

“A Problem of Visibility”

Remembering and Forgetting the Civil War in Cortland, New York

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ABSTRACT: In 1876, officials in Cortland, New York unveiled a bronze and granite Union soldier monument to commemorate the county’s participation in the American Civil War. Over time, the monument’s meanings and importance changed, and in 2013, Cortland officials began an attempt to move it out of the way for a music stage. This case study illustrates how Union monuments (similarly to Confederate monuments) represented local pride, masculine ideals, racial beliefs, and community values. Over time, however, original purposes faded from memory. By debating whether or not the statue should stay or move, Cortland reimagined the monument’s significance to its past, present, and future.

KEY WORDS: monuments, Union, memory, American Civil War, public history

In 1876, a bronze and granite sentinel took its place in Cortland, New York. A small, rural community in the center of New York state, Cortland County had sacrificed many of its men to the Union cause during the previous decade. Of the county’s 26,000 residents, over 1,500 men marched south, and 310 of them never came home. Those who remained and those who returned felt pride at having done their part to preserve the Union, but they were also haunted by those Cortlandites whose bodies filled graves in Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Three months after the Civil War ended, concerned citizen Charles P. Cole asked in the *Cortland Gazette and Banner*, “Shall the names and memories of these noble men pass away and be forgotten, except where they are preserved in dusty official records, piled among unseen archives?”¹ Cortland was not alone among northern communities whose residents felt the awful weight of sorrow, joy, and pride all at once, and like many others following the Civil War, its citizens

¹ Charles P. Cole, editorial, *Cortland Gazette and Banner*, July 1, 1865. Within Cortland County, the city of Cortland serves as the seat of government and most populous town. Throughout this article, “Cortland” refers primarily to the town, unless otherwise noted.

decided that the best way to remember the conflict and the dead would be to erect a public monument in the center of town.²

A century and a half later, these memories had long since faded, and with the Cortland Union Soldier Monument still occupying its original ground, a local initiative tried to move the statue to make room for a music stage. Cortland prides itself on its annual festivals, many of which occur at Courthouse Park where the monument stands, and a key feature usually includes live music. Spiegle Willcox, a well-known mid-twentieth century jazz trombonist, had called Cortland home, and his family approached the city to help sponsor a permanent stage in his name. In late 2013, a local consultant firm put together a conceptual design for the new stage at Courthouse Park, and although they tried to incorporate the Civil War monument into its plan, they concluded that “the statue provided a problem of visibility and compatibility with the community use of the space.”³ Cortland had long ago installed the monument to be the eternal centerpiece of the community, but after a century and a half, it just got in the way.

Over the last three decades, the historiography of Civil War collective memory and commemoration has flourished as scholars have pinpointed where, how, and why Americans still fight the Civil War—if not on battlefields, then through community debates and personal politics. Debates over Confederate monuments have become one of the most salient topics within public history and modern American politics, but by comparison, Union monuments have received little attention. But like their Confederate counterparts, stakeholders designed Union statues to control the narrative of who won the Civil War, as well as the meaning of that victory. Cortlandites had no Lost Cause myth to promote, but as historian Caroline Janney has demonstrated, northerners bristled at southern attempts to rewrite history in their favor. “Union veterans,” wrote Janney, “never forgot that they had fought against treason.”⁴ Although the Cortland Union Soldier Monument celebrated victory, it obscured the Civil War’s larger meanings beneath a veil of sentimentality and romance. Although with far more subtlety than Confederate sculptures, Cortland’s monument also perpetuated white supremacy. As citizens and historians continue to grapple with the future of Confederate monuments, we should remember to include Union statues within these conversations too.⁵

2 Edmund J. Raus Jr., *Banners South: A Northern Community at War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2005), xiv.

3 Cynthia Bickford Teter and Kenneth J. Teter to John McNerney, November 23, 2013, accessed via a successful Freedom of Information Act request, submitted by Edmund J. Raus Jr. on September 1, 2017 (hereafter Cortland Monument FOIA Documents). I want to thank Ed Raus for sharing these documents with me. Digital copies of over one hundred letters and reports are in my personal possession.

4 Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 9.

5 On the historiography of Civil War collective memory, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in*



Union Soldier Monument, Cortland, New York. (Photograph by author)

In its long history, the Cortland Union Soldier Monument encompassed mutable meanings over time. Bronze and granite monuments have a permanent texture, and in the minds of those who place them, they should stand forever. Yet monuments have elastic meanings—like the study of history itself, they change over time. What was the monument’s value in 1876, how did it evolve, and what is it now? Answers to these questions speak to ever-changing politics, values, and shared memories that inform daily interactions, opinions, and core beliefs. Remembering and forgetting the American Civil War has been a constant process ever since 1861. Community leaders who placed the statue on its granite pedestal in

the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War (New York: Vintage, 1998); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); David R. Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2004); Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*; Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States since 1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); and David B. Allison, ed., *Controversial Monuments and Memorials: A Guide for Community Leaders* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

1876 meant for it to teach civic values, but an unmoving, silent monument makes for a poor educator alone.

In this article, I do not argue whether or not the Cortland Civil War Monument should stay or move; instead, I want to explore the dilemma and its implications for public history. When architects noted that the monument's present position created a visibility problem, they also identified a disconnect between the present and the past. The statue no longer carries the same meanings as it did in 1876, and so a suggestion to move it does not commit violence against history but recognizes that society has changed. At the same time, fighting to keep the monument in its original place advocates for a stronger community appreciation of the past. Ultimately, the key implication for public history is not whether or not this monument moves or stays, but how the conversation continues. Even though the Cortland Civil War Monument has stood in place for well over a century, it became newly visible through the debate itself.

Comprised of land once belonging solely to Iroquois nations, Cortland County derived its name from Pierre VanCortlandt, an American revolutionary and New York's first lieutenant governor. In the years following the American Revolution, politicians carved out parcels of land across western portions of the state as gifts to veteran patriots, and many settled in what came to be known as Cortland County after breaking away from Onondaga County in 1808. As the state grew in population and economic strength over the next half-century, Cortland lagged behind, isolated within valleys on the northern edge of the Appalachian Mountains. The Erie Canal passed far to the north through Syracuse, and the Tioughnioga River, which flowed through Cortland on its way to the Susquehanna River, proved incapable of sustaining a robust trade economy. For many, Cortland appeared simply as a name on maps through which few travelers or business-minded folks passed. Lacking roads leading in or out, and with railroad tracks not laid through until 1854, Cortland, in many ways, functioned as its own society. From the early republic era through the eve of the Civil War, Cortland's residents remained self-sufficient out of necessity. They relied on themselves, neighbors, and their own crops and animals to survive from year to year, fostering a deep sense of community and local pride.⁶

Although remote, Cortland stayed up-to-date with the political goings-on, and its citizens debated slavery and abolitionism. The Whigs held slim political favor within Cortland County itself, and a majority allied with the Republican Party from the late 1850s through Abraham Lincoln's presidential victory in 1860. Although many local citizens disagreed with slavery, according to historian Edmund Raus, most "did not go so far as to embrace the abolitionist cause of

6 On the history and folklore of Cortland, New York, see Cornelia Baker Cornish, "The Geography and History of Cortland County" (MA thesis, Cornell University, 1929); Bertha Eveleth Blodgett, *Stories of Cortland County*, 2nd ed. (Cortland, NY: Cortland County Historical Society, 1975); *Cortland County Chronicles*, vols. 1-4 (Cortland, NY: Cortland County Historical Society, 1957, 1958, 1979, 1986); and Raus, *Banners South*, 1-6.

immediate slave emancipation in the South or the concept of social equality for free blacks.”⁷ Cortland did harbor at least a few abolitionists and rumors of Underground Railroad stations, but support for these often led to resistance. In 1833, after preaching abolitionism, the Reverend John Keep of the Homer Congregational Church resigned his post in the face of protests from parishioners. In 1837 with help from Gerrit Smith, locals formed the Anti-Slavery Society of Cortland County. Days later, Henry S. Randall, a community leader, denounced this new organization, worrying that such a movement would mean the “embroiling of neighborhoods and families, the setting of friend against friends, overthrowing churches and institutions of learning, and embittering one portion of the land against the other.”⁸ Beginning in 1849, Cortland County also housed New York Central College, a progressive institution educating both black and white students (men and women) by black and white professors. Yet on the whole, Cortland’s citizens did not participate in the movement to end slavery, although they quickly condemned southern states for seceding following the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln.⁹

When news reached Cortland of the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, many of its citizens went apoplectic. Furious over Americans attacking their own in an attempt to secede, numerous Cortlandites saw southern actions as nothing more than high treason. Overcome with anger and wanting to do something, the community formed a committee to meet and adopt resolutions for an official response. “A persistent and determined effort is being made for the overthrow and destruction of the Constitution,” its authors wrote, and their “Government needs the support of all good and loyal citizens.” Responding to President Lincoln’s call for volunteer soldiers, many Cortlandites signaled a willingness to fight. “If War *must* come . . . we are in [for] its vigorous prosecution until the Stars and Stripes float over our whole country and the traitors cry ‘enough!’” wrote the committee members. As for many northern communities, slavery and its immediate abolition was not the primary concern of Cortlandites taking up arms. Support for the union was, but even more than genuine patriotism, Cortlandites felt their very virtue at stake. According to committee member H. L. Green, a “civil war even with all its horrors is not the worst thing that can befall our nation. The loss of her honor is a worse calamity than even that.”¹⁰

And so, Cortland went to war. Over the next four years, over 1,500 men from Cortland served the Union. They fought with the 157th Infantry, the 76th Infantry,

⁷ Raus, *Banners South*, 4.

⁸ Henry S. Randall in the *Cortland Advocate*, April 15, 1837, quoted in Simeon Bradford, “The Anti-Slavery Society of Cortland County,” in *Cortland County Chronicles*, vol. 2, 241.

⁹ See Bradford, “The Anti-Slavery Society of Cortland County,” 240–46; Catherine M. Hanchett, “Agitators for Black Equality and Emancipation: Cortland County, 1837–1855,” in *Cortland County Chronicles*, vol. 4; Raus, *Banners South*, 4; and Marlene K. Parks, *New York Central College*, vols. 1–2 (Amazon’s CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

¹⁰ “Patriotic Meeting in Cortland,” 1861 newspaper clipping, A. D. Blodgett Scrapbook, vol. II, Cortland County Historical Society (all quotes, emphasis in original).

the 185th Infantry, and several other New York regiments between 1861 and 1865. Townspeople and women celebrated these homegrown soldiers as brave volunteers, symbols of their own community integrity. In the minds of Cortland's citizenry, their local soldiers were the real heroes of the war because they chose to fight—they were not drafted. Along with the county's sense of self-sacrifice as a small population sending a high percentage of soldiers south, the community revered these men as emblems of their own patriotism and strength. Years before the monument began its watch in Courthouse Park, locals already had in their minds the typical image of the handsome, white, young, courageous, and honorable soldier of Cortland County.¹¹

As soon as the Civil War ended and surviving soldiers made it back home, Cortland turned its attention to memorializing their legacy. Returning veterans and civilians alike felt the magnitude of the conflict, sensing that the actions of those on the battlefield and on the home-front should be remembered throughout history. And they wanted to write the story. After most veterans had returned in mid-to-late 1865, community members proposed building some kind of monument "to the memory of those who took part in that terrible conflict." Led by the ardent pre-war anti-abolitionist Henry S. Randall, the county formed an association to begin raising funds. The association contacted residents from across the county to invest in the project, but with Cortland readjusting back to normal life, most people had little to spare. Older residents sponsored concerts, and local women collected money, but in less than a year, they raised only \$187. According to Abram P. Smith, who served as a first lieutenant and quartermaster for the 76th New York, over the next ten years, the plan to build a Civil War monument in Cortland "slumbered."¹²

By the fall of 1875, when many in the North had grown weary of reconstructing the South, the idea for a Cortland monument gained renewed momentum. On November 1, at a meeting of the local post for the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), leaders passed a resolution creating a five-member committee to fundraise, design, and construct a monument in Cortland. The following month, the committee chartered the Monument Association and began raising money through membership subscriptions of one dollar. The idea took hold, and men and women who lived in towns, hamlets, and on farms throughout the county joined, many donating more than the one-dollar requirement. By the spring of 1876, the Monument Association had raised \$3,318. Many residents gave what little they could afford, and in his flowery speech at the dedication ceremony, Abram Smith recounted how "Poor men and women who needed the money have, with tears in their eyes and their hearts throbbing with emotion at the

11 See Abram P. Smith, *History of the Seventy-Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers* (Cortland, NY, 1867); Isabel Bracy, *157th New York Volunteer (Infantry) Regiment, Madison and Cortland Counties, New York* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1991); and Raus, *Banners South*, 13–257.

12 A. P. Smith, "History of the Cortland County Soldiers' Monument," speech given on May 30, 1877, newspaper clipping, A.D. Blodgett Scrapbook, vol. II.

recollection of the past, tendered their money freely to perpetuate the memory of our noble boys.”¹³

As prospects for funding a monument grew, three of the GAR committee members traveled to New York City to view the 7th Regiment Memorial in Central Park. Completed in 1874 by sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward and base-designer Richard Morris Hunt, the 7th Regiment Memorial symbolized the common, white, and noble volunteer—a representation of what they considered a real American man. According to art historian Kirk Savage, by the late 1860s, the popular trend for Civil War monuments personified a universal, generic, and white everyman soldier on endless watch staring out towards the enemy lines. Sculpture firms began mass-producing casts, and local communities appreciated this very repetitiveness because it connected their monument with countless others. Veterans themselves started to play a larger role in shaping these tributes, honoring their own self-perception as much as their fallen comrades. And increasingly, these figures occupied public spaces. Central Park’s landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted helped design the 7th Regiment Memorial and chose its prominent location. Impressed by the monument, the Cortland delegates decided to mirror its design and utilize the same materials of bronze and granite, but scaled it back to match their more limited budget. The 7th Regiment Memorial cost about \$25,000, and with only a little over \$3,000 available, they worked out a deal with the New England Granite Company for the base and commissioned sculptor Carl Conrads to create a similar, though much smaller monument for Cortland totaling \$5,000.¹⁴

After settling on the design and price, Cortland watched as a monument to itself slowly came together in 1876. After digging six feet down for the foundation, workers laid the cornerstone on May 30, 1876. Over the next year, the New England Granite Company delivered the base, Conrads completed the bronze sculpture, and Church Street transformed as the gleaming monument took its place in the center of the community. Harkening back to the American Revolution, the inscription on the granite base read simply, “Centennial Offering of Cortland County to the Memory of Those Who Fought in Defense of the Union. 1861. 1865. A.D. 1876.” Reverend Thomas Street proclaimed that the monument “represents a youthful soldier, in full regulation uniform, with cap and overcoat, standing with musket at rest. The face is singularly expressive and noble, and the pose of the figure as natural and graceful as if a living ‘boy in blue’ were standing in its place.”¹⁵ Cortland

13 Smith, “History of the Cortland County Soldiers’ Monument,” May 30, 1877.

14 Ibid.; Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 162–64; Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration*, 26–27; Sarah Beetham, “An Army of Bronze Simulacra: The Copied Soldier Monument and the American Civil War,” *Articulos Tematicos* 4, no. 7 (June 2015): 34–45; Carol A. Grissom, *Zinc Sculpture in America, 1850–1950* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009); “7th Regiment Memorial,” Central Park Conservancy, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190402140215/http://www.centralparknyc.org/things-to-see-and-do/attractions/7th-regiment-memorial.html>.

