

**Florida National Register Review Board  
R. A. Gray Building, Auditorium  
Tallahassee, Florida  
June 16, 2023  
Meeting Minutes**

**Commission Members Present In-Person:** Dr. Judy Bense, Kathleen Kauffman

**Commission Members Present Via Webinar:** Rick Gonzalez, Dr. Clifford Smith

**Commission Members Not Present:** Dr. J. Michael Francis

**Florida Department of State Officials and Staff Present In-Person:** Alissa Lotane, Division Director, Historical Resources; Khara Fleming, Administrative Assistant; Alexys Johnson, Executive Assistant; Jennifer Tobias, Historic Preservationist; Dr. Angela Tomlinson, Assistant Director, Historical Resources; Dr. Kyra Lucas, Survey and Registration Supervisor; Gina Lane, Historic Preservationist; Samantha Schmidt, Historic Preservationist; Andrew Waber, Historian; Jon Morris, Deputy General Counsel; Ethan Putnam, Historic Preservationist; Marsha Welch, Historic Preservationist; Jeremy Heiker, State Historical Marker Coordinator; Ruben Acosta, Bureau Chief, Historic Preservation.

**Florida Department of State Officials and Staff Present Via Webinar:** Vincent Birdsong, Florida Master Site File Supervisor; Christopher Fowler, Assistant Supervisor, Florida Master Site File; Cassandra Frederick, Historic Data Analyst; Johnathan Grandage, Public Engagement & Historic Sites Development Director; Dr. Sarah Liko, Operations Manager.

**Guests Present in Person:** Etta Johnson Huff, Beverly Steele, Cliff Hughes, Camelita Leon, Suncara S. Jackson, Mah Palua, Logan Opsahl, Jessical Kowel, Scott Sigler, Jamie Sanders, Annie Timonier, Brenda Solomon, Levi Solomon, Virginia Gadson, Jacqueline Dixon, Gwen Roach.

**Guests Present Via Webinar:** Thomas Barkanic, Chris Benvenuto, Stephen Browning, Don Buckner, William Burke, Lauren Camp, Beth Chambless, Alfred Corbin, Brad Cornelius, Ennis Davis, Annie Delaroderie, Quan Erving, Dallas Evans, Jess Fish, Dallas Fowler, Edward Gonzalez-Tennant, Diana Gonzalez-Tennant, Duane Jackson, Tameka Jackson, Dwight Jackson, Maxwell Jackson, Darrell Jackson, Shameka Jackson Herring, Brad Koozman, Rosalyn Lewis, Drew Love, Bill Luttrell, Angela Madathil, Berardo Mascioli, Chad Mendell, Patricia O'Connor, Cayla Owens, Jennifer Rey, Robert Roscow, Deidra Russell, Kristy Russell, Adrienne Schmitz, Steve Schnell, Jim Shields, Dionne Solomon, Dan Tatro, Tara Tedrow, CJ Williams, Tracy de Lemos.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Jeremy Heiker read the housekeeping notes addressing the webinar and in-person guests at 1:03 p.m. Meeting delayed until 1:25 p.m. due to technical difficulties. The board chair, Rick Gonzalez, called the meeting to order at 1:25 p.m. Mr. Gonzalez asked Ruben Acosta to do the roll call.

II. Introduction of Commission, Staff & Guests

Mr. Acosta introduced the Commission and staff.

III. Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Gonzalez asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. **Dr. Clifford Smith moved to adopt the agenda. Kathleen Kauffman seconded the motion. The agenda was approved unanimously.**

IV. Remarks by Chairperson on Purpose of Meeting

Mr. Gonzalez explained the purpose of the National Register meeting.

V. Approval of Minutes from the January 19, 2023, Meeting

Mr. Gonzalez asked for approval of the Meeting Minutes. **Ms. Kauffman made a motion to approve the Minutes from the January National Register Review Board meeting. Dr. Bense seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.**

VI. Approval of Minutes from the February 2, 2023, Meeting

Mr. Gonzalez asked for approval of the Meeting Minutes. **Ms. Kauffman made a motion to approve the Minutes from the February National Register Review Board meeting. Dr. Smith seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.**

VII. Director's Comments

Ms. Alissa Lotane thanked guests and staff for their time and efforts toward the National Register program. Ms. Lotane requested that the applicant for the Community of Royal Rural Historic District be allotted additional time to present an argument and video in support of the nomination. Mr. Gonzalez agreed to allot a total of 15 minutes, plus an opportunity for rebuttal and Q&A.

