

World Wide Attention is Given to the Removal of General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his wife Mary Ann's Grave from Memphis Park

Remains of Confederate general, wife to be removed from Memphis park: reports

By Danielle Wallace | Fox News



In this Aug. 18, 2017, photo, a statue of Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest sits in a park in Memphis, Tenn. A city council in Tennessee plans to consider four different ways to deal with the growing uproar over the existence of two statues of Confederate leaders at city parks. (AP Photo/Adrian Sainz, File)

The remains of a Confederate general and his wife might be removed from a park in Memphis, Tenn., after his

descendants dropped a lawsuit against the city this week, according to reports.

Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, a repudiated slave owner and early Ku Klux Klan leader who fought in the Civil War, as well as his wife, Mary Ann, are buried in Health Sciences Park. A monument of Forrest that stood nearby was taken down in 2017 after the city of Memphis got around legal hurdles preventing its removal by selling part of the parklands to the non-profit Memphis Greenspace.

Direct-line descendants of Forrest as well as the Sons of Confederate Veterans, a non-profit, dropped their lawsuit against the city of Memphis and Memphis Greenspace this week, the Columbia Daily Herald reported.

The family will search for a “proper burial site” if court orders allow the remains to be exhumed in Memphis, says their attorney, Edward Phillips. It has not been decided where the remains will be laid to rest.

“The issue (of removing the bodies) has been settled through agreement,” Phillips said. “We are now ready to move forward with a joint petition in regard to the graves. This paves the way for dealing with grave sites of Gen. Forrest and his wife in an effective, efficient manner but also in a manner that ensures the utmost respect and reverence to this process. We are talking about a family gravesite.”

A settlement reached between both parties last year gave possession of the Forrest statue, as well as two others removed from the park in 2017 -- Confederacy President Jefferson Davis and General James Mathis -- to be transferred to the Sons of Confederate Veterans Dec. 12, WMC reported.

The group said it plans to re-erect the monuments, but did not specify a location. Forrest's remains, as well as his bronze statue estimated at \$676,000, might be incorporated in a memorial at the new, privately owned Confederate museum on the Sons of Confederate Veterans' Elm Springs property in Columbia, according to the Herald.

"I am very happy that we have been able to resolve this matter, and I am very hopeful for the future of these two parks," Memphis Greenspace President Van Turner said this week.

"They don't have to worry about further protests, further potential vandalism of the monuments," Turner told WREG. "As an American, as a defender of the Constitution, it is their right to do so, to freely express their views. It's my right as an American to not support that, to not visit it."

A spokesperson for the plaintiffs, Lee Millar, said the December settlement "gives us permission and clear ownership to all the Confederate items in the two parks."

Forrest and his wife have been laid to rest in the gated cement tomb in the Health Sciences Park since 1904, when their bodies were moved from Memphis Elmwood Cemetery in the era of Jim Crow law. First called the Nathan Bedford Forrest Park, the name was changed in 2013.

Following controversy and protests, the city of Memphis sought a waiver in 2015 from the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act, the law that requires authorization before the removal, relocation, or renaming of a memorial, to remove the statues of Forrest, Davis and Mathis. The Tennessee Historical Commission rejected the request, so the Memphis

City Council then approved the sale of parklands to the Memphis Greenspace, to circumvent the Heritage Protection Act and have the statues removed anyway.

The remains of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a slave trader and leader of the Ku Klux Klan, will be moved from Memphis to a Confederate museum 200 miles away.



A statue of the Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest in Health Sciences Park in Memphis in 2015. The statue came down two years later.

A statue of the Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest in Health Sciences Park in Memphis in 2015. The statue came down two years later. Credit...Andrea Morales for The New York Times

By Maria Cramer

June 5, 2021

Traditionally, Memphis residents celebrate Juneteenth at Robert R. Church Park, named for the city's first Black millionaire.

But this year, residents and city officials plan to celebrate the end of slavery one mile away, at a park where the remains of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general and leader of the Ku Klux Klan who owned and traded enslaved workers, have been buried under a marble base since 1905.

Workers hired by the Sons of Confederate Veterans are digging up and removing the copper coffins that hold the remains of Forrest and his wife, Mary Ann. The remains and a statue of Forrest that had towered over the park, once named after the general, will be moved 200 miles away, to the National Confederate Museum in Columbia, Tenn.

The excavation may take several weeks, according to Lee Millar, a spokesman for the group, which represents direct descendants of Confederate soldiers and promotes a revisionist view of the Civil War.

But even if the process is not completed by June 19, the Juneteenth celebration will take place at the park, now known as Health Sciences Park, according to Michalyn Easter-Thomas of the Memphis City Council.

“Having him there was like having him dance on our graves, the graves of our ancestors,” she said. “You can go quietly. We won't miss you.”

The exhumation follows years of protests at the site, decades

of demands from the city's Black residents to remove the statue and the remains, and numerous court fights over what should happen to the burial site.

Tensions have erupted at the site since the excavation began. Debris from the burial site was dumped on a Black Lives Matter mural that had been painted around the base where Forrest's statue had stood.

On Tuesday, Tami Sawyer, a Shelby County commissioner who had led a campaign to remove statues of Confederate leaders around Memphis, was heckled by a Sons of Confederate Veterans volunteer as she spoke to reporters at the site.

The volunteer, waving a Confederate flag, loudly sang "Dixie" ("I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten") as Ms. Sawyer described how her ancestors picked cotton.

Ms. Sawyer said in a statement that since then, she had been threatened on social media.

"As a public official, Commissioner Sawyer is not opposed to critique and heckling, but these messages are racially violent and threatening to her physical safety," her office said in the statement.

Sgt. Louis C. Brownlee, a Memphis Police Department spokesman, said in an email that the department was investigating her complaints. No arrests have been made, he said.

Mr. Millar said a green security fence had been placed

around the excavation site to keep the area secure and “to keep spectators away so no one would get involved and get hurt.”

He said that the volunteer began singing because Ms. Sawyer was disrupting the workers by holding a “press spectacle.”

The statue of Forrest as well as one of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, in Memphis Park were removed on Dec. 20, 2017, the same night the City Council voted to sell both parks to the nonprofit organization Memphis Greenspace for \$1,000 each.

The move allowed the city to skirt the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act, a state law that prohibits the removal, relocation or renaming of memorials on public property and that state officials had used before to keep the city from removing the statues.

After the City Council vote, cranes maneuvered into the parks and removed both statues as crowds cheered and struck up songs including “Hit the Road Jack.”

The Sons of Confederate Veterans sued the city after the statues were removed and accused officials of violating a grave site and scheming to circumvent state law.

The organization later settled with the city, agreeing to drop the lawsuit in exchange for taking possession of the statues and the remains of Forrest and his wife.

Mr. Millar, the spokesman for the Confederate group, said it would cost about \$200,000 to exhume the remains and move the coffins and the statue. The group raised the money for the

project through donations.

Forrest's remains will be taken to "a better place," said Mr. Millar, who identified himself as a distant cousin of Forrest and as a spokesman for his direct descendants.

"It's sad you have to move a grave of anybody and particularly that of a veteran and a general like that, but it will be better for everybody," he said.

The debate over what to do with statues of Forrest has divided Tennesseans over the years.

A Republican legislator proposed building a statue of Dolly Parton to replace a bust of Forrest that looms prominently in the Tennessee State Capitol. A petition calling for the replacement has amassed nearly 26,000 signatures.

Last June, Black legislators left the Capitol in tears and anger after proposals to remove the bust of Forrest and other divisive figures failed. In March, the Tennessee Historical Commission voted to remove the bust at the Statehouse.



A crane being prepared to dig up the remains of the former Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest in Memphis on Tuesday. Credit...Adrian Sainz/Associated Press

In Memphis, the monument to Forrest “was one of constant pain to the majority African American community,” Councilman Jeff Warren said. “The vast majority of our citizens are glad to see the statue and the remains go.”

Defenders of Forrest’s legacy said that detractors fail to recognize his military skills and that toward the end of his life, he called for racial reconciliation in a speech before the Independent Order of Pole-Bearers Association, a fraternal organization of Black men.

But William Sturkey, a historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who has written about Forrest’s enduring hold on many white Southerners, said Forrest was “the most unrepentant soldier of maybe the entire conflict.”

Professor Sturkey said he was doubtful the next burial site would acknowledge the fortune that Forrest made through the slave trade, his role in the Ku Klux Klan or his role in the massacre at Fort Pillow in 1864, when forces led by Forrest killed hundreds of Union soldiers, most of them Black, as they tried to surrender.

“I’m not optimistic it will be a useful and educational display,” he said. “But at least Black kids won’t have to look at it in Memphis.”

The remains of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his wife are being removed from a Memphis park

Amanda Jackson

By Amanda Jackson and Devon M. Sayers, CNN

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JOE RONDONE/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL/USA TODAY NETWORK

On Tuesday, work began on exhuming the remains of General Nathan Bedford Forrest from Health Sciences Park.

(CNN) Crews have started to remove the remains of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his wife from a Memphis park where a monument of him once stood.

The decision to move their remains was decided last year after the Sons of Confederate Veterans, a non-profit

organization of male descendants of Confederate veterans, agreed to drop a pending lawsuit against park owners, according to CNN affiliate WREG.

Forrest, who was a slave trader and early Ku Klux Klan leader, and his wife, Mary Ann, had their graves at Health Sciences Park, where a monument to Forrest used to be.

The work to remove the remains started Tuesday morning and is being paid for by the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, Lee Millar a spokesperson for the group and fifth cousin of Forrest, told CNN.

The disinterment is expected to take three weeks, Millar said. Forrest and his wife will be re-interred on private land that will be publicly accessible in Columbia, Tennessee.

The years long battle over the remains

City leaders voted in 2013 to change the name of three parks that honored Confederate figures in Memphis. Then, in 2015, they voted to move the Forrest statue.

To proceed with the removal, they sought a waiver from the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act, a law that governs the removal, relocation or renaming of memorials on public property. But the Tennessee Historical Commission denied the city's request.

The denial led the city council to pass legislation allowing it to sell parkland to Memphis Greenspace, a non-profit that provides park-based recreation to the city.

The non-profit took down Forrest's monument in December

2017, as well as a statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

The Forrest statue was placed in 1904 amid the passage of Jim Crow-era segregation laws and the Davis statue was placed in 1964 amid the battle for civil rights, according to Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland. When the statues were removed, the mayor said they "no longer represent who we are as a modern, diverse city with momentum."

The Sons of Confederate Veterans had fought the city's efforts to remove the statues. The removal promoted the group to file a lawsuit against the city of Memphis and Memphis Greenspace, according to CNN affiliate WMC. The group said that it believed the removal violated the state cemetery law and Heritage Protection Law.

Memphis took down two Confederate statues. State lawmakers are punishing the city for it

"It is a deliberate attempt to avoid the state law and the city is breaking the law," Millar with Sons of the Confederate Veterans, told CNN affiliate WREG in December 2017.

In 2020, after years of controversy, both parties agreed to remove the remains, which will become property of The Sons of Confederate Veterans. The group will also take possession of two Civil War-related statues and other items previously on public display at the park, according to WREG.

"We are pleased to say that the statues and the bodies of the general and his wife will be placed somewhere that that will be honored and respected as all American veterans and citizens should be respected," said Donnie Kennedy, a

spokesman for the group, in a statement to CNN last year.

Both parties told WREG last year that they are happy they were able to reach this outcome outside the courtroom.

"They don't have to worry about further protests, further potential vandalism of the monuments," Van Turner, president of Memphis Greenspace and Shelby County commissioner, said.

Turner also told WREG that under the new agreement, Memphis Greenspace will not be pursuing action to get the statues banned from Tennessee.

"As an American, as a defender of the Constitution, it is their right to do so, to freely express their views," said Turner. "It's my right as an American to not support that, to not visit it."

CNN's Alex Medeiros, Melissa Alonso, Kaylene Chassie and Nicole Chavez contributed to this report.

Nathan Bedford Forrest's Remains Being Moved Out of Memphis Park, Into Confederate Museum

By Rebecca Klapper On 6/1/21 at 11:58 AM EDT
Newsweek

After a long legal battle and repeated calls for the removal of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest's remains from a Memphis park, workers arrived on Tuesday to begin the process of moving the former slave trader's body to a Confederate museum.

The removal of the statue and remains were approved by Forrest's relatives, and the move is being overseen by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The remains will be reburied and the statue placed at the National Confederate Museum at Elm Springs in Columbia.

An affidavit from one of Forrest's great-great-grandsons, Bedford Forrest Myers, detailed the plans of the move. Myers also wrote his support of moving the grave from the park.

"Relocating the graves is proper because the Property has lost its character as a burial ground," Myers wrote in a legal filing.

The museum is owned by the Sons of Confederate Veterans and opened to the public in October. It is located approximately 200 miles from Memphis.

Crews prepared to remove the graves of Forrest and his wife from Health Sciences Park in Memphis' busy medical district. The park used to bear the name of the early Ku Klux Klan leader, and feature a statue of the cavalryman on a horse, but the name has been changed and the statue removed in recent years.

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Workers must dismantle the statue's pedestal before they can disinter the Forrests' remains and move them to a Confederate museum in Middle Tennessee. A heavy crane was positioned near the pedestal as workers prepared the site Tuesday morning. The entire process is expected to take weeks.

It is another example of how cities and activists have taken steps in recent years to get rid of statues and monuments of

historical figures who supported the South's secession and led the fight against the North, from General Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy.

Forrest sold slaves in Memphis and served in the Confederate army as a cavalry general. In April 1864, Forrest's troops attacked Fort Pillow in northwest Tennessee and killed 200 to 300 Union soldiers, most of them Black.

Forrest was later accused of massacring the Union soldiers. Questions linger as to whether they were killed as they tried to surrender. Northern newspaper reports referred to the battle as an atrocity.

Historians say he later became an early leader of the Ku Klux Klan, though some of Forrest's supporters dispute that. Forrest's critics call him a violent racist.

The remains of Forrest and his wife were moved from a Memphis cemetery and buried under the statue of the former Memphis city council member in 1904. The city took down the statue in December 2017 after selling the public park to a nonprofit group, thus circumventing a state law barring the removal of historic monuments from public areas.

A judge in Nashville ruled that the city and Memphis Greenspace, the non-profit that made the park privately operated, removed the statue legally.

The park where Forrest was buried has been the site of protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. Activists have long called for the removal of both the statue and the remains. The words "Black Lives Matter" have been painted in yellow by activists on a walkway surrounding the

tomb.

The tree-lined park is next to the University of Tennessee's medical school and a community college on Union Avenue, a busy street leading in and out of downtown Memphis.



Nathan Bedford Forrest statue

In this February 6, 2013, file photo, a statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest rests on a concrete pedestal at a park named after the confederate cavalryman in Memphis Tenn. Workers arrived at a Tennessee park Tuesday, June 1 to begin the process of digging up and moving the remains of Forrest to a museum hundreds of miles away. Adrian Sainz, File/AP Photo