

# Wentz Post

*A Publication of the Peter Wentz Farmstead Society*

*Vol. XXXXI, No. 2*

*Summer 2024*



## LESS COMMON PLANTS

### IN THE KITCHEN GARDEN

*by Lori Curtis*

An 18th century Pennsylvania German garden contained many of the same vegetables, culinary herbs, and flowers as contemporary gardens do, such as beans, peas, onions, carrots, cucumbers, peppers, radishes, beets, lettuce, spinach, rosemary, parsley, chives, mint, and hollyhocks. However, there are unique plants in the Wentz Garden that are not usually found in today's vegetable gardens.

One example is costmary (*Tanacetum balsamita*), a plant with long, flat leaves that have a pungent odor. (*Pictured right.*) Because the leaves were frequently used as bookmarks for bibles, costmary was often called the bible plant and the smell helped keep parishioners awake during long sermons. Fresh leaves were used for tea or to add flavor to salads, and dried leaves were used in sachets or potpourris.

Another unusual plant commonly found in 18<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania German gardens is Jobs Tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*), a tall grain-bearing grass that gets seeds covered in very hard, pearly white oval shells that were used as beads for necklaces or prayer beads.

Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) is an aromatic herbaceous perennial that has fern-like foliage and yellow button-like flowers. In colonial times the stems were dried and used as an insect repellent. They were also put between mattresses and sheets to deter lice and made into a rub for raw meat to deter flies.

Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) is a hardy perennial herb that has a strong celery-like scent and a carrot-like root system. The flavor of lovage leaves is a cross between celery and anise and the chopped leaves were used in salads and cooked dishes. The stalks were blanched and used like celery.



*(Continued on page 4.)*

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Peter Wentz Farmstead Society is to preserve and interpret the 18th century Pennsylvania German farmstead established by the Wentz and Schultz families, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Society's goal is to stimulate public interest and support the site's heritage through educational programs and public events focusing on the architecture, crafts, customs, and furnishings of the period.

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## WENTZ POST

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## PETER WENTZ FARMSTEAD IS OPEN.

The Farmstead is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM; Sunday hours are from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Tours are given each hour, beginning at 10:00 AM, and the last tour begins at 3:00 PM.

Reservations are requested for groups larger than six people.

To make a reservation, or for additional information, please call the Farmstead office at 610 584-5104.

The articles and advertisements contained in the WENTZ POST express the views of the Peter Wentz Farmstead Society (PWFS). The PWFS makes every effort to ensure articles and advertisements are factual; however, our statements do not express the views of the County-owned and operated Peter Wentz Farmstead (PWF), or its management or staff. The PWFS is an independent, non-profit organization that was established "to preserve and interpret an 18th century Pennsylvania German farmstead, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, by stimulating public interest and support of the site's heritage through educational programs and public events focusing on the architecture, crafts, customs and furnishings of the period." The PWFS does not operate the PWF and is not affiliated with PWF management other than as an independent organization.

## GREETINGS TO ALL ...

*by Joy A. Dolan, Society President*

As you can tell from the byline above, change is "afoot." Carol Allen, a long-standing friend and supporter of the PWF Society while active in numerous other organizations, has passed the Society's Board President's gavel to me so that she could focus on her other commitments that increasingly stretched her limited time. Carol is not going far ... she's just switching Board seats and will continue to serve as Vice President. I am honored to take up the mantle of President and truly value Carol's continued involvement and support. She is an inspiration to all in her love and support of the Peter Wentz Farmstead and the Society.

Now a little about me ... I came to Peter Wentz Farmstead about five years ago to volunteer as a tour docent. As someone who had grown up practically on my PA German grandparents neighboring farm in York County, I was drawn to the Farmstead's rich history and culture with an immediate connection, both personal and passionate. Whether helping visitors discover the Wentz story or assisting Robin in open hearth cooking demonstrations, the Farmstead felt like home to me.

Fast forward through the dreary days of Covid isolation, I returned to the Farmstead to help with summer Camp and Candlelight programs. Having had some experience with museum shop retail, I quickly responded yes to an opportunity to volunteer in our wonderful PWF Museum Shop. The Shop opportunity provided outlets for both my creative expressions and to meet interesting people who quickly became friends.

My PWFS story evolved from a well-meaning volunteer to an active member of the Board. Now I stand on the threshold of a new leadership experience with very large shoes to fill. I take inspiration and guidance from all the previous PWFS Presidents who have gone before me. I hope that I can mirror their dedication and personal leadership.

As President, I will strive to move forward in a positive, transparent and collaborative direction that best supports the County, the Farmstead and its professional staff to make Peter Wentz Farmstead one of our region's premier historic sites. I eagerly look forward to working with our various committees and volunteers to preserve and present the Peter Wentz Farmstead story to audiences of all ages, from near and far. I'm also very excited about working with our newest Board members who bring a wealth of talent, enthusiasm and diverse skills.

If you want to be a part of the team, I invite you to join with fellow PWFS members and volunteer to help bring the Peter Wentz Farmstead story alive.

## SORELY MISSED

*by Linda Snyder*

**Deborah Jo Peterson**, born October 21, 1954 in Flemington, New Jersey, passed away March 14, 2024 in Harleysville, Pennsylvania surrounded by family. A lover of books, horses, nature, and more, she was shy as a child but developed a passion for people.

Deb left a mark on the American historical community through her vast knowledge of the 18th century. This was especially evident in her research into the myths of early American foodways. Her willingness to share this knowledge made her unpopular with some but a hero to others. Deb's presentations were always engaging. Her research contributed significantly to the field and broadened understanding of culinary culture, trade systems, domestic duties and more.

Her hobby brought her to Lance with whom she shared over 29 years of marriage. They welcomed one daughter, Abigail, into their lives.

Throughout her life as a wonderful wife and mother, Deb also touched hundreds of others.

She is survived by her husband, Lance, daughter, Abigail, daughter-in-law, Brianna, sister, Linda, and many other family members.

On April 3, 2024, **Richard Clauser** passed away peacefully at home with his wife by his side. Born on December 29, 1929, Dick graduated from Pottsville High School in 1947. He worked surveying coal mines for the Girard Estate before moving on to spend the rest of his career with Reading and Con Rail railroads. He retired after 36 years as a Senior Civil Engineer. In retirement, he did consulting work as a surveyor. Dick also retired as a Captain from the U.S. Army National Guards after 20 years of service.

Dick enjoyed time with his family at Ocean City, N.J. and traveled with his wife including four trips to Germany. Dick cheered the Philadelphia Eagles, played softball and volleyball at different times of his life, and loved attending his grandchildren's events.

His wife of 69 years, Dessa, survives him as well as a daughter, Krista, five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, a sister-in-law, plus nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, two siblings, and his son.

He will be missed for his joke telling - whether you wanted to hear them or not - and his smile that made you want to smile in return.





## AMERICAN REDWARE POTTERY IN THE MUSEUM SHOP

by Amy Dinkel



Local production of redware pottery in the Americas probably began in the 17th century. This form of pottery is so called because of the reddish-brown color of the fired clay. This pottery was inexpensive and used in the kitchen and dining room, as well as for chamber pots and some barn functions. Because imported ceramics were expensive, early colonists had to settle for this crude, often unglazed pottery. Early American potters did produce fancy pieces that were glazed and decorated, but they were uncommon.

Fortunately, modern-day potters have imitated some of the designs of early American redware pottery, as well as putting completely new spins on redware, sometimes with unique designs with which an individual potter's work can be recognized. Some well-known modern Pennsylvania redware potters are Lester P. Breininger, Jr. (1935-2011), Wesley Muckey, Bob Hughes, and Ned Foltz.

The Peter Wentz Farmstead Museum Shop has many beautiful redware pieces at reasonable prices. Most are colorful and some are whimsical, such as flying piggy banks. Some of the pieces are signed by the artist. Stop in and see our beautiful redware pottery offerings.



## LESS COMMON PLANTS

IN THE KITCHEN GARDEN, *cont. from page 1*

A noteworthy aspect of the 18<sup>th</sup> century kitchen garden is that much of what is grown was used for medicinal purposes. For example, Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), a low-growing herb with bright pink flowers and red stems, was used as an antiseptic as well as to treat upset stomachs.

The kitchen garden is maintained by the Wentz Weeders who are PWFS volunteers that do all the planting and harvesting. We got an early start this year and have already harvested and donated over 50 pounds of produce to a local food pantry. Besides enjoying gardening and the group camaraderie, the Wentz Weeders appreciate the unique challenges of caring for a historic garden.



