



PENN CENTER, INC., NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT

August 31, 2016

Governor Nikki L. Haley
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12267
Columbia, SC 29211

Dear Governor Haley:

We are seeking a Proclamation declaring the week of November 10-13, 2016 as "**Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration Week** on the occasion of the 34th Heritage Celebration and in recognition of its success through the years."

First celebrated in 1981, Penn's Heritage Days has become a significant event, drawing over 20,000 visitors, representative of the state and nation, and even from abroad. We feel that a Proclamation from your office will do much to enhance this year's celebration. We have enclosed information on both Penn Center and the origin of Penn Center Heritage Day.

Your consideration of our request will be deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rodell Lawrence
Executive Director

Enclosures

AN IDEA IS BORN: PENN CENTER'S HERITAGE DAY CELEBRATION

DATE: AUGUST 18, 1981 (Minutes from the initial meeting)

Meeting between Emory S. Campbell, Executive Director, and Penn Club Program Committee

The purpose of the meeting was to begin initial discussion on plans for a Fundraising Day for Penn Center. Persons presented were: Mr. Arthur Smalls, Mr. Elting Smalls, Mrs. Ercell Holmes, Mrs. Jessiemae G. Warren, Ms. Caroline Heyward and Mr. Emory S. Campbell.

The following decisions were made:

1. The Goal of the Fundraiser is \$15,000
2. The Fundraiser is called "Penn Heritage Day".
3. Activities for the day will include: spirituals, movies, children's games, museum items for sale, i.e. books, t-shirts, clothing, furniture, art work, i.e. painting, quilts, nets, farm produce, i.e. pumpkins, sugar canes, potatoes, etc., storytelling, oyster roast, bake sales, (items are solicited as donations)
4. Publicity must be wide spread throughout the state and region.
5. Committees needed: Publicity, Solicitation, Set Up, Clean Up and Finance

The date may be changed pending Homecoming dates of South Carolina State College and Savannah State College. The plans will be explained at the next Penn Club meeting Saturday, September 5, 1981. The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 15, 1981. Meanwhile, solicitation and publicity should be an on-going effort of all persons.

Emory S. Campbell, Recorder

cc: Mr. Roland Gardner, Mr. Louis Dore, Mr. Herbert DeCosta, Ms. May Louise Zumwalt, Mr. Denys Vaughn-Cooke, Mr. Arthur Smalls, Mr. Elting Smalls, Mrs. Ercell Holmes, Mrs. Jessiemae G. Warren and Ms. Caroline Heyward.

Committees and their functions for Penn Center Heritage Day

Planning and Coordinating Committee

This committee is made up of everyone who commits to work to attain the goals of the Penn Center Heritage Day, which is to raise the interest of the people of the southeast region and other parties of the nation and to raise at least \$15,000 toward funding the on-going operation of Penn Center.

This committee is responsible for planning the entire day and overseeing the activities of all subcommittees.

Subcommittees

- A. **Solicitation** - This committee is responsible for soliciting items to be sold at the event. This committee may be divided into several subcommittees i.e. food, farm produce, antiques, etc. This committee is also responsible for housing items picked up from the donor.
- B. **Publicity** - The day shall be one through every available source, including posters, church announcements, radio, TV and newspapers throughout the southeast.
- C. **Sales** - This committee is responsible for pricing of items and sales for the day.
- D. **Set Up** - This committee works with the sales committee to set up the various items. For Example: Art work shall all be together etc., items should look presentable for sale.
- E. **Finance** - This committee is responsible for planning for collection and accounting of all funds. Detailed procedures for payments and handling of money on that day are the direct responsibility of this committee. Penn's accountant shall serve as chairperson of this committee.

WHY A PENN CENTER HERITAGE DAYS CELEBRATION?

Because so many individuals and institutions of the Sea Islands have been touched by the activities of Penn School, now Penn Center, and because Penn has been instrumental in preserving and strengthening the Sea Island culture, the idea of a Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration was born in August of 1981. Questions such as: "What was Penn School?" "What is the Gullah Culture?" -- Which are asked by so many people locally and statewide -- further substantiated the need for a Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration.

The Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration is an effort to expose the public to Penn School, the Sea Islands' history and culture, and the various Africanisms that still exist. But, most importantly, it is a gesture to reveal to each and every person that Penn School is a place where people are always welcome, a place where people can learn about themselves and about the African-Americans of the Sea Islands.,

Since its inception in 1981, the Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration has grown from a single day of events and food to three days of festive songs, meals, performers, displays and other events. In 1983, the "Heritage Parade: from St. Helena Elementary School to Penn's Historic District was established. Schools and other groups are invited to participate each year in an effort to make it an event of family and friends. We want everyone to feel like one community, a family.

Actually, the activities for Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration are not all new ideas. These activities were carried out annually from the early 1900's until Penn School was closed in 1948. During that period, the Day was called "Harvest Day". Of course, when the idea for Heritage Days was conceived, the dreamers thought it was brand new. This only reinforces when a Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration is so appropriate, for at Penn Center a meaningful legacy exists.

So enjoy the celebration! Sing along! Enjoy our traditional meals! Share our programs and displays with us. Whether you are a welcomed visitor or a life-long resident, join in our Celebration. Your participation helps us to preserve and strengthen our Heritage: The Heritage of Freedom for all.



Penn Center, Inc.
Penn School Historic Landmark District
St. Helena Island, South Carolina 29920

Historic Facts and Service Information

Organization:

Penn Center is one of the nation's most historically significant African-American educational and cultural institutions. Located on St. Helena Island in Beaufort County South Carolina, it is a non-profit (501c3) organization, funded through grants and donations only. The Board of Trustees consists of members of diverse backgrounds who set policy and assist in fundraising.

Brief History and Background:

Two women, Laura Towne and Ellen Murray who were originally supported by the Freedmen's Society in Philadelphia, founded Penn Center as Penn School in 1862. Later in the year, Charlotte Forten, the first African-American teacher at the school, joined them. Penn School was one of the first schools to offer an academic education to African-Americans who had been recently freed. In the early 1900's, the school adopted the Tuskegee curriculum and began functioning as a normal, agricultural and industrial education institution. Penn School closed as an independent school in 1948. The state of South Carolina began to take an active role in providing a public education for African-Americans of the Sea Islands, incorporating Penn School's curriculum and utilizing its facility until 1953, when the last class on the Penn School site graduated.

Penn Center reorganized to focus on community development issues ranging in scope from daycare and healthcare, to full citizenship and economic development for African-Americans. In the early 1960's it was also utilized as training and meeting facility for the Civil Rights workers, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff met at Penn Center annually, between 1963 and 1967 for retreats, strategic planning and training sessions for the Civil Rights movement. The center has served as a model on an international basis for community development, citizenship, education, voting rights, daycare, cooperatives, and business development. In the late 1960's Penn Center conducted leadership-training programs for prospective government leaders in the southeastern regional states. The Peace Corps trained its volunteers in agricultural skills at Penn Center during the 1970's and 1980's.

In 1974, the 50-acre Penn School campus was designated a National Historic Landmark District by the United States Department of the Interior. The campus consists of 19 buildings, which are utilized as guesthouses, offices, dormitories, a dining room, museum and library, as well as program and activity buildings. It has remained a major educational resource and service center for African-American Sea Islanders, even though it has expanded its objectives, its audience and its sphere of influence to the national and international levels.

Mission Statement: To Promote and Preserve the Sea Island's History and Culture.

The mission is accomplished through the implementation of three program areas: History and Culture, Land Use and Environmental Education and the program for Academic and Cultural Enrichment.

Programs:

History and Culture Program: Maintains the York W. Bailey Museum and the Laura Towne Library & Archives, which contains the historic collection of documents and photographs dating to the founding of Penn School in 1862. The collection includes artifacts, photographs, personal and institutional papers, published materials, video and audio tapes. The York W. Bailey museum is open Monday through Saturday for visitation by individuals and groups. The permanent exhibit "Education for Freedom" displays some of the oldest photographs of African American history after the Civil War. The museum also offers self-guided tours, cultural lessons and demonstrations for groups visiting Penn Center.

Land Use and Environmental Education Program: Assists native Sea Islanders in preserving and maintaining the land and cultural practices in the midst of environmental changes. Four strategies are utilized to assist the communities: 1) leadership training is provided to the community by teaching effective leadership skills and familiarizing them with the basic principles of environmental protection and community economic development; 2) legal training and assistance is provided to help landowners exercise their legal rights to prevent property loss due to rising taxes and uncertain titles; 3) sustainable economic development to assist indigenous communities in the creation of environmentally sound and culturally sensitive alternatives to destructive forms of development; and 4) policy reform and coalition building to connect native communities with local environmentalists and other issue-oriented groups so they can work together to promote fundamental policy changes.

Program for Academic and Cultural Enrichment (PACE): Established in 1983 to provide an atmosphere and curriculum where students are encouraged to achieve their full educational and social potential. The four components of this program are: after school program, summer enrichment program, full day child development center, and the Teen Leadership Institute. Children between the ages of 12 months to 17 years are served by this program. The Teen Leadership Institute, creating a viable and comprehensive business and employment opportunity for the youth in the program, operates the Youth Print Shop. In addition, PACE provides after-school tutoring for elementary and middle school students, summer academic and cultural enrichment activities, year-round day care services, and college campus visitations for high school students.

Additional Information

Buildings and Grounds: Penn Center's land holdings consist of approximately 500 acres. The land has been utilized in the following way: The National Historic Landmark District consists of 19 buildings located within the 50 acres that once comprised Penn School (one of three such districts in South Carolina). Two hundred thirty-five acres are under conservation. Of the 235 acres, approximately 200 acres of pine forest has been managed for timber and non-timber forest products. Twenty-five acres of the 200-acre tract sits is a demonstration site illustrating various planting methods. Forty acres are managed for local farming needs, of which local farmers lease approximately 10 acres.

Conference Center: Comprised of four residential facilities and a waterfront Retreat House, the Conference Center can accommodate up to 85 residential guests. The facilities are ideal for business meetings, conferences, retreats, family reunions, or wedding receptions. The Frissell Community House and Darrah Hall are available for large gatherings. The Emory S. Campbell Dining Room can accommodate up to 125 people. Varieties of menus that include meals indigenous to the South Carolina Lowcountry are available.