



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
October 3, 2012 - 2:00 P.M.
Meeting Minutes

October 3, 2012 Regular Board Meeting

I. Call to Order and Welcome

II. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

1. [August 1, 2012 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [August 1, 2012 Minutes.pdf](#)

The minutes of August 1, 2012 will be approved at the January, 2013 meeting due to not having a quorum present.

III. Posting

IV. Consent Agenda

V. Regular Agenda

2. [Officer Elections](#)

Ms. Goode-Walker said the Nominating Committee was not present. Because of not having a quorum present, the election of officers will be back on the agenda for January 4, 2013. [NOTE: This meeting was subsequently rescheduled for January 16, 2013.]

3. [Overview and Site Visit to LePageville Cemetery](#)

Ms. Ellen Harris gave a brief presentation on the history of the LePageville Community as the Commission will visit the cemetery today after their meeting.

Ms. Harris explained that she received the information from the Historic Association. The LePageville Community was located off President Street behind the new Dollar General store and a Parker's store. In the 1880s, the railroad industry was very successful in Savannah and the number of African American railroad workers more than doubled the number of White workers in Savannah. Mr. Robert LePage was the superintendent of the Wharf of Savannah and built LePageville in 1885 to house the African American workers

of Savannah, Florida and Western Railway Company. Mr. LePage set aside ten (10) acres of land as his idea/vision was to built 108 houses on an as need basis. By 1888, the Savannah Morning News reported that 35 houses had been completed and five (5) more were under construction. He also set aside twenty (20) acres that would serve as individual truck farms for produce and rented them to the employees for twelve dollars (\$12.00) per year. Mr. LePage died soon thereafter and the development did not continue.

LePageville was named after Mr. LePage and the streets were named after different railroad officials. Some of the names of the streets were: Plant Street for Henry B. Plant, Haynes Street for Mr. H. S. Haynes, etc. Ms. Harris showed the Commission a plat map dated 1947 that showed the layout of the community. The plat described the houses as well-kept small gray houses. During the early days of 1885, each house cost the railroad \$850.00 to build. The houses were rented for six dollars (\$6.00) per month. They were rented to married couples only as the houses could not be rented by single individuals. Ms. Harris said this seemed to be quite reasonable as the average worker at that time earned sixty cents (\$.60) to one dollar and fifty cents (\$1.50) per day. Consequently, six dollars (\$6.00) per month was a reasonable rental rate at that time. A store was located here where the residents could go and purchase groceries and supplies. This was outside the city, but of course the residents could come into the city.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked Ms. Harris if Mr. LePage was from Savannah.

Ms. Harris answered that the information she received does not show where he was from.

Ms. Harris said in 1895, a church was constructed here and named LePageville Baptist Church. By World War II (WWII), most of the residents who lived in LePageville were working for the Southeastern Shipyards building liberty ships. The railroads began to decline prior to WWII. By the 1950s, Southern State Phosphate and Fertilizer Company leased LePageville from the railroad and was subletting it to their employees. During the 1950s, most employees were paying between five dollars (\$5.00) and seven dollars (\$7.00) per month for rent. Many of the elderly and disabled residents were allowed to live here rent free.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked if any of the residents owned their homes.

Ms. Harris answered no. They all were renters.

Ms. Harris said by 1967, the number of houses in LePageville had dwindled to 25 due to a series of fires, demolition, etc. Sixteen (16) of these 25 houses did not have electricity. Officials gave Southern Phosphate the choice of renovating the houses and bringing them up to code and, if not, the structures would be condemned. The officials decided that it was not economically feasible to bring the houses up to code. Therefore, the residents were asked to move and the remaining homes were demolished.

Ms. Harris reported that the LePageville Baptist Church was dismantled and another building that was later named St. Thomas Missionary Baptist Church, but it was built out of the lumber of the old LePageville Baptist Church. The piano from LePageville Baptist Church was brought to the new church. St. Thomas Baptist Church and its congregation

still exist, but the original church building of St. Thomas no longer exists.

Ms. White asked where is St. Thomas Baptist Church located.

Ms. Harris said she was not sure, but the residents that they will be talking with during their visit would be able to tell the Commission where St. Thomas Baptist Church is located.

Ms. Harris said by the 1970s, the railroad leased the land to the International Little League of Savannah for the new sports complex. The signing agent for the Little League was Ms. Patricia Jenkins. Ms. Jenkins will meet the Commission at the site. An elderly Black man named Alexander Middleton approached Ms. Jenkins and informed her that a cemetery was located here that is almost one hundred (100) years old. Mr. Middleton asked Ms. Jenkins to help them protect the cemetery. There are no markings to indicate the boundaries of the cemetery or even where the grave sites are in a lot of situations. Ms. Jenkins made sure that the Wessells Downing Sports complex which opened in 1979 did not encroach upon the known boundaries of the cemetery.

Neither the City of Savannah nor Chatham County have records to prove that the cemetery legally existed. The cemetery does not show up on the plat map, although it is presumed that it is in the area where the church was located. There are other references to the cemetery in terms of obituaries in the newspaper, accounting and funeral homes, but as far as City/County governments are concerned, there is no record that the LePageville Cemetery is an official cemetery.

Ms. Goode-Walker asked if there is a dilemma is present since no official records exist.

Ms. Harris explained that Englehart Incorporation in 2002 deeded the 3.85 acres of land to LePageville Memorial Cemetery Association. Therefore, they own the land and it is now no longer a point of contention. There have not been any new burials since the 1960s. The Association is not interested in continuing to bury here.

Ms. Lossing asked what date was the landed deeded to the Association.

Ms. Harris answered June 2002.

Ms. Harris said in 2007, the LePageville Memorial Cemetery Corporation built an arch over the entrance to the cemetery. They did a lot of fundraising in recent years and were able to erect a sign showcasing some of the history; they are seeking donations in order for them to be able to do more to commemorate and research the cemetery.

Ms. Harris explained that Patricia Jenkins in very active in the association and contacted her a few years ago when this Commission was just being formed. Ms. Jenkins asked her if there was anything that the Commission could help them with. Ms. Harris said she explained to Ms. Jenkins what the Commission was about and how they could help. Recently, Ms. Jenkins contacted her and asked that she meet with them. Ms. Harris said the Association is not sure what they should be doing with the cemetery. They do not have a preservation plan for the cemetery. They don't know what kinds of options

are available. Therefore, Ms. Harris said she believes they are looking for assistance in developing a vision of where they want to see this go.

Ms. Harris said she suggested that LePageville would be the focus of the Commission's meeting today. They will meet with the members at the site, not to develop answers such as this is what they should do, but just to talk about things that the members may consider or think about. She felt, too, that the Commission would be interested in learning more about the history and the community; plus they would be able to assist the members in coming up with ideas on how to go about best preserving the character of the cemetery.

Ms. Harris explained that they could go in the MPC car or the Commission members could drive their own cars. Ms. Harris entertained additional questions from the Commission.

Ms. Goode-Walker said she believes this is the first time a cemetery has come up in terms of preservation. She wanted to get some parameters from the staff on how this differs from a building.

Ms. Harris said cemeteries are unique, especially in this case as there are no grave markers here. This is a fairly wooded site. There needs to be some recognizance done in order to at least identify where the sites are. There is the potential of uncovering things that are currently hidden. From a preservation perspective, Ms. Harris believes they would want to treat this as a cultural landscape in need of a restoration. Therefore, it would not necessary to be about the built environment. They could also look at this in terms of archeology to see if they can locate where the church was and where some of the buildings were located. It is different from anything that this Commission has looked at before, but it is certainly a valuable piece of Chatham County's history.

Ms. Goode-Walker stated that she did not believe that this is much different than Pennyworth. The Commission went there, but the layers were different at Pennyworth as some work had already been done. She believes LePageville is a great puzzle and she looks forward to seeing it.

Ms. Harris said the members are struggling presently with their location off of President Street and what is available around them; their two neighbors are Dollar General and Parker's. The members are concerned about the continuing encroachment of commercial development. However, the Association owns their land and it is protected, but they are concerned about destroying the ambiance of the site in because of the close proximity of their commercial neighbors.

Ms. Lossing asked if there would be funeral home records on the burials.

Ms. Harris said this is one of the things that the Association is looking for help with as they do not have the resource capabilities to take this on as a project. They have been able to compile an informal list of based on someone remembering when someone was buried. The next step is to reach out to the funeral homes which would have more records and details on this.

VI. Request for Extensions

VII. Staff Reviews

VIII. Other Business

IX. Notices, Proclamations and Acknowledgements

4. [July/August The Alliance Review](#)

Attachment: [The Alliance Review_NAPC_July-August 2012.pdf](#)

X. Adjournment

5. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before this Commission, Ms. Goode-Walker adjourned the meeting at 2:30 p.m. to go directly to the LePageville Cemetery.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 4, 2013 at 2:00 p.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room, MPC, 112 East State Street. [NOTE: This meeting was subsequently rescheduled for January 16, 2013.]

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris
Cultural Resource and Urban Planning Manager

EH:mem

The Chatham County - Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective Board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.