Salvador Dalí’s name has become virtually synonymous with Surrealism. While his exploits in Paris, New York, and other international centers have been seemingly exhaustively documented, little has been published on the artist’s surprising relationship with the Capitol of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.

On March 17, 1966, the front page of the Richmond News Leader announced that Salvador Dalí had proposed a monument to Captain Sally Tompkins as part of the city’s recently resurrected plan to extend Monument Avenue.

Figure 1. Captain Peter J. Moore, Dalí’s “military advisor,” in front of the Jefferson Davis Memorial on Monument Avenue with the artist’s pet ocelot, Babou, during a site visit related to Dalí’s proposed monument to Captain Sally Tompkins. The photograph appeared in the 4 April 1966 edition of the Richmond News-Leader. (Photo: Courtesy Richmond Times-Dispatch)
Avenue’s Confederate memorial theme with seven additional statues.

Known for its grand monuments to Virginia-born Confederate heroes, Richmond’s Monument Avenue features traditional equestrian statues of Robert E. Lee (Antonin Mercié, 1890); J.E.B. Stuart (Frederick Moynihan, 1907); and Stonewall Jackson (Frederick William Sievers, 1919); as well as Edward Valentine’s monument to Confederate President Jefferson Davis (1907); and Sievers’ monument to Matthew Fontaine Maury (1929), oceanographer and Chief of Sea Coast, River, and Harbor Defenses for the Confederacy. The seven additional statues envisioned in the 1965 plan would never come to pass. Many years after Dalí’s doomed monument to Captain Sally alarmed the city’s Confederate faithful, however, artist Paul Di Pasquale’s 1996 monument to African American tennis player Arthur Ashe would put an end to the Confederate monopoly on Monument Avenue with the first African American man, not the first Confederate woman.

Monument Avenue with the first African American man, not the first Confederate woman.

Born in Matthews County in 1833 to a wealthy family, Sally Tompkins moved to Richmond after the death of her father. At the age of twenty-eight, she witnessed wounded Confederate soldiers pouring into the city where there were not enough hospitals to care for them. She prevailed upon Judge John Robertson to offer his home at Third and Main for use as a private hospital that she maintained at her own expense with her inheritance. As a biographer for the United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine described it, “With her medicine chest strapped to her side and her Bible in her hands, she flitted from duty to duty, ever ready to ease pain or relieve a distressed soul.” When the 1862 Act to Provide for the Sick and Wounded of the Army in the Hospitals was passed, Sally and her many admirers found themselves in a difficult situation. In an effort to insure an efficient hospital system for the care of the wounded, the act required that all private hospitals close and that all public hospitals be administered by Confederate officers. The law was circumvented by commissioning Sally a Captain in the Cavalry. In this way, she became our country’s first female army officer and a Confederate heroine.

Just a few weeks after the News Leader’s March 1966 announcement of Dalí’s proposal, Captain J. Peter Moore, self-described “military adviser” to Dalí, arrived in Richmond to survey Monument Avenue and to meet with members of the statue committee, headed by Roland Reynolds, research and development director of Eskimo Pie Corporation, then a subsidiary of the Reynolds Metals Company (fig. 1).

Moore told reporters, “Dalí sees [Captain Sally] as a kind of modern St. George and the dragon. The facial likeness would be as near as possible to Captain Sally, but the form of the actual body would depend on whether she wore a uniform or not. And she would probably carry a shield inscribed with the Confederate flag.” “Probably the dragon will be an enlarged microbe of some kind, not the standard dragon of medieval times.” Moore went on to say that it would probably be cast in aluminum, pointing out that it could be anodized to any color one
wanted. On April 27, the News Leader reported that, in subsequent communication with the committee, Dalí had indicated that the statue’s pedestal would be a twenty-foot model of the artist’s little finger.

Wayne M. Usry, whose advertising agency had Reynolds’s Eskimo Pie account, was asked by Reynolds to create drawings of the proposal for his committee’s consideration (fig. 2). While media accounts of the day attributed these drawings to Usry, in fact, they were done by Usry’s art director, Bill Wynne (now deceased). In reviewing news reports of the period, one senses that already Dalí’s proposal was in trouble, for even as Reynolds revealed the first rendering of Dalí’s proposal to reporters on April 27, he added, “But we haven’t decided who will do the statue yet.” He showed reporters two other proposals, these from committee members and also rendered by Wynne, with a decidedly more conservative bent (figs. 3 and 4). Both proposals featured a thirteen-sided base, representing the thirteen states of the Confederacy. One showed Captain Sally holding a dying soldier; the other, her giving water to a soldier. Both proposals had more than a touch of a Pietà in them. Sally was being cast as a selfless mother to the holy cause.

The next day, the committee announced its intention to organize an open competition for the commission, and the News Leader’s coverage began with the suggestion that “local sculptors may soon be competing with Salvador Dalí” for the project. Ed Grimsley, in his front-page article in the April 28 Richmond Times-Dispatch titled “Dalí’s Plan for Statue Given Cool Reception,” was more direct in his assessment of the situation. “At this point, it is safe to say that Dalí is not on the best of terms with the group of Richmonders attempting to encourage the erection of a statue to Captain Tompkins.... Dalí’s preliminary concept for the statue does not appeal to the group.” Grimsley revealed that “General Edwin P. Conquest, a member of the group, was horrified by the Dalí drawing. ‘Are we erecting a monument to Sally or Dalí?’ he wondered. ‘If this is what we’re going to put up, I won’t have anything to do with it.’”

Figure 3, above right. Bill Wynne. Presentation Drawing for Alternative Proposals for Monument to Captain Sally Tompkins, 1966, ink on paper. (Photo: Courtesy Estate of Bill Wynne. Photo by Matthew Koledziej)

Figure 4, right. Bill Wynne. Presentation Drawing for Alternative Proposals for Monument to Captain Sally Tompkins, 1966, ink on paper. (Photo: Courtesy Estate of Bill Wynne. Photo by Matthew Koledziej)

Figure 5, opposite. Salvador Dali painting in front of the Hampton Manor, Bowling Green, VA, 1941. Published in Life magazine, April 1941. (Photo: Courtesy Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images. Photo by Eric Schaal)
Conquest’s objections to the Dalí proposal were, I suspect, critical to its ultimate failure. As Grimsley pointed out, Conquest had actually known Tompkins, although she had died fifty years earlier. Taking its cue from Conquest’s previously quoted comment, an editorial in the next day’s *Times-Dispatch* titled “Sally and Dalí” suggested, “Dalí is about as suitable an artist to do a statue of Confederate Captain Sally Tompkins on Monument Avenue as Cleopatra would be as a candidate for halfback on the Green Bay Packers.” In less than two weeks, Conquest himself would be dead. The true extent of his influence over the fate of the project was suggested in a memorial resolution adopted by the City Planning Commission at its meeting on May 16, 1966. General Conquest, the resolution noted, had served as chairman of the City Planning Commission from February 1955 through January 1963.

In fact, neither Dalí nor Sally grace Monument Avenue these thirty-odd years later, but the memory is indeed persistent. In May of 1997, at Richmond’s Firehouse Theater, writer Harry Kollatz, Jr. presented his play, *The Persistence of Memory*, which revolves around the events just described. Kollatz, as staff writer for *Richmond Magazine*, had published a brief article on the would-be monument in May of 1995. A 1989 column in the *News Leader* had resurrected the story as well. Yet, while the story has not lacked for publicity, most of the important historical questions have remained unanswered. The circumstances under which the project to honor Tompkins evolved, for example, remain undocumented. Likewise, it has never been explained exactly how Dalí came to be involved in such an unlikely commission. Finally, the reason that Dalí chose the theme of St. George and the Dragon to represent Tompkins seems most peculiar of all. With the aid of old news clippings, a few documents from the files of the late Louis Reynolds, and an interview with Captain J. Peter Moore, Dalí’s advance man for the 1966 project, however, some tentative answers can be found.

In November of 1965, the City of Richmond Planning Commission was presented by staff with a study it had previously requested, *Design for Monument Avenue—1965*. A meeting was held on 6 December of that year for the purpose of soliciting public comment. Among the many interested citizens offering suggestions was Roland Reynolds, whose letter to the editor of the *Times-Dispatch* dated 17 December 1966—and headlined “Keep It Confederate But Keep It Virginian”—offered a list of prospective honorées for the avenue. Included in Mr. Reynolds’ list were eight Confederate luminaries, all male. Sally Tompkins was not among them. A copy of the letter was sent to Mr. Robert Hill of the City Planning Commission with a note from Reynolds referring to a conversation they had had a few days earlier and a request that Hill contact him “if you think there is anything we can do in the aluminum line.”

One month later, on the 17th of January 1966, Reynolds appeared before the City Planning Commission at its monthly meeting making an offer of 1,000 pounds of aluminum to be used for a future statue on Monument Avenue. As the meeting minutes note, “Mr. Reynolds advocated a statue to Confederate women, Sally Tompkins, in particular, and outlined briefly Miss Tompkins’ service to the Confederacy.” To what Mr. Reynolds owed his suddenly elevated consciousness, I cannot say, but it is clear that the idea to honor Tompkins emerged sometime between his December 17th letter to the editor and the January 17 meeting the next month. Quite probably, Reynolds encountered at least one Daughter of the Confederacy during his holiday party rounds.

The campaigns to appropriately recognize and honor Tompkins seem to have begun shortly after her death in 1916. In 1925, following a three-year campaign, the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of the Confederacy joined forces to erect an eight-foot monument of white Virginia granite at her previously unmarked grave in Matthews County. In January 1959, the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy announced their plan to erect a Confederate flag, pole and base with an inscription to her at their Richmond headquarters on Boulevard. In 1961, St. James Church in Richmond, where Tompkins had been a member, dedicated its last stained glass window to her memory. And, at Fort McPherson, an Army base in Atlanta, Tompkins Lane is a short, dead-end street dedicated to her memory.

While Sally’s history and that of the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s campaigns to suitably commemorate her are amply documented, there is no mention in the literature as to exactly how Salvador Dalí became involved with the project. A curious document in the files of the late Louis Reynolds, father of the also-deceased Roland Reynolds, reveals that during the same holiday period in the winter of 1965-66 when Roland discovered Confederate heroines—and Captain Sally, in particular—his father was meeting with Dalí in New York about a proposal to build a “Daliland” theme park. The document refers to a January 4 meeting in New York at which this proposed theme park was discussed, and it outlines a schedule of payments from the partners as well as subsequent deliveries of two sets of three watercolor studies each for attractions Dalí had conceived for the park. A December 1996 conversation with Captain J. Peter Moore confirmed a comment made to me earlier by Mr. Louis Reynolds’s former secretary, Betty R. Williams, regarding land that the elder Reynolds owned in Florida—and Disney’s interest in it for the then-yet-to-be-built Walt Disney World park in Florida. Moore suggested that the elder Reynolds was perhaps trying to gain some leverage in concurrent negotiations with Disney with the Daliland...
scheme. According to Moore, Dalíland was the elder Reynolds’s idea, offered up over cocktails at the St. Regis Hotel in New York where both Dalí and Reynolds were staying.14

I was unable to locate any of the actual Dalí watercolors referred to in the contract, so one can only guess as to how far off the fiction is from the truth. Strangely enough, in Ian Gibson’s 1998 book on the artist, it was revealed that Dalí had proposed a similar project (also unrealized) in 1931—a Surrealist pleasure park that would include a hollow globe providing visitors with the illusion of re-entering their mother’s womb.15

More pertinent to the subject at hand, however, is Moore’s claim that it was the elder Reynolds who approached Dalí about the Monument Avenue proposal as well — also at the bar of the St. Regis. It is very likely that Louis Reynolds recalled Dalí’s work as a Virginia resident in 1940 and 1941, which included at least five paintings—shown in his 1941 New York show at Julian Levy Gallery — and an outdoor installation created for the cameras of newsreel crews and Life magazine. It was at Hampton Manor, near Bowling Green, that Dalí wrote his autobiography, The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí.

