

Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission

July 8, 2009 – West side of Cambridge Common, at the cannons - 5:30 P.M.

Members present: Chair King; Mss. Harrington and Barton Tobin; Dr. Solet; Mr. Bibbins

Staff present: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Burks

Public present: See attached list.

Public Hearings: Alterations to Designated Property

Case 2035: Cambridge Common, by City of Cambridge, o/b/o Prince Hall Monument Committee. Review mockup on site of artist's design for Prince Hall monument.

Chair King called the meeting to order at 5:35 P.M. and explained that it was a joint meeting of the Historical Commission and the Public Art Commission. He provided the background of the case: the Historical Commission had approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for the monument, upon determination that several conditions were met, including review of a mockup on site, approval of the final height of the monument, satisfaction that the accessibility requirements of the ADA were met to the extent possible on the existing pavement, and approval of the Public Arts Commission. He introduced Greg Williams, who would be chairing the meeting of the Public Art Commission, which was present. The two chairs asked the applicants to make a presentation to the commissions jointly. There would be time for public comment before each commission separated to deliberate and vote.

Mayor E. Denise Simmons, chair of the monument committee, said the committee had begun the process in 2005. She described the history and achievements of Prince Hall, one of the first civil rights leaders in the country. She noted that the only other event on the Cambridge Common that she knew of relative to African Americans was the execution of a slave named Phyllis.¹ The Prince Hall monument will put forward a positive message about African American History and the Common. She introduced the artist, Ted Clausen.

Mr. Clausen described his background. He displayed a full-size mockup of the monument and described how the viewer would move around the outside first, and then move inside to view the panels. He described the kind of quotes that would be engraved on the stones and the type of finishes, both interior and exterior. The height would be 6'. There was room inside the panels for a wheelchair to turn around, per the standards of the ADA. The text would be sandblasted into the granite. He responded to questions he had received at previous meetings of the Commission with regard to the model, the siting, and the text. He displayed an alternative curved top for each of the panels, which recalled the design of the gravestone-type historic markers on the Common. He proposed the amended design for approval tonight. The Public Art Commission had asked why this site was chosen. The rotunda already had several monuments to Revolutionary figures. The Prince Hall monument would occupy an area of the rotunda that was empty and unbalanced. The monument would energize the site. The proximity to the Washington monument created a conversation between General Washington and Prince Hall. Hall was mustering his brethren for freedom as well. He said he had spent the last eight weeks working with high school students who

¹ Phyllis was not executed on the present Common, but in a gravel pit on Avon Hill that was used for this purpose in the 18th century.

researched civil rights activists, wrote reports, selected quotations, and presented their choices to the class. The final list contained 30 quotes, chosen out of 390.

Mr. Williams asked about the aesthetic relationship between the panels and the tombstone shaped markers. Was there a direct association with gravestones? Mr. Clausen replied that the shape suggested an era and added a degree of warmth through the movement of shapes. It was more inviting to the viewer.

Dr. Solet asked about reflectivity of the polished surfaces. Would the reflection of the sun make it difficult to read the text? Mr. Clausen assured her that the text would be legible.

Mr. King asked if there would be a marker on the monument describing its date and authorship. Mr. Clausen answered that there would be a plaque located somewhere nearby that would indicate when the monument was built, the name of the monument committee, and the involvement of the school kids. He did not want the distraction of fundraising information and corporate names, etc. Mr. King suggested that this explanatory plaque be delegated to the staff to approve.

Mr. Williams asked if the rotunda would be repaved. Mr. Sullivan answered that the rotunda would be resurfaced as part of a larger renovation of Cambridge Common, which would come to the Historical Commission for approval in the future. The renovation would not take place until 2011 or 2012.

Mr. King asked about installation methods. Mr. Clausen described the 1" thick stainless steel rods that would be inserted in a concrete base and epoxied to the granite panels. The installation would be very stable. Mr. Sullivan said the cobbles could be cut and reinstalled around the granite panels.

Cynthia Smith of the Public Art Commission asked if the spacing of the panels would be more generous than required by the ADA. Mr. Clausen said they would be no more than 6" tighter than the mockup and yes, they would be more generous than required by ADA.

Mags Harries of the Public Art Commission noted that most of the monuments and cannons were facing outwards toward the public while Mr. Clausen had oriented the opening to the circle of panels on the interior of the rotunda. Why? Mr. Clausen said the pedestrian or bicyclist would notice the stones and stop to take a look.

Mr. King asked for public questions and comments.

Red Mitchell of the monument committee noted that the location was chosen deliberately so as to have a relationship with the other monuments. They all had an association with Prince Hall in the Revolutionary period. Two thousand African Americans from Massachusetts alone served in the Revolutionary War. The rotunda was a gathering place of patriots and should include Prince Hall. It would be a tourist destination, bringing people to Cambridge.

Carol Weinhaus of 64 Oxford Street expressed her strong support for the monument.

James Rafferty introduced himself as representing the Prince Hall Committee.

Mr. King closed public testimony. He noted that the curved tops of the panels were appealing. They added a more modern look to the monument, which should be identifiable as a work of 2009.

The two commissions broke into separate groups for their deliberations and votes.

The Historical Commission discussed whether the three conditions of the April decision had been met.

Dr. Solet asked for clarification that the text placement and font were not subject to Commission approval. Ms. Burks said that was correct. The Commission had been consistent on that point when reviewing other monuments such as the Irish Famine Monument and King of Thailand markers.

Mr. Bibbins said the height was improved with the tops cut off for the new curvilinear shape.

Ms. Harrington said the amended height and shape were more comfortable and inviting.

Mr. King said the spacing and placement of panels was appropriate even if they became 6" tighter.

Dr. Solet suggested pathways to each monument in a different pavement type. Mr. Bibbins disagreed, saying it ought to all be one surface. Dr. Solet asked if the cobbles were old. Mr. Sullivan answered that they had been salvaged from the Quincy Market area.

Mr. Bibbins said the city staff responsible for accessibility would review the monument for compliance. He moved that the Commission find that conditions 1, 2, and 3 had been satisfactorily met, with the understanding that ADA compliance would be reviewed as appropriate by other city staff and on the condition that the explanatory plaque be reviewed and approved by the staff. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion, which passed 5-0.

Mr. King wished the sponsors and the Prince Hall Monument Committee well and commended them all for their perseverance.

The Public Art Committee reported that they had unanimously approved the remaining details of the monument.

Ms. Harrington moved to adjourn. Ms. Barton Tobin seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:32 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public
Who Signed Attendance Sheet 7/8/09**

Mags Harries	388 Walden St
Lillian Hsu	344 Broadway
Jeremy Gaucher	344 Broadway
J. Tyler Sumpter?	P.H. Committee
Josephine Bartie	82 Alpine St
Lawrence Adkins	45 Hayes St
David Phillips	40 Howard St
Hollie? Moultrie, Jr.	14 Crispus Attucks Pl., Rox,
Leroy Cragwell	13 Hubbard Ave
Howard Winkler	10 Sleepy Hollow Lane, Arlington
Alan Jones	1 Lehigh St, Arlington
Gregory Williams	15 Marie Ave #2
Teri Hensick	161 Hancock St #4
Stephanie Boye	204 Appleton St
Miriam Steward	53 Newcomb St, Arlington
Cynthia Smith	37 Crescent St
Julie Graham	50 Garden St #2
John DiGiovanni	50 Church St
Carol Weinhaus	64 Oxford St

Note: Town is Cambridge unless otherwise indicated.