

Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

April 30, 2020

Michigan History Center

Commissioners in attendance (all by Zoom): Laura Ashlee, Timothy Chester, Brian James Egen, Eric Hemenway, Susan Safford and Larry Wagenaar.

Excused Absence: Joe Calvaruso, Delia Fernandez, Tom Truscott

Staff (all by Zoom): Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, and Heather Lehman

Members of the public (by Zoom): Barbara Mort, Benzie Area Historical Museum

President Egen called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Commissioner Wagenaar hosted the meeting using the online facilities of the Historical Society of Michigan. Egen congratulated Clark on the center's COVID-19 collection plan. Clark stated that the Detroit Free Press contacted the center about a partnership where they will collect audio responses and the Archives of Michigan will provide long-term preservation. The collecting efforts will be promoted together.

Approval of Agenda: Ashlee moved to approve the agenda; the motion was seconded by Safford and was unanimously adopted.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Wagenaar moved to approve the February 13, 2020, meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously adopted. Safford moved to approve the March 12, 2020, special meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously adopted.

Marker Program

- **Battle Creek House, Battle Creek, Calhoun County (L8)** – The commission discussed Bill Schroer's concern surrounding the request to return the Battle Creek House historical marker. Ashlee moved to affirm the 1998 decision that the marker be returned because the changes to the outside of the building removed its historic integrity; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously adopted. The commission also indicated that it would consider a new marker application that focused on the importance of the corner rather than the structure itself.
- **Benzonia Congregational Church, Benzonia, Benzie County (L879)** – The Benzonia Congregational Church is currently used as the Benzonia Area Historical Museum. Barbara Mort has contacted the center and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) about maintaining the structure's historical integrity while repairing the structure's exterior. After discussion and review of the SHPO's recommendations, Ashlee moved that the commission's response be that using vinyl siding on the relatively new east wing of the structure and following SHPO recommendations for the roof would not damage the building's historic integrity; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously adopted. Commissioners noted that this meant that the historic center part of the building and the west wing should remain sided with painted wood to maintain the historic integrity of the building and the building's listing in the State Register of Historic Sites.

➤ **Move Requests**

- ◆ **Grosse Pointe High School, Grosse Pointe, Wayne County (L1882) and Martin Luther King Jr. in Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe, Wayne County (S754)** – Respond to the commission’s February 13, 2020, denial of a request to move the Grosse Pointe High School marker and locate the Martin Luther King Jr. in Grosse Pointe marker, the sponsor offered three new options for the marker locations. After discussion, Chester moved to approve option two, as preferred by the sponsor, noting that it provides each marker with its own space and both are accessible to the public; Wagenaar seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously. The markers will be placed along a new sidewalk linking the street to the main entrance of the school.
- ◆ **Mackenzie House, Detroit, Wayne County (S514)** – The Mackenzie House was recently moved from 4735 Cass Avenue to 510 West Forest. The commission reviewed a request to move the Mackenzie House marker to the new location. After discussion, Wagenaar moved to approve moving the marker to 510 West Forest Avenue near the northeast intersection of 2nd Avenue and W. Forest Avenue, GPS coordinates 42° 21' 11.9722" N, 83°; Safford seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously. Commissioners suggested that the sponsors may at some time wish to consider a new marker that identifies the original location of the house.

➤ **Delisting of State Historic Sites** – Clark presented three? sites to be delisted from the State Register of Historic Sites. Chester moved to approve delisting the sites from the State Register of Historic Sites as presented (Appendix A); Ashlee seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously:

- ◆ **Steel Hotel, St. Johns, Clinton County, L178**
- ◆ **Campbell House, Ferndale, Oakland County, L249**
- ◆ **Grand Rapids City Hall, Grand Rapids, Kent County, S293**

➤ **Approval of Marker Text** – Four new marker texts were presented to the commission for review and approval.

- ◆ **Thompsonville Junction/Village of Thompsonville, Thompsonville, Benzie County**
- ◆ **Michigan Trial Lawyers Association, Lansing, Ingham County**
- ◆ **Home of the Ancestor’s (revised Skull Cave marker), Mackinac Island, Mackinac County**
- ◆ **Manistee Courthouse Fountain/Onkema Memorial Fountain, Onkema, Manistee County**

Ashlee moved to approve the Thompsonville Junction/Village of Thompsonville marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Safford and was unanimously approved. Wagenaar moved to approve the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Safford and was unanimously approved. Wagenaar moved to approve the Home of the Ancestor’s marker text (revised Skull Cave marker) as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved. Ashlee moved to approve the Manistee Courthouse Fountain/Onkema

Memorial Fountain marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

Commissioner Hemenway shared some of the details of the reburial of Anishnaabe ancestors on the island, which was done in partnership with Mackinac Island State Parks in compliance with the Native American Graves Repatriation and Protection Act.

Wagenaar moved to use undesignated marker funds to purchase the Home of the Ancestor's marker (the revised Skull Cave marker); the motion was seconded by Ashlee and it was approved.

➤ **Reports:**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting – Davis reported that several marker dedications have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Clark stated that four of the five conservation markers have been delivered and will be erected once the state starts to reopen. She noted that the DNR had been working on finding one day to have multiple conservation marker dedications. Planning for the special event has been postponed. Clark stated that she was contacted about the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park approving placement of the Genevieve Gillette marker at their location. She explained to the interested parties that after not hearing from anyone for several years, the commission had moved forward with find a new location. They understood and agreed that the P.J. Hoffmaster State Park was also an appropriate location. They may seek a marker for Sleeping Bear Dunes that deals directly with Gillette's role is establishing the national lakeshore.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.

How has the world changed and how does it affect us—the commission and center?

- Clark stated that she is concerned with the museum and its admissions and store earned revenue. It seems likely that uncertainty will continue into the next fiscal year. Finding new ways to deal with social distancing, deep cleaning and online education are priorities. It could mean permanent changes to the way business is done. Adaptability will be a key component for any scenarios regarding reopening or continuing operations in 2020 and 2021.

Commission discussion centered around the marker program and its outdoor possibilities. Commissioners mentioned developing small historical marker tours and sharing them on the web, crowdsourcing opportunities such as Go-Fund-Me to help sponsors offset funding needs during a struggling economy, and online access to marker dedications. Ashlee will arrange a marker committee meeting to discuss various opportunities and will report back to the commission.

Hemenway reported that tribal activities have been greatly affected. The tribes continue to work closely with state and federal officials in order to protect their communities as much as possible and develop a plan to eventually reopen. Tribes were able to apply for some government funding, and some of those funds are being received now.

Commissioners asked if museums were able to apply for any type of federal relief. Clark noted that nonprofit organizations were able to apply for the paycheck protection program.

Commissioners asked about discussion of across-the-board cuts for state agencies. Clark reported that hours were eliminated for all non-career positions effective April 4. This includes all summer history employees. There has also been a two-week furlough for some state employees – five employees at the center were affected by this. Future cuts seem inevitable, but it is hard to predict the impact this will have as we move forward. Cultural organizations and heritage tourism will certainly be hurt. Collaboration and sharing online programs will be more important than ever.

Hemenway noted that he is working with the Newberry Library to gather data from hundreds of years ago on how diseases affected tribes. It is already known that diseases such as smallpox and measles wiped out entire tribes. As Hemenway continues to compile this data, he will share it with others.

Staff Reports:

- Director's Report – Clark reported that she received approval yesterday to reopen the Michiganology product line. She continues to work on various scenarios for reopening possibilities. The Yankee restoration project will move forward, as will the next phase for architectural work related to the Straits State Park project, since they are both completely privately and grant funded. Museum and archival cataloguing continues to be done by staff working from home. The shelving for the museum storage facility was delivered as the work-from-home order took effect, but installation is on indefinite hold due social distancing and fiscal concerns.

Ashlee noted the phenomenal job the center is doing in responding to the current situation and accomplishing so many things. Safford agreed, noted that it is a tribute to the resilience of human beings, and thanked everyone.

Public Comments

- **Barbara Mort – Benzie Area Benzonia Congregational Church –**
Mort complimented the center and SHPO staff on their quick responses and patience in responding to her many questions. She said the feedback has been very helpful. She affirmed her and the community's desire to restore and maintaining historic structure and sites, and to respect history while reviewing the many options that are available. Their community, like many others, is struggling with recruiting new donors and volunteers. However, Mort feels confident in her current board and the direction they are planning for their future. They will continue to find ways to maintain a balance between limited resources and respect for history.

Clark stated that the commission's recommendation would be to use vinyl siding on the east wing if they wish, maintain the wood siding on the historic portions (center and west wing) and follow the SHPO guidance for roofing materials.

Clark noted her appreciation for the Bruce Catton shoebox diorama collection at the Benzie Area Historical Museum.

Commissioner Comments

- Wagenaar noted that the Historical Society of Michigan continues to provide as many remote and online activities and events as possible.
- Ashlee announced that she and Dr. Dean Anderson welcomed twin grandsons to their family in March.

Ashlee moved to adjourn the meeting; Wagenaar seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra S. Clark". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Delisting Items from the State Register of Historic Sites

The Michigan Historical Commission is charged with maintaining the State Register of Historic Sites. When a historic structure is destroyed or so altered as to remove its historic significance, we require, by law, that the marker be removed. In most cases, the State Register listing should also be removed at that time.

At this time, we propose that the following site(s) be delisted from the State Register of Historic Sites:

Site No.	Date Listed	Name	Location	Reason for Delisting
L178	1972	Steel Hotel	St. Johns, Clinton County	Structure demolished; no marker existed.
L249	1973	Campbell House	Ferndale, Oakland County	Structure demolished in 1978; no marker existed
S293	1969	Grand Rapids City Hall	Grand Rapids, Kent County	Structure was demolished in October 1969; it was removed from the National Register in 1970

