



Research and Acquisitions Information on Memorials and Monuments

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Communities around South Carolina and throughout the United States continue to examine the meaning and role of memorials and monuments such as statues, murals, named spaces, and portraiture in their public areas. As the primary repository and a storyteller for the state's history, the South Carolina State Museum encourages transparent, deliberative, and inclusive conversations about these memorials with diverse groups, communities and individuals from across the state. The Museum is a resource to support these conversations, helping to examine our complex and sometimes difficult history, and grow together as a community.

Memorials and monuments uphold public values, mark significant achievements, and commemorate certain aspects of history. Not all aspects of our history should be revered, however, nor should they be removed from our public memory. Sometimes our monuments and memorials can actively cause harm to our valued community members. Reevaluating what is and is not memorialized and making informed changes do not erase history. They are efforts to make those histories more accurate and inclusive.

Monuments can be historically significant and help us understand critical periods of our history, especially the movements that fueled their creation. Understanding who or what is memorialized and who did the memorializing helps us appreciate the complexity of the people whose lives gave shape to our world. Whether memorials are removed, reinterpreted, or retained and recontextualized, the process should be done deliberately and with proper understanding of their historical context. This work should inspire humility and encourage us to navigate change without effacing the past.

Decisions about memorials and monuments should ultimately be made by the community through open dialogue and facilitated discussion with diverse representation. The South Carolina State Museum, along with other institutions can help provide meaningful context, reliable evidence, and best scholarship to inform communities' interpretive decisions. In some instances, a museum or archive may be a place to retire memorial objects, with the understanding that these difficult and complex conversations about our past should continue in the open. Institutions may or may not have the financial or spatial capacity to accept and properly care for monuments, especially ones of significant scale. We encourage communities to explore all options. They should create strategic plans that consider resources needed to remove, relocate, store, and/or interpret these objects appropriately.

As a repository for the state's material culture and an American Alliance of Museums (AAM) accredited institution, the South Carolina State Museum has a collections policy following best practices and standards. This policy sets criteria for acquiring objects to and deaccessioning objects from the permanent collection including considerations of significance and educational value, conservation needs, how the object supports the existing collection and interpretive goals, exhibition and research potential, and its impact on storage among other concerns. Additionally, interpretation of objects in the collection is founded on professional standards driven by experienced and knowledgeable staff working with the community in equitable and open conversations.

As we move forward together to tell South Carolina's story it is important that we do so in an inclusive way that recognizes the experiences and embraces the contributions of all people.

Questions or requests for information can be sent to PublicRelationsList@scmuseum.org