

The Oklahoma City National Memorial: collective narratives in memorial design

by

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B.A., University of Colorado, 1985
M.A., Arizona State University, 1994
M.S., University of Arizona, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning
College of Architecture Planning and Design

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This study adds to the understanding of the social role of designed memorials constructed at the sites of trauma by examining the memorial development process, the stated intent of the memorial design, and the public experience of the memorial space. The research site selected for this study is the Oklahoma City National Memorial (OKCNM), constructed on the site of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in downtown Oklahoma City. A domestic terrorist attack against federal agencies and their employees took place in 1995; the bombing killed 168 people and left many others physically and emotionally injured, orphaned and homeless. This event is recognized as the most destructive domestic terrorist attack in the United States' history.

As the physical manifestation of a collective design process, the memorial symbolizes the community's experience of the event and shares that experience with visitors through a carefully constructed set of narratives. The symbolic memorial along with texts and rhetorical materials created and disseminated by the OKCNM together form the site's intended narratives. These narratives are communicated experientially, visually, and didactically using signs and symbols, interpretive texts, staged events, public speeches, and publications.

This study documents these narratives through archival research that explores the process by which these intended narratives were conceived, developed, and disseminated during the initial creation and subsequent interpretation of the symbolic memorial. On-site observations document the ways visitors are using the memorial spaces, while surveys of memorial visitors document their reported experiences of the symbolic memorial. A comparison of the intended narratives revealed through document analysis with visitors' responses to surveys reveals the extent to which the memorial design is meeting the goals and objectives defined for the visitor's experience of the memorial design.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the victims and survivors of national tragedies, past and future, in the hope that this study will aid in defining methods to build bridges in the wake of tragedies as part of a memorial design and development process. May our jointly defined collective memory sustain us.

Preface

On Saturday morning, August 27, 2005, I was waiting for a moving van to arrive at my home in Tucson, AZ. I had accepted a three-year appointment to serve as the Executive Director of the Huhugam Heritage Center south of Phoenix and was scheduled to start work on Monday August 29th. Before the movers arrived, I received a call from my sister, Janice, in New Orleans telling me there was a class-five hurricane coming and she could not evacuate due to health issues. I was not aware of the storm as I had packed all my electronics and was focused on the move. I encouraged Janice to go to a shelter, but she cut the call short as she was feeling ill. I could not connect with her again before the storm made landfall. She was talking with our Mother on Monday, August 29th when cell service was lost.

Following breaches in the levee, Janice's apartment was inundated requiring her to navigate the rapidly increasing flood waters for 16 hours before being rescued by a neighbor in a small boat, who stayed with her throughout their evacuation. On September 3rd, after days of walking to reach a designated airport, the two were flown to Tennessee on a plane chartered by Al Gore to evacuate Hurricane Katrina survivors out of New Orleans (Mansfield 2005). After arriving in Nashville, they contacted our parents who arranged for their transfer to Tulsa and provided them with a home while they recovered from their ordeal. I spent the next year flying home every other month to help with Janice's relocation and stabilization. She eventually succumbed to her physical and emotional injuries and died on November 17th, 2006.

Following Janice's death, I searched online for a memorial to Katrina or development plans for such in the hopes I might participate but was unable to find information. Eventually, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), with assistance from the National Funeral Directors Association provided funds for the final burial of the 86 unclaimed bodies from the storm along with the creation of a memorial in the Charity Hospital Cemetery "by the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, August 29, 2008" (Williams 2026).

Earlier in 2008 I moved to Kansas from Arizona to be closer to family, hoping this would ease my sense of loss. Transitioning back to the mid-west after more than thirty years of work and research in the west was challenging and I struggled to find my footing. During a group therapy session in Wichita, I met a Katrina survivor whose testimony helped me find a new sense of purpose. He had been a pediatrician practicing in New Orleans at the time of the hurricane.

After the storm passed and the water receded, he and a colleague began walking the city in search of survivors in need of medical assistance. He shared his increasing sense of despair as they found one dead body after another and attempted to cover them to provide some dignity. I felt such compassion for this man who had suffered from the same tragedy as my sister and, like her, was left with a sense of futility. Hearing this Doctor's story and his struggle to find peace helped me to acknowledge the helplessness I felt in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and my sister's death. In my determination to transcend this helplessness, I set out on a new path of discovery that I hoped would help me in my own quest to heal and potentially provide others with something useful to consider, build-on and perhaps implement.

My determination to improve our understanding of how we collectively remember and memorialize a tragedy and to support those most impacted by devastating events became my life purpose and has sustained me over the 20 plus years since Katrina. I entered the PhD program at Kansas State University with the intent of studying memorial development, planning, and design. My research has been cathartic, allowing me to channel my experiences toward a greater understanding of collective memory and community engagement. I hope this research will inspire others to pursue research, design, and collective action that supports a sustainable path toward peace, mutual understanding, and acceptance at local, national, and international levels.

Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Study

This study seeks to increase understanding of how designed memorials¹ constructed at sites of trauma function within their physical and social contexts by examining the memorial development process, the stated intent of the memorial design, and the public experience of the designed memorial space. The study documents and analyzes the creation and visitor use of the Oklahoma City National Memorial (OKCNM), constructed on the site of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in downtown Oklahoma City following the building's destruction from a domestic terrorist attack against federal agencies and their employees that took place in 1995. The bombing killed 168 people and left many others physically and emotionally injured, orphaned and homeless. This event is recognized as the most destructive domestic terrorist attack² in the Nation's history³ (Linenthal 2001).

As the physical manifestation of a collective design process⁴, the memorial reflects the community's experience of the event and shares that experience with visitors through a carefully constructed set of narratives. The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial (hereafter Symbolic Memorial), which was one of three memorial components initially defined for development at the site by the Oklahoma City Murrah Building Memorial Task Force (Memorial Task Force), serves as study site. The Symbolic Memorial along with texts and rhetorical materials created and disseminated by the OKCNM together construct the site's intended narratives. These narratives are communicated experientially, visually, and didactically using signs and symbols, interpretive texts, staged events, public speeches, and publications. According to Kari Watkins, the President and CEO of the OKCNM, the annual visitation of the site is roughly 500,000 with approximately 250,000 of those visitors touring the museum (Wilson 2025).

¹The term "designed memorial" is used in this study to refer to memorials created through a formal process in which a design professional (architect or landscape architect) is selected to lead the design and creation of a durable commemorative space meeting a set of specifications."

² In contrast to the Oklahoma Bombing the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Washington, Virginia and Pennsylvania were foreign in origin, which called for a distinction between domestic and international terrorism.

³ For details of the bombing see: (Federal Bureau of Investigation n.d.)

⁴ The Oklahoma City National Memorial Task Force undertook extensive community engagement to define guidelines for the memorial's design. This process is discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 6.

On-site observations and visitor surveys were used to document visitors' use and descriptions of their experience to the memorial site. Visitor responses were compared with the intended narratives defined by the memorial organizations through documents and publications to understand if the memorial interpretation achieved its professed goals as revealed in the archival and public documents created and/or disseminated by the Memorial Foundation or its partners. In this way, the study seeks to reconcile the intent of the designed memorial with the visitors' experience and identify the extent to which the intended narratives for the site are being integrated into their cognitive framing of the memorial site.

Significance of The Study

Understanding the relationship between the intended messaging of a memorial design and the comprehension of that messaging by the visiting public will assist future designers in creating memorials that meet community defined goals and objectives. This study contributes to the field of environmental design research through its application of adapted ethnographic research and narrative analysis in understanding public engagement with commemorative landscapes. While there is an abundance of recent research that critiques contemporary memorials, it is generally based on an analysis of the broader historical and/or aesthetic framework of the memorial and lacks a robust visitor survey component. Given the exponential growth in designed memorials, it is critical that we understand how commemorative landscapes are experienced by the public to avoid wasteful expenditures creating memorials that are poorly designed or do not address the public needs for which they were designed. The OKCNM site was selected for this research because of the availability of baseline information that allows for a longitudinal component demonstrating its public use and community engagement over time. My experiences of visiting the Oklahoma City National Memorial site shortly after its dedication and the availability of extensive documentation of the community experience of the planning process provided essential baseline information for the development process and the initial opening of the memorial for comparison with the current data collected for this study. Edward Linenthal's publication *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma in American Memory* (2001), identified three narratives that were circulating within the community at the time the memorial planning process was being undertaken. Linenthal categorizes these narratives as Progressive, Redemptive and Toxic, describing them as different ways the story

of the bombing and its aftermath was being told at the time of his research (2001, 42)⁵. We can expect that with time such narratives may shift, grow or fade away entirely. Comparative analysis of the narratives derived from the OKCNM archival and public documents helped to understand the evolution of public messaging since the memorial dedication in April 2000. The visitors' experiences of the site provide an audience centered data set that does not exist in other studies of the OKCNM.

This study contributes to the larger field of environment-behavior studies through the application of narrative inquiry to environmental design. In reviewing the contributions and failures of environment-behavior studies (EBS), Amos Rapaport (2008, 278) laments EBS' failure to develop a significant body of explanatory theory since its initial inception in the late-20th century. He cites the large number of disciplines involved in generating research, and the production of a large volume of heterogeneous studies lacking consistency in the application of terms as contributing factors. His critique suggests the need to refine the conceptual framework for how we conduct environment-behavior research. In response to this critique, the research for this study was broken down into a series of clearly defined steps that work as discreet building blocks in the analytical process of reaching a conclusion. This research methodology allows for the analysis of each step in the design process as follows.

Step 1 – Community Engagement → Project Message Identification

Step 2 – Project Message → Methodology/Content Refinement

Step 3 – Method/Content Design → Message Reception/Experience

Step 4 – Reception/Experience → Message Integration/Internalization

These steps move from a community engagement or collaborative design phase that identifies a problem or need, to a developmental phase that refines the message and defines the methodology and content for the project, to an implementation phase that creates and shares the message or project with the intended audience, to a final phase in which the message is received and integrated into an experiential framework. Narrative inquiry is used to analyze the messaging as defined by the community, communicated through the design and then received by the visitor. The following research questions illustrate the application of this analytical framework.

⁵ In summary; the progressive narrative focusses on civic engagement and rebuilding, the redemptive narrative relies on religious convictions, and the toxic narrative is based unresolved physical and emotional harm (See Chapter 6).

Research Question

The study seeks to address the following questions as a method of understanding the social function of the Oklahoma City National Memorial:

1. In what ways did community engagement, conducted during the memorial planning process, influence the development of the intended narratives of the memorial design?
2. How are those intended narratives reflected in the content of on-site and promotional messaging?
3. How does today's visitor experience of the memorial reflect the intent of the design as revealed through archival and survey content?
4. How do the combined narratives of the site contribute to the collective memory of the bombing event?

The Memorial Site in Context

The Oklahoma National Memorial occupies the site of the former Murrah Federal Building north of the central business district in downtown Oklahoma City. The building was in the center of the federal district, surrounded by federal agency offices and community service buildings. In addition to destroying one third of the Murrah Federal Building the blast damaged hundreds of structures in the area. While most of the victims were in the Murrah building, some people were injured or killed nearby. For example, two people were killed in the adjacent Oklahoma Water Resources Building (Oklahoma Water Resources Board 1995). The area surrounding the memorial was redesigned during memorial construction. Redevelopment continues as part of Oklahoma City's downtown reinvestment strategy. The Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation launched a major fundraising campaign in 2025 for a future facelift⁶ to the Journal Record Building, which houses the memorial museum (Foreward Progress n.d.).

There are eight distinct areas of the Symbolic Memorial, five are classified as sacred and three as transitional based on their intended uses and the ways they have been described in the interpretive materials developed for the site (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum

⁶ "Foreword" introduces new and expanded programming spaces...the architecture embraces the site and signals to the community that a new experience awaits. "https://memorialmuseum.com/news/moving-foreword/"

2011) (The Experience n.d.). The following sections describe each symbolic element, providing context for the research project. The map in Figure 1.1 illustrates the site layout with the symbolic elements and areas of the memorial labeled. The red squares with arrows mark access points to the memorial. The original Murrah building plaza area, which now serves as an overlook for the Symbolic Memorial, is accessed by stairways from the street level on three sides, with a glass wall overlooking the field of chairs on the fourth side.

For visitors, a walking tour with the architects, Hans and Torrey Butzer, is available via YouTube for use on personal devices (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2011). The Butzer's explain the design intent for each area of the memorial in the portions of the video they have narrated. The OKCNM now offers an "OKC Memorial" app available from Google or Apple for on-site use that includes interpretation of the memorial grounds and educational materials.



Figure 1.1 Symbolic Memorial with elements identified

Spaces For Contemplation and Engagement

The following images illustrate the distinct spaces within the Symbolic Memorial along with brief descriptions of their experiential importance to the memorial design. The first five spaces constitute the most sacred area within the Symbolic Memorial. The memorial's entrance gates, emblazoned with the time before and after the bomb blast, serve as portals through which the visitor enters a sacred space of ritual commemoration and contemplation. The field of chairs is considered consecrated ground where the victims of the bombing lost their lives, while the reflecting pool creates a sense of calm. Surrounding this central sacred space are transitional spaces, which pay tribute to the rescuers and the broader local, national and global community of supporters. The transitional spaces are designed for rest and social engagement, allowing for emotional decompression before visitors exit the Symbolic Memorial into the public spaces of the museum or the city streets. The Murrah Building Plaza serves as both an overlook and buffers the interior of the Symbolic Memorial from noise and visual disruptions from the urban surroundings of the increasingly busy central business district.

The Sacred Spaces – An Overview

The 9:01 gate (Figure 1.2) symbolizes the moment before the blast, a time before the pain and chaos of the bombing began. The “time before” is a time of relative normalcy as compared with the time after the bombing, when everything changed.



Figure 1.2 The 9:01 Gate. Photo by author.

A remnant of the front of the Murrah building, seen to the left of the image (Figure 1.3), reminds us of physical devastation while two plaques inscribed with survivors' names bears witness to the extent of the suffering that was caused by this event. The alcove created by the corner of the building is referred to as the Survivor's Chapel. The juxtaposition of these two visual elements encourages the visitor to consider the duality they evoke. The destruction of the building on one hand and the survival of over 600 people who remain to share the first-person story of this tragedy on the other. This remnant is the only piece of the building that was retained after the Murrah Building demolition on April 26, 1995 (Department of Homeland Security Media Library n.d.) aside from the exterior Murrah building plaza which now serves as an overlook to the Symbolic Memorial.

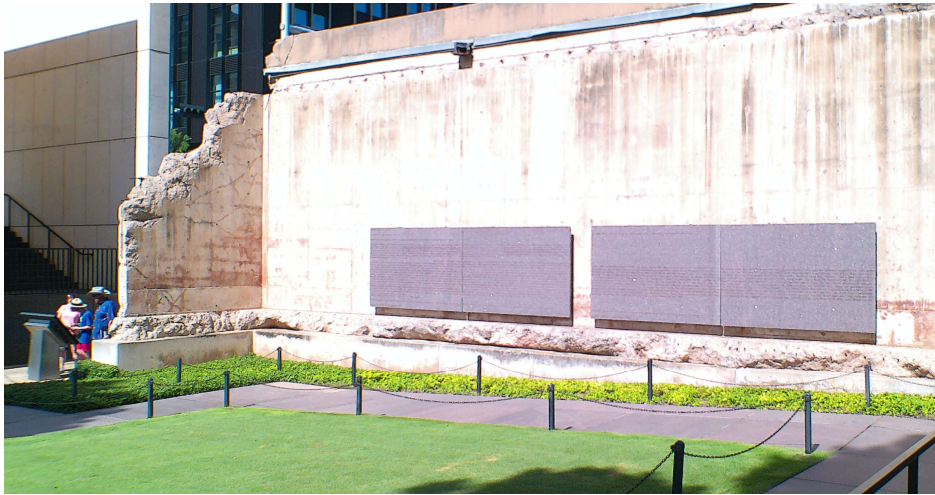


Figure 1.3 Survivor's Chapel. Photo by author.

The reflecting pool (Figure 1.4), bounded on either end by the gates of time, creates a moment of calm within the temporal space of the bomb blast. The memorial designers, Hans and Tory Butzer characterize the reflecting pool as “the heart of the memorial space” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2011, 8:20) The pool was designed with a shallow depth that imposes a sense of stillness in the water allowing it to reflect images. In the video tour Tory Butzer explains the intent of the pool's design, noting the calming sound of falling water below the surface of the pool. She further notes, “When you look into the reflecting pool you see the face of one changed forever” suggesting that a visit to the memorial is an opportunity to look inwardly and reflect on your own experience as you consider the tragedy that unfolded at this location (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2011, 9:07).



Figure 1.4 The Reflecting Pool and the 9:01 gate. Photo by Author.

The field of chairs (Figure 1.5) occupies the footprint of the Murrah building. The chairs, engraved with the names of those who died, serve as markers, inviting offerings of flowers, stuffed animals, and other tokens of affection. The chairs are arranged according to each person's location within the building at the time of the explosion. "Nine columns represent the nine floors of the Murrah Building. Each row includes an Empty Chair for every person who was killed on that floor" (H. Watkins 2025, 9). Loblolly Pine trees mark the original perimeter of the Murrah building and will grow to a similar height to that of the building (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2011).



Figure 1.5 The Field of Chairs. Photo by Author.

The 9:03 gate, located at the west end of the reflecting pool, marks the moment after the bomb blast. The gates of time serve as physical and metaphorical boundaries, serving as

ceremonial entrances to a sacred space. The gates of time are the only access points into the sacred area directly from the street. All other entrances from the street are through one of the transitional spaces, which provide time for visitors to become familiar with the space before entering the sacred area. The double walled construction of the gates of time encloses a long sloping walkway that encourages the visitor to slow down to navigate the sharp turns in the sidewalk. The height of the walls obscures the view limiting visual stimulation prior to entering the sacred space of the inner memorial.

These five areas of the memorial are intended to invite calm reflection, allowing visitors time to engage with their own memories of loss or trauma. The calm surface of the reflecting pool has a soothing effect, showing only slight ripples even on the windiest days.



Figure 1.6 The 9:03 Gate. Photo by author.

The sacred areas between the two gates, including the field of chairs and pool evokes the elegiac tradition of anti-heroic memorials that emerged in the late 20th century, beginning with Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Charney 1987). Certainly, one cannot help but meditate on the inevitability of death while walking among the tombstone like chairs. The idealization of nature is represented by the eternally peaceful pool of water and the enormous pine trees that dwarf the sculptural chairs, laid out so carefully beneath them.

Transitional Spaces

The spaces surrounding the sacred areas of the memorial serve as transitional spaces, allowing visitors time to decompress after leaving the deeply reflective interior spaces. The area in front of the memorial museum contains the children's area (Figure 1.7), set apart by a wall of tiles with images and inscriptions taken from cards sent to Oklahoma City by children from around the world after the news of the bombing spread.⁷



Figure 1.7 The Children's Area with Inscribed Tiles. Photo by Author.

A section in the children's area contains a chalkboard surface where chalk is available for visitors to write their own messages of sympathy and support, sometimes inspired by the inscriptions shown on the wall tiles (Figure 1.8).

⁷ This area is now being redesigned to accommodate an expansion of the Memorial Museum. Documentation of the area as it existed throughout the research project is retained as it reflects the visitors' experience during the project.



Figure 1.8 Chalk Inscription. Photo by Author.

The appearance of the Journal Record Building's façade following the bombing has been retained. Evidence from the blast can be seen in marks on the wall while the inscription of a rescue team member is a visceral reminder of the emotional toll the bombing took on everyone involved in the rescue and recovery operations (Figure 1.9). A sidewalk runs parallel to the building, allowing visitors to walk past the inscription on their way to the museum entrance.

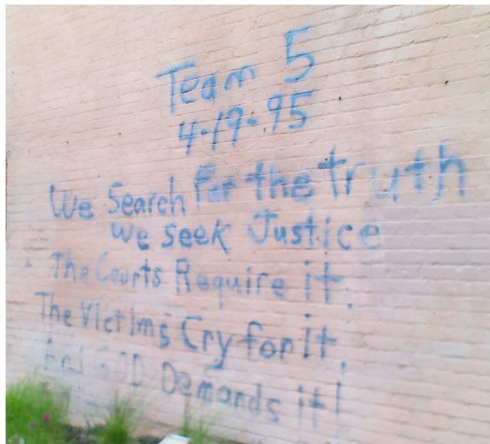


Figure 1.9 Journal Record Building Inscription. Photo by Author.

The Survivor Tree, (Figure 1.10), survived the bomb blast and figured prominently in photographs of the bombing's devastation of the area. It came to be a symbol of hope and resilience in the aftermath of the event and is a dominant feature of the memorial site. The interior of the surrounding wall is inscribed, "The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated; our deeply rooted faith sustains us." This area, adjacent to the memorial entrance from N. Robinson Street, serves as an orientation space. Within the Elm's walled enclosure, visitors can view introductory information at a large video kiosk, pick up a brochure with a map of the site, view the sacred space of the Symbolic Memorial below and the Oklahoma City Skyline beyond in three directions.



Figure 1.10 The Survivor Tree. Photo by Author.

The grove of trees located to the west of the survivor tree is identified as the rescuer's orchard and provides benches and shade for resting between the Symbolic Memorial and the Memorial Museum. Figure 1.11 shows a portion of the Rescuers' Grove with the construction fence in the background as it appeared in 2026 while the entrance to the Memorial Museum was under construction.

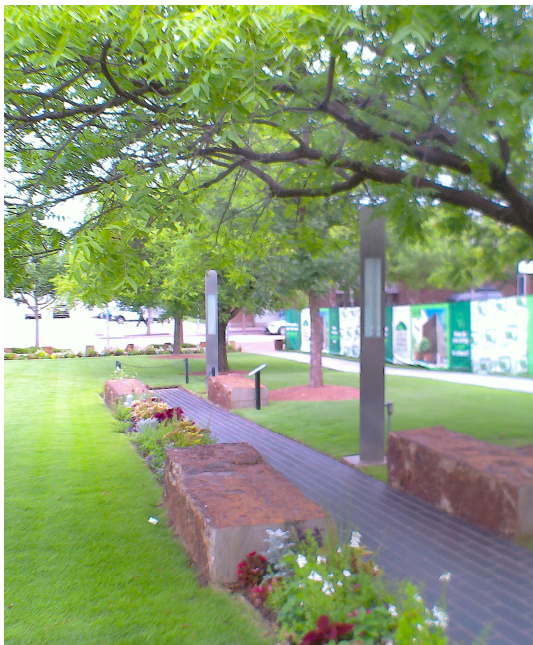


Figure 1.11 Benches in the Rescuers Grove. Photo by the Author.

Defining the Study Area

The sacred and transitional spaces as described, together form the “Outdoor Symbolic Memorial,” which provides the designed landscape context for this study. The memorial museum, while a significant element of the total memorial, was not included in the on-site observational research or survey design since the topic of this study is the designed memorial landscape. However, the proximity of the museum to the Symbolic Memorial and its role in fulfilling the defined goals of the Memorial Task Force and overseeing the use and management of the outdoor memorial space is considered from an operational perspective in later chapters when it is relevant to the interpretation of the research findings.

Following the demolition of the remaining parts of the Murrah Federal Building, a chain link fence was installed around the site. The fence became a site of spontaneous commemoration where people would leave flowers, notes, and memorabilia. A portion of the fence is now attached to the exterior of the memorial with a label that reads:

Although not a part of the original Memorial design, the Fence was incorporated in its plans and in October 1998- a day after the groundbreaking for the Memorial; family members, survivors and rescue workers joined together and moved sections of the Fence to its current location along Harvey Avenue – the symbolic healing side the Memorial. (The Fence n.d.)

Spontaneous memorials and acts of commemoration at sites of death and tragedy have become an increasing topic of research inquiry in recent years in terms of their psychological impact (Collins, et al. 2022) and the challenges they pose from the perspective and documentation and archiving (Arvanitis 2025). The Fence was not included in the data collection and analysis for this study because acts of spontaneous memorialization are distinct from professionally designed memorials and the fence section was incorporated into the memorial design after it was adopted by the Memorial Task Force.

The Study Design

Data collection and analysis details are provided in the methodology chapter while this section provides an introductory overview of the study along with explanations of the identified data sets. Research for the study began with a preliminary review of the OKCNM archives to understand the memorial development process and on-site observations to document visitors’ movement through and use of the Symbolic Memorial spaces. These two activities were

designed to provide a baseline for understanding the designers' original intentions for the space compared with how it was actually being used by visitors 25 years later. Memorial designs may encourage greater or lesser degrees of commemorative, ritualistic or mundane use of memorial spaces that may be understood through extended observations.

Stevens and Frank (2016, 20) describe the gradual evolution of memorial design from heroic and monumental to abstract and more accessible, suggesting these design shifts have encouraged changes in visitor's behaviours. On-site observations documented how visitors occupied the Symbolic Memorial space drawing on Stevens and Frank's observations of ritualized, commemorative and playful behavior. Understanding the comparative uses of the different areas of the memorial assisted in evaluating the function of the memorials design.

The archival research proved to be more complex and time-consuming than anticipated due to the sheer volume of materials, including the documentation of the extensive community-based work that was undertaken during the memorial development process. Initial review revealed that the memorial complex was originally conceived as three inter-related components with distinct functions. The three original components were 1) The Oklahoma City National Memorial 2) The Oklahoma Memorial Center, and 3) The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT). The names and functions of the first two components changed several times between 1995 and 2004 as the structure of the organizations changed. The third component, MIPT, ceased operation in 2014 due to the loss of public funding (EBSCO 2024).

In its almost 15 years of existence, the MIPT trained more than 20,000 security professionals. Its shuttering was unfortunate because in the decade since its closing, incidents of domestic terrorism spiked in the United States. Much of this increase in terror activity within US borders has been precipitated by rising political polarization as well as anti-semitic and anti-Islamic rhetoric. This trend exposed the need for the types of training formerly provided by the MIPT. (EBSCO 2024)

MIPT is peripheral to the current study, so the archival documents affiliated with this organization are not included in the document analysis. It will only be referenced as needed for clarification of issues included in the discussion of terrorism. As archival research progressed, critical new material was discovered within the digital archives of the National Park Service, that revealed an unanticipated partnership element that influenced the development and evolution of the interpretive programming planned for the memorial site.

This new material raised questions regarding the origins and intent of the interpretive program for the memorial and ultimately expanded the archival component of the research to allow for a better understanding of how the memorial's intended narratives were created and implemented. Ultimately, the volume of material selected for coding was reduced to a set of essential and representative documents, while other archival documents were treated as reference material that informed the background section of Chapter 6, Research Analysis and Findings. It is not uncommon for data collection processes and expected outcomes to shift in qualitative studies, such changes reflect the emergent nature of the research design. LeCompte and Schensul describe qualitative research as a process of repeated reformulation. "The process becomes what we refer to as iterative or recursive analysis" in which data are repeatedly reformulated and tested against what is found at the research site (1999, 158).

The Inductive Approach

Inductive research allows for methodological refinement in order to produce results that reflect the incorporation of new information and refinement of data collection processes to capture emergent information. The inductive approach used in the study does not pose a hypothesis to be tested through the collection of data. Instead, data is collected and analyzed to identify themes or patterns from which we can draw conclusions. The inductive approach is common with qualitative studies, particularly for projects taking a new approach to a topic rather than seeking to test previously established theories (LeCompte and Schensul 1999). The data collection techniques used in this study are informed by adapted ethnographic methods and narrative inquiry and have evolved over the course of the research as new information has emerged and site interpretation has changed.

Narratives within Memorial Landscapes

The questions defined for this research are based on the understanding that designed landscapes (including memorials) can be understood as texts employing literary tropes that may be understood by visitors as "cultural systems of signification" (Potteiger and Purinton 1998, 32). For example, the designers employed the trope of time to encourage visitors to consider how life was different before and after the bombing. From the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1980), we understand that collective memory represents a merging of individual and social memories that are created and reinforced through shared experiences and contexts (Erll 2011, 13). In the

absence of formalized memorial spaces, we might expect that individual memories of trauma would circulate in a random fashion based on the experiences and interactions of individuals within their social context. Weijer and Castel (2025) describe how collective trauma is experienced through an examination of individual and collective narratives.

Trauma fragments narratives and causes a rupture in the story of self and in relationships to others. In the aftermath of collective trauma, groups seek to restore narrative coherence through renewed collective meaning making and restoring a sense of self-continuity and cultural continuity. Events are interpreted and re-interpreted, in a manner that is often disconnected from historical reality. Groups choose how to remember, or how not to remember. These post-traumatic narratives provide a renewed sense of security. (de Weijer and Casterl 2025, 2)

The creation of a designed memorial space provides a locale for sharing memory and creating meaning from an event through a collective experience. In discussing recent debates over the meaning of historic monuments and memorials, Demaria, et al. describe “spaces of memory,” as locales of negotiation.

Far from being mere spaces of musealization that freeze and fix dominant narratives of the past, spaces of memory are increasingly turning into sites of negotiations and reconfigurations of meaning in which social and political identities are debated, strengthened, or weakened in reference to the traumatic experiences of the past which they “represent” (Demaria, et al. 2022)

The archival research conducted at the OKCNM revealed how the shared experience of the initial traumatic event led to a collective process that was codified in a set of design guidelines in the form of a Mission Statement. These guidelines provided an initial framework for the architectural design for the memorial and were used in selecting a design through a formal design competition. In an interview on the eve of the dedication of the memorial, designed by Hans and Torrey Butzer, they recalled receiving the solicitation packet from Han’s mother, who sent it to the couple who were working in Germany. It contained the guidelines and a history of the community-based process the Task Force had used to create the guidelines. Torrey Butzer recalled the details.

A key document they included in the packet was the mission statement. That was their guideline for what they wanted the memorial to include. It outlined no physical objects or restraints on what we were to submit, but rather sort of emotional suggestions. That it should offer feelings of peace, comfort, strength, hope and serenity. (Moore 2000)

Throughout the development process, the narratives in circulation within the community continued to evolve as they circulated within families and community groups. Many friends and family members of those killed, and survivors of the tragedy were engaged with the work of the Memorial Task Force and the experiences of these individuals were documented by Linenthal (2001). The intended narratives of the designed memorial were formalized and operationalized in preparation for the public opening of the memorial. After the completion of the designed memorial and installation of interpretive labels the intended narratives were shared through guided tours. Visitors receive this messaging through the lens of their own experience.

It is recognized that over time the narratives in circulation at a memorial may shift as visitors reflect on their experiences at the site, share those experiences online and within the community and memorial staff revise or publish new content or implement new operational objectives that influence visitor perceptions of the bombing and the memorial site. The inductive approach allows for increasing refinement of the research over time. The preliminary archival research and initial on-site observations helped to define general patterns of narrative circulation. The following diagram (Figure 1.11) illustrates these patterns. The right side of the diagram shows the circulation of narratives during the process of memorial development, while the left side of the diagram illustrates the circulation of narratives within the context of the completed memorial. The Symbolic Memorial ultimately becomes the center of engagement.

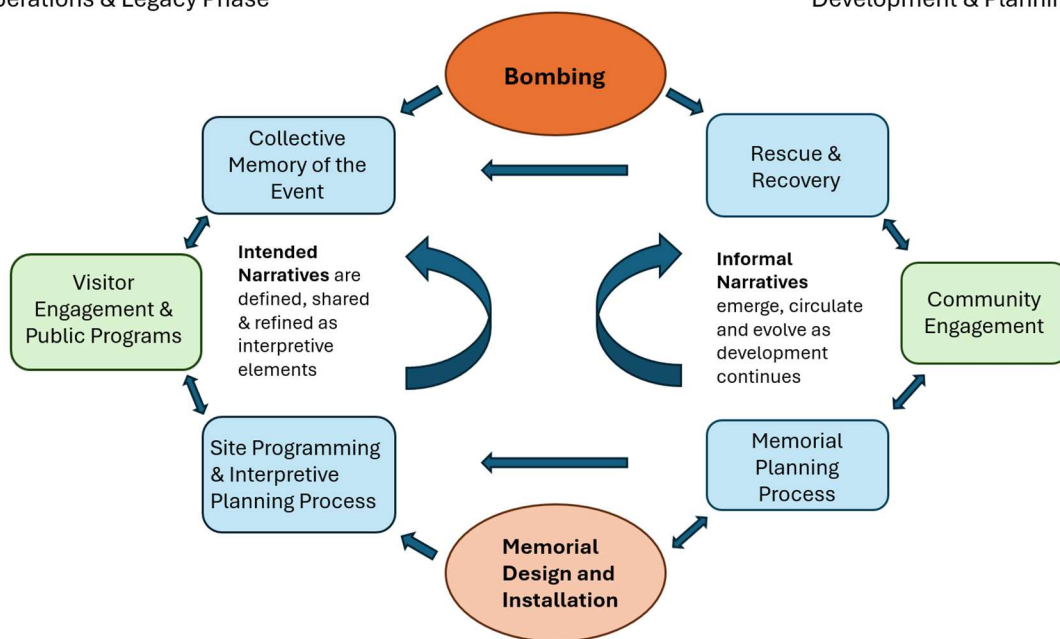


Figure 1.12 Diagram of Narrative Circulation Patterns

A Shift in Methods

The initial research proposal included three methods of data collection, 1) archival research 2) on-site visitor use observations and 3) interviews with visitors and memorial developers. Several factors contributed to the shift in research design. As the archival research progressed, several sub-categories of content were identified which expanded the archival research component. In addition to the archives housed at the memorial museum that document the collective planning process, development of the memorial mission statement, and development of the architectural design, a second archive was identified through the National Park Service (NPS) documenting the NPS involvement in the site's development and interpretive planning (See Chapter 2 for details). The volume of published materials available through the Memorial Museum gift shop and available online continued to grow and evolve, necessitating a greater investment of time in reviewing and selecting representative materials to code and analyze. Finally, there was some concern on the part of the memorial staff that interviewing visitors would prove too disruptive to their experience of the Symbolic Memorial. As a result of these factors, the research became more heavily weighted toward the analysis of archival and published sources.

An online survey that visitors could access by Quick Response (QR) code was substituted for the more in-depth interviews initially proposed for the study to address the concerns of the memorial staff regarding the potential for disruptive engagements. I solicited input by handing out an information sheet containing the QR code and the informed consent statement approved by the K-State Institutional Review Board for human subjects' research. I also introduced myself and explained the research as I approached potential participants. In many cases visitors approached me with questions thinking that I worked at the site, which made the distribution much easier. In response to their questions, I would explain my research and provide them with a handout. I directed them to NPS park rangers or the memorial museum for answers to their questions. While this methodology did not provide the depth of engagement originally defined for the study, the survey results provided some excellent data that will assist in defining new directions in visitor studies at memorials.

Chapter 2 - Background and Context

Understanding the ideological and organizational context of contemporary memorials is essential to comprehending their social function and interpretive framing. A great deal of new literature, illuminating both the symbolic and social roles of commemoration and the design and function of memorials in contemporary society, has been generated in the last ten years alone. Much of this literature considers memorials and commemoration from the position of comparative aesthetics or the historical evolution of memorial design. If we are to consider the developmental motivations and intended narratives for a particular memorial, we should consider the socio-political context in which it is created. Therefore, before diving into the literature review, we will consider the context in which the Oklahoma City National Memorial was conceived and explain the organizational structure in which the interpretive messaging and intended narratives were defined. We begin this discussion by considering what constitutes a memorial and defining some relevant terminology.

Terminology and Definitions

The current study is interdisciplinary, drawing from and contributing to the literature of several fields of study. Because the use of terms varies from one field to the next, it is necessary to define the way terms will be applied in this study. There are many different definitions for the terms *memorial* and *monument*. For example, the Inclusive Historian's Handbook (Miller 2019) proposes that a monument "usually refers to a commemorative structure or edifice, whereas 'memorial' applies to almost anything...that recalls the dead or the experience of profound loss." Despite this distinction, developmental processes such as design competitions, public comment solicitations, or community engagement processes may be used in the creation of both forms. Both terms will be employed in this study as they pertain to the source material and when deemed necessary for comparative purposes. However, the primary subject of this research is designed commemorative landscapes created at the site of tragedies, which will be referred to as "memorials" within this document.

The different academic fields contributing to this topic have utilized the terms "space" and "place" in different ways based on their academic orientation. On this topic Agnew finds fault with the ways "space" is metaphorically represented in social sciences, observing

“...representations of space set boundaries for non-spatial processes rather than provide an understanding of space and society as inextricably intertwined” (1993, 261). He suggests “place” as a better term for analyzing spatially defined human actions.

Interwoven in the concept of place suggested here ...are three major elements: locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted (these can be formal or institutional); location, the effects upon locales of social and economic processes operating at wider scales; sense of place, the local ‘structure of feeling.’ (J. Agnew 1993, 263)

McCarter and Pallasmaa, expanding on this ‘structure of feeling,’ suggest that “the experience of place is fundamental for our mental constitution and environmental perception, as well as for our innate structuring of the world” (2012, 403). In this study, “space” is used to refer to locations and attributes of physicality, while “place” refers to the setting of social relations and human attachments that imbue a location with meaning, thus imparting a “sense of place.” The Oklahoma National Memorial is a *place* of commemoration honoring lives lost and those forever changed by the bombing of the Murrah Building. “A place acquires its specificity as it organizes itself around the inhabitant/viewer and his/her inner world of memories, intentions and desires” (McCarter and Pallasmaa 2012, 405). Finally, the term “designed memorial” is used to refer to memorials created through a formal process in which a design professional (architect, artist, or landscape architect) is selected to lead the design and creation of a durable commemorative space meeting a set of specifications.

Narratives, Themes and Messages

In simplest terms, a *narrative* is a story, which may include a variety of themes holding potential for various interpretations. In landscape design, a story may be told using design elements with known cultural values or symbolic elements that are understood in the context of the total landscape design. The story may be told by building the narrative through the arrangement of design elements organized to convey meaning or explicitly stated using didactic materials such as physical labels or virtual content that provide explanation.

To clarify, the term *narrative* is used to describe a story, while *themes* are concepts within that story that relate to social or humanistic aspect of potential relevance to the theories of collective memory. For this study, the term *message* is used to describe key words or phrases within thematic and narrative structures that signal meanings. In considering the ways that a designed

landscape influences collective memory, we examine the intent of the design by analyzing the key words and messages used within the context of the design's creation through an analysis of organizational documents as well as the symbolic and explicit messaging contained within the realized design landscape. Through the narrative analysis process, these messages are codified into themes or narratives for comparison across different communication media to signal the occurrence of meaning. The narrative analysis employed in this study explored different themes as they emerged from the review of relevant literature and from the review of archival documents. The two most prominent themes to emerge from that examination were *resilience* and *national identity*, which are considered briefly as they relate to the memorial's development and organizational structure. These and other narratives are considered further in data analysis section of Chapter 6 as they relate to the visitors' experience of the site.

Resilience as Identity

Resilience describes the ability of a community to recover from a disaster or large-scale trauma, such as the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building. Daniel Aldrich (2012, 283) examines communal resilience, which he defines as the ability of a neighborhood, ward or other area to "...engage in positive, networked adaptation after a crisis." Oklahoma City's response to the bombing was rapid and extensive, demonstrating a high level of collective action in the face of unprecedented damage. The actions of people from across Oklahoma in support of the victims, survivors and rescue workers became known as "The Oklahoma Standard," a phrase applied by visiting first responders and journalists to describe the unprecedented local response.

Despite this unspeakable tragedy, among the most lasting memories are the tenderness of the response. The people of Oklahoma banded together in a community-wide display of spontaneous altruism. Trucks became ambulances. Strangers became neighbors. People donated the shoes off their feet. That spirit of generosity—of giving until there's no more to give—has been part of the DNA of the state ever since it was founded. (Oklahoma Standard 2026)

The local response to the tragedy defined the "Oklahoma Standard," which has evolved into a civic volunteer and educational outreach arm of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. This commitment to community reflects a deeply independent self-help ethic that is rooted in the populist origins of the state of Oklahoma. "The birth of the new state occurred in an era of protest and reform. Populist and Progressive currents merged to sweep reform-minded

Democrats to an overwhelming victory in 1906 in the selection of delegates to a Constitutional Convention tasked with forging Indian and Oklahoma territories and the Osage Nation into a single state” (B. Agnew n.d.). But the identity of multi-generational Oklahomans is also rooted in a shared sense of poverty and skepticism of authority.

Adversity has a long history in Oklahoma. Many of the state's American Indians arrived via the Trails of Tears. The Plains tribes battled unsuccessfully to preserve their way of life. The pioneers faced isolation, drought, and an unforgiving land. The state's farmers, oilmen, and miners lived with the knowledge that forces beyond their control could turn boom to bust. The Great Depression and Dust Bowl of the 1930s made "Okie" synonymous with poverty and failure. Tornadoes regularly cut swathes of destruction through the state. The bankruptcies of the 1980s still haunt those affected. Most Sooners who survived those tragedies picked up the pieces and began again as, did the victims who lived through the bombing of the Murrah building. (Goble n.d.)

A deeply rooted attitude of resilience is a positive historical legacy of these events. Oklahomans may not expect outsiders to help but are grateful and appreciative when they do. However, this does not mean they are willing to relinquish their authority or control in return for assistance, a potential legacy of the history of socio-political isolation. The promotion of the Oklahoma Standard, which seeks to advance civic engagement and community service, might be viewed as a grassroots effort to transcend the more negative historical legacies of poverty, isolationist politics and racism by leveraging the post-bombing environment of community collaboration.

One year after the bombing, Bill Moyers, an Oklahoma native, documented the socio-political tensions the bombing in Oklahoma City brought to the attention of the nation (Moyers 1996). The Dateline episode highlights anti-government attitudes of gun-rights advocates and militia members as well as the fears of federal workers and their families in the wake of the domestic terrorist attack. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks the activities of militia groups in American provides essential background on the contemporary movement.

The militia movement is rooted in the Posse Comitatus of the 1970s, which was based on the belief that the county sheriff had the ultimate authority over a county, serving as the highest legitimate law officer who was supposed to protect their community from the encroaching federal government. The sheriff was then able to recruit men from the community and form a posse that would enforce peace and security. Under this idea, the federal government had no authority to overrule a county sheriff. Over the years, the idea of the Posse Comitatus evolved and inspired what we now recognize as the paramilitary wing

of the antigovernment movement. Current militia members believe they are true patriots, with many holding onto the notion that they are modern-day versions of the 18th-century colonists who banded together to fight off the British. The idea of the “unorganized militias” and standing up to a tyrannical government helps shape their interpretation of the Second Amendment and cements their view that every American has a right to own firearms to keep the government in check. (Southern Poverty Law Center 2025)

The Bombing of the Murrah Federal Building increased tensions between federal law enforcement charged with investigating the crime and local militia members who felt they were being targeted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) despite their condemnation of the bombing (Moyers 1996). As a result, the rescue, recovery and memorialization processes took place within an atmosphere of heightened suspicion on all sides of this domestic conflict.

National Identity

While the theme of *national identity* has special relevance in terms of contemporary political discourse, it is notable that disagreements on this topic are as old as the nation itself. Kirk Savage’s “The Self-made Monument,” discusses the Washington Monument as a symbol of national identity, reflecting the historical invention of George Washington’s public identity. He notes, “If Washington was the founding father, what kind of nation did he found? Erecting a national monument to Washington ultimately demanded a symbolic construction of America” (1992, 6). His research illuminates the paradoxes inherent in narratives of national identity and highlights the “partisan warfare” that emerged during the development of the Washington Monument. The “symbolic construction of America” Savage references is demonstrated in the following description from the National Park Service website for the monument.

Built in the shape of an Egyptian obelisk, evoking the timelessness of ancient civilizations, the Washington Monument embodies the awe, respect, and gratitude the nation felt for its most essential Founding Father. When completed, the Washington Monument was the tallest building in the world at 555 feet, 5-1/8 inches. (National Park Service 2022)

The NPS web site emphasizes the difficulty of building the monument which had to be re-designed because of funding shortfalls, took more than 50 years to complete. While the re-design eliminated several original features, the height of the monument was critical as it demonstrated that America was taking its place on the global stage by erecting the tallest structure in the world. Linenthal’s study of the Oklahoma National Memorial also highlights the

theme of *national identity* and partisan warfare as it relates to the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building.

The Oklahoma City bombing was situated within starkly contrasting convictions about the essence of American Identity. Did it reveal an innocent nation victimized by an evil world or, conversely, a diseased nation revealing once again a virulent strain of violence? (2001, 27)

It seems significant that just 110 years after the dedication of the Washington Monument we would be contemplating whether the Oklahoma City bombing was a symptom of a diseased nation, but the federal law enforcement conflicts at Ruby Ridge and the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, the acknowledged motivations for the bombing, demonstrate the violent nature of the contemporary divide within the nation. The attack on a federal building, carried out by an honorably discharged American soldier, points to deeply conflicting ideas of what it means to be an American.

A National Memorial for Oklahoma

The organizational context in which new memorials are developed influences many aspects of their final form including their narrative messaging. Given the fact that the federal government was the target of the attack in Oklahoma City, it was natural that the federal government would be involved in all aspects of the response, recovery and memorialization. However, the details of collaboratively developing a memorial proved to be incredibly complex. Table 2.1 provides a list of key dates and events in the organizational development of the memorial. This information is provided for reference purposes to highlight the early involvement of the federal government in the development phase but does not begin to capture the nuances of the process and the lengthy negotiations between the National Park Service personnel and the local personnel working within the structure of the OKCNM Foundation and Trust to forge agreements and attempt to work out the complicated details required to operate within a unique partnership structure. Details related to these events are provided as needed within the respective sections of this document where the related topics are discussed.

Table 2.1 Oklahoma City National Memorial Organizational Development Timeline⁸

Date	Event	Event Details	Explanation
4/19/1995	OKC Bombing	Domestic Terrorist Attack on the Murrah Federal Building	759 people injured, 168 died, 324 buildings damaged, 16 buildings demolished
6/28/1995	Mayor Ron Norick announces Memorial Task Force	The Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building Memorial Task Force Created	The 350-member Task Force consisted of an Advisory Committee and 10 subcommittees
3/26/1996	Mission Statement Adopted by Memorial Task Force	The Memorial Mission Statement consists of the Preamble and Guidelines for the Development of the Memorial	Two Subcommittees solicited input on the thematic content for the Memorial from the greater OKC community.
7/1/1997	Winning Design for the Memorial Announced	Hans and Torrey Butzer submitted the winning design from Germany.	After the award they worked collaboratively with the Task Force on the design and installation
10/9/1997	The Oklahoma City National Memorial Act was passed PL 105-58	Established the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust as a Government Corporation to provide operational oversight for the site.	The Memorial was designated a Unit of the National Park Service with 2 years of funding after which the Trust would be responsible for funding all operations.
10/25/1998	Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Memorial	Vice-President Al Gore and Attorney General Janet Reno speak at Groundbreaking Ceremony.	The Groundbreaking event included NPS rangers and Superintendent McCrary along with members of the Task Force
11/29/1999	Congress passes appropriations funding PL 106-113	The Memorial Trust was awarded \$866,000 to cover initial memorial operation expenses.	The Trust endowment and admissions fees would fund future operations after the completion of the Memorial Museum.
4/11/2000	Memorandum of Agreement Signed by NPS and OKCNM Foundation	The MOA outlines the partner's roles. The Trust would provide physical facilities for NPS use and cover NPS salaries.	The NPS to provide law enforcement and interpretive services and bill the Memorial Trust not more than \$900,000/yr.
4/19/2000	Outdoor Symbolic Memorial Opens to the Public	NPS Rangers begin providing Visitor Services at the Symbolic Memorial Site	The NPS and OKCNM Staff working on a Long-Range Interpretive Plan, staffing plan calls for 14 NPS positions.
2/19/2001	Memorial Museum Opens	President George W. Bush provided an opening speech.	The NPS contributed coordination and security for the opening event.
11/20/2003	Congress passes FY 2004 Interior Appropriations Bill	Provides 1.6 million for the Memorial Trust in consideration of previous payments to NPS	The NPS required to fund their own operations at the Memorial going forward
1/22/2004	Public Law 108-199 Passes - Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004	Includes an amendment to the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997 which deauthorizes the NPS Memorial Park Unit with no guidance	The Memorial Trust was dissolved & assets transferred to the OKCNM Foundation. NPS operates as an affiliate going forward.

⁸ The content for this table was drawn from the following sources: (Bomar 2001, Bomar 2003, Bryans 2010, Congress.gov 1997, Federal Bureau of Investigation n.d., Linenthal 2001)

From Emergency to Memorial

Oklahoma Governor, Frank Keating, declared a state of emergency within an hour of the bombing, which initiated the deployment of the incident command system by the Oklahoma City Fire Department, who maintained command of the search and rescue effort. After damage estimates were available, the Governor requested a Major Disaster Declaration to assist with the estimated \$651.6 million in estimated damages (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 1996).

The local management of the incident and rapid development of the Memorial Task Force moved the process from recovery to memorialization very quickly. The expectation that federal agencies would continue to be engaged in the process as it moved from recovery to memorialization did not anticipate the differences in the way different federal departments and agencies operate. There was undoubtedly an expectation that designating the site as a “national monument” would move forward quickly and that funding for management of a federal site would be forth coming. Certainly, the cost of developing a large-scale memorial, particularly one with complex design elements, can be prohibitive without large amounts of public funding.

The Government Services Administration (GSA) managed the building on behalf of the federal government and undertook a memorial project to redesign the Murrah plaza, installing seals for each of the seventeen federal agencies the building had housed.⁹ They developed the interpretive signage that explains the significance of the plaza in the response and recovery effort.

In less than an hour, a triage center was set up here. During the following fifteen days, this plaza served as one of the command posts and staging areas for over one thousand firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and other support staff from all over the country whose heroic search and rescue efforts earned the gratitude of a city, a state and a nation. (GSA Team Effort Wall Plaque – Murrah Plaza)

But the process of creating a new unit of the National Park Service, which manages the nation’s commemorative landscape, proved more complicated than the local constituencies had imagined. At the time that the request for recognition came before congress, then President Clinton was emphasizing a balanced federal budget that would reduce funding for the

⁹ OKCNM Archives folder 474.001 contains details of the GSA project.

Department of the Interior, including the National Park Service (Broder 1995). However, the efforts of the Oklahoma Senators who advanced the request to establish a National Memorial were successful in achieving their goal by passing legislation to establish a public-private partnership "...built on the partnership model the Park Service had recently employed at San Francisco's Presidio in Golden Gate National Recreation Area" (Bryans 2010, 3).

The legislation, passed in October 1997, specified the creation of a government corporation, the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust, which would be an affiliate of the locally managed Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. The National Park Service would provide technical expertise for a two-year period during which time the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial and the Memorial Center would be constructed. After the Symbolic Memorial opened to the public, the NPS began on-site interpretive services for the memorial and initiated planning for educational outreach in collaboration with the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation.

While the Park Service bore the cost of providing the technical expertise required during construction, the legislation stipulated that the trust would reimburse the agency for its interpretive efforts [after the memorial opened]. At the time, the pact seemed ideal. It enabled the creation of a new national park without taxing the greatly strained Park Service budget...This certainly eased passage of the act in the fiscally conservative Congress of 1997. For the Oklahoma partners, the arrangement afforded them the local control they greatly desired. (Bryans 2010, 4)

Although the National Park Service had not been part of the legislative process, they were expected to shoulder the responsibilities of developing a new park within a very short time frame, a significant challenge for an agency accustomed to conducting background research and carefully considering the historical significance of a site before undertaking a collaborative planning process. In this case they were brought into a project that had already been defined by the local constituency without their input. "From the very outset, during the arrival of what was meant to be the Park Service's permanent presence at the Memorial in April 2000, it became evident that melding the two partners into a cohesive team would be difficult, if not impossible" (Bryans 2010, 4). As a large and diverse organization, the National Park Service (NPS) has a standardized method for developing and delivering interpretive services that are based in established methodologies for achieving educational goals. However, the local partners felt justified in challenging the interpretive approach used by the NPS, "...because they and other

Oklahomans were the ones most immediately impacted by the bombing. They felt that the story of the bombing ‘belonged’ primarily to the people of Oklahoma City, and they wanted to be sure the story of the victims and survivors was conveyed as they thought it should be” (Bryans 2010, 4). Ultimately, the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation and the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust agreed on the details of a request to congress that the partnership with the federal government be dissolved and the role of the NPS be changed to an affiliate of the OKCNM rather than a park unit. After the NPS unit was deauthorized by an act of congress in 2004, the NPS role at the OKCNM changed from providing management, security and broad-based interpretive services to providing guided tours of the Symbolic Memorial using the content approved by the Oklahoma City National Memorial staff (Bryans 2010, Congress.gov 1997). Ultimately the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation was successful at achieving national recognition for the memorial and retaining control of the all aspects of the memorial’s messaging and operations. Today, the OKCNM staff work closely with a “Conscience Committee,” who review and guide all public facing activities of the memorial (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2025). The members of this committee are drawn from the community of victims’ family members, survivors and rescue workers, which was also the primary constituency responsible for the development of the memorial design guidelines and the design selection¹⁰.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the use of advisory committees by federal agencies is restricted by law and requires that members of such groups go through a training process to ensure transparency and equity in their actions (U.S. General Services Administration 2026).

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

The literature review is organized into three broad topical areas beginning with the historical development of the concept of collective memory and the role sites of trauma play in formulating collective memory. Literature on national identity formation and expression, particularly as it relates to national memorials, is explored as an element of collective identity at local and national scales. The second area explores three lenses of analysis that hold potential for understanding individual engagements with the physical memorial as well as the broader social role of the memorial. Theories of affect, affordances and narratives address diverse types of human-environment engagements and offer analytical perspectives on the role of landscape memorials from an experiential viewpoint. Finally, literature on resilience is explored to provide a framework for understanding the potential role of public memorials at the sites of traumas to foster resilience through community engagement processes that encourage healing through individual or collective activities.

The Historical Context of Collective Memory

The large volume of recent literature on collective memory warrants an extended discussion beyond the scope of this proposal. For our current purposes, the concept of ‘collective memory’ is based on the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1874-1945), a French philosopher and sociologist whose seminal work on social theories of memory has earned him recognition as the father of social memory studies (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011).

Halbwachs first studied philosophy with Henri Bergson but turned to sociology when he found his intellectual orientation conflicted with Bergson’s (Douglas 1980). He worked with several prominent French Sociologists, although Emil Durkheim is generally thought to have had the greatest influence on the development of his theories of collective memory as they strongly reflect Durkheim’s theories of collectivity and social solidarity as explained in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).¹¹

¹¹ Biographical details on Maurice Halbwachs’ life, academic training and influences are from Georges Friedman’s entry in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-biographies/maurice-halbwachs>. Friedman, a French Sociologist was the former president of the International Association of Sociologists. Information on Emil Durkheim’s theory of collective representations is from Gordon Marshall’s “A Dictionary of Sociology,” Oxford University Press.

Several of Halbwachs' writings have been translated into English. The most often cited, "On Collective Memory," is comprised of selections from two of his works translated and combined into a single volume by Lewis A. Coser (1992).¹² Halbwachs' life was cut short at the height of his career when he was arrested in 1944 and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp, dying within a year of his arrest. *The Collective Memory*, was published posthumously, first in French as *La Mémoire Collective* in 1950 by *Presses Universitaires de France*, and later in English translation with an introduction by the British Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1980). Despite recent interest, it has not been reprinted in its entirety since, making access difficult. Coser refers to this later work as a mere skeleton "... in which Halbwachs attempts to deal with some of the objections of critics of his earlier work on the subject" (1992, 2). However, Douglas in her introduction to the English translation of *The Collective Memory* (1980) suggests the later work by Halbwachs represents a return to a more philosophical form of scholarship, highlighting his early disenchantment with Bergson's emphasis on time as more significant than space in relation to the development of knowledge. In *The Collective Memory* (Halbwachs 1980), he lays out the roles of both time and space in the development of collective memory, concluding that only in music is time apparent and space absent from the formation of collective memory. It is his emphasis on the materiality of space as a critical element of collective memory that makes his theories so uniquely applicable to the analysis of memorial architecture and landscape design.

Reframing Trauma through Collective Memory

Many scholars have provided commentary and summaries of Halbwachs' theoretical contributions. Erll suggests that his work united individual and social memory to create a concept of "...shared versions of the past which result from interaction, communication, media, and institutions within small groups as well as large cultural communities" (Erll 2011, 13). In the same manner, I postulate that it is the merging of the individual with the collective that

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/collective-representations>.

¹² The first part, "The Social Frameworks of Memory," was first published in French as *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* in 1925 (Truc 2012). Coser (Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1992) notes that Halbwachs referred to this work as his most important and therefore chose to include the majority of the original in this translation (1992, 1). Coser included only the conclusions of the second work, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*, and the remainder of that work is not available in English.¹²

allows a process of memorial design and experience to reframe individual tragedies as collective memory. Perhaps it is the process of translating a horrific event into a meaningful experience by actively engaging in the design of a place of contemplation and shared reflection that allows for collective transcendence of trauma. After exploring the competing impulses of remembering and forgetting, Müller-Funk (2003, 224) observes "... it is art (literature, architecture, film) which enables us to imagine a sort of freedom also from the remembered 'thing'." In this sense modern memorials can serve as spatial and experiential works of art that provide a context for reflection, contemplation, and engagement.

Theories and Expressions of National Identity

It is not coincidental that Halbwachs' theories of collective memory were formalized into the structure reflected in his final work at the height of WWII, as struggles for German national identity played out against the backdrop of atrocities. In the introduction to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John Gillis (1994) explores the historical relationship between memory and identity. He notes that memory is selective, and that national commemoration has historically been an allegorical process that generates a collective amnesia of past events in favor of a sense of national identity, citing the post WWII identities of Japan and Germany as examples.

He proposes that the "democratization of memory" that has occurred since the 1960s constitutes a sort of secularization of the types of commemorative events that would have formerly been viewed as sacred acts tied to national identity, citing the ritual of performance that continues to be enacted at the Tomb of the Unknown soldier in Arlington Cemetery as a sacred act representative of a previous era of commemoration. He acknowledges this secularization "has been remarkably successful in desacralizing the nation-state" but questions its future utility, suggesting that "taking memory out of the hands of specialists, diffusing its practices over time and space, runs the risk of merely privatizing rather than really democratizing it (1994, 19).

While contemporary memorials frequently lack the overt national symbols so prominent in the heroic memorials of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the messages of national identity may still be present, albeit in a more subtle way. To understand how a memorial might serve to support national identity, we should recognize that one function of a contemporary memorial is

to serve as a stage for commemorative events. Such events, commonly occurring annually, over time, become recognized as traditions.

Hobsbawn's (1983, 13), introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, concludes that invented traditions are central to the concept of the nation, "...with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest." Benedict Anderson espouses a similar position in which nations are imagined through a creative process of construction. He suggests that the idea of a nation filled a void that was created by the Enlightenment.

The century of the Enlightenment, of rational secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear... What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning....few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. (Anderson 1991, 11)

Anderson's concept of the imagined community proposes a need for amnesia for the forms of community that existed before the nation, such as tribal nomadism as one example. In the absence of these previous forms of community the need arises to construct an identity that ties the individual to the nation. The constructivist conception of a nation-state as described by these scholars requires the continual performance of national identity to ensure that this collective identity continues in the popular imagination.

Certainly, in the aftermath of a national tragedy, when those most directly harmed are searching for meaning, it is logical, if not necessary, for the nation to engage with the community to confirm the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the nation-state and its populace. Tragedies provide opportunities to reinforce the co-creation of national identity through ritualized collective mourning and commemorative performance.

Affect, Affordances and Narratives in Memorial Landscapes

In "The Meaning of the Built Environment," Rapaport describes how the environment communicates meaning as follows:

The environment thus communicates, through a whole set of cues, the most appropriate choices to be made: the cues are meant to elicit appropriate emotions, interpretations, behaviors and transactions by setting up the appropriate situations and contexts. (1990, 80).

The cues, situations and contexts to which he refers are imbedded within the designed environment and may be understood on multiple levels. A set of theoretical tools are required to

identify, analyze and evaluate how a designed environment communicates imbedded meanings and generates responses and actions.

Affect, affordances and narratives offer three distinct tools for understanding our engagements with the built environment. They are analytical tools for understanding the reciprocal nature of our experiences with designed spaces and the socially embedded meanings of these engagements. As human-environment research has evolved over the last thirty years, the application of these methods to the built environment has expanded and continues to be refined. While these methodologies had their origins in other disciplines, such as literature and psychology, their application to architectural and landscape design is now advancing our understanding of the reciprocal nature between humans and the environments they design and inhabit. These three concepts are particularly relevant to the analysis of designed memorials, which require the ability to consider highly nuances and potentially emotional engagements between humans and their material world.

Affect

The concept of “affect” has its roots in psychology in which it is viewed as a primary or elemental emotion. Recent uses of the term in critical studies literature “treat affect as an intensive force.” (Ott 2017) Ott notes that the use of the term in philosophy and the humanities has evolved “... to emphasize the importance of materiality, or what Jane Bennett has called “thing-power.” It is this understanding of the term that is most relevant for understanding the experiential impact of a memorial design on visitors’ emotions.

After visiting the Oklahoma National Memorial, a recent reviewer on Tripadvisor noted, “The symbolism of the gates and the reflecting pool really create a heavy experience I was not expecting” (Chris L. January 2021). Designed memorials at the sites of tragedies often seek to evoke responses from visitors by designing evocative environments intended to engage the affective domain. Analyzing a visitor’s responses to a memorial site requires an understanding of the different levels of engagement offered and how these elements might be received.

In advocating for the study of affect and emotion at heritage sites Smith and Campbell discuss deep and shallow “registers” of visitor engagement. They note:

“...understanding registers of engagement is important for assessing both the emotional and intellectual investments that visitors may make in their visits, the ways emotions and critical insight interact, and the meanings that are

subsequently rehearsed or constructed during visits. (Smith and Campbell 2016, 143)

They emphasize that affective responses are contextual, depending not only on the site, “...but the visitor’s relationship to it, their own political and social contexts, and their own skills at recognizing and working with their emotional responses” (Smith and Campbell 2016, 144). Understanding affect is critical to our ability to perceive and interpret the public use of heritage and memorial sites. Visitors may seek out places that invoke a particular feeling to process their own experience, which may reflect larger social issues.¹³ Smith and Campbell concluded their study on affect at heritage sites by suggesting that the affective and emotional dimension of these sites serves as a form of critical connective tissue.

Consequently, memory complexes, the suite of institutions such as museums, heritage sites, history education and memory practices, can be seen as elements of both individual and social cognition and memory, which have affective/emotional dimensions that are not arbitrary or marginal, but essential constitutive and linking elements. (Smith and Campbell 2016, 148)

Affordances

We may view the environment as a series of functional possibilities or affordances that can be understood as opportunities that the environment presents. Letiche (2009) describes affordances as: “Mutually determinative relatedness between life and environment...” which coevolve through action. Affordances may be physical, circumstantial, economic, or a combination of all these elements that create an environment inviting human action. As such, we could say that the bombing event that destroyed the Murrah building created an affordance, albeit a negative one, that initiated a collective action resulting in the construction of the Oklahoma National Memorial. On a smaller scale, we could use this concept of affordances to understand the visitor’s behavior relative to the affordances existing within the Oklahoma National Memorial. Overhill (2013, 1) describes Gibson’s original use of the term as “...the relationship between the abilities of a living creature, and features in the environment that afford action for those abilities. Letiche (2009, 3) identifies four features of the theory of affordances

¹³ See Erika Doss’s book *Memorial Mania* for an in-depth discussion of American memorials and public feeling (Doss 2010).

as it was originally defined by James J. Gibson in his foundational work in ecological psychology (1977).

The four features are paraphrased as follows:

1. Perception is an adaptive process that steers physical and social activity.
2. Perception specifies opportunities for interaction.
3. Perception reveals information in dynamic interaction with the perceptual environment of surfaces, objects, places and others.
4. Attunement to affordances is regulated via evolutionary design, individual history, intentionality and context.

Overhill (2013) offers an extension of Gibson's theory of affordances situated within designed environments. Although she focuses primarily on the expansion of physical affordances through tool use, her literature review includes sources that apply James J. Gibson's theory to non-physical affordances such as social opportunities and intellectual activities.

Gibson's original concept of an affordance as the relationship between a creature and the physical opportunities in its environment has inspired further development. His idea is now applied to human culture, social life, and the higher cognition.(Overhill 2013, 4)

Letiche and Lissack (2009) also provide a review of the literature with greater emphasis on social affordances. In summarizing related sources, they note:

They assume that human affordances are always social affordances, and thus that no concept of affordances can exist without a theory of social hermeneutics. Affordances are inherently interpretative; and interpretation is textual, cultural and illuminative. (2009, 8)

Within these expanded applications of Gibson's original theory, I propose that the Oklahoma City National Memorial affords social opportunities for commemoration, reflection, grieving, and contemplation. However, the ability to access and move through the landscape is a requirement of these experiential affordances.

Narrative

A narrative lens of analysis may take many forms, from visual representations that reference iconic forms to written texts that provide explicit interpretation or contextualization. A memorial landscape may be viewed as allegorical; a metaphor whose significance may be experienced as a physical manifestation of a literary trope. Simitch and Warke (2014, 6) suggest

that "...architecture might be understood to be comparable to a 'thick,' poetic language." Language metaphors may be used to interpret the landscape at different scales. For example, Potteiger notes:

Tropes are the basic schemes by which people construct meaning in language, narrative, and landscape. They perform the necessary function of relating one thing to another, the known to the unknown.... This ability of tropes to shuttle back and forth from representations in one medium to those in another is especially relevant for transpositions between the verbal and the visual, temporal and spatial, narrative and landscape. (Potteiger and Purinton 1998, 34)

Both analytical concepts for understanding built environments, one based on literary constructions and the other based on opportunities, are appropriate to the current research and will be used simultaneously to analyze different data sets. The analysis of affordances within the memorial spaces will assist us in understanding the behaviors of visitors, while the documentation and analysis of narratives will help in understanding visitors and stakeholders' perceptions of the memorial development process, the finished memorial and the interplay of people, programs and landscapes. *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Kim 2016), provides meaningful definitions and useful guidance for working with narrative inquiry as a research methodology. In defining narrative, Kim notes:

Thus a story is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order. This is what we mean when we say stories (not narratives) have a beginning, middle and end... Narratives constitute stories and stories rely on narratives. (2016, 8)

Emphasizing the ability of narrative inquiry to delve deeply into personal meanings, she notes: "...narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self and create and communicate meaning" (Kim 2016, 157). Despite the individuality of personal narratives, they are "unavoidably social in character" (ibid), reflecting influences from family, community, and shared experiences and events. As a result, a personal narrative will reveal social influences that contribute to the formation of collective meaning and memory.

Azaryau and Foote have examined narratives of history as spatially organized "in places invested with a sense of collective memory" (Azaryau 2011, 179) (Azaryahu and Foote 2008, 179). They conclude that the strategies used for constructing spatial narratives at memory sites differ substantially from other forms of narrative that have been extensively studied, such as literature and film. They emphasize the critical choices that must be made to translate temporal

events into spatially meaningful designs by using the layout of the Oklahoma National Memorial as one example of a spatially bounded and temporarily sequenced narrative.

A temporal trope, signified by the gates through which most visitors pass to enter the Symbolic Memorial space, is a central feature of the Oklahoma National Memorial. One “gate” is labeled with the moment before the bombing while the other is labeled with the moment afterward. The space in-between these “gates” represents the moment of the bombing, made manifest by the symbolic chairs representing each of the 168 people killed in the bombing. Analysis of visitor engagement with this space and their interpretation of its features is central to this study. Simitch and Warke (2014, 140) emphasize the generative nature of metaphors noting “...their analogous relationships can bring new insights to otherwise insufficiently observed phenomena.” Each feature within the Oklahoma National Memorial offers affordances for visitors to connect with the site’s history and symbolic narrative and to construct new personalized narratives through a process of individual and collective engagements within the commemorative spaces.

Stevens and Franck (2016) provide an overview of the history of memorial design in *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement: Design, Use and Meaning*. They suggest that changing social views of memorialization have influenced both memorial design and human engagement with designed memorials, noting that public use of memorials is sometimes in conflict with the intent of the memorial design. The norms of behavior they identify for public memorial sites will provide the initial framework for interpreting observed behaviors at the study site.

The Collective Roots of Resilience

Resilience research enhances our understanding of the capacity of memorials to encourage community stability and adaptability through design. Dukes, Williams, and Kelban (2012) explore the collective impact of historical community trauma. Their research suggests the emotional damage from trauma due to unacknowledged injustices can endure for generations, leaving communities less resilient and “...less able to respond and adapt in the face of new stresses and harms.” They identify five stages in self-reinforcing cycles of unacknowledged community trauma resulting in divisions over the memory of the event, which damages community cohesion and effective responses to new threats (Dukes, Williams and Kalban 2012, 232). Goldstein developed the concept of *communicative resilience* in response

to the Virginia Tech shooting of 2007. He defines it as “...an empowerment discourse that often functions outside state control and challenges state legitimacy...” (Goldstein 2012, 359). As such, *communicative resilience* offers the potential to place power back in the hands of a group or community who have been victimized or traumatized. This discourse is intended for use in collaborative settings to encourage resilience by fostering new collaborative frameworks built on trust, and mutual reinvention.

In considering the analysis of resilience, Zolli (2012) identifies recurring principles that can be loosely described as: 1) holism - the need to view a system holistically and to respect latent attributes of living systems, 2) seasonality – the fact that systems operate in cycles, and 3) interconnectedness – the fact that systems are networked and coupled in complex ways that are difficult to observe. He notes that:

...resilience-thinking does not simply call us into a defensive crouch against uncertainty and risk. Instead, by encouraging adaptation, agility, cooperation, connectivity, and diversity, resilience-thinking can bring us to a different way of being in the world, and to a deeper engagement with it (Zolli 2012, 16).

Literature on community resilience provides the background for reviewing and evaluating post-design memorial outcomes. By identifying the discreet elements that comprise community resilience, we can better understand the purpose of a collaborative development process and evaluate more clearly what makes a memorial meaningful for a community.

Chapter 4 - Design Precedents

This chapter introduces aspects of memorial design that are critical to understanding their significance and interpretive functions. Commemorative architecture and memorial design is a topic that has received much attention over the last 40 years (Foote 1997, Savage 2009, Wolschke-Bulmahn 2001, Woodger and So 2023). The shift to a minimalist form is perhaps the most significant change to the aesthetics design of memorials (Kimmelman 2002), but the type of event being memorialized, the desired intent or function of the memorial and the emotional impact of the memorial on visitors have also served as effective frames of reference for critique and analysis (Doss 2010, Foote 1997, Veil, Sellnow and Heald 2011).

Minimalist Memorials

The 20th century introduces a transition away from heroic and celebratory memorials that glorify war toward memorials that recognize loss. This type of commemorative memorial "...is a relatively novel and distinctly modern phenomenon," that emerged from the "unprecedented carnage of the First World War" (Tanovic 2019, 19). We see the antecedents of current memorials in the abstract non-representational and universalizing memorials designed to commemorate the loss of life from the Great War, such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington D.C. and Lutyens's Cenotaph in London. The extensive destruction and loss of life of WWI is understood as the motivation for a more abstract style of memorial. The Cenotaph was originally erected as a temporary memorial at the end of the war but was created in stone after the public response to the structure resulted in spontaneous commemoration, with people lining up to place wreaths on the temporary structure (Greenburg 1989). This example illustrates the overwhelming human need to commemorate loss through collective ritual expressions that often result in spontaneous memorials at the sites of tragedies.

Contemporary memorials since the 1960s share certain attributes that distinguish them from memorials of past eras, in part because we expect different things from them. While the representational forms of previous eras were intended to recognize acts of heroism based on the political framework in which they were conceived, contemporary memorials are more likely to challenge traditional narrative structures by using abstract design that encourages thoughtful reflection on events. The non-representational style of memorial has been categorized in

different ways, using terms such as commemorative, abstract, or minimalist with the latter being the preferred term for non-representational memorials of recent decades.

A major impetus for a shift toward minimalist design in American memorials was the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War, which influenced the design criteria for the proposed Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (VVM) in Washington D.C. "The design criteria were that the memorial should be reflective and contemplative in character, harmonize with its surroundings, contain the names of all the war's dead and missing and make no political statements about the war" (Hagopian 2001, 317).

The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

Maya Lin's ground-breaking design is recognized as a turning point that set a new standard for memorial architecture by honoring the memory of the men who served while simultaneously capturing the sense of ambivalence that many Americans felt toward the war effort. The memorial captures the skepticism surrounding grand expressions of nationalism and heroism that followed the Vietnam war. The intent of the memorial was more about commemorating loss through reflection than celebrating heroism.

Before Vietnam we expected national war memorials to honor the cause and those who died for it as one. But the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the most visited and copied memorial in American history, was intended from the start to separate the dead from the undeclared war in which they disappeared or perished. This concept was embedded in the commission guidelines. (Senie 2016, 11)

Despite its unanimous selection by the oversight committee, Maya Lin's radically different design concept created controversy, particularly among Vietnam veterans, many of whom were looking forward to a celebratory and heroic depiction of their efforts. The black granite creates a somber mood which is accentuated by the gradual descent below the ground's surface. The list of names, growing longer each year conveys the horror of the growing loss of life, but the names, all of them, listed without rank, in the order of their death was ultimately the most unifying element of the memorial's design.¹⁴ Savage refers to the VVM as the first "therapeutic" memorial "- a memorial made expressly to heal a collective psychological injury" (2009, 267). Ultimately the memorial was successful at achieving the task of healing, as friends

¹⁴ See *The Black Gash of Shame* (The Black Gash of Shame 1985)

and family members made the pilgrimage to the wall to find the name of their loved ones the memorial became a place for collective commemoration and a symbol of National Identity for an entire generation. The shift to Minimalism in memorial design gained momentum after Maya Lin's design rose in prominence to "become one of the most popular sites in the nation's capital, with over three million visitors a year. This simple V of black granite, even in its inscrutability, has risen to the universal" (Reston, Jr. 2021). The potential for minimalist design to rise to the level of the universal underpins its appeal.

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Peter Eisenman's design is a minimalist, experiential installation composed of hundreds of concrete stelae, intended to provoke a sense of disorientation (Craven 2021). "The slabs are all 95 centimetres apart, obliging those that enter this sombre maze to walk in single-file" (Woodger and So 2023, 89) Described by Wolfgang Thierse, president of the German parliament as "...a structural symbol of the incomprehensibility of the crime" (SPIEGEL International 2005). The memorial commission wanted a design that could serve several roles (Wefing 2005).

It was intended to be a cemetery for all those nameless victims..., a collective admission of guilt... a warning cry of - Never again!... Perhaps Eisenman's greatest achievement lies in having devised a design so intellectually flexible that it meets all these demands, but at the same time undermines all the expectations usually associated with memorials (Wefing 2005, 9).



Figure 4.1 Memorial to The Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany. Photo by Author.

The memorial's impact is subtle but suggests a gradual sense of increasing alienation and disorientation. At the periphery the stelae are short and easy to navigate, but as you progress deeper into the memorial, they become taller. In discussing the finished memorial Eisenman described the experience of watching people walk into the installation, "it is amazing how these heads disappear – like going under water" (SPIEGEL International 2005).

Experiencing the memorial conveys a metaphorical warning. It suggests that you may not understand the political implications of a situation at first because it seems manageable. As you enter the memorial, the concrete blocks are short and you can see over them to the horizon, but as you progress further, they become taller, obstructing your view. The external world is no longer visible, you can only see what is directly in front of you. The undulating ground increases the sense of instability and navigating the environment takes all your energy and concentration. The physical experience encourages visitors to consider the ways shifting political frameworks are similar, creating disorientation and increasing confusion.

According to Eisenman, 'this project manifests the instability inherent in what seems to be a system...(suggesting) that when a supposedly rational and ordered system grows too large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it loses touch with human reason.' (Woodger and So 2023, 89)

Eisenman's design is minimalist in its physical form, but the experiential aspects are complex and multi-layered. Aesthetically the memorial reflects the fragmentation and deconstructivism characteristic of the postmodern era (Hu 2018). Metaphorically it allows for interpretations that reference the experience of the victims of the holocaust as well as those in German society who stood by as the Nazi regime grew in power and inhumanity.

9/11 Memorial in New York

In *Reflecting Absence, or How Ground Zero Was Purged of Its Material History*, (van Toor and Ronnes 2015) the authors document the community-based struggle over the removal of a concrete staircase that came to be known as "the Survivor's Stairway."

The last flight of stairs from Tobin Plaza to street level still stood in its place, and naturally, hundreds of survivors attached meaning to it – everyone had used emergency staircases. The more material was removed from the site, the more poignant and visible the recognizable remnants became... (van Toor and Ronnes 2015, 97)

The authors argue that by removing all material remnants from the site of the World

Trade Center the site lost its value as a place of mourning. “What was lost, along with the material, was the emotional, social and historic value of the 16 acres as a place of mourning and remembrance” (van Toor and Ronnes 2015, 103). In considering this statement in the context of the design for the 9/11 memorial, it is useful to return to the quote at the beginning of this section on how buildings and metaphors of architecture serve as memory devices. The winning design *Reflecting Absence* does “concretize remembrance by containing and projecting memories” (McCarter and Pallasmaa 2012, 329).

The 9/11 memorial design has been criticized for not providing a sense of renewal or healing (Leigh 2014). In response we might ask if that is really the purpose of a memorial created to commemorate a tragedy on the scale of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The destruction of the World Trade Center by international terrorists is so rife with symbolism that only a memorial that encourages us to reflect on the very nature of existence seems appropriate. Whether a purely existential memorial might “...stimulate and inspire us to reminisce and imagine” (McCarter and Pallasmaa 2012, 329) will have to be addressed by future researchers who are able to reflect on the significance of the 9/11 memorial from the vantage point a greater distance from the incident. What we can say about the 9/11 memorial today is that it serves as a metaphor for the Twin Towers and represents their absence. In contrast to the more tangible representations of loss and destruction in the design of the OKCNM, which encourages empathy with the victims of the bombing even as it represents loss, through the individually designed and personally identified, empty chairs. The existential nature of the 9/11 memorial encourages a deeper analysis of our place in the world, which may have greater potential to generate numinous experiences in visitors through an existential consideration of the never-ending cycle of human suffering.

Critiques of Minimalist Memorials

In discussing the call for proposals for a 9/11 memorial in New York, Art Critic, Michael Kimmelman contextualizes proposed ideas for the memorial within the larger frame of design history (2002).

A memorial, as part of a mixed-use project, will in some way turn out to look Minimalist, Minimalism, of all improbable art movements of the last 50 years having become the unofficial language of memorial art. What used to be men on horses with thrusting swords has morphed more or less into plain walls and boxes. Once considered the most obstinate kind of modernism, Minimalism has gradually, almost sub rosa, made its way into the public’s heart. And now

those bare walls are blank slates onto which we project our deepest commonly held feelings. (Kimmelman 2002, 2:1)

Kimmelman has articulated the reason that Minimalism has become the language of contemporary memorials. There are no representations that define the meaning of a minimalist memorial, leaving the interpretations open to the visitor, which broadens its relatability to a larger audience. Minimalist memorial design has not been without its detractors. Beginning with the controversies surrounding the design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which was initially denigrated, “as shameful and nihilistic, an insult to veterans and a paean to anti-war protesters” (Reston, Jr. 2021), minimalist design has been criticized as cold and uninspiring.

Erika Doss’ critique of the OKCNM focuses primarily on what she characterizes as the minimalist design of the empty chairs that represent the absence of those killed in the bombing.

The chairs in the Oklahoma City National Memorial are usually roped off, preventing visitors from leaving offerings or even touching them; they are also made of materials that hardly invite visitors to sit. If their emptiness evokes loss, it also intimates silence. Chairs are generally sites of spontaneous, animated discourse-grouped around dinner or seminar tables, for example-but this memorial’s seats are lined up in nine immutable rows. Avoiding contact with one another, they fail to evoke conversations among those who visit; facing a reflecting pool, they gaze upon themselves in an unending loop. The memory of terrorism is managed in this memorial through a narcotizing narrative of “comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity,” the words inscribed on its Gates of Time. Searching for more intimate forms of meaning, some visitors dip their finger in the reflecting pool and leave their handprints on the metallic surfaces of its monumental gates. (Doss 2010, loc 3054)

Doss’s comment about the chairs being roped off references a brief moment in time rather than an access policy. Linenthal documented an issue with high visitation at the opening of the Symbolic Memorial resulting in trampled grass in the field of chairs. This difference in experience, created by the need to maintain worn grass, highlights that maintenance needs and practices can greatly affect affordances offered by a memorial site.

Torrey Butzer envisioned the sacred ground that contained the 168 memorial chairs being open space in which people could walk among the chairs and perhaps leave memorial items. Some family members looked forward to sitting in the chairs, bringing friends and other relatives to them. The huge number of visitors, however, destroyed the grass around the chairs, and the area began to look shoddy and worn. (Linenthal 2001, 232)

The OKCNM took a protective step in temporarily roping off the chairs while they considered how to address the problem. During this time the chairs remained accessible to the victims' family members by appointment, but the area was closed to the public (Linenthal 2001, 232). I can attest that this issue was resolved in a manner that made the chairs accessible to the public prior to 2008, since I have been a regular visitor since that time and have never seen the area roped off. During my on-site observations, I witnessed park rangers encouraging visitors to walk among the chairs, and many visitors do so. Visitor survey responses frequently refer to the chairs as being highest on their list of impactful design elements, suggesting that an empty chair is highly emotive and relatable. The chairs convey a human presence through metonymy, a literary trope that references the person through their relationship to the furnishings they would have inhabited.

Doss argues that the minimalist design of the empty chairs creates an impersonal atmosphere. It is true that visitors do not commonly sit on the empty chairs, but this is not because they are not allowed to, but because the chairs function much in the way a headstone would in a cemetery and most people do not climb on headstones out of respect for the dead. Finally, her statement that visitors are searching for more intimate forms of meaning when they leave wet handprints on the gates, seems to be speculative as there is no documentation of visitor engagement that conveys this meaning.

The irony of Doss' critique is that it demonstrates the malleable nature of Minimalism which allows for personal interpretation, which is the very reason Minimalist memorials serve the needs of commemorative design so well. Minimalism's abstraction allows visitors to bring their personal perspectives to the memorial and use the lens of their own experience to derive meaning from their visit. To quote Doss, "Many artists and critics feel that minimalism is, in fact, the only adequate art style for today's memorials, and in particular, for the commemoration of traumatic histories" (Doss 2010, loc 2277).

Classifying Contemporary Memorials

Several authors have attempted to classify the increasing number of contemporary memorials into meaningful sets for the purpose of discussion and analysis. In *Memorial Mania*, Erika Doss provides an overview of different forms of classification beginning with the distinction between Memorials and Monuments. She notes; "Art historian Horst Janson

explained that the traditional Western monument falls into three categories: the funerary monument, the monument to historical events or ideas (for example, “Liberty”), and the monument to great men” (Janson 1976). After reviewing different types of classification schemes, she concludes that “...contemporary American memorials embody the feelings of particular publics at particular historical moments” (Doss, 2010, Loc 1127). Based on this understanding, she examines a vast array of public monuments and memorials through the lens of feelings, using grief, fear, gratitude, shame and anger as the organizing principles for her discussions. Her compilation offers insightful content, serving as an excellent sourcebook on memorial design history.

Kenneth Foote (1997) also offers a set of categories that evaluates the ways designers have dealt with memorializing tragedies in his book *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*. Foote notes that the stories told at the sites of tragedies “offer insight into how people grapple with the meaning of tragedy and reveal much about attitudes toward violence” (1997, 7). He discusses four different collective responses to public tragedies defined by the method of memorialization which he categorizes as: *sanctification*, *designation*, *rectification* and *obliteration*, noting that all “can result in major modifications of the landscape, but of very different sorts” (Foote 1997, 7)

In brief, he suggests that *sanctification* occurs when people want to commemorate something of lasting meaning, such as an act of heroism, which commonly results in the creation of a durable memorial. *Designation* he describes as the act of marking a site where something important happened, which suggests the installation of a historical plaque or wayside. *Rectification* and *obliteration* are different ways of dealing with a negative event. “Rectification involves removing the signs of violence and tragedy and returning a site to use, implying no lasting positive or negative meaning” (Foote 1997, 8). The usefulness of such categories lies within their ability to help us make meaning of events and outcomes.

Interpreting the OKCNM within these categories demonstrates that a single memorial can exist across categories. The OKCNM clearly falls within the frame of *sanctification*, but it demonstrates elements of the other categories as well. The site has been *designated* as a National Historic Site and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It has been *rectified* by being returned to use with portions of the designed memorial providing a park like setting for public enjoyment and prior to the development of the memorial, all be a very small piece of the remains

of the Murrah building were demolished in an act of *obliteration*, cleansing the site of the act of violence in preparation for memorial development. The point of this analysis is to demonstrate that contemporary memorials often defy classification. Although, different efforts to classify memorials help us to understand and make meaning in the face of overwhelming events and perhaps think critically about the steps we might want to take to move beyond the event itself to a well-considered memorialization process. Erika Doss's categories of grief, fear, gratitude, shame and anger are all represented at the OKCNM and within the development process (Doss 2010). The comments by the community members who were interviewed by Bill Moyers acknowledged the fear that they felt in the wake of the bombing (Moyers 1996). The victim's family members and survivors acknowledged the incredible grief they felt at the loss of so many friends and loved ones and the anger they felt toward the perpetrators of the bombing. The inscription on the exterior of the promontory wall, references gratitude for the assistance that was provided. In thinking about the OKCNM within Doss's categories I see them as feelings associated with successive phases of a healing process rather than discreet categories. The design elements are intended to evoke different affective responses and it should be acknowledged that the same design element may evoke different responses in different people based on their life experience, the nature of trauma they might have experienced and where they are in the healing process. I suggest that bringing our own perspective to a memorial that commemorates a national trauma assists in bridging between personal and collective experiences in the same way that individual memories of these traumatic events contribute to the collective memory of the event.

The term "victim memorials" has also been used to group together memorials at the sites of tragedies, but the use of this term needs additional scholarly examination to be useful as a category of analysis. Senie (2016, 6) notes the lack of distinctions among groups of victims, citing Kirk Savage (2006, 109) who observed, "the question of which category of victim deserves a monument is fundamentally political, and the answer depends on the meanings that society assigns to their trauma. The severity of the trauma is not the crucial factor, but rather its collective significance" In *Memorials to Shattered Myths*, Senie (2016, 6) examines the conflagration of victims with heroes and the "diversionary narrative of hope that emphasizes the triumphal communal spirit prompted by the respective heinous crimes," perpetrated at the Murrah Federal Building, Columbine High School and the World Trade Center.

Failures in Planning

The next two memorials illustrate how flawed or incomplete planning processes can result in memorials that fail to resonate on a potentially larger social scale despite the national scope of the incident being commemorated. In both cases, memorial planning failed to bring the consensus needed to implement an effective memorial plan.

The Columbine Memorial

The memorial to the victims of the Columbine shooting is significant to this study as much for the motivations for the shooting as the memorial's design. Dave Cullen's extensively researched book *Columbine* (2010) utilizes entries in Eric Harris's diary to reveal his actions were motivated by the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building, including his intent to bomb Columbine on the anniversary of the Oklahoma Bombing, and the storming of Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Given this information, a memorial to this event might have incorporated a design that focused on societal unity in recognition of the national political divide that spurred the actions at both the Murrah Building and Columbine High School sites.

In describing the location and understated design of the Columbine Memorial, Senie (2016, 94) notes "you would be hard pressed to determine what precisely was being commemorated besides the deaths of thirteen individuals. She further describes an atmosphere of conflict and controversy that developed during spontaneous commemorations near the site selected for the permanent memorial when a local carpenter provided wooden crosses for the spontaneous memorial and included crosses for the two shooters. The crosses for the shooters were initially defaced and then removed and destroyed by the father of one of the victims (Senie 2016, 98). *Columbine: The Power of Denial*, which is the title for the chapter addressing this tragedy in Senie's book (2016, 94) seems a fitting title given her descriptions of the memorial planning process and the resulting installation that was completed eight years after the event.

"A closed inner circle, focused solely on the victims, is surrounded by an outer wall with comments from some of those directly affected by the tragedy, signaling an overwhelmingly local perspective." (2016, 94)

In the conclusion to this chapter, Senie observes "In almost every form of memorialization of the Columbine rampage, matters of church and states were intertwined" (2016, 118). This sentiment is echoed by Burkhart (2024) who recounts a situation where some

of the memorial tiles created by students were not included due to a Colorado Supreme Court decision regarding the display of the tiles, citing the separation of church and state.

