength. She has never been aggressive or competitive in procuring work. She views her passion for lettering as a genderless one. If you're doing uncommon work to begin with, you have curiosity and fascination, and have sought particular exposure and instruction. The result is acquired skill and patience... these qualities are neither male nor female-dominated. Her

profession was not always perceived this way, though. She furthers the point with a bit of historical fact. During the 19th and 20th centuries, quite a few women apprenticed and became accomplished stone carvers. Their talents were rarely openly credited; they were usually exercised in assisting male master carvers.

Ann shares the anecdote of her beginning at the National Gallery. The staff masons figured she would quit after a week or two. When she kept showing up week after week and was respectful of their long experience and asked them questions about sharpening and technique, they became friends.

Eventually, she became acquainted with other long-established carvers in Washington who, for the most part, came from Italy as young men to work on important buildings such as the Supreme Court, the National Shrine and the Washington National Cathedral. Nick Palumbo was head of the masons at the National Gallery. His brother, Vince, was the Master Carver at the Cathedral after Roger Morigi retired. Constantine Seferlis, from Greece, was also a Cathedral carver.

Now at 68, being a grandmother has also become a beloved priority. She finds that the amount of work she has is just the right portion to juggle with other pursuits, such as drawing and modeling clay with her granddaughter. Her intelligent vitality is apparent. Not many grandmothers know the difference between sharpening a chisel for granite rather than for slate, or the nuances of carving a fine-grained marble versus soft limestone.

She is a singular craftsman, indeed, who can observe and navigate the textures of various stones to coax the "voice" from it. >



*Ann (left) works on the front of the National Museum of American History (photo taken by Margaret Mook)*





From a follow-up correspondence of July 16, these are Ann's words:

*"You asked me what I think about when I am carving. Of course, I think about the shape I am making. But there is plenty of time for other thoughts and visions to float across my screen. I associate particular maneuvers with the chisel with the persons who taught them to me. When I use them, I think warm thoughts about those people, and thank them. They would probably be surprised how often I think of them."*

*"Carving is a slow process. It is a quiet time that affords an opportunity to sweep up all the mental fragments, memories, ideas, and good intentions floating around in my mind so that they can be sorted, assembled, and evaluated. Many people think that carving must be tedious. I admit that I am so slow that I often wish I could finish a job faster. I would make more money. While I am actually carving, I never, ever feel impatient the way one wants to go faster when held up in a traffic jam. I feel totally absorbed and happy. I don't want to stop, and only do when I realize that I am tired and might mess up if I don't rest. Everyone asks what do you do if you make a mistake? Eventually I was going to tell you about how a few mistakes were fixed in my experience. About patching materials. About erasing a shallow line in a sand-blasted surface with more sandblasting. About ignoring imperfections and moving on."*

For related information, visit:

- <http://www.stonecarversguild.com/>
- <http://www.cityandguildsartschool.ac.uk/>
- <http://www.marbleworkshop.com/>
- <http://www.sculptor.org/>
- <http://www.stonesculptorsupplies.com>

Above:

Details of a headstone project showing the process from the tissue layout, to the transfer rubbing, to the carved stone.

Above right:

Ann carving the letters into one of the Benefactors' walls in the West building of the National Gallery of Art. (Photo courtesy of Ann Hawkins)