

## OAKLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

### —MINUTES—

#### REGULAR MEETING MAY 3, 2022

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The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm for the examination of a wonderful gift: an 1857 Oakland County map!

**Roll call:** Rosie Richardson, Stephanie Suszek, Dave Walls, Dave Decker, Carol Egbo, Richard Stamps

Motion made by Stamps to approve minutes from April 5, 2022, seconded by Walls and Richardson, unanimously **approved**.

#### Old Business

- **Replacement for Melinda**

New Member: Stamps saw Ruth DuFresne and she seems enthusiastic about the open position, but they didn't have much chance to chat; Decker was unable to reach her today, but will try to touch base tonight or tomorrow morning. **Decker will help her access necessary application forms.**

Treasurer: we don't collect much money, so for now leave this position open.

- **Certificates of Thanks for Melissa and Melinda**

Certificate template has been created with a space for Dave Coulter's signature; **Stamps to seek him out.**

- **Archiving OCHC Minutes**

**Suszek to send approved minutes** since January to Haley and cc JoAnne

- **At Risk Properties**

There wasn't time for Craft to request each area's at-risk properties be added to the At-Risk Properties list at the Oakland County History Coalition meeting last Thursday. He can bring it up at the June Coalition meeting.

Stamps reported on the old administration building in Rochester that Jerry Murphy has been following. Current status is unknown. RFPs went out but have not yet been opened. Seven proposals were publicly listed on District website. All but one proposal planned to preserve at least part of the historic structure. That proposal (a \$1.21 million bid from a home construction company) calls for demolition; Rochester Community Schools has said they don't *have* to take highest bid, but they haven't committed to preservation. Legacy

committee, which recommended preservation, to meet again at some time. No other bids were above \$1 million.

Decker suggests the At-Risk Properties list also include the status of the at-risk properties, not just locations and history.

- **Tax Millage Proposal SB 653** - “Millage Group” (Charles Wright, Pastor Jones Welcome Baptist, DHM, Mike McGuiness)

Stamps attended the April 26 millage group meeting regarding the proposed senate bill (SB 653). The requirement of a population of over 500,000 is okay because it would include all Oakland County, not just specific cities or towns. Mike McGuiness presented the case for an Oakland County history millage to a group that included three representatives from Wayne County and fifteen reps from Oakland County.

If this passes, then how would millage money be disbursed? It would go to county-level authorities who would split it up within the county. Suggestion was made to use it as matching funds to encourage fundraising.

Three subcommittees were formed at April 26 meeting, including one that Jim Craft volunteered for, to describe ways in which a history and culture millage might serve a broader purpose than just the Wayne County-based Detroit Historical Museum and Charles Wright Museum. This subcommittee will work to emphasize history and that Oakland County residents must see the direct benefit in order to get their support for the millage.

**Could OCHC help develop guidelines for the future Oakland County history millage authority to guide dispersal of funds?** Craft’s letter to Pastor Jones suggests a rubric for funds dispersal, based on acquisition and maintenance of historic properties, programming, preservation, and historical resources.

**A follow-up millage group meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday May 20 at 12:00pm.**

It is unclear if SB 653 will make it in November, but the group is pressing forward! **OCHC to work on developing guidelines to be ready if it passes.** It is important to go through the process even if this particular millage does not pass – we can learn from it and try again, if needed.

## **Committee Reports**

- **Visit to County Records Storage** (repository in basement of 1200 building)  
Stamps visited county records storage and found that we *do* have an Archive in Oakland County – it is called Records Retention! A finding guide to what’s there would be helpful. It costs \$15/copy for records except for requests from OCHC. The current Finding Resources Guide indicates that OCHC makes maps and books available in the Oakland County Research Library; however, the library has been disbanded and the maps repository was closed about

5 weeks ago. **Stamps will meet with Joel Eaton to update the OCHC section of the Oakland County Finding Resources Guide** to better reflect reality.

- **Website**

Craft, Decker, and Suszek met with Haley and went through existing OCHC site to discuss reorganization of content based on the framework OCHC has developed.

We need: a solid framework for some of the content, particularly the landing page copy, as well as a brief history of Oakland County. Craft drafted a 1500-word overview and we'll need to bring it forward from 1970 to present; we can refer to previous Oakland County history book for a framework.

OCHC will need to flesh out over time where historic resources are to be found. We are not limited in terms of pages, images, uploads, or bandwidth.

The new calendar feature allows OCHC to approve submitted events and send them to Haley for update on the calendar. We can put a filter on submissions IF there are an overwhelming number coming in, but probably won't need to do this.

Next steps: **go through content one more time, Decker and Suszek to also take a run at the Oakland history overview.** Photo Gallery – ask community members to send in pics of the coolest buildings in their town to update the gallery and make it more interesting! **Decker to bring this up with Coalition.** Egbo suggests we also link to large pages like Rose Twp. that already have this content but wouldn't want to send all of them in. We can also use the gallery to point to places like Springfield and highlight other buildings and collections.

- **Observatory**

Egbo attended Oakland County Parks & Rec funding and finance meeting; she reports that now is not a good time to go to asset management. Should we (Stamps) try to attend a meeting and thank them for supporting history in the parks? Yes, it's a good time to alert new commissioners that history is important. **Stamps to contact Melissa Prowse to see which upcoming meeting would be a good one to attend.**

- **Finding Guide**

The Finding Guide should list and link to resources at various repositories (museums, historical societies, etc.) by topic and document type.

Decker wants to develop research guides – step-by-step guides to conducting local history research for specific types of projects.

Walls has had success going through the CMU digitized newspaper collection to help Helen Jane Peters find many, many pages on Sylvan Lake.

Decker to reach out to Samantha Lawrence at the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen about their finding guides.

**Egbo and Decker to coordinate on historic house research guide and land records for genealogy guide and could send to Fred Miller for use on the Tract Index Record website;** Egbo met Auburn Hills Historical Society archivist, their collection includes Pontiac Twp., too. **We should also reach out to Tyson from Auburn Hills Historical Society.**

- **African American History Update**

**Elizabeth Denison Forth Project:**

Egbo reached out to Veta Smith Tucker, a 1968 graduate of Pontiac Central High School and editor of *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, and both she and historian Tiya Miles have both responded positively. Smith Tucker has the data and will work with Egbo to write for the sign on Elizabeth Denison Forth.

**Freedom Seekers in Oakland County**

Stamps reported that Leslie Pielack of the Birmingham Museum said that more Underground Railroad sites have been located in Birmingham.

National Trust offers \$500k-worth of grants to put places on the National Freedom Trail with grants up to \$5,000 to facilitate that process.

Richardson spoke with Randy Carter about a man who lived in Pontiac in 1948, Joe Colvese, who lived during the Civil War and died at 107. His house still stood until about a year ago. There seems to be a groundswell in African American history discoveries in Oakland County communities lately. Decker heard about African American veterans being employed as farmhands after the Civil War by a white farmer. **Can we develop a list of people and stories that are being told and researched right now?** Egbo has traced Clarkston family of freedom seekers to Canada and back to US. Decker's research led him to Neil Hepburn, a Black man who also went to Canada and then came to Oakland County.

**OCHC to help develop a list of Freedom Seekers in Oakland County**, people who escaped slavery and stayed in Michigan, or who went to Canada and then came back.

**Richardson looked up African Americans who first worked for GM in Pontiac; she has this information and will print it up.** Egbo says Terry Connelly and Tim Dye of Pontiac Transportation Museum would really appreciate having this information, too.

Decker found Arthur Pound, a newspaper man raised in Pontiac, whose home was owned by a "Dr. Silas Paddack." Paddack would bring freedom seekers home and then help send them on their way. Pound gave a talk in 1956, "I Was Born in Paradise," recounting this; it was actually Isaac Paddack, not Silas Paddack. The house once sat where Grace Centers of Hope is currently. Decker found the pamphlet with the talk in it and is now searching for connections between Paddacks and the Oakland County Antislavery Society. Egbo has some

members identified, including Alonso Frost, who lived near Paddacks. *The Signal* and *The Liberator* are both digitized, so they could be good resources. Egbo can follow up on Isaac and Elizabeth Elliott Paddack. Paddack was connected to another published antislavery activist. We may have a shot of getting an Underground Railroad house documented in Pontiac. We need:

1. List of People – Freedom Seekers
2. Places
3. Antislavery Society – also individual abolitionists, families

**How to package and share this information with the public as research is done?** Perhaps a meet and greet, which could be held at a church with historic connections to antislavery movement. A presentation at one of the Coalition meetings to give/get reports on what researchers are finding about the antislavery movement in Oakland County to help facilitate conversation and show people how to do this research.

**Put on next month's agenda: ask Coalition for volunteers to form a study commission on Freedom Seekers in Oakland County.** Leslie Pielack and Egbo are already working toward this; they can bring in Decker soon to talk about sharing resources. OCHC could sponsor a workshop, perhaps on Saturday in the fall, maybe at Birmingham Museum, with a theme of Freedom Seekers in Oakland County.

Walls's ancestor in the Lundy family was an abolitionist – another connection. Decker pointed out importance of looking at churches and women as another way of finding antislavery activity in Oakland County. Check the *Pontiac Gazette* – did the Oakland County Medical Society have some connection to antislavery societies?

- **Essay Contest and Time Capsule**

Stamps shared examples of other groups' essay/photo contests with Richardson.

Richardson put together an introductory letter to go out before schools close for summer, to let them know about the contest and how kids can get started researching and writing this summer to be prepared for the essay contest when school resumes in the fall. Make archive collections available for student research this summer, maybe even the Rochester site where polio vaccine was produced.

Richardson also working on the time capsule idea and identifying the types of things that could be put inside. Filling a new time capsule could be done in conjunction with the opening of an older one; the Oakland History Center has the old Pontiac Central High School time capsule – this might be a perfect time to open it and kick off the essay contest/student time capsule with a big event – **Decker and Richardson to coordinate.**

- **Local History as a Subset of American History**

**Recap on the Poster project:**

Poster installation would happen at Libraries, City/Town Halls, Local Businesses. Topics include Rise of Leisure, Taverns and Mills, Early Settlement, as well as Arsenal of Democracy, which Craft has already drafted.

Suggestion to treat posters with a lacquer spray or similar to make them more durable and maybe even waterproof.

Suszek wondered if OCHC has a process for content and technical editing of things we publish. Stamps suggested bringing in an English or History teacher, or even a newspaper editor for help.

Power Point update:

OCHC members have reviewed the Arsenal of Democracy in Oakland County Power Point that Craft has created (Good job, Jim!!). We'll let Oakland Schools take a look and keep working on the posters and Power Points. Subcommittee of Craft, Richardson, and Suszek to continue vetting and editing content for now, take a look at Arsenal presentation.

- **New Business**

Stamps reports that OCHC is now an official member of the Oakland County Historical Resources.

Stamps noted that under the OCHC Project section on current website, the Completed Projects and Proposed Projects need to be updated and some items removed: We don't need to publish a newsletter; we'll have our own website and content can live online. We will not co-produce a vintage firetruck muster at one of the Oakland County Parks. We will not host a settler picnic event honoring descendants of early pioneers. Continue to evaluate copy on website and pull old items down, put new items up.

**Coalition Discussion:** Part of OCHC's mission is to maintain contacts with local historical organizations. The Oakland County Historical Coalition already does this. So should we start saying Coalition is *part* of OCHC and/or branding it in some way, because it is doing this part of OCHC mission? At the County level, Egbo points out that we have to be careful with wording (probably not "subcommittee" because it was an official ordinance that created OCHC). **Stamps trying to set up meeting with Dave Woodward to ask about our connection with Coalition, wording of relationship, etc.** In the meantime, Decker will keep organizing Coalition meetings.

How does OCHC incorporate the potential power of the Coalition and further the interests of local historical societies? How can the Coalition help OCHC itself? This could become extra important with proposed millage.

We are approaching the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. This would be a major hook for our American-Local history initiatives. Also motivation to bring the 1970 history up to date in time for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Local History projects are great chapters!

**MHPN Conference:** Egbo got goodie bags for both history tours with our OCHC branding on them! And we're in the program as sponsors.

- **Next Time**

What should we do with the new (old) 1857 map? **Decker to reach out to Jeff Krieger re: names of conservators to see how much restoration/cleaning will cost.** Where will we put it? Maybe in a lobby with permanent frame in Board of Commissioners building next to OCHC display. Would it be possible to photograph/scan and digitize?

June 7 Meeting – **Stamps to ask Craft to lead while he is out of town;** meeting to take place at Oakland History Center.

Update from Ruth Dufresne: she is concerned about time commitment of OCHC; we conflict with Oakland Genealogical Society's regular meeting – but OGS takes a break for summer, so Decker invited her to July meeting.

**Next Meeting: June 7, 2022 at Oakland History Center**

**Adjourned at 9:01pm**