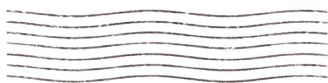
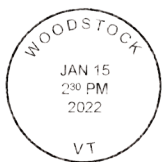




## LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK



## Who You Gonna Call?

*Rolf Diamant*

**Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park** in Cornish, New Hampshire, is the late-19th-century home and studios of American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Discreetly tucked into a forested ridge overlooking the pastoral Connecticut River Valley, Saint-Gaudens is a relatively small, eastern outpost

**OVERLEAF** Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park called in a crew of National Park Service experts to repair the physical damage when vandals attacked the park’s “Temple Monument.” NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

of a national park system best known for its predominantly western imagery. Found throughout the park’s hillside landscape of terraced flower gardens and graceful studio buildings are copies of several of the artist’s most evocative monuments and memorials. It is impossible not to feel at peace strolling down a path flanked by an allée of maturing birch trees or sitting on the wide veranda of the “Little Studio” overlooking the valley.

Many years ago I participated in a number of regional National Park Service (NPS) superintendents’ meetings convened on this veranda. As we sat under the shade of its grape trellis discussing our business it was hard not to gaze down the sloping hillside to the dark green valley of the Connecticut River framed on its distant shore by Vermont’s purple and blue mountains. Denis Galvin, former NPS deputy director, who knows a thing or two about national parks, thought of Saint-Gaudens as a perfect definition of “sense of place.”

So, it was more than a little jarring last fall to come across the classical funerary “Temple Monument” located down the hill and away from the main campus—marking the burial site of the sculptor and his family— and see it scarred by pink spray paint and black Sharpies. An anonymous late-night raid had taken place just a few days earlier, leaving

the monument defaced with crude Nazi and anti-Semitic symbols and language, including a misspelled “Hail Hitler.” (Probably the work of local teens who were not at the top of their history class; perhaps they confused the Nazi greeting with the Roman “Hail Caesar.”) Of course, national park properties have been defaced before. No doubt Washington’s National Capital Parks and New York City’s National Parks of New York Harbor have seen more than their share of urban vandalism. But this was Saint-Gaudens, in a small, quiet New England town where people take care of their commons, and it was deeply unsettling—like seeing your own home defaced.

In this 27th Letter From Woodstock, it is difficult not to take a more cynical view of what could be dismissed as juvenile hooliganism. It feels like we are seeing a disturbing erosion of normative behavior across America. In our body politic, violent rhetoric begets physical violence. Both create a permissive climate for truly outrageous behavior that otherwise might be self-censored. This was not the first time late-night vandalism had been inflicted on Saint-Gaudens such as overturning planters on Halloween. Some would say that graffiti is graffiti, just kids being kids. But this was not tagging a bridge abutment with the initials of someone’s girlfriend. This desecration was a hateful and offensive attack on a national park—on a creation of democracy and a singular representation of national unity and comity. Whoever did this, took their cue from hateful and offensive adult behavior, all too pervasive on social media and in today’s toxic, anti-government political culture.

**LEFT TO RIGHT** Shaw Memorial ROLF DIAMANT | Birch allée NORA MITCHELL | Little Studio NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



“We were heartbroken to discover this act of vandalism,” park superintendent Rick Kendall declared on Facebook, “and we condemn both the act and the language used. We are already working with National Park Service conservators to carefully restore the monument.” In fact, the day we first saw the damage, we met three of these conservators, Margaret Breuker, Naomi Kroll, and Karen Fix, already hard at work. The trio are with the National Park Service’s Historic Architecture, Conservation, and Engineering Center (HACE). Based at Lowell National Historical Park, this group of preservation architects, conservators, historians, and engineers provide technical assistance to NPS sites and, on occasion, to other historic properties throughout the Northeast. Their specialized services have been sought by national parks as far away as Alaska. Most national parks, regardless of their size, cannot keep such an array of professionals on staff. When a park has a need for their assistance, whether for a long-planned project or when faced with a sudden emergency, HACE can help. So, when Superintendent Kendall and his staff woke up that morning last October to discover the desecration of the Temple Monument, without hesitation Kendall immediately reached for the phone and called his NPS colleagues at HACE.

In many cases, depending upon the nature of the material that has been defaced, responding to vandalism of this nature can be exceedingly time critical. Here, the longer the graffiti had remained untreated, the deeper the pigments would have penetrated into the monument’s porous white

marble. With each passing day it becomes more difficult to reverse the damage. By the time Kendall could write and bid a contract for an outside vendor to come in, it might already be far too late. Fortunately for Kendall, on the other end of the phone was HACE senior conservator Margaret Breuker, who quickly mobilized a team, packed some supplies, and drove directly to Saint-Gaudens, two hours away.

Breuker graduated from Columbia University with a MSc in Historic Preservation with an emphasis on monument and archaeological site preservation. She was later a Kress Fellow at Harvard University, where she studied the biodeterioration of cultural materials. Breuker now has 20 years of experience working on National Park Service collections from Maine to Virginia, including decorative, archaeological, and utilitarian objects; historic house interiors; and outdoor monuments. “What we do is what objects conservators do in a museum,” explained Breuker, “but we do it on a large scale ... climate monitoring, integrated pest management, collections care, anything that would have to do with objects that the National Park Service owns.” Breuker seems to have worked everywhere, conserving every kind of collection, from the fragile painted screens acquired in Japan in the late 19th century and preserved at Longfellow House Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site, to all the early 20th-century plaques and markers laid down along Acadia National Park’s historic trail system.

LEFT TO RIGHT Blow-Me-Down Farm OPERA NORTH | Farm barn NATIONAL PARK SERVICE | Rehabilitated 18th-century farmhouse NATIONAL PARK SERVICE





Repair of the “Temple Monument,” and the monument after treatment. ALL PHOTOS NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Joining Breuker on her drive up from Lowell was conservator Karen Fix, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania’s Historic Preservation Program who also completed a post-graduate internship with the Getty Conservation Institute. Fix specializes in the conservation of outdoor sculpture and architecture. Driving up from HACE’s New York City satellite office to join Breuker and Fix, and round out the team, was Naomi Kroll. A graduate of the Conservation Center at NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts, Kroll like Breuker is a senior conservator with over 20 years’ NPS experience. She recently worked on removing spray paint graffiti from both the classical columns of New York’s Federal Hall National Memorial at the foot of Wall Street, and the statue of George Washington taking his first presidential oath of office, prominently mounted on the memorial’s steps.

Once on site at Saint-Gaudens, the team examined the vandalized Temple Monument with park curator Henry Duffy, and after some discussion set to work. They began with initial chemical cleaning, using custom-mixed solvent poultices and also commercial graffiti removers. They also considered using laser ablation, an approach borrowed from medical tech-

nology associated with the field of dermatology, pioneered through an unusual partnership between Massachusetts General Hospital and Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Knowing that lasers are better suited to removing thicker graffiti that is still on the top surface of stone, the team instead opted to try another state-of-the-art technique, a soft abrasive (calcium carbonate) directed with compressed air onto the marble at extremely low pressure (10–20 PSI, pounds per square inch) to gently remove the remaining paint from the monument’s surface. It was slow painstaking work, but gradually the crudely drawn SS and swastika markings began to lighten, and, finally, all but disappear.

Several days after meeting Breuker and Kroll at the Temple Monument, I caught up with both again at an outdoor evening gathering to honor retiring park curator Duffy. The event was held at Blow-Me-Down Farm, a part of the park, situated on the banks of the Connecticut River (currently being transformed by non-profit partners into a regional center for the performing arts.)

That evening, Nora Mitchell and I were pleased to join Superintendent Kendall, park staff, and special guests (including Breuker and Kroll) to applaud Duffy's remarkable 30-year career at Saint-Gaudens. All the people present—rangers, administrators, gardeners, museum technicians, resource managers, interns, park alums and friends—had been carefully following the HACE recovery team's progress. All were confident that there would be no lasting scars on this national treasure entrusted to their care.

As the sun slowly set, Breuker, Kroll, Mitchell, and I found ourselves deep in conversation. We talked about the role of the George Wright Society in connecting and supporting park professionals and growing interest in *Parks Stewardship Forum* (PSF). In fact, Breuker and Kroll have now been recruited as guest editors for a special September 2022 PSF issue focusing on museum conservation and climate change. Brushing aside the growing darkness and a few lingering late summer mosquitoes, the four of us discussed what it means for NPS to really function as a service, and the strength drawn not only from the breadth of the agency's knowledge base, but also from the experience and commitment of its people. We reminisced about

the creation of HACE and several sister Northeast technical centers in the 1980s and 1990s, including the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation which Mitchell, as founding director, and I were deeply involved with. These centers were established with the strong support of Northeast Regional Director Marie Rust. Rust had the foresight and fortitude to develop these professional centers at a time when several of her fellow regional directors looked askance on such a non-conventional investment in personnel. Not surprisingly, over time national parks in nearly every region would call on these centers for help—with increasing frequency now as the parks need specialized skills to recover from natural disasters and emergencies precipitated by climate change.

As darkness fell, we all raised one final glass acknowledging that, despite repeated NPS reorganizations, consolidations, and downsizings—and the seemingly irrepressible siren song of privatization—these centers still survive.

Rick Kendall was certainly thankful for that.

All of us should be.



*The views expressed in Parks Stewardship Forum editorial columns are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the University of California, the Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity, or the George Wright Society.*



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#### On the cover of this issue

The precipitous rock spires of Meteora World Heritage Site in Greece have a complex geological history. Over the centuries a number of Eastern Orthodox monasteries were built atop them, and today's World Heritage Site recognizes this cultural history as part of the overall geoheritage. | [STATHIS FLOROS](#)