Other houseguests at the time included Anais Nin and Henry Miller. It is clear from the many letters that appeared in the Richmond News Leader and Times-Dispatch in the spring of 1966 that memories of Dalí’s flying piano and half-submerged mannequins on the grounds of Hampton Manor were still vivid for many readers. A month before Dalí and his wife Gala arrived in Richmond in the flesh, Dalí’s set and costumes for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo’s production of Bacchanale—for which Dalí had also prepared the scenario—shocked Richmonders when they graced the stage of the Mosque on March 9, 1940. The Richmond News-Leader declared:

Figure 6. Dalí’s Enchanted Garden at Hampton Manor, 1941. (Photo: Courtesy of Virginia Chamber of Commerce Collection, The Library of Virginia)
The dance may be expressive of every emotion, but sadism is unpleasant in whatever guise one observes it, and “Bacchanale” was the sophistication of sadism in scenario, costume, design, and choreography. It is possible to say that even if it does perfectly express all that its program calls for, there is much that, disavowing even a shade of Puritanism, and a complete recognition of Freud in the scheme of things as they are one does not care to have introduced in the form of esthetic entertainment.16

Dance historian Jack Anderson was more direct in his account of the production:

Prudish audiences blushed to behold the male ensemble with large red lobsters (as sex symbols) on their tights, and Nini Theilade, portraying Venus, created a sensation because she seemed totally nude. In actuality she wore flesh colored tights from her neck to her toes.17

Indeed, the Dalí had lived at the Jeffersonian Hampton Manor near Bowling Green from August of 1940 through April of 1941. (While many accounts pass the mansion off as an actual Jefferson building, it was built in 1847 by John Hampton DeJarnette.) Their hostess, the American, Caresse Crosby, had been a friend and patron of theirs ten years earlier in Paris, where she had lived before the war, running a small, but very influential press, the Black Sun Press, which had published first editions of Hart Crane, James Joyce, and T. S. Elliot. She had gained another type of fame even earlier as the inventor of the modern brassiere in 1913. It was she who had convinced the reluctant Dalí to make his first trip to America in 1934. In 1940, at Gala’s request, she provided a letter indicating that Dalí was required in Virginia to collaborate on the publication of his memoirs for her new press; this letter was subsequently used by Dalí in his application for a visa he needed to flee the Nazis.18

Numerous stories in the local Richmond papers as well as stories in Life, Harper’s Bazaar, and The New Yorker offer a glimpse of this little-known period.19 For Life’s cameras, a bull was coaxed into the parlor to create a suitably surreal photo opportunity. Dalí also staged a tableau vivant for the canvas and the Life cameras that he called The Effect of Seven Negroes, a Black Piano, and Two Black Pigs on the Snow (fig. 5).

Among his many projects in Virginia during those seven months at Hampton Manor, Dalí “enchanted” the garden (fig. 6). Crosby had announced that this enchanted garden would be featured as part of the Garden Week tours in the spring of 1941, with the profits going to charity, but the plan never seems to have materialized. Two other works created during that period show a more discernible Virginia influence. As Richmond Times-Dispatch writer Parke Rouse, Jr. pointed out, “Spiders—That’s What Fascinates Dalí Most About Virginia.” “Future chroniclers of the little Spaniard’s art will note the sudden injection of this common garden insect into Dalí’s subconscious during the half year that he lived in Virginia.”20 Indeed in Daddy Long Legs of the Evening...Hope! of 1941 (fig. 7), we see a spider as well as the characteristic Dalí ants crawling over the profile of the artist’s head that...
hangs from the soft figure draped over the tree branch. And as with the installation at Hampton Manor, a musical instrument is included here as well, in this case a violin. This picture was the first to be purchased by Eleanor and Reynolds Morse, Dalí’s greatest American collectors, and the founders of the Salvador Dalí Museum now in Florida. In a BBC television documentary, however, the picture is discussed briefly by Mrs. Morse with no mention at all of Virginian spiders. At the Dalí Museum, the spider is French! According to Eleanor Morse,

