Understanding the Archivist’s Role in the Contextualization, Removal, and Relocation of Confederate Monuments

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The purpose of this research study was to interview archivists and librarians at cultural heritage institutions where Confederate monuments or memorials have been removed or relocated and learn how archivists were involved in the process, as well as their thoughts on what they believe their role may be as information professionals in the conversations around removal or relocation.
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELAINE RICE BACHMANN</td>
<td>Maryland State Archives</td>
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<td>Deputy State Archivist and Secretary of the State House Trust</td>
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<td>LISA BROUGHMAN</td>
<td>Randolph College Director of Lipscomb Library</td>
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<td>VALERIE GILLISPIE</td>
<td>Duke University Archivist, Rubenstein Rare Book &amp; Manuscript Library</td>
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<td>LAURA HART</td>
<td>University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Technical Services Archivist, Wilson Special Collections Library</td>
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Outline

1. Historical and Literature Review
2. Research Questions & Methods
3. Brief Overview of the Monuments
4. Findings
5. Conclusions & Implications
What do archives have to do with Confederate monuments?

- Archives are an extension of monuments: monuments generate a great deal of planning documents, correspondence, paperwork, and discussion.
- The archive is a place for saving and shaping memory, and “play[s] a critical role in assisting communities and cultures to create an imagined past” (Cox, 2012).
- Archives, special collections, and other cultural heritage repositories have become a popular option for relocating Confederate monuments.
Confederate Monuments: A (VERY) Brief History

- "Lost Cause:" early 1900s, reframed the Confederate effort as "valorous" and "noble" (Horton, 2017)
- Diverted focus from defense of slavery to states' rights (Isherwood, 2008)
- Analysis of 200+ courthouse and cemetery Confederate memorials in Virginia and other Southern states: "uplifted, idealized individual...standing at parade rest atop a pedestal" is common form (Sedore, 2003)
Confederate Monuments: A (VERY) Brief History

- 2015: Killing of nine African Americans at Emmanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, S.C. by self-identified white supremacist catalyzed nationwide debate about Confederate symbols
- 2017: Violent "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA targeted plans to remove Robert E. Lee statue from public park, leaving one dead and 30 injured
- 2015-2019: Rapid increase in attempted relocation/removal of Confederate symbols across the South, as well as passing of Heritage Protection Acts in many Southern States
CONFEDERATE SYMBOLS REMOVED SINCE CHARLESTON ATTACK IN 2015

114

CONFEDERATE SYMBOLS THAT STILL STAND IN UNITED STATES (FEB. 2019)

1,747

Southern Poverty Law Center, "Whose Heritage?," 2019
“It is dangerous because to remove (certain) monuments in (certain) contexts may do little more than assuage white guilt...such monuments may serve as physical locations where people can point to race’s ongoing power, be reminded that black lives have not mattered in the construction of society, and even serve as locations where people can gather antiracist energy in a shared public space.” (Newson, 2017)
“Not only do such arguments [for thick description] legitimate the preservation of existing monuments but, what is more, they encourage the conscious and persistent conjuring up of the past...The symbolic representations of the past are thus appropriated for the purposes of the new order.” (Marschall, 2009)
**ONE**

How have archivists been **involved** in the monument removal or relocation process at their institution, if at all?

**TWO**

What **challenges** did archivists face during the monument removal or relocation process?

**THREE**

Do archivists feel that archives are **appropriate** locations for Confederate monuments?

**FOUR**

Do archivists at cultural heritage sites feel they or their collections have a **role to play** in the monument removal process?

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- 5 Interviews
- 45 minutes each
- Transcribed, iteratively coded
3. The Monuments

Roger Taney
Maryland State Archives
Annapolis

Jefferson Davis
University of Texas
Austin

George Morgan Jones
Randolph College
Lynchburg, Virginia

Robert E. Lee
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

"Silent Sam"
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill

https://www.flickr.com/photos/retroweb/6399910097
Challenges archivists faced in the removal process

- 3 of 5 archive professionals were not consulted before administrative decisions were made
- Safety of employees and patrons most frequently cited issue
- Advocating to administration against moving monument to archive or library when it became evident it was a top contender for relocation
- Security to protect item from vandalism, defacement, and damage to facilities, and logistics of monument preservation
- Emotional impact of monument’s presence
- Broader, profession-wide challenge of confronting whiteness in archives
4. Findings and Analysis

Use of archives in monument removal/relocation


Duke University Libraries FAQ page on Chapel Figures
https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/archives/history/faqs/chapel-figures

Jefferson Davis in his new home at the Briscoe Center for American History

Jefferson Davis' statement on the present generation, criticizing monument removal/relocation.

The present generation, I am persuaded, scarcely takes note of what the Confederate soldier meant to the welfare of the Anglo Saxon race during the four years immediately succeeding the war, when the facts are, that their courage and steadfastness saved the very life of the Anglo Saxon race in the South - when "the bottom rail was on top" all over the Southern states, and to-day, as a consequence, the purest strain of the Anglo Saxon is to be found in the 13 Southern States -- Praise God.

I trust I may be pardoned for one allusion, howbeit it is rather personal. One hundred yards from where we stand, less than ninety days perhaps after my return from Appomattox, I horse-whipped a negro woman until her skirts hung in shreds, because upon the streets of this quiet village she had publicly insulted and maligned a Southern lady, and then rushed for protection to these University buildings where was stationed a garrison of 100 Federal soldiers. I performed the pleasing duty in the immediate presence of the entire garrison, and for thirty nights afterwards slept with a double-barrel shot gun under my head.

Archivists on the future of Confederate monuments in archives

- All 5 archivists agreed that storage in appropriate facility is preference for the current and foreseeable future
- 2 of 5 interviewed believed there might be a future time and place where monuments could be used as educational tools
- Belief that there are other projects in the archives that warrant greater administrative and financial support
- Monuments need not be replaced by something else
Archivists' role in monument contextualization, removal, and/or relocation

- All 5 archivists expressed strong beliefs that archivists have an important role to play in the removal and/or relocation of Confederate monuments.
- 2 of 5 had some level of influence on administrative decisions about monuments.
- 3 of 5 were not consulted but felt that they should have been, expressed feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, especially when their institution became likely recipient of monument.
- Archivists are experts in promoting productive, information-centered discussions.
Conclusions & Implications

- **The Archives Are a Vital Yet Undervalued Resource**
  The archives are a place for fact-finding, evidence compilation, and documentation of historic and current climate - all work participants had performed of a monument.

- **Archivists Express Doubt over Contextualizing Monuments**
  Interviews challenged the notion of thick description and reshaping of public monument for a new purpose (Newson, 2017).

- **Archivists Are Directly Impacted by Confederate Monuments & Decision to Remove**
  All expressed emotional impact and professional pressures related to the presence and removal of Confederate monument.

- **Archivists Are Actively Engaged and Have an Important Role to Play**
  Archivists can make valuable contributions to decisions on monument removal and/or relocation, and should be consulted more frequently by administration.
Bonus Slide! Headlines This Week

- Atlanta Will Add Context About Racism to Historic Monuments
  
  [Link to article](https://time.com/5641469/atlanta-confederate-monuments/)

- Metro Parks Will Explore Relocation Process For Confederate Monument In Centennial Park
  
  [Link to article](https://www.nashvillepublicradio.org/post/metro-parks-will-explore-relocation-process-confederate-monument-centennial-park#stream/0)

- Judge dismisses lawsuit seeking removal of Norfolk's Confederate monument
  
  [Link to article](https://pilotonline.com/news/government/local/article_75d5de96-ad60-11e9-8b5d-3b84ccc352bf.html)


Wilson, V. (2012). Research Methods: Interviews. Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 7(2), 96-98. https://doi.org/10.18438/B89P3B