

The Pennsylvania German Folklore



Society of Ontario

PGFSO

Newsletter

EDITOR: LORNE R. SMITH

NUMBER 50 SPRING, 2021



David R. Burkholder, President,  
and Marie Burkholder, Secretary

## Message from the President

David Reesor Burkholder

Spring greetings to Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario members and friends.

I am sure you have been staying safe and following the continuing and ever changing guidelines and protocols that have become a way of life.

Since our Fall newsletter there have been some positive developments in the battle to bring COVID-19 under control. A number of drug companies have sprung into action and in amazing fashion developed, manufactured and began distribution of several vaccines.

I trust you have been able to receive your initial and possibly second "jab".

## THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

*Sorry Folks but PGFSO is not planning any public events until COVID-19 is under control and most people have been vaccinated. The Board encourages ongoing family and community research during this downtime and welcome submissions that can be published in the newsletters.*

*2021 Memberships are now due. A membership renewal form is included with this newsletter.*

It appears we are not quite out of the pandemic woods yet so I'd encourage you to be vigilante and stay safe.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of our Society.

In the forward of his book "The Trail of the Black Walnut" founder Dr. G. Elmore Reaman wrote "this book is an effort to speak for those who would not speak for themselves".

Dr. Reaman vividly portrays the unassuming manner of our Pennsylvania German ancestors of sturdy moral character; their expertise in agriculture and the application of sound business principles as they quietly laid the foundation for the prosperity that distinguishes the localities they founded.

More on this in our Fall issue.

I would encourage you to visit our PGFSO website for the complete history of our society

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**PGFSO Newsletter**

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Articles for the PGFSO Newsletter are welcome

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Folks, spring has arrived, planting has begun.  
Have a safe summer; I hope to see you in the  
fall.

Please stay safe.

*John Doner*  
*Remembered*

*Marlene Mattson*

The morning of Thursday, February 4th, 2021 was beautiful. The sun was glinting brightly off the snow and the birds were already at the feeder just outside of our window. John Doner didn't see the beauty of the day; John passed away that morning. When I got the call just after 9:30 a.m. my heart broke.

John was a good friend, not only to me but to hundreds of others. He was very well known, very well-liked and respected. His family had been on the same land for over 200 years, farming and operating the grain elevators. He was happy with his life and thought the world of his family.

John was always part of the Festival Day at Black Creek each fall. Loaning his big white tent was vital to shade the pork shoulders and the meat cutters from the elements.

He was always first at the driveshed, starting to put up the big tent; my brother Murray and I were second there to back the trailer with the freezers into the back corner of the driveshed.

It was such a pleasure to see John, smiling his big wide smile as usual and happy to see us and to be at the Pioneer Festival working with other Pennsylvania German Folklore volunteers to put in a day of making and selling our sausage, sauerkraut and apple butter. He loved to talk to other volunteers and people that John had known for years during a quiet coffee break and lunch.

Because of this pandemic year, there was no memorial service for John Doner, however if service could be held with people recounting their memories of John, we would have had to bring our sleeping bags and box lunches, because our memories would stretch for days and days!

There was a wonderful tractor parade to honour John's life and his passing – it stretched for miles and John would have loved to see all of

throughout the past seven decades.

This issue contains a number of very interesting articles.

We pay tribute to our dear, departed and long time member, John Doner.

We will miss John's energy, enthusiasm and his stories.

Markham Museum celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year – it hardly seems possible.

An update on the much anticipated Jordan Museum in Niagara, some local farm histories and past reunion histories round out features in this edition plus some weather predictions for you farmers and gardeners out there.

Keep telling and recording our family and community stories from the past.

We encourage you to continue to submit articles or make content suggestions to our editor. Lorne thanks for your dedication in creating our newsletters.

those tractors motoring down the road.

I interviewed John for an article in our PGFSO Newsletter (York Chapter) in 2018 and I made sure that my recorder batteries were charged up to the fullest. We met in the boardroom/lunchroom adjacent to the office and John and I talked for what seemed like a half hour, but was actually two hours.

My recorder shut off and still we were discussing history and the Doner Family in Canada. John was pulling out books, photos and maps and talking faster than I could write notes, so I just gave up trying to record more information.

When I left that day, after viewing John's collection of tractors and viewing the pointing of the barn foundation that John advised Bruce Vander Bent had done for him. I just knew I could make three more Newsletter articles from the "extra" information that John Doner could supply.

The man was a wealth of information and not just about the Doner family in Canada... his information on the area he has lived in for so many years.

John was born August 11, 1945 and he and his wife June purchased the farm from his father Lloyd in 1981; they were on the homestead lands for 46 years. John was the 6th generation born on the farm and the 7th generation to live and work on the homestead lands.

John and June had four children and sons Mark, Paul and Glenn are the 8th generation to farm the land along with one sister Lori who works in real estate.

The PGFSO Newsletter (York Chapter) produced in the spring of 2018 has a much more detailed story of the Doner family in Canada. John was very fortunate to be able to work with his family for so many years.

John will be very much missed; we will always miss his help at Black Creek, we will miss his great big smile, we will miss his wonderful conversations, we will miss his happy open-hearted personality and we extend our sympathies to his family members who must have wonderful memories of their husband, father and grandfather. John was well-loved by many.

Sleep well John!



*Tractor Parade looking west  
on Stouffville Road from Woodbine Avenue*

## *Farmer Parade in memory of John Doner (1945-2021)*

On Saturday, February 13, 2021 the local farm community came together to create a parade of farm equipment and trucks to the John Doner farm in memory of John Doner who passed away peacefully on February 4, 2021 at the age of 75. This is a way the farm community could show sympathy and support to the family in the time of COVID-19 when a public funeral could not be held.

The Doner farm, Lot 35, Con. 3, (12112 Leslie Street) was first settled by Bishop John Doner Sr. who came from Lebanon County, Pennsylvania in 1806. The community of Gormley is carved out of the farm. Technically the farm is now part of Richmond Hill but John Doner Limited has served the communities of Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville and Richmond Hill since 1974. The company has a large grain storage facility, crops thousands of acres of land and has a truck repair business on site. John was noted for his service to his customers, his knowledge of community and family history and his friendly storytelling. John also had an extensive collection of early tractors and farm equipment.

The idea of a farm parade was arranged quickly as a show of support by the agricultural community for the Doner family. The 30 minute parade included 40 tractors, 50 trucks, 16 SUVs, 1 sprayer, 1 combine, 2 firetrucks for a total of 110 vehicles.

The April 2021 issue of Better Farming (mailed to all members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture) carried a two page photo and story of John's contribution to the agricultural community. John was passionate about advocating for farmers.

The article reports that in 2005 he helped organize a number of farmer demonstrations, including the tractor protest that circled Queen's Park in Toronto.

John also played a part in ending the Ontario Wheat Board's monopoly on the marketing of crops. He was an ag advocate and fought for fairer subsidies which eventually led to the development of government programs to benefit fellow producers.



*John Doner and Don Miller cutting meat at Black Creek*

## *Birds on the Smith Farm this winter*

*Lorne Smith*

We have enjoyed a large number of birds this year during the snowy part of the winter, in fact there have been dozens and dozens around the feeder. However on February 29 when we arrived back from our sugar camp after three days away there was still seeds in the feeders but little snow left. Then at lunch on March 1 we spotted two red winged blackbirds back from the south. We had another sign of spring when two Whistling (Mute) swans flew overhead. Interesting we have had no goldfinches this winter. However we have enjoyed seeing the woodpeckers and nuthatches hanging on the feeder instead. We use Mark's Choice niger seed/peanut chunks mix and it is interesting to see the woodpeckers tongue drawing the peanut pieces out of the feeder. We have also enjoyed 4 pair of beautiful cardinals all winter.

I thought I had solved the issue of black squirrels getting into my feeders by hanging them on the clothes line. One squirrel has beat me out by going along the line hanging underneath and going foot over foot sometimes on the top wire and sometimes on the bottom. He goes so fast I can never get a photo of him.



*Downy woodpecker on the feeder*



*John, June, Dorothy, Lloyd Doner*



*Four generations of Doners*

## Markham Museum celebrating 50th Anniversary

In 1968 the Village of Markham Council and the Markham Township Council with the support of the Markham Lions Club purchased the Mount Joy, S.S. #16 Public School to become a museum. In 1969 the Markham District Historical Society was formed to operate a Markham Museum. By agreement with the new Town of Markham the school house property was vested in the ownership of the Town and the MDHS was commissioned to create and operate a new Markham Museum.

The older volunteers of the Markham area organized by John Lunau pitched in to renovate the school buildings, accept artifacts from the community, and create displays and a meeting place to preserve Markham's history.

An Official Opening took place on July 10, 1971 preceded by a large parade up Main Street from the Fair Grounds at Highway 7 – 1,400 people were in attendance. Many will recall John Lunau's attendance at local Markham farm and home auctions purchasing items of historic significance from old Markham pioneer family homesteads for the Museum. The Collections building houses many artifacts and documents from our Pennsylvania German homesteads. We can thank Curator Janet Reid for her dedication in caring for these representations of our past. Unfortunately the Museum is closed because of the COVID-19 rules.



Mayor Frank Scarpitti, Janet Reid, Curator,  
Joe Sargent, volunteer, Carolina Moretti,  
Ex-Councillor, Cathy Molloy, Director

The Friends of Markham Museum are planning a 50th Anniversary event this summer to celebrate. Given the uncertainty of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions no plans can be confirmed at this time. However be assured that as soon as possible the Friends will announce the celebration event(s) so we can recognize 50 years of success in collecting, preserving and interpreting the history of Markham.

## Weather in the Spring

*Lorne Smith*

In our urban life we may watch the weather conditions on the TV but living off-grid in the forest during the spring sap season we are constantly watching the real weather conditions and particularly watch for signs of change. We watch the temperature, the atmospheric pressure, the clouds, the wind direction and intensity and of course the sunrises and sunsets. Changes in any of these suggest changes in the coming weather that can affect flow of sap from the trees. The sap run depends on warm sunny days and cool nights each spring as the sugar maple trees begin the process of budding and generating their leaf cover. Interestingly sap flow depends on many factors. Trees do not like east winds. Bright sunshine that warms the trunks promotes sap flow. But high atmospheric pressure will slow down the flow while a drop in pressure may bring on a good run even if the sun does not shine. On Friday night, February 25 we were aware of the pending full moon and stepped outside about 6:30 p.m. to note the perfect multi-coloured sunset in the west and the rising full moon in the east. The moon created the most beautiful shadows of the trees on the snow. At 1 a.m. (up for a pee break) we noted that it was just like daylight through the forest – no tree shadows now as the moon was directly overhead. Guess what, by 6:30 a.m. it was snowing. So goes the weather at maple syrup time but what a memory of that full moon. We got some warm, almost summer weather in the middle of March and the sap did not run from March 12 to 18. My theory that it always gets colder during the full moon worked again this year. The February 27, Snow Moon, delayed the first sap run until March 9.

The cold nights around the Worm Moon on March 28 brought the largest sap run of the season on March 30.

I know that many of our settler ancestors were acutely aware of the weather and had many ways of predicting changes. I welcome members to send me some of the sayings or predictions your father or grandfather used on a regular basis.

We will print them in the next newsletter.

You can text me at 416-996-2720 or send to [lorne.smith@sympatico.ca](mailto:lorne.smith@sympatico.ca)

