



Special Committee for Commemorative Works

Regular Meeting

~ Agenda ~

Friday, February 12, 2021

12:00 PM

Conference Remote Meeting

Join from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device:
Please click this URL to join. <https://providenceri-gov.zoom.us/j/92313782194>

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*Meetings are also streamed live on our YouTube Channel: <https://bit.ly/pydmeetings>
Please refresh your browser every minute or two until the meeting starts.*

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Item 1 – Request for Relocation: Thomas J. Waters Memorial Sq. Marker, Pleasant Valley Parkway
4. Item 2 – Request for Deaccession or Removal: Columbus Statue, Columbus Square
5. Report from ACT
6. Adjournment

**PER ORDER THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE
FOR COMMEMORATIVE WORKS**

Offices and City Council Chambers are accessible to individuals with disabilities. If you are in need of interpreter services for the hearing impaired, please contact the Mayor's Center for City Services at (401) 680-5221 not less than 48 hours in advance of the hearing date.

From: [Alex Ellis](#)
To: [Salkind, Micah](#)
Subject: Submission: Review Commemorative Works
Date: Wednesday, December 9, 2020 1:44:40 PM

Name

Alex Ellis

Email

aellis@providenceri.gov

Phone

(401) 680-8522

Address

444 Westminster St
Providence, RI 02909
[Map It](#)

Name and/or description of existing commemorative work

Thomas J. Waters Memorial Square marker

Address of existing commemorative work

in the median on Pleasant Valley Parkway, 70' south of Valley Street

Recommended action

- Relocation

Please provide your rationale for this recommended action:

A City safety project to make Pleasant Valley Parkway more accessible to nonmotorized road users is proposed to establish a left-turn lane for a portion of this median, including the location of the memorial.

Memorial reads:
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Post 228
Thomas J. Waters Memorial Square
Pvt.Co.F 61st Inf. 5th Div.
Killed in action Sept. 19, 1918
Buried in St. Nihiel Cemetery France
Dedicated August 26, 1934

Proposed address and/or organization to which CW will be relocated

Across Valley Street, ~150' away from current location, in Davis Park on the northwest corner of the same intersection

From: [Hilding Munson](#)
To: [Salkind, Micah](#)
Subject: Submission: Review Commemorative Works
Date: Friday, September 4, 2020 12:10:43 PM

Name

Hilding Munson

Email

[REDACTED]

Phone

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Name and/or description of existing commemorative work

Christopher Columbus Memorial Memorial Ststue

Address of existing commemorative work

Reservoir Av. and Elmwood Av.

Recommended action

- Modification (including structural changes and reinterpretation)

Please provide your rationale for this recommended action:

During all my years living In Providence I would get up early and go up to Columbus Square to celebrate the founding of America.

The band concerts, the speaking program, the schoolboy races, the amateur walking races, etc., and all at Columbus Square. Elmwood and Reservoir Av.

This is where the statue of Christopher Columbus should be, Columbus Square, as it has been for all of my years!

Please describe the proposed modification in as much detail as possible

No modification

From: [Elizabeth Kimzey](#)
To: [Salkind, Micah](#)
Subject: Submission: Review Commemorative Works
Date: Friday, September 4, 2020 10:51:45 AM

Name

Elizabeth Kimzey

Email

[REDACTED]

Phone

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Name and/or description of existing commemorative work

Christopher Columbus statue

Address of existing commemorative work

Elmwood Ave

Recommended action

- Deaccession and removal

Please provide your rationale for this recommended action:

Removing the Columbus statue was the right decision and I would be upset if we decided to again honor and uplift this figure. I encourage the thoughtful review of all figures of violence in our public spaces, whether they be colonizers, slaveowners, or perpetrators of other crimes against humanity.

From: [Wendy Klein](#)
To: [Salkind, Micah](#)
Subject: Submission: Review Commemorative Works
Date: Sunday, September 6, 2020 12:28:30 PM

Name

Wendy Klein

Email

[REDACTED]

Phone

[REDACTED]

Address

[REDACTED]

Name and/or description of existing commemorative work

Christopher Columbus statue

Address of existing commemorative work

Elmwood Ave, Providence

Recommended action

- Deaccession and removal

Please provide your rationale for this recommended action:

I have been reading about Roger Williams and would like to offer that we create an informational monument to honor the Native peoples that helped him, taught him, and possibly saved his life after his banishment from Massachusetts. I have quoted text below. to support my idea.

OUR HIDDEN HISTORY

Narragansetts offered refuge to formerly enslaved

By Mack Scott III

"It is a strange truth," wrote Roger Williams in 1643, "that a man shall generally find more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these Barbarians [Narragansetts], than amongst thousands that call themselves Christians."

Williams recalled the warm reception he and his fledgling community received when they sought refuge and protection from the Narragansett in 1636.

In what would become North America, the practice of indigenous peoples accepting and absorbing others into their unique communities was prevalent even before the arrival of the first Europeans.

City Archivist's Report: Bartholdi's *Columbus* Statue

In 1893, the original *Columbus* statue was unveiled at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, the famed French sculptor of the *Statue of Liberty*, the *Columbus* sculpture was shipped across the Atlantic and cast from 30,000 ounces of sterling silver at the Gorham plant once situated by Mashapaug Pond in Providence, Rhode Island.¹ The company wanted to present a piece at the exposition that would catch its spectators' eyes and demonstrate its casting and design skills. It was no coincidence that Christopher Columbus was the chosen subject for its showpiece.

Despite the fact that it opened May 1, 1893, and closed October 30, 1893, the Columbian Exposition celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America in 1492.² For the most part it showcased themes in American technological and cultural development. The nations of the world also shared their contributions to human civilization. Hosting the exposition was an opportunity for the United States to promote American society and progress during the midst of a significant sea change in the nation's history. It coincided with the nation's Gilded Age, its "taming of the west," and the opening of a new frontier for imperial "Manifest Destiny" on an international stage. Controversy arose at the exposition over racist depictions and celebratory themes there that depicted its many Native performers as showpieces and trophies.³ African Americans were barred from participation and faced discrimination too. Frederick Douglass coauthored a pamphlet titled "The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition at the Fair" in protest. The exposition did feature one day for African Americans designated as American Colored Day, in which Douglass was invited and spoke of the "Negro problem" in America.⁴

On October 3, 1893, the *Columbus* statue was recast in bronze by the Gorham Manufacturing Company from the original Bartholdi sculpture. The piece was never intended to be permanent. It was an advertisement for the exposition. It was too impractical to keep such an expensive and fragile work otherwise, and eventually it was melted down to be repurposed for silverware and other production line products. However, the silver-cast sculpture was displayed briefly at Providence City Hall in December 1893 after the exposition.⁵ Several people were allowed to witness the casting at the invitation of the company. Part of the impetus for the recast may have been Bartholdi's visit to Newport during that year, but it is not

¹ Ronald J Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Columbus," National Park Service, 1999, http://www.preservation.ri.gov/pdfs_zips_downloads/national_pdfs/providence/prov_elmwood-avenue_columbus-monument.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Melissa Rinehart, "To Hell with the Wigs! Native American Representation and Resistance at the World's Columbian Exposition," *The American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2012), 405.

⁴ For more information, please see: Rudwick, Elliott M., and August Meier. "Black Man in the "White City": Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893." *Phylon* (1960-) 26, no. 4 (1965): 354-61.

⁵ "In the City Hall. Visitors to See The Silver Statue of Columbus Began to Arrive Yesterday -- It May Be Exhibited Evenings.," *The Providence Daily Journal* (Providence), December 15, 1893.; "Joint Resolution of the City Council No. 714: Accepting the offer of the Gorham Manufacturing Company to Exhibit in the City Hall their Silver Statue of Columbus." Providence City Archives City Council Final Papers Collection, 1893.

substantiated as to whether he collaborated in the recasting.⁶ Around 1,600 pounds of molten bronze were poured to manufacture the piece.⁷

Gorham intended to present the statue to "the city of Providence as a memorial of the Columbian year and celebration, and the successful issue of the magnificent silver statue which brought fame to the city as well as the silversmiths" but the City of Providence needed to consider its options before accepting the acquisition.⁸ The Providence City Council had passed a resolution in June of 1893 to consider the Dexter Training Field as a permanent home for the monument in a Joint Special Committee.⁹ However, the Elmwood Association, a civic group from the residential neighborhood near the Gorham plant, took the initiative. Having already raised funds for the statue's purchase, they proposed to place the figure between Reservoir and Elmwood Avenue. The city considered the Elmwood Association's plan under the conditions that the association "guarantee of a sufficient amount to assure the bronze statue for the city." The association agreed and gifted the statue to the city to place it in their proposed location. A Mr. Joseph J. Cook, the first contributor to the subscription fund and "most earnest advocates of the Elmwood plan," presented to the city plans for a park¹⁰ to hold the statue and naming it "Columbus Square."¹¹ The unveiling ceremony began on November 8, 1893. A procession formed at the Elmwood Clubhouse at the corner of Burnett Street and Elmwood Ave. "under the escort of Reeves's American Band¹² and a chorus of over 300 children" from the Elmwood Grammar and Point Street School. A platoon of police from the 7th Station, belonging to a precinct from the neighborhood, also participated in the march.

⁶ Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places" – Columbus.

⁷ "Columbus in Bronze. The Bartholdi Statue Placed in Position in Elmwood Park. Appropriate Exercises at the Unveiling," *The Providence Daily Journal* (Providence), November 9, 1893.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Resolutions of the Providence City Council 1893* (Providence, RI: J.A. & R.A. Reid, City Printers, 1893), 509-510.

¹⁰ The site of the statue was originally deeded to the Town of Cranston by Joseph Cooke on May 24, 1824. It is possible that Joseph J. Cooke, the man who presented the park plan, is the same person, although he would have been very elderly in 1893. It could possibly be his son. More research is required on this. The Town of Cranston deeded it to Providence in 1868 during annexation and made into Columbus Park 1893. *Financial Report of the City of Providence, Rhode Island, Parts 29-164*, Providence (R.I.) Office of City Controller. 1917, 132. Providence City Archives Collections.

¹¹ Columbus in Bronze. Reproduction of the Famous Silver Statue Now at the World's Fair," *The Providence Daily Journal* (Providence), November 9, 1893.; and *Third Annual Report of the Park Commissioners, Providence, RI*, Providence (R.I.), Office of the Park Commissioners. 1893, 5. Providence City Archives Collections.

¹² David Wallis Reeves (February 14, 1838 – March 8, 1900), was the leader of a relatively famous American marching band from Providence, Rhode Island, during the late 19th century. For more information, please see: Providence Public Library Special Collections 026-02 David Wallis Reeves' American Band Collection 1857-1968.

The procession stopped at Reservoir Avenue's junction, and a representative from Gorham Manufacturing and Professor Alonzo Williams¹³ presented the piece to Mayor William Knight Potter.¹⁴ He graciously accepted it on behalf of the City at 2:30 pm. Soon followed the musical composition "Columbus"¹⁵ sung by the school children, and an oration by Reverend H.W. Rugg,¹⁶ exclaiming:

We may congratulate ourselves, I think, and the community as well, on the erection of this beautiful statue, which is to stand here at this parting of the ways. We may rejoice the public spirit of the residents of Elmwood, as signified by their procuring the memorial here placed. We may be glad and grateful also that this Columbus statue is a home production.¹⁷

This was followed by a lengthy oration on the merits of art in public spaces that remind the public of historical figures who "merited the honor paid [to] them," and concluded that the statue "stands on this conspicuous site to be a witness of things that uplift and clear the hearts of men, and to be an inspiring object lesson for years to come,"¹⁸ the oration concluded with a singing of "America" and "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" by all attending. Among some of the participants were Governor D. Russell Brown, former Rhode Island governors Royal Chapin Taft Sr. and John William Davis, as well as government officials from the City of Providence and representatives from Gorham. During the evening, "there was a general illumination of the residences in Elmwood, and there was a [copious] display of flags, lanterns and red fire."¹⁹

Since its removal in June 2020, the *Columbus* statue remains in good condition. It once stood on its pedestal a total of six-foot-eight inches tall, which remains at Columbus Park. According to the Providence Parks Department, the figure is stored for safe-keeping. Its value remains to be officially appraised. A brief literal description would describe the figure's pose as Columbus on Santa Maria's bow, with his arm and index finger extended, metaphorically pointing to the New World. At the figure's right side, a rope anchor is coiled by

¹³ Alonzo Williams, Brown University Professor from 1876 – 1901, taught classes in modern languages. In 1892, he became Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures. For more biographical information, please see: Brown University Portrait Collection, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://library.brown.edu/cds/portraits/display.php?idno=112>).

¹⁴ William Knight Potter (December 27, 1844 – August 13, 1914) was Providence's 17th mayor (1892-1894). Although a career politician and partner in A.B. Rice & Company (lumber dealer), his father, Arthur M. Potter, was a jewelry manufacturer. Mayor Potter would have been familiar, if not appreciative of the Columbus statue he accepted on behalf of the city from Gorham (biographical information courtesy of the Providence City Archives).

¹⁵ "Dedication of the Bartholdi statue of Columbus" (1893). Rider Broadside. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:318514/>

¹⁶ Henry Warren Rugg was an ordained Universalist minister, Master Freemason, and author. For more information, please see: Rugg, Henry Warren, 21st Grand Master of the Grand Encampment. Accessed January 26, 2021. <http://www.knightstemplar.org/pgeo/mepgm/21.html>.

¹⁷ "Columbus in Bronze. The Bartholdi Statue Placed in Position in Elmwood Park. Appropriate Exercises at the Unveiling," *The Providence Daily Journal* (Providence), November 9, 1893.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

his foot, emphasizing his nautical and exploratory prowess. The figure's base comprises Westerly, Rhode Island, granite with the numerals "1492" on its right side and "1893" on its left. The park where the statue had stood remains named Columbus Square, but the landscape there has changed both demographically, and in terms of its physical characteristics. In October 2001, the statue was officially recorded in the National Register of Historic Places. The report accompanying its recording states that "[w]hile the Columbus retains integrity of location, its setting has changed over time. The significance of the work is not dependent upon its setting but is encompassed with the object itself."²⁰

This representative piece of Christopher Columbus, displayed in the public square, is steeped in controversy. This will be communicated in additional supplementary material alongside this briefing. 128 years after its fabrication, the arguments the statue invokes today are no different than those expressed by the participants and the marginalized spectators at the World's Columbian Exposition. That said, this commemorative work does embody an element of enduring historical value to the standards of the resources provided in this report: beginning with its connection with the residents of Elmwood of the late 19th century and as a masterwork by artist Bartholdi. It also remains a testament to the highly skilled metallurgy produced during the apex of Gorham Manufacturing Company during the height of Providence's famed Jewelry industry era at the turn of the 20th century, a period that marked the city's place in history as the largest industrial metropolis in the United States per-capita and boasted with the "five industrial wonders of the world."²¹

The Providence City Archives' mission is to collect, preserve, and make our collections available equitably to our patrons. It is up to our representatives, the board, the public, and the community to take the information our office and the Department of Arts Culture + Tourism have submitted in this briefing and use them as a resource for their own decision making.

²⁰ Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places" – Columbus, 8.

²¹ By 1900 Providence ranked among the largest industrial centers in the country. The five industrial might that put Providence on the proverbial "map" were Brown and Sharpe; Nicholson File; Corliss Steam Enging Company; American Screw Company; and Gorham Manufacturing Company. For more information, please see: Patrick T. Conley, Dr. and Paul R. Campbell, *Providence: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA: Donning Company/Publishers, 1982), 100.

No. 401. Resolution Referring the Communication of Henry C. Clark, Relative to the Gift of a Statue of Columbus, to a Joint Special Committee.

[Approved June 27, 1893.]

RESOLVED, that the communication of Henry C. Clark relative to the gift of a statue of Columbus to be placed upon the Dexter Training Field be referred to a joint special committee consisting of Aldermen Fuller, Winship and Harris and Messrs. Vose, Vaughan and Giblin of the common council, to confer with the commissioners of the Dexter donation relative thereto and to report thereon.

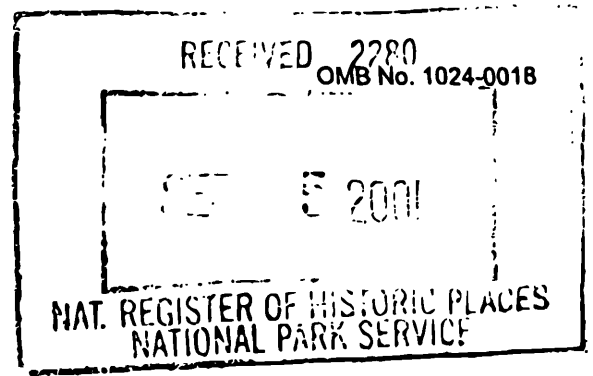
No. 714. Resolution Relative to Exhibition in the City Hall of the Silver Statue of Columbus, Manufactured by Gorham Manufacturing Company.

[Approved December 8, 1893.]

WHEREAS, the Gorham Manufacturing Company have kindly offered to place on exhibition in the City Hall, the silver statue of Columbus, manufactured by them, and which attracted so much attention at the World's Fair in Chicago, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the city messenger be and he is hereby instructed to receive the statue of Columbus and cause it to be located in some suitable place in the City Hall for the inspection of our citizens.

resub



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

01-468

1. Name of Property

historic name: Columbus

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Elmwood Avenue (at Columbus Park)

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02907

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: object

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
<u>1</u>	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Outdoor Sculpture of Rhode Island, 1851-present

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson

Signature of certifying official

Date 3/22/01

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain):

Bonnie L. Savage
Signature of Keeper

10/19/01

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: work of art

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: work of art

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

NA

Other Description:

Materials: foundation _____ roof
walls _____ other METAL/bronze

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: statewide

Applicable National Register Criteria: A & C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): F

Areas of Significance: Art

Period(s) of Significance: 1893

Significant Dates: 1893

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Bartholdi, Auguste (sculptor)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State historic preservation office

Other state agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 19 298460 4630010 B

C _____ D

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Ronald J. Onorato

Organization: R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission Date: 4/99

Street & Number: 150 Benefit Street Telephone: 401-874-2769

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

Section number 7

Page 5

Description

This is a larger-than-life-size standing bronze figure of Columbus, set on a simple stepped granite base. Sculpted by Auguste Bartholdi and cast at the Gorham Manufacturing Company's nearby foundry, the monument was erected in 1893. It is located at the center of a tiny park in the midst of a busy commercial intersection on the south side of Providence.

The figure of Columbus stands 6'8" high and 4'6" wide and deep; the base is 5'3" by 5'4". The explorer is caught in mid-stride, his left foot stepping off the base. In his left hand he holds a globe; his right arm is raised, his index finger pointing, as if giving an order or sighting land. Columbus wears a short tunic; a wide belt wraps the waist; a second belt across the hip holds a sword. A short full cloak billows out around the figure, and he wears a brimmed hat. There is a coil of line at his feet.

The plain square base is grey Westerly granite. The explorer's name is carved in raised letters across the front. On the right side of the base are the raised numerals "1492"; on the left side is "1893." There is a small bronze swag mounted on the front of the base beneath the name.

There is some chipping on the lower edge of the base. The tail ends of the bronze swag are missing. The bronze figure shows some very small cracks but is in generally good condition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

Section number 8

Page 6

Significance

Columbus (1893) is historically significant because it is a good example of the work of a master sculptor, Auguste Bartholdi, and because its creation illustrates some significant events in the history of Rhode Island's Gorham Manufacturing Company, one of the nation's leading fabricators of bronze sculptures.

This Columbus is a bronze cast of a work originally produced in sterling silver at the Gorham Company's plant. The sculpture was created by Gorham for the 1892 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The company had been casting large statues for only a few years and the Columbus was something of a demonstration piece for Gorham—it was large, technically difficult to cast in silver, and the work of a well known artist. In preparing for the exposition, a Gorham team had traveled to France to meet with Bartholdi, renowned for his statue of Liberty. Bartholdi's finished model was shipped across the Atlantic to be cast in Providence. The sculpture was made in two sections and used 30,000 ounces of silver. The casting was a ceremonial occasion—invited guests were feted as they watched the process. The completed work was shipped to Chicago via rail and accompanied by Gorham officials.

Following the exposition, Columbus was returned to the Gorham plant and was melted down—it had never been intended as a permanent work (sterling silver being an impractical material for an outdoor piece) and had served its purpose as a temporary celebration and as an advertisement for the skill and ambition of Gorham's foundry teams.

The bronze Columbus here nominated was created in 1893 and dedicated on November 8 of that year. Bartholdi visited Newport around this time and may have had some involvement in the foundry production. This Columbus was a gift to the City of Providence from the Elmwood Association, a civic group from the residential neighborhood near the Gorham plant. No other work by Bartholdi is known in Rhode Island. Though Gorham often produced multiple casts of works it had commissioned, no other cast of the Columbus has been identified.

Though commemorative in nature, Columbus has also achieved historical significance, both as the work of a master and as a document in the history of the Gorham Manufacturing Company.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

Section number 9

Page 7

Major Bibliographical References

The Echo, Providence, 1979.

Freeman, Robert, and Vivienne Lasky. Hidden Treasure: Public Sculpture in Providence. Providence, 1980.

Gorham Company Archives. John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI.

“Outdoor Sculpture of Rhode Island,” technical report, Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 1998.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Property name Columbus, Providence County, Providence, RI

Section number 10

Page 8

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is the land on which the sculpture sits.

Boundary Justification

While the Columbus retains integrity of location, its setting has changed over time. The significance of the work is not dependent upon its setting but is encompassed within the object itself.

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE.

JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

Resolved,

That

Whereas the Gorham Manufacturing Company have kindly offered to place on exhibition in the City Hall, the silver statue of Columbus manufactured by them, and which attracted so much attention at the Worlds Fair in Chicago. therefore be it

Resolved that the City Messenger be and he is hereby instructed to receive the statue of Columbus, and cause it to be located in some suitable place in the City Hall for the inspection of our Citizens.

IN COMMON COUNCIL,

Dec 4 1893

RESOLVED AND PASSED.

D. Hayden
Clerk.

In BOARD of ALDERMEN,

Dec 7 1893

READ AND CONCURRED.

W. Clarke
CLERK.

APPROVED

DEC 8 1893

William K Potter

MAYOR.

