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Abstract
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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER
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Monumental Questions: 1860s Civil War Monument Vandalization at Manassas

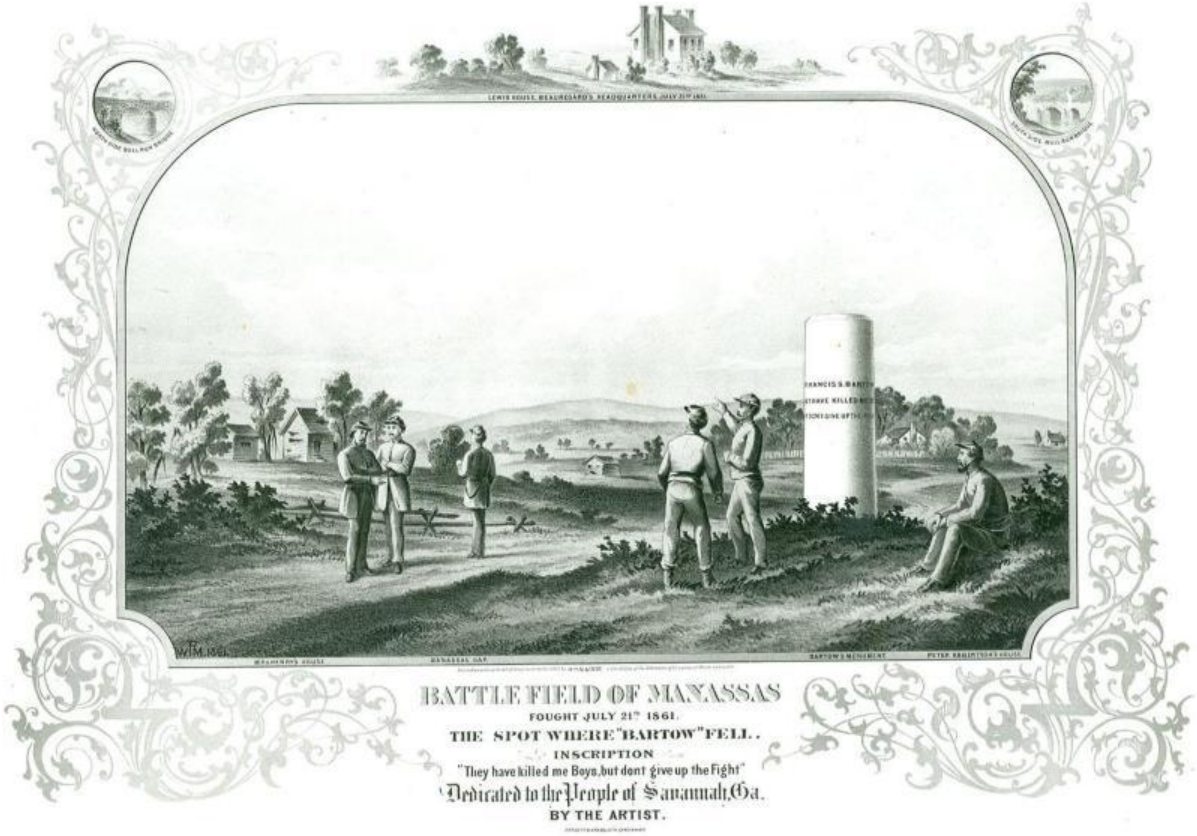
By *Ryan Bilger '19*

On October 4, 2017, I awoke to the news that the Stonewall Jackson equestrian monument at Manassas National Battlefield Park had been vandalized. Having worked there as a Pohanka intern during the summer of 2016, I was saddened to hear this. Now, I have no great love for the Jackson monument. It makes the Southern general look like Superman atop a horse that appears to have had a good amount of steroids mixed with its oats and hay. Yet, I believed then, as I do now, that covering the monument in colored paint was an extremely inappropriate act of vandalism.

The incident raised questions in my mind. In this era of tense controversy over Confederate monuments, vandalization seems to have become a common occurrence. Is it a particularly new one, though? How much of a history is there of defacing Civil War monuments? I still remember the outrage that I felt, even at nine years old, when another band of anonymous cowards vandalized three of Gettysburg's monuments in 2006, inflicting damage that took years to fully repair. How much further back do these stories go? As I pondered these questions, two examples from the battlefield at Manassas came to mind. One took place during the Civil War itself, while the other happened in the years following the war. Both constituted malicious acts that influenced the memory of those who fought and died in the two battles that took place on those hallowed fields. This phenomenon, then, does indeed have a history, one that stretches all the way back to some of the earliest days possible.

On July 21, 1861, as Union forces streamed up the side of Henry Hill in the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), Confederate defenders desperately attempted to push back the onslaught and earn an important victory. One of these units responsible for defeating the oncoming Yankees was a brigade of Georgia regiments under Colonel Francis Bartow. The Colonel stood as a father figure for his men, who referred to themselves as "Bartow's Beardless Boys." Sadly, their time with their beloved commander proved short, as he fell mortally wounded in the chest leading them in a counterattack across the hill. The soldiers of Bartow's brigade decided almost immediately after the battle that they wished to honor their slain commander on the field on which he fell, and officers in the 8th Georgia set about ordering a monument to fulfill that purpose. According to Melvin Dwinell, a second lieutenant in the regiment and editor of the *Rome Tri-Weekly Courier*, the original Bartow memorial was a rounded column of "plain white marble, six feet long, four feet above ground, and about eight inches in diameter at the top." The monument was dedicated on September 4, 1861, just over six

weeks after Bartow's death, at a ceremony attended by thousands of Georgia soldiers. These Confederates had erected one of the very first Civil War battlefield monuments, but unfortunately for them, it was not destined to last long as a reminder of the lost Bartow.



Artist's rendering of soldiers standing by the Francis Bartow monument. Library of Congress, via Civilwartalk.com.

In the months after the construction of Francis Bartow's monument, the marble shaft fell victim to a multitude of vandals. Observers noted that some visitors to Henry Hill, tourists interested in seeing the site of the great battle, had chipped away pieces of the memorial to keep as souvenirs. Others had damaged Bartow's column by inscribing their names on it in pencil, perhaps to make memories or leave their mark on the battlefield; one correspondent wrote in December 1861 that it had been blanketed in writing to the point of "not so much space being left as one might cover with his finger nail." The monument remained in this decrepit state until March of 1862, when Union troops took possession of the fields of Manassas, including Henry Hill. The site of a monument to a dead Rebel general surely galled many of these Federal soldiers, and one regiment took matters into their own hands. According to a New York soldier, members of the Fourteenth Brooklyn became "so exasperated at the treatment of their fallen companions as to break the marble monument erected over the remains of a secesh General who fell on that field." They destroyed Bartow's memorial in order to reclaim

the memory of that space, and to deny it to Confederates like the fallen general. Georgia soldiers attempted to find the monument they had so lovingly dedicated after Confederates reclaimed Henry Hill in the Second Battle of Manassas in August 1862, but they discovered only shattered fragments. The Francis Bartow memorial had thus fallen victim to two types of vandals: memory-making tourists and angry Federal troops. Even as the Civil War was still being fought, the memory of those who fell during its course became a flashpoint for controversy.

The impulse to memorialize the fallen of the two battles at Manassas evidently remained alive in the minds of many Northerners. Shortly after the Grand Review in May 1865, the U.S. Army approved the construction of two memorials on the Manassas battlefields. One was erected on Henry Hill near the remains of the Henry House, while the other was constructed at the Deep Cut, the sight of a fierce Union attack during the Second Battle of Manassas on August 30, 1862. The men of Colonel William Gamble's cavalry brigade built the monuments, using red sandstone from the battlefield's famous unfinished railroad, in about three weeks, and dedication ceremonies took place on June 11, 1865.

Photograph by Alexander Gardner of the Groveton Monument, taken shortly after its dedication in 1865. Wikimedia Commons.

While the memorial on Henry Hill remained largely intact, the Deep Cut's monument, often referred to as the Groveton Monument, suffered intense vandalism. The soldiers who built the monument had decorated it with shells and cannon balls found on the battlefield, as seen in Alexander Gardner's photograph of it in June 1865. However, these artifacts presented attractive targets for relic hunters, and they soon set about picking the Groveton Monument clean to obtain them for themselves. These vandals pried the precious shells and balls out of the mortar with which they had been attached to the base, and some even took away pieces of the wooden fence surrounding it. By 1886, there was nothing left but an empty stone pylon, slowly becoming covered by the four trees that had been planted around it. The desire for personal gain and profit led to the vandalization of another Civil War monument, thereby disrespecting the legacies and the memory of the soldiers who had fought and died at Second Manassas.

These stories from the Manassas battlefield remind us that Civil War monument vandalization is not a new phenomenon. Instead, it unfortunately has a long history, stretching back as far as the 1860s themselves. Each of these types of vandals acted on their own individual attitudes towards the war and its legacy; the relic-hunters saw it as a get rich quick opportunity, the soldiers of the Fourteenth Brooklyn felt that there was no place for Confederate memorialization, and the tourists used Bartow's monument as a way to remember their trip. In effect, all of these vandals, based on their personal viewpoints, worked to alter and reshape popular memory of the war by altering monuments from their original, intended state or even destroying them entirely. The motivations may have shifted over the last century and a half, but the impact remains the same on the war's memory: a destructive act that shows disregard for those who gave their lives in the conflict. The sad truth appears to be that as long as there have been Civil War monuments, there have also been those who wish to destroy them.

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