

Tower

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE 3

better living, for freedom and for independence. ... It seems fitting and proper to ask descendants of those Pioneers to send back tokens, to bed in with those (fieldstones) dug from this land, to express the unity and strength of a grateful nation honoring all her war dead."

In fact, in 1950, the Altar of the Nation was dedicated as a memorial to all American war dead.

But that is not the rest of the story.

A decade or so later, an anonymous woman visited the Altar of the Nation, and was so moved by it, she returned the following day to present the Sloanes with a check for \$460,000. In 1953, in response to this spontaneous generosity, Sloane built the first and only national monument dedicated to women who gave their lives for their country.

The Sloanes built a 55-foot bell tower. Each face of the tower displays a nine-foot-high bronze

Is it a metaphor for the essential yet unsung nature of women's work across millennia - the far less dramatic and often tediously repetitive work of keeping a household and family together? Like the tasks and lives of women over the centuries, history is also often invisible in plain sight - silent until it is expressed in the stories of those who came before us, those like the Sloanes who created a lasting legacy to transform their grief. The same can be said of women's lives across the annals of history. Unless we tell their stories, they remain invisible in plain sight.

bas relief of that depicts a different population of women. The reliefs were designed and drawn by Norman Rockwell, and executed by his son, sculptor Peter Rockwell.

Tablet No. 1, facing west, depicts the "Girls of the Combat Forces" - army, navy, marine corps, air corps, and coast guard women in uniform.

Tablet No. 2, facing east, depicts other roles in which women served their country. This relief features a Sister of Charity Nun, who tended troops in the War 1812 and the War Between the States; a Salvation Army "lassie;" a USO entertainer; a war correspondent; and a "Rosie, the Riveter,"

representing the women who began working in shipyards, munitions and aviation plants, shops and factories to fill the work force during wartime.

Tablet No. 3, facing north, depicts Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, representing all the women nurses who served the troops.

Tablet No. 4, facing south, features the pioneer woman, holding a rifle with a child at her knee, defending her home turf in the face of war.

The Women's Memorial Bell Tower was dedicated on May 28, 1967.

In honor of that dedication, an anonymous writer, wrote the following in a brochure entitled The

Memorial Bell Tower: A National Tribute to All American Women Who Sacrificed Their Lives in the Wars of Our Country:

"Henry Ward Beecher said that if he were invited to give an oration on July 4th he would celebrate the virtues of the fore-mothers instead of the fore-fathers. The latter, he said, had monopolized all the glory although their mothers, wives, and daughters had induced quite as much and had evinced at least equal piety and heroism in subduing the wilderness and securing our national independence."

I have visited the Bell Tower at least six or seven times. What disturbs me

about this unique tribute to women - the only one of its kind in the nation - is that it still remains so unsung. I have met at least fifteen women in my travels who were married at the Cathedral of the Pines, yet not one could recall what she was walking by - a 55-foot Bell Tower that is ten times bigger than the Altar of the Nation.

Despite the fact that the Bell Tower stands in the way of anyone walking to view the Altar of the Nation, most people do not see it. It is invisible in plain sight - and I ask myself why.

Is it a metaphor for the essential yet unsung nature of women's work across millennia - the far

less dramatic and often tediously repetitive work of keeping a household and family together? Like the tasks and lives of women over the centuries, history is also often invisible in plain sight - silent until it is expressed in the stories of those who came before us, those like the Sloanes who created a lasting legacy to transform their grief. The same can be said of women's lives across the annals of history. Unless we tell their stories, they remain invisible in plain sight.

Ponder the fact that just 7.4 percent of all Americans serve in the military. And only 10 percent of that number - just 1.4 percent of all Americans - are women. How often do we think of that? How do we honor that sacrifice and service?

Taking nothing away from the men who made the ultimate sacrifice, today, I would like to put the mothers, wives and daughters - the 1 percent - in the spotlight.

D. Quincy Whitney is a career journalist, author and historian and Nashua resident of more than 40 years. Contact Whitney at quincysquill@nashuatelegraph.com.