



HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Town of Chilmark

MEETING NOTES - APPROVED

May 15, 2023 (via ZOOM)

Present for the Historical Commission and attending the Zoom meeting were Barbara Armstrong - Chair, Jane Slater, John Flender (on Zoom), James (Jim) Malkin and Alison Kisselgof – Administrator. Also in attendance was Laurisa Rich, Lynne Thorpe (on Zoom) and Diane DeBlase (on Zoom).

Lenny Jason and Steve McGhee were not in attendance.

The meeting came to order at 3:02 PM.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION ITEM INVENTORY: Barbara said that she was considering hiring someone to conduct an inventory of Town's historical items. She would like to have an Excel spreadsheet to reference. There was a brief discussion about past efforts to establish an inventory. Although an inventory has been discussed before and there were even some volunteers to conduct the work, no action had been taken.

Barbara said that the inventory should include a description of the item, a picture and where it is stored. She also thought that the inventory could eventually be made available online for the public. Alison offered that the Historical Commission budget had funds available up to \$1000 unspent. Jane supported the idea and made a motion to hire someone to do an inventory and Jim seconded it. Jane added that a second part of the motion would be to use the money in the budget first and then request Community Preservation Act funds if needed. The motion passed by unanimous vote (Steve McGhee was not present at the time of this vote). Jane suggested talking to Tim about who may be available to perform the inventory. There was a brief discussion about some of the items that should be included and where items are located. Barbara said that she already started a list of items.

Barbara said that she was contacted by a reporter from the Vineyard Gazette who wanted to write a story about Chilmark's historical items after reading the Historical Commission's annual report. She asked if Jane could also be present for the interview and Jane agreed.

Alison asked if the pictures in her office would be part of inventory. Barbara replied that all items including pictures could be inventoried. Barbara said that this would also be an opportunity to get rid of any items if unneeded.

CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE CEMETERY COMMISSION ~ OTHER CHILMARK CEMETERIES:

Laurisa Rich from the Cemetery Commission joined the meeting.

Jane first thanked Laurisa for following up with the Nomans Land cemetery and the reinternment of graves, which was discussed at the January meeting. There was a brief discussion about how graves were determined to be Native American. Jane said that there is no written history of Wampanoag graves on Nomans.

Laurisa said that she and Judy Flanders went through the file cabinets in the town hall that contained both historic and cemetery files. They found some files in reference to the Nomans cemetery and other Chilmark cemeteries. One of the files contained a handwritten documentation thought to be written by Harriette Otteson. Laurisa requested some help deciphering what it says and also other files found. Jane offered to assist her.



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Laurisa mentioned that the Cemetery Commission would like to digitize the Abel's Hill graves so that it could be accessed online for ancestry purposes.

Laurisa said that there were no modern graves registered with the Board of Health in Chilmark. She mentioned that a list of modern graves, if any were found, could be used to prevent graves from mistakenly being dug up and also to help rule out foul play if bones were found.

Laurisa also said that photographs of Nomans cemetery were found in the file cabinets, which were thought to be taken by Allan Keith. She was looking for another set of photos taken by Tim Rich that have not been found yet. Laurisa asked if the Historical Commission might have them in their files. Alison had looked in the files and did not find them.

Jane said that there was a lot of history that Harriette wrote over the years and she had contacted the family to ask if her records could be donated to the town. Although the family agreed, the records have not been received to date. Jane mentioned that it would be worth contacting the family again about the records.

Laurisa recounted her communication with the Mass Fish & Game about the Nomans cemetery. She wondered if it was worth following up about this issue. Jane & Jim both felt that the topic should be concluded. Jane mentioned that the issue wasn't within the Historical Commission's purview but that the Cemetery Commission could continue to investigate if they wished. Jane made a motion for the Historical Commission to discontinue investigating the reinternment of Nomans graves and Jim seconded. Jim, Jane and Barbara voted aye. John did not offer a vote. He said that he wrote a long memorandum of his visits to Nomans and asked if it was found. Barbara answered that she did find his memo. John mentioned that this was all he would be able to offer on the topic.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION PURVIEW DISCUSSION: Barbara said that she has been approached by residents about various topics including stone walls and wasn't sure if the Historical Commission should be involved. Barbara went on to say that she researched online to locate guidelines for the Commission to follow but only found a mention of the Commission in regards to demolition of historical buildings.

Jim offered that the Historical Commission's involvement with stone walls was to repair them in the center of town. Alison said that the Site Review Committee has oversight for projects involving stone walls along the roadside and has advised residents on the bylaw regarding stone walls.

Barbara asked about past referrals of alterations of historical houses to the Commission. She wondered if the new Building Inspector would continue to refer these projects to the Commission and what the Commission's role was in these project. Jane explained that the Commission would look at the projects and make non-binding recommendations to the owners.

MEMBERSHIP & CPC REPRESENTATIVE DISCUSSION: Barbara said that Steve McGhee has offered his resignation from the Commission and therefore a new member was needed. She asked how the Commission could advertise for this. Alison offered that the town columns in the newspapers could include the information. Barbara asked if Alison could reach out to the column writers with this information.

Barbara asked about the Community Preservation Commission representative from the Historical Commission. Jane said that she was the current representative and that she would continue in the role.



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APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: Barbara had some syntax corrections to the draft minutes from 12/5/22. Alison had not sent the minutes from this meeting out to the whole Commission so it was decided that these minutes would be voted on at the next meeting.

There was a sentence that Barbara felt needed to be worded differently in the 1/9/23 draft minutes. Alison updated the sentence as suggested. A motion was made to accept the 1/9/23 draft minutes as amended. The motion was seconded and passed by unanimous approval.

OTHER TOPICS: Dilly joined the meeting at about 3:10 PM to let us know that John was having trouble logging into the meeting since the link that was emailed was incorrect. Alison emailed him at that time with the correct link so he could join the meeting. John joined the meeting at 3:12 PM.

Lynne Thorpe introduced herself as MV Signs: Then & Now producer and described her organization's goals. She was hoping to get history of Look family. Jane offered some her recollection of the Look family. Laurisa also offered to give some information about the Mayhew family.

Lynne described a program that she is working on with MV Signs: Then & Now that proposes an auto tour with stops in Chilmark related to the history of the sign language community. Alison shared the brochure on the screen. The proposed stops on the tour would include plaques with historic information about the site. There was a brief discussion about the original location of the town hall and a plaque that already exists at the site. The Historical Commission members did not support the idea of singling out those of the deaf community and did not support this proposed tour.

DOCUMENTS:

12/5/22 and 1/9/23 Draft Minutes

MV Signs: Then & Now auto tour brochure

NEXT POSSIBLE MEETING: TBD

With no further business to conduct the meeting adjourned at 3:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Alison Kisselgof, Board Administrator.