

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2024

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met on Wednesday, March 20, 2024, in the Archives & History/State Library Building in Raleigh. The following commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; Shana Bushyhead Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Barbara Groome (via conference call); Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Dr. Susanna Lee; Susan Phillips (via conference call); W. Noah Reynolds; and Commissioner Emerita Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan. Absent were commissioners Newell Clark, Samuel B. Dixon, and Barbara Snowden.

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); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of Historic Sites and Properties (DSHSP); Becky McGee-Lankford, head of the Government Records Section of the Division of Archives & Records (DAR); Brad Wilson, Interim Director, Division of State History Museums (DSHM); John Campbell, Collections Manager, DSHM; RaeLana Poteat, Chief Curator in the DSHM; Elizabeth Reign, Director of Curatorial Services in the DSHSP; Phil Feagan, General Counsel, DNCR; Parker Backstrom, administrative assistant in the Office of Archives and History (OAH) and Recording Secretary for the NCHC; Matt Zeher, Information Technology facilitator; and Norwood Bryan, Commissioner Bryan's spouse.

Copies of all cited written materials can be found in the file for this meeting.

Call to Order and Introductions

The chair called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m., welcoming everyone and asking those present to introduce themselves. He then called roll to establish the presence of a quorum of the Commission.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There were no affirmative responses when the chair asked the commissioners whether any of them had any conflicts of interest pertaining to the business outlined in the meeting agenda, and the meeting moved forward.

Approval of Minutes

At the chair's invitation, Commissioner Denard moved approval of the minutes from the December 6, 2023, meeting of the NCHC, pending one small correction of improper syntax, as pointed out by Dr. Dennard. The motion was seconded by Ms. Condill. The motion was then carried by unanimous vote.

Deaccessions of Items from the State Archives

Standing in for director of the DAR, Sarah Koonts, Becky McGee-Lankford cited a description of a 1861 model Colt Navy Revolver that was donated to the Outer Banks History Center (OBHC), where it has resided since 2008. Since the possession of this artifact falls outside the policy that defines what is to be managed in the division's collection, the division is asking that the NCHC authorize its deaccessioning from the OBHC. Arrangements have been made to transfer ownership of the weapon to the CSS *Neuse* State Historic Site in Kinston for that institution's collection, if approved. Ms. McGee-Lankford also walked the commissioners through two other items requested for deaccessioning by the DAR as described in the annotated list shared with the commissioners in advance of the meeting.

There was some concern expressed by Dr. Lee about the loss of potentially useful research materials when items such as the Carolina Legal Assistance records comprising one of the lots are removed from the state archives. However, since the records pertain to medical records, said Ms. McGee-Lankford, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) laws would strip the records of the kind of information researchers might deem useful. Added Mr. Feagan, the DNCR's Office of General Counsel has been in discussions with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services about how HIPAA records should best be handled to ensure the proper protections to all parties. That said, Mr. Feagan stated that he doesn't see an impediment to the Commission voting on the deaccessioning of the records presented today. Ms. McGee-Lankford assured the commissioners that the process of determining the need for deaccessioning materials is a rigorous and multi-layered one and decisions for such actions are made very carefully. Ms. Phillips moved approval of the recommended deaccessioning of the handgun and sheet music on the merits presented, and the deaccessioning of the "Thomas S." files based upon their review by DNCR's legal counsel. This motion was seconded by Mr. Reynolds and carried unanimously.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Dr. Waters recognized Mr. Campbell, Ms. Reign, and Ms. Poteat, all of whom serve on the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC) and cited the annotated list of items for accessioning into and deaccessioning out of collections of the Divisions of State History Museums and State Historic Sites and Properties created by the OAHCC, a copy of which was shared with the commissioners in advance of today's meeting. Ms. Poteat and Mr. Campbell described the processes that these entities use when deciding whether an item should be taken into collections. These criteria include but are not limited to such things as an item's connection to North Carolina, the condition of the item, and whether it poses any safety issues to staff. They also described the procedure for disposing of items no longer deemed retainable, including offering such items to other museums, retaining them for a teaching collection, placing them up for public auction—with any remuneration forthcoming used to add additional items back into the collections—or as a last resort, destroying items no longer needed.

Break Due to Setting Off of the Building's Fire Alarm System

The meeting was interrupted for roughly 20 minutes starting at 10:55 a.m. when the building's fire alarm was erroneously deployed during construction work within the building. After building

evacuation, fire department response, and the receipt of an “all clear” order, the meeting was resumed at 11:15 a.m.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections (Continued)

Mr. Campbell addressed the items requested for deaccessioning at the December 2023 meeting, the disposition of which were tabled at the request of Ms. Condill—Items 2019.57.6-7 and 2029.57.8, both World War II era newspapers. Addressing Commissioner Condill’s concerns about why the items were being deaccessioned, he relayed the results of his investigation, described the backstory of the items, and explained the process that went into the decision by the OAHCC to recommend their removal from the collection. Dr. Waters then asked Commissioner Condill whether she was satisfied with the explanation and wished to move the approval of the deaccession of these specific items. Ms. Condill so moved and her motion was seconded by Dr. Johnson. The motion was then carried by unanimous vote.

Dr. Waters then directed the commissioners’ attention to the annotated list of new items recommended by the OAHCC for accessioning into the collections of the North Carolina Museum of History (MOH), the North Carolina Maritime Museums (NCMM), the Museum of the Albemarle (MOA), and the Division of State Historic Sites and Properties. The commissioners, having had a chance to review the list in advance of the meeting, had no questions about any of the items, though Dr. Dennard did point out a typographical error that Mr. Campbell assured him would be corrected in the record. With no discussion, Dr. Dennard moved acceptance of the OAHCC’s recommendations as a single slate and Ms. Groome seconded the motion. The motion was voted upon and carried unanimously. Dr. Waters then asked for a motion to accept the recommendations of the OAHCC for items to be deaccessioned from the MOH and NCMM. Again, with no discussion, Ms. Phillips moved approval and Ms. Condill seconded the motion, which again was carried by a unanimous vote.

Proposed Replacement of a Plaque at Bennett Place State Historic Site

Ms. Lanier offered the backstory surrounding the requested replacement of a plaque at Bennett Place State Historic Site recognizing the contributions of the Durham Rotary Club in the repairs of the stone gazebo at the site. The proposed plaque would replace one erected in 1990 that was installed on the 75th anniversary of the creation of the historic site. It would have slightly different text—marking the 2024 100th anniversary of the site—but would otherwise be identical with regard to materials, size, font, and appearance. Dr. Johnson moved approval, Dr. Dennard seconded that motion, and the motion was carried.

Briefing on the State Historic Preservation Plan

Ms. Bartos, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, addressed the commissioners, explaining that the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is charged with developing a State Historic Preservation Plan every 10 years. The last one was dated 2013 to 2022, and the SHPO is about to begin drafting its new plan that will cover the decade 2024 through 2034. It will be forwarded to the National Park Service by the end of 2024, after approval by the NCHC, which will be forthcoming. She supplemented her briefing with a PowerPoint presentation. She provided background on legislation directing the SHPO to develop this plan, at both the federal and state levels, and laid out

reasons for producing such a plan. She also described how issues, threats, goals, and opportunities of such a plan are identified and how they are subsequently measured.

The public engagement process, said Ms. Bartos, began in December 2022, with the goal of getting as much feedback as possible to the proposed preservation plan, incorporating public surveys and listening sessions. Ms. Bartos described some of the themes revealed by these public surveys. Among them are a perceived lack of appreciation for the preservation of history, including historic cemeteries, farms, and rural landscapes, and the desired efforts to preserve and protect the same, the importance of preserving a “sense of place,” as well as a desire for more robust oral history programs, which often fills in gaps that written archival materials might not touch upon. Historic designations by local preservation groups were found to be among the most effective protection tools, where those options exist. It was also expressed by local preservation groups and the public that not enough preservation planning is being integrated into public planning and development. Ms. Bartos offered to send the commissioners the most recent survey so they themselves might contribute their thoughts.

Respondents in public surveys and at listening sessions were asked about the types of historical places upon which a preservation plan might concentrate. The top five responses were downtowns and streetscapes, residential housing districts, documents and written records, farms and rural areas, and natural and scenic landscapes, as well as archaeological sites. People were then asked what they believe historic preservation contributes to North Carolina. The top responses to that question included maintaining a sense of place, history education, a holistic approach to history, and connections to community. The greatest threats to preserving NC’s history and quality of life, as reflected in community feedback, included development pressure from sprawl, lack of appreciation for things historic, demolition of historic places, and the abandonment of historic properties. The public was also asked about their thoughts on the types of issues the State Historic Preservation Office should be concentrating on, among other things.

Chairman Ruffin commended the efforts of the SHPO. He challenged the commissioners to think about what each of them might contribute to the development of the State Historic Preservation Plan, asking for guidance from the SHPO staff. Ms. Bartos encouraged the commissioners to participate in an online survey, via a link that will be sent to them by email.

As discussion continued, Commissioner Reynolds pointed out—as it relates to identified threats to historic preservation—that as has been discussed in the past, local preservation groups typically have little to no power to stop demolitions of historic buildings and noted that neglect and abandonment of historic homes and other structures can be a problem for property owners who cannot afford restoration or rehabilitation. He asked Ms. Bartos what local governments might do to mitigate these impacts? Some localities have sought local legislation pursuant to a demolition denial. Others have sought conditions placed on re-zoning, where zoning issues apply. And sometimes, locally based groups like Preservation North Carolina can place easements or covenants on historic properties that might negate a developer’s ability to demolish them.

Dr. Dennard asked whether the “Teaching of History” committee might incorporate some of the materials presented by Ms. Bartos in its work, to which Ms. Bartos responded, “By all means.”

Introduction of the Interim Director of the Division of State History Museums

Dr. Waters introduced Brad Wilson, interim director of the DSHM, who succeeds Ken Howard. Mr. Wilson provided some background information about himself. He addressed the institution's transition to a new director and updated the commissioners on the architectural plans for the planned museum renovation, including the challenges of removal and storage of artifacts. He explained that a comprehensive communication plan about the upcoming movement of people and things out of the museum and the subsequent museum's closure to the public is under development. He anticipates the museum closing to occur in about mid-October 2024, and directed the Commission to his written director's report for other news about goings on within the division.

Lunch

The meeting was paused from 12:30 to 12:45 pm to enable the attendees to help themselves to lunch. The meeting recommenced at 12:45.

Reopening of the Proposal to Accept the Minutes from the December 6, 2023, NCHC Meeting

The proposal to accept the aforementioned meeting minutes was reopened to correct an erroneous statement. The minutes stated that a proposed subcommittee of NCHC members to address resolutions in support of the teaching of history in public schools, as formed by the NCHC at its December 2023 meeting, would not have to adhere to public meetings requirements. In fact, this committee will be required to adhere to the requirement that its meetings be open to the public. A motion to correct this false statement in the minutes was made by Mr. Reynolds and seconded by Dr. Johnson. The motion was then passed by unanimous vote.

Update on the Committee Formed to Address the NCHC's Role Advocating for Teaching History in North Carolina Schools

As its chair, Mr. Reynolds passed out a written workplan he developed for the committee of NCHC members formed to consider tangible ways that commissioners can advocate for the importance of the teaching of North Carolina history. It provided a charter for the committee, lists the members—Mr. Reynolds, Ms. Condill, Dr. Dennard, Ms. Groome, and Ms. Phillips—and proposes a 2024 workplan agenda. It lays out what goals the committee has and how often it will update the full Commission on its work. The committee will meet one to two weeks prior to each already scheduled quarterly meeting of the full NCHC and will update the full commission on its discussions at the subsequent NCHC meeting. A copy of that workplan can be found in the file for this meeting, held in the OAH administrative office.

The other commissioners offered their support of this plan.

Reports from Division Directors

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier presented a spoken report highlighting the goings on in her division since the last meeting of the NCHC. The full, written report—which was made available to the commissioners in advance of this meeting—can be found in the file for this meeting of the NCHC, located in the administrative office of the Office of Archives and History.

Division of Archives and Records – Ms. McGee-Lankford presented a spoken report highlighting the goings on in the DAR division since the last meeting of the NCHC. The full, written report—which was made available to the commissioners in advance of this meeting—can be found in the file for this meeting of the NCHC, located in the administrative office of the Office of Archives and History.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos presented a spoken report highlighting the goings on in her division since the last meeting of the NCHC. The full, written report—which was made available to the commissioners in advance of this meeting—can be found in the file for this meeting of the NCHC, located in the administrative office of the Office of Archives and History.

Division of State History Museums – Because Mr. Wilson had to depart the meeting immediately after his introduction and was unable to touch on highlights, Dr. Waters referred the commissioners to the division director’s written report for goings on within the division. It, too, can be found in the file for this meeting of the NCHC, located in the administrative office of the Office of Archives and History.

Deputy Secretary’s Report

Dr. Waters reported that a nationwide search for the new, permanent director of the Division of State History Museums will begin as soon as a search firm is selected. He brought the commissioners up to date on the Priority Updates to State History (PUSH) Project, reporting that the first phase of the initiative is now complete, and the second phase is about to begin. The PUSH Project involves the evaluation of a select number of state historic sites and museums by an outside group, which is charged with making recommendations for ways to update or “freshen up” institutions and exhibits that might have remained static for too long, thereby diminishing their interest to the public.

Other Business

Mr. Ruffin suggested, after discussions with Dr. Waters, that due to the “newness” of several of the NCHC members, a tour of the Office of Archives and History would be very beneficial to their appreciation for the scope of the work being done by OAH staff. It is his hope that in conjunction with one of the upcoming in-person meetings of the Commission in Raleigh, such arrangements could be made.

Final Thoughts

Dr. Dennard commended the chair for his oversight of the Commission. He also commended Dr. Waters for his presence and leadership.

Adjournment

With business concluded Dr. Dennard moved that the meeting be adjourned. Dr. Johnson seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters

Draft