**Brant Historical Society**

**Special Meeting for BHS Membership**

**July 27th, 2015**

**Brant Museum and Archives, 57 Charlotte St., Brantford**

**Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Jane Burnett, Margaret Carrow, Pat Dawood, Anne DeBoer, Robert DeBoer, Ruth Lefler, Margaret Lorenz, Marilyn MacDonald, Patti McNeill, Rachel McNeill, Brian Moore, Elizabeth Moore, Sharon Murphy, Sean Murphy, Ed Pancoe, Robert Riddle, Lorraine Sherred, Lorraine Snetsinger, Elizabeth Stone, Raymond Wright

By Proxy: Lana Jobe and Bruce Hill

Board Present: Michael St. Amant (President), Christopher Greenlaw (Vice), Bill Hanna (Treasurer), Jack Jackowetz, Anita Menon, Zig Misiak, Annette Minutillo (Secretary)

Staff: Nathan Etherington, Sarah Thomas, Carolee McNeill,

Non-members Present: Laura Duguid, Lucas Duguid, Don Wilkin

Regrets: Cody Groat, Kevin Raymond (Board Members)

1. Opening of Meeting at 7:00 pm by Christopher Greenlaw - introduced attending Board Members.
2. Scope of Meeting - Agenda provided
3. Presentation by Christopher Greenlaw - PowerPoint.

Christopher shared that in order to understand the challenges that the Brant Historical Society currently faces, it was necessary to conduct a broad examination of documentation produced between 2010 and 2015. The consequent analysis, coupled with interviews of various current and former staff members, directors, board members, and volunteers, identified issues and challenges that the Society has been working to rectify.

Christopher provided details of his fact-finding exercises of May and June 2015, undertaken in response to an email received by the Board following the resignation of the former executive director, and to the recording of an in-camera Board meeting by a staff person. At the same time the Board received a Petition from eleven Society members who had concerns about how things at the Society were proceeding. As the board began to address the operational necessities of the Society, it became clear that the state of affairs at the Museum were not as they had been presented to the Board going at least as far back as 2012. A thorough understanding of the corporate history of the Society and a complete audit of all programming, finances, and work-related activities was undertaken in order to address the affairs of the Society and to properly respond to the petitioners.

The first two concerns identified in the Petition

* 1. The background to the recent loss of our Executive Director;
  2. The plans by the Board to address the interim period without an Executive Director;

were answered in a written reply to the petitioning members. The presentation provided a more in-depth analysis of what occurred.

In the past five years the Society maintained staffing levels higher than was supported by revenue, however Staff were not used to execute innovative initiatives to modernize the offerings of the museum.

The Society has experienced instability in the Executive Director position since Joan Kanigan left the Society in May 2012, resulting in an organization focused on day-to-day operations rather than strategic long term initiatives. Christopher detailed the sustained managerial ineffectiveness during these three years, noting conflict between the board and two EDs, recurring failures in reporting practices to the Board (both financial and operational), poor fiscal management, a growing lack of community engagement and neglect of our volunteer base, as well as poor administration of marketing initiatives and technology management. He reported significant decreases in corporate sponsorship, fundraising efforts, grant reporting, and programming development. He provided illustrations and occurrences for all.

Chris identified the Inventory Project as the single most resource-intensive event over the past three years. The cost of this project exceeded the budgeted amount for both salaries and material. This information was presented in numerous graphs. To date, the Inventory Project has cost the Brant Historical Society $178,944.36 and is not yet completed. Of note, the Inventory Project has been responsible for cataloguing well over half of 28,353 inventoried records currently in PastPerfect. All that remains to be entered into the system are the textile collection, the half of the attic in which the large, bulkier artefacts are stored, and the museum’s permanent exhibits, at which point the museum’s collection can finally be properly appraised.

Chris then detailed the current state of affairs and the steps the Board has taken to address many of the issues (identified as Developments and Initiatives on the Agenda). BHS has hired a CPA to review the finances, ensure that any bookkeeping irregularities are rectified, and expenditures are under control. The inside of the Museum building has been decluttered, working spaces tidied, and the task of organizing the filing system in the back offices begun. The outdoor clean-up event helped to tidy the front gardens. The deaccession process is underway following a policy review during the June 2015 board meeting.

The BHS was present at the 2015 Canada Day celebrations after a two year absence. It was a wonderful way to connect with the community. Over 140 people visited the exhibit area and no fewer than 80 children made crafts. The Summer Camps at Myrtleville have become a great success after Sarah Thomas and the education committee led the charge to get the word out, resulting in higher enrolment than last year. The Seniors Program has grown significantly with the addition of three new programming locations with plans to increase the number that are offered. The Education Committee has broadened its outreach to schools within the county, not just for presentations, but also in their role in developing curriculum support for the new focus on First Nations content, particularly around the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report. We are uniquely positioned to be able to offer this product to schools and by the end of the next school year, the Education Programme will be an independent profit centre. We also have the opportunity to partner with local organizations, such as the Woodland Cultural Centre, and are in talks surrounding exhibit development in the wake of the TRC report.

An online retail store will complement the gift shop operation. We are the sole reseller for our Six Nations partners and feature several prominent local artists, such as potter Steve Smith, as well as local authors. Brian Moore’s Walking Tours are a revenue generating event and plans are underway to provide needed marketing support from the BHS.

Upcoming events include the bus trip to the Ontario Archives in Toronto which is a small but important project to improve relations with neighbouring organizations within our sector that have been neglected over the past few years. The BHS, in coordination with the Brant Museums and Galleries Association, have embarked on “Doors Unhinged” which will piggyback on Culture Days (for which we are already a participant). Also October 23rd, 2015, is the 130th anniversary of the birth of Lawren S. Harris and the BHS will have a temporary exhibit to commemorate the life of this Group of Seven great and the Harris family. There are plans to incorporate the former Speaker’s Series into the GWCA-Laurier Speaker’s series which BHS would support by way of artefact presentation and retail sales at the site.

Access to the software that created Hamilton’s The Worker’s City app has tentatively been offered to the BHS at no charge and negotiations are underway to have a Brantford-based version developed starting in the Winter 2015 semester by a directed study class. The software allows the user to take one of five tours of Hamilton’s historic manufacturing areas, complete with photos, video, interviews by former employees, and guided tour information.

Negotiations with Laurier Brantford, begun several months ago, are escalating to high level discussions with the University. BHS is looking to lease enough space in Market Square to house the entire collection, archives, provide room for exhibits and a gallery, a reading and research room, offices, and a large common room. This site is climate controlled, secure, and will suit the Museum’s needs for at least the next ten years. It is possible that our archives and library will be adjacent to the new Laurier library that is planned for the Market Square space, as this large venue will become the hub of operations for the University within the next 5-7 years. This comes most opportunely with the yet-to-be announced Public History programme planned for the Laurier Brantford campus. These potential connections to Laurier directly address various needs that have been identified and gone unfulfilled for so long, such as: relevancy within the community, attracting younger patrons, improved educational outreach, and sustainability (from a structural, financial, collections management, and preservationist perspective).

Finally the presentation addressed the last two Petition Items:

* 1. The plans to retain our museum status in the absence of a certified Curator; and
  2. The plans of this Society once an Executive Director has been recruited.

As was mentioned in the written response, all of the responsibilities associated with CMOG are fulfilled and up-to-date for this fiscal year despite not having a full-time curator on staff. BHS was required to have a curator on staff during the last fiscal year in order to be in compliance. As with any staffing issue, an increase in revenue is required in order to salary a new Curator. However, the Board has been investigating several other options including a part-time curator and/or sharing curatorial services with another museum, which would meet the requirements of the CMO Grant.

The Board’s intention is to stabilize the operation of the Society and then hire an Executive Director that will position the museum as a relevant community resource for these contemporary times.

1. Other Business - The Board responded to the following Questions and Comments:

**DOES THE BHS NEED BOTH AN E.D. AND A CURATOR?** (Anne DeBoer) Michael St. Amant responded that having both is a real luxury, and that there is a general trend towards establishing a relationship with a Curator who is not fulltime or who is shared with another institution. The ED has the important role of acting as the interface between the community and other organizations. BHS is the steward of the Museum’s artefacts for the greater community; we must be reaching out and engaging the community to make us more prominent in Brant County. The Board has already taken steps to reach out - dialogues with Bell Homestead, Simcoe and Paris Museums, working on projects with Glenhyrst. We’re moving forward in increments that allow BHS to re-establish relationships. Christopher Greenlaw noted that if the Museum moves, the exhibits will have to be reset/designed; grant money anticipated for this would assist in engaging a Curator contract.

**IF THE MUSEUM MOVES TO THE MALL, WHAT HAPPENS AFTER 10 YEARS AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THIS BUILDING?** (Ruth Lefler) Michael responded that BHS remains in the early stages of negotiations - looking at space and envisioning use. Recent discussions have identified 6300 sq./ft. of museum space which would encompass the existing mall location, and 7000 sq./ft. of archival storage space on lower level. Laurier intends to solicit an architect review (at Laurier’s expense). BHS is seeking to solidify a contract for at least 10 years, and would want to build in renewal options. As for Charlotte St, the Society could develop this property to be revenue generating. There is interest in a shared development project that will generate funds for the BHS over the long term. Funding for the move would be done through granting agencies and two corporate sponsors. Michael noted that operating costs to sustain the Charlotte St building would be at minimum equal to our lease costs at the mall, and those costs will continue to escalate (heating, maintenance etc). Timing is still undetermined. The Board has every intention of seeing the move well managed and financed.

**THIS INFORMATION-SHARING IS WELCOME.** Ruth Lefler acknowledged that the members have now been apprised as to what has happened and that this needs to be continued. She urged the Board when things “do come in hand”, to let the membership know.

**ACTION:** Revamp the newsletter to make it a communication tool - circulate it digitally and also ensure it is available to those without electronic access.

**WHO ARE THE BOARD MEMBERS?** The membership would like to know a little about their Board, and have access to Society information. The membership was reminded that all Society Policies, Board Minutes, and audited financial statements remain always available in hard copy to the membership at the Museum. While a Member’s Only page on the website had been included on the old website, it’s transfer to the new website hadn’t be made due to technical issues, and remains outstanding.

**ACTION:** The BHS will present on its website the names of all members of the Board of Directors, with Executive Officers identified, as well as a copy of the By-Laws and Annual Report. A brief bio of each Director would be especially appreciated.

**DID THE BOARD NOT KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON WITH RESPECT TO THE ACTIVITIES OF STAFF?** (Lorraine Snetsinger) Michael responded that the Board provides direction, following a Governance model. The Board asked for information which it did not receive or which was withheld. The Board repeatedly sought financials and was not provided with these. Michael acknowledged an unhealthy relationship between the Board and EDs. Christopher concurred that this should be a governing Board, and not involved in day-to-day operations, but that at this time, a number of Board members are fulfilling the function of an ED with a pooled skillset. Consequently it is a working Board, not a Governance Board. Jack Jackowetz identified that earlier EDs had pushed for a governance model, although the Board had to frequently fill in the gaps through a series of EDs. With the last ED, the Board intended to step back, asking and directing from a strategic perspective, only to discover belatedly that the direction of the Board was not being followed.

Christopher noted that we can’t we keep asking what happened, who did what, and who is to blame. We need to look forward. It’s taken several years to get where we are and it will take several years to get back, but we’ve hit bottom and are on the way up.

Raymond Wright commented that the Board has a responsibility to ensure the Society is well managed, and praised Christopher Greenlaw for doing a “good job of digging in”. He suggested that better accounting reports were necessary. Bill Hanna noted that since he had come on the Board in 2014, access to electronic records in time to make reports to the Board, allocations of accounts, and issues with the Gift shop have all been straightened out. The Board can finally get to budgeting with comparisons to previous year numbers. Basic management tools are being put into place, with the hiring of a qualified accountant. Thanks were extended from Raymond Wright.

**WHAT IS THE BOARD’S ROLE GOING FORWARD AND WHAT ROLE DOES THE MEMBERSHIP HAVE?**  (Brian Moore)

The current Board would like nothing better than to move back to a governance model, but without an ED there is no option at this time. This particular Board has a depth of expertise that has not been present previously. Brian Moore expressed frustration that he had to resort to this petition in order to get information. Lorraine Sherred noted that every member wants some return for their $25 membership, for their donations to the Society. Brian noted that a regular reporting process from the Board of Directors beyond the Annual General Meeting was needed, and especially at times of significant change within the Society. Subsequent discussion identified quarterly meetings would be sufficient, and that the meetings have a speaker or presentation, be free and open to the public, and include an informational report from the Board of Directors.

**MOTION: Moved by Brian Moore and seconded by Lorraine Sherred that effective September 2015 the Brant Historical Society will return to regularly scheduled quarterly meetings of Members.**

**CARRIED**

**DEACCESSIONING OF MUSEUM HOLDINGS**: (Sean Murphy). Sean shared that deaccessioning had been done by a Committee at the Paris Museum and it had gone amazingly well. He urged the BHS to be “brutal” in decision making. Christopher noted that the BHS will strike a Committee as well to assist in deaccessioning, and that it will follow the process as established by CMA, and according to the BHS Collections Management Policy, which had been recently reviewed by the Board.

1. Adjournment by Nathan Etherington at 8:35 pm.