

“Am I not a man and a brother?”



MEMBERS GUIDE TO THE PENNSYLVANIA ABOLITION SOCIETY

Compiled by Theopolis Fair; Revised by the Board of Governors, April 2012

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BRIEF HISTORY OF

**THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF
SLAVERY AND FOR THE RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES UNLAWFULLY HELD IN
BONDAGE AND FOR IMPROVING THE CONDITION OF THE AFRICAN RACE**

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society had its origins in early anti-slavery activities of Philadelphia Quakers. The exhortations of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet had convinced many Friends that the egalitarian and humanitarian doctrines of Quakers must be extended to include the enslaved black man. It was Quaker conscience, rather than civic consciousness, that led Friends to form an abolition society in 1775.

Between 1775 and 1784, some programs initiated by the Abolition Society were continued by a few members acting as individuals. ...Not until 1784 did the few remaining members call a meeting for the reestablishment of the Society. Their motivation was a cause célèbre involving two free black men accused of being runaway slaves. In the summer of 1783, while awaiting trial in the Philadelphia Work House, these men unsuccessfully appealed to several influential citizens to act on their behalf. With no hope for assistance or a verdict in their favor, both men committed suicide rather than live as slaves. The immediate reaction in Philadelphia, especially among Friends, was one of shock and anger. None was more enraged by these events than Benezet, who, in the last few months of his life, publicized the circumstances behind the suicides. This action prompted Thomas Harrison, James Starr, Thomas Meredith, and seventeen others to call a meeting of the Society after nine years.

One of the Society's first acts was to organize its Standing Committee whose members devoted particular attention to manumissions, indentures, and petitions to the Confederation Congress.

From the moment of its reorganization the Society took on the pragmatic, nonsectarian cast that has characterized it since. The reorganized Society invited a number of non-Quakers to join and elected Benjamin Franklin, the president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania and member of the Constitution Convention, as president. The broadened membership later included such well-known individuals as Tench Coxe, Thomas Paine, John Jay, Noah Webster, Dr. Benjamin Rush, and the Marquis de Lafayette. The new members brought not only credibility but a new, more pragmatic program to the Society. ...In 1787 it changed its name to [the current one]. Thus in a 1789 Address to the Public the Society noted that the newly emancipated black was "poor and friendless," and that "under such circumstances, freedom often proves a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society." Thus the Society intended to instruct, to advise, to qualify those who have been restored to freedom with the following purposes: for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty; to promote in them habits of industry; to furnish them

with employments...and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life.

Because of its varied contacts, the Abolition Society was often called upon to act as guardian for manumitted blacks unprepared to live as free men...

During the last years of the eighteenth century, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society mounted an attack against the slave trade, and against slavery itself. In 1787 they memorialized the Federal Convention in Philadelphia requesting the termination of the slave trade. ...In 1789 the members of the Society had moved again to place the business of their organization on a more orderly footing. They secured a charter of incorporation from the State as The Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, for the Relief of Free Negroes...

[After the Civil War] the Abolition of Slavery and the growth of free educational institutions for blacks achieved two of the goals of the Society. Consequently, its membership dwindled but did manage, however, to remain moderately active. In conjunction with the Pennsylvania Anti-slavery Society, support was voiced for the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. The Society also campaigned against the exclusion of blacks from Philadelphia streetcars, and conducted surveys to determine whether discrimination existed in the public school system.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Society increasingly became a source of funds for organizations and institutions that worked for the relief and education of blacks. It had always supported a number of worthy causes and institutions, but from 1880 on fell into the custom of regularly funding the Laing School in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. ...In 1894, a deed of trust to all the school's property was given to the Society. [This arrangement lasted until 1940 when the school and property was given to the State of South Carolina.]

...In the 1950's and an appeal from the Mercy-Douglas Hospital in Philadelphia brought a contribution allowing that institution to purchase much needed surgical instruments. Numerous black graduate students were encouraged with stipends to continue their education in social work. High school students were brought from the South and sponsored for their entire four years in college. Other grants were given to local Philadelphia organizations such as the Friends Neighborhood Guild and the Friendship House.

