



"Defending the Flag"

Norman Dasinger, Jr., November 30, 2020

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"Defending the Flag" | public domain

The creation of the Arkansas Confederate Soldiers Monument in Little Rock—aka "Defending the Flag"—took nearly 20 years from concept to finish. The Ladies Memorial Association of Little Rock kicked off the fundraising efforts in 1886. In 1896, the Memorial Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) took over the fundraising, and once the *Arkansas Gazette* newspaper joined in the effort, the \$10,000 needed to begin construction had been obtained.

Fredrick Ruckstuhl, a native Frenchman, was chosen to design and sculpt the monument. After moving from France to St. Louis, Missouri, with his family in 1855, Ruckstuhl decided as a young man to become a sculptor. He traveled back to his home country and studied under several artists including, perhaps, Auguste Rodin. Once back in the United States, he opened a studio in New York, and his work "Evening" won the grand medal for sculpture at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Such notoriety landed him the job of instructor of modeling and marble carving at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He was a founding member of the National Sculpture Society and editor of the magazine *Art World*.



Detail of "Defending the Flag" | Encycolpedia of Arkansas

The result? A five-tiered monument with a 12-foot bronze angel holding a wreath at the top and an eight-foot bronze soldier carrying a flag at its front. It stood on a knoll near the main entrance to the Arkansas State Capiitol before being moved to its current location on the northeast corner of Woodlane and 4th Street by 1911.

More than 3,000 people attended the monument's dedication on June 3, 1905. A parade led by the band of the Second Regiment of U.S. Troops from nearby Fort Logan Roots arrived ahead of a contingent of Confederate and Union veterans, UDC ladies, and Governor of Arkansas Jeff Davis. As the red, white, and blue cloth was removed, the band played "Dixie." U.S. Senator James H. Berry presented the UDC representatives' recent Confederate battle flags that had been returned from federal custody by an act of Congress. Berry was a wounded Confederate combat veteran, having lost a leg serving in the 16th Arkansas Infantry. Before his appointment to senator, Berry had served one term as governor. Later in his life, he was on staff with the Arkansas History Commission and charged with marking graves of Arkansas soldiers who had died in northern prisons.

On one side of the memorial, Ruckstuhl engraved: "OUR FURLED BANNER / WREATHED WITH GLORY / AND THOUGH CONQUERED / WE ADORE IT / WEEP FOR THOSE / WHO FELL BEFORE IT / PARDON THOSE WHO / TRAILED AND TORE IT."

Gov. Asa Hutchinson made this statement in 2020 in regard to the capitol grounds and its monuments: "These are controlled by the Arkansas General Assembly and the Secretary of State. The prominence of monuments does challenge us to reflect on what best represents our state and our future ... We can't change history, but we should emphasize the importance of our historical markers to learn from the mistakes of the past."



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