

AMERICAN STUDIES

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Middle Atlantic ASA

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:

IS THIS THE LAST ISSUE OF THE MAASA NEWSLETTER?

By John Haddad

We begin this Newsletter with an alarming announcement. What you are holding right now in your hands will probably be the very last issue of the Middle Atlantic American Studies Association Newsletter. But before you enter into open revolt, you should know that our organization is in the process of changing its name. This October, at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association in Albuquerque, New Mexico, we will present a proposal to the Committee on Regional Chapters, the essence of which is that we *request a name change!* One possibility: we may hereafter be called The Eastern American Studies Association (EASA). And thus, though we may die today, tomorrow we rise out of the ashes like the proverbial phoenix that we are!

Though our masthead may change, you can expect the same journalistic excellence that you have come to rely on these many years to stay informed. We promise to continue to deliver the very best in the genre of hard-hitting investigative journalism, such as my spare-no-prisoners "Newsmaker Interview" with Kasey Grier. Our stories and features will continue to come to you from the minds and pens of our news-gathering team (that's two graduate students and me). And you



will continue to receive notice of regional events related to our field, thanks to our state-of-the-art telecommunications instruments (email & telephone). In short, you can continue to count on us to remain your official American Studies headquarters.

Along with the usual intellectual cornucopia, this issue of the newsletter contains the all-important "Call for Papers." This year, MAASA will be partnering with the Pennsylvania Political Science Association (PPSA) for a joint conference, to be held in March 2009 in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. Though I encourage any and all interested professors, teachers, graduate students, scholars, and professionals to submit, I would also like to

urge faculty members from our region to locate [promising American Studies undergraduates](#) to participate in the Undergraduate Roundtable. MAASA Vice President, Francis Ryan (American Studies, LaSalle), will be organizing this stellar event, as he has done for the last few years. It has been a wonderful addition to the conference, and so we hope you will encourage future scholars to come and present their work in a friendly academic environment.

Have a wonderful autumn!

PENN STATE HARRISBURG UNVEILS AMERICAN STUDIES PH.D.



Penn State Harrisburg has even more to be proud of!

By Brant Ellsworth

Penn State Harrisburg American Studies graduate student Brant Ellsworth sat down recently with Dr. Simon Bronner about the school's new American Studies Ph.D. program, which will begin accepting students for the Fall, 2009 semester.

What can people do with a Ph.D. in American Studies?
Many go in to education, especially college-level instruction, but increasingly students use the degree for advancement in public heritage positions such as museums, governmental agencies, historical organizations, cultural associations, arts administration and cultural resource management, and communications.

What is unique about this program?

I would say "distinctive" rather than "unique." We have a distinctive emphasis among doctoral programs of emphasizing public heritage and public practice but also have strengths in other areas that we develop: interdisciplinary history and politics; culture, arts, and communication; society and ethnography; regional, local, environmental,

and urban studies. We also have our location, which is important because we plan to encourage using the many rich cultural resources in the region including Gettysburg, Amish Country, Coal Region, State Capital, and Hershey Foods and Entertainment.

With the shortage of jobs in liberal arts, how will the program prepare students for employment?

Recent surveys have shown that American Studies graduates have been doing well compared to other fields in the liberal arts. We do have assistantships to prepare students for teaching and we have internships both in museums and in other kinds of organizations to prepare for work in public heritage.

How will the program prepare students for work in public heritage?

Besides the internships, we have courses in archives and records management, museum studies, historic preservation, and oral history. We also have available the resources of the Public Administration Ph.D. program and expect that American Studies students working in public heritage will want to take advantage of their courses in public administration and public policy.

What is an ideal candidate for the program?

An ideal candidate is someone who sees connections of various sorts when working with different kinds of evidence or scholarship. An ideal candidate is willing to build on a foundation of American Studies scholarship and use that to open new

frontiers of knowledge. An idea candidate is someone who has original research in mind and will work with our faculty to develop it.

How can an undergrad or master's student best prepare for admission?

Students can build that foundation of American Studies scholarship, get hands-on experience in historical and cultural organizations, and become part of the American Studies community regionally and nationally. Attend some conferences, give presentations, and develop research skills.

What is the idea range for GRE scores?

Rather than working from raw scores, we look at percentiles which tell us how candidates stand against others who took the exam. A good goal to shoot for is to score above the 80th percentile in writing and analytical skills. I should emphasize, however, that we look at the complete person, not just one's test scores.

What are the benefits of Penn State Harrisburg's location for a Ph.D. student?

This is a great location because of the historic and cultural legacy and if one is looking to public heritage, the diverse array of museums, attractions, and research organizations in Central Pennsylvania. Harrisburg is not only central to Pennsylvania, but also centrally located between major metropolises with their own resources,

(cont. on pg. 7)

"We have a distinctive emphasis among doctoral programs of emphasizing public heritage and public practice..."

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

By Megan C. McGee

As each October debuts and northwest Philadelphia is bathed in brisk fall air, the thoughts of the La Salle University American Studies Association turn to muskets and revolution. Each year since 2003, the La Salle ASA has provided children's activities at the annual re-enactment of the Battle of Germantown at the Clivden Estates in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, which took place this year on October 4, 2008.

The La Salle ASA, advised by

Dr. Francis Ryan, provides a plethora of educational and autumnally themed activities for the neighborhood children, including pumpkin painting, coloring pages, and colonial games. In 2007, one of the most popular activities was the ring toss game, which the children took to immediately.

While the children's activities at Germantown kick off the academic year with a "musket-bang", the club sponsors a variety of other events that use American Studies outside of the classrooms in



The La Salle American Studies Association with a re-enactor in 2008.

Olney Hall. The fall is rounded out with the annual Multicultural Roundtable, where La Salle students from outside of the United States
(cont. on pg. 5)

"...the children's activities at Germantown kick off the year with a "musket-bang"..."

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE SPRING CONFERENCE!

THEME: FAITH, POLITICS, CULTURE: AMERICAN MIXTURES

These words are simple enough: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Yet, Alexis de Tocqueville noted, "The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me upon arrival in the United States." Between the twin poles established by these two famous statements lies abundant room for discussion and exploration.

Bearing in mind the fateful interstices between religion, politics, and culture, and seeking to explore the ways in which these modes of belief, expression, and behavior intermingle in American contexts, the MAASA announces its joint meeting with the Pennsylvania Political Science Association (PPSA). The conference will be held at Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, PA) from

March 27-28, 2009. The American Studies portion of the conference invites prospective participants to submit proposals for papers or panels which address the themes of religion and politics in American culture. **Deadline for abstracts is January 15, 2009.** Please send a one-page abstract and one-page CV to John R. Haddad either electronically (jrh36@psu.edu) or by mail:

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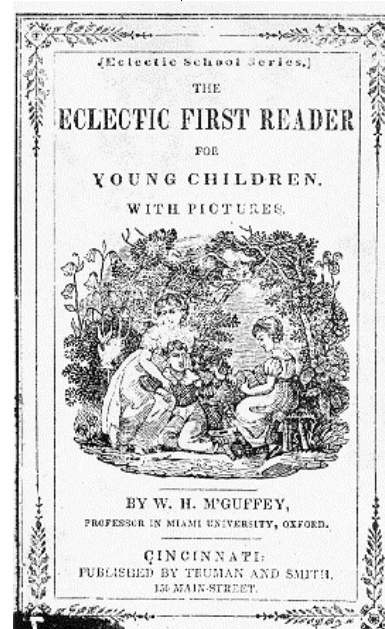
Conference Details:

- **Location:** Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown PA

- **Dates:** Friday, March 27-Saturday, March 28

- **Conference Hotel:** Holiday Inn Express, Elizabethtown

Proposal Deadline: January 15, 2009



NEWSMAKER INTERVIEW: DR. KASEY GRIER

By Dr. John Haddad

On November 11, 2008 at 7:30 PM on the Penn State Harrisburg campus, Dr. Kasey Grier will present her research on American pet-keeping as a part of our American Studies Lecture Series. The event is free and open to the public. A Professor of History at the University of Delaware, Dr. Grier also serves as Director of their Museum Studies Program. She is the author of *Pets in America: A History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), which was recently released in paperback.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Dr. Grier to discuss her long-time fascination with pets and their role in our culture. What follows, then, is our Newsmaker Interview.

Do you currently own, or have you ever owned, pets?

Grier: I've had pets all my life - in fact, I don't think I have ever been without one or more. The current Quadruped Squadron consists of two cats, two dogs, a

tortoise named Sidney, and a horse. The cats and dogs are all adoptions from shelters - one cat is an adoption from the barn where I keep my horse.

In the great dogs vs. cats



Dr. Grier with one of her beloved pets.

debate, where do you come down?

I like them both a lot. I have to admit, if I could only have one kind, it would probably be cats. I like their approach to life. Don't tell my dog Patti - it would break her heart.

Do you have a favorite pet story from youth?

Lots, but here is one. For my 8th birthday, I received a kitten, whom I had seen from the time he was a newborn, at the house up the street. He turned out to be a really mean cat who only liked my great grandfather, who lived with us for the last seven years of his life.

My favorite pet ad of all time is the one for Meow Mix, where the cat sings: "meow, meow, meow / meow, meow, meow, meow / meow, meow, meow, meow / MEOW meow, meow, meow..." Do you have a favorite pet ad?

Pet product ads are much more clever than the ones for people products. I wonder why that is? One I particularly liked was for a pet store chain, where a young couple counted all the elaborately wrapped gifts for "Gilbert" (or whatever the name was) - who turned out to be their dog.

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"If I could only have one kind, it would probably be cats. I like their approach to life."



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AMERICAN STUDIES IN ACTION: PA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ARCHIVES

By Erin Miller

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives Archives, squatting amid the pipes and oil-stained floors of the Irvis Building basement, is a treasure house of information on former Representatives and their historical documents, as well as more mundane records of various government offices and committee reports. When I was 21 and a junior in college, I would have been surprised to know that three years later I would be a full time employee of an archive. As an English major, I expected to be stationed in a magazine, probably starting out as an editor and fact checker before making my way up to being a professional writer, I realize now that an archive or library is proba-

bly one of the best places for me to be in.

As I mentioned earlier, the Archives has many records of interest, and almost every day we receive a call for committee reports, personnel records, or genealogy research. As the only archives dedicated solely to the operations of the House of Representatives, we are usually the final word on that body. If we do not have a given document, chances are no one else does either. However, if we do not have the information, we also do our best to track it down because, after all, the information is not only interesting to the requester but also necessary to the overall mission of the Archives.



An archives employee searches for pieces to the puzzle that is PA history.

One of my duties is to maintain the Archives newsletter. We have several ongoing articles, such as "A Closer Look at Our House History," "Did You Know?" and the ever popular "Mystery Photo" in which employees compete to identify people in photos. Our newsletter combines research, writing, and history to better educate our fellow employees, as well as former members and other (cont. on pg. 7)

"As the only Archives dedicated solely to the operations...of the House, we are usually the final word."

LA SALLE'S ASA CONTRIBUTES TO THE COMMUNITY

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speak on their experiences in our country.

The spring is full of community and educational activities as well. The semester begins with the annual lecture series. Speakers have included Dr. Charles Kupfer of Penn State Harrisburg and Dr. Carolyn Kitch of Temple University. The conference is also an event that the association participates in, especially if the conference is close to campus. If that is the case, the club attends en masse to support our presenters and to

hear the topics that are new in American Studies.

Finally, the school year is rounded out with the annual lyceum project. The club travels to area schools and gives short lectures on topics of interest to the students. Past topics include "Women in the Public Eye" and "Women in Politics." There is usually a PowerPoint presentation and a short film, then a question and answer section about everything from the topic discussed to the process of selecting the right college and major. There is hope of

scheduling this event twice a year, in order to give talks at more schools.

Outside the Classroom is a student-written column meant to show the various ways that American Studies students are using their skills outside the traditional learning space and giving back to their communities, which after all, is the foundation of the American experience.

LOCAL BOY MAKES GOOD!

James Brown, a recent graduate of Penn State Harrisburg's Masters Program, was awarded the Gene Wise-Warren Susman Prize at the most recent meeting of the American Studies Association, which was Albuquerque in 2008. This prize, which includes a certificate and \$500 in cash, goes annually to the best paper presented by a graduate student at the meeting. James's paper, "Interdisciplinary American Studies and the Cold War: A New, Archival History from the Records of the Library of Congress," represents a continuation of a research interest that began at Penn State

Harrisburg back in 2004. James has performed substantial archival research on many of the founding figures in the American Studies movement of the 1940s and 50s, a group of scholars and intellectuals that includes Leo Marx, John Ward, Henry Nash Smith, John William Ward, and F. O. Matthiessen. While such scholars are often dismissed today as being either out-dated or old-fashioned, James discovered that many of them in fact possessed highly progressive and forward-thinking social agendas. James Brown currently lives in Minneapolis, where he is pursuing a Ph.D. in American

Studies from the University of Minnesota. As delighted as he was to learn of the award, his scholarly success was eclipsed by a much larger event in his family. Just days earlier, his wife Carrie gave birth to their second child, Wiley, who joins their three-year-old, Ellie. In fact, our James Brown was overheard at the conference quoting emphatically the more famous bearer of the name – "I feel good!"

PENN STATE TO HOST RENOWNED PET SCHOLAR!

(cont. from pg. 4)

I always wonder why people dress their pets in silly outfits and costumes. Does your research shed light on this pressing social issue?

I argue that pet keeping is actually a form of leisure and play -- and I know that people have been dressing their pets up in silly costumes for a couple of hundred years, actually!

Now onto the serious part of the interview: How did you first become interested in Pets as an American Studies research topic?

I'm a historian of everyday life, so I find inspiration and topics in the things we do everyday. Top that off with the fact that I am an avid pet keeper....I paused and wondered where people like me came from, and how long we had been on the scene.

What do we learn about American culture and values when we study Americans' pet keeping habits?

The history of pet keeping has a lot to say about our changing ideas about human nature, about what constitutes a satisfying emotional life, and about our society's changing ideas about our obligations to dependent others. It is an integral part of the history of childhood. It speaks to changing understanding of gender roles, since men and women have often had somewhat different relationships to animals. It is part of the commercial and industrial history of the United States, and it is even part of environmental history. I also think that the history of our relationships with all kinds of animals has its own integrity, too. Always remember that when you are looking at them, they are looking back at you and trying to understand and

interpret what they see, even if it is only the dinner wagon!

Thank you for participating in our Newsmaker Interview. We look forward to your lecture in November!



"The history of pet keeping has a lot to say about our changing ideas about human nature, about what constitutes a satisfying emotional life..."

PENN STATE'S AMERICAN STUDIES PH.D.

(cont. from pg. 2)

such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Many of our students work in the state capital and mine the State Archives, State for materials.

Will the school introduce new

courses for the Ph.D. students? If so, what will be their focus?

We had a curriculum revision passed last year in which we introduced new seminars such as Topics in Popular Culture, Ethnography and Society, Seminar in Public Heritage, U.S. Literature and Culture, Seminar in 21st Century American Civilization, and

Material Culture and Folklife.

More information concerning the Penn State Harrisburg Ph.D. in American Studies can be found by visiting the Penn State Harrisburg website (www.hbg.psu.edu), selecting "Academics," then selecting "Doctoral Programs."

AMERICAN STUDIES IN ACTION

(cont. from pg. 5)

historical organizations, on the history we preserve here in the Archives. Often I use the Archives' materials to do my research, using them as primary or secondary sources to compile short studies of different aspects of House or activities.

A big source of information on the historical everyday life of the House is the Oral History Project. Many former House Members have shared their experiences with us, and we have compiled a well-rounded picture of how the House used to operate, as well as the personality of some Members who are now gone. Our earliest interview is Lee Donaldson (1955-1970), though Austin Lee (1957-1964), Kenneth B. Lee (1957-1974), Carl Nelson (1959-1960), and George Haudenschild (1959-1970) also served in the 1950's and so have valuable recollections as to how the

House used to operate. First-hand accounts of events, especially when corroborated by others, are the best source of information on how "regular people" responded to things, and the interviews are valuable resources for researchers wanting to learn about the life of the House and how it felt to be a Member at any given time.

One of the Archives' community outreach programs is a paid semester-long internship. This program gives students interested in archival work the chance to perform the duties of a full time archivist and explore the different career opportunities available to them. It also allows interns to investigate and process new collections, as well as tour and do research in other archives and history centers. The capstone project of the internship is often an article that will then appear in the Archives newsletter as the feature.

Because of its varied functions and duties,

the House of Representatives Archives is American Studies in action, changing the way people see their own history as Pennsylvanians and challenging them to explore history for themselves from a true American Studies perspective.

American Studies in Action is a student-written column which is created to show the ways graduates of American Studies programs are putting their degrees to use in the workforce.

"[The Archives] are changing the way people see their own history as Pennsylvanians..."



The Middle Atlantic American Studies Association (MAASA) is a regional chapter of the American Studies Association organized to promote and encourage the study of American Culture in the Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania areas. The MAASA sponsors an annual conference, special lectures and events, and publishes the newsletter twice a year.



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