

**CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**REGULAR MEETING  
110 EAST STATE STREET**

**ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM**

**July 2, 2008**

**2:00 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

**CCHPC Members Present:**

**Daves Rossell, Chairman  
George Cohen, Vice-Chairman  
Jane A. Feiler  
Vaughnette Goode-Walker  
William Haynes  
Stephen T. Lindell  
Pamela G. Lossing  
Christian Sottile  
Lisa L. White**

**CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:**

**Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP, Executive Director  
Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner  
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant**

**I. WELCOME**

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

**II. INTRODUCTIONS**

**Dr. Rossell** asked Board and Staff members to introduce themselves.

**III. Guest Speaker: Dr. Paul Pressly, Director, Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, “African-American Life in the Georgia Low-Country: Ossabaw and Pinpoint”**

**Ms. Harris** stated that Dr. Paul Pressly is the Director of the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance and that many have worked with him in the past. She said she was excited to have Dr. Pressly talk about African-American life in the Georgia Low-Country, Ossabaw, and Pinpoint. She hoped that Pinpoint would be the first local historic district, that they were waiting for comments from the County Attorney, and that everything was prepared but was a matter of going through the process.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that three years ago there was a discussion between historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists from Ossabaw Island about how South Carolina did a wonderful job with the Gullah heritage. He said there is the Penn Center, the Avery Institute and basket weaving, and Georgia has neglected the Geechee heritage for lack of sites. He showed a DVD about the history and development of Ossabaw Island.

He said they lost one of their greatest advocates about four weeks ago when Mr. Bo Bowens passed away. The Ossabaw Island Foundation has a use agreement with the State of Georgia that says the foundation is responsible for approving educational groups who come onto the island and for preserving the structures on the island. They have raised money to reroof the main house, the clubhouse that is an old 1880's hunt house, and the three tabbies, one built in the 1920's and two built in the 1840's. They are especially interesting because they were continuously lived in from the 1840's until the 1980's. That is why they are in good shape. Mr. David Crass, the state archaeologist, said that they are the best preserved cabins in the state of Georgia. They could be used to tell three different stories of Ossabaw Island: the antebellum period, the African-Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the story of 20<sup>th</sup> century workers living there. He found that there is a contact between Ossabaw and Pinpoint, got in touch with Mr. Bowens, and in June of 2006, 17 people came to Denegal Marina from Pinpoint. Mr. Jim Bitler, the educator, was showing the tabby cabins but the people weren't paying attention to him because they were pointing out where they lived and how their lifestyles were. They realized the people knew more than they did and allowed them to take over the tour. These people grew up there in the 1940's and they wanted to recapture their story. Working with Pinpoint, an incredible discovery was made that many of the people at Pinpoint are descendents of people who came from Ossabaw, including Mr. Bill Haynes. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century approximately 150 African-Americans on the island were tenant farmers and the one cultural institution they had was the Hinder Me Not Baptist Church. In the 1890's when the people left they went to Pinpoint and brought the church but renamed it to the Sweet Field of Eden Baptist Church. The church later split and the other church became the Beulah Baptist Church. Mr. Bill Haynes' great-grandfather, Mr. Ben Bonds, was the Pastor of the Hinder Me Not Baptist Church. They realized that they are in possession of something unique and are attempting to help preserve and tell the stories of Pinpoint in conjunction with Ossabaw.

He said that they have help with the Board of Regents, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Cultural Commission behind them. They need to make partnerships with institutions in Savannah. They are partners with the Georgia Conservancy and are raising money to help Pinpoint develop a blueprint to help the community come together to preserve themselves for the future. The Chairman of the National Gullah/Geechee Heritage Commission, Mr. Emory Cambell, translated the New Testament into Gullah and they have some other things going on.

**Ms. White** stated that Ossabaw was on the National Register of Historic Places and asked if it would make sense for Ossabaw to be on the Chatham County Register of Historic Places.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that it sounded like a good idea to him.

**Mr. Cohen** thanked Dr. Pressly for the presentation and asked about the plans for public access. He said there was publicity a few years ago but that he did not know the latest.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that there is a partnership between the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, where he is the director and the Department of Natural Resources, the Board of Regents, and the Foundation to open the island for educational purposes: for study, research, and education. They are increasing visitation and anyone who defines themselves as an educational group may come over, but there is a transportation problem because there is no ferry service and they don't have a boat. They are talking with DNR to see if something can be done.

He said they have raised over one million dollars to create an observatory on the island that will be called the Georgia Power Observatory and is a network of monitors, video cameras, and sensors at various strategic points that will be monitoring environmental change. There will be different groups coming like the Warnell School of Forest Resources, the Odom School of Ecology, Georgia Southern, etc., primarily educational groups. They want to bring other groups that are not just inside of a school setting and said that if the Commission had some good tips that they would like the help.

**Mr. Cohen** stated they are doing an admirable job that is probably challenging.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that Mr. Cohen touched on a sensitive point - the island is supposed to be used for education but many people aren't visiting it. He said everyone feels it is a wonderful resource and they want to open it up and remain true to the vision of study, research, and education without a ferry or bridge. It is a challenge and they try to share the island through the internet, but it is limited. They have talked about building an education center in a location where a barn collapsed and they want to reconstruct the barn and put a presentation center in it.

**Ms. Goode-Walker** commended Dr. Pressly on the work that is done with Ossabaw, the Foundation, and the Education Alliance. She asked what the fallout has been after the conference in February and did the momentum continue from the symposium.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that because of the symposium, the Georgia Historical Society has organized trips to the island of one week workshops for the community college teachers. He said two weeks from now there will be 25 community college teachers coming from Maine to California to visit Ossabaw and Sapelo, and to look at areas in Savannah.

**Ms. Feiler** asked if there is any documentation of Mrs. Eleanor Torrey-West's project that was done with the artist colony that lived on the island.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that they have tried to get Mrs. West to turn over her archives. He said that the Georgia Historical Society has some of the archives and that they have written to approximately 400 artists that they are starting to get back. It has started but they have a long way to go.

**Mr. Lindell** asked if there have been studies on the importance of preserving natural areas after the devastation of New Orleans and Katrina.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that they are way ahead of the curve. He said the State of Georgia has an incredible legacy with nine of the thirteen barrier islands being well-protected. When Georgia is compared to Florida and South Carolina, Georgia can stand tall, but it cannot be taken for granted because you don't know what the State Legislature would do.

**Mr. Lindell** asked about the volume of people tolerated on the island.

**Dr. Pressly** stated that they only take approximately 25 to 30 people at a time per day so it is limited to what they can do. He said it is so primitive there is only one wagon to take people in. It is a dynamic tension and they have to keep thinking it through. He would personally like to see them be able to take more people to the north end to let people see the tabbies. He said there will be 24/7 video cameras on the alligator den, the rockery, and an infrared camera watching sea turtles coming up at night. He has become aware of how much is out there in terms of Geechee communities, like Montgomery, Sandfly, White Bluff, and Coffee Bluff and there is so much there that is about to be lost.

#### **IV. COMMISSIONERS' ITEMS**

**Ms. White** asked if Board members received a letter from the Ardsley Park-Chatham Crescent Garden club requesting that someone from the Commission attend a presentation about the significance of the Ardsley Park-Chatham Crescent neighborhoods. She said they will celebrate the centennial in 2010 and that they are planning events and a legacy profit. With the Commission's permission she would go, although it is outside of their scope.

**Dr. Rossell** thanked Ms. White for bringing it to the Commission's attention and volunteering to go. He asked when it would be held.

**Ms. White** stated that there are two meetings: one on Thursday, July 10 at 6:00 p.m. and the other is on Monday, July 14 at 6:00 p.m. She said that both meetings will be held at 3601 Abercorn Street at the home of Mrs. Jo Hickson who is a retired landscape architect.

**V. MEETING MINUTES - June 4, 2008**

**Mr. Lindell** stated that on Page 3 through Page 4 he had asked about the current status of the World War II monument. He asked that the discussion be stricken from the record.

**CCHPC ACTION: Ms. White made a motion that Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Haynes seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**Dr. Rossell** stated that if anyone is interested in the full record of any meetings that Staff has access to the recording of the meetings.

**Ms. Feiler** stated that Dr. Rossell would be giving a lecture next Thursday night July 10 at the Telfair at 6:00 p.m. on the subject of architecture.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that there is an exhibit at the Telfair about William Christenberry, a photographer who is well-known for his photographs of vernacular architecture, particularly in western Alabama. If anyone is interested please come.

He said the Commission should pursue the designation of Ossabaw Island or begin discussions related to the designation of Ossabaw as one of the Chatham County Historic Preservation designated sites.

**Ms. Harris** stated that she has sent several letters to let them know they are qualified and has not received a response.

**Ms. Goode-Walker** asked who Ms. Harris sent the letters to.

**Ms. Harris** stated that they were sent to the director of the foundation.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that Dr. Pressly is the director.

**Ms. Harris** stated that he is the director of the Educational Alliance which is a different organization.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that Dr. Pressly seemed amenable to the idea.

**Ms. Feiler** asked if Ms. Harris had contacted Ms. Zelda Tannebaum.

**Ms. Harris** stated that she sent the letters to Ms. Elizabeth DuBose.

**Ms. Goode-Walker** stated that Ms. DuBose works with Dr. Pressly.

**Mr. Haynes** stated that he is on the Board and that he would ask them.

**Ms. Feiler** asked about an update from Mr. Michael Brown.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that Mr. Brown is in charge of providing the Commission with parking stickers and it is unfortunate that every Commission that only meets once a month will not have their parking stickers renewed. He said that he parked upstairs very easily today.

**Mr. Thomson** stated that if they park in the garage and put their name on the back of the ticket along with the letters “MPC” that it would be taken care of.

**Dr. Rossell** stated that he appreciated all of the help they’ve had trying to pursue this.

**Ms. Harris** stated that on next Tuesday, July 8, at 11:30 a.m. she and Ms. Bridget Lidy will give a Brown Bag Lunch at the MPC on their trip to France, and she invited the Commission members to attend.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,  
Preservation Planner

**EH/jnp**