15 “The Soldiers’ Monument: Unveiling and Dedication,” May 30, 1877, newspaper clipping in A. D. Blodgett Scrapbook, vol. II. See also H. M. Kellogg, “Cannon by Soldiers’ Monument,” *Cortland Standard*, April 3, 1911.

veterans felt that they had pieced the American nation back together again, and they projected an image of themselves as brave, ever-ready warriors able to do it again, if necessary. H. M. Kellogg, a member of the GAR, later wrote that “Our ideal soldier was to be bronze, not a figure of a Frenchy looking soldier with a waxed moustache and Zouave cap, not an old or middle-aged man with beard, but a youthful patriotic American volunteer about 18 or 20 years of age.”¹⁶ In veterans’ minds, the monument would “stand for all time” representing their imagined, masculine selves.¹⁷

Exactly one year after workers laid the cornerstone, Cortland officially dedicated the monument amid a day of public celebration. In the early morning hours, a thirteen-cannon salute announced the beginning of the festivities. The overcast sky soon gave way to bright sunshine, and many men and women rushed outdoors to finish decorating their homes and streets before the parade began. Large crowds gathered near the town square, and men, women, and children lined the streets for the half-mile parade route from Tompkins Street to the monument on Church Street. According to one newspaper account, “Main street and the other streets along the line of the march were fairly ablaze with the national colors.” Residents hung American flags from their homes and businesses with mottoes written across the colors, some reading “Loyalty the hope of the nation,” “Remember our fallen heroes,” and “They live in each patriot’s heart.” As the parade moved along, bands played, veterans marched, disabled soldiers rode in horse-drawn carriages, and residents from across the county pressed in around the monument, which had been covered with a sheet.¹⁸

After music, prayers, and words from local dignitaries, Stewart L. Woodford, a Union Brigadier General and former Lieutenant Governor of the state, stood to deliver the first of two dedication speeches. No record of his full speech exists, but a local newspaper summarized his brief words. Woodford focused on the meaning of the monument’s exact location: “With the Normal School behind it, the churches on either side of it, and the Court-House in front, [Woodford] found [the monument] fitly stationed to represent the ideas for which the soldier of the Union fought and suffered and died—education in its broadest sense, religion free and untrammelled, the equality of all before the law and respect for the law as the final judge and arbiter.”¹⁹ Community stakeholders placed the monument intentionally, surrounded by Cortland’s most important institutions. Founded in 1868, the Cortland Normal School served the region as a training ground for primary and secondary school teachers, and its massive, brick edifice sat just behind the monument. Presbyterian and Baptist churches rested nearby, and Cortland County’s

16 H. M. Kellogg, response letter, reprinted in unknown newspaper, date unknown, clipping, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society.

17 Smith, “History of the Cortland County Soldiers’ Monument,” May 30, 1877.

18 “The Soldiers’ Monument: Unveiling and Dedication,” May 30, 1877. See also “Decoration Day Exercises” pamphlet, May 30, 1877, series 3, Cortland County Historical Society.

19 “The Soldiers’ Monument: Unveiling and Dedication,” May 30, 1877.

courthouse stood just across the dirt road. As Woodford suggested, the Cortland Union Soldier Monument not only stood in the physical center of town, but also guarded over those ideals for which Cortlandites fought in the Civil War.

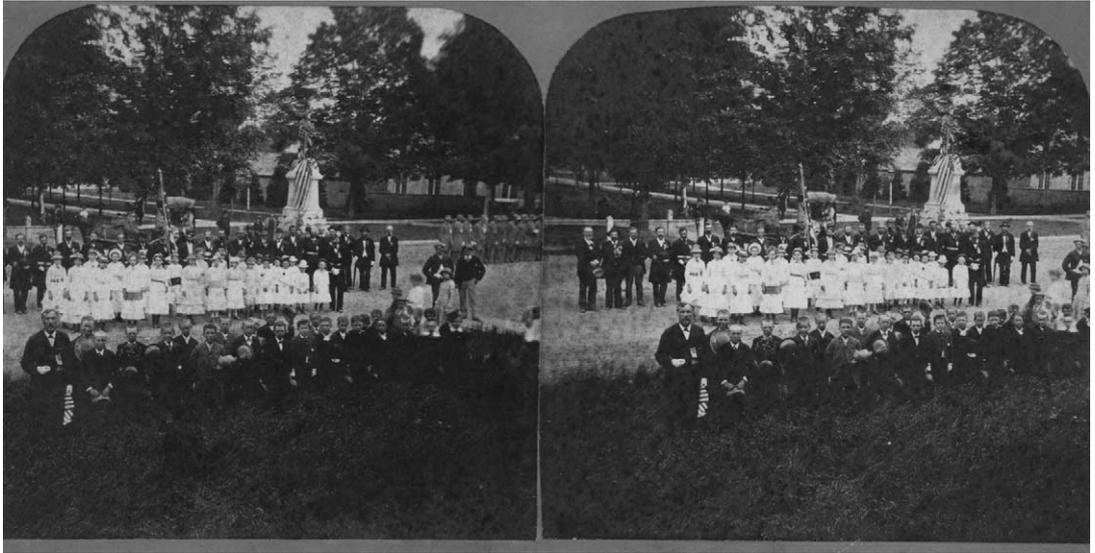
Just before the unveiling, Abram Smith took the podium to deliver the final dedication speech and mark the meaning of the Cortland Union Soldier Monument. Echoing Woodford, place and space mattered to Smith. “Here, at the entrance to your beautiful school-grounds in the midst of the youth with their plastic mind,” rang out Smith. “Here, in the presence of the people who every Sabbath throng your temples of worship; here to be seen and admired by every passer-by; aye, here at the very portals of your temple of justice,” the monument would continually remind people what happened between 1861 and 1865. Smith emphasized that the monument belonged to everyone, and that even though it stood in town, it belonged to the entire community. “We have here a statue and a monument of which the people of Cortland County may well be proud,” Smith proclaimed. “It is a *county* monument. When paid for it belongs to the *county* and not to *any one town*.”²⁰

Where the Cortland Union Soldier Monument stood and who it belonged to mattered, as did the direction it faced. Rather than look south to ensure the enemy did not rise again, the statue looked directly westward. Smith called attention to this deliberate feature, saying, “with his face to the west ‘whither [sic] the course of empire takes its way,’ shall forever stand this model of the American soldier *at rest*—a fit emblem of that peace which to-day smiles upon a united and happy people.”²¹ The quote Smith mentioned comes from the 1861 oil-on-canvas painting by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, which depicts white pioneers setting out to claim western lands. Inspired by a line from George Berkeley’s 1728 poem “On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” Leutze’s painting championed manifest destiny, and it hung near the chamber of the House of Representatives in the United States Capitol during the time when Cortland built its monument. By turning their monument to the west, Cortland’s leaders stood with other northerners who had grown weary of monitoring the South during Reconstruction, ready instead to conquer a new land. The vision of a white soldier scanning the west and scouting new opportunity appealed to white Cortlandites—the monument not only represented prior victories, but future ones as well.²²

²⁰ Smith, “History of the Cortland County Soldiers’ Monument,” May 30, 1877 (emphasis in original).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² On Leutze’s painting, see Jochen Wierech, *Grand Themes: Emanuel Leutze, Washington Crossing the Delaware, and American History Painting* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 5, 21, 26–27; *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, Smithsonian American Art Museum website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190402140411/https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/westward-course-empire-takes-its-way-mural-study-us-capitol-14569>; and *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, Architect of the Capitol website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190402140517/https://www.aoc.gov/art/other-paintings-and-murals/westward-course-empire-takes-its-way>.



Photographs from dedication ceremony, May 30, 1877. (Courtesy of the Cortland County Historical Society)

As Smith looked to the past, he also envisioned future generations not having to worry about remembering history—he and others had taken care of that for them. “Soon the last soldier shall have passed away,” he noted. “What, then, amidst the cares and struggles of business life shall tell of the heroic deeds of those dark days? Your munificence, my friends, shall furnish the answer.” Veterans wanted to make sure that Cortlandites of the near and distant future

remembered their sacrifice. How better could they pass along to future generations not just the stories, but the emotions of “the heroic severing of family ties, the long and weary marches, the miasmatic bivouacs, the hospitals, the boom of cannon and the death-rattle of musketry[?]” In Smith’s mind, the community *needed* the monument, or else they would forget. “Forgetting,” according to historian Caroline Janney, “was what [Union veterans] all feared the most.”²³ They put their faith in a statue—built to last centuries—to “silently remind the coming generations for all time of the billows of graves over the entire land, and of all the terrible trials of that fiery crucible of war.”²⁴

But why did Cortlandites fight in the Civil War, and what were the larger meanings of the sectional conflict to them? On these questions, Smith provided vague answers for the crowd. “Above all, shall he remind [the people] of that great boon of freedom and self-government which was secured and preserved by the soldiery he represents,” Smith intoned. “He shall be a mile-stone in the progress of civilization and free government as it advances and approaches perfection through the centuries.” Smith mentions freedom as an abstract idea rooted in the American Revolution, not entrenched in the more recent reality of slavery, emancipation, African Americans, or Reconstruction. Smith did call out the Confederacy, if not by name, then by action: “never while this monument shall stand shall the bloody hand of treason be raised to smite the liberties of our free and happy people.”²⁵ Not only were African Americans—as slaves, soldiers, and freedmen and women—absent from the idealized white soldier monument, they were erased from the discussion of the war and its meaning. The focus stayed on the white volunteer who won the war, not on those whose freedom needed securing. Even as Cortland remembered their hometown heroes, they began actively forgetting their roots in abolitionism, their African American allies and community members, and the larger causes of the Civil War.

After Smith concluded his speech and the crowd dispersed, the Cortland Union Soldier Monument stayed still. What it symbolized—and what it did not—remained etched onto the landscape, but over time, this icon of the heroic white volunteer also faded from public memory. County leaders had secured two cannons from Governor’s Island to sit on either side of the monument, but a month after the dedication, the town awoke to a loud explosion and found the cannons “kicked out of their supports and half buried up in the lawn.”²⁶ Troublemakers had set off the cannons. For safety purposes, as well as to raise funds, the Monument Association sold the cannons. Over the years, the lack of respect for the monument appeared to grow. In 1897, the community once again placed decommissioned cannons on either side of the monument, including forty cannonballs in piles beside them. People kept stealing the cannonballs, and those that remained became half-buried

23 Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 5.

