



CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING
Meeting Minutes of August 8, 2022, 8:30 a.m.
Coral Gables City Hall, City Commission Chamber
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Florida 33134

Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts

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MEMBERS	S 21	O 21	N 21	D 21	J 22	F 22	M 22	A 22	M 22	J 22	J 22	A 22	APPOINTED BY
Ana Lam	E	P	P	-	P	P	P	#	P	N	N	P	Mayor Vince Lago
Barbara Reese	E	P	E	-	P	P	P	P	P	O	O	E	Vice-Mayor Michael Mena
Bonnie Seipp	E	P	P	-	P	E	P	P	P	M	M	P	Commissioner Rhonda Anderson
Carmen Cason	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	A	E	E	=	Commissioner Jorge L. Fors, Jr.
Mary Beth Burke	-	-	-	-	P	P	P	P	P	T	T	P	Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez
Alexis Ehrenhaft	P	E	P	-	P	E	P	P	E	N	N	E	City Manager Peter Iglesias
Joanne Meagher	P	P	P	-	P	P	P	P	P	G	G	P	Board-as-a-Whole

LEGEND: A = Absent; P = Present; E = Excused; * = New Member; ^ = Resigned Member.
 - = No Meeting; # = Late meeting arrival.

STAFF: Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer; Kara Kautz, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer; Colette Worm, Docent Coordinator.

RECORDING SECRETARY/PREPARATION OF MINUTES: Nancy Kay Lyons, Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order by Chair Meagher at 8:42 a.m. and attendance was stated for the record.

Chair Meagher said they would hear the House Report first and then come back to the approval of minutes.

HOUSE REPORT:

- Docents:** Ms. Bondurant praised Colette Worm for her work with the docents and taking care of the house. She will not act as caretaker, only docent coordinator. However, whenever she or the docents were at the house, they would report any problems. Her primary focus, other than the scheduling of docents, has been recruiting new people. Two people were starting training, two were ready but reluctant to start (this would come to an end next month). Four would be starting the process in the fall. Her goal was to have 11 total docents by the end of the year, which would include the docent board members. She thanked Ms. Burke and Chair Meagher for their help to keep the house open. Last month Ms. Burke, Chair Meagher, Ms. Bondurant and one other person worked every weekend, a situation she was trying to remedy.
- House Openings:** Director Adams wanted to open the house during the week, but they did not have the personnel to do that. She invited other members of the board to be docents to cover the weekdays. The house was closed in July to give everyone a break and allow her time to interview for new docents.
- Training:** A training was held on July 14, 2022 with three new people showing up - one of whom left for Spain for a month. She said she had provided paperwork including a quiz to see what everyone knew about the Merricks.
- Research on the Merrick Family:** Ms. Bondurant had done research on George Merrick and his siblings, six of them altogether. Two were married once, two were married twice, two married three times, and out of all the marriages there were only three children. She did not know what happened to any of them as the family name that was generated was Kuhn, there were three boys. Donald Kuhn took over the running of the boarding house from his mother.
- Cement Stop Signs:** Ms. Bondurant had spoken to Dona Spain to find out if they were designated along with the street signs. They are not. There are several at Public Works and she thought they could be auctioned off and the funds claimed for the Merrick House. Ms. Kautz said the idea of auctioning them had been discussed before with the proceeds going to the Historic Preservation Fund not the Merrick House. She said there were about two dozen of them in the yard and she would investigate. There are currently two at the Merrick House.

OPENING STATEMENT:

Chair Meagher read the following passage: During the late summer of 1930 as George waited for Coral Gables, Inc. to complete its refinancing plan Richard convinced him to join him on an automobile trek across the country to California. George was away more than two months and during that time he and Eunice kept in touch by telegram. In a particularly

warm one Eunice wrote that she was glad he was getting so much out of the trip and hoped that “various things would be settled in your mind.” She ended with “Love from Mr. Meow, BunBun, Mike Stronger and Me.” George responded to her tender note with a nine-page letter which began “Dearest Precious Sweetheart.” He described his travels and travails and reminded her that Richard could not take her place and he constantly wished she were here with him. “I am missing you more than I ever did before,” he added. Every time he saw a cat, he wrote, he thought of their “little family” – Mr. Meow the cat, BunBun the rabbit and the Macaws Mike and Stronger. Asking her to give them a kiss and pat for him, he ended with “Big gobs of love and kisses for you, my sweetheart. Your George.”

APPROVAL OF ABSENCES:

A motion was made by Ms. Burke and seconded by Ms. Lam to approve the absences of Ms. Ehrenhaft and Ms. Reese.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Meagher reported that Ms. Reese’s operation had gone well, and she was on the mend.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Ms. Lam and seconded by Ms. Seipp to approve the minutes of May 9, 2022, with corrections.

The motion was unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. **Coral Rock Wall:** The wall has been completed. Chair Meagher asked Ms. Kautz asked if the obelisks were the same height as the ones in the picture, if the top was completed, and if they could tell from the picture if that is how it was done. Ms. Kautz stated that was the way they had to get it permitted, it made it a more stable wall because there is no foundation. It is a rubble wall with the mortar wedged inside. She had been concerned that it would not be truly authentic, but it turned out beautifully and she was quite happy with it.
2. **Leftover funds from the Coral Rock Wall:** It was discussed at the last meeting that they might be able to work on the west side wall or the grotto. Ms. Kautz will meet with the stone mason and Public Works to review what can be done with the balance of the funds before the end of the fiscal year.
3. **Ribbon Cutting:** Ms. Kautz said it was up to the board to suggest a few dates to the commission. She asked the board if they wanted to tie it into the lecture series. Ms. Kautz said she would check with Mayor Lago’s aide to see if he was available. Ms. Kautz said if Sunday, October 2, 2022, was not available would the board be amenable to the week before or after. Chair Meagher said yes.
4. **Repairs at the house:** Ms. Kautz said that Public Works staff was devoted to getting the Country Club up and running. They were aware of all the work orders for the Merrick House but cannot address them now. In addition, they were also dealing with staffing issues and only currently handling emergencies.
5. **Venetian Plaster:** Ms. Kautz said she was meeting with the person who did the plaster that day to get an updated quote and try and schedule the work.
6. **Garage Organization:** Ms. Levasser will be coordinating with Public Works.
7. **Donations:** Discussions on donated items was tabled until the next meeting as Ms. Cason was not present.
8. **“100 Voices Merrick House Lecture Series” Meeting:**
 - a) **Meeting with Caroline Vester:** Chair Meagher was trying to get a meeting with Ms. Carolina Vester, but she was busy with the Country Club, so she thought they should start the lectures and see how they progressed and then get with the City for the centennial.
 - b) **Lecture Times:** Lectures will start at 4:30pm after the last tour.
 - c) **October Lecture:** Juan Riera would do the first lecture on October 2, 2022, on the Merricks and the postal service. Mr. Riera will publicize among all his collector friends.
 - d) **September Lecture:** Ms. Bondurant will share her thoughts about living 73 years in Coral Gables and so would Mr. Lon Dowling, a long-time parishioner at St. Phillips. Three generations of Dowling’s live in Coral Gables. Mr. Dowling and Ms. Bondurant attended Coral Gables Elementary School and would tell stories about the school. Chair Meagher said while Mr. Dowling was still hesitant, she was sure he would come around.
 - e) **Advertising the Lectures:** Ms. Seipp said they could notify the parishioners at St. Phillips and people at the school and get Coral Gables Elementary School to announce it. She felt that if they had a hook to pull

people into the first couple of lectures, they would get a better turnout. Word would get around and people would start coming regularly.

- f) **Start date for the Lectures:** Ms. Kautz noted that people might not attend on the Labor Day weekend. It was suggested moving it to the next weekend. Mr. Adams suggested they start in October. He went on to say that if it was the same day as the unveiling of the wall, it would be good advertising. It was suggested to skip September and start in October with information about the Guavonia School.
 - g) **Lecture Material:** Chair Meagher suggested that they start with a little introduction like she does at the board meetings. They had a lot of testimonials and interviews with family members at the Merrick House. Ms. Bondurant mentioned that Ellen Ugucioni used to do the “geezer interviews” which were taped interviews from people who are no longer around. She suggested taking snippets from the interviews. She would ask Ms. Levasser if the interviews were in the archives.
 - h) **Spring Lectures:** Chair Meagher asked Ms. Seipp to reach out to Charles Flick for the spring.
 - i) **Recruiting Speakers and Advertising the Lectures:** It was suggested to do a call for volunteer speakers. Requests for volunteers and advertising the actual events would be done by putting it on the website, emailing it to attendees of prior events, putting it in E-News and Great Gables Guide and on EventBrite. Ms. Kautz said she would check with Ms. Pantin.
 - j) **Items needed for the lectures:** Ms. Kautz suggested a podium and to record the lectures. Chair Meagher agreed and said they needed a table and an easel.
 - k) **Number of Attendees:** Each lecture would have to be limited to 40 people to ensure access to the exits.
 - l) **Charging for the Series:** Chair Meagher suggested putting it on EventBrite and having attendees RSVP. Ms. Seipp suggested charging \$5. Ms. Kautz suggested giving everyone who attended a pass to visit the house.
9. **Fee Ordinance:** There had been no change on the fee ordinance.
10. **Donation Policy:** Ms. Kautz said she would get the donation policy to the board for their review at a later meeting.
11. **Piano Repair:** Chair Meagher said she had no response from the only people in the state that do piano repair but will keep trying.

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1. **Fall Festival:** The board decided not to do a fall festival but would still decorate the house for fall.
- 2. **Holiday Open House:** Will be held on December 11, 2022. St. Andrews Bell Choir wants to come to the Holiday Open House and play. This would be in addition to the carolers. Ms. Kautz said she would schedule the carolers.
- 3. **Granada Presbyterian Church:** Chair Meagher and Ms. Bondurant had given the church employees a tour in May and, as a token of their appreciation, the church sent a \$25 gift certificate for Starbucks. She invited the board members to meet at Starbucks for coffee.
- 4. **Tour for City Employees:** Ms. Burke suggested having a free tour for employees on a weekday. Many employees had never been to the house. Ms. Kautz said it had been suggested to have an open house (no formal tours) between 11am and 2pm to allow people to come on their lunch hour and serve lemonade and cookies or invite employees to have their lunch in the garden. Ms. Burke would coordinate with Ms. Bondurant and notify Ms. Kautz of the date to be advertised.
- 5. **Tea Party:** This would be an annual event, but lunch would not be served in boxes.

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None

CITY COMMISSION ITEMS: None

ITEMS FROM THE SECRETARY: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:34 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams

Historic Preservation Officer