

Memorial to Mildred Harnack

Artist: John S Durbrow

Specifications: *Granite Stele, approximately 8'6" tall by 1'10" wide by 1' deep* Mildred Elizabeth Fish was born September 16, 1902, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1926, Mildred studied and worked as a lecturer on German literature at the Milwaukee State Normal School (now the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee). She met and married Arvid Harnack, at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Mentored by William Ellery Leonard, she also worked on the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*.

Together with Arvid, the writer Adam Kuckhoff and his wife Greta, Mildred initiated a discussion circle which debated political perspectives on the time after the National Socialists' expected downfall or overthrow. From these meetings arose what the Gestapo would call the Red Orchestra (*Rote Kapelle*) resistance group. In 1940–41, the group was in contact with allied agents, trying to thwart the forthcoming German attack upon the Soviet Union. The group sent the Soviets information about the forthcoming Operation Barbarossa, and forwarded to them economic and resource assessments of German military strength. Meanwhile, Mildred was making contact with people who were against the Nazi régime, recruiting some for the resistance, and acting as a liaison with her husband and other members of the Orchestra, and allied agents.

In July 1942, the *Oberkommando des Heeres* managed to decode the group's radio messages, and the Gestapo arrested Arvid Harnack and Mildred Fish-Harnack on September 7th, while on a weekend outing. Arvid Harnack was sentenced to death on 19 December after a four-day trial before the *Reichskriegsgericht* ("Reich Military Tribunal"), and was put to death three days later at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin. Mildred Fish-Harnack was initially given six years in prison, but Hitler refused to endorse the sentence and ordered a new trial, which ended with a sentence of death on 16 January 1943. She was beheaded on 16 February 1943.

Artist's Statement:

"Mildred exhibited the strength, courage, and resolve to address early on the forces of oppression which eventually inflamed the entire world. Her convictions led her to associations and political environments far afield from her cherished serenity and comforts of Wisconsin, into a situation where once academic discourse begat deliberate action. She was too involved in the resistance to be perceived simply as a victim, yet too removed from mainstream conduct of war to have received accolades for heroism. Mildred's actions were imbued with personal resolve and inner strength rather than by ambition. The subtly anthropomorphized stele memorial reflects the quiet and somber dignity which is befitting one whose pursuits were impelled by selfless love and idealism. The memorial is intended to spiritually unite Mildred with her formative base and intellectual center, Wisconsin."

Proposal:

The Memorial should be installed near the lake's edge in Marshall Park on Madison's West side. The artist has agreed to donate the Memorial to the City of Madison. Due to the somber nature of a memorial, a quiet contemplative location is sought that can be both a tribute and an educational opportunity for the public to learn about this former Madison resident. The below image shows a scale model of the proposed sculpture.

