

Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2021

Michigan History Center

Commissioners in attendance (all by Zoom): Laura Ashlee (Okemos, MI), Timothy Chester (Grand Rapids, MI), Brian James Egen (Monroe, MI), Delia Fernandez (Lansing, MI), Eric Hemenway (Harbor Springs, MI), Tom Truscott (Dewitt, MI) and Larry Wagenaar (Lansing, MI).

Excused Absence: Joe Calvaruso, Robin Terry

Staff (all by Zoom): Sandra Clark (Holt, MI), Michelle Davis (Middleton, MI), Wayne Lusardi (Alpena, MI), Troy Masserant (Ypsilanti, MI) and Tobi Voight (Lansing, MI).

Guests (by Zoom): Dean Anderson (Okemos, MI)

President Egen called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Each member stated their name and their remote location.

Approval of Agenda: Chester moved to approve the agenda as presented; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved on a roll-call vote.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chester moved to approve the February 11, 2021, meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Fernandez and was unanimously adopted on a roll call vote.

Public Comment on Items Not related to an Existing Agenda Item: No comments

Marker Project

Clark reported that Troy Masserant, the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) marker graduate assistant, selected the marker project as the topic for his EMU grant-writing course. He is focusing on seeking funding for a community pilot in Ypsilanti.

Terry has suggested involving local federal legislative staff in convening Detroit conversations related to the marker program. MHC staff are applying for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to fund an individual to work in the Detroit area on both the marker project and the Grant House.

Ashlee asked about seeking Pomeroy Foundation support for the Mackinac Island marker, Clark indicated she would like to ask for more than just one marker and will need time to pull things together.

Clark reported that repair of the Knaggs Bridge Area marker, located in Shiawassee County, will require text revision because of concern with the Native American content in the current text. She also noted that the Malcomb X Homesite marker was recently damaged by a vehicle accident. MHC was contacted by the Lansing City Police, and the marker is currently in its possession. Clark was later contacted by Rep. Sarah Anthony, who agreed to cover the cost of the repair or replacement. The details are still being finalized.

Marker Program

- **Historical Marker Artifact Status Requests** At the previous meeting Ashlee expressed concerns about markers being approved for artifact status, especially those that relate to demolished structures. She noted commission policy that “.....” Wagenaar observed that the demolition of the structure is often not controlled by the people who sponsored the marker. He also asked the commission to think about what the purpose of the marker really is – continuing to share the story or trying to help preserve a structure. Ashlee reminded the commission that sponsors donate the money knowing that the marker will be owned by the State. She also noted that intention of the marker law is to have the marker used as an outdoor means to interpret sites. She urged that any exceptions to the policy be carefully considered. Clark noted that since the program left the State Historic Preservation Office, the markers tend to focus more on story and community engagement than historic building preservation. Markers sometimes validate something happened at a site and become the tangible representation that keeps the story alive. After further conversation, Ashlee noted that the policy needs to be kept in mind when making the decisions. The commission agreed to continue with the current policy and review it after a year.

- **Approval of Marker Texts** – One revised final marker text and four new marker texts were presented to the commission for review and approval.
 - ◆ **Manistee Courthouse Fountain/Onkama Memorial Fountain, Onkama, Manistee County (Revised Final – first approved September 3, 2020)**
 - ◆ **Hastings Table Company/Emil Tyden, Hastings, Barry County**
 - ◆ **Green Hill Farm/Elizabeth and Allan Shelden, Oakland Township, Oakland County**
 - ◆ **Smith Bayou/Hezekiah Smith, Ferrysburg, Ottawa County**
 - ◆ **Sojourner Truth Homes, Detroit, Wayne County**

Truscott joined the meeting after the Manistee Courthouse Fountain/Onkama Memorial Fountain marker text was approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the revised Manistee Courthouse Fountain/Onkama Memorial Fountain marker text as amended on Side One and retain the original Side Two; the motion was seconded by Fernandez and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote. Chester moved to approve the Hastings Table Company/Emil Tyden marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Fernandez and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote. Wagenaar moved to approve the Green Hill Farm/Elizabeth and Allan Shelden marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote. Wagenaar moved to approve the Smith Bayou/Hezekiah Smith marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote. Wagenaar moved to approve the Sojourner Truth Homes marker text as amended and with the understanding that staff would try to work World War II into the text for side two; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote.

➤ **Reports**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.

Staff Reports

- **Tuskegee Airmen P-39 Project** – Wayne Lusardi, MHC Archaeologist stationed at Thunder Bay, presented on the project to recover and preserve parts of a P-39 Airacobra lost during training over Lakes Huron and St. Clair. He is working with the National Museum of the Tuskegee Airmen out of Detroit on first documenting the parts of the plane on the lake bottom and then bringing them to the surface for conservation and eventual display. If all goes as planned, the diving portion of the work will occur in August. The entire presentation can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijPNBMMZ7dQ>
- **Grant House** – Tobi Voigt, Community Engagement Director, provided an update on the Grant House project, including photos of the house through history and video of the move. She is leading the effort to recruit diverse community members to work on the future use of the house while the Michigan History Foundation works to raise funds for the Phase I exterior renovation.

Director's Report – The full report was shared prior to the meeting. Clark noted that state employees will not return to work prior to July 12, 2021. She hopes the museum can reopen in September. She also shared information on a meeting with DNR Director Eichinger about the Heart of the Great Turtle Island project. Director Eichinger supported moving forward, encouraged the group to apply for a second DNR managed grant and offered to set up a meeting with the Governor's liaison to Michigan foundations.

Local Historic District Study Committee Reports

The commission was provided information on three reports from Local Historic District Study Committees:

- **Grosse Pointe Historic District, Grosse Pointe, Wayne County**
- **Troy Historic Village (delisting), Troy, Oakland County**
- **Eureka Fruit Farm Elimination, Rochester Hills, Oakland County**

Chester moved to accept the reports; the motion was seconded by Fernandez and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote.

Business Updates

- **Resolution for Tom Graf** – Clark thanked Ashlee and Dean Anderson for their effort in preparing the resolution. Wagenaar moved to approve the resolution as submitted; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote.
- **Nominating Committee Appointment** – Egen noted that Robin Terry has accepted his request that she join the nominating committee. Ashlee asked commissioners to notify her by the end of May 2021, if they are interested in serving as president or vice president of the commission.
- **Mackinac Island** – Commissioners agreed to hold the September 9, 2021, on Mackinac Island with lodging arrangements to be confirmed by Davis.

- **“America 250”** – Clark stated that Suzanne Fischer will represent the center and Wagenaar has appointed Amy Bradfield from Historical Society of Michigan to co-chair this committee. To continue moving forward, two commissioners are needed to help with making decisions and coordinating various local activities. Clark asked commissioners to notify her or Egen by May 7, 2021, if they are interested in serving.

Public Comments – No public comments were given at this time.

Commissioner Comments

- Ashlee – The center’s involvement in the Tuskgee project, the Grant House, and the marker project really show how the Center reaches out to various groups, and it is important to make use of the high-profile nature of these projects. The projects really show the breadth of what the Center does.
- Wagenaar – HSM recently opened up registration for the 72nd UP History Conference, which will be held virtually. He also offered a complimentary membership to each commissioner.

Ashlee moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar, and the meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.



Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary