

North Carolina Historical Commission
Meeting Minutes

June 10, 2025

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom on Tuesday, June 10, 2025. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Newell Clark; Shana Condill; Samuel B. Dixon; Dr. David Dennard; Barbara Groome; Susan Phillips; W. Noah Reynolds; and Barbara B. Snowden. Absent were commissioners Dr. Susanna Lee and Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson.

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); C.J. Roberts, Director, Division of State History Museum (DSHM); Becky McGee-Lankford, head of the Government Records Section (DAR) and Interim State Archivist; Chuck LeCount, Deputy Director, DSHSP; Terra Schramm, Public Information Officer, DSHSP; Elizabeth Reighn, Director of Curatorial Services in the DSHSP; Michael Moore, Registrar, DSHSP; Ansley Wegner, Supervisor, Office of Historical Research (OHR); 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 and Conflict of Interest Statement

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM. Roll was called to establish the presence of a quorum. The chair expressed disappointment that the meeting was changed from in-person in Edenton, NC, to virtual due to budgetary concerns. 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. He also explained that given the virtual nature of the meeting, all action items will be voted upon by way of roll call.

Chairman Ruffin explained that despite the terms of commissioners Condill, Dixon, Groome, and Phillips having concluded on March 31, 2025, state statute dictates that they continue to serve until such time that the governor reappoints or replaces them on the Commission.

Approval of Minutes

The chair entertained feedback about the minutes from the March 18, 2025, meeting of the NCHC. Since none were forthcoming Mr. Clark moved approval of the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and carried.

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. Each grouping, he said, will be dealt with as a single slate. He then opened the floor for questions or comments. Hearing none, Ms. Snowden moved approval of the recommended accessions into the MOH and Museum of the Albemarle, 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. Dennard moved approval, Ms. Phillips seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Next, Dr. Waters cited the list of items proposed for deaccessioning from the MOH. With no questions forthcoming, Ms. Phillips moved approval and Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Finally, Dr. Waters cited the list of items recommended for deaccessioning out of the collection of the DSHSP. Commissioner Phillips moved approval of the recommended deaccessions, Commissioner Groome 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. Dr. Waters introduced Ms. McGee-Lankford who described the lone item being requested for deaccessioning, the private papers of former state representative Betty Hutchinson Wiser. A description of the collection and the rationale for deaccessioning were made available to the commissioners in writing in advance of the meeting, and Ms. McGee-Lankford explained the request in more detail. Mr. Ruffin asked about the process of determining the value of such a collection. Given that Representative Wiser's term in the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) concluded in 1990, said Ms. McGee-Lankford, the relevance of the records decreased over time. And given the volume of the materials a decision was made to more closely scrutinize their contents. It was determined that although some of the material more personally pertaining to her role in the NCGA is being kept, a majority of it was simply not of use from an archival perspective.

A motion to approve the recommended deaccession was made by Ms. Condill, seconded by Mr. Reynolds, and carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Request to Relocate Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Rutherford County

Dr. Waters addressed the request on behalf of Rutherford County Manager Steve Garrison, who submitted a request to the NCHC that the county be allowed to physically relocate a Fallen Firefighters Memorial from the lawn of the Rutherford County Courthouse in Rutherfordton. The proposal would have the memorial, which is owned by the Fire Rescue Association, a 502(c)(3) organization, relocated to the campus of the Isothermal Community College, southeast of Rutherfordton. The proposed campus location is state property, which triggers the N.C.G.S. 100-2.1 requirement for approval by the NCHC. In addition, the county requests that permission be granted to place a second, similar memorial beside it because space to engrave names on the original

monument has run out. The materials submitted by Mr. Garrison to the Commission included a request to relocate the memorial, including the rationale, a request to install a second, similar monument upon which additional names can be engraved, and a map of the location on the college campus where the memorial is to be placed.

Dr. Waters cited a similar request that was submitted to and approved by the NCHC relatively recently—the relocation of a veteran’s memorial in downtown Raleigh—as precedent. Commissioner Clark moved approval of the request, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Reports from Division Directors

Because the division directors gave in-person reports at the March 2025 NCHC meeting, they were not asked to attend today’s meeting, though each one did. Rather, their summaries of the activities and initiatives that have taken place in their respective divisions since the last meeting of the Commission were limited to their regular, quarterly written reports, made available to the commissioners prior to today’s meeting.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos made the commissioners aware of funding challenges being faced in the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Office of State Archaeology (OSA), both of which fall under her purview as director of the DHR. A portion of funding that supports staffing, including that covering salaries, benefits, and travel, comes from the federal Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). This funding source is derived from offshore oil and gas revenue and was designed to signify a non-renewable resource being dedicated to a renewable resource, the preservation of our historic places. Fourteen SHPO and OSA employees combined depend upon that funding, including 2.5 split-coded positions, that is appropriated state and federal dollars.

Ms. Bartos explained that the United States Congress, through a continuing resolution, approved funding of the HPF through fiscal year 2025, which runs through this September. Unfortunately, the federal fiscal year does not match our state’s fiscal year, which runs through June. The DHR should have already been invited to apply for the congressionally appropriated funds, she said, but the federal funding is being held up by the Trump administration while it is being scrutinized and its continuation or cessation being assessed. She described how a few other state historic preservation offices are dealing with this challenge, depending upon their budgetary resources. This includes Ohio recently laying off 12 people, while some are seeking to continue their work through the use of volunteers.

Ms. Bartos explained that in August the DHR will have spent down all of its fiscal year 2025 federal money as it waits for funding to come from Washington, DC. Meanwhile, the federal government is looking at zeroing out the federal HPF nationwide for fiscal year 2026, which would mean the loss to North Carolina of \$1.3 million currently slated for the state. She reemphasized that congress has already approved the 2025 funding but the current administration is not releasing it. Without that funding the department will have to find alternate sources of funding very soon. This withholding of such a federal block grant to the states is unprecedented, she said.

Given the service of several members of the NCHC on the HPO’s National Register Advisory Committee (NRAC), said Dr. Waters, they know how valuable this federal funding is and they

recognize all the benefits of the work that the HPO does provide to the state. He thanked Ms. Bartos and her staff for all they're doing in the face of this existential threat.

Mr. Dixon, who is very deeply situated in historic preservation matters at both the state and national levels, stated that he's doing everything he can to ensure that the funding is restored. Mr. Reynolds confirmed that the situation is also being discussed at Winston-Salem's local historic preservation organizations' meetings. To emphasize the benefit of federal historic preservation funding to North Carolina, Ms. Bartos stated that \$200-\$300 million is invested in local communities annually on the tax credit side alone, not to mention all the other beneficial facets of the HPO's work, such as enhanced state heritage tourism and other unmeasurable benefits. In response to a question from Commissioner Snowden about what if anything the Commission itself can do to show that the federal funding situation needs to be rectified, Dr. Waters said he'd discuss the issue with DNCR General Counsel Jessica Sutton and will let the commissioners know the results of that discussion. Ms. Bartos did assure the commissioners that the DNCR's legislative liaison Anne Evangelista is doing what she can to advocate for the OAH at the North Carolina General Assembly.

Chairman Ruffin described the situation as a tragedy and urged any commissioner with any connection to legislators to do what they can to try to keep this funding flowing. He concluded by stating that the NRAC has shown that rural communities will be especially hard hit, further emphasizing the need to advocate for release and continuation of federal funding.

America250 – Dr. Waters noted that Ms. Wegner's role in the OAH has changed. She has assumed from recently retired division director Sarah Koonts the role of North Carolina representative to the national A250 commission, and like her will also take over organization of the state's commemoration events. Also, Ms. Wegner will no longer serve under Ms. Bartos in the DHR but will now report directly to Dr. Waters. He then recognized Ms. Wegner to presented a report on A250 happenings. Ms. Wegner updated the commissioners on the children's book projects, which include the titles *Blue's March* and *Freedom's Howl*. She reported that the A250 initiative is currently slated to receive no appropriated funding from the state for next fiscal year. Ms. Wegner concluded by noting that our A250 team will host an event at the governor's residence on the evening of June 11, which will include legislators and members of the council of state, among others. It will feature exhibits, costumed interpreters, and will be a chance to engage with attendees.

Division of State History Museums – Dr. Waters recognized Mr. Roberts who noted that he is beginning his sixth week of work as the new director of the DSHM. He continues to get to know staff and the department, to better understand policies and procedures, and has been traveling to visit and familiarize himself with the regional museums, where deputy director Maria Vann has been doing significant work getting site managers in place. He also reported that museum staff is just finishing up moving out of the MOH building as preparation for the complete renovation of the building continue, as reported upon many times in the two or three years. He offered kudos to staff for the massive amount of work they've been doing, which has included but has not been limited to the removal and storage of hundreds of thousands of artifacts. The museum team is continuing to refine the design of the building and exhibits upon the project's completion.

Dr. Waters added that significant progress is also being made at the planned Civil War & Reconstruction History Center in Fayetteville. We will soon be breaking ground and will also soon be naming a site manager.

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier addressed the commissioners, thanking them and Dr. Waters for their continued support, then touched upon a few highlights from the work being done in her division.

She proudly noted that visitation to the state’s historic sites continues to grow with 1.3 million visitors welcomed so far this year. Especially noteworthy, visitation by school-age children has increased by more than twenty percent from this time last fiscal year. Ms. Lanier reported that the division is seeing signs of morale issues due to unaddressed concerns surrounding the budget.

Dr. Dennard asked Ms. Lanier whether it is possible to discern a demographic snapshot of visitors to state historic sites, as a way to find out whether people who might not normally visit these sites—specifically, minority members of the communities—might be starting to do so. She cited the Rice Festival at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson, which falls within the Gullah-Geechee Heritage Corridor. Events like that, she said, attract a diverse crowd of young people, the elderly, and black, white, and immigrant populations, as well as indigenous people, all united by their love of history and heritage. Commissioner Dennard stated his concerns about whether we are seeing a “browning” of our visitation other than special events. Ms. Lanier responded that attendance is somewhat site- and event-dependent, noting that each historic site has its own “persona.” Citing another example, she noted that the State Capitol attracts a relative diversity of visitors. Other sites are better represented by the communities where they’re located.

Dr. Waters noted that with increased support for education initiatives in the DNCR we’re seeing a better opening of doors to engage a younger audience at some of these sites, as well as stronger teacher engagement. He stated that the DNCR’s Director of Education, Christie Norris, has been doing a remarkable job, as confirmed by the increase in school age visitation numbers.

Division of Archives and Records – Ms. Mcgee-Lankford reported that the DAR will be exhibiting the original State Constitution at the State Capitol over the July 4 holiday. She also cited the closing in early May of St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, North Carolina. Her division has been working with university staff and property owners to preserve student and financial records as well as university archives. So far roughly 200 square feet of records have been transferred into the possession of the state archives with a little less than that still to be transferred. Dr. Dennard asked her whether such a situation is considered a milestone type event for the division. Ms. Mcgee-Lankford stated that she believes it is. The archives have taken in entire collections of government records, since that’s one of the division’s mandates, but she can’t recall even doing so with a private college collection such as this. She emphasized the importance of archiving the records before the property is sold. After the transfer is complete the staff will evaluate the collection to determine whether it is appropriate that some of the materials be transferred back to the community. If none is, the state archives will keep it.

Deputy Secretary’s Report

Dr. Waters reported briefly on the budget process ongoing within the state legislature. By statute departments such as the DNCR are obligated to publicly advocate for governor’s proposed budget. Following budget reconciliation, we hope to get an appropriated budget within the next couple of months.

He also reported that the OAH is beginning its search for the permanent successor to former DAR director Sarah Koonts, noting that it's a very specialized job that requires unique skills. He is happy to report that the department has received applications from a number of strong candidates and he hopes to be able to report on the hiring of a new director at the next NCHC meeting.

Commissioner Ruffin thanked Ms. McGee-Lankford for the work she's doing in the interim.

Finally, Dr. Waters reported that Secretary Cashwell and Chief Deputy Secretary Thompson are traveling this morning to observe state archaeologists excavating an ancient Native American canoe discovered in the South River. Once raised it will be conserved.

Other Business

A discussion ensued about the site of the next NCHC meeting. Commissioner Reynolds offered to host the scheduled September 23 meeting in Winston-Salem. He reported that the Reynolda House has offered space for the Commission to gather. An exhibit on the history of the Reynolda Tobacco Company will be on display at the Reynolda House museum at the same time and he offered to lead the commissioners on a tour, if so desired.

Touching once again upon funding challenges, Ms. Phillips asked Dr. Waters about the Commission's advocacy role. How do commissioners know that they're advocating for things that are a priority for the department? Dr. Waters stated that staff is working on a number of "one-pagers" to address our concerns. Said Ms. Bartos, commissioners can also go to the website NCSHPO.org to see a discussion about federal historic preservation funding issues. Preservation North Carolina has materials on its site as well. The two most relevant questions to pose to powers that be are where is the already approved, congress-appropriated money, and will funding be forthcoming for fiscal year 2026? Ms. Phillips asked whether the department has a group of legislative advocates whose are focused upon statewide issues rather than just issues most concerning to their local constituents? Dr. Waters said he doesn't know but will talk with Ms. Evangelista and Deputy Secretary Deans Eatman about this and let the commissioners know what he finds out. He assured the Commission that the DNCR has strong friends in NCGA. Commissioner Dixon said he will be attending a meeting of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, DC, in the near future and will report on any news forthcoming from there.

Chair Announcements

The chair asked the commissioners to look at their calendars to determine whether they are amenable to moving the scheduled December 9 NCHC meeting—slated to be held virtually—to December 11 to accommodate a scheduling issue that he has, and report back to him. He also stated his desire to discuss at that meeting the latest involving the North Carolina Historical Commission Public History Advisory Committee and to delve back down into its mission, which is more relevant than ever, he said.

Dr. Dennard asked Dr. Waters and his staff to contact commissioners if they determine any specific ways that they feel the commissioners could lend additional support.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Ms. Snowden moved adjournment. The motion was seconded by Dr. Dennard and carried unanimously, ending the meeting at 11:33.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters

Draft