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Local Historic Object is Named One of Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts

*Passmore Williamson's Prison Visitors' Book, Held by Chester County Historical Society
featured in online campaign, launching today*

West Chester, PA – September 19, 2013 – **Chester County Historical Society** will be featured in a six-week online campaign to save **Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts**. An innovative experiment in nonprofit crowdfunding and community building, the campaign launches today and continues through midnight of November 1. The public is encouraged to support the conservation of Passmore Williamson's prison visitors' book through voting, sharing and donating at PATop10Artifacts.org/visitors-book.

Forced to make a decision most people never face, Passmore Williamson chose going to prison over going against his principles. In 1855, Williamson was jailed for not cooperating in recovering Jane Johnson, an enslaved woman who sought and gained freedom in Pennsylvania with his assistance. Williamson spent 100 days in Philadelphia's Moyamensing Prison before he was released. While imprisoned, Williamson took the unusual step of keeping a visitors' book that names the over 500 men, women and children who visited him in jail to show their support. It is tangible proof of the fight against slavery and Pennsylvania's resistance to the federal Fugitive Slave Act. The book contains the signatures of Frederick Douglass and hundreds of other notable supporters. In addition to Douglass, other prominent abolitionists who visited include Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman, William Still, who later published a history of the Underground Railroad, and Mary Ann Shadd, the first African American woman to publish a newspaper in North America. Tucked in the back of the book is a letter conveying gratitude from Jane Johnson, by then living safely in Massachusetts. Passmore Williamson's visitors' book is a powerful symbol of the fight over slavery, the issue that would not be settled until 10 years later, with the ratification of the 13th Amendment and the end of the Civil War.

Rob Lukens, PhD, President of Chester County Historical Society, is thrilled that the book was selected as part of the campaign. "It's such an inspiring object from a turbulent and significant time in our country's

history. The Top 10 campaign will not only make people aware of the book and Passmore Williamson's courage, it will raise the funds needed to make sure his book is preserved for many years to come."

[Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts](#), a statewide initiative created by the [Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts \(CCAHA\)](#) – the largest nonprofit conservation center in the country – began in January with a statewide call to nonprofit institutions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to submit artifacts demonstrably in need of conservation. An independent review panel of collections care professionals chose the top 10 artifacts from 60 submissions, based on their historical and cultural significance and need for conservation.

"Our goal with this campaign is to showcase the state's historic treasures and the need to preserve and protect our heritage for future generations," says **Ingrid Bogel**, Executive Director of CCAHA. "We've created this program to give institutions a new platform through which to share their stories and to give people a chance to show their support by voting as many times as they'd like, sharing their favorite artifacts with friends through social media and supporting the conservation of these artifacts with online donations."

Voting begins on Thursday, September 19 and ends on Friday, November 1 at midnight. At the conclusion of the campaign, institutions that meet their fundraising goals will begin the conservation process, and the artifact garnering the most votes will be named the winner of The People's Choice Award. ***For the full list of Top 10 Endangered Artifacts visit PATop10Artifacts.org.***

Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts is supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and by The Beneficial Foundation. The project is part of CCAHA's **Save Pennsylvania's Past** initiative, a multi-year, statewide effort to protect and preserve the millions of objects and historic artifacts that shape the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's history and define our nation.

How to Support Pennsylvania's Top 10 Endangered Artifacts

- **Vote** – Click to vote for the institution or artifact you are supporting – there's no limit on the number of votes you can cast.
- **Share** – Click to share your vote on Facebook and Twitter via PATop10Artifacts.org
- **Support** – Send a donation of any size to help conserve these historic treasures

Your donation is 100% tax-deductible and will be received by the institution you have donated to at the end of the voting period. All donations, regardless of initial funding goal, will go toward the preservation of the artifacts. Each vote, share, and individual donation will count as one point toward the overall score for the People's Choice Winner. Voting begins at 11 a.m. on Thursday, September 19 and will end at midnight on Friday, November 1. The People's Choice Award winner will be announced on Monday, November 4.

About Chester County Historical Society

The mission of the Chester County Historical Society (CCHS) inspires, informs, and builds community identity by preserving and sharing the remarkable story of Chester County and its people. CCHS fulfills that mandate through innovative educational programs, ground breaking exhibitions, and hosting a nationally known collection of artifacts and archives that reflects over 300 years of history. Learn more at chestercohistorical.org.

About the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) is the country's largest nonprofit conservation facility serving cultural, research and educational institutions, as well as individuals and private organizations. Its mission is to provide expertise and leadership in the preservation of the world's material culture. CCAHA specializes in the treatment of works of art and artifacts on paper, such as drawings, prints, maps, posters, historic wallpaper, photographs, rare books, scrapbooks and manuscripts, along with related materials like parchment and papyrus. CCAHA also offers digital imaging services, on-site consultations, educational programs and seminars, fellowships and emergency conservation services. Learn more at ccaha.org.

About Save Pennsylvania's Past

Save Pennsylvania's Past is a statewide effort to preserve the millions of objects and historic artifacts that shape the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's history and define our nation. Now in its second year, this two-year initiative is preparing collections care staff to address the challenges threatening Pennsylvania's world-class collections through training programs and online resources.

As Save Pennsylvania's Past project leader, CCAHA has partnered with a creative coalition of arts, cultural, educational, government, and historic organizations from all across the state: the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), PA Museums, and LYRASIS. The initiative is supported by an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Connecting to Collections Statewide Implementation Grant and by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

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