Riley Burkhart, (2024) a former Columbine student describes the sense that the shooting incident was ever present at the school almost 20 years later and provides insight from the perspective a student who lived with the legacy of the incident.

The location of memorials can convey a message about a tragedy, and the community's understanding of their history. Memorials of the columbine shooting are generally unobtrusive and occasionally inaccessible, so while they preserve this history they also emphasize the school's functionality over a need to memorialize. (Burkhart 2024)

The sense of denial acknowledged by Senie is seemingly confirmed in Burkhart's experiences at Columbine High School where the focus is on a productive future in which students are encouraged to participate in a Day of Service to recognize the anniversary of the shooting. "The focus on the future shown by both the physical memorials and the Day of Service allows the staff, students, and community of Columbine High School to channel a tragic past into something constructive" (Burkhart 2024). We may never know if the school's "commitment to positivity" is enough to allow the students and community to transcend the tragedy of the event.

Kent State Memorial

The development of a Memorial to commemorate the shooting of students at Kent State on May 4th, 1970, was fraught with difficulty from the beginning. In *Et in Arcadia Ego: The Place of Memorial in Contemporary America* (1987), Charney provides a comparative analysis of Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Ian Tabernor's 1986 winning design for the May 4th Memorial at Kent State. He notes:

In their understated forms and nonpolitical messages, both memorials have been lavishly praised as most appropriate expressions of commemoration in light of the disturbingly divisive and interrelated series of tragic events in our recent past which these two memorials, both separately and together, attempt to objectify. (Charney 1987)

Unfortunately, the entry by Tabernor and his partner Michael Fahey was disqualified based on American citizenship, a condition of entry into the design competition. The 2nd place

winner, Bruno Ast, eventually completed a modified version of his original design.¹⁵ The Kent State May 4th website provides the following description of the officially commissioned memorial.

The May 4 Site and Memorial, designed by Chicago architect Bruno Ast, was dedicated on May 4, 1990, as part of the 20th May 4, 1970, Commemoration. Engraved in the plaza's stone threshold are the words "Inquire. Learn. Reflect." The memorial is surrounded by 58,175 daffodil bulbs, which symbolize the number of our country's losses in Vietnam. Kent State artist Brinsley Tyrrell contributed to the concept of the symbolic planting of the daffodils <https://www.kent.edu/may-4th-memorials>.

The website lists all May 4th memorials, commemorative events and activities which collectively document "...a history of social division and reunification, political conflict and reconciliation, national trauma and recovery, after both the event and the war" (O'Hara 2006).

Steidl (2013) identifies four distinct periods in the commemorative evolution at Kent state: Early Fragmentation: 1970 to 1983, Toward a Multivocal Memorial: 1983 to 1990, the Process of Re-fragmentation: 1990 to 1999 and Integrative Meta-Narratives and The Integrated Commemorative Field: 1999 to 2012. Steidl suggests that the period of re-fragmentation began when Kent State sought to limit the cost and scale of Bruno Ast's original design.

This re-fragmentation took concrete form after the (scaled-down) memorial was completed in early 1990 and the university agreed to the addition of a plaque bearing the 13 students' names, in spite of Ast's personal opposition to it.... the plaque reduced the memorial's ambiguity, aligning it more closely with narratives commemorating the students who died. (Steidl 2013, 762)

Increasing demand for separate memorials and commemorative events signaled further fragmentation. A final shift toward greater integration occurred after the university agreed to install four markers in the parking lot where the students died. It is clear from the Kent State example that the realization of a designed memorial at the site of trauma can serve as symbolic validation for a particular group's narrative of the event. In this case, the competing narratives of

¹⁵ A detailed chronology of the many problems and controversies surrounding the May 4th memorial design and development process is available online at: <https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/may-4-memorial-chronology>.

the event pitted the champions of the student peace protesters (and innocent bystanders) against the Army National Guard, a political struggle between pacifists and the military. The contentiousness over the commemorative process at Kent State suggests a struggle over national identity. The war in Vietnam had already polarized America and the Kent State shootings brought the battle home in a very direct and tragic manner. Whether due to the design of the memorial, the accessibility of the site, or the way the development process was handled, the unification of narratives that began under the memorial planning process could not be sustained. It would take the dedication of markers to the dead in the location of their death and the efforts of a new generation to finally integrate the commemorative landscape at Kent State. In summary, the topics reviewed can be classed as: 1) minimalist design aesthetics and community response 2) therapeutic memorials and collective healing 3) memorial planning and collective decision making.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial in Comparative Perspective

In an interview on the eve of the dedication of the OKCNM, Kari Ferguson (Watkins), then Executive Director of the Memorial shared information about the memorial development process. “We found one great source of advice from a guy named Jan Scruggs, who had done the Vietnam Memorial Wall and had failed to involve the veterans. He said whatever you do, make sure that you involve those people most closely affected” (Moore 2000, 2). Jan Scruggs is the highly decorated Vietnam Veteran who founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund that aided in the development of the memorial and promotes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as “The Wall that Heals” (The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund n.d.).

The Memorial Task Force took Jan Scruggs’ advice to heart and initiated a major outreach campaign that was managed by the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee. A community meetings sub-group was formed that held seven community meetings to gather information from across the city to about what people would like to see in a memorial design. Subsequent efforts included a survey and in-depth discussions with the Victims’ Families and Survivors Subcommittee of the Memorial Task Force. The input gathered from these sources provided the basis for the design guidelines of the memorial (See Chapter 6 for additional details).

The Oklahoma City National Memorial (OKCNM) and the 9/11 Memorial in New York were both constructed on the site of buildings destroyed through acts of terrorism. As previously

discussed, the designs interpret these tragedies in very different ways. The design of the OKCNM makes use of several original elements of the site to connect the visitor to the violence and destruction of the bombing. The marks from the bomb blast and rescuers inscription on the wall of the Journal Record Building (Figure 1.9), the use of a portion of the foundation and wall of the Murrah Building to create an enclosure for the “survivors chapel” (Figure 1.3) and the overlook on the street above that served as the entry plaza for the building are all visible reminders of how the site has changed, providing links to the past which serve as reminders of the bomb’s destruction. Among those elements retained, the Survivor Tree is the most positive of the original elements, highlighting strength and resilience rather than destruction or absence. The visitor survey conducted for this research documents that visitor’s find it inspirational.

A critical analysis of the design of the Oklahoma City National Memorial was completed as part of a Landscape Architecture dissertation by Martin J. Holland titled “Empty Chairs, Broken Lives: The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum,” (Holland 2014). Holland analyzes the physical design of the memorial, contextualizing it within the urban design and developmental history of downtown Oklahoma City. In a separate work, Holland provides a critique of the design competition for the Oklahoma National Memorial noting:

In many ways, the memorial process in Oklahoma City was an extension of the community outreach that provided immediate triage in the minutes, hours, days, and weeks after the bombing. It was focused primarily on the psychological health of the victims’ families. Those who were still in shock understandably struggled with what the event meant for them, or what they would want to remember about the event itself. Robert Johnson spoke of providing “great deference” to those most affected by the trauma. But their influence extended far beyond merely sharing their opinions and feelings about the memorial. They were intimately involved with the entire process, including serving on the final selection jury. The resulting memorial was focused on providing a tranquil and peaceful experience, and each of the survivors, victims, children, and rescuers had a distinct area set aside for them. (Holland 2015, Loc 2009)

Holland claims that the victims’ families held a privileged position in the planning process and their concerns eclipsed those of survivors, the public and a highly regarded architect, Paul Spreiregen, who was initially approached to run the design competition.¹⁶

¹⁶ Holland’s critique is referenced throughout his manuscript as it is the central premise of his dissertation that the role that was played by the victim’s family members was detrimental to both the public process and the resulting design. (Holland 2014)

At the heart of the tension between survivors and the Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation, is the fact that the survivors can offer an alternative narrative to the one preferred by the foundation itself, one that counters the optimistic rhetoric of a community coming together, of shared sacrifice and loss, and eventual triumph over adversity. The survivors' narratives, rooted in real pain, are hardly as simple. There is a parallel between the memorial foundation's treatment of survivors and the location of the Survivor's Wall that extends past the physical isolation of their memorial component, for the idea of damage also roots survivors to the foundation of the former Federal Building. (Holland 2014, 39)

Linenthal (2001, 186-189) documented in detail the process by which the Task Force decided that Spreiregen was not the right person for the project. The community expressed concerns that he would not listen to their input on the design and decided to initiate a new search for a design competition that would better suit their needs.

After a brief and intensive search, the task force chose a team of competition advisors, Don Stastny and Paul Morris from Portland, Oregon, and Helene Fried, a public art consultant from San Francisco. Beth Tolbert, former chairperson of the Assembly of State Arts Councils and twice chairperson for the Oklahoma City Festival of the Arts, had developed the procedures for the first public art competition sponsored by Oklahoma City. With Jackie Jones, she cochaired the design competition committee and felt strongly that these three advisers contributed greatly to the success of the competition. (Linenthal 2001, 189)

Holland laments the fact that the resulting design did not lead to a more robust narrative of the event, suggesting that the rush to complete the process quickly was based in the desire to leverage the memorial to rebuild the Oklahoma City Urban core. My research suggests there were other issues that contributed to the push to memorialize the event, such as the need to mediate community concerns over tensions between federal law enforcement and local militia groups in the wake of a major domestic terrorism tragedy.

Azaryahu and Foote include a description of the OKCNM in their article *Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites*, but they offer little interpretation of the OKCNM design other than noting the use of time as an organizing principle and the fact that the design is what they classify as "hybrid" in the sense that it is both historical and commemorative. (2008, 191) They suggest that committee authorship, which is more common in the construction of spatial narratives can have "...disadvantages that can lead to compromise and stalemate in the development of narratives" (2008, 192). However, the design was never intended to be a linear narrative as it focuses on a single moment in time,

which occupies the center of the site's spatial narrative. The design elements highlight activities and individuals that were either impacted by or assisted with the recovery from that one moment.

The Symbolic Memorial is exactly what it promises to be, a representation of the experience of a single moment that had far reaching consequences at local, regional and national scales. The Butzers characterize the layout for their design as having a "sense of outdoor rooms, something that had a sense of intimacy or enclosure to it" (Moore 2000, 10). The Gates of Time contrast with this sense of intimacy, mimicking the scale of the downtown buildings, while aiding in the sense of enclosure for the memorial spaces. The architects explained:

The gates became the edges for us. They became a way for us to almost create doors, or places of passage into the site. It was very intentional that they be placed on the exits to 5th street. This is a Midwestern city where we expect the streets just to run through for miles in all directions, and just the gesture of saying, 'Something's happened here in the life of the city that has stopped the city motion...' So the gates work at that city scale, kind of this transitional element going from the downtown area, moving through these gates into the site. (Moore 2000, 10)

The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial was designed to be experiential while the larger historical narrative is situated within the didactic framework of the memorial museum. This reflects the expectations of the community that the historical narrative be separate from the Symbolic Memorial. In this way the two components of the memorial offer unique but complementary visitor experiences.

Hans and Torrey Butzer discussed their inspiration and the design process for the memorial in an interview with Rick Moore of "Towntalk," a publication of the Oklahoma Municipal Contractor's Association (Moore 2000). They described a process that was highly collaborative, beginning with a two-hour slide presentation for the family members, rescue workers and survivors about the details of their design which was followed by the submission of written questions from this group which were considered and answered individually. Voicing appreciation for the process Hans noted:

"...the one thing that we've really learned about during this whole project is communication, and the need to communicate as much as possible your ideas and your reasons for making certain decisions, and then presenting them in a very coherent way." (Moore 2000, 8)

Community engagement and co-design in landscape design is a well-documented approach. Writing shortly after the OKCNM planning process was implemented Staton Jones observed “Defined broadly, citizen participation is today an integral piece of nearly every project or process that environmental design professionals undertake” (Jones 1999, 65). In “Co-creation and the new landscapes of design,” Sanders and Stappers trace the evolution of collaboration in landscape design from “a user-centered approach to co-designing” (Sanders and Stappers 2008). Katie Kingery-Page highlights the importance of “community participation as a deliberative process,” concluding that “time is needed to engage the messy process of consulting local knowledge and learning about people’s lived experiences” (Kingery-Page 2019, 246).

Engagement with communities to integrate their lived experience into a design process is most critical in those environments dealing with difficult histories. The timing and methodology used for the public process will need to consider the variables of each situation. The extensive planning process conducted by the Memorial Task Force in advance of selecting the design team undoubtedly helped the community, particularly the victim’s families and survivor’s to think critically about their expectations. This allowed them to define their expectations for the design through the guidelines included in the initial design packet. If the task force had taken more time with the community engagement process, it is possible that the expectations for the design would have been different, but it is also possible that the process would have become more difficult to complete. A letter from Kathleen Treanor, whose daughter was killed in the bombing emphasized the need to move the memorial process forward before critical funding and public sympathy was lost through delays (Katz 1997). Commentaries on the OKCNM design are often more critical than analytical, lacking contextualization within a theoretical discourse of deliberative democracy, community engagement, or co-design, which disparages the landscape design because it does not fit a pre-conceived aesthetic rather than evaluating the design based on the development goals of the community and the people most closely impacted by the event.

Nationalism and Competing Identities

The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building was the largest domestic terrorist attack in the history of America. In a testimony before congress in 2002, the Executive Assistant Director of the Counterterrorism Committee of the FBI stated:

Right-wing groups continue to represent a serious terrorist threat. Two of the seven planned acts of terrorism prevented in 1999 were potentially large-scale, high casualty attacks being planned by organized right-wing extremist groups. (Watson 2002)

The Oklahoma bombing was a well-planned retaliatory attack against the federal government for federal actions taken against suspected or known armed militia group members at Ruby Ridge in 1992 and the Branch Davidian Settlement in Waco, Texas in 1993 (Wright 2007, 5). As a result, the federal investment in the Oklahoma Memorial was seen, in part, as an opportunity to bring recognition to the dangers of domestic terrorism. In its original form, the memorial consisted of three components, 1) The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial 2) The Oklahoma City National Memorial Center 3) The Oklahoma City National Center for the Prevention of Terrorism. The third component dissolved in 2014 due to a lack of funding (EBSCO 2024).

Early in the planning process, the Memorial Task Force defined federal recognition as one of their goals and pursued formal designation as a “National Monument” (Bryans 2010, 13)¹⁷ The Government Liaison Subcommittee of the Task Force made this recommendation and pursued this goal with the assistance of Senator Don Nickles of Oklahoma. Senator Nickles introduced a bill in the Senate on June 10th, 1997, which was signed into law as the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997 on October 9th (Congress.gov 1997), establishing the Oklahoma City National Memorial as a unit of the National Park System. The Act also established the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust which was defined as “a wholly owned Government corporation,” which would “administer the operation, maintenance, management and interpretation of the Memorial” (Congress.gov 1997). President Clinton’s statement at the time he signed the act on October 9th, 1997 explains the role of the Trust and the partnership with the NPS, noting “the National Park Service will provide technical assistance to the Trust for 2 years, after which time the Trust will reimburse the Park Service for any further services” (Clinton 1997).

Federal involvement had implications for the memorial development process and the operation of the site upon its completion. The NPS designated a Superintendent who hired staff to carry out the responsibilities of developing and operating the site in collaboration with the

¹⁷ “Initial Tasks of Memorial Task Force Subcommittees July 17, 1995,” Oklahoma City Memorial Archives, cited by (Bryans 2010)

Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation (successor to the Memorial Task Force). Differences in the federal and local expectations for the operation of the site created tensions that could not be reconciled, eventually resulting in the dissolution of the Trust. The Oklahoma Memorial Foundation has continued the partnership with the NPS, but federal involvement in the operation of the memorial was reduced to limited interpretation of the Symbolic Memorial by roving Park Rangers who are now supervised by the Superintendent of the Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

An administrative history outlining the early years of the partnership between the National Park Service (NPS) and the Oklahoma Memorial Foundation was commissioned by the NPS and is archived as an NPS internal document, fully accessible to NPS employees (Bryans 2010). This administrative history documents the complexities of the arrangement and identifies the issues that emerged as the partners sought to navigate the relationship. Bryan characterizes these issues as a contrast in organizational cultures, noting:

The Memorial Trust, in concert with the Foundation, expected to operate the Memorial as a private sector undertaking despite the Trust's classification as a wholly owned government corporation. The (National) Park Service, of course, operated within the bureaucratic environment of a federal agency, having both its own departmental and general governmental practices and procedures to follow. The challenge would be to meld these two organizational cultures into a workable whole. For many reasons, that ultimately proved extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish. (Bryans 2010, 67).

The issues between the organizations that are of interest for this study center primarily on the nature of interpretation and messaging at the Symbolic Memorial rather than the larger issues of funding and coordination of operations and issues of security that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Memorial Trust and transfer of full memorial ownership and operation to the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. However, some of the issues documented by Bryans suggest that there were underlying tensions between federal and foundation employees indicative of larger socio-political issues. In a recent email exchange with Kari Watkins, who now serves as President and CEO of the OKCNM, she referenced the federal budget issues that precluded the government committing to funding a permanent unit of the NPS noting:

When we went to President Clinton, [and] Congress (led by Newt Gingrich) — the NPS was \$8 Billion with a B in backlog and they weren't adding more national memorials/parks. They, the Speaker and President's staff along with our lead..., Senator Don Nickles told us if we wanted to get the national tag

to represent the hundreds of federal employees impacted (and not just in OKC) that we would have to look at local ownership, control and creation. While we didn't like it at first, it started to become clear that [it] was our only path and in hindsight, it makes so much sense. We have never had backlog maintenance, never shut down over the government shutdowns or been impacted by those type[s] of bureaucratic issues. If [there were] ever a place where the local people (350 Member Task Force) and the Federal government should set an example of cooperation it should be the site where a decorated American soldier tried to take down his own government. We are proud of how and what we have done the past 31 years and how we have honored those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. (K. Watkins 2026)

Watkin's statement clarifies the local expectations for the operation of the memorial at the time it was established. She also points out the advantages of not having to conform to federal operations requirements. Internal National Park Service (NPS) documents suggest NPS staff had a different understanding of the operational framework and expected to have substantial control, particularly relating to interpretation and site security. Their understanding of the operational requirements stemmed from the original legislation that designated the site as a *unit* of the NPS, suggesting that all operational requirements for designated national parks would be applied. In reviewing the history, it appears that the tension between the partners was based on a lack of clarity for how the partnership would operate. A lack of consensus in non-profit operations can create tension among staff and leadership that impacts operational efficiency, collaborations and long-term sustainability.

Perceptions of Federal Overreach

The Murrah Building was bombed on the second anniversary of the government raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco. The event was intended as a highly visible, physically devastating and symbolic attack on the federal government by a former member of the U.S. Armed Forces. The bombing was characterized as an attack on the American heartland, the geographic and symbolic center of the Nation. The fact that this bombing was perpetrated by a native son turned domestic terrorist rather than a foreign agent bent on destruction of the United States points to conflicts within our Nation that can be characterized as a struggle for National identity. In *Comprehending Columbine*, Ralph Larkin (2007, 166-167) provides a succinct description of ideological underpinnings of the militia activities leading up the Oklahoma bombing in a section titled, "The Revolt of the Angry White Male, 1992-1996."

Although ostensibly about the defense of the Second Amendment to the Constitution, the revolt of the angry white male embraced white supremacy, anti-Semitism (sic), fundamentalist Christianity, patriarchy, and hostility to the Federal government. The government was perceived as attempting to take away rights to gun ownership, promoting the interests of minorities and feminists, and secularizing public life (Dyer 1998; Niewart 1999; Stern 1997). The major events of the movement, besides the shootout at Ruby Ridge, included the destruction of the Branch Davidian compound, the rise of unorganized militias, the bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, the derailling of an Amtrak train in the Arizona desert, and, finally, the holdout of the Montana Freeman, which ended in June 1996.

As noted previously, the perpetrators of the Columbine shooting were motivated to carry out their plans in an imitation of Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Murrah Federal Building. Other events in American social and political life underscore the fact that these sentiments have increased since 1996. Larkin (2007, 167) characterizes the composition of this movement as "...males who were economically and socially marginal." He states:

They were involved in cultural wars against urban hipness, multiculturalism, feminism, and homosexuality. They advocated for a muscular Christianity based upon men as the undisputed authority in the household, as promulgated by such organizations as the Promise Keepers.

The events that Larkin addresses are further analyzed by Michael Barkun in his book, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (1997). Barkun describes the Christian Identity Movement as a millenarian movement whose adherents believe they are living in the "Last Days" (1997, 75). It positions the origins of the movement in Britain tracing its influence on protestant fundamentalism and American politics. His conclusion examines the "...ideological mutation, through which a benign and politically conformist movement turned into a movement obsessed with enemies and conspiracies" (1997, 243). He posits, "When that conspiratorialism was joined with a belief in the imminence of the apocalypse, identity could become a breeding ground for revolutionary millenarianism, the final assault of the pure on the citadel of corrupt authority" (Barkun 1997, 243).

Collective Fear and Terrorism Memorials

Doss (2010, loc. 5597) characterizes American memorial culture as one of anger over “the shifting dynamics of the national narrative.” Certainly, recently passed Executive¹⁸ and Secretarial¹⁹ orders point to an increase in political efforts to control the national narrative relative to American history and identity by limiting what is deemed appropriate for public display. It will take time and transparent review to understand the impact of these restrictive orders on public history, including memorial design initiatives.

Issues encountered with both the Columbine and Kent State Memorial development processes point to the inability to reconcile the social or political issues surrounding the events that the organizers were seeking to memorialize. In the case of Columbine, the decision was made to ignore the conflicts that arose during the planning process all together and focus on moving forward in a manner they defined as positive and constructive without providing resolution within the community. The outer circle in the Columbine Memorial includes engraved plaques with inscriptions from friends and family. The inscription provided by Brian Rohrbough, whose son was killed reads: “My son, in a Nation that legalized the killing of innocent children in the womb; in a Country where authorities would lie and cover up what they knew and what they did; in a Godless school system your life was taken.” In quoting this inscription, Senie notes that this is the only reference to larger societal issues in connection with the Columbine Memorial (2016, 106). While this inscription might be seen as social commentary, I understand it in the context of other information Senie shared about the conflicts that occurred during the memorial planning process that portray a school and perhaps a community with a troubled culture that seemed incapable of doing the difficult work needed to bring about resolution after this tragic shooting.

The Kent State Memorial has continued to be mired in controversy over the differing views of the shooting and how the memorial should reflect those viewpoints resulting in a never-ending debate and multiple re-workings of the memorial design. Neither of these two extremes

¹⁸ On March 27th, 2025, President Donald Trump implemented Executive Order 14253, titled: Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History, requiring all federal agencies review and revise historical content (Trump 2025).

¹⁹ Secretary’s Order 3431, issued by the Secretary of the Interior on May 20, 2025, requires internal review of all public facing content at any land management agency location (Burgum 2025).

suggest a positive outcome for those most closely impacted by the event, much less the local communities and larger society in which these events occurred.

Dateline: One Year Later

An episode of NBC's Dateline documents many first-person narratives at the first anniversary of the Murrah Building bombing, revealing the deep trauma felt throughout the community, and illustrates some of the efforts at collective processing that helped people navigate the aftermath of the bombing (Moyers 1996). One of the family members, Marsha Kight, whose daughter was killed in the bombing organized "Families and Survivors United," a group of that offered emotional support in the aftermath of the bombing. The film shows how narratives of personal trauma become intertwined with feelings of anger and fear over the threat of terrorism. When Moyers asked Marsha: "What does it say to you that Frankie died, apparently because someone wanted to strike out at the government?" Marsha responded:

It makes me madder than hell, I feel like the veil of innocence has been ripped from my eyes, you know, and what else will maybe come around because of this tragedy. Is there going to be more violence? Is there going to be a civil war? What's going to happen? (Moyers 1996, 8:05)

The documentary continues with interviews that highlight divisions in the community between those who support federal government programs and supporters of anti-government militias. Moyers (1996, 43:20) observes: "Nothing unifies the anti-government sentiment in Oklahoma like the right to bear arms, all kinds of arms." While attending a local militia meeting, Moyers documents the member's distrust of government and notes: "The militias have been under investigation, these people say they deplore the bombing and the government is using the tragedy to crack down on their movement" (1996, 45:22). The Dateline documentary illustrates the socio-political environment that existed at the time the OKCNM was being planned. The resentment and hostility demonstrated by militia members and gun rights advocates in the documentary corroborates the statements of survivors and family members who expressed fear over the potential for additional violence from militia groups and sympathizers. Sentiments of federal overreach by some members of the community may have contributed to an atmosphere of hostility toward uniformed federal employees who were brought in to assist with memorial operations. Within such a tense atmosphere, a large NPS presence, particularly NPS Law Enforcement Rangers and vehicles located at the bombing site could exacerbate the tension and

anxiety the community was experiencing in the wake of the bombing.

In *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, Erika Doss discusses fear as a driving force in the development of terrorism memorials.

Terrorism memorials – memorials that commemorate the victims of terrorism – have escalated in contemporary America. Memorial mania is typified, in fact, by projects that commemorate two acts of terrorism on American soil: the bombing of the Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, and the attacks of September 11, 2001. (Doss 2010, loc. 2183)

Doss explores the political frameworks surrounding terrorism memorials noting:

Bearing witness to unfathomable death, these memorials serve to offset the threat and fear of terrorism and its rupturing of American invincibility by reproducing national narratives of social stability, unity and endurance. The minimalist aesthetic adopted by many contemporary terrorism memorials helps to manage these security narratives by simultaneously expressing and containing affective conditions of fear. (Doss 2010, loc 2278)

The documentation of the rapid development of the OKCNM, which emphasized the role of victim's family members and survivors throughout the planning process suggests that fear was driving the process. The documentation of the frustrations of local militia members and the fear of returning to work expressed by federal employees are well documented in the *Dateline* documentary by Bill Moyers (Moyers 1996). Similarly, requirements that the memorial not contain any thematic content related to the bombing, investigation or trial suggests that members of the task force felt the need to create distance from the bombing event and anything associated with it.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

This research project is an in-depth study of the Oklahoma City National Memorial utilizing narrative analysis of archival and media materials and adapted ethnographic methodologies for on-site observations, brief visitor engagements, and online post-visit surveys. An interpretive paradigm, as defined by LeCompte and Schensul (1999), informs the research structure.

Interpretivists view culture as both cognitive and affective, as reflected in shared meanings and as expressed in common language, symbols, and other modes of communication. They believe that culture is created in a process as many individuals share or negotiate multiple and overlapping socially based interpretations of what they do and what occurs in local situations. Culture, then is an abstract “construct” put together or “constructed” as people interact with each other and participate in shared activities. (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, 49)

The interpretive emphasis on cultural construction through shared activities is conducive to the objective of understanding individual and collective meaning for a designed memorial. This study differs from a traditional ethnographic study in its site-specific focus with an emphasis on understanding the design, development, and use of a site over time rather than the central focus being on the illuminations of socio-cultural meanings reflected in human interactions across a broader cultural context. The methodological approach was modified to accommodate this more specific goal.

Kingery-Page et al. (2016) suggest “a time-limited project scope circumscribed by the planning and design needs of the community partner and stakeholders,” as an adapted form of ethnography for use in landscape architecture projects. For the current study, a time-limited adapted ethnography approach, with defined periods of on-site data-collection during various times of year over a three-year period was used. The scope of this adapted ethnography was limited to analysis of documentation related to the Murrah building bombing and the subsequent memorial planning and development process, identification of the narratives contained in public media materials, on-site observations, and a survey of visitors’ experiences of the memorial spaces.

This research seeks to understand how the memorial site is perceived by and influences visitors’ thoughts and actions as reflected in their behaviors and survey responses. This is not about how individual memory functions, but the role of the individual in actions that create and

advance collective memory associated with a public memorial.

Because organizations operate within established boundaries, they may be critical of research they perceive would threaten their operation or public perceptions of their organization. Developing trust with organizational leaders is essential to an effective data collection process. As such, the policies and personnel of the organization may influence the research process and adjustments to methods are sometimes necessary to move forward with the project (Garsten and Nyquist 2013). As noted previously, the current study was modified to accommodate the concerns of memorial staff regarding the potential for disruption to the visitors' experience. Rather than seeking to engage visitors in on-site interviews, an online survey was created to allow visitors to answer questions and provide details of their experience at their discretion.

In the initial stage of this project, care was taken to establish positive and effective relationships with the Memorial's Director, Kari Watkins and Archivist, Helen Steifmiller to gain permission for archival research, on-site observations and potential visitor engagement. Initial discussions with Watkins indicated that any on-site visitor contact should be minimal to prevent disruption of the visitor experience. In consideration of this guidance, an online survey form that visitors could access via Quick Response (QR) code after their visit was utilized rather than attempting open-ended interviews with visitors on-site.

Description of the Datasets

There are three distinct data sets for this study: a) archival and media documents, b) on-site observations, and c) survey responses. Each of these data sets contain variations, subsets or nuances that influenced how they were interpreted. Analysis utilized a process of triangulation to reveal meanings across all three datasets. The archival and media document analysis documents the goals and objectives of Task Force and its subcommittees, the expectations of the community and the differing perspectives of local and national level constituents.

The on-site observations document the behaviors of the visitors on the ground, how they used the memorial spaces and how they engaged with the designed elements of the site. Documentation of the observations included field notes, photographs and notations of visitor movements on copies of site maps. This information illuminates site use and aids in interpretation of the other two data sets rather than being analyzed as a unique set of data. The observations were conducted over several years and helped to define the questions used in the

survey instrument.

The survey provided opportunities for visitors to reflect on their visit and share their thoughts about that experience. The observations, along with the visitor survey responses, are interpreted within the defined intent of the site as revealed through planning documents and communicated through public programming and promotional materials available in text labels, brochures, publications, official websites and through and other online content. The objective was to understand the relationship between the intent of the collective design and the individual experiences of visitors and their use of the constructed Symbolic Memorial spaces.

The Archival and Media Documents

The archival and media documents were sub-divided into two groups for analysis and interpretation (see Appendix A for document analysis). The first group consists of planning documents, reports and government records documenting the work of the Memorial Task Force, planning committees and documents related to the short-lived partnership the National Park Service that was established prior to the dedication and opening of the Symbolic Memorial. The second group consists of public media materials including public speeches, published interviews, newspaper articles, brochures, guidebooks, and other publications of the OKCNM.

The archive of the Oklahoma City National Memorial contains extensive documentation of the bombing, recovery, community, national and international response as well as the memorial planning, design selection and memorial development process. Over a ten year period I reviewed more than eight linear feet of archival materials and four notebooks of finding aids to identify materials relevant to my topic of research. A list of archival resources consulted is provided in Appendix B. The memorial as it was originally conceived consisted of three components: a) a center for the prevention of terrorism (which lost funding in 2014), b) a designed memorial for commemoration, and c) a memorial center/museum. This research focuses on the archival content related to the designed memorial (b) only. Archives or publications related to the other two entities will be referenced as needed for clarification of research topics.

Document Selection and Coding

Archival research on materials housed at the Memorial and available online provided a wealth of information for preliminary analysis. Materials produced by the memorial foundation

and staff, ranging from planning documents to commemorative publications, were initially reviewed to identify messages useful for analysis of visitors' experience of the site as revealed through their survey responses.

Several readings were required to be able to code materials in a meaningful way. Saldaña (2016) suggests pre-coding by highlighting significant quotes or passages during the first read and then using subsequent readings to insert analytical notes and begin to refine the codes. A process of synthesis is used to create categories of meaning from the codes; a process that may be repeated several times before the codes and categories fully emerge to form patterns (Saldana 2016, 10). I began by creating a spreadsheet with separate tabs for each document and recording up to 9 key words for each document or section of a document for full publications.

Hay (2010, 282) further describes the coding process to distinguish between descriptive and analytic codes. In my coding process the key words serve as descriptive codes, many of which occurred in multiple documents both within and across document classes. During the process of identifying key words, broader messages within the documents were noted which were later reviewed and clarified through additional comparisons with the documents. These refined messages serve as the analytic codes for each document (see Appendix A for document analysis information).

The archival coding included formative documents produced during the initial period of memorial conceptualization and documents related to memorial operation. The narratives of site programming are examined through analysis of print materials, published narratives related to commemorative events, newspaper articles and documents available through the National Park Service's electronic archive (eTIC). Multiple reviews of these materials sought patterns of repeating concepts signaled by key words or statements. Through the coding process collective narratives surrounding the memorial's development and on-going interpretation are revealed. Synthesis of these categories reveals themes and concepts for use in interpretation and comparison with visitor observations and responses. A spreadsheet was created for each document or group of documents that identifies key messages and the action words or modifiers used in comparative analysis of the archival and published content.

On-Site Observations

Visitor observations track randomly selected individuals or groups through the memorial

space, noting the details of their physical use of the space and recording the amount of time they spend in each of the five defined areas of the outdoor memorial. These on-site observations served as a preliminary orientation and assisted in the creation of a survey instrument that was used by visitors to report on their experiences at the memorial.

The observations are informal and provided the opportunities to record examples of site use not captured by the survey. Efforts were made to record details of the visitor's engagements with specific elements of the memorial space. Documentation of the circulation path taken through the memorial space was illustrated on a map of the memorial with the length of time spent in each of the defined areas of the memorial. Visitor behaviors were documented for their potential contributions to our understanding of the ways the site is used.

The Survey

As noted previously, I solicited input by handing out an information sheet containing the Quick Response (QR) code and the informed consent statement approved by the K-State Institutional Review Board for human subjects' research and contact information for myself and my major professor. Survey invitations were handed out to visitors on-site between June 10th and September 3rd, 2025. More than sixty invitations were handed directly to visitors on-site during two research visits which took place June 10th through 17th and August 28th to September 3rd. The second of these research trips captured higher visitation over the Labor Day weekend.

At the end of the first research trip, I met with Carol Bartlet, a friend working at the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality located one half block north of the memorial museum building. During the proposal phase of my research, I had a brief phone interview with her to better understand how professionals working in the area use the memorial space. She said she often went there on her lunch break and walked around the memorial. I asked if there was any part of the memorial she preferred, and she noted her contemplation of the Survivor Tree.

Recognizing that the employees of the surrounding area constitute a unique dataset, I asked my friend if she would be willing to distribute survey invitations to her office. She agreed, and I provided her with twenty-five handouts for this purpose. My intention was to capture examples of how the memorial is used and viewed by businesspeople in the area as well as the visitors I encountered during my on-site research visits, which were primarily capturing out-of-town visitors and families on outings.

Following the second research trip, I was discussing my research, and the survey data sets with a colleague, Lisa McConnell, who teaches at Oklahoma State University in Oklahoma City. She offered to share the project with a couple of her classes to help me capture responses from another set of Oklahoma City residents living throughout the metropolitan area. Thirty-five invitations were provided to this university student population for a total of 130 invitations distributed between June 10th and October 3rd, 2025. Eighty-eight response records were generated between June 13th and October 6th, 2025, but eight were void of responses. The following discussions focus on the content of the eighty complete surveys.²⁰

Study Population

The study population is composed of all visitors to the memorial and may be characterized as “the general public.” The following distinct subsets present unique characteristics for analysis: a) community professionals employed within walking distance of the memorial, b) the general population of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area c) out-of-town visitors for whom the memorial was a destination. School groups represent a distinct category deemed to be outside the scope of the project. The four visitor categories were identified as representative groups with potentially different perspectives or knowledge of the memorial prior to their observed visit and with potentially different motivations for visiting the memorial site. While convenience sampling was used to select visitors for observation, efforts were made to ensure that different age groups, races, and ethnicities were represented in the sample. Participants are anonymized through assignment of a code or pseudonym, but details of identity such as age, race and ethnicity will remain associated with each participant's record.

Sampling Strategy

The following sampling strategy applies to the on-site observations and visitor surveys. The memorial has an annual visitation of 500,000 (Clark 2005). Convenience sampling is used to

²⁰ To keep the survey within Qualtrics' recommended length and mix of question formats for generating a high response rate, demographic questions were described as optional and listed at the end of the survey to avoid discouraging visitors from completing the questions most directly related to the central research questions. Perhaps because of these decisions, very few demographic responses were recorded and will therefore not be analyzed as a significant subset of the research.

select the visitors observed during pre-determined study visits. The research visits, scheduled at different times of day, and during different seasons, provide the opportunity to capture a broad range of visitors. Several observations were scheduled for holiday weekends to make sure that out-of-town visitors were included. This ensured that there were enough visitors to allow for a significant number of observations and that the sample reflected as much visitor diversity as possible. At least one observation session was scheduled to coincide with the noon to one o'clock period during each seasonal visit to capture lunch-time visitation from offices within walking distance of the memorial site.

The sample size was determined by the number of visitors available during the identified study periods. The percentage of visitors observed was constrained by the number of observations that can be completed during a given site visit. An initial review of visitation records for the memorial site allows for scheduling of site visits to coincide with high traffic seasons, days of the week, and periods of the day. I tracked 63 individuals and groups through their entire visit and documented another 42 partial visits. The partial visits resulted from losing track of people or switching to another task after starting a tracking sheet. On busy days it was difficult to keep track of a visitor from a single location, particularly if they entered the museum.

As a convenience sample, the percentage of the sample to the mean of the population is not relevant to the interpretation of the data. Because observations are being utilized as a tool for the identification of common experiences among visitors, research continued until common themes emerged from the analysis of the observations. Alternating short periods of data collection followed closely by review and analysis of the observations reduces misinterpretation of the data from recall bias and allows for on-going evaluation as additional data is collected. It was anticipated that at least two week-long data collection periods were needed on-site to compile sufficient visitor data for a meaningful sample.

Interpretation and Integration of Data

The final step of the analysis is a comparison of the three sets of coded data from 1) archival and media research; 2) on-site observations; 3) and visitor survey data. The coding and categorizing of each set of data, narrative themes will emerge that allow for comparison. Since the first data set includes materials developed over a 25-year period, changes in narrative themes over time are expected.

In contrast, the second data set does not have the same longitudinal component because it reflects a response to a specific visit in time. The theory of affordances described earlier played a more prominent role in the analysis of this dataset. Documented observations revealed experiential sequences afforded by the memorial design, some intended, and some being the product of the visitor's own invention. Narratives incorporated into the memorial design, such as didactic labels or inscriptions, may be viewed as an affordance available to visitors which may be captured through the survey instrument which is the third dataset. The degree to which visitors identify and engage with the intended design narratives indicates the level of communicative efficacy of the memorial, while reflections on personal, national or global narratives could suggest a deeper engagement with the space, perhaps one that unifies cognition and affective/emotional responses to a designed memorial environment.

The narrative themes and patterns of memorial use emerging from each of the coded datasets are discussed in comparison to the potential themes of National Identity and Resilience. The *progressive*, *redemptive*, and *toxic* themes identified by Linenthal (2001) are compared with the results from data analysis to identify if these themes are still circulating twenty-five years later. The persistence of certain themes is considered relative to the process of collective memory formation within a public realm.

Data from on-site observations are discussed as they reflect the uses of the memorial spaces by visitors. The observed uses are considered in comparison to the intended uses of the memorial spaces and how they reflect commemorative, contemplative, or ritualized behaviors. These observations are evaluated in terms of their support of narrative themes reflected in the other data sets. Finally, data sets are analyzed regarding how they reflect community resilience. Interpretation of results will provide opportunities for utilizing comparative examples from memorials to tragedies that were listed in the literature to illustrate contrasting or parallel examples. Implications for community engagement and memorial design processes are considered.

Chapter 6 - Research Discussion and Findings

This chapter provides detailed discussion of the data sets and shares findings from the data analysis. The developmental and operational structure of the OKCNM is discussed to provide context for understanding the archival documents that were selected for analysis. The analysis of each of the three data sets 1) archival and media documents 2) on-site observations and 3) visitor survey responses is followed by research findings for each dataset.

The Memorial Task Force

Even before the bombing rescue efforts had concluded, Oklahoma's political officials were feeling pressure to address the need for a permanent memorial to the victims. "Within twenty-four hours of the bombing, the offices of the Oklahoma City mayor and the governor of Oklahoma began to receive unsolicited memorial proposals from throughout the world" (Bryans 2010, 9). In response, Oklahoma first lady, Kathy Keating approached Robert Johnson, a well-respected and civically active local attorney, who agreed to begin the process of convening a memorial planning team. Johnson "solicited the assistance of seven additional citizens...(who) worked together to identify forty constituencies that they believed needed to be addressed in any memorialization effort" (Bryans 2010, 10).

Johnson and other members of the Memorial Task Force attended a contemporary arts conference in San Jose, California from June 10-13, 1995. "They learned, in Johnson's words, that 'the common thread of troubled projects is a lack of community input and participation, ...a resentment at not being allowed to be heard.'" (Linenthal 2001, 176) The members of the Memorial Task Force returned from the conference committed to a broad and inclusive public process that avoided political intervention and allowed survivors and their family members to be the primary voices as they defined their working structure and assignments (Bryans 2010, 10)

The task force would gather "extensive input from families, survivors, and the public about what visitors to the future memorial should think, feel or experience; develop a mission statement for the memorial; carry-out a design solicitation process based on objectives in the mission statement, and recommend to the mayor and Oklahoma City City Council a plan for design, construction, administration and maintenance of the memorial, including citizen oversight during the construction. (Linenthal 2001, 177).

On June 28, 1995 “Mayor Ron Norick formally announced the establishment of the 350-member Oklahoma City Murrah Building Memorial Task Force.” The Memorial Task Force consisted of “...ten operating committees, an advisory committee of 160 people, a coordinating committee, and a volunteer executive director. Family members and survivors were encouraged to serve on any committee, in addition to their own” Rowland Denman, a local business owner, initially served as the Executive Director (Linenthal 2001, 177). Robert Johnson agreed to serve as Chair of the Memorial Task Force with the aid of Karen Luke as Vice Chair. Together they managed the work of the advisory and coordinating committees. A list of the ten subcommittees along with their responsibilities and reporting requirements is provided in Table 6.1. These 10 subcommittees sometimes formed sub-groups that were charged with carrying out specific tasks. They also recruited volunteers to assist in their efforts as needed to stay on schedule.

The two subcommittees most directly involved with defining the memorial were the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee and the Victim’s Families and Survivors Liaison Subcommittee. It was their responsibility to create a Mission Statement that would define the parameters for the memorial and guide its design and development.

The Government Liaison Subcommittee was involved in the effort to secure National recognition for the memorial through Congressional action. This process resulted in an initial designation of the site as a National Park, but a second Congressional action later changed the designation to a National Park Service (NPS) affiliate rather than as a full unit of the NPS.

The Mission Statement

By crafting a mission statement that would inform the design of a memorial, the initial focus became not what the memorial should look like, but what its intellectual and emotional context should be. (Bryans 2010, 11).

Linenthal’s (2001, 178-186) account of the memorial planning process documents the challenges the Memorial Task Force faced in their efforts to facilitate dialogue so soon after the bombing. Several committee members he interviewed spoke of the difficulty survivors and family members of the deceased had initially in meeting with others and discussing their feelings and thoughts about a memorial in a collaborative manner.

Table 6.1 Responsibilities of the Ten Subcommittees of the Memorial Tasks Force

Content for this Table was compiled from “Briefing Book 1996-1998” OKCNM archives 349.001, with clarifications drawn from (Bryans 2010) and (Linenthal 2001).

Subcommittees	Responsibilities	Essential Requirements
Administration Subcommittee	Provide for human resource needs by recruiting volunteers and creating a program for employees to be loaned to the Task Force to assist with planning and development needs.	Schedule volunteers and loaned employees and provide for their space and supply needs based on their assignments.
Archives Subcommittee	Identify materials deemed important to memorial archives, determine their location, arrange for satisfactory storage and create and administer a traveling exhibit to serve as a temporary memorial.	Begin to assemble objects and archival collections.
Budget Subcommittee	Responsible for economic feasibility analysis of the Memorial Plans submitted by each finalist. Solicit input from the National Park Service on maintenance plan and costs.	Develop an administration/maintenance budget and funding plan.
Design Solicitation Subcommittee	Develop a plan for design competition or other method for selection of plans, components, architects, designers, sculptors and other contractors. Form a selection panel with experienced panelists.	Submit plans to Advisory Committee and Mayor. Finalist design plans submitted to Budget Committee and publicized for public comment.
Government Liaison Subcommittee	Secure GSA agreement to donate the AP Murrah building block and its improvements to OKC. Create private/city/state/federal partnerships and define partner roles in planning, funding, development, construction, and memorial administration.	Serve as liaison between Advisory Committee and government authorities during planning and implementation process.
Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee	Create and implement a plan to solicit input from all interested sectors of the public regarding objectives to be achieved by the creation of the Memorial. Prepare a report reflecting the objectives, opinions and design ideas opinions expressed by the public. Collaborate with appropriate government agencies.	Recommend to the Advisory Committee general objectives to be achieved in the creation of the Memorial.
Public Fundraising Subcommittee	Develop, implement and coordinate local, state, and national fund raising campaign for cost of completion and establishment of an endowment for ongoing administration of maintenance of the Memorial.	Create an Endowment
Public and Private Grants Subcommittee	Identify potential sources of public and private grants, and prepare applications for such grants and pursuit of the same.	Grantwriting and Administration
Public Relations Subcommittee	Inform the public of opportunity for input into the Memorial planning process and update the public on current basis regarding the status and progress of such planning process.	Provide Public Information and share progress.
Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee	Communicate with families of victims and survivors regarding their opinions and ideas relating to the Memorial. Discuss all sensitive issues relating to possible components of the Memorial, and advise the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee of the opinions and ideas of such parties.	Serve as a liaison between families of victims and survivors and the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee.

