

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

December 6, 2007

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

**Walter Wright, Chairman
Gordon Smith, Vice-Chairman
Ryan Madson**

HSMC Members Not Present:

**LaVerne Ricks-Brown, Secretary
Phillip Williams
Frank Lang, Ex-Officio**

HSMC/MPC Staff Present:

**Ellen Harris, Preservation Planner
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

II. Petition of the Georgia Historical Society

**Christy Crisp
File No.: C-071012-40394-2
Marker Application
St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church
(CONTINUED FROM 11/1/07)**

Present for the petition was Ms. Christy Crisp.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

NATURE OF REQUEST: The petitioner is requesting a Georgia Historical Marker to be located in the tree lawn in front of St. Benedict's, facing East Broad Street.

FINDINGS:

Theme: The theme of the marker falls under the Arts and Humanities, Religious History, and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage categories. The proposed marker commemorates the parish of St. Benedict the Moor, which is considered to be the oldest African-American Catholic parish in Savannah. The accompanying school served the black community for over half a century during the era of segregation, staffed by Franciscan sisters.

Location: The marker is to be erected in the tree lawn in front of the sanctuary building. The property is maintained by the church and there is some uncertainty as to ownership. Typically, tree lawns are considered public property.

Design: The proposed design is the standard GHS marker design. See attached revised text.

Funding: The estimated cost for the marker is \$3,000.00. The funds have been fully secured. As GHS, which administers the Georgia Historical Marker Program, assumes responsibility for the repair and replacement of all markers, the petitioner has requested the Escrow Payment be waived.

November 1, 2007, Meeting Discussion: There was some discussion at the November 1 meeting as to whether or not having the name of a for-profit business (as opposed to a non-profit organization which is the typical sponsor of GHS markers) constituted advertising (which would not be appropriate on markers).

Master Plan and Guidelines: The Master Plan and Guidelines do not specifically address the issue of whether or not ‘for-profit’ businesses can sponsor markers. However, the following guidelines are relevant:

P. 34 DESIGN:

“17. Donor names may be incorporated into the design (such as inscribed on bricks) but should be discreet and not detract from or dominate the monument or artwork.”

P. 35 TEXT:

“1. Text should be well-researched and based on historically accurate, documented facts.

2. The text should accurately and effectively convey to the reader the desired message.

3. Quotations should be noted accordingly and permission from the appropriate authority received.

4. Text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language.”

Existing Markers/Monuments: Most markers sponsored through the Georgia Historical Society marker program are through non-profit organizations such as historical societies, city government, churches, schools, or other benevolent associations.

However, during an informal survey on GHS markers in Savannah, two markers were found to have been sponsored by for-profit entities.

- The Joel Chandler Harris Marker in the 100 block of West Bay Street is sponsored by, “the Georgia Historical Society, the Joel Chandler Harris Association, the Marshall House, and the *Savannah Morning News*.”
- The Georgia Infirmary Marker located at 1900 Abercorn Street was erected by “the Georgia Historical Society and The Georgia Infirmary, Inc.”

Other markers and monuments, not erected through the GHS marker program, also have a history of for-profit sponsorship.

- The 1996 Olympic Yachting Cauldron Plaque states, “This legacy to the Olympic spirit is made possible by The Savannah Foundation and the City of Savannah with support from Arts Ashore 96, Savannah Electric, Savannah Sailing Center, Savannah Olympic Support Council...”

- The recently approved Battlefield Park Monument has a plaque which states, “This flagpole is dedicated to the memory of Edward J. Derst, Sr., 1896 -1965, Founder Derst Baking Company, Savannah, Georgia”

Consultation with City Attorney’s Office: The Assistant City Attorney, Peter Guisti, responded by e-mail stating, “...there does not seem to be a prohibition on this type of sponsorship/advertising. There is language suggesting it is not appropriate, but no specific prohibition. If the MPC agrees that it is inappropriate they should ask Council to amend the guidelines.” Further discussion clarified that the language he referred to is the guideline which states, “Text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language.”

RECOMMENDATION: Approval as submitted. The proposed marker text meets the existing guidelines. It is recommended that the Commission consider the location as public property for the purpose of processing and approving the application. The petitioner should coordinate with City Engineering to ensure no utilities are damaged during installation.

Mr. Wright stated that the legal opinion was that there is no prohibition against it and there is a precedent. He read the following statement from Ms. LaVerne Ricks-Brown.

“Unfortunately, I have fractured my right foot. Please be advised that I have read the information packet regarding the meeting and I am in agreement with the passage of both petitions, especially in light of the legal and background info regarding our concerns with for profit companies being listed on historical markers. I also noted the addition of the word integration in the St. Benedict's marker. I have only one question regarding the St. Benedict text. Should there really be a comma between the word community and the word and?”

Mr. Smith stated that in response to Ms. Ricks-Brown question, if the comma were taken away it would read, “...that two Benedictine priests arrived in Savannah and constructed a church.” The two Benedictine priests did not construct the church and because it is a separate phrase it needs a comma. He felt the language is very loose. He referred to the text that says, “...its closure due to integration in 1969.” It is unclear if it is integration in 1969 or the closure in 1969. He said it should say, “...until its closure in 1969 due to integration.” It might seem picky, but if it is going to be forever it should be clear.

Ms. Crisp stated that they can fix it. She said that it will read, “...until its closure in 1969 due to integration.”

Mr. Wright stated that there would be at least two more markers coming and that Wal-Mart will be paying \$3,000 per marker. He said they do have a precedent and that there is no legal objection to it.

Mr. Madson stated that when the Commission makes amendments in the future, it would be something to talk about then.

Mr. Wright stated that it is the nuance between sponsorship and advertising. He said there is nothing wrong with having corporations and interest groups sponsor something. If the Commission wants to have it as an agenda item for discussion in the future that would be fine.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Madson made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission make a recommendation to approve the petition with changes to the text. Mr. Smith seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**III. Petition of the Georgia Historical Society
Christy Crisp
File No.: C-071012-41708-2
Marker Application
Savannah's African-American Medical Pioneers
(CONTINUED FROM 11/1/07)**

Present for the petition was Ms. Christy Crisp.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

NATURE OF REQUEST: The petitioner is requesting a Georgia Historical Marker to be located along the north sidewalk at the corner of West Liberty and Montgomery Street.

FINDINGS:

Theme: The theme of the marker falls under the Science and Engineering, Civic and Institutional, Local History, and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage categories. The proposed marker commemorates Drs. Cornelius and Alice Woodby McKane who provided medical care, as well as civic leadership to Savannah's African-American community during their residence here at the end of the nineteenth century. They were responsible for the establishment of the McKane Training School for Nurses as well as the McKane Hospital for women and children (later named Charity Hospital). The McKanes were also instrumental in the development of healthcare facilities and programs in Monrovia, Liberia, Cornelius McKane's ancestral home.

Location: The proposed site is on public property in the north tree lawn at the corner of West Liberty and Montgomery Streets. The McKane Training School for Nurses was at the northwest corner of Liberty and Montgomery Streets, though Liberty Street has subsequently been altered. The exact location has been left to the discretion of the City.

Design: The proposed design is the standard GHS marker design. See attached revised text.

Funding: The estimated cost for the marker is \$3,000.00. The funds have been fully secured. As GHS, which administers the Georgia Historical Marker Program, assumes responsibility for the repair and replacement of all markers, the petitioner has requested the Escrow Payment be waived.

November 1, 2007, Meeting Discussion: There was some discussion at the November 1 meeting as to whether or not having the name of a for-profit business (as opposed to a non-profit organization which is the typical sponsor of GHS markers) constituted advertising (which would not be appropriate on markers).

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Consultation with City Attorney’s Office: The Assistant City Attorney, Peter Guisti responded by e-mail stating, “...there does not seem to be a prohibition on this type of sponsorship/advertising. There is language suggesting it is not appropriate, but no specific prohibition. If the MPC agrees that it is inappropriate they should ask Council to amend the guidelines.” Further discussion clarified that the language he referred to is the guideline which states, “Text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language.”

RECOMMENDATION: Approval as submitted. The proposed marker text meets the existing guidelines. It is recommended that the marker be placed in the tree lawn as close as possible to the corner at Montgomery. There are currently a number of traffic signs trees to consider.

The petitioner should coordinate with Traffic Engineering to maintain traffic sign visibility and City Engineering to ensure no utilities are damaged during installation.

Mr. Smith stated that the word permanently defines the word Savannah rather than that they left. He said it should say, "...the McKane's permanently left Savannah in 1901, etc.", rather than they "left Savannah permanently."

Ms. Crisp stated that it will be fixed.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Madson made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission make a recommendation to approve the petition with changes to the text. Mr. Smith seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

IV. MEETING MINUTES - November 1, 2007

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Smith made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Madson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp