

Alabama Association of Historians

Executive Council Meeting

Friday, February 27, 2015

Present: Bob England, Rich Schellhammer, Jeff Gentsch, Sam Covington, John Jackson

Jeff Gentsch asked that the meeting be called to order. He stated that there were no minutes from the last meeting that took place in Tuscaloosa as John Jackson had to leave early and Gentsch did not take notes in his place. Gentsch maintained that that situation would not happen again and that meeting minutes would be available for all future meetings.

Bob England remarked that Rich Schellhammer, Jeff Gentsch, and John Jackson met in a "mid-year" meeting as he understood it.

Gentsch replied that the three did meet in order to establish the parameters of the 2015 annual meeting. No further business was discussed at that gathering.

Treasurer's Report/Jeff Gentsch: The total in the General Account as of the date of the annual meeting was \$5,365.08. Gentsch remarked that only a small sum for the annual meeting will be taken from the General Account to pay for food. He noted that the CDs are accruing very little interest as they mature; last year only \$47.00 per \$7,000.00 CD. There are three CDs maintained by the AAH.

Secretary's Report/John Jackson: Jackson mentioned the discussion of the previous meeting between himself, Gentsch, and Schellhammer in which the details for the annual meeting were discussed. Jackson mentioned the caterers for both the dinner and the Saturday luncheon would be Wolf Bay Lodge. He stated that one check would have to be issued to Wolf Bay Lodge for their service. Jackson added that there were no costs associated with the use of facilities in the Foley Senior Center or in the Foley Public Library. Jackson said that the library had provided two gift baskets that would be given away to participants.

Bob England remarked that, under the circumstances, that Shellhammer, Gentsch, and Jackson had done a great job in preparing for the annual meeting.

Gentsch then brought up the topic of how to address the dearth of paper presentations and low member participation.

England stated that the organization needed to get back to its roots which is to provide a meeting place for professors and graduate students. He stated that he felt the attempt to broaden the base of the organization to include school teachers has become a failure, even though it was well intended. He also stated that he believed that broadening the base to people in public history has been the brightest spot in membership recruitment and retention that the AAH has experienced lately. England went on to say that another problem associated with the organization has been communication. The first step to rectifying the communication problem would be to develop a list of every history department in the state (undergraduate and graduate programs). From there AAH officers could develop a brochure with information on the AAH that would assist the organization in returning to its roots. It would be a means of focusing on providing graduate students experience in presenting papers, for example. England also stated that the AAH needs a vocal and vibrant champion at the University of Alabama.

Gentsch agreed with England that the organization should return to its roots. He also agreed that one of the things that the AAH should also try to find a champion at the University of Alabama. He continued by saying he felt the AAH was more rooted in the smaller places like the Foley Public Library and the University of West Alabama, Muscle Shoals, and Enterprise, etc. He stated that the previous year's meeting in Tuscaloosa ranged far from the traditional meeting and should be avoided in the future. Instead it should return to the values that made the AAH successful in the past.

Covington stated that if we could just get one person from the History Departments at Alabama and Auburn to promote us then we could increase our number of graduate students in attendance. He also mentioned that the AAH conference is such an economical event to attend that it should attract more graduate students.

Schellhammer questioned whether or not the graduate students at Alabama thought the AAH meeting was worth their time based on the attitude of the faculty there.

England responded by stating that the strength of the early organization were people like Milo Howard, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt among others. When those members asked others to do things they maintained such a presence that it was hard to say no. He said that the discipline has become much more isolated among specific areas of expertise with little or no communication between the specialties. He said that there was once communication between the specific specialties that doesn't exist anymore. England maintained that in order for the AAH to move forward the organization would have to improve communication and improve its presence at events such as the Southern Historical Conference. England also said that the AAH should commit to hosting a social event either this year or the next to garner attention and draw more presenters. The organization should also consult with Hardy Jackson and Wayne Flynt to get their input on how to proceed.

Jackson echoed the sentiment of the group in the call for improved communication among members and among those involved in the discipline. He said that he felt lost much of the time while putting together his part of the 2015 annual meeting and without specific guidance from Gentsch, Schellhammer, and England he would not have been successful. He also commented that he was willing to do what was necessary to help make the organization successful but that required more communication and the tools to complete the job.

England stated that the AAH needs to establish a level of achievement at which point we could state that we have been successful in improving the organization and if that doesn't happen in a reasonable time frame then the organizations needs an exit strategy. To meet those goals and to expand the presence of the organization England asked for the cost of an ad in Alabama Heritage.

Covington suggested that the AAH set up a Facebook page. He also offered assistance in compiling the list for the newsletter email.

Jackson suggested following up the creation of the Facebook page with distribution of a newsletter to membership.

England stated that in the coming year the organization would have a new slate of officers. He said that he would rotate off the council, Rich would become the new president. We will then need a vice president and there aren't a lot of choice at the moment.

Gentsch, in response, asked to speak about the Executive Council for a moment. He said that Kari Frederickson left the AAH after last year's meeting in Tuscaloosa. He believed that as such that meant that Schellhammer is now president and England is past president due to the non-status of Frederickson. He stated that Schellhammer should be established as president this year.

England commented that he did not believe that action should be taken and that the organization should work around what it has at the moment. He said that Schellhammer should remain as the current vice president with a president that is not performing any duties. Instead of removing Frederickson the AAH should work around the absence.

Gentsch then outlined the officer list: England as past president, Frederickson as president, Schellhammer as vice president/president elect, Gentsch as treasurer, and Jackson as secretary. He also remarked that there would need to be replacements to fill positions of those whose terms are up. Gentsch also brought up the conversation on future meetings and where they should be held.

England said that he thought the group should ask Paul Beezley at Jacksonville State if the 2016 meeting could be hosted there.

Gentsch agreed and said that we should contact Beezley concerning the 2016 meeting and that the AAH should consider a location for the 2017 meeting as well.

England responded by saying that the group could potentially go back to Montgomery in 2017 with the State Archives as the host if they would be interested.

Schellhammer brought up a possibility of holding a concurrent meeting with the AHA in order to bolster attendance. He emphasized that it would not be a joint meeting but a concurrent one where the AAH would not lose their identity. He stated that he would meet with the AHA president in April to discuss the possibility and then report back to the council.

Gentsch stated that the summer meeting of the organization should be held in the location of the annual meeting (in reference to the potential meeting at Jacksonville State.)

The meeting was adjourned by consensus vote.