



Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office  
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

# PA State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO)

## Guidelines for Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations

**UPDATED  
September 2020**

## Introduction

*Guidelines for the Pennsylvania Historical Markers Program* includes information about the nomination process, the Criteria for Approval, and the nomination form.

Nominations are evaluated every year by a five-member panel with varying areas of expertise in the field of history and regionally distributed throughout the state. They receive submitted nominations following the annual deadline and attend the Historical Marker Review Panel meeting where the nominations are discussed and voted upon. The panel's recommendations are presented to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Commission votes on the recommendations.

These Guidelines include the following sections, which you can reach by scrolling through the document or clicking on the links below for easier navigation.

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### For More Information

For more information on the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program, please visit PHMC's website at <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/Historical-Markers/Pages/default.aspx>.

To search the database of Pennsylvania Historical Markers, please visit <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/apps/historical-markers.html>.

To view a recorded webinar about the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program and nominating a subject for a historical marker, please visit [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gCLO2Kc\\_Yo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gCLO2Kc_Yo).

If you have any questions about the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program, please contact Karen Galle at 717-705-4266 or via email at [kgalle@pa.gov](mailto:kgalle@pa.gov).

## Criteria for Approval of State Historical Markers

The following criteria for approving state historical markers was adopted by Resolution of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) in September 2020. It is very important that the Criteria for Approval provided with the nomination form be carefully read and thoroughly understood. When reviewing nominations, the marker panel makes an informed decision using these criteria as well as the quality of the submitted nomination.

- 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.

## Considerations for Historical Markers Subjects

The marker panel makes an informed decision using the Criteria for Approval of State Historical Markers and will also evaluate the nomination for historical accuracy, inclusion of interpretation and analysis of the subject of the nomination, demonstration of an understanding of historical context, and appropriateness of the documentation provided.

### General Questions

When preparing the nomination for a person, place, event, innovation, or other subject, consider the following questions and address them as appropriate:

- What was the cause and effect?
- What changes or consequences occurred and why?
- How did the subject influence the course of events?
- What and how widespread was the impact?
- How was the person, place, or event of statewide or national historical significance?
- What was the subject's lasting influence in history?
- What role did the subject play in their area of significance?
- What factors contributed to the subject's development?

### Nominating People

When nominating an individual and their historical significance, consider what innovations an individual being nominated has made, and whether his or her impact has been statewide, national, or international in scope.

If such an individual was responsible for something significant in Pennsylvania, but has limited connection to the Commonwealth, consider making the subject for nomination the innovation, event, or work of significance rather than the person, e.g. Salk Polio Vaccine rather than Jonas Salk. Individuals who spent their formative years in the Commonwealth, and subsequently went on to achieve national recognition may be considered favorably by the panel, but the association with Pennsylvania should be substantial, i.e. they should have been shaped here, and it would be helpful if they retained ties to Pennsylvania after leaving.

### Nominating a Place

In addition to the general questions listed above, consider what changes in policy or practice were begun there.

### Nominating an Event

In addition to the general questions listed above, consider how the event fits into the context of a larger movement or philosophy.

### Subjects to Avoid

A nomination that suggests a subject solely due to sensationalism, durability or longevity, or philanthropy or beneficence does not conform with the intention of the State Historical Marker Program.

Also discouraged are nominations that advocate an individual with little or no connection to Pennsylvania. For example, a significant person who was simply born in or lived/worked briefly in Pennsylvania but lived the majority of his or her life and made their impact elsewhere, would not be considered favorably by the panel.

Consistent with Criteria for Approval #K, generally, burial sites are not considered eligible for a marker as persons should be commemorated where they lived or where their actions made an impact. The State Historical Marker Program is not intended as a memorial program. Nominations seeking to simply commemorate those who died, e.g. members of the military or victims of a crime or tragedy are inappropriate for this marker program. A locally erected marker or monument may be appropriate. The program also discourages nominations that appear to have a commercial motivation, even if educational or benevolent in nature.

Places of worship may be considered but will be recommended for approval only if they were the first of their denomination or if significant changes in religious doctrine or philosophy were initiated there or architectural or artistic distinction.

### **Historical Significance and Overview**

Specify the historical significance of the person, event, innovation, or place being nominated and include a historical overview. Be thorough, but concise, and try not to exceed the space provided.

The historical overview helps us understand how the subject being nominated for a historical marker fits into the bigger picture and provides the review panelists with the information they need to assess whether the subject had a significant impact on its times and has statewide and/or national, rather than local or regional, historical significance.

In this section, also explain why this marker will have meaning for people from the whole state or country, not just from your own community. If of broader significance, be sure to describe the subject's Pennsylvania connection.

