Charles has provided a factual account of the Association's origins. What he asked me to do is reminisce about my experiences in the Association. He pointed that I have been involved in the Association for more than half of its history. To paraphrase George Washington as he subdued the "Newburgh Conspiracy," I have grown gray and nearly blind in the service of our "Glorious Cause." Herb Eshkowitz called me the Association's "grand old man." I like the "grand" part but not the "old." I wish that Charlie Glatfelter could be here so that I could give that label to him.

It's difficult for me to believe that I attended my first P.H.A. convention in 1961. Phil Klein, who was known as "Mr. Pennsylvania history," urged me to attend. Bob Murry, Warren Hassler, Ira Brown, Neil McNall, and later Gerry Eggert were the Penn State contingent. Indeed, we Americanists were expected to attend the PHA convention. I had additional motivation. My initial appointment at Penn State was a temporary one. I did as many of you have done which was to go to a
convention to meet people who might offer me a tenure track position. Although I didn’t obtain any offers, I did meet interesting people.

Among them was Lawrence Henry Gipson, whom Charles mentioned as one of our founders. I was in awe of him and asked, “How did you manage to write fifteen volumes on ‘The British Empire Before the American Revolution?’” He replied, “You know, John, I haven’t taught a class since 1937.” Already enjoying my teaching, I asked “Don’t you miss the students?” He said somewhat impatiently, “I see a student now and then, and that is quite sufficient, thank you.” My admiration for him as a scholar remained intact but lost some of its mystery.

Despite not having a tenure track position, that first year at Penn State was delightful. Coach Rip Engle noticed that I attended football practice more regularly than some of his players and gave me a pass so that I could avoid being mistaken for a spy from a rival team. That was valid only until Rip retired. Later, I had the opportunity to tell Rip’s successor what a nice person Rip was. But I digress.

During the following year, the Penn State people decide that they wanted me to stay, and I decided that I wanted to. In 1965, as I was preparing new classes handling graduate students for the first time, and beginning to serve on committees, Phil Klein suggested that I become the Association’s secretary. I protested that I had enough to do without that. He explained that the Department assigned these tasks to new people, and that if they could handle them, they kept them on. If they couldn’t, they let them go. So I became the secretary. Charles said that he had a similar introduction at Indiana University to become the book review editor of Pennsylvania History.

At that time, the secretary’s job description was broad. I notified officers of meetings, wrote the minutes of council meetings, compiled reports of the annual meetings, maintained the membership list, addressed the envelopes for the mailing of the journal, sent back or missing copies of the journal and sent issues of “Pennsylvania History Studies” as requested, sent invoices for dues, received payments, and answered correspondence. In conjunction with my teaching and attempts to publish, lest I perish, all of this was overwhelming! Consequently, I asked that the position be divided to create the position of business secretary and corresponding secretary. Fortunately for me, the council agreed, and in 1968 Charlie Glatfelter became the corresponding secretary.

One task that the business secretary did not have at that time but has now was to tally the receipts and classify them as student, regular, sustaining,
contributing, lifetime dues, payments for Pennsylvania History Studies, contributions to special funds, and grants. I would pack the receipts and send them to treasurer Richard Wright, an Erie businessman, who, I suspect, had one of his employees deposit them in an account. Richard had followed his father, Ross Pier Wright who Phil Klein told me had said that the sheriff would never foreclose on the Pennsylvania Historical Association. No doubt, Richard also would have prevented that. His treasurer’s report was not as exact as is Bob Blackson’s. At council meetings, he would say, “The treasury is in good shape, and if it isn’t, I’ll make it so.” I suspect that, at times, he carried the Association financially. Somehow, Richard enabled the Association to become the beneficiary of a will that formed the Association’s first endowment fund, on which we have been building ever since. As far as I know, he never disclosed how he was able to provide us with this monetary windfall. As the Association became more complex, some members were restless with such vague financial management. Richard Wright resigned in 1986, and was succeeded by Bob Crist who reported with significantly greater precision. He, Charlie Glatfelter, and then Bob Blackson became the Association’s Alexander Hamiltons who place the finances on a more regular and stable basis.

Richard’s father has been “present at the creation” of the Association, and Richard followed in his father’s footsteps. Many of the council members also seemed to serve year after year. There didn’t seem to be much turn-over in the council’s membership. Consequently, several of us concluded that new blood would invigorate the body and proposed that the council members serve for only two consecutive terms and then sit out a year before becoming eligible for re-election. After this policy passed, a few long-time council members declined to accept re-nomination. Apparently, they enjoyed not having to sit though those long late night council meetings.

The custom was to hold council meetings after the evening banquet. The council acted as a “committee of the whole” and discussed every minute detail of the Association’s business. An issue such as whether a booklet should be priced at $4.95 or $5.05 inspired endless debate. After one such session, I developed such a severe headache that my good friend Jack Coleman drove me around the neighborhood until he could find an all-night store that sold aspirin. It took us a long time to realize that meeting after a reception at which we had drunk good wine followed by a banquet at which we had eaten too much good food was not the most effective time at which to conduct our business. It took us until 1989 to change the council’s meeting times to a
more reasonable hour. Since then, most of our fall council meetings have been held in the afternoon, as the session will be today. The length of our discussions now is limited by our desire to go to the reception to drink good wine and to the banquet to eat good food.

Also facilitating greater efficiency was the new constitution that Charlie Glatfelter prepared. It went into effect in 1984. I really appreciated it because I became president in that year. According to the new constitution, the president was to serve only two years whereas my predecessors had served for three years. I had been the second vice president, as the former constitution required three of us. If John Nance Garner thought that he, as the sole vice president, he had nothing to do but check the newspapers on the president’s health, you can imagine what a second or third vice president’s duties were. The vice president who was ahead of me, Bob Carlson, said that he wanted to help me by resigning so that I could become president. I tried to tell him that would not be helpful, but he resigned anyway. I was elected and thought of what a reporter had asked George Leader when he was elected governor of Pennsylvania in 1954. “Do you want congratulations or a bottle of aspirin?” I served my term, carried out my duties to the best of my ability, and peacefully turned over my position to my successor as John Adams had done a few years before me.

The new constitution was deficient in one respect. It did not provide for ex-presidents. We can’t give speeches for thousands of dollars as our counterpart Ronald Reagan did. What was to become of us? Whether President Charles Glatfelter, my successor, was concerned about his own future or was worried about my return to power, such as it was, is not clear. According to the minutes of the council meeting on October 21, 1988, he wrote

In many parts of the world, the only safe way to deal with a former president is to dispose of the creature, expeditiously and permanently. Thus far, the P.H.A. has had a much better and less messy way: put the person on the council. For the rest of his or her natural life, with voice, but no vote, so that he or she is placed on regular public display and under constant surveillance, utterly incapable of causing any danger to the body politic. This is a fate which may be even worse than death… he wrote.

What actually occurred, however, was to place past presidents, not only on the Council but to place them on the executive committee that was mandated by
the new constitution. With all due respect to the other changes that I’ve mentioned, in my opinion, the development of the executive committee was the most important. It consists of the Association’s offices, including the immediate past president, meets at least twice a year, discusses numerous issues, sometimes for five hours, and brings the important ones to the council members for their decisions. It enables the council to be the policy making body and leaves details to the executive committee. It has streamlined the conduct of the Association’s business. When I became business secretary again in 1998, I returned to the executive committee. Although I was allowed to vote as business secretary but not as a former president, I seldom did.

It was not necessary for me to vote because we did not decide issues by five to four votes, as does our current United States Supreme Court. Usually, we talked through the issues and arrived at a consensus. As I’ve said before, it has been delightful to work with the fine people who serve sacrificially as your officers. I am a member of the board of directors of another organization of approximately the same size as this one. It publishes a quarterly journal and an annual volume and holds a brief annual meeting. According to the treasurer’s report of February 14, 2006, the president who serves also as the executive director, receives $20,000.00 per year. He does what Charles does. The editor’s salary is $12,000.00, but don’t tell Paul Newman. The secretary gets $10,000.00 for her efforts. She does what Rachel and Karen do. Only the treasurer’s salary is comparable to ours. Our officers serve us well for far less, as our treasurer Bob Blackson indicates in his carefully prepared reports. We should be grateful to them. Working with these capable and unselfish people and their predecessors has provided me with extremely pleasant memories.

There are many other changes that I could reminisce about, including the admission of women to our hierarchy as Betty Geffen became our first female president in 1981 with others to follow a few years later- Susan Klepp in 1997, Leslie Patrick in 1999, and Rosalind Remer in 2001; the resumption of our close relationship with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission that emerged when S. K. Stevens when was the executive secretary and resumed under Brent Glass and Barbara Franco; and the expansion of our publication program with books by long-time council member Ira Brown, former president Gerry Eggert, and the ethnic series fostered by Bob Crist and facilitated by a grant from the Commission. Recent publications include those by vice-president, Marion Roydhouse, and business secretary Karen Guenther.
In conclusion, I think of Winston Churchill who is said to have been accosted by a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union who told him that if all the whiskey and brandy that he had drunk were still in him it would come all the way up to his neck. He raised his hands high above his head and said, “Madam, so little done; so much yet to do.”

But now it’s time for you to contribute your reminiscences. Thank you for your attention.