

Lee T. Pearcy
Research Associate, Department of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies
Bryn Mawr College
lpearcy@brynmawr.edu

Classicizing Philadelphia

America's engagement with Greece and Rome constitutes a continuous thread in the conversation that has created our culture and institutions. *Classicizing Philadelphia*, a concept for an ongoing research and outreach project at Bryn Mawr College, would engage scholars, students, and the general public in this important conversation and the questions that it raises.

- How deeply did classical reception penetrate American (popular) culture?
- What relation, if any, exists between various forms and mediums of classical reception?
- Do local variations exist in American classical reception? If so, are they significant?
- As Philadelphia moves ahead in the 21st Century, how shall we think about and use Greece and Rome?

Classicizing Philadelphia draws its inspiration from *Classicizing Chicago*, a project at Northwestern University (<http://www.classicizingchicago-stg.northwestern.edu/>); together, these two projects may become the first nodes in a projected network of centers for local study of the American reception of Greece and Rome.

Classicizing Philadelphia will approach these questions through three complementary methods. First, individual studies of classical reception in Philadelphia, in the form of short, factual articles on specific instances of reception and longer essays on general aspects or trends, will be collected and published on an encyclopedic web site. Articles and essays will be enhanced by indexed, searchable collections of images and other data. This is the method used by *Classicizing Chicago*, and the Bryn Mawr project will complement efforts already under way at Northwestern.

Second, *Classicizing Philadelphia* will move beyond anecdotal, particular studies to mine data on every aspect of classical reception in Philadelphia and the surrounding region. By using focused, diachronic searches of large bodies of data, it may be possible to suggest answers to questions about the distribution and penetration of ideas about Greece and Rome in American culture. Similar studies in other branches of the humanities are already beginning to return significant results (see for example "Analyzing Literature by Words and Numbers," *The New York Times* Dec. 3, 2010). Because Philadelphia is a city deeply conscious of its place in American history and rich in archives and institutions focused on local history, initial efforts will focus on building out from data already available; in later stages, *Classicizing Philadelphia* may be able to develop its own data sets.

Third, *Classicizing Philadelphia* will engage students and the general public in America's conversation about Greece and Rome. Curricular resources and collaborations with local schools and colleges will make students part of this conversation. Student internships will bring students into direct contact with the data of classical reception as they help to develop ways to organize and use them; for an example of undergraduate students contributing to crowdsourced digital research, see <http://literaryinformatics.northwestern.edu/node/63>. Academic conferences, public lectures, and exhibits

in collaboration with Philadelphia's many universities and historical institutions will bring our city's reception of Greece and Rome into dialogue with contemporary issues.

Bryn Mawr College has strong graduate programs in Classics, Art History, and Archaeology and an innovative undergraduate program in Growth and Structure of Cities. Several faculty members are already engaged in research on classical reception or on the historical culture of Philadelphia. Libraries and Special Collections have recently developed digital catalogs using open source software. The College has a tradition of involving students in faculty-led research projects (for a salient example, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zWG59YAekI>). *Classicizing Philadelphia* has the potential to build on these strengths, to bring external funding to these programs, and to connect the College to academic and cultural institutions like the Library Company, Free Library, Athenaeum, and American Philosophical Society.