

North Carolina Historical Commission

Meeting Minutes

September 23, 2025

The North Carolina Historical Commission (NCHC, Commission) met via Zoom on Tuesday, September 23, 2025. In attendance were commissioners: David Ruffin, Chair; Newell Clark; Shana Condill; Samuel B. Dixon; Dr. David Dennard; Barbara Groome; Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson; and Susan Phillips (joined late). Absent were commissioners Dr. Susanna Lee, W. Noah Reynolds, and Barbara B. 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); C.J. Roberts, Director, Division of State History Museum (DSHM); Chuck LeCount, Assistant Director, DSHSP; Jeff Bockert, East Region Supervisor, DSHP; Ashley Yandle, Digital Service Section Head of DAR; Terra Schramm, Public Information Officer, DSHSP; Elizabeth Reignn, Director of Curatorial Services in the DSHSP; Catherine Harper, Curator of Collections, DSHSP; Ansley Wegner, Director, Division of Historical Research and Publications (DHRP); Karen Blum, interim General Counsel for the DNCR; 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 10:02 AM. Roll was called to establish the presence of a quorum. The chair expressed disappointment that the meeting was changed from an in-person one in Winston-Salem, NC, to a virtual one due to DNCR budgetary concerns.

The chair then asked the commissioners to state concerns any might 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.

Approval of Minutes

The chair entertained feedback about the minutes from the June 10, 2025, meeting of the NCHC, as they were written. Dr. Dennard pointed out several small corrections that requested be made to spelling and syntax. Dixon moved approval of the minutes pending these corrections. The motion was seconded by Clark and carried by voice vote.

Accessions and Deaccessions of Items in State Collections

Dr. Waters cited a list of items proposed for accessioning into the collections of the Museum of History (MOH) in Raleigh, the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City, the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort, and the North Carolina Maritime Museums (NCMM), 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, will be dealt with as a single slate. He then opened the floor to questions or comments. Hearing none, Dr. Johnson moved approval of the recommended accessions into the museums, Dr. Dennard seconded the motion, and the motion was carried by voice vote.

Dr. Waters then cited the list of recommended accessions into the collection of the DSHSP. Ms. Groome moved approval, Dr. Dennard 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, Museum of the Albemarle, NCMM, and the Museum of Tobacco Life. With no questions forthcoming, Ms. Condill moved approval and Mr. Clark seconded the motion, which was carried by unanimous roll call vote. For the edification of any members of the public who might be listening in, the chair described possible reasons why items might be deaccessioned from collections.

Finally, Dr. Waters cited the list of items recommended for deaccessioning out of the collection of the DSHSP. Commissioner Groome moved approval of the recommended deaccessions, Dr. Johnson seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

Placement of Plaques at Fort Fisher State Historic Site

Lanier stated that discussion of this request has been ongoing for several months. This request is being submitted to acknowledge a funder who provided financial support for the newly constructed visitor center at Fort Fisher SHS. Protocol dictates that a description of the plaques including size, wording, proposed placement, etc., be presented to the Commission for its consideration. Clark moved approval of the request for placement and Ms. Groome seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Request to Relocate the Sir Walter Raleigh Statue in Raleigh

A request was received by the Commission that a statue of Sir Walter Raleigh, currently situated outside the Raleigh Convention Center, be removed from that location. This request was submitted by the non-profit organization Save our Sons, founded by Kimberly Muktarian, who herself submitted the petition. Chairman Ruffin stated that after discussions with legal counsel at the DNCR, it was clear that while the statue is owned by the state, per an agreement drafted in 1988 the statue is on long-term loan to the city. Because it is on loan to the city, stands on city property, and is maintained by the city, he said, it is not currently within the purview of the Commission to decide what can be done with it. He stated the Commission's belief that any request to remove the statue of Sir Walter Raleigh would have to be submitted directly to the city of Raleigh. Ms. Blum concurred, adding that given these facts she believes that this is not an action item for the NCHC at this time.

Mayor Clark asked whether state funds are being expended to maintain the statue, to which Dr. Waters responded not that he's aware. The chair then recited from the long-term loan agreement—

which all commissioners were given a copy of prior to the meeting and which was made available to the public on the NCHC's website—noting that “the city of Raleigh agrees to maintain the site around the statue ...”, and would be responsible for any cleaning, restoring, repairs and maintenance “with approval and supervision” of the Office of Archives and History. It was also noted that DNCR General Counsel Jessica Sutton send Dr. Muktarian a response letter dated June 17, 2025, which included a copy of the loan agreement. That correspondence was also provided to the commissioners and the public in advance of today's meeting.

Drs. Johnson and Dennard suggested that the Commission send a letter to the city stating its position and summarizing the discussion that took place in today's meeting. Mr. Ruffin asked Ms. Blum to draft such a letter on behalf of the NCHC, which she said she would do. He concluded the agenda item by stressing that the Commission understands the concerns put forth by Dr. Muktarian but feels its hands are tied on the issue.

Reports from Division Directors

Summary written reports were drafted by each division director and shared with the commissioners in advance of today's meeting. But at Dr. Waters's request each director or a surrogate is in attendance today to highlight a few activities and initiatives within each division. Dr. Waters commended the directors for the good work they and their teams continue to do while the state's fiscal year budget, which was supposed to be in place months ago, has remained unsettled.

Division of Historical Resources – Ms. Bartos reported a couple of updates since the drafting of her written report, including describing the travel she and Dr. Waters made to Milwaukee to attend the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. She noted that from interacting with counterparts from other states, everyone is feeling funding pressures given the administration in Washington's withholding of federal funds earmarked for next fiscal year. Fortunately, she said, federal funds that had been held up for the current fiscal year have since been released permitting the division's work to continue. She noted that she and Dr. Waters will be traveling to Asheville in early November to attend the fall conference of Preservation North Carolina, where Dr. Waters will speak.

To highlight the sometimes-unusual ways that state services connect with constituent interest, Ms. Bartos explained that something called Lego League is a global robotics competition and that this year's theme of the competition is archaeology. This has heightened young people's interest in that field. Since colleagues around the country have been reporting a lot of constituent demand for interaction with state services in connection with this endeavor, the Office of State Archaeology has developed a page on its website designed to accommodate individuals' requests for tours of its archaeology lab here in Raleigh.

Finally, in response to Hurricane Helene relief efforts, she reports that by end of September the HPO will have completed all of the environmental review submissions for the entirety of 2024.

No questions from the commissioners were forthcoming.

Division of State History Museums – Mr. Roberts reported that the move out of the MOH has finally been completed, with some 150,000 curated items relocated to off-site storage sites. On August 22nd the division unveiled artist renderings of the redesigned building, which was met with lots of positive feedback from the community. He expects to have bids for the construction work in

hand by end of the week. The work will be supported in part by \$180M in appropriated funding from the North Carolina General Assembly. He anticipates a February 2028 completion date, which will be when staff and exhibits are slated to be reinstalled into the museum, the first of two phases in the reopening process. The second will be the replacement of the artifacts and the installation of exhibits in the fall of 2028. Mr. Roberts anticipates a reopening to the public in the spring of 2029.

The division is also working on its strategic plan. It has welcomed input from staff and will also solicit input from the Museum of History Foundation, state partners, and others. The plan will be a five-year roadmap for the future that they hope to have completed by November. Mr. Roberts also noted that as outlined in his written report former deputy director of the division, Maria Vann, was named the director of the state's regional museums and site managers have been hired for each location.

Dr. Waters added that renovations to the Museum of History will include some major renovations to Bicentennial Plaza, the pedestrian mall located between the Museum of History and the Museum of Natural Sciences, so the entire area will look very updated. He also noted that development of the North Carolina Civil War and Reconstruction History Center in Fayetteville continues to move forward as well.

Division of Historical Research and Publications – Dr. Waters reminded the commissioners that the Historical Research Office, which had been operating under the auspices of the Division of Historical Resources, has been raised to the division level, with its director, Ansley Wegner, now reporting directly to Dr. Waters. As Ms. Wegner is also heading up the state's American 250 (A250) efforts, she was pleased to offer her first report as division director.

Ms. Wegner described the DHRP's reorganization. Operating under her are the following units: projects and commemorations; historical publications; research historians; and grants and outreach. Ms. Wegner reported that her division's publication unit has just published the children's books *Freedom's Howl*, *The Song of the Red Wolf*, about the Red Wolf in colonial North Carolina, and *Blue's March. An Overmountain Men Tale*. She also reported speaking recently at the American Association of State and Local Historians meeting in Cincinnati about the children's books and how the OAH is using primary sources to interact with children.

The publications unit has produced two A250-themed digital exhibits, and A250 is co-hosting with UNC-CH and UNC Press and evening panel discussion on October 1 titled "Teaching the Foundations of American Democracy." A250 will also have presence in Dorton Arena at the North Carolina State Fair which runs from October 16-26. It will feature a kiosk from the American Battlefield Trust that will enable people to click on depictions of battles and events in North Carolina. She noted that her and her staff are available to speak on America 250 if the commissioners hear of anyone who might want such a service at an event.

Dr. Waters took a moment to express his thanks to DNCR Secretary Pam Cashwell for her strong efforts supporting departmental projects that emphasize collaboration, especially between the cultural side of the department and the historical side, such as placing gifts shops at historic sites, including the U.S.S. *North Carolina* Battleship, which have proven to be quite successful.

Division of State Historic Sites and Properties – Ms. Lanier shared that interdepartmental collaboration has been key in this time of unprecedented growth within her division. She and her staff just held their annual summit last week, with a strong message about the need to emphasize the

remarkable stories each site has to tell. She also praised the collaborations between her division, the Division of Historical Research and Publications—the DSHSP has been selling the aforementioned books in its gift shops—and the Division of Historical Resources. She reported that the amount of grant funding that the DSHSP has itself been stewarding, has been partnering on with DNCR colleagues, or has benefiting from due to shared efforts stands at about \$14,000,000.

DSHSP staff are working on 22 capital projects, 12 major maintenance or repair and renovation projects, and numerous exhibits. Ms. Lanier commended Terra Schramm, Kara Deadmon, supervisor of the State Capitol State Historic Site, and Natalie Rodriguez, associate director of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, for overseeing the development of the “Naming to Knowing” online portal which amplifies the stories of the enslaved artisans who worked to build the state capitol.

Wrapping up her remarks, Ms. Lanier reported that the division has seen a seven percent increase in visits over the last year. She noted, however, that this growth is likely to slow because several historic sites are slated to close to accommodate major construction projects.

Dr. Johnson thanked staff at Charlotte Hawkins Brown SHS for recently hosting a meeting of the African American Heritage Commission, and she noted that the North Carolina Maritime Council will be meeting soon at Fort Fisher SHS. Dennard asked Ms. Lanier whether there are any plans in the works to commemorate the contributions of the late supervisor of Summerset Place SHS, Dorothy “Dot” Spruill Redford. Ms. Lanier responded that aren’t but stated that she would work with the team there to find a way to do so.

Dr. Waters concluded this division report by noting that when he was here former DNCR Secretary Reid Wilson directed a new initiative to find more effective ways to update exhibits and invigorate storytelling at state historic sites. This effort continues with the full support of Secretary Cashwell and striving for this has involved a lot of work by division staff. He also strongly encouraged commissioners to tour the brand-new visitors center at Fort Fisher SHS if they get a chance.

Division of Archives and Records – Ms. Yandle appeared on behalf of Interim Director of the DAR, Ms. Becky McGee-Lankford. Ms. Yandle reported that after renovation the Outer Banks History Center is set to reopen. She also noted that the division currently has quite a few vacancies that it has been working hard to fill. Two of these have been the supervisor for the Western Regional Archives in Asheville as well as another full-time staff member there.

The Docs Box initiative continues to work to get digital surrogates of primary documents into classrooms around the state, including those pertaining to A250. She estimates that about 150 packages have been disbursed thus far. Finally, she noted that because not all constituents are online, the division is working hard to both get staff members out into the field to meet the public and do presentations as well as welcome more people into the state archives for tours.

Following Ms. Yandle’s remarks Mr. Ruffin said that he and the Commission know that job vacancies and a lack of resources continue to be a challenge for state workers. And, he said, they know that when staffing and resources are depressed it can feel demoralizing to those doing the work. Therefore, he added, it behooves everyone to thank all public servants and the quality of the work that they do.

Dr. Waters affirmed that there has been a lot of staff turnover and that losing excellent staff continues to be a real concern for him and his directors, so the appreciation expressed by the commissioners means a great deal. He also thanked partners across the state for helping to carry out the department's mission.

Deputy Secretary's Report

Dr. Waters updated the commissioners on the status of the North Carolina General Assembly's (NCGA) biennial budget. He reported that a comprehensive reconciled budget still hasn't come forth from the legislature and that everyone continues to hope that the NCGA will soon be able to break its current impasse. The lack of a budget has resulted in the department having to operate in a conservative manner to keep our mission moving forward.

He thanked Ms. McGee-Lankford for her service as interim state archivist and division director. He stated that the department is in the final stages of the hiring process for a permanent director of the DAR and noted that by the next time the Commission meets there will be a new state archivist and division director in place.

Other Business

Mr. Ruffin opened the floor to other business, but none was forthcoming.

Chair Announcements

Said Mr. Ruffin, despite having had to cancel scheduled in-person NCHC meetings in Edenton in May and Winston-Salem in September, he affirmed that once control of departmental purse strings is relaxed upon the passage of a state budget, future meetings of the NCHC will be scheduled in both locations. He stressed his belief that it's important for the Commission to conduct its business both in Raleigh and outside it so as to connect more effectively with outstate constituents. He also stated that he will soon talk with Commissioner Reynolds to ensure that the scheduled December 11 meeting includes a report from the NCHC's Public History Advisory Committee. He noted, however, that the December meeting will again be virtual.

Adjournment

With business concluded, Dr. Dennard moved adjournment, Dr. Johnson seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:19 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Darin J. Waters