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CONNECTICUT

Sculptors Vie To Make Crandall A Capitol Fixture

August 20, 2002

By LORETTA WALDMAN, Courant Staff Writer

One depicts a detached Prudence Crandall standing behind a student. Another portrays her prodding one with a motherly, outstretched left hand. In a third, more contemporary interpretation, the 19th-century teacher and abolitionist stares pensively into the distance with two girls seated at her feet.

Which of the three plaster and clay models becomes a statue of Crandall at the Capitol will be decided in the coming weeks by a legislative committee overseeing the project. The display of maquettes, or models, in the east foyer of the building is the culmination of a more than two-year quest to erect a likeness of Crandall, who is the state heroine.

State Rep. Elizabeth Boukus, D-Plainville, launched the crusade after two fourth-grade girls from Bristol pointed out that there was no statue of Crandall at the Capitol. Boukus said she hopes to have it completed and in place across from a statue honoring state hero Nathan Hale in time for the 200th anniversary of Crandall's birth, in September 2003.

The Capitol Preservation and Restoration Commission approved the idea in January 2001. Last August, the legislature appropriated \$100,000 for it.

Elementary school students have been contributing to a statewide "Pennies for Prudence" campaign to raise additional funds for the \$125,000 undertaking. About \$10,000 to \$12,000 more is needed, Boukus said Monday.

"We don't want children putting too much of their money into it, but we do want them to feel vested," said Boukus, a former fourth-grade teacher whose legislative district includes Bristol and Plainville. "This is a great civics lesson. They made a difference to begin with and they followed it through."

The statue is to stand on the same spot in the east wing of the Capitol as the models do now, Boukus said. The three sculptors - two men and a woman, from Connecticut, North Carolina and New York City, respectively - were selected from the many submitting proposals to the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, which is helping the committee coordinate the competition.

Arnold Prince, James Barnhill and Gabriel Koren are accomplished artists and teachers with previous public commissions on the theme of civil rights, said Linda

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Dente, director of the Art in Public Spaces Program of the commission. Robert Taplan, a noted New Hampshire sculptor, known in Connecticut for his bronze relief sculpture at the state police barracks in Tolland, reviewed the initial proposals and boiled them down to a few finalists, she said.

Other than a statue of the late Gov. Ella Grasso outside the west entrance, there are no sculptures of female historical figures at the Capitol. Crandall, named state heroine in 1995, was a Quaker from Rhode Island who established an academy for African American girls in Canterbury, Conn., in 1833.

At the time, blacks were not considered citizens. Crandall and her students endured prejudice and violence during the 18 months the school was open; Crandall was arrested and put on trial for breaking a law aimed at keeping her academy from operating.

The models, though very different, attempt to interpret what that moment in history might have looked like, Dente said.

"There's a good range of styles and approaches," she said. "[Any] one will result in a good satisfactory piece for them."

A juror will appraise the work artistically, but it is up to the committee to make a final choice, Dente said. Whatever choice the committee makes must be approved by the preservation and restoration commission, said Eric Connery, an administrator with the state Office of Legislative Management.

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