

Independence Hall), built between 1732 and 1756. At the close of the American Revolution, westward settlement began in earnest, and thoughts of a more centrally located state capital, preferably in the Susquehanna Valley, soon followed. Acreage on the Susquehanna River was offered to the legislature by John Harris in 1784 and seriously considered for the next few years, but a competitor, the already established city of Lancaster, won the vote when the regular outbreaks of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia helped to push the issue of immediate departure from that city. Lancaster became the temporary capital on the first Monday of November 1799. Proposals and plans for moving further west began to circulate almost immediately, and by 1810 the legislature had considered Northumberland, Bellefonte, Columbia, Carlisle, Reading and Sunbury, in addition to Lancaster, as potential sites. In early 1810, however, they settled on what had, by then, become Harrisburg, due to its location on the Susquehanna and its relative proximity to Philadelphia.

The following description of the government structure is from the Pennsylvania State Archives website: The legislative power of the Commonwealth is vested in the General Assembly. Consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the General Assembly has the authority to enact laws, appropriate funds, and levy taxes. It also possesses the power to propose constitutional amendments, impeach public officials, conduct investigations, and confirm certain executive appointments. The first General Assembly was a unicameral body established under the Constitution of 1776 and possessed broad powers that enabled it to dominate the executive and judicial branches of government. This imbalance was corrected with the Constitution of 1790 that created a bicameral assembly and provided for a popularly elected governor.

Collection Overview

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania General Assembly Records are divided into two series: Series I, Correspondence and Documents; and Series II, Petitions, Remonstrance, and Memorials. Series I holds a wide variety of letters, depositions, reports, requests, and resolutions that were presented to the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives. Series II has only petitions and remonstrance which were also presented to the legislature, but because of their particular genre and format these documents were separated out and kept together.

The records in both series are generally (but not precisely) filed in chronological order, preserving an arrangement most likely imposed when the entire McAllister manuscript collection was formally accessioned by the Library Company at the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to 2005, all manuscript material had been combined, interfiled, and arranged in chronological order. The full collection spanned two centuries and included the records and correspondence of merchants, corporations, banks, clergymen, and statesmen. When the chronological order was established, earlier-dated documents that had been attached to cover letters were removed and filed under their individual dates of creation. No attempt was made