



Pennsylvania
Historical & Museum Commission

PA State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO)

Guidelines for Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations

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Introduction

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission administers a program of historical markers to capture the stories of people, places, events, and innovations that have affected the lives of Pennsylvanians over the centuries. The program began with bronze plaques in 1914 and the iconic blue and yellow roadside markers used today were introduced in 1946. The program has evolved from a largely staff-driven process, to accepting suggestions from historical societies to today’s fully public-driven program.

PHMC is committed to representing and reflecting the experiences of the people and communities it serves. As a public-driven program, PHMC supports communities in recognizing the importance of their history through the Pennsylvania Historical Marker Program.

Guidelines for the Pennsylvania Historical Marker Nominations includes information about the nomination process, the Criteria for Approval, a worksheet to help prepare your nomination for submission using PA-SHARE, and helpful resources and general recommendations for crafting a well-written nomination.

Please review all information before submitting a final nomination.

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For More Information

For more information on the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program, please visit PHMC's website at pahistoricalmarkers.com.

To read more about the history of the program, please read our article in [PA Heritage](#) magazine.

To search the database of Pennsylvania Historical Markers, please visit <https://share.phmc.pa.gov/markers/>.

To view recorded webinars about the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program and nominating a subject for a historical marker, please visit PA SHPO's YouTube Playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8ZjZK2E6_OsijOknIf23sTCvv3RjYUT.

If you have any questions about the Pennsylvania Historical Marker program, please send an email to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov.

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired and wish to contact a hearing person via Text Telephone, you may use the PA Relay Center at 1-800-654-5984.

Using PA-SHARE to Submit a Historical Marker Nomination

PA-SHARE, Pennsylvania's State Historic & Archaeological Resource Exchange, was launched in February 2021 as the commonwealth's new online data management and cultural resources GIS tool. It is now the primary interface for all program areas within the PA SHPO, including the historical marker program.

The final marker nomination must be submitted in PA-SHARE. No paper copies or emailed copies will be accepted. We have provided worksheets to help you develop your nomination. We strongly recommend that you complete and assemble your information before working in PA-SHARE.

If you are new to the process, follow the below steps:

1. You must have a Keystone Login before accessing PA-SHARE. Follow these instructions to register: <https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/phmc/pa-share/login-credentials.html>
2. Access PA-SHARE from the PHMC website: <share.phmc.pa.gov/pashare/landing>.
3. Register for a free Basic account to submit a Historical Marker Nomination.

For specific guidance on using PA-SHARE to submit a Historical Marker Nomination, please review the step-by-step instructions in the PA-SHARE tutorial [Submitting a New Marker Nomination in PA-SHARE](#).

Once you have completed your nomination in PA-SHARE, you, and anyone you have included as a project contact, will receive automated emails from PA SHPO staff about your nomination's status. You will be notified:

- when your submission was received
- when your submission was accepted as a project
- when PA SHPO has reviewed your nomination
- when PA SHPO has commented on your nomination
- if PA SHPO requires more information
- when PA SHPO closes the nomination project

These emails will provide you with instructions for accessing your submission, project, and PA SHPO correspondence.

Contact the PA-SHARE Help Desk at pashare@pa.gov with any technical questions about signing into PA-SHARE, submitting a marker nomination, or accessing a project.

Criteria for Approval of State Historical Markers

The following criteria for approving state historical markers was adopted by Resolution of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) in September 2020.

It is very important that the Criteria for Approval provided be carefully read and thoroughly understood. When reviewing nominations, the marker panel makes an informed decision using these criteria as well as the quality of the submitted nomination.

- A. The nomination is clear and organized and includes thorough documentation (with selected photocopies and bibliographies from reliable primary and secondary sources) and verification of the facts claimed.
- B. The person, place, event, organization, or innovation to be marked had a significant impact on its times, and has statewide and/or national, rather than local or regional, historical significance. The significance of the subject, particularly for continuing events and organizations, must be historically established rather than of contemporary interest. PHMC recognizes that continuing scholarship may help validate the subject's impact on its times or its significance from a more recent historical perspective.
- C. The subject to be marked has a substantial connection to Pennsylvania.
- D. An Historical Marker cannot be approved for a living person. With the exception of Pennsylvania governors and U.S. presidents, subjects must have been deceased for a minimum of five (5) years. The significance of an individual's accomplishments must have had a measurable impact on history and sufficient time has elapsed to evaluate that impact based on credible documentation.
- E. Nominations for geographical, topographical, or natural features may be referred to an appropriate federal, state, or local agency.
- F. People, places, events, and innovations already marked with existing monuments or markers may receive less favorable consideration for an Historical Marker.
- G. Nominated subjects reviewed and disapproved by the Commission three times in succession are not eligible for review panel consideration for a period of three years.
- H. Governors of Pennsylvania are approved as the subject of an Historical Marker upon nomination (subject to the criterion in subsection D herein).
- I. Historic sites or properties owned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission are approved as the subject of an Historical Marker upon nomination.

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- J. Places listed on the National Register of Historic Places and/or recognized as National Historic Landmarks or United Nations World Heritage Sites may be considered for an Historical Marker. These places will not be summarily approved by PHMC for designation because the approval criteria for those designations are different. Nominations for these places are subject to all these Criteria.

- K. Places of worship and cemeteries/burial places generally will not be approved unless the nomination demonstrates that the subject meets criteria in subsections B and J.

Understanding the Nomination, Evaluation, & Approval Process

The entire nomination process can be broken down into three parts: drafting and submitting a nomination; evaluation by the Marker Review Panel; and the Commission's vote for approval. Each part is further explained below.

Nomination

Any individual or group may nominate a subject for a historical marker. Further instructions and guidelines are included in the [next section](#).

PHMC marker staff encourage nominators to complete a [pre-application](#) to determine whether the marker subject will meet the PHMC historical marker criteria and would be considered a strong candidate for the program.

You will also have a chance to submit a draft of the complete nomination for preliminary review. Marker staff will read the nomination and provide recommendations for improvement before the final deadline.

The timeline for nominating is as follows:

- Pre-applications must be submitted by email by **11:59pm on January 15**.
- Preliminary reviews must be submitted in PA-SHARE by **11:59pm on February 15**.
- Final nominations must be submitted in PA-SHARE by **11:59pm on April 1**.

Evaluation

Three separate bodies of people are involved in the evaluation process. The evaluation rubric used by these bodies is available for applicants to review at the [end of this document](#).

Staff Review Committee

Consists of six to seven (6-7) PHMC staff. The Committee includes one staff member from each bureau, the Historical Marker Coordinator, PA SHPO Incentives Manager, and the PHMC Editor. The Marker Text Historian may also be involved, if available. The staff from the other bureaus have a generalized knowledge of Pennsylvania history and are familiar with the specializations of other PHMC staff. They may choose to ask other staff for input who have specialized knowledge about the nomination subject.

The Committee evaluates each nomination for compliance with PHMC criteria using the evaluation rubric. The nominations are reviewed independently and separately from the Marker Review Panel. Staff evaluations and comments are provided to the Panel only after the Panel has completed their own evaluations.

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Marker Review Panel

Consists of five (5) external individuals with expertise or experience in history, architecture, archaeology, museum work, or other related fields. Panel members evaluate each nomination independently for compliance with PHMC criteria using the evaluation rubric and discuss results at their annual review meeting, usually in June, where they reach a consensus on recommendations to provide to the Commission. Marker staff totals the scores and drafts a report of the Panel's recommendations for the Commission.

Commission

Governor-appointed body of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The Commission reviews the Panel's recommendations and votes on approval of the nominations at their September meeting.

Approval

There are three (3) possible outcomes from the evaluation process: approved, not approved, and recommended for resubmission.

Approved

If your nomination is approved, you will receive a notification letter signed by the PHMC Executive Director. You will also receive several forms and further instruction about dedicating the marker.

Not Approved

If your nomination is not approved, you will receive an email from Marker staff. If the Panel and Commission believe the subject is not appropriate for a PHMC marker, Marker staff will provide information to pursue a local marker.

Please note that all local markers must be distinguishable in color and design from official PHMC markers.

Resubmission

If the Panel and Commission believe the nomination could be improved for resubmission, detailed comments and recommendations will be provided via email from Marker staff.

