

The West Brookfield Historical Commission met on Monday, December 2, 2019 at 6:30 P.M. in the Commission office in the Town Hall. Attending were Ron Bullock, Dan Hamilton, Anne-Marie Nolan, Rob Lyon, with Dick Rossman presiding. The earlier meeting time was called in order to have extra time to meet with Jon Strauss, town Cable Access Manager, and Mike Seery, the town Cemetery Commission Chairman.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Town Hall Maintenance: Dick reported that he had delivered the letter to the Selectmen's Office regarding the safety of the front entrance railing, as voted upon in the November meeting. He reported that he had been informed that the Board had read it and contacted a carpenter to design and build a safety barrier for the front railing.

We are awaiting the December submission of the final report from Bob Haveles of Architectural Insights regarding the current state of the building and the specifics of repairs needed, with general financial estimates, recommendations, and priorities. Commission members were asked to list their top 5 priorities in the report for discussion at the January meeting. When the report has been received and discussed, we will forward it to the Board of Selectmen for their review. After which, we will ask to be put on the agenda for a future meeting with the BoS, Robert Haveles, and commission members to discuss moving forward with maintenance options.

Website: The website and the calendar of events are continuously updated as needed. Dan reported that the domain name renewal bill will likely be received in December and paid by him personally. Also, the Internet Service Provider bill through Douglas Sumner will likely be submitted this month.

Treasurer's Report: Anne-Marie, representing the Historical Commission, attended the meeting of the Town Accountant and Treasurer with department and Commission representatives, held on November 20<sup>th</sup>. She reported that the reorganization and upgrading of the town's organization, staff, and employees is ambitious and ongoing. She provided the commission with a written financial report.

H.S. Scholarship: Louise submitted an updated draft by email distribution after the last meeting. It was not immediately clear if all members had reviewed and approved it, and as Louise was not present, the matter will be concluded at the January meeting and the applications sent out to the high schools and posted on the commission website.

Lucy Stone Nomination: Amy Dugas has completed the revised application and it was mailed on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Old Indian Cemetery: we have received the binder of the documentation for Phase 3 of the planned work from the Fannins. It contains their usual excellent work and joins the previous reports shared with MA Historical. We also received an invoice from the Fannins for the completion of Phase 3 in the amount of \$13,275.00, which had been previously approved and will be submitted for payment from the England Fund.

We reviewed the material with Mike Seery, along with a general discussion of the restoration work done over the last six years.

Methodist Cemetery: In the continuing effort to provide a current owner for the cemetery, for the purposes of application to the National Register of Historic Places, Dan submitted a report showing that

the cemetery property had been defined by metes and bounds in the original 1832 deed to the Brookfield Methodist Society. It was then specifically excluded in subsequent deeds in 1891 and 1997, which changed our former evaluation that the property had been taken by the town in 1939 for non-payment of taxes and then sold at auction. Dan and Jesse reviewed the deeds and the last deed of record is that of the Brookfield Methodist Society.

However, there is no current Methodist organization in Brookfield. Dan will contact the Boston University School of Theology Research Library where they hold Brookfield Methodist records from 1843-1900. Perhaps we can find a reference to the Ragged Hill Property within the Board of Director minutes.

It is acknowledged the town has maintained and claimed expenses for the cemetery since 1972, as shown in the town reports, and that the many contemporary plot plans state the town's ownership. However, there is no deed of record showing such ownership.

Previously discussed options as to determining and establishing current ownership may still be considered.

We reviewed the process and status of the application with Mike Seery, as well as pointing out that if successful, this would be the first and only Methodist cemetery in Massachusetts on the Historic Register, which increases our historic profile and consideration by future grant committees.

Demolition Delay Bylaw: no further developments.

Master Plan Implementation: Dick reported that on December 2<sup>nd</sup> the Planning Board is reviewing the Town Center Bylaw prepared by the Master Plan Implementation Committee, which is the first of many steps toward realization and implementation of the Master Plan.

Library Programs: The library will present Sheryl Faye as Susan B. Anthony in a program held at the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library on Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at 3:PM (the actual 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, giving women the right to vote.) A motion was made and unanimously passed to pay \$200 from the England Fund towards the expenses of the presentation.

Cannons within Pine Grove Cemetery: Rob was able to contact Jim Bender, the current Keeper of the National Cannon Registry, and get answers to our questions. It was confirmed that Jim is a one-man operation and therefore the function of the Registry is very limited. There is no paperwork, certificate, registry number that reflects our registration. Should a cannon be stolen, the Registry will have the origin on record and authorities can trace ownership, if the cannon surface in the marketplace. They discussed the potential value of the cannon and agreed that insurance coverage would not be practical. Jim felt that chaining the cannon would not be a deterrent for theft. He made suggestions as to preservation, saying they should be cleaned if rusty with a wire brush or wheel, but never sandblasted, as that would remove markings. Painting with an oil base primer and an overcoat, and filling the primer hole with grease if open, Leave the current wooden plugs in the barrels were other suggestions, and he saw no need for mortar or stonework on the bases. It is Rob's opinion as well that the cannons do not need any treatment at this time.

We shared this information with Mike Seery, as well as a prepared report on the cannon and their history for the Cemetery Commission files. This will end the Current Business topic of Cannons within Pine Grove Cemetery.

Local Historical Memorials and Sites: Louise is developing a table from the starting list submitted last month and will distribute it to our commission members to expand and use in gathering information.

Foster Homesite Kiosk: Dick reported that Amy Dugas of the Quaboag Historical Society has contacted a carpenter who will build a new kiosk. The schedule for this work is unclear.

Professional Book Scanning: Dan contacted April Aulick of eWide Technology Solutions, Inc. in Sturbridge about the possibility of scanning books and documents. We will invite April to a commission meeting after the first of the year to discuss it further. Deb Blodgett of the WB BOS office reported she too had been contacted by eWide. Deb said the shredding company used by the town has a scanning service: ProScan Solutions. The first step for the Commission would be to inventory and prioritize those books and documents eligible for digital scanning.

History on the Road: Dick had previously reported that the Old Sturbridge Village might be interested in reviving it's traveling program of *History on the Road*, once supported by the Commission and presented in the Elementary School. He will ask the staff at the Elementary School if such a program could be presently used within their curriculum requirements.

OSV Discount Tickets : We received a donation of 10 discount tickets from Jim Donahue, President of Old Sturbridge Village. Dick will write a thank you note. The tickets will be given to the Library for dispersal.

White Christmas: Dick delivered the Fiske book to the library for their raffle and has taken four copies to be sold through the Purple Onion.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Meeting with Jon Strauss: Jon has been hired by the town as a part-time manager of the cable access broadcast station. He introduced himself, shared his background, and expressed interest in utilizing the resources of the Commission in creating new programming for the station. Discussion was held of photo collections, house inventories, cemetery photos, DAR, Veterans in town, and other potential topics to encourage and educate the audience about the history of the town. Waiting for new equipment, Jon is several months from broadcasting and has time to develop what he hopes will be a series of short programs on relevant and historic topics. Dan will share the photos used in the Fiske book with Jon, and the Commission presented Jon with a complimentary copy of the book.

Mass Preservation Seminar: Dan and Dick reported briefly on the seminar they attended on developing a Historic Preservation Plan for the town. Dick shared the seminar handout and included his notes. The three steps of Historic Preservation Planning – Identification, Evaluation, and Protection – dovetail with our current early work on Local Historical Monuments and Sites.

Meeting adjourned ca. 8:50 p.m. Next meeting Monday, January 6, 2020, at 7:00 P.M. Historical Commission Office, Town Hall. The Public is welcome.

Respectfully submitted, Dan Hamilton, Secretary