

Draft

NEXT MEETING – Tuesday, February 10, 2015

Minutes, Board Meeting, Alexandria Historical Society

November 11, 2014

President Debbie Ackerman called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. at the Alexandria Black History Museum. Other members present were Audrey Davis, Tal Day, Ted Pulliam, Jackie Cohan, Sarah Coster, Linda Greenberg, Dennis Hensley, Jim Mackay, Mark Whatford, and Helen Wirka.

Approval of Board Minutes: The Board approved the minutes of the October meeting with a change.

BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

Vice President: Davis reported that she was working on a program for March 2015 that would link with a French and Indian War event at the Carlyle House. She also said that Whatford had suggested Jay Roberts as a speaker for May. Roberts is the author of *River to Rails: A Guidebook to Historical Markers in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia*. He would talk on some aspect of the Old Town historical markers, such as markers that are missing or that are incorrect.

Treasurer: Day earlier circulated to the Board by email copies of the Treasurer's report showing the Society's cash flows from July 1, 2014 through October 31, 2014; the Society's banking and savings account balances as of September 30, 2014; and asset allocation as of November 11, 2014 (attached). Membership dues for the period equaled almost \$2,600 and exceeded cash outflow by \$993.28.

Day also circulated copies the AHS 2014-15 Budget Categories Preliminary Estimates (attached). He reported that he had not changed the previous budget categories in part because of uncertainty concerning whether the Society would charge for future lectures.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Membership: Whatford, Hensley, and Day recently met with former Treasurer and website manager Lisa Adamo to discuss the membership categories and membership figures as recorded by website operator Wild Apricot. Hensley reported that Adamo had gone through the membership categories that Wild Apricot used and that it was evident that she had spent a large amount of time working with the website operator. Hensley also indicated that Wild Apricot had the capability to do numerous things related to membership, but he was uncertain whether the Society needed that much capability. In particular, he questioned whether we needed all the categories Wild Apricot had that our members could be placed into, which could be somewhat confusing. Whatford pointed out that we were paying \$500 a year to manage less than 200 names. Day suggested that the categories that we need may be fewer than the ones Wild Apricot

has available. Hensley suggested that the Board might want to work with Wild Apricot to reduce the categories.

Whatford asked how far back the Board should go in contacting people whose memberships have lapsed. Hensley earlier had circulated to Board members by email spread sheets showing members whose memberships had lapsed as of July 1, 2013 and as of July 1, 2014 (attached). In a following discussion about lapsed members, it was uncertain whether reminders about renewing memberships sent by email by Wild Apricot actually had reached their intended recipients.

Ackerman and Greenberg volunteered to call those on the list of memberships lapsed by July 2013 to determine whether they would renew their memberships. Hensley earlier also had circulated by email a fund-raising letter. He and Whatford agreed to revise the letter so that it was only one page long and add a paragraph asking those members whose memberships had lapsed as of July 2014 to renew. The letter also would invite members to monitor the AHS website for any future changes in Society practices. Hensley and Whatford planned to send a hardcopy of the letter to members and recently lapsed members by December 1.

It was generally agreed that the membership year would be changed from March 31-April 1 to July 1-June 30 to coincide with the fiscal year. Wirka pointed out that memberships of those who had joined during the period April 1-June 30, 2014 should extend until July 1, 2015. It was agreed that this extension was appropriate.

Future Nature of the Society: Hensley opened a discussion on the future nature of the Society. He set out two models. One was the charity model in which membership as a source of funding would be eliminated and other types of fund raising would be substituted in order to support free events and services. The second was the membership model in which membership fees would be relied on as the principal source of funding and admission would be charged for lectures to enhance the value of membership. He then proposed to retain the membership model with modifications. (See the attached presentation outline.)

Modifications he suggested included increasing the value of membership by such means as expanding the categories of memberships, possibly by establishing premium levels of membership and subcategories of members who were interested in a particular historical subject or era, and expanding the offerings to members by adding private home tours, tie-ins with museum exhibits, and possibly other offerings. He also suggested recruiting corporate members who might advertise the Society. Whatford suggested having a corporate or other sponsor support a lecture or a series of lectures and having an exclusive members' night to preview a new exhibit in one of the local museums. Hensley suggested charging non-members for lectures and making it easy at lectures for someone to become a new member. Whatford questioned how the Society would use money obtained by charging. Hensley said the additional revenue might be used to offer free things for the community at large or for hiring a Society staff. Other suggestions and comments were discussed. Hensley mentioned that it would be necessary for the Board to reach a decision in time to give members adequate notice of any changes.

When questioned, Mackay said that wine had been served at a recent Lyceum lecture sponsored by another organization. He noted that it was the responsibility of the renter of the Lyceum to determine whether to serve alcohol and whether to purchase a \$55 banquet license.

Ackerman suggested establishing a committee to meet between now and the February Board meeting to develop a proposal on the future of the Society. The proposal would be circulated to Board members sufficiently in advance of the February meeting for the members to give it thoughtful review. Wirka, Coster, Whatford, and Hensley volunteered to serve on the committee. Ackerman appointed them as the committee.

The Chronicle: Greenberg reported that she planned to mail *The Chronicle* by bulk mail, which required 200 addressees. She had only about 170 and requested suggestions for the other 30. Whatford suggested adding the mayor and city council. Greenberg said she planned to mail *The Chronicle* by the end of the week.

Newsletter/Flyer: Cohan reported that she had mailed about 40 hardcopies of the last newsletter. She expected that to change as membership fluctuates. She indicated she would mail the next newsletter soon after the March speaker was chosen.

Website: Coster reported that on October 19 she had sent an email promoting the Society and the October lecture. She was waiting for selection of future speakers in order to post them on the website and suggested maybe Davis could provide her with a place holder for the March lecture. Her promotional emails went out to all email addresses that Wild Apricot had. She has added the most recent newsletter to the site but has had trouble with a recent lecture recording. She said that there had been 264 new visitations to the site over the last month, which was about average.

Publicity: Wirka and Mackay reported on publicity activities. Wirka reported that she had learned that the *Alexandria Times* had a circulation of 19,311 in 12 zip codes (including some in Arlington), and 155 street corner boxes. *The Gazette Packet* had a circulation of about 10,100 in seven zip codes. She had not yet obtained (?) the circulation for the *Old Town Crier*. Mackay suggested that in order to reach new members, it likely would be necessary to spend money for newspaper advertising. At a minimum, advertising should be tried a few times to see if it was worthwhile. He also said that locating places to site banners and sandwich boards was difficult because of city regulations. In addition, he suggested using signs and banners that allowed the date to be changed as appropriate to advertise variously scheduled events such as lectures.

Adult History Awards: Ackerman reported that she had talked with Julie Randle, who said that she had been working with Lance Mallamo on the solicitation of nominations for the adult history award winner and that he would send the solicitation. She said she was planning to have a past winner as speaker. Coster said there was a list of past winners on the website.

Student History Awards: Ackerman reported that she had made contact with history teachers at the four schools and given them the criteria and procedures for nominating a student. She hoped to line up a former winner as a speaker.

OLD BUSINESS

New AHS Brochure: Greenberg circulated at the meeting a draft of the text of a new brochure (attached) and reported that she had discussed it earlier with Mackay. Ackerman wondered whether the draft text would all fit in the brochure. Greenberg and Mackay thought it would. They also suggested using a more interesting photo on the cover than the current one of the Carlyle House and using more interesting images throughout the brochure, such as the 1814 cartoon of Johnny Bull and a photo of Colonel Ellsworth. Mackay suggested printing brochures containing different photos or maybe changing photos each year.

Whatford asked whether the printer of the brochure also could produce a small display box, made of cardboard or similar material, to hold the brochures and be set out in places like libraries. Greenberg thought that might be possible. She also said she could not finalize the brochure until more was known about the Society's plans for the future. Hensley questioned what would happen if the brochure was printed with certain cost levels for different memberships and they later changed. It generally was thought that the brochures could be reprinted or an insert could be produced and inserted.

Powerpoint Projector: Day reported that he had identified general criteria for a suitable projector but had not yet adequately reviewed different available projectors. He believes an adequate projector can be obtained for under \$500 and one with more capability might cost \$600-\$650. He would report in more detail at a later meeting.

Non-profit Bulk Mailing: Whatford reported that the cost of a bulk mailing would be approximately seven cents per postcard. It was generally agreed that there would be three mailings advertising lectures before each of the lectures in March, May, and June. The mailings would be sent to the 22314 zip code. A discussion was held concerning how the Board would determine whether a mailing had been successful in attracting attendees. Wirka suggested that if the Board agreed to charge a fee for lectures, someone not a member could bring the postcard and get in free.

AHS Movies: Davis suggested that the Society show a film in June rather than sponsor a lecture then. She reported that rentals for films cost around \$200-\$300 and suggested that the Board might find a donor who would pay the rental cost.

NEW BUSINESS

Lee-Fendall Walking Tour: Ackerman reported that she recently had been on a walking tour of Lee family homes in Alexandria led by the Lee-Fendall House director John Christiansen. She said the tour focused on the Lees and the War of 1812 and was excellent.

Resignation: Pulliam announced that he is resigning as the Board Secretary after completing the minutes of tonight's meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ted Pulliam, Secretary