

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
of the Niagara Historical Society
Thursday, October 9, 2008

Clark Bernat welcomed members to the 113th Annual General Meeting of the Niagara Historical Society. He welcomed Greg Ryan, chair if the Niagara Society of Architects to speak about the Museum's new exhibition, *Domestic Gems*, opening October 15th, 2008. After Greg's informative talk, Clark Bernat introduced Society President, Neil Rumble to approve the Minutes of the 2007 Annual General Meeting.

As outlined in the circulated agenda, the following motions were agreed:

- A quorum of 25 not being present, the members of the Board of Directors (of which there was a quorum) agreed that those present should represent a quorum for this meeting (ref. NHS By-Law III). Moved by Chuck Jackson, seconded by Brett Sherlock.
- Request to approve the Minutes of the 112th Annual General Meeting held Friday, October 12, 2007 circulated earlier, moved by Chuck Jackson and seconded by Elizabeth Surtees. Approved.

In the absence of Daryl Novak, Dennis Kam presented the treasurer's report:

- He noted that the Annual audit by Bridgman & Durksen (copies available) was a clean report and that we were left with an operating surplus at the end of the year.
- Dennis Kam reported our current financial status for both Society & Museum. Some areas of note were that donations, fundraising and programming were all down in Society revenue, therefore the transfers from Society to Museum were also less than budgeted. On the Museum side, it was noted that we were expecting a higher than usual Community Museum Operating Grant this year so this would make up for the fewer transfers from the Society. He also highlighted that repairs and maintenance were over budget because of the replacement of air conditioners and unexpected furnace repairs and that conservation and exhibitions were both slightly over budget for 2008.
- He presented the 2009 budgets for the Society and the Museum, approved earlier by the Board. He noted that it was a status quo budget, with most items that were increased in 2008 for special projects returning to previous levels. Motion to approve by Molly Enns, seconded by David Murray. Approved.

Dennis Kam also presented on behalf of the Finance and Administration Portfolio.

- He noted that the committee had completed the annual compliance checklist and that all required remittances and documentation was appropriately completed.
- Request to appoint the audit firm of Bridgman & Durksen for 2008 moved by Les Taylor, seconded by Deborah Paine-Corbiere.

The Chair introduced Municipal Representative Jim Collard who made a presentation outlining the actions the municipality had taken on heritage and thanked the Society for their continued support. He emphasized that the Museum is at a much better funding level from the Town as they are now part of their annual budget. He noted that a few years ago the Museum's grant was only \$45,000 and a couple years before that it was half of that. In 2008, the Museum received \$89,250.

The Chair introduced David Murray to present on the actions taken by the Publications and Communications Portfolio.

- David thanked Amy Klassen, Society Administrator, for the communication efforts made between the Society and Membership through emails and newsletters.
- He presented a new partnership with Brock University, which will give a Scholarship to a student doing their thesis project on a topic related to Niagara-on-the-Lake's history. The Society will be given rights to publish this work. This Scholarship is possible thanks to our members, David Murray and Elizabeth Surtees.
- David also noted that his committee is currently working on establishing partnerships with the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and Sheridan College for 2012 projects.

The Chair introduced Deborah Paine and Brett Sherlock to present on the actions taken by the Membership and Development Portfolio.

- Deborah presented the results of a Membership Survey which was conducted. Board members were asked to call active and inactive members to increase dialogue between the Society and its Members. The results were favourable and most agreed that the Society and Museum were improving. Suggestions from the survey will be used to plan future initiatives.
- Brett Sherlock announced the First Annual Phoenix Ball which will be held in Memorial Hall on December 6th, 2008. Tickets are \$125 and seating is limited.

The Chair introduced Jim Armstrong to present on the actions taken by the Physical Plant and Planning Portfolio.

- The building is in good condition thanks to annual inspections and the work of our volunteer maintenance committee.
- \$4000 was spent on furnaces and air conditioners this year; three furnaces need to be replaced at \$5400 each
- The Society is engaged in conversations with the owner of the property next door, with the intent to acquire the portion of land where his barn sits. This will give the Museum room for future expansion

- Jim noted that fire suppression equipment is needed in all the buildings. This is very costly but we currently only have hand-held extinguishers and an alarm system. The committee is looking at future grants to fund this project.
- Clark Bernat presented the new strategic plan set out by the Board at a special meeting. Please see attached document. He noted that these projects, which are centered around the bicentennial of the War of 1812, depend of funding.

The Managing Director, Clark Bernat, presented his report:

Research Room and Research

This past year saw the development of our new research facility. The former Board Room of the Museum was converted to provide access to our research files, our database, digital research files and digitized maps (both in our collection and other repositories). This will be a valuable asset to the community and visiting researchers for years to come.

The Society declared 2008, “The Year of the Art of Niagara” and accordingly, a large segment of staff time went into researching the art collection and developing “Inspired Landscapes”. New material was found regarding some of the artists in the collection and the artists who painted Niagara.

Collections Management & Development

Over the past year, 30 separate donors contributed to the collection. These donations represent well over 200 separate items. We also acquired a large collection of Gibson family records that Bob Knight is diligently sorting through. These were donated by the Virgil Women’s Institute. The Museum is increasing the number of artefacts in the collection that have been photographed digitally. This will improve access to the collection and improve our ability to track the condition of artefacts and to conduct research. 31 of our artefacts have been placed online at www.virtualmuseum.ca and we hope to increase our web presence in the near future.