24 Smith, “History of the Cortland County Soldiers’ Monument,” May 30, 1877.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Kellogg, “Cannon by Soldiers’ Monument,” *Cortland Standard*, April 3, 1911.

in the grass. On Halloween night in 1933, trick-or-treaters painted the statue's face white, and over a month later, no one had yet bothered to clean it. As more veterans passed away, the Monument Association became inactive. One hundred years after Fort Sumter, Nancy Duffy wrote in the *Cortland Standard* about how the history of the community's role in the Civil War "is slowly disappearing" and that the "Civil War monument in the Courthouse Park has lost its identity with many." She lamented the loss of appreciation and the fading importance of the monument. "But more than anything else," she wrote, "the heavy cannonballs perhaps represent the trend here away from Civil War consciousness—as they hide half-buried on the Courthouse lawn."²⁷

During the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s, Cortland began revitalizing Courthouse Park and its memorials. Back in 1906, the Tioughnioga chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution had placed a large boulder on the courthouse grounds to honor the 107 patriots buried in Cortland County. Less than one hundred yards behind the Civil War statue, the county had dedicated a World War I monument in 1926, reading "Lest We Forget Cortland County's Sons and Daughters Who Served in the World War," and had taken steps to preserve the pagoda-like structure. In 1985, the city installed a water fountain, and in order to make space and widen Church Street, a crane moved the Cortland Union Soldier Monument a few yards back from its original spot, although it still occupied the most visible place in Courthouse Park. During the early 1990s, the county had moved a Vietnam memorial to the park, represented by a bronze flame. In 1992, the county unveiled a new Civil War memorial on the property—granite plaques with many of the names of the soldiers who had died in combat. One local man, Ralph Pitman, noticed that the new monument had not included the eleven men who had died from the town of Lapeer, and through his efforts, the county amended the monument. The actions of Pitman and others who had invested in the public memory of Courthouse Park mattered to the community. According to city alderman Frederick Janke in 1991, "the park will not be a cemetery, but will be a living, reverent memorial."²⁸

27 Nancy Duffy, "Cannonballs 'Fade Away' Like Old Soldiers," *Cortland Standard*, November 14, 1961. See also "Soldier Monument Half Century Old," clipping, unknown newspaper, May 24, 1927, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society; "Veteran Memorial Stands Disfigured by Young Pranksters," *Cortland Sun Herald*, December 10, 1933, clipping, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society.

28 Richard Palmer, "Vets Park Becoming a Reality," *Cortland Standard*, June 10, 1991. See also "A Moving Experience," *Cortland Standard*, December 3, 1985; Report by David C. Crankshaw, Cortland County Genealogical Society, November 1990, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society; Connie Nogas, "Civil War Veterans' Names Missing in Action," *Cortland Standard*, clipping, 1994, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society; Richard Palmer, "Cortland's Civil War Monument is 120 Years Old," May 25, 1997, unknown newspaper, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society; Katie Hall, "WWI Memorial Restoration Urged," *Cortland Standard*, April 28, 1998; "Lapeer Monument Unveiled on Memorial Day," clipping, unknown newspaper, Monuments folder, Cortland County Historical Society; and Evan Geibel, "City to Repair Damaged Cannon," *Cortland Standard*, May 31, 2005.

In the midst of the Civil War's sesquicentennial in 2013, officials began to consider replacing the Cortland Civil War Monument with a music stage in Courthouse Park. The family of Spiegle Willcox approached the city first with the idea. During the previous forty years, Cortland had relied on a stage-on-wheels, known as the showmobile, for concerts and festivals, and it was showing those years of wear and tear. The Willcox family told the city that they would donate \$75,000 towards a permanent stage only, not a new showmobile. City officials saw an opportunity to replace the portable stage with a new structure to better draw in tourism and revitalize Cortland's downtown. According to mayor Brian Tobin, a permanent stage "would also provide a convenience and bring together a community to enjoy such events our courthouse park hosts throughout the year."²⁹ Local concept designers Cynthia Bickford Teter and Kenneth J. Teter outlined a proposal for the stage. The Teters considered placing the stage behind the Civil War monument and fountain, but they cited safety concerns regarding the fountain. They tried incorporating the statue into their plans, but they could not find a way to make it work, writing to Cortland's Youth Bureau director, John McNerney, that "the statue provided a problem of visibility and compatibility with the community use of the space." The Teters proposed moving the statue a few dozen yards south among some of the other veteran monuments, such as the Vietnam memorial and the Revolutionary War boulder. Doing so would be justifiable, the Teters wrote, asserting "it did not dishonor the intention of purpose of the statue." With the statue moved, the stage "would best support the needs of the community."³⁰

With the plan in place, the city needed to raise more money to see the project through. The Willcox family promised \$75,000, but the Teters had estimated the total project cost at \$192,000. Mayor Tobin wrote to State Senator James L. Seward to ask the state for additional funds. To justify the expenditure, Tobin drew inspiration from the Teters' design plan in which they explained that the permanent stage "would not only serve to honor Spiegle Willcox in an appropriate manner, but would represent his legacy and the image of both the City and County of Cortland in a very positive way in this very visible and accessible public space."³¹ Seward agreed with Tobin, and even though public finances were tight, Seward put in "extra effort" to obtain a state grant worth \$100,000 for the project that became known as the "Spiegle Willcox Community Stage." Seward wrote to Tobin with the good news, asking Tobin to keep the news quiet until an official announcement could be made. "It's clear that you [Tobin] have thought this project through," Seward wrote, "and that it will have a tangible, positive impact on the community."³²

²⁹ Brian Tobin, letter sent to New York State Senator James L. Seward, April 24, 2014, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

³⁰ Cynthia Bickford Teter and Kenneth J. Teter, letter sent to John McNerney, November 23, 2013, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² James L. Seward, letter sent to Brian Tobin, July 7, 2014, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

To secure the \$100,000 grant, Cortland officials had to formally apply for a State and Municipal Facilities Program grant, and they needed to have their plan approved by New York's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). John McNerney filled out the paperwork, labeling the project "Improvements to Courthouse Park." With \$100,000 from the state, \$75,000 from the Willcox family, and the remaining \$20,000 from the city's Department of Public Works, McNerney explained how the community felt "excited to make much needed improvements to the fountain and construction of a Community Stage in Courthouse Park." Without mentioning the Cortland Union Soldier Monument, he outlined how the city would revitalize the downtown space.³³ McNerney and city officials then awaited word from the OPRHP, which held the responsibility for ensuring that new construction would not interfere with historical integrity. In September 2016, the OPRHP affirmed that the music venue "will have No Adverse Impact upon historic or archaeological resources."³⁴ In March 2017, Tobin filled out one last form, indicating that the project would not "impair the character or quality of important historic, archaeological, architectural or aesthetic resources."³⁵ With this last piece of red tape complete, the project became public knowledge and Cortland prepared to move ahead.

Up until this point, Cortland officials had not foreseen any road blocks to moving the monument and building the stage, but they had not anticipated Ed Raus standing in their way. Edmund Raus grew up in nearby Syracuse, New York, but his grandmother had lived in Cortland, and his visits there instilled a passion for local history. Raus joined the National Park Service (NPS), and he served as a historian for Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Gettysburg National Military Park, and Manassas National Battlefield Park. He retired to Cortland County and published on local history and soldiers from Cortland during the Civil War. Once news broke about the plans for Courthouse Park, Raus began writing op-eds for the local newspaper, communicating with politicians, and publicly advocating for the Cortland Union Soldier Monument to stay put. In a letter to the editor that followed a stakeholders' meeting about Courthouse Park—one that conspicuously lacked historical perspectives—Raus reminded readers about the history of the monument, its symbolism, and how in 1876 and 1877, Cortland's leaders placed it purposefully to ever-remind the community about the Civil War. Raus suggested using funds to purchase a new showmobile but called the plan for a permanent stage an "ill-considered proposal." "Let's be clear," Raus wrote. "This project is not just a continuation of the popular special events programs currently

33 State and Municipal Facilities Program Grant Project Information Sheet and supporting documents, sent to Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (hereafter DASNY) Grant Administration, August 10, 2015, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

34 Christina Vagvolgyi, letter sent to Matthew Stanley, September 28, 2016, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

35 Short Environmental Assessment Form, filled out by Mayor Brian Tobin, March 1, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

held in the park. This will be a permanent structure that will, in effect, repurpose the park and reduce its size.” His chief worry did not concern new intentions for the park, however, but involved what he considered the erasure of the past. “Mr. McNerny’s preliminary plan identifies the [Cortland Civil War] monument as an obstacle that needs to be moved.”³⁶

Throughout the summer of 2017, Raus continued to pressure city officials to leave Courthouse Park untouched and preserve the Cortland Civil War Monument’s location. Although musicians, event organizers, and other local stakeholders kept planning for the stage, Raus persisted in voicing his disapproval. The city’s common council of eight alderman took charge of the project, and they affirmed that the statue would be moved over to the other war monuments to create space for the stage. Reporting on the common council’s intentions, Tyrone Heppard, writing in the *Cortland Standard*, stated that the “existing fountain structure will be fully replaced and the entire area reconstructed to create a new and inviting public space for relaxation and general enjoyment.”³⁷ Although Raus continued to oppose the idea, others voiced their support. Community member Mike Stevans submitted a letter to the editor to say, “I am sorry to see that there is controversy about this effort. Yes, the park is a place where we remember our military, but it is also a place for the living. It is a nice tribute to our dead heroes to have citizens enjoying their park. There is room for both.”³⁸ But Raus would not accept this opinion. He wrote back to the *Cortland Standard* summarizing his opposition: “I believe it is simply wrong to plunk down a new, modern 800 square foot building near the historic courthouse and among a number of monuments dedicated to the memory of Cortland County soldiers.”³⁹

Raus’s advocacy changed the scope of the debate, and towards the end of summer, the Spiegle Willcox Community Stage project was in peril. Cortland had recently won a ten million dollar grant from New York state for a downtown revitalization program, and Seward wrote Raus with news that “final designs are on hold as the city considers whether to use a portion of DRI (Downtown Revitalization) funding toward [the stage].”⁴⁰ At the same time, the primary for the mayor’s race was heating up, with Angela Wilde, a local community member,

36 Ed Raus, letter to the editor, “Don’t Change Courthouse Park,” *Cortland Standard*, June 2, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents. See also Sign-In Sheet at Key Stakeholders Meeting, May 15, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents; Raus, *Banners South*, ix-xi; and Joan M. Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battleground Park* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

37 Tyrone L. Heppard, “City Takes Project Reins,” *Cortland Standard*, June 23, 2016, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents. See also Robert Creenan, “Setting the Stage,” *Cortland Standard*, June 21, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

38 Mike Stevans, letter to the editor, “Bandstand a Great Addition,” *Cortland Standard*, July 12, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

39 Ed Raus, letter to the editor, “Stage Doesn’t Belong in Park,” *Cortland Standard*, August 1, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

40 James L. Seward, e-mail sent to Ed Raus, August 22, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

challenging Brian Tobin for the Democratic nomination. The two candidates held much in common, but they differed on what to do about Courthouse Park. Whereas the *Cortland Standard* quoted Tobin as desiring “to balance the stage with the needs of the community,” Wilde “consider[ed] the park akin to a historical artifact and says it is sacred ground to others.” Wilde went on to express concern for the lack of community involvement in moving the statue and building the stage. Tobin won re-election, but Wilde’s stance further destabilized the mayor’s plans.⁴¹

On September 15, 2017, the *Cortland Standard* published an op-ed by Raus laying out his beliefs about why the Cortland Union Soldier Monument should not be altered. Public hearings were scheduled for the following month, and Raus wanted to awaken the community to the project’s problems beforehand. Raus described the role Cortlandites played during the Civil War, and how veterans built the monument to symbolize their sacrifice and stand among the county’s most important institutions. He argued that the space “should remain as a county heritage site that needs to be preserved.” That officials would only be moving the statue over a few dozen yards was beside the point, according to Raus, for their motivations to upgrade the area signaled historical amnesia. To transform Courthouse Park into an “entertainment venue” promised to damage Cortland’s identity. But at the same time, Raus did not highlight the monument’s symbolization and expression of manifest destiny and whiteness, only referring to it as a statue honoring veterans. This uncomplicated presentation simplified its significance, helping craft an argument for historical relevance. “My concern here,” Raus summarized, “is with the indifference shown by this proposal for the historical context of the park represented by the historic courthouse, the monuments, the park itself, and the adjacent churches—all of which provide opportunities to help tell the story of our past.”⁴²

In the fight to save the statue’s location, the Cortland Union Soldier Monument took on new meanings. Instead of representing manifest destiny, whiteness, volunteerism, masculinity, and youth as it originally did in the 1870s, the monument in the twenty-first century stood as just another veteran from Cortland. As Kirk Savage wrote, a “monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and the cognitive landscape. Monuments attempt to mold a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest.”⁴³ After the passage of so much time, the Cortland Union Soldier Monument did remain a fixed, physical point, but its 1870s contexts had vanished. Instead, it became one with the other war memorials in Courthouse Park, another soldier in a long line of Cortland warriors fighting for the United States. It is no wonder why city officials had no qualms moving the statue over a little way to stand with other veteran monuments.

⁴¹ Robert Creenan, “Stage an Issue in Mayor’s Race,” *Cortland Standard*, date unknown, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

⁴² Ed Raus, “Courthouse Park at a Crossroads,” *Cortland Standard*, September 15, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

⁴³ Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 4.

Raus's advocacy garnered the attention of other community stakeholders, and at a public meeting on October 11, 2017, a group of residents "voiced their concerns about respecting the park's history."⁴⁴ They pushed the city government to revisit the idea of a new showmobile, not a new, permanent stage that would have relocated the Cortland Union Soldier Monument. With public dissension mounting, the city decided to halt plans for the permanent stage. Instead, the city proposed purchasing a new mobile stage and renovating the fountain in front of the statue, but those plans also fell through after community stakeholders decided to prioritize other public projects with the state's ten-million-dollar grant. After nearly five years of plans and ideas to move the Cortland Union Soldier Monument in place of a community music stage, nothing actually changed—except that the community reevaluated its shared past.⁴⁵

In 2018, Courthouse Park evolved once again, this time adding a memorial honoring those who died on September 11, 2001. Using metal and rebar from the Twin Towers, local artist Tino Ferro created two spires standing twenty-two feet tall. Standing less than fifty yards from the Cortland Union Soldier Monument—and occupying the exact ground that the statue would have if the stage plan had been realized—the 9/11 Memorial drew attention to history. "That's what art is supposed to do," Ferro said of his work, "make us think."⁴⁶

And that is what the debate surrounding the Cortland Civil War Monument accomplished—it made the community rethink its past, present, and future. Though labeled as an impediment, the statue became newly visible. As Cortland's history remains in flux—as all histories do—the monument will continue to instruct, though perhaps not in ways that Abram Smith and Stewart Woodford had originally intended. Marble and bronze remain permanent, but monuments never do.

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44 Robert Creenan, "Stage Options Presented," *Cortland Standard*, October 12, 2017, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

45 Creenan, "Stage Options Presented;" and Jacob DeRochie, "Final DRI List Unveiled," *Cortland Standard*, July 13, 2018, Cortland Monument FOIA Documents.

46 Jacob DeRochie, "Artist Recreates Twin Towers for 9/11 Memorial," *Cortland Standard*, July 12, 2018. See also Kevin Conlon, "9/11 Monument Sought for City Park," *Cortland Standard*, February 28, 2018; and Jacob DeRochie, "Forever Remember 9/11," *Cortland Standard*, September 12, 2018.