

SOAR Research Proposal: SUMMER 2013
The Bethlehem Area During the Great Depression

Faculty: Dr. Jane Berger, Assistant Professor, Department of History,

Student: Kimberly Lescowitch, Class of 2014. Intended BA in History and BA in Accounting

Dates: May 28-August 2, 2013. Ten weeks.

Project Description

Kim intends to dedicate her summer to studying how the Great Depression impacted communities in the Lehigh Valley, particularly those in Bethlehem. This topic has not received significant attention from scholars, so she will be making original contributions to her field. She hopes to present her findings in poster format at the next meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, which invites student proposals. Because the Lehigh Valley was highly industrialized by the 1920s, it is likely that the Great Depression had serious ramifications in the region. It is also likely that the consequences of the Great Depression in the Lehigh Valley had ramifications elsewhere because of the national and international range of business dealings of local enterprises. As a consequence, Kim's research will require her to make connections between local, national and global history.

To complete her project, Kim will utilize a broad range of historical methodologies. She will have to complete a survey of the scholarship on the Great Depression generally to gain an awareness of the types of questions historians ask about the topic and a sense of how the Depression impacted other areas. Then she will have to conduct multiple types of research. Most likely, she will be able to complete some oral histories with individuals who lived through the Great Depression in the Lehigh Valley. She will also take research trips to local archives and other repositories of historical documents. This process will give her experience critically analyzing written primary sources (documents from the past). She will also have to work with quantitative data such as census and other reports to gain an understanding of the impact of the Depression. I will also encourage her to utilize historical photographs to enhance her understanding of the Depression and its ramifications, and I will require her to analyze the built environment to further broaden the scope of her research. She might interrogate, for example, where public housing was built in the region during the 1930s and why particular sites were chosen over others. In addition, she will be studying historical newspapers available on microfiche and microfilm.

As an additional component of her summer project, Kim has agreed to compile a list of the twentieth-century, primary-source materials available in the research sites she visits. One of the courses I teach at Moravian is a 300-level writing seminar called *The Lehigh Valley in the Twentieth Century*. In the course, students write research papers on topics of their choice that have local significance. This semester, for example, I have students writing on topics that include women's clubs in Bethlehem during the Progressive era, deindustrialization and white flight in Allentown, and Bethlehem Steel's early twentieth-century soccer team. Because I have

been a resident of the Lehigh Valley for only a year and a half, I am not familiar with all of the history resources available in our area. I am committed, however, to providing Moravian history majors with experience research and writing about local history. Such projects enable them to get hands-on experience doing oral histories and working in archives with actual historical materials (as opposed to on-line or printed document collections). As Kim visits archives and libraries in Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, she will survey the collections housed in the sites and provide me with lists and descriptions of their twentieth-century holdings. Last year the History Department underwent an external review, and one of the suggestions our reviewers proposed is that we make better use of our local history resources. My class is the way that I have responded to that recommendation, and Kim's work this summer will improve the quality of that course.

Roles and Responsibilities, Schedule

The summer project will encompass the ten weeks from May 28 – August 2. Kim will work independently on her project but meet with the professor on a regular basis to ensure the timely completion of each stage of the process.

May 28 – June 2	Survey of the scholarship on the Great Depression
June 3 – June 14	Research in Bethlehem, compile list of Bethlehem collections
June 17 – June 28	Research in Allentown, compile list of Allentown collections
July 1 – July 12	Research in Easton, compile list of Easton collections
July 15 – August 2	Synthesis of data, complete a research report and poster

Benefits

Kim will gain many benefits as a result of completing her research. She will strengthen her facility at identifying the primary arguments of historical scholarship. She will gain familiarity with a wide range of historical methodologies. She will hone her abilities to synthesize a large quantity of materials and construct historical arguments. And she will have the opportunity to make links between local, national and international history.

I will benefit from Kim's Casey's research, as will my future students, because she will provide me with information about historical materials available in our region. The information will enable me to assist my future students in planning successful local history projects.

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Project Description

Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania became a very important part of history with the opening of Bethlehem Steel. Within a few years of its grand opening the company became a huge part of American industry in the early twentieth century. Of course, being a leading supplier of steel for many different industries, the demand was incredible. However, America experienced a massive economic tragedy in the late 1920s known as the Great Depression. As the second leading steel company in America, how did this company deal with the difficult times associated with the Great Depression? This project will look at Bethlehem Steel as well as other prominent companies in the Lehigh Valley that dealt with the effects of the Great Depression in the Lehigh Valley. As the depression put strains on the company that employed nearly 200,000 workers, we can only imagine the strains put on those who were left unemployed. I am also curious to see if any sources mention the New Deal and the ways that it may have helped to alleviate those strains. Furthermore, using Bethlehem Steel as one of many examples of the changes that took place during the Great Depression will enhance the purpose of my research by providing a clear and relatable portrayal of how this time period affected the local area.

To understand firsthand the ways in which lives were changed during the Great Depression, I will work with archival sources from Moravian Archives as well as archives in the surrounding area and other primary sources. Arguably a huge part of the Great Depression was the New Deal. So I hope to find sources on the New Deal to support my research. Not only do I plan to research the Great Depression in the Lehigh Valley but also I would like to gather information about the availability of archival sources in the Lehigh Valley. My goal is to gain information that will give me a better understanding of the Lehigh Valley during the Great Depression on a more personal level since this is the city where I attend post-secondary education as well as where I intend on living someday. As a history student working with archives is a great experience and it will help me with further endeavors by giving me an idea of how to use archives to my advantage and research.

Rationale & Expected Outcomes

My SOAR project, *The Lehigh Valley during the Great Depression*, will be the start of a greater project that I hope to complete for the Pennsylvania Historical Association's 2013 Annual Meeting in Gettysburg, October of 2013. The research that I will gather is intended to be presented in a poster form after being approved through their student's research proposal due

May 15, 2013. I was also given the opportunity to present my poster to the History Club during one of their Tuesday Talks. Throughout the summer my mentor and I will meet regularly to communicate about the progress being made in the archives and on the project as a whole. I hope to present my findings to others so that it may also encourage them to use the archives as well. It will benefit both my own as well as my mentor, Jane Berger's historical background. I will create an inventory of the types of historical archival collections in the Lehigh Valley that she can use to enhance her teaching. My complete, expected outcome is to attend the Pennsylvania Historical Association's Annual Meeting with my findings but also help Dr. Berger learn more about the resources available to students in and around the Lehigh Valley.

Unsure of what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, I decided to declare as not only an accounting major, which I originally thought I wanted to do, but also as a history major. This is because I am so completely dedicated to learning about the past and how it affects our futures. This SOAR project will give me the ability to dig deeper into the history of America and more importantly the Lehigh Valley. With the approval of this project I know that I will be able to provide the discipline of history with significant research and provide the Pennsylvania Historical Association with an introduction of my generation's scholarship.