During the 2022–2023 school year, National History Day® (NHD) invites students to research topics related to the theme, Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas. This theme is broad enough in scope to encourage the investigation of topics ranging from local to global history. To understand the historical importance of their topics, students must ask questions of time and place, cause and effect, change over time, and impact and significance. What factors contributed to the development of a frontier? Why did it emerge, and how did it change? When did it cease to be a frontier? What impact did it have on the people who experienced it, and how did they affect it? Regardless of the topic selected, students must present a description of it and draw conclusions about how their topic affected individuals, communities, nations, or the world, changing the course of human society.

Lancaster County has long been a frontier. It has been a geographic frontier that divided settled from unsettled land and free states from slave states. It has brought together people from all over the world from the 1700s until the present day. It has also been to the frontier of new ideas from technological innovations to social change.

To help students get started on their National History Day projects, LancasterHistory has compiled an idea list of potential topics that can be supported by resources at LancasterHistory.

Places

Pennsylvania as Western Frontier in the 1700s and 1800s

- Origins of Lancaster County (est. 1729)
- Andrew Ellicott
- Conestoga Wagons

Interactions between Indigenous People and European Settlers in Lancaster County

- Conrad Weiser
- Conestoga Indian Massacre

Mason-Dixon Line and the Border Between Free and Slave States

- The Underground Railroad in Lancaster County
- Thaddeus Stevens
- Lydia Hamilton Smith

Transportation in Lancaster County

- King’s Highway (est. 1733)
- Lancaster Turnpike (est. 1795)
Covered Bridges in Lancaster County
Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad (est. 1834)
Hot Air Ballooning in Lancaster County
Lincoln Highway (est. 1913)
MapQuest (web service est. 1996)

Lancaster Neighborhoods

- 7th Ward

People & Organizations

Madame Ferree (1653-1716)
- Emigrated from France seeking religious freedom in Pennsylvania.

Conrad Weiser (1696-1760)
- Interpreter and diplomat who negotiated treaties between Pennsylvania and indigenous nations.

Joseph Simon (1712-1804)
- Businessman and leader of the first Jewish community in Lancaster.

George Ross (1732-1852)
- Signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Andrew Ellicott (1754-1820)
- Land Surveyor, trained Merriweather Lewis prior to the Lewis-Clark Expedition.

Robert Fulton (1755-1815)
- Inventor and pioneer of steam engine technology.

Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868)
- Lawyer, congressman, and abolitionist during the Civil War era. One of the drafters of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

John Wise (1808-1879)
- Pioneer of ballooning, aircraft, and air mail.

Joseph Deane
- African-American sailor. Author of the memoir *Sketch of the life and travels of Joseph Deane.*
Lydia Hamilton Smith (1813-1884)
- Businesswoman and housekeeper for Thaddeus Stevens.

F.W. Woolworth (1852-1919):
- Pioneered discount shopping with the first successful “five-and-dime” store in Lancaster in 1879.

Milton Hershey (1857-1945)
- Started the Hershey Chocolate Company as the Lancaster Caramel Company in 1886.

Hamilton Watch Company (est. 1892)
- Helped standardize time for railroads. Developed the world’s first battery powered watch.

Florence Starr Taylor (1904-1991)
- Pioneering artist and reporter.

Barney Ewell (1918-1996)
- Olympic sprinter. Family was part of the Great Migration of African Americans to Northern states.

America’s Refugee Capital (2000s)
- Organizations like Church World Services have welcomed immigrants and refugees from around the world.

Ideas

Multiculturalism and Inclusivity
- William Penn and Religious Tolerance in Pennsylvania
- America’s Refugee Capital
- Food in Lancaster County

Freedom and Equality During and After Slavery
- Gradual Abolition in Pennsylvania
- The Underground Railroad
- Thaddeus Stevens and the 14th Amendment of the Constitution

Civil Rights in Lancaster County
- Racial Segregation at Rocky Springs Park Pool
- Gender Integration at Franklin and Marshall College
Migration and Immigration to Lancaster County

- English Colonists
- Pennsylvania Germans
- Jewish People
- Puerto Ricans
- Refugees in the 21st Century