

OLIVE BRANCH SCHOOL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Minutes of the meeting of February 2, 2015

Note: The OBSPS quarterly Board meeting (which had been scheduled on January 12th) was postponed due to inclement weather and was held on February 2nd.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chairman William Berry. Trustees present were William Berry, Cyndie Gerken, Jane Manemann, Susan Morgan, John Sipe, Howard Stahl, and ex officio member Paula Crew. Chairman William Berry introduced our guest, Jan Hillman. Jan is a community member and employee of Urbana University with experience in grant writing and fund raising. At a prior meeting, the trustees had agreed that Jan's input would be valuable in helping us decide how to proceed in the raising of funds and restoration of the Olive Branch School.

Due to the fact that both Paula Crew and Jan Hillman had to leave early, Mr. Berry moved the New Business (our consultation with Jan Hillman) to the top of the agenda. Jan led a brainstorming session with us regarding four areas to address in our process of the preservation of the building. The areas were: (1) Proposed utilization of the building, (2) Fund raising, (3) Historic significance of the building, and (4) Who will be involved in the process and what will be their responsibilities. Large sheets of paper were posted for notes in each area.

Regarding historic significance of the building, the following were mentioned: the age of the building (originally built in 1908), the uniqueness of the design (Craftsman style often used in rural areas), the fact that the architect (Charles Insko Williams) was from nearby Dayton, Ohio and the fact that it is the only historic building left on the Tecumseh Local Schools' campus.

Regarding utilization of the building (once restored), some discussion centered on the fact that at previous meetings the possible use of the building for housing the Board of Education had been mentioned. Several in the group expressed that they did not feel its design or size would be conducive to use by the Board of Education and if it was used for that purpose, it would be virtually unavailable for community use and appreciation of its historic features. Other suggested ideas for the restored building included using it for field trips on the history of education in our area (similar to how the retired teachers' group uses the one room school house for field trip education classes for schools both inside and outside the district) or art and /or architecture classes could have field trips there since it has such a unique design. Another suggestion was that it could be used as a community center for such purposes as housing artifacts and for social gatherings such as class reunions (with the possibility of some rental income). This last type of use, it was noted, would require some type of staffing to manage the scheduling and custodial duties, etc. Howard Stahl mentioned that each of the four rooms could be restored as a model to represent different time periods in the school's history. The discussion of fund raising included the mention of the difficulty of getting a broad, up-to-date data base due to the privacy concerns of individuals that have class lists with contact information of alumni.

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Jan Hillman suggested that presentations to community groups such as Rotary and Lions Clubs would be a good place to start in getting interest in the community. Jan also stated that community surveys and “town hall” type meetings can be used to make the community aware of (and build interest and involvement in) the project. Focus groups could then be developed for more specific tasks. Jan further stated that if we ask a business or person for help, we need to be very specific in what we ask for. Vague requests will not draw the attention or interest we seek. In addition Jan stated that the first thing those approached for help will want to know is what the restored building will be used for, and if it will meet a need in the community. Last, she stated timing is crucial. With the current crisis that the Board of Education and community are dealing with, it would be beneficial to wait until things calm down before proceeding. Other suggestions for contacts on fund raising were the Ohio and National organizations of architects as they may be interested in supporting the restoration of the unique building.

Jan suggested that deciding who would be involved and with what responsibilities should probably be put off until a specific use for the building is officially decided. Dividing projects such as ours into phases, and funding one phase at a time was another suggestion made by Jan and had been discussed by the trustees at previous meetings.

At this point in the meeting, both Jan Hillman and Paula Crew had to leave. Further discussion was held by the trustees. A general consensus of the group was that before we do surveys or town hall meetings, we need to clarify our position on the future utilization of the restored building and our role in that restoration with the TLS Board of Education. Official approval of our planned utilization by the Board of Education is also needed since they own the building and will assume responsibility for future maintenance of the building. The trustees agreed that we would like the future use of the restored building to be as a historic building for use by the school system and community. Specific uses would be determined by the Board of Trustees of the Olive Branch School Preservation Society with community input and approval of the Board of Education. We want to clarify that we do not feel it would be appropriate as housing for the Board of Education. To seek approval of the Board of Education for this utilization plan, Mr. Berry agreed to contact the TLS Board of Education to establish a meeting with them for discussion. Mr. Berry also volunteered to keep the posters from our brainstorming session for future reference.

Mr. Berry then moved on with the agenda. Cyndie Gerken moved and Mr. Stahl seconded that the minutes of the October 13, 2014 meeting be approved as written. Motion carried. The printed Treasurer’s Report (submitted by Treasurer Sharon Leathley) was reviewed and it was noted that we did receive a Della Selsor Trust award for the 2014 grant cycle. The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Susan Morgan, Secretary