Daddy Long Legs was also the first picture that was painted entirely in America. This painting is a war painting. And as you see, we have winged victory; we have an airplane; we have an inkwell signifying the signing of the peace treaty. And yet look at the Daddy Long Legs. In France there is a proverb that says if you see a daddy long legs in the evening, you’re going to have good luck the next day. And Dalí has deliberately painted the Daddy Long Legs.²¹

More apparently evocative of Dalí’s days as a Virginia gentleman is the painting Slave Market with Disappearing Bust of Voltaire, also of 1940 (fig. 8). While newspaper accounts place Dalí in Richmond movie houses and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, one can only speculate as to whether he had in fact seen any old slave markets. It is clear from the pictorial record, however, that the Black citizens of Virginia held a certain exotic appeal for the master, as Harper’s Bazaar, rather tastelessly and punningly suggested in its article titled “Massa Dalí in Ole Virginny.”²²

The racially charged subject matter of the Life magazine tableau vivant dubbed The Effect of Seven Negroes, a Black Piano, and Two Black Pigs on the Snow (fig. 5)—along with the more obviously racist title of the Harper’s Bazaar article—contributed, I suspect, to the virtual disappearance of this bit of local history from the occasional accounts that pop up in local newspaper and magazine articles. Dalí’s personal politics had often been controversial; he was famously aligned with Franco, for example, and this, I think it is fair to say, did his art historical reputation no good either.
It appears, by the way, that the first major Dalí painting to be displayed in Richmond — in June of 1966 — was a variation of the just-mentioned Slave Market with Disappearing Bust of Voltaire. A circular version of the picture, called simply Apparition of the Invisible Bust of Voltaire, was on view under armed guard at Miller and Rhodes’ downtown store as part of a promotion for a jigsaw puzzle. H. Having made a big splash in 1966 with its round puzzles, Springbrook Editions, Incorporated commissioned Dalí to create a round picture to be transformed into one of its new line of puzzles. At the time, no mention was made in newspaper articles that it was based on one of the artists first paintings made in the United States — in Virginia.

In 1956, the Dali Jewels made their first appearance at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as a temporary exhibition. The ruby-encrusted electrically-throbbing heart remains among the best-remembered objects to grace the Museum galleries. When the Dali Jewels returned in 1977 for a three-year extended loan, it was through Governor Godwin’s connections with the Owen Cheatham Foundation, whose namesake was a Lynchburg native. The Cheatham Foundation had acquired them from the previous owners in 1958.

In 1981, while the Virginia Museum was seeking funds with which to purchase the collection, they were bought out from under the museum — by the very Captain Moore who visited Richmond in 1966 — for his Dalí museum in Cadaques, Spain. Curiously, both catalogues from the 1956 and 1977-81 exhibitions at the Virginia Museum lack any mention of the fact that Dalí had created an earlier set of jewels while at Hampton Manor. This was, in fact, the primary subject of the Harper’s Bazaar article; it was written by Fulco di Verdura, who had traveled to Virginia to discuss the jewels’ design with Dalí. One of the drawings illustrating the article shows a cigarette case decorated with an ivory miniature of a spider by Dalí.

In 1966, the letters to the editors pages of Richmond’s newspapers were filled with references to the jewels shown in 1956 as well as the happenings at Hampton Manor. Maurice Bonds, for example, then-chairman of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Art History program, wrote:

Is this the same Salvador Dalí who brought a bull in the parlor for tea? The one who hoisted a grand piano into a tree to paint its cuticle? How about Captain Sally drooling over a branch with one eye supported by a crutch and all in shiny aluminum with a red neon heart that really beats? Let’s tie a bow on Traveler’s tail and hold a happening in Capitol Square. This brings us to my final question: “Why Saint George and the dragon?” Dalí had done at least one painting and one major print of the subject previously. A copy of a book inscription in the files of the late Louis Reynolds shows the subject drawn in Dalí’s own hand and inscribed: “Pour Louis Reynold (sic) Hommages de Dalí! (fig. 9)” Coincidentally, St. George and the dragon was then, and remains today, the Reynolds Metals logo (fig. 10). As a Reynolds trade ad from the April 1960 Federal Bar Journal explains:

Patterned after Raphael’s famous “Saint George and the Dragon,” this trademark quickly became a familiar symbol of progress in aluminum, recognized and respected alike by consumers and by leaders in many industries serving the consuming public. The spirit of progress remains a vital force at Reynolds, evidenced by continuous development of new and varied uses of aluminum...uses that are opening new markets in many lands for this versatile metal.

J. Peter Moore claims no knowledge of the book inscription and insists that the true source of the St. George theme lies in George’s role as patron saint of Barcelona:

In Dalí’s mind, St. George and the Dragon is a Catalan saint. Outside the town hall of Barcelona there is an enormous thing. You see St. George killing the dragon. So the first thing that came to his head I’m sure is Saint George and the Dragon...for sure that’s where it came from.

When asked why such a theme would have been appropriate for Captain Sally, Moore replied:

Because Dalí heard that this very courageous woman who had become a captain in the Confederate army... he said “It’s Saint George. She was Saint George.” Therefore he wanted to represent this ... woman as kind of a Joan of Arc...Of course the dragon was everything - whatever you’re against. That was the idea he had—to make of her a kind of Joan of Arc on horseback killing the dragon - like they have in Genoa, like they have in Barcelona, like they have in England.

Moore also claims that Captain Sally was to have been represented on horseback, and recalled that a photo-collage maquette had been made for the project. (This seems doubtful, since it was never mentioned in any contemporary accounts, and Reynolds’s secretary has no recollection of any such work.)
While there is no reason to doubt the Catalan connection, Moore’s assertion that the theme had nothing to do with the Reynolds logo is difficult to accept. He acknowledges that it was the senior Reynolds who approached Dali about the monument project and a Daliland concept as well. And clearly, Dali and Reynolds both were looking to “open new markets” for this “versatile metal.” Richmond just wasn’t buying.

While Reynolds cites Raphael’s St. George as inspiration for the company logo and Moore claims St. George’s Catalan pedigree on Dali’s side, it seems likely, in fact that both Dali and Reynolds had seen the Raphael. Dali’s admiration for Raphael is well known, and his March 1941 visit to the National Gallery’s Mellon Collection, in which the Raphael was included, was recorded in Parke Rouse, Jr.’s “Spiders” article for the News Leader.

In the end, Dali’s equestrian vision of Captain Sally slaying the dragon/germ was too much for Richmond. By July of 1966, as an editorial cartoon in the Times-Dispatch put it, Dali’s “symbolic statue” was “apparently dropped.” Sally, of course, remains now as then, immortalized only one block east of Monument Avenue in a stained glass window at St. James Church, where she taught Sunday School many years ago. She is portrayed as Richmonders prefer to remember her, with her medicine bag, her Bible, and her hospital at Main and Third.

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5. All previous published accounts have identified the artist as Wayne M. Usry. When contacted, Mr. Usry corrected this error, noting that the drawings were done by Wynne who worked as art director at Mr. Usry’s advertising agency, which had the Eskimo Pie account at the time. Mr. Wynne’s widow, in a telephone conversation November 1, 1997, recalled that Mr. Wynne spoke with Dali by telephone about the concept before creating the drawing. She also recalled that the two later drawings of the other committee proposals were done after the original met with a hostile reaction.

13. Salvador Dali. Letter concerning the development of Daliland and the formation of the Exploitation Corporation for that purpose, 6 January 1966. From the files of Louis Reynolds. Copy provided by his former secretary, Betty R. Williams, Richmond, Virginia.
14. Strangely enough, in the fall of 1996, shortly after I had been given this letter, a cartoon appeared in the now-defunct Richmond State making what the artists surely thought was a very imaginative joke conflating Dollywood - the Dolly Parton theme park - with Salvador Dali, the artist.
27. J. Peter Moore, Telephone interview with the author. 7 December 1996.
28. Ibid