

## Pennsylvania's Commitment to Preserving Heritage and Continuing the Dialogue of Freedom Through the Written Word

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When it comes to preserving American heritage, there is nothing more lasting than the written word. The writings of a particular era are not only important for their historical value as a record of events, it is also essential to see how they influenced the social and cultural dialogue of the time. There could be no better example of this idea than the writings from Pennsylvania during the Civil War era.

Pennsylvania has a richly written history of the debate for and against slavery and the struggle for freedom. The intensity and breadth of these writings suggest that Pennsylvania is the birthplace of the American dialogue on the issues of emancipation. The first written document advocating the abolition of slavery in America was written by Quakers and Mennonites in Philadelphia in 1688. Other writings disseminated by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in the 1700s began to bring abolition to the forefront of the American consciousness. By the 1820s a new generation of reformers "radicalized" the abolition movement and broke both racial and gender barriers with the formation of bi-racial organizations: the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Female Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia in 1833. Famous advocates, including Pennsylvanians Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Lucretia Mott, also fueled the flames for reform.

Originally from Baltimore, African American Poet Frances Watkins Harper spent most of her life in Pennsylvania where she wrote some of her most important poetry advocating for abolition. Her *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, published in 1854, became a commercial success and is noted not only for its attacks on slavery, but the oppression of women as well. Harper soon became a fixture of the anti-slavery lecture circuit and many of her poems were published in newspapers throughout the country. She used most of the earnings from her works to help free enslaved Africans. In 1892, she became one of the first African American women to publish a novel: *Iola Leroy*.

Pittsburgh's own Martin Delany founded and published *The Mystery* newspaper to communicate the ideas of abolition and equal rights for all Americans both enslaved and free in the mid-1800s. *The Mystery* proved to be very important for its time. It was for several years the only African American published newspaper in the country in the 1840s. Many of the articles in *The Mystery* were republished in other newspapers and were cited as the inspiration for many of the day's mainstream pro-abolition newspapers' opinions and columns. The success of *The Mystery* eventually inspired

Frederick Douglass to seek Delany's help in producing his own newspaper: *The North Star*. The spirit of this history lives on today in Pennsylvania, home of two of the oldest continually running African American newspapers in the country: *The Philadelphia Tribune* and *The New Pittsburgh Courier*. The *Tribune*, created in 1884 by Christopher James Perry, is the nation's oldest African American newspaper and continues to enjoy a strong readership to this day. The *Courier*, founded in 1907 by Edwin Harleston, was one of the first black newspapers to have a national circulation. Its campaigns, like boycotting misrepresentations of African Americans in mainstream media and the infamous "Double V" campaign that

symbolized the rights of full citizenship for African Americans serving in World War II, were revolutionary at the time.

In 2008, Pennsylvania is examining this written history with Live and Learn Weekends. These events seek to produce a greater shared knowledge about our nation's past and foster a dialogue about its future through discussions based on historical records and literature, hopefully strengthening the regional identities and local pride that newspapers like *The Mystery* and *The Courier* helped establish. The goal is to increase local participation in preserving our nation's cultural heritage and remembering the past.

As the name suggests, these Live and Learn Weekends are not just about learning about the past, but living it as well. These events feature historical personae and utilize artists and art organizations like the African American Museum in Philadelphia, *Living the Experience* in Lancaster, and the Heinz History Center and the Blairsville Historical Society in Pittsburgh and its countryside to help provide participants with an understanding of what these important writings meant to the people who first read them in the Civil War era. These weekends in Philadelphia, Lancaster and Pittsburgh include a scholar-led conversation about a featured book and guided tours of local historical sites. Visitors can also enhance their experiences while exploring all of the present-day shops, restaurants, and culture Pennsylvania has to offer.

On August 15-16, the final Quest for Freedom Live and Learn Weekend for 2008 will feature the book "Lincoln on Democracy," edited by Mario Cuomo and Harold Holzer. The editors of this selection of Lincoln's letters and speeches are scheduled to co-host a nationally televised presidential debate this fall that will be modeled after the Lincoln-Douglas debates and is a prelude to the 2009 Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial. Previous Live and Learn Weekend visitors have viewed the beautiful stained glass windows and original artifacts at Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia; toured the Senator John Heinz Center Underground Railroad exhibit in Pittsburgh; and attended *Living the Experience*, a spiritually creative production of the Underground Railroad at Bethel AME Church in Lancaster. All four Live and Learn Weekend books (Lorene Cary's *The Price of a Child*, Margaret S. Creighton's *The Colors of Courage*, Eric Foner's *Forever Free*, and *Lincoln on Democracy*) are on sale at the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission's (PHMC) online bookstore at [www.pabookstore.com](http://www.pabookstore.com). Pennsylvania will announce next year's Quest for Freedom Live and Learn Weekends during the National Park Service's Network to Freedom 2008 Underground Railroad Conference in Philadelphia, September 15th – 20th.

The Network to Freedom is a National Parks Service program that tells the story of resistance against the institution of slavery in the United States through escape and flight. Pennsylvania has 22 sites or programs certified by the Network to Freedom.

If you are interested in joining us for the next Live and Learn Weekend, log on to the Visit PA website at [www.visitpa.com/freedom](http://www.visitpa.com/freedom).

The Pennsylvania Humanities Council and Jump Street, Inc. are co-sponsors of the Quest for Freedom Live and Learn Weekends. Borders Books Inc, WITF-89.5 FM, American Urban Radio Network, and *The New Pittsburgh Courier* have provided promotional support for this project.

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