

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
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Written by Rev Fred Garry



June 2, 1913 was a unique day in the design and completion of monuments and memorials. It was as if the boundaries and distinctions which keep the debt of gratitude, the price of honor, and the tax of wisdom clear and defined were merged, cast into the same cauldron. It would take a century to undo the mess.

The statue is both monument and memorial, and with the delivery of Julius Shakespeare Carr's dedication speech it is also a kind of museum. The statue honors all who served, not simply all who died. What is more, the confederate soldier atop the memorial base is ready to fight. Silent Sam is still fulfilling his duty to guard and protect. And to add one more layer, the sacrifice of the mother is set in low relief on the pedestal as if to say, here is the source of honor.

Julius Shakespeare Carr gave his now famous speech to unveil the monumental gift of the Daughters of the Confederacy at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Carr's speech is remembered mostly for its racism and unapologetic White Supremacy. Yet, what is most challenging in his speech is his observation regarding the unique quality it sought to achieve.

The most remembered remarks are these:¹

“The present generation, I am persuaded, scarcely takes note of what the Confederate soldier meant to the welfare of the Anglo Saxon race during the four years immediately succeeding the war, when the facts are, that their courage and steadfastness saved the very life of the Anglo Saxon race in the South – When “the bottom rail was on top” all over the Southern states, and to-day, as a consequence the purest strain of the Anglo Saxon is to be found in the 13 Southern States – Praise God.

I trust I may be pardoned for one allusion, howbeit it is rather personal. One hundred yards from where we stand, less than ninety days perhaps after my return from Appomattox, I horse-whipped a negro wench until her skirts hung in shreds, because upon the streets of this quiet village she had publicly insulted and maligned a Southern lady, and then rushed for protection to these University buildings where was stationed a garrison of 100 Federal soldiers. I performed the pleasing duty in the immediate presence of the entire garrison, and for thirty nights afterwards slept with a double-barrel shot gun under my head.”

Yet, what Carr sought most to distinguish was not the notion that the "bottom rail was the top" but that such positioning of rails was no longer possible and would remain so because of the enormous sacrifice and honor of the students of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He described the role of Chapel Hill as thus:

Of the students and alumni of the University of North Carolina, about 1800 entered the Confederate army, of whom 842 belonged to the generation of 1850-1862. The University had in the service 1 lieutenant-general, 4 major-generals, 13 brigadier generals, 71 colonels, 30 lieutenant-colonels, 65

¹ Text of Carr's speech can be found at <https://www.hngreenphd.com/silent-sam-dedication-speech.html>

majors, 46 adjutants, 71 surgeons, 254 captains, 161 lieutenants, 38 non-commissioned officers and about 1000 privates.

No other institution, Carr infers, can come close to the sacrifice of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. But then he identifies the unique status of the memorial itself:

This beautiful memorial is unique in one aspect. I have participated at the unveiling of several Confederate monuments, and have intimate knowledge of a great many more, but this is the first and only one in which the living survivors have been distinctly mentioned and remembered, and in the distinguished presence I desire to thank that Daughters of the Confederacy, in the name of the living Confederate students, for their beautiful and timely thoughtfulness.

This distinction, both living and dead, becomes a torch Carr seeks to pass at the end of his speech.

That for which they battled in memory of this monument is reared, as well as for the survivors of that bloody drama, was not achieved. But the cause for which they fought is not lost, never can be, never will be lost while it is enshrined in the hearts of the people of the South, especially the hearts of the dear, loyal, patriotic women, who, like so many Vestal Virgins (God's name be praised), keep the fires lighted upon the Altars. Nay, as long as men anywhere pay tribute to the self-sacrificing spirit of a peoples' ideals.

The monument erected by the Daughters of the Confederacy and illumined by Carr's speech would be toppled in August of 2018. The monument joined the ranks of Confederate monuments to come down. The controversy surrounding its demise reveals the power of the statue. More than a century later it still served as a fire "lighted upon the Altars." Yet, whose fire and upon what altar is the question.



Silent Sam, the name given to the confederate soldier atop the memorial pedestal, can be seen as both a continuation of the "Cause" but also as the need to heal the wound of slavery. As Carr makes clear in his dedication, the cause of the Confederate states was not lost. And in the crushing reality of Jim Crow, especially in 1913, it is hard to counter his claim. Silent Sam is not only on guard and ready to fight, he can also be seen, and was seen, as a victor. Slavery was not eradicated; it was recast. White Supremacy was not eradicated; it was declared the winner of the true battle.

Here though the monument, memorial, museum continues its work. Not its original purpose, but a new one. Silent Sam serves as a persistent reminder that the causes and the purposes which led to the Civil War continue to lie buried, continued to be covered. The injustice abolitionists sought to end and the culture of supremacy the Ku Klux Klan sought to perpetuate found no resolution in 1865. Silent Sam's arrival in 1913 serves as a living witness, a marker of the continued struggle. The toppling of the monument in 2018 neither ends nor resolves the conflict. The toppling is a new speech offered to the wound never healed, a price of memory never paid.