

# The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

## Archives

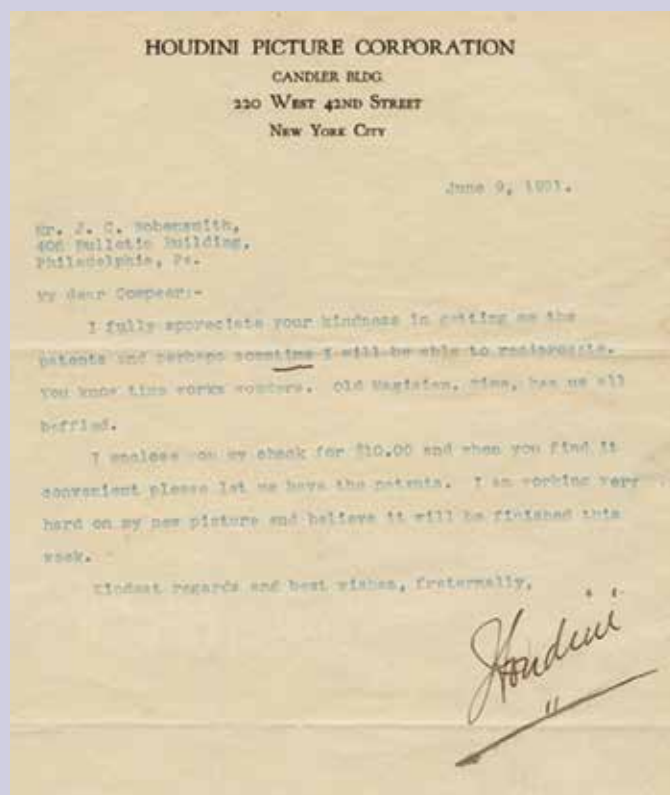
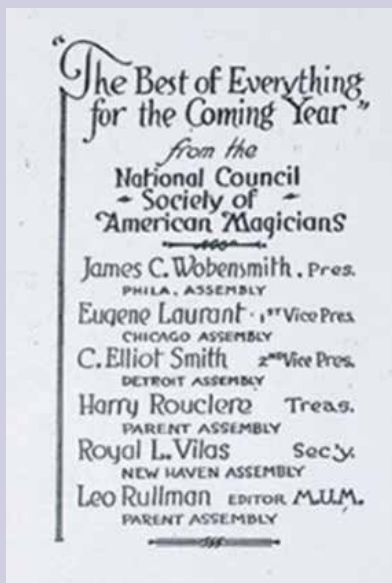
Fall 2025

### Magic, Music, and Merriment: Entertainers of the House

Despite the serious nature of elected office, many House Members have had careers which might be considered more “fun” than the grind of working in Harrisburg. From current House Members to ones who served a century ago — Pennsylvania’s legislature has a long history of entertainers-turned-lawmakers.

#### James C. Wobensmith, 1915-1918

In addition to being a highly regarded patent attorney and having a brief legislative career, Wobensmith worked as a magician throughout his life. He authored Magic Patents: A Classified List of United States Patents Relating to Magic, Illusions, and Allied Subjects (1928), which was at the time a comprehensive catalog of the various “tricks” of the trade of magicians. His patent expertise even led him to do work for renowned magician Harry Houdini. He also briefly served as the president of the Society of American Magicians in 1930.



Above: Holiday card from the Society of American Magicians.

Source: <https://quickerthantheeye.com/>.

Right: Letter from Harry Houdini thanking Wobensmith for securing patents for him.

Source: Potter and Potter Auctions.

# Entertainers Continued



## Clyde R. Dengler, 1957-1966

As well as having a long legislative career with time in both the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Pennsylvania State Senate (1969-1974), Dengler spent much of his life dedicated to music education and entertainment. He served as the chairman of the music department in the Upper Darby School District and authored Read This and Sing! For Voice Students, Chorus and Choir Singers (1945) and Johnny Schmoker: Comedy Chorus for Mixed Voices: Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Songs (1951).

Dengler continued his conducting and singing career well into his senior years. In 1983, he gleefully organized a White House holiday performance for his senior citizen singing group, the Sunshine Singers. Dengler orchestrated the concert by, according to him, writing President Reagan himself a

letter name-dropping every prominent Pennsylvania Republican Dengler knew in Reagan's circle, including Richard Schweiker and Faith Whittlesey. His ploy worked. He and his 13 senior performers traveled to the White House and performed for Members of Congress and their families. Unfortunately, President Reagan could not attend their performance — informing them as they passed him in the hallway that there would be no Christmas party for him due to a dentist appointment.



*Images: President Reagan and Dengler crossing paths in a White House hallway; Sunshine Singers of Upper Darby, led by 84-year old Clyde Dengler, performing in the East Wing of the White House; Sunshine Singers admiring a Christmas tree on their White House tour.*

*Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer; December 19, 1983.*



# Entertainers Continued

## Stanford “Bud” Lehr, 1969-1984

Representative Lehr began his musical career in his youth as a member of the Lehr Family Orchestra. He was also a leader and saxophonist in the Blue Moon Orchestra. In the late 1930s he formed the Bud Lehr Orchestra and performed at local clubs and youth dance nights in the York area.

While in office, Lehr was known as a hard worker and prided himself on focusing on serving the people in his district. He was also known to stand his ground on issues he was passionate about. Lehr served as Chair of the House Liquor Control Committee, and was not afraid to tell Governor Thornburgh that he “had a grave dug” for a bill the Governor wanted his support on when it got to his committee. — York Daily Record, November 30, 1984.



“A successful legislator must provide service for his constituents. I kept being re-elected because I was always giving service to the people of my district.”

— Retiring state Rep. Stanford I. Lehr

Above: Retirement image and quote from The Patriot-News, Harrisburg, PA, December 2, 1984.

Center: Advertisement from The York Dispatch, February 12, 1946.

Right: Lehr Family Orchestra, including Stanford Lehr, pictured with a violin from TempoSenzaTempo.blogspot.com.



## Seltzer Photo Update

In the last issue of the newsletter, we asked for information regarding the photograph on the right featuring Speaker H. Jack Seltzer wearing a neck brace. Former Representative Jere Strittmatter informed us that there was no accident to speak of resulting in the brace being worn. Instead, he recalled it was simply a pulled muscle, and that wearing the brace alleviated some of his discomfort.



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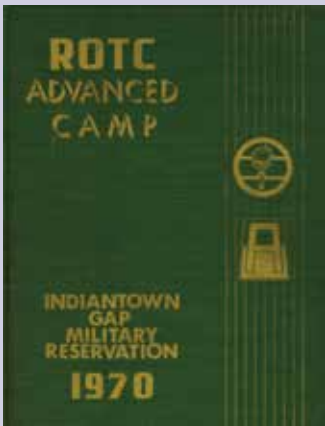
## New Donations!



Left: Representative Stephen C. McCarter recently donated a variety of items from his time in the House — and a few personal mementos from his younger days. Pictured are his 1970 ROTC yearbook, photograph, and his guest passes from the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.



Right: In our last issue, we highlighted the scrapbook collection donation from a descendent of the 1895-1896 and 1903-1906 Speaker Henry F. Walton. Generously, she returned to further gift the Archives with an additional piece from her family's collection — a 1903 photo and personalized message to Speaker Walton from President Theodore Roosevelt.



## Check it out!

Recently, Outreach Archivist Taylor Mason was a guest on the Joint State Government Commission's podcast. She discussed the history of the PA House Archives and how staff preserve and make available House records. The conversation also included discussion of the various types of materials stored within the Archives, research services, recent exhibits, and how archiving is changing in the digital age.

Listen here: <https://jsgc.buzzsprout.com/1400200/episodes/18096844> or scan the QR code on the right!

