

An Institution Transformed

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania stands as one of the nation's principal centers for historical research—our manuscript collections, totaling more than five shelf miles, hold treasures that can't be found anywhere else. The 560,000 printed volumes at HSP fill nearly seven additional miles of shelving.

Caring for the wealth of stories held in these pages is a formidable task. Aging books and manuscripts face the ravages of time, slowly dissolving in acidic folders or disappearing under a veneer of mold. Past repairs made with unstable materials or damaging adhesives must be corrected. Countless remarkable collections, donated without money for processing, line the shelves of our archives; thousands of printed items have yet to be added to national databases. The work to share the amazing history in our possession is an ongoing process—a task that would be impossible without support from not only government and foundations, but also from individual donors who recognize the value of our unparalleled collections.

Over the past several years, HSP has undergone tremendous changes. In August 1999, we completed the first phase of building renovations that, as one patron put it, brought researchers out from the catacombs and into a cathedral, where historical research was again a spiritual experience. Our collections benefited as well: materials that once had been stored in inadequate conditions had a new environment designed to protect them for years to come. The capital improvements, though, were only the first steps towards making HSP a resource that helps thousands of users every year to understand how our nation's diverse communities became American.

Exploring a Treasure Trove

In spite of the strength of HSP's collections and the marked improvement in their storage, in 1999 there was adequate physical and intellectual access to just 3 percent of our 4,600 manuscript collections. Our archives, despite years of exploratory mining by some of America's foremost scholars and genealogists, were full of hidden

stories and undiscovered voices. Since then, our position has changed radically: we have made material available in ways we never had imagined.

Did You Know?
Since 2002, HSP's conservation lab has treated over 15,000 documents.



The process began in 2000, when the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded a needs assessment and prioritization project that allowed us to survey 19,000 linear feet of manuscripts. Today, the contents and needs of the documents filling our shelves are no longer a mystery; our staff members know which collections are most in need and most worthy of attention. The methodology smoothed the transition of the merger of The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies with HSP in 2002, when we increased our total holdings by over 20 percent; Mellon protocols were used to evaluate 1,600 linear feet of the Balch manuscripts.

Another grant from the A. W. Mellon Foundation, awarded in the spring of 2002, allowed us to provide appropriate access to many of HSP's family archives holdings. These papers comprise the historical record of a broad array of Pennsylvania families active in business, civic, and cultural affairs. Combined with a companion access and preservation project funded by the National

This work has provided access to over 5,000 linear feet—almost a mile—of new material.

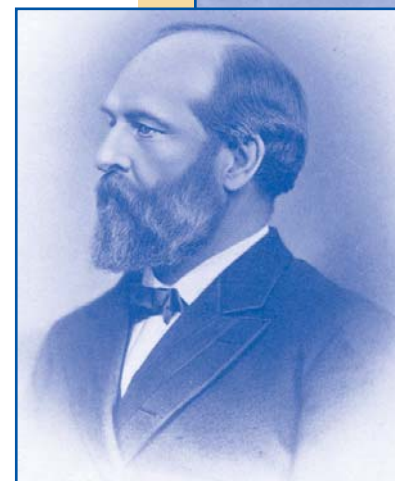
Endowment for the Humanities and other processing initiatives, this work has provided access to an unprecedented number of collections—over 5,000 linear feet—almost a mile of new material.

Recent projects that have contributed newly available materials include the following:

- A grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) enhanced access to and preservation of the J. G. Brill Company Photographic Archive.
- Members of the Cadwalader family funded much of the processing of their family papers, chronicling the lives of these influential Pennsylvanians from 1630-1900.
- The Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust provided support to process the nineteen largest collections in the Balch archival holdings.
- The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) provided a grant to develop control of the institutional archives of the Balch and HSP together, and to create a records management program for the combined institution that accommodates electronic as well as paper records.
- The NHPRC, together with the PHMC, also provided funding to process the records of the Coxe Mining Company, once the largest privately held anthracite coal-mining operation in the world.
- The PHMC supported the processing of seven archival collections of Asian American organizations and



Visit <http://timeline.hsp.org/>
Images from newly processed collections are featured on HSP's interactive online timeline; links to finding aids are also included so that you can navigate directly to pertinent materials. From the year 1881: President James Garfield was shot by Julius Guiteau on July 2.



individuals and also the papers of several private Philadelphia relief organizations that began in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth.

Building a New Gateway

Renovating our library space helped researchers at our building use our collections as never before. Many of HSP's users, however, never enter the doors of our building. Over the past few years we have striven to embrace new technology, opening a gateway to our resources. In 2001, with support from the Barra Foundation, we introduced an Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC), a database including most of our printed books, serials, and pamphlets. Subsequently, Barra provided support that allowed us to migrate our OPAC to a more robust system, providing records up to Library of Congress standards and links to finding aids. This funding also allowed us to catalog a significant portion of our ethnic-related manuscripts and printed material. A recent cataloging grant from the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program allowed our staff to add hundreds of new records for pamphlets relating to African American history to the international database of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC).

Our Web site has become a powerful new way to access our collections and to learn from them. The site, www.hsp.org, currently receives an average of over 50,000 unique visits a month, almost double the number of two years ago. Among the rich resources that these visitors from around the globe explore are library catalogs and finding aids, digital collections, exhibitions and essays, and curricular materials for teachers that enhance K-12 teaching about America's multicultural heritage. And the site continues to grow: in the future, we'll extend access by mounting select collections online and integrating them with other Web-based resources, making them available and relevant to a wide range of users. A new interactive online timeline showcases our collections and contextualizes them with historical events.

Preserving Our Treasures

In the wake of the comprehensive survey of our collections, we worked to rebuild our archives department and reinvigorate our conservation program. We developed a manual for processing collections and got conservation equipment up and running—giving expert staff the capacity to rebind broken volumes, clean and repair fragile manuscripts, and build specialized enclosures and mylar housings for unique and oversized materials.

A conservation survey, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1993, was supplemented in 2002 when the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts conducted a targeted evaluation of seventy-one manuscript collections. A Save America's Treasures grant from the federal government allowed HSP to treat some of our most vulnerable treasures, including copies of the Emancipation Proclamation, portraits of Hannah and William Penn, John Dunlap's printer's proof of the Declaration of Independence, and draft versions of the U.S. Constitution.

Much of this specialized and costly conservation work is made possible by the generosity of our most dedicated donors, the members of The Treasures Society. Established in 2004, this group provides HSP with meaningful operating support and funding explicitly dedicated to the preservation of our most endangered collections.

Looking Ahead

As our history continues to evolve and grow, our work continues. We have basic control of all of our institutional records and appropriate access to 22 percent of the total holdings of an institution that has seen total collection growth of almost 25 percent in seven years time. Despite these enormous strides forward, HSP still has approximately

four shelf miles of unprocessed collections that need to be made appropriately accessible to researchers. Of this total, more than half were identified as high priority during our collection survey. In addition, HSP has 130,000 political pamphlets still to catalog. Many are not listed in the national databases.

New grants and gifts are moving this important work forward. A project funded by the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program will create a set of freely available online digital resources on Philadelphia's African American history, including facsimiles and edited transcripts of key documents, K-12 lesson plans, supplementary readings, and links to collections from HSP, local archives, and historic Underground Railroad sites. Donors have "adopted" special collections profiled on our Web site, including the Whiteman family papers, 1849-56, a collection of miniature manuscript serials adopted by James D. B. Weiss Jr., and the records of The Lantern and Lens Guild of Women

Photographers, adopted by Howard Lewis and Sheila Bodine. Proposals recently submitted would allow for the processing and conservation treatment for many more of HSP's most endangered graphic, printed, and manuscript materials.

With continued support from all of our dedicated friends—from foundations to individual members—we look forward to an inspiring future for our past. Our work will unlock our treasures and make our history an open book. ♦

Did You Know?

Visitors from 35 different countries access the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* online.



Yesterday and Today: A Resource for the 21st Century



HSP Reading Room circa 1917



The new Reading Room.



Adopted by James D. B. Weiss Jr., the Whiteman family papers, 1849-1856, include a collection of miniature manuscript serials created by four young brothers. The collection will be conserved and processed by HSP staff.

HSP is always seeking to expand the stories that our collections tell. In addition to our work developing ethnic history curricula, we collaborate with community groups to develop exciting interpretations of local and regional history. A recent project to develop neighborhood tours is working with local businesses and community groups to gather and interpret the stories of historic neighborhoods in Philadelphia. This work has been generously funded by the Heritage Philadelphia Program, supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the University of the Arts. One of the community advisors for this project relates her experience.

The Greater Northern Liberties Treasures Tour

By Elaine K. Ellison, co-author, *Voices from Marshall Street: Jewish Life in a Philadelphia Neighborhood, 1920–1960*

Philadelphia is considered a city of neighborhoods. People identify themselves as part of a specific area such as Frankford, Olney, Kensington, South Philadelphia, or Northern Liberties. If someone asks me which neighborhood I called home during my “growing-up years,” I usually say, “Northern Liberties.” In reality, the nine hundred block of Marshall Street, where I lived during the first half of the twentieth century, sat at the perimeter of the Northern Liberties neighborhood. The demarcation of that area ran east to west from Front Street to Sixth Street and north to south from Girard Avenue to Spring Garden Street. The nine hundred block of Marshall Street, a place of one hundred shops, abutted Sixth Street and ran from Girard Avenue to Poplar Street. People came in droves from Northern Liberties and beyond to shop for food, clothing, and housewares. The street was a place to talk with the myriad of ethnic groups that lived in Philadelphia.

When Dr. Joan Saverino, assistant director for education at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania invited me to join the Neighborhood Tour Project committee, I was delighted. The focus would be to develop two tours, one to South Philadelphia/Queen Village (Old Southwark), and the second to an area that encompassed Northern Liberties, parts of South Kensington, and the Latino neighborhoods. Here would be an opportunity to interact with community advisors who were proud of and wanted to highlight their neighborhoods’ past history as well as current developments. We could also help HSP characterize how new immigrants are contributing to the reenergization of these neighborhoods. With Dr. Saverino as the facilitator and her two interns assisting, we met monthly to brainstorm and develop ideas for prototype tours. What a delightful experience to listen and exchange information with such a diverse group of Philadelphia citizens. We represented a diverse

group that reflected the multicultural mix of the city today. Some were first-generation American and others, second- and third-generation citizens. Each member helped discuss goals for the tours. Who lived in the neighborhoods in the past and who lives there now? What institutions serve as the social, educational, and economic fabric of the communities? How have the neighborhoods changed over time? Are old buildings being reused? What in the landscape has disappeared that once was extant? How could we design a tour of our respective neighborhood that would convey all this information in a few hours and still make it interesting and fun? It was a huge challenge.

The author on the pilot tour.



Children of varied backgrounds made tiles representing doorways to peace to decorate the façade of the Al Aqsa Islamic Society.

miniums. We toured the Lighthouse, a settlement house since 1893, located on Lehigh Avenue, to see its strong community interaction. We ate a fine lunch there cooked by Grupo Motivos, a women’s community group and part of the Norris Square Civic Association. We were inspired by a visit to the Al Aqsa Islamic Society, an educational, religious, and social gathering place for Arab Americans, mostly Palestinians. From Adab Ibrahim, another member of our HSP advisory committee and a mosque member, and Joe Brenman, a Jewish artist, we learned about the collaborative neighborhood project to decorate the façade of the mosque. A multicultural and religious mix of adults and children from schools nearby made decorative tiles for the outside wall representing doorways to peace. Messages for peace and community spirit fill the spaces.

On this day, we learned that in many ways, neighborhoods stay the same. Yet they are continually remade by the changing flux of people who call them home, creating new and vibrant communities. ♦

Tour participants boarded a trolley to explore the history and ethnic diversity of Northern Liberties.



Preserving History’s Light

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In This Issue...Neighborhood Tours...Collection Adopted...and more!

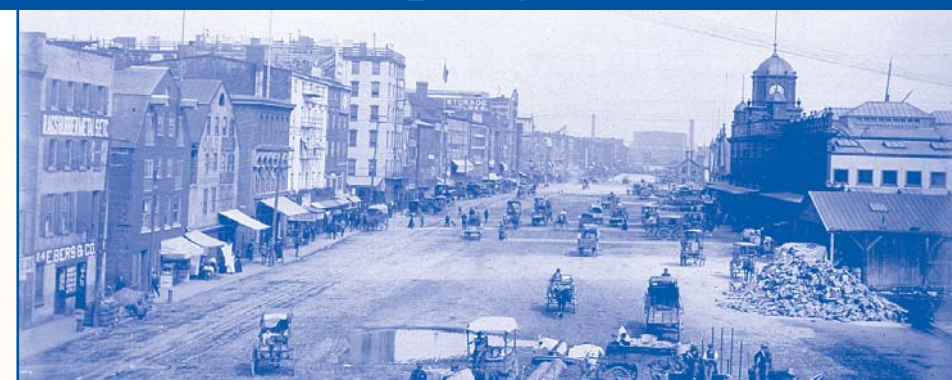


Tell us how you like our new look! Comments on *Sidelights*? Contact membership coordinator Kristina Leidy at kleidy@hsp.org

Coming Soon to www.hsp.org



(Above left) The earliest surviving American daguerreotype (dating to 1839), a view of Central High School in Philadelphia taken by Joseph Saxton (1799–1873). (Above right) Delaware Avenue north from Chestnut Street. (Below) Fairmount Park Waterworks and Boathouses.



Be sure to visit HSP’s Web site, www.hsp.org, to check out our new selection of vintage photo reproductions and books—including formerly out-of-print editions—available for purchase online. Find a historic photo of your neighborhood or a hard-to-find publication from The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies. ♦

Order Prints and Publications Online!

HSP *Sidelights*
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Preserving History’s Light

Dear Friends:

The last seven years have seen a transformation of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania as a center of historical exploration and engagement. Here, staff and volunteers report on some of the ways in which this work began and is continuing, thanks to the targeted support of foundations and government agencies as well as individuals. In addition to the remarkable progress and accomplishments described here, let me note other, often less visible changes and developments important for HSP’s future and continued success:

- the reinstitution and innovative development of our education and interpretation programs, starting in 2000–01, with the early expansion of our Web site, the launch of our authors series, conferences, and *Pennsylvania Legacies*, and continuing in 2002, with the incorporation of curriculum-development work and teacher workshops from The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies;
- the substantial, ongoing expansion and upgrade of our information technology and management systems;
- the establishment, in 2000, of our Founder’s Award for Exemplary Service to History, honoring leaders who champion history’s uses and enhance its value to the public;
- the launch, in 2004, of our Treasures Society, to support critical care of our collections;
- the paying off of our nearly \$5 million capital debt, also in 2004;
- the development of a widening array of community and professional partnerships and programs to promote history’s value and access to diverse constituencies and enhance the capacities of the region’s historical community.

Board leadership has both pushed and supported this agenda. Staff has accomplished a remarkable amount in its conceptualization and execution. My participation has given me pride as well as pleasure in the advancement of one of the great centers of American historical research and education.

In my new life as a full-time writer of history, to begin next summer, I look forward to using the collections and services that have become HSP’s signature contributions to American self-consciousness and understanding. Now, let me just say “thank you” to the hundreds of friends of HSP who have enabled this work, together with the foundations and other funders acknowledged all too briefly in this issue of *Sidelights*, the membership newsletter launched just two years ago.

Let me end by also expressing my deeply felt best wishes to my successor, the search for whom has just begun with the selection of a national search firm. While HSP has transformed itself and accomplished a huge amount over the past seven years, in many ways the organization has just started after 181 years in business. Its shelves are full and the historic building fabric needs constant attention; second-stage renovations and expansion will dislocate and demand much; emergent partnerships need nurturing; the good work on the collections is not half completed. All of this work will require unprecedented and sustained generosity, as well as commitments of time and energy.

The extraordinary gifts and critical grants that have fueled HSP’s recent successes have not been enough either to sustain the organization or to continue its essential work. Your commitment, therefore, will be what makes HSP succeed going forward. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David Moltke-Hansen

