

Historical monuments, memorials, and statues should reflect our finest values

The Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) welcomes the ongoing public discussion about monuments and commemoration in the Prairie State. Communities across Illinois face decisions about the presence of commemorative statues, monuments, and memorials and the naming of public spaces and buildings.

Removing or reinterpreting a monument does not “erase” nor “change” history. It asserts that interpretations of the past are dynamic and change over time. Voices and perspectives that were previously silenced are now active participants in choosing the priorities and purposes of public commemoration. Ultimately, each community is challenged to determine which stories best represent their history and values and how best to tell those stories in a commemorative landscape.

The ISHS encourages Illinois communities engaged in these discussions to carefully consider not just the historical facts of the figure being commemorated but the historical context and intent of the commemoration itself. Furthermore, those engaging in these discussions should reflect on who constitutes their communities and if all relevant voices are being heard. Finally, each community should determine what stories best represent their history and values and how best to tell those stories in a commemorative landscape.

We also want to remind our fellow Illinoisans that historians who specialize in the history of Illinois and its people have done careful and nuanced research that could meaningfully inform these discussions. Drawing on their expertise potentially helps uncover the intentions of those who erected the monuments, and how these monuments function as symbols whose meaning changes over time.

Since 1899, the ISHS has stood



The Mother Jones Memorial at the Union Miners Cemetery in Mount Olive.

Photo by William Furry.

for the open inquiry and rigorous research that helps to connect people with our state’s history.

We encourage communities to continue considering questions of monuments and commemoration, and

welcome them to avail themselves of our network of experts and resources.

The Board of Directors of the Illinois State Historical Society
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