



Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission

204 East Academy St. ♦ P.O. Box 771 ♦ Asheboro, North Carolina 27204

January 27, 2010

The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission (HLPC) met in the County Commissioners Meeting Room of the County Office Building at 725 McDowell Road, Asheboro, NC, and the meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

Members present were Hal Johnson, Mac Whatley, Warren Dixon, Robyn Hankins, Bill Johnson and Lynne Qualls. Bill Ivey, Robby Davis, and Fran Andrews were absent.

Chairman Johnson welcomed RCC students Jamie Kellis, Bryan Kennedy and Deana Ramirez, Mary Joan Pugh, representing the NC Zoo, William Moffitt, and others interested in the designation of the Pisgah Covered Bridge.

For the guests present, Chairman Johnson gave a brief history of the Commission since its creation by ordinance of the Randolph County Board of Commissioners and the requirements for designation.

Approval of Minutes from December 16, 2009

On a motion of Qualls, seconded by Dixon, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of December 16, 2009, as presented.

Public Hearing - Landmark Designation- Pisgah Covered Bridge

Chairman Johnson stated that the Pisgah Covered Bridge is the 7th local designation that the HLPC will recommend designating as a historic landmark in Randolph County.

Chairman Johnson stated that a public hearing for the consideration of an ordinance designating the Pisgah Covered Bridge is tentatively set to be held by the Randolph County Board of Commissioners on Monday, March 1st, but a time has not been set.

Chairman Johnson commended staff employee Randle Brim for all the work he put into the Pisgah Covered Bridge report. Mr. Brim gathered historical accounts from many sources of written material and interviews with local citizens who had knowledge about the site and has compiled the information into one history report.

At 2:35 p.m., the Commission adjourned to a duly advertised public hearing to consider the historic landmark designation request. Chairman Johnson opened the public hearing and closed it before taking action.

Randle Brim stated the following sources were used: *Architectural History of Randolph County, North Carolina*, Lowell McKay Whatley, Jr., 1985; *Randolph County, A Brief History*, L. Barron Mills Jr., 2008; *Remembering Randolph County*, Chip Womick, 2008; *Seagrove Area*, Dorthy and Walter Auman, 1976; N.C. Zoological Park Files;

William Moffitt Files; William Moffitt and Gerald Parker interviews, December 2009. Some photos were taken by NC Zoo Photographer Tom Gillespie.

Mr. Brim gave his report and shared a PowerPoint presentation supporting the information. He stated that according to county historian Mac Whatley, the first two covered bridges in Randolph County were authorized in 1845 at Cedar Falls and at Franklinville. The Cedar Falls Bridge was completed in 1846 and the Franklinville Bridge in 1848. Mr. Brim quoted Mr. Whatley: "Randolph has long been considered North Carolina's foremost covered bridge county." More covered bridges are said to have been built in Randolph County than in any other county in the state. In the 1920's, Randolph County could count more than 60 covered bridges but less than 10 by the 1950's. In 2010, the county has one surviving covered bridge.

Mr. Brim stated that located on the West Fork Branch of the Little River, within the Uwharrie National Forest, approximately 14 miles southwest of Asheboro, N.C., survives one of the two remaining covered bridges in the entire state of North Carolina. Most unique of all covered bridges in Randolph County, the Pisgah Bridge has survived the ravages of time and history. The 54' length Pisgah Covered Bridge was built in 1911 by J.J. Welch. (John Jackson Welch, 1863-1935). Many historical writers and newspaper accounts have the bridge's length at 40', and a few have it at 51', but the construction details prove it to be a 54' bridge.

Unlike many of the county covered bridges having been built by county funds, the Pisgah Bridge appears to have been built by private sources, namely J.J. Welch, and possibly assisted by his family members, including his brother J.D. Welch. By 1900, the Welch family had become a prominent and prosperous family in the Pisgah Community, helping to establish the nearby "Welch Brush Arbor," which became the Mount Lebanon Baptist Church. The two-room Welch School was also built at the same location.

By 1911, the Welch family, especially brothers J.J. and J.D., had amassed vast acreages of land. Anecdotal history states they employed many of the young men in the community to work on their farms and sawmills. In one tract alone, J.J. had consolidated a 540-acre tract bounding on the west side of the West Fork Branch of Little River where he would build the famous Pisgah Covered Bridge. He needed a suitable crossing to move his crops, produce, and wood products to Seagrove and other markets. Because of the quickly growing markets brought by the Seagrove Train Depot and the rail line to the region, the little Seagrove village was alive with commerce as it was about to be incorporated in 1913. Brothers J.J. and J.D. cast their financial eyes on the newly thriving village. J.J. purchased Seagrove lots in 1911 and was listed on the first Seagrove tax list of 1914. He had further ties to the Seagrove Mill & Store Company. In 1918, J.D. became a co-partner in the newly organized Seagrove Hardware Company. When the first meeting was held in 1920 to organize the Bank of Seagrove, both brothers J.J. and J.D. were present. J.D. became the bank's first president.

The bridge construction was reported to have cost a modest \$40, which supports the theory that J.J. Welch built the bridge without any county assistance. A examination of the original tread boards in the bridge by Building Contractor William Moffitt testifies to this modest cost. The original bridge was built with a combination of freshly cut white oak and recycled virgin forest pine boards. The virgin forest pine boards were recycled from an

older structure. Based on the holes, the mortise slots, and the grains in these floor runners of virgin forest pine, Mr. Moffitt stated that he believes the 1911 builder re-used the boards from much older structures, such as a grist mill, dating back well into the early 1800's. When these boards were originally cut, according to Mr. Moffitt, the grain count indicates the tree would have been 120 to 150 years old. This means that these virgin pine running boards probably first sprouted as a tree in the late 1600's.

Prior to the bridge's construction in 1911, this river area was forded approximately 60' downstream. The depression of the old wagon road and the river ford crossing area can still be observed in 2010. Mr. Moffitt had stated in his interview with Mr. Brim that anecdotal local history indicates that the old ford crossing may have been used for some years after the 1911 construction for wider equipment crossing.

Mr. Brim asked Mr. Moffitt to share the story of the firsthand testimony which reveals that the first man to drive a team of mules and a wagon through the bridge upon its completion in 1911 was Matthew Cagle.

William Moffitt stated that during the bridge's reconstruction in 2004, Claude Morris and his wife, Villie, were out for a visit to the bridge site on their anniversary. In a conversation with Mr. Moffitt, Mr. Morris, pointing to a nearby rock, proclaimed, "I was standing on that rock when the first man, Matthew Cagle, and his team of mules and wagon, crossed over the newly finished bridge!" Mr. Moffitt was taken aback, thinking that Mr. Morris was thinking of another later dated bridge, responded, "Are you sure Mr. Morris? That bridge is more than 90 years old?" Mr. Morris responded, "How old do you think I am?" Mr. Moffitt stated that he felt like crawling under that rock when Mr. Morris said that he was 102 years old. In 1911, Mr. Morris was about 10 years of age when he joined the community people celebrating the first crossing. On May 18, 2004, and 93 years later, Mr. Morris attended the celebration of the reconstructed bridge.

Mr. Moffitt also learned during the reconstruction project that one of the local saw millers who sawed the first oak timber and boards for the original bridge was W.D. Hurley. As it turned out, the grandson, Eugene Hurley, from several generations of W.D. Hurley saw millers, re-sawed his grandfather's bridge timbers being reused in the bridge. Eugene Hurley was delighted to use and volunteer his portable sawmill for the reconstruction.

In 1931, the county road system was assumed by the State of North Carolina. Thus began the ownership and maintenance of the Pisgah Covered Bridge by the state and NCDOT that continued until it was relinquished to the North Carolina Zoological Park in 2004.

The bridge escaped one of the deadliest 20th century storms, Hurricane Hazel of 1954, when the branch rose to just beneath the floor level. In 1970, the Pisgah Covered Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The bridge remained on the National Register after its flood destruction in 2003 because the bridge was rebuilt to its exact original dimensions at its original location, reusing more than 90% of the original bridge pieces.

After 1957, the covered bridge fell into disuse when a new state bridge was built approximately 60' upstream to replace the old one and the road was realigned. Gov. Kerr

Scott instituted a program of paving roads and building bridges in rural communities. However, NCDOT retained ownership and maintenance responsibility of the covered bridge. By 1994, dilapidation of the covered bridge had become more apparent, and NCDOT committed \$18,000 for its repairs.

Mary Joan Pugh, representing the NC Zoo, stated that around 1995, Dr. David Jones, Executive Director of the N.C. Zoo, had taken a particular interest in the bridge which began a new chapter in the bridge's preservation. He visualized that a restored Pisgah Bridge in its rural setting was a vital and integral part in providing a unique rural blend of tourism to the county visitors and in preserving a historical heritage of Randolph County. Dr. Jones initiated an effort in April 1998 to refurbish the bridge and build a connecting nature park, including picnic tables and nearby walking trails along both sides of the branch. The project involved a partnership with NCDOT, The Piedmont Land Conservancy, the Land Trust for Central North Carolina, the adjacent property owners Gerald C. Parker, Sr. and Norah Joan Benfield Parker (the west side of the branch), and James Brye Baker and Lena Strider Baker (the east side), along with the residents of the Pisgah community. More than \$73,000 in donations was raised during the 1998 campaign. On September 16, 1999, a dedication ceremony marked its completion.

Mr. Brim continued with the report stating that in 2001, about two years before the devastating storm that would crush the Pisgah Bridge, Nora Lucas Miller took a class at RCC that would help insure the bridge's survival as it was originally built. Ms. Miller was enrolled in a class entitled "Historic American Buildings Survey." Her instructor, Benjamin Briggs, suggested that she draw the Pisgah Covered Bridge. Ms. Miller spent about 10 days at the bridge recording detailed measurements, making sketches of the architectural details, taking photographs, and making notes. Taking these materials back to the classroom, and using specialized computer software, she produced scaled models of different components of the covered bridge. Reported to have been devastated when she heard of the bridge's destruction, she freely offered her drawings, plans, and photographs to William Moffitt, the lead contractor who supervised the bridge's rebuilding. Mr. Brim showed the drawings that Ms. Miller had completed. Mr. Moffitt stated that Nora Miller and her work "played a very vital role in the rebuilding of the bridge."

The disaster occurred on early Sunday morning, August 10, 2003, when rain storms and waters levels surpassed those of Hurricane Hazel, surging 14' above the normal level. By daybreak, the high waters had floated the bridge off its stone foundational piers. A wreckage of large assembled components and smaller pieces lay scattered among the tree limbs and river rocks approximately 100' plus downstream. Citizens of the Pisgah community were distraught. They had lost part of their local identity and their most important historical structure. Randolph County was without its remaining one covered bridge. Many individuals rushed to the location and carried away memorabilia pieces, most of which were later returned for rebuilding.

The two minds of the local contractor William Moffitt and the Zoo Director Dr. David Jones quickly came together to review the possibilities of reconstructing the bridge. The retrieved bridge's parts were disassembled, sorted, dry stacked, surveyed and analyzed. Word quickly spread to encourage the souvenir collectors to return their portions, without retribution, so that the bridge could be rebuilt. Two 18 wheel trailers were parked at the site for the returned pieces. Community residents and many of the N.C. Zoo Staff were

involved in collecting the scattered bridge pieces. When fully accounted for, more than 90% of the bridge's parts and materials were accounted for and would be reused in the rebuilt bridge.

Dr. David Jones spearheaded the overall leadership of the bridge's restoration and led the fundraising efforts to raise the necessary monies to rebuild the bridge. The N.C. Zoological Society was the designated agency through which contributions were donated. William Moffitt, a lifetime resident of the community, was selected as the lead contractor to head the rebuilding process. After detailed study, Mr. Moffitt determined that it would cost approximately \$80,000 to rebuild the \$40 original bridge.

Beginning on November 11, 2003, William Moffitt and his crew began the intensive work of rebuilding. As they laid the bridge off and obtained the level lines across the water, they discovered that the original bridge was out of level by only one eighth of an inch! Working through the winter, whenever possible, Mr. Moffitt and his 20-member crew completed the wooden bridge by March 31, 2004. All the stone ramps and adjacent rock walls were completed by the end of April, 2004. On May 1, 2004, the community came together and gave a work day clearing and cleaning the grounds, moving and placing 16,000 pounds of gravel, by wheel barrows, throughout the grounds and the trails.

Perhaps no other date exemplifies the community spirit and emotions of the Pisgah Community and their determination to save and to keep their Pisgah Covered Bridge more than November 15, 2003. Having been given a goal to raise \$5,000 to \$ 7,500 in monies to help rebuild the bridge, by day's end, they had netted \$21,500. It was known as the "Pisgah Covered Bridge Festival" and held at the Union Community Building. About 100 volunteer workers put on the event, and 700 to 800 people participated in the day's event and donations. Mr. Moffitt said that it "became the biggest day Pisgah Community and the High Pine Community had probably ever seen."

