

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
September 12, 2016, 7:00pm
Town Planner's Office
Second Floor
Great Barrington Town Hall
334 Main St.
Great Barrington, MA 01230

ATTENDING:

- *Members:* Marilyn Bisiewicz, Malcolm Fick, Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, Bill Nappo, David Rutstein
- *Guests:* Robert Kroll, Director, Great Barrington Historical Society, Chris Rembold, Town Planner

MINUTES OF JULY 11, 2016

- Malcolm noted that two corrections need to be made:
 - The Veterans Graves Books section should cite it as a project completed by the WPA, not the CCC.
 - The Newsboy paragraph should include the report that the juniper bushes need to be removed and replaced with a grass ground cover.
- Paul will insert these edits.
- On a motion by Malcolm and a second by Gary, the Minutes of July 11, 2016, with the edits, passed unanimously.

HOUSATONIC SCHOOL: APPLICATION FOR CPA ELIGIBILITY

- Chris Rembold reported that the town is applying for a CPA grant and, in accord with CPC policies, is requesting a determination of the historical significance of the building from the Historical Commission. The grant will fund an envelope study to determine what is needed to keep the building sound, safe and standing. The more effort the town devotes to the care of the building the more attractive it will be to potential developers. For example, there are leaks in the building and a need for re-pointing.
- An architectural historian, contracted by the town, completed Survey Form B with a full documentation of the school's architecture and historical significance, which has been submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. In a preliminary opinion, the MHC has indicated the building would most likely be eligible for nomination to the National Register. A copy of this survey form was submitted with the CPA grant application.
- Paul stated that the historical significance of the school has been clearly documented by the MHC survey form. On a motion by Malcolm and a second by Bill, the Commission voted unanimously to certify the historical significance of the Housatonic School.
- David noted that, in spite of the Form B's use of the name, "Housatonic Grammar School," in the Form B, in his research in primary sources (Town Reports, blueprints, etc.) on the school there is no evidence of the use of this name, rather "Housatonic School" was the commonly used name. Paul thanked David on this clarification and the Commission agreed that, unless contrary evidence is revealed, the name "Housatonic School" shall be used.

COLLECTIONS

A. Ramsdell Environmental Controls

- A key collection care priority for the town historical collection is to stabilize the temperature and relative humidity in the second floor of the Ramsdell Library. This goal coincides with a library-town initiative to install a new HVAC system in the Ramsdell building, which Library Committee chair Kathy Plungis recently reported to Paul. The library intends to seek a grant to fund this project. Don reported that the HVAC sought is a total system to cover the whole building. Joe Sokol is exploring a split system for the first and second floors. Don felt that Joe would do the first floor first as it is cheaper. Gary noted that when the library was operating an A/C on the first floor, it was 3 degrees cooler on the second floor. The library board is looking at this project as part of their long range plan.
- The next step is the gathering of prices by Joe.

B. Don Victor Collection

- A joint task force of the Historical Commission and Society rescued this valuable assemblage of late 20th-early 21st century images of Great Barrington places and people. It was packed into 180 storage

cartons, inventoried by Don's file titles and placed in secure storage, first in a pod at the Historical Society and then in the second floor of the Ramsdell Library, after a concern for weight load was relieved by the DPW. In accord with Don's wishes the collection was given to the Historical Society, but because of the space funding needed, the Society conveyed title to the Commission. The collection of books and other non-Great Barrington-related materials were retained by the Society for sale at their flea market. Thanks to the generosity of Jim Mercer, all 180 boxes were transported from the pod to the Ramsdell storage area. Thus, the collection has been saved. Paul thanked Bob Kroll and the Society for their key role in this preservation effort and Amanda for the library's cooperation in the project.

- The next steps are to place the collection into an acid-free environment, catalogue the contents and provide for public access.

C. Veterans Graves Book

- Malcolm reported on his research into what other parties with similar circumstances have done to provide on-line accessibility to collections. When he searched WPA Veterans Graves Registration sites in Massachusetts, Great Barrington was listed with access via the Berkshire Athanaeum which already has them on microfilm. He also found that Westchester County has made their collection searchable by paging through records in the book then bringing up cards. Malcolm said this approach was expensive.
- Gary recommended that he and Malcolm meet, prepare recommendations and report them at the next meeting. We need to ascertain that the pdf is accessible. Too, researchers need to know that this sort of site is available and how to get access.

D. Kormanik Collection

- Alexander Thorp, a local land surveyor, was alerted that Bill Kormanik, another local surveyor who worked in the 1960's to the 1990's, and who has been retired for 16 years, was seeking a home for his working files, maps and records stored in eight file cabinets and flat files. Bill turned over this collection to Alexander who asked Gary about any interest the Society or Commission might have in taking it into their collections.
- Gary believes the collection is a valuable resource and should be saved. With our limited available space and curatorial staff, restricted public accessibility and competing priorities, Gary is checking with the Berkshire County Historical Society and Athanaeum about their interest in being the repository for the collection.

E. Archivist

- With Gary's oversight, Margaret Cherin has performed her archivist duties in a textbook manner. Her professional competence, seriousness of purpose and goal orientation have contributed to great progress in the organization of the Town Historical Collection. Margaret's archival job at Simons Rock of Bard College has been elevated to a full time position which severely limits or eliminates her from continuing her work with the Commission. Paul will clarify her availability. Perhaps she could be used for a special project. In the meantime, the Commission needs to find potential candidates to assume this important post. It is a part of our work plan and budget and we need to follow through.

