

History Commission

April 6, 2022

A meeting of the History Commission was held this date beginning at 4:03 p.m. in Council Chambers at City Hall, 80 Broad Street.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

Present: Harlan Greene, Chair, Councilmember Peter Shahid, David McCormack, Mickey Rosenblum, Peg Eastman, Robert Rosen, and Angela Mack.

Also Present: Kaylan Koszela, Matt Frohlich, Velvett Simmons, and Patrick Carlson.

1. Call to Order

Chair Greene called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. December 15, 2021

Chair Greene asked if there were any changes to the minutes.

Mr. McCormack said that on page 7, "throughout the time I have worked on this Commission" should have been changed such that "worked" was replaced with "served."

On a motion of David McCormack, seconded by Mickey Rosenblum, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the December 15, 2021 minutes, with changes.

b. March 2, 2022

Chair Greene asked if there were any changes to the minutes.

Mr. McCormack said that on page 7, "apologized, but" should be deleted, as the use of the words "I'm sorry" were meant as a term of respect, not as an actual apology.

On page 12, paragraph 4, "then they wanted" should have been "then they should want."

He asked if the word "newspeak" should be clarified so readers understood that it referred to Orwellian newspeak.

Chair Greene suggested "[Orwellian]," in brackets for clarification.

Mr. McCormack agreed.

On a motion of Peg Eastman, seconded by David McCormack, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the March 2, 2022 minutes, with changes.

3. Old Business

a. Judge Fields Plaque

Chair Greene asked Councilmember Shahid if Judge Fields' birthday had been confirmed.

Councilmember Shahid said he had conferred with Judge Jefferson, who had clerked for Judge Fields and then took his seat. They communicated often, and she confirmed that the birth date was correct.

He said he tried to retool the text with the Commission's recommendations, and he hoped he had captured what they were looking for. He thought it was a lot better, and he appreciated the commissioners' input.

Chair Greene asked if anyone who was a member of the Charleston County Bar Association could answer if "the" was capitalized as "The" in "The Charleston County Bar Association," because it was that way in the plaque.

Mr. Rosen read from a website that it was not capitalized.

Chair Greene said he would assume it was officially “the,” in that case.

Ms. Mack asked if there needed to be a comma after “in 2013,” as there was already a comma after “in 1952.”

Mr. McCormack said he believed commas were supposed to go after dates.

Ms. Mack said that was normally the case.

On a motion of David McCormack, seconded by Councilmember Shahid, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the text as follows:

This Court room is dedicated to the Honorable Richard E. Fields. A native Charlestonian, born on October 1, 1920, Judge Fields was selected in 1969 as the first Black Municipal Judge in the City of Charleston. He was later elected a Family Court Judge in 1975 and in 1980 he was elected as a South Carolina Circuit Court Judge, where he served until his retirement in 1992. Judge Fields was universally respected for his court room demeanor and the respect shown to all those who appeared before him. His patience, wisdom and intelligence bestowed honor on the judicial system.

Judge Fields was the first African American attorney to open a law office in South Carolina since the early 1900’s upon his admission to the District of Columbia and South Carolina Bar Associations. In 2013, the Charleston County Bar Association honored Judge Fields with the prestigious James Louis Petigru Award, in recognition of his contributions to the legal profession and his community.

Judge Fields graduated from West Virginia State College in 1944 and earned his law degree from Howard University in 1947. As a member of the historic Centenary United Methodist Church he served for over 50 years as its treasurer. In 1952, he was elected to the Board of Trustees of Claflin College in Orangeburg, SC.

b. Slave Trading Complex

Chair Greene said Dr. Breeden had explained in an email shared with the Commission that the only reference to “dead-house” was a 20th century mention of it in an interview, and thus was not contemporary.

He asked if there were any suggested changes.

No one asked to speak.

On a motion by David McCormack, seconded by Peg Eastman, the Commission voted unanimously to approve side 1 of the Slave Trading Complex (south) text as follows:

Side 1

SLAVE TRADING COMPLEX | T1

This was the south end of a | 1
large slave trading complex | 2
known as The Mart or Ryan’s | 3
Mart. It was opened in 1856 | 4
by Thomas Ryan after the | 5

City banned auctions of | 6
enslaved people and other | 7
goods from streets near the | 8
Exchange building. At that | 9
time, this Chalmers St. lot | 10
was an alleyway that led to | 11
the rest of the complex, | 12
which extended one-block | 13
north to Queen St. In 1859, | 14
the Mart's second owner | 15
had the alley covered and | 16
converted it into a formal | 17
auction space. | 18

(continued on next side)

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Chair Greene asked if there were any thoughts on side 2.

Mr. Rosen said the State Archives had done a good job, and there had been a lot of work put into it.

Mr. McCormack said Dr. Breeden did a great job.

Mr. Rosen said he would vouch for Bancroft's *Slave Trading in the Old South*. He said that book was the leading authority when he was an undergraduate.

Chair Greene said Bancroft had been the first one to write about it.

Mr. Rosen said that if he said it, then somebody he thought was reliable had told him.

On a motion of David McCormack, seconded by Peg Eastman, the Commission voted unanimously to approve side 2 of the Slave Trading Complex (south) text as follows:

Side 2

SLAVE TRADING COMPLEX | T1
(continued from other side)

Behind this lot was a large | 1
"slave pen," kitchen house, | 2
four-story "jail" building, | 3
and a small structure later | 4
recalled as a "dead-house." | 5
None remain. Bombardment | 6
during the Civil War forced | 7
the Mart's abandonment in | 8
1863. Sales of enslaved | 9
people continued at other | 10
sites until Confederate | 11

forces evacuated Charleston | 12
in 1865. The Mart buildings | 13
later became tenements, | 14
portions of which African | 15
Americans occupied for | 16
decades. The Old Slave Mart | 17
Museum opened here in 1938. | 18

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Mr. McCormack said he had been fine with going along with the way it had been, but he had been a little concerned about the fact that they had been relying on one source of one recollection, where in actuality, what Dr. Breeden had said was that early research showed there was no reference to the term “dead-house,” and the reason he chose “sick house” was because there were contemporary dwellings like it in other slave complexes. He said he was fine with what they had done, but in the future, the Commission needed to be very careful, as they always had been, in making sure they felt comfortable with factual representations, as opposed to taking something from a later period and transposing it backwards.

He said he recalled that when they were asked to come up with language to put the Calhoun statue in context, there had been the use of revolutionary language from the 20th century and transposing it back, and they had all agreed that that had been improper use, because it was not contemporary. He felt they needed to continue to be careful about language.

Chair Greene said the point was well-taken. He believed they had not known of the term “dead-house” until they had been informed during the meeting, and he thought the one reference they had of it was almost both later and contemporaneous, because the one reference to a “dead-house” was from a WPA slave interview. Thus, it was someone who had been alive at the time who subsequently referred to it as such, and not a 20th century person who would have had no memory of it. He said he also agreed with the professionalism of the State Archives, and he believed the reason the Archives included the word was because the person who said it was a contemporaneous witness.

He asked if there were any changes to side 1 of the north marker.

On a motion of David McCormack, seconded by Peg Eastman, the Commission voted unanimously to approve side 1 of the Slave Trading Complex (north) text as follows:

Side 1

SLAVE TRADING COMPLEX | T1

From 1856 to 1863, this was | 1
the north end of a slave | 2
trading complex known as | 3
The Mart or Ryan’s Mart. It | 4
was opened by Thomas Ryan | 5
and extended south to a lot | 6
on Chalmers St. that became | 7
its main sales room. Prior | 8
to auction, enslaved people | 9
were held, prepped, and | 10
inspected in a large “slave | 11

pen" formed by high brick | 12
walls connecting the north | 13
and south ends of the Mart. | 14
The Mart also included a | 15
two-story kitchen house | 16
and a small structure later | 17
recalled as a "dead-house." | 18
(continued on next side)

On a motion of Peg Eastman, seconded by Robert Rosen, the Commission voted
unanimously to approve side 2 of the Slave Trading Complex (north) text as follows:

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Side 2

SLAVE TRADING COMPLEX | T1
(continued from other side)

Enslaved people were also | 1
confined and sometimes sold | 2
at Ryan's Jail, a brick | 3
four-story double-house here | 4
on Queen St. After slavery | 5
was abolished, local Black | 6
residents lived in the Mart | 7
buildings. African American | 8
families still resided in | 9
the Queen St. building as | 10
late as 1950 when the county | 11
health department condemned | 12
it as uninhabitable. It was | 13
torn down by 1951. The | 14
Chalmers St. sales room, now | 15
the Old Slave Mart Museum, | 16
is the last extant Mart | 17
building. | 18

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2. New Business

a. Charleston Work House

Chair Greene said they had previously approved the language for the Work House. Subsequent to that, a scholarly book about the Work House had come to light, and it specifically spoke about a rebellion that had occurred there. It was published by Cambridge University Press.

In Chair Greene's own review of the book, he suggested that they could put the monument to the Work House up on the anniversary of the rebellion. At the Mayor's suggestion, it was asked that they go back to the text and insert language about the enslaved people in the building, not just the architecture and location, now that it was well-documented.

There had been slight editing to the wording, but the real change was the insertion of the sentence "In July 1849, enslaved Nicholas Kelly led a rebellion that enabled the escape of 36 others; all, however, were recaptured and Kelly and two others were hanged" into the text.

The only other changes reduced the size of other sentences in order to incorporate the new sentence.

Councilmember Shahid said the first sentence of the last paragraph, "At the Work House, city staff charged owners for incarcerating enslaved people and those 'corrected by whipping'" seemed to him an awkward sentence. He had read it a couple of times, and he was unsure what they were trying to convey with that phrase.

Chair Greene said one of the initial requests was to use as much contemporary language as they could. "Corrected by whipping" was a contemporary phrase, lifted directly from the statutes. Enslaved people on the streets of the City could be incarcerated there, and they could be whipped. They were two different categories. The City would charge the owner separately for either one.

Councilmember Shahid said he understood that, he had read the statutes when they had gone over the apology for slavery several years prior. He understood the term, however, the sentence didn't necessarily make perfect sense.

Ms. Eastman said they could insert the word "for" in front of "those corrected by whipping" and it would cover what Councilmember Shahid was trying to do, she believed.

Councilmember Shahid said that was correct.

Ms. Mack suggested using the phrase "At the Work House, owners were charged by City staff for incarcerating enslaved people and those 'corrected by whipping.'"

Chair Greene said that was the passive voice, which they always tried to avoid.

Ms. Mack said it was, but she agreed with Councilmember Shahid that the sentence was awkward the way it was. She said her sentence was more cumbersome, but the original wording seemed odd.

Councilmember Shahid said either would work.

Chair Greene said changing "by City staff" to "by the City" would free up more room. He suggested "owners were charged by the City for incarcerating enslaved people and for those 'corrected by whipping.'" He asked if that would work.

Councilmember Shahid said it would.

Mr. McCormack said he had seen a very good article by Robert Behr about the new book about Denmark Vesey. There were six references to either 'slaves' or 'enslaved.' He said he had done that in order to modulate the article so that he did not repeat the same word every time. However, the Commission had gotten into the habit, at least recently, of only repeating the same words. To him, Mr. Behr's approach modulated the language to make it read and sound better. The first paragraph of the plaque read "captured runaway enslaved people." They used two words instead of one. He said they used to often talk about economy of language. He said it could stay the way it was, but he wanted to raise it as an example of what they were doing. He said they were doing it for a reason that had nothing to do with the real reason and the real way that text was written, whereas Mr. Behr did use synonyms.

Chair Greene said he felt they went out of their way to not repeat things in the same sentence. Further, they had just approved an item that did use the term "slave."

Mr. McCormack said that was exactly the point, and the Archives had to use economy of language. He said he had had a long talk with Eric Emerson about it, and he had said they could not in three words when two would do, or five when three would do.

Chair Greene said that it was not necessarily his position, but he wanted it stated for the record, that there was an incredible amount of pushback against using language that was viewed as insensitive and reduced a person to a status, such as making someone a *slave* instead of an “enslaved” *person*. He said that was the argument that was often raised, similar to how they now capitalized the word “Black” when they had not previously.

Mr. McCormack said he understood the argument. He said they were all concerned with historical language and also good writing.

Chair Greene said he thought they were trying to use historical language by putting “slave” in quotes, and that kind of thing. He asked if Mr. McCormack wanted to make a specific suggestion.

Mr. McCormack said he did not, and was just raising the issue, so that when they dealt with similar things in the future, they would be a little more sensitive to historical language and good writing, as well.

Chair Greene said they had touched on that at the previous meeting as well, when Mr. McCormack had made his comment about newspeak, and whether they would define what language they would use.

He said he had faith in the Commission. They had a rigorous loyalty to facts, but they were also all really good at language, as well, and tried to make sure that there was no redundancy, and that the same phrase was not repeated in the same sentence, at least.

He asked if there were any further emendations to the text.

No one asked to speak.

On a motion of Councilmember Shahid, seconded by Peg Eastman, the Commission voted unanimously to approve Item 2a as follows:

Based on the English practice of housing the poor, the first act to establish a work house came locally in 1736. The first building, doubling as a public hospital, opened in 1738 at the southwest corner of Magazine and Mazyck (now Logan) streets. By 1740, laws calling for all captured runaway enslaved people to be confined in the Work House until claimed by their owners or sold changed the building’s original purpose. In 1768, a new hospital for white paupers was built to the south, and the old Work House became exclusively “a place of correction” for the enslaved.”

After a fire in May 1780, the British occupying the city moved the Work House to a former sugar refinery at the west end of Broad Street. Charleston, incorporated in 1783, continued to imprison and punish enslaved Blacks there before moving the Work House to a newly constructed jail near its original site in 1786-87. In 1804 the Work House returned permanently to the old jail next door to the still extant Charleston District Jail of 1802.

At the Work House, owners were charged by the City for incarcerating enslaved people and for those “corrected by whipping.” There were fees for shackling and unshackling, with rules noting no more than “twenty lashes at one and the same time, nor more than two corrections in a week.” The city also received revenues from the sale of unclaimed enslaved people who had escaped bondage. In 1825, a large treadmill, an especially onerous form of forced labor, was installed. In July 1849, enslaved Nicholas Kelly led a rebellion that enabled the escape of 36 others; all, however, were recaptured and Kelly and two others were hanged. Afterwards, the building was enlarged and remodeled in 1850-52 to resemble a fortress-like Gothic-revival structure. Union soldiers were imprisoned here in the Civil War, and with slavery’s end, the

building became a segregated Black hospital. The building was razed after the 1886 earthquake and the land sold. The brutal history of the Work House was formally addressed in the City of Charleston's 2018 resolution apologizing for slavery.

4. Adjournment

Chair Greene asked if there was any other business to discuss before adjournment.

Ms. Eastman said Chair Greene had done a "masterful job" of chairing some contentious meetings, and she congratulated him.

Chair Greene thanked Ms. Eastman.

Mr. Rosen welcomed Councilmember Shahid to the Commission.

Councilmember Shahid said he hoped to be a great advocate for the Commission. He knew they did a wonderful job. There were contentious meetings, but that was nothing new.

Mr. McCormack said Councilmember Shahid was on City Council.

Mr. Rosen said [inaudible].

Chair Greene said it may or may not involve the Commission, but they may have read in the paper about Beaufort being the site of the Reconstruction history. He said the Mayor had suggested that a number of the sites in the City of Charleston could be nominated for that, but his comment to the Mayor was that they had already approved many plaques that already had that kind of language. They had approved a plaque on Queen Street for Jonathon Jasper Wright. There was a plaque on Pit Street for Alonzo Ransier.

Mr. McCormack said they had done one for the 1868 Constitution.

Chair Greene said that was correct. He said he thought Charleston's Reconstruction history would be acknowledged, as well. If new plaques came up, they would come before the Commission.

He said there also might be further developments regarding the anniversary of the American Revolution.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:41 p.m.

Philip Clapper
Clerk of Council's Office