

Eastville Confederate Monument Dismantled and Removed

By Stefanie Jackson

The Confederate monument in Eastville has been removed and the watch of the stone-faced soldier who stood atop a lofty pedestal, guarding the historic Northampton County Courthouse Green, has come to an end after more than 100 years.

Bill Payne, of Cape Charles, stood in the sweltering heat across the street from the courthouse green the morning of Aug. 26 to witness the descent of the Confederate soldier statue as it was slowly lowered to the ground by a crane.

“As I watched the statue being removed from its pedestal I thought of my friends who didn’t agree that the statue was out of place,” he said in an email Aug. 31.

When Payne brought the issue of the Confederate monument to the attention of Northampton supervisors via letter about one year ago, as a wave of Black Lives Matter protests washed across the nation, a debate began between two groups – but they were not supporters of the historic Union or Confederacy.

Some Eastern Shore citizens viewed

the monument as a piece of history to be remembered by future generations, while others saw it as a relic of the past and a symbol of racist attitudes that are best forgotten.

“It would be nothing but a tragedy to remove and try to just block out some portion of history. Do we not learn by our mistakes?” asked Granville Hogg at a public hearing last October.

During that same public hearing, a letter from Willie Randall was read into the record.

“The Civil War was fought to ensure

that slavery would remain a part of the south. These slaves were my (ancestors), and they did not have a say so in how they would live their lives,” he said.

“We do not need to be reminded of this racist symbol every time we go to a place of government business,” Randall said.

Removing the “traitorous” Confederate symbol would allow the people of Northampton County to “start to heal our wounds of the past,” he said.

Dr. Arthur Carter in August 2020 had suggested a compromise: leaving in place the monument of the Confederate soldier, who appears European, and building alongside it a monument of equal size of an African American Union soldier.

The new monument would honor the 943 Eastern Shore men who served in the Union army during the Civil War, 87.5% of whom were African American.

But Supervisor Oliver Bennett remembered hearing the recollections of racism experienced by the previous generation of African Americans, many of whom are still living. They “endured more than I ever will,” he said during the Oct. 13, 2020, public hearing.

After they were banned from restaurants, called racial slurs, and spit upon, “How can I tell them I made a compromise?” Bennett asked.



Left: Eastville’s Confederate monument moments before it was dismantled and taken to storage.

Above: One week later, straw and grass seed in the middle of historic Courthouse Green mark the former location of the statue. Photos by Jim Ritch.

Even though several citizens at the Oct. 13 public hearing argued for the monument’s removal, none of them suggested it be destroyed.

Randall said the monument should be relocated to a museum. Mike Ash, president of the Northampton Historic Preservation Society, agreed that the monument perhaps should be saved for “a meaningful and respectful exhibition at a later date.”

Confederate veterans of the Harmonson-West camp on the Eastern Shore first had raised money for a Confederate monument in Parksley, which was unveiled in 1899 and still stands today.

The Confederate veterans joined the Daughters of the Confederacy in funding the Confederate monument in Eastville, which was raised in 1913.

The Eastville monument was dedicated to the Confederate soldiers of both Northampton and Accomack counties. “They died bravely in war, or in peace lived nobly to rehabilitate their country,” the inscription reads.

Northampton County paid \$39,000 to trucking company Stratified, of Washington, D.C., to move the Confederate monument.

The dismantled monument is now in storage at the Northampton County maintenance shop in Eastville.

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