

MONUMENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

corroborating account with more detail seems remote. Still, the event that left H.A. London, for once in his life, bereft of descriptive powers must have breached some taboo. And in 1907 North Carolina, an act with the transgressive power to turn Henry London circumspect may well have touched on the matter of race.

To be sure, lacking details, it is challenging to say exactly what symbolic statement the vandal intended. Was it someone who hated the pretensions of the statue, the overbearing pitch of the London fund-raising drive, or the pomposity of the previous weekend's unveiling ceremonies? Could the gesture have come from someone whose garden hoe was stolen or porch peed on during the weekend of celebration?

Or was it truly a racially-charged act, done by an anonymous dissident making a point about apartheid in the era of Jim Crow? Given the risks to a person of color, who in that community would have dared? If the perpetrators never did get caught, they either kept mum about it — which, given the public nature of the gesture, seems unlikely — or they confessed only in circles tight enough that no one betrayed them for \$25. But the African-American community would have known that one among them, if caught, would be dealt with cruelly.

Furthermore, can we even say that the blacks of 1907 Chatham saw a potent racial symbol in the Confederate monument? Was there clandestine organizing; what affairs of race did the members of the African-American community discuss when they met privately? What were their private thoughts about the

memorial, the cult of the Lost Cause, and its connections to the Jim Crow regime? Unfortunately, the marginalization of African-American voices of the county limits us to nibbling at the edges of these questions.

The defacement may well have been a gesture with a more partisan point. In the decades before the memorial went up, a potent combination of Populist sentiment and black allegiance to the Republican Party ran through the county. Democratic sympathies would have been concentrated in Pittsboro, where Mr. Pittsboro himself, London, was a staunch Democrat who published a Democratic newspaper. Populists thrived in the other parts of the county, and many of the farmers developed their political consciousness via the Farmers' Alliance. It was a different political landscape from our own, which follows on the realignment of southern whites with the Republican Party starting in the 1960s.

With this background, perhaps it makes more sense to suggest that a Populist aimed the racially-charged vandalism of the memorial directly at London and the RECORD. Or perhaps the target was more broadly the Democratic elite, whom the shoe-polish phantom saw embodied in that figure posed in the center of Pittsboro. Or maybe it was, after all, just some teenagers who got into their father's corn liquor.

Whatever the particulars of the defacement, it must have stung Henry and Bettie London deeply, given their personal investment in the statue as a project. For the Londons and their white contemporaries, the movement to memorialize the Lost Cause of the Confederacy represented a sweeping, nationwide project

to pose firmly opposition to what he called "lynch law," and criticized the practice in the harshest terms. Yet he was just as firm in his support for Jim Crow. Following election day in 1898, white supremacists stormed the city of Wilmington, turned their guns on blacks in the streets, killed dozens if not hundreds, forced the duly elected Republican-Populist (aka, "Fusion") government to resign at gunpoint, and banished those who did not flee from the city. London's reaction was to write, "Wilmington is once more ruled by respectable white men and all her citizens are now safe and secure in their lives, liberty and property." There were no further Fusion electoral victories in North Carolina. About five years later, the Winnie Davis Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, led by Bettie London, announced their plans to erect a monument in Pittsboro.

The Confederate monuments that went up in the early and mid-Twentieth Century are not memorials to a defeat, but commemorations of a victory. They celebrate the enduring victory, in the states of the southern US, of a regime of racial apartheid. In recent years, this aspect of their history has flared in the national discourse, largely as a response to violent displays of hatred by white nationalists.

In 2017, the issue burned hot when white nationalists staged a murderous rally around the statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, and the same questions arose from the racially motivated murder of blacks in a Charleston church two years previous to that. There is an irredeemable bond between the monuments and the ongoing history of white supremacy in the United States. The ques-

If UNC does relocate the monument, it will have to work around the "Cultural History Artifact Management and Patriotism Act of 2015," a bill that the NC state legislature passed in a reactionary response to the discourse about monuments that accompanied the murders in Charleston. The General Assembly, in the time since Republicans took over in 2010, has proven itself hostile to the history of progressive change and leadership that is part of North Carolina's story. Further, the Republican majority in NC engages in extreme practices of gerrymandering and limiting access to the ballot, a sad continuation of Jim Crow. The majority that passed the law in 2015 was built on racially gerrymandered legislative maps that were later redrawn at the order of the judiciary.

This regressive and unjust law forces municipalities to maintain monuments in places of reverence whether they reflect the community's values or not. It makes removing them, and allowing our public spaces to reflect our values, an act of civil disobedience.

Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the Chatham Confederate monument should be removed from its place of veneration in public space. If it is removed to a public space, it should be placed in a context that recognizes the ongoing history of white supremacy that the Confederacy, and its later memorialization in the Jim Crow era, represent. I do not share this opinion lightly, and I recognize the legal and cultural barriers to taking such action.

The name of the township in which Pittsboro lies is Center. The traffic circle in which the statue stands is the center of town, an important symbolic crossroads that lies near the geographical center of the NC. The statue stands in the center of public space in the town and the county. That shared, central space should represent our values, and speak of who we are and who we aspire to be. The people who lived here 110 years ago took this truth to heart, and acted on it by placing a memorial there to a lost cause that sought to preserve slavery, while themselves engaging in the suppression of equal representation for those whom the system of slavery and apartheid had wronged.

As long as the Confederate monument stands there in a position of veneration, the public space of Pittsboro cannot reflect the values to which we aspire. There's no loss to history if we choose to alter that space to do so.

Will Sexton lives in Pittsboro. He adapted this series for the Chatham County Line from his blog.

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to sanctify the remembrance of the American Civil War. However, their version of the story behind that movement comes entirely from one side of what their black contemporaries, Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Dubois, called "the color line."

While the Londons and other "redeemers" of the Confederacy spoke in terms of remembrance, it also happens that their movement coincided with the implementation of a regime of voter suppression and terrorist violence that we know as Jim Crow. More than a century later, it is impossible to deny its corrosive and lasting effect on American life.

Henry London used the pages of the

and the agony around these symbols will persist until we have reconciliation on race in America, and reconciliation is a road that appears to stretch before us to something like eternity.

In the meantime, protestors have pulled down from their plinths the monuments in two of our neighboring towns, Durham and Chapel Hill. A fierce debate has arisen around the disposition of the statue in Chapel Hill, known as Silent Sam — at whose dedication in 1913 Bettie London herself spoke. The administration at UNC-Chapel Hill is reportedly set to share a proposal with the Board of Governors around the time this issue goes to press.

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Chatham County Line is a community newspaper serving all of Chatham County as well as the southern part of Orange. Our mission is to inform our community by providing a forum "where all voices are heard." We seek all views and ideas about our community, and we report on important matters — including our cultural life — comprehensively and in-depth. Our commitment is to create the best-written, best-edited and most stylish community newspaper anywhere. Chatham County Line is published ten times a year.

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BEVERAGE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

finding our way. Onsite events are growing. We have long enjoyed the company of Abundance NC, with their non-profit festivals and conferences. These days other non-profits are using the space for their fundraisers. People are getting married at the Plant. Go figure.

This time of year we do a roaring trade in gift crates. Those wishing to ship a box of hometown products to their far away relatives

can drop in and design their own local food creation.

A bottle of hot sauce from Fiddle Head Farm, a jar of pickled okra from Bonlee Grown, and one of Tuesday's jams makes a great reminder of Chatham County.

Of course there is something better. It's a bite of Angelina's fudge with a swallow of sparkling rose from the Yadkin Valley.

Better yet is the look on Angelina's face when I put in our order for more of her artisan products when we need to restock our shelves.

Lyle Estill, a long time Chatham resident, started Piedmont Buofuels and other cooperative ventures.

The Beverage District will host a New Year's Rockin' Eve from 6 p.m. to 12:01 a.m. on December 31, 2018.

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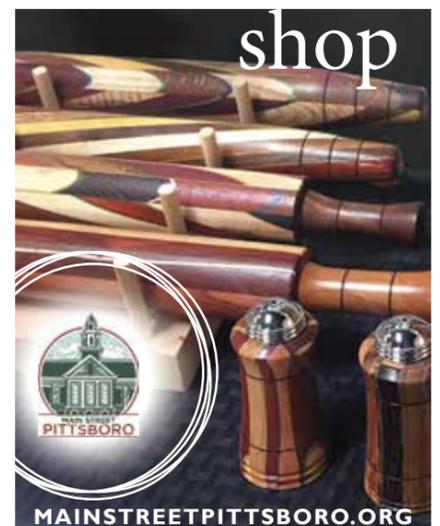
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