

Testimony of

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on

H.R. 1083

A Bill to Amend the Act Establishing the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area in order to include Butler County, Pennsylvania within the Boundaries of that Heritage Area

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 1083, a bill introduced by Congressman Phil English, to amend the Act establishing the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area to include Butler County, Pennsylvania within the boundaries of the National Heritage Area. I am grateful to you for considering this bill that is so important to Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. I am also grateful to Congressman English for his strong support of our National Heritage Area and for his leadership in drafting this legislation, which is important to the citizens of Butler County.

In 1996, when it established the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, Congress recognized the national significance of southwestern Pennsylvania's industrial and cultural heritage, and made it, at the time, one of 18 National Heritage Areas in the nation. A few months earlier, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also recognized this region for its industrial and cultural heritage, and designated it as one of the state's heritage areas. For the past 10 years, in partnership with the National Park Service and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, the management entity for the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, has been working in seven counties of southwestern Pennsylvania to conserve, promote and protect the nationally significant steel and related heritage of the region. This geographic area includes Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties. Notably missing is Butler County, north of Pittsburgh, one of the key counties in the region's industrial history.

The genesis of Rivers of Steel grew out of a true grassroots movement to conserve its industrial heritage and to make it a part of the region's economic revitalization efforts. Spawned from the efforts in 1988 to save a part of the former U.S. Steel Homestead Works and develop it into a National Park, the concept of a combined, unified geographic region working to preserve its unique heritage and identity began to take shape. First Allegheny County stepped to the table – more by its citizens rallying to save its history than by an edict from any government. Then Washington County stepped up, followed by Westmoreland, Fayette, Greene and Armstrong. Each county has a pivotal role to play in the region's history – whether for steel, coal and coke, glass, aluminum, railroad or river barge – the communities of the counties knew that a comprehensive story of one of the key industries of the region could not be told without explaining one of the other key, supporting industries integral to the steel manufacturing process.

From 1991 to 1996, SIHC led a comprehensive, regional feasibility study and management plan that examined the historic and cultural resources of southwestern Pennsylvania, and the reason why these counties should be incorporated into a proposed National and State National Heritage Area. During this planning, it became clear that certain other counties, which were not represented in the planning effort, may have significant history and add to the regional significance of the heritage area. One of these counties was Butler. SIHC's management action plan was presented to the National Park Service and it became the basis of the legislation which created the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area (P. Law 104-333). The very same management plan was submitted to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for designation as a State Heritage Area. The management plan made several recommendations for future work, including projects and programs within the proposed NHA. It also recommended that a feasibility study be conducted for Butler County to determine if it should be added to the National Heritage Area.

Despite the clear evidence of Butler County's significance, the recommendation in the MAP died there, for in 1996 and several years thereafter, there was little if local governmental and community support to have Butler County added into the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. As I stated at the outset, Rivers of Steel is a true, grassroots driven NHA. Its strength and legitimacy is derived from its true nationally significant industrial resources and the desire of the local communities to conserve them in a comprehensive NHA program. Without local support in Butler County, SIHC would not force the issue onto the County.

Things changed in 2002 when a local judge from Butler County Court of Common Pleas, the Honorable Martin O'Brien met with me to ask why SIHC did not work in Butler County. When I explained to him that a county must be included in the heritage area, and why Butler was not included, he thanked me for my time, left my office, and when back to Butler County with a mission. Today, I come before you to tell you that Butler County does have nationally significant resources that contribute to the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. In addition, Butler County now has widespread local government and community support for inclusion into the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area.

In 2004, the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program (PHPP) awarded a matching grant to support development of a plan for admitting Butler County into Rivers of Steel. Over the next year, the PHPP grant contract was enacted and match funds were raised and committed by Butler County. In spring 2006, work to develop the Butler County Heritage Plan began. SIHC in consultation with Butler County leaders formulated a cooperative agreement and scope of work to develop the plan. A Steering Committee was formed to include representatives from the county commissioners' offices; the offices of the county's state and federal legislative delegation; heads of key public agencies and private non-profit cultural organizations in Butler County; interested and knowledgeable Butler County residents; and SIHC staff. Open to the public, the Steering Committee held its first meeting in early June 2006 and continued to meet on a regular basis throughout the project. A televised public meeting was held in Fall 2006 to gather comments and information on resources. A team of fieldworkers visited every township and population center in the County, documenting sites, events and activities, and interviewing residents.

In June 2006, field research was initiated to study Butler County's steel-related industrial, cultural and natural/environmental heritage resources. Over the next 12 months, the fieldwork team visited every city and township in the county, documenting sites, events and activities through field notes and photography, and recording audio interviews with over 40 residents. They compiled a county-wide inventory of historic and current industrial sites and living cultural traditions. Based on their observations, they offered suggestions for programs and projects that could enhance the county's heritage development. Their reports along with the database of sites and events they documented form the basis of the recommendations given in this plan and are appended to the plan as supporting materials

Several Steering Committee meetings were held during the course of the project. During these meetings, SIHC staff updated the Committee regularly on the progress of the field research studies and plan development, and briefed members on issues relating to the federal authorizing legislation. The first Public Meeting was held in September 2006 at the Butler Chamber of Commerce, to acquaint the public with the project, and gather suggestions on interpretive themes, heritage project ideas, and heritage sites, events, activities that should be documented. This event was televised over the local Butler County public cable channel. In early April 2007, the historic sites and ethnographic field reports, along with the sites and events database, were uploaded to the Rivers of Steel website in downloadable PDF format for review and comment. Steering Committee members provided suggestions, which were incorporated into the final versions of the reports. In late May 2007, SIHC staff presented the draft plan to the Steering Committee for review, and revisions were made based on members' suggestions. A final draft of that plan is scheduled to be considered by the local Steering Committee, and a final public meeting will be held. Once complete the final draft will be adopted by SIHC's board, and forwarded to the National Park Service and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Butler County was carved out of Allegheny County on March 12, 1800. It was named for General Richard Butler, a Revolutionary War hero, judge, and state legislator from southwestern Pennsylvania. The county's land contained nearly equal portions of Depreciation and Donation Lands—those lands either sold to or given to Revolutionary

War veterans. In 1803, the county began establishing a county seat, ultimately choosing the present site of Butler City, a centrally located area where members of several Revolutionary War veterans' families had already settled. The town of Butler was incorporated in 1817. Originally, the county was quartered into the four townships of Middlesex, Slippery Rock, Buffalo, and Connoquenessing. Today, there are 33 townships and 29 boroughs. At Butler County's inception, its total population was 3,916. As of 2000, the most recent census, the county's population was 174,083.

Like other counties in the southwestern Pennsylvania industrial region, Butler County's industrial history is characterized by three distinct chronological periods. From its founding up to the mid-nineteenth century, Butler County was typically rural and primarily agricultural except for charcoal-fueled iron furnaces established to smelt iron from local ore deposits to meet the settlers' needs for consumer goods (tools, wagon parts, etc.); even at this early stage, however, these furnaces were also beginning to supply rolling mills and foundries in the Mahoning Valley and Pittsburgh. Often these early iron-making initiatives were undertaken by farmers to supplement their main source of income. Because farming was the principal industry of Butler County through the first half of the nineteenth century, many small processing industries such as gristmills, sawmills, wool plants, and distilleries emerged to serve the local community, along with blacksmiths, saddlers, and wheelwrights, whose artisan skills were useful not only to agriculture but also to industrial development as well. Small-scale extraction of lumber and coal, two of the county's most abundant natural resources, began for private and local consumption.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, Butler County became increasingly tied into the growing southwestern Pennsylvania industrial system dominated by major iron and steel producers centered in Allegheny County. In symbiotic fashion the region's industrialization accelerated the use of rail transportation, which had been introduced into the region in the 1850s, while rail transportation in turn encouraged greater regional industrialization by providing access to a ready market for its products. The rail industry itself was a market for iron and steel product.

During this middle industrial period, which began after the Civil War and lasted for about a hundred years, Butler County became part of the metropolitan reach of the Pittsburgh industrial complex, its new industries financed both by indigenous investment from within the county and by new capital from outside the county. In the 1870s, the introduction of the Bessemer process into the region's iron and steel industry enabled that industry to meet the growing demand for steel rails and other metal products. From the 1870s to the 1920s, the Pittsburgh region's iron and steel industry became the largest and most significant in the nation. When the demand for rails and railroad equipment lessened, the region's steel industry found new markets in building construction, military, and other applications. Through much of the 20th century, Butler County's steel-related industries included its major steel producer, Butler Armco, as well as specialty steel firms, manufacturers such as Bantam and Pullman-Standard that used steel in making road vehicles (including the prototype for the World War II military jeep) and rail cars, and an iron sintering plant, part of U.S. Steel's region-wide steel production network.

