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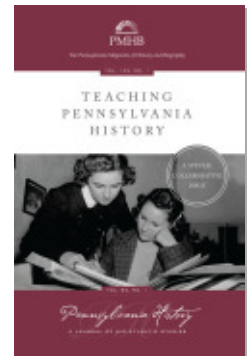
Three Miles, Two Creeks: Local Pennsylvania History in the Classroom

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THREE MILES, TWO CREEKS: LOCAL
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY IN THE
CLASSROOM

Edward Slavishak

Abstract: This article describes an undergraduate history assignment at Susquehanna University, through which students create virtual museum exhibits on the local history of Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. Students narrate and interpret the Penn's Creek Massacre of 1755 and the Stump Massacre of 1768. The goal is to tell a cohesive story and offer a clear viewpoint on the events while adhering to the research and design standards used by public history professionals. The historical content of the assignment emphasizes the diversity and violence of the American frontier in the decades before the Revolutionary War. The exhibition format highlights the need to think carefully about audience, voice, and storytelling, three aspects of making history that are often disregarded in student research papers. The ultimate value of the assignment is its ability to increase students' awareness of the manipulation involved in the process of historical interpretation, even as they attempt to "get it right."

Students in my Pennsylvania History course at Susquehanna University create mock museum exhibits to interpret two eighteenth-century events that occurred near present-day Selinsgrove: the Penn's Creek Massacre (October 1755) and the Stump Massacre (January 1768). The massacres, which took place on creeks three miles apart, bounding Selinsgrove to the north

and south, offer students the chance to ask what the historian Charles Joyner has called “large questions in small places.” One of those questions is about the role of grisly violence in the stories we tell ourselves about our region, state, and nation. No matter how they are told, these stories are not happy ones. The project tests students’ ability to integrate local history with larger scales of the past, all the while creating an exhibit that reaches out to the public and does not sensationalize the violence. The idea is to give students a creative way to consider local history as a practice while also identifying the global processes that produced this particular local place.¹

A small percentage of the students in the course plan on working in the field of public history, but the point is not to prepare them for their profession of choice. Rather, the goal is to use the format of the museum exhibit to bring out into the open the often hidden relationship between researchers and their audiences and underscore the concept of usable pasts. Local history has traditionally been an active site for the construction of common grounds and heritage narratives. It has also, at times, been a realm for insiders; genealogy and antiquarian studies reward an investment in a particular place. My students tend to have few links to the area being studied, and they mostly view local history as a quaint and pleasant pursuit lacking a critical edge. The discussions in and out of the classroom that help students complete the course project are ultimately about the value of local and state history in the twenty-first century.

The Course

As a cultural historian interested in work, play, and matters of space and place in the United States since the late nineteenth century, I am not the most obvious choice of instructor for a course on Pennsylvania history. As one of two Americanists in my department, however, I share responsibility for the course and teach it every two or three years. In a sense, my lack of experience with Pennsylvania as a unit of analysis has determined the style in which I approach the material. When I teach HIST 322: Pennsylvania History, the course does not operate on the coverage model. Instead, students and I follow three themes that come into focus as we move in a rough chronological fashion from the precontact period to the early twentieth century. One of those themes is the fragile nature of empire and Pennsylvania’s geographic and political role in that fragility. We focus on British, French, and Iroquoian attempts to maintain territorial power and diplomatic swagger in the face of fragmentation and encroachment.

The imperial theme, and the museum project itself, were inspired by the historian Joshua Piker's work on lying as a fundamental practice at the heart of interactions between European American officials and Native American leaders. Piker encourages historians to think about the everyday practices of empire by examining "events that are not earth-shattering but rather world-revealing." I impress upon students that, as a contested zone between overlapping systems, the land that is now Pennsylvania offers a vivid case study in the importance of temporal and geographic context. Taking Piker's point seriously means thinking of discrete events like the killings in 1755 and 1768 as moments when the ordinary and extraordinary converged, when the "mundane but potent" quickly transformed into something less prosaic and no less powerful. Local history becomes not a microcosm of regional and global systems, then, but a study of the very conditions that allowed the systems to exist in the first place.²

