

North Carolina Historical Commission
Conference Call Minutes

December 6, 2023

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom conference call on Wednesday, December 6, 2023. The following commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; The Honorable Newell Clark; Shana Bushyhead Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Barbara Groome; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Dr. Susanna Lee; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds; Barbara B. Snowden; and Commissioner Emerita Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan. Absent was commissioner Samuel B. Dixon.

Others in attendance were: Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Ramona Bartos, Director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR); Sarah Koonts, Director, Division of Archives & Records (DAR); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of Historic Sites and Properties (DSHSP); Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC; and Matt Zeher, Information Technology facilitator. John Campbell, Collections Manager, Division of State History Museums (DSHM), joined briefly to address some questions about a few deaccession items.

The meeting was livestreamed on the DNCR website. Copies of all cited written materials can be found in the file for this meeting.

Call to Order and Conflict of Interest Statement

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM. Chairman Ruffin extended a welcome those in attendance and anyone joining remotely. The chairman then asked the commissioners his standard question about whether any of them had a known or perceived conflict of interest with respect to any of the items of business slated for discussion, each having had a chance to examine the meeting agenda in advance. No such concerns were voiced. He then called roll to establish the presence of a quorum.

Approval of Minutes

At the chair's invitation, Commissioner Denard moved approval of the minutes from the September 19, 2023, meeting of the NCHC, as written. The motion was seconded by Ms. Groome. There was no discussion, so the motion moved to a roll call vote. The motion was carried unanimously, with Ms. Phillips abstaining since she was not at that meeting.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Again, at the chair's invitation, Dr. Waters presented a list of items recommended by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC) for accessioned into and deaccessioning out

of the collections of the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh, the Museum of the Albemarle, the Mountain Gateway Museum, the Maritime Museums, and the DSHSP. Dr. Waters presented the museums accession items as a single slate for voting. Dr. Johnson made a motion to approve the recommendations of the OAHCC and Dr. Dennard seconded the motion. Following a roll call vote the motion was carried unanimously. Dr. Waters then presented the OAHCC's recommendations for the accessioning of items into DSHSP's collections. With no questions about any of the items forthcoming, Mayor Clark moved approval and Ms. Groome seconded the motion. A roll call vote to carry the motion was unanimous.

Dr. Waters moved on to present the recommendations of the OAHCC for items to be deaccessioned from the collections of the Museum of History and the Maritime Museums. Ms. Condill asked why item number 2017.59.8, described in the list as 'Miscellaneous WWI papers re. James A. Rawls, 30th Division,' was recommended for removal from the division's collection. Collections manager John Campbell joined the conference call to address this question. He stated that the committee simply felt that the item was not of enough value to maintain in the collection. Commissioner Condill asked that more context be provided to the Commission before deaccessioning is approved, and she asked that the request be deferred until the Commission's next meeting in March 2024. Mr. Reynolds suggested that a representative from the OAHCC address the NCHC about the guidelines that are followed for accessioning and deaccessioning items in March, just to give the commissioners a better idea about the processes. To this end Mr. Campbell recommended that any action on deaccession item number 2017.59.6-7 also be deferred until March, since it is also part of the same collection as the previous item.

Ms. Condill moved that action on items 2017.59.6-7 and 2017.59.8 be deferred until the March 2024 meeting. Dr. Johnson seconded this motion and a roll call vote was unanimous. Mayor Clark then moved that the remainder of the recommended list of deaccession items be approved as presented. This motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Continuing Discussion about December 2022 NCHC Resolutions Pertaining to Advocacy for Teaching History in North Carolina Schools

Mr. Ruffin cited an email he sent to the commissioners dated November 20, 2023, in which he discusses possible steps that the NCHC can take to address concerns about the erosion of history awareness in our current culture. These concerns were originally introduced into discussion at the December 7, 2022, meeting of the Commission and were discussed at length at both the June and September 2023 meetings. Mr. Ruffin's email—a copy of which is contained in the paper file for this meeting—contained seven bullet pointed items summarizing past discussions. They were:

- More advocacy and exposure placed on what is already being done by existing programs.
- Riding the almost certain wave of increased historical awareness upcoming with *America 250*.
- More coordination with the *National Humanities Center*.
- More high-profile participation and advocacy by commissioners in promoting all things history.
- Exploring more initiatives through *Project Push*.
- More work with the NC Historical & Literary Association.
- Continued vigilance on adequacy of history resource funding in and by state government.

Mr. Ruffin began today's discussion by stating that after talking with Commissioner Reynolds they agreed that it would be prudent to form a committee of commissioners to focus more on this issue and delve deeper into what tangible steps the Commission might take to advance its advocacy to raise the awareness of the importance to both the teaching of history in our schools and the importance of historical knowledge to the public at large and its importance to our culture. Mr. Reynolds stated that until now the discussions, as robust and fruitful as they have been, remain just words on paper. The formation of a committee, it is hoped, will create energy and momentum toward putting those words into action. Toward that end, Mr. Reynolds has drafted a resolution that he is prepared to enter into the record. But before that is done, Mr. Ruffin opened the floor to discussion about the proposal to form a committee.

Dr. Johnson concurs that a committee might be the best way to streamline the process, move it past the circular discussions on the topic, help prioritize how best to move forward, and initiate action on those steps. She also suggested that such a committee remain a standing one with no pre-determined termination date. In response to a question from Commissioner Snowden about specific ideas about the kinds of things the Commission as a body and the commissioners as individuals can and cannot do, Mr. Ruffin emphasized that the Commission cannot exceed the limitations on its statutory authority, but also emphasized that if the NCHC does not advocate for the importance of history, who will?

The conversation shifted to ways that information about public, history-based events is disseminated to inform and ultimately engage the public about North Carolina's history and historic places. Dr. Johnson noted that the North Carolina African American Historical Commission, of which she is chair, constructed a calendar of events that it sends to its members, and she urged that something like that be developed for the NCHC so that it can stay informed about events. Keeping commissioners informed, said Dr. Waters, is really the responsibility of the OAH, and he pledged to work with staff to figure out a better way to do this. Ms. Lanier stated that the DNCR's Marketing and Public Information Office already shares department-wide information about events on its website. She also added that the DSHSP recently received funding for a division public information officer (PIO), its first in over a decade, which will help the sharing of information about events and programs at state historic sites. Dr. Waters clarified that while the OAH itself does not have a dedicated PIO, the DSHM has one. Ideally, he would like to see PIOs in place for each of the four divisions, since much of the work do—such as that of the State Historic Preservation Office and the Office of State Archaeology—is so forward-facing to the public. Ms. Phillips suggested that an NCHC committee could investigate ways to streamline an overarching public history website or calendar where people, including commissioners, could easily find information. Commissioner Condill also suggested that public history advocacy talking points be prepared by OAH staff and provided to individual commissioners that they can take with them to events and programs that they might attend in the future. Ms. Koonts also suggested that staff at satellite OAH sites keep in mind inviting more local state representatives and NCHC members to events that take place at those sites. Mr. Ruffin suggested that the role of a committee could include serving as a conduit between the communities being served by the DNCR and the Commission itself, learning on-site at the types of events being discussed ways to continue streamlining the efforts of the Commission's to maximize efficacy. Ms. Bartos said that much of the discussion has been centered on venue-oriented programs, but there are other important historical events that should also be included such as Historical Highway Marker Program dedications to which officials, commissioners, and the media should be invited. These are typically rich opportunities to share with the state's citizens the kind of work that

the OAH does. Ms. Bartos invited the commissioners to share ideas on ways they think information about non-event-based programs and events can be amplified.

Ms. Snowden made a motion that the NCHC form a committee, as discussed. She then yielded the floor to Commissioner Reynolds to present his aforementioned draft resolution for consideration by the Commission. That resolution, shared onscreen by Mr. Ruffin, read:

“Pursuant to the NC Historical Commission’s December 7, 2022 Resolution;

‘RESOLVED that The North Carolina Historical Commission, being aware of a general degradation of awareness of history among secondary and college students—and thus, in the general population—implores all aspects of state government having influence on public education to amplify history as a critical part of instructional curriculum going forward. To that end, The North Carolina Historical Commission requests specific staff recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Commission.’

And in recognition of subsequent staff reports and Commission discussions, the NC Historical Commission hereby resolves to create a Committee with the following charter:

- (1) Review the charter and mission of the NC Historical Commission;
- (2) Assess the Commission’s current role in promoting the importance of NC History as a resource for the people of NC in conjunction with the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources;
- (3) Recommend actions that the members of the NC Historical Commission and the staff of the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources can take in partnerships across the state to further promote the Historical Resources of our State and enhance the public’s appreciation for and importance of our common History.’

Mr. Reynolds then offered the resolution in the form of a motion, with Ms. Snowden seconding the motion. During discussion, Mr. Reynolds emphasized the importance of the first point of his resolution, emphasizing the importance of establishing what the NCHC is and what it is not, and what it can do and what it cannot do before moving forward. Dr. Dennard stated that he feels that a committee could bring the Commission back into “alignment,” helping refocus the NCHC’s mission, clarifying what it was established to do and what actions fall outside its bounds of responsibility, which, he said, he has seen signs of happening. He hopes it will also help the full Commission understand what kinds of similar efforts are taking place outside of North Carolina. The chair then held a roll call vote on the standing motion to accept the resolution and form a committee. The motion was carried unanimously.

With an understanding that the power to appoint the members of the committee falls within the prerogative of the NCHC’s chair, Mr. Ruffin appointed Mr. Reynolds as the chair of the committee. He will be joined by Commissioners Condill, Dennard, Groome, and Phillips. They will report to the full Commission quarterly. He noted that five members does not constitute a quorum, so the committee will be able to meet without running afoul of the public meetings requirement.

Reports from Division Directors

Chairman Ruffin asked Dr. Waters to represent the division directors. Dr. Waters referred the commissioners to the full, written reports prepared by the directors in advance of the meeting and supplied to the commissioners prior to today. They represent the amazing work being done daily within the divisions of Archives and History, Historical Resources, State Historic Site and Properties, and State History Museums. Dr. Waters noted that the DSHM is currently without a director, but that the department is working to fill the position. This is especially important given the \$80 million Museum of History expansion budget passed by the general assembly. Important work is also being done on the North Carolina Civil War & Reconstruction History Center project in Fayetteville, as well as in the maritime museums; a new exhibit is being installed in Hatteras and work continues on the Gallants Channel project in Beaufort. Other capital projects within the OAH include the development of the Tobacco and Farm Life Museum in Kinley and the newest state historic site, the Thomas Day House in Milton. Chairman Ruffin expressed his gratitude for the chance to work with Dr. Waters and his excellent staff.

Dr. Dennard commended Ms. Lanier for including news of the recent passing of Dorothy Spruill “Dot” Redford—the long-time manager at Somerset Place State Historic Site—in her division report. He feels that the contributions she made to raising awareness of North Carolina’s enslaved people should be honored in a permanent way by the NCHC. Doing so, he said, is another way that the Commission can raise public awareness of the state’s history, and he asked the Commission to give some thought to that proposal. Mr. Ruffin suggested that the Golden Frinks House in Edenton as an existing project that might be used to recognize Ms. Redford.

Concluding Thoughts and Chair Announcements

Dr. Johnson reported that the North Carolina Maritime History Council (NCMHC) recently held sessions at East Carolina University to posthumously honor Terry Compton, Wilson Snowden, Lindley Butler, and William Still, all of whom dedicated much of their time and life’s efforts to promoting the rich history of North Carolina’s maritime legacies. Commissioner Snowden, who was married to Wilson, offered a few words of recognition for each, and praised the young historians who presented papers at the sessions. She directed commissioners to the NCMHC’s web page where those papers can be found: <https://www.ncmaritimehistory.com/tributaries>.

Mr. Ruffin announced the NCHC’s 2024 meeting dates. They are:

Wednesday, March 20 (in person)
Tuesday, June 18 (virtual)
Tuesday, September 17 (in person)
Wednesday, December 11 (virtual)

Each will begin at 10:00 AM.

Adjournment

Dr. Dennard moved adjournment and Dr. Johnson seconded the motion. Following a unanimous vote the meeting was adjourned at 11:50 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters

Draft