

## PHA 2014 CONFERENCE POSTER SESSION

*T*he Pennsylvania Historical Association sponsors a poster session at their annual meeting for undergraduate and graduate students to present their research as emerging scholars in the field of Pennsylvania and Mid-Atlantic history. At the Fall 2014 meeting held November 6–8 in Philadelphia, the following were selected as the top three posters. The winning poster is reproduced on the following page. A list of all entries is included.

—*The Editor*

### First Place

“We Have Had It Up to Here”: Murder, Riot, and Civil Rights  
in a Western Pennsylvania Industrial Town

*Shelby Heisler and Alex Tabor*

Just after midnight on the first of November 1970, Ronald Mitchell, a Vietnam veteran, Purple Heart winner, husband, father, carpenter, and African American, was murdered outside of the Rainbow Gardens Bar in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Witnesses claimed the murderer was a white man who fired from a slow-passing automobile. Infuriated by this tragic act of violence and a notable delay in the response time of emergency services, African

Americans rioted in the streets of south New Castle, smashing windows, overturning cars, throwing rocks at police and firefighters, and firebombing neighborhood businesses and homes. The murder and riot occurred during a tense time for race relations in the city. During the late 1960s, New Castle civil rights and labor activists had protested for open housing and against discriminatory hiring practices with only limited success. Ronald Mitchell himself was active with Black Concerned Citizens, the leading African American rights group within New Castle at the time. Based on newspaper articles and oral history interviews with surviving participants and witnesses, this project aims for an objective evaluation of the series of events leading to Mitchell's murder, and also examines the significant impacts of the events in the context of contested civil rights in New Castle during the 1970s. The project also intends to question the place of the murder of Ronald Mitchell in local public memory, as the silences imposed by a predominantly white society significantly impacted the local understanding and passing down of civil rights and race relations in New Castle and western Pennsylvania. The story of Ronald Mitchell and the New Castle riot has received no significant



FIGURE 1: The judging begins at the poster session, November 8, 2014.

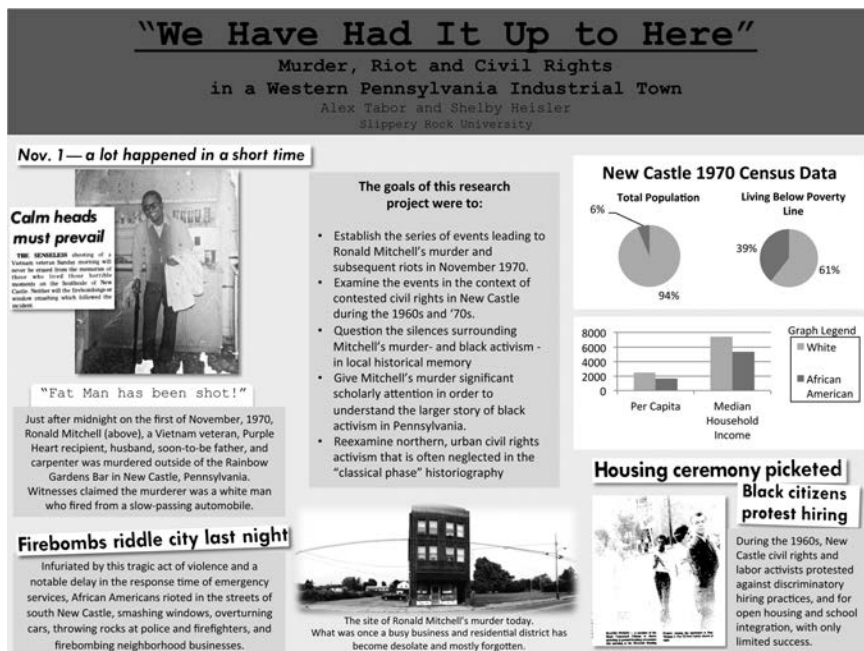


FIGURE 2: The winning poster: "We Have Had It Up to Here."

scholarly attention; thus this project advances our understanding of the larger story of black activism and race relations in Pennsylvania. It also contributes to the recent historiographical trends in civil rights scholarship that seek to reexamine northern, urban civil rights activism not usually included in the "classical phase" of the civil rights movement (see fig. 2).

## Second Place

*The Letter and the Spirit: Toward a Quantitative Method for the Study of Pennsylvania German Calligraphy and Manuscript Illumination, ca. 1683–1855*

*Alexander Lawrence Ames*

As members of early America's largest European minority, the Germans of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pennsylvania contributed to the spiritualistic heterodoxy that long characterized their colony-turned-state. The faith traditions of German-speaking Radical Pietists, who comprised a vibrant subset of German settlers, undergirded a manuscript culture in

which ornamental handwriting and manuscript illumination comprised acts of religious devotion. This manuscript culture, grounded in blackletter type and broken-letter script (known in German as *Frakturschrift*), represented a confluence of factors shaping ideas and material texts in early modern Europe and colonial America. First, the German language shared a close association with the blackletter print culture of Protestantism. Second, a vague sense of German identity was grounded in common linguistic heritage. Third, some branches of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestant theology were rooted in mystical engagement with Scripture through the activities of reading and writing. Radical Pietists' distinctive manuscript culture did not thrive in perpetuity. Within several generations, the baroque design template characteristic of early Pietistic manuscripts colloquialized into the rustic "Pennsylvania Dutch" aesthetic famous today. One illuminative form closely associated with the Central European Pietistic experience disappeared from Pennsylvania entirely. This form, the *Vorschrift*, or manuscript writing sample, was a ceremonial document presented by teachers to schoolchildren. The renaissance and decay of the *Vorschrift* may shed light on the breakdown of Pietistic hermeneutics in Pennsylvania, *if* scholars interpret the documents as evidence of cultural change.

### Third Place

William White's War: An Irish-Philadelphian's Experiences in the American Civil War.

*James Kopaczewski*

While thousands of letters from Union and Confederate soldiers exist, William C. White's letters, 1861–1869, provide an intriguing perspective on the war. As an Irish Catholic Philadelphian, White was raised in a tradition and culture that has not received much attention from scholars. White's upbringing in the tough ethnic districts of Philadelphia was marked by prejudice, poverty, and outright violence. Despite Philadelphia's standing as a cultural, economic, and political power, waves of ethnically focused violence periodically occurred. This violence climaxed with the destructive and deadly Nativist Riots of 1844. Irish men, women, and children were physically and verbally assaulted, Irish Catholic churches burned, and Irish laborers forced to work for the lowest paying, most menial jobs available. White grew up in this highly charged ethnic context and it helped to shape the ways in which he viewed the war.

When the Civil War erupted in April 1861, White rushed to sign up for the Union army. He joined the predominately Irish Sixty-ninth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment (69th Pa) and was quickly whisked off to Washington, DC, to protect the capital. White experienced some of the most pivotal moments of the war with the 69th Pa., including the Battle of Antietam, the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Battle of Gettysburg, and the Overland Campaign. White’s service in the Union army, his Irish Catholic upbringing in Philadelphia, and his marvelous set of letters offers scholars the opportunity to use White’s life to study the experience of Irish Catholic soldiers from Philadelphia. Evocative of African Americans’ and women’s war experiences, the war became an arena for William White and Irish Catholic Philadelphians to prove their loyalty and claim their stake in the future of the United States. William White’s war cannot be simply described by notions of fighting for “cause” and “comrades,” for this picture is too clear. Rather, White and Irish Catholic Philadelphians fought to cast aside identities as Irishmen and realize identities as Irish Americans. The process of developing an Irish American identity entailed ardent Unionism and devout religious belief. In all, the story of William White’s war is the story of all Irish Catholic Philadelphians struggling to build a new life in a new land, navigating the complexities of urban America, and creating a future in a country that begrudgingly welcomed them.

APPENDIX

*PHA 2014 Conference Poster Session Participants*

TABLE 1.

Student Name	Project Title	Faculty Advisor	University
Kaitlyn Adams	L’Hermitage: The History Behind the Mystery	Emily Blanck	Rowan University
Alexander Ames	The Letter and the Spirit: Toward a Quantitative Method for the Study of Pennsylvania German Calligraphy and Manuscript Illumination, ca. 1683–1855	Consuela Metzger	University of Delaware
Rachel Baer	The Power of an Ideal: Class and Professionalism at the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing	Karol K. Weaver	Susquehanna University

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Student Name	Project Title	Faculty Advisor	University
Tracy Barnett	Daniel E. Sickles's Unauthorized Advance at Gettysburg	Jeffery S. Prushankin	Millersville University
Sara Baum	A Prosopography of Pews	John Pankratz	Albright College
Nicole Crossey	The Unlikely Causes of the "Eight Year Cycle" Between Political Parties in Pennsylvanian Gubernatorial Elections since 1950	J. W. Leckrone	Widener University
Grace DiAgostino <sup>a</sup>	Columbia Avenue to Cecil B. Moore Avenue: Riots, Supposed Revitalization, and Temple University	Seth Bruggeman	Temple University
Mary Halbur	Giving Voice to the Jobless: The Unemployed Councils of Philadelphia in the 1930s	Rachel Batch	Widener University
James Kopaczewski	William White's War: An Irish-Philadelphian's Experiences in the American Civil War	Judith Giesberg	Villanova University
Caressa Lynch	Religious Thoughts Regarding the Yellow Fever Epidemic of Philadelphia in 1793	Scott Morschauser	Rowan University
Katrina Ponti <sup>a</sup>	Of Politics and Pedagogy: The Search of the Pennsylvania Germans for a Republican Identity in the Early Republic	Robyn Davis	Millersville University
Jennifer Rogers	The Transcribing of a Local Civil War Soldier's Diary: From Private to Doctor	Ellen Knodt	Penn State University, Abington
Ashley Smith	The Change of People's Attitudes Toward Migrant Workers from the 1950s to the Present in Pennsylvania	Patricia Clark	Westminster College
Alex Tabor and Shelby Heisler	"We Have Had It Up to Here": Murder, Riot, and Civil Rights in a Western Pennsylvania Industrial Town	Aaron Cowan	Slippery Rock University
Eric Wieland	African Americans in Pageants of the Twentieth Century: Negative Images, Morals and the Dominance of the Light Skinned	Bill Bergmann	Slippery Rock University

<sup>a</sup> Indicates graduate student.