

**North Carolina Historical Commission
Conference Call Minutes**

December 7, 2022

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met virtually, via Zoom, on Wednesday, December 7, 2022. All commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan; Newell Clark; Shana Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Samuel B. Dixon; Barbara Groome; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds; and Barbara B. Snowden.

The 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 State Historic Sites & Properties (DSHSP); and Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary of the NCHC.

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

Call to Order and Welcome

Chairman Ruffin called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. Because the meeting is being held virtually a roll call was taken to establish the presence of a quorum.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The chair asked the commissioners, their having had a chance to examine the meeting agenda in advance, whether any had a known or perceived conflict of interest with respect to any of the items of business slated for discussion. Ms. Snowden, citing her involvement with the Museum of the Albemarle, stated that she would recuse herself when discussion about accessions into the collection of that institution came before the commission for action.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Bryan moved approval of the minutes from the September 21, 2022, regular meeting of the NCHC, as written. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard. Mr. Ruffin then called a roll call vote on the motion. The motion was carried with Ms. Phillips and Mr. Reynolds abstaining, given that they were not in attendance at the September 21 meeting.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

At the request of the chair, Dr. Waters, citing the annotated list of items recommended by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee for accessioning into the collections of the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh, the Museum of the Albemarle, and the North Carolina Maritime Museums, briefly walked the commissioners through the list, which had been

made available to them in advance of the meeting. Dr. Waters recommended that the list be considered as a single slate for a vote, then opened the floor to any questions. Mr. Ruffin asked for clarification about the source of some of the garments included in the list. With no additional questions forthcoming, a motion to approve the list as presented was offered by Ms. Phillips and seconded by Mr. Clark. Other than Ms. Snowden, who recused herself from the vote, the motion was carried by a unanimous roll call vote.

The only items recommended for deaccessioning are from the collection of North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh. As was the case with accession items, deaccession items were presented by Dr. Waters as a single slate. Ms. Snowden moved approval, Dr. Bryan seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Deputy Secretary's Report

A procedure has been established by the NCHC that division directors will present division reports at every alternate meeting of the Commission, and as they had done so at the September 2022 meeting, they were not required at this meeting. However, Dr. Waters noted that Ms. Bartos and Ms. Lanier were in attendance, at his request, so that they could describe some select OAH activities with which they and their divisions have been involved.

Dr. Waters began by touching on a few recent activities in which he has participated, including a reception at the NC Museum of History in Raleigh, where North Carolina's copy of the Bill of Rights and a first printing of the U.S. Constitution—one of only two in private hands—were on display. He described it as a wonderful event.

The deputy secretary then ceded the floor to Ms. Lanier who reported upon the creation of a new state historic site, Shallow Ford, the first such addition in decades. The site in Alamance County, she said, was used by indigenous people before European contact, as well as used during the Revolutionary War, and likely by enslaved people also. Ms. Lanier also offered updates on an upcoming ribbon-cutting event at Historic Bath and the impending opening of a new exhibit there. Finally, a ground-breaking has finally taken place for a new visitors center at Fort Fisher State Historic Site, which has been years in the planning. Dr. Waters added that efforts are underway to update exhibits at all the state's historic sites, something which hasn't been done for many years.

Dr. Waters then offered a brief report on the new museum in Fayetteville formerly called the Museum of the Cape Fear. The official name of the new museum will be the North Carolina Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction. Despite some spirited, local debate about the venue over the course of the past several months, its recent approval by the Fayetteville City Council was unanimous. He thanked DNCR Secretary Reid Wilson, Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan—who as a resident of Fayetteville has advocated for many years on behalf of the proposed museum—and other Fayetteville citizens for the work they have put into the realization of this plan.

Dr. Waters reported on a couple of new hires in the OAH. Ms. Ansley Wegner was promoted to the supervisor of the Historic Research Office, to replace the departed Dr. Joseph Beatty. The OAH will soon begin a search for Ms. Wegner's replacement as head of the State Highway Historical Marker Program. Lastly, Kathryn McKee was recently hired as editor of the *North Carolina Historical Review*, succeeding the recently retired Anne Miller.

Dr. Waters next touched upon the continuing planning for North Carolina's observance of the America250 celebration three-and-a-half years from now. He said he just returned from Richmond, Virginia, where the State Historic Administrators Meeting was held, under whose umbrella national efforts for America250 are being organized. He noted with pride that under the guidance of State Archivist Sarah Koonts, North Carolina's work on this initiative is far outpacing that of other states.

Finally, Dr. Waters gave a very brief report on the ongoing budget planning for the next biennium, his first time through this complicated process. He thanked the North Carolina General Assembly (N.C.G.A.) for its support of the DNCR last biennium and expressed his optimism for the department's budgetary prospects this time around.

Dr. Waters rounded out his report by introducing Ms. Bartos, who described the imminent two-day retreat for staff of the Division of Historical Resources from across the state. They will gather to afford colleagues in the division to reconnect in person for the first time since the COVID pandemic. The retreat will also offer an opportunity for the division staff to refocus on its mission, to strategize about the challenges it faces, and to set goals for the months and years ahead.

Selecting 2023 Dates for NCHC Meetings

Chairman Ruffin proposed the following dates for meetings of the Commission in 2023: March 22, June 21, September 20, and December 6, each a Wednesday. He suggested that the March and September meetings be held in person, to facilitate the giving of reports by division directors. The other two meetings—and the June and December—will be held virtually. In each case these proposed meeting types will be at the discretion of the chair, based upon the business at hand. He also recommended that they each begin at 10:00 AM.

Ms. Snowden made a motion to approve Mr. Ruffin's proposal. The motion was seconded by Dr. Bryan and carried by a unanimous roll call vote.

NCHC Resolutions Regarding the Teaching of Public History and Staffing Issues in State Government

Chairman Ruffin cited conversations that the Commission has had in the past about a general lack of historical awareness, especially in the education system, and what effect that is having on our society. He also cited discussions around issues the state is having recruiting and retaining employees, due in large part to the uncompetitive salaries that it offers compared to those available in the private sector, as explained by Ms. Bartos at the September 2022 meeting of the NCHC. In each case, he noted, little to no "action" has followed those heartfelt discussions. Feeling strongly that the Commission had to move beyond just the "talking stage," the chair brought forth two resolutions that he drafted for the commissioners' consideration. The first resolution was presented as follows:

"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 reassess the value and prioritization of history as a critical part of instructional curricula going forward. To that end, The North Carolina Historical Commission requests specific staff recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Commission."

Ms. Phillips stated her support for the resolution but suggested removing the phrase “reassess the value and prioritization” and simply replace it with the word “prioritize.” Ms. Snowden stated her special appreciation that OAH staff, to be recruited by Dr. Waters, be asked for specific recommendations as to how this “prioritization” might manifest itself. Dr. Johnson offered to work with OAH staff to discuss identifying possible resources and recommend courses of action, if so desired.

(It was at this point that Mr. Dixon excused herself from the meeting to attend to another commitment.)

Speaking as an educator, Ms. Groome noted that public educators obtain their working knowledge of history through the standard course of study, by way of the North Carolina Department of Education. The NCHC, she feels, might be positioned to work with the Department of Education and supply public educator with the volumes of historical information available to it. Mr. Ruffin stated his appreciation for her position, but he drafted the resolution in a way as to emphasize the general “spirit of concern” about the issue. He’s concerned that getting too specific could result in unintended inaccuracies or the creation of controversy where it’s unnecessary. The crux of resolution, he summarized, is simply to call attention to a long-standing problem, as the NCHC sees it, and recommend—with the assistance of the OAH—ways to address that problem.

Dr. Johnson feels that the commissioners have to be clear in providing context to the issue to help the OAH staff as much as possible as they mull possible recommendations, a sentiment that Ms. Condill made a point of backing.

Dr. Dennard feels that this resolution is an excellent step toward being “intentional,” being that the NCHC is a “custodian and keeper” of state history. Given the commissioners’ deep knowledge of the subject and their position as overseers of the state’s history, he feels it is their role to offer more precise direction to teachers, staff, and legislators, to set forth precise guidelines on how to prioritize the teaching of history in a way that is more specific than the language currently offered in the resolution put forth by the chair.

Mr. Ruffin stated his appreciation for the deeper thoughts being conveyed but proposes that that type of discussion might best be continued at the next meeting of the Commission. To stay on point, he said, the commissioners should focus on the proposed resolution, which essentially states, “the NCHC sees a problem and it needs to be pointed out.” Dr. Bryan concurred with the chair’s summary and is in favor of a succinct statement, and she believes the Commission is positioned to be assertive about the issue. Mr. Reynolds also stated his support for the resolution, noting that the NCHC is positioned to use its “megaphone” to bring into the public eye what it sees as a problem, but feels that’s as far as its official role can go. How to influence change, echoing thoughts stated by Dr. Bryan, will fall upon recommendations from OAH staffers.

Ms. Snowden said she sees this as a two-pronged action. The first is the resolution, which is in essence the Commission sounding the alarm that there is a problem with the way history is or is not being taught in public institutions, a problem she would like to see acknowledged. Secondly, what specific things can the NCHC and the OAH do to contact educators and facilitate their efforts? One of the major challenges, she said, will be the Commission communicating its concerns without catalyzing some sort of political backlash.

Incorporating notes taken during discussions, Chairman Ruffin read out the modified 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 re-prioritize history as a critical part of instructional curricula going forward. To that end, The North Carolina Historical Commission requests specific staff recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Commission.”

(It was at this point that Ms. Condill excused herself from the meeting to attend to another commitment.)

Mr. Reynolds and Dr. Dennard questioned whether “re-prioritize” is the most effective term. Some thought that the word “prioritize” would be appropriate, but there was some debate about its contextual accuracy. The term “amplify” was offered by Ms. Bartos as an alternative.

Mr. Reynolds moved approval of the rewritten part 1 of the resolution, inserting the word “amplify” in place of the word “re-prioritize.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Snowden and carried unanimously via roll call vote. This makes the official resolution read as follows:

“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 curricula going forward. To that end, The North Carolina Historical Commission requests specific staff recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Commission.”

Mr. Ruffin prefaced the second resolution he drafted by saying that it’s meant to be a statement of concern from the NCHC about the difficulty state agencies, the DNCR in particular, are having attracting and holding on to quality employees, and the negative effects that lack of recruitment and retention is having on the ability of the DNCR to carry out its mission. He read out that draft resolution:

“RESOLVED that The North Carolina Historical Commission, being aware that the current economic conditions, particularly those resulting in significant salary inflation, are taking a disproportionate toll on state government staffing in areas critical to the preservation of history, requests heightened awareness of this issue relative to determining the state budget going forward.”

Its ultimate purpose, said Mr. Ruffin, is to encourage the N.C.G.A. to give public history interests their “place at the table” during budget negotiations.

The proposed resolution met with general support. Dr. Waters expressed his deep appreciation for the position the Commission is taking on this issue.

Dr. Bryan moved approval of this resolution as written and Mr. Clark seconded the motion. With no additional discussion the motion was carried by unanimous voice vote. Ms. Snowden then moved that the final version of the resolutions be attached to the meeting minutes. That motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and carried unanimously by voice vote.

Concluding Thoughts

Chairman Ruffin stated that he has no announcements but reminded the commissioners again that the next meeting of the Commission will take place in person on March 22, 2023, where the Commission will hear verbal reports from division directors, among other business.

Dr. Johnson reported that the Maritime History Council recently held its 32nd annual meeting. She commended the state's archaeologists and maritime museums staff, who Dr. Johnson described as "amazing," for the enthusiastic support they provide to the council in its work.

Adjournment

There being no more business to discuss Dr. Dennard moved adjournment. Dr. Johnson seconded the motion which was carried by unanimous roll call vote. The meeting ended at 11:28 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters

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 curricula going forward. To that end, The North Carolina Historical Commission requests specific staff recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Commission.

RESOLVED that The North Carolina Historical Commission, being aware that the current economic conditions, particularly those resulting in significant salary inflation, are taking a disproportionate toll on state government staffing in areas critical to the preservation of history, requests heightened awareness of this issue relative to determining the state budget going forward.

Dates for NCHC '23 meetings:

MAR 22 (In Person) 10 AM

JUN 21 (Virtual) 10 AM

SEP 20 (In Person) 10 AM

DEC 6 (Virtual) 10 AM