

North Carolina Historical Commission
Conference Call Minutes

May 29, 2020

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via conference call on Friday, May 29, 2020. The following commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan (who joined just as a discussion about accessions and deaccessions was about to begin); Dr. David Dennard; Samuel B. Dixon; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Dr. Malinda Maynor Lowery (who joined just as the discussion of accessions and deaccessions discussion was concluding); Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds, Barbara B. Snowden; and Dr. Darin Waters.

Others in attendance included: Dr. Kevin Cherry, Deputy Secretary, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Ramona Bartos, director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR); Ken Howard, director, Division of State History Museums (DSHM); Sarah Koonts, director, Division of Archives & Records (DAR); Michelle Lanier, director, Division of State Historic Sites & Properties (DSHSP); Phil Feagan, General Counsel, DNCR; and Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) Administrative Assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.

Call to Order

Chairman Ruffin called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM. The chairman called roll and then asked everyone to introduce themselves. With a vocal nod to the fact that a quorum was present, the meeting commenced.

Opening Statement and Conflict of Interest Statement

Mr. Ruffin noted the extraordinary times in which we find ourselves, being in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic and social and political upheaval, and commended the State Archives on its efforts to document North Carolina's experience for future generations of citizens.

The chairman also noted that while the decision was made to forego video conferencing for this meeting, he would like to see that method employed for future meetings. He noted that as mandated by statute governing virtual meetings during states of emergency, such as that under which the State of North Carolina finds itself, participants are required to introduce themselves when they speak, and that all votes will be taken via roll call.

Before proceeding, Mr. Ruffin asked the commissioners, having had a chance to review the meeting agenda prior to the meeting, whether any had a known or perceived conflict of interest with respect to any of those items. No such concerns were voiced, so the business portion of the meeting began.

Approval of Minutes

At the invitation of the chairman, Ms. Snowden moved approval of the minutes from the October 30, 2019 regular meeting of the NCHC. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard. During discussion, Dr. Bryan asked that the term “chairwoman” on page six be shortened to “chair.” The motion was amended to approve pending this change and again seconded. A roll call vote was called by Mr. Ruffin and all commissioners in attendance voted to accept the minutes as stipulated.

A second motion was made by Dr. Johnson to accept the minutes of the December 11, 2019 conference call meeting of the Commission as written. The motion to accept was seconded by Dr. Waters and a roll call vote unanimously carried the motion.

Appointment of New Commissioner

Chairman Ruffin announced that long-time commissioner Millie Barbee had submitted her letter of resignation from the Commission. Former commissioner B. Perry Morrison was appointed by Governor Cooper to serve the remainder of Ms. Barbee’s term. The chairman voiced his pleasure in having Mr. Morrison back on the Commission and noted that Mr. Morrison had been duly sworn in prior to today’s meeting.

Ms. Snowden made a motion that a letter be drafted to Ms. Barbee by the Commission expressing its thanks to her for decades of service. The motion was seconded by Mr. Morrison. During discussion, Dr. Cherry offered to draft the letter on behalf of the NCHC and the OAH. Mr. Morrison asked whether the sentiments of appreciation could be presented in resolution form, given her roughly 30 years of service on the NCHC, as well as her role as past chair of this august body, with this resolution being appended to the minutes. This idea was met with general agreement.

At the request of Dr. Dennard, Dr. Cherry clarified that members of state commissions are recognized in three different ways: the bestowing of emeritus status, an option available to the governor alone; a resolution; and a letter of thanks, the latter two initiated by the commission itself. Mr. Morrison expressed his belief that emeritus status would be appropriate for Ms. Barbee, and Dr. Johnson suggested that the Commission recommend such an action to Governor Cooper. To summarize a longer discussion, Mr. Ruffin suggested that a draft letter, to be written by Dr. Cherry, first be prepared and circulated for review by the commissioners—to be voted upon at a future meeting—with an eye on transforming the letter into resolution form, which in turn would be forwarded to the governor with a formal request that Ms. Barbee have bestowed upon her emeritus status. This suggestion was met with agreement by the commissioners and put forth in the form of a motion by Mr. Morrison. Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, with the motion being carried on a unanimous vote of approval.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Speaking on behalf of the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC), Dr. Cherry referred the commissioners to an annotated list of items that the OAHCC requests be approved by the NCHC for accessioning into and deaccessioning out of state collections. A copy of this list was made available to the commissioners for their consideration in advance of the meeting, and a copy of that list is contained in the file for this meeting. He stated that he would like to present all accessions as one slate and all deaccessions as a single, separate slate. The deaccessions, he said, would require two separate votes, the first as to approval of deaccessioning, and the second as to approval of the method of disposal.

• **Accession of items into NC Museum of History in Raleigh, Museum of the Cape Fear, the Maritime Museums, and State Historic Sites** – Dr. Cherry solicited questions about any of the items on the list but none were forthcoming. Ms. Snowden thereby moved approval of the recommendations. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard, and a roll call vote to approve was unanimous.

