

Minutes of Meeting September 16, 2015

Location: Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, 2636 Kingstown Rd, Kingston.

In attendance: Pegee Malcolm, Judy Fardig, Alan Clarke, Charlotte Taylor, Bob Butler, Evelyn Wheeler, Alex LaForce, Michael Laferriere, Rick Whitesell and Jennifer Galpern (RIHS).

Also in attendance: Cindy Corkum, Paul Hagist, Jay Waller, Caitlyn Picard, Morgan Wynes, Charlene Butler and Dave M.

Excused absences: Edna Kent, Sally Small, David Bell, Dory Wagner and Roger Guillemette.

Meeting called to order at 7:02 pm by Pegee Malcolm

- Visitors Morgan and Caitlyn appeared before the Commission to notify them of their intent to conduct a paranormal investigation of the Elder Ballou cemetery in Cumberland some time before the end of October. They will remove any equipment before leaving the cemetery. The Commission was in agreement that they had no issues with the plan. Rick Whitesell will contact the cemetery's caretaker.

- Introduction of Draft Meeting Minutes from June 17, 2015

Judy made a motion, seconded by Bob, to accept the Draft Minutes. The Minutes were unanimously approved.

- Commissioner Updates were submitted to Pegee prior to the meeting.

- Cemeteries Damaged

Pegee reported that a student crashed into a cemetery near the entrance of CCRI in Lincoln. A stone pillar and a slate headstone were damaged. There is a dispute as to whose insurance should be responsible. Also, there was damage from the August 4 storm in a cemetery in front of the DMV. The question was asked, does the state have insurance for these situations?

There are still approximately 15 cemeteries in Warwick with downed trees and large branches caused by that same storm. Pegee has tried to get volunteers with chainsaws to clean up the mess by offering the trees for firewood.

- State Institution Cemetery

Charlotte reported that work continues to correct the erosion that caused headstones to topple into the bottom of the ravine.

Pegee noted that prior to the August 4 storm a Boy Scout Troop cleaned a section of the cemetery thoroughly. She would like to see that group retained for future cleanups. Previous efforts to get ACI inmates or students from the Boys Training School to help with cemetery cleanups on state property were unsuccessful.

- Historic Cemetery Signs

Pegee was asked by Mike Hebert if all of the signs have been picked up from the sign shop.

- GPS Update

Evelyn reports that the list of cemeteries left to find/confirm is the same as last time. Greg Bonynge will continue work on the list over the winter. Gloucester and the Scituate Reservoir areas need more work. Evelyn will be going with various people to help get the final GPS readings.

- Website Update

Michael reports that the Facebook page has had additional activity lately and there are now over 1,000 "Likes". There are over 2,700 cemeteries with GPS readings. He will coordinate with John Sterling and Evelyn Wheeler to get an accurate number.

The conversation about cemetery ownership continues on Facebook. Evelyn noted that a lawyer explained that descendants can own a cemetery except if it is part of somebody's parcel of land, then it belongs to the property owner. A right-of-way may be deeded but if not, you may not gain access without the owner's permission.

- Met School Update

Evelyn was trying to organize a cleanup at Oakland cemetery with about 50 interested students but she didn't hear back from Santa (the contact at the school). It was expected that the students would begin working on a project for Ed Robinson in Foster this fall.

- Governor's Medallion Update

Judy received a phone call from Mike at DOT who found the design at the State Archives. He sent her the dimensions and now she can take them to the foundry. Rep. Malik will present the project to the General Assembly when they re-convene. Judy is hoping for options to keep the cost down.

- There was a discussion about the efforts of a volunteer who has been probing and digging for his ancestor's buried headstones at various cemeteries throughout the state. Questions have also been brought up whether what he is calling burials are actually burials.

- Commission Vacancies/Re-appointments

Henry Duquette resigned and will be replaced by Betty Mencucci. Rick also had previously announced his intention to resign. Several others need to have their appointments renewed. The governor's office explained that they cannot make the appointments and re-appointments at this time and will get to it when they can. In the meanwhile, Rick will remain until the issue is resolved.

Charlotte made a motion, seconded by Judy to nominate Pegee stay as Vice-Chair. All were in favor.

Evelyn made a motion, seconded by Bob, to nominate Alan Clarke to step in as Vice-Chair. All were in favor.

- Oaklawn School for Girls

Research is being conducted to locate the cemetery that had been used for the burial of students from the state's girls' training school. The state had sold the property to the city of Cranston but what became of the burials is unknown. An aerial map may narrow down the location of the plot. Jennifer from RIHS Library will check a couple of sources that she thought might be helpful.

- Pegee reports that the RIACHC received a letter from Smith's Castle expressing a serious concern about NK 043, located behind their property from which visitors are being chased away by the abutting property owner. The letter states that there is a right-of-way to the cemetery on the deed. At this time the recommendation is that descendants who wish to visit this cemetery travel with a police escort and a copy of the deed stating the right-of-way.
- The 2016 Statewide Historic Preservation Conference will be held in North Kingstown in April.
- Handbook Update

The update is not yet on the state's website. Judy reported that she personally distributed copies of the handbook to town officials in Warren and will do the same for Barrington and Bristol. Evelyn reports that Greg Bonyngue does not want the unconfirmed cemeteries included in any distribution at this time.

Member Comments/Updates were reported to Pegee via email but additions are reported below:

The Warwick Historical Society received a donation of helpful historical information and research from the collection of Elsie Williams, a descendant of Roger Williams.

Pegee reports receiving a phone call in regards to Oak Hill Cemetery on Rathbun St. (Woonsocket). The woman planted flowers which were removed from her ancestor's grave and when she attempted to cut the overgrown grass herself she was prevented from doing so.

The next meeting will be November 18, 2015 at the Rhode Island Veteran's Cemetery in Exeter.

Meeting adjourned at 8:47pm on a motion by Michael, seconded by Charlotte.

Respectfully Submitted by Maureen Buffi, Secretary