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The State Museum of Pennsylvania

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Harrisburg, 2005
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
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Pennsylvania is a history-minded state. It treasures its archives, historic buildings and sites and many artifacts and specimens that document its long history. This history intrigued citizens to establish learned societies like the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (1824) and the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (1812). Many of these societies’ members collected objects that told a story about the natural history or social history of the Commonwealth and some began to donate artifacts to the state as early as the 1820s. When received, the artifacts were generally kept in the old state capitol building where they accumulated quickly, using up precious office space. It was, in part, this crowding that caused politicians to insist that the state build a new state capitol building. Others disagreed, urging renovation of the existing capitol and erection of a building especially for archives, artifacts, and natural science specimens.1 Those who advocated the latter solution, however, were not necessarily “historically-minded.” Thus the creation of the forerunner to a state museum sprang not so much from the need to collect and preserve the state’s “flora and fauna” as from the bureaucratic needs of state officials, many of whom were not particularly interested in history.

It turned out that the creation of a building to house these artifacts and collections was indeed an auspicious move since the old state capitol burned down in 1897. By then, most of the precious artifacts, specimens and documents had been moved into the new Executive, Library and Museum Building adjacent to the capitol building, and were spared by the flames.

Long before 1905, a proposal had been made for a Pennsylvania state museum. In 1887 the state legislature considered an appropriations bill for the “safe keeping of the archives and early records of the State Department . . . valuable historic paintings, maps, deeds, and battle flags and other memorials, and renovations of existing state building and the Executive Mansion” as well as the state Geological Survey’s collection.2

State workers within the capitol lacked adequate office space. The solution to this problem was to move the artifacts to a separate building. Gov. James A. Beaver explained that “this bill is to . . . provide abundance of room for all departments of the [state] government who may justly demand office accommodations.”3 Philadelphia
state representative Henry K. Boyer, sponsor of the bill, was excited about the prospect of a Pennsylvania State Museum. To his fellow lawmakers, Boyer said “the State is in possession of the materials for one of the finest museums in the United States.” Boyer’s bill was passed by the General Assembly but it never became law because Governor Beaver vetoed the bill because of the state’s “shaky finances.”

Another bill was proposed in 1893 “to provide for the erection of a fireproof building for the State Department, State Library, and Archives, battle flags of the state, art treasures and geological collections.” This time the bill was passed and signed into law by Governor Robert E. Pattison and plans were made for the new building. Philadelphia architect John T. Windrim (1866–1934) was selected to design the new Executive and Library building. Among the many Philadelphia buildings he designed are Olivet Presbyterian Church at 22nd and Mount Vernon Streets, the Lincoln-Liberty Building at Broad and Chestnut Streets and the High School Annex at Girard College. Windrim was probably the best-known Philadelphia architect of the classical revival style often designated as Beaux Arts and this architectural style describes the Executive, Library and Museum Building, now the oldest building in the Capitol Complex. It was called the “executive” building because it housed the offices of the top state officials: the governor, lieutenant governor, auditor general, state librarian, and state treasurer.

In exterior appearance the three-story building is in the Beaux Arts style of architecture while its interior quarters resemble the mansion of a wealthy person. “The Executive Building has a frontage of 120 feet and a depth of 165 feet. It is entered from a semi-circle portico, supported by Ionic columns, passing through the massive mahogany doors into a vestibule, eighteen by twenty feet, the walls of which are lined with polished Sienna marble contrasting with the rich cream of the elaborately carved Caen stone pilasters and cornice which supports a half-groined ceiling beautifully modeled and paneled in stucco.”

Windrim built the “museum and flag room” on the second floor. It was described by the Philadelphia Inquirer as “fifty feet square with a twenty-six foot ceiling.” The Inquirer reported that Rothermel’s painting of the Battle of Gettysburg, the portraits of the governors of Pennsylvania, the war flags and relics (now stored at the state arsenal), and a collection of birds and animals from the Pennsylvania exhibit at the 1893 World’s Fair, will be displayed in the room.

In 1903, Samuel W. Pennypacker, a member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) became Pennsylvania’s twenty-fourth governor. He and other HSP members were keenly interested in state history. After Pennypacker took office, lawmakers drafted a bill for an appropriation of $50,000 for a new building for HSP. HSP historian Sally Griffith said that “the speed with which the legislation was approved may have had something to do with the fact that in addition to the presence of Pennypacker and Hampton L. Carson [attorney general], senate president John M. Scott was also a member of the Society.” Another HSP member, Thomas Lynch Montgomery, also served in the Pennypacker administration as state librarian.

Montgomery claimed he was the person who “suggested to Governor Pennypacker in 1903 the [idea of] founding of a State Museum to form the nucleus of flora and fauna of the state.” Montgomery saw the popularity of the Flag Room with the public as an indication that a state museum could be “one of the principle attractions of the Capitol.” Another state official, H. A. Surface, of the Division of Zoology of the state Department of Agriculture, said the need for a state museum was one of “urgent importance.” Surface promised Pennypacker that his department would donate zoology specimens if the museum was created. It was then, with the urging of Surface and Montgomery, that Pennypacker backed legislation for the creation of a state museum.

There were actually two acts concerning a state museum that were signed by Governor Pennypacker. Act 43 was signed by the governor on March 28, 1905, creating

![Image](image_url)
State Museum of Pennsylvania. The museum’s purpose was for “the preservation of objects illustrating the flora and fauna of the state, and its mineralogy, geology, archaeology, arts and history.” In this respect Pennsylvania followed the examples of the state museums of Illinois, Indiana, and New York in defining its mission as the preservation of the Commonwealth’s flora and fauna. The second law, Act 481, appropriated money for the museum and Governor Pennypacker signed it on May 11, 1905. Although the state legislature approved the appropriation of $30,000 for the museum, Pennypacker reduced the sum to $20,000, stating that “the condition of the State’s revenue does not justify a larger expenditure at this time.” As dictated by the legislation, the museum would be located on the second floor of the Executive, Library and Museum Building and under State Library director Thomas Montgomery. Because other state employees had to move their offices to the new state capitol, Montgomery’s staff could not move into the building until March 1, 1907.

Upon settling into the building, museum director Montgomery said that “considerable work [was] accomplished in the preparation of material for the Division of Education and the Division of Zoology based on the collection formed for the [Pennsylvania exhibit at] Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.” The educational exhibits featured “school work from the Kindergarten to the High School.” Other educational institutions like the Soldiers Orphans Industrial School, the School of Design for Women, the School of Industrial Art, the Spring Garden Institution, Pennsylvania Agricultural College, and the Philadelphia Commercial Museum. The social economy exhibits consisted of more than two hundred artifacts from the charitable and penal institutions of Pennsylvania, along with a scale model of the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. Education curator Alicia Zierden stated that the Louisiana Purchase Exposition artifacts “formed the nucleus of the exhibit” to which she added more objects acquired from visiting schools around the state. This apparently was the first exhibition at the new museum.

Zoology was the second division of the museum and its collection grew very rapidly from the beginning. Boyd P. Rothrock collected in 1907 “some five hundred and fifty specimens of Pennsylvania animals, either in skins or mounted, a great many of which have been gifts.” In 1909, Rothrock received numerous donations of birds and mammals such as the ruffed grouse (named the state bird in 1931), Canadian goose and gray fox as well as specimens of common Pennsylvania fish and reptiles. Many zoological specimens came from the Division of Economic Zoology of the Department of Education, where zoologist H.A. Surface worked. But other state agencies such as the state Game Commission and state Fish Commission donated to The State Museum as well.

Within the Division of Zoology two other subject collections—archaeology and geology—developed as well. The State Museum archaeological collection began in 1906 when J.A. Stoer donated his collection of approximately twenty-five hundred stone tools, mainly from Lancaster County. The next archaeological collections acquired were the Deisher collection from southeastern Pennsylvania (in 1915) and the Laverty collection from the Lower Susque-
hanna Valley (in 1919). Stephen G. Warfel, presently senior curator of archaeology at The State Museum, says “since that time numerous large collections have been acquired via donation, occasional purchase, and field expositions.” In 1913, Rothrock began acquiring geological specimens and these were put on exhibit as the first known science exhibit at The State Museum. While planning another geological exhibit in 1916 Rothrock contacted different mining companies for donations of mineral samples. Writing to the Pennsylvania Graphite Company, Rothrock said “We have a small sample of your graphite ore collected by Professor Benj. L. Miller of Leigh University and would like to have another small sample as an additional specimen. We do not have any sample of your concentrate or refined graphite. If you will send us about a pound of each, we will exhibit the same and give you credit.”

About 1908 a third State Museum division—lantern slides—emerged. Lantern slides were “the first form of projected group entertainment from the 1850s well into the twentieth century until replaced by the modern ‘2X2’ slide in the 1940s–1950s. We do not know whether the State Library or The State Museum originated the Lantern Slide Collection. Between 1907 and 1910, 10,165 slides were circulated throughout the state for natural history, art, architectural, and agricultural societies, schools, study clubs, and civic organizations. The State Museum loaned these slides to schools in much the same way libraries circulate books. Mail order catalogs of the museum’s lantern slide collections were sent to teachers who wished to order slides for their schools. When the collection began, most of the slides were about “Geography and Travel in Many Countries.” But other series were developed such as “Pennsylvania History,” and “Our Boys in France, World War I.” Soon the lantern slide programs became broader in subject scope, and slides were available in black and white and sometimes in color. As the demand increased so did the number of lantern slides, reaching a total of 10,165 in 1910. Education curator Alicia M. Zierden mounted some four thousand photographs of four hundred educational institutions in the state for museum exhibition. These photos promoted the “state of the art” in pedagogy including the best educational methods and best contemporary school architecture. By 1912 there were 13,448 lantern slides owned by The State Museum due to the rapid growth of the Lantern Slide collection, education curator Alicia Zierden hired two assistants in 1911. But in 1912, Zierden moved to Washington D.C. and the two assistants were left to carry on during the First World War.

Luther K. Kelker, custodian of Public Records, was also the curator in charge of the fourth division of The State Museum: History. The History Division was formed in 1909 when Kelker began collecting artifacts about Pennsylvania German life. In a 1906 letter to museum director Thomas L. Montgomery, Kelker described what he had collected thus far:

“Acting under your instructions, a beginning has been made for the collection of the Pennsylvania State Museum. It represents specimens of the early life, candlesticks, pie plates, Stiegel glassware, the chair that formerly stood in the old Pulpit in the Cloister at Ephrata, one of the Charts representing the beautiful pen-work of the Sisters, and last but not least, what is commonly known as the Alphabet Book, one of the finest specimens of artistic penmanship in existence.”

The History Division’s collection was small compared to the size of the Zoology Division’s collection. Kelker remained curator of this division until his death in 1915. Unfortunately, no one was appointed to replace Kelker, but the history collection still continued to grow.

Since the 1820s, artwork had been donated to the Commonwealth and either stored or exhibited in the State Capitol. Collection of artwork continued when The State Museum was started in 1905 but it would not be until 1965 that an official Fine Arts section was set up within the museum with its own curator. Many precious artworks were transferred from the old state capitol to the new Executive, Library and Museum Building in 1895. Among these artifacts were paintings depicting Giliberti di Sassuolo (acc. 06.20.2) and Amerigo Vespucci (06.20.1).
were hung in the Senate chamber of the old state capitol. Another early acquisition was a carved marble eagle created by an unknown sailor. It bears the inscription, “Alexandria, July 4, 1837.” (06.20.3)34

Perhaps the most intriguing early fine arts objects are the series of paintings comprising the Battle of Gettysburg series. In 1866 the state legislature commissioned Pennsylvania artist Peter F. Rothermel to do four paintings to hang in the old state capitol rotunda.35 When Rothermel finished the paintings, however, they were not displayed in the state capitol but rather in the Flag Room of the new Executive, Library and Museum Building. The largest of these was The Battle of Gettysburg subtitled “Pickett’s Charge.” The sixteen by thirty-two-foot canvas was the centerpiece of the room. The four other paintings measure forty-seven by seventy inches and depict other crucial points in the same battle: The Repulse of the Louisiana Tigers, The Death of General Reynolds, The Repulse of General Johnson’s Division, and The Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves at Plum Run.

State Museum director Thomas L. Montgomery, education curator Alicia M. Zierden, and curator Boyd P. Rothrock were early members of the American Association of Museums (AAM). Zierden was a founding member of the group in 1906.36 They regularly attended AAM annual meetings where they heard papers on current museum issues such as “The Advantages of Installation in Swinging Frames,” “Labeling Large Collections of Birds and Mammals,” and “Labeling Large Descriptive Labels on the Outside of Museum Cases.” State Museum staff interaction with other museum professionals from around the country paid off in terms of exhibits. Zierden drew inspiration from the AAM 1907 presentation on swinging frames when she put four thousand photographs of Pennsylvania educational institutions on exhibit in 1907.37 Rothrock was probably guided by the AAM 1910 presentation about labeling birds and mammals when he installed eleven new habitats of mammals and birds in the old Flag Room and created a museum exhibit labeling system in 1912.38 The notion of exhibit labels was at that time a relatively new concept in the museum world. Therefore, almost from the beginning of The State Museum, curators searched for ways to make their work reflect the museum standards of the day.

In 1917 the United States entered the First World War on the side of the Allies. The global conflict changed life in the American homeland, and had a direct effect upon The State Museum of Pennsylvania. A new lighting system had just been installed but it received minimal use because of wartime restrictions of the use of electrical current. The lantern slide division experienced a drop in circulation because of wartime restrictions on entertainments. Several key personnel left because of the war, causing a shortage of staff. C. Wynne Cassell of the Education Division took a leave of absence to go to France in the Y.W.C.A. service.39 Curator Boyd Rothrock wrote to Thomas L. Montgomery, state museum director:

“Mr. Charles Revie who was shipper for the lantern slide division and who also operated the stereopticon lantern and the Photostat, passed on while in the U.S. service at Camp Lee. The duties of this position are such that it has been impossible to fill it with a competent person, due principally to the demand for young men at higher salaries in the industrial world. This work thus far has been divided among the other employees. Conditions [during] the past year have prevented much of the field work as the present employees were constantly needed in the museum. In consequence few additions were made to the botanical collections . . . Thus the work of the museum has not been neglected although it has retarded the work somewhat in other branches.”40

The First World War would not be the last time The State Museum would be faced with a crisis of staff and resources. Yet the ability of its staff to persevere would be handed down from generation to generation during The State Museum’s first hundred years.

