

Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission Meeting

September 20, 2007 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

District 2 – Public Hearing

Mormon Trail Center at Historic Winter Quarters, Auditorium, 3215 State Street, Omaha

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

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

Introductions. Andersen introduced the Commission to the members of 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, and Michael J. Smith. Absent was commission members JoAnn Smtih, Mildred Curtis, and Governor Dave Heinemann, ex-officio.

Acknowledgement of Notice to the Press. 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. He requested that during the hearings individuals that have not had an opportunity to testify be allowed to do so. Fifteen minutes has been 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.

Grover Cleveland Alexander. Bob Hasebroock introduced Randy Lukasiewicz who was dressed in baseball attire. Hasebroock spoke in support of “Pete” Grover Cleveland Alexander, and the need to have a sports figure represented in the Hall of Fame. Those currently inducted do not have sports backgrounds. Hasebroock provided the Commission with a resolution from the Omaha Golden K (Kiwanis Club), supporting G.C. Alexander. He continued by stating that many baseball players have a great deal of influence in our culture and society.

Andersen commented that the guidelines/criteria for choosing does not rule out athletes. Hasebroock commented that in G.C. Alexander's case his recognition continues as the greatest baseball player that came out of Nebraska.

Jim Denney, former member and chair of the Hall of Fame testified on behalf of G.C. Alexander. Denney indicated that as a reporter he has written stories about the St. Paul museum and the exhibits that focus on G.C. Alexander. The community of St. Paul has a historical marker about G.C. Alexander and the museum has his uniform and caps.

Brendan Titrud provided testimony that G.C. is recognized as the best right-hander in the golden age of baseball - he has 373 wins. The bottom line is he is a baseball Hall of Famer from Nebraska.

Randy Lukasiewicz dress in a baseball uniform brought a poster, "The Nebraska: Our Greatest Athletes." The people of Nebraska voted for the best athletes to be included on the poster and G.C. Alexander is ranked number three on the poster. A vote for G.C. Alexander is a vote for hope and sports. Many Nebraska communities have developed a number of strong athletes: Gibson, Sayers, Rogers, Green, Strickland, Goodman, and Boone. A vote for G.C. Alexander would be a vote for the state.

Charles Bessey. Martin Massengale testified on behalf of Bessey and thanked the Commission for their consideration of Charles Bessey. The nomination presents Bessey as an outstanding educator for higher education both in public and private institutions. Bessey had an impact on the local, international, and national level. He is still recognized today in the field of plant science. Even though Bessey was a scientist and administrator he felt he was a teacher. Bessey's publications lead him to be the lead in botany across the nation. Bessey wrote bills for the Hatch Act, which set up the experimental agricultural stations – it is difficult to know and measure how the Hatch Act has affected all of us (e.g. new food products and nutrition information). Dr. Bessey recruited talents such as Roscoe Pound. Bessey set Nebraska apart in the plant science field. Bessey was selected president of the largest science organization in the world. He was president of the Botanical Society of America. There are buildings on two land grant campuses that are named after Bessey – one in Iowa and one in Nebraska. His pioneering contributions in botany, research, as a teacher, and administrator, leads him to be a strong candidate for the Hall of Fame. Massengale presented the Commission with a publication, *A Century of Achievement: One Hundred Years of Graduate Education, Research, & Creative Activity.*"

Thomas B. Bragg, testified on behalf of Bessey, and teaches at UN-O. As a biologist, who teaches about Bessey in my classes, and the discipline of science, I continue to use his information and what he has passed on. Bessey is not only important in Nebraska, but internationally.

Georgia Arbuckle Fix. No one in attendance to testify.

Andrew Jackson Higgins. A request was made to move to the testimony for Jeffers due to the late arrival of the individual that will be testifying for A.J. Higgins. The request was granted with the acceptance of those testifying on behalf of William M. Jeffers.

