

From Beck Cultural Exchange Center's "Friends of the Beck" email campaign 4/28/2023

25th Anniversary of

The Dedication of the

Alex Haley Statue

April 24, 1998

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Ceremony hails Haley

Dedication of author's statue stirs emotions in racially mixed crowd at Morningside Park

By Jim Balloch
News-Sentinel staff writer

The golden drapes fell away, and bright morning sunshine splashed across the bronze statue of Alex Haley.

There was a swirl and rhythm of African dance and drums, and everybody cheered and applauded.

Then many little dramas, some of them very personal, unfolded.

Actor Louis Gossett Jr. looked up in silence at the giant image of his good old friend.

For a second, he was motionless. Then, he reached out and reverently touched the open book in Haley's huge hands.

The eyes of Jackie Naipo, Haley's longtime personal assistant, glistened brightly with tears.

For a sweet but fleeting second, she said later, "I had a deep feeling that he was alive, that there was a soul in there, and a heart beating."

Haley's daughter, Lydia Anne Haley, 55, of Beaufort, N.C., gazed into the broad, serene face and said, "Oh, yes, that's him, that's him."

A happy smile spread across the face of sculptor Tina Allen when several small children began to scramble around the lap of her creation — well before the dedication ceremony at Morningside Park was over.

"Oh, just look at that! They can't wait," Allen squealed in delight.

She was watching her dream come true. One of the reasons she chose to sculpt Haley in a sitting position was so little children could climb onto his lap and touch his face.

A racially mixed crowd estimated at between 1,200 and 1,500 attended the formal dedication Friday of the statue of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of "Roots."

Several were holding well-thumbed copies of the internationally acclaimed book that made Haley one of the most famous black men in the world.

Based on stories and legends in Haley's family, "Roots" is the multigenerational saga of a black American family, beginning with the capture by slave traders of African ancestor Kunta Kinte. It has been published in 37 languages and sold millions of copies.

The novel not only gave black Americans the story of their own history as a people, but it sparked a renewed American interest in genealogy, which Haley encouraged at every opportunity.

A grandson of slaves, Haley was raised in Henning, a small



Michael Patrick/News-Sentinel staff

Actor Louis Gossett Jr., pictured above, points to the statue of his friend, Alex Haley, officially unveiled Friday. At right, the statue dwarfs dignitaries, from left: Gerlie L. King, who managed Haley's farm; Gwendolyn Winfrey of the Morningside Heights Homeowners Association; Sam Anderson, city Parks and Recreation director; Altovise Davis, widow of entertainer Sammy Davis Jr.; Thomas "Tank" Strickland, director, city community relations; Gossett, who starred in "Roots"; Mayor Victor Ashe; Tina Allen, the sculptor; and Commissioner Diane Jordan.



Michael Patrick/News-Sentinel staff



Michael Patrick/News-Sentinel staff

The presentation of the Alex Haley statue by sculptor Tina Allen on Friday, bottom left, attracted a large crowd to Morningside Park in East Knoxville. The dedication was an emotionally moving experience for many attendees.

The Knoxville News-Sentinel, April 25, 1998

Twenty-five years ago, over 1,000 attendees arrived at the Haley Heritage Square in Morningside Park to celebrate what former Mayor

of Knoxville, Victor Ashe, called “a lasting tribute to a man, a storyteller, and a great American.” The theme of the ceremony was “Alex Haley, America's Storyteller: A Legacy of Connection,” and family, friends, local schools, as well as admirers were among those invited to participate. On April 24, 1998, everyone gathered at the Square early that morning to witness the most anticipated moment of the ceremony, the dedication of the Alexander Murray Palmer Statue.

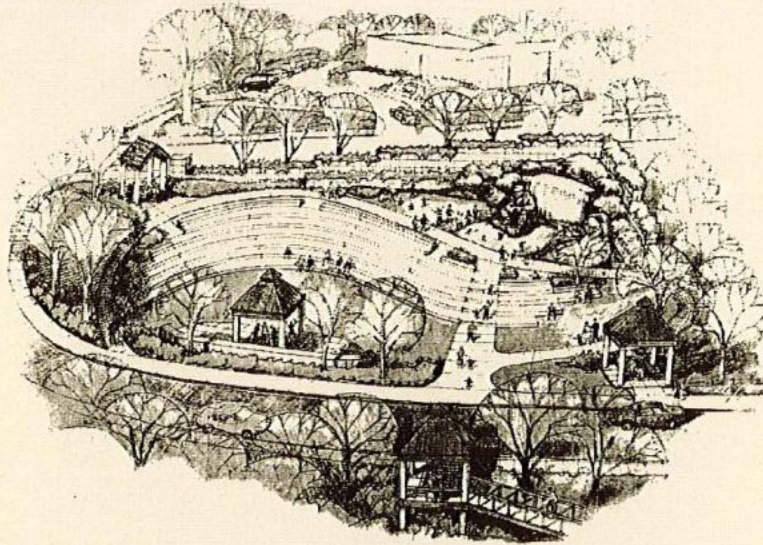


With emotion, the crowd watched as golden drapes fell to reveal the grand sculpture of Alex Haley perched on the Square's hillside in bronze glory. It was a historic day in Knoxville, at 13-feet and 6,500

pounds, the statue was the largest monument of a Black American in the United States and still upholds today as one of the country's largest statues of a Black American – a testament to a pioneer who revolutionized our understanding of history and genealogy.

“The project honors his legacy and encourages the rich continued search for the rich cultural heritage inherent in families which Haley inspired through his epoch novel, ‘Roots.’”

Theotis Robinson, Jr. *The Knoxville News Sentinel*, April 20, 1998.



Haley Heritage Square

HALEY HERITAGE SQUARE WILL PROVIDE A PLACE IN EAST TENNESSEE WHERE PEOPLE FROM AROUND THE WORLD CAN SHARE ART, HISTORY AND LITERATURE.

The site of Haley Heritage Square is on the slopes of Morningside Park, overlooking downtown Knoxville and facing the Great Smoky Mountains. Haley Heritage Square will be a lasting memorial to the rich legacy left by the storyteller, author and humanitarian, Alex Haley.

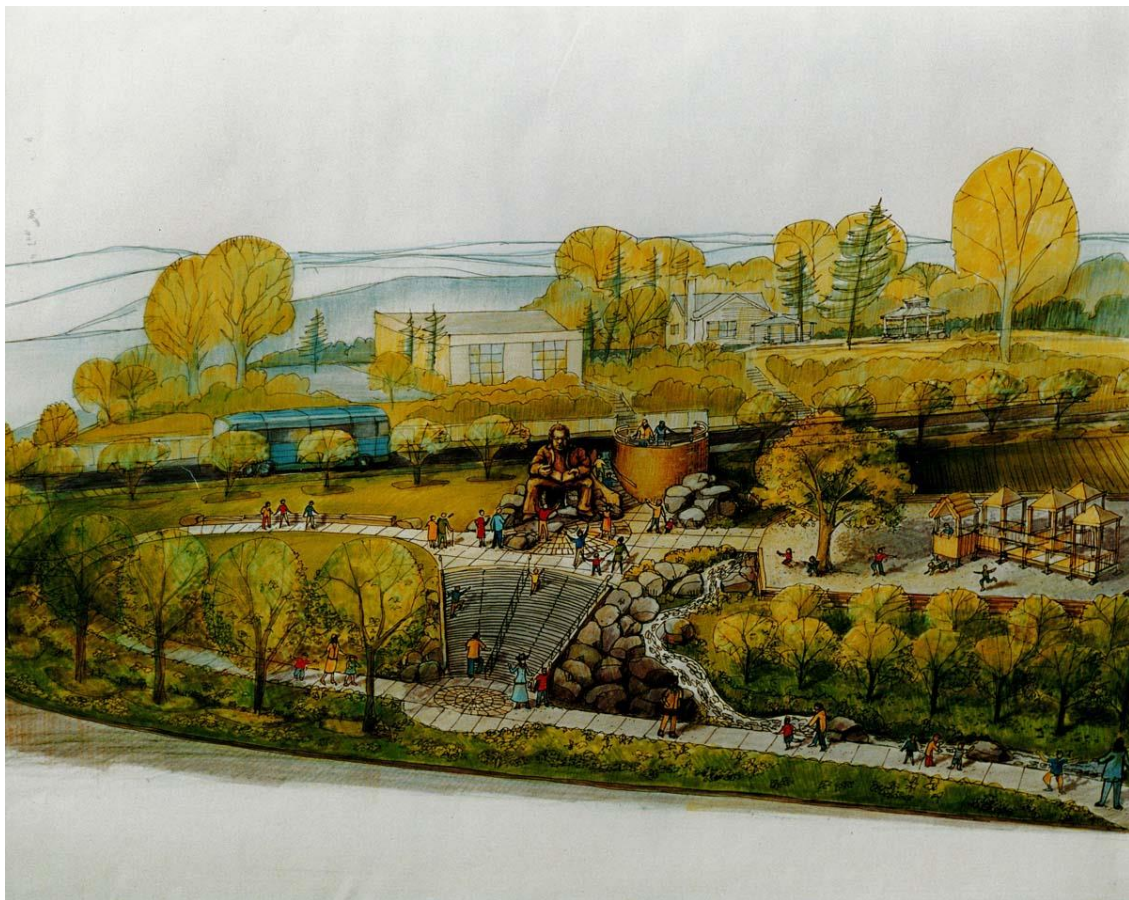
The initial phase of this project includes a thirteen-foot tall bronze statue of Alex Haley. Internationally acclaimed sculptor Tina Allen has been commissioned to develop the statue. The next step will be the development of cultural programs to provide support for the memorial and surrounding park. Among the programs envisioned for Haley Heritage Square are a genealogy center, family reunions and conventions, storytelling festivals and revivals.

