



# NEWS RELEASE

## CENTRE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE COLLEGE, PA. – Penn State President Neeli Bendapudi today dedicated a new campus historical marker titled “Birthplace of Penn State” at Centre Furnace Mansion, home of the Centre County Historical Society.

In her second year as Penn State’s president, Bendapudi has visited all of Penn State’s campuses across the Commonwealth. Today’s visit was her first to Centre Furnace Mansion, the place where it all began 169 years ago. “This is a proud history—one I am honored to help continue as Penn State’s president, and one I am thrilled to celebrate with you today,” she said.

The new historical marker—the latest addition to the 68 campus historical markers sponsored by the Penn State Alumni Association—details the events of 1855 that led to the institution’s founding:

“The charter for the Farmers’ High School of Pennsylvania was signed on Feb. 22, 1855, and on June 26 the Board of Trustees site selection committee visited Centre Furnace Mansion to inspect 200 acres offered by ironmaster James Irvin and enjoy a dinner hosted by Moses and Mary Thompson. After visiting sites across the state, on Sept. 12, 1855, the Trustees approved Board President Frederick Watts’ motion to locate the fledgling school here.”

Plans for the Farmers’ High School were set in motion by the newly formed Pennsylvania State Agricultural Society, founded in 1851 with agricultural innovator and advocate Frederick Watts of Carlisle as president. The school was originally chartered by the Pennsylvania legislature in 1854, but that document was rescinded because it called for an unwieldy 65 members of the Board of Trustees and offered no state funding. A new charter, specifying 13 Trustees, was signed by Governor James Pollock on February 22, 1855.

The chartering ignited a statewide competition with various counties vying for this revolutionary new school designed to teach agricultural science to the sons of Pennsylvania farmers. After their first site visit to Centre Furnace, the Trustees left to inspect other proposed sites in Erie, Allegheny, and Blair counties.

When they met in Harrisburg on September 12, 1855, they debated the matter and finally approved the motion of Chairman Watts to locate the school on Centre Furnace land.

## CENTRE FURNACE MANSION

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Centre Furnace Mansion is doubly significant because it is the site of the first charcoal-fed iron furnace in this part of Pennsylvania. The furnace was put into operation in 1792, prompting the development of additional iron furnaces and forges across Centre and adjacent counties. By 1810, Centre, Huntingdon, and Blair counties were generating more than half the entire amount of pig iron produced in the United States.

Thus Centre Furnace—with the remains of the furnace stack still standing—is the original source of wealth enabling James Irvin and his partner Moses Thompson to prosper and be in position to offer free land to get the Farmers' High School of Pennsylvania located in Centre County.

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*Image and Image Details*

