

MANDAN Historical Society

Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday April 12, 2017



Location: Conference Room at Keitu Engineers & Consultants, Inc.

Present: President Robert Porter, Vice President Walt Russell, Secretary Kathye Spilman, MHSoc Director Bob Barr and guests Dustin White-author and Walt Bailey-Director Bismarck Historical Society

Absent: Treasurer William Engelter Open Director Positions (2)

Meeting called to order by President Porter at 5:15 p.m. A quorum of Directors was present.

President suspended the standard meeting agenda and advanced the prior meeting's discussion on establishing a policy to share content of the Society's collection with commercial ventures to accommodate the guests present.

Pediment Publishing/Bismarck Tribune has re-approached the Mandan Historical Society to participate in their third volume of Bismarck-Mandan Memories. Sample contract was previously provided for review. The Society also received a copy of the first volume in the series for examination.

Discussion included weighing pros and cons of the proposed arrangement. Since the Society's collection has already been digitized/scanned, their offer to provide electronic copies of photos used is of no value. Photo credits are given to the Society, and a listing in the front of the book is also included. And a gratis copy of the volume would be provided for the Society's use or sale for every three photos used. Concern remains on diluting the uniqueness of the collection. An additional concern was raised as to loss of control of the images despite assurances to the contrary. If the Society was promised use of all images obtained from the general public, what would prevent the reverse from occurring with our photos and graphics. In the first volume, about 1 in 8 images were from "private" collections. Given this is the third volume, it may be reasonable to expect the new images would be even lower. Bob Porter relayed issues the State Historical Society of North Dakota was having with the arrangement including the time commitment of the part of the SHSND staff as well as enforcing unauthorized use of their images.

Motion to participate in the Pediment Publishing project was made and seconded. Board voted 0-4 to participate. Motion failed.

Secretary was directed to notify their agent of the Board's decision.

President Porter opened the floor to guest Dustin White who asked for an opportunity to speak to the Board. Dustin was the former editor of the Mandan News newspaper. He outlined his intended effort to prepare a comprehensive history on Mandan with an emphasis on photographs of current buildings and features of the area. He wanted to images to be archived on film rather than digital format. He reported his project has grown to include the Bismarck area. He expects to leverage his current collection of hundreds of anecdotes and “color” stories to supplement both a book on the subject as well as a website. While he makes his main income from a small regional newspaper he publishes, this would reportedly ask for financial support via “crowdsourcing.” It was unclear how much of a profit enterprise he was expecting from the project, but he contended that the existing history books for the area were both incomplete and largely inadequate for the period of time starting in about 1970.

He expected to develop both a website featuring the content as well as publishing a hardcover book that he intended to sell “at cost.” He was also expecting to produce a series of short digital movies on historical topics to be posted on the internet. Dustin was asking for access to the Mandan Historical Society’s records and collections, including photographs, in order to complete his project. His expected timeframe was to complete both within about 2 years.

Walt Bailey from the Bismarck Historical Society pointed out that the scope of the project had grown considerably from the recent feature story by a local television station – which contended he was focusing on photo documentation. White indicated that despite his efforts, the television producer did not accurately reflect the scope of his project. Bailey also emphasized the importance of fact checking especially hardcopy historical publications such as books as they tend to be referenced in subsequent research and/or educational programs. White had hoped that the historical societies would assist in that regard.

Secretary Spilman pointed out that with the addition of a webpage format, the project would actually be competing directly against the MHSoc’s website. And while the Society’s website was not currently leveraging page view traffic for ads or monetary gain, it remains an option at any point should the Directors choose to pursue it. Additional discussion recalled the prior request by Pediment Publishing/Bismarck Tribune regarding loss of control/unauthorized duplication of materials. Two other commercialized websites, BisMan Café and the Kevin Kremer’s “Growing up in Mandan” Facebook page were viewed to look how even just these two websites were using/misusing even the current content from the MHSoc’s website. These venues were compared to the current but temporary posting of all MHSoc’s materials on the topic of the Mandan Rodeo to support of a student’s request for a school project relating to a topic of North Dakota history. Concern was also expressed that as all the work to acquire, compile and organize the Society’s collections was done on a voluntary basis, it seems improper for someone else to gain financially from the effort. President Porter stated even the state-funded SHSND had a policy of requiring payment for publications rights to their collection.

The President asked Dustin for any final statements before he left the meeting to allow the Board to discuss his proposal.

Walt Bailey was asked how the Bismarck Historical Society was participating in the project. He reported the organizations had not (yet) been approached by Dustin White.

The Board discussed the proposal at length, acknowledging there is a significant gap in Mandan historical documentation for the most recent 50 years and that Dustin White had shown himself to be a capable writer. Spilman raised the concerns that the Society runs on private memberships and donations, without the aid of governmental dollars. And even the state historical society charges for use both private and commercial use of their collection. Website operators need content to drive traffic to their site to improve their advertising revenues. The Society is meeting its mission of preserving and promoting the history of the city and immediate vicinity via its website and special requests for photos, information and assistance. Concerns expressed by the Board included impacts to the MHSoc website traffic as well as what was deemed an unrealistic timeline and resources to produce movie(s), history book and website as well as a volunteer's time commitment to supervise his access to records. Of additional consideration was his claim that evening the project would be more of a hobby, not intending it as a significant source of income. However, the story in his "Midwestern Scout" website and paper he recounts his new historical research service. Several unique photos posted to the MHSoc website appear in multiple issues of his publication, without even a credit to the source much less compensation for copyrighted materials used in a commercial venture. Several of his historical based articles (such as the Mandan City Hall building) seem to be almost entirely derived from the corresponding featured webpage on the MHSoc's website. Board members were far more supportive of the project when it was narrowly focused on authoring a hardcover book on Mandan's history. Board members agreed the MHSoc should expect the same level of monetary compensation for use of its materials, if offered, as expected by the SHSND for use of their materials in any type of a publication, book, movie or webpage.

Since the time commitment and access to materials would largely fall to Secretary Spilman, the Board voted 3-1 to leave it up to her to decide how much to participate in White's project. However, the Directors did offer their assistance to proof-read or serve as fact checkers for any publications. Spilman is to draft and forward the Board's reply to White, with a review by President Porter before sending the response.

At the President's request, the meeting returned to the standard agenda.

Officers' Reports

Secretary's Report: Minutes from January 18, 2017 meeting were presented. Motion to approve was made, seconded and approved via voice vote.

Treasurer's Report: No report available.

Committee Reports

Buildings & Grounds Committee: Nothing new to report.

Communication & Public Relations Committee: Secretary/Webmaster Spilman reported on several inquiries over the last several months including a student's Mandan Rodeo project.

Donations & Acquisitions Committee: The Civil War Trust forwarded to the Society a collection of photos, including Zalmon Gilbert cabinet cards, of the Sam T. Hill family. Kathye and Bob are working with Sharon Silengo of the SHSND to try to track down information on the family to pair with the photos for a future webpage or display.

Endowment Committee: Nothing new to report.

Grant Committee: Nothing to report.

Nomination Committee: Nothing to report.

Membership Committee: Nothing to report.

Old Business

Pottery Grant: No activity to report.

New Business

The Secretary reported that she had been in contact with the past President of the Bismarck-Mandan Historical and Genealogical Society recently and their organizations was going to officially disband as of June 30, 2017. All of their materials were going to be turned over to the SHSND to be added to its collection.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, July 19, 2017 at 5 p.m. at the Conference Room at Keitu Engineers & Consultants, Inc.

Motion to adjourn at 6:08 p.m. made, seconded and approved via voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathye Spilman
Secretary

Approved: TBD