

Historic Monument in Marietta Faces Removal Amid Preservation Concerns

MARIETTA, OH, UNITED STATES, June 25, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In the heart of Marietta's Muskingum Park stands a sandstone sculpture of pioneers. Though a temporary cover has helped protect it for the last five years, it turns out the monument faces risks far greater than the elements: removal.

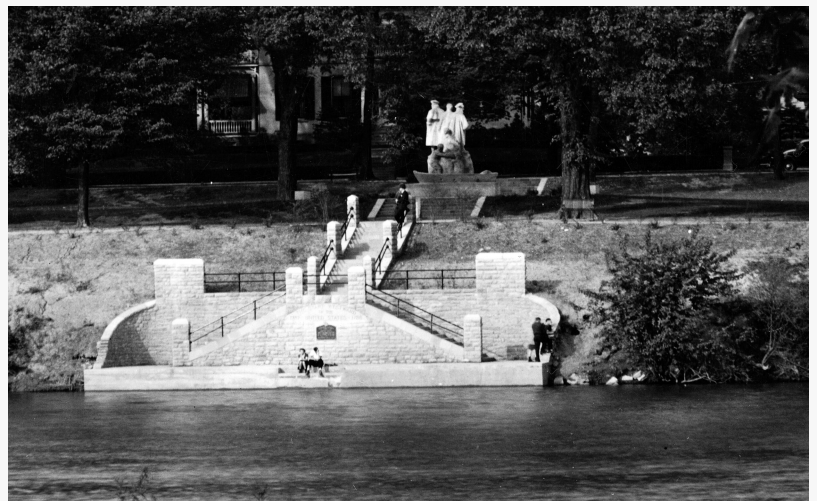
The sculpture is part of the National Memorial to the Start Westward of the United States, created by Gutzon Borglum, sculptor of Mount Rushmore. And this is where America's westward story began.

According to a [Marietta Times article](#) covering the June 19 Marietta City Council meeting, the city intends to move forward with plans to remove the original sculpture, citing deterioration concerns. Following discussions on Resolution 63 at the meeting, it was decided the sculpture would be placed in a "climate-controlled facility" during restoration, with "a bronze replica" installed "as a placeholder."

These recommendations were supported by a memo prepared by the same firm contracted to build the bronze replacement, McKay-Lodge Conservation Laboratory. The memo's recommendation to base the replica on a high-resolution scan of the existing sculpture suggests that a significant amount of original detail remains, raising questions about whether full replacement is necessary.



Start Westward Monument and Esplanade with Temporary Protective Cover



Start Westward Monument, 1938, view from the West Side.

The Marietta Times article covering the city council meeting noted a public comment from a resident who, “expressed concern over a May 12 memorandum from McKay Lodge Art Conservation Laboratory and questioned the objectivity of the firm due to a perceived financial interest in replacing the original sandstone sculpture with a bronze replica.”

The May 12 memo from McKay-Lodge Conservation Laboratory, the firm under contract with the city, cites “loss of sculptural detail” that “cannot be recreated” as a primary reason to replace the sculpture. Yet the same memo states that the proposed bronze replica would be “based on a precise 3D digital model” that would “restore the sculpture’s intended form and presence.”

Yet if the sculpture’s surface detail is irretrievably lost, as claimed, it raises questions about how a replica based on a scan could restore its original presence. Moreover, replacing the sandstone with bronze removes Borglum’s original hand entirely, something no material can replicate.

Ultimately, if the Memorial is intact enough to copy, it’s intact enough to save. While all parties agree that preserving the sculpture is the goal, the debate centers on how best to achieve it.

A letter from the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), dated Nov. 27, 2024 stated, “Removal of the sculpture from its historic location will result in an adverse effect on historic properties.”

The letter further advised that the City of Marietta should work with qualified consultants to minimize or mitigate adverse effects in adherence to the Federal Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This act mandates the assessment and identification of possible effects that actions may have on historically significant properties. It also states that public views and concerns about historic preservation issues must be considered when making final project decisions.

The Start Westward Memorial Society, with guidance from the Mount Rushmore Society and the National Park Service, has fought tirelessly to protect this monument in place, as it was meant to be seen, experienced, and remembered. The Society has been advised that moving the sculpture could cause irreparable harm and compromise the very artistry that has endured since 1938. Their board includes historians, preservationists, as well as the sculptor’s granddaughter, Robin Borglum Kennedy. In 2024, they engaged Historic Preservation Group, LLC to complete a comprehensive nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, correcting decades of under-documentation.

The story the Memorial tells is not one of conquest, but of courage. In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance established America’s first territory beyond the original thirteen colonies. It guaranteed civil liberties, banned slavery, and laid the foundation for five future states. The following year, in 1788, settlers from Massachusetts arrived by flatboat and established the first permanent settlement in that new land: Marietta, Ohio.

The monument honoring that journey was carved in 1937 from native sandstone during the Great Depression, funded in part by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It was one of the only commemorative sculptures commissioned by the WPA at a national scale, with involvement from Congress, the President, six states, and civic organizations like the American Legion, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated it in person in 1938, calling it a tribute to “one hundred and fifty years of Americanism.”

That legacy, and the values it embodies, live on in the stone itself.

As the idiom, “out of sight, out of mind,” may suggest, history cannot be appreciated when hidden away. However precisely cast, a replica lacks the historical weight of the original as well as the well-earned scars that time alone imparts. In a town that helped shape the American frontier, the monument’s presence is more than symbolic. It’s tangible.

To walk through Muskingum Park today is to experience that history firsthand. Children ride scooters past the sculpture’s base. Locals picnic beside it. Tourists pause in quiet reflection. The monument is not just a reminder of where America began—it is a part of the place where it began. For many in the community and beyond, that distinction matters.

Ways to Support Preservation

Citizens who wish to express their views on the importance of preserving the Start Westward sculpture in its original setting are encouraged to contact Ohio’s SHPO Section 106 staff directly via: <https://ncshpo.org/directory/ohio/>.

Visit startwestward1787.com to learn more about the effort or contact Joe Tucker, jtucker@pickeringusa.com, Vice President, Start Westward Memorial Society, and Chair of the Nomination of the Start Westward Memorial to the National Register of Historic Places Committee for more ways to support the preservation efforts.

About The Start Westward Memorial Society LLC

The Start Westward Memorial Society was founded on July 1, 2019, with guidance from the Mount Rushmore Society and the National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center. They provide private sector assistance to the Memorial’s owner, the State of Ohio. For more information, visit startwestward1787.com/.

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