

Historical Committee Minutes of the January 26, 2022 Meeting

Attendance: John Malchow, Chris Vander Fliet, Stephen Pote, Maureen Greenbaum, Tim Logan, David Scharf, Christine Ead (Liaison)

Absent: Fred Hayeck, Rick Stomber, and Bob Mayers

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 pm

No minutes from previous 2021 meetings were prepared, and therefore no minutes were approved.

Each of the members in attendance introduced themselves, gave some background on their involvement with the Borough, the committee (or other committees), outlined experience, and some projects they are looking forward to getting involved in while on the committee.

Election of Officers for 2022 calendar year were as follows:

Christopher Vander Fliet – Chairperson

John Malchow – Vice Chairperson

Stephen Pote – Secretary

Meeting Schedule was discussed amongst the committee and it was determined that the Historical Committee would continue their meetings on the third Wednesday of each month beginning at 7pm. The time change from 7:30 pm to 7:00 pm is a change from the previous year. Confirmation is needed on location of next meeting (Texier and/or virtual).

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT – Christopher Vander Fliet

C. Vander Fliet reminded members that the Mission of the Historical Committee is to preserve and protect the history of the Borough of Watchung. He discussed the responsibilities of the Historical Committee which includes Operating/Opening our Museum to the Public. He mentioned that Texier Building is open first and third Sundays from 2pm to 4pm. C. Vander Fliet mentioned special openings which include the Memorial Day Opening/Event (May) as well as the Weekend Journey Through the Past (October).

C. Vander Fliet outlined several of the accomplishments of the committee in 2021 which included: the War Display, Lions Club Display, New Signage, General Display Updates, Oral History Films, and twice the reopening of the museum to the public (once after the pandemic was thought under control enough to open, and once more after the flooding from storm Ida). He mentioned that the Museum has been a place where Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts alike have gravitated to complete their scouting projects. He encouraged Committee members to always keep an ear out for any future projects which scouts may want to do to enhance current displays or to create a new display.

C. Vander Fliet also spoke about the need to grow and establish our visibility in the Borough and beyond through digital archives and a website. C. Vander Fliet commented that in addition to displaying history, the Committee needs to be cognizant of the need to capture what is happening today in the Borough, and to report on that too.

OATH OF OFFICE – Mayor Keith Balla

After Mayor Balla joined the meeting, C. Vander Fliet turned the meeting over to him for the Oath of Office. Mayor Balla swore in John Malchow (term ending 12/31/22), Chris Vander Fliet (term ending 12/31/23), Stephen Pote (term ending 12/31/22), Maureen Greenbaum (term ending 12/31/22), Tim Logan (term ending 12/31/22), and David Scharf (term ending 12/31/22). C. Vander Fliet asked that the Oath of Office Form for Historical Committee, with original signature, be returned to the Borough Clerk's Office at Borough Hall.

At this time, there are two vacancies on the Historical Committee.

LIAISON'S REPORT – Christine Ead

Introduction/Welcome: Councilwoman Ead expressed her excitement in taking on liaison role and she looks forward to working with the Committee.

Councilwoman Ead is now working on Veterans/Local Heroes Banners Project, displaying banners in town of Veterans of Watchung. Several other towns (e.g., Berkely Heights, Scotch Plains) have done similar projects to remember their Veterans. It was discussed that possibly the banners could be flown not only on Somerset Street but potentially around both lakes and around the circle. There are several items being worked on, including the design of the banners (2'x5' size), making decisions on where the banners will be displayed, what provisions are required to hang them, when and how long they will be hung, and the collection of names and photographs of Veterans to be represented.

Committee member Stephen Pote commented that the number of Veterans identified needs to be reconciled against the locations available to hang the flags, so as to not set unrealistic expectations with its residents. Pote also commented that it is important to establish the criteria used to determine who is eligible for inclusion on a banner. Pote offered to provide guidance on the criteria, based on his work previously on Historical in choosing those to be remembered at Memorial Day and Veterans Day events. Residents Olivia Lope and Sue Tucker are also assisting in the identification of names, which are being stored on a database. The process and criteria, once established, needs Historical Committee and then Council approval, and then identified Veterans need to be approved by the resident, as believed required. It is possible that the Somerset Chamber of Commerce might provide light poles for around the lakes.

