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THE WAYSIDE INN
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Alde un Neies (Old and New)
(Inside back cover)

CONTRIBUTORS
(Inside front cover)

COVER:
The arrival of a stagecoach always generated a great
deal of excitement at the local inn. Pictured here is
the American House in Kutztown (background), and
an illustration (foreground) by Florence Starr Taylor
(copyright Lebanon Steel Foundry) which depicts a
stagecoach arriving with a flourish at the Buck Tavern
in Lebanon, Pa. in 1830.

Layout and Special Photography
WILLIAM K. MUNRO
THE WAYSIDE INN

by Amos W. Long, Jr.

The early wayside inn served as a public gathering place, and provided lodging, food, drink, and entertainment for travelers and villagers alike. Such inns catered to the comfort of patrons stopping for a meal, for a night, or for a longer period of time. Inns played an important and historic role in America from the colonial period until the present time, and through the years have enjoyed much good repute.

The terms "inn" and "tavern" were used interchangeably, although in Pennsylvania, inn was the more common usage. (Sometimes the terms were used to distinguish between a mere drinking place—tavern—where alcoholic beverages were sold and consumed; and an establishment—inn—where meals were also served.) In New England and New York state the name tavern was given, and in the South, the term "ordinary" was in general use. Hostel, hostelry, roadhouse, lodging house, public house, house of entertainment, stand, and cabaret were other common terms used; not until after the American Revolution did "hotel" come into general use.

The very earliest travel accommodations were provided by families who opened their private homes to those on the move. During the colonial period, individuals and families (often with their possessions) traveling on horseback or by wagon needed to find shelter before complete darkness overtook them. Weary and hungry from the long day's journey and far from any settlement, the traveler had no recourse before the day of the inn except to seek the hospitality of a private home. In those days such requests were usually honored without question or charge, particularly if the wayfarer inquired at a Pennsylvania German home where genuine hospitality was most often the norm. Perhaps there was not always a spare bed or a prepared meal, but at the very least the guest could sleep on several blankets spread out on the floor in front of the fireplace. And, while discussing the weather, the news, and the times before retiring, the traveler was usually offered something to eat and drink. In the morning, after a hearty breakfast, the traveler continued on, refreshed in body and spirit. (Of
"A favorite stop for the Conestoga wagons on the Liberty Trail was the Seltzer House at Womelsdorf. Joseph built it in 1762. Son John paved the yard with cobblestones to keep the wagons from freezing in the mud. Here the course, stories have been told—and writers have reported—that some of these private homes were not only dirty, but infested with vermin as well.)

As settlements in Pennsylvania and other colonies became more populous, turnpikes and other improved roads were built, and stagecoaches became an important method of transportation. This meant an increase in traffic and travelers, and made public accommodations for those travelers a necessity. Soon inns were located along heavily traveled public roads and turnpikes, until almost every community large enough to be deemed a village, and every major crossroads, had one. Later, inns were located near railroads, along canals, and by wharves to accommodate those who traveled and worked on trains and early sailing vessels. Many such inns were among the prominent landmarks on early maps of the colony and province.

In many areas of Pennsylvania the inn ranked next to the church as a gathering place. Edward Field, in his book *The Colonial Tavern*, tells of the close relationship that existed between such inns and some old meetinghouses. It was not unusual for an inn to be located near a meetinghouse, and the inn was where some among those attending worship went to warm and refresh themselves after a long service, or between services. Sunday services, which were conducted one or more times each month, consisted of morning and afternoon sessions, wagoners rested, swapped yarns and (we fear) downed a bit of rum before setting out with their teams over the hazardous mountain roads to the west." (Drawing by Florence Starr Taylor; copyright Lebanon Steel Foundry.) and were attended by people from miles around. A noon rest allowed for refreshment in the form of food and drink to be taken at the inn. No doubt the comfortable warmth of the fire in the inn fireplace during the cold winter months, and some refreshments outdoors in the shade during the heat of the summer before the home-ward journey, were both appreciated and enjoyed. Many such inns were in the beginning maintained by members of the church; later, management was given over to a paid agent, or ownership passed to a private individual.

During the colonial period, Pennsylvania had more inns than any other colony, and most of them were of good quality. After the American Revolution, with the establishment of better roads and turnpikes, the number of inns continued to multiply, and for a time most prospered. They were spaced at intervals (usually ten miles apart) along heavily traveled roads. After 1800 the number of inns increased even more rapidly, with more roads being constructed, and more people on the move. At one time there were more than sixty-two inns between Philadelphia and Lancaster, an average of one a mile. Eleven inns were within a distance of five miles.

The many and varied inns found in Pennsylvania were needed to accommodate pioneers and immigrants passing through the colony in search of adventure, fortune, and new lands. In *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1640–1840*, author Stevenson W. Fletcher iden-
Franklin House, a limestone structure, is located on the Square at Main and Market Streets in Schaefferstown. Originally called the King George, it was built around 1746.

It signifies four types of inns, based on the social status of those who frequented them: the stage stand; the wagon stand; the drove stand; and the tap-house. The stage stand catered primarily to stagecoach travelers and was at the top of the social ladder. Some stage stands did not even host every passing coach; many enjoyed an exclusive patronage. It was considered a lasting disgrace for a stage inn to entertain a wagoner, for it meant a loss of prestige; wagoners had to look to other inns for accommodation.

They found those accommodations at wagon stands, so-called because they were patronized mostly by wagoners who usually slept on improvised beds spread on the taproom floor. According to one account, "even as late as 1845 it was a common thing to see teamsters and farmers take their beds along and lodge on the floors...as many as one hundred lie down."

Lower still in social standing and in the quality of accommodations offered were the drove stands. Drovers spending the night in these herded their livestock into nearby lots where the animals could be fed and watered. (Some wagon and drove stands catered to both groups.) The lowest classification of inn was the tap-house. It gave shelter to those who were not accepted by other establishments, and derived its income mainly from the sale of liquor.

Each community and village, then, had its inn, so it could provide for the welfare of those passing through, and to help regulate the sale of intoxicating beverages; indeed, "Pennsylvania undoubtedly, during colonial days and later, had more inns than any other state." Then too, the inn was as important to those living in the village as it was to the traveler; for generations it was considered by many people to be the major source of information and news. It was the place where, in the words of a contemporary journalist, "the farmers of the neighborhood come, according to custom, and gather...to talk and drink."

***

Most of the early inns were rather large structures that served as a family dwelling and inn. Many a cherished and beautiful old home, rich in annals of family prosperity and private hospitality, in later years was used to house an inn. A number of residences once the home of a President or statesman were turned into inns. Such buildings were generally quite spacious, with ample room to house the patrons who chose to stay in them.

Many of the first inns were constructed with logs chinked with mortar and later covered with clapboards. A majority of the inns in Pennsylvania were stone struc-
tures with walls of twenty or more inches, similar to the large Pennsylvania German farmhouses. Fewer were of brick construction. Most were two-and-one-half stories and had rather steep roofs with dormers. Examples of each are to be found in the earlier areas of settlement, some with hand-hewn hardwood beams fastened with wooden pegs.

Numerous such inns were constructed with near access to a road or railroad. As traffic continued to increase, many of the inns became too small to accommodate all of their patrons, and a wing was added onto one or both sides or to the rear of the original rectangular or square structure. Occasionally a general store (or in later years a barber shop or other small business enterprise) was housed in one of these appendages. Many of the inns had a long porch or several porches in the front, and others on the side or rear. Almost invariably there were two doors, one leading into the barroom and the other into the hall, which opened into the parlor or the family living quarters.

The interior rooms at entrance level were usually large and low, studded with great beams running across overhead. Many of the inns were constructed so that a wide hall ran through the center of the building, with rooms on either side. Some of the rooms were separated only with wide partition boards nailed to the studs. Arrangements varied, although one of the front rooms usually contained the bar with the dining room behind it; behind this was the kitchen. On the other side of the hall were the living quarters or a long parlor, usually with a huge beam supporting the ceiling and an enormous fireplace. This area was used in some inns to more fully accommodate the patrons.

Many of the inns had an open staircase with a flight of stairs leading to the upper floor, sometimes into a spacious parlor where gatherings, meetings, parties, and dances were held. Some of these lovely old staircases had bannisters that were hand carved. From a narrow hall beside the first flight of stairs on the lower floor, other stairs descended to the lower level or cellar. Some of the cellars contained a flowing spring, which was used to help preserve food in warm weather.

The working end of the inn, where the meals were prepared and the linens cleaned, was located to the rear of the building, perhaps in an attached portion or sometimes on a lower level. This area in the early inns usually included an enormous open fireplace where the meals were cooked. In later years a cookstove (a curiosity at first, and to some an invention of the devil) was placed in this same area. Wall cupboards were sometimes found
in this area and in the barroom. Close by the kitchen was a long dining room (originally perhaps two rooms) with a huge fireplace. Sometimes these fireplaces had

In some of the more poorly furnished inns the floors were worn but clean from frequent scrubbing. In some, the floors were sanded (sometimes in patterns) and were kept clean and smooth. Occasionally small rag rugs were spread on the floors, which were constructed of hard oak or pine boards cut from solid timber. Much of the woodwork in the rooms was beaded and fluted, and the nails used were often made by local nailsmiths. The latches and bolts of wood or metal were also often made by local craftsmen; some of these artifacts still survive.

Somewhere on the first level of the inn was a hatrack on which the men hung their headgear, and scattered about the rooms were chests, tables, chairs, settles, and stools. Some rooms were decorated with wallpaper, and in early inns tallow candles or oil lamps provided light. Some of the better inns had a fireplace in many or all of the sleeping rooms, but most of these have long since been boarded shut. In later years a stove (sometimes in a box of sand) stood in front of the fireplace or in the center or in a corner of the room. Later, the more elegant inns had a reception room, office, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor; and bedroom suites consisting of a sitting room and one or more bedchambers on the second floor.

One of the privileges the inn enjoyed was the right to sell liquor—yet another reason it became a public necessity. The barroom (or taproom) provided liquid sustenance not only for weary wayfarers, but also for local people since drinking was indulged in by many, both young and old alike. Since the barroom was an indispensable feature of (and frequently the chief attraction at) all inns, it was one of the largest rooms in the building; only the parlor in some of the better inns was larger. The barroom usually had a fireplace (later a stove) and ample chairs or seats to accommodate patrons; the floor was bare. In smaller inns the bar was usually located in a corner of the main room. In others, it was a temporary arrangement that could be raised or lowered at will for the purpose. In some inns a buffet was built into a corner that furnished this important adjunct to the main room.

The inn served as a gathering place during inclement weather, and in the evening local citizens—particularly farmers—longing to quench their thirst and looking for companionship, visited to discuss neighborhood events among themselves, and to hear the news from travelers...
Harper's Tavern, a brick structure, is located at the intersection of Routes 934 and 22 near the banks of the Swatara Creek in Lebanon County. It was built in 1804 by John Harper near the site of the original structure constructed c. 1730. One of the two doors provided entrance for men into the bar area, and the other entrance for women into the dining room. The inn was the site for many a hoedown, for dances for soldiers training at Indiantown Gap during World War II, and for other activities not as reputable. The village of Harper’s Tavern takes its name from this inn. (Photograph by Amos Long.)

who were lodging for the night. Thus many hours were spent drinking, eating, relating anecdotes and adventures, playing practical jokes, and otherwise engaging in any act out of which some fun could be extracted. Here, also, there may have been a communal sharing of the cup extended to hospitable drinking with strangers.

Generally there was plenty of good whiskey to be had, not in bottles in those days, but in barrels with spigots. Usually drinks were measured out by the attendant behind the bar. In some instances, however, particularly in the stage stand or inn, the traveler was privileged to either pour his own drink, or to specify the quantity he wanted. The inn served, among other beverages, strong beer, porter, gin, ale, wine, brandy, rum, metheglin, cider, punch, grog, toddy, and no end of mixtures of which some of these form a base.

Since beer was the common drink of the first settlers, many of whom drank water only from necessity, they soon arranged to produce or import stronger liquors, which were consumed in the home as well as the inn. Cider was the most common drink and a substitute for water among the colonists in Pennsylvania. Rivaling in domestic use the beer of their European homeland, it was served in many forms and was consumed all during the winter; and diluted with water and sweetened and flavored with nutmeg, it made a delightful summer drink. Ciderkin was made by pouring water over the solid dregs (left after the cider had been pressed from the pomace), which were then pressed over again. This beverage was especially suitable for children, particularly when small amounts of molasses and ginger were added to it.

Cider was not only consumed in the home and in the field, but also at weddings, funerals, and other public gatherings. The apple crop was largely devoted to the making of cider, hard cider, and vinegar. It took large amounts of cider to supply a family when each member drank freely, and large quantities were stored in barrels for winter use. So great was the demand for cider in many areas of settlement that apple orchards were deemed one of the most important aspects of buying or renting property. As the number of orchards increased and the fruit became more plentiful this commodity became cheaper, although the price of cider was always influenced largely by the size of the apple crop.

Cider making was obviously an important industry, and most villagers possessed cider mills, cider presses, and cider troughs; these were listed in many estate in-
Fenwick Tavern, an early frame structure earlier known as Shirk's Hotel, is located on Route 422 west of Lebanon; it was an important stopping point on the turnpike connecting Philadelphia and Harrisburg. A secret entrance in the rear allowed women to enter inventories. Perry (made from pears), peachy (from peaches), and mead (made by fermenting honey and water) were also sold in some inns and used in Pennsylvania German homes; they have now disappeared. Large amounts of wine, particularly those made at home were also consumed. Among the most common were grape, blackberry, wild cherry, currant, elderberry, plum, and dandelion. The writer recalls helping his paternal grandmother pick dandelion flowers by the basket to make dandelion wine, which was used mostly for medicinal purposes.

Although the temperance societies never won much favor with the Pennsylvania Germans (for except among the Plain sects few are teetotalers), their passion for food was never matched by a similar one for drink. Not too many of them were extremely heavy drinkers or drunks. Drinking after curfew and on the Sabbath was frowned upon, and those who did so were frequently fined. But many were in the habit of drinking, and morning bitters were commonly taken, as was a dram before meals. Even though a great quantity of rum was brought into Pennsylvania, beer has also always been a popular drink with the Pennsylvania Germans, and many breweries were in existence in colonial times; nearly every city had one or more. Many of these have vanished, although there are still some breweries, distilleries, and wineries to be found in the Dutch country. Home-brewed beer was also made and consumed, but it was not as popular as cider and stronger liquors. Many of our colonial forebears seem to have preferred a more fiery mixture for the full gratification of their tastes. And speaking of tastes, cigarettes or "tailor mades" (which were available for sale at the inn before they became available elsewhere) were another attraction for some of the inn's patrons.

Many inkeepers provided accommodations for animals as well as for humans; for not only was it necessary to house travelers' horses, but relays of horses were kept at some roadside inns as well, so livery stables were to be found close by and were an important adjunct to the business. Besides the horses used on coaches, the innkeeper usually had several others for the use of travelers and other patrons; it was a place where villagers could hire a horse and sometimes a cart, wagon, buggy, sulky, or sleigh.
The village watering trough in Schaefferstown Square was a favorite gathering place, and was no doubt used by patrons of the local inn, also located on the Square. (Drawing by Florence Starr Taylor; copyright Lebanon Steel Foundry.)

In addition to the livery stables, frequently a privy, a springhouse, a smokehouse, or other outbuilding was annexed to the main building or stood nearby. And, many early inns had a lean-to attached to the side or rear that was used for many different purposes. Most inns also had a pump and water trough in the front or side yard for the convenience of travelers and drovers; and often an old bell, which was used to call guests to dinner, hung above the building. In the nineteenth century almost every inn had its flagpole and religiously displayed the national flag.

Many of the old inns were flanked on each side of the front dooryard with low-spreading hardwoods or evergreen trees; and one or more flower gardens with many shades and hues might also be found in this same area. Benches, beneath trees with wide-spreading branches or among the evergreens surrounding the inn, provided a cool sanctuary—a place to rest through the hot afternoon or evening twilight. Half hidden among the branches, one could enjoy a refreshing drink or watch the horsemen, cartsmen, and sturdy pedestrians come and go. Usually the porch was lined with onlookers, and often crowds were gathered around the building, particularly when a coach arrived.

The arrival and departure of the stagecoach was a matter of considerable excitement. Many of the patrons considered it a treat to witness the dashing vehicle with its four fine, dust-covered horses rumble and rattle over the rough country road. A flash of color and noise frequently gave warning of its coming long before its appearance at the doorway of the inn, and a snapping of the whip and a loud ‘whoa’ from the ruddy-faced driver meant the coach had arrived. Such arrivals were a weekly, bi-weekly, or tri-weekly event.

Frequently also as the coach approached the inn, the driver would blow a bugle or horn, and its shrill sound echoing over the hills alerted the guest and others inside the inn to prepare for the coach’s arrival. Generally the landlord-innkeeper with his smiles and graces stood ready to welcome the tired, dusty, and uncomfortable passengers as they stepped from the coach and stretched their limbs, happy to have arrived safely. In fact, sometimes even before the driver had come down from his seat after throwing the reins to a ready stableboy or livery attendant, the hostler would have the coach door open and be ready to assist the determined passengers to alight.

As the new arrivals entered the inn, local patrons,
prompted by idle curiosity, waited in the hope of hearing bits of news or the gossip of the day from other parts. The driver of the coach was perhaps the most important individual because he, more than anyone, carried news and scandal. This he had gathered on the way, when he stopped and indulged in a drink or two at a bar in order to refresh his dust-parched throat, or while he waited for a meal or perhaps for the horses to be changed. Likewise he was familiar with the passengers on the coach and their destinations; and his coach carried packages containing articles or mementos from distant relatives, friends, or suppliers, which often brought cheer or good will to the recipients.

After a visit to the lavatory and toilet, the passengers perhaps had something to eat and drink while the relays were being substituted for the exhausted steeds (if this was a relay point). Then followed the reembarking, a cracking of the whip, and perhaps a sounding of the horn as the stagecoach and its refreshed travelers resumed their journey and again raced speedily on toward the next inns or relay stations where the same scenes would be reenacted until the end of the trip.

If the stop happened to be late in the day and a long journey was involved, the stage frequently remained over at the inn until early the next morning. Again eager villagers mingled with the arrivals for any news from more distant areas. In such instances the passengers may have been under the necessity of agreeing amongst themselves for bedfellows, since the chamber accommodations were not always sufficient. When the stage remained over at the inn for the night and an early departure was scheduled for the morning, some of the travelers spent the night in the barroom area sleeping on a chair in order to be prompt when the stage departed for its intended destination.

At inns where regular stops were not scheduled, a flag, ball, or other signal was used to stop the stage for passengers or mail. Some innkeepers used a large ball which, when lowered, was a signal to stop; but when the ball was hoisted to the top of the post, a "high-ball" meant no stop. Thus the vernacular expression "highballing"—indicating express-like speed—became common transportation slang. (The same idiom became popular during the railroad age when express passenger trains "high-ballled" past non-passenger trains.) Stagecoach drivers soon learned of the best and least expensive places to eat along their route of travel, and made every effort to stop there. In addition to the authorized travelers' inns, there was usually a teamsters' and drovers' tavern close-by which was noted for its food and drink.

It was not uncommon for the area surrounding the early inn to be crowded with long lines of teams, stages, wagons, and droves traveling in one direction or another. In fact, it was a common sight at certain times to see as many as fifty wagons standing nearby an inn. During the early days of public transportation, the inn was to the stage lines what the depot was to the railway systems: the agency where the prospective traveler recorded his or her name, place of destination, and other information in a book provided by the stage line. And distances were reckoned from inn to inn, instead of from the towns in which the inns were located.

** * **

In former times signboards were a conspicuous and distinguishing feature of all inns, particularly during the pre- and post-Revolutionary War period. Painted on wood or metal, they were very ornate. Usually without print, they depicted an emblem, replica, or pictorial illustration to indicate the name of the inn: Black Bear, Black Horse, Red Lion, Spread Eagle, and Green Tree are but a few examples. Rural landscapes, patriotic symbols, horses, coaches, sporting subjects, beasts, birds, Indian chiefs, and ships were also favorites for inn signs. Many teamsters and travelers alike could not read or write, and many, many Pennsylvania Germans had difficulty with English, but they could all recognize a picture or symbol and would stop at an inn bearing a particular sign.

Before the time of named streets and numbered houses, and when relatively few people could read, painted and carved signboards and figures were more useful than at present; and not only innkeepers, but people of all trades and callings sought for signs that would attract the eyes of the customers and visitors. In addition to wood and metal, stone, terra cotta, and plaster were also used for making signs. The larger the settlement and the inn, the more imposing, elaborate, artistic, and ornamental were the signs. After the Revolutionary War this changed, and signs became more original or unique. Few references to the sign itself are to be found in the annals of Pennsylvania history, but the fact that they were in common use has been well established. (Although certainly not every named tavern had a sign.)

The history of signboards dates back to the time of the Egyptians. The Greeks and Romans also used signs to attract attention, and it was "from Roman tavern signs that the English derived the earliest symbol used for this purpose; the bush. The bush was discarded as more prosperous times came to the inn, and if there was enough in the name to preserve it, the sign was lettered 'Ivy Bush' or 'Green Bush' and this name given to the house." The practice of naming inns and using signs "was brought to the colonies from the continent where inns flourished everywhere and where signboards had reached a high grade of artistic merit and had also become a great nuisance on account of their number and enormous proportions."

Perhaps in order to prevent this same situation from developing, legislative authorities in some areas of Pennsylvania stipulated rules concerning sign placement. And, when the tavern was licensed, such signs were evidence of an authorized house of entertainment; if for
any reason the innkeeper’s license was revoked, the sign was also removed. Generally, the signboard was hung on or in front of the inn; or perhaps it swung from a yoke on a high pole. When the wind blew many of these signs swung to and fro, and at night their creaking scared some of the inn’s occupants. It has also been reported that in more than one instance during periods of high winds, signs were blown loose from their fastenings and injured—or even killed—passers-by. And, in some areas where signboards used by inns, taverns, and other business firms were so prevalent that they were declared public nuisances, there were instances when orders were issued for them to be removed.

The universal use of signboards furnished employment to many painters during the period when inns were the most prosperous. Even artists of reputation were known to paint inn signs; Benjamin West, for example, painted many such signs in the vicinity of Philadelphia. 10 In addition to the name of the inn, the name of its owner or founder, the date of its founding, and perhaps a slogan might also have been found on the signboard. Or, it was not unusual for an innkeeper to add, beneath the symbol on his sign, some rhyming or enticing words calling attention to the excellence of his establishment’s food and drink, or to the homelike comforts it afforded. Still, some had only a painting, and some had only the name lettered upon a rudely-constructed signboard.

When this signboard became worn and indistinct from long exposure to storms, sunshine, and other climatic influences, it was turned over to a sign painter for repair. There was no prescribed rule of orthography, and if the painter doing repairs covered the whole area with paint and blotted out the original data, he was not always careful to replace the words as he had found them. But as education progressed, and as road signposts were erected and houses were numbered, signboards were not as necessary and many old ones were not replaced. Some continued to be used as a means of identification, or because patrons were so used to them, but most early signboards simply disappeared; and those that do remain are usually in museum or historical society collections.

Not as well known as the inn signs are the barroom and bedroom signs used within, many with German inscriptions and beautifully decorated. One such inscription, found on a bedroom sign at the Pleasant Valley Inn near Bethlehem (where General Lafayette is reputed to have slept in 1777, reads as follows: 11

Lasst mich in Ruh in meiner kammer befreit von
lernun und von Jammer, diss ist der ort zu meiner
Ruh, biss ich einst thu die augen zu.
Translated, it reads:

Let me rest in my chamber free from shouts and wailings, this is the place for my repose, until at length mine eyes I close.

A barroom sign in the same inn reads:

Mein Freund ich bitte dich verschone mich mit
borgen,
Dieweils ver mich und dich es nur allein macht
sorgen;
Ich hab geborgt bisser gar oft und auch sehr viel,
Doch wann ich geld begehr, kein mensch bezahlen
will,
So will ich kunfftighin das borgen unterlassen,
Ob du in deinem sinn dessfals mich gleich wirst
hassen,
Dann es viel besser ist, des freunds sein erster Zorn,
Als gar zuletz das geld zusammen dem freund
verloren.

A poetic translation reads:

My friend, I entreat thee, excuse me from trusting,
Since for me and thee to borrow brings sorrow.
Oft have I trust given, e’en up to this day,
But when I want money no one will pay.
Therefore in future from trusting I’ll cease,
E’en though for this reason I may thee displease
For it is much better at first to offend,
Then at last to lose both money and friend.

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Licenses for operating inns were granted by provincial and, later, state authorities. In a few cases an inn may have been open for some time before a license was obtained or sought, but generally no one was allowed to operate a public house of entertainment without a license. Indeed, “as early as 1763 [in Pennsylvania] an application was made to the Governor for the regulation of inns, in which it set forth, that one only should be in a defined distance, or in proportion to as many inhabitants, that the bar rooms should be closed upon the Sabbath Day, as it would tend to prevent youth from committing exercises to their own ruin and [to the] injury of their masters and the affliction of their parents and friends.” 12

County courts were expected to determine the number of inns to be licensed within the county, and to fix their rates. In some cases, in order to get a license, the applicant had to be “passed by selectmen, and be possessed of a comfortable estate.” 13 The applicant for a license to maintain an inn usually also required a number of recommenders, and whether or not the license was granted or refused frequently depended upon the influence of such individuals.

Licenses for taverns were obtained on condition that “good rule and order be maintained,” and some games—such as cards and the use of dice—were judged unlawful and were prohibited. Although jollity was frowned upon, there were those who did engage in some friendly but unlawful games. Innkeepers who permitted drunkeness and other irregularities were liable to a fine,
as were those who were given to excessive drinking. Stiff fines were levied for infractions. And, although community officials were anxious that inns be opened, in some instances their attractions did cause some villagers to forsake the meetinghouse on Sundays. In consequence, some innkeepers near houses of worship were required to close on Sundays and other church days in order to promote better conduct and church attendance. There were also complaints in some areas that the influence of the tavern was demoralizing the community.

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The innkeeper during colonial days may not have been the most important local citizen, but he was almost always well-known, usually extremely popular, and frequently considered to be one of the officials of the village. A successful innkeeper had to be good natured and able to take a joke, for his patrons, whether local or traveling, soon became aware of his personality. Many were picturesque, cheerful, and obliging individuals; some were even entertainers in their own right. Contact with so many different people sharpened his wits, and it took a shrewd customer to take advantage of the innkeeper in conversation or in trade.

Like the storekeeper, the innkeeper exercised great power in political affairs. He often held public office, serving in the legislature, or as a councilman, road commissioner, tax assessor, tax collector, or constable; or even having a combination of these duties. Soldiers and officers in the militia, or old soldiers and retired military men were among those who frequently kept an inn. Active military men who were also innkeepers sometimes established their headquarters at the inn, thus combining business and pleasure. Obviously, then, most innkeepers were well-informed on public matters, and many enjoyed the confidence of their patrons on private matters as well. Some were excellent penmen and their services were constantly in demand by their neighbors; some acted as schoolmaster on occasion for the children of patrons who frequented their house. There were also innkeepers who served as band leaders on training or squadron days; who led the singing in the meetinghouse on Sunday, or who furnished the sacramental wine for church services.

Some innkeepers along stagecoach routes became closely associated with (or partners in) coach lines, and furnished teams which were relayed from inn to inn. (Such teams were changed approximately every ten or twelve miles, usually at an inn.) Some landlords had been wagoners and understood and catered to the tastes of drivers. Some innkeepers were also farmers, and tilled their own land in addition to helping their wife run the inn business. Others were antiques dealers who furnished their rooms with their wares, and sold individual pieces as interest was shown.

Women, too, kept inns from the early days of the colony. Widows abounded, for life in colonial Pennsylvania was often difficult, exposure was great, and many men died in middle age. As a result, many widows opened their house to the public. Many female innkeepers were more than competent and became skilled in business affairs. Innkeepers in general ranged from those who were frugal and thrifty and acquired great wealth, to those who were extravagant and wasteful and forced to spend their declining years in poverty.

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Most of the inns in colonial Pennsylvania were reasonably comfortable and their staffs hospitable. But there were exceptions, of course. There were inns that were uninviting and dirty; that were cold in winter and hot in summer; that harbored swarms of flies and mosquitoes; and where mice and rats were common. Some early inns offered few accommodations aside from shelter and regular meals; travelers sometimes brought their own blankets and bed provisions. It was not uncommon for a wagoner to enter a wagon stand late at night and find much of (or even the entire) floor covered with men wrapped in blankets, sleeping or trying to sleep. In such cases it was often impossible for the newcomer to approach the fireplace to warm himself from the cold outdoors.

At some of the early inns there were generally one or more blacks or Indians who had drifted to the inn for food, drink, and shelter, and who had lingered on and worked as attendants in the livery stable. On the whole, Indians were not as useful in and around the inn yard as blacks, who showed more love and concern for the animals. Indian women frequently proved better helpers than their men, and both black and Indian women often helped in the inn kitchen, particularly when there was an extraordinary demand for meals on short notice. They also helped with such routine chores as soap and candle making during the spring and fall of the year.

If there was no liveryman or stableboy available, travelers had to feed, water, and house their own horses and livestock. And other service at early inns was often slow or unsatisfactory until the traveler had satisfied the curiosity of his host on questions concerning his home, business, and destination. It was more than idle curiosity, however, for “prior to 1700 innkeepers were required to notify officers of the law when strangers sought lodging.”

Speaking of service, many early inns had a small box nailed to the dining room wall. This box had an opening in the top, and easily-read letters inscribed on the front which read “To Insure Promptness”; it was expected that guests would drop into this receptacle such amounts as their inclination prompted. Not infrequently, some inn employee would remind a careless guest of the “tip”
DID YOU EVER FIGHT BEDBUGS?

In the days before there were automobile clubs and other groups and organizations to provide information and rating services for the wary traveler, finding suitable lodgings was always a risky business. Just how risky is graphically (if not always correctly) spelled out in the following letter, which appeared in the Easton Free Press in 1871. The newspaper prefaced the letter by noting that “the following epistle was received from a travelling patent-right man. We copy it verbatim.”

Catsauqua, August 3, 1871.
Mr. _____: Dear Sir: __ This morning finds me at this Place and I am glad of it for I have left the most gods forsaken place that there is on the top of the Earth that is Lehighton I never suffered as much in fore weaks in all my life as I did there with the Dutch and bed bugs I must of don somthing at Strouds­burgh for god has punished me very hard for the last fore weaks I often wished I could of just set down to Jacob Shavees table in order to hav got a square meal and then talk about sleep did you ever fight bed bugs my God if I hadnot of bin game they would of carried me out of the rume but I fought them like a man and I slade thousands of them and you had ought of sene the blud that was spilt. But it was all my one [own] the varments took the advantage of me they would watch until I would git a naping and then they would make a rade on me and they fill themselves before I could farley git a poison to fight I sto pt with a long lank narow contracted Dutchman beny the Name of ____ becaus I could stop cheap I dont want eney more cheap Houis.

Free Press
August 11, 1871

box’s existence; the money thus collected was taken out at intervals and divided among the servants of the house. The box finally disappeared and in its place we now have the outstretched hand.

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Most of the old country inns of the nineteenth century provided a modest table with good, plain country cooking; and most of the patrons of those inns were hearty eaters and drinkers. At the better inns very liberal and excellent dinners were served, and one nineteenth century European traveler noted that Americans lived in a much more luxurious manner than their Old World brethren; that the meals served in American inns were composed of too great a variety and quantity to be conducive to good health.

One room in the inn was usually set apart for eating, and at mealtimes all those at the inn sat down together—even the innkeeper and his family joined the patrons for the meal. Table manners were generally very crude, and patrons were expected to take care of themselves in the dining room. Seemingly, it was understood to be one’s individual responsibility to insure that he got at least his share of the meal. In some inns the sour odors of the barroom and the even more penetrating odors of the outdoor privy and barnyard manure, helped destroy the full enjoyment of the savory dishes which were served.

Many of those savory dishes were to be found at Pennsylvania German inns which usually served a plentiful supply of delicious food. Some of the mouth-watering offerings served in addition to the many side dishes were: pork, sauerkraut, and dumplings (Schpeck, Sauerkraut und Knepp); ham, apple slices, and dumplings (ShunkelflAYSCH, Schnitz un Knepp); chicken potpie (Hinkel Bothoi); ham and green beans (Shunkelflaysch un Greena Bona); boiled cabbage (Weiss Kraut); fried sausage and potatoes (Bratwurst un Grumbera); chicken corn pie (Hinkel Welsconn Boi); chicken corn noodle soup with rivelis (Hinkel Welsconn Nudle Supp mit Riwwele); stuffed pig-stomach (Gefullde Seimaage); ham and bean soup (Shoonkaflaysch un Bona Supp); potato and bread filling (Grumbera un Brot Fillsel); brown flour potato soup (Brauni Meh! Grumbera Supp); mush and pudding (Mush un Leyerwasch); scrapple (Pannhaas); spiced soured tripe (Kuttelfleck); pigs-feet jelly (Tzitterli); bacon dressing and dandelion (Schpieck un Bidderer Salaat, Pissbett); cup cheese (Haffekaes); and buttered noodles (Schmeltze Nudlea). In addition there were such things as apple butter (Lottwaerrick); cottage cheese (Schmierkase); potato doughnuts, (Fasnachts); apple dumplings (Apfekloez); funnel cakes (Drechder Kuche); shoofly pie; green tomato pie; snitz pie; corn pone; and chow-chow.

Some of the inns in later years had a counter in the barroom or parlor which was used to serve lunch and coffee. The better inns always had a great room, main room, or parlor. Frequently it ranked as the main part of the establishment. It was generally used as a sitting room for women travelers, and occasionally was reserved for the exclusive use of an individual or family. The parlor was not as festive a place as the barroom, but in the cold winter season a glowing fire in the open, cavernous fireplace (which took up nearly the entire end of the room) gave the furnishings a look of good cheer and warmth. The flames which shot up from the huge, heaped logs in the fireplace blazed and crackled, sending
showers of sparks up the great chimney. All this tended to make one feel comfortable, snug, and welcome. The wind whistled down the chimney now and then, perhaps blowing smoke into the room.

The large chimney with its numerous hooks also provided a place to hang firearms, and the curious little drawers at the side of some provided a place for pipes and tobacco. In the summertime, the fireplace was frequently filled with green shrubs, or logs were piled neatly upon the firedogs or andirons.

Another indispensable article found among the furnishings of most inns and which stood or was hung by the fireplace was the flip iron (also called a flip dog, bottle or loggerhead) which was so often used in the concoction of certain drinks. When the flip iron was heated and thrust into the liquor, it gave it a peculiar, bitter flavor which was much sought after by those who enjoyed such beverages. Sometimes the flip iron became worn or broken from frequent heatings or other causes, and had to be turned over to the skillful hand of the village blacksmith for repairs.

A table or writing desk, oftentimes with a slanting lid which could be raised, would also usually be found in the parlor or main room of the inn. On the top stood an inkhorn, a sandbox, and a quill box. Here a traveler could write a letter, and here the innkeeper kept his books. The account book was used to record the various transactions which the proprietor had with his customers, and there were registers which often contained interesting comments from the guests. Some of these curious old records are yet preserved, and from them the researcher can get a glimpse of everyday life in an era now long gone.

After signing the register upon their arrival at the inn, guests were shown to their room. Bedrooms, which were usually located upstairs and downstairs in early country inns, were often shared by several people—even perfect strangers of both sexes; there was no such thing as a private room. Usually travelers did not undress completely; they merely removed hats, coats, shoes, and perhaps their outer clothes. Posted rules such as those stating that no boots were to be worn in bed or limiting the number allowed to sleep in one bed, were expected to be adhered to.

Most of the bedrooms were small and contained one or two single or double beds, and a small table and perhaps one or more chairs or stools; but there may have been as many as six or eight beds in the room, depending on its size. Patrons, even in the better inns, often had to submit to being crammed into rooms where there was scarcely sufficient space to walk between the beds. The bedroom usually had a bare floor, whitewashed walls, and plain curtains or no curtains at all. Quilts were often used as bed coverings, but sheets were seldom used except in the better inns, and then they were changed infrequently. (Happy was the guest who arrived on the day the sheets were changed.) If the inn had a best room for honored guests, it had a large feather bed, blankets or a coverlet, pillows and pillow cases, and a cotton rug on the floor.

Bedbugs were unwelcome guests in inns (and private homes as well), so bedsteads were sometimes made from sassafras wood. It had a strong, aromatic smell which helped to control or even expel these nuisances. Generally bedbugs were not a problem among the Pennsylvania Germans, whose establishments may have had meager furnishings, but where cleanliness and tidiness most often prevailed.

As already mentioned, each inn had its own particular class of patrons whose needs and requirements were catered to by the proprietor; this meant that sleeping conditions varied considerably among the different establishments. When a wagoner arrived at a wagon stand where he planned to spend the night, he usually went to the barroom, had a drink, then checked to find a corner or some other unoccupied section of the floor where he could spread out his pallet. This done—and trouble stirred if anyone attempted to move it once it was placed—he was assured of accommodation, so he ran his wagon into the backyard. After the harnesses were removed, the horses were tied to the wagon, to a nearby tree or post, or on either side of the wagon tongue on which the feed troughs and feed were placed. This saved the cost of stabling.

Many such wagon teams were seldom, if ever, sheltered inside a barn or shed, except perhaps during the most tempestuous weather. Most wagoners felt that the weather did not harm the horses in any way, because of the quality and stamina of those selected. The horses were fed grain that was brought along, or purchased at the inn at a small margin of profit to the host. The wagon stand host also had the benefit of the manure which he could sell, trade, or use on his own land.

But the greatest profit realized by the wagon stand proprietor was from the sale of alcoholic beverages. For after the wagoner cared for his animals he returned inside, got his own dinner, and joined the other men drinking in the barroom or playing cards on the porch. The evening was spent in a convivial atmosphere with others of his kind, for often thirty or more wagoners spent the night at the same inn. Usually they would have several drinks of whiskey or bitters before finally retiring to their beds on the floor. One eighteenth century traveler reports seeing wagoners “in a room next to the kitchen, all lying on the floor in a circle, their feet to the fire, each one on one or two bags of oats which they have with them to feed the horses on the way; they were covered with a poor blanket, no cap, and all dressed;—this lodging did not cost them anything—the inn keeper gave
Conestoga wagons were used to haul freight, and many wagoners were farmers who went on the road after their crops were harvested in the fall.

them this shelter to be able to sell them the small quantity of liquor they buy. 16

The wagoners would rise early to feed and care for their animals, and after breakfast they harnessed the horses and started out again on their often tiresome journey. They would not stop again, except at a stream or another inn to water their horses and, perhaps, to get a drink (frequently alcoholic) for themselves, until they arrived at another wagon stand at the end of the day. They usually ate only two regular meals a day, in the morning before leaving the wagon stand, and in the evening after arriving at such a stop. (It should be noted, too, that there were wagoners who did not patronize wagon stands; they slept outdoors, under their wagons, summer and winter.)

Many wagoners were also farmers, and tilled the soil during the spring, summer, and early fall. After the crops were in, they took their teams and went on the road as wagoners until the next spring when they returned to the soil. As one historian has noted: "It is a matter of record that many of our farmers or their sons by this means cleared the incumbrances off their homesteads."17 The wagoners transported flour, grain, and other bulky products to Philadelphia and other large cities. On the return trip they carried freight for the merchants of the inland country.

Wagoners and drovers were hardy men, noted for their endurance. Particularly well fitted for their occupations, they were generally honest, industrious, and trustworthy. Most of them were also addicted to the constant use of whiskey, but they rarely became such victims of its baneful influence that it interfered with their work. The wages of teamsters were very meager compared to present-day standards, yet by thrift and frugality many were able to save enough to purchase a wagon and team of their own within a year or two; some even had more than one team on the road. After delivering their freight, if they owned the team or not, for the return trip some would purchase and transport basic commodities and sell the merchandise on their own.

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In addition to their regular patrons, all inns also accommodated unusual customers from time to time. The stagecoach inn, forced in an emergency to house a drover, admitted that drover only under the condition that he leave early in the morning before the coach guests should see him. Emigrants moving westward also sometimes found it necessary to find lodging. Seeking a new home west of the Alleghenies, a family usually started out in a horse-drawn wagon which contained their few
household goods and such farm implements as could be conveniently carried. In warm, fair weather they would usually sleep in the wagon or beside the road (their stop being made near a spring or creek where a fire could be built and a scanty meal prepared). But in times of emergency and extreme weather conditions they were forced indoors and stopped—for economy’s sake—at wagon or drove stands; if neither of these was available they too stayed at an inn.

In fact, during severe weather many travelers found their way to the country inn. During a heavy snowfall many inns were open all night to accommodate those stranded on the road and those arriving late. If travelers were detained for several days as they sometimes were, many spent their time frolicking, dancing, and drinking. Sometimes transients stopped at an inn simply because they were cold and wet; they sat in front of the fire, and perhaps had a drink, while they warmed themselves and waited for their clothes to dry.

Many people fleeing from Indians also took refuge at an inn, some as late as the middle of the eighteenth century in Pennsylvania. In later years, Indians also visited the inns as guests, though hardly welcome ones, since they usually clamored for strong drink. Stories have been told of Indians who spent the entire day gathered around the fire in the great rooms of local inns.

After the coming of the railroads, if an inn was located close to a depot or track it was common practice to have the train stopped to allow the passengers a few minutes to purchase refreshments if they so desired. There was much rushing into the barroom for drinks, or into the lunchroom for a sandwich or perhaps a doughnut and coffee. For a few minutes the inn was packed until a bell rang and the conductor who had issued an “all out” call earlier, now called “all aboard,” and the train began to move—with passengers frequently left to scramble into the cars (with their food and drink in hand) as best they could.

There was, in fact, a constant stream of visitors passing through the doors of these old inns—some distinguished, some picturesque, some unwanted; for the inn served as a gathering place for scores of folks going about their various kinds of individual business, and for those simply looking for pleasure. (Even in those days there were people who liked good living and could afford to go where it was to be had.) Salesmen—variously called railroad tourists, trade interviewers, solicitors, knights of the grip, drummers, agents, missionaries, and commercial tourists—were regular patrons of the inn; and some itinerant workers and hired men from neighboring farms lived there when there was no room at the farm home where they were employed.

And, like the general store, the inn was habitually frequented by village idlers and roisterers who often delighted in playing practical jokes on some of the inn’s attendants. Tramps, too, were regularly found in the barroom and inn yard, and not surprisingly, many arguments, and rough, riotous fights and brawls broke out from time to time, especially in the lower class wagon stands. Indeed, there are many gruesome tales of crimes and tragedies said to have been committed within the precincts of the less reputable roadside establishments. There have been stories concerning the disappearances of itinerants and drovers who stopped for lodging with full purses. And there is no doubt that at some places it would have been very unwise for a lone traveler known to have a large amount of money in his possession to remain overnight; especially if he was addicted to alcohol and not particular about his company.

A great deal of disruptive and disorderly behavior took place during elections or at other times of public excitement. Then the inn was filled with drunken men who made a frightful uproar, and with their raucous laughter and ribald humor assaulted the ears of many of the guests far into the night. Physical assaults, too, were not uncommon, and the story is told of one patron, a farmer, who was beaten and embarrassed by another customer. After the assault the victim went directly to the stable outside the inn, sought out the vehicle in which his tormentor had arrived, took out its linch pin and hid it. Details of exactly what happened after the traveler who provoked the trouble left have not been preserved, but it was reported that along the roadside there were indications that the injured party got his revenge.

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From 1700 until the time of the American Revolution, the customary charge at an inn ranged from seventy-five cents to one dollar per day.18 (The innkeeper would very likely charge more for his services if the patron arrived at the inn late at night rather than during the day.) The charge included lodging, three meals, a fire in winter, and as much beer and ale as the customer wanted. Rates were generally equitable at the better inns. There may have been a form of extortion on the part of some innkeepers, but in most instances rates were fair for the services provided.

In addition to providing specific services—welcome food, drink, and shelter—the inn was also the center of community activities and affairs. It played an important part in the social, political, and military life of colonial society. Apart from the church, the inn usually provided the largest room in the village. Here lectures and speeches were given, and dances and other entertainments were held. Here was a meeting place for royal governors and substantial farmers, judges and juries, clergy and laity, politicians and merchants. It was here that distinguished strangers as well as humble wayfarers were received, and where public questions, trade, theology, crops, politics, scandal, and local gossip were among the topics of discussion.
Many old inns played a prominent part in the political life of the young nation. The inn often served as a secret meeting place for patriotic bands who listened to the stirring words of American rebels, and the Revolutionary War cannot be disassociated from early taverns. (Thomas Jefferson reportedly wrote the Declaration of Independence at such an establishment in Philadelphia where he was staying at the time.) Here grievances were made known, and measures formulated to correct them. Frequently, military men were feted and feasted in the same room where they had earlier subscribed to their oaths of enlistment. Many stirring strategy meetings were held before and after the outbreak of the Revolution in inns where landlords were sympathetic to the patriots' cause. And, the news of victory or defeat was often heard first at the inn—occasions for much joy or deep sorrow. Many inns were part of our national history, and those which remain are among the most interesting reminders of an earlier era.

It was an era when there was often not a local courthouse or municipal building, so the inn was the place where public business was discussed and transacted. Public officials met here to talk over the affairs of the community, and to make many important decisions concerning legislation. In many instances, after business was completed the officials dined, often at the expense of the village; usually this was the only compensation they received.

Then, too, the parlor or another public room in the inn may, on various occasions, have served as a courtroom when court was held. This was a convenience, for it was the custom to provide suitable quarters and reasonable comfort for officials discharging their often disagreeable duties. And, in some areas jurors had to travel great distances in response to the sheriff's summons, and were allowed two meals a day at the expense of the county. Trials (and executions) might attract great crowds of people to the inn, and were probably not appreciated by the landlord.

Landlords had other sources of income as well, for in some communities the post office was located in the inn instead of the store; consequently, the innkeeper was also the postmaster. Inns also served as headquarters for political parties, and as polling places at election time; many of the first insurance and land office companies were located in them; and some served (on a temporary or permanent basis) as shipping or exchange offices for early merchants. On the subject of merchants, markets were frequently set up near an inn (subject to the local laws and regulations governing such activities), and brought the innkeeper much business—farmers coming to sell their products and buyers coming to purchase. Public auctions and cattle and other livestock sales produced the same situation.

Public notices for those sales and auctions, as well as legal, lost and found, and lottery notices; and lists of
categorization, for anything novel in entertainment or and having with him a dog trained to do tricks; after
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jurors were all posted at the inn. Many times one of the few newspapers available was also to be found here, and these had such hard usage that toward the end of their circulation it was difficult to read them. (In some cases that did not matter, for there were individuals who merely pretended to read.) In later years, innkeepers advertised in the newspaper, calling attention to hours, provisions, drinks, and other offerings and attractions. Almanacs, too, carried such advertisements, for some almanacs had almost as large a circulation as the newspapers of the period.

Lotteries, both public and private, were prevalent in earlier years, and many were drawn at the local inn. They were used by schools and colleges to increase their endowments, by towns and states to raise money to pay public debt, and by some churches for building construction and to promote public worship and advance religion. They were, in fact, used for a variety of purposes: "the interests of literature and learning were supported, the arts and sciences were encouraged, religion was extended, the wastes of war were repaired, inundation prevented, travel increased, and the burden of taxes lessened by lotteries." A citizen might not frequent the inn for business or political purposes, but he would almost certainly attend one or more of the social gatherings that were so often held there. Activities for the amusement of young and old alike were frequent: concerts; weddings; dances—usually with music supplied by local players; sleighing parties in the winter and picnics in the summer; and fishing and boating—some inns had ponds stocked with fish and provided boats and other necessary fishing apparatus. Various lodges also met at local taverns, and in some places they served as a center for fox hunts and wolf drives.

Some of the busiest and most important times at the inn were during training or squadron days. And, on occasion, there were multitudes of people assembled to hear an itinerant preacher; this often became a day of hand-shaking and a time of reconciliation. In some areas Ordination Day, when a minister was selected for the parish, became a time of great activity at the inn. And it was always, of course, the place of arrivals and departures; the place where friends and neighbors gathered to meet and greet those returning from a journey, or to bid farewell to those about to depart on one.

Some of the activities which took place at the inn defy categorization, for anything novel in entertainment or instruction was to be found there at one time or another. It was not uncommon, for instance, for a man to drift into the barroom of the inn playing a fiddle or a flute, and having with him a dog trained to do tricks; after both had performed, the hat was passed around among the bar's customers. More professional showmen were to be found there too, for the inn was a favorite place for exhibitions and performances. Trained animals of all kinds were shown by their handlers, and pictures, statues, clocks, puppets, lightening rods, waxworks, mechanical contrivances and novelties, small and amazing inventions and skills, strange animals, and even human freaks were exhibited by would-be professors and petty fakers who traveled from one inn to another.

When given the opportunity, innkeepers frequently encouraged such showmen, allowing them the use of a portion of the stable or an outbuilding if such was needed. After the invention of balloons, their ascension became a popular attraction in many villages and towns, and an area near the inn was a favorite launching place. People would come from many miles away to see interesting and novel events, and after examining the curiosities or watching the performance they would gather inside to eat and drink, thus explaining the landlords' eagerness to encourage such activities.

With the coming of the railroad the role of the country inn began to decline; the passing of the stagecoach meant the passing of many inns as well. After World War I, the roadhouse and the dance hall began to replace the inn in most places; in the Pennsylvania German areas of the state, the corner saloon and the hotel took its place. With the passage of time, more and more inns simply ceased to exist. Some of the buildings which had housed them were used as summer boarding houses, some became private residences, and some were let to tenants to prevent the property from falling into decay. Others were renovated into apartment houses or places of business; some have been altered so completely it is now difficult to detect their age and earlier use. Still others were demolished even though they were still very solid structures.

Some of the better inns, particularly those located near larger cities, were expanded into comfortable modern hotels. There also remain some which were not expanded, but which were considerably renovated and modernized in order to continue to be able to offer accommodation to travelers. Oftentimes the proprietors of these old inns are well aware of their historic value. They know such structures have survived basically because of their heavy and careful construction. The solid timber and the techniques used by their builders still assures them a longer existence than many of our modern buildings. Concerned individuals have also purchased or leased houses from the colonial era and opened them as inns because of their age and their typical features.

At the present time increased automobile traffic due, in part at least, to improved roads, has given new impetus to the inn business. There were those who opposed the building of good roads, thinking that faster travel would eliminate the need for many places of accommodation; but more traffic and more travelers have created
opportunities for old inns to prosper again. Motorists sometimes come upon them in the most unexpected places; at other times they find them without ever leaving main roads. There are still individuals who prefer the dim restfulness of the past to the neon brightness of the present; they seek out the country inn to escape the fast pace of modern life and to recall memories of departed days.

But though many of the old inns are thriving again, the arrival of the stagecoach, the cracking of the whip, and the sound of the horn are seen and heard no more.

In the past inns were the scene of continual activity; some sheltered distinguished guests, others gave their name to the community; all provided "food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty and home for the weary traveler." That day is over; the inn as an institution has largely vanished, but its importance in the history of Pennsylvania and the nation will always remain.

"Down the street at a gallop comes the stage-coach, the four big bays flecked with foam, the passengers holding on for dear life as the driver pulls up in front of the Buck Tavern with a flourish that typifies his vast importance. The year is 1830. The place is Lebanon." (Drawing by Florence Starr Taylor; copyright Lebanon Steel Foundry.)

ENDNOTES

3Ibid.
8Field, pp. 77-78.
9Field, p. 78.

11Ibid., pp. 459-60.
12Sachse, p. 11.
14Fletcher, p. 466.
15Ibid., p. 262.
16Kelsey, p. 84.
17Sachse, p. 31.
18Fletcher, pp. 474-75.
19Alice Morse Earle, Stage Coach and Tavern Days (New York, 1900), p. 203.
20Field, p. 181.
Early in World War I, regional draft boards were appointed to help smooth the induction of men called into service. A typical board consisted of three men, one of them a physician, the other two men of some standing in the community.

The photograph above, taken in 1918, shows the board (Division #4) for the southern end of Fayette County, Pennsylvania—approximately the region from Mason-town south to the West Virginia border. In the front row, left to right, are the three board members: Alfred A. Stevenson, New Geneva (my father), Dr. E.R. Ingram, Masontown, and M. Lee Titus, Point Marion. In the back row, left to right, are clerks for the board: Edwin C. Bauer, Jean Berg Pratt, Ray Gans, Katy Hearn Golf, and Isabel Fairfield.

Dr. Ingram, who gave physicals to the draftees, practiced in the Masontown region for at least 40 years before and after the war. Al Stevenson, a lifelong farmer and teamster, became the major partner in the Stevenson Coal Company, which during the war began mining the five-foot vein on the 105-acre Stevenson farm a mile north of New Geneva. Lee Titus was a businessman in Point Marion. A project he helped promote was a bridge across the Monongahela River there.

The board had an office in the Devlin Building in Point Marion. It met there periodically, as well as occasionally in the physician’s office in Masontown. After World War I, the Devlin Building was renovated, and for some years before World War II it was operated as the Devlin Hotel. The building now houses a newspaper store, a drug store, a bar, and second-floor apartments.

At meetings, one function of all draft boards was to consider and make decisions concerning petitions for deferment from service. For example, employment in a war-essential occupation was one good reason for deferment. Family hardship, in case the draftee was the major breadwinner, was another. This board’s refusal to grant one petitioner a deferment led to some ill feeling among those concerned. Yet, the draftee eventually served with honor in the military.

In a letter dated February 21, 1920, Brig. General F.D. Beary, of the Adjutant General’s Office, Harrisburg, wrote to my father that “by direction of the Governor” he was sending “a certificate of honorable relief from your duties as a member of local draft board of Pennsylvania, as of March 31, 1919.” Along with the letter came a War Department certificate, signed by Governor William C. Sproul, of Pennsylvania, and E.H. Crowder, Provost Marshal General, attesting to my father’s draft board service.

As a result of this service, Al Stevenson in the late 1920’s was invited to join The Civil Legion. This organization, with headquarters in Chicago, drew its membership from civilians who served in various war-related jobs during the 1917-1918 conflict. My father’s membership certificate is dated March 10, 1928. He remained a member until his death in 1932.
To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

Know ye, that relying upon the best and fondest confidence in the patriotism, fidelity, and abilities of

A. G. Stevenson

I do hereby appoint him a member of the Local Board for Division No. 4, County of Fayette, State of Pennsylvania. He is therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duties of that office by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging, according to the laws of the United States and the rules and regulations prescribed from time to time, by me, or by the future President of the United States of America. This appointment to continue in force during the pleasure of the President of the United States for the time being.

Given under my hand at the City of Washington, this

day of , in the Year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and seventeen, and in the one hundred and seventy-first year of the Independence of the United States.

By the President:

[Signature]

Chief Secretary of War.

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War Department

To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

This is to certify, that during the War between the United States of America and the Empires of Germany and of Austria-Hungary, was a member of the Local Board of the Selective Service System in the State of Pennsylvania, rendering faithful and efficient service, and that by reason of the discontinuance of all boards of the Selective Service System pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 18, 1917, he is, by direction of the President, honorably relieved from the duties of that office this thirty-first day of March, one thousand nine hundred and nineteen.

[Signature]

Governor

Given under our hand and seal this day of March, 1924, and in the One hundred and sixty-first year of the Independence of the United States of America.

[Signature]

National President

This Certificate of Honor Membership is presented to

Mr. A. G. Stevenson,

In Recognition of His Membership in the Civil Legion and Honorable and Loyal Service to the United States of America during the World War as a member of the Selective Service Administration.

[Signature]
For many years, stagecoach passengers bound for Pittsburgh exchanged weary smiles as they reached the summit of Laurel Ridge. The long, jolting ride from Bedford had made them restless and eager to leave their uncomfortable seats. Near the foot of the mountain their smiles broadened as they finally left the wilderness, entered Laughlintown, and saw a street lined with inns and taverns. At last the stagecoach stopped in the center of town, in front of a log-and-stone building, and the stiff-legged passengers were able to disembark and hobble toward the Compass Inn where a hot meal, warm ale, and a firm bed awaited them.

Today, although the bar no longer serves spirits and the upstairs bedrooms are unoccupied, the Compass Inn continues to delight its guests. From 1799 through the 1850s, the inn offered travelers a stopping point on a tiring journey. Today, the restored inn offers travelers a starting point on a fascinating trip back into a time when the United States was a very young nation, and western Pennsylvania was being transformed from a frontier area into a burgeoning industrial and commercial center.
Back of inn showing original log building and stone addition. Also shown is the original door to the commons room located in the stone addition. (Photograph by Thomas Metarko.)

Side view of inn showing hand-hewn logs and details of original log construction. (Metarko)
Laughlintown, Pennsylvania, is located three miles east of Ligonier, along U.S. Route 30, which in many places overlies the old stagecoach route. The Compass Inn’s history is intimately associated with the history of Laughlintown, which was founded in 1797—only two years before the inn was built. The town, originally named East Liberty, was established by Robert Laughlin, a French and Indian War veteran (in 1758 he had served as a blacksmith in Forbes’s Army at Fort Ligonier) who received the land on which the town was built as compensation for military service. In 1814, when the town applied for a post office and discovered that an East Liberty already existed, the name was changed to Laughlintown to honor its founder.

The inn was built by one Phillip Freeman who was also a veteran, having seen action in many Revolutionary War battles, including those at Brandywine and Germantown. The second owner of the inn was Robert Armor; he moved to the west from Compassville, Pennsylvania, intending to start a glass manufacturing business in Pittsburgh, but ended up settling in Laughlintown which he evidently preferred. In 1814, Armor bought the hostelry from Freeman and named it the Compass Inn after an inn he had owned in Chester County. Robert Armor and his wife raised ten children at the inn.

Until the completion of the turnpike between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, the Compass Inn’s guests were primarily travelers on nearby Forbes Road. These travelers were mostly Conestoga wagon drivers hauling freight, and drovers taking livestock to market. Occasionally a stagecoach would also brave the tortuous road, which had been carved out of the wilderness in 1758 by the British during the French and Indian War to enable them to besiege Fort Duquesne. Travelers using Forbes Road (which was, in many places along its course, deeply rutted, swampy, and log covered) certainly deserved a rest; and the Compass Inn’s location at the base of Laurel Ridge offered a convenient stopping point for travelers ascending or descending the mountain.

Many of those journeying along Forbes Road in that era no doubt agreed with John Watson Jr., who called it “the worst road I ever saw.” That observation was recorded in Watson’s Journal, dated 1811 (and now in the Ohio Historical Society’s Collection in Columbus). Describing a section of the road east of Laughlintown, Watson goes on to write: “Descending Laurel Hill, the road [is] in many places covered with logs; [I] counted 1,431 in one place—an accordion road. [We] came into Ligonier Valley, and put up for the night, ourselves and [our] horses tired.”

In addition to travelers, local iron furnace workers,
farmers, and townspeople congregated in the Compass Inn’s commons room to hear news from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia; and to enjoy spirits, food, and gambling. The inn was favorably situated within the town, being located in the center of the community and across from a general store. For a time the inn was also the post office, and that gave local folks another reason to stop by.

A boon to the inn’s business occurred in 1817 with the completion of the turnpike between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh; the new road resulted in an increase in stagecoach traffic. The turnpike, located along what is now Route 30, brought business, literally, to the Compass Inn’s front door. Business was so improved, in fact, that Armor built a stone addition to the original log structure in order to accommodate more travelers.

Ironically, in the 1850s a second wave of progress, this time associated with the emergence of the railroad, doomed the business, for the stagecoach and Conestoga wagon on which the Compass Inn depended could not compete with the faster and more efficient “iron horse.”

But, despite the end of the hotel business, Robert Armor’s descendants continued to live in the building until 1968. In all, seven generations of the Armor family called the Compass Inn home, and many mementos of their tenancy remain at the inn, including a high chair, a cradle, a family Bible, a wedding certificate, and Robert Armor’s coonskin hat.

THE INN RESTORED

In 1968, the Ligonier Valley Historical Society bought the former Compass Inn and began the work of restoring it. At the time of the purchase the log portion of the building was covered with siding, and the interior had modern furnishings. Carl E. “Huck” Schultz, who had played a major role in restorations at Hannastown, Bushy Run, Fort Ligonier, and Fort Pitt, led the restoration effort; it was completed in 1972. It was often a tedious process (in one room, for example, thirteen coats of paint were removed before the original surface came to light), but today all of the exterior of the structure—with the exception of ten per cent of the windows—is original. Inside, all of the floors are original.

The restored building is impressive, but it is only the stage on which the Compass Inn’s story unfolds. The real Compass Inn has been brought to life through a tour developed by innkeeper Ken Blose, who explains that “the inn is not just a museum with signs, it is a living thing.” The tour, conducted by guides in period costume, provides a glimpse of the lifestyles of early nine-
Reconstructed liquor serving area (bar) in commons room containing collection of bottles from western Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The tour begins in the furnished commons room where men, primarily, would enjoy not only food and drink, but talking politics and gambling as well. The inn’s original licenses are displayed on the walls: One, dated 1816, authorizes Robert Armor to operate the business and describes him as “previously recommended as a sober and fit person to keep a house for the accommodation and entertainment of travelers and others”; another license, dated 1811, “authorizes the selling of wine, rum, brandy, beer, ale, cider, and all other spirituous liquors.” Highlights of the commons room are the original bar, pewter tableware, a bench-table, and a Pennsylvania long rifle made in Ligonier.

From the male-dominated commons room the tour moves to the kitchen, where the women associated with the business would have spent a great deal of their time. They no doubt considered it a well-equipped room, with its stocks of herbs and candle molds, its sausage grinder and sugar nipper, and its tin oven and many cooking utensils which are displayed in front of the room’s large fireplace.

The ladies retiring room also contains many interesting artifacts, including the Armor family Bible (which lists births and deaths in the family from 1805 through 1888), a spinning wheel, a strip loom, and the Armor’s wedding certificate. An outstanding feature of the room—and the inn—is a black iron stove stamped “Westmoreland Furnace”; it is original to the building. (Westmoreland Furnace, which began operation in 1794, was located three miles south of Lauglihtown.) Upstairs are four furnished bedrooms containing rope beds, bed warmers, and beautiful coverlets. Guides here explain one of the less-attractive facts of nineteenth century travel: typical sleeping conditions meant beds crowded with strangers, many of whom probably had not bathed in months!

The tour also includes a memorable visit to the property’s reconstructed barn, built in 1976 on the site of the...
Commons room wall on which original liquor and operating licenses are displayed (including Phillip Freeman’s). Brown Bess, a Revolutionary war musket, hangs above Robert Armor’s original desk.

Ladies sitting room wall on which silhouettes and marriage license of Robert and Rachel Armor are displayed. Rocking chair in left foreground dates from the 18th century.
This step-back cupboard in the ladies sitting room was originally owned by General Arthur St. Clair, who served as president of the Continental Congress. (St. Clair lived his later years in the Ligonier area.) Spatterware and Armor family spoons are among the items displayed.

original structure. (Records indicate the Compass Inn had two barns, with stalls to accommodate fifty horses.) The barn houses a Conestoga wagon, a stagecoach, and various farm implements. Many people believe that Conestoga wagons (first built by the Pennsylvania Germans) and stagecoaches were only important in the development of the old west; the inn’s guides point out the significance of these vehicles in the development of eastern commerce and communication.

The Compass Inn’s Conestoga wagon, for instance, was built in 1800 and was used to haul whiskey from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg. According to an inscription on its side, the wagon would complete the trip in “12 days or bust.” The Compass Inn’s stagecoach, a Concord coach, was one of the fastest means of travel in its time; but guides also explain that stagecoach rides were usually bumpy, dirty, and tiring affairs, quite unlike the pleasant journeys enjoyed by Hollywood actors.

In addition to visiting the barn, the tour also stops at the reconstructed cookhouse which contains a beehive oven and various baking implements. At the completion of the tour, visitors are invited to look through the inn’s gift shop, which offers country-style gifts and publications on regional and local history.

And, speaking of local history, in addition to the operating licenses and marriage certificate on display, the inn’s document collection includes a vast number of Armor family letters and bills, and a guest book. Later used as a scrapbook, the guest book will be restored using a freeze-drying technique to remove materials covering the original records. The letters and bills are currently being inventoried and catalogued, processes which have led to some interesting discoveries. One of the bills, for example, describes charges incurred by one unlucky guest who had evidently imbibed too much of the host’s “spiritsuous liquors,” and as a result had the misfortune of
This black iron stove in the ladies sitting room is original to the inn. The stove was made by Westmoreland Furnace Company in 1799.

Upstairs bedroom showing collection of rope beds and period coverlets.
having “nature come upon him too quickly”; his charges included 37½ cents for cleaning him up and 50 cents for meals during his stay; he was given a credit of 25 cents for chopping wood.

Another interesting sidelight of a Compass Inn tour is the result of innkeeper Ken Blose’s interest in etymology (the study of language development and change). It is an often fascinating insight into the early American origins of many words and expressions still in use today. For instance, a “bar” received its name because in many inns the serving area for spirits had bars which were lowered to restrict access to liquor at closing time, or when patrons became too rowdy. Another expression whose origin is explained during the tour concerns the slate on which innkeepers recorded drinks served. The names of the customers were listed and the drinks served to them recorded under “P” for pints, and “Q” for quarts. At closing time the guests were advised “to mind their Ps and Qs.” And guides explain that many old stagecoach roads (such as Forbes Road) had stumps underlying their surface, and whenever the road became muddy or deeply rutted, stagecoach or wagon wheels were often “stumped”—stuck against buried wood.

In addition to the tours of Compass Inn which are offered Tuesday through Sunday, May through the end of October, there are special events scheduled; these include candlelight tours and Living History Days. Candlelight tours take place on weekends in November and December, and Living History Days (a reenactment of early American life) are held on the next-to-last weekend in June, July, and August.

Visitors during Living History Days can see volunteer craftspeople—including bakers, blacksmiths, spinners, weavers, leather workers, and tinsmiths—using traditional tools and techniques as they ply their trades. They can see bread being baked in the beehive oven, and watch as maple syrup and apple cider are made. Fiddle and dulcimer music adds to the air of festivity, although occasionally the music cannot be heard over the blast of muskets from the firearms demonstration. And, speaking of firearms, Muster Day, an event for members of the Ligonier Valley Historical Society, is based upon the tradition of mustering militia for training. Even Ken Blose, a former lieutenant colonel, usually has difficulty mustering the men for drills, but he does manage to recruit children into the flag-waving parade he leads. Muster Day participants also enjoy grog, and fife-and-drum corps music.
The number of visitors to the Compass Inn has tripled since Ken Blose donned colonial garb and became innkeeper. The improvement in business during his tenure is no coincidence, for he has been dedicated to increasing public awareness of the inn, and to improving the quality of the visitor’s experience. His efforts, and the efforts of his staff, combined with the generosity of benefactors and volunteers, are responsible for the inn’s success.

And, although Mr. Blose has utilized various publications and brochures to promote the inn, he has found that satisfied visitors and old-fashioned word-of-mouth publicity have contributed greatly to its growing popularity: “I’ve had many visitors say that they heard about Compass Inn from a friend who had enjoyed his or her visit,” he notes.

Blose, like Robert Armor who bought the business in 1814, will leave a legacy at the Compass Inn. Almost 170 years ago, Armor built the fine stone addition to the inn which visitors still admire today. Blose’s “addition” which includes the fascinating and informative tour, may not be as obvious as Armor’s, but its effects can be easily seen and heard in the faces and voices of the inn’s visitors. One of those visitors summed up his experience this way: “I was enthralled by the richness of history present at Compass Inn as conveyed by the period furnishings, artifacts, and tour. The inn freezes in time a significant period of Pennsylvania and American history.”

One cannot help but feel that Robert Armor would be glad to know that satisfied guests are once again passing through the Compass Inn’s doors—130 years after it supposedly went out of business.

ENDNOTES

1Ken Blose has retired since this was written; the innkeeper now is Polly Kenton.
2James K. Turner, of Denver, Colorado.

SOURCES

Publications:
Hyatt, R. Mrs. Biography Of Phillip Freeman. n.d.
The Laughlintown, Commemorating One Hundred Fifty Years Of History. 1947.

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James K. Turner—Compass Inn Visitor
THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN DIALECT PLAYWRITING

by William Fetterman

INTRODUCTION
Pennsylvania German dialect folk theater has been one of the greatest social and artistic forces in twentieth-century folk life; there have been many such plays written and produced since the late 1920s. And, although much of what has been done is now irrecoverable for concrete research, one way of conveniently looking at this folk theater movement is to examine the dialect playwriting contests of 1941, 1942, 1983, and 1986. Involved are fourteen plays by twelve playwrights, many of whom are among the most prominent practitioners of Pennsylvania German folk theater. The variety of subject matter produced for these four occasions is ample proof of the depth of dramatic expression that can be found within this continuing historical tradition.

All of the contests were originally created because of the very real perception of just how important folk plays have become to contemporary folk life; they were designed to provide a formal recognition of the great vitality of dialect playwriting and production within the Pennsylvania German community. By coincidence, all the contests were centered in Allentown, and this seems appropriate since Pennsylvania German folk theater has been especially prominent in the Lehigh Valley, which has seen such historical productions as the dialect version of Gilbert and Sullivan’s H.M.S. Pinafore by Moss and Newhard in 1882; Clarence Iobst’s En Quart Millich un en Hallo Beint Raahm (A Quart of Milk and a Half Pint of Cream) in 1928; the works of Paul Wieand from the 1930s and early 1940s; and the Asseba un Sabina radio skits by Lloyd Moll and the Reverend Clarence R. Rahn, broadcast from 1944 through 1954. The tradition continues at present with the plays of Ernest Kistler for Grundsow Lodge No. 1 in Northampton, and the plays of Francis Laudenslager for Grundsow Lodge No. 16 in Orefield.¹

By no means does this essay attempt to give a complete picture of Pennsylvania German folk theater during the late 1930s and early 1940s and in the 1980s. The playwrights and their plays for these contests do, however, represent the dialect folk theater during its two most active periods of production, for after the last broadcast of Asseba un Sabina in June, 1954, there was little interest among members of the community in creating new plays. The plays of Ernest Bechtel of Reinholds (Lancaster County) and Dorothy Alexander of Stiles (Lehigh County) are isolated examples of new playwrights working during the 1950s and early 1960s, but at this time it was much more common for one of Paul Wieand’s earlier plays to be performed. But since the mid-1970s there has been a resurgence of interest in writing new dialect plays, in part because of the influence of the television program Roots, and also because of the national bicentennial celebration in 1976. Indeed, contemporary dialect theater continues to grow at this writing.

This contemporary Pennsylvania German dialect theater is a decidedly conservative theater aesthetically. Almost all of its present-day playwrights, actors, and audience members are over sixty years old, and plays written today often harken back to plays written during the 1930s, which in turn harken back to the turn of the century and before. Yet it is unfair to call this folk theater a “living antique,” for there is much important and creative work still being done, and there is every reason to believe that dialect theater will continue to grow and prosper for many years to come. It is in this spirit that I offer this summation of the contests from 1941 through 1986, with the hope that there will be many more such like occasions in the future.

THE 1941 PLAYWRITING CONTEST
Since there were many people involved in writing and producing original dialect plays in the 1930s, one could call this the Golden Age of Pennsylvania German folk theater. In order to give formal recognition to the importance and vitality of this relatively recent artistic development in Pennsylvania German folk life, the Allentown Recreation Commission decided to sponsor a dialect playwriting contest—the first event of its type—in 1941. (The Commission had been sponsoring folk life pageants arranged by William S. Troxell, popular dialect columnist “der Pumpernickle Bill,” at the Allentown Morning Call, and Paul R. Wieand. These were presented by Troxell and Wieand—with the collaboration of Mrs. George Laubach in 1938—from 1935 through 1939; in 1940 the program consisted of a play, Now Wot Amohl Justice Gadoo (Now Justice Will Be Done), presented by players from Springfield Township, Bucks County.)³

Much of the material from the 1941 contest was collected by Professor Harry Hess Reichard (1878-1956) and is now housed in the Pennsylvania German Archive of Muhlenberg College. Had Reichard not had the foresight to study productions and collect play scripts, much of this primary documentation would not be available today. Among Reichard’s papers is the contest guidelines sheet issued for the occasion:
PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH PLAY WRITING AND PRODUCING CONTEST

Things You Want To Know

Anyone living anywhere is eligible to enter.

Play must be written in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect.

Play may not take longer than 30 minutes to produce. The play must have one scene only. Use music only if it is a part of the story. Original plays only will be accepted, not translations. Transcripts should be typewritten if possible and if written you should use one side of the paper only.

Play must be submitted to Irene Welty, City Hall, no later than February 1, 1941.

Winners will be announced March 1, 1941.

Plays will be produced on or about May 15, 1941 at the Pennsylvania Dutch Festival.

Every play winning a prize must be produced by the author or someone the author secures to produce it.

Prizes

A $5.00 cash prize will be awarded every play accepted. An additional prize will be awarded to the best produced play on each night of production. The evening winners will then compete with each other with an additional prize to be awarded to the winner in the finals.

Pennsylvania Dutch Committee
Rev. Thomas R. Brendle
Dr. E.J. Balliett
Percey B. Ruhe
Miss Clarissa Breinig
Mr. Wm. H. [sic] Troxell
Miss Irene Welty, Secretary

There were six entries in the contest. Three plays—Tzu Forwitsch by Paul R. Wieand, Die Nochbera Lehna by Mrs. Irwin Frantz, and 'N Inside Chop by John Young Kohl—were given in the Allentown High School auditorium on May 21, 1941. On the following day, the remaining three—Immer Uff Gawarremed Essa by Mrs. Edgar T. Fink, Wies Dehl Monseleit Gebt by Mrs. George Laubach, and Em Dr. Eisabord, Sei Satchel by Mrs. William F. Masters—were performed. The plays judged best from both evenings—those by Mr. Wieand and Mrs. Laubach—were again produced, on May 23, 1941, to determine the winner, and the entry by Paul Wieand was judged the best play of the contest.

Because of Reichard's work, five of the six playscripts are housed at Muhlenberg; the sixth script, that of Mrs. Fink, was only recently rediscovered in the files of a nephew, Daniel A. Fink, professor of art at the State University of New York at Geneseo. It will be the first to be considered in the summaries and evaluations which follow.

Edith Gerilla Romich was born in Lower Macungie Township, Lehigh County, on July 9, 1884, the daughter of Morris and Anna (Rick) Romich. On January 1, 1904, she married Edgar T. Fink (1880-1979); they had no children. Mr. Fink was a farmer for most of his life, and his agricultural work led him to be active in local Grange halls; he was also a commissioner in Lehigh County, and a director of the Allentown Fair. Mrs. Fink was also involved in rural social activities, particularly with the Macungie Grange and the Lehigh Pomona Grange; she died in March, 1966.

Edith Fink was one of the most active persons in Pennsylvania German folk theater from the early 1930s until the late 1940s. Among Reichard's unpublished papers at Muhlenberg, he lists to her credit nine full-length plays and four skits. Reichard was able to collect several examples of her playscripts, one of which, Noshions Duhn Peel (Ideas Do Plenty), was chosen for inclusion in an anthology of dialect plays he was working on from the 1940s until his death in 1956. Reichard's plan was to publish at least one representative play by each known Pennsylvania German playwright. Originally designed as a two-volume anthology, only a draft version of volume one (covering plays from the 1820s through 1941) was published; it was edited by Albert F. Buffington and issued by the Pennsylvania German Society in 1962. Despite the limitations of the abbreviated published version of Reichard's dialect plays anthology, it remains the standard source for most Pennsylvania German playscripts in print.

Mrs. Fink's entry in the 1941 contest was Immer Uff Gawarremed Essa (Always Leftovers/Rewarmed Food). The playscript is only three and a half pages long, and would take approximately fifteen minutes to perform; it was the shortest of all the 1941 contest entries. The plot is simple and peppered with slapstick humor: The Knobloch family is complaining that this is the third day in a row that the meal has been rewarmed turnips; Girilla, the farmwife, is no longer able to tolerate the mounting complaints, and the play ends when the hired hand asks for pudding rather than the proffered vegetable and Girilla lets him have it—literally—in the face! This play was not one of the contest winners.

Professor Reichard was very tactful as a critic and avoided negative judgments as much as possible, preferring instead to find value in the whole range of dialect writing. Buffington, however, was less diplomatic; he writes: "Mrs. Fink is not a great dramatist, and her plays have little or no literary merit." It is rare that a Pennsylvania German folklorist has issued such a damning statement. A different opinion is given by Pennsylvania Dutch.
German scholar C. Richard Beam: In recent conversations Professor Beam has told me he finds Mrs. Fink's work to be very interesting and significant. For what it is worth, I also think her plays are important, not because of the quality of the writing, but because she was one of the most prolific and often-produced dialect playwrights to emerge during the early 1930s—being encouraged to write dialect plays in response to the huge success of Clarence Iobst's aforementioned En Quart Millich un en Halb Beint Raahm.

I think, too, that Mrs. Fink's most interesting surviving playscript is also the most untypical piece that she ever wrote—a three act play produced to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Western Salisbury Jerusalem Church (R.D. 2, Allentown), and performed on August 6, 1941. The first act takes place in 1741, and reenacts the problems encountered in founding the church and in establishing relations with the Lenni-Lenape Indians. (Several members of that tribe came from Oklahoma for the occasion to lend authenticity to Mrs. Fink's pageant.) The second act takes place in 1819, and tells of building a new stone edifice. The third act is set in the late 1930s-early 1940s, and is an autobiographical scene which shows the Ladies Aid Society planning and promoting the author's plays in order to raise money for the church. This last act is a refreshing documentation of the way in which the works of Edith Fink (and the works of many other Pennsylvania German folk playwrights of the era) found their original impetus.

Although my general comments on Mrs. Fink's work are less than enthusiastic, I do not believe that one should single her out, as Buffington did, as a standard-bearer of mediocrity. Her plays were often produced and much in demand in the 1930s and 1940s, probably not so much because of the writing, but because audiences enjoyed the actors' performances. Mrs. Fink never had any inspirations toward becoming a great writer, but wrote her plays—as did most other dialect playwrights—to raise money for her church or for the local community. Again, like other dialect authors, she wrote plays she knew would be thought humorous, and which would be readily accepted by the audience. And, if her work does not seem very inspired, one cannot deny her creativity and sincerity of purpose.

Another of the 1941 contestants, Verna Frantz, was born in Washington Township, Lehigh County, in 1903. She married Irwin Frantz (1896-1952) and they had two children. From the latter 1930s through 1952 the Frantzes presented their collaborative "Der Silas un Die Betz" skits at their own and other Grange halls, at the Apple Butter Festival at Dorney Park in Allentown and, when called for, at various church entertainment evenings. In the last months of the Asseba un Sabina radio broadcasts in 1954, Mrs. Frantz was Paul Wieand's replacement as Sabina. After her husband's death she continued living on the farm, and later remarried; she died at seventy-one in 1974.

Verna Frantz's entry in the 1941 contest was Die Nochbera Lehna (The Neighbors Borrow). A copy of the manuscript was collected by Professor Reichard and is now housed at Muhlenberg. Reichard also provides a summary of the plot: "An easy going farmer is willing to lend anything to the city folk who have just moved
A scene from Verna Frantz' comedy Die Nocbera Lehna (l. to r.): Anna Semmel, Anna Yehl, Verna and to an adjoining farm. One day when he is not at home they come to borrow his Sunday suit and his wife gladly lends it to them and thereby effects a cure. The generous farmer's love for 'the little brown jug' provides some very amusing comedy situations." Professor Reichard also adds that, "Die Nochbera Lehna has been their most popular and best known play. They have given it twenty-seven times at various places in the Lehigh Valley.""

Although this play proved popular with audiences after its initial contest performance, it was neither the winner nor the runner-up in the competition. The script is unpublished and has not been performed since the early 1940s. It is difficult to reevaluate this play, but I feel that the script, as read, contains little dramatic interest; it does, however, feature a fluid and natural writing style of ordinary dialect conversation. And, in part because Mr. and Mrs. Frantz also played the leading roles of the farmer and his wife, it must have been a good production of the period. If talented, experienced dialect actors were to perform this play today, it would probably still receive a welcome reception from the audience.

* * *

The most knowledgeable and sophisticated theater person of all the 1941 contestants was undoubtedly John Young Kohl (1895–1974) who lived his entire life in Allentown. Kohl began working for The Morning Call in 1914, and later recalled that he got his first reporting assignment because he "could speak Pennsylvania Dutch." Kohl quickly became a leading journalist at the newspaper, and it was at his instigation that a Sunday edition first appeared on May 15, 1921. Shortly afterward he became the Sunday editor, a job he retained until his retirement in 1970; he also wrote two columns—"This and That," and "The Curtain Rises." He was survived by his wife, the former Helen Wittman, whom he married in 1915.

Kohl had several passions, including raising tomatoes, preparing cranberries, and studying Pennsylvania German folklore. His greatest love, though, was the theater. He wrote several plays in English, and was co-founder of the Civic Little Theater in Allentown in 1927; for many years he served as its president and a board member. As a journalist he was a charter member of the Outer Critics (prominent theater reviewers outside of New York City), and served on the advisory board of the American Theater Council. He also wrote articles for the New York Times in 1940 about the status of professional traveling companies outside of New York.

Kohl's 1941 contest entry was called 'N Inside Chop (An Inside Job); a copy of the script is found among Reichard's papers. The play was probably performed only once, and is unpublished. The plot concerns a Pennsylvania German pastor who has been given a trip to Germany by one of his rich parishioners, who is himself a native German. The parishioner tries to get the pastor to agree with the sentiment "once a German, always a German," and thus give tacit approval of Adolph Hitler. But the pastor declares that it is because of just such injustices and repression as are found in Nazi Germany that Germans left Europe 250 years ago to settle in Pennsylvania. In the end, the pastor is vindicated by means of a hidden dictaphone recording of the conversation, and a Nazi fifth columnist is irrefutably exposed.

Of all the 1941 contest plays, Kohl's is the only one which dealt with contemporary events and crucial social issues—in just a few months after its performance, the United States would be involved in World War II. (Kohl is, in fact, one of the very few dialect playwrights who does deal with the events and problems of his own time; most have preferred to find solace in a nostalgic past.)
Cast members in a scene from John Young Kohl's drama 'N Inside Chop (l. to r.): Henry V. Scheirer, Mrs. John A. McCollom, John W. Wernet, James Toth, and Clifford Gackenbach. (The Morning Call, May 22, 1941, p. 5.)

But even though 'N Inside Chop is a well-written dialect play it was not the winner or the runner-up; no doubt the judges found its subject matter too controversial, however correct Kohl's message appears in retrospect. And, while Kohl's play has significant historical value and is the only one of the 1941 entries which clearly reflects what people were thinking just prior to our involvement in World War II, it would probably not have much interest for an audience of the 1980s.

Apart from 'N Inside Chop, Kohl's only other known Pennsylvania German play is a short comedy called Reunion in Macungie which, despite its English title, is a gentle dialect comedy. (The title reflects his interest in professional American theater, and is a burlesque reference to the popular 1930s play Reunion in Vienna which starred Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.) A copy of the script was collected by Reichard for his files, but I have no information that the play was ever produced. Kohl's last contribution to the local theater he loved so much was his nostalgic history of vaudeville in Allen-town, published in the 1974 Proceedings of the Lehigh County Historical Society.

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The runner-up in the contest, Verna Brotzman Laubach, was born in 1898 on a farm near Easton in Northampton County. She attended public schools in Bethlehem Township and continued her education at Churchman's Business College in Easton. In 1917 she married the Reverend George J. Laubach (1892-1959) and they had one son, Dr. George B. Laubach. Dr. Laubach recalls that his mother was always interested in giving monologues and in directing plays, but he does not have any of her scripts, nor does he remember much of her work.

Fortunately Professor Reichard had studied her work, and did collect a copy of her 1941 contest entry play-script. The following are Reichard's extensive comments on Mrs. Laubach's work, which began around 1930:

Asked to provide entertainment for a family reunion of one of their parishioners... [Mrs. Laubach] worked out and produced a skit—Wie die Schtory gawachsa is [How the Story Grows]—so simply and yet so effectively at Indianland Park, that she was asked to bring another the following year—result, Die Alt ferschwapped fer en Jungi [The Old Exchange for a Young One]. Her third play had "something to do with white shoes." She remembers that her mother had told her that there were only two occasions that called for white shoes, confirmation and burial. Now, Mrs. Laubach has a theory that when something she has written has served its purpose there is no reason why she should clutter up her house with a copy of it, she is a great thrower away! Of the white shoes play she has only memory. She even tosses it out of her mind so that she often does not recall clearly what it was all about.

By this time the church called for her talent. She thinks she chose the dialect for her medium because lobst's En Quart Millich un en Halb Beind Raahn was being so well received at that time. This was a wise decision. Farmers and their wives, their sons and their daughters, villagers and even city dwellers crowded churches, schools and Grange Halls, to hear the beloved speech of the home and the family, brought upon the stage after it had suffered a temporary eclipse, even
threat of extinction during and immediately following World War I. The Women's organization of the church coined money for their various projects. One almost hesitates to quote the figures they cite. One of Mrs. Laubach's earliest plays Die Goldene Huchzich [The Golden Wedding] we are told was given some 85 times by a cast from the Howertown Church to earn between $14000 and $15000. They must have given it over and over again at the same places and repeated it year after year. This was one of Mrs. Laubach's favorites. Others were Yuscht en Bauers Maedel [Just a Farmer's Daughter] and Der Arm Bill [Poor Bill]. They tell of having discussed one of their plays with somebody who recurred that an English play given on the same stage had one or two similar situations and it turned out that it was the same play which they had translated with variations. One suspects that this may have been Der John fun da Karipsa Krick, almost a verbatim rendering of Aaron Slick of Pumpkin Creek which was very popular on the rural stage at that time and by now has won for itself an honored place on the metropolitan stage. This play too brought in a fabulous sum of money when given by a group from Snyders, a Union Church (Reformed and Lutheran) near Bath.

Mrs. Laubach explains that she usually wrote her plays in English, then brought her copy to rehearsal and cooperatively helped the actors find the best and wittiest rendering in the dialect. In this way the actors wrote down their own lines and he avoided the problem of spelling for each actor spelled as best he could for learning his lines. In this work of translating from her own English she was ably assisted by Miss Margaret Jones, an Elementary School Supervisor with an M.A. from Columbia University and a member of the Lutheran Congregation of the Howertown Church. Mrs. Laubach and Miss Jones collaborated also in directing and both carried speaking parts; Mrs. Laubach did most of the planning.

The one play of which we have the text is neither a "translation with variations," nor yet an adaptation. It is the play written for the Pennsylvania German Play Writing Contest of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival in May, 1941. It was required that the play be original and "each group entering the contest must hand in a written script beforehand." Mrs. Laubach adds: "No one ever asked me for my copy for it"; by some chance it escaped destruction. The Contest was not only for writing but also for producing the play. It is entitled Wies Dehl Monsleit Gebt [How Some Men Give]. It treats the problem of the penurious farmer who is inclined to find the easier jobs for himself, and his long suffering wife who may or may not get a new spring dress, depending on whether there is any money left after "hubby" has been to every spring farm "Fendu" [auction]. This time the wife's patience comes to an end—and she carries out her plan of leaving him and the children to their helplessness. She goes in hiding in a neighbor's house. Several of the neighbors bravely play the game with her and the villain is quickly brought to terms.

In vigorous language Mrs. Laubach played the lead character; [she] lays down the terms of the new compact, in which the wife does not take undue advantage of her victory but insists on equal duties and equal re-

The actors in the 1941 contest's runner-up play, Wies Dehl Monsleit Gebt by Verna Laubach. Seated, Mrs. Laubach and Shirley Ruch; standing l. to r. Margaret Jones, Beulah Reph, Hattie Ruch, and Annie Schaeffer. (The Morning Call, May 23, 1941, p. 42.)
An interesting moment from Irene Masters’ *Em Dr. Eisabord, Sei Satchel* finds (l. to r.) Dora Holben, George Rupp, and Helen and Betty Herbst conferring responsibilities. Language and plot are carefully moulded to the prospective actors; two children were supplied by one of the actresses and were home trained to do their stunts. The drama critic of the Allentown *Morning Call* commented on how Mrs. Laubach “brought dialect of the best and provided some very amusing comedy situations, while as director she surrounded it with a maze of authentic properties, that were very interestingly used. In the play all of the parts were played by women but they were not less robust in word of action on this account.”

In the Contest this play won the first night [sic] over Mrs. Fink’s *Immer Uffgawarmed Essa* and Mrs. Master’s *Em Dr. Eisabord Sei Satchell*. On the 2nd night [sic] Mr. Paul R. Wieand was the winner with *Tzu Forwitsich* over Mrs. Frantz’s *Die Nochbera Lehna* and Mr. Kohl’s *’N Inside Chop*. When the Wieand and the Laubach plays were pitted against each other, the presiding Judge, a Professor from Pennsylvania State College, in awarding the decision to Wieand, explained that the decision had not been unanimous, so nearly were they adjudged equal in matter and manner.

In addition to her full length plays—an evening’s performance—Mrs. Laubach produced some twenty to twenty-five shorter ones, while of monologues there have been so many that she would not hazard a guess as to their number. More recently [late 1940s—early 1950s] she has presented monologues at dinners of the Pennsylvania German Society, the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society and at the Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival at Kutztown. It is regrettable that not more of her productions have been preserved; for vigor of language and range of vocabulary her monologues are unsurpassed.\(^{13}\)

In addition to Reichard’s comments, Dr. Laubach recalls that his mother virtually ceased her interest in playwriting during the 1940s, although she continued her public speaking and church and community work. Her son also recalls that she enjoyed quilting, and that she was a very good cook. Mrs. Laubach died in 1980. Her 1941 play has never been published or circulated in mimeograph in the community, and her works have now been largely forgotten, although they are among the most significant examples of Pennsylvania German folk theater in the 1930s and 1940s.

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The only author to enter both the 1941 and the 1942 dialect playwriting contests was Irene Hummel Masters. She was born at Trexlertown in Lehigh County in 1897, and married William F. Masters (1890-1985); they had one son. For many years husband and wife taught all eight grades in country schoolrooms. In the early 1950s, Professor Reichard wrote that Irene Masters “received part of her elementary education in Philadelphia, then returned to Lynn Township, Lehigh County, Pa. She prepared to become a teacher the hard way by submitting annually to the examinations of the County Superintendent. Finally, after studying at Schmehl’s Select School, The Keystone State Normal School, Kutztown, Pa., and Deibert’s Schnecksville Academy, she won the Pennsylvania Permanent Teacher’s Certificate. She taught in various districts of Lehigh County and in the city of Allentown, now lives in retirement on their farm near Claussville . . . and devotes her time chiefly to her garden and her garden club, to her Grange and to her Church."\(^{14}\) Altogether, Mrs. Masters taught for about
Climatic scene from the winning play in the 1941 contest, Paul Wieand’s Tzu Forwitsich. Seated (f. to r.) Audra Miller, Phyllis Wieand, Ray Ritter, and Bessie Haas; standing (f. to r.) Mr. and Mrs. Frank Forgan, 40 years, and Mr. Masters taught for about 53 years. Mrs. Masters died in 1980. Mrs. Masters’ 1941 contest entry was Em Dr. Eisabord, Sëi Satchel (The Satchel of Dr. Eisabord). Apparently it was her first dialect play, although she had had previous experience with writing plays to be performed by her school students. A copy of the script is preserved among Professor Reichard’s papers at Muhlenberg. It has not been published, and was probably only performed once more—at her Grange Hall in Seipstown.

The plot begins with a vaudeville-type setting in a doctor’s office. Dr. Eisabord enters, and begins singing the familiar folk song “Ich bin der Dr. Eisabord.” There is a telephone call for the doctor to make a house call, and just before he leaves, a man enters and asks about the doctor’s various herb cures. The doctor soon vanishes from the scene, and various persons dressed in appropriate colors enter the stage in groups of three. Each person represents an herb, and they sing and speak about their particular medicinal values to the tune of the “Dr. Eisabord” song. At the conclusion each herb reiterates its specific uses.

Mrs. Masters’ play was not chosen as either the winner or the runner-up, and clearly, its structure is more reminiscent of a pageant than a naturalistic comedy. However, in hindsight her play is one of the best examples of Pennsylvania German dialect theater based almost solely on actual folklore (rather than having folklore elements woven in as secondary elements with plot and character) ever written and produced. While much of the play is in prose, it might be appropriate to also catalogue this play as a leading example of verse in folk drama.

For many people, the name of Paul Wieand, the contest winner, is synonymous with Pennsylvania German folk theater; he is undeniably one of the most important playwrights, directors, and actors within the dialect theater tradition. While Wieand was certainly not the first person to make dialect plays, his plays are the most universally known and the most influential throughout the Pennsylvania German community. He was born in 1907 at Guths Station, Lehigh County, and married Mabel Shraden in 1929; they had three daughters. Until 1954 he was a school teacher, and after that a businessman in the Pennsylvania German community. He is presently in retirement at Luther Crest, just outside of Allentown, and continues to be active in several folk cultural activities.

Wieand’s winning entry was called Tzu Forwitsich (Too Forward); it is the only play from the 1941 contest that has been published. In addition, the playscript was circulated in mimeograph within the Pennsylvania German community, and it has been produced several times by different groups. The plot concerns the everyday goings-on in a typical Pennsylvania German farm family, with the grandmother as the focus. There is not so much interest in plot as in character interaction, and much of the success of the first production was because of the closely-knit ensemble acting of Wieand’s players, who had been acting in his plays since 1933, and in his
of all the acting groups in the 1941 contest, Wieand's players had the most varied experience in actual performance. This experience, together with the inclusion of real antiques and farm items as props, and Wieand's strict attention (as director) to pacing, probably made this play the most polished production in the 1941 contest.

The continued effectiveness of the script was revealed in the most recent production of *Tzu Forwitsich*, given by the Huff's Church Group in the fall of 1987. In this production the part of the grandmother was played by Doris Lesher, one of the greatest actors in contemporary dialect theater. Her talent is particularly evident in the ease and naturalness with which she communicates both the character she is portraying and her own persona. She is 'able to convey a sense of fun as well as a profound sincerity and depth of soul. Indeed, when Lesher played the grandmother in Wieand's play there was something so correct in her portrayal that her performance emerged as both inspired and subtle.

In 1941 the part of the grandmother was played by Audra Miller (1903-1969), one of the most important performers in Wieand's group and the actor who portrayed Keturah in the *Asseba un Sabina* radio skits. Audra Miller had a snappy, determined performance persona, and much of the success of the original production was due to her presence in the role. While Audra Miller was, by all accounts, a far different personality and performer than Doris Lesher, the more quickly-styled performance of the former, or the more gently-styled performance of the latter are equally appropriate approaches to the character of the grandmother. It is this variety of possible acting interpretations which marks Wieand's script as a major achievement in dialect theater.

The power of Wieand's play is especially evident at its conclusion. Wieand included many idiomatic expressions in his dialogue, and at the end of the play Becky, a little girl, runs on stage complaining about a sore finger that was caught in the cellar door. The grandmother soothes the hurt finger by reciting one of the most well-loved and familiar examples from all of Pennsylvania German folklore:

\[\text{Haelie, Haelie, bussie dreck b} \text{is moriah free is alles weg.} \]
\((\text{Haelie, Haelie, kitten shit, by early tomorrow all is gone.})\)

When I saw *Tzu Forwitsich* performed at Huff's Church, most of the audience members joined in reciting this with Doris Lesher. This example of communal expression tells much about why this play was chosen as the 1941 contest winner, and why it has continued to hold the stage through the present.

**THE 1942 PLAYWRITING CONTEST**

As a result of the success of the 1941 contest, the Allentown Recreation Commission decided to sponsor a second playwriting contest the following year. At the bottom of the program for the third and final evening of the contest on May 23, 1941, was this advertisement and announcement:

Plays should be in the Recreation Office, City Hall, by February 1, 1942.

For additional information, call Irene Welty, City Hall.
The only other entry in the 1942 contest was Esther Billiard's Des Happend Usht Zu Uns. Its cast members were (front, l. to r.) Evelyn Billiard, Dalton Kerschner, Ruth Bleiler, George Rupp, and Lillian Geiger; and (back, l. to r.) Lester Kerschner, Dora Holben, Raymond Billiard, Elma Rupp, and Esther Billiard. (The Morning Call, May 25, 1942, p. 6.)

The Committee feels the First Play Producing Contest was most successful and have decided to repeat the contest again next year.

The members of the committee were again Clarissa M. Breinig, Dr. E.J. Balliet, Percy B. Ruhe, William S. Troxell, and Irene Welty, with the Rev. Thomas R. Breindle as chairman. I have not been able to locate a copy of the outline used for the 1942 contest, but it was probably the same as that used in 1941.

There were only two submissions to the 1942 contest: Esther Billiard's Des Happend Usht Zu Uns (This Happened Just To Usj; and Irene Masters' Iver de Fense (Over the Fence). Probably it was too close to the contest of the previous year to arouse much interest, and the war may also have been a factor. The two plays were performed on May 22, 1942, at Allentown High School.20

The first play performed that evening was Esther Billiard's. She was born in 1917 and raised on a farm near Orefield in Lehigh County. Until eighth grade she attended the local school at Claussville where Irene Masters was her teacher (she also knew Mrs. Masters as lecturer at the Seipstown Grange). Esther Billiard married Albert Rothrock in 1944 and they had one son. Since their marriage the Rothrocks have lived in Palmerton in Carbon County.21

Des Happend Usht Zu Uns was written before her marriage, and it took some time to finally locate Mrs. Rothrock. Her play is the only surviving script from the 1942 contest. The story concerns two eighteen-year-old twins, Sue and Susan, who go to their grandfather for help in learning traditional Pennsylvania German games. Grandfather teaches the twins and their friends some games, there is a party, and even grandfather has a trick played on him when one of the boys pours some water over him!

This play was not chosen as the winner of the 1942 contest, but it is fortunate that I was able to locate the author, who in turn had kept what is probably the last remaining copy of the script. While this has been Mrs. Rothrock's only dialect play, her work is of more than casual interest, for it incorporates actual folklore as the focus of the play, rather than using a pre-conceived theatrical comedy formula. There is an undeniable charm to this play, and when it was new there certainly must have been a very real immediacy about it for the young Pennsylvania Germans in the audience. In hindsight, the content becomes even more poignant, for after the play's single performance the cast members either entered military service or went to work in the war effort on the home front. Had Mrs. Rothrock been just a little older, and begun writing just a few years earlier, she might have developed into a prolific dialect playwright. Unfortunately, 1942 was not the right social atmosphere for such folk plays, and after the war she concentrated on her family life and there was no opportunity for her to again write dialect plays. But Mrs. Rothrock recalls the 1942 experience as being very important in her life ("this was part of my development") and gives all the credit for being able to write the play to the encouragement of Irene Masters.
It was Irene Masters’ play, *Iver de Fense*, which was judged the best of the two plays performed on May 22, 1942. This, and her 1941 contest entry, are her only known dialect plays. Reichard was unable to locate a copy of the playscript in the 1940s, and I have not been able to find one either, nor have my contacts been able to recall what the play was about. Newspaper articles give cast information, but do not include any plot synopsis for either of the 1942 contest plays.

Among Professor Reichard’s unpublished essays is the following information which by now is the best documentation of this play available: “In 1942 there was a second Play Producing Contest in Allentown. This time there were only two entrants; Mrs. Masters—*Iver de Fense*—was judged the better. It was concerned with the idea that the grass always seems greener in the adjoining pasture. This play no longer exists. I have pointed out elsewhere that these Pennsylvania Dutch plays were written for a purpose—that purpose was not to create a literature nor yet to win acclaim for its author. After a play had served its immediate purpose, why should a tidy Pennsylvania German housewife let it clutter up her house!”

To write further about Mrs. Masters’ lost play is much the same as trying to sing the song that the Sirens sang to lure unwary sailors to their destruction. Unfortunately, there are far too many plays such as this one, where there is a tiny bit of information available, but where scripts cannot be found.

In retrospect, the 1942 contest was a decidedly minor event in the history of Pennsylvania German folk theater. By 1942 it was an idea that was still good, but it was also an idea that required a different social context to again be effective.

**The 1983 Playwriting Contest**

In late 1982, Mahlon Hellerich, as archivist and museum director of Lehigh County, began to assemble a committee to plan some way to celebrate the 1683 settlement of Germantown. By the early part of 1983, the Lehigh County German American Tricentennial Committee (LCGATC) was formed, and included the Reverend Richard Druckenbrod, Mahlon Hellerich, Ruth Kemp, Francis Laudenslager, Gladys Lutz, Paul Wieand, Oscar Wirth, and myself. In the early meetings I suggested that a fine way to mark the observance might be by sponsoring a dialect plays’ program. Because of my study and enthusiasm, Hellerich nominated me to be the committee chairman, and the group agreed. In planning a variety program of skits, I wanted to include not only older, historical examples, but some contemporary work as well.

Francis Laudenslager took up my hint and proposed that the committee sponsor a playwriting contest. That winter a subcommittee worked out an outline of what we were looking for: Each play had to be original, unperformed, and written for the occasion; it could be comic or serious, and the only restrictions were that it had to be in Pennsylvania German, could not include more than ten characters, and could not last longer than fifteen minutes. Invitations were sent out to approximately thirty people; the deadline for submissions was June 30, 1983. A standardized judging sheet was drawn up and approved—it listed the maximum number of points that could be awarded in eight different categories: staying within the fifteen minute time limit (5); staying within the ten-character limit (5); language usage (10); structure (10); characters—interest value (15); theme—contemporary relevance (15); theme—folkslore/lore anecdotes (15); originality/creativity (25). The winner would be determined by numerical averaging.

The judging committee included the Reverend Richard Druckenbrod, Francis Laudenslager, Gladys Lutz, Paul Wieand, and myself as chairman. There were four entries to the contest, all of which were submitted in the spring of 1983: *Der Dichter un der Artist (The Poet and the Artist)* by Ernest W. Bechtel; *Der Bauer Bu un Sei Meedel (The Farmer Boy and his Girl Friend)* by William H. Gross; *Der Narrschmidt (The Smith-Fool)* by Richard P. Middleton; and the winning entry, *Uff der Federsch H ocht (On the Front Porch)* by Mark Trumbore. The entire committee was both surprised and pleased by the enthusiastic response, and by the variety of material submitted for consideration.

Originally, it was decided that if there were several entries to the contest, the two best plays would be produced—one by the Haysseed Players under the direction of Francis Laudenslager, and one by the Huff’s Church Group under the direction of Carl Arner. As it turned out, it was not possible for the Huff’s Church Group to take on one of the plays (they were already rehearsing another skit for the LCGATC program in addition to preparing a full-length play for their own church), so only the winning play was performed. The playwriting contest was only one aspect of the tricentennial committee’s dialect plays’ program, which I had planned as an anthology of historical and contemporary Pennsylvania German folk theater. In addition to Trumbore’s winning play the program consisted of four traditional folk songs that are dialogues; the scene from *Hamlet* translated by Edward H. Rauch (1873); *'Sis Weg Ga­ l ain (It’s Loaned Out, 1936)* by Paul Wieand; *Die Reischeroi (The Gossiping, 1937)* by John Birmelin; “Der Asseba G rickt die Hohr G’schnitte” (“Asseba Gets a Haircut,” 1944) by the Reverend Clarence R. Rahn; and *Alles Im Kopp (It’s All in the Head, 1983)* by Francis Laudenslager. This program was performed on September 24, 1983 at Northwestern Lehigh High School, and on September 26, 1983, at Springhouse Junior High School.
One of the contestants in the 1983 contest, Ernest W. Bechtel, began writing dialect plays in 1951 when, as director of Paul Wieand’s *Es Faahre Uff der Train (The Ride on the Train)*, he discovered that the play as written was too short to fill the program. To complete the evening’s entertainment, Bechtel wrote a long prologue in verse describing each character. He would continue writing original dialect plays through 1966, and, like most Pennsylvania German playwrights, he wrote comedies almost exclusively. His first serious play was *Schalle Fun Freiheit (Echoes of Freedom)*, written and produced to commemorate the U.S. bicentennial in 1976. The action in this play takes place in a cemetery, where two families argue over the relative value of patriotism. Ghosts from Washington’s army at Valley Forge appear, and in the end the need to uphold traditional patriotic values is made clear and decisive.23

Ernest Bechtel was born in 1923 in Reinholds, Lancaster County. After graduation from Ephrata High School in 1940, he served in the U.S. Army on the European battlefront; he was awarded four campaign stars and a Bronze Star for service to his country. In 1950 he married Irene Fisher, also of Reinholds. From 1952 through 1978 he operated a barber shop at Sinking Springs in Berks County; he died in June, 1988.

In the studied estimation of Professor C. Richard Beam, Ernest Bechtel must be considered one of the most important Pennsylvania German playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s. And, in addition to writing plays, Bechtel was also a prolific dialect poet, and in January, 1970, he began writing his weekly column “Weisheide un Dummheide” (“Wisdom and Foolishness”) for the *Ephrata Review*. In the same year he and his wife began to appear in their improvised radio skits as “Der Buschgnippel un die Minnie Schnaus” on *Die Alde Kumraade (The Old Comrades)* broadcast from radio station WLBR in Lebanon.24

Bechtel’s 1983 contest entry, and his last play, was *Der Dichter un der Artist*. It takes place in a public park where a depressed man is sitting on a bench. A poet enters, and as the two converse it becomes obvious that the poet is an optimist, while the depressed man has gotten into a rut with negative thinking. An artist comes along, and together the artist and the poet demonstrate the value of living—while the poet recites two of his poems, the artist shows corresponding pictures from his sketchbook. This skit incorporates two of Bechtel’s poems, “En Dichter” (“A Poet,” originally written on October 23, 1980), and “Der Mensch” (“Mankind,” from September 21, 1973). In the end the man is transformed into an optimist, and proclaims, “*Long lewwe die Pennsylvanisch Deitsche*” (“Long live the Pennsylvania Dutch”).

This play was not chosen as the winner by the majority of the judging committee. Many felt it was not humorous enough to satisfy an audience, and many also felt it would be too difficult to make the drawings called for in the script. The play was, however, a good and worthwhile effort, and certainly I like to see people attempting more serious dialect plays. Although the work was not performed, it was later published in the summer, 1985, issue of *Da Ausauga*.25

Another of the 1983 contestants, William Gross, was born in 1913 at Freemansburg, Northampton County, where he attended local public schools. He graduated from Moravian College in 1935 as an English major, and was certified to teach elementary and secondary education; he worked for three years in local schools at Freemansburg, where he continues to make his home. In 1939 he married Helen Polcrack, and they have three daughters. After working for several years in state government at Harrisburg, he went to Bethlehem Steel where he worked until his retirement in 1976. He continues to be active in local community and church affairs, and especially enjoys giving poetry readings which usually include selections from his favorite poet, Robert Frost.26

Gross recalls that his parents did not use the dialect much at home (probably, he thinks, because they wanted their children to have the advantage of knowing English as their primary language), but they could speak it, and did so when they were with their own families. And the dialect has certainly been an important part of William Gross’s life: In the 1960s he became a member of the Vereinicht Pennsylfawnish Deitsch Fulk, Inc., and is now its secretary, a position he has held since 1971. From 1978 through the spring of 1983, he also served as editor of *Da Ausauga*, the organization’s quarterly publication.

As editor of *Da Ausauga*, Gross was particularly known for his original dialect pieces concerning the goings on in Freemansburg. (Gross began to write in the dialect when Warren Swavely, a member of the *Rawd*, suggested it would be better than using English.) And, it was while serving as editor that Gross wrote his first dialect play, *Es Sperk-Kehs Beim Schmarte Squeier Gesetelt (The Court Case Settled by the Smart Squire)*. It tells of a squire who deals with the complaints of a father about all the money he has had to pay during his daughter’s courtship, and is based on an article that appeared in *Dem Bauern Freund und Pennsbug Demokrat* on December 2, 1884. This play has not been performed, but reveals, with the best of his Freemansburg prose pieces, an affectionate and ironic sense of humor.27

Gross’s 1983 contest entry, *Der Bauer Bu un Sei Meedel*, his second and last dialect play, reflects his sensitivity to traditional dialect writing as well as his concern for using the dialect to explore, more seriously, human nature and social problems. The plot concerns a typical
Pennsylvania German father and mother and their son, who is bringing his girl friend home to meet them. The girl friend is Jewish, and the father at first is totally against the marriage; only the mother’s level-headedness allows for him to later change his mind. Then, when the girl arrives and they learn she can speak the dialect, the father is finally convinced that his son has made a good choice after all.

The majority of the judging committee thought this play too controversial, and many thought it would not “go over with the audience.” In my opinion, however, the very use of the dialect is emblematic of character and culture, and thus reveals some of the faults and good points that language imposes upon us. This play has not been performed, but was later published in the fall, 1984, issue of Da Ausauga.28

Many on the contest judging committee felt the most unexpected and surprising work submitted in 1983 was the play written by Richard P. Middleton. Middleton was born in Philadelphia in 1935, graduated from Germantown Academy in 1953, and studied electrical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania, although he did not complete his degree. Married and divorced, he has three daughters, and is currently employed as a civil engineer.29

Middleton began to study the dialect around 1970 in classes sponsored by the Goschenhoppen Historians; in classes taught by Fred Stauffer; and with Paul Kunkel and, in a few sessions, with the Reverend Richard Druckenbrod. He now writes dialect poems with accompanying English equivalents; and, although his work is for the most part unpublished and unknown, it is extremely clever and reveals a delight in playing with language and traditional verse structures. Der Narrschmidt, his only play, is a two-character sketch in verse. In it, a man comes into the blacksmith’s shop, and asks the proprietor to make him an article. The smith then tells of his apprenticeship, and we quickly learn that he is really just a common fool: Told, “when I nod my head, hit it,”’ the smith takes the customer at his word—literally—and does just that!

In part because of the fact that it is written as a dialogue in verse (which obscured some of its value as drama), and also because the piece relies more on verbal word play than physical action, the majority of the judging committee felt that this work would be too difficult for an audience to appreciate. In fact, some felt it was not really a play at all. But in truth, it might be said that Middleton’s play is one of the cleverest and most artistic contributions to Pennsylvania German folk theater ever written. (Perhaps it is too clever, which is a strange thing to say about folk theater.) In particular, Der Narrschmidt exposes the fact that what we speak is not always what we mean. Although the play has not been performed, it was published in the spring, 1985 issue of Da Ausauga.30

Mark Trumbore, the author of the winning play, was born in Pennsburg, Montgomery County, in 1912. Both of his parents worked as cigar makers, and after his graduation from Pennsburg High School, he went to work as a carpenter. From 1942 until 1946 he served in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Newfoundland. He returned home and married Pauline Senske (1906-1967) in 1947. In 1976—the year he retired from the Dana Corporation where he worked as a carpenter—he was married again, this time to Helen Breyer.31

Trumbore recalls that he was always interested in folklore and the dialect, but it was while serving in the army and being separated from the local community for so long that he realized just how important folklore was to him. For several years he collected idiomatic expressions and stories from local informants, and a selection of
these relating to child lore was published in the winter, 1985 issue of Da Ausauga.32 Trumbore is also the author of A Superficial Collection of Pennsylvania German Erotic Folklore which, despite its modest title, will probably remain the most comprehensive anthology of this genre of dialect humor ever assembled.33

Uff der Fedderscht Porch is Trumbore’s first and only play. Of it he writes as preface: “In submitting this skit I make no pretense of originality as to the stories, for they are obviously old, but none the less [sic] bear retelling. If there is anything creative, it’s in providing the setting and the way the stories are woven together by means of cliche and idiom. Uff der Fedderscht Porch, it seemed to me, provided the ideal setting for recreating this old medium of entertainment and communication—which is what the porch sitting really was—but which fell into disuse with the coming of the automobile, the radio, TV, etc.”34

The play concerns those who pass by the porch of Maisy and Sadie, including such various characters as typical country-village folk, a 1920s flapper, and “Der English” who, when Sadie says to him “Schaener Daag heit” (“Nice day today”), replies in rather pattered tones, “Gosh, I didn’t even know that Mr. Schaner had a dog.”

Of all the plays submitted in 1983, Trumbore’s was the one the majority of the judges thought would be a hit with audiences, and would be the most practical to produce. They also thought it showed local and community life as it is really lived, and that it made excellent use of the dialect. As already mentioned, it was part of the LCGATC program in 1983, and it was also performed in 1984 by the Huff’s Church Group under the direction of Carl Arner, and published in the summer, 1986 issue of Da Ausauga.35

THE 1986 DIALECT WRITING CONTEST

In the summer of 1985 I began editing Da Ausauga, my purpose being to promote and encourage new dialect writing. By the fall of that year I could see that it would soon become a problem to keep new material as the majority of the quarterly’s pages, and I went to visit William Gross to discuss the situation. Gross suggested a writing contest as a possibility, and at the annual members meeting of the Vereimicht Pennsylfawnish Deitsch Fulk in November, 1985, I presented an outline proposal for the contest which was accepted by the Rawd. Subsequently, these guidelines were announced in the winter, 1986 issue of Da Ausauga: The contest was open in three areas of writing—poetry, prose, and theater; members and non-members could enter; all submissions had to be original, unpublished dialect writings with a minimum of one page for poetry, two pages for prose, and three pages for theater; the deadline for submissions was September 31, 1986.36

The judges for the contest were William Gross, as secretary of the organization and former editor of its quarterly; William Parsons, now retired professor of history and former director of the Pennsylvania German Studies Program at Ursinus College; and myself. I drafted a judging sheet which my colleagues approved, and which listed the maximum number of points which would be awarded in four categories: style/voice (25); structure/technique (25); language effectiveness/quality (25); thematic/folk cultural creativity (25).37

At that time the readership of Da Ausauga was over 300 people, and I had sent out almost thirty extra copies to non-members I thought might be interested in writing. But when, by mid-1986, there were still no submissions, I stated the guidelines again in the summer edition of Da Ausauga and encouraged all interested persons to enter. By late September there were three entries in poetry, three in prose, and two in theater. All were sent to me in Allentown, and, in turn, copies—along with judging sheets—were sent to the other judges. The winner in poetry was determined to be Anna Faust; there was a tie in the prose category with prizes being awarded to the Reverend Phares O. Reitz and Neal Niemond; and a tie in the theater category as well between Paul Wieand’s Haes Wasser, Weibsleit! (Hot Water, Women!) and Peter V. Fritsch’s Mommi, Du Mir Tzugar Nei (Mommy, Put Some Sugar in for Me).

All of the contest entries were published in the five issues of Da Ausauga from spring, 1987 through spring, 1988. Since my concern here is only with the theater, I will not comment further on the prose or poetry categories, except to say that the entire experience was a gratifying one for me—I appreciated being able to work with William Gross and Professor Parsons in a spirit which saw the contest not simply as an event to determine winners or losers, but as a way to encourage people to continue to write in the dialect.

Paul Wieand’s entry in the 1986 contest is the first play he has written since 1944 when he completed the script fragment left by Lloyd Moll for the fifth radio broadcast of Asseba un Sabina. Haes Wasser, Weibsleit! is a dramatization of the “Hot Water Rebellion” that took place in Lehigh County in 1799 when “Grandy” Miller led a revolt against the window-pane tax. The play has two scenes: the first takes place in Grandy Miller’s kitchen, where Grandy and her neighbors Maria Rhoad and Cass Mohr meet to discuss the tax situation, and Grandy decides on a plan of protest. The second scene takes place the next morning in Grandy Miller’s bedroom; Maria and Cass have boiling water ready, and when the tax collectors arrive the women pour it on them as they climb a ladder to the second floor.38

Wieand was particularly commended by the judges for his creative use of history; for taking a relatively obscure historical event and dramatizing it as a reflection of both the past and the present—one need not read too closely between the lines to see this play as a defense of feminism on the level of Pennsylvania folk life. The structure of Haes Wasser, Weibsleit! is reminiscent of another Wieand play, ’Sis Weg Gelaind (It’s Loaned Out,
and there is a demonstration of love for theater can be. The judges commended it particularly to mime, and game playing in a delightful manner, and chores around the house. Mother finally rebels and tells verses that describe the complaints and proddings of her to do everything. In the end, however, all is forgiven.

**Ausauga.**

The other contestant in the theater category was Peter V. Fritsch, who was born in Longswamp Township, Berks County. Fritsch graduated from Kutztown State College in 1967 with a degree in art education, and took a master's degree in education in 1972. He is currently teaching in the Reading School District, and has also taught Pennsylvania German history and culture in the evening school of Ursinus College.**

Fritsch's interest in folklore and folk performance stems from his early childhood. He learned the dialect from his grandparents, and from working in his great-uncle's bakery at Longswamp. His father played at hoedowns, and Peter continues to have a special interest in folk music and dance. In the 1950s he performed at the Kutztown Folk Festival as a member of Earl Keller's Little Jiggers, and in the 1960s he helped thresh grain and demonstrated spinning and weaving there. In the 1980s he called and danced with a hoedown group called The Heckebreckers, and since 1980 he has been director of the Brandywine Ministrels at Topton. In 1984 he joined the Paul Wieand Folk Group, and beginning with the fall, 1988 issue, has been editor of Da Ausauga.

Mommi, Du Mir Tzugar Nei is Fritsch's first dialect play, and he describes it as "a nonsense folk opera." It is based on an old fiddle tune he remembers from childhood called "Tzugar Nei." To that tune, Fritsch wrote verses that describe the complaints and proddings of family members aimed at getting mother to do various chores around the house. Mother finally rebels and tells them that they must look after themselves and not expect her to do everything. In the end, however, all is forgiven and there is a demonstration of love for "mommy."**

Fritsch's is a play which combines song, dance, pantomime, and game playing in a delightful manner, and which shows just how refreshing traditionally-derived theater can be. The judges commended it particularly for its artistic polish and for the careful way in which it combined traditional genres of folk performance into a unified whole.

**CONCLUSION**

In looking back at these dialect playwriting contests, it is easy to see that they brought forth plays of historical, social, and aesthetic value; and that they reveal the variety of subject matter and presentational styles that have been part of dialect theater throughout its continual development. But perhaps the most crucial issue brought up by such competitions is the role of criticism within the context of folk theater.

Actually, there is little direct written criticism of Pennsylvania German folk theater. Reichard, its first scholar, would also be its first critic; his general view was that every dialect play should be treated as significant and worthwhile on its own terms—a view shared at present by Professor C. Richard Beam. Neither Reichard nor Beam give negative critical reviews, and, in part, I also agree with this approach since there are so few people making dialect plays. Each of us, in our own way, has shared the view that perhaps the most important role a critical scholar can play is in actively encouraging, rather than discouraging people to participate.

The first negative criticism voiced about the limitations of the dialect theater was by Earl Robacker, a noted Pennsylvania German scholar. In 1942 Robacker wrote that what was most typical of the Pennsylvania German folk play was the finding of humor essentially within the dialect itself.** Although he wrote this before the profusion of Asseba un Sabina scripts, it is still a popularly held view that the dialect is in itself humorous.

Albert Buffington also voiced negative comments about dialect theater and, as already mentioned, his opinion of Edith Fink's plays is one I am ambivalent about. One should not single out Fink as being a good representative of the folk theater at its most mediocre. However, one can turn this around. The acceptance of the typical play being a nostalgic comedy accepts without reservation this performance practice as being what Pennsylvania German theater really is. Edith Fink wrote plays that would "go over with the audience." No, I do not believe that the dialect is humorous in itself, however socially ingrained this view is in real life. I also believe that there is ample historical precedent to show that Pennsylvania German folk theater has always been more than the farcical comedies which are the mainstream tradition of playwriting and performance practice.

Of the plays submitted in the 1941 contest, four were nostalgic comedies well within the mainstream tradition of dialect plays. The play chosen as the winner in 1941 was the one which best fit the presumed standard of naturalistic production values with typical, though humorous, dialect conversational patterns. Neither Kohl's nor Masters' play fit into this category, but in hindsight, I feel that the real creative significance of the folk theater
is found in these rather atypical plays. This is not to deny any creativity to the typical Pennsylvania German playwright, for his is the life's blood of the folk theater, and several of the best Pennsylvania German dialect plays are what could be considered part of the mainstream tradition.

From all available information, both of the 1942 contest plays were also naturalistic comedies. It is not possible now to know what actually went on with the judging of the 1941 and 1942 contests under the chairmanship of the late Reverend Thomas Brendle. Brendle was himself one of the most significant playwrights of the 1930s, yet his plays were not comedies, and were not popularly appreciated at the time. Noticeably absent from the judging committees of both years are the two most prominent Pennsylvania German literature scholars of the period, Preston Barba and Harry Hess Reichard—particularly Reichard.

In contrast to the earlier contests, the 1983 submissions represent more of the variety of theatrical expression as found within the historical development of traditional Pennsylvania German folk plays. The number of submissions was encouraging, especially since, with the exception of Ernest Bechtel, none of the others were previously known as being folk playwrights. Trumbore's play represents the mainstream of dialect comedies which we think of as being a typical Pennsylvania German folk play, but it is well written and able to be comfortably performed. Middleton's play is one of the few Pennsylvania German dialect verse plays (a type of play not generally known by the audience), and is a sophisticated yet down-to-earth comedy. Gross's play is primarily a serious piece (although it does have some comedy), and it is the only play written for the 1983 contest that deals with concrete social issues. Bechtel's play is a serious piece too, although on a more generalized and abstract level than Gross's play; it is a piece that could be performed to advantage for any occasion.

I found being chairman of the 1983 contest and play production program a rewarding, though sometimes stressful, experience. Like the 1941 and 1942 committee, the 1983 committee was not unanimous in its decision. I emerged as the most aesthetically liberal-minded person on the committee, for I was primarily interested in encouraging plays that were not a part of the historical mainstream. Also, I was at least thirty-to-fifty years younger than the other committee members, and there was certainly sometimes a "generation gap" in communication, much of which, in retrospect, was due to my sometimes being overly enthusiastic and emotional. But I do feel that under the circumstances the 1983 committee was justified in awarding the first prize to Mark Trumbore and, more importantly, I believe that the 1983 committee provided a much needed and long-overdue impetus for Pennsylvania German playwrights to continue exploring the creative possibilities of dialect theater.

The 1986 dialect contest was considered a success by both the judges and the Rawel of the Vereinicht Pennsylvania Deitsch Folk. As far as the judges were concerned, I think there was less pressure on them than in previous contests, for, unlike previous contests, there was no possibility the 1986 entries would be produced; thus the judges did not have to consider foremost the problems associated with production or with pleasing an audience. These 1983 and 1986 contests are the most difficult for me to comment on, because I was actively involved in these events, and so am more subjective than when writing about the 1941 and 1942 contests. But my study of the 1941 and 1942 contests in large measure shaped my views in 1983, which in turn influenced my views in 1986. Unfortunately, I discovered that when running contests, no matter how much one tries to be fair and honest, there are inevitably some hurt feelings among some of those involved. While it can no longer be determined, this probably was true in the 1941 and 1942 contests also.

In summary, then, no one has yet formulated a concise and acceptable standard of criticism for Pennsylvania German dialect writings. And even in discussing the majority view—that all contemporary and historical dialect writings have approximately equal value—one must not forget that we all have our personal biases. I was surprised, for example, when talking with Professor Russell Gilbert about the poems of Henry Harbaugh. I had a solid respect for Harbaugh's work, while Gilbert found him rather uninteresting as a poet. Gilbert meant no disrespect of traditional standards, and I, in turn, though disagreeing with Gilbert had no less respect for his work and viewpoint.

It is this spirit of mutual respect which perhaps best animates Pennsylvania German dialect literary and dramatic criticism. I believe, with Gilbert, that the objective of criticism is not to mar but to beautify; and I believe, with Reichard, that the most important role a folklorist may play is in encouraging new productions in the dialect through an informed view of historical practice. While Pennsylvania German folk theater may be a rather obscure subject, there is much from these contests that should not be overlooked nor forgotten. After all, it is from such special events as the performance of a play, or the more formal situation of a contest, that one is able to renew and perpetuate the dialect as a vital social and artistic expression of Pennsylvania German folk life; and from which, in turn, one learns much about the inner life of the Pennsylvania German soul as well, for the dialect folk theater is a beautiful tradition. I cannot really have the last word on the subject, but if I may make a final criticism to end this essay, it is this: more should be done!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES


2Programs and newspaper clippings in the Reichard Collection of Pennsylvania German Theatrical Materials, in the Pennsylvania German Archive in the Muhlenberg College Library, Allentown, Pa.

3My thanks to Pastor Wallace J. Bieber, at Lebanon, who, through correspondence during May-December 1988, was able to locate for me the basic information of Edith Fink’s biography.


6Author’s collection.

7Stirling Franz, interview at Sheidy’s (Lehigh County), August, 1982. See also my “Asseba un Sabina, The Flower of Pennsylvania German Folk Theater” in Pennsylvania Folklore, Vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 30-68.

8Harry Hess Reichard, unpublished essay, Muhlenberg College Library.


12Interview, Dr. George B. Laubach, Easton, Pa., April 8, 1988.

13Harry Hess Reichard, unpublished essay, Muhlenberg College Library.

14Harry Hess Reichard, unpublished essay, Muhlenberg College Library.


16For further information see William Fetterman, “Paul R. Wieand, Lehigh County Folk Artist” in Pennsylvania Folklore, Vol. 30, no. 2 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 87-93; and my Asseba un Sabina essay mentioned above.

17Wieand’s 1941 contest-winning play appears in The Reichard Collection of Early Pennsylvania German Dialogues and Plays, pp. 312-329.

18For more information see my Asseba un Sabina essay mentioned above.

19Author’s collection.

20Newspaper clipping in the Reichard Collection, Muhlenberg College Library. In between the two plays Delight Breidegam of Lyons, Pa., gave a talk on painted chairs, with an exhibition of antique chairs, and newly-made chairs crafted in the high school shops and decorated with paint under the supervision of Clarissa M. Breinig, then supervisor of art in the Allentown public schools.

21Interview, Esther Billiard Rothrock, Palmyra, Pa., July 1988. Mrs. Rothrock is the daughter of Elmer and Blanche (Neff) Billiard; she met her husband when they were both working at the Vultee Aircraft Corporation in Allentown, building airplanes for the U.S. Navy. Harry Hess Reichard, unpublished essay, Muhlenberg College Library; the previous essay Reichard refers to is his essay on Mrs. Laubach, the majority of which appears earlier in this current work.

22Ernest W. Bechtel, Schalle Fun Freiheit (no imprint) [Breinigsville: The Pennsylvania German Society, 1976].

23The best work on Bechtel is by C. Richard Beam in his timely essay “A Century of Pennsylvania German Plays, 1880-1986” JSR, pp. 60-62. I look forward to a more in-depth study of Bechtel’s work in literature, performance, and broadcasting by Professor Beam in the future.

24Ernest W. Bechtel, Der Dichter un der Artist in Da Ausauga, Vol. 25, no. 3 (June-August 1985), pp. 12-16.

25Interview, William H. Gross, Freemansburg, Pa., June 3, 1988. I first met Gross in the late 1970s when we were both studying the dialect with Pastor Richard Druckenbrod.


28Interview with Richard F. Middleton, June 6, 1988. Mr. Middleton is the son of Plantou and Eleanor (Guckes) Middleton. He enjoys singing bass with the Choral Society of Montgomery County, and with the choir of St. Luke’s Lutheran Church in Obelsick, Pa. He is a member of Mensa, and lives in Lansdale, Pa.


32Mark Trombure, A Superficial Collection of Pennsylvania German Erotic Folklore (Pennsburg, Pa.: Published by the author, 1978).


34pp. 5-12.

35The entry chosen as the best in each category would receive a year’s membership in Ferencnicht Pennsylfawnish Deitsch Fulk, Inc., which includes four issues of Da Ausauga, admittance to the annual picnic in August, and first choice at tickets for the annual Fersommling (dilect banquet) in April. Winners would get first priority with publication, followed by the complete publication of all the pieces submitted.

36This sheet appeared as follows:

AUSAGUA DIALECT WRITING CONTEST WORK SHEET

PART ONE—FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

Yes No

1. Written in PG?

2. Minimum length satisfied?
   a. one page poetry
   b. two pages prose
   c. three pages theater

3. Piece is original composition?

4. Piece has not previously been published?

PART TWO—CONTENT EVALUATIONS

Points Determined

1. Style/ Voice
   25 Pts.

2. Structure/Technique
   25 Pts.

3. Language Effectiveness/ Quality
   25 Pts.

4. Thematic/Folk-cultural Creativity
   a. (i.e. Individuality/Uniqueness
   within larger cultural identity)
   25 Pts.

PART THREE—PERSONAL COMMENTS AND EVALUATIONS


2. Interview with Peter V. Fritsch, Longswamp Township, June 7, 1988. Fritsch is the son of John and Catherine (Strauss) Fritsch.


5. Brendle is known to have written only three plays, one of which is lost. The lost play was a skit presented at Grundsow Lodge no. 1 in Allentown in the early 1930s. Die Mutter and Di Hoffning appear in The Reichard Collection of Early Pennsylvania German Dialogues and Plays on pp. 198-222 and 223-253, respectively. For an appreciation of Brendle’s work as a playwright and of the intricacies involved in effective performance, see my “Reflections on Directing Die Mutter,” in Historic Schaefferstown Record, Vol. 21, no. 1 (January 1987) pp. 9-15.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

HAIL TO THE CHIEF! 200 YEARS OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY 1789–1989 is an exhibit presented by the Lehigh County Historical Society at the Lehigh County Museum, Old Courthouse at Hamilton and Fifth Streets in downtown Allentown, Pa. The exhibit, on view from January 15 to June 11, 1989, draws from local public and private collections to illustrate how the presidency has been depicted, commemorated, and revered through the abundant variety of artifacts generated by the campaigns, inaugurations, and terms in office of America’s presidents. The exhibit is free to the public; museum hours are Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN HEX SIGN is a poster panel exhibit which is appearing in various Pennsylvania locations this year and next. Scheduled dates are: March 6–April 17, 1978 at the Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pa.; October 16–November 27, 1989 at the German Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; and April 2–May 14, 1990 at the Schuylkill County Arts and Ethnic Center in Pottsville, Pa.

Accompanying the exhibition is the book Hex Signs: Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Symbols and Their Meaning written by guest curators Don Yoder, Professor of Folklore Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and Thomas E. Graves, Co-Editor, Keystone Folklore, with an introduction by Alistair Cooke, who discusses his experiences with barn signs in the 1930s. The book is published by E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum of American Folk Art (the exhibit’s sponsor) and the Arts International Program of the Institute of International Education.

THE 6TH ANNUAL PENN’S COLONY FESTIVAL will be held on September 23, 24 and September 30, October 1, 1989 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. This is a festival of traditional crafts and entertainment in a colonial marketplace. Located thirty-five miles north of Pittsburgh in Prospect, Pa. Call or write for more information: The Penn’s Colony Festival, 1635 El Paso St., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15206 (412) 441-9178.

NEW FOLK CASSETTE AVAILABLE

Folk Songs of Western Pennsylvania is a new cassette album (with an accompanying booklet which contains the lyrics and explains the background of all the songs) produced by Dave Krysty, a talented musician who has been compiling local folklore for several years. The music is performed by Krysty and Bill Lemons on the guitar, fiddle, banjo, mandolin, fife, and Jew’s harp. Songs include “Pittsburgh’s Not a Smoky City Anymore”; “In the Valley Where the Allegheny Flows”; “The Tune the Ole Cow Died From”; Monongahela Sui”; “Run Johnny Run”; “My Love is But a Lassie”; “The Johnston Flood”; “The Homestead Strike”; “Bitty Lay Over”; “Hard Times”; “Crawford’s Defeat”; and “The Flop-Eared Mule.”

Much of Krysty’s information and material comes from local performers in the western part of Pennsylvania, and he is always looking for new sources. “So,” says Krysty, “if you know of a fiddler or a banjo player, or if you know a song or a tale about Western Pennsylvania, I’d sure like to hear from you.” Krysty’s address is: P.O. Box 91222, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15221. His cassette is available by mail order from the same address.

FOLKLORE PRIZE ESTABLISHED

The Folklore Historian in association with the history section of the American Folklore Society announces the establishment of the endowed Richard Reuss Prize. The prize honors Richard Reuss (1940–1986), founding editor of The Folklore Historian and a leading chronicler of folklore studies. The prize of 100 dollars will be awarded to a student for a paper on a subject dealing with the history of folklore studies. The winner of the prize will have his or her paper submitted for publication in The Folklore Historian. Submit papers before June 1, 1989, to Simon J. Bronner, American Studies Program, The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg, Middletown, PA 17057. For information on contributing to the Reuss Prize Fund, write W.K. McNeil, Treasurer, Folklore Historian, Ozark Folk Center, Mountain View, AR 72560.
The Festival and its Sponsorship

The Kutztown Folk Festival is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Folklife Society, a nonprofit educational corporation affiliated with UR SINUS COLLEGE, Collegeville, Pennsylvania. The Society's purposes are threefold: First, the demonstrating and displaying of the lore and folkways of the Pennsylvania Dutch through the annual Kutztown Folk Festival; second, the collecting, studying, archiving and publishing the lore of the Dutch Country and Pennsylvania through the publication of PENNSYLVANIA FOLKLIFE Magazine; and third, using the proceeds for scholarships and general educational purposes at UR SINUS COLLEGE.

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College Blvd. & Vine, Kutztown, Pa. 19530