One of the prevailing imperial conditions was the existence of violence. Patrick Griffin makes an extreme case for the prevalence of violence on the colonial frontier, calling the woods of Pennsylvania a "world of all against all" in the years before the Revolution. Griffin might overstate the frequency with which Native Americans and European Americans lashed out at each other, but scholars have certainly demonstrated that a pervasive sense of fear and distrust characterized frontier interactions in the mid-eighteenth century. Chaotic violence formed the foundation of these strained relationships. Jane Merritt's work on the increasingly bloody nature of western Pennsylvania after 1750 emphasizes that the antagonists knew each other all too well; decades of trade, negotiation, encroachment, and cultural exchange led to clashes that were shaped by territorial aspirations. Kyle Somerville agrees, noting that the "intimate" violence between western settlers and Native Americans, characterized by ambush and scalping, can be read as a symptom of an ever-present social pressure for retaliation. The retaliation ethos grew from (and further aggravated) that "choking cloud of contention" that James Merrell finds on the southern frontier in the 1750s. In Pennsylvania, Merrell observes, settlers and Native Americans viewed each other in the kind of stark, polarized terms that led to quick confrontation as early as the 1720s.³

The main text for the course, Jeffrey Davis and Paul Douglas Newman's *Pennsylvania History: Essays and Documents*, contextualizes the violence while never suggesting that it was inevitable. Davis and Newman selected readings and wrote editorial introductions to their seventeen chapters with complexity and "hyper-diversification" in mind. The first three chapters successfully set

up my focus on the frontier by considering cultural mistranslation, forms of Native American agency, and the difference between official pronouncements and conditions “on the ground.” I devote class sessions to discussions about these readings and to mini-lectures about political, religious, and economic backgrounds, giving persistent attention to how regional trends relate to broad patterns. In the fourth week of the course, students start the museum project.⁴

Project Learning Goals

I give students the following guidelines and evaluation criteria:

Successful designs will: (1) combine panels of descriptive/interpretive text and images that could be mounted on form board; (2) tell a cohesive story about the central Susquehanna Valley in the mid-eighteenth century; (3) reveal the events according to a prescribed path through the exhibit; (4) target an adult audience (both SU & local residents) unfamiliar with either event; and (5) total sixty items, arranged to conform to the wall space and floor plan of [Susquehanna’s] Lore Degenstein Gallery.

Evaluation criteria:

- Clarity/detail of description
- Strength of scholarship
- Clarity/strength of interpretation
- Spatial “flow” of the design
- Overall narrative (*does it tell a cohesive story?*)
- Evidence from primary sources
- Selection of meaningful imagery
- Visual appeal of text layout
- Visual appeal of imagery
- Spelling, grammar, punctuation

The museum project is designed with five learning goals in mind. First, the project teaches students to demonstrate interpretive skills. In the annals of colonial American history, these violent events were commonplace in terms of causes and effects. The Penn’s Creek Massacre occurred in the third week of October 1755, when a Native American raiding party attacked Swiss and German settlers along Penn’s Creek. After killing men and capturing women and

children, the displaced Delawares soon returned across the western mountains. With over two dozen people dead or removed, the area around Penn's Creek became largely uninhabited for the next decade. The Stump Massacre (and the "affair" that followed) began in January 1768, when the German American squatter Frederick Stump killed six Native Americans in his cabin along Middle Creek and four more in their camp some ten miles away. Arrest and imprisonment in Carlisle followed, but the colony's legal process was thwarted when Cumberland County vigilantes helped Stump and his servant escape for good.

Neither event was unique; both rose from the slurry of rumor, animosity, reprisals, and government impotence that pervaded the western border of colonial Pennsylvania. Students *could* present these episodes as merely representative of local manifestations of broader developments that composed the colonial American frontier. The result might be an argument for the typicality of the central Susquehanna Valley—a claim that the area functions as a microcosm. On the other hand, students could accentuate the strategic value of the area at the time, thus heightening the meaning of sudden violence in 1755 and 1768. Interpretation, therefore, becomes the process through which students decide how to explain periodization, causation, and significance. The act of framing a museum exhibit about these events forces students to move quickly from chronicling facts to making analytical ventures that are supported by the available evidence. Even the act of labeling the events as "massacres"—or judging that one was a massacre and one was something else—raises questions of how such violence should be understood, if not condoned. The interpretive stakes are high in the project, particularly because some students are eager at first to act out a police procedural, with victims to avenge and suspects to interrogate.