Ms. Pugh, again spoke and stated that it was not clear who owned the property the bridge was located on. The Zoo applied for ownership and on May 13, 2004, NCDOT signed a right-of-way agreement and released its ownership and maintenance rights of the Pisgah Covered Bridge to the N.C. Zoological Park. It was the last covered bridge in North Carolina to be maintained by the Division of Highways.

On May 18, 2004, Dr. David Jones led a ribbon-cutting rededication ceremony, at the Pisgah Covered Bridge site, to honor the rebuilding of the historical bridge. NCDOT Secretary Lyndo Tippet was a featured participant, along with other local officials. More than 250 people attended the event. Dr. Jones stated, "This represents a quieter time gone by when things were less rushed and the sound of tumbling water in the creek was all that could be heard apart from the birds' songs and rustling leaves." Dr. Jones summed up the feelings of those in attendance when he said, "You don't know what you've got until you've lost it."

The total expenditures for the entire Pisgah Covered Bridge restoration project of 2003-2004, which included the adjacent grounds, picnic area, parking area, and trails, came to \$88,000. \$90,000 was donated as of July 23, 2004. After this date, NCDOT gave an additional \$5,000. The balance of the project money went into a Pisgah Covered Bridge maintenance fund.

Those individuals and groups to be historically credited for the bridge's survival are many. Space would not be adequate to detail and names lost to history would be absent. But the following come to the forefront: the Pisgah Community, its people from 1911 to 2010; in particular the first property owner on the west side of the bridge, J.J. Welch to the property's current owners, Gerald C. Parker, Sr. and Norah Joan Benfield Parker; the first property owner on the east side, Sam Graves, via to Lacy Strider, to the property's current owners, James Brye Baker and Lena Strider Baker; the Land Trust for Central N.C.; the Piedmont Land Conservancy; Dr. David Jones and the N.C. Zoological Park and its staff; the N.C. Zoological Society; William Moffitt, Jr. and his 20 member crew; NCDOT; Randolph County elected officials; numerous individuals of Randolph County and beyond; numerous donors, both small and large; and many volunteers.

Brye Baker, property owner on the east side of the bridge and the park gate closer, spoke in favor of the designation.

Ricky Allred, resident in the community, also spoke in favor of the designation.

Mr. B. Johnson stated that most covered bridges were built near grist mills and that the said theory for covered bridges was to protect the wood flooring. His theory for bridges having the covered sides was to keep mules and horses from seeing the water and wanting to head toward it. The covered bridge gave the illusion of a barn and this kept them in the intended direction of the route.

Mr. Whatley stated that he appreciates the park like atmosphere in preserving the property. He also said that because counties were responsible for the bridges at that time, the County Commissioner minutes reflect costs of covered bridges and when they were built.

On a motion of Dixon, seconded by Whatley, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the resolution of support for the Randolph County Commissioner's designation of the historic Pisgah Covered Bridge as a historic landmark, as follows:

***Resolution Recommending Local Historic Landmark Designation
1911 Pisgah Covered Bridge***

WHEREAS, Chapter 160A, Article 19, Part 3C of the North Carolina General Statutes provides for the designation of local historic landmarks; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Board of Commissioners has appointed the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission, having the authority to exercise, all powers and duties given it by the Randolph County Historic Preservation Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission has taken into consideration all information contained in the Historic Landmark Designation Report for the 1911 Pisgah Covered Bridge as reconstructed and officially reopened on May 18, 2004; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office, has been given the opportunity to review the Landmark

Designation Report to make comment concerning the requisite historical significance and integrity; and

***WHEREAS**, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission conducted the required public hearing, having published legal notices with mailings to adjoining property owners; and*

***WHEREAS**, the Pisgah Covered Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, and remains on the National Registry as a result of it being rebuilt to exact original dimensions and location, reusing more than 90% of the original bridge pieces; and*

***WHEREAS**, the Pisgah Covered Bridge is the only remaining covered bridge in Randolph County, and one of the two remaining covered bridges in the State of North Carolina; and*

***WHEREAS**, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission finds that the Pisgah Covered Bridge meets the following specific criteria outlined in the adopting Ordinance establishing the Commission: (1) Critical part of Randolph County's heritage by having value as an example of the cultural, historic, and social heritage of the county; (2) The location of the Pisgah Covered Bridge provides a unique and distinctive structure representing an established and familiar visual presence in Pisgah/Randolph County community; and*

***WHEREAS**, the property is more specifically described as follows: The Pisgah Covered Bridge located at 2659 Pisgah Covered Bridge Road, Union Township, Randolph County, North Carolina: PIN# 7635430492 and PIN# 7635338170; as more specifically described in the official Local Landmark Designation report; and*

***NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, this 27th day of January, 2010, that the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation commission approves the request for Local Landmark designation, and recommends to the Randolph County Board of Commissioners that the Pisgah Covered Bridge be designated as a Local Historic Landmark.*

Logo Discussion

RCC students Jamie Kellis, Bryan Kennedy and Deana Ramirez were in attendance to represent the classes that had made presentations to the HLPC at the November meeting.

Chairman Johnson read an email from program director Susan Shaw. Ms. Shaw stated that although none of the brand marks presented by her class were adopted she felt the students did an excellent job at their first attempt at branding. She agreed that there should be more refinement and would like to offer the option to continue the logo mark development to a few students in the spring semester as an independent project for their portfolio, since they will continue to be learning more about branding before they graduate. Ms. Shaw requested the students work directly with some of the HLPC members to gain more direct feedback. Ms. Shaw stated that students will have more flexibility, in their spring schedule, to go off campus for this project.

Ms. Qualls stated to the students that she appreciated them sitting through the critiques from the Commission and taking the initiative to want to improve on the class' initial presentations of logos and marketing of the HLPC.

On a motion of Hankins, seconded by B. Johnson, the Commission voted unanimously to continue working with the RCC students to develop a logo for the HLPC.

HLPC Clerk Amanda Varner recognized student Bryan Kennedy who had already taken his initial design using the 1909 Courthouse and altered with the logo the Commission had agreed upon for the HLPC. This design was presented to the Commission in an email when it was completed and now included in the minutes for public record.



Local Cultural Heritage Site Recognition

Chairman Johnson stated that at the December meeting he presented details that would constitute recognition of a place that has significant heritage and historical value, but may not meet the requirements for landmark designation. These locations would not require permission of a landowner and cemeteries could be included. Chairman Johnson stated that this type of recognition would give the Commission another way to educate the citizens about Randolph County history.

Chairman Johnson stated that the County staff attorney reviewed the details and incorporated the proposed amendments adding the guidelines for the recognition of Local Cultural Heritage sites into the HLPC Ordinance. Request for approval from the Randolph County Board of Commissioners and a public hearing is set for Monday, February 4 at 4:30 p.m.

Ms. Qualls asked to go on record that she is still concerned about using the word “site” as part of the title as it leaves out the possible recognition of people and events.

Mr. Whatley stated that the HLPC guidelines are specific and refer to property owners and the allowance of tax deductions for the property. He noted that the Board of Commissioners has the governing authority to recognize events or people by proclamation or resolution if they deem it proper.

Other Business

Chairman Johnson reminded the Commission that the regular monthly meeting for February would be relocated to the Training Room due to Early Voting scheduled in the Commissioner’s Meeting room.

Mr. Johnson advised that the HLPC web site has been very successful in its efforts to educate. He referred to a recent email from the University of California–Berkley, requesting permission to reproduce one of the web page pictures of Sandy Creek Primitive Baptist Church. The University hoped to use the picture in one of its architectural classes related to early church design.

Mr. Whatley asked what the members would be considering as the next designation. Ms. Qualls stated that the Commission had discussed the Female Academy and Mr. Whatley reminded that the Mt. Shepherd Pottery site had been discussed as well as some other pottery sites that are currently listed on the National Registry.

Mr. Whatley said he feels the Board should have several applications in progress so there would always be something in line for designation.

Chairman Johnson stated that after the amendments to the Ordinance are approved, the Commission could adopt a formal study list. Items on the formal list could be considered as a Local Cultural Heritage Site and after investigation and research, possibly a designation as a local landmark.

Mr. Whatley suggested that the appointment of a new member to replace Donna Hall be requested of the Randolph County Board of Commissioners.

Adjournment

At 3:15 p.m., on motion of Qualls, seconded by Dixon, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn.

Hal Johnson, Chairman

Amanda Varner,
Clerk to the HLPC