

## Records of the Historical Commission of Charleston, 1933–1956

*The Charleston Archive, Charleston County Public Library  
Compiled by Nicholas Butler, Ph.D., Manager, November 2007*

Collation: 0.75 linear feet.

Description: Collection consists of manuscript and typescript meeting minutes, annual reports, correspondence, scripts for radio plays, tour narratives, and drafts of a tour-guide licensing exam.

Historical Note: On 11 April 1933, the City Council of Charleston passed “An ordinance to create a Board, to be known as the Historical Commission of Charleston, [and] to prescribe its membership and define its duties.”<sup>1</sup> According to this ordinance, the Commission’s purpose was to “collect and preserve and promote the collection and preservation of historical data, making publicly known and commemorating persons, deeds, events and things of historic interest, by publication, erection of monuments, markers and otherwise that the historic and aesthetic interests of Charleston may not only be preserved but they desire and purpose to preserve the memory of these persons, events, and things may be fostered and stimulated.” The commission consisted of the mayor and six citizens appointed by the mayor (and re-confirmed annually). In addition to these volunteer commissioners, the city employed one paid staff member who acted as secretary and researcher for the Commission. Mary Sparkman held this position from the early days of the Commission until December of 1956.

During its twenty-three years of activity, the Historical Commission of Charleston researched and produced texts for historical markers, advocated the erection of monuments and interpretive materials, published historical articles, sponsored historical plays, and even experimented with historical dramatizations for radio broadcast. The last record of the Historical Commission’s activities is the 1956 typescript annual report of its activities in 1955. The Commission’s final minutes, dated 1 November 1956, note that “the present quarters, over Fire Engine House, #2, at 46 ½ Wentworth Street, are inadequate,” and that the commission had requested the Mayor to provide a more suitable place for their activities. This request apparently was not fulfilled. In the following month Miss Sparkman’s salary was discontinued and the Commission’s office closed in mid-December 1956.<sup>2</sup>

The journals of the proceedings of Charleston City Council in 1957–59 include no information about the activities or annual elections of Historical Commission members, but such election results are included in the Council journals of 1960 through 1975. Aside from these election reports, however, the Council proceedings for these years include no further mention of the Historical Commission or its activities. On 11 March 1975, Charleston City Council passed an ordinance to merge the Historical Commission with the Art Commission,

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<sup>1</sup> The full text is found in the City Council Journal of 28 March 1933, pp. 238–39, when the bill was read for the third time. The ordinance was official ratified on 11 April 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Charleston Evening Post*, 12 December 1956.

which the city had established by ordinance in 1929.<sup>3</sup> From that time to the present, the city's Commission on Arts and History has functioned as "an advisory board that promotes the collection and preservation of historical data, publicizes and commemorates persons, deeds, and events and things of historical interest through publication, erection of monuments, markers and otherwise, to preserve the historic and aesthetic interest of the city as well as the memory of those persons, events and deeds."

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<sup>3</sup> "An Ordinance to amend the Code of the City of Charleston, 1964, by deleting therefrom Chapter 6 [Arts Commission] and Chapter 27 [Historical Commission] and inserting in lieu thereof a new Chapter 6 entitled "Arts, History, Tour Guides, and Sightseeing Vehicles", creating a commission on Arts and History, and regulating Historical markers, public art, tour guides, and sightseeing vehicles." The full text is found in City Council Journal of 11 February 1975.

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### Collection Outline

Data re: 1933 establishment of the Historical Commission	BOX 1
Annual Reports, 1936–1956	BOX 1
Correspondence, 1935, Re: Radio Plays	BOX 1
Correspondence, 1938, Re: Guide Book	BOX 1
Radio Play Scripts, 1935 (all apparently by Robert Memminger) “Blackbeard’s Hostages” “The First Naval Attack upon Charles Town in the Province of Carolina, August 24–31, 1706” “The Exposure of General William Campbell” “Revolutionary Times. The General Committee” “Johnson’s Capture of Worley’s Pirates” “The Taking of Fort Johnson”	BOX 1
Tour Guide Exams, 1954–1956	BOX 1
Tour narratives, 1940, 1955	BOX 1
Rough Minutes / Meeting Agendas, 1937–1955	BOX 2
Minutes 1935–1956	BOX 2