In the following year, thanks to the assistance of a Museum Assistance Program grant from Heritage Canada, the Museum was able to hire Steven Baxter who oversaw the completion of the recommendations made by the Canadian Conservation Institute in 2005. This included better storage of artefacts and rewrapping of all textiles with new acid free tissue. The work was very extensive and even included the painting of all the floors in the storage area.

Of the over 200 new artefacts in the collection, I would like to highlight the purchase of a June, 1813 edition of “The War”, which is an American newspaper. We are also very pleased to acquire from the White family, the blueprints for the landscaping of Kings Landing done by the acclaimed early 20th century landscaping architectural firm of Dunington-Grubb of Toronto. The Curatorial Committee has had some very welcome additions. Betsy Masson has been adding the reference library material to our database, Marilyn Bray has been compiling lists of residents in newspapers, books and gazetteers, while Clara Tarnoy has entered this valuable material into our database.

Exhibitions

The Museum held two major exhibitions this year in the temporary exhibition space. They were;

1. “100 Years – 100 Artefacts” was an exhibition of 100 prized artefacts chosen by the community
2. “Inspired Landscapes” an art installation that utilized original works of art from private and public institutions that showcased the wonder of the Niagara River.

Both of these exhibitions were very well received.

Since 2005, the average length of a visit to the museum has increased from 35 minutes to 47 minutes (a 34% increase). This is a measure of the quality and satisfaction of the visitor experience. The projected aim for the new galleries was 45 minutes.

Marketing and Public Relations

The website is being tracked more extensively by staff since the addition of new tracking techniques in January 2008. In 2008, up to October 5th, the site has been accessed 3230 times, by 2750 people. The average visitor views 3.69 pages and stays for 2 minutes. The most visited sections (beyond the home page) are our pages with hours of operation and location, the exhibitions page and the brief history of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

However, our website will be having an overhaul in the next couple of months. Heritage Canada, through its Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program, has contributed funds to assist with the development with an effective marketing tool as well as a site that provides lots of information and access to the activities of the Society.

Partnerships

The Society and Museum has been involved in some very interesting partnerships over the past year. These have benefited the Society directly and indirectly this year and will benefit the Society in the long run.

This year we teamed up with RiverBrink Art Museum to market a twinned exhibition called “Niagara: History in Art” that provided some marketing support for both of our institutions. As well, the Museum has signed a partnership letter with Brock University, Lundy’s Lane Museum, Jordan Historical Museum, Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum, Grimsby Museum and the District School Board of Niagara with a project called “1812 online”. This partnership, pending funding approval, will see each institutions collection of material related to the War of 1812 digitized and made available for researchers and school children on a searchable website.

Another partnership has come from eGen Niagara. This computer programming incubator, which is funded by the Region of Niagara, Brock University and the City of St. Catharines has initiated three software programming initiatives. One project is a visitor led exploration of Niagara-on-the-Lake based on cellular capabilities, games and interactive components. This project has started and will be completed by April of 2009.

I was also very privileged to have been provided the opportunity to meet with Museum colleagues at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. Thanks to the Hawley

family, who facilitated this exchange of ideas and information. This was based on the potential to tell the North American Native American story in context of the 2012 celebrations.

The Museum has also been well represented on other committees. I am currently secretary and sit on several committees of the Niagara-on-the-Lake 2012 Bicentennial Committee, as well, I am on the Ontario Museums Association Council. The latter has provided us with better contacts and information with regards to what is happening provincially and federally with regards to programmes and granting agencies.

Conclusion

The year following the 100th anniversary was more of a transition year. Gearing down from all of the activities and events, it felt very different for the staff at the Society. However, it was a great year to look back on the achievements of the previous year and then get down to business of planning the next 5 – 7 years. I am very happy with the development of the Strategic Plan. This document will provide a path to better develop our knowledge of the collection, provide greater access to this knowledge and provide the people of Niagara with opportunities to understand and comprehend the role that the people of Niagara played.

The Chair introduced the Chair of the Nominating Committee, Kelly James, who presented the slate of officers for 2008:

President:	Neil Rumble
Vice-President Society:	Deborah Paine-Corbiere
Portfolios:	Development and Membership
Vice-President Museum:	Jim Armstrong
Portfolios:	Planning and Plant
Treasurer:	Dennis Kam
Portfolios:	Finance and Administration
Secretary:	Amalie Enns
Portfolios:	Finance and Administration
Director:	David Murray
Portfolios:	Publications and Communications
Director:	Chuck Jackson
Portfolios:	Publications and Communications
Director:	Karen McGrath
Portfolios:	Planning and Plant

Director: Brett Sherlock
Portfolios: Development and Membership

Director: Terry Boulton
Portfolios: Development and Membership

Managing Director: Clark Bernat
Society Administrator: Amy Klassen
Town Representative: Jim Collard

The new nominations to the Board, Terry Boulton and Karen McGrath, were moved by David Murray and seconded by Chuck Jackson

In Neil Rumble's closing remarks he thanked the members and the Board for their continuous support and thanked Geoffrey and Lorraine Joyner for their support with the exhibition. He congratulated the Society on an excellent lecture series and thanked Clark Bernat and Amy Klassen for all the work they accomplish as a staff of only two.

And to the retiring members of the Board, a special thank you.

- Harry Murdoch
- Daryl Novak

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm. Motion to adjourn moved by Les Taylor and seconded by Richard Taylor.

Secretary: _____

President: _____

Date: October 9, 2008