

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
February 25, 1981

The House Education Committee convened at 8:35 a.m., on February 25, 1981, in Room 129 of the State Capitol, with Chairman Eudaily presiding and all members present except Reps. Donaldson, Lory, Teague, and Williams who were excused and Reps. Azzara, Hannah, Meyer, O'Hara and Vincent who were absent.

Chairman Eudaily opened the meeting to a hearing on HJR 45.

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 45

REPRESENTATIVE FRANCIS BARDANOUVE, District 6, chief sponsor, said this is a resolution that could have a lot of significance in years to come. It recognizes the contributions made to Montana by Charles Monroe Bair and directs the Montana Historical Society to cooperate with the Bair family to preserve the collection of antiques and artifacts collected by the family of Charles M. Bair.

Rep. Bardanouve told how Mr. Bair had left his Ohio farm home with 14¢ and 7 green apples in his pocket. He went to Michigan and from there to Montana in 1876. He worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad between Helena and Billings. He was a very ambitious, hard working young man and arranged coal cars to meet the trains and a check cashing service. Having accumulated a little money he bought a small ranch at Lavina and a few sheep. He went to Alaska and bought the patent on a machine that would thaw the permafrost so the miners could get at the gold. He returned from Alaska with money and expanded his operations in Montana. He became one of Montana's wealthiest sheepmen. At the height of his operations he had the entire Crow Reservation as part of his ranch. His interests were widespread as he was active in the political world and was a friend to a number of presidents: McKinley, Coolidge, and Hoover. He was an admirer of western art and collected many pieces. He developed many irrigation projects. He was involved in the oil fields in Wyoming. He developed coal mines in the Roundup area - Bair Coal Company was one of the earliest companies. He took advantage of the dollar but was a generous man and had many friends.

He and his family built a family home on the highway by Martinsdale and furnished it with priceless period pieces. As the home became too small they added on. It is preserved by the daughter, Alberta Bair, today and is a real museum as it contains original Russells and many other valuable pieces from the bygone days. One daughter, Margaret Bair Lamb, left her half of the home and its treasures to the state of Montana. HJR 45, hopefully, will encourage Ms. Alberta Bair to realize that the State of Montana is interested in their family and their family's contribution to Montana. Mr. Bardanouve said we don't want to appear pushy. He mentioned that Ms. Bair has also donated very generously - at any one time has 25 fulltime scholarships going for students at MSU or Rocky Mountain College.

BOB ARCHIBALD, Historical Society, said they would like to voice their support for the bill.

There were no opponents and Rep. Bardanouve just closed.

Questions were asked by the committee. Rep. Anderson asked if the resolution was directed at preservation of the mansion itself - to make plans for preserving it.

Rep. Bardanouve responded that Ms. Bair could sell the mansion on the open market. She doesn't have to give her half. If sold at a public auction the state would receive money but loose the integrity of the collection if it was broken up.

Rep. Anderson asked Mr. Archibald if we were involved in other projects like this. Mr. Archibald said the Historical Society is involved only in the original Governor's Mansion. He said in this case the sister left one half undivided interest in the home and its contents and several acres to the state of Montana through the Historical Society. The concern is that if we are not able to negotiate for the other half, if indeed it is arrived at that we don't want the other half the whole thing will be sold to satisfy the terms of the will. Rep. Anderson asked in negotiation for the other half, do you have some estimate of the amount needed. Mr. Archibald said it is the possibility of the donation of the other half they are thinking of and not the purchasing of it. The family has put together the collection that is worthy of being a museum. Their intent, as he understood it, was to give it as a gift to Montana and one of their concerns is the willingness of the state to accept and maintain it. Rep. Bardanouve said the family's concern is that it not be broken up but maintained in its integrity. Rep. Bardanouve said there is a possibility if the state eventually controls the museum that there will be the expense of a custodian and other maintenance costs. On the other side of the coin the state would have a collection of artifacts that would probably be the envy of many states.

Chairman Eudaily recessed the meeting at 9:00 a.m. as the committee members were needed in the Committee of the Whole.


Chairman Eudaily called the meeting to order again at 9:20 a.m. for an executive session on the bill heard earlier. Reps. Lory, Williams and Hannah were now present also.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 45 - Rep. Dussault moved BE CONCURRED IN. The motion passed unanimously with those present. Absent now were: Reps. Azzara, Donaldson, Meyer, O'Hara, Teague and Vincent.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,


RALPH S. EUDAILY, CHAIRMAN