



DRAMATURGY PACKET

**CREATED BY
GILBERTO VEGA**



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OVERVIEW

ABOUT THEATRE HORIZON:

Theatre Horizon's mission is to use the transformative power of storytelling to foster empathy and to create an inclusive home for artists, audiences, and students alike. We stage stories that illuminate the full range of human experience, bring people together, connect students with theatre artists, and contribute to our diverse community in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

Founded in 2005 by Erin Reilly and Matthew Decker, Theatre Horizon has become an award-winning leader in Montgomery County's arts community. In October 2012, we completed a \$1 million capital campaign and opened our permanent home: a 123-seat theatre in the heart of Norristown's Arts Hill District. Since moving to our new home, our services have attracted over 40,000 people to Norristown. In 2019, on the cusp of our 15th Anniversary Season, our Board of Directors carried out a successful leadership transition, hiring Nell Bang-Jensen—the director for *TOWN*—as Artistic Director. Under her leadership, Theatre Horizon is actively committed to building long-term, sustainable relationships with Norristown residents and organizations.

ABOUT *TOWN*:

What happens when community members of a diverse town tell a story as one?

TOWN is Theatre Horizon's largest-scale production in our nearly 20-year history. Helmed by Director Nell Bang-Jensen and Playwright Michael John Garcés this new play celebrates and interrogates small town American life. Featuring music by Philly-based artist collective ILL DOOTS and featuring an ensemble of ~70 community members and professional theatre artists, *TOWN* will focus on Death & Eternity, Love & Marriage, and Daily Life all inspired by stories from over 130 Norristown residents.

ABOUT *OUR TOWN*:

TOWN is based on the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. This Pulitzer Prize-winning play was written in 1938 and has been performed around the world and inspired multiple adaptations. This three-act play takes place in the fictional American small town of Grover's Corners and offers a glimpse into the lives of its citizens. Beginning with Daily Life and followed by Love & Marriage and then Death & Eternity, *Our Town* introduces the audience to the character known as the Stage Manager, who serves as the play's narrator, commenting on the action and characters and guiding the audience across Grover's Corners. The Stage Manager even joins the action of the play!

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TOWN will be rehearsed and performed at Theatre Horizon and the Eisenhower Science and Technology Leadership Academy, located in Norristown, PA, which stands on the territory known as the “Lenapehoking,” the ancestral home of the Lenape people.

For the past 10,000 years, the Lenape have been the original caretakers and stewards of the Lenapehoking—one of numerous tribes that comprised tens of millions of people residing on this continent prior to the invasion of European colonizers.

Theatre Horizon recognizes that Isaac Norris, Sr.—Norristown’s namesake—purchased land from the family of William Penn even though nobody “owns” the Lenapehoking. We acknowledge that Isaac Norris, Sr. was a slaveholder who benefited from a system that captured, sold, and enslaved over 10 million Africans who were trafficked to various locations in North America, South America, and the Caribbean.

We acknowledge the 6 million African Americans that moved from the American South to the Northeast during The Great Migration and their role in making places like Norristown a central hub for industry and retail. Finally, with a large Latinx population—particularly people from Puerto Rico and Mexico—we acknowledge the past, present, and future legacies of the Taíno and Aztec peoples.

This land acknowledgement was written with advisement from Adam Waterbear DePaul and Barbara Bluejay of the Lenape Cultural Center.

CREATING TOWN: DEVELOPING A NORRISTOWN PLAY

Theatre Horizon has been developing this play over the span of two years, starting in September 2020 and culminating with the final performances in September 2022.

Creating a new play requires collaboration between a dedicated creative team of theatre artists—including a director, playwright, composers, and designers—and Norristown community members like YOU.



Community members participate in a group story circle with the creative team.
Photo Credit: John C. Hawthorne



A community member is interviewed by Director Nell Bang-Jensen.
Photo Credit: John C. Hawthorne

Step 1 (September 2020 - October 2021)

The project's creative team familiarize themselves with Norristown's notable places and people through:

- Research on Norristown's history
- Tours and Site Visits at community partner sites
- One-on-one interviews
- Group Story Circles

Step 2 (October 2021 - January 2022)



ILL DOOTS performs for community members at THE TOWN HOLLA: A Norristown Open Mic Night.
Photo Credit: John C. Hawthorne

Playwright Michael John Garcés compiles these stories to write the script while composers ILL DOOTS create music inspired by the sounds and music of Norristown.

