

A Closer Look at Our House History....

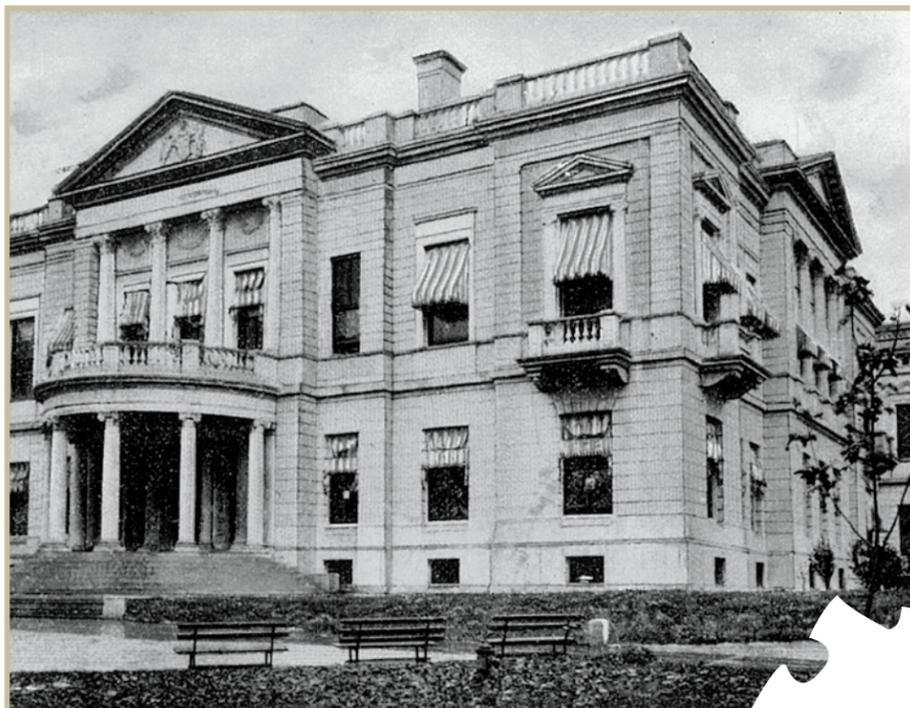
What is the oldest building in
the Capitol Complex?

The Ryan Building is the oldest building. Its construction began in 1893 and ended in 1894, and it survived the 1897 fire that destroyed the original Hills Capitol. The style of the Italianate Executive and State Library Building came from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which famously influenced many architects of the time and inspired the "City Beautiful" movement. Its front offices were the Executive Office of the Governor, and the back of the building, where Republican Research now is, used to be the State Library. The current Ryan Library was the precursor to the State Museum and displayed many Civil War relics, as well as the State's collection of valuable paintings and mounted specimens of birds and animals from the World's Fair. Eventually, both the State Library and the State Museum left for bigger quarters, and the Annex, as it was then called, was left without a clear purpose. The Executive Offices moved to the new Capitol in 1906.

The Ryan Building stood vacant for several years until the early 1970's when some Members and legislative support staff moved in. The building was falling into disrepair, though not dangerously so, but it was not until 1997 that the Legislature initiated a plan to conserve and refurbish the building. Matthew J. Ryan was one of the biggest proponents of restoring the building, which is why it was renamed in his honor in 1999.



Matthew J. Ryan Building circa early 1900's, photographs courtesy of
the Capitol Preservation Committee



Archives

PIECING IT TOGETHER

MARCH 2009

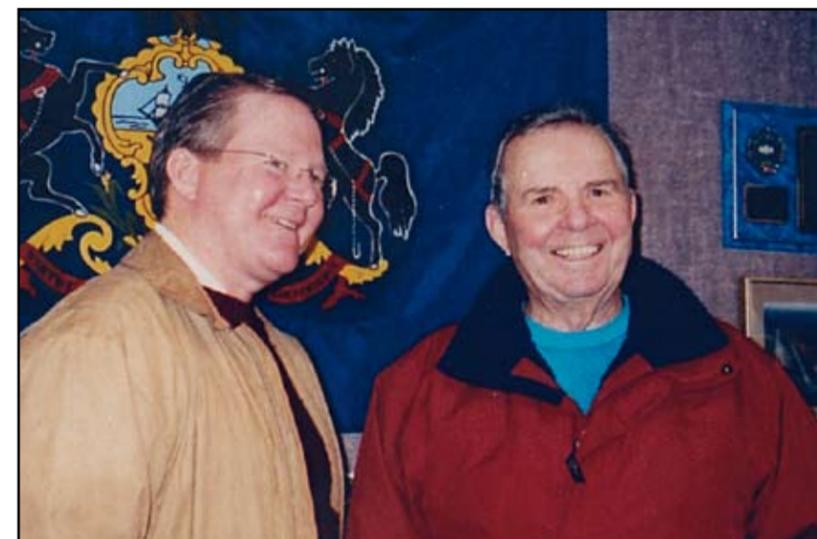
House Families

Within the past fifty years, at least twenty-five Members have followed a relative into House service. The oral histories and personal papers in the House Archives' collections bring to light different reasons why younger generations and spouses decided to follow their family members to the House. For instance, Rep. Katherine McHale took over her husband's seat when he volunteered for active duty in the Gulf in 1991. Also consider the Wilts, the first family to put three generations of Members into the House. Because they served different districts, two generations, Rep. Raymond Wilt and Rep. Roy Wilt, were in the House at the same time. Rep. Kenneth E. Lee followed his father, former Speaker Kenneth B. Lee, into the House, as Republican Leader Samuel Smith did his father, L. Eugene Smith. Great examples of just how varied the family experiences were are exemplified in three House families: the Laughlins, the Manderinos, and the Wrights.

SEE MORE INSIDE!



(left to right) Kenneth E. Lee and Kenneth B. Lee, Papers of Kenneth E. Lee



(left to right) Samuel Smith and L. Eugene Smith, courtesy of Samuel Smith

CHARLIE & SUSAN LAUGHLIN



(left to right) Susan and Charles Laughlin, photograph courtesy of Susan Laughlin

Rep. Charles Laughlin was not always involved in politics. Before coming to the House of Representatives, he was a produce manager at his hometown A&P, but when he needed an activity to get his mind off of his daughter's passing, Rep. Laughlin began working on campaigns for local candidates. After coming to the House in 1973, he relied on his wife at home to help with constituent services. Susan Laughlin took phone calls and answered the door at their home in Beaver

County. In her oral history interview, Rep. Susan Laughlin reminisces about the time her husband announced their home phone number on a radio show long after he had his own district office. When she asked him why he had done that, Representative Laughlin told his wife she was "the only one he could trust."

That trust continued after he fell ill; Rep. Charles Laughlin told his son, "If I don't make it, tell your mom to run for my seat." Rep. Charles Laughlin died sixteen days before the election, and Susan Laughlin quickly organized a write-in campaign to discharge her husband's wishes. She sent out stickers for people to use in the voting booth. In the end, she received 9,000 write-in votes to Rep. Charles Laughlin's 1,100 votes, fulfilling her husband's earlier prophecy that she was "probably the only one who [could] beat [him] on the ballot."

Once in the House, Rep. Susan Laughlin felt comfortable. Initially, she sat in the same seat as her husband, next to Rep. Keith McCall and Rep. Tony Melio. She also spent time in her early House career finishing work that her husband had started before his illness. For example, in 1989 she worked on legislation that would become Act 63, creating a permanent system of paying property taxes in installments, legislation that had been in Rep. Charles Laughlin's plans during previous sessions. Rep. Susan Laughlin credits some of her legislative success to people's fond memories of her late husband.

She also continued her husband's care of their Beaver County constituents. In her oral history interview, Rep. Susan Laughlin said, "It seems like because of Charlie Laughlin they just felt I was their friend." She also recounted a story in which a constituent came into her office for help after "praying to Charlie for a week." Much like her husband, Susan Laughlin made sure to take care of her constituents at home despite the heavy demands of Harrisburg.

JAMES & KATHY MANDERINO



(left to right) James and Kathy Manderino, photograph courtesy of Kathy Manderino

before he died while in office as Speaker of the House. In 1992 when Rep. Dick Hayden of the 194th District approached Kathy Manderino, she had not even thought of being involved in politics. Hayden was looking for a female candidate to take over his seat after his retirement and recommended Manderino for the position. She resisted for a while, as she had no interest in being a public figure, but eventually she decided that "the negatives were really minor compared to the pluses of the impact I [could] make in people's lives."

While Rep. Susan Laughlin took over her husband's seat immediately after his passing, the father/daughter legacy of Reps. James and Kathy Manderino developed through completely different circumstances. Rep. James Manderino had served in the House of Representatives from 1966-1989

Rep. Kathy Manderino indicated in a personal interview that her father's career in the House did not lead her to run for Representative. She did, however, mention that she grew up with a positive view of the job because people were constantly stopping her father on the street to thank him for the ways he had helped them. The involvement that she had in his political career was rather minimal: the children never tagged along to any events, and the only campaign help she remembered doing was "stuffing envelopes but not being allowed to lick the stamps because [she] was too young, and they were too expensive." He never mentioned to her that he would like her to have a career in politics, but he "softly encouraged" her to attend law school and become a lawyer, which she did at Temple University.

Manderino surprised her friends and family by running for office in Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties, rather than Westmoreland County, her father's former district. While lauded in the Daily News as "the daughter of 'the Babe Ruth of Pennsylvania Politics,'" she ran a campaign that did not take advantage of the use of her father's name (n.d.). In fact, on January 6, 1993, the Greensburg Tribune Review said, "the newest Manderino strongly signaled that she will be independent and will try not to trade on her father's reputation as one of the most effective politicians to ever serve in Pennsylvania's House of Representatives." Rep. Kathy Manderino carved out a niche for herself in the State House independently of her father because she wanted to help her constituents, not because her father was a popular and powerful Legislator.

House Families

JAMES & MATTHEW WRIGHT



(left to right) James and Matthew Wright, photograph courtesy of Matthew Wright

James and Matthew Wright, both former Representatives of Bucks County's 142nd District, present an excellent example of political interest being passed down from family member to family member. James Wright, Matthew's father, served in the House of Representatives for twenty-five years, a career spanning the years 1965 to 1990. Working out of his home office in Bucks County, Rep. James Wright included all of his children in the political process. As

Rep. Matthew Wright remembered in his oral history interview of November 21, 2006, "As we were growing up, we almost became the free staff of the office, trying to understand the problem, get to the root of the problem, anticipate what my father's questions were going to be." Matthew also accompanied his father on numerous trips to the State Capitol: "And as [my father] became committee chairs, he would have to come to Harrisburg just for the day, or many times, just to have meetings, and so, therefore, quite often, he brought me up with him. I had a lot of fun... I could wander all around and go to the [State] Museum and go down to the river, et cetera."

Despite growing up exploring the Capitol and living with his father's job and responsibilities, Matthew Wright did not directly follow his father into state politics. Instead, Matthew chose to obtain a college degree and pursue a career in business management until the late 1980s when James Wright was diagnosed with cancer. Following his long five-year struggle, the elder Wright decided to withdraw his name from the ballot for the 1991 election. Faced with an empty seat versus a strong Democratic candidate, the local Republican Party scrambled to find a replacement for Rep. James Wright. The party eventually approached Matthew Wright: "It was a very strong candidate, and pretty much everybody believed that they needed a strong candidate to replace my father or else the race would be lost, so after many people sort of vied to try to get it, the political Republican Party got together [and] tried to find the replacement candidate. I did not want to run." Finally, with the support and encouragement of both his father and his wife, the younger Wright made up his mind to run.

Rep. Matthew Wright's first election was successful, mainly due to the support his father had in the district. "Jim Wright was well-liked in the community ... [people were] familiar with the name—a lot of people liked him, so there was a lot of the benefit of the doubt... [saying], 'Matt, if you're anything like your dad,' or 'Your dad did a good job: you're worth a try.'" Although Rep. Matthew Wright was able to use his father's influence, popularity, and continuous support to help secure his first election, he was able to blaze his own trail in the House of Representatives and create a fifteen-year legacy in Pennsylvania state politics independently of his father.

The Laughlins, the Manderinos, and the Wrights are just three examples that sample the varying experiences of families who have made House service their very own "family affair." For more information on House families, please consult the personal papers submitted to the Archives by House Members.

PA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Archives

Room B-4
Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
(717) 783-3866
records@pabmc.net