The first decade of The State Museum was a time of...
striving. The first curators strove to build their collection—sólantern slides, zoology, geology, etc—and to care for them in the best possible way. Several state agencies, especially the Game Commission and the Department of Agriculture and the Fish Commission, were early donors to The State Museum. The first exhibitions were modest and featured recent gifts to the museum. One of the first State Museum exhibitions in 1908 was a display of school students’ work from around the state submitted by school principals or collected by education curator Alicia Zierden herself. For instance, the Carlisle Indian School sent the museum a number of silver trophies won by students in athletic contests and framed photographs of the Indian School’s classes. In 1913, the first geological exhibit opened. The museum’s staff was quite small but very open to new ideas. During an era when American museums were just beginning to see themselves as part of a “profession,” State Museum staff not only adapted techniques and methods suggested by the AAM but they were among the founding members and active members of that organization too. During these early years, there was also the genesis of the museum’s archaeology, geology, and history collections. As early as 1906, curator Luther Kelker was collecting artifacts about Pennsylvania German culture. By 1919, the museum had been in operation for fourteen years. Its staff, budget, and audience were growing steadily. To museum director Thomas Montgomery there was no reason not to anticipate that the 1920s would bring even more prosperity.
Chapter 2:  
Growing Pains: the Pennsylvania State Museum in the 1920s and 1930s

In 1920, Warren G. Harding ran a successful presidential campaign on the platform that Americans needed “a return to normalcy” after the upheaval of the First World War. For The State Museum, however, the 1920s were a time of change. In 1923, The State Museum became part of the Department of Public Instruction, That department gave The State Museum low priority. Finances fluctuated, and there was significant staff turnover. These problems were partly alleviated in the late 1930s by The State Museum’s participation in the federal Works Progress Administration. The WPA supplied money and manpower for the museum to clean and upgrade its exhibits. Some of these exhibits featured the archaeology collection which emerged in the 1930s as a major collection of The State Museum.

In 1923 Pennsylvania Gov. Gifford Pinchot introduced a new administrative code that reorganized state government by grouping the existing 139 agencies into fifteen departments. As a result, the State Library, which administered The State Museum at that time, came under the control of the Department of Public Instruction. Yet The State Museum fared no better under Public Instruction than it did under the State Library. The State Museum was given low priority. Appropriations were cut each biennium so that by 1926, the museum staff was working with a “shoestring” budget, two people, and no money to circulate the lantern slide collection. Museum director Anna McDonald, who became The State Museum’s first female director in 1923, faced a difficult challenge running the museum without adequate funding for collections and public programs. In the agency’s 1924 biennial report, McDonald advocated that The State Museum’s lantern slide collection be increased to “at least 100,000 slides” and that “a yearly fund of $15,000 for five years would be required to insure adequate lantern slide service.” She did not get the funding she wanted and it must have been with some relief that McDonald accepted an appointment as Library Extension Service librarian in 1927.

Believing that “inadequate appropriation” was the problem, Godcharles secured funding in 1927 to increase the staff to nine people. Yet the museum could not spend all of its funds because of an order “to set aside an amount exceeding $11,000 as a reserve fund” to be used only at the end of the fiscal year. Despite Godcharles’ appeals to state government officials, he obtained no additional money for purchasing specimens and artifacts. As The State Museum moved into the 1930s, the budget cuts became even worse. Its appropriations were slashed during each session of the General Assembly. In 1929 the state legislature appropriated $250,000 for the State Library and Museum, but by 1935 this amount had dropped to $185,000. Perhaps the most catastrophic effect of the Great Depression was in the area of personnel. In 1931 The State Museum had a staff of twelve—museum director, curator, assistant curator, exhibit preparer, taxidermist, three assistant taxidermists, two stenographers, lantern slide assistant, and general clerk. By 1933, at the depth of the Great Depression, the museum staff consisted of only three people: assistant director, curator, and exhibit preparator.

In the mid-1930s, the Roosevelt administration created a work relief program called “Federal One.” “This was the use of a small but highly significantly part of Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds for an experience in providing federal support for the arts in America.” In 1938, Fuller applied to the WPA on behalf of The State Museum. In her letter of application, she said “during the years of [the Great] Depression and deficit in the state
budget, the staff of the museum was reduced to an absolute minimum.” Fuller emphasized that collection, care, and exhibition of “fauna and flora of Pennsylvania” was part of The State Museum’s mission, but many exhibits needed repair and cleaning. Furthermore the museum’s largest collection—the lantern slides—was in poor condition, with as many as ninety-three thousand slides in need of repair or replacement. Fuller argued that The State Museum could not fulfill its mission without assistance.

Fuller obtained funding for two W.P.A. projects. Project #15024 was slated for repairing and cleaning artifacts and exhibits. The small exhibit groups of ruffed grouse, wild turkey, snowshoe rabbit, and other animals were cleaned, repaired, and installed with fresh “habitat” material (such as leaves and botanical specimens). Large exhibits such as those of elk and other mammals were upgraded by supplying a more naturalistic diorama background in keeping with museum trends of the times. Project # 17136 employed workers who created 500 lantern slides, 6 dioramas, 115 costume plates, and 48 water-color paintings of Pennsylvania wild flowers, 4 geological model casts and 6 maps. Under this project, the museum’s flag collection underwent conservation.

During the 1920s, the collections of The State Museum focused on seven subject areas: lantern slides, entomology, natural history, history, paintings, geology, and archaeology. During the period 1921–22, the major donations were received in natural history, but overall the largest museum collection was predominantly lantern slides. This trend continued throughout the 1920s, with the largest collections being lantern slides, entomology, and natural history. Although reports of collection statistics are incomplete for the 1930s, it is clear that the archaeology collection grew phenomenally, from just nineteen artifacts in 1925 to over ninety-one thousand in 1936.55

The involvement of museum staff in professional activities was critical to the development of the museum’s archaeology collection. In 1930, the Society for Pennsylvania Archeology (SPA) was founded. Among the charter members were museum director Frederic Godcharles and head curator Boyd Rothrock. Godcharles was elected to the executive board of the society and served as society president in 1933. Lancaster archaeologist Gerald B. Fenstermaker was also a member of the society. In 1930, he sold his archaeological collection of some fifteen thousand pieces to the Commonwealth which placed it in The State Museum. The Fenstermaker Collection has wonderful artifacts chronicling early Native Americans in Pennsylvania, including arrowheads, axes, celts, drills, pestles, banner stones, stone pipes, clay pipes, and sculptured pieces.57

Pennsylvania Power and Light Company (PP&L) developed plans in 1929 to build a hydroelectric power plant and dam near Safe Harbor on the lower Susquehanna River. A series of small islands that contained rocks with unusual petroglyphs or carved inscriptions, would have been flooded when the PP&L project was completed. The Pennsylvania Historical Commission (PHC) was founded in 1913. It was a separate state agency from The State Museum. The PHC promoted public history in the form of historic markers and it sometimes ran archeological projects and funded archaeological work in Pennsylvania. Archaeologist Donald A. Cadzow was hired by the PHC to salvage these petroglyphs. Casts were made of the petroglyphs which were then physically removed with a pneumatic drill. Since the PHC did not concern itself with curating collections produced by PHC expeditions, all the specimens recovered went to The State Museum. With the Safe Harbor petroglyphs collection, the J.A. Stober collection of twenty-five hundred pieces and the Henry K. Deisher collection, The State Museum had acquired a substantial collection of archaeology specimens by the late 1930s.59

A former museum curator, Henry K. Deisher was a collector of archaeological specimens who first sold objects to The State Museum in 1909. Eventually, the Deisher Collection was purchased by the Commonwealth for The State Museum in 1917. To care for the collection, Deisher volunteered at the museum and on July 5, 1928, he was hired as assistant curator. He later claimed that before becoming a museum employee, he had supplied 63 percent of the collections in the museum. But it was not his services as antiquarian dealer that The State Museum needed, but as a registrar. Assistant director Gertrude B. Fuller recalled: “I was deeply disturbed and rather shocked to find the cataloging far in arrears and records tangle. Various persons had dabbed at the work, changing systems and causing confusion.” In Fuller’s opinion, beside Deisher, “no other person has sufficient information to do the work. He knows the various collections and the donors.” At first Deisher utilized an alphabetical letter system to designate particular collections. For instance, “W” stood for the War Relics Collection. Later on, however, Deisher adopted the current American Association of Museums cataloging practice of noting the accession year first, followed by a specific...
number for the specimen or artifact in the group. His cataloging system laid the foundation for today’s collection management section of The State Museum and it stimulated exhibition production by providing accurate and detailed information for interpretation.

After the First World War, the education section was renamed the Lantern Slide Division with Julia M. Donnelly in charge. During the 1920s, the lantern slide collection was the largest collection in The State Museum. In 1920, the collection contained 30,859 slides. In 1925, there were 34,702 slides and by 1928, it had increased to 41,471. This trend continued in the 1930s, with 78,500 lantern slides inventoried in 1935 and 94,373 slides in 1938. As demand for slides from teachers all over the state increased, The State Museum acquired more and more slides for its subscription program aimed at the Commonwealth’s schools.

The lantern slide collection was also used by the museum for in-house educational programs. Weekly lectures were given in 1921 by staff members about botany, ornithology, geology and the like. Museum director Anna McDonald commented that “many of these lectures are given by the experts employed by the State and are illustrated by both lantern slides and moving pictures, the equipment and slides being furnished by the Museum.” She also said that the lectures were well attended by the general public. But school children became increasingly the museum’s core audience. In 1927, for instance, numerous “classes from the public schools under supervision of their teachers visited the Museum for study of natural history.” Museum director Frederic Godcharles proudly reported in 1928 that “in our museum, all records of visiting schools have been broken. There never was a time when so many students have been conducted through The State Museum by Curator Rothrock and his staff.” In 1929, the American Association of Museums ranked the Pennsylvania State Museum one of the top sixteen museums in the country boasting total attendance of more than twenty thousand. Donnelly left The State Museum around 1928 and between 1929 and 1939 there was no education department at The State Museum.

Several new and innovative exhibits opened at The State Museum in 1928. That year, the huge wood cases containing school exhibits were moved from the large room on the second floor and the exhibits were sent back to their respective school districts. Then the room was renovated and an artist hired to paint the background for the mammal collection. In August 1929, the “Animal Room,” with its groups of eagles, deer, bears, etc., was opened to museum visitors. The tradition of a gallery of mammals has been retained by The State Museum throughout the years. A 1928 exhibition of early Pennsylvania household utensils, including stove plates made in Pennsylvania iron furnaces was probably the first known exhibit of domestic and community life artifacts by The State Museum. That year witnessed the opening of the first genuine art exhibition: a show of paintings by the artist Lloyd Mifflin.

Museum preparator Linneas G. Duncan created an interesting replica of an Indian quarry for The State Museum in 1930. First, museum staff members visited a quarry in Berks County to get samples of the jasper rock, take photographs, and get other information for Duncan. With this data, Duncan was able to design the quarry replica in a historically authentic manner. The exhibit included Native American figures, trees, and rocks. An artist, John H. Froelich, painted the background of the quarry scene. Historian Laurence Coleman noted in the 1930s that “art has settled down in science museums to stay. There are wall paintings, nominally decorative but actually part of displays.” In April 1937 The State Museum partnered with the WPA in presenting an exhibit of museum and visual educational material. It consisted of “125 panels of costumes from primitive man through all periods and races to the present, 52 architectural models covering types of human shelter, a 3 ft diorama of an Indian village, and a 5 ft diorama of a central African village.”

At the end of the 1930s, The State Museum linked its survival to the fulfillment of its mission: to collect, care for, and exhibit the flora and fauna, history, archaeology, and fine arts of the Commonwealth. It managed to fulfill its mission not just with state appropriations, but federal dollars as well. But there could be no return to “normalcy” if normalcy meant the ways things were before 1920. Too much had changed in the museum world and in America. War clouds were now replacing the fog of the Great Depression. The resulting storm would bring dramatic change and renewal to The State Museum of Pennsylvania.
Chapter 3: Making a place for history: the 1940s and 1950s

The Second World War set in motion a chain of events that would forever transform The State Museum of Pennsylvania. Like other museums, The State Museum supported the war cause with programs for troops and military history exhibits. Growing consciousness about Pennsylvania history inspired a movement for a William Penn Memorial Museum in Harrisburg. The State Museum joined a new state agency—the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) in 1945 and this led to renovations in physical space, exhibitions, and educational programs. As PHMC executive director Brent Glass later noted, the establishment of the PHMC “provided official recognition that the history of the Commonwealth would be told through its museums and historic sites, as well as its myriad records, documents, markers, and publications.” The 1950s saw increased curatorial staffing, stimulating the diversification of exhibitions and the expansion of museum collections. Paradoxically, the increase in collections meant that, by the end of the 1950s, The State Museum had outgrown its building.

The nation entered the war in 1941 with patriotic enthusiasm and American museums joined in the effort to “assist in the broad national objectives of winning the war and winning the peace.” One way in which The State Museum supported the war cause was by offering office space to local National Defense personnel. The presence of numerous military camps and depots in south central Pennsylvania guaranteed the transformation of The State Museum’s audience during the war years. At New Cumberland, there was a reception center where soldiers were inducted and a Special Training Unit which readied thirteen thousand for combat. Across the Susquehanna River from New Cumberland was the Middletown Air Service Command, “which stocked more than 250,000 kinds of parts for combat planes.” A state School of Aeronautics operated out of the state Farm Show building for two years and graduated 12,330 people. Furthermore, there were three important training camps in the Harrisburg area: “the highly-secret Army Air Force Intelligence School operated in the old Harrisburg Academy buildings,” the Navy’s Photo Reconnaissance Training Detachment at the Harrisburg Airport, and the Army Medical Field School at Carlisle Barracks. In Carlisle, the military trained doctors, dentists, veterinarians, and administrative officers for war duty. The State Museum reached out to this new audience by opening the museum on Sunday. Museum attendance increased, varying from six hundred to four thousand each Sunday depending on the weather, movement of troops, and the calendar of local events for
The American Association of Museums declared that museums had a duty to sponsor “special exhibits and programs designed to interest and appeal to our men in the armed forces.” The wartime public programs of The State Museum were similar to those of other museums in the country. Many programs were musical in nature, consisting of records or volunteer live entertainment. Lantern slide shows illustrated the geography and culture of the countries involved in World War II. Occasionally there were special craft demonstrations and military history exhibits which were popular with the military and the general public. Among the notable exhibitions of the time were “Soldier Art from Life Magazine Competition,” a photography exhibit from the British War Relief organization, and “What the Boys Send Home,” an exhibit of artwork from World War II soldiers. In honor of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Grand Army of the Republic, there was a Civil War exhibit. Military history exhibits continued even after the end of the war. For instance, a 1945 exhibit featured two dinner plates allegedly from Adolf Hitler’s villa in Berchtesgaden, Germany.

Along with school children and the military, community groups were part of the audience of the 1940s at The State Museum. These groups saw the museum as a community center where they could hold meetings, classes and special events. For example, on Thursday evenings the Art Studio held a sketch class, a local group offered classes on spinning and weaving, and the Harrisburg Chamber of Music had their weekly rehearsal. On Saturdays, a Junior Art Class was held. The Natural History Society of Harrisburg held their regular meetings at The State Museum’s Indian Room. In May 1941, the Harrisburg Camera Club put on a photography exhibit. In October 1945, the Stamp Club of Harrisburg held its annual exhibit in the museum’s galleries. In 1941 and 1945, the Harrisburg Art Association sponsored an art show and exhibit of local artists. Prizes awarded to the winning artists consisted of war bonds and stamps. Another exhibition in 1945 at The State Museum was promoted by the Art Teachers of Pennsylvania. Other community groups regularly toured the museum.

Historical Commission lost its autonomy and became a section of the Department of Public Instruction along with the State Archives and State Museum. Subsequent amendments to the code in 1927 and 1929 ordered these bodies to work together on history-related tasks. In fact the alliance between the museum, archives, and historical commission was such that in 1945, Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Martin said “their activities and their budgetary needs could and did overlap and conflict” and proposed the merger. Yet some state officials remained skeptical. In a February 1945 letter, state historian S.K. Stevens wrote to Governor Martin: “I have long been an advocate of eventual consolidation of the State Archives and the Historical Commission. The addition of the Museum function is not necessarily so important.” Interestingly enough, Stevens would later prove to be one of the chief advocates for The State Museum. Finally, lawmakers proposed a bill creating a new agency for all three groups. House Bill 636 introduced by Allegheny County state representative John Haudenshield, proposed to create a “Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.” The bill passed both houses unanimously without any debate. On June 6, 1945, Gov. Edward Martin signed Act 446, merging the three agencies into one commission: the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The Department of Public Instruction was still involved with The State Museum through its ex officio board member. But the good news for The State Museum was that it could more earnestly pursue its mandate preserving, interpreting, and celebrating state history.

In 1947, the museum’s huge lantern slide collection was retired and put into the museum basement. The PHMC was free to acquire more modern audio-visual materials for its programs. While we do not know the official reason why the lantern slide circulation program was abandoned, it is clear that around this time 35 mm slides (the lantern slides were also photographs) began to outpace lantern slides in terms of cost and utility in visual education. The discovery of the Kodachrome three-color process made color slides less expensive to produce than lantern slides and persuading museums to switch over to the new technology.

In 1948, the museum committee of the PHMC recommended the hiring of “a guide to show school children and organized groups throughout The State Museum.” Marian Huff Baker, a teacher, was hired as a full-time guide and educator in early 1949 and her creative enthusiasm revived the museum’s education section. Baker sent out traveling exhibits around the Commonwealth for students.
to experience “hands-on” learning about artifacts. Museum orientation sessions and group tours taught visitors how to interpret artifacts.

Throughout her tenure at The State Museum from 1949 to 1962, Baker used different ways to teach the public through partnering with outside groups, use of docents in exhibit areas, and classes in nature study and Indian lore. By the end of that period, she had created tours keyed to classroom subject matter and curators had responded by installing exhibits that reflected textbook material but taught concepts in a more engaging venue. As one museum official observed, “a model of a Susquehannock village portrays Indian life in a way that the printed word cannot do.”

Historic dioramas and models became more important in the museum. In 1951, a recreated Country Store opened in the museum with docents in costumes interpreting the artifacts. During the fall of 1953, many school and club groups came to the museum’s “Nature Study Room” to have the educator identify their plants. In Native American classes, students learned about Indian folklore and listened to recordings of Native American music. During this period, The State Museum also offered classes in bird study and tree identification. A feature of the Nature Study Room was an exhibit of artifacts and images of Pennsylvania animals and trees. In December, 1953 guide Marian Baker assisted other museum staff members in the production of a Christmas television program. This may have been the earliest known use of television or video by The State Museum for a program. In 1954 Baker developed a study unit on the pottery of Native Americans and Pennsylvania Germans to be used in conjunction with the museum’s exhibits. The classes focused on the methods of manufacture, design, and use of the pottery by the different groups. Previously the Department of Commerce’s Arts and Crafts Workshop had conducted similar classes.

Those classes ended abruptly in 1947 when, in an effort to consolidate its physical space, The State Museum asked the Commerce Department to move the workshop out of the museum basement to make room for the museum’s archaeology section. Then in November 1947, the Department of Property and Supplies was persuaded to move out of its three offices in The State Museum. In 1948 the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Art Association followed suit by also moving out of the building. Finally, there were the gardeners who occupied half of the museum’s basement. Curator Kenneth Dearoff complained, “While these gardeners are occupying the above-mentioned space in the Museum, we are paying rent for space in other buildings.” At that time, the PHMC rented a storage building at Eighteenth and Herr Streets in Harrisburg. After some delay, Property and Supplies agreed to move the gardeners and their equipment. With complete control of the building, the PHMC was finally able to return to The State Museum numerous artifacts that had been in off-site storage.

With the reorganization of the museum’s physical space came a transformation of its organization. In November 1948, The State Museum was reorganized into different departments: Natural History, Earth Science, Entomology, Folk History, Photography, Archaeology, Preparation, and Shop. Three appeared to be curatorial divisions. Natural History incorporated the fields of botany and zoology. Earth Science was another name for geology. Archaeology covered mainly Indian artifacts. In 1956 an important change within the PHMC occurred when PHMC historian S.K. Stevens was appointed to replace Donald Cadzow as PHMC executive director. Stevens reorganized the PHMC into two bureaus: “Research, Publications, and Records,” and “Museums, Historic Sites, and Properties.” The State Museum was part of the Museums, Historic Sites, and Properties. In addition the curators were put under the state Civil Service. This meant that “the professional work of the Commission could now go on without the disruptions caused by changes of Governors. As a result, it was now possible to recruit and hold a more professional staff to man the new bureaus.”

Sylvester K. Stevens, executive director of the PHMC, 1956–72.
State Museum’s staff grew from 67 in 1952 to 123 in 1962. For example, the first curator of art was hired in 1956, which helped the fine arts collection to grow.103

Along with professional staff came the adoption of professional museum policies. For years, other museums and organizations asked to borrow from The State Museum artifacts and these requests were always turned down. Without a written collection policy, museum officials wavered on why loans were prohibited. Curator Henry Deisher declared that “a ruling made some years ago prevents us from making loans. If a precedent was established, there would be no end of call for loans of all kinds of material.” Assistant museum director Mabel Bittner said the museum’s collections came mainly through donors and that “we were to permit these donations to go out, it would incur the displeasure of the donors.”104 After the formation of the PHMC, executive director Donald A. Cadzow wanted to know the true extent of The State Museum’s authority. He asked the Department of Justice for an informal opinion concerning the Commission’s right to loan objects.105 Then The State Museum asked permission to loan an antique water wheel to the Pennsylvania Water and Power Company. This request was denied by the Justice Department which claimed that “the Commission does not have the authority to loan legally any article from the [State] Museum.” On the basis of this same ruling, the PHMC was forced to decline a loan request from the Medical Society of Pennsylvania for medical artifacts to display in an exhibition in Philadelphia. This made the PHMC commissioners angry. Feeling that the PHMC should have the power to loan artifacts, the commissioners drafted a bill to be introduced to the Pennsylvania General Assembly granting the agency the power to loan. Act 344, permitting the museum to create rules and regulations for museum loans, was signed into law May 11, 1949 by Governor James H. Duff. Later that year, the PHMC approved rules for museum “de-accessioning” by exchanging artifacts with other museums.106

For years, outside organizations such as the Harrisburg Philatelic Society were allowed to hold exhibitions at The State Museum. After the formation of the PHMC, The State Museum adopted a different exhibits policy. In May 1946, the PHMC turned down a request from the U.S. Steel Corporation for a special exhibit in the museum. Wishing to preserve the museum’s mandate to educate the public, commissioner Atwater Kent Jr. said The State Museum “was not in favor of establishing a precedent which might eventually be turned into a commercial proposition.”107 Curator Kenneth Dearolf agreed, saying that many exhibits by outside organizations did not promote The State Museum’s mission as prescribed by law. Therefore, he drafted a museum exhibition policy stating four major objectives: 1. “To tell a continuous story of Pennsylvania history, 2. To achieve a high standard of exhibit quality, 3. To present a balanced and properly proportioned amount of material, and 4. to always have temporary and changing exhibits . . . so as to keep something new before the public.” Dearolf’s policy marked the first time that Pennsylvania history was cited as a major mission objective of The State Museum. As a result, historical exhibits, dioramas, or reproductions of historic scenes, became more frequent. In 1950 The State Museum installed in the Transportation Room, a diorama depicting canal days at New Hope. Other dioramas were created featuring the Battle of Lake Erie, the Battle of Germantown, and the 28th Division of Pennsylvania troops passing under the Arch de Triomphe in Paris, France during World War II. In 1952, at the request of the Department of Agriculture, The State Museum created an exhibit about the Pennsylvania Rifle for the Pennsylvania Farm Show. The exhibit setting depicted a colonial rifle-making shop. In the foreground were displayed original boring tools along with various colonial rifles, shot pouches, and hunting bags. It was one of the most popular exhibits at the 1952 Farm Show and it helped increase museum visitation during Farm Show Week. In 1953, The State Museum had equal success with a dairy industry exhibit at the Farm Show. Occasionally, The State Museum featured traveling exhibitions. One such exhibition came from the Smithsonian in 1959: “Pup, Cub, and Kit-
In an encore of the acclaimed 1936 state constitutions exhibition, The State Museum created a “Hall of Freedom” of twenty-two important Pennsylvania historical documents. These included the William Penn Charter of Privileges, and the Charter of Charles II to William Penn. After the State Archives oversaw their restoration, the Penn documents were specially prepared for exhibition in The State Museum. The documents were mounted in sealed sheets of Plexiglas within exhibit cases containing “x-ray glass.” The cases were lighted with fluorescent tubes. The Hall of Freedom opened in the front lobby of the museum where visitors could see it upon entering. One museum staff member boasted that “no other State in the Union” has such a display of original documents.

The State Museum had always had fine-art exhibits such as works by sculptor Malvina Hoffman in 1937, yet in the opinion of some art connoisseurs the museum had few exhibits of “valuable works of art” or by world famous artists. S.K. Stevens thought that a retrospective art exhibition of Pennsylvania painter Jacob Eichholtz planned for the spring of 1959 would reverse this trend. Unfortunately, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania rejected The State Museum’s request to borrow an important Eichholtz painting because of the museum’s “inability to provide essential safety and other precautions for the proper care of such materials.” As a result, the Eichholtz show was cancelled. S.K. Stevens, with some embarrassment, told the press that The State Museum could not host quality art shows because “the building’s a firetrap.”

During the next several years Stevens would capitalize on the inadequacies of The State Museum building as a political strategy to encourage the Commonwealth to build a new museum, signaling the beginning of a new era. The 1940s and 1950s saw The State Museum evolve more fully as a general museum. The military exhibits and program during the war years stretched the museum’s audience beyond its core audience of school children. Similarly, The State Museum’s merger into the PHMC was crucial for its professional development. For the first time, explicit loan and accession policies were adopted. Social history and art exhibits became more frequent. The “Hall of Freedom” with its display of Pennsylvania state constitutions signified an effort “to make a place for history.” This reinterpretation of The State Museum’s mission would result in the construction of a new building.
The celebration of William Penn’s three hundredth birthday in 1944 was the first in a chain of events that culminated twenty years later in a new state archives and museum building for Pennsylvania. It is a story that transcends the administration of numerous governors, state museum directors, and pieces of legislation. It is the story of the heroic efforts of the PHMC historian and executive director S.K. Stevens. It is a story that began with the notorious conditions in the state archives and The State Museum after World War II. They had simply run out of space.

The Commonwealth had known about the overcrowded conditions of The State Museum and State Archives for many years. The Division of Public Records, as the State Archives was called then, quickly outgrew the three rooms or five thousand cubic feet allocated to it within the Education Building, popularly known now as the Forum Building. The Commerce and Property and Supplies Departments, the Art Commission, and The State Museum all shared the Executive, Library and Museum Building, compelling the museum to store most artifacts in a building at Eighteenth and Herr Streets. PHMC historian Roy Nichols contended that the demand for a new Pennsylvania archives and museum building began in 1940 but documents prove that The State Museum director had suggested this early as 1914. Thomas Lynch Montgomery complained of “the limitations of the building” and suggested that the Commonwealth follow “the example set by the state of New York in furnishing ample quarters in a new building for the Library and Museum.” The Postwar Planning Committee urged the Commonwealth to consider “the erection of adequate buildings to house the state archives, libraries, and museums.” Some state officials proposed instead that The State Museum building be remodeled in order to accommodate the State Archives. Still others doubted “that the Museum Building can be efficiently remodeled for archival purposes.”

