



# WSGS

## LEADERS' LETTER

Letter Number 9, 29 March 2003

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### Support for Wisconsin Historical Society Budget

As noted in Leaders' Letter # 8, issued just a few days ago, the 2003/05 Budget proposed by Governor Doyle, presents a serious, well-nigh impossible challenge to the Wisconsin Historical Society. If relief is not forthcoming, the WHS and the cause of history, *including family history*, in Wisconsin will be seriously and permanently damaged. We genealogists/family historians need WHS, and now WHS needs our help. I ask and encourage you as leaders of the genealogical community to lead in demonstrating that the genealogical community is concerned about the damage that can be done to the WHS and to family history in Wisconsin.

We need to get the Governor's budget changed to *reduce* the reduction. Our best chance to do so is to persuade the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) to recommend the change. That is where we must concentrate our effort. Joint Finance can be persuaded if they see that

1. there is significant, widespread concern about funding and staffing for the WHS,
2. that the Governor's budget will cause irreparable damage to the WHS, and
3. that this damage is harmful to the State of Wisconsin and its citizens.

The WHS staff, the WHS Board of Curators, and others are working very hard to establish point number 2 (irreparable damage); we need to concentrate on points 1 and 3.

Our most immediate effort should be directed to the Public Hearings conducted by the JFC (two of which have already been held). We need to get a LOT of people attending the remaining 4 hearings:

- Mon, 31 Mar at Washington HS Auditorium, Milwaukee
- Thur, 3 Apr at River Falls HS Auditorium, River Falls
- Tue, 8 Apr at UW-P Center for Performing Arts, Platteville
- Wed, 9 Apr at State Capitol Room 412-E, Madison

All hearings are scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

We need people to testify before the Committee. (Don't let the word "testify" scare you, that's just how presentations to legislative committees are labeled). Presentations are limited to 3 minutes, so those who testify must be prepared, concise and clear-spoken. Register to speak early because it may take several hours to be called. Speakers should have a copy of their presentations to give to the clerk when they register to speak. They will be provided to all members of the committee after the hearings.

Just attending the hearings is also important. It is not necessary to actually testify, nor to stay all day, but it is important to get genealogists to attend and REGISTER as AGAINST proposed reductions to WHS funds and staffing. We cannot afford to let the JFC think we are not concerned about these cuts. Those who do not feel confident about speaking before the Committee are encouraged to prepare written statements and give them to the clerk when they register. Additionally, letters to legislators are appropriate. Keep them brief, to the point and polite. Stressing the damage if the reductions are not scaled back, and why it is harmful to the state and its citizens is important. Avoid outrage and threatening language. If a member of the JFC is one of your legislators, these letters will count very heavily. Others may wish to write to the Representative and the Senator for their district and send a copy to the JFC.

Members of the JFC are: Sen Alberta Darling, River Hills (Sen Chair); Sen Robert Welch, Redgranite; Sen Mary Lazich, New Berlin; Sen Sheila Harsdorf, River Falls; Sen Scott Fitzgerald, Juneau; Sen Russell Decker, Schofield; Sen Gwendolyn Moore, Milwaukee; Rep Dean Kaufert, Neenah (Assy Chair); Rep Michael Huebsch, West Salem; Rep David Ward, Ft Atkinson; Rep Dan Meyer, Eagle River; Rep Jeff Stone, Greendale; Rep Kitty Rhoades, Hudson; Rep G Spencer Cogg, Milwaukee; and Rep Dan Schoof, Beloit. You can find out who the legislators for your district are at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/waml/>. Do not put off contacting them, particularly those on the JFC.

What to say is up to the speaker or writer. His or her own words and thoughts are much more meaningful and effective than canned pitches. Here are some important basic facts, however:

1. The GPR funding reduction is \$1.5 million, or 15.85% for each year of the 2003-05 biennium according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB). Over both years the reduction is 10.2% as compared to an overall increase of 1.3%. (Source: Table 4, LFB Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations, Jan 2003.

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/2003-05budget/Governor/table4.pdf>.) (NOTE: "GPR" means General Program Revenue, i.e., tax money)

2. The GPR staffing reduction is 30 FTE (Full-time Equivalents), all in the first year. That is 24% according to LFB analysis which also shows the overall reduction as 3.1%. (Source: Table 5, LFB Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations, Jan 2003. <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/2003-05budget/Governor/table5.pdf>). Twenty years ago the WHS was authorized 125 FTE, today it is still authorized only 125, and a number of these are vacant because of the current fiscal year cuts. WHS has not contributed to the growth in the number of state employees

3. Because the WHS is a small state agency, with broad responsibilities that demand a wide variety of specialized skills the staffing reduction is particularly difficult to implement. Archeologists are not easily exchangeable with librarians, archivists with directors of historic sites, nor professional historians with clerk-typists.

4. Because the Governor's budget, unlike the current fiscal year reductions, permanently cuts the staffing authorizations they cannot be easily restored if and when the economic situation improves. This is not belt-tightening, this is amputation—permanent damage.

There is much more information on the impact of reductions on the WHS web site, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/budget/index.htm>. I encourage you to study this information. Note that the WHS is asking for relief, not exemption from the cuts.

How one gets across the importance of maintaining the WHS and its services is a real challenge. Particularly when compared to the emotional appeal of some other programs that are also facing reductions. It is hard to get teary-eyed about history, but there is a reason why we each believe it is important. I think it is useful to identify ourselves as *family* historians, and to point out how the study of Wisconsin history, *including* family history, makes most family historians better citizens, more informed, more aware, more likely to pay attention to and study civic issues, and more likely to vote. I would discourage any reference to genealogy/family history as a *hobby*. There is no sympathy for using tax money to support someone's hobby!

A few other suggestions:

1. DO NOT try to defend the Library and Archives, which are admittedly of most concern to most of us, at the expense of other functions of the WHS. Particularly do not suggest closing any historic sites! These are very important to the legislators who have one or more in their districts. Political dynamite.

2. DO try, without overreaching, to point to how historic sites may *help* one to better understand one's ancestors and the situations in which they lived. Most of us can honestly say that.

3. At the entrance to each hearing room there will be one or more legislative pages who will collect any written statements that are submitted. They will also point you to the registers where you sign in. You can register to speak, or you can register without wishing to speak. You can register as in support of or as against a proposition. I suggest you register as against the reductions proposed for the Historical Society. **It is important to register**. All the statements are collected and summarized, and all the registrations against or in support are tabulated, and each committee member gets the whole bunch to review and consider.

4. Give us some feedback to help determine where we go from here. If you can send me copies of statements and any idea of the number of our folks who attend hearings it would be useful

Okay, that's the story, and some ideas for the story I hope we can tell. It is an important story, and we tell it for the genealogical community as well as for WHS. Thanks for becoming involved!

s/Jack  
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