

## Introduction

This special supplemental issue of *Pennsylvania History* edited by William Pencak and George W. Boudreau is published by the Pennsylvania Historical Association for the McNeil Center for Early American Studies—formerly the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies. As the Director of the MCEAS, I wish to thank the Council of the Pennsylvania Historical Association for permitting the McNeil Center to produce this issue as a bonus to the subscribers of *Pennsylvania History*. And I am most grateful to Bill Pencak for his enthusiastic supervision of the project. This is the third special supplemental issue of *Pennsylvania History* that Bill Pencak has produced during the last three years, and all three of these issues have been very important to me. The first one, which appeared in 1997 under the title *Empire, Society and Labor*, was a collection of essays by my students to mark my retirement from the History Department at the University of Pennsylvania. The second one, which appeared in 1998 under the title *Explorations in Early American Culture*, consisted of essays by historians closely associated with the MCEAS/PCEAS. The present issue carries the same title and follows the same pattern: it contains eight essays that were all presented in earlier form as MCEAS/PCEAS seminar papers.

The McNeil Center 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 awards nine-month fellowships to graduate students and postdoctoral scholars who wish to work in the Philadelphia-area archives and libraries; we've granted a total of ninety-one fellowships so far. 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. Anyone who wishes to attend our seminars or receive our papers can join our e-mail listserve via [mceas@ccat.sas.upenn.edu](mailto:mceas@ccat.sas.upenn.edu). The Center also presents scholarly conferences (ten so far) and sponsors a monograph series entitled *Early American Studies* published by the University of Pennsylvania Press (with four books issued to date). Now, thanks to generous 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 the Pennsylvania Historical Association to produce this annual *Explorations* issue, which is in addition to the four regular issues of *Pennsylvania History* and is being sent to all subscribers at no extra cost.

Bill Pencak and I see *Explorations* as a showcase for current work in Early American history and culture. Both of us are particularly interested in publishing the exciting new research of young scholars. In the spring of 1998 we assembled a committee from the MCEAS Advisory Council to make a selection of recent seminar papers. All of the essays that we chose for this volume were originally presented at seminars during the 1997-1998 academic year

except for Maurice Jackson's, which was presented the previous year. They are arranged in approximate chronological order.

The first two essays explore aspects of colonial social history. Philip Otterness, who recently received his Ph.D. in History at the University of Iowa and teaches at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, leads off with an examination of the German Palatine migration of 1709. He is particularly interested in how these people from diverse geographical and religious backgrounds in Germany adopted the fictitious generic label of "Palatine Refugees" after they got to London, and then created a separate and fiercely shared identity for themselves when they settled collectively on the western frontier of New York colony. In the second essay a pair of Stanford-trained senior historians, Jack Marietta from the University of Arizona and Gail Rowe from the University of Northern Colorado, analyze the surprisingly high rate of violent crime in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. They find some correlation with ethnicity (Ulster Scots being particularly prone to violence), but little correlation with economic status (the poor were not targeting the rich). Assailants and victims were most likely to be neighbors, and in this liberty-loving Quaker colony attacks on law enforcement officers—constables and sheriffs—were especially numerous and noteworthy.

The next pair of essays explore aspects of colonial intellectual history. Sara Gronim (a newly minted Ph.D. in History from Rutgers University) analyzes popular resistance to Copernican and Newtonian cosmology in colonial New York. She shows that almanac makers made astrologically inspired predictions of celestial and human events into the 1750s, and that although observations of Halley's comet in 1758 and the transit of Venus in 1769 signaled a new acceptance of celestial mechanics, sky watchers continued to find religious meanings in the passage of comets. Which leads her to conclude that the assimilation of the new cosmology by New Yorkers in the 1770s was still relatively shallow. In the next essay, Maurice Jackson gives us a preview of his doctoral dissertation at Georgetown University on the antislavery career of the benevolently radical Quaker Anthony Benezet. He shows how Benezet in his antislavery tracts drew upon a wide range of sources, including the journals of slave traders and travelers to Africa as well as the moral writings of the leading French and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. And he argues that Benezet, drawing upon his long personal experience as a schoolteacher of black children, was more progressive than any other white abolitionist agitator of his era because he insisted that blacks had full natural and mental equality with whites.

The next pair of essays focus upon popular entertainment in the Early Republic. Heather Shaw Nathans (a newly minted Ph.D. in Theatre History at Tufts University) discusses the emergence of the theatre in Boston and Philadelphia in the 1790s. She argues that the promoters of the theatre in both

cities were members of the Federalist elite who built grandiose playhouses for the production of genteel and uplifting patriotic entertainments designed for passive audiences in need of moral improvement. But the theatre managers in both cities found that their audiences were far from passive: they were divided into politically partisan camps (Federalist versus Republican), and they protested and rioted whenever they were displeased with what they saw on stage. In his companion essay, Brett Mizelle discusses a rival form of public entertainment very popular in the 1790s: the exhibition of exotic animals. Drawing upon his University of Minnesota dissertation research, he tracks a number of traveling showmen who exhibited monkeys and apes, and lured the public with advertisements stressing the resemblance between these performing animals and human beings. He shows that these animal exhibits, along with museum displays and moralizing accounts of monkeys and orangutans in contemporaneous magazines and children's books, reflected intense interest in the boundaries between animal and human, and provoked discussion and debate about the nature of human identity.

The final pair of essays focuses upon women—especially working-class women—in the Early Republic. Seth Rockman (a newly minted Ph.D. in History from the University of California at Davis) discusses the survival strategies of laboring women from poor households in Baltimore from the 1790s to 1830. He stresses the narrow options open to impoverished women in a society predicated on female dependence. And since Baltimore had an especially large slave and free black population, Rothman is able to compare the tactics employed by free black women versus poor white women as they all struggled to make ends meet via petty marketing, out-work, domestic service, the laundry trade, or prostitution. Which leads us to the final essay, a study by Rodney Hessinger drawn from his Temple University dissertation, on how middle class male reformers viewed the prostitutes they were trying to rescue in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia. He argues that the founders of the Magdalen Society—who established an asylum in 1807 for “unhappy females, who in unguarded hour, have been robbed of their innocence”—were initially influenced by seduction novels such as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*. The young women whom they interviewed told stories of lost virtue that echoed the *Charlotte Temple* formula. But when some of these Magdalens fled the asylum or otherwise misbehaved, and the great majority of Philadelphia prostitutes showed no interest in being rescued, the managers of the Society came to blame these women rather than their male customers for their depraved conduct.

To me, these eight essays splendidly represent the rich diversity of current work in Early American history and culture. I hope that you agree!

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