



LancasterHistory

For Immediate Release

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Historians to Discuss Religious Liberty in Lancaster

Regional History Colloquium at LancasterHistory Examines the Impact of Pennsylvania's 'Garb Law' in early 20th Century

LANCASTER, PA — LancasterHistory is pleased to announce the opening of its 2024 Regional History Colloquium season, featuring an insightful lecture on the history of religious liberty in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, the event will feature distinguished speakers **Dr. Steve Nolt** and **Dr. Jean-Paul Benowitz** from Elizabethtown College.

Titled "Plain Dress on the Docket," the lecture will explore the complex history surrounding Pennsylvania's 1895 "Garb Law," which banned public school teachers from wearing religiously distinctive attire. Initially aimed at Catholic nuns, this law was first enforced in Lancaster County against Mennonite and Brethren teachers. The discussion will focus on the landmark 1908 case involving teacher Lillian Risser, which marked the first legal challenge to this law. Dr. Nolt and Dr. Benowitz will dissect the intricate legal journey of the case from the Lancaster County Courts to the state's Superior and Supreme Courts, highlighting its significance in the ongoing discourse on religious freedom.

"We're thrilled to bring Dr. Nolt and Dr. Benowitz to LancasterHistory to share this important story which has such contemporary resonance and is so particular to Lancaster County," said **Dr. Mabel Meigs Rosenheck**, Director of Education and Exhibition Planning. "The talk is a deep dive into a topic we touch on in our new exhibit on the history of law and justice in Lancaster County. The exhibit will be open during the reception before the talk. We hope you'll join us early and take a look before hearing more from our speakers."

Dr. Steve Nolt, a renowned professor of history and Senior Scholar at Elizabethtown College's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, has authored several books on Mennonite, Amish, and Pennsylvania German history. Dr. Jean-Paul Benowitz, the Director of Public Heritage Studies and Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships at Elizabethtown College, is an expert in local and regional history, focusing on historic preservation and the history of the Historic Peace Churches.

The event will be held in person at LancasterHistory, with doors opening at 5 p.m. for a light pre-lecture reception and the main presentation commencing at 5:30 p.m. A simultaneous live stream will also be available on Zoom for virtual attendees. This program is free to the public, but advance registration is required for in-person and virtual participation to ensure seating and access to the Zoom link.

Registrations can be made online at lancasterhistory.org/events or by calling (717) 392-4633. Please note that due to capacity limitations, tickets may not be available at the door, and the online registration will close at 5:30 p.m. on the day of the event. The lecture will be recorded and uploaded to LancasterHistory's YouTube channel for broader access.

Join us for an enlightening evening as we examine a pivotal chapter in Pennsylvania's religious and legal history!

About LancasterHistory

LancasterHistory is a community-based, not-for-profit organization established to educate the public on the history of Lancaster County and its place in the history of Pennsylvania and the United States, to advance the missions of regional historical organizations, and to promote the acquisition, preservation, and interpretation of resources representing the history of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania within the broader context of state and national history, including the homes of 15th US President James Buchanan and Congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith.