

Testimony in Support of H.R. 1945
“The America’s National Churchill Museum National Landmark Act”

Submitted to the House Committee on Natural Resources by Timothy S. Riley,
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College

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be with you today, along with my colleagues Westminster College President Donald Lofe, Jr. and the College’s Board Chair, James Morton, Jr. to express our strong support for H.R. 1945, the “America’s National Churchill Museum National Landmark Act.” This legislation rightly recognizes the national significance of the America’s National Churchill Museum at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri — the site of Winston Churchill’s world-changing 1946 address, “The Sinews of Peace,” commonly known today throughout the world as the “Iron Curtain” speech.

Churchill’s most famous post-war speech, one he himself regarded as his finest, was a clarion call to Western democracies imploring them to work together to create a secure and peaceful world. Churchill’s address was also a stern warning of that an “iron curtain has descended across the continent” of Europe creating an ideological divide between Communism and Western Democracy that defined the latter half of the 20th century.

Historians—including Churchill himself—agree that the Cold War era began with a powerful speech in the gymnasium of Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri.

It was in America’s heartland, almost 80 years ago, in Fulton, the rural capital of Callaway County, Missouri, where Churchill, with President Harry Truman at his side, delivered a speech and changed the world.

While the “The Iron Curtain” speech is perhaps best known for its formidable warning about the threat of Soviet Communism, it is, at its essence, a profound document in defense of democracy and the importance of alliances—particularly the US-UK special relationship—to defend what Churchill called “great principles of freedom and the rights of man, which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world.”

So great was the power of Churchill's prose, that, 15 years after the speech, Westminster College officials desired to establish a permanent memorial to Churchill, his speech, and his legacy.

It will not be surprising to this august body, that the College did what it thought was necessary to mark the moment—it formed a committee.

And so it happened.

One committee member suggested putting up a statue. Another suggested a "Sinews of Peace" memorial garden or a stately plaque—the usual, if not pedestrian, tributes.

These were dismissed. Instead, Westminster College President Dr. Robert L. Davidson had a bold, alternative idea—to relocate from London to Fulton the war-scarred, Christopher Wren church of St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury and rebuild it at Fulton to honor Churchill.

The venerable building first appeared in British records in the 1100s. It stood proudly in London for nearly 500 years. William Shakespeare lived a block away. History records thousands of marriages in the church, including the famous British poet John Milton and lesser known but significant Allen and Margaret Robinette, who, after their nuptials, traveled to our shores and established a home in what was then known as "Penn's Woods," before establishing a long line of American Robinette descendants, including our nation's 46th president.

The original St. Mary Aldermanbury was destroyed during the Great Fire of London in 1666 before King Charles II asked England's finest architect, Sir Christopher Wren, to rebuild it along with over 50 other churches, including London's famed St. Paul's Cathedral.

More recently, but no less tragically, during the Second World War, on December 29, 1940—a moonless night—German warplanes dropped 20,000 incendiary bombs over London. In one of the worst raids of the Blitz, the Second Great Fire of London began.

Prime Minister Churchill commanded: "at all costs, save St. Paul's." Brave firefighters, many where were civilian volunteers, battled the infernal blazes. The next morning, as smoke rose above the City, the iconic dome of St. Paul's was intact.

St. Mary Aldermanbury, only blocks away, suffered a different fate.

The roof had collapsed and burned and the church was gutted by fire. Only the stone walls of Wren's building remained. It was a shell of a building.

The ruins of Aldermanbury stood in the City of London for two decades. The postwar economy in Britain made rebuilding it impossible. Some said there were not even funds to tear down the war-torn walls.

Westminster College, with private support from Americans across the nation who wished to honor Winston Churchill's leadership and legacy, raised funds to dismantle the ruins—7,000 stones—and transport them 4,000 miles to the middle of Missouri, where they were reassembled and refurbished at Westminster College as a memorial to Churchill and his lasting legacy.

Ladies and gentlemen, the building we speak about today has been a landmark in some form or fashion—on our shores or across the Atlantic—for almost 900 years. Today we ask that it be formally designated a United States National Landmark, which the current bill provides.

It is important to note, especially here, that the Churchill Memorial was an American project with the highest level of support from our nation's leaders.

Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Eisenhower and Truman served as co-chairmen of the project in the 1960s. Countless others in Congress and in statehouses across the country endorsed the project. Interestingly, on the day of the Memorial's dedication in May, 1969, Texas made Winston Churchill, posthumously, an Honorary Texan.

Winston Churchill was immensely proud of his American heritage and often reminded audiences—including Congress—that his mother was American and his ancestors were officers in Washington's army. Congress passed a Resolution authorizing President Kennedy to confer upon Sir Winston our nation's first Honorary Citizenship in 1962.

Winston Churchill, ladies and gentleman, was moved and honored that United States would so honor his legacy. (I might add, I believe he would be very much pleased to know that we are discussing his legacy before this committee today.)

Sir Winston Churchill, in 1963 at age 88, endorsed the Memorial project at Fulton, calling it "an imaginative concept" that he hoped would last as a symbol for the "hope of peace for the future of mankind."

And so it is.

Built by the British, bombed by Germans, and rebuilt in Missouri—by Americans—St. Mary Aldermanbury stands today as a beacon of resilience. It is a symbol of steadfastness in the face of adversity—a Churchillian trait, to be sure.

The Winston Churchill Memorial was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and formally commemorated and renamed by resolution of the 111th Congress as “America’s National Churchill Museum” in 2009.

America’s National Churchill Museum at Westminster College continually renews and reflects upon Churchill’s legacy. In this spirit, the Museum contains a notable collection of items that allow visitors to contemplate and understand the importance of Churchill’s legacy. Included among these treasures are Churchill’s own draft with his notes from his Iron Curtain speech, rare paintings by Winston Churchill, and other artifacts and archives related to the history of the Cold War and the Second World War.

Over the years, other world leaders have followed Churchill to our campus to share, like the great British statesman before them, their own ideas and identify challenges and opportunities for national and international security. These include U.S. Presidents George H.W. Bush, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan.

One year after the fall of the Berlin Wall—on November 9, 1990—President Reagan dedicated a sculpture by Churchill’s granddaughter, Edwina Sandys, comprised of eight sections of the wall—the concrete manifestation of the iron curtain of which Churchill spoke. The monument stands today as a part of America’s National Churchill Museum.

Two years later, the last President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, using the same lectern Churchill used in 1946, declared the end of the Cold War in the shadow of St. Mary Aldermanbury and in front of the Berlin Wall sculpture.

In 1996, former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher added a prescient warning to that of her predecessor, noting the threat of militant Islamic terrorism—five years before the unspeakable horrors of 9/11.

America’s National Churchill Museum is a living landmark, where history is not only preserved—it is where it’s made.

In recent years, Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer, General David Petraeus, Admiral James Stavridis, Secretary Madeline Albright as well as prominent historians such as Andrew Roberts and Jon Meacham have dignified and magnified Churchill’s message not only for the benefit of those who visit in Fulton, but all those who read or listen to archived addresses from all parts of our nation and beyond.

Since 2020, Westminster College has invested \$6 million in the preservation of America's National Churchill Museum. Funding was secured through private, state, and, notably, a \$1.9 million grant from the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

Ladies and gentleman, we are committed to preserving our rich history so that new generations of leaders can learn from it. While we work with the past—and indeed do learn from it—we are in the future business.

Designating the Museum as a National Historic Landmark will ensure continued preservation of the site and elevate public awareness of its historical importance. The Museum not only honors the life and leadership of Sir Winston Churchill, but also educates Americans about the values of democratic leadership, transatlantic partnership, and resilience in the face of tyranny. It is an important time to be in the Churchill business.

As our nation continues to reflect on the lessons of history and the defense of democratic ideals, this recognition is both timely and appropriate. I urge the Committee and the full House to advance H.R. 1945 and honor a vital chapter—and chapters yet to come—of shared U.S.-U.K. history.

I think it appropriate to let Churchill have the final say here today, and these words from 1943, seem to be fitting: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”

In America's National Churchill Museum at Westminster College, we have a landmark that continues to shape us in a most meaningful manner.

Respectfully submitted,

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July 16, 2025



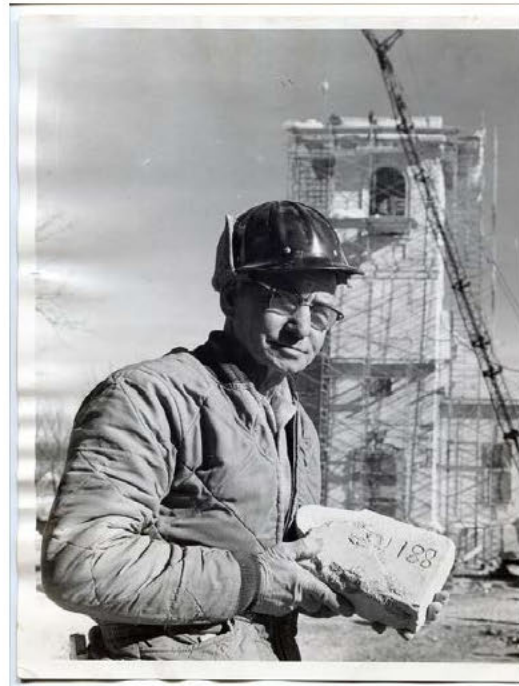
Winston Churchill with President Truman (seated left) delivering "The Sinews of Peace" address ("Iron Curtain" Speech), at Westminster College (Fulton, Missouri) March 5, 1946 IMAGE: America's National Churchill Museum Archives



St. Mary the Aldermanbury in London on December 30, 1940 showing damage by German incendiary bombs dropped the previous night IMAGE: America's National Churchill Museum Archives.



St. Mary the Aldermanbury in London, early 1960s IMAGE: America's National Churchill Museum Archives



St. Mary the Aldermanbury reconstruction at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, 1960s
 IMAGES: America's National Churchill Museum Archives



America's National Churchill Museum at Westminster College (Fulton, Missouri), 2016, with Edwina Sandys' Breakthrough (Berlin Wall) sculpture and St. Mary Aldermanbury
 IMAGE: America's National Churchill Museum Archives