



### PA House commemorates 200th Session in 2016

The opening of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' term in 2016 marked the 200th session in which the House has met. This relatively low number for a state with one of the longest histories in the Union may cause some history buffs or Pennsylvania enthusiasts to pause, and for good reason. Pennsylvania's colonial legislature, generally referred to as the Provincial Assembly, was the earliest legislative body for what eventually became the Commonwealth. It began meeting annually on December 4, 1682, in Upland, Chester County, and continued to do so throughout the

colonial period. The Pennsylvania Assembly properly became a state legislature following the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and met annually as a unicameral (single house) legislature until 1789, when the Assembly expanded to a bicameral legislature with the creation of the Senate, on December 7, 1790.

The General Assembly began to assign numbers to each session, starting with the first sessions under the fledgling federal government in 1776 (Sessions 1-102 held between 1776 and 1878). Sessions were counted annually for the

next century. A new model was adopted following the instatement of a new State Constitution in 1874, when a two-year session system was proposed. It went into effect following the closure of the 1878 session, and 1879-1880 was the first dual-year session of the Pennsylvania House (Sessions 103-142 held between 1879-1958). Each of these two-year terms was counted as a single session until another constitutional change took effect in 1959, when sessions—despite continuing to be held for two years at a time—began to count each calendar year as a distinct

session. As a result of this combination of numbering systems, this year the House commemorates its 200th session.



*Left: The first illustration of the Pennsylvania State House, since known as Independence Hall, which was the first purpose-built meeting place for the colony's legislature. This illustration was completed circa 1752, while the building was still under construction, by George Heap and Nicholas Scull, Philadelphia surveyors.*

# Homes of the House through the Years: Meeting

Over 334 years and 200 officially designated sessions later, the Assembly (and since 1790, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives), has met in a variety of locations. The first meeting at Upland in 1682, which lasted for four days, took place just over a month after William Penn had arrived in the new colony. It was held in a house owned by James Sandiland, known as the “Double House” (*page 3*). Throughout the colonial period, the legislature met in a variety of private residences and business spaces, wherever sufficient room was available. Construction began in 1732 on an official ‘state house’ in Philadelphia, to hold meeting rooms for all of the branches of government for the colony. This building (*as pictured on page 1 in an illustration done while the building was still under construction in 1752*) began

servicing as the meeting place of the legislature in 1753.

Over the next two centuries the legislature adapted to new meeting spaces by choice and by challenge. Seeking a location safe from British troops to carry out governmental business during the Revolution, the legislature traveled west to Lancaster, meeting in the county courthouse there (*page 3*) on September 27, 1777. When Harrisburg became the capital of Pennsylvania in 1812, the legislature moved to the city, using the courthouse (*page 3*) as a meeting place until construction on the first Capitol Building was completed in 1821. This new capitol (*page 3*), built by architect Stephen Hills, housed the legislature until it was lost in a fire in 1897, prompting the construction of a new building by architect Henry Ives Cobb. In the interim, the legislature met at Grace

Methodist Episcopal Church on State Street (*page 3*).

When construction of Cobb’s capitol became too costly around 1901, its completion was

abandoned. Instead, the current Capitol Building was constructed around Cobb’s capitol (*page 3*) by architect Joseph Huston, and completed in 1906.

There have likely been dozens of makeshift and temporary meeting places for the Pennsylvania House in addition to its purpose-built and beautiful chambers. One such diversion of location was while renovations were being done on the Hall of the House in 1968, when the legislature met in the Pennsylvania State Museum (then referred to as the William Penn Memorial Museum). Recently photographs of these meetings were donated to the House Archives by the son of former Speaker Kenneth B. Lee, former Member Ken E. Lee, shown below. *[Thanks to the Capitol Preservation Committee for their excellent materials on the history of our State Capitol buildings!]*



**These photographs—and more—will be on display in the House Archives’ display case in the Main Capitol Rotunda through February, if you’d like to take a closer look. Some of the individuals pictured here are unidentified, so if you think you see a familiar face, please let us know!**

# Places of the Legislature over 200 Sessions

Before the “Palace of Art,” the House conducted business across the state, sometimes in officially designated legislative buildings, including the four shown in this section. The four locations below comprise some of the informal or impromptu meeting places the House has used.



From top left: The first meeting place of Pennsylvania's colonial Assembly, in a building in Upland, now Chester (Sherman Day, Historical Collections of Pennsylvania); Independence Hall circa 1770s (National Archives); Hills Capitol, Harrisburg (PA House Archives Postcard Collection); Huston Capitol, Harrisburg (PA House Archives Postcard Collection); Lancaster County Courthouse (PA Historical and Museum Commission); Dauphin County Courthouse (PA State Archives); Grace Methodist Episcopal Church (PA House Archives Postcard Collection).

## In Memoriam

**Milton Berkes**

September 29, 1924-April 3, 2015  
D, Bucks County, 1967-1974

**G. Scott Dietterick**

February 10, 1941-February 22, 2015  
R, Luzerne County, 1987-1990

**Francis E. Gleeson**

November 25, 1937-February 17, 2015  
D, Philadelphia County, 1969-1978

**Thomas F. Lamb**

October 22, 1922-May 7, 2015  
D, Allegheny County, 1959-1966

**William J. Moore**

May 6, 1923-August 11, 2015  
R, Cumberland County, 1977-1990

**John Myers**

October 27, 1947-December 6, 2015  
D, Philadelphia County, 1995-2012

**Robert P. Ravenstahl**

December 31, 1924-September 1, 2015  
D, Allegheny County, 1975-1978

**James P. Ritter**

October 30, 1930-May 4, 2015  
D, Lehigh County, 1965-1982

**Edward A. Wiggins**

March 13, 1933-March 9, 2015  
D, Philadelphia County, 1975-1988

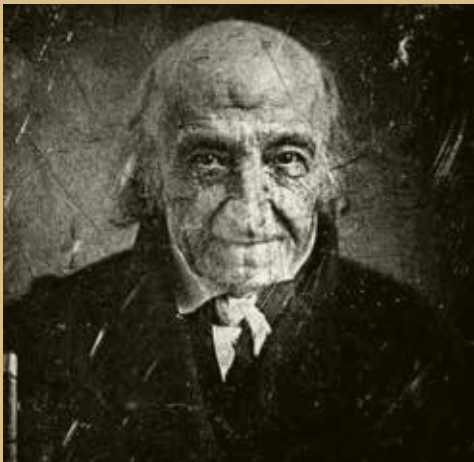
**Stephen R. Wojdak**

December 15, 1938-June 2, 2015  
D, Philadelphia County, 1969-1976

**Victor R.H. Yarnell**

October 5, 1919-January 22, 2015  
D, Berks County, 1963-1964

*More information on the Representatives listed here can be found in the House Archives' Biographical Directory at: [www.house.state.pa.us/bmc/archives/bioDir.cfm](http://www.house.state.pa.us/bmc/archives/bioDir.cfm)*



On May 8, 1811, United States Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin awarded a contract to a man named Henry McKinley to begin the construction of the first national road, through Pennsylvania. Gallatin himself had been a member of the Pennsylvania House from 1790 to 1793, representing Fayette County. The road began in Cumberland, Maryland and stretched to Wheeling, West Virginia. This first section was completed by 1818, though later additions expanded the road considerably. The National Road cut across the southwest corner of Pennsylvania.

*This daguerreotype of Albert Gallatin circa 1845 is held by the Library of Congress.*

DID YOU  
KNOW?