Tips & Tricks for a Successful Historical Marker Application

PA State Historic Preservation Office
September 2020
Welcome!

Purpose

1. Overview of Pennsylvania’s Historical Marker program & application
2. Review some common pitfalls and misunderstanding and examples of good subjects
3. Tips for a successful application
PA’s State Historic Preservation Office

• Official historic preservation agency for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

• A bureau within the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC)

• Administers federal historic preservation programs in PA and state programs authorized by the State History Code
Historical Marker Program

- Established in 1913 to capture the memory of people, places, events, and innovations that have affected the lives of Pennsylvanians throughout history
- Bronze plaques erected on boulders or stone monuments - first dedicated in 1914
- ~ 150 plaques erected through the 1930s.
Historical Marker Program

• PHMC created in 1945
• First roadside marker dedicated in September 1946

Early Markers told stories primarily about...
• Native Americans
• European Settlers
• Government and Politics
• Military
Historical Marker Program

Today, close to 2,500 markers and plaques

As the program evolved, marker topics expanded to stories about...

- Athletes
- Entertainers
- Artists,
- Civil Rights
- Scientific advancements
- Industry
- And much more!
PHMC’s Plan to Evaluate Historical Markers:

pahistoricpreservation.com/phmcs-plan-evaluate-historical-markers/
Application Basics

Annual deadline for submitting nominations is **December 1!**

Nominations for historical markers may be submitted by any person or organization.
Application Basics

12 complete application packets – nomination form & supporting materials – required.

Forms available online @
www.pahistoricalmarkers.com

OR email kgalle@pa.gov

Submissions must be postmarked by December 1, 2020 to be considered in 2021.
Application Basics

• Nominations reviewed by PHMC staff and independent panel members December through early February.
  • Nominations evaluated on their individual merit – do they meet the Approval Criteria?
  • Criteria for Evaluation & Guidelines available with forms.
• Commission votes on panel’s recommendations usually in March.
11 Criteria for Approval

Highlights:

✓ Nomination is clear and organized; facts claimed are documented & verified
✓ Significant impact on its times with statewide and/or national historical significance.
✓ Substantial connection to Pennsylvania.
✓ Places of Worship and cemeteries/burial places are generally not approved.
Approved Markers

- Nominators responsible for costs of marker
- PHMC assumes ownership & maintenance after dedication
Marker Dedications

• Coordinator works with local organizers to:
  o Develop a text
  o Arrange for manufacture
  o Coordinate installation

• Most dedicated at public events

  Each dedication presents opportunities for Pennsylvanians to celebrate and understand their heritage!
PHMC’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access Initiative

✓ Committed to covering costs for under-represented subjects and counties in the state
  • African American, LGBTQ, and Women's history outside of Philadelphia
  • Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander
  • Counties with less than 15 markers – many in the Northern Tier or rural counties
✓ Nominate little-known subjects to bring greater awareness
✓ Highlight varied perspectives

#PreservationHappensHere!
Questions?
Common Pitfalls: Applications

- Adequate documentation is not provided
- Subject’s significance does not rise to the statewide or national level
- Pennsylvania connection is not sufficient
- Subject is not unique - numerous similar subjects exist throughout the state
Common Pitfalls: Subjects

- Military heroes and political figures that served in state and/or federal offices may not be good candidates.
- National Register properties are not guaranteed a marker.
- Being the oldest in existence does not automatically make the subject significant.

#PreservationHappensHere

September 2020
To Increase Chances for Approval:

- Read and understand the Approval Criteria and Guidelines provided with the nomination form.
- Focus nomination on the subject’s broad significance – must have had impact on the entire state or nation.
- Consider preparing a draft nomination for staff review to get feedback prior to submitting final nomination.
Marker Examples: People

**PAUL ALLMAN SIPLE**  
(1908-1968)

One of the world’s foremost authorities on Antarctica, he was honored internationally for his work as scientist, explorer, historian, geographer, diplomat, and author. An Eagle Scout and NIAGARA Sea Scout from Erie, Siple was selected from all U.S. Boy Scouts to accompany R.E. Byrd on his 1928-30 Antarctic Expedition. In 1957, he led the first team ever to winter at the South Pole. Siple designed all-climate army gear and devised the “Wind Chill Index.”

**STEPHANIE KWOLEK**  
(1923-2014)

Polymer scientist whose discoveries led to the invention of DuPont Kevlar in 1965. Used by many industries because of its high strength and durability, this fiber is best known as the super strong material from which bullet-resistant vests are fabricated. This protective gear has been critical to the safety of law enforcement and military personnel worldwide. Kwolek was awarded the National Medal of Technology in 1996. Her former home was here.
Marker Examples: Place

**BETHLEHEM STEEL PLANT**

Headquartered here, it was one of the most important iron and steel manufacturers in the nation. In 1863, Bethlehem Iron Co. began producing railroad rails. Steel manufacturing began in 1873 with armor plate and guns forged for the US Navy. The plant was a major defense manufacturer for the Allied Forces during both World Wars. Structural steel produced here was used to build many iconic skyscrapers and long-span bridges. The plant closed in 1995.

**FALLINGWATER**

Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), this house was built in 1936 as a family retreat for Pittsburgh businessman Edgar J. Kaufmann. Widely admired for its design, it is dramatically cantilevered over a waterfall; it exemplifies Wright's desire to join architecture with nature. Edgar Kaufmann jr. presented the house to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1965.
Marker Examples: Event

RHOADS OPERA HOUSE FIRE

A disastrous fire destroyed the theater that stood at Philadelphia Ave. & Washington St. on Jan. 13, 1908. It claimed 170 victims, many buried here, due to overcrowding, poorly designed and unmarked exits, and inadequate fire escapes. The tragedy prompted the Pa. General Assembly to enact fire safety laws and improve construction and inspection standards, making public buildings safer and influencing similar legislation in other states.

US SANITARY COMMISSION GREAT CENTRAL FAIR

Held at Logan Square from June 7-28, 1864, this event raised more than one million dollars for the Union cause during the Civil War. Formed to coordinate efforts of women volunteering to support the war effort, the Commission gave relief and comfort to soldiers and their families. In his only official public appearance in Philadelphia, President Abraham Lincoln addressed the crowd on June 16, praising the important work of the organization.
Marker Examples: Innovation

**STUART TANK**

During WWII, 9,135 American Car & Foundry workers from the surrounding region produced 15,224 tanks for American and Allied Forces. The first US tank fabricated on an assembly line, the Stuart was favored for its speed and mobility and saw action in theaters of war on all continents. A.C.F. became the nation's largest producer of armor plate and was unique in having its own ballistics testing range. The plant was located here.

**THE BANANA SPLIT**

In 1904 in Latrobe, the first documented Banana Split was created by apprentice pharmacist David Strickler - sold here at the former Tassell Pharmacy. Bananas became widely available to Americans in the late 1800s. Strickler capitalized on this by cutting them lengthwise and serving with ice cream. He is also credited with designing a boat-shaped glass dish for his treat. Served worldwide, the banana split has become a prevalent American dessert.
Key Take-Aways

• Review the Approval Criteria and Nomination Guidelines
• Consult with marker staff
• Consider erecting your own local markers
Questions?
For More Information

www.pahistoricalmarkers.com

• History of Marker Program
• Calendar of Marker Dedications
• Marker Nomination Forms
• Searchable Database of PHMC Markers
• Additional Resources
• Markers Approved in Recent Years
Integrated on-line database management system and spatially-enabled application with GIS technology that will be the primary interface for all program areas within the SHPO
Convenience
PA-SHARE is an innovative platform designed to streamline every project.

Connections
PA-SHARE unites PA SHPO information and will make it easier for you to track submissions in real time.

Efficiency
PA-SHARE eliminates the need for paper submissions and responses & introduces Surveyor.

Options
PA-SHARE will include four levels of access to accommodate user needs for interacting with PA SHPO.

4 REASONS TO MAKE PA-SHARE PART OF YOUR PLANS.
What You Need to Know

- Current system, CRGIS, will go “read-only” in December 2020
- Expecting deployment in January 2021
- PA SHPO will offer in person, on-line, and on-demand training and help desks
- Sign up for PA-SHARE newsletter to stay informed @ pahistoricpreservation.com/countdown-share
Stay Connected!

PA SHPO Blog
pahistoricpreservation.com

PA SHPO newsletters
Keystone Preservation Post
Keystone Preservation Bulletin
Historic Metal Truss Bridge Newsletter
PA-SHARE
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Thank You for Joining Us!