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PHMC Scholar-in-Residence Final Report

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Research conducted at the Pennsylvania State Archives was the first major research trip for my dissertation, “A Post-Industrial State?: Work, Culture, and Deindustrialization in Post-WWII Eastern Pennsylvania.” This project is an attempt to provide an in-depth social and cultural study of the long-term aftermath of deindustrialization, one that explores the ways Pennsylvanians resisted, accommodated, or reinvented themselves in the face of economic change.¹ Central to my project is an understanding of the ways state residents identified and constructed the space around them, especially as they redefined former industrial sites and their communities.² Postwar economic change will be explored through a focus on the towns and cities situated along the Schuylkill River in eastern Pennsylvania, a region that encompasses the variety and scope of postwar economic change, including coal mining, diversified and decaying industrial cities and towns, and white collar New Economy sprawl and malls.³

¹ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, eds., *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closing, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); this work focuses primarily on the short-term dislocation and protest associated with plant-closings.

² For important examples of scholars who see deindustrialization as a long-term process with important ramifications well after factories close, see Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: ILR/Cornell U.P., 2003); My interest in spatial and social geography stems from the work of David Harvey and historians of the environment and spatial turn: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

³ See these economic and social histories of Philadelphia and the coal regions: Philip Scranton, *Figured Tapestry: Production, Markets, and Power in Philadelphia Textiles, 1885-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); idem, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983); Philip Scranton and Walter Licht, *Work Sights: Industrial Philadelphia, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986); Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The PA Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); For river-centered histories, see Ari Kelman, *A*

The 2006 Scholars-in-Residence Program provided an important jumpstart for my research project, providing time, funds, and access to rich historical sources.

My research at the Pennsylvania State Archives focused on a few broad areas and themes: comparisons between official and grassroots responses to deindustrialization; in-depth data on economic trends, including deindustrialization and job loss; state economic development efforts; the connections between changing political and economic trends; community revitalization efforts; different visions of the state's and communities' futures; connections between environmental concerns and economic revitalization efforts; economic revitalization alternatives, including those in high-tech or service economies; local responses to deindustrialization, particularly letters, surveys, interviews, or community input into revitalization plans. The entire list of record and manuscript groups I consulted is compiled in the "Pennsylvania State Records" section of my Working Bibliography at the end of this report.

As expected, the Archive's holdings were very strong on official state-level responses to deindustrialization. A few broad themes emerged from my reading of these responses. In speeches to organizations across the Commonwealth, for example, officials in the Departments of Commerce and Mines and Mineral Industries revealed doubts about Pennsylvania's place in the post-World War II "Affluent Society." Speeches from the 1950s and onwards conveyed increasing fears of industrial decline. Thus, in a 1956 speech on state industrial development efforts, Secretary of Commerce William R. Davlin referred to Pennsylvania's "industrial might" in the past tense, while lauding his state's role in World War II victory. Calling that war's outcome "an uneasy and tenuous

victory,” Davlin referred to looming Cold War military threats from abroad. However, his day’s purpose and speech concerned pressing problems on the domestic front. As the appointed frontman for the state’s industrial development efforts, Davlin’s work ran counter to the prevailing 1950s myths of an increasingly “Affluent Society” of economic abundance and the end of economic concerns. In the context of the state’s declining steel, mining, and manufacturing, Davlin’s “unease” could be shared by those in the audience concerned with Pennsylvania’s tenuous postwar industrial base.⁴ Speeches such as this, as well as press releases and other public policy announcements, are important sources for understanding state- and local-level theories of industrial decline and revitalization.

Official speeches and industrial development efforts attest to the inequality that existed amid more general postwar economic abundance. Records describing state-level economic decline and consequent revitalization efforts can be used to illuminate the contours of postwar political and economic thought, particularly the supposed Liberal Consensus that ruled both political parties of that period.⁵ Records of the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (31.5), formed in 1956, as well as the state’s participation in federal urban renewal, Area Redevelopment, and Appalachian development programs, reveal the extents and limits of postwar governmental economic and social policy. The PIDA, the state’s most pointed response to deindustrialization, was given the authority to dispense low-interest loans to lure businesses and industries to Pennsylvania’s towns and cities. But the Authority’s powers were clearly limited. The

⁴ Speech, William R. Davlin, “Industrial Development in Pennsylvania,” Banquet Address before the 48th Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Gas Association, Pocono Manor Inn, Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania, May 23, 1956, PA State Archives, RG 31, Dept. of Commerce, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence.

⁵ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of Political Thought since the Revolution* (Harcourt Brace, 1955); Liz Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

agency's adherence to federalism ran strong with economic powers devolved to the state and local levels. Deference to private initiative was also important as the agency only responded to local development requests. Indeed, the agency expected, even required, pre-existing local community redevelopment efforts, such as industrial development funding drives, to receive PIDA loans. While the agency was successful in luring industries to the state (up to the present), the lack of state-wide coordination or long-term planning is telling, particularly when understood in the context of contemporary socialist-oriented European governments.

In addition to PIDA efforts, officials in the Department of Commerce (RG 31) engaged in numerous other economic strategies useful for understanding public conceptions of Pennsylvania's changing postwar fortunes. Industrial development efforts were focused on luring out-of-state industries and federal or military contracts to the state. The agency also engaged in "testimonial-type" advertising campaigns to sell the state as potential site for industrial expansion or relocation. Commerce Department records also document increasing advocacy of high-tech research and development and tourism-related businesses, new alternatives to older decaying industries. In these efforts, searching for ways to revive or replace heavy industry, officials sought to project an improved image of the state – its economy, workforce, and landscape – to an outside audience. These images often sought to gloss over the state's contentious labor history and grimy industrial past, symbolizing the growing post-industrial mentality among state officials.

The prioritization of environmental issues, documented in various record and manuscript groups, was tightly bound up with the process of deindustrialization and

offers further proof of a major shift in mindset towards Pennsylvania's decaying industrial base.⁶ Environmental and conservation concerns, with strong roots in Pennsylvania's Progressive era, further developed in the postwar period, and increasingly focused on the ill-effects of industrial pollution. Records of the Department of Mines and Mineral Industries (RG 45), particularly those of the various Secretaries, contain correspondence related to mine fires, subsidence, strip mining, and acid mine contamination. Together with numerous petitions and letters from the anthracite region, these documents attest to feelings of insecurity, environmental instability, and ambivalence towards the once-lucrative mining industry. Letters from around the state also voice growing concerns about water pollution and advocate the reservation of water for recreational, aesthetic, and drinking purposes, rather than industrial uses (RG 6, RG 45, RG 31, MG 191, MG 206). Strong interest in outdoor leisure, recreation, and open space preservation, particularly through the state's Project 70, can be found in the governors' papers and should be considered in any understanding of (particularly suburban) concerns with the environment (MG 191, MG 206). Overall, the various examples of environmental activity convey an air of ambivalence towards manufacturing and industry that must be understood as a major factor in postwar culture and economic thought.

The Department of Community Affairs' records (RG 34) offer additional evidence of a citizenry dealing with changing economic conditions, often conflicting economic and environmental goals, and complicated attitudes towards industry. Planning documents provide useful descriptions of development efforts, including the comparative

⁶ On postwar environmental concerns, see Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

role of industrial development in larger planning goals. Maps and prescriptive literature for the location of industry in particular spaces can be used to track changes in industrial location in counties and municipalities over time. Using these sources, comparisons can be made between the more prosperous suburban Philadelphia counties and towns that more readily adapted to postwar economic change and those that did not. For example, prosperous suburban planning bodies focused their efforts primarily on guiding or even constraining sprawl, rather than undertaking industrial redevelopment of their older industrial centers. In comparison, less-prosperous counties focused more attention on attracting industry and alleviating employment concerns. Interestingly, however, county planners in both areas hoped to guide industrial growth to more appropriate spaces, particularly industrial parks, thus conforming to a wider trend of locating industry outside older urban centers. It is telling that planning bodies pushed this goal on industry even as they continued to prioritize open space preservation. That planning bodies were primarily concerned with these aesthetic concerns, as well as recreation, residential planning, open space, and environmental problems, rather than economic planning, is important evidence of a postwar economic and cultural transition.

Some tentative conclusions can be made from State Archival sources. Deindustrialization garnered early and consistent attention from state officials. However, the response was meager, short-term, and decentralized. The state's version of economic revitalization should be understood within Cold War anti-communist constraints, while compared to more comprehensive and successful efforts, such as the postwar reindustrialization of Europe and Japan. On the local level, deindustrialization elicited a number of expected responses, including calls for government assistance on economic

revitalization and unemployment. However, local residents often expressed ambivalence towards manufacturing, particularly in letters about environmental concerns, such as mining-related and toxic waste pollution. Related to these concerns, planning bodies made efforts to segregate or mask industry in landscaped industrial parks. When placed alongside government efforts to increase tourism, recreation, and jumpstart high-tech research businesses, these trends point to an increasingly inhospitable environment for industry in the postwar period. My research plan necessitates that I conduct more extensive local research to uncover longer and deeper narratives of particular industrial sites and communities. More research is needed on redundant industrial sites (how they were reused) and new industries (where they were sited) to confirm these tentative conclusions.

Future researchers would do well to use the State Archives as a window into official postwar state economic and social concerns. Less expected, but much appreciated, many of the record and manuscript groups I examined also offered openings into local concerns, the primary focus of my work. As mentioned above, letters to Department of Commerce and Mine officials and different governors contained evidence of local and working-class economic and environmental problems. Use of the Archives as a source for citizen concerns was confirmed in a later visit to the Archives in spring 2007 when I completed my search of postwar governors' papers. While many researchers may find the plenitude of postwar governmental sources daunting, governors' and their cabinet members' papers are often organized by subject, allowing fairly quick perusal of topics and focused research on major postwar topics of interest.

Working Bibliography

Primary Documents

Pennsylvania State Records

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David Lawrence Papers. Manuscript Group. PA State Archives. Harrisburg, PA.
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Richard Thornburgh Papers. Manuscript Group. PA State Archives. Harrisburg, PA.
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William Scranton Papers. Manuscript Group. PA State Archives. Harrisburg, PA.

Philadelphia-area Records

Chamber of Commerce of West Philadelphia Records, 1939-1980. Manuscript Collection. Temple University Urban Archives (hereafter TUUA). Philadelphia, PA.
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Newspapers

The Philadelphia Evening Herald

The Philadelphia Inquirer

The Pottstown Mercury

The Pottsville Republican

The Reading Times/Eagle