In its [more than] two-hundred year history the Pennsylvania Abolition Society has been undeniably pragmatic, but its commitment to "Improving the Condition of the African Race" has been consistent.

Taken from Jeffrey Nordlinger, A Guide to the Microfilm Publication of The Papers of The Pennsylvania Abolition Society at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania(1976)

See also Margaret Bacon, *History of the Pennsylvania for Promoting...* (Philadelphia, 1959).

THE PENNSYLVANIA ABOLITION SOCIETY TODAY

“The Abolition Society?” “Why does it still exist? “Isn’t slavery over?” These are questions people frequently ask when told one is a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society(PAS). The answer is quite simple. The PAS was founded for the three reasons that are part of its official name: The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race. The Society continues to work on the last goal. Today the Society uses interest collected on monies raised [before and] after the Civil War to offer grants to organizations fighting racism, poverty, drugs, improving education [and other activities used that benefit the African race]. ...The PAS created the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Fund at the Philadelphia Foundation, and groups requesting grants should apply through them.

PAS funded the placement of new markers on the graves of Robert Purvis, its first black member, and his wife, Harriet, at the Fair Hill Burial Ground.

Membership is open to anyone who is at least 21 years old, believes in the aims of the Society, is recommended by a board member, and is approved at the next annual meeting.

Taken from Theopolis Fair, “The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Today”, *Pennsylvania Legacies*, Volume 5, #2, November 2005, p. 26

CHARTER AND BY-LAWS

Every ten years the Secretary of the Commonwealth requires the “Decennial Report of Association Continued Existence” form to be filled out by all corporations. We last did so in June 2001. They will send the form to the treasurer.

Can only be changed by the Court of Common Pleas.

Section 3 (As amended by pursuant to decree of Court of Common Pleas #3 of Philadelphia county, March term 1900, #399.

The officers of the Society:

One President

Two Vice Presidents

One Secretary

One Treasurer, who should be keeper of the seal

Others as deemed necessary

Board of Managers consists of:

The officers named above and 4 other members

Election of Officers

To be chosen annually by ballot of a majority of votes of the whole number of members who shall be present *at the annual meeting to be held on the last fifth day (Thursday) of the fourth month(April) in every year* or at such other time and at a place as the said Society shall by their rules and orders direct and appoint.

Section8. (Added in 1900). That it shall be the duty of the...Board of Managers to conduct all the business of the...Society (except the sale of real estate, to receive bequests, to sell securities, and to invest and reinvest...and to make an annual report to the Society.

Several years ago the annual meeting voted to rotate Managers every 5 years. After one year off board, the person may be reelected. In other words—term limits.

BY-LAWS

Article 1. MEMBERS. *21 years old* and believe in mission. Come to a Meeting, receive a majority vote at a subsequent meeting **And** own no slaves. [Members who miss three consecutive Meeting without notification are no longer deemed Members]

2. DUES. One dollar on or before annual meeting.

3. REGULAR MEETINGS. Hold annual meeting last Thursday in April. The Board of Managers meets just before annual meeting and hold one other meeting in the fall (The two other meetings required by the charter and done by e-mail). Notice of annual meeting shall be given at least two weeks in advance.

4. SPECIAL MEETINGS. May be called

5. CHAIRMAN. The president, or, in his absence or inability of one of the vice presidents shall preside each meeting of the Board of Managers, or a president pro-tem, shall be appointed.

6. QUORUM. 5 members of the Board of managers.

7. ORDERS. Orders on the treasurer for the payment of money Shall be signed by the president, or chairman pro-tem, presiding at the of the Board of Managers in which the payments were authorized, and attested by the secretary of the meeting.

8. AMENDMENTS. These by-laws may be amended at any time by a majority vote of managers; but the change must have been proposed in writing at a previous meeting.

9. GRANTS. ALL grant nominations must be made by January 1 of the year to be considered.

Nominations of the Parrish Award must include a resume of the nominee and a statement of why person deserves the award.

(It has been voted many times that groups should not receive grants two years in a row, except in extra-ordinary situations.)

Standing Committees: Nominations, Grants

10. RECORDS OF THE SOCIETY. Records produced during the normal course of Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) business are the **sole** property of the PAS and are vital to evidencing the decisions and actions of the Society and for protecting its interests and assets. The PAS requires that its records be managed in a systematic and logical manner according to records management schedules and procedures authorized and approved by the Society. All members of the Society and those working on its behalf are required to following the PAS records management schedules and procedures. This policy applies to all records, regardless of whether they are maintained in hard (paper) copy, electronically, or in some other fashion.

The records of permanent value to the Society, both the legacy historical archives and the current records, are on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) and remain the property of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. All decisions regarding the disposition and use of these records are PAS' decision. Notwithstanding, PAS has authorized to permit researcher access to these holdings, in accordance with HSP's library research procedures.

The records of the PAS are governed and managed by its Records Management Policy and Schedule that is found on page 8 of this Members' Guide.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

PAS Article 10. The Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery... has upheld the highest standards of integrity for over 225 years. Each member and officer, therefore, is required to conduct all affairs in the best interest of the Society, and to avoid the appearance or the reality of a conflict of interest. Furthermore, each member of PAS is required to avoid actions which would further, or give the appearance of furthering, the interest or benefit of any other organization of which he/she is an officer, controlling member or staff member. Members who have a conflict of interest should make that know and when appropriate, recuse themselves from discussion and votes.

THE RECORDS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ABOLITION SOCIETY

Records Management Policy Statement

Records produced during the normal course of Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) business are the **sole** property of the PAS and are vital to evidencing the decisions and actions of the Society and for protecting its interests and assets. The PAS requires that its records be managed in a systematic and logical manner according to records management schedules and procedures authorized and approved by the Society. All members of the Society and those working on its behalf are required to following the PAS records management schedules and procedures. This policy applies to all records, regardless of whether they are maintained in hard (paper) copy, electronically, or in some other fashion.

These records evidence PAS' continuous ownership rights of its business records.

Vital Records. Some vital records (incorporation papers, contracts) on deposit at the HSP might still be needed from time to time for PAS business, and if so, may be temporarily withdrawn from HSP for such uses by PAS Officers. Such withdrawals are the fiduciary responsibility of Officers and they are responsible to ensure that vital records are care for appropriately outside the custody of HSP and returned to HSP in the same condition as received.

Permanent Records. The records of permanent value to the Society, both the legacy historical archives and the current records, are on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) and remain the property of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. All decisions regarding the disposition and use of these records are PAS' decision. Notwithstanding, PAS has authorized to permit researcher access to these holdings, in accordance with HSP's library research procedures.

All permanent records, including those created in an electronic format, are to be retained in hardcopy. This policy may change as HSP is capable to assure permanent retention of electronic records.

PAS Records Management Schedule and Procedures

Accounting (Treasurer, Business Manager and Bookkeeper)

1. Accounts Payable and Receivable ledgers, reports, etc – 7 years
2. Balance Sheets, Profit/Loss Statements – Permanent
3. Bank Statements, Reconciliations, Deposit Slips – 7 years
4. Cancelled Checks – 7 to 10 years
5. Check Registers – Permanent
6. General Ledger – Permanent
7. Vendor Invoices – 7 years
8. W-2, W-9 Forms – Permanent
9. Tax Returns - Permanent

Corporate Records (Officers, Business Manager and Members)

1. Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, Charter and Amendments – Permanent
2. Board of Governors Committee and Minute Books and Records – Permanent
3. Grant Applications (Funded) – Permanent
4. Grant Application (Not Funded) – 2 years
5. Audit Reports – Permanent
6. Stock Certificates, Ledgers and Transactions – Permanent
7. General and Legal Correspondence – Permanent
8. Contracts and Agreements – Permanent
9. Deeds, Title Papers, Mortgages, Patents and Copyrights – Permanent
10. Bill of Sale of Assets – Permanent
11. General Miscellaneous - Publications, Newspapers, Clippings and Press Released related to the PAS - Permanent
12. Fixed Asset Records – Permanent

RECORDS AND PAPERS AT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The records of permanent value to the Society, both the legacy historical archives and the current records, are on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) and remain the property of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society at all times. All decisions regarding the disposition and use of these records are PAS' decision. Notwithstanding, PAS has authorized to permit researcher access to these holdings, in accordance with HSP's library research procedures. **Decisions on producing and using reproduction of PAS records at HSP solely rest with PAS.**

The PAS minute books were first deposited at HSP in 1931. They had been at the Race Street Meeting House and at Swarthmore College, but the papers were moved and the main repository is now at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In addition to the PAS' organizational records, there are 15 related organizations also are included. This historical collection is organized as:

Minutes

Correspondence

Financial Papers

Manumissions, Indentures, and other legal papers

Miscellaneous

These records are in hardcopy, microfilm and also in digital format via Adams Matthews Digital Library. The hardcopy records require special handling.

MICROFILM OF THE PAS COLLECTION is the primary way researchers access PAS records at HSP.

DIGITIZATION OF THE COLLECTION. On 7 Nov 2007 Adam Matthew Digital of England was given permission to digitize the collection from the microfilm collection. Right to the publisher sole license to sell for 5 years from date of agreement and thereafter the non-exclusive right. Publisher to pay Society \$6500 on signature of agreement; a further \$9,750 after first 20 subscriptions and a further \$16,250 after every subsequent 20 subscriptions.

PAS GRANTS

Grants are financed primarily through interest gained from the Pennsylvania Abolition Fund (endowment) at the Philadelphia Foundation and from other investments and income. The Parrish Award cannot be funded out of the Philadelphia Foundation. The Foundation does not give awards/grant direct to individuals.

Regular grants at the Philadelphia Foundation are given to organizations tax exempt under Section 5013C of the Internal Revenue Code that submit proposals that pertain to “improving the condition of the African race”. PAS has the discretion to award other support to individuals and for profit organizations out of its private funds.

PAS Members cannot have a conflict of interest in the grant program and must excuse themselves when such conflicts arise. Notwithstanding, members may encourage any and all qualified applicants to apply.

Requests are due by the first business day after New Year’s. Awards are made at the PAS Annual Meeting on the 4th Thursday in April.

Applications are sought for work to improve conditions of African Americans throughout Pennsylvania, particularly in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. Examples of proposals that would be considered include projects confronting racism, preserving African American monuments, fighting housing discrimination, promoting multicultural arts, exposing children to multicultural opportunities, offering recognition awards, providing scholarships for persons of African American descent in seeking higher education, and improving the quality of race relations in Pennsylvania. Typically, these grants range in size from \$500 to \$2,000, although some grants have been higher.

Applicants must submit:

- Letter of application indicating that you are applying for the **Pennsylvania Abolition Society Fund** at the Philadelphia Foundation

- Description of project or program to be funded and the desired amount (may be included in letter of application)
- Application summary sheet:
http://www.paabolition.org/files/application_summary_sheet.pdf
- Background summary information about the organization and program
- Copy of IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter

Mail to:

The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Fund
c/o The Philadelphia Foundation
1234 Market Street, Suite 1800
Philadelphia PA 19107

The Parrish Award

The Parrish Award is named for John Parrish to honor his legacy of work helping Native Americans and African Americans. The funds for African-Americans were administered by the Abolition Society. A few years back those funds were incorporated into the general fund.

The award is given to an individual who has done outstanding work in Philadelphia improving conditions for African-Americans.

This award may not be given every year. It is solely at the discretion of the PAS.