**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Feb. 13, 2021**

Present at the online meeting were Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. Carole Nash, Lisa Moerner, Melany Stowe, Dr. Nancy Moncrief, Dr. Kal Ivanov, Dr. Adam Pritchard, Dr. Hayden Bassett, Dr. Jackson Means, Zach Ryder, and Ben Williams.

* Committee Chairman Dr. Art Evans called the meeting to order.
* The minutes were unanimously approved by the committee.
* Due to the meeting taking place online, the new acquisitions sign-off sheet was distributed to committee members electronically. Ben Williams will submit the sheet to VMNH Registrar Jill Harris once all signatures have been collected.
* The committee moved to recommend to the Board of Trustees that Dr. Katherine Harrell be made a Research Associate. According to Dr. Hayden Bassett, Dr. Harrell specializes in conflict studies and satellite imagery analysis and intends to attend the University of Virginia’s law school to specialize in cultural heritage law. As such, Dr. Bassett said, her skills will be an asset to the VMNH archaeology department’s Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab.
* The committee moved to recommend to the Board of Trustees that Dr. Michael F. Johnson’s appointment as a Research Associate be renewed for an additional five-year period. Dr. Hayden Bassett said that Dr. Johnson is well-known for his work at Cactus Hill, one of the oldest archaeological sites on the east coast, and is since retired and devoting his time to his research. Dr. Carole Nash added that she has been a colleague of Dr. Johnson’s for about 35 years and he’s a strong advocate of citizen science.
* The committee moved to recommend to the Board of Trustees that Paul E. Olsen’s appointment as a Research Associate be renewed for an additional five-year period. Dr. Adam Pritchard said that Olsen is a prolific collector of fossils along the eastern seaboard who contributed many specimens to VMNH in the early days of the institution, and he’s also a former winner of The Thomas Jefferson Award.
* Dr. Hayden Bassett provided an update on the repatriation of Guatemalan artifacts that the museum acquired in 2017, several of which date to the classical Mayan period. Bassett said that VMNH has four options for the future repatriation, two of which are actively being pursued concurrently. The first plan is for Dr. Bassett and Dr. Joe Keiper to meet with a contact at the Guatemalan embassy in Herndon, Va. to discuss the possibility of a direct transfer of the collections to the embassy. That meeting is scheduled for the week of Feb. 15. The second option which is actively being pursued is to work with one of Dr. Carole Nash’s contacts at the Smithsonian to see if the Smithsonian can serve as a liaison between VMNH and Guatemala’s museum of archaeology. The third option — which is not actively being pursued at this time — is to travel to Guatemala and hand off the artifacts directly. Finally, the fourth option — which also is not currently being pursued — is to donate the artifacts to a Virginia museum, such as Norfolk’s Chrysler Museum, which already has a number of Guatemalan artifacts. Dr. Bassett said an update on these plans will be available the week of Feb. 15.
* Dr. Art Evans asked the curators to detail some of the highlights of their work over the last quarter, which follow below.
* Dr. Nancy Moncrief said that she has submitted a paper to the Journal of Mammalogy. The paper, which is a collaboration between Dr. Moncrief, Dr. Kal Ivanov, and Liberty Hightower, concerns healed bone fractures in tree squirrels. Additionally, Dr. Moncrief said that she gave a presentation at Waynesboro’s Wayne Theatre and a presentation to Dr. DB Poli’s class at Roanoke College. Recorded versions of these presentations will be used by the VMNH Education Department to assist in teacher redevelopment.
* Dr. Adam Pritchard said that he and Dr. Nancy Moncrief have been working with Dr. Ray Bernor on an initiative to establish a functional trait database on the evolution of various animals. VMNH will contribute to this database data from research projects that involve collections of functional data from underrepresented groups of animals. Dr. Pritchard added that his monograph description of an extinct gliding reptile from the family Weigeltisauridae should be published in PeerJ within the next month.
* Dr. Kal Ivanov said that museum staff are nearing completion of the VMNH genetics lab. Ivanov added that he has been teaching online courses at Hampton University during the pandemic. The virtual classes, Ivanov said, are a unique benefit of the pandemic since museum staff are generally unable to teach courses directly.
* Dr. Jackson Means, who was formerly a collections assistant and was recently hired as the museum’s myriapodologist, discussed his work in invertebrate collections. Dr. Means said that getting to work in the late Dr. Richard Hoffman’s millipede collections has been a dream come true. Dr. Means said that he has managed to add data on more than 22,000 specimens to a spreadsheet that will eventually be made available to researchers and the public. He added that the museum’s collections contain nearly 400 millipede type specimens, more than 600 undescribed species, and roughly 200 undescribed genera. Dr. Means also discussed a paper that was recently published in Banisteria. The paper, which was a collaboration between Dr. Means, Dr. Kal Ivanov, and Ben Williams, concerns a second population of the rare millipede Apheloria whiteheadi that was discovered on Williams’ property.
* Dr. Hayden Bassett said that he has offered several presentations over the last few months, including a presentation to the Martinsville/Henry County Historical Society and a Zoom presentation in Jamaica. Additionally, Dr. Bassett said that the museum has finalized an MOU with the Smithsonian for the establishment of the VMNH Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, which will report directly to UNESCO with its findings. Dr. Bassett said that the archaeology department has also officially begun the Smith River Survey, the first steps of which will involve using ground penetrating radar to target specific areas for impact analysis and opportunistic research. In addition, Dr. Bassett said that his department has received a new grant for a project involving Waller’s Ford, an important local American Revolution site.
* Dr. Kal Ivanov mentioned that the former invertebrate paleontology lab is being converted into a shared lab that can be used by museum staff, visiting researchers, and students.
* Dr. Hayden Bassett said that a second shared lab is being created in the former Distance Learning Lab. This lab will become the VMNH Stem Lab and feature a GIS setup, a 3D printer, imaging stations, digital microscopes, and other items that will aid the museum in the long-term goal of digitizing collections. Dr. Adam Pritchard added that an additional goal is to have a large monitor in the lab facing the visitors in the Hall of Ancient Life. The monitor will be regularly updated with information about VMNH research activities.
* Dr. Tom Benzing said that given the museum’s recent efforts to reach out to the public through social media and online presentations, it would be useful to find a way to capture this outreach data and incorporate it into future committee reports. Ben Williams agreed and said he would try to incorporate that data in the future.
* Dr. Tom Benzing moved to adjourn the meeting and the vote was seconded by Dr. Carole Nash. The motion passed unanimously.