

Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission Meeting

October 11, 2007 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

District 3 – Public Hearing

Holiday Inn Express, Pauite Room

300 Holiday Frontage Road, North Platte, Nebraska

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

Call to Order and Welcome Guests. President Harold Andersen called the meeting to order.

Introductions. Andersen asked the Commission to introduce themselves to the public.

Formal Roll Call of Commission Members. Andersen asked for a roll call. Roll call showed the following members present. Harold Andersen, Dr. Ron Hull, Dr. Ron Naugle, JoAnn Smith, and Michael J. Smith. Absent was commission member Mildred Curtis, Dr. Dennis Mihelich, and Governor Dave Heinemann, ex-officio.

Acknowledgement of Notice to the Press. M. Smith confirmed that notice to the press had been given.

Nebraska Open Meetings Act (posted/available). Andersen stated that the Open Meetings Act was posted and available. The carrying a concealed handgun is prohibited sign was also posted. Andersen mentioned that several articles have been printed about the Hall of Fame in Nebraska newspapers.

REVIEW

Procedure for the Hearing. Andersen requested that members of the public sign in and indicate if they wish to testify, leave information, or wish not to testify. Andersen commented that the Commission had met June 14, 2007 to hear comments from individuals supporting nominees. The Commission also met on September 20, 2007, for the District 2 public hearing in Omaha, and on October 3, 2007, for the District 1 public hearing in Norfolk. Andersen requested that individuals who have not previously had an opportunity to testify be allowed to testify first. Fifteen minutes was allowed to present testimony for each nominee.

Andersen provided a brief history on the Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame was created by the legislature in 1961. Since that time twenty-three persons have been inducted in the Hall of Fame. The early legislation allowed for one person to be inducted every two years. More recent legislation calls for the induction of one person in a five-year cycle. The meeting commenced with the hearing portion of the meeting.

Refer to the District 3 Hearing file for complete testimony submissions.

Grover Cleveland Alexander. **Mary Ann Frederick**, Executive Director of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, and a tour guide at the Museum of Major League Baseball testified. The Commission was presented with letters from Omaha Monroe Middle School students, as well as a petition form signed by three hundred individuals supporting Alexander.

Randy Lukasiewicz. Showcased a poster featuring Nebraska's top one hundred athletes. Alexander was number three on the poster. Randy passed a baseball to the Commission. He commented that his testimony wasn't just for Alexander, but for sports athletes. Alexander would be 120 years old this year. He grew up in Alba, one of 13 children, and played semi-pro ball, and in 1907 signed his first pro contract. In his early days he played in Illinois, and tried to break up a double play and was knocked out for two days. He was then sent to Indianapolis, where he broke his managers ribs because he was disoriented. Alexander had a shambling walk, his cap seemed a size too small, his windup minimal, and he wound-up quickly. He had a fastball, he had no change up. Grover was acquired by the Phillies in 1911. As a rookie he led the national league in 38 wins. Alexander's greatest years were in Philadelphia. He led the national league in every pitching statistic at least once. In 1917 he was traded, along with the catcher for \$55,000. Alexander was a WWI veteran, and he received an injury (shell shock). "Pete" (Alexander) had trouble with alcohol. After 1926 he received a \$17,500 contract. After leaving the majors he played with the House of David, and spent time back in Nebraska, working with the little league.

Walt Whitman said baseball is the American game. Lukasiewicz passed a second baseball around to the Commission, and commented that it was just a ball, but with much significance – this ball is somewhat untouchable, and the impact of Grover is untouchable.

Hull asked if one of the individuals in the photograph, provided by Lukasiewicz, was related to him, with the response being that it was his grandfather.

Mary Ann Frederick. Frederick finalized the testimony by commenting that her passion for Alexander is extreme, and that she looks at the positive of what Alexander accomplished. Grover had troubles and an alcohol problem, and he had epilepsy before he started drinking alcohol. A letter from Grover's 94-year-old niece, Alma O'Neill was available.

