

Northfield Historical Commission

Northfield MA

September 23, 2021 1:00 (zoom)

Minutes

Attendance: Jacque, McLoughlin, Graveline, Bond, Campbell, Mayshark-Stavely, King. Guests: Rich Holschuh, Elnu Abenaki Tribal Historic Preservation Officer; Misha Storm, Dickinson Memorial Library Director; Eric Gradoia, Historic Preservation at Historic Deerfield, Michael Kline, folklife consultant and oral history collector/trainer.

Call to Order: 1:00 p.m.

Minutes, 8-3-2021: Motion to accept by McLoughlin, seconded by Graveline, passed unanimously.

Introduction: Library Director Misha Storm has a background in art history and library services. She is updating finding aids in the Local History Room at the library and relying on her archival and museum experience to make the library useful to the community as it approaches its 350th year since settlement by Europeans, and as the library prepares for its 125th birthday in 2023 also. Misha plans to do a "house genealogy" for Northfield, which will be a series of brief histories of Northfield buildings highlighting who has lived in or used these places through the years.

Introduction: Michael Kline (working with wife Carrie) produces a podcast, *Talking Across the Lines*. They offer workshops giving alternative ways to do meaningful oral history field research, called "Listening for a Change". The Klines now live in Sunderland after a career in Wheeling West Virginia as folklife consultants. They use music and peoples' stories to elicit more reminiscences from people, to gain a peoples' history and perspective that no one person could write or speak. Michael Kline formerly was a member of the Pioneer Valley Folklore Society, and used to live in Northfield.

Brainstorming an Architectural Tour of Northfield for the 350th: Gradoia is Director of Historic Preservation at Historic Deerfield and is a resident of Northfield. Campbell said that we have time to plan a good tour, select a few houses to highlight; the Beehive with its beehive ovens and dance floor is a good example. A tour might highlight the building, the people associated with it, and any commercial history that building has. Tours might be walking (Main Street), or driving (like the barn tour booklet from the Agricultural Committee). Campbell also mentioned the Collier houses off Orange Road, examples of the homes of early working people which Temple & Sheldon ignored in their Northfield history. Jacque asked what criteria would we be looking for in houses included in a tour? Also, what is no longer there that is significant, like Council Rock? Our goal should be to look and guide others to see Northfield in a different way -- what do we no longer even see, what do we overlook, what is now missing? Campbell said that precontact history and settlement history are important. McLoughlin mentioned that free

people of color lived among a Methodist community on the hill off Gulf Road, not far from Calvin Swan's sawmill and homestead.

What about West Northfield? The train station and King Philip's Hill are there; what about other things still there or now missing? What's the story of Satan's Kingdom? Misha Storm said that newer structures here, 100 years old, would be considered historic in other places across the U.S., they still have history and importance. Graveline said that old trees are called Witness Trees because of all the things they have been witness to over centuries; there are also Witness Structures. Our area has been inhabited for 9000 years; we must give a sense of that at least.

Kline spoke of gathering testimonials from our oldest residents, at their bedsides in care homes if necessary. An archive that preserves history in people's own voices is possible, and we'd find that these people reference the Witness Trees and the Witness Structures. When people talk their experiences freely, we will get the memories and the interpretation, no middleman. Record, archive, index to make it accessible now and later. Hearing 10 older, vulnerable people speak and recording it will "preserve the story that no one voice could tell". Is there a way to include Indigenous voices in this oral history, Bond asked?

Jacque suggested putting people in *places*, as the Brattleboro Words project does. Holschuh mentioned the recently funded series of canal side story walks, audio tours using QR codes, that are a spinoff from the Battlefield grant advisory group, at Great Falls in Montague. McLoughlin said that Google Mymap allows a free version of this, the ability to embed videos into Mymap. Campbell said that cellar holes are great for inspiring stories.

Campbell asked what Gradoia, Holschuh and Kline need from us to help them help us. Who is our audience? Gradoia asked us to brainstorm our most significant thematic subjects relating to Northfield:

- Prehistory
- Geology
- Landscape
- River
- Agriculture
- Education
- Early western settlement
- Small industry
- Mr. Moody
- Transportation (corridors, river, early auto, ferries, railroad)
- Crossings
- Quirky: Northfield sea monster (12' sturgeon)
- Flora, fauna...relating to endangered species

Jacque said the perspective of history as *ongoing and present* is important. How do you know you're in Northfield? The sense of place is so important, and an important objective during the 350th is to lead folks to read their environments, the landscapes, cemeteries, bridges,

structures, where waters meet, cellar holes, the unseen and no longer seen. Human stories help to tie things together. The 350th will provide as many doorways into our past and to our present as possible. History isn't past, and as Holschuh says 'it is all still here'.

King and Campbell will work to whittle down this list and remove overlapping ideas, in preparation for working with Gradoia.

Campbell, McLoughlin, Storm and Gradoia left the meeting at 2:35 p.m.

Updates were tabled until next meeting.

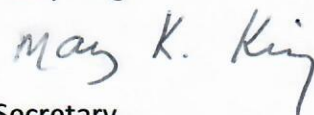
Commission officer elections were tabled until the next meeting.

Unanticipated business: Holschuh inquired about the interpretative panels for the Schell Bridge project. There has been no inclusion of the Abenaki in MassDot's process at all, only notifications. Jacque will alert Jeffrey Shrimpton, MassDot's cultural resource historian.

Adjourned at 2:40, **M:** Bond, **S:** Mayshark-Stavely, unanimous.

Respectfully,

Mary King


Secretary