Step 3

(January 2022 - May 2022)

Our playwright shares the script-in-development with community members.

Community members and

professional actors read the script aloud and provide feedback to our playwright. ILL DOOTS leads lyric-generating workshops with community members.

Step 4 (June 2022)

Theatre Horizon holds auditions for community members to perform in the show alongside a team of professional actors.

Step 5 (July 2022 - August 2022)

Community members and professional actors



Community members and professional actors read the script-in-progress at Hopeworx.

rehearse the show. Designers on the creative team—including costumes, set, lighting, and sound—finalize the plans for the technical aspects of the play.

Step 6 (September 2022)

The cast and the creative team complete technical rehearsals, which focus on the technological aspects and incorporate them into the work the actors have been doing in rehearsals. Then, Theatre Horizon presents TOWN from September 15-18, 2022 on the lawn of Eisenhower Science and Technology Leadership Academy.



The creative team tours Norristown with Mydera Taliah Robinson, a Norristown resident and Theatre Horizon's Education Director.

Photo Credit: John C. Hawthorne

A Norristown Timeline

TOWN IS...

THE LENAPE

- Among the oldest of the Northeastern Nations, the Lenape are the original caretakers and stewards of the land known as “Lenapehoking,” which stretches from what is now called Delaware to New York and from New Jersey to central Pennsylvania.
- 8,000 BC - The earliest evidence of the Lenape is found in New Jersey.

COLONIALISM

- 1492 - Christopher Columbus ignites the European invasion of the Americas.
- 1638 - Swedish colonizers establish New Sweden, with settlements throughout the Delaware Valley—including present day Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.
- 1655 - New Sweden is captured by the Dutch.
- 1664 - England takes control of the colony from the Dutch.
- Additionally, with more immigration from Europe to the Americas, in addition to the Swedes and Dutch, settlers in this area would include the Welsh, English, German, Scot, and Irish.



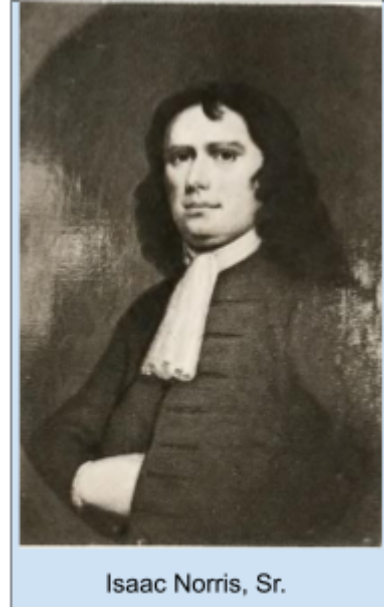
WILLIAM PENN (1644-1718)

- 1668 - William Penn—a devout Quaker who faced frequent religious persecutions—is jailed for blasphemy.

- 1681 - King Charles II of England repays debts he owed to the father of William Penn in the form of land stolen from the Lenape.
- 1682 - William Penn arrives in Lenapehoking and signs The Treaty of Shackamaxon with Lenape Chief Tamanend.

ISAAC NORRIS (1671-1735)

- 1678 - Norris moves from England to Port Royal, Jamaica.
- 1692 - Norris moves to Philadelphia.
- 1704 - While William Penn is in England, his son sells land to Norris.
- 1724 - Norris becomes the Mayor of Philadelphia.



Isaac Norris, Sr.

ESTABLISHING ROOTS

- 1784 - Residents of the upper part of Philadelphia County petition the State Assembly for the creation of Montgomery County with Norristown as the county seat.
- 1796 - The Norristown Library is incorporated.
- 1812 - Norristown is officially incorporated as the first Pennsylvania State Borough in Montgomery County.