Charles Bessey. **John Janovy** (see attachment testimony).

Andersen asked Janovy to expand on his comments that were mentioned about New Orleans. Janovy stated that we have known for decades about the ecological effect of coastline loss, of the management of the Mississippi and other rivers, and that they have been completely ignored for decades. We are a nation that makes decisions based on political power and votes, and it takes an articulate and powerful mind to override the desire of politics. I cannot think of another scholar from the scientific community that helped us build New Orleans correctly - we have known about this, and we haven't done anything about it.

Hull asked for a further explanation of Bessey's "model of teaching. Janovy indicated that Bessey's model of scientific teaching was to teach as peers and colleagues, and not subjects. To provide intellectual property - relies on the development on scientific habit of mind, rather than content. All of these ways to develop intellectual resources is really Bessey's story, and are copied widely.

Paul Nordquist. A retired agronomist, who worked for UN-L for 41 years at the North Platte Research Station. Bessey and his work with the land act and Hatch Act supported agricultural research. It was important to Bessey not to just have a scientific activity, but to get the scientific information in to the hands of farmers that could use it in Nebraska and across the U.S. The

Hatch Act is completely different than agriculture structures in other areas of the world. There is other land in the U.S., similar to the Midwest, that has the capability to produce like Nebraska, but the professors would never go to the field to have activity. The professors would give instructions to people, have the other people go to the field, and as you go down the ladder, the structure changes completely. There was no effort to get information out into the “working man’s” hands. This is the key that helped to develop the Hatch Act. We have the University of Nebraska and outlying experiment stations to develop practical methods to develop better ways to produce items, such as ways to save inches of moisture that would bring ten bushel an acre increases. The development of this structure was essential to agricultural systems in this country. Bessey helped write the Hatch Act, and the land grant institutions.

Hull asked if Bessey was considered the “Father of the Extension division?” Nordquist commented that it was the system that helped to get the information into the hands of the farmer. Andersen commented that on the drive to the North Platte hearing, he noticed there were places the sandbars were covered with vegetation, which is probably not wholesome for the river. What is being done to address that? Nordquist doesn’t think it is being addressed. What caused and allowed this to happen (near Maxwell), was a prairie fire, and some willows on the islands survived, and since we control burning now, and control conditions, we have a lot of tree growth. If we received 8-10 inches of rain at once, it would be interesting to see what North Platte houses would float.

Jeff Nichols, resource conservationist for the U.S. D.A. conservation service, with a mission to provide one-on-one technical assistance for management of natural resources. Nebraska is 50 percent grass/rangeland. His office also helps the range livestock industry. It is important that the grass/rangeland is healthy. He supports Bessey - a lot of what we do finds its roots in the mentoring and teaching that Bessey did 100 years ago. Bessey worked with and developed ecological concepts that are used today.

Hull asked if Nichols was a UN-L graduate? Nichols responded yes, in 1989, and that is when he learned about Bessey. In rangeland ecology course, Professor Stubbendieck discusses Bessey. Everything traces back to Bessey. Bessey's contributions helped the country, and Nebraska in particular. His influence is very far reaching.

Georgia Arbuckle Fix. No representation. The Commission commented that Fix is believed to be the first female graduate of the medical college. Fix lived in Goering and traveled a 100-mile radius to provide medical treatment. It was noted that just because no one was in attendance to provide testimony, did not mean that the nomination will not be given appropriate consideration.

Andrew Jackson Higgins. **Owen McCaulley from Lincoln**, showed a five-minute video clip from a documentary. *Andrew Higgins The American Noah*, produced for the History channel. WWL-TV Entertainment. Jerry Strahen and Stephen Ambrose, and Graham Haddock spoke in the documentary. Dawn Higgins Murphy, Higgins daughter, is featured in the documentary. Higgins was ahead of his time, he employed 30,000 people, and had an integrated workforce-both sexes. He produced over 20,000 Higgins boats. Higgins Nebraska roots produced a world-class product, the Higgins boat.

