

## HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMISSION (HSMC)

Application for Historical Markers, Monuments, and Public Art

HSMC reviews all historical markers, monuments, and public art on public property; markers, monuments, and public art visible from the public right-of-way on private property within all local historic districts; murals visible from the public right-of-way. Applications must be complete before the HSMC can begin the review process. Submit this application form and all supplemental documentation as required in the "Instructions: Submittal Criteria Checklist" with one hard copy and in PDF electronic format. Electronic files can be emailed (10mb limit) or submitted with the application on a disc.

File No.: (staff only)	
<b>Applicant Contact Information:</b>	
Name: African Diaspora Museology Institute	
Address:	
City:Stat	
	Mail Address
Property Owner Contact Information and Consent (Com Name: Estate of Virginia Jackson Kiah	plete only if the marker will be on private property):
Address:	
	teZip
	Mail Address
	er(Check all that apply)
<b>Property Information:</b> (PIN information can be found at w	ww.sagis.org.)
☐ Public Property ☐ Private Property PIN (Property	Identification Number):
Address:	
Scope of Work: (Check all that apply.)	
HISTORICAL MARKER:	MONUMENT:
☐ Freestanding	☐ Person
☐ Wall-Mounted	☐ Place
☐ Ground-Embedded	☐ Event
Other:	☐ Other:
PUBLIC ART / MURAL (Commissioned or Existing Work):	NAMING AND RENAMING:
☐ Mural	☐ Public Property
☐ Sculpture	☐ Public Facilities
Other:	☐ Public Streets
<b>Project Description:</b> Describe the proposed project and s Submit all supplemental documentation as required in the sep	scope of work in detail. Additional pages may be attached. parate "Instructions: Submittal Criteria Checklist."

Submit Application (max file size 15MB) and Questions by Email to the Preservation Department at historic@thempc.org. Questions? Email the Preservation Department at historic@thempc.org or call 912-651-1440.

#### 2021 Savannah-Chatham County Historic Site and Monument Commission Meeting Schedule:

Meeting Date
Thursday, January 7, 2021
February 4
March 4
April 1
May 6
June 3
July 1
August 5
September 2
October 7
November 4
December 2
January 6, 2022

<b>Estimated Cost of the Proposed Work: \$</b>	
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#### Filing Fee Schedule:

No filing fee is required for HSMC review.

### **Public Notice for Historic Site and Monument Commission Meetings:**

The applicant is responsible for posting the Board Meeting signs provided by the MPC fifteen (15) days prior to the HSMC Meeting. Refer to *Chapter 9 of the Markers, Monuments, and Public Art Master Plan and Guidelines for the City of Savannah* for additional posting requirements.

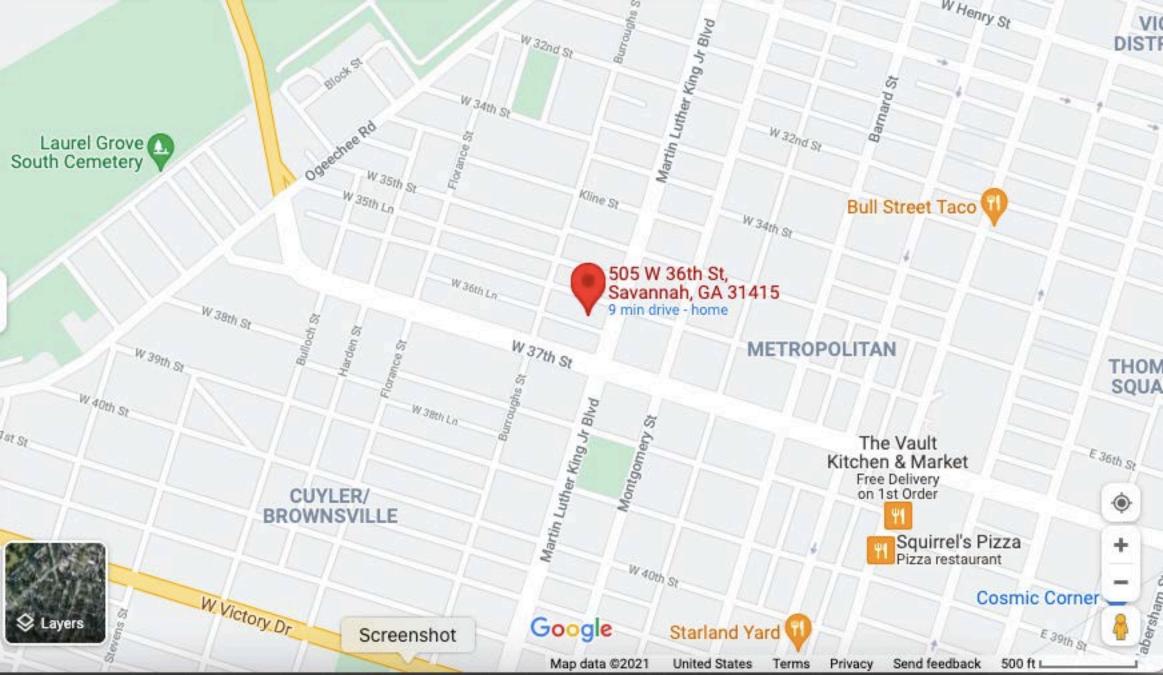
#### **Signature of Legal Owner or Authorized Agent:**

I have read and understand all the information enclosed in this application form. I understand that an Escrow Payment is required for any historical marker erected on public property. I hereby certify that I am the applicant.

Signature:	Date:
Signature	

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Revised 11/2020









### **Marker Theme**

Social and Humanitarian: The Kiahs were a significant force in education and civil rights, but not as commonly understood by organizing marches and protests. While other family members were deeply involved as NAACP leaders, Virginia and Calvin chose education and art, rather than legal means, to make positive changes in their community. The Kiahs used their professional positions as educator/activists to teach the next generation of teachers as well as mentor young people in the soft skills of navigating and contesting the Jim Crow South. From 1865 until today, education remains a priority in the African American community. First, education was a critical means towards full citizenship, including voting and opportunities to be candidates for elected office. Today, education is a means to economic improvement, increased job prospects, and the still on-going fight for civil rights and freedom from harm (Williams 2005).

Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-Taught:African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill, Nc: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

#### Title and Exact Text for the Kiah Historical Marker

#### The Kiah House Museum

(1959-2001)

On November 28, 1959, the residence of Dr. Calvin and Virginia Kiah at 505 W. 36<sup>th</sup> Street in Savannah GA was opened to the public as the Kiah Museum. The Kiah's were pioneers in the black cultural and museum movement and created the first African American-founded museum in Savannah. The museum was always free to its visitors who included those from the historic Cuyler Brownville Neighborhood as well as civil rights activists and artists national and international. It served as the headquarters for the National Conference of Artists and hosted the International Students Art Show, a traveling exhibition of student art from 20 US states, including Hawaii and 12 foreign countries, including Ghana. Virginia Kiah began her museum collection in the 1930s. The collection included her own world recognized portraits, antique furniture, artwork of local youth and adults, fossils, animals, exotic plants, African carvings, and Native American artifacts. In 1974, the Kiah Museum was listed in Readers' Digest Treasures of America. The museum closed to the public in 2001 upon the death of its founder, portrait artist, and educator, Virginia Kiah.

Erected by the African Diaspora Museology Institute, Friends of the Kiah Museum, Savannah Archaeological Alliance and Ethos Preservation.



P.O. Box 5261 Savannah, GA 31414

October 4, 2021

City of Savannah Historic Site and Monument Commission (HSMC)

To Whom It May Concern:

The African Diaspora Museology Institute has raised \$5,290.00 through a dedicated fundraiser to erect a historical marker for the Kiah House Museum at 505 W. 36<sup>th</sup> Street in Savannah, Georgia. Members of ADMI, the Friends of the Kiah Museum and the Savannah Archaeological Alliance are the sponsors of the marker.

