



Speakers of the Pennsylvania House Book Available Online

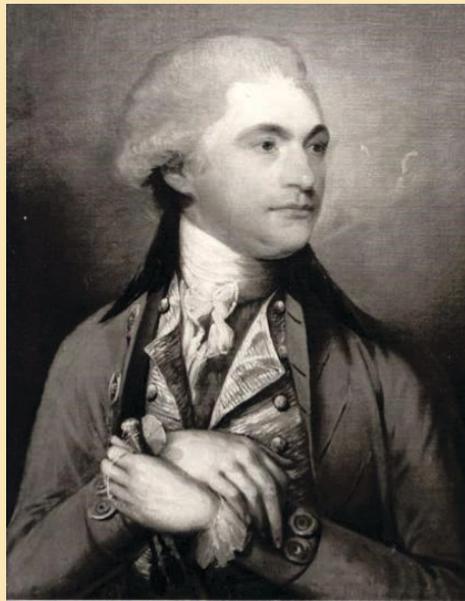
The House Archives is pleased to announce that its latest project is ready to be revealed. In conjunction with the Speaker's Office, the House Archives has updated and revamped the *Speakers of the Pennsylvania House* book. The new publication can be viewed on the House's homepage at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/SpeakerBios/index.cfm>.

The Speaker biographies can be searched by name, political party, county represented, years of service, or using a key word.

The Speaker's chair has been filled by many diverse persons coming from a wide range of backgrounds, engaging in a variety of professions, and bringing unique visions for both the House and the people of Pennsylvania. The Speakers include those who served in both the Colonial Assembly and the House after Independence. Here are just a few of the highlights from our research.

Wealthiest Man After Independence

William Bingham, who served as Speaker in 1791, continued his distinguished political career by serving in the Pennsylvania State Senate, as well as in the United States Senate. He was additionally known for his successful business



William Bingham

Photo: Stuart, Gilbert. William Bingham. 1795. *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804*, Robert C. Alberts, Houghton Mifflin Company, cover.

endeavors and large real estate investments, including a purchase of more than 2 million acres of land in what is today the state of Maine. He also co-founded the Bank of North America.

Despite his impressive achievements, he is perhaps best remembered for his efforts during the Revolutionary War. Though initially serving the British government, Bingham switched his loyalties to support the colonists. He served as a spy, propagandist, and facilitated the smuggling of weapons to the colonies. He emerged as a millionaire at the end of the war after his successful efforts in intercepting British cargo ships.

Speaker Bingham continued to make headlines long after his death when in 1964, a trust he established in 1804 was liquidated and his remaining fortune distributed among 315 heirs.

Source: "Heirs of 1804 Trust To Divide \$838,000," *New York Times*, November 15, 1964. <http://www.nytimes.com/1964/11/15/heirs-of-1804-trust-to-divide-838000.html>.

Speakers Book *continued*

THE UNHAPPY DELINQUENTS.

There promises to be an abundance of fun here when the house convenes tomorrow afternoon and when the fifty or more members who were delinquent on Friday afternoon are called up to purge themselves before the bar of the house of contempt. Among the number to be called up is John S. Rhey, of Cambria county. Mr. Rhey left the house on Friday afternoon to witness a ball game between the Harrisburg and Altoona clubs, and he had scarcely worked himself up to enthusiasm over the game when the sergeant-at-arms appeared. Mr. Rhey did not obey the summons, however, and it is questionable whether he will appear before the bar of the house to offer an excuse for his absence. He was conspicuous in making laws for this State before many of our present legislative bosses were born, and naturally he will be slow to compromise himself before them.

An Unruly Baseball Fan

John S. Rhey, who served as Speaker in 1852, was a lawyer and District Attorney in Armstrong County before his House service. After his one term as Speaker, he was re-elected more than 20 years later to again serve as a Member of the House. During his final term in office, Rhey made headlines when he refused to return to the House Floor after being personally summoned by the Sergeant-At-Arms while taking in a baseball game.

Left: "The Unhappy Delinquents," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, April 22, 1889.

A Renaissance Man

Henry K. Strong, who served as Speaker in 1855, had an incredible amount of professional pursuits in addition to his House service. He was an accomplished author, publisher and editor. His literary efforts included a play, historical monographs, and even geological studies and financial reports. Strong practiced law, engaged in coal mining operations, and even served as the State Librarian of Pennsylvania from 1842 to 1845.



Fathers and Sons

Two sets of fathers and sons have served as Speaker of the House: Joseph Lawrence and his son, William C. A. Lawrence as well as Isaac Norris and his son, Isaac Norris II.

Pictured: William C. A. Lawrence
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Brady-Handy Collection, LC-DIG-cwpbh-00058.



Benjamin Franklin

Perhaps Pennsylvania's most famous Speaker is Benjamin Franklin. In addition to being a renowned scientist, author, diplomat and Founding Father, he also held numerous positions in Pennsylvania's colonial government. Franklin served as the Clerk of the General Assembly from 1736-1750, and as a member of the House representing Philadelphia City in 1751-1764, 1773 and 1775. On May 26, 1764, Franklin was unanimously elected Speaker after the resignation of Isaac Norris. However, Franklin and several other Quakers lost their seats in the election later that year — making his tenure as Speaker brief.

Pictured: Duplessis, Joseph Siffred. Benjamin Franklin. 1785. Gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery. <http://npg.si.edu>.

Groundhog Day in the House



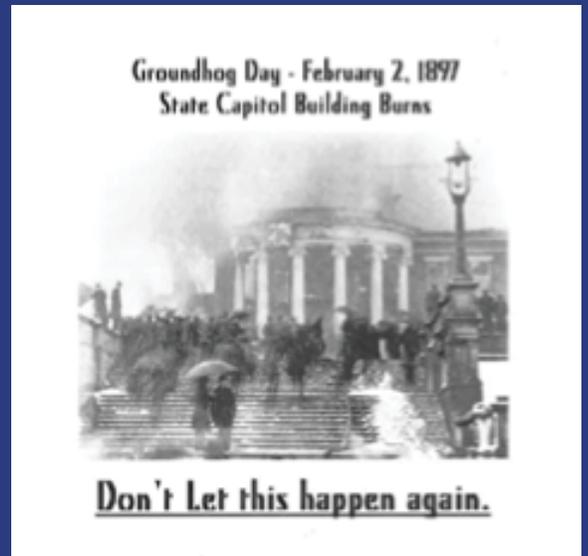
Every February 2nd we eagerly await Punxsutawney Phil to predict if we will have six more weeks of winter or if spring is around the corner. Pennsylvania's House of Representatives has several connections to this fun tradition.

William Orlando Smith (pictured left), former House Member from Jefferson County (1889 to 1898), was a well-known newspaper owner and editor. One of his newspapers, the *Punxsutawney Spirit*, is credited with first reporting on Groundhog Day in 1886. The following year, Punxsutawney began the annual tradition of watching Phil emerge from his hole to see if he spots his shadow.

On February 2, 1897, Pennsylvania's Capitol caught on fire during a snowstorm and was destroyed. The Legislature was in session and had to evacuate. This unfortunate Groundhog Day incident in the Capitol's history has been retold with humorous interpretations over the years, including one on a fundraiser invitation for former Speaker of the House Sam Smith (Armstrong, Clearfield, Indiana and Jefferson Counties, 1987-2014). The invite urged supporters to keep him in office to prevent a reoccurrence of the Groundhog Day disaster as his 4th floor office would put him in an ideal position to douse any potential fires.



Pictured: Stephen Miskin, Punxsutawney Phil, Bill Cooper (former Punxsutawney Groundhog Club President), and Speaker Sam Smith.



The History

100 years ago next Groundhog Day, the Pennsylvania State Capitol burned. The Legislature attended to the morning calendar but called a recess when the building began to fill with smoke. Within moments, Legislators were urged to "Get their buckets" but the Capitol was burning in at least 20 places and within hours the building was nothing but rubble. Reportedly the first to notice the fire was State Rep. Ezekial Smith, great-great grandfather of State Representative Sam Smith of Punxsutawney. Smith may have started the fire himself by baking Groundhog cookies for his colleagues.

Next Groundhog Day marks the Centennial of the Fire which destroyed the State Capitol.

Keep Punxsutawney's Sam Smith On The Job to prevent a recurrence of the disaster.

From his office on the Fourth Floor of the Capitol, Sam will be in an ideal position to douse the fire if one should break out again.

You're invited to
State Representative Sam Smith's Volunteer Firefighter Breakfast
to benefit
Citizens for Sam Smith
dedicated to keeping Sam Smith on the job.

Archiving Tips: Oral Histories

The House Archives has been conducting oral histories with former House Members since 2004. So far the Archives has conducted 141 interviews, asking Members to recall their time in office by sharing their favorite memories about campaigning, issues they were passionate about, and the relationships they formed.

Oral histories are a great way to learn about the past through someone's personal memories, aspirations, and disappointments. They provide a unique source of information that can't be gained through more traditional primary resources such as newspapers and government documents. Interviewing your own family members can be a

Pictured: Our most recent interview with former Representative Brandon Neuman (right) (D, Washington County, 2011-2017) conducted by House Archives Research Analyst Drew Greenwald (left). Neuman recently resigned his seat after being elected judge to the Washington County 27th Judicial District Court of Common Pleas.

To view transcriptions of interviews with former House Members, visit our website at:
<http://www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives/oralHist.cfm>.

For more information on oral history research, check out the Oral History Association's principles and best practices page:
<http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.

great way to learn about your family's history.

Tips for conducting an oral history interview:

- Do your research! Have a list of general or open-ended topics you want to address, as well as specific questions about things you are interested in knowing more about.
- Begin interviews with relaxed and easy questions, and build up to more serious or sensitive topics.
- Be patient with the interviewee — some of the best stories come up unexpectedly!
- Record the interview (audio or video). Transcribing the interview to make sure the information won't be lost is also a great idea.



DID YOU KNOW?

The House Archives has launched a blog! “On Second Consideration...” features news, articles, and fun facts from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Archives. Please check it out to engage in discussions about topics that are highlighted and to share any stories of your own. Visit us at: <http://pahousearchives1682.blogspot.com/>.