

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

March 18, 2025

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met in the Archives & History Building on Tuesday, March 18, 2025. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Newell Clark; Shana Bushyhead Condill; Samuel B. Dixon; Dr. David Dennard; Barbara Groome (remote); Dr. Susanna Lee; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; Susan Phillips; and W. Noah Reynolds. Absent was commissioner Barbara B. Snowden.

Also in attendance were: Pamela Cashwell, Secretary, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Maggie Thompson, Chief Deputy Secretary, DNCR; Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for Archives and History, DNCR; Sarah Koonts, Director, Division of Archives & Records (DAR); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of Historic Sites and Properties (DSHSP); Ramona Bartos, Director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR); C.J. Roberts, Director, Division of State History Museum (DSHM) (remote); Jessica Sutton, General Counsel for the DNCR; Jonathan Avery, DNCR Assistant General Counsel; Becky McGee-Lankford, head of the Government Records Section, DAR; Natalie Rodriguez, Associate Director, North Carolina African American Heritage Commission; Ansley Wegner, Supervisor, Office of Historical Research (OHR); and Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.

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 10:10 AM. Roll was called to establish the presence of a quorum, and the chair asked the commissioners to voice concern they may have about a potential conflict of interest pertaining to the business at hand. No such concerns were expressed.

Approval of Minutes

The chair entertained comments about the minutes from the December 18, 2024, meeting of the NCHC. Dr. Dennard pointed out some minor typos and asked that they be corrected, then moved that the minutes be accepted pending those corrections. The motion was seconded by Ms. Phillips and carried.

Comments from Secretary Cashwell

This being the first NCHC meeting that she has attended, Secretary Cashwell took a few minutes to introduce herself and provide the commissioners with background information about herself, describing her experience in public service, having served in the Department of Public Safety, the State Ethics Commission, and the Department of Administration, of which she served as Secretary.

She expressed her excitement about her new role. She highlighted the many positive and “fun” things the department has to offer the citizens of North Carolina but also outlined the challenges facing the department, including budget shortfalls and staffing issues. Secretary Cashwell also noted that Ms. Koonts and Ms. Tracey Burns, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Cultural Engagement will soon both be retiring. She concluded her comments by expressing her gratitude to the commissioners for their commitment and engagement.

Dr. Waters then introduced Chief Deputy Secretary Thompson, who provided some background information about herself and noted that she is trained as an archaeologist. Finally, Dr. Waters introduced, in turn, Ms. Sutton, who expressed her excitement about working with the Commission, and new director of the DSHM, C.J. Roberts, who was joining the meeting remotely from Florida, where he is winding down his role as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Tampa Bay History Center.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Dr. Waters cited the list of items proposed for accessioning into the collections of the Museum of History (MOH) in Raleigh and the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City, as recommended by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC). This annotated list was made available to the commissioners in advance of the meeting. He opened the floor for questions or comments. With none forthcoming Mr. Dixon moved approval of the recommendations, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion and the motion was carried.

Dr. Waters then cited the list of recommended accessions into the collection of the DSHSP. Dr. Johnson moved approval, Mr. Clark seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

Finally, Dr. Waters cited the list of items proposed for deaccessioning out of the collections of the MOH and the DSHSP. With no questions forthcoming, Ms. Condill moved approval of the former and Mr. Dixon seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Ms. Lanier addressed a question that the chair had about an item from the DSHSP. She also addressed a question from Mr. Reynolds pertaining to mold issues at a few state historic sites, going on to explain how conditions that lead to mold issues are being addressed. Dr. Johnson moved approval of the recommended deaccessions from the DSHSP, Ms. Phillips seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

Deaccessions from the Division of State Archives

As is statutorily required, items proposed for deaccessioning from the State Archives were presented as a separate agenda item by Ms. Koonts. She referred the commissioners to the list of items, four proposed deaccessions annotated at length, described the items, explained why the division feels that removal from the collection is warranted, and outlined what the disposition of those items will be. After addressing a question from Dr. Dennard about one of the items, a motion to approve the recommended deaccessions was made by Dr. Dennard, seconded by Mr. Clark, and carried unanimously.

Periodic Review of Administrative Rules

As a follow-up to his appearance before the NCHC at its December 2024 meeting, Mr. Avery updated the commissioners on the status of the review of administrative rules. He reminded them that at the December meeting, the presentation to them of the rules in Phase I of the Agency Review process, the Commission approved the initial classification of those rules. Per the process, those classifications were posted online for public comments before being moved on to the next phase, but no comments were received. So, Mr. Avery appeared today to present the proposed final classification of the administrative rules, a copy of which was made available to the commissioners in advance of this meeting. If the proposed final classification of rules is approved by the NCHC, they will be submitted to the Rules Review Commission for its approval. Mr. Reynolds moved approval of the final classification, Dr. Johnson seconded, and the motion was carried. Mr. Avery stated that the final phase of this long process will be readoption of the proposed administrative rules, which he will bring back to the Commission in, what he estimates will be a year or two by the time they work their way through the current phase of the effort.

Reports from Division Directors

Because the division directors did not give in-person reports at the December 2024 meeting, they appeared today to summarize the activities and initiatives that have taken place in their respective divisions since the last meeting of the Commission. These verbal reports touched upon more detailed written reports made available to the commissioners prior to today's meeting.

Division of State History Museums – Dr. Waters recognized Mr. Roberts for any comments he may wish to offer. He explained that although he has accepted the job of director of the DSHM, his current position required a four-month advance notice of departure, so he will not arrive in Raleigh until late April or early May. This period of time, he said, and his inclusion in discussions with the interim director Brad Wilson, Dr. Waters, and museum staff have given him an opportunity to wrap his mind around the operations of the MOH and all its facets, as well as strategize on how to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Division of Archives and Records – Giving her last report to the Commission prior to her retirement, Ms. Koonts summarized her experience at the DNCR, touching upon some of her particular points of pride, her collaboration with colleagues, and the programs she helped develop during her 30-year tenure in the OAH. She also updated the commissioners on the America 250 Project (A250) planning, noting that all \$1.8 million in grant money the DAR was charged with distributing has been earmarked for A250 by 75 North Carolina county commemoration committees. Dr. Waters reported that upon Ms. Koonts's retirement, Ms. Wegner will take the reins of the statewide A250 initiative. Dr. Johnson expressed her appreciation for the excellent work of Ms. Koonts over the years, a feeling that was echoed by all present. Ms. Koonts' full, written report about division news and activities can be found both on the NCHC website and in the paper 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 directed the commissioners' attention to her written report. She noted that she and Dr. Waters traveled to Washington, DC, for the annual National Conference for State Historic Preservation Officers and passed around the substantial report—drafted by the State Historic Preservation Office staff—that they dropped off in

congressional offices. Ms. Bartos noted the retirements in the division of longtime staffers Mitch Wilds and Jeff Futch and touched upon other personnel changes. Correspondingly, she echoed Secretary Cashwell's comments about the challenges of filling positions, noting that the average time it takes to fill a position in the DNCR is 180 days. Ms. Bartos' full, written report about division news and activities can be found both on the NCHC website and in the paper file for this meeting of the NCHC.

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier updated the commissioners on projects at several state historic sites, including House in the Horseshoe, Ft. Dobbs, Ft. Fisher, and the Thomas Day House. She noted that visitation to state historic sites has increased 10 percent from this time last year, bucking national trends. She introduced Ms. Rodriguez who provided an update on the 'Africa to Carolina' Public Art Installation at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site. As requested by the NCHC at its December meeting, Ms. Rodriguez shared the changes in the installation's design elements, as well as addressing and alleviating concerns about the accuracy of some of the references incorporated into the design. Ms. Lanier's full, written report about division news and activities can be found both on the NCHC website and in the paper file for this meeting of the NCHC.

Deputy Secretary's Report

Dr. Waters didn't have much to add to the division directors' reports but did commend the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's financial support for the 'Africa to Carolina' installation. In response to recommendations to the Commission by the NCHC's Public History Advisory Committee, chaired by Commissioner Reynolds, Dr. Waters noted that the department is developing an online calendar of events. It will include filters that will enable commissioners to narrow down the events to match their specific areas of interest, should they wish to attend any. The DNCR is also hoping to produce a monthly newsletter.

Dr. Waters offered a friendly reminder that commissioners will need to complete their online, mandated ethics training course by April 15. He finished by thanking Ms. Koonts for her service and spoke on behalf of all her colleagues in saying she will be greatly missed. He also recognized Mr. Backstrom for his ongoing work on behalf of the NCHC.

Other Business

Dr. Johnson noted that the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is a main funder and mentor for the African American Heritage Commission, for which she serves as chair. With slashes in federal funding under the current federal administration there will be cutbacks to IMLS funding, so she encouraged people to send letters of support for the IMLS to Washington, DC.

Chair Announcements

As addressed at the December meeting, Mr. Ruffin reiterated his interest in holding more meetings away from Raleigh and opened the floor for discussion. Mr. Dixon invited the Commission to Edenton, where the Commission last met in 2015. Dr. Waters stated that Winston-Salem would also be a good meeting place; the Commission has met there before as well. The next meeting of the NCHC is scheduled for June 10. Mr. Ruffin and Dr. Waters will discuss potential meeting sites and the choice will be communicated to the commissioners as soon as that decision is made.

Adjournment

With business concluded Mr. Clark moved adjournment. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and carried unanimously, ending the meeting at 12:07. The commissioners then took lunch.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters