

# The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

# Archives

Spring 2023



## Wildlife Photography Innovator: Representative George Shiras III

George Shiras III was born in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in 1859. In his youth, he was a keen hunter and annually traveled with his family to Marquette, Michigan, where he reveled in the wildlife that lived on the shores of Lake Superior. After graduating from Cornell University and Yale Law School, Shiras worked as an attorney. In 1888, he was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, serving one session. In 1902, he was elected to Congress, also serving for one session. While in office, he introduced legislation to protect migratory birds.

Shiras began his wildlife photography after finding open hunting seasons conflicted with his free time to travel. Shiras substituted his camera for the gun — a tool he could use to hunt any time of year. He developed several innovative techniques to capture nighttime photographs of wildlife. Shiras equipped a canoe with a box containing several cameras with focuses set between 25 and 45 feet. On top of the cameras, a flashlight and reflector were attached. The flash of light temporarily stunned animals long enough to capture the creatures in stunning poses. Other times Shiras reported scaring animals into a frenzy, which rendered him and his cameras soaking wet.

Shiras and his longtime assistant, John Hammer, were granted a number of patents for the equipment they created during the many years they collaborated.



*Left: George Shiras, "George Shiras and his assistant, John Hammer, aboard their jacklighting-equipped canoe," Whitefish Lake, Michigan, 1893 © National Geographic Creative Archives*



*Right: George Shiras, "Raccoon," Whitefish Lake, Michigan, 1903 © National Geographic Creative Archives*

# Shiras Continued

In addition to snapping photographs from his boat, Shiras also utilized a trip-wire method to capture images of other wildlife. He would set up baited “traps,” which when animals came to eat the treat, a wire would trigger a camera flash and take a picture. Similarly, he would secure ribbons across trailways frequented by animals, and when they passed through, they would trigger the camera’s shutter.

Shiras’ work gained him significant attention. His 1896 photographs entitled *Midnight Series* were exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition and 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition — winning a gold medal and a grand prize respectively. The July 1906 issue of National Geographic Magazine celebrated Shiras’ work with the cover story, “Photographing Wild Game with Flashlight and Camera,” and featured over 70 of his photographs. The issue was very successful and resulted in a surge in subscriptions. It also began the publication’s association with photography — a shift from just a few years prior where most issues were only text articles with sparse graphics. Shiras served as a member of the governing board of National Geographic for many years, and in addition to being a frequent contributor, donated his negatives and photography equipment to the National Geographic Society.

Shiras forged a friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt over their mutual love of the outdoors. The two had become acquainted while Shiras was in Congress, following his advocacy for the protection of migratory birds. Roosevelt — who even joined Shiras at his Michigan camp — encouraged him to write about his work and experiences with wildlife following the success of the 1906 article. In 1935, Shiras followed his advice and published a two-volume book entitled Hunting Wild Life with Camera and Flashlight: A Record of Sixty-five Years’ Visits to the Woods and Waters of North America, which was dedicated to the late President.



George Shiras, “Elk,” Minnesota, 1909 © National Geographic Creative Archives



George Shiras, “Lynx,” Loon Lake, Ontario, Canada, 1902 © National Geographic Creative Archives



George Shiras, “Three white-tailed deer,” Michigan, 1893-1898 © National Geographic Creative Archives

*“The longer we have hunted and the greater our success, the less able are we in after years to recall many of such scenes with satisfactory distinctness... Not so with the camera hunter. Each year adds value to his successful shots, and when he departs for the happy hunting grounds his works live on forever.”*

**- George Shiras III, National Geographic Magazine, July 1906**

# Exciting Acquisitions

Throughout the last year, the House Archives has received many donations from former House Members and staff. These collections include a variety of photographs, scrapbooks, campaign items, recordings, memorabilia, and more. These materials will be a valuable resource for researchers seeking to learn about both the legislative process and the Members who have served in the PA House. The Archives looks forward to incorporating many of these items in our future exhibits throughout the Capitol.



Items counterclockwise from top left

- Postcard with the 1909-1910 Appropriations Committee Members pictured (purchased from eBay).
- Campaign materials donated by Senator Lynda Schlegel Culver following her resignation from the House (R, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder).
- Bulletin board with pin collection donated by Representative Brian Sims (D, Philadelphia).
- “Every Closed Eye is Not Asleep,” sculpture by K. Leroy Irvis, donated by former House Parliamentarian Clancy Myer.



## Here are a few of the other Personal Papers recently received:

- Representative Stan Saylor (R, York)
- Representative David Hickernell (R, Dauphin, Lancaster)
- Representative Daryl Metcalfe (R, Butler)
- Representative Stephen McCarter (D, Montgomery, Philadelphia)
- Representative Frank Ryan (R, Lebanon)
- Representative James Roebuck, Jr. (D, Philadelphia)
- Representative Jerry Knowles (R, Berks, Carbon, Schuylkill )
- Representative Kate Harper (R, Montgomery)

## Bang! Former Speaker Rozzi Donates Gavel



On February 24, 2023, as Speaker Mark Rozzi (D, Berks) struck the gavel to begin House Special Session, the gavel gave way on the third strike and snapped off its handle. The moment of levity was in contrast to the serious topic on the agenda. **3**

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## Now and Then: A Century of Women in the PA House



Above: The 63 women currently serving in the Pennsylvania House, including the first woman Speaker, Joanna McClinton. (Photograph taken April 25, 2023)

Left: The first eight women elected to the Pennsylvania House, who took office in 1923. (Photograph c. 1923)