

The Pennsylvania German Folklore



Society of Ontario

PGFSO

Newsletter

EDITOR: LORNE R. SMITH

NUMBER 50 FALL, 2020

Message from the President

David Reesor Burkholder

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

What a summer we have experienced. Corona Virus – COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our day to day lives and activities.

Dozens of cancelled and postponed functions, reunions and activities.

Cancelled and rescheduled travel plans; restricted visiting with our immuno-compromised family members and relatives, especially those residing in senior and long term care settings.

The challenge of not being able to gather in our traditional rituals to celebrate and honour the lives of those of our community who have died during this COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult.

Birthdays and anniversaries have been celebrated in isolation from family and friends.

Zoom committee meetings, virtual classrooms and seminars; Zoom worship services; a lot of Face timing, emailing and lots of telephone calls are thankfully keeping us somewhat connected and in touch with each other.

The term “when we get back to normal” seems less likely as we move into this fall with elevated numbers in COVID-19 cases and a return to stage two restrictions. Fingers are crossed for better results and outcomes as we enter winter and eventually spring.

On a more positive note; the Ontario apple crop was abundant for eating, producing apple fritters to drown in maple syrup as well as making



COMING EVENTS

THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

The Board regrets that the Annual Sausage and Sauerkraut Dinner normally held in November is cancelled for 2020.

It is hoped that with the easing of COVID-19 PGFSO will be able to host its AGM in April 2021.

applesauce, apple butter and dried apples for later in the winter.

Many of you are putting your gardens to bed for the winter in anticipation of spring arriving in 2021.

I would encourage you and your families and those folks in your COVID-19 “bubbles” to continue following the recommended gathering and distancing recommendations of our Health departments.

COVID-19 isolation has “given” many of us time to sort through those archival cupboards and drawers we seem to never get around to. Keep digging through those collections for memories and story gems.

There are still many interesting stories to be discovered and shared, similar to our feature article about Ruth (Meyer) Byer in this issue compiled by her daughter Evelyn (Byer) Burkholder who will be celebrating her 100th birthday in early December.

Early birthday wishes Evelyn and thank you for compiling and sharing your mother's life story.

Stay safe: Stay well: Bundle up. Winter is coming.

Dave Burkholder

The Pennsylvania German Folklore



Society of Ontario

PGFSO Newsletter

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Articles for the PGFSO Newsletter are welcome

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memorial stone, an engraved piece of black granite, which will be mounted on an 1860 carved stone from the second track over the Twenty river at Bridgeport. This stone is to honour the Pennsylvania German Mennonite families who settled this area as well as drawing attention to the historical railway bridge across The Twenty. The drawing of the Conestoga wagon with two teams of horses was created by Marie Lounsbury (1928 – 2015) who was born and raised in Vineland. Her Mennonite ancestors were the Rittenhouse, Fretz, Overholt and Sherk families from this area.

The photo shows Mayor Sandra Easton receiving the cheque from Elizabeth Oliver Malone.

Evelyn Burkholder

Evelyn was born north of Markham where her Byer family were involved in the honey business. After a few years as a rural public school teacher she married Leonard Burkholder and together they raised their family of eight on a dairy farm east of Markham near Box Grove. Since being widowed in 1974, Evelyn has continued to be a source spiritual support to her community and her family. Evelyn is anticipating celebrating her 100th birthday in early December. She is a resident at Parkview Home on Weldon Avenue in Stouffville.

*Chapter of the Twenty
 Donation to Jordan Museum*

The Chapter of the Twenty was originally founded in March 1953 by Joseph E. Culp, Harper Moyer, Alf Fry, Alvin Culp, Lawrence Hipple, Gordon Fretz, Leo Martin, Fred Fretz, Gordon Fry, Reg. Rittenhouse, Ina Burkholder, Barbara Coffman, Hazel Fretz and Wray Honsberger to gather and record the contribution of the Pennsylvania German settlers in the Vineland District. The first AGM was held in November, 1953.

Unfortunately the Chapter of the Twenty disbanded in 2018 because of lack of local interest. The funds from the Chapter, including a generous donation from a member of the Chapter to be used to preserve and display local Fraktur art, were donated toward the cost of the new Jordan Museum being built by the Town of Lincoln.

In addition the Chapter is also donating a



Evelyn Burkholder at 100 years of age

Ruth Meyer Byer, December 3, 1892 - November 30, 1984



*Annie Hoover, Ruth's mother,
who died when Ruth was
3 months old*



*The home of Ruth's Grandparents,
Chris L. and Susannah Hoover
on 18th Avenue, Markham*

Ruth Meyer was born on December 3, 1892, the sixth child of Henry Meyer and Annie Hoover. The family lived on a farm on the corner of the 7th line (now McCowan Road) and 18th Avenue (now Elgin Mills Road) of Markham. Ruth's mother, Annie, became ill after her baby's birth and it became evident that her throat infection called "quinzy" was not going to heal. Annie's faith reached out to God and from her sickbed she sang to her family her hymn of hope, "O come, angel band, come and around me stand, O bear me away on your snowy wings, To my eternal home." Her sisters, standing around her bed, later could not relate this story without tears. Annie then said to her mother, "Will you look after my baby?" Grandma Hoover's reply was, "What could I say but yes." So the young mother departed into God's presence at age 28, leaving five children - Tillie, Emma, Reuben, Eva and baby Ruth. One child, Minnie, had died earlier. The young father, Henry, described his wife as "a sweet, kind woman, a ray of sunshine", and committed his tiny baby to Grandma's care.

Baby Ruth was wrapped in a large brown plaid shawl and in the chill weather of mid March was carried across the road to Grandpa Hoover's house which from that time on became her home.

(Grandpa's farm was directly opposite the Williamson farm, now Markham Fair Grounds on 18th Avenue, and two large walnut trees planted by Grandpa Chris still stand in 1994, at time of writing this story). Two of Annie's sisters, Tillie and Sarah, ages 18 and 15 respectively, were still at home. They became loving nannies to their little niece Ruth and to her sister Eva, two years of age, who was at Grandpa's for one year until father Henry remarried.

Grandma Susannah Hoover, already 57 years old, must have found the task of caring for a small baby a heavy one at times with no modern appliances or electric power. One night when Ruth was two years old, and needed some care, Grandma felt her way along the hall, misjudged her

place and fell down a full flight of steps, breaking her leg.

Aunt Tillie helped care for Ruth and shared a bed with her until Ruth was ten years old. At that point in time, Will Gilmore married Tillie and Ruth cried all night because of her loss. But Uncle Will became a special friend and Ruth visited them often in their Toronto home. (Years later, after Will's death, Aunt Tillie moved in with Ruth and stayed there until her own death. Aunt Tillie was always a much cherished aunt).

Ruth's childhood was full of activity. There were visits across the road to see the sisters and brother. The new mother, Matilda, presided there and she presented, one by one, three new sisters - Mae, Sarah and Mary. Even closer geographically were the three Hoover cousins, Uncle Dave and Aunt Josephine's girls - Florence, Violet and Edna. They lived in part of Grandpa Chris' house. Florence was almost the same age as Ruth and she stole her bottle of milk, teased her, helped her with chores and loved her. Later, when they went to community events, Florence hitched the horse and Ruth held the lantern for her.



Ruth about age 2 with her cousin, Florence Hoover. Ruth lived with her grandparents and Florence lived with her parents, Dave and Josephine Hoover, in another part of the same house.

School days were a challenge with a walk of over two miles to Dickson Hill. But in the company of sisters and cousins and the Williamson friends across the road, it was fun. Besides, there was the good-looking fellow named Edwin coming north from the valley. And down the hill from the east came Joe Reesor, a terrible tease. Ruth remembers whacking him over the nose with her lunch



Ruth with siblings, Emma, (Ruth), Tillie, Reuben, Eva



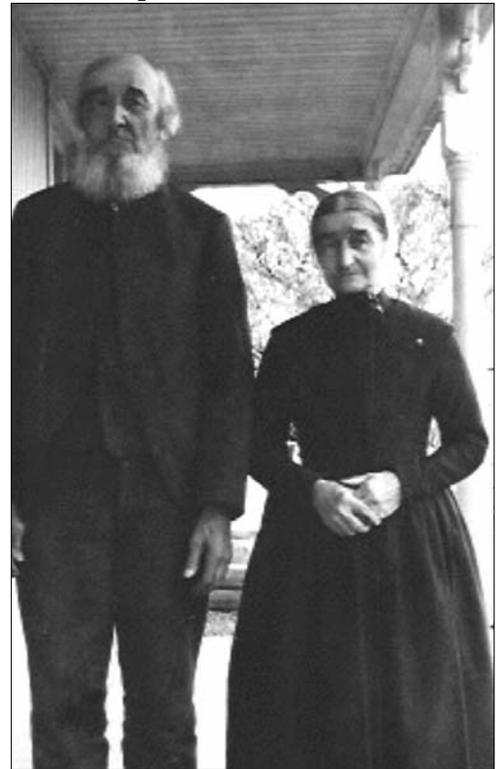
Ruth's step-sisters, Mae, Mary, Sarah

box because he persisted in stepping on her heels.

Their teacher, Augusta Wideman, had a large group of fifty pupils, ranging in age from beginners to senior fourth class. She was an excellent teacher with firm discipline and she is remembered

for her drills in adding and other math skills. Ruth missed one of her early years in school because of a nervous problem, on the advice of the family physician.

Ruth was taught the art of cooking and house-keeping by her aunts and grandmother. At the age of 14 when she



Grandpa Chris L. and Grandma Susannah Hoover, with whom Ruth lived.



Ruth

had passed the required entrance exam for high school, Grandma quite firmly told her that since the grandparents had cared for her until now, that she, in turn, should stay home and care for them. Ruth was quite willing, as most of her friends were not going to high school either, and she began a life of routine.

She rose each morning at five o'clock, milked one cow, helped to separate the milk and wash the utensils. A drink of warm milk always accompanied this task. Most of the skimmed milk was fed to the pigs and calves. The cream was brought into the kitchen and churned to make butter.

Every other week, bread dough was kneaded and shaped into loaves, and baked in the large oven of the wood range. On the first year at home, Ruth made her first dress - a blue jumper with white dots. She enjoyed this sewing job and discovered she had a gift which was exercised widely in later years.

Grandma Susannah, four feet, ten inches tall, dark-eyed and quick on her feet, enjoyed resting on wash days as she grew older. She sat in the wash house and chatted as Ruth scrubbed the clothing on the washboard with homemade soap. (Later, a hand-operated washer was used.)

Grandma watched as the clothes were rinsed and wrung out by hand. Then they were hung outside in the breeze to blow until dry. Wash days were wearisome days because the water had to be pumped by hand, carried to the stove to be heated, carried to the tubs for use, and then carried



Ruth and cousin Florence

outside and emptied. If Ruth felt wearied, she remembered Grandma's girlhood when she did the family wash in the creek behind their house at Dickson Hill.

Grandma shared other stories in her Pennsylvania Dutch tongue during this time with Ruth. Her father, Chris Hoover, was called stump Chris by the miller at Dickson Hill, to distinguish him from two other Chris Hoovers who were also customers.

Chris, her father, built a stone house beside the creek, and Susannah cooked for the stone masons and carpenters. She recalled the scaffolding built gradually around the rising structure, to carry the wheelbarrows full of stone and mortar. Susannah was one of ten children and she sewed by candlelight the night caps that everyone wore. She helped too in the cutting and stitching of linen trousers worn by her father and brothers.

The unbleached linen was dyed a yellow shade by boiling it with onionskins in a large kettle. When Susannah married another Chris Hoover and moved to his farm on 18th Avenue, she raised their large family and did sewing, cooking, washing, mending and gardening. Ruth knew she

had earned a rest and was happy to care for her.

Grandpa Hoover was a gentle, kind man and Ruth worked with him when he needed help. As a child she earned one cent for every mustard plant pulled on his fine farm.

On Saturdays she dusted the buggy which took them to church on Sunday. Early in the spring mornings she carried out the wood ashes to the shed where lye was made from them and used in soapmaking.

In the fall, there was apple picking from the trees with nostalgic names - Twenty Ounce Pippin, Wolf River, Maiden's Blush, Blenheim Orange, Duchess, Gravenstein. All around the orchard were grape vines with various coloured grapes and in the garden were several large sweet cherry trees. Ruth enjoyed harvesting these.

Grandpa was a handyman who did many carpentry jobs. He had built a wheel beside his carpenter bench where Rover, the dog, could supply dog power for running his lathe or for chopping turnips. Rover loved this job and would stand at the door, and whine until allowed into the machine. Ruth inherited a bake tray and picture frames made by her grandfather.

One of these frames was placed over a baptismal certificate for Grandma Susannah, printed and decorated by her husband.

Ruth knew that Christian had a bout of scarlet fever when he was a young man. He was forced to be quiet and at this time took up fraktur art drawings and paintings. These traditional Pennsylvania Dutch designs of birds, hearts and flowers, painted in bright colours, were used on German-lettered birth and baptism certificates. He would no doubt have been much surprised to learn that he would become, long after his death, a comparatively famous artist. He is remembered too for serving as deacon in the Wideman and Almira churches for many years.

Ruth and Edwin were married in Grandpa's living room in 1918. Grandpa was in bed following a stroke and Grandma was in a wheelchair with a broken hip. Pastor Lewis Burkholder married them. (Lewis later became their brother-in-law when as a widower he married Emma Meyer, Ruth's sister). Annie Byer Grove and



Edwin and Ruth on their wedding day

Reuben Meyer were the attendants.

Ruth looked beautiful in the white satin dress, decorated around cuffs and collar with French white knots, her own handwork. Edwin looked smart in his navy suit. Aunt Josephine invited the guests into her shiny dining room, with its long stretched-out table, for a bountiful dinner.

Ruth remembered no details except for potato salad and the wedding cake which she had made herself. The weather was a concern that February day in 1918. Snow was falling in abundance. Edwin and Ruth were to catch the 4 p.m. train, the "Hog Special" which would take them to Toronto, the first lap of a honeymoon trip to visit cousin Florence and her husband Erle Miller.

Topped in a hat which didn't cover his ears well, Edwin helped his new bride into the sleigh and they covered themselves and sisters Emma and Tillie who accompanied them to the station, with robes. Arriving at the station they learned that the "Hog Special" had been delayed by snow, that their suitcases had been securely chained shut and would require a tool to open them. Arrival at Toronto was at midnight! A check on all hotels near Union Station revealed



*The Byer Family:
Edwin and Ruth's family
from left,
Dorothy, Helen, Edith, Erle,
Evelyn, Ruth, Art, Edwin*

that a convention had packed out all available space. So the couple waded the streets searching for a room.

Finally they decided to head for Ruth's Aunt Tillie's home at 1034 Ossington Avenue. Since few street cars were running it meant a walk of several miles through snowy streets. When they finally arrived with almost frozen fingers and ears, they had to bang on the door with some force. Cousin Allan Meyer who boarded there let them in and surrendered his bed to the unexpected guests. Next day the trip to Berton took place uneventfully. We trust that cousin Allan found the necessary tools to open the suitcase!

Edwin moved in with Ruth and her grandparents. His help was much needed in caring for them and they remained there until both grandparents had died, grandpa in 1918 and grandma in 1920. Then Edwin bought a six-acre property on the 8th Line (Highway 48) which had been owned by his aunt Nancy Stover. It was a most convenient location for his work in the "Byer Honey" business. Here Edwin and Ruth brought up their family.

I remember mother Ruth as an active woman with a brisk walk. She was a great cook, an indif-

ferent housekeeper and a careful, almost painstaking seamstress who clothed her family well with made-over skirts, dresses and coats. She loved flowers, birds, trees and sunsets and somehow inspired us to do the same. She set us a tremendous example of loyal caring in the energy spent on her grandparents, Aunt Tillie and Florence.

The latter suffered a stroke and was unable to speak. Mom and Dad visited her almost daily for a few years. After my husband's death I found them very caring of my needs and I am grateful. I saw my mother growing spiritually through the years, even to the day of her death, on November 30, 1984.

Written by Evelyn Byer Burkholder, daughter of Ruth

Editor's Note

First the two black walnut trees are still standing out in the middle of that field and I am told they are very popular for photographs. I have brought some of the seedlings from these trees to our farm on McCowan Road and now have a good stand of Black Walnut trees for the squirrels.

Second, my grandmother, Sarah Hoover Smith, was one of the aunts who looked after wee Ruth Meyer after her mother passed away.



Log cabin

Smith Farm Stories

This year the barn swallows had outstanding success. There were at least 4 nests in the barn and each raised 3 or 4 offspring the first time and three had second hatches.

I have really enjoyed the summer evenings this year. We have been able to sit out on the deck without being bothered with mosquitoes.

It is just amazing to watch the barn swallows working overtime until almost dark catching insects for their families and then when they finish flying we notice the bats come out and take over. It has been very pleasant to have the time to

observe the actions of the many birds we have over the summer.

New this summer have been a family of red breasted nuthatches. I have given up trying to live trap the raccoons, skunks and opossums. They don't cause much trouble so let them be. This fall we have been graced with three doe deer with their fawns who come right up to the back lawn between the house and barn. What graceful animals.

Another first has been our ability to enjoy our sugar camp in Bobcaygeon this summer without very many bugs. It is the first time in 40 years of ownership that we have been able to work in the bush and enjoy eating on the deck without worrying about mosquitoes.

We are expanding again with the purchase of our neighbour's property. We have also discovered some interesting history about our original property. From the land records we have discovered that it was owned by Mossom Boyd from 1867 to 1897. He was the famous lumber baron in the Bobcaygeon/Trent watershed area. We have also deduced that our log cabin was built by Boyd as a 'log shanty' around 1870 and we still actively use it during the maple syrup season.

Lorne Smith



Ray Konkle, Joan Romagnoli, Mayor Sandra Easton, Elizabeth Oliver-Malone, Ruth Smith