

LEAD INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION, INC.

292 MADISON AVENUE

NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

ARCHITECTURAL LEAD WORK

Walter Beretta, Director of Monuments
New York City Dept. of Parks

(as presented, in his absence, by E.D. Martin,
Architectural Consultant, Lead Industries Assoc. Inc.)

I should like, first of all, to transmit to the membership the regrets Mr. Beretta conveyed to me for his inability to be here today. Those of you who have not heard him talk will not miss his vastly entertaining and colorful style. Those of us who have heard him will remember the breadth and depth of his knowledge, not only of sculpture and architecture but of the city and its life for he is a native New Yorker and he loves it. He also has, for me at least right now, one unfortunate habit; he speaks extemporaneously -- no notes, no copy.

This is an enviable ability of course but it leaves the poor guy who is asked to make a few remarks for him in a very un-enviable position. I have, in other words, no indication of what he might have chosen to talk about, nor on what terms. So I will simply paraphrase for you some of the remarks he made from time to time on those jobs which concerned lead and fill in with statistics or technical information which may be pertinent.

To begin with then, for those of you who do not know him, Walter Beretta is the head of the Monuments Division of the Department of Parks for all five boroughs in New York City. He has under his control, with the help of a tiny staff of seven men, the maintenance, repair or replacement of more than six hundred monuments of all kinds throughout the city. Some of these jobs involve the skills of such diverse trades or professions as bronze casters or jewelry repairmen or painting restorers. Since skills of this nature are increasingly hard to find today, Mr. Beretta has kept his small staff as a nucleus; some of them having been with him more than twenty years.

One of the largest jobs he has had recently, and one we were privileged to work on with him, was the Soldiers and Sailor's Monument on Riverside Drive in New York. This Vermont marble structure had deteriorated steadily since its dedication Memorial Day, 1902. Money was finally appropriated for its restoration and a beginning was made with the roof which was covered with four pound sheet lead. Since the structure is circular, roofing sheets are laid out and jointed in a radial pattern. Wood sleepers were let into the stone slab roof and the lead loose locked and cleated to them. In the other direction, that is up the roof,

*Presented at the 34th annual meeting of the
Lead Industries Association, Inc., Chase Park
Plaza Hotel, St. Louis, Mo., April 10-11, 1962

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The stone slabs are lapped over one another like shingles. At each change of levels then, a kind of cap and base technique was used. If you have seen our ad in "Progressive Architecture" or the "Engineering News Record" you will have seen the pattern of which I speak. A total of 17,000 lbs. of lead was used, about two thirds of it being four pound antimonial lead for the roof, the remainder being six pound material for use in foundation areas, under columns, etc., plus about a ton of lead wool for calking and 25 pounds of wire for burning.

Incidentally, back in 1902, when the monument was built, they ran over their budget. The total cost at the time, including an extra for all the approaches and all the landscaping and all the paving of the terraces was \$275,000. The cost to the city for the recent repair and refinishing alone was \$1,073,661.

Mr. Beretta, you can see, is a friend of ours. His experience with lead is wide — in fact it is unique. Only rarely is such an opportunity afforded one individual to test a building material as thoroughly and over as long a continuous period of time. Mr. Beretta has authorized me to say that his recommendation for the use of lead is unqualified and unequivocal. He has had the opportunity to compare materials in various uses too. He would not use another material than lead for pool linings — he has tried all the membranes and non-ferrous metals. He uses lead sheet wherever protection is needed in, under, or around stone work because it does not deteriorate even in New York's rugged atmosphere and it does not stain. Lead wool he has used in more ways than one. I would like to recite just one instance which comes to mind: This one happens to be notable not for quantities of material used nor for techniques displayed but simply as an illustration of the sort of off-beat adventures our favorite material can sometimes find itself engaged in. When the Sixth Avenue subway in New York was built, one of the strict provisions of the contract was that the contractor guarantee that all statuary on Columbus Circle, where the Sixth Avenue joined the Eighth Avenue line, be maintained intact. Dutifully, at the end of the job, the contractor sent his men to inspect for damage according to the terms of the contract. In due time an alarmed report was returned by the workmen. It seems at the head of the square stands a figure of the gentleman for whom the square is named, Christopher Columbus himself. He stands on a platform atop a tall masonry column. The column itself had been made of drums of stone, each weighing some seven tons, and each laid on top of the other without benefit of mortar as befitted the craftsmanship of the time. A hasty detail was appointed by the contractor and mortar was forced into the joints of the stone drums from top to bottom.

A few years passed over Columbus' head and many thousands of subway trains rumbled by under his feet before an urgent call summoned Mr. Beretta, like a doctor to his patient, to find out what had happened to Christopher. It developed that the mortar forced into the joints of the stonework had thrown the whole delicate balance of the column out of plumb. This, in combination with the vibration from the trains far below, had "walked" Columbus straight across his platform to the very edge and in imminent danger of falling head first into the busy throngs below. A quick inspection revealed the difficulty and an emergency squad raked the mortar out of the column joints and replaced it with lead wool so distributed as to restore the drums of stone to their former positions. Then, by inserting wedges under Christopher's feet, and using the self-same vibrations from the subways which had caused the original trouble, Columbus was "walked" back to his original position where he once more calmly stands quite unaware of the stir he once caused in the squirling city beneath him.

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I think, Gentlemen, if I have done anything, I've given you a good idea of the kind of life one Walter Beretta leads. It is the kind of life and the kind of job that permits lead to be used in a variety of ingenious, important and interesting ways.