

Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission Meeting

October 3, 2007 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

District 1 – Public Hearing
Norfolk Arts Center, Gallery Room
305 North 5th Street, Norfolk, 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. Dennis Mihelich, Dr. Ron Naugle, Michael J. Smith. Absent was commission member Mildred Curtis, JoAnn Smith, 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. Andersen requested that individuals who have not previously had an opportunity to testify will 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 1 Hearing file for complete testimony submissions.

Grover Cleveland Alexander. Randy Lukasiewicz , lives in Omaha and grew up close to where Grover Cleveland lived and played ball. He thanked the Commission and greeted the audience. He asked how many members of the audience have been to the State Capitol? As a fourth grader, the tour of the Capitol had a great impact on Lukasiewicz. The Capitol is the location of the Hall of Fame busts. He continued by adding that sports is about heroes. We have the Cornhusker State Games, the College World Series that brings attention to sports. We have fishing, soccer, baseball, volleyball.

Grover Cleveland's high school team did not have a gym or a coach, and individually he was recognized as a leader. Grover Cleveland's name is still talked about at sports events. This summer, Murdock, Nebraska kids enacted a 1940s baseball game. He shared a poster that featured some of Nebraska's best athletes, such as Richy Ashburn, Randy Rasmussen, and Louise Pound. The poster ranked the athletes. The number one ranked athlete is Bob Gibson, Gayle Sayers is second, and G. C. Alexander is third. Last year seventy-seven million people attended baseball events. Grover represents faith, attitude, heroes, communities, all ages, races, colors.

Hull interjected that the Ken Burns baseball film includes a spotlight on Alexander, and the impact of baseball in communities across America. Minor league baseball is what defined communities. Articles from the twenties indicate that towns drew 1,200 people to communities – the impact of sports at that time had a major impact on communities. Some men gave up sports to protect their country.

Charles Bessey. Jim Stubbendieck, professor of grassland ecology at Director of the Center for Great Plains Studies, UN-L, spoke on behalf of Bessey (see attached).

Andersen commented that during this time of year, it is appropriate to observe that Bessey thought there was too much emphasis on football in Lincoln. Stubbendieck responded yes, it took too much time from schoolwork. Hull asked if Bessey had any children? Stubbendieck did not know if Bessey had children.

Lowell Moser, professor emeritus of agronomy at UN-L, spoke on behalf of Bessey (see attached). Hull asked Moser if he would say that 1905 to 1920 was the golden age of the university? Moser said yes, and possibly earlier. Hull asked if any of the buildings at the universities were built while Bessey was alive? Moser responded, he did not believe so. The UN-L building was in the process of being constructed, and it was named shortly after his death. Andersen commented that Bessey was at the University of Nebraska in an era when the University moved from an era of one building, Nebraska Hall, to several more buildings. That was the era where the prairie university began to grow.

Georgia Arbuckle Fix. The Commission reported that they expect representation for the candidate at the North Platte hearing. Mihelich and Hull commented that Georgia Arbuckle Fix practiced medicine in western Nebraska at the turn of the century. Mari Sandoz based *Miss Marissa* on Fix and one other woman. Fix was one of the first women to practice in Nebraska.

Andersen pointed out that three-ring binders for each of the candidates were available for public view in the hearing room.

Andrew Jackson Higgins. Major General Roger Lempke spoke first. The Major was in civilian clothes and was not representing the Governor. Major Lempke acknowledged that he did not know that Higgins was from Nebraska until the 2001 dedication of the Higgins Memorial in Columbus. Major Lempke finds that few others know that Higgins is from Nebraska. The D-Day museum – the Louisiana memorial pavilion pays tribute to the boat and the civilians that built the boat. The museum says little about Higgins at the Louisiana museum. While at the museum, Major Lempke was able to share with visitors the Higgins connection. Higgins honed his theory for the boat on the Platte River in Nebraska. Lempke's point is that it is time that Nebraska connected the fame of the Higgins boat to the hard-working Nebraskan. He formed Higgins industries and sold the boats to the military. Criteria two of the Hall of Fame indicates that a person shall have been born in Nebraska, lived a significant part of Nebraska, or a contribution to society that was affected by the individual. Higgins accomplished all three of the criteria. He was born in Nebraska, he developed the boat and rifles, and during this period he devised a pontoon bridge. The death of his father forged a streak of determination to pursue a dream, though he settled in New Orleans, he often came back to Nebraska.

Major Lempke stated that Higgins said, Columbus, the town he was born, no matter how long the absence or whether chosen by his parents, was his home. His reverence for Nebraska, and his passion and drive were from his youthful experiences in Nebraska. Hopefully there is no doubt that his contributions with the Higgins boat, and thanks to Higgins, the allies had the right resources for the right time for victory. No wonder Eisenhower called Higgins “the man who won the war.”

Andersen asked if the Eisenhower quote came from an Ambrose book, with Major Lempke stating yes. Many have already died from the greatest generation, and this honor would honor Higgins and the lives of those that gave to the war. Higgins made a measurable contribution to society and Nebraska - we need to connect Higgins the boat to Higgins the man.

Andersen asked where his family died? It is thought that the family died in Omaha, but no one was certain. Higgins is buried in a military cemetery in New Orleans. Higgins still has a daughter living in Jackson, Mississippi. His daughter is 78 years old.

Ed Cerny, American Legion Post, Columbus. Higgins had heart, he set his mind to what he wanted to accomplish and he did it. Higgins set up a town for the people that worked for him. He practically went broke trying to take care of these people. I can relate to this because I have been an employer that kept people too long as Higgins did.

A letter from a gentleman from California was presented. It would seem fitting from a timing and historical view that Higgins be inducted. In this day and age when we are losing the greatest generation, and the craft that saved these men in war, the Higgins boat ensured that peace would be brought.

Laura-Nel Carlisle. A WW II nurse, Carlisle was deployed with forty-nine other nurses to the Phillipines. When the nurses sailed into the gulf on the USS Braxton, it was 2:00 in the morning. The Jacobs ladder was let down, and we were told to feel our way down the side of the ship, and we kept banging against the concave side, and they would say jump. Carlisle jumped into a Higgins boat that was waiting for the nurses. All of their footlockers and gear were put aboard. Carlisle stood at the side, there were no seats, and the metal on the side of the ship was even with my chin. What Carlisle wanted to impress upon everyone is that she would still be swimming with out the Higgins boat. A World-Herald article stated that General Eisenhower said the war would not have been won without the Higgins boat. This patriotism is needed for Nebraska.

Andersen asked Carlisle if she was from Columbus, she responded that she has been living in Norfolk since 1946. Hull asked Carlisle if she was been watching the Ken Burs series entitled, “The War”? Carlisle responded, she has been watching the film. Hull stated that he understands the roll of the nurses more fully with Carlisle’s presentation. Carlisle stated that the chief nurse said the nurses would have 1,000 patients. However there were 2,000 patients and there was no laundry. The nurse took the soap they had brought with them to set up laundry.

Mike Landkammer, serves as the American Legion past state commander, and currently serves on the national level. Landkammer emphasized that Eisenhower was a General, not the President during the war, and if the war would have been lost, we would be speaking another language. In 1944, Roosevelt brought Higgins to his office, he took up the challenge (for the Manhattan project) to make a critical part for the atomic bomb that was dropped on Japan. The government tried for years to get a tank landing craft, Higgins developed the craft in sixty-four hours. This information was given to Landkammer by Ed Cerny, post commander.

Andersen asked others supporting Higgins to stand, and to ensure that they had filled out a sign-in sheet.

William M. Jeffers. **Jim Reisdorf** (see attached testimony).

Hull asked if Reisdorf would address Jeffers producing synthetic rubber? Reisdorff responded, Keith Blackledge will address the “rubber czar” portion of his life at the North Platte hearing.

Hull mentioned that a young woman has produced a canteen film for Nebraska Educational Telecommunications.

Jim Hanna, resident of Columbus, his interest is driven by his interest in railroad history. William Martin Jeffers was a native son, and he spent his whole life in the service of the Union Pacific railroad. The U.P. railroad is a rich history and is tied to the settlement of the state, and development of the nation. He is a self-made man and began work at the age of 14 as a “call boy.” As a “call boy” Jeffers stated that his intent was to be president of the railroad, and he was. He was president in the depression and WWII. Under his leadership the railroad survived the depression, and he had the foresight to see the war coming. He began to plan for the war before others. Hanna then summarized the rubber czar information. Jeffers left the railroad and went to Washington, D.C. at the request of Roosevelt. There were techniques known for making synthetic rubbers. Jeffers agreed to take the salary for \$1a year to solve the problem, and he solved the problem in less than a year and collected \$.97 cents after taxes. He then went back to the railroad to work. Jeffers taught the President of the United States how to deal with American industry which helped to win the war Roosevelt was considering putting industry under the government, and Jeffers told Roosevelt to get out of the way of industry. As the war went on it took its toll on the railroad and railroad workers, because they were drafted for the war. Jeffers was instrumental in declaring that railroad workers could be kept at home. He was creative in solving manpower, but training and recruiting women, where they had previously been rare. Jeffers kept the Union Pacific running during the war effort. After retirement, Jeffers moved to California, but is buried in Omaha. Jeffers was unimpressed by politics. He was the right man for the right time.

Hull asked what was meant by the statement that Jeffers was a hard man? Jeffers walked over members of congress. During the rubber crisis the military wanted to use rayon cords in the military tires because it was stronger, this upset the cotton farmers. The cotton cords had a tendency to rot and fall apart. Jeffers was also known as a hard man on the railroad. He didn’t expect anyone to do something he wouldn’t do.

Everyone was encouraged to visit the Higgins memorial in Columbus.

Hull asked if the Higgins monument was built by the citizens of Columbus? In response, the memorial was built by donations of bricks and no tax money.

A teacher organized students and they built the boat for the memorial in a Columbus High School shop class. The boat in the memorial is made of steel.

Malcolm X. As someone that teaches about history and World War II, it is hard to compete with the greatest generation. Megan Winchell, is a history professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Her favorite course to teach is African American history, and she teaches about Malcolm X. Students arrive with one perception, and leave with another. Winchell has visited the state capitol with her family and hopes that one day a bust of Malcolm X were be in the halls of the Capitol.

Andersen commented that he has read the Malcolm X autobiography, and referenced the period of Malcolm X’s contribution which lasted from May of 1964 until he was killed. Andersen asked Winchell if she was aware that Malcolm X told a Life Magazine interviewer that he considered that his years pursuing racial separation were wasted. Winchell stated that Malcolm X’s words were used to uplift people that were beaten down.

Jennifer Nance. See attached testimony.

Ryan Post. See attached testimony.

With the testimony provided by Wesleyan students, Nance and Post, Andersen asked Winchel if this semester was devoted to a specific textbook or area of history. Winchel responded, she teaches

African American history, and a full semester is devoted to studying African American history from slavery to the present.

Mihelich commented that in defense of what was shared at the Omaha hearing, and that he has taught history for years, Mihelich pointed out that the Klu Klux Klan did not drive Malcolm X out of Omaha. This happened in Michigan, not Nebraska.. Malcolm X's father was part of the back to Africa movement.

Hull asked students (Nance and Post) what characterizes, or inspires hope for the future - what about Malcolm X speaks to you as a couple of white kids, and how can that be used in your life. Nance responded, it was Malcolm X's ever evolving knowledge of himself, and his recognition of the people that he was speaking to, and who followed him. Malcolm X had been knocked down to such a level - he knew what it took to get people to pull themselves up. She finished by stating that she has not been faced with that challenge, and knowing who you are is important.

Post commented that from his experiences, he has never had hardships. In his hometown things came easy, and he never had tough experiences or hard times, compared to Malcolm X. When things are irrational, Malcolm X was able to work through it.

Andersen commented to Winchel that the point was made make clear in her course that Malcolm X was a disciple of Muhammed, who believed in the creation of a separation of a separate state for blacks. Winchel responded, yes. In the 1960s, in the northern United States where segregation is defacto, what they are fighting is poverty and discrimination, so the idea was that blacks should come together and their lives would be better. The reality was they hoped for their own elected leader – churches/mosques in this case. Andersen commented that his autobiography implies that he believed in anything less than a separate organization for blacks.

Evelyn Sharp. Hanna Pauley, a 7th grader from Columbus. Last year Pauley competed in the Nebraska history day competition on the state and national levels. Pauley's competition included Evelyn Sharp, who began flying at 15, Sharp was the only woman in a class of 75 men. Business leaders helped Sharp buy an airplane thinking this would boost the community. She gave thousands of people their first ride in an airplane. While in Ord, Pauley spoke to a man that got a ride for a nickel. Sharp had her pilots license by the age of 20, and she went on to train over 350 people, mostly men, so that they could serve our country. Sharp inspired Pauley because of her passion, drive and determine, and strength to overcome her diversity.

Hull asked about Pauley's history day competition. Pauley responded that she prepared and presented a ten-minute presentation memorizing and portraying Sharp at the University of Maryland campus, in front of judges.

Susan Askew, Officer of the chapter of the 99's. Sharp was a charter member of the chapter. The 99s are an international organization of woman pilots. The Nebraska chapter was formed in 1937. The organization was called the Missouri Valley chapter of the 99s and later changed to the Nebraska chapter. Sharp was the youngest member, and Nebraska had 8 other pilots at the time. Sharp was part of the women ferry pilots, which was originally called the women's military army corp. Carl Steffen tried to the ferry pilots veteran status, and it happened in the 1970s. In watching the Ken Burns television program, "The War," Askew has been thinking about Sharp, among others Sharp gave the ultimate sacrifice for her country. Other organizations honor her, one is the civil air patrol. Sharp helps further education of aviation in many ways. Sharp did a lot of flying in county fairs – mostly in northeast Nebraska towns.

Andersen asked Askew if she is a member of the 99? She responded, yes.

Hull asked if any of Sharp's family is alive? No siblings from her biological or adoptive parents.

Askew has met a first cousin that has now died, and a second cousin from Oskaloosa is going to write a letter.

Diane Bartles. Bartels mentioned to the Commission that they will receive a couple of other letters –a former national history day winner, Kinsey Taylor, who did a video on Evelyn Sharp in 1999. Kinsey is a graduate student at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Another woman from Lincoln, Katherine Frieze, who attends the University of Indiana, will share how Sharp is her role model. The towns that Sharpie barnstormed in include: Albion, Basset, Newman Grove, Norfolk, O’Neill, and Yankton, S.D. Lastly, when Sharp flew the airmail flight, she borrowed a plane from someone in Norfolk.

Andersen asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak.

Dan Worth from Columbus asked to speak about Higgins. Worth does custom cabinetry work and compared his work and the work of Higgins designs as, simple is better. In a country that was in dire straights, Higgins contribution was simple, and his design of the boat was simple, and it didn’t take a lot of resources.

Hannah Pauley’s father commented that prior to his daughter researching Sharp, he didn’t know anything about her. He feels like he knows Sharp now because he went to Ord and talked to people about Sharp. Sharp had the drive and motivation that is needed today.

Motion to adjourn by Mihelich at 9:00 p.m., second by Hull. Voting yes was, Andersen, Hull, Naugle, Mihelich, M. Smith. Motion carried, 5 voting yes, 0 voting no.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "S".

Michael J. Smith
Secretary, Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission