

# Alternatives for the George Rogers Clark Monument at the University of Virginia



**A Report by the Genocide Ain't Glorious Movement  
of Charlottesville, Virginia  
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## Background

“George Rogers Clark, Conqueror of the Northwest” is a massive sculpture (approximately 24 feet in height, 20 feet in length, and 8 feet in width) that was put up in 1921 by the University of Virginia, at the edge of its campus in Albemarle County, just across the line from the City of Charlottesville. The location is prominent, although not as prominent as it was in the 1920s, due to the growth of trees around three sides of the monument, which nonetheless proudly and openly faces University Avenue with some 10 yards of grass between the memorial and the sidewalk along the street.

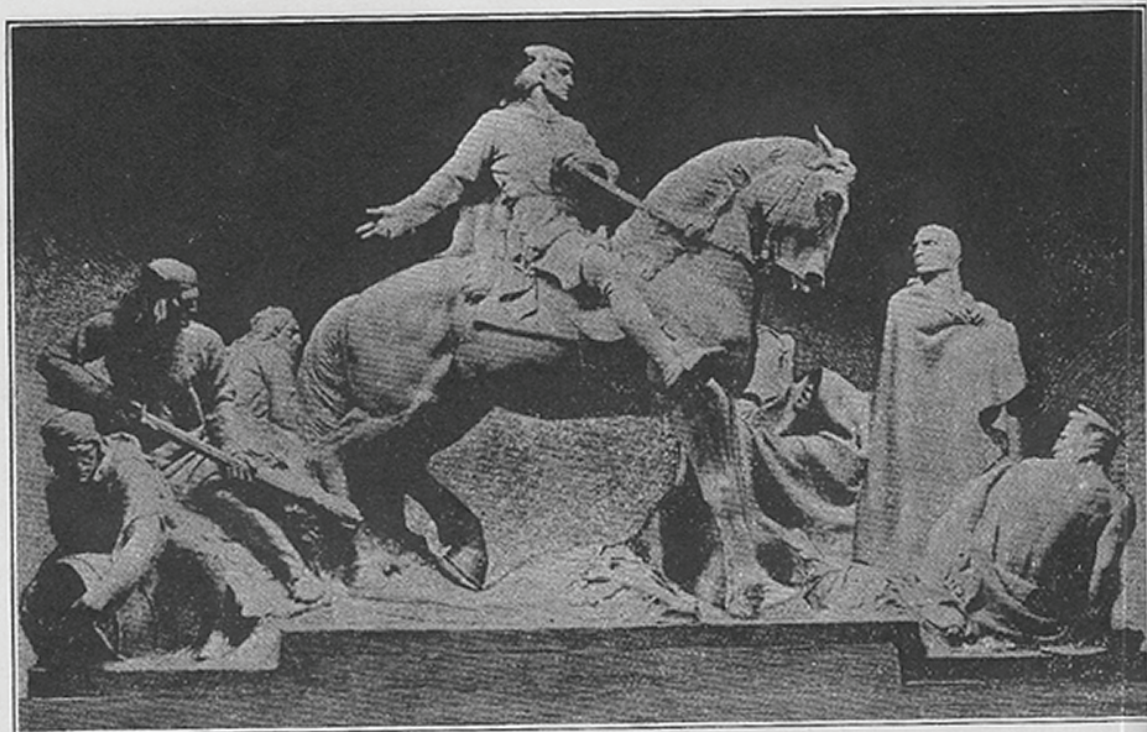
This monument was paid for by Paul Goodloe McIntire, the same wealthy individual who paid for three other statues in Charlottesville in the 1920s, all of which still dominate central spaces in the city: those of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, which have been in the news in recent years, and that of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and Sacajawea. Like these other statues, that of George Rogers Clark was created without any vote by the general public.

Like the statues of Lee and Jackson in downtown Charlottesville, the statue of George Rogers Clark at UVA depicts a white man on a horse dressed for war. But, unlike Lee and Jackson, Clark is not alone. He has other men behind him with a gun and a barrel of gun powder, and he appears to be reaching back for a gun with his right hand. There are four Native Americans in front of him, including one infant. One of them appears defiant. One appears to be a woman carrying the infant. An [article](#) from the 1921 dedication of the statue in the *University of Virginia Alumni News* approvingly describes the woman in the memorial as being forced to beg for mercy for her baby. A successful 1997 [application](#) to add the statue to the National Register of Historic Places reads, in part: “She kneels in front of Clark holding a covered cradle board aloft as if to plead for a papoose within.”

At the dedication, then-UVA President Edwin Alderman [credited](#) George Rogers Clark with stealing large amounts of territory for an empire -- the empire of Virginia, of which the land he claimed had been deemed a part. The *Alumni News* newspaper celebrated the statue when it was first created as “explaining the futility of resistance.”



## THE GEORGE ROGERS CLARK GROUP.



The above is from a photograph of the George Rogers Clark monument which has been presented to the University by Paul Goodloe McIntire, 79, whose generosity and interest in the University and Charlottesville has been responsible for other statues, parks and buildings which have gone so far to beautifying the city and University grounds.

The group is the work of Robert Ingersoll Aitken, of New York, whose McKinley Monument, in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, has brought him fame. His latest work received high praise when exhibited at the Architectural League in New York recently.

The group will stand on a base of polished granite twenty-six feet long and bearing the inscription "George Rogers Clark, Conqueror of the Northwest." It will occupy the triangular plot of ground formed by the C and O tracks, Main street and Fry's Spring Road. The spot is familiar to old med. students as the site of the old dispensary which was torn down several years ago. The plot has been improved into a very pretty little park and with the group statue will make an impos-

ing scene at the entrance to the University.

In his work Mr. Aitken depicts an incident in the adventurous achievements of George Rogers Clark who has been called "The Hannibal of the West". He is shown parleying with two apparently hostile chiefs with his group of Indian hunters prepared to aid him. One of his men is seen crouching over a barrel of powder and The Conqueror of the Northwest is evidently explaining the futility of a resistance. The Indian squaw with the chiefs is inviting the mercy of the invaders and begging for the protection of her young baby.

**Archibald M. Aiken, '14**, of Danville, Va., has been made judge of the Seventh Judicial Circuit. He was formerly city attorney for Danville. Judge Aiken has been practicing law but six years and his selection makes him the youngest judge on the Virginia bench.

The marriage of **John Gordon Brown, '19**, and Miss Teresa Margaret Wyatt, occurred in New York City, September 20th.

The base of the sculpture calls Clark the “Conqueror of the Northwest.”

The Northwest means the general area of today’s state of Illinois. At least that was the focus of Clark’s victories which either importantly seized or easily and temporarily occupied, depending on the account. But the entire Old Northwest Territory, which the United States took from Britain at the end of the Revolutionary War, included all or large parts of six eventual U.S. States (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the northeastern part of Minnesota).

Conquering means . . . well, let’s allow George Rogers Clark to tell us in his own words. George Rogers Clark said that he would have liked to “see the whole race of Indians extirpated” and that he would “never spare Man woman or child of them on whom he could lay his hands.” Clark wrote a statement to the various Indian nations in which he threatened “Your Women & Children given to the Dogs to eat.”

Thomas Jefferson, the founder of the University of Virginia, depicted in a smaller statue nearby in front of the Rotunda building, when he was Governor of Virginia, sent George Rogers Clark west to attack Native Americans, writing that the goal “should be their extermination, or their removal beyond the lakes or Illinois river.” Clark killed the captured and destroyed the crops of those he was sent by Jefferson to exterminate or remove. Clark later unsuccessfully proposed further military expeditions to Virginia Governor Benjamin Harrison in order to demonstrate “that we are always able to crush them at pleasure.”

The quotations above are found in *Surviving Genocide* by Jeffrey Ostler, who shows that U.S. officials developed the policy that “wars of extermination” were “not only necessary, but ethical and legal.” Causes of decline among Native peoples included direct killing, other traumatizing violence prominently including rape, the burning of towns and crops, forcible deportation, and the intentional and non-intentional spreading of diseases and of alcoholism to weakened populations. Ostler writes that the most recent scholarship finds the devastation caused by European diseases resulted less from Native Americans’ lack of immunity, and more from the weakness and starvation created by the violent destruction of their homes. In George Rogers Clark’s day, John Heckewelder (a missionary and author of books on the customs of Native Americans) noted that frontiersmen had adopted “the doctrine . . . that the Indians were the Canaanites, who by God’s commandment were to be destroyed.”



That is not the view of the general public of Charlottesville or Albemarle County or Virginia today. It is not the view of the University of Virginia today. But it is the view blatantly and explicitly celebrated by the George Rogers Clark memorial that greets those arriving from downtown to the campus of the University of Virginia. The University is constructing [a memorial](#) nearby to those enslaved people who built the university. This will arguably be the first and only major memorial in Charlottesville and the immediate surrounding area that is not clearly or arguably a celebration of war or genocide. (One could include in that statement the monument to the war on Vietnam, while some would claim it does not apply to the monument to Lewis-Clark-Sacajawea. Minor statues at UVA include war poet Homer and a World War I memorial, as well as Jefferson who of course engaged in many activities including but far from limited to war and genocide). But the new memorial at UVA will be dedicated just down the street from the monument celebrating the horrors inflicted by George Rogers Clark.

