

Watchung Historical Committee
Minutes of the November 16th, 2022 Meeting

Attendance: Chris Vander Fliet, Stephen Pote, John Malchow (via zoom), Bob Mayers, and Tim Logan.

Absent: David Scharf, Fred Hayeck, Maureen Greenbaum, Christine Ead (Liaison)

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 pm.

Motion to approve the minutes from the October meeting were deferred to December meeting as the minutes were not yet completed for Committee approval.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT – C. Vander Fliet

Open House Volunteers – Thank You! 4 visitors in the early November Open House. Visitors from Basking Ridge and Bergen County came and all visitors were very interested in the history of the Borough.

Hunting for History Scavenger Hunt – Fall Event and approval from PTO obtained from Jackie Pike.

No updates on the School Display with Helena Ruta.

Vander Fliet mentioned that the annual Borough Holiday Party will be held at the Watchung Valley Golf Club Ball Room – Friday Dec. 2, 2022 at 7pm. All are invited to attend. An email with details was sent out to the Committee.

Betse Titus was honored by the Borough with Emeritus status on November 3rd. She was humbled by the attention.

Vander Fliet reported that Don Monetti has been working hard to review, organize, and scan the Whispering Leaves Newspapers, a long-term goal of the Committee. Don provided a donation of binders and the papers organized by issue and year to the Committee. He also provided to the Committee a thumb drive with scans of all of the papers.

Vander Fliet was recently in touch with Johnny George (from Warren) who filmed Diddy Addario give a tour of the Texier House Museum before Covid. George mentioned that he would edit these videos and provided them to the Committee for their use. George mentioned to Vander Fliet he would try to get the footage to the Committee by the end of October. Vander Fliet will follow up with George again on this matter.

Details on the Trex outdoor benches that were discussed and voted on for purchase at the October Historical Committee meeting were sent to Bill Hance and the Borough for purchase.

Resident Laurie Wood is once again implementing the Watchung Holiday Ornament Program and the Historical Committee will receive a donation from a portion of the profits that are made from their sale. This year the Texier House is featured. Thank you to Laurie Wood.

Vander Fliet mentioned that Sue Tucker received VHS tapes of Tibby Wotherspoon/General Slocum Disaster. The content contained on the VHS tapes were unknown, but should be reviewed by the Committee. Pote volunteered to review them for the Committee. It was unknown if some of the footage was repetitive, original interviews, or TV specials.

Vander Fliet passed around the fall newsletter that the Committee wrote/reviewed and mentioned we should be proud of all of our accomplishments this year.

Vander Fliet mentioned that there are still ongoing discussions about an interview with Bruce Ryno. Pote and Mayers both mentioned they would be interested in sitting in on the interview and also participating in the pre interview process. The final interview would be recorded and added to our Reflections of Watchung film collections.

VICE CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT – J. Malchow

No Report, but Malchow mentioned that he had donated a cannonball to the Museum which was likely a British cannonball. The cannonball was found by his uncle Rich and found on Somerset Street when it was being widened/blasted in the 1980's. Because the cannon ball was smooth, it is believed to be of British origin, and not American colonist origin, whose cannon balls were more crude in finish. While there is no record of active combat on Somerset Street, historian Mayers commented that this is an "interesting addition" to Texier's artifacts.

LIAISON REPORT – C. Ead

Vander Fliet provided the Liaisons Report in the absence of Christine Ead (attending League of Municipalities event in AC). Ead's Notes were as follows:

1. DPW will be by this AM to check out the dehumidifier.
2. Ead will send info on the amended Bi-Laws to other members of Council, and she let the Committee know if they will go up for discussion at the next meeting.
3. Please let Councilwoman Ead know of any updates or information to be sent to Bill Hance on the benches for the exterior patio.
4. The prototype/preliminary website is a good start for information that gets created, as well blurbs, photos, articles. She believes that it is a good place to house things if space is needed.

5. Ead is waiting on confirmation of tree type to be planted behind 911 memorial (pushed to spring).
6. Another request went out to inquire about the key fobs (I keep getting told it is in the works).
7. T&B and Garden Club begins decorating for the Holidays on November 14th
8. The lights have been installed for the holidays on the roof of Texier and scheduled to light December 1st
9. New HVAC has been installed; please let Councilperson Ead know how it's working.
10. Let Councilperson Ead know if there is anything on the Committee's list that she can help with.

PROJECTS/NEW BUSINESS

Budget for 2023: \$7,000 budget, line item for website.

Committee Members for Next Year:

We need to identify and bring on to the Committee several new people. We have a lot to do and there is interested talent in the community. We need people with some longevity in the town who would understand the context of what is being reviewed and examined.

Plaque for 9/11 Memorial: The 9/11 Memorial has been resealed, thanks to the work of Seth and DPW. The Committee will seek out Seth Alexander to put together appropriate documentation on the procedures required to ensure proper sealant and maintenance of the memorial occurs. Plantings, including arborvitaes similar to those behind the "WATCHUNG" sign as you enter the circle from Somerset Street, have been suggested they be planted behind the memorial. Pote will contact Seth on the status of the plaque he was working on to thank major contributors during the design and establishment of the monument in 2017-2018.

Historical Website Discussion: Need for someone to help with website buildout. Talk with town on what the purpose of the website is. Maybe Maureen has someone who can help the Committee. This is an investment that should be made by the Committee. Other towns have wonderful websites. We need both an internal website for the Committee to house materials, as well a website that has an external focus for anyone with interest in Watchung and the area. Websites of Metuchen, Edison, Plainfield are just excellent websites. There 125 Leagues of Historical Societies, all of which have excellent websites. 3 years until we kickoff the 100th anniversary – need to start buildout of website now.

Scavenger Hunt: We need to invest properly in the website, and that includes the ability to showcase Watchung through a digitized Scavenger Hunt that downloads information on specific locations in Watchung.

Digitalization of Photos/Scrapbooks: There is great opportunity and need to digitize photographs and existing scrapbooks, to ensure permanent record of the history of Watchung.

Centennial Celebration: There was discussion to start a document, Pote suggesting possibly a large life size timeline, that would list the major and important events from each of the 100-years of Watchung History. There was also discussion on blown up photos from each of the major decades. Historical could sponsor a lecture series; we could bring in famous speakers. We could include events that invite Watchung “celebrities”, e.g., Billy Ard, Carl Banks, etc. Vander Fliet said he would start an Excel spreadsheet providing ability for Committee members to post events that took place during the 1926-2026 period. There was a rich discussion about the need for Historical Committee members to be shepherds of all these materials, memories, etc. (As an example, it was mentioned that the Arts Center used to be changed into a haunted house during Halloween during the early 1970’s; it was an extremely well-done and popular source of great Halloween fun for Watchung residents! A couple of the Committee members remember walking through the Watchung Arts Center on Halloween!)

Open House Schedule:

Vander Fliet provided the following open house dates for the remainder of the year:

December 4th 2-4 pm – Tim Logan volunteered to do this Open House with John Malchow.

PUBLIC PORTION

There were no comments from the public.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 pm.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday December 21st @ 7 pm.

Attachments:

1. No attachments.

Submitted by: Stephen Pote (Secretary)