



ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER
HON. STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

July 29, 2020

Mr. Jeffrey Small, Senior Advisor
U.S. Department of Interior, Immediate Office of the Secretary
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Secretary Bernhardt request regarding Executive Order on Building and Rebuilding Monuments to American Heroes

Dear Mr. Small,

Thank you for requesting input from local governments, in an effort to establish locations and monuments that honor those who have made significant sacrifices or contributions that have helped shape our communities and our nation.

It is disgraceful and despicable how radical progressives and the “cancel culture” they promote are ignorantly trying to eliminate and rewrite history by attempting to destroy historical monuments that revere American heroes. We need to honor and respect our great history, not destroy it.

We must fight back to preserve the story of our great country. Western New York has made tremendous sacrifices in the name of freedom. It is sad and shameful that extremists would seek to destroy all we hold dear, and all that so many gave all to preserve.

We witnessed some of that destruction firsthand during recent riots in Buffalo. The McKinley Monument, outside Buffalo’s City Hall, was damaged during protests where so-called peaceful protestors attacked police, burned buildings, and destroyed businesses.

President McKinley was the last president to have served in the Civil War, beginning as an enlisted soldier with the Union Army. Another nearby Civil War monument, known as Soldiers and Sailors in Lafayette Square, was also damaged during riots. The monument is located in a park named for General Lafayette who fought in the American Revolutionary War and once visited Buffalo. It is also where President-elect Abraham Lincoln once delivered a speech.

Buffalo and Erie County, New York are known for having a rich and significant place in the history of our country, ranging from the days of the Revolutionary War to present day. As far as your request for individuals that can be honored with a monument, whether it be here in Buffalo, Washington, D.C. or anywhere in our country, here are my suggestions:

Medal of Honor Recipient David Bellavia: he is the first living Medal of Honor recipient from the Iraq War, is from Western New York. President Donald Trump awarded him with the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony in 2019.

Former Congressman, Cabinet Secretary and Vice-Presidential candidate Jack Kemp: a champion Buffalo Bills football player of the 1960s, former Secretary of U.S. Housing and Urban Development, Kemp was a champion of supply side economics, an early advocate of immigration reform, and was known to have a strong influence on President Ronald Reagan.

Polish General and Revolutionary War Hero Casimir Pulaski: Considered the father of the American Calvary, the Casimir Pulaski Monument here once had the distinction as the world's largest monolithic bronze casting at the time of its creation in 1979. His memory is honored annually with the Pulaski Day parade.

Lieutenant Colonel Matt Urban (Urbanowicz): one of World War II's most decorated soldiers, a monument to him is located on the grounds of the Rath building, which serves as Erie County's primary government headquarters.

Shirley Chisholm: the first African American woman elected to Congress, first African American woman to run for President of the United States for a major party, retired to Western New York and is buried here.

Billy Wilson: More recently a park in Amherst, New York has been named for this hero who paid the ultimate price defending freedom, a local soldier that was killed in Afghanistan in 2012.

Mark Rademacher: Sergeant that was honored with the naming of Rademacher Memorial Park in Wales, who was killed in the Grenada Invasion in November 1983.

William (Wild Bill) Donovan: Medal of Honor recipient and instrumental in the creation of the CIA.

United States President Grover Cleveland: 22nd and 24th U.S. President Grover Cleveland, who once served as Buffalo mayor and Erie County Sheriff. A statue of him stands outside the entrance of Buffalo City Hall.

United States President Millard Fillmore: 13th U.S. President who began his political career in Buffalo and was an opponent of slavery.

Nobel Laureate Herbert Hauptman, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1985.

Dr. Roswell Park, who founded a cancer research hospital in 1898 that now bears his name.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, one of the most prolific American writers and author of such memorable novels as "The Great Gatsby," spent his childhood in Buffalo. Fitzgerald was named after a cousin, Francis Scott Key, who penned the lyrics to what became the American national anthem.

Your correspondence also requested information pertaining to existing monuments in and around Erie County. South Park High School in South Buffalo is known to have lost 179 classmates or alumni in battle since World War I, and has a marker outside the school honoring many of the fallen heroes.

Buffalo is also home to the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site. The mansion turned museum remains the only National Park Service facility in western New York, and is where the 26th President of the United States was sworn in after the assassination of President William McKinley at the Pan-American exposition in Buffalo.

Our monuments and memorials stand as a testimony to the vision of our founding fathers, the perseverance of the pursuit of liberty sought by the generations that came before us, and the patriotism celebrated by our great citizenry willing to lay down their lives for our country.

There is a beautiful Veterans Tribute in North Collins, New York, created by volunteers who spent years fundraising to create a spectacular remembrance to our war dead.

The Buffalo Naval and Military Park, home to the U.S.S. Little Rock and U.S.S. The Sullivans, has numerous monuments that honor our service men and women; the African American Veterans Monument WNY is the first in the United States to honor African Americans who have served or are serving in the military. The park is also home to many other monuments, including the Iraq-Afghanistan Monument, Vietnam Memorial, Purple Heart Memorial, The Battle Within PTSD Monument, Hispanic and Latino memorial, the AMVETS Pearl Harbor monument, another that honors Poland's contribution to the second World War, the World War II Merchant Marine Seamen Monument, one that honors the Special Marine Corps units of World War II, Buffalo's Union Army Irish Regiment, Korean War Memorial, U.S.S. Grenadier Memorial, and Rust Bucket Brigade Monument.

The Hiker Monument in downtown Buffalo is dedicated to servicemembers. There is a monument of a young Abraham Lincoln gifted to the city of Buffalo in 1935, and an 8-foot bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in a city park that bears the civil rights leader's name. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry is honored with a statue in Buffalo's Front Park. He led the Battle of Lake Erie in the war of 1812.

Our region also has a storied history with the Underground Railroad, where slaves seeking freedom would receive assistance, being hidden in Erie and Niagara Counties, on their way to freedom in Canada. The Michigan Street Baptist Church, which was built in 1845 by African Americans, played a crucial role in hiding and aiding them on their journey to freedom.

In honoring the historic achievements of those who helped make our country great, there is no shortage in American ingenuity found right here in Erie County, New York.

I should also note that the historic Forest Lawn Cemetery, covering 269 acres in the City of Buffalo is the final resting place of presidents, entertainers, artists, inventors, Native American leaders, and politicians of world-wide acclaim, and where several memorials honor their lives.

As is quite evident, Buffalo and Erie County has made many contributions and sacrifices in furtherance of our great country. We are proud of our great patriots, of our resourcefulness, and of the innovative minds always working to make us the world's last and greatest hope. It is troubling that so many monuments to our rich history are being disrespected and destroyed. I agree that they need to be not only preserved, but

celebrated as tributes to the long road our country has traveled, the accomplishments made, and the work left to do.

There are 23 county-owned parks, golf courses and public spaces totaling nearly 10,000 acres in Erie County. There is a statue of George Washington on the grounds of Old Erie County Hall. We celebrate our war heroes, and are proud of the entrepreneurial spirit here in Erie County. We have numerous monuments and memorials that pay tribute to them, and we have considerable public space that would allow for many more tributes here. As noted, we also have many heroes for which there have not yet had memorials created.

Thank you for your interest, for safeguarding the tributes we hold dear, and for taking an interest in our community as we work together for the safety and security in protecting its past, present and future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr.
Erie County Comptroller