Phillip Thompson, who co-chaired the Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison subcommittee recalled an initial meeting, held July 17th, 1995, with this group was very contentious until he and his co-chair shared their own stories of loss from the bombing. He recalled, "These first few months together were wrenching... We all had to learn to listen, we all had to learn not to argue about emotions" (Linenthal 2001, 179). The Memorial Task Force's emphasis on process undoubtedly helped those most closely connected to the event to process their grief as they worked within their committees to find consensus on topics critical to the development of the memorial plans. The Final Report of the Victims' Families and Survivors' Liaison Subcommittee (VFSL Subcommittee) provided details of the process they used to come to consensus regarding their recommendations for the memorial.

At our October 16th meeting, we began working in small group settings. We decided to use the smaller groups to promote intimacy and familiarity among victims' families and survivors. This was the process we chose to use to put our feelings and concepts down on paper. Counselors came to act as facilitators and to allow us to speak freely without reservation and without distraction. They were the recorders at the different tables, putting the committee's feelings into words. (1996, 4)

The extensive planning process eventually resulted in the adoption of a mission statement that was taken to reflect the sentiments and agreement of the committee members. The final report of the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee, which included the final report from the VFSL Subcommittee, was submitted to the Memorial Task Force on March 1, 1996 and documents the subcommittee's process, findings and recommendations. They defined their purpose as follows:

The Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee was created as an integral part of the Task Force. Its initial task was to prepare a plan for the solicitation of ideas and opinions from the public regarding the values, themes and messages to be reflected by the memorial plan that must create widespread public participation and help develop a sense of ownership by the public in the resulting Memorial. It was to present the plan to the Advisory Committee of the Task Force, implement the Plan after initial approval of its general concepts, and finally issue a report to the Advisory Committee reflecting the objectives and opinions expressed by the public, including recommendations as to the general objectives to be achieved in the creation of the Memorial. (Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee 1996, 2)

The process of creating the Mission statement had multiple steps that generated a series of reports. A Community Meetings Sub-Group of the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee was

formed to hold public meetings and collect feedback from citizens in the Oklahoma City area. Their final report as well as the final reports for the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee and the Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison subcommittee were all reviewed and coded for key words and are summarized in the Archival Findings section.

The NPS Partnership

While the Memorial Task Force initiated and coordinated the memorial planning process under the direction of Oklahoma City Mayor, Ron Norick, federal partners such as the General Services Administration were involved from the beginning. However, it was not until the passage of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act in October 1997 that the site was designated as a unit of the National Park Service. The Executive Director of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation provided an interview on the eve of the dedication of the memorial in which she describes the anticipated agreement with the NPS. In this interview Kari Ferguson (Watkins) highlights the benefits of the anticipated collaboration with the NPS.

The unique part of this project is that it will be a national park, an urban park in the heart of the city. It is an unusual circumstance because we will pay the National Park Service to be here. So it's a public/private partnership where we work together. There will be Park Rangers on the outside and private workers on the inside keeping it all going. It's the best of both worlds. (Moore 2000)

The Memorandum of Agreement that spelled out the roles and responsibilities of the partners was signed in April 2000 just days before the Symbolic Memorial opened to the public. After only three years, the enabling legislation was amended as the Memorial Foundation sought to reduce the financial burden created by the federal oversight provided for memorial operations.²¹ Since that change, the National Park Service has only provided limited interpretive services through on-site Park Rangers for the Symbolic Memorial. These Park Rangers are supervised through the Chickasaw National Recreation Area Chief Ranger and Superintendent since no other NPS staff are now employed for on-site duties at OKCNM. Archival documents generated by the NPS during the period of development were included in the archival research and summarized in the following section.

²¹ The amendment was passed as part of a massive Consolidated Appropriations Act which was signed on 1/23/2004 as Public Law no: 108-199.

Archival and Media Research Findings

The archival and media materials represent two distinct sets of documents. The archival dataset includes documents produced by the Memorial Task Force during the Memorial planning and development process and documents from the National Park Service (NPS) during their participation in development and site operations (Appendix A.1). The media dataset consists of public facing materials generated or commissioned by the Oklahoma City National Foundation such as walking tour guides, commemorative publications, Presidential and Vice-Presidential public addresses, and newspaper articles relevant to the analysis are included in this dataset (Appendix A.2). Scans of the site brochures used over the years of site operations are included in Appendix C. The analysis of the scanned brochures is included in summary form within the text of the media documents discussion. The text of the brochures is repetitive and did not warrant the generation of a summary analysis spreadsheet for each document.

The process used to analyze these documents required several steps, beginning with identifying key words, then reviewing how those key words were used within the documents to understand the context of use. This method of content analysis provides a structure for identifying the themes and narratives of the document. The narratives within a document may contain both *manifest* and *latent* messages. Ian Hay (2010, 282) explains the distinctions between these types of messages. “Manifest messages are those that are blatant and obvious...” while latent messages may be communicated in subtle ways by using words that signal unintentional messages that reveal socially coded narratives. In the contested terrain of public memorials, understanding the role of latent messaging is essential to understanding the purpose and social role of the memorial in generating or influencing collective memory.

Planning and Operations Documents

The planning documents reflect the period from the initial formation of the Memorial Task Force in the weeks and months after the bombing through the dedication of the memorial on April 19th, 2000. The planning documents include the Memorial Task Force Progress Report and Final Reports of the Subcommittees that resulted in the creation of the Memorial Mission Statement. The operations documents include the Annual Reports of the NPS Superintendent that document the implementation of the partnership between the NPS and Oklahoma City National

Memorial Trust and the Long-Range Interpretive Plan created collaboratively between these partners.

The final reports of Subcommittees that were charged with the development of memorial guidelines document community input into the planning process. The Victims' Families and Survivors Liaison Subcommittee (VFSL Subcommittee) was one of the first subcommittees the Memorial Task Force sought to create as it was identified as the most important constituency to the memorial process. Members of this subcommittee were encouraged to take part in other subcommittees if they had an interest in doing so. Their first meeting was held on July 17th, 1995. Their first task was to define what constituted a "survivor," locate survivors and develop an outreach strategy to invite others to participate in the process. Their final report outlines the process they went through to develop their recommendations.

Victim's Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee Final Report

The first paragraph of this report acknowledges that the subcommittee "began with a lot of anger and distrust" but "progressed to working as a family unit" (Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee 1996). Holland (2014, 2-8) proposes that the victim's family members alienated the survivors by sidelining them in the development process and insisting on their own control of the design process. In reviewing the OKCNM archival materials along with Linenthal's extensive documentation of the planning process (2001, 190, 195-196, 198-199), I came to disagree with Holland's interpretation of the inter-personal dynamics of this process. The report states that they began working on small groups at their October 16th, 1995 meeting.

We decided to use the smaller groups to promote intimacy and familiarity among victims' families and survivors. This was the process we chose to use to put our feelings and concepts down on paper. Counselors came to act as facilitators and to allow us to speak freely without reservation and without distraction. They were the recorders at the different tables putting the committee's feeling's into words. (1996, 2)

In referring to the definition of who would be recognized as a "survivor," Linenthal observes that "the construction of accurate memorial hierarchies is a volatile and important task, for the stakes are very high" (2001, 195). While he acknowledged that the process of defining the term "survivor" and identifying the names of survivors that would be included within the memorial was difficult and at time contentious, he also documents the careful process that was

used to reach agreement, particularly the critical role of Beth Shortt, who was the facilitator for the group.

Ernestine Clark, the committee's cochair, recalled, "I had watched Beth in action in other meetings and had witnessed over and over again her incredible strengths as a tactful but strong leader, incisive thinker and 'group processor'.... Beth would see to it that one person would not dominate, that all would participate, and that hard decisions would be led through a process that honored both feelings and logical decisions. (Linenthal 2001, 199)

The final report details the process the subcommittee went through to address their emotions and identify things they felt were important. After learning about the tree that had survived the blast, the committee submitted a proposal to the Advisory Committee recommending that measures be taken to save the tree and incorporate it into the memorial design. By February 19th, 1996, they had created a list of their top 10 themes for the memorial. The following list is paraphrased from their final report (Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee 1996, 3).

1. Focus on victims and survivors
2. Never forget/always remember
3. Quiet, peaceful, serene, sacred
4. Hope, spiritual
5. Something special for the children
6. Universal Symbol
7. Comforting
8. Sense of Pride
9. Educational (study of non-violence)
10. Loss of innocence/security

The committee recommended that the educational component be in a separate location from the memorial, which they wanted located in the site of the former Murrah Building.

Community Meetings Sub-Group Report Final Report

This 3-page report, providing information on meeting locations and attendance, was submitted to the Memorial Ideas Subcommittee on February 27, 1996²². The last page outlines the content that was compiled from seven community meetings held between November 15,th1995 and February 6th, 1996, with a total of 84 participants. Seventeen themes were

²² OKCNM Archives 474.000 Box 1, Folder 8, Memorial Ideas Input Survey Report 3/1/1996.

identified from these meetings which were listed alphabetically in the report. I have grouped the themes from this report into eight summary categories that reflect similar content as follows:

1. Community Spirit/Unity/Oklahoma City as Unique/Emerging Stronger
2. Effect of Violence Recognize Horror (divided on this topic)
3. Emotional Themes -compassion, hope, peacefulness, solemnity, sense of loss
4. Emphasis on Individuals/Groups - impacted or involved/multicultural
5. History – Should be separate from the memorial
6. Impact – Awe-Inspiring/Inspirational/Positive/Encourage Reflection
7. Nature – Use Natural Elements in the Design
8. Participatory/Evoke a Spiritual Response

These themes were combined with the themes developed by the Family/Survivor's Liaison Subcommittee to create the final list of recommended themes submitted to the Advisory Committee of the Memorial Task Force by the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee.

Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee Final Report

The report provides details of meetings and actions related to the creation of the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee and a survey to collect ideas for the memorial. A memorial survey subgroup was created that undertook the survey process that included press releases, web announcements and distribution of paper surveys to 17 U.S. Postal Service locations and 12 Library Branches in the metropolitan areas. The committee summarized the responses from the survey with the following theme headings (1996, 5-6). The words after the dash summarize the description that follows each theme outlined in the report.

1. Remembrance – live stories, who they were
2. Honoring – those who helped
3. Community - spirit, unity, recognition
4. Serenity, Peacefulness, Reflection - using natural elements
5. Something for the Children - special place on their physical cognitive level
6. Historical/Educational – A memorial center with victim biographies/pictures
7. Inspiration/Emotion – powerful and awe-inspiring
8. Spiritual, Participatory, Positive.

The Mission Statement

The Preamble to the Mission Statement, which was adopted on March 26, 1996, is included in all public media produced by the OKCNM and is engraved on the exterior of the 9:03 Gate which represents the moment after the bombing occurred. It states:

We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.

This preamble is used so frequently, even in simple communications, so that it functions like a mantra; guiding the thinking and actions of those tasked with the daily work of memorial operations. Perhaps a mantra is needed to mediate the public engagement surrounding a large-scale tragedy. Bryan notes, “interpreting this tragic and deadly attack on the federal government, of which some of the interpreters were part, meant reliving the event on a daily basis” (Bryans 2010, 78). He goes on to explain that many visitors in the first years of operation visited the memorial to experience some form of healing and that many of the volunteers were family members or survivors themselves (2010, 79). In this context a mantra that reminds you of your purpose might help you avoid emotional exhaustion from the daily processing of so much tragic historical content.

The Mission Statement included a refined list of themes, drawn from the final reports of the subcommittees, with the following headings: Remembrance, Peace, Spirituality and Hope, Cherished Children, Comfort, Recognition and Learning. Descriptions under these headings incorporate thematic recommendations submitted by the different subgroups and subcommittees in a more narrative form to serve as design guidelines for use in the design competition (Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation 1996).

Summary of Findings from Memorial Task Force Documents

The process of developing guidelines that would be used for the solicitation and selection of the memorial design was broad based, soliciting input from mail-in surveys from across the country. However, the survey form was guided by the initial expectations of the Victims’ Families and Survivors Liaison Subcommittee that the guidelines would focus on clarifying the experience or feelings the memorial would provide for visitors rather than emphasizing physical attributes. As a result of this emphasis, emotions and descriptions of feelings play a large part in the interpretive and marketing materials. While these guidelines were specific about the experience of the visitor, they left the design concept very open, identifying only a few expectations that such as the incorporation of the Survivor Tree and the footprint of the Murrah building in requirements for the design.

The Long-Range Interpretive Plan

One compelling reason the Memorial Task Force sought to partner with the National Park Service was to utilize their recognized expertise in interpretation. “At about the time the Memorial became a unit, the Park Service adopted a new unified planning process for interpretation that shifted responsibility for its formulation to the parks.” (Bryans 2010, 56). This Comprehensive Interpretive Planning process requires the creation of a Long-Range Interpretive Plan that outlines the parks interpretive vision for at least 5 years. “An annual Implementation Plan” addresses how these goals will be pursued on an annual basis” (Bryans 2010, 57).

During the memorial planning process the NPS interpretation staff worked with the OKCNM education staff to develop a long-range interpretive plan with two primary interpretive themes through which the messages of the Memorial would be communicated. These were defined as A) “Violence impacts those who were killed, those who survived, and those changed forever,” which is a message based on the preamble to the OKCNM Mission Statement and B) “Response to violence in Oklahoma City that threatened to destroy America’s feelings of security proved that the spirit, hope, great compassion, selflessness and determination of the nation and the world is capable of repelling the insidious effects of terrorism” (National Park Service and Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust 2001, 30). These themes work together; the first highlighting negative impacts of violence, and the second illustrating the positives that lie within the collective capacity to repel and recover from acts of violence.

Each of these themes includes sub-themes that demonstrate the main theme using tangible resources and intangible concepts in the form of facts or stories that tie to each design element or space within or visible from the Symbolic Memorial. The following are two examples that demonstrate the structure and content of the interpretive plan:

A.1 “Where were you on April 19, 1995?” Resource: 9:01 gate Concept: America’s perception of innocence as we start each day” (2001, 31)

A.2 “Damage Assessment!” Resource: Chairs, Concept: 168 individuals killed; Resource: Journal Record Building, Concept: Damage to surrounding buildings; Resource: Reflecting Pool, Concept: All buildings reflected in the pool were damaged; Resource: Survivor Wall, Concept: Over 400 individuals lives and those of their families forever disrupted. (2001, 32).

The interpretive plan’s sub-themes were developed using the themes identified by the Memorial Task Force and are linked to the design elements of the Symbolic Memorial. Theme A

has eight sub-themes and Theme B has ten sub-themes. Each sub-theme identifies additional linkages that might be used to help demonstrate the theme in more depth for visitors. For example: sub-theme A-6 is “A Rescuer Story” which is associated with the rescuers orchard (resource) which honors the people who came from near and far to help with the rescue (concept). Linked programming for A-6 suggested a visit from a rescue dog handler who could demonstrate the skill of the dogs that helped with the rescue or a program with that includes a rescue manager that “may be able to help visitors understand the difficult choices he/she confronted” (National Park Service and Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust 2001, 36).

The framing of the interpretive messaging by the NPS was heavily influenced by an educational message of terrorism deterrence. The plan follows the interpretive guidelines established by the Memorial Task Force closely, but the focus of the messaging is based on communicating facts and linking larger concepts to tangible resources more than on creating experiences based in emotional engagement with the Symbolic Memorial.

In this way the interpretive plan contrasts with the expectations of the OKCNM guidelines which were centered on defining what they wanted the public to **feel** when visiting the Symbolic Memorial spaces. The Superintendent’s report for FY 2002 states that the joint Interpretation/Education team continued to refine the plan – although the archived copy from 2001 was not signed. Recently created programming by the OKCNM is clearly based on the jointly authored plan (see discussion regarding app in Chapter 7). After the dissolution of the Memorial Trust in 2004 the role of NPS interpreters was reduced to providing on-site tours of the Symbolic Memorial or answering visitors’ questions rather than engaging visitors in a collaborative interpretive experience. The interpretive positions retained after 2004 were restricted to entry level positions (Bryans 2010).

NPS Superintendent’s Reports

NPS annual reports were included in the document review as they provide information about the changing nature of the relationship between the NPS and the OKCNM. They were not coded and analyzed in the same manner as other documents in this series since the information does not lend itself to meaningful analysis. However, some messages were noted as they contribute to the understanding of the evolution of the NPS role with the Oklahoma City National Memorial.

Annual reports are required of NPS Superintendents as documentation of the accomplishments and expenditures of the park unit over the course of the fiscal year (October 1st – September 30th). These reports are viewed as public documents and commonly focus on positive results, highlighting the number of programs offered, new partnerships and programs and non-service accomplishments such as resolving maintenance or safety issues. Reports of difficulties or negative situations would commonly be handled in private conversations or a separate memo that explains the circumstances of a problematic situation. Three annual reports are archived in the NPS electronic archive for the fiscal years 2000, 2002 and 2003. The report for FY 2000 states “On March 19, 2000, Mary A. Bomar transferred from San Antonio Missions National Historical Park arriving in Oklahoma City as the new Superintendent charged with setting up NPS operations to include staffing and opening the outdoor Symbolic Memorial site” (Bomar 2001). The cover memo for the report states:

Another milestone was just achieved, the opening of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum Center. Operations should now fall into more of a daily business routine. The Trust has achieved many of their goals...naturally one of the toughest lays ahead of them – financial solvency! They will have to raise enough money to garner an endowment large enough to sustain the operations and maintenance of the Memorial.

The Trust believes strongly in community involvement... I have truly seen that when people who share the same goals come together and work together amazing thing can be achieved – the Oklahoma National Memorial is a true testimony to that statement. We should benchmark the Oklahoma Standard in all cities throughout the U.S.A.

Much of the report is a list of staff hirings and trainings, events that staff planned, hosted or attended and documentation of site visitation (over 350,000) and recruitment and training of volunteers through the Volunteers in Parks (VIP) program. The report documents the creation of an NPS Web Page for the Memorial and the creation of the Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP). “The review and editing process for the LRIP has been a slow process due to having to be circulated past NPS employees, Memorial Trust employees, Memorial Board members, and members from the Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism” (Bomar 2001, 4). The report further documents the creation of a joint educational outreach and partnering program between the NPS and Trust staff. Bomar concludes the report by thanking the NPS team “for all their assistance and patience as we worked through this very tough first fiscal year together and thank you to the

Trust for their perennial drive to build a fitting and appropriate Memorial” (Bomar 2001, 6). The FY 2002 report documents memorial partnership accomplishments with Bomar stating:

I am truly pleased to announce that we’ve made it to Phase III – ‘daily park operations’ and continue daily to strengthen our partner relationship. We have made tremendous strides creating a suitable working environment that has melded our two organizations together. While this has not always been easy for either the Trust or the NPS, in fact often a struggle, it has always been worth while... The Trust has certainly done an outstanding job forging ahead with the mission of the Memorial, as drafted by the people. Thanks again to a great staff and of course to Kari Watkins, Trust Executive Director and the Trust staff; together we have been able to accomplish so much this past year as you will see. (2003, 8)

The report provides details of the educational outreach and on-site programs presented by the NPS staff, special events, safety, administration and staff training. The report ends with a closing statement in which Mary Bomar announces her departure for Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, acknowledging the partnership challenges the NPS and Trust faced over the three years of her tenure. The administrative history commissioned by Mary Bomar, “When a Park is Not a Park” (Bryans 2010), provides details of the difficulties she alludes to in her final report. One situation it documents relates to the cost of the law enforcement detail, which the NPS viewed as necessary given the potential for the site to be a target for future terrorist attacks by domestic militia groups.

The OKCNM Trust staff objected to the cost of the NPS law enforcement detail and submitted a proposal to replace them with a private security firm, which was not well received by the NPS leadership in Oklahoma. Chief Ranger, Mark Foust “detailed in an internal memo to Bomar why the Park Service should oppose the Memorial Trust’s proposal” (Bryans 2010, 82).

As the site of a deadly attack on federal employees, some in law enforcement, the Memorial demanded more than the minimal protection that a private security arrangement presented to him. The level of security provided at the Memorial, Foust believed, would signal the public the degree to which the lessons of the bombing had been learned... Foust concluded his memo recommending that, rather than eliminating the Park Service law enforcement presence, an additional protection ranger should be assigned to Oklahoma City. This would bring the total to the four positions he and most in the Park Service believed the site warranted. (Bryans 2010, 82)

Another issue related to NPS law enforcement was the presence of a Government Services Administration (GSA), law enforcement vehicle with the NPS logo being parked on-

site. It seems the OKCNM Trust staff viewed the vehicle as an extraneous expense since the memorial had no streets (Bryans 2010, 84). The NPS rationale was that the presence of an official law enforcement vehicle served as a deterrent to potential criminal activity.

Disagreements over operational methods likely exacerbated existing tensions between local staff members and NPS rangers. Bryan (2010, 84) documents this and other tensions, including NPS ranger's comments that they had received anti-government comments from local staff members.

The developing disagreement between the Park Service and the Memorial Trust over law enforcement was just one factor, although a major one, that contributed to an atmosphere of mutual distrust dating back, essentially, to the Park Service's resistance to the enabling legislation. The rift only grew once the agency arrived in Oklahoma City. At its heart, lay the very different operational cultures of each partner (Bryans 2010, 83).

The FY 2003 annual report documents the joint request by the NPS, the Memorial Trust and the Memorial Foundation to dissolve the Memorial Trust and fold its assets into the Memorial Foundation and request both one-time and on-going federal appropriations to operate the Symbolic Memorial as a unit of the National Park Service (Rudd 2003). While the documentation of these tensions focusses on the manifest messages of finances and operational control. A potential latent message of distrust of federal agencies, particularly law enforcement personnel, seems inherent in the documented disagreements. The objection to the presence of an NPS law enforcement vehicle seems particularly salient to this point. While NPS leadership may have seen this as a deterrent to criminal activity, it could just as easily have been a provocation to anti-government activists, who were angry with the federal investigations into local militia groups that took place in the wake of the bombing. For OKCNM Trust personnel a prominent law enforcement vehicle might also have seemed unwelcoming and antithetical to the commemorative intentions of the memorial. Certainly, a non-profit organization intent on raising funds for operations would not want to alienate its constituents with unwelcome reminders of the federal employee targets that brought this tragedy to their doorstep.

Public Media Materials

The Public Media Materials coded for analysis include OKCNM Brochures (Appendix C), public speeches by President Clinton and Vice-President Gore, and publications of the

OKCNM such as walking tour guides and commemorative books detailing the activities of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum Foundation (Appendix A.2).

Statements by Elected Officials

The statements of elected officials in the days, months and years following the bombing focused on rescue, recovery, healing and eventually rebuilding. Religious sentiments are prominent in public speeches during this time as are acknowledgements of pain, suffering, grief and the need for justice. Clinton's remarks during the prayer breakfast at the Oklahoma City Fairground on April 23rd, 1995, (Bill Clinton, Oklahoma City Speech) included the following statements invoking God and other religious references:

And to all the members of the families here present who have suffered loss, though we share your grief, your pain is unimaginable, and we know that. We cannot undo it. That is God's work.

Let us teach our children that the God of comfort is also the God of righteousness. Those who trouble their own house will inherit the wind. Justice will prevail.

As St. Paul admonished us, let us not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

It (dogwood tree) embodies the lesson of the Psalms -- that the life of a good person is like a tree whose leaf does not wither.

The speech also contains messages referencing the nation, national identity, and the support of people from "across this great land."

I am honored to be here today to represent the American people.

Today our nation joins with you in grief. We mourn with you. We share your hope against hope that some may still survive. We thank all those who have worked so heroically to save lives and to solve this crime -- those here in Oklahoma and those who are all across this great land, and many who left their own lives to come here to work hand in hand with you.

This terrible sin took the lives of our American family, innocent children in that building, only because their parents were trying to be good parents as well as good workers; citizens in the building going about their daily business; and many there who served the rest of us -- who worked to help the elderly and the disabled, who worked to support our farmers and our veterans, who worked to enforce our laws and to protect us. Let us say clearly, they served us well, and we are grateful

You have lost too much, but you have not lost everything. And you have certainly not lost America, for we will stand with you for as many tomorrows as it takes.

To all my fellow Americans beyond this hall, I say, one thing we owe those who have sacrificed is the duty to purge ourselves of the dark forces which

gave rise to this evil. They are forces that threaten our common peace, our freedom, our way of life. (Clinton 1995)

Clinton states that he represents the American people and that this terrible “sin” took members of the American family. In addressing the local crowd, he states “you have lost too much, but you have not lost America, for we (Americans) stand with you (Oklahomans). This statement suggests a distinction between the attributions of national and local identity.

Vice-President Gore’s speech at the groundbreaking for the memorial on October 25, 1998 (Gore 1998), also includes religious references and builds on the message of sacrifice in service to country from Clinton’s address by directly equating federal civilian service with military service as seen in the excerpts reproduced here:

Today we gather to see the light, to find in this soil nourished with a million tears, the harvest of God’s healing grace. For I believe in the words of the scripture: “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” The people who died here were victims of one of the cruelest visitations of evil this nation has ever seen, but we offer them today not pity, but honor, for as much as any soldier who ever fought in any war, they paid the price of freedom.

And to those who are ever tempted to denigrate the labor of our self-government, and demean our hard-working government employees, come here and be *silent*, and remember. Open your eyes and your hearts and you will see that on the chain link fence all around us -- filled with flowers and prayers and teddy bears -- is written the real story of our democracy. This is how we feel. (Gore 1998)

By analyzing the content of these two speeches, we can easily identify the manifest narrative of God as the source of healing and comfort. Both speeches contain words of compassion and encouragement and acknowledge evil and hatred as the source of violence. A narrative of patriotism and heroism is contained within the references to the sacrifice of federal employees who were killed in the bombing. A latent message about national identity is present, but confusing given the way the terms American and Oklahoman are used in reference to seemingly different groups of people. Doss observes: “Contemporary understandings of self and nation, like those of memory and history, are typically blurred and overlapping... This confounding of categories has had a striking effect on contemporary commemoration” (2010, Loc 980). This distinction between local and national identities is inherent in the United States

government structure and has been the source of internal conflicts throughout our history, most notably through conflicts between states over the abolition of slavery leading to the Civil War.

While Clinton's speech emphasizes the continuation of the rescue and recovery effort, Gore's speech is filled with personal stories of loss and hope for the future as people have moved from the initial trauma and have transitioned to thinking about what the future holds during the two years between these speeches. The narrative shift from rescue and recovery to future hope and rebuilding is accompanied by fewer religious references ²³ in Gore's speech, which emphasizes inspirational stories about survivors.

It is important to note what is **not** included in either of these speeches, which is a commitment to provide continuing financial support for the operation of a memorial. Clinton pledges to "do all we can to help you" heal, rebuild and seek justice, but it is not clear what support means in this context and by the time of Gore's speech Clinton has signed the Oklahoma National Memorial Act which only provided two years of assistance from the NPS in planning the national memorial, after which time the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation was required to reimburse the NPS for their assistance. This and the lack of other specific commitments of assistance suggest a latent message encouraging self-sufficiency and distancing the federal government from the contentiousness that resulted in the execution of the tragic bombing. The language of both speeches suggests a latent message that supports the idea of American Exceptionalism in their praise for Americans' dedication to service, courage and ability to move forward productively in the face of a traumatic incident.

Brochures

A review of the brochures used over the life of the memorial aid in understanding how organizational changes have influenced site messaging and the evolution of the intended narrative of the site being communicated to the public. Appendix C contains scans of site brochures from five distinct time periods that demonstrate changes and growth of the

²³ "God" appears 5 times in Clinton's speech and only once in Gore's speech. Clinton quotes 3 biblical scriptures while Gore quotes 1 scripture and 1 hymn.

organization²⁴. Analysis of the key words and messages in these brochures documents the shift in the intended narratives being communicated to the public.

The first brochure (Appendix Figures C.1 and C.2) documents the developmental phase of the memorial. The words and visual imagery of this brochure communicate a narrative of chaos and rupture. The imagery is visceral with numerous tiny pictures of personal objects, collected from the site, covering the exterior of the brochure. The primary message, A Nation Comes Together, in a small font is centered on the front of the brochure, suggesting a small but hopeful message of unity in the face of the divisiveness of domestic terrorism. The interior of the brochure emphasizes recovery with these messages: There is Power in Vulnerability, Strength in Weakness, Wisdom in Innocence; Where there are hearts that feel, There are hands that heal, and the Preamble to the Mission Statement: We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity. The design of this brochure utilizes large areas of black background with white and red lettering. Separate areas of the interior space are marked by ragged edges, like torn paper, communicating a message of darkness, damage and chaos.

The second brochure (Appendix Figures C.3 and C.4) contrasts with the first in both design and message. The background is white with a photograph of the 9:01 gate reflecting the sun against a bright blue sky. “We come here to remember...” is printed under the image suggesting a memory of the time before the bombing occurred. The back of the brochure shows a black and white aerial image of the damaged Murrah Building with the message “... those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence.” The interior of the brochure provides a site map and descriptions of the individual elements of the Symbolic Memorial. The remainder of the Mission Statement Preamble is prominent “May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.” The messages within the descriptions of memorial’s design elements focus on healing. The description of the Reflecting Pool states: “Here, a shallow depth of gently flowing water is intended to help sooth wounds, with calming sounds providing a peaceful setting for quiet

²⁴ While the brochures are not dated, it was possible to organize them by time periods based on their content and known changes to the site and organizational structure of the memorial and museum.

thoughts. Visitors may see their own reflection, a face of someone changed forever.” The description for the Field of Empty Chairs says the “stand as a poignant reminder of each life lost, articulated as the absence felt by family members and friends” further noting “By night the glass bases glow as beacons of light.” These messages communicate an intended narrative of healing and recovery.

The third brochure (Appendix Figures C.5 and C.6) provides an outline of the exhibits installed in the Memorial Center, the content of which was not included in this study. However, the brochure is useful in understanding how the operation and intended narratives of the site changed over time. Notably, the second and third brochures were created and used during the operation of the site under the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust, the government corporation created under as part of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997. The image of the Journal Record Building adorned with a large American flag on the back of the brochure suggests a national narrative for this time-period. Both these brochures include the NPS arrowhead logo alongside the Survivor Tree logo for the memorial site.

The fourth brochure (Appendix Figure C.7 and C.8) documents the shift to independent operation with information for the Symbolic Memorial and the Memorial Center Museum being included in a single promotional publication. The NPS arrowhead no longer appears since the government trust was dissolved and operation of the entire site was transferred to the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. The Symbolic Memorial is described in a summary format and much of the emotional language that defined the messaging in the earlier brochures is gone. The following statement was added to the summary description of the memorial museum in place of listing the headings of the different sections within the exhibit:

The story of the Oklahoma City bombing is presented in a 10-chapter format, originally developed by a committee of family members, survivors and rescuers, then adopted by the larger family member, survivor and rescuer group, as well as Memorial organizer.

The messaging in this brochure demonstrates a shift to narratives of operation and ownership. Highlighting the authorship of the exhibit suggests a need to emphasize local over national control, emphasizing that the narrative of the exhibit reflects the words, feelings and intentions of the people most closely impacted by the bombing rather than a federal bureaucracy. This is a smaller brochure which may reflect the financial status of the organization.

The fifth brochure (Appendix Figures C.9 and C.10) highlights the memorial museum and includes a photograph of the newly installed window that allows visitors to see the Symbolic Memorial from inside the museum where it can be interpreted by museum staff in a seeming effort to embrace the exterior memorial as a component of the museum. The preamble to the Mission Statement appears at the top of the window so that it is now visible from the Symbolic Memorial. The brochure returns to the previous descriptive format with details about the elements of the symbolic memorial including the original emotional statements describing the intent of the reflecting pool and the empty chairs. This brochure adds descriptions of the survivor wall and the section of the perimeter chain-link fence that was included in the memorial design at the request of the Memorial Task Force members. Prominent photographs of the Fence and the Survivor Wall are part of the section describing the Symbolic Memorial. The description of the Fence states “Today, more than 200 feet of the original Fence gives people the opportunity to leave tokens of remembrance and hope” (Appendix Figure C.10).

The content of this brochure emphasizes the memorial museum, suggesting a shifting emphasis away from the emotional and experiential Symbolic Memorial toward the didactic exhibits of the museum. The large type on the front of this brochure encourages visitors to “Visit the Memorial, Experience the Museum” suggesting that the museum is the more experiential component. This suggests a move away from emotional processing and toward intellectual processing through didactic and interactive exhibits.

The rack card (Appendix Figure C.11), advertising the memorial museum’s new exhibit, designed to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the bombing, also emphasizes the content available to visitors through the memorial museum. It makes this emphasis more explicit by suggesting your visit will be incomplete without touring the museum.

The OUTDOOR SYMBOLIC MEMORIAL is a place of quiet reflection. The MEMORIAL MUSEUM is a place of amazing transformation. Each offers a unique insight into the events of April 19, 1995, but to truly experience this place of honor and hope, we strongly encourage you to visit both. In fact, the outdoor grounds will be more meaningful and memorable after experiencing the entire story of the bombing as presented in the Museum. (See Appendix Figure C.11)

The sixth brochure in this series, which commemorates the 25th anniversary of the bombing, continues to emphasize the memorial museum. The content describing the museum includes four full-color pictures of people within the museum spaces. The interior of the

brochure contains one large aerial photograph of the memorial and journal record building showing the relationship between the two components of the memorial, while a map of the site includes a large green arrow pointing to the museum entrance. The shorter descriptions of the Symbolic Memorial do not include any photographs of those spaces and while there is some of previous descriptive language for the components, the descriptions are shorter. The text of the brochure emphasizes the importance of visiting the museum:

Even 25 years later, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum stands as a symbol of strength and unity in the face of violence. But the full meaning can't be grasped until you come inside the Museum. Through interactives, galleries and theaters, a powerful story unfolds. You will feel what we all felt that day. You'll see how precious life is, but also how fleeting it can be. What's more, you'll be bolstered by the resolve, strength and resilience of this city, this state and an entire nation.

The sacred site is a place of remembrance for many, but for some – you can't remember something you never knew. We invite you to come and discover what's inside the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. As we are Looking Back and Thinking Forward throughout 2020 – we commemorate 25 years of strength and resilience (Appendix Figure C.13)

The language of this brochure is much more in the vein of an attraction than previous versions. We can almost imagine a barker standing on the corner enticing visitors with promises of dramatic experiences inside. The distinction between the language of an attraction and the emotional language previously used to describe experience of the Symbolic Memorial is subtle. However, comments like “You will feel what we all felt that day,” seem inappropriate in the context of a national tragedy. This sensationalistic language is more egregious when we consider that there is an admissions fee to visit the museum as opposed to the open access of the Symbolic Memorial. Selling a sensational experience based on the pain and suffering of others crosses the line from commemoration to exploitation, which may be the reason that the next brochure returns to a slightly more balanced presentation.

The theme of the 30th Anniversary was “A Day of Darkness, Years of Light,” which is highlighted in the brochure created to commemorate that year's programming (Appendix Figures C.14 and C.15). The language of this brochure is still promotional, describing the museum's exhibits using adjectives such as powerful, courageous, incredible and unbreakable, as an enticement to get visitors through the door. However, the suggestion that the visitor should feel

what the community felt that day is absent and there is a return to balancing the promotion of the museum with respectful information about the Symbolic Memorial.

Discussion of Archival and Media Research

In reviewing the analysis of archival material, we see a distinction between the local documents represented by the Memorial Task Force reports, Memorial Mission Statement and Site Brochures and the national documents represented by the Presidential and Vice-Presidential addresses, NPS superintendent reports and Long-Range Interpretive Plan. Because the local materials were created through an extensive process of engagement with victims' family members, survivors and other community members, the content embodies first-person narratives and defines the memorial in emotional and experiential terms. There is an emphasis on recognizing people as individuals, recognizing them by name, and emphasizing personal stories.

In contrast, the national level content has a different emphasis. The NPS long-range interpretive plan emphasizes fact-based interpretation that ties stories to specific resources to assist visitors in understanding the impact of terrorism as a deterrent. It should be noted that this type of content is included in the Memorial Museum also. The design of the Symbolic Memorial is not inherently didactic it was designed to be experiential and evoke a variety of emotional responses. The NPS interpretive plan guides rangers in a process that overlays a fact-based educational experience onto the Symbolic Memorial for visitors who choose to participate in one of the Ranger led tours.

Analysis of the national level media materials in the form of Presidential and Vice-Presidential speeches illustrates a contrast with the locally generated materials in their emphasis on the collective rather than the individual. Both speeches refer to Americans, the nation, and the sacrifice of workers who were killed in the line of duty. Vice-President Gore's speech includes stories from survivors, but the focus of the speech is collective and references "...the price of freedom." President Clinton's speech mentions America or Americans five times and Gore uses the term three times.

In the analysis of the OKCNM site brochures we see an evolution in content and design that has moved toward greater emphasis on promotion of the memorial museum. This is likely an effort to increase revenue, but the increasingly promotional language in some of the brochures seems to skirt the ethical boundary of exploitation of pain for revenue. This is a topic that was

raised by public historians in the Los Angeles Times article *A Driving Need for Catharsis* (Katz 1997). Katz acknowledges the broad criticisms of the memorial design process and notes:

Yet, it is the pretense of the project, more than the aesthetics of any particular design that troubles some historians... ‘There’s something a little weird about doing this all so soon, without a chance to reflect and ponder,’ Stozier said, ‘It’s almost like trading on death.’ As much as Oklahoma City’s memorialists are offended by those words, they reluctantly acknowledge a pragmatic object to their haste. (1997, 9-10)

Inevitably, with the completion of the memorial, the local emphasis shifted from defining goals, objectives and design guidelines to sustainability of the operation. With this shift came changes to narratives that promoted both the experiential and educational nature of the memorial museum to help with generating site revenue.

On-Site Observations

Presentation of data from on-site observations and visitor surveys is followed by an analysis of site use and visitors’ feelings and reflections from their visits. Data collection followed the protocols for adapted ethnographic research as discussed previously. Field notes provide further explication of the data sets as needed and appropriate to the content.

Ethnographic studies use participant observation to provide firsthand experience of the cultural setting in which documented activities take place. “Participant observation refers to a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (Schensul 1999, 91). While not true ethnography, adapted ethnography for site exploration might include participant and/or passive observation. For this study I used passive observation of the Symbolic Memorial to witness the use of the memorial under different conditions, to informally engage with visitors, staff and park rangers and document the daily maintenance and interpretive activities that support the visitor experience. I found my passive observations invaluable to the study both in terms of what information they convey and in offering an opportunity to acclimatize myself to the site and its urban surroundings. The following discussion gives a few examples of information gleaned from these observations.

Description

I began systematic on-site observations in October of 2023 with additional visits in January, July, and September of 2024. These early passive observations provided essential orientation to site use and memorial operations and aided in refinement of the research process. I continued documenting my observations during survey distribution visits in June, August, and September of 2025. Using copies of the site map found in the memorial brochure, I recorded the pathways of visitors as they entered and moved around the memorial site (see example in Appendix D). I found this very challenging at first but became quite proficient at tracking people unobtrusively while making notes by the time I was distributing surveys in 2025. I tracked 63 individuals and groups through their entire visit and another 42 partial visits. The partial visits resulted from losing track of people or being interrupted after starting a tracking sheet.

On-Site Encounters

Spending time on site provided the opportunity for casual conversations on many topics. On my 3rd visit, one of the NPS park rangers recognized me and became curious about what I was doing. I explained my research and the methodology of the visitor observations I was doing, noting that I had met with the OKCNM President and CEO prior to initiating the research. These discussions were helpful as they gave me additional insight into his perception of his role at the memorial as an interpretive ranger. This led me to search the National Park Service archives for additional content not encountered in the memorial archives. This led to the discovery of additional archival documents related to the memorials development, expanding my comprehension of the memorial development process.

For each visit I spent two or more hours making passive observations with my notebook and site maps spread-out for easy access. Visitors sometimes assumed I worked for the memorial and would ask me questions, allowing for short and sometimes insightful conversations. I was always careful during these encounters to explain that I did not work for the memorial, only an independent researcher, before suggesting where they might find an answer to their question. An important observation that emerged from these conversations was that visitors that do not make use of interpretive materials (signage, apps, brochure maps) may not grasp the symbolic elements of the memorial design— at least on an intellectual level. I had several visitors ask where the Murrah building had been, a topic that is essential to understanding the symbolism of

the design elements. The nine rows of 168 chairs are arranged within the original footprint of the Murrah building and represent the nine floors of the building, with a chair for each person who died on each floor. The truck with the bomb was parked in front of the building in the space where the reflecting pool now imposes a sense of calm to replace the moment of chaos when the bomb exploded at 9:02. For some visitors, there is no replacement for a human guide.

Interpretive Approaches at the Symbolic Memorial

The interpretive approach used to communicate thematic content may result in different outcomes with respect to visitors' experiences. The Symbolic Memorial provides affordances that encourage reflection by using natural elements, minimal didactic labels, and opportunities to rest, in the form of benches, in various locations with access to shade and wind protection and to provide different views of the site. Visitors may choose to reflect on events from their own life or the experiences represented within the memorial's symbolic elements. Access to information to better understand the symbolism of the memorial's design is available through brochures, video kiosks, and online digital tools. The digital content has expanded since the data collection phase of this study was completed with a mobile application containing new educational materials and first-person narratives from six different perspectives. This allows visitors to the Symbolic Memorial access to interpretive content without visiting the Memorial Museum.

The memorial center provides information of a more historical and educational nature and appeals to the more analytical visitor. While it shares emotional content that encourages empathy, it guides the visitor's experience rather than offering a space where visitors can create their own experience. Some visitors prefer didactic and analytical content and are disappointed if they cannot tour the museum during their visit, such as a couple from Puerto Rico who decided not to walk through the outdoor memorial after they learned the museum had closed for the day.

For others, the Symbolic Memorial is a context that provides precisely the experience they are seeking. In *Designing Memory*, Tanovic observes:

A memorial's symbolic function is not necessarily apparent and often requires visitor's engagement to be discovered. In other words, instead of only creating a representation of what is being commemorated, a memorial is a custom-designed experiential space in reference to its topic. In this way, a memorial space is inevitably engaging visitors on several levels, not only on the level of visual perception. (2019, 9)

I recall a woman with a teenage daughter and young man (perhaps her son) that I had observed during their memorial visit. They had been on the site for about an hour and were resting on a bench below the Survivor Elm in the shade of a tree. I sat on a bench behind them and listened as the girl, who was lying on her back on the bench with her head near the woman, mused about the environment. The woman, who was older, had a relaxed demeanor that I had observed as they walked around the site. I said excuse me, introduced myself and offered her the survey handout, and she expressed interest in completing the survey. I said I was interested in learning about visitor's experience of the memorial. The girl sat up and offered her observations, "I was laying there listening to all the sounds, the birds, the wind, people talking as they walked past." I was struck by how attentively the woman was listening as the girl spoke about this experience. It occurred to me that having a relaxing and peaceful place to reflect on the sounds of nature in an urban context is a gift to the community, the significance of which cannot be underestimated.

I reflected on this conversation several times during my data analysis and thought about my own experiences at the OKCNM and other memorials I had visited during my research. While the empty chairs and the gates of time are broadly recognized as falling within the minimalist genre of memorial design, they are situated within a natural setting that allows visitors to commune with nature while also reflecting on the tragic history of the site. For me, that creates a feeling considerably different from the 9/11 Memorial and Eiseman's Memorial in Berlin, which left me feeling cold, empty and hopeless. Neither of these memorials offer such intimate connections with nature. The 9/11 Memorial uses water as a primary element, but it is falling into a dark abyss, and The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe offers no hint of nature at all – it is altogether unnatural in the absence of life and intentional disorientation.

I recall my first visit to the OKCNM, it was the first winter after the Symbolic Memorial had opened. I was traveling from Arizona to Tahlequah, Oklahoma to spend Christmas with my family and stopped to see the memorial on my way through Oklahoma City. It was long after dark, very cold and sleeting. The vegetation had not yet had a chance to grow, so the glow of the lights from the empty chairs highlighted the features of the site and reflected off the pock-marked wall of the Journal Record Building. I was not prepared for the way it made me feel – for the sense of desolation. I did not stay long, but the image of the site from the street is burned in my memory. It was several years before I visited the site again and by the time I began my

research, the trees had grown to become more prominent than the minimalist design elements. As a result, the feeling of the site is much different today than it was when it first opened. Perhaps the memorial's gradual evolution reflects the way that our memories of a tragic event gradually evolve as we find ways to mediate the tragedy in our individual and collective memories.

The Site Environment

The advantage of conducting passive observations over several years is having the opportunity to experience the public use of memorial spaces under many different conditions and to witness evolutionary changes within the site. Through my passive observations I was struck by how the uses of the memorial spaces changed with the time of day and the season. I found the daily lifecycle of the memorial, the way it reflected the diurnal pattern of city life the most fascinating. As the day dawns on Oklahoma City, the memorial seems to awaken slowly with a peaceful misty light at the end of long shadows cast by the buildings to the East. The morning light brightly illuminates the 9:03 at the west end of the reflecting pool. Early risers in the area arrive to exercise with brisk walks around the reflecting pool while maintenance teams consult with management about the day's tasks needed to keep the landscape in good condition.



Figure 6.1 Walking Around the Reflecting Pool for Exercise. Photo by Author.

Oklahoma is hot in the summer, and the hard surfaces of the federal district radiate the heat absorbed during the day well past twilight. On days of high humidity and temperature, the afternoons can be oppressive. The Symbolic Outdoor Memorial is open 24 hours, providing an oasis-like atmosphere in an urban downtown with limited green space. All areas of the memorial are well-groomed, immaculately clean with abundant shade providing at least one area of shade regardless of the time of day.



Figure 6.2 Cleaning the Reflecting Pool. Photo by Author.

Summer evenings provide a pleasant opportunity to experience the thoughtful lighting along the paths and the illumination from the field of chairs. I was grateful for the shade as I conducted my passive observations. The benches against the wall behind the rows of chairs became a favorite refuge from the heat while still allowing a broad view of the memorial space. Other on-site observation spots were the first bench near the steps to the survivor elm where a tree provided a spot of shade and the stone benches against the wall of the Journal Record Building where I could see when people entered the memorial from N. Robinson. I was sitting on one of these benches near 5PM after a day of passive observations when an older man approached from the West. He smiled at me saying as he passed, “You’re in my favorite sleeping spot” to which I replied it’s a good spot and he added, “It’s nicer at night,” as he continued walking toward the N Robinson street exit.



Figure 6.3 The Sleeping Bench. Photo by Author.

I have no doubt that a summer night spent in the memorial space is beautiful - with the glowing light from the chairs - and that the site provides a sense of security for an unhoused

person looking for a place to sleep. The site also provides context for group activities. As I arrived for an afternoon of passive observation, I noticed a group of men sitting in the grass near the entrance to the museum. They seemed to be deeply engaged in conversation. After some time, they stood and formed smaller groups and toured the various parts of the memorial. Since I had not seen them when they arrived on site, I went on with other observations, but I noticed them at different points and was struck by their solemnity.



Figure 6.4 Men's Group in Discussion. Photo by Author.

I gradually made my way to the bench near the Survivor Elm where I planned to camp out for on-site observations in the shade. There was a man sitting a few feet away from where I sat down. He turned to me and said, “In a few minutes there is going to be a group of men gathering here.” I took this opportunity to try and learn more, inquiring about the nature of the group to which he replied, “just some guys hanging out together.” I understood that he preferred I was not in the area when they re-convened, and as they began to arrive, I moved to a bench around the corner from the memorial on N. Robinson Street. From this vantage point I could see what appeared to be a parting prayer. They bowed their heads and after a brief embrace they left the site. It struck me that the Symbolic Memorial spaces provide affordances for engagement and reflection appropriate for people facing many of life’s challenges and transitions and could be used to facilitate some types of therapy.



Figure 6.5 Men's Group at Survivor Elm. Photo by Author.

Discussion of Passive Observations

On-site observations provided an enhanced understanding of the wide range of uses of the memorial by different groups of visitors daily and across the seasons. The changes in use from early morning to early evening illustrated the memorial's context within an active urban environment. Seasonal differences included a shift to increased tourism in the summer and slightly longer visits during times when the temperatures were more pleasant. On-site observations revealed the range of uses that occur within a single day from early morning recreational use, uses by business professionals in the morning hours and for lunchtime breaks with colleagues and mid-morning and afternoon hours being the busiest times for tourism. Tourism uses varied considerably with many people only spending 15 to 20 minutes walking through the Symbolic Memorial. Short visits commonly consist of walking around the reflecting pool with stops at the Survivors' Wall and along the Field of Empty Chairs. The most common addition to this route is to stop at the Survivor Elm and less commonly to walk along the path next to the Journal Record Building, which is most common with people who are also touring the Memorial Museum.

Outside of these most common uses, on-site observations documented the memorial being used by a men's group engaged in reflection and sharing, perhaps of a therapeutic nature and after-hours use of the memorial by members of the unhoused population. The extent to which the memorial grounds serve as respite for the homeless is not clear. The grounds are immaculately clean and maintained to a very high standard so any deleterious use would be addressed quickly and effectively. On-site security is unobtrusive with cameras being the

primary source of security observation. The roving security guards were friendly and conversational, with one man sharing his experience of working security for the Memorial as pleasant but low paying.

The Survey

The survey produced a small but robust data set which complements archival and observational information. The survey instrument was designed to capture information about visitors' experiences of the memorial site. Qualtrics software was selected for designing and administering the survey based on discussions with research support staff and advisors at Kansas State University. This software provides QR code generation for easy remote access, offers unique and varied question formats that allow questions to be structured according to the type of data being collected, and provides flexibility in data analysis. A copy of the survey handout and screen shots of all survey questions are provided in Appendix E.

Description

As noted in the methodology chapter, visitors were provided with a single page handout containing a QR code for survey access, my contact information, the script required by the IRB review board, and contact information for my major professor. Survey invitations were handed out to visitors on-site between June 10th and October 3rd, 2025. More than sixty invitations were handed directly to visitors on-site during two research visits which took place June 10th through 17th and August 28th to September 3rd. The second of these research trips captured higher visitation over the Labor Day weekend.

I had previously learned from my on-site observations that many visitors spend less than 15 minutes on-site²⁵, and some appeared to only be walking through the memorial on their way to another location. After attempting to engage a few of these types of visitors I realized that they were not as likely to accept or complete the survey as visitors who appeared to be more invested in knowing the site as evidenced by a slower pace or longer time spent on-site. After this realization, I began selectively approaching visitors that appeared more engaged with their surroundings. As a result, the survey represents the perspectives of visitors who were more

²⁵ Since these timed on-site observations were informal and imprecise they were not tallied.

engaged with the site rather than a truly random sample of all visitors.

During the June 2025 research trip, I met with a friend, Carol Bartlet, who worked at the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality located ½ block north of the memorial museum building. I asked if she would be willing to distribute survey invitations to her office and provided her with twenty-five invitations for this purpose. My intention was to capture examples of how the memorial is used and viewed by businesspeople in the area as well as the visitors I encountered during my on-site research visits, which were primarily capturing out-of-town visitors and families on outings.

Following the second research trip, I discussed my research, and the survey data sets with a colleague who teaches at Oklahoma State University in Oklahoma City. She offered to share the project with a couple of her classes to help me capture responses from another set of Oklahoma City residents living throughout the metropolitan area. Thirty-five invitations were provided to this university student population for a total of 130 invitations distributed between June 10th and October 3rd, 2025. Eighty-eight response records were generated between June 13th and October 6th, 2025, but eight were void of responses. The following discussions focus on the content of the eighty complete surveys.²⁶

Survey questions were designed to capture visitors' responses to the Symbolic Memorial by collecting information related to the visitor's a) time investment b) engagement with the physical features of the site and c) emotional or memory evoking responses to the memorial space. The questions, as shown in Appendix E, are grouped into three categories consisting of three orientation questions, three questions designed to register emotional impact and 4 optional questions focused on demographics.

Two questions provided opportunities for written responses. The second question in the emotional impact group asks respondents, "What words would you use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group that are completing the survey with you?" The final

²⁶ To keep the survey within Qualtrics' recommended length and mix of question formats for generating a high response rate, demographic questions were described as optional and listed at the end of the survey to avoid discouraging visitors from completing the questions most directly related to the central research questions. Perhaps because of these decisions, very few demographic responses were recorded and will therefore not be analyzed as a significant subset of the research.

question in this group asks visitors to share their thoughts about the two areas they ranked as having the most impact on them and explain why those places were important.

Analysis

In reviewing the responses to survey questions, I found it useful to compare the responses of first-time visitors to those of return visitors. Cross-tabulating responses helps to determine which variables are most significant to the research questions and provides content for the comparative analysis of the survey dataset with the observational and narrative datasets.

Time Investment – First Time vs. Repeat Visitors

Cross-tabulating responses to Question #3 – “Is this your first visit to the Oklahoma City National Memorial?” and Question #5 – “What was the date of your visit and the approximate amount of time you spent at the site?” documents the tendency for first time visitors to spend slightly more time on-site (10 minutes more on average) than repeat visitors. While all respondents indicated if they had been to the memorial before, and most respondents reported the date of their visit, only 47 of 80 respondents provided the length of time they were on-site. As a result, the cross-tabulated data set for these two questions is based on 47 responses with first time visitors reporting an average time on-site of 88 minutes and repeat visitors reporting an average of 78 minutes. The following charts provide a visualization of this dataset for each of the reported visits.

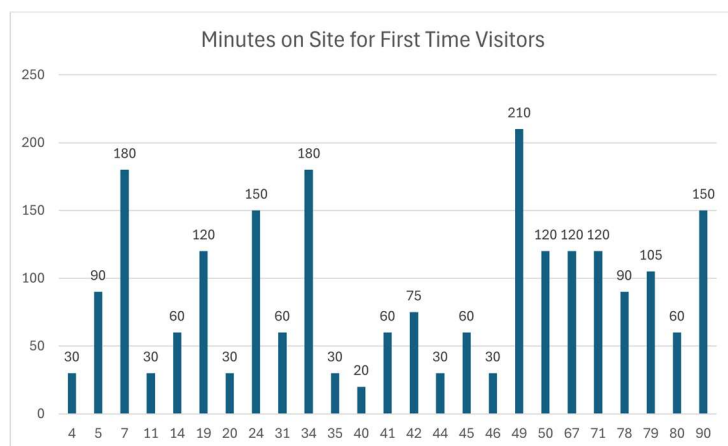


Figure 6.6 Time in Minutes On-Site as Reported by First Time Visitors.

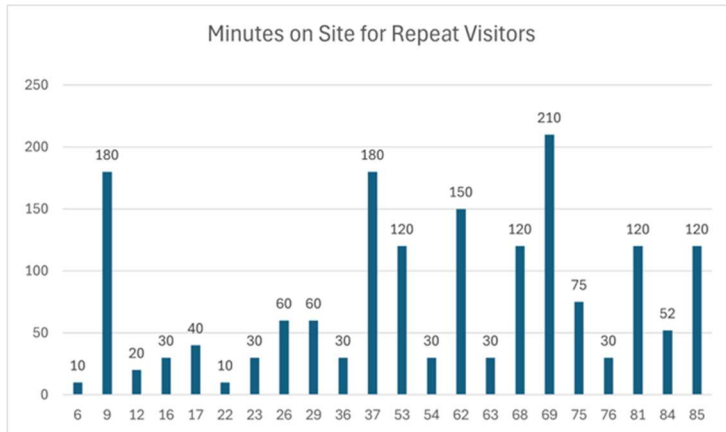


Figure 6.7 Time in Minutes On-Site as Reported by Repeat Visitors.

Time Investment – Correlated with Thermal Comfort

Introducing a trendline into the analysis illustrated a trend toward longer average time spent on-site for both groups toward the end of summer and beginning of the fall season. Survey responses numbered 4 through 31 took place between June 16th and July 16th, a period when the average daytime high temperature in Oklahoma City was between 87°F and 94°F. Survey responses numbered 63-90 took place between September 16th and September 30th when the average daytime high temperature was between 79°F and 82°F, with morning temperatures registering between 63°F and 68°F.

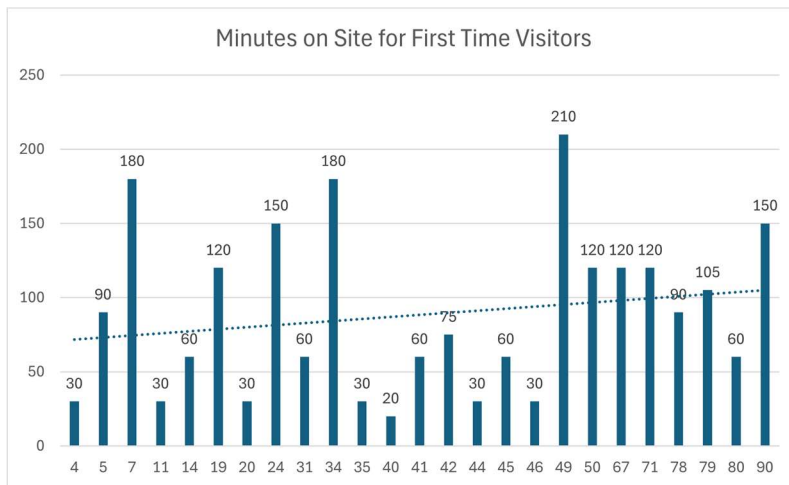


Figure 6.8 Trendline for First Time Visitors

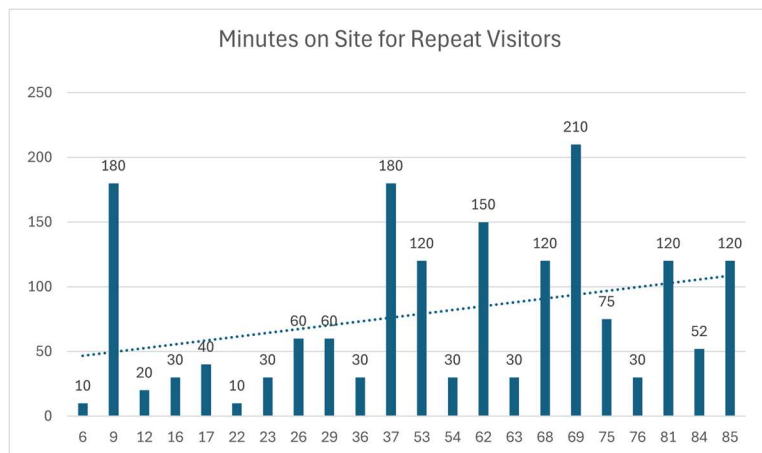


Figure 6.9 Trendline for Repeat Visitors.

It is natural that visitors would spend more time in outdoor spaces as the weather becomes more agreeable. Visitor comfort is dependent on many variables, but in the subtropical climate of Oklahoma City, humidity is a major factor and one where shade provides little advantage. During the summer of 2025, the months of June and July experienced high temperatures combined with high humidity, creating oppressive conditions from mid-June through the end of July (Weatherspark n.d.). By late August temperatures became more comfortable, but humidity levels continued to create muggy conditions through most of August. A reduction in humidity accompanied the change in seasons with more comfortable conditions beginning in early September.

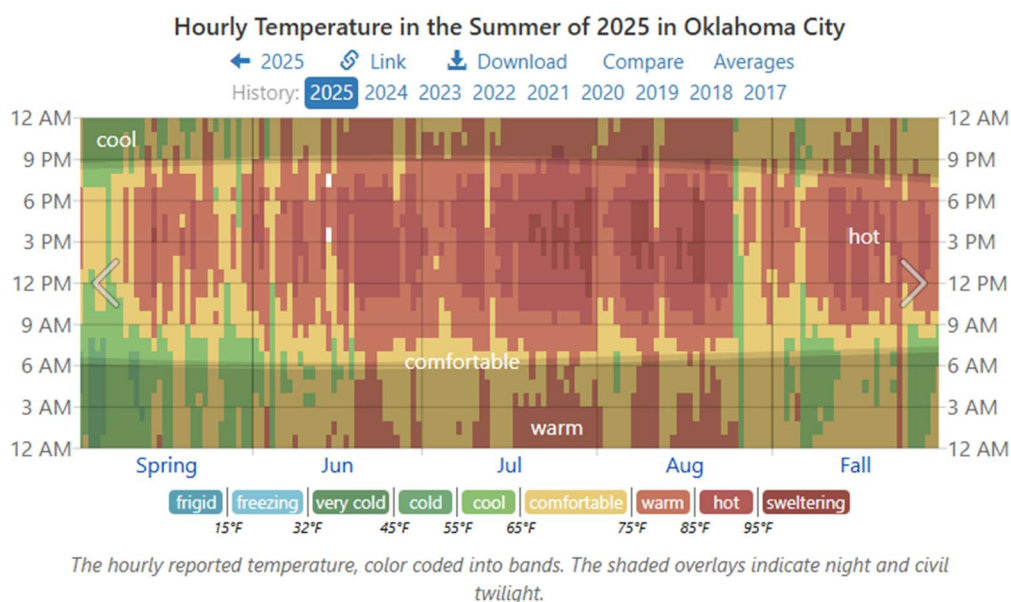


Figure 6.10 Seasonal Outdoor Temperatures Spring to Fall 2025 (Weatherspark)

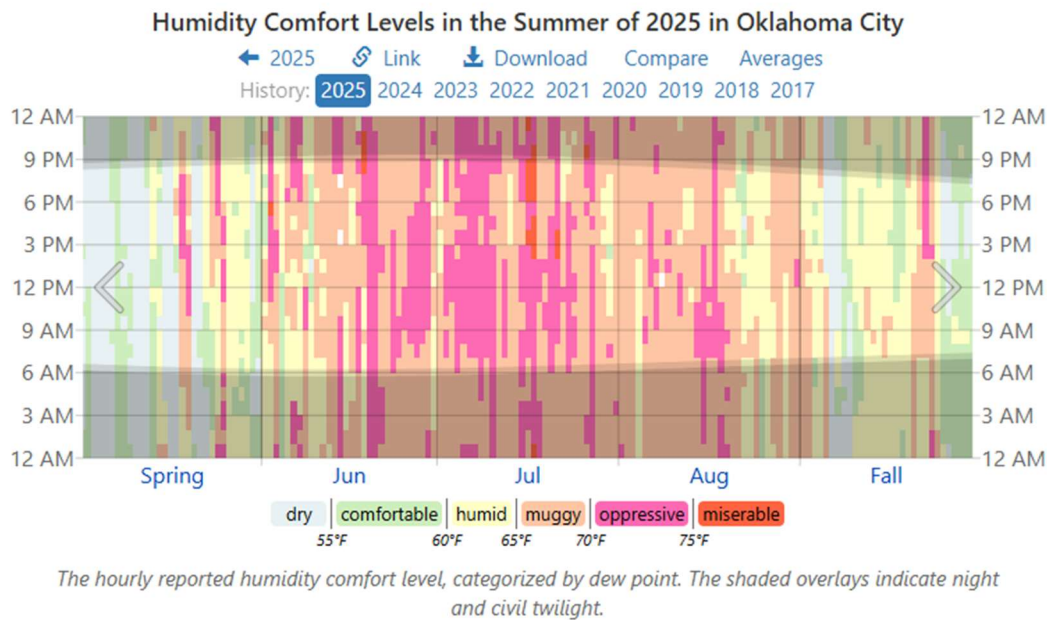


Figure 6.11 Seasonal Comfort Level based on Humidity (Weatherspark)

The inverse correlation between high temperature and humidity and length of time spent on site suggests potential for better site engagement during the spring and fall seasons when the Oklahoma weather is more agreeable.

Site Engagement

How visitors navigate the physical features of the memorial site and whether they recall the names of the areas they visited reflects their level of engagement with the site. Some visitors may come with the intent of only touring the memorial museum with little interest in the outdoor memorial site. However, most visitors will at least take a moment to look over the site from one of the prominent vantage points. Without reference to the site map, they are likely not to know the names of the elements they are viewing. As a result, those visitors that report remembering different areas would have likely walked through the memorial features and had thoughts or emotions in response to those areas.

The fourth question was designed to capture visitors' engagement with the site by asking them to select areas by name they recall visiting. The nine options provided correlate to the areas labeled on the site map (Figure 1.1). Of the 79 respondents to this question, the Field of Chairs and the Reflecting Pool were the most frequently noted features, at 70 and 71 respectively. The Gates of Time, Survivor's Wall and Survivor Tree are the next most frequently cited features.

The Memorial Museum was noted by half of the respondents, with the Children's area next and the Rescuer's Orchard and the Murrah Plaza tied for the least mentioned features.

This distribution correlates closely with on-site observations documenting the most prevalent visitor pathway was to enter through one of the gates of time, circle the reflecting pool, stopping at key features and then exit at the point of entry. Many visitors complete this walk in 15 minutes or less. The Survivor Wall was the most common additional stop on this pathway, which makes for an easy return to the 9:03 gate by the walkway behind the field of chairs. Adding the Survivor Elm to this route requires that visitors add length to their tour around the reflecting pool and requires more time in the sun. The Survivor Elm is a popular lunch destination for people who work in the area and can be accessed from N Robinson without entering the sacred spaces below.



Figure 6.12 Visitor Reported Engagements with Site Features.

A review of the number of site features reported by visitors in different time-periods shows a potential correlation with thermal comfort. Obviously, more time spent engaging with the features of the site is likely to yield better site comprehension, but a less obvious correlation would be a generally more positive response to the site features when the environment is more comfortable. In *Thermal Delight in Architecture*, Heschong (1979, vii) suggests thermal conditions are just as essential to our experience of space as lighting. "Thermal qualities-warm, cool, humid, airy, radiant, cozy-are an important part of our experience of a space; they not only influence what we choose to do there but also how we feel about the space."

The survey data suggests that uncomfortable conditions might contribute to a lower number of site features recalled or visited. Sixteen site visits that took place prior to June 15th reported an average of 6.6 out of 9 features recalled/visited while the visits recorded between June 15th and the end of July, when the heat and humidity was most oppressive, reported an average of only 5.2 features recalled/visited from 18 reported site visits. The current survey was not designed to capture information specifically related to the visitor's thermal experience, but the data suggests that this could be a fruitful area for future research. Including survey questions that ask visitors to share details of their personal comfort and experience of the environment on the day of their visit would help to accurately interpret the distinctions observed in the data.

Emotional Response

Capturing visitors' emotional responses to the design elements of the Symbolic Memorial was a primary goal of the survey. The sequencing of the questions guides visitors through a process of recalling their emotional responses by first using orientation questions to help them remember and potentially visualize the spaces they visited. They are then asked a series of questions about their responses to the spaces they visited. The first of these questions asks, "How much impact did your visit have on you personally?" The instructions ask respondents to slide an indicator to register the level of impact they experienced on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least impact and 10 being the most impact.

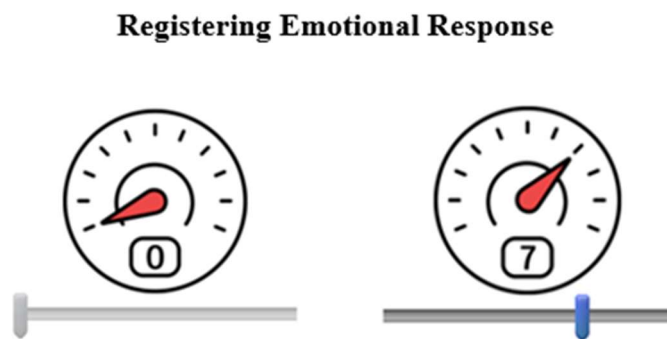


Figure 6.13 Registering an Emotional Response to the Memorial

The wording for survey questions was designed to be neutral to avoid leading respondents toward a specific type of answer. This question emphasized that the impact of the site visit on the individual respondent with the term "personally," while the term "impact" could

be interpreted as positive or negative depending on that person’s interpretation of their experience. Out of 65 responses to this question, 25 ranked the impact of the visit as 9 or 10 out of 10 and fewer than 10 respondents ranked the impact of their experience as less than 5. Figure 6.14 provides a visualization of this data with percentage of responses for each impact rating from 2 at the low end to 10 being the highest possible impact.

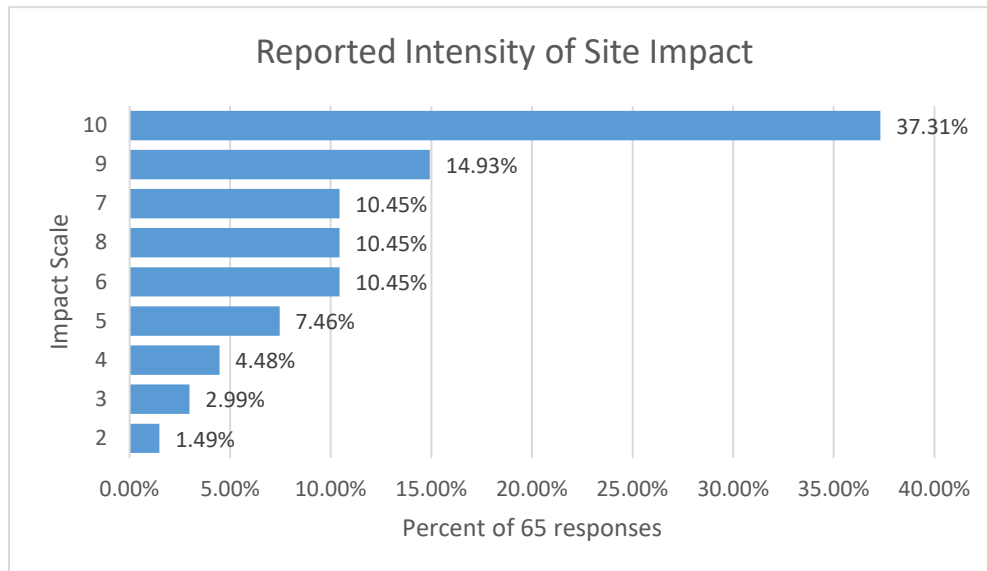


Figure 6.14 Visitors’ Ratings of the Intensity of the Site’s Impact

The next question in the survey asks visitors what words they would use to describe the impact their visit had on them (Appendix F). Responses were sorted into two categories reflecting first time and repeat visitors to allow for comparison between these groups. Key words from the responses were identified and color coded according to emotional intensity (low and high), inquisitiveness, and hopefulness.

It is interesting to note there are similar distributions across these color categories within the two visitor groups. The ranking by number of responses per category is the same for both groups (Weatherspark n.d.). Where the two groups differ is in the percentage of responses in each of these categories. The orange category (Intense or Difficult Emotions) had the highest number of responses in both groups, but first-time visitors used key words signifying intense or difficult emotions in 46.5% of responses, while repeat visitors used key words falling in the orange category in 35% of their responses. The green category (Knowledge, Honor, Meaning) had the next highest number in both groups, a 24% response rate among first-time visitors and a 28% response rate among repeat visitors.

Since the repeat visitors demonstrate an 11.5% lower response rate for intense or difficult emotions along with a 4% higher response rate for key words related to knowledge, honor and meaning, we might conclude that the Symbolic Memorial assists visitors in processing difficult emotions with an attendant growth in more intellectual considerations of the bombing and its aftermath resulting from their engagement with the memorial content. It is interesting that the percentage of responses falling into the blue category (Quiet or Reflective Emotions) is similar for the two groups with only a 1% difference. However, there is a 6.5% difference between the groups for the Pink Category (Positive or Encouraging Emotions) with 22% of responses among repeat visitors in this category and only 15.5% of responses from first-time visitors register as emotionally positive. This suggests that repeat visitors are more likely to have pleasurable and hopeful feelings during their visit than first time visitors.

Table 6.2 Summary of Visitor Responses, Key Words Distributions

First Time Visitors 71 Total Responses				Repeat Visitors 86 Total Responses			
Color	Type of Response	Response Tally	% of Total	Color	Type of Response	Response Tally	% of Total
Orange	Intense or Difficult Emotions	33	46.5	Orange	Intense or Difficult Emotions	30	35
Green	Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning	17	24	Green	Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning	24	28
Pink	Positive or Encouraging Emotions	10	15.5	Pink	Positive or Encouraging	19	22
Blue	Quiet or Reflective Emotions	11	14	Blue	Quiet or Reflective Emotions	13	15
	Totals	71	100		Totals	86	100

Narrative Survey Responses

Two survey questions provided the opportunity for visitors to write longer responses (Appendix G). The first of these questions asked visitors to share their thoughts about the two areas they ranked as having the highest impact on them personally. Many of these responses focus on the loss of life, the impact on families, and the unfulfilled potential of so many people. This question also elicited some insightful responses about specific design elements:

- The survivor wall was important because I got to put a name to a person and that was special to me.
- The Field of chairs were also important to me because it is truly devastating seeing just how many people were killed and the chairs just demonstrate just how many people it was not just the number.
- For the tree the way life is resilient.
- The gates are a beautiful representation of the time that it took place.
- The representation of the people (the chairs) is classy but solemn and makes me think of them not fulfilling the rest of life.

- The survivor tree is a great way of displaying the strength of the city before during and after the tragedy.
- And the gates to me showed anything can change in a moment that will affect you forever.
- Second on my list was the survivor tree. I found it very fascinating how a tree was able to survive under those circumstances. I believe it has a spiritual meaning in a way because not only were people harmed that day, but nature and planet Earth were as well...

The second question that allowed for longer responses asked visitors if there was anything else they would like to share. These responses varied widely but offered thoughts on topics that emerged as themes in the archival analysis. Many used this space to comment on violence, terrorism, hatred or the amount of damage the bomb caused. Others found hope or reflected on their personal experience of the site:

- Overall, it has become a place of reflection and peace for me. I never would have imagined a place where so much pain happened could be a place of so much comfort.
- It provides a very touching, meaningful, and hopeful message about the goodness in humans that remains even when faced with evil.
- Just that the process of completing it brought up so many memories. I can remember that day, and the emotions of myself and everyone around me.

One response mentioned the loss of innocence or sense of security after the bombing:

- Tragic that this carnage shattered the sense of safety that we take for granted every day.

Responses to both questions included reflections of a personal nature:

- Having lost a child (not in this manner) the thought of SO many parents having the grief of child loss made my heart hurt.
- I always enjoy the Rescuers Orchard because my uncle was an OKC firefighter who helped with rescue and recovery efforts.
- My niece is marrying a gentleman whose father died by suicide after the bombing. He was a lawyer representing the victims.
- I think the museum showed me how this happened, how OKC overcame the tragedy and came together, but also reminded me that radical elements on all partisan ends of our political and religious spectrum have more power than ever and this will likely happen again. I also think if the current ability for extremism to dehumanize their enemies and how history will quickly repeat itself. How a community came together, shower was beautiful. The field of chairs was powerful in showing all those lost, specifically the smaller chairs of the children. The gates were a close third, signifying the moment in time lost, and how we all were lost in those moment(s). I think it helps us accept what we've seen and move past it, but maybe the society has not learned how dangerous letting and encouraging fringe ideas overtake discourse is, and how fragile our society is.

Some responses seemed to express a sense of despair over the state of humanity:

- I'm tired of all the trauma caused by selfish people in this world. This place will forever hold memory for us for many reasons.
- Chairs are meant to have someone in them, whilst seeing the pool, just gave this immense feeling of emptiness. Emptiness in the world and an emptiness in so many people's hearts and worlds.

One response recognizes federal employees, suggesting a sense of patriotic sacrifice:

- My son recently moved to OKC to take a job with the FAA. My husband and I were visiting him in OKC. He had yet to be downtown to visit the site. We wanted to go there to see it for ourselves and so our son could see it and learn more about a defining event for many federal employees, Oklahomans, and our country that happened before he was born. I appreciated the site's beauty and design. It not only provides a place of remembrance and reflection, it memorializes the sacrifice made by those who died, their commitment to the service of our country, and the bravery of the rescuers. It's a tribute to the community's and our country's love of those we lost and those who survived the unthinkable that day at 9:02. It provides a very touching, meaningful, and hopeful message about the goodness in humans that remains even when faced with evil.

It is interesting that this same message recognizes the dichotomy of good and evil which is the only statement among these narrative responses that is suggestive of Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. I find it significant that none of these narrative responses mention God, faith or other religious terms aside from this one. Another response references "spiritual meaning," but this is specifically tied to the impact of the bombing on nature as well as humans, which is more suggestive of an animistic worldview.

Discussion of Survey Content

For first-time visitors to the memorial who aren't familiar with the details of the bombing, which is true of most of the younger visitors, the magnitude of the bombing and its impact on individuals, families and the community can be quite shocking. Emotional responses among first time visitors include words like: depressing, tragic, gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, anger, pain, shock, awe, scared, despair and sad. Repeat visitors use some of the same terms, particularly sad and heart-breaking or heartache, but they are more likely than first time visitors to use terms like poignant, touching, sobering, powerful, intense, and reflective which are more indicative of rumination. Not all first-time visitors have such intense reactions. I talked to two women who had just retired and were traveling to all 50 states. They were visiting one landmark in each state during their trip and had chosen the memorial as their Oklahoma destination, an indication of how the memorial is viewed as representative of the state. They said they were glad to be there and seemed very positive about the experience.

It is important to note that repeat visitors are a self-selecting set that may have a proclivity for emotion evoking experiences. OKCNM is listed with positive reviews on websites that cater to those interested in *Dark Tourism or Thanotourism*, suggesting it is a popular

destination for those who seek out sites of grief or tragedy²⁷. As a growing sub-category of heritage tourism dark tourism has been studied for several decades (Light 2017) While some might think this macabre, I believe such sites provide an opportunity to process and transcend personal traumas. Processing personal feelings through the lens of a collective trauma may provide a sense of community that reduces feelings of isolation relative to personal grief.

One of the first surveys I handed out on my visit on Labor Day, 2025 was to a young couple. They listened to my pitch and took the paper, but returned shortly and the young man said, “This is a very interesting topic of research, we have visited a lot of memorials,” the young woman interjected, “we like sad places.” The man continued, “we have been to all the 9/11 memorials, but we think this one (memorial) is the best.” I later wondered if he was the survey respondent who left this comment “The survivor tree moved me to propose to my now fiancé. It was fitting as a landmark as a symbol of our lives as well. Very inspiring to see.” Many people find inspiration in the survivor tree, as one survey response notes “The survivor tree is a great way of displaying the strength of the city before during and after the tragedy.”

The most common repeat visitors I encountered on-site were local people, such as the employees of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality who often take their lunch break near the Survivor Tree. There were people who mentioned they grew up in the area and were bringing their kids for the first time and residents who were showing out of town guests around. Others were from neighboring states and were accompanying more distant travelers that wanted to see the memorial. I witnessed couples or small groups of people on bikes and segways who stopped at vantage points near the Survivor Tree or the 9:01 Gate to point and chat for a few minutes before moving along, suggesting that at least one person in the group was sharing information from previous visits with others who were new to the site.

We might presume that people who found their first visit too traumatizing would not return for another visit. On the other hand, they might return after time has passed in search of a different kind of experience. For those visitors who do choose to return, the words they use to describe the experience suggest they are deriving something useful from the visit, even when it is phrased in terms of difficult emotions. This is precisely the type of visitor who is engaging in the

²⁷ The website Dark Tourism.com, which is authored and maintained by Peter Hohenhaus and includes OKCNM is one example (Hohenhaus n.d.)

rhetorical process that influences collective memory. By returning to visit a site of trauma multiple times and bringing others with them, they are processing the shock of the initial experience, coming to understand that experience and sharing that understanding with others. For those accompanying first time visitors, the more relaxed demeanor of the repeat visitor could help to reduce the sense of shock or discomfort expressed by first time visitors, helping them to understand and process their visit more easily.

Visual Messaging and Shifting Narratives

In addition to the site labels and digital content, the memorial site contains several types of visual messages. The times, 9:01 and 9:03, on the entrance gates, might be the most abstract of these messages in their use of a temporal trope of the times before and after the bombing. Other messages are more direct, such as the rescuers' inscription on the wall of the Journal Record Building which documents the communities' search for truth and the need for justice. The final line in this inscription emphatically states that these are things that "God demands," a sentiment that many people must have been feeling in those first days of the rescue and recovery operations when emotions were very high. However, to state that God demands something is a clear projection of what the human is demanding in the name of God. In this case, the people were demanding justice.

Located in the west half of America's Southeastern Bible Belt, Oklahoma City is deeply religious with 70 percent of adults identifying as Christian and 47% affiliating with evangelical protestant denominations (Pew Research Center 2026). It is natural that this community would turn to religion in the face of this tragedy. On April 23rd, 1995, the Reverend Billy Graham provided a spiritual message at a prayer breakfast at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds. This event was planned by Oklahoma's first lady Cathy Keating to provide solace at a time of emotional turmoil. A quote from Reverend Graham's homily is engraved on the interior surface of the wall surrounding the Survivor Elm (Graham 1995). The two parts of this quote offer distinct messages that are interesting to consider in this context. The first part "The Spirit of This City and This Nation Will Not Be Defeated," focuses on the governmental entities of the city and the nation as the subject paired with a transitive verb (defeated) suggests a battle or conflict and the need to overcome an enemy.



Figure 6.15 Interior Inscription at Survivor Elm Overlook, first part. Photo by Author.

The second part of this quote “...Our Deeply Rooted Faith Sustains Us,” emphasizes faith in a higher power as the source of the community’s strength and resilience. An emphasis on faith is central to the redemptive narrative defined by Linenthal in his documentation of the memorial process and is evidenced in the imagery surrounding the memorial site²⁸ as well as the inscriptions selected for inclusion within the Symbolic Memorial Spaces.



Figure 6.16 Interior Inscription at Survivor Elm Overlook, last part. Photo by Author.

²⁸ A sculpture of Jesus was installed across from the memorial at Harvey Ave and NW 5th street by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Oklahoma. “In the shortest verse of the Bible, Jesus weeps over the death of his friend Lazarus. Here we depict that same Jesus weeping and turning away from the bombing destruction” (Beltran 1999).

There is a redemptive narrative that emerges from religious communities' struggles to mobilize the sacred resources of their traditions to respond to the crisis of meaning engendered by the bombing. Indeed, the event threatened to subvert the convictions deeply held by many in this overwhelmingly conservative Protestant city, that God is loving, just, and all-powerful, and directs human history. (Linenthal 2001, 42)

Linenthal documented the struggles of those who asked why a loving God would allow this tragedy to happen and provided moving stories about individual spiritual journeys in the wake of the chaos of the bombing. In his homily at the Oklahoma Fair Grounds Billy Graham begins with the question of “why?” and reminds his audience that evil is real and it exists (Graham 1995). In discussing the efforts of local faith leaders to address the question why? Linenthal notes:

Not all religious responses offered “answers” for making sense of such horror. All of them, however, sought to give members of particular religious communities' theological contexts through which they could locate the bombing religiously through an understanding of evil's place in the world. (2001, 42)

The Heartland Chapel, located across the street to the East of the memorial at NW 5th and N. Robinson. Was built in 1995 to serve as an open-air sanctuary and place of meditation following the bombing as both the Methodist and Catholic Churches, located within blocks of the Murrah building were too damaged to hold services. It was rededicated in 2025 as part of the 30th anniversary events organized by the OKC National Memorial Trust. Their website acknowledges the religious communities that participated in its construction.



Figure 6.17 Heartland Interfaith Chapel. Photo by Author

The Heartland Chapel is an interfaith project of the First United Methodist Church, the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City, the Jewish Communities of America, the Islamic Community of Oklahoma City, and the Islamic Community of America. (Oklahoma City National Memorial 2025)

In the deeply religious environment of Oklahoma, faith and spirituality played a large part in the community's initial recovery and figured prominently in the media narratives following the bombing. The statements by President Clinton after the bombing and by Vice-President Gore at the Groundbreaking Ceremony both included statements invoking God. But as the document analysis shows, the religious overtones of the rhetorical messaging for the site have lessened with distance in time from the tragedy of the event. The focus has gradually shifted toward an emphasis on rebuilding the city, maintaining the memorial for future generations, improving museum exhibits and implementing new programming through the memorial museum that focusses on educational outreach and encouraging communication that reduces social divisiveness²⁹. These are topics more closely aligned with the Linenthal's progressive narrative.

This shift in rhetoric should not be taken to reflect a change in religious beliefs in central Oklahoma, but as a potential reflection of the healing that has resulted in less need to invoke God's assistance in working through the pain of a recent tragedy. It suggests a return to self-sufficiency and normalcy in daily life. While many still attribute their recovery to a faith in God³⁰, the emphasis is on moving forward, an indication that the narrative has shifted from the redemptive narrative to the progressive narrative as defined by Linenthal in the unfinished bombing (2001). It also prompts a reconsideration of all three of Linenthal's narratives, which might be revised to consider the gradual process reflected in the way the community responded to the initial trauma and subsequently recovered and rebuilt over an extended timeframe. The Toxic narrative identified by Linenthal provides the least structure of the three narrative frameworks he describes. It is defined by the way the bombing continued to negatively influence people's lives for years after the event.

²⁹“The Memorial created Better Conversations as a way for individuals to come together and discuss sensitive or controversial topics in a civil manner.” (Oklahoma National Memorial and Museum n.d.)

³⁰PJ Allen, an Avionics technician at Tinker Air Force base attributes his recovery to God: “A lot of people didn't make it that day, God chose me and others to carry out a mission for him,” (Cummins 2024)

“It’s almost five years now,” one survivor said to me, “and I still have glass and small pieces of rubble from the building working their way out of my scalp, back and my ears. I know other people who have the same experience,” he said “and it seems an apt metaphor for how the bomb lives on in us.” (2001, 70-71)

He notes “The bomb lived on in the disabling injuries and chronic pain of survivors,” but decades later we see the generational pain the event has spawned in some of the visitor’s survey responses. Such as this one from an Oklahoman who was visiting the memorial for the first time: “My niece is marrying a gentleman whose father died by suicide after the bombing. He was a lawyer representing the victims.”

Given the traumatic nature of the event, a narrative structure that considers the phases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)³¹ response and recovery might provide a useful framework in which to build a more nuanced narrative in place of Linenthal’s “toxic” narrative. It should be noted that the symptoms of PTSD are experienced differently by different people and may emerge long after a traumatic event. Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) is recommended as a second line treatment by the American Psychological Association for the treatment of PTSD.³² “This treatment helps individuals establish a coherent life narrative in which to contextualize traumatic experiences” (American Psychological Association 2017). On-site observations at the memorial and survey responses suggest that some visitors reflect on, and perhaps continue processing past personal traumas, during their memorial visit. For example one visitor commented, “Having lost a child (not in this manner) the thought of SO many parents having the grief of child loss made my heart hurt.” This points to the potential for some design elements to trigger unresolved PTSD responses among visitors, while they might aid others in processing past traumas through reflection and contextualization of their experience within a larger framework of shared suffering.

³¹ The Veterans Administration outlines 4 phases of post-traumatic stress in disaster events as 1. Impact, 2. Immediate-Rescue, 3. Immediate-Recovery, 4. Long Term-Reconstruction. (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2025)

³² The American Psychological Association provides guidelines for first-line and second-line treatments of PTSD of which NET is one of several second-line treatments (American Psychological Association 2017)

The Oklahoma Standard

The inscription on the exterior wall of the Survivor Elm expresses gratitude for the outpouring of help, coordination and empathy the community received throughout the rescue and recovery. The cooperation and generosity of local people who stepped up regardless of circumstances became known as the Oklahoma Standard, previously discussed in the section on resilience in Chapter 2. This sense of community, both religious and civic, underpins the concept of the redemptive narrative as defined by Linenthal. The two sides of this redemptive narrative are expressed in the interior and exterior inscriptions on the wall surrounding the Survivor Tree. The placement of these inscriptions seems symbolic, with the interior inscription focusing on faith and internal resolve, while the exterior inscription focuses on actions from others.



Figure 6.18 The Survivor Elm in Winter, Exterior Inscription. Photo by the Author.

Survey Responses

It is interesting that there is only one overtly religious word among the statements collected from the survey question relating to experiential impact. That word is faith, and it is only used by one respondent. Despite the lack of religious sentiments, there are many optimistic words among the responses such as hope, motivating, resiliency and inspiring, which suggest a redemptive narrative could be understood in broader terms than through the lens of traditional religion. The words some visitors used to describe the way their memorial visit affected them are

suggestive of catharsis, suggesting that a narrative of recovery might be less about religion and more about processing grief collectively. For some people that process might include an emphasis on Judeo-Christian religion, but for others it might include connecting with nature in a more animistic way or working through grief by focusing on personal or collective improvement through education, work or volunteer activities.

Comparative Analysis of Thematic Narratives

In comparing the themes and messages derived from the analysis of the archival materials to the visitor survey responses we can see areas where visitors' experiences closely align with the expectations of memorial developers and areas where expected experiences seem to be absent from visitor reports. Additionally, visitors report experiences not defined as the desired outcomes for the memorial. The areas where visitors' descriptions aligned with desired outcomes were characterized by the following key words: Inspiring, Resilience, Remembrance, Reflective, Community Recognition, and Peacefulness. Despite the expectation that the memorial would communicate or inspire spirituality and hope, visitor responses rarely used these terms. Additionally, visitors used terms such as *fragility* to describe their reflections on life and society. They mentioned fear and concerns over the potential for political extremism to result in additional violence. They also reported a sense of loss of innocence and security and profound sadness over the loss of life, especially the death of children. Some visitors reported that their visit was good or positive and that they left the memorial with a recognition that their problems were small or that they wanted to spend more time with their loved ones. These comments reflect the expectation that the memorial would inspire visitors to change their behavior. The comments that suggested changes to personal behavior were on a smaller scale than deciding not to commit acts of terrorism, but behavioral change has the potential for a positive ripple effect with larger consequences. Perhaps deciding to spend more time with loved ones and recognizing that personal problems are small would change the life of a child in a way that prevents a negative chain reaction leading to crimes at various levels.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions

Conclusions drawn from the three areas of research (archival, passive observation and survey) are first shared by addressing each of the research questions individually. A collective findings section, which summarizes the findings and presents the conclusions follows. The following are the research questions defined for the study.

Research Questions

1. In what ways did community engagement, conducted during the memorial planning process, influence the development of the intended narratives of the memorial design?
2. How are those intended narratives reflected in the content of on-site and promotional messaging?
3. How does today's visitor experience of the memorial reflect the intent of the design as revealed through archival and survey content?
4. How do the combined narratives of the site contribute to the collective memory of the bombing event?

Question #1 - Community Engagement and Memorial Planning

Question #1 – In What ways did community engagement, conducted during the memorial planning process, influence the development of the intended narratives of the memorial design?

The memorial planning process was a large-scale initiative that sought input from people throughout central Oklahoma. The Memorial Task Force and their subcommittees compiled the responses from surveys and public meetings to create a set of guidelines for the memorial design. The resulting guidelines, which focused on how the designed memorial should make people feel more than its visual appearance, are communicated through the Mission Statement. The Mission Statement was included in the design solicitation packets to assist prospective designers with the application process.

The Memorial Task Force received 624 entries that were narrowed to five finalists who were invited for a site tour. Torrey Butzer recounts “During the second phase, when they announced the five finalists, they brought all five finalists to the site... They took us on a tour of the site and also an exhibit they had set up in the parking garage to view that was very powerful,

so we had an opportunity to develop this very emotional connection to the site” (Moore 2000, 6-7).

Review of the Process

The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building was a high-profile retaliation against the federal government. The high number of people killed, and the nature of the crime resulted in extensive coverage and wide-spread outrage and urgent calls to memorialize those killed in the event. In response, Oklahoma City Mayor Ron Norick announced the establishment of a 350-member task force to initiate memorial planning on June 28th, 1995. The task force utilized ten subcommittees to carry out the process (see Table 6.1).

Defining Guidelines

The Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee and the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee took the lead in defining the criteria for the memorial. The Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee defined themes that reflected their expectations for the memorial, which they submitted to the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee, which also solicited input from the community on themes for the memorial through public meetings and a mail-in survey. The suggested themes were compiled from the responses received from the community outreach efforts and the Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee to create a Mission Statement that would serve as the guiding document for solicitation of design proposals. The guidelines specified the emotions the memorial designs should evoke more than the physical attributes it should include. Torrey Butzer recalled the guidelines specified that the design “should offer feelings of peace, comfort, strength, hope and serenity” (Moore 2000, 5). The only physical requirements were that the design include the Survivor Tree, that the footprint of the Murrah Building where people died be designated as sacred ground and that the memorial include a separate information center where details of the lives of those killed could be shared (Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee 1996).

Defining the Open Competition Process

Initially the Task Force engaged Paul Spreiregen, a Washington D.C. architect, to define an open design competition process. The plan he proposed utilized a design selection committee

composed of professionals in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture and design. Task Force Chairman Bob Johnson insisted that members of the task force that had defined themes for the memorial be involved in the design selection process. Spreiregen initially agreed to oversee the design competition but articulated his concerns regarding the involvement of the subcommittee members in the selection, proposing instead a process where they provided input on the selection to a professional committee. In response, Bob Johnson wrote to Spreiregen informing him of their decision to move forward without his involvement because they did not “share the same philosophical approach to the design selection process as it relates to community involvement” (Linenthal 2001, 187)³³. Following their dismissal of Spreiregen, the Memorial Task Force selected a new team of competition advisors that recognized the importance of local input on the design selection and moved forward with the open design competition (Linenthal 2001, 189). They received 624 entries that were narrowed to five finalists who were invited for a site tour. Torrey Butzer recounts: “During the second phase, when they announced the five finalists, they brought all five finalists to the site...They took us on a tour of the site and also an exhibit they had set up in the parking garage to view that was very powerful, so we had an opportunity to develop this very emotional connection to the site” (Moore 2000, 6-7).

Throughout the design process the Memorial Task Force supported the involvement of the Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee in defining criteria and selecting the design, which allowed the designers to connect personally with community members most directly impacted by the event, to hear their concerns and respond by interpreting the intentions of the community into a design that represented their intentions for the memorial. As a result, the guidelines that were developed address the needs of the community as reflected in Linenthal’s toxic narrative. His documentation included information from a study that reported high psychological effects from the bombing that persisted for more than a year (2001, 71) By creating a memorial that focused on the needs of the community over national security or aesthetic contributions, the task force address the most pressing needs of the local population.

³³ Holland (2014, 144-150) provides a detailed accounting of the concerns Spreiregen communicated to Bob Johnson.

Question #2 - Intended Narratives and Promotional Messaging

Question #2 - How are those intended narratives (as defined by the Memorial Task Force) reflected in the content of on-site and promotional messaging?

The guidelines developed by the Memorial Task Force were used by the design team to create a site plan addressing the themes embodied in the Mission Statement (Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee 1996) which are paraphrased as follows:

- Remembrance: a beautiful universal symbol and focus on victims and survivors
- Peace: spaces that provide opportunities for reflection incorporating natural elements
- Spirituality and Hope: Powerful and Awe-inspiring, conveying compassion and hope in the face of loss and the spirituality of the community and the nation
- Cherished Children: a special place for children that assures them that the world is good
- Comfort: provide comfort to visitors and offer an uplifting experience
- Recognition: include a tribute to those who helped and the unity of the community and the nation following the attack
- Learning: include a participatory learning center as a part of the memorial complex

Interpretive Design Elements

The narratives defined through Community Engagement and collaboration with the design team are communicated experientially as visitors tour the individual memorial spaces. Because the guidelines for the design focused primarily on the emotional experience of visitors, the design team created distinct design elements to elicit the desired emotional responses from visitors through their experiential engagement with the Symbolic Memorial. The site plan is organized in a manner that creates a sacred central space where the loss of life occurred. The Field of Empty Chairs and the Reflecting Pool occupy this central space which is designed for reflection. The Gates of Time fulfill the need for a design that is powerful and awe through their immense scale and encourages a sense of peace by creating a transition space for visitors entering the memorial. They also provide a “beautiful universal symbol” using time to signify the moment life changed. Hans Butzer describes the time symbolism used in the design noting: “if you ask anyone in the community where they were at 9:02, they know where they were. They

felt it, so many can remember the feeling in their chest, just the pressure of the explosion and the fear of what may have happened” (Moore 2000, 10). Torrey Butzer explains the intent to reference 9:02 by its absence in the space between the 9:01 and 9:03 gates, describing the reflecting pool as “mysterious void” (Moore 2000, 11). The Empty Chairs also reference absence and recognition of the loss of individuals whose names are engraved on the seats of the chairs. These two design elements fulfill the requirement of universal symbols that encourage remembrance by recognizing loss.

The use of trees at various scales, from the smaller decorative trees in the rescuers orchard to the towering pine trees that mark the perimeter of the Murrah building, provides visitors affordances in the form of shade and connection with nature as these trees provide habitat for song birds that can be heard by visitors as they rest on benches throughout the site. The symbolism of the Survivor Tree, which was saved and incorporated into the design at the request of Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee³⁴, communicates a manifest narrative of strength and resilience in the face of violence and loss. The inscription on the interior of the wall references strength, resilience, spirituality, and unity of City and Nation.

The design intentions are communicated through the messages in the site brochures available at two locations within the Symbolic Memorial, while messages on walls incorporated into the design concept (Figures 1.9, 6.15, 6.16 and 6.18) and small on-site didactic labels support the design intentions for each element. The intended narratives are communicated in greater detail in the walking tours available in book form in the gift shop, and in video form on kiosks located on-site, through YouTube and through a mobile app that can be accessed by QR code available in the latest brochure (Appendix Figure C.15) or by download from Google and Apple. The intended site narratives are communicated in a uniform manner across all platforms to generate a manifest narrative of peace, comfort, strength, hope and serenity. These intended narratives do not directly reflect the redemptive, progressive and toxic narratives identified by Linenthal in his study of the memorial development process. Instead, they define a narrative of reflection and recovery with very limited references to spirituality as expressed by the redemptive narrative, although visual references to spirituality flanked the site on either side

³⁴ The Final Report documents the request of this committee that efforts be made to make sure the tree survived (Victims’ Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee 1996).

where religious sites have maintained their local presence and responded to the event.

A latent narrative of transcendence is implied by the focus on peaceful engagement with natural elements, meditative self-reflection inspired by the pool of water and a lack of reference to the destruction or violence of the bombing or any references to the perpetrators, the location of the truck, the investigation or the trial. The inclusion of a small corner of the remains of the Murrah building lends authenticity to the site by referencing destruction. However, this element is small in comparison to the towering 9:01 gate and the increasing height of the pine trees that mark the building perimeter.

Narratives Communicated in Brochures

The site brochures are the principal interpretive materials used on site and include descriptions of the individual design elements for the site. The first brochure provides the initial interpretive text with minor changes in subsequent years as documented in the previous chapter. The brochures always include the preamble to the Mission Statement: We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, Peace, Hope and Serenity. The introductory text recognizes the design team, subcommittees and others that participated in the design selection process. The descriptions of the design elements provide basic details of each and a statement on their symbolism. The statements of their significance below are drawn from the 25th Anniversary Brochure (Appendix Figure C.13):

1. Museum Entrance and Memorial Store -In the OKC National Memorial Museum, you'll experience April 19th minute by minute. But more importantly, you'll discover what happened next – how a nation came together, healed and sought justice.
2. Children's Plaza – In the aftermath of April 19th, children from around the world sent messages of caring to Oklahoma City in the form of hand-painted tiles. These have a permanent place in the Children's Plaza along with a chalkboard terrace inviting you to share your feelings – an important part of the healing process
3. Rescuers' Orchard – Like the people who rushed in from near and far to lend a helping hand, this army of fruit-and flower-bearing trees surrounds and protects the Survivor Tree.
4. Survivor Tree – Encircled by the Promontory Wall with a message of resolve, this near-century-old American Elm stands at the highest point of the memorial as a symbol of strength and resilience.

5. The Gate of Time – The moment of destruction was 9:02 AM. The East 9:01 Gate and the West 9:03 Gate frame this moment, representing the innocence that came before and the healing that began immediately after.
6. Reflecting Pool – The Reflecting Pool stands where Fifth Street was on April 19, 1995. The gently flowing waters help soothe and inspire visitors to look into the pool and see the face of someone changed forever.
7. The Fence – Installed originally to protect the footprint of the Murrah Federal Building, the fence quickly found a higher purpose. People expressed their sorrow by leaving tokens of love and hope – and still do today.
8. Field of Empty Chairs – This field is where the Murrah Federal Building once stood. Arranged in the nine rows that reflect the floor where victims were located, these 168 chairs are each etched with the name of a person killed. The 19 smaller chairs represent children.
9. Survivor Wall – The Murrah Federal Building’s only remaining walls, with more than 600 names of those who survived the blast.
10. Murrah Plaza Overlook – This surviving original area offers a sobering view of the Memorial and Museum grounds.

While the site brochures provide the essential interpretive messages for each of the design elements, they do not contain full narrative descriptions. The new mobile application (app), launched last year as part of the 30th anniversary event, provides a variety of options for touring the memorial museum and first-person accounts from six different people who recount their memories of the bombing. This expanded content has the potential to enhance the collective memory of the event, but it is not related to the Symbolic Memorial. The free app includes a Symbolic Memorial walking tour with static images of each of the design elements and the original audio of Hans and Torrey Butzer describing the intent and significance of each design element of the memorial.³⁵

³⁵ At the time of this writing, the original video walking tour video with the Butzers is still viewable through YouTube in two parts <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iWL1WZVE-4> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNlgwIyx1kE&t=149s>

Question #3 - Visitor Experiences

Question #3 - How does today's visitor experience of the memorial reflect the intent of the design as revealed through archival and survey content?

The analysis of the archival and media documents revealed the reflective intent of the memorial by the Memorial Task Force and the Design Team who addressed the Memorial Task Force guidelines in their winning design submission and worked with the Victims' Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee, Rescuers and the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee to refine the design based on feedback they received. A thorough analysis of the visitor survey responses revealed areas where the intentions of the memorial design correlate with the visitor's experience and areas where they do not.

Current Operational Narratives

I have identified the primary narratives currently in operation at the Symbolic Memorial based on visitors' survey responses as follows:

- 1) Strength of the community exemplified by immediate response and recovery
- 2) Remembrance through recognition of individuals and their identities
- 3) Hope for the future gained through recognition of resilience and community unity
- 4) Reflection on the impact of violence on individuals and the community
- 5) Inspiration to appreciate life because it is fleeting and can change in a minute
- 6) Peacefulness through rest, reflection and connection with nature

These narratives are closely aligned with the themes identified for the memorial by the subcommittees of the Memorial Task Force in their final reports. The one theme identified for the memorial that is not represented in this list is spirituality. Only one survey response addresses the concept of spirituality, and this is related to nature, suggesting that it is a minor or secondary theme for visitor experiences. It is possible that visitors did not articulate all their experiences in their survey responses. Future in-depth interviews might identify additional sentiments and experiences. It is notable that there is only one visitor response includes a religious sentiment, which is "faith." Within the memorial only the inscription left by the rescuer on the wall of the Journal Record Building mentions God and the themes developed for the memorial through the Memorial Task Force do not mention God or religion. Religion is only referenced once in the visitor responses, and the context is a discussion of extremism noting, "radical elements on all partisan ends of our

political and religious spectrum have more power than ever and this will likely happen again.”

The inscription on the interior of the wall surrounding the Survivor Tree that quotes Billy Graham (1995) uses the term faith as a sustaining principle after stating “The Spirit of This City and This Nation Will Not Be Defeated.” Nation does not appear in the visitor responses at all and only one response references federal service, or concepts of patriotism and sacrifice which were identified as themes within the national level planning documents. As noted in the discussion of archival documents, the messages contained within the “national” documents, represented by the speeches by elected officials, NPS reports and the Long-Range Interpretive Plan reveal themes focused on America, nation, God, federal service, democracy, sacrifice and freedom. These themes are conspicuously absent from the narratives derived from the visitor’s experience of the site.

Visitors have considerable choice in their experience of the Symbolic Memorial. Those who are interested in a more reflective experience can find quiet and solitude, even on busy holidays, particularly if they arrive early or late in the day. In the summers, high temperatures and humidity can make the outdoor experience less pleasant but did not deter visitors from enjoying the memorial spaces at a slower pace, even when the comfort index registered “sweltering.” Slightly shorter visits were documented for the hottest periods in July. On-site signage is minimal which maintains the aesthetics of the site and enhances the reflective experience. Two kiosks, one located near the Survivor Elm and the other near the Survivor Wall offer introductory videos and brochures with site maps. I did not document any visitors referring to the maps in the brochures as they walked through the site but witnessed a few consulting brochures while seated near the Survivor Tree or the 9:01 Gate. Most visitors are focused on visual engagement with the site features, and many people spend five minutes or more gazing across the site from a single vantage point. The overlook near the Survivor Tree, shady spots on the low terraced benches near the 9:01 Gate and shady benches in the Rescuers Grove are the most common locations for relaxed on-site observations. In short, the visitor experience of the Symbolic Memorial closely aligns with the expectations of the Memorial Task Force and the Design team and does not reflect concepts of national identity and patriotic sacrifice expressed in the content of national documents and speeches but does reflect visitor recognition of Oklahoma City as a responsive and compassionate community.

Question #4 - Memorial Narratives and Collective Memory

Question #4 How do the combined narratives of the site contribute to the collective memory of the bombing event?

The narratives of the site as expressed by the themes identified by the Memorial Task Force and as captured through visitor surveys, suggest that manifest narratives contribute to the collective memory of the bombing event as a horrific tragedy that epitomizes the divisive nature of political and religious extremism which continues to be a concern across our Nation. Visitor narratives related to identity focus on local identity over national identity, reflecting their empathy with the victims and survivors of the event and their respect for the response and recovery effort. The concept of the “Oklahoma Standard” suggests the emergent identity for the event is characterized by the strength, compassion and unity of Oklahomans that was forged in the aftermath of the bombing and continues to be expressed through the Symbolic Memorial which welcomes everyone to share in reflection, whether of this event or their own traumatic experience and healing through engagement with the affordances of the designed memorial space.

Summary of Latent and Manifest Narratives

The manifest narrative of the OKCNM Symbolic Memorial focuses on the commemoration of loss, and healing in the aftermath of trauma. This is communicated through the preamble to the Mission Statement which is engraved on the exterior of the Gates of Time and over the viewing window that was installed in the Journal Record Building to overlook the Symbolic Memorial. The inscription over the entrance through the 9:01 gate (Figure 7.1) illustrates how the preamble serves as a reminder of the purpose of the memorial for visitors as they enter the central sacred area of the memorial space. The manifest narratives of peace and tranquility are emphasized using natural elements such as groves of trees, seasonal plantings of flowers and the intentionally calm waters of the reflecting pool.

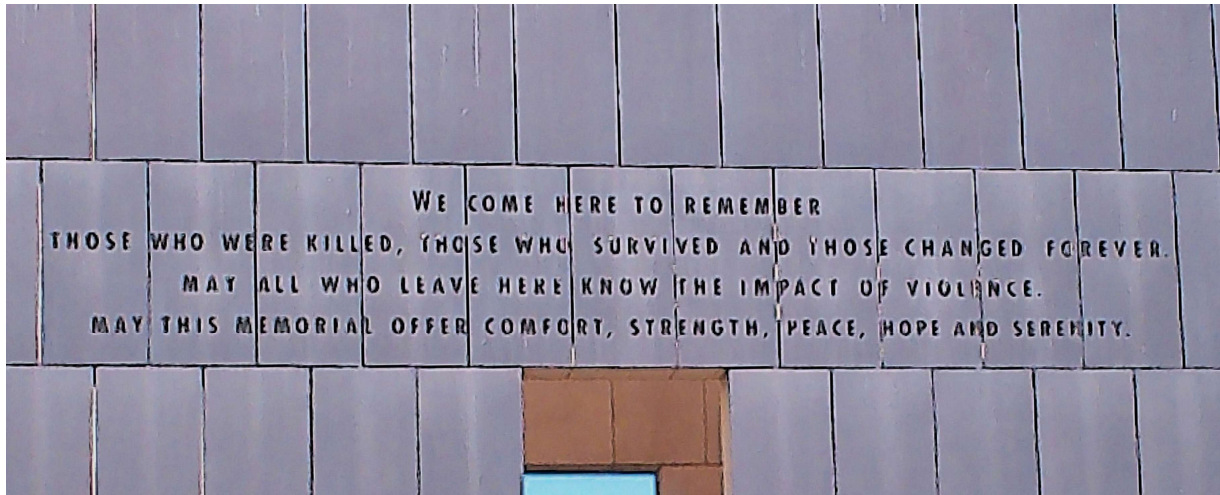


Figure 7.1 Mission statement preamble on the exterior of the 9:01 gate. Photo by Author.

The latent narratives communicated by the memorial are more complex and nuanced. The inscription on the interior of the wall surrounding the survivor tree, “The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated, our deeply rooted faith sustains us” communicates a manifest narrative of civic pride, resilience and faith in God. However, it also suggests a latent narrative of combat in the face of conflict. The efforts to minimize narratives of conflict in favor of peace and healing through commemoration of loss are evidenced throughout the community-based development process and the insistence that discussions of the cause of the bombing be addressed in the memorial center, separate from the Symbolic Memorial.

Analysis of the development and operations documents suggest an effort to minimize signs of federal presence on the memorial site, in the form of federal law enforcement and any logos or symbols of federal agencies. Normally a National Park Service Site would install signage, including the NPS Arrowhead logo, that clearly identifies it with the agency. Such signage was never installed at the OKCNM. After the site was decommissioned as a unit of the National Park Service, the NPS Arrowhead logos were removed from the brochures even though the NPS continues to serve as an affiliate of the OKCNM.

While the Murrah Building Plaza, which serves as an overlook for the Symbolic Memorial, displays the seals of all the federal agencies that were housed in the Murrah Building, this plaza is not directly accessible from the Symbolic Memorial. To reach this overlook, visitors must exit the designed memorial space onto the city sidewalk and find their way to the plaza stairs without the aid of wayfinding signs. The image below shows the stairway access to the Murrah Plaza from the sidewalk on North Harvey Avenue.



Figure 7.2 Murrah Plaza Access on N. Harvey Ave. Photo by the Author.

The latent narrative communicated by de-emphasizing the presence of federal agencies, suggests a narrative of de-escalation in the face of fears of additional violence. The Dateline program that documented the perspectives of local militia members in the year after the bombing confirms that a strong federal presence could be unwelcome from the perspective of some factions of the community. The Symbolic Memorial communicates a narrative of peace and healing in the face of violence through thoughtful design and careful interpretive messaging. But it seeks to eliminate any potential sources of conflict by distancing the visual or interpretive presence of the federal government.

In the introduction to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John Gillis states:

...the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. That identities and memories change over time tends to be obscured by the fact that we too often refer to both as if they had the status of material objects-memory as something that can be retrieved; identity as something that can be lost as well as found. We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena.... Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and “memory work” is, like any other kind of physical or mental labor, embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by who and for what end (Gillis 1994, 3).

The OKCNM seeks to solidify collective identity through shared commemoration of an event that caused trauma on a national scale. The interpretative elements use very limited references to local, state or national affiliations. The minimalist design of the architectural elements coupled with the use of nature to provide a sense of calm and enclosure creates a feeling of protection in which visitors may choose to reflect on the history of trauma on the site or within their own lives. The Symbolic Memorial contributes to collective memory by helping all visitors to reflect on the trauma of the event without reflecting on the source of that trauma, effectively separating cause and effect. This allows visitors to utilize the healing environment of the symbolic memorial as a source of healing for their own traumatic experiences. In this way it encourages visitors to reflect on their own experiences and to consider how they might live their lives in a way that promotes compassion and unity.

The Social Value of Designed Memorials

The current study demonstrates the value of designed memorials as spaces of personal reflection and on-going community engagement in the wake of tragedies. The responses of visitors suggest a high level of engagement with the symbolic elements of the designed landscape and significant emotional responses that are sustained through repeat visitation. A reduction in reports of intensely negative emotional responses among repeat visitors suggests that multiple site visits assist in the processing of event memory or newly acquired knowledge of the tragic event. Visitor's narrative responses include references to personal tragedies and traumatic experiences suffered by friends or acquaintances suggesting that visiting the OKCNM provided an opportunity for processing traumatic experiences unrelated to the memorial or the bombing event. This suggests that a designed memorial at the site of a tragic and widely recognized incident can provide opportunities for catharsis and personal growth through empathy with other victims and survivors and shared experiences of reflection and remembrance.

Using a narrative framework to define, understand and interpret a designed memorial space can provide insight into the needs of different constituencies and accommodate the ways a memorial might change over time. The manifest and latent functions of the memorial were to promote healing through reflection (manifest) and to de-escalate any remaining tensions within the community (latent), which served the community well in the first decades after the bombing. We now see the OKCNM moving into a new phase with greater emphasis on community

programming that focuses on dialogue and broad-based community assistance programs. In terms of narratives, the current phase of expansion is much more indicative of Linenthal's progressive narrative. While the toxic narrative may have influenced the design guidelines and the redemptive narrative played an important role in the aftermath of the bombing, it is the progressive narrative that has risen in prominence as the community has gained strength through years of recovery. This recovery also reflects a narrative of resilience, demonstrated by the continued evolution and growth of the OKCNM within the community. It is interesting that, in spite of the inclusion of "National" in the title, there is very little about the OKCNM that suggests a narrative of national identity. They have successfully retained a local identity characterized by the Oklahoma Standard, despite being labeled a national memorial.

Chapter 8 - Opportunities for Future Research

The primary focus of this study was the visitor experience of the memorial spaces and how that experience reflects the design intentions of the memorial as defined through community engagement during memorial development and contributes to the evolving collective memory surrounding the bombing event as reflected in visitor's survey responses. This study was limited by restrictions on the methodology that could be used to engage with visitors on-site and by a lack of institutional funding to support research time or travel. The limitations of the study and opportunities for research on related topics are outlined below.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings of this study provide useful information for memorial design research, a more in-depth engagement with visitors in the form of open-ended interviews would undoubtedly provide greater understanding of the ways the memorial has influenced personal and collective conceptions of the bombing event and its devastating impact on a large segment of Oklahoma and the surrounding central plains of the United States. With time and dedication, I believe the results of such in-depth conversations could also contribute to a greater understanding of the role designed memorials can play in the emotional recovery of communities devastated by violence and disaster. Engaged conversations utilizing an open-ended interview format with the leadership of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and with the memorial design team, and with members of the community who were involved in the task force and otherwise, could provide insightful reflections on the developments that have occurred over 25 years of evolving operations and additions to the memorial site, the museum and the journal record building.

The topic of how OKCNM and other designed memorials influence collective memory is one that deserves a dedicated study based on firsthand research with multiple memorial sites to allow for comparative evaluation of data. A similarly complex topic relating to the relative success or failure of a memorial planning process would also benefit from in-depth interviews. In having now studied many memorial projects, including some that were never realized, I have come to believe the planning process for a designed memorial to be built in commemoration of a tragic event must facilitate some level of reconciliation within the community for it to be

successful both in terms of design and its potential significance as a symbol of resilience at a broader scale and across generations.

The research presented here suggests that the Oklahoma City National Memorial reaches that higher bar as evidenced by continued visitor engagement and repeat visitation over its life cycle. However, adding an in-depth interview component to this research would provide greater understanding of how designed memorials contribute to our shifting notions of national identity. The lessons learned by those most closely engaged with the design and implementation process would help in understanding what they have learned from the evolution of site use over time.

The Memorial in an Urban Context

This research touched on the role the memorial plays in the evolving urban life of Oklahoma City. The data collected during on-site observations and through the online visitor surveys documents the use of the outdoor memorial spaces by the local community for general purposes such as exercise, lunch with colleagues, and peripatetic business and personal cell phone calls. Observations also suggested the Symbolic Memorial serves as a passageway in place of the 5th street corridor that it replaced as well as a destination for some of the unhoused and underprivileged residents in the area who make use of the memorial spaces for rest, particularly after the museum is closed and the staff have left for the day. Further documenting and analyzing these diverse uses can inform future urban design and social policy and help to address any security concerns related to adjunct and unintentional uses of the memorial space.

A recent study evaluating the quality of urban spaces by Melike Orhan (2025) emphasizes the importance of semi-public spaces to a positive quality of life in urban settings. Semi-public spaces are defined as the spaces between structural groups that are designed as common areas and are available to the public in addition to the occupants of the adjacent structural groups (Orhan 2025, 203). With the documented decline in civic participation in American society since the 1960s (Putnam 2000) designing for social engagement is critical to our ability to engage in trust building activities across socio-cultural boundaries.

On-site observations at the OKCNM demonstrate how a designed memorial in an urban center can accommodate adjunct uses not strictly related to site-based learning or commemoration. These documented uses varied from casual use of the space as a throughfare through the Oklahoma City urban corridor to group activities that use the space for impromptu or

planned gatherings. Given the expense of designing and installing new public spaces, it is economically prudent to provide for multiple uses within urban commemorative spaces. In their book *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*, Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Frank explore the potential for urban memorials to provide critical open space for a variety of purposes, noting, "...planning decisions about memorials are not just decisions about history and remembrance; they are also decisions that shape the wider on-going development of the city" (2016, 202).

The Oklahoma City National Memorial provides semi-public space where visitors can come and go freely, meet friends or have casual conversations with other visitors within a space that is closely monitored, which likely adds a sense of safety. I found most people I approached within this context to be very receptive, even if they were not interested in doing the survey. Only one person seemed suspicious when I offered her the information sheet and described the survey. She relaxed as I explained that I was doing research for my PhD and she responded by saying, "Okay, I just wanted to make sure you weren't one of those radicals." I smiled as I thought about the fact that she and I would probably never have engaged in conversation were it not for the memorial. But our shared interest in this memorial site provided the opportunity for us to have a conversation that might help to bridge our seemingly vast socio-political differences.

Further research on visitor use of semi-public urban spaces and how memorial spaces contribute to social engagement would help designers to create spaces that provide affordances for greater social connection. Understanding what types of affordances encourage people to relax and linger in public spaces or what types of symbolic elements encourage dialogue between people could promote urban design that reduces stress and allows for greater social connectivity.

Better Conversations

As noted, the Symbolic Memorial of the OKCNM provides a space for informal engagement among visitors, which helps to promote dialogue on difficult topics. During my research I observed parents answering questions from their children on complicated topics and couples engaged in thoughtful conversation about the memorial. New interpretive applications now available to OKCNM visitors through online applications provide educational materials to help parents and teachers address these types of questions. Another recently launched program, designed to improve interpersonal dialogue, is titled "Better Conversations." As part of a major construction project that is adding a new entrance for the memorial museum onto the Harvey

street side of the Journal Record Building a temporary lobby and a Better Conversations talking station have been installed in the Symbolic Memorial. These initiatives will increase the OKCNM Museum’s outreach by providing new spaces for engagement and more robust programming.³⁶ The image below shows these new additions to the grounds of the Symbolic Memorial.



Figure 0.1 Better Conversations station with temporary lobby. Photo by Author.

The addition of this Better Conversations kiosk on the grounds of the Symbolic Memorial blurs the line between the contemplative and educational spaces that were previously delineated between the museum and the memorial. Documenting the intent of this civic engagement initiative and the expansion of the museum into the memorial space would aid in understanding changes to the public engagement intent of the organization. It would be helpful to know if this expansion of programming reflects a change in the types of conversations the community is willing to have after 30 years of commemorative activity. Holland concludes with a discussion of the capacity for continuing conversations after a memorial is constructed to make room for contentious viewpoints. “Without this necessary, active, and often contentious engagement with the past, memorials can suppress important aspects of the lived experience of an event, in effect erasing the very meanings that the memorial was intended to represent” (2014, 262)

Perhaps enough time has passed since the bombing to begin a more serious dialogue about the socio-political divisions that continue to fuel conflict within our society. A 2021

³⁶ The OKCNM website provides details on the “Foreword” Initiative and their Better Conversations program (Oklahoma National Memorial and Museum n.d.).

publication of the National Security Council referred to the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building as documentation of the real and evolving threats of domestic terrorism (2021, 5). While the report identified intolerance as a major source of domestic violence and identified the agencies and policies that would be seeking to combat those threats, the lesson from Oklahoma City is that top-down government policies, federal agencies and law enforcement may not be able to provide a remedy to the social discord that drives domestic terrorism. If Better Conversations can teach us how to communicate in a less reactionary way, we might be able to find more common ground. Research that documents the efficacy of the educational programs associated with sites of trauma would be a benefit to society by identifying the methods of social engagement at local and regional scales that foster empathy and tolerance in diverse communities. Understanding the physical context of effective community engagement would support the work of environmental design to create places that encourage social cohesion.

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Appendix A - Archival Documents

The archival documents selected for coding and narrative analysis fall into two sets. The first set consists of planning and operations documents which are internal to the organizations involved in the development of the memorial. The second set consists of public facing documents such as political speeches, newspaper articles, and OKCNM publications.

Table A.1 lists the planning and operations documents. It is followed by the coding and analysis notations for each document. The documents are identified with Alpha-numeric headings with the table caption number followed by lower-case letters (A.1.a, A.1.b, etc.).

The public facing documents are listed in Table A.2 which is followed by the coding and narrative analysis for each document and are labeled A.2 followed by consecutive lower-case letters in the same format as A.1. For a list of OKCNM archival resources consulted see Appendix B. Scans of OKCNM brochures (which are included in the analysis of public facing documents within the text) are provided in Appendix C.

Appendix Table A.1 Planning and Operations Documents for Narrative Analysis

Document	Author	Role/organization	Date	Purpose
Final Report	The Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee	Co-Chairs Sydney Dobson, Polly Nichols, Jimmy Goodman	3/1/1996	Share Public Input on Ideas for the Memorial
Final Report	Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee	Co-Chairs Phillip Thompson and Toby Thompson	3/1/1996	Share thoughts about Memorial Themes
Final Report	Community Meetings Sub-Group Chairs	A Sub-group of the Memorial Ideas and Input Subcommittee	2/27/1996	Report on community ideas for memorial concept/design.
Memorial Mission Statement	Advisory Committee with Input from Subcommittees	Responsible for developing the Mission Statement	3/26/1996	Guide the Development and Future Operations of the Memorial
Statement at Signing of the OKCNM Act of 1997	Clinton Administration	U.S. President/Department of the Interior	10/9/1997	Announce NPS/Memorial Foundation Partnership
Progress Report	Robert Johnson, Chairman	Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation	4/1/1999	Documents Development Activities
Memo	Mary A. Bomar	Superintendent OKC Memorial	2/28/2001	Recognize Achievements
Annual Superintendents Report FY2000	Mary A. Bomar	Superintendent OKC Memorial	2/28/2001	Highlights Accomplishments
Long-Range Interpretive Plan	Institutional	National Park Service and the National Memorial Trust	9/1/2001	Sets Direction for Interpretation for 7-10 years
Annual NPS Superintendent's Report FY 2002	Mary A. Bomar	Superintendent for the Oklahoma City National Memorial	1/22/2003	Documents Activities of NPS Staff
Annual NPS Superintendent's Report FY 2003	Mary A. Bomar	Superintendent for the Oklahoma City National Memorial	10/31/2003	Documents Activities of NPS Staff
Fundraising Letter	Kari Watkins and Susan Chambers	The OCNM Museum and Foundation	4/14/2025	Annual Fundraising - 30th Anniversary

A.1 Planning and Operations Documents

A.1.a

Document: *Final Report of The Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee*. Co-Chairs of the Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee of the Memorial Task Force were Phillip Thompson and Toby Thompson

Date: 3/1/1996

Purpose: Share thoughts about Memorial Themes with Advisory Committee

Content: The Subcommittee defined a process and timeline and how they would communicate with other Task Force Committees.

Description: Began with anger and distrust but progressed to working as a family unit. Focused on keeping an open mind and being inclusive throughout the process.

Key Words and Phrases: Anger, Victims, Survivors, Children, Sense of Pride, Universal, Peaceful/serene, Quiet/Comfort, Educational, Spiritual/Sacred, Hope/Comfort, Loss of Innocence.

A.1.b

Document: *Final Report of The Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee*. Co-Chairs of the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee of the Memorial Task Force were Sydney Dobson, Polly Nichols, Jimmy Goodman

Date: 3/1/1996

Purpose: To provide Recommendations to the Advisory Committee of the Memorial Task Force that would help guide the creation of a memorial design.

Content: Provides historical context, explains formation of the subcommittee and the tasks they were assigned and shares the results of their work

Description: The final report provides background on creation, history of meetings/actions, descriptions of community meetings and memorial constituents. Sought widespread public participation that allowed people to share their feelings. Determined to listen carefully and record accurately and maintain an approach of sensitivity and inclusiveness.

Key Words and Phrases: Horror, Grief and Loss, Compassion, Dignity, Generosity, Tragedy, Sensitivity, Inclusivity, Despair, Hopelessness

A.1.c

Document: *Memorial Survey Summary of Results*, The Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee Co-Chairs of the Memorial Ideas Input Subcommittee of the Memorial Task Force were Sydney Dobson, Polly Nichols, Jimmy Goodman

Date: 3/1/1996

Purpose: To Share the Public Input on Ideas for the memorial collected by public survey and community meetings.

Content: Explains the survey process that was used to gather public input, provides recommendations based on that input and reflects on the process in parting thoughts.

Key Words: Remembrance, Honoring, Community (Spirit of Unity) Serenity, Peacefulness, Reflection, Historical, Educational, Awe-inspiring, Powerful, Compassion, Hope, and Loss

Note: Key Words for this section are drawn from the Summary of Public Input Section in the Final Report. The committee emphasized the need for a serene environment that encourages reflection and educates about the futility of terrorism.

A.1.d

Document: *Memorial Mission Statement*, Advisory Committee of the Memorial Task Force with Input from Subcommittees

Date: 3/26/1996

Purpose: To Guide the Development and Future Operation of the Memorial

Content: The Mission Statement begins with the Preamble: "We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the Impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity." The document shares the adopted mission statement which provides guidance for applicants to the design competition and explains the background and context in which it was defined and drafted. "The story of the bombing does not stop with the attack itself. The far-reaching impact of the bombing and its historic nature requires a uniquely inclusive development process for the memorial."

Key Words: remember, peace, spirituality, hope, cherished children, comfort, recognition, learning, stories, survivor tree, historic, inclusive, comfort, strength, serenity, changed forever.

Note:

A.1.e

Document: *Progress Report – Introduction: Plotting Our Progress* by Robert Johnson, Chairman, Memorial Task Force

Date: 4/1/1999

Purpose: Introduces the Chairman's Report Provide updates on Memorial Development Progress

Content: Emphasizes the collective nature of the various ceremonies and actions. "You make a life out of what you give."

Key Words: transformed (site) healing (community), tragedy, unprecedented resilience, courage, strength, generosity, unity

Note: This was the introduction to the progress report which contained chapters on multiple topics (see A1.f)

A.1.f

Document: *Progress Report-"Moving" Fence Ceremony* - OKCNM Staff wrote, compiled and edited various parts of the report.

Date: 4/1/1999

Purpose: Report on the collective process of moving the chain-link fence to allow for construction on the memorial. Documents the alteration of the Butzer's original design to include a portion of the chain-link fence on the exterior of the memorial wall facing N. Harvey Ave.

Content: The Butzers added three sections of the fence on the exterior of the 9:03 gate at the request of the families, survivors and rescue workers. The fence serves as a symbol of compassion and as a testament to the victim's control over the memorial design and the importance of providing space for spontaneous commemorations to continue.

Key Words: compassion, sympathy, despair, hope, love, healing, tributes, survivors, symbolically healing

A.1.g

Document: *Progress Report - The Survivor Tree Stands Tall*, OKCNM Staff

Date: 4/1/1999

Purpose: Describes the significance of the Tree as a symbol within the Memorial Design.

Content: Explains the efforts that were made to provide for the future health of the Survivor Tree in the memorial design. The promontory construction was designed to provide for the root structure of the tree.

Key Words or Phrases: The Tree Casts a Powerful Shadow as well as shade and is recognized as a symbol of survival, powerful shadow, minimize impact, withstood harsh conditions, urban development, cruelest terrorism, bloomed again.

A.1.h

Document: *Progress Report - The Last Look Inside the Rubble* Joan Gilmore Journal Record columnist

Date: 11/20/1998

Purpose: Provides testimony on the condition of the building

Content: A prominent columnist that worked in the Journal Record Building relates the experience of walking through the building for the first time after the bombing. Had she been in her office she would have been killed by the blast.

Key Words and Phrases: courage, miracle, fateful, grateful, shattered, innocence stolen, devastation, humble

A.1.i

Document: *Memo* from Mary A. Bomar, Superintendent OKC Memorial

Date: 2/28/2001

Purpose: Highlight agency commitment, recognizes achievements and celebrate partnership milestones achieved, mentions the opening of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum Center, and acknowledges the financial issues that lie ahead.

Content: This memo from Mary Bohmar, OKCNM Superintendent to Mike Snyder, Deputy Regional Director, Intermountain Region of the NPS serves as the cover to the annual report.

Key Words and Phrases: unique partnership, milestone, goals, community, together, amazing, Oklahoma Standard, unprecedented partnership

Notes: "When people share the same goals amazing things can be achieved. The Oklahoma Standard should be benchmarked across U.S.A."

A.1.j

Document: *Annual NPS Superintendents Report FY2000*, Mary A. Bomar, Superintendent OKC Memorial

Date: 2/28/2001

Purpose: Report on the activities of a park unit to the next higher NPS official.

Highlights partnership accomplishments for fiscal year 2000, Documents partnership activities, expenditures and progress toward shared goals, Sections address: non-personal services,

Education and Outreach, Administration, Resource Protection, Training and Management Highlights.

Content: Bombing left Americans feeling that security had been destroyed. Forces that sought to divide would not defeat us

Key Words and Phrases: nation, spirit, hope, determination, repelling terrorism, insidious effects, compassion, selflessness

A.1.k

Document: *Long Range Interpretive Plan* National Park Service and the National Memorial Trust,

Date: 9/1/2001

Purpose: Sets the Tone and Direction for Memorial Interpretation for 7-10 years. Considers interpretation very broadly to include all forms of messaging, tours and educational programs. Addresses: Role of associated programs, publications, brochures, guidebooks, etc.

Content: Includes the organization mission statements for each partner and the framework for their collaboration with a focus on defining Interpretive Themes and Sub-Themes.

Key Words and Phrases: The defined Interpretive Themes are conceptual: A. Violence impacts everyone involved and B. The response to violence in spirit, hope and compassion repels the effects of terrorism. The following sub-themes relate intangible concepts to the tangible elements of the Symbolic Memorial: Innocence/9:01 Gate, damage and disruption/building remains and Survivor's Wall, beautiful and serene/Reflecting Pool, sacred place/ Murrah Building footprint, resilience/Survivor Elm, countless, united, specialists/Rescuer's Orchard, healing and compassion/Children's Area, emotional and heartfelt/The Fence, honor/orchard and promontory inscription.

A.1.l

Document: *Annual NPS Superintendent's Report FY 2002*, Mary A. Bomar, NPS Oklahoma State Coordinator & Oklahoma City National Memorial Superintendent

Date: 1/22/2003

Purpose: Provides details of NPS Oklahoma State coordinator activities for the fiscal year. Documents partnership activities, expenditures and progress toward shared goals.

Content: Bomar announces departure for Philadelphia. The Memorial Partnership Section of the report provides details on park operations, educational opportunities through the museum, and outdoor interpretive programming in the symbolic memorial space. Bomar notes that partnership was not always easy for the Memorial Trust or the NPS, but they made great strides in melding operations. The memorial is not just for people to remember, but to learn through educational programs.

Key Words and Phrases: Sense of hope, civic renewal, impact of violence, outstanding job (Trust personnel), forging ahead, partnership challenges, leadership transition. bittersweet departure

A.1.m

Document: *Annual NPS Superintendent's Report FY 2003*, Connie Rudd, NPS Oklahoma State Coordinator & Oklahoma City National Memorial Superintendent

Date: 10/31/2003

Purpose: Provides details of NPS Oklahoma State coordinator activities for the fiscal year. Documents partnership activities, expenditures and progress toward shared goals.

Content: The Memorial Partnership Section of the report documents a request for appropriations from congress due to declining visitation and revenue. The Interpretive/Education program at the Memorial is a synergistic team effort that fulfills the mission of the memorial partners. Volunteers provide high level service.

Key Words and Phrases: dedication, compassion, sensitivity, eagerness, top-notch service, remembering, honoring, interpreting.

Note: The key words in this document all come from the description of the work carried out by volunteers.

A.1.n

Document: Fundraising Letter, Kari Watkins, OKCNM President and CEO and Susan Chambers, Board Chair

Date: 4/14/2025

Purpose: Raise funds for the "Foreward Capital Campaign"

Content: Includes information on the museum expansion and new programming the campaign will fund. Direct mail campaign to previous donors requesting support for a capital campaign.

Key Words and Phrases: 30th Anniversary Message: A Day of Darkness, Years of Light; unimaginable, shook nation, power, courage, resilience, hope, pivotal, poignant

Appendix Table A.1 Public Media and Publications for Narrative Analysis

Document Type	Author	Date	Publisher/Website	Title	Description
President's Remarks	William J. Clinton	4/23/1995	https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/220890	Remarks at a Memorial Service for the Bombing Victims in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	Public Speech
Newspaper Article	Jesse Katz	4/19/1997	https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-04-19-mn-50375-story.html	Memorial: A Driving Need for Catharsis	Critique of Memorial Process in Historical context
President's Statement	William J. Clinton	10/9/1997	U.S. Government Information	Statement on Signing the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997	Published Statement
Vice Presidents Statement	Al Gore	10/25/1998	https://clintonwhitehouse3.archives.gov/WH/EOP/OVP/speeches/okcity.html	Oklahoma City National Memorial Dedication	Transcript available online. Included in the Progress Report for the Memorial Task Force.
OKCNM	Education Committee	2001	OKCNM Trust	On American Soil: A Day to Remember	Illustrations by Tori Butzer
OKCNM	Staff	2020	OKCNM Foundation	25th Anniversary Publication	Promotional
OKCNM	Hardy Watkins and Ann Clark	7/17/2006 revised for 2025	OKCNM Foundation	A Day of Darkness, Years of Light:	30th Anniversary Walking Tour

A.2 Public Facing Documents

A.2.a

Document: *Transcript of President William J. Clinton's Remarks at a Memorial Service for the Bombing Victims at the Oklahoma Fair Grounds in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

Date: 4/23/1995

Purpose: To recognize the loss of life and acknowledge the scope of the bombing.

Content: This speech was a memorial tribute but also acknowledgement of the need for justice. The focus was on collective mourning "our nation joins you in grief" and called on the nation to purge the "dark forces that gave rise to this evil."

Description: Clinton offers words of comfort and praises the rescue efforts. He recognizes the federal employees and children who were victims, acknowledges trees as symbols of strength and shares a story of encouragement from a woman whose husband was killed in the Pan Am bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Messages: Collective National Mourning. Pledged to help heal the injured, rebuild the city and bring justice. Acknowledged the employees who were citizens doing their duty to help others. Noting we have a "...duty to purge ourselves of the dark forces which gave rise to this evil."

Key Words: Nation, Grief, Mourn, Pain, Peace, Freedom, Righteousness, and Justice

Notes: Clinton uses religious ideology in asking the nation to purge the dark forces that gave rise to evil. He quotes proverbs 11:29 "Those who trouble their own house will inherit the wind."

The dichotomy of good against evil is represented by the good workers - the citizens who were doing their work. They were carrying out the work of the nation when they were attacked by the evil perpetrators of the bombing.

A.2.b

Document: Newspaper Article by Jesse Katz, Los Angeles Times

Title: *Memorial: A Driving Need for Catharsis*

Date: 4/19/1997

Purpose: Review Memorial Efforts and Public Sentiments. Critique of Scope.

Content: Overview of OKCNM development effort, highlights fast pace of Memorialization and conflict over professional guidance vs. victim and survivor control.

Description: Compares Current and Past Memorialization Processes; reference to 168 people killed in 1944 arson fire who were never commemorated. OKC Victims or not waiting for history do define a memorial, they seek catharsis, scholars are critical.

Key Words and Phrases: reclaiming, commemorating, senselessness, Spiritual Magnitude, unprecedented (memorial scope and crime), Grieving, Catharsis and Healing, Conquering Evil

Notes: Distance in time allows for focus on Heroism or Patriotism. Time of the explosion figured prominently in design submissions. William Savage focused on fetishistic aspects.

Bodmar - today we commemorate victims not heroes. Trading on Death - Historians are troubled. Losing the sympathy of the Nation (Kathleen Treanor).

A.2.c

Document: *President Clinton's Statement on Signing the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997*

Date: 10/9/1997

Purpose: Announce and Define the Partnership between the NPS and the Memorial Foundation

Content: Establishes the Oklahoma City National Memorial as a unit of the NPS with funding for 2 years of development assistance, after which the NPS will be paid for services.

Description: Sets out the details for providing assistance to the OKCNM Foundation through the creation of a Federal Government Corporation. Defines the bombing as a tragedy that is significant to the Nation, which compels the establishment of a National Shrine.

Key Words and Phrases: Significance, Tragedy, National shrine, heal (the injured), rebuild (the city), tremendous (public outreach), commend (hard work), memorialize (innocent victims)

A.2.d

Document: *Groundbreaking Remarks*, Vice-President Gore, White House Representative

Date: 10/25/1998

Purpose: Show commitment of the federal government to assist with the on-going development

Content: Provided words of encouragement and emphasized the memorialization of the victims, emphasized the national perspective.

Description: Using the language of *National Identity* he equates the victims with soldiers who paid the price of freedom.

Key Words and Phrases: “Today we gather to see the light, to find in this soil, nourished with a million tears, the harvest of Gods Healing Grace.” Healing Grace, never forget, victims, cruelest evil, nation, honor, price of freedom, duty to country.

A.2.e

Document: *On American Soil: A Day to Remember* OCNM Education Committee and Tori Butzer Illustrations Published by the OCNM Trust

Date: 2001

Purpose: Provides Explanation of the Bombing for Children, Explains What Happened Simply.

Key Words and Phrases: *Changed Forever*, Working, Explosion, Destroyed (Building), Tree Survived, Helpers, Rescue Dogs, Rescued, Trial, Remember

A.2.f

Document: The Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum 25th Anniversary Publication, Selection of nine sections analyzed for Key Words and Phrases.

Date: 2020

Purpose: Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum OCNM Foundation 25th Anniversary Publication

Key Words and Phrases from First Section, Looking Back: Looking Back, Thinking Forward, Darkest Hour. Spirit Shone Brightest, extraordinary heroes, witnessed, kindest, reframed that day, response , story and lessons, teach, reach, coming generations

Key Words and Phrases from Second Section, 25th Anniversary Initiatives: Our Deeply Rooted Faith Sustains Us, 168 Day Remembrance Campaign, remembering, honoring, thanking, unifying direction, not forgotten, forward-thinking vision, listening/sharing, inspiring strength

Key Words and Phrases from Third Section, Marketing and Fundraising: Oklahoma City Thunder Memorial City Uniform: International Appeal, Global Audience, New Generation, Symbolic design, Remembrance: Preamble to Mission Statement, Oklahoma Standard: "Service, Honor, Kindness," Survivor Tree: "Resilience and Growth," Reflecting Pool: "Peaceful, Quiet"

Key Words and Phrases from Forth Section, First Responders Partnership: A Day of Honor and Unity symbolized by the exchange of Jerseys between the NY knicks and the OKC Thunder. Paying Tribute, Partnership, Shared Experience, torn apart, built back stronger

Key Words and Phrases from Fifth Section, Experiential Engagement, Special Arts Events: Lyrical Reflection, Remembrance, Resilience, Hope

Key Words and Phrases from Sixth Section, Powerful Messages: Quotes from Political Officials. This is the time for us to be Thinking Forward, Survived, Thrived, Grown, Strengthened, Impossible to Forget, After Evil - Came Good, Not Defeated, A Promise Kept, Overcome Evil with Good, Responsibility, Obligation, Faith

Key Words and Phrases from Seventh Section, Thinking Forward – Global Thought

Leaders: Lessons Learned, Listening, Sharing, Inspiring, Healing, Strength, Resilience, Growth

Key Words and Phrases from Eighth Section, Better Conversations – Grounding Virtues, Words Matter: Hospitality, Humility, Patience, Generous Listening, Adventurous Civility
Key Words and Phrases from Ninth Section, Reflection, A Community Stands Together: Devastating Tragedy, Resolute, Faith, Courage, Conviction, Healing, Grateful

A.2.g

Document: A Day of Darkness, Years of Light: 30th Anniversary Walking Tour by Hardy Watkins and Ann Clark, The Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation

Date: 2025

Purpose: Serves as an Introduction to the Eight areas of the Symbolic Memorial (Analyzed below) and Overview and Summary of the 10 Chapters of the Memorial Museum (analysis not included). The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is a private 503 (c) 3 foundation. It is recognized as a National Monument and affiliate of the National Park Service.

Key Words and Phrases from Preface: Living monument, Remembering, Educating, Senselessness of Violence, Hope , Memories. Meaning, America

Key Words and Phrases from The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial: International competition, largest memorial design competition, fitting tribute, honor, most visited.

Key Words and Phrases from Gates of Time: The design symbolism and the importance of light, monumental markers of time, innocence (before), healing (after), senselessness (of violence), magnitude (of loss), spirit (of healing), impactful, breathtaking, renewal

Key Words and Phrases from Reflecting Pool: Water introduces from four locations, walking through the Gates of Time, peaceful, impactful, reflection, understand(ing)

Key Words and Phrases from Field of Empty Chairs: Positioning indicates location and small size represents children vs. adults, stately (pines), sense of softness, protection, symbolic, fill a void, brutally (cut short), soft warm glow, illuminates (each base).

Key Words and Phrases from Survivor Wall: Engraving of more than 600 names on the only remaining section of the building, quiet, salvaged, survived

Key Words and Phrases from Survivor Tree: symbol of resilience, continued growth, roots flourish, seating, stunning overlook, powerful messages, courageous, caring, eternal gratitude

Key Words and Phrases from Rescuer's Orchard: heroic rescue, recovery, offered expertise and hearts, rest, reflection

Key Words and Phrases from Children's Area: tremendous outpouring, sympathy, encouragement, healing messages, letters of thanks, love, support, gratitude, spirit of caring

Appendix B - OKCNM Archival Resources Reviewed

Series 349.001 Box 1a - Briefing Book 1996-1998

Series 398.01.001 Box 1 Folder 35 Bombing Memorial Concert, Folder 43 Governor Keating Remarks, Folder 44 Clinton Speech, Folder 45, Cathy Keating Remark

Series 399.22.001 Memorial Museum Architectural Program Charette

Series 399.22.001 Pre Bid Conference

Series 399.23.001 Intergovernmental Letter

Series 399.24.001 White House Speech 8/13/97

Series 399.29.001 Announcement of Memorial Design Winners

Series 474.001.101 Design Competition

Series 294.11.001 GSA, Garage Exhibit

Series 294.13.001 Contributors List

Series 294.15.001 As We See It – Murrah Memorial Fence

Series 294.19.001 Exhibit at the National Building Museum

Series 294.18.001 Sewing Comfort Quilt Exhibit

Series 299.4427.1 Bob Johnson Collection B1F3, F14 and F15 Board Meeting Minutes

Series 299.4427.2 Box 2 Folder 2-5 Design Solicitation and Competition

Series 399.01.001-399.16.001 Visit from Political Officials, Public Events, Fundraisers and Receptions

Series 474.001 Box 5 Folder 4 National Park Service Final Report and Interpretive Themes

Series 474.001 Box 5 Folder 12 Survivor Wall, Folder 26 Final Draft Operations Plan

Series 287.001 Folders 1-4, Edward Linenthal Correspondence and Contract

Series 474.001.05 Five Year Strategic Plan developed with National Park Service

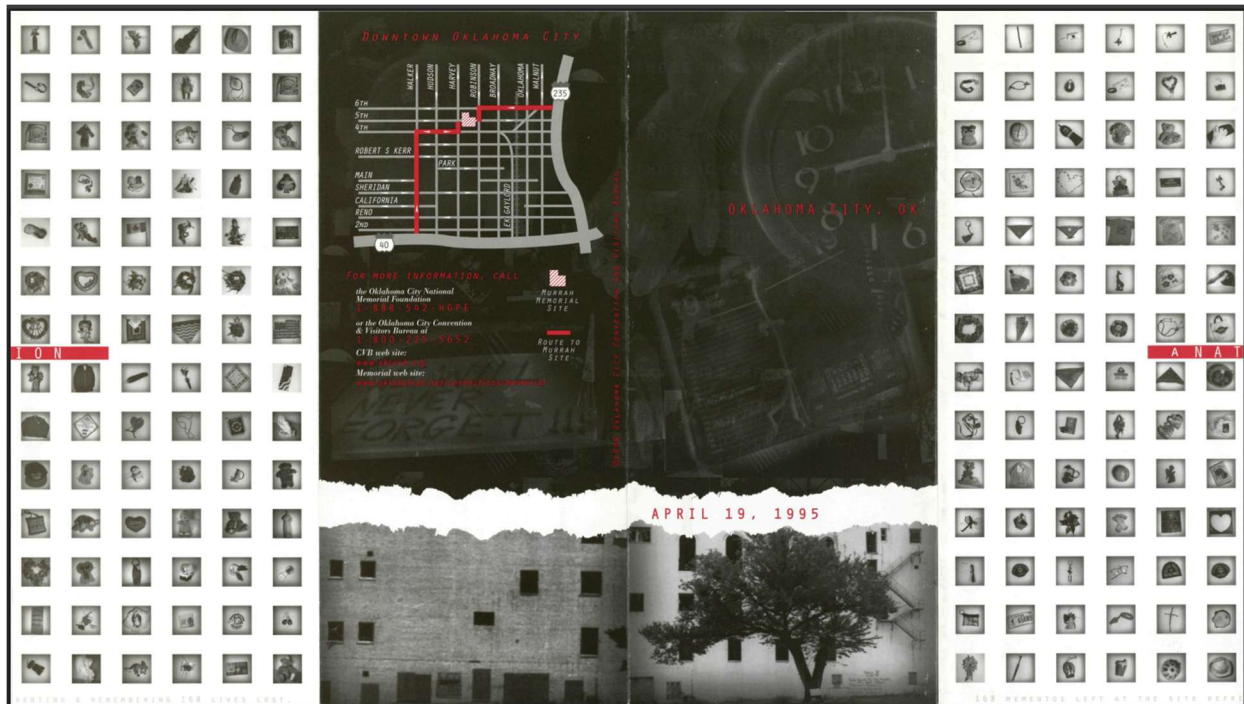
Appendix C - Official Site Brochures

The brochures included in this Appendix were archived and published on the website, National Park Service History.com (2026) ³⁷except for the most recent, the 30th Anniversary Brochure, which was collected as part of the on-site observations. While the brochures are not dated, it was possible to organize them by time periods based on their content and known changes to the site and organizational structure of the memorial and museum. The content of these brochures is discussed in Chapter 6 under the heading “Archival and Media Research,” and referenced as proper in other chapters.

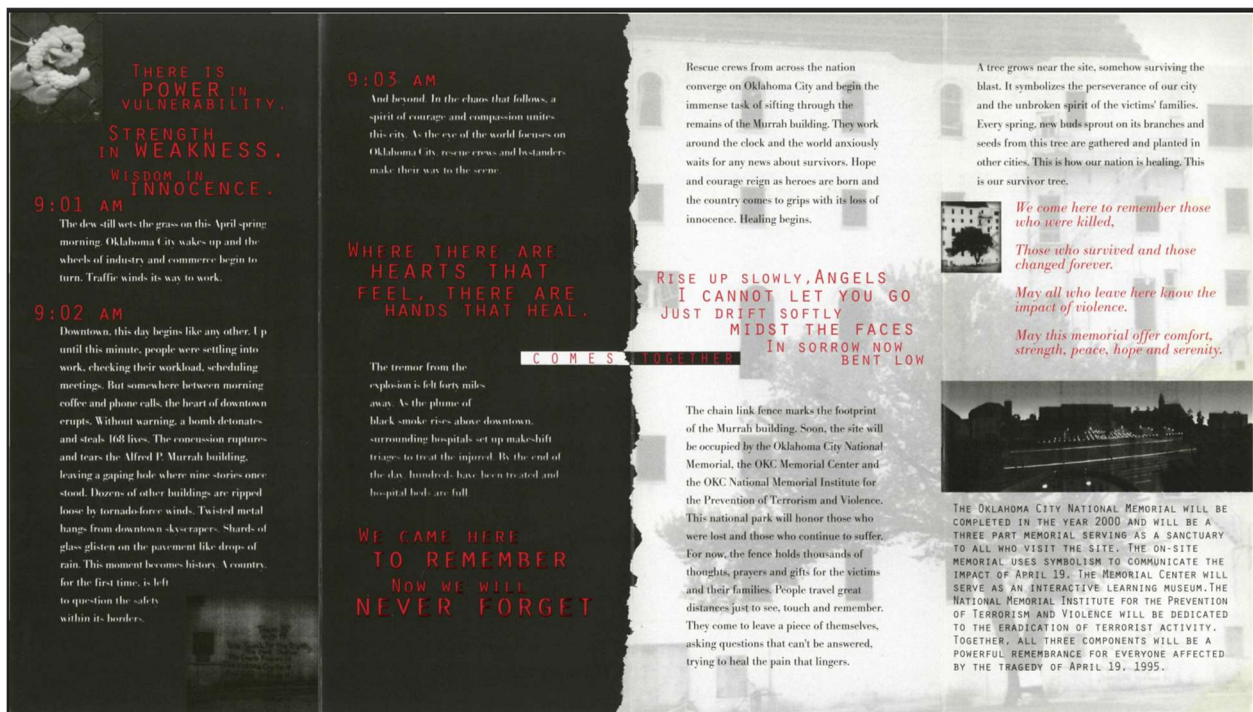
³⁷ This website is not owned or managed by the National Park Service but maintains a digital electronic archive of materials produced by or affiliated with National Park Service units, their partners and other federal land management agencies. The site’s byline reads “NPS History.com – Digital Hoarding Since 2013.”

The Conceptual Phase

Appendix Figure C.1 Exterior of brochure used prior to the completion of the memorial.

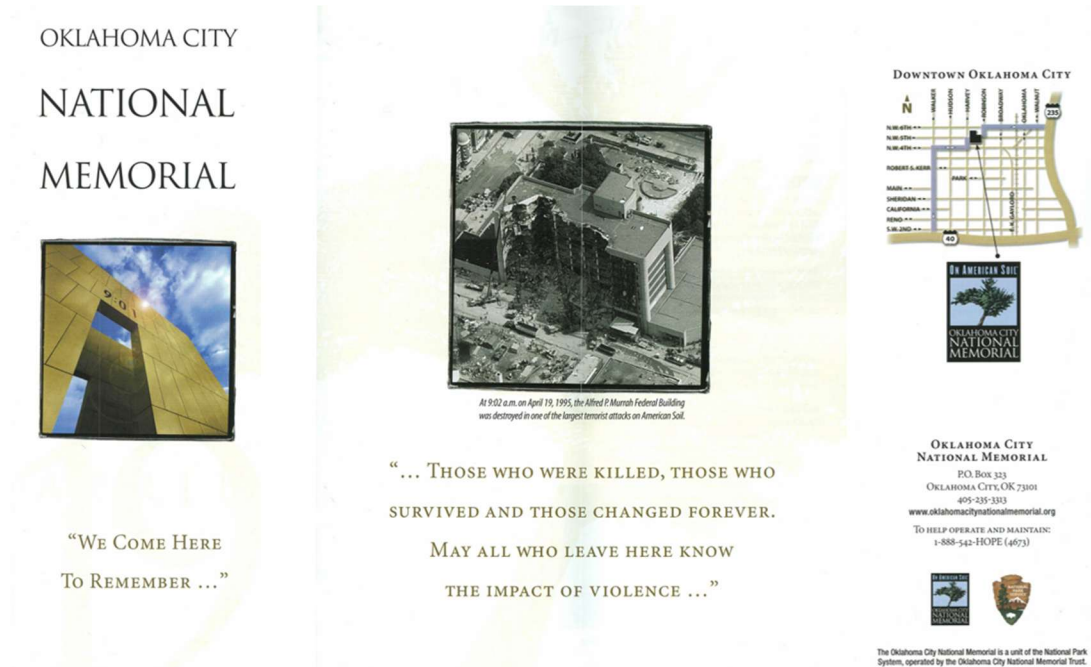


Appendix Figure C.2 Interior of brochure used prior to the completion of the memorial



The Initial Operation Phase

Appendix Figure C.3 Brochure Exterior – During Memorial Trust Operation.



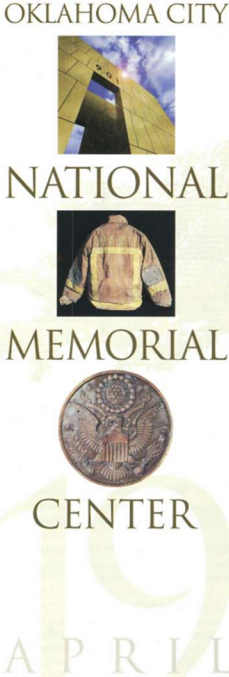
Appendix Figure C.4 Brochure Interior – During Memorial Trust Operation.



Appendix Figure C.5 Brochure Exterior – Oklahoma City National Memorial Center

WE COME HERE TO REMEMBER

OKLAHOMA CITY



APRIL

THOSE WHO WERE KILLED. THOSE WHO SURVIVED AND THOSE CHANGED FOREVER



The Memorial Center is an interactive learning museum that occupies the west end of the former Journal Record Building. Built in 1923, this building withstood the April 19, 1995, bombing and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The second component mandated by the Memorial's mission statement, the Memorial Center takes you on a chronological, self-guided tour through the story of April 19, 1995 and the bombing of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.



MEMORIAL CENTER OPERATIONS

HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday - Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
 Sunday: 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
 Thanksgiving: Closed
 Christmas: Closed
 New Year's Day: Closed

ADMISSION PRICES

Adult: \$7.00
 Senior (62+): \$6.00
 Student 6-17 years or college student with current ID: \$5.00
 5 years and under: FREE

Tickets are sold up until one hour prior to closing.
 Please no photography or recording device of any kind in the Memorial Center.

GROUP INFORMATION

Please schedule in advance for special pricing groups and educational/school groups. For more group information, please call 405-235-3313, ext. 222, Monday through Friday.

Daytime and evening meetings and other special events may be held in the Temporary Exhibit Hall. To make arrangements or check availability, please call 405-235-3313, ext. 233.

DOWNTOWN OKLAHOMA CITY



Oklahoma City National Memorial
 620 N. Harvey Avenue
 Oklahoma City, OK 73102
 405-235-3313 or fax 405-235-3315
 www.oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org



The Oklahoma City National Memorial is a unit of the National Park System operated by the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust. The Memorial does not receive annual appropriations. The Trust actually reimburses the National Park Service for ranger staffing at the Memorial site. All funds to operate the Oklahoma City National Memorial are raised through admission fees, Memorial Store sales, the Memorial Membership program and an endowment. Thank you for your support.

Appendix Figure C.6 Brochure Interior – Oklahoma City National Memorial Center.

MAY ALL WHO LEAVE HERE KNOW

THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE OF THE LARGEST TERRORIST ATTACKS ON AMERICAN SOIL.

CHAPTER 1 A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER
 April 19, 1995, began like any other day. Here you will see highlights of routine morning activities and everyday life in Oklahoma City.

CHAPTER 2A HISTORY OF THE SITE
 An overview of the history of the neighborhood in and around the Murrah Building.

CHAPTER 2B BACKGROUND ON TERRORISM
 What is terrorism? Learn the basic who, what, when, where and why of terrorism as it impacted America from 1985 to April 1995. Interactive touch-screen computer stations provide more in-depth information.

CHAPTER 3A A HEARING
 Imagine yourself in the setting of an Oklahoma Water Resources Board hearing room at 9:00 a.m. on April 19, 1995, just across the street from the Murrah building. In this room, you will hear audio of the hearing underway... then at 9:02 a.m., the actual explosion and confusion that followed.

CHAPTER 3B CONFUSION
 Following the explosion, exit into a narrow hall where you will see helicopter news footage taken at 9:13 a.m., of the ravaged building — the first images broadcast to people at home and around the country.

CHAPTER 4A CHAOS
 Aerial scenes and murals in this room depict the first minutes after the bombing. Kiosks are randomly positioned in the space to give you a sense of the uncertainty of where to go and what happens next.

CHAPTER 4B SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES
 Watch a video that shows the chaos, initial response and rescue in the first hour and a half after the bombing. Survivors tell their own stories through oral histories.

INVESTIGATION STORY: THE FIRST HOURS
 Discover the early clues and gain an understanding of the complexity of the initial investigative work that took place.

CHAPTER 5A WORLD REACTION
 Step into a fast-paced media environment that shows news footage and special bulletins from around the globe about the bombing.

CHAPTER 5B RESCUE AND RECOVERY
 Stories of the local rescuers, medical community, Incident Command set-up, trapped survivor rescues, construction volunteers, changing weather conditions and more are outlined.

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE. MAY THIS MEMORIAL OFFER COMFORT, STRENGTH, PEACE, HOPE AND SERENITY.



CHAPTER 6 WATCHING AND WAITING
 Focus from April 20, 1995, to May 14, 1995. You will learn more about rescue and recovery operations, USAR teams, the Family Assistance Center, the Oklahoma Standard, cards and letters, a national outpouring and special ceremonies to end rescue and recovery.

CHAPTER 6B FUNERALS AND MOURNING
 Imagine the enormity of loss felt by families and survivors. You will see images of faith traditions and excerpts from funerals of those killed in the bombing.

INVESTIGATION STORY: THE FIRST DAYS
 Learn about the leads on a suspect in the bombing and an accomplice. Then, see the story of the arrests.

CHAPTER 7 GALLERY OF HONOR
 This is the most beautiful room in the museum. It honors the lives of the 168 who were killed. Their photographs are placed throughout the room, along with artifacts related to the families.

CHAPTER 7 REMEMBRANCE AND REBUILDING
 This theater experience takes you through the first five anniversaries of the April 19, 1995, bombing and the milestones related to the Memorial process. Just beyond Chapter 8, the **Damaged Area** is a bombed section of the Journal Record Building that has been protected and preserved throughout construction. See first-hand the devastation caused by the bomb.

Along the **Wall of Justice**, examine the trial timeline and follow the story of the trial through newspaper headlines and reproductions of actual courtroom drawings by artist Pat Lopez.

CHAPTER 8B HOPE
 This space is filled with natural light through windows that overlook the outdoor Memorial grounds. Various symbols of hope are highlighted, and you can listen to closing thoughts from those who lost the most on April 19, 1995.

The pathway leading to the **Children's Area** is a trail of 27,000 pennies. Inside, children are invited to watch videos about helpers, read a children's big book called "A Day To Remember" and log on to computers for an interactive tour of the outdoor Memorial and its symbolism.

Share your own thoughts about April 19, 1995, in the **Memorial Registry** as you view some of the newspaper editorial cartoons related to the bombing. Learn more about the types of items currently housed in the Memorial Archives.

TEMPORARY EXHIBIT HALL
 Rotating exhibits, panel discussions and meetings related to the mission of the Oklahoma City National Memorial will be held in this area.

Don't forget to visit the **Memorial Store** on the lobby level for special gifts and keepsakes. Just outside the store, the **Donor Recognition Gallery** shows those who contributed to help build this nation's lasting tribute.

To learn more about our **membership program**, call 405-235-3313, ext. 221.

The Independent Operation Phase

Appendix Figure C.7 Brochure Exterior

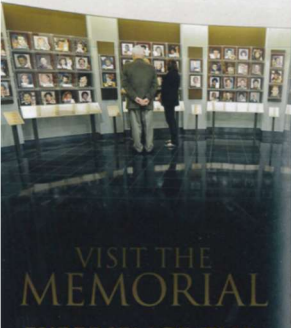


Appendix Figure C.8 Brochure Interior



Appendix Figure C.9 Brochure Exterior, Advertising New Exhibits

WE COME HERE TO REMEMBER
THOSE WHO WERE KILLED,
THOSE WHO SURVIVED AND
THOSE WHO CHANGED FOREVER.
MAY ALL WHO LEAVE HERE KNOW THE
IMPACT OF VIOLENCE. MAY THIS
MEMORIAL OFFER COMFORT, STRENGTH,
PEACE, HOPE AND SERENITY.



**VISIT THE
MEMORIAL
EXPERIENCE THE
MUSEUM**

The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial is a place of quiet reflection. The Memorial Museum is a place of amazing transformation. Each offers a unique insight into the events of April 19, 1995, but to truly experience this place of honor and hope, we strongly encourage you to visit both. In fact, the outdoor grounds will be more meaningful and memorable after experiencing the entire story of the bombing as presented in the Museum.

The Museum entrance is just north of the 903 Gate in the west end of the former Journal Record Building.

LISTEN TO THE DESIGNERS TELL THE STORY OF THE MEMORIAL

Cell Phone Tour
Use your cell phone to learn about the symbolism of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum's Outdoor Symbolic Memorial, any time, day or night.

Stop Numbers	14 - Field of Empty Chairs	18 - Children's Area
10 - Survivor Tree	15 - Reflecting Pool	20 - Memorial Museum
11 - Gates of Time	17 - Rescuers' Orchard	
12 - Survivor Wall	19 - An Army of Ones	
13 - Lobby Pines	16 - Journal Record Building	
	18 - A Shared Anniversary	



Look for this sign throughout the Memorial site, call in and follow the prompts.
DIAL 405.445.4792

Group Information
Special pricing is available for school and tour groups with advance reservations. For more group information, please call 405.235.3313. Monday through Friday, or log on to www.OklahomaCityNationalMemorial.org



Outdoor Symbolic Memorial
Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week
There is no charge to tour the Memorial grounds.

Memorial Museum
Open seven days a week. Ticket sales stop daily at 5 p.m.
See Museum entrance for seasonal hours. Memorial Museum is closed Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Tickets
\$12 Adults, \$10 Seniors 62+, \$10 Military with ID
\$10 Students (Age 6 through college with ID)
No charge ages 5 and under
Purchase your tickets online at tickets.okcmm.org
Group rates and programs available

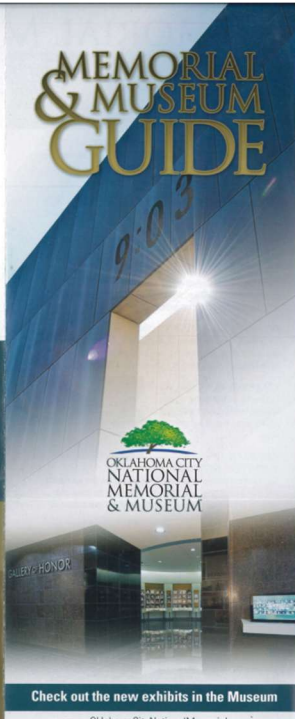
Location
620 North Harvey Avenue
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73102
Phone 405.235.3313
Fax 405.235.3315
Toll-free 1.888.542.HOPE (4673)

Enhancements Underway –
Thanks for your patience with our progress!
The Memorial and Museum is undergoing an \$8 million enhancement to update the Museum and some key maintenance issues on the Memorial grounds in preparation of the 20th Anniversary in April 2015. The Museum is open and has 30,000 square feet of new exhibits that tell the story of April 19th and the remarkable journey this city has taken over the last two decades in building back our city. It is a remarkable story as you watch people overcome horror with hope and will leave you with a sense of pride!

Memorial Store
Don't forget to visit the Memorial Store on the lobby level for special gifts and keepsakes. Just outside the store, the Donor Recognition Gallery lists those who contributed to help build and sustain this nation's lasting tribute.

Did you know?
The admission fee to the Museum helps pay for the operations and maintenance of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. All funds to operate and sustain the Memorial and Museum are raised through admission fees, Memorial Store sales, private fundraising, endowment earnings and the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is owned and operated by the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. The foundation does not receive any annual appropriations. The Memorial and Museum is an affiliate of the National Park System. *Thank you for your support!*



**MEMORIAL & MUSEUM
GUIDE**

9-03

**OKLAHOMA CITY
NATIONAL
MEMORIAL
& MUSEUM**

Check out the new exhibits in the Museum

www.OklahomaCityNationalMemorial.org

Appendix Figure C.10 Brochure Interior, Advertising New Exhibits.

MEMORIAL MUSEUM

THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM IS AN INTERACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN THE WEST END OF THE FORMER JOURNAL RECORD BUILDING, BUILT IN 1923. THIS BUILDING WITNESSED THE BOMBING AND IS LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES. THE MUSEUM TAKES YOU ON A CHRONOLOGICAL SELF-GUIDED TOUR THROUGH THE STORY OF APRIL 19, 1995, AND THE DAYS, WEEKS AND YEARS THAT FOLLOWED THE BOMBING OF OKLAHOMA CITY'S ALFRED P. MURKIN FEDERAL BUILDING. THE STORY TRACKS THE REMARKABLE JOURNEY OF LOSS, RESILIENCE, JUSTICE AND HOPE.

CHAPTER 1 – A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER
Experience a brief orientation video on A Day Like Any Other and begin to understand the Mission of the Memorial and Museum.

CHAPTER 2 – HISTORY OF THE SITE
Discover the history of the neighborhood in and around the Murrah Building.

CHAPTER 3A – A HEARING
Hear the official recording of an Oklahoma Water Resources Board meeting from April 19, 1995. The meeting, just across the street from the Murrah Building, starts at 9:00 a.m. A mere two minutes into the recording, you will hear the sound that changed us forever.

CHAPTER 3B – CONFUSION
Leave the confusion inside the Oklahoma Water Resources Board meeting to experience the chaos outside. Here, you'll see helicopter news footage of the ravaged building taken at 9:13 a.m. – the first images broadcast.

CHAPTER 4A – CHAOS
Experience the first frantic minutes after the bombing through detailed artifact cases, murals and computer kiosks.

CHAPTER 4B – SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES
See the chaos and the initial rescue response of the first hour and a half after the bombing. A stirring video documents the scene and survivors tell their own stories. Interactive touch-screen computers provide more in-depth information.

CHAPTER 5A – WORLD REACTION TO REPORTING TERRORISM
Step into a fast-paced media environment that shows news footage and special bulletins from around the globe about the bombing.

CHAPTER 5B – RESCUE AND RECOVERY
Encounter the true face of rescue and recovery with incredible stories of trapped survivors, rescue workers, the medical community, construction volunteers and others. And amid the search for victims, something else is recovered – a key piece of evidence.

CHAPTER 6 – WATCHING AND WAITING
Learn more about rescue and recovery operations. GSAT teams, the Family Assistance Center and the Oklahoma Standard. Experience a national outpouring of care and concern through cards and letters. Finally, feel the impact of special ceremonies marking the end of rescue and recovery efforts.

CHAPTER 7A – GALLERY OF HONOR
Honor the lives of the 168 who were killed. Here, in the Museum's most beautiful room, the families display personal photographs and artifacts of their loved ones. Interactive computers provide their personal stories.

CHAPTER 8 – IMPACT AND HEALING
Hear oral histories from family members, survivors and rescue workers about the first years following the bombing. You will also learn about changes that happened in our community and country following the bombing that now impact us all, how family members and survivors led an effort to pass new Congressional legislation and how a community rallied to remember and to memorialize.

CHAPTER 9 – INVESTIGATION, EVIDENCE AND JUSTICE
See key pieces of evidence on the trail of evidence used to piece together the case against the conspirators, including crime scene photos, the getaway car, parts of the rental truck, evidentiary boards from the trials and accounts from investigators and justice team members who worked together to bring justice. You can follow the trail of evidence on interactives that allow you to see up close the pieces of evidence.

There is a section of the Journal Record Building left in its damaged state to show the impact of violence and the devastation. You will learn how it was more than just this city block damaged by the bomb.

CHAPTER 10 – RESPONSIBILITY AND HOPE
As you turn the corner in the Museum you begin to understand the depth of the rebuilding that took place and the resilience of Oklahoma City. From the Memorial Overlook you see the Memorial grounds from a new perspective and a city changed forever by an ever-changing skyline that is part of the hope that people have found. But hope doesn't come without a sense of responsibility. Experience an interactive exhibit where you make choices and understand the impacting consequences.

OUTDOOR SYMBOLIC MEMORIAL

THIS MEMORIAL HONORS THE VICTIMS, SURVIVORS, RESCUERS AND ALL WHO WERE CHANGED FOREVER ON APRIL 19, 1995. IT ENCOMPASSES THE NOW-SACRED SOIL WHERE THE ALFRED P. MURKIN FEDERAL BUILDING ONCE STOOD, CAPTURING AND PRESERVING FOREVER THE PLACE AND EVENTS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD.

THE DESIGN
The design was selected in an international competition including 634 entries submitted from every state and 23 countries. The winning design, created by the *Bulfinch Design Partnership*, was chosen by a committee comprised of family members, survivors, rescuers, civic leaders and design professionals.

THE GATES OF TIME
These monumental twin gates frame the moment of destruction – 9:02 a.m. – and mark the formal entrances to the Memorial. The East Gate represents 9:01 a.m. on April 19, and the innocence of the city before the attack. The West Gate represents 9:03 a.m., the moment we were changed forever, and the hope that came from the horror in the moments and days following the bombing.

REFLECTING POOL
The pool occupies what was once N.W. Fifth Street. Here, a shallow depth of gently flowing water helps soothe wounds, with calming sounds providing a peaceful setting for quiet thoughts.

FIELD OF EMPTY CHAIRS
Each of the 168 chairs symbolizes a life lost, with smaller chairs representing the 19 children killed. Arranged in nine rows, one for each of the nine floors of the building, they are placed according to the floor on which those killed were working or visiting. Each bronze and stone chair rests on a glass base etched with the name of a victim. By day, the chairs seem to float above their translucent bases. By night, the glass bases illuminate as beacons of hope.

The field's perimeter matches the footprint of the former Murrah Building. It is lined by a granite path – granite that was salvaged from the Murrah Plaza.

THE SURVIVOR TREE
The Survivor Tree, a 90-year-old American Elm, bears witness to the violence of April 19 and now stands as a profound symbol of human resilience. The message to visitors reads: *The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated. Our deeply rooted faith sustains us.*

THE FENCE
The first Fence was installed to protect the site of the Murrah Building. Almost immediately, people began to leave tokens of love and hope on the Fence. Those items now total more than 60,000. Some are preserved in our Archives and many are used for education and outreach in a variety of projects. Today, more than 200 feet of the original Fence gives people the opportunity to leave tokens of remembrance and hope.

SURVIVOR WALL
On the east end of the Memorial stand the only remaining walls from the Murrah Building. These walls remind us of those who survived the terrorist attack, many with serious injuries. Today, more than 600 names are inscribed on salvaged pieces of granite from the Murrah Building lobby.

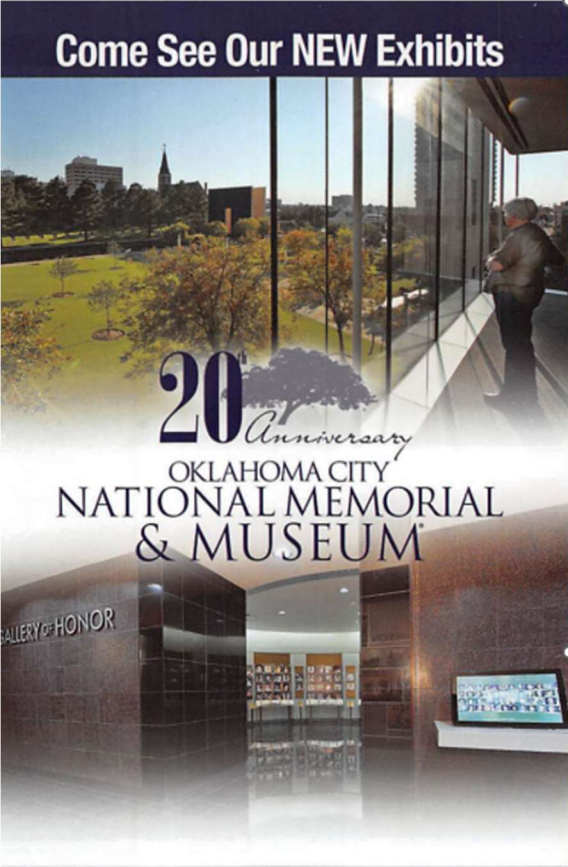
CHILDREN'S AREA
In the aftermath of the blast, countless expressions of encouragement were received from children. A wall of hand-painted tiles sent to Oklahoma City in 1995 by children illustrates that caring. In addition, a series of chalkboards creates an oversized display of these words where children can continue to share their feelings – an important component of the healing process.

RESCUERS' ORCHARD
Like the people who rushed in to help, this army of red and flower-bearing trees surrounds and protects the Survivor Tree. An inscription encircling the Survivor Tree facing the orchard reads: *Be the courageous and caring who responded from near and far, we offer our eternal gratitude, as a thank you to the thousands of rescuers and volunteers who helped.*



Commemorative Phase

Appendix Figure C.11 20th Anniversary Rack Card.



Come See Our NEW Exhibits

20th Anniversary
OKLAHOMA CITY
NATIONAL MEMORIAL & MUSEUM

GALLERY OF HONOR

WE COME HERE TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO WERE KILLED,
THOSE WHO SURVIVED AND THOSE CHANGED FOREVER.
MAY ALL WHO LEAVE HERE KNOW THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE.
MAY THIS MEMORIAL OFFER COMFORT,
STRENGTH, PEACE, HOPE AND SERENITY.

620 N. Harvey Ave • Oklahoma City, OK 73102
405.235.3313 or 888.542.HOPE

OklahomaCityNationalMemorial.org
Purchase your tickets online









The **OUTDOOR SYMBOLIC MEMORIAL** is a place of quiet reflection. The **MEMORIAL MUSEUM** is a place of amazing transformation. Each offers a unique insight into the events of April 19, 1995, but to truly experience this place of honor and hope, we strongly encourage you to visit both. In fact, the outdoor grounds will be more meaningful and memorable after experiencing the entire story of the bombing as presented in the Museum.

OUTDOOR SYMBOLIC MEMORIAL
Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free of charge

MEMORIAL MUSEUM
Open seven days a week, Monday – Saturday, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Sunday, Noon-6 p.m.
Ticket sales stop daily at 5 p.m. Check our website for seasonal hours

MEMORIAL MUSEUM ADMISSION
\$15 Adults / \$12 Seniors 62+ / \$12 Military with ID
\$12 Students (Age 6 through college with ID) / No charge ages 5 and under
Purchase your tickets online at OklahomaCityNationalMemorial.org
Group rates and programs available



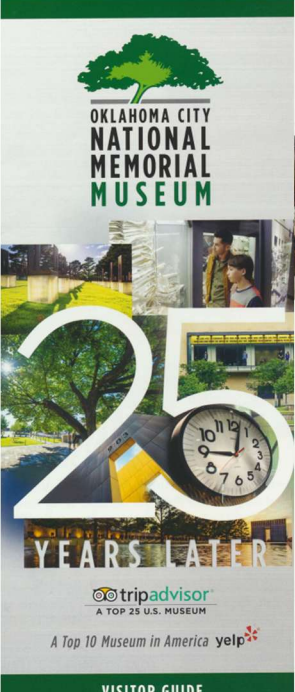
20th Anniversary
OKLAHOMA CITY
NATIONAL MEMORIAL & MUSEUM

Located at 620 N. Harvey, between Robinson and Harvey Avenues and 4th and 6th Streets in downtown Oklahoma City

405.235.3313 or 1.888.542.HOPE

CFC111611

Appendix Figure C.12 Brochure Exterior -25th Anniversary, A New Resolve.



OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL MUSEUM

25 YEARS LATER

tripadvisor
A TOP 10 U.S. MUSEUM

A Top 10 Museum in America **yelp**

VISITOR GUIDE

The Memorial Museum

Your journey begins on an April morning in downtown Oklahoma City. Learn how tragedy united a nation, and come away with a new sense of strength, peace and resolve.

