

# SEPCHE

## Nurturing Student Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty-Student Undergraduate Research Project

**Research Project: RACE RELATIONS IN CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, 1770S TO 1870S**

**Discipline: HISTORY**

**Faculty Mentor: RANDOLPH S. KLEIN, Ph.D., Neumann College, ([kleinr@neumann.edu](mailto:kleinr@neumann.edu))**

**Project Description:** Told from the perspective of slavery, race relations in Chester County during the century following the creation of United States might seem like one of enlightenment and progress. Many residents of the county were Quakers, and the Society of Friends banned slavery among its members before the American Revolution commenced. Pennsylvania was in the vanguard of states abolishing slavery as a result of “the contagion of liberty” that accompanied the movement for independence from Great Britain. Many Quakers became active agents of abolition. John Hickman is simply the most famous county resident thus involved. Not everyone who lived in the county admired the Quakers and their cause. Indeed, the Society of Friends divided over methods to oppose slavery while remaining faithful to “The Truth” and the duties of citizens who lived in a society of laws. Residents of other faiths wrestled with similar issues. More importantly, sharp divisions of opinion concerning the character and appropriate treatment of “free Negroes” living within the county, as well over the legitimacy of slavery, created controversy.

Although African-Americans comprised twelve percent of the population of the county seat of West Chester, few African-Americans lived in Chester County. Despite that, fierce denunciations of them arose in public discussions as well as in the press. Edward G. Roddy, editor of the Uniontown *Genius of Liberty* and John Hodgson’s *Jeffersonian* denounced the war to end slavery and described all blacks as inferior. For example, Hodgson’s denounced “the nigger war to liberate niggers.” Because Pennsylvania adjoined a slave state, it is not surprising that some Chester County residents benefited by receiving rewards as informants concerning runaway slaves. Racial or ethnic conflict was more complicated than black and white. Issues involving the Irish, women, and xenophobia complicated matters.

The plan of research will involve group biographies (“*prosopography*,” an approach pioneered by British historian Sir Lewis Namier). Because individuals make history and what makes them tick is both fascinating and informative, this research technique is particularly well-suited for a talented undergraduate. Although race-relations in the county are not uncharted territory, I believe that new and important insights will emerge concerning an issue that remains relevant to students and indeed most Americans today.

**Student Task(s):** Research involving primary sources and secondary works. Examples of the former include newspapers, original documents available at historical societies or in printed form. The latter include scholarly articles available online via ABC Clio and college libraries). Focus will be on individuals who made history. The task will involve identifying pertinent people, gathering information about them, and finally, analyzing the information gathered and presenting meaningful results in a well-organized essay.

**Student Time Commitment:** Minimum of 120 hours (Equivalent of 4 hours/day for six weeks, not including travel time).

**Student Learning Outcome:** Understanding of how historians gather information and then interpret the past. Deeper and specific knowledge of important subjects of broad interest including race relations, why people develop specific attitudes and actions that stem from their experiences. The benefits of the research process based on group biographies (formally known as “prosopography.”) Insights into the complexity of human behavior and change over time.

**Expected Student Product:** (1) Microsoft Excel data bank of information collected. (2) Analytical essay that tells a meaningful story concerning groups of individuals and illustrates generalizations about race relations during all or part of the century beginning in the 1770s.

**Other Expected Outcomes:** Experiencing the joy of being an historical detective and creating an original work based on primary sources and secondary works.