• **Deaccession of items out of the Maritime Museum in Beaufort** – Dr. Cherry briefly summarized the items and the proposed methods of disposal. He noted that any funds derived from disposal, such as those from the sale of artifacts to another party, would be used to support the museum’s current collection or to acquire new items.

Mr. Morrison moved approval of the OAHCC’s recommendations and Dr. Johnson seconded the motion. A roll call vote to approve was unanimous. Dr. Johnson then moved to approve the methods of disposal, as presented. Ms. Phillips seconded the motion. A brief discussion about how items are auctioned off was initiated by Dr. Dennard. Dr. Cherry and Mr. Howard explained the processes, which are based in part upon what the item is or when already scheduled auctions might be taking place. Dr. Dennard asked whether the Commission might be notified of when and where such auctions would be occurring. Mr. Howard offered to pass that information along to the commissioners when known. In conclusion, a unanimous roll call vote was taken approving the OAHCC’s recommendations.

Deaccession of Items from State Archives

As noted by Director Koonts, items for deaccessioning from State Archives’ are governed by separate statute and therefore require discrete attention from artifacts deaccessioned from state collections. To this end, Ms. Koonts summarized a list of items, presented to commissioners in advance of the meeting as unique series’ covering eight sets of records—from the Department of Public Safety, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Department of State Treasurer—and summarized the proposed methods of disposal. A motion to approve the DAR’s recommendations for deaccessioning was proffered by Dr. Dennard and seconded by Mr. Dixon. A roll call vote to approve was unanimous. A motion to approve the proposed methods of disposal was put forth by Mr. Morrison and seconded by Ms. Phillips. A roll call vote to approve was unanimous. Copies of these lists have been placed in the file for this meeting.

Cape Fear Museum Feasibility Study

Citing a copy of a North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA)-solicited feasibility study made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting, Mr. Ruffin explained that it is the role of the NCHC to either agree with the conclusions presented in the study by OAH staff, or make recommendations for changes to the study. The NCHC, he said, was then to forward the final report to the NCGA, via the OAH, with a letter summarizing its position by July 15, 2020. He then turned the floor over to Dr. Cherry.

Dr. Cherry made it a point to differentiate two similarly-named museums. The museum at issue in this study is the Cape Fear Museum (CFM) in Wilmington, not Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex, slated to become the Civil War History and Reconstruction Center in Fayetteville.

As explained by Dr. Cherry, the OAH formed a study committee, which began by looking at already existing museums in the southeastern part of the state that could be folded “as-is” into the state system. Any such extant museum would have to fit staffing, artifact collection, and programming criteria defined by the committee. Using these parameters, the only institution that fit was the CFM. Among the conclusions reached by the study committee (encompassed in the feasibility study): the building in which the CFM is located needs a great deal of work as there is little space available for programming, and storage space for artifacts is considerably substandard. The study committee determined that it would cost \$10 million to enhance the space, as well as \$1.7 million annually in recurring funds to cover staffing and operational costs. Especially vexing is the discrepancy between the salaries of the current, county employees and their state counterparts. If the CFM is brought into the state system, this discrepancy would likely need to be addressed by statute. The committee noted, as well, the lack of unanimity between local stakeholders, some of whom favor merger with the state and some who don’t. The study committee concluded that a merger is feasible, if one-time and recurring funds can be secured, a statutory arrangement to address the discrepancy of salaries can be addressed, and greater unanimity into the merger be achieved among local stakeholders. .

Commissioners asked Dr. Cherry about the concerns of those opposed to merger with the state. He noted the loss of local autonomy and fears that current employees would both be forced to take pay cuts and would see the end of cost-of-living salary increases provided by New Hanover County. Dr. Dennard asked whether there was a timeline associated with the request from the General Assembly. He was assured that there was not. Dr. Cherry postulated that even if the funding were made available, it would be at least a year before all administrative matters related to the merger could take place.

Dr. Waters suggested that the transmission letter be expanded beyond merely conveying approval of the report to incorporate concerns the NCHC itself has about the proposal. Ms. Phillips expressed a desire to see the reasons stated for opposition to a merger by locals expanded, while Mr. Morrison stated that from his experience, such letters must state that funding issues be clearly addressed.

Dr. Waters summarized these thoughts into a motion, stating that the transmission letter emphasize concerns of local stakeholders and include a request that funding for such an endeavor be addressed before any consideration of the addition of the CFM into the state history museum system. This motion was seconded by Ms. Phillips and carried unanimously on a voice vote.

State Textile Museum Feasibility Study

Dr. Cherry expressed regret that a final report from study committees looking at the possible addition of a textile museum into the state history museum system wasn’t ready prior to this meeting, as had been planned. Instead, the commissioners were supplied with a penultimate, draft version of the final report for their consumption, a copy of which has been placed in the file for this meeting. But, Dr. Cherry proceeded to summarize the final version, including describing the changes to the draft version that will be incorporated into the final version. He noted that because the feasibility study remains in draft form, the commissioners will be unable to take action on it today; the final report will need to be addressed in a subsequent meeting.

Dr. Cherry went on to provide background information on efforts by the state over the decades to establish a textile museum so as to more fully document the importance of this industry to the history of North Carolina. As laid out in the report, the two sites currently under consideration for a

textile museum are in the towns of Erwin in Harnett County and Franklinville/Cedar Falls in Randolph County. In addition to an internal study committee made up of OAH staff, an external study committee was created consisting of recognized experts and others with an interest in and knowledge of the industry's historical significance here. He explained the study's methodology, which included developing a list of criteria that such an institution should meet and attributes that it should have. The committees determined that the two sites under consideration both met most of the criteria. However, the Randolph County site has a decided advantage based upon two things: It already has a 150,000 square foot historic structure associated with the textile industry, built in the 1840s and renovated up through the 1980s that possesses ample, open space within it for exhibits programming and rentals; and, this facility now houses a large collection of historic textile industry equipment that was transferred from the American Textile Museum in Massachusetts, which was forced to close in 2016.

The study concludes that bringing the Randolph County facility up to the proper specifications would require three phases. The first would be securing the funding to rehabilitate and renovate the structure, estimated to cost \$7.5 million per year over the course of four years. The second would be the development of a central exhibit space, as well as development of storage space and the construction of a classroom. Phase three would entail securing funding from the NCGA for staffing and operations, requiring a recurring budget of around \$1.5 million per year.

The report concludes that adding a textile museum is both feasible and desirable as long as funding can be secured.

Reports from Division Directors

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier summarized a more detailed, written report that was made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting, and supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation. She touched upon several topics: initiatives and programs; digital engagement strategies; ongoing professional development; and updates on grants. A copy of Ms. Lanier's full report and PowerPoint presentation is contained in the file for this meeting.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos presented a summary of a more detailed, written report that was made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting. The topics upon which she touched in the Historic Preservation Office were: Hurricane Florence historic preservation aid package; constituent services via digitization and virtual visits; environmental review; an update on the Survey and National Register Branch; historic tax credits; and the division's Local Government Assistance Program. She also highlighted activities within the Office of State Archaeology, Historical Research Office and Historical Publications, and the Western Office. A copy of Ms. Bartos's full, written report is contained in the file for this meeting.

Division of State History Museums – Mr. Howard summarized a more detailed, written report that was made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting. He touched upon major repairs and other capital projects across the system, including where things stand on the Museum of History expansion project and exhibits. Given that the pandemic has forced a closure of the state's museums to visitors, the division is focusing upon virtual outreach, he said, including their History At Home web page. A copy of Mr. Howard's written report is contained in the file for this meeting.

Dr. Johnson opined that the NCHC should send a letter of appreciation to the soon-to-be-retiring MOH Education Director Emily Grant, who also served as museum liaison for the annual African American Heritage and Native American Heritage festivals.

Division of Archives and Records – Ms. Koonts presented a brief summary of a more detailed, written report, a copy of which has been placed in the file for this meeting. Among the subjects she touched upon were: outreach programming; facilities; electronic records and online catalog; social media initiatives; a project titled ‘TranscribeNC’, and one called ‘Your Story Is North Carolina’s Story,’ a collection of reminiscences, documentary heritage, and artifacts from citizens pertaining to their experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic, upon which the DAR is partnering with the DSHM.

Dr. Johnson suggested that the State Archives reach out directly to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to collect stories of the experiences of African Americans for the ‘Your Story Is North Carolina’s Story’ initiative, a sentiment echoed by Dr. Dennard. Ms. Koonts affirmed that she will direct her staff to do so.

Report from the Director of the Office of Archives and History

Dr. Cherry began by expressing his continued pride in the work of the staff of the OAH, as highlighted in the reports from the division directors. He went on to offer an abbreviated summary of two issues with which the DNCR and OAH is dealing.

With regard to the appropriated budget situation, with an emphasis in recent years on a shift toward receipts, the pandemic has resulted in a decrease in that form of funding that has approached \$30 million across the department since March. However, spending restrictions going into Phase I of Governor Cooper’s ‘Stay At Home’ executive order, coupled with the bestowing of inactive status upon most temporary state workers, should enable the department to “break even” by fiscal year’s end. That said, funding for next year is expected to be very tight.

Dr. Cherry also reported that while the United State Supreme Court found on behalf of the department on one facet of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* case, lawsuits related to this case at the state level remain ongoing.

Concluding Thoughts

Dr. Johnson requested that the NCHC hear from the African American Heritage Commission at the next meeting of the former. Dr. Cherry confirmed that it would.

Dr. Dennard asked whether any historic sites are in peril due to the budget challenges described. Dr. Cherry reaffirmed that the entirety of the department will face challenges next year, but there is no individual historic site currently endangered.

Ms. Snowden extended a virtual invitation to the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the landing of Spanish explorers in Currituck County.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Mr. Morrison moved adjournment. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and a unanimous roll call vote to adjourn ended the meeting at 12:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*[A final, post-edit version will be
supplied for a signature]*

Kevin Cherry

Draft