

A COLLEGE RESEARCH COURSE IN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

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RECENT years have witnessed a most encouraging amount of interest in the study and teaching of Pennsylvania history in both secondary schools and colleges. Greater development in this field has naturally been somewhat retarded by some very material reasons—the lack of adequate textbooks, comprehensive secondary reference works, syllabi and bibliographical aids. These are vital factors, the absence of which has justly given many an historian reason to think of Pennsylvania as “The Neglected State.” In strange contrast, few other states possess so rich a store of the basic elements of historical study—available primary sources. Records, archives, manuscript collections, newspapers and the results of local researches may be found in abundance throughout all the libraries of the state. Incidentally, few states possess a greater number of libraries, for Pennsylvania has more than three hundred and fifty.

A college research course in Pennsylvania history fits into this awkward situation with very satisfactory results. Several distinct advantages are associated with such a course. It is adaptable to all classes—Freshman as well as Senior—for the essentials of research and library technique may be learned (and certainly *should* be) as early as possible in the college career. A chemistry student is familiar with laboratory equipment before he goes to the graduate school, and the student of history will be aided appreciably by being able to find his way through the resources of his library, smoothly and surely, at an early stage. Secondly, a research course offers the student an excellent opportunity for the development of a genuine interest in the untouched resources and problems of Pennsylvania history. In addition, it provides him with certain central points of definite understanding about which he, consciously or unconsciously, builds an organized and comprehensive knowledge of the whole field. He secures a first-

hand knowledge of the sources of Pennsylvania history. Finally, he has not just "been taught"—he has *done something*.

A course of study of this type has been used with very satisfactory results at Franklin and Marshall College. Its general nature is outlined briefly below. Obviously, of course, different types of students and varying local library facilities determine the more specific details of the work.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL STUDY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

SUBJECT: Pennsylvania History

The course is offered for one semester to first-year men, but is open to all groups, and is required for all majors in history.

Work for the semester is divided into three projects, each requiring approximately one month's time. Classroom periods are used for lectures, individual conferences, and supervised research work.

I. The collection of information.

1. Purpose: To give the student experience in the making of a comprehensive bibliography, and to acquaint him with the Pennsylvania reference material available in his library.
2. Project: The writing of a biography of an individual associated with Pennsylvania history.
 - A. Type: Preferably individuals about whom "standard" biographies have not been written; individuals not too obscure to make elementary research difficult.
 - B. Examples: John Penn, Johann Printz, Baron Stiegel, Daniel Pastorius, Count Zinzendorf, James Hies-ter, James Logan, James Wilson, William Maclay, various Pennsylvania governors, etc.
3. Procedure:
 - First week: Lectures on bibliographical procedure—card catalogues, indexes, guides, bibliographical notes. Assignment: Start of bibliography from card catalogues, periodicals, guides and secondary works.

Second week: Lectures on subject notes and methods of classifying information.

Third week: Personal conferences to determine whether bibliographies are exhaustive and to discuss organization of material.

Assignment: Continuation of reading and note-taking.

Fourth week: Presentation of papers, subject notes and bibliographies. Discussion of bibliographical problems.

II. Criticism and the establishment of historical truth.

1. Purpose: To give the student practice in the technique of historical criticism: the establishment of facts, investigation of partiality, analysis of doubtful statements, etc., and to compare and contrast various types of Pennsylvania reference material.

2. Project: The writing of a critical book review.

A. Examples: Weems, *William Penn*; Faÿ, *Franklin*; Ferree, *Pennsylvania Primer*; Pennypacker, *Pennsylvania the Keystone*; Walton, *Conrad Weiser*; Fisher, *Pennsylvania*; Brailsford, *Penn.*

3. Procedure:

First week: Lectures on the critical review and external criticism.

Assignment: Investigation of author and reading of book. Summary of content.

Second week: Lectures on internal criticism and analysis of sources.

Assignment: Investigation of sources.

Third week: Lectures on the establishment of fact, use of footnotes, forming of conclusions.

Assignment: Checking of accuracy

Fourth week: Presentation of reviews and critical notes. Discussion of statements tested and conclusions reached.

III. Presentation of an historical problem.

1 Purpose: To give the student opportunity to perform an original piece of research in Pennsylvania history.

2. Project: A research problem involving the collection, criticism and presentation of facts relative to some phase of Pennsylvania history associated with the source material available in local libraries.
 - A. Type: The nature of these problems depends almost entirely upon library facilities.
 - B. Examples: The Elm Treaty; The Walking Purchase; Pennsylvania Indian Massacres; State Seals of Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania Militia.
3. Procedure:
 - First week: Lectures on selection of topic for research.
Assignment: Investigation of topic and beginning of bibliography.
 - Second week: Lectures on primary and secondary sources, analysis of evidence.
Assignment: Reading, note-taking, bibliographical search.
 - Third week: Lectures on presentation: organization, format, style.
Assignment: Checking and classification of material; reading and note-taking.
 - Fourth week: Presentation of completed researches, bibliographies and subject notes. Discussion of conclusions.

A brief outline of this sort cannot show the type of investigation and library work which goes on outside the classroom. The schedule of work has purposely been spread over a slightly longer period of time than might seem necessary, with a view to allowing the student ample time for the progress of various investigations throughout the semester without crowding other studies. Research work of any sort takes time. Much of the actual work may be done in the classroom, which also affords time for the very essential individual conferences concerning specific projects.

The present state of Pennsylvania historiography would seem to justify courses of this type. Recent contributions to Pennsylvania bibliography are of considerable help to research students and few libraries in the state are without the basis Pennsylvania reference material. It is an interesting course, and a

stimulating one to both student and teacher. No student who has become acquainted with the sources of Pennsylvania history in Project One, who has tested the value of these sources and compared them in Project Two, and who has actually used them in independent work of his own in Project Three, can fail to acquire a definite knowledge of the historical background of Pennsylvania as well as what is possibly more important—an acquaintance with and an understanding of the vast field of reference material from which the history of Pennsylvania will some day be written.