

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The Chatham County Line published the story of the Confederate monument in Pittsboro in three parts during Fall 2018. Given the attention the monument has received over the past six months, the paper has decided to reprint the history in one full piece with the ending being more contextual with the current dialogue and "reimagining" of the space. Except where noted by the author, the account is based on the August 15, 22, and 29 issues of the Chatham RECORD, 1907, published by Arthur London.

# The Monument

by Will Sexton

## PART 1: THE PROJECT

The rain that drenched Chatham County on the afternoon of August 22, 1907 must have made for anxious times in the London house. The next day would mark the unveiling of the Confederate Monument that stood now covered in white cloth, in front of the county courthouse in Pittsboro a block-and-a-half away. Henry A. London wrote in that day's Chatham RECORD that the largest crowd ever assembled in Chatham was here at the veterans' reunion in August, 1888... [and if] tomorrow (Friday) is a good day almost as large a crowd will be here ... "Visitors had already begun arriving in the town, and no doubt many called at the Londons' to pay respects. Talk probably edged into nervous concerns for the next day's weather.

Yet it almost surely mixed with congratulations and gratitude for the Londons as prime movers of the monument project. For years London, a Confederate veteran and editor of the weekly RECORD, had used the pages of his newspaper to advocate for the monument and solicit donations to the fund. No—the words "advocate" and "solicit" do not do justice—more like, harass, cajole, harangue and shame. London knew when folks were flush: "With cotton now selling at a good price contributions ought to be made promptly" (October 18, 1906). London appealed to guilty feelings: "Are not Chatham's soldiers as worthy of being honored as those of any other county? Why wait until all of them are dead?" (December 6, 1906). London called out the slackers: "The last contribution to Chatham's Confederate monument is one dollar by Mr. A.T. Womble, of Matthews township, a one-arm man. This ought to put to shame those two-arm men who are much more able to give and yet have not given one cent." (April 4, 1907). And London walked the color line; after a contribution of one dollar from a G.G. Smith of Fayetteville, London noted it as "the first that has been received from a colored person," and wrote (June 7, 1906):

*He was born and reared in this county, near Haywood, and is now a teacher in the graded school for the colored race at Fayetteville, and is highly thought of by all who know him. In his letter sending his contribution (which was unsolicited) he wrote these words: "Gratitude demands that I give my mite to any cause that will perpetuate the glory of the old soldiers." This surely should stimulate our white countrymen to contribute!*

THE REAL ORGANIZERS AND heavy lifters on the monument project, however, were the women of the Winnie Davis chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The former Bettie Louise Jackson, or "Mrs. H.A. London" as she was known in the pages of the RECORD, served as chapter president, and the London home served as a frequent meeting place. Bettie also joined her husband in hectoring the county from the editorial pages of the RECORD. On February 15, 1906, she expressed hope of unveiling the statue that coming August, and entreated her fellow countypersons in plaintive all-caps:

*[N]ow we appeal to ALL to come forward and make up the balance right away. We know that all will give; but we want it NOW. WE ARE READY FOR IT. Or a written PROMISE for the amount to be paid in June.*

Dedication to memorializing the Lost Cause brought Bettie renown and admiration; the RECORD on May 16, 1907 conveyed the following Fayetteville OBSERVER report on the recent Memorial Day parade there:

*[W]hen the Fayetteville Independent Light Infantry reached the Highsmith hospital, on the decorated balcony of which sat Mrs. H.A. London, they halted and presented arms, then came the veterans, seventy-five strong, who raised their hats and gave the "rebel yell." Mrs. London acknowledged the compliment by waving a Confederate flag.*

The fund-raising did not come easily in hard-scrabble Chatham, and the memorial project took longer than the Londons had expected. Target dates came and went, and the fund grew in dribs and drabs. By early summer 2006, it had languished for months, but a pair of fifty-dollar pops in April-May 1906 got it going again. One came from Dr. Isaac Emerson of Baltimore, inventor of Bromo-Seltzer and "a native of this county," and the other from American Tobacco Company attorney W.W. Fuller, a Durham transplant to New York, and "one of the most successful lawyers in the United

States." With the balance at \$1343.84 in October of 2006, London still complained that "in several other counties twice that amount has been raised in half that time for their soldiers." Even as the fund approached the target amount of \$1600, London's edge of disappointment never dulled. In February of 2007, he wrote:

*When the effort was started three years ago to raise money enough for the proposed monument many persons laughed at the prospect and predicted that even \$500 would never be raised. Of course more*

"I think it wiser not to keep open the sores of war but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife, to commit to oblivion the feelings engendered."

Robert E. Lee

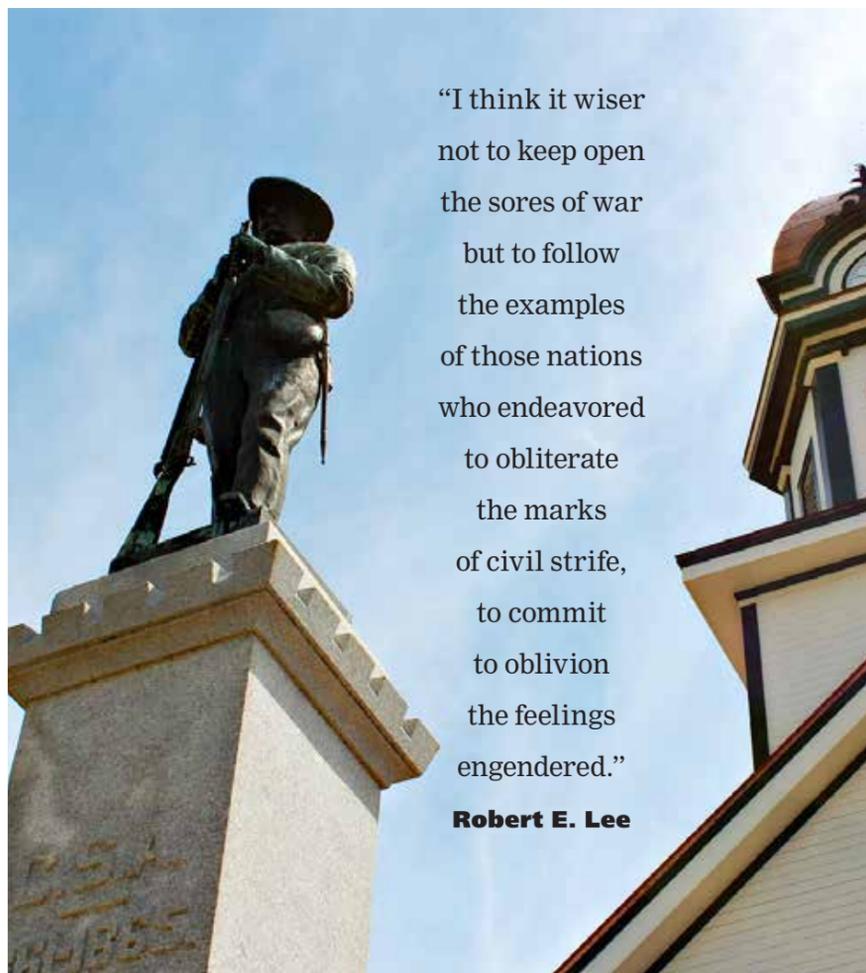


PHOTO: LESLEY LANDIS

*should have been contributed [than] has been, but enough is now on hand to make certain that the required amount (\$1600) will soon be raised.*

FINALLY ON JULY 19, 1906 THE RECORD announced that the Daughters had signed a contract with Durham Marble Works, and threatened that the monument "will not be unveiled, but will remain covered, until every dollar due for it is paid." Nearly a year later, on July 4, 1907, the newspaper announced the date of August 23rd for the unveiling. The full moon would provide light for those traveling to Pittsboro, but also, it was one of four days of the year on which the Daughters could present "crosses of honor" to the veterans. By August 8 the monument at last stood in place, draped in white cloth and awaiting the grand occasion of its unveiling.

As the day of the unveiling drew close, the London home became de facto headquarters of the Winnie Davis chapter of the U.D.C., who met frequently as the final plans for the unveiling ceremony took shape. The Raleigh drum corps, "composed of Confederate veterans, who were musicians during the war, ... said to be the only Confederate drum corps now in existence," committed to the program. A repair and paint job improved the looks of the courthouse. A dinner in the corridors of the courthouse was planned for the veterans.

Henry London devoted the editorial page of the August 22 edition of the weekly RECORD to framing the next day's events. Just a week earlier, he had announced the start of the paper's

thirtieth volume, three decades over which "no other paper has been exclusively and continuously owned and edited ... by the same person." This former Confederate courier and longtime voice of the county took the moment to wax editorial:

*The bronze figure, standing on this monument, will forever typify and call to mind the most magnificent soldiers who ever marched to battle in any age or country. In the ages to come that silent sentinel, standing with his empty musket at parade rest, will speak more eloquently than the glowing words of the impassioned orator, in perpetuating the memory of the heroism and self-sacrifices of the Confederate soldier. In a few more years the last of those whom he represents will like him, be at rest. Let posterity revere their memory so long as that bronze figure stands its silent watch!*

*It has been well said that "A people who forget their dead deserve themselves to be forgotten." It is eminently right and proper, therefore, for the people of Chatham county thus to honor the memory of their Confederate heroes.*

So it rained buckets that day, and the paper ran an item announcing the deaths of the snare and kettle drummer from the Raleigh drum corps. The Londons probably worried, as any organizer does the night before the grand event. But these setbacks would not have blunted the underlying sense of satisfaction with which both Henry and Bettie lay their heads down that night.

Their efforts of three-and-a-half years had placed a seven-foot "bronze statue or figure of a fully equipped Confederate soldier with his gun at parade rest" atop a twenty-foot granite base practically



Barbara Pugh, president of the Winnie Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy addresses the Chatham County commissioners regarding the Confederate monument.

PHOTO: CHRIS TELESKA