Confederate Troops Memorial (Phoenix, AZ)

By Christopher Hanlon

UDC members gathered around the plaque at its unveiling, Arizona Republic Feb 1962 Phoenix, Ancestry.

Commemorating Confederate troops who occupied Arizona territory briefly in 1861 and 1862 before being driven eastward by Union regiments from California, the Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops was located in Wesley Bolin Park at the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix from 14 February 1962 to 22 or 23 July 2020. This approximately six-foot-high, mixed-media sculpture consisted of three primary elements: (1) a large copper frame in the shape of the geographical outline of the present-day state of Arizona, filled with chunks of copper ore mortared into place and affixed with a concrete plaque inscribed "MEMORIAL TO ARIZONA CONFEDERATE TROOPS" / 1861 – 1865 / UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY / 1961"; (2) three segments of petrified wood arranged linearly at the foot of this representation; and (3) a poured concrete base inscribed with the statement: "A NATION THAT FORGETS ITS PAST HAS NO FUTURE" (Fig. 1)

Several elements of this object are worth noting. First, the geological materials of copper and petrified wood signify the state of Arizona itself. The ubiquity of copper within the state, for instance, is represented in the color of the five-pointed star at the center of the state flag, commemorating the copper mining industry upon which much of Arizona's economy was built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Petrified wood, on the other hand, occurs throughout the world but is particularly associated with Arizona's Petrified Forest, now a national park located in Navajo and Apache counties. The prominence of these elements in the Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops instills a dimension of deep time in the monument, as if the brief moment of Confederate occupation was part of a longer, epochal sweep of the region's history, a "PAST" as indelible as the stratigraphy of Arizona itself.

That said, the upper plaque's citation of 1861-1865 narrows that past considerably even as it would seem to dilate the brief historical period during which Confederate troops operated in Arizona territory. These troops entered the territory on 23 July 1861 in order to initiate Jefferson Davis' objective of opening a path to the Pacific through the Sonoran state of northern Mexico. After defeating Union troops at Mesilla and seizing much of the southern part of the territory, Colonel John R. Baylor issued a proclamation taking possession of Arizona "in the name of and behalf of the Confederate States of America," naming himself as its first governor. Arizona became officially a part of the Confederate States of America with a proclamation by Jefferson Davis on 14 February 1862. But after Union detachments from California under General James H. Carleton pushed CSA troops back into Texas during May, June, and July 1862, Carleton's General Orders No. 15 superseded the CSA proclamation, claiming Arizona "under the sacred banner of our country." The Confederate troops the monument ostensibly memorializes only operated in Arizona over the course of approximately one year; the four-year period inscribed in the plaque would, then, seem not so much to refer to Arizona history as to the Confederacy itself.

The Arizona monument may be read within the context of the UDC's wider project of memorialization: since the late nineteenth century, the United Daughters of the Confederacy installed many monuments to the CSA around the country, relocating sculptural representations of Confederate veterans, as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall notes, "triumphantly from cemeteries into town centers." The UDC had slowed that process by 1961, but that year of the Confederacy centennial witnessed a flurry of CSA memorialization in Arizona of which the Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops was only the most significant instance. How then to read the inscription at the monument's base, which rehearses the argument according to which monuments offer both the promise of accurate historical memory and a way of safeguarding a particular "future"? By the moment of the monument's dedication in 1962, there was consternation both in Arizona and the broader United States concerning at least one prospect of national future, that concerning the civil rights of Black Americans. By the moment of the monument's installation, the national movement for Black civil rights had hit a number of recent milestones. In February of 1960, sit-ins had begun at a segregated lunch-counter in Woolworth's at Greensboro, North Carolina, attracting international attention during their continuation over the course of six months and through the similar displays of passive resistance and civil disobedience they inspired. In May of that year, President Eisenhower had signed the Civil Rights Act of 1960, requiring federal inspection of voting stations and establishing penalties for voter interference. In December of 1960, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively outlawed segregation on interstate busses in

Boynton v. Virginia, and in May of 1961, the first Freedom Riders had commenced their effort to ensure that the Court's decision was abided throughout the South.

Arizona political leaders and editorialists positioned the state awkwardly in relation to the burgeoning movement for Black civil rights over the course of the early 1960s. In 1964 Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, having recently won the Republican presidential primary election in California, would be one of 27 senators to vote against the Civil Rights Act of that year. Well before that defining moment, Goldwater had been outspoken during a Republican filibuster stalling the 1960 Civil Rights Act, indicating that while he supported provisions securing voting rights for Black Americans, he would not vote in favor of measures to promote housing or employment equality.

Just a week before the unveiling of the Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops on the Capitol grounds in February 1962, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held public hearings in Phoenix in order to examine public perception of the level of racial discrimination in that city. While the *Arizona Republic* would report that at the meeting held on 3 February, "A long list of Phoenix residents testified to the lack of discrimination in our administration of justice, our voting, our schools, and our public accommodations,"[i] reporting in the *Arizona Daily Star* of Tucson described a less sanguine hearing. According to the *Daily Star*, Black community leaders in attendance described widespread discrimination in housing, employment, union membership, and education access. One spokesperson, realtor Lincoln J. Ragsdale, described a deeply segregated Phoenix where Black people were clustered in largely substandard domiciles and denied access even to federally-funded housing. "As you live so you shall die," Ragsdale stated to the commission: "segregated."

Nevertheless, by the moment of Goldwater's vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, public opinion in Arizona regularly expressed opposition to demonstrators for Black civil rights and anxiety over the prospect of federal intervention into local institutions. A letter to the editor in the *Arizona Republic*, while also criticizing white racists in the South, focused its criticism on Black activists, accusing them of ingratitude and overreaching: "The Negro demonstrators do not seem to realize that this nation as a nation, has done everything possible to grant them equality. The framework of our Constitution has been not only bent, but fractured, to please them. In fact, this legislation [the 1964 Civil Rights Act] coupled with the heart-rending public picture given of the poor trod-upon Negro, has put them in a place of pseudo-superiority."[ii] And yet, other indicators made clear that Black Phoenicians enjoyed no such advantages as those conjured in such editorials. At the 3 February hearing held in Phoenix by the United States Civil Rights Commission, Phoenix NAACP President Rev. George Brooks described a near-universal refusal to hire

Black workers in Phoenix, citing statistics revealing, for example, a firm of 4,800 workers without a single Black employee.

Read against this backdrop of dismay over the national movement for Black civil rights, dispute concerning the state of Black civil rights in Phoenix, and alarm over the possibility of federal efforts to secure those rights, the Phoenix Memorial to Confederate Troops signifies conflictedly, troubledly. Ostensibly a memorial to a brief moment in the history of Arizona territory, the dating on the plaque transforms this memorial into a monument to the Confederacy itself, in line with the other monuments to the CSA the United Daughters of the Confederacy had erected at hundreds of sites elsewhere. It is noteworthy, in this sense, that the monument was unaccompanied by a similar memorial for the Union troops who pushed the CSA out of Arizona; in fact, though a total of four sculptural monuments to Arizona Confederate Troops were eventually raised in Arizona—in addition to a marker commemorating the Battle of Picacho Pass (which includes in its design a Confederate battle flag but no emblem of the Union or of the United States though the battle was a victory for Union forces in the process of pushing the CSA from Arizona [Fig. 2])—as of 2020 there is not a single monument to the Union or its cause in Arizona (exempting nominal dedications such as Lincoln Street in Phoenix or Stoneman Lake in Coconino County).

In fact, the memorial to Confederate troops appeared as one of a number of public events staged or planned in Arizona in order to magnify the state's Confederate past. The monument was dedicated on 14 February in a ceremony that included a speech from Arizona Secretary of State Wesley Bolin (unfortunately, no copy of which survives), who was attended by members of the UDC dressed in antebellum costumes (Fig. 3). The following month the Arizona Civil War Centennial Commission announced a "ghost patrol" march to Picacho Pass, where a re-enactment of the battle ended with memorial services and a barbecue held at a second memorial for Confederate troops installed at the location. On 28 April—just slightly more than two months after the dedication of the CSA monument at the Capitol—the UDC held a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument dedicating "special memorials" to Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Lt. Col. John R. Baylor, who had established the territory's military government under the CSA. In August 1961, the Arizona Pioneer Museum in Tucson held a re-enactment of Arizona's secession from the United States, during which re-enactors "dressed in the gray uniforms of Confederate soldiers" stood at attention as a descendant of the aforementioned Lt. Col. Baylor re-read the ordinances of secession adopted in Mesilla in March of 1861 (Fig. 4). And in order to mark the sesquicentennial of the Confederacy, Arizona state legislators arranged in 1961 to fly the Confederate battle flag (which was by this point being bandied by segregationists in the South) over the state Capitol.

Arizona citizens led by African-American community leaders began to call publicly for the removal of the Arizona Memorial to Confederate Troops in 2015, when state representative Reginald Bolding urged Governor Doug Ducey to remove the monument. After police in Minneapolis murdered George Floyd publicly in May of 2020, racial justice activists, veterans' organizations, and other interest groups held rallies at the monument, intensifying calls for its removal or demolition. Prior to one such rally on 19 June (Juneteenth, celebrated since 1866 as the date upon which formerly enslaved residents of Galveston, Texas were informed by Union military leadership of their liberation under the Emancipation Proclamation), 29-year-old Sean Brennan of Phoenix defaced the monument with red paint and was subsequently arrested by Phoenix Department of Public Safety police and charged with misdemeanor abuse of a public monument.

In a letter dated 30 June 2020, after extensive journalistic coverage of the controversy surrounding the Phoenix monument along with a second Confederate monument in Gold Canyon, Arizona, leadership of the Arizona division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy wrote to Andy Tobin, Director of the Arizona Department of Administration, requesting that the State "re-gift the monuments back to our three Chapters and the elected Monument Restoration Committee." The letter stipulated that "[t]hese monuments were gifted to the State and are now in need of repair but due to the current political climate, we believe it unwise to repair them where they are located" (Fig. 5). During the night of 22-23 July, the monument was removed by a private contractor hired by the UDC.

Though journalistic coverage of this removal indicated that the object had been removed in its entirety ("A few tracks in the dirt were the only sign that anything had happened," the *Arizona Republic* reported) in actuality by the morning of 23 July, only *most* of the Memorial to Confederate Troops had been removed. While the UDC-hired contractors took away the upper segments of the piece—the outline of the state fashioned of polished copper and filled with the raw, unrefined form of this element that serves as the state symbol of modern Arizona—and while they also removed the three segments of petrified wood (examples of something equally Arizonan though once living, transformed through the eons to something still, monumental, preserved, dead), they left the concrete base with its inscription, "A NATION THAT FORGETS ITS PAST HAS NO FUTURE". The Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops was dedicated in order to mark the centennial of the Confederacy itself and—at least ostensibly, the inaccurate dating of the dedicatory plaque notwithstanding—Arizona's brief history as a territory of the Confederacy. But in an intriguing coincidence, the monument's dedication on 14

February 1961 also marked the fiftieth anniversary of Arizona's induction as the 48th of the United States of America; 14 February thus marks both Arizona's embrace and repudiation of the United States. And if only in that way, one aspect of the "past" this monument, or what remains of it, warns us not to "forget" concerns that moment of repudiation, which was justified through overt racism. Adopted at Mesilla on 16 March 1861, the sixth resolution of the Arizona ordinances of secession—the same document read aloud so reverentially in August 1961 by those reenactors in Tucson—inflected the delegates' rejection of US political authority in explicitly racial terms: "Resolved, That we will not recognize the present Black Republican administration, and that we will resist any officers appointed to this territory by said administration with whatever means in our power."

The closest the Memorial to Arizona Confederate Troops came to owning up to this fact of Arizona's Confederate history was in the fraught date of its dedication (also Valentine's Day, and also the date on which Frederick Douglass chose to celebrate the anniversary of his birth, any even approximate knowledge of which slavery had taken from him). But the originary condemnation of "Black" federal power that lay in the founding documents of Confederate Arizona—a precursor to the federal power many white Arizonans would strive to deflect during the early 1960s in the midst of the national movement for Black civil rights—was more explicitly recalled and indeed celebrated by those who gathered at that August 1961 ceremony in Tucson, dressed up as Confederates troops in order to listen to an actual grandson of Confederate Arizona read the ordinances of secession in their entirety. Though with greatly divergent styles of expression, such historical realities that lay bare the white supremacist project of the Confederacy—in Arizona and everywhere else the CSA emerged—is what later historical actors such as legislator Reginald Bolding and vandal Sean Brannan insisted that Arizonans not forget, lest in forgetting they foreclose a different possible future.

Resources and Further Reading

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