



RICH ADDICKS / Staff

Benjamin Hirsch, who was orphaned by the Nazis, designed the Memorial to the Six Million, in Atlanta's Greenwood Cemetery, in the 1960s. Six slender white torches rise from the memorial, which has rough granite walls. The torches represent 6 million Jews killed.

Structure honoring Holocaust victims lands spot on national register early

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There is a space in the middle of the Memorial to the Six Million in Greenwood Cemetery, just as there is space in the life of its designer, Benjamin Hirsch.

His father, Hermann, disappeared on Kristallnacht, the 1938 event in Germany whose mellifluous name masked its horrid results. Nazi-organized mobs ransacked and destroyed Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues. Tens of thousands of prominent Jewish men,

REMEMBRANCE

Atlanta's 43rd annual Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration will take place at the Memorial to the Six Million at 10:30 a.m. Sunday in Greenwood Cemetery, 1173 Cascade Road S.W.

Hirsch's father among them, were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

His mother managed to send Hirsch and four siblings to

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Memorial again part of history

Memorial: 'More meaningful than a tombstone'

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safety in France, then to the U.S., where she had relatives.

She stayed behind with her two youngest children, where in 1942 they shared Hermann's fate — murdered in the Holocaust.

The Hirsch orphans came to Georgia, where Hirsch became the architect who, with a bit of bravado, snatched the job of designing the Georgia Holocaust memorial from a business that was in line to get it.

His Memorial to the Six Million just won a place on the National Register of Historic Places, a rare feat for something less than 50 years old.

Hirsch said he had been an architect for two years in 1964 when he read in the newspaper of a committee of 100 survivors raising money to build the Georgia monument.

The committee had already selected a designer who proposed a white marble memorial in the shape of a tombstone. The committee was meeting to confirm its choice, and Hirsch saw his chance.

He went to the meeting and approached the organizers.

"I said, 'I want to give you something more meaningful than a tombstone, and I won't charge you a penny for this,'" he recalled.

His talk stirred some argument among the committee. They had already selected the design, some said. But committee member Lola Lansky argued to give the young upstart Hirsch a chance.

"Mrs. Lansky said, 'We will give you two weeks,'" Hirsch said.

He didn't need it. "I didn't sleep that night I was so excited," he said.

He went to work, sketching, thinking. He wanted an enclosed space to get people

involved in it rather than a monument that people would look at.

He wanted the walls and floor to be rough granite, not smooth marble, to symbolize the traumatic time.

His final design is sparse, linear and angular.

Four separate interlocking walls of granite stones leave four entrances: "To make the statement that it was open to the people of the four corners of the Earth," Hirsch said.

Rising from the interior space are six smooth torches, representing 6 million victims.

The committee accepted his design.

Steven Moffson, architectural historian for the state Department of Natural Resources, said the monument is significant because it is representative of historic events, at a time when survivors were building monuments around the world, and of the age, because of the modernist architectural style.

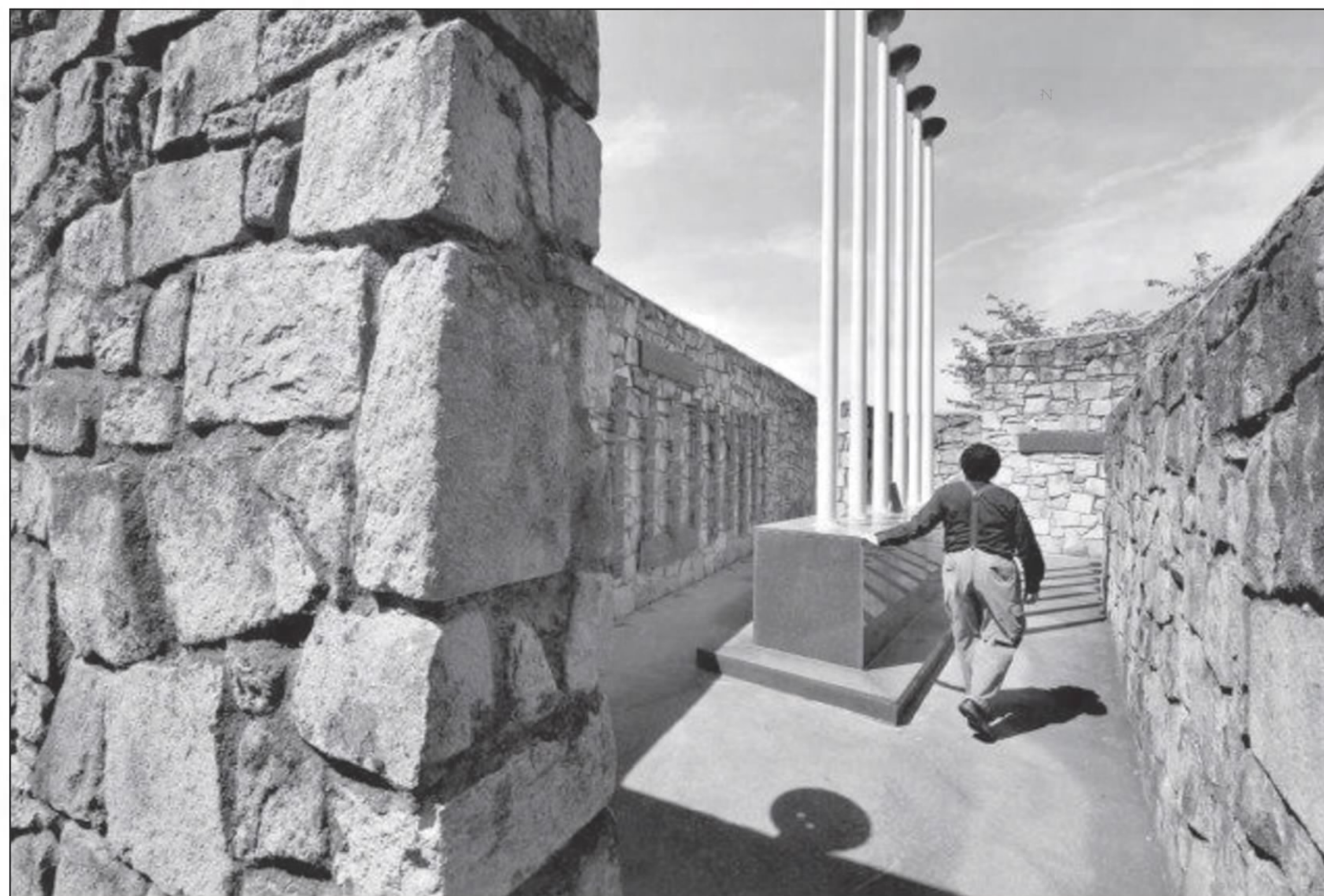
"It's very stripped down, nothing in the way of historical details," he said.

Hirsch was a Georgia Tech student during the tenure of Paul Heffernan, director of the school of architecture and a leading light in modernist architecture.

That bolstered the Department of Natural Resources' recommendation that the monument get the historical listing, overcoming the usual hurdle of having to wait at least 50 years after an edifice is built, Moffson said.

Hirsch, who spent much of his career designing synagogues and churches, recalled with a chuckle his initial response on seeing the memorial.

"I was 32 when it was dedicated in 1965. I went home that night and said, 'What am I going to do now?' I thought I had reached the pinnacle of my career."



Photos by RICH ADDICKS / Staff
Benjamin Hirsch walks through the Memorial to the Six Million. The walls and floor are rough granite, not smooth marble, to symbolize the trauma of the Holocaust. The memorial has won a place on the National Register of Historic Places, a rare feat for something less than 50 years old.

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