COLUMBUS IN BRONZE.

Reproduction of the Famous Silver Statue Now at the World's Fair.

The reproduction in bronze of the famous silver Columbus statue made by the Gorham Manufacturing Company for the World's Fair was cast yesterday afternoon at the Elmwood works. The bronze statue will be identical in size and detail with the silver Columbus, the same model from Bartholdi's design being followed in both cases. Although not attended by the novelty and rarity which characterized the casting of the silver statue, yesterday's event was an interesting one, and a number of people availed themselves of the courtesy and invitation of the Gorham Company to witness the procedure. About 5 o'clock the contents of the graphite crucibles, which contained 1600 pounds of molten bronze metal, were poured into the sunken mould under the direction of Foreman Allebaugh. The process was carried out without a mishap, and the indications are that the first casting will be an unqualified success, although this cannot be definitely stated until the casting has cooled sufficiently to allow the removal of the mould. The full completion of the statue will require about a month, and it is planned to have all in readiness to place the figure in position, with appropriate dedicatory exercises, early in November. Full arrangements for this occasion have not as yet been completed, but it is expected that the different orders of the Knights of Columbus will assist the promulgators of the plan in the ceremonies of dedication. The triangular plat, at the junction of Reservoir and Elmwood avenues is the site selected for the bronze statue as an appropriate and slightly location.

A proposition by the Gorham Company to reproduce Columbus in bronze for the city of Providence as a memorial of the Columbian year and celebration, and the successful issue of the magnificent silver statue which brought fame to the city as well as the silversmiths, was the origin of the idea. While the City Government was yet considering the matter of accepting the terms by which this could be brought about, the initiative was taken by members of the Elmwood Club and residents of that vicinity, and in a short time a substantial subscription fund was under way. Although this rested for a time, while the proposition of Mr. Henry Clark to place the statue in Dexter Training Ground was being considered by the City Council, it eventually resulted, after the reconsideration of the latter suggestion, in the guarantee of a sufficient amount to assure the bronze statue for the city. The plat designated for the location of the memorial was presented to the city for a park by Joseph J. Cook, the first subscriber to and one of the most earnest advocates of the Elmwood plan. The situation is a most fitting one in all respects, and as the completion of the statue is but the matter of a brief space of time the none too large list of municipal memorials will soon be increased by a notable and artistic production.

Dedication of Bartholdi Statue of Columbus.

This gem of art, cast by the Gorham Co., will be dedicated this afternoon, at 2:30 o'clock. A procession will form at the Elmwood Club house, corner Burnett street and Elmwood avenue, at 2:15, under the escort of Reeves's American Band, and a chorus of over 300 children. All public-spirited citizens are cordially invited to join this procession and march to Columbus Park, at the junction of Reservoir and Elmwood avenues, where the following dedicatory exercises will take place: Music, Reeves's American Band; presentation of the statue to the city, Prof Alonzo Williams; response in behalf of the city, His Honor Mayor Potter; song; "Columbus," composed by Emma Shaw Coleleugh, chorus of children; oration, Rev. H. W. Rugg, D. D.; song, "America;" music, Reeves's American Band.

CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)

Providence Journal (Providence, Rhode Island), November 8, 1893: 8. *NewsBank: America's News - Historical and Current.*

<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ric.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?>

p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2:14728889532D3B69@EANX-NB-16371A5EC1B01403@2412776-1636FAAE957B9369@7-1636FAAE957B9369@.

COLUMBUS IN BRONZE.

The Bartholdi Statue Placed in Position in Elmwood Park.

APPROPRIATE EXERCISES AT THE UNVEILING.

Formal Presentation by Prof. Williams and Oration by Rev. Dr. Rugg.—Singing by Children and Music by the American Band.—A Beautiful Addition to the City's Monuments.

The Bartholdi Statue of Columbus in bronze was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies in Columbus Park, Elmwood, at 2:30 p. m. yesterday. Columbus in bronze is the exact representation of Columbus in silver, and was cast by the Gorham Manufacturing Co. For a long time the residents of Elmwood have been desirous of placing some fitting memorial statue on the new park, and when it was found that a statue of that character could be obtained public spirit was at once aroused. The statue is distinctively an Elmwood production. It was cast by an Elmwood company, the money necessary for its purchase was subscribed by the residents of Elmwood, and the statue itself is now erected in the beautiful new Elmwood Park.

To the Elmwood Club and to the Gorham Manufacturing Company is due the successful completion of the idea of a statue in this section of the city. The Elmwood Club has had an open subscription list for this purpose for some time and its members have been tireless in their efforts to secure the statue. The Gorham Manufacturing Company has been able to give the club and the residents of Elmwood an opportunity of purchasing at a very low price a work of art designed by the foremost sculptor of the day.

Columbus in bronze is a fitting addition to the bronze statues which already adorn the squares and parks of this city. The beauty of this particular statue has already been enlarged upon at the time of its successful casting, but now the public may see for itself. It stands in the most conspicuous place in Elmwood, at the junction of Elmwood and Reservoir avenues, and will be at object of interest to all the passers-by.

The line of march to the statue yesterday afternoon was started at the Elmwood Club and was made up as follows:

Platoon of police, commanded by Capt. Corey of the 7th Station.
Reverend's American Band,
Elmwood Grammar School,
Peace Street School.

His Honor Mayor Potter, members of the City Council and representatives of the City Government and members of the Elmwood Club.

When the statue was reached a group of boys, bearing flags, surrounded the veiled statue, and after music by the band, Col. T. A. Burton, representing the Gorham Manufacturing Company, performed the ceremony of unveiling.

Prof. Alonzo Williams, in fitting language, presented the statue to the city. Mayor Potter responding in a happy manner.

Then followed the singing of "Columbus," written by Emma Slave, by chorus of children. Rev. H. W. Rugg, D. D., was the orator of the day.

He said: "We may congratulate ourselves, I think, and the community as well, on the erection of this beautiful statue, which is to stand here at this juncture of the ways. We may rejoice in the public spirit of the residents of Elmwood, as signified by their procuring

the memorial here placed. We may be glad and grateful also that this Columbus statue is a home production, cast in the great workshop close at hand. We appreciate the significance of the occasion that brings us here. The erection of this attractive memorial is justified, I believe, by the standards of a well-defined utility. The Columbus statue will not put food into the mouths of hungry men or lighten the burdens of taxpayers. All the same, however, there is a ministry of service here which we ought in no wise to overlook. As a work of art this statue will have usefulness. It will minister to the love of the beautiful an instinct or faculty, which, being nourished, refines and exalts human nature. It will minister to the imaginative sense and thus augment the satisfactions of life.

It is often said, and with truth, that art cannot produce virtue. It is not a prime factor of moral regeneration. There may be even base degeneracy on the part of people where love of art exists and its illustrations abound. Athens degenerated at a time when her streets and squares and gardens were filled with fine sculptures and her temples showed the attractive results of an unsurpassed architecture. Mr. Ruskin in one of his admirable papers says: "Art will not get your country clean, or make your people lovely." There must be something appropriate to its presence. But he adds this strong statement: "There has been indeed art in countries where people lived in dirt to serve God, but never in countries where the people lived in dirt to serve the devil."

In our squares and in the business sections of the city there stand statues of men who have merited the honor paid them, but are there not others who should be remembered in this way also? I am thinking now of a man whose talents and services were conspicuous in the War of the Revolution. Will not public spirit and patriotic feeling unite in speedily providing a statue of Nathaniel Greene?

This statue of Columbus has special value, because it represents a noble personality. It is not claimed that this form is a verity of representation. It does not portray the Genoese navigator after the manner of any authentic portrait or model. It is, however, an artistic and impressive ideal of the great discoverer. It represents a real person. As such it suits its best purpose and is charged with power. Enlightened people are disposed to cherish the relics and reminders of a heroic life and character, and to often rehearse the services of the illustrious dead. There are a few famous men whose names have become household words. In this list the name of Columbus is conspicuous.

There are two things to keep uppermost in our review of the character and career of Columbus. First, he was a man of faith; second, he was a man who did something worthy of commemoration.

Thus do we dedicate the memorial of a man of faith and heroic action to its varied uses. It is placed here on this busy thoroughfare to be a reminder of what makes man's life honored and useful. It stands on this conspicuous site to be a witness of things that uplift and clear the hearts of men, and to be an inspiring object lesson for years to come.

Dr. Rugg's oration was followed by the singing of "America" by the entire audience, led by the chorus of children and the full band. This completed the programme of the day. The committee in charge of the exercises consisted of James L. Bullock, Arthur Young, Joseph C. Johnson, George F. Weston and Charles A. Winsor.

At the conclusion of the ceremony group pictures of the school children were taken, as well as groups of the orators of the day. Among the occupants of the grand stand erected beside the statue were Gov. D. Russell Brown, ex-Govs. Taft and Davis, representatives of the City Government, of the Gorham Manufacturing Company and of the Elmwood Club.

During the afternoon and evening the Elmwood Club kept open house in honor of the occasion, as did many of the residents of the vicinity. Mr. Charles H. Smith, to whom is due the honor of being one of the originators of the idea of the statue, hospitably entertained the speakers of the day, members of the Gorham Company and personal friends at his residence on Reservoir avenue.

During the evening there was a general illumination of the residences in Elmwood, and there was a copious display of flags, lanterns and red fire.

'The Statue of Columbus.

To the Editor of the Journal:

Have you seen the Columbian statue at Elmwood? If not, go and take a view of it. It is a masterpiece in design and execution. As seen in silver at Chicago its fame is world-wide. But do protest against its position. Columbus, with searching gaze and uplifted hand, eloquently looking and pointing toward the east! Westward is the history, and "westward the course of empire," "the star of empire," Columbus of all men should stand by the points of the compass. It will be said that this will turn his face from the city and from the city's view. The more's the pity he should stand as he does. The opposite will be Columbian in character as well as in history.

Dec. 14, 1893.

L. M. D.

CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)

Providence Journal (Providence, Rhode Island), December 15, 1893: 10. *NewsBank: America's News - Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ric.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2:14728889532D3B69@EANX-NB-16371AA67B920E71@2412813-1636FAB20408D375@9-1636FAB20408D375@>

IN THE CITY HALL.

Visitors to See the Silver Statue of Columbus Began to Arrive Yesterday.—It May be Exhibited Evenings.

Columbus in silver is now in position in City Hall, where all may have an opportunity of seeing it. The task of hoisting it into position was a difficult one, but was accomplished without accident to the statue. Early yesterday morning the crowds began to come to the hall to inspect it. Of course the regular visitors at the hall were there, and there were others who perhaps would never have visited the place, had it not been for the statue.

Perhaps no other place in the city is so well fitted for the statue as the position which it now occupies. Situated half way up the stairs leading to the second story with its finger pointing into the dim corridor of the Common Council chamber, it is an object which cannot fail to be noticed by even a casual visitor. The light from the top of the building strikes the statue in such a way that every line is brought out to perfection. There it can be seen from all sides equally well, from the corridor below where it assumes almost gigantic proportions; from all sides on the second floor and from above. Even though it has been in position but a few hours, it has shown that it would certainly be becoming to the hall were there a figure of some sort permanently placed there.

It has not been decided just what plan to pursue while the statue remains in the hall. Officer Sherman now has general watch over it. Should the number of visitors increase it may be deemed advisable to open the hall evenings as well as during the day. It could certainly be seen to as good advantage in the evening as the electric lights in the hall are in good position. This would give the working people, who cannot visit the hall during business hours, an opportunity of seeing it, at the same time relieving the hall from too great a crowd during the day. The expediency of this will be determined by the number of visitors during the next few days.

The Silver Columbus in Solitude.

The Gorham statue of Columbus remains on exhibition in the City Hall, but the attendance is not so great as was at first expected. Whether the appreciation for art has waned or whether the Christmas shopping has completely engrossed the attention of the popular mind is not known. At any rate, the silver Columbus stands in solitary grandeur and few people comparatively, except the hall employes, visit it. To be sure, the taxpayers all stop and look at it, but they would have visited the hall any way. The statue will remain on exhibition a few weeks longer.

CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)

Providence Journal (Providence, Rhode Island), December 22, 1893: 10. *NewsBank: America's News - Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ric.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2:14728889532D3B69@EANX-NB-16371AACEE50613F@2412820-1636FAB2B0AB5BC7@9-1636FAB2B0AB5BC7@>.

Providence's Columbus Square: Recommendations on Confronting Colonial Ideology

Authors: Ryan Saglio, Allyson LaForge, Mark Tseng-Putterman

1. Introduction

This report examines the history and current conversations surrounding the statue of Christopher Columbus located in Columbus Square in the Elmwood neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. Through conversations with and citations of key stakeholders, including Karen Hlynsky of the Elmwood Neighborhood Association, Darrell Waldron, executive director of the Rhode Island and Regional Indian Council, and Maureen O'Brien, Curator of Painting & Sculpture at the RISD Museum, this report addresses key constituencies involved in conversations about the future of Columbus Square. We also draw on case studies of other municipalities that have grappled with decisions to remove, replace, or otherwise rethink honorific statues of Christopher Columbus, in order to situate this local issue within a national conversation around the uncritical celebration of Columbus and its erasure of the continuing legacies of Native American genocide and the ongoing presence of settler colonialism.



Figure 1: Columbus statue in Providence, Rhode Island. Image by Kenneth C. Zirkel and courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Providence, Rhode Island's Columbus Square

The over-life-sized statue of Christopher Columbus located in Columbus Square on Elmwood Avenue in Providence, Rhode Island was installed and dedicated in November 1893. The figure was a gift of the Elmwood Association to the city of Providence. The bronze statue was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 having been nominated by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission in the late 1990s. In recent years, in response to a larger national movement to recognize the Christopher Columbus's role in the violent processes of colonization, slavery, and genocide in the Caribbean and the Americas, in American History, the statue has been vandalized several times, for instance being defaced with red paint in 2017 and having been adorned with a "murderer" sign in 2010.

Much like the man it depicts, this statue has a long and complicated history. Understanding *Columbus*'s history and the various roles it has played in Providence is central to understanding the potential implications of relocating, removing, or leaving the statue on Elmwood Avenue.

The statue was designed by French artist Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, who is known for designing *Liberty Enlightening the World*, most commonly referred as the Statue of Liberty. The statue was designed for the Gorham Manufacturing Company. The Rhode Island-based company was one of the largest manufacturers of sterling, silverplate, and bronze in the United States and their work was recognized around the world. Gorham was also a major employer of Elmwood residents. The original statue was cast in silver for the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition. Following the Columbian Exposition, the figure was destroyed, having served its purpose as a showpiece. When there was a discussion of erecting the statue in Providence, the decision was made to recast it in bronze, a material better suited for outdoor exposure. It is unknown if Bartholdi was involved in casting the statue in bronze. The Elmwood Association had the statue cast and gifted *Columbus* to the city of Providence later that same year.¹

The Columbian Exposition was a celebration to mark the quadricentennial of Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas. One of the themes of the fair was to celebrate not just the conquest of the Americas but to celebrate the "progress" the Americas had achieved post-colonization. The world fair's depiction of and relationship to Native American communities of 1893 were incredibly fraught and complicated. By celebrating conquest and progress, the world fair was also celebrating the destruction of the Indigenous Peoples who were slaughtered and displaced as a result of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. The Native people who participated in the 1893 Columbian Exposition were treated as "iconic trophies of colonialism."² They were exploited performers who struggled to maintain their autonomy despite being treated with and portrayed with gross injustice.³

Understanding the complexities of the Columbian Exposition is critical to think through the purpose of Providence's *Columbus* statue. Often the statue's meaning is reduced to simply being a display of artistic skill and merit of Bartholdi and the Gorham Manufacturing Company. The statue was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places under two criteria. First, *Columbus* is the work of a master artist. To date, there is no other work by Bartholdi in Rhode Island. Additionally, the statue is considered to be a critical moment "in the history of Rhode Island's Gorham Manufacturing Company, one of the nation's leading fabricators of bronze

¹ Ronald J Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Columbus," National Park Service, 1999,

http://www.preservation.ri.gov/pdfs_zips_downloads/national_pdfs/providence/prov_elmwood-avenue_columbus-monument.pdf.

² Melissa Rinehart, "To Hell with the Wigs! Native American Representation and Resistance at the World's Columbian Exposition," *The American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2012), 405.

³ Ibid.

sculptures.”⁴ *Columbus*, however, is more than just an example of artistic skill. In recent years, some have explained that the statue can be read as a celebration of the spirit of exploration.⁵ The statue’s original commissioning for the 1893 Columbian Exposition is a reminder that at its core, the statue is a work of art designed to celebrate white supremacy and the extermination of Indigenous peoples. By depicting him larger than life and originally silver, the figure tells the story of power, prominence, and prestige. The statue’s origin and history is inseparable from the celebration Christopher Columbus and his acts of genocide, colonialism, and slavery.

In addition to several acts of vandalism, the statue is difficult for people to access. Busy roads surround Columbus Square and depending upon traffic, venturing to visit the statue is dangerous.

In light of the recent vandalism and increasing national attention directed at monuments dedicated to Christopher Columbus, Providence’s *Columbus* has warranted evaluation. Should the statue be removed from Columbus square and if so, what should be done with it?

Removing the statue from Columbus Square would involve working with the Historic District Commission and Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. Since the figure is recognized as a historic place, anything that would alter the appearance of the statue, such as moving it, may require consulting the National Park Service guidelines. However, when *Columbus* was placed on the registry, it was noted that “the significance of the work is not dependent upon its setting but is encompassed within the object itself”⁶, indicating that moving the statue to another location would not impact its status as a historic landmark.

2. Case Studies

Case Study 1: Baltimore, Maryland

The oldest monument to Christopher Columbus in the United States, the *Columbus Obelisk*, is currently located in Baltimore, Maryland.

In August 2017, the obelisk was heavily damaged by two individuals with a sledgehammer. The individuals responsible for the damage posted a video of their attack on Youtube. One man wields the hammer after placing a sign on the base of the obelisk reading "The future is radical and economic justice." The person filming later holds a sign reading "Racism, tear it down." In the video, a male voice explains that Columbus and the obelisk celebrate racism, slavery, genocide, murder, rape, exploitation, and ecological degradation. At one point in the video, they refer to Columbus to as a "genocidal terrorist."

⁴ Ronald J Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Columbus," National Park Service, 1999,

http://www.preservation.ri.gov/pdfs_zips_downloads/national_pdfs/providence/prov_elmwood-avenue_columbus-monument.pdf, 6.

⁵ John Hill, "Is There a Place for Christopher Columbus? - News - Providencejournal.Com - Providence, RI," *Providence Journal*, October 10, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018,

<https://www.providencejournal.com/news/20171010/is-there-place-for-christopher-columbus>.

⁶ Onorato, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Columbus," 8.

Much like the statue of Columbus in Providence, the *Columbus Obelisk* was initially created to celebrate Christopher Columbus's conquest of the new world. In 1792, the obelisk was a gift from the French Consul to Maryland to recognize the tricentennial of Columbus's founding of the Americas. It is no longer possible to celebrate Columbus's perceived triumphs without also acknowledging the long history of devastation, genocide, and destruction that go hand-in-hand. The vandalism video is a direct response to the larger national movement around not just Columbus and Indigenous Peoples' Day but also the current trend of removing Confederate monuments.⁷

The Mayor of Baltimore has charged the city's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, known as CHAP, to oversee the restoration of the obelisk. The act of vandalism has reignited discussion in Baltimore about the appropriateness of Columbus memorials. The obelisk is one of three in the city. In response to concerns, the Mayor is looking to re-dedicated the monument to another historical figure. The city is working with the neighborhood around the obelisk's current home in Herring Park to nominate other individuals for memorialization.⁸

This decision has provoked a backlash, particularly from the Italian-American community in Baltimore. Like other groups across the country, they cite the unfairness of holding Christopher Columbus to contemporary standards; Columbus and his actions were typical of the late 15th century; in short, he was a product of his time. Additionally, they cite concerns that re-dedication is an erasure of history.⁹ Advocates have repeated many of these same arguments in regards to the Columbus statue in Providence.

At this time, no official decision has been made on rededicating the obelisk.

Case Study 2: San Jose, California

In January 2018, the city council of San Jose, California voted to remove a statue of Christopher Columbus from the lobby of its city hall. The decision comes on the heels of ongoing activism from the Chicano activist group The Brown Berets, which said the statue was “glorifying” Columbus’s legacy of genocide and colonialism. In particular, the location of the statue in city hall implied official endorsement of Columbus by the municipal government, a stance the mayor and city council was not comfortable retaining. Said Mayor Sam Liccardo: “I think everyone’s been twisting themselves into pretzels to avoid hurting people. Let’s stop twisting ourselves. Let’s see if we can at last put this behind us and focus on what’s positive, and there’s a lot positive in our community to honor.”¹⁰ Councilwoman Sylvia Arenas echoed the call

⁷ Pamela Wood, “Christopher Columbus Monument Vandalized in Baltimore - Baltimore Sun,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 21, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-columbus-monument-20170821-story.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Morgan Gstalter, “San Jose council votes to remove Christopher Columbus statue,” *The Hill*, January 31, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018.

to look forward rather than backwards: “He belongs in history books,” she said of Columbus. “I don’t believe he belongs in our City Hall.”¹¹

Nonetheless, the council gave the area’s Italian American community the power to relocate the statue, a decision that has been criticized by activists who pushed for its removal. Peter Ortiz, a member of the Brown Berets, said “We are against a Christopher Columbus statue in a public setting because of the crimes against humanity.¹² Similarly, the activist group STAND San José, which said it is comprised both of San Joseans of Italian descent and indigenous descent, was “unified in our belief that a monument to Christopher Columbus has no place in our public spaces....Our communities, especially our children, should not continue to be exposed to the normalization and glorification of [his] crimes.”¹³

The statue had been vandalized twice in recent years, once by an activist who smashed the statue’s face with a sledgehammer while shouting “murderer” and “genocide.”¹⁴

Case Study 3: Los Angeles, California

In October 2017, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion “to remove all references to Columbus Day as an official County holiday and recognize Indigenous Peoples Day instead,” formally passing the ordinance in May 2017. The following year, during Los Angeles' celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day in October 2018, the city erected a temporary barrier to their Christopher Columbus statue located just outside Grand Park in downtown LA, hiding it from view.¹⁵

According to an article in the *Los Angeles Patch*, "Councilman Joe Buscaino, who is of Italian descent, expressed reservations about canceling Columbus Day and then in August 2017 made a late and unsuccessful push to have Indigenous Peoples Day take place on Aug. 9 and a second new holiday celebrating the diverse cultures of Los Angeles replace Columbus Day on the second Monday of October. 'With or without Columbus, Italians will continue to celebrate their sacrifices and contributions to this great country and our great city,' Buscaino said in August 2017 after the City Council approved the holiday switch."¹⁶

Just over a month later, on November 9, 2018, the city announced that they would permanently remove the Columbus statue. City councilman and member of the Wyandotte Nation Mitch O’Farrell told *Los Angeles Magazine*, “It’s a natural next step of eliminating the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jaleny Reyes, “San Jose to Evict Christopher Columbus Statue from City Hall,” *San Jose Inside*, January 31, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018.

¹³ STAND San José, “An open letter to our city council,” [Facebook post](#), January 26, 2018.

¹⁴ Gstalter, *The Hill*.

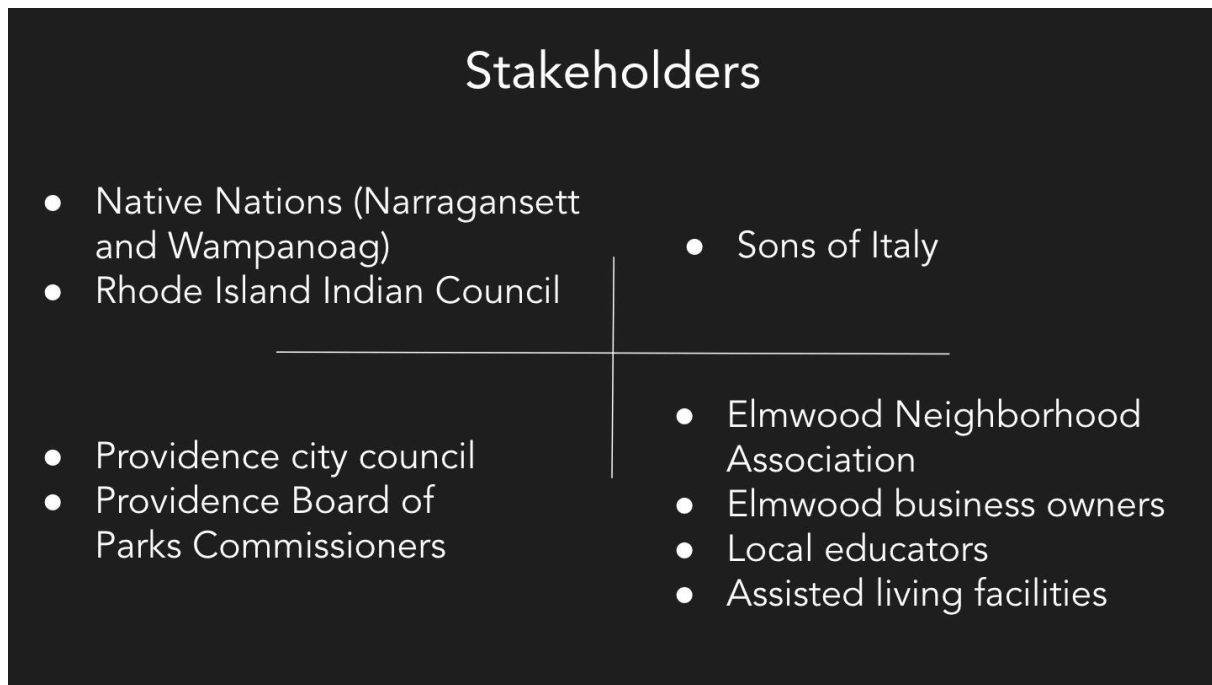
¹⁵ Pamela Avila, "Christopher Columbus Disappears From View in L.A. on Indigenous Peoples Day," *Los Angeles Magazine*, October 8, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/indigenous-peoples-day-los-angeles/>.

¹⁶ California News Wire Services, "LA To Remove 45-Year-Old Christopher Columbus Statue," *Los Angeles Patch*, November 9, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://patch.com/california/studiocity/la-remove-45-year-old-christopher-columbus-statue>.

false narrative that Columbus was a benign discoverer who helped make this country what it is. His statue and his image is really representative of someone who committed atrocities and helped initiate the greatest genocide ever recorded in human history, so the fact that his statue is coming down is the next step in the natural progression.” The statue is currently in storage, but city's Board of Supervisors will discuss permanently deaccessioning from their collections at a future date.¹⁷

Xicano, Huichol, and Northern Plains artist and cultural organizer Angeleno Joel Garcia, who has been working alongside the Native American Indian Commission as well as others to move forward with the removal of the statue, told *Los Angeles Magazine*, "Success for me and many others goes beyond the removal of the statue. For me, success would be for the county to establish a Decolonial Task Force to address other monuments such as this kind and the lack of equity, inclusion, and decision making for Indigenous people in L.A.” The decision of whether or not to replace the Columbus statue with another work, perhaps by a Native artist, will be made by the Board of Supervisors and the L.A. County Arts Commission.¹⁸

3. Stakeholders



As the above graphic suggests, there are multiple stakeholders involved in the reassessment of the Columbus statue, all with intersecting and sometimes competing investments. Through

¹⁷ Pamela Avila, "Downtown L.A.'s Christopher Columbus Statue Is Being Removed for Good," *Los Angeles Magazine*, November 9, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/los-angeles-columbus-statue/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

conversations and compilations of various media interviews, we have attempted to sketch out the key concerns of some of these primary stakeholders.

Karen Hlynsky, Chair of the Elmwood Neighborhood Association¹⁹

Karen Hlynsky is the Chair of the Elmwood Neighborhood Association and has been involved in conversations regarding the Columbus statue for several years. As such, she is a wealth of knowledge and perspectives and provided a survey of the various concerns regarding the statue. These concerns can crudely be broken down into two (often intersecting) categories: economic and political.

Elmwood is a working-class neighborhood with a median household income of \$35,034, compared to Providence's \$40,335.²⁰ It is also one of Providence's most diverse neighborhoods. As of 2007, Elmwood was over 56% Hispanic, 23% Black, 23% White, 9% Asian, and 1.8% Native American.²¹ As such, significant interest in the future of Columbus Square reflect local economic and quality of life concerns, namely access to decent public space and parks. For several years, the Elmwood community has sought to renovate Columbus Square into a lively, accessible, and thriving public space. However, they have faced reticence on the part of the Providence Parks Department, which voiced concerns that greater investment in the park (for instance, installing benches, flower beds, or better lighting) would attract greater attention to the Columbus statue and therefore lead to further vandalizations.

Karen relayed that numerous local actors seem interested in renovation or investment into the somewhat dilapidated Columbus Square. Business owners see a lively local park as a point of attraction for customers, while the neighboring Sophie Academy and Paul Cuffee School wish to use the Square for outdoor classes and visits. Meanwhile, nearby nursing homes and assisted living facilities are interested in the Square becoming a pleasant public park for residents to enjoy. On this front, Karen saw the Columbus statue as something of an excuse for the city to justify its lack of investment in the Elmwood neighborhood.

Karen also voiced significant political concerns over the Columbus statue. Recognizing that many view Columbus as an "old style Hitler," she resisted the notion that the Sons of Italy should move the statue to Federal Hill to be erected in an honorific manner. On the other hand, she pushed back against the idea that the Italian-American community had more claim to the future of the statue than the Elmwood neighborhood, which has a significant Dominican population. Thus, Karen linked Columbus's historical arrival to modern day Dominican Republic to the Dominican community in Elmwood's relevance in deciding the future of the statue.

¹⁹ All references drawn from a conversation between Allyson LaForge, Mark Tseng-Putterman, and Karen Hlynsky on December 10, 2018.

²⁰ "Providence, Rhode Island Neighborhood Map - Income, House Prices, Occupations, Boundaries, *City-Data.com*, accessed at: <http://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Providence-Rhode-Island.html>.

²¹ Providence Plan: Elmwood Neighborhood Profile, Rhode Island Community Profiles, 2007, accessed at <http://profiles.provplan.org/profiles/state/44/overview/>.

Karen also recognized that many people living in Elmwood have strong views about the statue. For instance, she connected us with Elmwood resident Nicholas Reville, who said he lives less than two blocks from the statue and finds it to be a “daily embarrassment to our neighborhood and our city.” Nicholas continued:

“I suspect that people who want to keep the statue in place just don’t know anything about who Columbus was—as soon as he arrived in the Americas, he started murdering, enslaving, subjugating, and torturing Native people. He also sent thousand of slaves across the Atlantic to Europe. Placing him in an honored position is a validation of his nightmarish legacy. The statue should be removed immediately and replaced with a statue of a Native person, so that everyone can feel more welcome and more safe in our community.”

Like Nicholas, Karen suggested several approaches to confronting the statue’s symbolic validation of white supremacy. While she vehemently resists the Sons of Italy proposal to claim the statue for Federal Hill, she seemed open to the idea that RISD could house the statue in its collections. She also suggested better signage that more accurately explained Columbus’s role in the colonization of the Americas, or bringing in another statue as a “counterpoint” to the Columbus statue. Here, she mentioned the iconic “Fearless Girl” statue placed in opposition to the bull on Wall Street.

Darrell Waldron, executive director of the Rhode Island and Regional Indian Council

While we were unable to interview Darrell Waldron for this report, he has previously expressed his opinions on the *Columbus* statue. In interviews after *Columbus* was vandalized in October 2017, he told *WPRI* that “America was built on the graves of Native Americans, they always portrayed us as the villains, never the heroes” and *NBC 10 News* that the statue was “built on the graves of Native Americans.”²² He added, “I never had a lot of love for the statue as a Native American growing up in this area. I don’t believe there is one Native American statue in Rhode Island.”²³

The *Providence Journal* reported that Waldron said that “Columbus was the harbinger of catastrophe, the man who opened a door to an invasion that destroyed his ancestors’ societies,” and that “We don’t celebrate Columbus Day.”²⁴

²² Shaun Towne, “Christopher Columbus statue vandalized in Providence,” *WPRI*, October 9, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, https://www.wpri.com/news/crime/christopher-columbus-statue-vandalized-in-providence_2018032707512072/1082434923; Crystal Bui, “Vandals target Christopher Columbus statue in Providence,” *NBC 10 News*, October 8, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://turnto10.com/news/local/vandals-target-christopher-columbus-statue-in-providence>.

²³ Crystal Bui, “Vandals target Christopher Columbus statue in Providence.”

²⁴ John Hill, “Is there a place for Christopher Columbus?” *Providence Journal*, October 10, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.providencejournal.com/news/20171010/is-there-place-for-christopher-columbus>.

WPRI also reported on the vandalism that "Waldron and most others passing by agreed that defacing property is wrong but understand the possible point behind the paint. 'It's public property, you don't like to see things defaced,' Waldron added." At the time, Waldron was willing to reach out to Don Angelo, head of the local chapter of the Sons of Italy, to discuss Columbus Day and the *Columbus* statue.²⁵

Maureen O'Brien, Curator of Painting & Sculpture at the RISD Museum

In a phone conversation with Maureen O'Brien, she expressed interest in the *Columbus* statue, noting that the RISD Museum has an upcoming exhibit focused on Gorham silver and that she is very interested in the works of Bartholdi.²⁶ Regarding RISD's potential acquisition of the statue, Maureen reported that storage space would be a concern, but that she would like to continue the conversation along with the Curator of Decorative Arts, Elizabeth Williams, as well as 2018 Artist Fellow Becci Davis, whose artistic work has included recontextualized statues in Georgia and Rhode Island.

4. Recommendations:

Our primary recommendation for this statue is for the City of Providence to remove it from Columbus Square and public view in order to improve the park for Elmwood residents and address ongoing legacies of genocide and colonialism in Providence. As our referenced case studies show, there is significant precedent for municipalities choosing to remove honorific Columbus statues in recognition of his role in facilitating genocide, slavery, and colonialism in the Americas. However, in line with statements from Karen Hlynsky, Chair of the Elmwood Neighborhood Association, as well as other Elmwood residents, the statue should not be moved to the Federal Hill neighborhood. As Hlynsky wrote in an email to us on December 4, 2018, "I'm opposed to such a move where Columbus would be heralded as a hero, with no deeper discussion than that."

We recommend that the City of Providence seek museums or collectors of Gorham art to accession the statue. After preliminary conversations with Maureen O'Brien, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the RISD Museum, we believe that the RISD Museum may be a suitable setting for the statue, due to its relevance as a piece of art designed by a master artist (Bartholdi) as well as the Museum's collecting interest in Gorham Manufacturing. While space is a concern, conversations with O'Brien show that the RISD Museum is interested in the statue, and is in fact planning an exhibition of Gorham silver in 2019. Should a museum or collector of Gorham art

²⁵ Shaun Towne, "Sons of Italy: Columbus statue should be moved to Federal Hill," *WPRI*, October 10, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, https://www.wpri.com/news/local-news/sons-of-italy-columbus-statue-should-be-moved-to-federal-hill_20180327075055723/1082432115.

²⁶ All references drawn from a phone conversation between Allyson LaForge and Maureen O'Brien on December 13, 2018.

accession the statue, its move from Columbus Square should include critical conversations about Columbus' legacy.

However, removal of the statue is only the beginning of the process to assure that the Elmwood community enjoys access to a renovated, publicly-funded park space. Decisions about how to replace the statue and improve the park should be formulated through ongoing community conversations with key stakeholders outlined in the previous section. One possibility for replacement is a statue of a prominent Native American, in line with Darrell Waldron's comment that "I don't believe there is one Native American statue in Rhode Island."²⁷

If removal is not possible, we recommend that the City of Providence collaborates with representatives from Native Nations to contextualize the statue with signage as well as provides funds for artwork created by one or several Native artists to counter the statue's presence the park and open up dialogue. An example of recent art project is the *Still Here* mural in Providence, created by Baltimore-based artist Gaia in collaboration with Narragansett leaders and educators from the Tomaquag Museum.²⁸

This report has identified some initial contacts such as Karen Hlynsky, the Tomaquag Museum, the RISD Museum, and Darrell Waldron but any final decision regarding *Columbus* will require more in-depth conversations with community stakeholders, this could be done through methods such as surveys or focus groups. Particular attention should be paid to the Elmwood neighborhood as they will be most directly impacted by any decision regarding Columbus Square. The neighborhood is home to both people of Dominican descent and Native Nations; both communities may have strong feelings regarding Columbus and his legacy.

²⁷ Crystal Bui, "Vandals target Christopher Columbus statue in Providence."

²⁸ Elise Ryan, "Debuted mural highlights Narragansett tribe," *The Brown Daily Herald*, September 12, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <http://www.browndailyherald.com/2018/09/12/debuted-mural-highlights-narragansett-tribe/>.