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Park County Historical Society meets to clear air

Apathy, anger, weather cited for low attendance; membership numbers down

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President under fire

Art Hall, shown here after the Oct. 5 special meeting of the Park County Historical Society in Shawnee, defended himself at the meeting, which focused on his actions as president. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

email and to the recent troubles in the historical society when she said Rankin invited all the membership to come and attendance was poor. "Doesn't (the low attendance) show you they don't care?" she said.

Rankin said it showed him the weather was bad. (A slight mist was freezing as it hit the ground, and the area had been immersed in low clouds all day; some snow accumulated and melted that morning.)

"People didn't come because they aren't interested," said Nelson.

A comment from member Jim Sapp near the end of the regular meeting seemed to contradict Nelson. He said, "(People) are angry at this organization."

Membership down

Whether because of apathy, anger or other reasons, membership figures for the historical society are down after climbing steadily since September 2011. It was reported at the Oct. 5 meeting that membership is down by nine, to 161, a drop of 5 percent.

Last September, membership was 79. A push for new members in 2012 brought total membership in September to 170 members. There was only one month prior to the October figure when membership dropped; between May and June the society lost two members, according to meeting minutes.

Regular meeting

The regular meeting lasted 90 minutes and was mostly non-controversial until the end of the meeting, when, under new business, Rankin brought up issues that have been plaguing the society since at least May.

On Oct. 5 the Park County Historical Society held its regular monthly business meeting at the Platte Canyon Community Center in Shawnee, and immediately after the regular meeting a special meeting was held to discuss recent problems of the historical society. (See letters in the Aug. 16, Aug. 24, and Aug. 31 Flumes and stories in the Sept. 7 and Sept. 28 Flumes).

The problems, according to some complaining members, have included a few members of the board making decisions for the entire board about society business outside of a formal meeting; President Art Hall taking action on his own without approval or discussion of other board members; and Hall losing his temper and yelling at fellow society members in public places.

There was low attendance at the meetings; 13 attended the regular meeting.

The 13 included five of the eight board members. In a conversation after the meeting, Hall said two on the board told him they would not attend because recent problems would be discussed.

Others attending were six active members and two who were not members – one nonmember who was a potential member and one nonmember from The Flume.

Eleven of those attended the special meeting.

Attendance reasons

In the week before the meeting, John Rankin, a 15-year member of the Park County Historical Society and a past president and past treasurer of it, sent an email to the membership urging attendance at the meeting.

Lifetime member Leona Nelson made reference to that

He said that Todd Alcock, the current treasurer of the board, had asked Rankin, Pat Mauro and Roger Christenson (the three who have voiced complaints about the board) to give the board a list of grievances.

Alcock interrupted and said the board did want the list, but also wanted supporting proof and suggestions for possible resolutions.

Rankin then handed out a list of complaints to everyone in attendance. Hall, Alcott and The Flume received a more detailed handout with supporting documentation.

“We don’t want to hear it,” said Nelson as Rankin was handing out the information. Nelson attends the monthly business meetings regularly and, although not a board member, is often included in board emails where business is discussed and voted on.

Alcock said the material would be distributed to the board to review, but Rankin suggested it be discussed “now.”

Alcock glanced at Hall and asked his thoughts on discussing it at the meeting. Hall indicated he had no idea what he was being charged with.

At that point Vice President Judy Jeute suggested they finish the regular meeting and “invite and welcome those who want to participate” to stay after the regular meeting for a special meeting to discuss grievances.

“Persecute me then, let’s wrap it up and end it,” said Hall.

Not adjourned

But before the regular meeting could be adjourned, the board backtracked. The last old-business item had been overlooked regarding updating of the society’s website.

Jim Sapp, the society’s website administrator, who was not at the September general meeting, was criticized at that meeting by Alcock. The complaint was that Sapp was not updating the website regularly, and Alcock said he was “willing to take over from Jim Sapp.”

Alcock said Hall sent photos to Sapp that the society wanted posted on the website, but Sapp had neglected to do it. Meeting minutes had also not been put on the website in a timely manner. The latest minutes posted are from last June. Alcock offered to take over posting items. He also said he could get things posted within 24 hours and host the site for free. It was noted at the meeting that Sapp also hosts the site for free.

Sapp came to the Oct. 5 meeting to answer the complaint.

Sapp’s answer

Sapp said the meeting minutes hadn’t been forwarded to him since June and that he had communicated with the secretary (Kate Andrews) about the minutes but had not received them.

Andrews answered that she “hasn’t gotten to them and will email (the minutes) as quick as I can.” Andrews was at the September meeting, but did not offer that explanation at the meeting.

Sapp also said that he “has received no pictures from Art.” Hall said that he sent them. Sapp said “this is the first I have heard of an issue with the website. All it takes is an email or phone call. I am more than responsive.”

He also said to Alcock, “I am more than willing to give up ownership of the website, if you want it.”

Alcock replied, “I don’t want it.”

Rankin suggested the board owed Sapp an apology, but Sapp waved the suggestion off and asked simply to be informed if there is a problem. There was no apology.

Complaints

Bylaws Committee

The first complaint, Rankin said, is that Christenson volunteered to be on the bylaws revision committee, but he was not included in those meetings. Hall said he does not remember the request, and it does not appear in any meeting minutes, according to Hall and Rankin. However, Hall was reminded by both Mauro and Rankin at the September meeting that Christenson had volunteered.

Christenson was not informed of a bylaw meeting, but, according to Alcock in a statement during the regular meeting, there has not been a bylaws revision meeting, and “we haven’t done anything” regarding the bylaw committee.

Following that statement, Christenson said, “Let me know when and where.” That comment was ignored by Hall and Alcock, who were running the meeting.

However, one possible snag in Christenson serving on the committee is that his lawyer sent a letter to Hall requesting that he restrict contact with Christenson.

On Sept. 11, Hall told The Flume that he had received a letter from Christenson’s attorney. The letter requested that Hall not approach or talk to Christenson



More discussion

John Rankin, a past president, past treasurer and past curator of the Park County Historical Society, left, and Kate

except regarding Park County Historical Society business and then only if there were at least three other members of the society present.

Andrews, current secretary of the society, appear to still be discussing issues after the special meeting on Oct. 5 in Shawnee. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

Christenson confirmed with The Flume that the letter was sent and why, but he said it does not preclude Christenson and Hall working together on a society committee. The letter was sent because, Christenson said, he was the target of at least three public incidences of loud yelling and criticism by Hall in the past year.

Hall said that he didn't see how Christenson could function on the board with those restrictions.

Mauro also volunteered to be on the bylaws committee. Hall told Mauro at the Sept. 7 general meeting that he could possibly be part of the second round of reviewers, but that the first committee consisted of Hall, Alcock and Andrews.

Movie projector

The purchase of a movie projector was another source of contention for Rankin, Christenson and Mauro.

A projector was used for showing movies at McGraw Memorial Park on three evenings last summer. At the first movie night on July 20, the projector used was not adequate to operate outside.

After that night, the membership started talking about either buying or borrowing a different projector. At their Aug. 3 business meeting, the subject was tabled with no decision made, according to Rankin.

But an Aug. 6 email from Hall to most members of the executive board suggested Alcock look for a used projector in the \$400-\$500 range, disregarding the decision made in the Aug. 3 meeting.

Mauro and Rankin were not included in that email but are members of the executive board; others were included in the email who are not board members.

In that email, Hall asked for opinions but said: "I approved the purchase if a good deal can be found. I hope you all agree." And, "If Todd finds a deal, then why not now."

In other words, Hall gave Alcock permission to buy the projector without getting a board OK. Another projector was bought by the time of the second movie night on Aug. 17.

That was contrary to Article XI of the society's constitution, which requires written authority from the board of directors to purchase real or personal property.

There is no provision in the current bylaws allowing for an email vote. In addition, all members of the executive board, and only the executive board, should have been included in a board decision, according to Article IV of the society's constitution.

According to Alcock at the Sept. 7 meeting, the projector cost \$500; the society paid half that amount, and the Platte Canyon Area Chamber of Commerce paid the other half.

Alcock said on Oct. 5 that the board had the chance to buy a projector at a good price that would do the job. Both he and Hall said: they had to do it.

Board meetings

For the Oct. 5 meeting agenda, Rankin requested Hall include a discussion of Hall's performance as president. Hall responded that his differences with Rankin, Christenson and Mauro were determined by the board to be personal and did not belong at a membership meeting. But there is no record of a board meeting being called or meeting minutes taken to show that decision was made.

Resign or impeach

Christenson's attorney sent the letter telling Hall to keep his distance on Sept. 6, but even before that, on Aug. 31 and again on Sept. 4, Christenson received emails asking for his resignation. The emails, signed by Alcock personally, suggested Christenson resign or take a leave of absence.

Another email was sent to Christenson on Oct. 1, this time signed by Alcock as treasurer of the Park County Historical Society with the subject line: "PCHS Request for Resignation or Leave of Absence." It implied that if Christenson chose not to resign or take a leave of absence, the board would take action to remove him as a director at the Oct. 5 business meeting.



And the reason?

Christenson didn't make it to each meeting of the historical society, and Christenson apparently said he couldn't work with Hall.

Because of that, his "job performance" suffered, according to Alcock. In the Oct. 1 email, Christenson was given a deadline of Oct. 4 to make his choice.

Christenson did not respond to the emails, yet there was no action taken on Oct. 5. There was nothing on the agenda regarding Christenson's forced resignation.

And, in fact, when Rankin mentioned the email everyone on the board, including Alcock, acted surprised, as if they had no knowledge of the correspondence.

Double standard alleged

Chat after meeting

Todd Alcock, left, treasurer of the Park County Historical Society, and Pat Mauro, the immediate past president of the society, chat after the special meeting on Oct. 5. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

An email from Hall to Mauro on Aug. 30 – which Rankin said indicates the board was concerned about the publicity surrounding the complaints surfacing about the historical society – Hall said the “board does have issues with those that attack a board member. It [affects] all of [Park County Historical Society].”

Rankin thinks Hall applies a double standard, depending on whether he is doing the attacking or is receiving the attack.

After the special meeting, Hall told The Flume that at the time of his verbal attacks on Christenson and Rankin, he had just begun taking a new medication for hypertension called lisinopril. He said the medication caused him to experience excessive anger. The website medications.com says that excessive anger, mood changes and feelings as if “nerves were shot” are reported side effects of lisinopril. Hall is no longer taking that medication.

Annex building

The Annex building at McGraw Memorial Park has been the subject of at least two grievances by Mauro, Christenson and Rankin.

The first was in June when Hall took down a wall in the Annex, thus eliminating the office space in that building. Then in July, Hall announced at a Platte Canyon Area Chamber of Commerce meeting that there would be a new museum at McGraw Memorial Park. His plan was to turn the Annex into a museum.

Rankin said that making the Annex into a museum was never discussed at any meeting. He said that Hall made the decision and began implementing the plan without approval or even discussion with any other members of the society.

After the contractors that worked on the GOCO project 2009-2011 were finished in the Annex, Hall noticed some keys were missing. He also noticed that some items were moved around in the Annex. It was then that Hall had the locks changed for the Annex door.

But Rankin said those locks had already been changed after the contractors left. And the second time that Hall changed the locks, Rankin and Mauro, who worked at the Annex occasionally and had personal items inside, were not issued keys.

Entriaken Cabin

The Entriaken Cabin at McGraw Memorial Park is the historical society’s most important asset, said Rankin. At one of the movie nights at the park, the screen that was “supposed to sit on the windowsill (of the Entriaken Cabin),” wouldn’t stay up, said Hall. He then used rope to secure the screen, but that didn’t work well either.

Hall said he was “not aware until after the fact that two fasteners were put in the wall.” The fasteners were attached to the outside wall of the historic 1864 Entriaken Cabin, built by William Bailey, the man the town of Bailey was named after, and by his brother-in-law, Father John Dyer.

“Yeah, he (Hall) put it in,” said Karen Christenson at the meeting, “Him and Craig (Christenson, a board member of the society and Karen Christenson’s spouse).”

Rankin said Hall’s action was done despite “objections to the possible damage to the cabin” from other board members on the scene.

Solution

To continue on the road to rebuilding the society, these suggestions were made at the special meeting by Sapp, Mauro, Jeute and Rankin:

Don’t alienate members because they have a complaint.

All executive board email communication should come from Hall. If someone wants to email the board, it first needs to be sent to Hall and he will forward it to everyone on the executive board. When replying to an email sent to the group, the sender should “reply to all.”

The board needs to follow the current rules, constitution and bylaws of the society.

Hall should be scrutinized on his decisions.

The membership needs to be brought up to date by Hall on the progress made in this meeting.

After the suggestions were made, Alcock questioned Rankin on whether “we still have a problem.” Rankin said that he, Mauro and Christenson would discuss it and get back to the board.

In a follow-up conversation with The Flume, Rankin said the list of grievances still needs to be presented to the membership, which he hoped to do by email. And he said that for the solutions to be valid there has to be an agreement by the membership, represented by a quorum of at least 20 members in good standing present at a regular monthly business meeting. Rankin’s thought was that the vote could be done at the same meeting where a quorum is present to vote on the revised bylaws.

Note: John Rankin is employed by The Flume.