Sincerely,

Shari P. Goins

Mrs. Shari P. Goins, Treasurer, CFO African Diaspora Museology Institute.

## Kiah House Marker Cost Estimate

24 x 36 double-sided aluminum marker: \$3,964

Pole: \$264

City's escrow payment: \$500

Installation cost: \$500

Total: \$5,228

The African Diaspora Museology Institute has \$5,290.00 available for the marker.



P.O. Box 5261 Savannah, GA 31414

October 6, 2021

**RE:** Statement of Understanding of Escrow Payment

### To Whom It May Concern

The African Diaspora Museology Institute (ADMI) recognized that part of the request for a historical marker for the Kiah House Museum being place on the public property on the tree lawn at 505 West 36<sup>th</sup> Street, Savannah, Georgia, requires us to take responsibility for future maintenance of the marker. An initial escrow payment is also required of us prior to construction and installation. Please be assured that funds will be set aside by ADMI for this purpose. We were made aware of the escrow when we applied for a marker through the Georgia Historical Society and that we could anticipate a cost range is generally between \$250 and \$500. This amount has already been budgeted. We await further notice from you in this regard and will respond immediately upon receipt of such notification.

Sincerely,

# Deborah

Dr. Deborah Johnson-Simon

ADMI Founder and CEO

<u>djohnsonsimon@gmail.com</u> <u>admi.researchcenter@gmail.com</u>

(352) 219-2629

(912) 328-8818

### MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

To: Mayor Van Johnson and the Council Persons of the City of Savannah, GA.

From: Pamela B. Jones Resident of the Cuyler-Brownville Neighborhood

Date: October 4, 2021

Ref: Support of a historical marker for the Kiah Museum

It is my honor to write this memorandum of support for the placement of a historical marker for the KIAH MUSEUM located at 510 West 36<sup>th</sup> Street in Savannah, GA. I, myself have been a resident of the neighborhood since 1954. Growing up in a community that supported education, culture and self- perseverance was a foundation for personal self confidence and professional success.

It has saddened the community that the museum has struggled for the last twenty plus years to maintain it standing in the community. Since 1959, it stood as a beacon of hope to the young people of the community. Through the years getting to know Dr. Calvin Kiah & Mrs. Virginia Kiah gave African American youth a window into a world of imagination and artistic acceptance that was not allowed anywhere else in the city. Parents with their children, teachers with their students and visitors from around the world came to this historical site. And as an aside, the Kiah's gave out the best Halloween candy.

This is a fervent request from a person who benefitted greatly from the heroic efforts of the Dr. & Mrs. Kiah for the City of Savannah to place a historic marker at the site of the Kiah Museum so that its presence and its cultural influence on the world will always be honored and never forgotten. Thank you.

### Dr. Calvin and Virginia Kiah

Research Paper

Dr. Calvin Lycurgus Kiah and Virginia West Jackson Kiah were civil rights leaders and educators who took a unique path in their activism. They used their skills and positions to train generations of artist/activists and educator/activists. The Kiahs were pioneers in the Black cultural and museum movement, an important part of a "Negro Canon" whose other principal components were the African American political and cultural activists of the earlier twentieth century in Maryland, Washington DC, and New York. They were also members of the greater society of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), such as Morgan State College, where Kiah family members earned degrees. Calvin's father, Dr. Thomas H. Kiah, became the president of today's University of Maryland, Eastern Shore. Virginia's father, Kieffer Albert Jackson was raised in Mississippi and witnessed lynching. He finished a degree at Alcorn College, an HBCU, and her mother, Baltimore-native Lillie Carroll Jackson, earned her degree from Morgan State. Later Lillie spearheaded the largest branch of the NAACP through the Depression, while Virginia and her sister Juanita would start the first NAACP youth division. They would be at the forefront of the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" movement.

The Kiahs came to Savannah, Georgia, in 1951 when Calvin accepted the leadership position of Savannah State College's new Division of Education. Virginia taught art in the public schools. Calvin would leave Savannah State College after serving 16 years as Dean of the Education Division to desegregate Georgia State College in Atlanta, serving as the Vice President for Academic Affairs. A man steeped in pride for his community and with an interest in historic preservation, he was instrumental in increasing opportunities for minorities within the University. He was a World War II veteran, a member of Asbury United Methodist Church, a 33rd Degree Mason, Secretary and Treasurer of the Toomer Realty Company's Board of Directors, and a member of the Carver State Bank Board of Directors. Today Carver is the oldest bank headquartered in the Savannah area and the only bank in south Georgia that is United States Treasury Department certified as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI).

Virginia Jackson Kiah was among the pioneers listed in the African American Museums Association's (AAMA) first published directory, which had over 300 entries. At least a quarter of the founding members were also artists or working in the arts. As a collector, Kiah was eclectic, and her work as an artist, writer, and curator bespeaks her many interests. Her descriptors include composer, educator, graphic artist, painter, writer, museum founder-director, and traveling exhibit organizer. She was one of the few artists of her day who majored in portraiture. She painted President Kennedy, Representative Adam Powell, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune and many other notable people as well as her family members and neighbors (Pittsburgh Courier 1964). Virginia's professional associations also included the National Conference of Artists, founded in Atlanta in 1959. She served as the national director of student artists for that organization, also leading a local chapter. In 1963, these students beautified Chatham Square in downtown Savannah with azaleas and a sundial dedicated to Louis B. Toomer. One of the

project fundraisers was a concert at the Beach High School auditorium, featuring Mrs. Kiah's sister, a soprano singer (Wright Benton 2018). Virginia also organized the International Students Art Show, a traveling exhibition featuring student art from 20 US states, including Hawaii, and 12 foreign countries, including Ghana (Pittsburgh Courier 1964). Locally, she was among the first members of color of the Museum Association of Savannah, Georgia, now known as the Coastal Museums Association (CMA). Today CMA members benefit from her namesake, the Kiah Fund, which awards grants for professional development.

What is important to understand about this talented couple is that their passions were not simply art and education, but using art and education to open minds and educate spirits. They directed their activism to the black museum movement and preservation in the communities where they lived. In Savannah, they selected Historic Cuyler-Brownsville for their home and museum, later founding the 36th Street Neighborhood Improvement Association. The couple chose 505 West 36th Street for its potential to be both home and museum, redesigning the building so the museum was on the first floor, and their residence was on the second floor. She and her husband were contractors for the renovation project. Mrs. Kiah's museum, the first African American-founded museum in Savannah, opened on November 28, 1959. The first visitors were the founder and first president of Carver State Bank and Register of the United States Treasury, Louis B. Toomer and his wife, Mrs. Janie Toomer. Virginia had started her collection in 1936 assisted by her mother, Dr. Lillie M. Jackson. The diverse museum collection included eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century furniture; adult and student art work from artists of diverse backgrounds; china and silver; the New York Harmon Foundation Collection of original African art; a 15,000,000-year-old fossil; 4,000-year-old collection of Native American artifacts; portions of now-demolished historic Savannah buildings; the Howard J. Morrison, Jr. Osteological Exhibit; an original block print by the world's greatest block printer-etcher Albrecht Durer; and the Sadie Steele Exhibit with personal items from Marie Dressler, a movie actress who co-starred with Wallace Berry during 1930s and early 40s. Mrs. Kiah's museum was in direct response to her childhood experiences with segregation and being denied access to museums in Baltimore. Atlanta Constitution writer Helen C. Smith quoted Virginia in 1974, "When I was a little girl in Baltimore, I loved art, but I couldn't go to a museum because my skin was black. I told my mother that someday I'd like to have a museum everybody could go to. My mama didn't laugh at me. She said she would help me." Therefore, she did. Kiah's own words set the stage for her entrance onto the Blacks in Museums world stage.

The museum became so well known that in the early 1970s, Reader's Digest's *Treasures of America* recognized their museum. Later, Virginia would create a United Nations traveling exhibit with children's art at the request of Leah Janus, chairman of the United Nations Association's Governor's Committee. When Virginia accepted this challenge it was not new; it was just another phase of civil rights activism, which, for her, had always been about serving people. While her sister Juanita integrated the University of Maryland Law School and used her talents for NAACP defense, Virginia used her art to capture the portraits of social and civil rights leaders in the movement, continuing her activism through her museum. Public historians Mack

and Welch noted," In creating their own organizations and institutions, African Americans historically have developed ways to address both needs and aspirations that fostered values of community, service, and mutual support. In this vein, museums were among the institutions established to both serve Black communities and serve as vehicles for social change" (2018).

After her father's death in 1970 and mother's death in 1975, their home in Baltimore was left to Virginia to be her second museum for the masses. It was opened in 1978 and named in honor of her mother. Virginia would serve as the founding director. Although Virginia never learned to drive, she commuted between Atlanta (where Calvin was working), their home in Savannah, and Baltimore to work on her mother's museum, the first museum in Maryland honoring a Black woman (Chico 1977). As the couple aged, the commuting and long work hours began to take a toll on Calvin's health. Virginia transferred the museum to Morgan State University for its long-term care.

Calvin Kiah passed away in 1994, leaving Virginia to care for her beloved museum alone. She was not in the best of health when he passed, and she struggled with health issues and continuing to care for an older museum. By that time, she had served on the Savannah College of Art and Design's (SCAD) Trustee Board, and a building on the campus had been named in her honor. By 1999, she could no longer live alone and operate the museum. Facing assisted living arrangements and with medical bills mounting, Virginia made a will and set up a trust in hopes that the trustee would carry out her wishes—that the promises a mother made to a young girl would continue to be realized. Just as her husband's promises were kept to the fullest, "My husband had promised me that the next time we moved, we'd get a house large enough for me to have a museum for little children to come and enjoy. It would be a learning museum, my kind of museum, with animals, and Indian artifacts, Civil War relics, antique furniture, and artwork. And it should be free for everyone. This all came about, with Calvin paying all expenses" (Smith 1974). Virginia's health continue to fail, and on December 28, 2001, she passed away. The property at 505 W. 36th Street that was her home and the Kiah Museum was closed, contents removed. It is not known by whom, or where they were taken. The Virginia Kiah Trust is now in probate. The building has been allowed to deteriorate since its closing in 2002.

In 2014, the Friends of the Kiah Museum group formed under the Center for the Study of African and African Diaspora Museums and Communities (CFSAADMC), which is now known as the African Diaspora Museology Institute (ADMI). ADMI conducts the research that investigates the cultural, anthropological, and genealogical forces that shaped the lives of Dr. Calvin Lycurgus Kiah, his wife Virginia Jackson Kiah, and the Kiah House Museum building itself to preserve their legacy for the masses. Under ADMI's leadership, the Kiah House and Museum was listed on the Georgia Trust's 2021 Places in Peril.

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## **Videos**

### Student interview with Mrs. Lavinia Jenkins Kiah Museum Neighbor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPWXQ6BXrEo

## Kiah House Museum - YouTube

#### ▶ 7:07

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPWXQ6BXrEo

8 hours ago - Uploaded by ShyShyLives

Interview with a resident within the neighborhood of which the **Kiah Museum** is located Music: "Everyone" By ...

## Kiah Museum: What if I told You? - YouTube

#### ▶ 1:14

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZWyaT0AJag

2 days ago - Uploaded by xXUltima ProductionsXx

I've been working with a professor at my college to raise awareness of the **Kiah Museum** in an attempt to.

Source: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZWyaT0AJag">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZWyaT0AJag</a>