

**Watchung Historical Committee  
Minutes of the April 26th, 2023 Meeting**

**Attendance:** Chris Vander Fliet, Stephen Pote, Terri Pawlak, Michael DeParto, Don Monetti, Bob Mayers, Keli Leunes, Fred Hayeck, Paul Fischer (Council Liaison)

**Absent:** Tim Logan, Maureen Greenbaum, John Guzman

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm, including both new and existing members.

Motion to approve the minutes from the October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 meetings was made by Chris Vander Fliet, seconded by Steve Pote and approved.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS --**

Pote motioned that Chris Vander Fliet be elected to continue as Chair. Seconded by Freddy Hayeck. The vote was unanimous. Chris Vander Fliet recommended that Steve Pote serve again as Secretary. Seconded by Bob Mayer. The vote was unanimous. Nobody was selected as Vice Chair at this time. Freddy Hayeck was chosen to be the Financial Manager (unofficial position at this time; waiting on Council to approve changed bylaws that include the addition of Financial Manager).

**CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT – C. Vander Fliet**

Vander Fliet opened thanking the Open House Volunteers who have continued to operate and open the Texier House Museum for the earlier part of the year. While the Committee was not active with meetings, we continued to maintain a presence in town and maintain the Museum openings.

Vander Fliet apologized for the late start of meetings this calendar year. He thanked all for their patience to date in the absence of the meetings.

There was an update on the School Display. Resident Helena Ruta is working to obtain approvals for her Girl Scout Gold Award. The project would create a timeline and where available pictures of all schools (construction, opening, expansion, relocation, etc.) in Watchung, as well as a connection to the Borough Schools. Details are to be provided at a later time. Member Keli Leunes reported that she would have some interest in assisting with the project. Pote believed we should ask Helena for a timeline, deliverables, and estimated time to complete her work.

Vander Fliet reported and thanked Don Monetti for his time and effort in the scanning and organizing of the Whispering Leaves Newspapers (local paper printed during the 1960s), a long-term goal of the Committee. Don reiterated that the binders are chronologically organized. It was also mentioned that he provided to the Committee a thumb drive with scans of all of the papers which can be used to upload to a future website.

Vander Fliet reported that Johnny George, a Warren resident, who filmed Diddy Addario give a tour of the Texier House Museum in 2018 released an edited version of the video

for the Committee's use. The video will go online and also aid our members in learning to give tours for the Texier House Museum.

Vander Fliet reported that Watchung resident Laurie Wood donated \$200.00 to the Historical Committee through the 2022 Watchung Holiday Ornament Program.

Vander Fliet mentioned that he will set up a tour with new committee members to teach them about giving tours of the Texier House Museum. He mentioned he would speak to Sue Tucker about this. The learning tour will also be open to previous members as well.

Vander Fliet mentioned that the Texier House Museum is in need of a new picture in the Hall of Mayors for Mayor Jubin. It was mentioned by one of the members that the Mayor should be asked when he comes to the meeting to swear in all new members.

### **VICE CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

No Report

### **LIAISON REPORT – P. Fischer**

Liaison's Report included the following:

1. Benches for Outdoor Patio: On order. Both need to be anchored to avoid loss during bad storms.
2. Alarms at the Texier House: being looked into by the Borough.
3. Historical Website/Digital Archive: Is being discussed with Administration. This is needed to better organize all materials and documents and improve access to them. Jim D'Amato (Borough Administrator) has been reviewing various videos of historical value. He is not finding any problems and is leaning towards permitting these videos to be uploaded and made available to the public.
4. Bylaws: sent to Paul; expectation is that Paul and Christine (former liaison and Council President) will finalize the Council's review of this so that we can move forward with a couple of suggested changes.
5. Fob Keys: Being looked into by the Borough Administration.

### **PROJECTS/NEW BUSINESS**

**Committee Members Introductions Roundtable:** All members present provided a little background, where in Watchung they live and how long they have lived in the borough. All of them are excited to be aboard; lots to be done!!

#### **Digitalization of Photos/Scrapbooks:**

Need to speak to the town and vendors about how to most cost effectively and methodically get this done. Pote suggested that a prioritization of pictures, scrapbooks, etc. has to be done first.

**School Display Updates:**

Someone needs to volunteer to be present at the Texier House for Helena Ruta as she completes the school display project.

**Interview with Bruce Ryno:**

Need someone to assist with a pre-interview.

**Historical Website Discussion:**

The website needs to be totally operational, so that content can be organized online and made accessible to the public. Bob Mayer stated that we have the most to offer in terms of content, but we need to make this material available to the public; this website has to be up and running.

**Videos on Tiby Wotherspoon:**

Steve reviewed the three VHS tapes that were given to him, relating to Tiby Wotherspoon and the Slocum Disaster. Only one of the tapes is of value; it is a complete History Channel recording that does an excellent job of describing the Slocum Disaster. Among the interviewees was Tiby Wotherspoon, who was only a baby at the time of the disaster. She was the youngest person saved, and was the last remaining survivor when she passed away at 100 (the only other person who was alive when Tibby was 100, was another woman who lived to be 109 years old, before her death 4 months before Tibby).

**Centennial Celebration:** Everyone agrees that the Borough's centennial will be here before we know it.

**Emergency Preparedness Seminar:** Pote attended state-sponsored disaster planning and response seminar that discussed the availability of knowledgeable resources to enable the Watchung Historical Committee to take initial steps towards implementing an "Artifact Assessment Program", a first step in becoming better prepared to prioritize, prevent and/or minimize damage to priceless artifacts at the Texier House. Steve will meet with representatives from the New Jersey Association of Museums who sponsored this course taken by Pote.

**Loose Ends/Other****Oath of Office – Mayor Jubin**

During the meeting, Mayor Ron Jubin joined the group to swear in all members of the Historical Committee. He agreed that something needs to be done about lengthening the number of years that a committee member "signs up for". This, so that there is more stability on the committee and it helps to ensure that experienced members remain on the committee.

**Publicity for Open Houses** – Ideas for members of the community to supplement Open Houses (with Rescue Squad, fire Department, Boy Scouts, professional athletes, e.g., Anthony Volpe, Laura Prepon, Authors) in order to increase resident presence at the Texier House.

**School Relationships** – Terri Pawlak discussed the efforts that high schools make to encourage community service among their students. Terri was aware, for instance, of the work that Pingry does (ISP Mentor Interest Program). It might be too late for this school year, but this is a great resource for the Historical Committee to use. The key is to continuously update a “projects list” that can be aligned with the skills and availability of students. This project list would be made available to possibly guidance counselors, who can mediate between students and the Historical Committee.

The owner of 241 Valley Drive (Jean Briski) wanted to know the history of her home. Don Monetti said he would reach out to her and see if he can help.

Following this meeting, Chris will provide a quick “Open House Protocol” tour to introduce what occurs when Historical Committee members are giving tours.

**Open House Schedule:**

Vander Fliet provided the following open house dates through September:

**May 7<sup>th</sup>**

**May 21<sup>st</sup>**

**May 29<sup>th</sup>**

**June 4<sup>th</sup>**

**July 16<sup>th</sup>**

**August 20<sup>th</sup>**

**September 17<sup>th</sup>**

**PUBLIC PORTION**

There were no comments from the public.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.** At which time a subset of the committee was taken throughout the first floor to get a quick, initial understanding of the flow of rooms and general content in each. More detailed training will be provided over the next several months.

Submitted by: Stephen Pote (Secretary)

**NEXT MEETING: Wednesday May 17th @ 7 pm.**

Attachments:

1. No attachments.