G.A.R. Memorial Hall Commission—City of Aurora
Meeting of January 15, 2020
MINUTES, APPROVED

Present: Commissioners Michael Collins, Harry Reineke IV, Michael Sawdey (Chair), Darlene Varney.
Excused: Jared Ploger
City of Aurora: Eric Pry, Curator

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 P.M.

Minutes from the meeting of September 18, 2019, were reviewed. Approval moved by Commissioner Varney, seconded by Commissioner Reineke; approved.

Curator Eric Pry provided an update on a number of items:

- Construction funded by the IDNR grant is underway: lower level remodeling, new stairs and railings for the west entrance, railings and lighting in the stair tower, upgraded security system including an additional camera. Eric has been taking pictures of the work in progress.
- Still on target to complete the lower level construction and cleaning of the murals by Memorial Day for the reopening. Recasting of the sentry statue and recreation of the Angel Room chandelier will be completed later.
- Invitations for the reopening have been sent to all the relevant heritage associations. Veterans groups will be invited to a preopening event on May 16, since most will be otherwise occupied on Memorial Day.
- Commissioner Collins noted that the 36th Illinois will march in the Memorial Day parade, with about 35 members.
- Talks are in progress with WWI and WWII re-enactors as well. A goal of the reopening is to make clear that the Hall Museum covers all of America’s wars, not just the Civil War.
- Eric noted that the mayor has urged inclusion of a new mural. It was noted that the 24th Illinois was a “colored” regiment, and that some members of GAR Post 20 had served among the white officers of the 24th. Commissioner Reineke noted that there is a cenotaph honoring the 24th in West Aurora Cemetery. This historical material could be useful and appropriate in creation of a new mural. There was a preliminary discussion of possible locations; the stair tower might be an impressive setting.
- Cemetery project: Scheduled for Spring Lake Cemetery, May 17, time TBA, but likely early afternoon, involving Sons of Union Veterans and the GAR Commission. Noted that the GAR section of the cemetery is on the right as one enters.
- Eric provided a copy of the script for the reopening exhibit. It was noted that at least one German item from the World War II section displays a swastika. The consensus was that this should be clearly addressed in the historical/contextual materials accompanying that part of the exhibit.

**Cannon retrieval update:** One cannon, the one in more original condition, has been retrieved and is in city storage. The goal will be to have a replica carriage constructed and display it in the lower level. The
second cannon, which had been loaned to the Chicago Light Artillery group, will be retrieved as soon as there is a window in the weather conditions—no snow and sufficiently hard ground for the truck to get to the location. Commissioner Collins provided contact information for a restorer who works with the National Park Service on projects of this nature.

**Silas Miller sword:** Eric has secured agreement from the Aurora Historical Society to display the sword at the GAR Hall. It is a goal to do this for the reopening.

**Other discussion:** One item in the collection is a personal flag of a Japanese soldier in World War II. In recent years, there has been a movement to attempt to locate families of Japanese soldiers to whom such flags could be returned. Eric will do some research on this topic and further discussion will be deferred to a future agenda. In the meantime, there will be an attempt to translate the inscriptions on the flag.

There being no further business before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:58 P.M.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for Wednesday, March 18, 2020, 6:00 P.M., City Hall, fifth floor conference room.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael R. Sawdey, Chair