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Park County Historical Society members in conflict

Will use outside mediator to help with resolution

Laura Van Dusen, Correspondent



Entriiken cabin

This cabin is the cornerstone of Bailey's McGraw Memorial Park. It was named for Elizabeth Entriiken, who came to the Bailey area in 1864 with her sister and brother-in-law, William and Ann Bailey. It was built by William Bailey and Father John Dyer, who was Entriiken's brother. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

Two past presidents and a current board member of the Platte Canyon-based Park County Historical Society disagree with President Art Hall's handling of the Society's business. Three letters to the editor in three weeks from John Rankin – past president; Pat Mauro – immediate past president; and Roger Christenson – current board member, brought the dispute into the open.

To solve the ongoing issues, an executive board meeting is scheduled for later this month. The attendees will include Rankin, Mauro and Christenson and the executive board; which, according to the Society's constitution "shall consist of all elected and appointed officers of the Society, all Directors, the immediate Past President, and Chairmen of existing committees. All other past presidents would be honorary (non-voting) members of the board."

Executive Board meeting

Hall said a Denver-based mediator – someone who assists disagreeing parties to negotiate a settlement – has been hired to meet with the group on Sept. 19.

Rankin said he would prefer the mediator act as an arbitrator – someone by whose decision parties in dispute agree to be bound.

The difference is that the group does not have to

necessarily go by the recommendations of the mediator, so the conflict may be prolonged.

In a first meeting of the executive board on Aug. 30, the parties agreed that they would not publicly discuss specifics of the disagreement, said Hall. However, much information has already been published, both on the Society's website under "Meeting Minutes" and in The Flume.

The situation will also not be discussed at the upcoming general membership meeting on Sept. 7, according to Hall. Those who insist on bringing up the matter "will be escorted from the room," he said.

Constitution and bylaws

Two of the letters to the editor, from Rankin and Christenson, criticized Hall for not following the constitution and bylaws of the organization. Hall said in a telephone conversation with The Flume that the constitution and bylaws are poorly written and ambiguous. He said three current members of the Society are working on revisions.

But maybe it is the ambiguity that makes it seem Hall is operating outside of the Society's founding documents. The bylaws list a few duties of the president and conclude the job description with, "and perform such other duties as pertain to the office." Without a definition of "other duties," the clause could be taken to mean almost anything.

But it's fairly easy to change the bylaws. According to that document, amendments can be made "at any regular meeting by a majority vote of members present providing a Quorum is present and a written proposal of such amendment has been given at the previous meeting."

A "Quorum," as defined by the Society's constitution, "shall consist of 20 members in good standing present at any regular or special meeting." The term "in good standing" is not defined in the Society's constitution, but the term typically means one who is current on dues.

So that means that 11 people, or a majority of the 20 present, could change the bylaws of the organization. The Society currently has 170 members, according to member Leona Nelson.

Annex

Rankin said Hall wants to make changes without going through the democratic process of having projects approved at meetings. An example, he said, involves the annex building at Bailey's McGraw Memorial Park. The board had approved tearing out a wall of the annex to expand the office space by about 25 square feet. But, Rankin said, when

Hall hired a workman to tear out the wall, he had another wall torn out at the same time, “without approval of the board, discussion with the board, or even mention in a meeting prior to its removal,” according to an attachment written by Rankin to the May 12, 2012, board meeting minutes.

Nelson explained Hall’s reason to The Flume in a telephone conversation. She said that Hall hired “a guy from community service” to take down the first wall, but, Nelson said, Hall decided that while he had a worker there, he would have the second wall taken down because “he had help then.”

Nelson is not on the board, but is a lifetime member of the Society, and she is involved because she wrote what she calls “an epistle” dated Aug. 12, 2012, and found online at www.pchswatchdog.wordpress.com, telling the board how she believes Rankin, Mauro and Christenson have failed in serving the Society for the past 11 years.

King shoes

The Society’s mission includes, “To collect, preserve, and display any items used by historic and prehistoric cultures prior to 1940.”

But in Christenson’s letter to the editor, he said Hall asserted “he will burn shoes from the King Coal Mine.” The mine was near the former town site of King, in South Park about three miles southeast of Como.

Christenson said, “I heard him (Hall) repeat this in front of other people. He did refer to them as ‘shoes from the King Coal Mine’ every time he talked about them.”

Hall held by the agreement not to talk about the issues before the Sept. 19 meeting, but said he was, “screaming inside to answer (The Flume’s) questions.”

But Nelson explained in the phone conversation that Hall was “making a joke” when he said of the shoes, “we should burn those probably.”

Secretary’s statement

Kate Andrews is the secretary for the Society. She said that in the Society’s recent executive board session where Rankin and Mauro were present, it was agreed that no one would “publish further opinions or stories in The Flume.”

She said the first meeting was held so that another executive board meeting could be held to find a solution to Rankin’s, Mauro’s and Christenson’s complaints. She said that the board needs to get back to “our goals of preserving artifacts and property, historic sites and the personal history of settlers of Park County.” She added that all in the Society are volunteers and nobody is getting paid for any of their work for the Society.

Note: John Rankin is an employee of The Flume.