### **Supporting Materials**

The nomination must be accurate and supported with attached documentation. Panelists consider many nominations and may be unable to consult sources listed in the nomination, so it is imperative to include pertinent photocopied excerpts from valid primary and secondary sources, along with citations. This material should support the overview you have written and verify your argument for historical significance.

Copies or printouts of excerpts from essential published or unpublished primary and/or secondary source material must be attached to the nomination and listed in the bibliography. Try to limit material to about 20 to 25 pages and choose wisely the information which relates most directly to the focus of your nomination.

Here are some suggestions when compiling the supporting documentation:

- Three to four supporting documents are recommended.
- If nominating a National Register-listed property, including Section 8: Significance of the National Register form is advised.
- Newspaper articles can be useful but should not be heavily relied upon.
- Letters of support can accompany the nomination, but those from experts on the subject matter carry more weight than those from political figures.

**Need help?** Staff will review and comment on draft nominations. If you wish to submit a draft nomination for staff review and comment, please contact Karen Galle and submit one copy of the draft nomination by mail or email. Please note that the draft must be received by November 1.

For more information, please contact Karen Galle at 717-705-4266 or via email at [kgalle@pa.gov](mailto:kgalle@pa.gov).

## Nomination, Approval & Installation Process

1. Any individual or group may nominate a subject for historical marker commemoration. Submissions must be **postmarked by December 1** each year.
2. In January and February, all nominations are reviewed by an independent panel of historical experts for compliance with PHMC criteria. A commissioner appointed by the PHMC Chairman chairs the panel. PHMC commissioners act in the spring upon panel recommendations. The commissioner who chairs the panel or the PHMC Executive Director sign and send a notification letter to approved nominators. PHMC staff notify others of Commission decisions.
3. If a nomination is not approved, the nominator may submit revised nominations for the same subject three years in succession. Any nomination that is rejected three years in succession may not be submitted again for another three years.

PHMC staff is available to work with nominators to revise or strengthen their proposals or to provide technical assistance to nominators who choose to manufacture and install a local—or unofficial—marker. All local markers must be distinguishable in color and design from official PHMC markers.

4. If the nomination is approved, the nominator receives several forms related to permission, fabrication, funding, and dedication accompanying an approval letter. On the Funding Commitment form on which a sponsoring individual or sponsoring organization is identified to cover the cost of marker fabrication. The Permission to Install form must be signed by the property owner or person with authority over the marker location. Both of these forms must be completed and returned to PHMC before a marker can be ordered.

It is recommended that commitment to funding the marker is obtained by the nominator prior to submission but can be obtained subsequently. One individual or organization must agree to receive the invoice for the entire cost of the marker and be responsible for payment of it, although multiple sponsoring individuals or organizations may be involved in the fundraising efforts. In some instances, the nominator is affiliated with a sponsoring organization, but that is not always the case. Should several individuals be involved with a marker, the group and PHMC staff will determine the most effective means of communication to all. PHMC maintains ultimate authority over administration of the program.

5. Marker contact people should work with PHMC staff to identify a dedication date several months in advance. Normally, it takes a **minimum** of ten weeks to prepare a text, plan a ceremony, manufacture a marker, and install it.
6. PHMC staff work with marker contacts to write a text that is agreeable to both parties. PHMC is ultimately responsible for determining the accuracy of a text, whether it complies with established space, content, and style guidelines, and making final edits.

If a sponsor elects to have PHMC take responsibility for ordering with the contracted vendor, PHMC staff will communicate with the manufacturer, and place the order for the marker. Marker texts are not to be released to the press or published in any source prior to the dedication ceremony. Markers are delivered to a shipping point specified by sponsors.

7. PHMC staff and sponsors work together to identify a mutually agreeable location for the marker's placement. The most appropriate location would be where the person lived or made an impact, where the

event took place, or at the site being marked. While most locations are straight-forward, some require negotiation and discussion to determine the optimal site.

Upon agreement, **the sponsor is responsible for obtaining all necessary permissions from local, state, and/or federal authorities and from any affected private parties.** *Proof of authorization and permissions must be provided in writing to the Historical Marker Program before a marker is ordered for manufacture.* **The sponsor is responsible for all costs and making all arrangements associated with installation of the marker.**

8. **Sponsors are responsible for arranging dedication ceremonies.** PHMC staff can provide guidance. Multiple nominators and/or sponsors may be involved in organizing the public dedication ceremony, although those identified as primary organizers will be the points of contact for PHMC staff. PHMC will provide written guidelines regarding invitations and programs to sponsors several weeks in advance of a dedication ceremony.

If possible, a PHMC Commissioner, staff member, or associated designee will represent the Commission at the event. This designee will be prepared to say a few words on behalf of PHMC and should be included near the beginning of the program. If not, a brief written statement will be provided to be read at the ceremony.

9. Upon installation, PHMC assumes ownership of the marker and responsibilities for maintaining it. PHMC historical markers and marker text are trademarked, copyrighted and the exclusive physical and intellectual property of the PHMC.
10. If a marker is not manufactured and installed within two years of its approval by the Commission, PHMC may choose to identify another individual or organization to take over the marker process or withdraw its approval of the nomination. Subject to the procedures outlined here, PHMC may work with a new individual or group to install the marker. If the approval is withdrawn, the subject must be nominated again and go through the standard annual review process.



## Historical Marker Nomination Form

Please review Guidelines, Criteria for Approval, and Procedures before completing this form. For ease of review, please type and use a font size no smaller than 10 point.

1. Subject of Marker / Marker Title. State name of person (include birth and death dates), event, innovation, or site to be commemorated.
  
2. Please use the space below to provide a historical overview and specify fully the historical significance of the person, event, innovation, or site. **Be sure to explain why this marker will have meaning for people from the whole state or country, not just from your own community. If of broader significance, be sure to describe the subject's Pennsylvania connection.** Be thorough, but concise, and try not to exceed the space provided.

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3. Please propose a draft of the text for the marker. (Note: A final text will be written according to established PHMC space, content, and style guidelines in collaboration with PHMC staff.)

4. Are you requesting a city type marker (27" x 41½", approx. 40 words, approx. cost \$1,660.00) or a roadside type marker (45¼" x 45 ¾", approx. 70 words, approx. cost \$2,110.00)?

Roadside type

City type

5. Bibliographical data — From which publications/sources did you obtain your information? Feel free to attach a list, utilizing the format below for referencing them. At least 3 or 4 sources (primary and secondary) are ideal. If nominating a National Register-listed property, including Section 8: Significance from the National Register form is advised.

Author:

Title:

Date:

Publisher:

Author:

Title:

Date:

Publisher:

Author:

Title:

Date:

Publisher:

Author:

Title:

Date:

Publisher:

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If the source of further information is an individual person, please furnish his or her name and address.

Name:

Email Address:

Phone number:

NOTE: Supporting Documentation is important. Attach copies of excerpts from essential published or unpublished primary or secondary source material. Again, at least 3 or 4 examples are expected. This material should support the overview you have written and verify your claims. Letters of support are acceptable to include. Those from experts on the proposed marker subject carry the most weight.

6. Provide location information for the suggested marker site.

County:

Municipality:

If the proposed location is in a village, small town, neighborhood, or city, please provide the corresponding street address or closest intersection (*Example: "in front of 325 Main St." or "southwest corner of Main and Oak Streets"*):

If the marker is suggested for placement inside a park, specify exact location within the park (*Example: "Adjacent to gazebo in Memorial Park; along Main Street side of park"*):

If the proposed location is in a rural area, please provide the following:

Highway route number (*Example: "PA 322"*):

If not a highway, identify road name and closest highway route and give approximate distance from it (*Example: ".5 miles south of Pa. 6"*):

Nearest town and approximate distance in miles (*Example: "2 miles east of Centerville"*):

7. Describe the proposed location and its connection the subject being marked and include a photograph, if possible. For example, how is the location associated with the marker subject? Are there any surviving features, built or topographical, that relate to the proposed commemoration? While survival of such features is not a determining factor in the approval of markers, a suggested marker should be close enough to the site described to take advantage of any features that do survive. It should also be located so as to maximize visibility and accessibility to the public. The final location will be subject to PHMC approval.

## Historical Marker Nomination Form

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8. Please provide information on yourself as preparer of this form:

Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Telephone:

Fax Number:

E-mail address:

Please provide the name and contact information for the Pennsylvania General Assembly legislators for the proposed marker site. If you need assistance, you can find Representative and Senators [here](#).

Pennsylvania Representative Name, District # and Address:

Pennsylvania Senator Name, District # and Address:

If you are writing on behalf of an organization, please indicate your title and the name of the organization (*Example: "President, Eastern Historical Society"*).

Your signature:

Submission date:

### Submitting Your Nomination

Please submit your nomination without using cover, page protectors, bindings, and other “presentation” materials. Annual postmark deadline is **December 1**. Notification letters are typically mailed in March of the following year.

**Note:** If you wish to submit a draft nomination for staff review and comment, please contact Karen Galle and submit one copy of the draft nomination by mail or email. Please note that the draft must be received by November 1.

Return twelve (12) copies of your completed nomination form including any additional supporting material, collated into twelve (12) complete packets for distribution to evaluators, to:

Historical Marker Program  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
State Historic Preservation Office  
400 North Street, 2nd Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093

If you have any questions about completing this form, please contact Karen Galle at 717-705-4266 or via email at [kgalle@pa.gov](mailto:kgalle@pa.gov).

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired and wish to contact a hearing person via Text Telephone, you may use the PA Relay Center at 1-800-654-5984.