

About the PAS Papers

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society was founded in 1775 at the Rising Sun Tavern in Philadelphia, as a Society for the “Relief for Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage.” Its mission was later expanded in the 1780s to include “improving the Condition of the African Race.” For the founders, this primarily meant offering jobs and education to black youth, whether escaped slaves from the South or native Philadelphians.

The Papers of the PAS at HSP cover the period 1775 to 1975 and represent an extremely rich documentation of the workings of the abolition and anti-slavery movements as well as the Underground Railroad. A large part of the collection concerns the records of the Society general meeting and various committees, financial papers, minutes, and legal papers related to cases taken on by the PAS. In addition, the Society’s efforts to document and assist the free black community are represented in censuses and studies and the papers of the several PAS education boards and associations, including the Clarkson Institute.

Many of the PAS members were also members or officers of other like-minded organizations whose records became part of the PAS collection in time: the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, the Young Men’s Anti-Slavery Society, the South Mulberry Ward Anti-Slavery Society, the Junior Anti-Slavery Society, the American Free Produce Association, and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. This last organization contributed the records of the Vigilance Committee, containing William Still’s famous Underground Railroad diary.

The PAS Papers were deposited at HSP primarily during the early 20th century. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society is still an active organization today and continues its educational mission by supporting projects such as this digital archive project.

About the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Digital Exhibit

From 2004-2008, HSP undertook a major digital history project focused on African American history in the Philadelphia area from the colonial era to the post-Civil War era. The project team digitized items from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society papers, transcribed select documents, created contextual essays and other background resources, and created educator lesson plans.

In 2013, HSP intern Lori Daggar updated the format of the digital exhibit, especially adding links and images.

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More about the Pennsylvania Abolition Society

"The PAS and American Abolitionism: A Century of Activism from the American Revolutionary Era to the Civil War," by Richard Newman ^[1] (pdf)

The PAS in Context: A Timeline ^[2] (pdf)

Links

[1] https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/newmanpasessay.pdf

[2] https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/pastimeline.pdf