

Tracing pasts: Governor hears genealogists' protests

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<http://www.newsherald.com/search/?q=Kleback&fistype=site&x=23&y=16>

A few weeks ago, I wrote a column on the funding crisis at the State Library of Pennsylvania, which faced a 90 percent cut in staffing from 57 to six. Trying to run a major library with a skeleton staff was an appalling idea.

Since Gov. Edward Rendell had asked for feedback, I asked you to let him know your concerns. Well, it seems he's heard from a lot of people. A Google search for "Pennsylvania state library cuts" brings up a long list of articles.

In Pennsylvania the protests were loud and long. There were newspaper editorials, letters to the editor and well-written articles on what havoc these cuts would cause, both to library patrons and to the state offices that depended on the library for information to do their jobs.

On March 7, an article appeared in The Philadelphia Inquirer: "Budget proposal had error on state library staffing." Reporter Amy Worden wrote, "In his February budget address, Gov. Rendell proposed chopping library funding in half, from \$4.84 million to \$2.39 million, a steep cut in a lean budget laden with across-the-board reductions. But yesterday, Rendell said a figure published in his budget proposal that projected a 90 percent staffing reduction was wrong.

"Rendell said he would never allow staffing to get to the point where the library would have to close. He said the library's 50 percent cut would mean a similar staff cut — from 56 to about 28 employees. But more jobs could be preserved if savings can be found in other areas, said his spokesman, Chuck Ardo."

Perhaps there was indeed a typo in the budget, but I wonder if the error would have been found without the many protests from Pennsylvanians and genealogists throughout the country. According to multiple online sources, the staff had been called into a meeting and told of the reduction to six employees. Obviously they believed the jobs were disappearing. In any case, 50 percent cut is better than a 90 percent one. We all know that cuts are necessary at all levels in this time of fiscal challenges, but they need to be made fairly and responsibly.

Libraries matter. As genealogists, we know that not every document is on the Internet and that the best research combines online and physical research. We might find a cemetery listing on a Web site, but the thrill of actually walking through the cemetery and doublechecking the information on site is worth the travel time.

We know there are millions of resources still not filmed or transcribed or even indexed that are sitting in libraries and archives, just waiting for us to find and preserve them. Support these facilities.

Financial contributions are welcome, but there are other things you can do. Write a thank-you note to the genealogical librarian who helped you. I still hear from people I was able to help when I worked at the Bay County Public Library, and their notes and e-mails mean a lot.

Donate the family histories you write to libraries in the area where your families lived. When you hear about situations like the one at the Pennsylvania State Library, send an e-mail or letter in support of libraries and their mission.

Libraries need our support, and we need their treasures. We can truly help each other.