

Did you know?



Did you know that "Commonwealth," the statue on top of the Capitol Building, is gilded with 7,500 leaves of 23.75 Karat gold?

"Commonwealth" is a 17' 8" gilded bronze statue designed for the dome of the Pennsylvania Capitol building by Joseph Hinton Perry, one of the Capitol architects. She weighs six thousand pounds and was originally placed atop the majestic Capitol Dome on May 25, 1905. She remained there until cracks and structural defects forced the Capitol Preservation Committee to take action to save her. She was removed by helicopter on December 13, 1997 and sent to Conservation Technical Associates of Connecticut for refinishing and crack repair. She returned to the Dome on September 12, 1998, where she has stayed ever since.

In popular belief there is some confusion as to the figure's actual name and significance. The newspapers at the time referred to her as "Miss

Penn" and reported that her face was modeled after that of Joseph M. Huston's wife, Mr. Huston being the architect of the Capitol Building itself. Other names that float around are "Miss Commonwealth," "Miss Liberty," or even "Letitia" because she is thought to have been modeled on William Penn's daughter. According to Perry, the statue "has no other significance than the symbolic embodiment of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," thus her name. She holds a mace representing statehood in her left hand and reaches out with her right in benediction. Much of the uncertainty may come from the fact that the statue is now simply a part of the building and no longer considered a separate piece of artwork, or perhaps it is a hold-over from that long ago newspaper article that got it wrong. Either way, people do not need to know her title to know "Commonwealth" is indeed a shining symbol of what it is to be a Pennsylvanian.

Archives Day at the Capitol

Archives Day was a huge success! Thank you to all who stopped by to talk with us. Archives Day is a wonderful opportunity for the House Archives to disseminate information about our collections and to answer general archival and historical questions. A sampling of our collections was on display with four posters dedicated to different aspects of the Archives' collections, such as "Personal Papers," "Oral History," "Campaigns" and "Legislative Work."

We enjoyed the interaction with our colleagues and listening to them recollect their experiences and memories. We even received some research assignments where we had to go back to the Archives and check some facts. Many people asked about what types of things we collect, especially from Members, and some wanted to know if we wanted campaign memorabilia. Several people mentioned they were running out of space in their offices, and we told them we have the ability to store materials for them.

We hope you know more about us and what we do, but if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact us.



October 31, 2007
(Left to Right) Holly Mengel and
Heather Deppen Hillard, Archives Staff

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Archives

DECEMBER 2007

PIECING IT TOGETHER

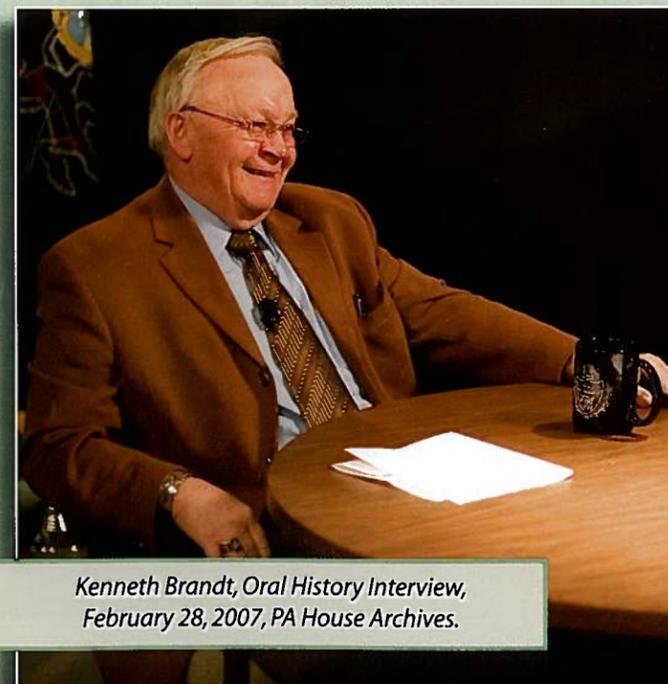
Keystone of the PA House's History

On November 17th, 2004, the House Oral History Project had its first interview; three years and seventy-two interviews later we are still going strong! We have, literally, traveled throughout the state, visiting many former legislators in their homes, as well as talking to many right here in the Democratic and Republican studios in the Capitol. After gathering the research and preparing the questions, it is always a unique experience from our vantage point to hear former legislators discuss their personal memories of the House. They really breathe life into the pages of history books!

In addition to the interviews, the Oral History Project has also accumulated personal papers donated from over thirty-five former Representatives. These items include news clippings, photographs, diaries, speeches, committee and public hearing information, prime sponsored legislation, awards, and campaign memorabilia like signs, flyers and buttons (and much, much more!)



Carl Nelson, Oral History Interview, August 23, 2006,
PA House Archives.



Kenneth Brandt, Oral History Interview,
February 28, 2007, PA House Archives.

All parts of the Oral Histories, which include the audio, visual and written content, as well as the collections of Personal Papers, are housed in the House Archives for the purposes of archival research and future publication. And, as former Representative Dr. George Haudenshield (R - 1959-1970) said, "I appreciate your interviewing me, and I hope this lasts forever and ever." Well, good Doctor, it certainly will.



In Their Own Words

In April 1983, with very high unemployment rates in Sharon and Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Representative Michael Gruitza and then Representative, now Senator, John Wozniak set out to raise awareness by walking from the Capitol Building in Harrisburg to the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Because very little could be done at the state level, they felt that their constituents deserved more and took their cause to the federal government. This is their story in their own words.



(Left to Right) Wozniak, Gruitza, and Thomas Phillip "Tip" O'Neill, Jr.

John Wozniak:

In the spring of 1983, the city of Johnstown, like many rustbelt cities across America, was in big trouble. The unemployment rate was almost 25%, steel mills were closing left and right, and morale was at an all-time low. I was a young state representative, a freshman actually. People would come into my office crying, angry, scared. They were losing their jobs, their homes, and mostly losing their faith in everything, and our area wasn't alone. This was happening all over Pennsylvania, all over the country, so fellow neophyte Rep. Mike Gruitza, my partner-in-crime in those days, came up with an idea. Since no one would listen to us lowly state officials, we decided to take a page out of the civil rights movement and have a march on Washington. It wasn't so much of a march since it was just the two of us. We called it the "Walk for Work." Our goal was to get the attention of Congress and President Ronald Reagan. Let them know that the national recession had turned into depression, and we weren't going to stand by and watch our communities die.

On April 6th, Mike and I left the State Capitol Building and headed for Washington, and I, for one, had no idea what I was getting myself into. We made it to our first stop in York after ten hours of walking. My feet were sore, my back ached, and I knew this was going to be a test of wills.

Looking back on this, there are a lot of stories that I can't share. Okay, I won't share them. But time heals all wounds as well as the countless blisters I had on my feet. I must say that Mike is a lot tougher than I am. I may outweigh him by some forty pounds, but he is a lot tougher than me. There was an incident with a reporter, but I'll let Mike tell that story.

Looking back on it, though, I am proud of the Walk for Work. Some say that desperate times call for desperate measures. And while walking some 125 miles to our nation's Capitol may not have delivered quite the results we were looking for, I can honestly say I'd do it all over again. Except next time I'd wear better shoes.



(Left to Right) Gruitza and Wozniak



(Left to Right) Gruitza and Wozniak

Michael Gruitza:

I didn't count the steps, but after the first 10 miles or so, I felt every one.

In April of 1983, State Rep. John Wozniak, now a state Senator, and I walked 120 miles from Harrisburg to Washington, D.C. to focus attention on the skyrocketing unemployment rates in Johnstown (24.8 percent) and Sharon (23.9 percent), the highest jobless rates in the nation at the time.

Our local economies were reeling from the thousands of jobs being lost in the steel and manufacturing industries. People were losing their homes... it was terrible.

John and I were frustrated because there was virtually nothing that could be done about the situation at the state level, so we decided to trek to Washington to make our case for rescuing the steel industry and let the President, Congress, and the American people know that while the national economy was in a recession, in our local districts, thousands were dealing with an outright depression.

The "Walk for Work" had been my idea. I was thirty-one at the time, and fellow spring chicken Wozniak, then twenty-seven, agreed to join me.

After searching fruitlessly for American-made sneakers to wear for the hike, we set out from the Capitol Building in Harrisburg on April 6.

By the time we hit our hotel in York ten hours, twenty-four miles, and several blisters later, we knew it wasn't going to be a stroll; it was going to be a trial of endurance.

"I'm going to kill you for this," John told me in front of a reporter... jokingly, I believe, but I'll bet the thought crossed his mind more than once.

As we passed through Baltimore, the mayor made us honorary residents, but working people who gathered to greet us at

numerous stops made even bigger impressions. It helped us to go on knowing that our steps were appreciated.

Finally, six-and-a-half days after we departed Harrisburg, we hobbled up the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington. We had hoped to deliver our message to President Ronald Reagan, but his office said that was not possible. The furthest up the Republican chain we got was then-Congressman Tom Ridge of Erie, who graciously accepted our list of proposals and promised to forward them to the White House. The late Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neil also received us, as did Congressman John Murtha.

Looking back on it twenty-one years later, I can say it was a challenge I'll always remember, along with sharing plenty of laughs with my still good friend Sen. Wozniak to get through the pain and the miles.

The rescue of the steel industry did not take place, but some aspects of the proposals we took to Washington were incorporated in legislation, such as tax incentives for job creation, establishing enterprise zones in areas of high unemployment, and eliminating some of the red tape for job and housing creation projects.

I like to think our "Walk for Work" played a part, even if just a tiny one, in helping to focus the attention of the American people and Congress on the desperate unemployment situation in Sharon and Johnstown.



(Left to Right) Gruitza and Wozniak

A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR HOUSE HISTORY....

HAS HARRISBURG ALWAYS BEEN THE CAPITAL OF PENNSYLVANIA?

No. The Pennsylvania Colony established its first capital in 1643 at Tinicum Island in the Delaware River.

William Penn arrived in 1682 and convened the first General Assembly in Chester, which remained the capital until the following year. Philadelphia became the state capital when the Provincial Government was established there in 1683.

Lancaster became the capital on the first Monday of November 1799 and remained so until Harrisburg was designated as the seat of state government in 1812.

Taken from: *Creating a Commonwealth, A Guide to your State Government*, pg. 7



View of the PA House of Representatives, Photograph courtesy of PA State Archives, MG-75 Joseph M. Huston Collection.