

## Introduction

This special supplemental issue of *Pennsylvania History* is the first in what I hope will be a long series of annual volumes produced in collaboration between the McNeil Center for Early American Studies and the Pennsylvania Historical Association. The McNeil Center (or MCEAS)—formerly the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies—was established in 1978 by the University of Pennsylvania to facilitate research into the history and culture of the mid-Atlantic in general and the Delaware Valley in particular. The Center grants nine-month fellowships to graduate students who come from universities all over the USA and Britain to work in Philadelphia-area archives and libraries; we've supported a total of 85 dissertation fellows so far. Beginning in 1999-2000, the Center will also sponsor a post-doctoral fellowship. The Center operates a seminar (meeting twice a month between September and May) designed to promote intellectual exchange and scholarly community among local and visiting scholars. The Center also hosts major research projects (such as our five-volume edition of *The Papers of William Penn*, published in the 1980s), presents scholarly conferences (eight so far), and sponsors a monograph series entitled *Early American Studies* published by the University of Pennsylvania Press (four books issued to date). Now, thanks to a series of major endowment gifts from the Barra Foundation and the Robert L. McNeil, Jr. 1986 Charitable trust, the Center has a new name and an expanded program. As part of our expansion, we have entered into partnership with Bill Pencak, the redoubtable editor of *Pennsylvania History*, to produce an annual collection of essays written by members of the MCEAS community. This supplemental issue is in addition to the four regular annual issues of *Pennsylvania History*, and is being sent to all subscribers at no extra cost.

For this opening MCEAS issue, we have assembled nine essays, a mix of work by senior and junior historians. Three of our authors—John Murrin, Gary Nash, and Billy Smith—have published widely in the Early American field. The Center has always benefited enormously from the active participation of established scholars, and John, Gary, and Billy are three of our chief supporters. John Murrin, who presented an earlier version of his provocative essay on bestiality in Early America at a joint meeting of the Shelby Cullom Davis seminar and the McNeil Center seminar in January 1998, is the Chair of the MCEAS Executive Council and Advisory Council. He teaches history at Princeton University in his spare time. For twenty years John has been coming regularly to the Center seminars, often with a cadre of graduate students in tow, and four of his Princeton PhD students have held Center fellowships. Gary Nash, whose essay on Haitians in Philadelphia during the 1790s continues his revelatory investigation into the beginnings of the Black Freedom

movement, is necessarily a more distant supporter of the Center, since his academic base is 3,000 miles away at UCLA. But Gary has shared his pathbreaking scholarship with us from the beginning, giving memorable Center seminar papers in the 1970s and 1980s that were previews of chapters in *The Urban Crucible* and *Forging Freedom*. And six of his UCLA graduate students, drawn to the Philadelphia archives and libraries by Gary's example, have held Center fellowships. One of Gary's first students to join us was Billy Smith, now Professor of History at Montana State University and the author or editor of five books. I like to think that the Center has had a share in shaping Billy's fruitful career. Back in 1980 he gave us his first discoveries about "the Lower Sort" in Philadelphia, and more recently—while making return visits to the archives—he has shared his findings with us on *Blacks Who Stole Themselves* and on the adventures of the "infortunate" William Moraley. Since Billy is an inveterate collector and disseminator of early Philadelphia documents, it is appropriate that his contribution to this volume—in partnership with Anita DeClue—is an edition of an important document: Edward Garrigues's 1798 Yellow Fever diary.

The remaining essays are by six younger scholars who are in the early stages of their academic careers. The very best feature of the MCEAS/PCEAS in my opinion is that we keep drawing highly talented beginning scholars to our fellowship competitions and to our seminars. Invariably, graduate students are the most lively participants in our Friday afternoon seminar discussions. The six junior scholars represented here have all held dissertation fellowships or visiting research fellowships at the Center, and have all been active participants in our community. Brendan McConville, who has a PhD from Brown University and teaches in the History Department at Binghamton University, is a few years ahead of the others, with a book in press on agrarian unrest in colonial New Jersey. Brendan was a dissertation fellow at the Center in 1990-91 and a postdoctoral fellow in 1995-96. His essay on Magdalena Valleau illustrates his larger arguments about crowd protest over land rights. Valentijn Byvanck, Thomas Humphrey, and Judith Van Buskirk were all dissertation fellows at the Center in 1995-96. Valentijn gives us an essay drawn from his New York University dissertation on "The Politics of Public Portraiture in America, 1800-1860." He presented an earlier version of this piece at a Center seminar in October 1996. Tom offers an essay drawn from his dissertation at Northern Illinois University on agrarian protest in Albany County, New York, 1751-1801. He presented an earlier version at a Center seminar in February 1996. Judy adapts from her dissertation at New York University a chapter on African Americans in the American Revolution in and around New York City. She presented a parallel paper at a Center seminar in April 1996. Konstantin Dierks, a Center fellow the following year in 1996-97, gives us an essay that he originally presented at a Center seminar in February

1996; it is drawn from his Brown University dissertation on letter writing in America, 1750-1800. And William O'Reilly from University College Galway and the University of Oxford is our overseas representative. Will's essay, drawn from his Oxford dissertation, compares eighteenth-century German migration east to Hungary and west to America. His first research trip to Philadelphia was on a Fulbright fellowship in 1994, and he presented an earlier version of the essay in this volume at a Center seminar in March 1997.

Collectively, these nine essays splendidly represent the rich diversity of current work in Early American history and culture. Yet they also intersect in fascinating ways. McConville and Humphrey both discuss agrarian rioting in the mid-Atlantic. Nash and Van Buskirk treat African-Americans on the move. Murrin, McConville, and Dierks find three different ways of exploring the relationship between gender and power. And Dierks, O'Reilly, and Byvanck point out fresh ways of exploring cultural history, with their reading of such "texts" as letters, broadsides, and portraits. As I surveyed these pieces, I found that all of them grapple with important issues that few if any historians even thought about back when I went to graduate school. To me, they demonstrate the bracing vitality of our field. I hope that you agree!

Richard S. Dunn  
Director, MCEAS