

**North Carolina Historical Commission
Conference Call Minutes**

March 22, 2023

**Archives and History/State Library Building
Raleigh, NC**

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met in the third-floor conference room in the Archives and History/State Library Building in Raleigh on Wednesday, March 22, 2023. The following commissioners were in attendance: David Ruffin, Chair; Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan; Mayor Newell Clark; Shana Bushyhead Condill; Barbara Groome; Dr. Valerie A. Johnson; and Barbara B. Snowden. Absent were commissioners Dr. David Dennard, Samuel B. Dixon, W. Noah Reynolds, and Susan Phillips.

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); Sarah Koonts, Director, Division of Archives & Records (DAR); Michelle Lanier, Director, Division of State Historic Sites & Properties (DSHSP); Ken Howard, Director, Division of State History Museums; Adrienne Nirdé, Associate Director, North Carolina African American Heritage Commission; Phil Feagan, General Counsel, DNCR; John Mintz, North Carolina State Archaeologist; Emily McDowell, Assistant State Archaeologist; Dr. Chris Southerly, Deputy State Archaeologist, Underwater Branch; Chuck LeCount, Deputy Director, DSHSP; Parker Backstrom, OAH administrative assistant and Recording Secretary of the NCHC; Matt Rebuck, Director, Samarcand Training Academy, North Carolina Department of Public Safety; Jamie Boles, former member of the North Carolina General Assembly, District 52; and David Winslow, Project Director for the North Carolina Civil War & Reconstruction History Center in Fayetteville.

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 10:03 AM and welcomed those in attendance. Mr. Ruffin called roll to establish the presence of a quorum. He then invited the other attendees to introduce themselves.

The chairman 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. No such concerns were voiced.

Finally, the chairman extended his heartfelt condolences to Commissioner Snowden for the recent loss of her husband, Wilson.

Approval of Minutes

At the chairman's invitation, Commissioner Bryan moved approval of the minutes from the September 17, 2022, regular meeting of the NCHC, as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Clark and carried unanimously, with no discussion.

Request for Placement of Fallen Officers Memorial at Samarcand Training Academy

Being cognizant of the personal time of Mr. Rebuck and Mr. Boles, the chair invoked his prerogative to propose moving the request for placement of a memorial at Samarcand Training Academy forward on the agenda. A motion to this effect was proffered by Mayor Clark, seconded by Ms. Snowden, and carried.

Ms. Bartos addressed the Commission, summarizing the request for a memorial to fallen officers at the Samarcand Law Enforcement Training Academy in Moore County. She then introduced Mr. Rebuck. Mr. Rebuck described the academy and directed the commissioners' attention to the visual renderings—including the depictions of size, shape, wording, materials, and placement of the proposed monument—made available to them in advance of the meeting. He noted that the proposal does not include individual names but rather is a general memorial that will serve to both “honor those who went before us” and instill in officers-in-training the solemnity of their role in society. Mr. Boles then addressed the commissioners “as a citizen” and provided some comments about the background of the facility as well as voiced his strong support for the memorial.

With little discussion, Dr. Bryan moved approval of the proposed memorial. The motion was seconded by Ms. Snowden and carried unanimously.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Dr. Waters directed the commissioners' attention to the annotated list of items recommended by the Office of Archives and History Collections Committee (OAHCC) for accessioning into the collections of the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh, the Mountain Gateway Museum, the North Carolina Maritime Museums, and the DSHSP. As is customary, the accession items were all presented as a single slate for voting. With no questions or discussion Ms. Groome made a motion approving the accessions as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Johnson and carried. The only item proposed for deaccessioning was a circa 1955 locomotive at the North Carolina Transportation Museum. Ms. Lanier offered a few comments about this item before Mayor Clark moved approval and Ms. Condill seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

Report on the North Carolina America250 Initiative

Ms. Koonts is heading up the North Carolina contingent of the national America250 Initiative, whereby each state is preparing its individual celebration for the semi-quincentennial anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. Ms. Koonts presented an update on North Carolina's planning for this event.

She reported that to avoid limiting all planned events to 2026, there would be a soft launch of the celebration in 2024 in conjunction with Halifax Resolves Day. As described in past reports to the Commission, the planning is centered around two main “pillars” or themes, “Revolutionary” and

“When Are We Us?” Ms. Koonts reported that at a recent national gathering of America250 committees in Virginia, the latter—“When Are We us?”—piqued so much interest from other states that a number of them plan to adopt this theme. She stated that the leadership of the North Carolina America250 contingent, primarily herself and LeRae Umfleet, have been talking with groups, among them the American Battlefield Trust, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the North Carolina American Indian Heritage Commission, the Currituck Historical Society, and Historic Hillsborough Alliance, to share ideas about ways to build in as much inclusivity as possible.

The OAH’s divisions, said Ms. Koonts, are working hard with the North Carolina America250 Committee to develop programming. This includes things like developing K-12 lesson plans, creating videos, constructing reading lists and activity kits for students, planning potential archaeological digs—such as at Historic Halifax—and designing traveling exhibits, as well as working on local outreach and advocacy plans. The committee is even in the process of identifying authors and illustrators to help create four planned books on America250.

Ms. Koonts noted with appreciation that former North Carolina representative in the U.S. Congress, David Price, successfully included in federal legislation a small, budgetary earmark for a “DocsBox” program, which will be a primary source for lesson plans tied to North Carolina’s America250 resources and will cover the costs associated with the committee distributing activity kits to schools by mail. Ms. Groome was especially complimentary of planned efforts to expand into schools and, being a former schoolteacher, offered her help in any way the committee sees fit.

Ms. Koonts addressed a few questions from Dr. Johnson about outreach and efforts to both raise awareness in the corporate sphere and to appeal for their partnership. Companies, she said, have been slow to come on board, but feels that their participation will be needed. Chairman Ruffin shared his belief that the corporate world often confuses history with politics, and companies work hard to avoid being tied to “political” issues. Ms. Condill expressed her interest in the “When Are We Us” approach to storytelling, emphasizing its importance from a Cherokee Tribe perspective.

Report from the Office of State Archaeology

Mr. Mintz and select members of his staff reported on recent activities and initiatives within the Office of State Archaeology (OSA), beginning with his introduction of Dr. Chris Southerly, who discussed recent activities in the Underwater Archaeology Lab in Greenville. Among its ongoing projects is a survey of prehistoric stone fish weirs along the state’s riverine waterways, which has been a successful endeavor. Staff is also working with two research associates to study the historical rice culture, including the tools and technology used along the Gullah-Geechee corridor.

Mr. Mintz brought the commissioners up to date on the activities of the OSA’s Historical Cemeteries Program. Incorporating archived records, the program has succeeded in documenting more than 16,000 cemeteries in 37 of the state’s 100 counties thus far. It is in the process of creating a searchable database with 10 or 12 variables of distilled information, which will aid genealogists as well as strengthen protections for these endangered entities and facilitate the state’s work, both at the state level and the federal level, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The program is also trying to conduct three or four workshops per year to teach others how to restore historical cemeteries and provide the required maintenance.

Request for Placement of Scottish Memorial at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site

Ms. Lanier said that for several years an idea has been discussed at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site about ways to commemorate the arrival at that disembarkation site of Scottish immigrants in the 1700s, who would go on to settle in large numbers in southeastern North Carolina. Numbers of people from both the DSHSP and other groups such as the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, North Carolina Arts Council, and members of the Cape Fear Scottish Immigration Memorial Fund have identified a site at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson where a waterside memorial, focused upon a cairn, might be placed. Ms. Lanier referred the commissioners to the written proposal for such a monument, which included design specifications and artist renderings of the project. Ms. Lanier noted that a secondary site, further from the water, has been selected if the original site is determined to possibly endanger potential, as-yet undiscovered archaeological riches.

As this project is in keeping with a larger discussion about the importance of identifying and recognizing sites of disembarkation of enslaved people and settlers along the coast of North Carolina, said Ms. Lanier, the request for approval for the placement of a Scottish memorial comes with a caveat. Since additional consideration needs to be given to representing the interests and concerns of not only Scottish immigrants but the state's early African American and American Indian people, the DSHSP anticipates reappearing before the Commission, possibly with a different proposed design.

Given the shifting nature of the project, the discussion transitioned to the NCHC being asked for approval of the concept of a Scottish memorial at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson, rather than a specific memorial, as proposed today. There was a lengthy discussion about how the request might be worded. With input from DNCR general counsel Mr. Feagan, the request for approval read as follows: "The NCHC is being asked to approve the concept of a proposed Scottish memorial at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, subject to future comprehensive plans developed by State Historic Site staff, with the intention of including future, additional memorials in commemoration of the historical contributions and experiences of North Carolinian African American and Native American people." Acceptance of this approval was proffered by Ms. Snowden in the form of a motion, which was seconded by Dr. Johnson and carried by unanimous vote.

Results of Request by the NCHC for Recommendations Pertaining to Resolutions in the September 2022 NCHC Meeting

Mr. Ruffin, citing resolutions passed by the Commission at the December 7, 2022, meeting, restated his strong belief in the critical importance to our society of teaching history. In response to the request set forth by the Commission, he commended the staff of the OAH for their ideas about ways each division might contribute to this mission. These ideas and suggestions, in written form, were provided to the commissioners in advance of this meeting.

Mr. Ruffin reiterated his strong belief that the importance to society of teaching and understanding history is something upon which the NCHC needs to take a position. He said he wants to do all that he can to make sure that the NCHC, within the boundaries set forth by the authority given it, is doing everything it can to not only support staff of the OAH and their solicited recommendations,

but also what the Commission itself can do to increase its profile within state government by making a very broad statement about the resolutions passed in December.

The plan was for the Commission to discuss the ideas put forth by the divisions at this meeting, said the chair, but noted that several commissioners unable to attend today's meeting have been vocal contributors to those discussions. To incorporate input from those commissioners, Mr. Ruffin suggested the following. He asked each commissioner in attendance to take time to "digest" the ideas put forth by the four divisions and combine them with their own ideas about ways the Commission itself can promulgate both the importance of how history is taught in our institutions of learning and to the wider general public and think of ways to amplify and accelerate that push. Then, at the next meeting of the Commission, he anticipates being able to have a more robust discussion about the subject, to include more commissioners.

Therefore, the chair is using his prerogative to table this topic until the June 21, 2023, meeting of the NCHC. He will communicate directly with each commissioner absent today to explain the rationale for this decision.

Ms. Groome asked whether there is any specific preparation or "homework" that the commissioners can do as individuals as they consider the issue at hand. Ms. Koonts replied that she has some resources that she got at the Virginia meeting of the America250 Commission that she thinks may be helpful. Mr. Ruffin expressed a hope that commissioners can share ideas with one another, but asked Mr. Feagan for clarification on what constitutes a "public meeting" and how much "sharing" can be done without members being in violation of public meetings laws. Mr. Feagan explained that as long as the number of members communicating with one another falls short of a majority of the Commission, and as long as the members do not "deliberate" on Commission business, there would be no prohibition on members talking with one another.

Dr. Waters thanked his staff for the time and effort they put into formulating their ideas for the commissioners' consideration.

Recess and Resumption of Meeting

The meeting was recessed for lunch at 11:47 A.M. and reconvened at 12:09 P.M.

Reports from Division Directors

Chairman Ruffin asked Dr. Waters to introduce the OAH division directors who'd been asked to offer verbal reports summarized from more detailed written reports shared with the commissioners in advance of the meeting.

Division of State History Museums – Mr. Howard reported upon activities and events that have occurred since the last meeting of the Commission. He reported that with the post-pandemic increase in in-person events, as well as virtual and hybrid events, visitation numbers have increased. He noted that the February 2023 African American Cultural Celebration (AACC), hosted by the Museum of History (MOH) in Raleigh, was a big success, with 5,345 attendees. In addition, 22,600 people virtually attended the new AACC Education Day, representing 62 North Carolina counties, six states, and the United Kingdom. Several new exhibits have attracted country music fans, and one is focused on protests.

Mr. Howard also touched upon capital projects at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum, as well as building and design efforts at the North Carolina History Center for Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction, at Gallants Channel in Beaufort, and at the MOH, which Mr. Howard noted, Governor Cooper's proposed state budget includes \$100 million for renovation.

Mr. Howard concluded by voicing ongoing concerns about staffing—both filling positions and keeping staff members—citing low pay levels as a major issue.

Division of Archives and Records – In the interest of time and referring commissioners to her written report, Ms. Koonts offered a very brief oral report. She outlined important, “behind the scenes” activities, such as the inventorying and rehousing of portions of archived records. She also briefly touched upon outreach efforts, such as in association with the aforementioned AACC. She then opened the floor to questions.

Dr. Johnson commended Ms. Koonts on her collaboration with the Wake County Register of Deeds in the latter's efforts to document historical records on enslaved African Americans in Wake County.

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier highlighted some of the news from her division that she either excluded or just touched upon in her written report.

As the division continues to develop and expand, redesigns are taking place at Historic Halifax, Historic Edenton, and Fort Fisher. As well, a \$10 million restoration project is underway at the North Carolina Transportation Museum. She was pleased to report that the division received a couple of grants in support of development of the Golden Frinks Freedom House in Edenton, as well as a grant for a long overdue “reimagination” of Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site. She also reported that the former dormitories at the Palmer Memorial Institute at the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum were recently designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as among the top 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in the nation.

Ms. Lanier concluded by reporting that at part of its approaching 100th anniversary, the Duke Endowment is considering making a transformative gift to Duke Homestead; the endowment has never supported the historic site heretofore.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos reported that in December the division held its first ever division retreat to refocus its collaborative sense of teamwork, collegiality, and passion, to discuss opportunities for improved workflow and external communication, and to talk about challenges. Among those challenges will be replacing longtime historic preservation architect Tim Simmons, who is about to retire, and deputy state archaeologist Lindsay Ferrante and assistant state archaeologist Dr. Mary Beth Fitts, both of whom resigned to take other positions outside the department.

Ms. Bartos outlined 11 new historical highway markers that have been approved by the Highway Historical Marker Advisory Committee for dedications across the state—they are listed in Ms. Bartos' written report—and extended an invitation to all commissioners to attend these dedication ceremonies if they get a chance.

North Carolina African American Heritage Commission – Dr. Waters introduced associate director of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission (NCAAHC), Adrienne Nirdé, who is serving as acting director. Ms. Nirdé explained that former director of the AAHC, Angela Thorpe, has stepped away from that position to become director of the Pauli Murray Center in Durham. Despite that she was pleased to report that staffing levels in the NCAAHC are as robust today as they have ever been with the hiring of three new staff members.

Citing her written report, Ms. Nirdé outlined the NCAAHC's 2023 strategic plan goals. She also described the status of the 'Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey' project, funded by grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. This includes the hiring of a two-year research fellow. The project has also developed a web portal, designed to showcase current information and resources, and to continue to build upon the project once the active development phase of it is complete.

Chairman Ruffin commended all the staff in all divisions of the OAH for their continued dedication and quality of work.

Other Business

• **Update on Departmental Litigation** – Mr. Feagan offered a brief update on the ongoing Pasquotank County Commission's confederate monument issue, as discussed at the previous NCHC meeting in December. A lawsuit brought against the NCHC by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in Pasquotank County, pertaining to the removal of a confederate statue in Elizabeth City, remained stayed until an unconnected matter pertaining to a similar issue in Winston-Salem was decided through a ruling by the North Carolina Supreme Court. Because there was language in the supreme court ruling in that case that supported the NCHC's position that it did not have the authority to intervene in a case involving a monument on local government property, the plaintiff's counsel has assured the NCHC's counsel in the North Carolina Department of Justice that the case against the NCHC will soon be voluntarily dismissed.

Concluding Thoughts

Chairman Ruffin reminded the commissioners that the NCHC will next convene at 10:00 A.M. on Wednesday, June 21, 2023. That meeting, he said, is slated to be held virtually.

Adjournment

With no other business to discuss, a motion to adjourn was proffered by Mr. Clark and seconded by Dr. Johnson. Following a unanimous vote to carry the motion, the meeting was adjourned at 1:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters