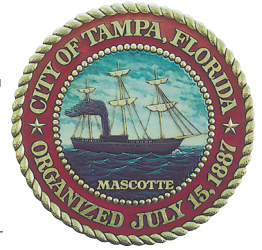


# TampaPublicArt

**Title of Project:**

*Saga of St. Benedicts*

**Artist:**

James E. Tokely, Sr., City of Tampa Poet Laureate

**Year Completed:**

2005

**Materials:**

Carved granite ribbon imbedded in sidewalk; 18 inches x 140 feet

**Commissioning Agency:**

City of Tampa, Public Art Program, in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation, Florida State Historic Preservation Office  
Columbus Drive and 20th Street

**Location:****Project Description:**

With the reconstruction of Interstate 4 (I-4), not only will the roadway be greatly improved but the adjacent community will also benefit. Many historic cigar workers' homes have been moved and saved in an area in need of revitalization. North of I-4, primarily between 20th and 17th Streets, 26 historic homes have been relocated and rehabilitated by the Federal Highway Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the City of Tampa. The project showcases how historic preservation can revitalize neighborhoods and the effects are readily seen in the private investment that has resulted in the surrounding area.

**The Public Art:**

Central to the homes relocated north of I-4 is the St. Benedict the Moor School site, a site of historic significance to the African-American community.

The Sisters of St. Joseph (SSJ) of St. Augustine started St. Benedict the Moor School in 1903. St. Benedict's students were mostly Afro-Cuban children of workers in the cigar industry of Ybor City and West Tampa. In an era governed by racial segregation, educating black children was



prohibited by a 1913 Florida legislature that forbid individuals of one race teaching another. Defiantly, the SSJ challenged this law and continued to teach the student-body. The 1913 law was eventually declared unconstitutional on May 20, 1916. The School was transferred to the Alagany Franciscans in 1944, and the school continued to serve the community until it was permanently closed in 1952 due to severe fire damage.

In an effort to recognize the integrity, the history of the site, and the lives of those who were forever changed by the events that occurred at the school, a poem by City of Tampa Poet Laureate James E. Tokely, Sr., has been engraved in a granite ribbon and imbedded in the sidewalk at the original location of the school. This poem is in recognition of the vital role that St. Benedict the Moor School and the SSJ played in the enrichment of the African American community for over 40 years.

*The mission of the City of Tampa, Public Art Program is to promote the involvement of artists in projects*

*throughout the city that enhance the physical environment and celebrate Tampa's unique character and identity.*

**City of Tampa Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs • Public Art Program**

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