

To: Chairman Dwight Evans and members of the House Appropriations Committee

From: Barbara Franco, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum
Commission

Date: February 21, 2008

Thank you for inviting us to discuss the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and to answer your questions concerning our 2008-2009 budget.

As the Commonwealth's official history agency, PHMC is responsible for the Pennsylvania State Archives, the State Record Center, The State Museum of Pennsylvania, 25 historic sites and museums around the state and the State Historic Preservation Office, Historical Marker program and History and Museum Assistance grants. We have prepared a personalized packet for each of you that summarizes some of these activities in the area of your district.

This year marks the 325th anniversary of William Penn's first visit to his new colony of Pennsylvania and the first meeting of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The Pennsylvania State Archives preserves many of the original documents that set up Pennsylvania's governmental systems and remain as testimony to the early workings of democracy on this continent. Penn's legacy to Pennsylvania, America and the world is his deep and abiding commitment to the rights of individuals and to the responsibilities of citizens. Pennsbury Manor, his reconstructed home on the Delaware River operated by PHMC, recently opened a new visitor center that is now better equipped to handle school groups and invites visitors who come to find out more about the founder of Pennsylvania. One of the opening events was a swearing in ceremony for new citizens who had a chance to immerse themselves in the history of their new country. William Penn remains a model for good citizenship and he continues to be a focus of our work with PennCORD and the National Constitution Center to help educate young people about the history and workings of their government so that they too can become informed and active citizens of the Commonwealth.

Education remains a particular priority for PHMC. Whether it is making research materials available on line, developing curriculum materials for teachers or hosting tours of students, PHMC seeks to actively engage the next generation. With a prestigious Teaching American History Grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, PHMC staff has provided access to primary history resources that have helped teachers excite their students about history—improving reading and writing skills as they learn.

PHMC's internship programs provide hands-on learning and experience in a number of areas. The competitive Keystone Internships provide pre-professional training to students interested in public history careers and attracts highly qualified upper level undergraduate and graduate students who we hope will ultimately return to work in

history organizations in Pennsylvania. William Penn Internships in Applied History offer full and part time internships throughout the year. The Diversity Internship program, a partnership with the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations and funded through a grant from the General Assembly, is expanding this year with locations in Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. The Preservation Trades Apprenticeship program introduces students or recent graduates of trade schools, technical colleges and other training programs to preservation and traditional building trades needed to preserve Pennsylvania's historic places. Paid apprenticeship positions are available at PHMC, partner organizations and participating companies throughout the state. All of these programs are important investments in Pennsylvania's future.

In addition to the responsibility of preserving the important permanent archival records of state government, PHMC is also charged with implementing the state's Records Management program. In this work, PHMC has developed considerable knowledge and expertise in current and pressing issues of electronic records, e-mail correspondence and preservation of e-Archives. The new right-to-know legislation is an important step forward for Pennsylvania, but it will challenge the ability of agencies, and especially local governments, to provide access to records previously closed. Without more assistance, adequate training and increased emphasis on good records management practices, many government agencies at both the state and local level may find it difficult to comply with the law.

The Commission is embarking on a newly updated strategic plan that seeks to position PHMC as a vital actor and valued resource in the state; to evaluate our governance and structure to strategically allocate resources; to expand and diversify financial support; to strengthen operational and programmatic effectiveness; and to secure capital funding to update the State Museum and State Archives facilities. This plan addresses budgetary constraints and seeks to prioritize what we do so that core programs can continue to be fully funded and essential services can be adequately staffed.

Strategic planning has helped focus our work and provides a framework to concentrate on a particular theme each year. This year's theme is the 75th anniversary of the New Deal which began with the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. Today, the legacy of New Deal programs still exist in roads and bridges, state and national parks, museums, post office murals, oral history and folklore projects. An exhibition of post office murals in Pennsylvania will open at the State Museum November 22, 2008 as part of the year-long anniversary. Like many New Deal cultural projects, they stressed local identity and artists worked closely with communities about subject matter. State histories were written to describe local points of interest and customs, and the Index of American Design recorded unique regional folk arts. The Federal Writers Project also organized archives, indexed newspapers, collected folklore and conducted oral history interviews. A special poster celebrating Pennsylvania's role in the New Deal has been created for distribution to schools and libraries and is available on our web site www.phmc.state.pa.us.

PHMC is also participating in a number of other important upcoming anniversaries. 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth and the 150th anniversary of oil

production in Pennsylvania at The Drake Well Museum in Titusville, Pennsylvania. The 150th anniversary of the Civil War beginning in 2011 provides Pennsylvania with an important opportunity to engage people of all ages in an all encompassing educational experience that connects the struggles of 19th-century America to today's and tomorrow's world through enduring themes of the struggle for freedom and equality and the challenge of coming together as one nation. PHMC has taken a lead in the planning for this effort in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Heritage Society and other partner organizations around the state. A National Endowment for the Humanities grant supported regional planning meetings and the participation of some of the foremost Civil War historians who helped shape the historical content to include new research and cutting edge scholarship. With their encouragement, we have launched a state-wide planning effort with support from a DCED grant that outlines a Civil War 150th that will position Pennsylvania as a destination for Civil War history that includes both the Gettysburg battlefield and the many other significant people, places and collections that chronicle Pennsylvania's key role in one of the defining events of our nation's history.

The 2008-2009 budget provides PHMC with the basic resources to continue these important programs and to preserve our historic sites as a lasting legacy for the people of Pennsylvania. A major challenge is how to continue to provide quality programs with limited resources and rising costs of utilities and personnel. Another challenge is how to address the aging facilities of the State Archives and State Museum in Harrisburg so that they meet health and safety codes and can provide a safe and secure environment for priceless, irreplaceable collections like the original Penn Charter signed by King Charles. This past year, DGS conducted a make safe study to investigate fire and life safety issues as well as deterioration of the exterior cladding. The results of that study will indicate what steps need to be taken to ensure the safety of visitors and staff and prevent more extensive damage.

We know that Pennsylvanians value their history. As the state agency whose mission is to preserve the Commonwealth's memory as a teacher and champion of its heritage for citizens of Pennsylvania and the nation, we are committed to enriching people's lives by helping them to understand Pennsylvania's past, to appreciate the present and to embrace the future.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this work with you.

