

G.A.R. Memorial Hall Board of Trustees

Meeting November 15, 2016

Minutes

National Guard Armory Room B, 50 Skyline Drive, Worcester, Massachusetts

Meeting Began at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Daniel McAuliffe, Michael Baker, Linda Hixon and Timothy Boucher

Guests: Jennifer Beaton, Worcester City Solicitor
William Wallace and Robyn Conroy, Worcester Historical Museum

The minutes of the October 11, 2016 were unanimously approved with one correction.

1. Chairman McAuliffe opened the discussion on the Confederate flags captured during the Civil War battle at New Bern, North Carolina, and the bell from the CSS Albemarle, which are considered "treasured historical items." He asked Jennifer Beaton, representative from the City's legal department, whether these should be put in a trust for posterity.
 - a. Ms. Beaton noted that she had reviewed the Board's trust documents from the 1930s, which were filed by a special act, and found that the trust created was for the preservation and maintenance of records and relics. When the GAR building at 55 Pearl Street was disposed of, several of those relics were put into storage, some at Worcester Historical Museum, although many of those were not itemized or identified.
 - b. Ms. Beaton said the items are already "trust property," and that rather than create a separate trust the best course was to have an item presented before the City Council noting the items are being held in trust by the Board. The process would involve the Department of Public Works, which would contact the City Manager's office for the item to be put on the City Council's agenda. The legal department would then draft the proposed order.
 - c. Chairman McAuliffe noted that he is concerned about the future of the Board, and that this action would put the artifacts on record and keep them safe.
 - d. Ms. Beaton said this action could be taken even if the items are currently on loan to other entities; only a description would be necessary. The items would then be under Board discretion in future. She noted that an inventory list of the items would be helpful but not necessary. Chairman McAuliffe had completed a list of some of the items approximately ten years ago.
 - e. Tim Boucher noted that the plaques in Bull Mansion were supposedly under Board protection, and that when the building was sold the deed may have reflected that fact. He asked if those plaques should be part of the filing with the City Council.

- f. Ms. Beaton said she had not seen the deed from that sale, but explained that those items could be part of that trust. The action by the City Council would put the inventory of the items on record at the City Clerk's office.
2. Trustee Hixon was supposed to update the board on the GAR materials stored in Memorial Auditorium but was unable to gain access, so Trustee Hixon was unable to report on the disposition of the books and documents.
3. Robyn Conroy of Worcester Historical Museum spoke as to the possible storage of those materials in the museum, but noted that she needed to see the items and compare them to the inventory of the items already on loan to the museum. She also said she would have to assess the materials for condition and for the scope of the collection. Ms. Conroy noted that the collection at WHM focuses on Worcester history, but the museum can consider housing documents outside of that scope if it would keep a collection intact. After assessing the items in the Auditorium, Ms. Conroy said that the accession committee of the museum would be informed of her findings and would decide if the items would be accepted on loan. She also noted funds would have to be found for any restoration or archival storage that the materials might need.
 - a. Chairman McAuliffe asked what would happen to any items the museum could not take on loan into its collection. Ms. Conroy said another repository might be willing to take some of the items. She also noted that if some items are moldy or water damaged, they would need to be assessed for possible scanning or photo copying; some items may have to be discarded if they cannot be saved.
 - b. Chairman McAuliffe asked if these items should be put under the GAR trust; WHM Director William Wallace said he thought that would be a good idea.
4. New Business: The disposition and ownership of the Charter of the Sons of Union Veterans of Civil War Willie Grout Camp 25 was discussed.
 - a. Ms. Conroy said she had been contacted in March, 2016, by the SUVCW about the return of the charter, which is currently housed in the museum in archival storage under climate controlled conditions and is available for research purposes.
 - b. Chairman McAuliffe asked who owned the charter; Mr. Wallace said that he thought it could be under the GAR trusteeship of the materials that are currently in the care of the museum. Mr. Wallace said the charter arrived at the museum under a move that included the Confederate flags, and that it was not included in a second move of 2006 that had a detailed inventory.
 - c. Chairman McAuliffe wondered if the Board was responsible for the charter since it had been housed in the building at 55 Pearl Street; he noted that the document should be preserved and kept safe.
 - d. Trustee Michael Baker asked if the museum knew the provenance of the charter, and questioned the safety of the document if it was released from the museum. Mr. Wallace noted that the charter had been moved from the building at 55 Pearl Street initially because of safety concerns. Ms. Conroy said that the charter had been matted and taped using un-archival processes in the past, a process she would reverse if the museum were allowed.

- e. Mr. Wallace noted the “larger ramifications” of letting the charter out of the safe conditions in the museum, and wondered if the ownership of other GAR artifacts now housed there could also come under question. Chairman McAuliffe said the bell and flags are GAR property, but the charter may be SUV property. Mr. Wallace suggested a complete inventory be taken before a decision was made.
 - f. Trustee Baker moved to table the discussion until the entire board could be present to discuss the matter, and possibly ask for paperwork on the ownership of the document; the board unanimously voted to do so.
5. Chairman McAuliffe informed Mr. Wallace of the GAR plans to possibly raise funds to refurbish and rededicate the General Charles Devens Monument located at the former District Courthouse on Highland and Main Streets in Worcester. Chairman McAuliffe received information that the courthouse is to be sold, and suggested a future meeting with WHM and Preservation Worcester about the monument project. Mr. Wallace said the statue had been moved and had originally been in front of the courthouse, and said he could do research on the history of the monument to try to find ownership of the monument.
 6. Chairman McAuliffe asked Trustee Hixon about the organization of the GAR members’ manual. She said she had read the manual and asked for electronic copies of the documents housed in the manual for editing. Trustee Hixon noted the manual will be helpful for future board members, and she wish she’d seen a copy when she joined the board.
 7. Chairman McAuliffe showed the board members an article in the *Journal of the New Bern Historical Society* on the flags owned by the GAR and currently on display, although he did note that there were some errors in the story. He pointed out that the loan agreement for the flags, currently housed at the Museum of the Albemarle, expires on November 1, 2017, and the loan agreement for the bell, which is housed at the Port O’Plymouth Museum in Plymouth, North Carolina, expires on December 31 of 2021. He said he will visit Tryon Palace, a possible repository for displaying the flags in the future, while he is in South Carolina for the winter.
 8. The board unanimously voted to hold a meeting in December if necessary; the date was tentatively set for December 13, 2016.
 9. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15.