

CAPITOL AT HARRISBURG

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

As one approaches the Harrisburg East Interchange of the Pennsylvania Turnpike the sign reads "State Capital"--T-A-L ending on Capital...and there have been some arguments as to whether or not that's the correct spelling of Capital. It is Capital--with an AL being the designation for the center of political interest--a Capital City--while an OL means the Capitol place--itself. So both are correct--both taken from the same Latin word meaning "head". And that Capitol of Pennsylvania is Harrisburg. I am often asked by Nigerian students who regularly come to Harrisburg as part of their government training at the University of Pittsburgh, as to how Harrisburg became the Capitol--so I pass it on to you today. Some of you might not know that your town was considered as the State Capitol. Actually back in 1787, the Pennsylvania Legislature--determined that Philadelphia was an "unfortunate location" for Pennsylvania's Capitol so they expressed the hope that the scene of Government could be moved to Harrisburg, where John Harris, two years earlier had conveyed 4 1/2 acres to the State to be used as a State House. (Independence Hall was then our State House!) That's when all the arguments began! First in 1795, the House voted Carlisle; the Senate did not concur. Then, in 1798, the House voted Wrightsville, York County, "without delay"--and the Senate again refused to concur. In 1799 their efforts were crowned with success, and Lancaster, then a town as it is today, of great importance, became the State Capital. So, from 1799 to 1812,

Lancaster was the capitol until it was removed to its present location at Harrisburg. It appears that the choice of Lancaster was not popular, and from 1799, agitation for another removal occurred regularly. First, Harrisburg was again suggested, then the town of Northumberland at the forks of the Susquehanna got on the public relations bandwagon. The House plunked for Northumberland, then the Senate concurred with the House bill, except that they left the name of the town blank; a cute trick. In a Senate Committee the "City of Philadelphia" was inserted for Northumberland, and this ploy failed. Then they tried Middletown, and again Harrisburg; all communities failing, but Harrisburg getting the most votes. Finally, in 1810, a bill passed that stated that "by the Month of October, 1812, the seat of government shall be removed to the Borough of Harrisburg". William Maclay sold 10 acres attached to the four or so that John Harris had offered, and plans went ahead for the building of the Capitol; whose cornerstone was laid by Governor Findlay in 1819 and which was finally occupied on January 2, 1897. The present capitol one of the most magnificent buildings in the world, was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt on October 4, 1906. A visitation to see the beautiful State Capitol should be a must for all Pennsylvanians.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.