Homer T. Rosenberger wanted to memorialize William Penn. And the three hundredth anniversary of Penn’s birth in 1944 seemed the right time to do this. A trained historian, Rosenberger headed a Washington D.C.-based group called the Pennsylvania Historical Junta. It urged that “some permanent, suitable and worthy memorial be erected on the Capitol grounds of Harrisburg to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Founder [of Pennsylvania].” The junta envisioned a 25 foot high and 130 feet wide monument or statue in the area of Capitol Park now called the Soldiers and Sailors Grove. Rosenberger came to Harrisburg to offer this plan to the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies and the Postwar Planning Commission. The latter commission consisted of ten members representing the industrial, labor, agricultural, and civil interests of the Commonwealth. Created by a law passed by the General Assembly on April 28, 1943, the commission developed plans and recommendations and suggested measures to offset the post-war unemployment that occurred after World War II. The Postwar Commission endorsed the museum-archives building recommendation of the Martin Administration, but it stopped short of approving the Rosenberg proposal for inclusion of a William Penn Memorial:

Nor was Rosenberger successful in getting the backing of the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies. The organization passed a resolution at its May 20, 1944 meeting endorsing the new proposed building. The resolution made four major points: 1. that “the Commonwealth include in the postwar public building program suitable provision for a building . . . to house the Public Records and the museum . . . 2. plan the building to reflect the dignity and importance of Pennsylvania, 3. the building should house the records reflecting the military history of Pennsylvania, and 4. that said building [is] to be made a part of the Capitol Park Extension.” There was no men-
tion of a “William Penn Memorial.”

Rosenberger did win an ally in S.K. Stevens even though Stevens differed significantly in how the memorial idea should be expressed. Stevens wrote in 1944:

The suggestion which I made to Doctor Rosenberger over a year ago was that the proposed Archives Building for Pennsylvania be so designed as to include an imposing entrance in which there could be located a beautiful statue of William Penn. While I am not an architect, I can conceive in my mind such a building which would have attractive columns at the entrance through which one would pass into a spacious foyer in which would located an imposing statue of Penn. The walls of the foyer could be suitably decorated and devoted to the same purpose—memorializing William Penn.”119

Rosenberg insisted upon a separate William Penn statue in Capitol Park, not within a building.120 Echoing the sentiment of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission rather than The State Museum, Stevens said “it has always seemed to me perfectly reasonable to suggest [combining] the proposed State Archives Building with a memorial to William Penn.” But, he added, “The addition of the museum function is not necessarily so important.” Later on, Stevens changed his mind and included The State Museum in the scheme for a William Penn memorial.

This was certainly Governor Martin’s position. In his annual message to the General Assembly, the governor asked for $6.5 million for the “William Penn Memorial Archives and Museum” and construction at the rear of the Capitol.”121 It was this proposal that was approved by the state legislature.122 On June 1, 1945, the General Assembly passed Act 42A, which appropriated the money the governor requested for completing three projects: renovation of the Capitol Building, erecting office buildings in the Capitol Park Extension and creating “a memorial building to honor the memory of William Penn, and other necessary buildings for the state archives, library and museum.”123 But “because of insufficient state revenue,” this was cut by Governor Martin to $6 million. Later the Department of Properties and Supplies suggested to Governor Martin that $2 million be allocated for the William Penn Memorial Building. Of this amount, Properties and Supplies dictated that $500,000 be retained “for the development of reports, studies, plans, and specifications.” This left a balance of $1.5 million. From this amount, $10,000 would be paid to the architects for designing the building, leaving a balance of $1,490,000 for the actual construction work.124

The PHMC hired the prominent Philadelphia architectural firm of Zantzinger and Borie, best known for designing the Philadelphia Museum of Art.125 Their appointment was approved by Governor Martin in March 1946, and they started working on the design plans. But their work quickly came to a halt because no one knew exactly how much space the State Archives needed, and the opinion of the PHMC that “$1,800,000 cannot adequately pay for the collections of both the museum and the archives.”126 The PHMC’s quest for additional building funds came at an awkward moment when state government was in transition. A new Pennsylvania governor, James H. Duff, took office in January 1947. During Duff’s first months in office the William Penn Memorial Building funding was slashed to $500,000 and then to just $360,000. The latter amount was prescribed by the General Assembly which in July 1947 amended the original appropriation act approved in 1945.127 By January 1948, the $10,000 allocated for payment of Zantzinger and Borie remained unspent, despite the fact that the studies and services undertaken by the firm were “considerable.”128 Nevertheless, their contract was terminated by the Department of Property and Supplies.

Because of constitutional restrictions on borrowing and the pressing need for additional state facilities, in March 1949 the Commonwealth created the General State Authority (GSA), an independent government agency that was given oversight of the Capitol Park Extension project.129 William Gehron, an architect based in Williamsport and New York City, was hired by the General State Authority as the architect for the Capitol Park Extension Project which would include the William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives.130

The PHMC was not immediately aware of Gehron’s appointment as architect for the William Penn Memorial project. This is why on September 26, 1949 PHMC Chairman Charles J. Biddle petitioned the governor about the need for a new archives building. The following day Duff replied to Biddle that plans for a new archives building must “await the general overall survey of the selection of sites.”131 Although Governor Duff told Biddle that the GSA gave mental health and teaching facilities higher priority than the William Penn Memorial Museum, Governor Duff didn’t tell him that Gehron had been appointed architect for the Capitol Park Extension and was drafting plans for the museum and archives even before the sites were completely surveyed. This explains why on October 10,
1949, Biddle suggested to the governor that a new archives building be constructed outside the capitol complex, which would cost a quarter of the original estimate for the William Penn Memorial Museum. Furthermore, argued Biddle, “If the building is not to be in the Capitol Park Extension, there would appear to be no need to wait until those plans are complete.” Governor Duff never replied to Biddle’s October 10 letter.

Ironically on that same day, historian Donald H. Kent wrote to architect William Gehron. Kent said PHMC Executive Director Donald Cadzow would be in touch with him soon about the commission’s requirements for the building. When Gehron presented his proposal to the PHMC commissioners, “they were very much impressed.” Cadzow sent Gehron “some tentative estimates of the exhibition space for the Museum,” and added that “of course, you realize this is an estimate and is very conservative.”

For two years William Gehron worked on architectural plans for the William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives. He envisioned the museum and the archives as separate but adjacent buildings. Approaching the buildings, the visitor would have entered from a half circle service drive off Third Street to the main entrance of the museum. Upon entering the visitor would come into the exhibition lobby. Walking through the lobby one would have entered the 121 feet long and 87 feet wide William Penn Memorial Room that was flanked on three sides by four different exhibition areas. The rear of the building looked out upon an “exhibition terrace” and a reflecting pool. The main entrance to the archives was off of the exhibition terrace. One entered directly into the search room and microfilm reading area along with a large stack room and vault. Overlooking the search room was the mezzanine level containing repair and preservation quarters, search clerk office, workroom, records storage, vault, stack room, map files, restrooms, and reference library. Turning left from the entrance was an “L” shaped corridor of archival offices. The second through thirteenth levels were all reserved for archival stacks and archival work. Gehron’s design for an archives tower was shorter than the present-day eighteen-story-tall Archives tower.

Gehron’s plans also included a basement and a sub-basement that would house two mechanical rooms, elevator machinery, stack room, ducts and vaults. There were two distinct plans for the basement. The first plan, dated July 31, 1950, designated half the basement as archival stacks. A photography room, darkroom, fumigator room, restrooms, and janitorial quarters rounded out the basement. At the rear of the basement were two “in-take storage rooms” which opened to an outdoor loading platform. A second plan for the basement was done by Gehron in December 1950. This plan called for a lecture hall seating 560 persons complete with stage, dressing rooms, restrooms, lounge, exhibit room and foyer. Gehron presented his final plans to the PHMC commissioners in October 1950. He was still working on the project as late as November 15, 1951, revising the electrical system plans.

The PHMC, however, continued to lobby for the new building and believed that new leadership was required in order to push the PHMC agenda for a new museum and archives. On February 9, 1956, Sylvester (S.K.) Stevens, a longtime PHMC historian, became its executive director. Stevens inaugurated a strategic plan called “Operation Heritage,” designed to inform the people of the Commonwealth about what the objectives of the PHMC were: preserving, restoring, and developing living Pennsylvania history. The subtitle of this initiative was called “Preserving Our Past, An Investment in Our Future.” There were three major components to Operation Heritage. The first component would be the completion of the William Penn Memorial Building (archives and museum). Another phase of Operation Heritage was persuading the General Assembly to enable the General State Authority to supply “sufficient funds” to improve the various PHMC properties such as Landis Valley Farm Museum and Pennsbury Manor.

The final goal of Operation Heritage was to ensure that there would always be operational funds for all the PHMC properties.

During the summer there was another painful reminder to state museum staff of the inadequacies of the current building. When Gov. George M. Leader wanted to return artworks to The State Museum which earlier governors had acquired for the governor’s mansion, PHMC chairman Frank W. Melvin had to turn the governor down because there was simply no room in The State Museum to store the paintings. This action made Governor Leader personally aware of the plight of The State Museum. Subsequently Melvin followed up with a suggestion that the governor resurrect the William Penn Memorial project. Meanwhile, S.K. Stevens was busy visiting and corresponding with other state museums including Illinois in order to learn what the state of the art was in the field of museum architecture. In particular, the Commission solicited the advice of Frank A. Taylor of the Smithsonian Institu-
On April 9, 1957, a resolution was introduced in the state legislature endorsing the idea of a William Penn Memorial Museum. The resolution noted that 1957 was the 275th anniversary of William Penn's landing in Pennsylvania and the media declared that "this provides a fitting occasion to proceed with erecting the building." Throughout the Commonwealth, the media were alerted with several newspapers endorsing the resolution. The Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph came out in favor of the bill, noting that "Harrisburg has many monuments to Pennsylvania soldiers and statesmen but it has no important memorial to William Penn, the founder of the colony." Similarly, the Centre Daily News urged passage of the resolution, stating that "Pennsylvania's rich heritage must have complete safeguards." S.K. Stevens was unhappy with the media coverage given to the resolution by the Harrisburg Sunday Patriot-News. He alleged that the newspaper overemphasized the memorial nature of the museum to the exclusion of its government functions. Stevens complained that "there is only the most incidental use of the word 'archives-museum building'" in the newspaper editorial. The "William Penn Memorial" resolution, as it were, was not passed but referred to committee. Stevens's publicity, however, did not fall on deaf ears, for on September 19, 1957 the General State Authority appropriated funds totaling $350,000 for G.S.A. Project 902-1 for architects "to complete final plans and specifications for the new museum." 

Next the issue of how to choose the architects for the project was up for debate. The General State Authority considered a proposal for selecting the architects by way of an architectural competition. The Harrisburg Sunday Patriot-News favored this over "handing out the contract to a favored architect in the state's political tradition of patronage." But the PHMC already had William Gehron in mind; both State Archivist Henry Howard Eddy and Commissioner Frank Melvin were seeking to have him work with the Commission on the project. Despite Eddy and Melvin's preference, the Harrisburg firm of Lawrie and Green was appointed as architects to devise the plans and specifications for The State Museum and Archives building; the first planning meeting took place in Harrisburg on January 23, 1958. In the beginning Lawrie and Green followed the Gehron plan. "We had developed our drawings," said M. Edwin Green, "with the east wall of our terrace on the line proposed under the original Gehron plan." 

In the meantime, Stevens and the PHMC were anxious that money for actual construction be made available. Commission chairman Frank W. Melvin targeted state Senator M. Harvey Taylor, reminding him of "how you pulled the fat out of the fire for Governor Ed Martin by reviving the bill for the State Capitol Park Extension project." The efforts of Melvin, Stevens, and politicians such as state senators Edward Kessler and M. Harvey Taylor paid off. House Bill 2386 proposing an appropriation of $11 million to construct a new archives and museum building was passed as Act 730 by the General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. David L. Lawrence on December 22, 1959. An additional $9,000,000 for the project was made available by GSA on January 20, 1960.

Visitors have often wondered why The State Museum is located where it is in the Capitol Complex. The "master plan" of the Capitol Park Extension called for "the reservation, on a plot plan, of a tract of land directly to the north of the Capitol as a possible site for a museum that might be built in the future." Gehron was the official architect for the Capitol Park Extension project, and his 1949 plans for the Capitol Complex clearly designate The State Museum and Archives at the corner of Forster and North Third Streets. The entire south side of Forster Street from Third to Seventh Streets was acquired by the Commonwealth in 1951 and Forster Street was converted into a four-lane thoroughfare connecting to the new M. Harvey Taylor Bridge that crossed the Susquehanna River to join the West Shore with Harrisburg. The city of Harrisburg used its influence to have the Capitol Park Extension project coincide with the city's plans for development. The widening of Forster Street was a critical element in these plans. To accommodate the new traffic boulevard, many businesses, homes, and churches were displaced by the Capitol Park Extension Project. Other crucial properties acquired in the late 1950s included the stretch of land extending along North Street from Capitol to North Third Street.

The official groundbreaking ceremony for the William Penn Memorial Museum took place on January 23, 1962 with S.K. Stevens joining Gov. David L. Lawrence and PHMC commissioners in doing the honors. Governor Lawrence told the audience

We are doing more than constructing a great museum and archives building here. We are giving Pennsylvania back to the people, where it belongs. We are creating totally new educational frontiers in the study of history. We are dramatizing the impor-
Afterwards, Governor Lawrence vigorously dug the first shovelful of dirt and was followed by PHMC chairman James B. Stevenson and executive director S.K. Stevens. At last the William Penn Memorial Museum was going to be built.

An extraordinary amount of talent, time, and money went into furbishing the rotunda called “Memorial Hall,” the shrine to William Penn. The rotunda is fifty-six feet high, seventy-seven feet long and forty-eight feet wide. Its ceiling ascends to the fourth floor and it features mezzalines on the second and third floors that overlook the centerpiece, which is the eighteen foot tall, 3,800 pound bronze statue of William Penn designed by Pennsylvania sculptor Janet de Coux (1904–99). De Coux admitted that her rendition of Penn was an “idealized version.” She explained, “In sculpture you have to emphasize one phase of a person’s life. You have to capture the essence of the man.” Creating the statue was a complicated process. First, de Coux began with an iron frame covered with wood. Plastline (composition clay) was then laid over the wood. De Coux created three models of the statue: a three-foot model, then a six-foot model and finally the eighteen-foot model. Once the six-foot model was completed it was cast in Plaster of Paris and broken down into six parts and shipped to a foundry in Mexico City where each section was cast in bronze full size and braised together to form the finished statue. It took de Coux two years to create the statue, which was installed in Memorial Hall on June 21, 1965. The installation and construction cost $82,100. De Coux created the William Penn statue not only as art but as a symbol. She said: “It seems important to me to depict William Penn as an important human symbol as well as an important symbol of our state and our history.” A granite wall forms a semi-circle behind the statue with a quotation from William Penn. Behind that wall are table cases originally designed to exhibit important Pennsylvania documents: the original charter given to Penn by Charles II of England, First and Second Frames of Government of 1682 and 1683, Great Law of 1682, Charter of William and Mary to William Penn, Release of the Duke of York to Penn, Pennsylvania ratification of the 1787 Constitution and the Constitution of 1834. For preservation purposes only digitalized copies of the documents are shown in Memorial Hall because the originals are kept in a climate-controlled archival safe in the State Archives. The display of precious Pennsylvania documents in the new State Museum was actually a continuation of a tradition that began in the 1930s when The State Museum first opened an exhibit with them. The documents, however, were never part of The State Museum collections but were in the custody of the State Archives, which lacking exhibit space, consented to their exhibition in the museum.

