**MEADOW CITY HISTORIANS**

**REPORT OF THE SECOND QUARTERLY MEETING**

**FEBRUARY 27, 2016**

The meeting convened at 10am in the gallery at Historic Northampton, 46 Bridge Street, was chaired by Nancy Rexford and adjourned at 11:55. There were 32 people in attendance. The agenda was as follows:

10:00 – 10:05 Open meeting, handouts, etc.

10:05 – 10:15 Short tutorial on using the Google Group site

10:15 – 10:45 Check-in (1 minute per person) includes announcements and proposals

10:45 – 11:05 Bruce Laurie presentation

11:05 – 11:25 U Mass Press presentation (Mary Dougherty & Matt Becker)

11:25 – noon Discussion of governance (see below)

12 noon -- Coffee and mingling

**ACTION ITEMS**

The primary legal business was to continue organizing ourselves by discussing bylaws and to choose a temporary Steering Committee to handle MCH business until bylaws are adopted and our first elections can be held.

1. **BYLAWS:**

Draft bylaws were distributed by email to everyone on the mailing list a week before the meeting. The major points covered the bylaws were brought up one by one. We asked for a show of hands for or against and continued discussion when opinion was divided until consensus was reached.

1. **Should our name be Meadow City Historians** – yes, without dissent
2. **Should the criterion for membership be that a person is actively doing research or simply interested in doing research** – answer was interested in doing research, without dissent
3. **Who can vote?** Two extremes were proposed for the sake of discussion:
   1. a strict view in which members had to pay dues and attend at least one meeting in order to be eligible to vote
   2. a relaxed view that whoever was on the mailing list was eligible to vote

Hands were near evenly divided, but in discussion, Matt Villamaino suggested that instead of having MCH dues, that dues-paying membership in Historic Northampton be the criterion for voting eligibility. This met with general approval. No attendance requirement was created.

1. **Steering committee make-up and responsibilities:** These were reviewed and seemed obvious and straightforward. No one offered amendments.
2. **Financial and governance relationship to Historic Northampton:** This was reviewed briefly and again seemed obvious and straightforward. No one offered amendments.
3. **Call for any other issues needing discussion:** No one offered any.

Nancy Rexford will revise the draft bylaws and send them to the Steering Committee.

1. **TEMPORARY STEERING COMMITTEE**

Since we do not yet have bylaws to determine our process, we formed a Temporary Steering Committee to handle MCH business for the remainder of this fiscal year (ending 9/30/16). The following people answered the call for volunteers and will constitute the Temporary Steering Committee:

1. Sara Lennox (Chair)
2. Janet Gross
3. Barbara Pelissier
4. Michael Ryan
5. Matt Villamaino

In addition, Nancy Rexford will revise the bylaws and assist with the transition and Marie Panik will be available for logistical advice.

The job description of the Temporary Steering Committee is as follows:

* Work out the final wording of bylaws for a vote at a subsequent meeting
* Plan the May 21 and August 20 meetings including selecting speakers
* Organize elections for the 2016-17 Steering Committee to be held at the August 20 meeting
* Get affinity groups organized and operating

**PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

1. **TUTORIAL ON USING GOOGLE GROUP**

* Please see the handout emailed with these minutes

1. **CHECK-IN**

* We heard brief updates about the work from members.

1. **PRESENTATIONS**
2. **Bruce Laurie**, retired historian at UMass(<http://www.umass.edu/history/people/faculty/laurie.html>), described how he discovered the history of a famous photograph variously known as *The Scourged Back, Poor Peter,* or *Gordon the Slave.* This photograph, which shows a “contraband” enslaved man with a back severely scarred from whipping, along with two others, were engraved for an article in *Harper’s Weekly* on July 4, 1863, which identified the man as “Gordon” (though his actual name was Peter). While the photographs were authentic, the author invented Gordon’s story in order to present the transformation of an abused slave into a brave soldier. The clue that led Laurie to this story was found in a set of carte-de-visite photographs in Historic Northampton’s collections which contained the other two photographic images engraved for the article.  These carte-de-visite photographs belonged to Civil War soldier Henry S. Gere, who served in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (but never fought in battle) and were donated to the museum by his daughter, Martha Gere Bissell.  Researching letters written by Henry S. Gere (published in the *Hampshire Gazette*) for his book Rebels in Paradise: Sketches of Northampton Abolitionists(2015) as well as letters by a fellow soldier, Marshall Stearns, Laurie discovered their comments about the photographs.  Stearns, the superintendent of the contraband camp in Baton Rouge, was so troubled by the condition of a brutalized enslaved man named Peter who had come into his camp that he took him to a local photographer. The photographer took several images of Peter emphasizing the wounds on his back. The image quickly circulated through the North and the South. It became the most iconic metaphor during the Civil War and long after for the brutality of Southern slavery. Laurie's article will appear in a forthcoming online article of *The Massachusetts Review*.
3. **Mary Dougherty (Director) and Matt Becker (Executive Editor) from U Mass Press** (<https://www.umass.edu/umpress/content/staff> ) discussed a new regional imprint they are developing focused on New England history and culture. After Mary talked about the difference between a university press and a commercial publisher and gave a general overview of the landscape of academic publishing, Matt told us about their new series, Bright Leaf Books, which is intended for a general audience, not just scholars, and will help people of our region understand the region. Authors of this series will read secondary material and synthesize it rather than presenting thesis-driven new scholarship. UMass Press expects the books of the Bright Leaf series to be super high quality, well-written, and really smart. MCH members with an idea for the series should talk to Mary and Matt, and they will also generate ideas themselves and solicit authors to write about them.

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**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

* May 21
* August 20
* November 19

*All are Saturdays, 10-noon*

Minutes compiled by Nancy Rexford and Sara Lennox