



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Mical Tawney, Acting Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: January 8, 2024
SUBJECT: CoA 23-20A, 5620 3rd St. South, Ball-Sellers House Local Historic District (LHD)

Background Information

The Ball-Sellers House, constructed ca. 1750, is Arlington’s oldest extant house. The property includes the original one-story log cabin and a two-story frame addition. Owned by the Arlington Historical Society (AHS), the original log section and lean-to function as a museum and the Victorian-era addition serves as a private residence.

In August and October 2016, the HALRB approved CoA 16-19 and 16-19A to install a rain garden and low wall outlining the location of a demolished historic addition. In 2017, the AHS requested a one-year extension of CoA 16-19A to complete the project as proposed.

In August 2023, the HALRB approved CoA 23-20 to install three 4” x 4” plaques or “stumbling stones” in the corner between the sidewalk and brick pathway along the west elevation of the Ball-Sellers House. The purpose of this interpretive site element was to honor the enslaved people who lived and worked at the house in the nineteenth century. This landscape element was installed as part of the broader AHS project “Memorializing the Enslaved in Arlington, 1669-1865.”

Each brass plaque mounted on a stone or concrete base at the Ball-Sellers House would include the following information:

- Enslaved Here, Nancy, born ca. 1775, died ca.1831-1840;
- Enslaved Here, Name Unknown, Male, Born ca. 1806 -1820; and
- Enslaved Here, Name Unknown, Male, Born 1844.

Each plaque would also include the Sankofa symbol, which is of Ghanaian origin and represents “embracing past lessons for brighter futures.”

Proposal

The applicant is seeking retroactive approval for two design changes made to the three markers installed at the Ball-Sellers House. The first change is the inclusion of a stamp on the back of each concrete base. The stamp includes: the names of the organizations responsible for creating the markers (Arlington Historical Society, Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, and Arlington Tech); the date of “10/28/23”;

and the logo of the AHS which is a drawn outline of the Hume School, another LHD property owned and maintained by the AHS.

The second change is the omission of the Sankofa symbol on the actual brass plaques. The AHS decided to not pursue this design element and only have the names (if known) and other information about each enslaved individual on the plaques. The project team for the markers felt the inclusion of the Sankofa symbol might not be inclusive given that it only represents one African culture/region.

Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

The DRC considered this application at its January 3, 2024, hybrid meeting. The DRC members did not have any questions or concerns about the changes and placed this item on the Consent Agenda for the January 17, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff recommends approval of this application as submitted. These are minor changes to the interpretive project which add to the narrative of the property without affecting the historic resource. Staff supports the applicant's desire for inclusivity by not including the Sankofa symbol on the plaques. Given that the markers are installed in the grass adjacent to the walkway and the right-of-way, and not on the home, the proposal meets the intent of Standard #10 of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.