William M. Jeffers. **Joe McCartney**, retired Union Pacific railroad executive provided additional materials about Jeffers, who was born in North Platte, and worked for the Union Pacific for 56 years. Jeffers began work at the age of 14 for Union Pacific, as a "call boy." In 1915 Jeffers came to Omaha's Union Pacific headquarters. Jeffers worked his way up becoming Vice President of Operations, President in 1937, and retired in 1946. Jeffers favorite book was the Union Pacific book of rules – Union Pacific is structured with no allowance for variance. Jeffers took his management to Washington. He popularized himself by imposing a 35 mph speed limit to save on

tires or rubber. Jeffers was labeled the rubber czar. Jeffers was featured in the 1945 issue of Time magazine. He married Lena, and had 5 honorary degrees.

Why he should be elected? 1) native Nebraskan, 2) used publicity and tenacity 3) icon of the hardworking man despite hard work. He kept Union Pacific a forward-looking company. Jeffers was a key to keeping Union Pacific as a fine corporate citizen.

Malcolm X. All individuals testified in support of Malcolm X.

Chris Rodgers, Douglas County Commission stated that Malcolm X was born his district. Rogers commented that this is the best opportunity to have someone of his stature in the Hall of Fame. Malcolm X's contributions to this country would be on par with anyone around. His legacy speaks well beyond his years. Rogers commented that he is not a native Nebraskan, but has been in Omaha 20 years, and Malcolm X has drawn a lot of attention to Nebraska. He is recognized across the country.

Tom Tomoser, Sr. stated that as a white veteran who served the U.S. in the military, and the segregated south, and knows how black people were treated in the south. Malcolm X was a great teacher, his message was empowerment, and that no one should be dependent on others for their life. He added, if one group is strengthened, we are all were strengthen. Nebraska has the distinct honor to claim Malcolm X as our native son. Malcolm X helped people nationally and internationally. We have the opportunity to honor this great man and great leader.

Dr. Liwaru, Ph.D. Liwaru knew Malcolm X personally, he met him in Harlem in New York City. Malcolm X asked if Liwaru was going to New York University, and Liwaru responded that he was. Liwaru is the father of ten, and grandfather of thirty-three, and a lot of who he is came from Malcolm X. Malcolm X encouraged his education and told him to educate others. Liwaru has a Masters from Kansas. His son is Sharif Liwaru, and some of my grandchildren area here. Liwaru's children were are raised on humanity, righteousness, and obeying the law. This came from Malcolm X, and the pride that was instilled, and by us studying our history. People talk about Malcolm X, and know he was born in Omaha. Liwaru returned from Africa a few months ago, and a student asked if he knew Malcolm X, and he said he met him – Malcolm X is known around the world. He thanked the Commission.

Franklin Thompson. Omaha City Councilman and professor of education at UN-L, provided the definition of "resiliency," as he spoke about Malcolm X. When Thompson thinks about resiliency he thinks about Malcolm X. Thompson commented that he knows of this personally. Thompson had little guidance as a young man from peers or parents. Going to school meant you were acting white. Thompson stated that he is here because of two people, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, outside of those two he has no one. Thompson spoke of about resilience and what it is to come back. Malcolm X was born of poverty, without guidance, and was a child of the streets, which lead him to a wrong lifestyle. As he grew older he grew up, and as he grew up, he overcame. In a lifestyle of drug usage, womanizing, corruption and dependency of the government, he overcame hatred. Malcolm X was killed because he said, I denounce hatred. There are a lot of people that are supportive of Malcolm X, both genders, all social classes, young and old. Malcolm X is an example of resilience. Had it not been for my two roles models, and a couple of teachers that took Thompson under their wing, he would not be here today. Sometimes you are so stuck in the status quo, that you are blinded by a larger truth. Don't be tripped up by an angry man in his youth. If Malcolm X were here today, all of this foolishness you would see – kids killing kids, name calling, prostituting, all of that would be stopped. I know baseball and football players are great. There is only one Bobby Kennedy, President Lincoln, and one Malcolm X. Malcolm X is not just a Nebraska leader. For all of us that had little or no help, he is an icon that helps Thompson say he can make it too. Look beyond politics, and look to the heart.

Vicky Quaites-Ferris – Ferris identified herself as working for the City of Omaha/Mayor’s office. Andersen asked if she was representing the Mayor or herself? She explained that she had asked the Deputy Chief of Staff Paul Landow if she could speak on behalf of Malcolm X, and received his approval. Ferris continued by stating that Malcolm X is known abroad. His birth site is in Omaha and continues to be an attraction, encouraging people to stop. The film “Malcolm X” continues to be a resource to teach others about Malcolm X and discrimination. There are streets, stamps, etc. that commemorate Malcolm X. It is time to bring national attention to Malcolm X. She thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak.

Senator Lowen Kruse. Strongly supports the nomination of Malcolm X for induction into the Hall of Fame. Malcolm X came out of a tumultuous time and he represents some of the best distillation of a tumultuous time. Whenever his name comes up people talk about his deficits. We have quite a few people that we have honored that have deficits, and it doesn’t take away from him. We are looking for people that did something beyond their time.

John Pollack – People have spoken about Malcolm X’s international stature, his character and growth personally. While reading his autobiography I was moved by the tremendous changes that he went through. As a white Nebraskan, as far as Pollack can tell, that Nebraska and the Klu Klux Klan drove Malcolm X and his family out of Nebraska. He deserves stature in this state.

Tim Clark. Representing himself. Clark serves as the President of the 100 Black Men of Omaha, which is part of a national organization throughout the U.S., with a mission to impact the quality of life and build a brighter future for our youth. In his daily capacity, he serves on the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. Others have said that the time is right and now. You may be aware of the challenges in North Omaha. Currently, a comprehensive study is underway that will look at economic development in North Omaha. Through the economic development process, we have identified areas of interest. At a community interest meeting, the question was asked, is there an area that we should place time and money. The Malcolm X site came out at number one. You will see a considerable amount of investment in the site. Improving the site will bring the community together. Not only personally, and in my travels in the U.S. and across the world, it is exciting when people discover that I am from Omaha, and how they relate Omaha to the birth site of Malcolm X. Clark encouraged the Commission to consider him for the Hall of Fame.

Rick Cross. Cross attended the hearing as part of the board of the Omaha Kiwanis group. Cross is not from Omaha, but moved here early in my life. Cross grew up a few blocks from where Malcolm X was born. Before coming to Nebraska, I grew up in the South and saw what Martin L. King and Malcolm X did. Cross has always worked in the community trying to bring equality for our children, and to let kids know that they don’t have to kill or steal. If Malcolm X were alive today, you would not have stealing or killing. Rowena Moore taught Cross a lot, it is never to late to educate yourself. Cross has had an opportunity to meet Malcolm X’s family, his wife, his daughter and brothers. Cross would like to make sure that each of us shows the youth of North Omaha, Nebraska, and the U.S., that Nebraska supports its native son, Malcolm X.

Andrew Jackson Higgins. Randolph Scott, Brigadier General for the Air Force and National Guard arrived to testify. All of the candidates should probably all be in the Hall of Fame. I am speaking on behalf of one individual for personal reasons, and because this person has a commonality. I am not a native of Omaha, I am from Louisiana. Higgins was a great entrepreneur and inventor. Higgins left Nebraska to go to Louisiana, and his company designed a boat to transport military into World War II. The boat, called the Higgins, was responsible for protecting marines, navy and army troops. One of the troops that was protected was the General’s father. Because of the boats design and safety features, my father was able to enter into his wartime destination, and the boat saved him. Higgins was an innovator in his own right, in terms of social rights, and an equal opportunity employer. Higgins did not discriminate from paying black and

whites differently, employing men over women. He did remarkable things in terms of employment practices. He was fair and equal to people, and for this very reason, I believe he should be honored in the Nebraska Hall of Fame.

Andersen asked if there is a Louisiana Hall of Fame that compares to Nebraska? Supporters indicated that there is a National D-Day memorial in New Orleans for Higgins, but were not familiar with a Hall of Fame such as Nebraska's.

Craig Bechtolt – A Nebraska National Guardsman, stated that he wouldn't have four generations of Nebraska National Guardsman in his family today without the Higgins boat. Higgins had ninety-two percent of the naval design industry business, at the time he was producing the Higgins boat. He also had various contracts for aircraft parts. There is a memorial located in the Pawnee Park in Columbus, Nebraska. Higgins and his boat did a lot to bring Nebraska name recognition.

Byron Diamond – Resides in Omaha and grew up in Columbus, and has seen what has happened in the last decade in Columbus, regarding the memorial that was built, and how the community has come together to honor Higgins. Over the last ten years the chamber of commerce, the mayor's office, the public school system and community worked jointly to raise one and a half million dollars to build the memorial in Columbus. Higgins went to high school at Omaha Creighton Prep, and he started his business, a 20,000-employee endeavor, that made World War II successful. General Scott mentioned paying black and whites an equal pay. There was an investigation by the Federal government for putting women on the dock yards, and Higgins said the women, Blacks, Asian's, and Whites, could all perform the job. We have had presidents mention Higgins in speeches. In conclusion, from his death to today, there has been one milestone after another to memorialize his contributions to Nebraska, because of what he did for the U.S. in winning the war. The National D-Day museum has been built, an expressway in his honor, and an official A. J. Higgins Day has been proclaimed by former Governor Mike Johanns. A continuum would be the induction of Higgins into the Nebraska Hall of Fame.

Jerry Meyer – A former schoolteacher at Columbus, now on active duty. As a schoolteacher, three years of my life was dedicated to the memorial in Columbus. My students collected sand samples from all of the beaches from WWII, in which all of the boats were used. In his practices, Higgins always credited his Nebraska roots.

Evelyn Sharp.

Michaela Schaaf - An aviation chapter advisor who also teaches aviation spoke of the need for more role models for women in aviation. Females look for careers that will provide challenges and opportunities. The first U.S. airline pilot wasn't hired until 1973. The women's WASPS and WAVES opened doors for women. Evelyn Sharp was an original member of the WASPS and then became a WAVE. Evelyn Sharp was a trailblazer, recognized by the Department of Aeronautics. They looked to her for recommendations for landing facilities/strips. She was a female instructor. She flew in the WASPS and WAVES program, and demonstrated that women could fly aircraft as well as heavy aircraft. Sharp put a down payment on an aircraft when she was seventeen years old. Evelyn is a part of Ord, aviation and the state's history. She was as well known as Amelia Erhart. She took the community of Ord, and Nebraska with her when she flew. The Ord airport is known as Evelyn Sharp Field. Evelyn's accomplishments came before the laws and legislation of civil rights. She was accepted as an equal to men based on her accomplishment. Sharp lived a short life.

Diane Bartels. Betty Davis from the Douglas County Historical Society will arrive soon to comment on Evelyn Sharp. Evelyn didn't let the role or the struggle of life's disappointments get in her way. She rose above meager circumstances. She came from a background that would be considered meager by today's standards. She found a way to make aviation her career. She was

instrumental in bringing aviation to the forefront of this country. She gave her life for this country, and her legacy is a source of Nebraska pride. There is a second cousin who lives in Oskaloosa. I have asked him to send a letter of support to the Commission.

Chairman Andersen asked if there was anyone in attendance who did not turn in a sign in sheet that identified their interest in speaking. If not, he would allow comments from others that had spoken at previous Hall of Fame Commission meetings. The following individuals provided additional testimony.

Malcolm X – Sharif Liwaru runs the Malcolm X Foundation, and stated that their membership is represented from coast to coast and internationally. Liwaru grew up in California and Kansas City, and moved to Nebraska his senior year so that he could attend UN-L. One of the first things he wanted to do was to know where Malcolm X walked, knowing the first things that Malcolm X saw, and the experiences of elders. When I saw that the birth site was being developed by a handful of people, he knew that they worked in the community to make a social change, a change in the lives of young people. He got involved in the organization at seventeen. At twenty, he served as Second Vice President, and in this role recruited others to carry out the message and teach others what he had learned. Much information has been provided to the Hall of Fame. It has been interesting to be a part of the Malcolm X Foundation, and to hear from people who want to know where Malcolm X was born. Despite his teachers telling him he could not be a lawyer, he did change his life. The kids from Chadron got involved in the nomination process, and they know that anyone can make a difference.

Andersen responded to Liwaru's comments about how a person can change and bring about change. Malcolm X took a pilgrimage to Africa. The people embraced him in Africa, and he is embraced in their textbooks. Malcolm X was killed eight months later after his return to the U.S.

Marshall Taylor – indicated he would decline to speak.

Arthur Stalwarth – Originally, he did not wish to testify, but changed his mind. The educational factor has been mentioned, how Malcolm X struggled, changed, and then bettered himself. With Malcolm X in the Hall of Fame, people will know that they can make change. The induction of Malcolm X would give African American kids a roll model to follow. This is why I am here to learn about the process. It would be a great contribution and honor for Malcolm X to be in the Hall off Fame.

Evelyn Sharp - Betty Davis arrived to speak on behalf of the Douglas County Historical Society. Andersen asked if the Douglas County Historical Society's executive committee had authorized Davis to speak on their behalf, or as an individual? Andersen asked Davis to clarify if she was speaking as Betty Davis. Davis responded that she was asked to speak for myself, but naturally the Douglas County Historical Society is identified because of her position. Evelyn Sharp was a woman before her time. Diane Bartels has carried the message forward for years. Sharp helped to fill the void by training pilots during the war effort. Seventeen of Sharp's twenty-four years were spent in Nebraska. With her advancement in the field, her service to the war, and her identity and courage where it was needed, she is worthy as a Nebraska Hall of Fame leader.

Malcolm X. Dayo Kosoko – Is from Maryland and a recent graduate of Creighton University. Reference was made to the t-shirt he was wearing that was imprinted, "The Noose is Loose" Handcuff Free Clothing, Free the Jena 6." Kisoko indicated that he has learned a lot about Nebraska history tonight. The first thing that I wanted to see when I came to Nebraska was to learn about Malcolm X. When I saw the birth site I wasn't impressed, but through the efforts of others the site is being built up.

Jane Erdenberger – Indicted that she had not expected to speak, and couldn't add anything else, except her own experiences. She was a lawyer for twenty-two years at Kutak Rock, and now teaches at North High School. Not honoring Malcolm X would be a travesty. Students have no role model. While I applaud the efforts at the site, we have not yet in fact yet honored Malcolm X in Nebraska. It sends an important to students that people can turn around.

Frank Peak. Identified himself as long time community activist in Omaha, who presently works at Creighton University. People visiting from across the U.S. ask why we don't see or hear anything about Malcolm X, but here at his home we have nothing to honor him with - people have a question about this. It is imperative that we do this. Even if you don't like him, he is a national icon. What does that say about us as a community, and as a people that we have not recognized him.

Andersen asked if the Hall of Fame apparatus is the body to correct the wrong?

Peak responded that it is incumbent on all of us to recognize Malcolm X, not with just the site, but the Hall of Fame also.

Motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. by Mihelich, second by Hull. Motion unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Michael J. Smith
Director/CEO, Nebraska State Historical Society
Secretary, Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission