Save the Dates

LCPS Annual Meeting
Saturday, May 9, 2pm
Astor Hotel Lobby
Duane and 14th

Garden Tour
Saturday, July 11, 10am-3pm

Workshop Recaps
Submitted by Ted Osborn, LCPS President

LCPS has held two very rewarding workshops thus far in 2015:

January: A group of 20, including the couple who had owned and lived in the building some decades earlier, gathered upstairs at our 1030 Franklin Street apartment building to plan the renovation of the third floor apartments #7 and #8. The subject apartments had been occupied in years past, but previous to LCPS’s ownership, the kitchens and bathrooms had been disassembled, and some doors, hardware, and wood trim members had been removed. There are substantial areas of damaged plaster.

The group took time to wander the apartments, checking on missing elements and notable differences between the mirror image 1,000 square foot layouts, and then met to discuss and agree on an appropriate level of restoration for each building component and material. The discussion led to fixes that were both respectful of the historic construction, yet doable within the resources (limited time and funds) of the organization and the volunteer work parties that could be mustered. Good notes were taken so that when the work of each trade (plastering, wood refinishing, painting, hardware and light fixture selection, etc.) is undertaken, the crews will know what to do.

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Although we are anxious to get the specific renovation underway, members of the group raised some larger issues that needed addressing before it is time for finish work.

1. Exiting – We need to check with the City building inspector to confirm that the second means of egress, namely window exits to a fire ladder, would still be deemed adequate.

2. Electrical – An electrical estimate was obtained two years ago. We need to confirm whether that estimate represented the full scope of work that would be required.

3. Structural – The foundation for the rear stair tower that serves as access to these apartments is substandard and should be reviewed by a structural engineer to determine the need for augmentation or replacement.

4. Roof Flashings – It was recommended that the chimney roof flashings be checked for tightness as many of the plaster damaging leaks appear to have occurred in those specific areas.

Since the workshop, I met with Jack Applegate, City Building Inspector, to talk about any issues he might have regarding the renovation and redeployment of these apartments. He said that we must begin by drawing up the floor plans and applying for a building permit. Also that since the building is multi-floor, multi-tenant, the application must be signed by a licensed architect or structural engineer. He further said that if the engineer determines that the stair tower foundation needs reconstruction, that work would be part of the same application and need to be completed before the project could be signed off and apartments #7 and #8 occupied. And lastly, some good news: Jack said that as long as the existing escape access windows remain operable, the secondary egress path will continue to be adequate.

In the past weeks the plans have been drawn and a structural engineer has reviewed the condition of the foundation. That engineer has also been retained to design the appropriate remedial work. When his plans are available, they will be combined with the floor plans, and the integrated packet will be submitted to the City for a permit. The fun work of renovating the interiors, therefore, must be placed on hold temporarily until we get the first steps done and find funding to offset the higher costs now anticipated.

February: LCPS members descended on Ed Overbay’s woodworking shop in Warrenton with their hands full of dull chisels and planer blades for the Tool Sharpening Workshop. Ed has good tools, knows how to care for them, and knows how to use them. He is very knowledgeable about all the sharp instruments he uses in his fine woodworking craft, and communicates their operation and care in a manner that portrays his passion for his work.

Two members brought planes that were generations old. Ed took each apart, showed the group how to hollow grind the blade and put a fine edge on the “bright,” reassemble and tune the planes. He then demonstrated how each plane now cut flawlessly on a piece of cherry he had positioned for the demonstration. He repeated the same process on several chisels and knives, sending each of us home with ultra-sharp tools, for which we were obligated to show greater care. I showed up with three chisels that I had acquired as an inexpensive set, and had put to multiple tasks, many of which compromised their sharp edges. Ed sent me away with new chisels that I pledge to use properly from this point forward.
Saving the Historic Hotel Merwyn
by Doug Thompson, LCPS Member

One of many new “fireproof” masonry buildings to rise from the ashes of downtown Astoria’s December, 1922, fire, was the Hotel Merwyn. The Merwyn is a relatively modest, four-story structure on Duane Street, adjacent to the corner bank building. The Merwyn eventually became Astoria City Hall, but originally it featured economy class lodgings for the traveler.

