

SAVANNAH - CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
112 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

February 7, 2008

4:00 P.M.

MINUTES

HSMC Members Present:

**Walter Wright, Chairman
Ryan Madson
LaVerne Ricks-Brown, Secretary
Phillip Williams**

HSMC Members Not Present:

Gordon Smith, Vice-Chairman

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.

Present for the petition was Ms. Christy Crisp.

Ms. Harris gave the Staff report.

II. Petition of the Georgia Historical Society

**Christy Crisp
File No.: C-080122-55019-2
Marker Application
Robert Sengstacke Abbott Marker**

NATURE OF REQUEST: The petitioner is requesting a Georgia Historical Marker to be located along the south side of the 3000 block of West Bay Street near the intersection with Albion Street.

FINDINGS:

Theme: The theme of the markers falls under Arts and Humanities, Social and Humanitarian, Local History, and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage categories. The proposed marker commemorates Robert Sengstacke Abbott. Born on St. Simons Island in 1868 to former slaves, he grew to manhood in Woodville, a small community three miles west of Savannah. In 1905, he founded the *Chicago Defender*, which became the largest circulating African American newspaper in the nation. An advocate of racial equality, Abbott used the *Defender* to focus national attention on Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and discrimination. He championed the migration of southern blacks to northern cities during the Great Migration of 1915 -1919. At his death in 1940, he was eulogized as one of the most influential African Americans in the nation.

Location: The proposed site is on the south side of the 3000 block of West Bay Street near the intersection with Albion Street on public property. The adjacent property owner, Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care, Incorporated also supports the marker. The proposed site was the boyhood home of Robert Abbott.

Design: The proposed design is the standard GHS marker design. See attached text. Consider the revising the last sentence which currently reads, "The *Defender* played a major role initiating the Great Migration of southern blacks to northern cities during and after World War I" to read, "The *Defender* played a major role initiating the Great Migration of 1915 -1919 during which some 1.3 million southern blacks migrated to northern cities."

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

RECOMMENDATION: Approval with amended text. The proposed marker text meets standards set forth in the Master Plan and Guidelines. The petitioner should coordinate with City Engineering to ensure no utilities are damaged during installation.

PETITIONER'S COMMENTS:

Ms. Christy Crisp (Georgia Historical Society) introduced Dr. Martha Keber and her husband Mr. Robert Keber who did the research that resulted in the marker request. She stated that the proposed location was discussed as being on Bay Street but it is actually on Albion Street. It is still public property because it is city right-of-way and being on Albion Street will remove it from the bus stop.

Mr. Robert Keber stated that they proposed it for Albion Street because they understood that there are plans for work to be done on Bay Street within the next few years. Instead of relocating it, they felt it would be better on Albion Street and away from the bus stop.

Dr. Martha Keber stated that they could be more precise with the dates with the beginning date being 1915 and the ending date being 1919.

Mr. Madson asked about the content where it states, that the Woodville Times was published by his stepfather and that Abbott learned the printing trade "here". He wondered if "here" refers back to the church. He asked where the site of the printing press was.

Ms. Ricks-Brown stated that according to the background information, it appeared that Mr. Abbott learned printing at the Hampton Institute (University) in Hampton, Virginia.

Dr. Keber stated that the printing press was most likely at the church. She said it could have been at the home, but it would have been at one or the other. He majored in printing at Hampton but the Woodville Times began a few months before he entered Hampton. During that time he was in Savannah helping his father and his first involvement with printing goes back to the Woodville Times. She was sure that he learned much more about the trade once he went to Hampton.

Ms. Ricks-Brown asked about his age when he learned the printing trade.

Dr. Keber stated that he would have been 20 or 21.

Ms. Ricks-Brown asked if there was any room to say that Mr. Abbott studied printing at Hampton.

Ms. Crisp stated that if they did, something else would have to come out. She said they have reached the limit for the number of spaces.

Ms. Ricks-Brown stated that the reason she asked was because the fact that he did attend a college at that time was unusual and very important.

HSMC ACTION: Mr. Madson made a motion that the Savannah – Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission approve the petition with the changes recommended by Staff. Ms. Ricks-Brown seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

III. Meeting Minutes - December 6, 2007

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

Mr. Wright asked for an update on the World War II Monument.

Ms. Harris stated that she has not heard from them. She said that she has read items in the newspaper from time-to-time regarding fundraising or a memorial service. She met with Mr. Jim Vejar several months ago which she mentioned at the December meeting, and subsequent to that she has not heard from them.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:16 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp