

# **HISTORY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HERITAGE AREAS**

Prepared for the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

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## **Table of Contents**

p. 3 .....	Executive Summary
p. 7 .....	Massachusetts Heritage State Parks
p. 11.....	New York Urban Cultural Parks / Heritage Areas
p. 15.....	Pennsylvania Heritage Parks / Heritage Areas
p. 28 .....	Directions for Future Research
p. 29 .....	Bibliography

## **Executive Summary**

In 1989, Pennsylvania launched its State Heritage Parks Program. Among the first such efforts in the nation, the initiative aimed to promote economic development, cultural conservation, recreation, education and intergovernmental cooperation in regions closely associated with industrial history and manufacturing. Twenty-five years later, the program remains vibrant and is widely recognized as the most successful state-level heritage area effort in the country.

This report provides a succinct overview of heritage areas in Pennsylvania, with a particular focus on the early years of the program. It offers information on other efforts, both state and federal, that influenced developments in the Commonwealth, and also links the emergence of heritage parks to broader trends in conservation, historic preservation and political economy. It is important to note, however, that each of the twelve heritage areas is unique - in its history, geography, management structure and cultural traditions. Just as communities like Scranton, Pittsburgh, Pottstown, Erie, Johnstown and Lancaster have diverse stories, so too do the heritage areas that encompass them. What follows, then, is an attempt to sketch out broad themes and key documents that have played a noteworthy role in overall program development, especially from the perspective of the state agencies charged with overseeing the initiative.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- The terms “heritage park,” “heritage corridor” and “heritage area” have been fluid over time and often seem to have as many definitions as there are heritage projects. Understandings of the designation vary not only by state, but also between individual states and the federal government. Heritage areas are linked together by their strategies for economic development,

preservation, education and conservation rather than by size, thematic emphasis or geography.

- Developments in Massachusetts and New York as well as on the federal level significantly influenced the development of the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program, but ultimately it emerged as a distinctive initiative, with unique characteristics, requirements and effects.
- The agendas of political leaders and state agencies shaped the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas. As a program sustained in part through public monies, heritage areas have had to adapt continually to shifting policy priorities at multiple levels of government.
- Over the course of roughly three decades, the focus of the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program shifted significantly, from an early planning initiative focused predominately on cities, to a regional effort centered on the history and contemporary legacy of specific industries, to finally a broad-based “heritage” program, with no particular shared thematic, geographic or temporal emphasis. This allows for much-needed flexibility, but may also hinder efforts to create (if desired) unified messaging and marketing
- Since the early 1980’s, the heritage parks program has emphasized four primary goals: economic development, cultural conservation (which complements, but is not analogous to historic preservation), environmental conservation / recreation and inter-governmental cooperation, which has since expanded to encompass coalition building more generally. Documenting the relative importance of these goals in 2014 could be an important element of the strategic planning process.
- Since the late 1970’s, the National Park Service has played an important role in shaping Pennsylvania Heritage Areas, through planning assistance for early projects, joint state-national heritage area designations (in 6 regions), and technical assistance from programs

such as Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) and the National Register.

Despite the at-times turbulent interchanges between individual heritage areas and the NPS, the overall influence has been positive and should be cultivated further if possible.

- Early successes at garnering state and federal funding have given way to leaner allocations, though this is in no way unique to Pennsylvania, and indeed, over the long term, heritage areas in Pennsylvania have fared better than in Massachusetts and New York. As part of a more detailed budget analysis, it would be beneficial to chart how funding for capital projects, including federal monies, has changed over time as this may be the category of support that has declined most significantly for all three states.
- Since the 1970s, a tension has existed in many Pennsylvania Heritage Areas between the promotion of tourism and the conservation of living cultural traditions. Moreover, scholars analyzing varied interpretative programs, especially those focused on labor history, have noted a tendency to, at times, romanticize the past and the present in order to avoid controversy. While there is some evidence to support such assertions, it is also important to note that the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas are among the most high-profile labor history sites in the nation, emphasizing work and industry more than the NPS, for example.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following texts provide critical interpretations of information presented at various heritage areas and urban cultural parks: Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000) p. 91-100; Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Carolyn L. Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); Brian O'Donnell, "Memory and Hope: Four Local Museums in the Mill Towns of the Industrial Northeast," *Technology and Culture* 37, no. 4 (1996): p. 817-827; Darlene Miller-Lanning, "Economy As an Artifact: Regional History and Public Planning Potential in the Delaware and Lehigh Navigation Canal National Heritage Corridor at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania," (PhD Diss. Thesis: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1995); Shalom Staub, "Cultural Conservation and Economic Recovery Planning: The Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program," in ed. Mary Hufford,

Interpretation, especially of labor, capitalism and race and gender relations within unions, is difficult, but incredibly important work. It would be worthwhile to re-visit periodically themes and programming in light of changes in academic and public scholarship – indeed, heritage areas might even be able to bring workers, management, academics and community members together (and some heritage areas have done this). In addition, more recent shifts in political economy, such as deindustrialization, which were relatively new when the program began to take shape, have now been ongoing for more than three decades. Programming focused on this type of issue, whether through an environmental, labor, ethnic or even artistic lens might be worth considering, if it is not already underway.

- Due to time and funding restraints, this history largely reflects agency records gathered from the state archives and secondary sources. Oral histories with longtime staff would likely enhance the information contained in this report, as would interviews with community activists involved in the designation and subsequent management plan implementation process.

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*Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 229-244.

## Massachusetts Heritage State Parks

### Key Points

- First heritage state park created in Lowell in 1976
- State planned, funded and staffed, with a few parks later moving to nonprofit management
- Parks only located in urban districts / neighborhoods
- Labor and industry primary interpretive focus
- Ongoing funding challenges, especially in non-federally supported parks
- Tourism, adaptive re-use, provision of urban open spaces primary emphases

The movement to create Heritage Parks in Massachusetts emerged largely in response to changing social and economic conditions linked to capital flight and the decline of manufacturing in the Northeast and Midwest. Beginning as early as the 1920's, but accelerating after the end of World War II, towns and cities across the Commonwealth lost jobs and tax receipts to non-union, low wage locations in the American South and overseas. Federal and state aid efforts, expanded during the 1960's Great Society, waned under the Nixon and Ford Administrations, forcing local government, business and community leaders to search elsewhere for sources of both public and private sector assistance.<sup>2</sup> Tourism and recreation soon emerged as potential new sources of revenue, with historic sites especially popular in light of both bicentennial preparations and expanded interest in family genealogy and local folklore.<sup>3</sup>

Early attention centered on the city of Lowell. It was home to a remarkably intact (though threatened) nineteenth-century industrial infrastructure, the highest unemployment rate in the

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<sup>2</sup> On the responses of the Nixon and Ford administrations to the Great Society, see Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011) p. 160-221.

<sup>3</sup> In *Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States: A Study*, Ormond Loomis discusses the significance of the bicentennial, local folklore and genealogy as turning points in the development of local and non-elite oriented history projects. See: Ormond Loomis, *The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States: A Study* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983) 8-10.

state, and a well-organized and extremely motivated group of local boosters. Many of these had been involved the Model Cities program (part of the War on Poverty) as well as late 1960's historic preservation campaigns centered on protecting worker housing from urban renewal.<sup>4</sup> Their ongoing efforts, which focused in large part on the potential economic impacts of adaptive reuse and heritage tourism, caught the attention of elected leaders, who were eager to find any solution to the state's high unemployment rate.

In 1976, Governor Michael Dukakis signed a bill that designated sections of downtown Lowell, as well as land adjoining the city's 5.6 mile power canal system, as the state's first official "heritage park." Recognition by the governor and legislature served to generate additional momentum for the city's ongoing campaign to gain federal designation through the National Park Service (NPS) - an effort that ended successfully in June 1978 when Congress passed a bill establishing Lowell National Historical Park.<sup>5</sup> Lowell's creation proved significant in several regards: the park was managed cooperatively; included very little direct federal ownership; interpreted industrial work and labor; and included economic revitalization as one of its primary objectives.

Public investment and interest in the project grew quickly after it became an NPS unit. Within only a few months, officials in the Divisions of Planning and Forests and Parks, within the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, under whose auspices the

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<sup>4</sup> Brann J. Wry, "Urban Parks," *Design For Arts in Education* 85, no. 1 (1983) 28; Loretta Anne Ryan, "Lowell in Transition: The Uses of History in Urban Change" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1987), p. 65–96.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the origins of Lowell National Historical Park, see: Ryan, "Lowell in Transition: The Uses of History in Urban Change"; Cathy Stanton. *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Robert Weible, "Visions and Reality: Reconsidering the Creation and Development of Lowell's National Park, 1966-1992," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 67-93.



heritage parks program was located, moved to expand the initiative.<sup>6</sup> Additional cities were invited to submit proposals for inclusion and, in early 1979, the state approved thirty-five million dollars in bond money for urban-focused, industrial heritage parks in seven more locations: Lynn, Lawrence, North Adams, Fall River, Gardner, Holyoke and Springfield.<sup>7</sup>

As in Lowell, these parks were relatively small, usually only the size of a single neighborhood, with limited public ownership of historic resources. The designation process did not depend on a formal study of potential sites or completion of a feasibility plan. Only cities were invited to submit proposals and compete for funding. Final park boundaries were often non-contiguous and could include scattered sites throughout a particular jurisdiction. The Division of Planning provided early support, with later operations overseen by the Divisions of Forestry and Parks. Early priorities included the creation of interpretive programs and exhibits housed at state-run and staffed visitor centers, as well as the promotion of adaptive reuse projects in mills and factories. In some cases, however, recreation was fostered through the protection of open space and shoreline access, including the purchase of lands with waterfront access in Lynn.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, the Massachusetts program grew to include a dozen locations, each with links to nineteenth and twentieth century labor and industry. While Lowell had served as the model, its experience proved unique, as no other site received such considerable federal support, running

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<sup>6</sup> Brian O'Donnell, "Memory and Hope: Four Local Museums in the Mill Towns of the Industrial Northeast," *Technology and Culture* 37, no. 4 (1996): p. 820.

