

Morris County Heritage Commission Minutes **Meeting of May 8, 2012**

Present: Commissioners Larry Fast, Epsey Farrell, Virginia Vogt, Henry Kafel, Dan Beards, Miriam Morris; Archivist/Acting Director Peg Shultz

Absent: Commissioners Kinsel and Woodruff

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Fast at the County Cultural Center at 9:33 a.m. The Open Meeting Statement was read.

Minutes: April minutes were read and approved, with Commissioners Farrell and Kafel abstaining.

Financial report: Three percent of the budget has been disbursed or encumbered as of 30 April, leaving a balance of \$26,539. However, \$10,000 of this amount is earmarked as match funds for a grant to create preservation planning documents for the county courthouse, and the money will be retained for that purpose.

Freeholder report: None

Chairman's report:

- Chairman Fast reports no further word from Herman Baron of Diane Publishing.
- He monitored newsletter workflow and timing issues as they developed.
- Mr. Fast reports that freeholder relations remain positive as changes at the county level continue.
- Mr. Fast assisted Archivist/Acting Director Shultz in fulfilling a county request for a preliminary 2013 budget that required MCHC to identify its priorities and review staff and tasks.
- He and Archivist Shultz met with Morris County librarian Sara Weissman regarding possible county archives storage and Commission office space.
- Chairman Fast attended a full-day meeting at Thomas Edison's Glenmont Estate in West Orange to continue work on an "Invented in New Jersey" theme, which will promote New Jersey as the place where modern electronic communication was born and developed through subsequent decades. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Morris County and National Park Services, the Edison site, and Leslie Bensley from the Morris County Tourism Bureau, among others. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled for late May.

Archivist/acting director's report: Archivist/Acting Director Shultz reports the following activities in addition to her ongoing work in various committee areas:

- Ms. Shultz completed five re-grant site visits.
- She continues to supervise intern Amanda Hefferan, who has catalogued 725 Greystone blueprints and is now entering them into the database. Intern Amanda Avci has completed her internship, having added 850 records to the database. A new intern will focus on one-room schoolhouse research and develop an exhibit on same.
- Ms. Shultz has begun a marker maintenance schedule for this summer.
- Ms. Shultz warned of a possible challenge to the Commission's funding at the state level due to the fungible nature of state dollars funneled through county budgets. All county commissions and advisory boards have been asked to define their missions in terms of their most vital functions and be prepared to defend them.
- In the above context, Ms. Shultz is reviewing legal documents at the state and county level that created and authorized MCHC.
- Ms. Shultz met with the following people:
 - April 18: Kristopher McMorland, Mosquito Commission
 - April 19: Mary Jo Mathias, director of the Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council
 - April 23: Sara Weismann, reference department supervisor of the Morris County Library
 - May 4: Picatinny Arsenal: exhibit planning meeting
 - May 7: Bonnie-Lynn Nadzeika, June program presenter
- She also attended a Digitization Basics seminar on April 25.

Committee reports:

Archives: James Woodruff, Chair

In light of the possibility of moving the county archives to space at the county library, the Commission may be called upon to clarify the difference between library collections and archives. Archivist Shultz also spoke to the need of developing a modern indexing system for the county archives.

Grants/Re-grants: Virginia Vogt, Chair

Ms. Shultz reports that her site visits went well and that all grantees are on track to fulfill their grant contracts.

Exhibits/Programs: Jim Woodruff, Chair

Ms. Shultz is working on a June program of speakers who will share their experience writing and publishing historical publications. She suggested an archaeology-themed program for spring. Ms. Shultz also described the assistance she has given Picatinny Arsenal in creating and scheduling a traveling historical exhibit. She provided copies of the exhibit and suggested offering exhibit space in the Cultural Center lobby for three months. All Commissioners present agreed to such a plan.

Long-Range Plan: Virginia Vogt, Chair

Year Two of Long-Range Plan is in effect.

Personnel: Henry Kafel

No report

Publications: Virginia Vogt and Epsey Farrell, Co-chairs

The newsletter will be printed and mailed this week. There was discussion of the lengthy and laborious newsletter production process, and the publication committee agreed to meet following the regular meeting, along with Chairman Fast and Ms. Shultz, to discuss potential solutions.

Markers: Dan Beards, Chair

There was a lengthy discussion revisiting the placement of a historical marker on the site of the current Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Morristown.

- Commissioner Farrell of the marker committee pointed out that current MCHC marker guidelines clearly require an extant historical site. There is nothing remaining of the original AME church, and the current church is not on the original site, nor is it old enough to be deemed historical, nor does it possess significant artifacts from the period of significance.
- Chairman Beards suggested that the marker guidelines might be amended to recognize the church organization as a uniquely important cultural institution in the early history of Morristown's black community.
- Commissioner Vogt questioned whether this would open up the marker program to additional requests to mark events or structures with no remaining traces. These requests have consistently been refused in the past.
- After much discussion, it was eventually agreed that there are valid and important reasons, supported by the Commission's mission and bylaws, diversity among them, for the Commission to make a good effort to define its marker standards in a way that could recognize such a unique institutional legacy and the AME Church. Commissioner Beards suggested we might revisit the National Register Criteria to consider whether there are possible grounds for marker recognition in federal guidelines.
- Draft copy was provided for the Bethel AME marker, but it was deemed by Commission members not to adequately reflect the cultural significance of the institution, which is the principal basis of the marker recognition.
- Next steps: 1) Review National Register Criteria*, 2) explore drafting a new marker guideline that might permit a marker for exceptional cultural integrity but one tight enough to forbear similar but less significant requests, and 3) send all Bethel AME historical research to David Mitros, who will work with Ms. Shultz to develop revised marker copy.

*Addendum (V. Vogt): I briefly looked up the National Register Criteria for Evaluation of Historic Places. The Introduction and Criteria A include the following excerpts that might serve as the basis for a MCHC marker standards "variance"):

The quality of significance to American . . . culture is present in districts . . . that possess integrity of feeling and association and (A) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history . . .

Communications: Secretary Vogt

Various newsletters and announcements were received and noted.

Old Business: Commissioner Farrell reports that the Harding cell tower site study is still in progress.**New Business:** None**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Virginia Vogt, Secretary

The next Commission meeting will be held on **Tuesday, June 12**, at 9:30 a.m.
Please inform Ms. Shultz if you are unable to attend.