Ivers Square
Interpreting an Inclusive History

Denise Lincoln 2018
Ivers Square – the courthouse park – for more than 165 years has been a gathering place for the community of Cape Girardeau. We now enjoy concerts, weddings, memories as the set of a major motion picture, and other community events at the historic landmark. Most are unaware this was also a place of great dread, then triumphant breakthrough for men and women of color.

Throughout our city’s history, this has been the place of legal public auction. In the days of slavery, property sold at bid included enslaved people of color. This is also the place of annual slave “hires” – when contract agreements were made between slaveowners of the city and farmers and households to “rent-out” slaves. These practices cruelly separated men, women, and children from their families and exploited their lives for uncompensated labor. This was a place of deep despair.

Despair turned to hope at this place from June 18, 1863, to July 4, 1864. Here, more than 200 men of color voluntarily enlisted for service in the Union Army Colored Regiments during the Civil War. They took the oath of service and signed their enlistment papers, often with an “X,” at the desk of the provost marshal, headquartered in this courthouse. Though freedom for Missouri slaves was not yet a reality, the act of enlistment marked beginning steps toward true freedom. As United States soldiers, these men were for the first time officially recognized as
men and not mere property. Their courageous contribution to fight for the Union, and their sacrifice to achieve freedom for their people, were important factors to end the war, preserve the union of states, and abolish slavery.

In June 2017, the City Council acknowledged this chapter of African American history in Cape Girardeau by designating the public space around the courthouse as “Ivers Square.” This designation preserves for community memory just one of the families who sacrificed in the slave to soldier experience – James and Harriet Ivers. How can we appropriately interpret this significant and engaging history?

**Our Contribution to Inclusive Public History**

The stated policy of Public Art criterion in the City of Cape Girardeau is to “promote and celebrate our community’s heritage, ethnicity, diversity and civic pride...,” 1

Nothing would exemplify and succinctly convey the significance of Ivers Square better than installation of classic historic art, comparable to the investments of past generations. I propose that our city’s Civil War story of patriotic devotion and sacrifice will

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1 Item #4, Public Art Policy and Procedures, City of Cape Girardeau, Ordinance adopted 10/1/12
be portrayed more completely with the installation of this artistically engaging statue of a United States Colored Infantry soldier.

Inclusive public history is powerful to convey appropriate remembrance. This is necessary to reckon with inequity and injustice, but also to display purposeful commitment toward a just future. This proposal is in keeping with the enduring nature of the monuments and memorials extant on the park property. The visceral presence of this symbolic soldier – conveying transition from slave to soldier – invites the observer to know more. While the broad scope of our community’s history, and the chapters of our historic enslaved community’s struggle toward freedom, is best conveyed in written word, this enduring public statue acknowledges and effectively points to the larger context. This statue, even at a glance, invites children, citizens, visitors to interact and assimilate more about Cape Girardeau’s rich history.

Our Present Opportunity

The citizens of the City of Cape Girardeau have a unique, but fleeting opportunity to acquire and accurately portray the city’s historic sacrifice for country and freedom during the Civil War.

Two castings of this full-figured statue, created by artist Roy Butler, are currently displayed. One, designated as United States Colored Troops National Monument is installed at the Nashville National Cemetery, and the second, at Freedom Park
in Helena, Arkansas. First commissioned by the Veterans Administration for the Nashville cemetery, Mr. Butler has artistic right for limited recasts. Consultation with Butler has determined the foundry molds for the statue can be used for only one additional cast of the image.

$47,000 delivered estimated price — includes artist’s project management fee, from the beginning of the project to the end, and assistance with pedestal selection and installation. The artist requires two payments: Initial deposit of 50%, prior to foundry fabrication, and 50% prior to the bronze crated and shipped. Butler’s quote was based on December 2017 communications and prices based on then-current market prices. Butler stated his quote would stand through April 2018.

An alternate artistic presentation – a cast of only head/shoulders – has been discussed if it is necessary to reduce project cost. Specific cost of a reduced rendering have not been determined.

This prospectus summary is respectfully presented by Denise Lincoln, a citizen of Cape Girardeau, for consideration. I hope to initiate requirements of approval as stated in the Public Art Policy & Procedure for the City of Cape Girardeau. I invite members of the City Council, City Administration, Public Art Committee, Parks and Recreation Department, Development Services Department, Public Works Department, and Old Town Cape to consider this statue to be included in planned improvements to Ivers Square as initiated with the November 2017 award of a Partners in Preservation grant through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express in partnership with Main Street America. To be successful in this unique historic opportunity, it is necessary to solicit individuals and businesses of the community to embrace and finance this artistic interpretation of Ivers Square history.