

Pennsylvania Abolition Society  
Future Directions and Sustainability  
Draft October 22, 2011

### Current Assets

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society's primary current function is to make annual awards, largely to Philadelphia regional groups, for "improving the condition of the African Race." It also has the John Parrish award to acknowledge an individual who has "done outstanding work in Philadelphia" in improving conditions of African-Americans though the award has not been given recently. The PAS also has its archival records, under the care of the Historical Society which are much used for research on slavery and abolition in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We also have "moral capital." The endorsement of PAS by funding a project says, or should say, that this particular project is supported by the oldest abolition society in the world.

### Membership and Future Directions: Some Potential Issues

The membership is self-replicating. Currently new members are recommended by existing board members. This personal approach to find and recruiting new PAS members is unlikely to significantly increase the size of the organization.

The fact that the Pennsylvania Abolition Society exists is not widely known. In the digital age, many people's first approach to finding out about an organization is to search on-line. I recently did so. There is a Wikipedia entry for the PAS which says the organization "apparently still exists" but provides no information on how to contact the PAS. There are a number of links related to PAS archives, but little here to indicate that the PAS remains an organization and less to say what it currently does.

To recruit new members, beyond that limited number that can come from personal contacts, we need a more robust on-line presence that clearly explains the organization and objectives of the present PAS.

### New Members

What would happen if from a new recruiting effort, we gained thirty new members for the PAS? People who were not brought in not by individual contacts with board members but who may have only seen a brochure and

decided to join? I see two related issues here: first, what would be the expectations of those new members, and secondly, what are the benefits of membership in the PAS?

Do we recruit people primarily to work on tasks of the organization as currently understood, our primary project and function is to award grant funds. What sort of people do we need to make this function more effectively? I am frankly comfortable with our deliberations on grant proposals, but would recruiting more people with specific skill sets – community activists, educators, social service workers—enhance the effectiveness of our grant giving? Are we looking for people who can assist with outreach to community organizations, e.g. someone who can identify potential recipients for grants?

If we are essentially trying to be more effective with those things we are currently doing, we are probably looking for a fairly modest increase in membership. Our goals here would be to find “new blood” – younger and more active versions of ourselves?

This is a fairly narrowly defined recruitment effort.

If we cast a broader net, recruiting through web sites, brochures and other methods, and accepted all that applied for membership, we will probably have a much wider range of membership expectations. What, for example, would happen if some of our new members decided that it was within the scope of PAS to endorse and take an active role in “Occupy Philadelphia” or whatever other issue was current at the time? It might be good for PAS to return to its more active functions of advocating, lobbying and working for change rather than simply remain primarily a funding agency.

An issue here with maintaining membership is that we need to meet expectations of members. Recruiting new members who are coming with an expectation that PAS be a more activist organization than it currently is, then disappointing them by not acting as such will likely result in those new members dropping out after a short period of membership.

### Increasing Membership, Increasing Costs

Expansion of the functions of PAS will increase costs. There are some things we can do with relatively little expenditure such as have a better web site presence. If we move into new roles (or new for the organization as currently configured) of, for example of engaging directly in “political issues” like endorsing Operation Philadelphia or advocating for legislation, it will

require commitments in both member time and organizational resources (money).

### A Few Suggestions

I think we do need to increase public awareness that PAS is a functioning organization and as part of that make it clear that we welcome new members. A basic first approach is to improve our on-line presence and make it simple for people who are interested in the work and goals of PAS to find us. This can be relatively simple and inexpensive, but will also require significant expenditures of the time and energy of the existing members.

A better, clearer and more accessible statement of PAS, its goals and objectives, enhances our moral capital.

As a small measure, there are quite a number of scholars working today on aspects of abolition in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who might make good additions to our membership, and might be a good source of suggestions as we work on the future of the PAS.

Large expansion of PAS membership needs to proceed deliberately, and be explicitly linked to program objectives.

### Financial Sustainability

For many years PAS have acted as stewards of existing financial resources. We have had additional funds added to our resources as royalties from the use of the PAS archives, but have not, as far as I know, aggressively pursued additional funds.

If we pursue a significantly increased membership and a more active role for the PAS, that will increase the demands on our treasury to support these actions. These funds will become available either at the expense of not being able to fund some of our usual grant projects, or through more aggressive fund raising. Aggressive fund raising requires staff (and expense) and also a clear statement of why someone would donate to the PAS rather than to some other organization.

Less aggressive fund raising can include reminders on our (hopefully improved) brochures and websites on PAS and its activities that contributions can be sent and to remember us in your will. It might be good to include on our website lists of things we have supported in the past. If I'm giving money to an organization, I do want to know at least in a general way, how it is being used.

## Final Comments

We have a good product to sell. There is a substantial moral message to the PAS. It isn't just that it has been at work for more than two centuries. The fact that it has been active so long is a statement that making the world aright is not a matter of some brief action constrained in a short period of time, but the work of lifetimes and generations of commitment.

John Parrish gave us money two centuries ago, and when he did stated that this was in acknowledgement that our (American's) wealth derived in no small part from the unpaid labor of enslaved Africans. His nephew Joseph Parrish, was president of the PAS and active in African-American education and the Underground Railroad. Joseph Parrish's son Dillwyn was president of the PAS for thirty years and involved in African-American education for decades following the Civil War (another son, Edward, was the first President of Swarthmore College). Joseph Parrish's daughter, Susanna Parrish Wharton, and Susanna's daughter Susan P. Wharton, were among the thirty founders of the NAACP in 1909. Joseph Parrish had been behind the PAS study of the condition of African-Americans in Philadelphia conducted in 1837. Susan P. Wharton, Joseph Parrish's granddaughter, who had been active in settlement work and related efforts in Philadelphia, was the person primarily responsible for bringing WEB DuBois to Philadelphia to conduct his study on the Philadelphia Negro.

This is generations of commitment. The continued existence of the PAS is a message that work begun before America was a country still continues.

The other major message of the PAS is that social issues are linked. Abolition wasn't just a matter of breaking the chains of the bondman, but seeing that the former bondmen had the access to education, employment and the courts that made freedom work.

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### The PAS, Abolition and Beyond

From its beginnings the Pennsylvania Abolition Society linked the issues of emancipation, education, access to jobs and access to the legal system. When legalized slavery was abolished in 1865, the American Anti-Slavery Society disbanded, feeling its work was done with emancipation. The PAS, who had been involved in African-American education and legal rights since the American Revolution continued with its missions. It was also at this time that the organization began to become significantly bi-racial.

## The Moral Capital of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society

The PAS, as the oldest abolition society in the world, and because of its work over the past 236 years has a reserve of "moral capital." The fact that a program is receiving support from the PAS should have a value beyond the actual financial award.