Chatlin's Department Store

BOOMING

- 1834 - Railroad construction is complete, igniting an industrial boom across the area.
- 1848 - Norristown Fire Company and Montgomery Fire Company are chartered.
- 1859 - Peak usage of a canal system created by the Schuylkill Navigation Company.

- 1892 - Chatlin's Department Store opens.
- 1893 - Schuylkill Valley Transit Company provides electric trolley service throughout the area.
- 1900s - Norristown experiences a hotel boom.
- 1911 - Trolley line extends from 69th Street Station in Philadelphia to Norristown.
- 1912 - Norristown celebrates its centennial.
- 1916 - 1950 - The Great Migration, during which 6 million African-Americans moved from the American South to the Northeast. This also triggers White Flight to suburbs and surrounding areas.
- 1940s-1950s - Pennsylvania Turnpike and Schuylkill Expressway opens.
- By the 1950s, Norristown becomes an industrial and retail center through: factories; foundries; icehouses; lumber yards; textile mills; department stores; and restaurants.
- 1962 - Norristown, a town with over 550 retail outlets, celebrates its sesquicentennial (150th Anniversary). Norristown's population peaks with 38,925 residents.



The Old Montgomery County Prison.

CHANGING

- 1963 - King of Prussia Mall opens.
- 1966 - Plymouth Meeting Mall opens.
- 1968 - \$11 million expansion of the Montgomery County Courthouse, which included the demolition of 100,000 square feet of homes, stores, and businesses.
- 1975 - Montgomery Hospital is closed.

- 1987 - Montgomery County Prison is closed.
- 1989 - Norristown Transportation Center opens.

NOW

- 2000 - Influx of the Latinx community, particularly Puerto Ricans and recently-arrived immigrants from Mexico and Central/South America.
- 2012 - Norristown celebrates its bicentennial (200th Anniversary).
- 2012 - Theatre Horizon completes a \$1 million capital campaign to open its permanent home in the former Bell Telephone building.
- 2020 - Lafayette Street Extension Project is completed.



The big parade on Main Street during the Sesquicentennial in 1962.

PROPHECY OF THE FOURTH CROW

Neweneit Na Ahas, or “The Prophecy of the Fourth Crow” is an ancient story passed down among the Lenape for generations. This story relates the ways in which Lenape people have struggled to survive and to keep their community and culture intact. Chief Red Hawk—the Chief of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania—summarizes the current interpretation of the Prophecy in the following way:

“We now know that the First Crow was the Lenape before the coming of the Europeans. The Second Crow symbolized the death and destruction of our culture. The Third Crow was our people going underground and hiding. The Fourth Crow was the Lenape becoming caretakers again and working with everybody to restore this land.

The prophecy’s text and English translation are found below:

Neweneit Na Ahas — “The Prophecy of the Fourth Crow”

As told by Robert Red Hawk Ruth

Translated by Shelley DePaul

Lomewe, luwe na okwes xu laxakwihele xkwithakamika.

Long ago it was said that a fox will be loosened on the earth.

Ok nen luwe newa ahasak xu peyok.

Also it was said four crows will come.

Netami ahas kenthul li guttitehewagan wichi Kishelemukonk.

The first crow flew the way of harmony with Creator.

Nisheneit ahas kwechi pilito entalelemukonk, shek palsu ok ankela.

The second crow tried to clean the world, but he became sick and he died.

Nexeneit ahas weneyoo ankelek xansa ok koshiphuwe.

The third crow saw his dead brother and he hid.

Neweneit ahas kenthul li guttitehewagan lapi wichi Kishelemukonk.

The fourth crow flew the way of harmony again with Creator.

Kenahkihechik xu withatuwak xkwithakamika.

Caretakers they will live together on the earth.

WHO'S WHO IN TOWN?

There are many characters in *TOWN*—both the play and in Norristown! Many of the character in the play are based on real people and communities, such as:

The Charming Shopper - Prior to the opening of the King of Prussia Mall and Plymouth Meeting Mall, Norristown was a central hub of retail, particularly large department stores along Main Street. Cars would line the streets and pedestrians would shop at places such as: Chaitlin's, Baer's Furniture, FW Woolworth's Five and Dime, and Sears Roebuck and Company.

