

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
May 23, 2011
Great Barrington Fire Station (Conference Room 6)

ATTENDING: Marilyn Bisiewicz, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, David Rutstein; Guest: Jim Mercer, Chairman, Historic District Commission and President, Great Barrington Historical Society

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 7, 2011: approved unanimously

REVIEW OF HANDOUT MATERIALS

- Mass. Historical Commission State Register of Historical Places, 2010: section listing individual sites and districts in Great Barrington. The Mahaiwe Block addresses should be changed from 6-14 Castle St., 314-322 Main St. to 6-14 Castle St., 304-322 Main St.
- Mass. Historical Commission Preservation Planning Manual: is a great resource for preservation methods and strategies. Paul will order a copy for each member.
- Mass. Historical Commission "A Summary Sheet for New Commission Members": an excellent précis describing a local historical commission's functions.
- Mass. Historical Commission letter from Brona Simon, SHPO, dtd. 4 Feb 2011, notifying GBHC that the Wheeler Family Farmstead will be considered by MHC for nomination to the National Register. The Commission expressed its congratulations to Jim Mercer and thanked the Historical Society for its role in the nomination and preservation of the Wheeler House.

INVENTORY OF HISTORICAL COMMISSION COLLECTION

- Background:
 - >Gary turned over the 1975 Accession Sheet inventory to the Historical Commission.
 - >The contents of the collection include materials transferred from the Mason Library and a gift from the Stockbridge Library Association.
 - >There are three sections: Part I Manuscripts; Part II Pictures and Photos; Part III Literature.
 - >Inventories for each piece include: Accession No., [Name of] Object, [a brief] Description and Location. Gary believes the list is incomplete; some HC material is not included, such as the airport poster hanging on the landing of the Town Hall stairway.
 - >Except for some photos that were exhibited along with Society material and not returned to their original storage location a number of years ago, 99% of the Commission collection is kept in a separate space in the storage area at the Ramsdell Library.
 - >The objects (e.g. artifacts) in the collection have not been inventoried and it is unknown if they are kept physically separate from the Society's objects, as is the other material. Gary and David believe that the pieces have been marked with their catalogue numbers which include a "C" to denote it's a part of the Commission collection ("S" stands for the Society collection).
 - >Paul will make copies at the Town Hall as well as e-mail Jim Parrish to ask if he has any additional Commission inventories in his files.

- Issues and Actions:

>Paul, David, Gary and Jim, and any other Commission members who want to participate, will visit the Ramsdell storage area to make an estimate of the situation to help determine the actions needed for the Commission to carry out its stewardship responsibilities. The disposition of the collection will be on the agenda of the next meeting. Paul will e-mail everyone about a date and time.

>The Commission needs to develop a manual of policy and procedures for the collection which will serve as a guideline to implement proper curatorial care. This includes: inventorying, marking catalogue numbers, entering information onto PastPerfect, photographing each object, appraisal, insurance and legally conveying the collection to the Historical Society. The manual can be used to train and guide volunteers and interns to complete these steps.

MHC MEMBERSHIP UPDATE FORM

- MHC sent their GBHC membership update form. It consists of members of the Historic District Commission. Paul will notify them that the list is wrong and attach a copy of the current roster.

BROADBAND REQUESTS TO GBHC

- Paul will e-mail Bob O’Haver again to request more detailed information about the route and equipment for the broadband project so the Commission can make an informed decision about its impact

MONUMENT MILLS: NATIONAL REGISTER IMPLICATIONS FOR OVERLAY DISTRICT

- Monument Mills is a National Register District, according to the State Register of Historic Places. The Commission has no record of the exact boundaries of the district. The Historic Places Register cites “Park and Front Streets,” which is too vague.
- Because it’s a National Register District, it is afforded some protection at the federal and state levels from projects that may impair its historic character. *Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (1966)* requires that any projects that require funding, licenses or permits from federal agencies (i.e. Community Development Block Grants, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Communication Commission) must be reviewed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission to determine the effect of their actions on historic properties. If there is an adverse effect, a consultative process is set up between all parties to discuss alternatives that minimize the impact. The MHC also reviews state-funded, licensed or permitted projects for adverse impact on historic properties. Too, as part of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, the MHC participates in the process of reviewing the effects of state agencies’ actions on the environment, including historic properties.
- The Commission approved sending a letter to the chair of the Selectmen, with a c.c. to the Town Manager, citing these protections and asking assurance that the Historical Commission will be consulted throughout any planning and project implementation in the Overlay District. Before a letter is drafted, however, the Commission needs to ascertain the exact boundaries of the National Register District so that all involved know which sections of the overlay district the National Register District jurisdiction affects.

- Jim Mercer stated that a goal of the Historic District Commission is to establish a Local Historic District in Housatonic to include the school and the mill buildings. He felt the district should coincide with overlay district and that its campaign for support should stress the advantages of eligibility for federal and state investment tax credits. The Historical Commission expressed its support for this initiative and will work with the HDC on the project.

ALFORD ROAD BRIDGE

- The BSC Group, Worcester, MA, wrote a letter, dtd 24 March 2011, to the GBHC requesting comment on the MA Department of Transportation, Highway Division's plans to replace the 1937 bridge which carries Alford Rd. over Seekonk Brook in Alford. A small portion of the project is within the Great Barrington town limits. The project will be supported with federal funds and, therefore, the letter was sent in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- The Commission reviewed photographs of the existing bridge and agreed that its reply should encourage the project to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, use as much original fabric as possible and produce a design that maintains the period appearance of the bridge.
- Paul will draft the response with cc's to the Alford Historical Commission, GB Selectmen and MHC.

PRESERVATION OF CASTLE STREET RAILROAD TUNNEL OVERSTRUCTURE

- At the 2011 town meeting the town voted to accept conveyance of the building over the Castle St tunnel from Dale Culleton.
- The building is a significant part of the portal between the town and Berkshire Heights and is at least a century old. Its architecture is distinctive and should be preserved and nominated for the National Register.
- The Commission voted to write a letter to the Selectmen urging preservation of the historic character of the building and employ the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as a guide. The letter should review the character-defining features and request the Commission be consulted in any rehabilitation work. Paul will draft the letter.

NEW ENGLAND LOG HOMES

- Paul will contact Tim Geller for permission to access the site and search for and rescue architectural and/or industrial artifacts that reflect its history, especially the Great Barrington Manufacturing Co.

HISTORIC RESOURCES DRAFT FOR TOWN MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

- Committee members will review the first draft of the "Historic Resources" section by the Town Master Plan sub-committee for discussion at the next Commission meeting. Comments will be submitted to the Natural and Cultural Resources sub-committee.

MAIN STREET RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

- Paul will draft a letter to the Selectmen to request that as a part of any Main Street Reconstruction Project plans, specifications, RFPs, official guidance, etc. they stipulate

the Historical Commission be notified, in a timely manner, of any invasive activity that exposes the street's subsurface, so that salvage archaeology can be performed. Paul will contact MHC about any state or federal mandates for this process and implementation guidance.

RAMSDELL LIBRARY

- Private citizen Jim Stark has, with GBHC suggested edits, completed Inventory Form B for the Ramsdell Library and submitted it to the MHC. The GBHC has requested Mr. Stark to keep it informed of any action on the Ramsdell nomination and offered its assistance as the project unfolds.

HOUSATONIC RIVER SKELETON LETTER

- Gary reported that there has been no further action on the skeleton.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- Monday July 25 7:00pm at place to be determined.