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# The Unsung Vigilance: A History of Sentinel

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# The Unsung Vigilance: A History of Sentinel

## Description

At risk of over using a popular cliché, there are objects everywhere on the Gettysburg College campus that are “hidden in plain sight.” For some objects, it is easy to stay hidden in this manner. Though we as college students and faculty pass them each day, they are simple plaques embedded in the cement paths we walk on, or the porticos of the academic buildings we enter without even thinking. Yet for other objects, it remains a perpetual mystery as to how even the infamously dense mind of the modern young adult could fail to, at least notice. The sculpture Sentinel, the massive conglomeration of stone and mortar standing 10 feet tall, is one such object. The plaque that is embedded in the ground at the foot of this monstrosity provides only vague enlightenment. [*excerpt*]

## Course Information:

- Course Title: *HIST 300: Historical Method*
- Academic Term: Fall 2009
- Course Instructor: Dr. Michael J. Birkner '72

*Hidden in Plain Sight* is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

## Keywords

Gettysburg College, Sentinel, sesquicentennial, Martin Puryear

## Disciplines

History | United States History

## Campus Location

Lawn between Pennsylvania Hall and Glatfelter Hall

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight

The Unsung Vigilance: A History of Sentinel

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

Austin Clark

Fall 2009

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Michael Birkner

Historical Methods – History 300

September 24, 2009

The Unsung Vigilance: A History of *Sentinel*

At risk of over using a popular cliché, there are objects everywhere on the Gettysburg College campus that are “hidden in plain sight.” For some objects, it is easy to stay hidden in this manner. Though we as college students and faculty pass them each day, they are simple plaques embedded in the cement paths we walk on, or the porticos of the academic buildings we enter without even thinking. Yet for other objects, it remains a perpetual mystery as to how even the infamously dense mind of the modern young adult could fail to, at least notice. The sculpture *Sentinel*, the massive conglomeration of stone and mortar standing 10 feet tall, is one such object.<sup>1</sup> The plaque that is embedded in the ground at the foot of this monstrosity provides only vague enlightenment.

Sentinel

By Martin Puryear

Commissioned by Gettysburg College in Celebration of its Sesquicentennial 1982

Who is Martin Puryear? What is the sculpture, exactly? Why is the sculpture here in the first place? What the heck does Sesquicentennial even mean? A cursory reading of the dictionary will answer only one of these questions definitively.<sup>2</sup> The rest requires a little bit of time, elbow grease and, if it's not too bold of me to say, a little dedication.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Sesquicentennial means “150<sup>th</sup> anniversary,” which in this case, would be of Gettysburg College.

“The sculpture (untitled) is a vertical element of concrete and fieldstone exemplifying permanence.”<sup>3</sup> It sounds a little poncy, but this is the description given of *Sentinel*, then untitled, in the bulletin distributed at its dedication in October of 1982. It is hardly alone in its description. In Charles Glatfelter’s comprehensive history of the college, *A Salutary Influence*, his short paragraph on the sculpture emphasizes the theme of permanence, mentioning that one of the main structural components was concrete, which has been in use since Roman times.<sup>4</sup> The sculptor, Martin Puryear, even referred to it as “permanence in a disposable age.”<sup>5</sup> This was a piece of art built to last.

The story of *Sentinel*, and it is only *Sentinel*, not *The Sentinel*, (perhaps at the risk of sounding like a Mel Gibson movie), starts two years before its dedication and is intrinsically linked with the Sesquicentennial Celebration. In 1980, with said celebration looming, the Associate Dean of the College, Robert Nordvall, suggested to President Charles Glassick that they spend some of the budget on something more permanent than a ball or a parade, such as a sculpture.<sup>6</sup> Glassick responded positively to the idea and created the Ad Hoc Sculpture Committee, to which he appointed Nordvall, who also became chairman, biology professor A. Ralph Cavaliere, art professor Alan Paulson, trustee Samuel A. Schreckengauast and, at Professor Paulson’s suggestion, the student Nicholas Micros, class of 1982.<sup>7</sup>

It was this committee that came up with the idea of looking to the National Endowment for the Arts for support. At the time the NEA, as it is more easily called, had a grant available known as the Art in Public Places Grant. The aim was to promote awareness of the arts by providing institutions with

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<sup>3</sup> Sesquicentennial Sculpture Dedication Bulletin, n.p, 1982, pg. 2, Charles E. Glassick papers, Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 26, Mussleman Library

<sup>4</sup> Glatfelter, Charles. *A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985* (Gettysburg: W & M Printing, 1987), 1017.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Sipkoff, “Puryear Completes Sculpture at College”, *The Gettysburg Times*, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1982

<sup>6</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Allen Carlson, Gary Lowe, Dan Mangan, Alan Paulson and Nick Schindeler, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1980, Charles E. Glassick papers, Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 26, Mussleman Library

<sup>7</sup> Charles E Glassick, Memorandum to Samuel A. Schreckengauast, Robert Nordvall, A. Ralph Cavaliere, Alan Paulson, Nicholas J. Micros ’82, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1980, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7 and Sesquicentennial Sculpture Dedication Bulletin, n.p, 1982, pg. 2, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

funds to display pieces of contemporary art, usually more abstract pieces.<sup>8</sup> This interesting concept was in the mind of President Glassick, who was well aware of what kind of controversy something abstract could, and eventually would, cause.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the committee came up with a proposal for the NEA, starting the process that would eventually lead to the creation of *Sentinel*.

At this point, it should be noted that most of my sources for the hard facts of the story of *Sentinel* have been a literal ream of memorandums between the various members of the sculpture committee, President Glassick, and Martin Puryear. While these are excellent resources and will continue to form the backbone of this narrative, I was acutely aware at this point that the story of *Sentinel* lacked a more personal angle. The memorandums were good at helping me pin down the chronology and great at giving me the facts, but they did not provide the insight I was looking for. To that end, my former art history professor, Carol Small, put me in contact with Alan Paulson, a member of the Ad Hoc Sculpture Committee and, eventually, the artist selection panel.

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Schmucker Hall is one of those places I enjoy walking into. Music is always drifting through its walls like a gentle breeze and it has the strange appeal of older and refitted buildings, with wandering hallways, doors that make no sense, and a generally inexplicable layout. Such a feeling had not changed when I met Alan Paulson and his dog, Chloe, in the Art Department Office.

Chloe is a mix of collie and German shepherd, the youngest in a long line of therapy dogs that Paulson trains. She immediately announced my entrance by demonstrating the German shepherd part of her with an intimidating and reverberating bark. That this was her first reaction as a therapy dog to my presence was a mite unsettling, but despite this, Paulson seemed generally happy to talk to me.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, Dina Dorich and David Crouner, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

He was quick on the uptake too. Despite being quite advanced in years, having retired only last semester, he began talking about *Sentinel* so quickly I hardly had time to pull out my digital voice recorder before the incredibly useful tidbits began flying. Though his articulation was somewhat haphazard, and our interview often interrupted by Chloe and Professor Small, he still managed to lay out for me what happened, from his unique perspective.

“We researched the necessary steps,” he recollected about the Sculpture Committee. “The first step was to form a committee; the second step was to pick a site.”<sup>10</sup> The site the committee settled on was by the apse of Musselman Library, then brand new.<sup>11</sup> The committee then wrote a proposal and sent in slides of the site, which would be reviewed by the NEA. The proposal argued that the timing was appropriate to have a sculpture raised on the college campus, as three large events coincided in 1982; the new Musselman Library, the re-working of Schmucker Hall into the music and arts building and, of course, the sesquicentennial.<sup>12</sup> The other main argument for the grant was that Gettysburg College was an ideal place to display a piece of art, not only because of its location, but because the abstract sculptures which the NEA usually funded would provide a “fascinating contrast to the abundant pieces of traditional sculpture that are in the battlefield area.” Plans were even being made, it claimed, for the piece to become a tourist attraction.<sup>13</sup>

Part of the Art in Public Places Grant contract was that it would only pay up to half of the cost of the sculpture, leaving Gettysburg College to foot the rest of the bill. President Charles Glassick approved 25,000 dollars to be spent on sculpture, which easily made it the most expensive item on the sesquicentennial shopping list.<sup>14</sup> This fact did not go unnoticed and with the sesquicentennial budget up for revision in 1981, members of the budget committee were making noises about cutting the funding.

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>11</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1980, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>12</sup> Richard Allen, Letter to Grants Office of the National Endowment for the Arts, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1980, Charles E. Glassick Papers, Box 7 – a letter summarizing the proposal to the NEA

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Norvall, Memorandum to George Howes, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

Fortunately, The Sesquicentennial Events Committee liked the idea of the sculpture enough to vote unanimously to keep it as part of the budget.<sup>15</sup>

The next step, in order to fulfill the rest of the grant application, was to find an artist and send in examples of the artist's work.<sup>16</sup> "We each came up with proposals," Paulson explained to me. "I came up with, I think it was six, and I sent in a bunch of slides, and then we had to form a master committee which involved people from the outside."<sup>17</sup> The NEA stipulated that the college had to use outside consultants when choosing an artist, so the "master committee" to which Paulson referred was formed. It included Paulson himself, David Pease, dean of the Tyler School of Art of Temple University and Julie Brown, curator of the Hudson River Museum.<sup>18</sup> The panel met on February 11, 1981 to review the proposals.<sup>19</sup> "They brought in six each and we voted on them," Paulson said. "Two votes, and then when we came back from lunch, one vote, and we ended up with Martin Puryear."<sup>20</sup> A memorandum from Robert Nordvall later in 1982 states that Puryear was selected unanimously.<sup>21</sup>

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It was an interesting and, as it turns out, eerily prescient choice. Today, in 2009, there is almost no bigger name in the world of sculpture than Martin Puryear. In 1981, Puryear's star was ascendant, but his full potential was not yet realized. He was not yet the big name he would become and, in fact, many of the 15 other artists brought forwards in the aforementioned panel were more famous and respected.<sup>22</sup> Yet the committee concluded that Puryear was best choice.

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<sup>15</sup> Allen Carlson, Memorandum to Dina Dorich, February 4, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>16</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, Dina Dorich and David Crowner, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>17</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>18</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, Dina Dorich and David Crowner, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>21</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>22</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 and Jim Newkirk, "Modernistic Sculpture Draws Mixed Reviews," *The Sunday Patriot*, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1982



Born in 1941 the oldest of seven children, it seemed that Puryear always had a knack for art. Yet because of his fascination with nature, he first attempted to study biology, only being convinced by his art history professor at the Catholic University of America to change majors late in his college career. After graduating, he joined the Peace Corps. where he taught in Sierra Leone, where he first began to take a serious interest in wood sculpture as an art form. After his term in the Peace Corps. ended, Puryear attended the Swedish Royal Academy of Art in Stockholm, Sweden. Returning to the United States in 1969, he enrolled in the graduate program at Yale University. Clearly, this man was no slouch when it came to sculpting. Teaching at various schools in the intervening years until his work at Gettysburg, Puryear settled down in Illinois, after a 1977 fire burned down his Brooklyn, New York studio. It was at this period in his life when the college commissioned him for the sesquicentennial sculpture, not knowing that the best of his work was yet to come.

In 1989, a scant seven years after he erected *Sentinel*, Puryear was selected as the sole artist to represent America in prestigious Sao Paulo Bienal international exhibition of contemporary art in Brazil, officially becoming the first African American to represent the United States in a foreign art completion. There his work netted him the grand prize. Later that year, he was awarded the MacArthur Foundation's "genius" Fellows, a 500,000 dollar grant. This reinforced his reputation and even today Puryear's work is in high demand. In 1991, The Art Institute of Chicago, the institution where Puryear had worked during his heyday in 1989, did a comprehensive exhibition on their shining star.<sup>23</sup> More recently, in 2008, the National Gallery of Art featured a large and well received showcase on his work.<sup>24</sup> It seems that Gettysburg College did well for itself, especially considering that Puryear has recently retired, put aside art for his almost constant circuit of lectures and lessons.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Biography for Martin Puryear." Ask Art, the Artists Bluebook, <http://www.askart.com/AskART/artists/biography.aspx?searchtype=BIO&artist=95520> (accessed September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009) – source for all previously stated biographical information.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Richard, "The Sculptor's Swell Curves," *The Washington Post*, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Martin Puryear Vertical File, Special Collections, Musselman Library

<sup>25</sup> Mark Warwick, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Today, most people seem to agree. I cornered Mark Warwick, the current professor of sculpture here at Gettysburg, to ask him his opinion of *Sentinel* and Puryear. His last words to me, “I hope to have him back,” reflects his good opinion of Martin Puryear, who he has personally met, but *Sentinel* itself proved to be the biggest surprise. As Puryear’s first outdoor piece, it is actually well known in the world of sculpture, and is featured in the National Gallery of Art’s large and fully illustrated catalogue, a fact I found that everyone in the art department was quite pleased with. But from Warwick, I learned that *Sentinel* has been assessed at a value of around 1,500,000 dollars – five years ago!<sup>26</sup> Paulson gleefully backed this up by informing me that *Sentinel* is worth more per square foot than anything on this campus, including Pennsylvania Hall.<sup>27</sup> The large, abstract lump of rocks I passed by every day could pay my college tuition for all four years, and leave me enough to retire comfortably at age 25!

The amazement of this aside, *Sentinel* turns out to be a piece that is pure, unadulterated Puryear. He is an abstract artist who prefers to use wood, and many of his sculptures look like *Sentinel*, only smaller and in Puryear’s preferred medium, wood. While they may be a little difficult to grasp, or even downright unsettling, Puryear’s sculptures soon grow on you. “Puryear’s are the deeper skills of a lutemaker, boatwright,” the Washington Post wrote about the National Gallery of Art exhibit in 2008. His art is “unafraid of beauty... and somehow torn from time.”<sup>28</sup> What he does, and *Sentinel* exemplifies, is force the viewer to interact with his sculpture. Unlike the myriad of heroic and no less impressive sculptures that dominate the Gettysburg area, *Sentinel* and other Puryear pieces cannot be summed up at glance. They need to be examined, digested from multiple angles.<sup>29</sup> In the words of the sculptor himself, “My work speaks to anybody who has the capacity to slow down.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Warwick, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009

<sup>27</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>28</sup> Paul Richard, “The Sculptor’s Swell Curves,” *The Washington Post*, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001

<sup>29</sup> Molly S. Hutton, “Under the Gaze of *Sentinel*”, *Gettysburg*, Autumn 2001, 15-17, Gettysburg College, Special Collection, Winter 2001-Winter 2004 Volume

<sup>30</sup> “Biography for Martin Puryear.” Ask Art, the Artists Bluebook, <http://www.askart.com/AskART/artists/biography.aspx?searchtype=BIO&artist=95520> (accessed September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009)

In 1981, the NEA officially awarded Gettysburg College an Art in Public Places Grant to the amount of 22,000 dollars, which would cover up to half the total expenses incurred by commissioning a piece of sculpture.<sup>31</sup> However, because of funding problems in Washington, notification of the award was delayed by two months and Puryear's original deadline for completion of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1982, the beginning of Sesquicentennial Week, became all but unattainable.<sup>32</sup> "I cannot produce a work of the scale and quality we both want by April 1," Puryear wrote to Robert Nordvall.<sup>33</sup> Alan Paulson agreed, and suggested that dedication of the sculpture be pushed back into the fall of 1982. In the meantime, Puryear and Gettysburg College signed the contract with the completion deadline reset for September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1982.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly enough, I found a copy of the contract between Puryear and the college in Special Collections, the Musselman Library's own archive, between sheaves of memorandums. While most of it was the typical dense, repetitive language of contracts, designed to leave no stone unturned, I was struck by the emphasis on liability and responsibilities. One passage in Article 10, Liability and Insurance, reads "all risk for liability, damages, theft, vandalism and Acts of God are the responsibility of Sculptor during any and all operations."<sup>35</sup> It later goes on to say much the same thing in at least two other articles, usually pertaining to whoever has responsibility of the sculpture at that time. It was only later in my research that the importance of this to Gettysburg College became apparent.

Going into 1982, the sesquicentennial year itself, *Sentinel* still faced problems, not in the least of which the hole the absence of its dedication left in the Sesquicentennial Week celebrations. Once again, Robert Nordvall came to the rescue, suggesting that Martin Puryear come down to the college to give a presentation and display on his concept for the sesquicentennial sculpture.<sup>36</sup> President Glassick approved

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to George Howes, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>32</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Dina Dorich, David Crowner, A. Ralph Cavaliere and Alan Paulson, September 28, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>33</sup> Martin Puryear, Letter to Robert Nordvall, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>34</sup> Robert Nordvall, Letter to Martin Puryear, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>35</sup> Contract Between Gettysburg College and Martin Puryear, September 1981, E. Glassick papers, Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 26, Mussleman Library

<sup>36</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Alan Paulson and Dina Dorich, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

the idea and for the beginning part of April 1982, Puryear displayed his models, drawings and concept pieces in the newly renovated Schmucker Hall gallery.

The other problem spun off of this one. If the Sesquicentennial Sculpture was not going to be dedicated during Sesquicentennial Week, when exactly would it be dedicated? Paulson had suggested earlier that it be held on another important day during the year, such as Homecoming or Parents Weekend.<sup>37</sup> President Glassick favored dedicating it on November 7<sup>th</sup>, the same date that, 150 years before, Gettysburg College began classes.<sup>38</sup> The eventual decision was to hold it on Homecoming Weekend, specifically on October 30<sup>th</sup>, in part because of an interesting shift in how the sculpture was going to be created.<sup>39</sup>

In a letter to Puryear, President Glassick proposed that the artist take different tack than what he had initially planned. Puryear had originally thought to begin construction of *Sentinel* sometime in July of 1982, in order to meet the September 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. However, Glassick expressed the idea of moving the completion date back to October 15<sup>th</sup>, so Puryear could start work on the sculpture a little later; so late, in fact, that the bulk of the work would be done while classes were in session. This way, Glassick and the Ad Hoc Sculpture Committee reasoned, it would give students a chance to interact with the artist and watch the sculpture grow.<sup>40</sup> Puryear agreed, and the already delayed construction of *Sentinel* was set back even more, but this time with a purpose.

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In researching the history of *Sentinel*, I was led to probably the least likely place I could imagine. As a history major, I not at all familiar with the Science Center, and even less familiar with McCeary 211, which bears the intimidating name of the Election Microscopy Lab. I was there to talk to former biology

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Dina Dorich, David Crowner, A. Ralph Cavaliere and Alan Paulson, September 28, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

<sup>38</sup> Charles Glassick, Memorandum to Robert Nordvall, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>39</sup> Charles Glassick, Memorandum to Robert Nordvall, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1982, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>40</sup> Charles Glassick, Letter to Martin Puryear, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

professor A. Ralph Cavaliere, so freshly retired that his name was still on the building directory, who was on the Ad Hoc Sculpture Committee. The Electron Microscopy Lab, where I was to meet him, was sterile and sharp, typical of college science laboratories. Classical music played gently in the background. When I sat down with Cavaliere, a shorter, fiery man, I first asked the obvious question; what was a biology professor doing as a member of a sculpture committee?

“I think more than being a biology professor, I’m an Italian,” Cavaliere chuckled. “Being an Italian, I love art and music. I have a minor in art, my daughter is an artist, and so I’m really a frustrated sculptor myself.” Fair enough, I admitted. “I’ve always encouraged art on campus, I’ve always supported it, and I think that’s one of the reasons they thought I would be a good candidate,” he continued to enlighten me.<sup>41</sup> That question settled, we moved onto *Sentinel*, and he seemed delighted to tell me about its construction and impact on campus.

“He [Puryear] worked in broad daylight while classes were going on so when students came by, a lot of them helped,” he told me. “They would go and they would put a piece in for him or they would watch him make it. So it was really a very, very interesting time.”<sup>42</sup> The sculpture itself was very conducive to student involvement, as one can still see today, being made of a jigsaw of fieldstone and mortar.

“He built it inside of a form, he didn’t build it as you would a stone wall, he had a form that he made and he built his stones inside the form,” Cavaliere explained to me.<sup>43</sup> Alan Paulson echoed this idea in his interview, and gave me a few more mechanical insights.

“His initial idea was different,” he said. “He wanted a mould, he was going to cast the mould, and have the basket weaving repeated in the stone.” It turns out, Puryear eventually changed the design, which first called for a cast sculpture with stone imitating a basket weave design inside of it. He even went as far

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<sup>41</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

as build five of these basket moulds, but became inspired by something else. “He used the basket thing as a guide and then fell in love with the local stone, and he got off a diversion,” Paulson recollected, his tone somewhat irate.<sup>44</sup> And local stone it was. Apparently, Puryear drove for hours scouring the countryside for authentic Pennsylvania fieldstone, bringing back pieces that struck him. Some of the stone is even more local than that, taken from the foundation of Linnaean Hall, one of the three original buildings of Gettysburg, which stood where *Sentinel* stands now. Chunks of the original foundation were unearthed when the sculpting process began, and Puryear promptly integrated them into his piece.<sup>45</sup>

At this point, it should be mentioned that *Sentinel* does not stand at the site the Ad Hoc Sculpture Committee intended it to be placed. The site they selected and had been approved by the NEA was by the apse of the Musselman Library. Upon being approached, and subsequently commissioned, for the project, Puryear changed the location to where it stands now, for aesthetic and artistic purposes.<sup>46</sup> President Glassick informed Puryear of his decision to change the site that Stahley Hall was slated for either a major overhaul or demolition in the next five years, and to make his plans accordingly.<sup>47</sup> Undeterred, Puryear built *Sentinel* at that site, regardless of the eventual fate of Stahley Hall. That fate was to be demolished shortly after *Sentinel* began its vigilance.

Hearing Paulson’s story was interesting, as I had already read a memorandum by Robert Nordvall explaining that Puryear changed the sculpture, at the last minute. Apparently, *Sentinel* was going to cast a concrete “shadow” on the ground, which would be sunk below the turf line to make mowing easier. Nordvall, while evidently annoyed, recommended to Glassick that they let Puryear work.<sup>48</sup> Cavaliere echoed this sentiment.

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<sup>44</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>45</sup> Martin Sipkoff, “Puryear Completes Sculpture at College,” *The Gettysburg Times*, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1982

<sup>46</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Samuel A. Schreckengast and Charles Glassick, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>47</sup> Robert Nordvall, Letter to Martin Puryear, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1981, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box 7

<sup>48</sup> Robert Nordvall, Memorandum to Charles Glassick, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Charles E. Glassick papers, Box

“We don’t know why he did it, but once you give an artist a commission, then you just have to give them the freedom to do what they want,” he said.<sup>49</sup> Art is an organic process, it seems, and *Sentinel* appears to be no different. I knew beforehand that Puryear had changed the design on artistic whim at least twice during its construction, but Paulson dropped the biggest surprise on my head.

“It was going to be a see through piece, did you know that?” he asked me with a wink. I replied, in amazement, that I did not know that it was going to be a see through piece. “At the time, my assistant’s pieces were being destroyed when we put them out on campus, so he poured it solid because of that.”<sup>50</sup> Earlier he had mentioned that the footer he had put in was over 5,000 pounds, going down four yards, apparently because of the chronic vandalism that Gettysburg College experienced for a while.<sup>51</sup> Cavaliere offered to go into more detail.

“For many years in the 70’s and the...early 80’s, we didn’t have much sculpture on campus,” he explained to me. “It was almost impossible to put a piece up because students would come by and destroy them.” This is an amazing bit of information, given the number of sculptures on campus today, in 2009. “Several pieces were knocked over, some were burned, there was no appreciation for it,” Cavaliere told me.<sup>52</sup> Not in vain then, was the specific language of the artist contract concerning liability. With such a record of vandalism, Gettysburg College would rightly be concerned about any piece of artwork it brought on campus. Paulson shed some more light on the vandalism, pointing out to me that it was usually freshman fraternity candidates who were responsible for the mischief, citing one story where the frats turned in one of their own and he had to prevent his assistant, Nick Micros, from ‘counseling’ the vandal.<sup>53</sup>

As an interesting aside, Nicholas Micros was the only student to serve on the Ad Hoc Sculpture committee, and the man who eventually became Puryear’s assistant in *Sentinel*’s creation. Described by

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<sup>49</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

<sup>50</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

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Paulson as a “big, hammy, Greek American,” Micros was perfectly suited to be a carver and stoneworker, and Paulson speculated that this may have had an influence on Puryear’s decision to work with stone as intimately as he did.<sup>54</sup> Puryear himself described Micros as “the condition without which the sculpture could not have been built,” high praise coming from one of the world’s most respected artists.<sup>55</sup> Micros has since gone on to be a sculptor of some acclaim, working mostly in the field of erecting monuments and sculpting heroes of the past.<sup>56</sup> I was fortunate enough to get into contact with him, yet as of this writing, I am still awaiting his reply with any comments he has on the subject of *Sentinel*.

As it turns out, Cavaliere credits Paulson with reintroducing art to the college campus. “When Paulson became chairman of the department, I can’t remember exactly when, there seemed to be a blossoming of the arts,” he recalled. “We had the gallery introduced and we had gallery showings...and we found that there was less and less destruction and we could bring more and more pieces on campus that were controversial. Granted, that [*Sentinel*] was one of the first pieces and it was hard to do anything to that,” he added with a wry grin. One word that stuck out to me was *controversial*. In my search of Special Collections and the online database of *The Gettysburgian*, I had come up with several scathing articles about *Sentinel*, dating as far back as to Puryear’s first showing in the Schmucker Gallery.

A letter to the editor I found expressed outright anger that the college was spending so much money on a “12-foot shark fin and its shadow that glitters.”<sup>57</sup> His letter ended with a rallying call to parents and alumni to make Pennsylvania Hall stop the project. Another article, this one an editorial piece, bashes *Sentinel* on more aesthetic grounds, saying that looked like “nothing so much as a stoved thumb with a thyroid condition” and had “about as much significance for this anniversary as Charlie the Tuna has for the grand opening of Joe and Wanda’s Feed Shop.”<sup>58</sup> Even after it was finished, *Sentinel*

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<sup>54</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>55</sup> Martin Sipkoff, “Puryear Completes Sculpture at College”, *The Gettysburg Times*, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1982

<sup>56</sup> “About the Art,” Nicholas Micros, <http://www.nicholasmicros.com/html/about.the.art.html>, (accessed September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Michael Ripley, “Another Student’s Opinion of ‘The Sculpture.’” *The Gettysburgian*, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1982

<sup>58</sup> Ellen McDaniel, “Piece of Mind – Sesquicentennial Sculpture: What Is It?”, *The Gettysburgian*, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1982



drew all sorts of criticism. “‘Shark’s Tooth’, ‘Barbecue Pit’, ‘The Wall’” were all commonly heard nicknames for it.<sup>59</sup> One article in the *Gettysburgian*, about a year later, claimed it was a “phallic symbol.”<sup>60</sup> Cavaliere smiled when I told him this.

“One winter,” he reiterated. “I imagine it was a fraternity, rolled up two great big snowballs and put two snowballs on either side of it, so it did look like a penis. Some of the comments were ‘the rest of the guy is underground’.”<sup>61</sup> I found this a little disturbing, but its well known resemblance to a, ah, phallus, was further solidified when Paulson told me it had once been covered in a giant condom when the school first started making noises about giving out free condoms.<sup>62</sup> Interesting. Apparently, this is where the aforementioned vandalism played in.

While all of this seems disrespectful, if not somewhat insulting to such a piece work (especially the articles), the President Glassick and the administration was more than willing to put up with it. *Sentinel*, after all, had ushered in the Gettysburg Renaissance, the “blossoming of the arts,”<sup>63</sup> so it was built to withstand such “Acts of God.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, such language and actions were viewed in an almost positive light by Paulson in a letter he wrote to President Glassick at about the same time the articles in *The Gettysburgian* were published. “The campus can use the inevitable controversy,” he wrote. “This is the kind of interaction that we need and dialogue of the best sort for an oasis of the liberal arts.”<sup>65</sup>

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One question I did ask of all my sources was where the name, *Sentinel*, had come from. Even in the dedication bulletin I found in Special Collections referred to it as the Sesquicentennial Sculpture, but the plaque at its base clearly indicates that its name is *Sentinel*. Paulson speculated that it was Robert

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<sup>59</sup> Jim Newkirk, “Modernistic Sculpture Draws Mixed Reviews”, *The Sunday Patriot*, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1982

<sup>60</sup> Glenn Whitney, “Feminism Rumbles on G-Burg Campus”, *The Gettysburgian*, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1983

<sup>61</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

<sup>62</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>63</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

<sup>64</sup> Contract Between Gettysburg College and Martin Puryear, September 1981, E. Glassick papers, Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 26, Mussleman Library

<sup>65</sup> Alan Paulson, Letter to Charles Glassick, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

Nordvall's idea, telling me that a year later, a student in his 3-D design class turned in a model, depicting *Sentinel* with a bomb stuck through it. Amused by the piece, Paulson sent it over to Nordvall and soon after heard the statue being called *Sentinel*. "Nordvall was a bit of a smart-ass too," he chuckled.<sup>66</sup>

Cavaliere suspected that it was Puryear who named it.<sup>67</sup> However amusing Paulson's story is, weight of evidence falls on Cavaliere's, and the sadly less entertaining, point of view. The first piece of evidence I ever came across in my research project was a letter from to Puryear, expressing an urgency to have an identification plaque cast.<sup>68</sup> The contract with Puryear also stated that he was responsible for marking it, leaving me with no other choice but to discredit Paulson's story.<sup>69</sup>

Such goes the story of one object on Gettysburg College's campus that is, as they say, "hidden in plain sight." Looking at *Sentinel* now, I have an odd appreciation for Charles Glatfelter's aforementioned connection to Roman times. As a historian I know that Romans built things to last, which is why they used stone and mortar, the exact same material *Sentinel* is made of. This idea of permanence was found wherever I came across references to *Sentinel*, from its physical materials, to the descriptions of Puryear and his work, to the aging corridors and drifting music of Schmucker Hall and even in the story of the sesquicentennial sculpture itself. It has timeless themes of overcoming obstacles, coming of age, inevitable controversy and enigmatic origins embedded in it at its very heart. Once again, Puryear says it best. "The sculpture should outlive us all," he wrote to Nordvall at the outset of the project.<sup>70</sup> Walking by it now, looking up at its towering bulk, I think that it just might.

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<sup>66</sup> Alan Paulson, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

<sup>67</sup> A. Ralph Cavaliere, interviewed by author, Gettysburg, PA, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

<sup>68</sup> Robert Nordvall, letter to Martin Puryear, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1983

<sup>69</sup> Contract Between Gettysburg College and Martin Puryear, September 1981, E. Glassick papers, Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 26, Mussleman Library

<sup>70</sup> Martin Puryear, Letter to Robert Nordvall, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Schmucker Art Gallery, Puryear File

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