ETHNIC HISTORY IN PENNSYLVANIA

A Selected Bibliography

By John E. Bodnar
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Ethnic Studies Program

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. General Works on Ethnic Groups in Pennsylvania</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II. Asians</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Dutch</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Finns</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. French</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Germans</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Greeks</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Hungarians</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Irish</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. Italians</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. Jews</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII. Lithuanians</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV. Mexicans</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV. Negroes (Nonslave)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGROES (Slave)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI. Norwegians</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVII. Poles</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII. Puerto Ricans</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIX. Scots</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX. Scotch-Irish</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXI. Slavic Groups (other than Poles)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXII. Swedes</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII. Swiss</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV. Welsh</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Few will deny the rich diversity of Pennsylvania's population. Originating from many lands, a myriad of ethnic groups has moved to Pennsylvania during its three centuries of existence. The result of this continuing inflow of races and nationalities was a heterogeneous society which felt the continual tremors of adjustment and contention.

The vanguard of Pennsylvania's immigrants arrived in colonial times. English Quakers, German religious sects, and the Scotch-Irish formed the major groupings of the society. These groups displayed persistent friction as well as accommodation. The differences between the English and the Germans or the Scotch-Irish on the frontier were many. Ben Franklin's disdain toward the growing number of German immigrants is well known. But few know of the conscientious attempts to "balance" political tickets to accommodate various ethno-religious groupings prior to 1800.1

After 1800 German immigration was rivaled by the inflow of Irish. Evoking resentment from native workers and suspicion toward Roman Catholicism, Irish newcomers were a constant source of strife. Antebellum Philadelphia would long remember the nativist riots directed toward the Irish. But here also adjustment existed alongside social tension. In the case of the Irish, a vast parochial educational system was forged which educated Pennsylvania Catholics from the first grade through graduate school.2

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Afro-Americans arrived in Pennsylvania. Slowly at first, and with a rush after 1914, blacks moved northward in search of freedom and, later, economic opportunity. Confined largely to unskilled work and often to a lifetime of impoverishment, blacks settled primarily in the southeastern part of the State and several industrial areas of the southwest. Black migration rose rapidly in the two decades after the Civil War. From 1890 until World War I, the tide of incoming Negroes was halted substantially by the "new immigration," which largely assumed the unskilled positions of Pennsylvania's expanding industry. It was not until the termination of European immigration that blacks moved again into the State in significant numbers.3

The late nineteenth century also witnessed the arrival of millions of Slavs, Italians, and Jews from southern and eastern Europe. Pennsylvania received more Slavic immigrants than any other state. Italians, in fact, became the largest single ethnic group in the Commonwealth and would combine with Slovaks, Ukrainians, Jews, and blacks to exceed the earlier white, Anglo-Saxon stock in numbers.

“New Immigrants” were also met with hostility and antagonism. Exploited in local courts, forced to pay higher tax assessments than industrial concerns, and relegated to lower-level jobs to compete with blacks, the Slavic and Italian newcomers became the source of social turmoil in twentieth-century Pennsylvania. Frequently the Catholic newcomers and the Protestant establishment clashed. In 1919 Pennsylvania business, through the use of the State police, successfully destroyed the efforts of striking immigrant steelworkers. Ethnics retaliated in such instances as the anti-Ku Klux Klan raid in Carnegie in 1923. The contention did not begin to be modified by adjustment until the entrance of Slavs, blacks, and Italians into the State legislature after 1934.4

The study of Pennsylvania’s culture and history has yet to capture the tremendous breath and importance of ethnicity in the State’s past. We still know little of blacks in the twentieth century, immigrant girls in silk mills and cigar factories, immigrants in Pennsylvania politics, particular ethnic agricultural settlements besides the Amish (consider the Ukrainians of Erie County), Jewish peddlers, the Polish National Church, the Windish settlements in Bethlehem, the role of the Slovak fraternal unions, the Italian markets of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Germans in the coal fields, the influence of Croatian boarding houses in Allegheny City, the ethnic festivals which flourished at Kennywood Park near Pittsburgh, and the Pennsylvania Afro-American League. We know of Penn, Franklin, and Weiser, but who were Peter Blackwell, Peter Rovnianek, Joseph Murgas, Louis Edward Levy, and Frank Di-Berardino?

This bibliography is only a selective listing of sources dealing with ethnic groups in Pennsylvania history. It attempts to provide a beginning for the extensive work that remains in depicting the State’s ethnic past. A product of the Ethnic Studies Program of the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission, the work has profited from

the efforts of Mrs. Mae L. Kruger and Mrs. Lesley Mack, who arranged and typed numerous drafts. The compilation was also encouraged from the beginning by the late Dr. S. K. Stevens, who was Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and Mr. William J. Wewer, who now is Executive Director. Dr. Donald H. Kent, Director of the Bureau of Archives and History of the Commission, not only assisted the compilation but continually supported the entire ethnic program with enthusiasm. As with all Commission publications, Mr. William A. Hunter, Chief of the Division of History, and Mr. Harold L. Myers, Associate Historian, expertly guided the manuscript through the final stages of publication. Mr. Joseph Bokensky also provided invaluable assistance at a crucial juncture.

Additional references on the Germans before 1952 can be found in the pioneering efforts of Dr. Norman B. Wilkinson in his Bibliography of Pennsylvania History, published in 1957. Mrs. Gail M. Gibson, who was an Associate Historian for the Commission, continued the bibliography into the 1960's and her work provided us with some source material. However, in dealing with many ethnic groups, we were forced to start with nothing in trying to locate relevant material. This was true especially with more recent immigrant groups such as the Slavs, Italians, Lithuanians, and Puerto Ricans, and, since the Civil War, the black migrants. Moreover, we brought much of the earlier bibliographical work up to date.

It would be impossible to acknowledge everyone who provided suggestions for relevant material. However, Dr. George J. Prpic, professor of history at John Carroll University, Cleveland, supplied especially valuable references on the Croatians. Dr. James Rodechko, Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, offered his suggestions for sources dealing with the Irish, as did Dr. Dennis Clark. Others who offered citations were Dr. Joseph Zacek, Dr. Maurice Mook, Dr. Kenneth Keller, and Mr. Joseph Borkowski. Dr. A. William Hoglund, professor of history at the University of Connecticut, suggested both relevant dissertations for inclusion and helpful criticism. The final responsibility for the work, however, is mine alone.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHS. Top: Serbian Sokol, Steelton, Pennsylvania, 1905; lower left: Irish breaker boys, Scranton, ca. 1915; lower right: Rev. Stefan Furdek, founder, First Catholic Slovak Union.
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82
INDEX


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Section XXIII
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