

# THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Publishers of *PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY* and the *PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY SERIES*

25-June-2020

**RE: Petition for Pennsylvania Lawmakers to Support Cultural and Educational Institutions in the Commonwealth through the COVID-19 Emergency Response & Recovery**

Pennsylvania Lawmakers,

The pandemic spread of COVID-19 is devastating communities throughout the world. Though a time will come when epidemiologists have the public health crisis under control, until then it is essential that lawmakers support medical research *in addition to educational and cultural institutions*. **Libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, and university programs in the humanities play a critical role in saving and sharing the stories that matter to residents of the Commonwealth.**

The **Pennsylvania Historical Association (PHA)** implores you to advance emergency funding for educational and cultural institutions in the 2021-22 state and federal budgets.

The **PHA**, a consortium of teachers, scholars, students, and museum professionals, advances knowledge about the history and culture of our Mid-Atlantic region because understanding how the past informs the present helps us shape a better future. Members believe deeply in the importance of this mission. Likewise, we hope lawmakers will recognize the social value and economic impact of educational and cultural institutions. Museums provide a space for people to honor their shared heritage, archives preserve the deeply personal histories of each community, and private and public universities look to welcome the next freshman class this fall. Without emergency funding due to the impacts of COVID-19, we risk losing these irreplaceable public assets.

Nearly all public, private, and nonprofit organizations face an extraordinary financial challenge. **PA Museums**, the statewide trade association representing museum professionals, estimates their members are losing \$1.2 million collectively each day and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) estimates that nearly 30 percent of museums in the United States may not be able to reopen without immediate financial assistance.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, many organizations continue to serve their communities. On May 11, 2020 the **York County History Center** partnered with the **York County Economic Alliance** to host a virtual discussion between public health experts and historians exploring how lessons from the past should guide local recovery efforts.<sup>2</sup> To aid teachers and parents with remote learning, the **Johnstown Area Heritage Association** quickly adapted museum exhibits to guided Virtual Classroom programs spanning topics including the Johnstown Flood and the contributions of immigrants to Johnstown's steel history.<sup>3</sup> "Our initiatives are made stronger by student interns and our ongoing collaboration with faculty at the local college," observed Richard Burkert, president and CEO of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association, whose nationally significant collections will soon be made digitally accessible through the **University of Pittsburgh Library System**.<sup>4</sup> "Students trained in public history and the digital humanities are essential to our mission."

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If cultural institutions do not receive emergency financial support, this will prove difficult for all sectors of the economy. Not only could vital educational programming be lost, regional tourism would likely suffer. Museums, especially those with archives, are the reason many people travel to small communities. “Folks from across the country visit our genealogical library to learn about their grandparents who worked in the anthracite coal fields,” notes Sarah Piccini, assistant director of the **Lackawanna Historical Society** in Scranton. Small businesses — ranging from restaurants, to coffee shops, hotels, and gas stations — depend on these visitors. According to Laura Lott, President and CEO of the **American Association of Museums**, travelers who visit historic sites and museums spend approximately 63 percent more than other tourists.<sup>5</sup> Well-supported museums are integral to the long-term sustainability of local tourism.

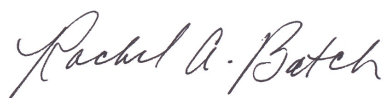
Private and public universities are facing serious budget shortfall from this spring semester and declining enrollments for the fall. Layoffs of part-time faculty appear to be the starting point of a series of cuts these vital institutions will make. Without short-term supplemental support there will be cuts to employee salaries and benefits, cuts to student grants, cuts of full programs, and additional furloughs of faculty and staff. In addition to the severe economic decline such cuts will cause in so many of our towns and cities, if our current high school seniors do not begin their college educations this fall, we will see a very small graduating class in 2024: underprepared for a world of work and the state will feel that impact.

The **Pennsylvania Historical Association** encourages all lawmakers to:

- Protect funding for the **Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission** and **Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education**;
- Address the financial emergencies of our many private, four-year universities serving students and their local communities throughout the state;
- And increase allocation of funds as well as explore additional measures to support the Commonwealth’s historical and cultural institutions.

Without critical funding at this time, many cultural and educational organizations will not survive the economic challenges from the public health measures taken to combat COVID-19. The **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania** will lose part of its heritage if local museums, historical societies, archives, and college programs are not protected. Future generations of citizens depend on your support.

Respectfully,



Rachel A. Batch, Ph.D.  
*President*



Kate Lukaszewicz  
*Chair of Outreach & Advocacy*

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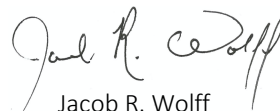
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<sup>1</sup> [“Tapestry Newsletter.” \*PA Museums\*. May 13, 2020.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [COVID in Historical Perspective. York County History Center and the York County Economic Alliance, 2020.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [“JAHA at Home: Virtual Classroom Debuts.” Johnstown Area Heritage Association, 2020.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [“UPJ and JAHA to Collaborate on Digitization of 1889 Flood Archival Materials” Johnstown Area Heritage Association, 2020.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Cronin, Mike. “What Are Museums' Economic Impact?” \*Ashville Citizen Times\*. May 22, 2015.](#)