PA State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO)

Guidelines for Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations

UPDATED
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Introduction

*Guidelines for the Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations* includes information about the nomination process, the Criteria for Approval, and a worksheet to help users prepare their nominations for submission using PA-SHARE.

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 navigate to a specific section by hovering over the line in the Table of Contents and following the instructions.

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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](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](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 send an email to ra-phmarkers@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.
Using PA-SHARE to Submit a Historical Marker Nomination

PA-SHARE, Pennsylvania’s State Historic & Archaeological Resource Exchange, was launched in February 2021 as the commonwealth’s new online data management and cultural resources GIS tool. It is now the primary interface for all program areas within the PA SHPO, including the historical marker program. **PA-SHARE replaces the current paper nomination process. All marker nominations must be submitted in PA-SHARE.**

Users can access PA-SHARE from the PHMC website and from this link: share.phmc.pa.gov/pashare/landing. A free Basic account is required to submit a Historical Marker Nomination. Users will first need to register for a free Keystone Login and then sign into PA-SHARE using those credentials. For instructions on registering for a Keystone Login and signing in to PA-SHARE, visit **Signing In and Subscribing to PA-SHARE.**

For specific guidance on using PA-SHARE to submit a Historical Marker Nomination, please review the step-by-step instructions in the PA-SHARE tutorial **Submitting a New Marker Nomination in PA-SHARE.**

Once your nomination has been submitted in PA-SHARE, you, and anyone you have included as a project contact will receive automated emails from PA-SHARE as your nomination moves through the system. You will be notified:

- when your submission was received,
- when your submission was accepted as a project,
- when PA SHPO has reviewed your nomination,
- when PA SHPO has provided comments on your nomination,
- when PA SHPO closes the nomination project.

These emails will provide you with instructions for accessing your submission, project, and PA SHPO correspondence.

**Users are encouraged to contact the PA-SHARE Help Desk at pashare@pa.gov with any questions about signing in to PA-SHARE, submitting their marker nomination, or accessing their project.**
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.
Nomination, Approval & Installation Process

1. Any individual or group may nominate a subject for historical marker commemoration. Submissions must use PA-SHARE, Pennsylvania’s new online GIS and project management system for working with cultural resources in the commonwealth. PA-SHARE replaces the former paper nomination process. Nominations must be submitted by 11:59 PM on June 1.

2. In July and August, 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 upon panel recommendations in their September meeting. 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 marker (not a PHMC historical 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, and dedication accompanying an approval letter. The Permission to Install form must be signed by the property owner or person with authority over the marker location. Both forms must be completed and returned to PHMC before a marker can be ordered.

Please note that beginning in 2022, PHMC assumes the costs for manufacturing and delivery of new markers.

5. Marker contact people should work with PHMC staff to identify a dedication date several months in advance. Normally, it takes a minimum of fourteen 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. PHMC has final approval for all marker text.

PHMC prefers to place all marker orders with the contracted vendor. 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 address and contact 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. Please note that all markers in Philadelphia must be installed by the Philadelphia Streets Department. The sponsor is responsible for coordinating the installation with Streets Department at least 30 days before the dedication date. PHMC Marker staff can provide contact information for the Streets Department.

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.

Every effort is made for a PHMC representative (a PHMC Commissioner, staff member, or associated designee) to participate in each marker dedication. These officials should be included in the program and given the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the Commission. In unusual circumstances when no one is available to represent the Commission, a 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.
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 and quality 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 on a statewide or national level?
- What and how widespread was the impact on a statewide or national level?
- 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 benevolence 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 item 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.

**Need help?** Staff will review and comment on draft nominations. If you wish to have a staff review, you can:

- Email the draft nomination, including supporting materials, to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov. If you choose this option, please wait to submit your nomination through PA-SHARE.
- Submit your nomination through PA-SHARE and select “Yes” at the end of the online form to request the staff review. If you choose this option, communications with staff and revisions to the nomination will be handled through PA-SHARE.

**Please note that the draft must be received by April 30 for PHMC staff to provide feedback.**

For more information, please send an email to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov.
Historical Marker Nomination Worksheet

Please use this form for reference as you collect and prepare your nomination materials for application through PA-SHARE. DO NOT SUBMIT THIS FORM AS IT WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AS AN OFFICIAL NOMINATION. All fields required to submit the nomination in PA-SHARE are marked with an asterisk (*).

**Contact Information***

Please enter the information for the primary contact person for this project. The accuracy of this information is extremely important as all communication and correspondence regarding the review of this project will be sent to this person. Additional contacts can be added and will receive communication and correspondence, however, only one contact is designated as the primary.

First and Last Names:
Email Address:
Mailing Address:

**Marker Information**

**Subject of the Marker / Title of Marker***

State name of person (include birth and death dates), event, innovation, or site to be commemorated. **NOTE**: This field in PA-SHARE allows for up to 100 characters, including spaces.

**Draft Marker Text***

Please note that PHMC retains final approval of a historical marker’s title and text. The information you provide in the initial nomination should be considered draft text subject to revision if the marker nomination is successful. PHMC staff will work with nominators to prepare the final marker title and text according to established guidelines for space, content, and style. **NOTE**: This field in PA-SHARE allows for up to 800 characters, including spaces.

**Type of Marker***

Are you requesting a city type marker or a roadside type marker? Please note that beginning in 2022, PHMC assumes the costs for manufacturing and delivery of new markers.

- City type marker: measures 27” wide by 41½” high, can fit approximately 40 words.
- Roadside type marker: measure 45¼” wide by 46” high, can fit approximately 70 words.
Historical Significance*
Provide a historical overview and specify fully the historical significance of the person, event, innovation, or site. 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.

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.

NOTE: This field in PA-SHARE allows for up to 5,000 characters, including spaces. Be thorough, but concise. If you need to provide a longer statement of significance, it can be uploaded as an attachment in the Supporting Documents section.
Supporting Documents

Documentation
The nomination must be accurate and supported with documentation. Panelists consider many nominations and may be unable to consult sources listed in the nomination, so it is imperative to include pertinent scanned (uploaded as a PDF) 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.

Scans (uploaded as a PDF) 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.

Bibliography
From which publications/sources did you obtain your information? Upload a PDF to PA-SHARE, utilizing the format below for required information. 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:

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

Name:
Email Address:
Phone number:

Letters of Support
Letters of support are acceptable to include. Those from experts on the proposed marker subject carry the most weight. Upload letters of support to PA-SHARE as PDFs.
Location
In PA-SHARE, you will need to indicate the proposed location of the historical marker on a map as well as provide the below information.

If you can locate the proposed marker location with an address, complete the below fields:

Address:
County:
Municipality:
Zip Code:

Describe Suggested Marker Site*
Describe the suggested marker site using the following guidelines. NOTE: This field in PA-SHARE allows for up to 1,000 characters, including spaces. The final location will be subject to PHMC approval.

- 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 this information:
  - Highway route number (Example: “PA 322”) or, 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”)

In this field, also discuss the connection of the proposed location to the subject being marked. 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 to maximize visibility and accessibility to the public.

Photograph(s)
Upload at least one photograph of the proposed marker site to PA-SHARE.