This seminar explores the social and cultural history of America by focusing on the lives of specific individuals, ranging from Jesuit priests in early Quebec to Philadelphia politicians to Saramaka slaves to Maine midwives. One of the people in Philadelphia who we will discuss is Benjamin Franklin, Penn’s founding father. As we examine biography and autobiography as two of history's most powerful narrative frames, we will concentrate on the spaces and places in the social landscape that shaped individual understandings of work, sense of self, gender, beliefs, and political power.

The requirements of the seminar include: active class participation, and after completing the required reads, coming to class with two or three focus questions that will contribute to the discussions at hand; and two short papers (3-5 pp.).

Because this is a seminar, critical reading and writing occupy the center of our concerns. Reading demands close attention and preparing useful questions that might serve to open conversation rather than restrict it. Hence, your three focus questions demand forethought and are not to be quickly formulated shortly before class begins; instead, they are to be posted to the class Canvas site by 12 midnight the night before. Please note: anything posted to Canvas can and probably will be seen by all members of the class, so if you only want to email me, or a particular member(s) of the class on private business, use stgeorge@sas.upenn.edu or their other email address(es).

The two papers will equire first and final drafts with some peer review along the way. The first of these is a personal essay about your relation (in some way) to the past, in which your own life story will challenge you to deal with the typical historical issues of evidence, selection, outlining, narration, editing, re-outlining, re-narration. This will be due in draft on Sept.17 and in revised form on Sept. 24. The second paper will be an interpretive book review, of any of the books that are either required or recommended readings on the syllabus. In this exercise you may want to begin to articulate a specific historical interest or direction of thought. Do not let this worry you; I will meet with each of you over the first few weeks of the semester to learn your interests and make any
necessary suggestions to get you started on a review. The second assignment is due in
draft form on Oct. 15 and revised form on Oct. 22.

Over the semester, as we work on writing we will also read the following books. They
are intended both as substantive studies of particular lives as microhistorical openings
into wider worlds, and as models of how writing history can bring particular issues into
sharp focus.

Coughlin, Michelle Marchetti. *One Colonial Woman’s World: The Life and Writings of

Dening, Greg. *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*
New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. RB

Books. This is online in many ways: deGruyter eBooks Complete, EBook Central
Academic Complete, and others, including a sight for downloading the complete book.


on ACLS Humanities E-Book. URL: http://www.humanitiesebook.org/.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her

1. (Aug. 27) Introduction to course: history as social science and art

2. (Sept. 3) Writing life stories and colonization: Quebec
   Req.: “Captivity of Father Isaac Jogues, of the Society of Jesus, Among the
   Mohawks,” in *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives 1642-1836*,
   ed. Richard VanDerBeets (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press,
   1973), pp. 3-40.
   Jeff Todd Titon, “The Life Story,” *Journal of American Folklore* 93:369

3. (Sept. 10) History, fiction, and problems of evidence
   Req.: Moore, *Black Robe* (entire)
   Note: we will also see parts of the film version of Blackrobe.

4. (Sept. 17) Life Stories and Colonization: Surinam


NB: Your *draft* of first writing assignment due in class today.

5. (Sept. 24) Multivoiced prose and fictive style
Req.: *Alabi’s World*, pp. 166-278, and look over the extensive "Notes and Commentary", pp. 279-432.

NB: The final edition of your first paper is due; print them out, bring to class, we will discuss them in class.

6. (Oct. 1) One life in British expansion in the Pacific
Req.: Dening, *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language* (entire)

7. (Oct. 8) Virginia and its unsettled past

We will discuss the interpretive book review second project this afternoon, concentrating on thesis or argument; evidence (both primary and secondaray), comparison with other books in field.

8. (Oct. 15) Mr. Franklin, 1788. Whither Philadelphia?


NB: Your *draft* second writing assignment is due in class today.

NB Your final book review due in class.


   In this last section, be sure to read pp. 193-217 closely, since it is the full (and unusual) full text of the Coit diary.

11. (Nov. 5) Gender and labor on the Maine frontier

   Req.: Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812*, pp. 3-203.


12. (Nov. 12) Gender and aging.


   NB: The first half of the class (alphabetically, unless we work out a better method?) will present 12-15 minute presentations of their second paper: your choice of book, models used, its argument, the evidence and documentation you marshalled, difficulties,

   Note: I may use reports as means of summarizing some readings.

14. (Nov. 26: THANKSGIVING BEGINS

15. (Dec. 3) Second group of oral presentations of book review projects continued-course conclusion.