VIII. Old Business

**A. The Community of Royal Rural Historic District, Wildwood vicinity, Sumter County**

The first item is the Community of Royal Rural Historic District, which is being re-presented to the board following edits done at the board's request following the January 19, 2023, meeting. The district is being proposed for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic History: Black, Exploration/Settlement, Community Planning

and Development, and Agriculture, at the state level of significance, for the period of significance 1870-1972. The 2546-acre historic district encompasses 56 contributing and 417 noncontributing resources, which collectively comprise most of the historic African American community of Royal. Originally settled in the 1870s as a Black homesteader community, Royal is significant as one of the few surviving Black settlements from the period. Many of the descendants of the original 31 pioneer families that homesteaded Royal continue to live and own property within the district. A farming community, the district retains its historic rural character of dispersed residential compounds surrounded by pastures, fields, and forested tracts.

The nomination submitted for review incorporates multiple edits made in response to the board's request to reevaluate the proposed district boundaries and the associated boundary justification at the January 19, 2023, National Register Review Board meeting. Staff worked with the applicant and their consultant, and reviewed additional documentation submitted by representatives of district property owners. Historic aerial photography, maps, and ownership records were also consulted. The boundary of the district was reduced to encompass those properties that were primarily under direct ownership by the African American residents of Royal during the period of significance, or had close association with the community through use and oral history, and which also retain both historic significance and integrity. Those parcels that had minimal connection with Royal, that were not under African American ownership, or that lacked historic significance or integrity, were excluded. Staff provided a summary of changes to the nomination to the board as part of our staff comments.

Staff mailed out new owner notification letters based upon the revised boundaries on May 12, 2023. Staff also notified those property owners who were excluded from the state's revised district, but were included within the boundary of the applicant's last submission to the state. As of today, staff has received one new objection, one duplicate objection, two letters supporting the revised boundary, three letters supporting the district in general, 21 letters from property owners objecting to their exclusion from the district, and additional documentation for an excluded property. All previously submitted letters of support and objection to the historic district remain on file and have been provided to the board.

Staff finds that the revised nomination for the Community of Royal Rural Historic District meets the National Register Criteria and possesses most of the eleven of the characteristics identified in the *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*. The district is eligible for listing under Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage-Black, Exploration/Settlement, Community Planning and Development, and Agriculture, for the period of significance 1870-1972, at the state level of significance.

Mr. Gonzalez requested that the board comment on whether anyone has had outside communication with members of this community. Ms. Kathleen Kauffman indicated that she had been contacted, but would not speak with them. Mr. Gonzalez indicated that he had a conversation with Mr. Bill Perry, who represents some of the local landowners objecting to the nomination. No other board members stated that they had outside communication with the applicant, or with other members of the public regarding the nomination.

Mr. Gonzalez invited the applicant to present. Ms. Beverly Steele, the applicant, spoke in support of the nomination, but argued for a larger boundary than that presented by staff, based upon initial revisions completed at the request of the review board. Ms. Steele presented a 10-minute video by the nomination author, Dr. Edward Gonzalez-Tenant, which addressed the specific boundary changes supported by the applicant. Ms. Steele requested the board support the larger boundary and objected to the state's revised boundary.

Mr. Gonzalez invited rebuttal to the applicant's presentation. Mr. Bill Perry spoke on behalf of 8G Farms. They support the state's revised boundary and argued that the exclusion of his client's property from the district is appropriate. He argued that their property did not have any historic resources associated with Royal, was not owned by African Americans, nor was farmed by them.

Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Gonzalez called for a recess at 2:10 p.m. The meeting resumed at 2:40 p.m.

Mr. Logan Opsahl spoke on behalf of Mr. William Farkus. They support the state's revised boundary, object to the applicant's boundary, and argued for exclusion of his client's property in the historic district. Mr. Samuel Albritton spoke on behalf of Gattis incorporated. They support the state's revised boundary and object to the applicant's boundary. Ms. Jessica Kowel spoke on behalf of Werner Enterprises. They support the state's revised boundary and object to the applicant's boundary. Mr. Dallas Evans spoke and objected to the inclusion of his client's property within the district. Ms. Tara Tedrow spoke on behalf of Ms. Deborah Farkus. They support the state's revised boundary, object to the applicant's boundary, and argued for exclusion of her client's property in the district.

Mr. Gonzalez solicited public comment on the nomination. Mr. Levi Solomon objected to his exclusion from the state's district boundary and argued in favor of the applicants' boundary. He shared his recollections of historic agricultural work in Royal. Ms. Etta Johnson Huff objected to the state's boundary and argued in favor of the applicant's boundary. She also stated her recollections of historic activities in Royal. Mr. Cliff Hughes objected to the state's boundary and argued in favor of the applicant's boundary. Ms. Brenda Solomon objected to the state's boundary and argued in favor of the applicant's boundary.

Comment from online guests was solicited. Mr. Bernardo Mascioli spoke on behalf of Champagne Farms, Inc. They support the state's revised boundary, but recommended that instead of a district, properties should be individually designated and recognized with markers. Mr. Don Buckner spoke on behalf of Buckner Land, a.k.a. Gatorworld. They support the state's boundary and object to the applicant's boundary for the district. Mr. Quan Erving supports the applicant's boundary for the district. Mr. Robert Roscow objected to the lack of highlighting of properties owned by residents who want to be included in the district during the presentation. Ms. Rosalyn Lewis stated that there are additional historic resources excluded by the state's boundary, including the Shady Oak property.

Mr. Heiker read a statement from Mr. Jim Shields, citizen of Sumter County.

Mr. Gonzalez solicited board comments. Ms. Kauffman restated her previous support for the Royal Rural Historic District. She thanked the public for attending the meeting. She stated that National Register nominations are living documents and can be revised or expanded in the future. Ms. Kauffman commented positively on the rural landscape and reiterated her belief that this property type merits preservation. She stated that while the boundary does not include all resources associated with Royal, that does not invalidate their history or connection with the community. Ms. Kauffman stated her support for the state's revised boundary.

Dr. Bense asked staff and the applicant as to the locations of the Solomon, Hughes, and Presley properties in relation to the state's historic district boundary. Ms. Steele directed staff's annotation of the map to show the locations of the properties. Dr. Bense asked staff regarding the connection between excluded properties and African American resources and history. Dr. Bense stressed the honorary nature of National Register designation and how it does not restrict property owners' rights.

Dr. Smith thanked staff for their work. He stated his support for the state's revisions and his belief that the boundaries are defensible.

Mr. Gonzalez stated his agreement with his fellow board members and did not make any additional comment.

Mr. Gonzalez called for a motion. **Dr. Smith made a motion to forward the nomination of Royal Rural Historic District to the National Park Service under Criteria A, at the state level of significance, with the SHPO suggested boundaries. Ms. Kauffman seconded the motion. The nomination passed 3-1, with Dr. Bense opposed.**

The meeting recessed for a break at 3:40 p.m. The meeting resumed at 3:51 p.m.

## IX. Review of Nomination Proposals

### **A. Ebenezer Methodist Church, Miami, Miami-Dade Co.**

The Ebenezer Methodist Church is being proposed for listing at the local level under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage: Black, Social History, and Architecture. The period of significance extends from 1948 to 1971. The church is being listed under the Historic and Architectural Properties of Overtown in Miami, Florida (1896-1964) MPS under associated property type "Churches," and associated contexts "World War II and Post World War II Years, 1939-1954," "The Civil Rights Era and Integration, 1954-1968," and "Preservation Efforts, 1968 to Present." The nomination consists of one single resource, which is a masonry mid-20th century Gothic Revival church building.

The Ebenezer Methodist Church is the best surviving resource associated with the Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), which was one of the most prominent congregations operating in the historic African American community of Overtown. The congregation had a long history of involvement in community outreach activities such running soup kitchens, hosting the Women's Society of Christian Service, and participating in local festivities such as the Easter

Parade along NW 2nd Avenue. The congregation was also active in civil rights activities, hosting a number of important meetings for the James E. Scott Association, CORE, and the National Conferences for United Nations Day. The church hosted prominent national figures such as Mary McLeod Bethune and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The church building is the one of the few remaining historic churches and the best extant example of Gothic Revival architecture in Overtown. It is one of just eleven extant historic African American churches in Overtown. The building is an excellent locally significant example of Gothic Revival architecture adapted to a mid-20th century African American church. This is perhaps best expressed through the castle-like towers flanking the main entrance, the prominent usage of lancet windows, and inset pointed arch main entryway. In keeping with the economic realities of a lot of Black churches of the period, the church is restrained in appearance, with minimal architectural adornment.

Staff drew attention to alterations that have occurred with this building since its construction, particularly to the interior. Most of these changes were required to rehabilitate the property after a long period of neglect. The building had significant condition issues due to vacancy after the congregation moved out of Overtown. The property was acquired by the local Community Redevelopment Agency, which rehabilitated the building into a performing arts center and events venue. The main assembly room, which is the historic sanctuary space, has lost much of its original materials. The tile flooring in this space is non-historic and the historic seating has been removed. On the west end, a beverage service room and storage replaced what would have been open seating space. The second-floor gallery overlooking the main assembly room, which historically was open to the sanctuary, has been enclosed with glass. The basement level of the church has also been reconfigured. This level typically hosted classrooms and meeting rooms, but now has a commercial kitchen and multi-use spaces.

In addition to changes that have taken place to the building, the surrounding neighborhood has been significantly impacted by urban renewal projects, which have eliminated much of the historic fabric of Overtown. The construction of Interstate 95 less than a block from the church has adversely affected and reshaped the historic setting through the destruction of numerous blocks of urban fabric. The Miami Metrorail elevated tracks also impact the historic setting of the property, as blocks of historic residences and commercial properties were demolished to build the rail line. This is a common problem seen in inner city and predominantly African American communities throughout the country and should be understood within the larger socioeconomic and racial factors shaping mid to late 20th century inner city development.

Despite the alterations that impact the building's integrity, staff determined that the building still retains exterior integrity of location, design, materials, association, and feeling that support eligibility under Criterion A and C. The interior retains integrity of design, association, and feeling as it preserves the overall form of the interior with a large open nave, raised dais on the sanctuary, overlooking mezzanine, and large windows. Special consideration should be paid to the scarcity of Ebenezer as a resource type, as well as the evaluation standard found in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, which addresses the church as a resource type. Recent guidance from the NPS has emphasized more flexibility in evaluating standards of integrity for

historically African American communities. Staff feels that the building, when taken into full context with the excellent exterior integrity and the relative scarcity of what was once a significant and ubiquitous resource type within the community, fits the standards of this recent NPS guidance.

Staff finds that Ebenezer Methodist Church is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under at the local level of significance under Criterion A: Ethnic History-Black and Social History, as well as Criterion C: Architecture, for the period 1948-1971.

Dr. Bense asked where the residents of Overtown moved to as it underwent urban renewal. Mr. Gonzalez commented on the destruction of the neighborhood.

Mr. Gonzalez solicited board comments. Dr. Smith expressed his support for the nomination. Ms. Kauffman stated her support for the nomination. Mr. Gonzalez commented on the rear addition, but stated his support for the nomination. Dr. Bense did not have additional comments.

There was no public comment on this item.

Mr. Gonzalez called for a motion. **Ms. Kauffman made a motion to forward the nomination of the Ebenezer Methodist Church under Criteria A and C. Dr. Smith seconded the motion. The nomination passed unanimously.**

X. Other Business

Mr. Acosta provided an update on National Register nominations, indicating that we are working on several resubmissions that National Park Service sent back to the Division of Historical Resources for editing. Mr. Acosta noted that the National Register Section hired a new staff member.

The next National Register Board Meeting is Thursday August 3, 2023. The following meeting will be tentatively on November 2, 2023. Mr. Acosta requested board members inform him promptly of any scheduling conflicts.

XI. Public Comment

No Public Comment.

XII. Motion to Adjourn

**Dr. Smith made the motion to adjourn. Ms. Kauffman seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.**

Chair, National Register Review Board

Date

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State Historic Preservation Officer

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Date

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