

**SAVANNAH - CHATHAM HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION**

**SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
112 EAST STATE STREET**

**ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM**

**February 23, 2007**

**4:00 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

**HSMC Members Present:**

**Walter Wright, Chairman  
Gordon Smith, Vice-Chairman  
LaVerne Ricks-Brown, Secretary  
Frank Lang, Ex-Officio**

**HSMC Members Absent:**

**Phillip Williams, Commission Member**

**HSMC/MPC Staff Present:**

**Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner  
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant  
Marisa Gomez, Historic Preservation Intern**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 4:16 p.m. Mr. Wright introduced Mr. Floyd Adams former Mayor of Savannah, Alderman Clifton Jones, Mr. Fields, Mr. Scott Smith of the Coastal Heritage Society, and Dr. Preston Russell.

**Ms. Harris** gave the Staff report.

**II. Petition of Daniel Fils-Aime, Sr.  
File No.: C-020812-32091-2 Part II Amendment  
Haitian Monument**

**NATURE OF REQUEST:**

The petitioner is requesting approval for the amended design of the Haitian Monument, memorializing the Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue. This unit was comprised of over 500 free men of color from the Island of Haiti, and was the largest unit of men of African descent to fight in the American Revolution. They formed one-tenth of the allied army in Savannah in the Fall of 1779.

**FINDINGS:**

On April 8, 2005, the Site and Monument Commission approved construction of an octagonal concrete pedestal, four feet tall and 14 feet in diameter. Six cast bronze statues by James Mastin were approved for the top of the pedestal. The direction the statues would face was to be submitted later. Eight plaques were approved for the eight faces of the pedestal. Five quotations were submitted for five of the eight plaques. These quotations were approved,

subject to the petitioner receiving the appropriate copyright permissions. (Previous approval attached).

**Proposed Changes:**

1. Monument pedestal to be constructed of granite slabs (as opposed to concrete).
2. Each of the eight faces of the pedestal to be etched with a decorative design (see attached "Pedestal Face Design"). Design is based on traditional Haitian design motifs.
3. Pedestal to be approximately 6 feet tall and 15 feet 9-inches in diameter.
4. Proposed text to be etched directly into granite (as opposed to being inscribed on metal plaques installed on base).
5. Proposed text content different (see attached). Only one quotation utilized.
6. Proposed additional separate "Thank You" plaque, away from the monument itself.
7. Statues to face north (direction not previously submitted).

The use of granite for the pedestal is more aesthetically appealing than concrete, and more in keeping with the use of traditional materials for monuments.

The inscription of the text directly into the granite (as opposed to on a plaque) is aesthetically pleasing and simplifies future maintenance of the monument.

The proposed "thank you" plaque is too prominent in scale and placement of the monument. The proposed design and materials (marble and galvanized metal) do not relate to the rest of the monument. There is no precedent for such a prominent recognition of support among the other existing monuments in Savannah. It is recommended that the petitioner make the "thank you" plaque more discreet. Consider using a slab of granite engraved with the same text and embedded in the bricks adjacent to the monument as an alternative design.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Approval of new pedestal design, new text, and direction of figures. Reconsideration of design and materials of "thank you" plaque.**

**Ms. Harris** stated the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) had met and they recommended that the petitioner make the "Thank You" plaque more discreet. They recommended that more research be done on the appropriate direction of the figures on military monuments. They raised the questions of whether the figures should face the direction of the battlefield or the direction of the enemy's approach. On Inscription Number 7 (Thank You plaque), they recommended that the third paragraph be eliminated. They recommended that the text "and other interested citizens" be added to the second paragraph just after "the Staff of the City of Savannah."

**PETITIONER'S COMMENTS:**

**Mr. Daniel Fils-Aime, Sr.**, stated on behalf of the Board of Directors they thanked the Commission for allowing them to come back, and said they appreciate the support to have the monument erected. He or his historians would be happy to answer any questions.

**Mr. Wright** asked why the podium is going to be raised from four feet to six feet.

**Mr. Fils-Aime** stated they don't want the public to damage it.

**Ms. Ricks-Brown** stated she was curious about the "Thank You" plaque, and could not recall seeing any plaques like this on other monuments. She said there is no precedent for it, and asked if the Commission wants to start a precedent.

**Ms. Harris** stated the only similar precedent she was aware of was Rousakis Plaza commemorating the plaza that has a list of the Mayor, Aldermen, and City Council Members in office at that time, but no formal thank you.

**Mr. Wright** asked if the TAC had comments regarding the plaque.

**Ms. Harris** stated they discussed it and they recommended not listing the individual people because of the risk of leaving others out, and the redundancy. TAC recommended it read, "We gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by the Mayor, Aldermen, City Manager, and Staff of the City of Savannah, and other interested citizens during the terms of Mayors' Floyd Adams and Otis Johnson."

**Ms. Ricks-Brown** stated she thinks it takes away from the historical significance of the monument and the people who fought and sacrificed their lives.

**Mr. Fils-Aime** stated the Haitian American Society wanted to be generous and recognize people.

**Mr. Claude Charles (Haitian-American Historic Society of Miami)** said the people who contributed should be documented on the monument to serve as a capsule of history of the particular time it was erected.

**Ms. Ricks-Brown** stated she was concerned about the precedent.

**HSMC ACTION:** **Mr. Smith made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve the removal of the "Thank You" plaque from the monument. Ms. Ricks-Brown seconded the motion. Mr. Wright was opposed. The motion passed 2 to 1.**

**Ms. Harris** stated the other recommendations from the TAC included doing more research on the direction of the figures in regard to a historical precedent. It is currently proposed that the figures face north toward River and Bay Streets. She said the battlefield was to the south, and there was some question about the figures facing the direction of the enemy.

**Mr. Smith** stated the precedent is that figures should face in the direction of attack, which would have been to the north.

**Mr. Lang** stated his concern that facing north doesn't favor the monument.

**Ms. Harris** stated there was discussion among the TAC, as to whether it should face east toward City Market, as that is where most of the tourism would probably be coming from.

**Ms. Ricks-Brown** stated she feels they should be historically accurate.

**Mr. Scott Smith (Coastal Heritage Society)** stated he agreed with Mr. Smith that the figure should face north to be historically accurate.

**HSMC ACTION:** Mr. Smith made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve of the orientation of the statue to face north. Ms. Ricks-Brown seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**HSMC ACTION:** Ms. Ricks-Brown made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham Historic Site and Monument Commission does hereby approve the amendments to the Haitian Monument as further amended by the Site and Monument Commission. Mr. Smith seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**Mr. Fils-Aime** stated on behalf of the 11 million Haitians that live around the United States and abroad, he wanted to say thank you to the Commission.

**Mr. Clifton Jones** thanked the Commission, and said as a City Councilman he believes, along with former Mayor Adams, that this is something long overdue for Savannah, He said when he first heard about it, most lifelong residents of Savannah did not know that the Haitians participated in the Revolutionary War.

**Mr. Floyd Adams** thanked the Commission, and noted that it has been a wonderful project and he is happy to see it moving forward.

**Mr. Wright** asked about the groundbreaking for construction of the monument, and about donations.

**Mr. Fils-Aime** stated people can make individual donations by purchasing a brick with their name, the company's name, or a family's name inscribed on it. The groundbreaking will be before the end of the year. He said they have three statues already cast in bronze. He said they appreciate the City of Savannah helping them all of the way, and just wanted to say thank you.

### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

**IV. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris  
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp