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"The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education in Pennsylvania" (review)

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Unlike most of the other topics or themes covered on ExplorePAHistory.com, both *Baseball in Pennsylvania* and *Pennsylvania Sports* examine topics that are not static. Both of these stories contain outdated information; certainly it is well-known that the Phillies did not win their only World Series title in 1980, and the Steelers have won the Super Bowl since 2005. Fortunately, because of the platform for disseminating information, both stories can be updated and corrected with relative ease. Otherwise, their primary use might develop into a scholastic exercise in which students research the mistakes instead of using the information to enhance their understanding of the role that sports in general and baseball in particular have played in Pennsylvania's history.

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Dennis B. Downey, et al. "The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education in Pennsylvania," in Explorepahistory.com.

<http://explorepahistory.com/story.php?storyId=40>

Explorepahistory.com has a well-deserved reputation for excellence in documenting and disseminating the Commonwealth's history through its "Stories from PA History" series, and its recently launched exploration of the history of education in Pennsylvania, *The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education in Pennsylvania*, is certainly no exception. Though completely synthetic and designed primarily to satisfy curriculum requirements for elementary and high school classes, *The Surest Foundation of Happiness* will nonetheless impress experts with its scope and links to a vast array of documents and images.

The Surest Foundation of Happiness is divided into four main "chapters" and an introductory overview. The chapters are thematic rather than chronological and explore topics like the growth of private education and the struggle for educational equality. Despite the chapters' brevity (approximately fifteen hundred words each), they do an outstanding job of introducing readers to the many important individuals, groups and institutions that shaped Pennsylvania's educational landscape. In addition, each chapter contains multiple links to a variety of primary sources supported by excellent analysis. A helpful bar on the left-hand side connects viewers to all of the primary documents, historical markers and images cited in each chapter,

making navigation seamless and easy. Perhaps the website's best feature, from a pedagogical standpoint, is the inclusion of multiple lesson plans aimed at elementary and high school students. As with the chapters, each lesson plan links to various images and primary documents and contains numerous suggested classroom activities.

Yet, for all its many strengths, *The Surest Foundation of Happiness* lacks an interpretive voice and is therefore less than the sum of its chapters. While each of the chapters does an excellent job of mentioning important individuals, groups, and institutions, the chapters' thematic approach tends to obscure the "story" of education in Pennsylvania. In short, the editors chose breadth over depth, which militates against a satisfying narrative structure. A related critique is that the introductory essay fails to place Pennsylvania's educational developments in any sort of regional or national context—educational innovations and institutions are described well but lack much-needed explanation. This is perhaps due to the fact that *The Surest Foundation of Happiness* relies very heavily on the introductory essay to provide a macro level view of Pennsylvania's educational history. Unfortunately, the introductory essay is too short to construct a satisfying narrative or connect all of the chapters' various thematic foci.

These minor weaknesses notwithstanding, *The Surest Foundation of Happiness* is an excellent classroom supplement and an outstanding addition to Explorepahistory.com. Elementary and high school teachers will undoubtedly find the site incredibly valuable, and college instructors may find it a useful supplement to their classes in Pennsylvania history or the history of education.

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