The Hotel Merwyn was known by that name continuously through a succession of owners, including the DiPolo family, until the early 1980s. At that time, the Merwyn was acquired in a trade by a local entrepreneur, Daymon Edwards, who renamed the building the Waldorf Hotel. Edwards lived in the top floor for a number of years until relocating to South Korea, where he resides to this day, an American expat and baker of American pies.

When Edwards left Astoria, the Hotel Merwyn, as it is known by its historic and original name, has fallen on hard times. It has been shuttered for most, if not all, of the past quarter century and now shelters only several avian urban wildlife species and perhaps the occasional human overnight camper. A couple of rehabilitation deals, both involving public entities and public funds, have fallen through in recent years. To city leaders, a derelict Hotel Merwyn seemed to be an impediment to their efforts to renovate and expand the adjacent Astor Library, both in programs and in space.

To remove that impediment, several years ago the City facilitated the acquisition of the Merwyn by a Woodland (WA)- based demolition contractor, Groat Brothers. The brothers had recently completed the demolition of the Clatsop County-owned, historic Mark Johnson creamery building, just a block west on Duane. The City planned to acquire the Merwyn site after its demolition by Groat to avoid the cost of paying Federal Davis-Bacon “prevailing wage” labor rates. Those plans faltered, however, when the City’s own mayoral-appointed Historic Landmarks Commission, composed of citizen volunteers, unanimously rejected Groat’s application for demolition of this forlorn, but intact, contributor to Astoria’s Downtown National Register Historic District.

Subsequently, not much happened to determine the fate of the slowly deteriorating Historic Hotel Merwyn. Within the last year, the Library’s Renovation Committee voted to attempt once again to have the Merwyn demolished. Library staff eventually reached out to the Merwyn owner last fall to resume discussions of acquisition, post-demolition, of the Merwyn site.

Around the 2014 Thanksgiving holiday, a number of local citizens interested in the renovation of the Library, but not at the loss of yet another historic building, came together to figure out a strategy to have it both ways: Improve the Library AND Save the Hotel Merwyn! Several were current or former LCPS members, and it was suggested that the LCPS leadership be engaged to join the effort. The LCPS Board responded positively, tasks were assigned, and a campaign was successfully conducted.

Elements of the all-volunteer campaign included:

- Establishing a friendly, positive relationship with the Merwyn owner (who simply wants to demolish or sell the property). Controlled, limited access was gained to document the historical, interior features (after a fashion).
- The LCPS Board President Ted Osborn (a retired but inveterate architect)
authored a letter to the Astoria City Council, calling for the preservation of the Historic Hotel Merwyn.

- A Facebook page, “Save the Historic Hotel Merwyn,” was launched and soon garnered hundreds of “likes” and well over a thousand “hits.”
- A wildly successful “pop-up” art exhibition of native Astorian Jeff Daly’s captivating and touchable photographs of the interior features of the Merwyn drew well over 500 visitors into Toni and Mitch Mitchum’s donated Commercial Street retail storefront during the February Downtown Art Walk.
- A good number of letters to the editor and individual contacts with City Councilors were generated.
- A number of former LCPS members promptly reinstated membership, and the ad hoc “Save the Merwyn” group became the new Advocacy Committee for LCPS.

As a result of those efforts, the Historic Hotel Merwyn, as of this writing, is no longer “on the table” for demolition as part of the anticipated renovation of the Astor Library. The challenge for LCPS now is to support the City’s efforts to have a 21st Century Library in the oldest U.S. settlement in the American West. In return, the City must realize that the ultimate revitalization of the Historic Hotel Merwyn may well rest with the success of the revitalization of the Astor Library.

Meanwhile, stay tuned for the next exciting episode in the life of the Historic Hotel Merwyn! For a peek inside the Merwyn go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVUYDAWXWxe

The Astor Library
Submitted by Fred White

The Astoria City Council has taken a step back from plans to expand the Astor Library into the Commodore/Merwyn Hotel. Now the focus returns to the Astor Library building itself. I have been waging what has sometimes felt like a one person campaign to save the exterior of the Library building, which is nearly old enough to be considered historic. While I have gained more—and significant—support, my pleas have also been dismissed by other preservationists saying “I hate that building.” End of story.

We are now at a crossroads with the Astor Library building. It appears that we have three options: (1) save the exterior, recognizing its valid architectural style; (2) tear the building down and start over; (3) alter the exterior into a hybrid design and lose part of our historic architectural fabric. Following is a reprint of an article I wrote for Restoria in 2012.

It’s the building everyone loves to hate! The Astor Library is in the Brutalist style, which derives its name from the French béton brut, or "raw concrete,”

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which, in the case of our library, is exposed aggregate concrete. According to Wikipedia, “Brutalist buildings usually are formed with striking repetitive angular geometries.” There are apologists for the style, which you can read about in two of the internet links below. The Astoria library was designed by Ebba Wicks Brown, who was the daughter of renowned Astoria architect John Wicks, and was reportedly the first woman architect licensed in Oregon.

Upgrading the library is among the top projects for the City of Astoria during the next year. Changes include major alterations to the exterior of the building, including replacing the north face of the building with a wall of glass, and other minor exterior architectural changes. The interior will get much needed upgrades, including addressing the need for accessibility.

I wrote a letter to the Daily Astorian two years ago (2010), when the proposed upgrades were first announced, in which I opposed making exterior changes to the building, while supporting needed interior improvements. I feel that most of the desired results can be achieved by making interior changes, especially those addressing accessibility needs. More light can be brought into the building by adding skylights when needed roof replacement is done, by altering bookshelves which currently block out light, and by changing or removing the mezzanine, which is not accessible to the disabled. Money not spent on exterior changes can be spent in the interior.

Perhaps other LCPS members have expressed opinions about the proposed library changes. We all know that changes have been made to other historic structures that unfortunately can’t be undone. While many may not like the Library building, it is part of Astoria’s architectural fabric, and if it is altered in inappropriate ways, we’ll have to live with it.

I hope the City of Astoria initiates a public discussion of the proposed changes to Astor Library, with much participation from LCPS members. Our organization should be at the forefront of such discussions to advise against the possibility of what we refer to as “remuddling.”

For further reading, I recommend the following web sites. The second and third links are specifically about brutalist style libraries. (Trinity College, in Dublin, Ireland, founded by Queen Elizabeth I centuries ago, has a brutalist style library, prominently placed near the ancient building that houses the Book of Kells.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brutalist_architecture
http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/002136.html

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New LCPS Board Officers

The election of the 2015 Lower Columbia Preservation Board officers took place at the December 11, 2014 board meeting. Ted Osborn was elected President; Richard Garner, Vice President; David Wigoutoff, Treasurer; and Richard Foster, Secretary. Mark Brown will take on the duties of membership. The newly elected slate took office in January. Members are invited to join the Board at their regular monthly meeting at 7:00 PM on the second Thursday of every month at our office in the Francis Apartments, 1030 Franklin Street, to share their ideas for the organization.

Thank you to those who served as officers in 2014: Anne Gyde', President; Ted Osborn and Richard Garner, Co-Vice Presidents; Mark Brown, Treasurer; and Pam Chestnut, Secretary. Anne Gyde' also fulfilled the membership duties. All your hard work on behalf of the LCPS is very much appreciated.

Introducing two new officers:

Richard Foster: Richard studied fine art in college and developed an interest in architecture. While living in Portland, he remodeled and landscaped a home. He owns an historic 1914 Upper Town home and is now a resident of Astoria and is excited to be joining the Board, helping organize and participate in the many LCPS activities.

Patricia Roberts: Patricia, a member of the LCPS since its beginning, served one term on the board in the early 2000s. She has also served on the Clatsop County Historical Society Board for the past 13 years. She is a resident of Gearhart, owner of a 1910 Arts and Crafts home, and is restoring a cabin in the Little Beach area of Gearhart. She is planning a follow-up Old House Forum for LCPS in the future.

LCPS Property Disposition to Date
Submitted by Ted Osborn

Last year the LCPS Board voted to sell four of the five properties that the organization had acquired from the estate of Roberta Stramiello. This decision resulted from the realization that (a) there were undoubtedly other prospective owners out there who could and would be more agile and rigorous custodians of these assets than could your volunteer Board, and (b) there was a desire to liquefy much of the asset base so an endowment fund, once established, could generate income with which we could
carry out "core" preservation activities more aligned with our mission. The Board elected to retain ownership of the Francis Apartments at 1030 Franklin Street.

Last summer the 665 12th Street building, the View Apartments, was sold to a known preservationist. He acted quickly and is well into the restoration of both the exterior and the enhancement of the apartments as they become available. The LCPS Board has watched with satisfaction as improvement work is proceeding, knowing that it had neither the time nor capital to make a similarly positive commitment.

Late last fall, we began to make arrangements to sell the remaining three properties. We established that it was vitally important that the potential buyers commit, within reason, to preserve the historic buildings in their original configurations. At the same time, we looked to the retention of lower cost housing in Astoria as an important factor in identifying an appropriate buyer.

The three buildings recently being offered include 1555 Exchange Street, 1432 Franklin Street (the Franklin Apartments), and the triplex at 1160 Grand Avenue. As of this writing, buyer interest on all three properties has been fruitful. All prospective buyers have stated a clear intention to preserve and protect the historic features of the properties. Offers to buy will very likely be in escrow when this edition of Restoria is published.

The Endowment Fund - Past, Present, and Future
Submitted by David Wigoutoff, LCPS Treasurer

The LCPS created its endowment fund in June 2005. For most of the time since, the amount of money in that fund has been small, less than $2500, which has been kept in a local bank.

The real estate and personal property donated to the LCPS in the will of Roberta Stramiello was specified to go to the endowment fund. The proceeds from the sale of personal property and the rent minus expenses from the real estate have been saved. In order to complete the process of putting Ms. Stramiello’s bequest into the endowment fund, four of the five apartment buildings are being sold. The sale of one of the buildings has been completed. The money from the rents, sale of personal property, and the sale of the one apartment building has been kept in a local bank.

By the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, the LCPS had in excess of $330,000 cash in local banks. The Board of Directors decided it was time to put that money into an investment account for the endowment. The board created an investment policy designed to minimize expenses and risk. That policy stated that the endowment funds would be invested in broad market index mutual funds with low expense ratios. The board chose the Vanguard Group of Funds, specifically the Vanguard Total Stock Market Index Fund and the Vanguard Total Bond Market Index Fund. So far the LCPS has invested $250,000 split evenly between the two funds. As the other three apartment buildings sell, the proceeds will also be invested.

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The Endowment Fund Policy states that when the endowment fund reaches a certain level, then a yearly amount from the fund of 4-8% can be used to further the mission and goals of the LCPS. A sufficiently large balance in the fund could be reached soon. In all the years of the existence of the LCPS, the annual budget has been in the $2,000 to $3,000 range. In the foreseeable future the income from the fund may allow a budget of several tens of thousands of dollars.

The board of directors is pondering how to use the income to further the mission and the goals of the organization. That is, the LCPS can now think about how to use its annual income to accomplish the mission to "preserve, protect, and promote the historic houses and buildings" of our region, by the organization's goals of providing support, resources, education, and advocacy to owners of historic buildings and to the community.

Our new financial situation calls for careful, thoughtful, and creative planning. The board of directors would greatly appreciate the ideas of the members. How should we use our new income to further the mission and goals of the organization? Please give your ideas to a board member.

Available Old Window Sashes
Prepared by Richard Foster

Recently we were given access to the basement of 1030 Franklin Street, the building that LCPS has elected to retain for its offices, as a location for workshops, and as a part of the Society’s endowment portfolio. As we sorted through the huge quantity of materials stored in the basement, we determined that there were some valuable building materials that belonged to LCPS. Much of the material we found included tools and equipment owned by the individual who has been involved with the building’s maintenance for years.

Most notably, and the subject of this brief article, is a large number (149) of old wooden window sashes. These have been inventoried, and put into the following categories.

9 light 1 @ 35"x30"
8 light 1 @ 42"x18"
6 light 46 @ 17.5"x32"
       16 @ 24"x32"
       4 @ 35"x30"
2 light 4 @ 21.5"x24"
1 light 8 @ 42"x18"
       2 @ 36"x20"
67 misc. @ 25"x25” to 40"x43”
       and 24”x48” to 17”x36”

These sashes are available to any member who has a need or use. If the inventory list includes a size that appears to be the very sash that you have been looking for, let a board member or office volunteer know and we will set up a time for you to scavenge through the assortment. We may very well have what you need.
Knobs, Set Screws and Spindles 101
Submitted by Dennis Stichman

I wanted to share a recent experience I had replacing door knobs in our home. During the last 110 years, this old house went through a few “style” alterations and the original door hardware was taken off and cannot be found. My current restoration project has been searching for and collecting knobs and applicable decorative hardware that is more reminiscent of the period the house was built. I focused on finding antique hardware, not reproductions and did my best to purchase these items locally when I could. I did not find complete door knobs sets and had quite the collection of knobs and the spindles, just no set screws to secure the door knob to the spindle.

FYI - The basic components of door knob sets are the knob rose or door plate, shank, spindle, and knob-top. The knob-top is the upper and larger part that is grasped by the hand. The shank is the projecting stem of a knob (brass or other metal) and contains a hole or socket to receive the spindle and on the side is a smaller hole for securing the door knob to the spindle. The knob rose or door plate is a plate or washer that forms a knob socket and is adapted for attachment to the surface of a door. The door knob is attached to the spindle, a metal shaft that turns the latch of the lock.

I did visit a few of our contemporary and antique/vintage hardware resources local to Astoria, but no one could help me with a replacement screw or what the size may be. After a quick internet search, I found what I was looking for, which is a 1024 or 10-24 set screw. This translates to a #10 size screw, with 24 threads per inch. The screws I purchased were 3/8" in length, which was a good match for my needs and is a general size.

Please note: these standard 10-24 set screws are used with antique knobs mounted on straight, tapped spindles. Tapped means there are threaded holes on the spindle. A tap tool cuts threads on the inside of a hole to accept the screw. Taps can also be used to restore an internal thread that has been damaged or to cut a new, larger thread in the case of severe damage or stripping. The screw slides through the antique knob and turns directly into the threaded hole on the spindle.

Antique spindles generally have six threaded holes. Once the spindle is inserted through the locking mechanism, there are three holes available to adjust for the depth of the door on each side. I found that this leaves a lot of room for backward-forward “play.” In my search of the appropriate set screw, I also discovered spindle spacers (they look like a washer). Spindle spacers are designed to lessen backward-forward "play" in antique door sets. Simply slide one or more spacers/washers over the spindle behind the knob shank until the slack has lessened. Spacers come in brass or steel and are 1/32" in thickness. The outside diameter is close to 19/32" and the inside opening is about 12/32" diameter. These dimensions seemed to work the best.

I did replace door knob sets that were obviously from the art deco period; those sparkling fluted pressed glass knobs were very popular. I noticed that the shank was tapped and the corresponding spindle was threaded and could be screwed right into the shank, which makes for a closer fit and alleviates the need for spacers. Nevertheless, set screws were also used to keep the knob in place. The screw threads through the knob shank and tightens directly onto the spindle, not to be confused with screwing into a tapped spindle. Please
note: these are a different size than mentioned above and are slotted ⅛ -20 size set screws.

As a result of this current restoration project, I came across a non-profit devoted to the study and preservation of ornamental hardware – very impressive. Even as a non-member, access is granted to their electronic archive of newsletters going back 35 years. I encourage you to visit the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America at www.antiquedoorknobs.org

Also, as a sustainable practice, I will keep the screws and applicable hardware from the door sets I am replacing together. Perhaps, a local antique/vintage store will get them for store credit or purchase.

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**In Memoriam, Melissa Yowell, 1939 - January 20, 2015**

Submitted by LaRae Johnson

The Lower Columbia Preservation Society membership knew Melissa as a dedicated volunteer for the Annual Garden Tour. It was her elegant and colorful home on 17th where people gathered for tickets to begin the Tour. She also served in the beginning years of LCPS on the Board of Directors. The distinguished home overlooking the Columbia River was painted in a cheerful pallet of sunny yellow, lime green and pumpkin colors, and appeared in the book "America's Painted Ladies," as well as many articles referencing historic architecture.

Melissa was born in Baltimore, Maryland, attended schools in Westport, Connecticut, and graduated with a BA in History from the University of Connecticut. Although her early life was East coast, it was her later life that centered on the West coast. Her Great Grandparents, Martin and Lillie Foard, had an established business in downtown Astoria. They built the lovely Queen Anne home on 17th in 1890 where Melissa's Grandmother grew up. The home was sold and went out of the family until Melissa discovered it "For Sale" on a vacation trip when she passed through Astoria up the coast from San Francisco. With her family connection, her history background and an understanding of preservation, the home had the perfect owner with Melissa, and future owners can be grateful it has not been "remuddled" with stripping the old and replacing with out-of-character modern.

Besides Melissa's membership and contributions to LCPS, she also became a Master Gardener, was a member of ENCORE through the college, volunteered for the Liberty Theater, and was an accomplished competitive bridge player. Her enthusiasm, her forthright manner and preservation ethic will be missed by all of us.
From the President’s Desk

In an open letter to the membership last December, I stated that the painful parts of the Stramiello inheritance were behind us, and that the Society could now focus on activities that serve its mission.

We have had a very active first quarter of 2015. As your new President, elected along with the complete slate of officers in January, I can tell you that we are full of energy and lots of ideas. We have a multi-talented Board consisting of a mix of knowledgeable veterans and newcomers.

In my earlier communiqué to the membership, I asked urgently for member input. I asked what activities you would most like to see? In what type of activities would you participate? Are you happy to read *Restoria*, open letters, and send post card announcements as the extent of your participation? If there is something that we are missing, we would be pleased to get detailed input and would be glad to give it a try. We are a member-driven organization and will thrive even better with more direct communication from a broad cross section of our membership.

We began the year with five very distinct, ambitious goals:
1. Sell the three remaining buildings slated for sale
2. Hold a membership activity (workshop, tour, lecture) each month
3. Consolidate the Society’s financials
4. Plan and begin renovation of 1030 Franklin Street
5. Initiate an expertise/tool share database

Good progress has been made on several fronts. The article entitled LCPS Property Sales Update explains the status of the building negotiations referred to in goal #1, and progress related to goals #2, #3, and #4 is explained in considerable detail in additional articles in this edition.

While we were in the midst of planning the activities through which to attain our goals, a high stakes preservation challenge arose. A group of our members, having heard word of a new and active threat to the historic Mervyn Hotel, formed a committee in January to work through LCPS to fight for the structure’s preservation. Thus a formal LCPS Advocacy Committee was set up, sanctioned, and placed into immediate high profile action. Your Board and Advocacy Committee have written appropriate letters and emails, attended City meetings, produced a pop-up Art Walk gallery (focused on the Mervyn), dueled with the Daily Astorian, and as of this edition of the Restoria, those who were looking at the Mervyn as a potential open building site for library expansion appear to have backed away and moved on with other ideas. Please refer to the Mervyn article enclosed for specific details.

The only goal in which very little progress has been made – goal #5 – is the idea of putting members with similar challenges (tiling, wood refinishing, etc.) together to share expertise and tools and camaraderie. In earlier correspondence and at each of the first two workshops, I have asked for feedback on the merits of setting up a project needs database and have received little response. I hope that others think this would be a good idea and/or just plain fun.

Look for emails and postcards each month announcing specific activities. Our intent is to present upcoming activities 8 to 10 days in advance. Hopefully this message has been informative but has also provoked ideas and productive feedback. Write to me at tko320@gmail.com or contact any of the other Board members. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by Ted K. Osborn, LCPS President

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LCPS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE ZIP
PHONE
EMAIL*

Annual Dues:

____ $15 Individual
____ $25 Family
____ $50 Business
____ $100 Supporter

Please indicate which areas you would be able to assist the organization as a volunteer:

____ Advocacy   _____ Newsletter
____ Education   _____ Planning
____ Grant Writing _____ Publicity
____ Membership   _____ Other ________

*LCPS will not share or sell members' email addresses

Lower Columbia Preservation Society
Board of Directors

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Richard Garner, Vice President
Richard Foster, Secretary
David Wigoutoff, Treasurer
Mark Brown, Membership Chair
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