

President's Report to the Membership of the Lycoming County Historical Society

Annual Meeting, May 19, 2020

As we all ride the rollercoaster that is known as Covid-19, this report has both good and bad news. I can predict that the Lycoming County Historical Society will weather the current adversity, and will emerge stronger than ever. It will do so, despite multiple challenges, because of the loyalty and strength of its members, its staff and its volunteers. Our mission to preserve the history of this region is all the more important, given the inevitable change that the current crisis will bring to the lives of our neighbors and society as a whole.

Covid-19

In late March the Board of Governors was faced with a difficult decision – to remain open with restrictions or close in response to dire predictions we heard in the media. Of course, that decision was made for us on March 19, when the Governor ordered all facilities such as the Taber Museum to close. With no income because of the closure, the Board had to make some tough decisions. Staff employed to interact with the public had no work to perform, and were furloughed. The executive director, curator and administrative assistant were called upon to work from home to perform necessary functions, with periodic visits to the Museum for security or other essential purposes. For two months, the Society has operated (as many of us) in this limited manner and with difficulty.

All Museum events planned for March and April (and subsequently May) were cancelled. This included our regular fundraiser, CasinoEvil, and several lectures and Society events planned for the Museum. Basic functions of the Society such as its regular membership renewal campaign were delayed and occurred only with great difficulty – thank you members for responding quickly to our delayed appeal with your renewals. The Annual Meeting, originally scheduled for April 19, was twice cancelled leaving the Society with hold-over officers, a depleted Board and no budget.

When will the Museum reopen? Unfortunately, that decision is not ours to make. We are hopeful for a reopening in time for our planned, spectacular summer exhibit, “Harley-Davidson vs. Indian Wars” scheduled to start at the beginning of June. With appropriate caution and safety measures, the Museum will be a safe place to visit. Ultimately, however, the Board will have to determine whether such safety measures will protect both guests and staff, and no decision has yet been made on reopening

Keeping the Taber in the Public Eye

When the Museum is closed, how do we keep the community engaged and interested in our mission? Early on, the staff undertook to write regular pieces focusing on interesting “treasures” in the Museum. The articles, under the heading of “The Rest of the Story...Little Known Taber Treasures” debuted on March 28, on *tabermuseum.org* and Facebook, and have proved to be very popular. At this writing the Facebook posts have reached over 54,000 people, demonstrating a successful way to connect the local folks to their history. Visit Facebook or the website for a fun read!

The Board also authorized the release of more than 60 years of the *Journal* in a digital format. Issues of the *Journal* are now available on the website, beginning with the first edition, issued in March of 1955. These volumes contain a wealth of local historical material, gathered by generations of local historians. Be sure to check out this freely available archive.

We were able to conduct the 2020 Richard L. and Miriam L. (Swan) Mix Student Historian Competition and a number of fine articles were received. The winning entry was written by Montoursville Senior Alexandria McKenna. You can read the article on the website.

Board Initiatives

Your Board of Governors has been very active in 2019-20. We have worked under a revamped and more efficient committee system, to attempt to address the most significant challenge facing the Society – persistent and growing budget deficits.

We will face the financial challenges with many new faces on the Board. At the end of April, we lost five very active Board members with a combined total of 40 years of service to the Society. We will miss very much the members leaving the Board – Marc Pompeo (11 years), John Raymond (11 years), Eiderson Dean, Penny Lutz, Larry Fryda (each 6 years). These folks will no doubt continue to serve the Society as volunteers, but their regular involvement as officers and Board members will be sorely missed.

At the same time we are excited to welcome new Board members who bring to the Society different backgrounds and perspectives. Rachel Buedel and Judy Bower joined the Board in January. Seth Burch, Lindsey Harner and Sara Kiehl will stand for election at the annual meeting. This is a group of community members who will work for the continued success of the Society.

Last year we established two committees to refine and implement several Board initiatives. The Donor and Member Relations Committee was formed to revamp our approach to our members and donors, with the goal of increasing membership and donations to the

Museum, by improving the experience of both members and donors. At the recommendation of this committee, the Board implemented several changes to the membership scheme, including fewer and less confusing membership levels, simpler renewal, and travelers benefits. Membership fees were increased by a modest \$10 to try to make a dent in our deficit. Visitor and event attender data is now being compiled for membership new solicitations. New business member benefits are being considered. Sponsorship opportunities will be made available. Increased numbers of members, means more revenue, which will ensure the viability of the Society.

The informal Marketing Committee of the past several years now meets regularly. It is responsible for maintaining and updating our website and social media pages. This committee is also very active in marketing our fundraising events. Its first substantial project this year was to rewrite and publish a new tourist brochure for travelers, that portrays the Museum as a desirable destination. That is now being printed. This year the focus will be to revamp the Museum store, improve sales and invigorate online sales.

By far the most significant decision by the Board was to hire a director of development, to take on the fundraising efforts of the Society. In January, the Board met with a facilitator to begin the conversation about whether a staff fundraiser would be advisable given our current financial concerns. After much debate, the Board concluded that the cost of hiring a fundraiser was necessary to avoid the alternative of exhausting our savings and closing the Museum. The position was approved. Hiring has been deferred due to Covid-19 related limitations. If the budgeted position is approved by the membership, it is anticipated that the employee will be on staff by the end of 2020.

Budget Deficit

Funding for Taber Museum operations has been a great concern for a number of years. Short term solutions and substantial donations have gotten us through past financial concerns. But the issue is reaching crisis level. This year's budget projects a budget deficit of a whopping \$237,859. With an endowment value of roughly \$1.176 million, it is crystal clear that action must be taken soon to preserve the endowment and prevent the closure of the Museum.

Obviously, the financial situation has been worsened by the Museum's closure, the cancellation of several fundraisers and the bleak picture for tourism dollars during the rest of 2020. The Board is attempting to increase membership, and has added several fundraisers in recent years and that have raised necessary funds, but the event fundraising efforts cannot hope to meet our operating budget, much less establish a cushion by way of a significant endowment.

With the recognition that the Board is not experienced in major fundraising efforts, the Board has approved the hiring of the development director. The reasoning is that the short term additional cost (and increased deficit) will bear fruit in increasing major donations to sustain the Museum operations.

Members . . .

Thank you for your continued support of the Lycoming County Historical Society. Your Board Governors is committed to serving this organization and ensuring its viability for many years to come. With your help, we will succeed.

Gary Weber, President

May 12, 2020