Memory in Stone and Bronze: Civil War Monuments in Florida
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The Civil War became part of our nation’s social memory and consciousness due in part to the deliberate actions of veterans and their families between the end of the Civil War and the early 20th century. During this period Union and Confederate veterans from east to west and north to south set out to imprint the landscape with monuments designed to commemorate, memorialize, and remind. In Florida these monuments date from 1866 to the recent past, and include examples that are modest and profound, well-preserved and threatened. The settings of some are little changed, while for others it has been transformed. Overall, the Florida monuments represent an important part of our modern landscape and a powerful collective document reflecting evolving national trends in the memorialization of this great conflict.

Shortly after the December 17, 1861 Battle of Rowlett’s Station, Kentucky, Union Private Christian Freidrich August Bloedner—a German immigrant stonemason—carved a monument out of limestone to commemorate the death of 13 fellow members of the 32nd Indiana Volunteer Infantry. Little did Private Bloedner know that his would be the first of many thousands of monuments commemorating the Civil War that would eventually be erected. He would probably be equally mystified that monuments to the Civil War are part of the landscape of most if not all of the 50 states that now make up our reconstructed nation, and that they are still being erected today.

By the summer of 1861, Florida and 10 other states had seceded from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. In less than five years these were defeated and occupied territories. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the population of Florida was 140,424 (78,679 free). At the end of the Civil War, close to four and one-half times that number—620,000 Union and Confederate soldiers—had died of battlefield wounds or, more commonly, diseases such as diarrhea and malaria. Most were buried far from home in hurried and poorly marked graves. By war’s end, the landscape and economy of each of the states of the Confederacy was devastated as well as several Union states, border states
with divided loyalties, and the western lands of the Indian nations known collectively as the Five
Civilized Tribes.

When the last musket fell silent in the summer of 1865, the great southern armies went home as did
most of the Union soldiers that were part of the largest army the world had ever known. Confederates
went quietly back to a place they hardly recognized, while many of the Union ranks assembled for grand
parades through a conquered Richmond or through the streets of the nation’s capitol before heading
home. But even for the victorious, home was forever changed because of voids left by those who had
died, and because of the brutal experience of four long years of Civil War.

This personal experience of war was in many ways the same for soldiers from north and south alike. It
was an experience forever welded to the loss they had witnessed and had themselves suffered.
Between the time that Private Bloedner carved the first monument and, in 1865, soldiers camped near
Bull Run battlefield erected a monument to the sacrifice of that first major conflict, soldiers and citizens
north and south had come to realize that the Civil War was the most profound event they or their
country would likely ever experience.

To look at today’s landscape, and to see the thousands of monuments to the Civil War erected within
the lifetime of these veterans, it is clear than none wanted future generations to forget their shared
sacrifice. But as scholars of social memory have pointed out in a growing body of literature about the
Civil War, because that sacrifice and its meaning was not the same in the lifetime of these veterans, it is
not the same to this day.
One of the outcomes of the Civil War was the imminent reunification of a country torn apart by a seeming act of self-destruction. The states and their population formerly in rebellion were none too happy about this outcome, and were soon suffering an armed occupation that was often under the watchful eye of US Colored Troops recruited from newly freed slaves. In the occupied south, any attempt to honor or commemorate the southern cause or its soldier dead was regarded as a continuation of the act of treason that had started the Civil War.

Another outcome of the Civil War was that over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers lay buried in places generally far from home, often in what was still perceived as “enemy territory,” and in poor and poorly marked graves. Veterans, and the wives, mothers, fathers, siblings, and children of those dead soldiers feared the neglect or outright desecration of these graves at the hands of former foes. They did not want the sacrifice or their fellow soldiers or loved ones to be forgotten or, perhaps worse, to have been in vain. With the power to do so, the Federal government and loyal Union states ensured that their dead were accounted for and properly buried, many in newly created National Cemeteries, and ensured that Confederate soldiers who died as traitors would receive no such due. Although southern states stepped up to do their part, the fact is that the nation remained divided through openly different respect for and treatment of their soldier dead.

For Union veterans, the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) appeared almost at war’s end as the preeminent veterans association of that conflict. Founded in 1866, the G.A.R. had long-reigning influence on veterans. Through impressive numbers (over 400,000 Union veterans in 1890) they had a very effective voice in defining the nature of commemoration through influence on the federal government programs to provide for care of the Union dead, care of living Union veterans, and through commemoration on federal lands including national battlefields such as Gettysburg. For decades
following the Civil War, the reconstructed nation’s program of commemorating the soldier dead of the
Civil War, partly due to the efforts of the G.A.R., did not include soldiers of the Confederacy.

In the Reconstruction-era south, preservation of war graves was understood, but commemoration of the
Confederacy was treated as an act of continued rebellion. A major force in southern commemoration
therefore became local women’s memorial associations originally dedicated to the care of soldier
graves. As time went by these associations undertook more overt forms of commemoration. They
eventually banded together as the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894. The UDC along with
the United Confederate Veterans, established in 1889, took charge of a commemoration of the southern
dead and the memory of soldier sacrifice that was separate from that being championed by the Federal
government, loyal Union states, and the G.A.R.

Unable to commemorate victory over their foes, the southern commemoration wrapped itself around
commemoration of the bravery and valor of the soldier, and the ultimate righteousness of the cause for
which he had fought. As the death of President Abraham Lincoln had done for solidifying northern grief
around a theme of the righteous cause of the nation and righteous duty of its soldier dead, the death of
Confederate leaders General Robert E. Lee in 1870 and President Jefferson Davis in 1889 did much to
fuel the origin story of the new south; the story of the “lost cause,” in which the valor of the southern
soldier and the right and just cause for which he had fought and died was at the forefront.

Although often left out or marginalized in national Civil War narratives, Florida contributed troops and
provisions to the Confederacy and suffered itself from blockade, battle, economic privation, and the loss
of her native sons in far off theaters of war. Florida was involved in a very interesting and involved way
in the Civil War, and was equally involved in the social forces that pulled and tugged at the way the victors and the defeated commemorated their different realities within an increasingly reunited country.

When the Civil War ended, about a third of Florida’s Confederate soldiers were buried in the western and eastern theaters of war in which they had participated. The state’s economy was, like other southern states, in ruin, but rebounded at the end of the 19th century at the hands of a lumber industry, fishing, and increasingly due to a boom in tourism and retirement that drew more and more people to Florida. The growth in population included many Union veterans including many members of the G.A.R.

Commemoration through monuments began in Florida shortly after the war’s end. In May of 1866, a large wooden cross was erected at the Olustee Battlefield, scene of a U.S. defeat where battle dead still remained in hastily made mass graves. This cross marked the location of the Union soldier dead, but unfortunately did not survive and the location of these graves is now unknown. A replica of this cross, made of granite, was placed in a local cemetery in 1991, and is the scene of an annual remembrance ceremony each year on a date near the anniversary of the 1864 battle.

Also in 1866, using funds from sale of furniture and equipment no longer needed at the Key West headquarters of the U.S. East Gulf Blockading Squadron, a marble obelisk was placed in downtown Key West by the Army and Navy Club. This monument is dedicated “To the memory of the officers, sailors, and soldiers of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps of the United States who lost their lives in their Country’s service upon this station from 1861 to 1865.”

Although the Federal government had denied the southern states the right to secede, each of the southern states that had been in rebellion had to be readmitted to the Union after adoption of a new
State constitution that prohibited slavery. Florida was readmitted to the Union in 1868, but it remained occupied by Federal troops until the end of the policy of Reconstruction in 1877, ironically the year after the celebration of the centennial of the United States. Two early Confederate monuments were erected in Florida during this period, and one very shortly after the end of reconstruction.

In 1871, the Walton County Female Memorial Association raised funds and erected a marble shaft “To the memory of the Confederate dead of Walton County.” This monument is inscribed with the names of 101 soldier dead, and carries a poem on one side that closes, “The fittest place where man can die is where he dies for man.” This invokes the sentiment that, thought the cause these men fought and died for was lost, their death was for a higher good. Of importance, although this monument now sits on the grounds of the DeFuniak Springs Courthouse, it began its life on the ground of the Euchee Valley Presbyterian Church and was only later moved to public property. The need to erect this monument on a church yard, and not on public property, was certainly a necessity based on the realities of Reconstruction.

A similar story holds for a Confederate monument erected in 1872 by the Ladies Memorial Association of St. Augustine. Originally erected on private property because permission was not forthcoming from local Reconstruction authorities, this monument is no longer standing although it has been reincarnated in St. Augustine’s public Constitution Plaza. The original monument had at its center a broken column, symbolizing perhaps the destruction of the Confederacy. On this plastered masonry monument were a number of engraved marble plaques—these plaques were reused in the monument that now stands in Constitution Plaza which was authorized in 1879, the year after the end of reconstruction.
Although these St. Augustine monuments differed in form and placement, the plaques that were carried from one to the other convey the same message. The monument is dedicated to “our loved ones who gave up their lives in the service of the Confederate States.” One plaque reads, in part, “They died far from the home that gave them birth,” which represented one of the major traumas of the war suffered by those at home who were accustomed to death as a passage shared with family, at home. Two other plaques carry the name of 46 soldier dead.

The first Union monument was placed by active duty military in Key West. Although I have yet to determine the dates for all of the monuments erected in Florida, it appears that the first Union monument erected by a veterans association was placed by the Mitchell Chapter of the G.A.R. in 1891 in Jacksonville’s Evergreen Cemetery. Between this date and the onset of World War II few other Union monuments were erected. These were placed by the G.A.R. in Orlando Greenwood Cemetery, St. Cloud Mount Peace Cemetery (St. Cloud was founded in 1909 by the G.A.R.), Tampa Woodlwan Cemetery (erected by the Women’s Relief Corps), Lynne Haven (1920) in Memorial Park, and Miami (1939) Woodlawn Cemetery. The Miami monument was dedicated in 1939 with the sole surviving member of the Roome Post 42 of the G.A.R. in attendance. It is notable, I think, that except for one, the Union monuments in Florida are in cemetery plots and not in public places and reflects the reality that these monuments were erected by a large body of Union veterans who had emigrated following the Civil War to a state that had once been a foe of the Union.

Dedications on these Union monuments are striking in the simplicity of the message. Only the 1891 Jacksonville monument attests directly to the conflict, being “In memory of our comrades who defended the flag of the Union on land and sea.” The others are dedicated to unknown soldier dead or to the simple memory of Union soldiers or veterans. The Miami monument of 1939 is interesting in that it
simply displays a plaque of the original 91 members of the Roome G.A.R. post, and another with the G.A.R. order creating Memorial Day observances.

The handful of Union monuments in pre-World War II Florida stands in stark contrast with a more sizeable population of monuments erected to commemorate the Confederacy. Although two monuments were erected during reconstruction, both by women’s memorial associations, it was the end of reconstruction that inspired a sustained placement of Confederate monuments in Florida. Starting with the relocation and reconfiguring of the St. Augustine Monument on city property about 1880, over 30 monuments were erected by 1940. Most commonly these were on the grounds of a county courthouse (10) or in a city park (9), but they were also placed on the grounds of the state capitol, in cemeteries (2), within or along the rights of way of city streets and highways (2), and on battlefields and historic sites (6). With one exception, a monument erected by private individuals, prior to 1900 these monuments were raised by women’s memorial associations. Starting with the erection of a monument in the Lake City Cemetery in 1901, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) became the common sponsor of Confederate monuments, with a few notable exceptions erected by the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) and the State of Florida.

At first these monuments, including that which is on the grounds of the state capitol, focus on remembering soldier dead of the county. The 1881 monument at Marianna is dedicated to “the warriors tried and true, who bore the flag of our peoples trust, and fell in a cause, though lost, still just, and died for me and you.”

Reflected in the 1891 monument in Pensacola, the focus of commemoration soon shifted to remembrance of the Confederate soldier in general and in some cases specific instances of valor. The
1891 Pensacola monument was erected after the death of Jefferson Davis in New Orleans in 1889 and before his final burial in Richmond in 1893. It is dedicated to the Confederate dead, but also notably is also dedicated to Jefferson Davis, “Soldier. Statesman. Patriot. Christian. The only man in our nation without a country, yet twenty million people mourn his death.” This is a clear reference to a still very divided nation.

In 1899 the UDC erected a monument at Monticello, on which is set into stone an eloquent statement of the need to evoke the justness of the lost cause to guarantee that southern deaths were not in vain,

“Let this testimonial of woman’s deathless fidelity to man’s imperishable valor speak to the sons and daughters of this southland for all time to come. Let this mute but eloquent marble, testify to the enduring hardness of that living human wall of Florida soldiery that stood during four long years of pitiless war—a barrier between our homes and an invading foe. Let the young souther, as he gazes upon this shaft, remember how gloriously Florida’s sons illustrated their sunny land on the red fields of carnage, and how woman—fair and faithful—freshens the glory of their fame.”

In 1908, on a monument recently moved from the courthouse grounds in Ocala to a veterans memorial park, is one of the most profound statements of the place of the southern cause in a just southern history of the Civil War,

“the south reveres her Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Andrew Jackson, and others, who laid the foundations of our grand republic. She honors her Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Stuart, Johnson, Forest, and every brave son who fought to preserve our liberties, guaranteed by the fathers, under the constitution.”
Here juxtaposed with the founding fathers of the Union itself are the heroes of what the Union saw as a traitorous rebellion—thereby establishing for the south the justness of their rebellion as a constitutional right if not responsibility.

In 1909 the State of Florida purchased a small portion of the Olustee battlefield, and in 1912 the UDC with the assistance of an appropriation from the Florida legislature erected a monument dedicated to the Confederate soldiers who fought there, “in commemoration of their devotion to the cause of liberty and state sovereignty.” This act of commemoration is also the first act of preservation of a historic site by the state of Florida.

I think the most profound monument in Florida, and high on the list nationally, is that erected on the grounds of the Tampa’s Hillsborough County Courthouse in 1911, and known as Memoria en Aeterna and dedicated “To the honor and courage of the patriots of the Confederate States of America.” What is profound about this monument is not engraved words, but the imagery created by two soldier statues at the base of an obelisk. Facing north is a soldier in a crisp new uniform, well equipped, musket over right shoulder, head held high, proudly it seems marching north to confront the invading foe. Facing south, the same soldier appears to be returning from the war, hatless and bandaged head, downcast look, tattered uniform, and trailing his musket on the ground. On the obelisk between these two figures is a Confederate battle flag with broken staff. To me the symbolism is of a cause lost, but of remembering not just the valor and heroism, but also the human price of the Civil War.

In 1915, on the site of the 1914 National encampment of the United Confederate Veterans in Jacksonville, the UCV erected an impressive structure housing a bronze sculpture of a woman and her children, erected “In memory of our women of the Southland.” A bronze plaque on this structure proclaims, “Let this mute but eloquent structure speak to generations to come, of a generation of the past. Let it repeat perpetually the imperishable story of our women of the ’60s. Those noble women who
sacrificed their all upon country's altar.” This monument is one of several placed in the south at about this time, and it serves to broaden the recognition of participation in the righteous lost cause to the women who, through women’s memorial associations and the UDC had been working tirelessly to instill in national culture the validity of the sacrifice made by Confederate soldiers.

In 1921, a granite obelisk was erected to commemorate the 1864 Battle of Marianna, notable because it was a Union victory. The monument informs us that, “overwhelming Federal forces were stubbornly resisted by a home guard of old men and boys and a few sick and wounded Confederates at home on furlough. The heroism of those who fought for home and honor is a priceless heritage of a loyal people.”

It is my hope that this brief review of commemoration of the Civil War through the erection of monuments in Florida has been instructive in the nature of this memorialization and in its relationship to social and historical processes that were affecting the entire country through World War II. Let me be clear that there has not been a cessation in the erection of monuments since 1940. Some of these are significant, such as the monument to the 2nd United States Colored Troops in Fort Myers; some are controversial, such as the Cow Cavalry monument in Plant City; and some are a bit radicalized, such as the big Confederate flag monuments along I-75 in White City and Tampa. We are seeing in places a struggle to understand the meaning of Civil War memorials to our culture today, resulting in the rededication of the Union monument in Lynne Haven to veterans of all wars, and the relocation of a profound Confederate monument in Ocala from the seat of local government to a new Veterans Memorial Park far removed from the city center. But the fact that the placement of Civil War monuments has continued unabated from the close of this conflict in 1865 to the present means, more than anything else, that we as a culture still find the need to express in stone and bronze our
conceptions about the different meaning of this conflict first developed when we went to war against one another in 1861.