

## Confederate statue removed from historic North Carolina courthouse

- *Court ruled that statue in Pittsboro was private property*
- *County official says: 'Residents are eager to move forward'*



*Workers load a Confederate statue on to a truck after it was removed from its spot in front of the historic Chatham county courthouse in Pittsboro, North Carolina, early on Wednesday.*

*Associated Press in Pittsboro, North Carolina*

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A North Carolina county removed a Confederate statue from a historic courthouse early on Wednesday, joining the handful of places around the state where such monuments have come down in recent years despite a law protecting them.

News outlets reported that a subdued crowd of several dozen people watched as the statue of a soldier was taken down overnight outside the historic Chatham county courthouse, where it had stood since 1907. By dawn, even the base was gone.

The removal comes months after Winston-Salem officials removed a Confederate statue from land there that had passed into private hands. Protesters have also torn down two such monuments in recent years, including one at a historic Durham courthouse and another on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

It has been rare for public officials to take down Confederate statues in North Carolina since the enactment of a 2015 state historic monuments law restricting the removal of public monuments.

But county officials argued in court that the monument was private property, owned by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and a judge hearing the group's challenge declined to block the removal.

Crews closed two highways that intersect at a traffic circle around the courthouse while they dismantled the statue, which stood outside the courthouse's front doors.

A University of North Carolina catalog of monuments says the statue depicts an anonymous soldier holding a rifle with its butt resting on the ground. It was made of stamped copper, finished to resemble bronze, atop a pedestal of granite.

A county news release said the statue and pedestal were carefully dismantled and taken to a safe location until the United Daughters of the Confederacy comes up with a plan for what to do with them.

In past weeks, demonstrators for and against removal had gathered around the statue, leading to scuffles and some arrests.

"The last several months have been a painful time for Chatham county. We've experienced high emotions, division and even violence which have impacted residents, businesses and the overall feel of our community," the chair of Chatham county board of commissioners, Mike Dasher, said in a statement. "What's clear now is that the overwhelming majority of our residents are eager to move forward."

North Carolina has been at the center of the debate over what to do with Confederate monuments as one of three southern states with the most statues, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

More than 90 Confederate monuments stand in public places other than cemeteries around the state. A state tally shows Confederate monuments are located at contemporary or historic courthouses in about half of the state's counties.

Onlookers to the Pittsboro removal on Wednesday had mixed opinions.

One supporter of the monument, Robert Butler, described its removal as "heartbreaking" to WRAL-TV.

But Sandra Day of Moncure, who is black, told the News & Observer that she supported its removal. She said she got out of bed and put on a heavy coat to come to Pittsboro to watch the statue come down.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be standing here," she said. "I wanted to see it for myself."