Second, the project focuses directly on history as storytelling and trains students to use multiple narrative strategies as they present the past. The format of the two-by-three-foot exhibit panels, with limited space to house text and the ever-present threat that a viewer will give up and move on, pushes students to think in two ways: what do visitors need, and how can I keep them engaged as I give it to them? A great help here is students' awareness of their own experiences in museums. Although they generally remember little specific material that they have encountered in museums, they do retain strong opinions about which museums were better at presenting material. Along with an attractive visual design and the use of interactive media, the ability of museum staff to cultivate an engaging voice for its interpretive panels is crucial (Fig. 1). The student project highlights the ways in which exposition and analysis support each other.

A Reversal of Roles

The call for blood was strong within the settler community of what is now central Pennsylvania. This need for vengeance manifested in violent acts against Native Americans. Murders, rapes, massacres all occurred at the hands of settlers.

As you continue along you will learn about the Frederick Stump affair, which signaled a shift in roles between Native Americans and settlers. The balance of power had changed after the French and Indian War. The Natives were now the victims of terror and violence.

FIGURE 1: A student panel that develops an engaging voice.

Third, the exhibit requires a moderate level of primary source research. This is certainly not the main component. In an exhibit of sixty items—a collection that is already quite “busy” in a single gallery—there is not enough space to report adequately on detailed primary source research. What the project emphasizes, then, is locating and analyzing a handful of primary sources to demonstrate conclusions borrowed from secondary sources, especially those that illustrate the meanings we can make from conflicting accounts of the events. Students become well-versed in using scholars’ footnotes to track down accessible primary sources.

Fourth, the project compels students to reflect on the ethics of manipulating the past. Telling the story of these events is not a simple matter of getting the chronology straight but rather an effort in balancing accuracy and thoroughness with the students’ perceptions of what their audience “deserves.” Conceptualizing this work as a museum exhibit instead of a research paper makes students think deliberately about who would benefit from their efforts. As the education researcher Veronica Boix Mansilla has noted, history students may presume that the residents of certain geographical regions exhibit cultural patterns that barely change over the course of centuries. An area that was a colonial frontier in the eighteenth century and

remains largely rural in the early twenty-first century, for example, could be misinterpreted as intrinsically and stubbornly parochial. The vast majority of my students grew up outside of central Pennsylvania, and not a semester goes by that I do not hear the term “Pennsylvucky” used to characterize the lifestyles and worldviews of local residents. When that vague Other becomes part of the hypothetical target audience of a museum exhibit about local history, students acknowledge their own calculated packaging of the past. They ask themselves questions that address and challenge what Boix Mansilla calls “simplistic linkages between past and present.” *Would local residents be offended if we criticized their eighteenth-century “counterparts”? Are there modern-day political investments in how we explain interactions between Native Americans and colonists?* Such reflection prompts students to clarify their standards of accuracy and argument.⁵

Finally, the museum project is meant to model a process of self-assessment that is readily applicable beyond the course. In the written rationale submitted with the final panels, students must justify each decision they make with respect to sources, narrative strategies, design elements, and overall organization. I give them the following instructions:

Submit a one-page, single-spaced rationale that explains and justifies your group’s approach to the museum project. The rationale should avoid describing the events themselves and instead focus on:

A. Your interpretation of the events:

- i. How do you fit the two events together (beyond geography and chronology)?
- ii. How do you handle causes and effects?
- iii. Why should visitors care about these events now (besides being local)?

B. Your techniques to “refresh and stimulate” visitors. Be specific about:

- i. how you encourage interaction
- ii. how you convince visitors that they are in an “exploratorium” instead of a gallery
- iii. what visitors will get from your exhibit that they couldn’t get from a book

Think of your task in this project as providing the type of space for local history that Frank Oppenheimer dreamed about for science.

