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Supporters of Confederate Gen. Winder plaque rally in Salisbury

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(Photo: Staff photo by Deborah Gates)

David Lee may be related to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee but for him, Saturday was about principle.

"I'm a descendent of Robert E. Lee, but I'm against destroying everything in history that's significant to the Confederacy," said Lee, standing in front of the old Wicomico County Courthouse. "Don't destroy history."

Others gathered couldn't claim kinship to a notable in history. But the handful of supporters at the Saturday, July 8 event were kindred spirits in a movement to preserve an iron plaque on the lawn at the old courthouse that commemorates the legacy of county native and Confederate Gen. John Henry Winder.

"I want to keep the plaque here for two reasons: To remove it would be a removal of history, and it is important that history is preserved — the good the bad and the ugly," said Char Selby, a Worcester County resident who organized the Saturday demonstration. "Also, it rubs me the wrong way" that opponents of the plaque "made it into a race issue; outside people want to cause radicalism, and I had a problem with it."

The peaceful afternoon gathering was to counter a movement to remove the general's plaque from the government property. In June, resident James Yamakawa of a group called Showing Up for Racial Justice launched a petition campaign that calls for the removal of the Winder plaque. The group has said it intends to submit petition signatures — which includes Salisbury Mayor Jake Day — to the Wicomico County Council with a proposal to have the plaque removed.

"A marker honoring a Confederate general, a person who supported the cause of slavery, sits within easy view of where black Americans were once treated like cattle waiting to be bought," Yamakawa wrote in the text of the petition he started [on Change.org \(https://www.change.org/p/wicomico-county-council-remove-the-marker-for-confederate-general-john-h-winder-from-salisbury-md?recruiter=false\)](https://www.change.org/p/wicomico-county-council-remove-the-marker-for-confederate-general-john-h-winder-from-salisbury-md?recruiter=false).

Jonathan Taylor, an online blogger on the Lower Shore, launched a [counter-petition \(https://www.change.org/p/wicomico-county-council-keep-the-marker-for-confederate-general-john-h-winder-at-the-courthouse\)](https://www.change.org/p/wicomico-county-council-keep-the-marker-for-confederate-general-john-h-winder-at-the-courthouse) and said at Saturday's rally that more signatures are on a document to keep the plaque in place than to remove it.

Some 522 supporters have signed to keep the plaque at the old courthouse, while 277 supporters have signed to have it removed, he said.

An online check of both petitions Saturday evening showed the signers of Taylor's petition had increased to 557, while Yamakawa's remained at 277.

BACKGROUND: [Salisbury mayor joins call for removal of Confederate historical marker \(/story/news/local/maryland/2017/06/21/salisbury-confederate-marker-winder/402975001/\)](#)

IN DEFENSE: [Salisbury Confederate marker finds support in petition \(/story/news/2017/06/22/keep-salisburys-confederate-marker-theres-petition/420998001/\)](#)

So on Saturday, the event was a chance to promote an online petition in support of preserving history — even when it is unpopular. That also includes keeping the Winder plaque where it was erected more than three decades ago.

Matthew Adams, chairman of the Somerset County Republican Central Committee, and Julie Brewington of the Wicomico County Republican Central Committee were in attendance Saturday in support of keeping the plaque in place.

"It is our First Amendment speech that we must protect," Brewington said. "It is our history."



This Saturday, July 8, 2017 photo shows a flag-waving Char Selby of Worcester County who organized a demonstration in Salisbury outside the old Wicomico County Courthouse. The event was to oppose a citizen's proposal to remove a historic plaque of Confederate Gen. John Henry Winder from the lawn of the old courthouse. (Photo: Staff Photo by Deborah Gates)

According to historians, the marker was never intended to be placed at the courthouse, or on any county property.

In 1965, the sign was erected on South Salisbury Boulevard near the Messick Ice Plant by the Wicomico County Historical Society and Maryland Civil War Centennial Commission, according to research by local historian Linda Duyer. The ice plant is now the home of the Evolution Craft Brewing Co.

After the sign was knocked over a few times in traffic accidents on the busy roadway, it eventually was moved to the courthouse lawn. The Wicomico County Council approved the request by the Sons of Confederate Veterans to move it, and a dedication was held Sept. 25, 1983, according to newspaper reports.

Adams said Saturday he believes that support to remove the plaque at the government building is from people wanting to join a national bandwagon, many of them for political reasons.

"I didn't even know it was here until 2010," Taylor said. "I thought, that's cool. There's a guy from Nanticoke who was a general in the Civil War. That guy is an American veteran hero."

Selby said the timing of Saturday's rally was not to coincide the event with a controversial rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. That rally, sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan, was in opposition to a local government decision to remove a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

"It's going on across the United States — the removal of Confederate signs, streets, buildings, everything Confederate," Selby said.

"It really comes down to whether we agree with the history of the Civil War or whether we are offended by that history," she also said. "There was division in history and hopefully we have learned by it and have become a better nation."



In this Saturday, July 8, 2017 photo, Wicomico County resident David Lee, who says he is a descendant of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, photographs a plaque in memory of Confederate Gen. John Henry Winder who is from the Nanticoke area. On Saturday, Lee gathered at the plaque with a group that opposes a proposal to remove the plaque. (Photo: Staff Photo by Deborah Gates)

The event also draws attention to history of significance on the Lower Shore, Wicomico County and the county seat of Salisbury, organizers said Saturday.

It doesn't matter that during the Civil War, Winder was commander over prisoners of war, including those held at the well-known Andersonville Prison down south where, under his leadership, according to historical accounts, Union prisoners were starved.

What matters, said the 65-year-old David Lee, is that historical facts are preserved. He proposes a compromise measure.

"Put something else up, too" that celebrates military notables of the Union Army, he said.

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