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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Delaware Historical Society Announces Sesquicentennial Campaign: Ensuring a Future for Delaware's Past

The Delaware Historical Society's Sesquicentennial Campaign: Ensuring a Future for Delaware's Past has raised more than \$5 million in gifts from individuals, corporations, foundations and the City of Wilmington towards a goal of \$6.6 million. The campaign is supporting capital improvements to the historical society's Old Town Hall and Delaware History Museum buildings and the exhibition galleries and other spaces within the two buildings.

The capital improvements when completed will support a new compelling and comprehensive program that will provide Delawareans and all visitors with greater access to and engagement with their history. New education programs, more objects on exhibition, the state's Center for African American Heritage, updated classrooms, other repurposed spaces, and a core exhibition on Delaware's rich and fascinating history are included in the project.

The following is an overview of the improvements:

- Build a connector between Old Town Hall and the Delaware History Museum to allow full access to Old Town Hall and the reconfigured Delaware History Museum (Old Town Hall will reopen to the public as multi-purpose space for rotating exhibitions and new education programs);
- Establish the Center for African American Heritage, featuring dedicated space for presenting the contributions of African American Delawareans to the state's historical record;
- Replace existing mechanical and electrical systems in Old Town Hall to bring the historic building back online. The building's spaces will be re-purposed to support mission-related rotating exhibitions and education programs;
- Create a new visible storage gallery, additional exhibition space and re-purposed classrooms to engage young and old alike with Delaware history; and
- Make improvements to the Copeland Room, a multi-purpose, large assembly space for public programs.

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As the campaign's quiet phase winds down, fifty-nine donors have contributed more than \$5 million to the campaign. Sesquicentennial Campaign co-chair, Beatrice Coker, was thrilled in explaining the Sesquicentennial Campaign's initial success.

"I have been involved in the development of this capital program for three years. The Center for African American Heritage is a major step forward in ensuring that the contributions of all Delawareans, African Americans in particular, are part of the historical record. The Delaware Historical Society has undertaken a long overdue project with cultural sensitivity and professionalism," said Ms. Coker.

Geoff Rogers and Richard Poole, both Delaware Historical Society trustees, are the campaign's two other co-chairs. A statewide steering committee, honorary committee and a corps of volunteers are active with the Sesquicentennial Campaign: Ensuring a Future for Delaware's Past.

A number of substantial contributions have enabled construction on the project to begin this month. DuPont recently made a \$1 million gift to the Sesquicentennial Campaign. In making its gift, DuPont Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Ellen Kullman, stated, "DuPont is pleased to make this contribution to the Delaware Historical Society's capital initiative. We are confident that our gift will support the Society in its mission to provide Delawareans and others with an opportunity to learn more about the history of this great state and the contributions of its citizens to that history."

The city of Wilmington provided a \$1 million capital challenge grant, the terms of which were met quickly by private contributions to the campaign. Wilmington Mayor, Dennis P. Williams, stated, "The Delaware Historical Society is a long-standing cultural and historical resource that continues to strive to educate, uplift and entertain the many residents and visitors who experience the various exhibitions and collections showcasing our state's history. The city of Wilmington is pleased to be a significant investor in the capital campaign for the development of the Center for African American Heritage. In addition to serving as an educational resource, the new center will continue the economic revitalization and diversification of downtown Wilmington."

Mr. G. Stewart Hoagland is another major donor to the Sesquicentennial Campaign, making a gift in memory of his wife, Cynthia Hoagland, a longtime historical society trustee and board chair.

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Construction is scheduled to get underway by August 15. The Delaware History Museum and Old Town Hall will be closed through March 2016. The historical society's Research Library and Willingtown Square will remain open to the public throughout construction. The Read House and Gardens in New Castle also will remain open.

"This is a pivotal time for the Delaware Historical Society. Years of planning have coincided perfectly with the historical society's 150th anniversary. The impact of the renovations is truly transformational. The visitor experience will be enhanced greatly by the many improvements made possible by our generous donors," explained Linda Boyden, Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Delaware Historical Society was founded in 1864 as a literary society to research, document and share the history of the First State. Today, 150 years later, the historical society continues as an independent, statewide organization that preserves and presents Delaware's history through exhibitions, education programs, publications, historical research and outreach programs. The historical society holds in public trust the largest collection of artifacts, items and materials on Delaware history. The Research Library and Museum Objects collections number an estimated 3 million. The Delaware Historical Society also serves more than 13,000 schoolchildren and their teachers annually through eighteen programs on Delaware history.

In addition to its permanent collections, exhibitions and education programs, the Delaware Historical Society owns several significant historic buildings. The downtown Wilmington campus includes the Delaware History Museum; four late-eighteenth-century buildings known as Willingtown Square; the 1798 Old Town Hall; and the 1930 Artisan's Bank Building, home to the organization's Research Library. The historical society also owns the 1804 Read House and Gardens in New Castle.

For more information on the Delaware Historical Society and the Sesquicentennial Campaign: Ensuring a Future for Delaware's Past, call (302) 655-7161 or visit <http://dehistory.org/press-room> .

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