Charles Rudy (1904–86), an artist from Bucks County, fabricated the unusual bronze ornamental gates in Memorial Hall. Rudy’s works in stone, bronze, terra cotta and teak had earned him a national reputation as a sculptor. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is one of many museums that own Rudy sculptures. Rudy was a member of the Pennsylvania State Art Commission when he was appointed to design the four gates within Memorial Hall. The gates flank the entrance to the area behind the statue leading to the charter display and the two exits to the galleries. The ornamentation consists of bronze statues of important Pennsylvania historical personages: philanthropist Rebecca Gratz, governor and conservationist Gifford Pinchot, abolitionist senator Thaddeus Stevens, Declaration of Independence signer Benjamin Rush, painter Charles Willson Peale, theologian and scientist Joseph Priestley, Hannah Penn, second wife of William Penn, abolitionist senator David Wilmot, architect Ben-
jamin Henry Latrobe and businessman Albert Gallatin. In addition there are four figures on top of the gates, depicting William Penn conferring with Native Americans. On both sides of the gallery entrances from Memorial Hall are large globe lights which are enclosed with similar brass motifs. Rudy also made the bronze seals of the Commonwealth, William Penn, and British monarch Charles II that are on the walls of Memorial Hall. Rudy created clay models of the seals before preparing the final casting in bronze. Beside the interior decorations, Rudy also created the stone coat of arms of the Commonwealth which is on the outside of the museum overlooking the museum plaza entrance.

Vincent Maragliotti (1888–1978), a prominent commercial painter from Scarsdale, New York, was actually born in Sicily. He had a distinguished career as a mural and decorative painter, beginning in 1925 when he executed the first mural decoration for architect William Gehron’s design for the Union Temple in Brooklyn. But he is best known for his murals in famous New York City hotels such as the Park Lane, the Lexington, the Waldorf-Astoria, and the Sherry-Netherland. Maragliotti took more than two years to paint the oil mural in Memorial Hall. The painting measures ninety by twenty-four feet and is intended to show the historical evolution of Pennsylvania and Penn’s ideals of freedom and justice.

How the mural was created is a fascinating story. Maragliotti began his painting “without seeing the finished hall his painting was to decorate.” For guidance, Maragliotti studied the architect’s plans and then selected as the mural theme “William Penn’s vision of a free society and what came out of it.” Important people in Pennsylvania history were portrayed by Maragliotti in small black and white drawings and then converted into “cartoons” or full sized preparatory drawings on heavy paper. Several colored sketches of the whole mural were then developed on a half-inch to one foot scale. Then the cartoons were transferred onto a canvas treated with lead and oil and cut into six sections. Next, a photographic slide was made of each cartoon, projected onto the canvas in magnified size, and then traced with charcoal. Maragliotti then painted on oil colors specially treated to create a “fresco” effect. His technique of painting has been described as “vibrating,” meaning that he applied “varied colors in short brush strokes in such a way to make the coloring seem alive and moving, and to make it pass from one object to another without leaving hard edges, interweaving all in a full color harmony.” Once the painting was finished, the canvas was rolled up and transported to Harrisburg where the six sections were applied to the wall, smoothed and dried. In order to bring out the full quality of the color and to protect the mural, Maragliotti applied a preservative vanish of beeswax and refined turpentine. At the official unveiling of the mural on December 4, 1964, visitors marveled at how Maragliotti had created a canvas whose color and composition harmonized with “the light warm beige walls, the travertine marble of the gallery, and the bronze statue of William Penn that dominates the Hall.” The total cost of the mural was more than $115,000. Beneath the mural are quotations from thirteen prominent Pennsylvanians: William Penn, Scharroady, Benjamin Franklin, Haym Salomon, Thomas Cooper, Stephen Girard, Jane Swisshelm, James Buchanan, Galusha Grow, Andrew Curtin, Andrew Carnegie, George Westinghouse, and John Mitchell.

From a bird’s-eye point of view, the William Penn
Memorial Museum and Archives has three parts: “a six-story cylindrical Indiana limestone, granite, and concrete-sheathed museum crowned with a dome of aluminum batten, a twenty-story rectilinear, limestone-sheathed archives tower, and a raised plaza on which these massive geometric forms appear to sit.” From an architectural history perspective, the William Penn Memorial Building reflects the style of Modern design for public buildings of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some of the hallmarks of Modern-design architecture are structures whose exterior is “uncluttered, uninterrupted with detail, and linear.” The interior of the museum, especially in the public areas such as the auditorium, utilizes rich, durable materials in a style consistent with the Modern aesthetic. “The wood paneled walls, terrazzo floors, brushed aluminum detailing (including the lettering above the elevator, escalators, etc.), recessed lighting, travertine marble, the wood screen and bench in the Auditorium reception area” recall the aesthetic of Modern design architect Mies van der Rohe.

A “pillbox,” “a drum-shaped structure,” convention-center style, and “Central Pennsylvania Guggenheim” were some of the descriptions made of the shape of The State Museum building. Regardless of how one describes the form of the museum, many visitors have wondered why that design was chosen. After World War II, Modern Style high-rise, slab office buildings like the Labor and Industry Building (dedicated in 1956) were built throughout the Capitol Complex. These structures were “placed asymmetrically in large paved and landscaped plazas,” in stark contrast to the “formal, axial Beaux arts” style buildings of the pre-World War II era. Lawrie and Green believed “public use of museums depended upon an interesting approach to attract the public and that the plaza with its pools and trees would provide such an approach.” Furthermore the plaza entrance would provide easy visitor access to the museum from the parking garage, which was never built. One PHMC official told why:

Why wasn’t provision made for more visitor and staff parking? It was, at least on paper. The plaza extending to the east of the museum was originally planned to cover a parking garage with space for museum visitors who could come directly to the north door (plaza entrance) and into the Memorial Hall. But that space was expropriated for office purposes when the Transportation and Safety Building was designed, and apparently no one in the Commission knew a thing about it until things were set in concrete.

Lawrie and Green’s original architectural drawings were approved by the Department of Property and Supplies and the GSA on July 31, 1959. A rectangular piece of real estate bounded by Third, Forster, North Streets, and Commonwealth Avenue was cleared of buildings before con-
struction began. During the next four years, photographers dutifully photographed almost every each phase of construction. Finally on May 20, 1964, Gov. William W. Scranton presided over the cornerstone dedication ceremony. Inside the cornerstone a time capsule was placed filled with Pennsylvania memorabilia including a four-foot by six-foot state flag, a copy of the legislation authorizing the William Penn Memorial Museum, a bronze medal depicting William Penn, statements from S.K. Stevens and Governor Scranton, and books and newspapers dated May 20, 1964. Governor Scranton beamed as he told the crowd: “Here it will be possible to show the amazing results of what William Penn started, by assembling and displaying exhibits which will vividly depict the entire historical development of Pennsylvania.” An eighty-pound covering stone was placed over the lead box containing the time capsule. “The governor then picked up a trowel, and, almost like a professional, sealed the cover with gray mortar.”

On December 12, 1964, the public entered the new William Penn Memorial Museum for the first time. However, the formal dedication of the building took place October 13, 1965. Governor Scranton officiated at the dedication, and in the audience were members of the American Association for State and Local History and the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies, both of whom were holding their annual meeting at the museum. The dedication ceremony was followed by a formal dinner in the William Penn Memorial Museum and dinner was followed by a concert program in the museum’s auditorium.

The grand opening of Pennsylvania’s new state museum made national news. The New York Times noted sarcastically that “Harrisburg Gets Museum—Empty.” S. K. Stevens retorted that “hard-headed budget officials” and “lack of advance planning and contracts for exhibit work,” were the reason why the first, second, and third floors were devoid of exhibits at opening time. Stevens said that the work of creating galleries lay ahead and that “we shall grow into the Museum after we move [in].” This was the challenge facing the William Penn Memorial Museum in the next decades.
Chapter 5: Developing the Museum Galleries, 1965–1979

The first fifteen years of The State Museum in its new building were highlighted by the opening of the long-term exhibit major galleries or halls: Fine Arts in 1965, Mammal Hall in 1968, Ecology Hall in 1973, Anthropology Hall in 1975, Geology Hall in 1976, and Industry and Technology in 1978. The making of each gallery was complicated, requiring a balance of scholarship, museum professionalism, good relationships with other state agencies, ample funding, and a dedicated labor force. The opening of each gallery resulted in the growth of collections, more specialized museum education and interpretation programs, and a more diverse image for The State Museum.

In 1965 the William Penn Memorial Museum opened to the public, but not all of it was accessible to visitors. One museum official claimed:

“The fact that there were wide-open spaces on the exhibit floors was the result of a deliberate decision (on the part of curators). The architectural designer at first couldn’t understand why we didn’t want to subdivide these floors into permanent galleries complete with fancy architectural finishes as one might find in an art museum. But we didn’t know what would be the final forms of or the volumes of space that would be needed for the wide range of exhibits that were contemplated, and we committed ourselves to only a limited number of adjustments on each floor to accommodate some of the things we had immediately at hand: the Brockerhoff House area, the Village Square, the Rothermel painting and the natural history dioramas.”

But there were also practical reasons why The State Museum was incomplete. Fabrication and mounting of the individual galleries had to be coordinated with architects, contractors, General Services, and other state agencies as well other PHMC staff. Curator Eric De Jonge said that “we do not have the manpower and resources to present a finished museum upon completion of the new museum [building].” For example, Geology Hall planning had to be postponed until a geology curator was hired. Even if there had been a geology curator on staff, The State Museum would not have been able to complete Geology Hall by the time of building dedication because the general contract for the building did not provide for planning and construction of that gallery.

Without knowledge of these circumstances, some members of the public and the museum criticized The State Museum for not having all the galleries completed upon opening. Director William Richards admitted that “Our inability to move into a full-scale museum operation at once is our most vulnerable area in terms of outside criticism, but it is a situation we could not avoid. You grow into museums rather than moving into them, but this is hard to make the public or sometimes a legislator, understand.”

The earliest known comprehensive museum exhibit plan for The State Museum was prepared by curator Eric De Jonge in 1963. De Jonge’s proposal was evidently the blueprint for the museums’ galleries, for many of the galleries proposed by De Jonge were actually created. The first to open was the Fine Arts gallery on the ground floor. Of all the galleries or halls, Fine Arts appeared to have required the least amount of fabrication and construction. The gallery had plenty of open space in which occasional free-standing panels and display cases and pedestals were erected for exhibition of art works and crafts. The first major art show in the William Penn Memorial Museum was “N.C. Wyeth and the Brandywine Tradition.” It featured the art of Newell Conovers Wyeth (1882–1945). It ran from October 21 through November 28, 1965. The sections of the exhibit included a replicated model of Wyeth’s studio at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, Far West pictures, book illustrations, mural decorations, easel painting, and “the second generation: art by Wyeth’s children.” It was a very popular show. By the end of November 1965, more than forty thousand people had visited the Wyeth exhibition. Thereafter, other art exhibitions at the William Penn Memorial Museum continued to draw large crowds prompting the Harrisburg Patriot-News to comment that The State Museum “has really begun to flower as the Commonwealth’s concert hall and art gallery.
for the young and old.”

The second major long-term exhibit to open was Mammal Hall, a gallery of dioramas filled with Pennsylvania mammals that has remained very popular with the public. It was designed as an introduction to the adjoining Hall of Natural Science and Ecology which is popularly known as Ecology Hall. As early as the 1930s The State Museum had an “animal room” or room of mammals and De Jonge envisioned Mammal Hall as continuing that tradition. According to curators, geologically we still live in the age of mammals, considered the dominant group among animals on earth. Dioramas were chosen as the format of presentation for several reasons. First, the diorama has always been considered by naturalists to be a superb teaching tool because it incorporates many aspects of animals in their natural environment. Above all, Mammal Hall gives visitors a look at animals and their behavior that people otherwise would never see. The dioramas could be thought of as kinds of “theatres” in which the tension between predators and prey, and competition for food and fight for survival are acted out.

Planning for Mammal Hall began around 1960 when The State Museum staff put together a storyline, similar to a movie or television script, which contained a full description of each diorama. The master plan for Mammal Hall called for thirteen separate dioramas, each featuring a different mammal native to Pennsylvania. The decision was made to include common species like the woodchuck, as well as species like the mountain lion that once lived in Pennsylvania. Building each diorama entailed acquisition of mammals, taxidermy and detailing. The State Museum curators wanted models that were at one time living creatures but it was considered unethical for the museum to hunt down the animals. This meant that obtaining the particular specimens for a diorama exhibit often was difficult; in the end the museum acquired the animals from natural science professionals and government agencies. The Pennsylvania Game Commission assisted by donating specimens that were killed on roads and highways and mammals that were illegally shot or trapped. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service provided the bison when they reduced the size of bison herds in western states. The Jonas Brothers Studio in Denver, Colorado completed the taxidermy mount to State Museum specifications and shipped the bison to Harrisburg. When the bison arrived at The State Museum, taxidermist Paul Sharp placed the animal within its proper diorama.

The next step in the exhibit development process was selecting the animals for the dioramas. First, mammals from around Pennsylvania were selected. Then the curators took a map of the state and divided it into regions, and a selected mammal was matched with a region it was likely to inhabit. Field trips were made to each region to identify a specific site where the mammal lived. Naturalists and artists traveled across the region in search of optimum habitat features in the natural landscape. Relying partly on topographic maps and physiography (the study of land formations), they were able to find a primary location for the mammal. Research teams spent one to three days in a location. Photographs, sketches, color notes, and detailed studies of plant and animal life were made by the museum staff. They also made numerous observations, preserved plant life, and collected materials for replication or inclusion in the dioramas. The red fox diorama field trip in May 1965 was the first excursion made during the making of Mammal Hall.

Back in The State Museum, artists worked from their field notes to develop sketches and clay models for each diorama. An artist might do a miniature painting on a piece of poster board to represent the colors and theme of the exhibit. Construction sketches were important in that they provided measurements of square footage of the size of the diorama. Next sketches and models were evaluated by biologists to make sure that the replica was an accurate interpretation of the animal’s behavior. A conscious effort was made by curators to incorporate as many variations in animal behavior and environments as possible. Within Mammal Hall, every season of the year is illustrated, various weather conditions are depicted and the mammals show many different kinds of behavior ranging from foraging for food, seeking prey, and constructing homes to caring for young, establishing territory, and protecting themselves. The artist and preparator John Kucera was mainly responsible for the artistic planning and construction of Mammal Hall.

After the specimens were chosen, the museum staff used the photographs, clay models, and sketches done on the field trips as the basis for “detailing.” This is the process of creating the background and foreground. Artists John Kucera and John Schreffler painted ten of the diorama backgrounds, while Jerome Connolly painted the mountain lion, the wapiti (elk) and the gray fox backgrounds. In creating his backgrounds, Connolly studied photographs of
the animal’s habitat site, developed his own composition, and sketched the major elements of the background painting. Kucera and Schreffler used oil paints, a more brilliant approach to color and an impressionistic style in their background paintings.

Creating the diorama foreground was more tedious work because the staff had to make artificial plant materials, flowers, leaves, stems, and tree branches. First, vegetation was studied in its natural setting and brought to The State Museum to copy. Next, the artists produced plaster molds of leaves. Thin sheets of acetate were pressed into the leaf molds, with the help of a vacuum form. Then individual acetate leaves were cut, assembled on wire stems, and painted. The abundance of foliage, especially in the summer, spring, and fall dioramas, kept four museum staff members working throughout the entire three-year project producing plant materials. Senior curator of Natural Science Albert Mehring was chiefly responsible for the scientific accuracy of Mammal Hall. He selected the sites, conducted detailed plant and animal surveys, and completed field reports that provided the documentation for the exhibit construction. Georgette D. Brickner was the artist who fabricated much of the plant life in each of the dioramas.

When the design for a diorama foreground and background was done, it was time to “merge” them in order to give the diorama a realistic look. Skillful merging was perhaps the most difficult challenge for the artist. He or she wanted to achieve an illusion that fools the visitor’s eye; this was accomplished when two-dimensional and three-dimensional components of the diorama were blended effectively. For example, the brush and leaves on a creek bank had to complement the beaver so the visitor can infer what the animal’s behavior is and its relationship to its habitat. Many times a miniature diorama was created out of wood by the curator to simulate how the background, foreground and animals would merge successfully as an exhibit. S.K. Stevens said

the actual construction involves primarily the application of plaster to form the background of each diorama, some related carpentry and a very few electrical connections to achieve special lighting effects. The bulk of the work consists of art production, in the painting of naturalistic backgrounds and the blending of these with realistic, full scale foregrounds.196

Ecology Hall was the brainchild of curator Albert Mehring and Winslow M. Shaughnessy of the museum’s natural history section. In discussion with the General State Authority in 1964, The State Museum christened the gallery as a “Geology-Earth Sciences-Botany Hall.”197 In 1966, the Chicago-based firm of Richard Rush Studio Inc. was selected by the PHMC to be the general contractor for GSA project 946-3 which now was referred to as “the Nature Museum/Geology Hall”198

The gallery discarded the outdated museum technique of compartmentalizing the natural sciences into halls or galleries of plants, insects, fishes, birds, etc. Rather [the curators] divided the entire area into three ecological zones: The Woods, The Edge, and The Open. Each of these zones represented a large ecological segment of the Commonwealth. Exhibit units within each zone were concerned with the plants and animals as they occur in the corresponding natural ‘zone’ out-of-doors. The interrelationship among plants, animals and their environments will be stressed.” Although the curators were innovative in their decision to combine various forms of life in the exhibit, Ecology Hall was traditional in that in many places it appeared to be a “a collection of instructive labels each illustrated by a well-selected specimen.199

More than five hundred people attended the dedication ceremony and reception marking the official opening of Ecology Hall on October 10, 1973.

Geology Hall or the Hall of Earth Sciences provides the visitor with an introduction to the fields of geology, paleontology, paleobotany, and mineralogy as they are related to Pennsylvania. The exhibit designer’s concept was to take the visitor on “a walk through time” in order to learn how long ago each geological epoch existed, what life could be found on earth, when scientists know these facts, and where in Pennsylvania these are found.200 Covering much of the south side of The State Museum’s third floor, Geology Hall is one of the biggest galleries in The State Museum.

Like Mammal Hall, Geology Hall makes use of dioramas to tell the story of the major forms of life at each period, for example, the age of fishes. Dioramas portray a glimpse under the Cambrian Seas while larger dioramas illustrate the development of life during the Ordovician, Silurian, and Devonian eras. Still larger dioramas are utilized for Triassic, Permian, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods. The dioramas were created similar to those in Mam-
Mal Hall. Animals were sculptured, backgrounds and foregrounds expertly painted, and terrain and plant life reproduced. Like Mammal Hall, the dioramas in Geology Hall were designed to replicate as closely as possible the habitat in which these creatures lived.

A special feature of Geology Hall is the “Carboniferous Forest.” Spectacularly lit, the forest has a pathway running through the center of it to create for visitors a “real life experience.” Scale trees, ferns and other plant life populate the “forest” and the canopy ceiling overhead. Geology Hall ends with the Pleistocene period when the age of man begins. Here the mastodon, some evidence of the Ice Age, mankind, modern vegetation, and an assembly of mastodon bones greet the visitor. The mastodon, similar to today’s elephant, was modeled out of fiberglass. In many areas of Geology Hall, visitors were able to see a color slide show by pressing a button. Many scientific specimens fill the hall including two rocks that are at least a billion years old. Natural Science curator Donald Hoff was mainly responsible for the concept of Geology Hall. The design contractor was the Richard Rush Studio Inc. of Chicago and additional assistance was provided by Dr. Donald Baird, curator of the Geological Museum, Princeton University. Geology Hall was dedicated on June 18, 1976.

As early as the 1950s, State Museum anthropologists W. Fred Kinsey III and John Witthoff wrote an original storyline for Anthropology Hall. But Kinsey and Witthoff left The State Museum in the mid 1960s, and when the new curators arrived, they revised the Kinsey-Witthoff storyline and exhibit hall design during the late 1960s. Barry C. Kent, Ira F. Smith III, Vance Packard, and Catherine McCann divided Anthropology Hall into five sections: 1. Introduction area; 2. Technology area; 3. Cultural history area; 4. Special exhibits area; and 5. Ethnology area. Various exhibit formats—photographs, graphics, lighted slides, maps, wall mountings, dioramas, wall display cases, and freestanding Plexiglas cases—are used to tell the story of archaeology and Native Americans in Pennsylvania. The ethnology section consists of five dioramas about the life of the Delaware Indians. As with Mammal Hall, much artwork went into the painting of backgrounds, fabrication of terrain and brush, as well as replicating Native American dwellings. The visitor is taken back in time to sense what it was like to be a Delaware Indian. Similarly, the replica of an open-air Indian archaeological site recreates an actual dig, showing tools, excavations, and workers in action. Artist and designer John P. Kucera was responsible for design, construction, and exhibit installation while Jerome Connolly executed the special diorama paintings. Anthropology Hall was dedicated on December 9, 1975.

Planning for Industry and Technology Hall began with State Museum curator Irwin Richman in 1965. Richman’s proposed exhibit script called for six separate exhibit groups in the gallery: canals, railroading, horse-drawn vehicles, bicycles, automobiles, and aviation. By 1971, however, Richman’s successor, curator John Tyler improvised on Richman’s scheme. Tyler’s six components of the hall were steam power, bicycling, hand-pulled apparatus, automobiles, horses, and aviation. A year later, Tyler changed his mind and decided that the six transportation sections should be understood in terms of the form of energy they utilized, i.e. man-powered vehicles, electric trucks, steam power, horse-drawn vehicles, internal combustion, and aircraft. Planning for Industry and Technology Hall began with State Museum curator Irwin Richman in 1965. Richman’s proposed exhibit script called for six separate exhibit groups in the gallery: canals, railroading, horse-drawn vehicles, bicycles, automobiles, and aviation. By 1971, however, Richman’s successor, curator John Tyler improvised on Richman’s scheme. Tyler’s six components of the hall were steam power, bicycling, hand-pulled apparatus, automobiles, horses, and aviation. A year later, Tyler changed his mind and decided that the six transportation sections should be understood in terms of the form of energy they utilized, i.e. man-powered vehicles, electric trucks, steam power, horse-drawn vehicles, internal combustion, and aircraft.

Industry and Technology Hall contains many standalone artifacts which a visitor may walk around. Unlike today’s curators, who strive to provide visitors with a “you are there” experience, Tyler was traditional in his
approach to exhibits. Tyler once explained that “I’m old-fashioned and I believe people come to a museum to see things and not to see graphics or plastic mockups. So I’ve tried to use what [artifacts] we have to tell the story.”\textsuperscript{209} His final exhibit storyline had just four sections: muscle power, water power, steam power, and electricity and petroleum. Tyler envisioned the gallery’s theme as “Man’s Utilization of Energy” through Pennsylvania’s history, emphasizing the relationships between energy use and use of materials. A visitor strolling through the gallery sees many “mini-exhibits” dealing with specific artifacts and modes of transportation.\textsuperscript{210} An exhibit design firm from York, MarkeTecs, was responsible for installing the gallery.

The Hall of Industry and Technology Hall was dedicated on September 26, 1971. The exhibition was formally called “Man and Machine–Technology in Pennsylvania”\textsuperscript{211} The media pinpointed several artifacts as highlights. The Rose Garden gristmill was described by the Harrisburg \textit{Evening News} as an “eye catcher.” The Lancaster \textit{New Era} singled out the Herr Company battery-powered electric car and the Piper V-Cub J3C-65 single engine plane as being particularly fascinating. Industry and Technology Hall quickly became a favorite with museum visitors.\textsuperscript{212}

During the era of “gallery building” at The State Museum, the curatorial collections grew.\textsuperscript{213} A prominent subject that covers numerous curatorial areas is that of the Pennsylvania’s governors. There are many artifacts with links to the administrations of Governors Samuel W. Pennypacker, James H. Duff, Arthur H. James, Raymond P. Shafer, Milton J. Shapp, James Pollock, and Edward Martin. The artifacts representing Governor Martin in the museum’s collections are typical of what is available: the dress uniform of General Edward Martin and the inaugural gown of Mrs. Edward Martin (68.103).\textsuperscript{214}

The paintings and sketches of The State Museum mural by Vincent Maragliotti (acc. 68.75 and acc. 74.135) are artifacts documenting The State Museum’s present building. Among the many interesting paintings obtained by the Fine Arts section is \textit{Christ Healing the Sick} by Benjamin West. (70.16) In the 1970s, a new social history focus emerged, replacing the study of the rich and famous with study of ordinary people, especially minorities and
women, the collections of The State Museum reflected this trend. While antique furniture was still being collected by the Decorative Arts section, household goods such as a small hand-cranked sewing machine (acc. 72.26) and exotic apparel such as anthracite jewelry (acc. 69.35) were also being acquired. Although the popular culture section of The State Museum did not exist during the era of gallery building, important artifacts were acquired. For example, in 1972, the museum acquired a 1950s-era Philco television floor model (72.140) and in 1975, a pianoforte, often found in Victorian parlors, came to the museum (75.158). The military history collection continued to grow with the acquisition of World War II artifacts. An uncommon relic of that war is a Jewish prisoner identification badge (74.106). The natural science, geology, and archaeology sections all gained artifacts but not as many as in the first several decades of The State Museum. A large insect collection of almost twenty thousand specimens was obtained in 1972 for the natural science section (72-161.1-19801). Fossils of extinct reptiles dating from the Triassic Period were uncovered in York County by museum staff members in 1973. The fossils, dating back approximately 195 million years ago, were used to create replicas for display in Geology Hall.215

The Education Section of The State Museum of Pennsylvania also underwent changes during the late 1960s. During this period the Mobile Museum was acquired by The State Museum and began bringing exhibits to most counties in the Commonwealth. In addition to guided tours, the museum staff began to teach audio-visual formats. In 1967, a twenty-minute film and slide program targeted especially students and teachers was introduced to the public. This program oriented visitors to The State Museum.216 The “classes” gradually evolved into “workshops” emphasizing hands-on learning in a variety of subjects ranging from painting, arts and crafts, to archaeology. These workshops proved to be very popular with children. About 1972, this education program was expanded to bring in the state Department of Education as co-sponsor for the elementary and middle school classes. High school students were offered a special training course in museum work and high school social science teachers could take a training course for academic credit.

There were also public programs especially for young people. For example in 1969, a special program “The World around Us” was offered for central Pennsylvania school districts. In 1970, there was the “Students’ Art Festival,” the Central Pennsylvania Science Fair and the Scholastic Art Awards Show.217 A Pennsylvania History Festival on October 24, 1973 was co-sponsored by the PHMC and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The event attracted grade school through high school students.218 Outreach to special students with special needs became an education priority as the museum inaugurated a program for mentally disturbed teenagers as well as a new “Touch and Learn” program for the blind and visually impaired in 1973 and 1974.219 In 1966, a museum membership group, the Associates of The State Museum, was organized. The Associates ran The State Museum gift shop and coordinated music and movie programs as well as general fundraising for The State Museum. The Associates disbanded about 1979 and another support group, the Friends of The State Museum, took their place in 1981.220

Despite these innovations, PHMC executive director

![Gov. Richard Thornburgh cuts the ribbon at the dedication of the Mobile Museum in 1987.](image-url)
Peter C. Welsh in 1977 sought to overhaul The State Museum’s education program. He said “the museum education program of the William Penn Memorial Museum is at least ten years behind current practice.” According to Welsh, museum education is not just moving a school classroom into a museum setting. Rather museum education is object and specimen oriented and includes interpretation. He thought that “museum education is most efficient when it presents thematic material that clearly relates objects and specimens to their social, historical and/or environmental context.”