<sup>7</sup> Antoinette P. Roise, "The Proposed Roxbury Heritage State Park: A Look at Its Role in Community Revitalization" (MCP Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Betsy Shure Gross, "The Urban Heritage State Park System: A Massachusetts Model for Environmental and Economic Revitalization," in *International Perspectives on Cultural Parks: Proceedings of the First World Conference* (Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado: U.S. National Park Service, 1984) 251-252.

over \$8 million in recent years.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the other parks often struggled to simply remain in the state budget, with the possibility of complete elimination narrowly avoided during especially difficult funding years in the late 1980's and early 1990s. Ultimately, most (though not all) of the heritage parks did manage to continue on, albeit with a more modest, community-oriented set of goals and aspirations and often with significant support from non-profit organizations.<sup>10</sup> Today, a smaller number of heritage parks (eight) are actively in operation, with one – the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park – sharing a landscape with a larger national heritage corridor, and two others, in Lawrence and Lynn, located within the Essex National Heritage Area. All are recognized as a part of the broader state park system and continue to be staffed by a modest number of state employees, with friends' groups often providing additional support.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Grant Welker, "Report: National Parks Like Lowell and Concord Prop Up Economy," *Lowell Sun*, March 4, 2014, [http://www.lowellsun.com/todaysheadlines/ci\\_25270046/report-national-parks-like-lowell-and-concord-prop](http://www.lowellsun.com/todaysheadlines/ci_25270046/report-national-parks-like-lowell-and-concord-prop), accessed June 1, 2014; For comparison's sake, in 2006, the state budget for the Lawrence State Heritage Park in 2006 was estimated to be \$250,000. Yadira Betances, "Preserving History for Twenty Years: Lawrence Heritage State Park Celebrates Anniversary," *Eagle-Tribune*, September 2, 2006, [http://www.eagletribune.com/local/x1876262139/Preserving-history-for-20-years-Lawrence-Heritage-State-Park-celebrates-anniversary?zc\\_p=0](http://www.eagletribune.com/local/x1876262139/Preserving-history-for-20-years-Lawrence-Heritage-State-Park-celebrates-anniversary?zc_p=0) accessed June 2, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Betances, "Preserving History for Twenty Years: Lawrence Heritage State Park Celebrates Anniversary," *Eagle-Tribune*, September 2, 2006, [http://www.eagletribune.com/local/x1876262139/Preserving-history-for-20-years-Lawrence-Heritage-State-Park-celebrates-anniversary?zc\\_p=0](http://www.eagletribune.com/local/x1876262139/Preserving-history-for-20-years-Lawrence-Heritage-State-Park-celebrates-anniversary?zc_p=0) accessed June 2, 2014; O'Donnell, "Memory and Hope: Four Local Museums in the Mill Towns of the Industrial Northeast," 822.

<sup>11</sup> It is not entirely clear whether Lowell Heritage State Park still operates independently of the federally run Lowell National Historical Park.

## New York Urban Cultural Parks / Heritage Areas

### Key Points

- First urban cultural park created in Hudson-Mohawk region in 1977
- State designation, but funding primarily generated by municipality and private sources
- A number of regional / multiple jurisdiction parks, but majority in single urban center
- Urban history broadly defined as primary interpretive focus, though this emphasis has expanded over time
- Ongoing funding challenges, difficulty in establishing program as priority within state budgeting processes

At roughly the same time as the Massachusetts heritage parks program took shape, a similar idea began to generate interest in New York State, where many urban areas were also suffering from job loss, capital flight and destructive attempts at urban renewal.<sup>12</sup> Efforts initially coalesced in a single location - the town of Troy, located north of Albany on the Hudson River. Known as the “collar city,” because of its history as a major textile producer, Troy also had impressive iron-making facilities, once among the largest in the nation. By the mid-twentieth century, employment in both industries had declined significantly, as had the overall city population.<sup>13</sup> In response, elected officials and a coalition of local residents came together in 1972 to form a nonprofit, the Hudson-Mohawk Industrial Gateway, an organization whose goals included economic development, historic preservation, education and community empowerment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wendy Ellen Feuer, “New York State's Urban Cultural Park System: An Innovative Use of Historic Assets to Promote Tourism,” in *International Perspectives on Cultural Parks: Proceedings of the First World Conference* (Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado: U.S. National Park Service, 1984) 243.

<sup>13</sup> Patrice Kuzniak, “Social change in upstate New York Cities,” in *New York State in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Thomas A. Hirschl and Tim B. Heaton (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1999), 123-140.

<sup>14</sup> Hudson-Mohawk Urban Cultural Park Commission, “Hudson-Mohawk Cultural Park Management Plan” (Cohoes, N.Y: The Commission, 1984); Wry, “Urban Parks,” 29-30.

While the Troy initiative shared many characteristics with the early Massachusetts program, it also differed in several key respects. Most significantly, despite initial roots in a single city, the project quickly expanded, with five additional municipalities, including neighboring Cohoes, joining the effort via an inter-municipal agreement. This made the New York approach, dubbed the Hudson-Mohawk Urban Cultural Park (HMUCP), far more regional in scope, encompassing a broader, more diverse landscape, rather than simply a single district. It also allowed for the incorporation of more explicit natural protection and recreation goals. Another distinction between what eventually took shape in Lowell and the Hudson River effort was the lack of federal aid for the latter. Instead, support came almost exclusively from local and regional sources (both public and private), with state government providing limited monies via the Office of Parks and Recreation.<sup>15</sup>

In 1977, leaders of the HMUCP successfully petitioned the New York Legislature for a state-level designation. During the same session, a second, related bill, the Urban Cultural Park Planning Act, also passed. It authorized the state Office of Parks and Recreation to develop a comprehensive plan, including criteria and possible locations, for a system of urban parks, which was to “provide for the preservation, interpretation, development, and use of urban settings of special significance to the historical and cultural evolution of New York State”<sup>16</sup> This decision set New York apart from Massachusetts, as the latter’s legislature never authorized program legislation. Beginning in the late 1970’s then, New York planners undertook an extensive, five-

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Bray, “The New York State Perspective: Urban Cultural Parks,” in *Proceedings from the Greenline and Urbanline Parks Conference* (Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government of the State University of New York, Albany: Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation, State of New York, 1983) 11-14; Wry, "Urban Parks," 29.

<sup>16</sup> New York Urban Cultural Park System, “Technical Plan: Submitted to Governor Hugh L. Carey and the New York State Legislature” (Albany: New York State Office of Parks and Recreation, 1981) 3.

year study, which examined hundreds of potential locations, before ultimately selecting thirteen sites representing nine separate themes to join the program initially.<sup>17</sup>

In 1982, Governor Hugh Carey signed a follow-up bill into law, officially creating an Urban Cultural Parks system. The legislation set procedures for the development of management plans, created a statewide advisory council and identified mechanisms for possible expansion of the number of designated sites. It also restricted the state's role to one of a catalyst by limiting the number of years a park could receive substantial financial support. Instead, following an initial period of assistance, responsibility would shift almost entirely to the municipal level, with the exception of competitive grants, in the hope that private fundraising would fill the void of decreased state support.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in contrast to the Massachusetts initiative, which was largely state-run and funded and included support for state visitor centers, the New York program was locally driven, with the state providing technical assistance, grants and credibility via the designation process. For example, the state provided 50% of funds for management plans and 25% for interpretation and education, with an even smaller percentage for capital improvements.

The thirteen areas included in the original "class" of urban cultural parks represented a wide variety of themes and landscapes, including "the flowering of culture" for an area of downtown Buffalo and "reform movements" for Ossining, New York, site of Sing-Sing prison. "Labor and industry" remained an area of interest, as did "Business and Capital," but work and

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<sup>17</sup> Feuer, "New York State's Urban Cultural Park System: An Innovative Use of Historic Assets to Promote Tourism," 243.

<sup>18</sup> Wry, "Urban Parks," 29. In some ways then, the New York program occupied a more precarious status than the Massachusetts parks – at least in the view of existing bureaucracies. While quite distinct from traditional protected areas, urban industrial parks in Massachusetts were nonetheless identified as a part the state system. The Urban Cultural Parks, by contrast, were more local and idiosyncratic, with diversity in structure and focus, but also subject to an even greater lack of predictable funding support.

industrial development were not the primary focus.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, of the thirteen parks recognized in the 1982 legislation, only two – the Susquehanna Urban Cultural Park and the Hudson-Mohawk Urban Cultural Park- included more than one municipality within the stated boundaries. More recently, the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt and the Long Island North Shore, both larger, non-urban landscapes, have also joined the program.

The New York State Urban Cultural Park System (re-named Heritage Areas in the 1990s) currently includes 20 locations. Several have some overlap with four federally designated National Heritage Areas.<sup>20</sup> By and large, the New York program remains urban-centered, though a subset of areas do include rural and/or agricultural landscapes. In recent years, funding from the state government in Albany has been reduced dramatically with no state staff providing support to designated areas, leading one longtime supporter to comment that the “state parks agency abandoned the state heritage areas and their law, leaving the responsibility to local governments.”<sup>21</sup> The cuts have arguably had a negative impact on efforts to implement management plan goals and contributed to a lowered program visibility among potential visitors and residents.

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<sup>19</sup> Bray, “The New York State Perspective: Urban Cultural Park,” 11-14; Feuer, “New York State's Urban Cultural Park System: An Innovative Use of Historic Assets to Promote Tourism,” 243-244; New York Urban Cultural Park System, “Technical Plan: Submitted to Governor Hugh L. Carey and the New York State Legislature,” 23.

<sup>20</sup> The four federal areas are the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. However, these are not the joint designations common in the Pennsylvania program.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Bray, “Help State Heritage Areas,” *Times-Union.com*, August 11, 2014, <http://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Help-state-heritage-areas-5680247.php> retrieved August 14, 2014.

## Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program

### Key Points

- Approximately a decade of planning at local, state and federal levels before program officially authorized (1989)
- The federal National Heritage Areas program played a significant role in shaping the Pennsylvania effort and the National Park Service invested both time and resources in several regions across the Commonwealth throughout the 1980's
- Emphasis on multi-stage planning with both feasibility studies and management action plans supported, at least in part, by state funds
- The first decade of the program featured a relatively rapid expansion in the number of participating regions (ten), while during the next fifteen years only two new heritage areas gained designation, for twelve total.
- Eventual "footprint" of Pennsylvania Heritage Parks, far larger than the Massachusetts or New York approaches, reflecting the regional orientation of program
- Recreation and conservation, always a key element of the program, received added attention with the migration of the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in the late 1990's.

On May 1, 1978, Jerry R. Wettstone, inaugural Director of the Bureau of Recreation & Conservation, sent a letter to colleagues in the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs as well as other state agencies, inviting them to attend a presentation on urban cultural parks offered by David A. Crane and Partners, an architecture and planning firm based in Philadelphia.<sup>22</sup> Included with his message was a copy of the *New York Gazette*, a short newsletter produced by the New York Office of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with Crane and Partners, highlighting progress on the state's efforts to develop a comprehensive plan for its nascent urban cultural park system. Impressed by the New York proposal, as well as by the developing Massachusetts Heritage Parks initiative, Wettstone commented, "I've become

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<sup>22</sup> Wettstone identifies the firm as "David Crane Associates," however, a review of documents produced by David Crane for the New York Urban Cultural Parks identifies the firm as "David A. Crane and Partners." Jerry R. Wettstone, "Briefing on Urban Heritage / Cultural Parks," May 1, 1978, Carton 3, Folder 1 (Plans and Studies), Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program Files, Record Group 65 (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

increasingly interested in the relationship between historic preservation, urban cultural parks and neighborhood preservation...I would like to invite you to attend this meeting to learn more about how we might consider applying some of the concepts of this program to our own historic preservation and neighborhood development efforts in Pennsylvania.”<sup>23</sup>

Wettstone’s short memorandum is among the earliest examples of interest on the part of a Pennsylvania state official in the development of urban or heritage parks in the Commonwealth.<sup>24</sup> It demonstrates that over a decade before the formal authorization of funding for heritage areas, Pennsylvanians had already begun to consider various options for linking together economic development, cultural conservation, inter-governmental cooperation, historic preservation and outdoor recreation. This process of investigation and planning would continue throughout the late 1970’s and 1980’s, as the state produced a series of heritage-oriented surveys and reports, eventually culminating in the 1989 creation of the Heritage Parks Program. The path of heritage development in Pennsylvania was far from linear, however, with several different geographic and thematic emphases emerging over the course of eleven years. In particular, the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that interest in industrial history pre-dates the emergence of heritage parks by more than 80 years. According to Carolyn Kitch, author of the recently published, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past*, Pennsylvanians have been interpreting the story of their state’s industrial past since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Kitch highlights the Poconos resort town of Mauch Chunk, where turn-of-the-century visitors could enjoy a ride on a railroad originally built to transport coal cars. (22) She also notes that by the 1920s’s, folklorists had begun to collect and catalog the songs of Pennsylvania coal miners. (24) Additionally, during the Great Depression, artists commissioned by the Treasury Department under its Fine Arts Section completed post office murals featuring scenes of the state’s industry, while WPA writers working on the Pennsylvania guide book also focused on industrial development, celebrating union victories, while critiquing environmental pollution caused by industries like coal and steel. (Kitch, 27) Kitch also highlights a 1976 exhibition at the State museum in Harrisburg entitled “Steel in the History of America.” Funded by Bethlehem Steel, it featured nearly 500 photographs and drawings connecting steel to American history. Carolyn L. Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), p. 22, 24, 27, 34.



history of Heritage Parks reveals an openness to change, as the program shifted from a chiefly urban focus, based largely on efforts taking place in neighboring states, to a more regional orientation, with a distinctive concentration on conserving and interpreting large landscapes associated with industry and labor.<sup>25</sup>

An early milestone in the history of heritage parks in Pennsylvania was the publication of the 1980 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, a document updated every five years per federal Land and Water Conservation Fund guidelines. The plan called on the state to draft a detailed proposal for the development of close-to-home recreation opportunities in or near urban centers. Eventually, the results of this study, supported with funds from the National Park Service, would serve as the basis for the state's first comprehensive heritage strategy, a proposal released in 1984, *Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications*.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly then, the first push for heritage parks came from a study aimed at increasing opportunities for recreation and open space.

During this same period, the State Planning Board also produced a significant report entitled *Choices for Pennsylvanians*. The result of a multi-year study process (1979-1981) initiated by then Governor Dick Thornburgh, *Choices for Pennsylvanians* sought to “suggest ways in which the private and public sectors could help to create more jobs for Pennsylvania’s working men and women.”<sup>27</sup> Focused on economic development and community conservation,

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<sup>25</sup> The Pennsylvania effort was not exclusively urban in the sense that only large cities or metropolitan areas received attention, smaller towns did as well, but the earliest studies, including the 1984 report, *Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications*, did not focus attention on rural or agricultural landscapes that later became part of designated heritage areas.

<sup>26</sup> Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Pennsylvania State Planning Board, *Choices for Pennsylvanians: Citizens Edition*. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State Planning Board, 1980) p. 1.

the report highlighted the state's history as an industrial powerhouse and, among numerous suggestions, advocated for adaptive re-use of existing infrastructure.<sup>28</sup>

Though funded and produced by different entities, the 1980 State Recreation Plan and the *Choices for Pennsylvanians* report both highlighted the need for creative responses to the Commonwealth's rapidly changing social and economic landscape. In 1963, for example, almost half (46.2 per cent) of the state's workforce was employed in manufacturing; by 1981, the figure had fallen by about a third, to only 33.2 per cent.<sup>29</sup> Cities, in particular, were hit hard by such shifts, as were communities dependent on resource extraction and manufacturing. As job opportunities in traditionally robust fields like steel and mining declined, government policymakers and community activists searched elsewhere for potential sources of employment and tax revenue. Tourism, already among the state's largest industries, garnered keen interest, with sites connected to heritage and outdoor recreation emerging as an especially popular economic development alternative.<sup>30</sup>

During the early 1980's, efforts to implement both *Choices for Pennsylvanians* and the Outdoor Recreation Plan moved ahead, as officials considered various ways to organize a new type of urban park system. One early approach is outlined in the 1981 study "Pennsylvania's Urban Cultural Park System: A Model for Development." Written for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) by a Carnegie-Mellon University History Professor, the paper proposed a set of parks that would "illustrate the broad spectrum of urban

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> David N. Allen and Walter H. Plosila, "Turnaround Strategies for Economic Development," *Long Range Planning* 21, no. 3 (1988), p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> This route did not prove universally popular, however, as some criticized it as a concession to corporations intent on leaving Pennsylvania for lower-wage, largely non-union locations in the southern and western United States and overseas, while others noted that wages in the hospitality industry tended to lag behind those in other fields.

development” in the state.<sup>31</sup> Though each site might focus on a particular theme or period, the system as a whole would seek to cover the entire breadth of Pennsylvania’s urban history. Industry and labor history would be significant, but not necessarily the exclusive or even primary focus of such an effort.

In 1984, following several additional years of evaluation, the state released (as noted previously) a more detailed survey, *Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications*. Produced by three agencies, the aforementioned PHMC, the Department of Environmental Resources (DER) and the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the study used a complex screening matrix to analyze more than forty urban sites (usually at the neighborhood or even building level) for possible inclusion in a new state heritage park system. Consideration was given to factors such as physical integrity of resources, revitalization potential and viability of recreational opportunities. Additionally, all the areas selected for study qualified as “distressed” according to standards set by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, meaning they suffered from high unemployment and poverty and had aging housing stock.<sup>32</sup> In this early iteration, the Pennsylvania program bore distinct similarities to the Massachusetts and New York efforts, especially in the size of potential areas under consideration and in the urban focus.

The 1984 study, while impressive in its research and recommendations, failed to galvanize sustained interest among high-level state policymakers, and it would take several more

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<sup>31</sup>Michael P. Weber, “Pennsylvania’s Urban Cultural Park System: A Model for Development,” January 26, 1981, carton 1, folder 1 (untitled), Heritage Park Planning Project, Urban Cultural Parks System, 1980-1984, Record Group 13 (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>32</sup> Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications*, 4. According to the report, a designation of distressed signaled “high levels of unemployment, many poor families, aging housing stock, and inadequate tax bases.”

years to establish a program. Nonetheless, the Department of Community Affairs did take smaller actions to support heritage-oriented projects, including the provision of planning grants via the Recreational Improvement and Rehabilitation Act (RIRA) program. For example, in 1985, DCA supplied \$10,000 to help fund a Susquehanna Heritage Park study - the first time formal heritage park planning had been undertaken in the state. In addition, also via RIRA, DCA provided \$1,765,000 in support to “heritage park-type programs and initiatives,” including land acquisition, in four regions: the Lackawanna Valley Heritage Park Area, the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Heritage Corridor, the America’s Industrial Heritage Project and the aforementioned Susquehanna Heritage Park. The Bureau of Recreation and Conservation also allocated funds to these same areas through Project 70 (P-70), Project 500 (P-500) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, during this period (1984-1989), the focus of the heritage park effort shifted rather dramatically, from one focused on tracing the broad sweep of Pennsylvania’s urban history through city-based projects, as outlined in “Pennsylvania Heritage Parks: A Concept with Applications,” to a regional initiative centered predominately on industrial themes, with all projects required to address one of the following fields: iron and steel, coal, textile, machine and foundry, transportation, lumber, oil and agriculture.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for this shift are complex and merit further scrutiny. My initial research indicates a variety of factors contributed to the change: a decrease in federal and state funding available for urban-centric programs; the creation of a

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<sup>33</sup> Raymond Angeli, Lisa Yaffe, and Larry Williamson to Honorable Karen A. Miller, “Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Workgroup,” August 29, 1988, carton 4, folder 1 (Heritage Parks Program), Record Group 34 (Subject Files, 1981-1986, Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>34</sup> Shalom Staub, “Cultural Conservation and Economic Recovery Planning: The Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program,” in ed. Mary Hufford, *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 231.

new, regionally-focused National Heritage Areas program that invested significant staff time and resources in three Pennsylvania efforts - America's Industrial Heritage Project, the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley; and a growing sense among Pennsylvania state officials that the significance of the Commonwealth's industrial history not only merited heightened recognition, but also could serve as the cornerstone for new heritage-focused tourism efforts

Following a few years of relative inactivity, the inauguration of a new governor, Robert Casey Sr., in 1987, offered the opportunity to revive the heritage parks effort. In a series of memoranda written for Karen Miller, Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs, as well as the governor's office, DCA staff made the case, especially in economic terms, for heritage parks. In a program prospectus completed in September 1987, for example, the heritage parks program was described as a "comprehensive effort to coordinate natural and cultural conservation, historic preservation, recreation development and services, and community awareness and education... The program is linked to an economic development process which provides the framework for public / private partnerships essential for community and economic revitalization."<sup>35</sup> Heritage parks, especially if centered in de-industrializing areas, could offer a "major contribution to the Governor's economic development program," which sought to combat unemployment linked to the closing of steel mills and other manufacturing enterprises by investing in new industries like tourism and travel, as highlighted in the well-publicized "America Starts Here" tourism campaign. It was now the time to fund this endeavor, the

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<sup>35</sup> Larry G. Williamson to Working Committee and Other Interested Parties, "Final Version: PA Heritage Parks Program Prospectus," September 24, 1987, Carton 1, Folder 1 (Heritage Parks), Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program Files, Record Group 65 (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

prospectus argued, especially given the ongoing support of the National Park Service and the success of similar efforts in New York and Massachusetts.

Another shift that occurred in the mid-1980s was an expansion in the number of state agencies and bureaus involved with the heritage parks effort, with the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission and the Governor's Office of Policy Development assuming especially significant functions.<sup>36</sup> By the end of 1987, a more formal work group had taken shape, which also included additional representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Education and Transportation, and the Pennsylvania Arts Council. Eventually, this group would gain a more formal status as the State Heritage Park Interagency Taskforce (later known as the Commonwealth Partners), playing an influential role in reviewing and approving both feasibility and management action plans. In this earlier period, however, the inclusion of so many varied agencies is noteworthy as it demonstrates the sheer variety of goals associated with heritage development – whether such diversity ultimately helps or hinders program sustainability and support is a topic worth exploring in future research and planning efforts.

Throughout 1988 momentum for the establishment of a heritage parks program continued to grow with increased media coverage and heightened recognition within the Casey Administration. In July, the NPS joined with the DCA, the Lackawanna County Commissioners and the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a one-day seminar in Scranton to explore the potential for a heritage park in the Lackawanna Valley. This event, held in the Governor's hometown, brought together a large and varied group of both private and public sector stakeholders, including the Mayor of Scranton, county business, nonprofit and social service leaders, congressional staff, and representatives from the New York and Massachusetts

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<sup>36</sup> PHMC, DCA and DER continued to provide leadership during this period.

programs.<sup>37</sup> While focused specifically on the Lackawanna Valley, the seminar demonstrated the crosscutting appeal of heritage parks and also signaled the real and continued interest of federal officials in supporting such an effort.

In 1989, after roughly a decade of study and planning, Governor Casey included \$550,000 in his yearly budget request for the Department of Community Affairs to support planning efforts for eight nascent heritage parks – Lackawanna Valley, Johnstown-Windber-Altoona (later Allegheny Ridge), Delaware and Lehigh Canal, Schuylkill River, Oil Region, National Road, Mon Valley (later Rivers of Steel) and the Lumber Region.<sup>38</sup> The program expanded in both the following budget cycles with appropriations of \$950,000 and \$1,800,000 respectively, with the number of prospective heritage park sites increasing to nine with the addition of the Lincoln Highway, all with a primarily industrial focus. The 1990 Budget Program Analysis (PRR), submitted to justify expanded support, emphasized the industrial focus and the economic development potential of the heritage parks as well as their broader goals:

Pennsylvania has a rich history of industrial development that has contributed, throughout its history, to the growth and economic progress of the state and nation. The program will identify and designate areas of the state whose cultural, recreational, and historic resources exemplify this industrial heritage, and develop and market these resources to attract tourists, create jobs, and generate public and private investment opportunities. In addition to economic development, goals of the program are intergovernmental cooperation, cultural conservation, recreation and education.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> C. Allen Sachse to Alan Chace, “Heritage Park for Lackawanna Valley,” July 1, 1988, Folder 1 (Heritage Parks, in a blue subfolder marked, “Lackawanna Valley Heritage Park Workshop,”) Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program Files, Record Group 65 (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>38</sup> Of the \$550,000 allocated, \$400,000 went to support management planning efforts in Lackawanna Valley, Delaware and Lehigh Canal and Johnstown-Windber-Altoona. *Penndustry: Newsletter of the Industrial Survey of Pennsylvania*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 1990), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> “1990-1991 Program Analysis” (PRR-Pennsylvania Heritage Parks program), Carton 1, Folder 1 (Heritage Parks), Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program Files, Record Group 65 (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

It is worth noting that the same PRR also highlighted federal investment as especially significant. “An important financial impact of the PRR is the continued leveraging of federal investments in the three federally designated heritage areas...a primary objective of the program will be continued leveraging of federal dollars.” (p.2) <sup>40</sup>

Also important in the program’s early years was the release of a 1991 research report commissioned by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Made in Pennsylvania: An Overview of the Major Historical Industries of the Commonwealth*.<sup>41</sup> The publication not only stressed the contribution of Pennsylvania-based industries (such as iron and steel, coal, textile, foundry and machine shop, transportation, oil, lumber, agriculture and transportation) to the broader course of American history, but also documented especially significant engineering and industrial structures across the Commonwealth – many of which had only recently been abandoned. The various sites and strategies identified in the report then served as an important influence on the designation and evaluation of prospective heritage parks, which, as noted earlier, focused much of their efforts on communities, sites and industries highlighted in *Made in Pennsylvania*.

In April 1991, roughly two years after the state heritage parks program received its first appropriation, Governor Casey designated the Lackawanna Heritage Valley as the first official state heritage park, based on recommendations from the Department of Community Affairs, which remained the lead administrative agency, and the State Heritage Interagency Taskforce. Shortly thereafter, in 1992, the Allegheny Ridge Heritage Park gained designation, followed by the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridor in 1993, which completed both a state and a federal

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce Bomberger and William A. Sisson, *Made in Pennsylvania: An Overview of the Major Historical Industries of the Commonwealth* (Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Bureau for Historic Preservation, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1991).



management planning process. During the same period, several other areas successfully completed initial feasibility studies, including the National Road Heritage Park and the Oil Region Heritage Park in December 1991, and the Mon Valley Steel Industry Heritage Park (later Rivers of Steel) and the Schuylkill River Heritage Park in January 1992, with all four regions beginning their management planning processes as official “state heritage park planning areas” in the summer of 1992.

By 1992, Pennsylvania had invested some \$3.3 million in the Heritage Park Program, with millions more in local, private and especially federal funds (both for heritage park planning and for specific capital projects within designated regions) augmenting state appropriations. In that same year, the State Interagency Taskforce, along with local heritage parks, organized the inaugural State Heritage Parks Conference, held in Altoona on May 4 and 5, 1992. The event focused on four key themes that served as the focus of program activity: economic revitalization, park planning and management, recreation and environmental conservation. Drawing several hundred attendees, the event also featured internationally renowned scholar David Lowenthal as its keynote speaker. Addressing the topic of “Holistic Heritage: Promises and Problems for Pennsylvania,” Lowenthal urged attendees to remember the dynamic nature of heritage, noting that, “Living tradition needs constant rekindling. *Nothing* [emphasis in original] stays the same; memory and hope evolve along with nature and culture. Heritage parks ossify unless change is built into them.”<sup>42</sup>

By the mid-1990s, the number of state heritage parks had grown to eight, with the National Road and Oil Region designated in 1994; the Lincoln Highway and Schuylkill River designated in 1995; and Rivers of Steel designated in 1996. Endless Mountains Heritage Park

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<sup>42</sup> David Lowenthal, *Holistic Heritage: Promises and Problems for Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa: Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission, 1993) p. 8.

and the Lumber Region Heritage Park continued management planning during this same period, bringing the total number of parks and prospective parks to ten. The program's primary theme remained industry, with all grant projects required to substantially address the topic.

Administratively, the program had undergone significant change, with the elimination of two key entities, the Department of Community Affairs and the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission, in 1996. As part of this shift, the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, which had been housed in the DCA and served as a primary agency overseeing the heritage parks moved, along with its responsibilities, to the Department of Conservation and National Resources (DCNR), which remains its current home. Under DCNR, the program had lead administrative staff in Harrisburg and Scranton as well as additional support staff in local offices. The impact that the elimination of the DCA, especially the Heritage Affairs Commission, had on the Heritage Parks Program is worth exploring in greater detail. For example, how did the loss of expertise in folklore and cultural conservation that accompanied the abolition of Heritage Affairs impact the review of grant applications, whether for planning or project implementation? Additionally, the shift from an agency centered on coordination with local government, community planning and urban development, to one with a mission more centered on land management, recreation and environmental restoration, among other goals, merits further attention. Impacts from these changes may have been mitigated by continuity in key personnel, who continued to work with the program, albeit in new capacities within the re-organized agency structure.

By the late 1990's, another important shift had occurred in the program's management as focus shifted away from the industrial theme. The three most recent areas to be designated, Endless Mountains (1998), Susquehanna Gateway (2001) and Pennsylvania Route 6 (2005) all

emphasize primarily rural landscapes, with little focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century sites of manufacturing and production that served as the focus for other heritage parks in their earliest years.<sup>43</sup> Temple University Professor Carolyn Kitch has highlighted this change in her work *Pennsylvania in Public Memory Reclaiming the Industrial Past*, noting that the return of “nature” to industrial sites in the form of flora, fauna, and enhanced public access renders it increasingly difficult to interpret stories of furnaces, mills, mines and factories.<sup>44</sup> These types of challenges will only grow more pronounced with the passage of time, especially as younger residents and visitors arrive with little to no first hand knowledge of industrial production. How have such changes impacted the program’s initial foundations as an urban industrial project and what changes lie ahead in for the next 25 years?

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<sup>43</sup> Of course, agriculture is an “industry,” which has become increasingly factory-like over the past fifty years. However, these aspects of farming are not the focus of the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas that emphasize rural landscapes.

<sup>44</sup> Kitch, p. 42-55, 68-73.

## Directions for Future Research

As part of the upcoming strategic planning process, the following items might merit further inquiry:

- What motivated passage of the 2014 heritage area program legislation? What changed (or did not change) over the course of 25-years which merited this new statutory authority?
- Do heritage areas originally established for their links to industrial history still feel this emphasis is core to their mission? Why or why not? Do heritage areas still feel that cities and urban residents are a core constituency?
- Pennsylvania Heritage Areas have often included working-class perspectives in their projects and interpretation, a rarity in much preservation and conservation work. What other voices / stories / perspectives have not received as much attention from heritage areas? Are women's voices, people of color, recent immigrants and the LGBT community, included in planning and programming? Are heritage area staff and board members drawn from the Commonwealth's diverse communities?
- Does it make sense to have a unified program theme like industrial history or is this too limiting? Why?
- How have connections to the federal government, whether through funding or technical assistance, aided the development of heritage areas in Pennsylvania? How might connections be strengthened?
- Has the goal of cultural conservation remained central to heritage areas over time? Why or why not?
- Has the goal of inter-agency cooperation remained central? Did the program become a platform for various entities within state government to work together?
- How have shifting funding priorities within DCNR impacted heritage areas, especially recent shifts towards environmental and other "green" initiatives?
- Does the public (s) understand the differences between a heritage area and a conservation landscape? What differentiates these designations? And why did they emerge at different moments in time?
- What budgetary, political, and management ramifications have emerged as a result of shifting the program's primary support and championing from the Executive branch to the Legislative branch of state government?

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