

North Carolina Historical Commission

Conference Call Minutes

June 22, 2022

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom conference call on Wednesday, June 22, 2022. The following commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan; the Honorable Newell Clark; Shana Bushyhead Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Samuel B. Dixon; Barbara Groome; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds; and Barbara B. Snowden.

Others in attendance included: 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 State Historic Sites & Properties (DSHSP); Phil Feagan, General Counsel, DNCR; Parker Backstrom, OAH administrative assistant and Recording Secretary of the NCHC; and information technology facilitator Matt Zeher.

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

Chairman Ruffin called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM and extended his welcome. He asked the commissioners whether any had a known or perceived conflict of interest with respect to any of the items of business slated for discussion. No such concerns were voiced, so the meeting moved forward. To establish that a quorum was present he called roll. He also reminded attendees that because this is a virtual meeting, all votes will be taken via voice roll call.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Bryan moved approval of the minutes from the March 23, 2022, regular meeting of the NCHC, as written. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard. Dr. Johnson asked that a slight correction be made to more accurately reflect comments she made as that meeting was concluding. Drs. Bryan and Dennard amended their motion and second to include Dr. Johnson's request. With no further discussion the motion was voted upon and carried unanimously.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

The chairman summarized that the list of items presented for consideration for accessioning into and deaccessioning out of collections pertain to items in the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh (MOH), the Museum of the Albemarle, and the North Carolina Maritime Museums (NCMM), as well as the DSHSP.

• **Accession of items into NC Museum of History in Raleigh, Museum of the Albemarle, the Maritime Museums** – Citing the annotated list of items recommended for accessioning and deaccessioning by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC), provided to commissioners in advance of the meeting, Ms. Snowden moved acceptance of the OAHCC's recommendations as presented. Dr. Johnson seconded the motion. With no questions or discussion, a roll call vote was taken, and the recommendations were approved unanimously.

• **Accession of items into the Division of State Historic Sites and Properties** – Citing the list of items recommended for accessioning into the collections of the DSHSP, Dr. Dennard moved acceptance as proposed. His motion was seconded by Ms. Phillips and carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

• **Deaccession of items out of the North Carolina Maritime Museums** – Citing the list of items recommended for deaccessioning out of the collections of the NCMM, Dr. Bryan moved acceptance as proposed. The motion was seconded by Mayor Clark and carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

• **Deaccession of items out of the DSHSP** – Ms. Phillips moved approval as proposed. Ms. Snowden seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously on a roll call vote with no discussion.

Reports from Division Directors

At Mr. Ruffin's request Dr. Waters introduced the division directors in the OAH and asked them to offer some brief comments to support the more expansive written reports they had produced in advance of the meeting, and which were sent in advance to the commissioners for their consumption.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos began by commending her staff for their work. She noted that job vacancies in state government sit at about 20 percent, double the usual figure, and her division is feeling the challenges of this, especially in the National Register Branch of the Historic Preservation Office (HPO). She is concerned that compensation figures don't appear to line up with market realities which makes filling positions and retaining staff difficult. She highlighted a few of the recent National Register nominees, including a Southern Railway passenger car that is one of the last segregated railway passenger cars from the Jim Crow Era known to exist in the U.S. She also reported that public interest in the Cemetery Protection and Survey Program continues unabated.

Chairman Ruffin thanked Ms. Bartos and echoed her frustration with the challenges of staff retention, noting that it is also prevalent in the private sector. Dr. Waters assured the Commission that the DNCR is doing everything it can to deal with this real challenge.

Commissioner Condill asked Ms. Bartos to expound on the comment in her written report about "now engaging" with NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act). Ms. Bartos explained that the Office of State Archaeology (OSA) has been re-inventorying its collections and has come across skeletal human remains of Native Americans. As a result, the OSA is working with Tribal Preservation Officers in the parts of the state as well as other parts of the country from whence the remains came to orchestrate their return.

Dr. Dennard expressed his fear that input the HPO receives when soliciting comments about National Register Districts may be geared more toward business interests and may not reflect broader community concerns. He asked whether the National Register Advisory Committee can look into whether this concern is legitimate. Ms. Bartos responded that given her current staffing levels this will be a challenge, but they will examine the question when they get a chance.

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier provided a brief summary of her written report. She reported that visitation at state historic sites have rebounded to within eight percent of pre-pandemic levels. The DSHSP, she said, is close to completing its comprehensive strategic plan, to align with that of the DNCR, and strives to emphasize true inclusion of all constituent citizens in its work. An example is the development of the Golden Frinks Freedom House in Edenton.

As the plans for development of the Golden Frinks House move forward Dr. Dennard emphasized the importance of listening sessions to enable those in the Edenton area to have a say in the development plan. He also asked Ms. Lanier whether listening sessions would expand to other areas as well. Ms. Lanier responded that the sessions are considered a phased project, with Phase I including local citizens and Phases II and III branching out to other areas. Mr. Ruffin made a point to recognize the contributions of Commissioner Dixon, an Edenton resident, in the Golden Frinks Freedom House project. Mr. Dixon in turn thanked Ms. Lanier for all she's done for both the Frinks project and work surrounding development of the Hayes Plantation.

At Dr. Waters' request Ms. Lanier touch upon The Harriet Jacobs Project. She reported that it is a public art installation that will convene artists at Historic Edenton in 2024. It was selected as a semifinalist in the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation Inclusive Public Art initiative.

Division of Archives and Records – Ms. Koonts highlighted several topics that are included in her fuller, written director's report. She noted that a 20 percent vacancy rate in staffing in the division is also proving to be a considerable challenge to her. She also reported upon community outreach efforts at a number of organizational conferences and meetings. Meanwhile, in-person tours of the archives are beginning to increase following limitations due to the pandemic. She also touched upon some important collection acquisitions—supported by the addition to her staff of a full-time, temporary archivist and a paid summer intern through the DNCR's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Program—including a LGBTQ collection at the Outer Banks History Center and a photographic negative collection from the early 1950s taken in Wilson, North Carolina and vicinity. Lots of oral histories also continue to come in, including to the Military Collection.

Ms. Koonts concluded by updating the commissioners about plans and progress on the USA 250th planning.

Following Ms. Koonts' report there was a brief discussion about the department's partnership with HBCUs and how the OAH would like to see an expansion of the program. Dr. Waters added that he has met recently with three chancellors of North Carolina A & T University, Winston-Salem State University, and North Carolina Central University, and discussed with them deepening the relationship between HBCUs and the department.

Division of State History Museums – Director Ken Howard was not in attendance at this meeting and therefore there was no oral report offered by that division to augment the written

report that he produced in advance of the meeting. In reference to that written report Dr. Johnson noted a few exciting things that have happened at the MOH that were not included in Mr. Howard's report that she feels it important to mention. These include community conversations headed up by Chrystal Regan, Chief Education Officers at the MOH, as well as "awesome" Juneteenth activities that took place at the museum in mid-June. She also expressed concern that activity reports that are inclusive of Native American populations in North Carolina are underrepresented, especially those she knows are taking place in the western part of the state. She hopes to hear more about these topics from Mr. Howard at the next meeting of the Commission.

Report from the Deputy Secretary on the Office of Archives and History

Dr. Waters thanked the commissioners for their continued interest in the work of the department and his divisions. He reported on visits he's made to talk in person with commissioners Bryan, Condill, Dennard, Reynolds, and Snowden to discuss the OAH and its work, and committed to visiting the other commissioners in their hometowns as his schedule allows. He also said that he continues to make personal visits to state historic sites and museums around the state, and that he has managed visit all but eight thus far since his tenure as deputy secretary began. He expressed his appreciation for the positive spirit and expertise of teams at all of the locations he has enjoyed visiting as well as among team members here in Raleigh.

Dr. Waters touched upon the proposed state budget from Governor Cooper, which includes expansion budgets of \$5 million to the OAH to support its mission in general and \$16 million for repair and renovation at the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum. He noted that Lord Cultural Resources has concluded its first round of evaluations of select museums and historic sites. Its recommendations resulted in \$6 million for exhibit updates. He also noted that with support from the North Caroliniana Society, the important book *African Americans in North Carolina* by Dr. Jeffrey Crow, former deputy secretary of the OAH, is being updated.

Dr. Waters concluded his report by thanking Mr. Feagan and Mr. Backstrom for their contributions to this meeting and the work of the OAH.

Concluding Thoughts

Chairman Ruffin commended the outreach and continued work of all the staff of the OAH.

He reminded everyone that the next meeting of the Commission, scheduled for September 21, may be a little more complex than the past few meetings. He asks the commissioners to consider their willingness to meet in person in Raleigh. He asked Mr. Backstrom to look into the logistics of this with an eye on a mid-morning start time rather than what has been the standard mid-afternoon start.

Mr. Feagan added that the flexibility afforded the Commission through virtual meetings is afforded by virtue of an Emergency Order from the Governor issued near the start of the coronavirus pandemic governing public meetings of state governmental boards and commissions. He noted that this order may be rescinded by the time September rolls around, which may change how the Commission conducts its business.

Ms. Snowden noted the passing of noted author and historian Dr. Lindley S. Butler of Reidsville. She asked Dr. Waters if he would send a letter of condolence to the family on behalf of the NCHC,

which he expressed his willingness to do. In response to a proposal for a resolution recognizing Dr. Butler's work, Dr. Johnson suggested sending a letter now and discussing a resolution at the September meeting, a suggestion met with consensus by the other commissioners.

Dr. Johnson expressed her thanks to Deputy State Archaeologist Mary Beth Fitts who appeared on a segment of Spectrum News to discuss the archaeological findings in connection with the construction of North Carolina Freedom Park directly behind the Archives and History/State Library Building in downtown Raleigh. Dr. Johnson felt Dr. Fitts was clear, concise, and enlightening in her reporting and generated excitement about the kinds of things that can be discovered, even in downtown Raleigh. Dr. Johnson summed up her comments by noting that she and Dr. Lynn Harris, Associate Professor of Maritime Studies at East Carolina University, have recently published a book called *Excavating the Histories of Slave-Trade and Pirate Ships*, highlighting the work being done in underwater archaeology in North Carolina, in particular focusing upon the newer interpretations surrounding what's being found on sunken slave vessels.

Adjournment

With business concluded Mr. Ruffin invited a motion to adjourn. A motion to this effect was proffered by Dr. Dennard and seconded by Ms. Groome. The motion was passed unanimously on a roll call vote. The meeting concluded at 3:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters