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### Folklore Term Paper

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May 23, 1950

FOLK BELIEFS OF  
LANCASTER COUNTY  
By William D. Boyle

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In my search for material to write this ~~paper~~, I received some valuable advice on the so-called ways and means of the Pennsylvania Dutch. My usual custom in securing material, such as this, is to directly approach the person of interest and then to immediately begin questioning, but to questions "do you know any folk songs, have you ever been to a pow wow doctor, are there any particular times you plant your crops?" and many other questions, I received vague answers. They were "my memory isn't very good because of my old age" or "I never heard of any." My main fault was a lack of patience and with a lesson learned I finally had success.

Saturday, May 20, I visited with Mr. Noah Landis of Lititz, R. D. #3. Mrs. Palmer Brown, who buys eggs, chickens and other farm products from Mr. Landis, arranged my visit. Mr. Landis is a direct descendant of "King" Landis, who was an outstanding person seventy years ago in the Lititz community. "King" Landis had fifteen children and I think that accounts for the many Landis families in that area today. Mr. Noah Landis had a speech defect because of a cerebral hemorrhage suffered six years ago and was very difficult to understand but I was able to interpret most of his conversation.

After meeting the Landis family, who were very cooperative and friendly, I started talking with Mr. Landis.

I asked him the usual questions and received the reply that he was not acquainted with any folklore material. After talking about crop rotation and other problems of farming for about two hours he mentioned a few practices used in farming that have been followed for many years and could be classified under the general heading of folklore. This was the starting point. To give this paper consistency I will divide the material into two sections, pow wow doctoring and general beliefs.

Mr. Landis started the discussion of pow wow doctoring with the direct question "Did you know that penicillin was used fifty years ago?" This annoyed me because I thought that penicillin was only discovered ten years ago. After giving him a negative reply he related the following story. Fifty years ago there was a farmer whose foot was badly trampled by a horse and he had been to every doctor in the Lititz area and they were unable to heal his foot. As a last resort he went to see Mrs. Sam Nolt, who was a known pow wow doctor in that area. After looking at this foot she told him to go home and get a loaf of bread. He should take the bread and cut it into four pieces and place these pieces in a damp place, preferably in the cellar. Every day he was to repeat this procedure and when the bread got pieces of green mold on it, he was to eat the bread, mold and all. After doing this for a short while his foot was completely



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healed. This story has some authenticity because they do make penicillin from cultured molds.

I asked Mr. Landis some more questions about Mrs. Nolt and he said that his father had a painful toothache one time and Mrs. Nolt cured him. He didn't remember the exact story but he thought she told him to go home and sleep on a small stone. After doing this his toothache went away and he was never bothered again by this tooth. While talking to Mr. Landis I noticed that he favored his right hand and didn't use his left hand at all. He said that his left arm was useless because of the stroke he had six years ago. He had been to a pow wow doctor last month, who works at Zook's Mill near his home. The pow wow doctor rubbed his arm and made an x sign above the bend in his elbow. The treatment was unsuccessful and the pow wow doctor told him he didn't have enough faith in his treatment. He had also been to a pow wow doctor in Lititz and showed me a pamphlet that he had received. In this pamphlet there were cures for all types of illness. I noticed in leafing through this pamphlet that all the cures were based on reading passages from the Bible and having faith in the possibility of cure. He didn't have too much faith in this cure and has been going to a doctor in Philadelphia for medical treatment. Also he had a wart on the back of his right hand. Saturday morning, the day that I talked with him, he had taken an onion and cut it in half. He

*Later*

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rubbed each half over his wart three times and then planted the onion in the garden. He previously had tried a potato which was cut in three sections and each section was rubbed over the wart three times. Then the potato was planted in a damp spot. He related another story about removing warts. On the night of a full moon, you were to face the moon and say "What I see I am to have, what I rub take away." This is to be said in German, and when you rub the wart it will go away because you have given the wart to some dying plant. When the plant dies the wart will leave your hand. I asked him if Mrs. Sam Nolt had passed her powers on to her children when she died. He said that she didn't because it was too much bother for all that she got out of it. She could only pass these powers to a person of the opposite sex and it would not be effective if passed to a person of the same sex. Her grandson lives on a farm near Mr. Landis and still has her "recipe book" as he termed it. Mr. Landis believes that the pow wow doctor can make you do anything. I asked him what he meant by this and he said they look deep in yours eyes and then you do anything they command. I think this could be called hypnotism, although I am not sure.

In general beliefs, he said that there was a day in May called "louse day" which was a bad day to plant crops. In late August there is a day you cut weeds and other plants you don't want and they will die immediately. This is the

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day that John the Baptist was beheaded. When you want to put up a fence or plant beans there are "up signs" and "down signs". You take a board and lay it over some grass for several days. If the grass under the board stays green, you plant beans because they will grow tall and straight. (I think it was beans but due to his speech defect I am not sure.) Also when putting in posts, the grass should be yellow so the posts will grown down in the ground.

In writing this paper, I have had a lot of interest and it was not a displeasing task like most term papers have been. It has also given me an educational and personal experience because of the direct contact I made, rather than condensing material out of a book.