

CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING
110 EAST STATE STREET

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

February 4, 2009

2:00 P.M.

MINUTES

CCHPC Members Present:

George Cohen, Chairman
Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Vice-Chairman
Jane A. Feiler
William Haynes
Stephen T. Lindell
Pamela G. Lossing
Christian Sottile
Lisa L. White

CCHPC Members Not Present:

Daves Rossell

CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:

Thomas L. Thomson, P.E./AICP, Exec. Director
Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner
Janine Person, Historic Preservation Admin. Asst.
Sarah Sisser, Historic Preservation Intern

I. WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Cohen asked everyone to introduce themselves.

III. Presentation: If These Walls Could Talk? Civil War Savannah in Black, White, and Gray: a photographic history of the largest surviving antebellum historic district in America, including its environs and fortifications. An insight into the project, its aims and objectives. By Barry Sheehy and Cindy Wallace.

Ms. Harris introduced Mr. Barry Sheehy, a successful business consultant and entrepreneur with clients from Fortune 1000 companies worldwide, and author of several books with more than 50 published papers and articles. She said that his great passion is the study of history where it has taken him into battlefields across North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Mr. Sheehy holds degrees from Loyola

and McGill Universities and is a graduate of the Canadian Armed Forces School of Communications Electronics Engineering. He holds the Canadian Armed Forces decoration, has a home in Effingham County, and is a lifetime member of the Effingham Historical Society.

She introduced Ms. Cindy Wallace who has spent many years traveling and photographing the American west; particularly the four corners area with a special interest in local slot canyons. Ms. Wallace participated in a number of solo and group photographic exhibitions including a Savannah Art Council grant-funded exhibit at Armstrong Atlantic Stated University (AASU). She has taught darkroom photography and art classes at AASU, and both darkroom and digital photography at Georgia Southern University (GSU) for ten years. She earned an Art Education degree at AASU and her Master's of Photography from GSU. She currently does freelance commercial work.

Mr. Barry Sheehy stated that the work is a collaborative effort by an outstanding team of professionals who have devoted their time and talent to complete an important historical task. He spoke about the samples of Ms. Wallace's work, Mr. Scott Newman the Graphic Designer, Mr. David Anderson the Historic Cartographer, and Ms. Catherine Routkin the Historical Editor.

He said that the project's undertaking has been completed over the past two years and has been supported by the Georgia Historical Society, the Bull Street Public Library, the Ships of the Sea Museum, the Historic Effingham Society, the Historic Savannah Foundation, the Ogeechee Canal Society, the City of Savannah, Chatham County, and others. When the book is published the majority of the revenue will be allocated to local historic preservation efforts.

The working title is "Wartime Savannah in Black, White, and Gray." Their aim is to capture every important antebellum and Civil War site, structure, or building in Effingham County and beyond; approximately 400 in all with at least 1,500 photographs to date, looking at the critical period from 1850 to 1865 for each location. Their real goal is to find out what happened at the structures and sites in the years leading up to and during the war. He discussed how an 1865 photo could be interposed with a 2008 photo and the difference could not be told. He walked the entire 13 miles of General Hardee's 1864 Line of Defense west of the city to see what is left. Some of it is in good shape, all of it is in danger, and some of it has been lost. They photographed sites west and north of the city that played a role in the Siege of Savannah; particularly the sites threatened by development. The sites included the line laid out by Robert E. Lee when he was in charge of coastal defense in 1861, which was the first step of the journey that took them across the river to South Carolina. They encompassed the entire county photographing the largest concentration of antebellum structures in America and have enough material to publish two books; one focusing on the City and the County during the war, and another focusing on Savannah's cemeteries and their unique Civil War legacy.

For the first part of the presentation he displayed many photographs depicting the building and sites outside of the city that are threatened and should be preserved. For the second part of the presentation he focused on the business of slavery in Savannah. He said that slavery was a big business; it was Savannah's largest non-export business measured in dollar value. The topic will eventually become a paper that he will submit to the Georgia Historic Quarterly (GHQ). The subject is painful and 150 years later still has the power to hurt because it happened, cannot be ignored but must be understood, and they set out to answer questions about how the business operated.

He began the second part of his presentation stating that Savannah's population of 22,292 in 1860 included 7,712 slaves, and 700 freed blacks or free persons of color. He said that some of the free persons of color owned slaves with 1/3 of the population buying, selling, and renting slaves as a regular and normal commercial activity. Half of Savannah's slave population lived on their own, away from their masters, working independently, hiring out their own time, making their own contracts, and paying their owners a set fee for the privilege. Savannah was Georgia's largest city and its largest slave-trading center, but the infrastructure lagged behind states like Virginia and Louisiana because Georgia banned interstate slave trading until the early 1850's. Once the ban was lifted, there was enormous expansion in the trade and it became a multimillion dollar industry, built around brokers, auctioneers, holding yards, and slave marts. The brokers and auctioneers who were active in the trade were aided by lawyers, notaries, doctors, bankers, and insurance agents. The first industry change was the lifting of the ban on interstate slave trading, and the second change was the general dislocation caused by the war as slave owners on front line states shipped their property inland to safer environments because of the fighting. Millions of slaves became unhinged from their past, their property, and their owner and because of the forced migration, and many became available for sale. He said that people with money, Protestants, Catholics, and Jewish people, the railways, hotels, lumber yards, the City of Savannah, and the Federal Government were large employers of slave labor.

