

Introduction

In May 2018 Dottie Watson, the President of the Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country, and curator of the Fort Hill Heritage Museum passed away. She had been the leader and driving force of the Historical Society for nearly 30 years. Unfortunately, the organization could not survive her loss. Running a museum, raising funds, managing volunteers, and preparing educational programs, was too much for the remaining members.

In November 2018, the three remaining members of the Historical Society Board of Directors wrote a letter to Mayor Lentz and the Village Board requesting that a Historical Commission be created to review the options for continuing the work of the Historical Society, make recommendations on how to best preserve Mundelein History and “to provide thoughtful, consistent oversight of this important community institution”. There was a strong desire to continue what the Historical Society had created and maintained for over 60 years, but, a new way forward was needed.

The Mundelein Historical Commission was created in February 2019 by Village Ordinance. This report fulfills a requirement of the Ordinance which calls for the Commission to report to the Village Board within 180 days. It includes:

- A brief history of the Historical Society, the Heritage Museum
- A summary of the agreement that governs the management of the Museum
- A review of the establishing Ordinance
- Commission’s work to date.
- Recommendations for managing the Museum in the future
- Other ways the Historical Commission can preserve and promote local History.
- Short term and long term goals.

Attached at the end of this report is a copy of the Collection Management Policy drafted by the Historical Commission and forwarded to the Mundelein Park District in July.

One of tasks assigned to the Commission was to evaluate the optimum size of the Historical Commission. There was Village Board discussion prior to adopting the ordinance whether the Commission should be seven or eleven members. The Commission feels that a seven is the optimum number. We recommend staying at seven and not increasing to eleven. Our recommendation is based largely on the fact that operating the museum and conducting additional historical programs to highlight Mundelein History will take far more than seven or eleven members. In order to be successful, we will need to draw from a wide range of volunteers with a variety of skills. We will need to establish a “Friends of the Museum” network to operate the museum and fulfill our other objectives. A seven member commission is a good size for planning, organizing, managing communicating and budgeting. The Commission is committed to openness, transparency, and volunteer involvement. We have had good results so far attracting interested helpers. We believe that there are many more people in the community that are interested in preserving local history. We suggest staying with the seven-member Commission.

The Establishing Ordinance of the Historical Commission

In the ordinance establishing the Historical Commission, the Village Board was clear that the work of the Historical Society should be continued; preserving local History was important; local history should be preserved; and making Mundelein history accessible to the public was a priority. The Ordinance directed the Commission to:

- Collaborate with other organizations to preserve Mundelein History

- Make Mundelein History accessible
- Plan programs, policies and activities
- Research and evaluate strategies to develop programs about Mundelein History
- Promote the use of artifact and memorabilia for continued education for residents and visitors.

The Ordinance directed the Commission to establish Goals and Objectives for completing the assigned Mission; present a report to the Village Board in August 2019, and make recommendations on the optimum size of the Commission.

The Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country and the Fort Hill Heritage Museum

In May 1956 a group of people who lived in the area called "Fort Hill Country" became interested in forming a historical society. On June 11, 1956 a meeting was called, to be held in the Ivanhoe Congregational Church basement. The first meeting of the Historical Society was opened and led by Richard Johnson. He began by reading a description of the area known as "Fort Hill Country". So begins the minutes of the first gathering of the founders of the Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country. The Society held its "Charter Membership" meeting on September 10, 1956.

At the May 1956 organizational meeting, those present spoke about why a historical society was important. They mentioned preserving the oral histories of the first settlers, remembering the customs of the native Indian inhabitants; creating educational programs for children, recording the hardships of daily life, and documenting changes since the first settlers arrived in 1835.

The group took its name from a hill at the NW corner of what are now Peterson and Allegany Roads. The hill was rumored to have once been a ceremonial campsite of Sauk Indian Chief Black Hawk, and known by the first settlers and their descendents as "Fort Hill". Oddly enough, there was never a military fort on the site. In 1890 the county's one-room school houses were organized into districts. The district that served the townships of Grant, Avon, Wauconda and Fremont, was named Fort Hill County District 45. The district schoolhouse was located at Fairfield Rd and Rt. 120. The "new" schoolhouse, built in 1916, was converted to a home in 1951 and still stands today.

Led by a series of dedicated, regional historians—Richard Johnson, George Brainerd, Len Schmitt, and Dottie Watson—the Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country was active for 60 years. In 1980 the Society embarked on its most ambitious project—save the Mundelein Soo Line RR depot from the bulldozer. The Society persuaded the Soo line to donate the rundown depot, built in 1924, to them with one condition—it must be moved off the RR right-of-way in 24 months, otherwise, the building would be demolished. With donated funds, local volunteers, technical help from Abbott Labs and the Carpenters Union, plus a strong partnership with the Mundelein Park District, the depot was moved to "Lions Park", on August 1, 1983. On July 4, 1987, the restored depot reopened as the Fort Hill Heritage Museum. The Historical Society delivered on its promise to create a museum and "Give the Past a Future". In recent years membership in the Society dwindled. Following the death of Dottie Watson, the Heritage Museum closed in 2018; its future uncertain.

The museum has been a fixture on Noel Drive in Mundelein for over 30 years. It is useful to understand the roots of Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country and the Fort Hill Museum. The Society was originally focused on the families and history of Fremont Township. Over the years, and especially after the museum opened in Mundelein, the focus became more Mundelein-oriented. The history of the Village

of Mundelein is intertwined with the histories of Fremont and Libertyville townships, the Village of Libertyville and the unincorporated communities of Ivanhoe, Diamond Lake, Gilmer, Sylvan Lake, Countryside Lake, Melody Farm. Much of this history is chronicled in the Museum.

Agreement Between the Historical Society of the Fort Hill Country and Mundelein Park District

It is important to understand the relationship between the Mundelein Park District and the Fort Hill Historical Society. As we move forward, this relationship is our starting point. The Mundelein Park District owns the Museum building and the land on which it is located. The park site also features other Park District assets including a Skateboard Park, a historic Railroad Caboose, and the Mundelein Centennial time capsule.

In 1996 the Fort Hill Historical Society and the Mundelein Park District, executed an operating agreement that established how the museum would function. That agreement is the governing document for how the Museum is operated, and how it would continue should the Historical Society disband. The key provisions of that agreement are as follows:

- The Park District is responsible for all building and grounds maintenance, security systems and utility costs.

- The Society is responsible for all maintenance and upkeep of all exhibits and artifacts. The Society owns the Museum Collection.

- The museum shall be used for community programs, teachers programs, historical data of Lake County and other community and Park District activities.

- The Society will offer regular programs and maintain regular operating hours for public viewing, conduct special events, and foster community awareness and appreciation of local history

- Should the Society cease to exist, the contents of the museum revert to the Park District

- No artifacts owned by the Society shall be sold

The Park District has a line item on its tax levies to support of the Museum and pays for its obligations from its Museum Fund. That money is held in Museum fund, which currently totals approximately \$85,000.

The Historical Society is for all practical purposes is defunct, however it has not yet formally disbanded. Only two officers—John Maguire, Treasurer, and Jeanne Steffens, Secretary---and one Board Member, Elaine Geffert; remain. The Society has not met for over 18 months. The Museum has been closed since before Dottie's death. The Society has closed its PO Box and has forwarded its mail to the Village. The remaining members recognize that they do not have the resources to maintain the Museum and fulfill the mission of the Historical Society. The remaining officers are working with the Park District to determine how, and when, the Society should disband. The Historical Commission has discussed the process at a public meeting, but the process of disbanding does not involve the Commission. It is between the Historical Society and the Mundelein Park District.

When the Society disbands, the proceeds of its treasury, approximately \$14,000 will transfer to the Park District. Ownership of the Museum Collection, which includes artifacts, art, photographs, books, and archival materials, plus display cases, and miscellaneous museum furniture, will transfer to the Park

District as well. The Park District has advised the Commission that before it will “accept ownership” of the Collection, and before the Museum can open to the public, it must have a full inventory of all the objects.

Historical Commission’s Work to Date

The work of the Commission has been focused in three areas: 1) Building Partnerships; 2) Researching how to run a museum; 3) Developing Policies and Procedures; and 4) Preparing the Museum for re-opening. The Commission first met in February 2019. We have held seven public meetings. We have reached out to other members of the community who have expressed an interest in local history, encouraging them to attend our meetings and participate in the work sessions. The remaining members of the Historical Society Board, and Park District Director, Margaret Resnick, have been regular attendees.

At its first meeting, the Commission agreed that the Fort Hill Museum was the essential component for preserving Mundelein’s history, and the vehicle for making that history accessible to the public. The old name was no longer relevant for the museum’s new focus so we voted to change the name to the “Mundelein Heritage Museum”. There are other things the Commission should do over time, but the best asset we have is the Museum. Preserving and improving it is essential. Our most pressing objective became re-opening it for public enjoyment. Prior to re-opening, we all agreed, the museum management had to be “professionalized” and re-organized to tell a more complete story of Mundelein and the surrounding area. To get to where we are at today we had to do a fair amount of research, meet with a variety of other historical groups, and undertake a lot of physical work.

I. *Building Partnerships*

Operating a museum is complicated. We are all amateurs so we reached out to professionals, and to our neighboring Historical Societies and Museum. spent a fair amount of time researching and talking to others in the industry. Our outreach has included:

- Contacting the Illinois State Historical Society for informational material
- Meeting with staff of the Lake County Dunn Museum at Mundelein Heritage Museum
- Touring the Dunn Museum cataloging and storage rooms to discuss cataloging, storage, and curatorship.
- Joining the Lake County Historical Alliance and attending quarterly meetings
- Visiting local history museums in other Lake County communities including Grayslake, Highwood, Lake Bluff, Milburn, and Libertyville.
- Reaching out to residents that have expressed an interest in preserving local history, invited them to meetings and work sessions.

II. *Researching How to Run a Museum*

- Researched Collection Management Polices on-line
- Drew Heavily from the book: “A Legal Primer on Managing Museum

Collections”

III. *Developing Policies and Procedures*

Our research led us to focus on creating three foundational documents: Museum Mission Statement, Collections Management Policy, and a Cataloging Spreadsheet. The Collections Management Policy (attached as Exhibit A) was approved at the July Commission meeting, and adopted by the Park District Board on July 23, 2019. The Collection Management Policy covers: 1) the Museum's Mission, 2) governance of the museum, 3) how items are added to, loaned to, and removed from the collection, and 4) how the collection can be accessed by the public. A Cataloging Procedure has been developed, with the help of Village Staff, using Excel software. The Commission evaluated museum software called PastPerfect, but decided that Excel was sufficient for our needs, and significantly less expensive. The spreadsheet contains a picture of the item, an accession number, accession date, description of the item, and other information necessary for tracking the item.

IV. *Preparing the Museum for Re-opening*

The museum was in state of disarray when we began. Commission has held 10 work sessions at the museum. We have been joined regularly by volunteers from the community that are interested in preserving local history. The work sessions have focused on cleaning out extraneous, non-historic materials; photographing and cataloging artifacts; moving artifacts to off-site storage; sorting, organizing and re-filing archival materials for accessibility; and reviewing the collection items to better understand the collection. We have brought WiFi to the building; purchased and installed a new computer and printer; and re-organized the on-site storage space.

We had hoped to open the museum to the public in the fall of 2019. However, it is clear we will not meet that goal. Several factors have led to the delay. First, before we open to the public the Park District wants us to complete the inventory, and what is known as the "accessioning" of the Collection. Second, after reviewing the collection we feel the museum is overcrowded. Typically, a museum will display about 10% of the Collection. The remainder is in storage. We have almost 100% on display. We need to balance the display space better. Plus, we would like to re-arrange the building to highlight its original use as a train depot. We are very pleased that the Village has made off-site storage at the Archer Business Center available to us. This provides us with a secure, climate controlled, dry, spacious storage space. Third, in order for the museum to serve an educational purpose, we think we should reach out to the local school districts to better understand the school curriculum. Finally, before we open to the public we will need to broaden our volunteer base.

The Commission feels that we need to raise the professional standards of the museum, and make the museum more accessible and more relevant to our visitors. Making the collection "accessible" and "relevant" means we will need to tell interesting stories about the residents, visitors, places, events and businesses that built our community. We must "connect" the artifacts in our collection to these stories to show how people lived, what they did for a living, and what they experienced. Telling these stories, managing and safeguarding the museum collection, preparing programs and special exhibits will require a wide assortment of skills. Volunteers will be needed as docents, catalogers, archivists, curators, etc.

Recommendations for Managing the Museum

The Commission thought long and hard about taking on the task of managing the museum. It is a lot of work. We came to the conclusion that it has been doing very well for thirty years. It is a very nice museum that has received a lot of community support over the years. It is the repository of a wealth of information, artifacts, photographs, and oral histories about Mundelein and the surrounding area. The Mundelein Park District facility does a great job maintaining the building and grounds and is willing to get

more involved in supporting the work of the museum. The Museum is too important of an asset to give up on. The Commission is willing to invest the time make the museum relevant once again.

We see the role of the Commission as essentially being the Board of Directors for the Museum. Our role will be:

1. Implementing the Collection Management Policy
2. Coordinating with the Park District and the Village Boards
3. Preparing and maintaining the Collection Inventory.
4. Accessioning and De-accessioning items in accordance with the Management Policy
5. Preparing and submitting the annual museum budget to the Park District
6. Preparing and reviewing necessary policies and procedures.
7. Organizing the archival records
8. Overseeing and managing volunteers
9. Curatorship of the collection; preparing programs and special exhibits

Other Ways the Historical Commission Can Preserve and Promote Mundelein History

The Museum will take a big portion of the Commission's time and resources for the foreseeable future. But, there are many other ways that the Commission can promote and preserve Mundelein History.

1. Commemorate Historic Local Events, such commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Village Hall on July 2, 2019.
2. Enhancing the museum collection of artifacts, photographs, personal stories, memories, oral histories, etc.
3. Conduct Community Surveys
4. Create a Mundelein Historical Web Page on the Village and Park District Web sites.
5. Work Cooperatively with the Old #1 Committee
6. Work with the owners of Historic Buildings
7. Work with the University of Saint Mary of the Lake
8. Conduct History walks and Community tours
9. Conduct special programs and retrospectives, at the Museum and in cooperation with other community organizations
10. Work with educational institutions (primary, secondary and college) on program development and preservation activities

Goals and Objective for the Historical Commission

1. Short Term: Prepare the Museum for Opening
 - a. Complete Inventory and Accessioning of all objects
 - b. Move duplicate objects, fabrics, and other select objects to the Archer Business Center
 - c. Paint portions of the interior
 - d. Reorganize the display layout to create a space for temporary displays, and highlight the railroad depot environment
 - e. Build volunteer base: Secure, train and schedule volunteer museum docents
 - f. Visit other local museums for curating tips and program ideas
 - g. Develop a FY 2020 budget for Park District funding
2. Long Term
 - a. Prepare list of archived materials
 - b. Create a Museum Website
 - c. Promote the Museum on Social Media
 - d. Align Museum displays and programs with School Curricula

- e. Evaluate Museum Policies and Procedures annually
- f. Continue participation in the Lake County Heritage Alliance

Conclusion

We are very fortunate to have a very nice museum, with a very nice collection of artifacts, and archival materials. Plus, we are extremely fortunate to have great support, both financially and operationally from the Park District; and excellent support from the Village. This strong base of support is not enjoyed by many communities. We are starting from a position of strength. There is a great network of support in Lake County for local history preservation through the staff at the Dunn Museum, the Lake County Historical Alliance, the Cook and Fremont Libraries, and the State of Illinois. There is strong interest in the community for promoting and preserving local history. While there is a lot of work to do, there is a lot of support for the effort.

Mundelein has a rich local history with some strong ties to Illinois and National History that we can be highlight. These include the Soo Line Railroad, The North Shore Electric RR, Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary, the Eucharistic Congress, the Underground Railroad, The Model Farm, Rural Electric Development, and more. Our core constituencies include genealogists, railroad buffs, school and scout groups, and local historians.