You may submit revised nominations for the same subject three (3) years in succession. Any nomination that is rejected three (3) years in succession may not be submitted again for another five (5) years. PHMC staff are available to work with you to revise or strengthen your nomination. A resubmission would benefit by taking advantage of the pre-application and/or preliminary review process in the next round.



Considerations for Historical Marker Subjects

PHMC encourages nominations that will help to enhance the Marker Program and the public's knowledge of history. This includes aspects of Pennsylvania history inadequately represented in the marker program, additional contexts to markers that already exist, and counties with fewer markers.

The State Historical Marker Program is not intended as a memorial program. A locally erected marker or monument may be more appropriate.

General Questions

When preparing the nomination for a person, place, event, innovation, or other subject, consider how the subject is of statewide or national significance. Consider the following questions and address them as is appropriate:

- What was the cause and effect?
- What changes or consequences occurred and why?
- How did the subject influence the course of events on a statewide or national level?
- What and how widespread was the impact on a statewide or national level?
- What was the subject's lasting influence in history?
- What role did the subject play in the cultural, societal, and/or political spheres of its time?
- What factors contributed to the subject's development?

In addition to these questions, consider the more specific points below by the type of subject:

Nominating a Person

Consider what innovations the individual made and whether their impact was of statewide, national, or international importance. The individual must have a strong association with Pennsylvania. An individual who was born or worked briefly in Pennsylvania but lived most of their life and made their impact elsewhere does not have a strong enough connection to the state to be a good candidate.

A good candidate will:

- have spent their formative years in the Commonwealth (i.e., their childhood, schooling, or most significant part of their career)
 - achieved national or statewide recognition
 - retained strong ties to Pennsylvania if they left
- Example: Allan Jaffe, born and raised in Pottsville, where he studied music and remained connected with the state throughout his music career.

If the individual had a limited connection to Pennsylvania BUT was responsible for something significant in or to Pennsylvania, consider instead nominating the innovation, event, or work of significance.

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- Example: Salk Polio Vaccine developed in Pittsburgh rather than Jonas Salk.

Nominating an Innovation

An innovation may have a greater impact than the individual(s) involved in creating it.

- How did this innovation change, improve, or revolutionize life, society, or an industry?
 - Who was involved in its creation?
 - What is the connection to Pennsylvania (i.e. where was it invented/manufactured/etc)?
 - What makes this innovation different from others before it or during its time?
 - Did it lead to other innovations?
- Example: Densmore Tank Cars, early functional railway oil tank car invented and constructed in Venango County.

Nominating a Place

To be considered for a marker, a building must be more than an example of a particular architectural style. Consider any noteworthy events or important people connected to the location, or its greater purpose to the state or nation. A location's connection to a particular individual, event, or innovation may be more significant than the location itself, and therefore that connection may be a better subject to nominate.

- What social movement or changes in policy or practice happened there?
 - How was it important to the state or nation?
 - If the site is on the National Register of Historic Places or a UNESCO site, you must be able to demonstrate its importance to the state or nation as a whole, not local or regional importance. Refer to Section 8 of the National Register application to confirm the level of significance.
 - Is it an exemplary work of a notable architect?
- Example: The Haines Shoe House, marketing strategy of Haines to promote his shoe business, notable example mid-20th century programmatic architecture, and representation of the nation's shift to car travel.

Nominating an Event

Consider the statewide or national impact of the event, those involved, and what led up to the event.

- What social, political, environmental, or other movement or changes in policy or practice happened at or because of the event?
 - How does the event fit into the context of a larger movement or philosophy?
 - Was there a purpose or goal?
 - Who was involved and why were they there?
 - What was the result?
- Example: Marshalls Creek Explosion, June 26, 1964 - The incident helped lead to the creation of the 1974 U.S. Transportation Safety Act.

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Nominating Places of Worship and Burial Sites

Burial sites for an individual or community are generally not considered eligible for a marker as persons should be commemorated where they lived or where their actions made an impact. These locations must be able to demonstrate a statewide or national significance, as these sites are typically hyper localized. In addition to considering the questions for nominating a place, these sites must also consider the following:

Places of worship may be recommended for approval only if the nomination proves one of the following:

- the first establishment of a denomination
- initiated significant changes in religious doctrine or philosophy
- architectural or artistic distinction
- Example: Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, the mother church of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, founded 1787.

Burial sites may be recommended for approval only if the nomination proves one of the following:

- architectural, landscape, or artistic distinction
- association with a significant event
- Example: Laurel Hill Cemetery designed by Scottish architect John Notman, major rural cemetery that offered a romantic alternative to the crowded urban environment, with rolling landscape, horticultural plantings, and eclectic architecture.

Subjects Unlikely to Be Approved

The Panel and Commission is not supportive of nominations that are based solely on:

- Sensationalism, durability, or longevity
- Philanthropy or benevolence
- Superlatives, such as “first,” “oldest,” “most/least,” etc., unless unquestionably provable and also of statewide impact
- Commemoration of those who died, such as members of the military or victims of a crime or tragedy
- Modern commercial motivation, such as promoting a business, even if educational or benevolent in nature. Longstanding organizations may be considered for historical, but not modern, accomplishments.

Need help? Staff will review and comment on a pre-application or a draft nomination. If you wish to have a staff review, you can do one of the following:

- Email the pre-application, including any relevant materials, to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov. **Do not** submit the pre-application in PA-SHARE. **Pre-applications are due no later than January 15.**
- Submit a draft nomination through PA-SHARE and select “Yes” for Preliminary Review at the end of the online form. Expect communications from staff via email from PA-SHARE. **Draft nominations must be submitted no later than February 15.**

For more information, please send an email to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov.

Historical Marker Pre-Application Worksheet

The pre-application is the first step to determine whether a marker subject will meet the criteria for a PHMC historical marker and would be considered a strong candidate for the program. The pre-application will be most helpful in the early phases of research. Staff can provide technical assistance and feedback on research before submitting a final nomination. Completing a pre-application will help nominators prepare a more competitive nomination.

Download the official pre-application worksheet from our website pahistoricalmarkers.com and click on the “Nominate” tile. Complete and email to ra-phmarkers@pa.gov **no later than January 15.**

DO NOT SUBMIT THIS FORM. IT WILL NOT BE ACCPETED AS AN OFFICIAL PRE-APPLICATION.

Contact Name:

Email:

Organization:

Proposed Subject:

Date Pre-Application is Submitted:

1. Please confirm you have read the [criteria for approval](#).
2. Please confirm you have read the nomination guidelines.
3. What is the statewide, national, or international impact of this subject? (3-6 sentences)
4. How is the subject substantially connected to Pennsylvania and its history?
5. Is the subject a religious building/property and/or cemetery/burial place?
6. Have any historical, cultural, or other organizations helped prepare the nomination and/or research? If yes, please list which ones.
7. Please summarize any primary and/or secondary sources already consulted. For information on what primary and secondary sources are, please see the [Marker Forms and Guidance page](#) on PHMC’s website.
8. Check our [marker search](#) to see whether the subject is already covered by another marker. If there are, please list those markers below.
9. Any additional comments not covered in the previous questions.

Historical Marker Nomination Worksheet

Please use this form for reference as you collect and prepare your nomination materials before submitting through PA-SHARE. **The below fields must be entered directly into the submission form via PA-SHARE.**

DO NOT SUBMIT THIS FORM. IT WILL NOT BE ACCPETED AS AN OFFICIAL NOMINATION.

Contact Information

Please provide information of all individuals who will be involved and/or should be included in the process. Please also identify your Documentation Partner(s) contact information.

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

Title (optional):

Organization (if applicable):

Phone (optional):

Subject of the Marker:

What type of marker are you requesting?

Statement of Importance:

Please write one (1) to three (3) sentences about the impact of the person, event, innovation, or site. Explain why this marker will have meaning for people from the whole state or country, not just from your own community. It should briefly introduce the topic and place it in context. 500-character limit.

Significance & Documentation Worksheet

Download the official worksheet [here](#) to complete and submit as a PDF attachment via PA-SHARE. Also submit the following types of documentation as individual PDF files with your submission.

- Scans/excerpts of your source materials
- For a National Register-listed property, Section 8: Significance of the National Register form
- Bibliography
- Letters of Support from subject matter experts or a local community organization. Letters of support from elected officials are welcome but will not be given weight in the evaluation process.

Worksheet Instructions

Please provide key points about the subject's significance and supporting evidence for your research. Think of this as your brief synopsis or overview. Marker staff will use this information as a

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starting point to draft marker text if it is approved. PHMC drafts all marker texts and texts are subject to final approval by the Executive Director.

- Identify the statewide, national, and/or international historical significance and importance of your topic.
- Explain the impact, effect, or contribution of your topic to Pennsylvania, the United States, and/or the world.
- Provide at least three (3) but no more than ten (10) points of significance. Each fact should be no more than 1-3 sentences to fully explain the significance.
- Cite at least one (1) primary and/or secondary source as evidence for each point and how you found them. You should have at least three to four (3-4) sources total for all points, at least one (1) must be a primary source.

Example

Point of Significance: 1-3 sentences, no more than 100 words
The Ford station was operated by Erie's first emancipated slave, a woman named Emma Howell, and her husband James Ford a runaway slave, and their family. This site is unique because "There are only a handful of documented female agents of the underground railroad" quote by Jok Walsh, President, Researcher, Caroline County Historical Society. This number decreases when counting documented black female ex-slave conductors in Pennsylvania.
Source: primary/secondary, author, title, date of publication, page number(s)
1. (primary) Howe, S.G. The Refugees From Slavery in Canada West. Report to the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission. Boston: Wright & Potter, 1864. 2. (primary) "Testimony of Fred Law Olmstead, Esq.," Record Group 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received by the Adjutant General, (1861-1870), file # 328-O-1863, Fold3 by Ancestry, https://www.fold3.com/image/300490430 (accessed March 23, 2019), https://www.fold3.com/image/300490440 (accessed March 23, 2019). 3. (secondary) YouTube video 'Harriet Tubman: They called her Moses (2018) Full Movie Dr. Eric Lewis Williams,' at 19:35.
How did you find this source? For internet sources, provide URL and date accessed
National Archives, Ancestry.com, YouTube search https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIXGK2wi5oM

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Suggested Marker Location:

Please provide as detailed information as possible, such as street address, municipality, ZIP, closest intersection, or description of location. Include a photo and/or map of the proposed location.

Preliminary Feedback Request:

PA SHPO staff will review a draft of your marker nomination upon request.

To request a preliminary review, select “Yes.” Please note that any communication about your draft will be through PA-SHARE. Preliminary Reviews must be submitted **no later than February 15**.

Submission Notice

Please Note: By submitting materials with respect to state or federal historic preservation programs administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), you grant to the PHMC the rights to:

- Use the materials for education and promotional purposes and to promote the mission of the PHMC;
- Publish the materials on the PHMC Web site; and
- Make the materials available to researchers and scholars

2025 Historical Marker Program Evaluation Sheet

**This form is used by the Marker Review Panel and PHMC Staff Review Committee.
It is available here for nominators to see how applications are evaluated.**

Marker Title:
Applicant:
Municipality, County:
Documentation Partner:

Assign a score from 0 to 3 for each of the following categories; 0 = does not meet criteria, 1 = minimally meets criteria, 2= meets criteria, 3 = exceeds criteria. See the associated “Guidelines for Evaluation[link]” for more specific points to consider related to the broad questions below.

Required Criteria (A – C) (completed by Panel)	Score
A. Nomination is clear and organized and includes at least five (5) sources and verification of the facts claimed.	
B. Subject had a significant impact on its times and has statewide and/or national and/or international historical significance.	
C. Subject has a substantial connection to Pennsylvania.	
Total Points for Required Criteria (9 max):	

Special Considerations (completed by staff, 1=Yes/0=No)	Score
Represents an aspect of Pennsylvania history not well reflected in the marker program.	
Contributes to a more equitable geographic distribution of markers.	
Provides additional context to existing markers.	
Coincides with a significant anniversary.	
Total Points for Special Considerations (4 max):	

Total Cumulative Points (max 13):	
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Reviewer:
Recommendation (yes/no/resubmit):
Comments: