



Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee
The Honorable Randy Gardner, Chairman
FY 2016-17 Budget Testimony
Testimony from Burt Logan, Executive Director & CEO
May 12, 2015

Chairman Gardner and members of the Subcommittee on Higher Education:

It is a pleasure to be with you this morning. Since 1885, the Ohio History Connection has been honored to serve as the State of Ohio's history partner. Throughout the past 130 years the study and presentation of history, like many other disciplines and professions, has evolved to meet the needs of those we serve – the citizens of Ohio. During the past few years, we, as an organization, have reassessed how to help Ohioans relate to the state and to its story. Our guiding principle has been, and continues to be, simple and straightforward: create a climate across Ohio where history can flourish. In order to advance Ohio's story, we are building, nurturing, and sustaining relationships with Ohioans in every corner of the state, instead of exercising a central, authoritarian voice. Before covering in more detail how we are creating such a climate where history can thrive, allow me cite several examples:

- Our management partnerships with more than 50 of the sites we administer on behalf of the state have produced an environment where local communities have reclaimed the stories embedded in these sites, and where the local community is actively shaping how their site's story reaches Ohioans.
- Four years ago, the Legislature created the income tax check-off provision for Ohio History. Instead of retaining those funds within our organization and deciding how to distribute them, we established a review process, whereby any non-profit organization within Ohio, engaged in the preservation and promotion of Ohio History, can request financial support for its project. Rather than our determining which projects should be funded, we bring together panels of experts from all areas of local history to prioritize funding. As a result, the Ohio History Fund, in its first three years, has invested \$350,000 in 33 local history projects.
- Perhaps the best example of how we, as an organization, are being responsive to Ohioans is to be found in our recent name change. Coming out of the Great Recession, we conducted extensive research between 2011 and 2013 to identify ways we could better connect what we do to everyday Ohioans. We

did not intend to lead down the path of changing our name, but we discovered that many Ohioans perceived the organization as exclusive and inaccessible. Through focus groups held in five Ohio regions, self-identified history buffs and moms told us that they could not readily identify with our organization. When asked, they described the organization's name as antiquated and exclusive.

Once we decided to consider changing our name and brand, we worked to create a name that is easy to remember and quickly captures and conveys the nature of the organization. Our mission remains the same, but how we go about delivering history services statewide is continually guided by the desire to create a climate where Ohio History can flourish.

It is a genuinely exciting time for Ohio History! Governor Jim Rhodes was fond of saying that Ohio has more history by accident than most states have on purpose. You might say that we live and work in a "content-rich environment" when it comes to Ohio's history. That is abundantly evident now that we are at the beginning of the busy season for our state network of historic sites and museums. A sampling of some of the exciting public programs and events coming soon:

- On May 20, two new exhibits open at the Ohio History Center. *RiverWorks Discovery*, a major traveling exhibit on the commerce, culture and conservation of America's rivers, will be on display through August 16. Also, *Lustron Stories: Americans at Home* features portraits of people who live in Lustron homes (this exhibit complements the ongoing 1950s exhibit at the Center that features a Lustron Home), photographed by Cleveland photographer Charles Mintz.
- On May 23 the Ohio Village, located at the Ohio History Center in Columbus, re-opens for the season (through Labor Day weekend). Among the numerous events this summer are Storybook Village (promoting early childhood literacy through characters from popular kids' books and TV programs) June 6 and Military Appreciation Day (where Warren Motts will be honored) on July 18.
- Starting in June, there will be twice-monthly Verandah concerts and free ice cream socials this summer at the home of 19th President Rutherford B. Hayes in Fremont. The outdoor concerts are sponsored by Fremont Federal Credit Union and will feature different performers every other Wednesday beginning June 10.
- The Summer Solstice is coming to Serpent Mound June 20th. Join us for an afternoon lecture, solstice mound tour and quiet sunset watch as spring turns to summer at one of Ohio's most famous and internationally significant sites.
- *The Fine Art of Jazz* exhibit opens June 20th at the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center in Wilberforce. This exhibit features the photos of

Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Dan White and includes items from the Museum's extensive collections of African-American history.

- Independence Day 1813 will be celebrated once again at Fort Meigs July 4-5 this year. The event will recreate the July 4, 1813 celebration at Fort Meigs that will include canon firings, toasts, music and kids activities – highlighted by an 18-gun National Salute.

You also may be familiar with our efforts to put Ohio literally on the world stage by elevating some of our archaeological sites to the World Heritage List, administered by UNESCO. The Newark Earthworks and Fort Ancient (two Ohio History Connection sites) are grouped together with the earthworks at the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park (a unit of the National Park Service) to make up the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks nomination. The nomination is on the "tentative" list for consideration. There are only 22 U.S. sites on the World Heritage List – and so far, none of them are in Ohio. We are confident that will soon change! Our World Heritage opportunity means more international and domestic tourism, more jobs and local investment.

It is also worth noting that some of our historic sites have recently had significant restoration work done – and they are worth seeing. We're very proud of the work that was done last year at Quaker Yearly Meeting House in Mount Pleasant and the John Rankin House in Ripley. Similarly, the Grant Boyhood Home in Georgetown got a major facelift in 2013 – go see it, it really sparkles.

If it seems that I am gushing about our state's historic sites and museums... well, that's because I am. We could not be more proud of the historic sites and museums themselves as well as our partners in each of the communities where these sites reside. More than 50 site management agreements with a diverse array of organizations help keep Ohio's local historical sites and museums open to the hundreds of thousands of visitors who come each year. By engaging local organizations to assist with daily operations, communities where sites are located feel more invested in their own portion of Ohio's story. Additionally, these site management agreements have become a national best practice with Colorado, Arizona, and Illinois turning to the Ohio History Connection for advice. Each site partner receives a modest stipend through budget line 360-502 (Site & Museum Operations).

The State of Ohio, the Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio History Connection have a longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship. There is so much to share with you about Ohio History it can hardly be contained in today's short presentation. To help, I have included an appendix that includes a lot of the pertinent information from Fiscal Year 2014.

We have much to be thankful for as we close out FY 2014. The increase in the last budget helped stabilize our budget that had been propped up with private reserves

during the tough years from 2008-2013. With your help, we have stabilized and are now poised to elevate Ohio's story and Ohio History to much greater heights.

This year is our 130th year as an organization founded to collect, preserve and make accessible the tangible history of Ohio. History is a growth business. It accumulates each and every year. It needs and deserves our care. We moved into the Ohio History Center in 1970 and – you'll not be surprised – 45 years later, we're concerned about running out of space.

We don't expect the Subcommittee to be able to resolve our space constraints in the context of this operating budget, but as stakeholders, you can help a great deal as we prepare for a future where history is an Ohio strength, not an item we pull from the shelf on occasion. Some of you have seen the space constraints in the state archives. Our collections storage facilities are about a mile from the Ohio History Center at Hudson Road and Silver Drive. I hope you will come back to tour them soon. These buildings are converted warehouses where we have stored Ohio's priceless historic, archaeological and natural history collections since the 1980s. Back then, they were meant to be a temporary solution – that was more than 30 years ago! We must solve this problem in the next couple of years and we need your help. An enormous number of collection items today sit in cold storage where the public does not know about them, nor have access to them, except in rare instances. These objects are significant and they should be located where visitors can experience them. We must plan for that future today.

A few moments ago I mentioned that our budget has stabilized and we are poised now to elevate Ohio's story and Ohio History. As both the State Historic Preservation Officer and the executive director and CEO of the Ohio History Connection, I cannot emphasize enough how strongly I believe this to be true. It feels to me as though we have been presented a once-in-a-generation window of time to elevate Ohio's story...if we have the resources to meet this opportunity.

As we look to FY 2016-17, we will continue leveraging state and private funding efficiently and effectively to preserve and project Ohio History statewide. Our volunteer board of trustees recently approved a 5-year plan we're calling the Initiative for Ohio History.. Instead of imposing a top-down, hierarchal approach, we have opted to put Ohio's story in the hands of Ohioans through innovation and engagement. As previously mentioned, the most visible expression of this belief occurred last May when, in response to feedback from Ohioans across the state, we changed our name from the Ohio Historical Society to the Ohio History Connection to better align with how Ohioans want to engage with the state's story.

Our 5-year plan includes a mix of objectives that are already underway (but can be strengthened) and others that are new. Some examples include:

- Strengthening our site management partnerships by increasing the Ohio History Connection's capacity to serve the needs of local partners

- Restoring the Harriet Beecher Stowe House in Cincinnati, including improved exhibits
- Celebrating internationally significant anniversaries such as the centennial of Hayes Presidential Library, the 100th anniversary of American participation in World War I and preparing for the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong's lunar landing
- Elevating the awareness and reputation of the Ohio Presidents through collaborative programming and marketing
- Heighten Ohioans' appreciation of their vanishing rural heritage
- Facilitating the preservation of Ohio's county courthouses
- Honoring our military veterans by conducting oral histories with veterans in partnership with the new Ohio Veterans Memorial and Museum

These are just a few relevant examples of an ambitious agenda we intend to execute in the coming years. What should be clear is that the Ohio History Connection is not standing by passively. We have a big supporting role to play when it comes to enhancing Ohio's competitiveness. Everything we do contributes in some way to economic development and education. Regarding economic redevelopment, the State Historic Preservation Office facilitates the rehabilitation of historic properties while our historic sites and museums attract hundreds of thousands of heritage tourists to some of our smaller communities. Both of these activities generate and sustain jobs that cannot be outsourced. We also play a huge role in helping educate students and lifelong learners about Ohio's heritage and the ways in which Ohio and Ohioans have contributed to national and even international history. Ohio's history is rich and diverse – and our historic assets here are most certainly a strength worth our state's investment. Let me add that there is also something interesting that I'll bet you've seen too. There is a growing Ohio Pride bubbling up in the local culture within Ohio. You can see this civic pride reflected in local shops, social media and elsewhere. You can't help but notice a dominant theme: history and sense of place. Only two states (Louisiana and Michigan) have a larger percentage of citizens who were born in the state in which they now live. Seventy-five percent of Ohioans were born here. This clearly suggests that Ohioans have a "rootedness" here where connections to history and family are of outsized importance.

One of our strengths as an organization is our ability to operate as a tax-exempt non-profit organization while working closely with the State of Ohio as its statewide partner in promoting history. We continue to leverage private dollars wherever and whenever possible to enhance our ability to fulfill our mission. We represent a true and successful public-private partnership with the state. We are building our private fundraising capacity and are seeing results. Private contributions have grown each year by double-digit percentages since 2012. Even FY 2015, which still has more than

a month to go, contributions have already surpassed last year's results by nearly 20 percent to more than \$2 million.

One thing we know for sure about this public-private partnership is that, to be successful, both sides of that equation must be strong. State funding is crucial to our ability to maintain the state-owned historic properties, state archives, State Historic Preservation Office, Local History Office and the state museum. Through earned revenue, philanthropic giving and grants, we find additional ways to make Ohio's history accessible to the public. We were fortunate during the Great Recession that our Board of Trustees approved a three-year plan to use private funds – gathered over generations – to supplement the dramatic decline in state support about five years ago. As a result, we were able to navigate those difficult years without having to close any of the state's historic sites and museums – something other states with far fewer historic properties were unable to do.

As a statewide history organization, you might think of us as always looking behind us at the past. Of course, knowing the past is the single best way of knowing what to expect in the future. But we want you to know that this is an organization that also looks forward – and sees opportunities. As we look ahead, we're excited about the increasing role Ohio history plays in shaping Ohio's future through education, quality of life and contributing to our economic prosperity. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the staff, our many partners, our statewide members, and the hundreds of thousands of Ohioans we touch annually, I pledge our full commitment to preserve and share Ohio's incredible story.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have of me. Christie Weininger, executive director of the Hayes Presidential Center, and Dr. Charles Wash, executive director of the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center, are also available if you have questions of them.

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