

BLACK IN TIME

Society celebrates Haitian contributions

BY DOROTHY JENKINS FIELDS
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The Haitian-American Historical Society promotes and preserves the intellectual study of Haiti's past. The mission is to fully investigate past Haitian contributions. The intent is to establish truth and accuracy in historical events pertaining to Haitians and those of



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Haitian descent. Established in 2001, the original officers included: Daniel Fils-Aime Sr., chairman; Jean Claude Exulien, first vice chairman; and Claude

Charles, second vice chairman.

The officers and a dedicated core of supporters raised funds and collaborated with government officials for nearly a decade. The result is that this Miami-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization completed three major projects. They built a monument in Savannah, Ga.; opened a museum in North Miami; and erected a marker in St. Augustine.

On June 27 in St. Augustine, the society unveiled the General Georges (Jorges) Biassou marker at his former residence, 42 Georges Street. Biassou was a leader in the Haitian revolution that led to Haiti's independence from

France. Biassou moved to St. Augustine when it was part of the Spanish colony of Cuba in 1796. The second-highest paid officer in the colony, Spanish leaders put him in charge of the black militia, leading free black soldiers defending Fort Matanzas. He died in 1801 and was buried in Tolomato Cemetery on Cordova Street.

In addition, St. Augustine's city commission recently approved a plan for the society to erect a monument of General Biassou at St. Augustine's visitor's information center. In a news article headlined "Haitian champion remembered," staugustine.com's Anthony DeMatteo's reported that "city and coun-

ty officials hope illustrating Biassou's local history leads to greater tourism" in St. Augustine, the oldest city in the United States.

Since October 2007, residents and tourists in Savannah have had the opportunity to visit the Haitian Memorial Monument in Franklin Square. This monument honors Haitian ancestors who fought to help the United States win independence during the siege of Savannah in 1779. It commemorates Haiti's role in the American Revolution: Les Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue, a unit of more than 500 free black men from Haiti, the largest regiment of volunteer soldiers of African descent to

fight in the Revolutionary War. This is one of many points of national Haitian pride and recognition.

In 2010, the Haitian History Museum and Archives became a program of the Society. Founder Daniel Fils-Aime Sr., with co-founder and executive director Alexandria Barbot, secured a home for the museum through former state Rep. Yolly Roberson.

U.S. Rep. Fredericka Wilson, D-Miami, paid tribute to the heroic efforts of the Haitian-American Historical Society in Washington, D.C., on the floor of the House of Representatives during the 112th Congress on May 20. Her expression is contained in the Congressional Record: "Mr.

Speaker, please join me ... on the inauguration of the Haitian History Museum and Archives. Today, I pay tribute to the triumphant and resilient Haitian people, and I congratulate the Haitian-American Historical Society on this new, wonderful chapter of its history!"

To learn more about Haitian contributions to World and United States history, visit the Society's website: www.haitianhistory.org.

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