Andersen asked for clarification on if Higgins went to the military, or did the military come to Higgins asking for a design a boat? It was uncertain.

Hull asked if Higgins designed the PT boat? There was much discussion among the audience and the Commission about the variety of boats - the Eureka boat, the LCD, LCI, and LCT’s.

Joe Jiresky, serves on the Columbus City Council. Higgins served during the greatest generation of Americans. What he designed is in history books, but there is nothing about Higgins in history books. Higgins designed, engineered and built the Higgins boats. The freedom we enjoy today is because of someone that was born in Columbus, Nebraska. Higgins built a community called “Our Town,” and a school for the children of his employees. He also furnished a monthly magazine called, “Eureka.” A schoolteacher and his students started the memorial in Columbus. There is an exact replica of the Higgins boat at the memorial.

Anita Jiresky. In the 1970s she distributed the Omaha World Herald. A number of the girls and boys that delivered newspapers for Jiresky are the parents of the children who were in Jerry Meyer’s class, who started the Higgins Memorial in Columbus. Jiresky commented that she knew nothing about Higgins until her grandchildren learned about him in Meyer’s class.

Jerry Meyer. Letters written by Dr. Gordon “Nick” Mueller, Kirt Garcia of the Stephen Ambrose Tours, Gayle Higgins Jones, and Pat Breuer were provided. It was clarified that Dr. Gordon “Nick: Mueller, is the other half of Stephen Ambrose. Meyer asked the audience if they have been watching the Ken Burns film *The War*, he pointed out that the Higgins boats are in the film. He also mentioned that the Higgins boat is displayed at the National WWII Museum in Washington . Additional statements by Meyer included: Higgins gave the federal government a refund check when they overpaid him; Higgins shared his patents with the federal government; Gayle Higgins Jones is the only living close relative.

Andersen asked for clarification on the burial place of Higgins mother. It was noted that she was buried in Louisiana and reburied in Columbus, Nebraska. Higgins is buried below ground in New Orleans, which is unusual to be buried under ground in New Orleans.

Hull asked Meyer, who was the catalyst for him? Meyer responded that he was reading the newspaper in 2000, and it was a news article that began the Columbus memorial project.

William M. Jeffers. **Senator Tom Hanson**. The U.S. is loosing veterans at a rate of 1,000 a day, and we need to know their history and pass the stories down to each generation. Jeffers was 65 when the U.S. attacked Japan, and he saw the world situation deteriorating. The North Platte depot was used as a canteen, and six and a half million troops later, the canteen is a story in and of itself. Jeffers was asked to serve as the rubber director for the U.S. Hanson looks at the Jeffers story as a politician. Jeffers planned to expand rayon production, not cotton, because cotton would get hot and explode from too much overheating. When Jeffers was called for not using cotton, he said he would not be influenced. Politicians generally want a study if they don’t have an answer, and Jeffers said we can’t wait for a study – the U.S. has been gambling too long on this rubber situation, and he made his decision and stood by it– he then became known as the rubber czar. The U.S. military couldn’t wait, they needed rubber, synthetic rubber because the Japanese cut off our rubber supply. Jeffers only worked 9 months and collected \$.90 for his work. Hanson also cited information from the nebraskahistory.org website.

Andersen asked if the U.S. government discontinued Jeffers salary from the Union Pacific during his employment. Hanson responded that he did not know. Andersen commented that there was a lot of \$1-men working during that time period.

Hull asked if the U.S. still depends on synthetic rubber today? It was not known, but with the supposition of steel-belted tires that we have today, that the U.S. is not as dependent on rubber. If Jeffers would not have gone to Washington with the tenacity that he used while working for the railroad, the work would have not gotten done.

James Whittaker, (comments attached) Whittaker lived in North Platte in 1941 when he was 5, and witnessed so many things about the canteen because both of his parents volunteered at the canteen. As a child he thought that every town had a canteen, but they did not. He was familiar with the Jeffers name because streets, ballparks, etc. were named for him. His home is now at the museum complex. While continuing his work with the railroad, he resolved the synthetic rubber situation, in nine months. The railroad was also very important during the War because raw products needed to be transported. The Higgins boats probably were transported on the train. Jeffers shortened the war, and saved millions of lives with his dedication as the rubber czar and running the railroad at the same time.

Andersen commented that Grover Cleveland Alexander was a WWI veteran.

Henry Spohn, is the son of a railroader. Jeffers stands for what he did for the country. Ken Burns's film, *The War*, focuses on four cities and the affects on the people. What Jeffers did went beyond the people. Spohn personally witnessed in 1942 and 1943, while in San Bernardino, California, and working on a newspaper. The trains going through were loaded with war supplies. One time the trains came through with an armed guard on the train. The reason for the armed guard was to keep citizens from stealing tires off of the train.

James Griffin. Director of the North Platte Museum. Griffin and others were responsible for submitting the nomination for Jeffers. Jeffers saw the war coming, and in the late 1930s Jeffers spent large sums of money to repair the railroad, so when the war came there would be adequate service to each coast. Without his foresight it would have been harder to get things from eastern factories.

Keith Blackledge, retired newspaper editor from North Platte. Commented on the impact of the Hall of Fame busts in the State Capitol, and what the busts mean to school children. Jeffers story is well known, he was a man that came from nothing and became president of the Union Pacific. Blackledge added, the people of Columbus have made a good presentation about Higgins, but unless they had the rubber they couldn't have built the Higgins boats.

Malcolm X. Brandi Williamson, student at the Pine Ridge Job Corp. (see attached). Omaha, but living at the job corp. Malcolm wanted to be a lawyer, but a teacher told him he could not be a lawyer. Malcolm's father was run over, his mother went to a mental institution, and the children were split up. If Malcolm X was violent and racist how did he capture the attention of so many? He is one of the African-Americans that allow us to sit in the place we now sit.

Janell Johnson, student at the Pine Ridge Job Corp. (see attached). When you hear a man wants freedom...A man who believes in freedom. Malcolm X is a great example in change. He made alot of changes in his own life. He graduated at the top of his class in junior high school. Malcolm X became a minister and traveled to Africa. He was known as one of the outstanding leaders during the civil rights movement. Everyone was urged to read the biography of Malcolm X. Johnson admitted that Malcolm X started out wrong, but changed his ways. People cannot dwell on the past, and make excuses for the future, people need to make their future better. Hull asked if Johnson had read Malcolm X's autobiography? Johnson responded that he has conducted much research on Malcom X. Hull then asked if Johnson's friends feel the same way as he does about Malcolm X. Johnson responded, some people disagree that he didn't believe in non-violence. They go more with Martin L. King's ways of doing things with less violence.

Antonio Bradshaw, student at the Pine Ridge Job Corp. Malcolm X fought for inequality. Malcolm X followed parts of Martin Luther King's ways, that is, Black people will never get anywhere without economic muscle, and Malcolm X felt the same way. Bradshaw stated that he can look past the things Malcolm X did poorly, because he did good things. Malcolm X overcame adversity.

Hull asked if Bradshaw thought Malcolm X had a positive impact on America? He responded, yes. Malcolm X was trying to help his race.

Nate Gilbert, student at the Pine Ridge Job Corp. People saw Malcolm X as an extremist. Near the end of his time he figured some things out and he had a different viewpoint. He was murdered.

Andersen commented that two years ago Malcolm X was nominated to the Hall of Fame, and the nomination process has started over. The previous and the current nominations came from students at the Chadron Job Corp, and Andersen asked if Malcolm X is a unit of study at the Job Corp? The students responded, the nomination came out of a multicultural club, which is optional for students.