Supporters of the project are committed to making Haley Heritage Square and its supporting programs a top tourism and cultural destination, particularly for families and family-oriented groups.

They are also committed to making the Haley Heritage Square project a model for inner-city redevelopment through job creation, economic development opportunities, and enhanced community pride and responsibility.

*Thank You
for your
Support*

The Haley Heritage Square was developed as a component of the Inner City Revitalization Through Cultural Enrichment Program by African American Appalachian Arts, Inc., (AAAA) a cultural arts agency located in Knoxville. Evon Easley, a member of AAAA conceived the project a year after the death of Alex Haley in 1992 and it was the statue that served as the focal point of his vision. Easley was appointed director of the Citizens for Haley Heritage Square Committee (CHHS) and together with AAAA, the groups worked in unison to secure necessary funding for the project.



Artist's rendering of Haley Heritage Square by Midori Barstow

Tina Allen,

Sculptor of the Alex Haley Statue



L.A. artist and internationally renowned sculptor of prominent Black Americans throughout history, Tina Allen (1946–2008), was contacted by Evon Easley in 1993 to create the larger than life sculpture of Alex Haley. Honored to take on such a project, Allen accepted the offer and would spend roughly 4 years working between New York and Knoxville to design and cast the sculpture.

Allen envisioned Haley seated on a hillside with his gaze towards the Great Smoky Mountains he so dearly loved. She wanted a sculpture large enough for children to play on and look up to. She dressed him casually, to portray him as a man of the people with a copy of “Roots” in his hand. During the 1993 Kuumba Festival (coordinated by AAAA), Allen attended the event and worked on the model of the Haley statue for guests to see.

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"I want children to look up, especially African-American children, and see that he looks like us; that greatness comes out of people that 'look like me.'"

TINA ALLEN



Tina Allen discussing her vision for the Alex Haley statue. Known for her sculptures of Black pioneers, she referred to her projects as "writing our history in bronze."

Beck Cultural Exchange Center



25 Years Later

The Haley monument is located near the Beck Cultural Exchange Center and serves as a memorial to the history of Knoxville's Black community. In honor of the 25th anniversary since the dedication ceremony, Beck will host a Kick-off celebration at Haley Heritage Square on June 17, 2023 during our three day commemoration of Juneteenth. Each year we seek to recognize and remember the legacy of Haley, an unforgettable pioneer who always sought to "find the good and praise it."