

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 4: "The National World War I Museum & Memorial"

Guest: Jonathan Casey

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. It was supposed to be the war to end all wars. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the guns on the battlefield fell silent to mark the signing of the armistice that ended World War I. Yet, for all the hope of peace and a return to normalcy, the First World War, as it would later be called, merely marked the opening act of a century dominated by global conflict. As we come upon the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, the *Our Missouri Podcast* is launching a three part series on "Missouri and The Great War." Each episode in this series will focus on different aspects of the war ranging from soldiers and civilians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean to how the conflict has been remembered in memory and monuments. Today, in Part 2, we are speaking with Jonathan Casey, director of the archives and Edward Jones Research Center at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from the College of William & Mary and a master's degree in Museum Studies from the University of Kansas. In addition to managing the museum's collection of over 100,000 items, he has also traveled to several World War I sites in the United States and Europe to give programs on the war's lasting impact.

SEAN ROST: Can you start by telling us a little bit about where the National World War Museum and Memorial is located at in Kansas City for people who may not be familiar with facility.

JONATHAN CASEY: Okay. Yes. We are in Kansas City, Missouri, in midtown. Across from Union Station—south of Union Station. That's the easiest way to find us. I mean, we have a 217-foot tower which is—it's easy to see from a distance. But, we're across from Union Station in midtown Kansas City, Missouri.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us a little bit about the history of the Liberty Memorial Tower, since it is so dominant on the skyline, what's the history of that overall structure?

JONATHAN CASEY: Well, the history starts right at the end of World War I. The Armistice—almost, actually a couple days before—there was an effort to want to build a memorial to those who served, and especially those who sacrificed. The business and civic leaders got together—this is in 1918 right after the Armistice of November 11, 1918—and formed what eventually became the Liberty Memorial Association. That was dedicated to raising money for a memorial, and also turned in to a museum. So, it's not just a memorial, it's a museum as well. A lot of money was raised in 1919, a little over two million dollars for the memorial and museum, and there was an architectural competition in the early '20s—I think in '22—and then construction started in like '23. It went along and then opened in 1926. November 11th, Armistice Day, 1926, the structure opened. President Calvin Coolidge was here to present—to bring the federal government's affirmation of the memorial and to indicate how important it was—the significance of it because he would be speaking here. That's 1926. There were other ceremonies. A cornerstone ceremony in 1924. And then in 1921, site dedication, and that's when General John Pershing, who's from LaCledde, Missouri, and the four other Allied commanders, top commanders from the war, got together and were here. The only place that they were together one time. They were here for other reasons, too, in the country, but they dedicated the site in '21. Eventually, then it opened in '26. Later on, the site was finished. Park land and everything—it's a public park, and that was finished and landscaped and then there was a sculptural frieze was put on the front of the building, the front wall facing north, in 1935 that was dedicated. So, all the original structure dates from that period, from '26 to '35. It has since been renovated and expanded into what one would see today.

SEAN ROST: Now, when was the museum officially created? What was the history behind that?

JONATHAN CASEY: Well, the museum itself—what became the—the original museum, which is still in a building called the Exhibit Hall, in the west building, it is still used as an exhibition space—that was done at the same time. Back in 1919, there was a vote to the people because they asked the people for their money, there was a public subscription drive modeled after the Liberty Loan Drives of the war that asked people for the money and that's how most of it was raised. People wanted a museum. They were given a ballot with several choices and one was to have a memorial with a museum. So, something that people could look at things from the war. What you might think of as souvenirs, but things from the war and what the actual soldiers and other servicemen and –women used. So, that was all part of it. So, there was a collections committee from the beginning, or it was called a War Trophies Committee, and their responsibility was to gather these materials. There were a number of them from foreign governments as gifts. It was three dimensional kind of materials and two dimensional. Materials like maps and posters. And actually the collection started with posters in 1920. Five hundred posters were purchased to start the collection. So, that was the museum, was planned from the beginning, and opened in 1926 with the tower and the east building called Memory Hall. The Memorial Courtyard around it and the two sphinxes statues on the south end and so forth that was pretty much what it was then. Then, as I said, more was added to it by 1935.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us a little bit about the facility you work in? The archives and the Edward Jones Research Center.

JONATHAN CASEY: Right. I'm the director of archives and the Edward Jones Research Center. So, I'm responsible for the archives collection and the library collection. So, we have a research center which is a library and it's open to the public six days a week, Tuesday through Sunday, 10-4. There is no admission. A person can just come in. Doesn't need an appointment. Sign in at the attendance desk and start asking questions. So, we have a library that's available to the public. We have more library that's not, that would have to be ahead of time we would have to know a book somebody wants and then we could pull those books because they are in storage. The information for the library and for a lot of the collection is in a collections database on our website: theworldwar.org. It's under the "EXPLORE" tab and it says, "Online Collections Database." There's a lot there to look at. Everything is part of the collection. The library—it's not a circulating library. Someone can't check out a book. So, he or she would have to stay here with the books. But, we're open 10-4. The archives is something that—people, of course, they donate books and other library holdings and they donate all kinds of things. We have a large collection of two dimensional and three dimensional objects. I'm responsible for the two dimensional objects, and just responsible for what goes in to the collection and what doesn't and working with potential donors and people—anything to do with the collection and the collections management. Then, I work with people who have research questions and people who really want to do research here, let's say, with two dimensional collections like letters and diaries, they would contact me. Then, they would be given the material, and they actually do the research in a room separate from the public research room where the library is so that we have some security for the collections material. So, I'm over all that kind of basic operations of what we have, again, for the two dimensional collection and for the library and research center. And also, to include everything, the Ellis Gallery, which is an exhibition gallery on the level of the research center, the Edward Jones Research Center, which is on the lower level of the museum, the Ellis Gallery is sort of an art gallery. It's for two dimensional objects. We have an exhibition there currently called "War Around Us," and that's also under my area of responsibility.

SEAN ROST: You mentioned some of the collections that you have. Are there any kind of notable or prominent ones that you like to show people if there are people who are interested?

JONATHAN CASEY: Well, if somebody is doing research on something, they can really see the collections like I'm talking about, the archival collections. We do have—the first thing that comes to mind, I've mentioned, is the posters which started in 1920 with 500 posters. We have a number of them on exhibit. So, throughout the gallery spaces there's posters on exhibit. We have like 1200 or something posters, and a number of those are duplicates, but we have a lot of posters and all from all the countries, pretty much all the countries, involved in the war. Pretty much all the major ones. A lot of things—they're really great for research and educational use. So, we have like the famous "I Want You" Uncle Sam poster, and then many others. We have a nice collection for our Medal Honor recipient. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration. This is for a U.S. Army soldier named John Lewis Barkley from Johnson County, Missouri—Warrensburg area. He was serving in the 3rd Division and he performed some deeds—his

actions—that made him a recipient of the Medal of Honor. It was during about this time of the year. Actually, in October 1918, during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. So, he's our Medal of Honor winner. He's kind of like our Sergeant Alvin York from Tennessee who was a Medal of Honor recipient. So, we have his collection. All the two dimensional—all the letters and everything to do with while he was in the service and after the service because he was kind of a celebrity. So, like book contracts and movie contracts and things like that. Then a third collection that I like is one of an American from Oklahoma who was a Red Cross surgeon serving in Vienna, Austria, before [the United States] was in the war. So, he was serving in 1914 and '15, before the [U.S.] got in the war in April of '17. [The U.S. was] neutral, and he went over there as a member of a team from the United States with the Red Cross. He helped out. He was a surgeon. Helped wounded Austrian and Hungarian soldiers. The collection gives you a look from behind the lines of the other side, eventually when [the U.S.] got in the war—because Austria-Hungary was allied with Germany and two other countries that were then fighting France, Britain, Russia, and other countries that [the U.S.] became allied with and were one the side, the other side. So, it's an interesting collection to have from the behind the lines thing.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute" about a simple man who believed he could trust other people. Moving to a remote part of the country, claiming a considerable amount of land, but whose brief and general descriptions of land were not good enough, and a court ruled he didn't really own it. So an old man now, he brought his family to Missouri. He was widely known as a frontiersman, a settler, Indian fighter, explorer. The Spanish gave him 845 acres of land and made him a syndic—a sort of sheriff, magistrate, and probate judge. Later, he had sell most of his Missouri property to pay his Kentucky debts. He was slightly bald. His remaining hair neatly combed with a ruddy fair countenance. A soft melodious voice. Stood 5'10. Weighed 180 pounds. And was still active when he died at eighty-five. Some say Daniel Boone, who was born on November 2nd, 1734, journeyed as far as Yellowstone. The path from Saint Charles County to the family salt works in central Missouri became Highway 40. He died about a year before we became a state. Some say he's still buried here. Others claim he was taken back to Kentucky—a place to which he once said he never wanted to return. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: In terms of this year, 2018, being the 100th anniversary of really the end of World War I, how far out did you all have to kind of prepare for exhibits and events kind of building to this year?

JONATHAN CASEY: Well, we started, say, in 2012, and thinking about exhibitions and programming. Back that far. We had a smaller staff, then. When I started, there was only one other person, who was the senior curator. So, it was real small. We had to re-open the whole museum and everything, and then plan on the new museum. But, for the centennial, really going back to 2012 [with the] planning, and then going out through June of next year, 2019. That's when the Paris Peace Treaty at Versailles was signed and we were one of the signatories. So, the centennial is from June of 2014 to June of 2019. So, all the, again, exhibitions and

programming—and the exhibitions have mainly been going year to year and there's a theme for each year—2014, '15, '16, so forth. A theme for each year during the war. You know, 1914, '15, '16, so forth. So, tying in to that theme. That's in Exhibit Hall. We have the main gallery—is the exhibition for the overall view of the war, the interpretation of the war, and the story and representing everybody. We try to represent as many countries as possible, and both sides clearly, with material from everybody. So, that's the main one, but in Exhibit Hall we have the annual exhibition for the centennial. And we've been trying to tie that in also with what's on in Memory Hall and the Ellis Gallery. And now, we have a new galley, the Wylie Gallery, that opened this February, so that allows us to bring in, mainly right now, traveling exhibitions and bring them in because that's a whole new space. Programming is part of all that. They work in tandem—exhibitions and programming. In terms of like the research center, research services we provide that to people, really, because of the centennial, and that we've got a lot of attention that people are looking for their relatives who served in the war. They are looking back 100 years and trying to find out about those people from then. So, we do a lot of business with that, with helping people find their relatives, which is good. It's really a personal thing. So, anyway, like I said, it started in 2012 and now we are looking forward to after the war, after the centennial, we've got to look now—we're looking from 2020 to 2026. And in 2026 will be the 100th anniversary of the Liberty Memorial. Well, it was called the Liberty Memorial then, now it's the National World War I Museum & Memorial. Sometimes you'll see an "at Liberty Memorial," but we're the National Museum & Memorial.

SEAN ROST: Now, as we think of this 100th anniversary, and you mentioned people interested in finding out more about their family members and their ancestors, how much attention have you all received, or visitors or dignitaries have come by?

JONATHAN CASEY: Yeah. Well, our attendance has grown every year. Setting a record every year. We have records back ten years or so, maybe before that. The new museum—well, the main gallery and what you would see today in the research center opened in December 2006. So, we've been opened about twelve years. And the attendance has grown, and a lot of our media presence has grown a lot through social media. Now, we do have a company that works with us that displays stories with all kinds of media, whether it's social or print media or whatever. So, we've been helped out. We really have grown so much. The attendance last year was something like 380,000. That's everyone who paid to visit the museum or to see a program. The programming schedule has grown. Just everything across the board has grown, which has increased our profile immensely, really exponentially. I've been here—I always put it in a personal way—I've been for seventeen-and-a-half years next month. So, that's a long time in one place and to see the growth of it. Like I said, when I started, there was just one other person. We were off-site in underground storage. So, it's really taken off, and our museum's staff is about forty people, I think, full and part-time and seasonal. But, it's really taken off. We've gotten a lot of national and international attention, which started to build when we opened almost twelve years ago now, back in 2006, but it really, since then, has taken off a lot. I think it's just the presence out there on the internet. People contact us every day. I mean, I'm talking to people every day about things. So, it's really grown and I think it will continue after the centennial. I don't think it will cut back so much. I think people now are aware of us and we have this

momentum. And, you know, we're the only national World War I museum. I mean, that's it. There are collections elsewhere, but we're the only ones to do World War I all the time. So, for better or for worse, we do World War I all the time. But, there's a lot. We get attention from everywhere. All over the country and the world.

SEAN ROST: Yeah, thinking about kind of the attention that you get and everything, I remember about a year ago I went to Connecticut for some research and came through the Knights of Columbus' Museum & Archives in New Haven and they were doing a World War I display. They had a number of artifacts and documents from, obviously, you all. I was curious, how do these exhibits get transported to various museums? Where have you displayed your artifacts at beyond your own museum?

JONATHAN CASEY: We have traveling exhibitions. Our registrar is responsible for those. Stacie Petersen, Museum Registrar. So, that's one of her responsibilities is to take care of loans for us loaning objects to other museums. And then, incoming loans. Like I mentioned, the Wylie Gallery, there's an exhibition there now, "For Liberty: The Jewish-American Experience in World War I." That's on loan to us. So, that's one of her responsibilities. That's a big responsibility. So, loans going back and forth. We just send them out. People think—I remember meeting some of those people from the Knights of Columbus Museum. There were the curators here and the archivist, and they were planning this big World War I exhibition. So, they naturally came to us for support. So, I forget how many objects we loaned them and everything. And then, as far as I know, the exhibition runs through this year. But, Stacie takes care of that. She does the paperwork, and actually literally packs things and then ships them out. We just got something the other day. I mean, there's places all over that are doing exhibitions, and we're credited for the other—some big some small. So, we're helping a lot of places. I don't know how many off-hand. But, we are helping a lot of places. I think that's going to continue even beyond the centennial. I think it would continue indefinitely. There's people still with interest in World War I beyond the centennial. So, Stacie takes care of all of that. Some of these are international. We had the opening exhibition of the Wylie Gallery involve this huge painting entitled, *Gassed*, by John Singer Sargent. This iconic painting that is in the collection of the Imperial War Museums in London. That was part of a traveling exhibition. So, we had to work with them. We had to get this shipped back to Europe. There's all kinds of stuff going on with that. It's an interesting part of museum work, but without a registrar, that would be almost impossible. Stacie's been here six-and-a-half years, and before her, we did do something like that a little bit, but it was really difficult. So, Stacie is doing a lot of work.

SEAN ROST: Sure. Now, if someone is interested in learning more about family history, and especially ancestors who served in World War I, what are some best practices you can recommend for them looking in to this family history or finding out more about their veterans in their family?

JONATHAN CASEY: Right. Well, one thing, a lot of people have objects, they have collections of things, like letters. They may have a uniform and all that. So, it's good to know maybe someone can look around into their family and see what's out there, see what the family knows. They can do some work online. If they find out some information about it, what they have, they

can just go online, see what kind of information is out there about a particular unit that the person served in. They can always, of course, a lot of people contact us and we help them out. If we just get enough information, we can find out information for them. We can get some answer. There are a lot of places to contact, a lot of repositories throughout the country. So, we can guide them as to where to go if we don't have information. But, we have really a lot through our library, and we have Ancestry and Fold3. They're research—they're databases that we can use because we have partnered with them. So, we can use their resources, and then what we have already in hard copy or what we know about online. We can help anyone to some extent. So, I think people just are becoming more aware of if they have a relative who's in the war, about that person. It's different generations, too. Sometimes it's like daughters and sons of the person who was in the war. And then other times, it's grandchildren or great-grandchildren that they're looking in to it. It's out there, all the stuff, and I hear from a lot of people, like I said, and we try to help them out and we can. So, that's what we're here for. That's one reason what we're here for. And that helps educate people about World War I. Overall, we've gotten a lot of good response, anyway, from people who've visited here. Everybody that comes here likes it. So, I've heard from a lot of people over the years. We're doing something right.

SEAN ROST: Certainly. Now, as we think of Veterans Day coming up here, what are some big things that are going to be happening on-site for you all in honor of Veterans Day, and the end of the war, and certainly November with the 100th anniversary?

JONATHAN CASEY: Well, we're going to have a lot of events going on that week. November 11th is a Sunday. We're going to have things leading up to it the week before. It's kind of the traditional ceremony, but with other things expanded. Just expanding the traditional ceremony, and remembering the 100 years. I mean, this is the centennial, this is a special anniversary. So, the thing I can say now is just really to keep looking at our website to see what is going to happen because some things are still in flux. So, it would be looking at our website. There will be bell ringing. They ring bells a lot. It's a celebratory thing. The wreath laying. Kind of the traditional elements that an audience expects from a ceremony at a museum. Something of this historical significance. So, there's going to be that. But, there will be speakers and others things. Probably in this case, more international, definitely. Usually it's local people from Kansas City, Missouri, who are speaking. But this is going to be broadened to include others representing other countries. I know there is a lot going on outside of us like in Washington D.C. and everything. But, we're one of the centers for the activities, as we should be as a national museum and memorial. But, all I can say right now is just look at the website.

SEAN ROST: And your website is?

JONATHAN CASEY: Is "theworldwar.org".

SEAN ROST: Well, thank you very much for joining us today, Jonathan.

JONATHAN CASEY: Sure, Sean. Sure, you're welcome.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin

Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around Our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

Benton's *Perilous Visions* is an exhibit of Thomas Hart Benton artwork from World War II that showcases the artists' interpretation of the anxiety, horror, grief, and resolve that permeated American society during the war years. This exhibit will be on display in the Main Gallery of the SHSMO's Columbia Research Center until Spring 2019.

Are you an educator who is interested in developing a National History Day program at your school or using Missouri's primary sources in your classroom? The State Historical Society of Missouri is participating in several educator workshops in November that will provide tips on exhibits, performances, programming, and finding effective resources within the Historical Society's vast collections. National History Day in Missouri Coordinator, Maggie Mayhan will be in St. Louis on November 9th for a workshop at the Thomas Jefferson Library on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis with senior archivist Claire Marks. National History Day workshops will also be held at Strong [Hall] on the Missouri State University campus in Springfield on November 9th and Gentry Middle School in Columbia on November 29th.

If you live in Southwest Missouri, come to the Library Station–Springfield-Greene County Library on November 10th for an event on the Springfield, Missouri streetcar strike of 1916–1917. This presentation by senior archivist Erin Smither will examine the causes of the strike, the ways protesters benefited from community support, and the kidnapping and murder that influenced the demonstration's outcome.

To register and learn more about these events, visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at shsmo.org/events.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.