TOUR BY CHAPTER

- 1 | A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER** Begin in the Orientation Theater.
- 2 | HISTORY OF THE SITE** Explore the Murrah Federal Building and its neighborhood. The rise of extremism in the United States looms.
- 3 | A HEARING** Hear audio of the blast two minutes into an Oklahoma Water Resources Board meeting. Experience the confusion and shock of the bombing as the story and magnitude of the event begins to unfold before your eyes.
- 4A | CHAOS** Witness frantic first impressions as everyone attempted to make sense of the chaos and rescue efforts began.
- 4B | SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES** Begin to understand survivors' experiences through miraculous stories of survival from the first hours, stirring videos, interactives and artifacts.
- 5A | WORLD REACTION TO REPORTING TERRORISM** A fast-paced media environment surrounds you with news from around the globe – and personal stories from those who covered this event.
- 5B | RESCUE AND RECOVERY** Trapped survivors, tireless rescuers, unbridled selflessness. Here you'll witness the spirit of service, honor and kindness that's become known as the Oklahoma Standard.



6 | WATCHING & WAITING Rescue and recovery efforts last 16 days as workers sift through the rubble. We see an international outpouring of care and concern. Finally, ceremonies mark the end of rescue and recovery efforts, even as a nation mourns.

7 | GALLERY OF HONOR Photos, precious artifacts and videos from family members and other loved ones tell personal stories of the 168 killed.



8 | IMPACT & HEALING To contend with grief, many people turn to their faith and their neighbors for strength. The Survivor Tree becomes a symbol of strength. Visitors leave tokens of remembrance on the Fence. The community comes together to plan for a permanent Memorial and the process starts with family members, survivors and first responders.

9 | INVESTIGATION, EVIDENCE & JUSTICE Track the Trail of Evidence: crime scene photos, the getaway car, parts of the rental truck. Explore the trials, sentencing and the team that sought justice.



10 | RESPONSIBILITY & HOPE The former Journal Record Building, left in its damaged state, shows the impact of the blast. Explore choices and consequences in the award-winning Responsibility Theater, then look out from the Memorial Overlook onto the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial and the city deeply changed through rebuilding and renaissance.

A NEW RESOLVE The rise of terrorism since 1995 has changed our lives – and expanded our mission to counter violence with vigilance.



UNCOVER-DISCOVER STEM LAB
Students find STEM concepts woven into our story. Schools can make reservations at MemorialMuseum.com/lab

MUSEUM HOURS & ADMISSION
Open Mon-Sat, 9 AM-6 PM & Sun, Noon-6 PM
Ticket sales daily until 5 PM • Check website for holiday hours
Purchase tickets online at MemorialMuseum.com
Adults \$15 • Seniors 62+ \$13 • Military with ID \$13
Students (Age 6-College with ID) \$12 • No charge ages 5 and under

GROUP TOURS
Special pricing for schools & tour groups with advance reservations
Call **405.235.3313** Mon-Fri or visit MemorialMuseum.com

OUTDOOR SYMBOLIC MEMORIAL
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, free of charge
ADA COMPLIANT

LOCATION
Downtown OKC • NW 6th and Harvey Ave.
Museum entrance on the west
405.235.3313



OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL MUSEUM

MemorialMuseum.com

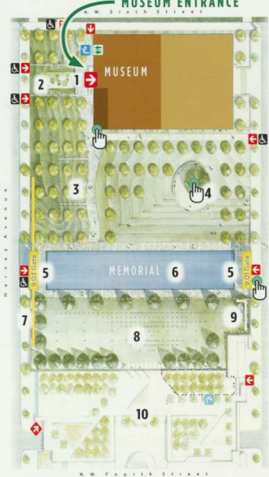
OFFICIALS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • ON THE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Get the free app for guided tours and more

Appendix Figure C.13 Brochure Interior -25th Anniversary.

The Outdoor Symbolic Memorial

This inspiring national monument occupies sacred soil where 168 Americans were killed. It is a place of comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.



3 | OUTDOOR INTERACTIVES Located at the 9:01 Gate, the Survivor Tree and the SW corner of the Memorial Museum. Touchscreens explain symbolic elements and introduce the Museum.



MEMORIAL & MUSEUM DISCOVER BOTH.

Even 25 years later, the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum stands as a symbol of strength and unity in the face of violence. But the full meaning can't be grasped until you come inside the Museum. Through interactives, galleries and theaters, a powerful story unfolds. You will feel what we all felt that day. You'll see how precious life is, but also how fleeting it can be. What's more, you'll be bolstered by the resolve, strength and resilience of this city, this state and an entire nation.

The sacred site is a place of remembrance for many, but for some – you can't remember something you never knew. We invite you to come and discover what's inside the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. As we are *Looking Back* and *Thinking Forward* throughout 2020 – we commemorate 25 years of strength and resilience.

COME TO REMEMBER. LEAVE WITH RESOLVE.



**LOOKING BACK
THINKING FORWARD**

- 1 | MUSEUM ENTRANCE & MEMORIAL STORE** In the OKC National Memorial Museum, you'll experience April 19th minute by minute. But more importantly, you'll discover what happened next – how a nation came together, healed and sought justice.
- 2 | CHILDREN'S PLAZA** In the aftermath of April 19th, children from around the world sent messages of caring to Oklahoma City in the form of hand-painted tiles. These have a permanent place in the Children's Plaza, along with a chalkboard terrace inviting you to share your feelings – an important part of healing.
- 3 | RESCUERS' ORCHARD** Like the people who rushed in to help, this army of trees stands guard over the Survivor Tree.
- 4 | THE SURVIVOR TREE** Encircled by the Promontory Wall with a message of resolve, this near-century-old American Elm stands at the highest point of the Memorial as a symbol of strength and resilience.
- 5 | THE GATES OF TIME** The moment of destruction was 9:02 AM. The East 9:01 Gate and West 9:03 Gate frame this moment, representing the innocence that came before and the healing that began immediately after.
- 6 | REFLECTING POOL** The Reflecting Pool stands where Fifth Street was on April 19, 1995. The gently flowing waters help soothe and inspire visitors to look into the pool and see the face of someone changed forever.
- 7 | THE FENCE** Installed originally to protect the footprint of the Murrah Federal Building, the fence quickly found a higher purpose. People expressed their sorrow by leaving tokens of love and hope – and still do today.
- 8 | FIELD OF EMPTY CHAIRS** This field is where the Murrah Federal Building once stood. Arranged in nine rows that reflect the floor where victims were located, these 168 chairs are each etched with the name of a person killed. The 19 smaller chairs represent children.
- 9 | SURVIVOR WALL** The Murrah Federal Building's only remaining walls, with more than 600 names of those who survived the blast.
- 10 | MURRAH PLAZA OVERLOOK** This surviving original area offers a sobering view of the Memorial and Museum grounds.

We are a nonprofit owned and operated by the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. Funding is raised through Museum admission, Memorial Store sales, private fundraising, endowments and the annual OKC Memorial Marathon. Thank you for your support!

Appendix Figure C.14 Brochure Exterior – 30th Anniversary.

*We come here to remember
those who were killed, those who survived
and those changed forever.*

May all who leave here know the impact of violence.

*May this memorial offer
comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity:*

MUSEUM

Visit for an experience that's as relevant today as ever—as is our mission to meet violence with vigilance.

Free Garage Parking
with Paid Museum Admission

MEMORIAL

Open 24/7 • Free Admission

GROUPS

Special pricing for school and tour groups with advance reservations at MemorialMuseum.com.

LOCATION

620 N Harvey Ave • 405.235.3333
Museum Entrance at NW 6th and Harvey
1 Mile N of Scottsdale Park

A Day of Darkness.
Years of Light.

MemorialMuseum.com

AFFILIATE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram icons

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is owned and operated by the nonprofit Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. Funding is raised through Museum admission, Memorial Store sales, private fundraising and the annual Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon. Thank you for your support!

A Day of Darkness.
Years of Light.

VISITOR GUIDE

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum tells the story of April 19, 1995. On that day 30 years ago, 168 people were killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. The outdoor Memorial is meant to be symbolic, while the Museum tells the story of the people and the heroism that was born from that day.

STORIES YOU NEVER KNEW.

At the **Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum**, a powerful story unfolds through exhibits, theaters and interactives. You'll meet courageous first responders, hear incredible survivor stories, cheer the city's unbreakable spirit and pay tribute to those who were killed **30 years ago**.

PEOPLE YOU'LL NEVER FORGET.

The **Museum** sets the stage for the outdoor **Memorial** and provides meaning and depth to the symbolism within the national monument, from the Field of Empty Chairs to the Gates of Time. It is on this **Sacred Ground** that we work to find **Common Ground** through hope, strength and resilience.

Appendix Figure C.15 Brochure Interior – 30th Anniversary.

THE MUSEUM

THE MEMORIAL

Your journey begins on an April morning in Oklahoma City. Learn how tragedy united a nation and come away with a new sense of strength, peace and resolve.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

1. ORIENTATION THEATER

April 19, 1995, began a day like any other.

2. HISTORY OF THE SITE

Explore the history of the site and its downtown neighborhood. The rise of terrorism in the United States looms.

3. A HEARING

Sit in on the meeting at the Oklahoma Tower Ballroom that morning and, two minutes in, you'll hear the bad news followed by the resulting shock and confusion.

4. CHAOS

Without frantic first impressions as everyone attempted to make sense of what happened and rescue efforts began.

4B. SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES

Begin to understand survivors' experiences as videos, interviews and official document introductions stories from the first hours.

5. WORLD REACTION TO REPORTING THE DISASTER

A fast-paced media environment surrounds you with news from around the globe, plus personal stories from those who covered the event.

5B. RESCUE & RECOVERY

Tragedy survivors, families, rescuers, unburied selves. Here you'll witness the service, honor and kindness that's become known as the **Oklahoma Standard**.

6. WATCHING & WAITING

Rescue and recovery efforts last 16 days as workers sift through the rubble. See the international outpouring of care and concern. Watch as ceremonies mark the end of rescue and recovery efforts, even as a nation mourns.

7. GALLERY OF HONOR

Photos, precious artifacts and interactive videos from family members and other loved ones tell personal stories of the 168 killed.

8. IMPACT & HEALING

To contend with grief, many people turn to their faith. The **Survivor Tree** becomes a reassuring symbol of strength. Visitors leave tokens of remembrance on **The Fence**. The community comes together to plan for a permanent **Memorial** and the process starts with family members, survivors and first responders.

9. INVESTIGATION, EVIDENCE & JUSTICE

Track the Trail of Evidence, crime scene photos, the getaway car and parts of the mental truck. Explore the trials and the prosecution and defense teams who sought justice, as well as the judges who handed down the sentences.

10. RESPONSIBILITY & HOPE

Embedded in the **Memorial** is a corner of the former Journal Record Building, left in its damaged state. It shows the impact of the blast. As you conclude your tour, explore choices and consequences in the award-winning **Responsibility Theater**. Then look out over the **Memorial Overlook** onto the **Outdoor Symbolic Memorial** and a city changed forever.

11. A NEW RESOLVE

The rise of terrorism since 1995 has changed our lives—and expanded our mission to counter violence with vigilance.

OKC MEMORIAL APP

Info, Tours & Augmented Reality
Download our app for your iOS or Android (QR code below) and find walking tours, an ADA tour, a Spanish tour and the **Remember Together** augmented reality experience. This experience enables you to meet six virtual storytellers who represent the thousands recruited by the bombings; they will share personal stories of their experiences and guide you through your experience.

Don't have a mobile device? Check out an iPad at the front desk.

12. MUSEUM ENTRANCE & MEMORIAL STONE

Enter the **Museum** and experience the events of April 19 minute by minute. You'll discover what happened and see how a nation came together and healed.

13. CHILDREN'S AREA

In the aftermath of April 19, children from around the world sent messages of caring in the form of hand-painted tiles. These are a permanent part of the **Children's Area**, along with a childhood-themed tenting visitors to share their feelings—an important part of healing.

14. RESCUERS' OVERARCH

Like the people who rushed in to help, this army of trees stands guard around the **Survivor Tree**.

15. THE SURVIVOR TREE

Enshrined by the **Proclamatory Wall** with a message of resolve, this century-old American Elm stands at the highest point of the **Memorial** as a symbol of strength and resilience.

16. GATES OF TIME

These two gates frame the moment of destruction at 9:02 AM. The 9:02 East Gate represents the innocence before the attack. The 9:03 West Gate marks the moment when healing began.

17. REFLECTING POOL

On the ground that was once 5th Street, calm reflecting waters now inspire visitors to pause deep inside and see the face of someone changed forever.

18. THE FENCE

Originally installed to protect the footprint of the **Mural Federal Building**, **The Fence** quickly found a higher purpose. People expressed their sorrow by leaving tokens of love and hope—and still do today. Many are preserved in the **Museum's Archives**.

19. FIELD OF EMPTY CHAIRS

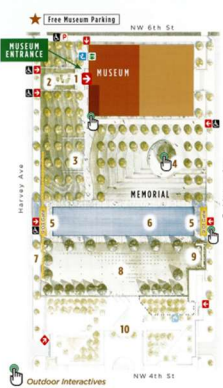
Located where the **Mural Federal Building** once stood, the chairs are arranged in nine rows that reflect the floor where those who were killed were working or visiting. Each of the 168 chairs is etched with the name of a person killed. The 19 smaller chairs represent the children. The chairs light up at night as beacons of hope.

20. SURVIVOR WALL

More than 600 names of those who survived the blast are etched upon the **Mural Federal Building's** only remaining wall.

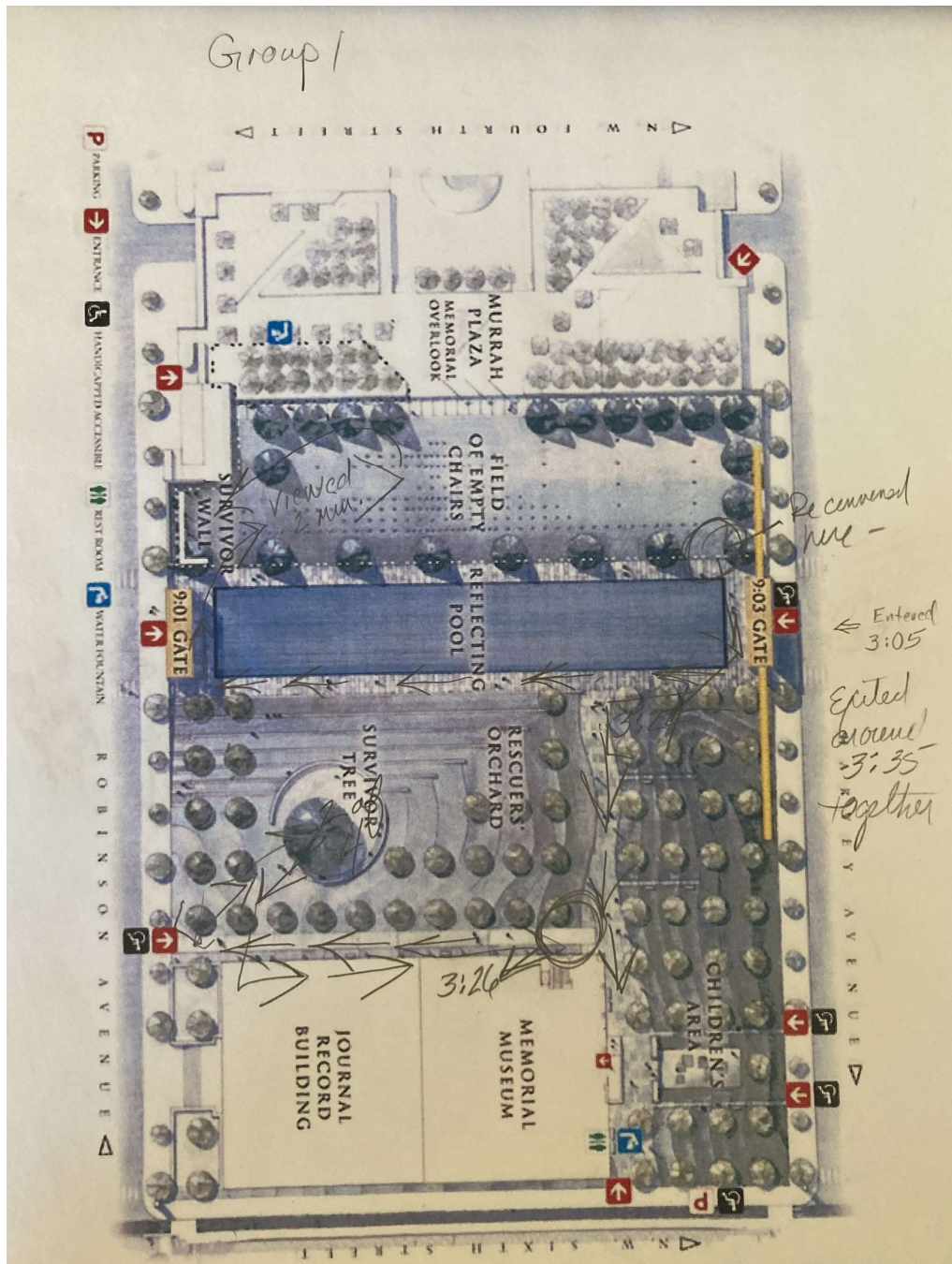
21. MURRAY PLAZA OVERLOOK

This surviving original area offers a sobering view of the **Memorial grounds**.

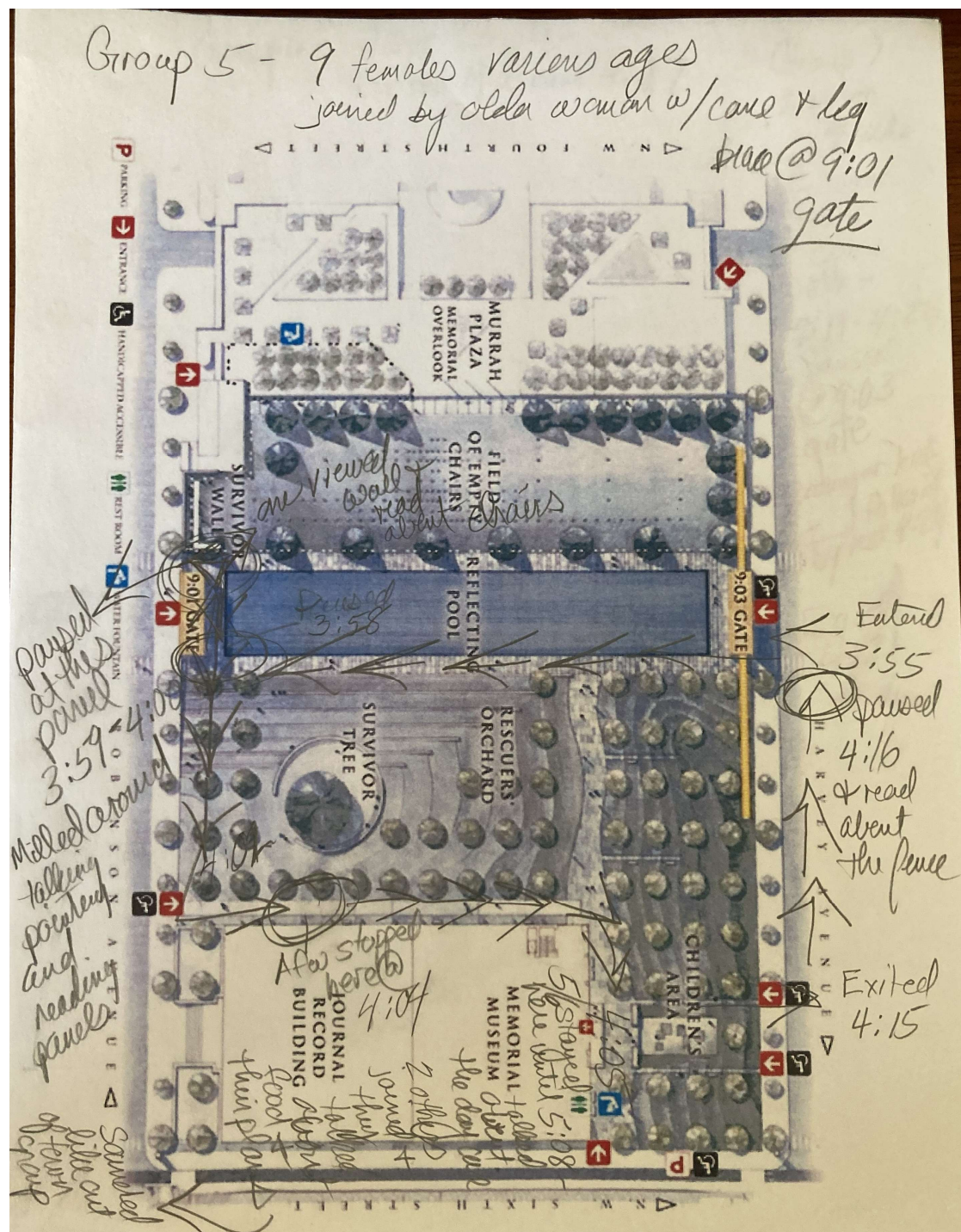


Appendix D - Passive Observations

Appendix Figure D.1 Sample Passive Observation Sheet for a Short Visit.



Appendix Figure D.2 Sample Passive Observation Sheet for a Complex Visit.



Appendix E - The Survey

Handout Provided to Visitors

Nancy Mahaney
PhD Candidate in Environmental Design and Planning
Kansas State University
Phone: 316-295-7650
Email: nanmahaney@gmail.com

Thank you for participating in this research project about visitor experiences at the Oklahoma National Memorial. You can access the survey by using your cell phone camera to open the QR code below or by entering the link address below the code in the online browser of your choice. There are no correct answers, the questions are intended to capture your experience of the memorial site. All responses are confidential and anonymous. You will have the opportunity to share your first name and contact information if you are willing to participate in a brief interview. Responses will be included in reports and publications but will be shared anonymously. There are no negative consequences to your participation and any contact information provided will not be shared with other researchers or organizations. Please feel free to share anything you felt was significant about your visit.
Thank you for your time!



https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cOy9hLM6XAlmT5A

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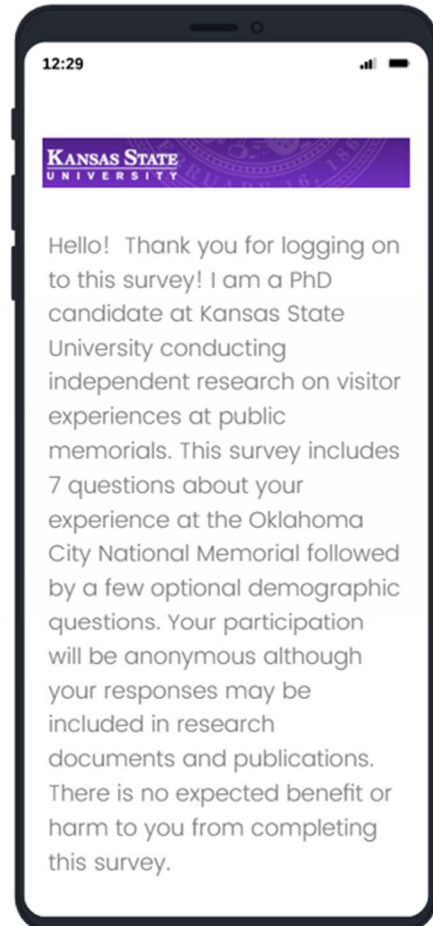
Questions

Appendix Figure E.1 Online Survey - Introduction with illustration of cell phone layout.



Hello! Thank you for logging on to this survey! I am a PhD candidate at Kansas State University conducting independent research on visitor experiences at public memorials. This survey includes 7 questions about your experience at the Oklahoma City National Memorial followed by a few optional demographic questions. Your participation will be anonymous although your responses may be included in research documents and publications. There is no expected benefit or harm to you from completing this survey.

If you have any concerns please provide your contact information below so I may contact you. Your participation will assist in our understanding of the social function of designed memorials at the sites of tragedies.



Appendix Figure E.2 Online Survey - Orientation Questions with cell phone layout

Is this your first visit to the Oklahoma City National Memorial?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What was the date of your visit and the approximate amount of time you spent at the site?

Which areas of the memorial site did you visit? Select all areas you remember visiting.

☐ 9:01/9:03 Gate

☐ Survivor Wall

☐ Field of Chairs

☐ Reflecting Pool

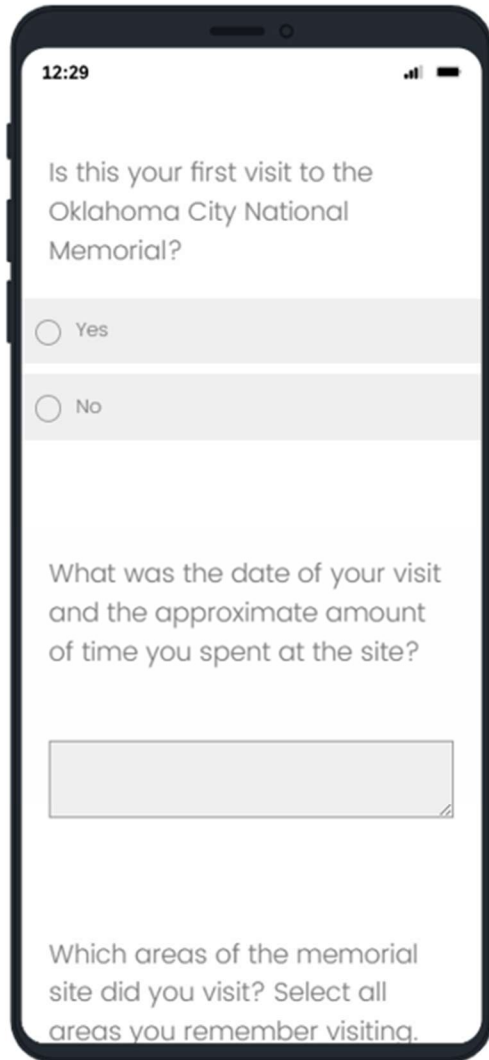
☐ Survivor Tree

☐ Rescuer's Orchard

☐ Children's Area

☐ Murrah Plaza

☐ Memorial Museum



12:29

Is this your first visit to the Oklahoma City National Memorial?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What was the date of your visit and the approximate amount of time you spent at the site?

Which areas of the memorial site did you visit? Select all areas you remember visiting.

Appendix Figure E.3 Online Survey – Questions Registering Impact of Site Visit



How much impact did your visit have on you personally? Please slide the indicator from left to right to indicate the level of impact with left being no impact and right being the most impact.



What words you would use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group who are completing this survey with you?

Please organize (click and drag to reorder) the areas of the memorial site according to their impact on you and members of your group with 1 being the most impactful and 9 being the least impactful.

9:01 and 9:03 Gates
Reflecting Pool
Field of Chairs
Survivor Wall
Survivor Tree
Rescuers Orchard
Children's Area
Murrah Plaza (memorial overlook)
Memorial Museum

Please share your thoughts about the two areas you placed at the top of your list. Why were these areas important to you?

Appendix Figure E.4 Online Survey – Optional Demographic and Other Questions

If you would be interested in talking with the researcher about your experience or thoughts about the memorial design please provide your first name and contact information (phone # or email address) below.

Demographic information will help us understand the influence of the memorial on different groups of people. Please select all choices that apply to you.

☐ I live or work in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area

☐ I live in the state of Oklahoma

☐ I live in a different state

☐ I live in a different country

Please select the choice that best describes your level of education.

☐ I have a high school education

☐ I have earned a post-secondary degree or certificate (associates, bachelors, trade school, etc.)

☐ I have earned an advanced degree (MA, MS, PhD, Ed.D, MD, JD, etc.)

Please select all choices that pertain to you.

☐ I am a current or former member of the U.S. Military

☐ I am a current or former federal employee or contractor

☐ I am employed in a non-federal government position (city, county, tribal, state, etc.)

Would you like to add any additional information about your education, or place of employment or where you live?



We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

Appendix F - Verbal Analysis of Survey Results

Appendix Table F.1 Impact of The Memorial as Reported by First Time Visitors

What words would you use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group who are completing this survey with you?	Key Words				
Eye-opening, sobering, informative	Eye-opening	sobering	informative		
Heart wrenching, despair, sadness, respect, faith	Heart wrenching	despair	sadness	Respect	Faith
Gut wrenching	Gut wrenching				
Moving	Moving				
bittersweet	bittersweet				
It had a positive impact because it helped inform us on what happened.	Positive	informative			
Upsetting	Upsetting				
Very well done and we felt anger but also gratefulness for the thought that went into the memorial.	Well done	Anger	Grateful for Thoughtful Memorial		
Well-organized, heartbreaking, and meaningful historical site which has to be remembered	well-organized	heartbreaking	meaningful	historical	must be remembered
disheartening and gut wrenching	disheartening	gut wrenching			
Very emotional	Very emotional				
Depressing, impactful, mourning	Depressing	impactful	mourning		
Gave me information about a tragic event that happened before I was born.	Informative	Tragic Event			

Color Key

Green – Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning

Orange -Intense or Difficult Emotions

Blue – Quiet or Reflective Emotions

Pink-Positive or Encouraging Emotions

Appendix Table F.2 Impact of The Memorial as Reported by First Time Visitors

What words would you use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group who are completing this survey with you?	Key Words				
Powerful, I remember when it happened and I remember seeing the fence. The stories were touching.	powerful	remember	touching		
Shock, grief, sadness	shock	grief	sadness		
Solemn resolve	solemn	resolve			
Somber, enriching, connecting	somber	enriching	connecting		
Sadness	sadness				
I felt sad because of the things like this that have happened pointlessly in our country, but proud that we honor those we lost.	sad	pointless	proud	honor	
Humbling, sad, somber, scared	Humbling	sad	somber	scared	
Evoked emotions that pain, anger, awe, hope and beauty.	pain	anger	awe	hope	beauty
Quieting, memorializing and honoring those whose lives were impacted, incomprehension, and profound sadness at man's inhumanity to man.	quieting	Memorial-izing	honoring	in-compre-hension	profound sadness
The survivor tree moved me to propose to my now finance. It was fitting as a landmark as a symbol of our lives as well. Very inspiring to see.	moving	symbolic	inspiring		
Informative, inspiring, heartbreaking, sad	informative	inspiring	Heart-breaking		
So sad but my whole family loved it by the end. even my kids	sad	loved it			
It was truly heartbreaking to go through the museum. But it showcased a horrible person to much for my liking.	Heart-breaking	horrible person			
It was very hard to see all the people impacted from this event	hard				

Color Key

Green – Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning

Orange -Intense or Difficult Emotions

Blue – Quiet or Reflective Emotions

Pink-Positive or Encouraging Emotions

Appendix Table F.3 Impact of The Memorial as Reported by Repeat Visitors

What words would you use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group who are completing this survey with you?	Key Words			
This was my husband and my 2nd visit and the first for our children. Ages 11, 9 and 5. We believe wholeheartedly that if we don't honor the past, we are doomed to repeat it. The biggest takeaway for my children was learning that true evil exists in the world. Before our visit I don't think they could have imagined that someone would intentionally hurt children.	honor the past	evil exists	intentional harm	
Impressive. Beautiful design. Sadness and disbelief.	impressive	beautiful	Sadness/disbelief	
reflective	reflective			
The impact that it had on me was that it caused me to reflect on the important things in life, such as family, friends, and life itself. Visiting the memorial always puts me in a reflective state of mind and helps me to realize how small some of problems really are.	reflective			
Thoughtful, curious, aware, serene	thoughtful	curious	aware	serene
My initial visits were extremely impactful. Since, it has become more of a peaceful oasis.	impactful	peaceful		
Sobering	sobering			
Powerful Humbling.	powerful	humbling		
Emotional, reminded, moved	emotional	reminded	moved	
Informative	informative			
Seeing the strength and resiliency of the survivors and the city through this memorial was truly touching.	strength	resiliency	touching	
Intense, emotional, educational, inspiring	intense	emotional	educational	inspiring
Profound, poignant, somber	profound	poignant	somber	

Color Key

Green – Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning

Orange -Intense or Difficult Emotions

Blue – Quiet or Reflective Emotions

Pink-Positive or Encouraging Emotions

Appendix Table F.4 Impact of The Memorial as Reported by Repeat Visitors

What words would you use to describe the impact your visit had on you or others in your group who are completing this survey with you?	Key Words				
I wasn't alive during this bombing, but I did learn about it in school, and the whole thing was horrific. When I visited the memorial, I became somber, because though I didn't bear witness to the bombing, I felt empathy for all the others who visited the memorial that day, and those who lost people that day.	horrific	somber	empathy	loss of people	
It had a very good impact. After my run with the Oklahoma Memorial marathon, I had to stop by and learn more about the history behind it. It was very touching.	good impact	learning	history	touching	
It made me realize how devastating it was. It also made me realize how many people were actually affected by it.	realize	Deva- stating	people affected		
Filled with and overwhelming sadness and heartache for those who suffered a significant loss during what became the most tragic event of Oklahoma City in 1995.	Over- whelming	sadness	heartache	suffered loss	tragic event
Heartbreak. Tragic devastating. Inspiring	heartbreak	tragic	Devastat- ing	inspiring	
Sadness frustration	sadness	frustration			
Every time I go, I feel grief and sadness. It impacts my mood and makes me reflect on how important the people in my life are because one day they can be there and then the next they can be gone in an instant. Though I would describe it as overwhelming and enduring.	grief	sadness	reflect on people	Over- whelmin g	Endurin g
Sad, heartfelt, motivating, togetherness.	sad	heartfelt	motivating	Together -ness	
tragic, solemn	tragic	solemn			
Made me realize life is precious	realize	Precious			
It impacted me by helping me recognize the impact one person can have on hundreds of families.	recognition	impact of one person			

Color Key

Green – Knowledge, Honor, and Meaning

Orange -Intense or Difficult Emotions

Blue – Quiet or Reflective Emotions

Pink-Positive or Encouraging Emotions

Appendix G - Narrative Responses

The following tables provide the narrative responses that were captured in the survey through open-ended questions. The first set of responses, Tables G.1-G.3, are related to the earlier survey questions that asked visitors to rate their responses to the different areas of the Symbolic Memorial. Visitors were asked to share their thoughts about the two areas of the memorial they ranked highest in impact on those previous questions.

Tables G.4 and G.5 contain the responses visitors gave to the question that asked if there was anything else they wanted to share about their visit, other designed memorials or the questionnaire. This was the only open-ended question in the survey that provided space for visitors to share responses on related topics of their choice.

Appendix Table G.1 Narrative Responses – Top Two Ranked Elements

Survey Narrative Responses Regarding the Impact of the Memorial
Please share your thoughts about the two areas you placed at the top of your list. Why were these areas important to you?
The museum had the news coverage, evidence, and actual items from the scene. The survivor wall with the pictures, especially the children's (Author Note: Both elements are inside the memorial museum)
I am not from Oklahoma and did not live here when this occurred, but the gates were a firm reminder of the timing the whole state changed as a whole, and the field of chairs serve as the never forgotten family and children whose lives were took.
The field of chairs was important to me because I could see them empty and I thought about the people who we lost and wondered who would be sitting in the chair next to me today. The survivor wall was important because I got to put a name to a person and that was special to me,
The representation of the people is classy but solemn and makes me think of them not fulfilling the rest of life.
There were many chairs in that plot of land; it made me really sad to think about all the people who could have had great lives. The reflecting pool seemed so peaceful, even though the bombing was so terrible.
Gave me the most emotion.
The Children's area is important to me because it shows how many innocent children were killed, injured, or impacted by this and how age doesn't stop nor prevent these tragedies. The Field of chairs were also important to me because it is truly devastating seeing just how many people were killed and the chairs just demonstrate just how many people it was not just the number.
The field chairs really impacted me and so did the survivor wall because I felt for the people that survived and probably lived with guilt and never got the chance to live a normal life.
I like that they are outdoors and you see a representation of the lives lost.
With field of chairs you get a glimpse of all the lives that were lost especially when thunder won and some one put the jersey on the chair. For the tree the way life is resilient
The chairs helped me visualize how many people actually were lost and the museum. I think it was listening to the conversation right as the bomb went off was most impactful to me.
the field of chairs literally gives a visual representation of how many people died that day and the fact that there was a daycare inside the building hit home considering there were children present.
Forced reflection, educational and inspiring
Upon going to the OKC national museum it made me understand fully what happened and exactly how many people's lives were affected. The gates are a beautiful representation of the time that it took place at and when it transpired. I learned exactly what it took for most of first responders, police force, doctors, FBI agents, and police force had to cooperate to make things work.
Memorial Museum was one of the best museums I've ever been to. I learned so much about the survivors and those who died. The survivor tree is a great way of displaying the strength of the city before during and after the tragedy

Appendix Table G.2 Narrative Responses – Top Two Ranked Elements

Survey Narrative Responses Regarding the Impact of the Memorial
Please share your thoughts about the two areas you placed at the top of your list. Why were these areas important to you?
I think the museums showed me how this happened, how OKC overcame the tragedy and came together, but also reminded me that radical elements on all partisan ends of our political and religious spectrum have more power than ever and this will likely happen again. I also think if the current ability for extremism to dehumanize their enemies and how history will quickly repeat itself. How a community came together, shower was beautiful. The field of chairs was powerful in showing all those lost, specifically the smaller chairs of the children. The gates were a close third, signifying the moment in time lost, and how we all were lost in those moments. I think it helps us accept what we've seen and move past it, but maybe the society has not learned how dangerous letting and encouraging fringe ideas overtake discourse is, and how fragile our society is.
The survivor chair for information already given. Secondly, aside from the engagement. Looking at the picture of the area in the museum and then going back out to see the chairs and tree and pools position was very impactful. It was saddening and maddening in so many ways. I'm tired of all the trauma caused by selfish people in this world. This place will forever hold memories for us for many reasons.
The chairs representing the lives lost were heartbreaking. And the gates to me showed anything can change in a moment that will affect you forever.
Having lost a child (not in this manner) the thought of SO many parents having the grief of child loss made my heart hurt. Chairs are meant to have someone in them, whilst seeing the pool, just gave this immense feeling of emptiness. Emptiness in the world and an emptiness in so many people's hearts and worlds.
Highly impactful, sad to see all the chairs especially for the kids
I had a hard time orbiting the list, every section was so moving in different ways. The exterior areas both eased you into the building and brought me peace as I exited from immersion in the events of that day.
The field of chairs gets me every time because you get to see the full amount of people that lost their lives. While standing there with all the empty chairs, it just sinks in and it's heartbreaking. I always enjoy the Rescuers Orchard because my uncle was an OKC firefighter who helped with rescue and recovery efforts.
Museum is very integrative and informative. The chairs were significant because they represented the empty chairs left behind by the victims loss
I work as a daycare teacher and it broke my heart.
1. The field of chairs because it showed how many people died. 2. 9:01-9:03, because it showed exactly when it happened.
I'm a mother and I could never begin to imagine the grief of losing a child. To see so many lives lost brought sadness to my mind and heart and left me with a lasting impact of what happened on what should have been a beautiful day.

Appendix Table G.3 Narrative Responses – Top Two Ranked Elements

Survey Narrative Responses Regarding the Impact of the Memorial
Please share your thoughts about the two areas you placed at the top of your list. Why were these areas important to you?
all the families it impacted and the loss of all the innocent children
the loss of all the innocent people and families
It is hard to think about what happened to these innocent people especially the children. The chairs puts into perspective just how many people were actually a victim of this tragic event.
The most impactful part of my last visit was the Memorial fence. Someone who had lost their sister wrote a heartfelt message and included a photo of her sister's family and children. She shared how her kids had all grown up and expressed how much she wished she could have been there for all their important milestones. It was truly heartbreaking because the loss didn't just affect those who died and are being memorialized — it also deeply impacts the people who have to live the rest of their lives carrying that grief. I can't imagine not having my sister and wanting to share those moments but being unable to. The museum itself was very moving as well. It was sad to see some of the belongings saved after the explosion, like car keys that would never be returned and a child's shoes — everyday items that suddenly took on profound meaning. Yet, they also serve as a tender reminder that, although those people are gone, a part of them remains with us, showing that they were just everyday people with lives that were unexpectedly cut short.
Both the memorial museum and Field of Chairs were deeply saddening.
The memorial museum is at the top of my list. All of the displays inside it are very meaningful as they go in great depth about the tragedy that occurred on that day. Second on my list was the survivor tree. I found it very fascinating how a tree was able to survive under those circumstances. I believe it has a spiritual meaning in a way because not only were people harmed that day, but nature and planet Earth were as well, but we still are trying our best to stay strong for those people that didn't survive on that day.
The field of chairs. Because it's for the lives taken from the bombing. The survivors wall because they had to go through a terrible situation like that. They probably witnessed friends, family or colleagues tragically die from the bombing.
The children's area touched my heart. The innocence and hope, while the field of chairs spoke silently of lives lost, together creating healing, remembrance, and powerful reflection.
It's been a while since the bombing and I remember the day but not all the specifics. So many children died which I didn't remember and it was heartbreaking.
The children's Area was the most saddening. It was hard to look. It made me extremely upset. The field of Chair's, the field of Chairs is also extremely saddening, walking and reading the writing on the chairs would make anyone cry. It made me very emotional.
the field of chairs is sad but a great memorial to those who died and the memorial museum to give tribute
The childrens area and 9:01 and 9:03 gates really hit the most for me just thinking about all the lives lost, especially the babies because I have children.

Appendix Table G.4 Narrative Responses – Memorial Visit

Survey Narrative Response About Memorial Visit
Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at the memorial site, thoughts about this or other designed memorials, or the process of completing this questionnaire?
It was insightful to see how violence and hatred can change so many lives in such a way several years later.
It was upkeep very well
The field of chairs really shows the price of domestic terrorism.
I was impressed with the care being taken to the lawn.
I really enjoyed this visit. It impacted me tremendously. And more memorials need to be built so that anyone considering doing something similar will hopefully be positively impacted by visiting the place and change their minds.
Made an impact. Memorial was beautiful. Respectful.
seeing the destruction one homemade bomb could cause really sat with me. I can't believe a non-militarized bomb could cause so much destruction.
Spoke to a park ranger and stated museum was like a funeral. Did not go in
It was so sad to think that people can do such harm, and it continues everyday.
So glad I got to go there. The museum was so well done
It is so respectful
Inspiring
I was glad I went to this and learned more about the OKC bombing. How Oklahoma dealt with this tragic event, and what grief was to follow.
Overall, it has become a place of reflection and peace for me. I never would have imagined a place where so much pain happened could be a place of so much comfort.
My son recently moved to OKC to take a job with the FAA. My husband and I were visiting him in OKC. He had yet to be downtown to visit the site. We wanted to go there to see it for ourselves and so our son could see it and learn more about a defining event for many federal employees, Oklahomans, and our country that happened before he was born. I appreciated the site's beauty and design. It not only provides a place of remembrance and reflection, it memorializes the sacrifice made by those who died, their commitment to the service of our country, and the bravery of the rescuers. It's a tribute to the community's and our country's love of those we lost and those who survived the unthinkable that day at 9:02. It provides a very touching, meaningful, and hopeful message about the goodness in humans that remains even when faced with evil.

Appendix Table G.5 Narrative Responses – Memorial Visit

Survey Narrative Response About Memorial Visit
Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at the memorial site, thoughts about this or other designed memorials, or the process of completing this questionnaire?
This one was very similar to me as the pentagon memorial but done slightly better.
Just that the process of completing it brought up so many memories. I can remember that day, and the emotions of myself and everyone around me.
My heart goes out to all those who were impacted by this tragedy. No one deserves this. I'm thankful to have visited this place as it has rich history to reflect on
I am a lifelong Oklahoman and this was my first visit. It was very moving. My niece is marrying a gentleman whose father died by suicide after the bombing. He was a lawyer representing the victims.
Good luck on your thesis!
Korean War Veterans Memorial located in Washington DC
Thank you for conducting this important research.
Tragic that this carnage shattered the sense of safety that we take for granted everyday.
My parents visited the memorial many years ago and we so moved that on this cross-country trip, I wanted to include a visit. I was not disappointed. Well done!
I've been to many memorials in dc and NYC. This is equally beautiful and impactful.
I thought it was sad and beautiful
I think having this memorial is important, so these victims are not forgotten.
I think it is a well-thought-out and beautifully designed memorial.
The Oklahoma memorial museum is a beautiful and holy place to be. It is a time capsule for future generations to never forget what happened on that day. Everyone who suffered that day will never be forgotten.
None. Just an amazing reflective experience.
It was deeply impactful, and probably one of the best memorials for a tragedy I have been to. I felt as though the weight of what happened there was truly conveyed well.
The biggest impact the site had on myself, and my teenage boys was seeing the chairs, but then noticing the smaller chairs for the children and truly grasping the loss of life.