## SOCIETY SPRING MEETING

Our Society gathered on May 1<sup>st</sup> to enjoy a lovely evening of good food and fellowship. A generous society member treated us to a wonderful buffet. Fifty members shared stories of the past with Mark Turdo, our speaker, who is a former PWF staff member. Mark's vast experiences included his association with the Museum of American Revolution in Philadelphia and many other historic sites. His presentation on the history of "Cyder" [*Cider*] was the topic of the evening. We were delighted to see Mark and his wife again.



## NEW OBSERVATION DECK OPENED

by PWF Staff

Just as the summer weather arrived, the Wet Meadow on the far side of the pasture dried out enough to allow the carpenters to complete construction of a low observation platform along the Peter Wentz Farmstead Nature Trail. Education programs will benefit from having this raised area to use as a base to gather for discussions of the birds, insects, flowers, and plants that are restored to the area, and visitors can use benches and the platform itself as a place to rest and look at scenery.

When the Zacharias Creek was the primary source of water for a herd of dairy cows, this area was clear-cut to give the cattle maximum access to water. For the past three decades, though, the streamside has been allowed—encouraged—to return to its natural state. Under the watchful eyes of farmers Jim Nichols and Jay Ryan, native plants such as the Paw-Paw, Ironweed, Joe Pye Weed, grasses, Jack in the Pulpit, and Common Milkweed are re-established and again providing food and cover for native wildlife including Great Blue Herons, Red-Tailed Hawks, Orchard Orioles, Bluebirds, Monarch Butterflies, Leopard frogs, and a variety of helpful insects. Whether you walk the entire 1.25 mile trail, or only a portion of it, you are welcome to enjoy the sights and sounds of the seasons as well as a wonderful view of the Farmstead.



## OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Bring our educator to you! Do you need a speaker for your history club, museum, class, or event? Schedule a program with us. Choose from one of our current offerings.

### Peter Wentz Farmstead Presentation

Learn about what you will see when visiting the Peter Wentz Farmstead, including a historic house and a functioning farm with animals, as well as the events and programs offered. This presentation explores the history of the farmstead, from its founding by Peter Wentz, to George Washington's stay in 1777, to the lengthy Schultz Family ownership, and then restoration by Montgomery County.

### History of Pennsylvania to 1800

Pennsylvania has one of the longest and richest histories in the United States. This presentation explores some of the important moments of our state's past: Indigenous peoples and their early contact with European settlers, the founding of a colony based on religious freedom by William Penn, society in colonial Pennsylvania, the colony's involvement in the Revolutionary War, and the creation of modern Pennsylvania in post-war years.

### Life in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Pennsylvania

We are all fascinated with the Colonial America era and how early Americans lived in ways very different from our lives today. This presentation explores various facets of life in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, including social classes, the lives of women and children, fashions and dress, religion, cooking and food, and other topics.

It includes historical diagrams, images, and portraits for visual representation. The PowerPoint is accompanied with a "traveling trunk" of reproduced eighteenth century articles of clothing and food utensils.

*Virtual Outreach is available on request.*

Want more information or to schedule a visit?

Call 610-584-5104 or

email [peterwentzfarmstead@montgomerycountypa.gov](mailto:peterwentzfarmstead@montgomerycountypa.gov)



## TAKE A HIKE AT THE FARMSTEAD

by PWF Staff

Montgomery County purchased The Peter Wentz Farmstead in 1969. Initially focusing on the well-documented history of General George Washington using the property as the temporary headquarters for five nights during October 1777. However, they quickly came to appreciate the multiple stories the property offers.



As research on the original fabric of the Farmstead continued through the 1970's and 1980's, additional subjects of interest to the public were added to the interpretive program for the property. The restored four-square garden at the side of the house was researched and designed by the Norristown Garden Club, and is now planted and maintained each year by the Wentz Weeders, a group of dedicated volunteers. Reproductions of original outbuildings added a recreated barn, a smokehouse, wood shed, sheep fold, ice house, and outhouse to establish an historical environment and setting for the house.





The property has been farmed continuously from the 1740's, first by Peter and Rosanna Wentz, then from 1784 to 1794 by Devault Bieber, then followed by five generations of the Schultz family, and at present worked by Montgomery County's farm staff. The farm includes, as it did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, cultivated and fallow fields, pastures for livestock, an orchard and gardens, a stream bank and woodlands. A less-known but exceptional feature of this environment is our Nature Trail. A walk along the Nature Trail at the Peter Wentz Farmstead offers a step back in time as well as an opportunity to enjoy its quiet beauty.



Montgomery County restored the farm to its late 18<sup>th</sup>-century appearance to reflect the Farmstead's early European settlement. The house, reconstructed outbuildings, garden and livestock represent 18<sup>th</sup>-century Pennsylvania German culture and practices. Whether you take a self-guided walk, or a more formal tour of the historic house, it's a lovely way to spend some time on a summer day.



*(Photos for the TAKE A HIKE article courtesy of the Peter Wentz Farmstead website.)*

### **Sending Mail or Packages to the Farmstead?**

Anyone who mails letters or large envelopes to the Peter Wentz Farmstead from the US Post Office, our mailing address remains the same:

Peter Wentz Farmstead

PO Box 240

Worcester PA 19490

To help UPS and FedEx deliver packages to the Office and the Museum Shop, the new address assigned to this building is:

Peter Wentz Farmstead Office and Museum Shop

56 Rosanna Lane

Lansdale PA 19446



# KIDS' FUN PAGE

## THE FAMOUS, FABULOUS BLUE WHALE

by Pat McDonnell



Hi, Kids! Do you know why the blue whale is famous? If your answer is "because he's big", you are right. The blue whale is the largest animal to have ever lived in the world; much larger than dinosaurs. It is hard to imagine how huge blue whales really are. We will try to compare their size to objects we are familiar with: for example 50 people standing up can fit inside of the whale's mouth; the blue weighs about 300,000 pounds equal to 20 elephants; his tongue weighs 8,000 pounds, more than 2 mid-sized cars; his heart is the size of an automobile; he is 80 to 100 feet long about the size of 2 and one half school buses No wonder he is called the Master of the Oceans and the Mind of the Sea! The blue whales can be found in every ocean except the Arctic. They are very intelligent. They use their excellent memories as they travel thousands of miles back and forth to places where they have found good feeding grounds, and to places where mother whales can give birth to their calves in the warmer waters. A single calf is born to the mother, and it spends 2 or 3 years remaining close to her. The calf is never left alone and has constant attention from his mother. If the mother has to leave the calf for any reason, she will call on another mother who is trustworthy, perhaps her sister, to stay with the calf until she returns. The calves need to be protected from any orca (killer whale) who will attack young calves if given the chance. At this time there are 89 kinds of whales. However, Scientists agree that the blue whale is in a league of its own!

There are many reasons why. Here are just a few of them: Blue whales eat krill that are like tiny shrimp. The krill swim in swarms, and just by keeping his huge mouth open, the blue whale swims right through the swarm and eats 40 million or about 8,000 pounds of krill a day. The Blue whales (called "blues") never fall completely asleep. They sleep close to the surface of the water ready to take in oxygen when they must breathe. The blues do not have to take their heads out of the water when they need to breathe. They have 2 blow holes to carry air in and out of their bodies. These blow holes serve to keep air in and water out. One of the blues was able to stay under water for 90 minutes! Unfortunately, today our fantastic blue whale is on the endangered list.

During the whaling days, we lost an enormous number of whales including the blue. There were mass killings and by the 1930's over 50,000 were killed in one year. You might ask "why?" Whales were killed for oil, meat and other products. It is taking the blues a long time to recover and increase their numbers. The condition of whaling and its effects were finally noticed by authorities and in 1946 the International Whaling Commission was formed and passed an international law against whaling. 88 members joined, but not all of them follow the rules. The commission looks after the safety of the blues who are threatened by ship strikes, entangled by fishing gear, ocean noise, pollution of plastics, the onset of climate change, and whatever else might cause concern. On the bright side, blues have been observed working together for mutual benefits, teaching others how to hunt, and "talking" to each other; communicating over long distances. Right now exciting research is going on in the area of whale "language" that we can read about in our newspapers and other forms of print. Researchers looking at the patterns of sound that the whales use to determine if these sounds make up messages that are simple, more involved or, have no meaning at all. Another research project is finding out how the blue whale grew to be the largest mammal in existence. These are very long range projects and will no doubt be ready for you as possible marine researchers to join the hunt for answers. We can only hope that these magnificent mammals, Blue Whales, the Ambassadors of the Oceans, will still be with us.



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