

St Clair Brooks' Religious Freedom Monument

**The trip it took from Maury School to
Washington Avenue in 1976 and the discovery
of its hidden cement base, three decades later**

August 26, 2026

R. Kravetz



Falmouth stonemason St Clair Brooks, his wife, Emma, and children, Marion, about 4, and Herbert, in 1929, at their home on Butler Road, now located geographically within St Clair Brooks Park, South Stafford, Virginia

**St Clair and Emma, Marion,
Herbert, and two younger
siblings, perhaps around 1935?**

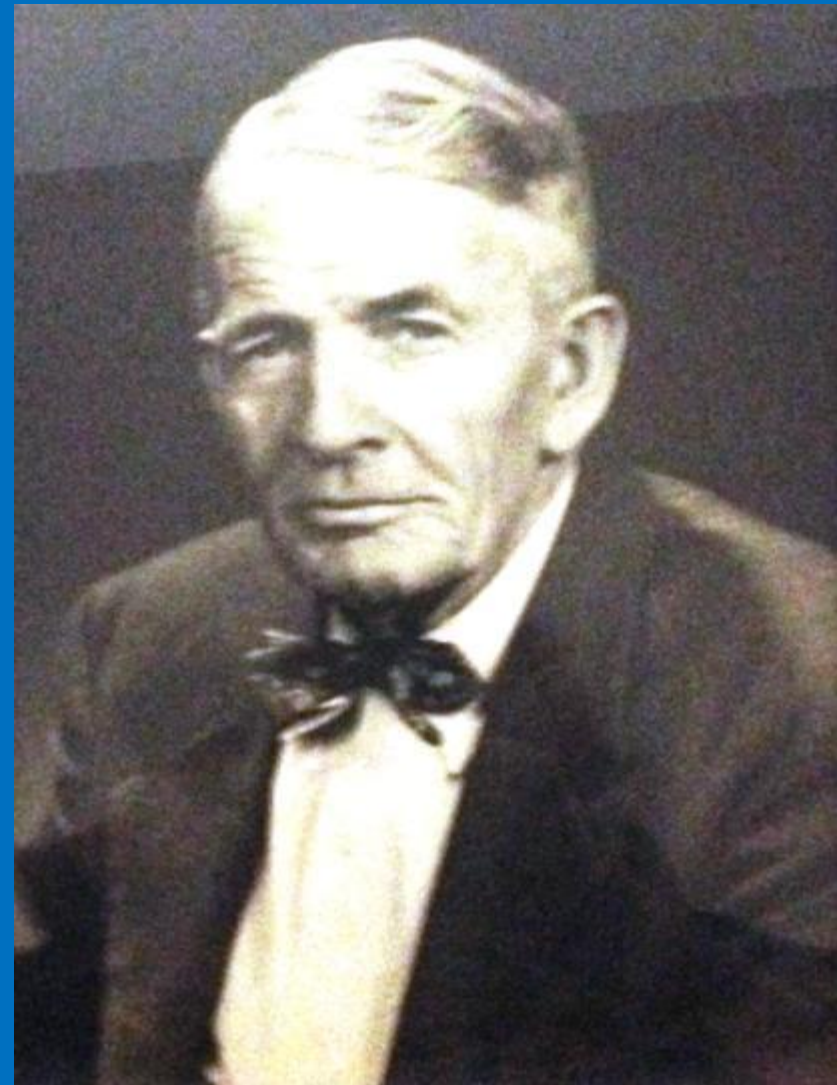




St Clair was boyhood friends with John Pratt, who was four years younger and later became chairman of General Motors. In 1931, Pratt became the last private owner of Chatham. He willed Chatham to the National Park Service at his death in 1975, already having carved out 75 acres along Butler Road in 1961 for a memorial park to his lifelong friend. The land surrounds the residence on Butler Road, just beyond the trees on the left. I believe it's been home to at least four generations of the family

P.S. St Clair spelled his first name without a period

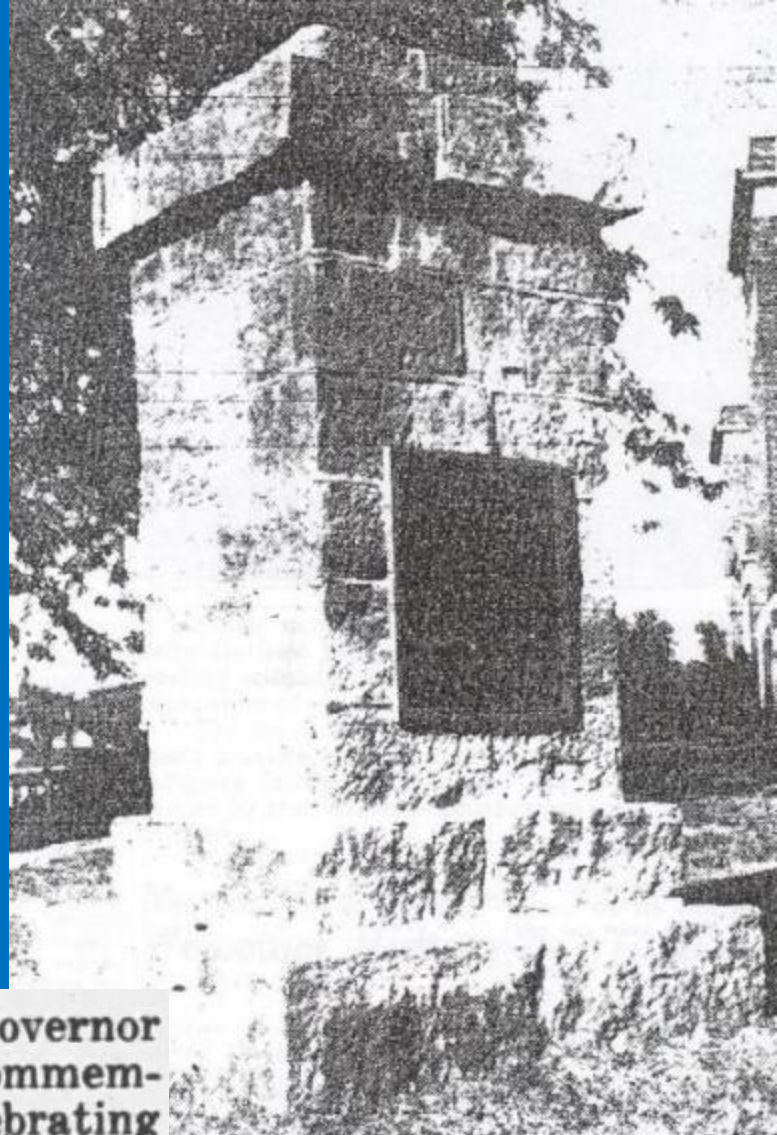
**December 2, 1883
– March 5, 1953**



**I repeat, St Clair spelled his first
name without a period**

St Clair built the monument at Maury School in 1932, where it was unveiled in October that year

It remained there until the 1976 Bicentennial, when it was moved to Washington Avenue, at a cost of about \$5000



Stone monument unveiled here Sunday by Governor John Garland Pollard as the climax of exercises commemorating religious life of George Washington and celebrating separation of church and state.

The monument situated on the high school campus was made possible by contributions from sixteen of the leading religious faiths in America. The bronze tablet was presented by the Virginia Conservation and Development Commission.

October 16, 1932



Sunday October 16, 1932
Columbus Day was the previous Wednesday, October 12, 1932



**Kurt Leidecker (1902-1991) MWC
Center for Asian Studies, Jefferson
Institute for Religious Studies
Recruited by Knights Gene Albrycht
and Don Hildebrand to ask City
Council to move the monument**



Staff photo by Roman Lykowsky

A change of scene

The top column of the Religious Freedom Monument was moved to its new site on Washington Avenue yesterday to await the transfer of its heavy stone pedestal from the Maury School grounds after a concrete foundation is also poured at the new site. By Jan. 13 the relocated monument is due to be ready for the 200th anniversary of the drafting

of the Act of Religious Freedom in Fredericksburg, which it commemorates. A new bronze plaque on its south face will be unveiled at that time. Garden clubs are also planning to landscape the 44-year-old monument when it's in place, midway between the First Christian Church and the Mary Washington obelisk (in background at right).

Free Lance-Star December 3, 1976: The monument was being relocated to Washington Avenue for the Bicentennial

PROGRAM

The Thomas Jefferson Bicentennial

FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

JANUARY 13, 1977



SPONSORS

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, INC.

and

THE FREDERICKSBURG AREA
BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13, 1977

PUBLIC GATHERING ORDER OF EXERCISES

North end of Washington Boulevard mall in front of relocated "Freedom Monument"; in case of inclement weather, inside adjacent First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), courtesy of Rev. E. Elwood Campbell.

3:00 P. M.

ASSEMBLING of participant individuals, organizations and youth groups around their standard

3:15 P. M.

RINGING OF CHURCH BELLS of Presbyterian Church:
Miss Sally Rowe

3:30 P. M.

WORDS OF WELCOME: Dr. Kurt F. Leidecker, Director,
The Thomas Jefferson Institute

INVOCATION: Rev. Vincent S. Sikora, St. Mary's Roman
Catholic Church

PROCLAMATION: Rev. Lawrence A. Davies, Mayor of
the City of Fredericksburg

RECOGNITION BY MILLS E. GODWIN, JR., GOVERNOR OF
THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA: Charles M. Hearn,
President, Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc.

~~P~~RESENTATION OF COLORS: Knights of Columbus

~~S~~TAR-SPANGLED BANNER: James Monroe High School Band,
Ronald Jordan, Director

ROLL CALL OF FAITH: Christian and non-Christian

ECUMENICAL RESPONSE: Rev. James G. Cobb, Christ
Lutheran Church, President Fredericksburg Ministerial
Association

ROLL CALL OF YOUTH GROUPS

The first of what would be yearly Religious Freedom celebrations occurred there January 13, 1977, essentially the last event of the bicentennial "year"

RESPONSE: Dr. Robert C. Haynes, Superintendent of
Fredericksburg City Schools

*MESSAGE OF GERALD R. FORD, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA:* Representative J. Kenneth
Robinson, Seventh District

FLOURISH

TRIBUTE TO JUDGE ALVIN T. EMBREY: Dr. Ronald E.
Shibley, Executive Director, Historic Fredericksburg
Foundation, Inc.

UNVEILING OF PLAQUE: Dr. Kurt F. Leidecker assisted
by Mayor Lawrence A. Davies and members of the City
Council

READING OF PLAQUE: Josiah P. Rowe, III, former
Mayor of the City of Fredericksburg

PLACING OF BOUQUET: Mrs. A. Wilson Embrey, III,
President, Council of Garden Clubs

BENEDICTION: Rev. Charles R. Sydnor, St. George's
Episcopal Church

ADJOURNMENT: Band Music



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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RELOCATION OF FREEDOM MONUMENT
Daniel W. Mitchell

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Marion Brooks Robinson and Cathy Kravetz at the yearly Knights parade, January 12, 2003

**Conversations
with Marion
Brooks Robinson
over the years
Cathy and I
accompanied her
to the celebrations**

St Clair Brooks' daughter, Marion, was still teaching Sunday School at Falmouth Baptist Church when the monument her father took her to see in 1932 was moved to Washington Avenue.

Years later, she told me: "He said it was important since it wasn't just about freedom to worship as you choose, but that it wasn't anyone else's business". I told Marion her father must have thought she was pretty smart for an almost 7 year old. She replied "He DID!"

Marion Brooks Robinson died age 92,
March 28, 2018.

Robert Kravetz



**January 16,
Mr. Clark,
site manager**

April 27, Dr. Kravetz

**Excavation of the
uppermost part of the
base of 1932 site during
renovation of Maury
School, 2007**



**My 2007 letter to Mrs.
Diana Tansill, a
director of the Heritage
Center, about the
remaining cement base
of the monument at
Maury School**

**Mr. Clark was site
superintendent for the
parking lot renovations**

Dear Mrs. Tansill,

I am attaching six jpegs and a word document about Marion [Brooks Robinson]. Now that I think of it, I'll also send you a picture of Marion and my wife Cathy at one of the recent religious freedom celebrations. Mr. Clark and I calculated that the cement base, at 20 tons, weighed just about the same as the monument itself. Each is about 265 cubic feet (cement, in the case of the base, and granite, in the case of the monument.) The base measures 6x6x4 1/2 feet, and would likely have remained unidentifiable without the history. Our hint that it was there was the small portion visible before the excavation. Marion and her daughter visited Maury to see the base just before it was again covered over, a few months ago. The monument, now on Washington Avenue, is over 11 feet tall.

Robert Kravetz

Marion sat with us on the risers for the last time on January 10, 2016, at age 90. It was the 239th anniversary celebration, and 83 years since St Clair had first shown and explained it to her. He thought she was pretty smart for an almost 7 year old...

Marion Brooks
Robinson
September 5, 1925 –
March 28, 2018

