

**Final Report**  
**PHMC Scholar-in-Residence Program, 2005-2006**

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**Project Title:** Mines, Mills and Malls: Regional Development in the Steel Valley

**Address:** P.O. Box 194 Hamburg, MI 48139

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**Narrative Summary**

I divided my time at the Pennsylvania State Archives into two periods of residency. During my first trip in June 2005, I focused on the records of the Post War Planning Commission (PWPC) and the State Planning Board (SPB). I was interested in these records because of the membership on both of General R.K. Mellon, a key proponent of the Pittsburgh-based Allegheny Conference on Community Development and of the Pittsburgh "Renaissance." The PWPC records provide important insight into the increasing involvement of state agencies in southwestern Pennsylvania including the creation of state parks, highway construction, and urban redevelopment. The SPB took over many of these activities during the late 1940s, though most of its day-to-day operations were subsequently transferred to other departments. Between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, the agency again played an important role in state government and developed a number of key reports on Pennsylvania's economy including, "Regional Development Reconnaissance" (1966), "Economic Development Through Innovation" (1977), and "Choices for Pennsylvanians" (1981). These reports are available at the Commonwealth Library, with the archives providing important background materials.

Since my dissertation is concerned with economic and community development, I also spent a significant amount of time exploring the records of the Departments of Commerce, Community Affairs, and Community and Economic Development. The records of these state agencies were particularly important in understanding the urban development activities of the region's smaller communities, many of which do not have extensive local history collections. The papers of Ray Christman, Secretary of Commerce during the late 1980s and early 1990s, were valuable for understanding the evolution of economic and community development programs during a particularly volatile period of Pittsburgh's history. Before joining the Department of Commerce under Governor Robert Casey, Christman was the director of Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority, and he left the post in 1992 to head the Pittsburgh High Technology Council. During his time in state office Christman maintained extensive contacts in the region and oversaw a number of important development initiatives aimed at alleviating the problems caused by the decline of the steel industry.

In addition to the records of state agencies, I also found the collections of Pennsylvania governors to be useful. The subject files relating to particular issues/events often provided important insight into the relationships between state and local government. Correspondence files provided a snapshot of those issues important enough to prompt local residents to write to the governor, including either support or opposition to highway construction, strip mining, water pollution, and the decline of the steel and coal industries. I found the records of Governors Richard Thornburgh and Robert Casey especially useful as their time in office corresponded with a period of tremendous upheaval in the region and of increasing state involvement in economic development programs. The records of their respective Secretaries for Legislative Affairs were also informative and easy to use, with correspondence arranged by House and Senate districts.

I spent a significant portion of the second half of my residency focusing on the papers of Representative Tom Murphy (D-North Side). Murphy served in the Pennsylvania Assembly

from 1979-1993 before he left to become Pittsburgh's mayor. His papers cover the years between 1989 and 1993 and offer an important and unique window into both Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh politics and history. Murphy was the impetus for *Strategy 21*, an economic development effort launched during the mid-1980s by Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh, and important issues covered in the papers include: a 1991 House special committee investigation into the Southwestern Pennsylvania RIDC; the tensions between city and suburb over issues of taxation; the redevelopment of Pittsburgh's riverfront land in the wake of the steel industry's collapse; and the construction of the East Street Valley Expressway (I-279) through Pittsburgh's North Side.

In addition to its significance for Pittsburgh, the Murphy collection also includes a number of issues with statewide ramifications. Murphy was a driving force behind the Ben Franklin Partnership, an economic development program that focused on fostering high-tech industries, and he served on the program's board of directors. He was also instrumental in the passage of Pennsylvania's rails to trails legislation, which fostered the transformation of abandoned railroad rights-of-way into recreational trails. In addition to fostering the program on a state level, Murphy worked with local groups in Pittsburgh and surrounding communities to develop the trail system in southwestern Pennsylvania into one of the most significant in the United States. His files include correspondence with local activists as well as a large amount of materials relating to the Three Rivers Heritage, Mon-Yough, Butler-Freeport, and Montour Trails.

In addition to the major collections outlined above, I also explored the papers of the GPU-DQE Transmission line project, the Monessen Oral History Project, the papers of the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, the Department of Highways, and the papers of Governors Martin, Duff, Lawrence, Scranton and Shapp. I also made extensive use of books, local history magazines, and other materials from the PHMC Library. Finally, building from my findings in

the Murphy collection, while I was in Harrisburg in April 2006, I recorded oral histories with Eric Bugaile and Tom Sexton, past and current directors of the Pennsylvania Regional Office of the Rails to Trails Conservancy.

I divided my residency into two-week segments separated by a significant period of time (approx. 9 months). Consequently, each period of residency accomplished a separate goal in the overall development of my dissertation. The first period occurred as I was conducting research for two dissertation chapters focused specifically on southwestern Pennsylvania. My research at the archives formed the majority of primary sources consulted for one of these chapters, which focused on the economic and community development strategies employed by local and state officials. This research also formed about half of the materials consulted for a second chapter on suburban development, especially for sections on postwar highway construction and urban development strategies during the 1980s and early 1990s.

My second residency occurred after I had completed a draft of my entire dissertation and thus I was able to target my research more narrowly on specific issues that I needed to further clarify. I accomplished this largely by searching for key events and actors in the office files and correspondence of Governors Martin, Duff, Thornburgh and Casey. Fortunately, I also stumbled on the Murphy papers shortly before leaving for Harrisburg and I couldn't have found a better source for a number of issues that needed further work concerning community and riverfront development in Pittsburgh during the 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to filling in gaps in my research, the Murphy papers also pointed me in new directions for understanding subsequent changes in the region during the 1990s.

The research I conducted at the Pennsylvania State Archives through my PHMC Scholar-in-Residence fellowship was crucial to my dissertation project and will continue to have an impact on my long-term research program. PSA records are especially important in narrating the histories of numerous smaller communities that do not have the same capacity for preserving

records found in larger cities. State agencies also provide a more comprehensive view of regional development that is oftentimes lacking in local history collections. I hope that my research might someday inform the interpretive programs of the PHMC as more recent history is slowly incorporated into our collective memories. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity presented by the Scholar-in-Residence program and would be happy to be of any assistance if needed. Please feel free to post this report on the agency website.