



Historical Marker Policy

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	3
II.	Historical Marker Policy.....	4

INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (“Commonwealth”) has been marking sites of historical importance in Pennsylvania through the Pennsylvania Historic Commission and then the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (“PHMC”). PHMC is authorized by 37 Pa.C.S § 303(2) to “mark by proper monuments, tablets or markers, bearing the Commonwealth crest, places or buildings in this Commonwealth where historical or cultural events have transpired or, with the consent of the state or county having jurisdiction, places or buildings outside of this Commonwealth having to do with its history; and arrange for the care or maintenance of these markers or monuments.” For purposes of this policy, the aforementioned shall be referred to as “Historical Markers.”

The Commonwealth’s Historical Marker program is grounded in scholarship and interpretation, both of which the Commission recognizes can change over time. New information may be discovered, adding context or proving old interpretation to be inaccurate; cultural shifts occur, meaning once-accepted references or interpretation may become outdated. These changes may periodically require review and revision of existing markers. For these reasons, this policy addresses not only the erection of markers, but also revisions and the possible permanent retirement of markers.

Therefore, PHMC adopts this policy to clarify the Commission’s role in the nomination, preparation, revision, or retirement of those “markers bearing the Commonwealth crest.”

HISTORICAL MARKER POLICY

Be it resolved that PHMC revokes all previous statements of policy on Historical Markers and adopts the following statement of policy:

1. The public, any member of Commonwealth government, or PHMC itself may nominate the subject and location of an Historical Marker.
2. PHMC will evaluate nominations for an Historical Marker according to the following criteria:
 - A. The nomination is clear and organized and includes thorough documentation (with selected photocopies and bibliographies from reliable primary and secondary sources) and verification of the facts claimed.
 - B. The person, place, event, organization, or innovation to be marked had a significant impact on its times, and has statewide and/or national, rather than local or regional, historical significance. The significance of the subject, particularly for continuing events and organizations, must be historically established rather than of contemporary interest. PHMC recognizes that continuing scholarship may help validate the subject's impact on its times or its significance from a more recent historical perspective.
 - C. The subject to be marked has a substantial connection to Pennsylvania.
 - D. An Historical Marker cannot be approved for a living person. With the exception of Pennsylvania governors and U.S. presidents, subjects must have been deceased for a minimum of five (5) years. The significance of an individual's accomplishments must have had a measurable impact on history and sufficient time has elapsed to evaluate that impact based on credible documentation.
 - E. Nominations for geographical, topographical, or natural features may be referred to an appropriate federal, state, or local agency.
 - F. People, places, events, and innovations already marked with existing monuments or markers may receive less favorable consideration for an Historical Marker.
 - G. Nominated subjects reviewed and disapproved by the Commission three times in succession are not eligible for review panel consideration for a period of three years.
 - H. Governors of Pennsylvania are approved as the subject of an Historical Marker upon nomination (subject to the criterion in subsection D herein).
 - I. Historic sites or properties owned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission are approved as the subject of an Historical Marker upon nomination.
 - J. Places listed on the National Register of Historic Places and/or recognized as National Historic Landmarks or United Nations World Heritage Sites may be considered for an Historical Marker. These places will not be summarily approved by PHMC for designation because the approval criteria for those designations are different. Nominations for these places are subject to all these Criteria.
 - K. Places of worship and cemeteries/burial places generally will not be approved unless the nomination demonstrates that the subject meets criteria in subsections B and J.

3. The Commission will appoint an Historical Marker Review Panel to advise it. This panel will operate according to the Commission's bylaws. The Historical Marker Review Panel comprises five professional historians or practitioners of public history who are not PHMC staff members. Panelists will serve for a two-year term. PHMC will solicit suggestions for panelists annually, and staff will put forward recommendations to the Commission based on the qualifications of the proposed members, geographic representation of the Commonwealth, and other factors to ensure a broad representation of the state's diverse population. The Commission will approve recommended panelists based on majority vote. One Commissioner will provide oversight of the Historical Marker Review Panel, and staff will manage the process.
4. The Historical Marker Review Panel is charged with reviewing new applications for markers following the established criteria, considering revisions and retirements, and making recommendations to the Commission.
5. The Commission will approve the subject matter of a nomination for an Historical Marker by a majority vote according to the Commission's bylaws.
6. The Commission may reject a nomination but may reconsider the nomination of the same subject at a later time or upon resubmission of the nomination with sufficient documentation, changes to the application, verification, and/or context.
7. Any resident of the Commonwealth can request the review of an existing marker for revision or retirement.
8. Revisions that correct errors of spelling, grammar, or particular fact (e.g., dates) may be managed by staff without Commission approval.
9. Markers proposed for revisions not covered under subsection 8 will be reviewed by the Historical Marker Review Panel. The Historical Marker Review Panel will provide recommendations to be presented to the Commission by staff. Recommendations will identify elements that include, but are not limited to, existing inaccuracies, lack of historical context, or references that could be seen as inappropriate, and provide proposed direction to changes in content. The Commission will approve the recommendations by a vote of at least two thirds majority of those voting and present. For markers approved for revision, Commission staff will consult experts, sponsors, the Historical Marker Review Panel, and members of the relevant communities to develop revised marker text in accordance with the recommendations.
10. If a property owner on which an Historical Marker is located requests its removal, Commission staff may remove it and reinstall it at another location.
11. If the Commission staff or Historical Marker Review Panel recommends the retirement of an Historical Marker, the Commission may approve the retirement and removal of an Historical Marker by a vote of at least two thirds majority of those voting and present.