I adapt the physicist Frank Oppenheimer's concept of the "exploratorium" to stress that their exhibits should do what textbooks rarely attempt—teach while also "arousing latent curiosity" and encouraging viewers to see themselves in a new light. Every step toward that goal must be documented and defended. Achieving this level of intentionality is difficult at first, but students learn to keep asking themselves how they could justify their choices. The aim is that this type of reflexivity carries over into other work, especially independent research at the senior level.⁶

The Process

One month before the first draft panels are due, students complete three readings that introduce and interpret the two events. From the Davis and Newman text, they read an abridged version of Matthew C. Ward's article about the changes wrought on the Pennsylvania backcountry by the Seven Years' War. Ward argues that war prompted unlikely affiliations between backcountry settlers and the colonial authorities whom they held in low esteem. A collapse of harmonious relations between colonists and Native Americans soon followed. In particular, he notes, Indian raids such as the Penn's Creek Massacre created "traditions of violence" in an arena where "government authority had all but evaporated." These ideas suggest to students that taking a simple snapshot of the middle Susquehanna Valley in the 1750s produces a blurry image; everything was in motion. Students also read G. S. Rowe's case study of the Stump Massacre as legal history and Alden Vaughan's article about vigilante violence on the frontier before the Revolution. (Linda Ries's work on the Stump Massacre remains the definitive chronicle of the event, but I do not refer students directly to her article. I prefer them to "earn" that source by following the footnote trail.) Rowe argues that backcountry and colonial reactions to Stump's killing spree reveal the deep distrust that white settlers had in Pennsylvania's legal system and the near-impossible position in which local magistrates found themselves when they had to do Philadelphia's business in places such as Carlisle. Vaughan examines the consequences in the 1770s of the colony's "inability to maintain order" on the frontier a decade before.⁷

During the week that students read these articles, we take class trips in a university shuttle to the sites themselves. Over the course of an hour at each site, I talk about the general sequences of events, quote from official records

and correspondence, and orient students to the geographic layouts. Two things become clear during these trips. First, except for a state historical marker and two plaques erected by the county historical society (both concerning the Penn's Creek Massacre), there are no physical references to either event. This brings to mind the geographer Doreen Massey's definition of an "unspoiled" place: "it is as we have imagined it to have been in some distant past." The sites we visit seem spoiled by steel bridges, power lines, "no trespassing" signs, and barking dogs. The inaccessibility of the sites makes it difficult to imagine the homesteads in and around which the killings took place (Fig. 2). An exhibit created in Selinsgrove, in other words, would become *the* public reference point. Second, the sites that we visit are only a part of the narratives that students will eventually create. Both violent episodes occurred at multiple spots along waterways over the course of two days; no single patch of ground encompasses the "action." In this way, the creeks become key parts of the analysis; settlement followed creeks, and the violence we study here followed settlement.⁸

I divide the class into groups of three. I assign the groups myself, rather than allowing students to decide. One of the reasons for this is that I try to distribute talents evenly. Creating digital panels that are sophisticated and



FIGURE 2: A student panel that presents the reference-free Stump Massacre site.

coherent requires basic graphic design skills and familiarity with design software. Before I form the groups, then, I ask students if they consider themselves skilled at using Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Quark, or (at least) PowerPoint. A few have used one of the first four applications, and everyone has used PowerPoint since high school. I evenly distribute the students who identify themselves as adept at any of these applications and build groups around them. This does not guarantee success, of course, but it makes it more likely that each group will manage the technical side of the project.

After reading the scholarly articles and compiling notes, audio recordings, and/or photographs from the trips, the students begin primary source research. I encourage them to start in the Pennsylvania Room of the campus library. In addition to local histories written since the mid-nineteenth century, students use this collection's *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania* and regional gazetteers. The research branches off from there to the local history collection of the Snyder County Library and the libraries and archives of the Snyder, Union, and Northumberland County historical societies. The groups decide for themselves where to go and what to use. They supplement this work with use of online versions of the *Colonial Records* volumes and Penn State's Digital Bookshelf.⁹

The group work leads to the first of three in-class workshops. For the first workshop, the groups prepare four panels of interpretive or expository material pulled from any one section of their exhibits in progress. For the second workshop, two weeks later, the groups revise the same four panels and prepare a draft of their written rationales. For the final workshop, two weeks later, the groups prepare a new series of four panels that apply the techniques they have learned over the month. Only the first of these is a true workshop, in the academic spirit of mutual exchange and debate. In that session, groups critique the work of other groups and respond to the feedback of their peers. Critiques at this stage follow four of the project criteria (clarity/detail of description, clarity/strength of interpretation, visual appeal of text layout, visual appeal of imagery). After this session, I encourage groups to turn inward and not focus on what others are doing. My goal here is to encourage different approaches in interpretation, organization, and design. The second and third workshops involve more individual consultation with the groups and classwide discussions of general principles.

For all workshops, students submit their work to me using a Moodle assignment drop box. Groups have consistently chosen to create their

panels with PowerPoint, due to their own familiarity with the application and the massive storage size of panels produced in applications such as Photoshop. I provide panel-by-panel feedback using the commenting tools within PowerPoint and by manipulating and marking up their panels in Photoshop. The former allows students to address my concerns sequentially, but it is rather time consuming for me to add dozens of comments to PowerPoint slides. The latter technique allows for easy presentation on a screen, but it requires more effort from students when they revise. I use a combination of the two reviewing methods, making sure that I do not make the revisions for the students. Rather than tell them how exactly to revise a panel about John Harris Jr., for example, I might indicate that Harris comes across as a cipher. The choice of how to flesh him out is up to them.

During the workshops and in meetings outside of class, I use three resources to get students thinking about how they package their information: the museum consultant Beverly Serrell's book on writing for exhibits, the psychologist Stephen Bitgood's work on the manipulation of human attention in museums, and a website with general museum design tips. These sources provide basic guidelines such as the number of words that should appear on a single panel, how to anticipate visitors' movement and attention with design, and how to enliven dull exposition with devices such as direct questions. Although Serrell becomes our DIY guru, students have the option of rejecting her advice if they can explain why their plans require something different. We consider best practices, then, but we agree that they might be ignored or improved.¹⁰

Two months after the initial workshop, groups submit their complete, sixty-item exhibits. I refer to these as "mock exhibits" to stress that these are meant to be complete but not final. The groups are, in effect, testing out their entire vision for the first time. By this point, students' digital files, laden with text and images, become too large for Moodle drop box limits. We exchange files via USB drives or Dropbox.com. The sheer scale of the material that I review at this stage (three hundred mock panels) means that the course takes a week's hiatus as I meet with groups individually to troubleshoot and discuss their strategies. This stage is grueling for all parties involved, but this is also when I first appreciate students' combined creativity and grunt work. Viewing the panels in sequence makes it quite clear whether the groups have mastered the organizational challenge or merely dumped material in to meet project requirements.

THREE MILES, TWO CREEKS

One week after I meet with the groups to discuss their mock exhibits and offer final tips for improvement, they formally present their projects to me in individual sessions. In twenty minutes, the groups explain the following points:

- (a) specific learning goals for visitors
- (b) interpretations of the events and how those interpretations achieve the learning goals
- (c) strategy used to link the Penn's Creek Massacre and the Stump Massacre
- (d) strategy behind the spatial flow of the exhibit
- (e) contributions to our understanding of the events

The heart of this exercise for students is to prioritize their most significant objectives and select several examples from the exhibits that illustrate their techniques. This is how I describe the intended approach:

The presentation requires you to “walk” me through the exhibit on a screen. But you should not plan to show all panels. The limited time means that you should select several focal points and use them to demonstrate your points. Treat this as if I am a museum curator and you are pitching me an exhibit design. Assume that I know what happened in 1755 and 1768.

It is at this stage that students must be conscious of how their materials work in physical space. The layout of the exhibit must conform to the shape of Susquehanna's 1,700-square-foot art gallery. They annotate a gallery floor plan to indicate how visitors move through their exhibits. Some groups have used Prezi to facilitate this movement through virtual space; another group created a miniature version of the gallery with foam board and balsa wood. All the while, students use the presentation to defend the choices they have made throughout the semester.

One week after the oral presentations of their work, students submit the final version of the project, and I begin evaluating them. I ask them to e-mail me with feedback about their group experience. Specifically, they assign themselves and their peers grades for the following:

- Ability/willingness to meet with group
- Preparation for meetings
- Contribution of ideas, strategies

Thoughtful research (reading, taking notes on, and analyzing secondary and primary sources)

Significant “discoveries” (*what did this person bring to the table?*)

Quality of panel work (*did this person’s material have to be heavily edited?*)

Contribution of constructive criticism

Leading the group when needed

I look for patterns in the student feedback, focusing on the positives more than the negatives. If two group members remark that the third member performed wonderfully and led the group effectively, then I award that individual several additional points at the end of the tallying. This is admittedly fuzzy, but it corresponds to how disproportionate the praise is for any given student. If all members applaud everyone in the group, I reckon that the final product benefitted from such group excellence and therefore award no bonus points. I tend to know ahead of time when individual students have not been working well with the group, and their individual weaknesses are usually reflected in the unaltered final score.

My grading rubric is composed of the original evaluation criteria, each graded on a one-to-five scale, with an additional section addressing the oral presentation’s five criteria. I weight the oral presentation elements as 20 percent of the total grade. The end of the three-month process comes when I e-mail the students a PDF of their evaluation sheet with my handwritten comments about each element.

Conclusions

Student evaluations of the project show a few expected patterns. First, many comments praising or criticizing the assignment refer to the dynamics of the group in question. Collaborative work has been characterized by education researchers as one of the “most emotionally charged areas of a student’s life.” Dissatisfaction and resentment arise when the collective workload is not distributed evenly, when constructive criticism within a group is unilateral, and when members betray their lack of commitment by missing meetings or deadlines. In a project that demands technical, interpretive, and artistic skills, some students do not—or perceive that they do not—have much to offer to the group.¹¹ This can result in an unhelpful reticence despite a sincere commitment to the work. Students’ negative evaluations of the project, then,

tend to comment on the nature of collaboration (as one noted, “group work is frustrating”). On the other hand, students who enjoyed energetic, supportive groups echoed one respondent who wrote, “My group members also did a great job of explaining questions I had and helping me understand the relevance of the project and the material to the class.”

Excluding complaints about collaborative work itself, the most frequent critique of the project involves its narrow focus. Approximately one in five students have expressed the thought that limiting the scope of the exhibit to two local events also limited them creatively or analytically. A few local students who recalled their high school state history lessons had reservations about focusing on events that were “clear from the start.” Others noted that they were not particularly interested in the history of the area, so studying it for three months felt oppressive. History students at Susquehanna are used to choosing their own research topics, and some struggled to engage with material that would never have made their wish lists. One student was explicit about this, suggesting, “Maybe if we could have picked our own topic, I would have liked it better.”

A final student comment has led me to specific plans about how I will address these experiences in the future. One evaluator observed that the museum work “felt like we were doing a project that had a purpose besides making us work with material.” This appeared in a section of my course evaluation form that asks students to list a course element that was least helpful in learning about the past and briefly explain why. I agree with the student’s impression of the project’s intentions, even if I judge the value of that ulterior motive much differently. I plan to be more explicit in the next go-round about the pedagogical underpinnings of the project. Whether they liked the project or not, students tended to see the exhibit work primarily as training for the museum field. The future classroom teachers, lawyers, and civil servants in the course thought they gained experience at something they would never have to do again. I plan to devote two more class sessions to the project (bringing the total to ten out of forty-two) that will consider readings on the role of museums in popular understandings of the past and on the portability of the interpretive methods they learn while working on the exhibit.

Although I do not intend to let students choose their own topics in the future, I will provide them with a short menu of options. A smaller exhibit (of thirty to forty panels) with more variety between the groups will decrease the isolation that the groups might have felt as they worked out of sight of

each other. If five groups focus on local history topics that are all based in the same era (say, 1750–1800), they will be able to help each other instead of compete. They will also produce five group contributions that can be revised, pared down, and then combined into one master exhibit. This has interesting potential; I will encourage groups to work on their own material while thinking about how it can be incorporated into the whole. Finally, this simultaneous expansion of the scope and reduction of the scale will make room for aspects of local history that do not revolve around violence and struggle. The project as conducted thus far has shied away from the celebratory mode of some local history, but in doing so it has neglected much evidence of cooperation, exchange, and even happiness to be found in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania.

As for managing group work more effectively, I intend to up the ante somewhat by connecting the project to two initiatives that are growing on our campus and in the surrounding community. The faculty at Susquehanna University has committed itself to various styles of experiential learning, particularly service learning. Through our Office of Civic Engagement, students and faculty receive training in how to design and execute academic projects that leave the classroom to collaborate with community institutions. When I run the museum project again, I will connect the class with the staff of Selinsgrove Projects, Inc. (SPI), a local nonprofit group that is working to improve the town's heritage tourism profile. Recent internships conducted by history majors with SPI demonstrate that there is ample work to be done in background research on the local area and the development of public history resources. I intend to bring SPI staff into the classroom and take students to SPI gatherings in town. This is a risky tactic to use with respect to the dynamics of group work, but I think that speaking early and regularly about the connection between the course and SPI (and adding formal language into the syllabus about students' role as university ambassadors) will compel students to commit to the project or abandon ship.

A final insight that has emerged from students' choice of interpretive strategies is that the Davis and Newman collection has tangible effects on student understanding of colonial complexity. The authors' hope that readers of *Pennsylvania History: Essays and Documents* will think in terms of intersections, overlaps, and debates seems to have been fulfilled. The richness of students' explanations of causes and effects has been rewarding to see. This manifests itself most in the "bridges" that the groups have made to link two events that were located closely to each other yet occurred thirteen years apart (Fig. 3). From reading the essays on Pennsylvania's past, students learn

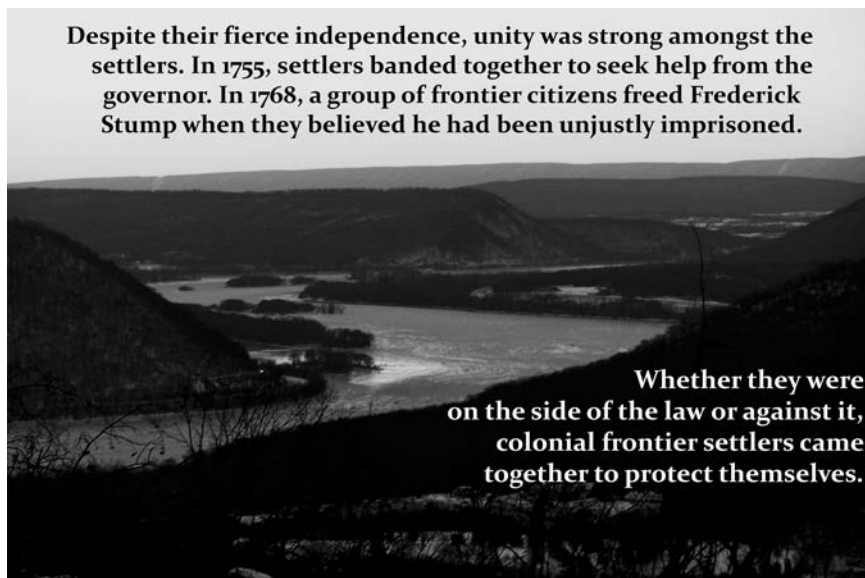


FIGURE 3: A student panel that “bridges” the two events.

that thirteen years was more than enough time for the local world to change several times over. Watching students as they find ways to position these lives altered (and lives ended) within the larger spectacle of colonial history has been illuminating.

By synthesizing primary and secondary sources while promoting close attention to the shifting meanings of place, the museum project has been an effective way to highlight the role of violence in threatening or supporting imperial power relations. Presenting the past to a hypothetical public audience has pushed students to think about the differences between two versions of the local: the eighteenth-century local, an area caught between contrasting cultural systems, and the present-day local, whose larger significance is more difficult to conceptualize. Today’s central Pennsylvania might seem peripheral to the urban power centers along the Eastern Seaboard or to the postindustrial belt to the west, but marginality is always a matter of perspective. The frontier of the eighteenth century seemed like a remote fringe when viewed from Philadelphia, but it was central to the lives of both Native Americans and European American settlers. Therein lies a final benefit of this project: it brings the political entity of Pennsylvania into focus while diverting students’ attention from

Philadelphia. Their exhibits have avoided equating Pennsylvania with its colonial capital, and that achievement is partially due to the presence of their phantom audience. As they ask their large questions of this small patch of ground, they come to understand that even small places contain worlds of their own.

NOTES

1. Charles Joyner, "From Here to There and Back Again: Adventures of a Southern Historian," in *Shapers of Southern History: Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. John B. Boles (Athens, GA, 2004), 153. For the approach to the global/local connection that I emphasize in the project, see Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 182–92.
2. Joshua Piker, "Lying Together: The Imperial Implications of Cross-Cultural Untruths," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 964–86.
3. Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007), 4; Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 170; Kyle Somerville, "A Case Study in Frontier Warfare: Racial Violence, Revenge, and the Ambush at Fort Laurens, Ohio," *Journal of Contemporary Anthropology* 2 (2011): 97–98; James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989), 182; James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999), 166.
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