PROJECTS/NEW BUSINESS

Veterans Banner (see above)

Legend of Watchung Mural

The Mural, which for 56 years had been built onto a wall at the Sears store on Route 22 in Watchung, is still in need of a permanent home. It is temporarily being housed in south Jersey by a company hired to temporarily preserve the piece. To date, all costs associated with its dismantling from Sears, as well its preservation and temporary housing, has been paid for through private donations. No public tax dollars have been used. Tim Logan expressed concerns that the mural, currently rolled up, may increasingly deteriorate over time. C. Vander Fliet said we need to identify some place in Watchung, even if it is “temporary” (4-5 years) where the mural can be hung. Suggested locations include: behind the Council chambers; at the Police Station/Court House; at Bayberry or Valley View School; at the movie theater where the Sears Auto Center used to be (across the street from what was the Sears store where the mural was originally built. There is a much smaller copy of the mural already in the movie theater. WHRHS was suggested, but concern was expressed that it might get damaged, and it also would no longer be in Watchung. The original location of the mural was intended to be the new library and community center. This eventually may still be the case long term. Tim Logan also suggested that possibly the mural or a copy could somehow be preserved in resin/plastic and placed outside, e.g., off the Watchung Circle. C. Vander Fliet asked for volunteers to approach these locations to inquire about possible use of those facilities to house the mural. Pote said that before anyone is approached, it is important that the Committee members have “a consistent and informed story to tell” as it relates to the history of the mural, including its American Indian history, its great symbolism and historical value to Watchung, its dimensions, requirements for proper hanging and preservation, etc. The Committee again expressed its sentimental and historical value to the town; it needs to be proudly permanently displayed.

Historic Website

Bylaws

Bylaws need to be discussed and voted upon. C. Vander Fliet said he would provide an initial version, and it will then be discussed and voted upon over the next couple of meetings.

Texier House Museum Display Updates:

- Lions Club Display
- Sports Display
- Tibby Witherspoon Display – a tea set, gifted to the Historical Committee by the estate of Tibby Witherspoon, deceased; a long-time Watchung resident and one of the survivors of the steamboat General Slocum fire disaster of 1904 in New York East River (killed 1,021 of 1,300 on board)
- Old Signs Display – Old “Watchung” sign will be preserved and hung somewhere at the Texier House.

Genealogy of Wars and the First Families of the Area/Watchung

Dave Scharf expressed interest in the genealogy of Wars and First Families of the area. C. Vander Fliet suggested that Dave contact local historian Bob Mayer for guidance and direction.

Research on the Moldenke Castle Property

God's Acre – Suggestion made to consider having the cemetery on the NJ Register of Historical Places – Maureen Greenbaum suggested that we explore the possibility; however, it is not easy navigating the small graveyard, and there is concern that if the site were on the Registry it might dramatically increase foot traffic in an area whose condition of headstones are already quite worn and “fragile”.

AARP Grant (Chairs, Musical Park, Plantings, Website, Museum Filming) -- the grant submission is due in April. It needs to be discussed at the next meeting; we either need to act quickly to be able to submit the grant, or push it off until next year. Instead, maybe time should be focused on banners this year, and renew preparing for the AARP grant at end of year.

Betse Titus – Emeritus Status (Submission to Borough)

Bench Donation for Richard Wellbrock – The bench at Texier House, previously donated by Richard Wellbrock, was destroyed during Ida rainstorm. If someone knows of an old bench which can be donated to the Texier House, it will be restored and rededicated to Wellbrock and his son.

Research on Ness Property – Tim Logan suggested that at some point more work needs be done to understand the history of the Ness and Camp Endeavor properties, gathering any photos, artifacts, etc.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

C. Vander Fliet reminded all members please return the Oath of Office Form, Volunteer Form, and Update Member List as required.

Texier House Museum will be open the first and third Sundays of each month from 2pm to 4 pm.

Donations from 2021 included:

- Susan Tucker – Candles in the Windows
- Garden Club – Case for Adella (Tibby) Wotherspoon Tea Set
- Laurie Wood – Ornament Program.

PUBLIC PORTION

Pete Martino, previous liaison to the Historical Committee outlined a number of accomplishments made by the committee in 2021. Pete commented on landscaping around the home, making various repairs, and cleaning after storm Ida. Pete expressed

concern that the basement still needs to be cleaned and disinfected. Work on the sidewalk is needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 pm.

Submitted by: Stephen Pote (Secretary)

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday February 16th @ 7 pm. Meeting will be virtual.