

**Bull Run Civil War Round Table (BRCWRT) Preservation Corner
June 27, 2020**



Greetings, and I trust that you and your families are doing well and remain safe and healthy.

This edition of *Preservation Corner*; 1) provides an update on the threat to the historic Conner House located in the City of Manassas Park, 2) addresses the current political and social environment with its attendant vandalism threats to Civil War sites, monuments, memorials and statues, 3) the ongoing controversy and discussions concerning actions and proposals to remove local civil war monuments and 4) identifies options available for individual involvement in relevant discussions, decisions and actions related to these subjects.

Historic Conner House Update

(Please see the May 25, 2020 Preservation Corner for additional background information on the Conner House and Manassas Park's City Center development.)

As reported in April 2020, BRCWRT became aware of the dire preservation threat to the historic Conner House posed by the City of Manassas Park's City Center development plan - a plan that was recently approved by Manassas Park's Governing Body. The four-phased development project will replace the current City Hall with a new multi-story City Hall, retail stores, a city square public plaza, an apartment complex and a nine-screen movie theater, along with the attendant public parking lots and a multi-story parking garage. Phase 4 of the development plan includes two, six-story apartment complexes, one of which will be built on the historic Conner House site.



Conner House (June 2020)

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The Conner House, located in the vicinity of 8220 Conner Drive, is the only historic structure in the City of Manassas Park and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its known history reaches back to the 18th century and the earliest settlers, the Hooe family, in Prince William County. During the Civil War the house served from July to November 1861 as the headquarters of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston, at that time the commander of the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah, and in August 1862 as the headquarters of the ill-fated Colonel Lewis B. Pierce, commander of the 12th Pennsylvania Cavalry during the 2nd Manassas Campaign. The Conner House was used as a field hospital during and after the Battles of 1st and 2nd Manassas, and is one of the few remaining antebellum structures in the Manassas area.

In May 2020 BRCWRT submitted three separate letters concerning the Conner House to Mayor Jeanette Rishell and the other members of Manassas Park's Governing Body. BRCWRT's letters (<http://bullruncwrt.org/BRCWRT/Preservation/Conner%20House.html>) highlighted BRCWRT's concerns with the threat to the Conner House and the Governing Body's decision to not even consider the Conner House in its consideration of the development plan, included information on the history of the Conner House and a summary of the restoration, preservation and interpretation work done on the Conner House in the early 1990s and information on the value of historic sites in local communities and the availability of preservation grants in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In addition to being Manassas Park's only historic structure, the Conner House is one of only three antebellum structures that remain in the Manassas area, the other two being Liberia and the Ben Lomond (Pringle) House.

In response to our continued inquiries as to the status of the Conner House on June 17, 2020 BRCWRT members Blake Myers and Kim Brace participated in a virtual (GoTo) meeting with Manassas Park City Manager Lazslo Palko to discuss the Conner House and its preservation in light of the City Center development plan. Information provided by City Manager Palko during this meeting indicated that during the previous evening's (June 16, 2020) Governing Body meeting, Phases 3 and 4 of the City Center development were approved by a 3-2 vote (with one abstention). Phase 4 includes a multi-story apartment complex and parking garage on the current Conner House site and the removal of the Conner House. City Manager Palko explained that he was seeking preservation organizations interested in participating in discussions with him and the developer as they develop a plan to move the Conner House. He requested that we provide him any recommended preservation organizations and their contact information.

Despite City Manager Palko's assertion to the contrary during our meeting and discussion, the entire process involved in the City Center plan development has been opaque, secretive and "behind closed doors". The lack of involvement of Manassas Park's Director of Community Development and his planning staff in this process, the absence of publicity and public awareness of or involvement in discussions concerning the development plan or the future of the Conner House and a June 2, 2020 public hearing

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where the development plan was introduced to the general public followed by a Governing Body approval vote within two weeks of that meeting is indicative of this closed, secretive process.



View of Conner House Looking Across Conner Drive from Osbourn Park High School (June 2020)

Scrambling to assemble a viable group of preservation organizations to help save the Conner House for future generations, following the June 17th meeting Blake and Kim reached out to various preservation organizations likely to be interested in the discussions with Manassas Park. Preservation Virginia and the Prince William County Historical Commission (PWCHC) eagerly agreed to be participants and on June 24th, Blake submitted contact information for these organizations, along with BRCWRT's, to City Manager Palko. We are awaiting confirmation from other preservation groups as to whether they wish to be involved in the Conner House discussions, and are awaiting information from City Manager Palko concerning the plan, schedule, etc. for the meetings and discussions with him and the developer.

Viable preservation options for the Conner House are few. By its actions and communications Manassas Park's Governing Body has made it clear it does not care what happens to the Conner House and has no desire to keep the House in its current location or to expend any funds to preserve, restore, move, etc. the historic structure. Demolishing the Conner House, in addition to losing forever an historic structure and site that greatly enhances learning about life in 19th and 20th Century Prince William County, would result in it being removed from the National Register of Historic Places, which according to Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) sources would be a first for a locale in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The sole viable preservation option at present seems to be relocating the Conner House (which will also result in removal of the Conner House from the National Register of Historic Places) to public park property within Manassas Park, to public property within Prince William County or to private property. Both of the last two options would likely result in transfer of ownership of the Conner House itself.

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More recently during its June 23, 2020 meeting Manassas Park's Governing Body authorized several individual relic hunters access to the Conner House site during the period July 1 - 5, 2020. In the discussion leading to granting this authorization, Mayor Rishell indicated that the city would not fund an archaeological assessment or project at the site. The relic hunters will be 'doing their thing' on an individual basis, and accordingly the items and artifacts discovered will not be recorded or maintained by the city as part of its historical record.

Stay tuned for future developments as this tragic story continues to unfold.

Civil War Monuments, Memorials, Sites and Statues

We are all aware of the current political, social and cultural environment and the protests and demonstrations continuing in cities and towns in our local area, across Virginia and indeed in cities across the United States. The accompanying damage and vandalism being done to public and private property (monuments, memorials, statues, etc.) in conjunction with the protests and demonstrations are deeply concerning to many. At the heart of the controversy over civil war statues, monuments and memorials is profound disagreement within our society over the purpose and symbolism associated with these monuments, memorials and statues, both individually and collectively.

Our Round Table examined this issue in detail in 2017. After much discussion and research BRCWRT's Executive Committee developed a Monument Statement, signed by then President Mark Trbovich on September 30, 2017, that clearly and unambiguously states BRCWRT's policy on civil war monuments. This statement remains valid and applicable today and is included as an attachment to this article.

Some examples of recent vandalism and defacing of local monuments include (not an all-inclusive list):

- Defacing and damage to monuments in Richmond, including those on Monument Avenue and in public parks
- Defacing and damage to monuments and memorials in Washington, DC including monuments in Lafayette Park, the WW II memorial (not a civil war memorial) and the Alexander Pike statue (not a civil war statue)
- Toppling of the civil war statue at White's Ferry
- Defacing of the civil war monument at the Loudoun County Court House in Leesburg
- Defacing, followed two days later by toppling, of a memorial grave marker in Grace Episcopal Church cemetery in Silver Spring MD for 17 Confederate soldiers killed in the Battle of Fort Stevens
- Defacing the memorial obelisk in Groveton Cemetery at Manassas National Battlefield Park (MNBPP)

For those familiar with the Appomattox Statue in the City of Alexandria, on June 2, 2020 the statue was removed by its owner, the Mary Custis Lee - 17th Virginia Regiment Chapter #7, United Daughters of

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the Confederacy, to protect it from damage threatened as part of planned protests and demonstrations. Plans are for the Appomattox Statue, including its granite base and bronze tablets, to be relocated and reinstalled in a donated, not yet publicly identified, plot of land. A formal re-dedication ceremony for the Appomattox Statue is planned, but not yet scheduled.



Appomattox Statue, 2015



*Pedestal After Removal of Appomattox Statue
June 3, 2020*



*Former Site of Appomattox Statue After Pedestal Removal
June 28, 2020*

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Three recent, closer to home actions highlight the controversy over civil war related monuments, memorials, signs, names, etc. and local governing bodies efforts to deal with it. Within the past week Virginia Historical marker B261, *Birthplace Of The Confederate Battle Flag*, was removed from its location adjacent to the Mount Vineyard Flats luxury condominiums on Fairfax Boulevard/Main Street in the City of Fairfax.



*Virginia Historical Marker
2007 - June 2020*



*Virginia Historical Marker Removed
June 27, 2020*

On June 23, 2020 the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors directed the Fairfax County History Commission to prepare and submit (by the end of the year 2020) a report listing a full inventory of Confederate street names, monuments and public places in Fairfax County and on Fairfax county-owned property. The report should include:

- *A comprehensive list and history of places in Fairfax County named after individuals who held military or governmental responsibilities under the authority of the Confederate States of America between 1861-1865;*
- *Identification of the party responsible for renaming the street, monument and/or place;*
- *Implications (including legal, cost, and other) of removing Confederate names of public places in Fairfax County;*

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- *Recommended guidelines with the input of other relevant County Boards and Commissions such as the Fairfax County Park Authority and the Architectural Review Board for the renaming/replacement process of Confederate:*
 - *Monuments*
 - *Street Names*
 - *Rec Centers & Parks*
 - *Additional Public Places*
- *Input from the County Attorney's office and other relevant county agencies on the renaming process of Confederate names of public places in the County.*
 - *This should include coordination with other local governments for any existing removals or replacements, to include the Marr monument located on Fairfax County grounds.*

Specific issues with this Fairfax County Board of Supervisors directive include:

- The directive is a thinly veiled attempt to cloak and legitimize apparently pre-determined actions by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to re-name or remove anything associated with Fairfax County's civil war history by having the Fairfax County History Commission serve as the lead agency;
- Specific elements requested as part of the inventory indicate a pre-determined decision to rename and/or remove names of streets, places, buildings and other public places and monument. Logical questions are "When and how was this decision made?" and "What public involvement was included in making this decision?". This action taken by the Board of Supervisors has all the indications of an opaque and closed process with a pre-determined outcome;
- The process being used is flawed - the City of Alexandria successfully took this issue on in 2015 in a very open and public process via an Ad Hoc Advisory Group composed of citizens with relevant expertise specifically to manage the process (which included multiple public meetings) and to provide recommendations to the City Council. As was determined in Alexandria's Ad Hoc Advisory Group's research, re-naming streets has multiple unintended financial consequences for the individuals and business alike who live or reside on those streets. Financial impacts include the costs associated with changing signage, marketing materials, legal documents (contracts, insurance policies, loan agreements, mortgage agreements, rental agreements etc. etc. etc.). Alexandria determined that there was already an existing city policy and process for changing a street's name - - the process rightfully is initiated from the residents and /or businesses that reside or are located on the respective street, not directed or implemented by any staff or governing body;
- To the best of my knowledge, there are no Confederate monuments (i.e., monuments to the Confederacy) in Fairfax County. The Marr monument specifically mentioned in the Board of Supervisor's directive is on the grounds of the Historic Fairfax Court House and is a memorial to an event - the death of the first soldier killed in action in Fairfax County (Captain John Quincy Marr of the Warrenton Rifles) in the Battle of Fairfax Courthouse fought on June 1, 1861.

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The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors recently announced it is revisiting the discussion about removing the civil war statue at the Loudoun County Courthouse in Leesburg and will hold a business meeting on July 7 to discuss its removal.

During the 2020 legislative session, Virginia's state legislature passed and the Governor signed into law, effective July 1, 2020, revisions to Va. Statutes 15.2-1812, 15.2-1812-1, and 18.2-137 that establish, respectively, the process governing removing, relocating, contextualizing, covering, or altering in any way monuments or memorials; establish actions for the recovery of damage(s) that can be taken for damage to public or private monuments or memorials; and establish that any individual, other than the owner, who willfully destroys, damages, relocates, defaces, removes, etc. a monument(s) or memorial(s) is guilty of a Class 3 or Class 1 misdemeanor. All parties, including the Governor of Virginia and the Virginia State Legislature, should be accountable for complying with both the letter and spirit of these revised statutes.

Individual Involvement

Several BRCWRT members have recently contacted me and other members of the Preservation Committee to note their concern over and objections to the damage, vandalism and removal being done to civil war statues, monuments and memorials in Virginia and within our local area and inquire as to what actions they can or should take. One key action is to become involved by communicating regularly, clearly and consistently with your elected representative(s) at the local and state levels, meeting with these individuals and attending meetings of the respective governing bodies where issues involving civil war monuments, memorials, statues, preservation and local historical sites and projects and activities are discussed. Applicable governing bodies include respective County Board of Supervisors -

- Fairfax County [<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/members-and-districts>]
- Loudoun County [<https://www.loudoun.gov/86/Board-of-Supervisors>]
- Prince William County [<https://www.pwcgov.org/government/bocs/Pages/BOCS-Landing-Page.aspx>]

respective City Councils -

- City of Fairfax [<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/mayor-city-council>]
- Vienna [<https://www.viennava.gov/index.aspx?NID=355>]
- Falls Church [<https://www.fallschurchva.gov/384/City-Council>],

and your respective Virginia state representative and Virginia state senator -

[<https://viriniageneralassembly.gov/viriniaLegislature.php?secid=20&activesec=2#!hb=1&mainContentTabs=0>].

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Key items of concern for many that would be excellent issues to communicate with your elected representatives about include:

- The protection of all public and private property by authorized and properly empowered law enforcement agencies and personnel
- Changes to, movement of, or removal of civil war related statues, monuments, memorials, markers, signs, etc. should be accomplished through a deliberative, public, democratic process that invites and encourages individual citizen input (written and oral) and non-partisan public forums for discussion and receiving input; unilateral, secretive decisions and action(s) by governing bodies or elected leaders without any public awareness, input and discussion is not wise, is not representative governance and is not acceptable
- Elected representatives should be sensitive to, and work on behalf of, the concerns of all constituents

Thank for your interest in, and support of, historic preservation. Stay strong, safe and healthy!

Blake Myers
BRCWRT Preservation Committee Chair

(photographs courtesy of Blake Myers unless otherwise noted)