

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
September 26, 2011
Great Barrington Fire Station (Conference Room 6)

ATTENDING: Don Howe, Malcolm Fick, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, David Rutstein; Guest: Glen Goble (Clark and Green Architects, Great Barrington)

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME TO MALCOLM FICK

- Members welcomed Malcolm Fick to the Commission. Malcolm expressed his enthusiasm for his appointment and briefed the membership on his background. He is retired and with his wife moved from Wilmington, DE to reside in Great Barrington. He earned a B.A. in history and a M.A. in library science. Malcolm most recently operated his own software company. He is looking forward to contributing his skills in organizing the collection. Gary will provide Malcolm with a tour of the storage area.

MINUTES OF JULY 25, 2011: approved unanimously

REVISED MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

- Paul distributed the latest edition of the roster. Malcolm requested that his cell telephone no. needed to be added.

LONG AND SHORT RANGE PLANS AND ACTION STEPS FOR HISTORICAL COLLECTION

- Background of Ownership: the collection consists of archival and library and Native American materials and other artifacts, some of which was previously owned by the defunct Southern Berkshire Historical Society, and certain other portions that had been in the care of the Mason Library and transferred to the Historical Commission in the mid 1970s. Also included are those objects the Commission has received as gifts since its creation, c. 1973. The bulk of the collection is currently located in a dedicated section of the Historical Society's storage area in the Ramsdell Library. Other objects are in the Wheeler House and private homes. The Society essentially cares for the collection.
- Future Stewardship: the Town of Great Barrington, by means of the Historical Commission, is responsible for managing and caring for this valuable town property. The Historical Society, however, has been carrying out this task for decades. The Commission needs to express all items in the collection on a computerized inventory: (1) as a means to document its contents; (2) to serve as the basis for establishing clear ownership by the town and (3) for an appraisal and insurance. A "Memorandum of Gift" form, completed and signed by post-GBHC formation donors, conveys the gift to the Commission/Town.

The current plan for future stewardship is to transfer the collection to the Society which is better equipped to care for it and make its contents available for study and exhibition. Don expressed the importance of ensuring that the course we chose provides the best possible stewardship of the collection; perhaps the Commission is best suited.

- Plan for Inventorying the Collection:
 1. The first step is to purchase the tools for the inventory: museum collection software and a laptop computer.
 - A. *Software:* The Commission favors PastPerfect software, a proven standard in the museum field. Since it is also used by the Society, it would be compatible and allow for ease of data transfer.
 - B. *Computer:* A laptop is preferred for its efficiency: it can be easily set up in various locations in the storage area and at external sites for convenient access. Perhaps, however, an excess PC could be provided by the Town. Malcolm noted that he has a laptop that the HC could borrow to use.
 2. Based upon PastPerfect procedures, prepare a plan for the inventory and photography and/or scanning of each item. This becomes a manual of procedures for all volunteers and paid consultant(s) who work on the project. The catalogue number system needs to be compatible with the Society's. Thus, a separate, but compatible HC catalogue will be prepared but it will be compatible with the Society and allow a straightforward merge during the transfer phase. Malcolm will study the PastPerfect instructions and draft a step-by-step set of procedures and recommend which version to purchase. Gary will check on the status of the Society's software license and cost for a version that is concomitant to it, if this proves the best choice for the Commission.
 3. Budget: the software and computer need to be included in the FY13 budget request. Don stated that the Historic District Commission may be able to help pay for these costs.

GLEN GOBLE, CLARK AND GREEN ARCHITECTS

- Clark and Green is requesting guidance and assistance in locating period images of the present Tom's Toys building as documentation for their commission to restore the storefront to its original appearance. They are also searching for photographs showing the continuum of appearance of Monument Mills. Gary and David noted that although the west side of Main St. is well documented over the years there is surprisingly little of the Tom's Toys section. The Commission recommended contacting: the Historical Society; Frank Ptak, Housatonic, for access to his collection of glass plate negatives of late 19th-early 20th century Housatonic; the Berkshire Athanaeum; the Berkshire County Historical Society; Berkshire Eagle archives; Town Directories and Donna Drew's history of the mills. Gary has assembled a legendary post card collection of Great Barrington images and David a library of period Berkshire travel booklets. They could also hire local historians to conduct their research.

CASTLE STREET RAILROAD PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL STRUCTURE

- According to Don Howe, the whole structure is under the jurisdiction of the Historic District Commission. The Commission needs to secure maps and descriptions of all districts in the Town to clearly document the purviews of the HDC and HC.
- At a meeting scheduled for October 3, Paul and Don will query Kevin O'Donnell about the Town's plans for maintaining the building and response to the preservation measures recommended in the HC's recent letter.

OUTDOOR MONUMENTS

- Gary reported that the Town hasn't been carrying out a maintenance schedule for the Newsboy Monument. A number of years ago, the gravity-fed water to the statue fountains was turned off without notice by the superintendent of Fire District to reduce water consumption. The New England Association of Circulation Executives then paid to have a new water recirculation system installed. Since then, the highly chlorinated water has apparently severely degraded the piping. In the meantime, the town has not been performing maintenance. Joe Sokul, DPW, inspected the statue and reported that it will be placed on a regular schedule for cyclical maintenance. Paul forwarded three sources for outdoor sculpture maintenance to him. Daedalus sculpture conservators has estimated a \$15,000 cost for restoration treatment of the statue and pedestal. There is currently \$2,000 in the Newsboy Statue Fund of the Great Barrington Historical Society.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION PRESERVATION PLANNING MANUAL

- The Commission agreed that the preservation tactics in the manual need to be studied and selected for application in Great Barrington.
- All members need to review the manual. Paul will request Chris Skelley send Malcolm the DVD.

GREAT BARRINGTON LOST PROJECT

- Paul showed two books: *Berkshire Lost*, published by Chesterwood as an exhibit catalogue, and *Lost America*, by Constance Greiff. Both catalogued significant sites that had been razed, burned down or demolished by weather or neglect. The lesson set forth in both publications is that the documentation of destroyed landmarks can raise awareness and appreciation of the cultural value of extant structures. He suggested that the Commission consider this as a project to help fulfill its goal of educating the public about the importance of historic preservation as a sound planning tool. It is a fitting use of the research and writing talents and knowledge of the membership. Too, an intern could very well undertake some of the research. The outcomes could be an exhibit, book, booklet, power point lecture, articles, etc. Don borrowed both books to show Jim Mercer of the GBHDC and GBHS.

ACCESS TO ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY FORMS ON MACRIS

- Don reported that Jim Mercer was able to print out town architectural survey forms from the MHC's MACRIS site. Jim has assembled the forms for the Monument Mills NR District. He intends to use them as a shoehorn for the Historic District Commission to contact each owner about the potential for creating a Local Historic District.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- Monday, November 28 at 7:00

ADJOURN

- Members voted unanimously to adjourn.