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Monument



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No Decision Has Been Made About the Removed Lawrenceville Confederate Monument

📅 March 30, 2021 ⌚ 6 min read 👤 Charlotte Reames

County officials have still not announced a decision on what will be done with the Confederate monument that was removed from Lawrenceville square.

“[The County Commissioners] keep it top secret,” Solicitor General Brian Whiteside said. “But they offered to give it back. If those Confederate personnel want it, they can come get it.”

Gwinnett County Commissioners removed the monument on January 18th after months of petitions and a lawsuit for its removal over repeated vandalisms and reckoning with the history of racial violence on its grounds.

“I’ve always wanted to create an environment, create a community where everyone feels welcomed, appreciated, valued, and respected,” County Commissioner Kirkland Carden said. “And there is no way that you can have a monument to the Confederacy and think that you’re achieving any of those things.”

A state ordinance previously prevented the removal, stating that various monuments are not allowed to be moved unless it is for preservation or to relocate it to a location of equal or higher prominence.

The Commissioners approved the removal using the clause in the state ordinance that the removal will prevent further vandalism and help preserve it, according to Carden.

Opponents of the monument’s removal have claimed that removing the monument is disrespectful. One Lawrenceville resident argued to the Board of Commissioners before they voted that the monument’s removal would erase history, according to an AJC report from January 19th.



Carden, a self-professed student of Southern history, told the Globe that the removal is not about history, but about removing the monument from such a “sensitive location.”

Officials hope that monuments like these can be placed somewhere more appropriate to allow citizens to continue to learn Southern history.

“I think it should be put in a historical setting, maybe a library or a special building that has educational information that can be provided to the citizens. There should be accredited information, and there can be a conversation about both sides of the North and the South,” Whiteside said. “If [the Sons of Confederate Veterans] want to move it, they should pay for it. They haven’t even proved ownership [of the monument] yet.”

The monument was commissioned and funded by the Sons of the Confederate Veterans and was presumably gifted to the county for installation.

Gwinnett County accepted it in 1992 and installed it on Lawrenceville square the following year. Martin O’Toole, the Sons of the Confederate Veterans spokesperson, said that he is unsure who the monument belongs to now, but assumes the county owns it. To his knowledge, there are no current plans for moving the monument.

In 2019, the state ordinance which prevents the removal of military monuments was expanded to encompass a variety of other monuments. Commissioner Carden said this decision was in response to the call to remove several historical monuments from prominent locations in Savannah, GA.

The state decision was an “overreach,” according to Carden. It deprived the local government of control over local concerns.

“The difference,” Carden said, “is that those monuments actually had historical context.”

A Racially Motivated History



The Lawrenceville Confederate monument was erected in the late nineties, almost a hundred and thirty years after the Civil War ended.

There were also no significant battles or events in Gwinnett County during the Civil War, according to Gwinnett Historical Society Committee President Beverly Paff.

“If it were in fact ‘erasing history,’ I would be adamantly opposed to it, but that monument was to the soldiers, and that was not a site that needed to be preserved where history happened,” Paff said. “It was not a battlefield, so I don’t personally feel threatened... but I do think it would be nice if they could find an appropriate place [for the monument].”

Paff made clear that these statements are her personal views and are not necessarily representative of the Gwinnett Historical Society.

Whiteside called for the removal of the monument with a lawsuit against the County late last year. He argued that the offensive nature of the monument could lead to violence in the community, making the monument a public nuisance.

Many supporters of the monument’s removal cited the location as inappropriate and offensive specifically for its close proximity to the lynching site of Charlie Hale in 1911.

Hale was lynched on the corner of Pike and Perry St., a few yards away from where the now removed monument was installed. According to the Lynching Project at UGA, he was taken from a local jail without trial and hanged after being accused of assaulting a married, white woman of prominence in the area.

Carden said this is not the only instance of racial violence that has taken place on the Courthouse grounds. According to Carden, there have been multiple documented lynchings and cross burnings on Lawrenceville square.

“Those of us who have lived here long enough, or those of us over a certain age, know about it,” Carden said. “I think Charlie Hale might be the oldest, but he’s definitely not the only [victim of a hate crime].”



Whiteside has dropped the lawsuit since the monument's removal. O'Toole said the organization member in charge of the commission was likely unaware of the violent history of the site and that the monument had nothing to do with "that history."

O'Toole indicated the Courthouse Square was likely chosen for the monument's installation as it was traditional practice to erect veteran memorials at town courthouses. In 1988, four years before the monument was commissioned, judicial operations moved to the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center, according to an AJC report from February 22, 2018. The Gwinnett Historic Courthouse was sanctioned under the National Register of Historic Places after that, according to Paff.

"[The monument is] on county property," Carden said. "If you look at [the County Commissioners'] mission statement, and you should, there's no way you can read that and think the Confederacy somehow aligns with that, that it strengthens that. It doesn't."

"When you have a segment of the population who were enslaved," Whiteside said, "Why would you put [the monument] there when it doesn't represent the wishes of the people?"

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