

June 17, 2020

Mayor's Statement Concerning Recent Petition to Remove Confederate Soldier Monument from Courthouse Lawn:

The Confederate Soldier Monument has been part of the courthouse square for over 100 years. In 1914, during the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War, the Sons of Confederate Veterans and Ladies Memorial Association, together with county officials and other citizens, raised funds for the monument and its stone base. They placed it originally at the east entrance of the courthouse lawn, facing East Main Street. Later, county officials relocated it to the northeast corner of the courthouse lawn. At that time, the other major Civil War monument in Murfreesboro was the Hazen Monument, which commemorates Union soldiers, on the Nashville Highway (now part of the Stones River National Battlefield).

I am aware that there is a petition and other movements related to the relocation/removal of the statue. I read one just last week. The petition states that the monument "belongs to a cemetery or museum." It soon will be in a museum. Over the next year, the county commission and I hope to complete our vision of renovating the historic courthouse, inside and out, and convert the building and its grounds into a "working museum." We recognize that the Rutherford County Courthouse is certainly the jewel of all of our historic sites. It speaks to the entire community and we wish for the "working museum" to do the same—convey the whole story of our history.

For the courthouse exhibits, we have asked for the assistance of Dr. Carroll Van West from Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation and officials from the Tennessee State Museum. We want the museum to showcase artifacts, maps, and photographs native to Rutherford County's history from the very beginning up to modern day. The courthouse grounds will be part of the museum as well. Already the lawn has a Veterans Memorial, a monument to the time when Murfreesboro served as State Capitol, and other monuments and markers addressing different people and events in our history.

Our "working museum," both inside and out, must portray the full history of Rutherford County. Our history is not always pleasant. Traders once sold enslaved people at the square. The Cherokee Trail of Tears passed through the town square. A Civil War battle was fought on the town square. Jim Crow segregation once held sway in the courthouse and entire county. Lynchings have taken place in our county. We must learn from those injustices. But we also must recognize our story is full of citizens who made a difference. Their journey for progress, hope, love, and unity has served to make our community a stronger, better place to live.

We are making progress. Phase I of the "working museum" has been completed (5 banners in the entrance way with pictures and historical information). Phase II was halted in early March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Phase II consists of a display in the main lobby of the courthouse from the Civil War era to World War II, and Phase III will cover post-WWII to the arrival of Nissan and other international corporations in recent times.

I served as a founding Board Member for the Bradley Museum and Cultural Center. I listened and learned much from my colleagues. Over a year ago, I met with my former board colleague Mary Watkins to discuss moving some of the Bradley Museum items to the museum in the courthouse, as those items

serve to depict what the black community was experiencing during the Civil War. I look forward to that day. I have worked with our partners to enlarge the museum's display capacity as well so that more stories can be added in the future

The steps toward our "working museum" are positive steps for the community. State law, "The Heritage Protection Act (Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-1-412), amended in 2018, states, '...no memorial regarding a historic conflict, historic entity, historic event, historic figure, or historic organization that is, or is located on, public property, may be removed, renamed, relocated, altered, rededicated, or otherwise disturbed or altered.'" Any formal change mentioned above has to be approved by a 2/3 majority vote of the Tennessee Historical Commission.

The statue and artifacts that are currently on display have either been acquired on loan or purchased through a grassroots effort by independent groups and organizations. No county tax money has been spent on these monuments. With support from our partners, we plan to stay on that course as we build a "working museum" for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bill Ketron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "B".

Bill Ketron
Rutherford County Mayor