

**TOWN OF BOONE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 18, 2019
9:00 A.M.**

Historic Preservation Commission Members in Attendance: Eric Plaag-Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson Phoebe Pollitt, Bettie Bond, Loretta Clawson and Rennie Brantz

Town Staff in Attendance: Christy Turner-Senior Planner and Marlene Crosby-Board Secretary

Others Present: None

Call to Order

Chairperson Eric Plaag called the meeting of the Boone Historic Preservation Commission, held in the Planning & Inspections Upstairs Conference Room located at 680 West King Street, to order at 9:00 a.m.

Adoption of Agenda

It was the consensus of the HPC members to adopt the agenda as written.

Discussion of the Junaluska Marker Application

Chairperson Plaag began discussion and explained that the purpose of this meeting is for the HPC members to begin to draft an application for the Junaluska Community Historic neighborhood (permanently attached).

Chairperson Plaag asked the HPC members and Planning Staff what their thoughts were on the goal of what they are trying to achieve in the drafting of the application. Each of the HPC members voiced their thoughts on it. The HPC members agreed that the Junaluska Community is a very important part of the history of Boone. They agreed they would like to tell the more positive story of the Junaluska Community and their perseverance with starting businesses and services as compared with other communities in North Carolina. Chairperson Plaag explained that in the narrative there is a way to acknowledge parts of the history of the Junaluska Community such as segregation and discrimination. Chairperson Plaag said that the focus on the historic marker relate to geography or community. He said that he felt that the focus should be on community. It was the consensus of the HPC members to focus on community while drafting the application.

Discussion ensued on the location of the historic marker. Chairperson Plaag suggested that it be placed on the east side of the concrete strip at the end of the sidewalk at the corner of Depot Street and Queen Street on property owned by the Town. Ms. Christy Turner, Senior Planner noted that the Town might be able to provide landscaping to this area to add to the appearance of it. Ms. Turner pointed out that the tourists use this corner of Depot Street and

Queen Street more frequently and she felt the historic marker might be seen more at this location.

Member Bond thought the marker should be placed on the opposite corner in the small grassy area near the Watauga County Library parking lot at Depot Street and Queen Street. Chairperson Plaag pointed out that this particular area is owned by Watauga County. Member Clawson noted that this location is the entrance into the Junaluska neighborhood and she thought this was the better location for it. Chairperson Plaag pointed out that the Town would need permission from the County to use their property for the historic marker. Member Bond suggested that we ask the County to see what they say about placing the historic marker on their property. Member Bond felt that the intersection of Depot Street and Queen Street is where the historic marker should be placed and she noted that either side of the intersection would work for the proposed marker.

Discussion ensued on the topic of gentrification. Chairperson Plaag explained that using the term gentrification is problematic because of his personal observation of some tensions within the Junaluska community about the right course of action on some things. Chairperson Plaag explained that he felt that it is helpful in telling the story to describe how the sense of community evolved. He supported Ms. Sue Keefe's thoughts on the settlement of the Junaluska vicinity that was already underway by the Civil War. He also explained that it is not the geography that drives the story but the community.

Discussion ensued on the third church in the Junaluska area. Chairperson Plaag noted that the third church was established in the neighborhood around 1941. He said he thought it was fair to include the three churches in the narrative. He noted that he had researched the Methodist church. His research showed that it was listed as (Methodist Episcopal, Colored) or the colored Methodist Episcopal Church.

Discussion ensued on the cemetery. Ms. Christy Turner, Senior Planner showed on the overhead screen the location of the cemetery. The HPC members reviewed the deed information for the cemetery property.

Discussion ensued on the outline for the creation of the draft application. The HPC members proposed the following topics for the outline:

- history of the black settlement generally along the hillside from North Street toward Howards Knob which would include the Civil War era
- reconstruction of the working of the land owned by Boone's large white landowners like the Councils and the Brannock's
- describe the pockets of black land ownership near Wyn Way that were scattered up the hillside that led to the establishment of the church near the lower water tower and black one-room school near Church Street, the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal church led to further land purchases nearby

Chairperson Plaag handed out lithographs of the hillside in 1905 for the HPC members to review. He pointed out the church and the Troy house in the lithograph and noted that there were not many buildings in this area at this time period. He explained that in 1915 there had not been much change on the hillside.

Chairperson Plaag suggested including the following information on the church in the outline:

- Perhaps by as early as 1918 and certainly by 1919 a second church was built at the heart of this emerging land settlement

Chairperson Plaag talked about including how members of the Junaluska community became respected members of the Boone Business Community; and they maintained examples of black only establishments such as the Chocolate Bar, barber shop and a grocery store in a personal residence. He also said it is important to add how Junaluska members simultaneously integrated into the civil life of Boone while also maintaining their own culture and identity and making a community within a community.

Member Clawson left the meeting at 10:42 a.m.

Discussion ensued on what will go on the Junaluska marker. Chairperson Plaag suggested that some things that could go on the marker would be to document the history of the community and note that the church remained vibrant.

Chairperson Plaag said that he and Vice-Chairperson Phoebe and Member Bond would work together by comparing sources and put together a proposed narrative to be discussed at the next HPC meeting on July 9, 2019. The HPC members were in consensus of these members working together on the narrative. Chairperson Plaag, Vice-Chairperson Pollitt and Member Bond decided to meet on July 8, 2019 at 2:30 p.m. at Member Bond's house to work on the draft document. Chairperson Plaag asked Vice-Chairperson Pollitt to research the Council person who wanted to give land for the church, and try to figure out when the third church and the Chocolate Bar functioned.

Chairperson Plaag noted that after the July 9, 2019 meeting, he could begin drafting the document. He noted that the completed draft document should be ready to be reviewed by HPC members by the August 13, 2019 HPC meeting.

Other Matters by Commission Members or Staff

There were no other topics discussed at this meeting.

Adjournment

Chairperson Plaag adjourned the meeting at 10:50 a.m.

Eric Plaag, Chairperson

Marlene Crosby, Board Secretary

Draft 4/25/2019

Bettie Bond/Phoebe Pollitt

APPLICATION FOR TOWN OF BOONE HISTORICAL MARKER FOR JUNALUSKA

This document applies for a historical marker for the historically African American community/neighborhood of Junaluska. The neighborhood's distinctive and continuing history and identity warrants recognition.

Contrary to the common belief that Appalachia has been a white-only enclave in a multi-racial country, African Americans have lived in the southern mountains since the 1700s. Though few in numbers, African Americans have made significant contributions to western North Carolina. Historically, Watauga County was not a melting pot, but might be better conceptualized as a picture with interlocking pieces. Many African Americans lived on the piece that was once referred to as "the mountain" or "the "hill" and today as the Junaluska Community.

At the close of the American Revolution, some of Watauga County's first permanent white settlers brought enslaved Africans with them from (**where ???**). Other settlers purchased slaves after their arrival in the county. The 1850 census lists 39 slaveholders and a total of 129 enslaved people in Watauga County (Olsen 1984). By 1860, those numbers had decreased. In that year 30 men and one woman owned 104 enslaved people. (<http://michaelchardy.blogspot.com/2011/01/slaves-in-camp.html>). The two largest slave holders, John Whittington and Jordan Councill, each owned eleven slaves. The largest slave populations in both 1850 and 1860 resided in the Boone Township. In addition to enslaved African Americans, free blacks also lived in Watauga County before the Civil War. The 1850 Watauga County census lists 29 free black residents. Following Emancipation, the 1870 census reveals 210 African Americans were living in the county, making up 4% of the total population. Over half of these people resided in Boone Township. By 1890, 431 African Americans lived in Watauga County (Keefe, 2019). The African American population of Boone has fluctuated between 200-500 residents for most of the first half of the twentieth century, increasing especially after 1970 with the growth of Appalachian State University and a doubling of the county's entire population between 1970 and 2010.

The people of Junaluska do not speak much about their slavery past. "History is sensitive and painful," says local Junaluska resident Sandra Hagler. "Blacks don't want to remember those things" (Hagler 1989). Most if not all, Junaluska residents trace their ancestry to enslaved people who lived in Watauga County and its immediate environs. This is evident in the surnames shared by many African American Junaluskans and white county slaveholders listed in the 1850 and 1860 censuses, including Councill, Horton, Whittington, Folk, Hatton, Shearer, and Moore (Olson 1984).

John Preston Arthur (1915) is the first historian to mention African American Boone residents by name. Arthur indicates that John and Ellington Cousins (also known as Cuzzens), moved into the area from Forsyth County in the 1850s. Ellington bought an acre of land on Blackburn Branch (now Depot Street) where he built a house, which marks the founding of a designated African American neighborhood. According to a recent architectural survey of Junaluska, the oldest standing house in the neighborhood (at the corner of Depot and North Streets) dates to 1880-1899, providing further evidence that the community began to take form in the nineteenth century (Margrif 2012).

Residents suggest that the land where Junaluska is located was originally owned by Jordan Councill, Jr., a claim supported by the fact that the community lies just north of the main street in town between the county courthouse (built on land donated by Councill after the county's formation in 1849) and the historic site of Councill's store. Frazier Horton (1942) wrote that in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, many African American men in Boone worked as farmers and sharecroppers for the Councils, Coffeys, and other landowners on the foothills north of the town of Boone. Some of these men were able to buy the parcels of land they worked outright while others were allowed to clear land and keep a portion of it. In any event, most Junaluska residents became landowners and home owners, a fact that remains true in the community today. In fact, land ownership has been critical to the survival of Junaluska as an ethnic community. Most families had enough room for house gardens, chicken coops and hogs.

Junaluska residents clustered on the hillside north of Boone on the slopes of Howard's Knob. The community eventually [by when] covered several blocks, including North Depot

Street, North Street, Tremont Street, Church Street, and Church Street Extension. Other households were built higher up the mountainside along Junaluska Road. Horton (1942) By the 1940s, the community extended from Queen Street to the top of Howard's Knob. The eastern boundary has consistently been Water Street and the western boundary, Junaluska Road.

In addition to homes, [by what date?] Junaluska Community members owned businesses including grocery stores, a barbershop, a club for teens, a boardinghouse, and a social club called The Chocolate Bar. A two-room segregated school served the children living in the Junaluska community from the turn of the twentieth century until a consolidated school serving all of the county's African American students opened in 1962. A community baseball team played against both teams in nearby counties and a team composed of African American prisoners housed in a local facility. Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite and Pentecostal churches served community residents over the years.

Many African American communities have disappeared in recent times as the result of various policies and processes. Rural black communities shrank with segregated school consolidation prior to the Civil Rights Act (1964) which caused migration to urban centers. Out-migration to escape Jim Crow laws reduced the African American population in the South generally. Government-funded urban renewal projects razed blighted housing areas; moreover, gentrification of urban residential neighborhoods in the twenty-first century continues to erase African American communities. Boone's Junaluska neighborhood is experiencing similar threats to its' status as one of the oldest African American communities in western North Carolina.

Another relatively unique feature about Junaluska is that it is the home to one of the largest black Mennonite Brethren churches in northwest North Carolina. In 1894 Emily Prudden, Protestant missionary and educator from Connecticut who was working in North Carolina, purchased property in Elk Park, Avery County, NC, and built a school and orphanage for black children (Ostwalt & Pollitt, 1993). In 1900, Prudden "sent a call westward" to recruit Christian teachers who would be supported by their home churches to come teach at the school. Krimmer Mennonites from Kansas responded to Prudden's call by sending Henry and Elizabeth Wiebe in 1903 to Elk Park. For the following decade, the Wiebes operated the Salem Mennonite Mission School and Orphanage, with assistance from the Mennonite Conference. The Salem School and Orphanage closed in 1912, and the Mennonites changed their mission from schools to

establishing churches in black communities in the region. Over the next decade, white Krimmer Mennonite missionary families built thirteen churches, one in Tennessee and 12 in western North Carolina in Avery, Caldwell, Watauga, and Wilkes counties. (Bechler 1986).

Boone Mennonite Brethren Church (BMBC) has always been the largest and most active in the North Carolina District. The congregation was established in 1911. Members met in private homes until the chapel was built on Church Street in 1918. Mennonite missionaries trained and ordained many black preachers, including four from Boone: Rev. Rockford Hatton, Rev. Ronda Horton, Rev. Coy Williams, and Rev. Morris Hatton (son of Rockford). Over the years, the church has worked to become independent and self-sufficient, and as a result, Junaluska residents have always considered it “their” church.

Establishing an historical marker for Junaluska will be a fitting way for Boone to recognize this neighborhood and help preserve its persistent people and unique culture.

Suggested inscription:

FRONT SIDE OF MARKER

JUNALUSKA

African Americans have lived in the Junaluska neighborhood since the mid-nineteenth century, and most residents trace their ancestry to enslaved people held in Watauga County and its environs. After Emancipation, many black families farmed, eventually buying their own land and starting their own businesses. By the 1940s, the community extended from Queen Street to the top of Howard’s Knob. Junaluska remains one of the oldest continuously occupied African American communities in western North Carolina.

BACK SIDE OF MARKER

The Junaluska Community is home to the Boone Mennonite Brethren Church, founded in 1911 by Krimmer Mennonite immigrants from Russia. Despite opposition from some local whites, Krimmer Mennonite missionaries and local African American congregants built a church in 1918. In addition, four black men from Boone were ordained as Krimmer Mennonite preachers. The Boone church is one of the largest black Mennonite Brethren church in the region and one of the few remaining in the United States.

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