

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, August 17, 2021 Via Remote Participation--GoToMeeting

Members Present Remotely: Chairman Bob Janes; Dot Cavanaugh; Jen Conway; Elisa Grammer, via GoToMeeting. Also present, G.A.R. Library Director Corinn Flaherty

Archives & historical materials—preserving, digitizing, etc

The Committee discussed digitizing historic documents. Ms. Grammer developed a digital collection of Annual Town Reports from around 1900 forward and Ms. Flaherty said that she has looked into the cost of taking that and having it professionally digitized and added to the Annual Town Report collection already on the library website.

Other priority items for digitizing include old Annual Town Reports prior to the 1880s, a couple of copies of which are in the archives room in the basement; Adelaide Janes' scrapbooks of clippings about West Newbury dating from around the 1970s; other very old documents, and large aerial photos of Town from the 1960s.

Commission Chair Janes, who also serves on the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), said that it is too late to seek CPC funds for Fall Town Meeting. Ms. Flaherty noted that former Town Clerk Mike McCarron said that CARES Act funding may also be available to fund digitizing Town records.

The Commission agreed with Ms. Flaherty's suggestion that she use library funds to have the more recent Annual Town Reports digitized. The Commission also agreed to go through a set of older Annual Town Reports to be sure it is complete and then provide that to the library to obtain a cost for digitization. This would be the next project, and CPC funding could be sought at Spring Town Meeting.

It was also agreed that Commission members will do a tour of the basement with Ms. Flaherty.

Ms. Cavanaugh and Ms. Grammer noted that enormous numbers of extra copies of Annual Town Reports are in the "dungeon" and archives parts of the basement, and in the Clerk's office. The Historical Commission would like to try to sell as many as possible and throw out the rest, keeping just a few hard copies for each year. Also, Ms. Grammer said that old case reporter law books in the dungeon will never be used and should be thrown out because legal research is now done online.

Website—adding links to bicentennial movies, etc

Ms. Grammer reported that she has been in touch with the Cable Advisory Committee and proposed to promote the three movies that Committee had made for the Town Bicentennial by putting them on the Historical Commission website on a new subpage for WN historical videos. The Julian Steele video could also be put there, as well as the movie about the Almshouse Cemetery. The new page could have a Town notice and email blast.

By unanimous roll call vote the Commission agreed to the new webpage. Ms. Grammer will set it up and seek comment and make any modifications before it is advertised.

Ms. Flaherty said that the video collection could also go on the library website. *It was agreed that once any comments, corrections were made to the Historical Commission webpage, we would share that with the library.*

Cemeteries—Almshouse, others

Almshouse Cemetery

Ms. Conway and Ms. Cavanaugh suggested that the draft Almshouse Cemetery story refer to those in the Almshouse as residents rather than “inmates.” *With that change, the Commission approved the draft story.* The Commission suggested that the story and the movie come out in September. Mr. Janes and Ms. Conway suggested that Ms. Grammer contact our local newspaper reporter Jen Solis to see if this could be in the *Newburyport Daily News*.

Ms. Grammer will revise the story and contact Ms. Solis.

Mr. Janes raised the possibility of doing a radar scan in the Almshouse Cemetery to see where graves are located and how many were buried there. He noted that such a scan had been done in part of the Bridge Street Cemetery. Ms. Conway said that she had researched potential grant funding for this, but it would be available only if the cemetery were on the State Historic Register. Ms. Grammer said that she believed she’d come across an almshouse cemetery on the state register and Ms. Flaherty suggested it might be Tewksbury. *It was agreed that the Almshouse Cemetery might be a candidate for the upcoming Historic Sites Survey.*

CPC Funding for Town Cemeteries

Mr. Janes said that he contacted various representatives of privately owned Town cemeteries with the idea that there might be CPC money to restore stones and maintain records. He said that those he first contacted expressed some interest, but then a representative of one cemetery, purporting to speak for them all, stated that they had no interest whatsoever in Historical Commission or CPC help.

Mr. Janes said he will confine his efforts to veteran graves.

Items if any for Fall Town Meeting

None.

Historic Sites Survey

Ms. Conway said that the Massachusetts Historical Commission’s (MHC’s) work has been delayed by COVID. It now appears that MHC will expect a letter of intent regarding our Phase III Historic Sites Survey in early to mid November. The Commission discussed potential places to include, such

as old homes that are not accessible from the road and the Almsouse Cemetery and the Middle Street Bridge.

With regard to the Middle Street Bridge, Ms. Grammer noted that she had submitted her individual Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act comments about the history of bridge and asked that they consider the history and the alternative of bridge repair as opposed to demolition and construction of a new bridge. She said that now that Newburyport has declined to fund its share of bridge rebuilding costs, it's unclear what the future will be for the bridge and at least we could "preserve" it in the form of a Historic Sites Survey.

It was agreed that the Commission members will make a list of potential places to be included in the survey and send that list to Ms. Conway.

Monthly stories

By unanimous roll call vote the Commission approved the draft monthly story about Rocks Bridge and the Almsouse Cemetery, as revised.

Ms. Grammer noted that additional stories for this year might cover the Central School and Main Street at Pipestave Hill, where the road was cut down. Ms. Grammer said that next year, the Commission might consider a hard copy book of the stories. She also noted that next year's stories could be about West Newbury soldiers and sailors if Mr. Janes could come up with 12 names.

Gift of Map

Ms. Grammer raised Kelly Scott's proposed donation of a framed 1856 map obtained from the estate of Bob Lovejoy. *The Commission, which has statutory authority to accept such donations, is interested. It was agreed that a first step is to determine the dimensions, and Ms. Grammer will ask Ms. Scott about this.*

Other Matters

Meeting with Select Board

The Commission agreed to ask for a meeting with the Select Board shortly after Fall Town Meeting. Items for discussion would include:

- Declaration of the law books and extra Annual Town Reports in the basement as surplus so that they can be sold or disposed of.
- Agreement to display the 1856 map in some to-be-proposed Town place
- Notice that the Historical Commission has voted to identify Town cemeteries as historically significant.

Mr. Janes asked, with regard to the Town cemeteries as historically significant, whether private properties can be included. Ms. Grammer noted that [three privately-owned churches in Town have already been deemed historically significant](#) by the Historical Commission. Being on the list imposes no obligation on the property or the property owner, but does increase the chances of getting CPC

funding if desired. It is a policy call whether the Town would want to extend CPC funding to private property, but it has been done elsewhere. Being on the list provides some status and potential protection from state or municipal actions inconsistent with preservation.

Minutes

By unanimous roll call vote the Commission approved the minutes of June 15, 2021.

Adjournment

The Commission adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Meeting Documents

Draft Minute Histories

2005 report on archiving historic documents

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer