

# **Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board**

**Minutes of Meeting—May 4, 2005**

**Rhode Island State Archives**

**337 Westminster Street, Providence**

**Attending: Marie Bennett, Mark Brown, Donna Longo DiMichele, Jonathan Galli, Stephen Grimes, David Maslyn, Marilyn Massaro, and Gwenn Stearn, Coordinator**

**Not attending: Jane Civins, Allison Cywin, Marlene Lopes, and Leonard Panaggio.**

**Also in attendance: Bernard Fishman.**

**Meeting called to order: 10:10 a.m.**

**I Minutes of the meeting of March 2, 2005**

**DiMichele moves to approve the minutes. Maslyn seconds. Approved unanimously.**

**II Speaker: Bernard P. Fishman, Executive Director of the RI Historical Society**

**Fishman, who has been Executive Director for three years, speaks to the crisis that has confronted the Society, including the possibility of its “extinction”. He states that difficulties and needed changes revolve around ensuring a stronger financial foundation, and providing adequate and proper collections care. Greater integration between the Society’s functional areas is also needed. A 25% cut in expenditures has been required, and the budget balanced last year only with the use of special funds. The RIHS library has seen a large personnel turnover, and 40% fewer staff. A reduction in library public hours was instituted to allow staff to concentrate on collections care and description. Reference services have been centralized and the library layout reorganized. A \$75,000 IMLS grant is being used to develop an online catalog, with an additional \$70,000 also raised. The description project will cover the family history collections in the library and museum. Ten times that amount is needed to catalog the whole collection.**

**The RIHS has spent 8 months developing a strategic plan, which is available online. There is now a focus on financial stability and a reorientation towards the Society’s core values and mission. There have been many staffing changes in all the Society’s functional areas and also changes on the Board of Directors. A Director of Education has recently been hired with her current focus being on the reinterpretation of the John Brown House, where physical changes and improvements are occurring. A staff person with conservation training is needed and the graphics department is not yet fully staffed.**

**With respect to newspaper articles, editorials, and letters which have been published about the proposed sale of the Joseph Brown desk, Fishman states that any sales from the holdings would be used to support collections care. \$3 million in collections care and needs have been identified, as well as \$3 million for needed capital repairs. All sales would be placed in an 8 - 10 million dollar dedicated collections care endowment. Over a two-year period the Society's Board had reviewed all possible alternatives before reaching a decision to sell items from the collections, and they continue to seek alternatives. They have made efforts to keep the public informed. A \$750,000 gift has postponed the sales, but only offers a reprieve. The Society's official position is still that the desk will be sold. Another major gift will shortly be announced with its purpose being for capital repairs. Fishman states that he is committed to seeing the RIHS through to stability.**

**Board members receive responses to questions concerning the library, funding, support, education, the collections and collecting.**

### **III Review of draft grant application (National Historical Publications & Records Commission)**

**Stearn had previously distributed copies of a "RIHRAB Grant Project Outline" document. She requests and receives input from members. During the remainder of May, Stearn will prepare the full grant application and budget for submission by the June 1st deadline.**

## **IV Old business**

### **- Status of Board appointments & re-appointments**

**Stearn reports that during March the Secretary of State's Chief of Staff had spoken with the Governor's Chief of Staff about the need to make Board appointments. In April, she wrote another letter to the Governor (copies distributed) that referenced the Board's pending NHPRC grant application, and the Code of Federal Regulation requirement for Board appointments to be current for NHPRC to consider the application. This letter was hand delivered by the Secretary's Chief of Staff, and assurances were given at the Governor's Office that action would be taken.**

### **- NHPRC funding crisis update**

**Stearn reports that with regard to the letters sent to RI Congressional delegates, she has received responses from Senator Reed and Congressman Kennedy. She had also received copies of letters sent to Rep. Kennedy by Lopes of RI College and Maria Bernier, a RI resident and librarian at Mystic Seaport. The NARA/NHPRC budget had been heard before the House Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, Housing & Urban Development, Judiciary, & D.C, on which Rep. Kennedy sits. At the White House's instruction, the newly appointed Archivist of the US, Dr. Allen Weinstein in testimony, stated only, "As you are aware, we**

**have included no funding in the 2006 request for the NHPRC.” In statements and questions by members it became apparent that the historical records community’s efforts had been effective, since all committee members expressed strong support for the restoration of NHPRC funding. Four other budgets were also heard, and 90 of 93 pieces of written testimony received by the committee were in support of NHPRC.**

### **V News and announcements**

- A report on activities of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators over the past year is available from Stearn.**
- The RI Permanent Commission on Civic Education is holding a Civic Education Summit today in the Senate Lounge from 1-3 p.m. Board members are welcome to attend.**
- The State Archives’ new brochures are now available.**
- The IMLS has awarded \$7,000+ grants to Blithewold Mansion (Gardens & Arboretum), Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum, and the RI Historical Society for conservation assessments, and \$3,000+ to Little Compton Historical Society for planning assistance.**
- An excellent article appeared in the Providence Journal about the Senator John Chafee Papers at URI. The NEH grant to process the Senator Pell Papers was not funded.**
- The NEH Preservation Assistance Grants application deadline is May 16.**

## **VI Adjournment**

**Bennett moves to adjourn. Massaro seconds. Approved unanimously. Meeting adjourns at 12:10 p.m.**

**Read and approved September 7, 2005**