This regional expansion of industrial iron and steel production and rail transportation created a demand for metallurgical coal and other minerals, such as limestone, to which Butler County residents responded by expanding coal mining ventures and other extractive industries. In the early 1870s, in addition to coal and limestone, another extractive resource, oil, became one of Butler County's important industrial products. Discoveries of natural gas deposits occurred as a result of drilling these oil wells. A fine example of Butler County's growing ties to the emerging Pittsburgh industrial complex was the expansion of the Allegheny County-based Spang Chalfont Company into Butler County to take advantage of the potential of natural gas as a new fuel for iron and steel making. As in other southwestern Pennsylvania counties, industrial glass-making boomed as well, fueled by the newly discovered natural gas, along with local deposits of sand and sandstone. Farming also continued, often both contributing to and being influenced by the nearby industrial initiatives.

Butler County's era of rapid industrialization lasted until World War II, after which its iron- and steel-related industries, while still productive, reached a plateau and subsequently declined. While steel production continued in Butler's urban center and the gas and oil industry remained an important part of the County's economy, much of the county returned to its agricultural base. The long interdependence between agriculture and industry helped to cushion the county's economy as its iron- and steel-related industry faded. Interviews with local residents indicate that farmers who had left their fields for jobs in the nearby industries went back to their farms; lands that had been taken over for industrial uses were returned to crop cultivation.

The cultural profile of Butler County follows the same pattern as the rest of the Pittsburgh Industrial District. The earliest Native American inhabitants included such tribes as Iroquois, Shawnee, and Delaware/Lenape. Following the cessation of the Revolutionary War in the late eighteenth century and the subsequent Indian treaties, European settlers came into the area – English, Scots-Irish, and particularly Germans – and continued to move into the county through the first half of the nineteenth century. They established the farmsteads, built the early iron furnaces, and began the craft industries in communities such as Harmony, Slippery Rock, and Saxonburg.

Our ethnographic research indicates that, as in other parts of southwestern Pennsylvania, the cultural mix broadened in the years just after the Civil War, with the regional expansion of steel-related industry and the railroads. Along with laborers drawn from the existing nearby farming communities, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, especially Italians, Polish, Ukrainians, and Slovaks, came to work in the county's steel communities, Butler City and Lyndora; in the steel-related industries in Winfield Township in the county's southeastern corner; and in the oil boomtowns such as Karns City and Petrolia in the northeastern part of the county. These newcomers brought their customs, foods, arts, and skills to the county. In Butler City a small African American community also grew, primarily as domestic help for the industrial managers.

Even during the industrial years, much of the county remained agrarian in character. Interviewees relate that not only was farming influenced by the Industrial Revolution through the use of steam-powered equipment and iron/steel forged tools and materials to build modern barns, but some family farms in the area helped the steel and coal

industries. Many area farms included sawmills or machine shops where farmers made items and structures that would then be used in the local industries. Ed Goldscheitter and his father made wooden posts in their saw mill to use in stabilizing underground coal mines in the Sarver area. Some farmers also used industrial fuels for their own work: the Goldscheitters for example had their own small coal mine for a while; other farmers drilled oil or gas wells on their property and used the fuel they extracted to fuel their homes and power their farming operations.

Because of this close inter-relationship between farming and industry, when the period of rapid industrialization began to end in the 1950s, while some workers left the county for jobs elsewhere, most stayed and were absorbed into the older population. Unlike the large steel-making areas elsewhere in southwestern Pennsylvania, Butler County did not experience a steep decline in population. The county today still has a viable industrial presence, particularly oil and gas extraction/processing and steel-related metal industries, which provide a livelihood for some local workers. But agricultural occupations have once again become the primary economic pursuit for many residents.

Among the places in Butler County now where pockets of distinctive cultural traditions remain are Lyndora (eastern European) and Butler City (Italian). The once-pervasive German cultural influence can now be seen particularly in the architecture of the Harmony/Zelienople area and in Saxonburg.

Mr. Chairman, Butler County has a unique and nationally-significant history. Its communities are alive today with the heritage of those who settled the region – and the traditions and customs of their ancestors can still be experienced in the towns and villages throughout the county. Moreover, the residents, local governments, business, historical organizations and other groups have led the planning and have diligently worked to have the county incorporated into the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. Congressman English has taken the lead on the designation, and introduced his bill at the urging of his constituents. I have in my possession a number of letters of support from businesses, citizens and organizations in Butler County urging the passage of H.R. 1083. I respectfully request that you approve H.R. 1083 so Butler County can officially become added to the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, and their rich heritage can be recognized nationally.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions that you or the other subcommittee members may have for me.