

THE PHMC SCHOLARS IN RESIDENCE
PROGRAM: A ROUNDTABLE ASSESSMENT

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FIFTEEN YEARS OF SCHOLARS IN RESIDENCE

Linda A. Ries, Commentator

Archivist, Pennsylvania State Archives and SIR Program Interim Director

We are at the fifteen year mark with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Scholars in Residence Program, and this is a good time to reflect upon what we have accomplished. The program was conceived by then PHMC Executive Director Dr. Brent D. Glass as a means of encouraging history professionals to use the extensive artifact and document collections throughout the agency, not only at the State Museum and Archives in Harrisburg, but at its over two dozen historic sites and museums throughout the Commonwealth. At the same time, of course, it benefited history professionals by subsidizing research on these holdings. This was a win-win situation.

It continued to be a successful formula for fifteen years. I can say I was present at its creation from a tangential standpoint, and have been involved with the program in one way or another over the years. Dr. Glass selected Linda Shopes, a historian with the Bureau of Archives and History, to administer the program, something she pursued with energy and excellence until her retirement in 2007. I was among the panel of

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professional historians and PHMC staff members chosen to rate the first slate of applicants, and have served as an occasional panelist in subsequent years. I also traveled with Linda when she visited various institutions to promote the program. In addition, I have served as a lead staff member to assist the needs of any particular scholar during his or her residency. I am now the Program's Interim Director, and will give it over to staff member Joshua Stahlman this coming year. I therefore feel quite qualified to make several observations about the program.

According to the PHMC website, we have funded 122 individuals between the years 1993–1994 and 2007–2008. This is an average of eight scholars per year, with as few as six and as many as ten for some years. They are an international body of researchers of Pennsylvania history. Fifty-two of the 122 are affiliated with Pennsylvania academic institutions; the rest, more than half, are from other states, or other countries. Of these, most are from New York, Virginia, and California. Universities and colleges represented include major institutions throughout the United States: SUNY Binghamton, Columbia, George Washington, Cornell, Yale, Case Western Reserve, Purdue, California State University, San Diego State University, and the Universities of Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Virginia. Scholars have also come from Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, England, and Ireland. Clearly, the interest in Pennsylvania history is national and world-wide.

Of the in-state scholars, the Pennsylvania State University system has by far contributed the most, with twelve; followed by the University of Pennsylvania with six, Temple University with five, and the University of Pittsburgh with four. The remainder includes the State Universities at Shippensburg, Mansfield, and Millersville, plus private institutions such as Villanova University, Franklin and Marshall College, Carnegie-Mellon University, Bucknell University, Dickinson College, Ursinus College, and Duquesne University. Graduate students make up the majority of these researchers, over ninety percent; followed by established historians seeking to further refine areas of study. Scholars have also included documentary filmmakers and even a novelist of historical fiction. Subjects cover the length and breadth of the Commonwealth's history, from the Carboniferous Era to the Vietnam War. The most often requested research venue, about two thirds, has been for the State Archives. A distant second (ten residencies) were for the Archaeology Collections at the State Museum of Pennsylvania, and the rest spread among the various PHMC historic sites and properties around the state. To see the complete list of Scholars, and to

read their reports, go to www.phmc.state.pa.us, click on the link to "Public Programs", then "Scholars in Residence."

We have heard today three recent SIR alumni speak about the benefits of the program to their own work. Beside the obvious, whereby a graduate student is subsidized to conduct research, there are other nuances. For example, Darlene Miller-Lanning mentioned the importance of having "PHMC Scholar in Residence" listed on her vita. Patrick Spero talked about the easier ability to access or to find out about collections he may never have thought twice about. Katarina Hering discussed the new relationships she's made and the opportunity to network. They all have remarked about the fact that, while our stipends are not a lot, we offer some things other institutions do not, like free photocopying, and making an extra effort to see they have a place to stay while in residency.

I would like to expand upon all that by saying the program has brought about relationships in the professional history community that otherwise may not have materialized. This has become a platform on which archivists and museum professionals can interact with academic historians and engage in active dialogue about current research in any given Pennsylvania history topic. It provides a much greater opportunity for collegial relations. This goes far beyond a standard and businesslike staff/customer transaction, such as providing guidance about collections to examine and fulfilling requests for photocopies at the end of the day. It creates a synergistic relationship whereby the scholar can inform the staff about certain aspects of a collection they may have never considered. Conversely, the staff can guide the researcher to little known or underutilized aspects of a collection, or alert them to other researchers with similar interests. The result is an education for both, and a kind of holistic total, creating better informed professionals on both sides of the fence who can in turn disseminate information and help others in the history community. I can say I have made many new friends in the academic history community, and we have continued to be friends, as a result of this program. This is very useful in a professional sense, and very satisfying in a personal one.

A significant aspect of the program is that the scholar is also contractually required to present the results of their research at the end of his or her residency. This is often done in a public forum, such as lectures at the State Museum or other PHMC venues, and sometimes publication in the PHMC's own history magazine, *Pennsylvania Heritage*. Scholars have also published

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their results as monographs in a long list of academic journals, including, of course, *Pennsylvania History*. I know that Editor Paul Douglas Newman is very grateful for the opportunity the SIR Program provides for potential articles. Books have resulted as well, including some major works. *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* by Helen Tangires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* by Charlene Mires, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* by Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910* by Kali Gross are but a short list of books by authors who mined the holdings of the PHMC as Scholars in Residence.

This has led to even further dissemination in a broader and even more satisfying sense, and by far is the greatest benefit of the whole SIR program. These published works have been in turn taken and used by employees at historical societies, museums, libraries and other institutions for the creation of exhibits, films, lectures and other means of interpreting the Commonwealth's history for the public in general. Charlene Mires' book has been employed by the National Park Service to help with their presentation of Independence Hall; Darlene Miller-Lanning's work has informed the exhibits at the Anthracite Heritage Museum, Kali Gross has enlightened the interpretation of African American women at Eastern State Penitentiary, and so forth. This is a "trickle down" effect that cannot be measured by say, the quantity of research, but perhaps by the quantity of people, the degree they are educated about Pennsylvania's heritage, and how well they come away with an appreciation of that heritage. This benefit is incalculable, and is a point that cannot be overstated here.

We now are entering into a tough economic era in our national and state history whereby many public programs are threatened to be cut. The future is unclear, but we of course hope that the PHMC and some of its programs, including this one, will not be threatened. The citizens of Pennsylvania that we educate through programs like this one are also the taxpayers whose funds help keep us going. We hope they realize the benefits as well.

[Author's note: In January 2009 the PHMC Scholars in Residence Program was suspended indefinitely along with many other of the agency's programs and projects due to drastic cuts in the Commonwealth budget. There will be no Scholars in Residence at PHMC sites in 2009–2010 and possibly thereafter.]