



American Institute  
FOR HISTORY EDUCATION

"Well done is better than well said"

# The AIHE Gazette

Vol. 4, Issue 10, October 2009

October's Featured  
AIHE Historian:

**Dr. Matthew Pinsker**

Dickinson College • [pinskerm@dickinson.edu](mailto:pinskerm@dickinson.edu)

**The Challenges of Teaching Slavery**



The best teacher-training workshops always produce a discussion that seems to have a life of its own. I have presented several sessions at American Institute for History Education (AIHE) colloquia, and the topic that seems to generate the liveliest discussion usually involves the history of slavery in America. I organize my presentation of this

complicated subject through the story of Dred Scott. Scott's personal story provides a compelling window into several of slavery's more peculiar traits.

Dred Scott was born in Virginia around 1800, but we are uncertain about his parents, birth date and even his name — all indications of what Frederick Douglass once described as the worst part of slavery's degradation, the erosion of identity. Scott migrated westward with his original owners, first to Alabama and eventually to Missouri. Again, this story of westward migration was an essential component of antebellum American slavery. We tell the story of westward movement in our classrooms, but often exclusively about white families. Yet scholars estimate that more than a million blacks migrated westward with their owners or as part of the domestic slave trade.

In Missouri, Scott became the property of an army surgeon named John Emerson who took him to postings in both free states and free territories. This fact offers a fine illustration of how reality often conflicts with law and theory, and, in particular, how complicated things can get along the borderlands between various cultures. At Fort Snelling in the Wisconsin Territory (present-day Minnesota), Scott met and "married" a woman named Harriet Robinson, who had been the slave of the fort's Indian agent. Harriet Scott then gave birth to two girls, and the Scott family began a complicated existence traveling between slavery and freedom and working both for their master (who died in 1843) and for others when they were subsequently "hired out" or rented to temporary owners.

Harriet Scott often fails to appear in textbooks or classroom discussions. I discovered her story at a teacher training workshop just a few years ago. Lea VanderVelde, a law professor from the University of Iowa, shared with a group of educators insights about Mrs. Dred Scott who was the subject of a biography she was then preparing (and has since published, *Mrs. Dred Scott*). VanderVelde argues persuasively that Harriet Scott was probably the driving force behind the freedom suit or civil action filed by Dred Scott in 1846. She had an even stronger case

for freedom than her husband and was twenty years younger. She also knew a pastor who probably arranged for their first attorney. Yet we never hear about Harriet Scott because the lawyers agreed to drop her freedom suit from the case since if she won, her marriage would negate most of her rights anyway under 19th-century common law doctrine known as coverture. In this fashion, we can teach our students a great deal about slavery and women.

There is so much to teach our students about 19th-century law. Freedom suits were rare, but they did exist and now modern technology allows us to share them directly in the classroom. Hundreds of freedom suits filed in St. Louis Circuit Court have now been digitized and are available online ([stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu/about-freedom-suits-series.php](http://stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu/about-freedom-suits-series.php)). You can show your students the original suit filed by Dred Scott containing his cross in lieu of a signature. Looking over actual court documents also provides an opportunity to point out to our students that the Scotts won their first lawsuit because of the longstanding precedent favoring the doctrine of "once free, always free." Yet the stunning reversal of their legal victory in 1852 by the Missouri Supreme Court also illustrates how the times had changed so quickly in the era of fugitive slaves and Underground Railroad activity. In similar fashion, Chief Justice Roger Taney's shrill and sweeping verdict in the 1857 Supreme Court decision also demonstrates how far the nation had moved away from an era of sectional compromise.

The final page of Dred Scott's personal story also adds a compelling epilogue to the tale. The son of Scott's first owner, now an opponent of slavery, bought Scott and his family following the Supreme Court ruling in March 1857 and freed them immediately. Dred Scott lived his final year of life (he died in September 1858) as a free man. His wife and daughters survived the Civil War, and there are still some direct descendants of Scott alive today.

As a teacher and citizen, this story has See **PINSKER**, page 3

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# Teachers from the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship Share Their Experiences



**Courtney Capone,**  
**Franklin Elementary School**  
**— Trenton, NJ**

I am a first grade teacher, and last year was my first experience with the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship. I absolutely loved everything about it, from the seminars all the way to the wonderful field-study trips that really brought history to life.

The presenters were wonderful. My favorite presenter was Dr. Dennis Denenberg. He really brought history to life and made it so interesting. He enriched me with so much information on how to make history fun. I couldn't wait to get back to the classroom and use his techniques. After reading his book, *50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet*, I created a HEROES PROJECT for my first graders and their parents. The project was a great success, and I cannot wait to do it again this year.

I learned so many things from this fellowship. It is amazing how many fun and different ways you can teach history through song and reading books. I was also very impressed with CICERO: History Beyond the Textbook™. I was amazed that every type of historical or educational material you can think of using in your classroom was on this web site. I was able to adapt so many things that I learned for my first graders. I am delighted that I joined this fellowship, and I am looking forward to my second year.

[ccapone@trenton.k12.nj.us](mailto:ccapone@trenton.k12.nj.us)



**David Hession,**  
**Daylight-Twilight Elementary**  
**School — Trenton, NJ**

Who the heck is Walt Whitman? And who cares anyway? That is what most of us thought last year before we became part of the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship with Rick Weiss from the Trenton Public School District, and the American Institute for History Education (AIHE). Now we have an entirely new outlook about Whitman and other figures. Rick and AIHE turned us on to an incredible learning experience throughout the school year, culminating in an enlightening tour of colonial Philadelphia, Valley Forge, and historic Annapolis.

I think I can speak for everyone involved when I say the word “fellowship” is exactly the right word to define what we, a privileged collection of teachers from Trenton, Plainfield, and Edison, NJ, experienced last school year. We are a group of people who share common interests, goals, experiences, and views coming together in the spirit of camaraderie to learn from each other. From the AIHE coordinators to the speakers

to the topics themselves, everything about the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship could not be beat. It is hands-down the most worthwhile, horizon-expanding, educationally advancing opportunity that a teacher of any discipline could come across. I'm already excited to see what they have in store for us this school year!

[dhession@trenton.k12.nj.us](mailto:dhession@trenton.k12.nj.us)



**Leslie Sanders, Joyce Kilmer**  
**Elementary School**  
**— Trenton, NJ**

*“We must go beyond textbooks, go out into the bypaths and untrodden depths of the wilderness and travel and explore and tell the world the glories of our journey.”*

— John Hope Franklin

Participating in the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship has been a wonderful experience for me. I was very fortunate to be given the time to be a learner, to continue my professional growth as a teacher, and to be able to reflect on my practices and enhance my teaching methods. The program has provided me opportunities to challenge myself academically and clinically.

What I found most surprising was that it forced me to face the challenge of dealing with the silenced voices of the past and my own feeling of detachment to American history. By experiencing the field-study trips I became intimately connected with subject and content. I was able to stand in the very spot where General Washington resigned his commission and touch the original banister Benjamin Franklin and others used. I understood that through years of silence the voices of enslaved Africans, women, and others could still be heard through the legacy they left behind. I know that this experience will have far-reaching residual effects on my teaching.

[lsanders@trenton.k12.nj.us](mailto:lsanders@trenton.k12.nj.us)



**Lysette Toro-Mays,**  
**Grant Elementary School**  
**— Trenton, NJ**

The Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship has been the best program I have attended to date. It provided me with information, techniques and strategies that can actually be implemented in the classroom. The fellowship started with Dr. Dennis Denenberg providing me with a wealth of information on how to bring history to life in the classroom. His heroes presentation left me in awe. I have used several of his techniques and strategies in the classroom and will continue to do so in the future.

See **WALT WHITMAN**, page 3

# AIHEtv Tackles “Heritage in the Classroom”

Dr. Yohuru Williams, Vice President for History Education for AIHE and host of AIHEtv, recently completed filming on the next episode that airs this month. A panel of experts, including Dr. John Dougherty, Instructional Design and Curriculum Editor for AIHE; the Honorable Gilda Rorro Baldassari, Vice Chair of the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission, and Stephanie Wilson, Executive Director of the New Jersey Amistad Commission, gathered at the AIHEtv studio to discuss the importance



Left to right: Dr. Yohuru Williams, Hon. Gilda Rorro Baldassari, Stephanie Wilson, and Dr. John Dougherty

of establishing heritage commissions in various states. They also focused on the value of teaching heritage in the classroom.

To get you into the Halloween spirit, this month’s program also includes a segment, filmed in a local cemetery, with Dr. Williams discussing AIHE’s “Haunted History” teaching strategy.

The show will be posted on **TeacherTube.com, SchoolTube.com,** and air on **WMCN-DT** in the South Jersey/Pennsylvania/Delaware broadcast area.

From **WALT WHITMAN**, page 2

As the fellowship progressed, I also was provided with information on how to use quality picture books in the classroom, the evolution of colonial settlement, the origins of the jury system and causes of the American Revolution. Midway through the fellowship I learned how to access and use **CI-CERO™**, a wonderful web site, where you have a plethora of information about history at your fingertips. I have used some of the PowerPoint presentations as well as handouts available on the site in my classroom. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and I have increased my knowledge from participating in the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship.

*itoromays@trenton.k12.nj.us*



**Ronald Maurais,**  
**Grant Elementary School**  
**— Trenton, NJ**

I attended the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship with two other teachers, and we had the best experience ever. It made us very excited to start teaching history, and we wanted everyone at our school to learn the various strategies that we developed. It was probably the best way to learn about content knowledge in American history.

Social studies does not have to be dull or mind-numbing. The sessions taught me how to engage students in our history and how it will help us today for the 21st century. The training really informed me on how to have students make connections with the past. Now I know how to make the essential ideas of American history clear to my students.

*RMaurais@trenton.k12.nj.us*



**Marilyn Eure,**  
**Robbins Elementary School**  
**— Trenton, NJ**

I chose to participate in the Walt Whitman Historical Literacy Fellowship because of my lack of background knowledge in history. I must admit that I never had an interest in history.

As a K–8 literacy coach, I am charged with working with all teachers in my schools to improve how literacy is taught. I embarked on this journey on the recommendation of a friend who went through the Woodrow Wilson Liberty Fellowship. It was my hope that I would attain resources for my elementary teachers to assist them in providing meaningful ways to teach history at the K–8 level.

My first year with the program has been a tremendously unparalleled experience. Not only did I get the unique opportunity to network with teachers from two other school districts, but it ultimately broadened my understanding and knowledge on some historic concepts that were vague. I was fortunate to visit many historic sites that made me feel more firmly bonded and connected to the part of history that they represented. Additionally, the lesson plans, CDs, books and the huge volume of resources that I received from the American Institute for History Education’s program have enabled me to be more prepared and creative in teaching. I have recommended the fellowship to many other teachers, and I look forward to starting again soon.

*meure@trenton.k12.nj.us*

From **PINSKER**, page 1

amazed me, and I have found my colleagues at AIHE sessions to be equally engaged by the tale and inspired to share their views on teaching this awful but critical subject. I have been teaching American history and the Civil War era at the college level for more than fifteen years, but these comments and suggestions from AIHE fellowship participants have quite literally changed the way I teach slavery in my classes at Dickinson College.

Matthew Pinsker holds the Brian Pohanka Chair for Civil War History and serves as co-director of the House Divided Project (<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu>) at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He is the author of two books on Abraham Lincoln, including *Lincoln’s Sanctuary* (Oxford, 2003).

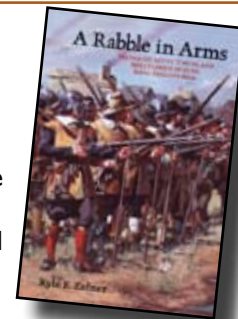
To order a copy of *Lincoln’s Sanctuary*, visit the AIHE Bookstore at **www.aihe-bookstore.com** and click on the link for AIHE Professor Books.

# A Rabble in Arms Shows How an Early War Helped to Organize the Massachusetts Militia

*A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War* examines one of the most significant wars that wracked early America. King Philip's War, the first major military crisis to directly strike Massachusetts, marked the first time that the colony had to mobilize large numbers of ordinary, local men to fight a war.

Author Kyle F. Zelner, Ph.D., boldly challenges traditional interpretations of who was called to serve. In an exhaustive social history and community study of the Essex County militia, Dr. Zelner employs muster and pay lists, as well as countless historical records, to demonstrate that the county's more upstanding citizens — yeoman farmers, church members, and family heads — were often spared from impressments. Meanwhile, the "rabble" — criminals, drunkards, and the poor — were pressed into active fighting units. Town militia committees selected men for soldiers who would be least missed should they die in

action. *A Rabble in Arms* shows that despite the stereotype of a universal military obligation, town fathers picked who would fight unevenly, often placing local and personal concerns above colonial military interests.



Dr. Zelner is an Associate Professor of History and a Senior Fellow of the Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of Southern Mississippi. He is a frequent presenter at American Institute for History Education (AIHE) seminars on the colonial and Revolutionary periods, has taped several segments for the CICERO web site, and sits on the AIHE Advisory Board.

To order a copy of *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen During King Philip's War*, visit the AIHE Bookstore at [www.aihe-bookstore.com](http://www.aihe-bookstore.com) and click on the link for AIHE Professor Books.

## Fort Mercer Monument Honors Patriots Who Defeated Hessians at Red Bank

James and Ann Whitall built a stately home on the Delaware River in New Jersey in 1748. It was the center of life on their 400-acre plantation called Red Bank. They were a prosperous Quaker family. During the American Revolution, patriot forces built Fort Mercer just north of the house to defend the river against the British navy.

Shortly after the British occupied the city of Philadelphia, General Howe sent approximately 2,000 Hessian soldiers to Red Bank to destroy the American fort. On October 22, 1777 the British attacked and, after a short but fierce battle, were forced to retreat. The American forces were led by Colonial Christopher Greene, and the Hessians were led by Count Carl Emil Kurt von Donop. Both sides fought with incredible bravery, and the battle was described as, "one of the most glorious stands ever made by patriots fighting for home of country." The final casualty count was 200 plus Hessians killed (including Count von Donop), wounded or captured, and 37 Americans. The wounded men were carried from the grounds into the Whitall's home, which was used as a field hospital for several weeks.

Less than a month after the battle, General Nathaniel Greene ordered Fort Mercer abandoned and burned when nearby Fort Mifflin was taken by the British, and Fort Mercer could no longer be defended.

Fort Mercer was named after Brigadier General Hugh Mercer who died at the Battle of Princeton. In 1905-06 the State of New Jersey called public attention to the action at Fort Mercer by building a 75-foot commemorative monument. The Fort Mercer site is the northern section of the Red Bank

Battlefield Park. The park itself is focused on the James and Ann Whitall House, which served as a military hospital after the Battle of Red Bank. Returning to their farm in April 1778, the Whitall family restored the place to prosperity, with orchards, livestock, a grist mill, a ferry across the Delaware, smokehouse and a shad fishery. Four generations of the Whitall family lived here until 1862. In 1972 this park was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders took major steps to preserve and interpret this precious natural and historical resource. Ongoing restoration efforts have ensured that the James and Ann Whitall House and remains of Fort Mercer will remain as significant reminders for future generations. Through the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Board of Chosen Freeholders provides a variety of guided tours, living history demonstrations of colonial life and on- and off-site educational programming. Site visits include a tour of the house with costumed interpreters, and classroom programs are highly interactive and object based. All school programs are free.



Whitall House

For more information, call the Museum at **856-853-5120** or visit [www.gloucestercountynj.gov](http://www.gloucestercountynj.gov).