

# The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

# Archives

## Summer 2024



## Uncovering History Through Archives

The House Archives strives to preserve and make available the permanently valuable historical records created by the House, its Members, committees, offices, and staff. The Archives has countless documents, images, artifacts, oral histories, and digital records. In addition to our holdings, the Archives staff utilizes an increasingly vast array of digital collections available through other institutions in our research. Thousands of newspapers, government records, and more are available online through the PA State Library, PA State Archives, as well as an ever-growing number of university and historical society collections from across the country.

This availability means that research that once could take weeks to call, plan, and visit another location to view records can now be done in a fraction of the time. This has allowed the House Archives to learn even more about the institution as well as the diverse and dynamic Members of the PA House. We are occasionally learning new things that even senior staff had never known! Through newspaper research, the Archives recently came across these photographs taken by the Associated Press that we had never seen before, showing some work on the House Floor.



**INSTALLING BULLET-PROOF GLASS**—Workmen have installed plastic in the visitors gallery in the State House of Representatives in Harrisburg to control the dust as they prepare to install bullet-proof glass in front of the gallery between the visitors and the State Legislators. The work is expected to be completed by the end of August. (AP Wirephoto)

*The Evening Sun*, Hanover, Pennsylvania, July 26, 1974

*During the 1970s, bullet-proof glass separated the House Gallery from the Floor — a feature no longer in existence.*



PAUL VATHIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER

### House cleaning

Gretchen Strang appears in the empty Pennsylvania House of Representatives chamber vacuuming the floor minus the legislators' desks preparing to install new carpeting at the State Capitol in Harrisburg Wednesday. The legislators are on summer vacation.

*The Tribune*, Scranton, Pennsylvania, July 1, 1999

*The Archives has many images of the light fixtures and art on the House Floor ceiling being cleaned, but none like this empty Floor image from a deep clean in 1999.*

# Uncovering History Continued

While uncovering new images and facts is often exciting, it can sometimes challenge what was long thought to be true. K. Leroy Irvis was the first African American Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives; however, not the first in the nation. Interestingly, S. Howard Woodson, from neighboring New Jersey, has this distinction, after being sworn in on January 8, 1974. Irvis was first elected Speaker on May 23, 1977. Additionally, Mississippi and South Carolina briefly had African American Speakers in the 1870s before laws limiting Black voter participation were widely passed in Southern States.



Above: Speaker S. Howard Woodson of New Jersey

Image source: [newjerseyglobe.com](http://newjerseyglobe.com)



Right: *The Daily Register*, Red Bank, New Jersey, January 9, 1974



Above: *The Daily Item*, Sunbury, Pennsylvania, May 24, 1977

## Doing our Part:

The Archives has been working to digitize a variety of records for potential researchers. The Archives is currently scanning House Journals from the 1920s and 1930s, which means soon more than 100 years of House Session will be available in just a few clicks. Visit <https://www.house.state.pa.us> and click on the House Legislative Journals link to read decades of Floor action!



These 1920s/1930s House Journals were cut for scanning and can be rebound when the project is complete.



February 22, 1933, House Journal page

# Caring for Our Collection

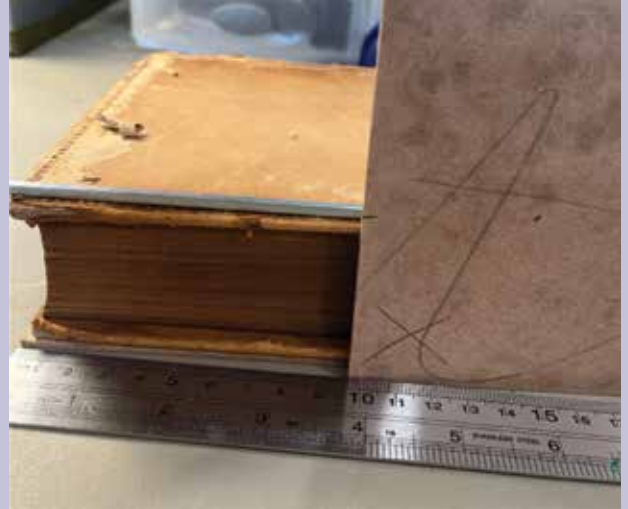
The House Archives endeavors to provide the highest level of care for all the materials in our collection. Occasionally, some items require specialized materials to ensure they will be in good shape for generations to come. Some of the most delicate artifacts we care for are the books in our library. House Journals are an often-utilized resource, and while we are working to digitize them, we still care for these original and valuable documents from the House history. Some of our oldest Journals have condition concerns due to old leather breaking down and weakening spines due to their large size. These books can be rebound, and sometimes that is the best way to repair a well-worn book. However, trying to preserve as much original material as possible from an older book is often preferable.

In an effort to provide some extra care for these Journals, House Archives staff member, Jennifer Ott, participated in a training to learn how to build custom enclosures to store fragile books. The cases are crafted using acid-free materials, and the end product is an extremely sturdy shell casing that will protect books long-term.

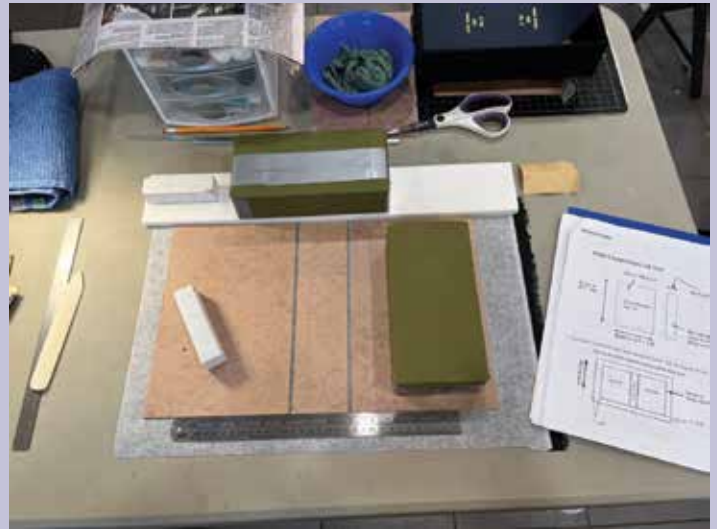


*Left/above: This 1853 House Journal has a fragile leather cover which has come loose. The pages are in great condition for its age but need support so that they don't detach from the spine over time.*

*Right/below: Crafting a case requires very exact measurements and a steady hand to ensure all the pieces fit together perfectly so the book inside is supported on all sides. Materials used include measuring instruments, weights, glue, sandpaper, scalpels, tweezers, and more.*



*Above: A press like this is used to ensure the glued surfaces are solidly attached.*



*Right: The final case with the 1853 House Journal snugly inside; the Journal returned to the shelf alongside the other volumes.*



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## Connecting with Archives Abroad: Ghana Delegation Visits House!

The House Archives had the honor of entertaining a delegation from the Ghanaian Parliament, who were guests of Speaker McClinton. In addition to their introductions on the House Floor and meetings with the Speaker and Chief Clerk, they spent an afternoon learning how the House Archives preserves records and crafts exhibits in an effort to jump start a similar program of their own.



*Photographs clockwise from top left: Chief Clerk Brooke Wheeler was presented with a kente cloth, a royal cloth reserved for special occasions among the Asante people of Ghana; members of the delegation inspect the House Archives oversize storage area; the delegation poses with House Archives staff.*