

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2026

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom on Thursday, March 19, 2025. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Newell Clark; Shana Condill; Dr. David Dennard; Dr. Sally Greene; Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson; Dr. Susanna Lee; Dr. Lawrence Locklear; Susan Phillips; and W. Noah Reynolds. Absent was commissioner Barbara Snowden.

Also in attendance were: Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for Archives and History, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of Historic Sites and Properties (DSHSP); Ramona Bartos, Director, Division of Historical Resources (DHR); Kelly Policelli, Director, Division of Archives and Records (DAR); C.J. Roberts, Director, Division of State History Museums (DSHM); Ansley Wegner, Director, Division of Historical Research and Publications (DHRP); Elizabeth Reign, Director of Curatorial Services, DSHSP; Michael Moore, Deputy Director of Curatorial Services and Chief Curator, DSHSP; Lori Townsend, Interpretive Curator, DSHSP; Parker Backstrom, Office of Archives and History (OAH) administrative assistant and Recording Secretary for the NCHC.; and Matt Zeher, Information Technology facilitator.

The meeting was livestreamed on Microsoft Teams. Copies of all cited written materials can be found in the file for this meeting.

Call to Order, Welcome to New Commissioners, and Conflict of Interest Statement

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 AM. Commissioners were asked to voice any concerns they may have regarding any actual or potential conflicts of interest pertaining to the scheduled business to be discussed. No such concerns were expressed.

The chair stated for the record that because this is a virtual meeting, roll call votes would be taken on all actionable items.

Approval of Minutes

The chair invited a motion to accept the minutes from the December 11, 2025, regular meeting of the NCHC, as well as the January 22, 2026, special meeting. Dr. Locklear noted that he was absent from the January meeting and asked that the minutes be corrected to reflect that. Ms. Phillips moved approval of both sets of minutes pending the correction. The motion was seconded by Dr. Greene and the motion was carried by voice vote.

Citing reference to this in the December meeting minutes, Mr. Ruffin asked Dr. Waters whether letters to immediate past commissioners Samuel B. Dixon and Barbara Groome, recognizing and thanking them for their service to the Commission, had yet been drafted. Dr. Waters stated that those letters had not yet been produced but that he will see to it that they are as soon after today's meeting as possible.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Dr. Waters reminded the commissioners that presentation of accession and deaccession requests brought to them at each regular meeting is a perfunctory but important exercise. He praised the staff of the Museum of History and Division of State Historic Sites for the thought and care they put into these collections and invited the commissioners to visit the myriad sites to see the fine work they do.

Dr. Waters cited a 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. All groupings, he said, would be dealt with as a single slate. He then opened the floor to questions or comments about any of the recommendations. Dr. Johnson opined that the 'Boricuas en North Carolina' materials, pertaining to the cultural significance of the Puerto Rican community in the state, are an important addition to the state's history.

With no other questions or comments forthcoming, Dr. Johnson moved approval of the recommended accessions into the museums, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by roll call voice vote.

Dr. Waters then referred the commissioners to the list of items proposed for deaccessioning from the DSHSP, as recommended by the OAHCC. Dr. Greene asked about the disposition of the tobacco knife. Mr. Moore stated that it will be going to the Civil War & Reconstruction History Center in Fayetteville for exhibition there.

With no additional questions or comments forthcoming, Commissioner Phillips moved approval of the recommended deaccessions. Commissioner Reynolds seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

Requests for Marker Placements at Vance Birthplace and Halifax Courthouse

Citing written proposals submitted in advance of the meeting, Ms. Lanier stated that stakeholders at state historic sites sometimes submit requests for placement of plaques or memorials. With the 250th anniversary of the Halifax Resolves to be held at Historic Halifax in just under a month's time, the Halifax Resolves Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution has requested that a marker originally placed in 1950 be relocated to a different spot on the property where subsequent research has confirmed the colonial-era Halifax Courthouse once stood.

Similarly, the Daughters of the American Revolution is requesting approval from the NCHC to plant a Chestnut Oak tree and place a marker at Vance Birthplace State Historic Site in Weaverville to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Halifax Resolves.

Ms. Lanier affirmed that the internal process before such a request is brought to the NCHC is to work with stakeholders and amongst staff to ensure that what is presented to the Commission conforms to all historical and archaeological knowledge and meets criteria for significance.

She offered these requests in the form of a single slate for the Commission's consideration. With no questions or comments forthcoming, Commissioner Clark moved approval of both requests. Commissioner Phillips seconded the motion which was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Reports from Division Directors

The Chair reminded everyone that division directors are given the opportunity at every other meeting of the NCHC to present highlights of their division's news and notes in verbal form. Directors' written reports on the activities and developments within each division were shared with the commissioners in advance of today's meeting.

Dr. Waters introduced each director who then offered brief comments.

Division of Historical Research and Publications – Ms. Wegner attended today's meeting virtually, reporting in from the VisitNC tourism conference in Asheville, where she has been letting people know about the state's America 250 (A250) planning and activities. Similarly, she reported about having traveled a few weeks ago to the 'First in Freedom' festival centered at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, just over 20 miles north of Wilmington, in observance of the 250th anniversary of that event. The festival attracted some 17,500 people. She also reported that the release of the book describing the chronology of the American Revolution in North Carolina that is being written by staff is imminent, with final edits underway before it goes to the printer next week. Ms. Wegner referred the commissioners to her written report for additional updates but cited one accomplishment that is not in the report. She proudly noted that all three of the A250-related children's books produced by the Office of Historical Research staff — *Within Our Power: The Edenton Tea Party Story*, *Freedom's Howl: Song of the Red Wolves*, and *Blue's March: An Overmountain Men Tale* — have been nominated to represent North Carolina at the National Book Festival this year. This honor will give the office the opportunity to travel to the Library of Congress this summer to talk about all the work being done at the department, and this recognition will certainly help increase book sales.

Division of Archives & Records – Dr. Waters introduced Ms. Policelli who is attending her first Commission meeting as the new director of the DAR. Ms. Policelli described her work background for the commissioners, which includes a former stint in the state archives. She reported that the most recent quarter has centered upon A250 commemoration activities. These include a very successful lunch-and-learn titled 'Marching Toward Revolution' which attracted 114 attendees. Ms. Policelli touched upon the division's 'One Day Wonders' traveling exhibit, the division's largest contribution to A250, and cited upcoming events. She said that staff have been working on The New American oral history project as part of the 'When Are We Us' project. They will also be presenting a lunch-and-learn in April to celebrate new Americans in North Carolina. Despite gridlock in Washington, DC, the division has been active in SHRAB grants, selecting five community archives to support this year. There have also been a lot of activities in the division's satellite branches in Asheville and Manteo. A cross-unit group from the Digital Services and the Government Records sections of the DAR have been working on draft documents about the use of artificial intelligence in government business. She reported that during the last quarter the archives has accessioned almost 133 cubic feet of physical records, almost 40 gigabytes of electronic records, and 305 reels of microfilm. Ms. Policelli completed her report with an update on some staff changes.

Mr. Ruffin welcomed Ms. Policelli to her role and Dr. Greene commended her for the impressive work being done within her division.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos thanked the commissioners for their continued engagement. Citing her written report, she began by reporting on the annual trip she and Dr. Waters made two weeks ago to Capitol Hill to advocate for preservation initiatives in the state. She said the meetings with North Carolina’s congressional delegation went well. They were joined by a member of the non-profit Preservation North Carolina (PNC). She stated that there is now a legacy funding request to congress to increase funding for the congressionally appropriated Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) which includes grants to constituents — municipal preservation organizations — so that they can participate in the A250 commemoration. Established in 1976, this fund was established with an appropriation of \$150M, a level at which it remains now 50 years later. With the current rate of inflation that figure would equate to \$800M if appropriated today. So, even though the current need for funding is much greater, the current request to congress is for a modest \$250M for A250. As previously reported, the HPF did receive emergency supplemental grant money for rebuilding after 2018’s Hurricane Florence, \$17M with most of that money going to constituent subgrants. She reported that the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is currently hosting an on-site visit by U.S. Department of the Interior staff interested in how the HPF is being administered. She took them on a tour of southeastern North Carolina including visits to the U.S.S. Battleship *North Carolina* and Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson State Historic Site, among other places, to give them a sense of the breadth of our programs and of the constituents benefiting from it. Along these same lines, she reported that the National Park Service has put forth another congressional appropriation for another emergency grant for 2023-2024, during which time Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina. The HPO asked for and received \$6.71M to help with preservation recovery from that event.

Mr. Ruffin stated that Ms. Bartos’ report was a true microcosm of the fine work she and her staff are doing. Dr. Johnson stated on behalf of PNC, with whom she serves, that the group appreciates its relationship with Ms. Bartos and the HPO. She said there is much that the two entities can accomplish together and pledged to continue that strong relationship moving forward.

Dr. Waters told the commissioners to let Ms. Bartos know if they would like to see the preservation projects book that they brought to Washington for distribution to congressional offices and that she would be happy to send them an electronic copy.

Division of State Historic Sites & Properties – Ms. Lanier began by highlighting the upcoming Halifax Resolves Days, which will take place at Historic Halifax State Historic Site starting on April 10, part of the A250 commemoration events. She extended an invitation to the commissioners to participate. To help illustrate the reach that the division continues to enjoy, for the current fiscal year, which runs from July through June, 860,000 visitors have visited North Carolina’s state historic sites so far. Also, the division has collectively impacted more than 250,000 school-age children through its tours, events, and programs. She reported that the DSHSP achieved a huge milestone in 2025. For the first time, historic sites surpassed 2 million visitors in that single calendar year, an increase of 15 percent from the previous year, including more than 775,000 children. Social media and web traffic continues to grow as well with over 2 million “impressions.” She said while they work very hard to enhance physical visits by constituents to the division’s sites, they also recognize that digital programming will take on ever increasing importance. Before concluding, Ms. Lanier touched on some personnel changes that have taken place within division. She directed the commissioners to her written report for more information about the division’s news and activities.

Dr. Greene thanked Ms. Lanier for including news about the ceremony marking the 160th anniversary of the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution at Tryon Palace. Commissioner Greene noted what a special event it was and commended the tremendous coordination behind it.

Division of State History Museums – Mr. Roberts reported that after a six-month process, a strategic plan for the Museum of History has been completed. It outlines the profile and mission of the museum for the next five years, both during the current period of closure and after the museum reopens. This plan will be a key constituent in the museum’s reaccreditation process. That document, he said, will be made available to anyone who wants to see it. Mr. Roberts reported that the renovation is going smoothly thus far. He reminded the commissioners that the \$230 investment — made up of both state and private funding — covers the four phases of the project over the coming four years. Those phases are the removal of artifacts and exhibits; the demolition of the building, which is halfway done; reconstruction; and the reoccupation of staff and reinstallation of exhibits. The project remains on schedule for a fall 2028 reopening. During this period of closure, museum staff is working hard to offer programming such as the African American Cultural Celebration, which attracted over 5,000 guests to North Carolina Museum of Art in February. Staff are also working with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on an America250 exhibition called ‘It’s Revolutionary.’ In other news, the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort is still working to recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene. Meanwhile, the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport will soon reopen after major renovation work, and the Civil War Emancipation and Reconstruction History Center remains on schedule to open in 2028.

Dr. Johnson went on the record to acknowledge the contributions by Emily Grant, the just retired festival coordinator at the Museum of History. Dr. Dennard asked whether any damage occurred to artifacts that were moved, stored, and relocated during the emptying of the Museum of History as renovation begins. Mr. Roberts confirmed that there was no major damage, due in large part to the planning and care by the museum’s curatorial staff, which created custom carriers and crates for the items that needed special care. He added that he hopes for the same good fortune when everything is moved back to the newly renovated museum in a few years’ time.

Other Business

Mr. Ruffin, noting that a state budget still has not been adopted by the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA), lamented the Commission’s inability to meet in person due to resulting budget restraints. But he hopes to commence in-person meetings again once a budget is in place. Dr. Waters noted that the NCGA is back in session next month and he hopes that the department’s funding requests will be addressed at that time. The lack of a budget, he said, is creating a sense of pressure here in the department.

Commissioner Phillips expressed her appreciation for the astounding work by staff, especially given the budgetary challenges.

Chair Announcements

None.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Dr. Dennard moved adjournment, Ms. Phillips seconded the motion, and following a vote the meeting was adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters

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