Commemoration, Preservation, and Affirmation: Analyzing the Roles of Confederate Monuments and the History of the Women who built them, 1865-1930

Abstract:
This thesis explores the history of Confederate monuments beginning in the aftermath of America’s bloody Civil War through Reconstruction, the ‘Jim Crow’ Era, and World War I. It sheds light on how the shifts within the major women’s memorial groups of the monument building movement, specifically Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and their motivations evolved the types of monuments they constructed as well as their significance. By breaking down the narrative of the Ladies’ Memorial Associations, who began the practice of Confederate monument dedication as a means to commemorate the dead, then shifting to a discussion of the ways in which the funerary elements of the monuments faded away as the displays became more public and representative of the Lost Cause, or the white southerner’s desire to recapture the essence of the slave-holding south, this thesis shows how the intentions behind Confederate monuments evolved and became increasingly racist in connotation over time. With the rise of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894 as national organization, the trend of public monuments amplified and the types of monuments erected began portraying Confederate leaders. This further politicized the Confederate monument and demonstrated how the Daughters’ emphasis on preserving Confederate culture and history through their memorial practices was identifiable in their statues. The white supremacist principles implicitly embodied in Confederate statues surfaced and became explicit in 1922 when the Daughters attempted to construct a monument to the faithful slave ‘Mammies’ of the Antebellum South. This affirmation of white hegemony in the form of a monument culminated an evolution highlighting the changes in the extent to which Confederate monuments expressed the racist ideologies of the Confederacy from 1865 to 1930.

Sources include: