

REPORT ON THE ANNUAL MEETING

A VIEW FROM THE 76TH ANNUAL
CONFERENCE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA
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*I*t is hard to imagine University Park, Pennsylvania, as tranquil on fall weekends. The Penn State Nittany Lions, win or lose, pack Beaver Stadium and downtown State College on game-day Saturdays. Even when the team plays away games, the social scene in State College is at least somewhat busy with hopeful fans. Yet, most who ventured to the 76th annual conference of the Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania History has renewed a tradition familiar to PHA conferences and the history journal of years ago. That is that the annual conference program chair provides a written report and observations to the journal's editorial review board for publication in a subsequent issue. Such a report intends to provide continuity from year-to-year, informs readers of happenings at PHA conferences, and serves as a record of the topics, themes, and issues discussed and presented by fellow scholars. It is the intent of this report not to necessarily be analytical or to critique what was presented at the annual conference: that is saved for future issues of Pennsylvania History as scholarly works come forth for publication. Moreover, this report mentions concurrent session topics rather than individual presenters. Finally, it is the intent here to, indeed, provide a record, offer some observations, and inform the audience of readers that PHA is alive and well as is scholarship on Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic region. My gratitude to the editors and the editorial board for renewing an important tradition.

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Historical Association (PHA) in State College—Thursday, October 18, through Saturday, October 20, 2007—found this college town to be relatively relaxed and, as is typical, very welcoming.

The 76th annual meeting of the PHA featured numerous quality topics, presenters, addresses, and tours. Two major themes were highlighted at this year's conference. First, 2007 marked seventy-five years since the initial meeting of the association's founders in State College in 1932. As a result, the program featured an opening plenary and Friday luncheon in which past PHA presidents reflected on the association's history and the interpretation of Pennsylvania and Mid-Atlantic history. Second, statewide, regional, and local planning efforts are mounting as the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the American Civil War approaches in 2011.

The PHMC hosted a pre-conference grants workshop at the Pennsylvania Military Museum in Boalsburg on the afternoon of October 18. The workshop hosted a record turn-out of representatives of historical societies, museums, and cultural institutions who gathered to learn about state-level funding opportunities for the interpretation and preservation of cultural and historic resources in the Commonwealth. Following the workshop, the conference officially opened with a thematic address at the Centre County Historical Society by Pulitzer Prize-winning Penn State historian Mark Neely who discussed Pennsylvania politics during the Civil War era. Mark's talk reminded listeners that Civil War-era politics in the North were anything but civil: deep divisions remained between Lincoln supporters and non-conformist Democrats. While popular conceptions of Pennsylvania politics during this era may lead one to believe that a united front was apparent in the struggle to reunite the union, Neely—in his inviting style—reminded historians that a closer look reveals that a good deal of anti-Lincoln and anti-war sentiment was expressed in newspaper editorials and primary source documents and uncovers public protests and political party dissention. His book, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* provides detailed accounts of such conflict. Professor Neely's talk, his book, and a new exhibit at the Centre County Historical Society provide compelling examples of new ways to examine the Civil War and its popular and scholarly interpretations as the sesquicentennial approaches in 2011.

Likewise, the opening plenary offered a compelling thematic look at *Perspectives from past Presidents of PHA on Writing and Interpreting Pennsylvania History* chaired by 2005–06 president Dennis Downey of Millersville

University. John Bauman (1993–94), Susan Klepp (1997–98), Leslie Patrick (1999–2000), Randall Miller (2001–02), Rosalind Remer (2003–04), and Downey each provided a retrospective on what has and has not been included in interpreting Pennsylvania and Mid-Atlantic history. For example, while the histories of specific events, conflicts, cultures, noteworthy individuals, and secular and non-secular institutions have been addressed and interpreted in the journal *Pennsylvania History* and at PHA conferences (some examples mentioned included the French and Indian War, the Whiskey Rebellion, the Revolution, and Quakers), it is only in recent times that issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and labor have been embraced and analyzed. Similarly, while Pennsylvania's industrial history and legacy have often been the subject of study, deindustrialization and the post-modern economy have received cursory (albeit increasing) attention. Indeed, the subject of PHA's gender diversity in scholarship, membership, and leadership (and its past lack thereof) was raised by several speakers. All generally agreed that a solid body of interpretive knowledge and sound scholarship have been increasingly realized and that diversity in leadership, research topics, approaches have been and continue to be embraced by the organization. Yet, much more remains to be done topically, thematically, and methodologically.

Following the plenary, concurrent sessions opened at the Day's Inn State College. As is the case at most PHA conferences, the papers and sessions spanned time periods, events, people, and places. Some shed new scholarly light on long studied subjects. Examples include a three part presentation that examined *War in the Backcountry—The Impact of Lord Dunmore's War on Native Americans, Pennsylvania, and the United States*; as well as: *Pennsylvania's Revolution Neglected Participants and Ideas*; *Pennsylvania in the Revolution: Interpreting Artifacts, Politics, and the Role of Women*, and: *Economies in Pennsylvania Communities*.

Other sessions provided updates on current projects and issues as well as interpretive and planning efforts to preserve and recognize historic and cultural resources and topics. Such was the case with *The Pennsylvania Civil War Muster Rolls Project*, an initiative of the Pennsylvania State Archives; *Planning for the Civil War Sesquicentennial in Pennsylvania—Statewide Perspectives*, a multi-agency initiative; discussion of a unique *Teaching American History* project involving collaboration with the PHMC and Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, and; *Linking Museums and Scholarship in Artifact Interpretation*.

And, other concurrent sessions provided novel insight on topics less explored and discussed in Pennsylvania history scholarship. These include *Sportsmen, Commissioners, and Governors—The Social and Political Dynamics of*

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Conservation and Environmental Policy in Pennsylvania, 1870–1960; Novel Research on Pennsylvania's 20th Century Cultural and Social History; Synagogues, Steelworkers, and Suffragettes—Local History Exhibitions at the Hope Horn Gallery, University of Scranton, and: Property, Public Exhibitions, and Knowledge—Adaptations of a Culture of Consumption.

At the Friday luncheon current PHA president Charles Cashdollar provided a history of the association's beginnings in State College in 1932 reminding listeners that PHA's original intent—still realized—is to provide a collaborative, professional, and inquisitive environment in which scholarship and discourse are encouraged and shared and in which knowledge of the field is broadened. Likewise, past president John Frantz, in his witty and collegial style, reflected on the history of the organization by highlighting past conferences, people, and places. John reminded listeners how the conference has traveled throughout the state, always included some element of local history related to the annual locale, and exposed scholars, literally, to the roadmap of Pennsylvania. The luncheon enjoyed the presence of past president Jerry Eggert as well. While his health prevented a lengthy speech, his presence reminded us of the distinguished service and contributions of many of the organization's leaders.

Two tours were offered as part of the conference: opportunities for hands-on learning. One was a tour of the State College Highlands Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The tour was led by Jackie Melander of the Centre County Historical Society and included views of architectural styles ranging from Sears-style “cookie-cutter” housing as well as more opulent English Tudor-style homes, many of which were constructed in the post – World War II era as the State College campus and population expanded exponentially (the tour even included an unexpected and friendly visit *inside* of a fraternity house—rain being the cause). And, Penn State archivist James Quigel enticed visitors with a tour of the University's Special Collections Archives, one of the more interesting and diverse in the Commonwealth.

Friday evening's reception and dinner were followed with an engaging keynote address by Brian Lockman, President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Cable Network and host of the program “Pennsylvania Books” that, at this writing, airs on PCN Sunday evenings at 9:00 p.m. A natural in front of an audience and a writer, Brian reflected on the several hundred book programs he has hosted over a ten year period that have featured authors on subjects ranging from James Buchanan to sports to Pennsylvania's roadside diners. Joking that his favorite authors were in the PHA audience, Brian discussed numerous intriguing interviews he has conducted on “Pennsylvania Books”

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that has brought both lesser and better known topics, subjects, and authors to the public eyes. Brian encouraged listeners to think about and pursue research and writing on subjects less written about such as the history of technology, twentieth century subjects, a solid biography of the Penn family, a comprehensive history of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and histories of ethnic groups and communities so familiar Pennsylvania's landscape.

Marion Roydhouse of Philadelphia University and vice-president of PHA closed the conference following Saturday's concurrent sessions with a post-luncheon talk, sponsored by the Committee on Women and Minorities, on her new publication, "Women and Industry and Reform." This important contribution, published by PHA, examines the role of women in Pennsylvania's past especially relating to social, political, and industrial reform efforts and movements in the early twentieth century. It seems especially appropriate that this book was released in conjunction with the 75th anniversary. I dare add that such a discourse is long, long overdue and invites more to be done especially with regard to the twentieth century as whole.

This commentary would be remiss in not mentioning another less obvious observation regarding the PHA conference and the organization itself in this important anniversary year. Among the more interesting evolutionary aspects of the PHA, at least in the ten years or so that this spectator has been an active member, is that the conference and its presenters—wittingly or not—have increasingly embraced the notion of andragogy as a learning methodology rather than more traditional pedagogy. While this term is unusual (it cannot be found in most contemporary dictionaries and a thesaurus search yields no alternatives) andragogy is familiar to the field of Adult Education and has even been embraced by some prominent historians including Charles A. Beard who, coincidentally, served among the first presidents of the American Association for Adult Education in the 1920s.

Andragogy implies that adults learn productively and engage actively in voluntary settings where they have input into what is learned and participate in learning. Moreover, andragogy assumes that learning is a natural part of human existence: humans learn every day whether it is intentional or by happenstance, learning is life-long, and adult learners are typically self-directed. Andragogy is, of course, opposite pedagogy where learning is prescribed and usually means being lectured-at and mandated to follow a specific curriculum. And, pedagogy typically implies that the outcomes of learning results in specified measurable accomplishments such as graduation from college, completion of a specific course of study, acquiring a new job, or publishing a paper.

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Contemporary technology, extant and interdisciplinary studies of the human capacity to create and retain knowledge, the sheer number of baby-boomers who engage in voluntary activities in which they have interests (and most of which involve learning in some capacity), the growing number of adult learners who pursue higher education as “non-traditional students,” and global economics have changed the nature of learning. Focusing solely on the United States, for example, the majority of living Americans are accustomed to traditional K-12 pedagogy. However, pedagogical approaches to everyday adult life have become outmoded. Put simply, most adults cannot survive today solely based upon knowledge, information, and behaviors learned in their youth. The reality is that we live in a culture that demands andragogy; yet most of us were educated—and are, perhaps, more comfortable with—pedagogy. And, herein is the challenge.

What does any of this have to do with PHA? Why is andragogy relevant to scholars? It was particularly noteworthy at the 76th annual PHA conference that several of the programs, presenters, and tours engaged the audience and involved the learners in dialogue and knowledge sharing. This seems appropriate perhaps even more so now than ever before as traditional history is increasingly engaged in competitiveness with other academic disciplines and the need to demonstrate its relevance in both the academic and public arenas. History—its people, places, and events—is better served by engaging the learner, giving them ownership, and connecting it to their lives whether in the academy, at the historical society or museum, or at a professional conference. That is andragogy in practice and it seems that PHA continues to move in an andragogical direction—all to the good.

A hearty thank-you goes out to 2007 Program Committee members Amy Bischof (Hershey Museum), Andrew Arnold (Kutztown University), Jeffrey Davis (Bloomsburg University), Jennifer Janofsky (McNeil Center), Rachel Batch (Widener University), Judy Ridner (Muhlenberg College), and Diane Wenger (Wilkes University). Also, the conference would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the Local Arrangements committee members and their respective institutions, John Frantz (Pennsylvania State University) and Jackie Melander (Centre County Historical Society). I remain grateful to chair and work with such a dedicated group of professional colleagues. Thanks as well to the Executive Committee of the PHA for their support.

Finally, for the sake of memory, senior quarterback Anthony Morelli initiated four long touchdown drives and the Penn State Nittany Lions defense forced four second-half turnovers to lead the team to a 36–31 win at Indiana. In retrospect, it was a winning weekend in more ways than one, unless you are a Hoosier fan.

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