*Economist and Sun,  
July 5, 1928*

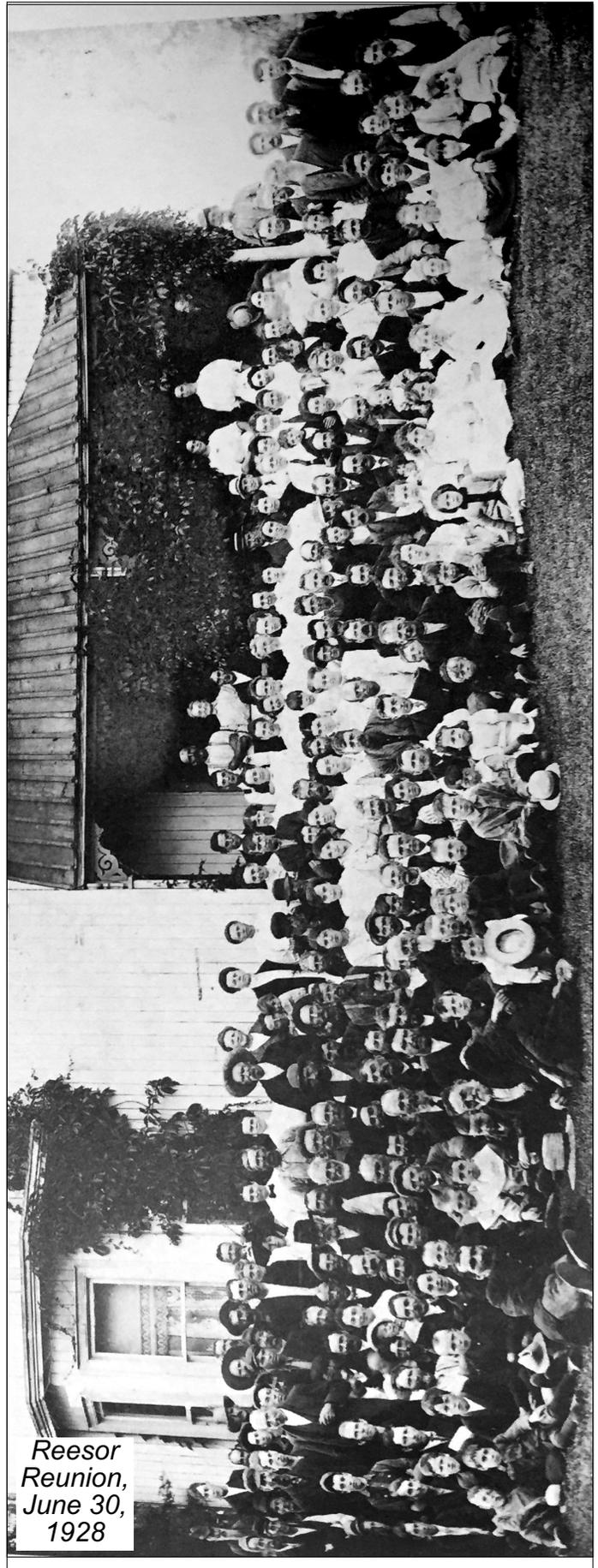
*Lorne Smith*

“The Canadian branch of the Reesor family celebrated the 124th year of the Reesor settlement in Markham Township by holding a reunion in a beautiful park in the valley of the little Rouge adjoining the Provincial Highway at Locust Hill on Saturday, June 30th, 1928. This park is part of the homestead of the late Christian Reesor and still in the family, Mr. Jarvis being the present owner.

An all day’s rain on Friday lasting well into Saturday morning doubles kept many from a distance away, but the weather in the afternoon was ideal and there were fully fifteen hundred present – about 1,000 of whom signed the register. It was a most interesting event – and thoroughly enjoyed by all. About thirty cousins from the Pennsylvania branch of the family were present and they received a very warm welcome.

The oldest Reesor present was Capt. Robert Reesor of the 10th Line Markham, who was in his 87th year. He is a son of Christopher Reesor and a grandson of Abraham Reesor who came over with his father from Pennsylvania and settled on Lot 8, Con. 8, Markham, still in the family and known as “Glen Rouge” farm. The president of the event was Frederick E. N. Reesor, proprietor of the Locust Hill Creamery, and a son of Christian Reesor the 2nd. A. E. Reesor of Markham was secretary, and F. Kay Reesor a son of Peter Reesor was chairman.”

I discovered that there was also a reunion on the same site in 1904 and 1934. This report of the



1928 reunion sent Carol and I exploring along the Little Rouge River near Locust Hill. It turns out that the park was called “Cedar Valley Park” and the roadway down to the park by the river is still in existence. In a roll photo of the 1928 reunion the roadway of Highway 7 is visible as well as a tree that is still present. The photo even shows some of the vehicles of the day. Evidence of a built structure and a hydro pole can be seen on the site. We also discovered that there was another park along the river just north of this site called “Riverside Park”, operated by the Pike Family. It is interesting these two parks were similar and in the same time frame as Woodland Park on the south side of Steeles Avenue at Reesor Road. These parks catered to the Toronto folks who were anxious to get out of the bad air in the city in their new automobiles.

## *Markham's Historical Places*

*George Duncan*

Pipher-Lewis Farm was site of annual pageant of old-time farming.

A trim Ontario farmhouse and barn on the west side of McCowan Road, not far from the Markham Fairgrounds, was the backdrop to a special event enjoyed by Markham's farming families for many years. The land has a long association with the Pipher and Lewis families, two early farming families whose legacy is still evident in Markham.

King's College, the forerunner of the University of Toronto, received the Crown patent for the entire 200 acres of Markham Township



*Murray, Harry, Steve Lewis with famous Black Clydesdale in front of the house*

Lot 27, Concession 6 in 1828. This land was formerly a Crown Reserve lot. King's College sold to Benjamin Oberholsen in 1832, who sold the property in two parts. The larger eastern portion, consisting of 130 acres, was sold to Joseph Pipher of Dickson Hill in 1840. The Piphers' were a Pennsylvania-German family that came to Markham about 1801. Joseph Pipher built an impressive stone farmhouse east of Dickson Hill in 1861 that is said to have been constructed under the direction of a stone mason that learned his trade while incarcerated at Kingston following the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837.

The McCowan Road property later became the farm of Joseph Pipher's son, Joseph Pipher Jr., born in 1834. At the time of the 1851 census, at the age of 17, Joseph Pipher Jr. was unmarried and living with his parents on Lot 29, Concession 8. By the time of the 1861 census, Joseph Pipher was married, and lived on this property, Lot 27, Concession 6, with his wife Elizabeth (Long) Pipher, and their two young daughters, in a two storey frame house. The classic Ontario farmhouse that still stands at 10982 McCowan Road was constructed about 1856-1860. When the Piphers' retired from farming about 1895, they moved to a new house at 1 Peter Street, in the community of Mount Joy, north of Markham Village.

In 1919, the executors of Joseph and Elizabeth Pipher sold the property to John. H. Hargraves, who in turn sold to Thomas Hargraves in 1924.

In 1926, the former Pipher farm was sold to Ambrose Lewis, beginning a long history of ownership by the Lewis family. Allen and Irene Lewis farmed here until Allen's death in 1957. The farm passed to sons Murray Lewis and Harry Lewis that same year. The oldest son, Gordon Lewis had a farm at Cashel on Lot 25, Concession 6, and his sister Margaret (Lewis) Ferguson lived across the road from her parent's property.

Harry Lewis and his wife, Esther, farm this property at 10982 McCowan Road and raised their family of Linda, Alan and Brian. Of particular historical interest concerning the Lewis farm was an annual event, held in the summer each year from 1980s to 2019, where vintage agricultural implements of all kinds were operated as a

demonstration of old-time farming technology. Most of the equipment was horse-drawn, carefully restored to operating condition, and painted in original colours.

The yearly pageant of old-time farming provided much inspiration to the late Murray Pipher, a local artist whose depiction of rural scenes, farm life and farm animals are very much admired by people familiar with his paintings in acrylic. His paintings depict a vanishing way of life, the family farm, and really capture the feeling of the people, animals and places in a way that will preserve them forever.

## *New Jordan Museum*

Past President Sandra Easton also Mayor of the Town of Lincoln, has informed us that the new Jordan Museum, now called the Lincoln Museum and Cultural Centre is just about complete. Work is finishing up on the outside landscaping this spring but the building is almost ready for the return of the artifacts that have been stored off site during the construction.

The permanent collection reflects the history of Town of Lincoln, with particular emphasis on the Twenty Mile Creek area and early pioneer settlement by Pennsylvania German Mennonite families. Established in 1953 the collection has been developed and added to over subsequent decades and not consists of 10,657 artifacts. Notable objects within the collection include a painting by Group of Seven artist A. J. Casson and a collection of Fraktur folk art. The W. E. Troup collection includes over 1,000 items of local relevance dated between 1800-1920, many of which have provenance directly related to the early Pennsylvania German settlers of the Twenty Mile Creek.

The nationally significant collection of 34 Fraktur artworks is part of the permanent collection. Fraktur is a traditional folk art that has its beginnings in Medieval Europe and was brought to North America by Germanic settlers. The most celebrated form of the artistic tradition was among the Germanic communities of Pennsylvania in the 18th and 19th centuries. The art form was brought to Ontario by Mennonite



*Lincoln Museum & Cultural Centre*

immigrants from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, the first of which settled on the Twenty Mile Creek (present-day Jordan Station) as early as 1786.

The museum's collection has been stored in various locations over the sixty-seven years since the Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty was originally established. The new museum will provide this extensive collection with a permanent home that adheres to strict best practices for museum conservation. Notably, the new museum will provide the collection with a storage space that houses the entire permanent collection with room for future expansion.

In the new building, high-density storage has been custom designed for the space and the collection. A move plan has been created to manage the actual relocation of objects including mapping out the storage based on the seeds and size of the collection.

The new centre will have a dedicated 'Fraktur Room' which has been designed as a permanent exhibition space. The space will feature UV coated windows and an independent climate control system.

The new museum building boasts three main galleries and four usable spaces for exhibits. The new displays will showcase previously unseen collection items, use tactile components, audio-visual technology and be designed for programming with a variety of ages.

Staff are working diligently to prepare for the move from the interim location in Beamsville.

We congratulate the Town of Lincoln in completing this project and look forward to visiting the new museum and enjoying the new exhibits.