NEWSBOY PLANNING AND TIMELINE

A. Booklet:

- Gary is writing and publishing a 32 page booklet on the history of the Newsboy and allowing the Commission to purchase 100 copies for local distribution at his unit cost of \$6. The initial Commission budget for the dedication event was \$600; \$300 for a small brochure and \$300 for dedication event expenses. To take advantage of this generous opportunity, made possible by Gary, to have a scholarly book be a part of the project, instead of an ephemeral brochure, the membership felt the book should replace the brochure. Since no funds will be expended on the event, the full \$600 will be allocated for the purchase of 100 books.
- A motion by Bill, and second by Malcolm, to expend the \$600 dedication budget for the purchase of 100 Newsboy books from Gary passed unanimously.

B. Re-Dedication Event:

- *Program:* The event is a joint effort by the Commission and Historical Society. The program consists of performance of songs by members of the Berkshire Ukulele Band, as a prelude and a concert after the formal presentations, a welcome by Robert Kroll representing the Historical Society, an introduction and description of the cultural context of the Newsboy by Paul and a description of the statue and its history by Gary.
- *Publicity:* Bob will send e-mail blasts to the Society membership. Gary will e-mail him photographs and basic talking points about the Newsboy. Paul will e-mail a release to all local media.

C. Fountain:

- Paul thanked Bill for his dogged determination and work to make sure the fountain operates as it should. Bill said there is a 20 gallon holding tank for the re-circulating pump which is fed by manually pouring water into the horse trough.
- There needs to be an efficient and regular way to replenish the water. Paul will talk to Joe Sokol about scheduling the town watering truck to make scheduled refill stops at the monument during the warm weather.
- Bill distributed copies of a report he prepared that provides a chronological photographic account of the restoration of the fountain mechanisms. To fix the clogging of the Devils head piping, Bill removed the head and replaced the connecting tubing.

D. Landscape

- Paul has drafted "Notes and Plan for Treatment of Newsboy Park Landscape" to serve as the guide for future actions and budgeting for restoring the landscape. It includes: an overview of the development of the landscape and its style, an overarching goal "*To restore the Newsboy Park landscape, as close as possible and practicable, to its late 19th-early 20th century appearance (the "period of interpretation"),*" short and long range action steps and photographic documentation of the appearance of the landscape in the late 19th-early 20th centuries.
- Some of the short range objectives coincide with tasks that need to be done to prepare the site for the re-dedication event including removal or trimming of the juniper bushes and painting the utility post green to help ameliorate its intrusive appearance. The juniper work will help remove the cause of the biocide staining on the monument, as recommended by Daedalus, and expose the original cobblestones (a restoration goal).
 - After discussion of the various options for the junipers, the Commission decided to hire Bailey Landscaping of Housatonic from whom Bill had secured an estimate, to trim the bushes back to the edge of the cobblestones. Bill will call Bailey and oversee the work.
 - On a motion by Malcolm and a second by Paul the membership voted unanimously to authorize payment of the \$700 bid by Bailey to trim the junipers in time to make the landscape presentable for the re-dedication and to endorse the goals and objectives of the plan drafted by Paul.
 - Chris Rembold informed the Commission that the Newsboy park is not under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Committee and, therefore, no coordination with that body is required.

HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY

- Paul reported that two consultants submitted proposals out of ten firms who requested a copy of the RFP. An ad hoc selection committee of Bernie Drew, Don, Chris Rembold and Paul recommended, and the Town subsequently hired, Larson Fisher Associates of Woodstock, NY to complete the first phase.
- Paul has been working with the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the town to complete all the necessary contracts and attendant paperwork and attended a meeting to brief all grant recipients at MHC in May. The next steps are to hold a "start-up" meeting with the consultant and MHC in Boston and then start on the actual schedule of work in town. The key first objective is to determine the final list of the sites to be covered in this phase. Part of the first meeting is a briefing and tour of the Town Historical Collection so they can apprehend the resources available to them. Gary volunteered to do this.

REVIEW OF FY17 BUDGET AND WORK PLAN

- The FY17 budget line for the Commission is \$7,470. With the addition of \$9,967 in remainder funds, the total monies available are \$17,437. In addition, Lauren informed Paul of the existence of a donation account of \$2,144. Paul will check on any restriction on expenditures from this account. In summary, including all the accounts, the total budget available to the Commission is \$19,581.

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROJECT

- Don reported that he and Chris Rembold will talk to Jennifer about the program.

CITIZENS' SPEAK

- No participants

OTHER BUSINESS

- Don reported:
 - The Historic District Commission is moving the First Resistance monument 20'.
 - The name plates that were once affixed to Main St. benches are in a box at the DPW. As some of the plates have been taken by the families represented, Don is moving the box to the Ramsdell storage area.
 - Veterans are seeking a new memorial on the Town Hall property commemorating those who served in WWII.
- Marilyn reported:
 - The CPC rejected the application to restore the Wetherbee Mausoleum because the funding for such projects is from the cemetery's budget line.
 - The location of the Searles time capsule beneath the Town Hall lawn may have been marked by a plaque. Marilyn and David will check.

NEXT MEETING

- Monday November 14, 2016 at 7:00 pm at a place to be announced

ADJOURN

- Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously.