

**WISCONSIN STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY**  
**LEADER'S LETTER #9 - FOLLOWUP**

15 April 2003

Friends, we've still got work to do!

This past Saturday the Board of Curators of the Wisconsin Historical Society approved a Budget Reduction Plan for the 2003/05 Biennium. They did so with great reluctance and sorrow because the impact of the plan would be irreparable damage to the WHS, and to the cause of history, including Family History, in Wisconsin. It is a plan they hope they never have to implement, but which will be forced on them if there is no change to the reductions in GPR funding and staffing proposed in the Governor's Budget. That means our job is not yet done. It is very important that we continue with our efforts to get the Joint Finance Committee to scale-back those reductions, and failing that to get the changes made when the Budget goes to the Assembly and Senate for floor action. The Curators, the WHS staff, and many other groups and individuals are trying hard to accomplish this, we need to do our part.

The Budget Reduction Plan addresses, primarily staff reductions because according to the Governor they MUST be met, and meeting the full 30 space reduction will reduce personnel expenditures enough to cover the 1.5 million dollar funding reduction, and then some! The Plan initially applies all currently available vacancies against the target. Next it proposes to transfer a number of spaces from GPR funding to Program Revenue (PR) funding where it is believed that revenue could be generated from fees, admission, sales, etc., or from grants. Achieving enough PR is not a sure thing, but it is worth the try. Finally, the Plan comes down to layoffs. There would be ten of them, four from Library-Archives Division. If they have to be implemented, as identified in the plan, it would mean that hours, and perhaps days, of operation in the Library, Archives, Museum, even the Historic Sites would probably have to be reduced. Without doubt, the level of service would be reduced—after all the staff that would be left can be stretched only so far. Of great concern would be the near-fifty percent reduction in collecting, and the physical deterioration of documents and artifacts because of the lack of staff to care for them. That affects the Library, the Archives, the Museum and the Historic Sites! The combined effect is to create a great black hole in Wisconsin History because of the materials that are not collected and those that are lost through deterioration. That is irreparable damage, and a disaster for Wisconsin.

The problem does not affect just Madison and Dane County. The entire Historical Society is impacted by the cuts, and they will be felt across the state through the ARC system, in the Historic Sites, and in the ability of the Library and Archives to respond to mail requests for research assistance. Saturday research trips via bus to the Library may also become a thing of the past.

That's the problem, the solution is to get the reductions scaled back. Our first target is still the Joint Finance Committee. If you, or the people you represent have not yet contacted members of the JFC, please do **WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK**. JFC will soon be starting executive sessions and we must make our case before the members make their decisions. Next, it is time for everyone to begin contacting their own legislators, both Assembly and Senate, who are not on JFC. Don't delay. They, too, can influence JFC if they are impressed that their constituents are

concerned about this, and secondarily they are part of our fallback efforts if JFC does not come through. It is always sound tactics to prepare defensive positions before they are needed.

Who else to contact? The Governor and his staff. Don't rule out the possibility of the Governor realizing he (or his staff) made a mistake when they set the WHS reductions so high.

What to ask for? To scale-back the GPR staffing reductions, including the associated funding, to a level that will give the WHS a fighting chance to survive. If the entire reduction were canceled WHS would still not have adequate funding or staff to do what it should be doing, but that is unrealistic in Wisconsin's financial and political climate today. If the reductions were halved there would still be serious adverse impact, but it would enable the WHS to keep going until a better way of funding the Society can be put in place. Anything less than a 50% scale-back will still be gratefully accepted, the situation is so dire that crumbs from the table count.

I am sending you this message as a follow-up to my Leaders' Letter #9 which include detailed information about how to contact legislators. Such feedback as I've been able to get says we just haven't done as much as we can to actually contact them. I address you as leaders of the Wisconsin Genealogical Community, and ask you to exert your leadership to get the contacts made.

Thanks!

Jack Brissee  
President, WSGS