## Petition

Hundreds of people have signed [a petition](#) to James Ryan, President of the University of Virginia, that reads:

*Remove the statue of George Rogers Clark engaged in genocide to a museum where it can be presented as a shameful memory.*



To: UVA President James Ryan

**Remove Monument to  
Genocide that Welcomes  
People to UVA**



**284** of 300  
signatures

**Sign the petition**

First Name \*



## Legal Hurdles

According to the U.S. [National Park Service](#), the fact that the statue is on the National Register of Historic Places is no legal barrier to altering it, relocating it, or destroying it:

“Under Federal Law, the listing of a property in the National Register places no restrictions on what a non-federal owner may do with their property up to and including destruction, unless the property is involved in a project that receives Federal assistance, usually funding or licensing/permitting. National Register listing does not lead to public acquisition or require public access. . . . National Register listing does not automatically invoke local historic district zoning or local landmark designation.”

However, Virginia [state law](#) includes this:

“§ 15.2-1812. Memorials for war veterans.

“A locality may, within the geographical limits of the locality, authorize and permit the erection of monuments or memorials for any war or conflict, or for any engagement of such war or conflict, to include the following monuments or memorials: Algonquin (1622), French and Indian (1754-1763), Revolutionary (1775-1783), War of 1812 (1812-1815), Mexican (1846-1848), Confederate or Union monuments or memorials of the War Between the States (1861-1865), Spanish-American (1898), World War I (1917-1918), World War II (1941-1945), Korean (1950-1953), Vietnam (1965-1973), Operation Desert Shield-Desert Storm (1990-1991), Global War on Terrorism (2000- ), Operation Enduring Freedom (2001- ), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003- ). If such are erected, it shall be unlawful for the authorities of the locality, or any other person or persons, to disturb or interfere with any monuments or memorials so erected, or to prevent its citizens from taking proper measures and exercising proper means for the protection, preservation and care of same. For purposes of this section, “disturb or interfere with” includes removal of, damaging or defacing monuments or memorials, or, in the case of the War Between the States, the placement of Union markings or monuments on previously designated Confederate memorials or the placement of Confederate markings or monuments on previously designated Union memorials.”

In determining whether this section of the state code prevents the University of Virginia doing what it chooses with the George Rogers Clark Monument, these considerations arise.

First, is this a memorial to one of the listed wars? Arguably it is a memorial to the Revolutionary War, and arguably it is not. While Clark's activities did not cease with the conclusion of that war, and may not have all been considered part of that war even at the time, his most famous exploits are generally deemed part of the Revolutionary War.

Second, does the law apply to a memorial (even a Revolutionary War memorial) erected in 1921 on property that is arguably not (these terms will be explained immediately below) "the public square" in the "county seat" of Albemarle County? The answer is no, in the [opinion](#) of the Attorney General of the State of Virginia Mark Herring:

"The Circuit Court of Danville ruled in *Heritage Preservation Association, Inc. v. City of Danville* that [this law] does not apply to any monument or memorial erected within an independent city prior to 1997. Nor does it apply to a monument or memorial erected on any property other than the 'public square' at the county seat before the same year."

Now, Charlottesville is an independent city, and the statues of Lee, Jackson, and Lewis-Clark-Sacajawea were erected long before 1997, and the City has not relocated any of them. And the University of Virginia receives a tiny percentage of its funding from the state of Virginia and is considered a public university, which -- together with a hefty fee -- could certainly produce a legal argument that the corner of UVA's campus constitutes the public square of Albemarle County. But, very clearly, it does not. Herring notes:

"No definition of 'public square' appears in the current Code, nor apparently historically within the Code. A number of older enactments refer to a public square as an area of land where the county courthouse, clerk's office and other official county buildings were located. See, e.g., 1890 Va. Acts ch. 632 (describing laying out a public square for the new county seat of Wise County)."



Never has Albemarle County had its court house, clerk's office, and other official county buildings on the corner of the University of Virginia's campus or anywhere near there. The County does not even own that land. And the County did not erect the monument; the University of Virginia did. By any reasonable understanding, the law does not apply, and the University is free to act.

The following alternatives are available to the University of Virginia, should it wish to relocate the George Rogers Clark Memorial, or should it wish to construct anything nearby that -- while not meeting the usual definition of "damaging or defacing" -- could be alleged in court to be "damaging or defacing" this monument to genocide.

- 1) Lobby the state legislature to explicitly grant permission to act.
- 2) Proceed with one of the options discussed below, and defend the right to so act in court.

## **Contextualization**

Numerous options for what to do with this monument could include not destroying it, not moving it, not altering it, and not constructing anything within several yards of it. While the case for a legal obligation not to damage or deface the monument is dubious, these options would seem to meet that obligation.

There is considerable space available on every side of the monument. It would be possible to construct several new memorials around this one. These new memorials might tell various parts of the story, or perspectives of the story, of the "conquering of the Northwest." One memorial might depict Thomas Jefferson sending Clark on his mission, and quote the instructions he was given. Another might depict the execution of prisoners, another the use of rape as a weapon of war, another the burning of crops, another the destruction of villages, another the struggles for survival by the nations devastated and displaced by Virginia's past imperialism. Quotes from Clark could be included on some of the new memorials. The possibilities are endless. The point is that the University of Virginia is in possession of the knowledge and the funding to wisely and beautifully communicate opposition to genocide, rather than glorification of it, without challenging any law or even facing any accusation of "destroying history!"

Proper contextualization would involve the creation of new memorials that demonstrated a current moral perspective. A simple sign with words on it would not accomplish this. Such a sign, explaining UVA's views on its monument, would contradict its own assertions by making plain that UVA cannot be bothered to memorialize Native Americans' struggles for survival, and can only be bothered to pretend to care.

## Upstaging

There is ample space between the George Rogers Clark memorial and the street in front of it, enough space in which to erect another monument obscuring the monument to genocide from view. Such a new monument could be related to the same topic or not. Charlottesville and environs thus far lack any major memorials to virtually anything. A memorial to peace or justice or sister cities or labor or nature or education or athletics or art or anything other than war and genocide would be an extremely welcome novelty in Charlottesville, and if it set George Rogers Clark behind it, that would be an added benefit that might powerfully symbolize progress in time and morality.

## Relocation

Over the decades, the idea to relocate the George Rogers Clark monument has been proposed and considered -- with the idea being to move the monument to a more prominent location. The other possibility is, of course, to move it to a less prominent location. If this monument were moved to an outdoor or indoor collection of shameful relics of the past, it could be presented with factual information on what was done to the people of the lands Clark "conquered" as well as information about the day and age in which the monument was created, and perhaps information on the later fate of the nations of what became the state of Illinois. One possible new location would be [Clark's birthplace](#) in Albemarle County. Another possible location very near that one, for both the Lewis-Clark-Sacajawea monument and the George Rogers Clark monument, would be the Lewis and Clark museum in Darden Towe Park.

Relocating the George Rogers Clark monument would, of course, open up the prominent location where it has been for the creation of a monument we could be proud of and agree with today.

## **Destruction**

The argument that destroying a statue constitutes the destruction of history is a fairly weak one, but not entirely so. Virtually all of the history of this area of the world is not depicted in massive monuments; and some of the massive monuments -- those of Lee and Jackson -- have only the most tenuous connection to Charlottesville. Yet it is at least the case that the presence of these monuments has been part of Charlottesville's history for nearly 100 years. It is also the case that destroying a monument could give the impression that the motivation is blind rage rather than careful and compassionate thought.

While destroying a monument might be cheaper than relocating it, the relocation preserves and augments something of value. Yet, it is hard to argue that destroying a monument to genocide wouldn't be preferable to keeping it in place at the entrance to the university with no indication that we do not all agree with and celebrate it.

## **Independent Creation**

Short of removing (or destroying) the George Rogers Clark Memorial, the University of Virginia could create numerous positive memorials. The City of Charlottesville and County of Albemarle might easily do the same. If the monuments to war and genocide were simply a handful of monuments among many, if they did not exclusively dominate public space, then arguments for keeping them in place as records of the past would become more reasonable. A Blue Ribbon Commission created by the City of Charlottesville went through an extensive democratic public process and developed [numerous ideas](#) for new public memorials that have not been acted upon. While the City can plead a shortage of funds, the University of Virginia simply cannot. It is in possession of vast resources, and its mission is public education, exactly what this project would serve.



## Recommendation

The University and the City should create a public process for considering the proper fate of the George Rogers Clark monument. Among those consulted should be representatives of the nations attacked by George Rogers Clark. Also among those consulted should be young people, who will be most influenced by the decision and live with it the longest.

