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ExplorePAhistory.com. WITF, Inc..

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All Things Pennsylvania!

I will admit it, I am an information junkie, happily addicted to exploring new web sites, interacting with interesting listserv cohorts, and even eliciting chatty e-mails from my students each semester. It was with great anticipation that I approached the new web site <cite>ExplorePAhistory</cite>, and I was not disappointed. <p> <cite>ExplorePAhistory.com</cite> is an extremely useful web site for a comprehensive study of Pennsylvania history, offering an immense amount of information about the state of Pennsylvania, past and present. Technically, it is user-friendly and easy to access; depending on your specific computer and modem speed, the home page loads very quickly and reads very pleasantly. The colors and layout are agreeable, and the text is easy to read. It is uncomplicated to navigate, even for those with few computer skills. The directions are simple and straightforward, and the links go exactly to where they claim they go. There is no need to search around to find your next focus, or hunt for a specific subject as you move from one screen to another. <p> The search tools are almost invisible, so much a part of the site that the user should not feel overwhelmed by technical usage. However, for those who want more specific control, there is also a generic key word search tool available. There are other additional tools, too, besides simply research. For example, "The Travel Organizer" is an interactive planning tool that can be used to collect information, build a personalized travel itinerary, and then be printed out for individualized exploration trips. <p> The home page is organized around three primary areas of interest: teaching, exploring, and regional travel. It also hosts "Featured Story" and "Featured Attraction" sections, and offers the user an "Interaction with History" section. Each of the subtopics is tied into the three primary areas as appropriate. For example, under "Teaching PA History" is the topic of the French and Indian War. There is a lesson plan on the French and Indian War for each of the elementary, middle school, and high school age groups, with a brief synopsis of what students will learn from that lesson plan. Each plan further links to documents, stories, and travel related to the French and Indian War. If the topic were the Underground Railroad, then the three primary areas would link to lessons and stories related to teaching, exploring, and traveling the Underground Railroad. <p> There are a few technical requirements for effectively using the web site, but most up-to-date computers will probably already be equipped with them. The minimum browser needed is either Netscape 6.0 or Internet Explorer 5.0. Other minimum plug-ins required are Adobe Acrobat PDF for large documents, QuickTime 6.0 for video and audio elements, and Flash 6.0 for timelines and other multimedia uses. These are all available as free downloads, and are easy to install. <p> Contents of the web site are developed by WITF, Inc., http://www.witf.org, a public media organization, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/, the Pennsylvania Public Television Network http://www.pptn.state.pa.us/, and several other agencies. Individual projects have contributions from teachers, writers, historians, and other authors too numerous to mention in this brief review. <p> This particular web site is specific to Pennsylvania, but contains critical information that benefits the general study of American history and culture. I anticipate other states creating similar web sites that give such comprehensive information. I found this web site entirely captivating and useful, and think students, scholars, educators, and even the general public can benefit from its use.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

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