

Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission
***Authorized in Revised Statutes of Nebraska 72-724**

Monday, July 25, 2022, 6:00 p.m. CST
Phelps County Historical Society, 2701 Burlington St., Holdrege, NE 68949
Congressional District 3 / Public Hearing Minutes

MINUTES

Times are estimates only, and the Hall of Fame Commission may take items out of order. Chairperson reserved the right to waive time limits. Minutes are paraphrased and summarized, but not comprehensive due to audio technical difficulties. Contact information as well as a recording is available upon request.

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

Ron Hull, Chairperson

Chairperson Hull called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. CST and noted Notice to the Press and that we were in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. He gave a quick review of the public hearing on Friday, August 12, 2022 to select 3 finalist from the nominees and that an open vote will be taken and every Commissioner member will explain his or her vote and the public hearing on Monday, September 12, 2022 to select a nominee under the same procedure. He asked nominators and testifiers to fill out a testimony sheet and give it to the Commission before leaving, as well as a summary of time parameters for nominators and support testimony.

Chairperson Hull asked Commission members to give formal introductions and then asked for a formal roll call vote of Commission members.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Rod Bates, Sara Crook, Jill Dolberg, Jim McKee, Aaron Wyatt

Present via Zoom and Not Voting: Tim Heller

Not Present: None

NOMINATOR PRESENTATION / DISTRICT 3

6:05 p.m. Presentation on Grover Cleveland Alexander, Paul Mueller (Secondary Nominator)

Paul is Chairman of the Board to a museum in Saint Paul. The museum has grown to have displays for 163 players and those who played or worked in major league baseball. Over the years, museum has grown. In 1993, St. Paul became the historical baseball capital of Nebraska by Ben Nelson. Grover Cleveland Alexander is a hero to the area, and he is "small town" and returned to his community. He is the best player of his era, and he returned from off seasons to see friends and family. He helped young baseball players and helped on American Legion teams. He return to St. Paul after his retirement. He pitched the first ball in district and state legion games. He was around in local and surrounding areas in his career. He served in the war during the prime time of his career. Paul asked the Commission to select him into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. Paul submitted his testimony in written format to the Commission for the record.

Chairperson Hull asked if there were any questions. A member of the Commission asked about other great players of the time, and Walter Johnson and Christy Mathewson were mentioned among others.

Chairperson Hull asked for support testimony.

6:16 p.m. Testimony from Cheryl Linden, Great Niece (power point presentation), Holdrege

Cheryl Linden noted her maiden name and that she is Grover Cleveland Alexander's great niece. He died before she was born. He was referred to as Uncle Dode. They were early settlers of Howard County. They came from Scotland in the 1830's to Clinton County, IA. One son, named William is married to Maggie and their first-born son is Charles. In 1871, they came to Nebraska and established a homestead plain in Howard County. They had a second son and then all together, 13 children, but only 8 lived. The oldest son, Charles, became a Sheriff. She pointed to a photo in her presentation regarding a school picture with Grover Cleveland Alexander graduated from St. Paul High School in 1905. He played ball in town and around town. He played in the minor league and then the Philadelphia Phillies in 1911, a major league. Cheryl continued in her power point presentation to show league and family photos of Grover Cleveland Alexander and talked about how he cared for his mother. An article written in St. Paul, in the Daily Independent by James Potter, historian, in 1987 was about the Historical Marker recognizing Grover Cleveland Alexander. The Lincoln Journal Star published he was a notable person from Nebraska in 2017, honoring him as 'Old Pete' and ranked him 37 out of 150 notable Nebraskans. Born in Elba, he began playing semi-pro baseball as a teenager, signed a pro-contract in 1907 and joined the Philadelphia Phillies in 1911. A dominant pitcher, the Hall of Famer's 373 wins are tied for third all-time. He is recognized by the Museum of Major League Baseball and the Nebraska High School Sports Association. Books are on the display table. She noted he is a farm boy from Nebraska, and memorialized in a movie. Jim Leeke is an author who has written about him.

A Power Point Presentation for this may be available upon request.

Chairperson Hull asked for further testimony.

6:30 p.m. Testimony from Randall Moody on behalf of Jim Leeke

Randy showed the book written by Jim Leeke regarding Grover Cleveland's life and career and mentioned that St. Paul is proud of Grover Cleveland Alexander. He showed an article about 'Dode' on the front page of the Daily Independent in St. Paul. Randy proceeded to read Jim Leeke's comments. He served on the front line often under fire. For seven straight weeks he took arms. He was a sergeant with the 342nd field artillery in World War I. He was known for his alcoholism but also his evangelism and baseball talent. He suffered from combat and shell shock and PTSD. He was treated in hospice later. He also suffered from Epilepsy, which either began short before or during the war. He persevered and was always a gentleman and never harmed anyone except himself. His funeral was given in St. Paul in 1950. Jim and Randy asked the Commission to see the same determination and courage as they do. He thanked the Commission.

6:33 p.m. Testimony from Carolyn Scarborough, Grand Island

Carol thanked the Commission members for everything they do for Nebraska. She stated she is a farm wife in Grand Island and a retired teacher. She noted Grover Cleveland Alexander was the most successful pitcher and struck out Babe Ruth. He stated he is more than a statistic. He was on his way to achieving his dream and it was no walk in the park. He had head trauma that resulted in double vision. He gave up a spectacular baseball career to serve his country and he met his wife in the Army. He had PTSD and tendencies towards epilepsy. Grover Cleveland Alexander had tenacity, perseverance and resilience, as well as a pioneer spirit. Carol introduced a musical performance for the baseball legend.

6:39 p.m. Performance from Actors/Singers

A song dedicated to Grover Cleveland Alexander as a youth is performed.

A song dedicated to Grover Cleveland Alexander as a baseball player is performed.

A song dedicated to Grover Cleveland Alexander's wife is performed.

6:52 p.m. Presentation on Ernst H. Herminghaus, William "Bob" Wickersham, Chadron

Bob stated that ten years ago, he did not know who he was and noted to appreciate and honor this forgotten Nebraskan into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. It is a journey to learn about. Ten years ago, as Bob and others were working to have fountains installed in the State Capitol. In 1934, the gardens had been installed in the courtyards at the State Capitol. The gardens had disappeared, but the design had not. We installed the fountains and reinstalled the gardens and received professional particulars from Ernst H. Herminghaus, as well as Dr. Richard Sutton, an academic, John Royster from Omaha, and Bob Ripley, the Capitol Architect in Lincoln.

We learned about Ernst H. Herminghaus from his family. He has two surviving children and one grandchild, and they provided an oral history to Bob. He was born in December 31st, 1890 in Lincoln, Nebraska and died September 30th, 1965. He was born in Nebraska and deceased for 35 years and he meets the basic qualifications for being in the Nebraska Hall of Fame. How is he set apart from the rest?

His career and individual leadership. In 1915, he became the first practicing landscape architect in Nebraska. He has an undergrad degree in horticulture from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and an advanced degree in design from Harvard University. He could have worked anywhere. He participated in the National Organization for Landscape Architects. During the depression and war, there were not many commissions for a landscape architect. He lost his home in the Woodshire subdivision, but he stayed in Nebraska and persevered and did work for the government. As a student, he wrote about Nebraska farmstead to show case plants in Nebraska and as an adult, he carefully produced landscape designs to Nebraska.

On the Capitol grounds, he designed the trees, as well as Pioneers Park and the Woodshire subdivision. Pioneer Park coincides with views of the Capitol's tower that did not yet exist. He noted that we are the beneficiaries of those designs. While living and working in Nebraska, he became an important landscape and design architect, because he has three of his projects recognized with the National Register of Historic Places. Bob cited the definition of a landscape architect, which is a professional who works in a multi-disciplinary field incorporating aspects of urban design, architecture, geography, ecology, civil engineering, structural engineering, horticulture, environmental psychology, industrial design, soil sciences, botany, and the fine arts.

He did some government work in Alaska, and private work in Albion, Fremont and Omaha. He wrote a paper about the project in Fremont, a suburban garden in Nebraska (Dec. 1931 issue of the Landscape Architect). He noted that we get a sense of what kind of devotion inspires this work. Ernst also advocated for the development of an Arboretum in Nebraska, and we have one on east campus. He helped found the Lincoln Symphony and the Lincoln Garden Club. He led in his profession and the community. The impacts of his leadership are still evident in Nebraska. He asked to imagine the Capitol without Ernst H. Herminghaus's landscapes. He did not receive the publicity he deserved.

Chairperson Hull asked for further testimony.

7:08 p.m. Presentation on Reverend Hiram Hisanori Kano, Stephen Kay, North Platte

Steve thanked the Commission and noted Rev. Kano's remarkable attributes. In 1916, after a life of privilege in Japan, he went to the University of Nebraska and built a new life. He had a master's degree in Agricultural economics and farm and became an Episcopalian priest. He represents fairness, justice and equality. He appeared before committees in the 1919-1920 Nebraska Constitutional Convention and the 1921 Nebraska Legislature when efforts were made to prevent the Japanese from only land in Nebraska. Hiram was a leader of the Japanese in this state and President of the Japanese-American Association Society from 1920 to 1941 when he was arrested, and served as a counselor, minister, teacher, translator, and agricultural advisor to the Japanese.

He completed applications for expatriation to the Japanese council in Chicago so the children of Japanese immigrants from western Nebraska upon reaching age 21, could renounce their Japanese citizenship. He kept a record of births and deaths of the Japanese families. He held annual summer camps at Camp Judson, South Dakota so the Japanese immigrants and their families could become accustomed to taking vacations as Americans.

After passage of the Karen Walter Act in 1952 allowing the Japanese immigrants to become U.S. citizens, Hiram and his wife taught citizenship classes in North Platte and Scottsbluff. In 1953, Japanese immigrants in Lincoln and Scottsbluff County became citizens. He did not blame anyone for placing him in an internment camp and he did not accept reparations from the U.S. government. In the camps, he helped others to read and write English and preach the gospel.

Hiram has strong ties to Nebraska. He lived in Lincoln, Sherman County, Hebron, North Platte, Mitchell, and Scottsbluff and his son graduated high school in North Platte in 1939. His daughter was born in Mitchell and graduated from Scottsbluff High School in 1944. Hiram took the oath of allegiance at the District Court of Scottsbluff on May 5, 1953. He is buried at Sunset Memorial Park in Scottsbluff. He stated that Kano is a role model and enhances the reputation of Nebraska. Former President Barack Obama stated that, "In the face of adversity and extreme prejudice, Father Kano dedicated and devoted himself to others, his abiding faith, compassion and resilience exemplifies the American spirit and his story will be remembered for generations to come." Hiram's efforts to prevent discrimination against Japanese immigrants is relevant and timely to the current immigration situation in our country. History repeats itself. We can learn. He asks the Hall of Fame Commission to consider Hiram Hisanori Kano's nomination. Steve made a short presentation with regard to materials on display.

Aaron Wyatt asked about his personal connection to the nominee. His uncle married a Japanese stewardess in 1965 and he is a lifelong member of the Episcopal church in North Platte. He is interested in the culture and history, and he believes this is relevant to the time in our country.

Sara Crook and Steve noted that he is the only Japanese American that was arrested and put in an internment camp from Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado. This did not just happen on the west coast.

Jim McKee asked about the specific charge for arrest. Steve answered they found him to be A1, most dangerous and the reason for that was that the U.S. Government had concerns about those who had influence over the Japanese. He spoke English fluently and could interpret contracts easily. Many Japanese were at his home and he was under surveillance and there was a concern that he was a spy. The federal government had a hearing at Fort Crook that lasted a couple of days and he was sent to three camps. After research, they found that he was not a spy. They sent him to a seminary for a year and then he went back to Scottsbluff in 1957.

7:20 p.m. Testimony from Roy

Roy thanked the Commission, remaining second generation that knew him. All Japanese had to learn the bill of rights and became naturalized citizens. He was born in North Platte and he went to Episcopal Church. Most could not speak English, so he would speak in Japanese. Hiram was highly educated and educated in Nebraska. He bought a farm and raised his family. He is very humble that this man made his life what it is today. He taught him to be a good citizen, and do not get in trouble with the law, and shoot straight.

7:26 p.m. Testimony from Vickie Schaepler, Kearney

Vickie is a third generation and Father Kano was close to her family. She is the coordinator of Japanese Hall and History project in the Plains Museum and it represents historical events happening at the time such as Asians and Chinese laborers, Japanese children separated from other children, a walk-out in the school of Omaha; an immigration act that banned immigrants from Asia and prohibited Asians from owning land. Hiram graduate with a Masters Degree and prevented Asians from not being able to own land. She noted a book about his life demonstrating that he was a farmer on the Plains, what he did in World War II and his leadership. Vickie mentioned that Nebraska did not allow interracial marriage, and they had to travel to Colorado to marry his son and daughter in Law. In 1963, Nebraska allowed it before the national law in 1967.

Vickie will be forever grateful and proud of her heritage, and to work hard and be accepted, and to help build a coalition of leaders; she is forever indebted to him.

Testimony from Steve Shively, Lincoln

Steve is a retired teacher from college and added that the Nebraska Hall of Fame is a wonderful teaching resource. He added that the Asian American experience is one of the more important stories of the immigration experience and this is absent from the Hall of Fame. It adds optimism and celebration and hope to a depressing experience. It is new and must help tell the story of the immigrant.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND TESTIMONY / OTHER DISTRICTS AS NEEDED

7:37 p.m. Testimony from Chris Lofgreen, Lincoln

Chris stated Emma Louise Pound lived and achieved and excelled while living the majority of her life in Nebraska. She went to British Columbia, Stanford and Yale. There was no one else as a woman in the doctoral program except her and she pursued her PhD in 2 semesters instead of 7. She also became proficient in the German language. Social restrictions did not stop her and she paved equal rights for women. He added that more women need to be included in the Nebraska Hall of Fame.

7:42 p.m. Testimony from Schmeeka Simpson, Director of Tours for the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation, Omaha

Schmeeka asked for Malcolm X to be inducted to the Nebraska Hall of Fame. He fits every requirement. He lived in Omaha for 18 months and he only left Omaha because his parents were threatened by the KKK to leave. Nebraska rejected Malcolm, not the other way around. They had a house and farm land. His mother was threatened by the KKK. He came from humble roots. His father was killed and his mother was put into a mental institution. They would not let a black man into law school. He had burglary charges. He relied on himself. He educated himself from an 8th grade education. When he came out of prison, he dedicated himself to a life different than others. He became a spiritual person. The FBI said he was so upright and moral, they could not do anything. He was a faith-based leader and he did not smoke or drink. He left Islam because it was corrupt. He had a high moral character. He said he would no longer make any sweeping statements about any one race. He spread growth, set up grocery stores, went around the world speaking. People come to Omaha to learn about Malcolm X. How is it possible that people do not know he is from Omaha? It has been 57 years and he is still changing lives. In Pakistan, he is considered a saint. All over the world, he has immediate name recognition. He was trying to make a difference. He addressed oppressed situations and took a stance on Vietnam. He was revolutionary and he had purpose in his resolutions. He is celebrated all over the world. Why is he not yet celebrated in Omaha? He did not believe in hand outs, but self-sufficiency. He believed in second amendment rights, protecting family, two parent homes, and that a father be with his children and wife. His autobiography has changed as many people as the Bible has. He fought fear, ignorance, hate, and stereotypes. He believed in family and God.

7:55 p.m. Testimony from Nature Medicine Song Villegas, for the Community Justice Center Omaha

Nature entered the system at 9 years old. She was Native American and colonized and an authentic way of life, her land, and people were stolen and she is still putting the pieces back together today. She didn't have a childhood or adolescence. She asked how can someone so honest and true be treated so awful? She became a product of the environment. She came across Malcolm X's book and she read those words and to stand up for herself and educate herself for her people. She was an orphan and alone. She made her own family. She went back to his books every day to see his picture as a father's face. This man died for humanity. He woke up to live and not just survive, and that is a huge difference. If we combined the integrity of group of people, it would not even be a 4th of the man. She works with the Community Justice Center and travels the world. She came to Nebraska because it caused harm in her life and she needed accountability. She had the power and humility to make that decision. She works with offenders and victims and members of the community. She is dedicated to reconciliation and healing.

Chairperson Hull asked if there was further testimony.

ADJOURN

Chairperson Hull asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion by Sara Crook, Second by Aaron Wyatt

Yes: Rod Bates, Sara Crook, Jill Dolberg, Jim McKee, Aaron Wyatt

Present via Zoom and Not Voting: Tim Heller

No: None

Motion adopted

The Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission adjourned at 8:04 p.m. CST

DRAFT