



**SAVANNAH-CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT  
COMMISSION  
HISTORICAL MARKER RECOMMENDATION**

**PETITIONER:** Elyse Butler  
Georgia Historical Society  
104 West Gaston Street  
Savannah, Georgia 31401

**FILE No.:** 17-000693-HM

**LOCATION:** 23 Montgomery Street

**DATE:** March 2, 2017

**NATURE OF REQUEST:**

The applicant is requesting approval to install a historical marker to recognize the history of the First African Baptist Church. This church is one of the nation's oldest continuous African-American churches. Two possible locations are proposed: a freestanding marker near the church front entryway (on Montgomery Street between West Bryan Street and West St. Julian Street) or in the adjacent Franklin Square.

**FINDINGS:**

The following standards from the Historic Site and Monument Commission Guidelines for Markers, Monuments and Public Art apply:

*Established Themes for Markers and Monuments. Existing markers and monuments in Savannah fall into one of more of the following established theme categories. Some of the categories overlap and many markers and monuments embody several themes.*

*Arts and Humanities. Includes art, architecture, music, theater, literature, education, etc.*

*Science and Engineering. Includes technology, inventions, medical, communications, etc.*

*Civil and Institutional.*

*Social and Humanitarian.*

*Industry and Commerce. Includes economics, agriculture, transportation, etc.*

*Politics and Government.*

*Military History. Includes people, places, or events.*

*Religious History. Includes people, places, or events.*

*Maritime History.*

*Colonial History.*

*Local History. Includes folklore and/or local heroes.*

*Cultural and Ethnic History.*

*Education.*

The standard is met. The marker demonstrates the themes of Civil and Institutional, Religious History, Local History, and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage.

*Evaluating Themes for Markers and Monuments. New markers and monuments commemorate and honor people, places, and/or events.*

The applicant provided the following information regarding themes:

**Civil and Institutional:** The FABC historical marker demonstrates the Civic and Institutional theme through the accomplishments of the congregation in their civil rights efforts, preceding and during the civil rights movement. In particular, the works of Rev. Emanuel K. Love (6<sup>th</sup> pastor) and Rev. Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert (13<sup>th</sup> pastor) illustrate the Civic and Institutional theme. Rev. E. K. Love, an advocate for education civil rights, was instrumental in the establishment of Savannah State University, while Rev. Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert was a key player in the revival of the Savannah chapter of the NAACP in the 1940s preceding the civil rights movement. FABC has also served as the site hosting prominent speakers, such as US. Representative Adam Clayton Powell and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Religious History:** The theme of Religious History is illustrated through the history of FABC as a religious institution. The church is considered one of the oldest continuously operating African-American churches in North America. Its roots are traced back to Rev. George Leile, who is largely referred to as the first African-American Baptist in Georgia, and the first ordained African-American preacher in the colonies.

**Cultural and Ethnic Heritage:** The FABC historical marker illustrates the Cultural and Ethnic Heritage theme through not only the efforts of its congregants and leadership mentioned in the above Civic and Institutional section, but also the manner and materials in which the structure was constructed. FABC was constructed by the congregants of the church with Savannah Grey brick. An architectural feature unique to Savannah, the bricks were made by the enslaved members of the congregation at nearby Hermitage Plantation.

**Local History:** As illustrated in the above sections, as one of the oldest continuously operating African-American churches in North America, FABC has had an impact on Savannah's history since its origins in 1773. The congregation shaped the cultural landscape of the city, while the building itself has shaped the physical landscape with the building's façade of Savannah Grey brick.

*Proposed themes should fall into one or more of the following categories.*

*Arts and Humanities. Includes art, architecture, music, theater, literature, education, etc.*

*Science and Engineering. Includes technology, inventions, medical, communications, etc.*

***Civil and Institutional.***  
***Social and Humanitarian.***  
***Industry and Commerce.*** *Includes economics, agriculture, transportation, etc.*  
***Politics and Government.***  
***Military History.*** *Includes people, places, or events.*  
***Religious History.*** *Includes people, places, or events.*  
***Maritime History.***  
***Colonial History.***  
***Local History.*** *Includes folklore and/or local heroes.*  
***Cultural and Ethnic History.***  
***Education.***

The standard is met. The marker demonstrates the themes of Civil and Institutional, Religious History, Local History, and Cultural and Ethnic Heritage.

***The proposed theme should have documented significant, clear and direct local relevance to the history and development of Chatham County. The local focus should be the predominant theme of the monument.***

The standard is met.

***The level of significance should be high enough to warrant a public presence.***

The standard is met.

***The person, place or event commemorated should not have been sufficiently commemorated elsewhere in the County. The theme should be distinct and original, and not be duplicated in other existing markers or monuments.***

The standard is met. Staff is not aware of any other significant markers related to the church.

***The theme should reflect a larger connection to the community as a whole, and not only to one distinct group.***

The standard is met. The marker includes information on the connection to the community.

***Commemorated persons should have enduring historical significance and have been dead at least twenty-five years. Living persons should not be commemorated.***

The standard is met. Overall the marker commemorates a place, but the people mentioned meet the standard.

***There should be significant documented evidence (written or oral) of the commemorated event, person, or place.***

The standard is met.

***Evaluating Sites for Markers, Monuments, or Public Art.*** *Certain factors should be taken into consideration when evaluating whether a site is the appropriate location for a marker, monument or public art [hereto referred to as “object” to indicate the inclusion of all three types]. These factors include:*

*The marker is proposed to be freestanding. Two locations are proposed:*

- 1. In the sidewalk near the church’s entrance on Montgomery Street*
- 2. Franklin Square*

***The installation of an object should not cause overcrowding of the site, if there are existing objects. Objects should be sited far enough away from other objects as to allow the visitor proper appreciation of each individually.***

The standard is met. There is at least one other marker in Franklin Square, but it would not be overcrowded by an additional marker.

***The proposed object should not damage or disturb existing established vegetation on the site including low tree limbs, or significant tree roots.***

Staff requests additional information. If the marker is located in Franklin Square, a specific location must be approved to ensure this standard is met.

***The proposed object should not require the removal or alteration of existing above or below ground utilities.***

The standard is met.

***The proposed site should be large enough to accommodate an object, and should not encroach on other existing object sites, buildings, or designated green space.***

The standard is met.

***The proposed site should not be utilized for special events (such as sports, festivals, ceremonies, etc) on a regular basis which an object would disrupt.***

The standard is met. While both the church and the square may be used for special events, the marker would not disrupt these in either location.

*The proposed site should not be prone to frequent automobile accidents which could damage the proposed object.*

The standard is met.

*The proposed site should be visible and accessible from a public right of way.*

The standard is met. The marker would be easily visible in either location.

*The proposed site should not have a high probability of significant archaeology unless an archaeological study is part of the proposal.*

The standard is met. There is not a high probability of significant archaeology.

*The proposed site should be easy to maintain.*

The standard is met.

*The installation of the object should enhance the space and character of the surrounding neighborhood.*

The standard is met.

*The installation of the object should not require the alteration or removal of existing signage (traffic, street, etc).*

The standard is met. No existing signage will be impacted.

*The installation of the object should not significantly affect automobile traffic sight lines.*

The standard is met. The marker will not have any impact on sight lines.

*The installation of the object should enhance the design of the overall site.*

The standard is met.

*The installation of the object should not require the removal or alteration of existing sidewalks, unless it is part of a comprehensive redesign for the entire site (which is generally discouraged).*

Staff requests additional information. If the marker is located adjacent to the sidewalk it should not require alteration of the existing sidewalk.

*If periodic memorial services are likely, the site should be able to accommodate them without causing undue disruption to the neighborhood, plantings, etc.*

The standard does not apply.

*Site in Relation to Theme for Markers or Monuments. The relationship between site and theme for a marker or monument is critical in determining the appropriate site for a particular theme.*

**Marker.**

*A marker should be erected in as close proximity to the site to which it is related as possible and be clearly visible from a public right-of-way.*

The standard is met. Both proposed locations meet the standard; however, the location adjacent to the church entry is the closest in proximity.

*A marker commemorating a place, such as a significant piece of architecture, should be located within 100 feet of the place or adjacent to the nearest public right-of-way.*

The standard is met.

*Design. The design of a marker, monument, or public work of art should be of the highest quality and caliber, and enhance public space. In order to promote the high standards the City of Savannah has historically enjoyed in its markers, monuments, and public art, the following guidelines should be observed.*

*The marker is being installed by the Georgia Historical Society. It will be the standard size, design, and material for Georgia Historical Society markers.*

**Markers.**

*Markers may be mounted on a freestanding pole, wall-mounted, or embedded in the ground. As the primary purpose is to inform the public about an event, place or person, the aesthetic significance of a marker is generally minimal.*

The standard is met. The marker will be freestanding.

*Except the marker title, the marker text should be not more than 1" in height, and not less than 1/2".*

The standard is met.

*Marker text should be created in a manner that, to the extent possible, prevents fading and erosion.*

The standard is met.

***Markers should be made of an enduring, non-corroding material.***

The standard is met.

***Markers should be considered permanent and designed accordingly. Temporary markers may be considered provided they serve an educational function, are made of a material designed to last for the proposed life of the marker, and a plan for removal or replacement of the marker at the end of the temporary period is submitted.***

The standard is met. The marker is considered permanent and designed accordingly.

***Text.*** *The text for a marker, monument or work of art is considered part of the overall design concept. Placement of the text, font type and size, etc. should be included with the final design drawings.*

*The marker will read as follows:*

*First African Baptist Church*

*First African Baptist Church traces its roots to 1773 and the organization of a congregation at nearby Brampton Plantation by Rev. George Leile. Under the leadership of Rev. Andrew C. Marshall (3<sup>rd</sup> pastor), the congregation obtained this property. Constructed of Savannah Grey brick by congregants, both free and enslaved, the current building was completed in 1859. Rev. Emanuel K. Love (6<sup>th</sup> pastor), an advocate for African-American education and civil rights, was instrumental in establishing today's Savannah State University. Rev. Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert (13<sup>th</sup> pastor) was a prominent leader of the NAACP and the revival of the Savannah chapter in the 1940s. U.S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are among the noteworthy speakers hosted here. FABC is one of the oldest continuously operating African-American churches in North America.*

*Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and First African Baptist Church.*

***Text should be well-researched and based on historically accurate, documented facts.***

The standard is met. The applicant completed research for and wrote the text with the First African Baptist Church.

***The text should accurately and effectively convey to the reader the desired message.***



The standard is met.

*Text should avoid offensive, obscene, or inflammatory language.*

The standard is met.

*Donor names may be included provided the names are in an identical but smaller font than the rest of the text and that no slogans or corporate logos are included.*

The standard is met.

***Funding.***

***Budget.*** *The Mayor and Aldermen do not fund new markers, monuments, or works of art. The applicant is fully responsible for funding the design, construction, installation, and any necessary landscaping, paving, or lighting involved with a new marker, monument, or work of art.*

***Escrow Payment.*** *All markers, monuments and public art erected on public property become the property of the Mayor and Aldermen. The Mayor and Aldermen assume responsibility for the future maintenance and upkeep of the marker, monument or artwork. Therefore, an initial Escrow Payment is required of the applicant subsequent to approval of the application. The Mayor and Aldermen, or their designee, will determine the appropriate Escrow Payment and will notify the applicant. The Escrow Payment must be paid prior to construction/installation of the monument or public art. Any marker, monument or artwork erected on private property is the responsibility of the property owner.*

The intent of the standard is met. The applicant agreed to pay for the repair and replacement of the historical marker as needed and is requesting the escrow payment be waived.

**Public Notice:** 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 fifteen days prior to the meeting. No comments were received from the public.

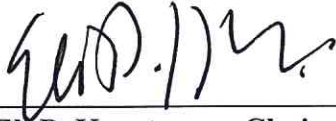
**BOARD DISCUSSION:**

The Board initially recommended placement of the marker on the Montgomery Street site if there was adequate space; however, after discussion with Traffic Engineering and Park and Tree this site could not accommodate the marker. The square was recommended by these departments as the site.



**RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL:**

Recommend approval to City Council of the marker with the condition that the selected site does not involve disturbing existing vegetation or sidewalks, because otherwise the marker meets the standards in The Master Plan and Guidelines. The Board recommends the Franklin Square site.



4-27-17

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Eli P. Karatassos, Chairman  
Historic Site and Monument Commission

Date



4/13/17

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Melony West, Interim Executive Director  
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

Date



4/13/17

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Ellen I. Harris, Director of Urban Planning and Historic Preservation  
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission

Date

EIH: sef