The Globe Dyer - Norristown's prime location near a major river, a railroad corridor, and other forms of transportation made it become a center for the textile industry. One notable mill was Rambo & Regar Globe Knitting Mills. Founded in 1885, the Globe Knitting Mills produced stockings and had the distinction of being the oldest textile plan operating under its original name in Norristown.

El Inmigrante - In the last 20 years, Norristown's Latinx population has tripled in size, now comprising nearly 30% of Norristown's overall population. The Latinx community of Norristown includes mostly Puerto Ricans and recently-arrived immigrants—both documented and undocumented—migrating from Mexico but with cultural roots throughout the Caribbean, Central, and South America.

The Playful Lover - This character is based on Linda Rowden, who was allegedly murdered by her ex-boyfriend, Robert Fisher, in 1980. Prosecutors allege



that Fisher shot Rowden twice as she drove him and another man through Norristown. They said that she was cooperating with investigators probing the death of another man Fisher was suspected of killing. Fisher has been convicted twice of the killing and sentenced to death three times, but in September 2021, during his fifth trial, a mistrial was declared.

The Refugee - Across Eastern Europe during the 1980s at the height of the Cold War, migrants from countries like Poland fled to France, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, the UK, and the United States, relocating to communities like Norristown.



Sanford Harling, III

RUNegade - A RUNegade is a runner who behaves in rebelliously unconventional manner. Since 2018, RUNegades has welcomed over 2,500 members to their weekly runs and community-based events, raising well over \$40,000 for local charities and non-profits.

The Running Back Who Ran Back - This character is based on Sanford Harling III, a 12-year-old boy who died in February 2016 attempting to rescue his father during a devastating house fire.

Siegmund Lubin - In the early boom years of movie-making, the world's largest, most advanced film studio was located in West Norriton. Betzwood Film Studios was created by Siegmund Lubin, a German-Jewish immigrant and ophthalmologist (eye surgeon). Lubin created the first chain of movie theaters and opened a movie studio in North Philadelphia in 1910 before moving west. Between producing mediocre films that did not have public appeal and WWI

eliminating Lubin's access to foreign markets, by 1916, Lubin was bankrupt.



The Underground Railroad Freedom Fighters and The Abolitionists

- With its location near major urban cities— Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, and Washington, DC—Norristown and the surrounding areas have multiple connections to the Underground Railroad. Specific sites in and surrounding Norristown that have significance to the Underground Railroad are Ebenezer Methodist Church in Norristown and the Peter Wentz Farmstead in Lansdale. Abolition Hall in Plymouth Meeting provided a meeting space for the Plymouth Meeting Anti-Slavery Society and for lectures by

prominent abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison, and Lucretia Mott.

PLACES AROUND TOWN?

Norristown is filled with historic buildings, businesses, non-profit organizations, restaurants, parks, and more. Some of these places are around today while others have been lost to change and time. This includes:

Acción Comunal Latinoamericana de Montgomery County (ACLAMO) Family Centers - ACLAMO is a nonprofit that provides educational programs, social services, and health access to Latino and other low-income residents.

Centre Theater - The Centre Theater has been serving the greater Norristown area as the anchor of Norristown Arts Hill since 1996. It has been home to Independence String Ensemble, Iron Age Theatre, Theatre Horizon, VOX, Vagabond Acting Troupe, Renaissance Puppet Company, Walla Fest, Open Words, B Sharp Productions, King of Prussia Players and Starving Artist Prevention.

Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educación (CCATE) - CCATE's mission is to ignite social transformation, developing the talents and empowering the Latinx community through education, culture, art, technology, health, and science. CCATE design classes in the areas of dramatic/visual arts, media production, and music and programs that support individual growth, community engagement, and social change.

Churches - Religious institutions are a core part of Norristown's social, cultural, and financial fabric. Spanning multiple faiths churches across Norristown—including St John's; St Patrick's; First Presbyterian; First Methodist; First Baptist; Living Word; Evangel; Church of God; New Hope; Mt. Zion AME; and All Saints—churches have consistently been supporting their congregants and community throughout Norristown's history.

Crazy Aaron's - Founded by Aaron Muderick, this business is located in the former Rambo & Regar Globe Knitting Mills. Crazy Aaron's makes Thinking Putty and other creative, innovative products to inspire curiosity and wonder and to educate and delight our customers all over the world.



Developmental Enterprises Corporation (DEC) - DEC is passionately committed to supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities to reach their fullest potential through personalized training, tailored therapies and other programs and services that promote independence, choice and community integration.

Elmwood Park - This central hub for Norristown features The Fire Chief's Memorial Bandshell, a Norristown landmark since 1936 that fell into disrepair in the 1970s. Activities at the park include a free concert series of Sunday Evening Concerts throughout the summer.

Hopeworx - The mission of HopeWorx is to promote the continued development of a community environment which supports and believes in the expertise and passion of individuals to create and direct their own paths to health and recovery, leading to the ultimate goal of reliance of oneself or one's own power.

Mills - As a center for industry, Norristown has and had many mills throughout the area.



The Montgomery County Justice Center, which will be ready in 2026.

Many of these were for textiles, such as Rambo & Regar Globe Knitting Mills, Wyoming Spinning Company, and Eureka Knitting Company. Others were steel mills, such as: Alan Wood Steel Mill; Phoenix Steel Corporation; and Lukens Steel Company.

Montgomery County Justice Center - Slated to have construction and renovations completed by Spring 2026, the new

justice center will be a 325,000 sq. ft., six-story new building connected to the existing courthouse housing new courtrooms, court-related offices, and public spaces.

Montgomery County Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC) - OIC's mission is to continue to be the nation's leader in providing quality education, training, employment, and housing services through a national network of local affiliated organizations enabling economically disadvantaged people of all races and background

to become productive fulfilled members of the American society. Their Xtreme Learning Center is a full-service daycare, extended care, and summer camp available for ages 0 to 14.

Montgomery County Senior Adult Activities Center (Montco SAAC) - Montco SAAC is a community focal point where aging adults and their families find support, guidance, educational and social programs to help navigate life transitions and continue to be active, creative, healthy and engaged in the community. Montco SAAC serves our diverse community with respect, compassion, and professionalism and has attracted a constituency that reflects these same values.

Norristown Chamber of Commerce - The Norristown Chamber of Commerce empowers Norristown's business community by promoting the growth and success of members and cultivating an environment where businesses can thrive.

Norristown Sprouts Community Garden - Located right next to the performance venue for TOWN, the Norristown Sprouts Community Garden was founded in 2021 to primarily serve Norristown residents to bring access to nutritious foods.

Riverfront Park - Located next to the Schuylkill River, Riverfront Park is a community hub that includes boat and fishing ramps, picnic areas, and trails.

Selma Mansion - Built in 1974, Selma Mansion was home to Revolutionary War General Andrew Porter, the great grandfather to Mary Todd Lincoln and father to David Rittenhouse Porter, the 9th governor of Pennsylvania. After nearly 200 years of various owners and selling more than 44 acres of land, the house and property have remained largely unoccupied since 1983.



Simmons Park aka Oak Street Park - Sports are central to the Norristown community, and this park is no exception. Their basketball courts—which the Norristown Municipal

Council recently authorized nearly \$170,000 towards upgrades—are frequently used for pick-up games, basketball leagues, and more.

The Willow School - The Willow School is committed to preparing children for success in primary school by providing a standard of excellence in academic rigor alongside a delightful, engaging, and fun environment. At the Willow School we are dedicated to maintaining a community where we focus on the whole child. We provide high quality faculty utilizing effective learning tools in an effort to foster independent thinking, creativity, responsibility and respect for others.



Theatre Horizon and The Willow School are located in the former Bell Telephone building.

QUESTIONS?

This packet contains a portion of the full scope of research for this project. If you have any questions or would like to see a list of sources for the content in this packet, please speak to a stage manager or email Gilberto Vega at Gilberto@TheatreHorizon.org.

THANK YOU!

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