Germantown PA: Researching the Great Road Welcome Mat

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Abstract

“...Germantown had a reputation as the place to go...” Stephanie Grauman Wolf, Urban Village

Germantown, Pennsylvania, a village established in the earliest days of William Penn’s Woods, because of its combined proximity to and distance from Philadelphia, has attracted and welcomed newcomers throughout its 325 years of history. Beginning in 1683 with the arrival of Daniel Pastorious, an agent for a Dutch trading company, immigrants brought their hopes and dreams, and their worldly goods. Succeeding individuals and groups of immigrants (Irish, African, Italian) joined the German speakers, with both unique and common reasons for choosing this earliest of “suburban” communities, encountered and responded to varieties of support for and challenges to their acceptance, then stayed or moved on.

This unit is intended for use as an introductory research supplement for 9th grade students in English 1 classes and/or an advanced refresher for seniors. Students will conduct research on the web, in their school and neighborhood libraries, at the Germantown Historical Society and in community historic sites. They will read primary documents, contemporary newspaper accounts and literary renderings of events, access the web and interview local authorities. Through exposure to processing and presenting from a variety of information sources and physical venues, students will have the opportunity to understand both the richness of the immigration experience and the value and fascination of in-depth research. Students will consider general aspects of Philadelphia immigration and immigration history along with features emblematic of Germantown – among them its diversity and its serendipity in development. Lessons will address the early non-indigenous immigrants; traditions of social justice that came along with them; the interaction with later arrivals, and the role of schools, religious and community organizations in facilitating assimilation.