There were ordinances and taxes built around the industry where brokers who kept slave marts, a house, yard, or other places for keeping slaves for sale, hire, or confining were subject to a \$200 a year annual tax. He said that the center of the multimillion dollar slave trading activity was on Bay Lane going one block in both directions, and it was almost entirely antebellum, still intact, and amazing that it survived. The banks operated closely with the brokers like E. M. Blout who founded the Darien Gazette, Alexander Bryan who ran the slave center that is still standing today, Joseph Bryan the biggest slave trader in the city, the County Courthouse where slaves were sold on the corner, W. C. Dawson, Charles Lamar the mastermind behind the Wanderer case which was the last attempt to illegally bring African slaves into the country, and many others.

He pointed out that 115 and 117 Bay Street was Joseph Bryan's offices on the back side. He continued to display different photographs depicting slave trading facilities and telling the stories that went along with them. He closed by stating that next month would be the anniversary of the slave sale at the Ten Broeck Race Track.

Ms. Goode-Walker stated that on Bay Street in one of the buildings next to the Custom House was the law firm of George Welshman-Owens built in 1823. During the Wanderer trial Mr. John Owens represented Mr. Lamar and the office is still there. She said that Mr. Sheehy also pointed out the Pulaski Hotel which was where they found the men from the Wanderer and it was said that Mr. Owens ran from the office on the other side of the Customs House down to the Pulaski Hotel. She asked Mr. Sheehy to tell everyone Mr. Montmoullion's fate.

Mr. Sheehy stated that Mr. John Montmoillion who built the Montmoillion building was taking a trip from Savannah to Augusta on a steamer called the Lawton. The steam engine blew up, killed a number of people, and blew Mr. Montmoillion off the boat with such force and velocity that he was buried in the mud. He said that it took two or three people to dig him out of the mud.

Ms. Karen Worthum (Historian and Office Manager for the First African Baptist Church) stated that she was happy to see the history and could not wait on the book. She said that Mr. Jonathan Bryan was the master of her second pastor, the Reverend Andrew Bryan, and they whipped him unmerciful in the streets of Savannah for preaching the word of God. The plantation that Mr. Bryan owned was located at the same place where the sugar refinery exploded. The First African Baptist Church, which was the first black Baptist church in Savannah, originated from the barn at the plantation. She said that Savannah is easy now and it feels good to live in Savannah, but it has not always been kind and they have come a long way. Bryan Street was named after the biggest slave trader and before 1905 blacks were not allowed to go to Forsyth Park. To see a presentation like this means a lot.

Ms. Mary Lou Brewton (Tour Guide for Discover Tours) asked when the presentation would be in the GHQ.

Mr. Sheehy stated that the piece on slavery would be submitted shortly but they are waiting on peer reviews to come back. He said it should be within a month, they have a vetting process, and it could be a year before it gets on the schedule.

Ms. Brewton asked if the presentation would be made again in another public format.

Mr. Sheehy stated that they have not made plans to do it again. He said if they get an invitation they would do their best to respond.

Mr. Cohen stated that it was one of the most riveting presentations and significant to what the Commission is trying to do. He said it also plays into the current designation with Pin Point, the Commission's first neighborhood that will be designated as a Historic District.

Mr. Sottile stated that the presentation was compelling and that the graphics were exquisite.

Ms. Harris announced that if any member of the audience wants to be added to the mailing list that they can leave their email address and she will add their name to the list.

IV. Updates:

A. Revisions to Chatham County Historic Preservation Ordinance

Ms. Harris stated that the revisions have been docketed for the County Commission first reading for Friday, February 13th, and they will have a second reading on February 27th where it will be voted on. She said that the updates would be completed at that time.

B. Pin Point Historic District Designation

Ms. Harris stated that the Commission recommended approval of Pin Point as a historic district to the County Board of Commissioners at the last meeting with some revisions. She said that she worked with the neighborhood on the revisions, that Commission members have a copy of the revised ordinance. It is docketed to be on the County Commission's agenda for February 13th and February 27th. The vote will take place on the 27th and anyone from the public can comment.

Ms. Feiler asked if it was different than what was mailed to the Commission.

Ms. Harris stated it has been updated based on the Commissions suggestions for more clarification and the County Attorney's comments.

V. Commissioners' Items

There were none.

VI. Meeting Minutes: January 7, 2009

CCHPC ACTION: Mr. Lindell made a motion that the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Sottile seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Ms. White was not present when the vote was taken.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp