

Press Release – March 2009

From March 30 to April 10, fifteen students of the American Studies Department of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany, supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), will be on a field trip to Pennsylvania. The trip is connected with the 300-year anniversary of the first German mass migration to North America. It is part of a number of projects undertaken by the American Studies program at Mainz this year in cooperation with the Atlantic Academy in Kaiserslautern, the German-Pennsylvania Association, and the State of Rhineland Palatinate.

The field trip's goal is introduce American Studies students to the history, literature, culture, and language of the German emigrants to Pennsylvania and to convey an idea for the influence the Palatine emigrants had on the region from the early 18th century until today. The tour is closely tied to the cultural studies programs of the American Studies program at Mainz and its longstanding teaching and research on topics of colonial North America.

Exactly 300 years ago, the area between Landau and Neuwied in the Palatinate was the scene of the first German mass emigration to colonial North America. In 1709, around 13,000 people fled from a hunger winter caused by crop failure, the ravages of war, and high taxation. They went to England, hoping to become colonists in the British colonies of North America. Most of them eventually settled in Pennsylvania, where they and the later arrivals from the Palatinate and its neighboring areas founded the largest self-contained German settlement in colonial North America.

The group's itinerary includes important historical sites, museums and libraries, and especially meetings with different religious groups, Mennonites, Moravians, and Amish. Furthermore, cooperative events with Kutztown University, the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, and the German Historical Society are part of the program.

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