

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
December 3, 2012
Great Barrington Fire Station, Main Meeting Room

ATTENDING: Marilyn Bisiewicz, Malcolm Fick, Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, Bill Nappo, David Rutstein

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 1 2012:

- The minutes were accepted unanimously.

FYs 13 AND 14 WORK PLAN, PRIORITIES AND BUDGET

- **Options for Current and Future Work Plan Priorities Matrix:** To help clarify the content and conclusions of many past discussions about the project and program areas on which the GBHC should focus its efforts, Paul drafted a matrix of options organized by broad operational categories. The membership used the summary as a basis for determining its goals for the remainder of FY13 and plans for FY14.
- **Goals and Objectives:** The following work priorities emerged from the discussion.
 - ***Ongoing Responsibilities***
 - ✓ *General Purpose Goals:* This goal refers to the fulfillment of the general purposes of the Historical Commission to protect and develop Great Barrington's historic resources, as set forth in Mass General Laws.
 - ✓ *Some of the specific programs and projects include:*
 - Encourage sensitive preservation of fire station, Searles High School, Monument Mills, Housatonic School
 - Monitor, document and conduct salvage archaeology as needed during Main St. reconstruction project
 - Continue to provide representation and advance historic preservation in the Town Master Plan Committee
 - Appeal to owners of fairgrounds to donate key artifacts to town museum
 - Complete inventory, Memorandum of Gift, acknowledgment (such as a proclamation from Selectmen, media release) of Mahaney gift
 - ***Museum Collections:*** Manage and care for town museum collection in accordance with professional museum procedures
 - ✓ Continue work to clarify, locate and inventory materials that are owned by the town.
 - *Cataloguing and Volunteers:* Gary reported that he has directed Historical Society contract archivist, Margaret Cherin, to catalogue the six boxes of Commission material. Commission members Marilyn and David have volunteered to work with Margaret on Fridays, her regularly scheduled work day, to assist in this effort. Gary will coordinate the arrangements.

- *Publicity*: The Commission and Society should consider suggesting an article about this project to the Berkshire Record and Eagle, especially when some prominent material surfaces.
 - *Charles Taylor Catalogue*: Gary discovered that the catalogue of Indian artifacts collected by local historian and author Charles Taylor is not in the storage area. When queried by Gary about his knowledge of the whereabouts of this document, Jim Parrish responded that he was securing it in his home to protect the information it included about the locations of archaeological sites from public access and possible disruption by treasure hunters. Gary will continue to negotiate with Jim about the return of the piece to secure and restricted storage on town property. He will also seek information about any other materials Jim may be keeping at home.
- ✓ As a part of long range planning, consider the technical requirements and possible locations for new storage and work spaces for collection.
- *Ramsdell Storage Area Meeting*: Paul and Gary met with the library director to adopt measures that will help accommodate the sometimes conflicting needs of the library, HC and historical society that arise from shared use of the second floor. In response to the agreements reached at the meeting, Gary reported that the vintage display cases have been moved to the Wheeler House, the “Off Limits” signs are being maintained and one of the period folding chairs has been set aside for deposit in the town collection. The application of a more decorative-looking covering on the display panels still need to be done.
- ***Historic Preservation***: Promote the preservation of significant structures in town
- ✓ Explore Strategies for Passing Demolition Delay Bylaw: this is a potent preservation tool that requires passage at a town meeting. In addition to general community support, a successful campaign needs the backing of the Planning Board and Historic District Commission. The first step is securing the advice and guidance of Chris Skelley, MHC. The HDC is seeking to schedule Chris for a presentation in January.
 - The presentation of a “Great Barrington Lost” lecture, exhibit, publication, and/or app tour in conjunction with this campaign would be a strategic plus.
- ***National Register Nomination and Listings***: Conduct research, survey and complete forms necessary to nominate and list every eligible site on the National (and State) Registers
- ✓ Prepare plan, budget and timeline for updating historic sites survey.
 - Dates and funding levels from MHC and CPA grants
 - List of qualified consultants or firms to do the work
 - RFP templates

- Paul volunteered to prepare grant applications. Bill offered the advice of colleagues who have experience in the application process and survey projects.
- **Marketing:** to heighten public appreciation of town's historic resources and build support for preservation initiatives
 - ✓ Continue development of Facebook page: Bill, with assistance from his son Willy, will work to expand content of the HC Facebook page. He will use photos from the walking tour and recent glass plate negative images to post and as a seed for making albums. At a later date Gary will supply images as well.
 - ✓ "Where is Great Barrington?" Program Planning: Marilyn will prepare a draft of ideas built around the concept of presenting images of architectural details of various historic town structures to the public, via articles, lectures, web site, app tour, connection with a local event, etc., challenging the public to identify their location. The goal is to encourage people to look and enjoy the visual delights local architecture supplies and to appreciate the authenticity of what we have.
 - ✓ Continue development of GBHC Logo: Bill presented additional ideas with Victorian ornament. He will design versions that incorporate actual architectural details from Great Barrington/Housatonic structures.
- **Education:** Present programs that educate and interpret Great Barrington history to the general and tourist public and schools.
 - ✓ Defer creation of new app to later year, unless a volunteer, such as an intern, can complete all or a portion of the work.
 - ✓ Defer development of some sort of "Great Barrington Lost" program to later date, but, strategically, to coincide with demolition delay campaign.
- **Fund Raising:** Raise monies to supplement annual town appropriation and for special projects.
 - ✓ Clarify Guidelines for Historical Commission Fund Raising: even though the Mass General Laws allows the acceptance of gifts, Paul will seek specific guidelines (i.e. deaccessioning, administration and restriction of money donations, etc.) from Kevin and/or the legal counsel from the State Ethics Commission.

FY13 BUDGET

- The Commission agreed that the bulk (or 100%) of the meager annual budget should fund the purchase of archival supplies.

COLLECTIONS

1. Mahaney Gift:

- *Gilded Age Magazines*: Malcolm reported that he has completed 50% of the library materials inventory. David reported that the *Delineator* and *Youth's Companion* magazines were not pertinent to Great Barrington and should not be a part of the museum collection. The magazines feature beautiful covers and some include interesting articles on Gilded Age subjects such as an image of Evelyn Nesbitt (who posed for the "Ann of Green Gables" story) and the first printing of the Pledge of Allegiance and a celebration of Congressional approval of Columbus Day in the September 1892 issue of *Delineator*. He recommended the Commission sell them, although because they are very common, generally of low value and don't attract much of a market. He recommended we sell the magazines in small lots (e.g. not individually) at a reasonable price. The attractive covers are the desirable feature. Perhaps the Historical Society flea market would be a good venue. We need the Mahaneys to sign the Deed of Gift before we can dispose of the magazines.
- *Merritt and Triscott Paintings*: The Mahaneys have also mentioned paintings by Amos Merritt and L.P.R. Triscott in the Baldwin collection. It is unclear if they had offered these as a part of the gift. Amos Merritt was Ruth Baldwin's father and Triscott "was associated with the Boston Art Club" (from Mahaney e-mail). Paul will try to research the two artists and affirm any Great Barrington connections so the Commission can decide on whether to ask the Mahaneys if they would consider depositing them in the town museum collection.

HISTORIC RESOURCES MAP

- Commission members will e-mail Paul any recommendations for additions or deletions of the sites on the Historic Resources map created by the Master Plan committee for inclusion in the Master Plan. Members agreed that the map should not be an exhaustive listing, rather a sampling of the marvelous historic resources in the town and restricted to high silhouette sites. Railroad St. should be added to the Main St. central business district.

CIVIL WAR TREASURES IN THE ATTIC

- The Massachusetts Sesquicentennial Commission of the Civil War has requested the Historical Commission share with them a list of documents in our collection that pertain to the Civil War. The purpose is to compile a statewide inventory that will aid researchers locate Civil War material. Although the town and Historical Society collections include weapons, clothing and documents, they are generally not catalogued and accessible. Paul will draft a response explaining our support of the program but the lack of an inventory or a catalogue.

MAHAIWE CEMETERY STONES

- Jim Parrish has alerted the Commission through Gary that in 1997 MHC funded a study (conservation survey?) of the hurricane-damaged stones in the Mahaiwe Cemetery by Fannin and Lerner Preservation Consultants. Their recommendations were then executed by conservator Eric Slavid. That year the Town Manager, Joe Kellogg, signed a 15-year

preservation restriction as a condition of the funding. According to Jim, the Cemetery Commission was unsatisfied with Slavid's work and by the way cemetery maintenance staff mowed around the stones. Jim recommended the work be redone and that it is the Historical Commission's responsibility. The Commission agreed that this was an important matter but it was under the purview of the Cemetery Commission. Marilyn will contact the CC about the project.

JOINT MEETING WITH GBHDC AND TOWN PLANNER TO REVIEW HISTORIC SECTION OF MASTER PLAN

- Don will talk with Jim Mercer and Paul with Chris Rembold about a convenient date.

DONATION OF EQUIPMENT TO HISTORICAL COMMISSION

- Bill reported that the Mason Library is disposing of three shelf units and has offered them to the Commission. Members agreed there was an urgent need for archival shelving and enthusiastically accepted the offer. Bill will make transfer arrangements, repair as needed and move them to the Ramsdell storage area.
- Bill also offered a two-year old Toshiba 16" lap top and Epson 2450 scanner to the Commission. Members again affirmed the dire need for computers (especially lap tops) in our cataloguing efforts, eagerly accepted the offer and thanked Bill for his generosity. At this point Bill hadn't determined if the transfer was a loan or a gift. Gary will contact Bill about picking up the two pieces.

TACONIC WEST HISTORIC DISTRICT

- Don reported that the HDC is mapping and planning signage for this National Register Historic District. The HDC will coordinate the interpretive message of the sign texts with the HC.

NEXT MEETING

- Monday, February 4, 7:00 pm, location to be determined.

ADJOURN

- Motion to adjourn unanimously approved.