



S A V A N N A H - C H A T H A M C O U N T Y  
HISTORIC SITE & MONUMENT COMMISSION

Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room  
April 3, 2014 4:00 P.M.  
Meeting Minutes

**April 3, 2014 HSMC Meeting**

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

1. [Order](#)

**Vice Chair Karatassos** called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He outlined the purpose and role of the Historic Site and Monument Commission.

**II. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

2. [Approve March 6, 2014 Meeting Minutes](#)

Attachment: [March 6, 2014 Meeting Minutes.pdf](#)

**Board Action:**

Approve March 6, 2014 Meeting Minutes. - PASS

**Vote Results**

Motion: Walt Harper

Second: Thomas Gensheimer

Thomas Gensheimer - Aye

Walt Harper - Aye

Eli Karatassos - Aye

Ryan Madson - Aye

Robert Pirro - Aye

Mary Soule - Not Present

**III. Regular Agenda**

3. [Petition of Christy Crisp, Georgia Historical Society | 14-000852-HM | 575 West Bryan Street | Historical Marker](#)

Attachment: [Staff Report.pdf](#)

Attachment: [Submittal Packet.pdf](#)

**Ms. Christy Crisp of the Georgia Historical Society** was present on behalf of the petition.

**Ms. Leah Michalak** gave the staff report. The Georgia Historical Society in collaboration with the First Bryan Baptist Church is requesting to erect a historical marker at 575 West Bryan Street commemorating the integral role that First Bryan Baptist Church has played in the religious life of the City of Savannah. The petitioner provided the following statement regarding the theme.

**Military History, Religious History, Local history and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage -**

Throughout its long history, First Bryan Baptist Church has played an integral role in the religious life of the City of Savannah. One of the oldest African American congregation in the nation, First Bryan traces its roots to the Eighteenth Century. Ministers from First Bryan attended the meeting at Sherman's headquarters during the Civil War that resulted in Special Field Orders No. 15 - the "forty acres and a mule" order. As a result of that order, Ulysses Houston, minister of First Bryan, led 1000 freedmen to Skidaway Island to claim land on Sherman's reservation.

**Ms. Michalak** stated that as required in the Master Plan and Guidelines, written notice was sent to all property owners and the neighborhood association within 200 feet of the subject property. A sign was posted on the property 15 days prior to the meeting. No comments were received from the public.

**Ms. Michalak** explained that another historical marker is located directly across the street from this site. The marker commemorates Andrew Bryan who lived from 1761 to 1812. Rev. Bryan started the First Bryan Baptist Church. Therefore, this marker is about Rev. Bryan and not about the Field Orders and Military History of that site.

**Ms. Michalak** stated that the proposed text from the marker is as follows:

**First Bryan Baptist Church  
Constituted 1788**

One of the oldest African-American Baptist Churches in the nation. First Bryan dates its founding to the constitution of the Ethiopian Church of Jesus Christ, led by Rev, Andrew Bryan, in January 1788. In 1793, the church began construction of its first building at this location on the property purchased by Reverend Bryan. Known later as First Colored Church, First African, and Third African, the congregation took the current name First Bryan Baptist in 1867. This building was completed in 1874. First Bryan Ministers Garrison Frazier and Ulysses Houston attended the meeting of local Black Leaders with General Sherman in January 1865 that resulted in Special Field Orders No. 15, promising confiscated coastal land to freed slaves. In the Twentieth Century, Civil Rights leader W. W. Law taught Sunday School at First Bryan Baptist Church for many years.

Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and First Bryan Baptist Church

**Ms. Michalak** reported that staff recommends approval of the marker as submitted.

**Mr. Gensheimer** asked staff if this is the actual text.

**Ms. Michalak** answered yes.

**PETITIONER COMMENTS**

**Ms. Crisp** came forward and introduced herself. She entertained questions from the HSMC.

**Dr. Pirro** said, in the text, the wording simply says "confiscated coastal land to be given to freed slaves," but did not state the "40 acres and a mule."

**Mr. Ryan** asked if the Special Field Orders No. 15 is singular. Is this correct?

**Ms. Crisp** said it is correct as shown, Special Field Orders Number 15. She realizes it looks odd, but in this case, the official records show it listed this way. They have a statewide review committee who reviews the markers and text. They commented about this as well. But, they actually use the specific information and language in the marker that more directly references this event which is in Madison Square. Therefore, they wanted to be consistent with that which is consistent with the actual "Field Orders Number 15."

**Mr. Karatassos** stated that he was a journalism major. He asked if the Ethiopian Church of Jesus Christ is the initial and original name of the church or is this another church that it was constituted to be a part of?

**Ms. Crisp** said that Ms. Georgia Benton was present as a representative of the church and the church's historian. Therefore, she may reference her in some of the questions of the church's history.

**Mr. Karatassos** said he was not questioning the facts, but the way the text is written he cannot tell whether First Bryan is the original name or a part of the Ethiopian Church. If it was, then what was led by Andrew Bryan? Was it the Ethiopian Church or First Bryan Church? He said that the first two sentences of the text are not clear. He believes the information is correct, but it could be worded differently. **Mr. Karatassos** said if the Ethiopian Church was led by Rev. Andrew Bryan that is fine; but if it was not led by him, then a period needs to be placed there and then put him with First Bryan. In other words, the way it reads now, Rev. Bryan was the head of the Ethiopian Church of Jesus Christ.

**Ms. Crisp** explained that Rev. Andrew Bryan was the minister of the congregation that in 1788 was known as Ethiopian Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, this church, through several different iterations, became First Bryan Baptist Church as we know it today.

**Mr. Karatassos** suggested that the name First Bryan be put in the first sentence; and then state its founding date. He said the petitioner does not have to do this, but he believes the text would read more clearly.

**Ms. Crisp** said she believes it is okay either way.

**Dr. Pirro** said the building was built in 1874. Is the current building the place where the

meeting was held? Was it being constructed when they met or is it a new building? Dr. Pirro said his question pertains to the meeting with General Sherman.

**Ms. Crisp** said this happened at the Green-Meldrim House which is located on Madison Square.

**Mr. Karatassos** asked if the reason for putting Ministers Garrison Frazier and Ulysses Houston in the text is because they were ministers at First Bryan. However, this has nothing to do with the site.

**Ms. Crisp** explained that this specific point does not have anything to do with the site as it is being described by the HSMC, but the significance of the statement is actually four gentlemen of this congregation participated in this meeting on local, state and national significance. This happened in Savannah and the meeting of approximately 20 local ministers and other representatives, four of the individuals came out of First Bryan Baptist Church. This is too much information to put on the marker, but speaks to the significance of that congregation. Ms. Crisp said, therefore, they are talking about the significance of the congregation and other things that have happened in local history. She said, however, she understands the HSMC's point.

**Mr. Madson** asked, "why was the wording about the 40 acres and a mule removed?"

**Ms. Crisp** said Special Field Orders Number 15 set aside hundreds of thousands of acres in what they call "Sherman Reservation" from upper South Carolina through Jacksonville, Florida; and for some distances inward both the coastal islands and property inward, specifically lands that had been abandoned by planters that were to be redistributed to freedmen. Therefore, the language includes in 40 acre tracts and there is also in the Field Order mentioned of mules owned by the army. There is nothing that says everyone is entitled to both 40 acres and a mule. However, mules are mentioned as is enlisted men in the U. S. Army. This is discussed a little more in detail in the historical marker, but the 40 acres and a mule has become what it is known as.

**Mr. Madson** asked Ms. Crisp if staff or the Georgia Historical Society recommended removing the 40 acres and a mule from the text.

**Ms. Crisp** explained that they never had the phrase 40 acres and a mule in this text. It was never included in the text for this marker.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

#### **BOARD DISCUSSION**

The Board's discussion centered on the "confusing" language of the first two sentences in the proposed text. There was also concern that the text is not clear regarding the location of the meeting with General Sherman.

**Board Action:**

Approval of the marker with the condition that the text is revised as recommended by the Board and submitted to staff for final review and approval. - PASS

**Vote Results**

Motion: Ryan Madson

Second: Walt Harper

Thomas Gensheimer - Aye

Walt Harper - Aye

Eli Karatassos - Aye

Ryan Madson - Aye

Robert Pirro - Aye

Mary Soule - Not Present

**IV. Other Business**

4. [Nominating Committee Discussion](#)

**Mr. Karatassos** reported that City Council did not make any appointments to the HSMC today. Therefore, as Ms. Soule will no longer be on the HSMC, they will not have a chairperson. He is the Vice-Chair and is willing to act as Chair until City Council appoints persons to the HSMC.

**Mr. Harper** suggested that they not get a nominating committee together until City Council appoints individuals to this Commission.

**NOTE:** It was the consensus that the nominating committee would be tabled until City Council makes appointments to the Historic Site and Monument Commission.

5. [Commissioner's Items](#)

6. [Next Meeting- Regular Meeting- May 1, 2014](#)

**V. Adjournment**

7. [Adjourned](#)

There being no further business to come before the Historic Site and Monument Commission, Vice-Chair Karatassos adjourned the meeting at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris  
Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation

EIH: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.*