



Savannah - Chatham County Historic Site & Monument Commission

Virtual Meeting
April 1, 2021 4:00 PM
MINUTES

April 1, 2021 Savannah - Chatham County Site and Monument Commission Meeting

Members Present: Kristopher Monroe, Chairman
Thomas Gensheimer, Vice - Chairman
Lisa Watson, Secretary
Eileen Baker
Sean Mannion

Members Absent: Ashley Rainge

Staff Present: Ryan Jarles, Historic Planner
Bri Morgan, Administrative Assistant
Pam Everett, Assistant Executive Director
Melanie Wilson, Executive Director

Staff Absent: Leah Michalak, Director of Historic Preservation

I. Call to Order and Welcome

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

[1. March 4, 2021 Historic Site & Monument Commission Meeting Minutes](#)

[📎 03.04.21 MEETING MINUTES.pdf](#)

Motion

Approve March 4, 2021 HSMC minutes as approved.

Vote Results (Approved)

Motion: Sean Mannion

Second: Thomas Gensheimer

Thomas Gensheimer - Aye

Kristopher Monroe - Abstain

Sean Mannion - Aye

Lisa D. Watson - Aye

Eileen Baker - Aye

Ashley Rainge

- Not Present

III. Regular Agenda

[2. Petition of Georgia Historical Society | 21-001376-HM | 705 East Anderson Street | GHS Historical Marker](#)

📎 [Staff Recommendation - 705 East Anderson Street 21-001376-HM.pdf](#)

📎 [Submittal Packet - 705 East Anderson Street 21-001376-HM.pdf](#)

📎 [AERIAL MAP 21-001376-HM.pdf](#)

Mr. Ryan Jarles presented the applicant's request for the Historic Site and Monument Commission to approve the installation of a Georgia Historical Society Historical Marker on private property at 705 East Anderson Street. The marker is proposed within the corner of the front yard.

The marker is proposed to read:

St. Pius X High School

The Blessed Pius X High School opened as a co-educational Diocesan School in 1952 serving students from Savannah's Black community. The Society of African Missions donated land for the school on property purchased by Father Ignatius Lissner. The school's name changed to St. Pius X High School in 1955 after the canonization of Pope Pius X in 1954. St. Pius provided a Catholic education that had not previously been available for African-American high school students. Accredited in 1969, St. Pius was closed by the Savannah Diocese shortly afterward as part of its integration plan. The building became the public charter school Savannah Classical Academy in 2013. Notable alumni of St. Pius X include Savannah's first African-American mayor, Floyd Adams, Jr., and U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas.

Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and Waters Foundation, Inc.

The petitioner provided the following statement regarding the theme of the historical marker:

"The St. Pius X High School historical marker demonstrates the themes of Arts and Humanities, Civic and Institutional, and Local History.

Following the Civil War, Catholic schools open to the public began to develop around the state, with the first of this kind opening in Savannah. In continuation of the church's educational mission, The Society of African Missions donated land purchased by Father Ignatius Lissner, S.M.A., for the construction of a co-educational high school for Savannah's African American population. Named after an early 20th-century pope, Pope Pius X, the school opened in 1952 with support from the Franciscan Sisters to provide a classical education to the city's Black youths during the era of segregation.

St. Pius X High School was built specifically to accommodate the Black student population from Catholic elementary schools. Due to mandated segregation in Georgia's public school system, many parents saved money to send their children to a school that provided a similar educational experience afforded to Savannah's White children. Serving students of both Catholic and non-Catholic faith, the school had modern classrooms, a library, and a science lab. Shortly after receiving accreditation by The Charter of the Southern Association in 1969,

the diocese announced the school's closure to integrate the diocesan schools. Some students who left St. Pius due to its closure attended other Catholic schools such as St. Vincent's Academy and Benedictine Military Academy.

Despite its closure in 1971, St. Pius has a legacy of producing influential attendees and alumni. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas attended St. Pius for two years, and prominent graduates include educator Ormonde Lewis; Savannah's first African-American mayor, The Honorable Floyd Adams; historian Charles Elmore; Judge Orion Douglass; and Alderwoman Mary Osbourne. Alumni of St. Pius emphasize the sense of community provided by the school, with students participating in extracurriculars such as choir and sports, and the St. Pius X High School Crusaders basketball team won the Georgia Class A basketball championship in 1964. Today, the alumni association is still active, continuing to build on that sense of community provided by St. Pius X High School."

The site currently does not have any "objects", and there are no visually related examples of historical markers. No vegetation is proposed to be altered in any way, and the historical marker is proposed to be located in the front western corner of the front yard. Information on the location of ground utilities was not provided; however, Staff has no concerns that this will be an issue. The front yard of the property is not utilized for special events, although it is assumed, due to the use of the property, that there will be special events held elsewhere on the property. Staff is not aware of the site being prone to automobile accidents. The historical marker will be visible from the accessible sidewalk as well as the street. The marker is proposed within a presently maintained private yard, will bring light to a previously untold story of the neighborhood and enhances the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The site does not include existing signage and will not significantly affect automobile traffic sight lines. The historical marker is to bring attention to a currently uninteresting empty portion of the property's front yard and is proposed to be within 100 feet of the property for which its' content represents. The marker meets all design requirements. The applicant has stated that they have secured the necessary funds (\$5,000). The historical marker will be maintained by the Georgia Historical Society.

Mr. Geinsheimer asked why not place by main entrance. **Mr. Jarles** referred to the petitioner, but suggested that the corner allowed for greater visibility.

PETITIONER COMMENTS:

Ms. Elyse Butler, of the Georgia Historical Society, stated that the corner is the location of the original school; the actual site of the school. The current main entrance is an addition. There are few historical markers in this area. It tells the story of the Catholic education for African Americans. They are happy to have a historical maker outside of the traditional historical district of the city, as there are little to no other markers in the area.

Mr. Geinsheimer asked if any of the original school survived. **Ms. Butler** stated yes; it was confirmed by the principal and attendees.

Mr. Lisa Watson asked if the names had to be mentioned, as Clarence Thomas is still alive. **Ms. Butler** stated naming attendees is a part of the state wide marker program for schools, churches, etc. **Mr. Mannion** stated the city has a policy of not naming sites after living people: is it permissible for Thomas to be mentioned. **Mr. Jarles** stated it is, as the marker is not commemorating him. **Mr. Mannion** asked if it could be made without Clarence Thomas's name. **Ms. Butler** stated despite thoughts of him, the fact remains that he was a notable attendee of the school. His name is found on other markers; this is not out of the ordinary nor inappropriate as it is a holistic look of the past. His name connects St. Pius to a national level of significance; no other name does that. **Mr. Gensheimer** stated he is on

other markers and the first African American on the Supreme Court from the Savannah area, which is significant. Excluding on personal preference is problematic.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment.

BOARD DISCUSSION:

Mr. Monroe stated that many in the community that recognize his being part of the highest court of the land. Fault could be found in all; this is not a personal decision. **Mr. Gensheimer** stated as historian, to omit is to rework history. **Ms. Watson** stated it is a sexual harassment and discrimination issue. **Mr. Mannion** stated he agreed with Ms. Watson: seeing his name immediately takes one to Anita Hill. **Mr. Monroe** stated he wants to voice that Clarence Thomas signifies achievement in the African American community. **Mr. Mannion** expressed his displeasure of Mr. Thomas's actions. **Mr. Jarles** reminded of the criteria of historical markers and that Robert's Rules of Order dictate that decisions cannot be based on opinion, only what can be reviewed and agree with masterplans and guidelines. **Mr. Mannion** stated Justice Thomas's name is obscene. **Mr. Gensheimer** stated the name is not obscene; it may invoke inflammatory feelings. How we vote shows how we as a Board think. He's a historical figure that came from this area. **Ms. Baker** stated it's for a school and he did go to that school. It's a marker, not a piece of art to drive emotion. **Ms. Watson** stated it puts a negative on the school; for a person to do such a thing and then be honored.

Motion

The Historic Site and Monument Commission hereby approve the installation of a Georgia Historical Society Historical Marker within the front yard at 705 East Anderson Street, as proposed, because the petition meets the guidelines set forth within the HSMC Masterplan and Guidelines.

Vote Results (Approved)

Motion: Sean Mannion

Second: Thomas Gensheimer

Thomas Gensheimer	- Aye
Kristopher Monroe	- Abstain
Sean Mannion	- Aye
Lisa D. Watson	- Aye
Eileen Baker	- Aye
Ashley Rainge	- Not Present

IV. Other Business

[3. Update on Masterplan and Guidelines Update](#)

- 📎 [MasterPlan Update 2021 - Blue Line - 04012021.pdf](#)
- 📎 [MARKERS - Individually Numbered Sites \[Final\].pdf](#)
- 📎 [MONUMENTS - Individually Numbered Sites \[Final\].pdf](#)
- 📎 [MURALS - Individually Numbered Sites \[Final\].pdf](#)
- 📎 [MasterPlan Update 2021 - Red Line - 04012021.pdf](#)

Mr. Ryan Jarles presented the Masterplan and Guidelines update. He stated this is the same information with Board comments added (blue version). There are also maps of monuments, murals, and markers added. **Mr. Monroe** thanked Mr. Jarles for his work.

Mr. Monroe stated he spoke with Gordon Denney with the City for repair of the artwork in Yamacraw Park. He requested Mr. Denney to provide update on its progress. **Mr. Mannion** stated Mr. Denney provides monthly updates on the progress within the City. The Board stated they would like Mr. Mannion to share updates as he receives them. **Ms. Wilson** suggested talking with elected officials regarding specific monies put aside from hotel and motel tax as a funding source for maintenance. **Mr. Monroe** stated he thought that was an excellent idea. **Mr. Mannion** stated that is what the Park and Tree Commission is doing. He invited all to the meetings on every third Tuesday of the month via Zoom. **Mr. Jarles** reminded the Board to notify staff of discussions so that the public can provide input and staff can gather additional information.

Mr. Monroe then asked if there was an update regarding the confederate busts. **Mr. Jarles** responded no. There will be scheduled discussion as to how the Board proceeds.

Mr. Monroe presented a resolution of appreciation to Mr. Ryan Jarles as he leaves the MPC; this is his last HSMC meeting.

V. Adjournment

[4. Next Regular HSMC Meeting: May 6, 2021](#)

[5. Adjourn](#)

5:30 p.m.

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