

Media Alert
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Emily Lucier, Manager of PR & Marketing
elucier@VirginiaHistory.org
804.342.9665

Virginia Museum of History & Culture Takes Ownership of the Robert E. Lee Statue from the U.S. Capitol

Richmond, VA – Following its removal in the early morning hours today, December 21, the statue of Robert E. Lee by Edward Valentine, which was given to the United States Capitol in 1909 as one of two statues from the Commonwealth of Virginia for the National Statuary Hall Collection, is in transport from Washington, D.C. to the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) in Richmond, Virginia. Ownership and title of the statue has been permanently transferred from the Commonwealth of Virginia to the museum.

In early 2020, Virginia’s General Assembly formed The Commission for Historical Statues in the United States Capitol. This commission subsequently voted unanimously to plan for the removal and replacement of the Lee Statue. The Governor of Virginia then submitted a formal request to the Architect of the Capitol on July 24, 2020. That request was approved by The Joint Committee of Congress on The Library and notification of their approval was sent on October 13, 2020.

As part of the Commission’s work during their August 7, 2020 meeting, they also voted unanimously to request that the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, the oldest cultural organization in Virginia and one of the oldest such museums in the nation, take full ownership of the Lee statue once retrieved from the U.S. Capitol. One Commission member, Dr. Edward Ayers, who made the motion suggesting the VMHC, said: “a statewide museum...it’s done a remarkable job of broadening and deepening its representation of Virginia’s history. I think it has shown itself to be excellent stewards of the diversity of Virginia’s past. It has the institutional capacity to deal with the arrival of the new statue and I think it has the curatorial expertise to deal with it in an appropriate way.” A formal request was sent on behalf of the Commission to the VMHC on August 14, 2020.

In a letter of acceptance sent in response to this request, VMHC President & CEO Jamie Bosket said: “Given the history of the statue’s creation, its placement at the U.S. Capitol in 1909, and the history of its removal in 2020, we believe this to be an artifact of historical importance. It will fulfill representation of the historical moments noted above as part of our extensive collection of materials that speak to the ever-evolving story of the Commonwealth of Virginia.” The VMHC maintains a renowned collection of some nine million items – one of the finest history collections in the nation.

In coordination with the Architect of the Capitol, trained art movers carefully removed and packed the statue for transport to the VMHC – leaving the Capitol for the first time in 111 years. Once it arrives at the state history museum, the statue will be placed in secure collections storage during the museum’s ongoing extensive renovation, which is slated to be completed in early 2022.

Just a week before the removal of the Lee Statue, Virginia’s Commission for Historical Statues in the United States Capitol selected Barbara Rose Johns, whose walkout of Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia was among the critical events that led to the desegregation movement in the United States, to replace Lee once a fitting statue can be made.

Virginia Museum of History & Culture

Owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society

428 N Arthur Ashe Boulevard
Richmond, Virginia 23220

PO Box 7311
Richmond, Virginia 23221

804.340.1800
VirginiaHistory.org

Associated Statements:

From Congressman A. Donald McEachin (VA-04):

“As Virginians, we have a responsibility to not only learn from but also confront our history. Today, with the removal of Virginia’s statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from National Statuary Hall, our Commonwealth has made it resoundingly clear that we will no longer participate in perpetuating a revisionist history that is incompatible with Virginian values. I am heartened by the Virginia Museum of History and Culture’s expressed commitment to ensure the Lee statue is contextualized with proper historical perspective and applaud the Governor, the General Assembly and the Commission for their dedication to replacing this monument in the U.S. Capitol with Barbara Johns, a figure who embodies the values of our Commonwealth.”

From Senator Tim Kaine (VA):

“2020 has been a year like no other in so many ways. The national consensus to take down statues honoring Confederates has been notable in this year’s remarkable set of events, both tragic and uplifting, that would have been hard to fathom just one year ago. I celebrate Virginia’s move to take down the statue of Robert E. Lee in the U.S. Capitol and replace it with a statue of student activist Barbara Johns. And the Virginia Museum of History and Culture is an appropriate venue for the removed statue because it is an institution that can tell the story of a Commonwealth that once felt it appropriate to honor one who fought to divide our nation and preserve slavery, but eventually resolved to withdraw state support for that cause and legacy. Johns fought for the very thing Lee fought against—the equality of every person. And the arc of this story shows both that ‘a little child shall lead them’ and that titular leaders of great advantage and education can fail to grasp basic moral truths. Humbling and inspiring.”

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The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 N Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. For more information call 804.340.1800, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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