

# **D&H Transportation Heritage Council**

## **October 26, 2022 Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

*Hosted at the Mamakating Environmental Education Center*

Participants:

**Bill Merchant (chair)**, D&H Canal Historical Society and Museum, High Falls  
**Cliff Robinson, Jr. (vice-chair)**, Neversink Feeder & Canal Conservancy  
**Donna Durland (treasurer)**, Mamakating Historical Society  
**Laurie Ramie (secretary)**, Upper Delaware Council  
**Kerron Barnes**, Town of Mamakating  
**Brian Scardefield**, Sullivan County Parks and Recreation (departed at 2:45 p.m.)  
**Sean Moore**, Sullivan County's Delaware & Hudson Canal Interpretive Center, Summitville  
**Norma Schadt**, Town of Deerpark Historian (departed at 1:45 p.m.)  
**Jane Varcoe**, Waymart Area Historical Society  
**Kathy Land**, Waymart and affiliate member  
**S. Robert Powell**, Carbondale Historical Society  
**Bill Bollinger**, Bollinger & Rutter Video Services  
**Bill Lucas**, Phillipsport Community Center  
**Debbie Bigelisen**, Phillipsport Community Center  
**Frank Coviello**, Basha Kill Area Association and Mamakating Environmental Education Center  
**Ron Freilich**, Mamakating Historical Society  
**Jack Weiser**, Mamakating Historical Society

**Call to Order:** Chairperson Merchant called the business meeting held at the Mamakating Environmental Education Center (MEEC) to order at 1:28 p.m. following an optional morning "TravelStories" hike originating at MEEC and a lunch gathering at Danny's Restaurant in Wurtsboro, NY.

**Preview of "The Delaware & Hudson Canal Co.: Its History and Legacy", Chapter Four: Port Jervis to Spring Glen:** A draft of the new 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Council's historic DVD series created by Bill Bollinger was shown. Bollinger explained that final editing is the next stage and that the color shown on the TV monitor was not accurate to the richness of the DVD itself. After the approximately 26-minute video played, participants praised its quality and educational value. Two corrections were noted: 1) delete the closing quote on the title for Archbald since there is no opening quote; and 2) Add explanatory text for clarity during Robinson's reference to the former D&H Conservancy's bridge-building project which states: "Members of the now defunct D&H Canal and Gravity Railroad Conservancy have re-formed as the Neversink Feeder and Canal Society." Coviello said that he has never seen a video about the D&H Canal to explain its historical operation and impact, and was advised that there are three prior chapters available that divide up the canal route into segments and one more on the way to complete the series. Bollinger said he needs to receive an image for the DVD cover and disc which Merchant had agreed to provide, and he will ask Ramie and others to review a final cut before ordering copies to be produced.

**Additions to the Agenda:** Introductions were made around the table, including several new members and guests. Barnes noted that there are now seven organizations in the Town of Mamakating that are or will become members of the D&H THC. He thanked MEEC Executive Director Jackie Broder for providing the grant- and town-funded facility for today's meeting, while encouraging everyone to check out the public self-guided mobile audio tour trails and schedule of programs. They're also looking for volunteers.

**Acceptance of July 27, 2022 Minutes:** Merchant offered two corrections to the last quarterly meeting minutes regarding the \$1 million amount of a referenced OSI grant for a feasibility study to expand the NY O&W Railroad trail and the number (411) of extant sites identified in the National Historic Landmark update report. On a **motion** by Durland, seconded by Barnes, the July 27, 2022 minutes were approved, as amended.

**Treasurer's Report and Membership Update:** Durland presented a report of transactions since late July starting with the prior balance of \$3,299.99 and ending with a balance of \$3,386.24. There are 21 full voting members and 9 affiliate members currently on the roster. She is in the process of updating the membership directory. We will re-start the collection of 2023 dues in January.

**Business and Discussion Items:**

- a) **DHTHC 501(c)3 Restructuring and Review of Bylaws** – Merchant said nobody noticed in 2018 when the bylaws were most recently updated that there is no mention of the D&H Canal Company's Gravity Railroad. That alone justifies reexamining them through a strategic planning exercise. We are also a different type of organization now following the 501(c)3 incorporation. The group, or at least the officers, may wish to start meeting more frequently than quarterly. He requests that everyone review the bylaws that were attached to this meeting agenda and come prepared to propose amendments in January. Robinson said as a 501(c)3, there are two formal positions/offices that should be established and DHTHC may now solicit grants. Those are the major distinctions from the informal organization we had previously. He suggests that the officers get together in advance of the next meeting to compile a package of restructuring proposals. Merchant said anyone interested in helping with that task is welcome to let him know they'd like to participate. In addition to the corporate restructuring considerations, he said other tasks include reviewing bylaws, updating the website, and rewriting the DHTHC brochure. Maintaining 501(c) status also requires filing an annual Form 990N (for under \$50,000 of gross receipts) with the IRS. [*Note to minutes post-meeting regarding Election of Officers:* DHTHC bylaws state, "Nominations for officers will be made by Nominating Committee or from the floor at the last meeting of the year. Election of officers for new terms will take place at the last meeting of the year as follows: The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will be elected in odd years. The Secretary and Treasurer will be elected in even years. Terms shall be for two years: January 1 to December 31. The Chairperson may serve no more than three consecutive terms in office." As per our records, Chairperson Merchant and Vice-Chairperson Robinson were elected on Jan. 22, 2020 to serve from Jan. 1, 2020 to Dec. 31, 2022; while Secretary Ramie and Treasurer Durland were elected on Jan. 26, 2022 to serve from Jan. 1, 2022 to Dec. 31, 2024. An agenda item to nominate candidates for chair and vice-chair for 2023-2025 was inadvertently missed at the October meeting.]
  
- b) **Release of Chapter 4 Historic DVD; Planning for Chapter 5; Video Platform Set-up** – With Chapter 4 nearly final, a **motion** was made by Ramie, seconded by Robinson, to issue a \$1,000 deposit to Bollinger & Rutter Video Services to start Chapter 5 which will cover the Ulster County section of the canal. The title will be: "Phillipsport to the Hudson." On a **motion** by Robinson, seconded by Barnes, members approved ordering 100 copies of the Chapter 4 video at a cost of \$475.00. Sally Talaga had provided a written inventory of the DVDs still available as of 10/24: Chapter 1= 27; Chapter 2 = 22; and Chapter 3 = 24. She can be reached at [sltalaga@gmail.com](mailto:sltalaga@gmail.com) for any order requests. At the last meeting, the Council pondered setting up a YouTube or similar video channel

since the current DHTHC website can't support hosting these videos. Coviello remarked that DVDs are an older format now. He suggested that having the content available as an MP4 thumb drive file to plug into a television may be better for organizations to use. Merchant said he understands the point but that wouldn't allow us to monetize it if we are interested in creating a revenue stream from our investment in this series. Perhaps we could request donations via PayPal for streams of it. Bollinger said one issue is they could be copied illegally. Robinson said he likes being able to sell the DVDs as a set and mentioned that the audience tends to be an older clientele. Any digital download would need to be encrypted, he added. Merchant said that his organization has approximately 300 subscribers to its YouTube channel. The top performing video is "The D&H Canal: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engine of Prosperity" which C-SPAN will be coming to film next Friday, 11/4, starting at 7 p.m. at the D&H Canal Museum and Mid-Hudson Visitor Center in High Falls and would benefit from having a large audience. He recommends giving more thought to the idea of a video platform and potentially deferring it until we have a more versatile website.

- c) **Planning a Bus Tour from Port Jervis to Spring Glen** – Robinson said he would like to plan this bus tour for April 2023 to coincide with the sites featured in the Chapter 4 video. He needs to scout the locations to assure that there are practical opportunities for bus turnarounds. This item will be put on the January agenda for further planning.
  
- d) **Report on National Historic Landmark Nomination Update** – In 1968, the entire canal made it onto the National Historic Landmark but it included only a perfunctory listing of five sites. The Neversink Valley Museum of History and Innovation was denied a grant because their site wasn't specifically listed on the Register, which led to the National Park Service (NPS) contributing \$50,000 a couple years ago to update the overall listing. Working for the contractor Richard Grubb and Associates as a local historian, Merchant helped identify 411 extant sites through a field survey. There was enough to cover an approximately 50-foot section on either side of the canal route. Where the project is at now is that NPS just returned comments on the submitted narrative report. Mapping will come next, expected next year. If individual property owners don't want to be listed, NPS said they could be excluded but Merchant noted there are no actual obligations that come along with it. This process is only adding to the original nomination utilizing modern standards of documentation. This is an unusual listing in that most National Register designations are buildings, and not an entity that is 108 miles long with a mixture of private and public properties. There is hope that this could lead to the designation of a national trail.
  
- e) **Planning for D&H 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** – Scardefield offered to join a committee that had been established at the last meeting with Merchant, Talaga, Christianson, Barnes, and Tantillo to coordinate a list of commemorative events. The committee can discuss whether this should be spread out over several years or focused in 2025. Merchant felt that July 13, 2025 will be a key date for this Council as the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canal's groundbreaking in Wurtsboro; obviously, local groups are welcome to organize their own activities whenever they wish. Powell said the anniversary celebration has already begun as he displayed a 2023 calendar from the Lackawanna & Wyoming Valley Railway Historical Society (a chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society) for which he'd been asked to contribute some photos. Along with noting their chapter's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they opted to recognize the "Delaware & Hudson Canal Company and Railroad 1823-2023" with top billing on the cover and six pages throughout the calendar including historical text. The narrative reads, in part, "The Delaware & Hudson Railroad

began life as the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company in 1823. The goal of the company was to build a canal to connect the anthracite coal fields around Carbondale, PA to New York City. The company received a charter to build a canal in Pennsylvania in March 1823 and in New York a month later. Surveys showed the best routes and construction began in 1825. The canal ran from near Kingston on the Hudson River to the Delaware River near Port Jervis, NY, then along the Delaware to Lackawaxen, PA, and along the Lackawaxen River to Honesdale, PA. Initial plans were to extend the canal west over the Moosic mountains and then descend to Carbondale. The excessive costs of such building convinced the company to consider a railroad instead of a canal. By 1829 the railroad was operational, ending the use of wagons which had been used to move coal from Carbondale to Honesdale... 2023 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the D&H. It evolved from a canal company and gravity railroad to a conventional railroad propelled by steam to a diesel-powered line. It changed its purpose from mining and hauling anthracite coal in the Lackawanna & Wyoming Valleys of Pennsylvania to a bridge line interchanging with neighboring rail lines to a minimal competitor to Conrail.” The calendar cost \$17; contact Lackawanna & Wyoming Valley Railway Historical Society at P.O. Box 3452, Scranton, PA 18505-0452 or via [www.laurellines.org](http://www.laurellines.org).

- f) **W Design Proposal for Website Re-design and Facebook Postings** – Dorene Warner of W Design in Barryville, NY offered a five-page written proposal for a responsive, mobile-optimized redesign of DHTHC.org utilizing the SquareSpace framework that will allow direct access to updating the site’s content with a “fresh, relevant, and inspiring new look” that “will be mindful of the historic nature of the subject, while making allowances for new technologies and user experience protocols.” She provided an update of a potential sitemap identified in June 2019 following discussion with members; a project timeline and process; annual fees associated with SquareSpace; and W Design fees with options for adding an eCommerce shopping cart, additional training beyond one two-hour session, and requested site maintenance. If preferred, Warner also offered to provide a proposal for a more robust, custom Wordpress site. Merchant said in either case, the Council would need to seek outside funding. He will consult a grant writer and encourages others to explore options to share with the group since the current website is stymied in its functionality. Powell said that the Carbondale Historical Society has had positive experience using SquareSpace. Merchant would like to see more content added to [www.facebook.com/D&HTransportationCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/D&HTransportationCouncil) and offered to post any group’s canal-related programs for them if they don’t have their own social media platform.

### **Announcements of Member Accomplishments, Concerns, and Upcoming Events:**

**Cliff Robinson** – Robinson is in talks with the Open Space Institute (OSI) to request assistance with advocating for Orange County to turn over responsibility for maintenance of the canal section they own from Port Jervis to Westbrookville to the Neversink Feeder and Canal Conservancy. Merchant said he’d like to be part of that discussion and would love to see that section re-watered. Robinson said he and Rob Honders have what they believe to be a viable plan for that which would cost far less than the \$5 million price tag that the county put on it for the repairs.

**Laurie Ramie** – On behalf of the Wayne County Historical Society since Talaga could not attend today, Ramie passed around two copies of a Sept. 13 *Tri-County Independent* article by Peter Becker headlined “D&H canal boat replica well underway near Hawley”, as well as copies of her Upper Delaware Council Summer 2022 newsletter, “The Upper Delaware”.

Sally Talaga (written report) – “*Daniels’ Farmhouse Restoration*: Prior to August 20<sup>th</sup>’s canal festival, plaster was restored professionally. Woodwork was scraped and painted their original colors by volunteers along with all walls and ceilings, and one fireplace was restored by Rob Orr. The electrical and fire detection systems upgrade was inspected and on Sept. 22, the Certificate of Occupancy was issued. Supervising Architect John Bowie gave his stamp of approval for all work done in the last two years during his final site visit on Oct. 6, followed by a celebratory lunch in the dining room. Several donated pieces of period appropriate furniture have been moved in and the building has been open to the public Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. *9<sup>th</sup> Annual Canal Festival*: Profit was \$6,577 and 857 attended, both all-time highs and feedback was all positive. Thanks to the 25 volunteers, sponsors, vendors and participating organizations including DHTHC members NPS UDSRR, Bill Merchant and Robert Powell who made it all possible! The festival is a great way to get your name out to canal enthusiasts, so consider participating on August 19, 2023. *Canal ‘Boat’ Pavilion*: Up to the deck and electrical wiring under it are finished. Above deck details and trench to lock house’s electrical service will be done in the spring. The structure has already hosted several WCHS events, but we are hoping for more rentals next year. Given all that has been accomplished since the last meeting at our Canal Park, I think DHTHC’s summer 2023 meeting should be there with a tour of the lock house prior.”

Sean Moore – Asking for ideas on how to boost visitation to the D&H Canal Linear Park Interpretive Center, people spoke of the need for an improved entranceway and more prominent roadside signage to indicate the Bova Road location, hours of operation, and cite what features are available since that isn’t visible from the highway. They also suggested that he set up a monitor to show videos. Moore added that they have significantly enhanced the website listing at [www.sullivanny.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/DelawareHudson](http://www.sullivanny.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/DelawareHudson) which includes a video with drone footage.

Kathy Land – The Waymart Area Historical Society will be open on Halloween night for the community celebration offering vendors, hot dogs, cocoa, and costumes, with the Gravity Railroad Car #43 decorated as a haunted house. That will be their final event before closing in November until the spring. They are excited to work with Powell on a special event this weekend.

Donna Durland – The Mamakating Historical Society will shortly be closing for the winter.

Kerron Barnes – They finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment of the federally-funded trail project, which is now open in Wurtsboro as a half-mile to Ferguson Lane. Orange & Rockland Utilities is moving their substation in the village and upgrading their system. In leading trail walks including Rt. 209 and at Bova Road, Barnes noticed that there is a parallel section of the NY O&W Railway built over the canal that would make an attractive one-mile loop. It would only need signage. He handed out a map showing the area in question. Merchant commented that the whole rail line there will be rehabilitated under an OSI grant project within the next several years.

Debbie Bigelisen – She is working on a Pomeroy Foundation application by Nov. 8 seeking a historic marker to install in Phillipsport but it needs more documentation than she has access to currently. She has been consulting with Merchant and would like additional help such as maps. Barnes noted that when the Phillipsport Community Center joins the Council, he can provide a license for their use of the historic D&H maps from the Canadian Pacific Railroad collection.

S. Robert Powell – The Pennsylvania Canal Society chose this area for its Fall 2022 bus tour from Oct. 28-30 originating in Allentown, with lodging and meals at the Ladore Retreat and Conference Center. The itinerary includes an Oct. 28 tour of the D&H Canal Lock 31 House, an

Oct. 29 tour that includes stops at several Carbondale sites, narration from Powell on the bus ride to Waymart, a visit to Plane No. 14 site, and a tour at the Wayne County Historical Society Museum. The Oct. 30 tour will visit D&H Lock 36. Participants will also be shown the Gravity Railroad Chapter One DVD. Powell said it is very exciting and has been beautifully planned out by the Pennsylvania Canal Society. Powell donated a Westport Plank chair signed by Harry Brunnel to the New York State Museum for its historic furniture collection. He was recently the speaker and walking tour guide for an Autumn Market Steamtown National Historic Site excursion to Carbondale on Sept. 24. An upcoming event co-sponsored by the Carbondale Historical Society and Museum is the 37<sup>th</sup> Christmas Concert by the Crystal Band on Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church (located at North Church St. and Salem Ave.), offered free to the public as a Christmas gift to the community with refreshments to follow. There will be a NEPA Local History Fair at the Viewmont Mall in Dickson City on Sept. 30, 2023, following this year's fair that took place on Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>. Powell has 28 volumes of his e-books on the Gravity Railroad and D&H Company available to order through [www.carbondalepahistorical.org](http://www.carbondalepahistorical.org).

Bill Merchant – Over 2,000 visitors have come to the D&H Canal Museum and Mid-Hudson Visitor Center in its first three months of operation, compared to about 700 in all of last year. The grand opening at the 1797 DePuy Tavern building was on June 18 after seven years and \$2 million of restoration and renovation work. Half of the visitors are walk-ins from seeing the sign in High Falls, with the visitor center being a big draw. The museum puts out a suggested donation box and collects names to build a database. Winter hours will be Thursday through Monday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with the visitor center available for event rentals. Merchant said they have a vigorous schedule of presentations, including a Makers of History series presented by residents of the Hudson Valley and canal-related lectures. Upcoming programs include his previously mentioned Nov. 4 “The D&H Canal: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engine of Prosperity”; Nov. 18 “The Cybersecurity Tipping Point” by Dr. Casimer DeCusatis from Marist College, and a Dec. 2 Wine Tasting Fundraiser with Keven Zraly, all at 7 p.m. See [www.canalmuseum.org/events](http://www.canalmuseum.org/events). Merchant said he continues to do research on marginalized populations who worked on the D&H.

**Next Quarterly Meeting:** DHTHC will meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, **January 25, 2023** at the Town of Deerpark's 1863 Schoolhouse Museum in Huguenot, NY. There will be a morning Power Point program by Historian Norma Schadt on John Roebling based on the translation of posters from the Muelhausen Museum in Germany, and examples of Roebling Wire available to examine. Lunch will be ordered in ahead of the 1 p.m. business meeting, with itinerary details to be announced closer to the date.

**Adjourn:** The October 26, 2022 DHTHC meeting adjourned at 3:28 p.m. on a motion by Barnes, seconded by Durland.

*Minutes submitted by Secretary Laurie Ramie, 10/31/22*