In 1979, museum director Ira Smith III realized the William Penn Memorial needed volunteers. He initiated a volunteer recruitment program. Soon Smith was able to boast that “volunteers in the Education Section are assigned to assist in providing guide service for school groups and to assist with special visits. They work at the spinning demonstration center and on occasion visit schools and nursing homes to show motion pictures or provide crafts and folklore demonstrations as requested.” Volunteers also helped out on weekends at the “Activity Corner,” a hands-on exhibit for children. Volunteers soon taught many of the summer classes and workshops too.

In short, the era from the date of its opening in 1965 until the end of the seventies was a time of “growing into the museum” building. The major galleries or halls—Fine Arts, Geology, Ecology, Mammal, Anthropology, Industry and Technology—were all installed during this time. These exhibition areas differed vastly from their counterparts in the old State Museum building in that they utilized many materials and formats in delivering exhibit storylines and they reflected the “state of the art” in museum exhibit design. Parallel to the development of the galleries was the innovations in the museum’s education section. Whereas in the past, they confined themselves to circulating lantern slides and giving docent tours, now the staff actively educated the public both in the museum and outside. Orientation films, classes, workshops and public programs especially for students aimed at getting young people interested in the museum and in education. The Mobile Museum was a giant step for the museum education section because now they delivered exhibits and programs to virtually every corner of the Commonwealth. Finally, the education section was buoyed by the influx of volunteers who were indispensable for running classes, workshops, and the Activity Corner.
The turn of a century signifies a change—the old and familiar makes way for the new and unfamiliar. So it was with The State Museum of Pennsylvania on the eve of its centennial. Some of the old was discarded to make way for the new. The internal organization was redefined and a new museum name was adopted, The State Museum of Pennsylvania. Exhibits became more diverse. Collections underwent change. A new curatorial collection was established and another collection was redefined. Science collections moved out of the museum into the Keystone Building. The education section went into action with innovative programs and partnerships with school districts. Finally, the museum itself was transformed as a new entrance and lobby symbolized its new face to visitors.

Twenty years before its centennial, The State Museum of Pennsylvania realized that times were changing and that the museum world was changing. It was a time of adapting to change and incorporating those changes within its mission to the Commonwealth.

In the 1980s, The State Museum redefined its goals and objectives, public image, audiences, and internal organization. Leadership changed frequently: there were five museum directors in the 1980s. The first shakeup in the museum organization was triggered by PHMC Executive Director Larry E. Tise’s 1980 strategic plan for the commission. This plan called for the commission “to view the pursuit of public history in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as an enterprise and employ selected strategies and stratagems of the private sector.” Thus The State Museum would market itself as a “tourist” attraction and devise ways to increase its revenue. As a means of improving efficient management, the William Penn Memorial Museum in 1981 was made part of the new
Several years later in 1983, The State Museum formed a “blue ribbon committee” to review the problems and issues facing the museum. One of those issues was the public perception among Pennsylvanians and non-Pennsylvanians that the William Penn Memorial Museum was only about the life of William Penn rather than the history of the Commonwealth. Former State Museum fine arts curator Donald Winer also thought that people didn’t realize what a state museum has in its collections. “Some people walk in and expect to see a Van Gogh hanging here or other fantastic [art] works,” said Winer. “Oh, we have some splendid art here, but it is Pennsylvania art. We are a state museum.” To correct this misunderstanding, the blue ribbon committee recommended changing the museum’s name from the William Penn Memorial Museum to The State Museum of Pennsylvania. The name change became official in 1984. Further visibility in the American museum community was achieved by The State Museum through accreditation by the American Association of Museums in 1978, and renewed in 1986 and 1998. Accreditation gives a museum prestige, signifying that it operates according to the highest professional museum standards. Furthermore, the positive public image and credibility resulting from accreditation can attract volunteers, donors, visitors, and stimulate fundraising. Thus The State Museum reflected the growing trend among American museums to focus on goal-setting, strategic planning, professionalism, and marketing. In July 1990, the PHMC was once again reorganized under Executive Director Brent D. Glass. Glass took The State Museum from the Bureau of Historic Sites and Museums and made it a separate bureau. The Bureau of Museum Services was dismantled and its exhibitions and collection management sections were transferred to the Bureau of The State Museum. Leadership of The State Museum stabilized when museum directors served longer tenures. Carl Nold headed the museum from 1984 to 1991 and Anita Blackaby became museum director in 1992, guiding the museum to the present day.

In 1982, the Friends of The State Museum of Pennsylvania was founded as a community support group to assist the promotion, development, and improvement of The State Museum. On May 13, 1987, the PHMC and the Friends of The State Museum amended their original agreement so that the PHMC would provide the Friends with a subvention of $57,050 “for the purpose of supporting the public programs and expanding and improving services provided by the Friends.” Soon the Friends operated The State Museum Gift Shop and aided the museum education division and volunteers in offering visitors public programs and educational workshops. It was partly due to the support of the Friends that in 1988 The State Museum was awarded the largest amount of grant and private enterprise funding in its history. The Friends were also helpful to the museum in support of the collections. In 1991, for instance, they founded a collection endowment fund for new acquisitions. This fund, however, was not adequate, and during the next several decades virtually all State Museum acquisitions consisted of gifts. A sample list of gifts received in 1981 reveals the width and breadth of the museum’s collections. The Fine Arts section received an oil painting of George Washington by C.H. Hinckley, an oil painting of Samuel Johnson painted by the artist John Sartin, and 363 studies for the Pennsylvania Capitol murals by Violet Oakley. The Industry and Technology Section received a lathe, table saw, and jigsaw from Fulton County used by the grandfather of state Representative Gregg Cunningham. The Decorative Arts Section obtained a donation of three pieces of grained painted furniture made by Frederick and Mary Ellen Heckart. It also acquired a World War I Victory Parade dress.
During the 1990s The State Museum saw even more eclecticism in its acquisitions. The State Museum received a donation of an electric chair from the State Department of Corrections in 1990. Memorabilia pertaining to Pennsylvania’s governors continued to come in; in 1991, artifacts relating to Gov. Arthur H. James (governor from 1939 to 1942) were donated, and in 1992 Gov. Robert P. Casey’s wife Ellen gave The State Museum her inaugural ball gown. Many artifacts pertaining to military history were donated during the 1990s. Perhaps the most valuable acquisition was the Penn Treaty Collection donated by Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin. This collection of 109 pieces of art and objects featuring images of William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians, was given to The State Museum in 1995 and 1996. The collection was the basis for the 1996 exhibition and catalog “An Image of Peace: The Penn Treaty Collection of Meyer P. and Vivian Potamkin.”

In 1995 the Fine Arts section acquired four massive contemporary sculptures made of Vermont marble and Pennsylvania granite. The sculptures, all created by Pennsylvania artists, were placed on the lawn of The State Museum facing Third Street and within the courtyard of the State Archives near the corner of Third and Forster Streets. 

Many donations arrived as a result of The State Museum’s search for artifacts to exhibit in the proposed Hall of History. Maids’ uniforms, K-Mart employees’ uniforms, and the uniform of astronaut Guion Bluford Jr. were acquired in 1997 and 1998 mainly for the Hall of History exhibition. The same is true of many of the artifacts documenting the Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, Lehigh Valley, Pittsburgh and Lake Erie and Penn Central Railroads in 1998 and 1999. The acquisition of football and bowling uniforms and other sports memorabilia in 1998 and 1999 would help lay the groundwork for a new curatorial section in The State Museum. Among the many donations to The State Museum in recent years, the painting Birth of Our Nation’s Flag, by American artist Charles H. Weisgerber, stands out. Painted in 1893, this huge painting depicts Betsy Ross showing her newly-sewn flag to George Washington, Col. George Ross, and the Hon. Robert Morris.

In 1999, a new curatorial section—Popular Culture—was initiated in The State Museum. Although the museum had long collected children’s toys and recreational artifacts like bicycles, the creation of the new section represented the first time The State Museum made an official commitment to collect in this area. The Popular Culture section emerged because of collection initiatives generated by the Hall of History project and the need for The State Museum to incorporate a social history approach to history. This approach erased long-standing collecting biases; artifacts collected by museums tended to focus upon the lives of white, upper class people from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In contrast, the popular culture collection reflects the experiences of ordinary people and everyday life, particularly in the twentieth century. An example of an artifact acquired in 1999 is a neon sign with the words “Bar” and “Seafood Cafe” that once graced the outside of the Locust Street Café in downtown Harrisburg. Popular culture curator Curt Miner says of the art deco neon sign that “in its time it was considered generic. If a person were to look at photographs from the 1940s of any city in Pennsylvania or the United States, he or she would find these kinds of signs. This is how people advertised their businesses.”

Another curatorial section was also affected by the new social history emphasis of the collections. The Decorative Arts section was renamed Community and Domestic Life in 1994. Curators realized that it was not enough to exhibit Chippendale parlor furniture and other expensive wares that upper middle class people owned, for example. It was essential that more mundane artifacts be collected and exhibited to reflect the diverse domestic life of Pennsylvanians. Although The State Museum had collected artifacts relating to the Pennsylvania German lifestyle, the new name for the section was intended to include artifacts of the folk and working class segments of all Pennsylvania’s people as well as the upper class.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, The State Museum of Pennsylvania’s collections consisted of 3.2 million objects organized and administered by nine sections: archaeology, geology and paleontology, zoology and botany, fine arts, community and domestic life, industry and technology, military history, political history, and popular culture. Since its founding in 1905, The State Museum’s collections had grown large and diverse in number. Once again, The State Museum was running out of space for its collections. Fortuitous circumstances, however, would produce a solution to this problem.

On June 16, 1994 there was a fire in the Transportation and Safety Building next door to the museum. Subsequent inspection by authorities disclosed a huge amount of PCBs and asbestos within the structure, prompting the Commonwealth to tear down the building in August 1998. Construction of a new building on the site, named the Commonwealth Keystone Building, began soon after-
wards. Because the museum needed more room for its staff and collections, PHMC executive director Brent D. Glass spearheaded the commission’s drive to acquire space for The State Museum in the Keystone Building. This was a significant accomplishment because the commission was competing with many other state agencies for the available space. After the Keystone Building was completed in 2000, The State Museum moved the curatorial offices and collections of archaeology, zoology and botany, and paleontology and geology into the building. According to State Museum Director Anita Blackaby, “this was a truly a major undertaking for us.” Thousands of artifacts and science specimens were packed, moved, and unpacked during the move of the curatorial sections. The last zoology specimens were moved from The State Museum’s former fourth floor collections storage space to its new area in the basement of the Keystone Building in early 2004. As of this writing, the move is not yet complete—part of the biology collection has yet to be moved to the Keystone Building, according to Blackaby.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the exhibits in The State Museum were more interesting and exciting than ever. On the heels of the success of the motion picture about dinosaurs, *Jurassic Park*, the exhibition “The Dinosaurs,”
opened in 1988. More than 103,000 visitors enjoyed the animated exhibit. Guests also participated in a black-tie dinner for longtime museum supporters, three performances of the children’s theater production, *Dino Rock*, a planetarium program about the demise of dinosaurs, and related special events. During an eight-week period, the museum planetarium was completely sold out, as were the three performances of *Dino Rock*, and Saturday children’s workshops. At the peak of the exhibit, the museum successfully responded to over nine hundred phone calls in one day and over fifteen hundred visitors per hour. Some visitors were forced to wait in line for as long as two and a half hours to get in. The Dinosaurs is arguably the most successful temporary exhibition in the history of The State Museum. Other memorable exhibitions of the 1980s were “Chair, Chest and Table” (1981), “With the Stroke of a Pen: Tercentenary Documents” (1981), “The USS Pennsylvania and Her Silver” and the art of “Charlotte Dorrance Wright” (1989).

In the 1990s and early twenty-first century, The State Museum continued to provide exhibitions focusing on the fine arts, social history, popular culture, ethnic history, and young people. “Art of the State” is a yearly art exhibition co-sponsored by The State Museum and the Greater Harrisburg Arts Council. The exhibition series began in 1967 under the name “Juried Museum Exhibition of the Greater Harrisburg Arts Festival.” But in 1990 museum director Carl Nold changed the name of the show to “Art of the State.” In “Art of the State,” as many as 148 artists compete for first, second, and third place in five categories. In addition, artists compete for the Pennsylvania Purchase Award in which The State Museum of Pennsylvania selects an artwork in the show for the fine arts collection. The exhibition is probably the longest running, regular, temporary exhibition of The State Museum.

Besides fine arts, The State Museum had temporary exhibits about Pennsylvania history. In July, 1990, The State Museum mounted the exhibit “Pennsylvania’s New Deal: Jobs, Art, and Politics.” Another outstanding exhibition dealing with history was “Levittown: Building the Suburban Dream” (2002). The exhibit coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Levittown in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Curator Curt Miner said that Levittown is presently “the largest planned community constructed by a single builder (Levitt and Sons) in the United States.” A highlight of the exhibit was a full-scale reconstruction of a pink General Electric kitchen from a 1958 Levittown “Jubilee” model home. The exhibition "Flight 93 Remembered" was an unusual exhibit for The State Museum in that it displayed items that visitors left behind as personal memorials to those lives lost on September 11, 2001 in Schwenksville, Somerset County, Pennsylvania. During the first weekend of the exhibit, more than nine hundred people visited the museum.


Other exhibits looked at ethnic groups in Pennsylvania, such as the 1992 exhibit, “Discovering America: The Peoples of Pennsylvania” cooperatively developed with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies. It explored the lifestyles of various nationalities and ethnic groups. The Latino experience was depicted in several fine art exhibitions including “La Expression de un pueblo en Pensilvania: Artistas Latinos Contemopeneas,” also called “The Expression of a People in Pennsylvania: Contemporary Latino Artists.” (1998) and the mural series “Artistas del Verano,” created with assistance from the Pennsylvania Department
of Education, Migrant Education (2000–3). The exhibition of photographs of two major Pennsylvania football teams—the Philadelphia Eagles and the Pittsburgh Steelers—in December 2003 may represent one of the few times The State Museum has mounted an exhibit about sports. The exhibit consisted of more than twenty color photographs taken by State Museum photographer Don Giles. In September 2004, another photography exhibit featuring Harrisburg native and environmentalist J. Horace McFarland opened. Based on the McFarland collection at the Pennsylvania State Archives, “Horace McFarland’s Harrisburg” offered a rare glimpse of old Harrisburg captured through the camera lens of a leader of the national “City Beautiful” movement.

 Provocative exhibits created to attract young people were popular in the 1990s. “aMaze and Beyond: A Playful Experience about Serious Stuff,” was an unusual exhibition that opened in 1999. It was unusual for several reasons: 1. it had no artifacts, 2. the exhibit was planned by a community advisory committee, and 3. the exhibit was about dealing with prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. It was designed for mainly eight to fifteen-year-olds and for parents and teachers. One teacher, Danielle Walt, expressed how she thought her students benefited from the exhibit. “We found that the students were afraid to talk about some of these issues and we felt this [the exhibit] would give them tools to know how to handle certain situations.” Other exhibitions of interest to youngsters included “Percy Platypus” (1997), and “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” (2001) which attracted visitors who were fans of the popular children’s television show.

 Children had a lot to choose from in terms of summer workshops at The State Museum in the 1980s. During the summer of 1980, for instance, visitors enrolled in courses such as “American Folk Music,” “Pennsylvania Pottery,” and a geology class called “Rivers, Rocks and Ridges.” There were also educational programs relating to African Americans. For instance, in February 1981 there were three Black History Month programs: Black History Month Jazz and Gospel Music,” “Black History Month Films,” and “Black History Month Children’s Activities.” During the 1987 holiday season, the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission sponsored a program of events entitled “Christmas . . . An Ethnic Experience.” It celebrated holiday traditions of different nationalities such as Irish, French, German, Italian, African American, and others. Production of these programs and workshops was not possible without the contributions of many museum volunteers. In June 1983, The State Museum had forty volunteers who accounted for 30 percent of the teachers of summer classes and summer workshops. By the end of the decade, volunteers contributed over almost ten thousand hours in aiding The State Museum’s education section.

 In 1992, The State Museum inaugurated an educational program, “Highlights Tour,” in order to personalize the museum experience for students. School groups were broken up into smaller sections or “classes” in which museum guides taught them about the museum’s exhibits and
answered the students’ questions. State Museum director Anita Blackaby reported that “the ratio of student per guide has been reduced by 50 percent and the time spent with the guides has doubled.” The “Highlights Tour” received high marks from students, teachers, and docents. In addition, two new fall programs were offered: “Contact: Conflict and Compromise,” offered to grades four through six, and “Nature at Night,” developed for children ages five to eight.

In 1994 The State Museum partnered with the Northern Tier Rural Distance Learning Consortium to create a distance-learning project that would link school children to State Museum collections and exhibits through interactive audio and video technology. The program began with seven counties and was later expanded to include more counties. Over sixteen thousand visitors enjoyed the “Stop and Learn Program” in 2000 at The State Museum.

Docents used hands-on objects to help participants explore exhibits located throughout The State Museum. Another educational program started in the new century was “Partners in History.” It was a three-year joint project of The State Museum, the State Archives, and the Central Susquehanna Intermediate School Unit. The project was funded by a $1 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching American History (TAH) program. The project began in 2002 and will continue through 2005. During this period, forty-five teachers will utilize The State Museum and the State Archives in developing educational materials for their school curriculums, with the help of archivists, curators, and historians. At the conclusion of the project, these materials were disseminated throughout the Commonwealth as learning tools to teach Pennsylvania and American history.

In April 2002 the first phase of The State Museum renovations began. The Pennsylvania Department of General Services repaired and re-roofed The State Museum’s dome ring and high roof areas. The ground floor galleries facing North Third Street were closed down to make way for a new lobby, exhibit gallery, student orientation area, learning area for youngsters—“Curiosity Connection”—and a new entrance for The State Museum. When The State Museum building was originally built, it was anticipated that the entrance off the museum plaza would function as the main entrance to the building. After the building opened in 1965, however, it was clear that the public preferred the entrances off of Third and Forster Streets. Therefore, it was decided that The State Museum would construct a new main entrance on Third Street to attract visitors. The entrance is framed by four pillars featuring banners bearing the name of the museum and the American and the Pennsylvania state flags. In front of the entrance doors is a large stone map of Pennsylvania featuring all the counties. On April 28, 2004, an official ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new entrance and lobby of The State Museum was held and several days later on May 1, 2004, “Curiosity Connection” officially opened to the public.

Curiosity Connection occupies twenty-three hundred
square feet on the ground floor adjacent to the new museum lobby. Since the 1970s, The State Museum had piloted places in the museum for children under the names such as Learning Resource Center and Curiosity Corner. But the Curiosity Connection is the first interactive environment for children age seven and under that orients them toward exhibits in The State Museum. It was designed by the architectural firm of Krent, Paffett, Carney Inc. There is the “Living Forest” where sound and light cycles reveal day and night critters that inhabit Pennsylvania’s forests. There is also the “Industry and Transportation Zone” where a miniature vehicle assembly line allows kids to create trucks while introducing them to the Commonwealth’s rich industrial heritage. Plus there is the “Pennsylvania Farmland” where an apple orchard and garden, complete with life-sized (and sometimes larger than life-sized) animals offer a chance to discover what lives on a farm both above and below ground. These are just a few of the features and attractions found within the Curiosity Connection. State Museum Director Anita Blackaby said: “The response to Curiosity Connection from children, parents, grandparents, and educators has been phenomenal. Everyone who has visited has said it was truly a remarkable experience and that they can’t wait to return.”256

“Curiosity Fest,” an all day event on June 19, 2004, brought in families, the media, and the general public to enjoy events and programs celebrating the official opening of Curiosity Connection and the completion of the first phase of The State Museum renovation program.

The second phase of The State Museum’s renovation plan called for construction of a Hall of History. Preliminary planning for the Hall of History began in 1985. In 1987 State Museum director Carl Nold announced that the museum had received a $100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Nold envisioned that the Hall of History would profile noted historical figures as well as lesser-known Pennsylvanians. “Through these peo-
ple’s words and what we know about them, we will tell the story of Pennsylvania’s past.” Shortly thereafter, museum curators started making plans for the gallery. This turned out to be an unexpectedly complicated task. The history of Pennsylvania is a long one, stretching back to the seventeenth century. Given the richness of the state’s history, museum staff debated what aspects of Pennsylvania to include in the gallery and in what exhibit format.

Meanwhile, the project was given a boost in January 2001, when Governor Tom Ridge briefly toured The State Museum and witnessed the interior problems such as the old escalator, installed when the museum was built in 1964. After touring the museum, Governor Ridge said that his 2001–2 state budget would include $80 million for renovation of the museum and the State Archives. In 2001, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a $20.7 billion state budget “that largely delivered on Governor Tom Ridge’s spending and tax-cut priorities,” but unfortunately excluded Ridge’s proposed funding for The State Museum and the Archives. Lawmakers reached a compromise with the governor on the issue, deciding that the state should float bonds or borrow money in order to pay for The State Museum renovations. The Boston architectural design firm of Krent, Paffett and Carney Inc. was commissioned to design both the “Curiosity Connection” and the new history gallery.

Barbara Franco became the new PHMC executive director in 2004, and with State Museum staff input she crafted a master planning process that began in September 2004. State Museum director Anita Blackaby said “this process will consider the entire interpretation of the museum and its collections for the public; from this we will then determine the final form of the History Galleries.”

The changes that The State Museum underwent in the 1980s and the 1990s should be interpreted in light of what was happening nationally in American museums.

A new entrance and lobby for The State Museum opened in 2004.
Throughout the nation, museums were striving to become “more socially responsive cultural institutions in service to the public.” For many museums this entailed “a shift from collection-driven institutions to visitor-centered museums.” The museum’s new focus on neglected aspects of its audience, such as pre-school age children and non-whites is one sign of becoming more “visitor-centered.”

The new orientation is also symbolically represented by The State Museum’s new entrance and lobby. Finally, it is mirrored in the museum’s new master plan, which The State Museum hopes to put in place in cooperation with the administration of Governor Ed Rendell. This plan will revolutionize the way The State Museum documents the heritage of all Pennsylvanians.
All record group citations refer to Record Group 13, Records of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, unless otherwise noted.

1. For instance, the *Harrisburg Telegraph* in a May 18, 1887 editorial said the desire for a new state capitol building, not preservation of artifacts was the motivation for the legislation.

2. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Vetoes. Bills Returned to the Legislature by the Governor, with his objections thereto, during its regular session, ending May 19, A.D. 1887*: 88. The proposed appropriation was for $235,000.


4. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Journal of the House of Representatives for the session of 1887*: 1667. Ironically, Boyer wanted the library/museum to be not an annex to the state capitol but a separate building because “if one of the other buildings should catch fire they would not by any means endanger the new library.” In fact, ten years later in 1897 when the 1825 state capitol burned down the library/museum was saved.


6. The building today is known as the Speaker Matthew J. Ryan Legislative Office Building.


9. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


16. “In 1869, the Indiana General Assembly enacted a law which provided ‘for the collection and preservation of a Geological and Mineralogical Cabinet of the Natural History of this State.’” Donald F. Carmo-ny, “The New Indiana State Museum,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 64 no.3, (September 1968): 191; The New York Museum owes its origins to a small geological collection acquired as a result of a govern-
36. State Museum staff members of the AAM were cited in membership lists in the American Association of Museums Proceedings, Vol. 1 (1907), Vol. 3 (1909), Vol. 5 (1911) Vol. 6 (1912).


40. Boyd P. Rothrock to Thomas Lynch Montgomery, 1 December 1918.


44. Biennial Report of the State Library and Museum from June 1, 1924 to May 31, 1926.


46. Frederick A. Godcharles to Dr. John A. H. Keith, 4 July 1928.


54. Collection statistics for the years, 1927, 1928, and 1929 were not compiled. But statistics were reported for the period 1924–1926. Report of the State Library and Museum, 1924–1925; Report of the State Library and Museum, 1925–1926.


60. Henry K. Deisher vitae; Laws of Pennsylvania for the session of 1917.

61. Gertrude B. Fuller to Joseph A. Rafter, 6 January 1938.


64. Anna A. McDonald to John A. H. Keith, 2 December 1927.

65. Frederic A. Godcharles to Dr. John A. H. Keith, 4 July 1928.


67. Names of the education section staff were verified by consulting the Pennsylvania Manual for the years 1906–1949 and the Capitol Telephone Directory (Harrisburg: Department of Property and Supplies, Bureau of Publications) for the years 1928–1949.

68. Frederic A. Godcharles to John A. H. Keith, 3 February 1928.

69. Frederic A. Godcharles to John A. H. Keith, 5 March 1928; Boyd P. Rothrock to Frederic A. Godcharles, 31 January 1929.

70. Frederic A. Godcharles to John A. H. Keith, 14 October 1930.


75. Mabel E. Bitner to Lillian F. Bly, 17 September 1941.


77. Ibid: 23–24.


84. Museum News, 15 November 1941.


89. Minutes of the PHMC, 4 June 1947. The lantern slides were eventually transferred to the State Archives.


91. Minutes of the PHMC, 3 June 1948.


93. “The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Report for the Decade, 1952–1962.” Although the document is unsigned, it appears to have been written by S. K Stevens, PHMC executive director.

96. Minutes of the PHMC, 2 October 1947.
98. Minutes of the PHMC, 4 March 1948.
100. Charles Steese to Kenneth Dearolf, 23 August 1948.
104. Henry K. Deisher to Mrs. F.B. Appleby, 5 October 1939; Mabel E. Bitner to Louise Albright, 17 November 1939.
105. Minutes of the PHMC, 6 December 1947.
106. Minutes of the PHMC, 6 October 1948; Laws of Pennsylvania for the session of 1949.
107. Minutes of the PHMC, 2 May 1946.
109. Minutes of the PHMC, 4 November 1948.
118. Ibid.
120. In his autobiography, Rosenberger says it was Governor Martin’s notion of a William Penn Memorial that he was opposed to: “the very thought of an archives building for Pennsylvania’s military records and calling it a William Penn Memorial was as repulsive as it was ridiculous.” Homer Tope Rosenberger, Adventures and Philosophy of a Pennsylvania Dutchman: An autobiography in a Broad Setting (Bellefonte: Pennsylvania Heritage Inc., 1971): 538.
126. Minutes of the PHMC, December 6, 1945.
128. “Analysis of Commitments and Expenditures, Act 80-A-1945 as amended by Act 41A-1947, as of February 25, 1948.” In RG 20, Department of General Services. A search of the Pennsylvania State Archives also revealed no contract for Zantzinger and Borie. It is also not clear whether Zantzinger and Borie were ever paid for the work they did perform. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, which has a notable archival collection on archives, has no information on Zantzinger and Borie. Email to the author from Michael Seneca, 14 May 2004.
132. See Fairfax Leary Jr. to N. L. Wymard, 20 January 1950, MG 190, James H. Duff Papers. Leary notes that Duff does not seem to favor the building.
141. Frank W. Melvin to George M. Leader, 7 June 1956. In MG 207, George M. Leader Papers.
1969: Ibid.
1972: Donald Hoff to William N. Richards, 30 June 1972.
1975: John Tyler to Richard Getz, 17 November 1971, Files in the office of the industry and technology curator, State Museum.
1976: Revised Script for Transportation Gallery, 12 February 1972. In files of the industry and technology curator, State Museum. Curators during the early years of the William Penn Memorial Museum some times referred to the Hall of Industry and Technology as “Transportation Hall.”
1977: Transcript of recorded meeting of 10 June 1975 and letter, Otis Morse to John Tyler, 10 June 1975.
1978: Caron N. Ehehalt to Leone J. Keene, 29 September 1975. Files in the office of the industry and technology curator, State Museum. Ehehalt was the president of MarkeTects.
1979: Dedication invitation, State Museum Bureau director’s files.
1981: The summary of The State Museum’s collections here is based upon the author’s survey of museum artifact and specimen collection files in The State Museum’s collection management section.
1982: Other Pennsylvania first ladies followed Mrs. Martin’s example. For instance, the wife of Governor Dick Thornburgh donated her inaugural gown to The State Museum in 1986. See Cal Turner, “Presentation of gown to museum occasions memories for Ginny,” Harrisburg Evening News, 4 December 1986.
2000: Minutes of the PHMC, 10 April 1974.
2006: Larry E. Tise to all field staff, 11 May 1984.


253. Personal communication to the author from Rhonda Newton.

254. “Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Infrastructure Renovations and Update,” Department of General Services, State Museum and Archives-Phase 1, DGS Project 948-54 (946–12).


