

Timeline

1778-1780

The City of Louisville (Kentucky) was named after Louis XVI (1754-1793), King of France, because of his support of the American Colonies during the Revolutionary War. The French King is also symbolized by the fleur-de-lis on the city flag. French names were the trend, with examples including Louisburg, Nova Scotia and Louisiana.

1793

Louis XVI was executed during the French Revolution.

c.1816-1829

Marie-Thérèse, daughter of Louis XVI, commissioned the statue of her late father as a gift to the city of Montpellier, as early as 1816, in her efforts to restore the Bourbon monarchy. The statue was completed in 1829 and placed in Montpellier's public square.

1830

After less than one year in the public square, the statue was removed and placed in storage. With a new branch of the royal Bourbon family on the throne, the statue represented the prior ruling branch that had fallen out of favor.

1899

The statue was rediscovered in storage during an inventory of a military facility, in damaged condition including a broken arm. The statue passed from the French military to the city's Mayor and to a university museum. The statue was moved to the basement of a municipal archives building.

1966

After 136 years in storage in Montpellier, the statue was offered as a gift to Louisville. The statue was transported to the U.S. aboard a Navy ship, the USS Aldebaran, arriving first in Norfolk, Virginia and then transported by train to Louisville. Then Mayor Kenneth A. Schmied worked with a committee to determine the location for the statue.

June 1967

Jefferson Fiscal Court passed a resolution regarding the location for the statue. The resolution passed, despite confusion over whether the statue portrayed Louis XIV or Louis XVI.

July 17, 1967

The statue was unveiled and dedicated by officials and dignitaries representing both Montpellier and Louisville. The statue was first installed on the west lawn of Metro Hall, across

from the 6th Street entrance of City Hall. It was moved to its present location at the corner of 6th and Jefferson in 1973.

The statue received mixed reviews according to Courier Journal reporting at the time.

1974

Minor restoration to the statue to repair a lost foot took place

2004

The statue had a significant restoration and an event celebrating its 250th birthday. Venus Bronze Works provided the assessment and conservation services. The assessment stated that the statue “suffered from being in an outdoor environment...stone weathering and erosion due to atmospheric pollution and acidic deposition.” The assessment further described structural cracks evident in the statue. The cost of the restoration was \$29,500, which was paid by the city.

December 2017

The Courier-Journal publishes a front-page story about the statue, with the headline [“Everything You Need to Know About Louisville’s Most Famous Re-gift.”](#)

May – August 2020

The statue sustained significant damage, including a hand broken during a protest in response to the death of Breonna Taylor and a local and national racial justice movement. There were multiple incidents of vandalism involving spray paint. After being vandalized, the statue was overcleaned, which damaged the surface of the marble and contributed to possible structural instability throughout the sculpture.

September 3, 2020

Due to severe damage and concern for public safety, the statue was removed and located in a Metro storage space until further assessment.

Present

Initial assessment from experts indicate that the statue has sustained severe damage, which may indicate structural instability. Local experts consulted were not able to provide restoration services due to the severity of the damage. Metro staff are actively exploring regional conservation experts on the feasibility and potential cost of restoration work.

Sources:

Louisville Metro Public Art Archives

Altrusa Club of Louisville. *Cut, Cast, Carved*. Louisville, KY: Altrusa Club of Louisville, Inc., and Louisville Area Chamber of Commerce, 1974: 10.

Altrusa Club of Louisville. *Who's Who of Cut, Cast, Carved*. Louisville, Kentucky: Altrusa Club of Louisville, Inc., and Louisville Area Chamber of Commerce, 1978: 46-48.

Gabet, Charles and Louis Charles Des Champs. *Dictionnaire des Artistes de L'ecole Francaise au XIXe Siecle*. 672-673.

Meadows, Lori. "Sculpture." *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*. John E. Kleber, ed. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001: 793-795.

Tihany, Leslie C., "Louis XVI in Louisville: Background and History of a Statue, 1793-1967", *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Volume 73, January 1999, No.1.

Williams, Caroline. *Louisville Scenes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday And Company, Inc., 1970 :90-91.

Courier-Journal:

"Statue of City's Namesake On Its Way to Louisville." *Courier-Journal*, November 25, 1966.

"City Looking for Place to Put Statue of Louis." *Courier-Journal*, November 26, 1966.

"Statue Due Today; Interim Home Found." *Courier-Journal*, December 15, 1966.

Lansdell, Sarah. "The Life & Hard Times of Louis XVI (His Statue)." *Courier-Journal*, May 21, 1967.

Loomis, Ken. "Meandering Monarch's Travels to End." *Courier-Journal*, June 7, 1967.

"Louis to Take Place on His Pedestal Today." *Courier-Journal*, July 15, 1967.

"Louisville, Montpellier: How They Became 'Twins.'" *Courier-Journal*, July 16, 1967.

"Long Live the King." *Courier-Journal*, July 18, 1967.

"Everything to know about Louisville's most famous regift: The King Louis XVI statue", Matthew Glowicki, *Courier-Journal*, December 26, 2017.