



The Pennsylvania Military Museum's award-winning architectural design features a 100-foot façade depicting authentic military service ribbons in full color.

HISTORY ABOUNDS IN BOALSBURG

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James H. Hillestad explores a small town in America that's a unique destination for lovers of history

Every fan of American college football knows that State College, Pa., is the home of coach Joe Paterno and the Penn State Nittany Lions. It is located right in the middle of the state, just off Interstate 80. My wife, Carol, was

attending an environmental workshop there and invited me to go along. Casting about for things to do while she saved the planet, I came upon the village of Boalsburg, three miles from State College.

Serendipity! Boalsburg turned out to be a historical jewel.



Boalsburg lays claim to being the birthplace of Memorial Day. A statute commemorates how three local ladies began the custom of decorating soldiers' graves in 1864.



Armored vehicles and artillery are exhibited in a gallery at the museum.

MILITARY MUSEUM

It was here during the Civil War in 1864 that three local ladies began the custom of decorating soldiers' graves, resulting in Boalsburg laying claim to being the birthplace of Memorial Day. A touching statue in a cemetery commemorates the event.

The small town is also host to the Pennsylvania Military Museum, which honors contributions the state's residents have made to



Martin Ritchie figures portraying 28th Infantry Division soldiers of WWI, WWII and the Gulf War (from left).

The U.S. Army's "Iron" division resulted from the federalization of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard in 1917. Monuments on the grounds are placed at points that correspond to the division's regimental units' relative locations in France during WWI's bitter and bloody Argonne Forest Offensive in September 1918. The Germans nicknamed the division "Bloody Buckets" for the Americans' shoulder patches showing Pennsylvania's Keystone State symbol in red.



During WWI German troops nicknamed the U.S. 28th Infantry Division as the "Bloody Buckets" after seeing American soldiers' red shoulder patches bearing Pennsylvania's Keystone State symbol.

The division fought in the hedgerows of France and participated in the liberation of Paris during WWII. Limestone walls at the shrine bear the names of those who died in battle.

Today's 28th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Pennsylvania Army National Guard, is known as "The Army's Oldest Division." Its history has inspired Martin Ritchie, a toy soldier maker from the Keystone State, to produce 54-mm painted metal figures depicting 28th Division soldiers of WWI, WWII and the Gulf War.

TUT & NAPOLEON LINKS

And there is more to Boalsburg. Across the road from the museum is the Boal Mansion.

Theodore (Terry) Davis Boal came from a family of means. He studied in Paris, married Mathilde de Lagarde and in 1898 returned to the United States, where he turned the family farm in Boalsburg into a country estate.

In 1916, convinced that America was going to war in Europe, he formed and subsidized a horse-mounted machine gun troop. It trained

the defense of the United States. The museum contains 18,000 square feet of exhibit space, galleries and a well-stocked gift shop. It is located on 67 acres of parkland with displays of military armaments and vehicles that include an M4 Sherman tank, an M114 155-mm towed howitzer and a "Duster" M42 40-mm self-propelled antitank gun.

Pennsylvanians have a proud heritage of military service dating back to the French and Indian War. They took part in almost all the campaigns of the American Revolutionary War. Nearly 350,000 Pennsylvanians saw action during the Civil War.

They distinguished themselves during the battles of St. Michel and in the Meuse-Argonne region in World War I. In World War II, one in every seven men in the armed forces was from Pennsylvania, and 33,000 lost their lives. In Operation Desert Storm, eight Pennsylvania National Guard units mobilized to join the Allied Coalition in the 1990 campaign to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

28TH DIVISION SHRINE

The museum was built on the grounds of the Shrine of the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard.



ACW re-enactors fire artillery on the grounds of the museum and shrine.



M4 Sherman tank from WWII.



Shrine of the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard.



M114 155-mm towed howitzer.



"Duster" M42 40-mm self-propelled antitank gun.

On his estate, which is now the location of the shrine and museum. After an engagement with Mexican Pancho Villa in 1916, the troop eventually became part of the 28th Infantry Division.



An admiral's desk owned by explorer Christopher Columbus is among the artifacts found at the Boal Mansion.

The Boal Mansion reflects the life of the family through the course of 200 years. The original furniture and countless artifacts are breathtaking.

There are scarabs and amulets of the grandparents of ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen. Theodore Davis, uncle of Terry Boal, was an Egyptologist who, with his employee the legendary Howard Carter, discovered Tut's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in 1914.

Mathilde was the great-granddaughter of French Emperor Napoleon I's stepson, Prince Eugène de Beauharnais. After Napoleon died, the family was given a lock of his hair displayed at the mansion.

COLUMBUS CHAPEL

Mathilde's mother's sister was married to Diego Columbus, a direct descendant of explorer Christopher Columbus. It is through this family connection that the most significant Columbus collection in North America came to Boalsburg.

When Mathilde's Aunt Victoria died in 1908 in Asturias, Spain, she willed the interior of

the Columbus family chapel to Mathilde. Terry shipped the historic contents to Boalsburg and built a limestone building to house them. This reconstructed Columbus Chapel is on the grounds of the mansion and is open to visitors. Did I say "breathtaking" before?

In 1817, the Roman Catholic bishop of León, Spain, gave the Columbus family two pieces of the True Cross which are contained inside a crucifix at the top of a silver reliquary on the altar. A document signed by the bishop is on the wall, stating that the pieces are from the left arm of the Cross, brought to Spain by St. Toribius of Liebana, Keeper of the Holy Relics in Jerusalem in the fifth century.

To the right of the altar is an admiral's desk that belonged to Christopher Columbus himself. Also displayed is an explorer's cross which would have been mounted on a staff planted in the ground to signify a land claim in the name of Spain and the Catholic Church.

The tour ends with a visit to the Weapons Room. Rifles, swords, and sabers belonging to six generations of Boals are displayed on the wall and in cases, along with a hat and epaulettes that belonged to Villa.

If your travels take you to Pennsylvania, you won't be disappointed in a visit to Boalsburg. I wasn't! ■



Altar of the Columbus Chapel at the Boal Mansion.



The Weapons Room at the Boal Mansion displays items that belonged to six generations of the wealthy family.

ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA. For more information about the museum and shop, visit his Website at www.the-toy-soldier.com.