M. Smith asked how many students are enrolled at the Pine Ridge Job Corp, with the response being 200.

Hull asked if the students feel that Malcolm X transcends any color boundaries? The response was yes. Malcolm X stood up for what he believed in, and he overcame hardships, and he still came around and did something good.

Andersen clarified that the assassination of Malcolm X followed his leaving the nation of Islam, the rejection of Elijah Mohammed.

Evelyn Sharp. Stephen Baker. Commented on all of the good testimony that has been provided during the hearing, and that the information should be shared with schools.

Evelyn Sharp will probably never have a museum or parks named for her, but she does have a street named for her in Ord. Sharp gave her life for her country. Women didn't have the right to vote in her time period. Sharp began to fly at age 14, which is amazing for this time period. The leaders of Ord thought so much of her, they purchased an airplane for her. Baker wanted the members of the Commission to understand what Sharp means to Ord and the state of Nebraska. Baker recently traveled to the National Air Force Museum in Ohio, and while there he saw a WWII Ferry Pilots exhibit that included Evelyn Sharp. Last summer Baker participated in a ceremony at the Ord cemetery that honored Sharp. President Bill Clinton signed an edict that women were considered veterans, prior to this time they were not. Sharp accomplished much during her short lifetime. She taught hundreds of men how to fly and she flew the U.S. mail. Because of what my children know of Evelyn Sharp, and because of trips to museums, my kids

have decided to build an airplane. They learned enough from the curators, they have taken it upon themselves to follow after Ord's heroin. Sharp lived in Nebraska the majority of her 24 years. She ferried from the east to west coasts. During her flying years, Sharp flew any airplane that was in the air.

Sherry Marchman. As a girl scout leader, one of Marchman's jobs is to create events for 33 counties of girl scouts, with 22,000 girls served. As a "military brat," Marchman wanted to do something for women in history, which is how she became familiar with Sharp. Sharp is a kindred spirit for Marchman. In 2008, girl scouts will learn about Sharp - her courage,

leadership, and confidence. While in Ord, girl scouts will learn how to believe and have dreams just like Sharp. The girl scouts will also learn about careers and that girls can get great jobs. Sharp left a legacy of empowerment.

Irene Abernathy. Abernathy grew up in Ord, went to Hastings College, taught school, married an optometrist, she served on the Hall County Supervisors board, and the Grand Island school board. Growing up in Ord, she knew Sharp well. Sharp and Abernathy's sister were the same age. Sharp spent a lot of time at the Abernathy home. Sharp knew her parents were not well off, so she did things to save money or make money. She fixed a cart so that she could sell ice cream cones; designed and sewed her clothes; helped with the cooking at the boarding house her family owned. Sharp soloed at age 15, received her pilot license at 16, and was a certified instructor at 20. Sharp was sent to South Dakota to teach 300 men how to fly. She was one of a few women that could fly a plane from the east to west coast. Sharp was a good athlete. She was such a good swimmer that the Red Cross sent her to Colorado to teach swimming lessons. There was a time when Sharp needed a better plane, so Abernathy's father asked the fellow business owners to provide financial support to buy a plane, which was purchased. Sharp wanted to take aviation instructions in Lincoln. So Abernathy's father and uncle, who were jewelers, held a dance and auctioned a diamond ring to help send Sharp to aviation school. Sharp needs to be recognized for what she did for her country.

Diane Bartels. Bartels initiated the nomination. Bartels mentioned that several letters of support were being submitted to the Commission. Bartels emphasized the spirit and contributions of Sharp that allow her a place in the Hall of Fame.

Andersen commented on the difficulty that the Commission will have in choosing a candidate.

Hull made a motion to adjourn at 9:20 p.m., second by Naugle.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Michael J. Smith
Secretary
Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission